

JAKE MADDUX

# JUMP SERVE



STONE ARCH

*Realistic Fiction*



# **JUMP SERVE**



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Summary: Ella and Laura can't believe it when two of the meanest girls from a rival volleyball team switch to their team. They decide to give the girls a chance, but before long it's clear that Beth and Gretchen have no plans to be good teammates. Since Laura has been benched with a knee injury, Ella feels very alone on the court. How can she manage to get Gretchen and Beth to play with her, not against her? Is there any hope for a championship, or was the season ruined before it began?

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## **Chapter 1**

The Jump Serve . . . . . 5

## **Chapter 2**

Fear Factor . . . . . 12

## **Chapter 3**

Final Game . . . . . 18

## **Chapter 4**

Recovery . . . . . 26

## **Chapter 5**

New Teammates . . . . . 36

## **Chapter 6**

Not the Same . . . . . 42

## **Chapter 7**

The Problem Grows . . . . . 49

## **Chapter 8**

Laura's Return . . . . . 56





## CHAPTER 1

# The Jump Serve

Ella held the ball carefully in her hands. She knew the time was right.

Her team was leading 24–23. Ella knew that this serve could be the final point of the game.

The winning serve here would mean a trip to the championship for Ella's volleyball team, the Rockets.

Ella got ready for the serve.

“Come on, El, let it rip!” cried Laura, Ella’s best friend.

Ella looked over at her. Laura, the team’s best setter, stood in the middle of the court, cheering her teammate on.

“If you’re not going to do it now, when are you?” Laura yelled.

Ella knew what Laura was talking about. A jump serve.

Ella had a powerful serve from a standing position. But she had also been practicing a jump serve.

Standing back from the end line, she would run up, flip the ball into the air, leap, and power the ball over the net like a bullet. When the serve was on target, it was difficult to stop. It could decide a game easily.

Very few girls her age could do a jump serve. The other team might not be ready to handle it. That would work in Ella's team's favor.

There was only one problem. Ella knew her serve wasn't perfect yet.

If it didn't work, they might not get the point. And then they wouldn't win.

Laura still wanted her friend to try it. Laura yelled, "Come on, Ella!"

Ella took a deep breath. She tried to turn off the noise of the crowd and forget the stares on her. She just focused on the way the volleyball felt in her hands.

Finally, she was ready. She stepped back from the line.

*Thud. Thud.* She bounced the ball twice.



Then she held it out in front of her in her left hand. She stared it down.

Then she pulled it back in and bounced it twice more.

*Thud. Thud.*

Finally, Ella held it out in front of her again. She always started a serve that way. She thought it brought her luck.

She stepped forward and tossed the ball into the air. Then she leaped up and pounded the ball with the palm of her right hand.

The ball whizzed across the net. It barely cleared the tape. It was headed for the floor, and it was staying in bounds!

A player from the other team ran across the floor. She dove for the spot the ball was targeting, but she was too late.



It was a great try, but the ball fell off the ends of her fingers and rolled across the floor.

The Rockets had won!

Ella leaped into the air.

Laura and the rest of her teammates rushed to her. They jumped up and down, hugging and giving each other high fives.

“We’re going to the championship match!” Laura yelled.

Ella beamed with pride.

She had played very well, but she was especially proud that her new skill, the jump serve, had won the match.

As they walked off the court, the girls noticed that their rivals, the Lakers, had been watching from the stands.

The Rockets would play the Lakers in the championship match the next day.

Two players from the Lakers stepped forward. “Enjoy it while you can,” one of them said. “Tomorrow, we’re definitely going to beat you.”



CHAPTER 2  
**Fear Factor**



Ella and Laura laughed off the threat. They both had played against the Lakers girls many times before, and it was always like that.

The Lakers were always trying to scare the other teams. If they weren't whispering mean things about the players on the other team, they were loudly telling people that they were going to beat them.

Usually, they were right.

The Lakers were the best volleyball team in the area. They hardly ever lost. When they did, it was usually a shock.

The Lakers even traveled outside the area for tournaments. They played in regional and sometimes even national events.

The Rockets were a younger team. They hadn't been playing together as long. They didn't have the same winning record as the Lakers.

But the program was getting better every year. This year, the Rockets had started to beat some of the top teams.

The match against the Lakers would be the Rockets' first tournament championship match so far that season. Ella and Laura were thrilled, but nervous.

The Rockets had played in several other tournaments. They had come close to going to the championship match a couple of times, but they had not made it.

Ella and Laura were excited that they were playing in the finals at a tournament. But they knew their chances weren't great against the Lakers.

\* \* \*

The next morning, the Rockets gathered on the court. They began their warm-up for the match.

The Rockets had warm-up routines that they did before each match, but they were nothing at all like the routines that the Lakers did before a match. The Lakers' warm-up routines were famous through the entire league.

Watching the Lakers warm up before a match was like watching an army get ready for battle. The players yelled cheers and chanted the whole time.

The routine got the Lakers ready to play, and it made other teams nervous. The Rockets, watching, could tell that they were in for a difficult match.

When the match finally started, the Rockets were pretty shaky. The Lakers quickly won the first game of the match without any trouble.

The Rockets felt horrible afterward. During the break between games, the Rockets' coach tried to settle the upset players down.

“Girls, you’re acting like someone just kicked your dog,” Coach Stiggle said.





She smiled at the players. “It’s not that serious. It’s just a game. Now go out there and have fun. Do the best you can.”

That made the girls feel more relaxed. They headed back out to the court feeling braver and more confident.

The second game was better. Laura did a great job as the setter. She passed to Ella for kill after kill.

It was a hard game. Finally, in the end, the Rockets were able to pull out the victory.

Ella served for the winning point, but this time, she held off on the jump serve. She wanted to save that for the third game.



CHAPTER 3  
**Final Game**



The Lakers started serving at the beginning of the third and final game of the championship match. They quickly scored five points in a row. That gave them the early lead.

The Rockets players tried to not get too disappointed. After all, the game wasn't over yet. They finally took the serve back when Laura set the ball for Ella, who spiked it for a point.