

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

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THE VOLATILITY OF the margin between winning and losing became very clear to me at a tender age, when I won a pink stuffed poodle at the Marshfield Fair, and my sister didn't. Naturally, she felt entitled to a poodle too. That I had won mine on my first dime just added insult to injury. My father did what any father would do under such trying circumstances. He bought up the entire board. In so doing, however, he only guaranteed that lightning would strike once. To win a stuffed dog, which was a top-shelf prize, you had to get lightning to strike twice. Once you had been lucky enough to get your number to come up on the board, you also had to be lucky enough to pick a plastic duck coded for a top-shelf prize out of the bobbing pool of plastic ducks. Despite her best efforts, my sister kept picking bottom-shelf ducks. At a certain point, her abiding belief in herself as a winner broke down, and she threw herself sobbing to the ground. Her four-year-old histrionics were not good for business, and the carnie, who had most vociferously refused the first few times my father had begged to be allowed to buy a poodle outright, finally agreed to sell my father a green stuffed poodle for ten times what it was worth.

Winners hold "infinity in an hour," to quote William Blake, as numerous athletes proved recently in the 2012 Summer Olympics. These included the "Fab Five" American gymnasts (Jordyn Wieber, Aly Raisman, Gabby Douglas, Kyla Ross, and McKayla Maroney), who clinched the Olympic team title with their phenomenal energy, elasticity and grace. They also encompassed Michael Phelps, who, despite placing 4th to Ryan Lochte's 1st in the 400-meter individual medley, did go on to amass enough medals to surpass Larissa Latynina as the most decorated Olympian of all time.

This year also brought us a Presidential election with a distinct winner, Barack Obama, and a distinct loser, Mitt Romney, although, for the first time in American history, each of the two major candidates won more than 60 million popular votes. The real margin of victory lay in Obama's surplus of 126 electoral votes. With the fiscal cliff looming over him, President Obama may not feel like much of a winner, however. With Congress at a stalemate, there are no winners and no losers, but no demonstrated progress either.

Sometimes, as with weathering Hurricane Sandy in October, no earnest effort can improve win/loss ratios. The destruction is cataclysmic. The losers are prodigious. In the face of such ravages, Monday morning quarterbacking about whether we could have prevented Sandy if we had addressed issues of global warming more assiduously is beyond the point. Ultimately, there is nothing to do but agree with Ecclesiastes that there is a time for every event under heaven, including the ripping up of 50 feet of the Atlantic City Boardwalk; the burning up of more than 100 homes in Breezy Point, Queens; the uprooting of trees and arcing of wires and flooding of basements in New York and New Jersey that killed so many.

Winning and losing continue, too, to be pertinent economic themes beyond the fallout from Hurricane Sandy. With one out of every five children in the United States living below the poverty level, the question of who the real losers are in our economy is an especially poignant one. Many citizens now put getting a job in the same category as winning the lottery. My family once took in an exhibit at the Museum of Science in Boston set up to illustrate the infinitesimally small probability that any one person buying one ticket would win the lottery. It took my kids twenty minutes of spinning the drum before they achieved a sighting of the one black bead among millions, if not billions, of white ones. And in those days, both kids had eagle eyes.

Freshman basketball player Isaiah Canaan must have felt akin to a lottery winner in MSU's contest against Southeast Missouri State on February 16, 2010. He didn't have to be a math wizard to know that after having had the ball knocked away from him at the top of the key with 7 seconds left on the clock *and* having had to race to half court and dive on the ball to get it back, he didn't have time to stand up if he wanted to score. Thus he fired off a shot on his knees from midcourt. It was not purely a desperation shot. Its success or failure was also informed by skill, by conditioning and by basketball intelligence. We felt all the more blessed when the shot did make because it defied all odds. The ball's swooshing in was like snow falling on a parched and desiccated place where snow had rarely, if ever, fallen before. Suddenly, we were like little kids, sticking out our tongues and opening our arms to the sky in strange joy.

In 2012-2013, MSU basketball fans were possessed by that strange joy all season. *You win some, you lose some* is the common wisdom, but the Racers *didn't* lose. In late November, they prevailed against Alaska-Anchorage, San Francisco and Southern Mississippi in the Great Alaska Shootout. In early December, they beat Dayton and Memphis, two formidable teams outside the Ohio Valley Conference. In late December, when they began playing their OVC schedule, they *kept* winning against teams like Eastern Illinois, Eastern Kentucky and Austin Peay. Suddenly, whenever Racer fans tuned in to ESPN, they heard Murray State being touted as one of the few remaining undefeated teams in Division One, and indeed, after MSU secured a victory against SIU-Edwardsville on January 21 and Syracuse lost to Notre Dame, the Racers emerged as the final undefeated Division One team in the nation.

This issue is intended to give tribute to the true grit of Steve Prohm and his Racers, including Ivan Aska, Donte Poole, Jewuan Long, Isaiah Canaan, Ed Daniel, Latreze Mushatt, Staci Wilson, Brandon Garrett and numerous others (some of whose images are featured in the following pages). After 23 wins, the Racers did eventually face a loss (to Tennessee State on February 9), but they didn't lose again until the third round of the NCAA tournament against Marquette.

How will we ever solve the world's most intractable problems, which seem to grow more intractable by the minute, and even more so since the economic downturn began? The Racer Men's Basketball Team has taught us to trust in the perversity of hope. Last year, Racer fans learned just how much of an investment hope is. It's not simply about applauding the team. Nor is it just about buying the tickets to home games. It's about going on the road. It's about watching every moment of every game religiously, no matter what else you could or should be doing, and then racing home to hear the commentary on the game on *Heartland News* and the basketball standings on ESPN. It's about researching more stats the next day. It's about sending Racer T-shirts to your elementary-school nephews in New England and emailing back and forth with them for weeks about Racer stats. In short, hope is a little scary in its voraciousness. Still, it would do us all good, given the gravity of the world's current problems, to invest more significantly in hope than in wishful thinking.

New Madrid's winning team for this issue includes MFA interns Zac Cunningham, Mick Kennedy, Jessi Randall, and Jayne Moore Waldrop, along with MFA veterans Heather Foster, Roger Stanley and Siarra C. Turner. Thanks especially to Jacque E. Day, who made incalculable contributions to the development and execution of our plan for the issue, and to Nita King, who helped to keep us all on task in any number of important ways.