Discussion Guide: *Hoop Dreams*

*Hoop Dreams* is a fascinating documentary, filmed over a four year period, following the lives of Chicago high school basketball players Arthur Agee and William Gates. The film contrasts two players and their struggles to succeed in basketball in the face of poverty, injury and academic eligibility while trying to satisfy one of the most legendary coaches in Chicago high school basketball history, Gene Pingatore of St. Joseph’s High School.

Both boys struggle in the face of their different adversities to make it to the collegiate level, and the impact of the film is in director Steve James’ ability to connect with William, Arthur and their families on a personal level. Without their trust, the message and values of the film would be lost.

Take advantage of the teachable moments presented in *Hoop Dreams* by using these questions to help guide a discussion with your team or children.

1.) Why does Coach Pingatore use Isiah Thomas in his rhetoric so often? What is the value of using a past star as a coach to motivate athletes? Does this help or hurt his cause? Does Coach Pingatore help or hurt William by saying “He could be the next Isiah?” Explain your answer.

2.) What could St. Joseph’s and Coach Pingatore have done differently to perhaps keep Arthur as a student at the school?

3.) How does William react to his first injury? Do you get the sense that he is motivated to come back as quickly as possible for selfish reasons, or because it’s best for his team? Explain why.

4.) Compare and contrast the coaching styles of Coach Pingatore and Coach Bedford. How does the socioeconomic status of their respective schools factor into their coaching styles?

5.) Discuss Arthur’s relationship with his father. What effect does Arthur’s father have on his ability to succeed? Does Arthur’s father contribute positively or negatively to Arthur’s goal of playing in the NBA?

6.) Despite being undersized and less talented than many of their opponents, what factors do you think led Marshall High School to make it to the state tournament?

7.) What traits does William possess that allow him to overcome both knee injuries and still earn a scholarship to a Division I basketball program?

8.) What is your opinion of Earl Smith? Does he have Arthur’s best interests in mind, or is he loyal to St. Joseph’s? Explain the positive and negative impact the recruiting process to St. Joseph’s had on Arthur’s high school career.

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