

ABSTRACT:

In this thesis for his Master of Arts in Journalism from Columbia University, Chilean journalist Daniel Matamala explores the relationship between sports and politics, looking at what voters' favorite sports can tell us about their political leanings and how this can be and is used to great effect in election campaigns. He finds that -unlike soccer in Europe or Latin America which cuts across all social barriers- sports in the United States can be divided into "red" and "blue".

During wartime or when a nation is under attack, sports can also be a powerful weapon for fuelling the patriotism that binds a nation together. And it can change the course of history.

In a key part of his thesis, Matamala describes how a small investment in a struggling baseball team helped propel George W. Bush -then also with a struggling career- to the presidency of the United States. Politics and sports are, in other words, closely entwined, and often very powerfully so.

DANIEL MATAMALA

"POWER GAMES: HOW
SPORTS HELP TO ELECT
PRESIDENTS, RUN CAMPAIGNS
AND PROMOTE WARS."



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INTRODUCTION

PLAYING POLITICS

A baseball team owner in Texas sits among the fans, eats hot dogs and signs autographs. A political consultant in Virginia analyzes tons of data about sports TV audiences. A millionaire buys an NBA team in Wisconsin. A former basketball star organizes a reunion of old friends in New York. An orchestra plays America the Beautiful before the Super Bowl in Louisiana.

These seem to be just everyday sports-related events. But they are not. Each one of them is a political event with significant consequences for American politics. The intersection between sports and political power is the topic of this thesis.

In the first chapter, I will demonstrate why no sport is politically neutral and, using NASCAR as my main example, why we can divide them into red and blue sports.

Every sport has its own cultural roots and its own political identity, information that is priceless to political consultants. Television advertising and campaign strategies are directly related to this political identity.

In the second chapter, I will explore professional sports as a path to political power for team owners and former stars.

My main example will be George W. Bush. Baseball was the magic ingredient that turned the failed son of an unpopular former President into the most powerful man in the world.

Bush's baseball story is the tale of a successful political strategy and can be read as a lesson in the political opportunities that sport provides to those who are willing and able to take advantage of them.

In the third chapter, I will demonstrate how sports fuel patriotic and military feeling in America. Since 2001, nationalism has become increasingly ubiquitous in American sports, usually in a militaristic, chauvinistic way.

My goal is to demonstrate one simple truth: in America, as in any other country, sports and politics are inextricably linked.

CHAPTER 1

RED SPORTS, BLUE SPORTS

Two large flags, one American and one Confederate, flap over the Phillips' motor home. As every November, Jeffery, his wife Natalie and his dog are camping in a park adjacent to the Homestead Miami Speedway to enjoy a Southern passion: the NASCAR races.

Both flags are deeply symbolic for Jeffery. The American flag was the one that covered the coffin of his grandfather, a soldier and NASCAR fan. The Confederate flag is his tribute to "the many Southerners who fought in the Civil War and deserve to be remembered."

On the roof of the mobile home, there are some keys to the "NASCAR Nation": family, tradition, patriotism. Indeed, when I spent a weekend with race fans in Florida, I saw Confederate flags and military paraphernalia everywhere.

The pre-race show started with the blessing of a pastor. "God, we thank you so much for those who fight the good fight around the world. We know that our freedom is not free. It comes with a price and we accept it for those who serve and sacrifice."

Then, a children's choir sang America the Beautiful and recited the Pledge of Allegiance. The announcer invited the public to put their right hand on their heart "in honor of America and our soldiers." A young girl sang the national anthem of which the last note was interrupted by the roar of two Air Force jets flying low over the circuit while a group of Navy paratroopers landed on the speedway with a giant American flag.

In the bazaar of brands and products displayed around the circuit, the Army had the largest stand, trying to recruit speed fans with helicopter simulators and interactive games. The Air Force and the National Guard also had their own stands. Indeed, each had its own car in the NASCAR competition, with its own colors and their sponsorship. A unique environment, that flows from NASCAR's roots.

THE ROOTS OF THE NASCAR NATION

Twenty-first century NASCAR is a multimillion-dollar enterprise, with its \$4.5 billion TV contract and its 1,500 races on over 100 tracks. But, at some level, it is still just about family. The CEO and chairman is Brian France, son of a former head of NASCAR, the late Bill France, Jr. who, in turn, was the son of the legendary NASCAR founder, Bill France, Sr.

“Unlike MLB, the NFL or the NBA, NASCAR is not indirectly owned by its teams. Rather, NASCAR is privately owned by one family, the France family. For the past fifty years, members of this family have served as the visionaries, the disciplinarians and the stewards of stock car racing.¹ The same family is also the owner of Daytona International Speedway, other tracks, related companies and even a motor sports-themed entertainment park in Daytona.

Track and team owners, as well as drivers, follow a similar pattern. Many of them are brothers, sons or grandsons of previous owners and drivers. And for many fans, NASCAR is also a matter of family tradition.

Wayne Jones lives in Nashville, Tennessee, and travels to races across the country “every time we can” as he explained to me at a camping site, before a NASCAR race, accompanied by his wife Jeannie and his dog Sassy. (“We are a three-member family,” he said.) Wayne’s dad was a mechanic at the NASCAR races in Tennessee, and his passion was inherited by his son.

Wayne, Jeannie and Sassy travel on their Harley-Davidson, with three other couples on their own motorcycles, sharing a trailer. They arrived the Wednesday prior to the race weekend and stayed in the parking lot until the following Monday. “When we retire, my dream is to go to every NASCAR race in the country,” Jeannie says.

Many other hardcore fans tell similar stories. Richard lives in Florida and travels around the country following NASCAR. “My dad was a car racer, driving a Volkswagen, so I have been attending races since I was a child,” he said.

NASCAR tradition has its roots in whiskey bootlegging in Appalachia – more specifically, the Piedmont region – during the Prohibition. The area’s mill workers and farmers “shared common cultural roots in the rural South that fed directly into the development and ongoing popularity of stock car racing.”²

It was a white, male chauvinist culture where the ideal male was a “hell of a fellow” – a freedom-lover and risk-taker, “a hot, stout fellow, full of blood and reared to outdoor activity.”³

¹ Hagstrom, p. 40.

² Pierce, p. 21.

³ Cash, p. 50.

The risk and speed of moonshining was obviously attractive to this kind of personality. Moonshiners modified their cars to drive them faster along twisting back roads and avoid the police. After the repeal of Prohibition in 1933, drivers continued to bootleg, now in order to avoid taxes.

Moonshiners became popular heroes and started to engage each other in informal speed competitions throughout the Appalachian region. As Richard Petty explained in a 1971 interview, "Open-cockpit racing cars never caught on in the South, not even midget races. I guess it's just the people in the South were so poor, and those fancy race cars were so exotic that they didn't know what to make of them. People identify with stock cars".⁴ It was a strictly white and strictly working-class spectacle. Fans and drivers had a bad reputation because of their heavy drinking and constant fights at the precarious tracks.

Even when these races evolved into a professional sport after 1948, NASCAR remained emblematic of Southern cultural chauvinism. In 1950, when former bootlegger turned NASCAR star Fonty Flock won the Southern 500 at Darlington, he "stopped his Frank Christian-owned mount on the front chute, climbed on the hood and led the huge throng of 32,400 in the singing of Dixie⁵, the unofficial anthem of the Confederacy and symbol of white domination.

THE POLITICS OF NASCAR

NASCAR races – their history and environment – are all about family, all about tradition, all about militarism and all about right-wing politics. Political pundits use the term "NASCAR dads" to describe white, conservative, religious, patriotic men who tend to vote Republican. Fans, drivers and owners share similar political views. Almost 90% of campaign contributions by those affiliated with NASCAR in 2000 flowed to Republican candidates.⁶

NASCAR races are full of politically-charged moments. Eleven years after the Dixie celebration, at the same speedway (Darlington) and the same race (Southern 500), Senator Strom Thurmond was allowed to give a speech prior to the start of the race. Thurmond was the segregationist presidential candidate in 1948, known for his infamous speech in which he promised that, "There are not enough troops in the Army to force the Southern people to break down segregation and admit the nigger race into our theaters, into our swimming pools, into our homes and into our churches."

⁴ Pierce, p. 39.

⁵ Pierce, p. 125.

⁶ CNN, http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/motorsports/nascar_plus/news/2001/02/20/nascar_politics/

Of course, Thurmond's speech to the NASCAR crowd was racist, supporting segregation in the South and against the Civil Rights movement. At one juncture, he promised that, "In 1861, South Carolina was the first to secede from the Union. And if necessary, it will be the first to secede in 1961!" Author Brock Yates described the scene. "The crowd went mad. Guns were fired. The Stars and Bars waved everywhere. Rebel yells filled the grandstands and Dixie was sung in drunken reverie."⁷

Richard Nixon's "southern strategy" also included NASCAR. He was the first President to invite a NASCAR driver (Richard Petty) to the White House, in 1971. In 1984, another Republican, Ronald Reagan, was the first President to attend the Firecracker 400. He made the traditional "Gentlemen, start your engines!" call. After the race, the President ate fried chicken with the drivers and pit crews.

NASCAR has remained a friendly environment for right-wing politicians. During his 2006 reelection campaign, ultraconservative Senator George Allen "routinely brandished the microphone at races in his home state of Virginia and emphatically, persistently declared that NASCAR fans were "his people."⁸ Allen lost his seat months later, after referring to an Indian-American cameraman as "macaca" during a rally.

According to research by journalist Mike Fish of CNN, the France family and top officials at its International Speedway Corporation have written checks for over \$100,000 in federal election contributions, 70% of them for Republican candidates. In 1999, the France family organized a fundraiser for conservative Senator Jon Kyl, a Republican, at the family-owned Phoenix International Raceway.

The fundraiser was a success, with many drivers and owners attending and donating. "We see eye-to-eye on a lot of issues that have to do with racing – and in general," said veteran driver Mark Martin. "Just as a lot of Hollywood folks tend to agree with liberal Democrats on their issues, NASCAR folks tend to be Republican and conservative and therefore to support conservative issues and conservative candidates," Senator Kyl said.⁹

⁷ Steinberg, p. 64.

⁸ Steinberg, p. 65.

⁹ http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/motorsports/nascar_plus/news/2001/02/20/nascar_politics/

On the eve of the 2000 election, Kyl was again invited to the track, this time as grand marshal for a NASCAR race, with 100,000 fans in attendance. He won reelection. Joe Gibbs, a NASCAR team owner, spoke at the 2008 Republican National Convention.

DAYTONA'S BIG MOMENT

But even considering its history, NASCAR's political involvement in the 2004 presidential campaign was unprecedented. President Bush had had a great relationship with NASCAR since his time as Governor of Texas when he spent \$65 million on highway projects to improve access to the Texas Motor Speedway in Fort Worth. As the track's owner, Bruton Smith, recognized, "The state of Texas, they have done some wonderful things in connection with Texas Motor Speedway."¹⁰

As a presidential candidate in 2000, George W. Bush was the honorary starter at the Texas Motor Speedway and at the Daytona Pepsi 400. As President, he added NASCAR champions to the list of celebrities who received public congratulations in the White House.

In his 2004 reelection campaign, Bush enjoyed the public support of NASCAR. Seven drivers and racing personalities (Darrell Waltrip, Mark Martin, Bill Elliott, Jack Roush, Benny Parsons, Jeff Hammond and Eddie Wood) appeared in the battleground states of Michigan, Ohio, West Virginia and Pennsylvania at 14 separate events as part of a two-day campaign tour. Shortly before the election, nine of the ten drivers in the Chase for the Nextel Cup publicly endorsed the President.

NASCAR's equivalent of the Super Bowl, the legendary Daytona 500 race, was also part of the 2004 reelection effort. President Bush appeared in front of 180,000 cheering fans, a crowd "almost exclusively white and heavily male,"¹¹ in the battleground state of Florida.

"His motorcade took a slow half-lap around the flat shoulder of the track (...) with his wife, Laura, trailing him, Bush walked the pit, mingling with drivers, shaking hands with fans. He peered into car No. 16, sponsored by the National Guard (...) as Bush strode through pit row, he received rock-star treatment. An extravaganza unfolded around him. A man with a rocket strapped to his back sailed into the speedway, followed a short time later by a bald eagle that landed on its trainer's arm. Fireworks erupted, cheerleaders danced, Leann Rimes sang R-O-C-K in the USA. Bush bumped into actor Ben Affleck, getting ready to drive the pace car. The

¹⁰ http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/motorsports/nascar_plus/news/2001/02/20/nascar_politics/

¹¹ <http://www.nascar.com/2004/news/headlines/cup/02/15/bc.bush.ap/>

President lingered with NASCAR legend Richard Petty”¹² (Petty, a Republican, was a candidate in the 1996 North Carolina election for Secretary of State but was defeated by State Senator Elaine Marshall).

The reception accorded to Democratic presidential candidate Bill Clinton at Darlington Raceway in 1992 was markedly different. Not even his Southern roots saved him from humiliation. "It was rude, to be honest," said Eddie Gossage, general manager of Texas Motor Speedway. "Booing. Airplanes flying over, saying, 'Clinton is a draft dodger'. He got a very cold reception from the fans, the competitors, everybody.”¹³

Barack Obama tried to emulate Bush’s NASCAR reelection strategy, and he failed. When he invited top NASCAR drivers to the White House, four of them refused. Greg Biffle, Carl Edwards, Kevin Harvick and Tony Stewart said they had “schedule conflicts.” Biffle contributed \$3,500 to the Republican Party and candidates in 2003 and 2006.¹⁴ Tony Stewart contributed \$4,000, also to Republicans. Neither driver made any contribution to Democrat campaigns.¹⁵

The stars who did accept Obama's invitation had to deal with criticism from fans. Champion Jimmy Johnson received many complaints via Twitter and tweeted a response himself. "Regardless of political views, when (the President of the United States) sends an invite and wants to honor you at the White House, you accept," he wrote.

But Obama insisted, this time through his wife. Protected by her 63% national approval rating, Michelle Obama appeared at Miami Speedway, in the battleground state of Florida, for the last race of the 2011 season.

Her appearance was carefully planned. She and the Vice-President’s wife, Dr. Jill Biden, were promoting Joining Forces, a program on behalf of veterans, and were accompanied on stage by veterans of the Afghanistan and Iraq wars. NASCAR fans cheered the soldiers, but when Obama's name was announced, the booing was overwhelming.

¹² <http://www.nascar.com/2004/news/headlines/cup/02/15/bc.bush.ap/>

¹³ http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/motorsports/nascar_plus/news/2001/02/20/nascar_politics/

¹⁴ http://www.newsmeat.com/sports_political_donations/Greg_Biffle.php

¹⁵ http://www.newsmeat.com/sports_political_donations/Tony_Stewart.php

DAYTONA'S FAILED MOMENT

Following the tradition of Reagan and Bush, the Daytona 500 is now a must for every Republican presidential campaign. In 2012, Mitt Romney also appeared at the Daytona 500. But the context and outcome were very different.

In 2012, no Republican candidate was expected. The Daytona 500 was scheduled several weeks after the Florida primary, and only two days before the decisive primary in Michigan. Mitt Romney was under fire, with the momentum on the side of the populist campaign of former Senator Rick Santorum. Polls projected a too-close-to-call primary in Michigan, with Romney risking the devastating prospect of losing in the state where he was born.

Even so, Romney decided to spend precious time traveling to Florida to attend the NASCAR race. It was a controversial call ("Shouldn't he be in Michigan?" was the headline in the *Christian Science Monitor*) but the event would be broadcast nationally to an audience of 15 million, many of them conservative blue-collar workers in states like Michigan.

Romney arrived at Daytona and spent two hours mingling with fans, drivers and owners, wearing a red jacket with the official Daytona logo on it. The reaction of the NASCAR Nation was warm in the boxes, but cold in the stands. Romney was booed by many fans who weren't in the mood for politics. Moreover, rain forced NASCAR to postpone the Daytona 500 for the first time in history, ensuring that Romney's presence would not generate warm memories for the fans.

Romney had bad luck and made bad choices, too. The whole point of his presence at Daytona was to overcome his image as a distant millionaire, out-of-touch with the concerns of common people. But asked if he was a NASCAR fan, his answer was terrible: "I do not follow the races closely. But I have some great friends who are NASCAR team owners."

Immediately, Brad Woodhouse, communications director at the Democratic National Committee, made fun of Romney, sending out a tweet: "I don't know pilots, but I know people who own airlines."

The anti-Romney attacks came from the air, too. The Michigan-based Auto Workers Union attached a banner that read "Mitt Romney: Let Detroit Go Bankrupt" to an airplane that flew over Daytona for an hour before the race, reminding voters of Romney's opposition to a bailout of the auto industry.

Meanwhile, Rick Santorum, the conservative whose personal history was much closer to the hearts of NASCAR fans, did not travel to Florida. But he had his name and logo – a big “Rick 2012” symbol – on car number 26 driven by Tom Raines. “NASCAR and the Daytona 500 are about as American as you can get, and it’s great to have my campaign represented by one of these incredible machines,”¹⁶ Santorum said.

Santorum also advised Raines on how to win the race, drawing an obvious parallel with his own insurgent campaign. “It’s what I call “The Santorum Strategy”. When you are starting way back in the pack, just hang back there for a while. Let all the other cars in front of you wreck. And then run hard in the last few laps and win the race,” he laughed. The race finally started the night before the primary.

“No matter what you might think of Rick Santorum and his race for president, his decision to sponsor a car in tonight’s NASCAR Daytona 500 is a stroke of political genius. On the day before a critical primary in Michigan, home of the American auto industry, Santorum has a Ford race car with his name on it running in what’s called the ‘Great American Race’,” noted commentator John Baer.¹⁷

Political genius, perhaps, but not original. During Governor Rick Perry’s 2010 reelection campaign, his name and logo were on Bobby Labonte’s car. Labonte and his car also toured the state of Texas, helping to attract little crowds of NASCAR fans to Perry events.

THE SEARCH FOR RED AND BLUE FANS

There can be no doubt that NASCAR owners, drivers and hardcore fans are highly conservative and Republican. But what about the growing and widespread crowd of occasional NASCAR followers? Do they also lean Republican? And what about the millions of football, basketball and baseball fans across the United States? Can we identify each sport with a color, red or blue? And if so, what are the consequences for politicians, team owners and athletes?

In Alexandria, Virginia, many hours of work have been invested to answer this question. From this quiet suburb of Washington DC, you can see the impressive silhouette of the Capitol just across the Potomac River. This is where different companies work on micro-targeting data for use in political campaigns.

¹⁶ <http://www.usatoday.com/sports/motor/nascar/story/2012-02-25/Rick-Santorum-campaign-to-be-Daytona-500-sponsor/53241258/1>

¹⁷ <http://www.philly.com/philly/blogs/growls/Ricks-Racer.html>

Micro-targeting is a relatively new discipline, a mixture of science and art. In the understanding that voters are also consumers of products, services and media, these firms dig deep into credit card bills, purchase records and Nielsen ratings in order to identify targets for political campaigns. Do you want to mail only people who are likely to belong to the National Rifle Association? Do you want to advertise only on TV programs with a heavily Democratic audience? With micro-targeting, you can do it. “Our work is to sell eyeballs,” said expert Ben Angle. And not any eyeball – a Republican or Democratic eyeball. And sports are a big part of the equation.

Angle's company, Natmedia, searches for TV shows on which Republican candidates can advertise. It is hard work, because, as Natmedia discovered, Democratic voters consume more television than Republicans. In fact, Democrats are more likely to be regular viewers of 12 out of 15 TV program formats. The only exceptions are adventure reality shows (with a small difference between Democrats and Republicans), national network news (not available for local ad insertions)... and sports.

“Every time we assist a Republican candidate, we advise him to advertise at sports events,” Angle said. For sports events, high-turnout Republican viewers have an index of 118 (100 being the national average). But this is just an average. The relevant data is in more detailed sport-by-sport information.

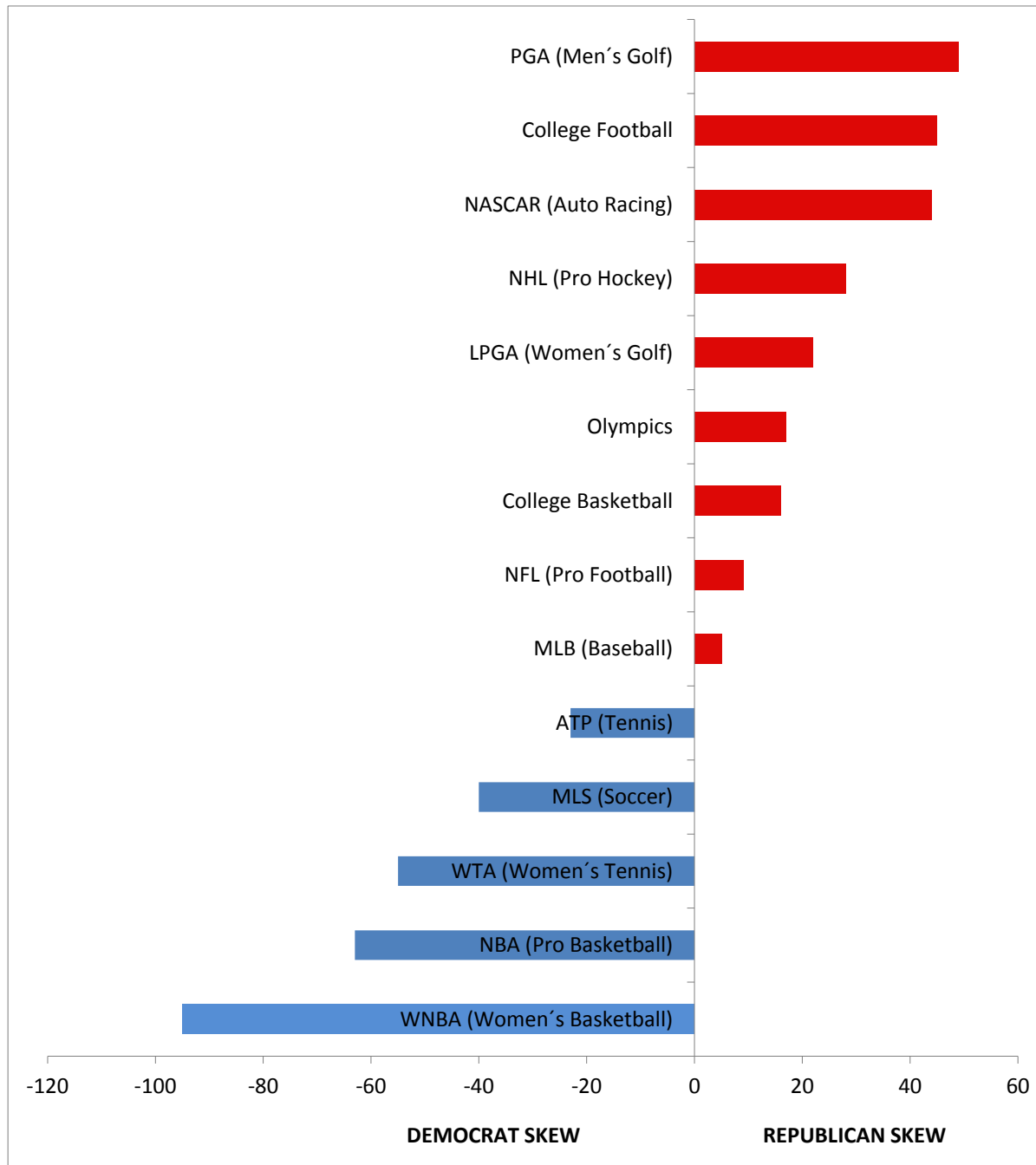
The graph below shows the political leaning of sports TV audiences. On the right of the spectrum, there are the PGA tour (professional men's golf), college football and NASCAR. Also heavily Republican are the NHL (professional hockey) and the LPGA Tour (women's golf). Still red, but closer to the center, are the Olympics, college basketball, the NFL (professional football) and MLB (professional baseball).

On the other side of the spectrum, the ATP (men's tennis) is slightly Democrat. The MLS (professional soccer), WTA (women's tennis), NBA (men's professional basketball) and WNBA (women's professional basketball) are deep blue.

In all professional sports, the women's version or league is more Democrat than the men's competition. This is true for golf, tennis and basketball, an obvious consequence of having more women (who lean Democrat) in the audience.

SPORTS AUDIENCES IN A REPUBLICAN

MINUS DEMOCRAT INDEX ¹⁸



¹⁸ The information is presented as a Republican minus Democrat Index. It compares the political leaning of sports viewers, compared to the total adult population which has an average index of 0. The information was provided by a Natmedia analysis of Scarborough Research, Scarborough USA+ Study. Survey period: Aug. 2008-Sept. 2009. N = 218,313 U.S. adults.

Other companies, like Target Point Consulting (TPC), reached similar conclusions by analyzing credit card information. Trevor McGaughey is one of the experts who dig into mountains of consumer data to advise political campaigns. Each time you purchase something (a book or CD, shoes or a new cable TV subscription), your credit card leaves a trace that, combined with your consumer, Internet and residence data, reveals information about your ideological leanings that experts can read like an open book.

Sports are one powerful clue to add to the mix. "We use a lot of sports data. Have they been a football or baseball spectator, do they own season tickets, are they NASCAR enthusiasts? If you use your credit card to purchase a baseball ticket, we know that you have a baseball interest. If you buy a NASCAR ticket, we have an auto racing interest warning flag, etc.," McGaughey details. Internet surveys and subscriptions to sport magazines are other sources of data.

In the TPC database, for instance, the variable "someone in the household has an interest in watching basketball" is "element 7781" in the magic predicting formula.

"Sports can be a strong predictor of electoral behavior," McGaughey explains. "Fans of different sports have different political views because sport reveals socioeconomic, racial and lifestyle differences."

One TPC analysis identified a constituency that strongly favored higher taxes on cigarettes. And the best predictor was not ideology, voting history or demography. "The more powerful predictor was "people who practice scuba diving". It was surprising, but I guess it makes sense because probably if you smoke you don't want to go underwater and breathe from a tank," McGaughey says, smiling. "So, if you want to mobilize people to restrict tobacco, scuba divers are your gold mine."

WINNING THROUGH SPORTS

January 7, 2012. Three days before the decisive primary in New Hampshire, the Republican candidates faced each other in a debate organized by ABC News in Manchester.

I was also in New Hampshire, covering the primaries and watching the debate that night on television. But, during a commercial break, I switched to NBC to take a quick look at the other confrontation of the night –the Detroit Lions facing the New Orleans Saints in the NFL wildcard playoffs.

The game gave way to a commercial break and Mitt Romney appeared on the screen. Yes, while Romney was debating live on ABC, his ads (I counted at least four) were running on NBC. A waste of money? Of course not. It was a political strategy that made perfect sense.

"In sports, the audience is engaged, they like to see it live so they do not skip the commercials by using a recording device. Only 4.5% of people with TIVO skip them. In other shows, we have double-digit numbers. And if the audience skips the commercials, you are wasting your money," Ben Angle says.

The Lions-Saints game had a larger audience than the debate (27.88 million versus 5.41 million, according to Nielsen ratings).¹⁹ It was, as we learned before, a largely Republican audience. And the spectators were less willing to skip the commercials, as my own experience testified.

This is why the NFL is a must for political campaigns, especially for the Republican Party. In the month prior to the 2010 elections, Saturday Night College Football aired 214 political ads, 74% of them for Republican candidates. Similar patterns can be found for NBC Sunday Night Football (506 political ads, 69% Republican), NFL Sunday Kickoff (75 political ads, 69% Republican) and NASCAR races (163 political ads, 69% Republican).²⁰

In some specific markets, sports are an even bigger player. Ben Angle explains it using the case of Spencer Bachus, the Republican U.S. Representative for Alabama's 6th congressional district (basically, the suburbs of Birmingham, one of the most Republican districts in the country). "College football is pretty big in Alabama so we advertised heavily in it before the primaries," Angle says. As college football is strong among Republicans, the strategy worked perfectly.

Alabama Crimson Tide, the University of Alabama's football team, played along with the plan, with a great campaign that ended with a 21-0 win against LSU in the 2012 BCS National Championship Game. Bachus's ads, proclaiming that, "Bachus battles Obama at every turn", received a substantial amount of attention. He secured the nomination and, virtually, the seat (the real election was the primary, considering that Bachus received more than 97% of the votes in the last four general elections).

¹⁹ <http://tvbythenumbers.zap2it.com/2012/01/08/tv-ratings-saturday-saintlions-wild-card-game-dominates-ratings-of-course/115720/>

²⁰ <http://www.sportsbusinessdaily.com/Daily/Issues/2010/11/Issue-36/Law-Politics/Republicans-Using-Sports-Programming-To-Reach-Potential-Voters.aspx>

Birmingham is the hottest media market in the country for college football, with 55% of high-turnout voters "very interested" in NCAA football (the national average is 23%).²¹

Similarly, the NFL is the ideal way to reach voters in Pittsburgh (54% are "very interested") or Green Bay (52%). Major League Baseball is a must for candidates in Boston (41%), the NBA in San Antonio (33%) and the Olympics in Salt Lake City (41%).²²

Data analysis reveals that sports are useful to political campaigns across the U.S. The five media markets with most interest in the PGA golf tour are in the state of Florida. The two most interested in college basketball are in Kentucky (Louisville and Lexington). High school sports are a big deal in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, El Paso, Texas, and Wichita, Kansas, and so on.

Heather O'Donnell at On Message, a company that buys advertising space for congressional candidates, is also aware of the powerful role of sports in political campaigns. "We do buy ads at sports events –we have bought from the Masters to March Madness basketball games, Super Bowl the Olympics, etc."

The sports calendar provides opportunities for political advertising throughout the year. The Summer Olympics, the NFL and NCAA football seasons and the baseball World Series are popular events that take place just before the general election. And all of these sports have a mostly Republican audience.²³

The primary season also has its own opportunities –the Super Bowl and the Daytona 500 in February; March Madness the following month; the Golf Masters in April and the Kentucky Derby in May. "If a campaign centers around a much watched sport event, where we know the audience saturation is higher than normal, then we will typically buy in that slot," Heather O'Donnell says.

The gender gap is also a powerful factor. "If a majority of our votes come from a male audience, then we can and will target specific shows or games in order to reach that demographic," O'Donnell makes clear.

²¹ "The Politics of Sports Fans", Natmedia, April - May, 2010.

²² "The Politics of Sports Fans", Natmedia, April - May, 2010.

²³ With 100 as the average, the Summer Olympics have a Republican audience of 115, NCAA football 126 and NFL 117. World Series: 120, according to Natmedia report "The Politics of Sports Fans." (April - May 2010).

SPORTS AND VOTERS

Popular counterfactuals: if Ralph Nader had not run in 2000, Al Gore would have been President. If Ross Perot had not reentered the presidential race in 1992, George H. W. Bush would have had a good chance of being a two-term President. Let me add another one: if NASCAR fans had not voted in 2010, the Republican Party would have lost the mid-term elections.

It is true: NASCAR fans are a small, yet decisive, constituency. They are so homogeneous that they are able to turn an election around by 180 degrees. After the 2010 election, a Pew Research Center poll asked voters if they followed NASCAR races. Only 16% answered yes, 83% said they did not. Considering only the 83% that did not follow the races, the Democrats would have won the election by 47% to 44%. But NASCAR fans voted Republican by a 20-percentage point margin (52% to 32%) so they defined the election in favor of the GOP.²⁴

Four weeks before the 2008 election, a CBS poll asked voters, "Which one sport do you watch or follow the most?" By crossing the answers with political preferences in the Obama-McCain election, we can draw a good picture of the differences between fans of different sports.²⁵

SPORT	ALL	Vote: Obama	Vote: McCain	Liberal	Moderate	Conservative	Rep.	Dem.	Ind.
Football	41%	42%	45%	34%	47%	41%	47%	42%	39%
Baseball	12%	13%	13%	13%	10%	15%	12%	14%	12%
Basketball	7%	11%	3%	9%	10%	3%	2%	11%	6%
NASCAR	6%	3%	7%	3%	4%	9%	5%	3%	9%
Golf	3%	1%	5%	1%	3%	4%	5%	1%	3%
Other	7%	7%	5%	11%	5%	8%	8%	7%	6%
None	24%	22%	20%	28%	20%	20%	20%	21%	24%

²⁴ Pew Research Center poll, April 7-10, 2011.

²⁵ CBS News poll, October 3-5, 2008.

POLITICAL IDENTIFICATION OF SPORTS FANS

The data matches information about TV audiences and credit card charges. Basketball fans are deeply Democratic (11% of Obama voters versus only 3% of McCain's). NASCAR fans are strongly Republican (3% of Obama's constituency and 7% of McCain's). Golf fans are heavily Republican, too (1% of Obama voters and 5% of McCain's). Football fans also tend to be slightly more Republican while baseball fans are in the middle.

The roots of NASCAR political identification were discussed above. Golf fans are mostly white, wealthy and older – a formula for leaning Republican. On the other hand, interest in basketball is strong in African-American communities and serves as a proxy for Democratic votes. The same reason (minority fans) explains why soccer fans, found particularly in Latino areas like San Diego and El Paso, lean Democrat.

Football is the sport of young people (an impressive 52% of voters between 30 and 44 years mentioned it as their favorite sport in a CBS News poll compared to a low 6% for baseball). While college football is still identified with white conservatives in red states like Alabama, Louisiana and Tennessee, the success of the NFL is attracting a heterogeneous audience across the country. The NFL is perhaps on its way to becoming what soccer is in Europe or Latin America – the sport that everyone loves, regardless of race, education, socioeconomic condition or ideology.

YANKEES AND METS ARE EQUAL

In countries where soccer is king, political loyalties correlate not with different sports but with different teams. In Spain, Real Madrid was considered the "official" team of Francisco Franco's right-wing dictatorship while Barcelona became a symbol of the regionalist opposition.

Similar political, racial and social identifications are found in Lima, Peru, (*Universitario* is identified with the white middle class and *Alianza* with the indigenous lower class) and in Glasgow, Scotland, (Rangers as the team of the Protestants and Celtic of the Catholics). The situation is also similar in many other countries.

But, in the United States, most cities have just one professional team in each sport. An exception is New York, the only city with multiple teams in almost every professional league.

In a study prepared especially for this thesis, Natmedia measured the political identification of fans in the New York–New Jersey media market, with 100 as the average. The study included

two NFL teams (Giants and Jets), two Major League Baseball (MLB) teams (Mets and Yankees), two NBA teams (Knicks and Nets), one Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) team (Liberty), three National Hockey League (NHL) teams (Rangers, Islanders and Devils) and one MLS soccer team (Red Bull).

NEW YORK SPORTS FANS BY PARTY IDENTIFICATION

	Democrat	Lean Democrat	Independent	Lean Republican	Republican	None
NFL: Giants	92	113	112	124	124	67
NFL: Jets	94	113	117	122	123	63
MLB: Mets	107	111	96	107	115	64
MLB: Yankees	100	114	104	105	113	75
NBA: Knicks	119	115	93	77	89	80
NBA: Nets	116	124	102	70	84	85
WNBA: Liberty	135	106	80	52	72	90
NHL: Devils	76	94	154	135	129	76
NHL: Islanders	80	82	163	118	135	74
NHL: Rangers	82	98	152	133	125	69
MLB: Red Bull	108	115	79	58	81	125

NHL fans are on the right, NFL fans on the center-right and MLB fans in the middle. NBA, MLB and, especially, WNBA fans are on the left.

But we do not find a substantial difference between each sport's teams. Giants and Jets supporters are almost equally "red". The same is true for Devils, Islanders and Rangers fans. Nets and Knicks supporters are equally "blue". And even the most famous New York rivalry (Yankees versus Mets) does not have any ideological meaning. As with baseball fans all across the country, Yankees and Mets supporters are evenly distributed across the political spectrum.

At least in New York, social, racial and ideological differences determine the particular sport of which a person is a fan. But, unlike the situation in many European and Latin American countries, politics does not make any difference as regards support for a specific team within that sport.

OBAMA'S BEST SHOT

It was a decisive moment in the 2008 presidential campaign. A Gallup poll had just shown that Barack Obama's advantage over John McCain was evaporating. The Democratic candidate was ahead by only three points. Obama started a world tour that would take him to Kuwait, Afghanistan, Iraq, Jordan, Israel, Germany, France and England in an effort to improve his foreign affairs credentials.

Visiting the troops in Kuwait, "they invited me to go into this gym and there were like 3,000 of our troops there," Obama says. "And somebody just handed me a ball and said, 'Come on, Mr. President, take a shot'. And I said, 'OK' and I shot it and swished it from the 3-point line. And the amount of excitement that those folks had was surprising to me."²⁶

But Obama was excited, too. He called his campaign manager, David Plouffe. "Did you hear about my shot?" he asked. "I swished the first three-pointer I tried. Money."²⁷

Money, indeed, and votes, too.

"When I saw the pictures, I understood why he was crowing," Plouffe wrote. "It was a pretty awesome scene: Barack in dress shirt and pants, casually knocking down a three on his first attempt while the troops went nuts. A pretty good first day."²⁸

John Heilemann and Mark Halperin described the impact of Obama's basketball chops in their book, *Game Change*. "The pictures beamed around the world were priceless: Obama visiting an army base and effortlessly sinking a three-point shot in front of hundreds of cheering soldiers," they note.²⁹

The images became even more priceless for the Obama campaign when, the following day, Senator John McCain was filmed in a turtleneck, driving in a golf car with former President

²⁶ http://www.grantland.com/blog/the-triangle/post/_/id/18690/b-s-report-transcript-barack-obama

²⁷ Plouffe, p. 276.

²⁸ Plouffe, p. 276.

²⁹ Heilemann and Halperin, p. 329.

George H. W. Bush. In Plouffe's words, Obama "looked young and strong, McCain looked old and silly. Obama looked like the future. McCain, the past."³⁰ "I could not get enough of the footage of Bush and McCain tooling around the compound and encouraged us to use it in every ad we could. 'Bring back the cart!' I'd say."³¹

Basketball is one of Barack Obama's valuable assets as a politician. As a true fan, he understands the game (he even coached his daughter's basketball team while in the White House). As a former high-school champion, he can play, too. And his media team is always ready to remind the public how into basketball Obama is.

The "3-point-moment" could have been spontaneous but, as a candidate, Obama was shown countless times playing or seeing basketball games. His spokesman, Tommy Vietor, candidly pointed out during the campaign that, "Senator Obama would be happy to appear on ESPN at any time."³²

"If you think of Barack Hussein Obama's presidential runs as one long campaign to convince America he is not The Other, then sports is one of his most formidable weapons,"³³ Newsweek columnist Bryan Curtis says.

And Obama uses it. Over and over again, the President appears in basketball games, always willing to provide his half-time commentary. He is usually accompanied by VIP guests. On March 13, 2012, he gave British Prime Minister David Cameron a taste of March Madness. Obama and Cameron traveled to Ohio, a swing state, to see the tournament's opening game between Mississippi Valley State and Western Kentucky.

To complete the populist exercise, Obama and Cameron ate hot dogs. In a courtside TV interview, Obama said he wanted to take Cameron to "the great state of Ohio, the heartland is what it's all about."³⁴ Obama also shared his sports knowledge. "Both teams are shooting

³⁰ Plouffe, p. 277.

³¹ Plouffe, p. 277.

³² <http://www.nydailynews.com/gossip/barack-obama-game-espn-article-1.283098>

³³ <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2011/07/07/the-fake-sports-fandom-of-the-presidential-candidates.html>

³⁴ http://espn.go.com/mens-college-basketball/tournament/2012/story/_/id/7679976/president-barack-obama-british-prime-minister-david-cameron-attend-ncaa-tournament-game-dayton

terribly. It may be nerves. These are not teams that normally end up coming to the tournament," he said.³⁵

Every year since arriving at the White House, the President had announced his NCAA tournament bracket picks. March, 2012, was political madness. In addition to his Ohio trip, the President offered his remarks during half-time at the Final Four National Championship game, played basketball with the Harlem Globetrotters at the White House (using a ball with his name and face on it!) and gave a 25-minute interview to ESPN, talking exclusively about basketball.

Michael A. Memoli wrote in the LA Times that, "While his Republican rivals are out tearing one another to pieces and focusing on more conservative media outlets and Fox News, the President is expanding his reach to American voters."³⁶

"Never forget the connective power that sports holds in the world of politics. Obama's ability to speak the language of sports is a major political plus for him," says Washington Post columnist Chris Cillizza. "While making connections with voters who may not be entirely favorably inclined to you is important for all politicians, it's especially important for Obama whose background – biracial parents, childhood in Hawaii, Harvard Law School, etc. – are somewhat unfamiliar to many of the voters he needs to convince to back him if he wants to win a second term in November."³⁷

The most ambitious effort to link Obama and basketball was the celebration of Veterans Day when the President's team deftly united Obama with two great American passions: war and sports.

The deck of navy carrier USS Carl Vinson was transformed into a basketball arena. Barack Obama, wearing a military jacket with the words "Commander in Chief" on it, was the center of the attention, shaking hands and giving a speech before a game between Michigan State and North Carolina. To close a perfect day, former basketball hero Magic Johnson announced to the press that he would vote for Obama.

³⁵ http://espn.go.com/mens-college-basketball/tournament/2012/story/_/id/7679976/president-barack-obama-british-prime-minister-david-cameron-attend-ncaa-tournament-game-dayton

³⁶ <http://www.latimes.com/news/politics/la-pn-obama-sports-guy-interview-20120301,0,5952436.story>

³⁷ The Washington Post, http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/the-fix/post/why-president-obama-sat-down-with-bill-simmons/2012/03/01/gIQAntY5kR_blog.html

NBA AND THE DEVIL

The coincidence of a liberal, African-American president, who is an avid fan of the liberal, African-American league, is a public relations goldmine for both Obama and the NBA.

On February, 2012, shooting guard Vince Carter of the Dallas Mavericks hosted a \$30,000-ticket fundraiser at his home in Florida. Obama was joined by NBA Commissioner David Stern, Magic Johnson, Alonzo Mourning, Chris Paul and many other former and current stars. LeBron James was unable to attend but sent a donation. The night raised \$2.1 million.

The event replaced another fundraiser, the "Obama Classic", that had been scheduled for December, 2011, in Washington, with stars like Carmelo Anthony, Ray Allen, Chris Bosh, Kevin Durant and Dwight Howard, but which had to be suspended due to the end of the NBA lockout. NBA's MVP Derrick Rose, a member of Obama's favorite team, the Chicago Bulls, also spoke at an Obama reelection campaign event.

"It's the Obama factor. Obama is really a once in a lifetime kind of figure who isn't viewed (by the players) simply through the prism of politics," says Democratic strategist Cornell Belcher.³⁸

As the NBA embraced President Obama the way NASCAR had embraced Bush, voters followed. The Obama-McCain voting ratio among basketball fans was 11:3, compared to 8:3 for Kerry four years earlier.³⁹

In his infamous 2008 speech, about the presence of Satan in American society, former presidential candidate Rick Santorum said that Satan's actions are behind "the corruption of culture, the corruption of manners, the corruption of decency (that) is now on display whether it's the NBA or whether it's a rock concert or whether it's on a movie set."⁴⁰

Santorum did not explain why he mentioned the NBA (and not, let's say, NASCAR) as his example of Satan's influence on American culture, but we can guess. The NBA's political and ideological skew (three liberal fans for every conservative one, three Democrats for every Republican) mirrors the fear of many conservatives who see the basketball league as a cultural menace, due to its players' hip hop taste in music, clothes and tattoos.

³⁸ <http://www.thegrio.com/specials/perry-on-politics/how-the-nba-has-embraced-president-obama.php>

³⁹ CBS News poll, October 3-5, 2008.

⁴⁰ <http://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/article/2012/feb/22/context-santorum-satan/>

THE END OF THE CURSE

In 2004, baseball fan George W. Bush's rival was another self-proclaimed baseball aficionado: John Kerry. As would be expected of a Massachusetts senator, Kerry was vocal about his love for the Red Sox. And, in the final weeks of the campaign, the Red Sox wrote one of the biggest stories in American sports. After 86 years, the Boston baseball team beat the "Curse of the Bambino", overcoming a 0-3 deficit against its nemesis, the New York Yankees, in an unprecedented comeback.

The timing was ideal. The Red Sox defeated the Yankees on October 20 in Game 7 of the American League's Championship Series. A week later, the Red Sox defeated the St. Louis Cardinals 4-0 to win the World Series -a bonanza for Sox fans just five days before the elections.

Kerry "has taken every opportunity to assert his citizenship in Red Sox Nation -in debates, interviews and speeches," pointed out The Washington Post.⁴¹ Kerry used the Red Sox surge as a way to connect with blue-collar workers. "We all want the same thing. We want our country to be respected in the world. We want good jobs, and we all want to beat the New York Yankees!"⁴² Kerry said to a crowd in an economically struggling area of Ohio.

The candidate also used self-deprecating humor to criticize Bush in the second presidential debate. "The President, I don't think is living in a world of reality with respect to the environment. Now, if you're a Red Sox fan, that's okay. But if you're a President, it's not."⁴³

Game 7 between the Red Sox and the Yankees was a potential PR dream for Kerry. TV cameras were allowed into the hotel suite where he watched the game. The Northern liberal elitist drank beer from a Budweiser bottle (no glasses, of course) and cheered for the Red Sox - exactly the same thing that almost every American outside of New York City was doing.

After the Red Sox's win, Kerry, holding an old Red Sox cap in his hand, told reporters that the victory was "historic, absolutely stunning. Gutsy, unbelievably gutsy team with a whole lot of heart."⁴⁴

The cap, the bottle of beer, the popular language are all part of the same populist effort. "To the extent that populism means for politicians to show their common ground with the common

⁴¹ The Washington Post, 10/22/2004, p. C1.

⁴² The New York Times, 10/20/2004, p. A16.

⁴³ The Washington Post, 10/22/2004, p. C1.

⁴⁴ The Washington Post, 10/22/2004, p. C1.

man -"we" or "us"- this would be part of the populism that, to one degree or the other, all politicians exploit, especially during campaigns," political scientist Brigitte Nacos says.

But Bush's campaign strategists were ready to counterattack. The day after the game, Bush operatives released a letter in support of Bush signed by famous athletes, including Carlos Beltran and Craig Biggio of the Astros.

And they had a more powerful secret weapon. Curt Schilling, the Red Sox hero who played post-season on an injured ankle, his sock soaked with blood, was a Republican. Hours after winning the World Series, Schilling endorsed Bush on ABC's Good Morning America. "Make sure you tell everybody to vote, and vote Bush next week,"⁴⁵ was his message, broadcast live on national television. Then, Schilling appeared with Bush at two rallies in New Hampshire.

Kerry had the cap (he wore his old Red Sox cap at almost every rally during and after the World Series) but Bush had the hero. The President's campaign also smashed Kerry in his Achilles heel: authenticity.

In his enthusiasm for portraying himself as a sports fan, Kerry committed some gaffes. In a campaign speech in Boston, he professed to be a big fan of "Manny Ortez", then corrected it to "David Ortez" (he meant to say "Manny Ramirez" and "David Ortiz".) He cheered Ohio State in the enemy territory of Minnesota. And he talked about the "Lambert Field", meaning "Lambeau Field", the legendary home of the Green Bay Packers.

The mistakes were a golden chance for Vice-President Dick Cheney who joked that, "I thought after John Kerry's visit here I'd visit Lambert Field. The next thing is he'll be convinced Vince Lombardi is a foreign leader."⁴⁶ A group of Republicans even created a 527 committee, Football Fans for Truth (an obvious wink to the Swift Boat Veterans for Truth), with a website that exposed Kerry as "a poser" and "unsuitable to be Sportsman-in-Chief".

THE AUTHENTICITY PROBLEM

Kerry's experience is a warning. Being known as someone who does not like sports is bad enough for a politician. But being caught pretending to be a big fan is even worse. Sports can be tricky.

⁴⁵ The Boston Globe, 10/29/2004.

http://www.boston.com/news/nation/articles/2004/10/29/schilling_delivers_for_bush_on_good_morning_america/?page=full

⁴⁶ Slate, http://www.slate.com/articles/sports/sports_nut/2004/09/fumble_on_the_kerry.html

"Gaffes in the intense arena of presidential politics are commonplace but there is no gaffe more susceptible to ridicule than a sports one," sports columnist Melissa Jacobs says. "Some politicians, whether they love sports or not, are very good or not that good in convincing people," Brigitte Nacos agrees. "I bet Romney is not a typical sports fan. And he, far more than Obama or George W. Bush, must work much harder to convince sports fans that he is one of them."

In 2012, the field was inverted. While Democrats had the ultimate sports guy, Republicans (the sports party) had a bunch of sports neophytes.

So the Obama strategy was particularly useful in 2012 against Mitt Romney (the "I have some great friends who are NASCAR team owners" guy). Asked to provide his own NCAA picks, Romney's answer was painfully sincere: "I'm not plugged in well enough." Obama's top adviser, David Axelrod, immediately mocked Romney. "He said, 'No, I have my accountants to do that'."⁴⁷

Of course, Romney can flag his experience in the 2002 Winter Olympics, but it was about management, not sports. "Mr. Obama's image makers see sports as an opportunity to exploit what they regard as the President's advantage over the former Massachusetts governor in the quadrennial battle over which candidate can seem more "ordinary" than the other (rich) guy running," explained The New York Times.

"The presidential campaign puts candidates in a miserable position sports-wise," Bryan Curtis, a Newsweek columnist, wrote. "To say you don't like sports would be more damning than admitting you're a Kenyan anti-colonialist."

"I don't think anyone will be elected president by filling out an NCAA bracket," Axelrod said. "But I do think that that accessibility to a person is important. People want to support people they can relate to and are comfortable with."⁴⁸

So, everybody tries. As well as visiting NASCAR races, Romney presented himself as a Red Sox fan (at the launch of his campaign, he said that, "As the Red Sox like to remind the New York

⁴⁷ The New York Times, 3/23/2012, p. 17.

⁴⁸ The New York Times, 3/23/2012, p. 17.

Yankees, there are no dynasties in America."⁴⁹) and proved it by saying that his family had season tickets at Fenway.

During the New Hampshire ABC debate, looking for an unscripted answer, moderator George Stephanopoulos asked the candidates what they'd be doing that Saturday night if they weren't debating.

"Watching the national championship college basketball game," said Newt Gingrich, who played football in high school. Then he corrected himself –"football".

Santorum agreed. "I'd be doing the same thing with my family. We'd be huddled around and we would be watching the championship game." "I'm afraid it's football," Mitt Romney said, and he emphasized, "I love it."⁵⁰

They were all wrong. As any true football fan knew, the much anticipated Bowl Championship Series (BCS) was scheduled for Monday, two days after the debate. The event was already on Gingrich's official Monday schedule. He would see the game with supporters at a bar in Concord, New Hampshire.

⁴⁹ <http://www.mittromney.com/press/2011/06/mitt-romney-launches-presidential-campaign>

⁵⁰ <http://espn.go.com/espnw/commentary/7446558/a-reminder-why-sports-important-2012-gop-candidates-espnw>

CHAPTER 2

BUSH THROWS A CURVEBALL

The audience was ecstatic. George W. Bush, the former President of the United States who left office with the support of only one in five Americans, walked confidently to the mound, enjoying a unanimous ovation from the crowd.

It was a day to remember, both for the unpopular former President, suddenly transformed again into a celebrity – like old times, after the 9/11 attacks, when the entire nation rallied around him.

It was not just polite applause. It was euphoria. Bush, dressed in a red shirt with a "T", arrived at the mound. He knew exactly what to do. He had done it many times before. Confidently, without hesitation, Bush tossed a perfect fastball, wide to the right, to baseball legend Nolan Ryan.

Bush laughed. Ryan laughed. One of the fans, a woman, screamed loudly, "Thank you, George." Not "Mr. President", simply "George".

The man that 51,539 fans were cheering wasn't the President who went to war in Iraq, failed to respond to Katrina or was hit by the economic collapse of 2008.

He was simply "George". The guy who arrived in 1989 as the new co-managing general partner of the Texas Rangers, a struggling team with an aging stadium and an unglamorous history of zero presence in playoffs. The likeable man who never used the owners' box and instead sat in Section 109, Row 1, behind the Rangers dugout. The down-to-earth Texan who shook hands, joked with the fans, signed baseball cards and knew all the hot dog vendors by name. The skilful manager who built a new team, capable of reaching the World Series. And the visionary entrepreneur who brought a modern, beautiful stadium, the Rangers Ballpark, to Arlington, Texas.

On that night, October 23, 2011, the Texas Rangers were about to play Game 4 of the World Series against the Arizona Cardinals at the Rangers Ballpark. A dream come true. And the fans didn't forget George.

Bush's successful career in baseball was the key factor that turned a failed entrepreneur into a popular politician and allowed him to move directly from the Rangers headquarters into the Texas Governor's Mansion. Baseball was the curveball that changed Bush's life... and world history. This is the story of how he made it.

GEORGE JR. GETS A JOB

In November, 1988, George H. W. Bush won the presidency in a comfortable victory over Massachusetts Governor Mike Dukakis. Bush Sr. prepared to move to the White House and Bush Jr., who worked in his father's campaign as an adviser, had to decide the next step in his until then unsuccessful professional life.

Despite the influence and power of his family, Bush, aged 42, had failed in both politics and business. His only political effort, a 1978 campaign for an open House seat in Texas, ended in defeat at the hands of Kent Hance, a Democratic lawyer. Bush's business enterprises in oil exploration had a similar fate. His first company, Arbusto Energy, merged with the larger Spectrum 7 which, in turn, merged with HKN.

But George W. Bush's fate was about to change, thanks to baseball.

Bush wasn't an intellectual. He didn't inherit his father's enthusiasm for diplomacy, intelligence or public affairs. But he did inherit his passion for baseball. As a kid, "I filled many of my days with baseball,"⁵¹ Bush wrote in his autobiography, *A Charge to Keep*, a book in which the word "baseball" is a recurring presence. As a child, "My political talents first blossomed," Bush remembered, when "I helped organize a stickball league and named myself the high commissioner."⁵²

A baseball fan with great connections needed a job. And an investors' group needed a frontman with great connections. Cincinnati investor Bill DeWitt, son of a former owner of the Cincinnati Reds, was trying to buy the Texas Rangers from Eddie Chiles. DeWitt had already formed an investors' group with Mercer Reynolds, Dudley Taft and Robert Castellini when he contacted Bush.

"The attractiveness of Mr. Bush as a partner had little to do with his business ability; at that time, his business record was a bleak one, involving faltering oil companies. Rather, Mr. Bush

⁵¹ Bush, p. 15.

⁵² Bush, p. 21.

was useful because his father was then the President and because he and his parents were longtime friends of the seller, Eddie Chiles. If anybody could get a good deal buying the team from Mr. Chiles, it would be Mr. Bush," wrote Nicholas Kristoff of the New York Times.⁵³

Bush did not have much money to contribute. He borrowed from the United Bank of Midland, a Texas bank of which he had been a director, and contributed a total of only \$605,028, equivalent to a 1.8% stake. Bush had no real money but he had friends. "A bunch of big little guys," as he explained. Roland Betts, a former classmate from Yale and a motion picture financier, jumped in with \$3.6 million.

Baseball Commissioner Peter Ueberroth, a Republican (who, years later, would run for Governor of California) was instrumental in the deal. First, Ueberroth blocked another bid from minority owner Edward Gaylord. Then he helped put more Texas money into the group, bringing in billionaire Richard Rainwater from Fort Worth (\$3 million) and businessman Edward Rose from Dallas (\$3.2 million).

Fort Worth columnist Jim Reeves was the first journalist to break the story about the deal. "Ueberroth said to Bush, 'You don't have enough local interest, why don't you get together with the other group of local entrepreneurs who are interested, join and buy the team?'" Reeves recalled.

Then Ueberroth convinced the owner. "Eddie Chiles was quite a character –a flamboyant "oil-field millionaire" best known for his radio spots which began with 'I'm Eddie Chiles and I'm mad'."⁵⁴ As would be expected of a conservative Texan Republican, he was mad at government spending, social programs and environmental regulation. In Bush's words, Chiles "had long been involved in supporting Republican and conservative causes and candidates."⁵⁵ In retrospect, selling his team to Bush was the most relevant of Chiles's contributions.

So Republican Ueberroth went to Texas, talked to Republican Chiles and convinced him to sell his team to Republican Bush and his group of "big little guys".

⁵³ The New York Times, 9/24/2000, <http://www.nytimes.com/2000/09/24/us/2000-campaign-breaking-into-baseball-road-politics-ran-through-texas-ballpark.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>

⁵⁴ Ivins, p. 34.

⁵⁵ Bush, p.199.

When the purchase was completed, on April 21, 1989, Bush finally had a new job, and a sweetheart deal, too. Once all the investors were repaid, his 1.8% stake magically jumped to 11.3% as compensation for his work in putting the investor group together. Bush was very, very happy. "This is as good as it gets. Life cannot be better than this."⁵⁶

A LIKEABLE GUY

Everyone who knew Bush as the general co-managing partner of the Texas Rangers agrees on two things – he is a likeable guy and he is a real baseball fan. Columnist Jim Reeves, who enjoyed several golf games with Bush, says that, "George was very personable, he was a good guy to get along with." Ken Herman, a Texas journalist who knew Bush well and followed him to Washington as a White House correspondent, remembers long conversations on the road. "If he found out you are a baseball fan, he would probe how much of a fan you are. If you could recite the 1961 starting lineup of Los Angeles Dodgers, you were in. It is a valuable thing. He really knew about baseball."

A baseball fan and a likeable guy. The first decision was symbolic. Bush would not use his luxury skybox. Instead, he would hang out in the front row of the stands. "For one thing, I am a fan. I'd rather be down here where I can smell the bats and the hats and get a feel for the game," Bush explained.⁵⁷ And he candidly revealed his PR strategy. "We wanted to become known as owners who are very sympathetic with fans. And the best way to do that is to be down here with them."⁵⁸

Bush not only sat with the fans. He also stood in line to buy a hot dog or a soda, a perfect opportunity for the informal kind of chat of which he is a master. "He loved the interaction with fans," Ken Herman says. "He is a friendly man, who is very good in finding something he has in common with people, he has that gift. He went to the games and he was very approachable."

The President's son was only a minority owner and one of the two co-managing partners but, right from the beginning, he concentrated all the public attention. The other co-manager, Rusty Rose, "was not a guy who likes the spotlight a lot, so they were very happy to have Bush on board to be the upfront guy, the partner the media spoke to," says Jim Reeves.

⁵⁶ Bush, p. 198.

⁵⁷ The Washington Times, 7/25/1989, p. D2.

⁵⁸ The Washington Times, 7/25/1989, p. D2.

"I became the face and the voice for the management of the Texas Rangers... I got to know all the hot dog vendors and signed thousands of autographs," Bush recalled.⁵⁹

He got along with the fans, the journalists and also with the players. "From the get-go, I liked him," says pitcher Kenny Rogers, a rookie in the 1989 season.⁶⁰ Bush cultivated the relationship, spending time in the clubhouse with the players. "He came in after his daily run. He came in shorts and t-shirt in the weight room, hanging out with some of the players," says Jim Reeves, who covered the Rangers on a daily basis. "I think it just comes natural, he gets along well with guys around him, in this macho atmosphere."

A CONTINUOUS CAMPAIGN

At the same time that he became the frontman for the Rangers in April, 1989, George W. Bush was considering a bid for the gubernatorial election of 1990. But, after watching him throw the first pitch in a Rangers game against the Yankees, his mother, First Lady Barbara Bush, said to reporters that she had given her son some advice. "I'm rather hoping he won't," she said. The son did not seem happy with his mother's remarks. "For 42 years, she has given me her opinion. I have listened to it, sometimes," he replied.⁶¹

That time, however, he listened to his mother and stayed out of the race. The Republican field was really open, without any powerful candidate, and the election was eventually won by a Democrat, Ann Richards. Bush became the subject of criticism and even mockery. Commissioner Fay Vincent told the press that, after an argument about revenues in Major League Baseball, "I told George Bush that if he didn't stop yelling at me, I was going to tell his mother."⁶²

But the rationale had nothing to do with his mother's advice. Bush understood that his time had not yet come. "No one knows much about him. You know he had been in the oil business in West Texas and Midland, he had a company in Dallas that wasn't terribly successful, he had run for office and lost. Besides that, he only had the name recognition of being the son of a President," says Jim Reeves.

⁵⁹ Bush, p. 203.

⁶⁰ The New York Times, 9/24/2000, <http://www.nytimes.com/2000/09/24/us/2000-campaign-breaking-into-baseball-road-politics-ran-through-texas-ballpark.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>

⁶¹ St. Petersburg Times, 4/29/1989, p. 3A.

⁶² The Toronto Star, 6/15/1991, p. B3.

This was going to change in time for the next election in 1994. Bush's PR effort was not only visible at the ballpark and the clubhouse. He toured Texas tirelessly, giving speeches and meeting social and religious organizations. The ostensible purpose of these tours was to urge people to attend Rangers games but, when Bush gave speeches in far flung places such as Amarillo or Corpus Christi, it was obvious that he was promoting himself as much as his team.

Ken Herman remembers those days of continuous campaigning. "I think he knew that he would run for something. He had the political bug genetically and had political ambitions. Among the reasons to do it was, if I want to run someday, I will get a lot of publicity, in a high profile endeavor, and it can be successful," he says. Jim Reeves notes that, "For sure he had political aspirations already so he kept himself in the public eye."

Bush's friend and former aide Mark McKinnon denies this. "I don't think that, at that point of his life, he was thinking in politics at all. I think that it never crossed his mind," he says.

In 1991, Bush created and promoted a charity, the Texas Rangers Baseball Foundation, which provided him with another good reason to travel around Texas, giving baseball equipment to kids and sponsoring reading initiatives. A perfect frame for the "compassionate conservative" agenda of his political career. In his own words, "I traveled Texas, speaking to civic groups and chambers of commerce. I did thousands of media interviews."⁶³

George W. Bush also tried to help his father through baseball. But the effort backfired. The President was invited to throw the ceremonial first pitch at the opening game of the 1991 season. He warmed up with TV commentator and Hall of Famer, Joe Morgan, who advised him to go "with the straight one, just right down the middle." But, full of confidence, the President (who had been captain of the Yale baseball team in 1948) replied, "I'm not gonna, Joe. I want to show the crowd something."

Surely he did. He tried a curve and "bounced the ball in the dirt at the catcher's feet. He threw his hands down in disgust and tore off the field after a hasty apology to his battery mate."⁶⁴ He was upset with his poor performance, as he confessed to reporters on Air Force One. "Never should have gone with the curve. It broke too soon," he said.⁶⁵

⁶³ Bush, p. 203.

⁶⁴ The Washington Times, 4/10/1991, p. D2.

⁶⁵ The Washington Post, 4/10/1991, p. A21.

He had good reason to be upset. The image of Bush being incapable of delivering a decent throw soon become a symbol of a President who lost his aura of invincibility after the Gulf War and came to be viewed by many as out of touch with average America.

BUSH'S BALLPARK

Every politician in the world knows that building a sports facility is a sure way to improve popularity. The opening of a new stadium is a perfect moment to enhance a reelection campaign or a brilliant end of term. A stadium is a tangible legacy, tied to the positive emotions associated with sports. Just perfect.

And George W. Bush, as a politician and the co-managing general partner of the Texas Rangers, discovered a new way to do it. He built a stadium while running for office, making it the symbol of his new identity. He won, launched a political career that took him to the White House and became a millionaire in the process. Just perfect.

Everybody knew that the old Arlington stadium was useless. A remodeled minor league ballpark, it did not have the size or comfort of a major league stadium. Even worse, it was not allowed to build luxury boxes, a key element in the budget of any professional baseball team.

The new owners' group wanted a new stadium but they did not want to pay for it. So they adopted the classic strategy of blackmailing the local community, threatening to move the team out of Arlington.

That put Bush on the horns of a dilemma. He wanted the stadium as the symbol of his success and in order to launch his political career. But he did not want to be contaminated by the inevitable controversy about financing a private business with public funds – something especially delicate for a fiscal conservative. So he designed a strategy that worked perfectly and allowed him to take credit for the stadium without standing in the line of fire.

The first step was to get the Mayor of Arlington, Richard Greene, on board. A Republican, Greene designed a plan to increase local taxes to pay for the new stadium and campaigned for it. The plan was to be voted on by the Arlington community and then delivered to the Texas legislature in Austin.

The campaign had two faces. The positive side was the promise of a broad economic package under which Arlington would have a River Walk like San Antonio, with restaurants along

Johnson Creek. The negative side of it was clear –if the taxpayers did not approve the deal, the Rangers would move to Dallas.

Jim Runzheimer, a Republican attorney and sports fan, led the opposition to the project. As a fiscal conservative, he was enraged with "Republicans involved in earmarks, getting federal money for their local districts. Bush claimed to be a fiscal conservative but he used public money for his own benefit."

Bush hired Tom Schieffer, a Democrat and former Texas Congressman, as the man in charge of the ballpark project. "Bush was very clever," Runzheimer says. "Whenever there was something positive about the Rangers, he would be at the front taking the credit. Whenever it was anything controversial, it was Tom Schieffer who was the spokesperson."

The public campaign was conducted by Greene and Schieffer while the regular spokesperson, Bush, remained silent. Days before the vote, in January, 1991, the local League of Women Voters sponsored a debate about the proposal. As in the rest of the campaign, Bush did not appear but Greene and Schieffer got the help of Tom Vandergriff, the legendary former mayor of Arlington, who brought the Rangers to Arlington in the seventies and who was in the process of switching parties from Democrat to Republican. Greene, Schieffer and Vandergriff defended the proposal against Runzheimer and two other local activists.

"I think it was very deliberate," Runzheimer says. "On one hand, of course, it was Bush's springboard into politics. He wanted to show it as a success but, by the same token, he did not want to be in a situation where he was directly advocating to raise our taxes." As a matter of fact, the 2000 Texas Republican Party platform stated that "public money or public powers should not be used to fund or implement any private projects such as high-speed rails or sports stadiums," a flagrant contradiction of the attitude of the 2000 Republican presidential candidate.

The opposition campaign raised \$3,000 and was easily outspent by the Rangers. The local press also helped. "The media was very much in collusion with the Rangers," Runzheimer says. "They paid very little attention to any negative aspect of the deal. And the reason is that these newspapers made a huge amount of revenue from the sports page. There was a conflict of interests."

Jim Reeves, at this time an influential columnist, says that, "I wrote many columns saying Arlington cannot afford to let the Rangers get away. From my personal perspective, the Fort Worth Star-Telegram had a big interest in it because, at that time, this was the only major professional franchise in Tarrant County, so I urged the people in my newspaper to support keeping the team and I wrote many columns about keeping the team in Arlington. In retrospect, it was the right thing to do."

The voters' verdict was clear. In January, 1991, by a two-to-one margin, they approved a half-cent increase in local sales tax in order to collect \$135 million for building the new ballpark.

THE TRIPLE CROWN

The details of the deal raised more eyebrows. Many critics pointed out that the Rangers "would get virtually full control over the project but be exempted from obligations of ownership like paying school taxes; and the Rangers would have the right to get the entire stadium complex for nothing after 12 years of paying a modest rent."⁶⁶

The Arlington authorities also used their power to condemn private land for annexation to the new ballpark complex, a practice that led to a judicial battle and eventually forced the Texas Rangers to repay the city for its losses.

William Eastland, a Republican accountant in Arlington, said that, "You can call it anything you want but it's corporate welfare."⁶⁷ With Bush silent, Tom Schieffer jumped to defend the deal. "There is no question that the ballpark made a huge difference for this franchise but we think the citizens of Arlington benefited as much as the owners did." Critics also argued that, while negotiating the deal with the son of the President, Mayor Richard Greene was a defendant in two civil suits with federal regulators about his previous private business dealings. He was allowed to settle both, paying \$165,000. Greene denied that his personal situation was an issue in his negotiations with Bush.

Gaining the support of Arlington voters was only the first step of the plan. A new tax needed to be passed by the Texas legislature, a peculiar institution that only meets in regular session for five months in each odd-numbered year. In order to have his ballpark built on time for the

⁶⁶ The New York Times, 9/24/2000, <http://www.nytimes.com/2000/09/24/us/2000-campaign-breaking-into-baseball-road-politics-ran-through-texas-ballpark.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>

⁶⁷ The New York Times, 9/24/2000, <http://www.nytimes.com/2000/09/24/us/2000-campaign-breaking-into-baseball-road-politics-ran-through-texas-ballpark.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>

1994 campaign, Bush needed a quick resolution. Again, Schieffer was in charge of the mission. Using his contacts with Democratic congressmen and with the Governor, Schieffer did it. The lobbying operation was very effective and the bill was passed overwhelmingly by both chambers of the legislature.

Bizarrely, the future of Bush's candidacy ended up in the hands of Governor Ann Richards, who could have vetoed the bill and postponed discussion until 1993. "She could have been courageous and taken a populist position, and shown that she was not going to tolerate public money being used for a facility to benefit only white male millionaires, because the sales tax will be paid disproportionately by poor people and by the middle class. She could have done this," said stadium critic, Jim Runzheimer.

But she signed the law. "She basically signed her own political death warrant by going along with the lobbyists and signing that bill that would ultimately make him, President Bush's son, a powerful rival and a multimillionaire. So she blew it," Runzheimer said.

Bush would have his stadium. And just in time for his 1994 campaign. As Ken Herman says, the ballpark "was the face of the team. It's a monument, it's a big business and it's baseball. If you are a politician, that's the triple crown."

"THE ONLY PRINCIPLED OWNER AROUND"

With the controversy behind him, George W. Bush reassumed his role as spokesperson for the Rangers while Schieffer became the Rangers president. Ground was broken on April 2, 1992, and the building was scheduled to be finished in two years, just in time for the 1994 baseball – and election – season.

In February, 1993, Bush acknowledged that he was "interested in looking at the gubernatorial race." When TV networks proposed a new contract with both major baseball leagues, including an expansion of the playoff system and a division of each league into three divisions, Bush was vocal in his opposition.

The deal was also opposed by many fans who saw it as a loss of baseball tradition for economic reasons. The owners were unanimous in supporting it, with the exception only of Bush. In the end, he lost the vote, 1 to 27.

In his solitary opposition, Bush was not an owner looking for profit for his business, as were the other owners. He was a candidate making a move to be on the right side of an emotional issue. "I will go down defending principle and hope history judges me correctly," Bush said after casting the dissident vote. "I represent the silent voices of baseball's purists."⁶⁸

His epic defeat (1-27!) was a huge political victory for Bush. Columnists all over the country, enraged by the changes, praised Bush as a man of principle. In Texas, he was acclaimed as a hero by baseball fans. "George W. Bush may be the only principled (owner) around... Mr. Bush is right when he says that baseball should change for its own reasons, not to please television interests."⁶⁹

With his candidacy imminent, Bush's solitary vote was seen as a sign of integrity and character. "Mr. Bush has demonstrated a degree of independence. Just ask baseball's 27 other owners whom Mr. Bush singularly opposed... in their dollar-driven efforts to lengthen major league playoffs. No other owner had the courage to object that fans should not be asked to watch baseball until the first snow, just so owners could get more television money."⁷⁰

The New York Times congratulated Bush in its first in-depth report on his candidacy. "One vote was not enough to stave off the potential post-season change. But it was an important, and impassioned, statement nonetheless," it wrote.⁷¹ "Baseball is still a huge issue with me because it helps define part of my identity," Bush said.

In another decision that pleased baseball purists, the Rangers named the new stadium simply "The Ballpark in Arlington." "Mr. Bush... did not succumb to the temptation of corporate dollars and severely cheapen what is going to be – guaranteed – the grandest structure in the baseball world," wrote The Dallas Morning News.⁷² Again, Bush seemed interested in building a strong moral image, putting aside for the time being longer-term economic considerations.

THE NOLAN RYAN EFFECT

The stage was obvious. On November 6, 1993, when George W. Bush announced his candidacy for Governor of Texas, he met the press at the site where the new ballpark was under

⁶⁸ The Financial Post, Toronto, 9/10/1993.

⁶⁹ The Dallas Morning News, 5/21/1993, p. 1B

⁷⁰ The Dallas Morning News, 9/14/1993, p. 1B.

⁷¹ The New York Times, 17/11/1993, p. B4.

⁷² The Dallas Morning News, 9/29/1993, p. 1B.

construction. TV interviews were conducted with the unfinished stadium as backdrop. In the newspaper, photos showed Bush walking around the construction machinery.

Bush impressed journalists covering the event with specific inside information on details of the construction. "(I take) some heat over every aspect of this business. Kind of like being governor," he explained.⁷³

The press remarked that, "A politician who wants to point to sturdy evidence of his devotion to cause and effect could do worse than finger a magnificent baseball stadium. A candidate who wishes to remind voters of a platform including traditional values and a family focus could do worse than point to the Ballpark in Arlington. It anchors an inviting sports, retail and amusement complex bound to generate jobs and regional pride."⁷⁴

Jim Reeves says that, "Schieffer should take credit for the Ballpark, he was the hands-on guy, making decisions, working with the architects, with ideas...The media focused on Bush so the fans don't know that the Ballpark was Schieffer's baby, not so much Bush's, although he was part of it."

Bush took the credit. Ken Herman observed that, "The Ballpark gave him a lot of high-profile publicity and, when he announced he would run for governor, he could say, 'I am a successful businessman, who helped to build this stadium'. It was an achievement."

The new Ballpark in Arlington opened on April 1, 1994, in an exhibition contest between the Texas Rangers and the New York Mets. Ken Herman recalls that, "I went with Bush to the first game and he was in all his glory. It was a great day for him." Ten days later, following the season opener at the Ballpark, Bush invited 250 guests to a VIP luncheon on the ground floor of the stadium.

Bush continued his role as co-managing general partner during the gubernatorial campaign and attended games at the new stadium "to relax," as he said. But the first season of baseball at the Ballpark was not the only manifestation of baseball during the campaign.

Nolan Ryan was one key name. A baseball legend, Ryan played his last seasons for the Rangers and became a close friend to Bush. He involved himself in the Bush campaign, introducing the

⁷³ The Dallas Morning News, 11/7/1993, p. 43A.

⁷⁴ The Dallas Morning News, 11/9/1993, p. 1B.

candidate before public speeches and fundraisers (at one of which the candidate collected \$1.1 million). Ryan was so relevant to the Bush campaign that when Governor Richards received the endorsement of Ross Perot – whom Bush held responsible for his father's defeat two years earlier – Bush's answer was defiant – "She's got Ross Perot; I will take Nolan Ryan and Barbara Bush."⁷⁵

During the campaign, Bush also continued his work as spokesperson for the Texas Rangers Charity Foundation. In 14 March, 1994, the candidate led the ground-breaking ceremony for a new park donated by the Rangers to the Dallas Oak Cliff Little League, a \$50,000 initiative that helped hundreds of children and their families.

As Bush's friend and consultant Mark McKinnon says, "That was really the only way people knew about him, through baseball. That was his only identification. And it was a very good thing, they associated him with the Texas Rangers, a baseball team which is very popular, and he did a good job with the team. That was a better association than his previous work in the oil business that was not particularly successful."

And the Rangers played for him, too. They played a great season and were on the way to their first playoff ever. On July 28, Kenny Rogers made history when he pitched the 12th perfect game in Major League history. The 1994-1995 players' strike eventually ended the season and prevented the Rangers from playing the post-season but the improvement in the team was evident to the grateful fans.

GAME OVER

For the national press, Bush seemed a long shot. Besides baseball, he did not have much. Even the "Bush factor" was no longer an asset in Texas where the George H. W. Bush vote collapsed from 56.3% in 1988 election to 40.6% in 1992.

And Governor Richards was hugely popular. Everybody remembered her keynote speech at the 1988 Democratic Convention, with the legendary line that George H. W. Bush "was born with a silver foot in his mouth." Texans liked her charisma and her sense of humor and the Texas economy was growing. When Bush started his campaign, Governor Richards had an approval

⁷⁵ Rove, p. 96.

rating of 70%. But the challenger had "strong name recognition".⁷⁶ Intriguingly, even before starting his campaign, Bush was only eight points down in the polls. Baseball had done its job.

Bush's campaign, directed by strategist Karl Rove, was highly disciplined. Bush exploited the conservative shift in the Texan electorate and hammered Richards on issues such as gun control, without making any personal attack against the popular incumbent. Meanwhile, he traveled the state talking about the Texas Rangers and the Ballpark. By late September, Richards's advantage had slipped to two points.

Baseball provided Bush with a message for every constituency, even the most difficult – African-Americans from whom Richards had received 96% of the votes back in 1990. Nine days before the election, Bush visited two black churches in Houston and, in both, reminded the congregation that he "personally recruited the only African-American part owner"⁷⁷ in the major leagues, Dallas businessman Comer Cottrell.

Richards's camp tried to counterattack, denouncing the problematic aspects of the Ballpark deal. Richards's spokesman, Rafe Greenlee, accused Bush of being "an expert at avoiding taxes in Arlington," and asked whether the stadium was "nothing more than a tax shelter" for Bush.⁷⁸

In mid-October, as Karl Rove recalls, "Richards unleashed an attack spot alleging that the companies on whose boards Bush sat had lost \$371 million. Her ad also belittled his role as managing partner of the Texas Rangers."⁷⁹ In summary, Richards's ad tried to tie Bush to his past record and, at the same time, discredit his only success: baseball. The TV ad announced that Bush "makes a big deal about running a baseball team, but he only owned 2%."

On November 8, 1994, George W. Bush scored an overwhelming victory against Ann Richards. He won 53.5% of the vote, carrying 188 out of 254 counties. Of course, Bush's victory was not just about baseball. It was part of the conservative revolution of 1994 that allowed the Republican Party to take control of the House of Representatives for the first time in 40 years. The political shift was especially strong in Texas where, as Mark McKinnon says, "Ann Richards was popular but she was a Democrat and a very liberal one while Texas had become a Republican state."

⁷⁶ Christian Science Monitor, 11/8/1993, p. 4.

⁷⁷ The Dallas Morning News, 10/31/1994, p. 6A.

⁷⁸ The Dallas Morning News, 10/22/1994, p. 16A.

⁷⁹ Rove, p. 95.

But the Rangers allowed Bush to be the right man at the right time. "Baseball went hand-in-hand with his political aspirations. Being in the public eye thanks to the Rangers helped him immensely," Jim Reeves says. "I think baseball was a huge factor in him becoming President. Without baseball, I don't see how he could have done it."

PAY IT FORWARD

In 1988, George W. Bush was just the son of the President-elect, a man without any success of his own. Six years later, thanks in part to baseball, he was elected as the new Governor of Texas. And another six years later, in 2000, he would win the Presidential election. And baseball, again, was a factor in that.

As Governor, a grateful Bush named Nolan Ryan as a new member of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission. In 1996, Governor Bush was inducted into the Texas Baseball Hall of Fame. "Only in America can a guy hit .320 in Little League and be inducted into the Hall of Fame," Bush jokingly said.⁸⁰

In 1998, the owners' group accepted an offer to sell the team to billionaire Tom Hicks for \$250 million, three times its 1989 value of \$83 million. Of course, the deal included the Ballpark, 43 acres of nearby land and an option to buy 227 acres of adjacent property – the fruits of the deal with the City of Arlington to build the stadium. Public funds were transformed into huge private gains.

For Bush, the agreement was beyond a sweetheart deal as his initial 1.8% stake had become 11.3%. In just nine years, his \$600,000 investment had been transformed into a fortune of more than \$15 million. "I am proud to say this has turned out to be a very good investment," he said.⁸¹ No one would argue with him.

When the Governor made his 1998 tax returns public, his income was estimated at \$18.4 million, up from \$271,920 in 1997.⁸² "I never dreamt I'd write a check that big," Bush happily told reporters. "Of course, I'd never dreamt I'd make that much money, either."⁸³

⁸⁰ The Dallas Morning News, 11/7/1996, p. 6A.

⁸¹ The Dallas Morning News, 1/8/1998, p. 1A.

⁸² Bush's 1998 Tax Return: <http://www.makethemaccountable.com/tax/BushTaxes1998.pdf>

⁸³ National Post, Canada, 12/6/1999, p. D4.

Mark Rosentraub, a scholar and author of the book, *Major League Losers*, said that "the team's value is attributable to the revenue streams of the new stadium."⁸⁴ Bill Eastland, a Republican, who in 2000 was a delegate to the GOP Convention, simply said that, when Hicks purchased the team, he was "buying the damn Ballpark."⁸⁵

Bush's opponent for reelection as Governor, Democrat Garry Mauro, tried to create controversy about the bargain. Mauro's campaign manager, Billy Rogers, said that, "The windfall profit that Governor Bush will make off this sale has been subsidized by the taxpayers of Arlington as well as the taxpayers of the state, since the Ballpark in Arlington doesn't pay any property taxes."⁸⁶ The accusation did not hurt Bush. He won his reelection by a landslide, carrying more than 68% of the vote.

Again, the deal came just in time for Bush. Now he would have a comfortable economic situation from which to seek his new goal - the Presidency. Republican strategist Charlie Black agreed "that the financial security the team sale may provide could help the younger Bush's political aspirations."⁸⁷ As the *Houston Chronicle* summarized it, "It is a financial home run that could well give him the financial security to pursue presidential aspirations."⁸⁸

THE BASEBALL VOTER

The Ballpark's money was one contribution from baseball to the presidential campaign. Another was more direct – an explicit strategy to catch what Bush's advisor Mark McKinnon termed "the baseball voter."

At his office in Austin, Texas, surrounded by autographed photos of Bush and himself posing in cowboy hats, McKinnon explained to me the rationale for the "baseball strategy" that he applied as chief media advisor and director of advertising for Bush's 2000 and 2004 campaigns.

"When voters choose a President, they are voting not only on issues, but on attributes and character. And Governor Bush had a long history in baseball, he was a great lover of baseball," McKinnon says. "Many people love baseball so a lot of people would say 'hey, that means he is kind of a regular guy'. And in today's politics, in America especially, people want to see

⁸⁴ National Post, Canada, 12/6/1999, p. D4.

⁸⁵ National Post, Canada, 12/6/1999, p. D4.

⁸⁶ The Dallas Morning News, 1/8/1998, p. 1A.

⁸⁷ The Washington Times, 1/9/1998.

⁸⁸ The Houston Chronicle, 1/8/1998.

authenticity, they want to see someone who is in touch with the public and somebody they could have a beer with." McKinnon conclusion is unequivocal. "The fact that Bush liked baseball was a very big deal."

And the campaign was ready to use it as a hidden weapon to break the ice between Bush and the voters. "Lots of people, even if they disagree with his politics, can share the love for baseball so we could use the baseball card as something that everybody can relate to," McKinnon says.

The baseball card was a classic, with Bush's picture, the caption "GOP's best hope for 2000" and the description "Position: Governor of 2nd largest state". On the back, along with a baseball and two crossed bats, were the words: "2000. Home run". The card summarized Bush's gubernatorial record and political platform, much like a regular baseball card offering the statistics of a pitcher.

The baseball card was a success. "Oh, people looooved to talk about baseball, more than anything, really," McKinnon says with a big smile. "We used to hand out the baseball card and he signed hundreds and hundreds of them," particularly during the grassroots campaigns in Iowa and New Hampshire.

Was Bush fully aware of the strategy? "No, he never liked the idea of marketing; he just was who he was. He never said, 'I care about baseball and I want you guys to say that'," McKinnon states. "Of course, this was why the strategy was successful. It was not just some marketing trick; it was a part of who Bush really was."

The strategy paid off. Not only were the cards hugely popular; many people also came up to Bush on the campaign rally, with their own caps or balls to autograph, or just to chat a minute about baseball with the candidate.

Bush also used his Texas Rangers years as a way to avoid criticism for his lack of experience in a campaign against long-time Representative, Senator and Vice-President Al Gore.

In an interview with Time magazine, Bush cited his decision to fire manager Bobby Valentine as proof of his capacity to take tough decisions.⁸⁹ And every time he was asked to admit the

⁸⁹ Daily News, 11/8/1999, p. 8.

biggest mistake of his career, he had a smart response – "I signed off on that wonderful transaction: Sammy Sosa for Harold Baines."⁹⁰

Once and again, Bush referred to baseball to define his identity. He said that his favorite childhood memory was "little league baseball in Midland," and, asked about his childhood aspirations, answered, "I never dreamed about being President. When I was growing up, I wanted to be Willie Mays." Another of his repeated sound bites was to say that "baseball was a great training ground for leadership and government."

Bush's campaign website used the same strategy, with a page that compared running for President to playing in the World Series.

Recognizing the power of the baseball strategy, the Gore campaign counterattacked with the same weapons. They distributed buttons with a picture of a baseball and the words "Strike Bush Out" while Democrats repeatedly called him a Bush Leaguer, or a minor-leaguer trying to play a major-league game.⁹¹

During the campaign, Nolan Ryan was inducted into the Hall of Fame and decided to wear a Rangers cap at the ceremony. Candidate Bush traveled to join Ryan. Baseball columnist Jim Reeves was there. "Suddenly, George ran into me, just me and him in the hallway of the Hall of Fame, looking at the exhibits. He asked me, 'How do you think I am doing?' and I told him, 'If you are just yourself, you will do fine'."

He did it. Just months later, the former co-managing partner of the Texas Rangers was sworn in as the 43rd President of the United States.

BASEBALL DIPLOMACY

In 2001, the New York Yankees arrived at the White House to fulfill one of the duties of the World Series champions, that of meeting the President. But this time, it was different.

Relaxed, Bush welcomed the Yankees in the Rose Garden, making clear that he knew the names and records of many of the players. "Some players told Manager Joe Torre what a great time

⁹⁰ St. Petersburg Times, 8/1/2000, p. 10C.

⁹¹ The derogatory use of the term "Bush Leaguer" in order to depict Bush as amateur and incompetent survived the campaign and was used by critics during his presidency. In 2002, Pearl Jam released a song called "Bu\$hleaguer" - "A confidence man, but why so beleaguered? / He's not a leader, he's a Texas leaguer / Swinging for the fence, got lucky with a strike."

they had... Players recalled that the last time they went to the White House to celebrate a World Series Championship with President Clinton in the summer of 1999, they did a lot of waiting, their contact with Clinton felt scripted and they did not go through the Oval Office."⁹²

Of course, Bush took the players to the Oval Office, where he joked with owner George Steinbrenner. Reliever Mike Stanton came to his own conclusion after the meeting, "That was awesome."⁹³

Many times during his Presidency, Bush got positive headlines via baseball. In 2001, for example, the White House opened its backyard to a game of T-ball, played by children aged 5 to 8. Bush presided over the event.

He also used the power of the Presidency to return some baseball favors. In April, 2001, Tom Schieffer, the loyal soldier who took bullets for Bush in the Ballpark deal, was appointed as the new U.S. Ambassador to Australia, clearly designated as among the closest allies of the Bush administration.

The local press reacted with rage. "Insult as Bush sends his mate," was the headline in The Sunday Telegraph, along with a harsh commentary. "Australians have a right to feel insulted by the choice."⁹⁴ The Courier Mail used sarcasm in its headline ("Thanks buddy. Would you like Australia?") and described Schieffer as "a man with absolutely no diplomatic experience and next to no knowledge of Australia."⁹⁵

Schieffer served successfully in Australia and, later, as Ambassador to Japan. Bush appointed another of his Rangers friends, Mercer Reynolds III, as Ambassador to Switzerland. Reynolds was part of the first group of investors, along with Bill DeWitt, with a \$1 million stake. Craig Stapleton, who joined the group with a \$1.1 million investment, received a new job as Ambassador to the Czech Republic and, later, to France, one of the most complex diplomatic assignments during Bush's "War on Terror".

The President also proposed another former Ranger owner, Jeffrey Marcus, as Ambassador to Belgium. Marcus, a Dallas cable TV magnate, was part of the original 1989 owners' group, with

⁹² The New York Times, 5/5/2001, p. D6.

⁹³ The New York Times, 5/5/2001, p. D6.

⁹⁴ The Sunday Telegraph (Sydney, Australia), 5/13/2001, p. 92.

⁹⁵ Courier Mail (Queensland, Australia), 5/11/2001, p. 17.

a \$1 million investment. But, just four days after his Senate confirmation, Marcus resigned when his wife Nancy filed for divorce.

Bush extended his "baseball diplomacy" even further. He appointed George Argyros, former owner of the Seattle Mariners, as Ambassador to Spain. St. Louis Cardinals co-owner Stephen Brauer went to Belgium (unlike Marcus, he did travel and served for two years). None of Bush's baseball friends had any diplomatic experience.

CODA

Every U.S. President has created his own role after leaving the White House. Jimmy Carter is the skilful diplomat. George H. W. Bush is the wise former statesman. Bill Clinton is the energetic leader. Without the diplomatic and intellectual assets of his predecessors and without their international recognition, Bush is largely confined to Texas. But he "has perfected one role of his post-presidential life: baseball fan."⁹⁶

Bush attends the Texas Rangers games on a regular basis, seeing the action from his old seat near the dugout, next to his friend Nolan Ryan, the team's current president. Ryan is a ubiquitous presence at the Ballpark: his name and photos are everywhere, from the Nolan Ryan Expressway near the Ballpark to the Nolan Original Sausage (\$7) and the Nolan Hot Dog (\$6) that fans can purchase inside the stadium.

The park near the stadium is now officially called Richard Greene Linear Park, a tribute to the Mayor who campaigned untiringly to build the Ballpark. And Bush? Well, he does not have his own park or expressway. But the owners' box, the same one he never used, is now named after him – the George W. Bush Owners Suite.

A LOCAL HERO

George W. Bush is the U.S. politician who has been most successful at using a sports team as a springboard to political office. But he is not the only one. Meet Democrat Herb Kohl, U.S. Senator and owner of the NBA Milwaukee Bucks.

Born and raised in Wisconsin, Herb Kohl had one of the two required assets to launch a political career – money. As the former president of Kohl's, the familiar supermarket and

⁹⁶ The Washington Post, 10/25/2011, p. C2.

grocery store company, he had plenty of cash. But he lacked the second requirement – popularity. As with Bush, sports would give him a shot.

In 1985, Jim Fitzgerald wanted to sell the Milwaukee Bucks. Wisconsin sport fans were terrified. Milwaukee was a small market with the smallest stadium in the league (MECCA Arena, with only 11,052 seats). As the city refused to pay for a new arena, fans feared that the new owners would relocate the franchise out of Wisconsin.

Kohl was a lifelong basketball fan and part of the owners' group that brought NBA to Wisconsin in 1968, opening a new franchise. Now he saw his opportunity. He purchased the team for \$18 million and promised never to move it from Wisconsin. "It was a fair negotiation," Kohl said in 1985. "It's not extraordinarily high or low. It's healthy for a franchise in Middle America."⁹⁷ But, years later, Kohl presented the deal in a different light. "At the time I paid the most that anybody had ever paid for an NBA team," Kohl said in 1999. "I thought it was a stupid investment – way too much money in a small market for a basketball team."⁹⁸

It might have been bad business, but Kohl knew exactly what he was doing. He "became a local hero."⁹⁹ And, taking advantage of his new status, he prepared his first race for office, a U.S. Senate seat, in 1988. Kohl made several gaffes in the campaign (once he did not remember the name of the Secretary of Defense) but he won anyway, with 52.1% of the vote.

Obviously, basketball was a relevant part of his public profile. He visited schools and gave the students free tickets to Bucks games. He also made a high-impact gift: \$25 million to the University of Wisconsin-Madison to build a new sports arena, which was named Kohl Center.

Herb Kohl retired from Senate in 2013, after 24 years. He is still the owner and president of the Milwaukee Bucks.

A FIELD FOR HEROES

American politics are a field for heroes. Generals and decorated soldiers make good politician material and, if sports are a proxy for war, sports heroes also have the potential to transform themselves into triumphant politicians.

⁹⁷ The New York Times, 3/2/1985, p. 42.

⁹⁸ <http://www.alumni.hbs.edu/bulletin/1999/december/qanda.html>

⁹⁹ <http://www.alumni.hbs.edu/bulletin/1999/december/qanda.html>

As writer David Foster Wallace once pointed out, "Americans revere athletic excellence, competitive success, and it's more than lip service we pay; we vote with our wallets. We'll pay large sums to watch a truly great athlete; we'll reward him with celebrity and adulation and will even go so far as to buy products and services he endorses."¹⁰⁰

Americans are willing to "vote with our wallets." And with their actual votes, too. A sports star has many of the assets needed to start a political career: positive recognition, leadership skills and money.

"Being a famous athlete is being a well known person. People know your name, know your face, so they think they know you personally," political consultant Bill Miller says. "And that is exactly what a politician tries to do.... introduce himself to people, have a personal connection with them. An athlete already has it."

They are famous, and in a positive way. "Being known as a good guy is pretty easy for an athlete, he just needs to play, sign autographs and avoid scandals and people will love him," Bill Miller explains.

It is a good starting point but does not, of course, guarantee success. Bill Bradley and Jack Kemp are two sports celebrities who had especially successful political careers.

Bradley is one of the biggest stars in the New York Knicks history. He played 11 seasons (1967-1977) with the Knicks, won two NBA rings and was an NBA All-Star in 1972. The Knicks retired his #24 jersey and Bradley was inducted into the Hall of Fame.

He ended his NBA career in 1977 and started his political career immediately, announcing his candidacy for the U.S. Senate from New Jersey. He won as a Democrat and was reelected in 1984 and 1990. "His personal fame, celebrity supporters (Robert Redford, Paul Simon, John Belushi) and middle-of-the-road Democratic appeal"¹⁰¹ were the explanation for his victory, according to Newsweek.

¹⁰⁰ Esquire <http://www.esquire.com/features/sports/the-string-theory-0796>

¹⁰¹ Newsweek, 11/20/1978, p. 47.

In 1999, Bradley went for the major prize – the White House. Running in the Democratic primaries against Vice-President Al Gore, Bradley promised to replace "a broken political system" with "the values of the game."¹⁰²

Bradley enjoyed the support of many of his former colleagues and organized what the press described as "the biggest political fundraiser in history."¹⁰³ All but one of the League's 50 Greatest Players attended the event at Madison Square Garden, the scene of Bradley's glorious moments.

The event raised \$1.5 million but, even more importantly, captured press headlines and the attention of the entire country.

"What Bill's campaign is all about," said Julius Erving, the legendary Dr. J., "is bringing back the good old days." "Telling the truth to the American people is always the right thing," said former Boston Celtics star Bill Russell. "In these days of spin control, Bill Bradley is one of the most honest people I've ever met."¹⁰⁴ Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, Oscar Robertson, Earl Monroe and all the other former NBA stars were also there.

"It's remarkable," said Allan Lichtman, history professor at Washington's American University. "He is the man who runs to the left and gets his support from millionaires, limousine liberals and sport fans. Take the celebrity out of Bill Bradley and dock him 10 points. [Sports are] a necessary part of Mr. Bradley."¹⁰⁵

Pollsters theorized about a "reverse gender gap", with Bradley polling better among men than women, despite his political position as a liberal insurgent to the left of Vice-President Al Gore.

"There's not much glue that holds this society together," said American Enterprise Institute scholar Karlyn Bowman. "But the one national conversation we seem to have is about sports."¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² Daily News, 11/12/1999, p. 36.

¹⁰³ The Independent (London), 11/15/1999, p. 13.

¹⁰⁴ The Washington Post, 11/14/1999, p. A1.

¹⁰⁵ The Ottawa Citizen, 11/15/1999, p. A7.

¹⁰⁶ The Ottawa Citizen, 11/15/1999, p. A7.

Even the usually apolitical Michael Jordan endorsed Bradley as did former Chicago Bulls coach Phil Jackson. But not even the support of the entire NBA was sufficient. Bradley was unable to win any presidential primary and withdrew in March, 2000.

Jack Kemp was Bill Bradley's equivalent on the right. Like Bradley, he had built a successful political career on the basis of recognition as a sports hero. Like Bradley, Kemp was more obstinate than gifted as a sportsman, overcoming many obstacles. He was cut from five professional teams before finally finding glory as the Buffalo Bills quarterback in the sixties.

During his career as a professional footballer, Kemp volunteered for Barry Goldwater's 1964 presidential campaign. With two years left on his contract with the Bills, Kemp ran for U.S. Congress from a Buffalo suburban district. He won and was reelected eight times. In 1988, he ran in the Republican presidential primaries and, in 1996, was the running mate for Bob Dole's unsuccessful presidential bid.

Many former stars are now following in the footsteps of Bradley and Kemp as shown in the table below. The relationship between politics and sports is in good shape.

SPORTS STARS WHO RUN FOR OFFICE

Sportsman	League / Sport	Party	
Bill Bradley	NBA	D	Senator, New Jersey (1979-1997) Presidential candidate (2000, lost primary)
Shawn Bradley	NBA	R	House candidate, Utah, defeated (2010)
Peter Boulware	NFL	R	House candidate, Florida, defeated (2008)
Jason Buck	NFL	R	House Representative, Utah, candidate in 2012 (defeated)
Jim Bunning	MLB	R	House Representative, Kentucky (1987-1999) Senator, Kentucky (1999-2011)
Clint Didier	NFL	R	Senate candidate, Washington, defeated in primary (2010)
Chris Dudley	NBA	R	Governor, Oregon, defeated (2010)
Jimmy Farris	NFL	D	House Representative, Idaho, candidate in 2012 (defeated)
Keith Fimian	NFL	R	House Representative, Virginia, defeated in 2008 and 2010
Craig James	NFL	R	Senator, Texas, candidate in 2012 (defeated in primary)
Kevin Johnson	NBA	D	Mayor of Sacramento, California (2008-)
Jack Kemp	NFL	R	House Representative, New York (1971-1989) Presidential candidate, defeated in primary (1988) Vice-Presidential candidate, defeated in primary (1996)
Steve Largent	NFL	R	House Representative, Oklahoma (1995-2003)
Bob Mathias	Decathlon	R	House Representative, California (1967-1975)
Wilmer Mizell	Baseball	R	House Representative, North Carolina (1969-1975)
Ben Nighthorse Campbell	Judo	R/D	House Representative, Colorado (1987-1993) Senator, Colorado (1993-2005)
Tom Osborne	NFL	R	House Representative, Nebraska (2001-2007)
Jay Riemersma	NFL	R	House candidate, Michigan, defeated (2008)
Jon Runyan	NFL	R	House Representative, New Jersey (2011-)
Jim Ryun	Athlete	R	House Representative, Kansas (1997-2007)
Heath Shuler	NFL	D	House Representative, North Carolina (2007-)
Mo Udall	NBA	D	House Representative, Arizona (1961-1991)
Jesse Ventura	WWF	I	Governor, Minnesota (1999-2003)
J.C. Watts	CFL ¹⁰⁷	R	House Representative, Oklahoma (1995-2003)

¹⁰⁷ Canadian Football League.

CHAPTER 3

WAR GAMES: SELLING PATRIOTISM THROUGH SPORTS

It was the seventh-inning stretch at the Yankee Stadium and Bradford had to pee.

Not a bad timing at all. The seventh-inning stretch bears its name precisely because, for decades, it has been the moment for a pause – to stretch, to go for a beer and a hot dog... or to the restrooms.

So, Bradford Campeau-Laurion, a 29-year-old man, walked down the aisle at the exact moment at which the patriotic anthem God Bless America started to play in the stadium. Then, as he wrote in a statement, “I was stopped by a police officer. He informed me that I had to wait until the song was over. I responded that I had to use the restroom and that I did not care about God Bless America. As soon as the latter came out of my mouth, my right arm was twisted violently behind my back and I was informed that I was being escorted out of the stadium. A second officer then joined in and twisted my left arm, also in an excessively forceful manner, behind my back. I was escorted in this painful manner down the entire length of the stadium.”

“When we reached the exit of the stadium,” Bradford continued, “they confiscated my ticket and the first officer shoved me through the turnstiles, saying 'Get the hell out of my country if you don't like it'.”¹⁰⁸

Welcome to compulsory patriotism, Yankees style.

Baseball is a sport of traditions. For decades, Take me out to the Ball Game was the song heard during the seventh-inning stretch. But, after the 9/11 attacks, John Dever, an executive of the San Diego Padres, suggested that a patriotic anthem would be more appropriate. “It was one idea for one night,”¹⁰⁹ Dever said. But Commissioner Bud Selig and the team owners liked it and Major League Baseball (MLB) decided to make it mandatory for the rest of the season.

In 2002, MLB determined that the performance of God Bless America would remain mandatory only on Sundays and some other special dates. But, while President Bush's administration was

¹⁰⁸ <http://deadspin.com/5042588/so-yankee-stadium-takes-this-no-moving-during-god-bless-america+thing-rather-seriously>

¹⁰⁹ http://mlb.mlb.com/news/article.jsp?ymd=20110910&content_id=24486076&vkey=09112011

convincing the American public to support the looming Iraq War, some teams decided to keep the patriotic anthem as part of everyday shows when action returned to ballparks for a new season.

Some activists welcomed the new patriotic seventh-inning. Bryan Fischer, director of Issues Analysis at the conservative group The American Family Association, even thanked baseball for the lack of new attacks against the United States.

“By God’s blessing, we have not been hit by a Muslim attack since 9/11,” Fischer said in 2011. “I suggest that, in part, we have Major League Baseball to thank. God Bless America is not just a song, it is a prayer. So for one brief, shining moment every night, Major League Baseball has converted our stadiums into cathedrals in which tens of thousands of ordinary Americans lift their hearts and voices as one and ask God to watch over and protect the United States. Ladies and gentleman, I think that those prayers have been heard and they have been answered,” Fischer said.¹¹⁰

The patriotic prayer caused joy in an organization seen by some as anti-Muslim and homophobic. But, for many baseball fans, the seventh-inning stretch was still just that – a pause to stretch. To impose discipline, at least nine teams (the Astros, Athletics, Marlins, Padres, Phillies, Rangers, Red Sox, Twins and Yankees)¹¹¹ instructed ushers to prevent fans from moving while the song was being played.

George Steinbrenner, the legendary owner of the New York Yankees, went even further. He instructed Lonn A. Trost, the team’s chief operating officer, to design a complex system to restrain movement during the song. The Yankees hired off-duty uniformed NYPD officers to keep an eye on the public while stadium security personnel physically blocked the aisles with chains during the performance of both God Bless America and the national anthem.

Steinbrenner’s spokesman, Howard J. Rubenstein, explained that the no-movement policy was an expression of patriotism. “Mr. Steinbrenner wanted to remind the fans about how important it is to honor our nation, our service members, those that died on September 11 and those fighting for our nation,”¹¹² Rubenstein said.

¹¹⁰ Talking Points Memo, 10/8/2011.

¹¹¹ http://www.nytimes.com/2007/05/10/sports/baseball/10stadium.html?_r=2&ref=sports&oref=slogin&oref=slogin

¹¹² http://www.nytimes.com/2007/05/10/sports/baseball/10stadium.html?_r=2&ref=sports&oref=slogin&oref=slogin

Given his political views and his obsession with order and control, it is not surprising that Steinbrenner implemented the compulsory patriotic policy. A Republican, Steinbrenner was a close ally and friend of Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, whose firm, Giuliani Security and Safety, was hired by Steinbrenner as a security consultant. “The Boss” also contributed \$4,600 to Giuliani's failed 2008 presidential campaign.

As owner of the Yankees, Steinbrenner imposed a military-style grooming code. Hair below the collar and facial hair other than mustaches were prohibited for all players, coaches and executives. In 1991, he ordered player Dan Mattingly benched because of his hair style.

However, in 2008, after his painful ejection from the stadium, Bradford Campeau-Laurion fought back. The New York Civil Liberties Union sued the Yankees and the NYPD on his behalf. The City had to pay \$10,000 to the fan and the patriotism versus pee argument ended in a draw – the Yankees still play God Bless America during the seventh-inning stretch but they agreed to a judicial settlement ensuring they would abandon the chains policy and stop restricting spectators' movements. "This settlement ensures that the new Yankee Stadium will be a place for baseball, not compelled patriotism," NYCLU executive director Donna Lieberman said.

But seven years before the settlement, it was Yankee Stadium that had been the site of one of the greatest displays of patriotism ever seen on an American sports field, one that eventually become the model for sports-fueled nationalism.

AN OVERWHELMING CLOSURE

“U-S-A, U-S-A!” The cheers were deafening. As President George W. Bush thanked the crowd at Yankee Stadium, waving his right hand, the cheering did not stop: “U-S-A, U-S-A!”

It was an extremely emotional moment. Seven weeks after the 9/11 attacks, President George W. Bush –dressed in a FDNY jacket –threw the ceremonial first pitch of the World Series game between the Yankees and the Arizona Diamondbacks.

Scott Gutterson, one of the fans attending the game, remembers that, “The crowd just erupted in shouts of 'U-S-A, U-S-A!' There is nothing similar that I have ever experienced in a ballpark. It was overwhelming, just overwhelming.”¹¹³

The experience was also overwhelming for Bush. After leaving office, the former President recalled that, “The adrenaline was coursing through my veins and the ball felt like a shot put (...) The response was overwhelming. It was the most nervous I had ever been. It was the most nervous moment of my entire presidency, it turns out.”¹¹⁴

Mark Grace of the Arizona Diamondbacks remembers the moment. “President Bush standing out there like a brick wall, I am not afraid of terrorists, I will stand here and give you thumbs up and I am going to throw a strike.” And he did it, no matter that he was wearing a bullet-proof jacket while a secret service agent, dressed as an umpire, watched him at a close distance.

Author David Fisher says, “I did not vote for him but, at this point, my personal feelings about him as a politician are gone. I watch him and he was my representative. I had never felt this way before.” Even President Obama hailed Bush's performance that day. “Right down the middle. And huge credits for that. I give that guy a lot of props [proper respect] for that one.”¹¹⁵

As MLB proudly describes it on its website, “From the American flags on all the uniforms to chants of “USA! USA! USA!” in the stands to “God Bless America” supplanting “Take Me Out to the Ballgame” in the seventh-inning stretch to the Mets and Yankees wearing FDNY and NYPD hats to President George W. Bush tossing out the ceremonial first pitch before Game 3 of the World Series (a perfect strike, no less), the ballpark became a stage on which America displayed its resilience.”¹¹⁶

THE PITCH

Three years after the perfect strike, the media team of George W. Bush's reelection campaign had a task – to find the right image for the 2004 GOP Convention biopic, the image that would condense the best of Bush's life and presidency.

¹¹³ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=evb489N11Q4>

¹¹⁴ Beyond 9/11: Portraits of Resilience.

¹¹⁵ http://www.grantland.com/blog/the-triangle/post/_/id/18690/b-s-report-transcript-barack-obama

¹¹⁶ http://mlb.mlb.com/news/article.jsp?ymd=20110904&content_id=24200512&vkey=09112011

There was an obvious choice, that of Bush visiting Ground Zero and addressing the crew of firefighters and policemen with a bullhorn. But Bush's media team decided on something different. They decided that the key image would be Bush throwing the pitch at Yankee Stadium. The convention film was named "The Pitch."

"The whole construct of that film is based on the idea that the President, right after 9/11, went to the Yankee Stadium and threw the first pitch," recalls Mark McKinnon, the man behind Bush's media strategy. "It was a big deal, not only for the game, but for the country, and the whole video is about him going back to Yankee Stadium to throw that pitch."

"The seminal idea was that this pitch represented two things that Americans love: baseball and a comeback," McKinnon says. "And the message of him going out and throwing that pitch after 9/11 was 'we are back', America is back, you can't keep us down." He was courageous. He sent a message to America and the world. And baseball is the perfect way to do it."

The film ended with the voice of Fred Thompson, saying, "What he did that night... helped us come back. That's the story of this presidency... You keep pitching, no matter what. You keep pitching. No matter what. You go to the game. You go to the mound. You find the plate. And you throw!"

This highly emotional moment illustrates the enormous usefulness of sports in encouraging nationalistic, militaristic feelings during wartime. Weeks later, the national pastime would be followed by an unofficial national holiday –the Super Bowl.

SUPER BOWL CHAUVINISM

The march to Baghdad started five days before the 2002 Super Bowl. During his State of the Union Address, President Bush for the first time used the term "axis of evil" to portray the tyrannical governments of North Korea, Iran and Iraq. Bush described the latter as a regime that "continues to flaunt its hostility toward America and to support terror."

Throughout the following days, the Bush Administration continued to build the case for war. Bush presented himself in a military hangar in Florida. Wearing a brown bomber jacket, emblazoned with an American flag over his heart, and surrounded by the cheers of hundreds of members of the Air Force, the President repeated his "axis of evil" statement and said that,

"The United States of America will not permit the world's most dangerous regimes to threaten us with the world's most destructive weapons."¹¹⁷

This was the rhetoric on the road to Super Bowl XXXVI. And while the government inflamed the bellicose feelings of the American public, football did exactly the same.

Rupert Murdoch's Fox Network was responsible for broadcasting the Super Bowl. After 9/11, Fox Sports chairman David Hill decided to change his plans for the three-hour pre-game show to a patriotic theme: Hope, Heroes and Homeland.

On the afternoon of January 29, the same day of the State of the Union Address, NFL Commissioner Paul Tagliabue arrived in New Orleans and reviewed the pre-game TV pieces with Hill, Fox Sports president Ed Goren and executive producer Scott Ackerson. Understanding the new political environment, they decided to change the schedule, moving the "patriotic" elements one hour closer to the game. "Paul thought the pieces were so powerful they should be moved to later in the show for a larger audience," Fox Sports chairman said. "It's worth the effort," Hill said. "The audience will be about 30 million higher an hour later."¹¹⁸

The Super Bowl XXXVI mixed different aspects of patriotism. International goodwill was there, with Irish rock band U2 commemorating the victims of 9/11 and frontman Bono opening his black leather jacket to reveal a stars-and-stripes lining. Britain's Paul McCartney was also part of the show, performing an ad-hoc song, Freedom.

The "military against terrorism" theme was also present. Mariah Carey sang the Star-Spangled Banner, accompanied by a color guard of five survivors of the Al-Qaeda attack against the USS Cole, while NYPD and FDNY members raised an American flag.

The Fox show also included American history. In a video segment, NFL players read excerpts from the Declaration of Independence and former Presidents Gerald Ford, Jimmy Carter, George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton (Ronald Reagan was replaced by his wife Nancy) recited speeches by Abraham Lincoln.

The most spectacular participation was reserved for Bush the Elder. The White House weighed the possibility of a Presidential presence at the Super Bowl but finally preferred a more subtle

¹¹⁷ <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1001775,00.html>

¹¹⁸ USA Today, Feb. 1, 2002, 2C.

message. George H. W. Bush became the first President, past or present, to participate in a Super Bowl coin toss. He was not only the father of the current President. He was also a symbol of the battle against Saddam Hussein. He was the man who won the Gulf War and was the target of an assassination plot by Saddam's regime. Not a bad choice to represent the American fight against the "axis of evil".

During the game, everything went smoothly. After a surprising victory, the name of the winner of the Vince Lombardi Trophy could not have been more appropriate –the Patriots.

AFTER 2002: THE NEW PATRIOTIC NFL

The Super Bowl XXXVI ratified an informal rule. If America is at war, football will fight, too. In the Super Bowl I, in 1967, the Star-Spangled Banner was the only patriotic moment. But, by 1968, coinciding with growing opposition to the Vietnam War, the Super Bowl included a new tradition –Air Force flyovers, a win-win deal for the show and for the cause of promoting war.

An expensive deal, too. In fuel alone, every flyover costs \$109,000. Every year, the Air Force executes 600 flyovers, 275 of them at sporting events. Almost any relevant sports competition has its own flyover as a part of the show, paid for by taxpayers. Commander Ben Hewlett justified the cost, saying, "There is a desire for it. There is a want there. There is a public interest. There's a lot of Americans that want to look up and say: 'We are super proud of our Marines, our sailors out there doing the job every day'."¹¹⁹

Other Vietnam-era traditions, however, were short-lived. The Pledge of Allegiance was performed only in 1969, 1970 and 1973. The Marine Corps Silent Drill Platoon starred at the half-time show in 1972. In 1972, the Air Force Academy Chorale performed the national anthem, a duty generally assigned to the pop star of the day.

Post-Vietnam Super Bowls were politically neutral. In 2000, for example, the theme was Tapestry of Nations, inspired by the Epcot parade in Disneyworld, while the pre-game show was a joyful tribute to The Great American Music of the XX Century.

But the War on Terror changed everything. In 2003, eight weeks before the invasion of Iraq, Celine Dion performed God Bless America for the first (and, until 2012, only) time in Super Bowl's history.

¹¹⁹ <http://www.khou.com/news/Super-Bowl-flyover-costs-taxpayers-450000-115109249.html>

In 2005, the situation in Iraq was at its lowest point for the United States. During the months leading up to the Super Bowl, the news was dominated by stories about the abuses at Abu Ghraib and the bloody Second Battle of Fallujah. And Fox, as in 2002, was again in charge of broadcasting.

Alicia Keys sang America the Beautiful and the combined choirs of the U.S. Military Academy, the U.S. Naval Academy, the U.S. Air Force Academy and the U.S. Coast Guard Academy sang the national anthem, accompanied by the U.S. Army Herald Trumpets. This was the first time in 32 years that all four service academies sang together (the previous time was during the second inauguration of President Nixon in 1973).

In the following years, the patriotic temperature in the Super Bowl fell a little. True, America the Beautiful is now an annual tradition and, in 2009, General David Petraeus performed the coin toss. But, in 2012, Madonna's half-time show ended with the display of two words in the Lucas Oil Stadium: "World Peace".

Even so, the NFL learned something about patriotism: it is good business. "The NFL has had a longstanding tradition of supporting the military," NFL spokesman Brian McCarthy told the American Forces Press Service. "We have a great appreciation for what the military does and feel honored to include the military in the Super Bowl."¹²⁰

Prior to the 2009 Super Bowl, McCarthy went even further, saying that the NFL "feels that the 70,000 fans attending the Super Bowl this year should be cheering louder for the military than the two teams playing. It is, indeed, very important for the NFL to look for every opportunity to support the troops."¹²¹

The NFL surge is one of the most successful marketing stories in America and Mark Waller, NFL chief marketing officer, offers his explanation. "We tap into that community feeling that quite honestly has been lost in many respects," he says. "I do think we are meaningful and unifying.... Nothing unites the country like Super Bowl day."¹²²

¹²⁰ http://www.army.mil/article/16243/Petraeus_set_to_perform_coin_toss_for_Super_Bowl_XLIII/

¹²¹ American Forces Press Service, 1/29/2009.

¹²² <http://articles.latimes.com/2011/feb/04/entertainment/la-et-nfl-marketing-20110204>

The TV networks, key NFL partners, feel the same way. NBC's Sunday night pre-game show is called Football Night in America and the theme song features the lyrics "NFL players bleed red, white and blue".

"We're all very much interested in wrapping ourselves up in patriotic fervor," NBC Sports Group Chairman Dick Ebersol said. "I don't think it is misplaced, it is truly an American game."¹²³

Is football's chauvinism about politics? Is it about patriotism? Is it just good business? Who cares. Everybody (the government, the military, the NFL, the networks) is a winner in this game.

LOUIS AND ALI

"Pvt. Joe Louis says, 'We're going to do our part... and we'll win because we're on God's side'." This World War II recruiting poster was a milestone: the boxing hero who called his fellow citizens to arms was a black man, part of a still segregated Army.

Private Joe Louis broke down the barriers of racial segregation. In 1938, his victory over German contender Max Schmeling was interpreted as a victory for democracy against Nazism, a rare occasion on which white America cheered an African-American in a confrontation with a Caucasian. On the eve of World War II, nationalism was more relevant than racism.

After Pearl Harbor, Louis volunteered to enlist in the Army and was assigned to a segregated unit based in Kansas. He was placed in the Special Services Division and traveled the country on celebrity tours, encouraging African-Americans to volunteer, despite racial segregation in the Army. "Lots of things are wrong with America but Hitler ain't going to fix them,"¹²⁴ was Louis's explanation.

Private Louis's actions later became a target of criticism. Muhammad Ali said that, "Joe Louis is making himself an Uncle Tom for white people."¹²⁵ Louis's son, Joe Louis Jr., defended him.

¹²³ <http://articles.latimes.com/2011/feb/04/entertainment/la-et-nfl-marketing-20110204/2>

¹²⁴ New York Times, 4/22/1997, <http://www.nytimes.com/1997/04/22/sports/joe-louis-was-there-earlier.html>

¹²⁵ http://unclebarky.com/reviews_files/14d8e25a43106399c54ed166114ef7cd-353.html

"What my father did was enable white America to think of him as an American, not as a black. By winning, he became white America's first black hero."¹²⁶

The biggest irony is that the same government that Louis helped also pursued him after the war. The IRS demanded taxes and interests, including those of his wartime charity fights. Louis was forced to make a comeback to boxing and to become a professional wrestler. He even took a job welcoming tourists to Caesars Palace in Las Vegas in order to pay his debts. Uncle Sam offered no clemency with the man Ali mocked as "Uncle Tom".

"Decency. Fair play. A nice person. A helluva professional," African-American Congressman Charles Rangel said once. "And a guy that got screwed by the United States of America. Hey, that's Joe Louis."¹²⁷

If Private Joe Louis was the symbol of the role of sports in World War II, draft dodger Muhammad Ali was the opposite kind of icon in the Vietnam War. Louis criticized Ali's black supremacy views and his membership of the Nation of Islam, saying that, "I've always believed that every man is my brother. [Cassius] Clay will earn the public's hatred because of his connections with the Black Muslims."¹²⁸ Louis declined to call Ali by his new Muslim name.

Ali refused to join the Army propaganda effort and lost his boxing license and his world title. His famous 1967 sentence, "I ain't got no quarrel with them Viet Cong... No Viet Cong ever called me nigger" transformed him into a political force.

The effort to use Ali backfired and provided the anti-Vietnam activists with a social idol for opposing the war, in the same way that Louis was instrumental to patriotic efforts in World War II.

Political consultant Bill Miller says that, "People really trust in sport stars and in what they say. The logic is I know him, I can trust him, I can trust what he is saying." Sport stars are valuable resources to any public campaign. It does not matter if the goal is to endorse a candidate, sell a shampoo... or promote a war.

¹²⁶ ESPN, <http://espn.go.com/sportscentury/features/00016109.html>

¹²⁷ http://unclebarky.com/reviews_files/14d8e25a43106399c54ed166114ef7cd-353.html

¹²⁸ The Observer, 11/2/1983, <http://observer.guardian.co.uk/osm/story/0,,1072751,00.html>

Elect a President, run a campaign, promote a war. When sports plays on your side, all these tasks are easier. "Politics and sports don't mix" is a common saying but the evidence suggests otherwise. President John F. Kennedy put it well. "Politics is like football; if you see daylight, go through the hole." Many politicians have followed that advice. And some of them have scored a touchdown.

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POSTSCRIPT

As a sports fan and political journalist, the complex interaction of sports and politics has always intrigued me. In 2001, I published my first book about this issue in Chile, my home country. It was called *Goles y Autogoles* (Goals and Own Goals or, to translate it loosely, from soccer to a more American sport, baseball, "Strikes and Balls"), meaning that the political use of sports is a powerful instrument, but can sometimes backfire.

When I arrived to the United States, I was surprised by the lack of in-depth investigation of the issue. So I decided to do it myself. My initial thesis was that sports are used by the political powers in any country, and that the United States is no exception.

Of course, soccer was not the place where I would find anything interesting. Logically, politicians approach the most popular sports so I had to learn more about football, baseball, basketball, hockey and NASCAR.

I went to Florida and spent a weekend with NASCAR fans to understand the deep roots of the Southern love for stock car racing. I went to Texas to investigate the story of George W. Bush in baseball and determine the influence of the Texas Rangers in his political career. I worked in permanent contact with political consultants and campaign advisers who use sport as a source of information about voters.

My topic was wide and the most difficult decisions were about the need to leave out many stories and focus on the most powerful ones. Some stories, like NASCAR Nation and the Texas Rangers, were relevant from the beginning of my work. Others, like the love story between Obama and the NBA or the patriotic Super Bowl, appeared later in my investigation.

Google, Lexis Nexis and the Columbia Library (the iPoll database, especially) were invaluable sources of information. But, as always, nothing replaces a good conversation. Looking for background, I talked to many journalists, columnists and scholars with sports knowledge and political instinct, and they gave me many hints that led to relevant information. Consultants, columnists, political advisors, experts and sport fans were willing to talk candidly about their roles in the stories.

I have a special debt with my adviser, Professor Thomas Edsall. His knowledge and political instincts were an invaluable help in my work.

Sports are an influential force in today's society. Understanding them is more relevant than ever before in order to understand power in America. I hope that this work helps in this understanding.