

“The price of anything is the amount of life you exchange for it.” -Henry David Thoreau



## Game Over

*It was a day like any other for the  
three elite athletes... and then it wasn't.*

One day, in three areas of the world, a champion NBA player, a World Cup soccer star and an Olympic volleyball gold medalist shared an identical mystical experience.

Each was standing in front of their home when a FedEx truck pulled up to the curb. The truck looked new—iridescent white, brilliant logo in purple and orange, the negative-space arrow suggesting movement and direction.

The driver stepped out of the cab in a crisp new uniform—logoed cap, emblazoned knit shirt and matching pants. She walked to the back of the truck and opened the doors.

Each of the athletes at their three locations on different continents approached the truck to receive their packages. But, instead of taking out a parcel, the driver said with a bright, friendly smile, “Please, get in.” Though friendly in tone, the instruction was clearly non-optional, like a mob boss inviting a henchman into his limousine.

Understandably perplexed, they did as they were told, stumbling in among the dozens of boxes and envelopes. The doors closed. The only light came from a small, louvered vent. The truck started. The players settled onto the parcels wondering where they were headed and why. The ride lasted hours. Eventually, they fell asleep.

The next thing they knew, the champion NBA player, the World Cup soccer star and the Olympic volleyball gold medalist were standing together in a strange, dark space without walls or ceiling. A slight breeze suggested they were out of doors, but there was no moon, no stars, only eerie blackness. The floor was onyx black, like a polished dance floor in a Fred Astaire musical. The athletes were lit, the floor shimmered, but there seemed to be no light source.

They recognized the fourth person facing them as the FedEx driver, only now she was dressed as a referee with a black cap, zebra-striped shirt and black pants with a white strip down each leg.

The three athletes stood motionless, unable to form even a simple question about their situation. Though they had never met, they knew each other by sight and reputation.

After a moment, the ref said, “The rules: One whistle, start. Two whistles, foul.”

The ref lowered her gaze causing the athletes to look down. Between them they saw a ball of familiar size but oddly colored in white, grey, blue, green and brown. Strangely, the ball floated just above the floor and turned slowly on its axis.



Without warning, the ref gave a single blast of her whistle. Instinctively, with the reflexes of a cat, the NBA player snatched up the ball, pivoted and began dribbling away from the group. Ahead of him, about a half-court distance, a backboard and hoop appeared floating in the darkness.

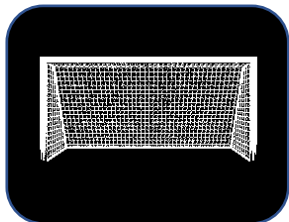
He slowed his forward motion, glancing back and forth as if sizing up an invisible defense. He quickly faked a pass to the left, darted right and charged the backboard taking two long strides before leaping above the rim and slamming the ball through the hoop.

As the ball passed through the net, the ref gave two sharp whistles and declared, “Foul!”

Before he could protest the inexplicable and unfair call she said enigmatically, “You win, you lose.”

A moment later the NBA champ was standing with the group again, the ball slowly spinning in front of them.

Just as suddenly as before, there came another blast from the ref’s whistle.



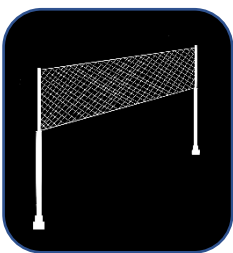
This time, the World Cup star deftly swept his foot forward, tapping the ball out of the circle. He turned and dribbled toward a soccer net that appeared roughly a half field away. Like the NBA player, he seemed to be sizing up an unseen defense, making a swift move left as if to evade an opponent at his right side. With a stab of his toe, he lobbed the ball in the air toward one side of the net, sprinted under it as it arced, and kicked it midair as it came down. It flew past an imaginary goalie and into the upper left corner of the net.

The ref again gave two sharp whistles and declared, “Foul!” She then said to the dumbfounded player, “You win, you lose.”

A moment later the soccer star was standing with the others. The ball had returned to its position.

By this time, it was clear what would happen next. The ref’s whistle sounded.

The volleyball medalist did not hesitate. She reached down and lifted the ball with her fingertips, sending it above her head and away from the circle. Moving quickly under it, she sent it skyward again with a bump from her forearms. It sailed toward the volleyball net that materialized out of the darkness a few yards away. She sprinted to the net, leapt upward, drew back her arm, and with a powerful swing smashed the ball over the tape.



Two sharp blasts from the whistle: “Foul!” The ref stifled her objection with a glare, “You win, you lose.”

A moment later the volleyball player was standing with the others.

The ball had returned to its position. But, after being slammed, kicked and smashed, the orb was now half-deflated, scuffed, tattered and discolored.

The players exchanged glances of confusion and distress.

As the light slowly faded, engulfing them in darkness, they heard the ref say a final time, "You win, you lose."

Minutes or hours later, the three athletes were awakened in their respective FedEx trucks by the driver swinging open the doors. Daylight streamed in. They stepped out, groggy and disoriented, to see they were home. The driver closed the doors, climbed back in the cab, wished them a pleasant day and drove off.



The next day, after a night in their own beds reliving the dreamlike but eerily real experience, the three athletes contacted one another. Their recollections coincided in every detail. They agreed they must share their experience despite what the sports world and others might think.

The players began by telling their coaches and teammates. They admitted to their incredulous listeners they could not say if their experience was real or imagined. As they related their stories, they emphasized the message they had received: "You win, you lose." They had no idea, they said, what the strange message meant, only that it seemed critically important they share it.

Feeling compelled to take their message to the world, the three players organized a joint international press event via videoconference. They told the story of the FedEx driver and referee, the strange place they were in and what happened there. Then, one by one, the players announced they would never again participate in their sport.

Their bizarre story and surprising retirements sent shockwaves across the sports universe, grabbing the attention of hundreds of millions of fans. Bombarded by questions, the only reason the players could offer for their decision was: "You win, you lose."

Sports writers were unanimously consumed by the news. Mainstream and tabloid media outlets picked up the story and ran with dozens of theories about what had happened to the trio. Psychological breakdown. Mass hysteria. Drug-induced hallucination. Directed-energy beams. Shadow government. Terrorist plot. Space aliens. Lizard people.

Overnight, the athletes went from famous to infamous, but they never wavered in their conviction that the experience was in some way real and the message vital.

Because they had nothing more to tell, repeated questions about their experience and the puzzling message only deepened the mystery.

The intrigue and furor had an impact. Before long, hardly a person on the planet had not heard and repeated the phrase: "You win, you lose."

Eventually, some began to understand.

- Robert L. Lindstrom