

Ball Is Life

Feature screenplay

Sports drama / family drama

Written by Ben Burgess Jr.

Key art and visual approach are proposals. No cast or production attachments are implied.



A story in one sentence

After burying her NBA legend father, a grieving WNBA star must decide whether to return for a championship showdown with her rival, while confronting the family legacy that made basketball both her identity and her burden.

Listing synopsis

Destiny 'Beloved' Muhammad has built a celebrated basketball career, but the death of her father, NBA legend Devine 'Mack' Muhammad, leaves her unable to answer her coach's calls. On the day of his funeral, the New York Liberty face a decisive Finals game against the Los Angeles Sparks. Rival Renee Parker is ready to claim the title, while commentators question Destiny's commitment.

Alone in her childhood home, Destiny revisits the family history behind her success. Devine survived loss and foster care before Coach McCoy gave him and Naomi a home. As parents, Devine and Naomi taught Destiny different lessons about strength. His demanding training helped develop her talent, but Naomi insisted that their daughter needed room to be herself and enjoy life beyond basketball.

Memories of Naomi's illness, Devine's grief, and his unconditional acceptance of Destiny reveal a legacy more complicated than trophies. Remembering her father's assurance that she owes the game neither her soul nor her identity, Destiny returns on her own terms. The championship becomes a test of whether she can carry her parents' love forward while finding her own reason to play.

The story

New York mourns Devine 'Mack' Muhammad, an NBA legend whose daughter, Destiny 'Beloved' Muhammad, is a star in her own right. At his funeral, a reporter presses Destiny about playing in Game Seven of the WNBA Finals. The New York Liberty have lost without her, and Renee Parker's Los Angeles Sparks are poised to take the championship. Destiny refuses to discuss basketball while burying her father. Coach McCoy, Devine's childhood coach and adoptive father, reminds her that she still has family.

The funeral opens a series of memories that trace the love, loss, and pressure behind the Muhammad family's basketball careers. As a boy, Devine's mother Dianne worked extra shifts to send him to camp, where McCoy recognized his ability. Her death left Devine devastated and eventually in foster care. There he formed a bond with Naomi. When McCoy offered to take him out of the foster home, Devine insisted that Naomi come too. McCoy brought both into his home. Years later, Devine and Naomi welcomed Destiny, and Devine called his newborn daughter Beloved.

Growing up, Destiny learned the game through her father's exacting drills and fierce expectations. Basketball had given Devine opportunities and security, and he wanted his daughter to understand the responsibility attached to her talent. Yet his determination sometimes overwhelmed her. Destiny struggled with exhaustion, unfair treatment, and the fear that disappointing him on the court would cost her his love. Naomi intervened, insisting that Devine speak as a father rather than merely a coach. He reassured Destiny that her worth extended beyond the game and that being his daughter was enough.

Naomi offered another model of strength. She taught Destiny to accept imperfection, preserve her own joy, and recognize love in ordinary family routines. Beneath those routines, however, Naomi concealed a serious illness. After she collapsed while watching Destiny practice, the family learned that she had advanced esophageal cancer. From her hospital bed, Naomi asked Devine to play for her. He returned to the Knicks and delivered a record-setting scoring performance while Naomi watched on television. He and Destiny then faced her death together.

The resolution

Their shared grief tested the father and daughter who had always relied on basketball. Devine practiced alone in the rain, then struggled to leave the stillness of the house. Destiny eventually drew him back to their backyard court. Their connection also grew beyond sport. When Destiny revealed that she was gay and feared his rejection, Devine affirmed his love without conditions. Later, after breaking his college scoring record, she publicly declared her intention to become the first Destiny Muhammad rather than the next Devine Muhammad.

In the present, media criticism makes Destiny feel guilty for missing the Finals. A memory of her fourth MVP ceremony changes that feeling. Devine had acknowledged the time, physical sacrifice, and childhood the game had taken from her. He told her she owed it nothing more, including on his behalf. Remembering that permission allows Destiny to return because she wants to play, rather than because grief must be justified by a championship.

Destiny joins the Liberty, meets Parker's hostility with composure, and receives support from teammate Williams and McCoy. In the closing minutes, she draws on lessons from both parents. She makes free throws, creates a crucial shot, passes to Williams when defenders expect her to shoot, and challenges Parker's final attempt. After Williams rebounds, Destiny races downcourt and hits a deep three-pointer at the buzzer to win the championship.

Holding the trophies, Destiny credits the family hours that made her love basketball. At the press conference, she rejects the suggestion that victory validates grief. At her parents' graves, she recognizes that their legacy lies in how she uses what they gave her. The final memory returns to a father and daughter embracing beside their backyard court. Destiny leaves the cemetery as another group of children plays nearby.

People at the center

Destiny “Beloved” Muhammad

A Liberty star grieving her father. She must distinguish her love of basketball from the demands, inherited expectations, and public scrutiny surrounding it.

Naomi Muhammad

Destiny's mother and Devine's partner. She protects their daughter's emotional freedom and teaches the family to value life beyond achievement.

Renee Parker / Williams

Parker is Destiny's Sparks rival. Williams is her Liberty teammate, offering humor, reassurance, and a crucial late-game partnership.

Devine “Mack” Muhammad

An NBA legend, demanding father, and survivor of early loss. Memories reveal both the pressure he placed on Destiny and the unconditional love he learned to express.

Coach McCoy

Devine's childhood mentor and adoptive father. He offers continuity and support across generations of the Muhammad family.

What the story examines

Grief without public justification. Parental love and performance pressure. Black girlhood and professional identity. Acceptance of a daughter's sexuality. The freedom to choose a life beyond inherited ambition. These are editorial interpretations of the supplied screenplay.

A championship game frames a daughter's reconsideration of the parents who shaped her. The question is whether Destiny can choose basketball for herself after a lifetime of measuring her worth through it.

The world of the story

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New York streets, the funeral home, the Muhammad family home, backyard and community courts, foster care memories, hospital rooms, Madison Square Garden, and the Liberty's championship setting at Barclays Center. Present-day mourning alternates with formative family memories.

This lookbook describes the supplied screenplay material. Proposed visual choices are labeled separately.



An approach to the image

Proposed visual approach: intimate, naturalistic family scenes against the public scale of professional basketball. Teal and deep charcoal for the present, restrained warmer light for memories. Use the championship ring, photo album, and backyard hoop as recurring visual details. Let crowd noise fall away at moments of private grief. The key art depicts imagined characters, not attached performers.

How the story turns

The funeral and unanswered calls establish the present conflict. Memories uncover Devine's childhood losses, McCoy's support, and Naomi's place in the family. Destiny's training reveals the pressure inside their love. Naomi's illness and death expose the limits of basketball as protection. Devine's acceptance and later permission release Destiny from obligation. Her return, final shot, press conference, and cemetery visit complete the decision to play for herself.

Ben Burgess Jr.

Ben Burgess Jr. is a novelist and screenwriter with a background as an NYPD detective. His published work includes *Mothers Vol. 1* and *A Father's Sacrifice: Daddy's Girl*. He previously published with Urban Renaissance/Kensington Publishing and has identified Legacy Books LLC as his publishing company.

His screenplay portfolio includes *Ball Is Life*, a basketball drama about a professional athlete grieving her father while reconsidering the family legacy that shaped her. *Black and White*, adapted from his novel *Defining Moments*, follows competing attorneys whose criminal cases expose pressures on their careers, relationships, and sense of identity. *Faces* follows a trusted teacher's concealed predatory behavior, his exposure, and the consequences for the people who believed in him.

These projects place personal relationships alongside professional roles, examining what people protect, what they conceal, and what their choices cost. Burgess brings experience in both prose fiction and screenwriting to stories concerned with Black family life, interracial relationships, responsibility, grief, and trust.