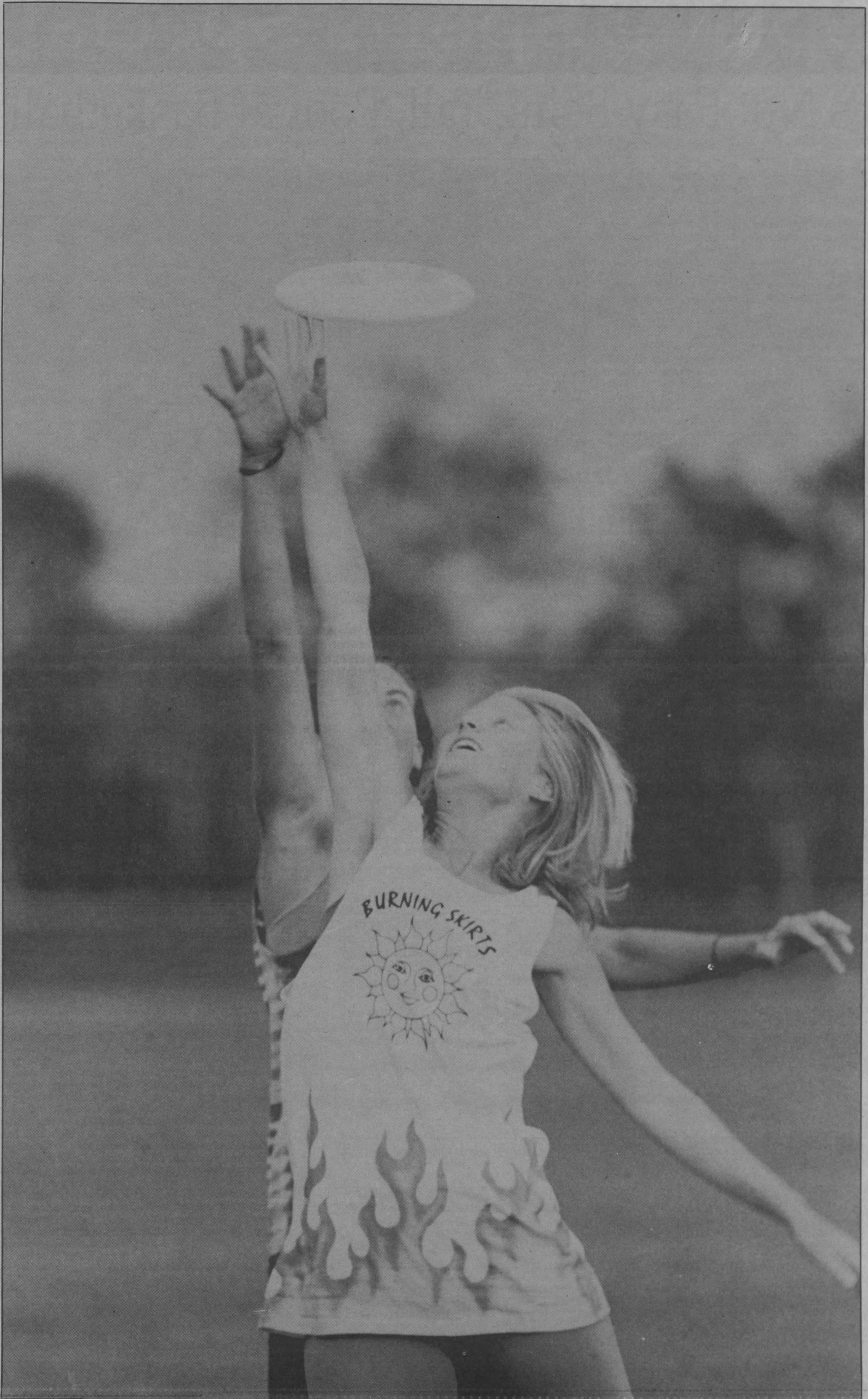


Spring Sports Special



Spring Sports Special!

It's Not Easy Being Tall, Poor at Basketball

By Ross French

Being 6'5 1/2" is no picnic.

First of all, you never, ever have any leg room. Every theater, airplane or sports stadium leaves a whopping five to six inches for you to put your legs in.

But worse than that is *The Question*.

It's inevitable. It has dogged me all my life. I meet somebody, and one of the first questions out of their mouths is, "Wow, did you play basketball?" When I truthfully answer, "Not much," they then proceed to tell me what a shame it was and that I really should have played. With really macho short guys, it is often followed by, "Boy, if I had your size, I would have been a

god out there."

I've been getting this since high school, ever since I evolved out of my pre-sophomore fat stage and shot up about six inches overnight. For the last two years of my life at La Cañada High School, I was continually told how I should play for the Spartan basketball team. Sure, I was taller than everyone on the team, but I lacked one major thing.

Talent.

Yes, I'm 6'5 1/2". But when it came to basketball, I stunk. I had no moves. A poster child for "White Men Can't Jump." I mean, I would have loved to be a god out there. I really tried. But when it got right down to it, the only way that I could have shot the lights out is if one of my pathetic heaves had veered off and struck a light fixture.

My one saving grace was the fact that I could rebound pretty well. I wasn't a Dennis Rodman. In fact I wasn't even Dennis Rodman's pinkie. But I used to get a lot of practice. When I played in P.E., my position was "under the left side of the basket." My job was to stand there and get every rebound, simply by reaching over everyone else. I would then throw the ball back in the general direction of the basket, and frequently miss. Fortunately, my shots usually bounced right into the hands of Tristan, who played "under the right side of the basket." It was like a handball game with the wall 11 feet in the air.

When I graduated, I hoped that the questioning would be over. Alas, it was not to be.

When I entered the dorm, my new neighbors saw me



DAVID ROSEN/Daily Nexus

AROUND THE WORLD — Basketball has been called the "social sport." Discuss.

as their center. The new question became not, "Do you play basketball," but instead, "Can you dunk?"

The answer was "No," which always met with several disapproving stares. "Sorry," I explained, "But my vertical leap is about as high as a credit card on its side." But for some reason, they still wanted me on their team.

Perhaps it was because my hall team, the Nasal Drips, were really horrible our first year. We didn't play badly all of the time, but always seemed to find a way

to lose. Like, for example, the time we were up by three with four seconds left. All we had to do was let them shoot and not foul them. We could stand on the sidelines if we wanted to and win. No problem.

Except that in a fit of optimism, I tried to block the guy's driving layup.

Swish. Tweet. Free throw. Tie. Overtime. Choke. Lose.

But I persevered. I worked on ball handling skills. I took P.E. classes that taught me how to post up against the big men in the

middle and use my size to my advantage. And I improved.

A little.

I still can't shoot very well. My free-throw percentage looks something like Bob Uecker's career batting average. Get me outside six feet and it's hazardous for spectators. My favorite shot is the ever-ugly "spin-without-looking-and-throw-the-ball-hard-against-the-backboard-so-the-other-team-can-get-the-rebound" shot. Perhaps you've seen it.

But at least now I can dunk.

It happened when I was doing a little student coaching at the Pat Riley Basketball Camp (Yes, I got the job by default, but we won't go into that). I was surrounded by people my own age who could have been blindfolded and have several extremities tied behind their back and still beat me. Guys like ASU's Issac and Alex Austin. Issac was bound for the NBA, and Alex could be right behind him. The other student coaches were JC and small college players. I was way outclassed, and I was feeling it.

So during the lunch break one afternoon I was shooting around. All alone in the Thunderdome. I was feeling pretty good, so I figured it was definitely time to embarrass myself with a dunk attempt.

I brought the ball back, then dribbled towards the hoop. I planted, leaped and threw it down.

Boom.

I didn't believe I actually did it. So I tried again. I missed.

And missed.

And missed.
And missed.
And missed.
And missed.
And hit.

Satisfied that it wasn't a once in a lifetime thing, I quit for the day.

I did it every so often in practice just to prove I could. For a change, I was too humble to show off. But one day, I decided to unleash it, in front of my teammates from the Nasal Drips. We had continued to play together throughout our four years of schooling, and I wanted to go out with a bang.

It was a great feeling when it happened. I dribbled up, threw it down, and everything just stopped. Balls just rolled away from hands that had been frozen in mid-dribble. Shock was evident in a couple of my teammates. I relished the moment, savoring it like a tall glass of lemonade on a long, hot summer day. I felt I could do anything.

I was wrong. I should have quit while I was ahead.

But no, I had to try and cap off a 73-31 victory with a dunk. An opposing player took a little offense and smashed me into the hardwood like a bug under a foot. My back still hasn't recovered.

Since then, I haven't done it many times. I don't really get the chance to play much, and my legs usually don't have the spring in them unless I've played for a while. But it is a great feeling to know that even though I generally can't hit the broad side of a barn, I'm a white man who can jump. At least enough to dunk.

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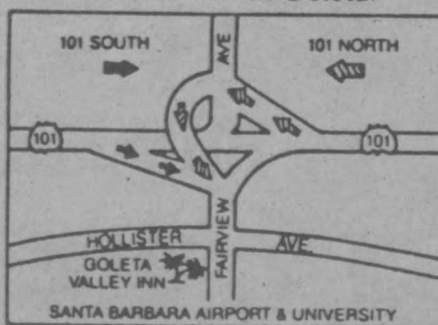
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Spring Sports Special!

The Game of Baseball: Something to Talk About

By Dino Scoppettone

They say that you'll like a movie more if you identify with one of its characters. The same applies to baseball — if you really feel you have something in common with a player, you'll tend to root for him a little more.

My roommate Scott liked the Boston Red Sox long before the Bill Buckner Incident. But when it happened, Scott felt a pit in his stomach, a sinking pain akin to the one he felt way back in his Little League days.

It almost seems like yesterday, yet it was over five years ago, in the fall of 1986, when the Red Sox were within one strike of winning their first World Series since the advent of electricity. And then the New York Mets, Destiny's Team, strung together a couple of hits, a wild pitch and the Buckner Incident, and went on to win that sixth game, and eventually, the Series.

Scott, I'm sure, remembers it well. Runner on third, two outs, dribbling ground ball hit to Buckner at first. Third out, right? No. Buckner watches the ball go through his legs into short right field, and that's the

ballgame.

Scott's mind goes back, in one of those "Wayne's World"—type dream sequences, to his first year in Little League. He's playing first base, it's the last inning, and his Yankees are up 8-7 on the A's. The winner clinches the pennant. The loser gets nothing but the bitter stares of disappointed parents.

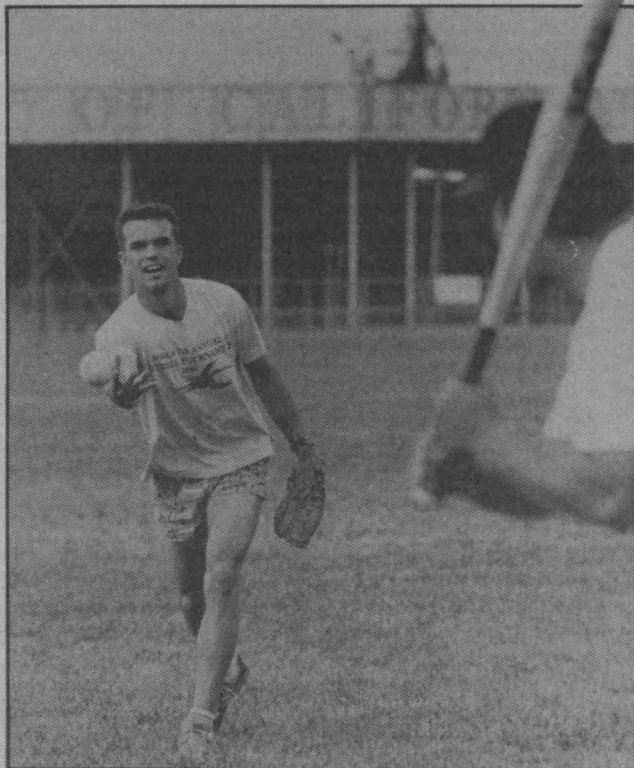
Runners at first and second, two outs. Hard shot to first base for what should be the final out. But the ball bounces in front of Scott and spins away, laughing at him all the while. Runner scores, tie ball game. A's go on to win. Scott gets nothing.

How did Buckner feel after his botch? Ask Scott. He knows.

"I walked back to the dugout, and everybody was hanging their heads. Daryl was just glaring at me," Scott said sadly.

Daryl, who is now in professional baseball, trying to make it to the bigs in the Pittsburgh organization, has probably forgotten about the incident. Scott has not.

"I felt like a dog," Scott recalls. "It didn't matter that our pitcher had given up nine runs. It was like I had



DAVID ROSEN/Daily Nexus

lost the game for us."

Scott *had* lost the game for his team. And it was up to us, his friends, to dutifully remind him of that fact when the situation called for it.

Scott: "I hit two home runs in our intramural softball game today."

Me: "But you still lost the

pennant for your Little League team. How do you feel now?"

Really, though, nobody was immune. If you weren't playing in the game, you were there watching your friends. And if you goofed up, they wouldn't let you forget.

For instance, Pat, who ir-

onically also attends UCSB, was forced into some pitching duty during his playing days. As the story goes, his first pitch was a little high. In fact, it went over the backstop.

"That did not happen," Pat attests. "The real truth is this: The ball hit the front of the plate and bounced over the backstop, due to the ferocity of the pitch."

But that's not how we remembered it. That's another thing about the Little League days — sometimes little myths get formed and soon these are taken as scripture.

When Andrew, who by pure chance also happens to attend school here, moved on from Little League to Pony League, he was drafted onto an expansion team, the Angels. Of course, we know the story differently. The real truth? Andrew's dad started a new team because Andrew wasn't good enough to play otherwise. Andrew will fight this story to the death.

There are the funny myths, and then there are the funny realities; such as the time Carlos tripped between second and third. *Everyone* saw that one. And nobody ever let him live it down.

But the winner for stupidity on the playing field, hands down, was David. This is the guy who walked back to the wrong dugout after striking out. This is the guy who, after waiting in the on-deck circle, walked to the plate *after* the third out of the inning had been made. This is the guy whose Mom thought *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* was a double feature — ah, but that's another story.

Sadly, the days of Little League are over. The days of getting some sunflower seeds and a candy bar, hitting the bleachers, and watching your friends screw up are long gone. The carefree days of baseball have given way to the responsibilities and worries of adulthood. But sometimes you get drawn back.

Sometimes, when you see Darryl Strawberry tripping over the bullpen mound in search of a foul pop fly, or when you see Matt Williams miss pitifully for strike three, or when you see Randy Johnson fire a pitch that breaks the plexiglass behind the catcher, you get pulled back, just for a second, to those days of blunders and sunflower seeds. But just for a second.

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Spring Sports Are Many and Varied

By Stephen Lynne-Bachelor

When spring comes to town, the world opens up to you.

You say to yourself, "Yeah, I think I'm going to make it." You get your taxes filed, you finish up your schooling, you comment on how "green it is" to everyone you see and you stay out later and meet with friends and enjoy food and conversation.

It's great. You know what I mean. *The world opens up to you.*

Every season has its sports, I guess. But all too often, the season dictates which sports you are able to play. Don't tell me you don't know what I'm talking about. Winter = skiing. See? And I would say "summer = surfing" and you would know what I mean, but you would still say, "Some of the best surf is winter surf." You know what I mean, but you still have to cause trouble! Let's get along. Let's cut everybody some slack. It's

spring, after all. Flowers, daylight until almost 8 p.m. *The world has opened up to you.*

It's time to throw off the shackles of overcoats and early darkness and get out there and run around. Run around fast! It's just like when you were a kid, except that you get to drink beer afterwards! It's great!

What I was saying earlier — before you interrupted me with the "Some of the best surf is winter surf" business — was that spring's kindness and clemency allows for just about any sport you can think of. Basketball, baseball, football, Frisbee, tennis, bowling, surfing, whatever. It's all possible. Oh, I know what you're saying. You're saying, "spring = skiing." Come on. Don't you have anything better to do than nitpick? You know what I mean! Let's put it this way: when you're playing spring sports, at least there's no imminent danger that you might freeze to death. See? *The world has opened up to you.*

I will now talk about

three springtime sports that are fun and easy to get casually involved in.

Tennis

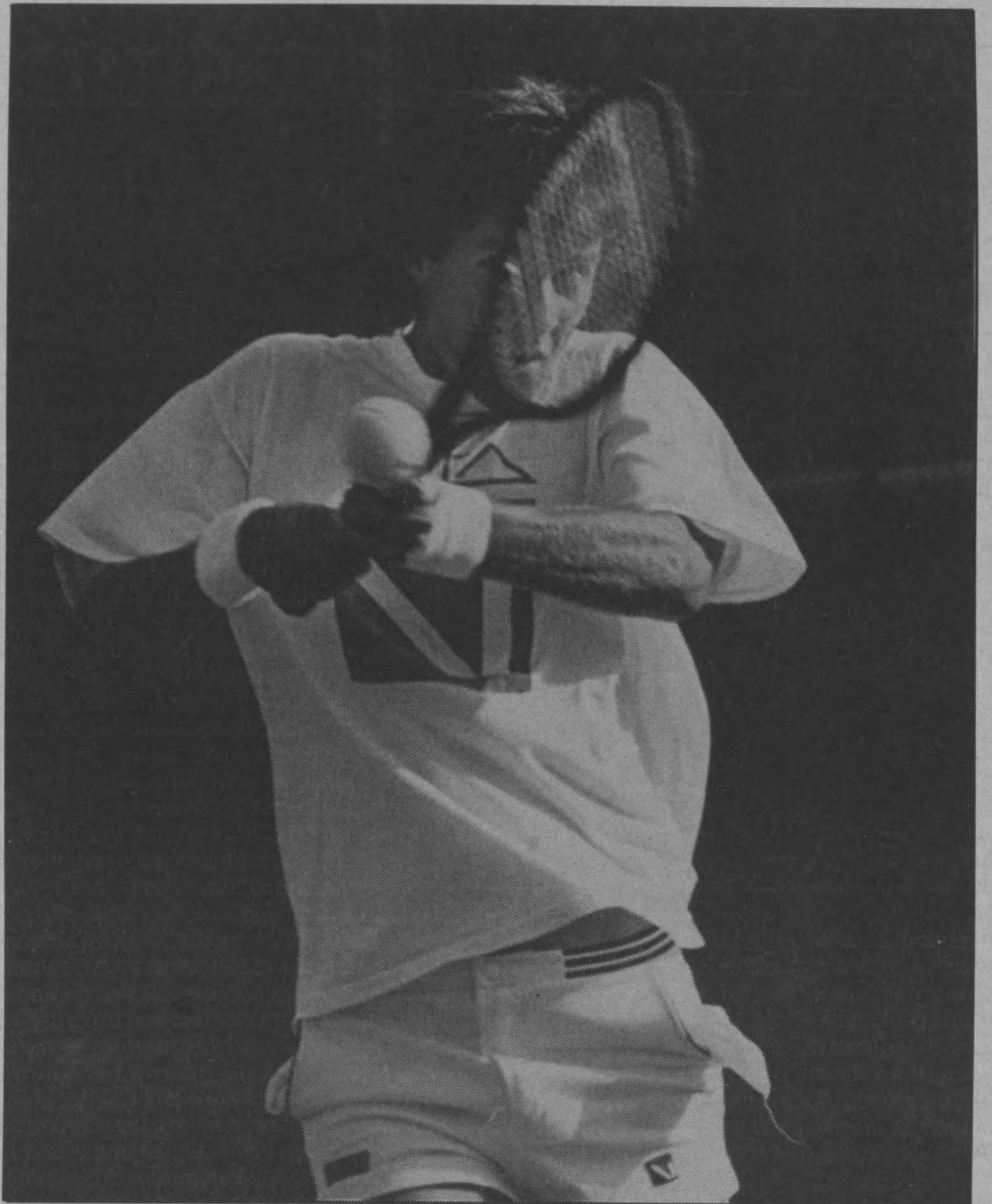
What a wonderful way to spend an afternoon: out on the courts. It's good, solid exercise with just enough pauses in the action to keep you from getting winded. You can play it competitively or on a purely recreational level. Or any combination of the two. ... Get creative!

Basketball

Some people tend to really get into this game, which is fine. Healthy competition is one of the eight things that make this country so great. It's a pretty interesting game, too. Ball in the hoop, things of this nature. It's a good way to meet friends; the almost universal on-court etiquette is one of the more inspiring examples of unsupervised social interplay.

Football

Touch, flag or tackle — all of these words, with the exception of "tackle," have an inseparable connection with communication between people.



CAT GUT — Do tennis players get a lot of backhanded compliments? Why or why not?

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Spring Sports Special!

Need Excitement? Try a Little Wiffle

By Jonathan Okanes

So I'm sitting around the ole' Nexus office the other day, when this weird-sports editor type guy comes waltzing into the sports office and tells me that he needs a story on spring sports by Tuesday.

Spring sports? I thought. Then I thought for about another millisecond and, genius that I am, knew what I was going to write about. Wiffle ball.

It all started when I was about seven years old and moved to California from the not-so-glamorous town of Springfield, Illinois. My family moved into a not-so-glamorous house on a cul-de-sac in Concord. But the lack of glamour didn't bother me — I was being introduced to the wonderful, orgasmically primitive world of wiffle ball.

It began with my next door neighbor, Dave — a jolly young kid who had the build for wiffle ball ... and nothing much else. He almost immediately approached my brother Paul and me from the day we moved in.

"You guys baseball fans?" Dave asked us. "Do the Bee Gees rule?" I asked back.

And from there a somewhat unstoried childhood was born. We made all the arrangements — getting masking tape and measuring a grotesquely incorrect strike zone on my garage door, painting a pitcher's mound on the street adjacent to my driveway and wrapping up the wiffle bats in masking tape so we'd actually be able to score some runs when we played.

We'd play every day, many times a day. At first, it would be just Dave, my brother and me — we'd play "rotation" with three stations: batting, playing the outfield and pitching. It was one-on-one-on-one.

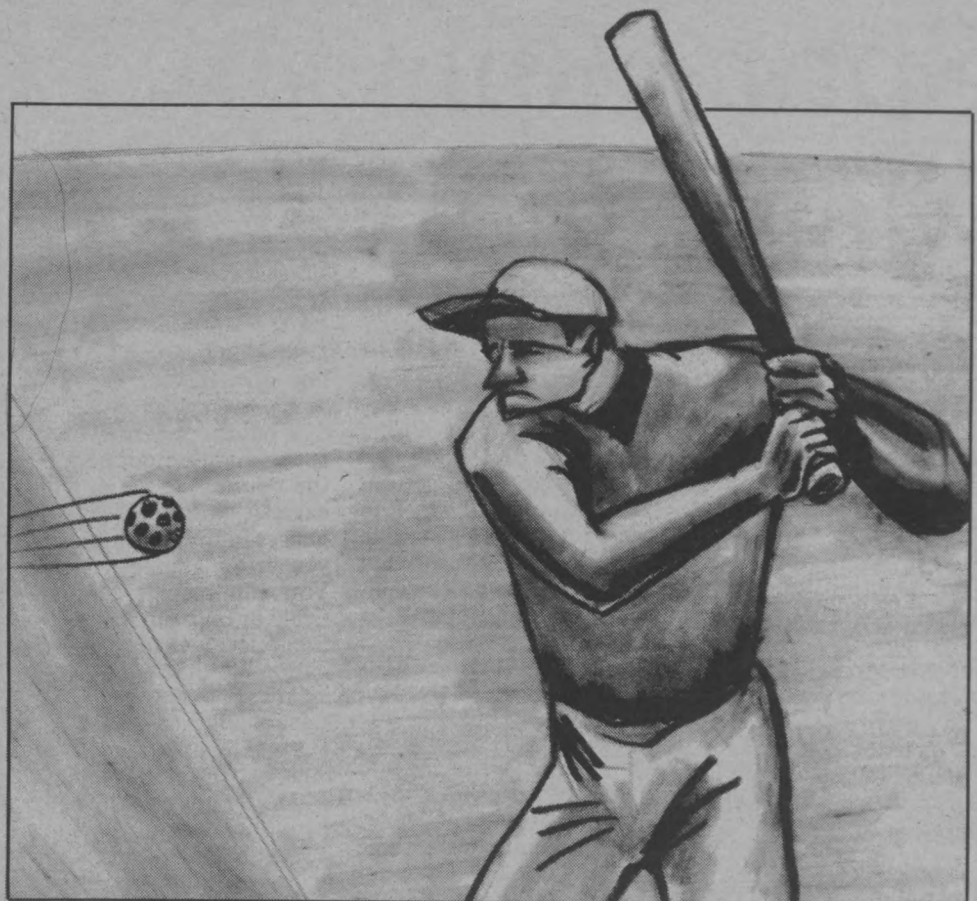
Only in wiffle ball. Pretty soon we had more people involved. Another kid on the court moved in who was my age, so that helped balance out the mini-generation gap we had going between myself and the three/four years older duo of Dave and my brother. And as we got older, we were even able to

hold our own with the extremely older group on the court who were high school veterans — a short pudgy kid named Mike, who talked as if he was Babe Ruth but played like he was Dr. Ruth, and the God of the group, Lance, who has since made his way all the way to the major leagues (Lance Blankenship of the Oakland A's).

All of us, like it was our job, cranking out hundreds and hundreds of wiffle ball games. If it was time for dinner, it would have to wait — our parents understood. I could handle eating tepid food if it meant I would start getting my curve ball over.

And that's the challenge of the game of wiffle ball. Getting this sphere, that looks like such a simple concoction, to do what it wants you to do. It's simple, right? You throw the ball with the holes on the outside and it's a curve ball. Pitch it with the openings on the inside, you can be Fernando Valenzuela and have a screw ball ... OK, maybe you don't want to be Fernando.

But it wasn't, and still



PAT STULL/Daily Nexus

isn't, that easy. I would throw the ball exactly the way I was "supposed" to and have control like Nolan Ryan in the early days, while Dave had about 10 different pitches, each of which were barely touchable.

Needless to say, Dave emerged as the consensus wiffle ball champion of the court — except when Lance was up for a game — while I kept lobbying that we

should play with a tennis ball. For a while, Dave and Paul agreed to do that, but when I was giving up runs that were approaching three digits for a game, it was time to scratch that idea and go back to the scientifically incorrect wiffle ball.

That's what made the game so intriguing and so time-consuming — it involved this ball that looked

so simple but seemed to require a rocket scientist to figure out.

And although all of the kids on the court have all now gone their separate ways, when a few of us simultaneously return to our not-so-glamorous court, it never fails that a game or two of wiffle ball is played. Next time I'm bringing that rocket scientist with me.

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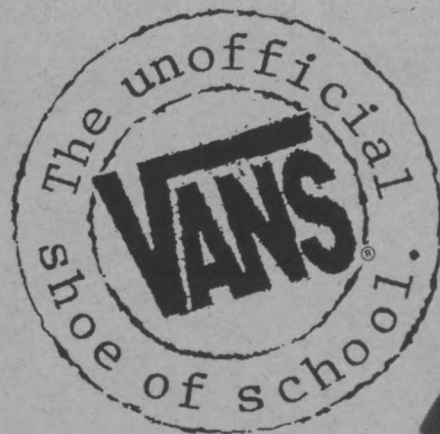
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Spring Sports Special!

Golf Game Improvement Fun!

By Brian Banks

This game they call golf has me confused.

I ask myself, "Hey, what's the point?" You hit a small ball into a small hole, pick it up, and move on to the next small hole. And you do this 18 times!

You lug around a bag full of clubs that can be used in any situation, only to play with three of them. And the ones you do use never work right anyway, always sending the ball off in the wrong direction. And when you do get close, you can't sink a putt. The ball just rolls in and out of the cup.

The game goes against all our competitive instincts, which teach us to score more than our opponent. In golf, we have to score less. And for what? There's never any great prize. Even the greatest golfer in the world gets stiffed — a lousy green jacket for winning the Masters.

Yes. I'm a frustrated golfer.

There are many of us, duffers who take the greens looking for only a few hours of relaxation and light exercise. By the end of our round, however, our score is the same as our weight and we never want to handle a club again.

But I will not let these experiences deter from a game I am determined to conquer. After much careful thought, I have reasoned that neither I, nor thousands of my frustrated brothers and sisters, are the problem.

The game is the problem.

So here, on this sixth day of May, nineteen hundred and ninety-two, I introduce

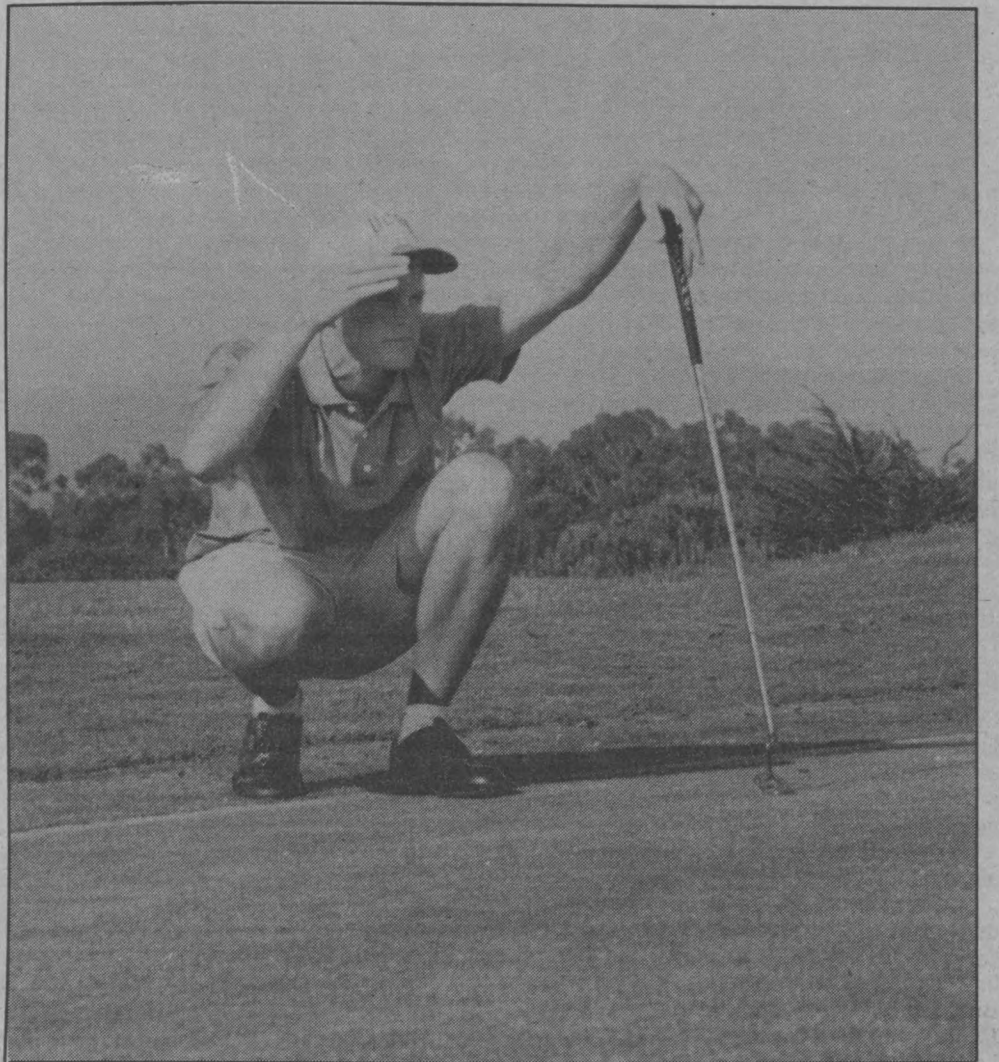
revolutionary changes in golf which will make the game more exciting, more pleasurable, and much easier for all its participants.

Elimination of the Approach: If putting be the key to good golf, there should be less emphasis on teeing off and approaches. I suggest that we do away with those extraneous activities and simply start each hole from the green. This way, those with poor swings or bad clubs will not be at a disadvantage.

The "One Foot" Principle: Adapted from a similar rule used in miniature golf, if a golfer does not like where his or her ball is placed on the green, he or she may move it one "foot" in any direction. The exact distance will be determined by the golfer placing his or her foot down next to the ball and in the direction the ball should be moved. The ball would then be picked up, and set down at the tip of the golfer's big toe.

The Backstop: Basketball has been very successful in the United States with its use of a backboard for the rim, so why not the same for a golf hole? The 8x6 inch wall would rotate around the hole, so that it may be placed directly in the line of a shot. Golfers would no longer be punished for a putt that is just a little long. This would also give new status to the game, as it would be entered in everyday lexicon with the phrase, "Close only counts in horseshoes and golf."

The Magnetic Hole: In an effort to make more putts fall, a small magnet would be placed inside each hole. With a metallic marble in-



STEVE OLSEN/Daily Nexus

BIRDIE WATCHING — The author of this story thinks the game of golf needs an overhaul. Do you? Explain.

side the ball, the magnetic pull would make playing on the green much easier. And quicker, which brings me to ...

One-Hole Rounds: In its current form, a single round can take hours to finish. I propose that a round of golf be shortened to a single hole, during which the participants would get a maxi-

mum of six putts before they have to pick up their ball. This would make the games shorter, and put added pressure on golfers. Think of the excitement!

The Name: Finally, I am calling for a change in the term "golf." It's so sophomoric, like something to describe a small gnome or a bowel movement. A strong

sport needs a strong name. I enter a few suggestions — Crackage, Lazetball, Pomp.

I realize that these radical changes will be met by some hesitation from golf traditionalists. But those are the same people who set par at 72. There are a lot more of us who think the game needs major improvements. And better prizes at the Masters.

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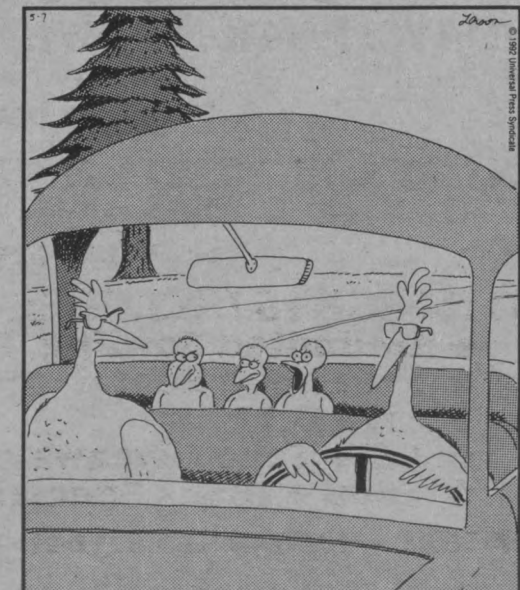
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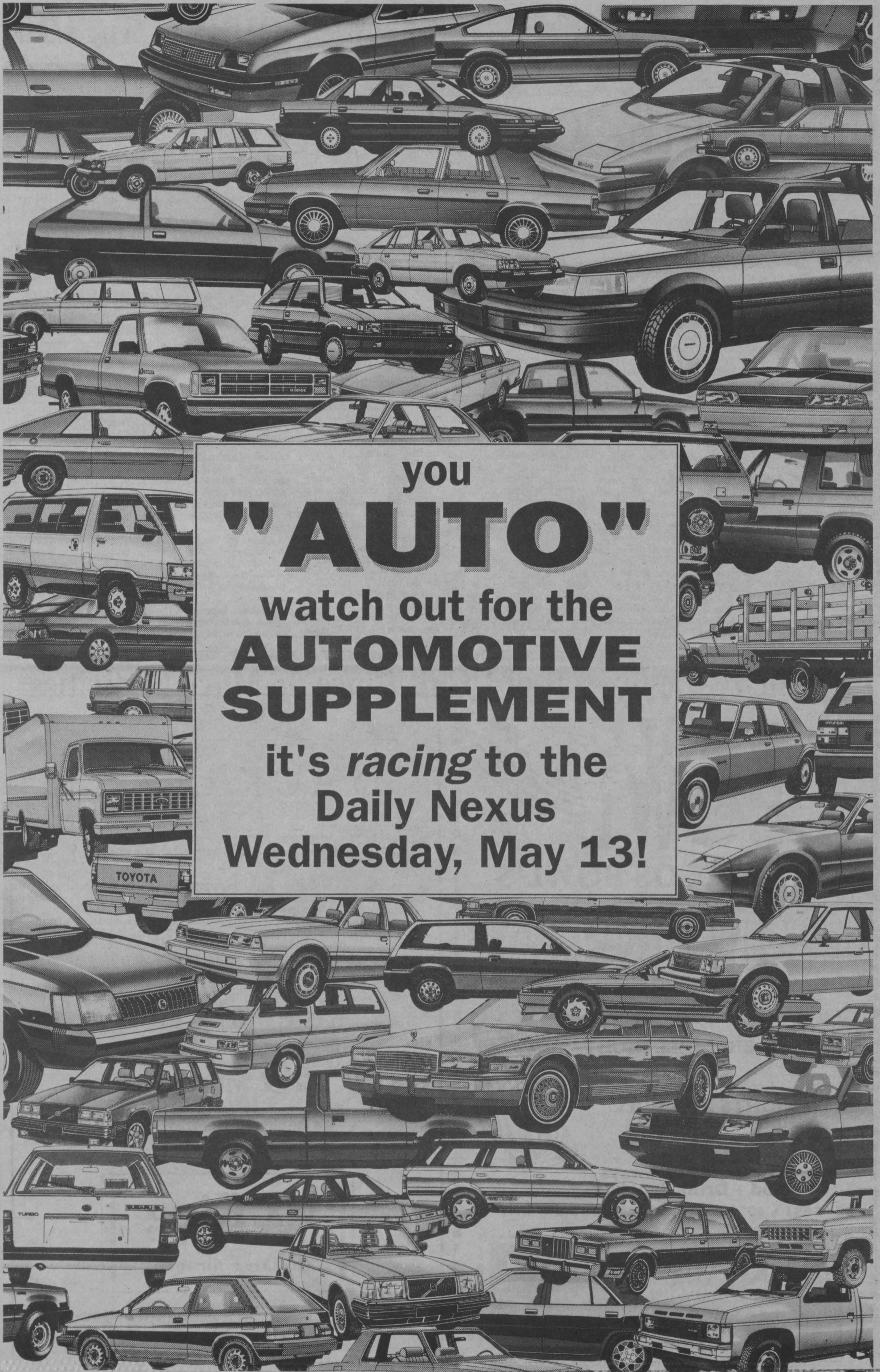
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