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# Sports Illustrated

*Why Kyler Murray Is the Man In Arizona*

# WILD CARDS 1

*Why Josh Rosen Is Starting Fresh in Miami*

BY ROBERT KLEMKO

P. 26



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# LINEUP

RAY OF HOPE

Acquired from the Tigers in the David Price trade of 2014, shortstop Willy Adames is one of several youngsters keeping Tampa Bay atop the AL East.

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BY SI PREMEDIA

STEVE HELBER/AP/SHUTTERSTOCK  
(MURRAY); MAX FAULKNER/FORT  
WORTH STAR-TELEGRAM/TNS/  
GETTY IMAGES(ROSEN)



NOW ON



## Hard Paths to the NFL



**EARNING AN** NFL roster spot is not easy, especially for players who competed at FCS schools. SI TV's latest feature-length documentary, *Next Level*, went behind the scenes with two small-conference prospects—defensive tackle Khalen Saunders (Western Illinois) and receiver Keelan Doss (UC Davis)—from the conclusion of their college careers through the final round of the NFL draft. The 6-foot, 324-pound Saunders (*top, center*) had more on his mind than football at the Senior Bowl, for example. SI captured the moment his wife, Ayanna Hall, called to say she had gone into labor. After a quick trip home to Chicago to meet his daughter, Kambridge, he returned for the game and showed enough to be taken with the 84th pick, by the Chiefs.

Doss (*inset*), a 6' 2", 211-pound speedster who grew up in Alameda, Calif., set Aggies career records for catches (321) and receiving yards (4,069). He suffered a pectoral injury at the NFL combine and was crushed to not be one of the 28 receivers selected. (Doss signed a free-agent deal with the Raiders after the draft's seventh and final round.) His journey continues.

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LEADING OFF

FROM THE

VAULT

FOLLOW @SIFULLFRAME

# THREE FOR ALL

THREE TRIPLE CROWN WINNERS, THREE  
DIFFERENT TRIPLE CROWN RACES, THREE  
SPORTS ILLUSTRATED PHOTOGRAPHERS ON  
THE IMAGES THAT MET THE MOMENT

## SECRETARIAT

KENTUCKY DERBY ■ MAY 5, 1973



**O**U DON'T forget the champions," says Neil Leifer, who shot 17 Kentucky Derbys—as well as scores of other marquee events—over his long tenure with SPORTS ILLUSTRATED. "This was the greatest horse of all time." To get this iconic photo of Secretariat and jockey Ron Turcotte winning the first leg of the Triple Crown, Leifer mounted a remote camera on the inside rail, about 125 feet from the finish line. "The shot that was in focus just happened to be when all four of his hooves were off the ground," says Leifer. "It was honestly luck."

► PHOTOGRAPH BY NEIL LEIFER





FROM THE

# VAULT

FOLLOW @SIFULLFRAME



## JUSTIFY

PREAKNESS STAKES ■ MAY 19, 2018

**T**

**HE FOG** grew thicker as race time approached, settling like a blanket over Pimlico Race Course and obscuring the rain-soaked track so thoroughly that the race caller had to rely on the television monitor rather than what he could see with his own eyes. Simon Bruty was stationed near the first turn with a 600mm

telephoto lens. He had been betting the fog would lift by the time the race started, and when it didn't, it was too late for him to change spots. "What I was seeing through my camera looked awful to me," says Bruty. "It was too dark." But the weather ended up being a blessing, as he was able to capture this "ghostly" image of Justify and jockey Mike Smith (third from right) leading the field early in the race.

► PHOTOGRAPH BY SIMON BRUTY



LEADING OFF

FROM THE

# VAULT

FOLLOW @SIFULLFRAME 📸



## ***AMERICAN PHAROAH***

BELMONT STAKES ■ JUNE 6, 2015

M

**Y FAVORITE** images have always been those where you can tell the time period by the way the crowd looks,” says Erick W. Rasco, SI’s director of photo operations. So when American Pharoah was poised to become the first horse in 37 years to win the Triple Crown, Rasco says, “I knew I wanted to get the shot from a perspective of a spectator.” He waded into the stands and paid a fan \$40 to vacate a spot on the bench. In test runs from that location, he had been able to see the track over the crowd. But there were too many people on race day. With his camera mounted on a monopod, Rasco held it high and waited for the cheering to reach peak volume, then snapped away and hoped for the best. The result is a stunning image of a modern champion.

► PHOTOGRAPH BY ERICK W. RASCO



# INBOX



FOR APRIL 22–29, 2019

## COVER

A cover with no headline? It reminds me of when the U.S. hockey team beat the Soviet Union at the 1980 Olympics. No need for words—the images tell stories that will never be forgotten.

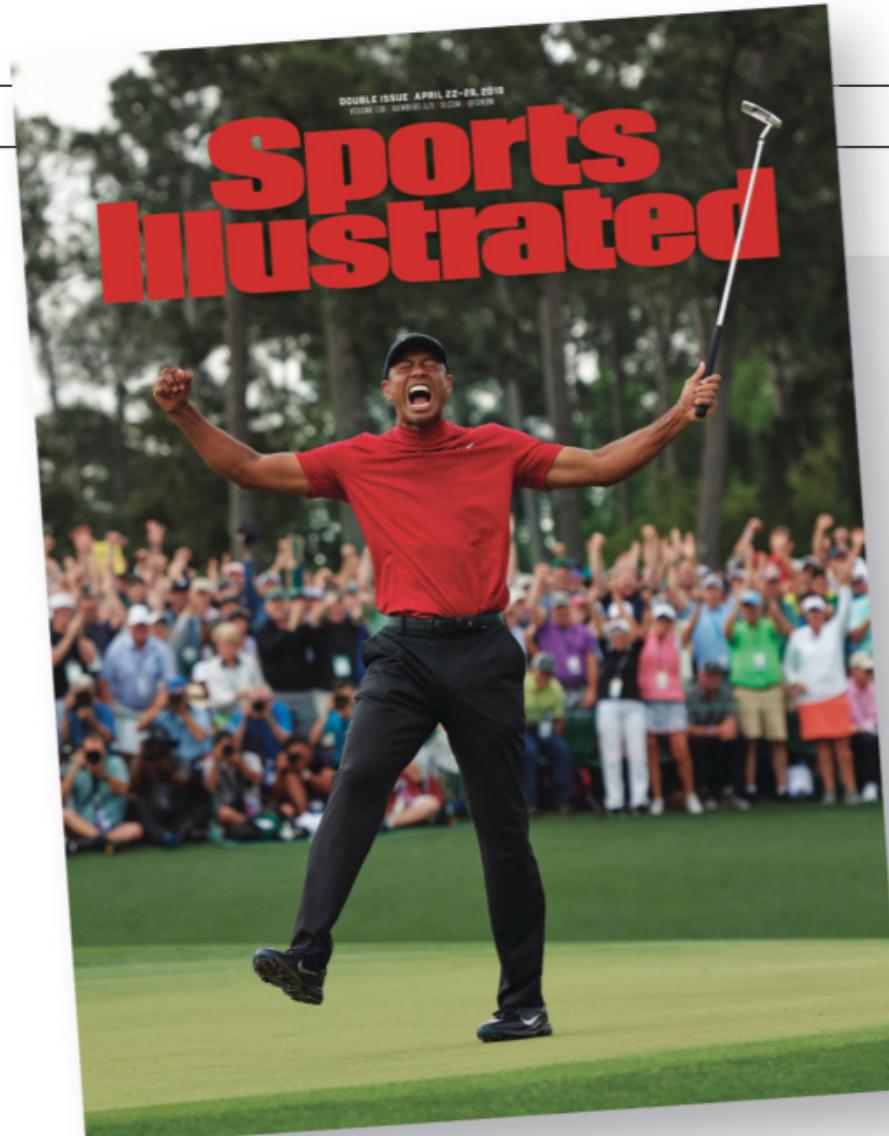
**David Flood**  
**Biddeford, Maine**

## TIGER

**Tiger Woods's** win at Augusta National may be the biggest event in the history of sports—for what he has been through, for what he has overcome and for the man he has become. His return sends chills up and down the spine.

**Herb Cockcroft**  
**Oakland**

Michael Rosenberg's story on Tiger's 15th major title—with lines such as "moving up the leader board, one goose bump at a time"—was as spellbinding as the victory itself. When he wrote of Woods's



can-do mind-set “as though birdieing is a choice anybody can just make on the Sunday of the Masters,” I thought of Rosenberg: as though world-class phrase turning is a choice anybody can just make.

**Gina Tedesco**  
**South Bend**

## GET YOUR FREAK ON

Chris Ballard's in-depth study of the Bucks' emergence as an NBA power [SI, April 8], focusing on the dominance of **Giannis Antetokounmpo** and the deft coaching of Mike Budenholzer,

should be studied and emulated by teams in all sports. Milwaukee's tenets include: Treat the people you work with with respect and honesty; encourage teammates to “let it fly”; understand players' abilities and develop offenses and defenses to maximize their strengths; and enjoy the process. It all sounded very easy; we know it is not.

**Daniel Feigin**  
**New York City**

## MOCKUMENTAL

Dr. Z is simply the greatest of all time. In addition to his on-point mock draft



in 2000, he was one of the few people to predict that the Giants would knock off the undefeated Patriots in Super Bowl XLII.

**Dennis Rodriguez**  
**Miami**  
**[Via Facebook]**

## NATIVE SPEAKER

The critics should be thanking lacrosse star **Lyle Thompson** [SCORECARD] for his contributions to the sport and his ancestors for creating it, instead of denigrating his heritage. If these critics had a better understanding of the sport's rich history, they would be showing him much more respect.

**Emily Elkins**  
**Collierville**  
**Tenn.**  
**[Via Facebook]**

Lacrosse is a tough but beautiful sport. It's a shame that it takes small-minded fans who are trying to ruin the game to bring attention to it. Please cover this and other nonmajor, but worthy, sports more often.

**Tim Ackert**  
**Orlando**

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## ON DECK

The next edition of SPORTS ILLUSTRATED will be the **May 20, 2019**, issue. Look for it on newsstands and in your mailbox beginning on **May 15**.



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\*Fingersticks are required for treatment decisions when you see Check Blood Glucose symbol, when symptoms do not match system readings, when you suspect readings may be inaccurate, or when you experience symptoms that may be due to high or low blood glucose.

**REFERENCES:** 1. FreeStyle Libre 14 day User's Manual. 2. Data on file. Abbott Diabetes Care.

The FreeStyle LibreLink app is compatible with iPhone 7 and later running iOS 11 and later. Use of the FreeStyle LibreLink app requires registration with LibreView, a service provided by Abbott and Newyu, Inc.

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# SCORECARD

## OFF THE RADAR

MLB IS NO COUNTRY FOR OLD SCOUTS, FORCING MANY TO LOOK FOR LIFE AFTER MONEYBALL

► BY STEPHANIE APSTEIN  
► ILLUSTRATION BY ALEX NABAUM

**S**O MANY scouts have been laid off that the Boys of Summer now gather all year round. When longtime *Sarasota Herald-Tribune* writer John Brockmann began organizing lunches for old baseball men (average age: roughly 65), in the 1970s, he held them twice annually, at the beginning and end of the offseason. But this past January, when former scout Jim Thrift surveyed the room, he saw a group that did not lack for free time.

"There are 40, 50 people there," Thrift says now. "Only three or four are employed."

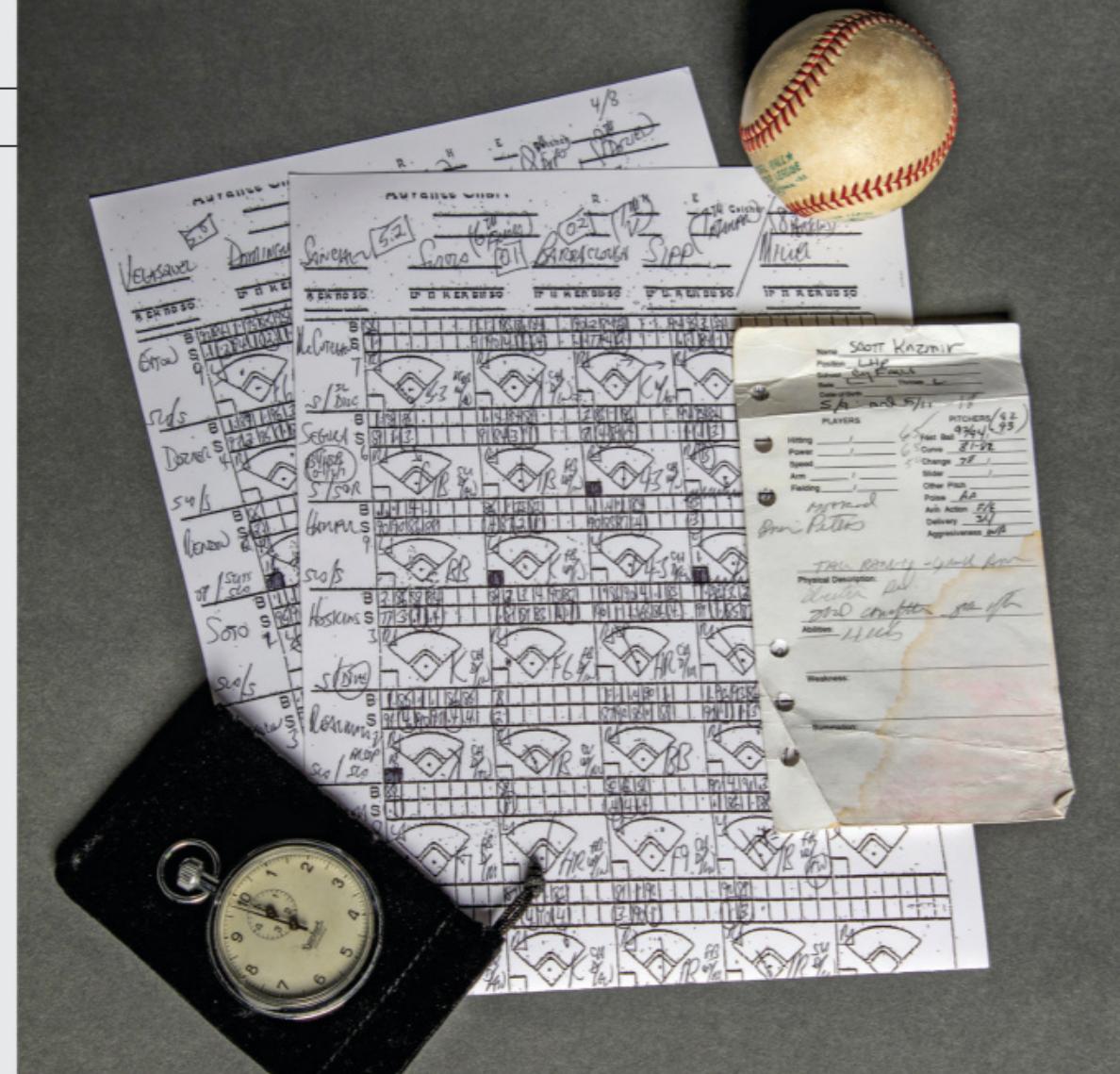
Most of the retirees aren't retired



by choice; they are among the casualties of a change that has swept through baseball in the past few years—according to *Baseball America*, 60 scouts lost their job last year. Former scouts, jettisoned from the game, sit on their couches, watching baseball on TV and wondering why no one wants their opinion. So, in an attempt to get them out of the house, Brockmann upped the Boys of Summer lunches to once a month.

For his part, Thrift, now 56, was told in 2015 that his contract with the Orioles would not be renewed. He noticed around Thanksgiving that the phone hadn't rung, so he filed the paperwork to renew his dormant real estate license. A few months later he began working for a home builder. As the season began, he considered where he had been a year earlier. "I used to wonder if I can get this guy for \$400,000 in the fifth round," he says. "Now it's, 'Hi, Mr. and Mrs. Smith, would you like to buy this house for \$400,000?'"

Many of the laid-off scouts do not have as well developed a backup plan. Today the man delivering your UPS packages (Wade Taylor, 53 years old, 20 years with the Yankees, Dodgers, Nationals and Diamondbacks) or teaching your son or daughter (Ron Brand, 79, 20 years with the Yankees) may once have sat in the stands, wielding a radar gun and a pen. Bob Johnson (72, 41 years with six teams) has begun offering to scout for no salary, just expenses, so much does he miss the game. Marty Scott (63, 15 years with the Marlins and the Rangers) was reduced to requesting donations on GoFundMe after Miami declined to renew his contract while he lay in the hospital recovering from surgery to remove a cancerous tumor. Scouts are not unionized, so although they bat around ideas of a class-action suit over age discrimination, they have no real recourse.



## TOOLS OF THE TRADE

A Scout's stopwatch, game board and player card are becoming relics of the past.

Although GMs are careful to note that scouting departments across the game have for the most part increased over the past few years—the average team, according to research by *The Ringer*, had 41.5 scouts in 2009 and has 54.6 today—their composition has changed. Today meetings tend to be full of men in their 20s and 30s, speaking up from behind team-issued iPads or laptops, fluent in complex analytics and as quick to cite spin rate as to use the traditional 20–80 scouting scale.

Brand knew his time was up when the Yankees asked him to file his reports on a computer—and worse, to choose evaluations in each category from a drop-down menu.

"You couldn't even use your own words," says Brand. "You had to select from somebody else's words."

In truth, he knew it had been a long time coming. Over the previous season or two, he had started to notice

his words seemed to carry less weight. "You just get a feeling," he says. "I go with that a lot. I trust my feelings." Of course, that's what cost him his job.

The most obvious change has come among advance scouts. Twenty years ago every team had at least one man on the road ahead of the team, watching the club his employer would next face. He would note tendencies and chat up writers and rival executives, trying to piece together who swung at high fastballs and whose girlfriend was cheating on him.

Scouts love to cite the story of Mel Didier, who spent more than 60 years in baseball and was still working for the Blue Jays when he died, at age 90 in 2017. As an advance man for the Dodgers in 1988, he noted that A's reliever Dennis Eckersley often went to his slider in 3-and-2 counts. Kirk Gibson remembered his tip, and the rest is history.

Scouting wins championships, Didier's descendants say.

Down the stretch, most contenders assign one or more scouts to cover potential playoff opponents in person. But during the regular season they rely on video. There are so many

# Beantown Slam

camera angles and so much data from Statcast, teams are happy to save on the flights and hotel nights.

"Ideally you'd have three [on the road], but that's not gonna happen," says Indians manager Terry Francona, whom scouts consider to be one of their great champions. "You'd have one guy go out and watch a team for five days. It's not cost-effective. And we can probably see more with video. The scout gets one look and they're writing stuff down. We can watch stuff over and over again."

The additional scouts have mostly been assigned to the amateur ranks. "The further away from the big leagues [a player is], the more I need subjective information," says A's GM David Forst. Thrift began scouting at the amateur level in 2011 after his job as an advance man was eliminated. He joined half a dozen other men who hadn't watched a high school game in years. Thrift considers himself old school but bears no ill will toward analytics. He's just sad. When he was starting out, Thrift says, "You had your ears open and your mouth shut" around the legions of experienced scouts. Now, he says with a sigh, "We've learned what we've learned and want to give it to the next generation. There are hundreds of people without anyone to talk to."

Thrift knows advanced metrics work. Last winter he completed a course called Business Analytics: From Data to Insights, at Wharton, seeking to gain fluency in a language in which he was only conversational. He loved it and immediately understood the benefits as applied to baseball. "If I have enough data," he says, "I can tell you what time you're gonna go to Starbucks in June."

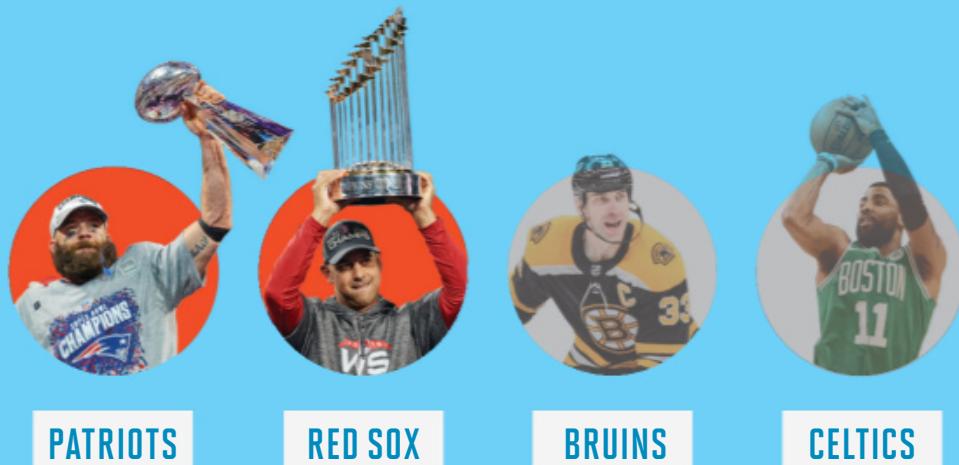
That's the problem with that saw about Didier and Eckersley's slider: A computer knows what pitchers throw in 3-and-2 counts too. □

**NO SURPRISE,** Boston has had plenty to celebrate over the last seven months. The Red Sox won the World Series in October, and the Patriots outlasted the Rams in Super Bowl LIII. And now, with the Bruins and the Celtics advancing to the second round of their respective postseasons, Boston could conceivably do something no city has ever done before: simultaneously hold titles in the four major sports leagues.

Los Angeles, in 2002, did claim four champions at once (the Galaxy, Lakers, Sparks and Angels), but when it comes to the Big Four, no city has held even three titles at once in more than 80 years. Detroit was the last to have a true claim to Titletown, in 1935–36, when the Tigers, Red Wings (in a six-team league) and Lions (31 years before Super Bowl I) won their respective leagues—and pro basketball didn't even exist yet.

Even seeing two concurrent champions in one city hasn't been all that frequent—nine times in the last 31 years—and that's only been achieved by five metropolitan areas: Los Angeles, the Bay Area, New York/New Jersey, Boston and Pittsburgh.

So come June, if the Bruins and the Celtics come out on top, Boston will become the undisputed center of sports power. And the rest of the country will groan.



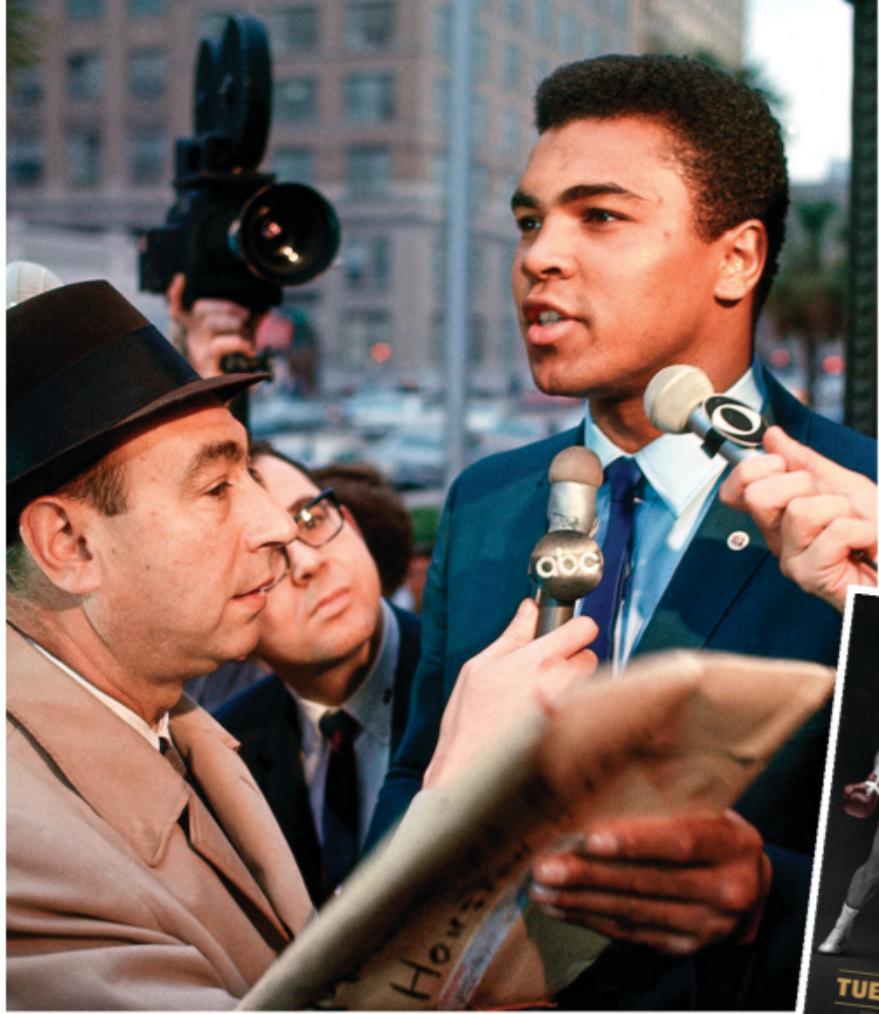
PATRIOTS

RED SOX

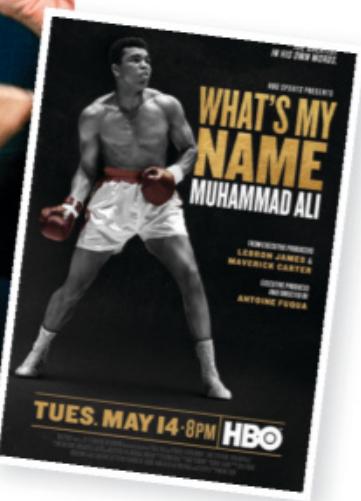
BRUINS

CELTICS

CITY	YEAR	TEAMS
Bay Area	2015	Giants, Warriors
Pittsburgh	2009	Steelers, Penguins
Boston	2008	Red Sox, Celtics
Boston	2004	Patriots, Red Sox
Los Angeles	2002	Lakers, Angels
New York/New Jersey	2000	Devils, Yankees
Bay Area	1989	49ers, A's
Los Angeles	1988	Lakers, Dodgers



SCORECARD



## NEWSMAKERS

# HIS OWN WORDS

ALI'S MESSAGE SHINES THROUGH IN A NEW DOC

BY JACOB FELDMAN

**A**MOST THREE years since the great Muhammad Ali died, a two-part documentary, *What's My Name*, debuting May 14 on HBO, brings back the iconic fighter's voice. Relying solely on archival footage, director Antoine Fuqua (*Training Day*) retells Ali's

story—from his success as a young amateur through his postcareer health struggles—almost exclusively by using clips of Ali talking, essentially narrating his own life.

The loquacious champ, of course, is perfectly suited for this approach. As Malcolm X says at one point in the film, “Ali is probably more capable of speaking for himself than any man in this country.” And the result feels appropriate in this era of empowered athletes, who’ve grown accustomed to sharing their thoughts, unfiltered, with the world. “Muhammad Ali transcended sports in a way the world had never seen before,” co-executive producer LeBron James says. “He showed us all the courage and conviction it takes to stand up for what you believe in.”

Indeed, the most inspiring moments come early on, as Ali struggles to be recognized by his chosen name. (The documentary’s title comes from Ali’s

repeated taunting of Ernie Terrell during their 1967 bout, after Terrell continued to use Ali’s “slave name,” Cassius Clay.) In those days, and later in his protest against the Vietnam War, viewers see a black celebrity fighting against an establishment trying to muzzle him. “It’s about a man who stood up for his principles, fought for what was right, paid for it, was willing to die for it, suffer for it, and never wavered, never blinked,” Fuqua says.

But the cinema vérité setup also leaves an incomplete picture at times. Without commentary or present-day interviews, it’s impossible to know what Ali was like away from the cameras. His four marriages and financial woes are largely glossed over.

The film’s second half opens immediately after Ali’s first loss, in 1971, to Joe Frazier in the Fight of the Century. Three years later he reclaimed his title with wins over Frazier and George Foreman. Original music brings new life to the boxing sequences, but there’s no time to celebrate Ali’s triumphs, particularly knowing the physical punishment that accompanied them. The sport “was hell,” he says, and it only got worse during a career-ending 1–3 stretch. The film that hands the mike over to one of history’s best talkers resorts to subtitles as Parkinson’s takes its toll.

At its core, *What's My Name* is a celebration of Ali’s voice, and his words still pack a punch. Beyond gaining celebrity and selling fights, he spread messages that only become more powerful with time. □

## SIGN OF THE APOCALYPSE

- A FLORIDA TEENAGER WAS ARRESTED AFTER PERFORMING WWE WRESTLER RANDY ORTON'S SIGNATURE RKO MOVE ON A FAKE ALLIGATOR AT A MALL.

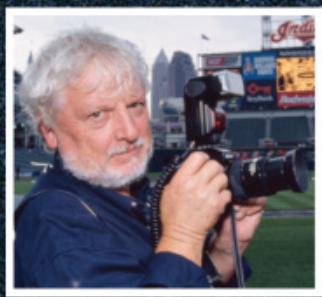


## THEY SAID IT

- “IF THERE IS A SUCH THING AS AN INSPIRATION DINNER THAT I NEED TO COOK TO BRING ALL THE DIGNITARIES TOGETHER—ALL THE PLAYERS, HIS TEAM, HIS MOM, YOU NAME IT—WELL, CONSIDER THAT MEAL COOKED.”



► **GUY FIERI, THE CELEBRITY CHEF AND WARRIORS FAN,** on what he's willing to do to convince Kevin Durant to stay with Golden State this summer



JOHN JACONO

A LIFE REMEMBERED

# TONY TOMSIC

1935–2019

**G**ROWING UP in Cleveland, Tony Tomsic shot his first football game at age 14. Sixty-five years—and by his estimation, some 500,000 pictures—later, he was on the sideline of Super Bowl XLVIII, one of only four photographers who had worked each of the NFL's championship games to that point. Though his streak ended the following year, his images have long endured. Tomsic died on April 21, following a brief illness, at age 83.

In 1955 the self-taught Tomsic joined the *Cleveland Press*, quickly becoming known for his versatility.

He shot games, of course, but also covered news events. He was a finalist for a Pulitzer Prize in '64 for his image of a civil rights demonstrator being killed by a bulldozer in the East Side neighborhood of Cleveland.

But Tomsic became best known for his work on the Browns' sidelines, chronicling the careers of Jim Brown and Bernie Kosar. He joined the staff at SI in 1981, and in all, shot 16 covers and countless more iconic images—like this game-winning touchdown by Webster Slaughter on the last weekend of the 1988 season. □





SCORECARD

**GAMEPLAN:** THE SMART FAN'S GUIDE TO RIGHT NOW

# FIRST LADIES

SI'S NEW PODCAST SERIES REVISITS  
THE INAUGURAL WOMEN'S WORLD CUP AND THE  
LEGACY OF THE 1991 U.S. NATIONAL TEAM



**LISTEN**



## THROWBACK, SEASON 1

Premieres on May 9 on Apple Podcasts, Spotify and SI.com

A few months after the U.S. women's national team won the 1999 World Cup on home soil, SI called the July final "the most significant day in the history of women's sports" [SI, Dec. 20, 1999]. That might be true, but it wasn't the

first time the U.S. had won soccer's ultimate prize, nor was it the origin of the women's soccer boom in America. Eight years earlier, in China, the American side captured the inaugural Women's World Cup—but at the time, few noticed. That's the subject of the first season of *Throwback*, a podcast series from SI that explores the foundations of iconic sports moments. Featuring interviews with former players like Michelle Akers [above, center] and Julie Foudy [above, left], the five episodes reveal how that first World Cup paved the way for 1999. "There's an origin story behind that pioneer story," host Grant Wahl says on the show, "a prequel that's just as fascinating in its own right." It's an essential listen before this summer's tournament in France—the latest sequel to the overlooked achievement of '91.



READ

## THE COST OF THESE DREAMS

By Wright Thompson, out now  
The ESPN scribe's book—featuring incisive profiles of Michael Jordan and Tiger Woods—is a must-read for sportswriting aficionados.



WATCH

## MADRID OPEN

Begins on May 5, Tennis Channel  
The last time Roger Federer competed on red dirt—2016—the Cubs were still lovable losers. He skipped playing on clay, his weakest surface, in '17 and '18 to rest.



READ

## WOLFPACK

By Abby Wambach, out now  
After four World Cups, the retired U.S. national team star has plenty to say about leadership. In her new book, she offers her vision for women's empowerment.

## SWIMMING

# WILL TO SWIM

AFTER A CANCER DIAGNOSIS,  
OLYMPIAN NATHAN ADRIAN  
FOCUSSES ON MEN'S HEALTH

► BY CHRIS CHAVEZ



**HEN SWIMMER** Nathan Adrian, a five-time Olympic gold medalist, hit SHARE on a 226-word Instagram post in late January, announcing his recent testicular cancer diagnosis, he was prepared for responses. But even he admits the outpouring of support was overwhelming. Countless men told him they'd get checked out. Moms of young survivors thanked him for speaking out publicly. His comments section was flooded with thousands of messages of encouragement. He even received a heartfelt text from Lance Armstrong, the famed and infamous cyclist and testicular cancer survivor.

But the most meaningful outreach came from within the tight-knit swimming community. His teammates from the 2008, '12 and '16 Olympic team messaged him. Katie Ledecky sent a card. And Eric Shanteau, who was diagnosed with Stage 1 testicular cancer just a week before the 2008 Olympic trials and went on to compete at the Summer Games in Beijing, became a welcome sounding board and offered Adrian perspective.

"Eric said to me, 'I had one of the best meets of my life about four or five months after my tumor removal,'" the 30-year-old Adrian says. "I was like, O.K. That's the light at the end of the tunnel. That gives you something to strive for. That makes the process a lot easier to digest."

Adrian recalls feeling stiffness and swelling in his lower body in late December, and when symptoms did not improve after a couple of weeks, he saw a doctor. Since testicular cancer is very treatable (the five-year relative survival rate is 95%) and his was detected early, Adrian

got a positive prognosis. Doctors scheduled two surgeries to remove lymph nodes to prevent a possible cancer spread, and he has not needed to undergo chemotherapy or radiation.

The treatment, Adrian says, "wasn't fun," but he wanted to make his experience as positive as he could. After having conversations with urologists, he built up the confidence to go public, in hopes of raising awareness for men's health issues and inspiring more people to get checked out. "I've realized that too often . . . we tend to ignore the potential warning signs and put off getting the medical help that we may need," he wrote in his post.



"If I could help someone else do the same thing, that's what's worth it," Adrian says now. "There's no harm in talking about it for me. I feel that there's only good that can come from it."

By early February, Adrian was back in the gym, targeting his fourth Olympics, next summer in Tokyo. Though he has not competed since his cancer diagnosis, he is planning to swim at July's world championships in Gwangju, South Korea, and then the Pan Am Games in Lima.

"For me, at this point, I do have some gold medals, but I still want to achieve more," Adrian says. "It is still the journey. It's coming back from cancer. It's figuring out how to go as fast as I did before. If you get too wrapped up in the end goal, that's when you get overwhelmed. It's a day at a time."

## SHIFTING CURRENTS

Adrian won the 50-meter free at winter nationals in November [above]; a month later he learned that he had testicular cancer.

EATS: FOOD. DRINK. CULTURE. SPORTS.

# FAST FOODS

HOW ONE MUSLIM  
ATHLETE FUELS  
DURING RAMADAN

► BY ALAA ABDELDAIEM



**FOR MORE** than a billion Muslims around the world, Ramadan entails several weeks of fasting. But this year's holy month is especially challenging for Mohamed El-Munir of the Los Angeles Football Club: It coincides with an important stretch of his team's Major League Soccer campaign.

During Ramadan, which this year begins at sundown on May 5, El-Munir—who joined LAFC in December after one season with Orlando City—abstains from eating and drinking between sunrise and sunset, fulfilling one of the five pillars of Islam while practicing purification and self-discipline.

"Ramadan is one of the most special months we have in our lives as Muslims," El-Munir, 27, says. "We enjoy 11 months of God's blessings, and this is a time we can make sacrifices and be thankful and submit to Him."

Not every Muslim athlete chooses to fast while training, but for strict adherents, the month poses a distinct challenge. Hakeem Olajuwon famously fasted during Ramadan, even on Rockets game days, while former Chiefs and Vikings safety Husain Abdullah fasted throughout training camp in 2010. (Ramadan's timing varies each year based on the Islamic



▼ FULL  
▼ STRENGTH

To stay fit during Ramadan, it's crucial to make healthy choices between sunset and sunrise. These nourishing foods are popular among fasting athletes.



**AVOCADO TOAST** on whole-grain bread is a good source of fiber and potassium, which helps prevent cramps. A hearty meal before sunrise is essential for observant athletes.



**NUTS,** a mainstay in Ramadan diets—not just for fuel but also for convenient snacking between nighttime prayers—are rich in fiber and healthy fats.

calendar.) LAFC entered May in first place in MLS, and the team has five games during the holy month. So to stay fit during that stretch, El-Munir adheres to a special diet at night, when eating and drinking are permitted.

"I take some protein shakes for energy before the sun rises," the Libyan defender says. "To break my fast, I start off with dates, milk and sometimes a strawberry and banana smoothie. Then I work my way through dishes like chicken and meat, fish, pastas and rice."

Harry Routledge, LAFC's head of sport science and nutrition, says those calorie-dense, high-carb meals help El-Munir maintain muscle mass and body weight even though he's fasting. He also works with El-Munir to develop a hydration plan for the hours after dark when he's allowed to drink.

"Our hydration strategy is regular water intake with regular electrolyte intake through an electrolyte solution," Routledge said. "This helps maintain hydration through high amounts of sodium potassium and magnesium, the minerals that are lost in sweat."

During Ramadan, El-Munir also indulges in Libyan cuisine such as *osban*, a traditional sausage stuffed with a mixture of rice, herbs and chopped lamb served with couscous—though he's careful to limit himself. "Those meals makes me feel at home, but just because you're fasting doesn't mean you can eat whatever you want, whenever you want [at night]," he says. "You have to be mindful of what you're putting in your body."

But when the holiday of Eid comes along in June, signifying the end of Ramadan, El-Munir knows exactly how he'll celebrate another year of successful fasting: "At the dessert table, eating everything I can find." □

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Edited by JEREMY FUCHS

# FACES IN THE CROWD

**CHLOE BAYNES**

- Softball
- Tallahassee, Ala.

Chloe, a freshman centerfielder at Tallahassee High, had her streak of 115 consecutive stolen bases—dating back to seventh grade—end in a 7–4 win over Auburn. Her 60 straight steals in 2018 ranks fourth in the state for a single season. Through 24 games Chloe is batting .679 with 42 steals.

**GARRETT WESNESKI**

- Wrestling
- Canton, Pa.

Wesneski, a senior at Lycoming College in Williamsport, Pa., defeated Augustana's Adarios Jones 9–7 to win the Division III title in the 285-pound weight class. Wesneski finished the season with a record of 28–1. He had previously spent three years at Maryland, where he went 39–34.

**IRENE OBERA**

- Track and Field
- Fremont, Calif.

Obera, 85, earned five gold medals at the WMA indoor championships in Torun, Poland, including 85-and-over records in the 60 meters [12.28], the 200 [44.18] and the 4 × 200 relay [3:18.43]. Obera appeared in FACES in June 18, 1962, after breaking 11 seconds in the 100-yard dash.

**TREVOR HUDGINS**

- Basketball
- Manhattan, Kans.

Hudgins, a 6-foot freshman guard at Northwest Missouri State, in Maryville, had 12 points and six assists in a 64–58 win over Point Loma in the Division II national final. He was named the Elite Eight's Most Outstanding Player. Hudgins averaged 18.7 points and 5.3 assists this season.

**LINDSEY PIATANESI**

- Soccer
- Sacramento

Lindsey, a junior forward for St. Francis Catholic, scored in overtime for a 1–0 victory over Mountain View to take the CIF Northern California Division II regional title. The Troubadours finished the year ranked 21st nationally. An all-league choice, Lindsey, led the team with 14 goals.

**UPDATE**


## You Can Win 'Em All

Ella Eastin, a senior at Stanford, earned a spot in the June 8, 2015, FACES IN THE CROWD after nearly breaking the national high school record in the 200-yard individual medley as a senior at Crean Lutheran High in Irvine, Calif. She has gone on to excel as a Cardinal, winning seven national titles in the IM and butterfly while earning 13 All-America honors. At the Division I championships in Austin, in March, Easton finished second in both the 200-yard IM and the 200 fly but accomplished the unprecedented by winning the 400 IM (3:57.03) for the fourth time in four seasons. Her performance, which included a leg on the victorious 4 × 200 freestyle relay, helped Stanford take its third straight women's championship. Though Eastin missed out on the 2016 Olympics, her sights are set on Tokyo.

—J.F.



# PICKARD

The MMQB

BY ROBERT  
KLEMKO

Photo Illustration by  
BRYCE WOOD

Photographs by  
KOHJIRO KINNO

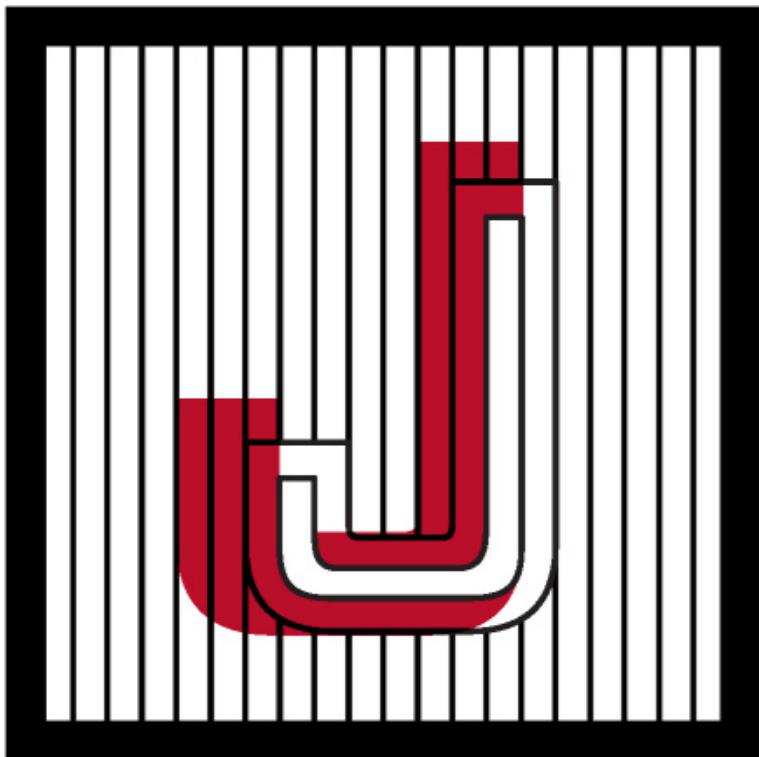
✖ The inside story of how the football fates, and some befuddling dealmaking, figure in the 2019 NFL draft—and why the competitive, cerebral quarterback



A close-up photograph of a Miami Dolphins football player's face. He is wearing a white helmet with blue and orange accents. His right hand is resting against the side of his helmet. He has short brown hair and is looking directly at the camera with a serious expression. The background is a solid teal color.

# AND REWARD ED

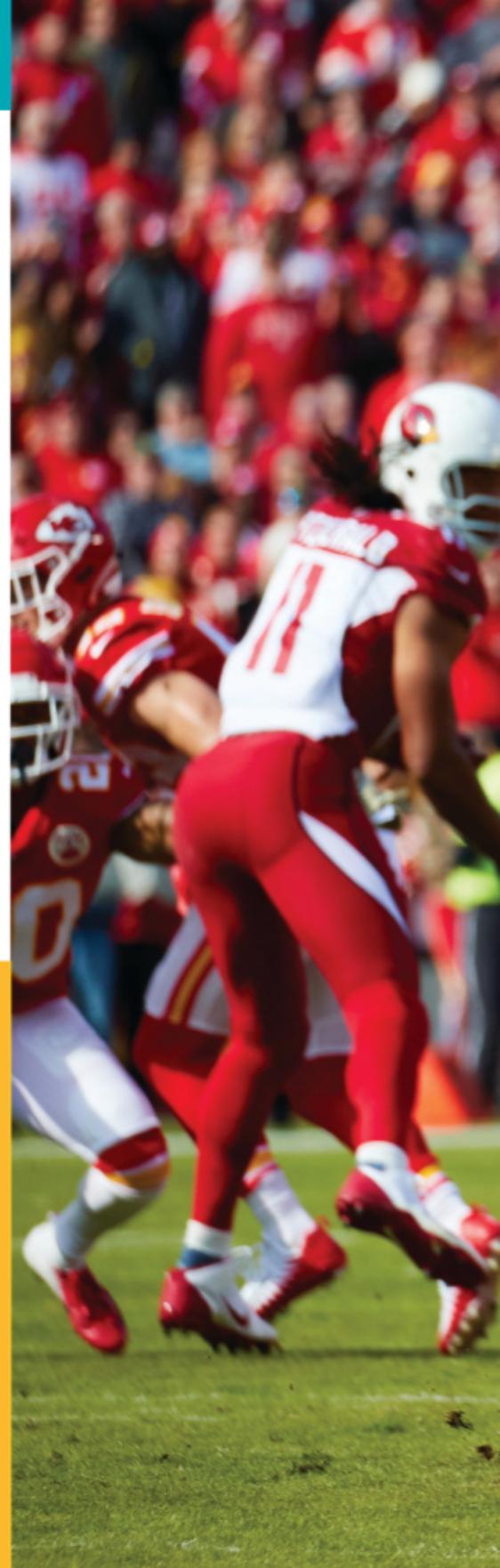
conspired to make 2018 top 10 pick **JOSH ROSEN** the most compelling  
is getting a start fresh in Miami after Arizona moved on from him



#### ONE AND DONE

- Rosen won just three games in Arizona, but the Dolphins heard plenty of praise for the QB.

**JOSH ROSEN** didn't believe, *really* believe, it would happen until a few minutes before NFL commissioner Roger Goodell stepped to the dais in front of an estimated 200,000 fans on Lower Broadway in Nashville and put Rosen's Cardinals on the clock with the first overall selection in the 2019 draft. Arizona management, linked for months to eventual No. 1 pick Kyler Murray, had finally engaged potential trade partners for Rosen in those moments before the draft, taking calls from the Giants, Washington and Miami.



Word spread fast. Rosen's agent, Ryan Williams, called to deliver the news to his client as Rosen watched the draft in the \$1 million Scottsdale condo he'd purchased in 2018. Then, new Cardinals coach Kliff Kingsbury, who only days earlier had tutored Rosen on his playbook, called Rosen to say the decision had been no reflection on his play. "We think the world of you," Kingsbury told him. *It's not you, it's me.*

That Rosen had been team president Mike Bidwill and general manager Steve Keim's 10th overall pick in 2018 mattered not. Goodell returned to the podium 15 minutes after putting the Cardinals on the clock and read the draft card: "With the first pick in the 2019 NFL draft, the Arizona Cardinals select Kyler Murray, quarterback, Oklahoma." Rosen had been through the draft only a year ago, and he'd seen the smoke screens and the subterfuge. He'd let

x

himself think this might be one of those baseless draft rumors. Then it wasn't.

"My heart really didn't believe it was going to happen until a couple minutes before it happened," Rosen told SI two nights later. "Common sense sort of kicked in then, but my heart didn't want to believe it." After Rosen's 13 starts, 2,278 passing yards, 11 TDs, 14 interceptions and three precious wins, Arizona made Murray and Rosen the first QBs chosen by the same team in back-to-back first rounds since the Colts took Art Schlichter in 1982 and John Elway in '83.

Elway forced a trade to the Broncos six days later. Rosen and his agent believed a deal would materialize much sooner this time around. Each of this year's QB-needy teams had ample draft capital to make a move, and there was a general consensus that the 2019 class of quarterbacks wasn't nearly as



## x JOSH ROSEN

strong as the previous one, which included five first-rounders. Williams was sitting behind his desk in the modish Laguna Hills, Calif., offices of his agency, Athletes First, watching the 49ers select edge rusher Nick Bosa with the second pick when Keim texted giving him permission to supplement Arizona's efforts to find a trade destination for his client. Then at No. 6 the Giants took Duke quarterback Daniel Jones, and Keim asked Williams if the Patriots liked his client and might be open to making him the heir apparent to Tom Brady.

Williams was taken aback and grew angry. *How did Keim not already know the answer?* The whole world knew, or had a good idea, that the Cardinals were taking Murray. *Why are we negotiating trade terms now instead of weeks ago?* Keim was texting all the right things: "We want to do what's best for Josh and also what's best for the organization." But his ac-

tions spoke louder. He wanted a first-round pick in return for Rosen, and might be willing to settle for a second-rounder. A Washington exec, upon hearing that price, chuckled over the phone: "That's really bold for someone who just took a QB."

And if that bid failed? Keim told Williams he would keep both quarterbacks on the roster. The GM said the Cardinals had done a study showing that on average over the past three seasons fewer than half the starting QBs in the league had played all 16 games. Many teams had to rely on a backup for five or more games. Keim felt the two first-rounders could coexist and give Arizona the deepest QB room in pro football.

While agency staffers in the next room celebrated the selection of other clients with wine and pulls of Tito's vodka, Williams called Rosen with an update: *The Cardinals might actually keep you.* "If that's their position," Rosen told him,



"then I'll just beat him out and Kyler can be the backup." Williams's reply: "They don't want that, and they know they don't want that. We're getting a trade done."

A

**AS THE DOLPHINS**—whose nominal starter was 36-year-old journeyman Ryan Fitzpatrick, a March free-agent signing—emerged as front-runners in the Rosen trade negotiations the next morning, the Miami media scrambled for information on the biggest name of the NFL draft's second day. "I've talked to multiple people about Josh Rosen today," tweeted *Miami Herald* veteran Armando Salguero. "The play is not what troubles. The person does." It's the type of nebulous assessment that has followed Rosen throughout his career, inflamed by what evaluators see as his too-candid sound bytes and what was judged a tepid endorsement last spring from his UCLA coach, Jim Mora Jr. "He needs to be challenged intellectually so he doesn't get bored. He's a millennial. He wants to know why," Mora said. "Josh has a lot of interests in life. If you can hold his concentration level and focus only on football for a few years, he will set the world on fire."

Rosen says: "I don't think you can go back to any team I ever played on and find someone who will say I was a bad teammate. All my teammates throughout my entire career in football had my back. I loved them, they loved me. I've never been uncoachable. I've been tough to coach because I'm hypercompetitive and always get to the bottom of things. I can be a prickly personality at times, but none of it's ever malicious. I don't think anyone who really knows me on a deep level thinks I'm a bad guy. I like to think I'm a good guy."

Rosen resolved at the beginning of the 2019 draft process, when reports connecting Murray to the Cardinals surfaced, to take the high road. He showed up to work with the Cardinals—as recently as the day of the draft he was at the offseason program—and kept quiet in the media. When he unfollowed the Cardinals' social media accounts on draft night after Murray was picked, people noticed. Former wide receiver Steve Smith, on NFL Network, slammed Rosen for supposedly not wanting to compete. Rosen laughed it off privately, telling a friend, "I wonder if I unfollow Parley for the Oceans [a climate change awareness group], that will bring the same kind of attention for their organization, and maybe we can save the planet."

"I absolutely would have competed if they kept me, but I would've been kind of bummed about it because I knew I wouldn't get a fair shake," Rosen says. "A GM's not going to draft a quarterback [one year] and another one the next year, higher, and then play the first one. It's admitting you made two mistakes. It just wouldn't happen."

You might expect a player whose prospects were thinning pick-by-pick to shut down and go to a dark place, or stomp

## KYLER INSTINCT

*Why use a high draft pick on yet another young quarterback? For Arizona [and the rest of the NFL], it's the most cap-effective way to build*

BY JENNY VRENTAS

**IT WAS** a moment destined for Instagram. Chevron-patterned neon lights coursed up a digital background on the night of April 25 while Kyler Murray, the former Oklahoma QB, held a red Cardinals hat to his chest. Two hours had passed since his name was the first called in the NFL draft, and now a photographer was yelling out which way to turn, how to pose, while Drake's "God's Plan" blared from a speaker—fitting, because the moment had seemed preordained. "Finally being able to play for coach Kingsbury," said Murray, "is something we've been talking about for a long time."

Their relationship began when Kliff Kingsbury was Texas A&M's offensive coordinator and Murray was a promising Allen (Texas) High sophomore. While the QB did enroll at College Station, it was only after Kingsbury left to coach Texas Tech. So when Kingsbury said in October of Murray, "I'd take him with the first pick of the draft if I could," it meant nothing—until Jan. 8, when the Cardinals, owners of the No. 1 pick, hired Kingsbury as their coach.

When Arizona general manager Steve Keim then made Murray



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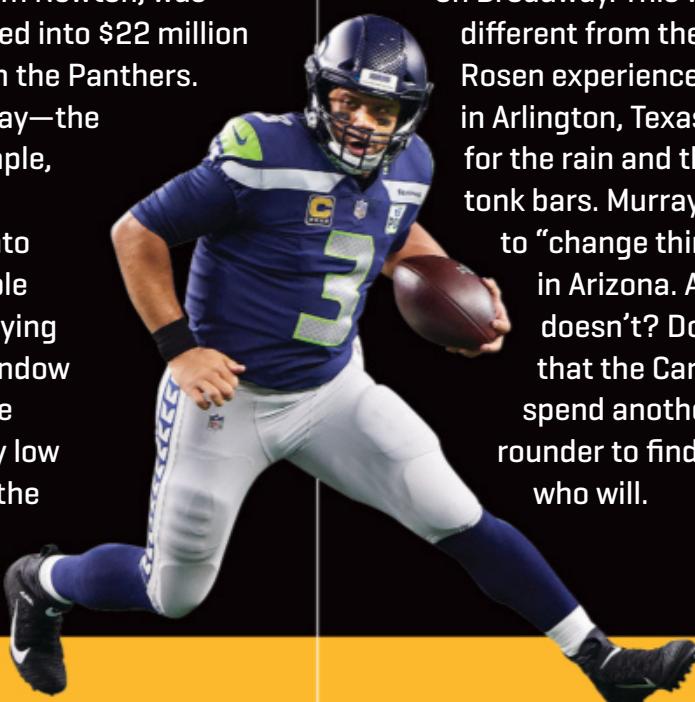
**Reigning MVP Patrick Mahomes will account for just 2.4% OF THE CHIEFS' SALARY CAP, allowing them to spend on other positions.**

his man—using his top pick on a quarterback for the second straight year—it represented sort of a jackpot for Kingsbury. He got the pilot he wanted for his Air Raid offense, and got him on a fresh rookie contract. While Murray is projected to sign a deal worth roughly \$35 million over four years, the total value of his contract will equal only the average yearly salary of the NFL's highest-paid passer, Seattle's Russell Wilson (right), who on April 16 signed a four-year, \$140 million extension.

Funny enough, it was Wilson's highly affordable rookie contract—\$4 million over three years, signed in 2012—that inspired the roster-building strategies of so many NFL teams today, Arizona among them. When the Seahawks went to back-to-back Super Bowls, in '13 and '14, their QB accounted for less than 1% of their salary cap.

Even before Wilson [who, as a third-round pick, is an extreme example of rookie savings], the rookie wage scale that was established in the '11 CBA provided a road map to cap flexibility, allowing teams to spend money building out the rest of their rosters. One season after Sam Bradford, the No. 1 pick in '10, negotiated a six-year, \$78 million deal with the Rams, the top '11 pick, Cam Newton, was automatically slotted into \$22 million over four years with the Panthers.

What we see today—the Cardinals, for example, dipping twice in successive years into the well of affordable QBs—is all about trying to maximize the window provided by a rookie starter on relatively low wages. Combined, the



salaries of Carson Wentz and Nick Foles accounted for less than 5% of the Eagles' cap when they won Super Bowl LII. The Rams drafted Jared Goff, used the savings to make several big defensive splashes in free agency and reached Super Bowl LIII. Reigning MVP Patrick Mahomes will account for 2.4% of the Chiefs' salary cap this season; when they traded for and inked defensive end Frank Clark (from the Seahawks) to a contract extension in April, they loaded the guaranteed money into the first three years, allowing flexibility when they need to sign Mahomes to what could very well be a \$200 million deal, in 2021.

Kingsbury and Murray enter this same win-now window together, with an important caveat. Because the Cardinals first tried to solve their QB issues through free agency, they have a graveyard of dead cap charges: Bradford and Mike Glennon, along with Josh Rosen (the pick from 2018)—none of whom are with the team—will combine for more than \$16 million in dead money this year. As is always true, though, when it comes to football's most important position: If Murray truly elevates the Cardinals, none of those past failures will matter.

As Murray walked across the draft stage in downtown Nashville last Thursday wearing a pink suit styled after a costume Leonardo DiCaprio wore in *The Great Gatsby*, he held up a red jersey and gazed out at the thousands of people lined up on Broadway. This wasn't so different from the moment Rosen experienced last year in Arlington, Texas—except for the rain and the honky-tonk bars. Murray has vowed to "change things up" in Arizona. And if he doesn't? Don't doubt that the Cardinals will spend another first-rounder to find someone who will.

JOSH ROSEN

around and boil. But that's not Rosen. As trade talks cooled on Thursday, Williams told him it looked as if a deal would have to wait another day—if one were coming at all. "I'm fine," Rosen told him. "It's not like I'm some child soldier in Darfur. I've had it pretty good. I think it's time I had some legitimate adversity handed to me."

"I try to put everything into perspective," Rosen tells SI. "If I'm bummed I'm getting traded by the Arizona Cardinals, I try to think I'm living in an awesome condo in the middle of Scottsdale. I'm on a team, I have food on my table, a good family. Life could be a lot worse, so you count your

blessings and try to put good energy out into the world."

By the start of the second round, the Dolphins were the only team still clearly in the market for a starting QB. They held the 48th pick—but instead of offering it to Arizona for Rosen they traded down, deeper into the second round, acquiring the 62nd pick from New Orleans. Keim and the Cardinals finally accepted a deal at 62. How Arizona went from bundling draft picks in 2018 and trading up for the 10th overall pick (Rosen) to a last-minute deal for the 62nd overall pick (plus a fifth-rounder) to dump Rosen is for the moment known only by the people in that war room.

ANDY BENOIT

## THREE TAKEAWAYS

*Why QBs no longer need to stand tall, teams want players they can plug in now and one position went from overlooked to coveted*

### 1 THE KYLER MURRAY MOVE

Ten years ago Kyler Murray would have been a middle-rounds pick. It was believed that short quarterbacks simply couldn't play in the drop-back, passing-centric NFL. But not only did the Cardinals take the 5'10" Murray with the No. 1 choice, they also traded to Miami—for pennies on the dollar—Josh Rosen, the 10th pick in 2018, who checks all the boxes for a conventional NFL QB.

It's reasonable to say that Murray's ceiling is Russell Wilson Plus. Murray is a faster and quicker runner

than Wilson, plus his arm is livelier. And like Wilson, Murray is a phenomenal touch passer. But it was not the success of Wilson, a largely improvisational QB, that made Arizona more comfortable with Murray; it was Baker Mayfield. The 6-foot, No. 1 pick of 2018 ignited the Browns as a rookie, playing at a high level predominantly—but not exclusively—from the pocket. Success inside the pocket will always be vital, but with Mayfield, and now Murray, we're seeing teams rethink what that looks like.

New Cardinals coach Kliff Kingsbury is expected to

run a highly structured, quick-strike offense. He likely believes that Murray's obscured vision in the pocket can be mitigated by spread shotgun formations that present quick throws outside and defined reads downfield. College concepts once trickled into the NFL, but in the last five to 10 years, they've gushed in. Hiring Kingsbury and spending a bounty to draft the unique QB he covets represents, by far, the largest investment yet in college-style tactics.

### 2 SCHEME FIT EMPHASIS

The rookie wage scale implemented by the NFL's 2011 collective bargaining agreement has resulted in midlevel veterans being replaced by cheap players fresh out of college. The terms of that

CBA also severely restrict how often and hard teams can practice. And so coaches are left with young talent they have had less time to groom. This makes it more critical than ever for them to draft players who can fit their schemes right away.

So, what do the 49ers, Raiders, Jaguars, Bills, Panthers, Chargers and Seahawks have in common? They run fairly straightforward zone-based defenses that are dependent on a four-man rush. All seven teams used a first-round pick on a defensive lineman



The Cardinals did not respond to requests for comment.

Two days after Murray was chosen, Rosen shot a video thanking the Cardinals staff and fans and his teammates. He wished Kyler Murray good luck and offered him a deal on his condo in Scottsdale. He showed up at Larry Fitzgerald's charity softball tournament and won the game's MVP and the home run derby, sending nine moonshots into a picturesque desert sky. Miami is an unknown, with a first-year head coach (Brian Flores) and a first-year offensive coordinator (Chad O'Shea), both from a Bill Belichick coaching tree that has yet to bear fruit for the rest of the NFL. It might not have

been Rosen's first choice, but it wasn't his last choice either.

It's Groundhog Day for Josh Rosen: He's a rookie again, with the benefit of experience. Looking back, he saw some opportunities to mentor other players in Arizona that he let slip. He wants to fix that. "There are little moments where you can step up and be a leader and help a guy," he says.

"I think some people take this chance for granted and think it will last forever," Rosen continues. "I got a little newsflash after Year One: You've really got to give it absolutely everything you've got every day, because this game is fleeting." □

who, at the very least, can contribute immediately in their third down front: **DE NICK BOSA** (San Francisco), DE Clelin Ferrell (Oakland), DE Josh Allen (Jacksonville), DT Ed Oliver (Buffalo), DE Brian Burns (Carolina), DT Jerry Tillery (San Diego) and DE L.J. Collier (Seattle).

Obvious scheme-fit starters were taken at other spots, too: Linebackers Devin White and Devin Bush went to the Buccaneers and Steelers, respectively, both 3-4-based teams that prioritize run-and-chase speed in the middle of the field.

The Lions, trying to become the Patriots of the Midwest, drafted do-it-all tight end T.J. Hockenson to fill the Rob Gronkowski role. And the Falcons and the Vikings, who both feature traditional outside-zone blocking on offense (think '90s-style Broncos), found quick, athletic guards in Chris Lindstrom and Garrett Bradbury.



### 3 SAFETY FIRST (OR AT LEAST SECOND)

Expanding your defensive scheme almost always involves safeties, the most maneuverable pieces on the chessboard. Lately, with offenses using more flex tight ends and running the ball out of three-receiver sets, defenses have taken to replacing their third

linebacker with a third safety, putting more athleticism on the field. And so it's no surprise that, after free agency this year brought sizable contracts to a host of safeties (Landon Collins, Earl Thomas, Tyrann Mathieu, Lamarcus Joyner, Adrian Amos and, on the second tier, Kenny Vaccaro, Tashaun Gipson and Eric Weddle), this draft also proved how highly

teams value the position. Since 2010, NFL drafts have averaged 4.7 safeties taken in the first two rounds, but this year, teams selected six pure safeties in those rounds (including **DARNELL SAVAGE**, the first one off the board, at 21 to the Packers), plus two more who may well play the position (Joejuan Williams in New England and Lonnie Johnson in Houston).

# LEAGUE

The inside story of how  
the AAF—a football  
startup with Silicon Valley  
dreams—crashed and  
burned so spectacularly

# ON



BY CONOR  
ORR

ILLUSTRATION BY  
DAVIDE BARCO



## A

**S A COFOUNDER** of the Alliance of American Football, which launched in February as a spring alternative to the NFL, Charlie Ebersol could come and go wherever he pleased around the startup league. And so there he was on March 31, wandering around the visitors' locker room at the Alamodome, where the Arizona Hotshots had offed the San Antonio Commanders 23–6, soaking up the energy as Hotshots players belted out their adopted theme song: “Shots! Shots! Shots-shots-shots....”

At 36, Ebersol, with his tightly manicured scruff and sanguine smile, had already directed a *30 for 30* doc (*This Is the XFL*, about his father Dick’s 2001 football flop) and been placed by *The Hollywood Reporter* atop a list of the most powerful players in reality television. Whether or not he understood it yet, however, this was not his highest moment.

Amid growing speculation that Ebersol’s new league was on shaky ground, the Hotshots had flown to Texas in Week 8 on a plane much smaller than the one they were used to. On arrival they found their hotel space so inadequate that the offense did its pregame walkthrough in the parking lot. Across the league, employees were feeling a similar pinch. Nonessential personnel were increasingly barred from traveling at all. Work computers were suddenly inventoried. One player even recalls getting a notification on his team communications app, warning against taking expensive bottles of Cholula hot sauce away from the dining area. Now an impending doom was making its way to the media.

With this in mind, Hotshots linebacker Kaelin Burnett approached Ebersol. “Hey, Charlie,” he asked, “should I show up on Monday?”

Ebersol half-laughed. “If you want to get paid.”

However you cut it, this was misplaced optimism. Weeks earlier, with funds depleting rapidly, Ebersol had sold controlling interest in the league to billionaire Tom Dundon, owner of the Carolina Hurricanes, who promptly removed Ebersol from a voting seat on the board of directors, leaving him with little say in the AAF's fate. Still, here Ebersol was reassuring an employee. "You're all going to be fine."

Three days after that game in San Antonio, with Dundon having already spent \$70 million to keep the Alliance alive, the new chairman cut off his cash hose and the league suspended operations, immediately freezing the workdays of 940-plus employees. Within weeks the AAF would file for bankruptcy, claiming some \$11 million in assets against \$48 million in liabilities. Cash on hand: \$536,160.68.

As word of the crash came down on April 2, players scrambled to book their own flights home. Others, some of whom had literally crammed their kids' cribs into hotel rooms, searched for places to stay. In the mayhem, one Hotshots player texted a friend on the Memphis Express to ask if he was O.K. The reply: "This feels like the Fyre Festival."

If only it were that simple.

It would be easy to paint Ebersol as the naive hotshot in over his head. Or Dundon as the league's heartless executioner. The whole story, though, is far more complex. Conversations with more than a dozen people connected to the operation (most of whom asked not to be identified as they sought new employment) paint the picture of a corporate drama straight from the white-knuckle world of Silicon Valley startups. Of secret software that promised to change sports gambling as we know it. Of players, coaches and execs serving as stagehands for the *real* grand design, a company that would use live football to experiment with and eventually sell off its technology—or, as one AAF engineer put it: a "petri dish for the NFL." And a "boon for gambling companies."

Who is to blame? A better question might be, What the hell was the AAF?

**T**HE VISION laid out by Ebersol and cofounder Bill Polian was built around one core goal, that they become necessary to the pro football ecosystem, or at least valuable enough to exist as an offseason pacifier for what they calculated to be "millions" of fans who craved live football after the Super Bowl each February.

Games would be faster (under 2½ hours), safer (no kickoffs), more transparent (live looks into officiating decisions) and more interactive (through gambling tech). The league would attract talent with standard three-year contracts,

#### FACE TIME

*Dundon and Ebersol were the frontmen, but the AAF was largely about tech—and a disappointing app augured a bad ending.*



How bad off was the AAF? One team warned players to stop taking expensive bottles of CHOLULA hot sauce from the dining area.

built-in raises, postcareer scholarships and bonuses that could be earned through stellar play and community engagement. Profit, it was projected, would come after three years, a slow-burn investment in hopes that the AAF would eventually become a sought-after television property (even if at first the league paid to be broadcast, not the other way around), that individual franchises would become attractive enough to sell and, crucially, that the tech they developed and showcased would become desirable enough to license.

About that tech. Last July, half a year before a snap of football was played, a small number of early-hire employees hopped on a video conference call to preview an artist's rendering of the technology their outfit hoped to develop. First they were shown a smartphone, which in this demo displayed a Steelers game shot from a low SkyCam angle, playing out on a large video tile in the center. Flanking that were four smaller tiles, each showing the same action, zoomed in on an individual player. Touching a player's tile brought up a display at the bottom of the screen where you could view his energy bar, showing his level of fatigue, or engage in a variety of gambling-type activities. Probabilities for the upcoming play popped up, and the user could wager "points"—an effort, at least initially, to distance the project from actual gambling—on, say, whether the Steelers would run or pass, or in which direction.

It was an aspirational look at a still-developing product, but the intent was clear: Pair mountains of historical football data with machine learning to create predictive analytics the likes of which the sporting world had never seen. *How likely*



is Mike Tomlin to pass on second-and-10 out of 11 personnel against nickel D? Then

feed that data to viewers instantly

and ask, How much do you want to bet on it?

One employee who saw the presentation remembers thinking, If fans can gamble on this, you're pretty much printing money. This is the golden ticket.

And Ebersol had a tech team he believed could execute that vision. With engineers who'd worked for Lockheed Martin, BitTorrent and Tesla, they represented an abstract think tank in the budding world of football technology.

On the back end, though, they faced thorny issues like building predictive-analytic and machine-learning algorithms for tracking players, seamlessly integrating with networks and broadcast crews, and deploying high-end tech in decaying stadiums. "We had a small team and a limited amount of time," says one engineer, who says work on the mobile app didn't start in earnest until last November, four months after the demo, as they first rushed to build the platform through which everything would function.

What did launch—what fans at home and in stadiums found on the AAF mobile app this spring—didn't quite live up to the July demo. There was a live streaming video element, but it was separated from the predictive/gambling function where live game footage was replaced with simple digital renderings, using 3-D helmets to represent players. These renderings typically ran just 200 milliseconds behind the live action, but TV runs on a 10- to 15-second lag, so a fan at home could be wagering on a second-and-five play while the broadcast still showed first-and-10. Gone, too, was the energy bar. After experimenting with tracking players' fatigue levels, engineers couldn't find a way to keep heart monitors in place through heavy hits. One engineer says he understands how someone might have felt the user experi-

ence "kind of sucked" (even if the team was regularly adding features).

While one fellow sports-tech executive says the AAF's timeline and goals were unrealistic, the department remained a great source of pride for Ebersol.

Then Dundon took over. And he, says one engineer, "couldn't give a --- about the tech." The same engineer recalls having a very brief conversation with his seemingly uninterested new boss . . . only to be fired when the league closed a few weeks later.

The tech team would later get a kick out of speculation that Dundon shut the league down in order to steal their work, perhaps even applying it to the Hurricanes. If that was the case, why the hell did he get rid of the only people who could make sense of it?

If anything, the new leader's apparent lack of interest in the tech should have heralded a change in direction. This was no longer a tech startup on a three-year march to profitability. To Dundon, it appeared, the Alliance was a fledgling football company that needed to show him something concrete.

**T**HE EMAIL from Ebersol to the entire Alliance went out on Feb. 22, 2019 at 5:34 p.m. ET.

*This week, all of your hard work was validated and our company secured the necessary funding to accelerate growth into our next phase as a business. Tom Dundon, [now] our largest institutional investor and the control owner, will serve as chairman of the Alliance Board of Directors. . . . He is excited and fired up about what we've created, and ready to propel the league forward for many years to come. . . .*

It was a strange but optimistic time for the AAF, which had opened with two weeks of solid attendance (19,400 per game) and ratings comparable to most NHL or MLS games. Teams had kept their preseason camps closed to media to protect their fragile product—past startup leagues had suffered when they debuted with sloppy play—but in February the reviews were largely positive. Football was not the problem.

According to multiple people familiar with the AAF's business operations, the arrival of Dundon (an initial investor candidate who had acquaintances in common with Ebersol) coincided with a difficulty in accessing some of the funds already pledged to the league. Reggie Fowler, once a minority stakeholder in the Minnesota Vikings, had committed to being the Alliance's primary investor during its first season and had already injected nearly \$25 million. But withdrawals from Fowler's various foreign and domestic banks were suddenly, without full explanation, held up around Christmas.

In stepped Dundon, promising a new \$250 million, which it was understood would carry the Alliance through its first three years, under the condition that he be the new primary investor. That agreement, consummated by phone—a shotgun wedding by all accounts—came at an immense cost to

Ebersol, who stayed on as CEO but lost his voting seat on the board. (His father, Dick, was also removed.) Dundon would be the AAF's new controlling owner, and it would show.

The founder of a subprime auto-loan financing outfit, Dundon believed he could maximize the AAF's returns more quickly. And while some thought the league was over-spending in certain sectors, others recoiled when the new leader went searching for savings under every rock, including revisiting TV and camera-equipment deals that had been built upon the Ebersols' personal relationships.

One insider says Dundon earned the nickname Trump, based on his slashing of budgets and his hard-liner approach to renegotiating deals. Suddenly the necessity of certain business trips was questioned. Meals were cut from team flights. Every expenditure had to be rationalized. "As soon as Dundon took over," says one former mid-level employee, "our f----- expense reports were getting approved out of Dallas," where the billionaire was based.

It may have been due diligence on the television front, however, that eventually helped inform Dundon's decision to shut it all down before his investment reached nine figures. According to a high-level sports exec from one of the four major networks, Dundon called to ask about the Alliance's TV future. What he learned: While it wouldn't necessarily *always* be this way, the AAF would have to continue paying to be on the air for the foreseeable future.

If Dundon felt the promise of the league differed from what was delivered, it showed. He took charge of the media messaging, first publicly floating the idea of working with the NFL Players Association as a long-term partner, borrowing from them third- and fourth-string NFL players who could cement the Alliance's status as a developmental league, and then, on March 27, telling *USA Today* the league was in danger of folding without such a relationship. (That announcement came as a shock to many in the AAF but would come to be understood as Dundon's negotiating style.)

And so everyone marched on, pragmatists and dreamers squeezed together, each trying to be the one out front.

**I**N FAIRNESS to Tom Dundon, the league he took over in February was already flawed, even if some of those flaws could be spun more positively as quirks.

For all of the Alliance's innovations, one of its most ambitious aspects (especially for a single-entity operation where the league owned each team, like MLS), was its de-

centralized business model, with employees in 30-plus states. There were core staffers in San Francisco and in Florida, a few people operating out of a small Beverly Hills office, and key cogs in the media relations department working from home, across several time zones.

At his launch press conference in March 2018, Ebersol had addressed the meaning of the league's name, describing an alliance between "the fans, the players and the game." Unmentioned were certain lower-profile but equally important elements of the infrastructure. His boldest undertaking might have been in forging bonds between walks of life that have the tendency to ricochet off one another. While

**SPRING FEVER**  
*Football wasn't the AAF's problem. Early on, at least, the league drew decent crowds and eyebrow-raising ratings.*



employees on both the football and tech sides describe a largely harmonious relationship, for example, sources in each camp blame the other side for extraneous spending and other inconveniences. Like: *Why does the football side need new state-of-the-art equipment and an XOS video system? Why does the tech side need all those servers? And, hey, is that engineer really making more money than someone calling the actual plays?* One former employee recalls discussions about creating a position to liaise between the tech and football divisions, in order to curb conflict.

It's difficult to imagine someone who's lived by the NFL's typical rigidity adopting the soul of an iconoclastic tech entrepreneur. But many in the AAF say Ebersol wore that costume well, and perhaps one of his weaknesses as a leader was his trying to give everyone exactly what they wanted. Still, one person who categorized the situation as a "divide" seemed to think Ebersol was closer in his makeup to those who aspired to see the operation into its full potential as a tech company. And there was an aspect of the now-blended

Silicon Valley–celebrity culture that could rub some of the more ingrained football people the wrong way. Like when Ebersol was interrupted in a meeting by a call from actor Ashton Kutcher.

Employees on the tech and business sides, meanwhile, seemed to have a better understanding than their football counterparts of the constant pivoting and pinballing that tends to occur in a startup of any kind. In its infancy (even now, some would argue) Facebook was hampered by palace intrigue and technical deficiencies. Early on, Apple, too, was wild enough to warrant a feature film about internal discord. But when you take a startup, which the AAF was built as, and drop in militaristic coaches who wear the same outfit every day and take their coffee at the same time each morning, interruptions in normalcy can, at the least, be a distraction. A few curveballs that caused varying degrees of consternation:

- Brad Childress, an NFL coaching veteran of 20-plus years, inexplicably walked away from his position leading the Atlanta Legends after just three practices. The team promoted defensive coordinator Kevin Coyle, then rolled through a handful of offensive coordinators and advisers: Michael Vick, Ron Turner and, finally, Ken Zampese. One of those coaches was there for mere days; others never made it to the role of play-caller at all.

league was in danger of folding, the staff received another email from Ebersol, celebrating their one-year anniversary. “This endeavor,” he wrote, “is a tremendous challenge each and every day. We are tested in so many ways we couldn’t even have predicted a year ago. Of course the challenges will continue to appear and each will seem more difficult than the last. . . . Alone some of these challenges would be insurmountable, but together. . . .”

He finished, “I will quote Kevin Garnett. . . . Anything is possible. Good luck this weekend and for many more years to come.”

**P**LAYERS ON the Memphis Express were in their locker room getting dressed for a practice near the Liberty Bowl when everything came undone. A few individuals had already started seeing early reports on their phones that the Alliance would suspend operations—then the team’s equipment manager told them all to get to the main building, on the University of Memphis campus, for a meeting. There, coach Mike Singletary, a Pro Football Hall of Famer, instructed everyone to head back to their hotel rooms at the Sonesta ES Suites on Old Poplar Pike Road. They’d figure out the next step.

At the Sonesta, though, hotel staffers told everyone their room bills hadn’t been paid and that they had to pack up

**The AAF's Silicon Valley-celeb culture could rub football people the wrong way—like when Ebersol was interrupted in a meeting by a call from ASHTON KUTCHER.**

- According to one employee, the tech side experienced a delay on an order for servers and switched media-storage platforms four times in a two-week period, all before the season started. These little technological shifts were a constant annoyance for the football department, and for those who constantly had to call and explain the new software.
- The league missed payroll by 12 hours after Week 1. And while those on the business side claim this resulted from a change in payroll companies, already some coaches and players were concerned. (It would be reasonable for those on the football side to associate the timing of the delayed paychecks with the disappearance of Fowler’s money and the gap before Dundon came on.)

A successful first few weeks on the field calmed nerves, though, and some of those extraneous issues were buried as coaches and execs found themselves consumed by the weekly grind, lost in the game. That attitude was reflected by the front-office types they had most regular contact with. On March 20, one week before *USA Today* reported that the

and vacate the premises “right now,” remembers one player. A deadline of 30 minutes was set, but eventually a more reasonable solution was settled upon: *Stay the night and be gone by 7:30 a.m.* Players were in shock. They wandered around the lobby trying to book flights or call their agents. They scrambled to pack their cars.

Adrien Robinson, a fourth-round pick of the New York Giants in 2012, had learned about the league through his girlfriend’s mother—an NFL personnel man had walked into her furniture store one day in Albany, N.Y., back in ’18, and struck up a conversation. Shortly afterward, the 30-year-old tight end left his factory job, tested well at the Alliance combine and landed a spot with the Express. It was a godsend for his family, with two young girls and a son on the way. Over eight games with Memphis, Robinson caught seven of eight targets for 40 yards, finally giving him a bit of recent film to circulate to the NFL.

That fleeting bit of progress flashed across his mind as he opened up a notification on his Teamworks app that after-

noon in the Sonesta lobby. A message from an assistant on Memphis's operations team told him, "You need to pack up tonight and leave tomorrow. . . . It was my pleasure working with you. I wish you success in the future."

Robinson's headaches were only beginning. The next morning he woke up to a \$2,500 charge on the credit card he'd put down for hotel incidentals. For players, free housing had been promised to anyone willing to have a roommate, but now it looked like the hotel was simply taking any card on file and hitting it with the entire bill. Robinson called his own bank and was told the charges were pending; there was nothing they could

do yet. He dialed the personnel assistant who'd sent the message about leaving the hotel, but no one answered.

As Robinson's debacle played out live on Twitter—along with those of now-jobless players hustling for the airport, guys with broken bones wondering who'd fix them up—the saga privately carved the hearts out of those who still believed in the Alliance. Even for anyone who saw the AAF as a startup tech company, trust and respect had been earned by some pretty high-minded, egalitarian ideas. Now, none of that mattered, even if, after some early confusion, medical services were made available through April. Even if everyone (stadiums and vendors aside) eventually got paid—or paid back,

## DON'T CALL IT EXTREME

**Can Oliver Luck help a new version of the XFL figure out what it stands for—and how it will succeed?**

BY DAN GREENE

**T**HE XFL'S initial initial means nothing. That's always been the case. A list of FAQs in the league's media guide from its first iteration, which collapsed after three months in 2001, reads: "The letters XFL are not an abbreviation. The name of the league IS NOT the Xtreme Football League." As the outfit prepares for a Feb. 8, 2020 debut, this fact remains true. The F and the L act to indicate a football league. But the X is a variable. It could signify anything.

"I don't know what our corporate response is," says the league's new commissioner, Oliver Luck, "but I like to think it stands for exceptional and exciting and excellent." He turns to the publicist seated next to

him. "Is that O.K.? Can I say that?" She approves.

Luck, 59, asks this at the XFL's temporary offices in Stamford, Conn., a cubicle farm across the street from the headquarters of the XFL's sister company, WWE. He is the embodiment of establishment credentials: five-year NFL quarterback for the Houston Oilers; father of Andrew, the Colts' Pro Bowl QB; lawyer specializing in commercial litigation; high-level executive for NFL Europe, MLS and the NCAA. [A history major and finalist for a Rhodes scholarship at West Virginia, Luck recited a stanza from Robert Frost's "Provide, Provide" at the 1987 press conference announcing his retirement from the NFL.]

The original XFL was

a boorish, irreverent spring league launched by WWE magnate Vince McMahon that flamed out spectacularly. Its *raison d'être* was to amplify [and capitalize on] football's powerful id: harder hits, fewer penalties, more-objectified cheerleaders. "This will not be a league for pantywaists or sissies," McMahon crowed. The first televised game, which aired as a lead-in to *Saturday Night Live* on Feb. 3, 2001, drew a curious audience of more than 50 million. But sloppy, uninspired play failed to sustain interest. After the title game that April, NBC pulled out and WWE eventually followed; each lost \$35 million.

Luck held only vague memories of the XFL's first go-round when one of McMahon's associates contacted him last spring about heading 2.0. Serving at the time as an NCAA regulatory exec in Indianapolis, he spent two Saturdays at WWE HQ hearing McMahon's

pitch for a revival in eight cities—Dallas, Houston, Los Angeles, New York City, St. Louis, Seattle, Tampa and Washington were eventually selected. McMahon's pitch was bolstered by research showing that 70 million Americans identify as football fans. He touted WWE's relationships with Fox, ESPN and NBC Universal, as well as his willingness to invest up to \$500 million. He just needed someone who knew football and could turn all that into a league. Twice last year Luck led brainstorming sessions about league rules, weighing innovations ranging from the simple [a 30-second play clock, 10 seconds shorter than the NFL's] to the progressively practical [headsets in every helmet, so coaches can call plays directly] to the radical [refs being tipped off on play calls through earpieces, to better focus their attentions on relevant penalties]. Almost certain to be adopted,

in the case of Sonesta's hotel guests. Even if the tech they were developing finds its way into our football lives sometime soon. For this moment, the Alliance *was* the Fyre Festival.

Which, again, was . . . *whose fault?* There may never be a satisfying answer. Perhaps, once all the brand-new football equipment and high-end cameras are auctioned off a few weeks from now, as part of the AAF's Chapter 7 proceedings,

everyone will move on. What's left, the words and actions of millionaires and billionaires trying to control the narrative (Dundon and Ebersol declined to comment for this story; Fowler did not respond to calls), won't do much, anyway.

Not for the players, the low-level coaches and mid-level office employees who thought they'd latched onto something real, and who now can't even get COBRA to continue their health insurance. Not for people like Robinson, who ultimately packed his things and headed home to Albany, hoping the next new spring league might have a spot for him. February will see the launch of the rebooted XFL. Whatever that ends up being. □



however, are new formats for kickoffs and overtime. On kicks, the ball will be booted from a team's 15- or 20-yard line in order to prevent touchbacks; to cut down on the trauma of high-speed collisions, the rest of the kicking team will line up on the opponent's 35, five yards from the return team's blockers. For OT, teams will alternate offensive snaps from the

opponent's five-yard line, scoring one point for each TD or forced turnover, in a rapid best-of-five format inspired by soccer penalty kicks. "We needed an overtime that's gonna be done quickly but that's [still] real football," says Luck.

The XFL had already tested its kickoff rule at a December scrimmage between two jucos in Mississippi. For that,

Luck invited some NFL representatives, emblematic of how this XFL's relationship with the NFL is markedly different from 20 years ago, when McMahon positioned himself as an adversary. Luck is open about his love for the more established league. In December he even brokered a meeting at the NFL's Manhattan office, where he and McMahon outlined for Roger Goodell the XFL's intentions: innovate in the spring, don't compete with the big boys in the fall.

Given the salaries allowed by the XFL's \$4 million-odd salary cap for its 52-man rosters—roughly \$77,000 per player; the NFL rookie minimum is \$495,000—the talent pool is what Luck calls "the best of the rest": undrafted rookies, young players a step too slow or a few inches too short for NFL standards. (The draft will most likely be held after NFL teams trim their 2019 rosters, on Labor Day weekend.) He cites his

experience in NFL Europe, where as president he saw former NFL afterthoughts Kurt Warner, Brad Johnson and Jake Delhomme rejuvenate their careers with 10-game star turns before returning to start in Super Bowls.

This XFL will also be free of the original's garishness. Gone are the jersey nicknames—most famously HE HATE ME—the WWE crossovers, the cheerleaders. The ball is not likely to be defiantly black and red. Luck wants officials to adopt a high threshold for throwing most flags, to keep games in the 2½-hour range, but he still wants safety-related rules strictly enforced. It's a tight window to hit, upping football's speed without upping its danger. But Luck believes he can make that throw—and others—to avoid the fate of the AAF. "We want everybody to remember: We flopped the first time around," he says. "We gotta do it different." □



**NAH, I'M GOOD...**

*While Popovich isn't afraid to call a TO early (and often), D'Antoni (opposite) rarely calls them, preferring to let his players play.*

# GET A TO, BABY

The clock is ticking down in a tight game. To call a timeout is a split-second decision,

O

**NE OF** the biggest decisions of Terry Stotts's coaching career actually wasn't much of a decision. With 17 seconds left in Game 5 of his Trail Blazers' first-round series against the Thunder, Portland forward Al-Farouq Aminu rebounded Russell

Westbrook's missed layup and handed the ball to his point guard, Damian Lillard, who, in the tied game, had already scored 47 points. Stotts had one timeout left—an opportunity to stop the game, get everyone on the same page and call a play he was confident could work—but the seventh-year coach chose to let the action run. Lillard jogged up the floor, sized up Paul George, and then drilled a walk-off, 37-foot, step-back three.

Stotts has served as an assistant for several coaches, including George Karl (who preserved his timeouts) and Rick Carlisle (who calls more than any other coach). He leans toward the former, preferring to let his team push through runs. "I have a tendency to hang on to them probably more than some other coaches," he says.

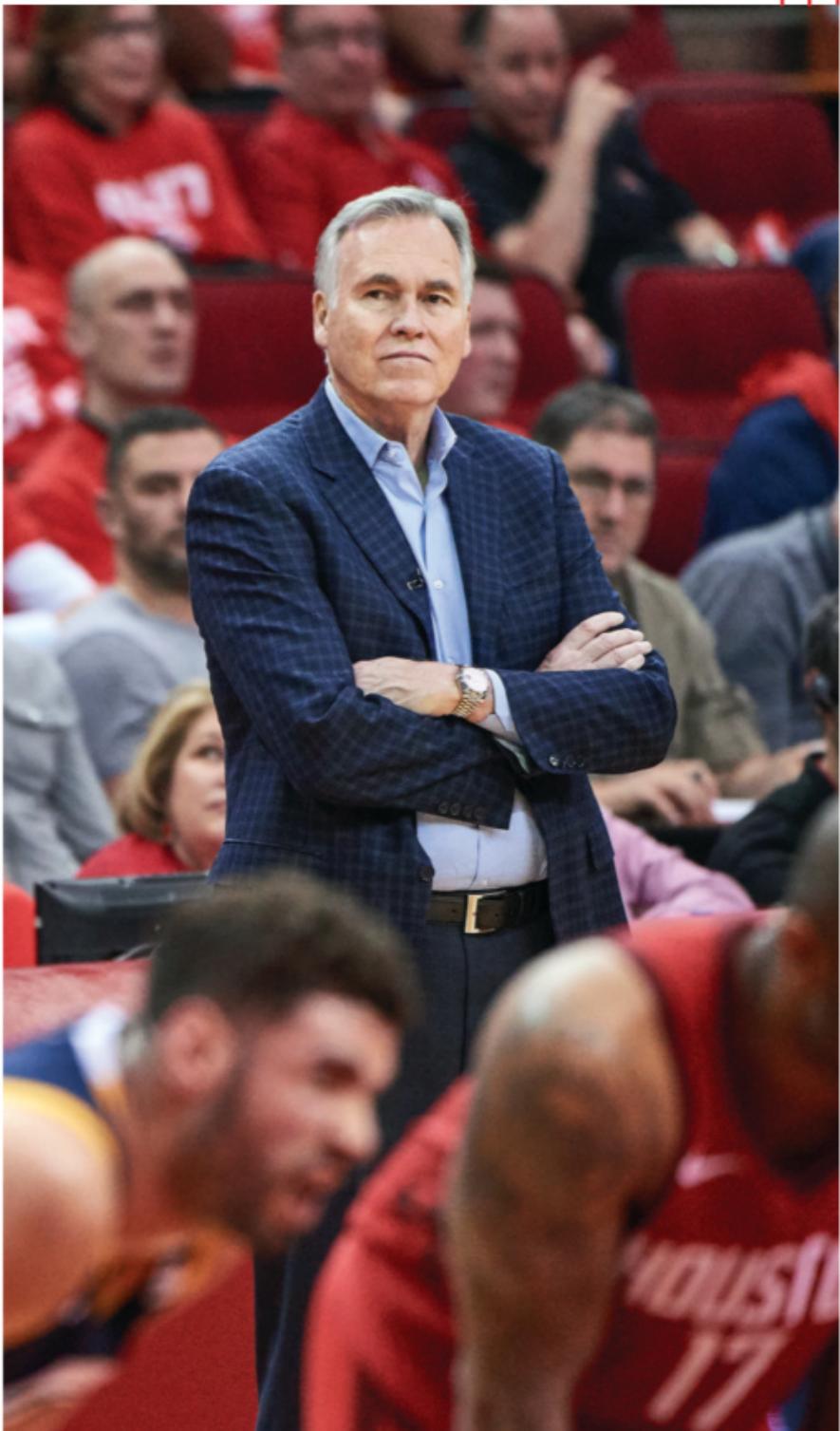
Thirty-six hours after Lillard's shot, Stotts thought back to a much less important game that took place 14 years ago, when he was coaching the Bucks and facing Jerry Sloan's Jazz. After Bucks guard Michael Redd hit a game-tying three with 6.9 seconds left, Sloan didn't call timeout. Deron Williams grabbed the inbound, raced up the floor and found Matt Harpring along the baseline for the game-winning layup. Milwaukee was stunned.

There are some parallels here to Lillard's dagger, and so much of Stotts's choice boiled down to personnel, the score ("maybe if we were down one, I'd bring back [center] Enes

## OR DON'T

BY  
**MICHAEL  
PINA**

PHOTOGRAPHS BY  
**GREG  
NELSON**



Do you get the team together and draw up a play, or let the action unfold naturally? Whether or not but—especially in the playoffs—it's one of the most significant ones an NBA coach can make

[Kanter] as an offensive rebounder, but the game had been flowing, we had a lot of momentum going,” he says) and not wanting to risk turning the ball over on an inbounds play that would have to be executed with no timeouts available.

Not everyone would’ve done what Stotts did, but Portland’s head coach liked who was on the court and had players who knew exactly what to do in that exact spot. For late-game isolations when Lillard has the ball, CJ McCollum will spot up in the strongside corner with three spacers on the opposite end. If the Thunder sent a second defender at Lillard, Portland knew how to react.

“It was situation that we were prepared for, and I couldn’t think of one good reason to call a timeout,” Stotts says. “Really, there wasn’t a lot of decision to make.”

Timeouts serve countless masters, and the reasons they are used (or suppressed) are—in an NBA that’s infusing itself with more data, trying to satiate a hunger to be faster and more exciting—as important and complicated as ever. Some of the rationale for calling them is timeless. Emotion will never leave the game. Tactical shifts are deeply embedded into the sport’s DNA. While the best timeout is often the one not called, they still serve an undeniable purpose as guardrails. Players need to rest. Strategy must be explained and altered. Substitution patterns should be adhered to. Miniature sideline classrooms are essential. They remain the primary way a coach can impress himself upon the action.

But the more we learn about lineup arrangements, keeping players fresh, the advantages of playing in transition versus in the half court and countless other areas that quietly influence in-game decision making, the more critical timeouts become.

In most cases, watching a coach call one is as much fun as being reminded to eat your vegetables. People love basketball for many reasons, one being the building tension as the clock ticks toward zero. Unwanted interruptions that remove fans from the moment and send them scurrying to open Twitter are a bummer.

Two years ago, in an effort to expedite game flow, the NBA’s competition committee voted to reduce the number of total timeouts in each game from 18 to 14. Coaches can’t enter the fourth quarter with more than four or have more than two in the final three minutes. According to Kiki VanDeWeghe, the league’s executive VP of basketball operations, timeouts over the last three minutes of games are down approximately 25%, while pace is up nearly four possessions per game.

A pair of additional TV timeouts at the nine-minute mark in the second and fourth quarter used to be the norm, but now there are only two in each frame: at the first dead ball after the seven-minute mark (charged to the home team)

**GO WITH THE FLOW**  
*Instead of calling time and setting up a play, the Blazers elected to leave the ball in Lillard’s hands—and he delivered a game-winner.*



and after the three-minute mark (charged to the team that hasn’t already called one). Coaches can cross the mandatory stoppages out by calling for it earlier themselves, but in most circumstances that still leaves them with only three discretionary timeouts. There’s not a lot of room to reduce any more without taking away TV timeouts, an option that isn’t in the cards anytime soon. (Mandatory timeouts last 2:45 during local games and 3:15 for national games. Additional timeouts beyond those are 1:15.)

“We want players rested because clearly injury numbers go up as fatigue goes up,” says VanDeWeghe. “This is a game of motion. It’s a game of emotion. And so players can get very tired out there. You’ve gotta have those breaks. So we tried to balance those things with game flow and not spend too much time in stoppages and yet give the players enough rest to recover. I think we’re always trying to tweak that balance, but it is a balancing equation. There’s no question.”

**I**N 2015-16, the season before the Rockets hired Mike D’Antoni, they finished 15th in timeouts. Since his arrival they have been dead last every year. (All team timeout statistics in this article include automatic television timeouts and those called by players, and were provided by STATS LLC.)

This season Houston was charged with a staggering 133 fewer timeouts than the league-leading Bulls. On the surface,



coach of the 76ers. They won 10 games in 2015–16 and were charged with 666 timeouts, 41 more than any other team. But D'Antoni never challenged Philadelphia coach Brett Brown about all the voluntary stoppages. "The biggest thing, I thought," he says, "was that it ate into my dinner time."

Now 67, with the peaks and valleys of a lifetime in basketball behind him, D'Antoni makes a gray area sound more black-and-white than it actually is. Leaning on probabilistic rationale when you only have a few seconds to make a decision in a high-pressure situation is not easy for a coach, particularly with so many pros and cons to consider.

In a March 24 game against the Hornets, Raptors coach Nick Nurse spent the closing seconds squinched in a stress ball. Up two with the rock in Kawhi Leonard's gigantic paws, Nurse analyzed all the information his brain could process in a few seconds, then hoped for the best.

He decided against using a timeout, saw Leonard brick an awkward, contested jumper, then helplessly watched Jeremy Lamb bang a half-court game winner as the buzzer sounded. "There was something in me, where I wanted to take [a timeout] and draw up a special play and try to get [the lead] to two possessions and just try to end the game there," he explained later. "But then if something were to happen and I'd need to advance it, I would've really been pissed at myself. But the way it turned out, I wish I would've taken it. I was really close, like, I got up, I raced

**"THE BIGGEST THING, I THOUGHT, WAS THAT [CALLING A TIMEOUT] ATE INTO MY DINNER TIME," SAYS D'ANTONI.**

this shouldn't be that surprising. The Rockets have shooting guard James Harden, the bearded embodiment of offensive dependability, and Chris Paul, an all-time orchestrator at the point. "What am I gonna do, say 'Oh, let me take the ball out of James's hand, then take it out, call a timeout, put it back in their hands in the exact same spot they were?'" D'Antoni says. "We just go with it."

If there's one theme that runs through D'Antoni's 15 years as an NBA coach, it's subversion. While most coaches won't hesitate to halt games when the other team rips off a quick 8–0 spurt, D'Antoni's belief system goes the other way. "There are no analytics that really proves that if you call a timeout, it stops the run of the other team," he says. "Actually, there's evidence that doesn't support that." D'Antoni is happy to use a timeout if the clock runs a bit too far past the point when Paul, Harden or center Clint Capela is supposed to reenter a game, or if he sees one of his players limping around the court. But even when Houston stumbled to an 11–14 start this season, there wasn't any deviation from his philosophy.

D'Antoni thinks back to his brief tenure as associate head

to midcourt, and I was kinda watching us play. Regret is a strong word, but it's the right word."

While cutting his teeth as a coach in England, where he spent more than a decade leading a handful of clubs that no longer exist, Nurse would watch Phil Jackson's Bulls over and over and over. He absorbed how Jackson used to let his teams play through painful runs and course-correct on the fly. "I've got a little bit of that in my blood," Nurse says. "There are times when I think I should probably call one. Then I say, 'No, no, let 'em figure it out. Let 'em go through it.' I probably do that a little more than maybe I'd like to, to be honest."

Warriors coach Steve Kerr won three championships in five seasons on Jackson's Bulls; he subscribes to his former coach's strategy. "It's good for a team to get itself out of a ditch instead of relying on a timeout and grumbling at each other," he says. "Let's communicate, get all five guys [working] together and execute a play. And if they can do that on their own, it's very empowering."

One of the biggest reasons coaches hang on to timeouts is

ball advancement, the desire to keep one in the chamber in case a game is tight and someone grabs a rebound without enough time to push the ball up the court. “I would say I’m pretty adamant about trying to keep one for that situation,” Bucks coach Mike Budenholzer says. But Bud—and several other coaches, including Nurse and the Celtics’ Brad Stevens—will always let things ride when they can.

“Even though we can advance it and save three seconds or whatever we’re gonna save, now we’ve gotta get in a half-court set, which isn’t that easy sometimes late in the game, with the physicality of it,” says Nurse. “Sometimes you’re calling one and putting yourself in a bind right away. So [I prefer] letting it play on, especially if you’re just gonna kind of run a mid pick-and-roll with your best players anyway.”



**“A TIMEOUT IN GAME 10 [OF THE SEASON] IS NOT THE SAME AS A TIMEOUT IN THE PLAYOFFS,” SAYS VAN GUNDY.**

Stevens led a team that’s finished with the third-fewest timeouts this season and the second fewest in 2017–18. “If I had my druthers I would always choose to run against a defense that’s not set, or execute with an action you feel like is great at that moment without calling a timeout,” he says. “I would always prefer that.”

**W**HAT’S NOT to say that Stevens, one of the best coaches in the league at drawing up plays in the huddle, won’t interrupt the flow in crunch time. Last year in Game 3 of the second round against the Sixers, Boston’s Marcus Morris grabbed a rebound down one with 14 seconds left. Stevens called time a few seconds later and designed a play that got Al Horford a game-winning layup.

The reduction in total timeouts—along with other rules changes made by the NBA to facilitate flow—initially brought a new challenge to coaches who already had to process an information overload in a short period of time. Even with fewer timeouts at their disposal, a sharp coach can still manipulate rhythm better than any on-court participant.

Stevens, who is the personification of the word *calm*, has ironically been branded “Mad Brad” on Twitter (he allowed a smile when first informed about it) because of his penchant for angrily calling timeouts in the first minute of a quarter. (It’s Spurs coach Gregg Popovich’s calling card. In Game 3

of San Antonio’s first-round series against the Nuggets, he called two in the first three minutes of the second quarter.) But in reality it’s more about motivation, a stern message sent to a team that needs to change its disposition or focus.

“The start of the quarters, especially that third quarter, is really, really important,” says Stevens. “If you see you’re not quite as locked as you were at the end of the half, whatever the case may be, and you’re gonna use one at seven anyways, using one at nine or 10 isn’t the end of the world.”

Personnel is an undeniable factor in the timeout, and that may not be more glaring than in Philadelphia, where the Sixers called 492 timeouts this season and 493 last. (Both were third highest in the league.) Brown, their sixth-year coach, makes a point to watch the last two minutes of every



close game in the entire league just to see how different coaches behave. “There are many situations where you might have to burn your timeouts and be left with none,” he says. “I don’t like doing that, but I don’t care if I die with money.”

There are situations where Brown wishes he had the same flexibility as his peers, but he also coaches center Joel Embiid, a lumbering 25-year-old whose health and physical conditioning affect Philadelphia in myriad ways—especially when combined with an influential analytics department that helps decide which players play when and for how long. “There’s a Joel factor involved in this,” Brown says. “There’s also a factor that we still are

incredibly young with a rookie—sort of, at some of those stages—point guard [Ben Simmons] who used to be a college four man, and you’re trying to help him navigate through it. If they let me have another timeout, I would use that, too.”

Whenever the Warriors—a team that finished with the second-fewest TOs this season—call time, the procedure is the same. Kerr summons assistants Mike Brown, Bruce Fraser and Jarron Collins on the floor to draw up a play, while assistant Ron Adams consults with players on the bench. As the timeout winds down, everybody meets in the huddle and finalizes the plan. It’s here where Golden State’s players are allowed to offer their input, too. “They’re the ones doing it and feeling it,” Kerr says.

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Nurse also follows a script for his timeouts. For the first 30 or 40 seconds, he inspects the margins of his iPad, where he's written down the initials of everyone in the game, then looks at his assistants and asks a series of questions. "The first thing I'm always doing is figuring who the hell should be in," Nurse says. "Do we have the right matchups? Is anybody tired? Is anybody in foul trouble? Is there somebody we need to see? That's always what I've started with, from when I was 23 to now, in my 50s."

Some timeouts can feel a little more extemporaneous. In February 2000, Jackson's Lakers were playing the Trail Blazers. The teams were tied for first in the West with 45–11 records, and Jackson, perhaps exaggerating just a bit, said he had never seen "a bigger game in my 33 years." Despite his penchant for sitting on his timeouts, he called one midway through the first quarter with his team down 8–6.

"We were just bringing the ball in and he called a timeout," Lakers guard Brian Shaw told *The New York Times*. "Everybody looked at him and was surprised. I thought, Uh-oh, he must have called something in the huddle and we didn't run it the right way. So I said, 'Did we do something?' And he said: 'No. I'm just messing around.' We just went over and had some water and sat down. And then he said: 'O.K. Get ready to go.'" The Lakers won 90–87.

**T**HREE MONTHS later, when the Lakers and the Blazers met again in playoffs, Jackson was back to his old tricks. In the third quarter of Game 2 of the Western Conference finals, he sat on his hands as Portland went on a 20–0 run. (The Lakers ended up losing by 29 but rallied to win the series.)

## TO or Not TO

*Regular-season usage*

### MOST

BULLS	510
MAVERICKS	493
76ERS	492
KNICKS	488
SUNS	482

### FEWEST

ROCKETS	377
WARRIORS	388
JAZZ	399
RAPTORS	400
TRAIL BLAZERS	403

### HUDDLE UP

*Since he doesn't have an experienced creator like Harden (opposite), Brown's Sixers take more timeouts than any other playoff team.*

The postseason has a way of magnifying every shot, turnover and decision. For some coaches, like Jackson, the increased stakes don't mean they'll reexamine their TO M.O. In the regular season Kenny Atkinson of the Nets called the second-most timeouts of any coach whose team made the playoffs. In the postseason he called 28 in five games, the third-highest rate. "It's the same," Atkinson says. "Same feel. And, you know, sometimes I'm good at it, sometimes I'm not."

For other coaches, though, the heightened postseason environment impacts when and why they'll choose to burn one. There's more pressure to communicate a message to the team. "A timeout in game 10 [of the regular season] is not the same as a timeout in the playoffs," says ESPN analyst and former NBA coach Stan Van Gundy."

Says Brown, who matched Atkinson with 28 timeouts in their five-game first-round series, "You're more mindful in the playoffs of fixing something immediately."

Not everyone sticks to his guns. During the regular season, Kerr prefers to be as judicious as possible with his timeouts, but if something isn't working out in a playoff game, he won't hesitate to burn one. In the regular season the Warriors averaged 4.7 timeouts per game. In the playoffs that number is 5.3.

In Game 1 of the first round against Clippers, he took one seven minutes into the game for no other reason than to replace center DeMarcus Cousins—who was getting repeatedly targeted by guard Lou Williams in the pick-and-roll—with Andre Iguodala. In Game 2 he called time midway through the third quarter after his team allowed a layup in transition. The Warriors were up 27 (and would eventually lose the game), but watching Kevin Durant and Klay Thompson opt not to run back on defense overruled the scoreboard. "We're much more likely in the regular season to let play go on. But in the playoffs," he says, "every possession takes on more significance." □

# TRIUMPH

## SHARKS BITE

Goodrow, who had just seven goals all season, scored in overtime to take down Vegas in a wild Game 7.

OR



# PH TORTURE

NOTHING PROVIDES THRILLS AND MINTS LEGENDS LIKE A GAME 7, AND THE NHL'S TOPSY-TURVY FIRST ROUND—BOTH CONFERENCE WINNERS ELIMINATED, EVERY WILD-CARD TEAM ADVANCING—YIELDED THREE, INCLUDING ONE THAT RANKS AMONG THE ALL-TIME BEST

BY ALEX PREWITT

PHOTOGRAPH BY  
CHRIS  
BROWN/CSM/  
SHUTTERSTOCK

**OUTSIDE THE** doors to the home locker room at San Jose's SAP Center on April 24, an hour or so after perhaps the most thrilling comeback in Stanley Cup playoff history, general manager Doug Wilson enveloped the Sharks' oldest player in an elephantine embrace and, leaning close, whispered a single word to "Jumbo" Joe Thornton: "Unbelievable."

What more could be said? The hockey gods have provided plenty of Game 7 dramas, from Too Many Men to the Easter Epic to Howie Rose's iconic radio call as the Rangers triumphed over the Devils to decide the 1994 Eastern Conference finals: *MATTEAU! MATTEAU! MATTEAU!* And now future generations will tell tales of the Bedlam by the Bay, a nutty and wrenching thrill ride that was instantly heralded as among the genre's best.

Trailing the Golden Knights 3–0 midway through the third period, the Sharks scored four times across a five-minute power play after Vegas center Cody Eakin received a major penalty on what turned out to be a largely innocuous cross-check. (In fairness to the zebras, the sequence in question had left San Jose captain Joe Pavelski motionless, blood pooling beneath his helmet, after he fell awkwardly and slammed his head on the ice.) The Knights struck back in the dying seconds of regulation, but winger Barclay Goodrow tucked the series winner past goalie Marc-André Fleury with 101 seconds left in the overtime period.

"Maybe the best hockey game I've ever been a part of," the 39-year-old Thornton said. Then again, he mused, "it's supposed to be crazy. It's Game 7."

Fans have gotten their fill of chaos this postseason; all four division winners were upset in the first round for the first time ever, including the Blue Jackets' landmark sweep of the 62-win Lightning. But there is something especially tantalizing about the NHL's best answer to single-game spectacles like the Super Bowl or March Madness.

Winner-take-all scenarios are more prevalent in hockey than in any other pro sport; there have been 52 NHL Game 7s over the previous decade (including three in this season's first round), compared with 32 for the NBA and eight for MLB. They are a rite of passage for Cup contenders—six straight champions, and eight of the last 10, have endured at least one Game 7—and catnip for casual fans: Over the past four

seasons, every Game 7 broadcast on NBCSN has enjoyed at least a 20% ratings boost from Game 6; the 2014 Western Conference finals rubber match between the Blackhawks and the Kings still stands as cable's most-watched NHL game since 1994, at 4.1 million viewers.

Next month marks the 25th anniversary of Rose's career-defining cry, which New York fans still gleefully parrot to the longtime WFAN broadcaster each spring. But his first Game 7 experience was a painful lesson from the losing side.

He was a self-described temperamental 17-year-old on May 2, 1971, eyes glued to the television set in his family's Bayside, Queens, living room as his beloved Blueshirts faced Chicago for a Cup final berth. When the Blackhawks struck first, young Howie cussed and got banished to his sister's bedroom by their father. And then, when Bobby Hull struck the series-clinching goal in the third period, he stomped the floor so hard that the whole apartment shook. The next morning he went to school wearing funeral attire: black jeans, black socks and a black sweatshirt.

"From the moment you walk into the arena, the entire outside world ceases to exist," says Rose. "You're consumed by the enormity of the moment. Just saying *Game 7* makes you a little nervous. And that's regardless of your role, whether you're an announcer or a fan or a vendor. Nothing can replicate the feeling of Game 7."

**O**NE YEAR later coach Barry Trotz remembers Game 7 of the 2018 Eastern Conference finals not for its result—his Capitals' tidy 4–0 win over the Lightning—but for what happened earlier that morning in Tampa: "My hot lap."

It had been a team tradition throughout the postseason, one brisk twirl to energize the troops before their pregame

skate. Last to emerge from the visitors' tunnel at Amalie Arena, Trotz was greeted by a sea of smirks. And so off he went, lumbering around the rink, nearly wiping out at the finish line while trying to celebrate like captain Alex Ovechkin. "I didn't do it fast, dismount wasn't great," says Trotz, now behind the Isles' bench in the second round against the Hurricanes. "It relaxed them. If I would've said no, I think that would've been a real big coaching mistake."

Besides, by the time a series goes the distance, there isn't much else for bench bosses to do. Teams typically hold long personnel meetings before each round, but after six games, "X's and O's are pretty much thrown out the window," says retired forward Brad Richards, owner of a spotless 8–0 Game 7 record. "Most of my experiences just came down to will."

Hockey players are raised to always focus on the next thing: next shift, next period, next game. Naturally this sense is intensified in the playoffs, even more so before a Game 7. "You become like a sociopath in a way, as an individual and also as a group," says retired forward Andrew Ference, who survived three Game 7s to win the 2011 Cup with the Bruins. "It gets very businesslike, very tactical." But Game 7s are the one time when no nexts are guaranteed. "That is the reason these Game 7s become so dramatic," says Doc Emrick, the play-by-play voice of NBC who has called 44 winner-take-all in his career. "All that these teams started with, nine months before, can come to a slamming halt."

**I**T IS the ultimate hockey cliché: a frozen-over pond, a starry-eyed skater . . . 3 . . . 2 . . . 1 . . . an overtime goal to capture the Stanley Cup. And all before suppertime!

Pat LaFontaine, for instance, grew up imitating Guy Lafleur and Gilbert Perreault in his Detroit neighborhood.

BRUCE BENNETT/GETTY IMAGES (RANGERS); TONY TRIOLO (BRUINS)

# 7<sup>TH</sup> HEAVEN

## SIRANKS

### THE NHL'S ALL-TIME GREATEST DO-OR-DIE GAMES



1

5-27-1994  
EASTERN CONF. FINALS

RANGERS 2  
DEVILS 1 (2 OT)

New Jersey winger Valeri Zelepukin tied it with just eight seconds left in regulation, setting up the most iconic goal in Rangers history: a wraparound off the stick of Stéphane Matteau [left, center] that sent New York to its first Cup finals in 15 years.

2

4-18-1987  
PATRICK DIVISION SEMIFINALS

CAPITALS 3  
ISLANDERS 2 (4 OT)

When the horn blew to signal the end of regulation, the game wasn't even halfway over. Finally, Pat LaFontaine blasted a shot—the team's 57th to Washington's 75—past Bob Mason to win the longest Game 7 in NHL history.

"It was always Game 7," he says. Even so, there is no way his adolescent mind could have dreamed up a scenario like the Easter Epic, the gold standard of do-or-die games.

The rubber match of the 1987 Patrick Division semifinals began on Holy Saturday, but it spilled into Sunday with the Islanders and the Capitals knotted 2–2. Before the fourth overtime LaFontaine and his teammates were sprawled

across the dressing room carpet, legs elevated, as they huffed from an oxygen tank. Relief soon arrived when a reinvigorated LaFontaine hammered a spin-o-rama slapper past goalie Bob Mason just before 2 a.m.; at 128:47, it remains the longest Game 7 in NHL history. "It's the best time of the year for being a hockey player," LaFontaine says. "It's what you sacrifice for."

Indeed, most good Game 7 stories feature some form of superhuman feats. "Lots of needles, lots of feet getting frozen up to fit in skates," Richards says. On May 1, 1992, Devils defenseman Ken Daneyko made two assists against the Rangers while wearing a hockey glove re-fashioned like a mitten so that the rubber cast protecting two broken fingers would fit inside.

Two years earlier Bruins defenseman Ray Bourque emerged from the tunnel at Boston Garden to a massive roar, still nursing a bruised left hip that had sidelined him for four games against the Hartford Whalers in the first round. A Willis Reed on skates, Bourque logged more than 20 minutes in a 3–1 win. "If it was the regular season,



3

5-10-1979

PRINCE OF WALES CONF. FINALS

### CANADIENS 5 BRUINS 4 [OT]

With 2:34 left, linesman John D'Amica blew his whistle and changed the outcome of the series. Boston had too many men on the ice, and on the ensuing power play, Guy Lafleur scored to tie the game (above). Montreal won on a Yvon Lambert goal in overtime.

4

5-14-2010

EASTERN CONF. QUARTERFINALS

### FLYERS 4 BRUINS 3

First the Bruins watched their 3–0 series lead crumble. Then, in the deciding game, they blew a three-goal lead, letting Philadelphia become just the third NHL team (after the 1942 Leafs and the '75 Islanders) to take a series after dropping the first three games.

5

5-13-2013

EASTERN CONF. QUARTERFINALS

### BRUINS 5 MAPLE LEAFS 4 [OT]

Toronto, looking to capture its first series win in nine years, held a 4–1 advantage, but when Bruins winger Nathan Horton scored midway through the third, the Leafs fell apart. Boston scored twice more in the last 90 seconds of regulation.

6

6-12-2009

STANLEY CUP FINALS

### PENGUINS 2 RED WINGS 1

In a rematch of the 2008 finals, which Detroit won in six games, Pittsburgh got its revenge. After building a two-goal lead, the Penguins held on during a furious third period, in which they had just one shot on goal, to win their first Cup in 17 years.

I'd probably be out another week to 10 days," Bourque says.

Legacies are defined in Game 7s, for better or worse. Oilers defenseman Steve Smith will always be linked to his horrific own goal against the Flames on April 30, 1986, which ended Edmonton's chance to threepeat. And just ask the fine citizens of Toronto how they feel about the Maple Leafs furling three Game 7s against Boston over the past seven years, including this spring.

On the opposite end of the spectrum was Bourque, who mike-dropped into retirement after his Avalanche beat the Devils in Game 7 for the 2001 Cup. But lesser-known names are just as likely to emerge. Joel Ward will forever drink gratis in Washington after his OT goal eliminated Boston in '12. Ditto for Max Talbot among the Yinzers after scoring twice to win the '09 Cup for Pittsburgh. And, let's be honest, how many among us mistook Barclay Goodrow for the name of a law firm? "You just don't know where a hero will come from," Emrick says, "but in Game 7 there always is one."

Eight decades ago, on April 2, 1939, the NHL's first-ever Game 7 went to triple overtime. It was an appropriately tense affair between the Rangers and the Bruins; at one point someone hurled a grapefruit from the second balcony at Boston Garden, causing New York to erect a protective fortress of blankets. The Rangers had their hands full with the famed

the Hurricanes hammered the defending champs throughout both overtime periods, until winger Brock McGinn tipped a centering feed from captain Justin Williams. Or, as Carolina defenseman Calvin de Haan kept calling him during the on-ice celebration, "Mr. Game 7!"

Mr. Game 7! Mr. Game 7!"

The truth is that Williams hates the nickname, thinks it grants too much individual credit, especially when Game 7s in hockey are just as

**THE GAME NAME**  
*Williams has earned the handle Mr. Game 7 with 15 points in nine of them, including an assist against the Caps.*



**"YOU JUST DON'T KNOW WHERE A HERO WILL COME FROM,"**  
**EMRICK SAYS, "BUT IN GAME 7 THERE ALWAYS IS ONE."**

Kraut line, but the night belonged to Bruins rookie winger Mel Hill, who whizzed a loose puck past goalie Bert Gardiner's left knee at 12:40 a.m., sending Boston to the Cup final.

The next day, according to a *Boston Globe* report, the youngster now known as Sudden Death Hill had been so exhausted by his first Game 7 experience that he slept until suppertime.

**JUDGING SOLELY** by the visiting locker room after Game 7 at Washington's Capital One Arena on April 24, it would have been hard to tell whether Carolina had just won its first NHL playoff series in 10 years or if a youth soccer team had finished practice.

Empty bottles of water, Gatorade and organic juice cluttered each stall. Orange wedges and bananas were offered on a service cart, along with peanut butter sandwiches and palm-sized packets of something called Oatmeal Fruit Squeeze. But then defenseman Justin Faulk, chomping on a folded slice of cheese pizza, offered a clue. "Can you grab me a beer?" he hollered at a team official. "That'd be great."

Calories are calories, especially after 4½ periods of full-tilt playoff hockey. Fighting back from an early two-goal deficit,

likely to turn on blind luck—or, as it happened in San Jose the night before, blind refs. But it's hard to argue that anyone is more deserving: With 15 points in nine career Game 7s—seven goals, eight assists and eight victories—the 37-year-old Williams ranks first on the NHL's all-time list, ahead of Mark Messier and Wayne Gretzky.

The big secret to Mr. Game 7's latest triumph? Carolina had lost its previous five visits to Washington, so rather than stick to his rituals, Williams "switched up any little thing I could think of," from the length of his afternoon nap (45 minutes, half as long as normal) to the type of potatoes that he ate at lunch (sweet instead of mashed) to the status of his cellphone (turned off, no distractions).

"The mind is a crazy thing, right?" Williams explained. "If you let it control you, it will. But if you just roll with it...."

He's visibly exhausted, having just skated nearly 30 minutes before assisting on the series-clinching goal in the second overtime period. Scribbled on the dressing room whiteboard are three gratifying words: POST GAME, RECOVERY.

"We've got more to play," Mr. Game 7 says, as his attention turns to the next Game 1. □



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BY  
**STEPHANIE  
APSTEIN**

PHOTOGRAPH BY  
**ALLAN  
HENRY/  
USA TODAY  
SPORTS**

OVER HIS FIRST THREE YEARS IN THE MAJORS  
**TIM ANDERSON RARELY STOOD OUT. BUT**  
**HE DIDN'T FEEL LIKE HE FIT IN. NOW, BRING ON THE**  
**BAT-FLIP BACKLASH AND THE PURPOSE PITCHES—**  
**HE'S GOING TO PLAY, ACT AND SPEAK UP HIS WAY**

... *LET HIM*

**F L I P !**



**TIM ANDERSON'S** baseball life is often a lonely one—even when he's on first base, usually the most social stop on the diamond. “My conversation is limited over there,” he says. “It’s like, *What’s up, dude? What’s up, man? How you doin’ today?* Because we don’t have nothing in common.” He doesn’t speak Spanish; he doesn’t hunt or fish. “I don’t even want to touch a fish!”

Anderson, the 25-year-old shortstop who was hitting a league-leading .385 through April 28, is the only African-American on the White Sox roster, making him one of only 72 black players in a game that, percentage-wise, was more than twice as black as recently as 1994. For Anderson, though, this is not just a matter of statistics. He says he feels out of place in baseball, like he belongs on the field but not in the game.

Most days, he keeps this problem to himself. But sometimes it surfaces. On April 17, in the fourth inning of a lightly attended home day game, he cracked a two-run homer to deep left to put Chicago up on the Royals. The moon shot became notable for what would follow it. As he was leaving the batter’s box, Anderson spun to face his dugout, and he fired his bat toward it in triumph before rounding the bases. When Anderson came up next, leading off the sixth, Kansas City pitcher Brad Keller fired a 92-mph fastball at his backside, and the benches cleared. Major League Baseball suspended Keller five games for throwing at Anderson and



Anderson for one game for what it called his “conduct”: He had allegedly called Keller, who is white, a “weak-ass f----- n-----.”

A week later, during a chat at a Starbucks in Baltimore, Anderson is even-keeled as he reflects on what he calls “the incident.” What did you call him, Tim?

“I called him a weak-ass f----- n-----,” he says. “That’s what I said.”

He doesn’t regret it. He doesn’t think he deserved to be suspended. He doesn’t think baseball’s mostly white hierarchy should be allowed to tell him when and how he can use a word that for two centuries has been used to oppress his people. “That’s a word that’s in my vocabulary,” he says. “When’s the last time [MLB chief baseball officer Joe Torre] heard that word?”

He doesn’t think baseball, or America, has made as much progress on questions of race and fairness as we would like to believe. He has not heard fans yell the n-word at him, as then Orioles centerfielder Adam Jones did in Boston in 2017. But as with Cubs reliever Carl Edwards Jr., who recently received hateful messages on Instagram (the league is investigating), Anderson has seen such invective directed at him online. He has not reported it.

Sometimes the indignities are smaller. After the Royals series, he tore up his left thumb sliding into second in Detroit, so he dug around in the team first-aid kit until he found a one-inch dot the color of flesh—someone else’s flesh. “That’s small stuff,” he says. “We got bigger problems.” But it is symbolic of his place in his sport in 2019. Anderson plays a white man’s game, and he plays it in a white man’s Band-Aid.

**“I kind of feel like today’s Jackie Robinson,” Anderson says. “He changed the game, and I feel like I’m getting to a point to where I need to change the game.”**



**T**O WHOM does baseball belong? Is it the people who make its rules? The people who play it between the lines? The people who watch it? And what about when those groups disagree?

Baseball says it wants Tim Anderson. Anderson isn’t convinced. After the bat flip, MLB’s official account tweeted, “Keep doing your thing, @TimAnderson7.” But there’s a welt on his backside and a suspension on his résumé that testify otherwise about what thing exactly the game wants him to keep doing.

The color barrier fell 72 years ago. Anderson honored the occasion by wearing number 42 on the birthday of the man who broke it, as do all major league players and staff, and by hosting a private screening of *42*, the 2013 biopic, for kids from the White Sox’ Amateur City Elite program,

which introduces inner-city Chicago youngsters to baseball. But he sees another barrier, one he’s intent on toppling: the “have-fun barrier.”

“I kind of feel like today’s Jackie Robinson,” he says. “That’s huge to say. But it’s cool, man, because he changed the game, and I feel like I’m getting to a point to where I need to change the game.”

Anderson’s point is more nuanced than it might sound. Robinson remains an American hero, and Anderson will never face the Jim Crow horrors Robinson and the first generation of black major leaguers endured. Also, plenty of players, white and nonwhite alike, have had fun while playing the game.

But, as a rule, baseball does not encourage individualism. As other sports have evolved to showcase their stars’

personalities, the baseball old guard has held tight to its principles. Run out ground balls. Keep your mouth shut. Gently place your bat near home plate—a player should react to a home run just as he would react to the news that an acquaintance filed his taxes on time.

These attitudes often map along racial lines, though not always. Pirates righty Chris Archer, who is black, recently threw behind Reds first baseman Derek Dietrich, who is white, after Dietrich admired a home run. And perhaps no modern player is better known for his on-field emotions

(and bat flips) than Phillies outfielder Bryce Harper, who is white. (Famously, Harper wore a MAKE BASEBALL FUN AGAIN hat in 2016.)

Again, there is tension among the parties as to whom the game belongs: MLB's recent marketing campaign has

#### ROYAL RUMBLE

*Anderson flipped his bat after homering off Keller—and got drilled in his next at bat, sparking a near-brawl and suspensions for both.*



showcased the league's young stars and their impassioned styles. "Let the kids play," the ads exhort. But sometimes the other kids do not.

Anderson's complaint is not simply that Keller sought revenge for the bat flip. It's that Keller received a five-game ban—which, for a starting pitcher, amounts to one missed game of action—for hurling a projectile at his body, and that Anderson received the same punishment for reacting, in the heat of competition, with a word that he believes he should be allowed to say.

He did not appeal the suspension, he says, because there would have been no point. "I don't think there's a black guy that's up that high in baseball that they could drag in and be like, 'Hey, what do you think we should do to this guy?'" he says. While the game has grown more diverse

overall—41% of players today are of color, according to MLB statistics—Latin Americans have made up most of that growth. They too face a sense of isolation and discomfort, and they have been among the wave of players introducing emotion into the game, but the experience of a Latino is not identical to that of an African-American. At the moment, if Anderson wants to see someone who looks like him in his clubhouse, he has to look in the mirror.

For a long time he was quiet about all this. This season marks Anderson's fourth in the majors; he had never before made waves for his play or his words. So why speak up now?

**H**E HAD been dreading this trip to Baltimore for a while. This is the city where, on May 7, 2017, he awoke at 3 a.m. to a frantic call. His best friend, Branden Moss, was dead at 23, shot multiple times from close range while trying to break up a fight. Anderson sobbed. Moss had made smart choices. He was a high school football star, a college graduate. He had made time for a rare night out in their shared hometown of Tuscaloosa, Ala., to celebrate a friend's graduation from Alabama.

Anderson took three days of bereavement leave, then tried to muscle through his emotions. His wife, Bria, whom he met in Tuscaloosa and married in 2016, begged him to seek help. "I was like, *Man, I don't need therapy*," he says. "*I'm a man! I know how to handle my situation*. But then I got to the point where I'm like, *All right, I'm tired of feeling like this. I'll try something new*. I got better when I went to therapy.... You just sit in a room and you talk to somebody, and they just listen. You can hear yourself talking, and it's like, *Man, you are going through a lot*."

Moss was more than a friend. He was a steady force in a life that had undergone too much turbulence. Anderson's father, Tim Sr., was in prison by the time his son was born, doing 15 years on a drug conviction. Tim Jr. was the fifth of Kim Clark's children; her sister, Lucille Brown, and Lucille's husband, Roger, ended up taking Tim in when he was born.

Anderson did not understand that his childhood was unusual until he got older. "Nobody ever told me what was going on," he says. He just got used to spending some weekends with his mom and siblings, and others in the prison visiting room, playing board games and eating chicken sandwiches with his jumpsuited father. He got used to looking up at the stands at his Little League games and knowing neither of his biological parents would be there.

So when he takes three-year-old daughter Peyton to Disney on Ice, it's hard to tell who is more excited. (These trips will soon include newborn daughter Paxton.) When he works with children through the Chicago-based violence-prevention program Becoming a Man, he says he gets as much out of the visits as his mentees do. They compare playlists and dance moves. They talk trash. The kids don't bother to ask for photos. They just want to be his friend.

"When I was a kid, I didn't have nobody to come in and talk to me," he says. "I get my childhood back. That's



why I want to take my kids and do things that I didn't do, because it's an experience for me, too."

Anderson had played Little League as a kid, but dropped the sport until his junior year of high school, when knee injuries kept him off the basketball court. He was light on baseball tape, so he sent major league scouts video of himself dunking—after two seasons at East Central (Miss.) Community College, he wound up being drafted No. 17 overall in 2013.

Still, he wants at-risk kids to pick up a bat. Football is dangerous; basketball is for physical freaks. But an otherwise unremarkable child can dedicate himself to baseball and give himself a shot at college. Maybe more: Four years after drafting him, the White Sox signed Anderson to a six-year, \$25 million deal. Baseball changed his life. So he signs autographs and poses for photos and donates equipment.

#### POWER FLIP

*Against Detroit on April 26, he hit a walk-off—and flipped his bat before his teammates mobbed him at home.*

He might have been comfortable doing that and that alone if not for Moss's death. Anderson had always felt the swagger inside himself, but he was afraid to let it out. Moss, though, was fearless, no matter what he was up against. "*I don't care who you is,*" Anderson says of Moss's attitude. "*I'll whoop you.*" Anderson began to wonder if he was really honoring his friend by living another life, a life that wasn't his. This offseason he told Darrius Chapman, his friend and manager—and the person who delivered the news of Moss's death—that he had big goals. He wanted to break "the have-fun barrier."

He considers the contrast between the way NBA players walk into stadiums as if they are stalking a catwalk, and the rumpled shirts and cowboy boots he sees around him. He has dreams of starting his own fashion lines—one athleisure, one urban—and he dresses for the job he wants. He owns hundreds of pairs of sneakers, spread across his two homes and Chapman's. On Jackie Robinson Day, he wore a bow tie, suspenders and a flat cap.

But none of what he hopes for will come without more months like this past April. When Anderson flipped his bat, Blue Jays centerfielder Randal Grichuk appeared to take a shot at him on Twitter: "Guys are getting a little excessive on pimping HRs, on meaningless HRs too. Act like you have done it before, one time."

" Put a name on so we can see who you talking bout bra ,'" Anderson fired back. (Responded Grichuk, "Guy, are you really responding to my tweet . . . SMH. It wasn't intended for anyone specific but clearly you responding shows you're guilty of something .

He has not spoken to the Royals. He does not intend to. "I want to be that guy you don't want to play against, because I'm a dog," he says. "My team loves it, so I don't care about anybody else. That's what you get when you come to the South Side. We're going out and trying to whoop your ass."

Chicago holds the second-largest black community in the country, about 900,000 people. He wants to inspire them. He wants to show them what someone who looks like them can do. "I'm bringing something to baseball that's never been brought, as far as the swag," he says. "I love fashion, and just being different, and bringing black culture to baseball and doing it in a different way, because today's game is boring. . . . [After the bat flip,] a lot of people who don't watch baseball, they actually gave me feedback, like, 'Man, if this is going on in baseball, I better watch it.'"

On April 26, with the White Sox and the Tigers tied and two out in the bottom of the ninth, Anderson demolished a belt-high slider. His bat was still in his hands as he saw the ball clear the leftfield wall. *I've got to do it*, he decided. He launched the lumber toward his teammates, who were spilling out of the dugout, preparing to douse him in yellow Gatorade. Anderson grinned and circled the bases. □



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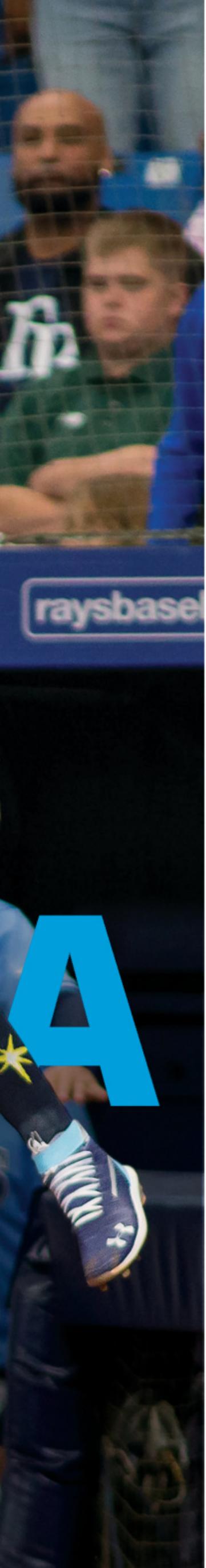
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# THE AM R A Y S

BY  
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**NO-NAME  
PLAYERS.  
RELIEVERS AS  
STARTERS. A  
MATHEMATICIAN  
ON THE  
COACHING STAFF.  
**TAMPA BAY****

**IS TRYING  
EVERYTHING  
TO WIN—AS  
LONG AS IT'S  
CHEAP. AND THAT  
BOLDNESS COULD  
CHANGE  
THE GAME**



**HE RAYS** didn't always use a starting pitcher in 2018, but when they did, their best one won the Cy Young. They haven't always been active at the trade deadline, but when they were last July, they sold off their biggest names, only to catch fire in a surprising sec-

ond half. And they don't always stretch their budget, but when they do . . . well, O.K., they never do that. Yet they've almost always found ways to win on the cheap. Tampa Bay is, yes, *the most interesting team in baseball*.

And through the first month of 2019, the Rays are looking like one of the best teams in baseball too. Their pitching is highly ranked in almost every key category; their offense, buoyed by outfielders young (Austin Meadows) and not so young (Kevin Kiermaier, Tommy Pham) is among the strongest in the game; and their 18–9 record leads the AL East. This April success follows a 90-win (albeit playoff-missing) '18 season, which might not seem like much of an achievement, except that when camp broke, the club seemed more likely to *lose* 90.

Baseball's most interesting team may not be its most winning (for long, anyway), most memorable or most powerful. It is certainly not the most beloved. Still, it is the most indicative of where the game is, and where it's going.

# AZING

## **FRUGALITY PLAY**

The Rays opened 2018 with MLB's lowest payroll and won 90 games. With an even lower payroll in '19, Pham, Adames & Co. are off to a 18–9 start.

**ON A** pitching staff, the starters start. The middle relievers relieve in the middle of the game. The setup guys set up the closer, who closes.

The game's familiar vocabulary proscribes innovation; the 2018 Rays, hoping to write something new, had to create a different language. They were trying to solve a problem that faces most every team: a pitching shortage. Behind lefty Blake Snell, who went 21–5 en route to the Cy, Tampa Bay had hardly anything, having traded away several starters for prospects and salary relief. Where another team would have looked to replenish its rotation, the Rays instead chose to change what starting pitching is.

Here comes the new dictionary. The first inning, with a

team's biggest threats packed in the top of the order, produces more runs than any other. Why not give it to a would-be closer, trained to excel in short appearances under pressure? Call him the *opener*. After one or two frames, he'll be pulled for a pitcher who would otherwise be a starter who's now able to work deeper into the game, his exposure to the best hitters reduced. He's a *bulk guy* or *primary pitcher*.

The Rays relied on an opener for more than a third of their games; using that strategy, they went 32–23, a .582 winning percentage that was better than their mark with conventional pitching (.542). Even with a stronger rotation in 2019—beefed up by the addition of Charlie Morton and the development of Tyler Glasnow—the team has continued to use it. A handful of other clubs picked up the strategy in the second half of last season; the same could happen this year as pitching injuries pile up.



## EVERYTHING THAT MAKES THE RAYS INTERESTING—THE OPENER, FRONT-OFFICE WIZARDRY, TANTALIZING PROSPECTS—HELPS THEM WIN AND KEEP PAYROLL LOW.



The approach made plenty of sense on a spreadsheet. But it's one thing to push a cell's contents from column to column; it's another to ask a pitcher to produce reliably after breaking his routine. (It's a lot for a pitching coach, too: Ask Kyle Snyder about a typically straightforward task like, say, scheduling bullpen sessions and you'll hear, "It's hard to answer the same way 29 other pitching coaches would.") Statistical analysis may have given rise to the opener, but its implementation was psychological, social, emotional. General manager Erik Neander says Tampa Bay's staff felt

like a fit for the experiment in part because of its youth. "In many ways, disruption can help a young player find success," he says.

Ryne Stanek was the team's most frequent opener in 2018, with 29 "starts" that lasted a total of 40 innings. The righthander was suited to the role of guinea pig circumstantially—it was his first full season in the majors, so he had fewer routines to break—and temperamentally. He's an easygoing guy who sports a tie-dyed headband to keep his flowing blond locks out of his face during workouts.

Stanek found that his new challenge wasn't so imposing. He now had advance knowledge of his duties, which as a reliever he had lacked. He had also started in college,

**MAD SCIENTISTS**  
*With Stanek opening, Erlichman coaching and Pham slugging, Tampa Bay has followed its plan to an early AL East lead.*

at Arkansas. "It was kind of just like stepping back into something that I was comfortable doing," he says. "It was a little bit of a relaxing thing for me." Stanek struck out nearly a third of his opponents and finished with a 2.98 ERA, and he's on a similar pace in 2019.

The Rays have no similarly identifiable hitting innovation, but that doesn't mean they aren't trying new things. You just have to see them before the first pitch. "Traditional BP doesn't work," says hitting coach Chad Mottola. "From Day One, I knew that was wrong, and we're trying to discover ways that are right." There's a general focus on velocity, "trying to do everything harder," Mottola says. (This part is working: Tampa Bay's hard-hit rate, per Statcast data, is 43.5%, second best in MLB.) Mottola uses varying approaches for practice—one day he might have a series of fences up in the field, inviting hitters to shake up their approaches by focusing on sending the ball to a given fence; another, he might work exclusively with high-velocity pitching machines.

Mottola says the Rays are trying to change players' emotional response to practice, too: "Back in the day, coaches would want to have you fail just to make you feel bad. I want to present failure in a different way. It's a way to discover things, and that's the fun part."

**UNTIL HE** was suiting up to head into a major league dugout for the first time, Jonathan Erlichman, 29, had never worn a baseball uniform. Not a real one, anyway: The Toronto native had played T-ball but dropped the game before he was old enough to graduate from a T-shirt to a jersey. Instead, he focused on



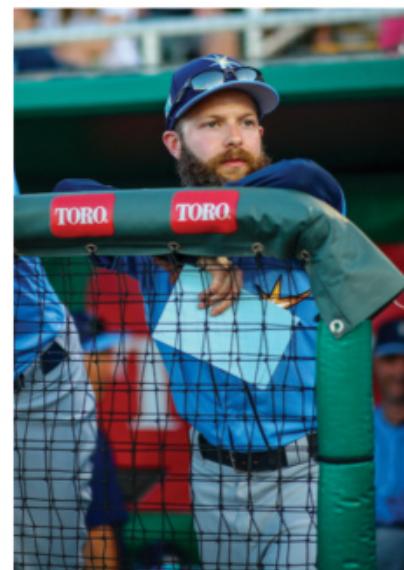
hockey until he went to Princeton, where he studied mathematics. Fresh out of college, he took an internship in the Rays' front office. After four seasons he was named director of analytics, a role he held for two more years. Last spring the Rays put him in the dugout for a few games, and the experiment worked well enough that this season, he put on the team's uniform for good.

Erlichman is MLB's first process and analytics coach. The team expects the gig to evolve through the season; so far he has sometimes focused on pitching and sometimes on hitting, sometimes worked with players and sometimes with other staff.

Erlichman's focus isn't on in-game strategy. Instead he's providing a different perspective on the team's preparation (the "process" part of his title) and identifying where new data can help most ("analytics").

As a coach in uniform, Erlichman is hard to dismiss as a clubhouse interloper—a fate front-office quants have often met. "Being there every day will help create some more organic conversations," Erlichman says. "It's not about having presentations." He'll just be there, a daily presence for players to get used to and, eventually, potentially, to trust.

"He's going to be my favorite coach," outfielder Pham, who's a fan of advanced metrics, said this spring. "I think, pretty soon, every team's going to be doing this."



**T**HE LAST time the Rays were any good—and, lest we forget, they were very good, with four playoff appearances and a .565 winning percentage (second best in MLB) from 2008 to '13—their success came from homegrown stars. Evan Longoria, Carl Crawford, David Price, James Shields: all were drafted by the then Devil Rays.

This iteration, Snell and Kiermaier aside, has been cobbled together with other techniques: trades (Pham, infielder Joey Wendle, shortstop Willy Adames) and even some short-term, small-dollar free-agent signings (Morton, outfielder Avisal García).

"Realistically, not everything is going to go as well and not every bounce is going to go our way, the way that it did last year," Neander says. "It's not something where you win 90, you have a young team, therefore you win 95, you know?"

No matter how much luck was involved, the team's over-performance in 2018 changed the organizational timeline. Looking at the Rays' transactions last year, you would have guessed that they were entering a fallow period. A few days before the team's first full squad workout the front office flipped Jake Odorizzi, its No. 3 starter, for a minor leaguer. Outfielders Corey Dickerson and Steven Souza Jr., two of the 2017 team's best hitters, were sent packing in separate deals. (The off-loading of closer Alex Colomé, outfielder Denard Span, catcher Wilson Ramos and starting pitchers Nathan



### ANOTHER ACE, JUST IN CASE

*While the Rays may now be known for the opener, conventional starter Glasnow has a 1.75 ERA in his first six games of 2019.*

## SMART MONEY

**TAMPA BAY DOESN'T SPEND—YET IT WINS. SINCE 2016 NO TEAM HAS PAID LESS FOR PLAYER PRODUCTION**

### PAID LEAST PER WIN ABOVE REPLACEMENT, 2016 TO '18

TEAM	\$ PER WAR
RAYS	<b>1.8 MILLION</b>
BREWERS	<b>2.0 MILLION</b>
INDIANS	<b>2.3 MILLION</b>

### PAID MOST PER WIN ABOVE REPLACEMENT, 2016 TO '18

TEAM	\$ PER WAR
GIANTS	<b>6.8 MILLION</b>
TIGERS	<b>6.7 MILLION</b>
ORIOLES	<b>6.0 MILLION</b>

Eovaldi and Chris Archer would follow during the season.)

“The trades early in spring last year personally had me very upset, and I think I’m speaking for a lot of other guys,” says Kiermaier, whose six seasons with the club make him its longest-tenured veteran. “Those were really good players and really good teammates. . . . It stung.”

As always, though, winning was a balm. While last winter brought a new approach—adding rather than shedding—their farm system remains their greatest resource. Baseball America and Baseball Prospectus both rate it as second only to the Padres’. A few highly rated prospects should graduate to the majors this year, with more in 2020 and still more in ’21. Brent Honeywell could be the first screwball pitcher in decades; Brendan McKay could be a two-way star à la Shohei

Ohtani; Wander Franco could be a teenage phenom at shortstop—and the Rays have plenty of talent behind them. If 2019 seems bright, well, 2021 will be that much brighter.

## S

**O THIS** is baseball’s most interesting team, with a radical strategy on the field, a quant in the dugout and a bounty down on the farm. But what are the Rays here to do?

To win? That’s the easy answer, and it certainly isn’t wrong. But it is incomplete. More emphatically than any other team, the Rays want to win without spending. Long plagued by poor attendance, they have drawn just 16,240 fans per game over the last six years, finishing last in the American League in five of them. Their lease at ghastly Tropicana Field runs through 2027, and given the collapse last year of a proposal to build a stadium in the Ybor City neighborhood, they’ll likely fulfill it. They’re entering Year 14 under the ownership group led by Stuart Sternberg; in 11 of those seasons they’ve had one of the three smallest payrolls in baseball. The 2019 Rays fit right in with an MLB-low outlay of \$61.5 million, less than half of the league-average figure. Everything that makes them interesting—the opener, front-office wizardry, tantalizing prospects—helps Tampa Bay pursue victories *and* keep this number absurdly small.

The MLB Players Association filed a grievance against the Rays last February, shortly after their spring training salary dump, alleging that they had failed to spend their estimated \$45 million in revenue-sharing payments to improve the club. But the Rays *did* improve. They just didn’t spend.

In a moment of broader tension between players and management, Tampa Bay is a tricky case. What does it mean when a team is doing everything it can to succeed on the field—everything except spending money on players? In recent years, teams have increasingly embraced the idea that organizational spare parts, properly developed, bring more value than veterans. What happens when this concept is pushed to the extreme? What happens when spare parts can hang with the Yankees and the Red Sox?

The problem with winning is that someone has to lose: Every bit of success the Rays’ players have on the field may well make it that much harder for the players, as a whole, to advocate for themselves. The locals may not be paying attention, but baseball sure is. □

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**NONE**



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# RAW

# TAI





BY MIKE PIELLUCCI

PHOTOGRAPHS BY  
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#### SIDE EYES

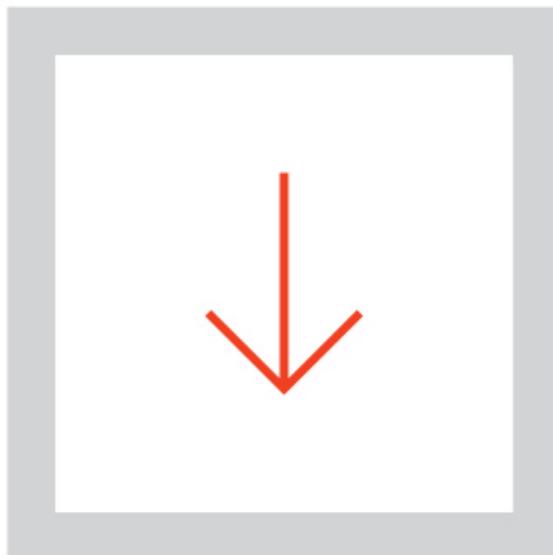
Texas Tech's Schertz (left) was one of 84 meat judges from eight schools at the Southwestern Intercollegiate Meat Judging Contest in Fort Worth.

Recruiting and rivalries. Championships and iconic coaches.

Sounds like just another day in the Big 12—but this is a sport unlike any other. What exactly is the high-steaks world of competitive

**MEAT JUDGING?** Think college football in a cooler

FIRST



**TAYLOR SCHERTZ STAYED** on the move as she considered the four pig carcasses dangling in front of her, their hooves pierced by gleaming silver hooks.

A clockwise sweep to the left to gauge their exposed innards.

A dip back to the right for a better view of the flanks dotted by inspection stamps.

A plunge forward to inspect each veined hide up close.

Her baggy blue jeans scraped the floor with every pass. Her blond hair was braided and pulled inside a red hairnet, which itself was tucked under a red hard hat. Industrial fans whirred in the background. Every 10 minutes, she and a dozen students with name tags pinned onto their white lab coats rotated between a series of eight stations, each one bearing a different sampling of cuts to inspect. None of them said a word. A wall-mounted thermometer put the temperature at 36°—cold enough for Schertz to layer a red parka atop a hoodie beneath her frock and to pull a gray mitten over her left hand, which she used to grip a clipboard the way a doctor carries a patient's chart. On it she scribbled shorthand and bubbled in a Scantron that read INTERCOLLEGIATE MEAT JUDGING CONTEST QUALITY GRADING.

It was Super Bowl Sunday, and Schertz, a Texas Tech sophomore, was entering her fourth hour in the walk-in cooler at Frontier Meats in Fort Worth, where she and 83 other students were competing in the Southwestern Intercollegiate Meat Judging Contest. The following morning, Tech would be announced as the winner of the team competition while Schertz would be named the high individual scorer, the second time she has done so in three competitions this semester. Midway through the 2019 season, which corresponds to the calendar year instead of the academic one, she is regarded as the best meat judge in the country.

Intercollegiate meat judging is like no sport you've ever



seen. Its core components, however, are intimately familiar to anyone who follows NCAA athletics. It's college football in a cooler, a world built around high school recruiting, top-notch facilities, competition for scholarships, rivalries, national championships, All-Americans and professional scouts.

The biggest difference? Here, college students aren't the meat market. They grade the beef.

**FIRST, LET'S** address the obvious question: No, no one actually eats the meat. "People think we're in the meat lab grilling steaks," says Sam Davis, a senior animal science major at Kansas State who competed last year, "and we're about to have a burger-eating contest."

Otherwise intercollegiate meat judging is exactly what it sounds like: Colleges compete against one another to see which team can best evaluate cuts of beef, pork and lamb. In Fort Worth, students began to spill out of white passenger vans at 5:45 a.m. By 7 a.m. they were in the cooler, where a panel of five event officials had spent the previous day setting up the eight stations, or classes. Most classes call for judges to identify and order a series of cuts according to quality. One class, yield grading, requires the judge to eyeball the amount of fat and muscle on a beef carcass down to fractions of an inch. Then there's specifications, in which judges evaluate whether a table of 10 cuts fits a checklist of United States Department of Agriculture standards.

After two hours, competitors decamped to a warehouse room to sit down and explain why they judged the way they judged. A lunch break gave way to the afternoon session, in which they repeated the morning routine. By midafternoon the contest was over. Soon after, the officials issued each team's raw scores as well as a rubric for how each class should have been graded. An awards banquet was held the following day, before students headed home.



### PRIME TIME

*The heavyweight programs hail from cattle country: Texas Tech (below), Oklahoma State, Kansas State, and Texas A&M.*

A school can enter as many competitors as it pleases—Texas Tech, one of eight schools competing, sent 22 to Fort Worth, a full quarter of the field—but only four judges’ scores count toward the team’s official total. A meat judging coach’s greatest challenge is identifying which combination of teenagers can be depended on in a given weekend. “You never pick the right team,” Clay Bendele, a judge on the 2015 Texas Tech national champions and a Red Raiders coach two years ago, says with a sigh. Talent evaluation is difficult because a meat judge’s competitive window is so small: Rules limit students to one season of eligibility at the college level.

Competitive meat judging traces its roots to 1926, when it was introduced at the International Livestock Exposition in Chicago. For the first 70 years it was governed by the National Livestock and Meat Board. Since 1996 it’s fallen under the purview of the American Meat Science Association, which schedules six competitions each year—two in the spring, four in the fall—headlined by the International Intercollegiate Meat Judging Contest in Dakota City, Neb., every November. It’s the national championship; winners are awarded belt buckles instead of rings. A seventh competition, organized by the Houston Livestock Show each March, completes the schedule of major events. Nineteen schools entered last year’s International, but the heavy hitters travel to all seven and mostly hail from agricultural hotbeds: Texas Tech, Oklahoma State, Texas A&M, Colorado State and Kansas State.

Some meat judges begin as young as nine years old through grassroots 4H competitions (think 7-on-7 football). Plenty more start in high school with the Future



Farmers of America (FFA) circuit (akin to traditional high school athletics). But the most decorated intercollegiate meat judge of all time, Maddy Ainsley, took it up as a Texas Tech sophomore, when she won five of seven contests in 2017. “Meat judging is really you against yourself,” says Dr. Mark Miller, Texas Tech’s head coach. “Your number one opponent is you, because it’s an objective thing that you know all the answers to. It’s a matter of you being able to put those together with the most precision.”

The skill set of a champion meat judge is both eminently teachable and difficult to master: quick decision making, critical reasoning, self-assurance and, above all, the ability to quiet one’s mind for upward of six hours standing in frigid temperatures and total silence. “You have to fight your own demons in the meat judging cooler,” says Erin Beyer, who judged on Texas Tech’s 2015 team and coached in ’17.

All of which, to the uninitiated, sounds a touch out there.

“Whenever outsiders ask about it, you just admit, ‘Yeah, it’s really weird,’ ” says Kansas State’s Davis. “We freeze our butts off for five hours in a contest, and it is what it is.”

Just like their counterparts in NCAA athletics, plenty of judges will go pro in something other than meat. Still, nearly

80% carve out careers in the food and livestock industries, where corporate giants like Tyson Foods, Cargill Foods and Hormel Foods all sponsor contests and eagerly recruit judges. None of them wind up as household names, but their work can become kitchen staples: Rody Hawkins, a former meat judge at Tennessee and coach at Kentucky, co-invented Lunchables and relaunched the Slim Jim as the product that became globally famous.

Regulatory agencies such as the USDA get into the game, too. “We do hopefully glean some of the students off these judging teams because they can go right into my world and go to work,” says Darrell Dowd, assistant to the national supervisor of the standards branch of the USDA.

For the last decade, pro scouts have kept their eye on one school in particular.

**T**AYLOR SCHERTZ was a Red Raider from the womb. Her parents met as Texas Tech students in the mid-90s; Taylor, the oldest of four girls, was conceived while her father, Michael, was in graduate school at Tech and an assistant coach for the meat judging team, which he competed for in 1995. Texas Tech was a program on the

rise but barely a decade removed from being meat judging's doormat: It took 44 years for the school to win its first major contest after the program was established in 1938.

Today the Red Raiders are the Alabama football of the meat judging world. Under the guidance of Coach Miller, Texas Tech has reset the standards of collegiate meat judging excellence. Tech has captured seven of the last 11 national championships, highlighted by a three-year stretch from 2015 through '17 in which it won a staggering 19 of 21 major contests. The crown jewel came in '17, when Tech became the first and only school to go undefeated since the major schedule expanded to seven events in 1981. Says Travis O'Quinn, a Tech alum who's now the coach and faculty sponsor of Kansas State's meat judging team, "What they've done ranks right up there with the John Wooden UCLA Bruins. That level of dominance is seldom seen in any athletic competition."

There's no consensus on why exactly the Red Raiders are so unstoppable. There are the usual reasons that distinguish, say, college football's predators from the prey. Geography, for starters: "They're in the heart of cattle country," says Dowd. Texas Tech's Lubbock campus sits just over an hour away from a Cargill Foods plant in Friona, Texas, where the team holds practice every Friday afternoon with a fresh set of cuts to evaluate—the equivalent of extra live reps on the practice field. Several of their competitors travel at least twice as long to access something similar.

There's also Raider Red Meats, a side business established in 1982 to recoup the costs of running the meat judging team by packaging and selling leftover teaching product as steaks, chops and processed meats. Over time it's mushroomed into a \$2.2 million auxiliary enterprise of Texas Tech that does retail and catering across the state. All proceeds funnel back into the program's endowment, which presently is in the neighborhood of \$10 million. That, in turn, allows Miller to furnish scholarships to help defray tuition costs at a public school where most of his team already pays in-state rates.

But according to O'Quinn, the easiest explanation for Texas Tech's dominance might be the most insurmountable of all: "They just have a dire commitment to do more than what everyone else is willing to do consistently."



## MEAT PROCESS

Judges evaluate beef, lamb and pork carcasses and cuts for quality, cuttability and traits that impact taste.

## MARBLING

Gauging fat dispersion—which adds flavor—in the rib-eye muscle.

## YIELD GRADING

Estimating how many boneless cuts a slab of meat will produce.

## SPECIFICATIONS

Identifying defects in 10 different cuts.

The team decamps for Friona by 1 p.m. each Friday, returning to Lubbock around 8 or 9 that evening. The next morning they're in the cooler at 4 a.m. for Super Saturdays, an all-day gauntlet that simulates contest conditions and can stretch up to 12 hours. That's on top of two more weekday practices squeezed in around students' class schedules. Outside of contest weeks, that cycle repeats itself every week of the academic year. It works—and nobody, from the students to the coaches, wants to be the team responsible for breaking the cycle of success. "There's always going to be that pressure because you have the teams before you that have done so many great things," Schertz says.

That same ethos bleeds over into talent acquisition, where Miller is notorious for being the best closer in the business. He susses out targets using

the same tactics as college football coaches. Miller scouts stat lines through JudgingCard.com, a website that tracks results for every high school and college meat judging competition in the country. Otherwise, it's word of mouth through his network of high school coaches. Then there are pipeline programs such as San Antonio's Hondo High School and Clarendon College, both of which are coached by Tech alums. Miller also evaluates prospects firsthand at summer camps on Tech's campus. Loni Lucherk, a 29-year-old Ph.D. student and former All-American who competed for and later coached under Miller, got her first recruiting letters and Texas Tech swag as a high school freshman.

Schertz was a Texas 4H state champion as a high school senior, in 2017. Her family ties to the university were so ingrained that, she says, "honestly, there was no other option" for where she'd judge meat in college. But Miller



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still pursued her more relentlessly than any other coach did.

"There's nobody in the same ballpark as Mark Miller when it comes to recruiting," says Dr. Jeff Savell, who until recently was Miller's counterpart at Texas A&M.

"Nobody."

**T**HE NICK SABAN of intercollegiate meat judging can often be spotted in a red fleece vest with his program's mantra—"Striving for honor in the pursuit of excellence while unselfishly serving others"—stretched across the shoulder blades in a white font.

Mark Miller was a Texas Tech junior in 1981 when Gordon W. Davis, the first coach to record a 6–0 season while at Texas A&M, moved to Lubbock to take on a moribund program. It amounted to Bear Bryant's choosing Kansas instead of Alabama once he left the Aggies.

Miller competed for Davis that year, then learned at his feet as an assistant coach in 1982 and '83. Along the way he, a few friends and his wife, Celia, raised the first \$5,000 of that now-eight-figure endowment by working catering gigs all over town. Miller moved to Texas A&M to pursue a Ph.D. in meat science, and in 1987 he landed his first head coaching job at Georgia while serving as an assistant professor of meat science. By September 1990 he was back in Lubbock to succeed Davis as head of the Red Raiders' program.

Twelve national championships later, Miller's legacy is unimpeachable. It isn't just that he's captured every piece of hardware but that he's done so in every way imaginable. Miller has won with novices like Ainsley and lifers like Lucherk, who won so many 4H and FFA competitions

**"Whenever outsiders ask, you just admit,  
'Yeah, it's really weird.' PEOPLE THINK WE'RE  
IN THE MEAT LAB GRILLING STEAKS."**

while growing up that she estimates she'd earned \$70,000 in scholarships and prize money before ever setting foot on campus. Miller doesn't have a coaching tree so much as a coaching forest: Six of the other seven schools competing at Fort Worth had former Raiders on the coaching staff. Miller's quest for a 13th belt buckle now runs through his former pupils. "Like when Coach Saban has [to face former disciples] Kirby Smart and Mark Dantonio," says Mike Orth, chair of Tech's Animal and Food Sciences department, with a grin.

At 59, Miller has outlasted many of his contemporaries who've retired or lean on grad students to handle the bulk of the grunt work. He will have none of it. He's still in the cooler every Saturday morning and still makes every road trip.

Miller admits there was a time when all of this consumed him. He jokes about "Old Testament Doc" and "New Testament Doc," with the latter usurping the former around 2007. The program had fallen into a rut, having captured just one championship in the decade after winning four in the 1990s. "We always believed in doing the right thing and all those things, but we probably didn't walk that very much," Miller says. "We said, 'Oh, winning is not important,' but that seemed to be all we were focused on. We weren't happy when we lost. We weren't joyful, and we weren't really good losers.

"When we stopped talking about winning and making that a priority is when we started having the success," he says.

That could easily come off as coachspeak from a sports fanatic who keeps a signed greeting from Lou Holtz near his office door. But New Testament Doc, for all his drive, is a man who takes his team to church every Sunday,



grills them steaks at his house, fires off inspirational group texts and becomes so enmeshed in their lives that Lucherk refers to Miller and Celia, who passed away in May 2018, as her second set of parents.

In the year since Celia's death, the meat judging community at Texas Tech has become even more of a family for Miller: his support group while grieving and his prayer team during Sunday morning Bible studies at his church. Mark and Celia's birthdays fall four days apart in February. When Mark's rolled around this year, his students and colleagues threw a huge party at his house so he wouldn't have to celebrate alone. Their importance in his life transcends any competition.

"I wouldn't be able to breathe without them," he says.

**LEGAL NOTICE**

**If you subscribed to Premium Cable and paid a rental fee for a Set-Top Box, you could receive benefits from a Class Action Settlement.**

*Si desea recibir esta notificación en español, llámenos o visite nuestra página web.*

A settlement has been reached with Defendants Comcast Corporation, Comcast Holdings Corporation, Comcast Cable Communications, LLC, and Comcast Cable Communications Holdings, Inc. (collectively "Comcast") about alleged antitrust violations and unfair trade practices related to the rental of "Set-Top Boxes" to Comcast's Premium Cable subscribers. The Settlement provides benefits to former and current Comcast customers who file a valid Claim Form.

The United States District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania will hold a hearing to decide whether to give final approval to the Settlement, so that the benefits can be issued. Those included subscribers have legal rights and options, such as submitting a claim for benefits or excluding themselves from or objecting to the Settlement. More information is in the Detailed Notice, which is available at [www.SetTopBoxSettlement.com](http://www.SetTopBoxSettlement.com).

**WHAT IS THIS ABOUT?**

The lawsuit claims that Comcast engaged in various anti-competitive activities and unfair trade practices related to the rental of Set-Top Boxes to Comcast's Premium Cable subscribers. The claims asserted in the lawsuit can be found in the Fourth Amended Consolidated Class Action Complaint, available at [www.SetTopBoxSettlement.com](http://www.SetTopBoxSettlement.com). Comcast denies all of the claims and allegations in the lawsuit and says it did nothing wrong.

**WHO IS INCLUDED?**

The Court decided that the Class includes all persons who: (a) resided within the states of California, Washington, or West Virginia during the Class Period or have opted out of Comcast's arbitration clause as recorded within the arbitration clause opt-out list kept at Comcast's offices; and (b) paid Comcast a rental fee for a Set-Top Box at any time during the Class Period.

The Class Period is from January 1, 2005 to September 5, 2018.

If you are unsure whether you opted out of Comcast's arbitration clause, then you may call 1-888-748-8055 or email [info@settopboxsettlement.com](mailto:info@settopboxsettlement.com) to determine whether you are recorded as an arbitration clause opt-out within the arbitration clause opt-out list kept at Comcast's offices.

**WHAT DOES THE SETTLEMENT PROVIDE?**

Subscribers who are Settlement Class Members and submit a valid Claim Form can receive between \$10.00 and \$15.00 payable by check. In lieu of that cash payment, Current Subscribers who are Settlement Class Members and submit a Claim Form have the option of receiving credits redeemable for a variety of Comcast services. Benefit options may vary depending on the period of time you rented a Set-Top Box and how many Set-Top Boxes you rented. If more than \$15.5 million worth of claims are submitted by eligible claimants, the benefits will be distributed on a pro rata basis. If less than \$15.5 million worth of claims are submitted by eligible claimants, Comcast is entitled to retain the balance. Details on all of the Settlement benefits are included in the Detailed Notice and the Settlement Agreement, which are available at [www.SetTopBoxSettlement.com](http://www.SetTopBoxSettlement.com).

**HOW DO YOU ASK FOR BENEFITS?**

To get a payment you must submit a Claim Form. You can quickly and easily submit your claim online at [www.SetTopBoxSettlement.com](http://www.SetTopBoxSettlement.com). You can also request a paper Claim Form be sent to you by calling 1-888-748-8055. The claim deadline is **August 31, 2019**.

**YOUR OTHER OPTIONS.**

If you do not want to be legally bound by the Settlement, you must exclude yourself by **July 9, 2019**. If you stay in the Settlement, you may object to it by **July 9, 2019**. The Detailed Notice explains how to exclude yourself or object. The Court will hold a hearing in the case on **September 10, 2019**, to consider whether to approve the Settlement, and a request by Settlement Class Counsel for attorneys' fees, costs, and expenses of up to \$1.1 million and incentive awards, which will not exceed \$1,000, to the four named Plaintiffs for their services on behalf of the Settlement Class. Members of the Settlement Class will not be responsible for the fees and expenses of Class Counsel, and the payment of attorneys' fees and expenses will not reduce the benefits to the Settlement Class. You or your own lawyer, if you have one, may ask to appear and speak at the hearing at your own cost, but you do not have to. For more information, call or go to the website shown below.

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# POETRY IN MOTION

REMEMBERING JOHN HAVLICEK:  
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NEVER STOPPED RUNNING

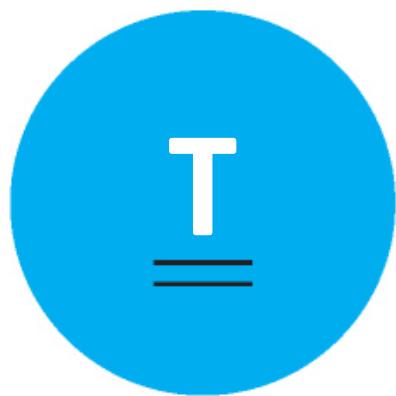
► BY CHARLES P. PIERCE  
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## SIXTH SENSE

Though he was often the first man off the bench, Havlicek produced many indelible Celtics moments—none more memorable than his game-clinching steal in Game 7 of the 1965 Eastern Division finals.





**TO TELL** you the truth, I never really saw the resemblance, so I never really got the nickname. When John Havlicek arrived in Boston in 1962, it was said that he'd picked up the nickname Hondo because he looked so much like John Wayne. To my eyes he looked as much like John Wayne as he did Geraldine Page, Wayne's costar in the forgettable 1953 Western of the same name. Havlicek had the height, but he was broad-faced, jug-eared, and buzz-cut. As his remarkable 16-year career in the NBA went along, and he grew his hair out, he never looked like John Wayne. He looked like a mill hand's smart son or a farmer's talented nephew. He never looked like a cowboy movie hero. He just played like one.

Havlicek died on April 25 at the age of 79. It was Parkinson's disease that he battled, an irony that is cruel in so many ways. Parkinson's is a progressive disorder of the central nervous system. Its initial symptoms often are involuntary tremors and twitching. Gradually, it deprives the patient of any ability to move voluntarily, and John Havlicek's greatest gift was that he never stopped moving. Every movement he made on the court was purposeful. He was a perpetual-motion machine, moving, cutting and always finding the open space from which to score. The numbers are impressive enough—eight championships and 13 All-Star teams; leading scorer in the history

of the Boston Celtics, which is not the same as the history of, say, the Sacramento Kings; 26,395 points and 1,270 games in which he never seemed to tire. He spanned the lifetime of the Celtics' greatest dynasty. He came in as a rookie in 1962 and played a year with Bob Cousy. He retired two years too early to play with Larry Bird. In between, he won two titles with a delightfully funky crew that included Dave Cowens and Paul Silas, Jo Jo White and Don Chaney.

He also played on some of the worst Celtics teams ever, including his last one, which won 32 games and probably was lucky to have won that many. It was a ragbag of malcontents and enthusiasts of recreational drugs. The ownership was a mess; the NBA allowed the owners of Buffalo and Boston to "swap" franchises so that the Braves could move to San Diego. That left the Celtics to be owned by one John Y. Brown, and the less said about him, the better. But through it all, Havlicek never stopped moving, never stopped running. In one of his memoirs, former New York Knick—and U.S. senator—Bill Bradley said trying to guard Havlicek was like "trying to hold mercury in your hand."

The people who knew him well—his teammates and some of the corporal's guard of reporters who followed the NBA back when it was hostage in its

arenas to the Ice Capades and not an international entertainment-industrial complex—remember a genuinely humble and fastidious man. Bob Ryan of *The Boston Globe*, who knew him best, remembers him as a guy who hung his socks on hangers and arranged his cologne bottles in order of height, and whose locker generally would have passed muster with the toughest gunny at Parris Island.

For those of us who watched him only as a fan, we marveled as everyone did at the way he illustrated at all times that hoariest of basketball clichés: "moving without the ball." When I was young, my father was an administrator in what was then called an "inner-city" high school. Every now and again, he would open the gym to the neighborhood kids and I would run with them. Inevitably,

someone would call me "Havlicek," and I felt as though I should live up to the moniker. I almost killed myself in those games just so I wouldn't cheat his name.

The myth was that Havlicek had a third lung, but the truth was that his lungs were so big that technicians needed two plates to give him a chest X-ray. Remember after Secretariat died, and they discovered that his heart was twice the size of the average heart of a racehorse? Same thing. Thoroughbreds are different from you and me. □



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