TICKETS
A Sports Promoter's Uncommon Life in the Big Town and Beyond.
BILL GOLDSTEIN

PART ONE – GETTING THERE

Chapter One

Manhattan. Fall, 1974

I'm perched in a crummy, $145/month studio apartment at 58th & 1st scouring the City for even the vaguest whiff of a connection in my implausible pursuit of a job – any job—in the still nascent sports business. If that blowhard Howard Cosell (like me a lawyer) could become such a colossus, I reasoned, there had to be a job for me *somewhere*. Which presumption had so far produced *nada*. Six months in, unemployed benefits expired, no money, no prospects, no clue.

In desperation, I adopt a radical, new strategy. Employing what today would be called "guerrilla marketing," I decide to start crashing meetings of the major sports leagues and just ambush targets in the lobbies, bars, elevators, men's rooms, corridors,

business centers, parking lots and any receptions I could sneak into. Anywhere. Everywhere.

So, in late September I flew standby to Las Vegas—cheap in 1974, when the first New York-to-Boston shuttle flights cost 16 bucks! —to try and intercept NBA executives at their Fall confab.

But catching people for even an elevator pitch was damn near impossible. The lobbies and bars were noisy and packed with owners, GMs, athletes, agents, salesmen, reporters, camera crews and acolytes of all stripes fighting for facetime with the varying power brokers. And though receptions were easy to slip into, crashing them was no more fruitful, everyone bending their el-bows on the free booze and stuffed mushrooms while working the room hard advancing their own narrow agendas. I did manage to foist myself on a few people and make a couple of quickie pitches, but to no avail.

On the evening of the third day of this dogged, empty effort, and with all the big fish already heading home on their private jets, badly discouraged I returned to my own private refuge—a rent-ed $5 a day Ford Pinto I'd stashed in a dark corner of Caesars' parking lot. Pretzeled up in the back, eventually I managed to settle in for the night conjuring my next move.

At 5:15am my slumber was abruptly interrupted.

“Out! Get out of the car! Now! Show your hands!” bellowed one of Las Vegas’s finest, blinding me with the most potent flashlight I’d ever encountered.

“Whoa! Whoa! Officer! What the …?” I stammered, shaking the cobwebs away while climbing out from the back of the Pinto, barefoot, in my skivvies, hands to the sky.

“We’ve left you alone the past two nights, sport, but one of the night watchmen at Caesars caught you again on camera an hour ago, and called it in. My sergeant told me to bring you in.”

“Bring me in?”

“Yup,” reaching for his cuffs. “Your cozy, little Pinto here will get towed to the station.”

“You’re gonna *arrest* me? For sleeping in the back of my rental car?”

I reached for my wallet, fumbling around for my California Bar card.

“Look, look, I’m a lawyer. Really. See?”

"A lawyer? You're living like a wino."

"Well, what can I say," synapses firing at record speed scheming on how to avoid getting hauled off to jail. "Actually, I had a helluva run last night at the craps table," holding out a handful of Caesars' casino chips worth about $300, a goddam fortune to me then. "I'll just lose it all if I go back, and now I gotta get out of Dodge anyway. Maybe you could cash these in for the Police-man's Benevolent Association."

"Yeah, you're a lawyer, alright." Then, neatly palming the chips, which I'm confident never made it to the PBA, "Ok, *counselor*, I'll be back in an hour. You and this bucket of bolts better be long gone"

"Absolutely, officer."

Now entirely broke, and nearly busted by the local gendarme, I moved the Pinto to a legitimate space, changed into my usual coat & tie camouflage and then, disinclined to leave town on an empty stomach, headed toward Caesars' complimentary break-fast buffet, the lavish bounty of which I'd managed to partake all week posing as a hotel guest.

Certain that my opportunity to meet anyone of import had

lapsed, despondent, I slipped into the line. Contemplating my loathsome fallback position of interviewing at entertainment law firms -- if any would still even talk to me -- I loosened my tie and tight hold on my demeanor.

Seeing the toasters in their typically inconvenient place at the *end* of the sumptuous spread, I was reminded how toasters always back up breakfast buffet lines. Bad enough that toasters were then—and inexplicably remain today—excruciatingly slow. Why exacerbate the problem by putting them at the *end* of the buffet where, unable to keep up, they force people to endure long waits while their food goes cold?

Spying an empty electric outlet at the front of the buffet line and the toasters quite fortuitously sitting on a table with *wheels*, I went rogue: abandoned my position, walked across the room, unplugged the toasters, wheeled the table across the room putting the toasters where they belonged—at the *beginning* of the buffet—and got back in line.

The impeccably put together gentleman right behind me inquired with some interest:

“What the hell are you doing?”

That was all I needed to let loose with my toasters-haven't-got-ten-any-faster-in-my-lifetime rap. Especially aggravating in a buffet line, I raved on—

"If the toasters were at the front of the line, we could put in our bread, go get the rest of our food, circle back for our toast, then sit down to enjoy a breakfast that might just still be semi-warm. Isn't it absurd that we can send a man to the moon, transmit sound and light through fiber optics, transplant hearts, but are still without a ten-second toaster? Everyone'd buy one in a New York minute. They'd fly out of the stores."

He, the impeccably dressed guy who, as it turned out, knew quite a bit more than I did about New York minutes, broke out into an unrestrained guffaw, and then, most thankfully, waved off the restaurant manager, now crimson with rage and bearing down on the commando who'd trifled with his buffet.

"Oh, ok, Mr. Burke. If you think he's alright?"

Mr. Burke? Was this *the* Mr. Burke—Mike Burke, the major domo of Madison Square Garden?

And, yes, as the gods would have it, indeed, it was.

Burke had stayed on an extra night at Caesars and come down-

stairs early for a quiet breakfast by himself, only to be subjected to my wild toaster rant. Despite which, shockingly, he invited me to join him for a “quick breakfast” during which we only talked about basketball. Agonizingly, I got no clean shot to pitch myself. But as he was taking a final sip of coffee he inquired knowingly:

“You’re looking for a job, right?”

“Yes, sir, I certainly am.”

To my everlasting astonishment, he reached into his pocket, pulled out his calendar and suggested I show up in his office at 8am ten days hence. Now I knew what it meant to be borne again. Stuttering my profuse thanks, wishing him safe travels, I jubilantly took my leave.

As we all come to realize, however, life often -- very often -- requires us to adjust our expectations. And so it was, that the day before my scheduled appointment -- for which I’d bought the priciest suit I’d ever owned, a Pierre Cardin beauty, and polished my shoes to a fare thee well -- his assistant called to cancel, not *postpone*, but *cancel*, my appointment. When I tried to secure another date, any date, she demurred, allowing as how *she’d* called me back *if and when* the appointment could be rescheduled.

Well, that’s a Hall of Fame kiss-off if there ever was one. I was heartbroken, as low as I’ve ever been.

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