

## **Bubba Goes to a Tennis Tournament**

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### **Abstract**

*In an effort to share the culture, values and colloquialisms associated with a stereotyped West Texas male, the Author tells the story of a trip to a professional tennis tournament through "Bubba's" eyes. Life-long and long-time residents of West Texas, including citizens, reporters, and local University faculty were asked to review and comment on drafts of the manuscript in an effort to ensure that the manner of speech and colloquialisms utilized in this manuscript were reflective of the area and that the ethos and social class of the main character were consistent with that of a West Texas "Bubba". At the tournament Bubba is confronted with a culture that is quite foreign to him. Consequently, he learns a lot about others as well as himself. Classism, nationalism, sexism, values, and numerous other sociological topics are illustrated throughout Bubba's story.*

**Keywords:** Culture, Nationalism, Tennis, Values, Bubba, Colloquialisms, Classism, Ethnocentrism

### **Bubba Goes to a Tennis Tournament**

They call me Bubba and I've lived in West Texas all my life. Well, Bubba's really my nickname. A lot of boys are called Bubba in West Texas. We're the guys that fit in and the name is kinda like a badge of respect. This story is about a trip that my darling wife and I took to a professional tennis tournament. I never had much use for tennis and have a real preference for sports like football, but my wife really loves her some tennis. She's never been a player but can watch it on TV for hours at a stretch. She even records matches from the big tournaments to watch when she ain't busy taking care of the house and kids.

As for me, high school football was the best. I had the opportunity to play in front of 20,000 people on lots of Friday nights. I was the big man on campus. I was on TV and in the newspapers. Had a lot of girlfriends too. I love football. It was important to me in high school. I still talk with my friends about the good old days when we played high school football. You know, they're kinda like my brothers. Now days I pretty much follow college and professional football, 'specially the Longhorns and the Cowboys. Football's about like a religion around here. I also spend time watching baseball, basketball and NASCAR, but back to the trip.

For our twenty-fifth wedding anniversary I wanted to do something a mite bit special for my wife, Sue Ann. The big day was in March. I thought going to a football game was a good idea, but football season would be long over. Since I couldn't think of nothing else I wanted to do that would be special, I thought she might like to go to a tennis tournament.

Of course if we were going to a tennis tournament, I wanted to go to the U.S. Open. There's nothing like the good old U.S. of A., but the U.S. Open's held during football pre-season and I'm obliged to watch each and every one of them football games on my satellite TV. I do love the little woman, but a man has to make choices! Men bashing each other around or men bashing a yellow ball around... which seems more exciting to y'all?

The other biggest tennis events, the Grand Slams, are in foreign countries and I have no desire to travel with the threats of terrorism and all. A trip to the Super Bowl might be worth the risk of a terrorist attack, but not going to watch a sport that is played on a court with a net separating the players!

So, I settled on attending the BNP Paribas Open. I was told that except for the Grand Slams it's the largest and richest professional tournament in the whole world. Though I was not too excited about tennis, at least the tournament is played in the Southern California desert in the city of Indian Wells and I could expect warm weather and sunny skies.

The weather's good here in Texas but sometime the skies are cloudy all day and our finest weather doesn't come in March... unless you like 50 mile per hour winds! The BNP Paribas Open wasn't one of the Grand Slams, but at least it was the next best thing. Why do they call them the Grand Slams anyway? Getting good seats was important because 'twas probably the only tennis tournament we'd ever go to. Well, I slapped down 'bout \$2,500 for a hotel and ticket package for three days. It was all the extra money we had for the year and to do it I had to be a bit like the Grinch during Christmas. The money could've purchased some good seats in Cowboy Stadium for the contest with the hated Eagles, but it's good for a guy to do something nice for his wife once in a while. The seats were eight rows up and close to the center of the baseline. We also had rights to go into six other courts where matches were fixin' to be played. When a person spends a lot of money, I suspect it buys 'em special privileges.

In our part of the main stadium we saw diamond rings on women's fingers big as thumbnails. We saw people with tennis tattoos in delicate places and tennis rackets that were painstakingly painted on finely cared for toes. There were Rolex watches. People paid seven dollars for a can of beer! I had a powerful hankering for one, but seven-dollars was a bit outrageous! Kin folks to hotshot players sat near us, and so did some rock stars. We bucked right up against people who actually didn't have to work for a living. Well, one lady edited a magazine 'bout orchids, but she didn't get paid for it or nothing.

I'm proud to say we ain't poor or anything, but we felt a bit out of place, kind of like a prairie dog surrounded by a family of coyotes. Shoot, I didn't even know who many of the tournament sponsors were or what they sold. And there were sponsors everywhere. Come to think of it, I didn't see a Budweiser, Chevrolet, or Doritos ad in the program or at the tournament. Did see ads for wine, diamonds, fancy watches and new homes for sale in the range of one million to two million dollars... each! What is BNP Paribas? I couldn't tell y'all, and they were the main sponsors for the tournament! Had to look it up!

I've heard it said that getting there is half the fun. My sweet wife darn near had a heart attack on the freeway as we drove from the Orange County Airport to Indian Wells. She was about as nervous as a cat in a room full of rocking chairs! Folks flew past us going at least 95 miles an hour, while driving with one hand and texting on their cell phones with the other. Everyone was driving faster than the speed limit. I kind of felt like a NASCAR driver at Texas Motor Speedway. It was good times!

I was proud to know that the Orange County airport was named after one of my heroes, John Wayne. There was even a ginormous statue of him where the bags come out from the plane. I've met quite a few folks in Texas named John Wayne. The Duke, what a guy! He was a picture of what men are supposed to be: tough, independent, fearless... a man among men; I'll tell y'all. He didn't take nothing from no one!

Palm Springs was up the road a piece from Indian Wells where the tournament was played. Movie stars and other muckety-mucks reside in Palm Springs. I'd never heard of Indian Wells. Common folks didn't live in Indian Wells neither from the looks of things. Stucco walls surrounded spreads that looked like mansions. The streets, walls and plants darn near sparkled. I didn't like the place much. Way too fancy for my taste.

I could see the "Tennis Garden" up the road as we closed in on the site of the tournament. The main stadium weren't all that impressive compared to the billion-dollar stadium Jerry Jones built for our Cowboys to play in. The tournament program said the main stadium could hold about 16,000 folks for a tennis match. That's nothing compared to the 80,000 that watch the "Boys" play. They say that they crammed in about a hundred thousand folks for the 2011 Super Bowl. The largest outer stadium at the tennis garden held about 5,000 people. I never really thought too many people liked tennis. The size of the main stadium darn near confirmed my suspicions.

The locale didn't look much like Texas, except for the Guadalupe Mountains where no one resides. Mountain peaks poked up from the floor of the desert. There was still some snow on top of 'em. I must say, the place looked a bit purty with the players, stands filled with folks and the mountains all in view at the same time. It plumb near brought a tear to my eye, but don't tell anyone.

Our tickets were for the three days before the championship weekend and we were able to attend matches from the third round through the quarterfinals: all day and all night. Football marathons are just fine with me, but I just knew that watching tennis would be a lot like watching paint dry.

We were both excited to see the Williams sisters, Serena and Venus, play. I'd heard of 'em before. I have to ask here, who names their young one after a planet? Venus and Serena had both been number one in the world and they had won a butt-load of Grand Slam tournaments between 'em. There are a lot of things I can't appreciate; like wine, sushi, caviar, and expensive foreign cars but watching the best do what they do is all right by me.

Well, come to find out, those Williams Sisters were not even participating in the tournament. That really got my goat! I asked some lady in a uniform why they weren't there. She said they refused to play in the event!

It seems that back in 2001 they'd both beaten down their opponents and they were to square off in the semi-finals. It would be a heavyweight slugfest. I can imagine the excitement. When they were warming up in front of the 16,000 fans, one of them had a leg cramp or something and decided not to play. The fans booed 'em and called 'em names... names even I don't think are acceptable unless it's at a football game and the "Boys" are playing the Giants. There is you know, a time and a place for everything.

The sisters said that they would never play in Indian Wells again 'cause of how they'd been treated. Then again, who won't play just 'cause they've got a hurt leg? Slap a wrap on what ails you and get after it!

The Women's Tennis Association (WTA) and the Association of Tennis Professionals (ATP) require all top players to play in the Indian Wells tournament unless they are unable to 'cause of injury, illness or other good reason. I was told that ever since the Williams sisters stopped playing in the tournament, they've been fined by the WTA for not playing and the WTA has taken away world-ranking points from both of 'em. So not playing costs 'em big time. They give something up for their principles and their honor. Honor and principles... I like those things, but I'm still ticked off that I didn't get to see 'em play.

Justine Henin retired from tennis for a number of months and had made a comeback in the Australian Open a few weeks previous. She made it to the finals. Isn't that something? She is a fiery gal and I couldn't wait to see her play. She lost in the first round so I didn't get to see her play. I also wanted to see Maria Sharapova. Who wouldn't? She is a doggone model, for gosh sakes! I even brought my binoculars. She lost the first day too. "Hay, Maria!" That's a bit of Spanish. I'm cultured. You know?

The number one seed in the women's tournament lost in the first round of the tournament too. There weren't any other women playing that I was interested in seeing. I was afraid this tennis outing was going to be a dud of an experience. Three days of tennis and not one of the women I really wanted to see were gonna participate.

At least there were some people I'd heard of playing in the men's tournament. Roger Federer had been number one in the world for quite a spell and I'd enjoyed watching him on TV in a few of the Grand Slam finals. Though tennis don't really interest me, I watch some of the Grand Slam finals with my wife and a few cold ones if there's nothing else on. Y'all know there is nothing like spending quality time with the family! On *Sports Center* they said Federer is the greatest player ever. I'd heard of Rafael Nadal and several others so at least I had something to look forward to in the men's tournament.

When I was looking at what they call the "draw", it dawned on me like a sting from a yellowjacket that there weren't many Americans playing in this here tennis tournament. There were only seven American women out of ninety-five and thirteen American men out of eighty-six in the tournament! Three of the men and three of the women didn't even earn their way into the tournament. They were given wild card entries! That don't even seem American! Then again, the top players in the world didn't seem to be American neither. We do need to help out our own, I guess. I had been thinking that the U.S. was pretty good in everything, including tennis. Some things just creep up on your mind and mess it all up.

I also detected that none of the matches we watched over the whole three days commenced with the playing of the national anthem. I never saw a military jet flyover or a color guard. Aren't those things supposed to be a part of the sports we play in this here country? Could've been in Argentina for all I knew. There were flags from all kinds of countries on display but I couldn't tell y'all what flags went with what countries. There were players from a couple a dozen countries in the tournament. There were fans from countries all over the world too: Spain, Denmark, Japan, and Mexico to name a few. They didn't speak very good English. They should have took lessons before coming.

In sports I usually watch like basketball, baseball and football, players and coaches throw a conniption when the zebras and umpires make bad calls.

Somehow it seems that they're always making bad calls against the teams I'm rooting for. When they were playing tennis in the main stadium, I never saw anyone get their panties in a bunch over a bad call. They just signaled to the referee who sat under the shade of an umbrella. How's a person get that job? The referee would then signal for a review. On one of those big TVs in the stadium, we could see the ball's path and where it landed. Then, it showed a close-up of the ball and the line. After he chewed on what he saw a while, the referee made a decision. Not much to shout 'bout. The crowd was excited when the replays were being shown. It seemed as though they enjoyed the replays more than a lot of the tennis! What would folks do without technology to settle disputes?

Things were a mite bit different on the courts outside the main stadium. There were no giant TVs so there were no reviews. Just when I was a fixin' to think tennis players had no *cojones*, I saw players staring, glaring, and yelling at the linesmen and referees. Even though they didn't speak no English, I just knew that they were ripping the officials a new one. It did my heart proud! All us humans share the same feelings, desires and goals after all. It was a tribute to humanity; I am here to tell y'all. I even got to see a few rackets fly. It was good fun. Life was a lot more exciting on the outer courts!

At a football game I can go to get a beer or drain the lizard any time I want to. And so it is with any sport I've ever attended. But no, that ain't how it is at tennis matches. Before they commence with the first serve of the match folks can go to their seats and move 'round but as the first serve is 'bout to be taken, they close the entrance to the seating areas and make everyone sit down. If you stand up during play you're told by an usher to sit down. They won't let you out or in 'til the change over after every other game. Have y'all ever heard of such a thing? They probably lost money on concessions, so at least they had to pay for inconveniencing folks.

Come to think of it, people were incredibly silent as players commenced to serve. The players stopped their service attempts when some poor souls couldn't stop from coughing. Can y'all imagine a football game that had to be stopped when there was noise coming from the stands? Lord be!

Who attends a game of any kind and does not wish to become a part of it by intimidating and humiliating players of the opposing side anyway? No wonder the stadium only holds 16,000. I'm not the sharpest tool in the shed, but wouldn't attendance be better if we could do and say what we wanted and when we wanted in the stands? Wouldn't they make more money? Isn't that why they have professional sports anyway, to make money?

The only American I saw play was John Isner, a guy that seemed to be seven feet tall! The program showed that he was 6'9". I wondered why he wasn't making millions in the NBA. He had a big-time serve and a killer overhead, but such should be expected from a giant, not that I live by preconceived ideas or anything. You also expect giants to be slow and he didn't do nothing to make me think different. His lack of speed showed everyone as plain as day why he wasn't in the NBA. Well, maybe he couldn't shoot. Maybe he didn't like physical contact. But how could any red-blooded American boy not like tough physical contact?

Isner was playing the number two seed, Rafael Nadal in the round of sixteen. 'Cause he was American, I rooted for Isner. The added plus was that he was an underdog. I like rooting for underdogs! Through the whole match, folks in the stands shouted "Come on Bulldogs!" Why were they shouting that? Come to find out he played tennis at the University of Georgia. I didn't know they played tennis at Georgia. I thought they only played football and basketball there.

Isner was down-right humiliated by Nadal. Though it was hotter than a jalapeno on a grill and I was stewing in my own juices in the desert sun, Nadal hardly broke a sweat. Isner didn't seem much to care 'bout losing the match. He didn't throw a fit, his racket or shout obscenities at no one. It seemed that college boy had something else on his mind or that tennis didn't mean that much to him. Perhaps he majored in accounting or something and that was how he would make a real living after playing tennis. A person expects to see losers throw a bit of a fit. If they don't, it makes you wonder what their priorities are, or if they really care 'bout winning at all.

Nadal, conversely, played with lots of skill, passion and power. He moved well on the court. I must confess right here that the crowd loved him. People chanted "Rafa! Rafa! Rafa!" and "Vamos Rafa!" There were Rafa T-shirts, and there were Rafa signs lifted along with Spanish flags throughout the stadium. Weren't we in America? It was like he was a rock star or something. Did I tell y'all that a rock star sat a few seats from us? There was a great fuss 'bout that. They had extra security to keep the weirdoes away. I didn't recognize her 'cause she wasn't a country singer, but back to Nadal...

I can't state for certain that Nadal was good looking because y'all would probably wonder something about me. I moseyed on up to the rail after one of his matches to get a good photo for my wife. Next to me stood a woman screaming, "Rafa! Rafa!" I guesstimated she was 'bout thirty. She couldn't wait to see the boy up close and personal. She took a photo as he walked by and then she simply swooned. After she composed herself and had regained her senses she asked me weakly in a thick Spanish accent, "Can I just die now?" I said, "M'am, that probably wouldn't be a good idea." With all the folks crowding around and all, the paramedics probably wouldn't have arrived in time to revive her.

After each match, the winner autographed three balls and hit 'em into the stands. The swooning lady received an unexpected gift from the heavens. I guess y'all could kind of say her prayers were answered. One of the Rafa balls sailed from the floor of the stadium towards her seat in the twenty-second row. Her husband gallantly caught the ball and right quick presented it to her. She excitedly raised her hand to the heavens showing off her prize to the thousands who wished they'd have caught it. The spirit moved me to take a photo of her and her husband. The picture shows her proudly displaying her prized autographed ball and together they're holding a large Spanish flag.

I saw her and her husband again outside another court later in the tournament. She recognized me and with incredible passion again told me how she'd received a signed ball from Nadal. I felt bad for her husband over the hero worship. I asked her if her husband caught the ball for her. I knew he did but I asked the question anyway to rebuild the *machismo* that he must of lost watching his woman make such a fuss over another guy. He must of felt a mite bit sissified!

Nadal worship extended to older ladies too. As Sue Ann and I waited for a shuttle to our hotel, a woman in her seventies told stories of how she'd come close to Nadal and even once had shook his hand. She also discussed a bothersome habit Nadal had. Before he served he went through a routine that included pulling a "wedgie" out of his hind end. I said to the elderly woman that I found the habit a bit disturbing. She replied quite loudly and joyfully, for all in the area to hear, that she would, "be glad to help him pull it out any time." I don't even think she'd been drinking.

I was most surprised to find that there were tennis groupies, though I was not as shocked as I would've been had the seventy-something year old lady not shared her Nadal fantasies for all the world to hear. Groups of fine looking women could be heard to share their plans to make rendezvous with male tennis players. One woman excitedly said to her three purty friends, "The German coach I met said that he could hook us up with some tennis players tonight." Sometimes it's not good to eavesdrop but being the keen observer of human nature that I am, I couldn't help it. On occasion it's kind of embarrassing, what I hear. I knew of groupies who followed rock stars, basketball players, baseball players, and football players, but who'd have thought there were females of the predatory type associated with TENNIS? Go figure. I didn't hear men talk 'bout plans to hook up with female players. I'm not sure why that was.

The majority of the fans at the tournament looked to be women. I figured that the women would enjoy watching other women play, but turned out I was wrong. On the shuttle bus from the hotel to the stadium I'd come to hear several women discussing the fact that they didn't like watching the women play 'cause they took too long to get ready to serve and 'cause the speed of the game was so much slower than the men's. Women take too long to get ready. Nothing new 'bout that.

Based on what I saw, folks really did seem to have a preference for watching the men play. The crowds were a whole lot bigger for the men's matches than they were for the ladies'. At one point in time there were 'bout 12,000 in the main stadium while a women's match was going on. When it was over, a men's doubles match was fixin' to be played there. All of a sudden, an announcement was made that the men's doubles match was being moved to Stadium 2. An important match involving the number two women's seed would be played in the main stadium instead. Right quick, the crowd shrunk to 'bout 3,000. Watching the stadium empty was like watching air rush out of a balloon. I stayed to watch the women. Sue Ann wanted to.

On another occasion Sue Ann and I were on the shuttle to the tournament and again I listened in on people conversing. This time it was a conversation taking place between four Canadian women. The first part of the conversation was about the number one seed Roger Federer. The Canadian women said many contrary things about Federer. They said he was "aloof", "conceited" and "poorly mannered".

All things considered, they seemed to hold him in low standing. I'd never noticed any of those things on *Sports Center* when I watched him play on TV. He was good friends with Tiger Woods. I guess y'all know 'bout the Tiger's problems. I wouldn't have expected Tiger to have problems either, but who's to really know?

On the second evening of our stay, Marcos Baghdatis from the little old island of Cypress defeated the top dog, Roger Federer, in a Dallas-sized upset. Baghdatis was ranked only number 32 in the world. The crowd really rallied behind Baghdatis as he closed in on the upset win. There was a whole lot of whooping and hollering; I'm here to tell you. I enjoyed watching Federer's stroking of the ball and the way he glided across the court, kind of like an antelope on the prairie.

The breaks didn't seem to go Federer's way. Sometimes that happens, I imagine. Baghdatis seemed to want to win more. He was more emotional, and more energetic. He ran down shots that I couldn't imagine he'd return. Federer was surprised many times too. I thought it to be a special match and a special day in Baghdatis' life. For a second I felt a little sad for Federer, and then I was down-right happy for Baghdatis. The underdog had his day. 'Twas a great day for all us little folks! Y'all know, sometimes sport just lifts us up and give us hope.

The Canadians then moved on to talking 'bout the weather. That's something I talk 'bout when I don't know folks too well. Besides it was in the mid-eighties at the tournament and below zero where they resided. Then they spoke of the 2010 Winter Olympics that just ended a few weeks previous. I watched some of the Winter Olympics on TV. Who doesn't? I'm obliged to as a sports fan, but if I'm gonna be honest, the Winter Olympics don't do much for me. There's not too much ice and snow in Texas. When there is, driving gets to be quite the adventure! We don't ski or ice-skate all that much. I guess it is hard to appreciate things you don't understand too well.

Back to the Canadians... they said they'd watched every event either live or on replay. They came to agree that the whole nation seemed to be "transfixed" during the whole affair. They all said they stayed up too late and had a rough couple of weeks at work as the games went on, but they thought 'twas great to be able to see it all. They also came to the conclusion that the Olympics did more to make them proud to be Canadians than anything else they'd experienced in their lives. Canadian flags were everywhere and millions wore Canadian colors. One lady confessed that she was glad when the games ended 'cause she wanted to wear something in colors other than red and white. I can relate to all of that. I wear my Cowboys jersey, sweater, polo or jacket just about every day during football season. What real fan doesn't? It's important to show your pride!

Just before we climbed down out of the shuttle, one of the Canadian women said, "Nothing binds people together like sports." Now her comment really made me think for a minute. I even had a little headache. I can't think of anything that made me feel closer to other people than sports, except for when those terrorists crashed the planes into the twin towers. My buddies and I get together with our families to play sports, to watch sports and to drink a few cold ones to celebrate when the Cowboys win. You know, I think she was right. Without sports my social life would take a serious hit.

I enjoyed watching some of the men's matches but I must confess I also enjoyed watching some of the women's matches. The players certainly did things I couldn't do. I have an appreciation for people who do things well. The men and women were skilled and played with grit and determination. They actually did some strategizing as they played the matches. I saw men serve right near 140 miles per hour and women serving right at 120 miles per hour. That's danged impressive.

I was partial to a little Chinese woman named Jie Zheng, who I don't mind stating, was cute as a button! She was the 35<sup>th</sup> ranked player in the world and was matched up against the number 2 seed, Caroline Wozniacki of Denmark. Jie stands 5'4 but looked so much smaller than her 5'10 opponent did. It was a competition I will always remember even though Jie was whipped in a tiebreaker. She was quick as lightning, skilled and could hit that ball a ton. She never gave up. I respect that 'bout a person.

I'd always been told that losing was a lot like passing on. When the Cowboys lose, I kind of have that feeling, but for some reason watching my girl lose did not make me feel that way. Somehow I felt a mite bit inspired. I became aware of the possibility that there could be honor and satisfaction found even after whipping... long as it don't involve football!

We Texans have no problem teaching our kids how to value football. We buy our little boys Cowboy jerseys and other stuff branded with the star. We buy 'em footballs and sign 'em up to play tackle football in the third grade. We teach 'em to idolize players, to get their autographs and to purchase their posters and photos. We teach 'em to be aggressive, to hit hard, to take a hit and to get right back in there when someone smashes 'em in the mouth. They have to learn to cowboy up. They need to be as tough as the mesquite. We buy our little girls Cheerleader outfits. We teach 'em to cheer and to support the boys. Our kids do, after all, need to fit in when they grow up. You know?

I was down-right surprised to see that the same kind of stuff went on with tennis folks and their kids. I didn't see their boys and gals play tennis, but I could see that they must. They had the right kind of clothes. At the tournament they were seen buying souvenirs and photos. Kids and their parents could be seen waiting outside the courts and dressing areas for a chance to get an autograph. Some kids had Texas-sized tennis balls with autographs all over 'em. Those must of been some driven kids!

I realized that those tennis folks want their kids to fit into their world when they grow up too. The things that struck me so strange at the tournament won't seem funny to their kids at all. Even though football is way more important than tennis, I think I get it. I'm not sure I ever would've if I hadn't treated my wife to a trip to the tennis tournament. Just goes to show you that when you do something good for someone else that good things happen to you too!