

PLAYBOY

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Ted Turner

a candid conversation about big-time sports, sex, money and the media with atlanta's hip-shooting team owner and america's cup winner

"What's happened to sports today? There are a million guys who have to work in a factory for only \$12,000 a year. If you asked any of them if he'd like to play for \$18,000, would he turn it down?"

"A little violence in the rink or on the football field is OK. The worst they do is knock each other down. That's what men really enjoy, anyway: getting together and beating the shit out of each other."

"It's only horny people who shoot people. I mean, you never feel aggressive just after you've gotten laid, right? Lots of sex for everybody, that's a solution to the world's problems."

Introduction

How do you figure a guy who thinks he was once Christopher Columbus? Or John F. Kennedy? Or Sir Francis Drake bearing down on the Spanish Armada? Whether you figure him for nuts or not, one thing is certain: In his present incarnation, Ted Turner, the rambunctious owner of Atlanta's baseball Braves and basketball Hawks, is one of the best entertainments in sports today.

As the first baseballs were thrown out to open the 1978 season, fans everywhere welcomed back the oddest ball of them all. After sitting out last season under suspension by commissioner Bowie Kuhn, Terrible Ted, the Mouth of the South, the America's Cup skipper with delusions of historical grandeur, was officially back at the helm of the losingest team in the National League (61-101 for 1977).

At Atlanta Stadium, Turner sets himself up in a front-row seat behind the Braves' dugout with a live public-address microphone at his side; a portable radio, his feet and a fresh pouch of Red Man chewing tobacco are arrayed on the dugout roof in front of him. At any moment, he may jump the rail to shake a scoring player's hand, dive into the seats to catch a foul ball or grab his mike to announce rain checks for everyone if the Braves continue to lose. Because of an inability to say no, he suffers a constant stream of young (and not-so-young) autograph seekers. During any home game, it is Turner who will give out two to three dozen autographs, more than any player in the park (unless the retired Hank Aaron shows up). Mockingly protesting the burdens of fame--even as his picture is flashed onto the 30-foot TV screen in center field--Turner gladly signs everything thrust before him (including arms and sometimes chests). Sitting behind Turner during a game last year, an Australian visitor said, "was like sitting behind Caesar at the Colosseum."

For a decade, Charlie O. Finley kept baseball hopping with his impish and unpredictable variations on the old game. Turner bids fair to replace Finley as the game's chief unguided missile, yet he manages to have everyone (but the other owners) like him. On the Braves' promotional brochure, a picture of Turner, done up as a ringmaster, is larger and more prominently displayed than those of the players.

Turner is a born-again millionaire (his father was a millionaire who shot himself after becoming overextended) who flies coach class, drives an economy car and preaches equality. He has played David to many Goliaths and usually comes up victorious or at least honorably bloodied. It is for that simple, unrelenting scrappiness that they love him in Atlanta.

A television executive who had never played baseball and did not know a balk from an infield fly, Turner bought the lackluster Braves only two seasons ago amid rumors that the faltering franchise might soon be sold to another city. By assuming the team's \$9,650,000 debt with a \$1,000,000 cash down payment and 12 years to pay at only six percent interest, Turner took a calculated risk on a team then known mostly for its absentee ownership and its fiscal tightfistedness.

Immediately upon taking over, Turner signed a handful of high-priced players: Jeff Burroughs, Willie Montanez, Andy Messersmith and Gary Matthews. As with most of his executive decisions, Turner plunged into the deal for free-agent out-fielder Matthews mouth first: At a New York cocktail party, Turner casually but noisily challenged San Francisco Giants co-owner Bob Lurie to outbid him when Matthews' contract with the Giants expired. Turner won the bidding war--he signed Matthews for \$1,750,000 for five years--but his slip of the lip led to a \$10,000 fine and his suspension for tampering with a player who was at the time still the "property" of the Giants.

Turner is also known to millions as the three-sheets-to-the-wind sailboat skipper with the Clark Gable mustache and chiseled Hollywood looks who appeared on national television last September looking under a table for his bottle of hooch. The son of a Georgia billboard hustler had just won the America's Cup yachting race--the world championship of sailing, which has gone on since 1851 and has never been lost by the United States--and was scandalizing the crusty denizens of the sponsoring New York Yacht Club at the postrace press conference in Newport, Rhode Island, by acting more like a stevedore who had won the New York State Lottery. While Newport shuddered, America applauded the new folk hero.

The victory was doubly sweet for Turner. As a successful and aggressive newcomer to ocean racing, he had twice been named Yachtsman of the Year but had never won the race for the America's Cup. When he was invited to the 1974 U.S. trials, Turner was saddled with an innovative 12-meter yacht named Mariner "that just wouldn't go." Most sailors today agree that Mariner, with her unconventional truncated stern, was a sailing lemon; Turner lost not only the trials but his helm as well. Losing is what he hates most, so in 1977 he returned with many of his former crewmen to skipper Courageous, a proven winner, and beat the barnacles off his two American competitors, who are old-guard sailors and professional sailmakers to boot. After the grueling competition of the summer-long trials, defending the Cup in four races against Australia

was a runaway for Turner. As a result, he became the first sailor ever named Yachtsman of the Year three times.

Born 39 years ago in Cincinnati, Robert Edward Turner III moved as a boy with his family to Georgia, where he attended one public and two private military schools. The pressures of the military atmosphere and his father's stern discipline turned him into a fierce competitor; he also became a history and classics buff fascinated with wars, warriors and naval heroes. When Turner was 11 and living in Savannah, his father indulged him with a tiny Penguin sailboat; that was the beginning of a great sailing career.

After graduating as a debating champion from McCallie School in Chattanooga, Tennessee, Turner attended Brown University and became known as its leading Southern hellion. When he decided to major in classics rather than business, his outraged father wrote, "I think you are rapidly becoming a jackass," But Turner never graduated; he was twice suspended for such infractions as having a coed in his room and burning down his fraternity's homecoming float.

On completion of a short stint in the Coast Guard, Turner returned to the family outdoor-advertising business just before his father committed suicide. Turner knew the business well: He had worked summers, nailing frames and pasting ads. Although the company had been sold to pay debts, Turner, against all the best business advice, immediately bought it back and eventually turned it into a huge success. Several years later, again over the protests of his closest financial advisors, he purchased a foundering independent U.H.F. television station. After an initial loss of \$2,000,000, Turner's WTCG forged a lock on the sports, sitcom and movie-return market for a whopping 16 percent average share of the Atlanta television audience. "I want to be a millionaire owner, not a broke owner. Millionaire players are driving Lincolns and I'm driving a leased Chevrolet."

So it should have come as no surprise when, two years ago, Turner again defied his advisors and bought not one but two failing franchises--the baseball Braves and the basketball Hawks--in a city that cares only about football. Turner immediately promised Atlanta's baseball fans a world series within five years.

To find out just what makes Teddy run, we assigned Contributing Editor Peter Ross Range (who interviewed another Georgian, Andrew Young, for Playboy) to catch up with him at Newport and points south. Range's report:

"Catching Turner is a feat in itself. Our interviewing took place on his sailboat, on a motor launch, in various cars, in an airplane, in his office, at his home, in a baseball stadium, in a high school gymnasium and in several restaurants. Since it was impossible to predict what would make the most telling comment, I had to tape everything, and because Turner's mouth almost never stops, the total verbiage came to almost 800 pages of transcript. At one point, he kept talking to me through an open door while he used the john--as the tape rolled on. When I visited his posh office at Atlanta Stadium--Turner, still suspended, was not officially allowed to go in--he suddenly showed up with his nose pressed to the picture window facing the ball field, talking for all he was worth. I couldn't hear a word. The tape at that point reveals an unidentified voice saying, 'Look at that fool; he never stops.'

"But Turner is not simply a guy with a big mouth; he is a bona fide, larger-than-life character. He dominates any room or situation he is in; you feel his presence right away. Yet he is also an overgrown kid who brings a joyful naïveté to every enterprise. He is innocent of the simple mechanics of almost everything he does--from running a television studio to throwing a curve ball--but is able to motivate others to do those things for him to the best of their ability. As a true naïf, Turner is unfettered by preconceptions of how things should work. His is a blithe spirit that skates along on the smooth ice of its own self confidence; he will try anything ten times. He is a fanatically positive thinker who can be made to believe in almost any scheme or person. And he can always pull out a Biblical quote or classical tale to help rationalize whatever he decides.

"Just as his life is not a single, focused achievement, Turner's fame is the product of assorted sins, outrages and successes in more than one field. So I started the interview by trying to get a fix on his new celebrity."

PLAYBOY: How are you best known--as the winner of last year's America's Cup sailboat race or as the outspoken owner of the Atlanta Braves?

TURNER: Both. The reason the America's Cup became famous was because Bowie Kuhn suspended me from baseball for a year. I was an innocent man serving time. I mean, Jesus Christ would have been considered just another long-haired hippie freak if he hadn't been crucified. The folks weren't impressed with healing the sick, feeding the multitudes bread and fish or anything else, except maybe the walking on water. But when he got crucified, that gave him his big start. Especially when he came up again three days later--that was a real good show. The America's Cup wouldn't have been famous if I hadn't been suspended. I've got to be some kind of awful guy. I was the only guy suspended for a year. Nobody in hockey, nobody in football, nobody in soccer, nobody was suspended but me.

PLAYBOY: Kuhn suspended you for tampering with Gary Matthews' contract. Do you think you were unfairly treated?

TURNER: It's not fun being suspended. That's why I went in to have a secret meeting with the big chief last fall. I just walked in and said, "Hi, boss, can you maybe unsuspend me early so I can help the team in the off season?" A year seemed like an awfully heavy penalty just for making a cocktail-party remark during a rained-out game of the world series. I mean, the Braves had a reputation for being cheap and I just wanted to let them know I would pay what it took to get a quality ballplayer. Anyway, at the winter baseball meeting in Honolulu last December, the commissioner lifted my suspension.

PLAYBOY: By bidding so high for Matthews and offering a \$300,000-a-year contract to Andy Messersmith, weren't you actually attacking the reserve clause in baseball?

TURNER: Well, yeah, I believe in freedom. Of course, Messersmith pitched only 16 games for us before he was hurt. That works out to \$18,750 a game, and now I've sold his contract to the Yankees. I'm not buying any more millionaire players--no more free agents for superbig loot. I mean, we're not only the worst team in baseball, we're the poorest. We're losing something over \$4000 a day, about \$2,000,000 cash loss per season. I want to be a millionaire owner, not a broke owner. Millionaire players are driving Lincolns and I'm driving a leased Chevrolet. But I'm getting a Toyota because of the energy crisis.

PLAYBOY: Isn't the Atlanta Hawks basketball franchise costing you a lot, too?

TURNER: That was like taking over the Confederate Army on the steps of Appomattox Court House. I bought the world's two worst sports franchises. Last season, we finally did OK and got into the playoffs. But the thing that's a disaster for a basketball franchise is not to have any season-ticket holders, like we don't. That and having a whole lot of hacks under long-term, no-cut contracts for big bucks. Hell, the President of the United States gets only a four-year contract and it's got a cut provision in case he's impeached.

PLAYBOY: Don't you have a lot of young talent?

TURNER: Yeah, but a lot of old bills, too. The Hawks had one forward pulling down \$160,000 a year, and he never played at all. He broke his leg playing around and we had to pay him anyway. That was a disaster.

PLAYBOY: Isn't there insurance against these things?

TURNER: You insure a guy's life when you have a no-cut contract, but you can't insure his knees or his arm. You can't insure whether he'll be able to play or not. A guy can't play baseball if he's got a blister on his hand or toe. Just can't do it, you know. Like, if you've got a sore cock, you can't fuck. There's just certain days you can't do it. I tell you the truth, if they tried to play basketball with a sore knee as much as they try to fuck with a sore cock, we wouldn't be in a bad league. You'd have a lot more guys going to the basket. As it is, they get freighted around first-class in 747s, and not exactly to bad spots--New York, Los Angeles, Chicago. They've got girls waiting for them in every hotel; all they've got to do is pick the one they want. They have their choice, at 60 grand a year.

PLAYBOY: At the beginning of last season, you fired the top management of the Hawks, just as you did when you took over the baseball team. Why?

TURNER: We had some guys around here who could fuck up a two-car funeral. And they were wasting my money. I paid \$10,000,000 for this team. We can't afford expensive managers. I bet you we could get some volunteer workers if we got on TV and said, "Help the Hawks. Give the Hawks a helping hand." We could run the whole front office on volunteers. In fact, maybe we could get them to pay us \$1000 to come to work. Everybody wants to work in sports, right? I know a guy who has a TV station and calls it a broadcast school; people pay \$200 a week just to work there. They screw up a lot, like running the commercials upside down, but the guy has no payroll costs. "Buying the Atlanta Hawks basketball franchise was like taking over the Confederate Army on the steps of Appomattox Court House. I bought the world's two worst sports franchises."

PLAYBOY: Back to baseball. You promised you would bring a world series to Atlanta by 1980. Why did you make such an unbelievable claim?

TURNER: I may have to revise my time-table to about 1982, five years from last season. Since I was suspended last summer, I couldn't do anything with the team. And I was away racing sailboats in Newport for four months. But I'll do it. I'll do it because a lot of people in high places laughed at me. Watch me. I'm like a bulldog that won't let go. Why do you think my own racing yacht is named Tenacious, dummy?

PLAYBOY: We give up. Why?

TURNER: Because I never quit. I've got a bunch of flags on my boat, but there ain't no white flags. I don't surrender. That's the story of my life. Just think, if you were a rabbit, to survive, you'd have to hop fast and keep your eyes open. "Ride, boldly ride," the shade replied--"if you seek for Eldorado."

PLAYBOY: Do you feel the baseball establishment is against you?

TURNER: There is definitely a power structure in baseball, just like in any corporation. And I think the suspension covered a lot of other things they didn't like about me--to bring to my attention the fact that I was going to have to knuckle under and be more like everyone else.

PLAYBOY: How?

TURNER: Like not being so friendly with my players. Chub Feeney, the president of the National League, let me know some of the things I was doing were not endearing me to the establishment. I mean, all the owners are friendly with the players in public, but I was with them a lot on a personal basis. On road trips, we used to have a little poker game, me and Big Earl Williams and Jimmy Wynn, Davey May and Vic Correll. It was just nickel-and-dime stuff. I mean, the only guy who was losing a lot was the Delta Air Lines guy, he must have dropped \$100 a night, the rest of us just lost maybe \$30 or \$40, max.

PLAYBOY: What did Feeney do?

TURNER: It was right after I had hollered at Al Hrabosky not to sign his contract. He was jogging out a fly ball and I yelled, "Hey, Al, don't sign your contract." That's all I said. But about 15,000 people heard me. The crowds at Atlanta Stadium are pretty quiet, because there is nothing to cheer about. So Feeney called me in, said there were a few things he wanted to discuss. And soon. So I went soon, out to the old league office in San Francisco.

PLAYBOY: And what happened?

TURNER: Feeney said, "Owners don't play poker with players." I said, "Why not? Is there some kind of goddamned rule against collaborating with the enemy? On my team, I am part of the damn team." I couldn't believe there was this double standard where all the players have to bow their heads and say, "Yes, sir," and "No, sir," to the owners. Maybe to the older guys, but why me?

PLAYBOY: What did Feeney say?

TURNER: He suggested I stop playing poker. So I did. But the players still like me. Even Pete Rose of the Cincinnati Reds told me one day, "I wish I had an owner like you." Strong!

PLAYBOY: What about another well-publicized run-in you had with the baseball establishment when you appointed yourself the manager of the Braves in May 1977?

TURNER: That lasted only one day. Bowie Kuhn said it was bad for baseball. But, hell, when they asked me to join the league, all they asked was what I thought of the baseball rules and primarily what my financial backing was. I told Kuhn, "They didn't ask if I could play baseball and they said I could hire any manager I want." I said, "Why didn't they give me a goddamn test, like a driver's-license test, to see how much I knew about baseball?" Maybe I'da flunked it.

It was just a bunch of horseshit, but they were so happy to find somebody who would buy the team. They must have figured that I didn't know anything and I wouldn't be a threat. Then I went out and signed Messersmith and got the shit for doing that. He had caused a lot of trouble by breaking down the reserve system. The old-line owners just weren't going to give Messersmith a good offer. This may be an assumption on my part, but there were some owners who would have preferred to see him sit the season out. That opinion wasn't shared by everyone, because Messersmith had come very close to signing with both the Yankees and the Padres. There are other mavericks in baseball. Ray Kroc of the Padres is a little bit of one. Steinbrenner certainly is one. Hell, most owners of sports teams are weirdos. But I don't like being on the other side of the fence from the players.

PLAYBOY: But you're paying their salaries.

TURNER: That's right, but I'm willing to share. If we win a world series, the ballplayers should be paid world-series wages. I'm not trying to get rich off baseball.

PLAYBOY: Why did you want to manage the Braves?

TURNER: We had lost about 16 games in a row and I figured if I could really get down in the dugout with some authority, I might find out what was wrong. I'm just like the average guy in the stands: When things are going bad, there are 10,000 guys up there who think, If I could just take over this ball club for a while, I'd straighten them out. And I own the club, right? But Kuhn said I couldn't manage again, regardless of anything. So I asked him if it was OK if I went and managed in the minor leagues for a year and really learned how to do it. He said, "Nope."

PLAYBOY: How could you do that and manage your television station and other businesses?

TURNER: Baseball is a big part of our company now. We're losing as much money in baseball as the rest of the company is making.

PLAYBOY: What makes you think you could manage a baseball team? You never played the sport.

TURNER: That's true. I went into sailing as a kid, because I was no good at baseball, no good at hockey, no good at basketball. And I was always just a skinny little shrimp, so I couldn't play football. When I bought the Braves, I didn't know what a balk or an infield fly was. But I've got the ability to inspire people. What makes me a successful sailboat racer is that I've got executive ability. I can make 11 guys work harder and longer than anybody else. And baseball players are the same way: They just want someone who really cares. Look, we're reviving that old high school spirit around here, and it's working. We've got a bunch of good guys, the nucleus of a good ball team, and a lot of them are young and unknown. What if we put together a team with nobody making over \$30,000?

PLAYBOY: We doubt that the players would like it.

TURNER: What's happened to sports today? I mean, there are a million guys who have to work in a factory for only \$12,000 a year. You think if you asked any one of them if he would like to come play for a living for \$18,000, he would turn it down? That's what I said to one of our minor-league players who complained last summer about having to ride a bus from Pawtucket to Rochester.

PLAYBOY: Besides fraternizing and trying to manage the team, in what other ways did you alienate your fellow owners?

TURNER: Another thing they didn't like, I think, was some of the things I did at the ball park. One time last year, I just decided to run out with the ball girl when she went to sweep the bases after the fifth inning. I swept the bases, then did a flip at third base. "You want to know why I bought the Braves? Because the stadium is one big play pen where I can have 53,000 of my friends over for a little fun."

PLAYBOY: Are you some kind of gymnast?

TURNER: No, never did a flip before in my life. When I got to third base, the people were cheering and everything; it just seemed like the right thing to do. I landed on my feet. I have a picture somewhere that shows me upside down in the air, with my head about six inches off the ground. Also, I raced an ostrich around the ball park and I pushed a baseball from first base to home plate with my nose.

PLAYBOY: When was that?

TURNER: The Phillies were in town and we had this little pregame competition, with six events, like throwing a basketball into a garbage can from the pitcher's mound. Nobody on our team volunteered for the baseball push, so I said, "I'll do it." I'm one of those idiots who would have volunteered for a dangerous mission in the Army. I was going to be bat boy that night and I was already in uniform. Tug McGraw volunteered for the Phillies.

PLAYBOY: Who won?

TURNER: I beat Tug by a mile. But my nose and forehead got all bloody. Tug was just nudging his ball along, but I didn't know that. You had to hit it hard with your nose or it wouldn't really go, and I knew I wasn't going to let him beat me. You hit it, then scoot up behind it and hit it again. I

started on the grass, but it rolled onto the gravel in the base path. That's when I noticed blood all over the ball. We won five out of six events. Too bad we couldn't play baseball, too. They killed us that night.

PLAYBOY: Do you go out of your way to act outrageous?

TURNER: Hell, no. There's a fine line between being colorful and being an asshole, and I hope I'm still just colorful. Do you think I'm wacko? I am feeling a bit weird about now.

PLAYBOY: Are you having qualms about doing this interview?

TURNER: Oh, boy, I know I'm burying myself. You think Jimmy Carter had trouble? Wait till this interview comes out. But this is the big time. Everybody wants to do something like this. I'm just a big kid who loves a good time. This is the big leagues. But it's always my mouth that gets me in trouble.

PLAYBOY: That's why you're known as the Mouth of the South?

TURNER: I hate that. That's derogatory. I got that from some guy who didn't like me.

PLAYBOY: Why do you talk so much?

TURNER: Maybe because I'm good at it, you dodo. I couldn't do any sport, but I learned to speak on my feet, and that's a hell of a lot better than being a high school quarterback. I went into debating in my sophomore year in high school and ended up winning the state championship my senior year. I've got a virtually limitless supply of bullshit.

PLAYBOY: Where did you get your competitive spirit?

TURNER: I've always had that. I guess I was born with it. I was 11 when I got my first boat. I couldn't sail, either. So I just kept trying, sailing around the Savannah River in weather that drove everybody else in, trying to go too fast. I was in the water a lot. They called me Turnover Turner.

PLAYBOY: Obviously, you like to win. Why did you make such an investment as paying almost \$10,000,000 for the world's losingest baseball franchise?

TURNER: Well, I got a deal: nothing down and 12 years to pay. We already had the Braves on our television station and it just made sense to buy instead of paying \$600,000 a year for broadcast rights. And the league really wanted somebody local to buy the team. People were mad about absentee ownership; the newspapers and the fans were really down on the team, almost ran them out of town. I'm reminded of the franchise that was probably in the most trouble ever throughout history--after Jesus Christ was crucified. The remaining 11 members of the team, who were just Jewish fishermen, gathered in a small room in Jerusalem. They figured they were in a lot of trouble because they had just lost big and they weren't drawing at all. The deal was really on its ass. And Saint Peter suggested that if they were ever going to draw a crowd, they'd better move the franchise, so they headed for Rome. And, of course, it became the most successful franchise in history. We decided not to move the Braves but to stick it out here. When I bought the team, even the ticket takers were miserable. Now Atlanta loves the team and loves me. I'm the most popular last-place owner in sports. That's strong, right?

PLAYBOY: None of which sounds like a very good reason for buying a team.

TURNER: You really want to know why I bought the Braves? Because the stadium is one great big play pen where I can have 53,000 of my friends over for a little fun.

PLAYBOY: Do you like the baseball business?

TURNER: This ain't like a business in any way. But that's no big problem, because I don't really see business as a business, either. To me, business is a game. It's like a poker game: You're playing for chips, but the most fun is the game. I may look like a clown, doing flips at a baseball game, but I'm a very deadly serious person in trying to accomplish things just for the satisfaction of accomplishing them. Struggling hard to achieve something is the most fun I get. All my life is a game. Everything is a game----

PLAYBOY: Of continuously higher stakes?

TURNER: Yeah, and you keep score with dollars, to a degree. It's like there are two kinds of points. I consider the money like hits in a baseball game. They're great, but the runs are what really count. And the runs are just being successful and having a good time. It takes a lot of hits to win a game. You can have more hits than the other team and still lose the game. The dollars are one way of keeping score, but not the primary way.

And the game goes fast, too. "Whether at Naishépér or Babylon, Whether the Cup sweet or bitter run, The Wine of Life keeps oozing drop by drop, the Leaves of Life keep falling one by one." Omar Khayyém, Edward Fitzgerald's translation of the Rubéiyét, which I committed most of to memory.

PLAYBOY: But can you score either hits or runs with a baseball franchise in Atlanta, which doesn't seem to be a town that really cares about baseball?

TURNER: Atlanta is an executive's town, people play golf and tennis. So we've got to give them a winner to get them out. But the team's really a disaster. We had only 900 people come out one night last year, the lowest attendance in baseball that year. That's why it's insane for Bob Lurie of the Giants to get me suspended for tampering. Atlanta and San Francisco, who have nobody coming to their games, are trying to kill each other.

PLAYBOY: You go to every home game and sit in the front row. Why don't you sit in the upper deck in the owner's air-conditioned box?

TURNER: That's what's wrong! I told you, you idiot! All the owners sit up there behind their bulletproof glass and they're afraid to meet the fans. I sit down front and I have to give about three dozen autographs during every game. Anyway, I figure the best seats are in the front row. The first thing I did was spend \$1,000,000 on a giant TV screen over the scoreboard, then I spent \$500,000 moving the dugouts and front rows closer. What I really love is catching foul balls and throwing them back in. Caught one the first day after I got back from winning the America's Cup. Not too shabby!

PLAYBOY: We've noticed you have a wad of tobacco in your cheek and spit into a paper cup throughout the game. Have you always chewed tobacco?

TURNER: Not until I bought the baseball team. I was down at spring training the first year and all the coaches were chewing and somebody offered me a chew. They were teasing me, so I took it and chewed it. They all stood around, waiting for me to get sick, but I fooled them: I liked it. Been chewing ever since.

PLAYBOY: You once told your friend Stan Musial that baseball needs a regular guy like him to run it, not a lawyer in expensive clothes. We suppose that was a dig at the present commissioner.

TURNER: Well, Bowie Kuhn is basically a good man. Besides, he has a seven-year contract at about \$200,000 a year and a big expense account. But they could save some money. Whenever I've seen him staying in hotels, it's always the Presidential suite. It seems like they throw an awful lot of money away. Here we are, the Atlanta Braves, nearly going broke. The game is not very

efficiently structured, with two league offices and a commissioner's office. I mean, basketball has almost the same number of teams, with about a third of the number of people in the hierarchy. If anybody were really interested in economizing on the part of the game that doesn't put anybody in the seats, there could be some streamlining at the top. I don't mean merging the leagues, just some streamlining at the top. I'm really just repeating something said at one of the meetings by Gussie Busch, who owns the St. Louis Cardinals.

PLAYBOY: Do you think the baseball fan is getting his money's worth these days?

TURNER: It comes closer than any other sport. Our tickets cost about half of what a football ticket costs. And less than those for hockey and basketball.

PLAYBOY: Won't free agents and lack of a reserve rule create unbalanced baseball teams, with all the talent going to the highest bidder?

TURNER: Listen, I believe in freedom. When I bought the Braves, I came out and said that I just couldn't understand why the free-agent thing was such a big issue; it seemed to me everybody ought to be free. And I said that any players who didn't want to be in Atlanta wouldn't have to be there. If a guy tells me he wants to leave, he's traded within a week--if anybody will take him. I don't want them out there making four errors in one game, trying to get the message to me. Just like I told them not to say "Mr. Turner" to me. I said, "Call me Ted. I ain't no mister."

PLAYBOY: What does that prove?

TURNER: That I'm just a regular guy. I'm a millionaire, I guess, but I'm just a normal person and I like everybody, taxi drivers, whoever you are, to call me by my first name and talk to me on a man-to-man basis. I think the garbage collector is as important as the goddamned President.

PLAYBOY: What do you think of violence in sports in general?

TURNER: Well, all I can say is, violence wouldn't happen in Atlanta, because people are pretty quiet here; hell, there ain't nothing to cheer about, anyway. I abhor violence when it's taking another person's life, but a little violence in the rink or on the football field is OK. The worst they do is knock each other down. That's what men really enjoy, anyway: getting together and beating the shit out of each other.

PLAYBOY: We notice that some of the Braves grew mustaches and beards. You have no objection to that?

TURNER: Hell, you've got a beard and I've got a mustache. I don't care what a ballplayer does, if it makes him happy, it makes me happy. Just as long as he wears something over his cock, you know.

PLAYBOY: Didn't you once get so mad at the Braves during a losing game that you said the fans could have rain checks?

TURNER: Not exactly. We were at the end of the 16-game losing streak last year, only we didn't know it was about to end. And only a couple of thousand suffering fans had come to the stadium. So I told them--that was before I was suspended and I could still use the microphone beside my chair that is hooked up to the stadium public-address system--that any fans that loyal could get a rain check after that game and keep coming out for free until the Braves won again. Fortunately, we won the next night.

PLAYBOY: Don't you ever get tired of this grief?

TURNER: Yeah, you know, sometimes I think I oughta pull back and take it a little easier. I mean, I've provided for my family, I've done what society says you're supposed to do. I don't know what I'm working for now, but I'm still running around like a peg-legged man in an ass-kicking contest. But, God, it's fun. Naw, I couldn't quit. That's why I always win in the end. I could no more give this up than an alcoholic could give up his whiskey. I'm a workaholic.

PLAYBOY: Considering the fact that you got interested in baseball just two years ago, how can you stand to be around it so much?

TURNER: It's like anything, my friend; no matter what you're doing, if your attitude's right, you're going to enjoy it. I mean, when I was in the Coast Guard cleaning latrines, I whistled while I was cleaning them. I didn't even question it. "Mine is not to question why, mine is but to do or die."

PLAYBOY: Do you think about your past a lot?

TURNER: Yeah, I always wonder why people did things. When you think back, when men look back, the happiest times of their lives were when they got together and did something. We are social animals. The most fun that you ever have as a man is in doing men's things. Men's things are primarily getting a bunch of guys together and going out and conquering a country, fighting a war, winning a big fight, putting a baseball team together. For most guys, the happiest times were when they were on the football team, when they won the Ivy League championship or the state championship or the debate team or the bridge team or whatever it was. But first of all, you got to get a good bunch of guys together and do it, whatever it is. And then you have to get them all excited and motivated so they'll bust their ass. People have the most fun when they're busting their ass.

PLAYBOY: Sounds like your description of how you won the America's Cup.

TURNER: I guess that's right. I had a great crew. And I guess I did have to show a few people that when my crew and I lost out sailing Mariner in 1974, it was the boat's fault, not ours. I mean, all the knowledgeable people knew that boat was hopelessly slow. When I got fired as skipper, I decided to come back in 1977 on a better boat. Courageous was the defender of the Cup in 1974 and we made her the defender again in 1977.

PLAYBOY: Some say your sailmaker, Robbie Doyle, was the secret of your victory.

TURNER: It was all 11 guys. But Robbie's a genius. I mean, I've sailed Hood sails, North sails and John Marshall sails. And Robbie Doyle is a self-taught genius with sails. He doesn't just design them; he makes them all himself, too. He makes sure they are right.

PLAYBOY: Racing a 12-Meter boat is no doubt a complicated science, but can you tell us what your other secrets were?

TURNER: What secrets? We won because we were faster.

PLAYBOY: Isn't there any sea wisdom you want to share with young sailors?

TURNER: I don't have any sailing rules. One reason we beat the other American boats was that I delegated the detail work and basic preparation to others. Ted Hood and Lowell North, who skippered that Independence and the Enterprise, are professionals who make their living off sailing. They had these big technological programs and computers and stuff. They were the primary sailmakers on their boats. They were dealing with a lot of technical details all the time. So while they were worrying about how to make their sails go faster in the next race, we were beating them in this one. I mean, we just sailed.

PLAYBOY: What about the computers? Did you use any scientific aids?

TURNER: Hell, no. We just went up there for the summer and went sailing every day. We didn't use tank tests or anything. We didn't even have an on-board computer--except for a thing we got toward the very end just to keep track of where we were, in case it got foggy, which it never did. We used a hand-held calculator, a sophisticated one, to figure out what the wind speed would be on the next leg of the course. "You have to get guys excited and motivated so they'll bust their ass. People have the most fun when they're busting their ass."

PLAYBOY: You have a reputation for being a pretty tough skipper to crew for. One writer quoted a sailor as saying about you: "He's an asshole, but not your usual run-of-the-mill, boring asshole. He is a glorious, totally mad, larger-than-life asshole and, besides that, he has class."

TURNER: Yeah? Well, maybe that's why the same crazy guys keep coming back to sail with me every year. Bunky Helfrich, who was the tailer on the main sheet on Courageous, and I have been sailing together for 27 years. We grew up in Savannah together.

PLAYBOY: Is it true that you almost hit one guy in the face who made a mistake?

TURNER: I wouldn't have hit him hard.

PLAYBOY: Do you hit guys in the face?

TURNER: Usually just in the back.

PLAYBOY: There was a lot said last summer about the New York Yacht Club's not wanting to have a loudmouthed Southern renegade sailor defending the America's Cup. You were not exactly the typical kind of yacht-racing skipper one sees around Newport.

TURNER: That's a bunch of bull. The Yacht Club committee was completely fair. That's why they named us the defender.

PLAYBOY: Well, some of your crew said you had an uphill battle all summer.

TURNER: We were the underdogs. I mean, there's not a single really wealthy kid on my crew. I had a helicopter pilot, a sailing instructor, a guy from Detroit, a guy from the Bronx. They don't do much sailing in the Bronx. And they didn't get paid a penny all summer. They had to sell their cars, put their wives to work and just do without. Of course, we got free room and board at our dorm and various companies gave us clothes and watches and things over the summer.

PLAYBOY: Why was the musical score from the movie Rocky your crew's theme song? We heard a Coast Guard cutter playing it on its loud-speaker when you went out to race the Australia.

TURNER: We went out to see Rocky together and the guys sort of identified with it; they're a bunch of street fighters, too.

PLAYBOY: We heard you were not favored by your own syndicate, the King's Point Fund, which back-rolled the Courageous campaign.

TURNER: Well, that's sort of true. I mean, the King's Point Fund raised money to campaign the Independence, raced by Ted Hood, and the Courageous, raced by me. But Lee Loomis, who ran the fund, was a friend of Hood's and wanted him to win.

PLAYBOY: How do you feel about Loomis?

TURNER: I have no comment.

PLAYBOY: Around Newport, it was not secret how you felt about him.

TURNER: Well, he wanted us to lose.

PLAYBOY: How do you know?

TURNER: He told me when I came in as skipper of the Courageous, "I'm doing this because I am Ted Hood's friend, but I am going to be fair to you." Which he just about technically did.

PLAYBOY: What do you mean, "technically"?

TURNER: Well, the thing that broke my heart happened during July, when we were having troubles and lost two races to Enterprise, which was being campaigned by a different syndicate, mainly because we didn't have a new jib. One night my wife, Janie, was upstairs dressing when Mr. and Mrs. Loomis came in the front door of the dorm for dinner. They didn't realize that she could overhear anything you said in the entryway. Mr. Loomis told Mrs. Loomis that he was glad we had lost those two races, because it made them look better. The "them" was, you know, Independence. He was saying, you know, we're not going to be the whipping boys around here tonight. I always thought Mr. Loomis was the coach of the two teams at once, but I felt that he saw us as much or more the enemy as he did Enterprise. In other words, our own coach was against us. [Asked by Playboy about this incident, Loomis, a New York financier, replied: "It is flatly wrong that I was ever against Turner. It really burns me that he says that."]

PLAYBOY: So you wouldn't want to campaign again with him in 1980?

TURNER: He wants to campaign again with Ted Hood, and Ted's a super guy. Let's just put it this way: Next time, I would like to have my coach hoping that we would win. It's very difficult when the coach of your own team wants you to lose, for whatever reason.

PLAYBOY: Weren't you a member of the syndicate yourself?

TURNER: Yeah, I invested \$250,000 of my own money. Plus approximately \$10,000 more in sails. I had to borrow the money.

PLAYBOY: That's a pretty expensive hobby. How much do you usually spend on sailing?

TURNER: About \$100,000 a year.

PLAYBOY: You got into trouble during the summer over a story that said you had gone to a dressy party at the uppercrust Spouting Rock Club at Bailey's Beach in Newport and said, "The trouble with these stiff bitches is that they really need to be fucked--and I'm the guy to do it." What was that all about?

TURNER: Oh, do I have to talk about Bailey's Beach again? That was a totally unsubstantiated story a guy from New Times wrote. He never even asked me about it or checked it out.

PLAYBOY: What happened?

TURNER: Some people I hardly knew from Atlanta took me to this party. I thought it would be a quick dinner about eight o'clock and then home. I had been going to bed about ten all summer. Well, they took over an hour at their house giving me drinks, making me autograph magazine covers and having my picture taken with their kids, see. Then we go to the club and they're introducing me all over as their good friend, Ted Turner. I had just met them! I wasn't their friend. I was being shown like a prize bull or something, which I'm not. By then, I had a few drinks and I was mad. I didn't need a free dinner. I was being ripped off. I'm not an alcoholic; hell, I hardly

drink. But I have a very, very low tolerance for alcohol. I like vodka and tonic and a couple of drinks go a long way. But what else was I going to do? I drank out of self-defense.

PLAYBOY: And what happened?

TURNER: By then, it was already about ten o'clock and dinner had not even been served. I met this couple, this man was about 65 and the girl, the woman, could not have been over 30. So I asked her, I just said, "What are you doing with an old guy like that?" And she said she was with him for his money. And I said, you know, "Have you been laid lately?" I mean, I had a lot of single young men on my crew and I asked her what she was doing. She looked pretty, made up and everything. I said, "What is it like making love to a 65-year-old guy?" And she said, "I'm horny as hell." And I said, "Well, we might be able to get that taken care of," and that's all I said.

PLAYBOY: What about fucking the "stiff bitches"?

TURNER: I mean, how could New Times quote me as saying that? That's just crazy. First of all, I wouldn't want to screw old bitches. It doesn't make sense.

PLAYBOY: So there it ended?

TURNER: No, well, I looked at my watch and saw how late it was and went up to take a pee before dinner. While I was in the bathroom, I decided the best thing for me to do was to go home and go to bed. I wasn't hungry, anyway. So I hopped in my car and left. And, as I understand it, the lady who had taken us there started crying when I didn't come back and went around saying that I wasn't a gentleman and all that stuff. The lady who had been introducing me around as her lifelong friend.

PLAYBOY: Were you reprimanded by the club?

TURNER: I wrote a letter to the commodore, apologizing if I had done anything wrong. And he wrote a nice letter back, saying it was like the time someone told Lincoln that General Grant was drunk all the time and Lincoln said, "Tell me which whiskey he drinks, so I can send him another case."

PLAYBOY: Didn't you get into trouble again at the end, when you won the America's Cup? Weren't you seen getting drunk on national television during the final press conference?

TURNER: I wasn't getting drunk on national TV; I was already drunk on national TV. I got that way beforehand. It snuck up on me. Somebody gave me a bottle of aquavit when I already had a buzz on.

PLAYBOY: Did that get you in trouble with the New York Yacht Club?

TURNER: I saw Commodore McCullough a few weeks later and asked him about that. He's a super guy and a good friend of mine. He just said that I had disappointed some people.

PLAYBOY: You've said that Hood and North were yachting professionals. Sailing is officially an amateur sport. Is there such a thing as a professional sailboat racer?

TURNER: There are some, but nobody admits it.

PLAYBOY: Who are they?

TURNER: Nobody. Only guys who work on sailboats during races. Boat niggers.

PLAYBOY: If your opponents were practically professional sailors, how could you outsail them?

TURNER: Well, I've probably sailed more than they have. I sail just about every weekend somewhere. Right after the Cup, I took only one weekend off and then entered the Annapolis fall series. Then we took Tenacious down for the Southern racing circuit. And I'd like to sail the Sydney-Hobart race again. Have to find me a boat in Australia for that. I've put in about 10,000 miles of ocean racing.

PLAYBOY: When did you graduate from the smaller boats to ocean racers?

TURNER: Twelve years ago. The first time I went to Europe, I sailed across on a little 38-foot boat. We didn't do a lot of sleeping. It took 20 days and nights. Six-man crew, two men on a watch. We weren't really set up for that long a race because of a lack of provisioning. We ran out of water.

PLAYBOY: What did you do then? Drink soda?

TURNER: We didn't take any soda to start with, because the cans weighed too much. We were racing, remember? So we went on rations. We had to reconstitute our dehydrated food with salt water. It was pretty rough. We were down to basic survival conditions. When you're racing across the ocean on a small sailboat, dodging icebergs and killer whales, you live at a subsistence level, you know. I mean, it's hard to eat, you're wet a lot of the time and just going to the bathroom is a chore. You have to hang on when it's rough to keep from getting thrown off the toilet. You get seasick and there's no heat, you're freezing to death and you've got to get up at night to stand watch.

PLAYBOY: Do you think the notoriety you brought to sailing last year might make that sport as popular as Billie Jean King and Bobby Riggs made tennis?

TURNER: I have nothing to gain from the growth of sailing, because I am not in the sailboat industry. I got into the boatbuilding business once, but that failed. Anyway, sailing is already monstrously popular. Boating is the number-one leisure-time activity in the country.

PLAYBOY: Is it really a sport?

TURNER: There is no sport, by far, that even comes close to the complexity of racing sailboats, particularly large ones, and I'll tell you why. Baseball, football and basketball are played with a fixed number of people within lines drawn on a field that doesn't move around. In sailing, you can't even see the next goddamn mark most of the time. You're going on a compass. Just to find where you're going in poor visibility is a pretty big deal. Crossing the ocean with nothing but a sextant, when you're out there in hurricane winds in the middle of the Atlantic, makes just staying alive pretty tricky. Racing around a course is actually easier. In America's Cup, you don't even go out when the wind is over 25 knots.

PLAYBOY: What do you like best about sailboat racing?

TURNER: Looking over my shoulder and seeing the whole rest of the racing fleet behind me. That's beautiful. That's the big thrill.

PLAYBOY: You were talking earlier about not wanting to screw old bitches. Do you deserve your reputation as a womanizer?

TURNER: That's none of your business. I've got a wife and five kids and a mother and my in-laws and I don't want to disappoint them. I'm not a movie star or anything! I've got a lot of very regular, normal-type people who are counting on me, and I can't let them down. Of course, I didn't get five kids by being a saint, either.

PLAYBOY: You're not saying you've turned against sex, are you?

TURNER: Hell, no. But who's got the time? The way I'm going, I never even see my wife.

PLAYBOY: That doesn't sound healthy.

TURNER: Well, I can always pick up your magazine and look at the pictures. I love pictures of nude girls. I photograph nudes myself.

PLAYBOY: Do you? Where do you get your models?

TURNER: This isn't going to be in this interview. I told you we weren't going to get into my sex life. Do you think I'm a dumb shit? Don't answer that.

PLAYBOY: All right. Any advice on the subject of sex for the rest of the world.

TURNER: Well, everybody wants to be loved, right? In fact, most criminals and sex perverts and weirdo creeps were just rejected somewhere along the way. Son of Sam or whatever his name is couldn't get a girl, so he went out and shot them. People who are in love never want to hurt anybody, you know that? It's only horny people who shoot people. If people get all the sex they can handle, they're so happy and content they just sit around and smile. I mean, you never feel aggressive just after you've gotten laid, right? Lots of sex for everybody, that's a solution to the world's problems.

PLAYBOY: Would the women agree?

TURNER: Hell, that's no problem, with the pill and all. If I'd known what I know now when I was in high school....

PLAYBOY: Didn't you attend all-boys schools?

TURNER: Yeah, I mean, I went to a regular grammar school in Cincinnati, but my family moved to Georgia when I was in the fifth grade. They put me in Georgia Military Academy outside Atlanta.

PLAYBOY: Was it rough?

TURNER: Yeah, it was rough. When we moved to Georgia, I was coming in as a Northerner. And we got here about six weeks after school started, so I was the last one in. The other kids, most of whom had been there from the first grade, delighted in beating up on the new kid.

PLAYBOY: What did you do?

TURNER: I could sense from the atmosphere that I was going to have to earn my own way. I was a pretty good fighter as a kid. There were four kids to a little room. And within the first 48 hours, I got in a fight with the biggest guy in the room and knocked the hell out of him. I sensed that if I didn't come out swinging, they were going to kill me. And that night, I said to my roommates, "Who's the boss in here?" Because I wanted to establish myself in the pecking order. So I had the other three guys going around saying I was the boss.

PLAYBOY: Did it work?

TURNER: There was one hitch. There was a little bathroom joining two dorm rooms, which really made eight of us in this little cell. So the next day, I went into the next room and said, "OK, I intend to be the boss in here, too." And that was a big mistake. All four of them jumped me at once. Three of them held me down while the other one kicked me in the head until I could barely

see. And then all seven of them ganged up on me and the whole dormitory joined in until they just about killed me. "I told you we weren't going to get into my sex life. Do you think I'm a dumb shit? Don't answer that."

PLAYBOY: You seem pretty Southern now; how long did they consider you a Yankee?

TURNER: I learned to become a Southerner fast. One time, a kid started a rumor that I had said that Robert E. Lee was a bad guy. At Georgia Military Academy in those days, nothing could be worse. They wore those Confederate-gray uniforms. I can remember about 40 kids running after me, saying, "Kill the Yankee bastard!"

PLAYBOY: Did the same thing happen when you went to McCallie School, the military high school from which you graduated in Chattanooga?

TURNER: Yeah, I had to go through the same thing all over again. I was the only seventh grader in a dorm full of eighth graders. They beat the hell out of me. There were no knives or anything, but it was just like West Side Story. Nothing can be crueller than little kids. It was like Lord of the Flies.

PLAYBOY: In view of that, why did you send your oldest son to the same school?

TURNER: Military school is good for boys. One of the good things is that everybody wears the same uniform, so there's no distinction as to class or anything. One kid doesn't have better clothes than another because he's from a wealthy family. Everything is equal. It's like being in the Army, which is the same deal. Everybody gets the same allowance, a buck a week or whatever it is. You've got to make it completely on your own; you have no advantages over anybody else. There are no rich kids. There are just kids.

PLAYBOY: Didn't you get into some trouble at Brown University, too?

TURNER: Yeah, I got suspended. I got suspended twice--the first time for having a girl in my room. And the second time, I don't remember.

PLAYBOY: What about your fraternity?

TURNER: Yep. Set their homecoming float on fire and got suspended from the fraternity, too.

PLAYBOY: Whatever your social life, somewhere along the line you became interested in history, in the classics.

TURNER: Yes. I always liked grandeur and tradition, glorious and beautiful things. As a kid, I was a little bit of an artist and a poet. I painted and sculpted a little, but it was too slow-moving for me to really get into. But the whole idea of grand things always turned me on. The grand idea of building the Parthenon. And it was a grand idea to build the Pyramids. I'm inspired by great works of the past and present. I like all that stuff. When I went to Paris, I saw the Louvre, you know, and I've been to Versailles.

PLAYBOY: When your father heard you were going to major in classics instead of business, he wrote you a long, scathing letter, calling you a classical snob and saying, "I think you are rapidly becoming a jackass."

TURNER: I was a jackass, sometimes. But one of the things I learned was that you have a limited amount of time to live, so you should make the most of it. "Ah, make the most of what we yet may spend, Before we too into the Dust descend; . . . Sans Wine, sans Song, sans Singer--sans End." Rubéiyét.

PLAYBOY: After college in Rhode Island, did you go to work for your father?

TURNER: Well, I was in the Coast Guard for six months first. Then I went into my father's outdoor-advertising business. I had been putting up billboards with a hammer in my hand every summer since I was about 12, anyway. One summer, my father started making me pay for my room and board at home. Charged me \$40 a month. When I complained, he suggested I look around town for something cheaper. So I stayed. But I admired my father a lot.

PLAYBOY: It wasn't long before you took over the company, right?

TURNER: That's right. My father committed suicide when I was 24 years old. Blew his brains out. I think he made the mistake of limiting his horizons. When he was a boy in Mississippi, he had told his mother that someday he would make \$1,000,000. And when he did that, he had nowhere to go from there. When he killed himself, he was extended for about \$5,000,000 or \$6,000,000 and had assets of only about \$2,000,000. But the situation was not hopeless.

PLAYBOY: How did you handle it?

TURNER: Well, just before he shot himself, he had actually sold the company. But I wanted to keep it. So I had to return the down payment, plus a penalty to the guys who had bought it, to annul the deal. Everybody said I was crazy. I could have taken that money and started something else. Those were very bad times in outdoor advertising. Television was killing billboards.

PLAYBOY: How did you survive?

TURNER: By hustling. We doubled our profits at a time when the industry went down 16 percent. But it's fun, too, getting up at five in the morning to get out and install a new sign before the traffic gets started. And painting billboards, you're Michelangelo in the Sistine Chapel, except that you don't have to work lying on your back. One night, the guys were doing this 50-foot billboard with the Coppertone girl stretched out across it, you know. So they just left off the bikini. Painted on tits and a nice bush at the right spot, see. But we made them dress her before it went out of the warehouse. After about four years in the business, I could have retired.

PLAYBOY: Why didn't you?

TURNER: I heard about a television station for sale. It was Channel 17, a U.H.F. independent in Atlanta. When I bought that, everybody just hooted at me. The station was really at death's door--we lost about \$2,000,000 in the first two years. I didn't bullshit anybody: I told them I didn't know anything about TV. But now we're socko. We've got all the reruns, all the sports in Atlanta and people love us. Our movie inventory includes about half of the 6000 or 7000 movies ever made. We even have news: It comes on at four in the morning. Our news director gets pies thrown in his face a lot.

PLAYBOY: What kind of news operation is that?

TURNER: It's great news! We tell about the boy scouts doing something good. What do you want, how many children got killed in a school-bus accident in Chile? The network news is just half an hour of gloom and doom, with a few sports scores interspersed. I don't think that's public service. The way they present the news, I think it does more damage than any entertainment program. How does I Love Lucy hurt anybody? Or the Saturday Georgia Championship Wrestling? You know, television news has done a tremendous amount to destroy our faith in our institutions. When I read a newspaper now, I flash through the headlines on the front page, where all the sensationalism is. I don't need that. Then I flip to the sports page, which I enjoy. Then I go to the business page, read that, and then I read the cartoons. If I have the time.

PLAYBOY: Does anybody watch your newscast at four in the morning?

TURNER: Well, we've got a 100 percent share of the audience. We're the only 24-hour-a-day station in Atlanta, so nobody else is on. That's when people who work in bars and things are getting off. They love it. Bill Tush, my low-budget Walter Cronkite, does funny things, like trying to get a head transplant. He held up Cronkite's picture in front of his face all through the broadcast one night. Some nights he just reads through the Associated Press wire. If he comes to a story he doesn't like, he'll say, "Oh, that's too awful, I'm not going to read that," and he'll throw the copy over his shoulder. They throw pies a lot, usually lemon meringue. We also do little three-minute news capsules in the afternoon, before the Mickey Mouse Club starts at three.

PLAYBOY: How do you know what people want to see?

TURNER: I looked at what other U.H.F. stations were doing and studied the rate books, dummy. It's tough for a little station to compete against the networks. We're a nitwork.

PLAYBOY: What else do you run on your station?

TURNER: Oh, Bonanza, Mission: Impossible, Star Trek, Night Gallery, The World at War--that's my favorite--and, of course, sports. Sports is what finally gave us respectability in Atlanta so we could get some of the big advertisers, like Delta Air Lines and Coke.

PLAYBOY: Aren't you trying to start a sports cable network?

TURNER: Yeah, WTCG is the first station in history with a satellite network. There wasn't a satellite earth station to transmit from Atlanta, so I am the first guy in the history of the world to own his own earth station. Bought it for \$750,000 from RCA. We lease it back to RCA and rent time on it. Our signal goes up 23,000 miles to a SATCOM II satellite--we have one of the 24 transponders on it--and can be received all over the United States, Canada and Hawaii. Channel 17 is on cable networks in 27 states already.

PLAYBOY: Is that how you followed the Braves while sailing in Newport?

TURNER: Yeah, I had to buy my own satellite receiver. That cost \$35,000. We set it up in the back yard at Conley Hall and ran a line up to the TV set in my room. I could watch the Braves playing anywhere in the country.

PLAYBOY: Was it difficult getting FCC permission to do that?

TURNER: The FCC had to change the rules a little bit. And now we've got everybody in the world suing us. The networks are scared to death of cable television and now that we're on satellite, they're really scared. We're sucking up the market. But NBC, ABC, CBS, the Motion Picture Association of America, the N.B.A., the baseball commissioner's office, the N.A.B., the BBC, the National Hockey League and an assortment of other people are trying to stop us. Can you imagine that? A little old raggedy station with 100 employees and a bunch of torn-up furniture is going to destroy television and cause the motion-picture industry to collapse! I'm going to run for President just to stay in business.

PLAYBOY: Is your station just a vehicle for escapism, then?

TURNER: People have been escaping for a long time. Remember Grimm's Fairy Tales and Aesop's Fables? Hansel and Gretel, Snow White? Gilligan's Island has been here for only 20 years. Give it 1000 years and I'll bet it is still running. What do you want? A system like in Russia, where they sit down and decide what everybody is going to see?

PLAYBOY: So you let the ratings decide?

TURNER: Not entirely. We put on some programs that we think it would be good for people to see, and they don't do well in the ratings. Like every Sunday at three in the morning. Nobody watches. It's like Playboy. I read the captions under the three pictures in the interview, then I look at the pictures and read the cartoons and jokes. I tried to read one of the interviews, but it was boring as shit. I consider myself fairly much of an intellectual and I haven't got time to read all that shit. It's just a bunch of fucking garbage. I'd rather watch Gilligan's Island.

PLAYBOY: We've been told you could be elected governor of Georgia if you ran. Do you believe that?

TURNER: I'll tell you one thing, I'm the only white man who could get every black vote in Atlanta. They love me here, because I don't go around acting like a millionaire.

PLAYBOY: Are you saying you might run?

TURNER: I haven't made up my mind yet. I've got to get the ball teams straightened out first. I've thought about being President, but I've got to do something else first--like be a governor or a Senator--to learn the job, just like I'm doing with baseball and basketball.

PLAYBOY: You think you could win a Presidential election?

TURNER: Sure, easier than any living man except Jimmy Carter. I can tell you a dozen reasons why.

PLAYBOY: We're listening.

TURNER: Number one is that I'm a good speaker. Number two, being in television, I know how to market things. Number three, the entire media force in America would be behind me, because I know people in the publishing business, in the broadcast business and I'm in outdoor advertising. And the media would love to have a guy who was pro media. Everybody's worried about having some guy like--what's his name?--Ralph Nader come in and do away with advertising or something like that. And I'm honest, that's the main thing. I don't need the job for the money. I wouldn't have to make any deals. I believe in advertising, I believe in America and I believe in people. The only thing that bothers me is it's such a hard job. It's almost like killing yourself. I felt like a politician last year.

PLAYBOY: How's that?

TURNER: Because I had to answer the same dumb-ass questions over and over again for every reporter, just like this interview. You know, "How do you feel about taxes?" "Well, I think taxes are too high."

PLAYBOY: Then you ask the questions and give the answers. We'll just sit back.

TURNER: Do you think I'm dumb? Don't answer that. You're a nice young man.

PLAYBOY: You never seem to come up speechless.

TURNER: Talking I can do on my death-bed.

PLAYBOY: What kind of politician would you be?

TURNER: I'm conservative fiscally and a liberal socially. I'd take care of welfare by making everybody work who could. Some hard labor, like digging ditches, for the minimum wage.

PLAYBOY: Why hard labor?

TURNER: Because they would hate it so much that they would go out and find some easier job for more money. Like working at McDonald's: \$2.65 an hour and all the Big Macs you can eat. I think McDonald's is great.

PLAYBOY: You said the blacks would vote for you. You grew up in the segregated South. What are your feelings on race?

TURNER: No problem. Only difference I can tell on my ball team is that some of the guys have better suntans. I went to school with black kids when I lived in Cincinnati. And we have a black man, Jimmy Brown, living in our own home. He lived in my dad's home and raised me and now he lives with me. He helps around the house.

PLAYBOY: But you're a member of the Capital City Club, which is well-known for its antiblack, anti-Jewish policy.

TURNER: I joined it about nine years ago so I would have a downtown luncheon club. And so my wife could take the kids swimming during the summer at their country club.

PLAYBOY: When Bert Lance was nominated as Carter's budget director, he had to resign from that club because of the policy. Haven't you felt that to be necessary?

TURNER: If I thought it would do any good for me to resign, I would do it right now. But I think it is better to be on the inside trying to get change. "I'll keep sailing for the same reason I always did: I enjoy it. Sailing is like screwing--you can never get enough."

PLAYBOY: How do you feel about the South today?

TURNER: I like the weather and I like the romance. I like the romance of the Confederacy, you know, going down against overwhelming odds. I liked Rhett Butler in *Gone with the Wind*, because he was trying to help a lost cause. Like when I bought the Atlanta Hawks.

PLAYBOY: You still love history?

TURNER: Yeah, mostly military history. As much as I hate war now, I was basically a warrior. I was reading about war all the time as a kid. Fighting and soldiers and all that stuff. What I wanted to be was Horatio, Admiral Nelson, Napoleon, Alexander the Great and Pericles; they were the greatest warriors.

PLAYBOY: Why did you like it so much?

TURNER: In the past, war was a lot of fun. You know, rape and plunder, kill and steal. There weren't enough women to go around, because they died early, so you grabbed the other guy's women, sold his children into slavery and killed the soldiers. Used to go home and have a big parade. Glorious, you know. Now war is finished.

PLAYBOY: What do you mean?

TURNER: It's no longer fun. The weapons are too sophisticated. It's not men leading the fleet into battle or running up the flags, you know. Back in the old days, when they didn't have professional sporting events, war was sport, like gladiators killing each other. You know who was the original rookie of the year? David, when he went out against Goliath.

PLAYBOY: Was winning the America's Cup like being Admiral Nelson?

TURNER: Absolutely. When we were out there racing, it was to the death. That's one of the things I like about it. Like, if you'd had guns on the boats, you'd be trying to blow each other out of the water. And when it's over, you go out and have a beer together. That's the way it was in World War One; the pilots used to wave at each other. And if a guy on the other side hit something good, they'd send him a telegram. During the War between the States, they used to have flags of truce on Christmas Day and they'd mingle and have Christmas dinner. The next day, they would call off the war for a day.

Conquest is full of beans. Every country is overpopulated. The only places that are worth conquering are the Arab countries, because they've got plenty of oil. And not much in the way of liabilities, because they've just a few people going around on camels and stuff, except for the ones driving Cadillacs. But that's not an awful lot of people to support.

PLAYBOY: You mean if you went into politics, you'd advocate taking over the Mideast?

TURNER: Not really. But if we were going to do it, the way to do it would be the same way the Russians and the Germans did in Poland. If we absolutely had to do it because we were getting ripped off too much, the thing would be to make a deal with the Russians where you split it down the middle. And you would put all the names of the Arab countries in a hat and pull them out. "You get Saudi Arabia, I get Syria"--you know, like Hitler and Stalin did over in Poland. But I don't think that's necessary--if the Arabs aren't too greedy. As long as we don't end up working for the Arabs.

Anyway, I am absolutely positive that no matter how much we let our defenses down, there is no possibility of a Russian attack on us before 1980. And I'm the only guy who knows it.

PLAYBOY: How do you know that?

TURNER: Because the 1980 Olympics are scheduled for Moscow, and even Hitler didn't start a war until after the 1936 Berlin Olympics. They don't want to screw up the Olympics. First of all, they're getting \$200,000,000 from NBC, and Commies love money more than anybody I ever saw. And they want the glory of it. They want peace, because you can't have the Olympics during war.

PLAYBOY: Are you at peace?

TURNER: I consider myself the luckiest man in the world. I've achieved everything I've set out to achieve. Except to make my ball clubs winners. I'm going to dedicate the rest of my life to doing what I can for the rest of the world. You know, one area where we've really failed in American society is that we've conned everybody into thinking that if you're rich, you're going to be happy. Every television commercial tells you that if you just get this new Cadillac or this new Toyota, you're going to be happy. Our communications media, which are supported by advertising, tell you that if you get a certain thing, you'll be happy. Like making kids want a GI Joe doll. Fifteen minutes after they've got it, the kids forget about it. It's a rip-off.

PLAYBOY: That's what made you a millionaire. Do you feel guilty?

TURNER: I don't feel guilty, because every intelligent person realizes what advertising is, right? And it keeps the wheels rolling; it gives us a variety of choices. So many creative minds are in advertising: Some of the stuff is super. Like, I mean, I just changed from Old Spice to Mennen Speed Stick. Man, it was great. Instead of going around like, squirt, squirt, squirt, now I can fix my underarms in two strokes.

PLAYBOY: How much money do you need to stay happy?

TURNER: Not much. Just give me an old 12-meter sailboat and a couple of movie starlets, a house in the suburbs and a television station and I can get by on one sirloin strip at a time, or a two-and-a-quarter-pound lobster, plus a couple hundred thou in the bank.

PLAYBOY: Sounds like wealth is the way to joy, then.

TURNER: I've seen very, very poor people who were happy and very, very wealthy people who were miserable. I mean, you have to realize how lucky you are that you weren't born a mosquito. Not to mention people--a black guy wonders, Why wasn't I born white? Or a guy from India says, Why wasn't I born an American? But you're still better off than a mosquito, 'cause it lives only one summer and gets swatted at every time it gets a bite to eat.

PLAYBOY: You turn out to be quite a philosopher.

TURNER: Well, at least I know the meaning of life.

PLAYBOY: We're waiting.

TURNER: Man is put on earth for one reason alone, and that's to reproduce. As soon as we do, we start dying. Life is one great big endless circle. You know that song, "We're here because we're here because we're here"? Who was the wisest man ever? Socrates, right? He said, "All I know is that I know nothing." Which is pretty heavy. It's a shattering thought.

PLAYBOY: You mentioned Aesop's Fables earlier. Do you have any favorites?

TURNER: I love them all. They may seem a little silly, but they contain some of the greatest wisdom. Zillions of them pertain to my life. Like the tortoise and the hare. The tortoise beat the hare because he stayed in there plugging, while the rabbit took a nap because he had gotten so far out in front. I didn't go to Harvard. They wrote back and said I wasn't Harvard material. I had to struggle to make the top percentage of my class. I'm smarter than the average, but I know exactly how smart I am.

PLAYBOY: How smart?

TURNER: The highest I ever did on an I.Q. test was 128, but I have some 115s, too. That puts me in the 95th to 97th percentile.

PLAYBOY: That's not too bad.

TURNER: There's probably no one my age who has been as successful as I have. I've been on the accelerated program in life. At 24, I was running my own company. I was the youngest member of my Rotary Club by seven years. I mean, usually guys are about 35 before they become vice-president or general manager or something. There are certainly people my age who have made more money. And there are better sailors than I am, but not many. And there's nobody who's made as much money and is as good a sailor as I am. In other words, I may not be the best hitter in the league, but there aren't many better. And I may not be the best fielder, but there are not many better. I'm not the fastest man in the league, but I'm one of the fastest. But if you add them all together, I'm an all-star, right? Because if you judge me in three or four categories, I win. That's strong.

PLAYBOY: Is this what you wanted in life?

TURNER: I told you, I'm happy wherever I am. You have to play the game with the cards you got. Actually, I would like to have been an explorer, like Captain Cook. I'd like to go all the way up the Amazon River.

PLAYBOY: What will you do next?

TURNER: I don't know what the hell I'm doing. I'm doing too many things. I'll tell you that. It's so easy to get me enthusiastic about something. But I know one thing: I'm going to keep sailing. I'll keep sailing for the same reason I always did: I enjoy it. Sailing is like screwing--you can never get enough.