Clarion Review

General

The Coach's Son
Jeffrey Hickey
CreateSpace
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Five Stars (out of Five)

Wherever there is a sporting event, the die-hard fans will be there. It may be a mother at her son's Little League game, screaming wildly, or a middle-aged man painted in his team's colors at a soccer match. Regardless of who the home team is or who has the odds stacked against them, such fans believe their cheering and acts of encouragement will help their team emerge victorious. For Mark O'Bern, his loyalty is more than an unfounded belief in his team's ability to win: it is his gift.

Chester O'Bern, Mark's father, had been the head coach of the 1963 San Francisco 49ers. After a miserable season that had fans ridiculing and cursing him after games—antics witnessed by Mark, who was six years old at the time—Chester lands an assistant coach job with the Dallas Cowboys. During Cowboys games, Mark develops a series of rituals, including two special sitting positions, patterned finger tapping, and touching of pressure points, that he feels have a direct effect on the game. In fact, "he still joined the crowd in their chants, though these were beginning to strike Mark as irrelevant to the action and somewhat irritating when they interrupted one of his own silent strategies." Indeed, evidence mounts that Mark's gift of being able to manipulate events on the field is undeniable.

Mark learns that he can influence the outcome of an athletic event and control people's thoughts and actions. He can even cause physical reactions, such as when he uses only his thoughts to make his teacher's nose start to bleed. He eventually learns that his brother and mother have kept silent about their own unusual gifts.

Jeffrey Hickey's account of a boy coming of age in the 1960s succeeds on many levels. Sports fans will enjoy the abundance of stories about professional baseball and football, especially since Hickey speaks of real players and teams—such as Don Drysdale, the Cowboys, and the New York Mets—to draw the reader into the story. Hickey meshes well-known names

and believable situations with Mark's exaggerated exploits, and the result is a story that is both entertaining and well told.

Hickey also weaves in several serious issues that make strong points. Mark witnesses blatant racism, religious hatred, bullying, and political unrest typical of the turmoil of the decade. Alongside these, Mark is experiencing the usual boyhood tumult of relationships, love, and self-discovery.

The underlying theme of "doing your duty" as a family member surfaces throughout the story, from Mark's childhood years through his adulthood. The point is reinforced by the many insightful interactions that convey the strength and support of the O'Bern family.

Although heavily loaded with sports stories, *The Coach's Son* will appeal to readers looking for a skillfully written, family-based novel full of intriguing story lines.

Jeff Friend