



The Penalty Box

Deirdre Martin

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Can a jock and a nerd find true love together?

Everyone from Didsbury High remembers Katie Fisher as the dumpy brainiac from the poor side of town.

Everyone from Didsbury High remembers Paul van Dorn as the school hockey star and heartthrob.

But now they're facing off -- and matching up in more ways than one. Katie's lost the pounds, added some self-confidence, and become a drop-dead gorgeous sociology professor.

And since a series of concussions put an end to Paul's pro hockey career, his star has dimmed. Now he hits the ice as a coach. But he's still got the hometown crowd behind him as the owner of a bar called The Penalty Box.

Paul is reliving his glory days. Katie wishes she could put those years behind her. And the battle of wills that ensues just might knock love right out of the game.

The Penalty Box Details

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Author : Deirdre Martin

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From Reader Review The Penalty Box for online ebook

Tammy says

This was my least favourite book in the series so far. It really didn't do it for me. Book 1 and 2 were good, Book 3 wasn't nearly as good but this book... ugh, it was so hard to force myself to keep reading. I had many debated about deleting it from my eReader without finishing.

Paul is a character from previous books and one I did not like. Honestly, he had virtually no character development within the series. What did we learn about him?

1. He was a hockey superstar that had to retire after having too many concussions in a short period of time.
2. He used to be an enemy of Michael Dante but now they are best friends. Michael doesn't make an appearance although there is a short clip with his brother Anthony.
3. He grew up wealthy and hates his parents. We have no idea why though because it was never really explained. The only thing said was that his dad was always pushing him too hard with hockey as he grew up. I have no clue about his mom. He can't stand her but I didn't see anything that said why.
4. He spends the entire book trying to hold onto whatever fame he has left now that his hockey career is over.
5. He bought a house but never unpacked. He partially unboxes stuff about 75% into the book but nothing really comes of that. He never finished.

There was so much more that could have been done to build up this character. I was unable to connect at all with him. Half the time he was an ass and the other half he was a nice guy.

As for Katie, omg she needs therapy! She has the most coveted man in her bed and she wants to keep it a dirty secret. When the secret came out she couldn't stop being embarrassed. There was absolutely nothing to be ashamed about. She was completely neurotic.

They broke up about halfway through the book and literally did not get back together until the last page. A lot of the second half of the book was them living their lives separately. They cross paths now and then but not as much as you would expect.

There was some interesting drama with a crazy girl in town but very little came of it. Again, there could have been more. This book just didn't mesh well, for me but that's just my opinion.

Tammy says

Isis already wrote a great review on this one, and I agree whole-heartedly with what she had to say, so I won't bother with a full-fledged opinion. Paul, a former hockey player, was sort of a jerk (at first). The heroine (can't even recall her name at the moment!) was annoying and had deep issues. It started grating on my nerves every single time she whined about the lack of a Starbucks in her small town. Even her visit(s) to "Fat Fighters" and the way she obsessed with her weight became obnoxious. Be forewarned this is one of those romances that had a kid as part of the focus. There was no real depth to the characters or the romance - it was fun and they had cute moments, but it was also fluff. Not a lot to be said as far as the hotness level between Paul and what's-her-name either.

In essence The Penalty Box was just another bad cliché and I put the book down feeling like I needed something more.

Does anyone have a good sports romance recommendation? I've read the SEP Chicago Stars series and golf series - loved them. I tried a few of Rachel Gibson's - they were okay IMO. I would love to read a sports romance where the hero isn't an injured (former) professional sports jock and the heroine doesn't fit the TSTL profile. =)

Ines says

Minor Spoilers

Although I enjoyed other books in this series, it was very hard to finish this book.

The characters lack depth and connection, their bickering is exhausting instead of being witty and amusing. Ultimately, what bothered me about this book was that the characters aren't likable. The female lead is a woman who used to be overweight and bullied in high school, but has since become a hot university professor. When she returns to her home town to take care of her nephew she sparks a romance with a former jock turned retired NHL player who used to bully her in high school but likes her now because she's hot.

She somehow doesn't seem to mind that he bullied her because of her weight, as he likes her now that she's skinny so she forgives him instantaneously for being shallow and mean to people who are overweight. Their new problem then is that she is now ashamed of him because he's a 'townie' stuck in their tiny pond of a home town, which doesn't have a Starbucks, a fact we can't forget as she bemoans it the entire novel. To conclude, this is a romance between a shallow former jock hanging onto his glory days and a snobby vain woman who is obsessive about her weight due to her prior ostracization, and still longs for the approval of the cruel and shallow people who made her adolescence difficult, instead of befriending people who find merit in attributes apart from beauty.

Basically, this book is what would happen if the girl from the Princess Diaries dated the jock and not the guy who really liked her, after her make-over. Apart from the shallowness of the main characters, the other characters are flat, and somehow none of the main character's friends or relatives think that it's weird that she's dating the man that used to torment her.

Apologies for the rant-y nature of the review, I have issues with weak female leads, as I believe them to have strong negative influences on how women think they should behave, and how they think they can be treated.

Jen says

Well, this book didn't get great reviews on GR either, but I actually liked it...better than the last one. It's about Paul, who you got to know a bit in a previous book, and honestly, he seemed like a real prick. It was interesting to see his personality after his hot-shot career as a hockey player ended....really not such an ass. I actually liked him pretty quickly, even though he acted like a man-whore by sleeping with that bitch Liz at the beginning, which made me want to throw up!

Our heroine in this book, Katie, is a sociologist that seriously needs to have her own head examined. While she's so busy psycho-analyzing and criticizing Paul, she should take a look at herself! Although she made me crazy, I also felt for her....the burden of always feeling like the 'fat girl', the girl that always had to be 'good' and the girl that felt that she had to prove to the 'townies' that she was better than them really plays a toll on her, which in the end effects her ability to tell Paul how she really feels about him. Thankfully she DOES finally get her head out of her ass, but MAN, Deirdre Martin makes you wait until the VERY LAST MINUTE to give you the HEA (and even then....she left us hanging just a bit...)!

There were tons of laugh out loud moments in this book, and honestly, there was more emotional burden in this one, which kept me reading because I really wanted these two to get rid of their demons and be together!

Here are a few good moments:

"Katie?" He looked up at her woozily. "What are you doing here?"

"That was my bumper you tried to kiss."

Paul chuckled, then grimaced. clearly, laughing hurt. "Getting revenge for high school, huh?"

"Actually, I thought you were trying to end it all."

"Believe me, if that was the case there are a lot more pleasant ways to go about it."

"Such as-"

"A hotel room, two hookers, some downers and a bottle of Jack Daniels."

"Nice to see you've put some thought into it," Katie said dryly.

Lying beside her, Paul propped himself up on one elbow while the fingers of his free hand brushed easily over her right hip. He slid down her body, kissing the spot he'd just caressed. "What are these?" he asked innocently.

Katie lifted her head, peering down the length of her body as Paul continued to gaze curiously at the intricate netting of pearly white lines crisscrossing her hips.

"Those are stretchmarks," she said quietly, moving to turn away from him. "From when I was fat."

Paul pulled her back toward him, pressing his mouth to the marks and letting his lips linger. "I think they're beautiful."

Katie snorted. "My God, you can sling the bull."

Paul lifted his eyes to hers. "I'm not bullshitting you, Katie. They're hieroglyphics. I read them and I can see where you've been and how hard you've worked to get to where you are now. They're part of you, so they're beautiful." He kissed her right hip again before spreading the afghan over the two of them and settling back down with Katie nestled in his arms.

"Care to tell me what's really going on here?"

"That IS what's really going on."

"Fine, whatever you say. But I'm not hiding this relationship forever. It's ridiculous. And insulting. If you don't want me, I know plenty of women who do."

"Like Liz Flaherty?" Katie snapped.

Paul chuckled. "Jealous?"

"Of the she wolf of the SS? Hardly. No, I just happend to know from Bitsy, who heard from Frank"- she glared at Paul-"that Liz was here angling for a ride on your joystick."

Paul looked amused. "And that bothers you."

"Of course it bothers me! You - you're -" she was painting herself into a corner.

"I'm what Katie?" Paul raised a questioning eyebrow. "I'm yours?"

"Yes," Katie muttered.

"Ah. So let me make sure I'm getting this straight: I'm yours, but no one can know I'm yours. Or, no one can

know I'm your until YOU want them to know I'm yours."

"It sounds awful when you put it that way!"

"That's because it IS awful, Professor." He put his arm back around her, kissing her hair. "It's awful and mean and cruel."

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"Katie?"

Katie sprang up, clutching the bed sheet to her chest. What the hell was her mother doing home? She was supposed to be away all day with the church ladies! Why was it that Mina could do half the high school football team on her lunch hour and no one was even he wiser? So much for the good girl being bad....

"Oh, Katie," her mother sounded upset. "What happened?"

"I don't know," Katie sniffed. "Actually, I do. I fucked up."

"Language, dear," her mother tut-tutted.

"Fuck, fuck, fuck!" Katie chanted defiantly. "If I want to say it, I'll say it!"

"You're right honey. You 'fuck' away all you want."

Katie lifted her head, catching her mother's eye. They both began laughing before Katie dissolved back into tears.

Paul sighed heavily. "I suppose you want me to kiss you."

"I suppose you want me to beg you."

"That usually comes later."

Katie nipped his lower lip. "Snot."

"Witch."

His lips brushed over hers slowly. Once...twice...three times, each time lingering a little more than the time before.

"I bet you think you're torturing me," Katie murmured as her body stirred to life.

"I bet you like it."

"I bet you're right."

Juniper Shore says

I'll go out on a limb here and assert that romance does not mix well with professional sports. I know, I know, there's this manly thing associated with beating up people in the rink, but that's more about sex appeal than love. Maybe I'm old-fashioned, but I like a romance that has more personality than lust in it. That's not to say it's impossible to do a good romance-on-the-ice (I thought *The Cutting Edge* was great), but the main characters have to have *something* in common.

Anyway. *The Penalty Box* follows the adventures of Katie and Paul, who knew each other slightly during high school. Katie has returned to her hometown after ten years away to help look after her poor nephew, while Paul has ended up running the titular bar after injuries ended his hockey career. Both of them have a

lot of baggage to overcome, and neither seems able to move on from the past, which is frankly sad. The plot drags a bit, as we wait for our heroes to have a grand epiphany that never comes.

The real problem with the book is that it's impossible to imagine these two people ever passing the time of day, let alone leaping into a loving relationship. They share absolutely no common characteristics. Their scenes together are mostly about business--looking out for Tuck, especially. I honestly found the subplot involving Tuck and Mina to be the most interesting part of the novel. (Okay, and Snake was cool, mostly because he was so unexpected.)

Blah. Two stars for writing that was just good enough to get me to finish.

jenjn79 says

Like the other books of Martin's I've read, this one makes good light reading. The book is amusing and cute, but lacking in the depth that would make it a truly good book. It's all just very superficial. She skimps past the real issues, never digging down to the true emotions and problems. Martin doesn't do justice to the characters, their pasts, and their situations.

Paul was introduced in at least one of her other books that I've read. In that book, he was a total prick until near the end. This was addressed with about two sentences in the current book. It should have been talked about and dissected a bit. Because she didn't, there was a lack of realism with Paul's character. As for Katie...she pissed me off a lot. She was very self-focused to the point that it was annoying. And there was the whole issue with her weight that is mentioned a lot, but never really dealt with.

Overall, like I said, it's a cute story and good if you want some light reading, but if you want something deeper, I wouldn't recommend Martin's books. I tend to read them only because they involve hockey players.

Vicki says

Hmmm, I wish I could say I loved this book, but it just isn't the case. It wasn't as good as the first two books in the series, but it was marginally better than the third.

In 'The Penalty Box' we meet two new characters in the series - Katie Fisher and Paul van Dorn. The story starts off with the high school reunion for Didsbury High. Katie reluctantly attends. She's a successful professor now and a knock-out stunner to boot but back in her high school days she was over weight and the butt of countless jokes and taunts. One of her harassers being the high school hockey star and hottie Paul van Dorn.

Just like the school days, Paul is the centre of attention at the reunion, and he's even more handsome than he was at school. He was at the top of his NHL career when he took one too many hits to the head and was forced to retire. Now he runs The Penalty Box, a bar in downtown Didsbury that is a temple for his glory days and brings in crowds of adoring fans.

Katie is a sociologist writing a book on male sporting stars and Paul makes a perfect case study. Unfortunately she is also incredibly attracted to him. Soon they fall head over heels for each other but predictably, there are problems. Katie thinks Paul is stuck in the past - reliving his glory days with no goals for his future. Paul thinks Katie is stuck on the future, refusing to acknowledge her painful past. This proves

to be the basis of their discontent.

To add to the story, Katie's sister is struggling with drug and alcohol addiction and is in and out of rehab. Consequently, Katie has taken over the raising of her beloved nephew - who becomes the star player of the squirts hockey team - coached by Paul. There is a nice relationship between Paul and Tuck (the nephew) and the story of Katie's sister Mina and her boyfriend Snake is interesting but frankly, Katie is a snob and she stuffs nice guy Paul around one too many times for my liking. If I was him I would have headed for the hills long ago. It became a little too much for me. As the story progressed I felt that he was such a nice guy and loved her so much and she thought she was so much better than him. When they eventually got back together for the (very speedy) happy ending, I felt sorry for him. Not a good outcome for a romance novel! Deidre Martin can do better. Hopefully the next book in the series proves me right.

Jac (For Love and Books) says

I have absolutely been obsessed with hockey romance lately, the latest being the New York Blades series by Deirdre Martin. Unfortunately? This book nearly ended that streak. I've written a lot of "Gushing" reviews lately. Talking about how I love the big bad hockey players, and the conflict both on and off the ice. But this one? This review is one of those I hate to write.

This book? Didn't do it for me. And I'm going to tell you why. (All the painful stuff, even talking sock puppets. I wish I was joking.)

I wanted to love Paul van Dorn. I hated him when he started talking smack to Michael Dante in Fair Play, but I just assumed by the time his book rolled around, we'd love him. Unfortunately? Even after spending 352 pages with him? I don't know him. (This seems to be a weakness with Deirdre Martin's writing - there's always one character who is incredibly underdeveloped.) Apparently, he's best friends with Michael Dante (although we only get a few small mentions of him, so we don't know that story at all.) He's retired, lives in his hometown and is generally miserable. But that's all we know. We don't know who he is, where he comes from, etc. We know he likes to have sex, with Katie. We know he dated a bitch in high school. But that's it. Seriously.

This book was more about Katie's relationship with her nephew Tuck than anything. (And it was a sort of touching story, poor kid.) But there was no chemistry between Paul and Katie - they just sort of fell into bed together, then broke up (after a really bizarre scene where Katie used Paul's socks as sock puppets to rip him to shreds - yes, I wish I was joking. It was painful and awkward.)

And Katie? Wow... trainwreck? She was whiny. She complained about her hometown (don't we all?) and not having a Starbucks. (Seriously - WAY too much complaining!) She complained about the mean girls from high school (UGH!) and she complained about having to go to Fat Fighters (I'm guessing weight watchers) meetings. Seriously - not even her corny humor could come close to saving this one.

I wanted to love this book. I want to love Deirdre Martin. But I'll be honest, it was hard to read this one. It was hard to not DNF it and walk away from my 18 day reading streak, from this series, from all of it. I just didn't feel it. At all. It was weird, lacked chemistry (or any real relationship) and the only real hockey was the kids - which I'm fine with, I'm a hockey mom, if coach Paul wasn't such a dick on the ice.

Unfortunately, this book fell WAY short of the mark, and I just can't even pretend to recommend it! (Although the previous two books in this series? I can recommend, so check them out instead!)

Serena Miles says

La prota esta obsesionada con sus antiguos problemas de peso y me ha sacado de quicio. No se salva casi nada del libro Me costo horrores acabarlo

1/10

Smut Junkie says

Well, this book didn't get great reviews on GR either, but I actually liked it...better than the last one. It's about Paul, who you got to know a bit in a previous book, and honestly, he seemed like a real prick. It was interesting to see his personality after his hot-shot career as a hockey players ended....really not such an ass. I actually liked him pretty quickly, even though he acted like a man-whore by sleeping with that bitch Liz at the beginning, which made me want to throw up!

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"I bet you like it."

"I bet you're right."

WhiskeyintheJar/Kyraryker says

What is it about a Deirdre Martin book that I get giddy excited just reading the first sentence of the book? The character of Katie and Paul are classic Deirdre Martin, real- with all their flaws and insecurities. I was a little astonished at how soon Katie gets over her embarrassment and nervousness around Paul; they end up sleeping together on their second date, the first date she ended up throwing up.

Have I mentioned I love the humor Deirdre Martin writes in her books, because I do, I really do. I laughed myself silly when Katie and Paul are busted having an afternoon sleepover by Katie's mom, really great comedic scenes. The situations she puts her characters into could be taken right out of everyday life and the way they react is so normal and real. Well real if every lady had an ex-NHLer drooling after them as is the case in this book.

Oh God, a big thank-you to the character "Snake" for giving one of the best lines I have read in 2009:

"Sports ain't macho unless something dies." Anyway I like how Martin always pairs hilarious situations with a side storyline which involves a deep emotional real-life problem. In this case Katie's sister is a recovering druggie who is in rehab while her son is staying with their mom and Katie is helping to take care of him.

Emotional stuff which somewhat steals the spotlight from the romance storyline of the book, but done so well I didn't really mind.

This book is all about if you can go home again, family dynamics, coming to terms with your past and future, and what you really want out of life. Sometimes the romance aspect of the story takes a backseat, but I didn't mind, well ok I started to mind when the last 30 pages or so had basically no interaction between Katie and Paul. The ending was a bit abrupt and a tad unsatisfactory, give me a little more here Martin! However, I love books which make you feel, think, and question what is important in your own life; this book certainly does all that. The first 90% of the book was really great and even though the last 10% of the book started to drag with its lack of romance, I am still going to make this book a personal keeper. (My love for the NHL absolutely didn't influence this decision at all, really....ok maybe a little)

A-

Devyn says

I found *The Penalty Box* abandoned in a unused hospital room and decided to take a chance on it.

Everything about this book is predictable and Mary Sue, but the writing's good and there is some genuinely funny moments and dialogue that made me like this book more than I probably would otherwise.

I love a book that brings on the funny, and this one definitely delivers, so I can't complain.

Tina says

Unfortunately, I'm going to have to DNF this one on page 145 (42%). I don't like the characters and don't

like the story. Rating it 2 stars because I enjoyed the book in the beginning and I'm basing off my ratings for the other books in the series. I don't think I'll continue with the series though as it's just not my thing anymore.

Myself says

Un 3.5/5 le doy. Podía haber sido un 4 pero el final no me termina de gustar demasiado, no es que termine mal pero me falta algo más en la relación de Paul y Katie.

Pero en general está bastante bien y a ratos te echas unas risas. Y Paul con la manía que le tenía cuando le conocí y puteaba tanto a Dante ahora es ñam ñam. A Katie le daba con la mano abierta unas cuantas veces.

Shawna says

3 stars – Contemporary Romance

This contemporary romance about an ex nerd/fat girl turned knockout and esteemed Sociology professor/writer who goes back to her small hometown for a year to look after her nephew and has a fling with her high school crush, an ex hockey star turned local bar owner, has some humorous parts, but the characters are all rather annoying. The H/H both have self-esteem and identity issues masked with big egos, and the sexual banter and constant bickering is exhausting and dull instead of entertaining. And although there are some steamy moments, the romance just falls a bit flat. Overall, it's an okay/average read with a few funny lines (like the scene below).

Katie pondering her screw-up sister Mina's naming of her nephew Tuck.

“There was no way she was going to tell him he got his name because of Mina's adolescent fixation with the Marshall Tucker Band. Good thing I didn't have a kid when I was in my teens, Katie thought. His name would have been Ring Ding.”
