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1-4-1995

## "Hoop Dreams"

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### Recommended Citation

Crepeau, Richard C., ""Hoop Dreams"" (1995). *On Sport and Society*. 231.  
<https://stars.library.ucf.edu/onsportandsociety/231>



SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR ARETE  
January 4, 1995

It is unusual that a documentary would be named as movie of the year. It is astounding when the subject of the film of the year is sport. Both have occurred and starting tonight you can see "Hoop Dreams" at the Enzian Theater in Maitland.

Winner of the 1994 Sundance Film Festival Award for best Documentary "Hoop Dreams" an eight year project by Steve James, Frederick Marx, and Peter Gilbert follows the lives of two inner city Chicago boys who become men, during the five years chronicled in this extraordinary work of art. William Gates and Arthur Agee are fourteen-year-old children when they first appear on screen, and they are nineteen-year-old young men when the film ends.

This five-year journey extending over nearly three hours-and no it isn't too long-will leave you drained emotionally and challenged intellectually. You will never watch a high school or college basketball game in the same way again. You should come away with a much better sense of what life is like in the inner cities of America. And you should seriously question the industry of Sports in America and what it has done to the values of those whose lives it touches--players, coaches, school authorities, or fans.

You will never watch a game in the same way because after you live through the dreams of William Gates and Arthur Agee you will know the complex pressures that play upon these and so many other young men. Both Gates and Agee see the "pro myth" as the ultimate goal of their lives. The struggles to achieve the goal amidst the pressures put on by family, coaches, peers, and the environment twist and turn these young men in ways that will both amaze and appall.

Surely children in their mid-teens are not capable of dealing with all of these pressures and temptations, and surely no sane society would tolerate institutions that not only place these pressures on children, but seem to find enormous delight in doing so. The spectacle of college coaches recruiting these young men to come to their schools, the meat market environment of the Nike basketball camp complete with Dick Vitale, and the monstrous presence of the Dream, will leave you pondering the meaning of the corruption of education by sport.

But all of that pales when compared to the recruiting of these two fourteen year old eighth graders by a suburban Catholic high school. Anyone who thought that there was something religious about Catholic education will have to reevaluate after watching how quickly the authorities at St. Joseph's High School cast off Agee when it appears he will not be a star player. And the real scandal is that so few people recognize that it is.

This is not a film about basketball. It is about the dreams and aspirations of two young and representative men, and more importantly it is about the American dream as played out in a disenfranchised sector of American life. This look at African-American family life in the most trying of circumstances, is both depressing and exhilarating. Depressing for what it exposes about the powerful forces that seek to devour the human spirit in the struggle for everyday existence. Exhilarating for what it shows us about the power of the human spirit to struggle both valiantly and vainly against these forces. The inner beauty and enormous courage of Emma Gates, William's mother, and Arthur and Sheila Agee, Arthur's parents are more inspiring than anything appearing on the silver screen in years.

But in the end the centerpiece of this film are the two similar and yet quite different young men who have staked their lives on the belief that the NBA is a ticket to happiness. Of the two Gates may be the more interesting because he is more aware of the forces operating on him, and he is an extremely sensitive person. He appears, at least initially, to be more talented physically and academically than Arthur. In the end when a knee injury threatens to end his basketball career, and his priorities change after he becomes a father William realizes that the Hoop Dreams are false and that real life lies ahead.

For Arthur Agee this emotional and intellectual maturation never seems to happen. After he is dumped by St. Joseph's, he returns to an inner city school and finds basketball stardom. Lacking the grades and test scores to go big time he settles for a Junior College where the Dream lives on.

Perhaps most remarkable of all, both are still in college. William seems likely to graduate after having taken the ACT test five times to get into Marquette, while Arthur's career seems more a tribute to the ability to major in eligibility while going the JC route to his present address at Arkansas State.

This is a truly remarkable story about Sport and American Life, and should be seen by anyone who cares about either. It will be playing at the Enzian for at least the next two weeks.

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