

TRANSCRIPT: ONE MAN'S QUEST FOR RPS GLORY

BY CHRIS SCHONBERGER

IT WAS HARD TO EXPLAIN TO PEOPLE EXACTLY WHY I WANTED TO TRAVEL TO TORONTO TO COMPETE IN THE ROCK, PAPER, SCISSORS WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS. I TRIED TO EMPHASIZE THE 10000 CANADIAN DOLLARS OF PRIZE MONEY UP FOR GRABS, BUT THAT DIDN'T SEEM TO DIMINISH CONCERN FOR MY MENTAL HEALTH. "WHY NOT JUST BLOW ALL YOUR MONEY ON SCRATCH LOTTO CARDS?" A FRIEND ASKED. "THE ODDS ARE PROBABLY THE SAME."

WITHOUT A STATISTICIAN ON HAND, I COULDN'T SAY FOR SURE. BUT I COME FROM A GENERATION BRED TO BELIEVE THAT WE DESERVE TO BE FAMOUS. WE HAVE THE RIGHT TO BE ON TV, WINNING MONEY FOR DOING USELESS THINGS. SO WHY NOT RPS?

IT IS THE NIGHT BEFORE THE CHAMPIONSHIPS AND PLAYERS FROM AROUND THE WORLD HAVE GATHERED IN THE VILLAGE PUB. THE MINNEAPOLIS HUSTLERZ ARE IN THE GARDEN OUTSIDE, THROWING REAL CANADIAN DOLLARS ONTO THE GROUND AND TAUNTING STRANGERS TO TRY THEIR LUCK—OR SKILL—AT A BEST-OF-THREE STREET MATCH. ACROSS THE BAR, A YOUNG MEMBER OF THE REVERED NORWEGIAN TEAM DELIVERS A BILINGUAL FREESTYLE RAP TO A GATHERING CROWD...

MIKEL (RAPPING): YOU THINK YOU CAN PLAY A ROCK SCISSORS PAPER, I SHOW YOU ROCK SCISSORS PAPER. YOU DON'T KNOW HOW TO SING, BUT I SHOW YOU HOW TO LING A LING.

PLAYING UP MY FRESHMAN STATUS, I WANDER AROUND ASKING FOR ADVICE. IT'S EASY TO FIND. PROBLEM IS, MOST OF IT'S CONTRADICTORY.

TRIPLE A ALEX APTER: IF YOU'RE PLAYING A GUY I WOULD START WITH ROCK. IF YOU'RE PLAYING A GIRL, I WOULD START WITH SCISSORS. BECAUSE THAT'S GONNA GIVE YOU A STALEMATE AGAINST THEIR MOST LIKELY OPENINGS IF THEY'RE UNSEASONED PLAYERS, AND IT'S GONNA GIVE YOU A SLIGHT ADVANTAGE IF THEY ASSUME YOU'RE A COMPLETELY UNSEASONED PLAYER.

THE NEXT NIGHT, I ENTER THE BUSTLING STEAM WHISTLE BREWERY-AKA, THE RPS STADIUM. THE CHAMPIONSHIPS ARE UNDER WAY. CAMERA CREWS FOLLOW PLAYERS DRESSED AS GORILLAS, AND UNIFORMED OFFICIALS RULE WITH AN IRON FIST...WHICH, BY THE SOUND OF THINGS, IS PROBABLY AN ILLEGAL THROW.

REF: I DO NOT WANT TO SEE ANY ILLEGAL THROWS. I DON'T WANT TO SEE FIRE, OR NUCLEAR BOMB, OR DYNAMITE, OK...

SPECTATORS ARE CROWDED AROUND MY ARENA. A GLARING SPOTLIGHT CASTS A CLEAR SILHOUETTE OF EVERY THROW. THEY CALL MY NUMBER FOR THE FIRST ROUND, AND I STEP TO THE TABLE. NEARBY, CROWD CHEERS FOR A FELLOW COUNTRYMAN. FOR THE FIRST TIME IN MY LIFE, I FEEL

PATRIOTIC. I'M SWEATING PROFUSELY AND MY HEART-RATE IS COMPLETELY OUT-OF-CONTROL. AND WORST OF ALL...I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT I AM GOING TO THROW. IN LESS THAN 45 SECONDS... I AM OUT OF THE TOURNAMENT. THE REF RIPS OFF THE PERFORATED "CURRENTLY UNDEFEATED" TAG BELOW MY NUMBER, AND THE NEXT GAME IS UNDERWAY. I FIND ANOTHER FIRST-ROUND LOSER AND WE COMMISERATE.

CHEDDAR: IT WAS WEIRD, LIKE, I TRAVELED UMPTEEN MILES TO GET HERE, YOU KNOW, AND THEN I FELT LIKE I WASN'T EVEN PLAYING. SO...THANKS FOR A GREAT WEEKEND RPS!

I FEEL THE SAME WAY. I KNOW I OPENED WITH SCISSORS, BUT AFTER THAT IT'S A BLANK. I DECIDE NOT TO GIVE UP. I PLAY AS MANY PEOPLE AS POSSIBLE, TOSSING AROUND WADS OF FAKE RPS DOLLARS WITH RECKLESS ABANDON. AFTER LOSING TO A GIRL I ASK WHY SHE THINKS SHE BEAT ME.

GIRL: I NOTICED WITH THE GUY I JUST PLAYED, I THINK HE HAD SOME SCRIPTED ONES AND I STARTED TO PICK UP ON THEM, BUT YOU? I DON'T KNOW, IT WAS JUST NOTHING, I'M SORRY.

I FEEL LIKE I'VE BEEN REJECTED ON A DATE? YOU MEAN YOU FELT NOTHING? I THINK ABOUT GIVING UP AND DROWNING MY SORROWS IN THE SUDS OF THE STEAM WHISTLE BREWERY, WHEN OUT OF THE CORNER OF MY EYE I SEE AN UNMISTAKABLE BALD HEAD GLISTENING BENEATH A SPOTLIGHT. IT'S MASTER ROSHAMBOLLAH, THE MOST CELEBRATED PLAYER IN RPS HISTORY. IF I CAN BEAT HIM, I CAN MAYBE CALL MYSELF THE WORLD'S GREATEST...OR AT LEAST BETTER THAN STEVE INSKEEP?

MASTER ROSHAMBOLLAH: I DID BEAT STEVE INSKEEP FROM MORNING EDITION...HE'S PROBABLY BETTER THAN ABOUT 30% OF THE PLAYERS OUT THERE. HE'S CERTAINLY HAS THE GUMPTION. CHALLENGED ONE OF THE GREATEST PLAYERS IN THE SPORT. HIM CHALLENGING ME WAS LIKE SOMEONE CHALLENGING TIGER WOODS TO A ROUND OF PUTT-PUTT. "CAN YOU PLAY ME?" WELL YOU KNOW I AM RETIRED. "5 DOLLARS CANADIAN?"

I SIT BACK TO WATCH THE FINAL, TRIUMPHANT THROWS OF THE TOURNAMENT. I'VE BEEN SHUNNED BY A LEGEND AND TROUNCED BY 80% OF MY OPPONENTS. BUT WITHOUT A STATISTICIAN ON HAND, I HAVE TO WONDER HOW BAD THAT REALLY IS. WIN OR LOOSE, AT THE END OF THE DAY, I THREW WITH MY HEART. AND FOR ME, THAT'S ENOUGH.

FOR INTERN EDITION, THIS IS CHRIS SCHONBERGER.