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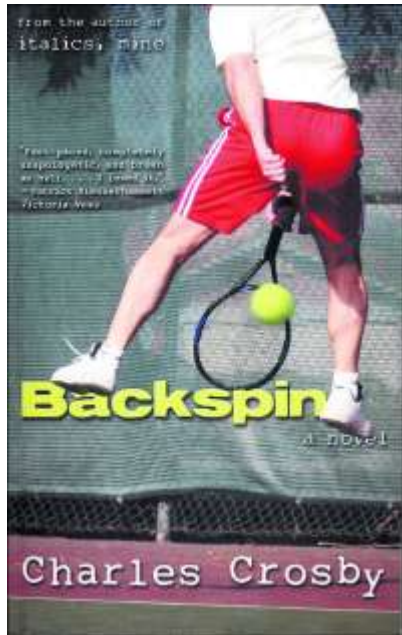
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Age shouldn't matter, novel says

By ELIZABETH PATTERSON
Sun. Mar 30 - 7:27 AM



Backspin by Charles Crosby (Now or Never Publishing, 262 pages, \$19.95)

We've heard it all before. You can become anything you want.

You must hold on to your dreams.

Never give up.

No one likes a quitter.

Now let's say you actually believe all that.

You have the desire, the hard goals and the talent to succeed. You don't want to do anything else and you don't know how to do anything else.

Yet, it's just not happening. Maybe because you're getting a little old. After all, who hasn't rolled their eyes at the 50-year-old who still wants to become a rock star. Or, the athlete who just refuses to give up even though he is, gulp, all of 31.

Yet, why shouldn't a 50-year-old become a rock star? Why can't a 30-year-old compete on Canadian Idol or be taken seriously in the world of competitive sports?

Why does the world on the one hand feed us a line about never giving up on your dreams but then puts an age limit on those same dreams?

Backspin by Charles Crosby takes a look at what happens to one man, Olie Wood, who blossomed in his teens into a tennis prodigy and who un-blossoms just as quickly, with some of the worst luck imaginable.

Now in his 30s, he just keeps playing, even when his life and seemingly, his abilities, hit rock bottom. At first, Wood is an unlikable character — he'll do just about anything for a buck. Yet, for the most part, he is driven by desperation and the simple need to keep going.

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"He's been reduced to little more than his lower functions," says Nova Scotia author Charles Crosby.

"He eats, he sleeps, he plays, he screws. He just keeps plowing ahead because he doesn't know what else to do. It's keep moving or, at least metaphorically, die. His life hasn't gone anywhere near where he expected or hoped it would and he holds out this tiny idea that things will work out for him if he just keeps moving, just keeps scrabbling forward.

"And he's so narrowly focused on this goal that nothing gets in his way; he may be slowed by losing a body part or two, or by a mugging at the hands of a gang of little girls, or by his capture by a Portuguese terror cell, but nothing completely stops him."

By the end of the book, you can't help but cheer Olie on when he finally gets a break.

If you have ever had a spate of bad luck that just refuses to go away, you will identify with this character.

Crosby admits the book is a reaction towards our society's love affair with youth.

"Absolutely. I was closer to his age when I started writing the book and I felt it myself. The youth culture dominates so much these days that someone Olie's age suddenly finds themselves falling into this no-man's land, neither truly old nor a kid anymore. More specific to sports (and tennis in particular), we see it almost to a hysterical degree.

"Roger Federer, the number one tennis player in the world is 26 and I've been hearing since late last year about how he's 'aging' and in the 'twilight of his career.' It's become truly ridiculous."

Backspin is Crosby's second novel. His first, *mine*, was shortlisted for the Margaret and John Savage First Book Award. He has also written numerous plays and is already working on his third novel.

"I am about two-thirds through my next book, *Monsters in Suburbia*, which is about a mid-30s urban professional who moves to the Halifax suburbs, and is utterly miserable. He starts to think he's seeing very strange and unsettling things from the neighbours. I'm also just finishing a new play called *A Box, a Bag and a Bottle*, which we will stage in Halifax this fall."

Crosby plans to keep writing and keep proving you're never too old to tell a story — even one that thumbs its nose at youth.

Elizabeth Patterson is a freelance writer in Sydney.

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