

you make is controlled by what someone else does, your observations and the relevance you attach to them give you something to hold onto, like the guardrail on a roller coaster. Sometimes he comments on how a coach managed the clock at the end of the game and at other times he adds his favorite quotes from a coach's postgame press conference.

START Here → Alan listed Stanford as a two-point favorite over Duke in his binder, figuring that as a veteran team it would be more disciplined early in the year than Duke, which prominently featured a host of freshmen in its rotation. At the Stardust, however, the game opened with Duke as a 4.5-point favorite. All over town, the books followed suit, giving the edge to the Duke team that, while it was the national runner-up the year before, still featured a freshman point guard running the show.

The name Duke carries a lot of weight in college basketball. For the squares making a play or two, Duke over Stanford by 4.5 is a gimme, whether it's Magic Johnson or Mickey Mouse starting at point guard. The money came in on the Duke side in droves, pushing the spread up from 4.5 to 5 and ultimately 5.5.

Alan's live-wire eyes practically popped out of his skull. Having the game at Stanford minus-2 according to his ratings, meant getting it at Stanford plus-5.5 was a 7.5 point value. This was, to say the least, a huge gap.

To Alan, money on Stanford plus-4.5 was a good bet. At plus-5.5, his money is safer than being in a bank. He hadn't planned on putting so much money down on the opening game. But now he physically couldn't stop himself. He ran around town, putting \$3,000 down on the game at various sports books. If he could, he would have put more, but ever since the early nineties, when large, risk-averse corporations took over the casinos, the limits in the sports books have been lowered to eliminate huge losses. While you could once get down \$10,000 or \$15,000 or more on one game at one place at one time, now \$3,000 is the limit. So, if you see a Stanford-Duke spread that will make you so much money your brain sizzles like a short-circuited computer, you've got to shop all over Vegas to get down your bet.

By game time, as they watched the spread go higher and higher, meaning Duke would have to win by more and more, Alan and his

partner, Billy, had laid out \$20,000 in cash by either walking into sports books or calling phone accounts at various books in Nevada.

“Ultimately, I have to bet a lot,” says Alan. “Not just because I am betting for three. But because it’s the only time I feel anything.”

Sick to your stomach. That’s the only thing you would feel as a bettor watching the Stanford-Duke game. The first half was a cacophony of shots clanking off rims and sneakers squeaking on a polished floor in a quiet gym. To the fan, the game was sloppy, with nothing to cheer about. “I tried watching the game,” Alan says. “But it was so poorly played and I had such a big bet on it, I couldn’t stand it.”

In the first four minutes of the game, Stanford was up by ten points. With five minutes left in the half, it was down by three points. At halftime Stanford was up by two. At one point early in the second half, Stanford builds a nine-point lead. But, after taking a 60-55 lead with 4:26 left, Stanford goes cold. Over the next three and a half minutes, Duke

outscores Stanford 11-0, taking a six-point lead with less than a minute left in the game. Suddenly, the bet that had been a sure thing to kick start Alan's season looks like it would cripple him instead. With thirty seconds left, Stanford cuts the lead to two. Then, after a bad pass by Duke's freshman point guard Jason Williams—thank god for the freshmen, Alan thought—Stanford tied the game, sending it into overtime.

The Duke-Stanford overtime takes on the same course as the game's first two halves. Stanford jumps out to an early lead—ahead by as much as eight—only to squander it late in the game. Lucky for them, Duke runs out of time, losing by one. Alan's prediction was right, and, in his first game of the year, it paid off to the tune of \$20,000.

RULE NUMBER FIVE

Seniors may struggle, but freshmen
will falter.

As much as winning the money, wiseguys get a rush from seeing bookmakers and bettors react to their bets. Alan is no different. Does