

# The Underdogs

A Full English translation is available.

宅男打籃球

**Author:** Yuan-Jian Hong **Illustrator:** Yuan-Jian Hong **Publisher:** Dyna Books

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188 pages | 14.8 x 21 cm **Volume:** 1 (ongoing, already published 30 volumes)

**BFT 2.0 Translator:** Kevin Wang

During his school days, Chou Ta-Hua was a campus star—talented, handsome, and seemingly destined for greatness. But after graduation, the spotlight fades. Now nearly thirty, he's become an underdog adrift, with no clear goals and no future in sight.

At the lowest point of his despair, a loyal fan from his school days reappears, inviting him to join the Formosa Cup: Community 3v3 Tournament. And so, he joins a ragtag team of misfits and officially enters the competition.

Awkward spin moves, sloppy passes, and defenses that can't keep up with the pace—frustration surges through him, and bitter thoughts creep in. Nonetheless, he loves the feel of the basketball in his hands. The dream, the passion, the excitement—it all comes roaring back.



Author **Yuan-Jian Hong**

Yuan-Jian Hong is a veteran designer and a newcomer to comics. He has run a design studio for over a decade, with work spanning web and graphic design, animated music videos, and numerous corporate mascot projects. He has also created designer toys and published independent comics. Now, after a long detour—and only after settling down and starting a family—he has finally begun pursuing the comic-making dream he once longed for but didn't dare to chase. He turns his lifelong love of basketball into comics—building characters, shaping worlds, and telling the stories that matter most to him.

# When Underdogs Dare to Dream: An Interview with the Author

by the editors of Dyna Books  
(originally published on [OKAPI.BOOKS.COM.TW](http://OKAPI.BOOKS.COM.TW))

*The Underdogs* has been serialized for over a decade, with its 30th collected volume already published, making it one of Taiwan's longest-running sports manga series today. What makes this manga "cool" is not glamorous characters or exaggerated heroism, but the sheer ordinariness of its protagonists. Most have already entered the workforce, holding jobs that bear little—if any—connection to their youthful dreams, and in many cases are worlds apart from them.

Two key themes crystallize in this series: underdogs and dreams. The idea of rediscovering one's dreams only after reaching adulthood is profoundly moving. When underdogs meet dreams, the result is a story that is unexpectedly, deeply cool.

**Q: What made you start drawing this manga in the first place? Was it because you really love basketball?**

My relationship with basketball

probably began around fourth or fifth grade in elementary school. Back then, everyone was talking about Michael Jordan, and later I started following the Chicago Bulls. That was when I truly fell in love with basketball and began playing by myself. The friends I became closest to in junior high school—friends who are still with me today—are all people I met through basketball.

After entering the workforce, I continued playing, though less and less because of how busy work became. Even so, I've always followed basketball in one way or another. From the moment I first got into the sport, I knew very clearly that none of us would ever become professional basketball players. Even so, we kept practicing and trying to get better—just so that in the next game, we could finally pull off the moves we'd been imagining in our heads.

I kept thinking about how people who would never make a living from

basketball could still love this sport so deeply. That's why I wanted to draw a story about basketball accompanying ordinary people throughout their lives.

**Q: Why did you name the team "MEIYODA"?**

The name "MEIYODA" comes from the breakfast shop run by the protagonist's father, which is also the sponsor of the team—so the team ended up taking the shop's name.

In Taiwan, there are many chain restaurants. When a shop eventually breaks away from a franchise and continues operating independently, it often changes its name to something similar to the original. "MEIYODA" is a play on "MEI & MEI," a well-known traditional Taiwanese breakfast chain. In Taiwan, when people participate in informal competitions, team names are often chosen quite casually. Professional teams will think carefully to come up with something that sounds impressive, but in amateur games, people tend to let their imaginations run wild.

Personally, I have an aversion to overly conventional ideas of "cool." Since this manga leans toward realism, I don't think reality is actually that cool

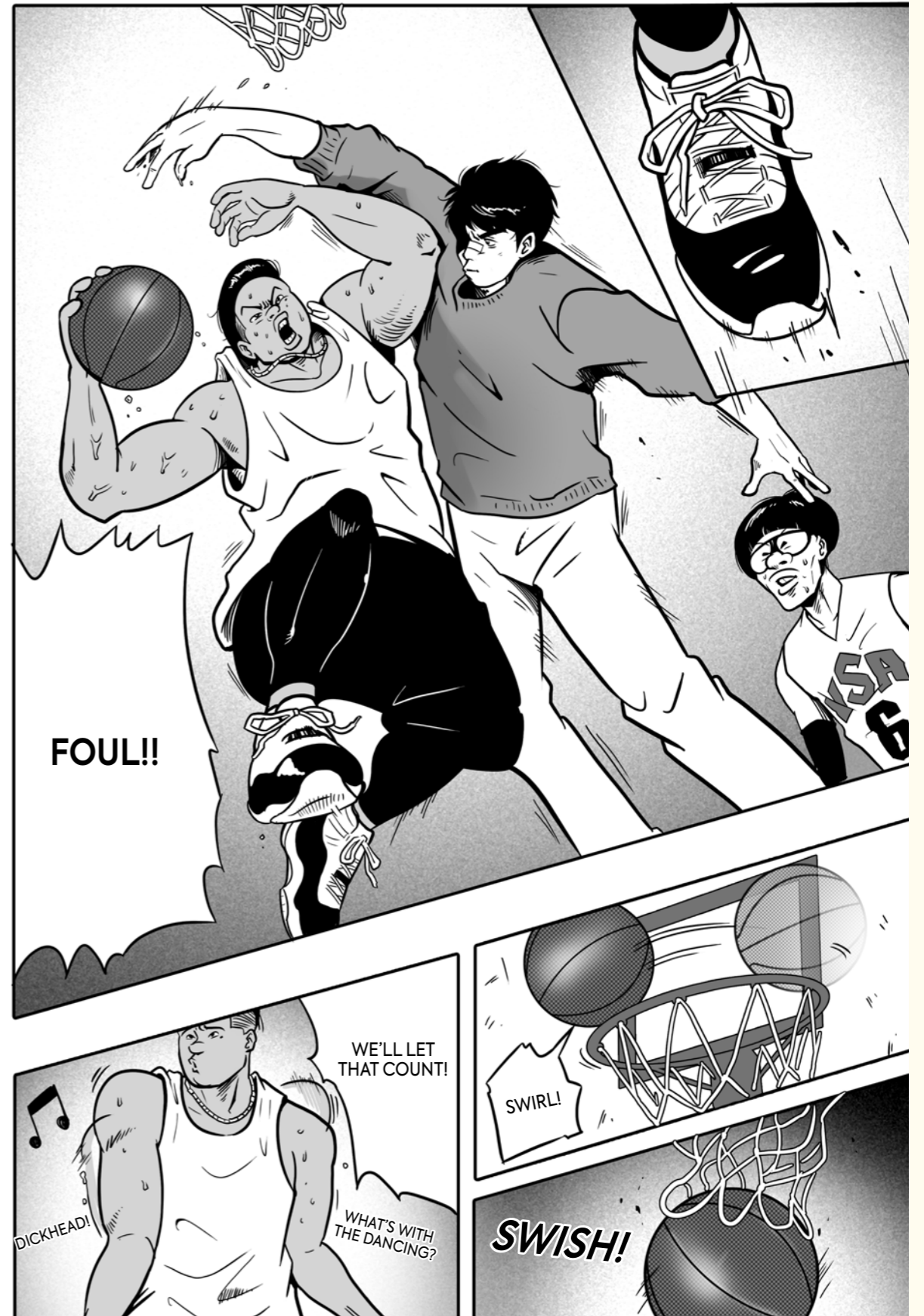
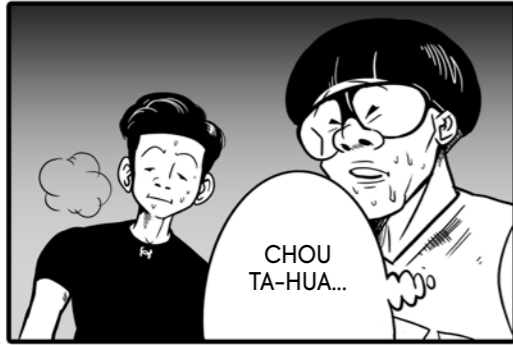
in the typical sense. Taiwanese readers don't particularly care whether a work is domestic or foreign—if you're dealing with the same subject matter, comparisons are inevitable. If I had tried to portray a standard kind of coolness, I was worried readers might find it off-putting. That's why I decided to make more localized choices.

At the time, the template I had in mind was closer to *Shaolin Soccer*. In that film, only the main character is conventionally cool, while everyone else is doing ridiculous things. Yet in the end, those ridiculous moments are what move people to tears. What I wanted to depict were people who aren't cool doing something truly cool.

**Q: How would you define the spirit of this work? Where do you hope to take your readers?**

I think that pursuing basketball—or anything you truly love—may not be able to change the environment or the system. But it can change you.

*This interview has been edited for the purposes of this booklet.*



I CAN'T STAND THIS!  
EVEN IF WE LOSE, I'M NOT GONNA  
MAKE THIS EASY FOR YOU!

PULL!

BACK THEN,  
I USED TO WIPE  
THE FLOOR  
WITH THEM  
FOR FUN...

THESE GUYS...



PFF!

!!

TELLING ME  
I DON'T  
KNOW HOW  
TO PLAY...

AND HIS  
MOVEMENTS ARE  
DRIPPING WITH  
CONTEMPT.



THAT LOOK  
IN HIS  
EYES...

DAMN IT...

I'VE GOTTA TAKE  
THIS CRAP FROM  
THEM!

BUT EVEN ON  
THE COURT...

WHAT AM  
I DOING?  
I LOST OUT  
THERE IN THE  
WORLD.

