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Spenser goes back to school--to investigate corruption in college town. Taft University's hottest basketball star is shaving points for quick cash. And if Spenser doesn't watch his own footwork, the guilty parties will shave a few years off his life...

Playmates Details

Date : Published (first published 1989)

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Author : Robert B. Parker

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From Reader Review Playmates for online ebook

William says

(The word "maroon" appears twice in this novel)

3.5 stars

It's a bit uneven in places, but ends satisfyingly... and without a massive gunfight ... a new concept for Parker, perhaps °?°

I must say that enjoy far more the grateful young people that Spenser saves, rather than those who are sullen... But hey, what are you gonna do?

The relationship between Susan and Spenser in this book feels more stable, a bit happier, a sense that joy is still possible, along with passion and repartée.

See my review of **Crimson Joy** for more Spenser Series opinion...

<https://www.goodreads.com/review/show...>

Lee says

This was a "mellow" case this time for Spenser. The action was not present as in the past. This one showed his ever present wit, gourmet cooking skills and the his compassion really shines in this one. Another fun, quick read...from this great series. 3.5 stars.

Gloria Bernal says

As a big college basketball fan, I personally enjoyed this writing. In Playmates, # 16 in the Spenser series, we see him take on a case for Taft University and tackle a problem of point-shaving. Most male fans would be aware that this has happened in the past, but I was not. I found it fascinating, and believable, much like the main character, the big (yes black) basketball player and his girlfriend, and the situation they find themselves involved in. No spoiler here, but I enjoyed how Spenser handled the situation with them. This was not a high-thriller story, like some of his past novels have been. No matter, I liked the premise of the novel and the writing doesn't disappoint. Spenser's sense of humor, his expertise in the kitchen or restaurant always engages me.

As usual my main interest in this series of novels is the relationship between Spenser and his lady-love, Susan Silverman. I was happy to see that their relationship was more stable in this installment. 3.5 stars from this reader.

Cathy DuPont says

Reading the Spenser series, along with about six other series in order, has been a challenge but a fun one.

When I first began reading *Playmates* I was thinking about how much I missed Spenser's wise ass remarks, being, not trying to be but actually being funny, by my warped sense of humor standards.

The farther along I read, the more I was thinking to myself, I've read this before and about a quarter through, read a couple of reviews (without spoilers) to determine if I was correct. Reading the first review by a Goodreads reviewer who was not a GR friend, he was saying that *Playmates* was nothing but a re-write of *Mortal Stakes* which was about baseball. I continued reading because I was enjoying it, but it was sounding so very familiar. Was close to the point of knowing what was going to happen on the next page because I had 'read' it before.

So, it wasn't just me! If so, it was me and another fellow who felt the same way; this was a re-write of sorts with basketball being substituted for baseball. Oh, well, the book didn't take that long and it was enjoyable albeit familiar.

Not sure either, whether I'm over Susan's past actions. She was so disappointing to me in an earlier book that I'm still finding it hard to forgive her as easily as Spenser obviously did. If someone had just picked up this book and read as standalone, they would never know what a difficult wishy-washy woman she can be. Perhaps she's found her feet solid in reality, maybe not. I'm not totally trusting of her, yet, sorry about that Spenser. And her waxing romantic about love? Come on now, Susan. Remember when you said...blah, blah, blah?

Spenser though, continues on in his quest to 'save' one person at a time and with Hawk's help, he may just have. Love Hawk, everything about him; I could read an entire book devoted only to Hawk, provided it wasn't a re-hash.

Spenser's such a unique guy but I hope that this isn't the beginning of the end for Parker's so far, great plots.

I'm continuing on my quest to read them all in order, but hope this doesn't happen again. Won't know unless I pick up the next book. There are many Harry Bosch, Dimas Hardy, Lucas Davenport, Dave Robicheaux and in the future, Elvis Cole's that I need to read first. And then I want to read for the third time around, my good buddy, Travis McGee in 2013 who is always a joy.

Moving forward...

Jeff Yoak says

An all-around solid Spenser novel.

Kevin Doyle says

I've recently begun rereading the Spenser series in order, and when I got to *Playmates* I noticed something rather refreshing. As I review various tomes in the series, I'm going to do my best to refrain from Susan-bashing. Not that I don't agree with the Susan-bashers, it's just that I can't think of much new to say on that

subject. But that's exactly what I noticed about halfway through *Playmates*.

In this one, Susan really isn't all that bad. She actually fits into the plot, contributes something relative to her "sweet patootie's" efforts, and doesn't come off as nearly as starry-eyed and cloying as she usually does.

In short, Susan's kind of cool in this one.

I think this happens for two reasons. First, she doesn't really appear until about halfway through and doesn't become actually involved in the plot until the last third. So she's not that constant, irritating presence, like a gnat hovering around you that you can't brush away.

But even more important, she has an honest-to-goodness role to play in the plot. Her academic background and training comes in helpful, so most of when the reader sees her she's acting like a professional, not a flighty debutante. (Man, it is hard to keep away from the bashing.)

In one of the main confrontations towards the end, she hovers in the background, observes the actions of the participants, and manages through subtle expressions to guide Spenser in his interactions with the others. In other words, she actually does something.

My only regret is that in most of the later books Parker couldn't have found equally positive ways to make use of one of his main characters.

Larry says

On rereading, I bumped this book from two stars to four. I must have been in a bad mood the first time that I read it, because it is a strong book in the series. The crime is a point-shaving scandal in a top-rated university basketball program. The chief point shaver is an illiterate, arrogant power forward who sees himself as God's gift to basketball, and who talks about himself in the third person. How Spenser comes to save the arrogant star from himself while sinking the criminals he fell in with is vintage Spenser. Spenser's riffs on higher education (the college president and most professors he meets) no doubt reflects his own experience as an academic.

Amanda McGill says

Meh... that pretty much sums up my thoughts on *Playmates*, the 16th book in the Spenser series.

I never got into this series (after reading the first two novels), so now I'm just reading the books that I own and sadly *Playmates* wasn't a big hit.

My biggest problem was that there was a lack of mystery and suspense. There is a potential scandal at Taft University where the star basketball player may be shaving points (scoring less points at the end of the game to not cover the spread). Spenser is hired to investigate if such a thing is occurring.

There is some intensity in the later half of the novel, but for me, it just wasn't that interesting. It was mostly reading about Spenser talking to different people and trying to come up with the best outcome for all parties.

Mark says

When the college newspaper at nearby Taft University reports a rumour that there is point-shaving going on in the basketball team - which features a kid called Dwayne Woodcock, who is certain to go into a multi-

million dollar pro contract - Spenser is called in to find out the truth. Moving quickly from the newspaper, through the faculty and on to New York hood Bobby Deegan, Spenser is forced to protect the obnoxious, unco-operative Woodcock whilst dodging criminal types intent on bumping him off. Although this has a lot going for it, I should mention that it's late 80s Spenser (published in 1989) and is basically a novella stretched to novel length (he spends quite a bit of time trying to figure out how best to progress) and that can get a bit wearing after a while. Having said that, the interplay with Hawk (brought in to cover Spenser's back from Deegan's hired goons) is good fun and the romantic interludes with Susan are as pleasant as ever. With nice cameos from Quirk and Belson (though at one point, Quirk says "Frank, Spenser..."), the paralegal across the hall and ruminations on changes to Boston, this works well (even if the ending is tied up neatly and with little fanfare) but it's not vintage Spenser. Recommended, of course, but if you're just starting to get into the series, start at the beginning and not here.

Jack says

What's there to say?

It's Spenser I don't think Mr Parker ever wrote a bad Spenser novel. The characters, the dialogue, the description are all top notch. I've never particularly cared for Susan or the expansive meal descriptions but that has also never affected my enjoyment of the novels.

Brent Soderstrum says

This is the 16th book of Robert Parker's Spenser series.

I am a big sports fan so I enjoyed the underlying connection of this book to basketball and oint shaving. Spenser is hired by Taft University (Boston College) to investigate the rumor that someone on the Taft team is shaving points. Spenser finds out it is a couple different players but one of them is Dwayne Woodcock who is Taft's best player and will be a first round NBA draft pick. Dwayne is an arrogant college student who is great at basketball but can't read. How did he get to be a Senior? Spenser meets his girlfriend Chantel and his tutor. He also finds out who is paying Dwayne to shave points.

Spenser can bring the whole thing down but he doesn't want to hurt Dwayne (more accurately Chantel because as mentioned, Dwayne is not too likeable). How can he bust the crooked bookie and keep Dwayne out of it? That is the true story behind this.

I have no doubt there are college athletes that get padded GPA's and probably even some that can't read. I enjoyed Dwayne's coach Dixie Dunham who is a very successful coach who is used to getting his way. Think Bobby Knight when you read this.

Fun enjoyable story with a dash of Hawk thrown in and limited Susan added.

Beth Ann Warg says

Playmates

Classic Spenser. Great graphic descriptions. Subtle but picturesque. Have to read it all in one day cause you just can't stop.

Penny Evenson says

Interesting - learned about "shaving points" in basketball. As always this author writes a great plot!

Kemper says

Spenser gets hired to check out an accusation that a star athlete is screwing with the outcome of games for gambling purposes. When he investigates, he finds that the athlete is with a good woman that he truly loves, and that he is in way over his head with shady people. Spenser decides to confront the gamblers and help the couple out rather than destroy the athlete's career.

"Wait a second, Kemper. You mixed up your books. That's the plot from *Mortal Stakes* where Spenser is hired by the Red Sox to check out their star pitcher. This review is supposed to be about *Playmates*."

Sadly, I have not made a mistake. The basic plot is the same for both books. Parker did make changes so that the stories have differences, but it is disappointing that he started recycling plots at this point.

Taft University hires Spenser to check out a story that someone on their highly ranked basketball team is shaving points. Spenser quickly figures out that Dwayne Woodcock, one of the best players in the country, is in on the scheme. Dwayne is arrogant and spoiled, but he has a good woman in his life. Spenser can't bear to see her suffer for Dwayne's idiocy so rather than trash Dwayne's career, he doesn't report what he knows to the college and starts trying to find a way to pry Dwayne free from the gamblers.

This isn't a bad story. In fact, it's a pretty good Spenser adventure. There's some funny stuff with Hawk, and Spenser gets to annoy a loudmouth Bobby Knight-style coach. (I hate Bobby Knight so that bonus feature may not tickle all readers.) Parker flips his usual theme of a 'good' man with a 'bad' woman to a quality woman making a pain-in-the ass man worth saving. However, I have never been able to get over similarity in plot to the superior *Mortal Stakes*.

With my 2010 cynical nature about sports, I found it highly funny that the 1989 Spenser is shocked and outraged to find out about academic fraud done to keep Dwayne eligible to play. It's kind of quaint.

Next up: Spenser goes Hollywood in *Stardust*.

Bill Kerwin says

My favorite Spensers—I believe the best Spensers—are the ones where The detective is committed to saving a young person enmeshed in an adult world of selfishness and criminality. He can solve the murders easily—and there are always murders—but it is the rescue of the next generation that requires the most

ingenious—and often extra-legal—solutions.

Ceremony and *Early Autumn* are the classic examples of this theme. *Playmates*--like *God Save the Child*--just misses being up to their level, but it is still a very good book.

Spenser is hired by Taft University to investigate a disturbing rumor: somebody on the basketball team—their best chance to win the NCAA in years—may be shaving points. (The investigation must be “hush hush” of course; no need to cause a scandal.) Spenser discovers that someone is indeed shaving points: their star player Dwayne Woodcock. Spenser also discovers other things: 1) Dwayne is mixed up with some sort of mob, and 2) Dwayne can’t read.

This really bothers Spenser, that a sophomore in college can pass all his classes and still not be able to read. So he decides to protect Dwayne from scandal, break off his mob ties, and make him learn to read—even if he has to blackmail the stubborn young man to do it.

All this for the sake of basketball and literacy? Well, there is one other thing. Dwayne may be a pain in the ass, but he has a beautiful and intelligent, loving and loyal girlfriend. Her name is Chantel, and Spenser thinks she is “a woman and a half.”
