

Joseph Lee's Letter to Family and Friends – 2023

Joseph Lee

August 2, 2023

2000 Summer Olympics

“What do you mean he jumped over a guy? Like, was he laying on the ground?”
– LeBron James¹

In September 2000, the world gathered in Sydney, Australia for the quadrennial Summer Olympics. Over two and a half weeks, the United States would win 37 gold medals, including their third straight gold medal in men's basketball. But 23 years later, there is only one thing people remember about these Olympic Games – that Vince Carter jumped over a 7'2" man and dunked a basketball. In my lifetime, it is one of the two most memorable plays in basketball. You have Jordan crossing over Russell in Game 6 of the Finals, and you have Vince Carter jumping over a gigantic human and dunking a basketball. That is it. There are no other plays more memorable that you can point to if you are a fan of basketball. Think about it: Kobe, LeBron, Steph, name anyone you want, but you cannot name a single play that is more indelibly linked to our collective basketball history than Vince Carter at the Summer Olympics (save Jordan over Russell).

What people forget, however, is that no one saw this dunk when it happened. The games were half way around the world in Sydney, and the middle of the day in Australia is the middle of the night here in America. Now you might think America would have woken up the next morning and watched it on a loop on SportsCenter all day, but that was not the case either. NBC embargoed all footage from the Olympic Games. All ESPN was allowed to show were still photographs of the dunk. Everyone at ESPN knew our history had changed that night, but all they could do is describe it to us and show us a still photograph. LeBron James, one of the greatest players of all time, learned about the dunk the same way everyone else learned about it. He heard, by word of mouth, what had happened. We did not have Threads back in the day, so people used to just go around and tell all their friends all the news they heard. LeBron James's reaction was no different from anyone else. No matter who you told, it was difficult for them to mentally process this almost mythical tale of Vince Carter dunking over a full-grown man.

¹“In A Single Bound,” *ESPN*. Michael Wallace, Rob Peterson.

Twenty-three years later, the world has once again gathered in the oceanic nations of Australia and New Zealand, this time to contest the Women's World Cup. The United States has won the two most recent World Cups in 2015 and 2019 and is looking to become the first country to win three straight titles. The finals are set to take place on August 20th. If you live in the central time zone in America, you will need to set your alarms for 5:00AM if you want to watch the game live. My mother and I, however, are making the trip to Sydney to watch the finals in person at Stadium Australia at 8:00PM local time. Of course, we do not know if the United States will be playing in the final, or if they are playing, we do not know if Rose Lavelle will do something as dirty to her opponent as Vince Carter did 23 years ago. But if something does happen that changes the course of history, we will be there to witness it ourselves.

Back in the Kitchen

Before we leave for Australia in a couple of weeks, I am very happy to share an update with everyone for the twelfth straight year on the progress we continue to make toward our goals and ambition in life. Honestly, I feel like we are at the beginning of something special this year. I would compare it to 2007 when we started working at Village Pointe Cinema. At the time, it would have been difficult to explain how over the next 13 years we would gradually become the most indispensable man in West Omaha from simply working at a movie theater. Imagine me writing a letter in 2007 – five years before my first letter – and I told everyone that what I was about to do at the movie theater was going to be the most important thing in West Omaha for the next 13 years. No one would have believed me. No one would have thought it was remotely possible, but it happened, no matter how unbelievable it would have been at the time.

Of course, the world changed in 2020, and like everyone else, we have had an opportunity to reconsider all the choices we made in life. The pandemic gave everyone an opportunity to quit a job, to move, to reshape their life in any way they could imagine. For me, as someone who had really come to enjoy his self-appointed position as the most indispensable man in West Omaha, I realized I had ambitions that were much larger than any movie theater. It has taken us a few years, but I am convinced now that we can build something far bigger than we did at the theater for 13 years. Just as before, we are prepared to put in any amount of work to see our vision come true. It feels like 2007 all over again. We are back in the kitchen and ready to cook.

- We travel to Australia in two weeks. Australia is our first international trip since we visited Canada in 2003. I can promise you, however, that you will not have to wait another 20 years for our next international trip.
- We attended the Big 12 Baseball Tournament in Arlington, Texas for the third straight year.² Throughout the season, we watch every game, either at the stadium or on ESPN+. We made it to nine games in person last year. We should easily hit double digits next year.

²Arlington for the past two years, and Oklahoma City three years ago.

- While the Big 12 has the fan-friendly option of watching all the games on ESPN+, the Big 10 only has the shameful option of watching games on BIG10+. Nonetheless, I have purchased an annual conference pass for BIG10+, so we will be able to watch every Nebraska volleyball game this year. If you missed the spring game in Grand Island or the summer games in Brazil, here is a quick update on the 2023 roster: Nebraska will feature the almost-certain-to-be national freshman of the year in outside hitter Harper Murray. The other outside will most likely be fan-favorite Lindsay Krause, transitioning from opposite. Bergen Reilly might be the first freshman setter since Nicklin Hames to play all six rotations. Thus, the only opposite will be Florida transfer Merritt Beason. At middle, sophomore Bekka Allick will be joined by freshman Andi Jackson. While former national freshman of the year Lexi Rodriguez remains at libero, freshman Laney Choboy will get significant time as a defensive specialist, starting at libero at almost any other program. Expect another deep run in the NCAA tournament this year.
- While we may miss a lot of games due to baseball, Nebraska softball enters the year with a ton of hype. From my 2020 letter, you may recall Papillion-LaVista won the Nebraska state softball championship behind pitching phenom Jordy Bahl. Jordy Bahl would go on to win two national championships at Oklahoma, being recognized as national freshman of the year in 2022 and most outstanding player at the Women's World Series in 2023. After winning her second national championship at Oklahoma however, Jordy Bahl has transferred to Nebraska for the 2024 season. Here is what people who did not see her play in high school do not know: she can play both ways. She almost killed a pitcher with a line drive at the state tournament in 2019. Is Nebraska going to let her play both ways this season? It could be a lot of fun this year.
- We watched 50 movies at the movie theater this past year. We will be at Village Pointe Cinema every night a new movie opens, not to sell you a ticket, but to sit at the front of the theater and watch the movie with you. And if the movie is really good, you can grab some late night dinner with us at IHOP after the show.

You will find our complete schedule of movies and everything else at vpclord.com.

I know I have a lot of people who support me. I know there are people who will look at the schedule and say to themselves, "It would probably mean the world to him if I went to a movie with him, or went to a baseball game, or took a trip outside of the country with him. He goes out of his way to post his schedule months in advance, and the least I could do is show up every once in awhile to let him know that I care."

I know there are a lot of people who support me, but what I find most rewarding are the people who *believe* in me. They know I have a vision for how I want to live my life, for the goals I want to accomplish, and they believe in my ability to make those dreams come true, no matter how impossible they may seem. When these people get asked, "Hey, don't you think he would appreciate it if we went to this movie with him? Don't you think it would be fun to watch a baseball game or take a trip outside of the country?" They believe in me completely and respond, "No, let him cook."

Appendix. Complete List of Annual Letters

- 2012 – “Letter to Shareholders”
- 2013 – “Wealth and a Purpose for Wealth”
- 2014 – “The Flower and Fruit of a Man”
- 2015 – “Burdened”
- 2016 – “Seventh Grade Prophecy”
- 2017 – “In Love with a Smarter Woman”
- 2018 – “Two Kinds of People in the World”
- 2019 – “The Most Indispensable Man in West Omaha”
- 2020 – “Day One”
- 2021 – “Lord of Village Pointe Cinema”
- 2022 – “Enduring Advantages”
- 2023 – “Back in the Kitchen”