

**THE AVERAGE JOE'S**

*Super*  
**Sports**  
*Almanac*

**STEVE RIACH**



**HARVEST HOUSE PUBLISHERS**  
EUGENE, OREGON

Cover by Jason Gabbert Design

Cover Image © Scukrov / iStock; Robyn Mackenzie / Shutterstock

## **The Average Joe's Super Sports Almanac**

Copyright © 2018 SER Media

Published by Harvest House Publishers

Eugene, Oregon 97408

[www.harvesthousepublishers.com](http://www.harvesthousepublishers.com)

ISBN 978-0-7369-7248-2 (pbk.)

ISBN 978-0-7369-7249-9 (eBook)

**All rights reserved.** No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, digital, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior permission of the publisher.

**Printed in the United States of America**

18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 /BP-SK/ 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

## Acknowledgments

*The Average Joe's Super Sports Almanac* is the result of many years of fascination with the unique stories and people from the world of sports. It really began about 40 years ago when my good friend Dr. Lance Rawlings and I started to converse about the trivial, the incredible, and the inane in sports. That banter, as well as the friendship, continues today. Much of what we laughed or expressed amazement over throughout the years found its way into this book.

While much of the content contained on these pages is public domain or comes from the work I have done with athletes for film, television, radio, and books over the years, this book is also the product of many years of research, work, and documentation. As with all projects of this magnitude, I received help and support from a number of people. I would like to thank the following:

My wonderful wife and children, who give me their constant love and support and often unselfishly sacrificed to allow me the necessary quiet time to write. More than that, they cheered me on to the finish line.

Some great research assistants over the years, including Nelson Staats, Anna Brocato, and Kristen Martin, each of whom spent hours researching, transcribing, and following leads for me.

And Todd Hafer at Harvest House, who believed in this book and originated the idea.

Thank you all. I hope you enjoy the read.

# CONTENTS

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Introduction .....  | 7   |
| 1. Inspiring Performances .....   | 11  |
| 2. Legends of Sports .....  | 31  |
| 3. The Best .....   | 43  |
| 4. The Numbers Game .....   | 51  |
| 5. Origins of the Games .....   | 73  |
| 6. Trivial Pursuits .....   | 89  |
| 7. The Business of Sports .....   | 109 |
| 8. Strange but True .....   | 115 |
| 9. The Tragic and the Comic .....   | 145 |
| 10. Say What? Some of Sports Most Memorable Quotes .....  | 169 |
| 11. Parting Shots: Random Moments of Amusement,<br>Amazement, and Inspiration from the Sports World ..... | 189 |

# INSPIRING PERFORMANCES

**S**ports have always given us great moments. Some jubilant, others heartbreaking. All evoke emotion. Whether our team is on the winning end or losing end, we salute those who have left us amazed and inspired.

## OVERTIME

Feel-good stories don't get much better than this. Five months after being diagnosed with multiple sclerosis and less than 24 hours after announcing his retirement, Carolina Hurricane forward Bryan Bickell ended his career with a Hollywood flourish. Bickell had spent time in treatment and regaining his strength in the minor leagues to prepare for the 2016–17 season's last four games. Now here he was in the finale, with Carolina deadlocked with Philadelphia at the end of regulation. Of course, Bickell was selected to take the first shot in the shoot-out. He promptly ripped the puck past the Flyers goalie, Anthony Stolarz. The crowd erupted, the Carolina bench erupted, and even the Flyers bench got into the act. It was a fitting way for the three-time Stanley Cup champion to close out his career.

## FASTER, HIGHER, STRONGER

The games of the thirty-first Olympiad in Rio provided thrilling competition. When the games closed, there were many reasons to celebrate: fewer illnesses than expected, fewer crimes, and no massive outbreak of the Zika virus.

Yes, there was Ryan Lochte and his antics, but that didn't overshadow the truly great moments. Michael Phelps owned the pool once again. Two Simones shone—Biles in gymnastics and Manuel in swimming. The U.S. women swept the 110-meter hurdles. But the finest moment of the games had nothing to do with medals and everything to do with mettle.

By now, most everyone has seen the dramatic images of U.S. 5,000-meter runner Abbey D'Agostino tripping and tumbling over New Zealand's Nikki Hamblin, who had fallen in front of her during a qualifying heat. As you probably know, D'Agostino rose, helped a distraught Hamblin up, and then encouraged her to finish the race. "Get up," she said. "We have to finish this."

If you don't know the rest of the story, there was a slight problem. As she started to run, D'Agostino realized her right knee wasn't cooperating. She had torn her ACL and meniscus and strained her MCL. She collapsed in pain. But that's not the end of the story.

D'Agostino got up again and hobbled around the track. Seventeen minutes and ten seconds later, she finished the race. At the finish line, she was met with a wheelchair and an awestruck Hamblin.

Olympic athletes prepare for a lifetime for one brief moment to reach for the ultimate crown. It seems that Abbey D'Agostino had prepared for a lifetime for her moment, just the way it unfolded.

"Although my actions were instinctual at that moment, the only way I can, and have, rationalized it is that God prepared my heart to respond that way," she said in the aftermath. "This whole time here, He's made it clear to me that my experience in Rio was going to be about more than my race performance—and as soon as Nikki got up, I knew that was it."

Pure gold.

Said Hamblin afterward, “I’m never going to forget that moment.”

Neither will I.

## GIVING GLORY

Perhaps no athlete ever confronted a greater personal challenge at the Olympic Games than Glory Alozie. At the 2000 games in Sydney, Australia, a tragic accident on the streets of Sydney claimed the life of Alozie’s fiancé just before the games began.

Hyginus Anugo, a 22-year-old Nigerian 400-meter runner, was killed three weeks prior to Glory’s run for gold in the 100-meter hurdles. Anugo left his dorm in the Olympic Village and ran across the street to a nearby convenience store to pick up snacks for some of his teammates. On his return trip across the street, he was struck by an automobile and killed instantly.

Glory Alozie had come to Sydney as the second-best 100-meter hurdler in the world. She was all smiles about her chance for Olympic glory—and her pending wedding, scheduled after the Olympics were completed.

No Nigerian runner had ever won a gold medal, but Glory was determined to change that. She had a strong chance.

Suddenly, in one fateful moment, her hopes and dreams were lying in a Sydney morgue.

Glory was a mess. She wanted to leave the Olympics immediately. She wanted to cry, to sleep, to pray, to do anything but run.

“She couldn’t be left in a room alone,” says friend and 1984 Olympic bronze medalist Innocent Egbunike.

Glory didn’t march in the opening ceremonies, and she couldn’t even think about running. Her friends, teammates, family, and coach all begged her to reconsider. She was so close to her lifelong dream. She needed to persevere. It was what Hyginus would have wanted, they told her.

The 5-foot-1, 115-pound warrior agonized over her loss and the decision that lay before her. Her whole life seemed like one big hurdle now. How could she possibly get herself over ten of them on the track?

“It took lots and lots of prayer and talk,” said teammate Joan Ekah.

Finally, Glory decided that Hyginus *would* want her to compete. So, just days before her event, Glory boarded the team bus to head to practice.

“She decided to race,” Egbunike said, “and dedicate it to Hyginus, whom she loved so much.”

“It seemed impossible for me to compete,” Glory recalled.

But compete she did, and in one of the most courageous efforts in Olympic history, Glory won the silver medal. During the medals ceremony, Glory Alozie paused to kiss her silver medal. Many thoughts raced through her mind. Most of them focused on her fiancé.

“It has been a very difficult time,” Glory told the assembled media following the event. “My coach and friends have helped me a lot. I cannot express my happiness for winning the silver medal.”

## MAN ON THE RUN

The year was 1968. The place was Mexico City, site of the Summer Olympic Games. It happened late one night in the main track-and-field stadium.

Out of the darkness, John Stephen Akhwari from Tanzania hobbled slowly and unsteadily into the stadium. Pain filled every step. Blood ran down his bandaged leg. His dreams of Olympic glory faded in the night shadows.

More than an hour earlier, the winner of the marathon had already been declared. All other runners had completed the 26.2 miles shortly thereafter. Only a few spectators remained in their seats. There was no cheering, no flag waving. Yet the lone runner pressed on.

Moments before, as he'd neared the Olympic Stadium, word had circulated that there was one runner still on the course. Other



Olympians and spectators quickly came back to the stadium to watch the scene unfold. The stadium lights flickered back on. Akhwari entered the stadium and wearily began his final lap around the track. As he neared the finish line, the small crowd that had gathered stood and cheered the lone runner all the way to the finish line. After crossing the white stripe, Akhwari nearly collapsed. Yet in his anguish, he managed to exhibit an expression of determined achievement as he acknowledged the faithful few who had witnessed his final steps.

After it was all over, a reporter asked Akhwari why he had not retired from the race, as he had fallen so far back and had no chance of winning.

Akhwari seemed confused by the question, but he finally answered.

“My country did not send me 5,000 miles to Mexico City to start the race,” he said. “They sent me 5,000 miles to *finish* the race.”

## WINTER WONDER

The 1964 Winter Olympic Games in Innsbruck, Austria, became the site of one of the great displays of sportsmanship. It was there that bobsledding legend Eugenio Monti showed the world what the true spirit of competition is all about.

The bobsled events were shaping up to be highly competitive. In the four-man event, the hometown Austrians and the Italians (led by the legendary Monti) were clear favorites for gold. The Canadian team was expected to compete for the bronze medal, with an outside chance of finishing higher. But an amazing story unfolded that would forever mark the landscape of sports and competition.

On their run in the first heat, the Canadian team broke the Olympic record, posting a time a half second faster than the rest of the field. However, on that record-setting run the Canadians' sled went into the last turn too fast, hit the ice wall, and damaged the axle. If the axle couldn't be fixed, the Canadians would be disqualified.

Monti did not want to win the event unless he was able to race

against each competitor at his best. Fifteen minutes before their next run, the Canadian team's Victor Emery reached the top of the track to find their sled upside down. In an incredible act of sportsmanship, the Italians had taken the sled apart, and Monti's mechanics were fixing it. With Monti's help, the Canadians were able to keep racing. They went on to win the gold medal. Monti and his team had to settle for the bronze.

Later, in the two-man bobsled, Monti displayed his character again. Great Britain's Tony Nash posted the fastest early time, but the bolt attaching his sled's runners to the vehicle's shell had sheared. Monti was at the top of the course and poised to steer the Italian team's sled down the track when he learned of the incident. He said, "Get an Englishman and a spanner to the finish and they can have my bolt." Monti even offered to withdraw from the race if it was the only way he could lend Nash his bolt.

True to his word (and ignoring questions from startled Italian journalists), Monti, after his run, had the bolt from his sled removed and sent to the starting line, where it was quickly attached to Nash's sled just in time for his next run. Once again, Monti's actions proved heroic for his opponents. The team of Nash and Robin Dixon took home the gold for Great Britain. Monti again won the bronze.

When the games were over, Monti was honored for his amazing display of respect with the first Pierre de Coubertin Award for Sportsmanship. But not everyone was happy about Monti's sportsmanship. He was viciously attacked in the Italian newspapers, but he responded graciously. "Nash didn't win because I gave him the bolt," Monti said. "He won because he had the fastest run."

Monti eventually won his gold medal. At age 40, at the 1968 Grenoble Winter Olympics, he took the gold in *both* the two-man and four-man events. He completed his storied career with six Olympic medals—two gold and two bronze, along with two silvers he earned at the 1956 Games in Cortina, Italy.

Monti also won nine world championships and earned the

nickname *Il Rosso Volante* (the Red Flyer). Award-winning Olympic historian and filmmaker Bud Greenspan, in partnership with General Motors, honored Monti as the third-greatest winter Olympian of all time. “Eugenio Monti is deserving of the title as the Greatest Bobsled Driver in history,” said Greenspan. “His career was significant, and his gesture of friendship and good sportsmanship in 1964 has been an inspiration for all who compete at the Olympic Games.”

## **LEAN ON ME**

The 1992 Summer Olympic Games were destined to become one of the most touching and memorable in history. In Barcelona, Spain, emotion was high as much of the world had just come through the tension of the Gulf War. The Olympics provided an opportunity to rebuild a sense of peace and goodwill among nations. No event made a greater impact than the 400-meter track semifinals.

Derek Redmond, a British track star, was a favorite to be among those on the medal podium. He had his heart set on receiving a gold medal. But what Redmond earned instead was a golden moment.

In the middle of the race, Redmond seemed to be running smoothly, poised to secure a spot in the finals. Suddenly, he pulled up and grabbed the back of his leg just before collapsing in a heap on the track.

His dream had been crushed, but he was not to be defeated. With his face showing the excruciating pain of a torn hamstring, Redmond rose from the track, his competitors now 100 yards ahead, and began to hobble toward the finish line. Each step was marked by agony, yet Redmond was undaunted in his desire to cross the finish line. His will was strong, but his leg could not hold out.

Within moments, Redmond’s father, Jim, jumped out of the stands and made his way toward the track. When security personnel attempted to stop him, Jim Redmond yelled, “That’s my son!” He was allowed on the track.

When he reached Derek's side, Jim grabbed his son's arm and said, "You don't have to do this."

"Yes, I do," Derek said.

Jim draped Derek's left arm around his own shoulders and his right arm around his son's shoulders and began to lead Derek to the finish line. With his father walking beside him, Derek completed the race. The amazed crowd rose to their feet and roared with wild cheers. The image was captured by photographers and television cameras and was quickly seen around the world in what has become one of the most emotional and inspiring moments in Olympic history.

The official results of the men's 400-meter semifinal race show Derek Redmond's performance as "race abandoned." That's not the way the world remembers it. Rather, this race will long be remembered as a unifying moment that sport has rarely seen: a father and son finishing a race together, a true display of teamwork and love.

## **ABOVE PAR**

For 12 years, Joel Edwards had been grinding it out on the PGA tour, trying to pick up his first victory. He had been teased with a number of close finishes. He had come back from serious injury. He had lost and regained his tour playing card. Along the way, he carried the pressure of providing for his family.

But when Edwards stepped on the course for the 2001 Players Championship, he was feeling good about his chances in what would be his biggest tournament of the year. He had tied for fifth in his previous tournament and seemed to be putting things together.

On the tourney's first hole, Edwards narrowly missed a putt for par. The ball lay but three inches from the cup. As he was getting ready to tap the ball in, just before his putter made contact with the ball, Edwards noticed the ball move ever so slightly. He followed through with his stroke and the ball rattled into the cup. It was a

first-hole bogey, en route to an opening round of 72, right on par. The first day was over and Edwards was not in bad position as he prepared for the next day and round two.

But something didn't feel right. Edwards kept thinking about that putt on hole number one. Throughout the afternoon, as he hit balls on the driving range, talked with other players, and ate dinner, that putt consumed his thoughts. He replayed the image over and over in his mind and asked himself two questions: *Was the ball rolling when I hit it? Did I break a rule by hitting a moving ball?*

"When it first happened, I knew there was a rule or something, but I didn't lose a ball or anything like that, so I just blew it off," Edwards said. "The ball turned maybe a millimeter. I said, 'I've already signed my scorecard and I'm going well. I don't think it's that big a deal.'"

Edwards played on, shooting well enough on Friday to advance to the weekend rounds. But on Saturday, just after he had hit a shot near the pin on the thirteenth hole, he decided he couldn't go on any longer without doing something about the moving ball. He had no idea if he had broken a rule, but the fact that he couldn't get it out of his mind convinced him he needed to discuss it with an official.

Following the round, he went straight to the tournament director and told him of the situation. Officials asked him if he had touched the ground with his putter prior to hitting the ball. Edwards said he didn't remember, but that nine times out of ten he usually did. So he must have touched the ground. The officials said they wouldn't penalize Edwards unless he could say his club touched the ground. So Edwards disqualified himself on the spot. He shook hands with the officials and walked away. With his head held high.

"I'd rather live with an honest mistake and admit it than live for the rest of my life knowing I made money, and it may have been tainted in a way," Edwards said. "It was not worth feeling like this.

"My dad was one of those people who said, 'Son, you have to stand for who you are, and if you don't do that, then you're being dishonest

with yourself. And if you're honest with yourself, you can go on and be the person you want to be.”

Integrity won out in the end, and Joel Edwards penalized himself even though he was unsure he had actually violated a rule.

“These rules and this sport are pure,” Edwards explained. “I want to know that what I earned is what I *earned*. This game doesn't owe anybody anything. You're blessed to be able to play it.”

## ONE ON FIVE

In 1982, the West Coast Christian College Knights were taking on the University of California at Santa Cruz in a basketball game when they found themselves in serious foul trouble.

With just over two minutes left in the game, the Knights led the Sea Lions, 70-57. But how the Knights would hold that lead was the question on everyone's mind that day.

Why? Every player on the WCCC team had fouled out except guard Mike Lockhart, and he had four fouls, just one away from disqualification.

“We started the game in a tandem zone,” Lockhart explained later. “Then we went to a straight two-three zone. After we were down to four guys, we used a two-two box. Then [with three players] a one-two diamond. Then [with two players] a one-one zone. Finally a one.”

Incredibly, Lockhart was outscored only 10-5 by the five Santa Cruz players during the game's final two minutes. He managed to single-handedly hold on to help the Knights win the game, 75-67.

## ARM, STRONG

Pete Gray lost his right arm in a childhood truck accident. Still, he was determined to play professional baseball. So he learned to hit and throw with his left arm. He was good enough to play for semi-pro teams in his area, including the Brooklyn Bushwicks. In 1942, he played for Three Rivers of the Canadian-American League and

hit .381 in 42 games. He moved to Memphis of the Southern Association in 1943 and played centerfield, hitting .289 over the course of the season.

In 1944, he put together a season that would get him noticed by major league scouts. He hit .333 with 5 home runs and stole 68 bases. Baseball writers in the minor-league circuit named Gray the Player of the Year. The St. Louis Browns purchased his contract and brought him to the big leagues. He made his big-league debut on April 18, 1945, notching a hit in 4 at bats. Gray played in 77 games in centerfield that season, hitting .218 with 13 RBIs and 5 stolen bases. He collected 51 hits with one arm and a full-weight regulation bat. In the outfield, Gray wore a glove without the padding.

When a ball was hit to him, he would make the catch with the glove directly in front of him. As the ball hit his glove, he would roll the glove and ball across his chest from left to right, separating the ball from the glove, so that his glove would come to rest under the stump of his right arm and the ball would end up in his left hand—all within a split second.

## **AGAINST THE WALL**

One of the most heartwarming stories in sports is that of Jim Abbott, the pitcher who was born without a right hand. Incredibly, Abbott enjoyed a strong ten-year major-league career, which included a no-hitter. But his success was no fluke. As a youth, Abbott pitched against the wall of his townhouse in Flint, Michigan, for hours on end. He drew a strike zone on the brick wall. The building behind Abbott was lined with windows, which put pressure on him to catch the ball when it bounced back. It was there Abbott honed his famous glove-switch by pitching a rubber ball against that wall and fielding its odd caroms coming back. Abbott credits the hours of this practice for getting him to the big leagues. He was one of a few players who went directly from college to the majors and never was demoted to the minor leagues.

Over his American League career, he had two tenures with California and Chicago, as well as a stop with the New York Yankees. On September 4, 1993, he pitched a no-hitter with the Yankees against the Cleveland Indians. He also played briefly in the National League with the Milwaukee Brewers. In National League parks, pitchers have to hit for themselves instead of using a designated hitter. He recorded two hits in 21 at bats, swinging with only one arm. He truly was a sports icon for generations to look up to and admire.

A handful of other special athletes have overcome disabilities to compete at the professional level. Some of them are:

- Bethany Hamilton—The teen surfer was attacked by a shark in Hawaii in 2003 when she was just 13 years old. She lost her left arm, as well as more than 60 percent of her blood. After only three weeks of recovery, she returned to the waves with a custom-made surfboard. She went on to have a successful pro surfing career and won an ESPY in 2004 for the Comeback Athlete of the Year. A movie called *Soul Surfer* was made about her story.
- Casey Martin—Born with a birth defect in his right leg that made it difficult for him to walk normally, he faced significant obstacles in his pursuit of a career in pro golf. At Stanford, he was a member of the 1994 NCAA Championship team. He turned pro in 1995 and won one tournament on the Nike Tour. Martin went to court in 2001 to secure the right to use a golf cart during tournaments. He ended up winning more than \$206,000 on the PGA Tour despite struggling with chronic pain and functional limitations in his legs. He went on to become the head coach of the men's golf team at the University of Oregon.
- Steve Downie—The hockey player battled a hearing



disorder called otosclerosis, which required him to wear a hearing aid in his right ear. He fought through his hearing disorder to have a very productive NHL career.

- **Curtis Pride**—Born deaf, Pride overcame his lack of hearing to play 11 seasons in Major League Baseball. For his career, the outfielder hit 20 home runs with 82 RBIs, while batting .250.
- **Tom Dempsey**—Despite being born with only half of his right foot and no right hand, Dempsey enjoyed an 11-year career as a kicker in the NFL. In 1970, as a member of the New Orleans Saints, Dempsey set an NFL record when he booted a 63-yard field goal against the Detroit Lions in the game's final seconds to win the game 19-17. The kick bettered the existing record by 7 yards. Fitted with a special shoe that allowed him to kick without suffering pain in his foot, Dempsey earned a Pro Bowl berth in 1969 and scored 106 points in 1973.
- **Fred Arbanas** was an AFL all-star tight end for the Kansas City Chiefs in the 1960s. In December 1964, his life and career were forever changed when he was attacked by two men on a Kansas City sidewalk. The beating resulted in Arbanas losing sight in one eye. Still, he came back to play the following season and ended up earning all-star honors three more times. He played in two Super Bowls with the Chiefs—the first-ever Super Bowl and Super Bowl IV, when he and the Chiefs won the championship.

## **ROYAL TREATMENT**

During their amazing 2015 season, the Kansas City Royals played 53 innings in the World Series. They held a lead after only 13 of them.

With those numbers, it seems impossible that they actually became world champions, doesn't it?

Instead of getting swept, as the numbers might indicate, the amazing Royals won the series in five games.

Their opponents, the New York Mets, led in *every* game of the series. They even led in the eighth inning or later in four of the five games. The Royals came back to win three games in which they trailed in the eighth inning or later. Guess how many teams have ever done that in the World Series? If you guessed zero, you're right.

It seems fitting that the guy who got the series-winning hit in game five was backup infielder Christian Colón. Before that hit, Colón hadn't even made it into the batter's box over the last four weeks of the season. During the regular season, he recorded zero RBIs in the ninth inning or later. And he'd never delivered an extra-inning RBI in any regular-season game in his career.

The Royals roster was constructed by Dayton Moore, the team's general manager. I've had the privilege of getting to know him, and I'm fascinated by how he built a championship team on a small budget by focusing on developing chemistry and culture. Because of this, his players exhibited a unique brand of unity.

On a flight one day, I was seated next to a Royals coach. For the entire flight, he told me about how much Moore had influenced his life personally and changed the culture of the Royals.

Dayton Moore is one of sports' high-character people, a man who puts value on people and relationships. That's why people in the Royals organization love him and love being part of the team's culture. When I met Dayton, I learned that his approach was strongly influenced by the book *The Management Methods of Jesus*, written by the late Bob Briner, whom I also had the privilege of knowing.

Dayton has succeeded because, like Briner and Jesus did, he puts people first.

## ONE FOR THE AGED

It was baseball's version of Halley's Comet. In a 2016 game against the San Diego Padres, New York Mets pitcher Bartolo Colón hit his first career home run—at age 42. He turned on a James Shields fastball and deposited it over the left-field wall to become the oldest player in history to hit his first career home run, just three weeks shy of turning 43. Coming into the game, Colón (nicknamed “The Round Mound of The Mound”) sported a microscopic .089 lifetime batting average over his 19 seasons.

With his dinger, Colón surpassed Hall of Famer Randy Johnson, whose first homer came at age 40. Colón became just the third Met to homer after turning 40, joining Willie Mays and Julio Franco—baseball's Methuselah—who was 48 when he homered. Said Colón, “I don't even know how to explain it.”

The Mets play-by-play announcer told the television audience, “The impossible has happened!”

The crowd went nuts and then watched the portly pitcher take 30 seconds to haul his 283 pounds (or so he is graciously listed) around the bases.

## BEATING THE ODDS

One of the things we love about sports is that it gives us a chance to witness the improbable. The underdog overcoming all odds to take down the giant. The comeback from a seeming insurmountable deficit. The competitor, wrought with exhaustion, finding the strength to cross the finish line. It's why we watch. The road to the 2016 College World Series gave us one such moment. Along with traditional powers like Miami, Arizona, Florida, and Oklahoma State, the eight-team field included UC Santa Barbara, making their first ever appearance in the series. But it's how the Gauchos got to Omaha that reminds us what makes sports great.

In the final game of their regional tournament, UCSB trailed the

nation's second-ranked Louisville Cardinals 3-0 in the bottom of the ninth inning. On the mound to close it out for Louisville was their star reliever, Zack Burdi, who earlier in the week had been the first-round draft pick of the Chicago White Sox. Not great odds, right? In fact, Louisville was 47-0 during the season when leading after eight innings.

However, Burdi struggled with his control, and UCSB loaded the bases with one out. Up to the plate stepped *freshman* catcher Sam Cohen, a guy with all of 26 at bats during the entire season. So what happened? The freshman blasted a *two-strike*, walk-off grand slam. Just like that, UCSB was making travel plans for Omaha.

## ALMOST PERFECT

It had happened just once in baseball history. Harvey Haddix did what no one else before had accomplished. On May 26, 1959, the diminutive left-hander tossed a perfect game, only to *lose*.

Haddix's Pittsburgh Pirates were facing the Milwaukee Braves in a game at Milwaukee's County Stadium. Haddix was not thought of as a candidate to pitch a perfect game. He was coming off an 8-7 season with Cincinnati (in 1958) and was fighting the early stages of a cold, complete with sore throat. He felt anything but strong.

But his performance was dominant. Haddix pitched nine perfect innings. However, his Pirates had failed to score against Braves starter Lew Burdette. So, at the end of nine innings, Haddix was locked in a 0-0 tie, even though he had pitched a flawless game. As he began the tenth inning, he became the first and only pitcher ever to take a perfect game beyond nine innings.

As the game stretched into extra innings, Haddix continued to set the Braves down in order. In the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth innings, not a single Braves batter reached base. Haddix had faced and retired 36 consecutive batters, a feat that has never before or since occurred in Major League Baseball.

Finally, in the bottom of the thirteenth, Haddix's perfect game

came to an end when Felix Mantilla reached on an error and Hank Aaron was intentionally walked. Braves first baseman Joe Adcock then connected with a 1-0 pitch from Haddix, sending a drive that just cleared the 375-foot mark in right-centerfield. The Braves won 3-0. Haddix became the losing pitcher despite what many consider the greatest pitching performance in history.

Haddix relied on just two main pitches during the game—his fastball and his slider. “I threw only a few curves and a few change-ups, but my fastball was jumping and my slider was great,” he recalled. “So when I was getting them out on the two good pitches, I just kept going.”

In 1991, Haddix saw his perfect game disappear from the record books when Major League Baseball changed its ruling on no-hitters and perfect games. The new rules required that a pitcher must finish the game—no matter how long—without giving up any hits. Thus, Haddix’s gem was wiped from the record books.

Some years later, Milwaukee’s Bob Buhl revealed that the Braves pitchers had been stealing signs from Pittsburgh catcher Smokey Burgess, who was exposing his hand signals. From their bullpen, Braves pitchers repeatedly repositioned a towel to signal for a fastball or a breaking ball, Haddix’s go-to pitches. Despite this assistance, they couldn’t touch Haddix until the thirteenth inning.

Haddix pitched for the Pirates from 1959–63. He retired in 1965 after two seasons with the Baltimore Orioles. The 1959 season was his best, as he went 12-12 with a 3.13 ERA. He finished his career with a won-loss mark of 136-113 and was a 20-game winner for the St. Louis Cardinals in 1953. However, Haddix will be remembered as the hard-luck pitcher who was perfect and still lost.

## **HADDIX REDUX... ALMOST**

Harvey Haddix nearly gained company in 2017. Los Angeles Dodgers pitcher, Rich Hill, took a perfect game into the ninth inning.

After an error broke up the perfecto, Hill got through the inning without giving up a hit. His no-no was intact at the end of nine innings. As he headed for the tenth, Hill could not have imagined he was about to join Haddix as one of baseball's best losers. In the bottom of the tenth in a scoreless game, Pittsburgh Pirates second baseman, Josh Harrison, led off with a walk-off home run to spoil the no-hitter and shutout and send Hill home with nothing but a loss.

Like Haddix and Hill, other athletes have produced incredible performances in a losing cause.

- Jim Furyk made history in the final round of the 2016 Travelers Championship by shooting the PGA Tour's first-ever round of 58. This round came just three years after Furyk became one of six players ever to shoot 59 on tour. The record 58 was the good news. The bad news: Furyk didn't win the tournament. He started the final round 16 shots back. His 12 under par round left him tied for fifth.
- In 1954, Australian champion runner John Landy was cruising to victory in the British Empire and Commonwealth Games in Vancouver, British Columbia. Landy had recently become the second person to run a sub-four-minute mile. (Britain's Roger Bannister was the first.) The Vancouver race, featuring Landy and Bannister, was called "The Miracle Mile," the "Race of the Century," and the "Dream Race" as it pitted the only two runners in history to run the mile in under four minutes. The race was heard over the radio by 100 million people worldwide and seen on television by millions more. On the final turn of the last lap, as Landy looked over his left shoulder to gauge his lead, Bannister seized the opportunity. He passed Landy on the right to win at the tape. The

moment was commemorated by Vancouver sculptor Jack Harman, with a larger-than-life bronze sculpture of the two men at the moment Landy was passed. About the sculpture, Landy said, “While Lot’s wife was turned into a pillar of salt for looking back, I am probably the only one ever turned into bronze for looking back.”

- The 1969 NBA Finals will be remembered as the only time in history that the finals MVP came from the losing team. The Boston Celtics beat the Los Angeles Lakers four games to three in a tight back-and-forth series, closing out the series with a 108-106 win in Los Angeles in Game 7. This marked the first time a team had captured the title on the road. It was the only game of the series that the home team failed to win. To win the series, the Celtics had to overcome the heroics of Lakers guard Jerry West, who averaged 38 points per game in the series. West poured in 53 and 41 points in Games 1 and 2 to get the Lakers off to a 2-0 start and seemingly headed to the title. But the Celtics began double-teaming West in Game 3. Then West pulled a hamstring in Game 5. Still, a hobbled West put up a triple-double in Game 7, with 42 points, 13 rebounds, and 12 assists in a losing effort, in what remains perhaps the single greatest finals performance in NBA history.
- In Super Bowl V, the Baltimore Colts beat the Dallas Cowboys 16-13 on Jim O’Brien’s game-winning field goal with five seconds left. Yet the game’s best player that day was on the losing team. Cowboys linebacker Chuck Howley earned the Super Bowl MVP award based on his two interceptions and a fumble recovery. It was the first and only time in Super Bowl history that the MVP did not come from the winning team.

## **AMAZING FEET**

Julia Hawkins set the world record for the fastest 100-meter dash by a senior citizen at the National Senior Games in Birmingham, Alabama, in 2017. After accomplishing the feat, Hawkins announced her retirement from running. She was 101 years old at the time.

## **HOMETOWN HERO**

Hurricane Harvey slammed south Texas in August 2017, bringing devastation to the greater Houston area. Houston Texans defensive lineman J.J. Watt was so distraught that he took action. He made a plea to his more than 6 million Twitter and Instagram followers to donate money to help victims of the hurricane. He set up a funding page and got the funding started by making a \$100,000 donation. In less than 24 hours his Houston Flood Relief Fund had totaled more than \$625,000. Within two weeks the fund had grown to more than \$30,000,000.