

Foreword

QuantCoach (alias “QC”) and I first connected on social media, an arena full of fakes, phonies, and mirages, where the best policy is to get in and out, if its gates must be breached at all.

His words, however, were smart and sober. Via his @QuantCoach Twitter/X account, there existed intrigue and value. On social media, he dissects and distills pertinent National Football League figures, formulating a direction, to those with such a proclivity, for smart investment.

My following his account turned into an occasional direct message, for more information or to exchange ideas or thoughts, which became emails.

QC is the judge of the Logan County Court of Common Pleas in Bellefontaine, Ohio, the son of a decorated Catholic Youth Organization football coach who in the 1970s and 1980s sent several elite players to prep powerhouse Cincinnati Archbishop Moeller High School.

With such deep paternal pigskin roots, it made sense he would dabble in football metrics. Little did I know there exists some combination of Jim Murray and Damon Runyon inside that judge’s robe.

Eventually, he divulged a detail or two about the book project that had been consuming his free time, a labor of love tracing gambling’s roots in this country with the creation and ascension of sports franchises and leagues, baseball, and football in particular, that are as intertwined as Wrigley Field ivy.

When QC mentioned how Newport, Kentucky, the burg across the Ohio River from Cincinnati, once became a major layoff hub for many of the nation’s illicit bookmakers, I was hooked. I contacted him to arrange an interview.

As someone who provides a weekly Vegas-based sports-betting column to the *Chicago Sun-Times*, this nugget—I knew—would provide keen entertainment for Windy City residents about a wild era in a place not far from them.

We were off to the races about Newport, yapping about Big Porky and Little Porky, the Lassoff brothers, and Chicago-born and raised Sleepout Louie Levinson, whom Runyon considered to be a character. Runyon, himself, makes a couple cameos in QC’s book. “All life,” Runyon famously once said, “is six to five against.”

QC grew up in and around Cincinnati, hearing street stories about Newport. “That Newport used to be Vegas, used to be this great gambling town,”

he told me. “I didn’t know, though, that it involved all this networked book-making till I started working on the book.”

He unearthed how ace mob bookmaker Gilbert Lee Beckley Jr.—known as “the Brain” in his circles—came to Newport and, with the help of an ex-Xavier University linebacker, ran the national layoff. Beckley’s operation dodged sleuths via free telephone service provided by phone company co-conspirators in Canada and in New Orleans. It ceased to be a minor deal after John F. Kennedy (as President) and Robert F. Kennedy (as U.S. Attorney General) seized power.

“I knew this to be incredibly important when I realized Beckley is who Robert F. Kennedy was targeting. My gosh. Now, I get it! ... This little town across the river becomes super important in bookmaking, and Beckley was RFK’s great white whale.”

I first spoke with QC right after Kentucky, in early September 2023, became the 36th U.S. jurisdiction to make sports betting legal and entertain wagers. About a mile south of East 4th and York Streets in Newport, the one-time epicenter for national layoffs, the Newport Racing and Gaming sportsbook opened in the Newport Shopping Center.

“Kentucky should hold some kind of ceremony,” QC said that day, “to commemorate the resurrection of bookmaking in Newport.”

No such ceremony took place.

We chatted for 90 minutes, which led to many follow-up texts, emails, and DMs. The piece ran in the *Sun-Times* on October 21, 2023, but it served as a mere appetizer to my curiosity about what QC had been cooking up as a 16-course meal.

He divulged how he had positioned himself to prosper when New Jersey once and for all failed in its many efforts to have the U.S. Supreme Court strike down PASPA, the Professional and Amateur Sports Protection Act, inked by New Jersey Senator Bill Bradley, the onetime Princeton hoops ace.

The Garden State, of course, did not fail. The U.S. Supreme Court quashed the Bradley Bill, another of its titles, in May 2018. States—other than Nevada, which has had legal single-game sports betting since the 1930s—would be allowed to determine their own sports-wagering futures. As this is being written, 38 states and Washington, DC, have legalized sports gambling. Since the PASPA dam disintegrated with the Supreme Court ruling, the national sportsbook handle, or what has been legally bet on sports, has surpassed \$300 billion—generating billions in extra state tax revenue.

QC, who was in the eye of the turmoil for its duration, was flummoxed by the Supreme Court's ruling, which was aided in no small part by the death of Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia and the election of Donald Trump as the 45th President of the United States. (It was not the first-time bookmakers crossed the path of a candidate for the Oval Office. Bookmakers and their craft were issues in the elections of 1876, 1920, 1928, 1940, 1952, and 1960.) After the Supreme Court's decision came down, QC pivoted, with his law practice and his career, and accepted an appointment to the Logan County bench from Ohio Governor Mike DeWine in October 2019.

The kid who dreamt of being a sportswriter, who had wisely detoured to the law, seized upon an opening to fulfill that writing passion. This beast possesses so many tentacles, it deserved a book—which, thanks to QC, you now have or hold.

I was immensely honored when he rang to ask me to pen its foreword. I accepted, then hesitated. What had I gotten myself into? Aspiring to write about sports, with a *Sports Illustrated* goal—every sportswriter's dream in the 1980s and '90s—is one deal. Another is, years or decades later, being able to assemble a book that keeps the reader moving, word by word, 'graph by 'graph, page by page.

I've written four, and have been a sportswriter since 1987, so I know a bit about the discipline's daunting and demanding challenges. After producing the *Sun-Times* column on Newport, I wanted to press QC about that very ideal, to inquire how he hoped to pull it off without sounding like, "How the hell are you going to pull this off?"

Without producing dry, academic text? His reply text settled that concern. "When I get into something, I pretty much have to get to the bottom of it before I'm satisfied."

Devotion and drive, check. What about the passion, to not only excavate for the actual answers but to deliver them in an entertaining fashion, with flair and style? It arrived in the next paragraph.

"My passion for sports writing completely drove this book. Great sports writing is found at the bottom of the well of truth, where the water is pure, cool, and exceptionally refreshing." *Voila!*

Perusing his draft proved enjoyable, especially since QC spells it all out, in layman's terms, from the beginning of the Cincinnati Red Stockings to what was a complex and detailed series of events that led to the Supreme Court's ruling, or a dam's removal.

I had believed, via many sources, that it was expected, that states being allowed to pursue their own gambling fates was, in the end and in fact, anti-climactic. In fact, it was not expected, not at all.

The twists and turns in the episodes that QC documents are priceless, the action and entertainment constant, the players performing as arch capitalists in their fortune quests. H. Price McGrath, a riverboat sharp whose thoroughbred Aristides won the first Kentucky Derby, was an early catalyst. Pugilist John Morrissey brought political punching power to bet handling. Another jovial Irishman, John Paul Joyce, started up the first professional baseball franchise in Cincinnati much like a 20th Century software entrepreneur in Silicon Valley.

Newspaper publishers, politicians, and former boxers played cards in saloons with prospective team owners, gambling always in the fabric of everyday-life functions. Their interactions raised and answered many questions about how sports operators and bet handlers played their cards in the formative years of professional sports.

Why was the construction of that fence so pivotal at those cricket grounds in Cincinnati, where the Red Stockings would play their first games?

How did criminal defense attorney Clarence Darrow, famous for his role in the Scopes Monkey Trial in Tennessee in 1925, find himself in baseball's legal playing field and QC's book?

And what, exactly, transpired between Pittsburgh's Art Rooney, aware of how bookies operated "and angles within angles," and Tim Mara of New York at Saratoga Springs that Opening Day in 1937?

Charles Bidwill and Bert Bell of Philadelphia—Rooney's pals at the track—with George Halas of Chicago, served as the bedrock of a National Football League whose success would dwarf any of their imaginations. But who was "Mrs. Trafton?" And who was NFL Commissioner Joe Carr's bookie brother?

The role of changing technologies, from the telegraph wire to radio to the telephone to television to the internet, affected outside business and required constant adaptation. Technological change empowered keen factions from a 19th Century baseball betting syndicate to "The Speed Boys" of the 1940s to "The Computer Group" of the 1980s to score big.

Charles K. McNeil—the "Professor"—played no small role when he championed a "point spread" as a common way of betting over "split lines," altering everything. One of his biggest customers, James "Jimmy the Greek" Snyder, loved McNeil's point spread long before he became the most famous

gambler in the country with his picks on the *NFL Today*.

The text is rich with scores of additional characters. Some are probably familiar, such as famous scribe Grantland Rice, loan shark Arnold Rothstein, Judge/Commissioner Kenesaw Mountain Landis, and New York Giants owner Charles Stoneham, the bucketing beard of Broad Street. Others may be new to you like real estate developer James McCloud, telegraph operator Fred Seibert, public transit expert Delancey Horton Louderback, race wire kingpin Mont Tennes, Cook County State's Attorney's secretary Edward J. Fleming, liquor store owner Billy Hecht, and Cincinnati wise guys Sam Nason and Joe Bauer.

I was pleased to tackle the manuscript for many reasons, chiefly to discover what QC meant when, in my interview with him for the Newport piece, he mentioned, twice or thrice, team owners' "right to exclude." I didn't get it. As we chatted, I wrote those words in all caps. I circled them. He took them for granted, rightfully so, because they were such a key part of his life for years. I suppose, too, I didn't want to sound ignorant; I could look them up, maybe, and figure it out, find an explanation. But, on that phone that day, I did not follow up.

I now am glad I did not return to the "right to exclude." In these pages, it is revealed with precision. It's so complicated, another hour would have been required for QC to give it proper perspective and explain why team owners botched this whole ordeal so badly, due to *their* ignorance of the *right to exclude*.

Alas, I can't reveal more. This is an intriguing and instructional opus that divulges the aims of our first baseball and football team owners and what drove them to partake in the madness of sports. Money, and gambling, were as central to that initial impetus in the 1800s as they are today.

Fortunately, someone dived into the well of truth and spent considerable time and effort separating fiction from fact, down at the bottom where the pure water circulates, all cool and refreshing. It's a heavyweight production pulled off masterfully, and surgically, by an exceptional scribe. Satisfaction is imminent. Hopefully, QC will have much more to write about in the future.

Rob Miech

Las Vegas

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