
Chapter Forty One

*Showdown at Sky Creek Ranch – Mano a mano**

October 12, 2008

There are some people in this world that are just plain better. My brother Rob, for instance - he is the best. The evidence of this fact is in his academic success, career achievements, sports and family legacies. Rob always excels. Being the best, however, does not make him unbeatable. Remember: On any given Sunday...the best can show vulnerability. Being the best makes you a little bit arrogant and a little bit overconfident (at times). Therein is the Achilles heel of my opponent on Sunday, October 12, 2008. Rob vs. Wes - 18 holes at Sky Creek Ranch.

Situated between Dallas and Fort Worth within the community of Keller – the spectacular Sky Creek Ranch Golf Club is an award-winning daily fee championship golf course designed by renowned golf course architect Robert Trent Jones, Jr. My dad, James O’Connell Morgan, lives on that golf course. The Number 7 hole is in his backyard. By the time Rob and I reach that par five hole (#7) on Sunday, Rob is winning by five strokes. It doesn’t look good for me.

I’m not the best. I am completely average or below average in most things - including golf. I expect to lose. I am more like Charlie Brown. Charlie Brown is a loveable loser, but he never quits. I have an edge - I play a lot. Rob laughs to himself because he suspects that I am just practicing my bad habits and only getting into a groove of my losing ways. Even playing as much as I do, I am the underdog in this contest. Nevertheless, I plan to fight to the finish.

At the turn, the score is 54 to 59. Rob is still has a winning margin of five strokes. I have two choices. 1. Let the five stroke deficit get under my skin and ruin the back nine or

2. Think of the new nine holes as a clean slate. I’m thinking clean slate. The underdog quietly comes out of the locker room

in the second half with an uncharacteristic calm. When you are me, you are not expected to win. (So in a way – I can't lose.) When you are the best you have everything to lose.

Four holes into the back nine (#10, #11, #12 and #13) and the gap does not change. But it doesn't get worse. A harmless par three (#14) is the beginning of the swing my way. The golf gods are now with me. The water hazard eats Rob's tee shot. And by the time we finish this little hole the gap is reduced to just one stroke. Victory is still within Rob's grasp by the time we reach #18. Unfortunately for him, his short game fails him. (His second shot misses the green by inches and he has to chip out of a sand bunker. He doesn't play enough to be comfortable in this situation. Chunk! Blade! He has imploded. He's on the green in six strokes and with a two stroke maximum putt rule – he earns a snowman (eight). It's a two stroke swing and Rob hands me a victory on a silver platter. The back nine yielded scores of 52 and 45. Rob 106 and Wes 104.

If this was a football game it would be one of those games where in the final seconds of the contest, careless mistakes in execution result in a painful defeat for the heavily favored team. As we drive our cart toward the Sky Creek Ranch Golf Course parking lot, I'm trying to be a good sport. But the underdog team doesn't have enough experience with winning to act like we've been there before. Instead the fans go nuts and tear down the goal posts and swarm the hapless losers in inexplicable joy over this single victory. It must be something in the air, because already this weekend the Oklahoma Sooners, and Missouri Tigers have gone down in defeat. The NFL Arizona Cardinals go on to win over America's Team: The Dallas Cowboys in overtime on Sunday Night. And the Cleveland Browns won on Monday night over the Super Bowl Champion New York Giants. (Clearly this is a week that favors the underdog.)

Last week I was in Las Vegas on business for a big trade show. I can't help wondering if the wagering on college and NFL football games and mano a mano Morgan golf challenge beat the odds-makers (by a comfortable margin). Bets on Arizona,

Cleveland and Wes would have fantastic payouts. The gamblers huddled around the TV screens in the Sports Book area at the Flamingo hotel would be screaming with glee. The BCS rankings are sure to change! The Cardinals beat the Cowboys! The Brownies are beginning a new season. And Wes beat Rob!

The truth be told and for the record - Rob beat himself. But for the fans of underdogs everywhere, it is good to see the odds-on favorite get knocked down a peg. It makes them human. It makes them tolerable. It reminds them why they need to be a good sport when they crush their foes. It makes them just a little bit more humble when they resume their winning ways.

Joy is anxious for a recap. Rob is a good sport but is struggling to get it right in his head. In his mind, he plays the game over and over until he can rationalize it as some sort of a victory. He doesn't like to lose. It isn't in his DNA. So in his retelling he's convinced himself and now it's trying to convince others that he actually won. Joy is amused. She knows she's on a winning team. She also knows that character is destiny. She knows that this is just a setback for Rob. She knows that the universe is out of equilibrium - but that's the reason the Cleveland Browns beat the New York Giants. Isn't that worth it? Rob might not concur.

Kevin (K-Mo), Rob's son is very much like my son was at 15. Quiet, smart and a gifted athlete, he doesn't seem to be quite as competitive as his dad. Surely he is observing how graciously Rob accepts defeat. Surely he is not persuaded by Rob's lame attempts at revisionist history.

**Mano a mano is Spanish for "hand to hand." Since hand-to-hand combat typically pits two individuals against each other, the expression is often understood to, but doesn't literally, mean one-on-one.*