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THE GREAT 8
KILLS OFF
THE CAPITALS’
GREAT WAIT
*(It’s Going to Be a
Very Fun Summer in D.C.)*

BY ALEX PREWITT p. 42

Photograph by
SCOTT K. BROWN
WASHINGTON, D.C. | JUNE 9, 2018

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Lars Eller's third-period goal in Washington's comeback win over the Golden Knights in Game 5 gave the Capitals their first Stanley Cup.

Photograph by
ISAAC BREKKEN/GETTY IMAGES



NOW ON



Smart Rookies

AFTER THE Cardinals selected Josh Rosen with the No. 10 pick in the 2018 NFL draft, the former UCLA quarterback lamented the “three mistakes” taken ahead of him—Baker Mayfield, Sam Darnold and Josh Allen, picked by the Browns, Jets and Bills, respectively. But Rosen recently joined those three “mistakes” and Lamar Jackson, drafted by the Ravens with the No. 32 pick, in a roundtable discussion of rookie gunslingers, facilitated by The MMQB’s Robert Klemko and filmed by SI.

The wide-ranging interview, available to watch on SI TV starting June 20, features the five first-round quarterbacks sitting down together for the first time since April’s NFL draft. They discuss their journeys to professional football—including what the draft process is really like—and their expectations for life in the NFL. The rookies, two of whom won the Heisman Trophy, offer their expert advice for aspiring signal-callers and reveal the NFL players they most look up to. With training camp less than two months away, trust us: You don’t want to miss this. As a certain quarterback might say, that would be a mistake.

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DAVE SEPPERSON



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JUSTIFY'S MEANS

Thirty-two times horses had bolted from the starting gate at Big Sandy—New York's Belmont Park—with a chance to win the Triple Crown; 20 times they failed. But this year, on the second Saturday in June, Justify, a chestnut colt born on March 28, 2015, at Kentucky's Glennwood Farm, won the 150th Belmont Stakes to become the 13th Triple Crown champion in history, just the second (after Seattle Slew in 1977) to win while undefeated.

► PHOTOGRAPH BY ERICK W. RASCO



LEADING OFF



PARK PACE

Justify broke first from the gate, leading Restoring Hope [5] and Bravazo [3] into the first turn on his way to a wire-to-wire victory.





LEADING OFF

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BRISK JOCKEY

Smith—called Big Money Mike by those who wager on his skills—is a Hall of Famer who had won the Belmont twice [in 2010 and '13].

PHOTOGRAPH BY
SIMON BRUTY





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HOME FREE

Down the stretch, Justify held off a challenge from Gronkowski [6], as Hofburg [4] and Vino Rosso [8] came up for third and fourth.

PHOTOGRAPH BY
SIMON BRUTY



INBOX

FOR JUNE 4-11, 2018



HERE COMES THE SON

I can still picture Vladimir Guerrero, wearing the Montreal Expos' uniform, launching moon shots at Olympic Stadium and making laserlike throws from rightfield against my team, the Phillies. If his son, **Vlad Jr.**, is truly a chip off the old block but with better plate discipline, as Jon Tayler described, his career is going to be a lot of fun to follow.

Bruce Morgan
Lititz, Pa.

WORLD CUP PREVIEW

I don't know who decided that **Mexico** was "America's Other Team," as declared on one of your covers, but that'd be comparable



to stating that the Yankees are Boston's other team on the front of the *Boston Herald*.

Ben Guter
Bloomington, Minn.

For an event that occurs every four years, I was expecting more substance about the teams involved. Is Croatia's jersey pattern more important than the fact that it has some of the best players in the tournament? I

expected a group-by-group preview with more predictions and less sarcasm. And let's get over the fact that the U.S. did not qualify.

Ralph Michilli
Larchmont, N.Y.

SHADOW OF DOUBTS

In the story about the FBI's investigation into NCAA corruption, I was appalled to read that U.S. attorneys were making allegations about NCAA rules violations. Since when is that any of our government's business? And why are taxpayer dollars being spent on FBI investigations into an



organization that most feel is out of date, out of touch and often out-of-bounds?

Jeff Clarke
Tampa

POSITION BATTLE

I'm as outraged as anyone by the number of unarmed black and Hispanic men that have been killed by police. But as an Army veteran I still stand for the Pledge of Allegiance and our national anthem. I strongly recommend that **NFL players** take a better tactic: Join the NAACP or the National Action Network. These organizations protest and get results. You can stand for the anthem and at the same time fight the horrible racism that exists.

Theodore R. White
East Elmhurst, N.Y.

ONAR VEGA/LATINCONTENT/GETTY IMAGES (SOCCER); MARC O JOSE SANCHEZ/AP/SHUTTERSTOCK (NFLING PLAYERS); ROBERT BECK (MEXICO COVER)

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ON DECK
The next edition of **SPORTS ILLUSTRATED** will be the **July 2-9, 2018**, issue. Look for it on newsstands and in your mailbox beginning on **June 27**.

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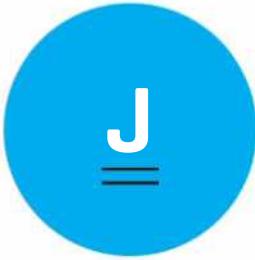
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JEFFERY A. SALTER

THE PRESIDENT IS GOLFING

HEAVY HITTERS

Before their book tour for *The President Is Missing* went into full swing, Clinton and Patterson—both avid golfers—played nine holes in Coral Gables, Fla.





JAMES PATTERSON, who is jousting with J.K. Rowling for the title of Richest Author in the World, twirls a golf ball between his thumb and forefinger and says in a faux conspiratorial whisper, “He’s better at picking up three- and four-foot putts, and I’m better

at getting a second ball down quickly.”

“He,” Patterson’s playing partner, is sticking his peg into the ground on the 1st tee at the Golf Course at the Biltmore Hotel, in Coral Gables, Fla. He rolls his neck and shoulders and takes a few casual warmup swings. One could hardly imagine a more nerve-racking scenario for a double-digit handicapper—a rushed, late-afternoon outing without a preround bucket of balls and a group of reverential onlookers waiting in hushed silence, praying a drive doesn’t go Gerald-Ford awry. But Patterson’s partner seems oblivious to it all.

Why, it’s almost as if Bill Clinton is used to performing before a crowd.

“Could’ve been better,” says Clinton, after delivering a slight draw down the center of the fairway, “but I’ll take it.”

Patterson, more of a let’s-get-the-hell-off-the-1st-tee type, lashes his drive to the right and, true to his word, gets a second ball down quickly. Their round goes like that—picked-up putts, a roll-in-in-the-rough here, a winter-rules adjustment there. But let’s be clear: No one is cheating. No one is writing down 5 when he had 7. These are the unspoken rules of engagement between a pair of worldwide celebrities, now collaborators, trying to find a few hours of relaxation at a game designed to elicit precisely the opposite.

Clinton and Patterson are here not just to golf but also to talk about *The President Is Missing*, their jointly written page-turner that is already disappearing from bookstores. They chose the course because POTUS 42 had a Clinton Foundation event at the University of Miami the next day, and Patterson lives part of the year in Palm Beach, a 90-minute drive away. Plus, the grand old Biltmore, hotel and layout, is their kind of place.

As a golfer Clinton is a searcher, an analyst, almost every shot followed by a mini-disquisition. “My iron game’s gone to hell in a handbasket. . . . This Bermuda grass?

You really gotta hit down on it. . . . Now, didn’t that look like it was breaking the other way?”

“My best year as a golfer,” says Clinton, whose Secret Service name of Eagle had nothing to do with his game, “was the first year I got out of the White House. I got down to a 10 handicap. But I’m not close to that now. I just don’t play enough.” Unending global travel does tend to wreak havoc with a player’s index.

On the 1st hole, a gone-to-hell-in-a-handbasket iron plops down in the second cut.

“Pick that up, will you?” Clinton hollers to a tailing reporter.

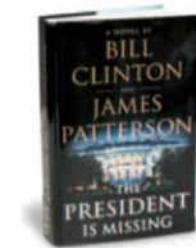
“Yeah, make yourself useful,” says Patterson, a low-handicap needler.

Clinton’s choice (such as it is) of ball speaks volumes. It bears not a presidential seal, the stamp of POTUS ALUMNUS or even a WJC monogram but rather the logo of the Miami Dolphins. “I always toss Mr. Clinton a few balls before he goes out,” says Harvey Greene, the Dolphins’ vice president of historical affairs, who helps out with publicity and logistics on Clinton’s forays to Florida and is part of the entourage traveling in a small caravan of carts. “He just uses what he uses.”

It is hard to imagine our current chief executive striking anything that isn’t MAGA-*logo’ed* and gold-filigreed. So, while on the subject, yes, both men have played with the current president, though not since November 2016. But over the course of three hours the name *Trump* was not mentioned. When the conversation turned to politics, however, it did hover, storm-cloud-like, at least when Clinton was speaking.

The golfers are not too far into their round when a father-and-son twosome on an adjoining fairway spots the distinctive Clinton white mane and begins a headlong gallop toward the group, only to be intercepted by a Secret Service agent. But Clinton beckons them on, and photos ensue. Angel Ureña, his press secretary, just shrugs. It happens, he says. Like every day.

Though Patterson is serious about golf—he is a 12 handicap; appeared on an episode of *Feherty Live* with Greg Norman and Mike Eruzione; wrote, with collaborator Peter de Jonge, *Miracle at Augusta* and *Miracle on the 17th Green*; and can be seen on a YouTube video talking about his “golf addiction”—he seems a little less able than Clinton to give



IT’S AGAINST
CLINTON’S NATURE
TO LEAVE ANY
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STONES UNTURNED.
HIS WRITING
APPARENTLY
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DELIBERATIVE
STYLE TOO. “WE
HAD TO WREST THE
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HANDS,” SAYS
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himself wholly to the round. Perhaps that's because the tyranny of the blank page (and it is a page; he and Clinton both compose in longhand with pencil) is never far from the mind of a man who has written or cowritten 246 books.

"Here's a golf story from my youth," says Patterson, walking down the 3rd fairway. "I'm a teenager growing up in Newburgh [N.Y.], Tommy Bolt comes in for an exhibition at the Powelton Club, and my friend and I caddie for him. On the 10th hole Bolt pushes one into the weeds. I see where it went, but when we get up there, we can't find it. And Tommy Bolt, who is known for getting pissed, is really pissed. Later, when we're walking home, my friend takes something out of his pocket and says, "Well, I got Tommy Bolt's ball."

Patterson smiles. "Nothing much happened in Newburgh. But besides Tommy Bolt, what I really remember was the day that President Eisenhower came through. I never got that out of my head. The presidency always meant something to me."

Clearly, he has met the ideal collaborator.

IT'S AN HOUR before what turned out to be a nine-hole outing, the day having gotten off to an extremely late start due to Clinton's travel problems. The conversation takes place more than eight weeks before the Clinton-Patterson book tour that, at a *Today Show* stop, went off the rails for the ex-president when he got angry and defensive when asked whether he still owes Monica Lewinsky an apology. This conversation consists mostly of sports talk, golf talk, and book talk and, despite the delay, moves at a relatively unhurried pace, primarily because of that Clintonian I-only-have-eyes-for-you magic. He wants to get out to the course, but it's against his nature to leave any conversational stones unturned. His writing apparently reflects a certain deliberative style too. "We had to wrest the manuscript from the president's hands," says Patterson wryly.

The collaborators—Clinterson if you will—are sitting in a

well-heeled, well-secured Biltmore suite, Clinton's advance team having chosen the temperature (warm) and the fare (fruit and crackers befitting a vegan). There is speculation about the health of Clinton—who, like Patterson, is 71—but in person he seems hale, if about 25 pounds lighter than he was when he presented as barbecue-eating Bubba.

The collaborators' love of sports is evident throughout *The President Is Missing*. President Jonathan Lincoln Duncan is a former governor of a Southern state and an old ballplayer who once had a "live fastball." His Secret Service detail is compared to a left tackle protecting the president's blind side; his chief of staff is described as "a five-tool player"; political challengers are referred to as backup quarterbacks (loved until they actually get the starting job); and an assassination attempt takes place during a major league game at Nationals Park. Plus, the

head of the German nation is a former West German Olympic hoopster. Do come in, Chancellor Schrempf.

The NCAA final was taking place on the night of this interview, and Patterson had followed it closely. "The big kid from Villanova, Omari Spellman, will really make a difference," he says, accurately as it turns out. (Among Patterson's legion of devoted fans are Dwyane Wade, Diana Taurasi and UConn coach Geno Auriemma.)

"I grew up in Arkansas," says Clinton, providing, unnecessarily, a little biographical detail, "and our state was big on sports. Football primarily, but we followed the St. Louis Cardinals, too. We didn't have a TV, so we got everything from radio. Harry Caray was doing the Cardinals at the time.

"So it was baseball and football for me for a long time. But then Eddie Sutton came along to coach Arkansas basketball and Nolan Richardson followed, and I became a big fan. Both of them are still friends of mine after all these years."

Clinton and Patterson had met casually before they starting writing together, but the matchmaker in this literary marriage was Robert B. Barnett, whose Washington-based law firm,

AS A GOLFER,
CLINTON IS A
SEARCHER AND
AN ANALYST. "MY
IRON GAME'S
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A HANDBASKET,"
HE SAYS.

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◀ **STATEN ISLAND YANKEES PRESIDENT WILL SMITH**, whose team will change its name to the Pizza Rats for Saturday home games after fans voted for it in a Name the Team contest.





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Williams & Connolly, represents both men. “I like to do new things,” Clinton says. “A couple of years ago I read a scientific survey that said people could form new neuro networks in their brain until very late in life, but only if they try new things. So this is a new thing for me. I’m an old dog, and this is a new trick.”

Hearing that an ex-POTUS would like to collaborate would induce an automatic yes from most writers. But Patterson, whose very name transports you to a bookshop in Terminal C, is not most writers. He has sold 375 million books and been an internationally known writer for as long as Clinton has been an internationally known politician. He is also a philanthropist deeply involved in literacy projects. Throw in some golf, and, yes, the man is a tad busy.

Yet even if Patterson didn’t bite at first, he couldn’t pass on the chance to write an authentically inside book about the presidency. “Could I have done this without the president?” asks Patterson rhetorically. “Absolutely not. Normally what you do is make stuff up, right? But he”—Patterson points to his collaborator—“would not let me.”

Clinterson has certainly constructed the ultimate modern presidential thriller: the world imperiled by global cyberterrorism. Patterson always aims high on the plot front, but Clinterson insists that every one of the dizzying twists and turns is reality-based. Well, there is a pregnant vegan assassin who plays Bach in her head while she lines up a target. “I had nothing to do with that,” says Clinton, smiling.

One can clearly see the Clinton contributions, though. The unavoidable tension between president and vice president. Riffs about the wallpaper in a White House dining room. (Jackie Kennedy liked it, Betty Ford hated it, Rosalynn Carter liked it.) The description of a tunnel that leads the president out of 1600 Pennsylvania Ave. The techniques a Secret Service driver employs to steer the car in such a manner to keep the pressure off the Chief Executive in the backseat.

The exact division of labor, however, is impossible to untangle. As their book tour rolls along and a Showtime series based on *TPIM* begins airing (no date yet), you will hear lots



HAIL TO THE CHIEF

Patterson's name has always gone first in his cowritten books, but in this case POTUS 42 got top billing.

of mutual admiration and precious little about their process. Patterson likes it that way. Someone once said that two people trying to write a book is like three people trying to have a baby, but that has never bothered Patterson. On cowritten books Patterson’s name has always gone first, but in this case it will appear second. Cue “Hail to the Chief” in the background.

BACK ON THE course, Clinterson and followers have reached the fifth green. Sunset is not far off, and the twosome wants to play the rest of the round without company. But Clinton is game to answer a couple short follow-ups (“When I played golf, I gave the launch codes to my military aide, who was always with me”) and wax more seriously about the state of our political discourse.

The President Is Missing ends with an idealistic, can’t-we-all-just-get-along speech by Duncan, and one wonders if, given a national audience, that would be the speech Clinton would give now. “I’d say it would be very close,” Clinton answers. “All this division and personal animosity, character assassination and loss of trust is bad for the country. I think, fundamentally, even the people who currently benefit from the state of affairs can’t possibly be happy with it. I just don’t think it’s consistent with human nature to wake up every morning and say, ‘Gosh, who can I hurt today?’ Because we’re all just passing through.”

Patterson adds this: “The book is partly about compromise. We compromise all the time in our lives, with our spouses, with our kids, with our employees. But all of a sudden it’s become no compromise about anything.”

Clinton mentions an obituary he read that morning about Guatemalan dictator Efraín Ríos Montt, who was convicted of genocide and crimes against humanity in 2013. “I kept thinking, I wonder what he’d like to take back. Was it worth it to him for all the pain he inflicted?” says Clinton. “People might think they want to do something because of their momentary road rage. But would they really feel that way if they knew they had a day to live?”

With that, Clinton turns back to face his putt, a sign that the summit is over. He lines it up with his handsome TaylorMade Spider Tour Red, a gift from a friend in England. He leans close. “I really like it,” he says, “but you gotta be careful. It’s not a putter you want to use from off the green.” □

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RACING MIND

FOR INDY 500 CHAMP WILL POWER,
WINNING STARTS IN HIS HEAD

- ▶ INTERVIEW BY JENNA WEST
- ▶ PHOTO BY CHRIS GRAYTHEN/GETTY IMAGES

W

ILL POWER

had a good month of May at the Brickyard, winning the IndyCar Grand Prix and his first Indy 500. For the 37-year-old Aussie, who was the 2014 series champion and now sits tied for eighth on IndyCar's all-time wins list, success behind the wheel starts with the right mind-set.

▶ **SI:** How has life changed since your Indy 500 win?

WP: The feeling of accomplishment is something I worked very hard for. I feel so many different emotions but kind of a relief in a way. It brings a smile to my face.

▶ **SI:** You enjoy meditation. How did you start?

WP: I stumbled across it when I broke my back [in 2011] and was on some medication. You get kind of a euphoric feeling from that, and I was able to achieve that same feeling from meditation with breathing exercises. In 2016, I struggled a lot with energy and fatigue and it was almost necessary for me to switch my mind off. I started doing it every day.

▶ **SI:** Does meditating help you as a driver?

WP: It helps me more off the track. At a race I'm in the moment.

▶ **SI:** If you lose focus during a race, how do you get it back?

WP: You don't get mad when something goes wrong. You think about executing each little increment. [There] shouldn't even be a thought of winning because that's the end result of the right process. □

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A LIFE REMEMBERED

RED SCHOENDIENST

1923–2018

I **N APRIL 1943**, Red Schoendienst, a small 20-year-old infielder, reported for duty with the Rochester Red Wings, the Triple A affiliate of the St. Louis Cardinals. Wings manager Pepper Martin was in the midst of reaming his underperforming charges when Schoendienst knocked on the clubhouse door. Sizing up the redhead, Martin screamed, “We don’t need any batboys!” and slammed the door shut. When Schoendienst announced he was a player, Martin said, “I need men and they’re sending me babies.”

By the time Schoendienst had finished the season—with a league-best .337 batting average—Martin had a nickname for him: the Team.

It was a fitting moniker. For the next seven decades (save for a few years in exile with the Giants and the Braves), Schoendienst was a mainstay in the Cardinals organization, first as a second baseman (10 All-Star appearances), then as

a manager (the 1967 World Series championship), and then as a coach and consultant.

He broke into the organization at age 16, attending a tryout camp at Sportsman Park, 40 miles from his home in Germantown, Ill. He hitched a ride down on a milk truck with a friend, thinking he’d get to see a few free major league games; he returned with a job, but only after spending a night sleeping on a park bench across the street from the train station.

Schoendienst was still in uniform—hitting fungoes and giving tips to fielders—more than 60 years later, long after he was elected to the Hall of Fame by the veterans’ committee in 1989. When he finally got the call to Cooperstown, his wife reminisced on his time in the sport. “I think the baseball game is a boy’s game,” said Mary, to whom Schoendienst was married for 52 years, until her death in 1999. “And I don’t think Red has ever grown up.” —Mark Bechtel

EXPLORING PLANET FÚTBOL: ICELAND

SI Senior Writer Grant Wahl hits the road to discover how Iceland became the smallest country ever to qualify for the World Cup

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PLANET FÚTBOL WITH GRANT WAHL

No, the U.S. didn't qualify for the World Cup, but we know of at least two Americans who'll be in Russia: Grant Wahl and Brian Straus, SI's foremost authorities on the beautiful game. Catch their discussion of hot topics, as well as interviews with luminaries from the soccer world, every night on the Planet Fútbol podcast. [This essential listen for soccer fans airs June 12 through July 16 and is available for free on Apple Podcasts, Spotify or wherever you get your podcasts.] No matter how your preferred side fares, trust us: Grant and Brian will quickly become your favorite team.



WATCH

U.S. OPEN

June 14–17, FS1 and FOX Shinnecock Hills, much maligned in 2004 for brutal course conditions, will again host the U.S. Open. Dustin Johnson and Rory McIlroy lead the list of favorites.



READ

WHAT'S WRONG WITH US?

By Bruce Arena with Steve Kettmann, out June 12 Still mad we missed out on Russia? Former USA coach Arena examines his team's failure in this candid memoir.



WATCH

COLLEGE WORLD SERIES

June 16–27, ESPN and ESPN2 *Omaha!* Eight teams will vie for a national title in Nebraska. A Southeastern Conference team has won the championship five of the last nine years.

FROM FAR LEFT: CADENCE/PLANET FÚTBOL; FABRICE GOFFRINI/AFP/GETTY IMAGES; ROMAN LODOI; CHRISTOPH SCHMIDT/PICTURE-ALLIANCE/DPA/AP (TROPHY); GABRIEL ROSSI/GETTY IMAGES (MESSI); MANUEL VELASQUEZ/GETTY IMAGES (HERNANDEZ)



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FACES IN THE CROWD

Edited by JEREMY FUCHS



RILEY MAGOON

- Softball
- Colchester, Vt.

Riley, a senior righthander at Colchester High, struck out 18 and walked just one in a six-inning no-hitter against Burlington High. She also hit two three-run homers in the 15-0 win. A month earlier Riley threw a perfect game to beat Burlington 16-0, while fanning 14.



BRIAN PECCIE

- Golf
- Norfolk, Va.

Peccie, a sophomore at Washington and Lee, defeated Logan Young of Concordia in a three-hole playoff to take the Division III title. A first-team All-America, Peccie made three pars after finishing three under for 72 holes. His win helped the Generals finish second in the team event.



SYDNEY MILANI

- Track and Field
- Pleasant Hill, Iowa

Sydney, a senior at Southeast Polk High, won the 100-, 200-, 400- and 800-meter races at the 4A championship, the first sweep of those four events in state history. Her victories in the 100 [11.49], 200 [23.68] and 400 [52.90] were state records. Sydney will run at Iowa State.



SETH BORTON

- Bass Fishing
- Adrian, Mich.

Borton, 35, the coach at Adrian College, led the Bulldogs to a win at the 266-boat Carhartt Bassmaster College Series Southern Tour in Florence, Ala. They caught a school-record 58 pounds, 11 ounces. In the program's four years, Borton has led the team to two No. 1 rankings.



BRYANNA FAZIO

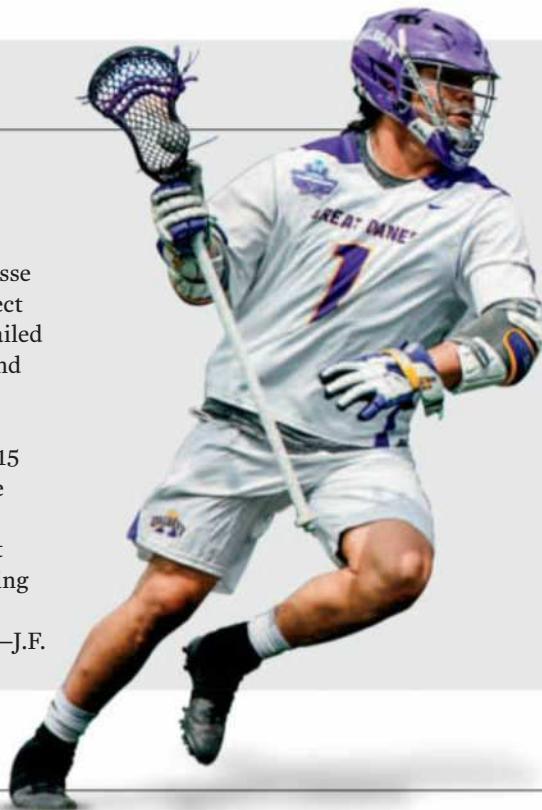
- Lacrosse
- Watertown, N.Y.

Fazio, a junior attack at Le Moyne, had six goals and an assist in a 16-11 win over Florida Southern for the Division II championship. It was the team's first title and she was named the game's Most Outstanding Player. In 23 games Fazio scored 78 goals, tying for sixth in D-II.

UPDATE

The Greatest Dane

For the first time in its 48-year history Albany reached the men's lacrosse Final Four, losing to Yale 20-11 in the semis on May 26. But don't expect the Danes—which led the nation with 14.4 goals per game—to get derailed too often over the next three years. Tehoka Nanticoke, a 6' 1", 235-pound attack from Six Nations, Ont., promises to be the sport's next big star after an epic freshman season in which he finished third in D-I with 50 goals. He was a FACES IN THE CROWD selection in SI's May 18, 2015 issue, and as a member of the Iroquois national team, impressed at the '16 U-19 championships near Vancouver, earning attack MVP honors when he scored 22 times in seven games to lift the team to bronze. But in Foxborough, Mass., Yale held Nanticoke to a single goal before beating Duke 13-11 in the national championship game. The title was the Elis' first; the Final Four appearance is unlikely to be Nanticoke's last. —J.F.



COURTESY OF EARL MAGOON (MAGOON); WASHINGTON AND LEE UNIVERSITY (PECCIE); SHERBYN PHOTO (MILANI); PATRICK STEWART (BORTON); GREG WALL (FAZIO); MICHAEL DOWER/APS/SHUTTERSTOCK (UPDATE)

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NBA FINALS

THE WARRIORS SAW A NEW, EDGIER KE

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BUT THE FINALS MOST VAL

STRAIGHT TITLE THAT CAM

W O R

THE 2018 NBA FINALS
MOST VALUABLE

IN FULL VIEW

Durant's brilliance was on display all season, but he elevated his game when it mattered most, becoming the sixth player to win back-to-back Bill Russell trophies.

VIN DURANT THIS YEAR,

TOP

UNABLE PLAYER WAS WEARING A FAMILIAR SMILE AFTER A SECOND

OF THE

HE THANKS TO A SECOND STRAIGHT GAME 3 DAGGER IN CLEVELAND

WORLD

BY
LEE JENKINS

Photograph by
JOHN W. McDONOUGH

THE HOME of an NBA champion 48 hours after the Finals looks sort of like a honeymoon suite the morning after a wedding: balloons at the door, nachos in the kitchen, friends on the couch, rehashing the previous night's activities. Kevin Durant's commemorative hat was already in the closet, next to his Longhorns' and Redskins' lids, and his MVP trophy perched on the windowsill along with its predecessor. "Reminds me of when I was a kid," Durant said. "My brother and I would line up all our fifth-place trophies from the rec league on the dresser and see who could stack the most."

He sat atop the kitchen counter, corn on the cob sizzling in a frying pan, late-afternoon sun pouring through floor-to-ceiling windows. Across the Bay, he could see almost to Oracle Arena. Durant lived in the Oakland Hills last season, but he found the location desolate, so he moved to an apartment on the 54th floor of a high-rise in downtown San Francisco. At rush hour, it can take him 35 minutes just to merge onto the bridge, but he appreciates the view and the bustle. Plus, he is well positioned for when the Warriors open their new hardwood palace in Mission Bay next year.

He was still in his sweats, to the consternation of stylist Nchimunya Wulf, who has tried to coax him into more formal attire for a couple of months now. Most players of Durant's ilk arrange elaborate postseason ensembles weeks in advance, but KD broke from peacock protocol this spring, rocking a procession of Nike hoodies instead of short suits. "I thought I did something wrong," Wulf said.

"No," Durant laughed. "I sometimes stress about what I'm going to wear for the walk-in. I can't worry about it."

He admits things like that, things other megastars do not: "I feel as if a lot of basketball players, celebrities, put on this front that they're bigger and stronger and *different*—that they're superheroes—so they're not seen as somebody with weaknesses or insecurities. I'm not a celebrity hooper. I don't care about money and fame. I don't need everything to revolve around me. I like to play basketball. I like to talk basketball. I like to debate basketball."

He is a repeat champion and Finals

typically lead 2-0 when they take to the road.

"Everybody on the other side is excited, everybody is looking for that extra emotion," Durant starts, describing a hypothetical showdown. "They're thinking, 'I need it from the crowd. I need it from knowing that I slept in my bed last night, that my family is here, that I did my usual routine.' But then you hit an early three, and you get up 29-26 going into the second quarter, and they're like, 'Damn, I'm a little nervous now.' And then you go up seven in the third, and they're like, 'S---, this isn't what we planned.' They make a layup, and get so hyped, but you come down and score again. You have a chance to demolish them, to take their heart. It's like my drug. I love Game 3."

A year ago, he earned his fix with 38 and 13 in Game 3 at Utah, 33 and 10 at San Antonio, 31 and 9 at Cleveland. After each of those epics, the Warriors lost only once, so the prognosis for these Cavaliers was predictable. The dagger foreshadows the broom. "I felt like I was at Barry Farms again," Durant told his business partner and agent, Rich Kleiman, following his latest Game 3 spree. Barry Farms, the famed outdoor courts in Washington D.C., represent the hoops haven Durant is forever trying to re-create.

"It's how we all start, isn't it?" he asks. "Pickup is the heartbeat of basketball, the spirit of basketball, and as you get further and further away from that, to AAU to high school to college to the NBA, you're stacking layers and layers of nonsense onto something simple. You get money involved—and here I





ROAD WARRIOR

Curry [opposite] led the Dubs in Games 1 and 2, but Durant exploded when the series shifted to Cleveland, dropping a career playoff-high 43 on just 23 shots in Game 3.

am living in this penthouse in San Francisco—but if you can take it all the way back to streetball then nothing will really bother you. Just tie up your shoes and play.”

He tries to insulate himself from the nonsense, as he terms it, which is a daily struggle. “The entitlement,” the 29-year-old explains, “the idea that I scored 30 so you should let me in this club for free.” But also the criticism, some of which predates his move to Golden State, and sticks with him still. “This is a wild life, a crazy lifestyle, and I’m not saying I have it all figured out. But I do know it can affect me if I let it, so I have to do my best to control it.”

Listening to Durant is not so different than watching him post up George Hill. Once he gets going, he does not stop. “I have so much in my head, it’s hard for me to say it all. I know what I’m thinking, but it comes out a little weird and different.” Not really. You just have to know him. Last season, he yearned to fit in with the Dubs. This season, he revealed more of himself, and coaches privately wondered if he was unhappy. “They saw my edge for the first time,” Durant says. “I go, ‘What the f--- are we doing?’ and they go, ‘Whoa, we didn’t know you were like that.’ Well, I grew up in a s--- talking household, insults thrown across the room from uncles to aunts to cousins to brothers. That’s how I do it.” He can be simultaneously fiery and gentle. Toward the end of the regular season, teammates noticed he turned quiet, his passion muted. “I wasn’t good every day,” he says. “I wasn’t on every day. I felt like we were dragging, and I was down, too. I internalized it a little bit. I wanted some meaningful

basketball.” Coach Steve Kerr, generally demanding of Durant, adjusted his approach. “You try to give him space at those times, but also lift him up,” forward Shaun Livingston says. “It’s challenging because you never know what he’s going through, a guy like that who is so visible.”

Durant’s mood lightened as the playoffs dawned. He watched a Bob Marley documentary. He grabbed burritos and beers after practice at Tamarindo in Old Oakland. He beamed when Kerr deployed him in oddball lineups. “He’s one of the most authentic people I’ve ever met,” says Warriors general manager Bob Myers, “because if he’s having a hard time, he’ll tell you, ‘I’m having a hard time,’ and if he’s feeling great he’ll tell you, ‘I’m feeling great.’ You can connect with someone like that because he wears all of it. He wants so badly to be part of everything, and you have to tell him, ‘You are. You are.’ We lost when we didn’t have Kevin Durant. We won when we did.”

His first game of the Finals was, by his own admission, a dud. “I disrespected Cleveland,” Durant volunteers. “I didn’t come in prepared. I didn’t pressure LeBron. I was shooting long jumpers and wasn’t getting to my spots.” The next three, however, were a masterpiece. The Warriors will replay those 15-foot turnarounds over Hill for posterity.

After the inevitable sweep, Steph Curry charged through the Q with a bucket of popcorn under his arm and a cigar behind his ear. Klay Thompson gave a champagne shower to the ball boys. And Margot Kerr, Steve’s wife, was summoned for her annual picture with the Larry O’Brien Trophy.

“Oh, Larry,” she said. “I know him well.” On the way, she stopped at the sight of Golden State’s 6’ 11” center Zaza Pachulia lifting p.r. ace Raymond Ridder into the air. “Nothing easy!” Pachulia bellowed, parroting a war cry he coined with the Hawks a decade ago.

Not only have the Warriors captured three of the past four titles, they have posted the best regular- and postseason winning percentages over a four-year span in NBA history. They finished these playoffs with the top-ranked offense *and* defense. They inspired legitimate complaints that the Finals are a formality and have been since July 4, 2016, when Durant migrated west. So was it easy? By any normal standard, yes, it was another

YELL OF A GUY

The play of Durant—who helped slow James after his Game 1 51-point explosion—delighted Green (below).





the spirit, to find the joy,” Livingston continues. “And then you see it every night on the other side, with the Houstons but even the Brooklyns, because they want so badly to knock you off.”

Kerr stressed patience to the coaching staff, but heeding his own message proved difficult. When he excoriated the Warriors, most memorably after a 20-point loss at Indiana in April, they didn’t respond. They weren’t accustomed to the iron fist. “Sure, this sucks,” Myers told Kerr in Indy. “But who are we to challenge the character of our players after everything they’ve done in the past three years? They’ve given us no reason not to trust them.” Kerr backed off, apologized to the team, told them to regroup for the playoffs. Then they lost by 40 at Utah five days later in the season finale. “That was the moment I worried,” says assistant coach Bruce Fraser. Concern being relative, they still racked up 58 wins. “Yeah, but we jacked around,” says another assistant. “Our superstars played more like All-Stars.”

Early in the playoffs, Myers called Heat president Pat Riley, a veteran of dynasties on both coasts. “Give me some advice,” Myers said. He expected memories about

“YOU HAVE A CHANCE TO DEMOLISH THEM, TO TAKE THEIR HEART. IT’S LIKE MY DRUG. I LOVE GAME 3.”



eight-month joyride. But the Dubs are spoiled, and for them it was a slog, overcoming their most formidable adversary: themselves.

SOMETIMES, YOU have to wait on a championship team.”

Chuck Daly said that, about his 1980s Bad Boys, wisdom that provided solace for Kerr as he checked his watch through an interminable winter. During three dream seasons, the Warriors started 21–2, 24–0 and 27–4, immune to the malaise that infects virtually every NBA power. The Dubs destroyed opponents, whether from San Antonio or Sacramento, less for seed than for sport. They were the most talented team in the league but also the most driven, and while Kerr snapped a few clipboards along the way, he rarely so much as raised his voice in a film session. He didn’t have to. His players earned the freedom he afforded them, and kept earning it.

“First year, it’s all new, we’re all hungry,” Livingston says. “Second year, we’re chasing history, trying to get the best record ever. Third year, we just lost in the Finals, and we’ve got KD. This year, what is it?” Golden State’s roster is loaded but its system is taxing, constant cuts and reads. When effort wanes, so does movement, and clean threes become contested twos. “It’s harder to keep

motivating Magic, prodding D-Wade. “You cannot force people to do anything,” Riley replied. “You cannot move them in a direction. You have to let them be.” They kept waiting. Myers reflected on the final installments of the Kobe-Shaq Lakers, the LeBron-Wade Heat. “It always ends differently than you think,” he says.

The 2018 Warriors reminded Kerr of the 1998 Bulls, Scottie Pippen pedaling furiously on a stationary bike in the hallway of the Delta Center during Game 6 of the Finals, desperate to loosen his back. “LeBron—sorry, Freudian slip—Michael had to do everything that night,” Kerr recalls. “We felt vulnerable, whereas the previous two years we didn’t. It was the same way this season. We felt vulnerable against Houston.”

The Rockets’ remade defense was longer, faster and more versatile than past incarnations. They crowded Curry and Durant 30 feet from the basket, funneling them toward the rim and inviting them to finish over 6’ 10” flyswatter Clint Capela. Tested for the first time in two years, the Warriors resorted to uncharacteristic isolations, abandoning their egalitarian offense. Golden State needed another facilitator, but Andre Iguodala was out with an injured left leg. Midway through Game 5, the Warriors moved a big man—Kevon Looney or Jordan Bell—to the three-point line even though neither shoots well enough

to draw a defender outside. “Doesn’t seem logical, does it?” Fraser asks. The Dubs lost Game 5, but at practice in Oakland before Game 6, they ran through reads with Looney and Bell as playmakers on the perimeter. Neither possesses the ballhandling skills to drive and kick, but both can throw a quick pass or execute a dribble handoff. “Our pass total was low, our shot rhythm was off,” Fraser continues. “We weren’t moving enough, weren’t cutting enough. We had to crack the code.” Shifting Looney and Bell did not alter Houston’s defensive strategy. “No,” Fraser says. “But it unlocked our movement and it unlocked a lot of the stuff that gets Steph going.”

Curry could bring the ball up, find Looney or Bell, and then relocate to the corner. This pass-and-dash action became a hallmark three years ago during the Western Conference semifinals against Memphis, with Iguodala and Draymond Green shoveling to Curry while screening for him. The Dubs don’t have a play call for the pass-and-dash. Rather, it is a by-product of their flow, and a sign of their engagement.

Before Game 6, Kerr told the Warriors they would not lose again this season, though a hamstring injury to Chris Paul and a brain lock by J.R. Smith helped his prophesy come to fruition.

DROP IN
Frigid in Game 3 [3 of 16], Curry averaged 33 points in the other three victories.



SAYS GREEN, “WE DON’T LOOK AT IT AS, ‘KD, YOU THE GUY.’ OR, ‘STEPH, YOU THE GUY.’ THERE AIN’T NO GUY.”

Golden State escaped Game 1 of the Finals, winning in overtime when Smith forgot the score in regulation, and afterward Curry broke down video with his dad. “We don’t do that a lot,” Dell Curry says. “But you could see that he had some more opportunities in transition. He’s a pass-first guy, but sometimes he has to be aggressive.” Since the outset of last season, Curry has cut down on his circus shots, in part to ingratiate Durant. But the Warriors and their fans feed off those 30-foot moonbeams, low percentage for anybody but Steph. On the way to Game 2, Dell told a friend, “I’ve never been more confident.”

His son drilled a Finals-record nine threes, including a pass-and-dash late in the fourth quarter, with Kevin Love crashing into him. Oracle erupted as if it were 2015 again. Here was a flashback to the days before Durant, when Curry was everybody’s underdog, and each step-back was a spectacle. Both co-stars have suppressed skills, part of the superteam compromise, but in the Finals they took turns letting loose. When Curry finally

cooled off, he met his family in a corner of Oracle’s BMW Club, greeted by an MVP chant.

The wait was over. The champs had arrived.

THE DIFFERENCE between the ’18 Warriors and the ’98 Bulls, which Kerr did not mention, is that Chicago was at the end of its reign while Golden State likely remains in the middle. Some coaches questioned this spring whether Durant would re-sign, but that now appears a given. They also wondered about Kerr, still enduring severe headaches as a result of a botched back surgery. For three years, players have seen Kerr lean against the scorer’s table at timeouts, dreading the day he flies home to San Diego for good. But he bought a house last month in San Francisco’s Presidio Heights, a couple blocks from Myers and Gregg Popovich, which the staff took as a signal he isn’t going anywhere either.

“All good things come to an end,” Green says, “but I don’t think the end is near.” NBA headliners want to win. They also want to win on their terms. After James



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AND PUSH YOUR BODY FURTHER.*

and Wade united in Miami, Wade ceded the front seat. With Curry and Durant, no such bargain has been struck, nor has one been necessary. When Curry tells Durant, “Stop following me!” as he did between Finals press conferences, they both laughed. “What we have here is so unique,” Green says, “and what makes it work is selflessness. We don’t look at it as, ‘KD, you the face, you the guy.’ Or, ‘Steph, you the face, you the guy.’ There ain’t no guy.”

It is Green’s job, apart from all-league defense, to keep this delicate ecosystem intact. “You see a lot of bands break up, and when you look back on why, it started with something so small,” Green begins. “Like maybe one band member used the other band member’s hairdresser, and it wasn’t a big deal, but nobody nipped it in the bud. So that’s one little something, and then there’s a second little something, and a third, and before you know it, all those little somethings add up to a big something. I try to see it all, but I can’t. So if something slips by me, Bob will say, ‘You need to watch this,’ or Steve will say, ‘You need to watch this.’ I’m like, ‘Oh s---, I missed that. O.K., I’m on it.’”

Green is both fixer and instigator. Late in the second quarter of Game 7 of the Western Conference finals, Green fired an errant pass and yelled at Durant, the shouting continuing into a timeout. “It was a bad pass,” Kerr announced in the huddle. Several Warriors referenced the significance of the timeout, with Curry going so far as to suggest the team could have splintered. “I think it was important because Steve had Kevin’s back,” an assistant said. Golden State, in peril for a solid 20 minutes, was again home-free.

“Remember why you’re here,” Green told Durant as the Finals opened. “It’s for this.” After the Warriors took the title last June, Durant braced for a transformation, and it never came. “Remember when you got your job?” Durant says. “For two days, you’re really excited, and then you have to get to work. Basketball is great and championships are great. My life is intertwined with this game. It’s who I am. But there are things I want to do that are more fulfilling than getting sprayed with champagne. There’s family, friends, life, culture.” He is particularly



GRIN AND BEAR IT

Still struggling with back issues, Kerr was all smiles as he ran his career playoff record to 63–20, the best in NBA history.

proud of the documentaries and TV shows he and Kleiman are producing through Thirty Five Media.

Assuming Golden State doesn’t self-sabotage, the responsibility of restoring suspense to the NBA falls on James, per usual. After he scored 51 points in Game 1, the Warriors adjusted their defense, jamming him on the perimeter

with help at the rim. Durant picked him up at half-court, and Curry withstood incessant switches. James left the Q with a bloody eye, a bruised hand and a blank slate to create a superteam rebuttal in the market of his choosing. The Dubs hadn’t even popped corks and social media influencer Joel Embiid was already tweeting sweet-nothings at the King.

Get ready for a seismic summer, with James and Paul George hitting free agency, plus several other keystones inching closer to the trade market. “I want to see that movement,” Durant says. “I think it will make the league better.” Even in Philadelphia, with Embiid and Ben Simmons, or Houston, with Paul and James Harden, or Los Angeles, with George and prospects, LeBron cannot immediately match wattage with Golden State. But the eternal quest to capsize the Warriors will determine this latest decision, more than corporate ambitions or children’s schools.

Durant will be watching like everyone else, swaddled in sweats at his home in the sky, 54 stories and two trophies above it all. □

BRADEN HOLTBY



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| STANLEY CUP FINALS |

THE
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IS

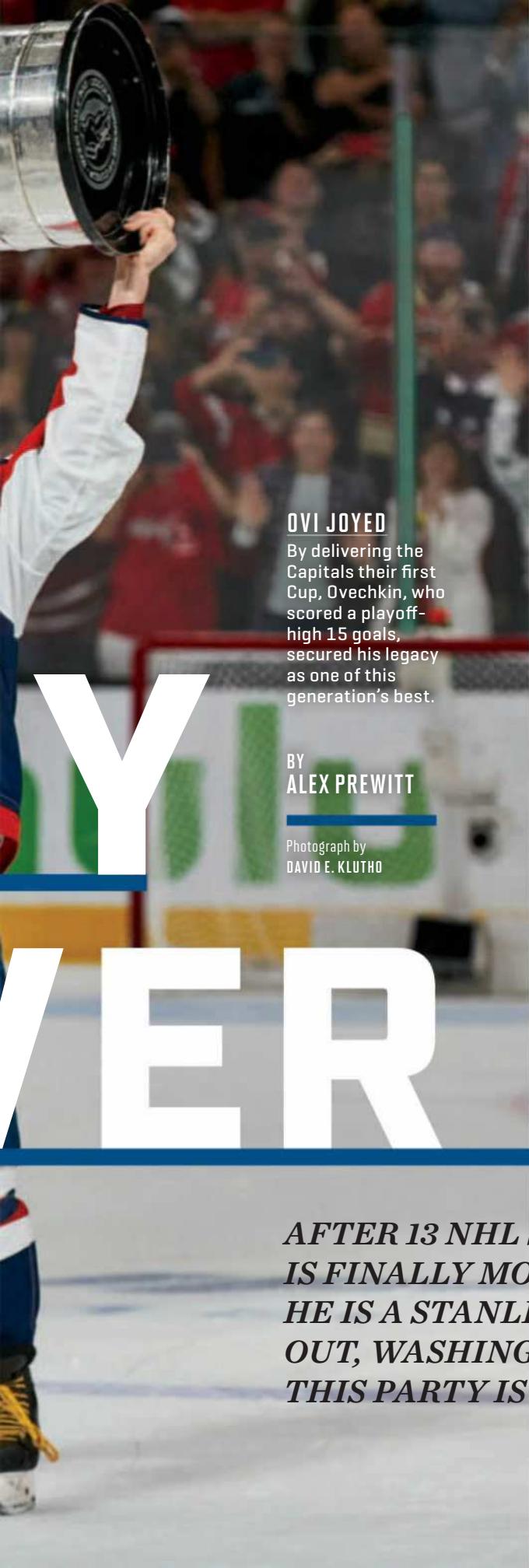
FINALLY

★ → **FOR ONCE**, the weight has become too much for him to bear. Lugging the Stanley Cup like a milkmaid with her yoke can work for a bit, but soon Alex Ovechkin's shoulder muscles begin to ache. Sweat dribbles from beneath his 2018 Washington Capitals championship cap, smelling faintly of hops and barley. "Right now we exhausted," he says, handing the 35-pound trophy to a team official, and he struts ahead—unburdened at last.

Wearing a white number 8 baseball jersey with a red C stitched on the front, Ovechkin rounds a corner in the bowels of Nationals Park, greeted by rousing applause from the stadium's grounds crew. Moments earlier, surrounded by teammates and coaches on the mound, he had airmailed the initial first pitch over Nationals pitcher Max Scherzer's head before requesting—and connecting on—a mulligan. "He wanted another shot," Scherzer explained with a shrug, unclear whether that meant opportunity or vodka.

In any case, the second first pitch was perfectly symbolic. It took the Capitals and their captain 10 playoff





OVI JOYED

By delivering the Capitals their first Cup, Ovechkin, who scored a playoff-high 15 goals, secured his legacy as one of this generation's best.

BY
ALEX PREWITT

Photograph by
DAVID E. KLUTHO

Y VER

AFTER 13 NHL SEASONS, ALEX OVECHKIN IS FINALLY MORE THAN THE GREAT 8: HE IS A STANLEY CUP CHAMPION. WATCH OUT, WASHINGTON. (YOU TOO, MOSCOW.) THIS PARTY IS JUST BEGINNING

tries together before finally capturing the franchise's first Stanley Cup, snapping D.C.'s 26-year major pro sports title drought and drowning every asterisk affixed to Ovechkin's career résumé in bottomless brut. "I think my legacy, you know, everybody going to remember me now, for sure," he says, ducking into an elevator and heading toward a suite where the party will continue on this Saturday afternoon. "That's something special. That's something cool."

Thirty-six hours after clinching against the expansion Golden Knights, Ovechkin has barely slept beyond the flight home from Las Vegas, when he dozed off big-spooning the chalice. Later tonight, Ovechkin will bring the Cup to his McLean, Va., mansion and into bed with his pregnant wife, Nastya, who is due with their first child in late August. He chuckles when it is suggested that Ovi 2.0 should be baptized in the Cup bowl, but he does not entirely rule this out given his current state of stupefaction. "Still can't believe it," he says. "I'm pretty sure it's going to take a couple more days to realize."

Ovechkin plans to rewatch all of Game 5 sometime soon. But for now he has only seen celebration clips from the 4-3 victory on social media, most of which feature his bone-rattling roars. "Crazy moment," he says. "Happiest guy." As his agent, David Abrutyn, later relayed, the scene of Ovechkin taking the Cup from NHL commissioner Gary Bettman was almost identical to the time Mark Messier shook with joy upon breaking the Rangers' ringless streak in 1994. (Seriously. YouTube it.) "I wanted to win with the Caps so badly," Ovechkin says. "I only won championship back in the Russian League [with Dynamo Moscow during the 2004-05 lockout]. Stanley Cup is something different. You can't explain how tough it is. But how sweet is this?"

The sweetest, really. Twenty-four years ago Messier and the Rangers partied so hard through Manhattan that the Hockey Hall of Fame established its Keeper of

the Cup position as a protective measure. Within a few hours the Capitals were well on their way to joining them in Lord Stanley lore. Since taking possession at T-Mobile Arena, the Caps have already paraded the trophy around the MGM Grand casino floor and onto the dance stage at the Vegas nightclub Hakkasan. After the Nationals game, Ovechkin & Co. would be spotted making snow angels in a public fountain, performing keg stands from the silver bowl, posing at a Georgetown restaurant with Jared Kushner and Ivanka Trump and leading what felt like all of Washington in throaty, sloppy renditions of “We Are the Champions.”

Ovechkin did not miss any of the Capitals’ 106 regular season and postseason contests—11 more than he has ever played—yet somehow he seemed to gain energy as the mileage added up. (His 497:26 playoff ice time led all forwards.) He spent off-nights battling virtual foes in Fortnite, searing meats on his grill and fooling around with his black Labrador, Blake.

Finishing the postseason with 15 goals, tied with Pittsburgh’s Sidney Crosby (in 2009) for the most over the past two decades, Ovechkin joined Evgeni Malkin as the only Russian-born winners of the Conn Smythe Trophy. He steered the Capitals through what coach Barry Trotz calls “an absolute mental mindf---” of a postseason: Washington became the first team ever to face deficits in all four rounds and then clinch each series on the road.

Against Vegas, this involved stomaching a fluky Game 1 loss in which Ovechkin had an assist but only managed two shots on goal. “The whole atmosphere, we were a little shocked,” he says, eyes widening for emphasis. “But after that, we turned the button on, and we crushed it.” Indeed, few forces seemed capable of knocking off the Knights . . . until Ovechkin stormed the castle in all his gray-haired, GIF-able glory. “I don’t know where it came from,” general manager Brian MacLellan said after Game 5. “But all of a sudden he took charge.”

JAMIE CLARKE bills himself as a professional adventurer, though a more accurate title would be general outdoor badass. Now 50, the Calgary native has crossed the Arabian Peninsula’s Rub’ al Khali desert, summited the highest peak on each of the seven continents and scaled Mount Everest twice. After hearing Clarke speak at a Hockey Canada event last June, Trotz invited him to spend several days at the Capitals’ training camp and relay his expedition experiences. The metaphor couldn’t have been more obvious.

As Clarke detailed in a lengthy slideshow presentation, he had endured two failed attempts before finally conquering Everest. (*See?*) In 1991 subzero temperatures and triple-digit wind speeds sapped morale and forced Clarke’s team to turn back with only 3,000 feet



PAINTING THE TOWN RED

After scoring a power-play goal in the Cup clincher (above), Ovechkin won the Conn Smythe and then quickly became the team’s most visible partier.

left. Three years later and a hundred yards from the finish line, a fellow climber began suffering altitude sickness, fell unconscious and required rescue. Only after trying again, in ’97—and then again in 2010—did Clarke succeed.

Listening from his front-row seat in the dark film room at the team’s practice facility, Ovechkin was gripped. Over the following days he would periodically track down Clarke—on the bus, around the rink, at team meals—to address several lingering curiosities: How do climbers train? What do they eat? How are injuries treated? Where is the toilet?

“Very inquisitive,” Clarke says. “He was really rolling up his sleeves.” In particular, one question struck Clarke as deeply revealing: “When you didn’t make it to the top,” Ovechkin wondered, “how did you deal with that disappointment?”

At the time the Capitals were still saddled by what Clarke calls “the Penguin-shaped monkey on their backs,”



less dancing and a tea set gifted by personal friend Vladimir Putin, Ovechkin welcomed an envoy from the District. Trotz had traveled to Russia to see his son Tyson, who teaches English several hours outside Moscow, and alerted his other Russian contact. Before leaving on his honeymoon in the Maldives, Ovechkin scooped up Trotz in his white Mercedes G-Wagon and steered northwest, pointing out childhood landmarks—first apartment building, first school, first ice rink—along the way.

Eventually the pair reached one of Ovechkin's favorite local restaurants, where they sat in a curtained section, sipped beers, discussed married life, and ate "some giant pierogi thing," Trotz says. Midway through, the coach arrived at the main reason he had called on his star player. "Everybody thinks you can't do it anymore," he told Ovechkin, referencing a lineup of Canadian TV talking heads suggesting that the Capitals should explore



"HE WAS ON A MISSION," TROTZ SAYS. "IT WAS ALMOST LIKE, 'I'M GOING TO SET THE STAGE, I'M STILL GREAT. AND ALL YOU HATERS OUT THERE, I'M BACK.'"

a wicked creature that had fattened to an all-time weight last spring, when Pittsburgh again eliminated Washington in the second round. "It was miserable," one front-office official recalls. "A lot of finger-pointing about what's going on." As usual, blame largely fell upon Ovechkin, who scored a career-low 16 goals at even strength during the 2016–17 regular season and ended the playoffs with costly errors on both Penguins tallies in Game 7.

Unable to represent Russia at the world championships due to a hamstring injury, Ovechkin instead decamped to his beachside Miami condo and detoxed from hockey, only glancing at the score when Pittsburgh and Crosby clinched their second straight title. "You play for your team," he says, "and when your team is out, why you have to watch the game?"

A few weeks later, following a raucous wedding weekend back in Russia highlighted by some shirt-

trading their captain. "You've got to evolve. You've got to become the athlete that everyone expects you to be."

On the one hand, Ovechkin will always remain the same genetic marvel who crushes Coca-Cola cans and devours spaghetti slathered in cream sauce as a pregame meal. (Contrary to breathless playoff reporting, Ovechkin doesn't eat the chicken parm included in his usual delivery from local restaurant Mamma Lucia's but continues to order it out of superstition. "Why change?" he says. "Do the exact same thing. Keep pounding the rock.")

But he has made some necessary tweaks—fewer Red Bulls, more micronutrient-enriched smoothies, for instance. Thanks to a cardio-heavy summer regimen, featuring sprint workouts at a northern Virginia high school track, Ovechkin also reported to camp better conditioned than he had in years, according to Capitals strength coach Mark Nemish. The result was a superhuman



CAPITAL THRILL

Holtby's miraculous save in the final minutes of Game 2 preserved Washington's 3-2 lead and gave the Caps their first ever finals win.

blast from the past: Ovechkin became the first player in 100 years to score consecutive hat tricks in the first two games of the season, and he ultimately finished 2017-18 one shy of reaching 50 for the eighth time while winning his seventh Rocket Richard Trophy.

"He was on a mission," Trotz says. "It was almost like, 'I'm going to set the stage, I'm still great. And all you haters out there, I'm back.'"

ON APRIL 16, facing a two-game deficit after suffering consecutive OT losses at home to start the first round, the Capitals flew to Columbus with their Stanley Cup hopes suddenly on life support. "Yeah, we were disappointed, we were mad," Ovechkin says. "But we still believed."

Upon arriving at the downtown Hilton, Trotz pulled Ovechkin aside for another one-on-one. Opening a laptop on the couch in his suite, the coach queued video clips detailing areas where Ovechkin could have more of a defensive impact. As Trotz explained, blocking shots or making smart exit passes would help Ovechkin gain "street cred" with his teammates. "There's a level of commitment that people need to see, especially from you, that will pull them into the fight," Trotz told him. "They'll go, 'S---, he's doing that? I've got to do that too.'"

One night later, thanks to an arcade pinball goal by center Lars Eller in double OT, the Capitals captured Game 3 against the Blue Jackets and closed them out in six. Shaking that Penguin-shaped monkey took about 5½ minutes longer, climaxing when Ovechkin hustled to coax a turnover on a neutral zone backcheck and fed center Evgeny Kuznetsov for the breakaway series-clincher in overtime of Game 6.

All the while Ovechkin emerged as a vocal leader on the bench, offering more positive words of encouragement that assistant coach Todd Reirden says "got him over the hump with players." Former Capitals

goalie Olie Kolzig, now the organization's professional development coach, cites a moment from Game 7 of the Eastern Conference finals against Tampa Bay, when Ovechkin wrapped his arm around rookie Jakub Vrana and whispered advice. "That's a side of Ovi I haven't seen," says Kolzig. "He's doing everything that a captain is supposed to do."

As Ovechkin took his victory lap in Vegas, only one captaincy obligation remained. The line of celebratory succession had been plotted before Game 5, when Ovechkin told Nicklas Backstrom to be ready to take the Cup from him "because we've been since Day One together." Indeed, it was a 20-year-old Ovechkin who announced the Swedish center's selection fourth overall at the 2006 NHL draft in Vancouver; it was Backstrom who fed Ovechkin on the power play for the Capitals' second goal in the clincher; and it was Ovechkin who escorted Backstrom around the ice, two hands each clasped onto the trophy. "It was awesome to share this moment with him," Backstrom says. "To all the people who doubted us, stick it up their asses."

And yet it is telling that Washington finally reached its summit with Ovechkin and Backstrom skating on separate lines for the first time since 2011-12, only spending 36:54 together at even strength over 24 playoff games. (The former was centered by Kuznetsov, who led the postseason with 32 points, while the latter anchored sturdy veteran T.J. Oshie and the speedster Vrana.) Internal tensions had run high after the Pittsburgh loss last spring, leading to discussions about whether the Capitals would consider soliciting trade offers for one of their core pieces. Trotz explains the calculus like this: "Do you break the band up, or do you say, let's stick with it one more time and maybe we can get a record deal?"

Ultimately the Capitals stayed pat and went platinum by adding backup performers such as winger Devante Smith-Pelly (goals in Games 3, 4 and 5 against Vegas) and second-pair defenseman Michal Kempny (17:42



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**“IT WAS AWESOME TO SHARE THIS MOMENT WITH HIM,”
BACKSTROM SAYS OF OVECHKIN. “TO ALL THE PEOPLE
WHO DOUBTED US, STICK IT UP THEIR ASSES.”**



playoff time on ice). Ovechkin singles out youngsters like Vrana (“He was struggling at one point, but you can see he plays unbelievable”), Andre Burakovsky (“How he’s grown up as a player”) and fellow Russians Kuznetsov and defenseman Dmitry Orlov (“Those guys stepping up big time”). Splitting their superstars also provided greater lineup balance, allowing Trotz to hand Ovechkin offensive-minded matchups while delegating heavier checking assignments to Backstrom’s line.

Meanwhile, a tradition developed among the longtime friends. After each playoff victory this spring, Backstrom and Ovechkin would come together in the locker room and recite the number of wins remained before they could hoist the Stanley Cup.

After beating Columbus in Game 3: “Fifteen more.”

After eliminating Pittsburgh in Game 6: “Eight more.”

After shutting out Tampa Bay in Games 6 and 7: “Five more . . . Four more.”

After clinching on June 7, they embraced and screamed, simply, “We did it!”

IN 1974, before the inaugural season of their expansion Capitals, the team owners, Abe and Irene Pollin, flew to Moscow in search of talent. They held several meetings with local hockey officials, offering \$1 million for the rights to sign two players, but they ultimately returned Stateside empty-handed. “That was my husband’s dream,” Irene, 93, says today. “He wanted to be one of the first owners to bring back a Russian player.”

Forty-four years later—and almost two decades after the Pollins sold the team to AOL magnate Ted Leonsis—Irene beamed in her Bethesda, Md., home as Ovechkin became the first Russian captain to win the Stanley Cup. “It’s almost like he can push a button and all this energy comes out,” she says. In that way Ovechkin functions as a 235-pound counterweight to old stereotypes. “Our

BALANCING ACT

The emergence of Kuznetsov (far left), who led the NHL with 32 points this postseason, allowed the Caps to split Ovechkin (8) and Backstrom (19) on separate lines.

experiences with Russian players for so many years were that they were tight-lipped, robotic and didn’t show any emotion,” says Golden Knights general manager George McPhee, who drafted Ovechkin in 2004 while running the Capitals’ front office. “Alex’s passion and intensity and exuberance

is at a level that most players rarely get to.”

Most? There was a reason NBC glued its cameras to Ovechkin during the playoffs: No one emotes like the Great Elate. When Kuznetsov scored against Pittsburgh, Ovechkin closed his eyes, tilted back his head and sighed in relief. Upon seeing goalie Braden Holtby’s miraculous backdoor save on Vegas winger Alex Tuch in Game 2 of the finals, an astonished Ovechkin buried his head in his gloves à la Macaulay Culkin from *Home Alone*. And as the final seconds ticked down during Game 5, Ovechkin prayed on the bench, unable to look any longer.

As the celebration shifted to a private ballroom at the Mandarin Oriental, several partygoers approached Ovechkin and offered some version of the same history lesson: “Congratulations! Did you know Steve Yzerman won his first Cup at 32?” A keen student of hockey greatness, Ovechkin was already aware. Previously ringless through 11 postseason trips, the former Red Wings captain—and current Lightning GM—went on to capture consecutive titles and three in six years. Ovechkin hopes that similar floodgates open for Washington. “Only a couple days since the last game, but I think everybody [is] ready for another run,” he says. “You get a taste of your dream, you just want more and more, you know?”

There will be time for that later. For now there are beers to chug, fountains to invade, a city to lug along for the ride. A full half-hour after the Nationals game ends, Ovechkin finally exits the suite, last to leave just like on the ice in Vegas. To his left, a few teammates head toward the elevators. On the opposite end of the hallway, a thick horde of fans is clamoring for his attention. Mulling over these options, Ovechkin turns right. As two nervous security guards hustle to catch up, he approaches the crowd and does not stop. Spreading his arms wide, he walks straight into the middle, swallowed by a hundred hugs, a champion embraced in full. □

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THE BELMONT STAKES

CROWN IN GLORY

*JUST THREE YEARS AFT
TRIPLE CROWN, RACING
THE UNDEFEATED JUST
BECOME THE 13TH HORSE*

★ → **HISTORY WRITES** a chapter for each of them and the book of the Triple Crown becomes longer and richer. A tale for the horse from a century ago, the very first. Tales for the three in the 1930s and the four in the '40s, golden ages both; for Big Red most of all, and for Slew and Affirmed. And for the sleek bay colt who three years ago ran wire to wire in the setting sun and lifted a curse that had lingered for nearly four decades. The earth shook beneath Belmont Park that day because the sport had waited so long and wanted it so badly. No one could have known that the next chapter would

come so soon. No one could have known that there is always more that we can surrender to greatness when it arrives. And so: Again.

The horse's name is Justify. He is a tall, muscular chestnut-colored colt, the type that painters paint and sculptors cast, and on a Saturday evening, in the same long shadows that have followed so many champions before, he won the 150th Belmont Stakes and racing's 13th Triple Crown. He is just the second undefeated Triple Crown champion (the first was Seattle Slew in 1977), his perfect record written in a frenetic six-race



ACHIEVEMENT GAP

As he headed for home, Justify fended off Gronkowski (6) and Vino Rosso (in orange).

BY **TIM LAYDEN**

Photograph by **ROB TRINGALI**

G

***ER AMERICAN PHAROAH WON THE
FANS WERE SPOILED WITH ANOTHER:
IFY LED THE BELMONT WIRE TO WIRE TO
TO JOIN THE RANKS OF THE IMMORTAL***

career that began on Feb. 18, a breakneck 112 days from first race to Belmont. The architect of this furious rush to immortality is trainer Bob Baffert, 65, who also trained American Pharoah to the Triple Crown three years ago, the second trainer—after Sunny Jim Fitzsimmons in the 1930s—to win two Triple Crowns.

“Unbelievable training job, one of the greatest of all time,” said Chad Brown, who trained Gronkowski to a runner-up finish at 25–1 odds. “Just adds another incredible accomplishment to an incredible career.”

Baffert saw it another way. He saw Justify as a gift

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Justify was shipped by WinStar Farm to Baffert's care late last fall. Minor injuries had prevented him from running the major 2-year-old races, but on Jan. 29 at Santa Anita, Baffert worked him five furlongs. "Owners wait for me to make the call and tell them they've got a good horse," says Baffert. "I made some calls that day." There were just 97 days to the Derby, and most contenders had already logged multiple races. Baffert decided to put the process in the microwave.

He ran Justify in a seven-furlong race on Feb. 18 at Santa Anita, under 23-year-old jockey Drayden Van Dyke, who got Justify into a speed duel. "I thought, s---, he's done," says Baffert. "And then at the quarter pole, he explodes. I was like, Wow, this is a serious horse." Baffert replaced Van Dyke with Smith, who had taken Van Dyke into his Southern California home when Van Dyke moved to the area.

Baffert and Smith have shared a tumultuous—but not unusual—trainer-jockey relationship. It started 16 years ago when Baffert put Smith on Vindication, a beastly 2-year-old who went unbeaten and won the Breeders Cup Juvenile. In the winter Baffert replaced Smith with Jerry Bailey and promised Smith, "I'll make it up to you someday." (Vindication was injured and never raced again.) They went on and off for a decade and a half, until Baffert put Smith on Arrogate in 2016 and together they went on a four-race tear. On Justify, Smith won an allowance, the Santa Anita Derby and then the Kentucky Derby, the first horse in 137 years to win the Derby without having raced as a 2-year-old.

Just before the postrace press conference in Louisville, Baffert said to Smith, "You remember Vindication?" Smith nodded. Baffert said, "We're even, dude."

Says Smith, "Bob put me on the bench for a while. But we kept talking. You always, always, always keep the lines of communication open. Never burn a bridge."

On the day after Baffert's trip to Lexington, he watched from a balcony above the finish line at Churchill as Justify prepared for his half-mile work. "I'm nervous," he said. Justify's Preakness had been courageous but not dominant. Some handicappers called it a sign of fatigue. Baffert said Justify needed a tough effort and compared it with American Pharoah's Kentucky Derby, a grinding victory that laid the foundation for stellar performances in the Preakness and the Belmont. "The Preakness will make [Justify] better," Baffert said before this workout. But he wanted validation.

For the workout he had flown in Martin Garcia, his

top exercise rider. At 7:28 a.m., Garcia steered Justify onto the nearly empty track. "*Chilito*," said Garcia. It's a word with some vulgar connotations, but in this case, Garcia meant that Justify was calm and relaxed.

Moments later Justify scored four furlongs, effortlessly, in less than 47 seconds. "Beautiful, beautiful," said Baffert. "Awesome. Just awesome." Pause: "Not nervous anymore."

As Baffert hustled into an elevator, Garcia called on the radio. "*Chingon, patron*," he said. It was the same term he had used with Pharoah after a similar workout three years earlier, also with some ugly connotations but in other ways, loosely translated: *Strong. Tough. Badass.*

EARLY IN the morning on Belmont Saturday, Baffert visited Justify in his stall in Barn 1. Hours later he was asked, *What was he like?* Baffert, standing under a canopy of spring trees in the paddock, raised his eyebrows and looked over the top of his ubiquitous sunglasses. "He's ready," he said. "So ready."

The starting gate slammed open at 6:50 p.m., and Justify broke alertly—"Maybe the best he's ever broken," said Smith. He nudged Justify into the lead approaching the first turn. Nobody tried to push him.

"There was no pace and nobody put any pressure on him," said Bill Mott, trainer of third-place Hofburg. "You can't doubt [Justify] now. He's probably a great horse. Everybody had an opportunity to take their shot. They let it go too easy."

It started less easy than Baffert and Smith might have liked, the first quarter mile in 23.37 seconds. "A little quick," said Baffert. Smith slowed the second quarter to 24.74 and the third to 25.10. Before the race Baffert had

said he wanted three quarters in 1:13 or 1:14. Justify passed three quarters in 1:13.21. There was no chance of catching him at that pace.

Gronkowski broke horribly and fell 14 lengths behind on the first turn. (Baffert, meanwhile, was thrilled to have snagged a photo of minority owner Rob Gronkowski with Bode, prerace.) Under jockey Jose Ortiz, Gronkowski cut the second corner and briefly seemed to have a shot. That shot vanished when Smith asked Justify for more.

As darkness fell on Belmont Park, the Triple Crown near misses of decades past receded further from memory, old wounds healed over, nearly forgotten. Three years ago the curse was ended and a sport felt relief. On Saturday the sport found adulation again. This much we know: The feeling will never get old. □

★ VINDICATION

★ Baffert once took Smith off another promising horse; after Justify's victory, they're even.





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EAT

UP

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Photograph at Succotash restaurant in Washington, D.C. by **Simon Bruty**

IN THE WINGS

Melding the tastes of his Korean heritage with traditional Southern American flavors, chef Edward Lee turns out dishes that Cup fans the world over would love to dig in to.





LEAGUE OF NO

TEAMS ARE ORDERED BY STRENGTH OF CUISINE. THE KNOCKOUT STAGE BRACKET IS ON PAGE 62.

GROUP A

RUSSIA

 Such a sprawling country is bound to have diverse gastronomic influences, so there's more going on here than *borscht* [beet and beef soup] and blini. Like all good hosts, the Russians aren't shy about sharing booze—vodka, [▲] of course.

URUGUAY

 You've got to like any country whose national dish is a sandwich. Uruguayans are known for *chivito*. [▼] While that translates to "little goat," it's actually a grilled beef sammy with cheese, mayo, hard-boiled eggs, ham and just about anything else you can think of.



EGYPT

 Ancient Egyptians subsisted on bread, beer and something archaeologists call, of course, beer bread. Nowadays the fare is largely vegetarian: The national dish is *koshari*, a mix of lentils, noodles, chickpeas and rice with a spicy tomato sauce.

SAUDI ARABIA

 Traditionally, Saudis would roast and grind coffee [▼] in front of houseguests, and that love of joe continues to this day. The food leans heavily on earthy spices [cloves, nutmeg, etc.]. Due to Islamic restrictions, pork and alcohol are nowhere to be found.



GROUP B

MOROCCO

 A culinary dark horse in a tough group, Morocco has some seriously exotic fare. The best is tagine, [◀] a stew cooked in an earthenware pot of the same name. A staple since the ninth century, it has staying power.



SPAIN

 Tapas—that is all. O.K., O.K., we'll say more. Paella. Now, back to the tapas. The country's cuisine is best sampled in small dishes. It's also the perfect way to have an upscale World Cup party. Olives. [▶] *Gambas al ajillo* [garlic shrimp]. Cured meats. The list goes on and deliciously on.



IRAN

 Unlike other Middle Eastern countries, Iran has a climate conducive to growing delicious ingredients, like fruits and nuts. They come together best in *fesenjan*, a pomegranate stew served at Persian weddings. You'd do well to get yourself invited to one.

PORTUGAL

 Portugal has given the world some unexpected delights—tempura, for example, was introduced to Japan by Portuguese missionaries. Back on the Iberian Peninsula, seafood plays a big role. Bonus points for Madeira, the fortified wine that makes any dessert better.



GAMBAS AL AJILLO

INGREDIENTS

6 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
3 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
2 guindilla or other small hot dried red peppers, such as chiles de arbol

1/4 pound medium shrimp peeled and deveined
1 tablespoon brandy
1 tablespoon finely chopped flat-leaf parsley
1 tablespoon lemon juice

DIRECTIONS

Combine the oil, garlic and peppers in a medium skillet. Set over high heat and cook, stirring, until the garlic becomes golden brown, about two minutes. Add the shrimp in a single layer and cook until the undersides

color, about 45 seconds. Flip all the pieces quickly. Add the brandy. Using a long match, or carefully tilting the skillet toward the



flame, flambé the brandy. Cook until the flames die out, about 30 seconds. Remove from the heat. [If you don't feel comfortable flambéing the brandy, boil it for a minute instead.]

Top with the parsley and lemon juice and serve from the skillet.

Reprinted from *Boqueria: A Cookbook*, from Barcelona to New York. Copyright © 2018 by Marc Vidal and Yann de Rochefort. Published by Absolut Press. For more on the restaurant, visit BOQUERIANYC.COM.

SHING

WHICH OF THE 32 COUNTRIES COMPETING IN RUSSIA SERVES THE BEST FARE ON PLANET FOOTBALL? **WELCOME TO THE WORLD CUP OF CUISINE** BY MARK BECHTEL

GROUP C

FRANCE

No one does fancy food—coq au vin, [▼] mille-feuille—better, but it's not especially fun to eat or easy to make. A ham sandwich—sorry, a *croque monsieur*—requires making a mother sauce. Sometimes a guy just wants a ham sandwich.



PERU

Thanks to the Humboldt current off Peru's coast, fish are plentiful. They are best enjoyed in a ceviche, in which acid from a citrus marinade cooks the seafood. Surf and turf lovers would do well to try *anticuchos*, grilled skewers of marinated beef.



DENMARK

Something is rotten in Denmark, and it's the country's conceptualization of the sandwich. Danes go open-faced [*smørrebrød*], [▲] which requires a fork, which makes it not a sandwich. At least the bread [*rugbrød*, a rye] [▶] is quite tasty.



AUSTRALIA

G'day! Not-so-g'food! O.K., so throwing meat on the barbie is a fine pastime, and vegemite is a sneaky good umami bomb [throw some in your next tomato sauce], but Aussie grub is too similar to English fare. And to answer your question: Yes, they sometimes eat kangaroo and emu.



GROUP D

ARGENTINA

As Guy Fieri might say, you could put *chimichurri* [▼] on a shoe and it would rock. But don't! Slather the vinegary sauce on a steak instead, then wash away the acidity with a hit of dulce de leche. ¿Cómo se dice Flavortown?



NIGERIA

In a country where more than 500 languages are spoken, the cuisine is similarly diverse. Stews and one-pot dishes are common, including *jollof*. The national meal—there's an ongoing beef between Nigeria and Ghana over who does it better—features spicy chicken and rice.

ICELAND

In a tiny, remote country you can expect a lot of curing, smoking and fermenting. The last is what gives us *skyr*, an omnipresent yogurtlike fat-free cheese. It's so beloved [and versatile] that protesting Icelanders pelted parliament with it in 2016.

CROATIA

The cuisine inland reveals Turkish and Hungarian influences, but on the coast there's a distinct Mediterranean flair. It's most apparent in *crni rižota*, [▲] a risotto dish with cuttlefish or squid ink. Keep a toothbrush handy, though: The ink will turn your mouth black.

ISTOCKPHOTO/GETTY IMAGES; DENMARK, FRANCE, CROATIA, ARGENTINA, TUNA EYE, FERMENTED SHARK; ANAMA IMAGES/GETTY IMAGES (FIGU)

ACCOUNTING FOR TASTES

▶ COMPARING CUISINES

isn't easy. It's not apples to oranges; it's more like hamburgers to snails. In other words, there's a lot of stuff out there that could seem strange to someone half a world away. Oh, a few hearty American souls might eat lamb fries [sheep testicles], but fewer will also eat the animal's head, as is common in



Norway at Christmastime. Tuna eyes [◀] might not sound like a delicacy, but they're packaged and sold in grocery stores in Japan, which is also the home of fugu. The pufferfish sashimi [▶] is reputedly tasty as heck—but, as any fan of *The Simpsons* well knows, it can be lethal if prepared improperly. Then there's *hákarl*, [▼] an Icelandic "treat" of fermented Greenland shark meat, buried in the sand to let the



toxins ooze out and then hung to cure for several months. The late Anthony Bourdain called it the worst thing he'd ever eaten—and he once ate a beating cobra heart. It made Gordon Ramsey barf. That's not to say these foods shouldn't be eaten. On the contrary, there's joy to be derived from embracing another culture's food, especially during a global event like the World Cup. So be adventurous. Except the *hákarl*. That's a hard pass.





**JUST
FONDUE IT**
The Swiss hit originated as a way for villagers to use hardened cheese and stale bread.

GROUP E

BRAZIL

 With its variety of regional cuisines, Brazilian food can mean anything from rice and beans to pasta to an endless parade of grilled meats in a *churrascaria*. [◀] Brazil has mastered the beautiful game, and it's got the beautiful grub to match.



SWITZERLAND

 Sitting amid Italy, France and Germany, Switzerland has some serious gastronomic influences. But the one dish that is definitely the country's own is cheese fondue. This isn't just nuking a block of Swiss; ideally it includes garlic, wine and cherry brandy.

SERBIA

 Burgers-and-dogs types will feel right at home here. *Cevapi* is a grilled sausage-like hunk of minced meat, while *pljeskavica* is shaped into a patty, making it akin to a spicy hamburger. In other words, if some Serbs ask you over for a cookout, take them up on the offer.

COSTA RICA

 If this were the World Cup of Condiments, Costa Rica's *lizano* salsa [▶] would beat England's brown sauce [on penalties, knowing England]. The spicy, Worcestershire-esque *lizano* livens up the Ticos' otherwise traditional Latin fare.



GROUP F

SOUTH KOREA

 With the U.S. out, skip Buffalo wings and go with their sweet, spicy and superior Korean cousins. The *gochujang* chili paste that's the base of the sauce is also a key ingredient in *bibimbap*, which comes served in a scorching hot bowl and is the most delicious way on Earth to get your veggies.

MEXICO

 Our neighbors have given us so much: molé, tacos, enchiladas, [▲] pozole, the cheesy gordita crunch [just making sure you're still paying attention]. Whether haute cuisine or street cart grub, Mexican is satisfying no matter what mood you and your stomach are in.



GERMANY

 Their wursts [not to mention their beer] are among the best. The Germans also have an elite side dish: spaetzle, [▼] minidumplings sauteed in butter. But that's not enough to get Deutschland out of this culinary Group of Death.

SWEDEN

 Hate vegetables and love meatballs? Have we got a place for you! Sweden's long winters make growing food difficult; luckily, lingonberries, which go into the traditional jam that accompanies the meatballs, thrive in the cold.



KOREAN WINGS

INGREDIENTS

- 3 lbs. chicken wings
- 2 teaspoons kosher salt
- 1/4 cup potato starch

FOR THE SAUCE

- 6 chopped garlic cloves

- 1 2" piece fresh ginger, peeled, coarsely chopped
- 1 cup plus 1 1/2 tablespoons reduced-sodium soy sauce
- 1/4 cup *gochujang*
- 1/4 cup light brown sugar
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice
- 2 teaspoons honey
- 2 tablespoons rice wine
- 2 tablespoons unseasoned rice vinegar
- 1 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

DIRECTIONS

Season chicken wings with salt. Cover and chill at least eight hours.

Bring sauce ingredients to a boil over medium-high heat. Reduce heat and simmer until slightly thickened, about five minutes, then strain.

Pat chicken wings dry; add to potato starch and toss.

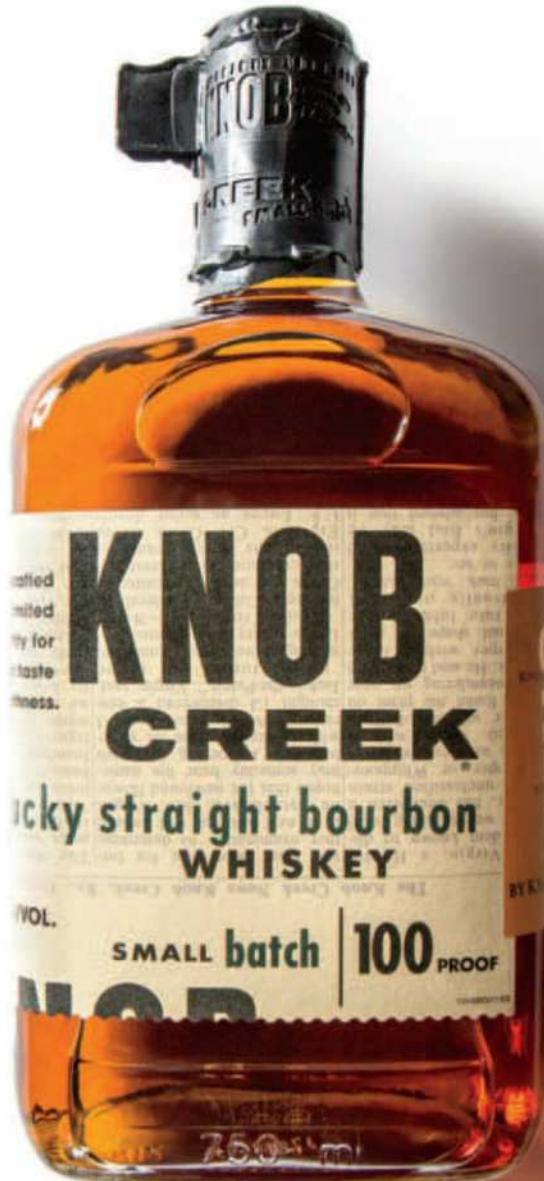
Fry wings in batches in a cast-iron skillet in 325° vegetable or peanut oil until golden, about five minutes. Transfer to a wire rack set inside a baking sheet. Increase oil to 375° and fry again, until golden brown and crisp, about five minutes. Brush liberally with reserved sauce, and top with sesame seeds.



Read about Edward Lee, his restaurants and his new book, *Buttermilk Graffiti*, at CHEFEDWARDLEE.COM.

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HIT THE BRIK

The Tunisian pastry relies on a crust that's thin yet sturdy enough to stand up to an egg yolk.

GROUP G

BELGIUM

 What makes Liege waffles [▼] so incredible? Yeast. That means an overnight rise, which is time-consuming. But the result—something akin to fried brioche with giant lumps of pearl sugar embedded—is worth the effort. Add pomme frites, and Belgium is a real threat.



PANAMA

 The national drink is *Seco Herrerano*, an alcohol distilled from sugar cane and sometimes served with milk. It packs a wallop—but fear not. Panama's most famed dish, a thick, hearty chicken soup called *sancocho*, is reputed to be a terrific hangover cure.

TUNISIA

 Blame the harissa. Or don't, if you're a sensible person who likes spicy food. Harissa, the red pepper paste that gives Tunisian food its kick, is found in almost everything, including *brik*, a fried pastry usually filled with an egg—the yolk of which remains luxuriously runny.

ENGLAND

 In 2005, French president Jacques Chirac said of the fish-and-chippers, [▼] "One cannot trust people whose cuisine is so bad." English food isn't terrible—no land that gave us Mary Berry and the *Great British Bake Off* can be all bad—but reputations are earned for a reason.



GROUP H

COLOMBIA

 Utensils are optional when dining on the best Colombia has to offer: empanadas [fried meat pies] and arepas [maize dough sandwiches stuffed with meats and cheeses]. The plantain—aka the banana's more flavorful cousin—features prominently.

JAPAN

 No culture better bridges lowbrow and highbrow fare than Japan's. Bad *gyoza* dumplings are still *gyoza* dumplings—and, therefore, awesome—and \$5 sushi [▲] is a fantastic lunch. Plus, Japan now has the most Michelin three-star restaurants in the world. Sorry, France.



POLAND

 The eternal question with dumplings is "boiled or fried?" The answer, when the dumpling is a pierogi, [▼] is both. These potato-filled delights wonderfully accompany kielbasa [Polish sausage], the best of which are smoky and garlicky.

SENEGAL

 Many Senegalese meals are meant to be eaten by a group of people sitting around one shared dish, digging in when the order comes. [In French: *mangez!*]. Prepare to sweat; a habanero dipping sauce, *sosu kaani*, is applied to just about everything.



ROUND OF 16
RUSSIA vs. SPAIN

QUARTERFINALS

ROUND OF 16
FRANCE vs. NIGERIA

ROUND OF 16
BRAZIL vs. MEXICO

QUARTERFINALS

ROUND OF 16
BELGIUM vs. JAPAN

SPAIN vs. FRANCE

SEMIFINALS

SPAIN vs. MEXICO

MEXICO vs. JAPAN

FINAL

SOUTH KOREA over SPAIN

SEMIFINALS

MOROCCO vs. SOUTH KOREA

MOROCCO vs. ARGENTINA

QUARTERFINALS

ROUND OF 16
ARGENTINA vs. PERU

SOUTH KOREA vs. COLOMBIA

QUARTERFINALS

ROUND OF 16
S. KOREA vs. SWITZERLAND

ROUND OF 16
COLOMBIA vs. TUNISIA

KNOCKOUT DISHES

The elimination stage features some massive munchie matchups: Tacos over sushi in the quarters, while French haute cuisine drops a tough Continental showdown. At the end, one nation's flavorful fare overwhelmed the field: South Korea takes home the Jules Flambé trophy.



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I N V I N O A

FROM JOE MONTANA TO ERNIE ELS, THERE'S NO SHORTAGE OF ATHLETES-TURNED-VINTNERS THESE DAYS

CHARLES WOODSON

2013 CABERNET SAUVIGNON

NAPA VALLEY (\$85)

ALDO'S NOTES:

Very rich; there's a lot of cassis, which you look for in Cabernets. The tannins are fine, and they're abundant, so this has had a lot of oak treatment. The finish is a touch short because the wine requires more aging; with one or two years it will blossom. It's a classic example of a well-made, tailored Napa Cabernet by the former NFL defensive back's vineyard.

FOOD PAIRING:

Steak, medium rare—it will absorb the tannins.

DOUBLEBACK

2015 CABERNET SAUVIGNON

WALLA WALLA
VALLEY, WASH. (\$97)

ALDO'S NOTES:

There's a lot going on in this wine from ex-NFL quarterback Drew Bledsoe's label—spice flavors, dark fruit, oak. It's very intriguing on the nose; you want to keep smelling it. The fruit is really smooth. Tannins are present, but they're integrated. It's a pretty wine; delicate, but it also stays with you.

FOOD PAIRING:

A refined wine requires a refined dish, possibly venison.

SEAVER VINEYARDS

2010 CABERNET SAUVIGNON

NAPA VALLEY (\$110)

ALDO'S NOTES:

Quite jammy, this wine from Hall of Fame pitcher Tom Seaver's winery is a crowd-pleaser. On the palate you have a fair amount of sweetness—a certain voluptuousness. There's more red-fruit than dark-fruit flavor. The oak brings hints of vanilla.

FOOD PAIRING:

Grilled Wagyu beef. The high fat content will complement the fruit's sweetness.



Photographs by
Taylor
Ballantyne

THLETICAS

S. SO WE ENLISTED **FAMED SOMMELIER ALDO SOHM** TO GUIDE US THROUGH THE GOOD AND THE GRAPE

MIRROR

2015 CABERNET SAUVIGNON

NAPA VALLEY (\$85)

ALDO'S NOTES:

There's a strong pine component coming through this wine from former NFL quarterback Rick Mirer, and it masks the fruit. It has more of a dark fruit—huckleberry—than a red fruit. You can taste the residual sugar. It's a very delicate, easy-drinking wine that won't require much more aging.

FOOD PAIRING:

A stew or a braised short rib, which will deliver a certain sweetness.

MONTAGIA

2007 CABERNET SAUVIGNON

NAPA VALLEY (\$199)

ALDO'S NOTES:

This wine from NFL legend Joe Montana has aged for more than 10 years, so the primary fruit flavors have shifted to the background and its spice component has come out. It's slightly herbacious—rosemary, maybe thyme.

And though it doesn't pack a fruity punch anymore, there's still so much going on. The tannins are very subtle. It stays with you on the palate.

FOOD PAIRING:

Roasted leg of lamb spiked with whole cloves of garlic.

ERNIE ELS

2015 CABERNET SAUVIGNON

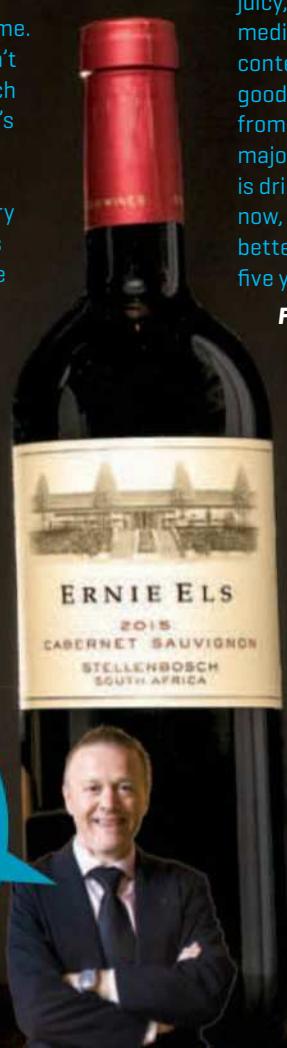
STELLENBOSCH, SOUTH AFRICA (\$24)

ALDO'S NOTES:

This is a very clean, very fruit-expressive wine. It seems to be balanced, with the oak well-integrated. The wine is fruit-dominant—very juicy, very lush. It has medium to high alcohol content, and a pretty good finish. This wine from the four-time-major-winning golfer is drinking nicely right now, but it'll be even better after another five years.

FOOD PAIRING:

Roasted rack of lamb with rosemary, which will pull out the oak and vanilla flavors.



ABOUT ALDO SOHM

The longtime wine director at the three-Michelin-star restaurant Le Bernardin in New York City, Sohm was named the Best Sommelier in the World in 2008.







REALITY CHECK

BY TRADITION, NFL ROOKIES FOOT THE BILL FOR A TEAM

DINNER. BUT AFTER DEZ BRYANT IRKED THE VETS IN DALLAS,

THEY CHOSE TO **STICK HIM WITH AN EPIC TAB** BY TIM ROHAN

Illustration by
Kagan McLeod

ONLY TWO DAYS into his first training camp with the Cowboys, in 2010, Dez Bryant made an enemy of fellow receiver Roy Williams. When Williams told Bryant to carry his shoulder pads to the locker room, the brash rookie refused to be hazed. “I’m not doing it,” Bryant told reporters. “I feel like I was drafted to play football, not carry another player’s pads.”

Williams, then in his seventh NFL season, was not amused. As a rookie with the Lions he had to buy sandwiches and doughnuts for the veterans before team flights, nearly missing departures because he had to stop at so many restaurants to fulfill specific orders. Of course, he recalled lugging around the vets’ pads too. “I was drafted No. 7—I still had to do it,” says Williams.

Meanwhile, Bryant, the team’s first-round pick out of Oklahoma State, and Williams were fighting for a job. Bryant was emerging as a fan favorite, flashing a game-breaking ability that Williams had yet to show. Still, Williams says he tried to resolve the matter amicably, explaining that the duties were part of an NFL tradition. Bryant’s response? “I’m not going to do that,

blah, blah, blah,” recalls Williams. “O.K., no problem.”

When reporters asked, Williams said there was no feud. “We talked about it,” he told ESPN. “[Dez] wants to concentrate on football. We’re going to let him. But, when we go out to eat, I’m going to be a little bit more hungry and a little bit more thirsty.”

ONE MONDAY in late September, about 30 Cowboys gathered at Pappas Bros. Steakhouse for the offense’s annual group dinner. These meals are common around the NFL, and they follow a similar pattern: The veterans order whatever they want, and the rookies foot the bill.

Everyone understood, then, that the undrafted free agents would pay a flat fee; the other rookies would pay a prorated amount based on their draft slot; and Bryant, who had \$8.3 million in guaranteed money, would cover the rest. A select few veterans saw it as a chance to teach Bryant a lesson. What ensued was one of the most gluttonous team dinners in the history of sports.

Lobster tails as appetizers. An assortment of other seafood. “We were ordering \$90 Kobe beef steaks, and



COWBOYS'
DINNER

guys were ordering two!” says Jesse Holley, a second-year receiver then. Pappas Bros. has one of the most extensive wine lists in Texas, with some bottles going for as much as \$58,000. “Cristal, Ace of Spades, Patron bottles—you name it,” Holley recalls. “They were ordering bottles of Cristal and pouring them in the flower pots.”

Rick Turner, the restaurant’s general manager, denies that it went that far, noting, “There were no plants in the room.” He says that Pappas Bros. has hosted these dinners since the Bill Parcells era and that the spending was pretty typical. The difference this time was the shots. One of the players asked for the most expensive cognac, and soon a server wearing white gloves brought out a sparkly case that held a bottle of Louis XIII Rare Cask.

Says Turner, “It’s extremely rare. I think there was a total, throughout the world, of only 640 bottles from this cask.” The server used an instrument to measure out each shot, to not waste a single drop. The Cowboys ordered roughly 10 to 15 shots of Louis XIII—for \$1,700 apiece. “Just sipped and then poured into the water glass,” says Williams.

How was Bryant handling all this? “Dez came late and saw them with the [Louis XIII] shots,” Chris Gronkowski, an undrafted rookie fullback on that team recalls. “At that point he was like, *Man, this is already happening?* He joined in and had one for himself.”

As the night wound down, people ordered entrees, wine and dessert to go. “I made steak and eggs in the morning,” Holley says. Then they passed around a few empty wine bottles for everyone to sign, to commemorate the night. The final bill was reported as \$54,896.

News of the dinner sparked another round of stories about the Bryant-Williams feud. Pappas Bros. staffers were offered money for a copy of the bill. “People from all over the country ask, ‘Isn’t this the place where Dez spent all that money?’” Turner says. “Yes, yes it is.”

When the bill came, “I don’t really remember [Bryant] flinching,” recalls Stephen McGee, the third-string quarterback. “If it would’ve been me, I would’ve crapped my pants. I don’t think he blinked an eye.” But Bryant had some help. “Several veteran players stepped in and helped with the tab as well,” says Turner. “The leaders of the team. A couple of linemen put in \$4,000 apiece. There was another player who put in \$5,000.” (Bryant did not return multiple messages sent to his manager.)

And Williams? The Cowboys cut him after the 2010 season. He played one more year, with the Bears, then retired, moved back to Texas and became a season-ticket holder at AT&T Stadium. Looking back on the dinner now, Williams says it all could have been avoided. “But, nope. [Dez] got stuck with [most of] it. I can’t tell you who paid for [all of] it. I know one person that didn’t pay for it, and that was me.” □



ON THE PROWL

When he’s not eating with his kids or watching sports, Tiger makes regular appearances in the kitchen.

COURTESY OF THE WOODS

INTO T H



ENTER THE EPONYMOUS RESTAURANT OF GOLF'S BIGGEST STAR, AND YOU WON'T BE SWAMPED BY MEMORABILIA. INSTEAD, THERE'S A VIBE THAT HAS HELPED MAKE IT A HANGOUT FOR TOP PGA PLAYERS

BY MICHAEL ROSENBERG

THE FIRST THING you notice when you walk into Tiger Woods's restaurant in Jupiter, Fla., is that it doesn't seem like Tiger Woods's restaurant. There are only three photos of Tiger in The Woods Jupiter. All are sepia-toned. In one, you see only his legs and his shadow; in another, his face is obscured by his hands; and in the third, a golf ball is in focus but the man who putted it is impossible to make out.

You might think Woods employs the world's worst photo editor. Actually, there is a point to fuzziness and strange cropping. You are supposed to know who owns The Woods, but you aren't supposed to care.

"Most of the people who are close to me were surprised that I didn't want my face associated with it," Woods says. "I just didn't think it needed that. I wanted it to stand out on its own merit. I didn't want it to be that people were going there because it's my restaurant."

THE WOODS

The only real sign that this is a famous golfer's hangout is the famous golfers who hang out. The Woods is the sport's version of Cheers, but with a twist: Fans know *everybody's* name. Visit on the right day, and you might see some combination of Justin Thomas, Rickie Fowler, Rory McIlroy, Daniel Berger, Keegan Bradley and Michelle Wie. McIlroy's parents are regulars too. And yes, that guy standing over by the bar, joking with the bartenders, is indeed the owner of 14 major championships, as well as The Woods.

With its leather chairs and bevy of wine bottles on display, The Woods may seem like a typical upscale restaurant, but there is no place in America quite like it. LeBron James or Sidney Crosby couldn't copy the formula: The stars of their sport don't live in the same city year-round (though many NBA stars do spend the offseason in Los Angeles). Jupiter has become the capital of the PGA Tour, and The Woods is where the movers and shakers meet. This is not what Woods envisioned when he decided to open his own restaurant. And that is exactly why it happened.

TO UNDERSTAND how The Woods breaks from the tradition of the sports star restaurant, go back to the early 1990s. Michael Jordan was playing basketball better than anybody ever had, and so, naturally, Michael Jordan's Restaurant opened, in the River North neighborhood of Chicago.

The restaurant—not to be confused with the Michael Jordan's Steakhouse chain, which came later—was the quintessential American celebrity restaurant. The logo was Jordan's autograph on a basketball. An enormous mural of Jordan hung outside. Tourists flocked there to buy not just food but also shirts, golf balls and posters. Jordan had a private, glass-enclosed room on the second floor, where, like a museum piece, he could be viewed but not touched. But Jordan didn't actually own the restaurant. It was a licensing deal.

After a while Jordan realized that sitting in a glass-



**COURSE
OVERVIEW**

Carnivores like Woods can dine on steak, with Brussels sprouts and a glass of red.

enclosed room of a restaurant that bore his name was not quite the same as privacy, and that eventually led to the quintessential American lawsuit: The owners said Michael Jordan abandoned Michael Jordan's Restaurant, and he sued them for denigrating him. (He won. The restaurant closed.)

The Woods is everything that Michael Jordan's was not. Woods owns it outright. Asked if he picked a lot of people's brains when he decided to open a restaurant, he says, "Honestly, not really." There were two good reasons for that. One is that while restaurants are notoriously risky business ventures, The Woods is a tiny slice of Tiger's portfolio. The place could be empty all year, and he still wouldn't have to sell his yacht. So he didn't have to obsess over profit margins.

The other reason Woods didn't do much due diligence is that he knew exactly what he wanted: somewhere to eat while he watched sports and "a place where my kids and I can have dinner and relax." Woods has no apparent problems relaxing at his restaurant—he is usually found up front and often mingles with waitstaff and

customers. The customer he most wanted to please was the Tiger fan but himself, and he said he would feel weird eating regular meals at a restaurant that was essentially a shrine. He says he called it The Woods instead of something like Tiger Woods's Place because "I just felt it is a family restaurant. My family are the two kids and my mom. We're all Woodses."

He does have a private room, but it's more of a design afterthought than a centerpiece; you could walk through the whole restaurant and not figure out where it was. Woods says, "I really don't go back there that much. I'm usually at the bar." He sits in the room only when he wants privacy with his daughter Sam, 10, and son Charlie, 9.

The year after Woods won his first major, the 1997 Masters, he famously chose cheeseburgers, chicken sandwiches, French fries and milkshakes for the club's Champions Dinner. Some of the event's older champions were appalled, but Woods was 22 at the time. This was what he liked to eat. His tastes have matured since then, but he still says, "Anything that has to do with beef, I'm definitely in." There are five steaks on the menu. It is common to visit The Woods and see Tiger eating one while Charlie and Sam eat salads or bison burgers.

WHAT WOODS did not realize until the place opened in August 2015 was that other star golfers would gravitate toward The Woods. They go because the food is delicious and the place is upscale but not pretentious.

On a recent trip this writer plowed through the calamari (served with blue cheese and a Buffalo-wing style sauce, a genius idea), the lollipop lamb chops, a rib eye sandwich and the s'mores casserole. The young Tour

"PEOPLE WERE SURPRISED I DIDN'T WANT MY FACE ASSOCIATED WITH THE PLACE," WOODS SAYS. "I JUST DIDN'T THINK IT NEEDED THAT."

pros often make a meal out of appetizers alone. As Woods says, "A lot of the kids on Tour have gravitated toward it. They like it. They know they're safe there." When Thomas won the PGA Championship last August, he went to The Woods and took the Wanamaker Trophy with him. Fowler was there, and so was Woods, and it's easy to imagine them both looking at Thomas and thinking, "I'll have what he's having." □



STAR POWER OUTAGE

In his first foray into the restaurant business, Woods learned that the food is the thing **BY DAN GREENE**

NEARLY TWO decades before The Woods Jupiter plated its first ceviche—and months before its namesake won his first green jacket—Tiger took his first round through the restaurant industry. In December 1996 the 20-year-old, freshly crowned PGA Rookie of the Year, invested in the Official All Star Cafe, a chain of sportscentric eateries whose partners included Joe Montana and Wayne Gretzky. At that month's Las Vegas opening, Woods celebrated by sprawling himself in the arms of new business partners Monica Seles, Andre Agassi, Shaquille O'Neal and Ken Griffey Jr.

The initial Official All Star Cafe had opened a year earlier, in New York

City, near the peak time of a 1990s fad: the themed restaurant. In '91, Hard Rock CEO Robert Earl had left to found Planet Hollywood; as that venture grew, he announced plans for a sports bar on steroids. The two-level, 34,000-square-foot All Star Cafe in Times Square—featuring a TV-saturated, stadium-inspired dining area, patrolled by a miniature blimp—was loaded with memorabilia, from Agassi's ponytail to Babe Ruth's camel-hair coat. It quickly became a go-to site for press conferences and charity benefits, and franchises sprouted from Cancun to Waikiki.

Alas, the Cafe did sizzle better than steak. The *Orlando Sentinel* declared diners would "be better off with a hot



dog from a stadium vendor." In 2000, with the company in debt, Woods and three other investors sued to end their endorsement deals and to have their likenesses removed from menus and their keepsakes from exhibits. By then only the Myrtle Beach, S.C., and Orlando outposts remained; the latter proved the final, star-crossed holdout, finally going under in 2007. □

POINT AFTER

CHALLENGE FOR CHANGE

THE EAGLES' OWNER ON THE NEED FOR AUTISM AWARENESS—AND FUNDING

BY JEFFREY LURIE

I N OUR SOCIETY, professional sports franchises operate on a unique platform. They have the power to bridge gaps and bring communities together. They foster a deep sense of pride and respect for the cities they call home. Most important, this distinct platform affords them the opportunities and resources to cultivate positive, fundamental change. The power of sport has the extraordinary ability to transcend what happens on the field and address some of the key issues we face on a daily basis.

Take autism spectrum disorder, for example. It has become one of the fastest-growing developmental disorders in the country. Autism is a neurodevelopmental disability that affects typical brain development. It has no bias and touches every economic, racial and gender grouping.

Historically, autism has been very challenging to treat because it manifests itself in varying degrees. A new study conducted by The Centers for Disease Control and

Prevention reveals that as recently as this past April, autism prevalence has increased by 15%, changing the previous statistic of one in 68 children to one in 59. Just take a moment to think about that.

One might assume that a national health issue of this magnitude would be met with large-scale private and public funding, but that is not the case. In fact, despite its growing prevalence, autism has been commonly underfunded and underresearched.

You may ask why the Eagles are so committed to prioritizing autism research. My personal connection is the reason I began this journey, but what continuously motivates me is knowing that families are in need of real help. In my experience, football has always been a great unifier. So I thought to myself, How can I leverage the Eagles' brand and the ability to bring people together in a way that will help drive critical resources and funding to autism?

This led to the creation of the Eagles Autism Challenge—our team's signature cycling and 5K run/walk charity event dedicated to raising funds for innovative autism research. It is extremely difficult for a single organization to address the complex nature of autism. With our platform, along with some of the world's leading institutions, we felt like this initiative could advance scientific breakthroughs and establish Philadelphia as a hub for autism research and care.

After a year of planning and coordination, the inaugural Eagles Autism Challenge commenced on

May 19 at Lincoln Financial Field. More than 3,300 participants came out to bike, run and walk with our team to raise funds for autism research. That day was both inspirational, from the standpoint of how many people answered our call to action, and aspirational because of the research breakthroughs we hope to achieve. We are all on the same journey, and we are stronger when we come together.

More than \$2.5 million was raised by the Challenge this year for autism research, which is a remarkable start for any first-year fund-raising effort. With time, our hope is that the Eagles Autism Challenge will be a signature event for funding autism research.

We know this will not happen overnight or without others who share the same vision. This is bigger than me, the Philadelphia Eagles or our city. We must collectively work together to shift from autism awareness to action. This will

require bold research initiatives whose results can be shared both nationally and globally. It's an ambitious endeavor, and it will take the very best scientific minds to make the transformational impact we seek.

As a professional football team, we take our responsibility to the community very seriously. The overwhelming response and support we received in Year One was nothing short of amazing, and we are hopeful that what we are doing here will motivate others to join us. Reflecting back, this past year will not only tell the story of our Super Bowl season but also how we began to positively impact the lives of those affected by autism. □



ROBERT BECK



ALL THE FLAVOR WITH A
SMOOTH FINISH



GATORADE FLOW

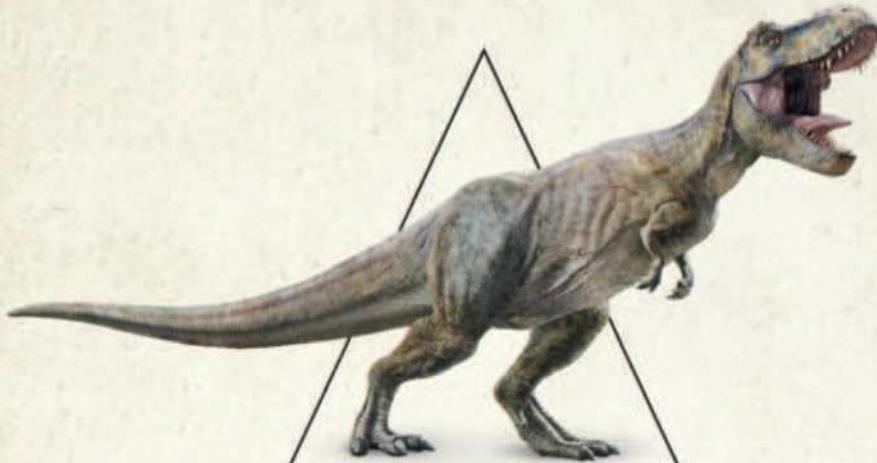


Fig.1 Top Predator



Fig.2 Secondary Carnivore



Fig.3 Primary Prey



Fig.4 Primary Prey's Prey

THE JURASSIC WORLD FOOD CHAIN

M&M'S® aren't the only thing on the menu June 22

