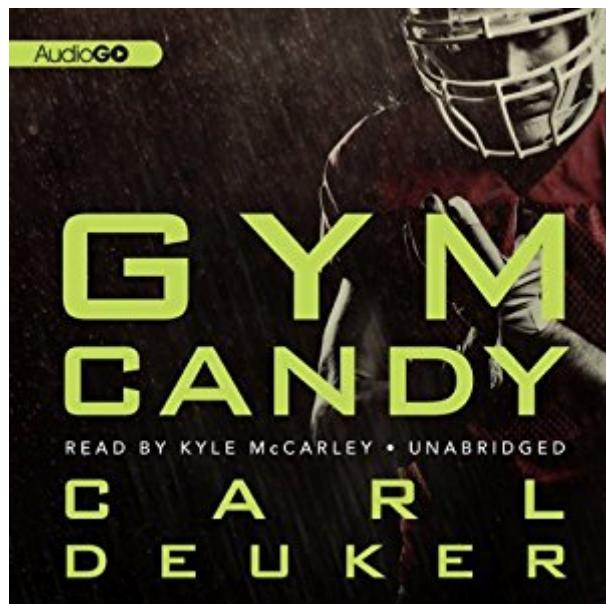


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# Gym Candy



## **Synopsis**

Running back Mick Johnson has dreams: dreams of cutting back, finding the hole, breaking in to the open, and running free with nothing but green grass ahead. He has dreams of winning and of being the best. But football is a cruel sport. It requires power, grace, speed, quickness, and knowledge of the game. It takes luck, too. One crazy bounce can turn a likely victory into sudden defeat. What elite athlete wouldn't look for an edge? A way to make him bigger, stronger, faster? This novel explores the dark corners of the heart of a young football player as he struggles for success under the always glaring - and often unforgiving - stadium lights.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Carl Deuker, a name of note in YA sports writing, has scored again with this realistic look at how a high school football player who knows better can rationalize his way into steroids merely by being ambitious, competitive, curious, and in the wrong place at the wrong time. The scary thing is, that's not too unusual a combination. Take this plus the fact that protagonist Mick Johnson already knows about steroids' side effects and health risks -- but takes the plunge anyway -- and you see the stuff of Deuker's engaging plot. The stage is set with exposition about Mick's family -- chiefly the story of his dad, Mike, an ex-college football stand-out who fumbled his career away with a combination of bad behavior and worse attitude. Now Mike's redemption can only come vicariously by encouraging his son to succeed where he failed. Next we get a series of game scenes, a Deuker specialty, showing Mick's strengths -- speed and quick moves -- as well as his weakness -- strength. The

pieces are in place, and when Mick's dad's company buys a health club, Mick gets an "in" that begins a dark journey into a tangled forest, the world of weight lifters on juice. Books like this are a boon for boys who are reluctant readers but enthusiastic sports participants, and Deuker doesn't pretend to be writing anything deep and literary -- he's just writing great plot that makes kids read. Make no mistake, however: this book has a message worthy of discussion. Better yet, it avoids the mistake of coming across as any finger-wagging lecture. In fact, I tip my hat to Deuker for juking the obvious ending (which was about to tackle him shy of a successful conclusion) and writing a more realistic one that scored big with me (extra point is good, too). You see, sometimes stories don't tie together so sweetly. Sometimes, in fact, the truth is more bittersweet than not. GYM CANDY is such a story with such an ending. A thoughtful, sobering sports book, I recommend it highly.

I had ordered a set of this book for one of my 7th grade teachers. She liked it for her reluctant readers. I hadn't read it until now and I couldn't agree more with her assessment. Students from 5th to HS will connect with this book. Very realistic in its portrayal of the pressure young athletes endure from parents and coaches. Highly recommend this book. The ending will take your breath away.

I teach Deuker's "Night Hoops" in my eighth grade English classes and it's consistently popular with even the reluctant readers. But now, I've found a novel I like even more. I like it because it wrestles with issues deeper than sports. I like it because it doesn't take the easy way out in the end. And I like it because it's just a damn good story, timely and entertaining. Despite my high endorsement, I do have one quibble. I'm very familiar with weights and lifting, and one sentence reveals a lack of care to details: "Now he was standing in front of the mirror, bench-pressing two hundred pounds . ." Every bench press I know involves lying on the bench, not standing. That one quibble aside, this book is bound to be popular with boys facing the same issues Mick Johnson is facing.

As a former language arts teacher, I highly recommend this novel to middle school boys who claim they hate to read. This book reached my sports minded students and non-readers with its honesty, action, surprises, and relevance. Carl Deuker, you did the impossible. My congratulations on an outstanding novel!

The teacher in me knows that boys need books that spark their interest, and "Gym Candy" should do the trick. It's not a great young adult novel, but the football backdrop and timely subject matter are enough to warrant it a place on middle/high school shelves. There's nothing to offend

parents--no adult language or sexual situations. This is the story of a boy feeling the pressure to outdo his peers on the field and succumbing to the temptation of steroids. Today's young adults live in a world of instant gratification. There's a lesson to be learned here, and the author does a good job teaching it.

About eight years ago, I was nine years old and had challenged myself to reading Harry Potter. That was a great decision; I LOVED those books and they were so good that I had managed to "take the place" of the main character. It almost felt like virtual fantasy. Afterwards, I never happened to be that involved with reading, and I thought that maybe I flat out lost my desire of reading for good. Fast forward to two years ago. For school, I had to choose ANY book and read it and then complete three out of ten possible creative activities. After searching through the library catalogue, I decided on this book. I figured that I would probably read a fourth of it before finding an online summary to "finish" it. This book started off kind of slow, but wow, I became very interested in the book. It was very "magical" like Harry Potter was in the sense that I felt like I was in control of the main character and I could interact with other characters; that's how good it was. I probably read the final two thirds in one night.

Gym Candy by Carl Deuker starts with Mick Johnson playing football through out his childhood. As his football career goes on, things start to get more competitive. He tried lifting weights religiously. Obviously, that wasn't enough for Mick. As a result of this he gets sucked in to the life of steroids. This is the best book I've ever read. It is the book that is the most entertaining book to read. Well at least out of everything that I've read. Regularly I hate reading with a passion, but I could read this book for two straight hours. This book is a must read. I can almost assure that if you are a teenager you will enjoy this book. After reading this, I named it my all time favorite book. This book is a great example of realistic fiction. In my opinion, this book is definitely a five star.

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