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SPORTS UNITED

BY STEVE KERR, CHARLES P. PIERCE, S.L. PRICE, PETER KING, ROBERT KLEMKO AND JONATHAN JONES

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SPORTS UNITED

Departments

PENNANT RACE
José Ramírez has the Indians eyeing a winning World Series outcome in 2017.

Photograph by **CARLOS OSORIO/AP**

Cover:
Photo Illustration by **BRYCE WOOD**

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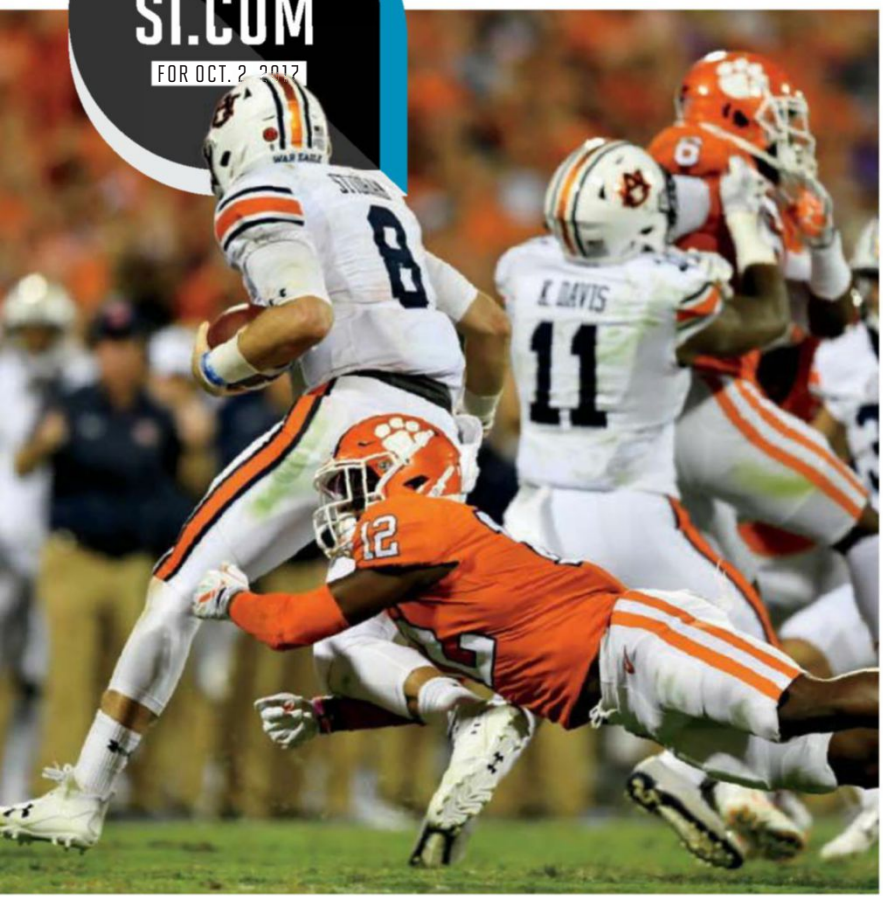
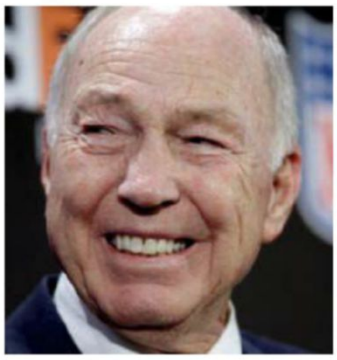


20/20 HINDSIGHT

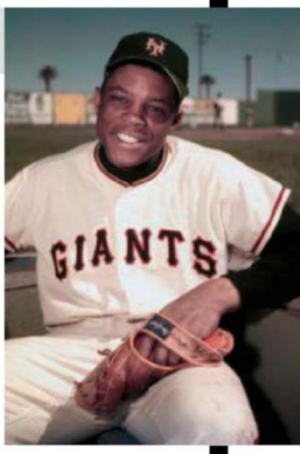
When the college football season kicked off, SI's staff felt confident about a few key predictions. Some of them we got right: Alabama is indeed a juggernaut, knocking off opponents with machinelike precision, and the Big Ten is, as we thought, a three-horse race between Ohio State, Michigan and Penn State. Some of our other predictions, however. . . . Yeah, we've got some explaining to do. For starters: LSU is not, in fact, "this year's biggest surprise team"; Clemson *(left)* hasn't shown any signs of that championship hangover we saw coming; and Texas isn't exactly "back" yet. To see what we whiffed on during the preseason, and why, go to **SI.com/college-football**

Starr Treatment

Dr. James Andrews has been at the forefront of sports medicine for decades, and now he and his team are diving into a new treatment: stem-cell therapy. Advances could lead to faster recovery times, with stars returning from ACL surgery, for example, in a fraction of the usual time. Eventually, teams could harvest and bank stem cells from players to treat injuries as they occur throughout a season. SI's Greg Bishop explores the significant benefits stem-cell treatments had for the health of 83-year-old Hall of Fame quarterback **Bart Starr**, as well as what these advances might mean for athletes down the road, at **SI.com/nfl**



One Giant Step



New York once had three major league teams. Then, suddenly, it had one: In 1957 the Giants joined the Dodgers in announcing a move to the West Coast, taking **Willie Mays** with them. The latest episode of SI's *The Narrative* podcast examines how, 60 years later, the fans and the city still feel the effects of the Giants' departure. Go to **SI.com/podcasts** to download or subscribe.

MIKE COMER/GETTY IMAGES (CLEMSON); J. PHILLIP/AP/REX/SHUTTERSTOCK (STARR); BETTMANN/GETTY IMAGES (MAYS)

1 of 3

Leading Off

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SEATS OF POWER
Most of the Raiders remained on the bench during the singing of the national anthem on Sunday in Landover, Md., one of many responses around the NFL to President Trump's attack on players who protest (page 26). Oakland lost to the Redskins 27–10.

PHOTOGRAPH BY
JOHN MIDDLEBROOK/
CSM/ZUMA WIRE


1982
RAIDERS

Leading Off

@sportsillustrated

UNHAPPY HUNTING
Chiefs running back Kareem Hunt led the opposition on a wild chase on Sunday, rushing for 172 yards and a touchdown in a 24–10 Kansas City win over the Chargers. Through three games—all victories—the rookie leads the NFL in rushing yards (401), yards per carry (8.5) and total yards (538).

PHOTOGRAPH BY
JOHN W. MCDONOUGH

Leading Off

@sportsillustrated

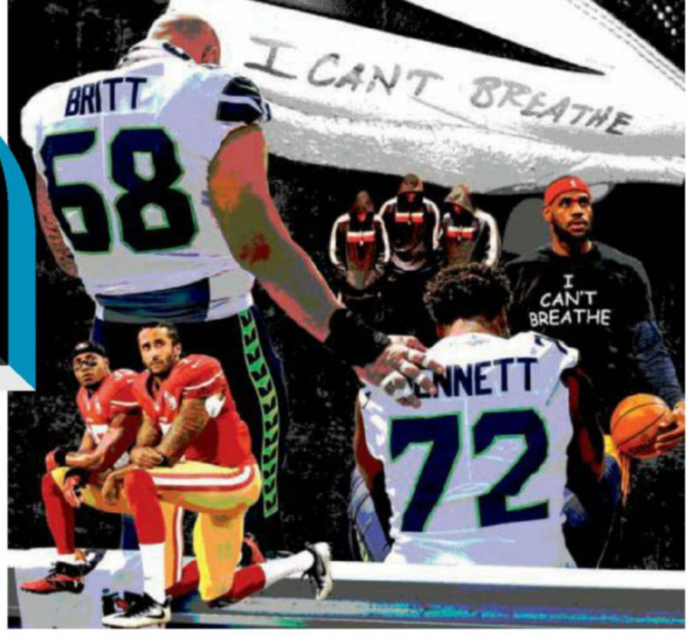
MEAN FEET

Patriots receiver Brandin Cooks made a toe-tapping 25-yard reception with 23 seconds left for the decisive touchdown in a 36–33 home victory over the Texans. Cooks's catch capped a 75-yard drive. He finished with five grabs for 131 yards and two TDs.

PHOTOGRAPH BY
AP/SHUTTERSTOCK

INBOX

FOR SEPT. 18, 2017



Charles P. Pierce's piece on **Michael Bennett** is the latest in a string of important writings you have published in the magazine and online regarding race relations. And while some readers may criticize you for mixing sports and social issues, I'm happy you have helped keep alive this important discussion.

Michael Weinberg
NAPA, CALIF.

While I agree with Pierce that intentional police brutality and racism must end (SCORECARD), I also think he should have pointed out that in some cases these victims did not do what they were asked to do by uniformed officers. The promotion of police disrespect by many athletes (like Colin Kaepernick's socks with pigs dressed as cops) only exacerbates the tension. Dave Pete, HORNELL, N.Y.

Often when discussing the unfair treatment of the **student-athlete**, as Dan Greene did in criticizing the college transfer rule, the NCAA is painted as the villain (SCORECARD). But the truth is the NCAA no longer runs college sports; TV networks do. And college sports are not about students and education anymore; they're about making money for TV, then feeding enough of it back to schools to make them compliant.

Dick Wolven, COROLLA, N.C.

I stopped when I saw the photographs of the **baseball dolls** made by Indians pitchers Carlos Carrasco and Trevor Bauer (LEADING OFF). It may have been the most intriguing, imaginative and hilarious thing I've ever seen in the magazine. As a lifelong Red Sox fan, I'm pained to say it, but Cookie and Bauer are my new favorite major leaguers. I can't stop laughing.

Jen Rottenberg, LOS ANGELES

COVER

I was excited to show my two daughters this week's issue featuring U.S. Open winner **Sloane Stephens** on the cover. But instead, I received a copy featuring Chiefs running back Kareem Hunt. Putting Stephens on the cover was a good move. I just wish it had been the *only* cover.

Eddie Becker
SPARTANBURG, S.C.

PAGE 68

POINT AFTER

I hardly ever use the word *sweet*, but in the case of **Steve Rushin**'s tribute to his wife, Rebecca Lobo, as she was inducted into the Naismith Hall of Fame, I will make an exception. I appreciated the little peek into her journey as a basketball pioneer and a mother. And as for Rushin's Larry Bird response: hysterical!

Rance Bishop
MOUNT AIRY, MD.

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SCORECARD

Edited by **ALBERT CHEN** + **SARAH KWAK**

TURNING HEADS

Despite the President's claim that football has become soft, the discovery of CTE in Aaron Hernandez's brain renews calls for caution on the field and further study of an insidious disease

BY JENNY VRENTAS

AMONG HIS BARRAGE of comments last week about the NFL, President Trump said, "Today if you hit too hard—15 yards! Throw him out of the game! They had that last week. I watched for a couple of minutes. Two guys, just really, beautiful tackle. Boom, 15 yards! The referee gets on television—his wife is sitting at home, she's so proud of him. They're ruining the game! They're ruining the game. That's what they want to do. They want to hit. They want to hit!"

Boston University researchers also made an announcement last week about trauma and football. They revealed that former Patriots tight end Aaron Hernandez, who took his own life this spring while incarcerated for a murder conviction that was pending appeal, died at age 27 with a severe case of chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE). Their findings were accompanied by something as central to football in 2017 as X-and-O diagrams: images of a deceased player's brain that had been stained to reveal deposits of abnormal tau protein.

A neurodegenerative disease first recognized by a medical examiner in 1928 among a group of boxers, CTE can only be diagnosed at autopsy. This century its discovery in the brains of more than 100 former NFL players has pushed it to the front page.

Hernandez's diagnosis came just a few months after the researchers at BU's CTE Center, which has been studying this disease, published a sobering picture of some of their findings in *The Journal of the American Medical Association*: They found CTE in 110 of the 111 deceased NFL players they examined. The study was largely composed of brains donated by players who had shown symptoms of neurological impairment while alive, and thus draws only from an incomplete sample—but the numbers were alarming nonetheless.

There remains much that scientists don't know about CTE. Just two years ago researchers met to define the specific criteria by which CTE should be diagnosed in postmortem exams. And the most recent international consensus statement on concussion in sports—drafted last fall in Berlin during a gathering of the world's leading neuroscientists—stops short of establishing a cause-and-effect relationship between CTE and contact sports.

Hernandez's case was notable for its severity at just age 27. Did CTE affect his behavior? We'll never know with certainty.

The public dialogue and public health concerns have outpaced the research. There is no disputing—the President's statements notwithstanding—that repeated blows to the head are damaging to the brain, especially the developing brain. As Ann McKee, the chief neuropathologist at

HEINZ KLUETMEIER (HERNANDEZ); ANN C. MCKEE M.D./VA BOSTON/BOSTON UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF MEDICINE (BRAIN SCAN)

the BU brain bank, once said, "We know there is a problem, but not enough to know how to solve the problem."

Understanding CTE starts with analyzing how degeneration in the human brain occurs. A collision on a football field can damage nerve cells through shearing and stretching. As a result, tau, a protein that stabilizes the structures in nerve cells, may be altered in a way that it aggregates into tangles, which can interfere with brain function. Abnormal tau deposits are a hallmark of Alzheimer's disease as well—but the tangles in the brain manifest in different patterns for each disease, and CTE generally has a much earlier age of onset than Alzheimer's.

It's these specific tau protein patterns in a postmortem examination that determine a diagnosis of CTE, and they are what McKee found in Hernandez's brain: tau protein deposition in the frontal lobes of his brain and microscopic deposition of tau in nerve cells around small blood vessels—"a unique feature of CTE," according to a statement from BU. However, scientists are still trying to unlock how, and to what extent, such neuropathology causes clinical symptoms.

Mike Webster was the first NFL player diagnosed with CTE when Bennet Omalu, then a forensic neuropathologist for the Allegheny County Coroner's Office, performed Webster's autopsy in 2002. Webster had been suffering from dementia for years before his death at age 50. In the years since, as the tally of prominent players diagnosed with CTE has grown, researchers have sought to understand the link between symptoms like memory loss, depression, mood swings and aggression while alive and the abnormalities discovered in the brain after death.

Hernandez's case was notable for its severity; at just age 27 he was diagnosed with Stage 3 CTE, out of four stages, which are determined by how widespread the tau deposits are. Did CTE affect his behavior? We will never be able to say with certainty if tau tangles played any role in a promising young football player's ending his life in a prison cell while incarcerated for murder.

To fully understand a disease that strikes fear in those who love football at every level, more research is needed. How many people have CTE and no symptoms? How many people have CTE and never played a contact sport? How many people played a contact sport and never developed CTE? What role do genetics, substance abuse and performance-enhancing drugs play in the accumulation of abnormal tau? What are the keys to slowing, or stopping, the disease's progression?

The race is on among scientists to find answers and to discover a way to detect CTE in the living—that would be a watershed moment for the disease, and for the sport. For now, football continues, under the specter of a risk we know is real but cannot yet quantify. □

GO FIGURE

1

Playoff series won by the Knicks during Carmelo Anthony's six-plus seasons in New York. **Anthony** was traded last week to Oklahoma City for center Enes Kanter, forward Doug McDermott and a 2018 second-round draft pick.

3

Career field goals by Philadelphia's **Jake Elliott** before converting a 61-yarder as time expired in the Eagles' 27–24 win over the Giants on Sunday. It was the third longest walk-off field goal in history.

50

Home runs hit by Yankees rightfielder **Aaron Judge** this season, through Monday, breaking the rookie record of 49 set by Mark McGwire in 1987, when he was with the A's.

BRIAN SEVALD/NBAE/GETTY IMAGES (ANTHONY); ELSA/GETTY IMAGES (ELLIOTT); ERICK W. RASCO (JUDGE)

NFL

WHY DO I FEEL SO EMPTY INSIDE?

L.A. is a two-team NFL town for the first time since 1994. So how do Angelenos feel about this pro football renaissance? *Uh, it's complicated*. The Rams will play at Memorial Coliseum until 2020, when a new $2.6 billion stadium will be completed. Our reporter surveyed a section of the Coliseum, a third of the way up from the field at the 20-yard line, during the Rams' loss to Washington on Sept. 17. (Official attendance: 56,612; capacity: 93,607.) Here, observations from a virtual NFL wasteland. —*Michael McKnight*

MANNY SILVA, 33

Employer-provided ticket

"When the Rams win, everybody wants to claim that and be a part of it. When they lose, everyone stays home. The fans here today are the real fans."

DAVID ELIZALDE, 36

Season ticket, $154

"I couldn't get season tickets last year; I was on the waiting list. This year I might have a hard time reselling the tickets when I can't make it."

KEVIN PORTER, 58

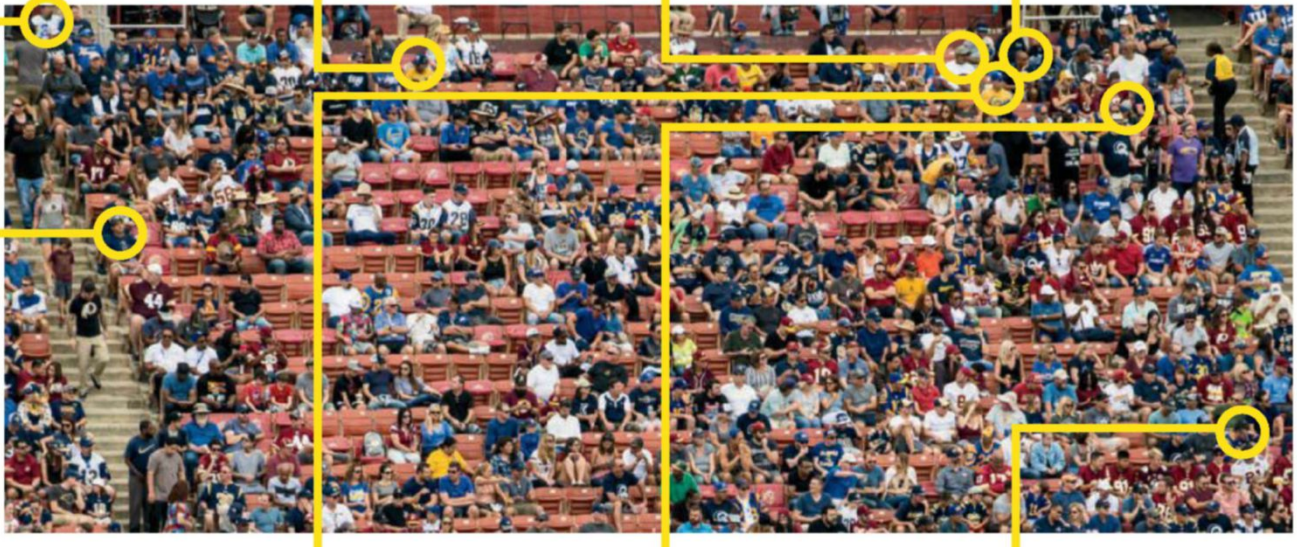
Season ticket, $162.50

"You've gotta remember, this place holds almost 100,000 people. In any other stadium this is nearly a packed house."

J.P. HARLETT SR., 57

Season ticket, $162.50

"USC is the home team in L.A. Trojans' seats are more expensive, but USC didn't leave L.A. and come back. The Rams have to earn fans' loyalties back."



JOE GUTIERREZ, 61

Season ticket

"The Chargers being in L.A. too—and playing on the same day—that's why it's half-full here. If either of these two teams has a winning record, that'll attract more fans."

CARLO CECHETTO, 48

StubHub, $180

"Texas-USC here last night was much more electric. We don't know [Rams owner] Stan Kroenke yet. You're not gonna weather a bad team unless you know who's in charge."

MICHELLE SALZMAN, 53

Season ticket, $178

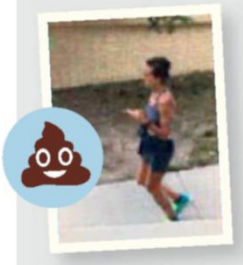
"[My family] also has USC season tickets. My son's friends Uber here and tailgate with us, but they don't go to the game. They just enjoy the scene outside."

MICHAEL SANCHEZ, 30

Season ticket

"When [they're good] and you get the bandwagoners, it'll start filling up. Like Warriors games. As a season-ticket holder, this is not a great investment."

JOHN W. MCDONOUGH (9)



SIGN OF THE APOCALYPSE

A Colorado Springs jogger has been defecating in neighbors' yards, and Charmin has offered a year's supply of toilet paper to the Mad Pooper if she turns herself in.

Todd Gurley

With three more TDs against the 49ers in Week 3, the Rams running back has already matched his total from last season (six).

HOT

NOT

Crystal Palace

After a 5-0 rout by Manchester City, Palace is off to the worst EPL start ever: no wins, no draws and no goals in six matches.

DUELING ROLES

The nationwide release last week of *Battle of the Sexes*, in which Emma Stone and Steve Carell convincingly portray tennis stars Billie Jean King and Bobby Riggs, suggests there are other iconic sports rivalries that Hollywood could re-create. Here's a casting call

PENGUINS CENTER **SIDNEY CROSBY**
(ANDY SAMBERG)

VS.

CAPITALS WINGER **ALEX OVECHKIN**
(CHRISTOPH WALTZ)

TOP-RANKED TENNIS PLAYER **STEFFI GRAF**
(LAURA DERN)

VS.

TOP-RANKED TENNIS PLAYER **MONICA SELES**
(MAGGIE GYLLENHAAL)

PATRIOTS QB **TOM BRADY**
(EWAN MCGREGOR)

VS.

NFL COMMISSIONER **ROGER GOODELL**
(DAMIAN LEWIS)

NBA LEGEND **MICHAEL JORDAN**
(MICHAEL B. JORDAN)

VS.

HIS HIGH SCHOOL COACH **POP HERRING**
(DON CHEADLE)

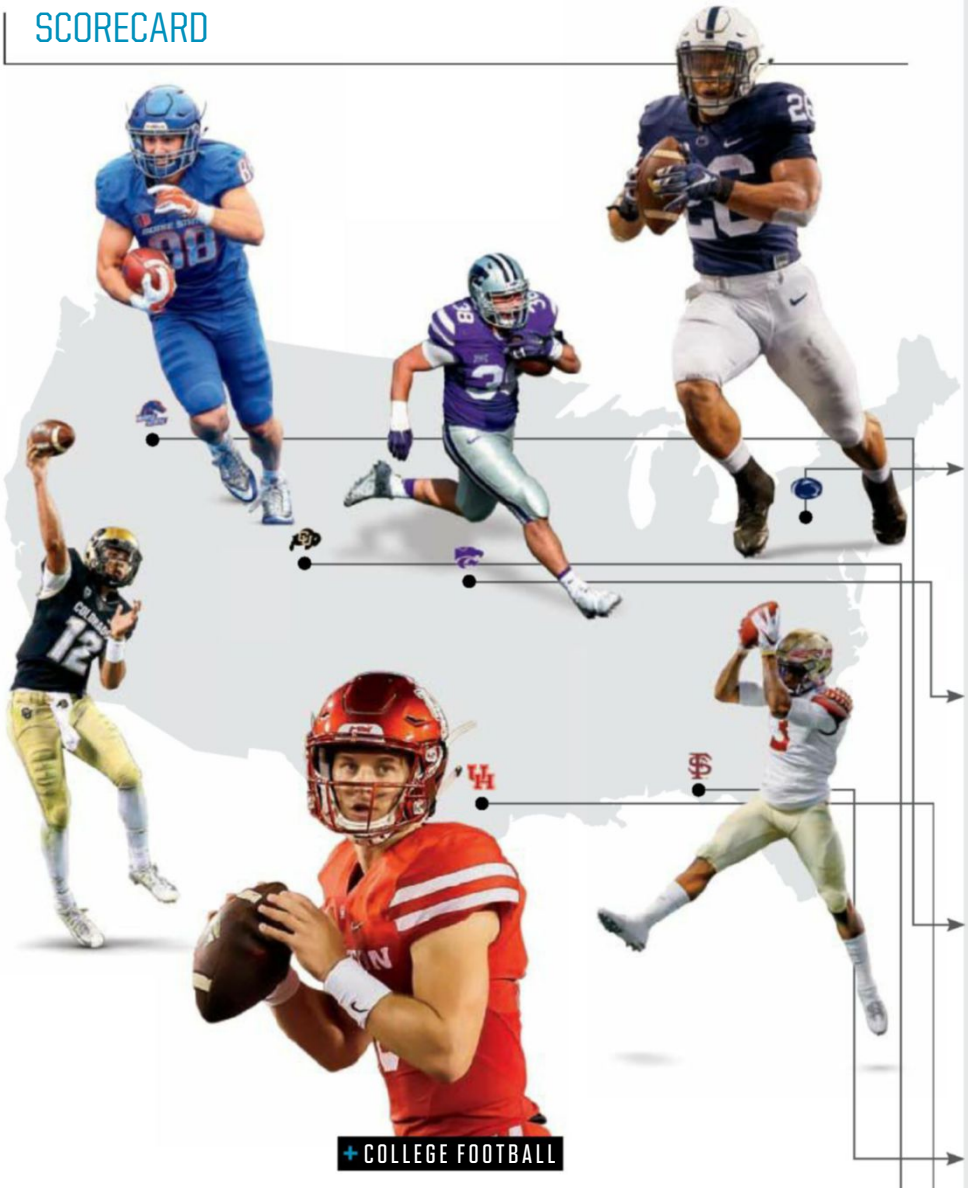
THEY SAID IT

"PLEASE BEAT THE WARRIORS FOR ME. PLEASE? I'M GOING TO BE WATCHING THAT GAME."

Enes Kanter

Former Thunder center, in a message to his old team after learning that he was part of a trade for Knicks forward Carmelo Anthony.

TWITTER (JOGGER): JEFF GROSS/GETTY IMAGES (GURLEY): HARRY HOW/GETTY IMAGES (CROSBY): MATT BARON/REX/SHUTTERSTOCK (SAMBERG); GREG FIUME/NHLI/GETTY IMAGES (OVECHKIN); KEVIN MAZUR/WIREIMAGE/GETTY IMAGES (WALTZ); GABE GINSBERG/FILMMAGIC/GETTY IMAGES (GRAF); DAVID LIVINGSTON/GETTY IMAGES (DERN); CLIVE BRUNSKILL/GETTY IMAGES (SELES); DIMITRIOS KAMBOURIS/GETTY IMAGES (GYLLENHAAL); TAYLOR HILL/WIREIMAGE/GETTY IMAGES (BRADY); C FLANIGAN/FILMMAGIC/GETTY IMAGES (MCGREGOR); ROBERT BECK (GOODELL); TRISTAN FEWINGS/GETTY IMAGES (LEWIS); LAYNE MURDOCH/NBAE/GETTY IMAGES (MICHAEL JORDAN); ROBIN L MARSHALL/GETTY IMAGES (MICHAEL B. JORDAN); BILL FRAKES (HERRING); JASON MERRITT/GETTY IMAGES (CHEADLE); GREG NELSON (KANTER)



COLLEGE FOOTBALL

ALLOWANCE TO PLAY

They may not be getting a salary, but college athletes are (finally) getting a piece of the pie

FOR YEARS COLLEGE athletic departments across the country had seen their coffers explode with the rise of media rights fees, but they had no means to share the windfall with their athletes. That changed two years ago with the approval of the "cost of attendance" stipend, money paid over and above the benefits of a scholarship. The yearly stipends, which go to athletes in all sports, range from $1,500 to more than $6,000 and are intended to cover a student's cost-of-living expenses. Because the amounts vary by college—it's up to each school to determine who, if anyone, receives a stipend—the grants could have a potential impact on recruiting, giving an advantage to Power Five programs (with more resources for bigger stipends). The total cost is small change for the biggest programs, but for college athletes with demanding workloads and workouts, the financial boost is long overdue. □

COINAGE

Presented by GEICO

Here's a sampling of the stipends granted to college football players in major programs across the country

$4,788

Penn State ///
For in-state and out-of-state students

$4,210

Kansas State ///
For out-of-state students; $3,910 for in-state

$3,542

Boise State ///
For out-of-state students; $3,320 for in-state

$6,218

Florida State ///
For out-of-state students; $4,860 for in-state

$3,956

Colorado ///
For out-of-state students; $3,294 for in-state

$3,956

Houston ///
For in-state students

LOREN ORR/GETTY IMAGES (BOISE STATE); PETER G. AIKEN/GETTY IMAGES (KANSAS STATE); JEFF HAYNES (PENN STATE); KEVIN C. COX/GETTY IMAGES (FLORIDA STATE); LESLIE PLAZA JOHNSON/ICON SPORTS (HOUSTON); DUSTIN BRADFORD/GETTY IMAGES (COLORADO)

+INDYCAR

GOOD AS NEW

Josef Newgarden is the face of racing's next generation

IN THE END, second place was as good as a win for Josef Newgarden *(above)*, who was crowned the 2017 IndyCar Series champion on Sept. 17. Despite finishing 1.1 seconds behind fellow Team Penske driver Simon Pagenaud at the season finale at Sonoma (Calif.) Raceway, Newgarden maintained his razor-thin points lead over four-time champion Scott Dixon to become, at 26, the youngest series winner since 2002, when Sam Hornish Jr. took the title at 23.

The championship tops Newgarden's already impressive résumé, which includes seven career victories and 27 top five finishes in only 100 IndyCar races. And it set off a deluge of congratulatory texts and Twitter shout-outs. Among the well-wishers were NASCAR stalwarts Jimmie Johnson, Ryan Blaney and Darrell Waltrip—not that any of them are likely to get a response soon. "I'm the worst texter in the world," Newgarden says. "I'm bad at replying. . . . I don't know what to do with all of this."

A native of Hendersonville, Tenn., in his first season with Penske, Newgarden is the brightest star in a dazzling array of up-and-coming drivers. Nine of the top 20 points leaders this season were under 30, not including Gabby Chaves, a 24-year-old Colombian who had two top 10 finishes in just three starts.

With 42-year-old Helio Castroneves contemplating a move to a sports car circuit full-time and Dixon, 37, coming off his lowest victory total in a season since 2005 (one), young drivers will steer IndyCar's future. "Having an American champion is really important in this sport," Pagenaud says, "and Josef will be a great champion."—*Mike Harris*

YOUTH BE KNOWN

Four other promising American drivers under 30

ALEXANDER ROSSI, 26

A former F1 driver from Nevada City, Calif., he took the 100th Indy 500, in 2016, for Andretti Autosport, becoming the first U.S. rookie to win since 1928.

GRAHAM RAHAL, 28

The son of 1986 Indy 500 champ Bobby Rahal was the youngest winner in IndyCar history (in 2008, St. Petersburg, at 19), the first of his six career victories.

ZACH VEACH, 22

After finishing fourth in Indy Lights in 2016, with three victories, he made his IndyCar debut last April at the Indy 500 and will race a full season for Andretti Autosport.

SPENCER PIGOT, 24

The winningest driver in Mazda Road to Indy history—24 victories across three circuits—has signed with Ed Carpenter Racing for the 2018 IndyCar season.

RETRO FIRE

Designs in 2018 celebrate yesteryear

Young drivers may be ready to rule the circuit next year—but they'll be chasing one another in throwback race cars. In unveiling its designs for 2018 *(below)*, IndyCar introduced a universal body kit—featuring smaller front and rear wings and a sleeker profile, thanks to a lowered engine cover—inspired by the iconic cars from the 1990s. The tests have resulted

in raves, particularly when it comes to drafting. "I have never been able to follow someone that close, not at the speeds we're turning in," tester Oriol Servia told motorsport.com. That should create tighter packs and more thrilling chases, which is good news for fans. But the best news may be for owners: Converting cars won't be prohibitively expensive, and maintaining them is expected to be cheaper than it was this year. IndyCar hopes the reduced costs will attract new teams to join the series. —S.K.

ROBERT REINERS/GETTY IMAGES (NEWGARDEN); CHRIS OWENS (CAR, PIGOT, VEACH); TAYLOR BALLANTYNE (RAHAL, ROSSI)

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TRIBUTE

JAKE LAMOTTA
(1922–2017)

Indelibly portrayed by Robert De Niro in the 1980 biopic *Raging Bull*, Hall of Fame boxer Jake LaMotta was a beatdown brawler with a chin of steel: In 106 bouts he was knocked down only once. He earned the middleweight title in 1949 and defended it twice, retiring in '54 with a record of 83-19-4 that included Sugar Ray Robinson's first career loss. (Robinson won their five other fights.) A self-described "good-for-nothing bum kid" from the Bronx, LaMotta was accused of beating his first wife, Ida, and served six months in prison for abetting prostitution. After exiting the ring, he acted on stage and in movies. LaMotta, 95, died of pneumonia in Aventura, Fla., on Sept. 19. —J.F.

Sundara Chinn | *Houston* | *Volleyball*

Chinn, a sophomore at Division II Angelo State in San Angelo, Texas, had 39 kills in four games, all wins, against Limestone, Colorado Christian and New Mexico Highlands at the Kathleen Brasfield Invitational. Through 11 games she is second on the team with 105 kills and 117.5 points. As a freshman Chinn led Tennessee Wesleyan with 381 kills.

Rose Zhang | *Irvine, Calif.* | *Golf*

Rose, a freshman at Pacific Academy, fired a 20-under 268 at the Country Club of St. Albans (Mo.), tying the lowest score in the 42-year history of the Girls Junior PGA Championship and winning the title by six strokes. Her seven-under 65 equaled the record for a second-round score. In the AJGA rankings Rose, 14, is ranked No. 7 in the country.

Billy Maples | *Weatherby Lake, Mo.* | *Football*

Billy, a 6' 3" senior quarterback at Park Hill High in Kansas City, threw a school-record nine touchdown passes—including eight in the first half to tie a national mark—in a 66–35 win over Lee's Summit. Through five games he has completed 63.6% of his passes for 1,306 yards and 23 touchdowns. Last year Billy threw for 2,148 yards and 21 TDs.

FACES IN THE CROWD

Edited by **JEREMY FUCHS**

Breanna Clark | *Los Angeles* | *Track and Field*

Clark, 22, set the T20 400-meter world record at the World Para Athletic championships in July, finishing in 56.33 and breaking her own mark of 56.71, established a month earlier at the nationals. At the Paralympics in Rio, Clark, who has autism, ran a 57.79 to take gold. Her mother, Rosalyn, won a silver in the 4x400 in the 1976 Games.

Martha Thomas | *Weston, Fla.* | *Soccer*

Thomas, a senior at UNC Charlotte, scored twice in a 3–0 win over Marshall to set school marks for career goals (41) and points (106). She already held the record for shots (256). The reigning Conference USA offensive player of the year and a three-time all-conference pick, Thomas has seven goals and 19 points through nine games.

Livi Pappadopoulos | *Holmen, Wis.* | *Log Rolling*

Livi, a sophomore at Holmen High, won the girls' amateur championship in Hayward, Wis., in July. It was her fifth straight title. Livi, who has been log rolling since she was seven, has won more than 50 tournaments and hasn't lost a match in four years. Among girls under 17 she is ranked No. 1 in the country by the U.S. Log Rolling Association.

Nominate Now

To submit a candidate for Faces in the Crowd, email **faces@simail.com**
For more on outstanding amateur athletes, follow **@SI_Faces** on Twitter.

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GATORADE

The Case for . . .

KLUBOT AS MVP

BY GABRIEL BAUMGAERTNER

IN 2011, WHEN Justin Verlander became only the 10th pitcher to win both the Cy Young and MVP awards in the same season, the Tigers righthander was the game's most feared ace (and, in the eyes of the voters, the most viable candidate in an underwhelming field). Verlander is the last AL pitcher to be named MVP, and that will likely remain true after the ballots are counted in November. And yet his '11 season was worse by every conceivable metric than that of Indians righty Corey Kluber in '17—the latest player to force the pitcher-versus-position-player MVP debate.

José Altuve is a deserving candidate, but Kluber's role as **baseball's best pitcher for the AL's best team** should elevate him.

Voters err by siding with everyday players over pitchers who make around 30 starts, but if Verlander did enough to win the award, then Kluber deserves it at least as much—even in a year in which Astros second baseman José Altuve was hitting .348 at week's end and Yankees rookie Aaron Judge had bludgeoned 50 home runs. On an AL Central championship team *(page 40)* with two other MVP candidates—infielder José Ramírez and shortstop Francisco Lindor—Kluber is the most consistent and dominant force. Since June 1 he has been the game's best pitcher, with an astonishing 1.62 ERA and 221 strikeouts (12.34 per nine innings). He trailed only Altuve among AL players in Wins Above Replacement (according to Baseball Reference) through Sunday and is the preemptive favorite to take the Cy Young over Red Sox lefthander Chris Sale, the first American League pitcher to log 300 strikeouts since 1999. After a so-so first two months Kluber has held opposing hitters to a .171 average, and he leads the majors with five complete games, three shutouts and a strikeout-to-walk ratio of 9.61.

Kluber's primary competition will be Altuve, who leads the majors in batting average and will eclipse 200 hits for the fourth consecutive season. Altuve is a deserving candidate as the most consistent player on baseball's best offense, but Kluber's role as baseball's best pitcher for the AL's best team should elevate him. The Indians are 19–8 when Klubot—as he is known for his precision and efficiency—starts, though he has allowed two earned runs or fewer in six of those losses. Excluding a May game against Detroit, he has not exited a start with the Indians trailing by more than two. When Kluber is on the hill, Cleveland is always in a position to win, just as the Dodgers were in 2014, when lefty Clayton Kershaw toed the rubber. (L.A. was 23–4 in games he started.) Kershaw is the last pitcher to win an MVP, and he did so by a healthy margin over Marlins slugger Giancarlo Stanton, who finished with 37 home runs and a mere .950 OPS. It seems that pitchers historically win the MVP award only when the rest of the competition is decidedly weaker.

Kluber's competition for the AL award is much stiffer than Kershaw's or Verlander's. Altuve might be the most well-rounded hitter in baseball, with 24 home runs, 32 stolen bases and a .968 OPS, while Judge shed a nasty midseason slump to break Mark McGwire's rookie home run record and help New York earn a wild-card spot. Ultimately, the questions MVP voters need to ask is, Which player gives his team the best opportunity to win whenever he's on the field?

The answer is Corey Kluber. □

BY THE NUMBERS

20

Pitchers in major league history who have won an MVP award; only six since 1972.

7.9

Kluber's Wins Above Replacement, as measured by Baseball Reference. He trails only José Altuve (8.2) among major leaguers.

DAVID E. KLUTHO

PLANET FÚTBOL

COVERING THE WORLD'S BIGGEST SPORT

Sports Illustrated

SI.COM/PLANET-FUTBOL

A TIME

TAKE A

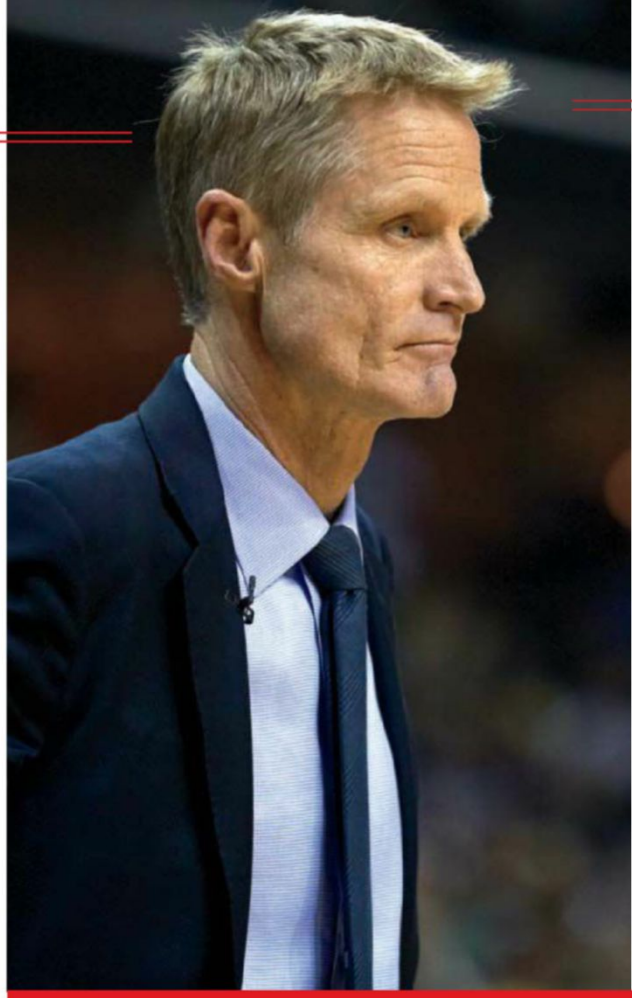
TO STAND

Stick to sports? Not possible, not when the passions stoked by ***protest and the President*** threaten to subsume the games themselves. Those who watch and play—in other words, all of us—want to believe that sports are a force for teamwork in every sense. The time to set that example is now

Photograph by **Patrick Smith** Getty Images

BRING US TOGETHER

BY STEVE KERR
(AS TOLD TO CHRIS BALLARD)



Mr. President, the way is through compassion *above the fray.* N

WE KNEW it was coming.

After Steph spoke up at media day last Friday, we figured it was just a matter of time until he responded. Then on Saturday morning my wife, Margot, woke me up. "Here it is," she said, and showed me President Trump's tweet. Our invitation, he wrote, had been "withdrawn," because "going to the White House is considered a great honor for a championship team," and "Stephen Curry is hesitating."

First off, I'm pretty sure Steph wasn't "hesitating." He made it clear he wouldn't go. Second, as I joked to the media Saturday afternoon, it was like the President was trying to break up with us before we broke up with him.

Regardless, it's a shame. I've been fortunate enough to meet President Reagan, both Bushes, Clinton and Obama. I didn't agree with all of them, but it was easy to set politics aside because each possessed an inherent respect for the office, as well as the humility that comes with being a public servant in an incredible position of power, representing 300 million people. And that's the problem now. In his tweet to Steph, Trump talked about honoring the White House, but really, isn't it you who must honor the White House, Mr. President? And the way to do that is through compassion and dignity and being above the fray. Not causing the fray.

Would we have gone? Probably not. The truth is we all struggled with the idea of spending time with a man who has offended us with his words and actions time and again. But I can tell you one thing: Had we gone, it wouldn't have been for the traditional ceremony, to shake hands and smile for cameras. Internally, we'd discussed whether it'd be possible to just go and meet as private citizens and have a serious, poignant discussion about some of the issues that concern us. But he's made it hard for any of us to actually enter the White House, because what's going on is not normal. It's childish stuff: belittling people and calling them names. So to expect to go in and have a civil, serious discourse? Yeah, that's probably not going to happen.

Look, I'm a basketball coach and what I do obviously pales in comparison to what the president does. But our jobs are similar in at least one respect. If you want to be an NBA coach, you need to be prepared to be criticized. You kind of know that going in. If I coach poorly and we lose the game, I hear about it. That's O.K. It's really where we coaches earn our money, accepting and dealing with criticism and keeping the ship moving forward. There has to be an inherent understand-

DAVID E. KLUTHO

Kobe Bryant @kobebryant
A #POTUS whose name alone creates division and anger. Whose words inspire dissension and hatred can't possibly "Make America Great Again"

to honor the White House and dignity and *being* ot causing the fray

Michael Thomas @Michael31Thomas
Continue to use your voices and your platforms for racial equality and to stop injustices in our communities. This is bigger than us!!!

ing when you enter into any public position—especially one that, like the presidency, comes with great power—that this is what happens. People are going to take shots at you and it's incumbent upon you to absorb those shots. Maybe you respond diplomatically, but you maintain a level of respect and dignity. What you can't do is just angrily lash out. Can you imagine if I lashed out at all my critics every day and belittled them? I'd lose my players, I'd embarrass ownership, I'd embarrass myself. Pretty soon I'd be out of a job. It's a basic adult thing that you learn as you grow up: People aren't always going to agree with you. And that's O.K.

Instead, we got Trump's comments on Friday night about NFL players, calling them sons of bitches for kneeling during the anthem. Those words just crushed me. Crushed me. Just think about what those players are protesting. They're protesting excessive police violence and racial inequality. Those are really good things to fight against. And they're doing it in a nonviolent way. Which is everything that Martin Luther King Jr. preached, right? A lot of American military members will tell you that the right to free speech is exactly what they fight for. And it's just really, really upsetting that the leader of our country is calling for these players to be "fired."

The hard part is knowing what to do now. Margot and I talked for a long time on Saturday morning about what I should say publicly. I've probably been as critical of Trump as anybody, but maybe it's time to take a different course. There's no need to get into a war of words. It's about trying to hang on to the values that are important to us as an organization, a country and, really, as human beings.

RIGHTEOUS WARRIORS

Golden State's coach was "crushed" by the President's call for protesting NFL players to lose their jobs.

The fact is, we live in an amazing nation, but it's a flawed one. I consider myself unbelievably lucky to live here, so please spare me the "If you don't like it you can get out" argument. I love living here. I love my country. I just think it's important to recognize that we as a nation are far from perfect, and it's our responsibility to try to make it better. And one of the ways to do that is to promote awareness and understanding and acceptance. Not just acceptance, but embracing our diversity—which, when you get down to it, is not only who we are but truly what makes us great. And it's not happening.

Remember, the president works for us, not vice versa. We elected him. He doesn't just work for his constituents and his base. He works for every citizen. Once you take that office, you have to do what's best for the entire country. Sure, you're going to have policies that align with your party, but that's not the point. Respectfully, Mr. Trump, the point is this: You're the president. You represent all of us. Don't divide us.

Bring us together. □

MICHAEL CONROY/AP (NFL PLAYERS); AP/REX/SHUTTERSTOCK (TRUMP)

PROTEST S

> As a team, it was not a protest of the flag or the anthem. I personally don't believe the anthem is ever the time to make any type of protest."
> **–Ben Roethlisberger,**
> *Steelers QB, on his team's remaining in the locker room for Sunday's national anthem*

NAM Y. HUH/AP

BY CHARLES P. PIERCE

THE REAL ISSUE BEHIND THE WAVE OF NATIONAL ANTHEM DISSENT—RACIAL INEQUALITY—HAS EXISTED FOR DECADES, AND IT WON'T BE RESOLVED ANY TIME SOON

ON SEPT. 16, 1960, before a home game against the Athletics, Cleveland pitcher James (Mudcat) Grant was standing in the bullpen singing along with the national anthem. Grant decided to do a little barbering of the lyrics. He adjusted the last line to "This land is not so free/I can't go to Mississippi." This was some topical humor of a very high order: Opposition to the civil rights movement was growing more violent, and, as had been the case since the Civil War, Mississippi was the cone of the volcano. Michael Schwerner was leading civil rights protests on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. Andrew Goodman was a classmate of Paul Simon's at Queens College in New York City. James Chaney was a star athlete in track and football at his Mississippi high school and a budding civil rights activist. Medgar Evers was organizing boycotts in and around Jackson, Miss. Within four years Grant would be traded to the Twins, and all four of those men would be murdered by the forces Grant sang about that September day.

The Indians' bullpen coach, a Texan named Ted Wilks, took exception to Grant's improvised lyrics and, according to Grant's account, called the pitcher a "black so-and-so." In reply, Grant told Wilks that Texas was worse than Russia. Grant then got dressed and left the park. The next day Cleveland manager Jimmie Dykes suspended him for the season without pay. Wilks apologized, but Grant refused to accept it. He would no longer accept that this racist invective was part of the cost of doing business as an African-American athlete in the U.S.

I mention all this in support of one of several things to which you must stipulate if you're going to talk sensibly about the controversy that blew up over the weekend, and the ongoing controversy regarding displaced quarterback Colin Kaepernick, whose protest against police brutality is at the heart of what went on in stadiums all over the world.

1) The inclusion of a national anthem—any national anthem—in a sporting event necessarily politicizes that event. Historically, this is best demonstrated by protests at the Olympic Games. Everyone knows about Tommie Smith and John Carlos in Mexico City in 1968. But few remember Czechoslovakian gymnast Věra Čáslavská, who bowed

TRUTH TO POWER

Clockwise from near right: Protestors LeBron; Smith and Carlos; Evers; and Tea Party revolutionaries.

her head and looked away from the Soviet flag while sharing the top spot on the medal podium with the U.S.S.R.'s Larisa Petrik at the same Games, only two months after Soviet tanks crushed the Prague Spring revolt of 1968. When Cáslavská got home, she was investigated by the new government and forbidden to travel or compete for several years.

2) The protests of today are not about the anthem or the flag or the troops, or even about Donald Trump. The protestors are high-profile African-American athletes raising awareness of how lower-profile African-Americans are often mistreated by police officers.

3) All effective protest is inconvenient and, in its own way, uncivil. The Boston Tea Party was an act of vandalism. Critics' appeal to "find a better way to protest" is really a call for self-sabotage, and it's a dodge that dates back to the Olive Branch Petition of 1775.

In short, if you're going to perform national anthems, you're going to have politics. And if you have politics, you're going to have political statements, and this being the United States of America, those statements are not always going to make everyone comfortable. And once military-related promotions reached a level that made even John McCain uncomfortable, those statements had to get louder, if only to be heard over the fighter jets, and more garish, if only to be seen beyond the giant midfield flags.

The NFL power structure chose a relatively anodyne approach to the whole matter: *standing behind their employees' free-speech rights.*

The way to avoid this, of course, is to de-emphasize the anthem ritual and return to the days before 2009 when it was common practice for teams to remain in the locker room while the anthem was played. (During this interlude, of course, fans generally fled to the concession stands.) Unfortunately, today it would take courage beyond that possessed by most owners and league commissioners to take this simple step.

This is why, over the weekend, we had so many owners framing the issue as a matter of standing behind their employees' free-speech rights. The NFL power structure chose a relatively anodyne approach to the whole matter. It enabled the league to stay away from the issue that prompted the protests in the first place, the issue that very likely has kept Kaepernick from getting a job. Those same owners, along with commissioner Roger Goodell, don't want any part of the issue of why African-Americans end up dead on the pavement after traffic stops and other encounters with police officers. But ultimately the owners and commissioners may not have a choice: The real issue behind the protests has been out there all along.

It was there in the summer of 2016 when WNBA players demonstrated in protest of the police killings of Philando Castile in Minneapolis and of Alton Sterling in Baton Rouge. (The WNBA's players have been out front on the issue longer than most athletes. On Sunday the Minnesota Lynx linked arms, and the Los Angeles Sparks left the floor during the anthem before Game 1 of the WNBA Finals in Minneapolis.) It was there in '12 when the Miami Heat wore hoodies to remember Trayvon Martin, and in '14 when LeBron James, Kyrie Irving, Derrick Rose and others warmed up in T-shirts reading I CAN'T BREATHE, reportedly the last thing Eric Garner said

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: KATHY WILLENS/AP/REX SHUTTERSTOCK; AP/REX/SHUTTERSTOCK; BETTMANN ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES; GETTY IMAGES

INTERNAL DEBATE

The conversation in the Seahawks' locker room was similar to what was happening all around the league—and a newly assertive quarterback helped the team decide what to do

★ BY ROBERT KLEMKO

LAST SATURDAY, as the Seahawks returned to their hotel in Nashville following a morning walk-through, the players were discussing what to do in the wake of President Trump's comments about NFL players' protesting inequality and police brutality. The usual suspects were making themselves heard: cornerback Richard Sherman said his piece, and defensive end Michael Bennett did too.

Then a powerful voice, which had been more moderate, emerged, urging a more forceful protest. Quarterback Russell Wilson believed that locking arms and standing for the anthem, as the team had done last season, was not enough. "It was a surprise, I think even for him," Sherman says.

In the 2016 preseason, in response to 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick kneeling for the national anthem, Wilson had explained that while he respected Kaepernick's cause, he "loves the flag" and "the anthem is an emotional time for me because I'm so grateful I get to play football." But Trump's comments, describing a protesting NFL player as a "son of a bitch" who ought to be fired, caused Wilson to speak up in a way he hadn't before.

"It was sad to see that," Wilson said of Trump's comments. "There are so many guys across the league who do good things . . . without aggression and peacefully. It's a serious issue and it can't be taken lightly."

Wilson's involvement is a significant development in a league in which quarterbacks—the most visible players on any team—have largely stayed mum on the debate initiated by Kaepernick, a QB.

Still, Seattle's locker room was far from united about how to respond to Trump. The players debated for more than an hour after the Saturday walk-through and again with coaches at the end of an extended team meeting that night. Sherman said the discussion pitted some of the team's strongest personalities against one another. "It's a lot of very intelligent individuals, and they all have opinions about what should and shouldn't be done," Sherman says. "Not only that, but you have white people who don't really understand the issues. It's just something they've never had to deal with. So you have to try to get them to understand why we're doing it and why we need them to come along." A quorum including Wilson, Sherman, Bennett, K.J. Wright, Kam Chancellor and Earl Thomas agreed the best response was to skip the anthem and remain in the locker room. They informed the rest of the team of their decision 30 minutes before kickoff.

On Sunday evening, following a 33-27 loss to the Titans, several Seahawks declined to comment on the protest. "They're just like, 'Man, I don't really agree. Just get me somewhere where I don't have to explain myself,' " Sherman says.

Sherman's candid remarks on the racial dynamic in Seattle's locker room underscored a debate happening across a league that is more than two-thirds black. For now, there's no game plan for more protests, though Sherman, for one, says he believes some sort of protest will continue.

"We were not just protesting Trump," Wright says. "We were protesting the message that we can't do certain things and express ourselves in a certain way, that we aren't full citizens."

Says Bennett, "This is beyond a black-white thing. This comes down to what are we going to do as a country, as a world." □

> It's dangerous when folks in our country stop respecting the White House and the seat of the president. It's not a good situation."
> **—Joe Maddon,** *Cubs manager*

MARK ZALESKI/AP

before dying because of a chokehold applied by an officer on Staten Island. Seen as a continuum, there is no end in sight to this tragic series of events. It is reminiscent of the 1960s, except now there is instant communication and the athletes know how to use it better than their employers. Isolating the "troublemakers" is going to be impossible. Smith and Carlos got thrown out of the Olympics and were disappeared for a time from their sport, as thoroughly as Cáslavská was in Czechoslovakia. It's almost impossible to imagine that happening today; there are too many options to get your message out, too many ways to rally support.

There's a history to this issue, and that history provides formidable momentum, so, very likely, this conflict will be with us for a while. And Donald Trump, who never saw a crack in the pavement he couldn't turn into an earthquake, is not going to absent himself from the controversy that he has done so much to stir up.

There is something admirably American in the way this is headed, it should be noted. In Chicago, for example, most of the Steelers stayed in the locker room or in the tunnel rather than appear on the sideline for the anthem. The exception was left tackle Alejandro Villanueva, a former Army Ranger and combat veteran who stood with his hand over his heart just outside the tunnel. From a free-speech standpoint, this was a perfect moment. Villanueva did what he thought was right. His teammates did what they thought was right. And then they all got together and . . . lost to the Bears 23–17, but that wasn't the point. Everybody handled the situation with dignity and grace, (even the next day, when Villanueva expressed regret for standing apart from his teammates). Sunday, Sept. 24, was one of the oddest afternoons of fundamental Americanism that we've seen in an awfully long time, and it was directed by U.S. citizens against misbehaving institutions of their own government—specifically against the President, but also against that which Marvin Gaye called out as "trigger-happy policin' " in 1971 on an album that included backup vocals from Mel Farr and Lem Barney, two Detroit Lions who did not stick to sports. Make me wanna holler, indeed. □

> The Pittsburgh Penguins respect the institution of the Office of the President, and the long tradition of championship teams visiting the White House . . . and have accepted an invitation to attend again this year. Any agreement or disagreement with a president's politics, policies or agenda can be expressed in other ways."
> *—Penguins team statement*

LIVE AND LEARN

Our 45th president would have loved Vince Lombardi. *(A real winner!)* And he could have picked up a thing or two from the man ★ BY PETER KING

If you asked President Trump what he thinks about Vince Lombardi, I bet it would go something like this: *Now that's a great American! Winner. They don't come tougher. A beautiful man . . . beautiful. Wonderful example of what makes America great. We would have been great friends.*

It would be close to that. So it's interesting to note that at a similar time in our country, nearly 50 years ago, Lombardi *(left)* spoke in support of the social unrest movement. In 1970, Paul Zimmerman interviewed him, four months before the coach died, at 57.

As Zimmerman later wrote: *We were in the latter stages of the counterculture movement, campus unrest, hippies. . . . "They're showing an awareness; they're making themselves heard," he said. "They have a right to say what they want, and it behooves us to listen. My kids tell me things, and sometimes I have trouble understanding. Well, I've got to learn."*

Had Lombardi not died so young, I'm guessing he'd have engaged some player about what was going on in this country. A player like Eagles safety Malcolm Jenkins, who has stood with a raised fist during the national anthem and who helps lead the 40-odd-man Players Coalition. Jenkins would have told Lombardi something like what he told The MMQB: "Athletes have been doing this work for a long time. We just don't hear about it. . . . If we just go out and do the work silently, it doesn't get the attention it needs."

Maybe Trump should invite Jenkins to the White House for a discussion about why players are so angry. That would be a great meeting, potentially a healing meeting. I don't believe Trump would make the call, though. □

NEIL LEIFER

IN THE WAKE OF A HURRICANE

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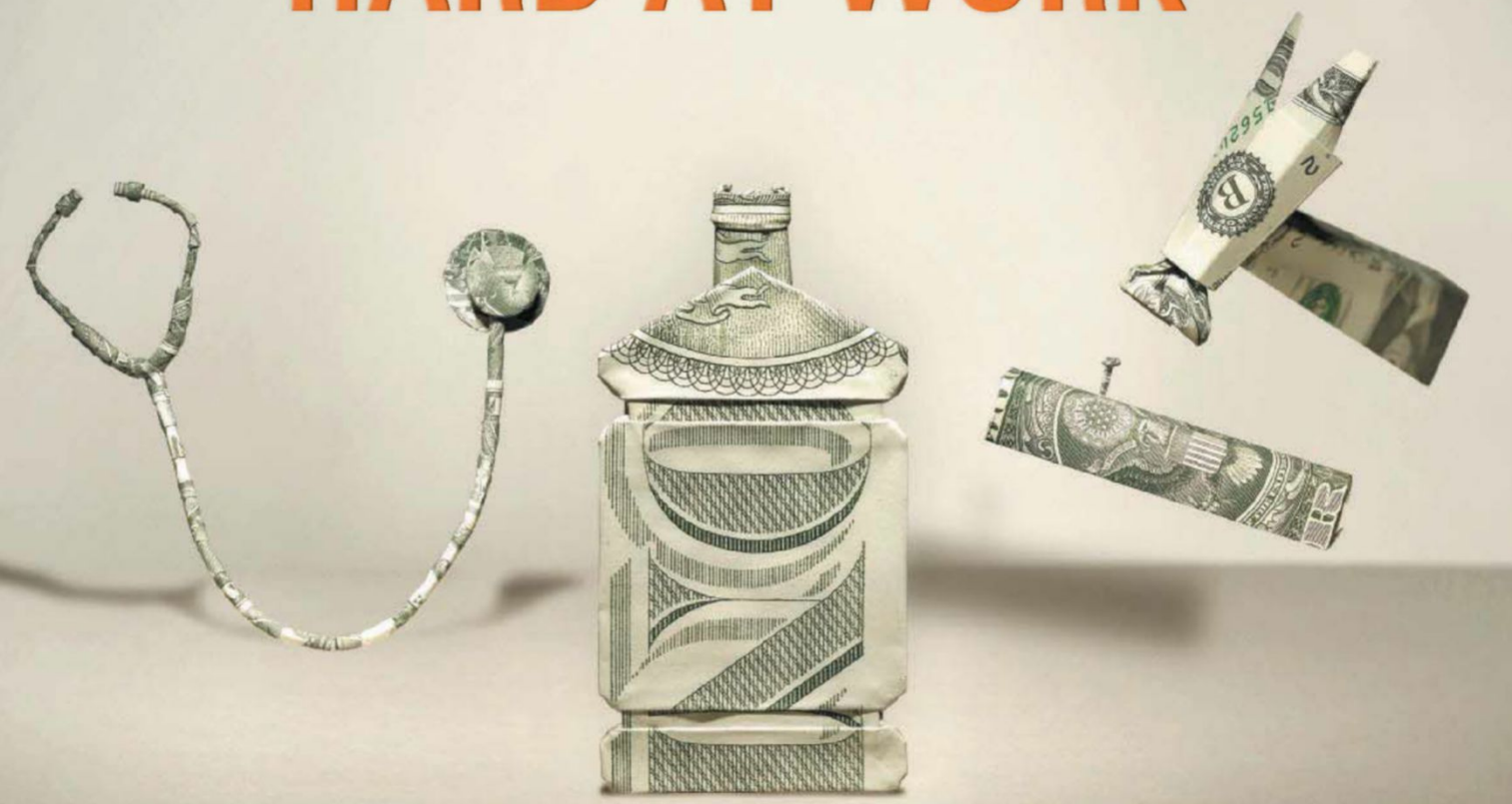

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CHIEF CONCERNS

RAISE A FIST OR TAKE A KNEE? NOT IF DONALD TRUMP HAS ANYTHING TO SAY ABOUT IT. THIS AGE OF ***ACTIVISM IN SPORTS*** *HAS MET AN UNLIKELY PRESIDENTIAL OPPONENT. AS ONE TITLE-WINNING COACH PUTS IT:* COME ON

cameron jordan @camjordan94
Only validates @Kaepernick7 bringing social injustice to light, he kneeled hoping it'd bring attention to what he believed in... Has it not?

MATT ROURKE/AP

BY S.L. PRICE

FOR GENERATIONS, presidents have taken a proud and, at times, patronizing stance on American athletes—when not preoccupied with more important matters. Big Daddy in the White House didn't bother much with sports.

Yes, Jimmy Carter embraced the 1980 U.S. Olympic hockey team, fresh off its gold medal upset in Lake Placid, and organized a boycott of the '80 Summer Games in the Soviet Union. Seventy-five years earlier Teddy Roosevelt called football's leaders to the White House for a safety summit. But overall, sports have been an afterthought, even when athletes try to get serious. Lyndon B. Johnson never said a public word 50 years ago when Muhammad Ali refused induction into the U.S. Army. LBJ's only response after the black power salutes given by medalists Tommie Smith and John Carlos at the '68 Olympic Games was *not* to invite the U.S. track team for a White House visit. He issued no statement explaining why.

We live in a different universe now. Last Friday, at a rally in Huntsville, Ala., President Donald Trump called on NFL owners to fire any "son of a bitch" who knelt during the national anthem, encouraged fans to protest such protests by boycotting NFL games, and decried—in the face of mounting medical evidence and heartbreaking tales about bewildered former greats—new rules designed to improve player safety. Then, at 8:45 a.m. EDT last Saturday, Trump tweeted a rebuke to Warriors guard Steph Curry, captain of the 2017 NBA champions, who on Friday had reiterated his stance against the team's celebratory trip to Washington.

"Going to the White House is considered a great honor for a championship team," Trump tweeted. "Stephen Curry is hesitating, therefore invitation is withdrawn!"

That afternoon, as talk of nuclear war with North Korea swirled and the latest Republican bid to replace the Affordable Care Act teetered in jeopardy, another flurry of presidential tweets erupted, demanding that athletes stand for "our Great American Flag (or Country)"—or be fired—and slamming commissioner Roger Goodell for supporting his employees. "Tell them to stand!" Trump demanded. Sunday morning saw two more. "Fire or suspend!" ended the first. The second, essentially accusing NFL owners, coaches and players of disloyalty, declared, "League should back U.S."

Just eight months into Trump's administration, overuse has drained the word *unprecedented* of all oomph. It isn't every day, weekend, year or century that a U.S. president, in effect, goes to war with American sports. The immediate response—surprising only in the fact that athletes, owners and commissioners across many sports presented an all but unified front—swung between the eloquent and the uninhibited.

"U bum @StephenCurry30 already said he ain't going!" LeBron James tweeted after Trump's uninvite. "So there-

AT ARM'S L

A gesture of support by NFL owners is meaningless without ther

IT WAS the same scene, with slight variation, playing out in every stadium, and it defined the NFL weekend: players standing along the sideline during the national anthem, sometimes with their coach, sometimes with their owner, linked arm-in-arm.

If it was the most common protest, it was also the least effective. After the example set by Colin Kaepernick, it can be assumed that a player taking a knee or sitting

LINKED IN

In Foxborough, the Texans and coach Bill O'Brien (third from left) locked arms, while a dozen Patriots knelt.

fore ain't no invite. Going to White House was a great honor until you showed up!"

"It's hard for us every day, when we're seeing the things he's saying," Warriors coach Steve Kerr said of Trump. "His comments about the NFL players were as bad as anything he's said to this point. It was awful. You're talking about young men who are peacefully protesting police brutality and racism. Racial inequality. Peacefully protesting—hallmarks of our country. Come on."

HAVE OTHER presidents used sports to appeal to their base, to advance agendas? Of course. But George W. Bush's uplifting post-9/11 pitch at Yankee Stadium aside, fun-and-games have been used mostly to burnish these leaders' everyman bona fides. JFK played touch football, Richard Nixon drew up a Super Bowl play, Barack Obama couldn't stop bragging about his basketball jones. All sent the same message: *Hey, I'm just like you!* Armchair psychologists would try to go deep on Bush's daily bike ride, on Bill Clinton's and Trump's golf cheating (this publication included), but in the end it was featherweight stuff. Play. Everyone knew it.

That exasperation bubbling beneath Kerr's two most urgent words—*Come on*—signals something altogether new. Anybody who hoped to insulate him- or herself in a world of bats and balls, ignore the anthem protesters and, as the saying goes, *stick to sports*, will not have it easy the next few months (if not years).

We should have seen it coming. After all, "locker room talk" is how Trump explained his recorded boast to *Access Hollywood*'s Billy Bush about sexual assault, and such flippancy—not to mention the glaring lack of familiarity with how grown men speak—made it obvious that he regards the athletic world as morally bankrupt and, just as alarming, simplistic. To Trump, the thought that players can both love their country *and* kneel during the national anthem as a means of pointing out social inequity is impossible. "Wouldn't you love to see one of these NFL owners, when somebody disrespects our flag, say, "Get that son of a bitch off the field right now,' " Trump said in Huntsville. "Out! He's fired!"

The thought that a "beautiful tackle" could also do serious brain damage, or that repeated hits to the head have been proved such a menace to players that the NFL has agreed to pay up to $1 billion in damages, or that one can love football while ceding its ravages, allows for the kind of paradox our sitting president would rather not entertain.

"Today, if you hit too hard? 'Fifteen yards! Throw him out of the game!' " Trump complained at his rally. "They're ruining the game! Right? That's what [players] *want* to do; they *want* to hit! . . . It is hurting the game."

> I don't think it is a fight against Trump. I think we need to focus on the real problem. The inequality, the police brutality, that's the real problem."
> **–Kenny Vaccaro,** *Saints*

This sounded like the nattering of someone who has been asleep for the last decade or, worse, whose mind admits no reality beyond its own. Add in that visceral growl when Trump repeated "He's fired!" last Friday, or his recent retweets of video clips portraying him thrashing a CNN stand-in or hitting a golf ball that sends Hillary Clinton sprawling, and it's reasonable to consider that

ERICK W. RASCO

...ENGTH

...n taking real action ★ BY JONATHAN JONES

out the national anthem is protesting the injustices facing people of color in America, and the lack of accountability when unarmed black and brown people are harassed, assaulted or killed by law enforcement.

To stand for the anthem does not mean you oppose these injustices, of course. But linking arms presents a faux show of unity that promotes the false ideal that we are one, that we are all treated the same and that we're in this fight together.

What is this show of unity? If anything, the linked arms appear to be a sign of solidarity against President Trump, a man with a history of inserting himself into conversations that do not include him. But Kaepernick's protest isn't about Trump or the flag but about racism and inequality; Trump perverted this to make it all about him.

Panthers defensive end Julius Peppers stayed inside the locker room during the anthem on Sunday because "there are only a few times in life when you have a chance to stand up for something you believe in." But the arm-in-arm stances are moderate compromises that point to an issue off in the distance rather than a confrontation of ugly truths about the country—*We're thinking about the issues but we can't be bothered right now with solutions.* Protests are designed to make you feel uncomfortable, to motivate change. Linked arms do little.

But it was the appearances in London and in Landover, Md., by team owners Shad Khan of Jacksonville and Dan Snyder of Washington that stripped the "protest" of credibility. They stood linked with their employees on Sunday; each had given $1 million to Trump's inaugural committee—for a candidate who had promised citizens further division through bigoted, reckless rhetoric.

The presence of Khan and Snyder on the sideline was an affront to the cause championed by Kaepernick. If you truly stand with your players—some of whom condemned the President after the game—anything short of a total rebuke of Trump and a sizable donation to an organization promoting justice would be insufficient.

But there they were in this charade of unity, months after giving a fortune to celebrate a man who believes the players beside them are sons of bitches. And there wasn't a hint of irony.

his brain isn't the prime organ at work here. Maybe, like many a 12-year-old boy, Trump works mostly from his gut and crotch and just can't resist the fun of watching things blow up. Maybe we've got our first Child-in-Chief.

FUNNY. AMID all that slinging of red meat in Huntsville, Trump produced one revealing, all-but-ignored moment. "The NFL ratings are down massively," he began, jaw ajut. Then a pleasing thought hit; the President smiled and poked both hands at his own chest. "Now, the No. 1 reason happens to be that they like watching what's happening with yours truly," he said. "They like what's happening."

He was, just then, the very picture of self-satisfaction. Could Trump possibly believe he'd become America's top spectator sport? It seemed absurd. But recall that in the early 1980s he had finagled desperately through the upstart USFL to become an NFL owner and failed; had tried in '88 to buy the Patriots and failed; had tried in 2014 to buy the Bills and failed. At one point he began showing up at the U.S. Open in an Arthur Ashe Stadium luxury box, stepping forward at key moments to gaze imperiously over the crowd—a man, in Jimmy Breslin's saw about the power-hungry, in search of a balcony. But the people weren't there to see him.

Now everything is different. Come kickoff on Sunday, every football klatch buzzed with talk of Trump, tweets, disrespect. Every game began with a demonstration during the national anthem: Players and coaches locked arms with owners, line upon line; some 200 players, more than ever, declined to stand; three teams stayed in the locker room during the song. Trump took it all in.

Like rattled foreign leaders and media types, like the Republican party and Congress and the Fed officials and the NGO staffers and the diplomats seeking consistency and calm, like all those Wall Street swells and bookish types who once dismissed him as too lightweight, too tabloid, sports waited to see what he'd do next. At 2:20 p.m., the tweet finally landed, impervious.

"Great solidarity for our National Anthem and for our Country," Trump wrote. "Standing with locked arms is good, kneeling is not acceptable. Bad ratings!"

In Indianapolis, Browns QB DeShone Kizer felt the need to declare after his game, "I'm no son of a bitch." So now, along with the rest of the week, Trump had Sunday, too. His dream came true. Now everything, nationwide, was all about him.□


Indians
Franklin

THE NEXT STEP
It took a while for Lindor, like many of his teammates, to find his groove this season. When the Tribe did, the results were epic.

MLB

SEVENTH SONS

LAST YEAR THE INDIANS CAME *THISCLOSE* TO WINNING GAME 7 OF THE WORLD SERIES. THE LOSS COULD HAVE BEEN CRUSHING. INSTEAD, IT BECAME FUEL

BY TOM VERDUCCI

Photograph by
Jason Miller/Getty Images

ONE DAY this summer, preparing to play the Yankees, Indians shortstop Francisco Lindor sat at a clubhouse monitor to watch a video loop of his at bats against New York pitchers. Suddenly Aroldis Chapman, the Yankees' closer, popped up on the screen—but the footage was from Game 7 of last year's World Series, when Chapman pitched for the Cubs.

"No!" shouted Lindor, who quickly switched the video to another pitcher—from any other day of his life. "I can't look. I don't want to see it!"

Lindor is a self-described television fanatic. "I fall asleep every night with the TV on," the 23-year-old All-Star says. But for 2½ weeks after the Indians' 8–7 loss last Nov. 2—one of the most meaningful and dramatic baseball games ever, and the most-watched in a generation—Lindor refused to turn on the tube, fearing he could not escape Game 7 highlights or reminders as he channel-surfed. Then he packed up for a vacation to Israel.

Cody Allen, Cleveland's closer, chose a similar media exile. He departed immediately for a vacation in Big Sur, Calif., where he turned his back on Game 7 for 10 days by driving the Pacific Coast Highway, reading five books—and never once firing up the TV.

"I just flushed it," he says of Game 7.

Indians president of baseball operations Chris Antonetti, asked last week if he has watched the game again, said, "Nope. I've seen the last out and Rajai [Davis's] home run, and that's about it. There may come a day, but not now."

Manager Terry Francona has yet to even replay Game 7 in his head, let alone watch it. "I went in three days later and got my hip [surgery] done," Francona says. "I woke up and thought we won. With all the pain meds, I was like, When's the parade?"

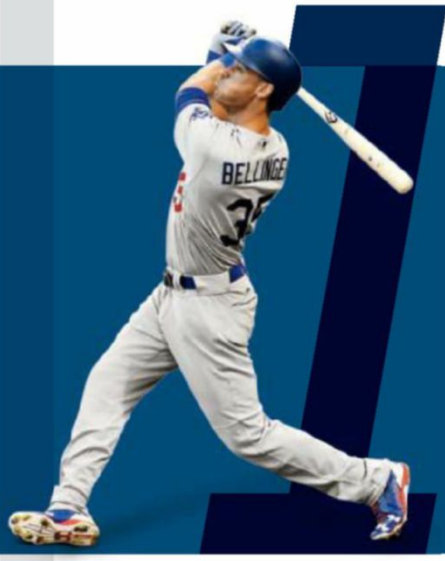
SEVEN.

No number is more hallowed. The seas we sail on, the continents we walk on, the deadly sins we fear, the colors we see in the rainbow, the days of the week we count—all are famed and familiar as bundles of seven. Religions also exalt seven, whether in blessings, heavens or sacraments. Ancient Egyptians equated seven with wholeness or perfection.

And so it is in baseball. Seven, as in the seventh game of the last series in the seventh month of the season, is as far as a club can venture to win a championship—or lose it. Even seven runs in the seventh game weren't enough last year for the Indians—for just the third time in 37 decisive Game 7s (after the 1925 Senators and the '60 Yankees). Cleveland became the first team ever to lose Game 7 in extra innings on its home field. Coupled with a 3–2 loss to the Cubs in Game 5, a 9–3 loss in Game 6 and another Game 7 extra-inning loss in 1997 (3–2 to the Marlins), the Indians have played four games to win their first championship since 1948 and lost all of them—three by one run. No other ringless franchise of the last 69 years has been so heartbreakingly close so often.

It has been so long since the Indians won the World Series that the pitcher who closed their last championship was a World War II veteran who survived a torpedo attack in the South Pacific. Gene Bearden was a machinist on the USS *Helena* when it went down on July 6, 1943; 168 of his fellow crew members were lost. Five years later, floating the knuckleball he learned in the minors under Casey Stengel after the war, and pitching with metal plates in his head and knee, Bearden secured the last five outs of a 4–3 win over the Braves in Boston.

AL TIELEMANS (3); DAVID BANKS/GETTY IMAGES (BELLINGER)



SIX PLAYOFF QUESTIONS

DOES MOMENTUM MATTER?

Just as baseball fans were getting used to a world in which the Dodgers were the best team of all time and the Indians were suffering from a Game 7 letdown, everything changed: Los Angeles couldn't win (it lost 16 of 17, including 11 straight) ,and Cleveland couldn't lose (an AL-record 22 victories in a row, and a 30–4 record over the last five weeks). Surely this means that Cody Bellinger *(left)* and the Dodgers are likely to bow out in the NLDS while the Indians cruise into the World Series? Fortunately for L.A., a study by SI's Jay Jaffe found that momentum doesn't matter going into the playoffs. If a team goes 25–5 in the final month, it has no greater chance of piling up postseason wins than a team that finished with the same number of overall victories despite a late-season tailspin. In other words, the (at week's end) 98-win Indians and the 99-win Dodgers should have similar chances to keep playing deep into October. *–STEPHANIE APSTEIN*

ALL THE RAJAI

After Davis's blast, the Indians and their fans thought the 68-year title drought was about to end.

So many years have passed that a time-worn Indians fan might be forgiven for wailing, like a woozy post-op Francona, "When's the parade?" But Cleveland has played so sublimely that now even the most sober-minded Tribe faithful might be asking the same question. Beginning on Aug. 24, Cleveland went on a 27–1 run that included a never-before-seen 22 wins in a row. (MLB recognizes a 26-game streak by the 1916 New York Giants as the record, but that included a tie game, which was not official, smack in the middle of it.) Down to the last strike in the ninth inning against the Royals, Lindor made the 22nd straight win possible with an RBI double. A sellout crowd, on its feet throughout the ninth, went home giddy when outfielder Jay Bruce delivered the wining double the next inning. The streets around Progressive Field clogged with celebrants, car horns honking, shouting and cheering in decibels beyond even the level of the World Series games there, when Cubs fans had bought up hordes of tickets.

Says Allen, the winner that night, "What was I thinking? I was thinking, We're going to walk 'em off. That's what it's been like around here."

It turns out seven begets strength even to the defeated. Among Game 7 losers, the past seven (what else?) all made the playoffs, including the 2012 Rangers, who lost another World Series, and the '15 Royals, Cleveland's role models, who returned and won it. Six of those seven had more victories in the season after their Game 7 loss.

Count the Indians, with 98 wins at week's end, among that group. They'll enter the postseason with

CAN STARS GET HEALTHY?

It's unlikely that any team can match the dramatic success of last year's Cubs, who quietly rehabbed Kyle Schwarber—six months removed from surgery to repair a torn left ACL and LCL—and added him to their World Series roster as a DH. This year's biggest shelved star, Nationals rightfielder Bryce Harper, plans to return from a left-knee injury in time for the postseason, which could make Washington the NL favorites. Outfielder Michael Brantley, who has missed six weeks with a right-ankle injury, could do the same for the Indians in the AL, but he suffered a setback last week. Red Sox starter David Price has returned from left-elbow pain and could be an x-factor as a multi-inning reliever, but given his shaky work this season, don't expect him to become Boston's answer to Andrew Miller. And Chicago will try to re-create some of last year's Schwarber magic: No. 2 starter Jake Arrieta *(left)* returned last week from a right-hamstring strain and allowed only one run in five innings. —S.A.

the most prolific strikeout pitching staff in baseball history: 1,543 K's through Sunday and a 3.9 strikeout-to-walk rate, both records. They have the leading bullpen in baseball (2.84 ERA), while working with the best run differential (+241) and the top record on the road (53–28)—all key indicators for postseason success.

"Because of last year, now we know what it takes to get all the way to the last game," Lindor says. "It's not just an idea. That's what we prepare for. And the way that happens is, every day everyone just thinks about ways to get better."

WHEN FRANCONA REASSEMBLED his team for spring training this year in the appropriately named Arizona town of Goodyear (given its ending, 2016 wasn't quite a *great* year), the manager did his best to put last season behind his players. He said, "I don't want the new guys [on the team] to always be thinking, *God, they're always talking about 2016*. They're good memories, but they're memories."

Francona already knew what it was like to lose a Game 7, though in 2008 it was one game for the AL pennant, against a Rays team managed by Joe Maddon, now the Cubs' manager. Francona's Red Sox led Tampa Bay 1–0 heading to the fourth inning but lost 3–1, leaving a boatload of runners on base.

"It absolutely devastated me," Francona says. "It took me the longest time to get over it. Last year I think pride won out. You're disappointed, but I was so damn proud."

Game 7 was the banyan of managerial decision trees. Francona, for instance, put the eventual go-ahead run on base with an intentional walk in the 10th inning (Anthony Rizzo), one of two intentional passes that were immediately followed by unusual run-scoring hits. Ben Zobrist, batting lefthanded, slashed an opposite-field ground-ball double—he had done so just four times in the previous three years—and Miguel Montero sliced an opposite-field ground-ball single, which he had not done in more than four months.

FUN RUN
Edwin Encarnación joined Lindor (right) and Carlos Santana to make Cleveland one of the AL's highest-scoring teams.

The Indians' last at bat, with the tying run on base, fell to bench player Michael Martínez, who had not had a hit in 48 days. Francona had replaced a better hitter but weaker defender, Coco Crisp, with Martínez in the ninth, with the potential tie-breaking run on third with one out. Martínez grounded out.

The late manager Gene Mauch once told Maddon that a manager manages a game three times: before it's played, while it's played and after it's played. "I don't really feel like that," Francona says. "I understand the before and during. But I feel like once I'm ready for the game, I'm ready. Then I just do what I think is right, have

JASON MILLER/GETTY IMAGES (TOP); JOEL AUERBACH/GETTY IMAGES (BELTRAN)

WHO'S DUE FOR A BREAKOUT. . . ?

Predicting playoff performance is almost impossible; anything can happen over five (or 12 or 17) games. That said, luck—good or bad—is bound to change at some point, and the postseason is as good a time as any. Curtis Granderson, for example, has hit .139 since he joined the Dodgers from the Mets in mid-August, but a closer look at the numbers reveals that he's been unsustainably unfortunate: He's hitting the ball harder than ever, yet nearly 90% of the time that he puts a pitch in play, defenses turn it into an out. If Granderson keeps doing what he's doing, he'll get better results sooner or later—for Los Angeles's sake, the sooner the better. Astros outfielder Carlos Beltrán *(left)* is experiencing a similar disparity in process and result. And in alarming news for his future opponents, Red Sox ace Chris Sale, of the 2.75 ERA, has also been unlucky; his strikeout rate, walk rate and home run rate indicate that his ERA should actually be closer to 2.22. —S.A.

MATTHEW STOCKMAN/GETTY IMAGES (GONZALEZ)

confidence enough in what I'm doing, answer the questions and move on."

In Game 7, Indians ace Corey Kluber failed to strike out a batter for the first time as a major league starter. After pitching just four innings, he watched the rest of the game on a television in a small room behind the Indians' dugout, where he saw Davis homer off Chapman to tie the game in the eighth. (The lockers in the Cubs' clubhouse had just been covered with protective plastic in anticipation of the postgame celebration. After Davis's two-run shot, attendants scrambled to tear down the sheeting.) Allen joined Kluber in the room the next inning, after Francona replaced Allen with Bryan Shaw with one out and a runner at first.

"It was a helpless feeling," Allen says. "I had finished every playoff game for us except Game 4, when we had a big lead. Now all I could do was watch. We didn't bother icing because this was it. The last game.

"People say Corey Kluber doesn't show emotion, but you should have seen us in that room. When Frankie [Lindor] made that play on [Dexter] Fowler to end the ninth, we were acting like a couple of morons, throwing chairs around and cheering and hollering. And then in the bottom of the inning, [Jason] Kipnis hit that foul and we just went crazy. . . . We're talking about a fraction of an inch off the bat. That's how small the difference is between winning and losing."

Kipnis—a tried-and-true Chicagoan who attended the 2003 NLCS at Wrigley Field, lived on the same block as Steve Bartman and went to the same high school as Ferris Bueller—smashed a hanging slider from Chapman, but well foul down the rightfield line. He eventually struck out. After Lindor flied out on the next pitch, with the last game of the year tied after nine innings, rain fell hard enough that umpire Joe West ordered the field covered.

When the Indians retreated to their clubhouse, they were greeted by a visual reminder of just how close they stood to winning the World Series: Now *their* lockers were covered in plastic sheeting, most of which was pinned up.

Lindor repaired to the team's weight room, where he unrolled a cushioned mat on the floor, plopped down and took a nap. It already had been a long, emotional day. Driving to the ballpark that afternoon, he got a call from his older sister, Legna. She had been diagnosed with cervical cancer during the summer.

"I've got some good news," she said.

"What's that?"

"I am now cancer-free."

Lindor, 23, was thrilled. He is close to Legna, 35, whom he regards as a role model. "I watched what she did, how she acted, and followed her," he says. He thanked God for the news, then realized the biggest game of his baseball life suddenly seemed a bit smaller.

"Legna," he told his big sister, "no matter what happens tonight, we've got our win."

THE RAIN DELAY lasted only 17 minutes. Shaw returned to the mound. Including spring training and the postseason, it was his 95th game of the year.

"I'm so proud of all our guys," pitching coach Mickey Callaway says. "But if you ask me if one pitch stands out, it's the one to Zobrist. We had a lot of success going in with Shaw, with his cutter. But Zobrist handles that ball well. The last two were away. Had the ball been in, who knows? That's the one pitch if I had to pick out one, the one where I go, What if. . . ?"

. . . AND WHO'S DUE FOR A SLUMP?

Dodgers outfielder Chris Taylor may be facing a reckoning. The formerly middling prospect broke out this year with an OPS of .867, but some of that has come on an unusually good batting average on balls in play (.362), which is likely to regress. In fact, it's already begun: After hitting .305 with a .530 slugging percentage through August, Taylor is so far hitting .202 and slugging .348 in September. Meanwhile, lefthander Gio González *(left)* has had a terrific year—his 2.68 ERA is tied for third best in the NL—but the same peripheral numbers that portend a good future for Chris Sale suggest that there could be trouble ahead for the Nationals' No. 3 starter. González is striking out, walking and allowing home runs to batters roughly as often as he did last year, when his ERA was 4.57. —S.A.

Says Allen, "It was a hollow feeling. You start beating yourself up. I'm thinking, *Well, what if I didn't walk [David] Ross to start the [ninth] inning?* Then Shaw can come in the game clean rather than have to come in and get two outs, wait out a delay and then go back out for another inning. What if. . . ?"

Left in the on-deck circle when Game 7 ended was Yan Gomes, who wears number 7.

Antonetti turned to his daughters, Mya, 11, who had been a beacon of optimism all postseason, and Ella, 8. Mya was crying.

"What are you going to do now, Daddy?" she asked.

"IF YOU'RE ASKING IF I'VE GAINED PERSPECTIVE? NO." SAYS FRANCONA. "NEVER HAD IT. *NEVER WILL.*"

"I'm going to go downstairs and look for Mr. Epstein and Mr. Hoyer and congratulate them on a job well done," he replied, referring to Cubs executives Theo Epstein and Jed Hoyer.

Says Antonetti, "It gave me a chance to share a life lesson with my daughters. The lesson was about losing, that even though we were so disappointed we didn't win, there's a right way of handling it."

Despite Francona's spring warning, and despite avoiding anything to do with Game 7, the Indians would need months to find their groove again. They fell to 29–28 on June 7, after an 8–1 loss in Colorado. Francona, simmering all week, finally blew a gasket, airing out his team in what he called his biggest outburst since managing the Phillies in the late '90s. He sensed a lack of attention to detail and a lack of urgency.

"The feeling the first couple of months was, 'Oh, we'll be O.K. It's a long season,' " Lindor says. "I think he said what needed to be said."

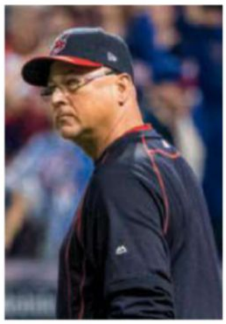
Since Francona's blowup the Indians are 69–30. One week after that, during a game against the Dodgers, Francona felt his heart racing and grew dizzy. He rushed out of the game and went to a hospital, where doctors told him they would monitor the situation. Thirteen days later he experienced the same symptoms. He started meeting with reporters in the clubhouse rather than the dugout before road games, just to save himself some steps. But eight days after his second episode, in the fifth inning of a game against the Padres, his heart started pounding 200 beats per minute. He grew so light-headed, he thought he was going to pass out.

Back to the hospital he went, this time for several days of more intensive tests. The diagnosis was an irregular heartbeat; he needed cardiac ablation surgery. It took 10 hours. By Francona's count it

CHRISTIAN PETERSEN/GETTY IMAGES (TOP); STEPHEN GREEN (MILLER)

IS IT ANOTHER YEAR OF THE BULLPEN?

Terry Francona set the tone early last October when he summoned lefty Andrew Miller (left) in the fifth inning of Game 1 of the ALDS to protect the Indians' one-run lead. Relievers ended up throwing 43% of the innings in last year's postseason, the most in the LCS era. Their 9.5 strikeouts per nine innings were second only to the 9.6 in 2015. Still, statistically inclined observers, who have long called for more creative bullpen usage, shouldn't get too excited: Those numbers were skewed by Cleveland's deep run and, more important, this year's playoffs feature significantly stronger rotations. A healthy Carlos Carrasco joins Corey Kluber for the Indians; the Dodgers supplemented Clayton Kershaw with Yu Darvish; the Nationals can follow Max Scherzer with a healthy Stephen Strasburg. You can expect to see fewer firemen because the starters will allow fewer fires. —S.A.



WHAT IFS
Francona (above) and Kluber have had plenty of time to ponder Game 7, when Cleveland's ace struggled.

was about the 20th operation he has endured, for ailments including blood clots in his lungs, a staph infection, two knee replacements and the hip replacement.

"I've had health issues for years," says the 58-year-old master of self-deprecation. "If you're asking if I've gained perspective? No. Never had it. Never will."

Doctors told him he would have to make concessions. He has to wear a heart monitor in the dugout occasionally. He has to stay off his feet more. When the Indians take batting practice, Francona no longer commands his post near the batting cage but instead heads inside to his office, leaving bench coach Brad Mills to oversee BP.

Says Antonetti, "He cares so much, it takes a toll on him, regardless of what's going on, good or bad."

"I didn't come here to go to pasture," Francona says. "Some of the job is harder physically than it used to be, with age and health. That's just reality. Someday, if I get to the point where I feel like I'm shortchanging the organization, I'd probably get out. But I don't want to. I love what I'm doing."

WHAT'S NOT to love? Francona has a team inspired and informed by losing Game 7 that now is playing even better baseball, in a town where the club is a civic treasure. When Francona was born, his father, Tito, was an Indians outfielder. It was just Year 11 of the Great Drought. There have been 1,211 men who played for Cleveland during this epochal wait. The senior Francona ranks 30th among them in games played in vain. Tito will turn 84 on Nov. 4, three days after Game 7 of the next World Series is scheduled.

In Terry's lifetime he has seen the four longest title droughts end: the Cubs' (108 years, in 2016), the Phillies' (97 years, 1980), the White Sox' (88 years, 2005) and the Red Sox' (86 years, 2004, with Francona as manager). He has played or managed in all four organizations. The next-longest drought, and the longest active one, belongs to his current employer.

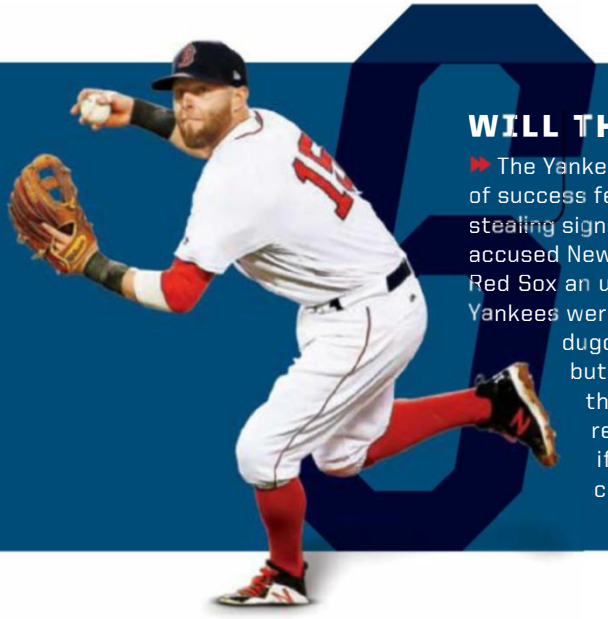
On the night Cleveland lost Game 7, Francona gathered his team in the clubhouse and told them how proud he was of them. It was 2 a.m. before most of his players began to head home. Lindor, as he walked a long corridor under Progressive Field, ran into Cubs infielder Javy Báez, his good friend and fellow Puerto Rican. Lindor hugged Báez and told him how happy he was for him. He continued outside to the players' parking lot, which is surrounded by a tall fence.

"I remember being mentally exhausted," Lindor says. "Just exhausted. There were people singing that Cubs song, 'Go, Cubs, Go!' I got in my car. My mom and two older sisters were with me. They were crying. I asked them, 'Why are you crying?' They said, 'We lost the World Series.'

"I said, 'No, we didn't. Well, yes we did . . . and it's the World Series and it's important. But we went for it. We never stopped playing. And we will be better for it.' "

The headlights made the road home wink and glisten because of the rain that had fallen just hard and long enough to pause Game 7. With every revolution of the wheels, Game 7 fell further behind, and the opportunity of this next postseason drew nearer. □

AL TIELEMANS (FRANCONA); ADAM GLANZMAN/GETTY IMAGES (DUSTIN PEDROIA)



WILL THERE BE SIGN-STEALING DRAMA?

The Yankees–Red Sox rivalry, dormant in recent years as the two teams' cycles of success fell out of sync, got a jolt this September. New York accused Boston of stealing signs using an Apple Watch—or maybe it was a FitBit—and Boston countered accused New York of using a YES Network camera to do the same. (MLB fined the Red Sox an undisclosed amount for using an electronic device in the dugout; the Yankees were fined a lesser undisclosed amount for a past infraction involving a dugout phone.) The division front-runners would not meet until the ALCS, but sign-stealing story lines will pervade the postseason no matter what the matchup is. With monitors now behind every dugout as part of the replay system, nearly every team is taking advantage of the possibilities, if usually without smart watches. Expect many catcher-pitcher conferences on the mound this October to change up the signs. —S.A.

WILD MAN CER AGE

SURFING | PAGE 48

NOW 53, AMERICA'S MOST RECOGNIZABLE
PEERS SURRENDER TO CAUTIOUSNESS. BU

IS STILL LOOKING FOR A BIGGER, BADDER WAVE. A NEW DOCUMENTARY REVEALS WHAT PUSHES HIM: FEAR—OF NO LONGER FEELING ALIVE

BY CHRIS BALLARD

photographs by JENNIFER CAWLEY
courtesy laird apparel

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SURFER HAS SEEN MOST OF HIS
T **LAIRD HAMILTON**

OF A

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WHO TELLS HIS STORY
Known for his love of isolation, Hamilton opened himself up to Oscar-nominated filmmaker Rory Kennedy.

BONUS
This page has special augmented reality content. To activate an exclusive Laird Hamilton VR experience directed by Elijah Allan-Blitz, download the Life VR App and scan this photo with the AR camera.

ON AN afternoon in the winter of 2004, big-wave surfer Darrick Doerner launched into a 50-footer at Jaws, the fabled break at Pe'ahi, on the North Shore of Maui. As he began his descent, Doerner found his path blocked by another rider, forcing him down and across the face of the wave. An avalanche of whitewater crashed behind Doerner. The ocean sucked him down.

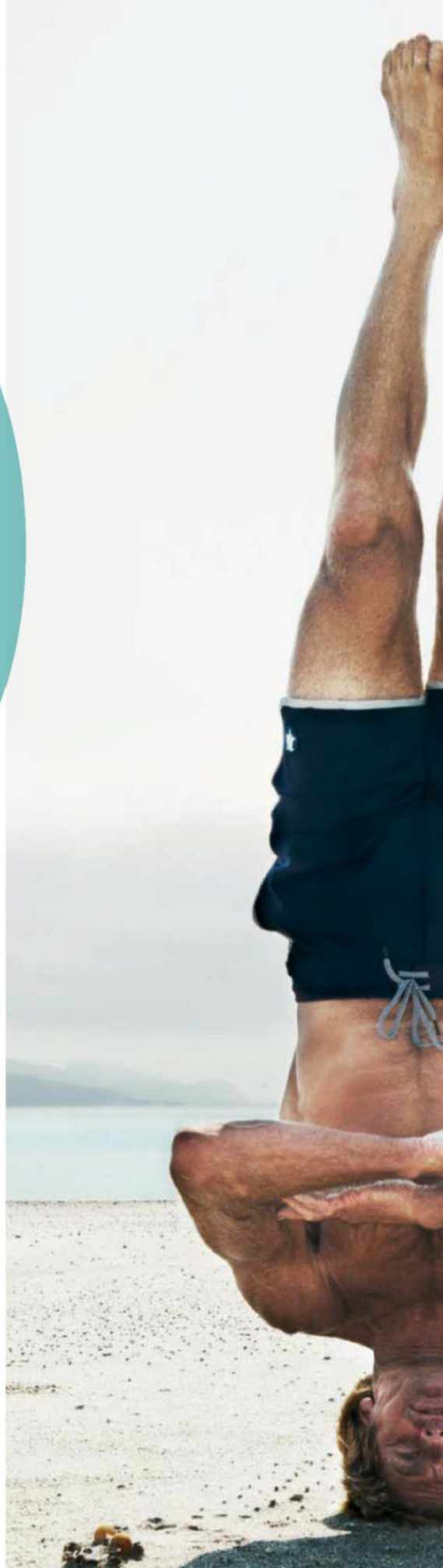
Not everyone resurfaces at Jaws—which has been called "liquid napalm." Doerner did, but he got pummeled again. He ended up stranded on a shelf of jagged rocks, awaiting helicopter rescue alongside his friend Laird Hamilton, who had towed him into the wave on a Jet Ski, then tried to save him.

Doerner had spent the bulk of his 47 years in the water, many of them chasing monster swells. But something changed that day. "It was one of the most horrific experiences I ever had, almost dying," Doerner says in *Take Every Wave*, a new documentary by Rory Kennedy about Hamilton. "I lost everything on that wipeout. I lost my board, I lost my self-esteem. I never surfed Pe'ahi again."

A half-dozen years later, back on Maui's North Shore, Brett Lickle, another member of Hamilton's inner circle, got crushed by a "tank of a wave" after towing in Hamilton. The fin of Hamilton's board sliced open Lickle's leg from the Achilles to the back of the knee. Lickle survived. Still: "That was the end of it for me," he says in the film. "After that trip, the whole accident, it was like I had my ticket out of the gang. I look at big waves now and I'm just freaking chicken, I'm running for the corners."

Not Hamilton. After Lickle crashed, Hamilton used his wet suit as a tourniquet for his friend's leg before recovering the Jet Ski and racing Lickle to shore for medical assistance. Then he turned around and headed back out to the ocean.

OVER THE last decade Tim Woodman, a sports psychology professor at the Bangor University in Wales, has studied the psychological profile of men and women who participate in high-risk sports. He has come to believe many have a condition called alexithymia, a difficulty in expressing and experiencing emotions. Unable to feel and connect in their daily lives, they instead leap from the sky, climb peaks and slice down the face of big waves, the better to engage, and then conquer, the most primal sensation: fear.



LAIRD

COURTESY OF SUNDANCE SELECTS. A SUNDANCE SELECTS RELEASE

In *Take Every Wave*, Hamilton certainly provides an interesting case study. Born in 1964, he never knew his biological father. When he was one, his mother moved to Oahu, where she met and married Bill Hamilton, a talented surfer. Laird grew up on the beach, studying the men out on the water. Lifeguards rescued him from the undertow so many times that they asked Bill, when he surfed, to lock Laird up at home.

One of the few white kids in most of his classes, Hamilton eventually found "equality," as he puts it, in the ocean. But not before being a huge pain the ass. In the second grade, after he cursed repeatedly in class, his teacher left to get the principal. In the interim Hamilton scrawled every obscenity he knew on the blackboard and then picked up all the chairs and heaved them out the window. Bill didn't shy away from physical discipline, paddling Laird. His younger half brother, Lyon, surmises that had it not been for surfing, Laird, who dropped out of school in the 11th grade, might have ended up in jail.

HAMILTON LIVED IN A REMOTE SURF HUT WITHOUT A PHONE AND TRAVELED THE WORLD IN SEARCH OF *"the unknown and the undone."*

But surf culture was in the midst of a boom, and Hamilton was a natural in the water, fluid and inventive. He also embodied America's idea of a surf god: tall, straw blond, broad-chested, fearless. An older surfer, Buzzy Kerbox, introduced him to modeling, and Bruce Weber shot Hamilton with Brooke Shields for LIFE magazine in 1983. A director cast him as the villain in *North Shore*, a goofy 1987 surf movie.

From the start Hamilton eschewed traditional surfing contests, saying, "I didn't reject competition so much as judgment." But one senses his reasons ran deeper than that. He also sometimes refused to go on casting calls for acting and modeling jobs, surrendering potential paydays. Men like Hamilton don't always play well with others. On the one hand, he sought isolation. He lived in a remote surf hut without a phone—he built a wooden box at the end of the driveway housing an answering machine that he could check selectively—and traveled the world in search of "the unknown and the undone."

At the same time, celebrity beckoned. In the late 1990s, after pioneering tow-in surfing—essentially being pulled by a Jet Ski into a swell that is too big to paddle into, allowing enough speed to catch enormous waves—he conquered Jaws. Then, on Aug. 17, 2000, at Teahupo'o reef in Tahiti, he rode what became known as the Millennium Wave, or, in the Lebowski-ese of the film, "the wave of heaviest consequence," a thick, crashing tube that was previously thought unrideable.

Hamilton appeared on *Letterman* and *60 Minutes*, on the cover of *Surfer*, *Esquire* and *National Geographic*. Authors and filmmakers sought him out. Meanwhile, his wife, retired volleyball star Gabrielle Reece, with whom he has two daughters, was an icon in her own right. Over the years he has made millions off being Laird Hamilton, to the point where now, at 53, even though he's still in the water every

day, he exists as personal brand more than surfer. His own line of clothes, Laird Apparel, launched in 2015, and *Take Every Wave*, while entertaining and visually stunning, has the feel of a legacy project.

In part because of his fame, Hamilton remains disconnected from the community he helped create. He went through what the film terms a "divorce" from his closest colleagues, including Kerbox, Doerner and Lickle, who were known as the Strapped Crew because they were the first to attach foot straps to a board for greater control on big waves. And while no one doubts Hamilton's inventiveness, not all appreciate what it has wrought. In particular, tow-in surfing wrecked what, to many, was a crucial element of the sport: the mind-body connection to the ocean. As Nick Carroll, former editor of *Surfing*, puts it in the film, "Take a normal person and ask them to climb onto a Jet Ski, and instantly they turn into a wanker."

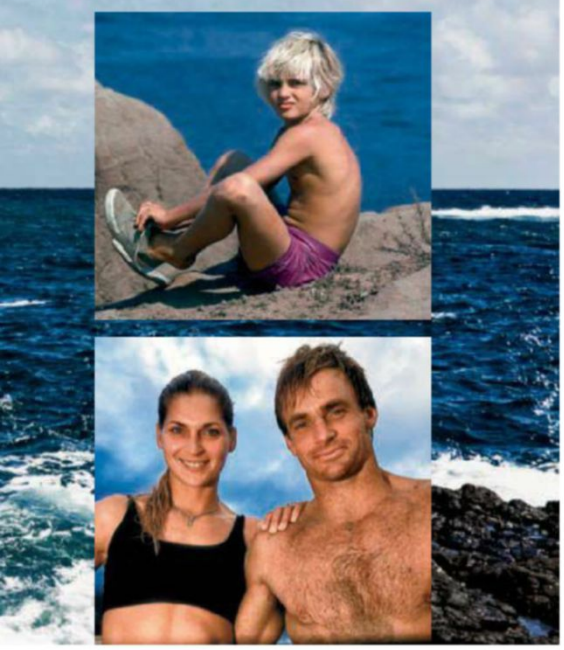
Hamilton is no wanker—his connection to the water is clearly real and passionate—but, while respected, he does not always seem beloved. At various points in the film, other surfers call him "an egomaniac" and "arrogant." Then again, perhaps these are necessary qualities for someone attempting to keep doing what he does well into middle age.

THE MAJORITY of *Take Every Wave* focuses on the what and the how of Hamilton's life. We see him applying Velcro to boards to create surer footing for booties. We see him meeting with an America's Cup sailing team, trading notes on his latest passion, foil surfing, which uses a board with a hydrofoil that extends underwater, making it appear that the rider is hovering above the water. We see him wearing duct tape on a broken ankle. We see him eating kale salad—he is Paleo—and consulting with his doctor, plotting the best strategies to surmount an arthritic hip and a balky back.

All of this is interesting, but the most compelling parts of the film—and Hamilton's larger story—concern the why. Reece touches on his moodiness, and how he needs friction to survive: "If there is something that is uncomfortable, Laird veers toward it and not away from it," is how she once put it. Meanwhile, his peers marvel that he has "all the frickin' balls in the world" and posit that he was born with a "fear defect." Hamilton frames it differently, saying he uses fear "as a tool" and that he has developed a "relationship" with it. Heading out after that Lickle crash? He did so because, as he told me, he didn't want "that doubt seed to grow." (So what is he afraid of? "I'm afraid of my children not being O.K.," he says. "I fear those things that I have the least amount of control over, that are out of my hands.")

Often, extreme athletes such as Hamilton are

SO WHAT IS HAMILTON AFRAID OF? "I'M AFRAID OF MY CHILDREN NOT BEING O.K. ***I fear those things that I have the least amount of control over***, THAT ARE OUT OF MY HANDS."



ON THE MOVE
His 1997 marriage to Reece (left) did nothing to slow Hamilton, who has been chasing extreme challenges since he was a towheaded youth.

WALTER BOLSTER (YOUNG HAMILTON); ROBERT BECK (WITH REECE)

considered inspirations—exaggerated versions of our best selves. Dean Potter began climbing to overcome his childhood fear of falling to his death; ergo, shouldn't we be able to face our own, more mundane fears? In Potter's case his life ended tragically during a wing-suit flight in Yosemite Valley, in 2015. Still, he died on his own terms, and, as the climber Alex Honnold wrote of Potter in TIME, "Dean was making his choices clear-eyed. He knew the risks in his life, and he was still willing to pursue his dreams. How many of the rest of us live with that kind of intention?"

It is a good point. But what if the reckoning comes not when the lights go out but when we cannot pursue those dreams in the first place? In *The Rise of Superman: Decoding the Science of Ultimate Human Performance*, author Steven Kotler recounts an email he received from Chris Malloy, a big-wave surfer and filmmaker. "I hope you talk a little about how utterly f----- we can become when we get too old or broken or smart to keep it up," Malloy wrote. "Not all of us experience a happy life after doing this s--- for a couple of decades. I bet there are some PTSD similarities. It's funny, I read Sebastian Junger's *War* and I learned something: The guys coming home are all screwed up, not because they saw people die as much as they missed the rush. I would never put myself in the same category as those fighting men, but it can be hard to get excited again. Ever. And that feeling sucks."

WHEN I spoke with Hamilton by phone, at 10 a.m. on a recent weekday, he had already been training for hours at his house in Malibu. After waking before dawn, he logged an hour in the sauna at 175°, one of two such daily sessions. He had also iced and worked out in his pool, using dumbbells to mimic activities such as running on the bottom of the sea with a boulder, which he considers the ultimate ocean workout.

Hamilton says he does not think about what comes next. "I'm not going to fall victim to what I'm supposed to do at any certain age," he says. "We subject ourselves to a lot of dogma but also social pressure—'Oh, this is how old you are now, this is the only thing you can do.' "

Instead, he believes that if he can just keep starting over—as when he took up windsurfing, then put straps on boards, then moved to foil surfing—he can stay engaged. "If you're a straight-up adrenaline junkie and it's all about you falling out of the sky to get that feeling, that's going to be a more difficult process," Hamilton says. "But if you're connected to the process of learning, then there are a million things you can do. Hopefully, we can evolve to a point where we can sit under a tree and get that through meditation and breathing."

Hamilton's optimism is impressive, even if it's difficult to imagine him feeling fulfilled through mindfulness alone. Still, his devotion is an (earned) luxury. Most of us are bound by the constraints of our bodies and lives. Sneaking in 45 minutes at the gym counts as a win; two hours in the sauna isn't possible or, if we're being honest, even alluring. Easier, especially as we grow older, to let go of certain expectations, and sensations. For Hamilton it's the opposite. He trains harder than most professional athletes half his age.

In his 1973 book, *The Denial of Death*, anthropologist Ernest Becker argued that everything we do in our lives is, in essence, a defense mechanism against mortality. Life is different, though, for elite athletes, who die two deaths. The second is the one that awaits us all. The first comes when they can no longer compete in their chosen craft, the one that provides meaning and identity. Perhaps this provides insight into the motives of Hamilton and fellow seekers. Perhaps the reason they take such outsized risks is because, for them, that death is the more terrifying of the two. □

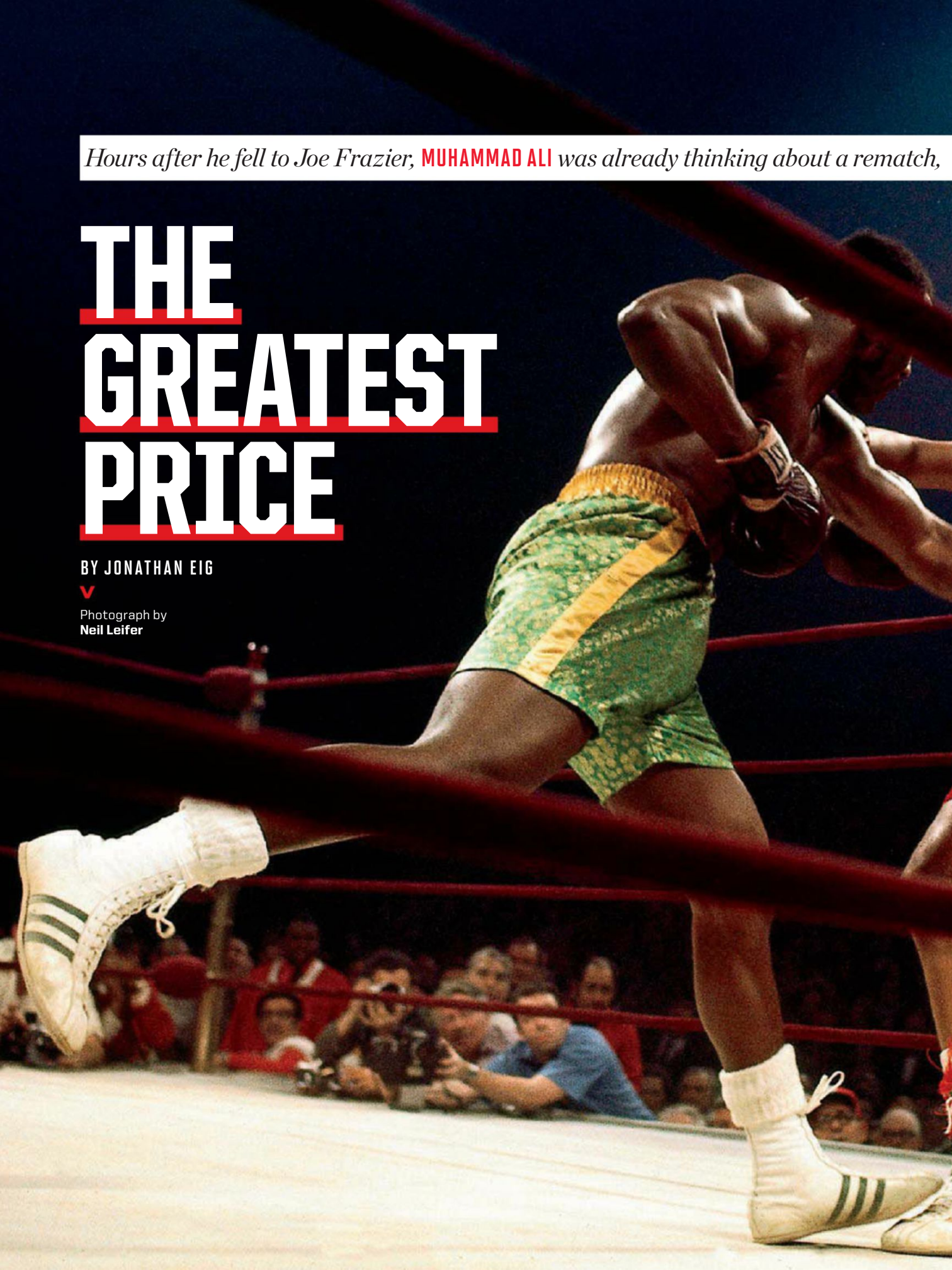
HAMILTON

Hours after he fell to Joe Frazier, **MUHAMMAD ALI** *was already thinking about a rematch,*

THE GREATEST PRICE

BY JONATHAN EIG

Photograph by **Neil Leifer**



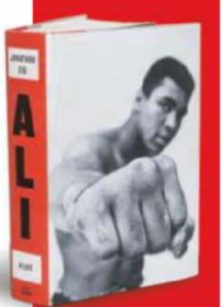
beginning a long—and punishing—journey back to the pinnacle of boxing

MUHAMMAD ALI sat up when Diana Ross arrived in the dressing room. She took an ice bag, pressed it to Ali's jaw and whispered in the ear of the fallen fighter, who had just lost by judges' decision after 15 brutal rounds against Joe Frazier. Ali managed a wink. With his jaw the size of a small pumpkin, Ali then traveled 73 blocks north of Madison Square Garden to Flower Fifth Avenue Hospital for X-rays. Doctors said the jaw wasn't broken, but they suggested Ali stay overnight. He refused. Ali was already talking about a rematch with Joe Frazier, and by refusing medical care he was launching the first attack in his psychological battle.

Not long after the Fight of the Century on March 8, 1971, Ali was training again, preparing for a July 26 fight against Jimmy Ellis, his former sparring partner and Louisville friend. Ali said he intended to retire after three or four more bouts. Once he beat Frazier and won back the championship, he would quit, return to the Nation of Islam as a minister and pass his days in the company of his wife and children. "I can't represent the Muslims again until I quit sports," he said. "I spoke with the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, and he told me, 'If boxing's in your blood, get it out.' "

Once the legal battle over his draft status finally came to a close—the Supreme Court ruled on June 28 to reverse Ali's four-year-old conviction for draft evasion on a technicality (thereby not setting a precedent)—he said remarkably little about race and politics in public. He gave the impression of a man who, above all else, was glad to be a boxer again.

But Ali's body told him that boxing was not a good long-term option. He had gained at least 10 pounds since the Frazier fight. Ever since he'd taken



that beating, he'd found that he lacked the energy for training. Before his three-year exile from boxing in 1967, he said, he would run five or six miles a day, then hit the gym for sparring, jumping rope and heavy-bag work. Now he ran two miles and needed a nap. Ali wasn't the same in the ring or out, and he knew it. "I used to dance every minute, to the left, to the right, always moving and sticking," he told reporters before the Ellis bout. "You don't see that no more. I got another year, and that's it. I could fight for eight more years but I'd be flatfooted. I'd start getting bruised up. I'd start getting knocked down more."

ing jab to keep Ellis from working his way inside the way Frazier had. Comfortable and confident, thumbing his nose, lowering his hands, even daring Ellis to try to hit him, Ali still let the fight go almost the full distance. Only in the 12th and final round did Ali open the kind of full-throttled attack that fans had been waiting to see.

When it was over, Ali made no apologies for his lackluster performance. "I wasn't going to kill myself for this one," he said. "I'm training for Frazier."

IF ALI WAS indeed training for Frazier, he went about it in a less than optimal way. Over the course of 27 months, beginning with the Ellis bout, Ali fought an astonishing 13 times, or roughly once every 60 days. In that same period, Frazier fought only four bouts.

Why would a man fight 13 times in 27 months when he didn't have to? Why would he endure 139 rounds of punishment, plus thousands more rounds of sparring? Why would he absorb about 1,800 punches in those 13 fights? Was his schedule an acknowledgment that he disdained the rigors of training? That the only way he could stay sharp was by scheduling a steady string of bouts? That he needed the money? That he needed to prove he deserved another shot at the championship?

Or was it something even worse? Was Ali's judgment clouded? Ferdie Pacheco, the doctor working in Ali's corner at the time, said he saw signs of lasting brain damage after the Frazier fight in 1971. Pacheco said he told Ali to quit after that fight. Why didn't Ali listen? "There is no f------ cure to quick money," Pacheco said.

No one can say with certainty when brain damage begins to affect a person, although scientists have become much better in recent years at recognizing signs of trouble. When a person nears the age of 30, his brain tissue becomes progressively less elastic, making him more susceptible to

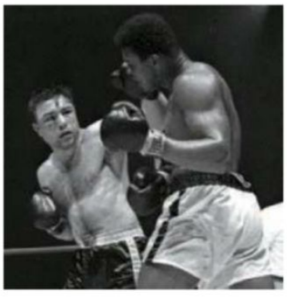
AFTER FRAZIER I

7•26•1971	11•17•1971	12•26•1971	4•1•1972	5•1•1972
JIMMY ELLIS	BUSTER MATHIS	JUERGEN BLIN	MAC FOSTER	GEORGE CHUVALO
W - TKO	*W - UD*	*W - KO*	*W - UD*	*W - UD*

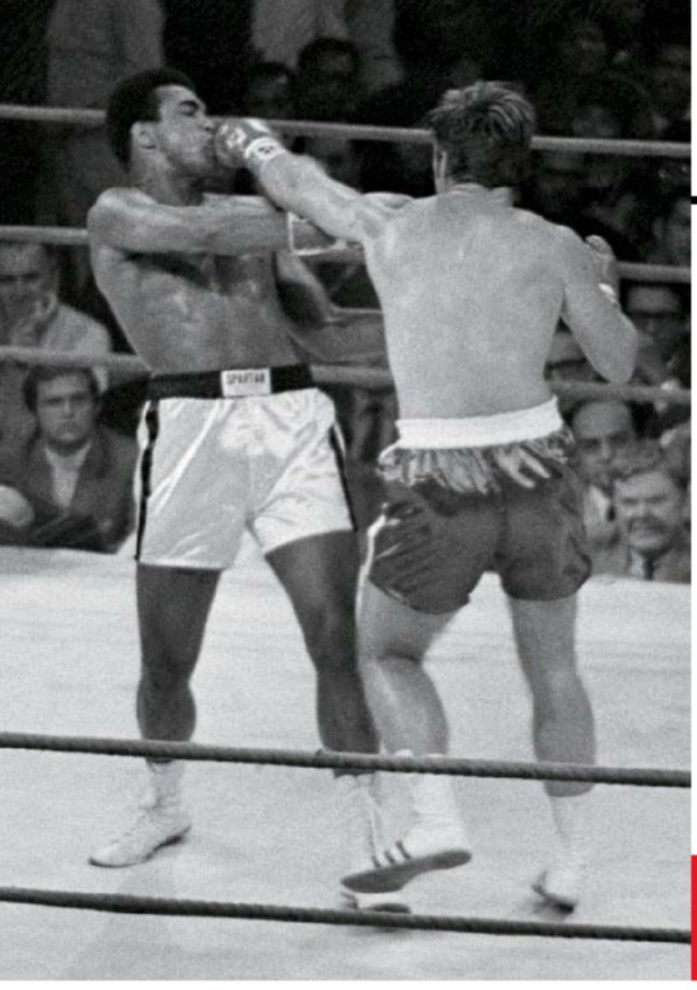
ON JUNE 25, Ali fought several rounds in an exhibition against a young fighter named Eddie Brooks, who hit the former champion with sharp shots, "right on the button," according to Rolly Schwartz, an Olympic boxing referee who watched the sparring match.

Ali wanted his sparring partners to hurt him. He believed that suffering was an important part of his preparation for a fight, that a man could build up tolerance for blows to the head and body in much the same way that one might build up tolerance for spicy food by eating jalapeño peppers. The effect of all those blows over the course of a career would never be quantified, but sometimes, even in the short term, it was clear that Ali's strategy backfired. While sparring one day in July, Brooks hit Ali on the chin and Ali went down, flat on his back, as suddenly and stunningly as he'd gone down against Frazier. According to some accounts in the press, Brooks floored him two more times in the same session, which suggests that Ali may have suffered a concussion from the first knockdown. In another sparring session, the European heavyweight champion Joe Bugner popped Ali consistently with quick left jabs, and Ali, flat-footed, seemed either incapable of or uninterested in getting out of the way.

Against Ellis, Ali was lazy. But while overweight and sluggish, he was still 30 pounds heavier than his opponent and much stronger. He used his crack-



AP (MATHIS, CHUVALO, QUARRY); MARTIN/SVEN SIMON/PICTURE-ALLIANCE/DPA/AP (BLIN); HERB SCHARFMAN (PATTERSON)



permanent damage with each passing year and each passing shock to the skull. Boxers are especially susceptible. After all, the point of boxing is to concuss the opponent, to knock him down and out. If attempts were made to render boxing safe for boxers, it would likely mean the end of the sport. When Ali bounced back up after he was floored by Frazier's left hook, boxing fans and writers admired him for his grit. No one stepped in to offer a concussion test. The crowd cheered. The men in his corner urged him on.

The sport's long-term hazards have been studied since 1928, when an American doctor first used the term *punch-drunk* to describe fighters suffering cognitive dysfunctions, including memory loss, aggression, confusion, depression, slurred speech and, eventually, dementia. Today, punch-drunkenness is sometimes associated with chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE), a progressive, degenerative brain disease believed to be caused by repetitive trauma. Scientists now understand that even small jolts to the brain, when repeated, can cause lasting damage. A boxer with a busy schedule probably takes more than a thousand shots to the head a year in bouts and thousands more while sparring.

Did Ali suffer for all those blows to the head? In all likelihood he did. Even as he entered what would later be described as the greatest phase of his career, there were signs of trouble, and they were noticeable every time Ali opened his mouth beginning around 1971.

The act of speaking is not as simple as it seems. Speech and language circuits in the brain work together to form a message, translate that message into movement across more than one hundred muscles from the lungs to the throat to the tongue and lips, and execute those intricate muscle movements to produce sound waves. That's why slurred speech is often one of the first indicators of moderate to severe neurological damage or disease. That's why drunks and stroke victims and victims of neurological disorders such as Parkinson's disease or Lou Gehrig's disease often slur their words.

In 1967, according to a study published this year by speech scientists at Arizona State University, Ali spoke at a rate of 4.07 syllables per second, which is close to average for healthy adults. By 1971 his rate of speech had fallen to 3.80 syllables per second, and it would continue sliding steadily, year by year, fight by fight, over the course of his career. An ordinary adult would see little or no decline in his speaking rate between the ages of 25 and 40, but Ali experienced a drop of more than 26% in that period. His ability to clearly articulate words also declined significantly.

< 6•27•1972 **JERRY QUARRY** *W - TKO* / 7•19•1972 **ALVIN BLUE LEWIS** *W - TKO* / 9•20•1972 **FLOYD PATTERSON** *W - RTD* >

The brash boxer was slowly being hushed, and not by the government or by his critics; he was doing it to himself.

ONE HUNDRED fourteen days after his fight against Ellis, Ali fought Buster Mathis. Ticket sales for the Houston Astrodome fight were moving sluggishly, and Ali couldn't think of anything nasty to say about Mathis to stoke interest. His act was getting old. His poems had grown familiar. His teasing of Howard Cosell had the feel of a well-polished routine. A crowd of only 21,000 showed up as Ali beat Mathis by a unanimous decision in 12 rounds.

Ali fought Juergen Blin 39 days later, winning in a seventh-round knockout. Ninety-seven days after

that, he fought Mac Foster, who lasted 15 hopeless rounds. Thirty days later Ali beat George Chuvalo. He stopped Jerry Quarry 57 days after that on cuts in the seventh round. Twenty-two days later he took out Alvin Blue Lewis in the 11th round. After another 63 days he danced around with Floyd Patterson for a few rounds before landing a punch that opened a cut over Floyd's eye and caused the fight, Patterson's last, to be stopped. And 62 days later Ali knocked out Bob Foster in the eighth. (Foster fired off a lot of sharp jabs and one of the best lines about fighting Ali: "He was never in one place at the same time!")

Eighty-five days after that, on St. Valentine's Day 1973, Ali battered Joe Bugner but couldn't knock him out, winning in a bloody unanimous decision. Ali made it all look easy—that thudding jab, that smooth footwork, that surprising power. But it was still a business, of course. And in the summer of 1972, in the midst of

11•21•1972
BOB FOSTER
W - KO

2•14•1973
JOE BUGNER
W - UD

3•31•1973
KEN NORTON
L - SD

that 27-month run of fights, a new figure entered Ali's life and made a play to supplant Bob Arum as his promoter, someone who would change the business forever.

DON KING was a hustler from Cleveland, a large man (at about 6' 3", 240 pounds) given to large assertions. "I transcend earthly bounds," he once told a journalist. "I never cease to amaze myself; I haven't yet found my limits. I am ready to accept the limits of what I can do, but every time I feel that way—*boom!*—God touches me, and I do something even more stupendous." It was no wonder he and Ali hit it off. King carried himself like the black Al Capone, with a big Afro, lots of sparkling jewelry and pockets full of cash. Mark Kram of SPORTS ILLUSTRATED called him "a 50-carat setting of sparkling vulgarity and raw energy, a man who wants to swallow mountains, walk on oceans, and sleep on clouds." Before his foray into boxing, King allegedly ran an illegal gambling operation. In the late 1960s he was said to be grossing $15,000 a day, most of that money coming from poor, black Cleveland men and women who hoped to hit it big playing his rigged numbers games.

One day in April 1966, King walked into the Manhattan Tap Room in Cleveland. Sam Garrett, a former employee of King's operation, sat at the bar. Garrett owed King $600, and King wanted the money. An argument turned into a fight, and the fight turned into a beating, with Garrett on the sidewalk outside the bar and King kicking the smaller man in the head until blood flowed from Garrett's ears. He later died. A jury found King guilty of second-degree murder, punishable by life in prison. But, in a move that puzzled prosecutors, the judge hearing the case reduced the conviction to manslaughter. King emerged from prison after serving three years and 11 months, and he was later pardoned.

In 1971, on his first day out of prison, King got a visit from his friend Lloyd Price, the legendary singer and songwriter. The men talked about what King would do now that he was free. King said he was interested in the boxing business because it would give him a legitimate way to make money and asked if Price, who knew Ali, could arrange an introduction to the champ.

Price arranged first for King to speak to Ali's manager, Herbert Muhammad. King told Herbert he wanted to bring Ali to Cleveland for a boxing exhibition that would raise money for a hospital in a black neighborhood, on the verge of bankruptcy. Ali, he said, had to come to Cleveland and save this black hospital. Ali had to come or else poor black people would die and black doctors would lose their m---------- jobs! Herbert Muhammad agreed. Ali went to Cleveland to box a 10-round

AP (FOSTER); NEIL LEIFER (2)

exhibition for charity on Aug. 28, 1972. Later, *Boxing Illustrated* reported that King made $30,000 from the benefit and the hospital got $15,000. The hospital closed its doors a few years later. But from King's standpoint, the exhibition was a huge success because it allowed him to establish a working relationship with Ali and Herbert Muhammad.

King knew little about the business of boxing, but he was a huckster. He could sell anything—even freezers to Eskimos, as he liked to brag. When Ali first visited King's home in Cleveland, there was cash everywhere, much of it lying loose in dresser drawers. As Ali's eyes bugged wide at the sight of so much green, King asked the boxer if he was familiar with the

< 9•10•1973 KEN NORTON *W - SD* / 10•20•1973 RUDI LUBBERS *W - UD*

claw machines commonly found in bars and arcades, the ones that allow players to drop a metal claw into a pile of toys and grab a prize. King told Ali he could reach in one of those drawers one time—only one time, like the claw—and he could keep as much cash as he cleanly grasped.

Ali rolled up his sleeve and stretched his fingers wide.

"All he could pick up, he could keep," King said with a smile. "You know what I mean? You couldn't scoop, you had to pick it up, bring it out. . . . But knowing the psychological elements of humanism . . . Greed! You know what I mean? You gonna get too much in your hand, it's gonna fall—*plop, plop, plop, plop, plop*." King laughed at the memory. If Ali had taken his time, he could have looked carefully in the drawer. But King assumed, correctly, that the boxer would get excited, rush and fumble. Ali played the game every time he visited King in those early years, and every time the boxer tried it, he rushed and fumbled. "One time, he got $35,000, and a couple times $25,000," King said, laughing harder and harder as the story went on. "You know what I mean? But if he would've stopped, reconnoitered, looked around for the $10,000 [bundles], he could've got much more. . . . He would wind up trying to grab so much, and he would lose it all. That teaches you a lesson. Be patient, be objective, and go out there and get it all. So it was a thrill for me."

HARD KNOCKS

As King made his move to get closer to Ali, the fighter traveled a grueling path to a 1974 Frazier rematch.

King asked Elijah Muhammad: Why continue to let Arum promote Ali's fights **WHEN A BLACK MAN WAS READY TO DO IT BETTER?**

The thrill for King was that he had spotted vulnerability. Greed is a kind of fear, and fear is a kind of weakness. King was a master at exploiting weakness.

By flashing cash, King did more than use greed to his advantage. He also sent the message to the black men with whom he did business that he understood them, understood that black success looked different from white success in 1970s America, understood the inherent suspicion that if a black man struck it rich, the white man could take it all away. But cash! Cash was difficult to take away!

"Cash is king and King is cash," he said. "This is what it's always been. Dealing with human nature. And dealing with those who are the downtrodden, the underprivileged, people who have been denied, you've got an opportunity, because white and black alike, that green is always there, it stands out. . . . You give 'em a check, you got to wait till they cash it. . . . But if you give 'em cash, it's instant; they can't stop payment on that."

King related to black boxers in ways white promoters could not. He reminded fighters that he shared their plight. Like them, he'd been cheated and mistreated by a white power structure designed to subjugate black men. Yet he'd clawed his way to wealth and fame, as he reminded them again and again.

But for all his intelligence, for all his powers of persuasion, and for all his cash, Don King still needed the blessings of Elijah Muhammad to do business with Ali, so he made an appointment to see the Nation of Islam leader in Chicago. During their meeting, Elijah Muhammad tried to convince Don King to join the Nation of Islam. King said he would have considered joining if not for one big problem. "I just couldn't give up pork," he said.

King went on to talk about the importance of putting black men in positions of power surrounding Muhammad Ali. Why continue to let Bob Arum promote the champ's fights, King asked, when a black man was ready to do it better?

That was the right approach. The Messenger gave King his blessing. □

PLAYING IT SAFER

→ BY BEN REITER

LAST FRIDAY was, in most ways, one of the better days of Jonathan Keane's life. To celebrate his 40th birthday, Keane—along with two of his four golf-mad younger brothers and their father, Tom—teed off at Bethpage Black at 7:54 a.m., having camped out for 14 hours to secure their first tee time on the legendary Farmingdale, N.Y., course. Keane shot a 96. "He's got three little kids, so he doesn't have much time for golf these days," says his dad. His thoughts also kept straying to an incident that had happened two days earlier and 35 miles west, at Yankee Stadium.

There, New York third baseman Todd Frazier smacked a 105-mph foul ball in the fifth inning of a matinee against the Twins. The liner struck a two-year-old girl, who was sitting with her family just past the third base dugout, in the face. Details about the girl's condition remain scarce, but the Keanes could imagine the pain and fear she and her family were experiencing. On Aug. 7, 1982, those feelings were theirs.

That day Tom drove Jonathan, then four, and his two-year-old brother from Greenland, N.H., to Fenway Park. The Keanes had great seats behind the first base dugout. In the fourth inning Red Sox second baseman Dave Stapleton hit a foul screamer. The next thing Tom knew, Jonathan was down.

That incident is best remembered for the actions of Jim Rice. He sprinted out of the dugout, scooped up Jonathan and rushed him into the Sox' clubhouse for treatment and then transport to Boston Children's Hospital, where he underwent emergency surgery to relieve pressure caused by swelling in his brain. The moment was immortalized by an image of Rice, the future Hall of Famer, cradling the bleeding child. "Jim Rice likely saved Jonathan's life," says Tom.

Jonathan spent a terrifying five days in the hospital but made a full recovery. He now runs customer service for a tech company in Raleigh and has only a light scar above his left eye. Still, that day marked his life. "The odds are so small," says Jonathan, "but the impact when it happens is so dramatic."

In fact, the odds aren't *that* small. This is believed to be the third serious foul-ball-related injury suffered by a fan at Yankee Stadium this season, and a 2014 Bloomberg study estimated that 1,750 fans are hurt by batted balls in major league ballparks every year. The solution seems obvious: Extend the netting beyond home plate past both dugouts. Yet MLB, which does warn its fans on tickets and signs in ballparks of the danger they face, has been wary of mandating it, lest it deprive its highest-paying customers of unimpeded sight lines and the thrill of taking home a hard-won souvenir.

> "It has become more real to me, knowing **how fragile [kids are] at that age,"** says Keane.

Just 10 clubs currently have such netting, though last week four more said they would expand theirs. "We will redouble our efforts on this important issue," commissioner Rob Manfred says. Players appear to be virtually unanimous in wanting more extensive protection. "I don't care about the damn view of the fan," says Brian Dozier of the Twins, who watched from second base as the girl was struck. "It's all about safety. I still have a knot in my stomach."

For a long time Jonathan—who has no memory of that day in 1982—has declined to advocate for expanded netting. His feelings have changed, not only because of last week's incident but also because he is now a father himself and has taken his five-year-old son to several minor league games. "It has become more real to me, knowing how fragile he is at that age," he says. "If you'd asked me five years ago, I think I'd probably have been more neutral. Having kids makes nets seem like a good idea."

It is, even 35 years too late. Players shouldn't have to face the guilt of having inadvertently harmed a child. And all families ought to drive home from the park intact and with warm memories—even if they leave without a souvenir foul ball. □

SHOULD MLB TEAMS EXTEND NETTING TO PROTECT YOUNG FANS?
JOIN THE DISCUSSION ON TWITTER BY USING **#SIPOINTAFTER** AND FOLLOWING **@BENREITER**

CHAD MATHEW CARLSON

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