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Long Shot

Timothy Tocher
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Basketball season is just about to start, and eleven-year-old Laurie Bird Preston doesn't want to move to a new town. But her dad has just accepted a new job as the girls' basketball coach in the middle school in his old hometown, and they are moving in with Laurie's grandmother.

For the fifth-grader, the move is tough. She doesn't want to leave Bradley, New York, and her best friend Christy. Her dad didn't even let her see her new school, and she's worried about being the new kid. Plus, Grandma wasn't expecting an athletic granddaughter who prefers basketball to knitting.

The first person Laurie meets, Howard, is often a target of older bullies, but is invaluable to the team, because he's a computer whiz who understands statistics. But basketball practice isn't what Laurie expected or hoped for. Dawn and Jackie, two eighth-graders, expect to be the stars of the team, and don't like Laurie's prowess with the ball. The two girls also resent the new coach, and don't think they need to work hard to secure starter spots, but Coach Preston feels differently. The eighth-graders quit the team, taking two other players with them. The remaining girls are all younger, less experienced players who are unsure about their abilities and nervous about the season.

Coach Preston works the girls hard and doesn't give up on the team. Slowly, as the girls get stronger, their play improves. Eventually, Jackie and Dawn want back on the team, and the girls have to decide whether to vote them in. The team makes it to the state middle school basketball championships, where Laurie meets up with her old best friend, Christy. It isn't the meeting they envisioned, though-their two teams play against each other for the championship. Feeling the conflict between old loyalties and new commitments, Laurie must make the final shot.

Tocher, an elementary school teacher, really understands kids-and basketball. His stories have appeared in the Girls to the Rescue series, New Fangled Fairy Tales, and Cricket magazine. The characters in *Long Shot* are likeable and believable; they act like real kids, as intermediate readers will recognize. For basketball fans, there is enough play-by-play to satisfy. This is an enjoyable story that sports-loving girls will love, and it fills a real need for sports fiction.

TRACY FITZWATER (August 16, 2001)

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