



The Heroes of Bluffton

BY L. JON WERTHEIM

NBA: WARRIORS OUT OF NOWHERE P. 72  
NFL DRAFT  
JaMarcus Russell  
THE ECSTASY  
BY PETER KING  
THE AGONY  
BY RICK REILLY



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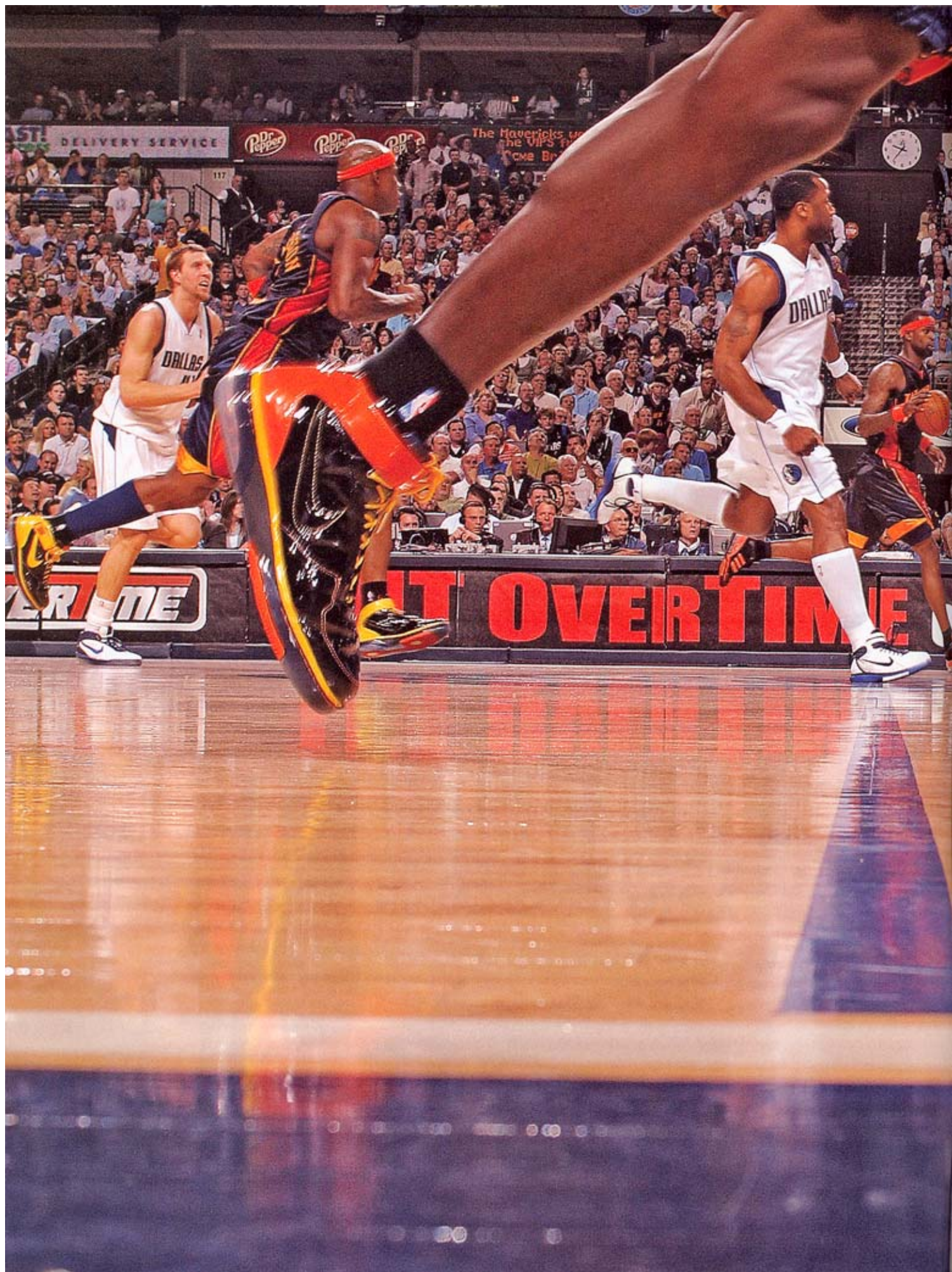


★ DE LA HOYA vs. MAYWEATHER ★

## The Fight to Save Boxing

BY RICHARD HOFFER





before Davis played 44 minutes in Game 4. "If he breaks down, he breaks down, and we go home. What am I waiting for?"

**T**HROUGH IT all, Nelson has been the steady presence. When he arrived in Oakland last August, he announced that he was too old to worry about losing his job; he was going to tell it like it is. And he has. When most NBA

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says Stackhouse. "He was around this organization forever. I think he's been able to instill in his team that they have a good chance of beating us, and they believe him."

Nelson's job is made easier because his Warriors are the quintessential nothing-to-lose, everything-to-prove team. Davis and Jackson are rehabbing reputations, Richardson is tasting the playoffs for the first time in his six-year career and Nelson

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**GETTING A JUMP** A record crowd joined Davis (left) and Barnes in relishing Sunday's victory, which put Golden State up 3-1.

None of this is lost on the players in Dallas, where, lest anyone forget, Nelson traded for and groomed the two-time reigning MVP (Steve Nash), drafted and groomed the presumptive MVP (Nowitzki), mentored last season's Coach of the Year (Johnson) and drafted the Mavs' other All-Star (Josh Howard). "You have to give him a lot of credit—he knows this team,"

himself was considered washed up two years ago. Now? Davis is hearing M-V-P! chants, Jackson is lauded as a team leader, Richardson is hitting game-breaking threes, and Nelson is inspiring signs like the one Sunday that read NELLIE SMOKES CUBAN. "This is as much fun as I've had coaching," says Nelson. "I've never enjoyed a year more than this one."

Not since the Run TMC teams of the early '90s—coached by, of course, Nelson—have the Warriors been at the forefront of Bay Area sports. Perhaps it's fitting, then, that there is such a nostalgic feel to this run. Chris Mullin (the C of TMC) is now the team's executive VP of basketball operations, Mitch Richmond (the M) is a special assistant and Rod Higgins is the G.M. Late Sunday night they all crossed paths outside the locker room. There went Richmond, then Higgins, leaving Mullin and former teammate Tom Tolbert, who held a giant cup of beer and, in shorts and a backward hat, looked like a 6' 8" frat boy at the world's greatest kegger. Someone suggested it was a veritable Warriors reunion, to which Tolbert cracked, "It can't be a reunion without Chris Gatling."

No doubt Nelson would have appreciated the joke, but he was already gone. After the win he had walked off the court and down the tunnel, high-fiving fans as confetti colored his white hair, then grabbed his customary Bud Light, followed by his customary second Bud Light, which he brought with him to the podium for the press conference. There, as usual, he played the role of aw-shucks Midwestern coach and praised Dallas, asserting that he was just happy to be part of all this craziness. Then he retreated to his downtown Oakland apartment to revel with friends and have a cigar. It's safe to say that the man had earned it. □

