

# Best

by Jason Lee Norman

Two thousand and two was the worst year for love in the history of sports. People carried their sadness around in wheelbarrows. They painted it on their faces with zinc and mascara. They wrote *D-E-S-P-A-I-R* on the fat stomachs of photocopier salesmen in oxblood and ram's blood and royal blue paint. Their tears filled an Olympic sized swimming pool in Belgrade- the same swimming pool that Hungary failed to win a gold medal in at water polo. The *Rayos* came runner up in the Apertura in the Mexican premier football division and three million monarch butterflies instantly died and rained multicoloured death over the city of Aguascalientes. The citizens wept purple tears and mourned for weeks. It was the worst year for sports in the history of love.

Alejandro San Miguel, the son of a shopkeeper in Buenos Aires asked his best girl, his one and only, his Antoinetta if she would be his one and only forever- his best girl always. I will love you always and forever, she replied. I will be your best girl always, she said with a kiss, *if* Argentina makes the great eight in the World Cup tournament this June. Alejandro shot her a puzzled expression for just a split second and then smiled a wide smile. This is great news, Alejandro shouted, Argentina will be champions again and we will be lovers forever!

That June Alejandro sat with Antoinetta in the parlor and ate pre-shelled peanuts. The rain pitter patted on the *quinchos* and patios and nobody remembered to take the clothes down off the line. In Korea the mighty Argentines wore their proud away blue colours. Flags were waved and confetti was tossed but then Gabriel Batistuta was carried off by a condor in the first half and Argentina was eliminated from group play. Antoinetta left Alejandro on the couch that same afternoon. She left her jacket behind and Alejandro used it to wipe away the tears and the beard of salt and peanut dust left on his face. It was the worst year for love in the history of sports.

In the U.S.A it was a time of ifs. Prom nights, first dates, engagements, all depended on a specific moment: *If* Tiger Woods sinks this put, *if* Peyton Manning completes this pass, *if* Sammy Sosa smacks just two more dingers. Men held their breath and squeezed their testicles; women held their breath and squeezed stuffed animals. The summer sun seemed to never leave the sky. A marmot made off with Woods' ball, Manning tripped over a shoelace, Sosa's bat broke in two and in it they found cork and pirated DVDs. Proms were cancelled, engagements called off, first dates never happened, first kisses never happened. It was the worst year for sports in the history of love.

In Canada the hockey ice melted. In England the pitches turned to mud. Cricket bats turned to rubber tires and rugby balls filled with helium and littered the sky and fought with pigeons. The stopwatches malfunctioned and everyone placed second.

That last day in London I held you close and let your warm tears run down my back and you let me kiss each nipple for twenty five second intervals. We ate a cold pizza breakfast and wore only hotel towels that smelled of bleach. We listened to each other's heartbeat; we rubbed our feet with cream. You cried once more and then I took you to the airport. At the terminal you licked the leftover sauce from my beard and gave me a quick kiss goodbye. It was the worst year in sports. You hated sports.

