

KIRKUS REVIEWS

TITLE INFORMATION

BORN READY: THE MIXED LEGACY OF LEN BIAS

Ungrady, Dave J

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BOOK REVIEW

Ungrady (co-author: *Tales from the Maryland Terrapins*, 2014) examines the lasting effects of an American tragedy, a talent cut down too soon.

Len Bias, the No. 2 overall draft choice of the Boston Celtics in 1986, died of a cocaine overdose two days after he was anointed to help sustain the NBA dynasty. His death, followed by that of Celtics star Reggie Lewis from cardiac arrest in 1993, set the team back for more than two decades. Bias' death in particular has always been surrounded by the question: Why? A quarter-century later, Ungrady—who, like Bias, attended the University of Maryland—set out to learn the answer and to find the rippling ramifications of the star basketball player's death. As the sportswriter explains, “more than any athlete who has died in the last half-century, Bias still evokes a searing and confusing mix of regret and remorse, anger and sympathy, bewilderment and bitterness, and lingering sadness over the success the young athlete might have known had he not celebrated too hard, too soon.” Ungrady argues that Bias' death, at just 22, has had unparalleled effects not just on his family and friends, or on the son he never knew, but also on the careers of Maryland administrators, coaches and athletes. There was an outcry for tougher drug laws, which led to harsh, mandatory sentencing for cocaine dealers and users; on the flip side, cocaine use has since dropped among high school students. Ungrady faced one big obstacle when researching this book: Two and a half decades hasn't been enough time for the wound to heal. “Many of the people most affected prefer to remain silent on the topic, or talk guardedly about it,” Ungrady says. Still, his dogged research, including his conducting new interviews and mining previously produced materials, has yielded a well-rounded portrait of Bias and those who are trying to make sense of his death.

A cautionary sports tale that shows how one life unexpectedly ended can affect so many others.