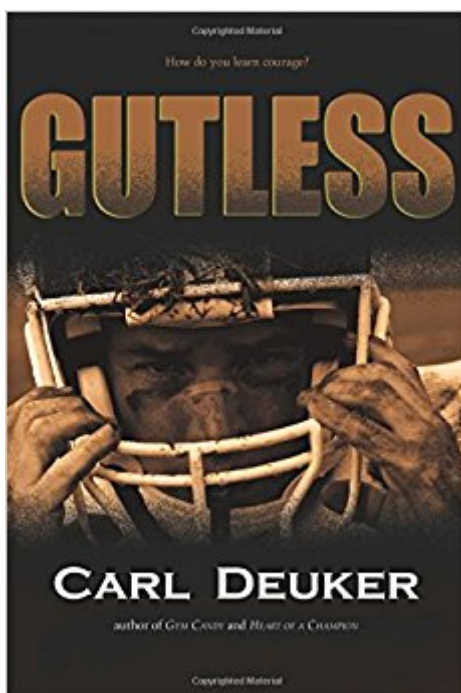


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# Gutless



## Synopsis

From the author of *Gym Candy* comes a novel of football and bullying, finding friends and finding courage. With both good speed and good hands, wide receiver Brock Ripley should be a natural for the varsity team, but he shies away from physical contact. When he gets cut from varsity, he also loses his friendship with star quarterback Hunter Gates who begins lashing out at not only Brock, but also Brock's friend, the quiet and smart Richie Fang. Brock wants to stand up for Fang, but he is younger, smaller, and doesn't want to cause problems. But when the bullying goes too far, will Brock be able to face his fears, stop being a bystander, and prove to himself that he is brave enough?

## Book Information

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Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars 22 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #279,920 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #60 in Books > Teens >

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Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

## Customer Reviews

[View larger](#) A Conversation with Carl Deuker The acclaimed author of *Gutless* talks about his approach to writing for young adults, the ongoing realities of peer bullying in the classroom, and some of his favorite sports activities.

What Inspired You to First Write YA Sports Fiction? Here's how I got started. I gave a writing assignment to my eighth-grade class. The directions were simple: Write about something you care about, and write honestly. That night I sat down to work on my then-current

project. It's a philosophical novel set in Czechoslovakia that was a total botch. I wrote a paragraph or two, then put my pencil down. I realized I'd given excellent advice to my students, and it was time for me to follow it myself. I lived and died with the Giants, the 49ers, the Warriors, the Cal Bears. I started On the Devil's Court that night. Talk a Little Bit about Brock, the Main Character of This Novel, and the Challenges He Faces. I taught middle school for thirty-five years. I had students like Brock come to school, blend in just fine, seem to be enjoying a Leave It to Beaver home life. Then, during the year, I'd learn that their lives were much harder than I could ever have imagined. Because of their tough home situations, Brock (and Richie) know more about life than most of their peers, but it's the kind of knowledge they can't easily share.

What Do You Hope Readers Will Take Away from How You Tackle the Issue of Bullying In Gutless?

That standing up to a bully requires courage. Hunter is physically powerful; he has a highly valued skill. He's a force at the school, a leader. Taking on the Hunters of this world is, therefore, a revolutionary act. It's turning the established order upside down. It's not a sign of weakness to ask for help; it's a necessity. Tell Us More about How Your Teaching Background Has Influenced Your Writing. Having watched boys, in particular, struggle to finish books, a few things became clear to me. First, I try to move the story and keep descriptive passages to a minimum. Second, I write short chapters. Finally, I never think, "I'm writing for a young adult." The books all revolve around some sort of moral choice/turning point facing the main character. The fact that the characters are young doesn't make problems less complex, so I avoid easy answers. Brock, for example, doesn't go to an adult, get immediate help, and poof the bullying ends.

In What Ways Do You Think these Expectations Affect Teenagers in Particular? Young adults are filled with doubt about themselves, their friends, their eventual place in the world. What they don't learn until they're older is that this doubt is a lifelong condition. We don't grow out of it. So I think there's a sense among middle and high school kids that they should be "squared away." I try to write books in which doubt and confusion are the norm, so that they can see their own doubts and confusion as normal. What Would You Say to any Kid Who is Currently a Victim Of Bullying but Unsure What to Do Next? Victims often blame themselves. So

the first thing I'd say is "Yes, you are right. You are flawed. But so is every other person in this world. You didn't bring this on yourself and you don't deserve what's happening to you." After that, my advice is standard. Bullying results from an unequal power situation. A bullied student needs to get help from adults, be they parents, coaches, or teachers. And if the student doesn't get that help the first time they ask, they need to go to somebody and ask again until they do.

**How Do You Tap into the Teen Voice When Writing Your Novels?** For many young people, male and female sports play a major role in their teen years. So in my books, sports aren't just something in the background. How the characters perform on the playing field profoundly influences how they feel about themselves the next day at school or at home. That, I think, rings true to the "reluctant" reader who is deeply involved in sports. It's not "just a game" to them, it's not even close. I think my books acknowledge that truth. **Were You Interested in Sports As a Kid? If so, Which Ones Were Particular Favorites?** If a ball bounced, I wanted to play and still do. I was generally good enough to make sports teams, but not good enough to crack the starting lineup. (Perhaps all that time on the bench observing games paid dividends in my writing.) Basketball was my favorite sport in high school, volleyball in college, and golf today. But if someone wants to play Ping-Pong, croquet, or go bowling, I'm in.

**Gr 6-10** Brock Ripley has just finished the eighth grade. While playing with his friends at a local park, he is spotted by the high school quarterback, Hunter Gates, and Hunter's dad. They ask him if he would like to help run passes so Hunter can get ready for fall football. It's odd, but when Hunter throws the football, somehow he and Brock share a connection that sets up a successful partnership but also a complicated relationship. Brock is athletic enough and known for his speed. However, he is also known for his aversion to any form of contact. He played goalie for the middle school soccer team and lost a big game when he froze in the face of a big player racing toward him. It's the kind of behavior that labels someone "gutless," and Brock feels it a lot, even off the playing field, especially when Hunter starts to bully Brock's new friend, Richie Fang. Richie is a wunderkind, the kind of kid who excels at math and science but also plays soccer and football. But he's also a show-off, and this gets him in trouble with the jocks. When Richie blows the game that

could take the team to the playoffs, Hunter takes it hard and tries to destroy Richie. Can Brock face his gutlessness and save Richie from serious retaliation? Full of play-by-play soccer and football action, this novel will appeal to sports fans who also like a well-crafted story. Deuker's characters are sharp, and the plot moves at a quick pace. Readers will empathize with Brock, who is also coping with a parent with a serious illness. His reactions to situations in the story as well as his perpetual honesty about his own limitations will endear him to readers. It is also refreshing to see that adults aren't always the infallible, wise heroes of the narrative. VERDICT A well-written offering that deals with coming-of-age, bullying, and exciting sports action; a touchdown for sports collections and reluctant readers. —Carol Connor, Cincinnati Public Schools, OH

"Deuker effectively draws readers into his protagonist's world..." —Horn Book "Fans who count on Deuker to put a provocative spin on an already satisfying story won't be disappointed." —Bulletin "A well-written offering that deals with coming-of-age, bullying, and exciting sports action; a touchdown for sports collections and reluctant readers." —School Library Journal "The sports may hook readers, but the bullying will land them." —Kirkus

My teenage sons favorite writer...

Already checked out at our library

Great book, should be required reading in 8th grade as a High School prep course, and Greater advice "Victims often blame themselves. So the first thing I'd say is "Yes, you are right. You are flawed. But so is every other person in this world. You didn't bring this on yourself and you don't deserve what's happening to you." After that, my advice is standard. Bullying results from an unequal power situation. A bullied student needs to get help from adults, be they parents, coaches, or teachers. And if the student doesn't get that help the first time they ask, they need to go to somebody and ask again until they do." Seattle, and the local high school is Hunter Gates' domain, the rest of the students are there to serve or get out of his way, he has big plans, it's all about him, he may not have been born that way, but he is the product of a narcissistic father living his youth by pushing at his son relentlessly. Richie Fang is Chinese-American, a stand out soccer player, and I would say it his overabundance of enthusiasm that makes him a magnet for any boy in school who needs to bring someone down,

He's a renaissance man good in so many fields, chess, math, architecture, violin. Brock Ripley, is the soccer goalie becomes friends with Richie. Hunter's dad hooks Brock to practice with Hunter, Brock is a natural athlete and catches anything Brock dishes out. Brock is so non-confrontational to the extent when Hunter targets Brock's friend Richie he isn't able to come to his friend's defense, as much as he wants to. This goes on for two long years until the day Richie cracks. This is a page turner our teen had his nose in til the very last page.

My middle son will only read sports books, unfortunately by now he has finished all of the teen & kids books that Mike Lupica and Tim Green have written. This is the second book he has tried by Carl Deuker. He said it was an okay read but it didn't keep his attention like some of the other books. He said it was pretty predictable. Regarding the subject matter, I would recommend it more for upper middle school or high school as there is some content that is best rated as PG-13+

Carl Deuker is usually on his game, but *Gutless* is subpar in comparison to his best. The usual tackling of real life issues is present in this latest outing, but there is an extreme lack of focus at times. Deuker ends up with too many dropped passes. Brock Ripley is our narrator and he knows more or less what he's talking about when it comes to sports like football and soccer, but life is a different issue. His new best friend happens to be the object of the star quarterback's ire and Brock has every opportunity to stick up for his friend but doesn't when it matters most. Much of the narrative builds toward a much hinted at episode that even an inattentive reader can sort of figure out long before it arrives. In the middle of the book Brock is trying to sort out bullying, his father's illness, his best friend being picked on, his best friend's ill mother, and trying to figure out his own place in the scheme of things, mainly his role on the football team. It is a true reflection of what happens in real life, but in a novel all those things become difficult to navigate. Still, Deuker's name being on a novel is enough to make it worth picking up, especially when trying to connect to readers who will more likely be drawn in by the sports action. It's an ambitious novel, just one that doesn't quite connect in the end.

I work in a middle school media center and we just about will do anything to get kids to read. Boys are especially difficult to get interested. Whenever we get a book with a sports genre, it's one of the surefire ways. Mike Lupica and Tim Green are the writers I'm most familiar with. We have no books by Deuker but that will change. While sports is sub-genre, this book deals with more than just football. It parallels life. The heart of a football game is confrontation. You can throw the ball, run

with it, try to fool the other team but in the end, you'll either be tackled (which is most of the time) or you reach the goal and you stop. Deuker uses football to illustrate the everyday problems of a teen's life. While I don't know if middle school boys will understand the parallels, the book just might be the bait to make lifelong readers out of them. The writing is crisp and descriptive and the plot is so totally believable.

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Gutless

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