

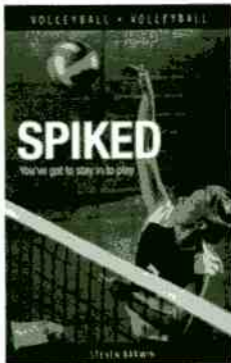
BARWIN, Steve

*Spiked (Sports Stories Series)*

James Lorimer & Co., 2013. 117p. Gr. 5-8. 978-1-4594-0528-8. Pbk. \$9.95

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Popular middle schooler Emma is caught texting in math class. During the obligatory visit with her teacher and mother, she is assigned to help with the volleyball team as punishment. Seeing as she is 6 ft. tall, the assignment is not without forethought. The problem with the arrangement is that Emma is not interested in anything to do with volleyball. She is part of a threesome of powerful "mean girls" who consider sports as a boy thing; girl athletes are not of their world.



Emma soon learns that she is lost to her cool friends and not welcome among the volleyball team. Even though the coach convinces her to join the team, Emma's skills are rusty and she makes costly mistakes. Her former friends are horrified with what she has done and many on the volleyball team don't trust her. Emma has reached a crossroads. To make matters worse, a backpack the coach uses to house some team-building notes written by the players goes missing and Emma is the major suspect. She has a very good idea of who really stole the backpack, but she is also aware that it is unlikely she will be believed. What transpires is that two friends show their true colours in different ways to Emma and some order is restored to her life. The bullying stops, not by a miracle, but by intelligent intervention and in keeping with what each bully deserves.

A middle school teacher who has published other YA titles, author Barwin's dialogue and characters are spot-on in this sports story for reluctant readers, and the way the story plays out is believable. There are different levels and styles of bullying examined in this book, as well as how they are handled by those being bullied and the school administration. His insightful portrayal of adolescent friendship, good and bad, inside and out, thanks to his middle school experience is entirely believable.

**Thematic Links:** Volleyball; Friendship; Sports; Bullying; Middle School

Lesley Little