

## Press Release



# **FANATIC**

by [Jim Gorant](#)

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“Here’s the eleventh thing all sports fans should do before they die: read this book. This vastly entertaining work — part bawdy travelogue, part touching memoir, part architectural tour, part sports reportage at its best — reminds us why games matter so much to so many of us. If only all our seatmates at sporting events were as perceptive as Jim Gorant.”

— L. Jon Wertheim, author of *Venus Envy*, *Transition Game*, and *Running the Table*

## About the Book

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A lifelong sports fan, Jim Gorant was horrified to realize he had never attended a single one of the greatest events in sports. What kind of fan could he claim to be if he had never been to the Masters and smelled the pine needles at Augusta National or tasted the strawberries and cream at Wimbledon? To satisfy his hunger for riveting action and human spectacle, Gorant embarked on a yearlong pilgrimage that culminated in **FANATIC: Ten Things All Sports Fans Should Do Before They Die** (Houghton Mifflin, June 4, 2007).

Some of the events that Gorant decided to include in his once-in-a-lifetime trip were easy choices. Almost every sports fan would agree that the Final Four is an adrenaline rush unlike any other. Those who have been to the Kentucky Derby will tell you that visiting Churchill Downs is akin to a religious experience. And the Super Bowl is the most watched sports event of its kind. But a true fanatic knows there is more. Gorant attends a day game at Wrigley Field in Chicago, attempting to ingratiate himself with the Bleacher Bums, a community unto themselves. He walks the grounds and summons the ghosts of Wrigley and the curse that’s haunted the Cubs for nearly a century. He visits Fenway Park on Opening Day, where the Boston Red Sox spurned their own curse by winning their first World Series in more than eighty years. He travels to Green Bay and learns why it is considered bad form to take your shirt off and wear a cheesehead at Lambeau Field

in December.

As Gorant travels around the country on his sports odyssey, he becomes a fanatic at every event by surrounding himself with those who already are. He spends a morning preparing for the Michigan–Ohio State game with a family who raised their children in both states, declaring afterward, "*Ich bin ein Michigander.*" Visiting Fenway brings out a particular form of fanaticism in Gorant, a lifetime Yankees fan, since "more often than not it was the Sox who stood between my team and my goals for them." After swapping stories with the Oshkosh Packer Club outside Lambeau, he decides, "I'm not here as a neutral observer, I've come to root for the Pack and I want them to win."

As the ranks of sports fans continue to grow and new athletic competitions increase in popularity, **FANATIC** brings us back to the ten classic events of sports. With the frank, observant eye of a sportswriter and the passionate involvement of a fan, Gorant takes you to the heart of the spectacle. Golf may not be your game, but his vivid descriptions will have you breathing in the fragrant Georgia pines from your living room.

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### **Jim Gorant's Ten Iconic Sporting Events**

#### **The Super Bowl**

"Whenever and wherever I watch the Super Bowl next year and the year after that, it will be more than an overanalyzed hype-fest flickering through the TV. . . [It will be] a party that stretches for miles, a taste, a scene, a feeling. An annoying song, sung by a band of drunken fools, that I can't get out of my head."

#### **The Daytona 500**

"The sound of a NASCAR race is unique: a whine mixed with a roar, a jet takeoff undercut by one hundred dump trucks rumbling past."

#### **The Final Four**

"An event that allows a grown man to put a giant orange on his head and run around like an extra in a Richard Simmons video can't be that bad."

#### **The Masters**

"What is it about the Masters that would make you risk missing the birth of your child?"

#### **The Kentucky Derby**

"I don't even know what's in a mint julep."

#### **Wimbledon**

"I may not be able to tell a story about the time I snuck into Wimbledon, but you can bet your ass twenty years from now I'll be boring the crap out of someone with the tale of how I got thrown out."

#### **A Day Game at Wrigley Field**

"If sports ever presented the perfect lost cause for a fan to pour his heart into, this is it."

#### **Ohio State vs. Michigan**

“What better intro to the UM-OSU rivalry could there be than a family divided by it.”

### **A Game at Lambeau Field in December**

“I have come to Green Bay for the frozen tundra and the frostbitten nipples.”

### **Opening Day at Fenway Park**

“I don’t hate the Red Sox or their fans, but we do have a history.”

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## **A Conversation with Jim Gorant**

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**In your introduction, you explain that you’ve been a sports fan since around five years of age. What initially drew you to sports—was it a family pastime or something else?**

I can remember from a very young age sitting on the couch watching the New York Giants with my dad, and that was something of a family event. My sister and brother also gathered for the games, and we often fought for the spot next to our dad. And he got into the games. He shouted at the TV and stood and clapped and waved his hands in disgust, so all that made quite an impression. Still, other than the Giants and the occasional golf tournament, my dad didn’t really watch sports or follow them very closely. I think those experiences prepared the ground, so to speak, and when I went to school the whole thing just blossomed.

Socially, culturally, and instinctively, it seems, the boys in my class were drawn to sports. They were a way to express ourselves and expend our energy and figure out where we fit in among our peers, and that’s not only in terms of playing them but following them. There was a sort of cultural cachet to knowing the name of the Yankees’ backup left fielder or collecting the entire series of baseball cards for a given year. I remember getting the sign-up sheet for Little League in first grade and feeling like there was no way I wasn’t going to play. And I don’t want to understate this, but even at a young age I somehow knew that sports were a way to get girls to like you. The irony is, it’s just such thinking that starts you down the road to being a sports meathead, which women do not find attractive. At all.

**How did you formulate your list of ten must-attend sports events?**

I had a list of around eighteen events that I had compiled over time. Some events eliminated themselves—the timing wasn’t right for the Olympics, the World Cup, or the America’s Cup—so that brought it down to about fifteen. From there I really thought about which ones I would most like to go to. It’s as simple as that. There are still a number of events I’d like to see, and some I have a deep curiosity about, but I don’t know enough about them to say they’re truly must-see events (like various European soccer rivalries and a few other international events). But I have no regrets. Wait, that’s not entirely true. For a brief period in college I wore my hair in what can only be described as a mullet, for which I’m deeply regretful.

**Over the course of fourteen months, you traveled from Jacksonville, Florida, for the Super Bowl, to England for Wimbledon, to Boston’s Fenway Park for an Opening Day game against the Toronto Blue Jays, with as many places and events in between. Tell us a few of the highlights of your**

## **dream sports journey?**

There are so many, really. At the Daytona 500, I spent three days living in an RV in the infield with some people I met over the Internet. So, going into it, I had never been to a NASCAR event, I didn't know the people I'd be living with, and generally had no idea what to expect. But the folks I stayed with were great, and the entire stay was really a blast. And the place itself was surprising. I had no idea how big the track was. It's so big that there's a lake in the infield, and they put on water-skiing shows a few times a day.

Beyond that, things that jump out include some of the partying at the Michigan–Ohio State game, the tailgates at Lambeau, and the scene at the Final Four, but overall, the center of insanity was definitely the Super Bowl. The scale of it is overwhelming and the characters are incredible. I spent time with one guy who was standing on a corner with twenty \$100 bills fanned out in his hand trying to buy tickets. He claimed to be a former scalper who'd been to every Super Bowl since 1973 and who'd also snuck into dozens of major events. He'd even partied backstage with the Rolling Stones after talking his way into one of their concerts. He said if I let him, he'd be able to sneak into the Super Bowl with me. He'd just carry a box and walk behind me and we'd breeze right through. I've never been able to resist a plot with all the complexity of a Scooby Doo episode, so I agreed to meet with him outside the media entrance before the game. I'd bring my media credentials, he'd bring the box. Little surprise: he failed to show. He did call me on my cell phone about an hour before kickoff. I was already in the stadium, and he wanted me to go down and meet him. I hung up on him. The guy was certifiable, but he told a lot of great stories.

## **Can you tell us the difference between a sports viewer and a fanatic?**

Fanaticism connotes devotion beyond reason. If you're a fan, you're a little crazy, and at least for the purposes of this book, that plays out in two ways. First, in the sense of being so devoted to a team that you can actually feel physically ill after they lose, and second, in a willingness to go to extreme lengths to watch a sports event, whether it means traveling a great distance or skipping some family occasion or whatever. In either case, you've clearly lost touch with the rational world. Now that I think of it, that's part of the appeal. It's like a Calgon moment for guys.

## **Before this undertaking, you had scaled back your sports intake, and you say that part of the journey was to find out why so many fans are addicted to sports and why your relationship had changed from "passionate participant to distant viewer." Did you find the answers you were looking for?**

I don't know if this answers the question, but I found that sports are a totally legitimate way to engage with the world. I think you need to keep some perspective and be well rounded, but there's nothing wrong with being devoted to sports, which is what I had lost sight of. There's something invigorating and enriching about reaching that level of emotional and intellectual involvement where you can be carried to great highs or terrible lows by watching an event or following a team that, in retrospect, I realize, my life would be diminished without.

## **What's the eleventh event on your list?**

There are a few elevenths, but if I had to pick one, it would be the final rounds of

the World Cup. There's so much going on there, with the history, the rivalries, the nationalism, and the sort of operatic drama on the pitch, with the faked injuries and the prima donnas. It seems like something that would be both fun and compelling to get close to. And where else do you get the chance to pillage and riot?

**In addition to *Fanatic*, you've written two golf books. Do you have another sports-related book in the works?**

I'm researching two or three potential ideas right now, trying to figure out which is the most viable and which I'd most like to work on. I hope to get started on something this summer.

**Do you have favorite sportswriters or sports books?**

There are a bunch of fantastic writers at *Sports Illustrated*—Tom Verducci, Scott Price, Jon Wertheim, John Garrity—although naming names is a bit like giving an acceptance speech at the Oscars: I'm certain to leave someone out. Oh, well. I've always liked Charlie Pierce at the *Boston Globe*, Chris Jones at *Esquire*, Harvey Araton at the *New York Times*, and Steve Friedman. As far as books go, I can't say, because I don't really read sports books. I think one of my assets when it comes to writing about sports is that I haven't been a sportswriter, which allows me to come at the subject from a different place. I don't think I can name ten sports books I've read (although I've certainly read more than that). In fact, the only ones that come to mind are *A Fan's Notes* by Fred Exley, which is more about mental illness and self-identity than sports, and *Seabiscuit*, which I recently read because I was interested in how Laura Hillenbrand put the book together. Let me just say, what she did, in terms of research, is sort of amazing. Hat's off.

***Fanatic* makes one great Father's Day gift. What do you hope to unwrap on Father's Day?**

Since I'll be in the office on Father's Day, working on the coverage of the U.S. Open, I'd like to unwrap a few elves who could go in and do my job for me. Short of that, I'd love a plate of homemade chocolate chip cookies.

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