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Man In The Middle



Synopsis

Man in the Middle chronicles John Amaechi's extraordinary journey from awkward, overweight English lad to jet-setting NBA star. Along the way, he endured endless obstacles to his hoop dreams being abandoned by his father, being cut from his first college team, recovering from a life-threatening injury, playing for abusive coaches, and losing his mother -- while also protecting a vital secret that could have ended his career: John Amaechi was gay. Now in this poignant and intimate memoir, Amaechi takes us into the hypermasculine world of professional sports and into the very center of his soul. As tender as it is brutally frank, Man in the Middle follows him from the rough streets of Manchester to Penn State (where he first achieved basketball stardom and began to recognize his sexuality) to the cities (Orlando, Houston, Salt Lake City) and countries (Greece, France) in which he played. A moving story of adversity and diversity, Man in the Middle is a testament to the power of one man's convictions and to the universal desire to make the world a better place.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Full disclosure: I was actually a fan of the man known as "Meech" back in his "pre-gay" days, when he was "merely" a center for the Orlando Magic (albeit a tea-drinking, poetry-writing center - none of which are gay per se, just highly unusual for NBA big men). I had no knowledge of his sexual orientation until this book was announced. I just knew of him as an articulate, funny, hard-working and self-effacing gentleman - an unlikely success story in the world of professional athletics, to be sure. The British version of Rudy, perhaps...So I fully acknowledge that just because I really liked

this book doesn't necessarily mean you will. After all, I am the most ready-made of target audiences, already holding the author in high esteem. But please allow me, in this review, to introduce you to Mr. John Amaechi and give you a sampling of his words. And hopefully once familiar with this wonderful fellow you will be encouraged to see for yourself just what he has to impart. First off, let me say that with most sports books that are co-written with another author, you would be right to be cynical about words like "gregariousness" and "miscreants" (and phrases like "a bonanza of flesh") appearing in the prose. You'd be forgiven for finding it highly unlikely a pro athlete would write like that. But anyone who has heard John's spoken eloquence (or read his website poetry) knows that these would not be surprising word choices for him. And one of the best things about this book is the joy in the language - John has always been a bit of a "word nerd" of sorts, so this offering comes loaded with a colorful vernacular and some nifty turns of phrase (I think "barmy armies" is my favorite - used to describe the truly fanatical basketball fans in Europe).

Most famous gay people are really famous people who happen to be gay. Being a writer is what put Oscar Wilde in the spotlight; being the First Lady is what did the same for Eleanor Roosevelt. John Amaechi's life is the exact same way. This book is 95% about life before and in the NBA, period. A straight person who wants to be a basketball star could find this just as useful as a person struggling to accept being gay. Governor James McGreevey and Mr. Amaechi both visited what the British call "cottages," but just as McGreevey's autobiography was mostly about politics and a little about being gay, so Amaechi's book is mostly about his profession. That being said, homophobes, and of course I disagree strongly with such bigotry, could pick apart this book and the man's life. John Amaechi had an absent father and a strong mother: the recipe that many bigoted people say would make a male gay. Amaechi is a political liberal who loves writing poetry and drinking tea. He also hates guns proliferation and doesn't really care for sports. Again, bigoted readers may dismiss him as a stereotypical gay man, despite his accomplishment as the first NBA player to come out. Amaechi's witty urbanity will rub many "red-blooded, all-American" sports fans the wrong way. Though there are more out football players than basketball players, Amaechi makes the NBA sound far less homophobic than Esera Tuaolo described of the NFL. Tuaolo said he feared for his bodily safety and that footballer players spouted homophobia constantly. Amaechi never describes fearing for his life and he minimally talks of homophobia in the NBA. Moreover, Tuaolo basically said NFL players could lose their jobs in an instant.

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