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Murder, He Wrote Creating Tennis Fiction With Homicidal Humor

'Now, *That's* a Killer Serve!'

By JOHN MARTIN

MELBOURNE, Australia – My first novel, “Murder at the Australian Open,” is taking shape in my mind. Some of the characters (fictional, of course) are starting to come alive (before death, of course):

I'm leaning toward a greedy sports agent, a maniacal coach, an unscrupulous chair umpire, a hyper-competitive player, and a sermonizing sportswriter.

Of course, those are just the victims.

Villains are harder to conjure, but an Australian mob family can't be a bad choice. A Melbourne friend tells me they come in Irish, Italian, or Vietnamese. With three Irish grandparents, I'm partial to Celtic criminals who've emigrated to Australia from Dublin.

Having an experienced crime novelist at my side would make this a lot easier, especially in creating an heroic sleuth. Unfortunately, my favorite mystery writer isn't available.

Robert B. Parker, an American often compared favorably to Raymond Chandler (but with a wicked wit), passed away 10 years ago (Jan 18, 2010). His detective hero, Spenser, a boxer turned cop, can't stand authority and quits to become a private detective.

For “Murder at the Australian Open,” I'm thinking about creating a sportswriter who played junior tournaments and college tennis, then became a brilliant reporter. Okay, that's shamelessly autobiographical. I'll work on this.

Let's see: Our wisecracking hero puts his tennis smarts and investigative skills (and failings) to work. His editors invariably want him to

report (and solve) murders at the four major international championships. Australia comes first.

I'm working on a couple of plot lines.

One idea: High-tech hoods working for a global gambling syndicate hack into players' and coaches' computers, sending fake messages and spreading false rumors before a match.

They make a bundle when unsuspecting gamblers bet the wrong way. Then a vengeful victim silences the hoods violently before horrified fans eating vegemite in the Melbourne Park Oval

The grounds here are perfect for villains hiding in wait. At least one killer will get lost in the underground passageways leading to the Margaret Court Arena. At least one photographer (maybe a whole bunch) will trip, bind and hold a

killer trying to escape from Rod Laver (the stadium or the star). Spider Cam will undoubtedly spot a bad guy sneaking onto the Laver roof to take a shot at a mob rival.

Another idea: A heist of cash from the small Australian Open tournament bank, where every day is pay day but only by check.

Robbers posing as security guards enter and leave the bank by a back door, handing off the cash from a secret safe. Their accomplices take the money and hide in the stands posing as Swedish tennis fans with painted faces.

Stepping away from my press room desk (#49) and slipping on my gumshoe's cap, I've got to find the bad guys and protect the innocent. A villain might die. Gracefully, of course

I think writing a great tennis murder mystery should be easy. Of course, writing a bad tennis murder mystery would be even easier.

**MURDER
AT THE
AUSTRALIAN
OPEN?**