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JOHN FEINSTEIN



ONE **ON** ONE

BEHIND THE SCENES

WITH THE GREATS IN THE GAME

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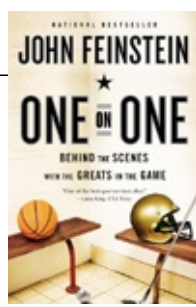
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BEHIND THE SCENES WITH
THE GREATS IN THE GAME

JOHN
FEINSTEIN



LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY
New York Boston London



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*This is for Jane Blythe Feinstein,
whose smile can light up any room.*

Introduction

THIS IS NOT EXACTLY the book I thought I would write in 2011.

I always thought there might come a point in my life when I would go back and talk to all the people I encountered while researching *A Season on the Brink* twenty-five years ago. I knew exactly where the book would begin and where it would end. I would fill in the blanks in between by talking to the players and coaches I got to know so well in the winter of 1985–86 in Bloomington, Indiana.

But the more I thought about it the more I realized that a *Boys of Summer* book wasn't really what I wanted to do. What made that book unique—besides Roger Kahn's writing—was the bittersweet nature of the story line: young, powerful men twenty years later, stripped of that which made them powerful and dealing with the harsh realities of getting older.

There's really very little that's bittersweet about the characters in *Season on the Brink*. Sure, Bob Knight got fired after twenty-nine years at Indiana, but who among us was surprised to see him self-destruct—and then blame everyone else for his own failings? Most of the other people in the book had gone on to lead successful lives: a handful in basketball, some in law or medicine, while others had gone home to family businesses. If there was one thing Knight always did well as a coach, it was to prepare his players for Life After Basketball. The kids in *A Season on the Brink*, all in their forties now, were a bright group who would find their way in life—probably in ways that were difficult for the old Dodgers of Kahn's book to accomplish. All are college graduates; most knew they probably weren't going to play in the NBA. Only one actually did play in the NBA—Steve Alford, who played for four years before becoming a college coach.

After a lot of thought, I realized how lucky I had been to write the books I'd written. I had come in contact with so many different people from across the spectrum of sports. I hadn't just been in Bob Knight's locker room, I'd been in Mike Krzyzewski's and Jim Valvano's and Larry Brown's locker rooms. I was never in Dean Smith's or John Thompson's, but I'd certainly had plenty of interactions with the two of them too.

I had also been in both locker rooms during an Army-Navy game (a distinction usually reserved, I believe, for those who hold the office of president of the United States). I had spent hours and hours with Tom Watson and Arnold Palmer and Jack Nicklaus and John McEnroe and Ivan Lendl and Pete Sampras and Martina Navratilova and Chris Evert—not to mention Joe Torre and Bobby Cox and Tony LaRussa and Deion Sanders. I even spent an evening once with Tiger Woods. Yup, seriously.

There were others, not nearly as famous but perhaps more fascinating, and at least as admirable: Paul Goydos, Bruce Edwards, Chris Spittler, and Steve Kerr, who is at least semi-famous. And then there were the young men I got to know and like so much while writing *A Civil War* and *The Last Amateurs*. I had dustups around the world with security people, *Pravda*, and the Czechoslovakian secret police. I learned from people like Bob Woodward, David Maraniss, and Tony Kornheiser, and I battled with editors, notably George Solomon, who helped launch my career.

So why not go back and talk to all those people?

Going into one's past can be dangerous. You might be disappointed by those you revisit: the way they react to you, what they have become, the stories they don't have to tell. But I was lucky. I found the people I wanted to find and every one of them reacted to my reappearance in their lives exactly as

I would have hoped—or in the case of Bob Knight, exactly as I'd expected.

~~This isn't meant to be a memoir. I hope I'm still a little too young to write one. What it is meant to be is a trip through reporting my first ten books, bringing me—and the reader—up to the present day.~~

One note about the way the book is written: Clearly, I don't remember word-for-word all the dialogues presented here. A lot of the quotes in the book are verbatim because they come from interviews—old and new—I have conducted over the years. But many of the conversations come from my memory, which is still, I'm happy to report, pretty good. The give-and-take in some cases isn't exactly correct but does accurately depict the gist of what was said. I do not, for example, know exactly how many times Mike Krzyzewski said to me, “Are you out of your f—ing mind?” that fateful night in Lexington, Kentucky, but I do know for certain that was the message he was trying to convey.

I'm happy to report that digging into my past and into my memory bank and old notebooks and tapes was great fun and brought back events I hadn't given any real thought to for a very long time. Seeing people I hadn't seen for years was terrific. Maybe I will do this again sometime down the road. Of course, the chances are good that Bob Knight will react to me then the same way as now.

Which is fine. I wouldn't want him to ever stop being Bob Knight.

How It Began

March 30, 1985, Lexington, Kentucky

WHEN THE SEMIFINAL DAY at the Final Four was still a *day* rather than the long day's journey into night it has now become, the first game tipped off at 3:40 in the afternoon and the second game was over by about eight o'clock. That meant even if you had to write about the second game, you were out of the arena no later than 9:30, if only because Saturday newspaper deadlines dictated you not linger over your story.

The matchups that afternoon were Villanova–Memphis State and St. John's–Georgetown. I had more or less stumbled into the unofficial role of being the *Washington Post's* Villanova beat writer. The Wildcats were the number eight seed in the Southeast Region, and it didn't appear the basketball committee had given them much respect from the start, since their first-round game had been against ninth-seeded Dayton in the University of Dayton Arena.

Villanova managed to beat Dayton, 50–49. Then, on Sunday, the Wildcats easily beat Michigan while Maryland—triple-teaming future star David Robinson every chance it got—came from behind late to beat Navy. That set up a Villanova-Maryland round of sixteen game in Birmingham the following Friday.

I took the train to Philadelphia on Monday afternoon to spend some time with Coach Rollie Massimino and his players. I hadn't dealt with Rollie much, but thought of him as prickly and difficult. That day he was a delight, telling funny stories and joking about his penchant for unraveling fashionwise during games. His players were bright and outgoing, especially Eddie Pinkney, the starting center, and Gary McLain and Dwayne McClain. The other player who was really helpful was Massimino's son R.C., who was a rarely used walk-on but had great stories about his dad.

Four days later the Wildcats beat Maryland in the regional semifinals—which was a mild surprise to me.

And then it was on to play North Carolina, who had beaten Auburn in the second regional semifinal on Friday night. Massimino had finished all of his postgame media and had walked to press row to scout that game just as Carolina came onto the court. A large chunk of the crowd, dressed in light blue, exploded.

“Hey, Rollie,” said Mark Whicker, who worked in those days for the *Philadelphia Daily News* and had graduated from North Carolina. “Take a look: *those* are the Tar Heels.”

Whicker and Rollie were good friends, and Rollie waved a hand dismissively at him. “Screw you, schmuck,” he said, using one of his favorite words. “We'll see who cheers last on Sunday.”

Even though the Tar Heels had lost Michael Jordan and Sam Perkins off their 1984 team, they were still, well, the Tar Heels. They had Brad Daugherty and Kenny Smith and Dave Popson and Steve Harris and, most important, Dean Smith. Back then, people who spent a lot of time around the ACC—myself included—figured if you gave Dean five guys who could walk, he would usually find a way to win.

But Villanova pulled the upset, 56–44.

I wrote the next day about Massimino's emotions in the final seconds after Smith had ordered his players not to foul and Massimino got to hug his coaches and his players—including his son—as the final seconds ticked off the clock. "I hope every coach gets to feel what I felt once in his life," he said. "To know you're going to the Final Four is just an unbelievable feeling."

Six days later in Rupp Arena Villanova had pulled away from Memphis State in the final minutes of that first game on semifinal Saturday. Then Georgetown absolutely blew St. John's out of the building in the second game. That made my sidebar easy to write, and I didn't take very long with it, writing about the shock on the St. John's side after being manhandled by a team it had beaten in January. The theme of all the *Post* stories was pretty much the same: Georgetown was one game from a second straight national championship.

As soon as I had filed my second game sidebar, I headed out of the arena and walked several blocks to a nearby Italian restaurant. I can't remember what it was called, but I knew why I was going there: I had been invited to dinner by Bob Knight.

HE'D ISSUED THE INVITATION on the phone in February several days after his infamous chair throw. The orange plastic chair had skidded across the court at Indiana's Assembly Hall a few minutes into Indiana's game on a Saturday afternoon against Purdue.

Indiana was in the midst of Knight's most frustrating season as a basketball coach. The previous year the Hoosiers had stunned North Carolina in the Sweet Sixteen. All you need to know about that game is that Dan Dakich spent most of the night guarding Michael Jordan—and Indiana won. Carolina had Jordan, Perkins, Daugherty, and both Smiths, Kenny and Dean. Indiana had Dakich, a freshman guard named Steve Alford, and Uwe Blab. That win had to be one of the high points of Knight's career and one of the low points of Dean Smith's, although he managed to maintain a sense of humor about it.

The next week, when I flew into Seattle for the Final Four, I ran into Dean at the rent-a-car counter. Seeing me, he smiled wanly and said, "I didn't think I'd be renting a car this week. I thought I'd be riding on the team bus."

Indiana lost to Virginia in the regional final after the win over Carolina, but still went into the following season ranked in everyone's preseason top five. Knight was coming off the best summer of his life—or so it appeared—having coached the U.S. Olympic team to the gold medal in Los Angeles. Only later did I find out how upset Knight had been by the Soviet bloc's boycott of those games. More than anything he had wanted to coach his country in the gold medal game against the Soviet Union.

Instead, he got Spain, a team coached by a good friend of his. The U.S. team won by thirty-three and Knight insisted he could not have been more thrilled. That wasn't quite the case: Knight wanted to crush the Soviets and he wanted to do it in the Olympics. Every chance he got when speaking publicly in the next couple of years, he took shots at the Soviets and talked about what his team, led by Michael Jordan, David Robinson, and Patrick Ewing, would have done to them given the chance.

But they never got that chance.

The '84–85 season quickly turned into a disaster. Indiana wasn't as good as it had appeared to be in the Carolina game. Knight got frustrated and began feuding with his players. Mike Giomi, the leading rebounder, was thrown off the team for cutting classes. Marty Simmons, after a superb freshman season, put on weight and was benched. Winston Morgan, one of the team's three seniors, got left off the team plane on a trip home from Ohio State because Knight was so angry with him. Even though he had another year of eligibility left, because of an injury, Knight told him he didn't want him back.

In late January, Indiana played at Illinois. Knight couldn't stand Illini coach Lou Henson. He thought he was a cheat, and he didn't respect him as a coach. And so, angry with his team, trying to make a point on national television, he benched four starters—including Alford, who was already an iconic figure in Indiana. He had been Mr. Basketball in the state as a high school senior, Indiana's leading scorer as a freshman, and a part of Knight's Olympic team.

Illinois won the game easily and people began whispering that Knight was losing it, that he was exhausted from coaching all summer and then dealing with a disappointing team.

That's where I came into the picture.

"Go out and see if he'll talk to you," *Post* sports editor George Solomon said to me one morning in February. "He likes you. Maybe he'll talk. If not, stay out there and just write around it."

Knight did like me. I had met him on several occasions, often through Dave Kindred, who had been a columnist at the *Post* and had a good relationship with Knight dating to his days at the *Louisville Courier-Journal*. The first person to actually introduce me to Knight had been Lefty Driesell at a pre-conference prior to an Indiana-Maryland game in the second round of the 1981 NCAA Tournament.

What really jump-started my relationship with Knight, though, was a piece I wrote two years later in *The Sporting News* about the success his former assistants were having as head coaches. At that point in time, Don DeVoe was winning consistently at Tennessee, Dave Bliss was doing very well at Southern Methodist, Bob Weltlich was having success at Texas, Mike Krzyzewski, who played for Knight at Army and then coached there, was beginning to take off at Duke, and Gerry Gimelstob seemed headed in the right direction at George Washington—having gotten the job back in '81, soon after I met Knight.

Talking to the ex-Knight assistants for the piece was easy. Talking to Knight wasn't so easy. This was during the summer, and every time I called the Indiana basketball office I was told Knight was away either fishing or playing golf or recruiting. I would leave a message and get no call back. I was beginning to think I would have to write the story without Knight.

As luck would have it, the week the piece was due, I was in Chicago on an assignment for the *Post*. Walking into O'Hare Airport, I practically ran smack into Knight, who was walking out of the airport. I reintroduced myself, told him I'd been trying to get him on the phone, and asked if he had a few minutes. More good luck: he did. He was en route to play in a golf tournament and his ride—Digger Phelps—hadn't shown up yet.

The subject was an easy one for Knight, and he talked about how proud he was of all his protégés. I thanked him, wrote the piece, and didn't think about it again until I got a letter from Knight several weeks later. In it, he told me how much he liked the story and how well I had captured what he tried to do as a boss to help his assistants advance their careers. The last line was the most important one: "Anytime I can help you in the future, don't hesitate to call. Let me know anytime you're planning to come to Bloomington."

Coming from Knight, that invitation was a big deal. Dave Kindred had told me that Knight granted regular access to a small handful of reporters. Bob Hammel, his local guy in Bloomington, was a pal, and Kindred, Billy Reed in Louisville, Dave Anderson of the *New York Times*, and David Israel of the *Chicago Tribune* were often granted close-up glimpses of the inner workings of Indiana basketball. All I really wanted was the chance to talk to Knight when I needed to write about him. That appeared to be what he was offering.

That fall, the *Washington Post Sunday Magazine* asked me to do a story on Knight—most of it focusing on his selection as the Olympic coach, something that had surprised some people (including Knight) since he had gotten himself arrested in Puerto Rico in 1979 while coach of the U.S. Pan

American team.

~~Knight was such a good coach that he overcame that incident to get the Olympic job.~~ When I called Indiana sports information director Kit Klingelhoffer, to ask about coming out to spend some time with Knight, he sounded skeptical. "Let me get back to you," he said. The next day he did. "You should have told me you were on the list," he said.

"The list?" I asked.

"Yeah, the list of guys who he'll always talk to. He said come on out whenever you want."

So I did. I flew to Indianapolis on the Monday after Indiana had lost a close game to a Kentucky team that would go on to the Final Four that season. I rented a car and drove to Bloomington in a driving rain—a harbinger, although I didn't know it at the time, of the weather I would see for most of my winter in Indiana. I arrived just before practice began. Klingelhoffer escorted me down to the court and told me to wait in the empty gym. The team was in the locker room having a meeting.

A few minutes later, the players and coaches came onto the court. If Knight knew I was there or cared, he never showed it. I sat and watched practice. When it was over, everyone went back into the locker room and I was alone in the gym again. I waited a few more minutes, then walked across the court to where I knew the coaches dressed in a locker room separate from the players. Maybe, I thought, someone would be in there who could tell me where Knight was and whether he was still planning on talking to me.

Tentatively, I knocked on the door. It was answered almost immediately by Jim Crews, Knight's top assistant. Before I could begin to explain myself, I saw Knight sitting a few feet away in a comfortable armchair. "Jesus Christ, John, where the hell have you been? I thought you wanted to talk."

Welcome to Knightworld.

I ENDED UP SPENDING the evening with Knight, having dinner at his favorite Chinese restaurant, and filling up several hours of tape on my recorder. When he dropped me off at my car, still parked at Assembly Hall, he left me with one last thought.

"There's one thing I don't think people understand about the way I coach," he said. "I coach like I'm still at West Point, like the other team is always going to be more talented. When I get my players to think that way, we're good. When I don't, we're not as good. But I'm always thinking that way."

I covered Indiana in the regional that year when the Hoosiers pulled the monumental upset over North Carolina before the disappointing loss to Virginia. Then I covered the Olympic trials, which were in Bloomington, and the Olympics in Los Angeles. Knight was alternately hot and cold with me as with everyone. At times he would pull me aside, put an arm around me, and explain something to me about a certain player. At other times he would walk right by me as if not seeing me. Kindred explained that was just Knight being Knight, always letting you know that he controlled the relationship. My attitude was simple: as long as I could get in touch with him when I needed to, he was welcome to feel in control.

When George Solomon suggested I go out and talk to Knight not long after the Illinois benchings and the Giomi expulsion from the team, I decided not to call Knight. I called Klingelhoffer and asked for a credential for the following Thursday when Illinois was coming to Bloomington for a rematch.

"You going to try to talk to him?" Kit asked, knowing I probably wasn't coming to write a game story.

"Going to play it by ear," I said. "See what his mood is like."

"Probably smart," he said. "It hasn't been good very often this winter though, I should warn you

about that.”

I hardly needed warning.

I caught the exact same flight to Indianapolis I had taken in the past en route to Bloomington and drove—again in the rain—down State Road 37 into town. It was mid-afternoon on game day. Since I had gotten to know Knight’s assistants a little during the Olympics experience, I figured it couldn’t hurt to stop at Assembly Hall before checking into my hotel to see if anyone was around. My best hope was that Indiana would win the game and Knight would be in a good enough mood that he would talk to me afterward.

I knocked on the door of the coaches’ locker room, which sits a few yards from the floor. Within seconds the door was opened—by Knight. He looked at me for a second and then waved me into the room.

“John,” he said. “What can I do for you?”

He was alone. He sat down in his armchair, where he had been watching tape. I gingerly sat on the arm of another chair, not sure just how welcome I was, showing up unannounced.

“You show up unannounced to see Dean [Smith] and Mike [Krzyzewski] a lot?” he said, as if reading my mind.

“Only on game days,” I said, going for humor.

If he was amused he didn’t show it.

“We’re a bad basketball team right now, John,” he said. With that he launched into an explanation of everything that had gone wrong that winter. I waited a while before I took out a notebook. When I did, he kept on talking. And talking. The coaches began showing up as game time approached. I waited to be dismissed. I hadn’t even picked up my credential yet.

“Come on, walk me over to the locker room,” Knight said about thirty minutes before game time.

We walked the back hallways of the building to the far side where the players dressed. I could hear the band playing out on the court. Knight nodded to the various security people as we walked down the hall. I followed him into the locker room and found a place in a corner to stand. Knight went through the matchups and explained to his players how sick and tired he was of losing to Illinois. “I don’t care how many f—ing All-Americans he [Henson] has out there,” he said. “You boys play Indiana basketball tonight the way we coach you to play and we’ll win the game.”

There was a lot more, but I didn’t have my tape recorder with me. It was a miracle I had brought my notebook inside. I trailed Knight when he walked out onto the court, an exercise that would become the norm for me the following season. No one stopped me since I was clearly with him. When Knight went to the bench I went to press row and found Klingelhoffer.

“Where’ve you been?” he asked. “I thought maybe you weren’t coming.”

“I’ve been with Knight since three thirty this afternoon,” I said.

Klingelhoffer shook his head as he handed me my credential. “He really *does* like you, I guess,” he said.

Illinois won the game easily. Knight got a technical foul and put his foot through a chair before it was over. He refused to shake Henson’s hand at the end and didn’t come in to talk to the media. I wondered if I should take what I had—which was plenty—or push the envelope a little bit further. I had told Knight that I was hoping to talk to some of the players the following day, and he had said that would be fine. I wondered if it was still fine.

So I went and knocked on the door again to the room I would eventually come to call “the Cave.”

Knight was sitting in his chair when assistant coach Kohn Smith opened the door and looked at me as if to say, “Are you nuts?”

“Sorry you flew all the way out here to see that, John,” Knight said. “We’re ordering food. You hungry?”

I was starving. I hadn’t eaten anything since getting off the airplane about nine hours earlier. I sat and listened to Knight talk to the coaches about how they needed to recruit junior college players in order to compete with teams as athletic as Illinois. I listened to him rail some more against Henson. I ate some chicken wings and watched some tape. Klingelhoffer came in and Knight told him to arrange for me to talk to the two captains, Dakich and Blab, the next day. It was 2 a.m. when I called it a night.

I almost felt as if I could fly home the next morning. I had plenty for my story. I stayed and talked to Dakich and Blab, who were brutally honest about how poorly the team had played. Dakich expressed concern. “We’re so bad we might drive Coach out of the game,” he said. “I’ve seen him mad, but never like this.”

Knight was mad at practice that afternoon. I continued to have complete access: pre-practice talk in the locker room (which wasn’t pretty), practice, postpractice talk. Then it was back to the Chinese restaurant for dinner, where Knight talked calmly and philosophically about getting through a season like this one and regrouping to come back next year.

I was on an early morning flight the next day thinking I had enough to write three stories. Indiana was playing Purdue that afternoon. I figured sticking around would be redundant, since I’d seen everything there was to see in the past forty-eight hours. Of course I was completely wrong.

I WAS ACTUALLY SITTING in George Solomon’s office writing the Knight story a few hours after I’d left Indiana—it was a quiet place to work on a Saturday afternoon—when someone came in and said, “Your guy Knight just threw a chair.”

I walked out into the newsroom just in time to see a replay. I hadn’t even bothered to watch the start of the game, figuring I’d wait to see how the first half went and then watch the second. Purdue had jumped to an 11–2 lead, and Knight had gotten into it with referee London Bradley—one of many Big Ten refs he insisted shouldn’t be reffing in the Big Ten.

Bradley had teed Knight up. As Purdue’s Steve Ross walked to the free-throw line, Knight turned and picked up the orange plastic chair where he had been sitting and sidearmed it across the court. It skittered directly in front of Ross and lost steam just as it reached the far side of the court. What’s funny to me all these years later is that if you watch the tape, no one on the Indiana bench moves or shows any kind of emotion—except for a manager who, without missing a beat, grabs another chair and puts it in the spot where the one Knight had thrown had been.

Everyone at IU had seen Knight throw chairs and all sorts of other things, so the sight of him tossing this chair was pretty ho-hum. Not to the rest of the world. Knight was ejected on the spot, and Indiana president John Ryan was in the Cave a few minutes later. Knight did something at that moment I’m guessing he probably hasn’t done five times in his life: he apologized.

Needless to say the lead and the tone of my story had to be changed after the chair throw. There was certainly no defending what Knight had done, and I didn’t defend him. In fact, the opening line of the story said this: “Maybe if he had counted to ten he wouldn’t have done it.”

But of course he didn’t count to ten and he did do it. I ended up writing close to three thousand words—many of them coming directly from Knight—about his lost season and the dichotomy of the calm, measured man I’d had dinner with on Friday night and the crazed coach who had tossed a chair about sixteen hours later. The day after the story, my phone rang. It was Knight. I braced myself. About nine times out of ten when the subject of a story calls, it is to complain about something in the piece.

“I just wanted to tell you,” Knight said as I readied myself to play defense, “how much it means to me that you went out of your way to tell both sides in that story you wrote. You could have taken me apart after what happened Saturday, like most people are doing, and you didn’t do it.”

I told Knight that being able to talk to him and to his players and to watch him prepare for the Purdue game—regardless of what had happened—allowed me to write the story that way. I thanked him for the time and the access.

“Anytime,” Knight said. “I hope you know that. You’re welcome here anytime. Speaking of which I always go out to dinner on Saturday night at the Final Four with a bunch of my coaches and friends. I don’t know what your schedule is, but I’d really like it if you joined us.”

I told him if I could get there once I was finished writing, I would. He said he would get me the information on the restaurant they were going to, thanked me again, and we hung up.

It was at that moment the thought first crossed my mind: What if he meant it about me being welcome out there anytime? What if I could have the access I’d had for two days for an entire season? Was I nuts or was there a pretty good book in something like that?

I asked four people what they thought of the idea: Bob Woodward, Tony Kornheiser, David Maraniss, and Lesley Visser. They all thought it had a lot of potential if Knight was actually willing to give me the kind of access I’d had during those two days. The only person who had any doubts was Visser, but it had nothing to do with the book’s potential. “Do you really want to spend a winter in Bloomington, Indiana?” she asked.

I was single and had just broken up with someone, so I had no reason *not* to spend a winter in Bloomington. I decided the place to broach the idea to Knight was face-to-face—at the Final Four. I figured I had nothing to lose.

AS I WALKED TO the restaurant that night, I was nervous. Even though Knight saying no wouldn’t change my life—in fact, him saying yes would potentially change my life far more—I didn’t want him to turn me down. I had really come to believe in the idea and I had always wanted to write a book.

In fact, the idea to do a book tracking a college basketball team from the inside dated to my college days. Even though Duke wasn’t any good when I was an undergraduate, I had gotten to know both the players and the coaches well by covering the basketball team for the student newspaper, *The Chronicle*. I believed there was a story to be told about what really went on inside locker rooms and practices and huddles.

The idea stayed with me during my early days at the *Post*, but I was convinced you had to have a truly big name coach give you access to his program in order to write a book that a publisher would buy and that the public would want to read.

To me there were only three coaches who fit that profile: Knight, Dean Smith, and Georgetown’s John Thompson, who in 1984 had become the first African-American coach to win a national championship. Thompson was brilliant, he was intense, and he was perhaps the most secretive and paranoid person I’d ever met in a business filled with men who were secretive and paranoid. He literally chained the doors to McDonough Gym closed when his team practiced, and he had a bell attached to the door of the reception area leading to the basketball offices so that even when he was in his office, he knew when someone was coming in or going out.

Thompson’s desire for secrecy and my desire for storytelling led us to clash early and often. We battled frequently, often screaming at one another outside locker rooms and in hotel lobbies. Once, when I made the mistake of snapping at his academic coordinator / alter ego / best friend, Mary Fenlon, who had more authority than anyone in the program with the *possible* exception of Thompson

he went off on me completely.

On this particular night, I had waited in the hallway for Thompson and Fenlon to make the short walk from the back door of the Capital Centre's home locker room to the interview room. As they came out, I said to Thompson, "John, when you're done in there, I need a minute to ask you a couple of quick follow-ups for the Ewing piece." I'd been working on a feature on Patrick Ewing.

Before Thompson could answer, Fenlon looked at me and said, "He doesn't have time for any of your questions." I never liked Fenlon. I thought she fed Thompson's paranoia and went out of her way to be unpleasant to people. So, when she answered for Thompson, I answered instinctively: "Mary, I don't think I was talking to you. I think I was talking to John."

Now Thompson *did* answer me. Standing up to his full height of 6 foot 10, he loomed over me and screamed, "If you're talking to Mary, you're talking to me. And if you're f—ing with Mary, you're f—ing with me. You want to f— with me?"

Clearly, I didn't want to f— with him. Just as clearly, I wasn't going to let him intimidate me, no matter how intimidated I felt at that moment. He had me by ten inches and probably 150 pounds (I was a lot thinner then than now).

I stood up as straight as I could and remembered something Wil Jones, who had played against Thompson in high school, had once told me: "John loves to intimidate. But he's not so tough. When we played I always told him he was nothing but a pussy jump shooter."

So I looked up at Thompson and said, "Fine, John, you wanna go out back? You want the first swing? From what Wil Jones says I'll have a pretty good shot. And if not, what the hell, you can knock me out and make me a millionaire." (I'd stolen that line from my pal Ken Denlinger, who had once had a similar conversation with Lefty Driesell.)

Thompson's mouth dropped open for a second. Then he started to laugh. He put his arm around me and said, "You know something, motherf—er [that was John's catchall word for everything; it was often a term of endearment], I have to admit something. I respect you. I don't *like* you, but I respect you. I'll give you five minutes when I'm done."

Which he did.

Our relationship got worse before it got better. I used the term "Hoya Paranoia" in a story about Georgetown that I wrote for *The Sporting News* in the spring of 1984, and at the Final Four in Seattle that year, Thompson accused the media of having a "herd mentality" when it came to his team because the "Hoya Paranoia" reference had picked up quite a bit of steam.

Clearly, Thompson was not going to be the guy who gave me complete access to his team for a season. I was lucky to be allowed in the building when Georgetown played.

THAT WASN'T THE CASE with Dean Smith. In spite of my educational background (Duke), I'd always had a good relationship with him. In fact, in 1981 I had written a lengthy two-part series on Smith in the *Post* for which he had given me a lot of interview time and allowed a lot of his close friends to talk with me. For Dean, this was very rare. He hated publicity.

"Write about the players," he would always say when someone asked him for extended interview time. He had even done that when approached by the great Frank Deford for a profile in *Sports Illustrated*. Deford was so good he could write around not having sit-down time with Dean and still be brilliant. I wasn't that good. So in January of 1981, absolutely determined to get Dean to give me some serious time, I drove down to Charlottesville on a Friday afternoon to see him at his hotel—the Boar's Head Inn. North Carolina was playing Virginia the next afternoon.

Rick Brewer—who had been the sports information director at North Carolina since 1975, but had

worked in the athletic department since his days as a student in the mid-'60s—had convinced Dean to speak to me that evening and allow me to make my case. So I made the drive from D.C. even though I had to turn around and go right back to cover a game at Maryland the next day.

Dean was trying unsuccessfully to light a fire in the fireplace in his room when Rick and I walked in. Through the years, one thing he and I have shared is a complete inability to figure out anything mechanical or technical. Once, when I was trying to track him down by phone for a story I was working on one Sunday afternoon, I asked Keith Drum, who worked at the *Durham Morning Herald* at the time, if he would give Dean the 800 number at the *Post* and ask him to call me. When Keith handed Dean the number, Dean looked at it and said, "I'm not sure I know how to dial an eight-hundred number." He was serious.

Now he had put out a call for someone on the hotel staff to come to the room to light a fire for him. I would have offered to help, only I probably couldn't have done any better.

"So what do you need?" Dean asked, sitting down.

"You," I answered as he started shaking his head.

I told him I *had* written stories about his players, including one earlier that season on Sam Perkins. I had even driven down to Wilmington to see one of his future players, a kid named Michael Jordan, play that winter. I told him if he didn't talk to me, I was going to write the story anyway, but I also said I knew it would be a lot better if he did talk to me.

He sighed and looked at Rick. "What do you think, Rick?" he asked.

Rick shrugged. "I think if John's going to write the story it *will* be better if you talk to him," he said.

Dean looked at me and shook his head. "I still wish you'd just write about the players," he said.

"I know you do, Dean," I answered.

"Okay. Let me think about it overnight. I'll let you know after the game tomorrow."

"That's fine," I said. "Maybe you can call me, or Rick can call me, because I won't be here. I have to drive back tonight since Maryland plays at noon tomorrow."

He looked puzzled. "You mean you drove down here just to talk to me?" he said.

I nodded.

He smiled. "I wish I'd have known that. I'd have had Rick buy you dinner."

To this day Rick and I still laugh about that line. Because I'd driven to Charlottesville to see Dean, Rick should get stuck taking me to dinner. I told him that, as much as I liked Rick and as much as I enjoyed the Aberdeen Barn (a great steakhouse in Charlottesville), my only mission that night was to get him to say yes.

The next day, shortly after Virginia and Ralph Sampson had beaten North Carolina, my phone rang. Hearing Rick's voice, I expected bad news, since I had just seen the end of the game a few minutes earlier.

"Dean says if you can come down the Friday of the North-South doubleheader, you can drive with him to Charlotte and talk then. That'll give you at least two and a half hours."

"That's a start," I said.

Rick laughed. "It's not a start," he said. "It's a miracle."

I really didn't care who was playing the two-day North-South since I wasn't staying for the games. The plan was for me to drive to Charlotte with Dean—who almost never traveled with his team, in large part because he thought the players would be more relaxed without him around, but also because he didn't like to smoke around them—and then drive Dean's car back to Chapel Hill, where I had left my car.

It was a fascinating two and a half hours. Dean talked about how he had always wanted to play the positions where you were in charge as a kid: quarterback, point guard, catcher. He talked about his dad and how proud he had been when he realized years after the fact that he had coached the first integrated high school basketball team in the state of Kansas. He was as open and unguarded as I'd ever seen him. At one point when he was talking about archconservative North Carolina senator Jesse Helms, I asked Dean if he had ever considered running against him. He shook his head.

"I could never get elected in this state," he said. "I'm too liberal."

The highlight of the trip came when we stopped at a gas station. It was February and cold, so the windows were rolled up and Dean was smoking. When he asked if I wanted to stop to get a Coke, I practically screamed, "*Yes, dear God, yes!*" The smoke was killing me. We pulled into a gas station and walked inside. There was an elderly gentleman in red overalls behind the counter. Just as we walked in he spit a large wad of chewing tobacco into a pail next to him.

When he saw Dean, his eyes went wide. Dean noticed and was instantly embarrassed. "Please don't write this—" he started to say just as we heard the man say, "*Oh my God.*" Dean was waving him off trying to get him to stop, when the man added, "*It's Norman Sloan!*"

I'm honestly not sure who laughed harder, Dean, the old guy, or me. As we walked back to the car Dean said, "You see, I told you I'm not that big a deal around here."

When we got to Charlotte, Dean showed me where the car's registration was after explaining to me for a fourth time that the only reason he drove a BMW was because one of his ex-managers ran a BMW dealership. I laughed when he showed me the registration.

"Dean, if I get pulled over by a cop and I say that Dean Smith gave me his car, what do you think the chances are I'm not going to jail?"

"Yeah, and with your luck, it'll be a State fan," he said.

I was really proud of the story I wrote. I was able to talk to Dean's sister, to lots of his ex-players, and to coaches and friends. The most telling anecdote came from his pastor at the Binkley Baptist Church, Reverend Robert Seymour, who Dean described as one of his closest friends.

Reverend Seymour told me that, shortly after Dean arrived in Chapel Hill as Frank McGuire's assistant coach, he and Dean had gotten into a conversation about segregation. This was 1958 and restaurants in the South were still segregated. The two men agreed it was wrong and decided to try to do something about it. And so, one night that summer, North Carolina assistant basketball coach Dean Smith and an African-American member of the church walked into one of Chapel Hill's best-known restaurants, the Pines, and sat down together at a table.

One can imagine the conversation that went on among the employees and the management that night. They all knew that the man sitting at the table was Frank McGuire's assistant. On the other hand, he wasn't Frank McGuire—he was an assistant. Someone made a decision: dinner was served without anyone saying a word. That night was the beginning of desegregation in Chapel Hill.

"You have to understand," the pastor said to me, "Dean Smith wasn't Dean Smith in 1958. He was an assistant coach. It wasn't out of the question that management might have complained to the university and he might have gotten in serious trouble. But he never hesitated to do it."

When I asked Dean to tell me what he remembered about that night, he looked at me with some anger in his face. "Who told you that story?" he said.

"Reverend Seymour," I said.

"I wish he hadn't."

"Why? That's something you should be proud of."

Dean shook his head. "You should never be proud of doing the right thing," he said. "You should

just do it.”

I knew he meant it. I can't tell you how much I admired him at that moment. When I interviewed John Thompson, who had been a close friend of Dean's for years, I asked him if he knew the story. “No, I don't,” he said. “And I'm not surprised. It's not Dean's way to take bows for anything.”

The first part of the story ran the day before the start of the ACC Tournament, which was played in Washington that year. When North Carolina came on the court for its practice session that afternoon, I was standing courtside. Dean walked over to say hello. “I haven't read the paper today,” he said. “Am I speaking to you?”

A couple of weeks later, I got the answer, in the form of a note from Dean. Typically, he started by saying he still wished I hadn't done the story. But since I'd done it, he thought I'd been very fair and thorough, although he wished his sister hadn't told me quite so much about his boyhood. I wrote back and thanked him for the note and for the time and his patience. Then I added another sentence: “I think you know how much I admire and respect you. Someday there will come a time for a book to be done on your life. I would love it if you would consider me as the person to write that book.”

It was probably pretty audacious for me, at the age of twenty-five, to write that, but I did it anyway. Dean wrote back very graciously and said, “Of course, when the time comes, I would be happy to talk to you about a book. But I hope that I will be coaching for a long time to come.”

One year later, North Carolina won the national championship, beating Georgetown and John Thompson in a classic game. Michael Jordan hit the famous winning shot and Fred Brown threw the infamous losing pass. Now Dean had officially done it all: he had won an NCAA title (and been to seven Final Fours), he had won the NIT, and he had won at the Olympics.

Now, I thought, with Jordan and Sam Perkins both coming back, was the time to strike. My plan was to write the book during the '82–83 season and make it a combination biography/story of a season. I had no idea how much access Dean might give me or how much access I would ask for; I just wanted to see if he would agree to a book.

I called him. I told him I knew he was a long way from retiring but, now that he had the national championship monkey off his back and his team had a legitimate chance to perhaps win again the next year, I thought this was the time. I promised I would come down during the summer and get all the long interviews out of the way before school even started. I already had a lot of the background work done because of the *Post* story.

“Let me think about it,” he said. “I want to talk to Linnea [his wife] and give it some thought.”

That was all I could ask for. He called back within a week. “I seriously thought about it,” he said. “I understand why you want to do it now, and I know you'd do a good job. But there are some things I know you're going to want me to be frank about that I'm just not ready to talk about yet. [I'm sure he was talking about his opinions of other coaches.] It's just too soon.”

I understood. I was also disappointed. “I really did seriously consider it,” he said. “I feel bad about it. Is there anything I can do for you? Maybe get you some tickets?”

I laughed. I didn't need tickets. I told him I hoped someday his answer would be different. It would be twenty-seven years before we would discuss a book again.

THAT LEFT BOB KNIGHT. And when he invited me to the Final Four dinner, the thought crossed my mind that he might—*might*—just go for it. After all, he was inviting me into his inner circle at dinner and he had allowed me a glimpse of day-to-day life inside his team back in February, at a time when things could not have been worse.

Dinner was well under way by the time I arrived. I had hoped to maneuver myself someplace close

to Knight, but that option wasn't available. Everyone was in the middle of their entrées when I sat down, and a waitress came and I ordered quickly. I was close enough to Knight that I could hear him explaining that he didn't understand how Lou Carnesecca and Bobby Cremins had won most of the coach-of-the-year awards and John Thompson had been shut out. Somewhere along the line he began addressing comments to me for most of the table to hear.

"You see, it's the writers like you, Feinstein, who just don't understand the game or coaching," he said. "John Thompson had the hardest job in the country this year because everyone picked him to win again and he doesn't have the same team. I know he's got Ewing, but he lost the kid [Michael] Graham, who was a big part of that team, and the other kid, the guard."

"Gene Smith," I said.

"Yeah, him. Ewing finished their defense last year but that kid started it. Now here they are without those two kids about to win a second national championship, and you people are giving all the awards to those other guys."

"Those awards are all voted on during the regular season," I started to say in defense of my brethren.

Knight waved a hand in my direction. "That's bullshit and you know it."

I did... sort of.

At that moment I wondered if his hostility might mean this was a bad night to bring up the book idea. I also wondered if he'd had a few drinks, a notion I would come to learn was laughable. Knight doesn't like to drink. Every so often he will mix a little sangria into lemonade or ginger ale, but that's rare and is usually done more for show than anything else. I would also come to understand that the hostility I had sensed wasn't hostility. It was just Knight showing off for his pals. They knew he liked me, otherwise I wouldn't have been there. But he needed them to know that I was still one of *them*, "you people" as he liked to put it. By next season, when he would go into that routine, I had learned to sit back and enjoy the show. That night, it made me nervous.

When dinner was over and everyone was standing to leave, Knight came over to me and put out his hand. "I'm really glad you could make it," he said.

"I'm sorry I was late," I said.

He waved his hand. "It was no problem, you had to work. As you could see you didn't hold us up any."

I was now beginning to understand—at least a little—that the riff on writers had been just that, a riff. I took a deep breath and decided to dive in. "Have you got a few minutes to talk?" I asked. "I want to ask you about something."

Knight shrugged. "Sure," he said. "Why don't you come back to the hotel with us."

When we got to the hotel, we went straight to Knight's room. We consisted of Knight; Pete Newell, the Hall of Fame coach who Knight traditionally shared a room with at the Final Four; and Mike Krzyzewski. At that point in his career, Krzyzewski was a long way from being the icon he is now. Although he had not been involved in the growth of my relationship with Knight, his name had often come up in conversations I'd had with Knight—since Knight knew I covered the ACC, had graduated from Duke, and was friends with Krzyzewski.

During my visit to Bloomington in February, we had talked at some length about how relieved he was that Krzyzewski seemed to have Duke headed in the right direction. The Blue Devils had made the NCAA Tournament that March for a second straight season, even though Krzyzewski still hadn't gotten beyond the second round.

Knight and Krzyzewski were driving to Bloomington the next day to do a clinic together.

Krzyzewski was coming back to the room so they could go over some of the details of the clinic. So the four of us piled into the room. Knight stretched out on one bed, Newell the other. Krzyzewski and I pulled up chairs. I talked to Coach Newell—one of the all-time good men in sports—while Knight and Krzyzewski went over what they were going to do at the clinic. Finally, Knight looked up and said to me, “Okay, John, what can I do for you?”

I had no set speech or pitch. I’ve never really done that. I just sort of wing it. I think pretty well on my feet and have a good memory, so that makes it easier. I don’t remember everything I said, but I remember the basics.

“Next year is going to be an important year for you,” I said. “You’re going to do a lot of new things. You’ve recruited the junior college kids, and you’re going to play some zone.”

“*Might* play some zone,” Knight interrupted.

“Okay,” I said. “At least you’re thinking about it. We’ve talked about how tough this season was on you. You’ve never been under five hundred in the Big Ten before.”

“I never wanted to see a season end more,” Knight added.

“Exactly. Anyway, I know you have a lot of hopes and a lot of fears about next year, and I think there’s a hell of a story there.”

I paused because I had now come to the punch line. “I’ve given this a lot of thought, and I think if I came out there and spent the season—you know, just stuck around the way I did for those couple of days in February—that I could maybe write a really good book about what you do, how you do it, and why you do it.” (The last line I *had* thought of in advance; Knight talked often about how the public didn’t understand *why* he did the things he did.)

Knight looked at me and said, “Have you ever done a book before?”

I shook my head. “No, never. Always wanted to.”

“Do you have a publisher for this book?”

I shook my head again. “I didn’t think there was any point in talking to a publisher until I had talked to you.”

“Probably smart thinking,” he said, smiling. “Do you think you can get a publisher?”

“Bob, I have no idea. I’ve never done this before. But I would think if I told them I had access to Bob Knight for a season, someone would be interested.”

“You know I might know a guy in Chicago,” he said.

“Well, I might want to call him,” I said, having no idea who or what he might be talking about.

“Okay,” Knight said. “If you can get a publisher, let me know. If you can’t, call me. Maybe I can get you to this guy in Chicago.”

I was tempted to jump up and say, “*Really? Seriously? That’s it? No negotiations? No ground rules?*”

I didn’t think that was the right response. I wanted to get the money issue out of the way though, one way or the other. “Bob, if I get a contract, I don’t know how much money it would be for—”

He waved a hand. “I don’t need any money. If I get money then the book’s not legitimate. If you’re going to do it, you’re going to do it right.”

I’m guessing my mouth dropped open. The fact that he understood that so clearly was remarkable. Krzyzewski was standing up. “Coach, we have to get an early start in the morning.”

I had lost track of the time. I looked at my watch. It was close to midnight.

I stood up too. “Bob, thanks for even considering this.”

“Let me know what happens,” he said.

I shook hands with Coach Newell, and Krzyzewski and I walked out of the room. The instant the

door shut, Mike looked at me and said, “Are you out of your f—ing mind?”

“What?”

“You just *volunteered* to spend a season with him? What are you thinking?”

“Look, I know what it’s like. I was there in February—”

“No, *you don’t*. You haven’t got a clue what it’s like. You can’t. I was with him five seasons.”

“So, you spent five seasons with him, why shouldn’t I spend one?”

“I spent four so I could go to college, one because I needed a job. You’ve been to college and you have a job.”

I waved a hand at him. “Chances are I won’t even get a publisher,” I said. “But I *do* want to give it a try.”

“In that case, you’re crazier than he is,” Mike said. “And he’s crazy.”

Little did I know how prescient those words would turn out to be.

No, No, No, No... and No

AS IT TURNED OUT, my prediction that I wouldn't get a publisher almost proved true. I even had a hard time getting an agent.

Two nights after my conversation with Knight, Villanova won the national championship in one of the most stunning upsets in college basketball history. The Wildcats shot a remarkable 79.3 percent from the field for the game, including going 9 of 10 in the second half of the last college basketball game played without a shot clock. After the game, Rollie Massimino invited me to fly home early the next morning on the Villanova team plane. He also invited my friend Dick "Hoops" Weiss, who was and always will be the dean of Philadelphia basketball writers.

On almost no sleep, we flew into Philly with the team and were actually *in* the parade. Everyone on the plane was loaded onto flatbed trucks at the airport for the trip to City Hall. Since I was there to cover the parade and the scene, I certainly wasn't going to say no. I don't remember anyone screaming my name as we went up Broad Street.

I took the train home after the ceremony at City Hall and after I'd had lunch with Hoops and Dave Zinkoff, the legendary Spectrum public address announcer. I didn't know that day how lucky I was to meet Zinkoff, whose rumbling voice and mannerisms—" *This* is the penalty shot!"—were as much a part of Philadelphia sports history as the Palestra or cheesesteaks. Later that year, on Christmas Day, Zinkoff died. I was glad I had the chance to spend an hour with him.

I was only home briefly because George Solomon always sent me to the hockey playoffs as soon as the Final Four was over. So it wasn't until early May that I went to talk to Sally Jenkins about my book idea. The reason I went to Sally was simple: she was my friend and she was Dan Jenkins's daughter. Dan had worked at *Sports Illustrated* for years, covering college football and golf, and was as funny and talented and brilliant as anyone I had ever read. He and Frank Deford were *SI*'s two signature writers. There was lots of other talent, but everyone else lined up, as far as I was concerned behind Frank and Dan.

Sally had come to the *Post* at the start of 1985. In fact, she'd taken over the Maryland beat from me, which freed me up to cover national colleges and do stories like the one I'd done on Knight in February. We'd quickly become good friends, and there were two things I knew for sure about her: she could write circles around me and she could drink me under any table where we happened to be sitting.

As soon as I told Sally what had happened with Knight in Lexington, she said, "You have to call Esther right away."

"Esther?"

"My dad's agent. She's the best. Just tell her I told you to call."

So I called the number Sally gave me and, after dropping Sally's name, got put through instantly to Esther Newberg.

I introduced myself and explained that I could get access to Bob Knight for an entire basketball season and that I thought there was a good book to be done based on what I had seen while there just

couple of months earlier and—

Esther cut me off, which I now know she does most of the time when she has either sized up a situation or is bored or both.

“First of all, I represent David Israel,” she said. “And I think he’s talked to Knight about a book.”

“Oh, I didn’t know that,” I said, deflated. Knight had said nothing about Israel wanting to do a book. “I know David pretty well and this is the first I’ve heard of it.”

“Really?” Esther said. “Well, the other problem you have is no one is going to buy a book by a first-time author about a basketball coach in Indiana. You’re wasting your time. Tell Sally hello. I have another call.”

The line went dead. “Well,” I thought, “that went well.” I walked over to Sally’s desk.

“How’d it go?” she said brightly.

“The highlight is that she says hello,” I reported. Then I told her the rest. Sally rolled her eyes. “That’s just Esther being Esther,” she said.

While I was mulling over whether to try to find another agent, I figured I better call Israel. Given that he’d known Knight longer and better than I had and that he was a lot more experienced—at least *he* had an agent—I didn’t think there was much point in pushing forward if he was trying to do a book that Knight had somehow forgotten to mention to me.

Israel had worked for the *Washington Star*, the *Chicago Tribune*, and the *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner* as a columnist. He’d gone on to work closely with Peter Ueberroth on the 1984 Olympics and was trying (successfully) to make a career in Hollywood as a writer and a producer.

As soon as David heard my voice on the phone he started laughing. “I just hung up with Esther,” he said. “She wanted to know who the hell you were.”

I would learn through the years that Esther is intensely loyal to her clients. Her first thought when I called that day was that I was somehow poaching on David’s territory.

“You don’t need to worry about me,” David went on. “I’ve talked to Knight a couple of times about doing a book, but I’m not spending a winter in Bloomington. You want to do it, go ahead. I certainly won’t be in your way.”

That was a relief. Of course, I still didn’t have an agent. I decided to go home and sleep on things for a night and then go see Bob Woodward in the morning. Maybe his agent, even if he didn’t represent sports books, would know someone who did. (What I didn’t know at the time was that Woodward didn’t *have* an agent, largely because he didn’t need one.)

Before I could finish my coffee the next morning and head to Woodward’s office, the phone rang. It was Esther.

“I’m sorry I was rude yesterday,” she said. “I talked to David and I talked to Sally. If you’d still like me to, I’d be happy to take a look at any kind of proposal you have. I’ll tell you honestly what I think one way or the other.”

A proposal? I’d never thought of that. How in the world did one write a book proposal? Too embarrassed to ask, I thanked her and said I’d be in touch. Then I went to see Woodward to ask him how to write a book proposal.

“Just tell the publisher why this is a book and why you’re the person to write it,” he said.

“But how long should it be?”

“As long as it needs to be.”

Okay, that narrowed it down.

I went home and wrote twenty-two pages. I went through Knight’s history and then added some of the details I’d witnessed during my February visit. I concluded by saying Knight would give me

complete access to himself and his team for an entire season. After I'd written those words, I wondered if Knight would stick to a deal like that if the book actually were to happen.

I mailed Esther the proposal just before I flew to Paris to cover the French Open. It was my first trip overseas, and I was both excited and nervous about it. I was going to be in Europe for eight weeks—two weeks in Paris, a week of vacation, three weeks in London for the run-up to Wimbledon and then the two-week tournament, a week in Scotland playing golf, and then one week for the British Open at Royal St. George's in the south of England.

I arrived in Paris on a Sunday morning and went straight to bed. I woke up shortly after noon and somehow got myself to Roland Garros, hoping to find a couple of players to talk to so I could write an advance on the tournament scheduled to begin the next day. When I arrived at the player and media entrance armed with the gate pass that was supposed to get me to the press pavilion where I would collect my credentials, I was told it would cost me forty-five francs to get in.

Doing my best to speak French—which wasn't very good—I explained that I was with the media and here to work. The man was sympathetic. In English he said, "I understand. But today is a charity day. Everyone pays to come in. Even the players."

Well if that was the deal, I could hardly argue. I pulled out my money and was handing it over when Chris Evert came strolling by on her way inside to practice.

"Bonjour, Madame Lloyd!" all the security people screamed. (She was married to John Lloyd at the time.)

No one asked her for forty-five francs. I decided against bringing that up.

I managed to find a story that day and arrived the next morning—I didn't have to pay to get in this time—eager to get to work. I found an empty desk in the press room, set up my computer, tossed a rain jacket on top of it, and went out to watch Gabriela Sabatini, who was fifteen and about to become the next glamorous star on the women's circuit.

After Sabatini had won her match, I returned to my computer only to find it wasn't there. Someone was sitting in the seat where I had been writing. I looked around for a second to be sure I hadn't gotten confused. I hadn't. I said to the guy in the seat, "Excuse me, was there a computer and a jacket on this desk when you got here?"

He looked up at me and pointed to a spot on the floor in the corner of the room. My computer and jacket were sitting there.

"This is the room for French journalists," he said in good, accented English. "Your room is downstairs."

"You might have told me that before you threw my stuff on the floor," I said.

"You weren't here, I had to work," he said.

Several ugly American lines about surrender ran through my head, but I passed on them. I picked up my things and found my way downstairs. The room was virtually empty. There were almost no Americans covering the French Open, so I felt pretty lonely as I set up my computer. That night I wrote about Yannick Noah and his godlike status in Paris and walked onto the Bois de Boulogne at about ten o'clock to try to get a cab back to my hotel.

It was raining. There wasn't a cab in sight. The only people around were a few of the famous transvestite hookers who populate the street at night. I began walking in the direction of the nearby square, where I knew there was a Metro stop. I was exhausted and hungry. There's no way to grab a quick lunch in Paris; you have to sit for an hour and I hadn't had time earlier—so when I saw a restaurant right next to the subway stop, I decided to get something to eat.

At any restaurant on the Champs-Élysées, everyone speaks English since a lot of their business

comes from American tourists. Not on the outskirts of the city, which is where I was. I recognized the word *entrecôte* (steak) on the menu, but knowing that the portion sizes for meat were about half what they were at home, I wanted a starter.

I looked up and down the menu and finally found something I recognized: *fruits de mer*. Aha—fruit cup! Some nice fruit would be a good appetizer. The maitre d' came to take my order.

Even though my French was limited, my accent was decent. I have a good ear. So, confidently, I ordered the *entrecôte* and then, for my starter, I said, "Fruits de mer, s'il vous plait."

The maitre d' looked at me strangely. "Pour une, monsieur?" he said, holding up one finger.

"Oui," I said, wondering what the big deal was.

"D'accord," the maitre d' said. He shrugged and walked away. A few minutes later the fruits de mer arrived. The plate was so big it barely fit on the table. It was *not* any sort of fruit cup. *Fruits de mer* means *fruits of the sea*. It was a mammoth plate filled with scallops, shrimp, lobster, and anything else that came from the sea—much of which I didn't recognize.

"Fruits de mer, monsieur," the maitre d' said in a tone that I knew meant "you idiot."

I ate what I could, had the *entrecôte*—about five bites, as I'd suspected—and walked back into the rain. "Welcome to Paris, city of great food and romance," I said to myself. There still wasn't a cab in sight.

THINGS IMPROVED OVER THE next few days. Bud Collins got to town on Tuesday, a day later than usual since he had just gotten married.

I had first met Bud in 1980 at the U.S. Open when the *Post* sent me to the last four days of the tournament to back up Barry Lorge, the paper's longtime tennis writer. Bud had been a hero of mine since boyhood. I still remember watching the marathon final of the 1968 U.S. Amateur Championships between Arthur Ashe and Bob Lutz with my dad. Tennis was the only sport Dad was passionate about, and since seeing it on TV was brand new, we both paid rapt attention. Bud seemed to know everything about both players, as well as everyone in the sport. How cool, I can remember thinking then, to be a newspaper guy but also be on TV. No one had ever done it before.

When tennis took off on TV in the Open era, Bud was The Man. At one point, when the networks first got involved in tennis, he was doing Wimbledon for NBC and the Open for CBS. PBS expanded its TV schedule to include most of the summer season in the States, and Bud did that package too. I still remember that when NBC decided to televise the Italian Open (which was a big deal back then), the French Open, and Wimbledon, Bud called it "the old world triple." I dreamed of someday being a part of the old world triple.

That first weekend in New York in 1980, Lorge introduced me to Bud, who, before I could say anything about how long I had watched him and read him, grabbed my hand and said, "Of course I know who you are. You're one of those talented kids George [Solomon] always seems to hire."

George did, in fact, like to hire young. The saying in the newsroom was that George wanted his reporters young, single, hungry, and cheap. At that point I fit the prototype.

On Friday afternoon, one day after meeting Bud, I was in the press box writing a sidebar on Chris Evert-Lloyd's comeback from a first-set loss to beat Tracy Austin in the semifinals. I got up to get something to drink and happened to walk by the *Boston Globe's* phone, which was in the third row because Bud was smart enough to know that the late-afternoon sun beat right down on the front row, making life down there fairly miserable.

The phone was ringing. Neither Bud nor his *Globe* colleague Lesley Visser was around—they were both outside watching the men's doubles final—so I answered. A voice said, "I'm looking for Bud

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