



Rules of Contact (A Play-by-Play Novel Book 12)

By Jaci Burton

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In the new Play-By-Play novel by the *New York Times* bestselling author of *Unexpected Rush*, a football player who knows how to win on the field needs a better game plan for his love life.

A defensive end for the San Francisco Sabers, Flynn Cassidy is used to being in the spotlight—he just doesn’t enjoy it. But if getting in front of the cameras will help his new restaurant succeed, he’s willing. Now if he could just meet a woman who loved him and not his fame...

After her divorce, Amelia Lawrence is thrilled to start over as head chef at Ninety-Two. It’s just the opportunity she needs to heat up her career—if only she wasn’t wildly attracted to her sexy new boss. Their chemistry might be sizzling hot, but Amelia has no intention of being burned again.

Flynn can’t get enough of Amelia, and Amelia loves every second she spends with the tough yet tender Flynn. But trust is a hard-fought battle for both. Breaking the rules of contact and surrendering to their passion was the easy part. Are they willing to risk their hearts to win at the game of love?

From the Trade Paperback edition.

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Editorial Review

Review

Praise for Jaci Burton's Novels

“Jaci Burton’s stories are full of heat and heart.”—Maya Banks, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author

“A wild ride.”—Lora Leigh, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author

“Jaci Burton delivers a hot read.”—Fresh Fiction

“Passionate, inventive, sexually explicit.”—*USA Today*

About the Author

Jaci Burton is the New York Times and USA Today bestselling, award-winning author of over seventy books, including the Play-by-Play series and the Hope series. She was awarded the RT Book Reviews Career Achievement Award in 2012. Jaci lives in Oklahoma with her husband and dogs. Visit her at jaciburton.com.

Tatiana Sokolov narrates a variety of fiction but especially likes saucy romances. She lives in the Midwest with her menagerie of pets.

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one

Of all the things on Flynn Cassidy's bucket list, opening a restaurant hadn't been anywhere even close to his top ten. Yet here he was, sitting at one of the corner tables of Ninety-Two, his new restaurant in San Francisco. He marveled that at some point in his life, cooking had joined playing football on the list of things he loved the most.

If someone had told him five years ago he was going to open his own restaurant, he'd have told them they were full of shit. But look at him now, owner of his own place.

Ninety-Two was shiny and new-sort of. He'd had the old building renovated after he'd bought the property, so it still felt like it belonged in this neighborhood. He made sure it didn't look too trendy, keeping a lot of the original details intact both inside and out. He was more in favor of restaurants that felt comfortable-like home. He wanted his customers to feel as if they could come in, sit down, and feel at ease.

They'd been filled to capacity since they opened two weeks ago and so far things were going well. He took that as a sign that his inclination to keep it simple appealed to others as well. Besides, it was damn good food, he'd made sure of that. But still, opening a restaurant was a risky proposition and he didn't want to get too cocky. He knew Ninety-Two needed all the good press and attention it could get. Which was why he was sitting here. Right now one of the major entertainment media outlets was doing a feature on the restaurant. Great for publicity, but it meant camera crews, bright lights and a lot of damn people in the way of regular business. He had already wandered around and apologized to his patrons, who seemed to take it all in stride. He hoped the crews would grab all the film and sound bites they wanted and get the hell out shortly.

"This is so thrilling, Flynn."

He dragged his gaze away from the camera crews and onto Natalie, the woman he'd been dating the past few weeks. She was a looker, for sure, with beautiful auburn brown hair that teased her shoulders and the most incredible green eyes he'd ever seen.

"Yeah, thrilling isn't the first thing that popped into my head when the crews showed up today."

Natalie grabbed his hand. "Oh, come on. Who doesn't want to be on TV?"

Him, for one. As a defensive end for the San Francisco Sabers football team, he'd had plenty of cameras and microphones shoved in his face over the years. It was the last thing he wanted now, when his fledgling restaurant was just getting off the ground. But since the restaurant was new, he wouldn't turn down some publicity for it. So he'd done the interview and now he just wanted to stay out of the way while the film crew got their overview shots.

"Do you think they'll want to get some film of the two of us together?" Natalie asked. "You know, kind of get some background on your personal life, like what you do on your off time away from football and the restaurant, who you're seeing, stuff like that?"

Warning bells clanged loud and hard in Flynn's head. He'd gone down this road with more than one woman, and had ended relationships because of women who were way more interested in the limelight than in him.

Lately he'd been careful to steer clear of any woman who had an entertainment background. No models, no actresses, no one he could suspect of chasing face time in front of a camera. He figured since Natalie was a financial analyst, he was safe.

But seeing her gaze track those cameras like a vampire craving blood, he wasn't sure career choice had much to do with someone hungering to get their fifteen minutes of fame.

He didn't understand it. Not at all.

"Maybe we should move to one of the more prominent tables, Flynn," Natalie said. "You know, that way we might be in one of the camera shots."

He forced back a sigh. "I don't think so."

She pushed back her chair and stood, ignoring him. "I'm going to go to the bar and get a drink. You know, all casual like, and see if maybe they notice me."

He leaned back in his chair. "Sure. You do that."

This relationship was doomed. Just one of the many Flynn had seen go down in flames in the past couple of years. He bit back the rising anger over having yet another woman use him to get her time in the spotlight.

What the hell was wrong with him that women craved camera time instead of just being with him? Yeah, he was a football player, and maybe that held some appeal, but he was also a nice guy who had something to offer besides photo ops. He was getting damn tired of playing this game with every woman he dated.

Maybe there wasn't a woman out there who was interested in him. Just him. Not Flynn the football player. Just Flynn the guy.

He shook his head, mentally notched up another failure and took a long swallow of his beer.

Since orders had slowed down and she had the kitchen under control, Amelia Lawrence washed her hands in the sink and tried to hide, avoiding the cameras. The last thing she wanted was to be on television. She was head chef at Ninety-Two. This whole publicity thing was on Flynn, and she didn't need to be interviewed, filmed or in any way noticed.

But as she did her best game of hide and not be sought, she also spotted Flynn's new girlfriend doing her best job to try to be seen by any of the camera crew.

Oh, no. Not another one of those kind of women.

She'd worked with Flynn the past couple of months, even before Ninety-Two had opened. And in that time period she'd seen him go through no less than three women, all of whom seemed to be way more interested in his prowess as camera fodder than anything else.

She felt bad for him, and nothing but disdain for the women who couldn't appreciate what a fine man Flynn Cassidy was.

He was supremely tall and ridiculously well built, with a thick mane of black hair and amazing blue eyes. She could spend at least a full day doing nothing but ogling his tattoos. And who didn't love football? Plus, the man had fine culinary taste. When he'd hired her, they'd spent several weeks designing the menu for the restaurant. She had to admit, he had good ideas.

So did she, and she appreciated that he listened to hers, and had been willing to blend their ideas for the final menu. She loved the way it had turned out and her estimation of Flynn had risen. In the past she'd worked for her share of egomaniacs who insisted it was their way or the highway, but Flynn wasn't like that. He was willing to collaborate. He also liked to crack jokes, was kind to the employees and seemed like a nice guy.

So why couldn't the man find a decent girlfriend? He kind of sucked at it, actually. If she had been a native of San Francisco maybe she could have helped him out, but she'd only moved here recently from Portland. Her only ties in the city were her best friend from college and her friend's husband. Otherwise, she was pretty much alone. She'd rented a house not too far from the restaurant, and she was getting out in the neighborhood and meeting people there.

She knew it would take time to form a circle of close friends, but even with her limited contacts she guessed she could find better women for Flynn to date than the ones he'd been parading in and out of the restaurant lately. She could spot posers a mile away. Maybe she could offer her services to Flynn.

"Orders up."

Pulling her focus away from Flynn, she put her attention on the incoming orders, on directing her staff, on minding her own business, and not on Flynn's girlfriend who was currently preening for the cameras as if she was auditioning for the next blockbuster movie.

With an eye roll, she dismissed the woman and set about making scallops.

Because Flynn Cassidy was decidedly not her problem. And no matter how sorry she felt for him, she wasn't going to get involved in his personal life.

two

Flynn showed up for practice early, just like he always did. He liked to get a run in to warm up before hitting the weight room.

After logging his three miles, he made his way to the weight room. As usual, he wasn't the first one in there. His defensive teammates-the guys he counted on-were up and at it early today, too.

He spotted Junior Malone, Alfonso Labelle, Hank "Hey Man" Henderson and Chris Smith. These guys were his rocks, the ones he depended on to be at the line of scrimmage with him and prevent the offense from moving forward. He'd worked with most of these guys ever since the San Francisco Sabers had drafted him. The only one to join the team after him had been Junior Malone, but he'd been a perfect fit to the line. They were fierce, ass-kicking defenders, and the reason the Sabers had one of their best years defensively last year. They were clicking on all cylinders and even though they were only five games into the season so far, their numbers were solid.

"You're late," Hey Man said.

Flynn laid his towel on the bench. "I'm the only one out there running three miles before workouts. You're all welcome to join me if you want to burn some of that fat off."

Hey Man looked down at his stomach. "This is all muscle, man."

Flynn let out a snort. "It looks a lot more like too much fried chicken."

Hey Man glared at him. "Don't mess with my fried chicken. You know it's my weakness."

"We all know what your weakness is, Hey Man," Chris said. "Food. All of it."

Flynn grinned, then lay on his back and started light with the bench press. Soon enough, he added more weight and the trainers had showed up to spot him. There was nothing like a pounding, sweat-pouring workout to get the blood pumping and prepare him for practice.

He finished off with an energy drink, jawing with the rest of the guys, then they headed out to the field where Mick Riley, the Sabers quarterback, was leading the offense in practice drills.

Since they weren't ready for the defense to come in yet, Flynn took a minute to watch the offense play. Defense could keep the opposing team from putting points up on the board, which was key. But if your offense failed to score, your team was sunk. Mick had been leading the Sabers offense for ten years now. He'd won two championships and didn't appear to be slowing down any time soon. At thirty-five, the man looked to be in the prime of his life, which was unusual for a quarterback.

Still, when it was time for the defense to take the field, Flynn had to take a shot at him.

"How's it going, old man?" Flynn asked.

"Hey, fuck off, Cassidy."

Flynn took his position with a grin at Mick.

"You know if you give shit to my quarterback, I'll lay you flat." Oscar Taylor, the left offensive guard, joined the fray.

Flynn crouched down in front of him. "You could try, Oscar, but you know I'm just going to run right past you."

Oscar growled. "We'll see about that, Flynn."

Flynn grinned. Shit talking was a normal part of practice. It got them fired up and ready to play. So when the ball was snapped, he and Oscar went at it, though not as fiercely as they would in a game situation. The last thing you wanted to do was hurt someone on your own team.

Practice lasted two hours. After general drills, they worked with their position coaches and went over plays for this Sunday's game against Detroit. When they were finished he and Mick headed back to the locker room together.

"How's the new restaurant?" Mick asked.

As was typical, all the trash talk ended once practice was over. "It's good, thanks. You and Tara should come for dinner."

"Yeah, she asked me about it the other day. She's eager to try it out. But it'll be a couple of weeks before she can fly out here."

As they walked down the long hallway toward the locker room, Flynn turned to him. "Well, actually, Irvin's assistant has booked the team party at the restaurant two weeks from now. Is Tara coming for that?"

Mick nodded. "Yeah, she is. So, your first big gig at the restaurant and the whole team will be there. Make you nervous?"

Flynn laughed. "Not really. I think the restaurant can handle it. And I'm grateful Irvin is giving the restaurant some business."

"I'll definitely let Tara know about the party being at your place. She'll be excited, since she's wanted to eat at Ninety-Two ever since she heard you were opening it."

"Good. I can't wait to see her."

Flynn knew that Mick and Tara made their off-season home in St. Louis, where the entire Riley clan lived. Mick also had a place here in San Francisco and Tara often came and stayed during the season, since she owned an event planning business here, along with another office in St. Louis.

Lots of juggling there, as well as their four-year-old son, Sam, and another son in college.

He didn't know how they managed. Family support, he supposed. The Rileys were a big clan, so he knew they all pitched in and helped rally around Tara and Mick and their kids.

He stripped down and headed to the shower, letting the hot steam rain down over him. Damn, that felt good. As he lost himself under the water, he thought about family.

Yeah, he knew all about family support. The Cassidys were a big family, too. And with Flynn, Barrett and Grant all playing pro football, plus Tucker playing pro baseball, it was one crazy sports-minded family. He had their dad, Easton, to thank for the guys' love of sports. Their younger sister, Mia, was the only one to escape the sports bug. She was the brains of the family.

He smiled thinking about his sister. He hadn't talked to her in a while. He needed to give her a call and check up on her. As the oldest sibling, he often felt like it was his responsibility to look after the others. Rowdy bunch, all of them.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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