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INTRODUCTION

Full-Court Journalism

“It is fairly obvious that a man who has been tapped on the chin with five fingers wrapped up in a leather boxing glove and propelled by the arm of an expert knows more about that particular sensation than one who has not, always provided he has the gift of expressing himself.”—Paul Gallico, “The Feel”

So what’s it like to scale Everest, parachute out of a Cessna, stunt with the Blue Angels, tend goal for the Boston Bruins, burn rubber on a NASCAR track, marathon one hundred miles in twenty-four hours, quarterback the Detroit Lions, sail the ocean blue between Los Angeles and Honolulu on an all-woman crew? What’s it like to receive John McEnroe’s slice serve, paddle Jack London’s Alaskan river route, take a punch from Muhammad Ali, coach the Phoenix Suns’ Steve Nash, or call “fair” or “foul” to a Manny Ramirez line drive and suffer the consequences?

If you’re a good little sports reader, you know already—because you’ve skipped the dry stuff, the bunny hill of prefaces and intros, the bookish yadda yadda yadda—and headed straight for the slopes: the forty eye-popping accounts that follow from the world’s top participatory sportswriters.

In a July 2007 interview with National Public Radio, veteran sportswriter Frank Deford claimed sports were “the easiest thing to write about, and I guess the most fun to write about. . . . Every day there are winners and losers and there’s drama and there’s joy and there’s glamour.” As a former newspaper sports editor, I can vouch for the second part, the part about

sportswriting being a whole lot of fun. But some would beg to differ with the “easiest thing” thing, as the rigorous brand of sportswriting that fills this book is the antithesis of a walk in the park and one reason why the sportswriting milquetoast must sit this one out: that person isn’t willing to lace up the sneakers or strap on the jock to experience the world of the athlete from the inside out.

Sportswriting great Paul Gallico had the empathy principle figured out way back in 1937, circa his seminal sportswriting memoir, *Farewell to Sport*. When a mere sportswriter gets knocked out by the likes of Jack Dempsey, as Gallico did, or by Archie Moore, as George Plimpton did, or by Muhammad Ali, as Davis Miller did, he’s indisputably been “touched.” His hard-won knowledge makes him special—in a sense, shamanic. And, if you believe in the six degrees of separation, you are, through the accounts written by Gallico, Plimpton, and Miller as they appear in this collection, one degree removed from those famous fists. By the same token, if you’ve received McEnroe’s serve, as James Kaplan did, you’re just two steps removed from Bjorn Borg, Jimmy Connors, and Boris Becker, and only one step from Jimmy Mac himself, whether you consider him the tennis Christ, the tennis Antichrist, or somewhere in between. The religious analogy, fanciful as it may seem, serves here: participatory sportswriters assist, witness, and testify, Magi-like, one hand filled with frankincense, the other with smelling salts.

Insofar as this collection is concerned, a reporter hasn’t really begun to report—or become real like the Velveteen Rabbit—until he or she follows a star, leaving behind a desk calendar, a faux leather chair, and a half-eaten jelly roll to take part in the minor miracle that is big-time sports. Sports-hungry television audiences are rapidly reaching the same conclusion, which is one reason why it seems that every immaculately enunciating, moderately interesting, mildly amusing host playing emcee in the broadcast booth is joined by two ex-pro athletes doing the heavy lifting alongside. Put another way, the on-camera sports vets constitute the real life of the party. Still, who better to sort through the vainglorious athlete’s whopping fish tales or those larger-than-life battlefield blow-by-blows than the retiring writer standing next to the punchbowl, jotting it all down on a well-worn notepad?

The fact is, it takes two to do the sports coverage tango: a skilled communicator—light of foot, deft of pen—and an amateur or ex-athlete still close enough to the “thrill of victory and the agony of defeat.” And sometimes, rarely, when the beast in question—half-sportswriter, half-participant—puts it all together, a perfect centaur sings.

Athlete-journalist-visionary Walt Whitman sums up the esprit de corps of the participatory sports journalist in “Song of Myself,” where the old wrestler-vagabond avows: “I am the teacher of athletes / He that by me speaks a wider breast than my own proves the width of my own.” In a bear-hug of all things participatory, Old Walt reminds us that it’s “first-rate to ride, to fight, to hit the bull’s eye, to sail a skiff.” Another fine poet-athlete, Theodore Roethke, who, incidentally, once worked as a tennis coach, puts an equally fine point on it in his great poem “The Waking,” wherein he writes, “I feel my fate in what I cannot fear / I learn by going where I have to go.”

Roethke and Whitman have it right: the most athletic writers in any genre are those who choose the unadulterated, unmediated experience and, through it, achieve a natural high, a moment of *clairvoyance*, of clear seeing, to share with their readers. There’s a palpable youthfulness about the work of the participatory journalist. The thirty-something-year-old narrator of Chuck Palahniuk’s blockbuster novel, *Fight Club*, for example, speaks volumes for participatory sportswriters everywhere when he muses, “Love and life belongs to great risk.”

Like the existential characters in *Fight Club*, participatory journalists often get spooked by their own complacencies and domesticities and rubberband into a competitive world, into a fight club real or imagined. Hunter S. Thompson, whose oblique gonzo accounts of gambling and racing make a gesture at participatory sports journalism without fully becoming it, posed the crucial rhetorical question in his 1955 essay, “Security,” penned at the ripe old age of seventeen: “We shall let the reader answer this question for himself: who is the happier man, he who has braved the storm of life and lived or he who has stayed securely on shore and merely existed?”

The journey of the participatory sportswriter is thus a hero’s and a

heroine's journey, as mythologist Joseph Campbell sketched it—the writer hears the call to adventure, initially resists it as pure folly, and finally relents when the voices (e.g., *If you build it, they will come*) become too loud to ignore. The man or woman who accepts the participatory challenge undertakes the hero's journey, in fact doubly so: each faces the epic self-doubts implicit in both sport and writing. These folks are not just facing a blank screen, a blinking cursor, or a screaming editor. No sirree, as these pages attest, they are about to get hit by a two-hundred-and-forty-pound lineman or mauled by a thousand-pound bull. Playing out the Joseph Campbell storyline, then, participatory sportswriters face threshold guardians and gatekeepers (in the guise of micromanaging owners, dubious editors, and dismissive athletes) yet fully immerse themselves in the alluring athlete's world (typically disguised, having donned the chosen sport's uniform) to face the supreme ordeal (the game, the race, the contest) and return home safely, often regretfully, to their humdrum cubicles, bearing fantastical dispatches from another world. As Palahniuk writes, "After a night in a fight club, everything in the real world gets the volume turned down."

There is, it's fair to say, something of the wild child's willfulness and acting out in the sportswriter who demands to *see* and *feel* for himself or for herself, to go inside the ropes and beyond the call. Whether participatory sports journalism may be considered an offshoot of Tom Wolfe's New Journalism or not, what's distinct about the next-generation work in this compendium is what editor Robert Boynton claims, in his anthology, *The New New Journalism: Conversations with America's Best Nonfiction Writers on Their Craft*, characterizes the journalistic new age: namely, "innovative immersion strategies" forever changing "the way one gets the story." In Boynton's book and others, Tom Wolfe gets more than his fair share of credit for pioneering, or at least defining, New Journalism. In his definitive 1973 book, *The New Journalism*, Wolfe famously declares nonfiction, and journalism especially, "literature's main event." Easily lost in such creation myths, however, is the fact that a mere sportswriter, George Plimpton, had already published his bestselling participatory, New Journalism account of exhibition pitching in the Major Leagues, *Out of My League* (1961), a

half dozen years before Wolfe's breakthrough *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*. While Wolfe postulated in a 1966 interview with *Vogue* that the key to every journalistic article worth its salt should be "discovering and defining a new status," Plimpton was living that nugget as he entered the lion's den, quite literally, by suiting up as a Detroit Lions quarterback for the 1963 NFL preseason, a tale he relayed in his second participatory book splash and eventual major motion picture, *Paper Lion*.

More than forty years after the publication of *Paper Lion*, Plimpton's brand of shape-shifting, disguise-making, boundary-crossing New Journalism remains front and center in the participatory writer's bag of tricks. Non-sport immersion journalist Ted Conover—whose books have featured an undercover Conover hobbing his way across the United States—working as a prison guard at Sing Sing, and smuggling himself across the U.S.-Mexico border—told Boynton in an interview, "I am fascinated by the wearing of different hats, of how one's outlook changes depending on one's position in the world, by the whole question of identity." The use of personality as both costumery and journalistic strategy may be traced, in part, to Plimpton. Hence the real father of New Journalism may not be the Ph.D.-wielding, white linen-clad Wolfe after all, but a regular ol' sports guy, forsooth.

If George Plimpton is the godfather of experiential sportswriting, in the way that James Brown is the Godfather of Soul, the genre's grandfather is certainly Paul Gallico, who Plimpton himself describes as a "crack sportswriter" of the 1930s. Gallico, Plimpton reports in his introductory tribute to his mentor in *The Best of Plimpton*, gave himself what was then a novel assignment: "To find out firsthand about athletic skills at their very best—catching Herb Pennock's curveball, playing tennis with Vinnie Richards and golf with Bobby Jones, sparring with Jack Dempsey and getting knocked down."

Granted, Gallico was not the first American writer to make his niche by attempting sport and writing about it—pitching and telling—but it is fair to say that he was the first to make a journalistic calling card of it, the first to gain consistent, playful access to professional athletes in a Golden Age when sportsmen and sportswomen first became media

superstars. Likewise, Gallico's was probably the first sustained practice of the journalism aspect of *participatory sports journalism*, complete with the hallmarks that today define the field as a discipline, a pursuit, and a methodology rolled into one. Before Gallico, accounts of first-person adventure and sport were often penned by those who otherwise earned their livings as naturalists, adventurers, and literary luminaries—men and women like Walt Whitman, John Muir, Frances Elizabeth Willard, Jack London, Zane Grey, and Ernest Hemingway, to name a few—but history doesn't remember these folks primarily for their journalism. Appropriately, it was the ever-eclectic, rough-riding hunter-naturalist-writer-politician Teddy Roosevelt who, in speaking to Chicago's Hamilton Club in 1899, first used the presidential platform to advocate the strenuous life of the sportsman that so appealed to Gallico. In a forerunner to Nike's "Just Do It" sloganeering, the Bull Moose roared, "I preach to you, then, my countrymen, that our country calls not for the life of ease but for the life of strenuous endeavor. The twentieth century looms before us big with the fate of many nations. If we stand idly by, if we seek merely swollen, slothful ease and ignoble peace, if we shrink from the hard contests where men must win at hazard of their lives and at the risk of all they hold dear, then the bolder and stronger peoples will pass us by, and will win for themselves the domination of the world." Though Plimpton was a thoroughgoing ironist by comparison with the more literal-minded, dogmatic Bull Moose, both men demonstrated for their respective generations that a man of letters could also be a man of action.

Gallico's influence on Plimpton was more immediate than Roosevelt's, and it hit closer to home, too: Plimpton, born in 1927, grew up in New York City in the era when Big Apple-native Gallico enjoyed his heyday as the sports editor at the *New York Daily News*. Both men, in addition to being gifted writers, were natural athletes: Plimpton, a lithe six-foot-four with a quarterback's hands, and Gallico, a boxer and the inventor-organizer of the Golden Gloves amateur boxing competition. After reading Gallico's memoir, *Farewell to Sport*, it came as a revelation to Plimpton that he could, as he put it, "undertake the same kind of research . . . and expand it somewhat—to find out not only about athletic skills at their best, but

also something about the society of athletes, to join the team as a kind of ‘amateur professional.’” To conceive of Plimpton’s joyous, participatory romps through the NFL, NHL, MLB, and PGA as “research” stretches the moth-eaten definition of scholarship wonderfully, and leads us back squarely to Frank Deford’s shot-across-the-bow proposition. Maybe sportswriting is the most fun, and doubly so when the journalist doesn’t have to hold someone else’s jock.

Still, in an age of professionalism, when many Olympic athletes have gone pro, the question remains: What does the amateur know that the professional doesn’t? What did Bobby Jones, the quintessential amateur of Gallico’s era, understand that Tiger Woods can’t fathom? Humility? Honor? Heritage? The best participatory sportswriting, like the best, most noble amateurism, resurrects long-lost virtues America preserves in purposeful, Jeffersonian hybridity: the citizen-legislator, the farmer-teacher, or, in the case of Bobby Jones, the lawyer-scholar-engineer-writer-golfer. In a phrase, *inside the ropes* suggests fortuitous, anomalous access, existential manna, and perspective-giving centaurism: it tells the feel-good Cinderella story of a housemaid guesting as a princess for an evening, the tale of a beggar permitted, for a day, to be king.

Literature and myth are, of course, chock-full of command sports performances in which the heir apparent must come to the fore, must transform from backstage hand to leading man. In Homer’s *Odyssey*, the sporting prince Telemachus laments, “Ah! Shall I ever be a coward and a weakling. . . . Come, you who are stronger men than I, come try the bow and end the contest.” Staying with the Greeks, there was, of course, Heracles (Hercules)—not much of a writer but one helluva wrestler. A couple of millennia after Heracles whopped Achelous, hard-pressed amateur and celebrated folk hero Willy Tell, taking a page from Odysseus’s playbook, had to draw the crossbow under duress to save both son and homeland. The modern day sportsperson-writer seeks such Herculean labors while simultaneously scribbling them down for posterity, à la Plato.

While folk legends abound with tales of inspired athletic amateurism, science-fiction narratives project the role of the amateur-cum-athlete-cum-protagonist ages hence, most notably Brian M. Stableford’s 1976 sci-fi

sports classic, *The Mind-Riders*. In *The Mind Riders* athletes have become extinct, in much the same way drones figure to replace flesh and blood soldiers in a future War on Terror.

The editorial description of Stableford's *The Mind-Riders* nicely distills the work of today's participatory sportswriter: "If millions pay today just to watch two men fight for a champion's crown, tens of millions will pay for the additional thrill of being actually within the mind and body of the boxers themselves, to experience, *in person* the tension and combat, to throw themselves into punch and counter-punch *without having to feel the pain*." Published in 1976—the year Ali escaped Norton in the Bronx, his world heavyweight title still intact—Stableford's sci-fi title bouts prove eerily prescient as, in the futuristic world of the novel, experience-hungry spectators, otherwise known as "vamps" and "mind-riders," psychically merge or "e-link" with sim-athletes who duke it out cathartically in the ring.

Similarly, the 1975 sci-fi film *Rollerball* lends to action sports and their narratives the dreadful centrality typically reserved for war. The film, set in 2018, follows the trials of Jonathan E., an athlete-hero-everyman seeking authentic individual sports experiences in a world dominated by corporations. Ring any bells? Apropos to the contemporary ascendancy of participatory sport as political and cultural *primum mobile*, the tagline for the Hugo-nominated *Rollerball* read, "The next war will not be fought, it will be played."

In an era when surveys show young people, young men especially, are demonstrating less interest in the armed services than ever before, and when the Army, in particular, struggles to meet quarterly recruitment goals, the sci-fi logic implicit in *Rollerball* and *The Mind-Riders* makes alarming sense. Sports have become the surrogate battlefield, the new-old sociopolitical arena. In this sense, and in others, ESPN's highly rated broadcasts of the X Games were only the beginning of an alt-engagement strategy for young men, as NBC, USA, FOX, and the Outdoor Life Network have at various times jumped on the bandwagon to carry popular spinoffs such as the Gravity Games and the Dew Action Sports Tour. More recently, extreme sports have launched entire networks the way Helen launched

a thousand ships. One of the latest is Fuel, a Fox cable venture peddling round-the-clock “action sports television.”

Traditional network television, too, has stepped to the plate, seeing stars and bars as well as dollar signs in the marriage of unscripted reality TV with sports programming. Such cross-pollination has produced programs such as NBC’s 2005 boxing reality show, “The Contender,” and Fox’s “The Next Great Champ.” More recently, ABC and NASCAR’s reality offering, “Fast Cars and Superstars,” and Spike TV’s “Reality Racing: The Rookie Challenge” seek to translate NASCAR’s cross-demographic popularity into cross-media synergy. In a phrase, participatory sports ventures have seen their stock rise to the level of “sure bet.”

In such a multimedia age, for-print participatory sports journalists—the real McCoy—do invaluable, hands-on fieldwork on behalf of their readers. Characteristically humble, the participatory sportswriter seeks equity and integrity via unrestricted, pull-back-the-curtain access. Perhaps because of their *Rollerball*-styled corporate culture, today’s professional sports leagues are less than open to such in-person, touch-it-taste-it-feel-it journalistic intrusion, and are more hostile to true, gold-standard participation of the kind celebrated in this book. Flies in the corporate sports ointment, experiential sportswriters fight the good fight, push back, seek a level playing field by way of subversive, subjective participation, much like investigative and undercover reporters do. They’re our ultimate free agents.

If you’ve ever worked in a newsroom, you know there’s something different about sportswriters to begin with. Let’s start with their offices, which are invariably trashy. Where their colleagues in news and op-ed display something journalistically indispensable—a desk calendar or plat map—or at least personally meaningful—a picture of the better half or the kids—sportswriters glory in their inglorious trade’s flotsam and jetsam: candy wrappers, cigarette butts (in the old days), and decades-old floppy disks. It is the sportswriter, the ungrateful imp, who typically is the first to provoke a water cooler dispute and the last to do the breakroom dishes. He’s the last to arrive in the morning and the last to leave in the evening. He haunts the paste-up room, an untidy, flatulent ghost.

The Feel

Paul Gallico

A child wandering through a department store with its mother, is admonished over and over again not to touch things. Mother is convinced that the child only does it to annoy or because it is a child, and usually hasn't the vaguest inkling of the fact that Junior is "touching" because he is a little blotter soaking up information and knowledge and "feel" is an important adjunct to seeing. Adults are exactly the same, in a measure, as you may ascertain when some new gadget or article is produced for inspection. The average person says: "Here, let me see that," and holds out his hand. He doesn't mean "see," because he is already seeing it. What he means is that he wants to get it into his hands and feel it so as to become better acquainted.

As suggested in the foregoing chapter ["Young Men of Manhattan"], I do not insist that a curiosity and capacity for feeling sports is necessary to be a successful writer, but it is fairly obvious that a man who has been tapped on the chin with five fingers wrapped up in a leather boxing glove and propelled by the arm of an expert knows more about that particular sensation than one who has not, always provided he has the gift of expressing himself. I once inquired of a heavyweight prizefighter by the name of King Levinsky, in a radio interview, what it felt like to be hit on the chin by Joe Louis, the King having just acquired that experience with

rather disastrous results. Levinsky considered the matter for a moment and then reported: “It don’t feel like nuttin’,” but added that for a long while afterwards he felt as though he were “in a transom.”

I was always a child who touched things and I have always had a tremendous curiosity with regard to sensation. If I knew what playing a game felt like, particularly against or in the company of experts, I was better equipped to write about the playing of it and the problems of the men and women who took part in it. And so, at one time or another, I have tried them all; football, baseball, boxing, riding, shooting, swimming, squash, handball, fencing, diving, flying, both land and sea planes, rowing, canoeing, skiing, riding a bicycle, ice-skating, roller-skating, tennis, golf, archery, basketball, running, both the hundred-yard dash and the mile, the high jump and shot put, badminton, angling, deep-sea, stream-, and surf-casting, billiards and bowling, motorboating and wrestling, besides riding as a passenger with the fastest men on land and water and in the air, to see what it felt like. Most of them I dabbled in as a youngster going through school and college, and others, like piloting a plane, squash, fencing, and skiing, I took up after I was old enough to know better, purely to get the feeling of what they were like.

None of these things can I do well, but I never cared about becoming an expert, and besides, there wasn’t time. But there is only one way to find out accurately human sensations in a ship two to three-thousand feet up when the motor quits, and that is actually to experience that gone feeling at the pit of the stomach and the sharp tingling of the skin from head to foot, followed by a sudden amazing sharpness of vision, clear-sightedness, and coolness that you never knew you possessed as you find the question of life or death completely in your own hands. It is not the “you” that you know, but somebody else, a stranger, who noses the ship down, circles, fastens upon the one best spot to sit down, pushes or pulls buttons to try to get her started again, and finally drops her in, safe and sound. And it is only by such experience that you learn likewise of the sudden weakness that hits you right at the back of the knees after you have climbed out and started to walk around her and that comes close to knocking you flat as for the first time since the engine quit its soothing drone you think of destruction and sudden death.

Often my courage has failed me and I have flunked completely, such as the time I went up to the top of the thirty-foot Olympic diving-tower at Jones Beach, Long Island, during the competitions, to see what it was like to dive from that height, and wound up crawling away from the edge on hands and knees, dizzy, scared, and a little sick, but with a wholesome respect for the boys and girls who hurled themselves through the air and down through the tough skin of the water from that awful height. At other times sheer ignorance of what I was getting into has led me into tight spots such as the time I came down the Olympic ski run from the top of the Kreuzeck, 6,000 feet above Garmisch-Partenkirchen, after having been on skis but once before in snow and for the rest had no more than a dozen lessons on an indoor artificial slide in a New York department store. At one point my legs, untrained, got so tired I couldn't stem (brake) any more, and I lost control and went full tilt and all out, down a three-foot twisting patch cut out of the side of the mountain, with a two-thousand-foot abyss on the left and the mountain itself on the right. That was probably the most scared I have ever been, and I scare fast and often. I remember giving myself up for lost and wondering how long it would take them to retrieve my body and whether I should still be alive. In the meantime the speed of the descent was increasing. Somehow I was keeping my feet and negotiating turns, how I will never know, until suddenly the narrow patch opened out into a wide, steep stretch of slope with a rise at the other end, and that part of the journey was over.

By some miracle I got to the bottom of the run uninjured, having made most of the trip down the icy, perpendicular slopes on the flat of my back. It was the thrill and scare of a lifetime, and to date no one has been able to persuade me to try a jump. I know when to stop. After all, I am entitled to rely upon my imagination for something. But when it was all over and I found myself still whole, it was also distinctly worthwhile to have learned what is required of a ski runner in the breakneck *Abfahrt* or downhill race, or the difficult slalom. Five days later, when I climbed laboriously (still on skis) half-way up that Alp and watched the Olympic downhill racers hurtling down the perilous, ice-covered, and nearly perpendicular *Steilhang*, I knew that I was looking at a great group of athletes who, for

one thing, did not know the meaning of the word “fear.” The slope was studded with small pine trees and rocks, but half of the field gained precious seconds by hitting that slope all out, with complete contempt for disaster rushing up at them at a speed often better than 60 miles an hour. And when an unfortunate Czech skidded off the course at the bottom of the slope and into a pile of rope and got himself snarled up as helpless as a fly in a spider’s web, it was a story that I could write from the heart. I had spent ten minutes getting myself untangled after a fall, without any rope to add to the difficulties. It seems that I couldn’t find where my left leg ended and one more ski than I had originally donned seemed to be involved somehow. Only a person who has been on those fiendish runners knows the sensation.

It all began back in 1922 when I was a cub sportswriter and consumed with more curiosity than was good for my health. I had seen my first professional prizefights and wondered at the curious behavior of men under the stress of blows, the sudden checking and the beginning of a little fall forward after a hard punch, the glazing of the eyes and the loss of locomotor control, the strange actions of men on the canvas after a knockdown as they struggled to regain their senses and arise on legs that seemed to have turned to rubber. I had never been in any bad fist fights as a youngster, though I had taken a little physical punishment in football, but it was not enough to complete the picture. Could one think under those conditions?

I had been assigned to my first training camp coverage, Dempsey’s at Saratoga Springs, where he was preparing for his famous fight with Luis Firpo. For days I watched him sag a spar boy with what seemed to be no more than a light cuff on the neck, or pat his face with what looked like no more than a caressing stroke of his arm, and the fellow would come all apart at the seams and collapse in a useless heap, grinning vacuously or twitching strangely. My burning curiosity got the better of prudence and a certain reluctance to expose myself to physical pain. I asked Dempsey to permit me to box a round with him. I had never boxed before but I was in good physical shape, having just completed a four-year stretch as a galley slave in the Columbia eight-oared shell.

When it was over and I escaped through the ropes, shaking, bleeding a little from the mouth, with rosin dust on my pants and a vicious throbbing in my head, I knew all that there was to know about being hit in the prize-ring. It seems that I had gone to an expert for tuition. I knew the sensation of being stalked and pursued by a relentless, truculent professional destroyer whose trade and business it was to injure men. I saw the quick flash of the brown forearm that precedes the stunning shock as a bony, leather-bound fist lands on cheek or mouth. I learned more (partly from photographs of the lesson, viewed afterwards, one of which shows me ducked under a vicious left hook, an act of which I never had the slightest recollection) about instinctive ducking and blocking than I could have in ten years of looking at prizefights and I learned, too, that as the soldier never hears the bullet that kills him, so does the fighter rarely, if ever, see the punch that tumbles blackness over him like a mantle, with a tearing rip as though the roof of his skull were exploding, and robs him of his senses.

There was just that—a ripping in my head and then sudden blackness, and the next thing I knew, I was sitting on the canvas covering of the ring floor with my legs collapsed under me, grinning idiotically. How often since have I seen that same silly, goofy look on the faces of dropped fighters—and understood it. I held onto the floor with both hands, because the ring and the audience outside were making a complete clockwise revolution, came to stop, and then went back again counterclockwise. When I struggled to my feet, Jack Kearns, Dempsey’s manager, was counting over me, but I neither saw nor heard him and was only conscious that I was in a ridiculous position and that the thing to do was to get up and try to fight back. The floor swayed and rocked beneath me like a fishing dory in an offshore swell, and it was a welcome respite when Dempsey rushed into a clinch, held me up and whispered into my ear: “Wrestle around a bit, son, until your head clears.” And then it was that I learned what those little love-taps to the back of the neck and the short digs to the ribs can mean to the groggy pugilist more than half knocked out. It is a murderous game, and the fighter who can escape after having been felled by a lethal blow has my admiration. And there, too, I learned that there can be no sweeter sound than the bell that calls a halt to hostilities.

From that afternoon on, also, dated my antipathy for the spectator at prizefights who yells: "Come on, you bum, get up and fight! Oh, you big quitter! Yah yellow, yah yellow!" Yellow, eh? It is all a man can do to get up after being stunned by a blow, much less fight back. But they do it. And how a man is able to muster any further interest in a combat after being floored with a blow to the pit of the stomach will always remain to me a miracle of what the human animal is capable of under stress.

Further experiments were less painful, but equally illuminating. A couple of sets of tennis with Vinnie Richards taught me more about what is required of a topflight tournament tennis player than I could have got out of a dozen books or year of reporting tennis matches. It is one thing to sit in a press box and write caustically that Brown played uninspired tennis, or Black's court covering was faulty and that his frequent errors cost him the set. It is quite another to stand across the net at the back of a service court and try to get your racket on a service that is so fast that the ear can hardly detect the interval between the sound of the server's bat hitting the ball and the ball striking the court. Tournament tennis is a different game from weekend tennis. For one thing, in average tennis, after the first hard service has gone into the net or out, you breathe a sigh of relief, move up closer and wait for the cripple to come floating over. In big-time tennis second service is practically as hard as the first, with an additional twist on the ball.

It is impossible to judge or know anything about the speed of a forehand drive hit by a champion until you have had one fired at you or, rather, away from you, and you have made an attempt to return it. It is then that you first realize that tennis is played more with the head than with the arms and the legs. The fastest player in the world cannot get to a drive to return it if he hasn't thought correctly, guessed its direction, and anticipated it by a fraction of a second.

There was golf with Bob Jones and Gene Sarazen and Tommy Armour, little Cruickshank, and Johnny Farrell, and Diegel and other professionals; and experiments at trying to keep up in the water with Johnny Weissmuller, Helene Madison, and Eleanor Holm, attempts to catch football passes thrown by Benny Friedman. Nobody actually plays golf until he has acquired

the technical perfection to be able to hit the ball accurately, high, low, hooked or faded and placed. And nobody knows what real golf is like until he has played around with a professional and seen him play, not the ball, but the course, the roll of the land, the hazards, the wind, and the texture of the greens and the fairways. It looks like showmanship when a topflight golfer plucks a handful of grass and lets it flutter in the air, or abandons his drive to march two hundred yards down the fairway to and look over the situation. It isn't. It's golf. The average player never knows or cares whether he is putting with or across the grain of the green. The professional *always* knows. The same average player standing on the tee is concentrated on getting the ball somewhere on the fairway, two hundred yards out. The professional when preparing to drive is actually to all intents and purposes playing his *second* shot. He means to place his drive so as to open up the green for his approach. But you don't find that out until you have played around with them when they are relaxed and not competing, and listen to them talk and plan attacks on holes.

Major League Baseball is one of the most difficult and precise of all games, but you would never know it unless you went down on the field and got close to it and tried it yourself. For instance, the distance between the pitcher and catcher is a matter of twenty paces, but it doesn't seem like enough when you don a catcher's mitt and try to hold a pitcher with the speed of Dizzy Dean or Dazzy Vance. Not even the sponge that catchers wear in the palm of the hand when working with fastball pitchers, and the bulky mitt are sufficient to rob the ball of shock and sting that lames your hand unless you know how to ride with the throw and kill some of its speed. The pitcher, standing on his little elevated mound, looms up enormously over you at that short distance, and when he ties himself into a coiled spring preparatory to letting fly, it requires all your self-control not to break and run for safety. And as for the things they can do with a baseball, those Major League pitchers . . . ! One way of finding out is to wander down on the field an hour or so before game time when there is no pressure on them, pull on the catcher's glove, and try to hold them.

I still remember my complete surprise the first time I tried catching for a real curveball pitcher. He was a slim, spidery left-hander for the

New York Yankees, many years ago, by the name of Herb Pennock. He called that he was going to throw a fast breaking curve and warned me to expect the ball at least 2 feet outside the plate. Then he wound up and let it go, and that ball came whistling right down the groove for the center of the plate. A novice, I chose to believe what I saw and not what I heard, and prepared to catch it where it was headed for a spot which of course it never reached, because just in front of the rubber, it swerved sharply to the right and passed nearly a yard from my glove. I never had a chance to catch it. That way, you learn about the mysterious drop, the ball that sails down the alley chest high but which you must be prepared to catch around your ankles because of the sudden dip it takes at the end of its passage as though someone were pulling it down with a string. Also you find out about the queer fadeaway, the slow curve, the fast in-and out-shoots that seem to be timed almost as delicately as shrapnel, to burst, or rather break, just when they will do the most harm—namely, at the moment when the batter is swinging.

Facing a big-league pitcher with a bat on your shoulder and trying to hit his delivery is another vital experience in gaining an understanding of the game about which you are trying to write vividly. It is one thing to sit in the stands and scream at a batsman: “Oh, you bum!” for striking out in a pinch, and another to stand twenty yards from that big pitcher and try to make up your mind in a hundredth of a second whether to hit at the offering or not, where to swing and when, not to mention worrying about protecting yourself from the consequences of being struck by the ball that seems to be heading straight for your skull at an appalling rate of speed. Because, if you are a big-league player, you cannot very well afford to be gun-shy and duck away in panic from a ball that swerves in the last moment and breaks perfectly over the plate, while the umpire calls: “Strike!” and the fans jeer. Nor can you afford to take a crack on the temple from the ball. Men have died from that. It calls for undreamed-of niceties of nerve and judgment, but you don’t find that out until you have stepped to the plate cold a few times during batting practice or in training quarters, with nothing at stake but the acquisition of experience, and see what a fine case of the jumping jitters you get. Later on, when you are writing

your story, your imagination, backed by the experience, will be able to supply a picture of what the batter is going through as he stands at the plate in the closing innings of an important game, with two or three men on base, two out, and his team behind in the scoring, and fifty thousand people screaming at him.

The catching and the holding of a forward pass for a winning touchdown on a cold, wet day always makes a good yarn, but you might get an even better one out of it if you happen to know from experience about the elusive qualities of a hard, soggy, mud-slimed football rifled through the air, as well as something about the exquisite timing, speed and courage it takes to catch it on a dead run, with two or three 190-pound men reaching for it at the same time or waiting to crash you as soon as your fingers touch it.

Any football coach during a light practice will let you go down the field and try to catch punts, the long, fifty-yard spirals and the tricky, tumbling end-over-enders. Unless you have had some previous experience, you won't hang on to one out of ten, besides knocking your fingers out of joint. But if you have any imagination, thereafter you will know that it calls for more than negligible nerve to judge and hold that ball and even plan to run with it, when there are two husky ends bearing down at full speed, preparing for a head-on tackle.

In 1932 I covered my first set of National Air Races, in Cleveland, and immediately decided that I had to learn how to fly to find out what it felt like. Riding as a passenger isn't flying. Being up there all alone at the controls of a ship is. And at the same time began a series of investigations into the "feel" of the mechanized sports to see what they were all about and the qualities of mentality, nerve, and physique they called for from their participants. These included a ride with Gar Wood in his latest and fastest speedboat, Miss America X, in which for the first time he pulled the throttle wide open on the Detroit River straightaway; a trip with the Indianapolis Speedway driver Cliff Bergere, around the famous brick raceway; and a flip with Lieutenant Al Williams, one time U.S. Schneider Cup race pilot.

I was scared with Wood, who drove me at 127 miles an hour, jounced,

shaken, vibrated, choked with fumes from the exhausts, behind which I sat hanging on desperately to the throttle bar, which after a while got too hot to hold. I was on plank between Wood and his mechanic, Johnson, and thought that my last moment had come. I was still more scared when Cliff Bergere hit 126 on the Indianapolis straightaways in the tiny racing car in which I was hopelessly wedged, and after the first couple of rounds quite resigned to die and convinced that I should. But I think the most scared I have ever been while moving fast was during a ride I took in the cab of a locomotive on the straight, level stretch between Fort Wayne, Indiana, and Chicago, where for the first time we hit 90 miles per hour, which of course is no speed at all. But nobody who rides in the comfortable Pullman coaches has any idea of the didoes cut up by a locomotive in a hurry, or the thrill of pelting through a small town, all out and wide open, including the crossing of some thirty or forty frogs and switches, all of which must be set right. But that wasn't sport. That was just plain excitement.

I have never regretted these researches. Now that they are over, there isn't enough money to make me do them again. But they paid me dividends, I figured. During the great Thompson Speed Trophy race for land planes at Cleveland in 1935, Captain Roscoe Turner was some eight or nine miles in the lead in his big golden, low-wing, speed monoplane. Suddenly, coming into the straightaway in front of the grandstands, buzzing along at 280 miles per hour like an angry hornet, a streamer of thick, black smoke burst from the engine cowling and trailed back behind the ship. Turner pulled up immediately, using his forward speed to gain all the altitude possible, turned and got back to the edge of the field, still pouring out that evil black smoke. Then he cut his switch dipped her nose down, landed with a bounce and a bump, and rolled up to the line in a perfect stop. The crowd gave him a great cheer as he climbed out of the oil-spattered machine, but it was a cheer of sympathy because he had lost the race after having been so far in the lead that had he continued he could not possibly have been overtaken.

There was that story, but there was a better one too. Only the pilots on the field, all of them white around the lips and wiping from their faces a sweat not due to the oppressive summer heat, knew that they were looking

at a man who from that time on, to use their own expression, was living on borrowed time. It isn't often when a Thompson Trophy racer with a landing speed of around 80 to 90 miles an hour goes haywire in the air, that the pilot is able to climb out of the cockpit and walk away from his machine. From the time of that first burst of smoke until the wheels touched the ground and stayed there, he was a hundred-to-one shot to live. To the initiated, those dreadful moments were laden with suspense and horror. Inside that contraption was a human being who any moment might be burned to horrible, twisted cinder, or smashed into the ground beyond all recognition, a human being who was cool, gallant, and fighting desperately. Every man and woman on the field who had ever been in trouble in the air was living those awful seconds with him in terror and suspense. I, too, was able to experience it. That is what makes getting the "feel" of things distinctly worthwhile.

THE CONTRIBUTORS

Billy Anderson serves as executive director of the AMICI camping charity based in Toronto, Canada, which has raised over \$1,000,000 and provided over one thousand camping experiences for Canadian youth. An amateur boxer, licensed skydiver, and accomplished outdoor guide, Anderson's participatory journalism has been included in *Europe from a Backpack* and *Muskoka Magazine*, among other venues. Anderson lives and works in Toronto.

Barbara Beckwith took up squash belatedly at age fifty-six. A freelance writer based in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Beckwith is active in the National Writers' Union. Her work has appeared in *Whatever It Takes: Women on Women's Sport*, among other publications.

Greg Bishop is a two-time winner of the Associated Press Sports Editors (APSE) award for newspapers with circulation of one hundred to two hundred fifty thousand, a first-place winner for feature sportswriting in the Pacific Northwest Chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists, and a two-time honorable mention in the Best American Sports Writing series. A former sports editor at the *Daily Orange* at Syracuse University, Bishop has freelanced for such venues as *Inside Lacrosse*, the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* and the *Washington Post*. Bishop joined the *Seattle Times* as a staff reporter in in 2002, covering the Seattle Seahawks as part of his beat. In 2007, Bishop joined the staff of the *New York Times*, where he covers the New York Jets.

Grace Butcher writes as a consummate athlete, having participated in

motocross and road racing for twenty years and having held the title of U.S. 800-meter/880-yard champion from 1958 to 1961. In 1996 Butcher set a world indoor record for the mile for women age 60 to 64. A former regular columnist for *Rider* magazine and a one-time contributor to *Sports Illustrated*, Butcher teaches at Hiram College and lives in northeastern Ohio, where she has recently rekindled an interest in horse racing and riding. A poet as well as a prose writer, her poems have appeared in three collections and many journals and anthologies.

Tim Cahill, winner of a National Magazine Award in 2003 and a recipient of the Lowell Thomas Gold Award from the Society of American Travel Writers, is the author of many books of sports adventure including *Jaguars Ripped My Flesh*. Cahill lives at the foot of Montana's Crazy Mountains and serves as *Outside* magazine's editor at large, as well as a contributing editor to *Esquire* and *Rolling Stone*. His work has appeared in *National Geographic*, the *Los Angeles Times Magazine*, *Sport Diver*, and many others. Like George Plimpton and Paul Gallico before him, Cahill's star has reached the film industry in the form of his coauthored, Academy Award–nominated documentary, *The Living Sea*.

Betsy Crowfoot, a contributing editor for *Sailing* magazine, describes herself as a “late bloomer” who began sailing at the ripe old age of thirty-two. When she's not sailing on the all-women's team based in Long Beach, California, Crowfoot earns a living from her freelance writing, which she has placed in numerous magazines and newspapers. Her mission is to ensure women sailors the highest possible profile and to encourage future generations to pursue sailing. Crowfoot's adventures with her daughter, Coco, can be followed on her website <adventure-mom.com>.

Michael Finkel is author of *True Story: Murder, Memoir, and Mea Culpa* and *Alpine Circus: A Skier's Exotic Adventure's at the Snowy Edge of the World*. Finkel's many international sports participations include skiing in Iran, golfing in Iceland, mountaineering in Greenland, backpacking through Tanzania, and, in this country, bicycling five thousand miles across the United States, running one hundred miles in northern California, ski jumping at Lake

Placid, and joining the U.S. Marines Mountain Warfare Training Center. He has also skied the country's smallest ski area, bowled the world's largest bowling alley, covered as a journalist two Olympic games, competed at the World Lumberjack Championships, and summited Kilimanjaro. A contributing editor for *Ski* magazine for more than ten years, Michael Finkel lives in Montana.

Steve Friedman, whose work has been selected a half dozen times and counting for The Best American Sports Writing series, is the author of *The Gentleman's Guide to Life* and the coauthor (with NBA star Jayson Williams) of the *New York Times* bestseller *Loose Balls*, as well as *The Agony of Victory: When Winning Isn't Enough*. A longtime senior editor at *GQ* and a contributing editor at *Esquire*, Friedman's work has appeared in newspapers and magazines including *Ski*, *Backpacker*, *Bicycling*, *Outside*, the *New York Times*, and the *Washington Post*. A St. Louis native and graduate of Stanford University, Friedman lives in New York City, where he teaches courses at *mediabistro.com* and serves as a writer at large for the Rodale Sports Group.

Paul Gallico's career as a participatory journalist was launched, ironically, when he was knocked cold sparring with Jack Dempsey. A New York City native, Gallico assumed the post of sports editor at the *New York Daily News* in 1923, writing daily columns while gradually segueing into a career as a fiction writer after placing short stories in such leading magazines as *Vanity Fair* and the *Saturday Evening Post*, the latter of which published his O. Henry Award-winning story, "The Snow Goose." After his fiction writing breakthrough, Gallico quit his sports department gig and moved to Europe, where he wrote *Farewell to Sport*. His essay "The Feel" is considered a manifesto for participatory journalism and a defining influence on George Plimpton. A World War II correspondent and popular novelist and screenwriter, Gallico was also a formidable athlete. Prodigiously versatile and prolific, he helped organize the Golden Gloves amateur boxing competition and pursued fencing and deep-sea fishing with gusto while authoring more than forty books and twenty movies, including *The Poseidon Adventure*, which was made into a feature film in 1972 and again in 2006.

Helga Hengge was the first German woman to successfully summit Mount Everest and the first American woman to do so from the north side. A former New York–based fashion editor for *Miss Vogue*, the dual American–German citizen Hengge has since returned to Germany, where her Everest ascent has resulted in a bestselling book, *Nur der Himmel ist höher* (*Only the Sky Above*) and a successful career as a keynote speaker. She continues to climb, and to write.

Leslie Heywood directs the Nell Jackson Center for the Study of Female Athletes and teaches at the State University of New York, Binghamton. A competitive powerlifter and a former track and cross country standout, she is the author of *Pretty Good for a Girl: A Memoir* and *Bodymakers: A Cultural Anatomy of Women's Bodybuilding*, among others.

John Hildebrand, author of several books of participatory journalism, has had his work selected for the Best American Sports Writing series while placing outdoor, sports, and adventure articles in such magazines as *Harper's*, *Audubon*, and *Sports Illustrated*. Hildebrand received a BA in Journalism from the University of Michigan in 1971 and an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Alaska in 1974. In 1977 he joined the English Department at the University of Wisconsin–Eau Claire, where he has since earned the Maxwell Schoenfeld Distinguished Professorship. He has been awarded a Bush Artist Fellowship, a Wisconsin Arts Board Fellowship, the BANTA Award from the Wisconsin Literary Association, and a Friends of American Writers Literary Award.

Zachary Michael Jack, a former Iowa newspaper sports editor, has written or edited more than a half dozen books. A regular reviewer for the *Journal of Sport History* and an active member of the Society for Sport Literature, Jack specializes in writing about baseball, football, golf, and nature sports, while teaching courses in literary journalism and creative writing at North Central College in Naperville, Illinois. A writer of poetry, essay, literary journalism, history, and cultural criticism, Jack's work has been featured in the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Des Moines Register*, and on Chicago Public Radio and Iowa Public Radio. A winner of the Prentice Hall writing award and

nominee for a Pushcart (Best of the Small Presses) prize, Jack has been a writer-in-residence at New York's Blue Mountain Center, Ireland's Tyrone Guthrie Centre, and Mexico's Great River Arts Institute. His most recent book is *Letters to a Young Iowan: Good Sense from the Good Folks of Iowa for Young People Everywhere*.

Mark Jenkins is the author of several award-winning sports adventure books, including *The Hardway*, *To Timbuktu*, and *Off the Map*. A winner of the Alpine Club Literary Award and Polartec Explorer's Award, and holder of the McGaw/Hull Endowed Chair of Literature at the University of Wyoming, Jenkins is most widely known for his longstanding and widely read *Outside* magazine column, "The Hard Way." Jenkins's accounts of sports endurance span the globe and encompass many athletic firsts, including the first ascent of the highest peaks in the Arctic Circle, the first descent of the Niger River headwaters in West Africa, and the first coast-to-coast crossing of the former Soviet Union on bicycle, a feat which earned Jenkins a place in the *Guinness Book of Sports Records*. Jenkins's writing and photography have appeared in dozens of national and international publications, including *Bicycling*, *Condé Nast Traveler*, *GQ*, *Playboy*, *Reader's Digest*, *Sierra*, *Sports Afield*, the *Utne Reader*, the *Washington Post*, and *World*. He has been interviewed by *Good Morning America*, CNN, PBS, BBC, and NPR. Jenkins lives with his family in Laramie, Wyoming.

Ron C. Judd's journalism has been selected for the Best American Sports Writing series. His *Seattle Times* column "Trail Mix" explores the outdoors in the Northwest. A Seattle area native and *Seattle Times* writer since 1988, Judd has covered a range of sports from the high jump at the Olympic Games to the high places of Olympic National Park.

James Kaplan's widely read sports journalism includes the coauthored Brad Gilbert book, *I've Got Your Back: Coaching Top Performers from Center Court to the Corner Office*, and the co-written John McEnroe *New York Times* bestselling memoir, *You Cannot Be Serious*. Since the late 1980s he has contributed articles to *Vanity Fair*, *Entertainment Weekly*, *New York Magazine*, *The New York Times Magazine*, *Esquire*, the *New Yorker*, and *Tennis*, among others. A one-

time Warner Brothers screenwriter, Kaplan teaches magazine writing at New School University and lives in New York.

Don Kardong, winner of the Fred Lebow Award given by the National Distance Running Hall of Fame, is a senior writer for *Runner's World* magazine, founder of the 50,000-strong Lilac Bloomsday Run in Spokane, Washington, and past president of the Road Runners Club of America (1996–2000). In addition to writing several books, including an American Library Association Editor's Choice, *Thirty Phone Booths to Boston: Tales of a Wayward Runner*, Kardong has written for *Running Times*, *Runner*, and *Running*. Kardong's penchant for novelty races has led him to race to the top of the Empire State Building and run across the Grand Canyon. Unsurpassed as a writer-athlete, Kardong is a former fourth place Olympic marathoner. An author, speaker, consultant, and online coach, Kardong lives in Spokane, Washington.

Donald Katz, winner of the *Chicago Tribune* Heartland Prize for Nonfiction, and a National Book Critics Circle and National Magazine Award nominee, is the author of many books, the most popular of which anthologize the brand of madcap adventure Katz made famous in *The Valley of the Fallen: And Other Places*. Though Katz's sportswriting is often humorous, his serious nonfiction, namely, *Just Do It: The Nike Spirit in the Corporate World*, for which he spent seventeen months among Nike's senior management, shows the range of his immersion journalism. Katz is a contributing editor for *Rolling Stone* and has been a contributor to the *New Republic*, *Esquire*, *Outside*, *Sports Illustrated*, and *Men's Journal*. He is the founder of the spoken-word audio company Audible, Inc.

Melissa King's work was selected for the Best American Sports Writing series and her first book, *She's Got Next: A Story of Getting In, Staying Open, and Taking a Shot*, has been featured in the *Chicago Tribune*, *Newsday*, and the *San Francisco Chronicle* in addition to being covered by National Public Radio and ESPN2's "Cold Pizza." Her nonfiction has appeared in the *Chicago Reader*, *Sports Illustrated*, and *The New York Times Play Magazine*, among others.

Davis Lee (Davis Miller), a finalist for the 1990 National Magazine Award

for “My Dinner with Ali,” has turned celebrity fetish and participatory journalism into a trailblazing career and two popular participatory sports accounts, *The Zen of Muhammad Ali* and *The Tao of Bruce Lee*. His oft-anthologized piece, “My Dinner with Ali,” was selected in 1999 by David Halberstam as one of the fifty best pieces of sportswriting of the twentieth century. A related story, “The Zen of Muhammad Ali,” was nominated for the 1994 Pulitzer Prize and was later included in the 1994 edition of *The Best American Sports Writing*. Miller’s writing has appeared in the upper echelon of sports and men’s magazines, including *Men’s Journal*, *Sport*, *Esquire*, and *Sports Illustrated*. An accomplished kickboxer, Miller lives near Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

Corey Levitan, winner of multiple first place journalism awards from the Greater Los Angeles Press Club for daily/weekly newspapers with circulations under 100,000, writes the popular participatory column, “Fear and Loafing in Las Vegas,” for the *Las Vegas Review-Journal*. His popular website by the same name asks readers to consider his style as a combination of Hunter S. Thompson and *Seinfeld*’s George Costanza. After the fashion of George Plimpton, Levitan’s participations are multisport, including playing point guard for the ABA’s Las Vegas Venom and standing in as a little league umpire, stock car racer, and balloon pilot. His racier nonsport immersions include working as a nude model, filling in as a mist sprayer at a topless pool, and serving as a sex toys party host, to name just a few. A minor celebrity in Sin City, Levitan has been interviewed about his exploits by the likes of Howard Stern and turned the tables to interview legends Steven Spielberg, Johnny Cash, and Ray Charles. His byline has appeared in magazines such as *Rolling Stone*, *Details*, and *Entertainment Weekly*, and newspapers such as the *New York Post*, the *New York Daily News*, and the *Los Angeles Times*.

Jeff MacGregor is a six-time National Magazine Award nominee whose work has been selected for inclusion in *Sports Illustrated*’s *50 Years of Great Writing* and *Sports Illustrated: The Anniversary Book*, as well as the *Best American Sports Writing* series. His first major book, *Sunday Money: Speed! Lust! Madness! Death! A Hot Lap Around America with NASCAR*, was selected as an

editor's choice by the *New York Times Book Review*, the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, *Sports Illustrated*, *Book Lust*, and Amazon Best Books of 2005. MacGregor is currently a special contributor at *Sports Illustrated* magazine. He has written for the *New York Times*, the *New Yorker*, *Esquire*, *Men's Journal*, *Details*, and *Los Angeles Magazine*, and has taught both fiction and nonfiction at Yale University.

David Mamet has earned the Pulitzer Prize for playwriting, Oscar and Golden Globe nominations for best screenplay, and a Tony nomination for *Glengarry Glen Ross*. A Chicagoan whose screenwriting and producing credits include *The Untouchables* and *Hoffa*, respectively, Mamet writes often of the masculine psyche, a preoccupation that has made him a contributor to sportswriting magazines such as *Sports Afeld*.

Jack McCallum, recipient of the Basketball Hall of Fame's Curt Gowdy Media Award for outstanding writing and a selectee for the Best American Sports Writing series, has been at *Sports Illustrated* since 1981 and the chief NBA writer since 1985. His popular sports journalism participations include *Seven Seconds or Less: My Season on the Bench with the Runnin' and Gunnin' Phoenix Suns*, for which McCallum served as an "assistant coach" for the 2005–2006 season. McCallum has also authored *Unfinished Business: On and Off the Court with the 1990–91 Boston Celtics* and coauthored *Foul Lines: A Pro Basketball Novel*. He lives in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

Bill McKibben is a recipient of the Guggenheim and Lyndhurst Fellowship for his engaged and engaging nonfiction on the environment, sport, and community. A former writer for the *New Yorker*, McKibben's books of sports participations include *Long Distance: A Year of Living Strenuously*, which details a grueling year spent training for endurance events, and the more recent *Wandering Home*, an account of his solitary hike from Ripton, Vermont, to his former home in the Adirondack Mountains. A pioneering advocate for climate change awareness, McKibben is a frequent contributor to magazines such as *Outside*, *Mother Jones*, and *Orion*, among many others. He currently teaches as a scholar-in-residence at Middlebury College.

James McManus, a 2001 winner of the Peter Lisagor Award for sports

journalism, is best known for his book of participatory journalism, *Positively Fifth Street: Murderers, Cheetahs, and Binion's World Series of Poker*, which tells how McManus gambled his book advance into a fifth place World Series finish. The author of many books, McManus teaches writing at the School of the Art Institute in Chicago.

T. Edward Nickens is a winner of two first place awards in the prestigious Outdoor Writers of Association of America (OWAA) national writing contest. A freelance journalist specializing in outdoor adventure, Eddie Nickens has paddled remote Canadian rivers and tracked Florida panthers to investigate the effects of urban sprawl on large predators, among countless other participations. His award-winning articles and essays have appeared in *Field & Stream*, *Smithsonian*, *National Wildlife*, *National Geographic Adventure*, *Men's Journal*, *Backpacker*, *Audubon*, and *Wildlife Conservation*. He lectures widely and serves as a consultant for a diverse clientele, including The Discovery Channel. He lives in Raleigh, North Carolina.

Nick Paumgarten is an editor for "Talk of the Town" at the *New Yorker*, a former reporter and editor at the *New York Observer*, and a past contributor to *Slate.com*. Paumgarten's sports participations include a lengthy *New Yorker* account of ski mountaineering, about which he was interviewed by Noah Adams on National Public Radio; a 2005 profile of Roger Federer for *Men's Vogue* entitled "Levels of the Game" and billed as "A Roger Federer Fanatic Follows His Man from TV Set to Center Court"; and a 2005 immersion *New Yorker* experience with Explorers Club President Richard Wiese in a high altitude chamber in preparation for Wiese's ascent of two Mexican volcanoes.

George Plimpton is the dean of participatory sportswriters and a towering figure in international arts and letters. Upon his death in 2003, Plimpton, who was tapped to be the first editor of the legendary *Paris Review* in 1952, was eulogized on both sides of the Atlantic. A September 29, 2003, *Guardian* obituary credited Plimpton with bringing "sports journalism in from the tabloid ghetto." Plimpton's sports participations began with a *Sports Illustrated*-sponsored, 3-round exhibition with light-heavyweight

champ Archie Moore, an encounter he described belatedly in his book *Shadow Box*. Plimpton's participatory breakthroughs came with the best-selling *Out of My League* in 1961 and *Paper Lion* in 1965. Though most of Plimpton's bestselling participations came in the 1960s and 1970s, his later work was collected by his second wife, Sarah Whitehead Dudley, in the posthumous collection, *The Man in the Flying Lawn Chair: And Other Excursions and Observations*. A friend of the Kennedys and the man credited with wrestling Sirhan Sirhan to the ground after Bobby Kennedy's assassination, Plimpton achieved celebrity status as a writer and man about town: he was to the New York City of the 1960s and 1970s what Gertrude Stein was to Paris of the 1920s: consummate host, gossip, and provocateur. Like his predecessor Paul Gallico, Plimpton's star drew him to television and film, where he made cameo appearances in films such as *Bonfire of the Vanities* and *Good Will Hunting*, as well as on television shows from *The Simpsons* to *E.R.* Ironically, as he came to define contemporary literary sports journalism, Plimpton wrote in his 1997 introduction to *The Best American Sports Writing*, "Because I only wrote about sports part-time, . . . I never truly felt myself a member of the sportswriting fraternity."

Rodney Rothman's first book, *Early Bird: A Memoir of Premature Retirement*, a participatory account of living in a Boca Raton retirement community and competing against octogenarians at such sports as softball, tennis, gambling, and shuffleboard, was featured on *The Today Show* and *CBS Sunday Morning*. A former head writer for the *Late Show with David Letterman*, Rothman has also written for the *New York Times*, the *New Yorker*, and *Men's Journal*, among others.

Bob Shacochis, winner of the National Book Award and a contributing editor for *Outside* and *Harper's* magazines, is a versatile writer of fiction and literary journalism. A one-time volunteer for the Peace Corps, Shacochis's New Journalism is vested in political justice, a passion that plays out in his books of nonfiction about Caribbean politics: *The Immaculate Invasion* and *Conversations with Cuba*. An amateur gourmand, Shacochis worked as a cooking columnist for *GQ* and, in the spirit of Ernest Hemingway, edited the volume *Drinking, Smoking, and Screwing: Great Writers on Good Times*.

Rob Story, recipient of the Lowell Thomas Award for print journalism, is the author of *Outside Adventure Travel: Mountain Biking*. An avid skier who averages fifty days on the slopes every winter, Story is an editor-at-large at *Bike* and has written for magazines including *Outside*, *Powder*, and *Skiing*. He is based in Telluride, Colorado.

Robert Twigger, winner of the prestigious William Hill Sports Book of the Year Award and the Somerset Maugham Award for Literature, has devoted his writing life to participatory journalism, adventures captured in several books, including *Angry White Pajamas: A Scrawny Oxford Poet Takes Lessons from the Tokyo Riot Police*, which he has written as a film script for Miramax. In several decades as a participatory writer he has caught the world's longest snake—documented in his Channel 4/National Geographic film *Big Snake*—and was the first person since 1793 to cross Western Canada in a birchbark canoe. He has written many books, made multiple documentary films, and written and lectured extensively in Britain. He divides his time between the Middle East and Europe.

Tom Verducci holds the title of senior writer for *Sports Illustrated*. Before joining *SI*, Verducci spent ten years as a sports reporter for *Newsday*, serving as its national baseball columnist from 1990 to 1993. Along with colleagues Rick Reilly and Jack McCallum, Verducci is the *SI* heir apparent to George Plimpton, an ascendance announced by his popular 2005 account of playing left field in a five-day stint with the Toronto Blue Jays titled “I was a Toronto Blue Jay.” Born in East Orange, New Jersey, and raised in Glen Ridge, Verducci has always been a standout athlete, having led his high school football team to a state championship. Verducci currently lives, and golfs, in New Jersey.

Sam Walker, winner of the Hopwood and Arthur Miller Awards, serves as senior special writer for the *Wall Street Journal*. Prior to joining the *Journal* in 1998, he worked for the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* and spent five years at the *Christian Science Monitor*. He has been a regular guest on both ESPN and CNBC and has appeared on CNN, C-SPAN, NPR, and BBC Radio. Author of the popular book *Fantasyland: A Sportswriter's Obsessive Bid to Win*

the *Most Ruthless Fantasy Baseball League*, Walker actually won the American League Tout Wars championship in just his second season playing Rotisserie Baseball. He lives in New York City.

Dan Washburn's columns in the "Sporting Life" newspaper series won him first place in the Sports/Outdoor Writing category in the award series sponsored by Gannett, as well as first place awards from the Georgia Sports Writer's Association, Georgia Press Association, Georgia Associated Press, Best of Gannett, and the National Shooting Sports Federation. In addition to writing for the *Times of Gainesville, Georgia*, Washburn served as the senior sports copy editor for *TV Guide*. In 2002 the native Pennsylvanian took his sports show on the road, moving to Shanghai to kick off his award-winning blog, *Shanghai Dairies*, and to begin work on a participatory book about the Chinese professional golf tour. His sports journalism has appeared in *ESPN.com*, *Baseball America*, and other top outlets.

Dana White is executive editor of *Golf for Women* and coauthor of two books, *Picabo: Nothing to Hide* and *The Heart of a Soldier: A True Story of Love, War, and Sacrifice with Captain Kate Blaise*. A tireless advocate for women, White was part of the editorial team that launched Condé Nast's *Women's Sports & Fitness* and has freelanced for magazines such as *SELF* and *Parenting*. She began her career as an editorial assistant at *Skiing* magazine, where she rose through the masthead to become executive editor. White lives in Westchester County.

Randy Wayne White is a contributing editor to *Outside* magazine and a former tackle-fishing guide based in Sanibel Island, Florida. An avid windsurfer and saltwater boater, White has published more than two dozen articles for major magazines, most on sport risk takers and adventurers. His Doc Ford crime novels have been honored by the Mystery Bookseller's Association as one of the "Hundred Favorite Mysteries of the Twentieth Century."