



Painting the Black

By Carl Deuker

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In his senior year of high school, late bloomer Ryan Ward has just begun to feel the magic of baseball—the thrill of catching a wicked slider, of throwing a runner out, of training hard and playing hard. His friend Josh, the star of the team, has helped Ryan push his limits. But when Josh clearly pushes the limits too far, Ryan is faced with a heartbreaking dilemma: he must choose between his love for the game and his sense of integrity.

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Editorial Review

From School Library Journal

Grade 8 Up. During the summer before his senior year, Ryan Ward is thrilled when a kid his age moves in across the street. He's even more thrilled when he learns that Josh Daniels is a star athlete. The two play catch for hours and Ryan secretly dreams of catching for the varsity team in the spring. He watches in awe as Josh proceeds to become the school's starting quarterback and leads the football team to a terrific season, but he is unsettled by the aggressive side of his friend's personality. When baseball season finally arrives, Ryan makes the team as a third-string catcher. He eventually becomes a starter because he's the only one who can handle Josh's hard slider. Just before the championship game, Ryan stumbles upon and stops an assault on a girl in the school. He realizes that one of the masked assailants is Josh, but telling the authorities proves to be an agonizing decision. The book ends somewhat ironically, yet realistically, with Josh signing a multimillion dollar professional baseball contract and receiving a tap on the wrist for his crime. Ryan, meanwhile, enrolls in the local junior college. Rather than producing a stereotyped high school jock, Deuker portrays Josh as a complex and multidimensional character. Ryan is a player who succeeds with his head, rather than through sheer talent. And while he learns about the subtleties of baseball, he also learns about the subtleties of life. A well-crafted sports novel that delivers without becoming didactic or boring. ?Todd Morning, Schaumburg Township Public Library, IL
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From [Booklist](#)

Gr. 8-12. After a disastrous fall from a tree, senior Ryan Ward wrote off baseball. But he is swept back into the game when cocky, charismatic Josh Daniels--a star quarterback with the perfect spiral pass as well as a pitcher with a mean slider--moves into the neighborhood. Josh is adept at placing his pitches on the line between fair and foul ("painting the black"), and in his sweep to sports fame, he lives his life much the same way. Ryan, whose spot on the team hinges on his ability to catch Josh's pitches, soon learns that more than a team slot is at stake. The well-written sports scenes--baseball and football--will draw reluctant readers, but it is Ryan's moral courage that will linger when the reading is done. *Candace Smith*

From Kirkus Reviews

For Ryan Ward, 17, the baseball diamond leads to much more than just a winning season in this exciting and moving novel from Deuker (*Heart of a Champion*, 1993, etc.). Until Josh Daniels and his family move in across the street during the summer, Ryan seems destined for mediocrity at Seattle's Crown Hill High. Eager for a friend, Ryan tags after the charismatic, athletically gifted Josh, a pitcher; while they play catch, Ryan realizes that he enjoys catching and thinks of trying out for the varsity team. But Ryan's plans are put on hold when autumn rolls around and Josh concentrates on the football team. Throughout the novel, his single-minded, nearly ruthless ambition is shown as the opposite of Ryan's nagging insecurities. The image of himself as Josh's toady drives Ryan to begin working out months before baseball season. Josh's careful maneuvering during practice shows Ryan at his best, and he makes the varsity cut; the team's unprecedented success is achieved largely through the symbiosis between the boys as pitcher and catcher. There the connection ends: Josh, master of high school politics, grows more arrogant while Ryan blossoms with newfound confidence. A championship season seems clinched until Josh, in a wolf mask, assaults a female classmate who has embarrassed him. Ryan interrupts the assault and recognizes Josh. Deuker, adept at capturing the thrills during the game, also proves talented at dramatizing Ryan's torment in the face of his friend's deeds; the depiction of a boy coming into his own is resonant and inspiring. (Fiction. 12+) --
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Users Review

From reader reviews:

April Little:

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Donald Hamann:

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