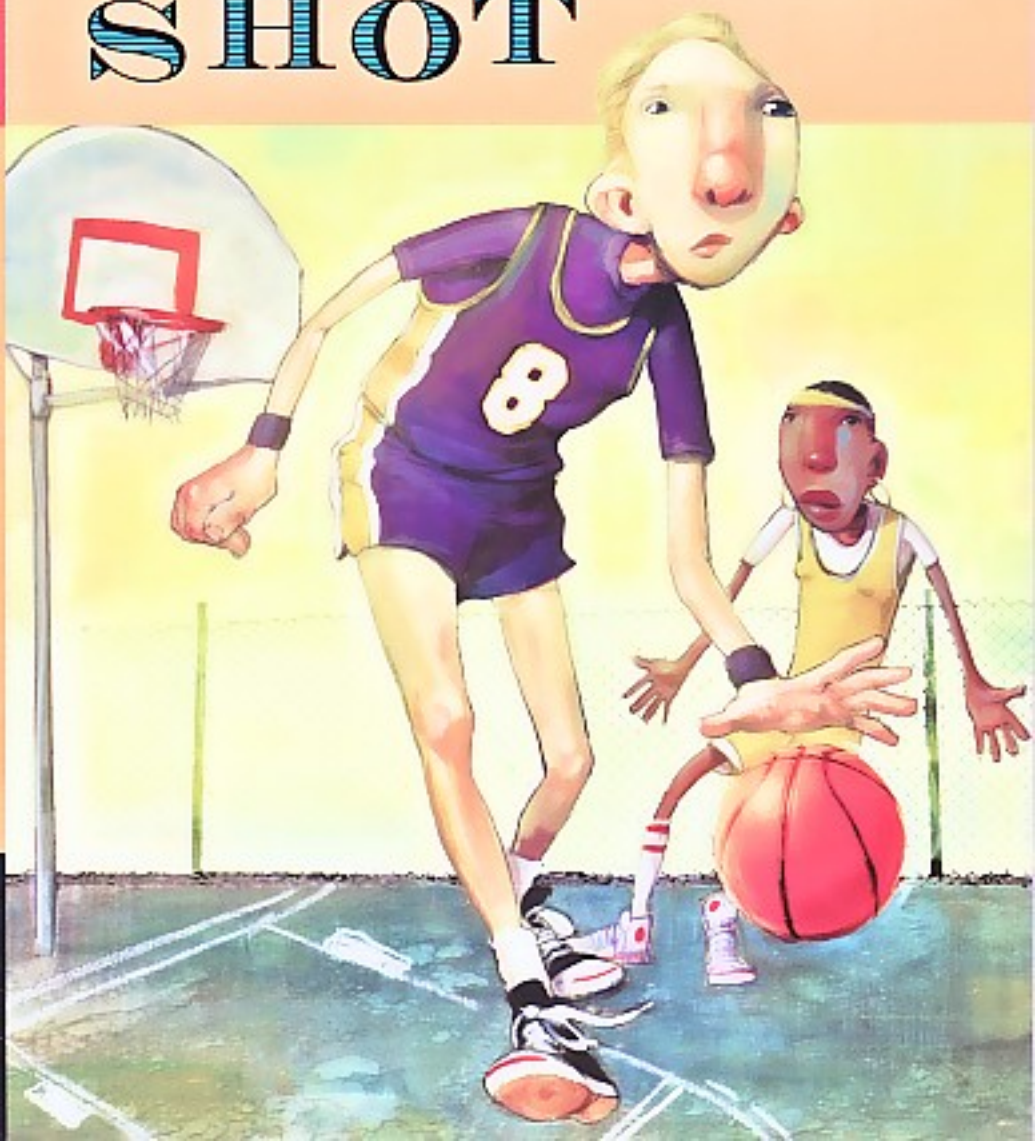


Author of THE MILLION DOLLAR KICK

THE **DAN GUTMAN**

MILLION DOLLAR SHOT



Eddie "Air" Ball

OKAY, LAST PLAY! Your turn, Eddie Ball!" hollered our gym teacher, Mr. Ianucci. "This is Eddie's shot, everybody!"

It was the end of the school year, and Mr. Ianucci was putting the fifth-grade boys through a basketball drill. He had split our class into two teams, Shirts and Skins. I always prayed to be on the Shirts because I'm real skinny and I don't like taking my shirt off in front of other people. My ribs show, you know? It's embarrassing.

But today I was a Skin. One of my friends, Ty Wegner, dribbled the ball upcourt. The Shirts backpedaled to defend their basket. Ty passed off to Johnny DeFonzo, another friend of mine.

As the designated shooter, I wasn't allowed to touch the ball until the end. The shooter's job in this drill is to

move *without* the ball and try to get open so one of your teammates can pass it to you. It's tough, because everyone on the other team knows you're the one who will eventually take the shot.

I scooted under the basket and out to the corner of the court, but there were Shirts all over me. Johnny passed the ball to Ty. I cut back the other way, but I was still covered in the other corner.

"Okay," boomed Mr. Ianucci. "Pretend there are six seconds left on the clock!"

Oh, man! I *hate* when he does that.

I ducked behind Johnny, faked as if I were heading for the basket, and ran out near the foul line. I was open, and I figured I had about a second or so before I'd be surrounded by Shirts.

Ty whipped a pass to me. Quickly, I planted my feet at the foul line.

"Shoot it, Eddie!" Johnny yelled.

I took aim and put it up. The ball missed everything.

"Air ball!" Ty said disgustedly.

"Hey, we shouldn't call you Eddie Ball," one of the Shirts said, laughing. "From now on we oughta call you *Air Ball!*"

I heard the guys snickering as we filed into the locker

room. Mr. Ianucci slapped me on the back and said, "Nice try, Eddie. You'll sink it next time."

It didn't make me feel any better.

Let me get one thing straight right from the start. I can *shoot*.

I can shoot the daylights out of a basketball. I've always had a special talent for throwing stuff at targets. I can toss a soda can into the recycling bucket from across the room. No problem. I can fire a snowball at a tree across the street and hit it nine times out of ten.

It's like a sixth sense. Sometimes I set up a bunch of toy soldiers on a table and pick them off with a rubber band one by one. Other kids are amazed. I can shoot a bow and arrow like a laser beam. I'm always winning stuff at carnivals.

Of course, being a great shooter isn't good enough in a real game. You've got to be able to dribble the ball. You've got to be able to pass. You've got to be able to handle pressure.

I was never as good at those things. I get rattled when I'm playing in a game. The other kids are always shouting, sticking their hands in my face. Everybody's running

THE MILLION DOLLAR SHOT

When Eddie Ball finds out about the Finkles poetry contest—a chance to win a million dollars by sinking a foul shot during halftime at the NBA Finals—he realizes it could be the end to his and his mother's problems. But someone really wants Eddie to shoot an air ball on the big day, and will do anything to sabotage the million dollar shot....

"Another page-turner...Gutman's subtle humor, exciting sports action, and excruciating suspense make this title an outstanding choice. . . ." —*School Library Journal*

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