

Reviewer's Name: Karen Steinberger

Reviewer's Position: Young Adult Librarian, Carmel Clay Public Library

## ***The Walk On***

**AUTHOR:** John Feinstein

**PUBLISHER:** Alfred A. Knopf

**COPYRIGHT:** 2014

**GENRE:** Sports

**SETTING:** The setting is high school football season 2014 in Chester Heights, Pennsylvania.

### **SUMMARY:**

*The Walk On* by John Feinstein is the first book in The Triple Threat series. It follows a freshman athlete through a year of high school sports, one season, and one book at a time, starting with football. Alex is a talented quarterback dealing with his parents' separation, a move across the country, and an unscrupulous head coach whose son is the current starting varsity quarterback. Play-by-play football along with freedom of the press, an absentee father, and a surprise twist fuel a realistic page-turner with controversies on and off the field.

### **BOOK TALK:**

Starting as a varsity quarterback would have been a sure thing back in Boston. Even though he's only a freshman, Alex is a triple threat--a three-sport athlete who can lead a team in baseball, basketball, and especially football. But at his new school in Pennsylvania, the starting quarterback is none other than the coach's son. And not just any coach: a local legend who will stop at nothing to showcase his own son while browbeating the team to win the state championship. When the clock is at twenty seconds and counting and everyone on the sideline is screaming, will it be the BEST quarterback or the coach's favorite who takes the snap?

If you like realistic sports stories with exciting play-by-play action, *The Walk On* by John Feinstein might be the novel for you, as it is the first book in The Triple Threat series that follows a freshman athlete through a year of high school sports, one season, and one book at a time.

### **AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH:**

**AUTHOR'S NAME:** John Feinstein

John Feinstein is an American sportswriter who has reported for the *Washington Post*, *Sports Illustrated*, and more. A prolific author mainly of sports nonfiction for adults, he writes a weekly blog for CBS Sports Radio and hosts the CBS Sports Minute at [radio.cbssports.com](http://radio.cbssports.com).

- Blog for CBS Sports Radio: [radio.cbssports.com/personality/john-feinstein](http://radio.cbssports.com/personality/john-feinstein)
- Twitter: [@JFeinsteinBooks](https://twitter.com/JFeinsteinBooks)
- Website: [jfeinsteinbooks.com](http://jfeinsteinbooks.com)

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**Other books written by the author:**

YA Series Fiction (sorted by volume):

- The Sports Beat: Steve and Susan Carol Sports Mysteries  
*Last Shot: A Final Four Mystery* (2005)  
*Vanishing Act: Mystery at the U.S. Open* (2006)  
*Cover-Up: Mystery at the Super Bowl* (2007)  
*Change-Up: Mystery at the World Series* (2009)  
*The Rivalry: Mystery at the Army-Navy Game* (2010)  
*Rush for the Gold: Mystery at the Olympic Games* (2012)
- The Triple Threat  
*The Walk On* (2014)  
*The Sixth Man* (2015)

YA Standalone Fiction: *Foul Trouble* (2013)

Adult Nonfiction (sorted in descending order by publication date):

*Where Nobody Knows Your Name: Life in the Minor Leagues of Baseball* (2014)  
*One on One: Behind the Scenes with the Greats in the Game* (2011)  
*Moment of Glory: The Year Underdogs Ruled Golf* (2010)  
*Are You Kidding Me?: The Story of Rocco Mediate's Extraordinary Battle with Tiger Woods at the US Open* (2009)  
*Living on the Black: Two Pitchers, Two Teams, One Season to Remember* (2008)  
*Tales from Q School: Inside Golf's Fifth Major* (2007)  
*Last Dance: Behind the Scenes at the Final Four* (2006)  
*Next Man Up: A Year Behind the Lines in Today's NFL* (2005)  
*Caddy for Life: The Bruce Edwards Story* (2005)  
*Let Me Tell You a Story: A Lifetime in the Game* (2004) co-written with Red Auerbach  
*Open: Inside the Ropes at Bethpage Black* (2003)  
*The Punch: One Night, Two Lives, and the Fight That Changed Basketball Forever* (2002)  
*The Last Amateurs: Playing for Glory and Honor in Division I College Basketball* (2000)  
*The Majors: In Pursuit of Golf's Holy Grail* (1999)  
*The First Coming: Tiger Woods, Master or Martyr* (1998)  
*A March to Madness: The View from the Floor in the Atlantic Coast Conference* (1998)  
*The Best American Sports Writing, 1996* (1996) edited by John Feinstein  
*A Civil War: Army vs. Navy: A Year Inside College Football's Purest Rivalry* (1996)  
*A Good Walk Spoiled: Days and Nights on the PGA Tour* (1995)  
*Play Ball: The Life and Troubled Times of Major League Baseball* (1993)  
*Hard Courts* (1991)  
*Forever's Team* (1990)  
*A Season Inside: One Year in College Basketball* (1988)  
*A Season on the Brink: A Year with Bob Knight and the Indiana Hoosiers* (1986)

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Adult Fiction

*Running Mates* (1992)

*Winter Games* (1995)

### **SIMILAR BOOKS/BOOKS WITH A SIMILAR THEME:**

*Cover-Up: Mystery at the Super Bowl* by John Feinstein

*Gym Candy* by Carl Deuker

*If You're Reading This* by Trent Reedy

*Payback Time* by Carl Deuker

*Pop* by Gordon Korman

*QBI* by Mike Lupica

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

1. "A football team is a family." (p. 143) Do you agree? Why or why not? What do you think of the Chester Heights Lions' football team? Consider the players, coaches, practices, games, and the season as a whole.
2. Nepotism means favoritism based on relationships with family and friends. How does nepotism affect the Lions? Do you think Matt would say that he is the starting quarterback because of or in spite of his father being head coach? Why? What would it feel like to be Matt?
3. Coach Hillier advises Alex to consider transferring to a different school for more game time (p. 23-25). Other players on the team have repeated a grade solely for football, getting bigger, learning more about the game, and waiting for an open position (p. 30). What are the pros and cons of staying back a year or transferring to a different school for sports? Do you agree with the decision that Alex makes (p. 66-67)? Why or why not?
4. Why did Coach Hillier allow the school newspaper to include articles that criticized Coach Gordon (p. 115-116, 121-122, 135-137, 140-142)? Do you think there is a conflict of interest between managing the school newspaper and coaching the football team? Why or why not?
5. Discuss the practice of drug-testing high school athletes during statewide competition (p. 268-273). What do you think about what happens to Alex (p. 283-285, 300-301, 306-307, 313-314)? Are the procedures fair? Why or why not?

### **ACTIVITIES WITH STANDARDS:**

#### **Language Arts**

- **Sportscast the Game for a Radio Broadcast**  
Imagine what happens after the cliffhanger ending.  
Read *The Walk On* in its entirety and then review the last two pages of the book.  
Imagine you are a sports reporter in the press box at the stadium, preparing to broadcast the game live on the radio.

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Write a pre-game script that introduces some of the players, briefly recaps the season, and generates excitement and anticipation for the game.

Imagine that the game begins and you are broadcasting live for a radio audience. Write a script describing the action on the field for the first few minutes of the game.

Record a podcast that includes the pre-game introduction and the first few plays.

### **Indiana Academic Standards for Language Arts**

**8.RL.1** Read a variety of literature within a range of complexity appropriate for grades 6-8. By the end of grade 8, students interact with texts proficiently and independently.

**6-8.W.1** Write routinely over a variety of time frames for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences; apply reading standards to support analysis, reflection, and research by drawing evidence from literature and nonfiction texts.

**6-8.SL.4.2** Create engaging presentations that integrate multimedia components and visual displays to clarify information, strengthen claims and evidence, and add interest.

### **Indiana Academic Standards for Theatre**

**7-8.6.2** Use fictional or non-fictional resources to create a short script.

- **Interview a Player and a Coach for a Post-Game Video**

Imagine what happens after the cliffhanger ending.

Read *The Walk On* in its entirety and then review the last two pages of the book.

Collaborate in a three-person group so that there is one TV sports reporter, one Lions' football player from *The Walk On*, and one Lions' coach from *The Walk On*.

Imagine that the state championship game is over. What happened?

Write a script that includes questions and answers as if the TV news reporter were interviewing the player and the coach to get their reactions to the outcome of the game and the season as a whole.

Film the interviews and produce a video.

### **Indiana Academic Standards for Language Arts**

**8.RL.1** Read a variety of literature within a range of complexity appropriate for grades 6-8. By the end of grade 8, students interact with texts proficiently and independently.

**6-8.W.1** Write routinely over a variety of time frames for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences; apply reading standards to support analysis, reflection, and research by drawing evidence from literature and nonfiction texts.

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**6-8.SL.1** Listen actively and adjust the use of spoken language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.

**6-8.SL.4.2** Create engaging presentations that integrate multimedia components and visual displays to clarify information, strengthen claims and evidence, and add interest.

### **Indiana Academic Standards for Theatre**

**6.8.2** Write and perform dialogue for characters from familiar stories.

**7-8.6.2** Use fictional or non-fictional resources to create a short script.

- **Write a Sports Column for *The Weekly Roar***

Imagine what happens after the cliffhanger ending.

Read *The Walk On* in its entirety and then review the last two pages of the book.

Imagine you are Steve Garland or Christine Whitford from *The Walk On*, reporting the state championship game for the school newspaper.

Write an article with an attention-getting headline to appear in *The Weekly Roar* after the game. Invent game highlights, the outcome, and interview quotes from characters in *The Walk On* to include in your article.

Also include a brief recap of the Chester Heights Lions' football season.

### **Indiana Academic Standards for Language Arts**

**8.RL.1** Read a variety of literature within a range of complexity appropriate for grades 6-8. By the end of grade 8, students interact with texts proficiently and independently.

**6-8.W.1** Write routinely over a variety of time frames for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences; apply reading standards to support analysis, reflection, and research by drawing evidence from literature and nonfiction texts.

**6-8.W.3.3** Write narrative compositions in a variety of forms that –

- Engage and orient the reader by establishing a context and point of view and introducing a narrator and/or characters.
- Organize an event sequence (e.g., conflict, climax, resolution) that unfolds naturally and logically, using a variety of transition words, phrases, and clauses to convey sequence and signal shifts from one time frame or setting to another.
- Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, and reflection, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.
- Use precise words and phrases, relevant descriptive details, and sensory language to capture the action and convey experiences and events.
- Provide an ending that follows from and reflects on the narrated experiences or events.

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- **Research High School Football**

In *The Walk On*, Alex reads the sports section of the newspaper (p. 77) and Coach Gordon follows the top twenty-five high school teams ranked by *USA Today* (p. 86).

Locate **Indiana** high school football news by navigating *The Indianapolis Star* online at [www.indystar.com/sports](http://www.indystar.com/sports), using the menus on the website.

Locate **national** high school football news online from *USA Today* at [usatodayhss.com](http://usatodayhss.com), using the menus on the website.

Read one article about high school football from each website.

Locate and watch one video clip of a high school football game online at MaxPreps [www.maxpreps.com](http://www.maxpreps.com), using the menus on the website.

Read *The Walk On* in its entirety.

Compare the news articles and the video clip to any aspect of *The Walk On*.

Summarize your findings in your choice of the following two formats: essay or collage.

Cite all four sources (including *The Walk On*) in MLA format, following the guidelines posted by Purdue OWL.

- a. Electronic Sources: [owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/0](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/0)
- b. Books: [owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/06/](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/06/)

### **Indiana Academic Standards for Language Arts**

**8.RL.1** Read a variety of literature within a range of complexity appropriate for grades 6-8. By the end of grade 8, students interact with texts proficiently and independently.

**7-8.W.5** Conduct short research assignments and tasks to build knowledge about the research process and the topic under study.

Formulate a research question.

Gather relevant information from multiple sources, using search terms effectively, and annotate sources.

Assess the credibility and accuracy of each source.

Quote or paraphrase the information and conclusions of others.

Avoid plagiarism and follow a standard format for citation.

Present information, choosing from a variety of formats.

### **RELATED INTERNET SITES:**

TeachingBooks.net [www.teachingbooks.net/qlq5mpn](http://www.teachingbooks.net/qlq5mpn)

### **Challenging Words**

unscathed - p. 45

sulk - p. 52

stymied - p. 63

endorphins - p. 66

entourage - p. 71

bravado - p. 107

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catalyst - p. 116  
mimicking - p. 117  
libelous - p. 122  
amnesty - p. 144  
ostracized - p. 147  
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dissipate - p. 296  
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jeopardize - p. 345  
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