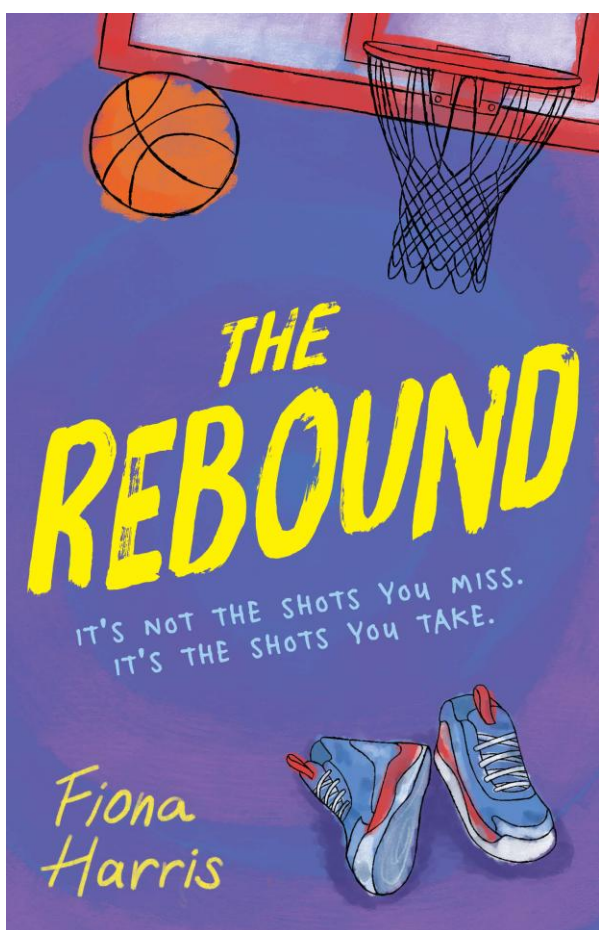


The Rebound

By Fiona Harris



'Hoop wizard' Harry is relegated to his school's worst basketball team when he misses tryouts, but his new team has some surprises for him in this triumph-over-adversity story. Perfect for sports-mad kids and readers of series such as Patty Mills' Game Day.

RECOMMENDED FOR

10–14 (Upper Primary and Lower Secondary)

THEMES

Overcoming adversity, team sport, resilience, grief, competitiveness, friendship, self-development

ISBN (AUS)

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SYNOPSIS

After missing his eagerly awaited trial to play for the Under Sixteens Firsts, fourteen-year-old Harry Portelli has no choice but to play with the worst performing team in the school.

The Redbacks are a mess. They can't pass. They can't shoot. They can't win.

This is not the future either Harry or his dad imagined. Harry has to dig deep to work out what basketball means to him, and with the help of surprising new friendships, he rediscovers his love for the sport as the Redbacks start to play like a team.

But then the school arranges a derby, the Redbacks against the Firsts, and Harry's heart sinks – the Redbacks are bound to be destroyed. But is winning all that matters? Harry learns that sometimes the sweetest shot is the one you get on the rebound.

AUTHOR MOTIVATION

'The Rebound was born out of a tragic and heartbreaking experience in my own life. In 2023 a dear friend of mine was unexpectedly struck down with a terrible illness and was put into an induced coma a few days later. Over the next few weeks, I spent a lot of time sitting in intensive care with her husband (also a close friend) until she passed away. Her fourteen-year-old son was supposed to be trying out for a basketball team with his mates that week but missed the tryouts because he was at the hospital with us. The club wouldn't let him join the team with his friends when he returned, which was the inspiration for this story.'

Fiona Harris

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Fiona Harris is an award-winning author, scriptwriter and actor with over twenty years of experience across publishing, television and theatre. Over the past thirteen years, she has penned forty-seven books, including two adult fiction novels *The Drop-off* and *The Pick-up*; the middle grade fiction novel, *The Embarrassing Confessions of Gracie Sparks*; five books and two graphic novels in the Sleepover BFFs junior fiction series; Holocaust survivor Abram Goldberg's memoir, *The Strength of Hope*; five books in Liz Watson's junior fiction series, *Diary of a Netball Star*; three books in the *Trolls* series for Dreamworks; six books in Sam Kerr's junior fiction series, *Kicking Goals*; and two picture books for footballer Marcus Bontempelli. She also co-authored the children's book series *The Super Moopers* with Sally Rippin, and wrote four books in the *Miraculous* series, based on the animated kids TV series.

Fiona co-created the award-winning comedy web series, *The Drop Off*, with her husband, Mike McLeish, which aired on Channel 9, and in 2025 they co-adapted the script for the Dolly Parton musical, *Here You Come Again*, for Australian audiences. She has acted in numerous TV shows including *The Beautiful Lie*, *Tangle*, *One More Shot*, *Offspring*, *Comedy Inc* and *The Librarians*. Her TV writing and acting credits include *Flipside*, *Skithouse* and *Prank Patrol*.

IN-CLASS DISCUSSIONS AND ACTIVITIES

- Cover Analysis:
 - Title — In basketball, a 'rebound' is when a player catches the ball after a missed shot. But the word 'rebound' is also used in everyday life to mean recovering after something hard. What are two different things this title might be telling you the book is about? Which meaning do you think is more important, and why?
 - Subtitle — '*It's not the shots you miss. It's the shots you take.*' is a twist on a famous saying. What is the original saying it's based on? How does changing it shift the meaning? What does it hint about the story's themes?
 - Cover images — Look at the three objects on the cover: a basketball, a hoop and backboard, and a pair of runners. What do they tell you about the story *before* you've opened the book?

- The illustration style — The artwork on this cover **was digitally created to** look like it was created with paint and ink. Look closely at the basketball, the hoop, the sneakers and the background. Can you see any brushstrokes, uneven edges or lines that aren't perfectly straight? Why do you think the designer made that choice? How would the cover feel different if everything was **photographic**? Does a hand-painted **illustration** style make the book feel more or less serious? More or less fun? And what does it suggest about the kind of story inside — is it polished and perfect, or is it warm and human?
- Colour— The cover uses purple, yellow and orange together. Why do you think the designer chose these colours? What mood or energy do they create, and would the cover feel different if it used dark or muted colours instead?
- Use the following prompts to initiate whole-class or small-group discussions that delve into students' understanding of the story, across the first nine chapters (Off Season).
 - In the opening chapter, what do we learn about Harry and his relationship with his dad through their shared love of basketball? What is Harry's relationship with his mum like? Would you describe their family as happy? Give examples from the text.
 - How does the author create a sudden shift in pace and tone at the end of Chapter One? What effect does this change have on the reader's understanding of Harry's world and the events that will follow?
 - Why do you think that it becomes important to Harry to remember his father's last words to him?
 - How does Harry's attitude about playing in a basketball team change after his dad's death?
 - Create a comparison chart showing how Mum, Aunty Jo, Jamal and Harry's teachers respond to his grief. Identify similarities and differences in their approaches, then evaluate which responses seem most helpful to Harry and explain why, using evidence from the text.
 - Why does Harry react so strongly to missing out on the Under Sixteens Firsts team? Do you think Coach Butler and Mr Trimble made the right decision? Explain your view.

- Finn is one of the few people who treats Harry 'normally.' What does she do or say that helps normalise the experience for him? Why do you think Harry feels more comfortable around her than other students and adults?
 - Throughout these chapters, Harry often feels isolated from other people. What moments best show this feeling of isolation, both at school and at home? How does the author 'guide' readers to recognise Harry's true feelings?
 - By the end of Chapter Eight, Harry is beginning to reconsider basketball and his future with the Redbacks. What clues suggest that Harry may be starting to change, even if he doesn't realise it yet?
- Authors use **metaphors** (figures of speech that describe one thing as if it were another, e.g., *Her smile was sunshine*) and **similes** (figures of speech that compare two different things using the words **like** or **as**, e.g., *The playground was as busy as a beehive*) to help create a stronger image or deeper meaning, and help readers *feel* emotions rather than simply observe them.

In *The Rebound*, Fiona Harris portrays Harry's inner world with vivid, familiar images, so that we can better understand his feelings of grief, anger and isolation. Which of the following is a simile and which is a metaphor?

- *A tsunami of fatigue hits me.* Page 17
- *Days bled into nights.* Page 18
- *It's like all the bad thoughts creep in as soon as the house is dark.* Page 19
- *... the three of us have been wandering around each other in a daze, like we've all been whacked in the head with a cricket bat.* Pages 19-20

Make a list of as many similes and metaphors as you can find in Chapters One through to Ten.

- *The Michael Jordan quote was at the tip of my tongue, but instead, I said something totally random. 'Winning at all costs.'* Page 84

What is it that Harry's father said about Michael Jordan? Why is it significant that Harry comes up with something his father never said? How does this scene reflect Harry's attitude when he starts to play basketball with the Redbacks?

- Create a timeline of key events in Harry's journey throughout *The Rebound*. For each event, record what happened, how Harry responded, and what the event reveals about his character at that point in the story. Include moments such as his father's death, his struggles with grief, changes in his friendships, missing the basketball tryouts, and his growing connections with people who support him. Once your timeline is complete, identify the events that had the greatest impact on Harry and explain how they contributed to his growth and resilience. Conclude by writing a paragraph that compares Harry at the beginning and the end of the novel, using evidence from your timeline to show how he has changed.
- *Being a good player – a great player – isn't only about talent,' Coach Shea continues. 'It's about character. Great players don't build great teams, Harry. It's the other way round. Great teams build great players. Page 130*

Players who make mistakes like that don't play for their high-school team,' Coach Butler tells a gutted Santos. 'And if you don't play for your high-school team, you'll never play NBA. Page 261

Coach Shea and Coach Butler have very different ideas about what makes a successful player and team. Create a comparison chart with two columns: Coach Shea and Coach Butler. Using evidence from the novel, record:

- What each coach values most.
- How each coach speaks to players.
- How each coach responds to mistakes and setbacks.
- What behaviours they encourage in their teams.

Next, consider the impact of each coaching style on the players. In small groups, discuss:

- How do the Firsts players behave under Coach Butler?

- How do the Redbacks players behave under Coach Shea?
- What evidence from the text supports your ideas?
- How do the players treat one another?
- How do they respond when things go wrong?

Use your notes to identify the strengths and weaknesses of each coaching approach.

Finally, write a paragraph explaining which coach you think is more effective. Use evidence from the novel to compare their coaching styles and explain how each influences the attitudes, behaviour and development of the players.

- Choose any scene from the book and recreate it:
 - as a text message thread
 - as a script
 - as a cartoon
 - as a poem
- In Chapter Thirty-one, Harry sees his mum grip the steering wheel and close her eyes when a song she and Harry's dad used to love comes on the radio. The scene is told from Harry's perspective, so readers must use clues from the text to infer what Mum might be thinking and feeling.

Create a 'Mum's Perspective' gingerbread chart. Draw an outline of Mum on a large sheet of paper and use evidence from the chapter to complete the following sections:

- **Head:** What might Mum be thinking during this scene?
- **Heart:** What emotions might she be experiencing? Find evidence from the text to support your ideas.
- **Eyes:** What memories might the song bring back?
- **Mouth:** What might Mum want to say to Harry but chooses not to say?

- **Hands and Feet:** What actions does Mum take in the scene, and what do these actions reveal about her feelings?
- **Outside the Figure:** What forces are affecting Mum? Consider grief, memories, family responsibilities, Harry's wellbeing and the loss of her husband.

Discuss your ideas with a partner and compare the evidence you have used. Then write a short piece (150–200 words) from Mum's point of view during the scene. Use your gingerbread chart to help you imagine her thoughts, memories and emotions as the song begins to play and as the moment unfolds.

- In *The Rebound*, Harry doesn't simply recover from losing his dad — he has to learn how to move forward in a life that has changed forever. Throughout the novel, Harry faces setbacks, difficult emotions and new challenges, but he gradually finds ways to adapt and grow.

Create a Harry's Rebound Moments chart. As you read, identify key moments when Harry faces a challenge or disappointment. For each moment, record:

- What happened?
- How did Harry respond?
- Who or what helped him move forward?
- What else could Harry have done?

Working in pairs or small groups, compare your responses and discuss: Which of Harry's actions were most helpful? Were there times when he made things harder for himself? How did the people around him influence his ability to move forward? Then consider the following questions:

- What does Harry learn from the challenges he faces?
- How does he change throughout the novel?
- Is Harry 'bouncing back' to who he was before, or is he 'bouncing forward' into someone new?
- What advice would you give Harry at different points in the story?

In three to four sentences, explain what *The Rebound* suggests about resilience, growth and moving forward after difficult experiences. Use examples from the text to support your ideas.

- Some of the most important moments in *The Rebound* aren't the big ones — they're the small, quiet acts of bravery. Harry texting Jamal. Harry lacing up his sneakers. Real courage often looks like one small, hard thing.

Think of one small, brave thing you could do this week — apologising to someone, trying something you've been avoiding, asking for help. Write it down, then answer in two to three sentences each: *Why is it hard?* and *What might it change?*

In two to three sentences, explain how your brave action connects to a theme or moment from *The Rebound*. Which character or scene does it remind you of, and why?

- The characters in *The Rebound* all have things left unsaid. Now it's your turn to say them. Choose one of the following and write 150–200 words:
 - **A letter** from one character to another — something they never got to say
 - **A short speech** defending a character's actions at a moment when they were at their worst
 - **A persuasive piece** arguing what Harry should do next, now that the novel has ended

Whichever you choose, your writing needs to take a clear position and back it up. Use specific moments or details from the book as evidence — and when you're done, share with a partner. Do they agree with your argument?

- *The Rebound* is one version of a story that gets told again and again: loss, identity and finding your footing. But every author tells it differently.

Choose one of the following to compare with *The Rebound*:

- A coming-of-age novel you've read
- A film about reinvention or starting over



- A memoir about loss or a new beginning

In a short response of 200–250 words, compare your chosen text with *The Rebound* across these three areas:

- **Voice** — how does the narrator draw you in and make you trust them?
- **Structure** — how does the story move through time and emotion?
- **Emotional truth** — which moments felt most real, and why?