

Double Fault

at

Roland Garros

Home of the French Open



A Novel by Jim Plautz

Basque Country



Copyright

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Double Fault

Fact or Fiction

A work of fiction, although some characters and themes are drawn from personal experience and exhaustive research.

There is a French Open tennis tournament played at Roland Garros Stadium every year in May; it is the 2nd leg of the tennis Grand Slam;

The Basque people and the ETA are real, although the characters and events portrayed in this novel are fictional;

Bouygues, Hunt and Clark are reputable construction companies, but the project to rebuild Roland Garros is fictional;

Saddlebrook Tennis Center is an excellent tennis and golf resort, but the people and events portrayed in this novel are fictional;

The four tennis players portrayed in this novel; Pete, Ambre, Lisa and Carlos are fictional; Pete is not my son, Carlos is not Nadal;

The book is narrated in the first person, so I guess I am Jim Simpson, with a couple exceptions; I don't own a construction company & I'm not rich.

Readers have described this book as:

A love story

A book about tennis

A book about revenge

A book about the French Open, the second leg of tennis'
"Grand Slam"

A book about Roland Garros Stadium, site of the French Open

A book about the development of junior tennis players into pros

A book about large construction projects

A book about international terrorism

A book about the Basque fight for a separate homeland

I would describe Double Fault at Roland Garros as "all of the above"

DOUBLE FAULT

Themes

TENNIS THEME: I try to explain tennis terms and strategies in a way that non-players can also enjoy this book, but if you don't play tennis, you are welcome to skim these parts. Tennis buffs might want to read these sections and skim the rest (not recommended).

CONSTRUCTION THEME: The construction projects; Mexico City, Raymond James Stadium, Saddlebrook, Sports and Field and finally Roland Garros, are an integral part of the plot, but the details are not. Skim the details unless you are into PERT Charts and GANTT Charts.

BASQUE THEME: The Basque heritage is fascinating, but some of you won't care that ETA (Euskadi Ta Askatasuna) means "Basque Fatherland and Liberty," the Basque national language is Euskara or Txikiteo is the Basque word for pub crawl. Skim the history lessons and concentrate on the plot.

TERRORIST THEME: There has to be a good guy, or in this case a girl, Chris Lewis. The CIA works with the French Police to combat terrorism and protect the Simpson family. Discussions about Semtex and C-4 explosives or cell phone detonation devices can be skimmed.

Double Fault

Characters

Pete Simpson is a promising junior tennis player from Tampa, Florida, on track to earn a tennis scholarship to a major college. Pete's game and expectations soar when **Ambre**, the beautiful French tennis sensation begins training at the Saddlebrook Tennis Academy. **Carlos Cordero**, the world's #1 ranked junior tennis player steals Ambre away from Pete, but not before Ambre and Pete's younger sister **Lisa** become bitter enemies. Lisa channels her anger into tennis and vows retribution. The paths of these teenagers are destined to cross at Roland Garros Stadium, home of the French Open.

Jim Simpson, father of Pete and Lisa and husband to **Mary**, is a successful businessman with a rapidly expanding international construction company. Jim hires **Marco Noah** away from the French construction firm, Bouygues, to head up Simpson Construction. Successful projects in Mexico City and Tampa land Simpson a three billion dollar project to repair Roland Garros after it is severely damaged by terrorists. The huge project is on a tight timeframe and requires a joint venture with industry giants Bouygues, Hunt Construction and Clark Engineering. Jim's best friend and CFO, **Ken Reed** asks **Sven Johansen** for financing. It is a race against time to complete the new, domed stadium, in time for next year's French Open tennis tournament.

Agbu Galan, Carlos' boyhood friend, becomes leader of the New ETA, the terrorist arm of the Basque Nationalist movement. Haunted by the death of his older brother **Anton**, who is shot by Jim Simpson during an attempted kidnapping in Mexico, Agbu swears revenge. Uncle **Enrique** and boyhood friends **Rico**, **Stefano** and **Tito** assist Agbu. **Muhammad**, leader of the European Al-Qaeda cell and supplier of Basque drugs, has his own agenda.

Chris Lewis, Ken Reed's fiancé and longtime friend of Jim and **Mary Simpson**, is now with the CIA. She is assigned to protect the Simpson family and works with the French Police to stymie **Basque** and **Al-Qaeda** plans to blow up the newly rebuilt Roland Garros stadium. French Police Lieutenant, **Georges Caron** agrees to watch over **Susan Peterson** when she returns to Paris to help cope with the death of her husband **Bill**, at the hands of Basque kidnapers.

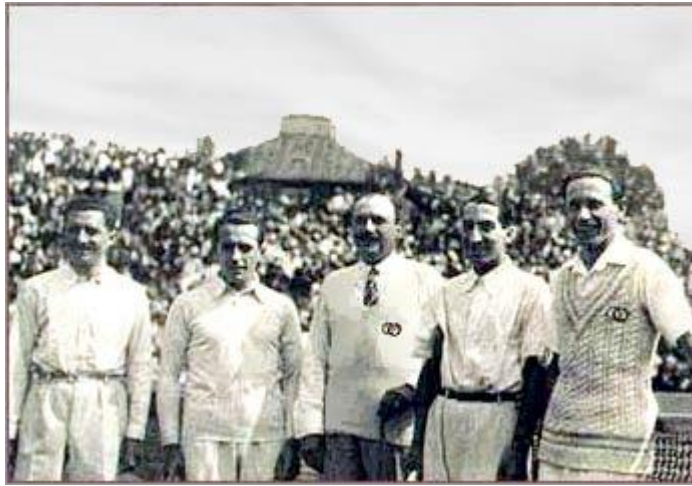
Origin of the term “Grand Slam”

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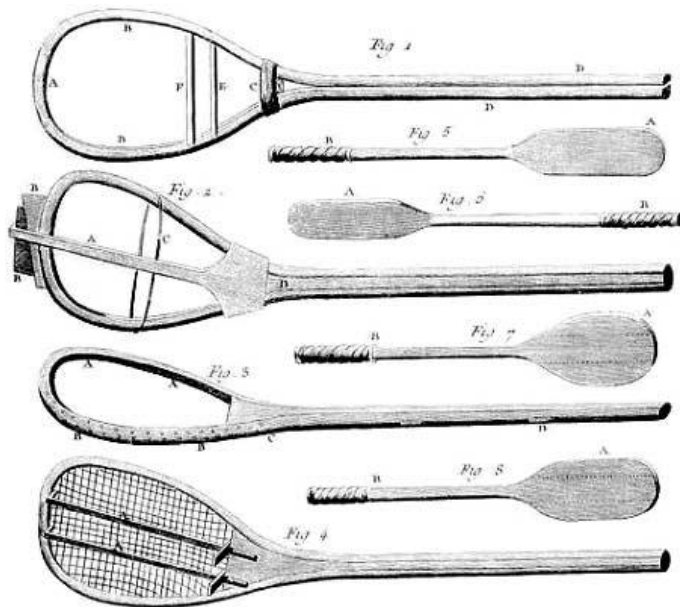
The History of Tennis



Suzanne Lenglen



The Four Musketeers with tournament director Pierre Gillan (from left): Jacques Brugnon, Henri Cochet, Gillan, René Lacoste and Jean Borotra.



13th and 14th century racquets

Prologue

1933

The First Grand Slam

“One no-trump” North bid, showing his partner 16-18 high card points and even distribution.

West passed. In his Saturday night couples’ rubber bridge game, he would be allowed to throw in his hand and ask for a re-deal; he had zero points. However, this was duplicate bridge where every trick counted.

South’s eyes lit up when he heard his partner’s 1-NT bid. South was looking at 17 points and a 7-card heart suit headed by the KQJ. They were playing the ‘Goren convention’ so he knew that his partner had at two hearts headed by the ace or king, or at least three small cards in support of his heart suit. “Four Clubs,” South responded.

East looked at the North-South “convention card which confirmed his opponents were playing the Gerber convention, and told him the 4-club bid was an artificial bid asking North to tell South how many aces North had; Four Diamonds is zero (or four), 4 Hearts is one, 4 Spades is two, 4 No-Trump is three. East passed.

North bid four Spades showing two aces. South had taken control of the hand and all North could do now was respond.

West passed.

South was holding two aces and liked his partner’s responses; they held all four aces. Unless one of their opponents had a void, they had first round control. South also knew they had between 33 and 35 high card points, depending whether North had the minimum (16) or the maximum (18) points. South decided to ask for kings and bid five clubs.

East passed.

North considered responding 5 hearts, which would have been a small fib. The hand only sported one king and the proper response was one diamond; but he also had two queens, two jacks and two tens; 17 points. It was a good No Trump hand. North decided to play it safe and bid 5 Diamonds, showing the one king.

West passed.

South now knew two kings were out against them and had a couple decisions to make. The first was whether to play the hand in hearts or no-trump. No trump is worth an extra 10 points, which could mean the difference between a top board and an average board. Six hearts was safer, because he might be able to generate an extra trick by roughing. They were vulnerable, so a 6-Heart contract, bid and made, was worth 1,680 points; six no-trump was worth 1,690. North decided on no-trump.

His second decision was whether to bid 6 NT or 7 NT, a baby slam (12 tricks) or a grand slam (13 tricks). A 7 No-Trump contract was worth

2,210 points and would most likely give them a top board. They were missing two kings but had 11 sure tricks, four Aces, two Kings and five small hearts. Making 7 NT would probably come down to a finesse, at worse a 50-50 chance. In Rubber Bridge you would bid 6 NT or 6 Hearts and be happy with the baby slam. Duplicate bridge is different.

“Partner, we don’t get many hands like this. I can’t remember when I bid a Grand Slam. Let’s go for it; Seven No Trump.”

West looked at the two kings in his hand and knew that North had shown only two aces. The odds were that at least one of his kings would be behind one of South’s same-suit Ace, and a finesse would not work.

“Double.”

North glared at her partner. “I remember clearly the last time you bid 7 NT. You were set five tricks, doubled and vulnerable; 1,400 points I seem to recall; I pass.”

East passed.

South looked at his hand again at his 7 Hearts. He couldn’t believe his good fortune. Unless West was deliberately misleading him, West had just told him where to find the two missing kings, and which way to finesse.

“Redouble,” South responded, ignoring the groans from his partner.

The contract did indeed depend upon a finesse. South had a choice of finessing East for the King of Clubs or West for the King Of Spades. West’s double had made the decision easy because it marked him for the missing kings. The spade finesse was successful. Seven NT, doubled and redoubled, vulnerable was worth 2,940 points and a top board. South savored the rare accomplishment in bridge; the Grand Slam.

Jack Crawford, four-time winner of the Australian Open and reigning champion of the Australian, French and English (Wimbledon) championships, was on the verge of greatness. He had just outlasted the great English Hall Of Famer, Fred Perry, in a grueling third set; 13-11, at the US Open in Long Island, NY. There were no tiebreakers in 1933. Jack was leading two sets to one, one set away from being the first tennis player to win all four major tennis titles in one year.

There were no on-court trainers in 1933 and Jack needed one badly. His chronic asthma condition was aggravated by the hot, muggy conditions of the New York summer. Jack could feel his strength draining from his body as the match progressed.

“Are you okay, Jack?” Perry asked. They were sitting next to each other on the same back-less, wooden bench taking a short break before the fourth set. There were no ball boys holding umbrellas for shade or fetching them Gatorade, just two fierce competitors who were playing a game that they both loved.

"My asthma is acting up," Jack replied, "but I'll be all right in a minute. Don't worry about me; I have enough left to get one more set off you. By the way, are we still on for dinner tonight?"

"Dinner and a few drinks; winner buys. I hope I can afford it," Perry needed. In 1933 tennis was a gentleman's sport and most of the players were good friends.

There were 1,800 fans in the stands including John Kieran, an American journalist. John also had another passion; competitive bridge. While Crawford and Perry were making dinner plans, Kieran reportedly turned to another writer and occasional tournament bridge partner, and unknowingly coined a phrase that would grow to humongous proportions in the sports world. He later perpetuated his analogy in his daily newspaper column. "If Jack Crawford wins one more set, he will have won all four major tennis championships in the same year. That's like making a 'Grand Slam' in bridge, doubled and vulnerable."

The analogy stuck, and the four major championships in tennis became known as the "Grand Slam." Jack Crawford lost the next two sets to Fred Perry and failed to achieve this apex of tennis. Five years later Don Budge became the first tennis player to win the "Grand Slam", but Jack Crawford, elected to the tennis hall of fame in 1949, became immortalized for his failure in 1933 to win the first "Grand Slam."

I like to think that Crawford and Perry went out to dinner that night and after a few drinks, it didn't really matter. Tennis was a gentleman's game in 1933.

Studies of Greek and Roman literature reveal evidence of a sport played with ball and paddle. One theory holds that the Greeks acquired the game from the Persians or Egyptians as far back as the 5th century B.C., and that it found its way to France as a result of the Saracen invasion. In similar accounts, the Persians played a game in the 4th century A.D. called "tchigan" which resembled "chicane", an ancient sport in Languedoc, France.

Real tennis, a sport which originated in 13th century France, appears to be the true precursor of the game we know as *tennis* today. This game came into being in the monastery courtyards of France. As the Middle Ages drew to a close in Europe, the monastic pastime evolved into a form known as "real" or "royal" tennis, adopted enthusiastically by royalty and their court — who dubbed the new sport *jeu de paume*, meaning "the game of the palm".

Real tennis was played indoors in long narrow rooms, which made it challenging to hit the ball through the passages. Eventually, gloves were used to prevent the build-up of calluses. Over time, the game adopted the use of wooden bats, varying in size and shape, and finally racquets were invented.

The word *tennis* is generally attributed to the French *tenez*, which in context is a phrase meaning "here, catch!", "here you are!", or "be ready!"

(I'm about to serve the ball), an equivalent to the golfing expression "play away!" The use of the word *service* originates from the fact that royalty (apparently King Henry VIII, in particular) disdained it as too menial a task, and therefore had their servants place the ball in play.

The method of scoring which we use today has basically remained the same over the ages; each point being scored by fifteen, such as 15, 30, etc. The score "forty," which comes after "thirty", is actually an abbreviation of "forty-five." The word *deuce* (this term denotes that each player has a score of forty) is a derivative of the French words "à deux", indicating that two points must be won consecutively to win the game. There are many stories as to the origins of the score *love* (having zero points). Its most likely derivation is from the French word *oeuf*, which means egg. The oval shape of the egg is symbolic of the numeral "0."

During the French Revolution of 1789, tennis almost vanished throughout Europe. In France, anything associated with the King was abolished. The announcement of the French Revolution became known as the "Tennis Court Oath" (Le Serment du Jeu de Paume). In fact, the venue for this announcement on 20 June 1789 was carefully chosen: the Royal Tennis Court of Versailles Palace.

Following the revolution, tennis began a revival and became even more popular. Tennis clubs were built to accommodate its many enthusiasts. In 1861, Napoleon III gave permission for the construction of two courts in the Tuileries Gardens of Paris. The building still stands today, though it has been converted into a famous museum for modern art, the *Galerie Nationale du Jeu de Paume*.

It was during the 1870's that a new form of *real tennis* appeared. This new adaptation, called "lawn tennis", emerged for several reasons. First, real tennis was played indoors at the monasteries where the courts were not of a uniform size or shape. Second, it was impractical to travel great distances to play in a cloister. The aristocracy preferred to entertain their guests at home in their own backyards. They had the spacious lawns on which to set up a court, as well as the financial means for its expensive maintenance. Lawn tennis soon became the chosen sport of the well-to-do. As it was primarily played by the upper class, immense importance was placed on proper etiquette and controlled behavior.

In 1874 Major Walter Clopton Wingfield, a British Army officer, designed and patented his own version of the sport and made it portable so that people could carry all the equipment: net, ball and racquet, along with an instruction booklet. Major Wingfield called his version of the sport "Sphairistike" (a Greek word meaning "ball game"). Later the name changed to "Sticky" and then to its more descriptive name, "Lawn Tennis." Soon manufacturers began producing their own portable tennis sets.

The original French Championship began in 1891 for the men, and in 1897 for the women. At the time, the closed tournament was strictly for

French citizens and residents. Starting in 1925 the tournament was opened to amateur players from other countries.

In 1968, the French Open became the first Grand Slam tournament to accept amateur and professional players to compete in the same event, as well as being the first to offer prize money to the competitors. The French Open remains one of the most popular tennis tournaments in the world, along with its other Grand Slam cousins – the Australian Open, Wimbledon, and the U.S. Open.

The 22-month construction project to rebuild Roland Garros Stadium was back on schedule and the final renovations would be completed in time for this year's French Open, scheduled to begin in May.

Agbu, leader of the Basque terrorists, has other plans.

Footnote: Much of the above information was borrowed from "The History of Tennis," by Nancy Koran

PART ONE

The Early Years



1

Bjorn Borg Flashback

AP World News Report – “A car bomb exploded in the Madrid business district Wednesday morning shattering office building windows and injuring 43 people. A witness told CNN that the explosion shook his car as he drove 100 yards away from the blast site. The injured suffered bruises and cuts from flying glass as well as damaged eardrums. Minutes before the blast the Basque newspaper Gara received a warning call from the Basque separatist group ETA warning police to evacuate the nearby convention center where King Juan Carlos is scheduled to speak later today. A spokesman for the King told CNN that the ceremony would still be held.

The explosion came hours after police arrested 14 suspected members of the ETA and a week after Spain’s Parliament rejected a plan giving the Basque region virtual independence. The plan proposed by the Basque regional parliament calls for Spain to accept ‘shared sovereignty’ over the three-province Basque region in Northern Spain in exchange for cessation of ETA violence. The Basque made a similar proposal to France in respect to the three ‘departments’ located just across the Pyrenees Mountains that are also considered part of Basque country. France has not responded.

This was the worst terrorist act in Spain’s capital since the March train bombings, which killed 191 people and led to the latest crackdown on the ETA. Militants claimed to be acting on behalf of Al-Qaeda. Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero denounced the bombings. “ETA and those that support it have no place in political or civil life. Bombs lead only to jail. We will not negotiate with terrorists.”

This was yet another blow to the Basque who trace their heritage and language back thousands of years and have been fighting for their own homeland for centuries.

“Hey Dad, look at this.”

“Just a minute, son, I’m on a business call. I’ll be there in a few minutes.”

Fifteen minutes later I finished my call and went into the living room. The television was still on but Petie was nowhere in sight. Surprisingly, the TV was tuned to the French Open and was showing re-runs of yesterday's men's quarterfinal matches. Petie wasn't into tennis.

I found him in his bedroom playing video games. "What was it you wanted, Petie? I was on the phone and couldn't get away; sorry." I felt bad about not being there for Petie when he wanted me. He was a good kid, but was entering that age when they relied less and less on their parents.

"It wasn't anything, Dad. They were showing some re-runs of old French Open Champions and I was wondering if you ever saw this guy Borg play. He must have been pretty good."

"He was the best of his time, son. In the late '70s and early '80s he was the man. What did he win, six French Opens?"

"Yeah, they were showing a match from 1981 when he beat Ivan Lendl in the finals. Gee, he was like a machine. He never missed."

"That's what Borg was known for, his consistency."

"Is that why they called him the Ice Man?"

"That was part of it, Petie, but it was something more. Borg had this look in his eye that said, 'I'm going to stay back at the baseline and wear you down. If you get 15 balls back, I'll get 16, if you get 17, I'll get 18. I'm willing to stay out here all day; are you?' He was relentless."

"Wow, that's cool."

"Did you see the rackets they used back then Petie? Wood frames with small heads. Racquet faces had about 66 square inches of hitting area. Now, a racquet face with 95 square inches is considered mid-size. Some oversized racquets have 120 square inches. Borg played before tennis became such a power game."

Petie hesitated for a few seconds before responding. I could see his mind working overtime struggling with what he wanted to say. When he finally decided, his decision surprised me. "Let's go to the club and hit a few balls, Dad. Okay?"

"Sure, get the rackets while I change." I had planned on going into the office, but made a snap decision. It was a good one.

Looking back years later, I remembered this moment as a turning point in Petie's life, and for the lives of those of us around him. It was the day that my son became a tennis player.

4,300 miles away, two 13-year olds were robbing a small drugstore in Vitoria-Gasteiz, the capital of Spain's Basque Country. The boys escaped with 30 Euros, less than \$40 American dollars. More importantly, they found a variety of barbiturates and opium-based prescription drugs worth more than a thousand dollars on the street. Drug trafficking was a major source of revenue to the local Basque cell group. Agbu's older brother Anton was their leader.

"That's the last time for me, Agbu, tomorrow I leave for the tennis school in Madrid."

"I envy you, Carlos. I wish I could play tennis like you. That's your ticket out of this slum. Don't blow it."

"What will you do, Agbu?"

"Don't worry about me, I'll get by. Soon I will join my brothers and do what my family has done for generations. The ETA needs young people now more than ever."

"Be careful my friend; it's dangerous."

"I know, but it is what my family has done for three generations. My great grandfather fought against Franco in the Spanish Civil War. One day the Basque will have our own country, that's what my brothers say."

"You don't really believe that, do you Agbu? Do you really think Spain and France will ever agree to that?" A third of the land that the Basque claimed as their homeland was located across the border in Southern France.

Agbu was an intelligent boy and had often considered the question. "No, I guess I don't Carlos, but it doesn't matter. We fight anyway. If they give us our own country, we would think of some other reason to fight. It's what the Basques have done for centuries."

Carlos thought about what Agbu had said and knew there was a lot of truth in it. He wasn't as smart or quick as Agbu, but Carlos had the ability to reason things out and usually came to the right conclusion. The Basque trace their heritage back over two thousand years and were always warriors. Agbu was destined to be a terrorist; it was his culture and it was in his blood.

"You keep the money, Agbu, I won't need it. The Spanish Tennis Federation will be picking up my expenses."

The friends parted and went their separate ways. It would be many years before they would meet again in Paris at the French Open.

I was bored. My business was doing well, but it wasn't enough. I needed a change. Mary and I just returned from a two-week golfing vacation to Ireland and Scotland. The kids, Pete and his younger sister, Lisa, were growing up faster than we wanted, but seemed to be doing well in school and other activities. They were a pleasure to be around and we counted our blessings. It had been over two years since my dramatic golf match with Jack Pardo in the club championship. I can still visualize Jack's putt rimming out on the 18th hole and handing me a 1-up victory. I guess the excitement from the myriad of events that surrounded that day had spoiled me. It wasn't every day that an amateur match play golf tournament has a winner-take-all prize of a business valued at 938 million dollars.

I still played golf twice a week when time allowed and my handicap hovered around plus three or four, not bad considering I was a plus

fifteen when I moved to Tampa five years ago. Ken Reed, my golf mentor and business partner usually teamed up on Saturdays to play Jack and his partner in a two-ball, \$50 Nassau. Jack and Ken were scratch golfers so a lot depended upon Jack's partner whether we got strokes. Like most golf wagers, the winner is determined on the first tee. Ken was a great negotiator.

The Cabo San Lucas casino and resort project had been a tremendous success and I was fortunate to have maintained an ownership interest for my company, Global Management. Casino operations had been sub-contracted to a large management company that operated casinos throughout the world. They took 97% of adjusted gross revenue and paid all expenses. The ownership group received three percent, which amounted to about \$80M annually. Global Management received 15% of this amount which provided Mary and me opportunity for several vacations a year.

Knock-on-wood, there had been no turnover of the key people at Global Management. The mortgage brokerage and equipment leasing businesses continued to grow. We exercised our option on an additional 20,000 feet of office space and added 15 new employees over the last two years. Our Christmas party was no longer a table of eight and Christmas bonuses last year totaled \$320,000. It was money well spent and well earned.

Our international funding business was expanding and was the one area of the company that held my interest. In the last two years we funded three small deals in South America, one in China and several in Europe. The average size of these projects was just over \$60 million dollars. Half of our business is for hotels and golf resorts but recently we began funding real estate developments and community infrastructure.

Relationships with our lending sources had also improved. We were now table-funding deals under our own name, pooling loans into investment grade packages, and then selling the paper to large Wall Street lenders and pension funds. There were two relatively small deals that I liked so much that we funded using our own money in exchange for a percentage of ownership. These changes significantly enhanced our credibility. We were no longer thought of as a broker, but as the final lender and source of money. It was mostly perception, but who cares, business opportunities were increasing.

The construction side of our business was treading water. Simpson Construction hadn't done much since the Cabo San Lucas casino was completed. I maintained a skeletal staff, but they wouldn't stay long unless we developed some new work. Maybe the phone call I received this morning from the government official in Mexico City would prove interesting. They were planning to build a new all-sports complex and asked if we might be interested in managing the project. "Sure," I replied, "we would be interested in discussing this further. When can we meet with you?" *We had never built a domed sports stadium.*

2

Establishing the Groundwork

“When did Borg start to play tennis? When did he win his first tournament? Did he play any other sports? What’s he doing now?” Petie talked tennis the entire ten-minute ride to the club.

Where did this come from, I wondered? Mary and I had never pushed sports on Pete or his sister, Lisa. If they wanted to play something, we encouraged them. Pete was pretty good at soccer and baseball, but not a star. He was fast and could throw pretty well, but wasn’t as big or strong as some of his friends. Tennis might be a good sport for him.

“Borg grew up in Sweden, so naturally hockey was his first love. I read that his father gave him a racket when he was nine and he won his first tournament a year later. I guess he had some natural ability, but I’m sure he practiced quite a bit.”

“How long, Dad? How many hours would I have to practice to be as good as Bjorn Borg?”

“Petie, let’s take it a step at a time. It’s more important that you have fun. Not many people will ever be as good as Borg, but most of us can enjoy playing. Remember, he quit playing tournaments when he was only 26. It doesn’t sound like he was having that much fun anymore.”

“Dad, it will be fun when I win the French Open, I promise you.”

“Okay Petie, let’s stop the chatter and hit a few. Don’t try to hit winners, just keep the ball in play like Borg would have done. Let’s see if we can get to 20 in a row without missing.”

Petie had hit with Mary and me before and knew the basics. He had a pretty good forehand, but wasn’t consistent. His backhand was weak and he still made the mistake of most beginners by standing a few feet inside the baseline. He would learn that it’s a lot easier to come forward for a ball than go back, and those half-volleys at your feet weren’t as easy to hit as Andre Agassi made it look.

Mary showed Pete the correct way to grip the racket but he usually reverted to his natural ‘western grip’, which coincidentally was similar to Borg’s. Pick up the racquet off the ground and you have a western grip. It’s the natural grip for kids because your wrist is behind the racquet and it feels strong in your hand, especially on your forehand. The grip allows a player to hit heavy topspin off the forehand, but requires a severe grip

change to hit volleys at the net or to hit a one-handed backhand. Many players with a western forehand use a two-handed backhand, including Borg.

Mary and I used the more conventional 'continental grip', which is the grip you get if someone holds the racquet head with the strings to the side, and asks you to shake hands with the racquet handle. Mary uses the same grip on both her forehand and backhand and was dynamite at the net. I couldn't break my habit of moving the racket a quarter-turn to hit my backhand volley. As a result, I can't count the times I've been caught at the net with the wrong grip, forcing me to pronate my wrist to get the racquet face square to the ball.

This wasn't the time for a lesson; it was time to have fun. Any tennis player will tell you that there is a certain level of ability you need to reach in tennis before the fun begins. It's not too much fun if you or your opponent can't get the ball back over the net with some consistency and all you're doing is running after balls. It's a lot more fun when you start hitting two or three shots back before someone misses. We started off slow, but after 25 minutes we finally broke 10 and were at 13 in a row when I netted a backhand. Petie was so disappointed that he looked like he was going to cry. "Geez Dad, we almost made it," he whimpered.

"I'm trying, Petie, believe me, I'm doing the best that I can." I wanted to tell him how hard it was to keep hitting the ball to his forehand with just the right speed to have it bounce waist high. Petie still wasn't too good at adjusting his swing or hitting the ball on the run, much less his backhand. It's like pitching baseballs to a five-year old. They swing the bat hard, but usually on the same plane. It is a dad's responsibility to pitch the ball to that spot.

Thirty minutes later we were at 12 when I ran far to my left and returned cross-court to his backhand.

"Thirteen," I shouted and watched as he set up for his backhand.

"Fourteen," he shouted as the ball came back to me perfectly on my forehand side.

"Fifteen," as I hit a perfect shot to his forehand. Believe me, I was starting to feel the pressure.

"Sixteen," Petie called as the ball came back, barely clearing the net.

I raced forward and barely got to his shot just inside the service line. "Seventeen," I yelled as I scraped the ball off the court and cleared the net with inches to spare.

"Eighteen," Pete whispered as he lobbed the ball back deep to my backhand. I could tell that Petie was nervous too.

I sprinted to the ball and hit an over the shoulder lob back to his side. "Nineteen," I gasped as I saw the ball heading over Petie's head, landing just inside the baseline. He would never catch up to it.

"Twenty," he screamed as he lunged for the ball and crashed into the back screen moments after he had sent back his shot. Lying face

down on the green, synthetic har-tru clay, Petie never saw the ball clear the net and land safely on my side of the court.

I was racing to Petie to see if he was okay, but I needn't have. He was crying, but they were tears of joy. So were mine.

"We did it, Dad!"

Monday Ken and I flew to Mexico City to meet with the group that called about the domed sports complex. We weren't sure why they had called us but we looked forward to hearing more about the project. This was a great opportunity for a small firm such as ours.

We flew business class and Ken's 6'3" frame sprawled into the aisle as he tried to get comfortable and catch some sleep. He had played in a 2-day invitational golf tournament in Jacksonville over the weekend and hadn't gotten home until midnight. His final round 69 had earned him the winner's trophy and the right to buy drinks. I could picture him sitting at a large table of men exchanging war stories. While other players talked about 300-yard drives or 250 yard 3-woods, Ken would be bragging about the 25-foot downhill, down grain, putt he nailed for par. At 180 pounds Ken wasn't a long hitter, but he prided himself on hitting fairways and greens. "If you hit a 170 yard shot to within 10 feet, Jim, nobody cares if you used a five-iron or pitching wedge," he once told me. "Consistency and a good putter is all you need to play scratch golf." Men liked him because he had that casual, unassuming way about him that projected self-confidence. He wasn't what most women would consider handsome, but they were attracted to him because he was polite and complimentary while seeming indifferent, like he was having too much fun to chase women. For reasons I couldn't understand, women responded to this non-approach and did the work for him. I see others try the same approach and go home alone. Go figure.

I was fortunate to have Ken with me these last five years. He's been a good friend and golfing partner, but more importantly, he is someone whose opinions I respected and whom I could trust. I knew Ken Reed four years and was constantly amazed at his breadth of knowledge and quick mind. I have watched him complete a New York Times crossword puzzle while I was still reading the instructions. He could solve an "evil" Sudoku puzzle in minutes using x-wing, jelly-fish, Ariadne's thread and other techniques that I never dreamed of understanding, much less mastering. "The secret is, Jim, you need to see the entire puzzle, not just a single box or column." Easier said than done, I thought.

Ken got engaged last Christmas to Chris Lewis, a former employee who moonlighted as a DEA agent, but broke it off three months later. Ken didn't talk about it much, but I'm sure it had something to do with her heavy travel schedule. He and Jack are still good friends and plan to enter several two-man golf tournaments this summer. They make a good

team. Jack has the length to reach most par 5s and Ken is money around the greens.

Ken had a high I-Q, but unlike many Mensa club members, Ken also had the ability to relate this intelligence to the problem at hand. He was someone I could trust to do a tough job with a minimum of supervision, but let me know if there were problems that required my input. This is a trait that I valued highly, and requires an individual with enough self-confidence to tell his boss or in this case, the owner of the company, "Jim, I could use your help on this one." Ken had this ability and would be in charge of this Mexico project if we got the work. I had a gut feeling that getting a job like this on our corporate resume could be a catalyst for bigger and broader opportunities.

I interrupted my day dreaming and started reading the background material my secretary had provided. It never hurt to know a little about your client and the job environment before going into a meeting. The travel brochure told me Mexico City was founded in 1521 by Cortés in the middle of the now drained Lake Texcoco on the ruins of Tenochtitlan, the capital of the Aztec Empire together with its lesser-known twin city, Tlatelolco. Located in the high plateaus in roughly the center of Mexico, it is 2,240 meters above sea-level and surrounded by volcanoes towering 4,000 to 5,500 meters above sea level. It is Mexico's largest city and one of the most beautiful cities in the world. This was confirmed when our Delta flight passed by the volcanoes before circling and approaching for landing to the North, offering a fantastic panorama to passengers fortunate to have window seats.

I skimmed the remaining information until an item regarding crime and guerrilla warfare caught my eye. I was surprised to read that factions in several Southern states were seeking independence and travel advisories were posted warning tourists to avoid these areas. There was apparently a strong Iberian-led independence movement in Mexico that is loosely affiliated with the Spanish Basque and South American terrorism. There was also a second article about increased crime and growing protests in the city. My reading was interrupted by the awakening giant on my left. "Are we there yet?" Ken asked, while he unsuccessfully tried to stifle a yawn.

The stewardess answered his question by announcing our arrival at Benito Juarez International Airport in Mexico City. It was 8:35 AM local time and 82 degrees. It would be a warm day. With only carry-on luggage, we cleared customs quickly and arrived five minutes early for our 10 AM meeting. A pretty receptionist promptly escorted us into a small conference room where our hosts rose to greet us.

"Mr. Simpson, thank you for accepting our invitation. I'm Juan Fretes, project manager. On my right is Commissioner Raphael Hidalgo who represents the Distrito Federal and to my left is Alejandro Rodriquez, Governor of the State of Chihuahua."

We had done our research and knew that the D.F. was the basic governing body we would deal with. "Buenas dias gentlemen, I am Jim Simpson and this is my friend and associate, Ken Reed."

"It's a pleasure to be here," Ken said as everyone shook hands.

"Please sit down, gentlemen. May we get you anything before we get started? There is water on the table, but we have juice or soft drinks. Have you eaten?"

Ken and I shook our heads. "Water will be fine. We had a light snack on the plane and are set for a while. Let's get started."

Juan took a moment to get organized providing me an opportunity to assess the three men at the table. It was clear that Juan was going to chair the meeting, which made me wonder where the other two gentlemen fit in. They obviously outranked him. "Before I get into the details of the project, you must be wondering why we called you. As you know, there are plenty of companies that would love to undertake a project of this magnitude."

I nodded, but wondered to myself how many companies had already turned them down.

"It's really quite simple. My cousin, Pedro Sanchez is the General Manager at the Hyatt in Cabo San Lucas has told us many good things about your company. He complimented your firm on handling a difficult situation with competence and integrity and assured us that you will treat us fairly."

What a lucky break. I now understood why they called us. Advertising is great, but referrals are everything in the business world, and nothing is a substitute for a little luck. We found out later that all three men attended the casino grand opening two years ago and each had won a few dollars at the tables. It's no wonder they were ready to do business with us again.

"I appreciate the kind words, we were fortunate to have Pedro on the project. He is doing a great job managing the hotel and golf courses."

Juan continued. "Your firm also has a reputation for providing project financing, which I understand is your specialty. This is a key requirement for this project. You see, neither the D.F. nor the State of Mexico can afford to fund this sports complex through taxes, revenue bonds, or various other methods governments normally use to fund this type of project. Our country has too many basic needs to fund a sports arena with tax dollars. Compared to the basic necessities of life, many would consider this project a luxury, me included."

Ken and I said nothing although this tied into the information I was reading when the plane landed. Apparently, the protests and violence were not just in the South of Mexico.

Juan took a sip of water and continued. "As you may know, Mexican banks don't have the resources to fund a project this big, and outside investors still remember the losses they suffered when the peso was devalued back in the 80s. It's been over 25 years, but bankers don't

forget. The construction firm we hire to build the arena must also provide funding.” He looked at me for a response, but none was necessary. Everyone in the business was aware of the challenges in funding projects in Mexico, not the least of which is the problem foreigners had in perfecting property liens. The business climate is improving, but the court system in Mexico is slow.

“Let’s hear more about the project before I try to answer that, Juan. We have provided funding in the past although this project is a little bigger than our usual deal. I will say that our firm has made money on the Cabo San Lucas resort, and certainly would be open to reinvesting these profits back into your country. Are there any other conditions?”

Juan glanced at his two associates for help. Commissioner Hidalgo picked up on the signal. “Yes, Mr. Simpson, there are. We need the new arena to be a Mexican icon, and a source of pride for the Mexican people, but ownership must be turned over to Mexico when the project is completed. You might have read about some of the protests over the last few months. A large segment of our people will not be pleased if this were an American-owned facility.”

I could see why Juan had wanted Commissioner Hidalgo to handle this issue. It wasn’t something that would appeal to a foreign investor. What are they saving the Governor for I wondered?

Ken vocalized what we both were thinking. “In other words, you want someone to fund a project that no one else will fund including your own banks, build it and then turn it over to the Mexican Government when it’s finished. Is that all?”

“No, Mr. Reed, there is one more item,” Governor Rodriguez interjected. “The final stipulation is that the borrowing entity must be a nonprofit, joint venture between the D.F. and the State of Chihuahua. The only assets of this company will be 200 hectares of land valued at \$20M dollars.”

I must have had a perplexed look on my face as I tried to understand what he was getting at. “Is this is another way of saying that neither the State nor the D.F. will guarantee the loan?”

“That’s pretty close to accurate,” the Governor replied with a sheepish smile.

I could feel Ken grimace next to me, but I intervened before he could voice his displeasure. “And what is your estimate of total construction costs?”

“Approximately \$300M dollars, maybe a little more.”

Ken started to say something, but I held him back again by putting my hand on his arm. “Gentlemen, I’d like to learn more about your sports arena, and maybe after lunch we could take a ride out to the project site. I have some ideas as to how we might get this done.”

Ken told me later that he thought Juan and his associates were going to crack their faces trying to keep from smiling. My openness to working with them despite their unreasonable demands was obviously

unexpected, probably because the large, international construction firms had already turned them down. I wasn't naïve enough to believe that we were at the top of anyone's list.

Lunch turned out to be sandwiches in the conference room while we poured over plans and drawings for the new stadium complex. The centerpiece was an enclosed soccer stadium that also housed a practice field, locker rooms and a convention center. The domed arena was surrounded by a 25-hectare park that included eight tennis courts and two soccer fields. It was an ambitious undertaking. The most challenging and difficult component was the retractable dome that would protect fans and athletes from the elements. It has been done many times before, but is new technology in Mexico.

We took a 10-minute break during which Ken cornered me in the rest room. "I can't wait to hear your ideas for getting this done," he said sarcastically. "They are asking for a \$300M loan and will not provide loan guarantees or supporting collateral. We are in a foreign country that hates American businessmen and has a history of screwing foreign investors by devaluing their currency. Even their own banks won't lend to them. Why are we considering doing this?"

"Let's wait and see, Ken. It sure would be an interesting construction job, wouldn't it?"

Ken wasn't amused.

The trip to the project site almost changed my mind and proved to be a forewarning of things to come. The governor and commissioner begged off with other commitments, having done their jobs. It was just Juan, Ken and me together with our driver and bodyguards. We traveled in an armored Lincoln town car with a police escort in front and behind. "Juan, Is there a reason for this extra security?"

Juan smiled nervously and assured me it was just a precaution that most government officials took advantage of when traveling on official business due to the growing number of kidnappings of politicians and foreign businessmen. "Don't worry; it's really nothing to be concerned about."

Two hundred yards from the stadium I became concerned. After exiting the turnpike onto a dirt road, our small caravan came to a dead stop as we neared a disabled truck on the narrow road. I could tell our driver was concerned as we watched a policeman from the lead car get out and approach the vehicle with his hand on his holstered pistol. I tried to roll down my tinted window to get a better view, but found the windows locked. Seconds later I heard shots ring out and saw the policeman fall in a hail of bullets. More bullets raked the bulletproof glass of our town car as our driver swung around the truck and accelerated out of danger leaving the two police cars to fight off our attackers. Moments later the gunmen disappeared into the mountains. We found out later that the wounded policeman died on the way to the hospital.

"Are you all right Mr. Simpson? Ken, are you okay?" Fretes asked when we reached the construction site.

"Yes, we're okay, but what happened? Why would anyone want to kill us?"

"There are some groups that don't want this project to be built, particularly after the newspaper article last week that mentioned we might need to use an American construction company. Unfortunately, there is still a considerable amount of anti-Americanism despite the new employment opportunities that NAFTA has created."

"How can you expect anyone to work in this type of environment?" Ken asked, raising his hands in exasperation. "Will our people be safe?"

"We'll provide 24-hour security for the job site and the hotel, although I don't deny there is some risk."

"You don't say!" Ken replied sarcastically.

"Mr. Simpson," Juan said, looking at me hopefully. "I hope this doesn't affect your desire to work with us? I promise you we will do everything within our power to address your needs."

I was still rattled and took a few moments to gather my thoughts. I knew Ken was right and I usually took his advice when he thought this strongly about something, but I still had that gut feeling that this job provided a once in a lifetime opportunity. "Juan, give us a few minutes to talk things over."

Ken hadn't changed his mind and repeated his earlier warnings. "And now, we can't even drive to work without getting shot at. Why should we do this?"

"I'm bored, Ken. We need a challenge, and besides, I am counting on you to come up with some ideas on how we can get this done. It's your baby."

Little did I know at the time that this decision would start us on a course to rebuild Roland Garros Stadium in Paris, France, home of the French Open.

"Mary, you should have seen him. He was so competitive. I never saw him want something so much. That's something you can't teach. It's easy to teach kids to hit a good forehand or backhand, but you can't teach desire or competitiveness. Petie showed me something today."

"That's great, but all I know is that I cooked a nice dinner and you and Petie were over an hour late. You could have called."

"Okay, but I'm telling you, you should have seen him. We went into the clubhouse to celebrate with a coke and fries, and one thing led to another. I just lost track of time. I'm sorry, but don't take it out on Petie, he is so excited about tennis. Go talk to him."

"Fine, but what's this about tennis lessons with Gregg?"

"Gregg was just finishing up his lessons and I invited him to join us. I mentioned that Petie saw a Borg-Lendl replay of the 1984 French Open

finals and that Petie was excited about Borg. It turns out that Gregg saw Borg play in Miami and was at the French Open at Roland Garros five years ago. Petie just hammered Gregg with questions.”

“What about the lessons?”

“They’re really not lessons; just a junior tennis program that Gregg suggested would be good for Petie to get involved in. The lessons are 90 minutes, Monday thru Friday and on Sundays, teams from our club play matches against other clubs in the area. Gregg thought this would be a great way to get started.”

“It sounds good, but if Petie is really interested in playing tennis, lessons might not be a bad idea. He should learn the basics before he develops bad habits that will be hard to break later. It’s like golf, once you start having some success with a bad swing, it’s awfully tough to change because it always means a step backward before you realize the benefits.”

“I know what you are saying. Petie still grips the racquet with the full western grip and was even trying a two-handed backhand today. Gregg likes a one-hander because it allows you a little extra court coverage. What do you think he should do?”

“Let me think on it for a while, there are a lot of arguments for the two-hander. In the meantime let me go talk to our young tennis star and take him some dessert. I’m feeling a little guilty for banishing him to his room without dinner. I guess I was a little hasty.”

“I love it when you admit you’re wrong” I said, as I wrapped my arms around her.

“Don’t push it, Bozo. I’m still mad at you for not calling.”

Mary found Petie watching French Open highlights in his bedroom. “Well, Peter, your dad says you did pretty well on the tennis courts today.”

“Did he tell you we had a rally of 20 in a row?”

“He sure did, your father was awfully proud of you.”

“We had another rally of 13 but Dad missed an easy shot. But that’s okay, he was trying.”

Mary had to stifle a laugh. Jim was right; this was a new boy she was seeing. Something had changed in him. “I understand you want to start playing in the junior program at the club.”

“May I, Mom? I’ll get my homework done after dinner.”

“Sure, I think it’s good to get involved in sports. Tennis is a great game that you can play all your life.”

“I want to be just like Bjorn Borg, the Ice Man. Dad said he practiced three hours every day after school.”

“Borg had a two-handed backhand. Is that what you want?”

“Yes, and I want a full western grip, just like his. Will you teach me, Mom? Dad says you know more about tennis than he does.”

Mary couldn’t help but be flattered by the compliment, and Petie asking her for help. She couldn’t say no if she had wanted to. “Sure, I

would be glad to help you, under one condition. The first time I see you throw your racquet our deal is off. I want you to have fun. If I don't think you are having fun, you will be grounded from tennis."

"Okay, Mom, I promise. I'm going to have more fun than Borg did and won't retire until I'm at least 27."

Mary smiled. She knew that being 27 years old is unimaginable to a 12-year old. "Okay, let's start tomorrow."

Pete surprised her by jumping off his bed and giving her a big hug. "Thanks Mom!"

3

The Spanish Training Center

Carlos caught a local bus and arrived in Madrid the next morning carrying just one bag containing his tennis racquet and all his worldly possessions. Most 13-year olds would have been scared, but Carlos was not like most kids. He hadn't lost a tennis match in two years and knew deep inside him that he was destined for stardom. He wanted to be the best tennis player in Spain and make his countrymen forget about Brugerra, Sanchez, Moya and the other great Spanish champions.

Carlos looked around and recognized no one, so he grabbed his bag and wandered out to the street fronting the station. He saw a van with the Spanish Tennis Federation sign and climbed aboard.

"You must be the new kid, Cordero," the driver said. "I'm Fritz, one of the pros at the academy. Today I'm your chauffer but tomorrow at 8 AM I'll be your drill instructor. Are you ready?"

"I've been preparing for 13 years, bring it on," Carlos replied with a lazy, confident smile that hid his inner competitiveness. He was smart enough to know that he was entering a new phase in his life and had just been issued a challenge.

This one is different, Fritz thought. We'll see if he has the game to back it up.

At lunch the next day, camp director and head tennis pro, Sergio Brugerra, the former #1 player in Spain sat down at Fritz' table. "How's the new kid working out, Fritz, any talent?"

"You have to see him for yourself, Sergio. He has it all. He's the best young player I've ever coached."

"You're kidding, aren't you? He's better than Jose, better than Pedro?"

"This kid is Moya with an attitude. He knows he is the best, or at least will be the best. Talk to him a few minutes and you will see what I mean. That's him sitting by himself at the corner table."

"Carlos, I'm Sergio Brugerra, head of this tennis camp. Welcome." They shook hands but Carlos didn't get up or indicate that he recognized his name. Sergio sat down and continued. "Is everything okay so far?"

"Everything is fine, Mr. Brugerra," Carlos replied politely. "I like it here."

He's not a complainer, thought Sergio, that's good. "Fritz tells me you have some talent. What are your goals?"

"I'm going to be the best Spanish player there ever was," Carlos answered, looking Brugerra directly in the eye.

Sergio was a little taken back. Holder of two French Open championships and over thirty other titles, many considered him to be Spain's greatest player. This kid will be mortified when he realizes who I am, he thought. "Well, the purpose of this camp is to allow promising players to maximize their potential. If you have the physical and mental makeup to be a champion, we will help you to attain your goals. Work hard and success will come to you."

Sergio got up to leave the table. "Just let me know if there anything I can do for you"

"There is one thing, Mr. Brugerra. Tell me what it felt like to win your first French Open."

Ten minutes later Sergio Brugerra left the table and whispered to Fritz on the way out. "Work his ass off this afternoon and then set up a match with Pedro at 5:00. Let's see if he can play as well as he talks. See how well he competes."

By 7:00 Sergio had his answer, Carlos had been beaten. Pedro won a competitive match in straight sets, 6-3 and 7-5 and was being congratulated by the 25 other players at the camp who had watched the match. None of them had wanted the newcomer to beat their best player.

Carlos sat by himself, close to tears. He didn't like losing, in fact this was the first tennis match he had lost in two years. It didn't matter that Pedro was four years older and ranked #7 in Spain's 18-year old age bracket. It didn't matter that Fritz had worked him hard for six hours before the match and he was dog-tired. There were no excuses for losing.

Carlos got up and slowly walked over to Fritz. "I'm sorry I let you down, Fritz. I know I need to get in better shape. What else do I need to work on? I know I missed a ton of volleys."

"Don't beat yourself up, Carlos, you were fine. In fact, you were better than fine, you were good. Have some fun this evening and we'll go over the match tomorrow."

Brugerra came over as soon as Carlos left. "What was his reaction Fritz? I could see he was tired. Did he complain?"

"Not once, Sergio. He apologized for letting me down and asked what I thought he needed to work on. Can you believe that?"

Sergio Brugerra, two-time French Open champion and one of Spain's all-time great players just smiled. "You were right, Fritz, we have something special here. I never was that good at that age, not even close."

"I really believe he will win the French Open some day, at least twice."

“The construction team they hired couldn’t build a barn much less a domed sports arena. Did you know that it’s owned by Juan’s brother-in-law? If we are going to do this, we need to bring in our own people.” I had asked Ken to come up with a plan to build the sports arena in Mexico City and a week later we were sitting in my office discussing options.

“What do we know about construction, Ken? We don’t have any experience other than the Cabo San Lucas casino.”

“I agree, but we can hire people who do. We have a different work ethic than they do in Mexico. We believe in making a plan and sticking to it. They don’t. We have two years to build this arena or the additional construction costs and interest payments will eat us up.”

“I gather you have a plan?”

“I do. We need to hire a team, maybe four to six people, who have international construction experience and can oversee a project this large. They can hire local contractors but we would be in charge.”

“Where do you plan to find these people?”

“Remember Alberto, the consultant for the Cabo job? He has contacts throughout the Caribbean and knows several people who would be interested. He also knows an architectural firm that has done domed stadiums in Milwaukee and Detroit. We need someone with experience to review the plans.”

“Alberto worked for Mario, didn’t he? Do you feel comfortable working with him?”

“As far as I know, Alberto was only a consultant to Mario, and probably no worse than most other consultants. He didn’t have anything to do with Mario’s drug ring. Consultants will work for anyone if there is a buck or peso in it for them. We will watch him, but I think he will be okay.”

“Mario’s still in jail, isn’t he?”

“Doing 10-20 in Attica the last I heard. He’ll be an old man when he gets out. I doubt if we need to worry about running into him for a while.”

“Anything else, Ken? I get the feeling you have another surprise for me.”

“This one you will like. I think I found a way to minimize our risk. We would still need to put up \$40M or so to cover the A-Piece of the loan, but I think I found someone to put up the rest of the money. We obviously need to work out the details.”

“What’s the catch?”

“Remember Sven Johansen? Sven now controls the investment for several large European Pension Funds. Would you be willing to work with him again?”

“You’re kidding, this is like the Cabo project all over again. But to answer your question, yes. It would be fun to work with Sven again as long as the money doesn’t come from Mario’s drug network.”

“Sven assures us that his money sources are clean, and we will have the opportunity to verify them ourselves. You know, I still don’t think he knew where the money came from for the Cabo deal.”

“I agree, I think Mario had them all fooled. Sven could be a great resource if he really does control pension fund money. This could work out well.”

“Yes, and this time we are in control and can end up with a great reference for future construction projects.”

“I took a sip of coffee and considered what Ken was suggesting. “I like it, Ken, make it happen.”

4,800 hundred miles away in Nice, France a beautiful French girl rocketed a service return to the feet of her older opponent, came to the net and smashed the weak reply for a winner. It culminated an awesome display of clay court tennis resulting in a 6-3, 6-2 victory and the tournament championship in the eighteen and under division. Ambre threw her racquet into the air and blew kisses to the adoring French crowd that had cheered her every shot and now gave Ambre a long, standing ovation. They knew this ten-year old French prodigy would become the first French-born woman in 40 years to win the French Open.

4

Tennis Lessons

“Move your feet, Pete, come on, move your feet. Take small steps when you are back-pedaling.” Petie tried it again, but his overhead was off the frame of the racquet and sailed long.

“Pete how many times do I have to tell you to get your racquet back early. Let’s try it one more time.” Gregg hit another lob and this time Pete was in perfect position and crunched the overhead at Gregg’s feet. Pete and his friend Kyle had been hitting overheads for 15 minutes and Pete was bored.

“Let’s play some points,” Pete suggested.

“Okay, we will play some points as soon as we play a little four-ball,” Gregg replied with a grin. “Kyle, you first.”

Kyle and Pete both groaned. Even though they took turns this was still a tough tennis drill. Gregg had four balls in his hand. The first was a deep shot that you returned from the baseline and tried to get to the net. The 2nd ball came to you at the service line where you did a split-step and volleyed deep, continuing to the net. The 3rd shot was a volley that you tried to put away and the 4th was a lob over your head that forced you had to back-pedal to hit the overhead. If you screwed up any of the four shots, you went again.

Four-ball was more of a conditioning drill than a drill to improve your strokes. After five or six turns, Pete was just trying to survive. After 15, Pete and Kyle were exhausted.

Mercifully Gregg called a halt and the two friends headed for the water. “Hold it! Let’s try a few serves fellows. You need to learn how to serve when you are tired. Believe me, it’s different serving in the 3rd set when it’s 90 degrees and you’re exhausted.”

Twenty minutes and 50 serves later they got their water break. “Guys, you are looking pretty good. I think you both are ready for the tournament this weekend. Let’s go inside and have a coke, I want to talk a little strategy. Go on ahead and I’ll catch up to you.”

After two hours of drills, Pete and Kyle didn’t need any coaxing. They grabbed their tennis bags and headed for the snack room.

Gregg had noticed Mrs. Simpson watching from a distance and went over to talk with her. Keeping the parents happy was part of being a club pro, but in this case it was different. Mary and Jim Simpson were a

pleasure to work with, and Pete was the type of player that came along only once or twice in a club-pro's career.

"Mrs. Simpson, it's nice to see you. How did Pete look to you?"

"Hi Gregg. I thought his volleys and overhead looked pretty good, a lot better than they did a couple weeks ago. What do you think?"

"Every part of his game has improved, especially his two-handed backhand. He doesn't miss. I can't believe how far he has come in the last two months. Those private lessons you gave him sure paid off."

Mary was pleased with the job Gregg was doing with Pete and his willingness to work with her. Most tennis pros would have objected to Mary giving Pete private lessons with another pro, but Gregg had supported her. Gregg had a traditional one-handed backhand. Going to a pro that used a two-handed backhand made sense to both of them and Gregg had even given Mary a list of teaching pros she could call.

"You are working them pretty hard, Gregg. Are you concerned that they might burn out?"

"I'm watching for the signs, but so far they seem to be okay. All kids complain, but Pete and Kyle are disappointed when I don't work them hard. Has Pete said anything different to you?" Gregg asked apprehensively.

"No, Pete seems to be having a lot of fun and is looking forward to the tournament this weekend. How do you think he will do?"

"I'm hopeful, but it's hard to tell. It's his first tournament and he will be nervous."

"Whatever happens, it's important that he has fun and comes away with a good experience. I just hope he isn't blitzed," Mary added.

"This is a pretty small tournament and I don't think Bollettieri or Saddlebrook will send any of their kids. Pete should do okay."

"How much longer are you going to keep them tonight, Gregg? He has his bike, but I was wondering when to start dinner."

"I just need them for another 30 minutes. I wanted to talk a little about strategy, and then spend some time on court etiquette. It's important that they know how to act if they get a bad call and stuff like that."

"I agree, Gregg. Will I see you at the tournament Saturday?"

"You sure will. I wouldn't miss it. I will be more nervous than Pete."

"You and me, both," Mary replied as she headed for the car. It would be hard not to show Pete how nervous she was, but she would do her best. After all, she thought, this was his tournament, not hers.

"Let's get started, folks. We're not making any money sitting in this room rehashing the weekend and I have a 1:00 o'clock tee time," I lied, knowing that Ken would be jealous and wondering why he hadn't been invited. It was my way of retaliating in advance for the grief he gave us at every staff meeting. "Sally, start us off."

Monday morning staff meetings were informal and a good way for everyone to find out what's going on in the other departments. Sally had equipment leasing, Roger was commercial mortgages and Ken was special projects, which now meant the Mexico sports complex. Each manager took their turn, highlighting major activities in their respective domains. Occasionally they would bring up problems, but not unless they had already discussed the problem with me. Our goal was to be done in one hour. The record was twenty minutes when Ken had laryngitis.

Sally remained sitting. "Business is still looking good even though interest rates are rising. It's tougher to get a bank loan, which is forcing more people to lease the equipment. We currently are working on 78 lease applications totaling about \$4.4M. That's about \$56,000 per deal, Ken, with another \$1,900,000 approved and waiting for installation."

"\$56,410.25," corrected Ken who was notorious for his ability to work math problems in his head and irritate the heck out of us.

"Children, let's not argue," I interjected. I could see Roger using his calculator to check Ken's number, but Sally and I knew from experience it was a waste of time. He was always right. "Sally, please continue."

"I decided to add another person to concentrate on track-leasing, anything with wheels such as construction cranes, fork lifts, trucks and so on. We have turned away too many deals lately and decided to give it a try. It's a different business. Our average deal will be over \$1M but the margins are small, probably in the neighborhood of 1% versus the 4% we get now. Questions?"

"Thanks, Sally. Roger, you're up!"

"I can make this real quick. Business is good, I have all the people we need and profit is 20% over budget. There is \$370,000 in commissions due in the next three months for deals that are approved, but not funded. We are working on 12 deals that are likely to close this month worth approximately \$188,345,212," Roger explained, looking at Ken in anticipation of another quip.

"\$15,700,000 per deal is higher than normal, isn't it?" asked Ken. "Are we still getting our 1% commission?"

Everybody chuckled at Ken's one-upmanship, but it was a good question.

"Thanks for rounding it off, Ken, but yes, we are averaging just under 1%. We only got ½% on the \$55M condominium deal, but we got 2% on several of the smaller deals."

"Whatever the market will bear," Ken added with a nod of approval.

"Ken, your turn."

"Not much to report since last week, Jim. As everyone knows, we finalized the agreement with Mexican government, and Sven's group has agreed to provide a \$300M, 6%, 2-year, interest-only construction loan. We break ground next Monday."

"Tell Roger and Sally what our risk and upside is, Ken. They obviously have a stake in this." Everyone knew that a deal this size could

kill the company if it went bad. It had almost happened with the Cabo casino.

“We are providing \$45M to the project secured by our 10% stake in the Cabo Resort and Casino. Theoretically, our only exposure is the loss of the \$45M and future revenues from the casino, but we all know that this could change if the project goes bad. We have 24 months to pay off the bridge loan. It can be extended for one more year, but the interest rate jumps to 16%, which we cannot afford to pay. Sound familiar?”

“Without dwelling on the negative, I estimate our upside on this deal to about \$500M.”

“Wow!” Sally exclaimed. “How did you come up with \$500M? Is this real or did your internal calculator finally lose a synapse?”

Ken smiled at the dig. “It’s real, Sally. Our contract states that at the end of the project, the State of Mexico will buy the project back for 80% of the as-completed appraisal, which I believe will be in the neighborhood of \$1.25 billion dollars. Do the math,” Ken grinned.

“If we are done with Ken, I have on more bit of news to pass on. I hired a new construction manager, Marco Noah, who will be responsible for the Mexico City sports complex and all other construction projects. He starts Monday. You can’t believe how many opportunities I have passed up because we didn’t have someone to manage the work.”

“Where did you find him?” Sally asked.

“Alberto heard about him from a business associate in Paris. Marco has 20 years experience with several international construction firms. The last five years was with Bouygues, the French construction giant.”

“Okay, if there is nothing else, let’s get to work.”

“Who are you golfing with?” Ken asked as we walked out of the conference room. I just smiled, enjoying his torment.

5

First USTA Tournament

The waiting was almost over. Petie was warming up and his match would start in a few minutes. His opponent was a small, 14-year-old boy from Clearwater, the #4 seed.

“What do you think, Mary, any chance?”

“The kid looks steady, Jim. Pete will need to put some pressure on his backhand or the kid will keep the ball in play forever.”

Gregg agreed. “Pete can’t out-rally him, the boy has been playing tournaments for three years and is too experienced. He’s almost two years older than Pete. It’ll be tough.”

Pete was 12 but would turn 13 in July, two weeks before the August 1 cutoff. That meant he was considered a 13-year old by USTA standards, and forced to enter the 14 and under age bracket rather than the 12 and under. The United States Tennis Association was the governing authority for U.S. junior tennis.

They were ready to start. Pete won the toss and elected to start with his back to the sun. His opponent elected to serve. “Good,” Gregg said, “that’s just what we wanted. It will give Pete some time to get into the match, and who knows, the other boy might be nervous too.”

As Pete got into position to return serve, he looked over at his small cheering section and winked. Maybe we were more nervous than he was?

The boy missed his first serve and hit a short second serve with nothing on it. Pete stepped in and blasted a winner up the line. The boy just looked at Pete who calmly walked over to the ad-court.

The boy took something off his next first serve and Pete returned hard to the backhand, producing a weak reply that landed inside the service line. Pete stepped in and nailed a forehand into the corner for another winner. The boy was shell-shocked. You could see it from the stands.

The boy tried two hard serves on the next point and double faulted. He won the love-40 point with a service winner but lost the game on the next point when he netted a backhand. Parents are supposed to be invisible in these matches, but it was so hard not to applaud and cheer. The three of us settled for a couple claps and a thumbs-up as the boys switched sides.

Pete was all business as he prepared to serve. It was one thing to break his opponent's serve, but tennis is all about holding your own serve, even at age 12. Gregg had a great service motion and had been working with Pete every day. His serve was pretty good, but serving in practice and serving in a match is entirely different.

"Bam," was the sound I heard as Petie's first serve rocketed up the middle for an ace. What a way to start!

"Wide," shouted his opponent.

Pete looked over at the boy but said nothing. Gregg and he had talked Thursday about how to react if he got a bad call. It helped that Mary put her hand on my knee. It was all I could do to keep my mouth shut.

Pete's second serve kicked wide to the boy's backhand. The return was pretty good but Pete had followed his serve to the net and volleyed a winner to the open court. Three points later, including an ace and a service winner, Pete was ahead two games to zero.

"It's over," Gregg whispered.

"I agree," Mary nodded.

"Why didn't anyone tell me he was this good?" I asked.

Gregg looked at Mary and tried to answer. "We didn't have any idea, Jim. You never can tell how a kid will react under pressure. Most of us get nervous, some choke. A few like Pete raise their game to a new level. They thrive on the competition."

"Jim, we have a real tennis player here," Mary added. "There is no telling how good he can be. The sky's the limit."

"Or the French Open," I thought to myself.

A continent away Carlos was finishing a straight set annihilation of his nemesis, Pedro, the boy who had beaten him the first day at camp. The scores were 6-1, 6-2, but it really wasn't that close.

Sergio and Fritz had watched from a distance. "He's ready," Sergio proclaimed. "Let's see how he does at Nationals."

6

Kidnapped

San Sebastian, once the summer residence of Spanish Royalty, is a beautiful city particularly for tourists such as Bill and Susan Peterson. It is a cultural blend of tradition and the cosmopolitan bustle of the twenty first century. Donostia as it is called in Euskadi, the Basque native tongue, is sandwiched between the majestic Pyrenees and the Atlantic Ocean. Founded in 1180 by Sancho el Mayor, called "Sancho el Fuerte or Sancho the Strong". The original walled city overlooked the port and provided a natural military stronghold. The city survived many sieges from the 15th century through the Napoleonic wars before it was destroyed by fire in 1813. The walled city was rebuilt over the next twenty years and has enjoyed prosperity and growth in the 19th and 20th centuries.

It was the Peterson's first trip to Spain and they spent their first day on a walking tour of the Parta Viaja, the original walled city and the adjacent port area and Naval Museum. "Wasn't it a wonderful day?" Susan offered as they entered their suite at the Hotel Maria Christina. "What a fascinating city. I'm really looking forward to dinner this evening. Where are you taking me?"

It had been a great day, Bill thought. He was so lucky to have married a woman that liked to travel and see new places. "Let's try that traditional restaurant on the boulevard we saw this morning, and then maybe stop at a Tapas bar or join the locals during their evening Txikiteo."

"The Tapas bar idea sounds great, honey, but I'm not up to another pub-crawl. The idea of stopping at a half-dozen bars for a tiny glass of wine before moving on to the next bar may be the local Basque custom, but I can't do that two nights in a row. Besides, the wine tasted like vinegar."

"Okay, but it was fun and a great way to meet the locals. I didn't know anything about the Basque homeland and their traditions before yesterday. Why don't we just go to that last bar where we had dinner?"

"Do we have time for a nap? I'm worn out after all that walking. I should have worn more comfortable shoes."

Bill came across the room and pulled her close. "Did you mean nap, or NAP?"

"I meant nap, my feet are killing me. But hold that thought for later. Are you going to join me?"

"In a few minutes, honey, I need to make a few phone calls and see if we still have a business back home. It shouldn't take long."

This was one reason they had reserved a suite rather than a standard hotel room. Bill knew he would have to combine a little business with pleasure. The other reason for the suite was, they could afford it. Bill's dot-com business was doing well.

"Okay, I'll see you later. Don't be too long," Susan said as she closed the bedroom door. As she drifted off to sleep Susan was thinking of how lucky she was.

It was more than an hour later before Susan slowly woke up and reached for Bill. His side of the bed was empty and hadn't been slept in. There wasn't any noise coming from the living room. "Bill, are you out there?"

Bill didn't answer.

Two hours later after a frantic search of the hotel, Susan called the Police. Bill had disappeared.

Petie won a tough, three set match earlier to reach the quarterfinals. It was a fun match to watch, not only because Petie won, but also because both kids were such good sports. There were several close line calls where they gave their opponent the benefit of the doubt. On one point Petie called a shot on the sideline good, but the boy overruled him. "I had a better view Pete, it was clearly out." After the match was over the boys talked for twenty minutes and exchanged phone numbers. It turned out that Ron lived in New Port Richey, only 30 minutes from our house. Petie had reached the semi-finals, and made a new friend.

This afternoon it was quickly obvious that Petie was overmatched. The boy was almost six feet tall and 180 pounds, pretty big for a 14 year old. He had been playing tournaments for five years and his serve was harder than anything Pete had faced. The final score was 6-1, 6-2.

"This is tough to watch," I whispered to Mary midway through the 2nd set. What a difference a day makes. I thought back to the ride home yesterday after Pete's two impressive victories to reach the quarterfinals. We stopped for pizza on the way home to celebrate. Mary and I were so proud of him and we could tell that Pete was pleased with himself. It's important for kids to feel good about themselves.

Mary squeezed my hand. "It's a good thing in a way. He won't win every match and the sooner he knows it the better. There is only one winner in the draw of 32, two winners if you count the consolation division."

"Is there consolation?"

“Not for Pete. This tournament has consolation play only for first round losers. Some of the bigger tournaments have feed-ins and all first-time losers fall into the consolation bracket,” Gregg explained.

“This kid he’s playing is good,” Gregg whispered, leaning towards us so his voice didn’t carry onto the court. “Pete has nothing to be ashamed about.”

The match was finally over, ending with Pete netting a volley as he tried to come in behind his serve. This was the 5th time his serve had been broken. Pete waited at the net while his opponent came to the net for the traditional post-match handshake.

“Watch,” Gregg said as he put his arm out to keep us back. “Let’s see how he reacts.” Gregg was always coaching.

“Nice match,” Pete said looking the boy in the eye. You were too good today. Good luck in the finals.”

“I wasn’t playing well today, you were lucky to get a game off me,” the boy replied barely touching Pete’s offered hand as he turned and walked away. So much for civility and friendship.

Pete stared for a second before he stuffed his racket in his bag, packed the sweaty wristbands in a pouch, and left the court.

“Nice match Petie,” I offered as I put a hand on his shoulder.

“Great tournament,” Mary said, emphasizing her remark with a hug.

“Gregg,” Pete said turning around to find Gregg who was following us. “Help me get better. I want to kick that jerk’s ass the next time we play.”

“We can start Monday, Pete, but in the meantime you need to enjoy what you did here. A semi-final in your first tournament is pretty good.”

“I know, but I wanted to win. But before I forget, I want you all to know how much it meant to me to have you in the stands pulling for me. I could feel your support.”

These are the rewards of being a parent.

Gregg just smiled.

Bill made the necessary phone calls and was ready to join Susan for a quick catnap. Everything seemed to be going well at home, which bothered him a little. Maybe he wasn’t as indispensable as he thought? He convinced himself that he had only been gone a week, and that eventually they would need his direction. He also knew that he had good men working for him and could trust them to do the right thing.

Bill was on the way to bed when he heard a soft knock at the door. “Yes, who is it?”

“Bellboy, I have a message from the general manager.”

Bill looked through the security hole and opened the door. “Yes, what is it?”

“He said you should come downstairs, someone has broken into your car.”

Bill thought quickly. What had he left in the car? "Are you sure? I'm driving a red BMW rent-a-car. There was anything in it."

"He told me it was a BMW, but I don't know the color. They tried to drive away and crashed into a pole."

"Okay, let me get my shoes on." Bill thought of waking Susan to tell her where he was, but decided to let her sleep. This shouldn't take too long.

"Your English is pretty good, young man. Where did you learn it?" Bill asked, as they waited for the elevator.

"Most schools in Spain teach English as a second language," the young man replied.

When he got to the garage Bill noticed his car still parked where he had left it. There wasn't any noticeable damage. "What's going on?" Bill asked, as he turned back to the bellboy. "Where is...."

He stopped short as he saw the two men wearing ski masks and holding guns pointed at him. "Shut up and get into the van. One word and we will knock you unconscious and carry you."

Bill started to ask what was going on, but thought better of it. "He meekly crawled into the van where his hands were handcuffed behind him. Later he wondered why he had not tried to escape, but he had been too surprised and too scared. It never occurred to him at the time.

"Good job, Agbu. Did anyone see you?"

"No. The elevator was empty and we went out the back door into the garage."

"What about his wife?"

"She was sleeping," Bill interrupted from the back. "Leave her alone. She didn't see or hear anything."

"That's right" Agbu added. "He didn't talk to anyone and I didn't see her either."

"Good," the kidnapers said. "It looks like we can take our time."

"Where are you taking me? Why? What have I done to you?"

"Don't worry, it's nothing personal. Your only crime was bragging about how well your company is doing. I'm sure they will be happy to pay a ransom to get you back. How much do you think you are worth? I'm told that \$10M would be a nice round number."

Oh shit, as he recalled his conversation in the Tapas bar last night. Whom had he been trying to impress? "Our company is only three years old. We won't have a lot of cash until we sell the company or go public. You guys made a big mistake."

"Shut up. You are the one that made the big mistake, and if someone doesn't come up with \$10,000,000, it will be your last mistake. Now lie down and keep quiet. Raul, club him if he says another word." The leader was obviously not happy with the turn of events.

\$10M, Bill thought. There was no way they could raise that much, maybe one million.

Agbu watched and listened. It was another lesson. He had told them they should have done more research, but he had been over-ruled. He was only 14, eight years younger than Anton and six years younger than Raul, but Agbu already knew that he was smarter than his brothers. This just reinforced the lesson that he had learned two years ago. Agbu would go back to school and get an education.

He thought back to the day Carlos left for the Spanish Training Center, Agbu made a call to his older brother who had moved to Deba, a small city along the French border, about 80 KM north of Vitoria. "Anton, it's your brother. What's going on?"

"Hey little brother, how are you doing? Are you staying out of trouble?"

"I'm bored to death. I want to help you out. I'm 13 and ready to get to work. I hate school."

Anton hesitated. He knew this moment would be coming, but it was too soon. He had been 15 when he started, but that was different. Pa was still alive then. "Don't be crazy, Agbu, stay in school. You are the smart one in the family. Don't blow it. I'll be down there next week and we can talk then. I might even have something for you. Okay?"

"I'll be here, Anton, and I'll stay in school for a while. But let's talk. I'm ready."

The following week Agbu acted as a lookout as Anton and a fellow ETA member planted a bomb in the engine of a local politician's car. Agbu was told the man had voted against a bill to allow Euskara, the Basque language, to be taught in schools. They watched from a distance as the politician started his car and drove away.

"What happened?" Agbu asked. "Why didn't it explode?"

His brother and friend just shrugged.

The next day newspapers reported that the man's wife and two children were killed by a car bomb that exploded when they were driving home from school. The newspapers and television denounced the ETA as murderers of women and children. There was no mention of the ETA's objective.

Agbu learned his lesson and returned to school. He knew he must get a lot smarter if he was to accomplish his goal. He vowed to become leader of the Basque people and achieve their dream, an independent homeland including the four provinces in Northern Spain and the three adjoining departments in France.

7

Ransom

Anton and Raul had themselves a hostage. That was the easy part, now the trick was to get someone to pay the ransom. Agbu headed home to Vitoria-Gasteiz. Collecting the ransom was someone else's responsibility. He had done his part.

Ten minutes into the trip Bill was blindfolded and ordered to lie down and keep quiet. He tried to concentrate and keep track of time and direction, but soon became disoriented and gave up. What was the boy's name, Agbu? Bill knew he would not forget the boy's face. After what seemed like hours, he sensed they slowly climbing into the mountains. What was Susan doing? Had she called the police? She would be frantic. Bill knew she was a fragile woman and worried how she would hold up under the stress.

Anton headed for a cabin on the French side of the Pyrenees owned by two loyal ETA members who had agreed to let them use the cabin. Most of the locals in that area were Basque and strangers were not welcome. It was ideal for their needs. An elderly couple acted as caretakers and had agreed to help baby-sit the prisoner in exchange for a few Euros a week and the promise of a bonus when the ransom was paid. It was a small price to pay.

They reached the cabin just before sunset "We're here," someone said as they pulled Bill out of the van. "Did you sleep well?"

Bill didn't think he had slept, but was surprised at how disoriented he had become from being blindfolded. "Where are we?" Bill asked, not really expecting an answer.

"It's your home for awhile and maybe forever if your wife doesn't cooperate," the man replied as he was led into a house or cabin. He was led through a second door where his handcuffs were removed. He heard the door slam behind him and he was alone. Removing his blindfold, Bill evaluated his surroundings.

It's certainly not a suite at Ritz, he muttered to himself. There was a cot in one corner, a small table with a water-pitcher, and a commode. Nothing else, not even a lamp. The room was about ten feet square and appeared to be made of concrete block. There was a small window near the ceiling just out of his reach. Bill jumped and caught the ledge, and pulled himself up, but all he saw was trees. He checked out the plumbing

and was not surprised to find there was none. The commode was self-contained. The water-pitcher was empty.

“Not bad,” he thought, “it could be worse. I should only be in here a few days, maybe a week at most.”

Two months later Bill had grown a four-inch beard and the elderly couple had provided a wooden chair and kerosene reading lamp, nothing else had changed.

Susan heard nothing for two days and was beginning to fear the worst. The local police interviewed guests and employees, but had not come up with anything useful. Two hotel guests thought they had seen Bill and a young boy getting into an elevator at the time of the kidnapping, but they couldn't provide a description. Video security cameras in the lobby and hallways showed nothing and the camera in the parking garage was broken. Georges Caron, a French police lieutenant, was put in charge of the case and helped Susan retain her sanity.

“Be patient, Mrs. Peterson, they will contact you. The kidnapers are just trying to make you nervous so that you will cooperate.”

“How do we know they haven't killed him already?” she sobbed.

“These aren't killers,” Mrs. Peterson. “They consider themselves businessmen, and your husband is not worth anything to them dead. Trust me, I've seen this many times.”

On the 3^d day, Susan finally received a ransom note asking for \$10M if she wanted to see Bill alive again. A 10-year old boy had been paid five Euros to deliver the note and could provide no clues to the identity of the kidnapers. Susan had one week to come up with the money.

“At least we now know it's definitely a kidnapping for money. Most hostages are released unharmed once the kidnapers get what they want,” Caron said in an encouraging tone. What he didn't tell her was that 30% of the victims never made it home after the ransom is paid.

“But there is no way we can come up with \$10M,” Susan blurted out, not even if we had a year. The business isn't worth that much. Bill's partners said our shares are worth a million dollars, at most, assuming we could find an investor.”

“How much could you put together by next week?” Georges asked.

“We only have about \$200,000 in stocks and cash and maybe \$60,000 equity in the house. That's all, unless we find a buyer for our shares of the company. I'm told a bank won't lend us anything as long as Bill is missing. They say he is too important to the company to risk a loan.”

“Tell me again what you remember about that conversation in the Tapas bar last Monday,” Georges asked. “Did you or Bill ever mention how much the company was worth?”

"No, I didn't have any idea how much the company is worth until I asked Bill's partners. Bill might have said something; he was having a pretty good time. I do remember him saying something about doing an IPO and raising millions, but this was just bar talk. Nobody takes that literally, do they?"

"Someone might have, Susan. It's our best lead. Let me ask you, did the guys Bill was talking to even know what an IPO is? I assume it means an Initial Public Offering of your stock."

"That's right. The only reason I know is that a few months ago Bill explained that this is how they were going to get rich, but he figured we were two or three years away before we could take the company public. I do remember someone asking Bill how much money he expected to raise by going public."

"Can you recall what Bill said?"

"I'm not sure that he gave a specific answer. I think he said something like, 'Bill Gates raised over \$200M when he took Microsoft public, but we'll settle for a little less.' He was just joking," Susan said, but realized Georges wasn't laughing.

"Okay Susan. We are staking out that bar as well as the other bars you visited that night. We will start looking for someone with a financial background, although there are a lot of people that play the stock market and know about IPOs. In the meantime, I suggest you see if you can raise a little more money. I'm not sure they will settle for \$250,000 after thinking they would get millions."

"Do you think they will kill him?" Susan asked, voicing her fears for the first time.

"I don't think so Susan," Georges answered, "although I am worried about one thing. This doesn't seem like it was a well-planned operation. The people that did this are amateurs, and you never know how amateurs will react."

"It is going to be difficult to wait another week. I can't help but wonder how they are treating him."

Three weeks later there was no progress. The kidnappers had dropped their demands to \$5M but insisted they would go no lower. The most Susan could raise was \$1M tops, thanks to an offer from Bill's three partners to buy his shares in the company. They were at a standstill.

"Georges, I can't stay in Spain forever, I am going home tomorrow. Please let me know if there are any new developments."

"I will, Susan. Trust me, I will keep trying."

As Susan boarded the plane the next day, she couldn't help but wonder if her return trip would be happy or sad.

Pete had tasted success and returned to practice Monday with renewed enthusiasm. He wanted more and looked forward to getting revenge against the boy that beat him, but that could wait. He had a lot of work to do.

They spent the first hour on groundstrokes, cross-courts and up the line from both sides. The emphasis was hitting the ball deep. Anything that bounced near the service line was a miss. Pete was on today, particularly off his backhand and Gregg was particularly pleased with his footwork and preparation.

"Nice work, Pete" Gregg said. "You're moving your feet real well. That's the key. Tennis is easy if you get to the ball early. Let's try some serve and volleys."

Pete served and came in behind it, doing a split-step at the service line to prepare for the return. If the serve was in, Gregg drilled a second ball at Pete's feet. After 20 minutes Pete walked to the net after missing his third volley in a row.

"Gregg, my forehand volley sucks. Do you think I came into the net too much Sunday? Maybe I should just stay back and rally. That's what Borg did."

"Pete, there was only one Borg, and tennis has changed in the last 20 years. Even the Spaniards are coming to the net. You are going to be a big kid in a few years, and you will want to serve and volley. It needs to be a strength, not a weakness. Let's keep at it."

After practice, Gregg walked over to Mary who had caught the last 15 minutes of the workout. "Hi Gregg, good workout?"

"It was, Mrs Simpson. He really was into it today. I'm thinking another tournament will do him some good."

"Me too. He obviously likes it and I think he needs the competition as well as the drills."

"There's a tournament coming up in two weeks at Innsbrook in Palm Harbor. It's close and will probably have a strong draw. The Bollettieri and Saddlebrook kids will probably be there."

"That's okay. Let's see how he stacks up."

"Okay, I'll enter him. In the meantime, I'm going to try to schedule him to play matches against a couple of the best players in the club. Dave and Clint will give him all he can handle. Pete could use some practice returning good serves."

"How do you think Pete will do?" Mary had played Dave a couple of times and could only get a few games off him, never a set.

"I wouldn't expect too much, but it will be good learning experience."

8

Rescue

“Georges, this is Lamar. I’m at Romas and the guy we have been looking for just walked in and ordered a beer. Should I grab him?”

It had now been two months since the kidnapping, and this was their first break. They had been staking out the Tapas bars with undercover agents and they finally found the man that was so interested in Bill’s company and the value of the IPO. Georges didn’t want to blow it. “Are you sure it’s him?”

“Yep, the bartender remembers him.”

“We are sending backup. Don’t touch him unless he tries to leave. Give us 15 minutes.”

Ten minutes later Georges and another officer walked into the Tapas Bar and took a table. Two other officers were stationed outside of both doors. They made eye contact indicating everyone was in position.

Lamar got up and walked over to the man at the other end of the bar. “Excuse me, Mr. Cruz, may we have a word with you outside? The two large gentlemen behind me are police officers.”

“What’s this all about? What have I done?”

Cruz vaguely remembered the conversation with the Americans, but swore he didn’t know anything about a kidnapping. “This American couple kept buying us drinks and asking questions about the Basque. We see tourists like that in here all the time.”

“Did they talk about money?”

“Now I remember. The guy kept telling us how much his company was worth and how they were going to be rich. I just figured they were blowing smoke, but Emanuel and his friend kept asking him questions.”

Cruz provided an address for Emanuel and two hours later the police had the name of the person Emanuel passed the information to. By morning they had what they wanted. Bill was being held in a small farmhouse in the French Pyrenees.

Lt. Caron knew time was of the essence. They must act before the local Basque sympathizers became aware that two of their members were missing. Georges planned on raiding the farm the next evening, but needed French cooperation. Ten years ago it would have been impossible, but cooperation between the two countries had improved tremendously since the wave of terrorist attacks in the 90’s, most of them attributed to the Basques although many were in fact done by Al-Qaeda

sympathizers. Georges called his counterparts in France and the joint Spanish-French rescue operation was scheduled for the next morning at 2:00 AM. They were to meet in San Sebastian at 11:00 P.M.

Bill had fallen asleep early that evening after another day of routine and boredom. In two months he had lost 20 pounds and had grown a full beard and mustache. He discovered quickly it was difficult to shave without a razor, mirror or hot water. What would he give for a hot shower? He had not been harmed but yearned for human contact. The old couple fed him twice a day and allowed him to clean his commode when the smell got to bad. They spoke little and when they did, it was a language Bill couldn't understand, probably Basque Euskadi or Castillian Spanish. The two guards that took turns outside never spoke. Bill had heard the woman call one of the guards Raul, one of the men that had taken him from the hotel. Gee, that seemed like a long time ago.

Bill was worried for himself, but also worried about Susan. Her life must be turned upside down due to his own stupidity. He was sure that he had been kidnapped because of his ego-trip at the Tapas bar. What a fool he had been.

Pete had two great weeks of practice leading up to his second tournament. Playing against the adults at the club had given him confidence. He had lost to both men the first week, but split sets the 2nd time they played. He knew he would have won the 3rd set, but it didn't matter, he was improving.

"Did Clint really say that?" Mary asked Gregg as they sat watching Pete warm up for his first match. Jim was in Mexico on business and despite his efforts, hadn't made it back in time for Pete's first-round match at Innsbrook.

"Yeah, both he and Dave were pretty impressed. They couldn't believe how fast Petie caught on to their games. The first day Pete couldn't handle Dave's lefty serve, but the 2nd time Pete adjusted and was drilling his returns. They won't want to play him in a couple years."

"Let's see if the competition helps him here. This kid looks pretty good."

"He's the # 3seed, but I really think Pete will overpower him, at least I hope so. I don't think Pete can beat him from the baseline, the kid's too fast."

Gregg was right. Pete won most of the points when he got to the net, but too often he chose to stay back. Pete's serve was good but he only managed to break the other boy's serve twice in 3 sets. Pete lost 6-2, 3-6, 7-5 in a well-played match.

"You played great," Mary said as she gave him a hug. "I am proud of you."

"Nice match" Gregg added. "Your volleys were awesome today."

"Thanks. I should have come in more, but I just couldn't make myself do it. I'll do better next match." Fortunately for Pete, there was a feed-in consolation division where losers in the first three rounds dropped into the consolation bracket.

Pete was right. He won his first match in the consolation round and both matches on Sunday, beating a Bollettieri kid from Georgia in the finals. Pete jumped for joy when the match ended.

"My first trophy, Mom. Where should I put it?"

"I slept with the first trophy I won Pete, but eventually I put it in my room."

"I'll sleep with it tonight, Mom, and then next week maybe Dad and I can build a trophy case."

"Raul, answer your phone. It's been ringing forever," the woman shouted as she shook Raul's shoulders, angry at having been awakened in the middle of the night. For the 10th time that day she regretted ever getting involved in this, but they needed the money.

Raul thought he was dreaming and couldn't open his eyes. It was a combination of the wine at dinner and the fact he had only a couple hours sleep. He would be glad when he left this hellhole.

"Hello," Raul whispered sleepily as he finally answered the phone.

"Get out of there, they are coming."

"What are you talking about, who is this?" Raul asked. He was having trouble thinking. Raul was never a fast thinker to begin with, and the headache wasn't helping.

"The police are coming. Get the prisoner and get out of there. Hurry!"

The message finally got through and Raul bolted into action. "Open the door," he shouted, "I need to take him," he yelled at the old woman, as he hurriedly got dressed.

The woman unlocked the prisoner's door and Raul barged in and pulled Bill upright. "Get up," he yelled, "We're getting out of here, now!"

Bill looked up and recognized the guard. For a fleeting moment he thought he was being rescued. He was shoved towards the door still dressed only in his shorts and T-shirt. What's going on he wondered?

Raul pushed him out the front door and headed for the woods. They were 40 meters from the trees when the floodlights hit them square in the face. "Halt," someone shouted, "we have you surrounded. Throw down your gun."

Bill felt Raul grab him and pull him close. "Get back, or I will kill the prisoner," he demanded. Bill felt something hard against the side of his head.

"Throw down your gun! You don't have a chance," a voice shouted from the darkness.

It might have been the two months of humiliation he had suffered, or it might have been his regret at not trying to escape in the parking

garage, but something in Bill made him brave. He shoved an elbow into Raul's solar plexus and dove to the ground. Without a hostage, Raul would have to surrender.

Raul was scared and would have been happy to surrender, but the blow to his stomach caused him to tighten his finger and accidentally fire a shot that buried harmlessly into the ground. Suddenly, the field erupted in a torrent of gunfire from the dozen police officers that surrounded him. Raul felt a bullet hit his arm and another in his right leg, and thought how lucky he was that the shots were not fatal. Another shot hit him in the chest and he knew then he was going to die. His gun went off once more as he fell to the ground.

Bill was lying flat on the ground as bullets whizzing around him. He was relieved when the gunfire ended. He knew he was rescued and soon he would be home with Susan. Bill started to look up when he heard Raul's final gunshot, and then everything went dark.

Lt. Georges Caron had been looking forward to calling Mrs. Peterson for the past month, ever since Susan went back to the States. They had been together for several weeks and had become good friends while they waited word from the kidnappers. Georges dreamed about providing Susan with the good news. In his dreams, the conversation was always the same; *"Susan, this is Georges. I have great news for you. We rescued your husband and he is safe. Would you like to talk with him?"* He envisioned handing the phone to Bill and sharing in their happiness.

Georges made the call. "Susan, is that you? This is Lieutenant Caron. I'm sorry but I have terrible news."

Anton got the word a little after 7:00 AM and knew he would have to move fast. The elderly couple would talk. He packed and was out of the house in 30 minutes, less than an hour before the Spanish militia raided his house. He was wanted on both sides of the border and needed a place to hide.

Four hours later Anton caught an overseas flight from Lisbon to Mexico City where the ETA had a strong network of support. He had time for only one call. "Agbu, Raul is dead. The police murdered him during the raid."

"Oh no," cried Agbu as the import of Anton's words became clear. "What are you going to do?" Agbu managed to ask.

"I'm flying to Mexico tonight until this quiets down. I'll write when I can. Agbu, listen to me. The police will question you because we're brothers. Be ready. Don't be afraid."

"I'm not afraid, Anton, but I will miss you and Raul." Agbu tried not to cry. Raul had been a good friend and brother. He made a promise to himself that someday, he would avenge Raul's murder.

9

The Basque Separatists

Anton's call made Agbu realize how lucky he was. He had been stupid to let the man see his face and hear his voice. Fortunately, Peterson was dead and would not identify him. Agbu had stayed away from the cabin where they kept the hostage so police could not tie him to the crime scene. Fingerprints found in Anton's van or home could be easily explained. They were brothers, and yes he had visited Anton frequently, but no, he knew nothing about any kidnapping. He had taken his brother's word that there were no video cameras or security guards, but next time he would trust no one and verify everything himself. It was the only way to survive.

Saying yes to the ETA was not a difficult decision. Both his father and mother had been leaders in the military wing of the ETA and had given their lives to the cause. Anton and Raul followed in their father's footsteps and joined the fight for Basque Independence. Agbu would learn from their mistakes and lead the Basque in a new direction.

The ETA (Euskadi Ta Askatasuna), meaning "Basque Fatherland and Liberty," is a loosely knit organization of Basque separatists located on both sides of Spain's border with France. Their primary objectives are autonomy from Spain and France, with Euskara as the compulsory language. College student activists from Bizkaia and Gipuzkao founded the ETA in 1959. Disappointed with the slow progress made by the PNV, the mainstream Basque political party, they first obtained notoriety by bombing government and military targets in Bilbao and Vitoria, the capital of the Basque homeland.

In 1961 the ETA went too far when they attempted to derail a military train carrying war veterans to Donostia to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the Spanish Civil War. The resultant uproar resulted in roadblocks, house searches and the widespread use of torture to find the ETA members responsible for this heinous act. Many ETA members were forced into exile abroad, but many other activists joined the struggle for Basque independence.

These events were a harbinger of the ETA's future for next 45 years. The ETA enjoyed periods of growth followed by severe

crackdowns by authorities when their actions upset the sensibilities of the nation. In 1997 for example, six million Spanish people took to the streets to condemn ETA violence following the brutal kidnapping and murder of a conservative, Basque politician. The resultant cease-fire ended in 1999 when the ETA became disenchanted with the slow progress being made towards Basque Independence.

This is not to say that the Basque have not made progress in their quest for independence. When General Franco died in 1976 and democracy was restored in Spain, many exiles were allowed to return. The Basque region was granted considerable autonomy including its own parliament and control over local issues such as education and taxes. Euskara is now taught in all Basque schools in Northern Spain.

The Basque Country currently recognized by Spain consists of three provinces in Northern Spain with a population of 2.3 million people. The Basque's would like to add a 4th province, Navarre, and three departments in Southwest France to "The Basque Country." The ETA is now at a low point. Some estimate that there are no more than twenty hard-core activists and several hundred supporters, organized in small, loosely coordinated cells.

The Basque heritage and language, Euskara, trace back centuries to the Stone Age and has survived countless wars and invasions. They have never had their own homeland, but remarkably, their culture has survived.

Ken and I were enjoying a casual dinner in Mexico City and discussing progress on the new Sports arena. They had spent the day meeting with Marco and his project managers, getting a first-hand look at the job site. "Ken, everything is going so well it scares me a little. We are ahead of schedule. Sven came through with the funding and Marco has a good handle on day-to-day operations."

"You're right, Marco and his team really know their business. It's only been six months and they have completed the roads and infrastructure. Next week they start pouring the footings. Surprisingly, the terrorists are even leaving us alone. Other than a few peaceful demonstrations, everything's been quiet."

Too quiet, I thought.

"We need to start looking for other projects; it doesn't look like we're needed here. Things here are going too well."

"Don't jinx us, Ken."

PART TWO

The Roads to Saddlebrook



10

The Florida Juniors

Petie finished his first year ranked #55 in the Florida 14-and-under USTA age bracket, despite never having won a tournament. It didn't sound like much, but his ranking usually got him seeded, which meant he avoided playing the top players until the second or third round. Nobody wants to drive a 100 miles to a tournament and be beaten in the first round. Unfortunately, half the players will lose their first round match; it's a statistic that holds pretty steady in tennis tournaments.

Another statistic is that there is only one winner, meaning that everyone else loses their last match. It's like the NCAA Basketball Tournament or the World Series, there is only one winner, but in this case you are talking about young kids. Winning a consolation championship is only fun the first time. After that it's like kissing your sister.

He opened his second year by entering a small tournament in Fort Meyers, about a 190 miles South of Tampa. Seeded #4, he reached the semifinals where he lost to a boy that he should have beaten. The boy played well, but Petie clearly did not play his best tennis, losing 5-7, 4-6 and double faulting on match point. To his credit, he congratulated his opponent graciously and wished him luck, before slamming his racquet into his bag and heading for the car.

"Petie, there is a consolation bracket in this tournament for first round losers. The tournament officials won't be happy if you withdraw and might report you to the USTA. Don't you want to stick around?" I had mixed emotions after I checked the schedule and saw that Petie wouldn't play his consolation match until 2:30 PM. Four hours was a long time to hang around after a tough loss.

"Let's go, Dad. I don't want to play again today. Tell them I'm injured."

It was a long ride home, particularly since Petie and I had driven to Ft. Myers alone. Gregg had a living to make and only went to the tournaments in the Tampa area. Mary was playing in her own 35-and-over singles tournament in Orlando and had reached the semifinals. The 35s were a tough bracket.

"Pete, you played well, reaching the semis is pretty good," I offered, trying to break the awkward silence. "You can't win every match."

"Dad, I sucked, and you know it," Pete answered. "I choked. I should have beaten that kid easy and be playing my second match by now. I'll never win a tournament."

"Pete, don't be too hard on yourself. You have only been playing tennis eight months; some of these other kids have been playing for years. Keep practicing, your time will come."

Pete wasn't hearing me and the rest of the trip was made in silence. Not even a stop at McDonalds' could shake Pete's depression. Pete headed for his room as soon as we got home, ignoring Lisa's question about how he did.

"Sorry for asking," Lisa yelled after him.

It was after 7 P.M. and I was beginning to worry when I heard Mary's car pull into the garage. Lisa had already eaten and was holed up in her room studying for a test. "Anyone home?" she yelled as she came into the kitchen. "I could use a little help."

TV would have to wait as I jumped up from the couch. "What can I do?" I asked as she dropped her tennis bag on the floor and put a take-out order of Chinese food from Ho Ho Choy restaurant on the counter.

"There is something on the front seat that's too heavy for me. Please?" she pleaded.

I was a little suspicious as I headed to the garage wondering what could be heavier than her tennis bag that held three racquets and enough clothing for a weekend vacation. My suspicions were confirmed as I returned with her winner's trophy. My only satisfaction was yelling "oh no," as I pretended to drop it.

"Congratulations, honey, I'm so proud of you," I said as we embraced. "What were the scores?"

"7-5, 6-3 in the semis and 7-6 (10-8) in a third set tiebreaker in the finals. She had me four match points."

"Wow, I wish I could have been there. It certainly would have been more exciting than my day," I said between mouthfuls of moo-shu pork.

"I was afraid to ask. When I didn't hear from you I figured the news wasn't good, and when I saw your car in the driveway I figured he must have lost in the semis."

I nodded.

"How is he taking it?"

"Not well," I said as I quickly related the long ride home. "He's really down."

"Well, he and I are going to have a little talk. We had an agreement. He shouldn't be playing if he isn't having fun."

"Mary, let's wait and see how he handles it tomorrow at practice. It's not like he threw his racquet or had a temper tantrum. He's just disappointed at losing. Who wouldn't be?"

"You're right; we should give him a chance to work things out in his own mind."

"Did I hear you say that I was right?" I said with a smile. "That and your tennis win is a cause for celebration," I said, leading her towards the bedroom.

"Aren't you hungry?"

"Yes I am."

The next morning we got up early and noticed that someone had raided the refrigerator and the moo-shu pork had mysteriously disappeared. We knew it wasn't Mama or Papa Simpson and Lisa didn't eat that much. Our suspicions were confirmed a few minutes later when Pete bounded down the steps in good spirits. "That Chinese food was great, Mom! What's for breakfast?"

His good spirits carried over to his afternoon lesson with Gregg. Mary watched from her car and it seemed like Pete was a bundle of energy. After practice, she approached Gregg to get his input on Pete's attitude.

"I don't know what you were worried about, Mary. Pete never looked better. He certainly seems like he is putting yesterday's loss behind him."

"That's terrific, Gregg. Did he say anything about it to you?"

"He just said that he should have won, but he choked. Pete feels terrible about losing the match on a double fault. We talked a little about the difference between choking and playing under pressure. We are going to work on a few things that will help him stay focused."

"Like what?"

"You ever watch the Bollettieri kids, and how they always are adjusting their racquet strings between points. This is what his sports psychologist Jim Lenoir teaches as a way to reduce tension and help the player focus on the next point. We need to develop some kind of routine for Pete."

"It sounds like a golfer's routine that Jim keeps talking about."

"The concept is exactly the same."

"Just don't let him start grunting or squealing."

"Jim, there's a call for you on line one, a Mr. Hunt from some construction company," Grace announced via intercom. "It sounds important."

"Take a message, Grace, we are in the middle of something here."

"You might want to take this one, Jim. I tried to take a message, but he said he needs a quick response. He says he has an opportunity for us."

Three of us were in my office discussing our new track leasing program. I looked across my desk at Sally and shrugged. I didn't like being interrupted, but Grace had been with me for several years and her

instincts were usually pretty good. She was more like an office manager than a secretary. "Okay, put him through, but I'm holding you responsible," I said as I winked at Sally.

"Just add it to the list," Grace mumbled as she put the call through.

"Jim Simpson here, may I help you?"

"Mr. Simpson, good morning. My name is Carl Lindner. My company is in a bit of a bind and I'm hoping you can help us out."

"I'll do what I can, what's the problem?" I asked distractedly as I continued looking at the papers Sally and I had been reviewing. "Who is this again?"

"I'm sorry. My name is Carl Lindner, President of Hunt Construction Group out of Indianapolis. Maybe you have heard of us?"

Later Sally told me my mouth dropped open and my eyes opened wide. All I remembered was that Mr. Lindner suddenly had my full attention. Get Ken, I mouthed to Sally. Hunt Construction Group ranks as one of the top construction firms in the nation with and specializes in building major league sports arenas. Hunt is also of the few American-owned construction companies.

"Of course I have, Mr. Lindner, and I apologize for being short with you. I was in the middle of something, but it can wait. What can I do for you, and please call me Jim."

"We got ourselves in a little situation, Jim. Our firm is over committed. We bid on three projects that are scheduled to start next month. We expected to win one or two but as luck would have it, we just learned this morning that we were awarded all three jobs. It sounds good, but we don't have the resources to take on all three projects at one time."

"What type of work is it, and how much money are we talking about?" I was beginning to think he was looking for construction financing.

"One is a large utility plant and two are new sports stadiums for NFL teams. I don't have the manpower to do all three. I'm not looking for money, Jim; I'm looking to farm out at least one of the projects to another construction company such as yours. Otherwise, the next highest bidder gets the work."

Ken came into the room and sat down. "Carl, let me put you on speaker phone so my associate Ken Reed can listen in. Do you mind?"

"No, that's fine. Hi Ken."

"Good morning," Ken responded, not sure who he was talking to.

"Ken, this is Carl Lindner, president of Hunt Construction. They apparently have too much on their plate and are wondering if we are in a position to help them out by taking over one of their projects. Is that about right Carl?"

"That's pretty close, Jim. The project I have in mind is in your own back yard, the new stadium for the Tampa Bay Buccaneers. I'm sure you have read about it?"

"I sure have. There is an article in the paper this morning that said Hunt Construction was awarded the work."

"Carl, this is Ken. Will they let you sub the work out? The newspaper article said there were several bidders on that job including a couple other large construction firms. Didn't Clark Construction bid?"

"They did, Ken, but Clark's bid was not in the top two. The next highest bid was from a Korean company, and for various reasons, we would prefer they do not get this job. Normally the Korean firm would be automatically awarded the job, but in this case, I think I can get them to make an exception, particularly since you are based in Tampa. Hunt would need to be the contractor of record, but you would have complete autonomy and receive all the credit."

"Why us, our only experience with football stadiums is the Mexico City sports arena."

"I know, but I have my reasons, Jim. My people tell me the Mexico City job is going well. You will be pleased to know that City officials are giving you a great reference. We also have a great deal of respect for the construction manager that you hired away from Bouygues."

"Marco Noah," I interjected. "I'm glad to hear he is held in such high regard. We are happy with his work and he would certainly have responsibility for this new project."

"Excellent. Another reason is that you are local, and American owned. I think the Tampa politicians are more likely to accept this restructuring if we bring in a local firm. You would be the general contractor and my people would be made available on a limited consulting basis, as you deem necessary. I'm sure we can work out the details."

"I'm sure we can, Carl. Is there anything else?"

"Jim, most of our competitors are foreign-owned companies. George Hunt likes to help out American-owned companies whenever possible. George does not want another foreign company to get a toehold in the United States. That's about it. Any questions?"

"I have one that comes to mind. I assume the construction contract you were awarded would allow us to make a profit? Would your company want anything off the top?"

"Not a dime, Jim, other than maybe a fair reimbursement of the work we put in to prepare our bid. Your firm will get 100% of what we negotiated, and believe me, it's a fair contract. Hunt Construction doesn't need to low-ball bids to get work."

"So that's about it, Interested?"

Ken and I exchanged why-not shrugs. "Absolutely, it sounds like a great opportunity. What's the next step?"

"We will notify the Tampa Sports Authority immediately and try to set up a meeting for later this week. Are you available?"

"We'll be there. In the meantime, please email us what you have so we can begin assembling our team."

"Thanks gentlemen, I know you won't be disappointed," Carl said as he hung up the phone.

Ken let out a loud "Yes!" as we high-fived.

"Wow, what a start to the week. This could be a tremendous opportunity," I said, thinking of what this might eventually lead to.

"Did I do good?" Grace asked as she stuck her head in the doorway.

"Yes you did," I laughed as I came around my desk to give her a bear hug. Grace had four grandchildren and was a few pounds overweight, but today she was especially beautiful.

The next year Pete's Florida ranking jumped to #7 in the 14-and-unders, due largely to wins in four tournaments. His best match was a victory in a designated tournament over a boy ranked #4 in the State. Pete lost in the finals to Florida's #1 ranked player but earned USTA ranking points by winning a set. It was what the USTA called a good loss.

"A good loss" I thought. "That sounds like something some honest lawyer or concerned banker dreamed up."

11

Tampa Stadium

Pete continued to grow and improve. As a fifteen year old he was ranked #12 in the Florida 16's even though it was his first year in this age bracket. Just over six feet tall, his serve was becoming a weapon. He was a long way removed from that boy who wanted to hang out at the base line. Borg was still his hero, but Pete's all-court game was beginning to look more and more like his namesake, Pete Sampras.

Driving to tournaments every other weekend was getting to be a drag particularly to the out-of-town tournaments in Orlando, Boca Raton and other "designated tournaments" that offered stiff competition and an opportunity to improve his State ranking. We looked forward to a weekend off until Pete decided at the last minute to enter the New Port Richey tournament where he had started two years ago. He wanted to play doubles with his friend, Ron, whom he had met at the tourney two years ago. "Ron said I could stay at his house and his parents will drive. You won't need to drive me and can stay home and relax."

Pete was seeded #1 and easily reached the semis. Saturday night we got a call. "Are you coming to the tournament today?" Pete asked. We hadn't gone the first day because these small tournaments no longer provided much competition.

"Is there someone there that is going to give you a problem?"

"Yeah, the finals could be tough. There is a Canadian kid from Saddlebrook that looks pretty good. He doesn't have a Florida ranking, but I heard he is ranked #2 in Canada. The semi final match should also be interesting," Pete said with a chuckle. "I guarantee you will enjoy the match."

We got to the semi-final match just as the boys were completing their warm-ups, and immediately saw why Pete had invited us. His semi-final match was against the boy that had beaten him badly two years ago and then complained that he hadn't played well. Pete still remembered the disrespect the boy had shown him.

Forty minutes later it was over: 6-0, 6-2. Pete shook the boys hand and left the court quickly.

"Well, was revenge as sweet as you thought it would be?" I asked.

"No, it was really disappointing. He's not really a bad guy, just a little cocky when he wins. I actually felt sorry for him, that's why I gave him those two games."

"It's a good lesson, Pete" Mary said. "Revenge is a negative emotion and in the long run, seldom brings you the satisfaction you are looking for."

"Anyway" I said, "you are right about the Saddlebrook kid". I was watching him play on the next court and could tell he had a game that could give Petie problems. "He has a darn nice game. You better be ready."

Carl Lindner called back and said a meeting was scheduled with the Tampa Sports Authority for Friday morning. He introduced Tim Samuels who had overseen the preparation of the bid. Thirty minutes later Tim emailed us the TSA bid specifications and the Hunt proposal, including cost estimates and supporting CAD drawings. The project was off to a good start.

I called Marco and gave him the news. "Can you get away? We need you in Tampa ASAP." I summarized the gist of the phone calls from Carl Linder.

Marco was absolutely thrilled. This was exactly what he had been hoping for when he joined our small company. The Mexico City job was going well and most of his responsibilities could be delegated. This was an opportunity to show what he could do.

"I'll be there tomorrow morning, Jim. This sounds awesome. The Hunt people know what they are doing so we should be in good shape with the bid price, but I want to look at everything again. Do we have the software to read the CAD drawings? Will our printer handle it?"

"Tell you what, Marco, here's Ken. Tell him what you need and we will have it ready for you when you get here."

Marco was in the office early the next morning and spent the next five hours reviewing the CAD documents and the bid specifications. Ken helped where he could but basically stayed out of his way. We got together after lunch.

"Well, Marco, what do you think? Can you do it?"

"You're damn right we can, and we can do it better and cheaper than what they planned. I think we can double or maybe even triple the \$8M profit they projected."

"Okay, tell me how," I asked with some skepticism. I preferred a more conservative approach of promising less and producing more. Marco was sticking his neck out.

"I'll need more time to work on this but there are savings in at least three areas. Being local will save us about a \$1M in travel costs, but the main savings come from their design and choice of sub contractors. The numbers they have in for the electrical and mechanical subs are way out of line. I can get local people to do the job for half their estimates if you let me hire someone I worked with at Bouygues. I spoke with him earlier and he can be here next week."

"Do it," I agreed. "This is your baby. What's the problem with the design, Marco? That concerns me. Will the TSA (Tampa Sports Authority) go for it?"

"They will, because my design is better. The Hunt proposal was done in hurry and uses poured concrete for all the pilings and footings in the stadium and garage. We can save \$5 - \$7M by using reinforced steel. It looks better, it's stronger and it's cheaper. Hunt would have ended up doing the same thing."

"Hunt mentioned reimbursement for their bid costs. What do you think is a fair price?"

"Nothing, if you ask me, unless you hire the guy that did them. They are just rough sketches used to come up with a cost estimate. The next step will be to develop the actual drawings. The rough drawings in the proposal don't really help you much unless you know what the guy was thinking and have access to the Computer Assisted Design system they used."

"They sent us an internal cost schedule showing they spent \$450,000 on the bid. Most of this was time charges priced at their normal billing rates. Their actual out-of-pocket costs were less than \$20,000. I wouldn't pay them more than that."

I sat back and considered our options before deciding on a course of action. "Tell you what. Let's reimburse them the entire \$450,000 in return for access to the people that prepared the proposal. Who knows, they might be able to help us, and I don't want to appear cheap when we stand to make \$10M - \$20M. Okay?"

"You're the boss," Marco said. "By the way, I will need to hire a few more people to oversee the sub-contractors. I can borrow some people from the Mexico City team, but not enough to do both projects."

"Go ahead, Marco. Put your staffing and manpower requirements together and let's talk again tomorrow."

Ken had been an interested listener. "If I may suggest, let's hire people with the idea that we will need them for future projects. I have the feeling that this is only the beginning."

Marco and I nodded in agreement.

Pete's match against the Saddlebrook boy was worth the trip. Down a set and a break, Pete fought back to win in three exciting sets; 5-7, 7-6 (5), 6-3. The boys were exhausted, but only had 30 minutes to rest before they met again in the doubles finals where Pete and Ron won in straight sets.

Mary and I were watching the doubles match when a young man, about 30, approached us. "May I join you?"

I motioned him to sit down. "My name is Sammy Baston, head tennis pro at Saddlebrook. I'm really impressed with Pete's game. Whoever is teaching him has done a great job."

"Thanks," I said. "Mary has been doing some of the coaching and he takes lessons and drills with our club pro, Gregg."

"Thanks for the compliment" Mary added. "Your boy is a nice player too. It could have gone either way."

"You're right, but your son was able to reach back for something extra when the match was on the line. That was the difference, and that's what we look for in a kid. Not too many players can do it. It's like Sampras on break points. He always seemed to come up with the big serve. Your boy seems to have that ability."

Sammy certainly had our attention. The best way to a parent's heart is to compliment their kids, but he seemed sincere in what he was saying. "Thanks, we appreciate the compliments. Parents always enjoy hearing something nice about their children."

"Have you thought of bringing him out to Saddlebrook to look around? The competition for Pete would do wonders for his game. There are ten or twenty kids out there that could give Pete a real good game, and a few that frankly are quite a bit better. It's really the next step if you want him to get to the next level."

"Let us think about it. Right now we are happy with the coaching he is getting from Mary and Gregg."

"I understand, Mr. Simpson, but if you want to try us out just give us a call. This is my direct number," he said as he handed me a business card. "Believe me, Pete would benefit from training at Saddlebrook."

Mary and I watched as he walked away. "It's something to think about," I suggested.

"I know, it's tempting, but I'm not sure if Petie is ready to make that type of commitment. Five hours of tennis every day isn't for everyone."

12

The ETA in Mexico

Anton found new friends when he arrived in Mexico. The ETA has a well-coordinated infrastructure in several South American countries including Nicaragua, Venezuela, El Salvador, Uruguay and Cuba. They are strongest in Mexico where there is a movement to establish an autonomous "Basque-like" region in the Mexican State of Chiapas.

The Mexico ETA is centered in Mexico City where Anton soon became an integral member of a terrorist cell specializing in kidnapping and extortion. After a few months he was sent to a camp in Managua where he trained with the Sandinistas and El Salvador's FMLN. Upon graduation, Anton was provided a list, pictures and a short biography of 12 businessmen living or working in Mexico City that the group considered "prime targets." Jim Simpson was the 4th name on the list.

Carlos was 16 and seeded 6th in the European junior championships 18-and-under age bracket. The winner receives an automatic entry into next month's French Open tennis tournament. There were three Swedes, a Frenchman and an Italian seeded higher.

The tournament was held in Paris, on the outer courts of Roland Garros Stadium. Carlos was from a small town and had never been to Barcelona, much less Paris. He looked forward to seeing the city at night. Their hotel was near the tennis center on the outskirts of Paris, but Marta is a great subway system. The four Spaniards set their sights on Friday evening.

Carlos breezed into the semis without losing a set and was scheduled to play the Italian at 9:00 AM, Saturday morning, with a doubles match to follow. Carlos was the only Spaniard boy remaining in Singles or Doubles.

Curfew was 10:00 PM and the three boys were in their room apparently asleep when Fritz did his bed check. Forty-five minutes later the boys caught the subway and by 11:15 they got off at the Latin Quarter station across the Seine from Notre Dame Cathedral.

The view was breathtaking but was lost on the teenagers. It was Friday night and the Quarter was hopping. They crossed the open square past the many brasseries and headed into the labyrinth of small

alleys and streets that make up the Latin Quarter. Carlos had never seen so many good-looking women.

The other boys were 17 and 18 and more experienced, but Carlos looked older than 16. He soon learned that Paris women liked him. He was already over six feet tall, with broad shoulders and shoulder length hair. Deep green eyes offset his dark, tanned complexion. The other boys made the first moves, but soon learned that the girls wanted Carlos. At 12:30 Carlos lost his virginity in an alleyway to a 19-year-old French girl named Alexis.

At 1:30 they met two American girls who invited the three friends to their hotel room in the Quarter. The other boys wisely said no and headed home, but Carlos decided to stay. The next morning he woke up with a bad headache and a naked girl on either side. "*Where am I?*" he thought. He remembered only tiny fragments of how he got here; his friends leaving, the walk down the narrow alley, the tiny lift that pressed him against the two girls, and smoking something the girls gave him in the room. Carlos remembered telling the girls that he didn't smoke, but they just laughed.

He sat up and saw the clock said 9:45 AM and it suddenly dawned on him that he had forfeited his semi-final singles match. He might be able to make the doubles match if he hurried.

That thought disappeared when Melanie rolled over and put her hand between his legs. "Come here, Carlos, I want you first this time." Carlos learned that there really could be too much of a good thing, particularly when you have a hangover. When Melanie was sated, Cynthia took her turn.

Finally Carlos called a halt. "Girls, I need something for this headache and I need to make a call. May I use this phone?"

After gulping down three Excedrin, Carlos called Fritz' cell phone.

"This is Fritz."

"Fritz, Carlos."

"Where in the hell are you, are you okay? The other boys said you wandered off and they couldn't find you. What happened?"

"I'm okay. Somebody must have slipped me a pill or something, because I woke up in this alley about an hour ago. I have a headache, but I'll be okay."

"Is that a shower I hear in the background?"

"This married couple found me and let me use their place to shower and clean up. He is going to drive me to the Marta station and show me how to get back."

"I'm glad you're okay, but we need to talk. You really blew it this week. You realize the winner here gets an automatic entry into the main draw of the French Open."

Carlos finally started realizing what he had done. "I'm sorry, Fritz."

The girls were laughing at him when he hung up. "That's quite a story you made up Carlos, we think you deserve a reward."

Three hours later Carlos arrived back at the hotel and headed for his room. His headache was back and he badly needed sleep. The temporary euphoria he felt from the funny cigarettes the girls had given him was starting to wear off.

Fritz was waiting for him, but took one look at Carlos and walked away without saying a word.

Sunday, Carlos had nothing to do but roam the courts and think of what could have been. The boy's finals weren't scheduled to begin for another hour so Carlos wandered over to watch the girls' championship match. The 15-year old French girl that was thrashing her opponent immediately captivated him. She not only was good, but she was beautiful.

Match point was a powerful overhead from the service line that put an exclamation on the 6-1, 6-2 drubbing. She threw her racquet high into the air and waved to the large, partisan crowd. The 500 French fans went wild. It's been a long time since they had a French-born tennis player that was this good.

Carlos needed to meet this girl and waited by the gate. "Excuse me, Miss, but I wanted to congratulate you. You've got game."

She looked up at the handsome boy and immediately reverted from the confident champion that just won the European Junior Championship, to a 15-year old girl that just met the boy of her dreams. "Ah, thank you," she managed to utter. "Did you play?"

"I lost in the semis," Carlos replied without elaborating. "I'm Carlos, what do they call you?"

"Ambre."

"Maybe we can hit some time?"

"Any time," Ambre replied as her coach and trainer pulled her away.

"That's the kid that got drugged up in Paris Friday night and never showed for his semifinal match. Stay away from him. He's bad news."

Ambre turned and found Carlos still watching her. She gave him a smile. *So that's the guy everyone is talking about. He is quite a player from what I hear and he sure is good looking.*

The grand opening of the Mexico City stadium was scheduled for a week from Saturday. Jim and Mary were scheduled to get in Friday night for the VIP party hosted by Mexico's President. Ken and Marco were also invited.

"Jim, Chris Lewis is on the phone," Grace announced. "It's so good to hear from her again."

"Chris, is it really you? To what do I owe this honor? It's been awhile." Jim was trying to remember the last time they had spoken; three or four months at least. It had been almost two years since she had broken off her engagement with Ken. Chris quit her job with the DEA to accept a position with an International Consulting Firm and was doing a

lot of traveling to Europe. There were unsubstantiated rumors that her new job was a cover and Chris was still a government employee.

"I know, Jim, but I've been so busy and, well, you know, it's still a little awkward with Ken. Is he doing okay?"

"Yeah, he seems to be doing fine. Business is good and his golf game is better than ever. I can't comment on his love life because no one could replace you. I think he is considering the priesthood."

"That's not the Ken I knew and loved. Listen, Jim, there is something I need to talk with you about. I'm in town and could be over in a half-hour. Is that convenient?"

"Come on over, Chris. It will be great to see you. I love mysteries."

"Okay, see you in 30 minutes."

"What could she want?" I asked Ken. I had walked over to Ken's office to warn him that Chris was on the way over. Surprises weren't good when someone was still carrying a torch.

"I have no idea, but it probably has something to do with her work. I think she is still some kind of spook. We'll find out soon enough."

"Do you mind hanging around in case you are needed?"

"Sure, why not. It will be good to see her again," he said without conviction.

It was less than four years ago that I had hired Chris to work with Ken on the Cabo casino project. She was fresh out of Harvard Business School with little business experience, but it was obvious from day one that she would fit in. Not only was she smart and fluent in Spanish and French, she was drop-dead gorgeous. Tall with short black hair and a slim, athletic figure, she could easily have gotten by on her looks alone, but didn't. I knew from the first day that she had a great future. Little did I know at the time that she moonlighted as an undercover DEA agent and was using our company as a way to get closer to Mario and his Miami drug ring. Chris managed to perform both jobs well and in her spare time, fall in love with Ken. Despite her motives, she had been a great hire,

Chris showed up five minutes early accompanied by two men. She was all business as I led them into my office. "May we close the door" Chris asked as her partner closed the door. "This is Special Agent Fred Reese and Special Agent Ray Barlow with the CIA. As you might know, I'm not with the DEA anymore." We shook hands all around.

"It's that traffic ticket, isn't it? I told Mary to pay it."

"Jim," she admonished, "just listen to what Ray and Fred have to say."

"Have you ever heard of the ETA, Jim?" Ray asked.

"I think so. Aren't they some kind of terrorist group over in Europe? I also happen to know that they have a strong presence in Mexico and South America"

"That's accurate, Jim. They're most known for being the terrorist wing of the Basque Separatist movement that wants an autonomous country covering parts of Northern Spain and a little bit of France. What isn't widely known is that they are stronger in Mexico and Central America than they are in Spain."

"And this has something to do with me, or if I can guess, the Mexico City stadium project?"

"Both," Fred interjected. "We have reason to believe they will try something to disrupt the opening ceremonies next weekend. In addition, Ray just received evidence that you may be targeted by a kidnapping ring during your visit."

"Did you put a contract out on me, Chris?" I joked, trying to absorb what they had said.

Chris remained silent. She knew I was stalling as I tried to assimilate what they had just told me. It's not every day that a person receives this kind of news.

"Okay, can you tell me what you have? I'm still finding this hard to believe. And Chris, can we get Ken in here. He is going with me to the grand opening ceremony next week."

'Sure, that will be fine.'

I buzzed Ken's office. "Ken, come on in here for a minute. You need to hear this."

"Chris," Ken said as he took a seat.

"Good morning Ken," Chris replied as she greeted Ken and introduced her associates before quickly recapping the conversation.

"Wow," was all Ken said.

Ray laid out the information the CIA had collected. The agency had intercepted several cell phone conversations between suspected terrorists alluding to a major event coming soon and last week intercepted a truckload of explosives on route to Mexico City. The truck driver is a known member of an ETA cell group.

"The evidence that they are targeting the sports arena is circumstantial, but compelling," Chris added.

Fred's evidence about the possible kidnapping was less circumstantial. He handed me an envelope. "Recognize anyone?"

I opened the envelope and saw my picture and a short bio. I also saw a list with my name circled and a date written in the margin. "That's a week from Saturday," I said as I handed Ken the envelope. I recognized a couple other names on the list. "Why me? These other guys on the list have a lot more money than I do."

"You know why, Jim. This project is controversial, particularly since an American company is building the stadium. That makes it a perfect target for the ETA, particularly when they are talking some nonsense about an autonomous government in four or five Mexican States."

"It's nonsense, but this grand opening next Saturday ties right into their rhetoric," Fred added. "It would be tremendous boost to their cause

if they could disrupt the ceremony and hold the president of the American firm for ransom. It makes perfect sense from their perspective.”

“What do you suggest we do? I certainly don’t want to take Mary along although she will be disappointed.”

“We can’t force you to do anything, Jim, but we are asking you to proceed as normal. If Mary doesn’t go, they might be suspicious. Believe me, we will do everything we can to ensure your safety. We are also going to need to do a complete background check on your entire construction crew. It’s possible they have someone on the inside.”

“Bait?” I thought to myself.

“Chris, did you say you would do anything to ensure Jim’s safety?” Ken asked with a straight face.

“That’s what I said, Ken,” Chris answered hesitantly. She knew Ken well enough to see he had something on his mind.

“Okay, then you should agree to be my date for the weekend. You can ride in the car with Jim and me and take care of him at the party, without raising any suspicion.”

“But ...” Chris started as she tried to escape the trap.

“It’s perfect,” Fred said.

“What a great idea,” Ray agreed.

I couldn’t help it and started to laugh and was soon joined by Ken. Chris managed a smile. Fred and Ray were clueless.



Morane-Saulnier Type G



Roland Garros
([October 6, 1888](#) – [October 25, 1918](#))

DOUBLE FAULT at ROLAND GARROS is a novel about four junior tennis players from Spain, France and the United States that are destined to meet at Roland Garros, home of the French Open, the second leg of the Tennis Grand Slam. The four teenagers meet at the Saddlebrook tennis academy in Tampa, Florida where tennis lessons are spiced with love, jealousy and revenge. Basque ETA terrorist plans to blow up the newly rebuilt Roland Garros stadium set the stage for a thrilling and surprising climax. The author has created a cast of intriguing, real life characters and themes.

“You don’t need to play tennis to enjoy this book.”

“The character development is excellent.”

“This is a love story.”



Jim Plautz is a businessman, avid tennis player and father of three. Originally from Wisconsin, Jim now makes his home in Tampa, Florida with his wife, Rosann. This is his second novel.

“My novels are similar in structure to the Stephen Frey books (The Day Trader, The Vulture Fund, Silent Partner, etc.). These are action thrillers set in a business environment. I add a sports theme. My first book was about golf and my next books will be about basketball, baseball, football and soccer. This book is about tennis.”