

The Ten Biggest Non-Sports Upsets of the Last 25 (or so) Years, Part I

by Joe Mulder

I'm sure I'm forgetting some major ones. I'm sure I'm forgetting some whose omission is downright unforgivable. But, hey. This thing's free. Lambda Lambda Lambda and Omega Mu over Alpha Beta and Pi Delta Pi

Admittedly, this one involved sports a little. Plus, it isn't real. It's from *Revenge of the Nerds*. Still, it was such a huge upset that even the fact that it didn't actually ever happen shouldn't be enough to keep it off this list.

Faced with overwhelming odds, the nerds of Lambda Lambda Lambda used brains, wit and guile to neutralize the superior athletic prowess of the Alpha Betas, led by two-time All-American quarterback Stan Gable (and, really, most elite-level college football players have nothing better to do than spend the bulk of their time hassling nerds, right? Forget his quarterbacking skills, which as a two-time All-American must have been damned impressive; Stan Gable was clearly the 20th century's greatest multi-tasker).

Anyway, the Tri-Lamb/Omega Mu upset in the battle for control of the Greek Council was really just a classic retelling of the Old Testament's "David vs. Goliath" story, reimagined as an R-rated '80s movie. Which is fine with me; I've always found that Biblical allegory is a lot more palatable when served along with a nice side dish of naked boobs. Prince Harry over Prince William

Here I'm relying almost entirely on the firsthand testimony of my wife, and the secondhand testimony of her gay friend from work (who by his very nature is probably even more qualified than she is to judge male hotness). Both of them apparently agree that not only is Harry now the more attractive brother, but that it's no longer even particularly close. That's good enough for me, since I was really having trouble coming up with ten of these.

And to think, it was only four years ago that William was on the cover of every teen magazine in the English-speaking world while Harry was busy apologizing for wearing a Nazi uniform to a costume party. Now William's starting to look a little more like his dad, and Harry, after having been denied the chance to fight in Iraq, pretty much snuck into Afghanistan undetected and was hours away from single-handedly defeating the Taliban (check out his Wikipedia page; all that stuff is practically true) until some German newspaper gleefully alerted the world to his presence, putting an end to his tour of duty. Thanks again, Germany! Kris Allen over Adam Lambert (and every other "American Idol" Season 8 contestant)

It's not just that Adam Lambert was an over-the-top fireball of talent and unrepentant fabulousity. Yes, that alone makes it something of a surprise that Kris Allen beat him out for the

latest "American Idol" title last Wednesday. But what really makes this upset list-worthy is the fact that Kris Allen was initially nothing more than cannon fodder.

You see, I watch a lot of "American Idol," and the way it works is that every year they pick a few personalities – a couple of whom have a chance to win, a couple of whom they hope will simply provide some water cooler talk before they're kicked to the curb – and follow them throughout the preliminary rounds of the show. And every year there are a few people we haven't see a second of until it comes time to sing for your life in the semifinals. You know, cannon fodder. You can't have 24 (or, in this year's case, 36) semifinalists and expect a typical TV viewer to keep track of them all, must be the thinking, so you give them 8 or 10 "personalities" and pad the rest out with cannon fodder.

In Kris Allen's case, the first we ever saw of him was when they announced, prior to his group's episode, who would be singing when next "American Idol" came on the air. And if the show doesn't bother with you but puts you through to the semifinals anyway, it's a pretty good indication of what they think about your chances in the competition, and about your marketability as a star.

But Kris Allen got lucky enough to draw a relatively weak field in his semifinal show, and pretty soon the cannon fodder became the... I don't know... something. I was going to do a "the hunter became the hunted" or "the student became the maser" sort of turn of phrase there, but I couldn't get it to work.

Ooo: pretty soon, the cannon fodder became the cannon ball.

No?

Yeah, I don't blame you. VHS over Beta

I still remember when TV commercials for videos said, at the end, "available in VHS or Beta!" Apparently Beta was the higher-quality format, came out first, and was backed by electronics giant Sony, but VHS tapes allowed you to record more hours of programming, and the machines were cheaper. In retrospect it seems obvious what most consumers would choose, especially given that many people I talk to these days literally can't tell when a show is in HD and when it isn't. I can imagine that those are the same people who weren't exactly lining up in the early '80s to shell out big bucks for what would have amounted to an imperceptible advantage in quality, but with less recording time.

Thank goodness we settled the HD-DVD vs. Blu-Ray thing quickly and decisively, though; we lost enough good men in the videotape format wars, and I'm not sure this country wants to go through something like that again. Jesse "The Body" Ventura over Skip Humphrey and Norm Coleman

Truly the most stunning upset in modern political history,

POOP READING

former professional wrestler (and onetime mayor of the Minneapolis suburb of Brooklyn Park) put together enough clever campaign ads and held his "9/11 was an inside job"-sized insanity and paranoia in check juuuuuust long enough to convince Minnesotans that he was a common sense alternative to politics as usual. He beat St. Paul mayor Norm Coleman and state Attorney General Hubert H. "Skip" Humphrey III to become governor of Minnesota, and it's probably best if we just pretend the story ends there.

Two notes about this:

1) Once Jesse became governor of Minnesota, there was no chance that Arnold Schwarzenegger wasn't going to make a run at governor of California in a "mine's bigger than his, so if *he* can do it..." sort of way. This situation was paralleled in short order in the world of sports when, after hockey great Mario Lemieux returned to the ice three seasons after retiring, it became a virtual certainty that Michael Jordan wouldn't be able to stop himself from returning to the NBA for a third go-round.

2) If, as most people assume, Norm Coleman ends up losing his legal battle to retain his U.S. Senate seat, then he will have the distinction of having lost statewide elections in Minnesota to a professional wrestler (Jesse in 1998) and a sketch comedian (Al Franken in 2008), while winning a statewide election against a former Vice President of the United States (Walter Mondale in 2002). How many politicians can say that?

Answer: one. One can say that.

You know what? Let's break this puppy up into two installments; look for Part II of the Ten Biggest Non-Sports Upsets of the Last 25 (or so) Years sometime next week.
