

Hello Stranger

BY HILARY SAUNDERS

I am notoriously oblivious when it comes to movies and television shows. Growing up, I much preferred listening to music or simply reading to watching screens. If anything, my family and I watched sports together. That was my viewing of choice.

Inspired by the Paris Olympics this summer, which of course will be long over by the time this issue lands in mailboxes, I decided to revisit the ill-fated year of 2020 in order to watch the first season of *Ted Lasso*. Surely, pop culture fiends have already seen the show, but for anyone who hasn't, Jason Sudeikis plays the lovable but absurdly ignorant Ted Lasso, who moved from coaching NCAA college football in Kansas to leading a professional club soccer team in London.

Part of the show's charm stems from the characters' quick-witted banter and cultural references across literature, politics, and music. But *Ted Lasso* also dares to broach weightier topics of panic attacks, divorce, alcoholism, broken family dynamics, and colonialism, all set against the backdrop of teamwork through sports. Throughout the show, the camaraderie of the players, coaches, and staff of AFC Richmond — on and off the soccer field — uplifts viewers and reminds us of what we can accomplish together. It's idealistic, humanistic, wholesome, and, thankfully, hilarious.

Last year I read a book by New York University professor David Hollander titled *How Basketball Can Save the World: 13 Guiding Principles for Reimagining What's Possible*. He takes the original, founding rules of the sport and



translates their relevance from the hardwood to the courtroom, boardroom, town square, and across social and political settings. It's basically the book I've wanted to write about music one day, but for sports. And in June I impulse-bought a new book called *Kicking Off Around the World: 55 Stories From When Football Met Politics* by Ramon Usall. Though the title seems pretty self-explanatory, I hope it also tells stories about when soccer has impacted politics and how those moments can be models for future policies.

Sports, like music, don't exist in their own silos. And while we don't really cover sports here at *No Depression*, the necessity of collaboration and solidarity of teamwork does run parallel in our field. In this issue, it manifests in the stories about Red Dirt alt-country band The Great Divide's

reunion and New York City's roots-rock band Fantastic Cat. Intense and intentional cooperation made the Bluegrass Music Hall of Fame and Museum's special exhibit on Jerry Garcia come to fruition after years of brainstorming and made Linda Thompson's new album a reality, even after she lost her ability to sing.

Those of us on the outside — who watch sports on our screens, listen to music through our headphones, and experience them both from the audience — will never fully understand what it takes to be on a team or in a band in this way. We'll never feel the pressure of the Olympics or the awe of walking into Wembley Stadium, whether to play on the pitch like AFC Richmond or to play music on its massive stage. We'll never have to depend on each other so viscerally in order to accomplish something so competitive together. But as fans, of a team or of a band, we can always find each other in a crowd — just a logo, chant, cheer, or sing-along closer to harmony.

I've always believed that sports and music have a lot in common in this way. Both of these activities, or art forms, have the power to unify people in unprecedented ways. And once people share a common love it helps us accomplish things bigger than ourselves.

These themes resonate even more strongly as we on Team USA face another stressful, contested election cycle this November. Everyone has to do their part to vote, stand up for each other, protect democracy, and ultimately — as Ted Lasso's off-center locker room banner reads — “BELIEVE” in the process, and in each other.