

Two states, one best-seller

The subject is a UNC coach, but the setting that resulted in Tim Crothers' first book is Inverness.

BY DAWN REISS  
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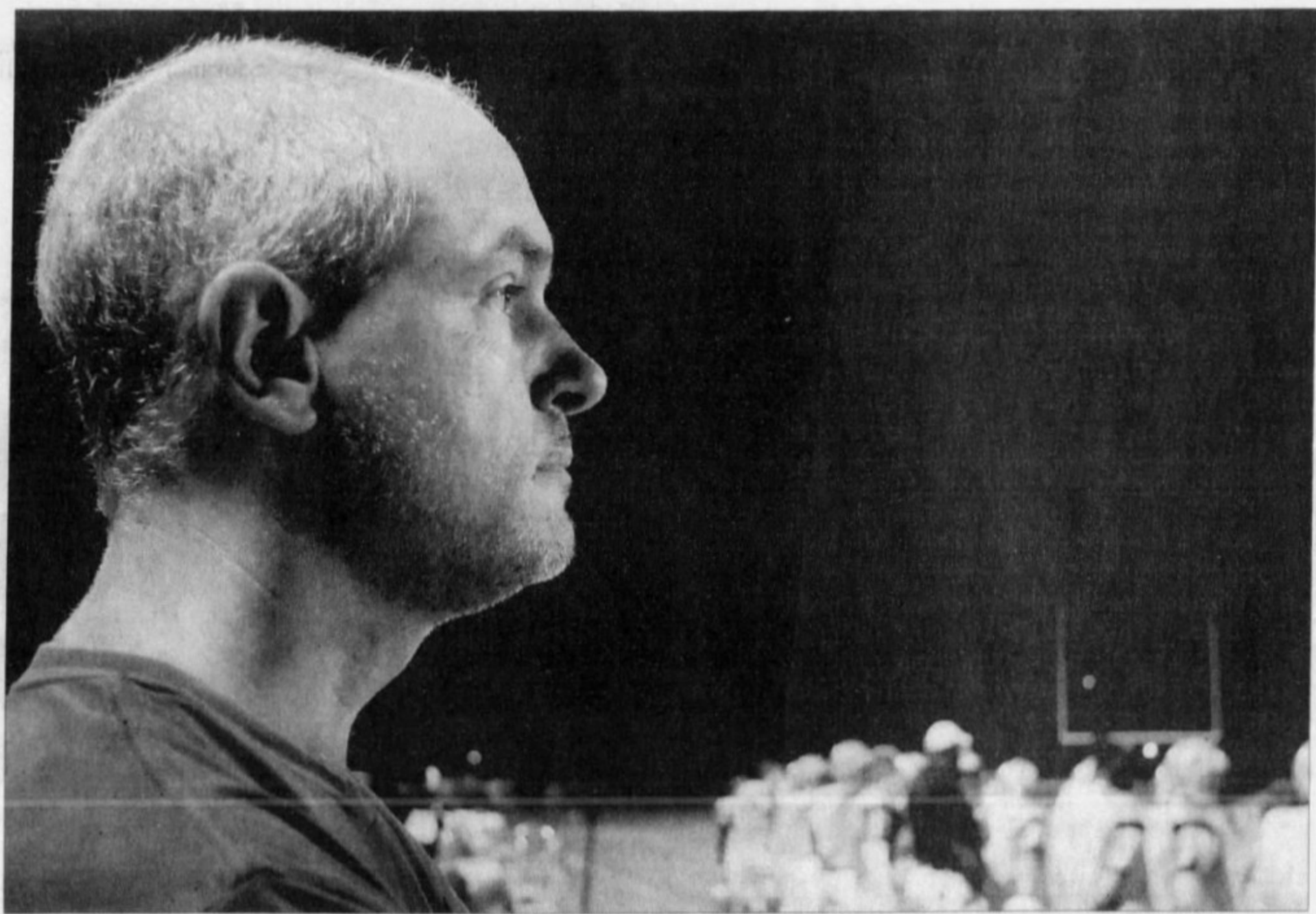
Hemingway had Cuba. Tim Crothers has Inverness.

The small Citrus County town, tucked away from the bustle of urban life, is where the former *Sports Illustrated* writer chose to write his first book, a biography about University of North Carolina women's soccer coach, Anson Dorrance.

Crothers spent six weeks in Inverness in January and February 2004 writing much of the book.

"It's the quietest place I could think of going to," Crothers said. "Hemingway had to go to Cuba to get away. Inverness is my Cuba. I can escape the rest of the world, and no one knows where to find me, and it's the one place I can have total solitude to write a book."

After completing his 13-year career at *SI* in 2001, Crothers decided to write a book. He thought about everything he covered as a general assignment writer for the magazine: various Super Bowls, college football, baseball and basketball.



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**Former *Sports Illustrated* writer Tim Crothers stands on the sideline of a Citrus High football game back in October.**

He also wrote the first national piece about Tiger Woods, at the time a 15-year-old at Los Serranos Country Club in Chino, Calif.

Then, Crothers remembered Dorrance, the eccentric coach he covered a half dozen times as a student reporter at the *Daily Tar Heel* before graduating in 1986. "I got a sense this guy was different, a little special, a little out there, so I put it in the back of my mind," Crothers said. "But I never thought I'd write a book about the guy."

More than 10 years later, Crothers turned that idea into a 331-page book, *The Man Watching*, published in October and a best-seller on Amazon.com.

What was supposed to be a one-year project turned into five, with unprecedented access that began in August 2001 and went through the end of 2005.

Sitting in the backyard, Crothers could look out at Lake Spivey and talk about local sports with his father-in-law, Dr. John Gelin, Citrus High's football team physician. It was in this very place that Crothers and his wife, Dana Gelin, a 1986 Citrus graduate who wrote for *SI* from 1994-98 and now works as an associate director of athletic communications for UNC, were married seven years ago.

It was after Christmas when Croth-

ers' pregnant wife told him to focus on the book and not drive back until he was done. Fueled on double cheese pizza and motivated by the fast-approaching birth of his son, Atticus (named after the lawyer in *To Kill a Mockingbird*), Crothers completed his task. "I think she realized it was a real crossroad," Crothers said. "Bless her heart, because if I didn't have a long period of solitude I might still be working on the book in 2050."

When Crothers first approached Dorrance, he wanted to make sure he was willing to discuss everything, including two pending lawsuits, which Dorrance had never publicly discussed.

"I explained to him that the book could not be written without it," Crothers said. "I think a part of him wanted to finally tell the story. He was anxious to defend himself all along."

The coach, who has won 18 national titles, was skeptical at first.

"I told him he wasn't going to sell any copies, but he was certainly welcome to hang out if he wanted," Dorrance said.

Crothers found out firsthand how hard the Tar Heels worked after he joined the team as a volunteer coach his second season. He knew the practices were brutal but didn't think he could describe them until he participated in 110-meter sprints, shuttle runs and cone

drills.

"I was humiliated on a regular basis," Crothers said. "I played defense most of the time, but I was just embarrassed by the talent that was spinning circles around me."

Crothers observed and interviewed Dorrance and 127 of his approximately 240 players, including famous alumni such as Mia Hamm and Cindy Parlow.

Unlike most biographers who "go away for a weekend and learn a person's life in 48 hours," Crothers had to interview Dorrance in six- and seven-minute spurts.

"Anson, in some ways, is a dream subject. He's incredibly candid compared to other coaches I've talked to over the years. In other ways, he's a writer's worst nightmare, because you can never have an hour-long sit down with him"

Dorrance was pleased with the book, which he uses as a recruiting tool. Dorrance jokes that his wife, who, like him, is Mormon, was shocked by some of the language in the book.

"We're very conservative, and she was horrified of the swearing and was afraid we'd get a letter from Salt Lake City, from the Mormon church," Dorrance said. "Other than that, she absolutely loved it."

But others, like Craig Jennings, father

of Melissa Jennings, a former player who (along with former teammate Debbie Keller) brought a sexual harassment lawsuit against Dorrance, were less pleased.

Jennings, who said he wasn't contacted by Crothers, told the *Times* he wants more stringent action taken against Dorrance for what he called sexually explicit comments after a game that left his daughter in tears. Jennings' suit is pending appeal. Keller's portion was settled in March.

"(Dorrance) likes to manipulate, and he never apologized (for the comments) immediately," Craig Jennings said. "His attitude says, 'I'm above the law.'"

Crothers said Melissa Jennings declined to comment through her lawyer.

Crothers isn't sure what his next project will be. He is considering co-authoring a leadership book with Dorrance. Until then, he'll continue teaching journalism at UNC.

One thing is for sure: "I don't think I could ever spend five years on another book," Crothers said. "It's a luxury you can only afford once in a lifetime."

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