

The

MAN WATCHING

ANSON DORRANCE and the University
of North Carolina Women's Soccer Dynasty



WINNER OF

21 of 29 National Championships

The first Women's World Cup

Women's and Men's NCAA Soccer Coach of the Year

TIM CROTHERS

The Man Watching
Anson Dorrance and the
University of North Carolina
Women's Soccer Dynasty

Tim Crothers

Thomas Dunne Books
St. Martin's Press
New York



Infancy

I

Roses

“Here is my secret. It’s quite simple: One sees clearly only with the heart. Anything essential is invisible to the eyes.”

“Anything essential is invisible to the eyes,” the Little Prince repeated, in order to remember.

“It’s the time you’ve spent on your rose that makes your rose so important.”

“It’s the time I’ve spent on my rose . . .,” the Little Prince repeated, in order to remember.

“People have forgotten this truth,” the fox said. “But you mustn’t forget it. You become responsible forever for what you’ve nurtured. You’re responsible for your rose . . .”

“I’m responsible for my rose . . .,” the Little Prince repeated, in order to remember.

Antoine de Saint Exupéry

Alllllrightthen, here we go. I’ll tell you, I loved last year’s Final Four because of the position we were in. I loved coming in as an underdog. Guess what? I think the same thing is happening again at this Final Four. In the press conference yesterday all the questions I got this year were about how well Portland is playing and about how we’re struggling. Well, I can play that tune. I went right along with them. But I was thinking that if you people had seen the second half of our quarterfinal game against Penn State, you pinheads!, you’d have known that we outshot them 9 1. Where the hell have you been? I didn’t deliver any of that to the media because I know what we can do, and if right now they have written us off, then I want us to show everyone what this team can do out there on the field tonight because I tell you, when you guys play your best you are devastating. You are frigging inspirational. You play through your hearts with extraordinary passion, and our opponents know that if they don’t bring it, you guys are going to humiliate them.

In the press conference I thought one of Portland’s players talked about their confidence with a little too much confidence. You know what I mean? They think they’re on a roll and they think that we’re collapsing. They think we’re toast. They think they can grind it out. Let them try to grind it out with us for ninety minutes. We are professional grinders. Everybody’s talking about all of their great players, but do they have our personalities all over the field? I don’t think so. I think we have great weapons and we need to bring them to bear. We have something to

prove. The media doesn't think we're going to play. Portland doesn't think we're going to play. I think we're going to play. Are you with me?

The man delivers this speech before an audience of women. Coach Anson Dorrance conveys this message to a specific team inside a specific locker room during a specific season, but these are words he could have said at any Final Four in any season in the history of the University of North Carolina women's soccer program, because, like so many of Dorrance's speeches, this one is timeless.

On this day Dorrance will not talk about the past. He will not talk about the ludicrous number of national titles won by women wearing the same distinctive blue uniforms as the women gathered around him. He will not talk about all of those championship trophies back in Chapel Hill that are stuffed into the display case like a set of encyclopedias, or about the fact that runner up trophies are traditionally utilized as doorstops because anything less than a national title is considered a failure. He will certainly not remind these players that they are the caretakers of the greatest dynasty in the history of collegiate sports. Because, this being college athletics, every season, every team, is totally different, and the women in this room are not even the same women they were at the Final Four last year or the year before that. Far from it. So Dorrance will not mention anything won in the past. Or anything not won. In fact, he will not mention winning or losing at all. Everybody present already understands the one quest that binds them all. Shared expectations. Shared destinies. The roses.

As Dorrance concludes a brief synopsis of the game plan, the team's manager, Tom Sander, carefully removes the roses from a duffel bag in the corner of the room. And thus begins a ceremony that ushers the Tar Heel senior class out of the locker room. Each of the seniors is handed a bouquet of roses. Most of them wipe tears from their eyes. The underclassmen, many also crying, applaud and cheer each senior as she walks a receiving line, stopping for a hug and a few encouraging words from Dorrance and then from assistant coach Bill Palladino, goalkeeper coach Chris Ducar, and finally the team's trainer, Bill Prentice. During these moments, there is a collective flashback to three weeks earlier, when Dorrance walked into the team meeting room back in Chapel Hill before the opening game of the NCAA Tournament carrying a vase of flowers, and told them all about the roses. He had explained then that each red rose in the vase represented a national championship won by the current senior class, and he had read them a passage from Antoine de Saint Exupéry's *The Little Prince* about caring for a rose. Then he had summed up what it all meant to him. "The rose is symbolic of wherever each of you are athletically, and it's symbolic of championships because you're all responsible for them," Dorrance had said. "What I like about the symbolic use of flowers is that we're celebrating our past, but after a while, the flower shrivels and dies. That glory is dead. Athletics is about renewal, and you guys are sitting in the places of all the previous classes who have tried to send their seniors out as champions. If we lose a game in this tournament, there's no tomorrow for them. Their careers have died. So we play for them."

As the locker room door closes behind the final exiting senior, Dorrance pulls several photocopied sheets of paper out of the breast pocket of his jacket. As is his custom, he has worked through much of the previous night in his hotel room, writing and rewriting a personal letter to each of his seniors in his barely legible longhand. Then he has awakened early this morning to polish his words, editing until the last possible moment, because that is the only way the letters can be genuine, the only way they can express what he sincerely feels at that instant. Then he has delivered the original letters to each of the seniors a few hours before the pregame talk.

He knows that he's only got a moment with these letters, and that this could be his last chance to make sure each senior knows how much he cares about them. He wants each young woman to know that even though he has spent four years telling her this isn't good enough, that isn't good enough, she isn't good enough, that what he's been secretly searching for all along is what really is good enough in her. When he recounts a personal story or two about her that she'd never expect him to remember, he wants her to know what he thinks is her finest quality and this is never a soccer quality, but a human quality because he believes that's what his women appreciate most. When he reads the copies of the senior letters to the underclassmen left behind in the locker room, he wants his admiration to resonate. As he shares the words he has written to each senior, no matter how large or small her role on the team, Dorrance wants everyone inside that room to be in awe of her.

We're all familiar with our tradition here, and part of it is that I get to share my memories of the kids we're going to lose. These are the letters I wrote to our senior reserves. It's always hard. Obviously you guys think you've got all the time in the world. You think you're going to be in college forever. At least that's what I thought when I was there. Then all of a sudden it's gone and we'll never play with these kids again . . .

Dear Katie,

There are many great memories that I will treasure from this year, and one that will stand out was after the conference championship game when you were jogging off the field smiling from one ear to the other after playing in just the second game of your career. I heard someone's voice calling my name, and I turned to see your father. Reaching down to extend his hand from above the rail at the Wake Forest soccer stadium, a tear was rolling down his cheek. He was so proud of you. I told him that you were going to take a piece of history with you. Until the end of recorded time in the pantheon of great goalkeepers that this program has had who have won world championships, Olympic medals, national championships, no one will beat the goals against average of his sweet and humble daughter, Katie. Please take that history with you, Katie, and one day brag to your grandchildren that, yeah, Tracy Noonan,

Siri Mullinix, Jenni Branam were all pretty good goalkeepers at UNC, but how about 0.00 goals against? . . . How about that? . . .

So we play for Katie.

Dear Whit,

You are a triumph of the human spirit. Every image I have of you is a catalog of your guts and your indefatigable will. My first image of you was seeing you sprint and dive across the finish line your freshman year to pass your first fitness test. My second image is when we were desperate that first week of games your freshman year, and we asked if anyone wanted to play up front to make up for the lackluster effort of our starters, and you volunteered and with sheer effort turned the game for us. The next image was you as a sophomore on a stretcher after they put those rods in to repair your broken back. And where are you? You're not in the hospital. You're on the sidelines with us. Part of our team. The most recent image brings it all back together. It was this year, and like your freshman year, we were wondering out loud if any of our starting forwards would take any kind of risk to help us win. We asked you if you would take a risk. You survived Lyme disease as a child, a broken back on the soccer field as a young college kid, and a medical dismissal as an old college kid when doctors told you you could never play again. So if you did not want to take the risk anymore, it was OK. You earned the right to quietly decline, but you said yes, you'd take a risk to help the team win. To this day, that goalkeeper does not know what hit her. When she discovered you lying next to her and the ball in the back of her net behind her, she learned how hard and courageous someone's heart could be. You are my inspiration.

So we play for Whit.

Dear Kristin,

I want you to know I think you are an example of everything that is good in athletics. Athletics does not necessarily build character, but it definitely exposes it, and what it exposed in you is uniquely powerful and positive. We won't find your name on any collegiate All American list or your face on a highlight reel, but your moral fabric and work ethic is pervasive here. Your concerns were for an environment that transcended self interest, and you supported your teammates and coaches in our mission to be the best we could be even when the playing time and glory went to the goalkeepers you played behind. For four years in a row I have brought you into my office to tell you that someone else is going to play in your place in the NCAA Tournament. And in this, your final year, it is most painful. Your nobility in the face of this disappointment will always set you apart. Please know this. You are finishing at

your best, following your greatest performances in a development that's ascending still. We will all miss you on the field, but we will also know that your mark was always made on a higher plane.

So we play for Kristin.

Dear Johanna,

There's a part of me that will forever burn with the idealism that I envy in you. There's another part that wanted you to serve yourself and let West Africa be, but I admire that you had to go there last summer to help any way you could. In the swirl of glitz and glory in the numbers of our tradition, and in the interviews of our stars and goal scorers and media darlings, the stories miss their mark because the values of everything we really treasure are preserved in you. You kept alive the tradition of running fitness with the ones who can't. You gave back to your local community to fight for the construction of fields that you will never play on as an example to the ones who won't. You passed the most excruciating fitness test in the game with only the rarest possibility of ever playing as a standard for those who have none, baffling the ones that try to cut every corner. You leave no margin for the ones who whine about the conspiracy of their human condition. When you go, some of the things I like best will go with you. You'll be missed, more than you'll ever know.

So we play for Johanna.

Dorrance's voice cracks with emotion several times throughout the reading of the letters. Twice he stops to compose himself. There is much sniffing among the players, a few are openly sobbing, dabbing at their faces with their uniform sleeves. When Dorrance finishes reading the final letter, everyone in the room, including the coach and all of his staff, have their heads bowed, fighting back tears.

Let me tell you this. I'm watching practice yesterday and we're wrapping it up, doing our set pieces at the end, and I'm watching Catherine Reddick practice free kicks. All season she's so afraid to hit anyone in the wall that most of her shots are skying over the crossbar or going wide. Well, Catherine knows now that it's time to go after it. All of a sudden she smacks one, and it almost tore a couple of ribs off Johanna. I wanted to set Johanna free so I said, "All right Johanna, that's it. You're outta the wall." And she didn't move. She didn't move. It looked like a tear started to well up in Jo's eye, and I know she was in pain. But I was wondering, what was she in pain from? That the ball hit her? Or that this was all she could do to help us win, and she did not feel complete or satisfied, and would anyone even notice or care? So remember this. When you're out there tonight, playing out the last minutes of someone else's career, don't waste a second. Don't avoid a physical risk. Don't not make a run. Don't dishonor the wonderful nobility of the reserves you are playing before. You will never eliminate the quiet pain

they are all suffering, but you will make it a bit more bearable, and if you are truly valiant it might even feel inside that all of their sacrifice is worthwhile.

All right. Here we go.

2

Here We Go

Life is either a daring adventure, or nothing.

Helen Keller

Albert Anson Dorrance IV was born in an earthquake. Peggy Dorrance felt the tremors as the car barreled through the narrow streets of Bombay in the middle of the night on the way to the hospital. First she thought it was just the rumbling in her belly, but these were Mother Nature's contractions.

As Nathan Dorrance awaited the birth of his first child on that Monday, April 9, 1951, he immersed himself in the newspaper accounts of American troops under the command of General Douglas MacArthur, on the offensive against the Chinese Communists in the Korean War. Just hours later, he would be stunned upon hearing that President Harry Truman had relieved MacArthur of his duties for insubordination, abruptly ending the general's dynamic military career and reminding Nathan, a former soldier himself, that no leader, no matter how decorated, is ever bigger than the war itself.

The Dorrance family's genealogical history features a proud legacy of military service. Anson's great great great great grandfather Samuel Dorrance fought for the Continental Army in the Revolutionary War. Samuel's older brother Lieutenant Colonel George Dorrance also fought for the colonies, leading troops into the Battle of Wyoming, where he was wounded and captured by Indians near Pennsylvania's Forty Fort. Lieutenant Colonel Dorrance stubbornly refused to surrender his sword to his captors, so the Indians wrestled his weapon away from him and cut off his head with it. He died on Independence Day, July 4, 1778. Samuel's son, Captain George Dorrance, fought for his country in the War of 1812. George's grandson, George, fought for the Union Army at the second Battle of Winchester in the Civil War and later witnessed the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln at Ford's Theatre in Washington, D.C.

Anson's paternal grandfather, Albert Anson II, was a pilot in World War I. After the war, he moved to Shanghai, China, where he lived until World War II. There he was recruited as a supply pilot with General Claire Chennault's legendary Flying Tigers, a guerilla air force that supported the Chinese in their military struggle against Japan. Anson II flew arms from India into China over the Hump, a perilous labyrinth of 14,000 foot mountain peaks in northern Burma, until he was shot down, captured, and charged as a spy. He was eventually imprisoned in the hold of a Japanese ship, where he and his fellow POWs survived by drinking each other's urine. After two years in captivity, he was freed in a prisoner exchange.

At the same time that Anson II flew missions around Southeast Asia, his son Nathan, known to his family as Pete, also served in the Pacific theater as a Navy submarine navigator. Pete would name his first born son after his late brother, Second Lieutenant Albert Anson Dorrance III, who perished on D Day when the C 47 he piloted was shot down behind enemy lines in Normandy.

Both Pete Dorrance and Peggy Peoples were born and raised in China. Peggy's family came from North Carolina and worked in China as representatives of American Tobacco, while Pete's side worked there through Standard Oil of New Jersey, until both families were forced to leave the country at the beginning of World War II. The families had occasionally socialized with each other in China, but their children never met until a reunion in Washington, D.C., in December of 1949. Pete took Peggy out on a date the next night; they were engaged within a month and married in Bombay in May of 1950.

Pete followed in his father's footsteps as a Standard Oil executive. Since he was transferred regularly, the Dorrance family moved every three years or so, bivouacking from Bombay to Calcutta to Nairobi, Kenya, to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, to Singapore, Malaysia, and then to Brussels, Belgium, when Anson was four teen years old. During those years, Anson was attended by a fleet of servants, from nannies and maids to cooks and chauffeurs. That life of privilege was interrupted every few years when the Dorrance family returned to the United States on "home leave," spending several months at Anson's grandparents' farm in Louisburg, North Carolina. There young Anson primed tobacco and slopped hogs alongside the tenant laborers. The farm was owned by Anson's mother's father, who divorced his wife and later married Anson's father's mother.

As Anson bounced around the globe, he used sports as his road to acceptance. He taught himself how to play the most popular sports wherever he lived, like rugby, field hockey, softball, and soccer. But he never took to soccer much, bothered by his lack of instinct for the game as compared to his classmates who had spent their youth playing it daily.

Growing up in various British colonial outposts, Anson gained his first enduring memories of sport with his experiences at his British grade school in Nairobi. "Sport wasn't a choice; it was a part of our lives," Anson says. "There were four team colors in the school, and I was on Mead, and there was this sense of mission that we had every afternoon when we were competing for Mead. I loved playing this ridiculous game where everybody tries to run across the field and pick up a guy and scream out, 'British Bulldog!' and then throw him to the ground and he's dead. Mead came to represent something greater than ourselves, and that became a part of my personality."

After Anson, the Dorrances would add four other children: daughter Maggie, sons Pete and Lewjack, and finally another daughter, Chantal. To simplify life around the house, Anson's father was called Big Pete. Anson's primary sports role models were the women in his family, particularly Peggy, who was the family's most natural athlete. Peggy had grown up playing basketball, cricket, tennis, and golf. At American University in Washington, D.C., she was captain of the tennis

team and set swimming records for the number of events won in a single meet. Anson's mother was the best adult athlete he knew, dominating everybody she met on the tennis court and incessantly teasing Big Pete about beating the stuffing out of him on the golf course. Anson's sister Maggie, one year his junior, was clearly a better athlete than Anson, as well as being so ferociously competitive that she was chosen before him in most backyard pickup games. One day seven-year-old Anson proudly arrived home with news that he had won a school boxing tournament. Maggie promptly slipped on his boxing gloves and knocked one of his teeth out.

If Anson had an athletic cross to bear, it was his stature. Throughout his childhood he was always among the smallest kids in his class, a deficiency that he blamed on his Hindu nanny in India, who, for religious reasons, had regularly removed the meat from his curry. Still, Anson always refused to use his size as a crutch. "My initial spark of competitiveness came from what they call in psychology 'the Napoleon Complex,'" Anson says. "I was always tiny for my age, and I always felt like I had to prove myself."

"As a young kid Anson would teach the other kids how to play the games, but he was too small to win," Peggy says. "He became extremely competitive, and I think that's because it was never easy for him as an athlete. He had to make a significant effort to be a good player, and he wanted to win so desperately that he struggled to keep himself under control."

Any activity became a competition for Anson. Once in Ethiopia, when he was riding a tandem swing with his brother Pete, Anson began to propel the swing so feverishly that Pete couldn't keep up. Pete's foot slipped off the pedal, and his leg snapped in two. Another time while visiting their grandfather in Hong Kong, Anson and Pete bought what are called "fighting kites," which have strings that contain ground glass. When Anson and Pete flew their new kites out the window of their grandfather's apartment building, Anson relentlessly sawed his kite's string across Pete's until his little brother's string broke and the kite soared off into the sky.

Anson also believed that a score should be kept in any game, and whenever he sensed that the environment wasn't competitive enough, he would intentionally say something to irritate his rivals, challenging them not to give up. *This could be a shutout! Do you want me to play with one hand?* In his mind, he would rather have someone beat him than let him win, so he did his damndest to motivate his competition. "As Anson got older he was still smaller than anyone on the field, but you didn't feel that way after a contest," Pete says. "Every game he played, he kept score, and then he happened to be the guy who won."

In Singapore, Anson was the youngest and smallest kid on his fast pitch softball team, but he was still chosen to be the team's pitcher. The best youth team in the city at that time, Boystown, was a squad of Catholic orphans who had produced a long winning streak until Anson pitched a 1 0 no hitter against them, bunting home the winning run himself in the final inning. After the game, the vanquished Boystown team gave Anson a handkerchief with a note scribbled on

it that read: *The day the little guy did the impossible!* “That’s like a microcosm of his whole life,” Pete says. “They probably looked at the little squirt on the mound and thought, ‘No problem.’ Then all of a sudden there are these bullets flying right past them and they’re thinking, ‘How does he do that?’”

Throughout his childhood Anson was constantly reminded that he was in the minority. Sometimes he was the minority. In Addis Ababa he was the only white kid in a student body of five hundred at St. Joseph’s School. Anson compounded his racial minority status with his attitude. He wasn’t afraid to tell any of his classmates that he was the proud son of an American imperialist whose family traveled around the world exploiting the natives in their own countries. He blindly supported the United States of America like a hometown team even though he had rarely set foot on American soil. So patriotic was he that he began to shun sports like rugby, cricket, and soccer, preferring to play only sports that were popular in the United States. “Being an American kid raised abroad you develop a tremendous patriotism because there is constant persecution,” Anson says. “You become a radical American chauvinist because you’re constantly defending your country and its actions.”

Anson fought regularly on the school playground at St. Joseph’s. Many scuffles began with a game that involved cards made from scraps of old cigarette cartons stacked in the center of a dirt circle. Players stood around the circle and won the cards by knocking them down with a rock, but the game sometimes devolved into throwing rocks at the white kid. Anson’s schoolmates also clamored to play him in marbles because he was the rich foreigner with the shiniest marbles. Anson was good at marbles, which often meant that the only way to win his marbles was to beat him up for them. On more than a few occasions, Anson left school bruised and bloodied. “Most of the fights I got into were not because I was an asshole, but because I was an American,” Anson says. “I’ve never been afraid of fighting. I didn’t win that many because I was never very big, but I’d rather fight and lose than not fight at all. I learned that after someone pounds you there’s nothing else they can do to you, and you gain a huge amount of power by not backing down. It’s bizarre, but by the end of my time there I had earned respect from the African kids.”

Meanwhile, during his occasional sojourns to Louisburg, Anson ran into trouble with race relations there as well. As a result of his time in Africa, Anson had become very comfortable befriending blacks. All of the tenant workers on the Louisburg farm were black, and Anson would play baseball with their children, mowing the diamond and clearing the basepaths in the pasture himself. Still mired in the twilight of segregation in the South, some of Anson’s white classmates didn’t appreciate his tolerance for blacks. “I developed this wonderful understanding of how it works on both sides of the divide,” Anson says. “I’m beat up by blacks for being white in Addis Ababa and then I’m beat up by the whites in Louisburg for hanging out with the blacks. At the time I didn’t see the obvious irony because I didn’t know what irony was, but I had a suspicion that there was something very wrong about it.”

As a fifth grader in Louisburg, almost every day as Anson walked to the school bus for the ride home, a collection of rednecks and sons of Ku Klux Klansmen shoved and harassed him. Anson never told any administrators at school or any one in his family. He considered it a problem that he could handle himself. One day he left a classroom to go to the bathroom and discovered his most intimidating tormentor out in the hallway, the first time Anson had ever encountered the boy one on one. "There was a broom in the corner, and I grabbed it by the straw end and started beating the hell out of him with the stick," Anson says. "You could hear the blows, *Whack! Whack! Whack!* The kid started wailing and the classrooms emptied out into the hall and everybody was horrified. I went to the principal's office, and the principal asked me, 'Anson, what happened? Did you snap?'"

Anson refused to apologize for his outburst, acknowledging only that he shouldn't have tried to kill the guy. From that day forward, Anson required a personal escort each afternoon from the school to the bus, though it wasn't at all clear who was being protected.

A few weeks later, when Anson was assigned to deliver a speech in a history class, he pointedly selected the Gettysburg Address. Anson proudly recited the entire two minute speech from memory, putting particular emphasis on the words *all men are created equal* as he stood before his white peers in the heart of Dixie.

A soldier was all Anson ever wanted to be. It was in his genes. He was fascinated by war. When he was a boy in Ethiopia he would line up two rival battalions of tiny metal infantrymen and conduct combat on his bedroom floor that would last for days. He came home one afternoon to find that the maid had swept the battlefield clean, and he was so devastated that servants were forbidden from ever entering his room again.

"Anson was always playing military board games, and even from an early age he was kicking everybody's butt," Pete says. "He was so competitive that I didn't really enjoy playing those games with him, because I didn't have the same cut-throat attitude and my brain wasn't wired the way his was. It was so easy for him to crush me whenever he wanted to and take over the whole world. It was like Genghis Khan sitting across the board from you."

Often when Big Pete came home from work, he would be greeted at the door by his eldest son, who was itching to go to war. Anson had already spent hours studying the game board for battle, plotting every strategy to destroy his father in a reenactment of D Day or the Battle of the Bulge. He had calculated every conceivable counterattack that his dad might launch until he felt he'd created an overwhelming offensive game plan. Father and son would battle for two, three, four hours, sometimes deep into the night. "It was my dad's investment in me," Anson says. "Even though he knew I'd prepared for the game, like a good sport he always encouraged me and tried to beat me. If I won I knew it was still an achievement. He liked these kinds of confrontations, and I appreciated the way he competed so hard but was very gracious when I won."

Anson regularly organized the local boys and Maggie for war in the neighborhood. “Anson was always this kid with a dangerous edge to him,” Maggie says. “He was always playing war games, and it was stunning how this little boy would just take command and tell us all where to go and what to do. He was the Clint Eastwood of all the kids.”

Says Pete: “When we would play war in the yard, Anson was always the general, plotting where we were going to set up an ambush. Instead of us harmlessly trudging around with fake guns, he’d arm us with BB guns or rocks and slingshots and we’d actually inflict pain upon each other.”

The points of reference were all too real during Anson’s childhood. He spent the early years of the Vietnam War living in Singapore and studying the Domino Theory, which warned that Communist forces would begin by overtaking Vietnam and continue knocking down the countries of Southeast Asia like a series of dominoes. Malaysia was one of the dominoes, a daunting notion for a sixth grader whose headquarters for war games was an actual military bunker. Anson read about Che Guevara and digested every guerrilla warfare book he could find. He followed the Vietnam body counts and believed the American government’s spin on the war as winnable, passionately defending American foreign policy against classmates who viewed the United States as a guileless bully.

While in Ethiopia, Anson had only to look out the window to study the strategy of war. When he was eight years old, rebellious members of the Royal Body guard attempted to overthrow the government of Ethiopian emperor Haile Selassie. The guerrilla attack passed down the street in front of the Dorrance family’s compound, the rebels chasing after fleeing soldiers loyal to Selassie. One loyalist soldier surrendered and started praying for his life. A rebel pulled out his gun and fired a bullet into the base of the soldier’s skull. Anson watched the young man die.

During the rebellion, Big Pete explained to Anson that their family was relatively safe, because regardless of which side triumphed, that faction would continue to value the American presence. Big Pete continued to go to work every day, and whenever shots rang out, the Dorrances would roll down the iron shutters that protected their windows. One evening Big Pete was reading in his favorite armchair when he stood up to get a beer. A few moments later, he heard a gunshot. The bullet penetrated through the metal shutters and pierced the back of Big Pete’s vacated chair before ricocheting around the living room.

Anson wasn’t frightened by the rebellion. He found it compelling, as if it were all just another war game. At one stage, the battle heated up to a point where Big Pete called home and told Peggy to drive the children to the protection of the American Embassy. Peggy piled her children into the car and floored the gas pedal, repeatedly screaming at her curious kids to duck their heads. The car careened right down the battle line through a crossfire produced by soldiers who had no idea they were shooting at Americans. When the Dorrances finally reached the embassy they found themselves in danger from scattershot mortars that were landing all around the grounds. Peggy quickly decided the family would be safer

at their house and drove back through the gunfire. “It was very frightening driving down that road through this *bang bang bang* that sounded like Chinese New Year,” Peggy says. “Up to that point I think Anson was too young to understand what war actually was. When he heard the panic in my voice, that finally made it real to him.”

One snowy night in the dead of winter, Harry Dodson was stripped to his underwear and tied to a tree. It was 1968, and with the Dorrance family having moved to Brussels, Anson was in his third year at the Villa Saint Jean, a Catholic boys’ boarding school in Fribourg, Switzerland. Anson was still playing war games, and Dodson was his prisoner in Capture the Flag. While Anson eventually released Dodson that night after fifteen chilling minutes, the harsh consequences of failure were precisely what attracted Anson to the game. “Those nighttime raids taught us planning, risk taking, teamwork, and, when we were caught, accountability,” Dodson says. “Anson was a good leader because he usually had a great strategy, and his enthusiasm and humor convinced others that they should follow him.”

Standing just four feet eleven as a ninth grader, Anson had the persona of a much larger boy. “Despite the fact that he was prepubescent, Anson had a very competitive, chip on the shoulder attitude that translated into this fun kind of cockiness,” Villa classmate John Akers says. “He was not an asshole, but he stepped on toes sometimes, and just as some bigger guy was about to pound him, Anson would crack a joke or deftly change the subject. He had a very good sense of how far to push someone before they reacted.”

Says another Villa classmate, Alan Hirsh, “Anson was infectiously enthusiastic, never upset or apathetic or negative, and he liked to laugh at other students who took themselves too seriously. He spoke it as he saw it, and if you didn’t like it, he didn’t much care. He never minded being one against ten because he knew that rebels weren’t chastised at the Villa. You were still a part of the community.”

Daily activities at the Villa consisted primarily of classes, study hall, or sports. Anson felt compelled to participate in almost every sport offered because there were only two dozen boys in each grade, of which only ten were interested in athletics and only five were remotely coordinated. Anson played for the Villa teams in softball, tennis, track, and ice hockey, and he was one of the best basketball players on campus, practicing alone for hours by dribbling around the pillars that lined the Villa’s makeshift court. He was the quarterback in touch football games; he earned a green belt in judo; and he treated mountain climbing field trips as competitions, delighting not in the scenic alpine vistas but in rushing to be the first to summit. On Villa ski outings he liked to careen down the slopes out of control, enduring catastrophic crashes and once flying off the side of a mountain, surviving only because he was caught in a net suspended over the gorge. As a senior his recklessness won him the school’s giant slalom competition, even though he was not a member of the ski team.

The only Villa team from which Anson was ever cut was the soccer team as a freshman, though he did make the team as a midfielder in his final three years. He distinguished himself not with talent but with his boundless stamina, his thirst for practice, his distinctive tip toed stride, and his acid commentary. Often, when a teammate misplayed the ball, Anson was heard to say, "You might want to try passing to someone in our colors!"

"Anson was not a particularly skilled or experienced soccer player, but he was a real hustler, and because of his size he often ended up flat on the ground," Dodson says. "In our team meetings Anson would be fighting a battle with himself to avoid monopolizing the conversation. The exuberant Anson versus Anson the team player. He seemed to have more energy and opinion than he knew what to do with."

During high school Anson began to broaden his interests beyond war and sport. He wore a Beatles haircut as the drummer in a campus rock band called the Leaves of Mercy, a not so subtle reference to marijuana. He participated in the choir and in debate and speech clubs, and acted in school plays, where his size and the lack of female students often compelled him to play women, like the role of Grandma in Edward Albee's *The American Dream*. He was the head of the Material Support Committee, which organized intramural sports on campus, and in his senior year he was elected vice president of the student council. In 1969, when students at the Villa organized a Vietnam War protest and refused to take final exams, Anson rebelled against the rebellion, conscientiously objecting to the revolt while reporting the movement's progress as the editor of *Vision*, the school's newspaper.

Such independent thinking was encouraged among the Marianist brothers on the Villa teaching staff, whose discipline was based on allowing students to experiment and learn from their mistakes. While some of Anson's classmates regularly got stoned, Anson's partying consisted mostly of Friday night outings after soccer matches, when the team would sneak off downtown to a bar for french fries and draft beer in massive steins that required two hands to lift. Despite the Villa's regular mixers with girls from nearby schools, Akers cannot recall that, over four years, Anson so much as talked to a woman who wasn't a nun.

Fribourg, considered the intellectual capital of Catholicism, attracted top students from around the world. The twenty three students in Anson's 1969 graduating class came from twelve different countries. Anson, one of a half dozen Americans in his class, was the only one who chose to list his home country as the United States in the Villa yearbook. He was poured into this scholastic melting pot with the progeny of a Turkish diplomat, a Spanish surrealist painter, a Philippine president, and a Cuban dictator. The school's most celebrated alumnus was the French writer, philosopher, and aviator Antoine de Saint Exupéry, class of '35, author of *The Little Prince*. Saint Exupéry's work was required reading, and Anson's favorite prank was to write a poem in the author's famously sparse prose, sign Saint Exupéry's name to it, and plant it in the room of a naive Villa newcomer. The victim would then stumble upon it one day and think he'd discovered

a priceless literary treasure, never stopping to ask himself why a Frenchman would have written his poetry in English. “Anson struck me then as a confident guy, and with good reason, because he seemed to accomplish things effortlessly,” Villa classmate Thomas Brew says. “In high school one is always measuring oneself against one’s peers. Who’s the smartest? Who’s the best athlete? While that kind of thing may not get articulated aloud, in my mental pecking order, Anson was one of the most gifted guys in the class of ’69.”

Anson studied under some of the most accomplished seminarians that the Catholic Church had to offer. His professors preached the power of dialogue, discussion, and debate. Anson embraced philosophical theology because that’s what many of his mentors cherished. As a senior, he won the school’s religion award for compiling the best four year average in his theology courses. He was recruited for the priesthood by his theology teacher, Brother John Rechtien, and seriously considered that path before deciding that he was more of a philosopher than a theologian and that he didn’t truly possess the judgmental spirit he felt was inherent in his Catholic faith.

His most taxing course was an English class during his sophomore year in which he was told to write a paper every day in class and another every night for home work. He wrote more than three hundred essays in one school year on a variety of subjects from “Why is Catholicism restrictive?” to “Why does the cafeteria food suck?” to “Why does the housemaid look ugly when you get here every fall and great by the time you leave in the spring?” The rules of Study Hall stated that each student had to sit up straight at his desk with a book open in front of him. No sleeping or reading of comic books was permitted, so Anson and many of his schoolmates became voracious readers because they had no other choice. Anson particularly enjoyed reading military history, and he was chastised on more than one occasion for reading contraband in class during lectures.

During Anson’s junior year at the Villa, Anson’s father satisfied his son’s craving for war history when he drove the family from Brussels to the American Cemetery in Normandy. Big Pete led his wife and children through the grounds until they came upon his older brother’s grave. He humanized the simple white cross by telling Anson that his uncle was a talented jazz musician who had once collaborated on a song called “Straighten Up And Fly Right” that Nat King Cole turned into his first hit. Anson whispered to his father that he was proud to be named after a war hero. When the rest of the family walked away from the grave, the teenaged boy lingered for a moment, both spooked and thrilled by the name on the headstone, *Albert A. Dorrance*.

Maybe it was that day in Normandy, or maybe it was his blood lust for fighting off the Commies, or simply the desire to live out his childhood fantasies. Anson isn’t sure himself exactly why he decided to go to college at West Point. The notion had blossomed in the back of his mind since the moment when he’d read, as a young boy, that one of his military heroes, Gen. Robert E. Lee, had been trained there. Anson’s father supported the idea. His mother did not. “I had a fit

and told him, ‘No way,’” Peggy says. “I think Anson would’ve made a good officer, but I don’t believe in teaching a man how to kill another man. I thought war was a typical male thing and it was stupid.”

“The way my mother said it made it clear to me that it wasn’t going to happen,” Anson says. “She was horrified. It was a visceral reaction. She had no illusions. She knew that war was no glorious mission.”

So, as a senior at the Villa Saint Jean, Anson applied instead to Connecticut’s Trinity College and to Bowdoin in Maine, and was rejected by both institutions, he surmises, because he had flunked French at a school that taught the language for two hours every day and was located in the francophone region of Switzerland. His failure wasn’t entirely unintentional. As part of his jingoism, Anson resisted speaking the language of a country he did not respect.

With no college acceptances at hand, one of Anson’s teachers at the Villa suggested he attend another Marianist school, St. Mary’s University in San Antonio, Texas, as a way of continuing his education under that order. “I imagine that for Anson it was a huge adjustment getting oriented to life in America,” Brew says. “Attending a Catholic, all male high school in a small town in Switzerland hardly prepared him for the tail end of the sixties in the United States. He might as well have dropped in from Mars.”

Anson quickly discovered that even in central Texas, the Vietnam War was never very far away. One evening in the fall of 1969, Anson and a group of fellow students gathered around a television in a dorm lounge to learn their draft numbers. Everyone chipped in for a case of beer to be awarded to the guy with the lowest number. The “winner,” who had received number 1, sat directly to Anson’s right. Everybody else in the room found the guy’s predicament amusing and drank his beer.

At St. Mary’s, Anson earned a spot on what was arguably the best college soccer team in Texas. The Rattlers were a team made up largely of talented South American imports. Though Anson possessed the least skill on the St. Mary’s roster, he was one of only two Americans to start, surviving on his energy and competitiveness. The Rattlers carpooled across Texas, playing all the top colleges, and lost just one game that season. They weren’t even a varsity squad, just a club team.

Anson had chosen St. Mary’s expecting it to be a Camelot like the Villa, having no idea that the school was located in a hardscrabble section of a city then known as the Murder Capital of the United States. There were almost constant undertones of violence. One night after a rugby match, Anson and his teammates went drinking at a pool hall near campus. It was the third bar they’d visited that night, and they’d been tossed out of the first two. As Anson and his buddies left the bar, a young woman was walking in, and one of Anson’s teammates playfully slapped her on the butt. Moments later, a pack of strapping young men in cowboy hats stormed out the door, and a melee ensued. Anson fought his opponent to a draw, but many of his teammates were beaten up, including one who had his front teeth knocked out with a pool cue.

On another night during his first semester at St. Mary's, Anson was walking down the side of the road to an all night diner when a beer can tossed from a passing car struck him on the back of the head. Anson instinctively picked up a rock and hurled it at the car, cracking the rear window. The driver hit the brakes and reversed back to Anson, and six people got out—three local teenaged boys and their girlfriends. "I tried to get myself out of trouble with my mouth," Anson says. "I suggested, 'Couldn't we just settle this one on one . . . with your smallest guy?' I was beat to crap. Two black eyes. When it was over I just kept walking and ate steak and eggs. Telling the story afterward made it worthwhile."

St. Mary's required ROTC for all freshmen. Anson felt comfortable with a gun because during his visits to Louisburg, he and Pete had ventured out on regular hunting trips to shoot turtles, frogs, and snakes, eventually graduating from BB guns to .22 rifles. At the St. Mary's rifle range, Anson earned an Expert shooting medal, easily piercing pop up targets with an M16. He trained to act as a forward observer in the infantry, taking a class in coordinates and vectors to learn how to get an artillery shell to land on target. He relished the fact that when his ROTC instructors returned tests, they were not graded with the customary A, B, C, D, or F, but instead either "Alive" or "Dead." Anson always graded out "Alive," and he enjoyed mocking the cadets who had perished.

During one war games drill, Anson and the other underclassmen in his unit were scripted to be killed by the juniors and seniors, but Anson refused and ran off into the hills, much to the chagrin of his superior officers. "I wasn't a very cooperative soldier," Anson says. "I told them, 'There's no fucking way I'm going to die. I'm an expert in guerilla warfare. There's no way any of those guys is frying my ass. I'm immortal.'"

Cadet Dorrance was court martialed for not dying.