



Front and Center

Catherine Gilbert Murdock

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After five months of sheer absolute craziness I was going back to being plain old background D.J. In photographs of course I'm always in the background...

But it turns out other folks have big plans for D.J. Like her coach. College scouts. All the town hoops fans. A certain Red Bend High School junior who's keen for romance and karaoke. Not to mention Brian Nelson, who she should not be thinking about! Who she is done with, thank you very much. But who keeps showing up anyway...

Readers first fell in love with straight-talking D.J. Schwenk in *Dairy Queen*; they followed her ups and downs both on and off the court in *The Off Season*. Now D.J. steps out from behind the free-throw line in this third installment of the *Dairy Queen* series.

Front and Center Details

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From Reader Review Front and Center for online ebook

oliviasbooks says

Sniff. I had tears in my eyes when I read the last chapter. But they were tears caused by the warmth of the story. I was perfectly happy with the conclusion and I think, that this might have been the last of the D.J.-Schwenks-books.

But am am convinced that Mrs. Murdock will just create a brand-new heroine as likable and real as D.J. And I am sure I will be among the first to place a pre-order.

One more thing I have to say is, that I do not think the cover particularly fitting. It does not show the sports connection. And secondly I understood that D.J. is a rather sturdy person. Check out the other covers that had been in the discussion. I would have like the first one from left:

<http://www.catherinemurdock.com/cathe...>

Limonessa says

I want to make clear from the start that despite having rated all three books in this series with 4 stars, I really think the series as a whole deserves **5 stars**.

I haven't written a review for the second installment and I won't write a review about this last book either. I'd rather tell you why the whole trilogy is great and you should go start reading it right now.

DJ Schwenk is just about one of the best characters in YA lit I have had the fortune to encounter lately. Written in the form a sort of diary the Dairy Queen trilogy just oozes DJ's hilariousness, simplicity, naivete, snark, wisdom and teen-age.

And talk about character development: in the course of the books I got to learn to love so much all characters in DJ's universe that I am really reluctant to let them go: from her father, who I disliked in the first book and that, end in end, is just a big, fluffy teddy bear who loves his children fiercely, to Curtis (Murdock should totally do a spinoff about Curtis, by the way) her super shy and brainy baby brother, to Brian, the love interest, who is a jerk but maybe not and just needs to grow up.

The books felt REALLY American to me, American sports playing a huge role in this series but it didn't bother me one bit, the fact that I knew close to nothing about them. Actually I was marveling all throughout the third book at this completely foreign concept that is getting a scholarship to college for athletic merits. Like, we don't even have sports here at Uni. And the meritocratic system I completely admire, which we also do not have.

So to me, it was really interesting to have this window opened on an instance of rural America, populated by cows, pickups, coaches, football players and hoops.

It felt very real. DJ's voice sounded very realistic and honest to me and very, very funny. I couldn't help but sympathize with her throughout the whole series.

This is a very refreshing and light read but in NO way shallow. Highly recommended.

Arlene says

Front and Center is the third installment of the Dairy Queen series and IMO... by far the best one of a great storyline. I really did love all three books, but this third book did such a great job of bringing the storyline to a close and showing how just about all of the main characters grew and developed from beginning to end. D.J. Schwenk is at the top of my list of fave female fictional characters. Her modesty, work ethic and humor really shine through as she tells her story; and from the first to the last line, I hang on her every word. Great character... that girl!

In this book, D.J. is facing some big decisions with a few top colleges vying for her attention because of her basketball skills. She has to decide between playing for a Division I or Division III b-ball. And for someone like D.J. that loves to play and operate in the background, those are two different leagues with opportunities and challenges on both ends. Her brother Win, having suffered from a SCI in the previous book, plays an integral part in helping D.J. evaluate her choices; and at times she's not always very appreciative of the pressure and decisions he places on her. But at the end of the story, her dedication to him almost brought me to tears, as she tells her brother:

"Win, you say I saved your life. Well, you didn't save mine. You got me one. You found me a better life than I ever imagined I deserved...I'll never forget that...And just so you know, I will think of you... well, I'll think of you a lot. Every Big Ten game I play, every time I sit there waiting to run out in front of ten thousand people and play the very best I can, I will think of you Win, and this is what I will whisper to myself: Thank you."

You might have to read the books to appreciate that, but all I have to say is *tear*. :(D.J. is such a great character to read about and I'll keep this on my fave list of books to enjoy when I want a motivator or inspirational push every now and again. If Catherine Gilbert Murdock decides to continue with D.J.'s story, I'll be there Front and Center to read her book. If not, she did a fine job and ended with a perfect conclusion. AWESOME.BOOK!

Keertana says

Rating: 3.5 Stars

I just want to say, before I start this review, that if you plan to read this series, or just one book from this series, on a read-along...DON'T. I kid you not, but the *Dairy Queen* Series is THE WORST book you could pick for a read-along because you just cannot. Stop. Reading. IT'S IMPOSSIBLE! I know because I've tried...for THREE BOOKS! It's HOPELESS! *throws hands up and stalks away*

Anyway, that being said, this is also one of those series you just HAVE to read because it is simple amazing. I love it. D.J. Schwenk is a heroine who is compelling, unique, and her voice is so relate-able, despite the fact that she lives on a farm, wakes up early morning to milk cows, and is the only girl to play football on her team. *Front and Center*, I can assure fans of the series, does not disappoint in terms of a conclusion at all. In fact, I found the romance to be resolved perfectly and it was heartwarming to see the full circle the Schwenk family had made since the beginning of our time with them.

BUT, I will say that out of the three books in this series, *The Off Season*, Book 2, is the strongest. It was heartfelt, deep, and truly brought together the bonds of the Schwenk family and D.J.'s maturity. In many ways, I still feel as if the ending of *The Off Season* is perfect in a bittersweet way - because, you know, I like those endings. While I still did enjoy *Front and Center* immensely, I do think that it failed to impress me as much as its predecessor.

For one, I have to admit to being disappointed by a certain lack of family in this story. Murdock's trilogy has been so well-loved, by me at least, because of its strong focus on the Schwenk family, their growth, development, and realistic tendencies. While I hasten to reassure readers that all this is still very much prevalent in this last novel - including some utterly heartwarming mother-daughter bonding scenes - I still came away unimpressed. With *The Off Season*, Murdock had established a strong relationship between D.J. and her two older brothers. Win and Bill are still strong presences in this novel who had a huge impact on D.J.'s life decisions, especially the former, but I didn't *feel* this bond as strongly as I wished. It's not that it wasn't there, but simply that it wasn't as deep as I remembered.

Next, I really do have a fight to pick with the unrealistic portrayal of college in this story. As an American student undergoing the process of finding colleges and applying to them, D.J.'s journey is simply too convenient, unrealistic, and a little grating for teens to read about. In *Front and Center*, D.J. is vying for a basketball scholarship and, after getting an article published about her in *People* magazine, she has floods of letters from colleges, requesting her to contact them, and even has Division-I college coaches actively seeking her out in her school itself. (Note: D.J. is a junior while this is happening and she hasn't even written her SATs yet when she begins to receive scholarship offers! Yeah, this doesn't happen in America. I wish.)

While all this is a vastly unrealistic experience to go through, I do have to commend Murdock for making D.J.'s reactions to these events as realistic as possible. You see, D.J. is still confused and distressed because although she has a variety of options before her (and never even had to research colleges with the programs she wanted), she still faces a drastic inner battle. Despite being an incredible basketball player, D.J. is unsure of joining the competitive Division-I league of players. Although Murdock writes about sporty kids who are athletically talented, I find that I can relate to their issues, which I love. Plus, D.J. really gets out of her comfort zone in this novel, learning to talk to other people and make friends [who are, you know, not just Amber or Brian or Beaner or other guys who play sports but actual GIRLS who maybe like to do math in their spare time (although what kind of person LIKES to do math??)].

Front and Center is a great novel and a fantastic conclusion to a delightful trilogy, but I did wish for more family bonding in this one, not to mention a more realistic portrayal of colleges and going about the college process. It seemed a little convenient, in my eyes. Plus, it's also so nice for D.J. that because colleges don't care about her SATs or grades she can just skip school to visit colleges while the rest of us have to schedule college visits when we don't have AP Bio Lab or AP Physics Tests or, you know, a composition for AP French. (Sorry, I am seriously SO BITTER that my life isn't as easy as D.J.'s is! >.<)

Bottom Line? Read the series. Murdock's writing is impeccable, her characterization spot-on, and her books sure to put a smile on your face. I find that this is one series that simply does not disappoint and its originality makes it stand out from the usual contemporary read. If you skip out on this series, believe me when I say you are missing out - majorly.

You can read this review and more on my blog, Ivy Book Bindings.

~Tina~ says

Front and Center is the last D.J book, and I got to say, I'm so sad to see this series go. I would love to see more book about this extraordinary girl and her family but I am quite content with the ending. It was perfect. I have to applaud Catherine Murdock here, she did a fantastic job of giving us such wonderful, wonderful characters. Her plots are very believable and heartfelt and her writing really pieces everything together of how I see it in my mind. Amazing!

These books are so much more then just sports. It's about family, struggle, passion, love, heart and soul. It is a beautiful mix of inspiration, strength and brilliance.

It's about a girl named D.J Schwenks and how her stories can make you believe in the very best of yourself. These books are incredible I absolutely loved each and everyone of them!

If your looking for a good series that is different from all the rest, but will entertain you in ways you wouldn't think would. Then you should give these books a go.

An amazing and unforgettable trilogy that will touch your heart.

Cara says

GIVE ME A D! GIVE ME J! WHAT DOES THAT SPELL? D.J.!!!!!!

I thought it was appropriate to begin this way because D.J. Schwenk deserves a whole cheering squad for being who she is. I don't think D.J. realizes it herself but she is probably envied by her peers. She doesn't think so but let's just look at her:

1. She is tall (I'm kind of short so yeah this counts)
2. Can play sports and is so good she rumbles on the guy's team
3. Gets attention from cute boys (Brain and Beaner)
4. and did I mention all around awesome decent person? Yeah that too.

Here we begin with her going back to school after the whole thing with Win. She thinks she'll be able to lay low, but she is so wrong. Beaner asks her out, the coach is talking about getting scholarships like right now, Win is on her case, and of course Brian has to pop up **AGAIN**. The pressure is on and D.J. just can't help but think she won't be able to handle it all.

I have to say this wasn't my favorite of the series (I do love the series though.) Things are actually easier for her in the sense it's not bad things that are happening but good things. I'm sure a lot of us can relate to her thinking we aren't good enough. Even if everyone is telling her that she can, she knows she can't. What probably bothered me the most was that a lot of scenes are just explained and not "acted" out so to speak and sometimes the narrative seemed all over the place. It does make sense though because it gives you the frantic feeling that she has.

What I did love about this one was that D.J. was finally getting some things she deserved. In the first two she just couldn't seem to catch a break, but you love her to pieces because no matter what happens she is strong, loyal, compassionate and real in her own unique way. You see why people love sports so much when you read the book, even though you might not be into them yourself. Murdock definitely tied things nicely at the end though, not like everything is resolved but when you read it it's going to make you love D.J. and Win even more. It comes full circle and I *really* hope she will do a spinoff with Curtis from the series. I think she

could write more if she wanted to, but I'm fairly sure it's going to end here, which is fine. Best of luck D.J. Schwenk and thanks for sharing your story.

Chelsea ♥Peril Please♥ says

So. Flippin'. Adorable. **Perfect**. I will come back to this series again and again...D.J.'s voice and Brian's quest to win her back truly warmed my heart. I can't wait to write a review on this lovely book.

(It was totally one of these types of books)

Review to come.

Lisa says

Actual Rating: 3.49 stars

I feel like I have to preface this review by saying I liked this book because I fear my review is going to come across more negative than my star rating suggests. I did enjoy reading it, and I got through it pretty quickly (partly, because it's very short) but it was a disappointment when compared to the first two.

The strongest aspect of this book for me was D.J.'s relationships with Beamer and Brian Nelson, her on-again/off-again ex-boyfriend. I felt like D.J.'s struggles and growth in the romantic sphere were very realistic, (view spoiler) The chemistry between D.J. and Brian was still going strong, and I liked how in the end she was still true to herself. The conclusion to the romantic relationship could have been a disaster in the hands of another author, but Murdock does a great job giving readers a happy ending that is still realistic, and didn't ruin her characters.

Unlike the first two books in the series, I wasn't immediately sucked into this one. The start was very slow, and the entire book seemed to have a lot more filler, which is odd since it's already very short. Even more problematic for me was D.J.'s character regression. All of the lessons she'd learned from books one and two completely flew out the window. Her self-esteem reached new lows, which was particularly unbelievable because, unlike in the first book, both this one and the second were filled with people praising her for her accomplishments and recognizing how amazing she was. D.J.'s actions in this book would have been much more believable if the events from the last two hadn't happened.

Speaking of praise for D.J., I also felt like I was being beat over the head with how wonderful, important, and special she was in this one. Every character seemed to fall all over themselves for her. Even characters with whom she had previous conflict were nice to her. None of the characters held her accountable for her actions, and overall there weren't any longterm consequences for her mistakes. The only conflict in this novel comes from D.J. herself and her unbelievably low self-esteem.

Lastly, I just wasn't interested in the college sports recruitment process or basketball. It's funny because I much prefer basketball to football, yet I was actually interested in the football storyline in the first book and bored by the basketball storyline in this one. It's clear that Murdock has done a lot of research about the college sports recruitment process, but there wasn't enough of a plot outside of that to keep me engrossed.

Overall, I liked the book but I didn't "really like" it or love it the way I did the first two. Still, it's part of a great series overall and I would hesitate to recommend it to anyone.

Megan says

If you have already read Dairy Queen and The Off Season then you pretty much know what to expect from this one ~ another fantastic journey to Schwenk farm as we follow DJ in her junior year. This wasn't my favorite of the series, simply because this final installment didn't have a plot line that was worthy of being a stand alone book. Rather, Front and Center was a conclusion to the first two as we see DJ on the path to becoming a woman who isn't afraid to be, well... front and center ;)

That being said, if you love the first two, you will love this as well. Seeing the series end so well I am totally going back and rating the first two books five stars (because they deserve more than the four stars I originally gave them.) This was an amazing series. Nothing else to say, except (view spoiler)

Sara ♥ says

I think I'm extra emotional lately (thank you pregnancy!) because I seriously want to cry thinking about how sweet and fulfilling this book was to me!

This series has been really interesting for me because while sports are all right, I'm not THAT into them, you know? I like them more than my husband... (This isn't saying much, if you know him. He thinks they're utterly pointless...) I've been watching curling during the Olympics, and I will watch parts of March Madness if I feel like it, but still. BUT, these books were like really good sports movies. Like Remember the Titans and Glory Road and The Greatest Game Ever Played. Not in the same way, but in that the sports are important (central, even) to the story, but they're not the WHOLE POINT of the story. So whether you like Football (meh) or Basketball (yeah) or Golf (no, thank you), the message is something on a deeper level—something moral or emotional or whatever.

And that's what these books are like. Dairy Queen was very footbally and this one was very basketbally (The Off Season was less sporty... hence the name), but they're all about DJ Schwenk and her growth as an individual. And there's marked growth, which is refreshing in a series... (Sometimes you read those multiple book series about girls in high school, and you're like, "WOW. Are you EVER going to grow up???" *coughThe Princess Diariescough*)

I didn't really know where Ms. Murdock was going to take this story, but I was really happy with how it turned out. I think DJ made good decisions and stuck up for herself and it was just really good. YAY! I'm just sad it's over!!

Wendy Darling says

So sad it's all over! What I wouldn't give to read DJ Schwenk: The College Years.

Liz* Fashionably Late says

An amazing MC for an inspiring YA series.

I really liked *Front and Center* as a warm and refreshing coming of age story. Catherine Gilbert Murdock is an exceptional writer who gave us the perfect ending for this trilogy with real characters and real problems. DJ's relationship with her parents and brothers seemed a little bittersweet to me. She had to manage with all the pressure and expectations. She realized how strong and brave she was, how talented she truly was even when it was so hard for her to gain some self confidence.

Because if you're not okay with who you are, why should anyone else be?

That kinda sums up what I loved about this whole series. She realized she could do anything and go wherever she wanted once she accepted herself.

DJ has been one of the cutest and funniest heroines I've ever read and it is really sad to say good bye.

Penny says

D.J. Schwenk is the exact opposite of most YA protagonists. That's right, she's got a brain. Also? She won't let any boy mistreat her, no matter how ridiculously good looking they might be. She's a little shy but will speak up when she has something worthwhile to say, which, honestly, is more often than she gives herself credit for--like I said, the girl has brains. She's so easy to relate to, on several levels, you can't help but root her on.

The *Dairy Queen* series is up there on my list of favorites now. I highly recommend it. D.J. Schwenk is my hero.

Ilsa Bick says

Having adored *DAIRY QUEEN* and really liked *THE OFF SEASON*, I was all set to enjoy this book. D.J.'s voice comes through loud and clear, but the problem with this book is two-fold.

One is the same problem I found with *THE OFF SEASON*--why have a sequel to a book that ended very well? As it turned out, enough character growth and plot twists abound in that book to make it a worthwhile read. (Again, though, it wasn't a necessary book.)

I had a feeling that THIS book was written only because there was supposed to be a trilogy . . . so write the

third book already. Not only didn't I care so much about whom D.J. ended up with (although, hello, it was a completely foregone conclusion) but there were really no stakes here at all. D.J.'s "growth" was unbelievable and seemed entirely too pat (and a forced tie-in to the very first book).

The second problem is that the book is completely tell-tell-tell and very little show. Now, I enjoy D.J.'s voice, but DQ was able to have it both ways, and the same with OS (though less so). This was not the case with F&C--or maybe I was just uninvolved in the story enough to find the going very tedious. I blistered through the first book, trotted through the second, slogged through the third--and I don't feel exhilarated at all. Just . . . whew, glad that's done.

Aj the Ravenous Reader says

"Being front and center sucks."

Do I relate so much with D.J! Because that is exactly my thought most of the time. I never wanted to be the center of attention except maybe when I was five. Like D.J., I'm happiest and most comfortable when I'm at the background blending in right along with everybody else but life doesn't give us what we want most of the time.

Like I said on the first two books of this series, the story and every character in it are so relatable, they felt like family. I have become so at home with the Schwenk family, I feel like a part of them already. One of my good buddies mentioned the reason she loves this series so much is how it is so grounded and so real and I definitely agree with her. It's also so funny.

"Would it kill the teachers to assign us just one book, once, that didn't make you want to jump off a cliff?"

Right?! .

The third book is a great conclusion to the series as it gives even more focus on sports, on girls' basketball in particular and how DJ shines (even though she does not want to) with her inherent kindness, perceptiveness and exceptional skills. I love that the third book is more about her relationship with her older brother, Win, and how in a way, they saved each others' lives. Of course, we find out which boy D.J. finally chooses and it's just so uncomplicatedly right. These books have been consistently real, funny and heartwarming from first book till the end and I would highly recommend this to readers of YA contemporary. ;)
