

News from Houghton Mifflin Books for Children
For Immediate Release
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***Award-winning author Carl Deuker tackles the controversial
issue of teen steroid use.***

Gym Candy **By Carl Deuker**

Running back Mick Johnson is feeling the pressure of his big football dream. He wants so much to be the best, but his goal of perfection on the field seems so far away. He knows that in order to succeed he has to be the biggest, toughest, fastest, and strongest, but when good old-fashioned hard work stops cutting it, Mick's thoughts and actions turn dark and he begins to question how far he'll go for that extra edge.

Carl Deuker's *Gym Candy* (September 2007; Houghton Mifflin) is a bold and powerful look at the temptations and consequences of steroid use. Deuker, a seasoned and award-winning sports fiction writer, skillfully climbs into the mind of a young athlete pushed to his breaking point and bent on winning, no matter the cost to his body, mind, and soul. *Gym Candy* also touches on the important issues of peer and parental pressure and the extraordinary struggle today's young athletes face under the glare of the often unforgiving stadium lights.

Young readers will relate to Mick's anxieties and confusion as he struggles with lure of the "quick fix" and its ultimately destructive consequences. Parents, teachers, and coaches can and should share this book with one another and with young athletes in order to open a crucial dialogue on this frightening and increasingly pervasive issue.

Carl Deuker has written many exciting novels for young adults, including *Runner*, a Booklist Top Ten Sports Book; *High Heat*, a Booksense 76 Pick; and *Night Hoops*, an ALA Best Book for Young Adults. He currently lives in Seattle with his wife and daughter.

***Gym Candy* • September 2007**

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Dear Reviewer, Producer, Editor,

What happens when a healthy, driven, ambitious teen athlete finds himself collapsing under the crushing weight of his sports stardom dream?

This is the scary but important question that the award-winning author Carl Deuker poses in his latest novel, *Gym Candy* (September 2007; Houghton Mifflin).

Mick Johnson is a nice normal kid with a big dream. Raised by a father whose own botched football career hangs over the family like a shadow, Mick knows early on that failure is not an option. In the beginning, Mick is hopeful that practicing hard, taking care of his body, and going the extra mile will be all he needs to meet his goal. But when his best efforts fall short of the perfection he demands of himself, the once inconceivable prospect of illegal steroids becomes a very real temptation.

Carl Deuker is a seasoned and award-winning author of sports fiction, having written such acclaimed novels as *Runner* and *Night Hoops*. Deuker's ability to write accurately for the avid sports fan without alienating his audience is his calling card. His expertise and prowess is in full force in *Gym Candy*. Deuker's involving and empathetic characterizations perfectly encapsulate the teen experience, without being preachy or patronizing.

Ours is culture that worships the superstar athlete. Every day more and more star competitors such as Barry Bonds, Jason Giambi, and Rafael Palmeiro are being accused of steroid use. If these mature professional adults whose entire careers are staked on their not using steroids still find themselves drawn into its dark world, one can only imagine that young adults must feel this pressure tenfold. This powerful and provocative novel will challenge young readers, coaches, and parents to confront the increasingly prevalent issue of teen steroid use and its devastating consequences.

Carl Deuker is available for interviews to discuss his work. Please let us know if you need more information or would like to set up a time to speak with Carl.

A Conversation with the Author

Carl Deuker

Why did you write this book?

At my daughter's high school, the mantra for athletes was "bigger, faster, stronger." As a life-long mid-level athlete, I'm very aware that there is only so far that natural ability can take a person. Steroid use is the dark side of "You can be whatever you set out to be."

How did you become a writer, and what interested you in the profession?

I always liked to read. When I turned 13, my world was full of Bob Dylan, the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, etc. I had a teacher hand me *Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* by James Joyce. I didn't understand much (any?) but I was overwhelmed with the power of words.

Why is it important to educate young readers about steroid use?

To me, the question is limits. In trying so hard to encourage kids, we adults often tell them absurd things. "You can be great if you put your mind to it. You can become anything you want." Well, not everyone can be great, not everyone can become anything they want.

What do you want young readers to learn from this book?

Do your best and accept the results, whatever they might be. Adapt, change, respond to life.

What can parents, teachers and coaches do to educate and protect young athletes?

The key thing is to work with the person in front of you. Yes, some kids can work out in the summer and gain 20 pounds and increase their bench press by 20 percent. But not all kids can. And the kids that can't are not failures. Kids mature at different rates. Sometimes the fantastic eighth grade athlete is actually just a young person who has matured more quickly.

What was the most surprising thing you learned while writing this book?

How very easy it is to order steroids (or something that someone says is steroids) through the Internet. Also, how wildly different the "advice" about "proper use" from "experts" is. I wanted to "get it right" in describing steroid use, but it would be hard to get it wrong.

How do you feel about the prevalence of steroid use among professional athletes? Do you feel this plays a role in the pressure that younger athletes feel to take steroids?

The professional leagues need to test all the time. Users are cheating, plain and simple, and steroid use by big-name athletes encourages young athletes to cheat. The next big problem, I suspect, will be in the high schools and especially the colleges. Athletes there (as amateurs) are – in most states – legally protected from any kind of forced drug testing. Think of the pressure on a junior and senior in college who dreams of being an NFL player, or on a junior or senior in high school who dreams of landing a scholarship to one of the big-time college programs. It's wishful thinking to believe that steroid use won't become more and more common.