

# FAST BREAK

TOM MCMILLEN IS A SCHOLAR AND ATHLETE, AND IN THE NBA HE WAS KNOWN FOR HIS SHARP ELBOWS. NOW HE'S ABOUT TO WIN HIS FIRST CONGRESSIONAL RACE, FOLLOWING IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF HIS ROLE MODEL, BILL BRADLEY. BUT HE'S FINDING THAT POLITICS IS NOT ALWAYS AN UNCONTESTED LAY-UP.

BY JAMES RESTON JR.

**O**n the Capital Centre court, the Washington Bullets and Philadelphia 76ers are playing hard, trying to win the last game of the 1985-86 regular season. The Bullets' center, the rail-thin Manute Bol, is struggling; he has four fouls and appears worn out.

Looking on, a gray-haired Democratic candidate for Maryland's Fourth Congressional District seat squirms combatively—ready, it would appear, to dash in there himself to replace the flagging Bol.

And ready he must be. This congressional candidate is Tom McMillen of the Washington Bullets.

"What the Fourth District needs is a congressman who can stuff it!" As the NBA season is ending, it is one of Tom McMillen's standard lines on the stump between games, but it is a joke that cuts two ways: The 33-year-old McMillen, in his eleventh season in the National Basketball Association, can just barely slam-dunk it—despite standing nearly seven feet tall—and the joke among his teammates to the coach is, "Call an alley-oop for McMillen."

Now, on the bench awaiting an opportunity to play, the candidate looks sallow, downright unhealthy. His media adviser, Sara Eisner, wants her candidate to get a tan when the season and play-offs are

over, even if he has to acquire it at the tanning studio in a Glen Burnie shopping center. She also wants him to loosen up on camera. "I can't do anything about the guy's personality," she says a bit forlornly.

McMillen's right hand hurts. Two weeks before, against the Atlanta Hawks, he chipped a knuckle, probably in one of those exaggerated flails of his long arms. He is like a huge, wooden puppet out there, joints connected with dowels, appendages doing the most surprising, dangerous things. Everyone in the league hates to play against him. His elbows have the reputation of being the sharpest in the league. He puts no foreign objects in his elbow pads—things like jacks and marbles—as some NBA players are accused of; the elbows themselves are the foreign objects.

He's not a dirty player, simply awkward, aggressive, and fond of contact, and just as he's not afraid to take the clutch shot, he's not afraid to take his punishment.

He has to shake voters' hands with his shooting hand, the left one. That's okay, though. Senator Robert Dole, who lost the use of his right arm in World War II, does just fine, and

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it's thrilling for the potential voter to shake McMillen's left hand and feel the right one come gently over top of it, to hear the brief apology for his scruffy cast.

Manute Bol is now taken out, and McMillen goes in. Tonight the sellout crowd cheers. That does not always happen. When congressional candidate McMillen entered the game in the overtime victory over the Celtics on March 8, a fan turned to his neighbor and whispered: "I'd vote for him just to get him out of the NBA." But tonight is McMillen's last night, time to be gracious, and they cheer. McMillen deserves it. He has been playing well recently.

The Bullets have a new coach, Kevin Loughery—Gene Shue having been fired twelve games earlier—and Loughery is playing McMillen more.

Loughery admires McMillen, considers him a credit to a game tainted by cocaine abuse, calls him the "ultimate pro." To Loughery, McMillen is an underrated player with a good jump shot and a strong defensive game. When McMillen announced his retirement, Loughery told him

that he wished he would play one more year and forgo this silly congressional race.

McMillen considers these last games campaign appearances. He hopes the Bullets will go far in the play-offs; that would keep him before the voters.

The Bullets need to win tonight to draw the 76ers in the play-offs rather than face the tougher Milwaukee Bucks. The 76ers are thought to be easier because they are nursing many injuries. Moses Malone, their blockhouse center, has a broken eye socket; Bob McAdoo, the old scoring champ, has a hyperextended knee; Andrew Toney, their shooting guard, has had surgery on his groin; and the fabled Julius Erving is down with the flu. This last is a pity, because Dr. J was supposed to have given a speech for McMillen at tonight's half-time retirement ceremony, but the Doctor stayed in Philadelphia and instead sent a check for \$500 to the McMillen for Congress campaign.

In the absence of so many established stars, the 76ers go with a small, quick line-up, one that has won six straight. Such a line-up is not the right mix for



The determined Tom McMillen whom Bullet fans came to know and sometimes love: a good shooter, not too smooth, but very aggressive.

McMillen to get more than eleven minutes in relief of Bol.

After the game, at a fundraiser for McMillen in the Showcase Room at the Capital Centre, Loughery apologizes to the people who have come to cheer the candidate. The coach is sorry that at this, McMillen's last game, the old guy didn't play more, but the chemistry wasn't right. The apology is readily accepted because the Bullets have won—by one point, on a shot by Darren Daye.

Downstairs, in the catacombs of the Capital Centre, a statuesque blonde from a Baltimore TV station sends her card into the Bullets' locker room, hoping to interview McMillen while he is still in uniform. Female sports reporters have long since established their right to be part of this elemental post-game news opportunity, but the blonde already tried that once, in the Baltimore Orioles' locker room, and once was enough.

Inside, McMillen has already showered and is eager to get upstairs for his fundraiser. Wrapped in a terry-cloth robe, he is holding forth on the emotion of the moment. He towers above the

mikes and the reporters. He looks better after a shower; the steam has imparted some color to his cheeks.

At last he breaks away from the regular reporters inside and makes his way into the hallway, where the blonde waits with her cameraman. She drapes him over a stool against the cinderblock walls. The lights go on, and they talk. Will he miss basketball? How are sports and politics similar? Different? How does he feel?

This is the kind of situation about which McMillen's political managers are ambivalent. On the one hand, the politician is loose; the blonde animates him. Stiffness on camera is usually a problem for him, especially when he sits in his bland, gray office in Crofton fielding questions about defense policy. Here, on this night of farewell, observed against a cinderblock wall, he seems human, accessible, comfortable. But is it dignified? His managers worry that he will be seen as frivolous, as a single swinger. They prefer to have him seen with middle-aged mothers rather than beautiful young blondes.

"I will miss the adrenaline factor," he is saying. "There's

nothing to replace that winning shot in a tight game. Politics is not the same, but it does bring out my competitive spirit. I play to win in anything I do."

He has said it a thousand times, but now he seems to mean it. All this—the noise, the girls, the physical combat—is slipping away, and soon his only opponent will be a feisty, five-foot-seven-inch father of four: Robert R. Neall, a Republican with twelve years of experience in the Maryland State Legislature.

Neall, at this stage of the campaign, thinks he can beat this "stringbean," as he refers to McMillen, and he has begun to discover ways to make fun of how McMillen "makes his money." At their early debates, McMillen sometimes leads off by invoking the game he has played the night before, and Neall counters: "Yesterday I was hard at work on the savings-and-loan bill in Annapolis. Quite frankly, I would much rather have been at a basketball game."

The blonde now puts the question to McMillen: Really, isn't basketball frivolous?

"The great thing about professional basketball is that it takes only a couple of

hours a day," McMillen replies. "It has left time for other things. And as this campaign has heated up in the last few months, getting out there and knocking around with these guys is a great way to relieve tension and frustration."

National attention has already started to focus on McMillen's campaign. The blonde asks whether such interest isn't unfair to the opposition. This is a frequent complaint of Neall backers.

"No, I don't think it's unfair," McMillen says. "I've worked 25 years to develop a good jump shot."

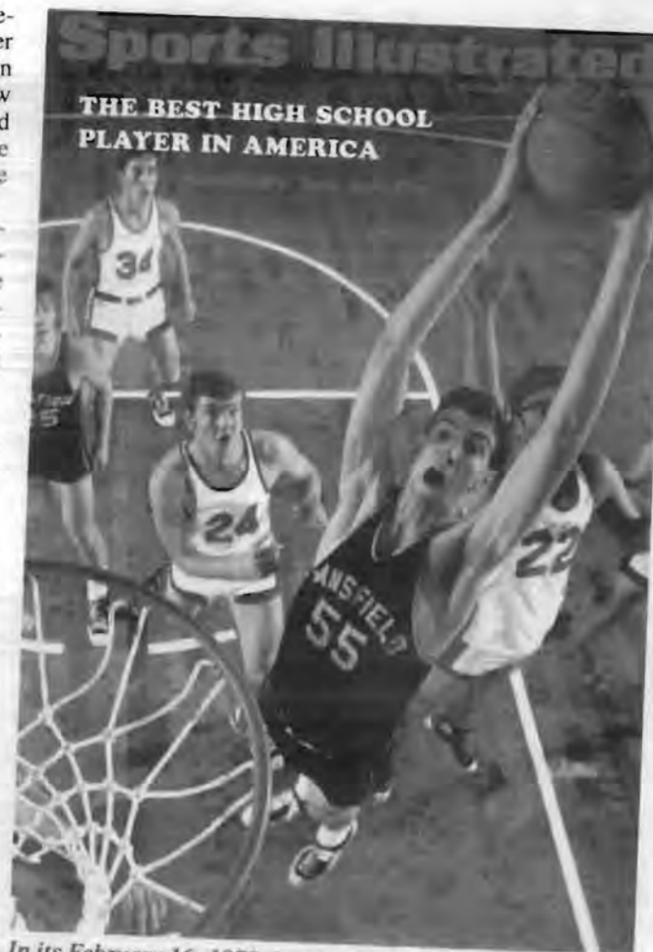
Tom McMillen became actively involved in Maryland politics in 1981, casting his eye on Maryland's Fourth Congressional District. The district is sometimes called the "golden triangle," whose angles are Washington, Baltimore, and Annapolis.

It is a district that demographically might be considered a snapshot of the nation. Prince George's County is something of a bedroom community. Anne Arundel County still has some rolling countryside, and it includes the upscale, pleasant community of Crofton, where McMillen took up residence nine years ago.

Anne Arundel also has sailors who cluster around Annapolis and blue-collar "stack-potters" whose powerboats are launched into the Chesapeake Bay from trailers with plenty of bait and beer aboard. In the portions of Anne Arundel and Howard counties around the southern rim of Baltimore, steelworkers living in such communities as Glen Burnie and Pasadena lend a heavy union presence to the district.

Marjorie Holt reigned in the Fourth District for twelve years. A Republican with staunchly conservative positions, she became entrenched there, largely because she was so good at constituent service. McMillen decided to pass up a race against her in 1984 because she was so formidable—and because he still had some more basketball in him. Holt decided not to run this time.

Although McMillen didn't become actively involved in politics until 1981, it might be argued that he decided on a political career when he was about eight years old. There has always been a sense of purpose about him that comes from setting goals and going out to accomplish them with a determination that



In its February 16, 1970, issue, Sports Illustrated featured high schooler Tom McMillen at the height of his game. He could still slam-dunk.

verges on single-mindedness.

On the face of it, his is the perfect American success story: The sickly kid becomes a straight-A student, All-American athlete, Olympian, Rhodes scholar, NBA veteran, successful businessman, and finally congressman.

McMillen grew up in Mansfield, Pennsylvania, where his father was the town dentist and his mother worked at the local state college. His parents were hard-working, well educated, and respected in town, and their five children shared a healthy sense of competitiveness. The children all became achievers; among them are a physician, two writers, and a business executive, as well as a professional basketball player turned congressional candidate.

When he was eight years old, Tom developed a bone problem in his legs. The doctor said he would never be able to run again; his knees were turned strangely inward. The remedy was to batten his feet at bedtime to a pair of shoes connected to an iron bar, and for three years that was how he slept. From the beginning his father drove him hard, putting the boy through a rigorous pro-

gram of calisthenics to strengthen his legs. "I'd try to do an exercise, mess it up, and then I'd look at my father just knowing he was thinking, 'I'm going to have a seven-foot invalid for a son.'" In due course, the program worked, and the boy grew out of the problem. But there was another difficulty to correct as well, a muscle deviation in his eyes that prevented him from focusing on a basketball hoop or anything else.

Meanwhile, Tom's legs grew long and spindly, an embarrassment—especially in the summertime, when he wore short pants—until basketball became important. Cautiously at first, his father pushed his son toward the sport. Soon it became a common sight on the streets of Mansfield to see the McMillen kid, after a two-hour practice, walking down the sidewalk bouncing a basketball between his long legs with every stride.

Running scared thus became part of Tom McMillen's personality. If he was to succeed in basketball, it would come not simply from his God-given height, but through hard work. The dentist transferred this lesson to his son's academics as well. If

he was to do well in school when he wasn't as smart as his brothers and sisters, he would have to work very hard at it.

"There will always be talent," Tom McMillen says. "But that is not enough. It's the composite that leads to success and survival. Talent plus sacrifice, dedication, hard work, a willingness to be taught, an openness to team structure."

This ethic of hard work by the moderately endowed has been frequently invoked in McMillen's congressional campaign. At almost every stop, he could be heard to say that he was probably the least gifted athlete in the NBA.

In fact, he wasn't fast, he didn't jump very high, and he wasn't very strong. But he worked hard to develop the skills he needed, and that resulted in a classic jump shot, a good hook, and a first-rate grasp of strategy. He was known as a "cerebral player," although the rules he followed—and which he proposes to apply to public life—were simple enough: work hard, develop team instincts, take the pressure.

Continued on page 256

## Fast Break

Continued from page 201

To McMillen, life is a set of high but achievable goals. Early in life, his basketball game was subjected to a test of fifteen standards kept on index cards. McMillen scored himself after each game, reaching for a perfect 100. To earn 100, he needed to score 36 points, get 26 rebounds, be called for no more than two fouls, make all his foul shots and 65 percent of his attempts from the floor, block five shots, make two assists, and have at worst only one turnover. This may be the mark of a perfectionist. It could also be the mark of a grind.

With such self-discipline, McMillen became an extraordinary athlete and student. He maintained a straight-A average while becoming the most highly recruited high school player in America. After making the cover of *Sports Illustrated* as the best high school player in the country, he became the focus of one of the most unusual recruitment efforts ever. To impress his blunt mother, Margaret, a coach needed to promote culture. To impress his intense father, Dr. Jim the dentist, academics were the key.

The ultimate goal in those early days was for young Tom to become a doctor. But politics was on his mind even as a teenager. To *Sports Illustrated* he said: "I wouldn't want to go to a place like Columbia University, where they have open violence, I can't see having my name associated with a place like Alabama, where they really haven't faced up to racial problems, or a school like Georgia in a state where Governor Maddox seems to be against progress. I read *National Review*, but I wouldn't want to be called a conservative. I don't want people to think I'm against progress."

Tom McMillen's somewhat insipid evenhandedness in the era of radicalism has survived into the era of Ronald Reagan. It is the kind of tone he projects on the stump in 1986, decent and cautious and somewhat goody-goody.

During his recruitment, he read deeply about the colleges and states that wanted him. He subjected coaches to questions about how many books their libraries had, how many of the professors had PhDs, how their medical schools were staffed. More than 270 colleges wanted him, and near the end his choices narrowed to the universities of Maryland, North Carolina, and Virginia. His mother liked the Jeffersonian ideal of Virginia. His father got along well with coach Lefty Driesell of Maryland. And young Tom leaned toward North Carolina.

At a delicate stage of the recruitment process, with the player still leaning toward North Carolina, Tarheel coach

Dean Smith alienated Tom McMillen's parents with an action that was more a violation of small-town ethics than of the recruiting rules.

While visiting the McMillen home, Smith encouraged Tom to call Tom Burleson, another highly regarded prospect, to say how grand it was that the two would be playing together for North Carolina. McMillen's parents were mortified. This was making their son the recruiter as well as the recruited, and they would not have it.

Tom McMillen switched to Maryland, though not without considerable family

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strife. And Burleson ended up not at the University of North Carolina but at North Carolina State.

At Maryland, McMillen once again set goals. On the court, he became an All-American and an Olympian. In his freshman year, Bill Bradley of the Knicks, a Rhodes scholar, was his model. McMillen also wanted to be a Rhodes scholar, and he carefully set out to become one. He came to know Bradley and another Rhodes scholar, Senator Paul Sarbanes of Maryland. He visited such dignitaries as Senator William Fulbright of Arkansas and the other senator from Maryland, Joseph Tydings. As the youngest member of the President's Commission on Physical Fitness, he became friendly with the astronaut Jim Lovell. His closest adviser at Maryland was the late Dr. Gordon Prange, the Asian scholar who wrote the best-seller *At Dawn We Slept: The Untold Story of Pearl Harbor*.

This elite body of advisers encouraged McMillen to diversify his curriculum beyond his narrow pre-med course of study. When the time came for McMillen to write his Rhodes essay, Dr. Prange helped him with it.

At Maryland, while maintaining a straight-A average, McMillen also was active in student government. Even in college, he was looking ahead to a political career. Marvin Mandel, the former governor of Maryland, was an early adviser, as was Louis Goldstein, the longtime kingmaker of Maryland Democratic politics.

When he won his Rhodes scholarship, McMillen had to make a big decision. As an All-American and Olympian, he

was sure to go in the first round of the NBA draft. If he took the scholarship and stayed two years in England, his skills might deteriorate and his contract money could diminish sharply. If he didn't take the Rhodes, the serious part of his life after athletics—becoming a doctor or pursuing a political career, that part of life his father so looked forward to—could go aglimmering. Having attended every game at Maryland and having ridden his son hard from a seat beneath the basket, Dr. McMillen lay on his deathbed as his son pondered the dilemma.

Fate interceded. A cousin was playing pro basketball in Italy on the Bologna team, and he suggested that Tom take the Rhodes and play professional basketball in Italy. Bill Bradley had been a weekend player in Italy when he was a Rhodes scholar, so the idea seemed reasonable enough. Here was a way to do everything: He could keep his skills sharp and maintain his attractiveness to the NBA—and, not incidentally, make \$80,000 in 1974 as a 22-year-old.

The wackiest year of McMillen's life ensued. On the Italian end, there was no flexibility. This was big business, and players were expected to be at every game. At Oxford, meanwhile, he was required to be in residence and had been warned on this requirement by the warden at the Rhodes House. What to do?

For centuries, Oxford students have been attended by "scouts," who clean their rooms, wake them in the morning, make their beds, and serve them meals in the dining halls. But they also keep an eye on their shenanigans and can be informants to the college administration.

McMillen surmised that he had two options with his scout: either go the "ugly-American route" of paying him a modest bribe not to report his absences, or be surreptitious. He chose the latter.

For weeks during his first term, McMillen rose early, made his own bed, and walked the grounds of University College. Ostentatiously, he searched out his scout and explained that he was an early riser and quite neat, so the scout really needn't bother to wake him in the morning. Once this "habit" was established, he was certain his absences in Italy would go unnoticed.

McMillen followed that routine for seven weeks of the Oxford term, slipping away to London and flying off to Italy for games, sometimes two a week. After leaving Oxford in, say, the early afternoon, he would catch a flight from London to the Italian city where he was playing, sometimes arriving just moments before a 9 PM game. After a game he would often face a drive of several hours—perhaps through the Alps, to Na-

ples—to catch a flight back to London, arriving at Oxford in mid-morning. It was a grueling routine, not conducive to the serious contemplation of philosophy, politics, and economics. McMillen remembers it as a time of barely made travel connections and oaths hurled at airport fog.

Then, not many days before the term ended, his scout happened onto his exhausted figure draped over the couch in his room.

"Mr. McMillen," said the scout, "I hear you are a terrific basketball player and that you may be playing in Europe. When are you going to begin?"

The wily little bugger had known all along.

A Sunday morning in early March of 1986:

The candidate is being driven along a road near the Baltimore-Washington International Airport while he ices his foot. He is on his way to another breakfast with a handful of potential constituents. To an aide, he snaps that he wants to restrict these "events" because he is not convinced that they are worth the effort anymore. Besides, his foot hurts from the overtime victory over the Boston Celtics the night before.

He ponders what for him is a normal schedule: this breakfast; then a basketball clinic for kids at Old Mill High School, an event he considers a campaign appearance in itself, because the kids will gush about their idol to their parents; then a bull-and-oyster roast for old Bill Huggins, the sheriff of Anne Arundel County for 25 years; then a labor dinner in Baltimore. The next day, after issuing a small-business position paper, he must fly to Cleveland for a game against the Cavaliers.

The strain of this dual life is beginning to wear on him. His conversation drifts back and forth disjointedly between the distant poles of his current existence. He doesn't want to talk about breaking Bill Walton's nose the night before.

It was, of course, unintentional. Guard Gus Williams of the Bullets had taken a pass and driven across the key, past center Robert Parish of the Celtics. McMillen set a pick on Parish, sensing Walton behind him, as Williams slid by and put up a finger-roll off the glass. As McMillen jockeyed for position for a possible rebound, his left arm swung back and caught Walton across the bridge of the nose.

Williams's spectacular shot was good.

"What a move!" the announcer shouted before noticing Walton crumpling to the floor, blood streaming through fingers gripped over his face.

"Who hit him?" the announcer asked.

"Did you see who hit him?"

The videotape was replayed, slowly,

almost pornographically, for the viewers. "Oh," said the announcer in a flat tone of familiarity. "It was McMillen."

Several minutes after it happened, McMillen was back on the bench. He had gotten some grease on his hands, so he slipped away under the bleachers, the muffled roar of the crowd overhead, and into the nearest locker room—the Celtics'—to wipe the stuff off. There was Walton, stretched out on a table, attended by the trainer, who was having trouble stopping the bleeding. Walton's face was buried under an ice pack. As McMillen walked in, the trainer looked up. "We're going to get you, McMillen," he said. McMillen took it to be a jest, but he did not stick around.

Now, on his way to the political breakfast, the candidate reaches for an analogy. "In sports, the competition may be angry, but it's superficial," he says. "The next morning, people forget about it. Politics has an angry side, too, and there's more substance to the anger. Basketball is a kid's game, but in politics people hold grudges for a long time."

His driver, a cynic, is unmoved. "Walton is such a political flake," he quips. The morning after, McMillen is generous. "Oh, he's mellowed some."

Soon McMillen is talking about national defense. He has staked out a conservative position, good politics in a district where there is a fair amount of defense-contract work. His defense position paper, issued several weeks earlier, was developed with the staff of Senator Sam Nunn of Georgia. It pleases McMillen to be thought of as a Sam Nunn Democrat.

The Buick now arrives at a modern, sky-lit house in a fashionable development outside Annapolis. The breakfast represents the upscale part of the Fourth District's constituency, where the overtime victory over the Celtics the night before will be a fascination, as will the fact that a *People* magazine profile of McMillen is about to hit the stands. In this part of the district, *People* can certify a campaign breakfast.

On the landing behind the chintz couch, the table is set with lox and bagels, ham, cakes, cookies, fruit, crystal, and silver. McMillen works his way around the room. His patter swings from the Celtics to the pollution of Chesapeake Bay, where these people sail. to *People*.

He seems to be at ease. He has learned to step back a few feet when making conversation, so he won't tower above people. They get uncomfortable talking straight up, he has been advised.

He has studied the way another large politician, Lyndon Johnson, used to "spider" a constituent, bending down

and wrapping his long arms around the unsuspecting subject, overwhelming him with embraces and whispered nothings. But that is not McMillen's style. He is cooler. So he steps back now to offer a less acute angle of vision.

After drinks, the crowd gathers in the living room for the candidate's stock speech. His polls tell him that he enjoys a 70-percent recognition factor in the district, and that it is his task to fill in the rest of the picture. What is he besides a

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prematurely gray pro-basketball player?

He stands near the fireplace and starts with a crack about his height. He has a whole repertoire of such jokes: Soon he's thanking his host for everything, including the cathedral ceiling.

Luckily, this time there is no microphone. This is frequently a technical difficulty. People rarely remember to place a mike high enough, which means that the candidate often has to stoop to be heard, and it is hard to maintain eye contact that way. In debates with Robert Neall, the podium is sometimes lifted onto an orange crate when it comes time for McMillen to speak.

"As Liz Taylor said to Senator Warner when they got married, 'I won't keep you long,'" McMillen now says. It is his standard opening gag. It is as risqué as he gets.

He proceeds to fill in the picture, giving them a thumbnail sketch of who Tom McMillen is beyond what they already know. He speaks first about coming to Maryland in 1970 to play basketball for "Charles Driesell." This plays well to sports-minded males, who know that Driesell recently made an official protest about being called by his long-time nickname of Lefty.

Beyond the joke, the candidate is addressing a concern of the campaign: McMillen may be regarded by some Marylanders as an outsider, a carpetbagger. But it is not a major concern, because McMillen strategists estimate that more than 60 percent of the Fourth District now is made up of carpetbaggers, and their membership in the Terrapin Club, the booster organization associated with the University of Maryland's sports programs, is strong.

"I came to Maryland in 1970—it

seems as if *everyone* came to Maryland in 1970." In the new suburbs of Annapolis, he can get away with that line, but later in the day, when he attends the bull-and-oyster roast for Sheriff Huggins and supporters, most of whom are natives, he would not dare say such a thing.

The narrative proceeds. He talks about the Olympics, his Rhodes scholarship, pro basketball.

On his first NBA team, the New York Knicks, he played with Bill Bradley, in Bradley's last year in the league, and this seems to mean quite a bit to the audience, for Bradley's success helps sanction McMillen's campaign.

Bill Bradley was important to McMillen in a direct, personal way well before Bradley became a US senator from New Jersey. Had it not been for Bradley, McMillen might not have finished his degree at Oxford.

McMillen entered the National Basketball Association draft after only one year at Oxford, where it takes two years to earn a postgraduate degree. The reason was that the NBA was merging with the erstwhile American Basketball Association in 1975, and McMillen's agent had insisted that his client had better enter the American professional ranks then or lose out on a financial windfall being created by a bidding war between the two leagues.

At first McMillen had asked the Rhodes office if he could finish his second year there in the off-season. The office said no.

He continued to negotiate with his lawyer, in New York, from a pay phone in Oxford. And then one day, as he walked down High Street at Oxford, he remembered the case of Cecil Rhodes himself. He raced to the Bodleian Library to research the point. There he found chapter and verse: Cecil Rhodes had entered Oxford in 1873, but had indeed interrupted his studies with trips to South Africa, where, in the mid-1870s, the Kimberley diamond fields were newly opened. Rhodes had not finished his degree until 1881, by which time he was head of the De Beers Consolidated Mines Company and dreaming of British colonization of South Africa. Was there any real difference between diamonds and a first-round NBA contract?

Armed with these facts, McMillen confronted the Rhodes office again and won the argument. With Bradley's encouragement, McMillen returned during the summers after his first three seasons in the NBA to finish at Oxford.

Bradley has advised McMillen in other ways. To gain a cosmopolitan polish, Bradley encouraged McMillen to travel abroad, which McMillen did the summer after he received his Oxford

degree. More recently, it was Bradley who encouraged McMillen to play with the Bullets during the 1985-86 season—even as the congressional campaign geared up and even though it would be hard on his body—so McMillen could raise money for the campaign on the road.

"I used to come off the bench for Bill Bradley," McMillen now tells the breakfast crowd. Lately, he has been substituting for Bradley at rubber-chicken political dinners as well. "Bill Bradley has become a team player in Congress. He knows what he can do and what he can't do."

Having wound up his biographical sketch, the candidate moves to his politics. "Tom McMillen is for a strong defense," he says, his voice rising. Then it is on to the necessity of cleaning up Chesapeake Bay, something of a motherhood issue in the Fourth District. This is something we need to do for "our children," says the bachelor candidate. Then he touches on the problems of the small-business community, which he says he understands from his own experience in the phone-paging business. Tom McMillen knows how to balance a budget and meet a payroll, he says.

His speaking style is easy and articulate, much improved over the last six months. He cuts an elegant figure against the soaring fireplace. His gray hair, so strange on the basketball court, helps him here. He swings smoothly into his conclusion. "I am a baby-boomer Democrat," he says.

An hour later, as we drive toward Old Mill High School and McMillen changes into his sweatsuit in the back seat of his Buick, customized for legroom, he is asked what he means by "baby-boomer Democrat."

It refers to the burden of the past, he says. "Democrats are viewed as being the status quo now. I don't have the past that, say, a Kennedy or a Mondale has. I want to be strengthened by the past but not burdened by it."

The candidate is pleased with his performance at the breakfast. It was "a nice, little hit."

At that moment he displays the vulnerability that his campaign manager has worried about from the beginning. Professional athletes love to be loved. They are used to public adoration, a fawning press. The candidate is young and handsome. He is a celebrity and a millionaire twice over. He is invited to play tennis with stars, to escort beautiful ladies, and to speak at fancy dinners in Washington.

"Mark my words," Jerry Grant, his manager, once confided: "Before it's over, this is going to be a dirty campaign. If I were running the opponent's

campaign, I would have a photographer follow Tom. I can hear the histrionic voice of a narrator in a negative advertisement now: 'Congress . . . the deliberative body of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln . . . where the great issues of war and peace are decided' . . . and then, in the background, the tinkle of glasses at a place like Champions in Georgetown, and the giggle of girls." But by mid-October Neall was still avoiding negative campaigning, preferring to accentuate his legislative experience. "Congress is no place for rookies" was a line Marjorie Holt delivered for one of Neall's radio spots. But that was as rough as it got.

After McMillen's car pulls up outside the gym at Old Mill High School, he unfolds from the back seat and is surrounded by kids. They press slips of paper and programs at him to autograph, bubbling about the game last night, asking him to palm the basketball.

"It's crazy, isn't it?" he says later, moved by the sweetness of it. "I'm living out my birth sign. I'm living my Gemini to the fullest."

In the early stage of the campaign, it was clear that Tom McMillen had failed to define his political persona. He was regarded as a serious person despite his "frivolous" first career, the early polls

showed, but serious about what? What did he really stand for? Whatever the early polls, it was plain that McMillen's celebrity did not guarantee him votes.

His opponent in the Democratic primary—which McMillen would win handily—was John Pantiledes, a businessman of Greek-Cypriot roots who left his job to wage his campaign and who por-

*McMillen showed that he had made \$271,000 in 1985 and had invested in oil and gas tax shelters ever since he entered the NBA.*

trayed himself, as distinguished from McMillen, as "the candidate who has a wife, two kids, and a mortgage." Pantiledes took to referring to McMillen as "the kid" and attempted to make an issue of McMillen's income and taxes:

"Let's face it. The kid has been living in a different world. I don't care how much he makes. It's how much you pay in taxes that counts. Here's a guy whose money is sheltered, who has taken advantage of every loophole, and he wants to be called upon to vote on tax reform!"

Pantiledes and Robert Neall released their tax forms, challenging McMillen to do the same. McMillen refused.

It was scarcely a situation unknown in American politics, where political opponents frequently try to make a wealthy candidate feel awkward, and McMillen was under no legal obligation to disclose tax information. But he was required by law to make a personal financial disclosure. McMillen's showed that he had made \$271,000 in 1985 and had invested in oil and gas tax shelters ever since he entered the NBA.

Pantiledes also talked about outside campaign contributions. He made much of McMillen's gifts from the likes of Howard Cosell (\$1,000), Donald Trump (\$1,000), Jay Rockefeller (\$250), Herman Wouk (\$250), Abe Pollin (\$500), Pam Shriver (\$500), Jeff Ruland (\$1,000), Jerry Brown (\$250), and Dan Roundfield (\$500).

Neall also thought this made good political hay. By midsummer, the Neall campaign was running only \$80,000 behind the McMillen campaign (\$270,000 to \$350,000), and the Republican was touting the fact that he was out-raising McMillen, 11 to 1, inside the district. Neall was claiming that McMillen had raised more money at swanky New York parties than in Maryland. "Don't you think New York has enough congress-

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men?" Neall asked.

From the beginning, it was evident that Fourth District voters weren't crazy about celebrity politics. While McMillen's recognition factor was high, he also had a high negative rating. In a March poll taken by the Neall campaign, the figure was one unfavorable opinion of McMillen against every two favorable; in other words, one out of three voters in the sample had a distinctly negative attitude toward McMillen.

Neall, by contrast, enjoyed a low negative rating—only one in seven felt negative about him—but he suffered from a far lower recognition factor. Neall's low negative rating was surprising for a man who had been in the Maryland State Legislature for twelve years and might be expected to have made many enemies.

Resentment against McMillen also seethed in the local wing of the Democratic party. By July the candidate had the endorsement of US Senator Paul Sarbanes, state senator Mike Wagner, and the new mayor of Annapolis, Dennis Callahan. But key elected officials in the three counties withheld their endorsements in the early going. Some had taken a personal dislike to McMillen.

"Something's missing," one high Democratic officeholder says. "There's something there that offends. He flashes

into Crofton and says, 'Here I am. I'm Tom McMillen. Come on, guys, jump on the bandwagon.' I resented that."

McMillen's campaign experienced buffeting from other quarters during the summer. On June 12, the Neall campaign filed a complaint with the Federal Election Commission charging that McMillen had accepted an illegal corporate contribution from the Bullets in the form of free travel to major American cities, where, during the basketball season, he raised more than \$70,000. McMillen had not reported this "corporate contribution," as was required by law, the Neall complaint argued, nor had the McMillen campaign reimbursed the Bullets for McMillen's travel.

McMillen presented a new wrinkle to the FEC. Corporate contributions are absolutely forbidden, but the election laws were aimed at the business executive running for political office. If a business-executive-cum-candidate travels for his company but uses the travel for a political purpose, his campaign must pick up the tab, and the travel must be reported. But if that executive engages in "incidental" political contacts in the course of business travel, that activity need not be reported, nor must the travel be paid for by the campaign.

Was McMillen, in effect, a business executive as a Washington Bullet? He

was under contract to travel. As a player, he had to travel. But he had reported none of his travel, and his campaign had not reimbursed the Bullets when political fundraisers were held for him in NBA cities. Was that illegal?

The McMillen campaign says no, that his politicking on the road was "incidental," all of it. While other NBA players shuffled cards, watched television, or played arcade games or worse during their free time on the road, McMillen politicked. What was wrong with that?

What McMillen was discovering in his campaign for Congress was that to be sports-rich and jock-famous is not an unqualified blessing in politics. His high negative rating was probably due to a prejudice against professional athletes, particularly the notion that they are all overpaid and probably use drugs.

One McMillen campaign poll tried to discover how deep the prejudice against professional athletes as politicians ran. It asked its sample to choose which of the following statements it espoused: "Pro athletes like Tom McMillen are just trying to use their celebrity status to worm their way into political life," or "Jack Kemp and Bill Bradley have shown that former athletes can serve well in the US Congress. Tom McMillen can do so as well." Respondents agreed,

by 4 to 1, with the latter statement.

The drug-induced death of Maryland basketball star Len Bias in mid-June introduced a potentially explosive element into the Fourth District campaign. McMillen had been stressing his relationship with Coach Driesell and the Maryland basketball program from the beginning. Driesell had become a fixture at McMillen campaign functions, and Driesell and his wife had contributed \$500 to the McMillen campaign. McMillen had counted on the University of Maryland booster clubs, strong in the Fourth District, to be a big help.

After Bias's death, McMillen wrote an op-ed piece for an Annapolis newspaper, the *Capital*, in which he criticized collegiate athletics for stressing competition, travel, tournaments, and the possibility of lucrative professional contracts to the detriment of academics.

"Sports addiction is clouding our vision and must be put in perspective with our larger priorities," he wrote. But he avoided a specific discussion of Bias and offered a tepid defense of Driesell, saying that his former coach had always respected his academic ambitions.

Meanwhile, McMillen's campaign strategists said he was actually the reverse of Len Bias, that he was the epitome of the successful student-athlete and valued education and athletics equally. While Bias had betrayed the youngsters who worshiped him, McMillen, by contrast, was the perfect role model, the All-American with the straight-A average. McMillen had closed his *Capital* piece with words that applied to both Bias and himself: "There must be life after sports."

The question confronting McMillen's campaign was: What was registering with the public in the Bias death? How like Bias—or unlike him—was Tom McMillen, another famous basketball player, seen to be?

The innuendo that McMillen was guilty by association on the drug issue is one of the few things that can move him to anger. He says flatly that in his eleven years in the NBA he never witnessed a player using drugs. With considerable animation, he asserts that a "few bad apples" in the NBA created this negative image, and they are being weeded out by the league's drug-enforcement program.

In the *Capital*, McMillen wrote: "It is unfortunate that role models, some athletes included, whom children look up to, have abused their responsibility, but the reality of it is that drugs are a problem that face our world in general, and athletes shouldn't be treated any different than any other member of our society."

In his passage from sports to life after sports, that is the way politics is treating Tom McMillen.

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