

Trolley Dodgers

Jeff Stanger

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It all started out as a joke. A local sports columnist in Bloomington, Indiana had hoped to get people amped up about bringing a minor-league baseball team to town someday. But that joke turned into a very real effort by the residents to buy the Los Angeles Dodgers and transplant them to this small Midwestern town.

Crazy idea? Definitely. But that didn't stop the people of Bloomington in this debut novel by a former sports and humor columnist (his column, "Instant Replay," appeared in BC Magazine). He brings together a hodge-podge cast of characters typical of any middle-America town and makes jabs at most of them—the local environmental group, the liberals, the conservatives, everybody—with humor that should crack a smile at the very least.

They were twelve-year-old pals when Andy and Darryl wished on a couple of shooting stars one night while playing baseball. Andy pinned his hopes on a baseball team in Bloomington, but he could have never imagined what would happen many years later. When the story begins, Andy, Darryl and two of their buddies are all grown up, but that doesn't keep them from chasing that childhood dream, far-fetched as it is.

With a summer to raise \$250 million, the four friends hire Kate Ketner as the would-be first female general manager in baseball and the dollars begin to pour in. Each chapter starts with a running tally of money raised, building the suspense of the story. Will this small town pull it off? Will all the silly antics during a Fourth of July parade, in which a food fight ensues between grown adults, be the undoing of this dream? Despite the obstacles, the friends persist; in the words of Andy's wise and spirited grandmother, "Sometimes a dream is too big not to go after."

Jeff Stanger lives and writes in Indianapolis. He is a grant consultant for nonprofits in the Midwest and serves on the board of directors for Play Ball Indiana, an organization committed to providing inner-city youth with opportunities to play baseball. He also operates a popular online blog, "Jeffreaux's World."

Trolley Dodgers is a story in which readers can't help but root for the underdog, and it's that quality that will keep them engaged. Some of the humor may be inappropriate for less mature readers, and the author includes some subtle right-wing ideology. However, Stanger's writing style will still appeal to most of his young-adult target audience.

LYNN GEIGER (August 18, 2009)

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