



# *Phenom*

*Let's Play Basketball*

*Another Sports Thriller*

*By Jim Plautz*



James Naismith (1861-1939)

On December 1, 1891, in Springfield, Massachusetts, James Naismith hung two half-bushel peach baskets at opposite ends of a gymnasium and out-lined 13 rules to his students at the International Training School of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), which later became Springfield College. James Naismith became famous for creating the game of basketball, a stroke of genius that never brought him fame or fortune during his lifetime, but enormous recognition following his passing in 1939. Naismith's name adorns the world's only Basketball Hall of Fame, a tribute that forever makes James Naismith synonymous with basketball.

Phenom - Let's Play Basketball

By James Plautz

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## Phenom Novels

### By

## Jim Plautz



**PHENOM – Let's Play Basketball** - Too good to be true, a mid-year transfer student leads his high school basketball team to the State Championship and along the way helps others become better students and young adults. Matthew Wilson's past finally catches up with him when the Russian Mafia seeks retribution for past transgressions.

This is a feel-good love story and suspense novel structured around a basketball theme. At graduation, students, faculty and the President of the U.S. make a vow; "If you ever need me, I'll be there for you."

Wisconsin Basketball is featured in three chapters in the Appendix. Alumni groups, Athletic Departments from any University or College are welcome to customize these chapters for their own Teams. It's free publicity and a great fundraiser.



**PHENOM – Search for the Ark of the Covenant** – Matthew Wilson cements his reputation as the greatest basketball player of all time as he leads the University of Wisconsin to four successive NCAA championships and then forms a globe-trotter team to travel the world and play all star teams from China, Africa, South America and Europe.

But basketball is only a backdrop as Matthew teams up with Father McGinnis and Jim Simpson to bring water to Ethiopia and later, to rebuild the biblical city of Babylon to its former splendor; all part of a master plan to find the Ark of the Covenant, an event heralded by Muslims and Christians as a precursor to the second coming of the Lord.

Matthew is severely injured in a basketball showdown with the Muslim basketball star known as the Mahdi, or Chosen One. Matthew's former classmates are asked to renew a vow made ten years ago; "If you ever need me, I'll be there for you."

## Other Novels By Jim Plautz



**Match Play Championship – Winner Take All** - Drug smuggling and corporate finance structured around a 36-hole club championship golf tournament. A Miami-based drug cartel is pitted against Swiss financiers for control of a new resort and casino in Cabo San Lucas, Mexico. The match-play tournament stakes are ‘winner-takes-all’.



**DOUBLE FAULT at ROLAND GARROS** - Four junior tennis players destined to meet at the French Open Tennis Championship get caught up in Basque terrorist plans to destroy the newly rebuilt Roland Garros Tennis Stadium; a story of love, jealousy and revenge.

## Characters

- **Matthew Wilson:** ‘Phenom’
- **Jim Simpson:** Coach; filling in for Ray Meyer
- **Father Sean McGinnis:** Roman Catholic Priest
- **Amar Rashad:** ‘The Mahdi’
- **Ken Reed:** Simpson’s right-hand man and best friend
- **Chris Lewis Reed:** Former DEA; married to Ken
- **Jerry Hayes:** Challenged by Matthew to be a leader
- **Jennifer:** Head Cheerleader and dancer, Matthew’s girlfriend
- **Shorewood High School Basketball Team:** Matthew, Rodney, Andy, Erin, Tom and Sam
- **Waukesha High School Basketball Players:** Roy Burke, Tim Rappis, Rick Roby,
- **Moses:** Built ‘Ark of the Covenant’; Mt. Sinai, 1480 BC
- **Wisconsin Coaches:** Bo Ryan and Dick Bennett

## Dedications

For Rosann, my lovely wife and head cheerleader – Thank you!

My teammates at West Allis Central High School

‘The Bulldogs’

1959 Starters: Jack Szczesny, Dick Starcevic, Jim Eisenman, Joel  
Thompson, Jim Plautz

1960 Starters: Jim Eisenman, Dave Krahn, Joel Thompson, Jerry  
Lawetski, Jim Plautz

1961 Starters: Jerry Lawetski, Doug Sinclair, Chuck Pitcel, Mike  
Sachen/ Tom Osteen, Jim Plautz

# *Phenom*



## **Let's Play Basketball!**



**Featuring the Wisconsin Badgers**

## Chapter 1

### Pick-Up Game

Swish.

There was a five-on-five pick-up game in progress, but Hank Raymonds, Al McGuire's chief assistant at Marquette University, watched from his office window. He couldn't help but notice the tall boy shooting at a side basket while waiting his turn to play. He looked like a player.

Raymonds returned his attention to the game. He had his eye on Roy Burke, an all-state forward from Waukesha High School, #1 ranked team in Wisconsin. At 6'3", Burke possessed a deadly jump shot from almost unlimited range and was the top high school prospect in Wisconsin and possibly the country. The NCAA doesn't allow colleges to conduct practices for high school students, but nothing stops a coach from watching a player that happened to show up at their gymnasium to scrimmage. After ten minutes, Raymond decided that Burke was as good as his reputation. He didn't play much defense, but who did in these pickup games. The boy could shoot.

Swish.

Moments earlier, the tall boy had walked confidently onto the court looking for a game. While he waited, he grabbed a loose basketball and began his routine that he had practiced since he was ten. Moving slowly along the top of the circle he launched 25 foot jump shots with an easy, effortless stroke.

Swish. Swish. Swish.

Raymonds watched with interest as the boy made shot after shot, each shot just grazing the back of the rim as it swished through the net, causing the ball to spin back to the shooter. Nobody is that good, Raymonds thought. The boy doesn't miss.

Matthew Wilson needed the exercise after being cooped up in a car the last three days. He watched the game while he warmed up and had a pretty good idea who the better players were. Burke appeared to be the best player; he certainly took the most shots. Matthew had seen this type of player many times in California.

The game ended and one of the ten players had to leave.

"Hey kid, care to play?"

“Sure,” Matthew responded, anticipating the competition. He could feel the adrenalin begin to flow. He found himself guarding “the shooter”, as he referred to Burke, and looked forward to the challenge. True to form, Burke received a pass the first time down the court and launched a jump shot from the top of the circle. He had made his last five in a row and expected to make this one, but was surprised when the ball was rejected. The new boy followed his blocked shot and turned it into an easy lay-up at the other end.

Raymonds grimaced when he heard Burke complain. “You fouled me,” he yelled at Matthew. “You caught me across the wrist; our side out.” Matthew remained silent while Burke’s team inbounded the ball. Raymonds watched from above. It was clear to everybody on the court that it had been a clean block, and Burke was just trying to maintain his dignity. This could be interesting, Raymonds thought.

Burke took the inbounds pass and drove strong to the basket. The new boy went up with him and deflected the ball off the backboard, got the rebound and was heading up court while Burke was complaining about another phantom foul. Raymonds watched to see if he would dunk and was pleasantly surprised when the boy slowed and fed off to a teammate for an easy basket. “You don’t see enough unselfish players anymore,” he thought.

Raymonds wondered what Burke would do next and was initially disappointed when the game was interrupted by an unexpected turn of events. Don Kojis, a former Marquette player and first team All-American, walked out of the locker room looking for a game. Burke called out to him, “Kojis, over here. You can take the new guy’s place.”

Kojis had seen the previous play and knew there was something going on. “Do you mind?” he asked Matthew.

The new boy responded easily, “I have another suggestion,” as he looked over at Burke. “Why don’t you take a rest for a while, you seem to have trouble getting your shots off anyway.”

Burke was furious as his face turned red. “Why don’t we have a little one-on-one game for a little side bet, just you and me? Chicken?”

“I’m not afraid, but basketball is a five-on-five game. Let’s pick teams. You pick first.”

“Okay hotshot, you got it. I’ll take Kojis,” Burke said with a sneer. “You can have the next four picks if you want.”

“No, we’ll just go one player at a time.” Matthew had watched the game earlier and knew the players he needed, and also knew that Burke would choose the flashy scorers. He ended up with exactly the team he

wanted. The eleventh player, a 5'8" substitute from Burke's high school team, went to Matthew when Burke said he didn't want him.

"What are we playing for?" Burke asked arrogantly.

Matthew decided to take a chance and risk his prized possession. "Let's play for the shirt off our backs. You get my shirt if you win; if I win, I get yours."

"You won't win," Burke challenged. "I guarantee it. Take the ball out. The first team to 21 wins; count by one."

Raymonds wouldn't have given the new boy's team a one in 50 chance when the game started. Kojis was a pro and Burke was one of the top high school players in the country. After five minutes, it was obvious the sides were not fair; the new boy was too good. He was all over Burke and had stolen the ball three times, feeding his teammates for uncontested lay-ups. The boy had only scored two baskets, but had a dozen assists and the score was 15-4. Rick Robey, the short kid that Burke didn't want, had four baskets.

The defining moment came in a series of plays under the basket. Kojis, who had a well deserved reputation in college and the pros as a rough, physical player, caught the new boy with an elbow as they fought for a rebound. The boy was dazed, but didn't say a word. The next time down the court he took Kojis to the basket, stopped short and faked a fade-away jump shot. Kojis went up for the block, but instead of shooting a fade-away, the boy went straight up with elbows extended and caught Kojis underneath the chin as he leaned in. Kojis knew the foul was on him and raised his hand signifying the other team side-out and was surprised when the teams retreated down court. The new boy had made the shot despite the foul. "That's a pro move," he thought.

The final score was 21-9 and Kojis congratulated the boy. "You have a good game young man; where do you play your college ball?"

Matthew smiled; he got that a lot from strangers. "I'm just a senior in high school. We just moved to Milwaukee and I'm not sure where I'm going to play my final semester."

Kojis couldn't believe that a high school player had taken him to school like he did. He looked up at Raymonds and mouthed the words "*high school*" and pointed at the boy. Burke came over and begrudgingly tossed his shirt at the new boy. "Lucky," he mumbled under his breath.

Matthew had been wearing his shirt inside out and when he took it off to change, Kojis noticed it read; Kobe Bryant, #24, Lakers.

It suddenly dawned on him who the kid was. "I've heard of you," Kojis exclaimed. "You're the kid from California that plays the Lakers' players one-on-one and beats them? Kobe talks about you."

The boy smiled. "Yeah, I've played one-on-one with Kobe, O'Neal, Odom and Payton. Shaq is too strong, but I have had some luck against the others. This shirt is my prized possession."

"You weren't worried about losing it?"

Matthew just smiled.

I was sitting in my coach's office daydreaming, thinking back to the unusual circumstances that had brought me to this position. Friday I was named interim head basketball coach at Shorewood High School, the school I had attended 25 years earlier and had been named to the all-conference team my junior and senior years. I loved basketball and still kept in touch with my old coach, Ray Meyer, who was now in his thirty-third year as head coach. I had been visiting him in October when his junior varsity coach walked into his office and resigned.

"Oh great," Meyer said to me as his former JV coach left the office. "Now I get to coach both teams until they appoint someone who probably won't know a darn thing about basketball."

To this day, I have no idea what made me volunteer. "Ray, I'll be glad to help you out until you find somebody. I have no coaching experience, but I love basketball and I love working with kids. Just tell me what I need to do."

"You're hired, Jim, and I'll see if I can get you \$120 a month coaching stipend and an extra \$1,300 if you teach a couple drivers education courses." I smiled as I thought back to that magnanimous offer. My construction and financing businesses were both very successful and I was probably earning several million dollars a month. I wasn't really concerned with the \$120 a month stipend that was in the athletic budget, but I appreciated the gesture.

One month later I was still coaching the JV when Ray suffered a minor heart attack and doctors advised him to take it easy. His wife insisted that he stop coaching basketball for a year, and, before I could say no, I was appointed interim head basketball coach. The next day the sign on the door was changed to Jim Simpson – Head Basketball Coach. I liked it.

Unfortunately, our record halfway through the season was 2 - 11 and we were mired in last place in the Suburban Conference. I didn't mind, and accepted the job eagerly. Coaching basketball was something that I always had wanted to do, but couldn't justify the lack of financial return. Schoolteachers were not paid well to begin with, and coaches seldom made

more than \$3,000 or \$4,000 extra a year, which probably translates to about \$3 per hour. There were several changes I wanted to make on the basketball team such as playing more up-tempo and pressing on defense, but my expectations were realistic. At best, we could hope to win half of our remaining games. I was still lost in my own thoughts when I heard the knock on the door.

“Hello!”

“Oh, I’m sorry, I must have been daydreaming. Please, come in,” I said, standing up to greet my uninvited guests. “Have a seat.” There were two of them, probably a father and son. I couldn’t help but notice that the young man was well over six feet tall and carried himself with an easy confidence. He looked like a basketball player.

“Mr. Simpson, my name is Ray Wilson and this is my son, Matthew. We just moved into your school area and were hoping Matthew can try out for your basketball team. We know it’s late in the season, but for business reasons we needed to move at mid-semester.”

I smiled as I thought back to that day. I had no expectations that Matthew would be the player that he turned out to be, but I remembered thinking that it would be awfully hard for a 6’5” boy not to make our team. We were not that good.

“Sure,” I replied, “we are always looking to improve our team.” Matthew was carrying a small gym bag and I figured he was ready to go. “You may start today if you have your stuff with you, Matthew. Why don’t you change and join the other kids on the floor? Practice starts in about ten minutes.”

“What position does he play, Mr. Wilson? He obviously has the height to be a center or forward.”

“I’ll let you be the judge of that, Coach. He’s played everything from center to point guard. You decide where he’ll fit best with your players.”

“Anything I should be aware of?”

“Well, there is one thing.”

Uh, oh, I thought, here it comes. Now I get the bad news. My face must have registered some concern.

“Don’t worry; Matthew is an excellent basketball player, I have no doubt about that. However, he has a tendency to take charge. I would appreciate your giving him the benefit of the doubt for a while until you see what he can do. Some might think he’s trying to usurp their authority, but this isn’t the case. He only wants to win.”

“If you’re talking about egos, Mr. Wilson, you don’t have anything to worry about with me. I’m the coach, of course, but I encourage all my

kids to think for themselves. Why don't we go out and see what your son has and we'll just take it one step at a time."

"I have a feeling you and Matthew will get along just fine."

Matthew was still stretching when I walked out on the court for our afternoon practice. "Come on, boys, two lines, let's shoot some lay-ups. This is Matthew Wilson; he's going to try out for our team."

The 12 boys formed two lines, one shooting and one rebounding before feeding the next shooter, a typical lay-up drill used at all levels of basketball. Matt took three lay-ups from the right side easily laying the ball gently off the backboard. It didn't take long to see he was coordinated. Even at 6'5", he moved with agility and ease. We then reversed the lines and the players shot from the left side although most of my players still shot right-handed. I knew Matthew was a basketball player when I saw him shooting with his left hand, easily reversing his footwork, which is the most difficult thing to learn. Most boys are right-handed and their last step before shooting is with the left leg which becomes stronger over time. As a result, they have trouble getting lift off their right leg when shooting with their left hand. Matthew had the same fluid movement from either side. We changed the drill to shooting jump shots from the free throw. Matthew made five of six shots.

We hadn't planned to scrimmage that day, but I couldn't resist getting an opportunity to see how Matthew would fit in with the rest of the team. I put Matthew at forward with the second team and later at center. He played well, rebounded, and ran the court with ease. He didn't score much, primarily because he didn't get the ball, but it didn't seem to bother him. You could tell he had fun when he played basketball.

"Okay, boys, let's call it a night. We have a big game Friday. Everybody take ten free throws and head for the shower. If you haven't met him already, introduce yourself to your new teammate." I sat down next to Ray Wilson and watched Matthew make all 10 of his free throws.

"Your son looks pretty good out there, Mr. Wilson. It's obvious he's played some basketball. Does he have an outside game?"

"Coach, you'll be pleasantly surprised."

There was something in his voice that made me stop and recognize what he said. "Just how good is he?" I finally asked.

"He's the best you've ever seen, bar none."

His demeanor told me he was not exaggerating. I found out later that his nickname in California had been Phenom.

5,000 miles away another 17 year old boy walked onto a basketball court in the old section of Istanbul, Turkey, the part of town still referred to

by locals as Constantinople. He was tall, lean and confident despite being matched up against the Turkish National Team that last year finished third in the Euro Championships. Two hours and 46 points later Amar Rashad was invited to join the elite squad. Muslims would call him 'The Mahdi'.

## Chapter 2

### New Kid on the block

The new boy kept pretty much to himself the first couple of days, letting others form their initial judgments. At 6'5", 215 pounds and sandy blond hair, he looked like an athlete. He carried himself with an easy confidence that made the boys gravitate to him. Girls found him attractive. The first thing they noticed was his deep blue eyes that seemed to have unlimited depth, almost as if you were looking into a crystal clear lake. His eyes projected a serenity and calmness that made people comfortable. But surprisingly, there was little of the "he's hot" talk. Most of the comments were along the line of, "he's nice" or "he's really easy to talk to".

By Wednesday, his classmates started to notice that there was something special about Matthew. He had an easy smile and greeted everyone by their first name. There were 1,150 kids at the three-year high school and 325 in the senior class. Everyone was his friend; it didn't matter if the person was popular or a football player, he treated everyone the same.

Toby Hanson was a studious young man with few friends. Only 5'7", overweight, and wearing thick horned-rim glasses, Toby was fair game for bigger boys to pick on. Wednesday, two wrestlers took great enjoyment in walking up behind and knocking the books out of his hands, strewing papers all over the hallway. The boys laughed as Toby scrambled to recover the papers. More than 20 students walked by without offering to help, a few intentionally kicking the papers and creating a larger mess.

"Let me help you," Matthew offered as he knelt down beside Toby. Matthew asked others to help and within minutes, seven boys were on their knees cleaning up the mess. The two wrestlers watched in amazement, knowing that their prank had backfired. Matthew looked up at them and asked, "Larry, Sam, don't you think you boys owe my friend Toby an apology." It wasn't a question.

Larry and Sam were not overly intelligent, but it was obvious that they had a choice to make, and they needed to make it now. It wasn't a question of physical force, although neither boy would want to tackle Matthew alone. He looked like he could handle himself. Rather, it was the new boy's strength of personality that was evidenced in his request. He expected them to apologize and if they didn't, they would not be his friends. The boys made the right decision and mumbled an apology before departing to their next class. Later, during lunch hour, the wrestlers

tentatively approached Matthew and apologized. “We’re sorry; we won’t do anything like that again.”

“Okay; friends.” The boys shook hands and the incident was over. Word spread quickly that it wasn’t wise to mess with the new boy’s friends.

Word also spread that the new boy was good in the classroom. Tuesday, there was a pop-quiz in trigonometry class. Part of the teacher’s motivation was to see how far along the new boy was. There were ten questions and students were required to show both the answers and the derivations. The teacher watched as the new boy wrote for fifteen minutes before putting his pen down and waiting silently until the class ended. He was somewhat surprised because he had thought that the new boy might be smarter, but apparently the subject material was more advanced than he was accustomed to.

A girl seated to his right had also noticed the new boy’s inactivity. Trudy was an introverted girl that excelled in the classroom. She was also 60 pounds overweight and as a result had few friends. People did not see she had a big heart. Trudy had also finished the math test early and noticed the new boy sitting at his desk without writing. Later, she found herself next to him as they turned in their tests and walked out of the classroom.

With a slight stutter, she introduced herself to the new boy. “Uh, Matthew, I’m Trudy.”

“I know who you are, Trudy, we’re in three classes together. How did you do on the quiz today?”

“I think I did well, but I noticed you seemed to be having trouble. I would be glad to help you if you’d care to study together sometime. Maybe I can answer some of your questions you might have in our other classes. That’s all, I.....it’s not a date or anything I just thought I could help you.”

Matthew saw how difficult it was for Trudy to speak to him and how sincere the offer was. He never considered saying no, and gave her a smile that had never been directed at her by a handsome boy. “That’s nice of you, Trudy. I really appreciate your offer to help. If you have time tonight I can come over to your house about 7:30.”

Trudy almost died with pleasure; she had never expected her invitation to be accepted. She was accustomed to rejection and later half-expected Matthew to call and cancel their study date.

After class, the math teacher glanced at the new boy’s paper expecting to see a blank page. He was amazed that all 10 questions were answered correctly and the derivations supporting the answers were clearly explained. It had taken the new boy no more than 15 minutes to finish the 45-minute quiz.

Matthew showed up promptly at 7:30 and Trudy introduced him to her parents. It was obvious where Trudy got her propensity to gain weight; each was portly to say the least. Trudy and Matthew set up their study hall in the dining room and much to Trudy's amazement, it soon became clear that Matthew did not need her help in math. What she did find was a friend that had interests in literature and history that were similar to hers. They exchanged views and opinions and the two hours passed quickly. Trudy had never been able to talk so easily with another student, much less a good-looking boy such as Matthew. Trudy found herself talking about her friends, or lack of friends, and her desire to lose weight and be just one of the girls. Like all girls, she wanted to be popular. She had opened up to Matthew, a boy she had only known for two days and told him things she had never talked with anyone about before, not even her parents. Matthew made her feel more attractive than she had ever felt before. He saw inside her a person that she wanted to be and looked past the exterior. It didn't matter to him that she was overweight or wore glasses; he saw what other people didn't see.

"Are you sure you want to lose weight, Trudy, because you don't have to lose weight to be a beautiful person."

"I really do, Matthew. You know it's important to other kids. They look at me and see a fat person."

"Would you like me to speak with your parents about helping you?"

Trudy nodded her assent and almost on cue, her mother entered the room with a surprise dessert. "You kids have been working so hard, I thought you would like some chocolate cake and ice cream as a reward."

"That's kind of you, Mrs. Rodgers; would your husband like to join us?" They were about to start eating when Matthew asked, "may I offer grace and thanks for this good food?"

"Go ahead, that would be nice," Mr. Rodgers said with some apprehension. They were not a religious family. Matthew offered his extended hands to Trudy and Mr. Rodgers on his left and said a simple grace. "We thank you, Lord, for the food on our table, and the new friends we have met today. I especially ask for your help in supporting Trudy while she begins a difficult task."

"So, what's this difficult task, Trudy?" Mr. Rodgers asked as he began eating.

Trudy looked at Matthew for support and answered her father. "Dad, Mom, I've decided to try and lose weight and Matthew has offered to help me," she said with obvious trepidation.

“Trudy, we like you just the way you are. A little extra weight never hurt anybody. What if you get sick? Are you telling her to lose weight Matthew?”

“Dad, that’s not true at all. Matthew is the only person who told me I was beautiful the way I am. But, you don’t realize what all the other kids say. They call me tubby and fatty and a bunch of other names.” There was a moment of silence and Trudy looked at Matthew for support.

“Mr. and Mrs. Rodgers, both of you are big people and that’s fine. You are adults and have earned the right to make your own decisions. Unfortunately, children and teenagers can be cruel. It’s not fair, but there is little that Trudy can do about it. She’s as nice a person as I’ve met, but there are some kids that only see what is on the outside. They don’t see what a beautiful young woman she is. She will feel much better about herself if she loses a few pounds and it will help her fit in better with her classmates.”

The parents looked at Trudy who was close to tears and stared at Matthew with adoration. They loved their daughter and could see how important this was to her. “What can we do to help, Trudy?”

“I need to start watching my calories, and stop late night snacks. If you don’t mind, I would like to start right now,” Trudy said as she pushed her half-finished dessert to the center of the table. She looked at Matthew for support and was rewarded with a reassuring smile.

“Do you mind if I finish your dessert?”

Ms. Thompson loved poetry and every year she looked forward to this part of her senior English class. “Okay, class, settle down. This week we are going to study some of the great love poems of modern times. Can anybody give me an example?”

Silence was their response which was not totally unexpected. Poetry wasn’t something that most high school kids understood.

“Anybody? Come on, surely there are some boys out there that have quoted poetry to their girlfriend.”

Silence again. “Okay. I’ll give you an example,” she said as she turned to write on the chalkboard. “*Your words are my food, your breath is my wine; you are everything to me,*” a male voice said from the back of the room.

The classroom was silent. It was not only the words, but the way the verse was read, with depth and feeling

“Excellent, Matthew, Sarah Bernhardt is a great example of Victorian poetry. Do you have another example?”

“Of course. Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote.”

*“I love you not only for what you are,  
but for what I am when I am with you.”*

“Do you know the rest of the poem Matthew?” the teacher asked softly.”

*“I love you not only for what you have made of yourself,  
but for what you are making of me.  
I love you for the part of me that you bring out.”*

Tears formed in her eyes. Browning was her favorite poet and the favorite of her ex-fiancé who had read poetry to her for hours with the same feeling that Matthew exhibited. She had broken-off their engagement last month. Ms. Thompson was fighting the tears when Matthew gave her needed time to recover.

“As I’m sure you know, Emily Dickenson was greatly influenced by Browning. The Heart is the Capital of the Mind, is one of my favorites.”

*The Heart is the Capital of the Mind —  
The Mind is a single State —  
The Heart and the Mind together make  
A single Continent —  
One - is the Population —  
Numerous enough —  
This ecstatic Nation  
Seek — it is Yourself.*

“Can anyone tell me what this means?” Ms. Thompson asked, as she recovered from her reflections. “Debbie?” The remainder of the class passed quickly. She had never had a group of kids more interested in poetry. When the bell rang, she instructed each student to have a short poem that they could quote by heart for tomorrow’s class. “Matthew, please stay for a minute.”

“I want to thank you for changing the subject. Elizabeth Browning’s poetry affects me, for several reasons. If you know her poetry, you know the poem I wanted to avoid. I got the impression you sensed that.”

“Would you like to talk about him Ms. Thompson? He must be special to you.”

She didn't know how he knew, but found herself spilling out her heart to this 17-year-old boy. "His name is Jeff, and he is a graduate student at the University of Wisconsin. We were going to be married this summer, but I broke it off because ..." Matthew was a good listener, and twenty minutes later she admitted that she had made a terrible mistake. "I just wish he would give me another chance, but he won't even answer my calls."

The next day everyone was ready with their poem and eagerly awaited their turn. One-by-one the students read their poetry, most without glancing at their notes. It was a teacher's dream. Elizabeth Barrett Browning was off limits, but one young man had chosen a poem by her husband, Robert Browning.

### Summum Bonum

*"All the breath and the bloom of the year in the bag of one bee:  
All the wonder and wealth of the mine in the heart of one gem:  
In the core of one pearl all the shade and the shine of the sea:  
Breath and bloom, shade and shine, — wonder, wealth, and— how far  
above them —  
Truth that's brighter than gem,  
Trust, that's purer than pearl, —  
Brightest truth, purest trust in the universe — all were for me  
In the kiss of one girl."*

"Jeffrey, can you tell us what Robert Browning meant?"

"I'll try. Summum Bonum is a Latin word meaning 'highest good' and in Christian philosophy, the highest good is usually defined as the life of the righteous, the life led in Communion with God. I guess Browning is equating this kiss to the ultimate pleasure."

"Excellent, Jeffrey. Okay, Matthew, your turn." She couldn't wait to see what he had come up with.

"Ms. Thompson, with your permission, I would like you to help me on this; I'll read a couple lines and then you read a couple. May we put the projector screen between us so you can have a little privacy?" The kids applauded so she was left with no choice. She knew what was coming and braced herself for the inevitable rush of emotions. It might have been a mistake to tell Matthew her secrets.

"**How Do I Love Thee?**" a poem by Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Matthew started, as a young man slipped into the room and took Matthew's chair.

“Ms. Thompson, you begin.”

*“How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.  
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height  
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight  
For the ends of Being and ideal Grace.”*

Tears appeared in her eyes as she paused to let Matthew continue.  
It was Jeff’s favorite poem.

*“I love thee to the level of every day's  
Most quiet need, by sun and candle light.”*

Tears gushed down her face as she recognized Jeff’s voice. She was sobbing as she continued.

*“I love thee freely, as men strive for Right;  
I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise.  
I love thee with the passion put to use  
In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.”*

Jeff finished the beautiful poem that had been a symbol of their love.

*“I love thee with a love I seemed to lose  
With my lost saints,-I love thee with the breath,  
Smiles, tears, of all my life!-and, if God choose,  
I shall but love thee better after death.”*

The room was still; the class mesmerized by the emotion that filled the room. Ms. Thompson looked up and saw Jeff’s face, and cried with happiness as he slipped their engagement ring onto her finger.

The class erupted with applause as they embraced.

She learned the rest of the story in bits and pieces. A guidance counselor provided Matthew with Jeff’s address and phone number. When Jeff did not immediately return his call, Matthew jumped in his car and made the 90-minute drive to Madison and camped out on Jeff’s doorstep. They talked for almost three hours before Jeff swallowed his pride and agreed to be there the next day. The ring was Jeff’s idea; at least he thought it was.

## Chapter 3

### “You Can Do It!”

The rout was on. The Waukesha Blackshirts, Wisconsin’s number one ranked high school team, was trouncing my Shorewood Bulldogs. There was nothing I could do about it. We had hung tough in the first half and trailed by only nine at the break, but in the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter Waukesha started to roll. Their star, Roy Burke, had 30 points by the end of the quarter.

I glanced down at the end of the bench and saw Matthew sitting on the edge of his chair. His paperwork had still not arrived at game time and he was not eligible to play. At half time, my assistant coach told me the paperwork was due one minute from his high school in California. I couldn’t help but wonder if he would have made any difference. There was no question he was good, but the team we were playing had five players better than any of my other starters.

The score was 61-40 when the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter mercifully ended. The team gathered around me and I could see the dazed look in their eyes. They were beaten. “Come on, kids, don’t stop trying. We still have a chance,” I said without conviction. We were overmatched, and to make it worse, my star player, Rodney, was having a terrible shooting day.

The 4<sup>th</sup> quarter started off the way the third quarter ended. Tim Rappis, the Waukesha point guard stole the ball from our guards and came down one-against-two on a fast break. He made two sensational fakes, dribbled between his legs and broke to his left. Our guards collided while he went in unmolested for a lay-up. He was laughing and pointing at our players as he ran back up the court.

Matthew wasn’t accustomed to seeing his team lose and his anger erupted when he saw what Rappis did. There is no excuse for rubbing it in like that. “Come on, play basketball!” I heard Matthew shout in anger. I looked down the bench and saw a determined look that I had not seen before. At that moment my assistant coach came running from the locker room holding papers in his hand. His smile told me that the eligibility papers had arrived.

A pass was deflected out of bounds stopping the clock. “Matthew, go in for Jerry at center,” I shouted, not waiting for my assistant to arrive. Matthew was up like a shot, racing to the scorer’s table while stripping off his warm-up suit. His eagerness betrayed him as he tripped over his warm-up pants and fell awkwardly to the floor, much to the delight of the 5,000-plus Waukesha crowd. Laughter erupted throughout the gymnasium.

Matthew seemed to pay no mind to the crowd, but instead concentrated upon loosening up. He had been sitting on the bench for almost two hours. The laughter and abuse continued while he jumped and ran short sprints to loosen his legs. Paper cups were thrown on the floor causing a delay while the mess was cleaned. Matthew continued to loosen up and seemed unaffected by the verbal assault. He had the same steely look in his eyes that I had noticed previously. He was ready to play.

Insults continued to rain down from the crowd; “teach your players to walk before they run,” one fan shouted. “He looks like a jumping jack rather than a basketball player,” another voice rang out. A third voice asked if we were putting in our B-team because we had given up.

The referees and Waukesha coach implored the crowd for silence. Inexplicably, the crowd quieted and there was complete silence, until a small voice rang out to break the spell, “you can do it Matthew, I know you can.”

It was a squeaky voice, off key, almost timid, but it shattered the silence. The sound had come from Jennifer, our head cheerleader. The Waukesha crowd again erupted in laughter and jeers. A number of falsetto voices emanated from the crowd mocking the cheerleader. Jennifer stood there embarrassed, helpless and alone and looked like she wanted to crawl into a hole until Matthew walked over to her and put his hand on her shoulder. The crowd became mute. “Thank you for believing in me, Jennifer,” I heard him say, “It means a lot to me. I’ll do my best, but I need your help,” he said as he looked at the other cheerleaders. “We need to get the crowd behind us. Spread the floor during time outs and get the fans to cheer for us.”

“These are Waukesha fans,” one of the girls complained. “Why would they cheer for us?”

“They are Waukesha fans now, but they appreciate good basketball and a team that gives 100%. Trust me. They will all be cheering for us at the end of the game.” He gave Jennifer a light kiss on the cheek and trotted back to his team’s huddle.

There were only a couple dozen or so Shorewood fans at the game, mostly parents and family of the players. Among them were Matthew’s father and younger sister, Kelly. I heard later that Ray proclaimed, “I’ll take our boys, even-up.”

“You’re crazy,” one of the other dads answered. “We’re down 23 points with seven and a half minutes to play. I’ll take that bet.”

“Okay, you’re on for one dollar. Now sit back and enjoy the show, I’ve never seen my boy this focused.”

## Chapter 4 “Comeback”

We inbounded the ball and Rodney put up a quick jump shot, which missed and bounced high off the rim. Matthew got his fingertips on the ball, batting it up against the backboard. Like a flash, he was up again for the second rebound, but missed again. He was up again for the third try and laid it in, cutting the lead to 21. I was amazed at how quickly he got off the floor. His feet touched the ground for only a second before he was back up again for the rebound. Waukesha came down quickly and Burke launched a long jump shot from the left side. Matthew grabbed the rebound and in one fluid motion was heading up court before the other players reacted. He flew by the two Waukesha guards and went in alone for the lay-up. Wow, I thought. He had not shown this quickness in practice.

“Press, 3-1-1 press,” Matthew shouted, directing players to their positions while he took the middle. Waukesha inbounded the pass to the left side and easily broke the press, going past Rodney who showed no interest in defense. They quickly got the ball to Burke who went in for a one-handed dunk that would restore their momentum, but it was not to be. Matthew seemed to come out of nowhere and got a hand between the ball and the rim, deflecting the ball away. His momentum caused him to fall to the ground, but he was back up in a flash to block Burke’s second attempt. He deflected the shot into the air, soared high to grab it at its apex and passed the ball to a teammate in one motion to begin another fast break. The ball surprised Rodney who had been loafing along the sidelines. Rodney fumbled the ball and by the time he finally got control Matthew was already racing for the basket with his hand in the air, calling for a lob pass. Rodney was accustomed to being the star of the team and resented the new boy. I groaned as Rodney threw the ball much too high and could only watch as the errant pass headed for the top of the backboard.

I then witnessed an amazing athletic play, one of the best I had ever seen. Matthew leaped higher than I had ever seen a player jump and seemed to soar through the air, just barely getting his fingertips on the ball and deflecting it off the top of the backboard. Twisting 180 degrees in mid-air, he caught the ball with his left hand and threw it down into the basket while ducking his head to avoid the bottom of the backboard. The crowd was stunned. No one could believe what they had just seen. The silence was broken by Matthew’s primal scream, “let’s play basketball!”

Waukesha took a quick time out. They were still up 17 points, but the momentum had changed. My team came off the floor with exuberance and huddled around me, but Matthew wasn't with them. He was at the far corner of the gym shouting to the fans for support. "We can do it with your help," he screamed at the pro-Waukesha crowd that was determined to ignore his plea.

Jerry Hayes, captain of the Shorewood football team and all-conference fullback, was with a half dozen friends that had made the trip to the game. The group sat under the basket where Matthew had just scored. While Matthew implored the crowd for support, Hayes talked to a co-ed sitting behind him. Hayes was in the 3<sup>rd</sup> row when Matthew reached into the stands, grabbed him by the shirt and with one hand hauled him over the first two rows. "Come on, Jerry, I need you. I thought you were my friend." Their faces were only inches apart with Matthew still holding him by the collar. Still with one hand, Matthew deposited the 230-pound football player back into his third-row seat. "Be a leader," Matthew commanded, as he ran to our bench leaving Hayes in a state of shock, and a decision to make.

"Coach, we need players that are willing to hustle and play defense."

"Okay," I agreed, and looked at my top two subs. Matthew beat me to the punch.

"Andy, go in for Rodney. Erin, you go in for Sam. Remember what we talked about. If there is a loose ball or rebound, it's ours."

Andy and Erin were considered the worst players on the team, and the last two players I would have put in at this time. They seldom played, but Matthew had been sitting between them for the first three quarters, so he must have something in mind. I now knew why Matthew's father had warned me that his son might overstep his authority. I also remembered saying that I wasn't concerned about egos, just winning. I decided to let him have his way. I substituted for the other two players, leaving Matthew with a new supporting cast. It was his show.

"We press full court." Matthew commanded. "If there's a loose ball, I want everyone on it. Take the shot if you're open." We broke from the huddle with an enthusiasm that sent chills up my spine while the Waukesha players jogged slowly onto the court fully aware they were up 17 points, and the #1 team in Wisconsin.

Rick Roby sat alone on the end of the Waukesha bench. He had warned the coach before the game about Matthew, but Burke told his coach that Matthew wasn't anything special and his teammates made fun of him earlier when Matthew tripped over his warm-up suit. They weren't

laughing any more, but they still wouldn't listen to him when he suggested double-teaming Matthew and working the clock to protect the lead.

"Rick, what's wrong with you?" his coach said with disdain. "We're up 17 against a team that's won two games all year, and you want us to stall? Just keep your mouth shut and watch the game." Rick bit his tongue. He knew, without a doubt, that his time would come.

Waukesha took the ball out under their basket and Matthew was all over the passer. Rappis faked and Matthew dove to his right anticipating a bounce pass that didn't come. He looked foolish as Rappis lofted the ball over his head. The Waukesha fans jeered as Matthew quickly picked himself off the floor and raced up court.

The other Waukesha guard took the inbounds pass and nonchalantly dribbled up the court looking for the open man and was surprised when he felt the ball slapped away from behind. Matthew had raced up-court and dove just before the Waukesha guard picked up his dribble, slapping the ball to Andy. Matthew was up again racing the other way and as Andy hit him with a perfect pass for the layup. The lead was cut to 15.

Matthew picked up the ball and held it for the Waukesha guard. "Come on, laughing boy, let's play basketball." Tim Rappis, Waukesha's quarterback and a three year starter, wasn't easily rattled. He took the ball out of bounds, faked a bounce pass to his left and watched as Matthew fell for the fake again and sprawled to the floor. This guy's goofy, he thought, as he again passed the ball over his head. Matthew quickly picked himself up off the floor and raced up court, but this time the Waukesha players were ready. After the press was broken, our team resorted to a man-to-man defense. Andy was guarding the dribbler when he suddenly remembered what Matthew had told him while they were sitting on the bench in the first half.

*"Andy, watch this kid, every time he makes that spin move to his right, he gives it away by dipping his left shoulder. When you guard him, just anticipate the spin move and you will have an easy steal."* Although Andy hadn't been put in a game for almost a month, he had paid attention.

The Waukesha guard dipped his shoulder and Andy reacted the way Matthew suggested and found himself with the ball and an open path to the basket. Andy hadn't scored a basket all year and probably couldn't be blamed for getting excited. He picked up his dribble too soon and was called for traveling. Crestfallen, he turned to face his teammates. "Nice steal, Andy," Matthew said as he patted him on the shoulder. "Let's play defense, we'll get them next time."

Waukesha broke the press again and got off an open jump shot from the free throw line. Erin went up high and ripped down the rebound with enthusiasm. "Let's go," Matthew shouted as he raced up court on a two and one fast break. Erin hit him with a perfect pass and Matthew fed Andy who went in for an easy layup, the ball never touching the floor. Andy never thought about this being his first basket, he just turned and yelled; "defense!"

Rappis inbounded the ball again and this time Matthew sprung the trap. Pretending to go for the fake bounce-pass he dove to his right, but this time he landed in a crouched position and immediately sprang straight up in the air to intercept the lob pass that had twice gone over his head. He caught the ball on his upward flight and dunked with two hands. It happened so quickly that many people in the stands didn't see it. Matthew handed the ball back to Rappis and taunted; "come on, laughing boy, let's play basketball." Rappis grabbed the ball and tried a full court pass to break the press, but Erin was ready. He cut in front of the Waukesha player, caught the ball and passed to Matthew, who passed to Andy on the baseline. Andy made the ten-footer and Waukesha's lead was cut to 11 points.

"Time out!" the Waukesha coach demanded as he saw the shocked looks on his team's faces. Matthew again stayed on the floor and implored the fans to get behind the Bulldogs. "Come on, people, we need your help. We are trying our best." This time he was not alone. Jerry Hayes had made his decision - he decided to be a leader. Hayes and his friends were making as much noise as possible under the one basket. Noise was also coming from our team's parents, led by Matthew's father and sister. The Shorewood cheerleaders spread the court pleading with the Waukesha fans to get behind the Bulldogs, but again got only minimal response from a few Waukesha fans.

"Coach, I need Andy out here with me, but let's get some fresh bodies out here. Two minutes is enough for everyone if we work hard." I looked down at Rodney who had been sulking at the end of our bench and decided not to put him back in.

"Come on, Rodney, "Matthew said, "get your head together. We will need you before this is over. The three substitutes reported in and were doing jumping jacks and short sprints to loosen up. No one in the crowd was laughing or jeering this time. They knew their team was in trouble.

Our team burst from the huddle ready to play. Conversely, the Waukesha players walked slowly, almost reluctantly onto the floor. Rick Roby again returned to his seat at the end of the Waukesha bench. The Waukesha coach had finally decided to double team Matthew, but his

instructions were to keep him away from the basket. “Make him shoot from outside,” Coach said. “Roy doesn’t think he has a jump shot. Rick, does that meet with your approval?” he asked sarcastically.

Rick answered honestly, “he can shoot from outside, Coach.”

“Well, then what would you have us do?”

“I already suggested slowing down the game and milking the clock. You could also put me in to guard him; I have seen his moves before. Nobody can stop him now, but I think I could slow him down a little. You might also try apologizing.”

“Apologize for what?” the coach responded.

“Apologize for laughing at his team earlier, that’s why he’s mad. We made fun of them.”

“I’m not apologizing to anyone. Come on team; let’s show them why we’re number one.”

The Waukesha team did regain its composure and over the next three minutes saw Burke make two long-range jump shots and Rappis drive to the basket for one basket and assisted on two others with perfect passes to his teammates. Unfortunately for Waukesha, they couldn’t stop Matthew. He made four long jump shots and four free throws besides assisting on two other baskets. The final basket was an assist to Rodney whose attitude and defense had improved dramatically.

The lead was still five points when our team made the play that I will remember forever. Waukesha missed a shot and our center Tom Osteen went high to grab a rebound, tipping it to Matthew, who in one fluid motion passed to Rodney who was racing up the sidelines. Unfortunately, Rodney did not look up in time and the ball hit his back and veered toward the sideline. He hung his head in despair, knowing the turnover was his fault. Only Matthew and Andy reacted. Matthew was faster and with a last second dive managed to flip the ball back over his head, but knew immediately that he was a split-second too late and the ball would land out of bounds. Always hustling, he rolled to his feet and headed back onto the court, hoping for a miracle.

The miracle was named Andy Hefner. While the other players had given up, he had charged after the loose ball, knowing he would be too late. Matthews attempted save gave him the extra time he needed. As the other players watched, Andy threw his body forward and just barely got his fingertips underneath the ball before it hit the floor, slapping the ball inbounds to Matthew before crashing into the bleachers.

Matthew headed up court, switching the dribble to his left hand to drive around a Waukesha defender. He changed directions at the top of the key, but tripped as he caught his toe on the player’s foot. Matthew went

sprawling through the air searching for someone to pass to, but our other three players were still at half court. Matthew was about to launch a desperation left-handed hook shot when he heard Andy yelling for the ball. Somehow he had gotten himself off the floor and raced up court. Matthew twisted in the air, caught a glimpse of Andy streaking towards the basket and threw him a perfect bounce pass, a split second before crashing to the floor. Andy caught the pass and shot in one motion, and the lead was cut to three points. Waukesha called another time out as Matthew threw his arms around Andy and screamed; “we are a team!”

The Shorewood cheerleaders raced onto the floor and this time received a different reaction. Scattered cheers were heard from all over the field house as the Waukesha fans applauded a great effort. My entire team stayed on the court begging the fans for support. I heard Matthew scream up to the fans and point at Andy. “If you don’t appreciate that hustle, you don’t like basketball. We are giving 100% out here and we need your support.”

Matthew had worked his way down towards the far corner of the court lifting his arms and yelling at fans to stand up and cheer our Bulldogs. He stopped and watched as a man in a wheelchair struggled to stand. After several agonizing attempts, the man finally made it to his feet and applauded. Matthew watched the entire episode and nodded at the man, before he came back to our bench with eyes glistening.

There was little I could say other than suggest we double-team Rappis whenever he gets the ball. “You’re right, Coach, he’s the key to this. He is the only one maintaining his poise out there.”

We erased the three-point lead in 30 seconds and went up by a point. A deflected pass and a loose ball set up the first bucket. Waukesha had the angle to recover the loose ball, but three Bulldogs made a dive at the last second and the Waukesha player shied away. Heads cracked, but the ball was slapped over towards Matthew who took one dribble and launched a 40-foot jump shot. The ball was half way to the basket when he yelled, “defense”. The go ahead basket was set up by a traveling call when Andy again anticipated the spin move of the Waukesha guard. The boy realized his mistake and palmed the ball as tried to change direction at the last second. Matthew took the inbounds pass and drove hard to the basket before dishing off to Rodney for a 12-foot jump shot that gave us our first lead of the game.

My happiness was short lived. Rather than call a time out, Rappis dribbled quickly up court and launched a jump shot from the top of the circle. Matthew attempt to block the shot was a second too late and we were down one point with six seconds on the clock. Erin inbounded the ball

to Matthew who streaked up the right side of the court. Behind him a Waukesha player was racing to keep up, but to no avail. In desperation, the Waukesha player reached out and grabbed Matthew's shirt, trying to hold him back. Matthew swept his arm away with his left hand, took one dribble over half court and launched a 50-foot shot that swished through the basket as the buzzer sounded.

Half the crowd erupted in cheers and our entire bench raced out onto the court to celebrate. We stopped when we saw the referee waving off the basket and whistling for a foul. "That's okay," I thought. "Matthew will make the two free throws for the win." Unbelievably, the foul was called on Matthew for swinging his arm. I almost lost it.

"He was just trying to get the guy's hand off his shirt, the kid was holding him," I screamed, but the referee wasn't listening. He marched to the foul line to give Waukesha a one-on-one free throw. "Put five seconds on the clock," Matthew's father shouted from the stands. "There's still time on the clock."

I got the message. The referee wasn't going to change his mind about the foul and all we could hope for was to get as much time on the clock as we could get so we would have one more opportunity. The timekeeper finally agreed to reset the clock to 2.5 seconds. I called time out to discuss our strategy. Matthew was talking to Jennifer when I got back to the huddle. "On my signal," I heard him say. I was still trying to decide on what strategy to use, when Matthew took charge again.

"Okay, he's going to miss the free throw and Erin, you or Tom are going to get the rebound. Throw a quick pass to Rodney in the corner. Rodney, you catch the ball and in one motion throw a hook pass up the sidelines aiming for a spot right where the center court intersects the sideline. Trust me, I'll be there. Andy, as soon as they miss the free throw, you head the other way shouting for the ball, make some noise, anything to pull their defense towards you. Okay, we have just enough time to pull this off. There can't be any wasted motion, any questions?" There were none. "Okay," Matthew continued. "When I give the signal, we break out of our huddle and race onto the court."

I noticed Matthew watching the Waukesha players and remembered their habit of putting their hands together in a pack and then breaking after a time out. Matthew had also noticed that there was a two second delay from when they clasped hands to when they broke the huddle. I saw them clasp hands and Matthew nod to Jennifer. The cheerleaders broke out on to the court raising their hands and screaming for support. "Let's go," Matthew commanded, and our team raced on to the court at exactly the same time that the Waukesha players broke their huddle. The

cheerleaders did not see what was happening behind them; all they knew was that this time when they asked for support the entire crowd stood up and cheered. I'll never know how many were cheering for us, but I would bet it was the vast majority.

The cheerleaders were thinking back to Matthew's words. "If we all do our jobs, we will have the entire crowd cheering for us at the end of the game." His prophecy had come true. Sally, the cheerleader that had expressed her doubts earlier, fell to her knees ashamed of her lack of faith, but felt Matthew along side of her pulling her to her feet. "You did your best, Sally, that's all I asked." Later when she repeated her story she was told that Matthew had not come near her, but she knew that wasn't true.

The Waukesha free throw shooter was unnerved as he felt the home crowd turn against them, and his free throw attempt hit the back of the rim. Matthew tipped the ball back to Erin, who immediately threw to Rodney in the corner. Rodney turned and fired the ball to the spot where Matthew said he would be. Matthew got there just in time, caught the perfect pass shoulder high and in one motion turned and launched his shot. I looked up to the clock and saw the final 10<sup>th</sup> of a second tick off and the clock turn red. Matthew followed the flight of the ball and knew immediately it was good. He turned and pointed at Rodney and Erin as the ball swished through the basket for the one-point victory. I screamed in delight and raised my arms in celebration.

My first indication that something was wrong was when I saw Matthew fall to his knees in disbelief. One referee was signaling good, but the other referee, the same one that had called the foul on Matthew earlier, was waving off the basket claiming time had expired before the shot. I couldn't believe it and raced out at the referee not sure what I would do when I got there. Fortunately, I never had to face the problem as Matthew saw me coming and raced to intercept. The referee thought Matthew was coming at him and threw a punch at Matthew, cutting his lip. Matthew ignored the pain and grabbed me. "Come on, Coach, it's over. Let's congratulate the winners." He held me for another second while I calmed down and realized what I had almost done.

"You're right, Matthew, let's congratulate the winners."

## Chapter 5

### “Referees”

I heard Matthew telling Rappis what a great game he had played. “I tried to break you, but you kept your cool better than anybody else I have played against.” Despite my frustration I had to laugh when I saw him congratulating the player that had pulled on his shirt at the end of the game. When the player turned to leave, Matthew playfully tugged on his shirt in obvious reference to the penultimate play. The boy smiled and nodded his head in understanding.

I congratulated the Waukesha coach and was there when Matthew came over to add his congratulations. He had his friend Rick Roby in tow. “Rick, I know you stood up for me and I appreciate that, but don’t you think you owe your coach an apology? He is the coach, you know.”

Rick hesitated only briefly. “I’m sorry, Coach, I guess I got a little excited. I didn’t mean any disrespect, but you have to admit, he’s pretty good.”

“I’m the one that should apologize, Rick. I should have listened to some of your suggestions.”

“Coach, it might have helped if you had put Rick in to guard me, but at that point in time, I don’t think an apology would have done any good.” Neither the coach nor Rick had any idea how Matthew guessed what the argument was about.

The crowd stayed, as if they could not believe the game was over. Our cheerleaders were sitting on the floor in tears when Matthew walked over and sat down in front of a despondent Jennifer. A few minutes the girls were smiling and the tears had almost stopped, and the girls went over to congratulate the Waukesha cheerleaders. Matthew found Jerry Hayes and the rest of his group that had been so vocal in their support during the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter. Hayes had tears in his eyes and apologized for fooling around earlier when Matthew had lifted him out of his seat. Matthew embraced him and told him that what mattered was that he was there when he needed him. “You showed me you were a leader, Jerry.” I could see the tears coming back to the boy’s eyes.

Matthew walked towards the Waukesha side of the court and waved at the crowd, thanking them for their support. The crowd as one gave Matthew and our team a standing ovation. Matthew approached the man in the wheelchair who was struggling again to rise. He made it to his feet as Matthew stopped ten feet away.

“You can do it,” Matthew whispered. “I’ll help you.”

The man’s wife was behind him in case he fell. But the man shrugged her off and took a step towards Matthew, and then another step, and then another. He stood before Matthew and applauded. Tears come to Matthew’s eyes as he in turn applauded the man’s effort. He put his arms around the man and held him for several moments while the crowd cheered. His wife stood behind him, proud, but dumfounded. Her husband had not walked in fifteen years. Was it the adrenalin from the close game?

Matthew gathered the cheerleaders together to thank them for their efforts and to ask them for another favor. “I need you to help me tomorrow. Can you all be at the school at eight thirty?” Sixteen heads nodded in unison.

The crowd was still clapping as our team made its way back towards the locker room. Matthew stopped along the way and saw his father halfway up in the stands. The crowd separated to make room for him. As he approached his father, his resolve seemed to disappear and he collapsed in his father’s arms in tears. “What did I do wrong? Why did the referee make those calls?”

“You didn’t do anything wrong, Matthew. Sometimes there’s no explanation for things like this. All we can do is go on and hope it makes us stronger.” The crowd cheered again as Matthew and his father separated and Matthew made his way to the locker room.

There was a fight going on in the referees’ locker room. Ed Corbett and Jeff Chandler were arguing vociferously when their district director came into their locker room. “What went on out there, Jeff? Those were two of the worst calls I have ever seen.”

“Don’t ask me,” Ed Corbett said. “But I’ll tell you this, I don’t ever want to work with this guy again.”

“Calm down Ed, let’s not make things worse. Jeff, what happened? You seemed to lose your cool. Taking a swing at that kid was inexcusable.”

Jeff had realized he had made a mistake when the Waukesha crowd booed the call that had helped their team win. He lost it when he saw the new kid running towards him and had reacted instinctively. He had never hit a kid before and by the time he got to the locker room he was wondering himself what had happened. “I don’t know, Dick, I guess I just lost it. That kid was so good that I guess I just wanted to protect the Waukesha players. I made a fool of myself, didn’t I?”

“Well, it’s over, there’s nothing we can do about it now.”

“Yes, there is,” Jeff replied with conviction. “I can go to their locker room and apologize. Would you go with me, Ed?” They arrived at

the visitors' locker room only to find the entrance barred by a determined 16-year old who had been instructed to keep everyone out until the team meeting was finished. Bill Hawkins, the school principal, had tried minutes earlier, but Johnny stood his ground.

"Matthew asked me to keep everyone out until he lets me know, and that's what I'm going to do," the young man had told him.

Ray Wilson could tell the boy was more than a little scared to be arguing with the principal, but was determined to follow Matthew's instructions. Ray pulled the principal off to the side. "Bill, isn't it amazing how quickly these boys grow up? We try to get these kids to stand up for themselves and what they believe in and all of a sudden to our surprise they are doing it. Isn't it wonderful?"

Bill Hawkins had been a high school principal for thirteen years, and knew what Ray Wilson was saying. He smiled and nodded. "You're right Ray. I know Johnny and yesterday there was no way he would have stood up to me like this. That boy just matured into a young man in front of my eyes."

They turned and saw the referees pleading with Johnny to let them in and Matthew's father interceded again. "Johnny, I know what Matthew said, but I also know that my son wants his friends to think for themselves. He couldn't have anticipated that the referees would want to speak with the team. Don't you think you should ask him if he wants to meet with them?"

Johnny slowly digested the suggestion, afraid to make the wrong decision. "Wait here," he told everyone as he entered the locker room, closing the door behind him.

Matthew was telling his teammates that they should not be happy with a close loss when he noticed Johnny at the door. He looked over at Johnny and smiled, "what is it, Johnny?"

"I'm sorry to interrupt. I know you told me not to, but, uh....."

"That's okay, Johnny, just go ahead. What do you have?"

"Your father said you might want to know that the referees are outside and would like to come in and talk with you."

"What do you think, Johnny?"

Caught by surprise, Johnny was surprisingly calm. "I think we should."

"Okay, give us 60 seconds and let them in." As Johnny headed out the door, Matthew called out at him, "You did the right thing, Johnny."

Johnny closed his eyes and counted. When he got to 60, he opened the door and allowed the referees to enter. "Mr. Hawkins, you may go in, too." It was an amazing transformation from a timid young man to a

decision maker. He would never be the timid boy that his parents kissed goodbye and sent off to school that morning.

The referees wasted no time. Jeff Chandler did the talking. “Coach Simpson, we, I should say I, want to apologize to you and your players for some of the calls I made tonight. I made some mistakes. I also want to apologize for striking your player. The game is over and there is nothing we can do to change the outcome, but I hope you can find it in your hearts to forgive me.”

“That goes for me too,” Ed Corbett said, looking directly at Matthew.

I was still disappointed about the loss and didn’t know immediately what to say. I decided to let the kids decide. “I would like to accept your apology,” I replied slowly, “but first I would like to see what my players say. They are the ones that poured their hearts and souls into this game. Matthew?”

Matthew thought a moment before responding. “I’m just one player and I’m not the captain of the team, so I can only speak for myself. I don’t think there is any need for an apology. Everyone makes mistakes including everybody in this room. It’s silly to think that the referees aren’t caught up in the excitement of the game, just like the players. We all try to do our best, but sometimes we make mistakes. Everyone does. However, these men have come asked us to accept their apology, and I believe that a sincere apology should never be rejected. I would offer my hand to these gentlemen and tell them to forget it, if it were up to me. But we are a team and I’ll do what the team decides. Rodney, you’re the captain, what do you think?”

Rodney stood and walked towards the referees. “I missed more shots and made more mistakes than anybody out there tonight, I would be a hypocrite not to accept their apology, especially after Matthew gave me a second chance tonight. Let’s put this behind us,” he said as he offered his hand. I watched as the other eleven players shook the hands of the referees. I did the same.

The referees walked out of the locker room and glanced at Matthew’s father as they walked by. “You have quite a boy there, Mr. Wilson.”

“The boys continued their team meeting and Matthew pointed out that winning was more fun than losing, but winning requires dedication and hard work. “Each one of us must decide for if we are willing to put forth the effort.”

The team set our sights on winning the rest of our regular season games and the state championship.

## Chapter 6

### Saturday Night

“Where do you go after the game? Matthew asked, as the players were getting dressed.

The responses varied. A few players had dates and a couple others said their parents were taking them home. “We each pretty much go our own way,” Andy replied. “We don’t really hang out together that much.”

“Is there a pizza place or somewhere we could get a bite to eat?” Matthew asked. “Care to go, Andy?”

“Sure, I’ll go. There’s a place called Mama Mia’s where some of the kids hang out. They have pretty good pizza and great garlic bread.”

“Mama Mia’s it is,” Matthew said loudly. “Anyone care to join us. Bring your parents or girlfriends, everyone’s welcome. From now on we start hanging out together. We are a team!”

Rodney and Seth started to leave the locker room when Matthew stopped them. “Hold on a minute, guys. We leave the locker room together. Come on, get your bags and let’s go. Coach, lead us out.”

I had no idea what was going on until I opened the door to a round of applause from the parents, fans and cheerleaders. The small crowd continued the applause until the last player appeared. I asked Principal Hawkins what the occasion was.

Ray Wilson said this was the tradition at Matthew’s California high school, so now it’s our tradition. Win or lose, we wait for the boys and show our support. I didn’t know it at the time but soon there would be hundreds, even thousands, waiting for us after every game.

“Thanks for coming tonight, Ray. I hope you all can make it tomorrow night at Whitefish Bay.”

“I’ll be there, Jim. I haven’t missed one of Matthew’s games yet.”

“Dad, we are going to Mama Mia’s for pizza tonight,” Matthew interrupted. “Parents are invited too.”

“We can’t make it tonight son,” Matthew’s father answered. “I need to pay off some friendly gambling wagers. I owe a few people a cup of coffee.”

“We told him we weren’t taking his money,” one of the parents said. “We all knew who really won the game tonight.”

“That’s enough of that,” Matthew replied. “We lost by one point and that’s all there is to it. Let’s learn and put it behind us.”

“Here he comes,” a coed whispered moments before Matthew and Andy walked into Mama Mia’s Pizza Parlor. The twenty or so Shorewood students burst into spontaneous applause which Matthew acknowledged by raising Andy’s arm. “Over here, Matthew, we saved a spot for you at our table.”

“Thanks, Jerry, but Andy and I are sticking together.” He looked around and spotted teammates Seth and Nick who were already at another table. “Let’s pull a few of these tables together and make one big table in the center.”

Everybody wanted to talk about the game, but after 20 minutes Matthew steered the conversation to other things. “What are we planning for the senior project?” he asked, and was met by a bunch of blank stares.

“What senior project?” Seth responded.

“Well, the high school where I came from, the senior class undertook a major project each year, something to remember then by.”

“Like what?” a boy asked.

“Well, last year the seniors built two homes for underprivileged families. They held carwashes and other fundraisers to raise the money for the materials and then got parents and volunteers to provide the expertise. The boys did most of the hard labor under the direction of professionals; plumbers, electricians, and the like. The girls did all the interior decoration; painting, wall paper, carpeting, drapes, bedding and so on. To my knowledge, the two homes are still standing,” Matthew quipped.

“We could do something like that,” Allen volunteered. “My dad’s an electrician and I know he would be happy to help.”

“Allen, put a committee together of eight or ten kids to come up with ideas that we could present to the Student Council and the school administrators. We would need their backing in order to do something like this.”

While the kids were throwing out ideas, Matthew motioned to Jennifer. “Come on, I’d like to talk with the owner. Are we all set for tomorrow morning?”

“We’ll be there at 8 AM and Principal Hawkins said he would let us in and provide us with names and phone numbers.”

“Good, did you ask them to keep this quiet? I’d like it to be a surprise.”

Mama Mia’s was a franchise and the store manager and half-owner of the franchise was in the kitchen. Matthew made his request. “We need to

reserve the restaurant tomorrow night for Shorewood students, parents and teachers. There will be more than a 1,000 students and teachers that will be ordering pizza. Can you handle a crowd like that?"

"Not all at once," he responded as his eyes lit up, "but if you stagger them over a four hour period, I'll get the people in here to man the ovens."

"Great, Jennifer will coordinate with you. The game should end about nine and the team will get here by 10 pm, but by 8 pm the place should be full with students that didn't go to the game. From 9 to 1, just start making pizzas as fast as you can. You won't have time to take orders, so just make the pizzas that are most popular and we will charge a flat amount. Keep track of how many you make and we will settle up after if there is a discrepancy, but remember, keep this quiet. I don't want word getting out that we are planning anything tomorrow night."

Jennifer got home about 12:30 and tried to sleep, but her mind was racing. So much had happened today and tomorrow would even be a bigger day. Matthew was relying upon her. Her mother had been waiting up when she got home and promised to drive her to school. "Why do you have to be there on a Saturday?" she asked. "Is there anything wrong?"

"No mom, I'm fine, in fact everything is wonderful."

She finally managed to fall asleep around 4:00 AM and two hours later the alarm went off. Jennifer washed and set her hair and by twenty of eight she was ready, but her mother was refusing to wake up. "Mother, we need to go now, I can't be late. Give me the keys and I'll drive myself."

"Okay, come on, I'll drive you," she said as she threw a coat over her nightgown. They drove up to the school and Jennifer could tell she was the last one there. She was frantic and worried that her most important day was getting off to a terrible start. As they pulled up in front of the school, Matthew walked over to open the passenger door. "Good morning Jennifer, you're just in time. Wow, I like the way you did your hair. You look beautiful." Jennifer felt the same glow that she had the night before and her anxieties disappeared.

"Mrs. Kirkland, I'm Matthew Wilson. Thanks for driving Jennifer this morning; we couldn't do this without her. Your daughter looks just like you - I can see where she gets her good looks. Are you planning on going to the game this evening?"

Mrs. Kirkland was flustered and embarrassed and chastised herself for not spending the time to make herself more presentable. She knew that her hair was a mess and she had no make-up.

"I don't think we can make it this evening, we're going out to dinner with some good friends; maybe next time."

"If they are really good friends of yours, Mrs. Kirkland, I think they would want to see your daughter cheerlead. She is really good. We are also planning a surprise party after the game and you and your friends are invited."

Ed Kirkland was reading the paper when Sandy returned home and the paper was open to the sports section. "Sandy, come take a look at this," he said pointing at the paper.

"Ed, you won't believe the wonderful boy I just met."

"Is his name Matthew Wilson?" Ed asked, pointing at the picture. There on the front page of the sports section was a picture of their daughter, Jennifer, being kissed on the cheek by Matthew. The headlines touted him as the best high school player this sportswriter has ever seen.

"I just met him, Ed, and he is something really special. He has a way of making a person feel good. Do you think Adam and Amy would agree to go to the game with us tonight?"

There were only three adults at the school Saturday morning; Principal Bill Hawkins, Peggy Jones, Director of Cheerleading, and me. The 16 cheerleaders, eight from both the Varsity and Junior Varsity cheerleading squads, waited for their assignments eagerly. "Girls, we are going to throw a party tonight and the entire school is invited. Our job is to call every student today and make sure they are there tonight. I have copies of the script that you are to use when contacting students. After you greet the person and identify yourself, here's what I want you to say.

*'There is a surprise party being thrown tonight for the basketball team, this year's state high school champions. Everyone at school is invited and we really need your support.'* If they laugh or ask you something about being future champions, just ask them to look at today's Milwaukee Journal sports section and tell them that Matthew Wilson personally asked you to call them. If they say they can't make it, try to find out why and somebody else will call them back later. If they need a babysitter, we will find a babysitter for them. If they have to work, we'll try to find someone to take their place. I'll be in charge of handling the follow-up calls. Tell them the party is at Mama Mia's starting at eight o'clock. Remember, this is a surprise party. Nobody from the basketball teams, varsity or junior varsity, must know. I want it be a surprise."

"Okay, if there are no questions get a homeroom list from Principal Hawkins and begin making your calls. Ms. Jones and Coach Simpson will call the teachers and parents of the players." Matthew did not tell the cheerleaders that their parents would also be invited.

"Principal Hawkins, could you help me out on something?"

“What I can do, Matthew?”

“There will be an awful lot of people packed into a small area this evening. We can expect parking problems, traffic congestion and the like. It would be nice if we could get some off-duty policemen working with us to provide traffic control.”

“Better yet,” Principal Hawkins replied, “the mayor and I are good friends. Why don’t I see if we make the entire block a pedestrian walkway? We could also call the other restaurants on that block and advise them to be ready for a crowd of hungry students.”

Four hours later everything seemed to be falling into place. 85% of the students and teachers had been contacted and said they would be there. Matthew was calling the ones that said no. My call to Ray Wilson was a pleasant diversion. “I figured Matthew was up to something,” he said. “Susan and I will be there.”

“I’m sure you already know he is quite a young man, just as you knew that he was probably good enough to make our team.”

“I do have a little fun understating his abilities and then watching the reaction as people see how good he is. I was proud of him last night and the way he handled defeat. You know, Coach, this was the first time he’s been on a losing team.”

“You mean a team with a losing record?”

“No, I mean he had never lost a game before – ever.”

“There were only two minutes to go before half-time and my Shorewood Bulldogs were up by five points, 35-30. The stands were packed as 300 people had made the trip from Shorewood to see the new player. Matthew had scored eight points, but was nothing close to the dominating player he had been the evening before. He seemed content to get his teammates involved. There were two college scouts in the stands, and one of them said he was going to get a hot dog and coke before the half-time rush. “I’ll stick around,” the other said. “I want to watch this new kid.”

“Don’t waste your time, he’s not as good as the newspaper claimed. There are four or five better players in the city conference.”

“Coach, let’s put a press on them after our next basket.”

While I made the assignments I noticed that Matthew nod to Jennifer before he headed back on court. We inbounded the ball and Kevin dribbled the ball into the fore court. He called out a play; a double screen for Matthew who came around underneath the basket and flashed the top of the key. Kevin got him the ball waist high and his 18 ft. jump shot split the net.

All eight cheerleaders jumped to their feet holding identical signs; “press, press,” They were screaming at the top of their lungs and were quickly joined by our 300 supporters. The Whitefish Bay guard was caught unaware and was double teamed and trapped in the corner. He should have called time out, but panicked and threw a long pass up court that was intercepted by Osteen. Tom passed to Matthew who launched a 25 ft. jump shot which again swished through the basket. He was yelling, “press, press,” before the ball reached the rim.

Rodney intercepted the inbound pass and put up a quick jump shot that went high off the rim, but Matthew caught the rebound above the basket and slammed it down for two more points. Whitefish Bay needed a time out badly, but there were only 40 seconds left in the half, enough time for Matthew to score two more baskets to increase the lead to 15. With five seconds to go he deflected the ball and caught up to it just before it went out of bounds. In one smooth motion, he turned and fired up a desperation shot from mid-court. He looked at the referees while the ball was in the air and both referees raised their hands and gave the “good if it goes in sign”. The ball fell through the basket as the half time gun sounded. Our five point lead had grown to 17 in less than two minutes.

Matthew raced up into the stands high-fiving the Shorewood students and supporters, and the other players followed. Matthew nodded his recognition to Jennifer’s mother as he high-fived Ed Kirkland and his friend Adam Moore. The crowd was still applauding as they returned to the locker room.

“I wouldn’t have missed this for anything,” Adam said to Ed and Sandy. “Thanks so much for inviting us.”

The scout returned with his hot dog and coke and asked what he had missed. The other scout’s player evaluation form had 10 scrawled across all categories. “If you have five players like this in the city conference, I wish you would show them to me. They could win the NCAA Championship next year. This kid is the best I have ever seen.”

The final score was 91 to 62 and the players were still celebrating as the team bus approached the school. As is tradition, the Varsity team was in the back of the bus while the JV team was in front. “Why aren’t we stopping,” one of the players asked as the bus driver drove past the school, “my car’s at the school.”

I stood up and addressed the players. “Roll down your windows, and greet your fans and admirers. You are members of the Shorewood Bulldog basketball team, future state champions. This party tonight is for you.” I glanced at Matthew and could see that he was pleased that the

surprise had worked. The players had not suspected a thing. They could see the students walking along the side of the road yelling their names and holding up State Champion signs created by the cheerleaders earlier that afternoon. We pulled up in front of Mama Mia's and the school's pep band began to play. One call from Principal Hawkins to the bandleader had been enough to get this started. Even Matthew was surprised.

Matthew led the team into Mama Mia's where parents and teachers were waiting. There were several players whose parents had never been at a game and it was wonderful to see the reaction on the boys' faces. The varsity players and parents were set up at a table in the middle of the room with the rest of the people in the booths and tables around the room. A half hour later Jennifer was sitting next to her dad in one of the booths across from their friends, Adam and Amy Moore. They were just finishing their pizza and were about to leave to make room for others. Matthew had been making the rounds talking to the parents and thanking teachers for coming. He approached the table and crouched down at the end much like a waiter taking an order.

"Mrs. Kirkland, I am so glad you could make it. Mr. Kirkland, I'm Matthew Wilson, and these must be your good friends, Adam and Amy Moore." Everyone but Jennifer was surprised that he knew their names, but then he knew everybody's name, Jennifer thought. He had greeted each parent by name when they walked in the door.

"I hope you enjoyed the game tonight. Weren't Jennifer and the rest of the cheerleaders tremendous?"

"They were, Matthew, and the team looked pretty good too. I'm so glad we did this tonight. It wouldn't have missed this for anything," Sandy Kirkland said. "Thank you so much for encouraging us to be here." Ed Kirkland and the Moore's muttered their agreement.

"Mr. Kirkland, I have a favor to ask. If it's okay with Jennifer, may I have your permission to drive your daughter home tonight?"

Ed Kirkland could barely speak, partially because he felt fingernails digging into his legs from both his wife and daughter. He knew what he wanted to say but he didn't know how to say it. "That will be fine, Matthew, just so she doesn't stay out too late. Okay, Jennifer?" Jennifer just nodded her head in agreement.

"Thank you, and thanks again for coming. Some of the other parents are leaving now and I need to say goodbye. Jennifer, I'll pull up a chair next to mine at the center table for you." With that, he was gone.

"I wish you could have seen the look on your daughter's face," Amy Moore said after Jennifer left the table.

"I didn't have to see it," Sandy replied, "I probably had the same look on my face. It reminded me so much of when Ed asked me out the first time back in college."

"Well, let me leave the tip and we can make room for the next group. Are we still planning on stopping for a cocktail?"

"I don't think so," Sandy replied. "I'm a little tired and would like to get home."

"But, it's early," Adam insisted, as he felt his wife's elbow dig into his stomach.

"What? What did I say?"

"I'll tell you later; I think I'd like to get home, too."

It was one o'clock when the final group left. Some of the players and cheerleaders stayed and helped clean up. There were 730 pizzas served that night plus another 400 orders of garlic bread. The surprise party had been a wonderful success.

Matthew took Jennifer home that night and walked her to the door. She was exhausted and her body was trembling, partially due to the lack of sleep, but mostly because of the closeness of Matthew. She had never felt this way about a boy before and didn't know what she should do. She wanted so much for him to kiss her. She was glad that her mother had forgotten to turn on the front porch light. As they got to the door, Matthew turned her by the shoulders and put his arms around her and drew her close.

"Jennifer, I'll never forget the support you have given me these last two days." He then reached down and kissed her gently on the lips.

Jennifer had been dating for two years and had been kissed by several boys, but never like this. Her body shuddered as his lips touched hers and he pulled her gently against his body.

## Chapter 7

### Father Sean McGinnis

Father Sean McGinnis was new to the community and this was his first assignment in the United States. After graduating from Regis Seminary School in Colorado, he had spent the six years as a missionary in remote parts of Africa spreading the gospel of the church. The first year he was shocked to see the deplorable conditions and watched as thousands died of illness and starvation while he spread the word of the Lord. He learned quickly that clean water, medicine and food were needed most and turned his efforts to building an infrastructure to help his people survive. An engineer by background, McGinnis used his training and the resources of the church to dig fresh water wells, create irrigation systems for the crops or construct a dam to power electric generators. He oversaw the construction of a rudimentary sewage system adopting concepts first used by the Romans in 300BC. The people trusted him and he soon commanded an army of willing workers.

Schools and hospitals came next, with an emphasis on educating both children and adults in basic principles of personal hygiene and everyday, practical matters. Children were taught about germs and why it was important to keep their bodies clean. Adults were trained about the importance of vaccinations against smallpox, malaria and the diseases that ravaged their people. He was rewarded by an overwhelming participation in the hospital's immunization program.

A trade school was established for exceptional students that grasped basic engineering concepts that Father McGinnis used in his public works projects. These students received advanced training and were sent out into the surrounding communities to oversee the digging of more wells, planting of more crops and building of more schools and hospitals.

Father McGinnis was tireless in his efforts and seemed to be everywhere offering direction and support. "He is not like any of the others," a tribal chieftain commented. "The others talked about their God, but didn't take care of our stomachs."

This was not entirely true, but Father Sean as he was called, would have been pleased to hear this compliment. True, there were no religion classes taught in his school, but there were daily prayers thanking the Lord for His help in taking care of His people. There were prayers thanking the Lord for the food on their table, the blessings of new babies and prayers for

the dead. There was no formal decree, but parents began having their children baptized under the name of the Lord.

Word spread throughout Africa and nations sent emissaries to view the progress that was made and see what could be imported back to their countries. The need for teachers, doctors, nurses and skilled craftsmen was filled by an ever-increasing stream of volunteers from the western world, supplemented by the education and training of local tribesmen. Money poured in from international charities that finally could see concrete results from their contributions. Conversion to Catholicism was not a requirement, and in fact, several Protestant, Muslim and Hindu ministries established a presence, but with only limited success. The people knew that it was Father Sean and his God that was responsible for their good fortune and membership in the Roman Catholic Church grew at an unprecedented rate. Rome took notice.

Father Sean was rewarded with a position at the Vatican where he spent two years rubbing elbows with the church hierarchy and became immersed in church theology and politics. After his six years in Africa doing hands-on work and seeing the tangible results of his labors, the two years at the Vatican were frustrating and boring. Exposure to Bishops and Cardinals, and several times even the Pope, was a tremendous opportunity to further his career within the church, but he couldn't help seeing how far removed these church leaders were from the needs of their constituents. Father Sean stopped talking about his experiences in Africa because he could predict the glazed look that would come over their eyes after a few minutes. The Vatican hierarchy had no idea what he was talking about and couldn't believe that a priest was actually involved in building sewers and latrines.

Father McGinnis was 31 years old and happy with his current assignment as Vicar at St. Timothy's Catholic Church in Shorewood, Wisconsin. Shorewood is a suburb just north of Milwaukee and only twenty minutes from his hometown of Wauwatosa. He had been there six months and met most of the regulars by attending men's and women's club meetings, fundraisers, jamborees and administering to the sick. He was beginning to feel comfortable in his role and believed the parishioners were starting to trust and confide in him. It wasn't as exciting as Africa, but it was God's work.

Saturday night he had worked on his homily until midnight and felt prepared. The readings were from the book of Revelation sometimes referred to as The Apocalypse of John, from the New Testament. It was a favorite subject of his and vital to church doctrine. It also provided much of

the basis for the schism between Catholics and Protestants. He had spent hours debating alternative interpretations with his peers in Rome. Was the Catholic Church the Antichrist referred to in the Revelation? It was a complex and difficult subject, particularly when he only had 10 minutes.

He made his entrance at exactly 8:00AM, preceded by two altar boys carrying the cross and the bible, and took his place at the side of the altar. Before starting the familiar litany of the Catholic mass he greeted the congregation. “Good morning, I’m Father Sean McGinnis.”

“Good Morning, Father,” the response came back.

“That wasn’t as enthusiastic as I might have hoped, but I’m sure some of us had a long night and are still trying to wake up.” The light laughter told him he was right on with a few parishioners.

“In the name of the Father and ...” he began, starting into the familiar litany of the mass before realizing that there was a murmur going through the congregation as a tall, young man walked into the church and took a seat in a middle pew next to his parents. People whispered and pointed as the young man kneeled and said a private prayer before sitting back in his seat. Most priests would have ignored the interruption and continued with the service, but Father McGinnis had a playful streak and decided to have fun with the boy. “Young man, what’s your name?”

“Matthew Wilson, Father.”

“Matthew, you seem to have everyone’s attention, perhaps you would like to give the Homily today.”

Matthew looked directly at Father McGinnis for several seconds attempting to read what was behind the offer. Later Father Sean would say that he felt the boy was reading his soul. “I would be honored. The controversy surrounding John’s book of Revelation is an exciting and provocative subject that is core to our beliefs.”

The boy had called his bluff, and from the response of the congregation it was obvious that they wanted to hear the boy speak. Father McGinnis had no choice. “I suggest we wait until after the readings in order to provide the proper context,” Father Sean suggested, “if that meets with your approval.” His Irish temper wouldn’t be completely suppressed.

Matthew smiled and nodded his agreement.

Father Sean’s mind wandered as he mechanically repeated the opening prayers. The boy looked vaguely familiar, but he couldn’t place the face. Where had he seen him before? At his first opportunity he whispered to the altar boy on his left; “Who is this Matthew Wilson?”

“Basketball player; Shorewood High School; front page of sports section yesterday.”

Everything fell into place for Father Sean. That's why the parishioners recognized the boy. He had seen the article and had marveled at the poise Matthew had shown and the way he had handled defeat. Father Sean had also noticed a small side bar that described the fan reaction, particularly the part about a man getting out of his wheelchair to applaud. His wife claimed he hadn't stood for almost fifteen years, much less walked. "It was a miracle," she told the reporter.

The first reading was from Revelations 13, describing The Sea Beast arising from the sea demanding that the multitudes worship him. The Beast receives power from Satan, referred to as the Dragon.

The second reading from Revelations 17, described the coming of the seven angels who carried the seven bowls and said; 'Come, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot ... Babylon the great, the mother of harlots.'

The final reading delivered by Father Sean addressed the Destruction of Jerusalem and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple, by the Romans in A.D. 70, introducing the question of whether John was talking about what happened (Preterism) or what will happen (Futurism).

Father Sean looked up when he was finished and gestured for the young man to come forward. He took his seat and watched with interest as the boy approached the podium, marveling at the boy's composure and presence. There was complete silence interrupted only by a baby's loud crying in the third pew, which ceased immediately when the boy stopped and put his hand on the baby's forehead and whispered something in his ear. "*Who is he?*" Father Sean wondered.

He watched and listened in awe as the boy spoke, marveling at his ability to bond with the congregation. He scanned the crowd and realized that each person was concentrating, and digesting his words. There were none of the telltale signs of restlessness and boredom that public speakers recognize. The boy had their complete attention.

His sermon was well thought out and his argument based upon what he believed were misinterpretations of the scripture, passages that Father Sean had often questioned. He was totally enraptured in the boy's argument when the boy suddenly concluded, exactly ten minutes after starting. His final message was; "Be prepared, the Apocalypse is coming soon and will be followed by the second coming of the Lord when All Nations will be judged."

The boy nodded his thanks to Father McGinnis and strode back to his pew as the congregation sat in silence, awed by what they had just heard and the power of the sermon. Father McGinnis was also in awe. It wasn't just the message, but the way it was delivered and the reaction of the

congregation. Father Sean was no stranger to leadership and possessed a gift for public speaking, but he had never witnessed a performance like this. Matthew Wilson was in total control of the congregation. Father Sean was smart enough to hold his own homily for another day.

“Thank you Matthew, that was most enlightening,” he said before proceeding with the Apostles Creed, the next part of the liturgy.

After mass ended and Father McGinnis stood outside the front door shaking hands with the parishioners as they exited the church. He kept an eye out for Matthew and wasn’t disappointed as Matthew and his parents stopped to introduce themselves.

“Matthew, that was a beautiful homily. I was impressed by your insight into a complex subject.”

“Thank you for the opportunity, Father. I realize I took away your time.”

“That’s okay, but I would love to discuss the subject with you in more depth.”

“Perhaps you would like to join us for dinner this evening?” Mrs. Wilson suggested.

“I accept,” Father Sean said too quickly.

Thus began a partnership and friendship that would have a profound effect upon Father Sean’s future with the Roman Catholic Church.

At Matthew’s urging and with his full support, Father McGinnis started an inter-denominational youth group consisting of high school kids from the community. The first week there were 35 kids who met in the church youth room, but attendance grew to several hundred by week three as word spread that Matthew was active in this group and was urging his friends to attend. Most kids wanted to be his friend.

The charter for the group was to obtain a better understanding of God, and Father Sean knew first hand from his missionary work in Africa that the Catholic Church did not hold an exclusive on this subject. Unlike many of his peers, he recognized that not all people that believed in God were Christians. He believed religious education and the values of the Christian Church would be better served by exploring all religious beliefs. Matthew was totally in agreement with this approach.

“How many of you attended mass within the last month and can tell me the story of how Jesus Christ was crucified on the cross and later rose from the dead?” Father Sean asked the 35 kids who attended the first week. Most raised their hands.

“Excellent, I’m sure most of you are good Christians, but let me ask you a few more questions. How many of you can tell me why Martin Luther broke away from the Catholic Church and started his own church?” About half the kids raised their hands.

“How many of you have attended a Jewish Synagogue?”

“How many have attended a Muslim service? How many have read the Koran?” No hands were raised as they began to realize how limited their knowledge was.

“What can you tell me about Buddhism?”

“Okay, that’s why we formed this group, to get answers to these questions, and more. To do this we need the participation of other religious groups. Are you with me?”

Father Sean was a natural organizer and enlisted the help of the leaders of the major religions in the area. Rabbi Goldberg became an enthusiastic supporter and representative for the Jewish faith. Overtures were made to leaders of the small, but growing Muslim and Buddhist populations in the city. Meeting locations rotated between the various churches and other places of worship in the area. I attended several of these meetings and was impressed by the enthusiasm and knowledge of the kids. They were having fun and learning too. Sure, there were comparisons of biblical scriptures and interpretations of scripture, but there was a lot of one on one dialogue and humor. There was one dress-up day when representatives from each religion dressed up in the trappings of their forefathers. It was funny, but also a great teaching aid. I also remember well the ill-fated ‘science night’ when each religion was asked to discuss their attitude towards the Ark of the Covenant.

“Next week we will discuss the Ark of the Covenant and its role in various religions. I want you to organize into four groups; Jewish, Muslim, Catholic and Protestant. Each group has 15 minutes to give us a little history and tell us what the impact would be of finding the lost Ark. Questions?”

“Should we talk about the biblical accounts of Moses and Solomon’s Temple and stuff like that?”

“Sure, but concentrate on the Ark’s influence on your religion and how it relates to current beliefs. I’ll give a 10-minute introduction and talk about Moses at Mt. Sinai and set the stage for your in-depth analysis.” Father Sean answered with a grin. “I’m challenging you to be creative.”

“Can we use pictures and props?”

“Sure, anything that helps get your point across. Okay, if there are no other questions, I’ll see you next week.”

Until that day I had just assumed that the Ark was basically a Jewish concept and had not realized that the legend of the Ark was an integral part of the Muslim and Catholic religions as well. It was also the only time that I ever saw Matthew lose his temper.

The evening started off well. Several students had constructed a full size replica of the Ark according to the instructions that God gave Moses in approximately 1250 BC while the Jews were camped at the foot of Mt. Sinai. The Ark was a box the size of a large tea chest approximately 50" in length, 30" in height and 30" in depth. It was constructed of acacia wood and plated with pure gold. On the bottom were four gold rings through which poles were inserted so that the Jews could carry the Ark. Covering the box was a pure gold covering and two Cherubs (angels) facing each other. The kids had carved the cherubs in wood working shop and sprayed the box with a metallic, gold paint. A tent was used to demonstrate how the Ark was housed in its portable Tabernacle for six centuries as the Jews wandered through the desert. They had done a wonderful job and the replica provided an excellent backdrop for the discussions. There would have been no problem if they had stopped there, but a few of them took it an extra step.

The presentations went smoothly for the first hour as the groups used videos to briefly describe how the Ark was constructed, that it housed the two stone tablets containing the ten commandments; that it represented God's physical presence on earth and was a means to communicate with man; and was used a weapon of war, notably at the battle of Jericho. The group responsible for describing the dangers of the Ark had the entire audience in stitches as they acted out the problems that befall those that did not keep their distance from the Ark.

"Luke, take a look in the chest."

"No. Moses says that we are not supposed to. It's dangerous."

"Chicken."

"I am not."

"You are too. Cluck-cluck-cluck."

"Okay, but if there is any gold, I'm keeping it for myself." Luke opened the chest and stuck his head inside. "See, nothing happened."

"The crowd roared in laughter as Luke turned around and his face was covered with measles-like spots."

I happened to glance over at Matthew and noticed he wasn't smiling.

The evening grew to a close as the various religions debated the role of the Ark in today's religious beliefs and the impact of finding the Ark.

Jews and Christians believe that finding the Ark will signify the coming of the Lord and will put great pressure on rebuilding the third Jewish temple on the original site at the Temple Mount which is now under Muslim control and is considered their 3<sup>rd</sup> most important Holy site.

The Koran and hadiths, the oral traditions relating to the words and deeds of the Islamic prophet Mohammad, proclaim that the Mahdi will find the Ark of the Covenant in Lake Tiberias while other hadiths suggest it will be found in Antioch. Most Muslims agree that together with lost Torah scrolls, finding the Ark will be fundamental in educating Jews and converting the entire world to Muslim.

The fascinating interchange was drawing to a close when smoke started rising from inside the Ark and it was encased by an eerie glow. A voice seemed to rise from the smoke.

“Moses, this is the Lord. I’ll take the Packers in Monday night’s game” The smoke cleared showing a two foot statue of a goat standing atop the Ark with smoke rising out of its mouth.

The reaction of the audience was mixed. My bible training was weak and I didn’t realize the full implications of what was happening, but I sensed something was terribly wrong. I found out quickly that my instincts were correct. Laughter rose from some of the kids, but they were interrupted by Father McGinnis who jumped to his feet and shouted; “Who is responsible for this blasphemy?”

Matthew had also risen to his feet and from forty feet away I could see the outrage burning in his eyes. His voice was deadly calm and resonated throughout the church. “There is but one God. Who dares brings false idols into the House of the Lord?”

I then witnessed something that I can best describe as frightening. Two jets of flame shot out from the Ark and the statue atop the Ark exploded into tiny pieces and the Ark itself set fire and gradually disappeared before my eyes.

“Leave us,” Father Sean commanded, “and dwell upon what you have witnessed here tonight. Pray to the Lord for his forgiveness.” Outside the sky crackled with thunder and lightning and the heavens opened up with a torrent of rain and half-inch hailstones. I was thoroughly soaked and shivering when I reached my car, but I hardly noticed as I drove home in a daze.

“Jim, are you all right?” Rosann asked as I walked in the door. “I was worried that storm came out of nowhere.”

“Rosann, sit down and let me tell you what happened. Maybe you can make some sense of this?”

It would be many years and several trips to the Holy Land before I began to understand the full significance of what had transpired that evening.

## **Chapter 8**

### **Pep Rally**

Basketball practice Monday was spirited, to say the least. All 12 boys were eager to show what they could do. Monday was normally a light practice limited to shooting and rebounding drills. We shot for 45 minutes; practiced out-of-bounds plays and then players took 100 free throws, in sets of two. Tuesday and Wednesday we scrimmaged and Thursday was limited to shooting and a walk-through of what we could expect from Friday's opponent. The kids were so hyper that I decided to change the routine and scrimmage five-on-five for a half-hour at the end of practice.

"Okay, that's it, boys. Shower up, and we will see you tomorrow. Great practice!" The boys were tired as they headed for the locker room. I could see they were exhausted, but pleased with their effort. Johnny and I were picking up the basketballs when Matthew asked if he could borrow a ball for a few minutes.

"Sure Matthew, go ahead." He took a CD player from his gym bag and started playing Chuck Berry music as background for his individual workout routine. For ten minutes I watched perpetual motion as he traversed the full length of the court at least fifty times, dribbling and shooting with either hand. I finally picked up the routine; right hand dribble down, through the ball off the backboard, rebound and dunk; left hand dribble back. Repeat, this time shooting a jump shot from the free throw line, repeat, this time a shot from the top of the circle. He didn't slow down and he didn't miss. But as soon as I thought I had spotted his routine, it changed. He started throwing the ball on the floor and diving, rolling and getting to his feet and dribbling towards the basket.

"Where's Matthew?" Andy asked Johnny who was putting out towels. Most of the other kids were already in the shower.

"He's still out there practicing. You should see the drill he has."

“Tell the others,” Andy ordered, as he quickly got dressed, not bothering to put on his sweat-soaked practice jersey.

Andy arrived just in time to see Matthew diving for loose balls. He grabbed another ball and attempted to mimic what Matthew did. Within minutes there was a line of half-dressed boys strung out behind Matthew, emulating his every move. A half-hour later I blew my whistle and called a halt to the workout. “Come on boys, hit the shower. Save something for tomorrow. Matthew, didn’t we give you enough of a workout today?”

“Good practice, Coach, but if we’re going to win State we need to get in better shape.”

From that day on I stepped up the tempo and intensity of practices.

“Which project should we do, Matthew?” the student council president asked.

“They are all fine projects, Seth. It’s up to you and the rest of the group. Put it to a vote. Keep in mind that we have only five months before graduation.”

The council was trying to decide on a senior project and had narrowed a list of ideas to three. The junior class had already decided to work with the local Mothers Against Drunk Driving chapter (MADD), to raise money and increase awareness for this worthy cause. Several students at Shorewood High School had lost family members in car accidents where alcohol was a contributing factor. It was a good cause.

The senior class wanted an even more ambitious project that would provide a legacy for future students. Ideas such as painting the football stadium bleachers or building a new practice field for the soccer team had been discarded after Matthew suggested that their project should have an impact upon the community as well as the high school.

The first project was to rehabilitate homes in the inner city for needy families. Parents and adult volunteers could provide the skilled labor and supervision while the students could provide the manual labor. “My dad’s a plumber,” one girl volunteered. “My uncle’s an electrician; I know he will help.” “My older brother puts up wall board and sheetrock.” “My mother owns an interior design store. I know she will help out with the interior decorating.”

“How do you plan to pay for the materials?” the faculty advisor asked. “I would guess that it would take \$5,000 or more for each house.”

The students quieted as they considered the large number. Eyes slowly turned to Matthew for advice.

“Let me worry about this. We will need to set up a finance committee responsible for fundraising. I’m sure we can get some donations

and the rest we will need to earn. I have some ideas. We already have over a thousand dollars we earned Saturday evening. For now, let's assume that money is not a problem." The faculty advisor kept his doubts to himself. It was apparent that the kids took Matthew at his word.

The second project considered was a broad-based community cleanup; dredging debris from rivers, picking up litter on highways, planting perennials on highways, and so forth. The list was endless.

"Isn't this something we could do some weekend?" Matthew asked. "We could even ask other schools to get involved and make this a community wide cleanup?"

"That's a great idea," Seth offered. "We could make this an annual event."

"Yeah," another boy volunteered. "It's a great idea, but I think our senior project should have a more lasting impact upon the community. Unfortunately, the junk we pick up this year will be back again next year."

The third project idea came from a young man whose parents had moved from Atlanta, Georgia. "I think this community needs something for kids like me that don't plan on going to college. School counselors help you prepare for college, but there is nobody to help find a good job or trade." Most of the kids on student council were overachievers and planned on going on to college. The only question was which school. Nobody was interested in the boy's idea, almost no one.

"What percentage of Shorewood students go on to college?" Matthew asked to no one in particular. "Does anybody know?"

"Last year the percentage going to college was about 65%." The faculty advisor offered. "That means that about 112 seniors didn't."

"Is that 65% of the graduating class or 65% of the freshman enrollment?" Matthew pursued.

"I see your point. It's hard to keep track of how many kids drop out of school or transfer somewhere else."

"Take a guess. Would you say that another 50-100 students drop out before graduating and enter the job market?"

"That would be a fair estimate," the advisor agreed starting to warm up to the discussion.

"And let's not forget the number of kids that drop out of college after one semester or one year," Seth added. "These kids need jobs too."

Everyone recognized the enormity of the problem. "What can we do about it?" a girl asked. "What did they do in Atlanta?"

"They have an in-house job counselor, just like we do here. But they also had a community job center where kids could go and meet with representatives from trade schools, junior colleges, companies looking for

employees, etc. Kids could get a good idea of what is out there and how much they could earn before they graduate.”

“Or before they decide to drop out of school,” one girl suggested. “It would be nice to see some real numbers before making the decision to drop out.”

“I bet we could get volunteers to tell these kids what it’s really like trying to get a job without a degree. That would make more of an impression than reading statistics in a book.”

“Joining the armed services is another option,” another boy suggested. “I bet the recruiters would be glad to participate.”

“Okay, are we ready to vote?” Seth asked. “Is there a motion?”

Matthew was the first to respond. “I make a motion that we do all three. The ‘jobs program’ will be our official senior project, but we will also sponsor a ‘community-wide clean-up’ and ‘home-rehabilitation weekend’.”

The motion was seconded and carried by unanimous vote, beginning five months of hectic activity.

Attendance Thursday was 100% for the first time in school history; not one student called in sick and not one parent called to ask permission to pull their student out of school early for an appointment. Nobody wanted to miss the basketball pep rally scheduled for 2:00 PM in the school auditorium.

Rumors started floating around the school Tuesday when the pep rally was rescheduled from Friday afternoon to Thursday and from forty-five to ninety minutes. The audiovisual department, with the help of outside electricians and contractors, worked evenings installing new lighting and sound systems. A modern dance group was created Monday and the 12 girls practiced daily. The pep band was heard practicing at six AM. Something special was being planned, but only one person knew exactly what. Matthew was in charge.

I taught two Drivers-Ed classes in the morning and could feel the excitement in the classroom. I didn’t envy the teachers that had to teach one of the two afternoon classes before the pep rally.

Mrs. Pederson was trying without success to keep order in her fifth period American History class. She glanced at the clock and saw it was only 1:45; there were still fifteen minutes to go. The entire class was on edge, but Sam Arnold was acting up more than normal. He was a troublemaker who tried to get a laugh with some smart-alec comment every chance he could. He wasn’t a dumb kid; he just didn’t apply himself and

didn't have many friends. His long, unkempt hair was revolting. Mrs. Pederson had enough.

"Sam Arnold, one more word out of you and the entire class can sit here for the next two hours."

"But I know the answer, Mrs. Pederson. It was Professor Plum who shot Abe Lincoln, with a revolver."

"That's enough, one more word out of you or anyone else and you all can forget about the pep rally."

Jennifer couldn't believe this was happening to her. She had practiced the dance number with Sally and Matthew for two hours every night this week, followed by another two hours working on her surprise. She wasn't going to let this jerk ruin it for her. Sam was just about to make a wisecrack reply to Mrs. Pederson's challenge when he felt someone grab his shoulder and spin him around. Jennifer was leaning over him with her forefinger two inches from his nose. She didn't say a word, but he could see the resolve in her eyes. For a change, Sam Arnold made a wise decision and kept his mouth shut.

The auditorium was packed to capacity and students were on the edge of their seats in anticipation. Lyrics from the Queen song played softly in the background, almost too soft to discern. "*We are the champions – my friends, and we will keep on fighting to the end.*" The music set a mood of excitement and anticipation.

The auditorium went mute as the music stopped and the lights dimmed. A spotlight picked up Matthew walking slowly to the microphone amid scattered applause. Matthew held up his hand for silence. "We have two rules for pep rallies; nobody sits and everyone makes noise. Let's try this again."

The lights went dim again as Matthew exited the stage. Matthew trotted back on stage accompanied by Bill Haley's Rock-Around-The-Clock and was greeted by a screaming audience. The decibel level hit the roof as Matthew grabbed the hand mike and started dancing to the music, encouraging students and teachers to follow his lead, and we did. The song ended and Matthew shouted for volunteers to come on stage to dance. A thousand hands shot up. "Jennifer Moore, come on up! Sally Smith, come on up!"

The girls rushed on stage to the music of Van Halen and went into an impromptu dance routine that they had practiced for two weeks. The girls had changed into coordinated dance outfits. The new sound system and amps were tested as the three dancers went through their medley ranging from Rock to Disco and culminating with the Twist. The students screamed

in appreciation as the music ended and the dancers took their bows. Matthew kissed each girl on the cheek and stepped back, leaving Sally and Jennifer alone to accept the applause. He returned and joined the crowd in applause as the girls left the stage.

The crowd remained standing as Matthew grabbed the microphone and waited for silence. "The theme of this pep rally is 'kicking ass,'" Matthew started before being interrupted by hoots and whistles. "I was going to give you examples of what I mean by 'kicking ass,' but there is no better example than what you just saw from Sally and Jennifer. They worked countless hours this week on that impromptu routine you just saw. It wasn't easy, but these girls put in the time and effort to make it happen. That's what I call 'kicking ass'." Students and teachers applauded again, many of them just now recognizing that this was a planned routine. They would learn that little of what Matthew does is impromptu.

"There are three parts to this pep rally," Matthew announced loudly, holding up three fingers for emphasis, before pulling in two fingers. "My name is ....

The stage lights dimmed and his microphone went silent. I could see that Matthew was truly surprised as he looked up at the control booth at the back of the auditorium.

Music started to play as a spotlight focused on the back curtain. "Boom-boom-boom-boom, boom-boom-boom-boom, boom-boom-boom-boom." The drum beat keep playing as the spotlight sought out the unseen performer.

"Boom-boom-boom-boom, boom-boom-boom-boom, boom-boom-boom-boom."

The curtain moved, but the spotlight didn't seem to notice, and continued its search.

"Boom-boom-boom-boom, boom-boom-boom-boom, boom-boom-boom-boom."

"In the center," a student shouted, trying to help.

The spotlight slowed and finally settled on shoes and ankles that appeared in the middle of the stage, and slowly rose as the music began.

*"I call you when I need you, my heart's on fire."*

"Tina," voices from around the room shouted; "Simply the Best."

I thought I heard Matthew yell something that sounded like, "sex," but the thought was wiped away as the music continued.

*“You come to me, come to me, wild and wild.”*

The spotlight moved up to reveal long legs that would have made the real Tina Taylor proud.

*“Give me a lifetime of promises and a world of dreams,  
Speak a language of love like you know what it means”*

The audience roared as the spotlight revealed the singer’s face. “Jennifer, Jennifer,” the crowd shouted as they recognized the singer. The 17-year old girl had changed quickly behind stage and looked absolutely beautiful, in a sexy and provocative way. I could hear the wows from the boys. Jennifer was now up close to Matthew, pounding a fist against his chest for emphasis as she sang the song’s refrain.

*“You’re simply the best, better than all the rest,  
better than anyone I’ve ever met.”*

Students raised their arms high above their head, swaying side-to-side with the music. Boys whistled and shouted in admiration.

*“In your eyes I get lost, I get washed away.  
Just as long as I’m here in your arms I could be in no better place,  
You’re simply the best, better than all the rest.”*

Although I know it was a complete surprise to Matthew, the couple acted in unison as she leaned against him for emphasis.

*“I’m stuck on your heart,  
And hang on every word you say  
Tear us apart, baby  
I would rather be dead.”*

It helped that most of the kids knew the song lyrics by heart, but for those of us that didn’t, the words were projected onto a large screen along with the blown-up image of the couple on stage. I could see Matthew whispering to her as she sang the next stanza.

*“You’re walking away with my heart, and my soul  
Oh baby, don’t let go.”*

The noise level of the crowd increased another level as Jennifer punctuated the final phrase by again pounding on Matthew’s chest. She was delivering an unbelievable performance.

Just when I thought that the auditorium couldn’t get any louder, they kicked it up another notch. The spotlight left the couple for only a couple seconds, but when it returned the auditorium erupted in bedlam to the sound of an alto sax. Matthew was on one knee, clad in a sleeveless t-shirt, displaying bulging biceps and playing the sax with the skill of a professional. The girl next to me started screaming at the top of her lungs and didn’t stop until the wonderful performance was finished. She wasn’t alone, and it wasn’t just students. Girls on the aisles rushed to the front of

the stage to get closer. This was as close to a rock concert atmosphere as you can get at a high school pep rally.

The song ended and the students applauded and screamed; “encore, encore,” and were rewarded with a short refrain;

*“I could be in no better place,  
You’re simply the best, better than all the rest,  
Better than anyone I’ve ever met”*

Matthew and Jennifer pointed at each other as they sang, and then pointed to the audience. The audience pointed back as they continued to cheer the couple, and then just Jennifer, as Matthew disappeared off-stage to allow Jennifer to accept her due. He came back and held Jennifer with one arm around her shoulder as he waited for the crowd to settle. “Jennifer, I cannot thank you enough for the gift you gave me today. This will always be our song.” He pointed at the audience. “If someone asks you what kicking ass means, you tell them about what you saw here today.”

Matthew put his shirt over Jennifer’s shoulders and asked two boys in the front row to escort Jennifer to her seat. I was exhausted and the pep rally had just begun.

“Let me try this once more,” Matthew repeated, again holding one finger up for emphasis. “My name is Matthew Wilson and I play basketball, and when I play basketball, I KICK ASS.”

The auditorium roared as video highlights of Friday’s game against Waukesha were projected onto the large screen. There were two minutes of kids diving for loose balls, rebounding, playing defense and hustling. When it ended I realized that the video showed little of Matthew - it was all about the team.”

“We lost that game,” Matthew continued, “but in the fourth quarter we kicked ass.”

More cheers and whistles.

“There was one person in particular that kicked ass, and I want to thank him this afternoon.” A video started again showing 30 seconds of Andy hustling and diving out of bounds to save the ball, and then getting up and racing down court to make the lay-up on a feed from Matthew. The play was replayed in slow motion highlighting Andy’s intensity. I cheered louder than anyone when the clip ended.

“Andy, you were the first player to believe in me as a basketball player and you gave 100% when you had the opportunity. That’s what I call KICKING ASS and I will always be in your debt. If you ever need me, I’ll be there for you.”

The auditorium erupted in applause for Andy, finally interrupted by Matthew. “But he wasn’t the first to believe in me.”

The auditorium went silent again as video screen showed Matthew tripping as he took off his warm up pants. We heard the jeers and catcalls from the Waukesha crowd for what seemed like an eternity before a single, squeaky voice proclaimed, “You can do it, Matthew, I know you can.”

Many in the auditorium laughed at the squeaky voice, but quickly recognized they were out of line. Matthew stood at the podium waiting until there was complete silence. The audio visual crew enhanced the mood by dimming the lights almost imperceptibly.

“Image yourself lost, walking alone at night in a strange neighborhood. The streets are dark and a group of strangers appear in front of you. Think of the relief when one of them asks you if they can help.” The room was absolutely silent.

“Can anyone remember when you were young, lying in bed during a storm and listening to the windows creak or tree branches scraping against the window, and feeling afraid, before your mother came in to see if you were all right?” You could have heard a pin drop as Matthew paused for several seconds.

“Now imagine leaving your friends and starting at a new school. It’s your first chance to show everyone that you can play basketball, but everything seems to be going wrong. You are alone, and there are five thousand people laughing at you. Then out of nowhere you hear a voice.” They played the tape again.

“You can do it, Matthew, I know you can.”

There was complete silence, interrupted only by the sounds of girls, and boys, trying to hold back tears. The voice didn’t sound as squeaky this time.

“Jennifer, you were the first to believe in me and I will always remember that. I’ll be there for you if you ever need me. Please come back on stage so I may thank you properly.” Cheers followed Jennifer to the stage and erupted in a crescendo when Matthew hugged her and kissed her lips. Every girl watched in envy as she returned to her seat.

Sam Arnold sat two rows behind Jennifer and thought about how he had almost ruined this day for Jennifer, and vowed he would make amends.

“My name is Matthew Wilson,” he proclaimed, holding up two fingers, “and I am a student at Shorewood High School.”

The students interrupted Matthew with cheers. They too, were proud of their High School.

“and when I’m a student,” Matthew continued, “I KICK ASS.”

More cheers.

“What do I mean by kicking ass in school?” Matthew asked rhetorically. “It means that I study as hard for exams as I practice for a basketball game. It means that I try to do my best on every exam and learn from my teachers. It means that if I do poorly on a test and miss questions I should have known, I study harder and try to do better next time.”

There was silence, but I could tell that Matthew had the attention of the faculty. “Yesterday, I asked one of you how you had done on a math test. You told me you got a C, which happens to all of us. But you then told me you could have done better, but you didn’t study. You went to a movie instead.”

Matthew hesitated. I could tell that no one was sure where he was going with this.

“Imagine, one of my teammates missing two free throws to lose a game, and then telling me he could have made them, but he was too lazy to practice free throws.”

Matthew hesitated again and you could feel many of the students start to squirm.

“Don’t tell me you didn’t study, it just makes you look stupid. If you did study and you got a C, that’s fine. Ask me for help if you don’t understand something, or ask your teacher. They are here to teach us, and we are here to learn. Let’s not waste this opportunity. Kicking Ass means that we do our best.”

The teachers led the applause.

“Starting next week, we are going to honor three students and one teacher that have ‘kicked ass’ the preceding week. The student council will be responsible for collecting nominations and selecting the teacher, while Principal Hawkins will be responsible for nominating the students. We even have a trophy that commemorates this prestigious award.”

The trophy was projected onto the video screen, showing a mule kicking a farmer over a fence. Raucous laughter demonstrated the student’s approval.

“Today, I have made these nominations myself. Ms. Thompson, you are my teacher of the week for your enthusiasm and excitement you bring to your English class and the way you make poetry a part of our soul. Come on up and receive your just reward,” Matthew grinned, holding up a trophy with her name engraved on the mule’s flank.”

“You will notice that the students I nominate are not chosen because they are necessarily the smartest in class or get the best grades, or are close friends of mine. They are picked because teachers told me they

each did something special like acing a test or in one case, getting a B+ when the student normally was getting Cs or Ds. We want to reward students that improve and do the best they can.” Each student received warm applause as they received their trophies. I could see how proud they were as Matthew congratulated each of them.

“My name is Matthew Wilson,” Matthew started holding up three fingers, “and I am a member of this community, and when I work in the community, I KICK ASS.”

There was light applause.

“We will have opportunities to get involved in many community activities in the upcoming weeks, but today I want to concentrate on one area which is the foundation of the community. I am talking about the family, your mother and father and brothers and sisters. This is the foundation of every community.”

“How many of you told your mother or father this morning that you love them? How about yesterday? I did? Did anybody else?”

There was no response. “Kelly, did you?”

“Yes, but why don’t you try to spot me out?”

Laughter.

“Kelly knows better. She is the best sister any guy could have and I don’t tell her that enough. Kelly, I want you to know that you are a great sister and that I love you. I’m lucky to have you as my sister.”

“I love you too, Matthew.”

The auditorium was quiet and Matthew continued.

“You know what, that wasn’t hard to do at all. It felt good. It made me feel better, especially when Kelly told me she loved me too.”

“I have permission from Principal Hawkins to cancel all homework assignments for tonight and to ask teachers to postpone any tests until Monday. There is just one thing that each of us needs to do this evening. We want each of you to go home this evening and tell your parents that you love them.”

Matthew paused and let this sink in.

“That’s your assignment. Say it like you mean it. Look them in the eye and say; Mom, Dad I love you. Add whatever else you want, but be direct. Tell them you love them. Don’t say that ‘you know’ that I love you; the only way they know is if you tell them. Okay?”

He again paused to let everyone know he meant it.

“One more thing. I have reserved five restaurants for dinner this evening starting at 6:00 PM. The list and menus are posted on the bulletin boards. Invite your parents and tell them it’s your treat. It’s our way to

show your gratitude for all they have done. If you can't afford it, just sign your name and we'll find some way for you to earn the money. I want everyone, and I mean everyone, to attend. Teachers too, bring your husbands and wives. We won't take attendance, but I hope you all can make it."

"I have to baby-sit," a girl in the back row asked, almost in tears.

"There will be some conflicts and I apologize for not giving you more notice, but try. Do your best. If you need to pay someone to baby-sit, give me the bill and I will see that you are reimbursed. If you try, but can't make it, I will understand."

"That's it; I hope to see you all tonight. I plan on making the rounds with my parents to all five restaurants. Principal Hawkins has a brief announcement. Principal Hawkins."

"There will be a brief meeting for all faculty in the teachers' lounge. Students, you are dismissed and I hope to see all of you this evening."

Queen's "We Are the Champions" music blared as we vacated the auditorium, much louder than when we walked in. The audio visual team had done a tremendous job on short notice.

## Chapter 9 Dinner

I was one of the first to arrive in the teachers' lounge and listened to the diverse reactions of the other teachers.

"I don't care who he is, there is no excuse for swearing in school. Ass is a cussword in my book."

"Oh fiddlesticks, did you see how the students paid attention when he told them to study. I've already seen a big improvement in my classes."

"That was quite a performance Jennifer put on," a male teacher remarked.

"Disgusting," another said.

Mrs. Reynolds was the oldest and had the final word. "I almost wet my pants when he started playing the saxophone. Did you see those biceps?"

Principal Hawkins arrived and the room quieted. "Okay, if everyone is here, let's get started."

Ms. Thompson burst into the room holding a bouquet of flowers. “Sorry, I’m late, but I stopped to buy flowers for my husband before they’re all gone.”

“Where did you get them?” I asked.

“Look outside, there are four florist trucks lined up and the kids are buying them as fast as the florists can supply them.”

Most of the teachers flocked to the window to see for themselves. Sure enough, there must be four hundred kids standing in line while the lucky ones walked away with their bouquets. It looked like the florists had just run out. Then we noticed the lucky kids coming back.

“Look, do you see what’s happening? The kids with the flowers are offering part of their bouquets to the kids that don’t have any.” Pretty soon, each student had at least a single flower to take home to their mother.”

“Can you believe that?” someone said. “I’ve never seen anything like that before.”

Ms. Thompson had taken the rubber bands off her floral arrangement and offered to share. “Sometimes we can learn from our kids.”

“Let’s continue,” Mr. Hawkins said. “I for one have a dinner date with my wife this evening. But I did want to talk with you about what we saw this afternoon.”

Another teacher piped in. “I just got off the phone with the principal from the high school Matthew transferred from. Did anyone else get a call?”

Every hand shot up. Matthew’s former basketball coach had called me the day after Matthew walked into my office the first day. I had a hunch what the calls were about.

“I didn’t,” Mrs. Holmes said, “although someone named Jones has tried to call me seven or eight times. I don’t accept calls from strangers.”

“You had better take the call, Mrs. Holmes, or you will wake up one morning and find a beautiful, 66-year old teacher sitting on your doorstep.” Matthew was standing in the doorway. “May I say something, Principal Hawkins?”

He nodded, and Matthew continued. “I have a hunch what Mrs. Jones wants to say, and probably what the rest of you were told by your peers at Santa Barbara High School. She will ask you to give me some leeway. They are proud of what we accomplished in Santa Barbara. Am I right, is that what the rest of you heard?”

Several teachers nodded.

Matthew continued. “Let me tell you a wonderful story. Mrs. Jones was ready to retire three years ago. She had lost her husband to cancer, and

frankly was becoming a bitter woman. Today she is the best teacher in that school and the students love her. We sent a petition to the school board to waive mandatory retirement and let her teach another year.”

Teachers listened as Matthew went on. He was speaking their language.

“My former principal called me yesterday and asked how things were going and if there was anything he could do. I told him about the pep rally and my concerns that teachers here would think I’m moving too fast. He asked if it would be all right to call Principal Hawkins. My understanding is that he mentioned it to his assistant principal and pretty soon every teacher got the word had decided to call. Believe me, I didn’t ask every teacher to call.”

Mrs. Butler supported what Matthew had said. “The teacher that called me said you didn’t know, but felt he had to call after everything you had done for the school.” Several other teachers nodded in agreement. They had been told the same thing.

Matthew continued. “I’m not trying to take over the school. We are all trying to make sure the students get the best education. Sometimes kids listen better if they hear it from another student. I think you know that and I hope you understand.”

Having said what he came to say, Matthew departed.

Principal Hawkins summed up what we were all thinking. “Not that I want to, but we couldn’t stop him if we did. Did you see how the kids worship him?”

Rosann and I arrived at Logan’s Roadhouse just after 6:30 PM. The place was already packed and we were ready to try another restaurant when Tom Osteen, one of my players made room for us at their table. “It’s the same at all the other restaurants, they are all packed,” Tom informed us. “Matthew is sending the overflow to other restaurants.”

The waiter took our order and we sat back and looked at the crowd. Everyone seemed to be in a festive mood and many of the ladies wore flowers in their hair or pinned to their dresses. Tom went to another table to talk with friends and his mother leaned over to Rosann. “Can you believe that Tom said he loved me?” She said with pride.

“What brought that on?” Rosann asked.

“He just came home from school and put his arms around me and said, ‘Mother, I love you very much. You are the best.’”

“I looked up at him to see if he was kidding, or something, but he wasn’t. You haven’t said that to me since you were seven. What brought this on?” I asked him.

“Mom, I am so lucky to have a mother like you. Someone at school just reminded me to say it.”

“I just started crying, and then he handed me some flowers and said he wanted to take his dad and me to dinner tonight, and here we are.”

Tears came to her eyes and Rosann offered a comforting hug. A woman at the next table overheard the conversation and said the same thing had happened to her. “My daughter hadn’t told me she loved me for six years and then out of the blue she comes out and tells us what great parents we are and that she loves us. My husband had tears in his eyes.”

“Another father interrupted and said that the same thing happened at their home.” The story was the same at every table.

We were waiting for dessert when a buzz started to flow through the room. Matthew and his parents were on the way. The room spontaneously erupted with applause when Matthew and his parents appeared.

Matthew ignored the many invitations and zeroed in on several small tables in the corner where families were eating alone. “Come on, let’s pull these tables together. John, Mary, Sally; introduce your parents.” Five minutes later the men were talking deer hunting and the women were talking golf. I had seen it before, but I was constantly amazed at Matthew’s ability to bring people together. Matthew took a few bites of food and began making the rounds, greeting every student by first name. He stopped briefly at our table and introduced himself to Rosann, complimenting her on her dress and telling her what a pleasure it was to play basketball for me. Fifteen minutes later he said his goodbyes and was headed for the next restaurant. Before leaving he asked everyone to introduce themselves. “Get to know each other; we have a lot of work to do together this year.”

You might have thought that people would begin to leave after Matthew departed, and a few did, but most stayed and did what Matthew had asked. It was more than an hour later when Rosann and I said our goodbyes. “Well Rosann, what do you think of him?” I asked. It was the first time she had spoken with Matthew.

“I don’t know how to say it, but he made me feel so good about myself. He looks you in the eye and makes you feel important. I have never met someone like that before.”

“I understand, I see it every day at school.”

“Besides, he is a hunk. You better treat me nice or I just might be tempted to rob the cradle.”

“I accept your challenge, starting as soon as we get home.”

“Why wait?” Rosann said, as she leaned towards me.

Friday's basketball game was anticlimactic. Matthew scored only 12 points, but we beat Wauwatosa West by 28 points. Every player scored and six were in double figures. The crowd was large and noisy and two hours before game time the auditorium was packed. There were 3,000 fans crammed into a gymnasium designed to hold 2,300 and another 2,000 cheered from outside in fifteen degree temperatures. It would be like this for every game. Matthew went outside at halftime to thank the shivering fans. "The team knows you are out here and it means a lot to us," Matthew shouted. "Thank you!"

## Chapter 10 Media Bash

Headlines of the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel' Sunday editorial section read:

***Morality lacking in school system!  
System Condone Cussing!  
What are teachers thinking?***

*Cusswords! Sex! Dancers with low-cut dresses exposing breasts! What is our school system coming to? What has happened to the rah-rah, go-team, cheers that we are all familiar with? What has happened to our society when high schools need to resort to cuss words and sexual innuendo to arouse (pun intended) fan interest?*

*Thursday our children attended a purported pep rally and were forced to witness a most disgusting example of the evil that is permeating our educational system and destroying the values that we, as a society, hold dear. The term "kick ass" was used more than 20 times, apparently to convey the message that the kicker was giving maximum effort. If that's the message, why not say so? Why not say, I gave 100%, or I gave everything I had? Why resort to cuss words?*

The article rambled on for two pages, concluding with; "let's stop this trend before it gets out of hand. Call or write your school board and implore them to take back control of our educational system." The byline for the article was: Gus Edwards, Sr. Editor.

Rosann read the article first and handed it to me while I was still engrossed in the sports section. "Take a look at this," she added. "Apparently not everyone is enamored with the new boy at school."

"Wow," I said quietly as I finished skimming the article and began reading it again. "Is this guy talking about the same pep rally that I was at? What a prude!"

"He apparently has no sense of what was going on," Rosann offered. "He obviously wasn't there."

"It will be interesting to see how Matthew reacts to this," I mused while I sipped my coffee. I don't think he will take this lying down. Monday should be an interesting day at school."

# APPENDIX

## The College Years @ The University of Wisconsin



**Kohl Center**

 **Freshman Year**

**Wisconsin Badgers**  
Vs.  
**1961 Ohio State Buckeyes**  
(Championship Game)

*The University of Wisconsin Basketball resurgence started with Dick Bennett and continues with Bo Ryan. The philosophy is the same. Both coaches preached defense.*

*In 1995, Bennett replaced Stan Van Gundy at the [University of Wisconsin–Madison](#) as the head coach of the men's basketball team. In Bennett's first year, the [Badgers](#) earned a bid in the [NIT Tournament](#). Over the next four seasons Bennett coached Wisconsin to three [NCAA](#) tournament appearances including the Final Four (1999-2000). The Badgers had played in a total of three NCAA tournaments in the 97 years before his arrival. Bennett also coached Wisconsin to its first ever 20-win season in 1998-99. Bennett resigned three games into the 2000-2001 season citing [burnout](#)—he said he "simply was drained".*

*Bennett's teams were known particularly for their defensive prowess. While at Wisconsin his teams led the Big Ten in scoring defense four straight years and finished in the top-five nationally three times.*

*Bennett recruited players who were willing to place teamwork and discipline ahead of personal statistics. His players excelled in the classroom as well as on the court. While few NBA players emerged from his programs, most of his players have gone on to success in other careers, including coaching.*

*Bo Ryan learned leadership skills from his father while growing up in a tough, working class neighborhood in Philadelphia, Pa. With these skills, he became a star basketball player, leading his high school team to a 25-1 record in his senior year. In addition to basketball, Bo was a high school quarterback and class president. He used these skills to be a successful*

point guard in high school and later star at a small college in Wilkes-Barre Pa.

Head coach [Dick Bennett](#) retired two games into the 2000-2001 season following the Badgers' 2000 [Final Four](#) run. Assistant coach [Brad Soderberg](#) finished the season as interim head coach, but was not retained by the university. The coaching search began to concentrate on [Rick Majerus](#) of the [University of Utah](#), a Milwaukee native, and Bo Ryan. When Majerus pulled his name out of consideration, the decision was made to hire Bo Ryan as head coach of the [Wisconsin Badgers men's basketball team](#).

Ryan's first season was much more successful than anticipated. The team was predicted to finish as low as ninth in the [Big Ten](#) in pre-season polls. The team, led by [Kirk Penney](#), surprisingly tied with three other teams for the 2002 Big Ten Championship and received an invitation to the [NCAA Tournament](#). The Badgers again won the Big Ten championship in the 2002-2003 season and advanced to the "Sweet Sixteen" in the NCAA Tournament. The Badgers won the Big Ten Tournament Championship in 2004, led by [Devin Harris](#), and once again received an NCAA Tournament invitation. In the 2004-2005 season, Wisconsin advanced to the "Elite Eight" in the NCAA Tournament, losing to the eventual national champion, the [University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Tar Heels](#). On December 10, 2005, Ryan recorded his 100th victory as Wisconsin head coach by defeating in-state rival [Wisconsin](#).

In the 2006–2007 season, Ryan led the Badgers to the pinnacle of college basketball, helping them achieve their first top-five ranking and #1 ranking in the [AP poll](#) in the school's history.

Ryan and Bennett preached defense, but they also stressed teamwork. Ryan is known for the Swing Offense which emphasizes unselfishness and the interchangeability of parts. Sis foot Trevon Hughes posts up inside while 6'10' Jon Leuer waits at the three point line. If there is no opening, the players rotate. It's unselfish basketball and more importantly, it works. The players have bought into it.

Mile Kelley's career exemplifies what is great about Wisconsin basketball. Kelley, a 6'3" All State guard from Menomonee Falls, Kelley was a key member of the Wisconsin 1999-2000 final four team. His career high in points scored was only 13, but the 1999 Big Ten Defensive Player of the Year was 5 for 5 in the NCAA semi-finals. Kelley played with determination and desire. He knew how to put himself in the right position for a steal, something he accomplished a school record, 275 as a Badger.

*His tenacity on defense was felt by fans in the upper deck and cheered by those of us Badger fans watching on television.*

*A badger is defined as a fierce mammal that will tenaciously defend its home and family against larger predators. The Wisconsin Badger's at home are 136 - 11 under Bo Ryan.*

***Author's Note:** This chapter, and the other chapters about basketball, are mostly fiction. Most of the names and names are correct, but the times and places have been changed. Marquette rosters are jumbled so that every member of Marquette's Basketball Hall of Fame could be included. The games are fictitious. Most were played in a time when palming the ball, and taking two steps without dribbling, were traveling violations.*



### Chapter 3

### Freshman Year

Vs.

### 1961 Ohio State Buckeyes

Wisconsin	
Coach	Bo Ryan
<b>C</b>	Christian Steinmetz
<b>F</b>	Alando Tucker
<b>F</b>	Brian Butch
<b>G</b>	Ken Siebel
<b>G</b>	Wes Mathews
Sub	Kammron Taylor

***Author's Note:** This chapter, and the other chapters about basketball, are mostly fiction. Most of the names and names are correct, but the times and places have been changed. Marquette rosters are jumbled so that every member of Marquette's Basketball Hall of Fame could be included. The games are fictitious. Most were played in a time when palming the ball, and taking two steps without dribbling, were traveling violations.*

The Badgers were an unknown quantity and picked to finish sixth by Big Ten coaches. Matthew Wilson was an unknown quantity. The team

featured Christian Steinmetz, a prolific scorer who averaged 25.7 points year and still holds the single game scoring record of 50 points. Brian Butch was a blue collar power forward with an excellent three point shot for a big man. The, 7'0" junior, was a former Parade All American out of Appleton West High School. Dubbed the 'polar bear' by sportswriters and broadcasters, Butch provided the Badgers with size and tenacity under the basket. The point guard, Wes Mathews was a senior with three years' experience. Alando Tucker, a 6'6", 205 pound jumping jack from Illinois played like he was 6'10". Tucker brought his inner city game to Wisconsin and dominated much taller players.

As was typical of Wisconsin basketball teams under Ryan, the pre-season schedule was relatively soft, allowing Wisconsin to rack up victories and qualify for the year-end NCAA tournament. Their first real test was in the sixth game when they played Marquette University in Milwaukee, and lost 72-69. Wilson was in foul trouble throughout the game and finished with only 13 points. Wes Mathews had seven turnovers and was an anemic three for 14 from the field.

The Badgers finished the pre-season eight and one and entered the Big Ten conference schedule with high hopes. The opening game against a mediocre Northwestern team proved to be a cakewalk as the Badgers got off to a fast start and won by 18. They followed this with victories against Penn State, Michigan and Indiana before running up against a tough Illinois team in Assembly Hall. They lost by seven points as they were unable to handle the Illini press and athleticism under the basket. Matthew had 28 points, but got little help on the front line as Steinmetz and Butch fouled out with a total of only 13 points and 8 rebounds between them.

The following week the Big Ten favorite, the #3 ranked Ohio State Buckeyes, came to Madison. It was the Badgers first big test. They were more than up to it as they easily beat the Buckeyes 74-58, playing smothering defense highlighted by full court press for the entire game. Ken Siebel made 5 of 6 three pointers and finished with 26 points and eight assists. Matthew was held to seven points but contributed six steals and 17 rebounds. Alando Tucker, only 6'6", had his way inside against the taller Buckeyes and finished with 19 points and 15 rebounds. Wisconsin's record was 22 and three as they entered the Big Ten tournament which they won handily; beating Minnesota, Illinois and Michigan State, and upset winner over Ohio State, in the finals.

Wisconsin was ranked #4 in the national polls and awarded a #1 seed in the Southern regional. Ryan would have preferred to play in Chicago, the home of the Midwest region, where Badger fans would have packed the

arena. Ryan was not one to complain about things beyond his control. Besides, it might be good for recruiting.

The Badgers won their first two games easily and advanced to the round of 16 in Atlanta where they faced the University of Nevada-Las Vegas. The Running Rebels came out hot, hitting their first seven shots, and quickly took a 17-6 lead before the Badgers slowly crept back. Tim Locum got into immediate foul trouble against the fast UNLV guards and was replaced by a promising freshman, Kammron Taylor. Kammron could drive to the hoop, and today he showed the national television audience why he was such a prized recruit. He finished the game with 23 points and 10 rebounds and led the Badgers to a 12 point victory. Matthew contributed 18 points and 14 rebounds. Tucker led all scorers with 23 points.

In the round of eight, the Badgers were matched against Big Ten power Louisville who had beaten them earlier in the year. This time the Badgers jumped off to a quick start and easily beat the Cardinals, 81-66, exacting revenge for their early season loss. The Wisconsin Badgers were in the Final Four.

Their first game in the Final Four was against UCLA, the No. 1 seed from the West. Unlike recent UCLA teams that were dominated by the All-American centers Lou Alcindor and Bill Walton, this team featured two power forwards - David Meyers and Curtis Rowe. Ryan knew that Christian Steinmetz and Brian Butch needed to have big games inside if the Badgers were to compete. Wisconsin jumped off to a quick start and Matthew completely shut down Curtis Rowe who was held to 11 points. His running mate, David Myers, the consensus all-American and future #1 draft pick of the Milwaukee Bucks, had 26 points and 16 rebounds but it was not enough as Wisconsin prevailed, 86-82. Christian Steinmetz had a game-high 28 points and Lucas contributed 17 points and 17 rebounds.

Wisconsin advanced to the finals where they were matched against possibly the greatest collection of college basketball players ever put together, the Ohio State Buckeyes, led by three-time All-American Jerry Lucas. In addition to Lucas, Ohio State featured four other starters that would go on to play pro basketball; John Havlicek, a member of the NBA Hall of Fame, Mel Nowell, Joe Roberts and Larry Siegfried. The sixth man for the Buckeyes was Bob Knight, future coach of the Indiana Hoosiers.

Havlicek was a great defensive player as a college basketball player and set his mind to shutting down Matthew Wilson. He succeeded for the first 35 minutes and his team led by seven points. At that point, Matthew had four fouls and six points on 3 of 12 shooting as Havlicek had a hand in his face on every shot attempt. The leading scorers for the Badgers were Alando Tucker with 16 and Christian Steinmetz with 15 points, but Rand

fouled out with seven minutes to go. It was time for Matthew to step up and he did. Matthew scored the next 12 points for the Badgers, starting his spree with a rebound basket off a missed shot by Thompson. He then hit two outside jump shots, stole the ball from Siegfried and drove in for an uncontested layup. He finished his scoring spree with a running hook shot over the outstretched arms of Havlicek and the Badgers were up by three points. This lead quickly dissipated as Lucas hit a short hook shot and then followed up a missed shot by Roberts with a rebound basket. Ohio State was up by one with only eight seconds to go.

The team huddled around Bo Ryan who had a deserved reputation as one of the best game day coaches of all time. Ryan gave directions for the final play. It was typical of Ryan not to go to his shooting star, but go with the person he felt would perform in this situation, which in this instance was freshman Kammron Taylor. Only 6'1", Taylor scored most of his points underneath the basket, but to this point had been stifled by Lucas and Havlicek. That didn't stop Ryan from calling his number for the final play.

"Matthew, get the ball to Kammron at the top of the circle. Brian and Christian will set a double screen at the free throw line and draw their men away from the basket. Kammron, fake left and drive hard right and you should have an easy layup. Questions?"

The play worked to perfection although not as originally planned. Kammron found a clear path to the basket and went up for the winning shot, only to find Havlicek slide off his man to help out on defense and leap high to block the shot. Taylor double clutched and at the last moment, turned in the air, and found Matthew alone in the corner with a perfect bounce pass. The buzzer went off as the ball swished through the basket. The Wisconsin Badgers were National Champions for the first time since 1941. The 5,000 Badger fans poured onto the floor to congratulate their heroes.



## **Badger Stars**




**Sophomore Year**  
**Wisconsin Badgers**  
 Vs.  
**1976 Indiana Hoosiers**

<i>Wisconsin</i>	
Coach	Bo Ryan
<i>C</i>	Al Henry
<i>F</i>	Kim Hughes
<i>F</i>	Matthew Wilson
<i>G</i>	Devin Harris
<i>PG</i>	Wes Mathews
<i>Sub</i>	Kerry Hughes

The Wisconsin Badgers entered the college basketball season as defending NCAA champions with only one returning starter, Matthew Wilson, and ranked outside the top 20 in pre-season polls. Alando Tucker and Brian Butch graduated and Wes Mathews left school a year early to enter the NBA draft. It was time to put Bo Ryan's recruiting skills to good use.

Ryan's style didn't appeal to everyone, but he knew his niche. Like his predecessor Dick Bennett, Ryan looked for certain types of players that fit his system. He found these players close to home, with most of his recruits coming from Wisconsin, Illinois and Minnesota. Ryan was the first Wisconsin coach to heavily recruit Minnesota area and had a steady stream of talent from Joe Bryant to Jon Leuer and Kammron Taylor.

Wes Mathews was the recruiting exception. From Bridgeport Conn, Wes Mathews was one of the most athletic players in Wisconsin history and went on to a successful NBA career would start at point guard. Only 6'1", he once dunked over the 6'11" Kevin McHale. However, his most notable achievement might have been to sire a son, Wesley, who 20 years later became 'Mr. Basketball' in Wisconsin, but broke Badger hearts by choosing Marquette over the hometown Badgers. The other guard spot belonged to Devin Harris, from Wauwatosa East high school. Harris was one of the quickest guards to play for Wisconsin and went on to star in the NBA for Dallas and New Jersey.

The strength at the guard positions forced Matthew Wilson to move to forward where he teamed with a couple of 6'11" twins, Kim and Kerry Hughes. The twins were a prime example of Ryan's interchangeable offense. After a nice NBA career, Kim would later go on to become head coach for the L.A. Clippers. Ryan still needed a center, and found Al Henry who would have a nice career as a Badger. Nicknamed 'The Tree', Henry a wiry 6'9", 190 pounds, was a good scorer and a tremendous wingspan that allowed him to play taller than his height.

The season opened with a tournament in Alaska; the Great Alaskan Shootout. Wisconsin had played an AAU team and an international team as practice games, but these would not count in the NCAA standings. The Great Alaskan Shootout was their first real test and it would be a good one because 18 of the 24 teams that were invited had been ranked in the top 25 the preceding year. Given the team's youth and inexperience, and the stellar competition, it was not surprising that the Badgers lost in the second round and then lost again in the 5<sup>th</sup> place consolation game.

The team started to come into form as the badgers settled into the easy part of its schedule. They finished December on a roll, highlighted by a 15 point home win against the University of Wisconsin, the team that beat them in Milwaukee the prior year. It was a good win and gave indications that this team might be better than some people thought.

Matthew took a different approach this year. As a freshman he had been surrounded by good players and content to contribute assists, rebounds and occasional scoring; whatever the team needed. He finished the season averaging a respectable 16 points and 12 rebounds. This year he was asked to provide more offense and was averaging 23 points heading into the tough Big Ten schedule. Ohio State, Purdue, Indiana and Michigan State were all ranked in the top 25.

Wisconsin finished the Big Ten schedule 13 and 5, in third place behind, Purdue, led by Glenn Robinson and Dischinger, and Indiana, who went undefeated. Big wins over Ohio State and Michigan State were tempered by upset losses to Minnesota and Illinois. Still, third place in a tough conference was a good way to enter the Big Ten tournament.

The Badgers got revenge against Illinois in the opening round as Matthew scored 31 points, the fifth time he had scored over 30 points. However, Michigan led by center Juwan Howard, and lightning fast Rickey Green, shocked the Badgers in round two, winning by 18 points. Wisconsin came out flat and was routed by the Wolverines. Howard had 31 points and Michigan, peaking at the right time, played their best game of the season.

The Badgers could do nothing but wait to see how it would affect their NCAA seeding. No one was surprised when they were seeded 15<sup>th</sup> overall and sent to the Western Region where the top seeds were UCLA, Stanford and UNLV. Wisconsin was not expected to make it out of this region. Matthew called a team meeting before the first game at the large UCLA pavilion stadium. "Nobody's giving us much of a chance this year, but I disagree. Let's give 100% and see what happens."

Matthew kicked his game up another notch. He carried the team on his back, scoring 33 and 36 points as the Badgers easily defeated Pepperdine and Oklahoma State to reach the round of 16 where they were matched against UNLV, the No. 3 seed. Jerry Tarkanian's Running Rebels were fast and could shoot, but paid little attention to defense. Predictably, it was a high scoring game. The outcome came down to one factor; which team was willing to step up and play defense?

Larry Johnson erupted for 26 in the first half, continually using his 6'7", 250 pound body to get position underneath the basket. At half time, the Badgers switched defensive assignments and Matthew took it upon himself to shut him down. Johnson, destined to be the #1 overall pick in next year's NBA Draft, was held to three free throws in the second half and the Badgers prevailed 103-97. Devin Harris finished with 31 points to lead all scorers.

The regional championship game was set for Saturday evening against the No. 1 regional seed, UCLA, featuring two-time All-American Gale Goodrich. Wes Mathews put the clamps on Goodrich and Harris scored 21 points while Kim Hughes had 20 points and 14 rebounds. Al Henry also played a great game, finishing with a double-double, 12 points and 10 rebounds. Wisconsin won 89-76 and it was on to New Orleans for their second consecutive Final Four.

The semi-final was a matchup against Georgetown who easily won the Big East regular season and year-end tournament. They were seeded #2 overall behind the No. 1 seeded Indiana Hoosiers. The Hoyas were big and talented, featuring twin towers Patrick Ewing and Alonzo Mourning and lightening fast Michael Jackson at guard. Ewing didn't disappoint as he scored a game high 46 points on a combination of dunks and short jumpers, but it wasn't enough. Matthew, Harris and Wes Mathews all scored over 20 points and Henry and Hughes combined for 26 rebounds against the bigger Hoya front line. It was a dominating display of basketball as the Badgers pulled away at the five-minute mark for a 12 point victory. After the win, the players stayed and watched Indiana easily defeat the North Carolina State Wolfpack team led by 7'4" Tom Burluson and David

Thompson. Legend had it that the 6'6" Thompson could touch the top of the backboard from a standing jump. He scored 27, but it was not enough.

Indiana was undefeated and coached by the legendary Bob Knight, the former Ohio State player and Army coach. The Hoosiers sported three All-Americans; Kent Benson, who would be the 1<sup>st</sup> overall pick in next year', Scott May, a high scoring shooting forward and Quinn Buckner, one of the best defensive guards ever to play the game of basketball. Although giving away five inches, Quinn Buckner accepted the assignment of guarding Matthew who tried to take advantage of Buckner's lack of size, but was constantly double teamed by Benson. Combined, they held Matthew to only 11 points, but that was all Wisconsin needed. With the defense packed inside to stop Matthew Wilson, Kim Hughes and Devin Harris erupted for 27 and 24 points respectively and the Wisconsin Badgers won their second national championship, 86-81.

This championship was more satisfying for Matthew than the previous year's victory. Last year Matthew was the hero, making the final shot, while this year the accolades went to his teammates. Matthew could care less. There is no I in TEAM, at least the way Matthew Wilson played basketball.



## Chapter 33

### Israel

Matthew's trip to Jerusalem had political overtones from the start, but the basketball game was one of the most entertaining sporting events I have ever witnessed. Part of it was that the Jewish people in this oppressed country were desperately searching for something to cheer about, but a lot of it was Matthew.

There is no shortage of Jews at the executive levels of the NBA, including the commissioner of the league, David Stern. There have been a few great Jewish players in the past including Hall of Famer Dolph Schayes, who played for the Syracuse Nationals throughout the 1950s, and Ernie Grunfeld, the son of Holocaust survivors, who went on to star with the New York Knicks in the 1980s. Today, though, there are no Jewish players in the NBA. An Israeli-born player has never played in the NBA.

Israeli basketball star Oded Katash is trying to become the first. Last summer at the European Championships, Katash's 22 points per game for the Israeli National Team was the best average among all tournament scorers and was one of the 20 top players picked for the first-ever European All-Star game. There is also a money issue. If Katash makes the team, he'll have to accept a salary that would reportedly be in the \$400,000 range - considerably less than what he makes playing basketball in Israel.

The last Israeli player with serious hopes to make the NBA was Doron Sheffer, who starred for the University of Connecticut from 1993 to 1996. He was selected in the second round of the 1996 NBA draft by the Los Angeles Clippers, but decided to return home after not being offered a guaranteed contract. Three other Israeli players in the past have attended summer free-agent camps with respective NBA clubs. Amit Tamira, a 6-foot, 10-inch recent graduate from the University of California at Berkeley, and Elad Inbar, a 26-year-old forward, at the University of Massachusetts at Lowell, are also NBA prospects. Israeli basketball legend Mickey Berkowitz had offers from the Atlanta Hawks and New Jersey Nets in the early 1980s, but a contract with Maccabi Tel Aviv stood in the way. These four players all played on the Israeli national team which beat Russia to win the European championships two years ago.

The score was tied at the end of the first quarter before Matthew's team pulled away and took a comfortable ten point lead into the halftime break. It was good basketball and the crowd cheered both teams. The same

crowd erupted spontaneously when the Israeli team came out on the floor to start the second half, including two new players in the starting line-up; two women whose homes are only about 10 miles away from each other along the Mediterranean Sea are changing the way Israelis look at basketball; Shay Doron, a junior at Maryland and an All-American candidate and Liad Suez-Karni, a senior All-Big East selection at Villanova.

Suez-Karni, a 6-foot-2 senior forward, started playing basketball in Israel the same way many American girls learned the ropes - she just tagged along when her big brother went to the court. The most popular woman player is point guard, Shay Doran who is almost a rock star. Maryland women basketball games are televised back to the small nation and eight million people follow her every move.

The girls were no slouches on the court and the crowd went wild as Doran stole the ball from Matthew and went in for a layup to give the Israelis their first lead. The lead went back and forth until Matthew's jump shot put his team ahead by two points with only 12 seconds remaining. The Israeli team called time out to set up the final shot.

The ball was inbound to Oded Katash who had 24 points on 10 for 12 shooting and was the team's go-to man. Katash drove off a screen and headed to the basket where Matthew was waiting to block his shot attempt, but the shot never came. At the last moment Katash passed out to Doran who had set up at the top of the circle, just outside the men's three point line. The ball was in the air when the final buzzer went off and fifteen thousand people screamed for the ball to be good. The cheers changed to groans as the ball bounced hard off the back rim, but changed again to a thunderous roar as miraculously, the ball reached its pinnacle and slowly dropped down through the center of the net. I was too emotionally drained to follow the crowd as they stormed the court to celebrate.

It took twenty minutes to restore order and get the fans back to their seats. Matthew congratulated the Israeli team and awarded the game's MVP trophy to Shay Doran, much to the delight of the crowd. "This proves once again, that women can compete with men and deserve the right to be treated as equals." The crowd was momentarily silent as they glanced over at the president's box, waiting for a reaction to this obvious criticism of Muslim traditions, before erupting in applause. Matthew waited stoically for the noise to abate before continuing, and when he did, Matthew got right to the point.

*"The Jewish people are being oppressed once again, but I promise you that this will not last." Pointing directly at Ahmadinejad in the presidential box, he said the words that rocked the world; "the end is*

*coming and your time is almost over. God will not allow false idols in the house of Yahweh."*

The crowd gasped as the words sunk in before erupting again with a standing ovation. I watched Ahmadinejad's face turn blood red as he stood and pointed at Matthew. I couldn't hear his words over the noise of the crowd, but the meaning became clear as armed guards marched to the podium to arrest Matthew. The crowd boomed as Matthew was forcibly escorted away. Scores of Jews piled onto the basketball floor and the heavily armed guards were moments away from firing on the unruly mob. We were moments away from an awful slaughter when Matthew held his arms above his head for silence. "Have faith, my children, and trust in the Lord. Yahweh will protect me."

I called Rosann a half-hour later, but she had already heard. The game had been televised nationally and all major networks were provided footage of the arrest.

"What happened, Jim; it was like he wanted to be arrested."

"I'm not sure, but I hope he isn't trying to be a martyr."

"Get out of there, Jim, there is nothing you can do that isn't being done. The network says that the President has already called demanding his release, as have presidents from almost every Western country."

"I know, Rosann, but I have to try. I'll call you in the morning."

I was at the Temple Mount with thousands of other protestors, when, surprisingly, Matthew was released just before noon. Matthew calmly walked down the steps as his supporters roared their approval. He smiled when he saw me.

"Hi Jim, what are you doing here?"

"I was bringing you a toothbrush and pajamas; figured you would be here for a while. How did you break out?"

"I'm not sure why they released me, but I'm glad they did. It wasn't comfortable in there."

"Did you meet with Ahmadinejad?"

"Oh yes, and I can assure you it wasn't his idea to set me free. I think he mentioned something to the effect of rotting in hell."

"I'm confused. He's the top guy, isn't he?"

"Apparently not, or at least not in this instance. I think it had something to do with not wanting to cancel next week's basketball game. They want to see my butt kicked by that Muslim kid everyone is talking about."

"Why did you get yourself arrested in the first place? Were you trying to draw attention to the Israeli plight?"

“Yes, but I was also passing on a message. His days are numbered.”

“Do you know something? What’s going to happen?”

“All in good time, Coach.”

I wasn’t going to get any more out of him so I decided to pass on the good news. “By the way, did you know that Lake Tana only dropped 13 feet when we released the water to Somalia? Everything looks good.”

“That’s great. Father McGinnis called me yesterday and told me the Somalians are pleased. Your team did a great job. Please congratulate them for me.”

“Thanks, Matthew, I’ll pass that on. Is there anything you need from me before I head back to Ethiopia?”

“No, I’m heading back to the United States for the game against the Turkish team.”

“Good luck! The Muslim kid is pretty good.”

“Good luck to you, Jim. What you are doing in Ethiopia is more important than any basketball game.”

At the time I thought that Matthew was referring to our efforts to get water to the Somalians, but I would soon learn that Matthew was a step ahead of me again.

Amar watched the events in the basketball game unfurl and shouted in anger as Matthew was led away. He knew it was time to act. The following morning he flew from Istanbul to Jerusalem to meet with Ahmadinejad. Matthew Wilson was freed from prison an hour later. Matthew Wilson’s release had little to do with basketball.

## Author's Note

This book is a work of fiction. A few of the characters in Part One, 'Let's Play Basketball', have names similar to former teammates and opponents, but that's where the similarity ends. All of the events and basketball games are fictional.

The Marquette players and names of their NCAA opponents are very real. I grew up listening to Marquette basketball on the radio and Terry Rand was the first name I remember. I played basketball and baseball with Tom Kojis, Don's brother. I pray Tom achieved everlasting peace. I was on the University of Wisconsin freshman team when we upset a great Ohio State team in 1962.

The International players are also real, although the basketball games are mostly fiction. I enjoyed most the research I did on Yao Ming and Dikembe Mutombo and learned to appreciate the impact these two men have upon their countries. The same goes for the Lithuanian basketball players and the suffering their country endured to regain independence.

The Ark of the Covenant is mentioned frequently in both the Bible and the Koran. Graham Hancock's book, 'The Sign and the Seal', was invaluable; I actually read the whole book, some parts more than once. This book is a must-read for anyone interested in delving further into the Ark of the Covenant, James Bruce, The Knights Templar, the Ethiopian Black Jews and other themes in this book.

Matthew Wilson and Amar Rashad are fictional, but the belief in the 'Second Coming' and 'The Mahdi' are very real for their respective religions. The idea of an Antichrist is also well documented, although the idea that Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is the Antichrist is probably fictional. I find it intriguing to think of what would happen if the Ark of the Covenant was found. Would it create pressure to return the Ark to The Temple Mount and rebuild Solomon's Temple on the site currently occupied by the Al Aqsa Mosque, Islam's third most holy site? The Ark of the Covenant may indeed still be hidden on one of the many islands in Lake Tana, Ethiopia.

I apologize to anyone offended by my simplified treatment of very complex and controversial subjects.

## **The Agents** (Coming Soon)



### **The Next Sports Thriller by Jim Plautz**

“I regret to inform you that you that your petition to purchase the New York Yankees has been denied. A majority of owners have decided that your ownership group fails to meet the high standards that major league baseball has established for admission into this closed fraternity. As a result, the Yankees have decided to move in a different direction. The Commissioner’s Office appreciates the time and effort your group has invested. We wish you luck in future endeavors.”

“Screw you, you sanctimonious bastard, and screw the rest of you that voted no. Your fraternity is nothing but a sham. I’ll see you in court. This isn’t over by a longshot.” Having vented his immediate rage, Malcolm Linebaum stormed out of the conference room. His attorneys and minority partners followed, with one exception. There was always Plan B.

Jim Simpson made his decision. Malcolm could have his revenge and the new owners would make a very nice ROI on their investment. Simpson hurried to catch up with Malcolm Linebaum.

## Back Cover

**PHENOM – Let's Play Basketball** - Too good to be true, a mid-year transfer student leads his high school basketball team to the State Championship and along the way helps others become better students and young adults. Matthew Wilson's past finally catches up with him when the Russian Mafia seeks retribution for past transgressions. The entire school is held hostage by Chechnya terrorists. Can Matthew save his classmates and avoid a slaughter like the one that occurred at a school in Besian, Russia where 334 hostages, including 1,500 children were slaughtered? This is a feel-good love story and suspense novel structured around a basketball theme. At graduation, students, faculty and the President of the U.S. make a vow; "If you ever need me, I'll be there for you."



**Jim Plautz** is a businessman, former basketball player and father of three. Originally from Wisconsin, Jim now makes his home in Tampa, Florida with his wife, Rosann. This is his third novel. "My novels are action thrillers set in a sports environment. My first book ('Out of Bounds') is about golf and my second book ('Double Fault at Roland Garros') is about tennis. This book is about basketball and sets the stage for Book Two in this series; Phenom - The Search for the Ark of the Covenant.