

SPORTLIGHT

**RADIO SCRIPTS
FOR
“ONLY A GAME”
BY
RICK NORMAN
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GYM CLASS

The great twentieth-century philosopher, Woody Allen, once said: "Those who can-do; those who can't do-teach; those who can't teach-teach gym. Coach Mac taught gym at my junior high. He had the kind of big red nose you don't get from drinking buttermilk and kept his hands jammed in his pockets, which habit was the subject of many a crude innuendo among us pimply faced kids. To us, in a word, he was a joke. His coaching consisted of handing us a ball and telling us to go play. He was the first grownup we openly ridiculed. He must have heard what we were saying about him but he never did retaliate.

Coach Mac was from my father's generation. Unlike my generation that has never missed a meal or my son's generation that has never missed a movie, Coach Mac suffered through a depression and a world war. Recently, I read his obituary, and found out Coach Mac had himself fought bravely in Europe and had liberated a concentration camp. But in Junior High, the only history is ancient history. We lived in the present and Coach Mac had obviously perished in the past.

Almost daily, some of the older guys who had been in his P.E. classes in years past would speed down the road next to the practice field, honking the horn, bare bottoms sticking out of the windows, in an act of cowardly defiance directed at Coach

Mac. But he was always strangely unaffected. He would smile and wave and say the same thing: "Some of my former students. They have gotten much better looking since they were in my class."

I only saw Coach Mac lose his cool once. One day after gym class, he summoned me to his office. When I shuffled in, he pointed at my book sack with a shaky trigger finger. Months before I had been doodling like kids do and had innocently drawn a couple of Swastikas on it. He asked me slowly, unbelievably: "Son, do you know what that means?" I only knew it was what the Germans had put on their planes a long time ago. I didn't know it meant anything. I swore to him I didn't. He stared into my soul for a long time, like he must have stared into the ovens at Buchenwald, looking for an explanation. But there was none. Finally, he said: "Okay Norman, see you tomorrow." When I walked out I glanced back over my shoulder. He was looking down at his hands, watching them shake.

It took twenty-five years and an obituary but I finally learned something from gym class.

RADIO FLYER

In 1970, I learned several of life's main-most lessons during my first high school football game and, incidentally, introduced electronics to football long before helmet cameras and two-way radios.

I was a wide receiver known for my deceptive speed. Deceptive because it puzzled everyone why I couldn't run any faster. I had been told up front by our coach not to expect to play much that year, but I was allowed to suit up for the game. The mere fact that I was listed as a wide receiver in the program, endowed me, in my own mind at least, with an aura of speed that had me more excited that fall night than all my Christmases combined.

Our games were broadcast by the local radio station. Wanting to experience my first game as fully as my senses would allow, I taped my transistor radio up under my shoulder pads, ran the ear plug into my helmet, and reveled in the play-by-play, the smell of a mild September night, and the feel of a real, high school football uniform.

I was up on Mount Olympus. That is, until the 4th quarter, when out of my unplugged ear I heard coach screaming my name. I didn't even have time to disconnect my radio before he was

shoving me out onto the field, telling me to tell our quarterback to run a certain pass play.

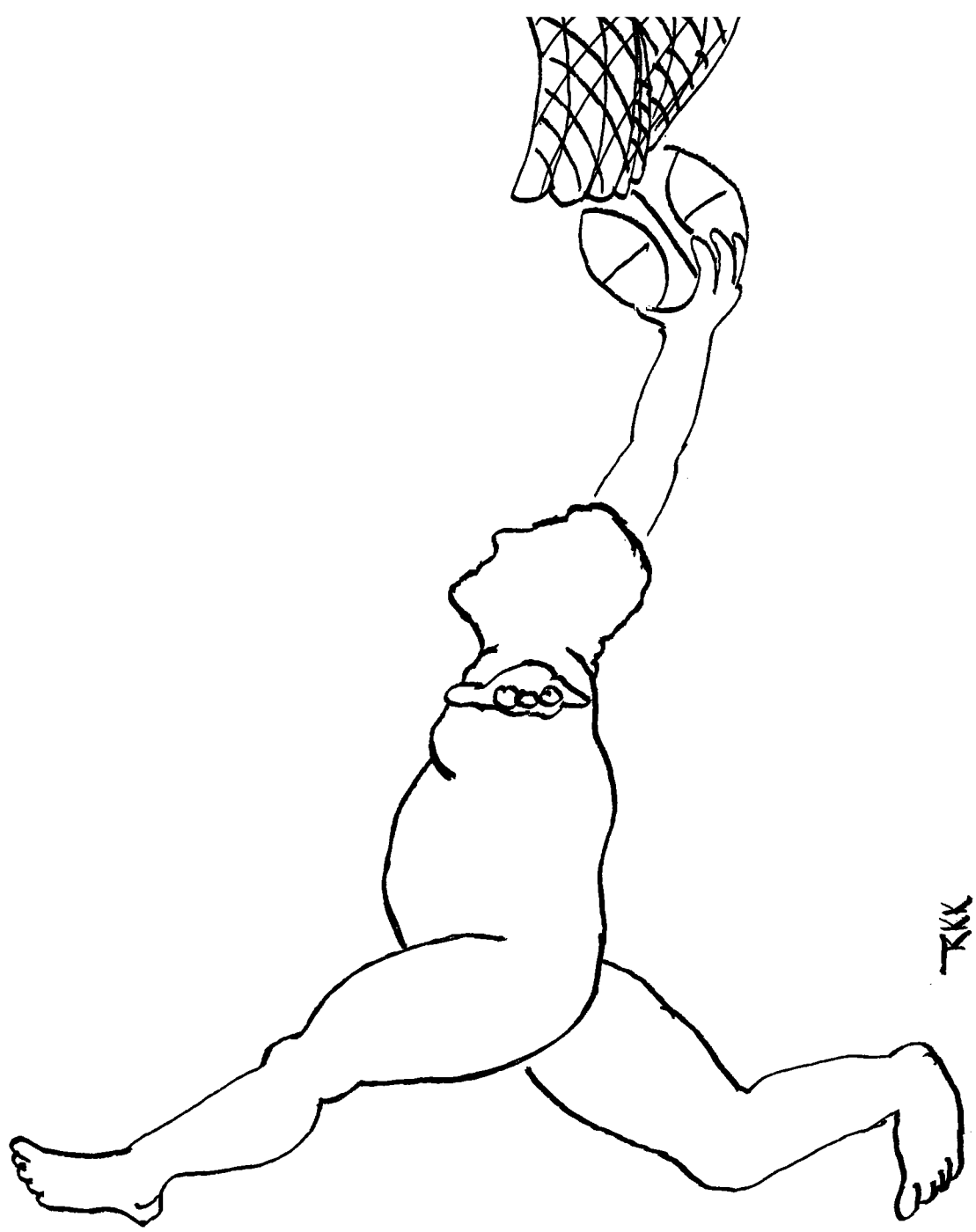
As I ran toward the huddle, I noticed I was virtually gliding above the turf. I was Mercury, the winged messenger. Through my earplug, I heard the radio announcer, who was taking a little theatrical license here, say excitedly: "Norman's now in at wide receiver. They need a quick touchdown to get back in this game and they're putting all the speed they can into lineup." A real radio announcer mentioning my name in the same sentence as the word "speed" was the pinnacle of my young life.

I was now a Minute Man missile ready to launch. It was all I could do to keep still at the line of scrimmage and wait for the quarterback's countdown. At the snap, I blasted off the line and into the trajectory of a deep fly route, the chalk hash-marks passing under me like runway lights. I heard the announcer scream, "Womack's gonna throw, he's got somebody open long!" I pumped even harder. I was running faster than I ever imagined, listening out of one ear to the roar of the crowd and out of the other ear for the announcer to tell me how the play turned out.

Then, I was knocked off course by a sharp blow to the helmet and my radio went dead. I throttled back and went to visual. I was in the end zone, miles from the nearest defender, the football rolling near my feet. I'd been so enraptured with

the exhilaration of my acceleration, I never thought to look back for the pass, which had hit me square in the head. As I attempted to taxi back to the bench, coach grabbed me. I half expected him to rub my head and say: "You'll get them next time, tiger." But coach lived in the real world. He barked: "Norman, there ain't no second chances."

So what I learned that night was this: (1) there ain't no place to hide on a football field; (2) electronics and sports don't mix: and (3) though you can enjoy the radio all your life, a football career is fleeting.



BIG ROYALTIES

I'm at home the other night watching an NBA game. It's a close game, which is good except that in the NBA they let you save your timeouts from season to season, which means in the last two minutes of play you've got to suffer through two dozen sneaker commercials.

On this one commercial, Shaquille's mamma or somebody holds up a basketball shoe the size of a bass boat and declares: "It must be the shoes." I jumped off the couch and kicked at the dog. "Wait a minute!" I screamed, "That's my slogan." I came up with that slogan in 1970, the same day my buddy Steve Kirsch and I introduced America to the designer basketball shoe. Remember now, I'm talking 25 years ago when your only choice was between white Converse All-stars and black converse All-stars. Me and Steve changed that, and basketball, forever.

It was the last game of our Junior Varsity season. I was the small, quick kid who couldn't do anything but hustle and he was the tall, skinny kid with glasses thick enough to see into the future. We'd been riding the pine all season and we knew that unless God dropped everything else He was doing during the off season and concentrated exclusively on us, this would be our last organized basketball game.

Steve had forgotten his size 16 Converse at home but, since he hadn't crossed the inbound line all season, he decided to make do with his school shoes, a pair of landing-gear size, brown wing tips.

My fashion statement was less of an accident. That year all the popular kids, which group didn't by any stretch of the definition include me or Steve, they were all wearing a new shoe called the Adidas Rom, which looked like a track shoe. For me, who prided myself on my unimpressive speed, these shoes were beautiful beyond description. But expensive.

Unable to afford Adidas Roms, I did the next best thing and unscrewed the metal spikes from my track cleats and wore them to the game. The problem was that the bottoms were made of hard plastic and during the pre-game lay-ups I got about as much traction as a mule on a frozen lake. Luckily our warm-ups, which me and Steve expected never to have to shed, hid our innovative fashion statements from coach and the near capacity grandstands.

Unfortunately however, this being the last game, coach felt obliged to play everyone. So in the 4th quarter, he called my name and kept calling it until I had no choice but to go out on the court, which I did gingerly like I was walking into a mine field.

The ball was inbounded and everyone ran down to the other end of the court. Everyone, that is, except me. I was stranded, my track shoes making a click, click, click, click sound on the hardwood as I ran in place. Coach blew a head gasket, ran out on the court and dragged me off, screaming for Steve to go in for me. As Steve shucked his warm-ups and stood up, his wing tips made it look like he was standing, not on human legs, but on two giant plumber's helpers. I heard some wise guy behind us crack: "Houston, the eagle has landed."

Steve's playing time was even shorter than mine. He hadn't made it out on the court 10 feet before the laughing and pointing reached unacceptable levels and coach summoned him back to the bench. As he came and sat back next to me, I put my arm around him and said: "It must be the shoes."

You know, somebody probably owes me some royalties. Heaven knows I'm due something.

PEP THIS

The next time you watch an NBA game, pay attention late in the game when the coach gathers his players around him for a last minute pep talk. All eyes will be on the coach except there is usually one player who is just looking around. This is the guy I identify with. Like me, he's a skeptic.

The last time I swallowed a pep talk hook, line and sinker was the summer I turned 8 years old. An old couple moved in down the street and brought with them a Boxer that made the Hound of the Baskervilles look like Benjy. I went from staying outside from can-see to can't see to hiding inside and helping my sister cut out clothes for her paper dolls.

When I finally confessed to my mother that my sudden interest in dolls was due to the fact there was a child-eating hound roaming the neighborhood, she sat me down and gave me a long pep talk. She said this dog wasn't baring his teeth at me, he was just communicating with me. So, against my better judgment, I let her talk me into venturing outside. I made it half-way across the street when the death hound appeared from behind a parked car. He grinned at me. After a brief loss of all muscular control, I broke towards the nearest street light and was two shimmies up the pole when the dog communicated through the back of my pants.

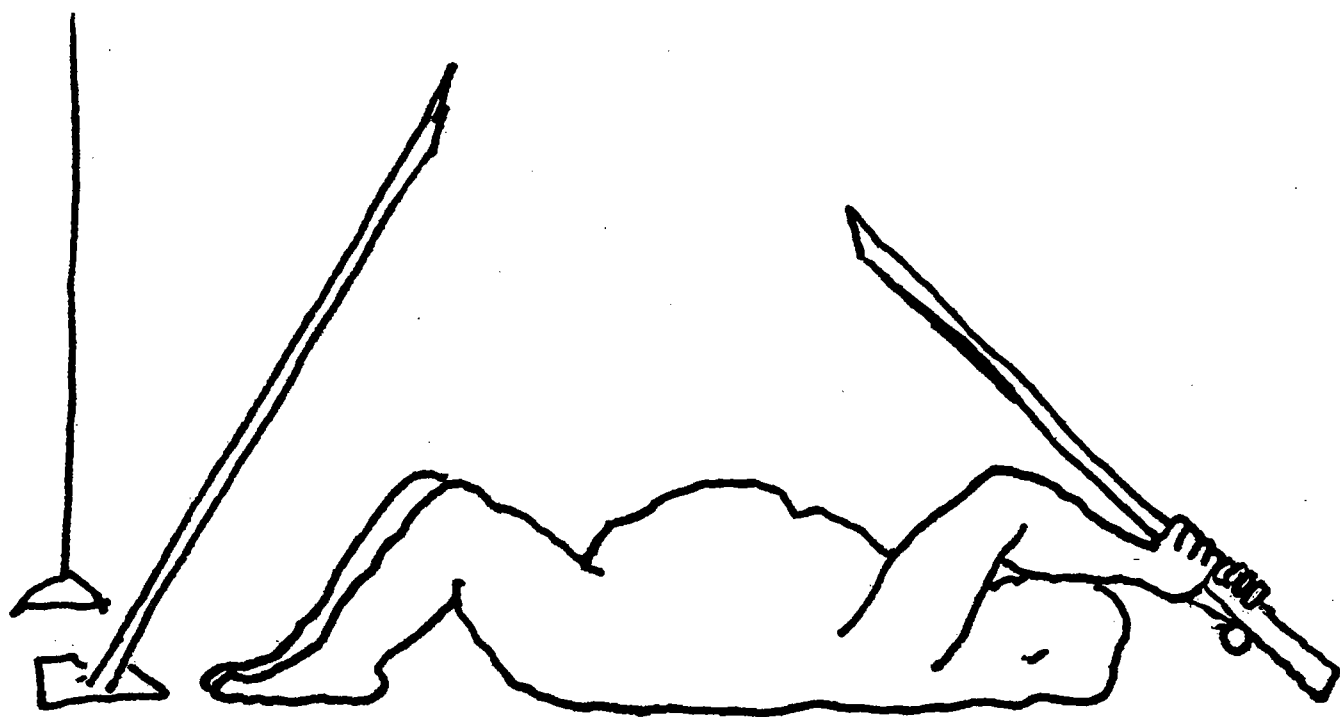
So the next time you see that player looking around during the coach's pep talk, don't be too critical. He is not being disrespectful to the coach. For some reason, probably deeply imbedded in his childhood, he's wary of pep talks. He may even be on the lookout for dogs.

HUNTING LESSON

High school is a time where you learn to distinguish beneficial behavior from detrimental behavior. Many lessons are learned the hard way. Most of mine were.

The week before a big game with our cross-town rival was filled with good natured pranks traded between the two schools. The pranks escalated as game day grew closer but they were generally on an acceptable level. I got caught up in the exchange and because of my immature judgment, crossed way over the line with, let me just call it, a thermonuclear prank.

I did not become the big man on campus as I had hoped, but instead found myself grabbing my ankles in the coach's office. Before he drove home his point with several expertly placed paddle strokes, he said something that we'd all do well to remember. "Son" he said, "if you're going bear hunting there ain't no sense in doing anything ahead of time to get the bear angry."



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INVOLUNTARY ISOMETRICS

Like most people, I blame television for my shabby physique. As a child, I was well on my way to becoming a regular Arnold Schwarzenegger when television ended my body building career. I had started working out that summer in a gym run by a fellow that had a 30 minute show on local TV on Saturday morning before the game of the week. He'd set up a few weight stations in the studio and the camera would follow him from one station to another letting us kids demonstrate the proper way to do exercises.

On this particular Saturday, I had been selected to demonstrate the proper way of doing a chin-up. Everyone I knew was tuned in to watch my television debut. However, the chin-up bar was at the far end of the line and the show ended before I got to exhibit my technique. I was crushed.

But all was not lost. For the last 60 seconds of the show while they ran the credits, the camera would pan across all the exercise stations as all us boys did our particular exercises. When the cue was given, I started doing chin-ups like a tractor piston. As the camera panned across toward my station, it failed to telecast any of the 99 chin-ups I did in about forty seconds. By the time the camera finally focused on me, I didn't have another chin-up left. For the last twenty seconds of the

show, the image broadcast was me stuck somewhere between one-half and three-quarters of a chin-up, my legs twitching in the air like a hanged man dancing at the end of a rope.

I made the decision then and there that radio would be my electronic medium of choice.

SCIENCE DOCTOR

NORMAN: We are here today at Spring Mesa Vo-Tec to ask your questions to the Sports Science Doctor. Good afternoon, Doctor.

DOCTOR: A scientific good afternoon to you, Rick.

NORMAN: Are you ready for your first question?

DOCTOR: The scientific truth will set you free.

NORMAN: O.K. A listener from Duckling, Michigan asks: "Why does a curveball curve?"

DOCTOR: Let me take this opportunity to dispel an old wive's tale. A curveball does not really curve. It is an optical illusion caused by the rotation of the laces. You can prove this at home. Try throwing a curve with a ball without laces. It can't be done.

NORMAN: Well, then there are a lot of major league players getting paid good money for throwing optical illusions.

DOCTOR: Nevertheless, science is science.

NORMAN: Well, it's hard to argue with that. Next question, from a teenager in Little Rock: "Dear Sports Science Doctor: My dad says the old straight ahead field goal kickers were better than the soccer style kickers and that the soccer style kickers have ruined pro football

by introducing foreigners into an American game. I say my dad is deranged. Who is right?"

DOCTOR: Deranged or not, your dad is scientifically correct. The old fashioned, George Blanda style straight-ahead kickers were more accurate and less genetically contaminated.

NORMAN: If that were the case doctor, why aren't there any straight-ahead kickers in college or the NFL today?

DOCTOR: Two scientific reasons. First, the Rawlings square-toed cleat factory burned mysteriously in 1971. Second, about the same time Richard Nixon increased the immigration quota from Eastern Europe. The conclusion is inescapable.

NORMAN: Those don't sound like very scientific reasons to me.

DOCTOR: Are you a doctor?

NORMAN: No. Last question. This comes from a listener in Denver. He asks: "In the 1976 Mexico City Olympics, Bob Beamon broke the broad jump record by two feet. How did the thin air in Mexico City affect the jump?"

DOCTOR: Actually, it is well-known that Mexico City has some of the thickest air in the Southern Hemisphere. No, the reason Bob Beamon broke the record was simply because he was able to stay airborne longer, thus giving the earth time to rotate just a little farther

under him. To fully explain this scientific phenomenon I would have to get into Einstein's Theory of Special Relatives. I'm afraid that is beyond your radio audience.

NORMAN: I'm afraid it may be beyond a lot of people. You don't happen to have your doctorate diploma handy? I believe you; I'd just like to see it.

DOCTOR: As I told your people when they interviewed me for this job, my undergraduate degree is in air conditioning maintenance. That is what I teach here at Spring Mesa Vo-Tec. I am fully tenured. I have a doctorate from the University of World Experience. That's a home study course out of the Lesser Antilles.

NORMAN: Thank you, doctor. You have explained a lot here today. This is Rick Norman signing off.

SWING LOW

I just found out something that, had I learned it in school when I was supposed to, it would have made a tremendous difference in my life. I might even be playing pro baseball today. And like most things that matter, this fact is relatively simple, yet it explains so much.

The fact is that our planet earth, as we speak, is spinning on its axis at 1,000 mph. That's right. And at the same time, we're circling around the sun at 18-½ miles per second. The sun, and us along with it, is traveling through curved space toward the star Vega at 12 miles per second, while us and everything we can see in the sky is swinging around the Milky Way at 150 miles per second.

All this spinning, spiraling, whirling and swirling not only explains why I never could hit a curveball, but I now know why when I played golf, I couldn't hit nothing but curve balls. No one ever told me you had to adjust for the earth's gyrations.

Kids, let that be a lesson to you. Not only is knowledge power, but it can help you hit for average.

So keep your eye on the ball sure, but you might also wanna swing a little low and toward the star Vega.

VIOLENCE IN SPORTS (3 STOOGES STYLE)

Just a while back I was watching one of those TV shows where several calm, well-dressed people start out speaking like they're smart and end up yelling at each other like little league parents in a close game. They were discussing why kids seem to be more violent nowadays than thirty or forty years ago. One reason they came up with was that sports are so much more violent now than they were then.

I wanted to tell the distinguished panel that on that particular subject they did not know their shoes from shinola. I grew up thirty or forty years ago and if I didn't turn out to be a mass murderer, it ain't because sports were kindlier and gentler.

A typical fall weekend for us kids would start with the Friday night fights. My first paying job was fetching beers out of the refrigerator for my dad and his friends for a penny a piece. They watched the fights, not for boxing technique, but strictly for the knockouts.

We would wake up early on Saturday morning to watch the Three Stooges hit each other in the head with pick axes and shoot each other in the rear end with arrows, shotguns and other small arms.

Saturday afternoon might bring a TV hockey game with my favorite, a close-up of a toothless goalie. We knew he didn't lose those teeth eating Wheaties.

On Saturday night, our boy scout troop would usher at Louisiana State University football games. At that time, distilled spirits flowed freely in the stands and we were disappointed if we didn't see two or three good fistfights amongst Tiger fans unable to resolve their differences peacefully.

On Sunday we'd rush home after church so as not to miss the kickoff of the NFL game of the week. One of my most vivid childhood memories was seeing Sam Huff, linebacker for the New York Giants, beat an opposing lineman senseless by wielding his helmet like a club.

The panel was wrong in saying that sports were less violent in the past. These talk shows should be taken right off the air or, if not, they should at least get better guests. I wonder what Sam Huff is doing these days?

MR. FUNGO

NORMAN: We're here today at the county little league park to talk with Mr. Fungo. He is putting on a hitting exhibition for the kids today.

(crack)

FUNGO: (to kids in field) Stay down on it!

NORMAN: Mr. Fungo, let me interrupt...

FUNGO: Sure.

NORMAN: Wait! Hold the bat still for a second.

FUNGO: Sure.

NORMAN: Mr. Fungo, our radio audience is curious about why an elderly man such as yourself would travel around the country hitting fly balls and grounders to the kids.

FUNGO: Simple, Rick. I love the kids. I love the game.

(crack)

FUNGO: (to kids in field) Pee Wee Reese never ran away from a grounder in his life.

NORMAN: Pee Wee Reese never saw a grounder hit that hard.

FUNGO: You got to stay down on them.

NORMAN: Are you paid for your appearances, Mr. Fungo?

FUNGO: I donate my time. Sometimes I get my expenses. Watch this. (to kids in field) Outfield, look alive!

(crack)

NORMAN: Whoa -- that's a major league fly...He doesn't see it
-- watch.

(distant scream)

FUNGO: Nailed him! (to kid in field) Use your glove next
time. (to Norman) I do birthday parties, too.

NORMAN: Next time I have a piñata party I'll keep you in mind.
Back to you, Bill.

KILL DA BUM

NORMAN: It's not unusual to be interviewing one of our professional players from jail. But tonight, we're here at the county lockup to talk to a grandmother, Mrs. Ruth Waters.

WATERS: I've never been so embarrassed in all my 85 years.

NORMAN: Everyone at the game tonight saw you being handcuffed in the stands there in left field. What happened?

WATERS: When the home plate umpire blew that third strike call, Grace and I yelled, "Kill da bum." Next thing I knew the swat team was frisking me.

NORMAN: Well, you know these days the security people can't be too careful.

WATERS: When I was a kid, we always yelled "kill da bum" at the umpire. It was like yelling "Indians." Seldom was anyone serious.

NORMAN: Yes, but regardless of what you may have intended or not intended, you did incite violence.

WATERS: I can't believe anyone would think I would kill an umpire. I was up in the mezzanine section for heaven's sake.

NORMAN: What did you think when the swat team repelled down into the mezzanine from the upper deck?

WATERS: I turned to Grace and said, "Ain't this some (bleep)?"

NORMAN: Why didn't they arrest Grace also? She was yelling the same thing.

WATERS: The strip search didn't reveal her to have a dangerous weapon.

NORMAN: Granny, were you packin'?

WATERS: I happened to have in my purse my extra set of dentures.

NORMAN: Well, mother, what are you going to do? No offense, but even a short sentence might be a life sentence for someone your age.

WATERS: Don't I know it. Me and some of the boys here are going to bust out of this joint.

NORMAN: Well, good luck. There you have it. Another sad example of our troubled elderly generation and the violence caused by growing up without television.

BEAT UP FAN

NORMAN: I'm speaking with Wallace Waldermeir who, this week, filed a multi-million dollar civil law suit against Joe Joe Wilson, all-star outfielder for the Boston Red Sox.

Good afternoon, Mr. Waldermeir.

WALDERMEIR: Nice to talk with you, Mr. Norman.

NORMAN: Tell our listeners about your lawsuit.

WALDERMEIR: Well, I'm very excited about it. I'm currently between jobs so to speak and 75 million dollars would certainly help with the bills.

NORMAN: I'll bet. For the few people in our radio audience who may not have heard, your lawsuit alleges that Joe Joe Wilson punched you in the nose last week in a local Chinese restaurant.

WALDERMEIR: That's right, right in the nose. You can see if I take the bandage off, it looks like a hood ornament.

NORMAN: That's okay, Mr. Waldermeir, this is radio.

WALDERMEIR: All I done was ask Joe Joe for his autograph.

NORMAN: Well, that is certainly a request that a local sports hero like Joe Joe should expect. What did he say?

WALDERMEIR: He said after he finished eating, he would gladly oblige.

NORMAN: That seems like a positive response. When did things turn nasty?

WALDERMEIR: Well, the restaurant manager had suggested a little earlier that I leave the restaurant claiming that I was being generally obnoxious. Since I was on my way out, I really didn't have the time to wait for Joe Joe to finish eating. And his girlfriend was taking her sweet time with her food. I asked her, "Hey baby, you gonna push those snow peas around your plate all night, or what?"

NORMAN: Then he punched you?

WALDERMEIR: No, first he warned me that the next thing I ate off his girlfriend's plate I would probably never get the chance to swallow. So I said, "She's not your girlfriend. She's my girlfriend."

NORMAN: Was that true, Mr. Waldermeir?

WALDERMEIR: No. I didn't know her. But it seemed like a clever thing to say at the time.

NORMAN: So then he hit you?

WALDERMEIR: Like a jackhammer.

NORMAN: Did you see a doctor that night?

WALDERMEIR: No, but I did the next morning after I met with several excellent lawyers.

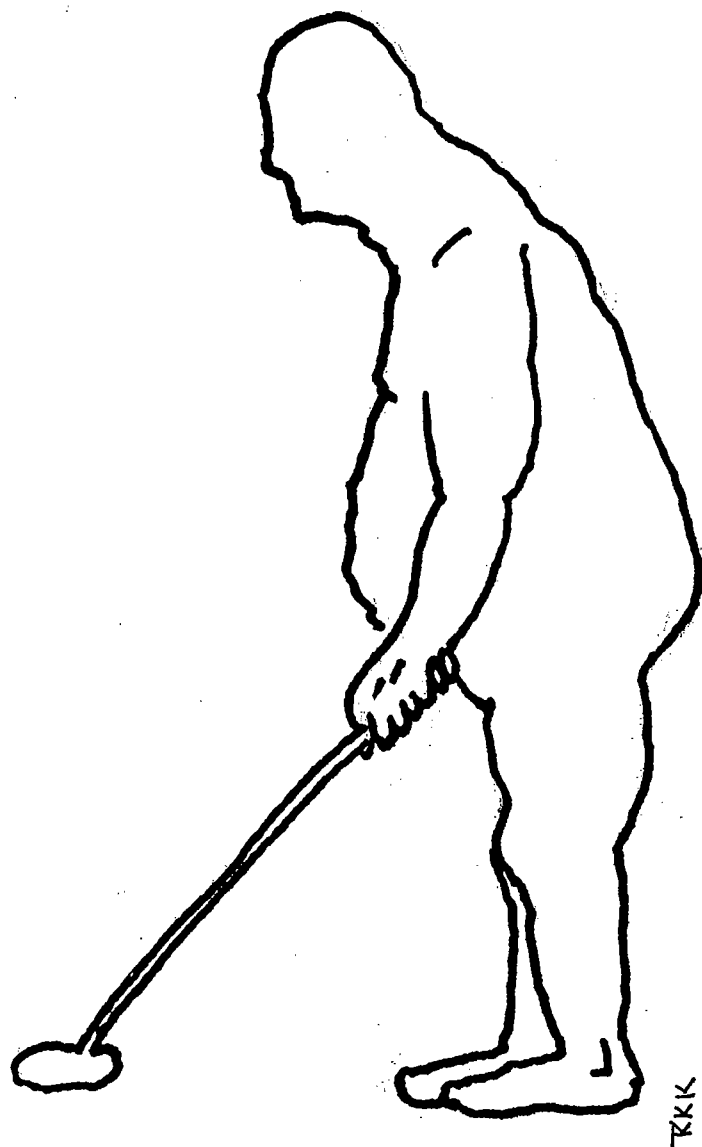
NORMAN: How did you decide to sue for the sum of 75 million dollars?

WALDERMEIR: My lawyer calculated that amount based on my injuries and disfigurement. He admits now he may have been a tad high owing to the fact that some of my bruising resulted from taking a pool cue across the forehead the night before in an argument about the infield fly rule. I'm a big baseball fan.

NORMAN: And apparently a credit to the game. Good luck with that face, Mr. Waldermeir.

WALDERMEIR: I'd rather you wish me luck with my lawsuit.

NORMAN: I don't think I want to do that. Back to the studio.



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LIGHTS -- CAMERA -- ACCIDENT

NORMAN: This is your trusty film critic Rick Norman. I'm inside the Hollywood compound of America's newest heartthrob, Bernardo Ducci. I'm here to talk to Bernardo about the new football movie he is directing, producing and starring in.

DUCCI (with Italian accent)
Bon journo, Rick. I hope my German Shepherds didn't do too much damage to your audio equipment.

NORMAN: No, you were right. If you play dead, they eventually turn loose.

DUCCI: They're just big puppies. Look, Mussolini is grinning at you.

NORMAN: Yeah, he grinned through the seat of my pants. But the big question everyone is asking in Hollywood, Bernardo, is will your health allow you to finish your romantic action football thriller, "Dead End Zone?"

DUCCI: Well, after my unfortunate accident we had to rewrite the ending. But still we expect to be able to meet our release deadline.

NORMAN: You yourself played football of a sort back in Italy.

DUCCI: We call it football. Here, you call it soccer. It's the same game as you play, only better. I played for Intermilan. I was a striker.

NORMAN: How did you get the National Football League to allow you to participate in a real, preseason game?

DUCCI: That was no problem. Professional sports and Hollywood have long had an understanding. Pro players can be in the movies and movie stars can play pro sports. Your ability as an athlete or an actor doesn't matter.

NORMAN: Yes, I saw Mandingo.

DUCCI: Entertainment is entertainment. The universal language.

NORMAN: I'm sure your fans and perhaps other people who might care for your brand of overacting will want to know how you are doing.

DUCCI: Better, the doctors say it's a miracle, but I will be able to walk again.

NORMAN: Let's talk about your accident, as you call it. Whose idea was it that you would attempt to run back a kickoff?

DUCCI: Well, it seemed like a good idea at the time. I wanted to capture the primal reality of American

football on film. A staged football scene just wouldn't be real enough.

NORMAN: Was there a moment during your run back, before you lost consciousness, when you perceived that something may not be going according to script?

DUCCI: Well, when I bent down to pick up the ball, I dropped my mouthpiece. In the film, you can clearly see me trying to signal cut. But I later came to learn that the director's signal to cut is also a gesture used in the NFL to taunt the opposing players.

NORMAN: They call it throat slashing.

DUCCI: Now I know. I guess Blizzard Newcomb felt I was taunting him or he would not have hit me with such ... How do you say ... violence!

NORMAN: Did you have any idea some of your larger bones would break as easy as they did?

DUCCI: No, I was as surprised as the doctors. I've been taking vitamin supplements since I moved to Los Angeles.

NORMAN: I understand the runback scene was so brutal, that you may have to cut it out of the film to avoid the dreaded NC17 rating.

DUCCI: That is what we, in the theater, call irony.

NORMAN: We call it blooper material. When do the doctors plan to take out the pins, plates and screws?

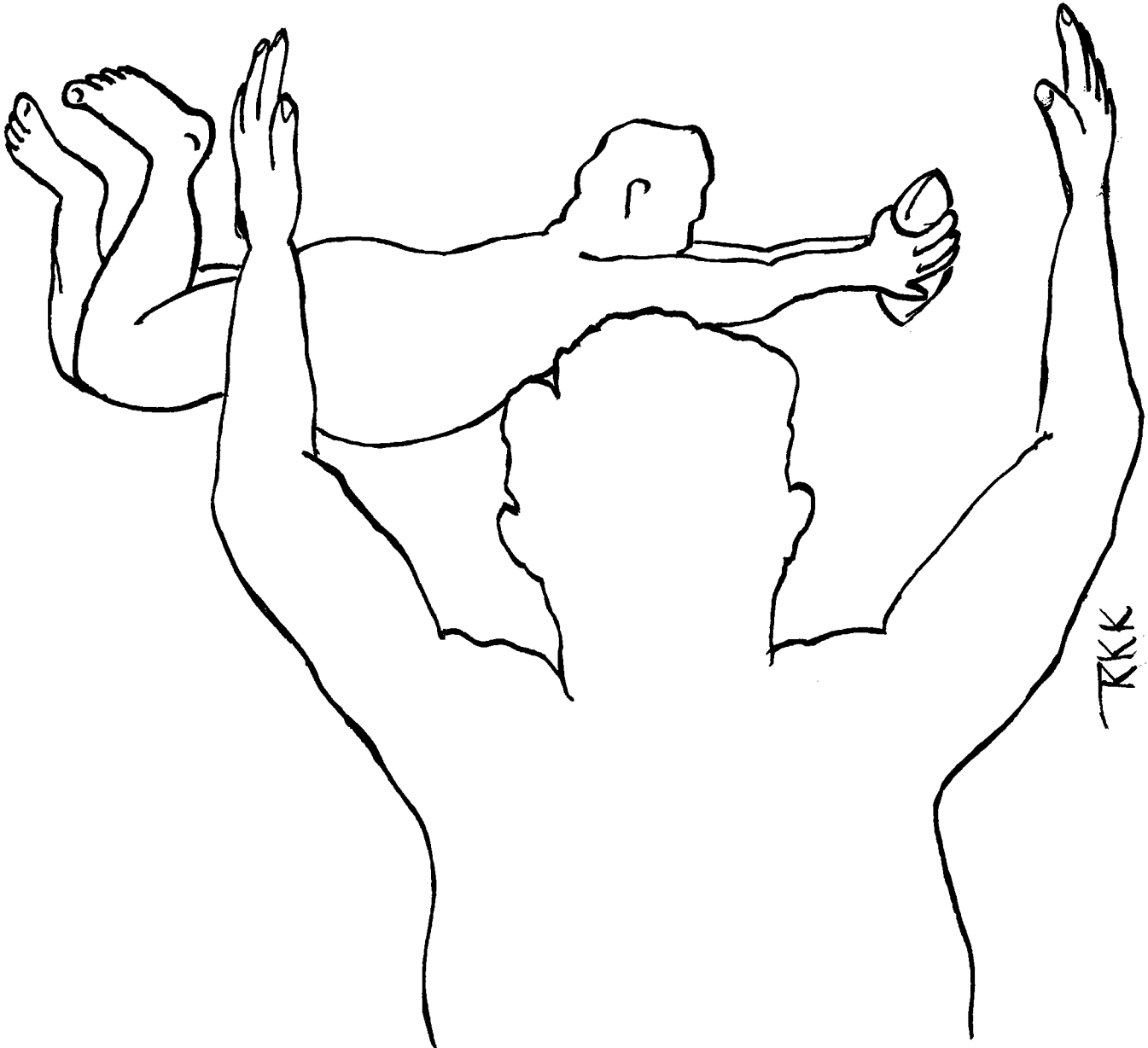
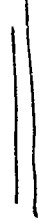
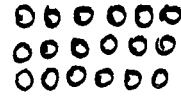
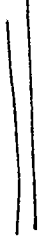
DUCCI: Hopefully, in time for the academy awards.

NORMAN: Well, that's confidence. Great!

We've been talking to the Italian actor, Bernardo Ducci. Be sure to keep an eye out for "Dead End Zone," coming soon to a theatre near you. And you can see the runback scene on "The Greatest Italian Sports Bloopers."

DUCCI: Gratsi, thanks for the plug Senior Rick. Ciao.

NORMAN: Ciao back to you, Bill.



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SPORTS VIOLENCE

NORMAN: Our continuing series on sports violence brings us today to the Knights of Columbus nursing home in Sarasota, Florida.

MUSSO: Can I talk yet?

NORMAN: Go ahead, Mr. Musso.

MUSSO: Well, what do I say?

NORMAN: I want to ask you about the riot here at the nursing home last week.

MUSSO: I'll say there was a riot. It was the Sharks. It's always the Sharks.

NORMAN: What Sharks, Mr. Musso?

MUSSO: They started as a bowling team but now they're a gang.

NORMAN: Here in the nursing home there is a gang?

MUSSO: Bad eggs. They're into prosthetics and performance enhancing dietary supplements.

NORMAN: What happened last week that the police had to be called out to the bowling alley?

MUSSO: Well, my team, the Many Pauses, were bowling against the Sharks. Their captain, Joe Cirroni, he picks up a six - ten split. Okay? He then climbs up on the scorer's table and starts doing the chicken dance.

NORMAN: Taunting they call it.

MUSSO: Right. I yell: "Don't swivel those plastic hips at me, Joe Cirroni." I don't have to take that. I was in the battle for San Lo.

NORMAN: Was that the Spanish-American war?

MUSSO: He says to me: "Musso, come over here and I'll knock that hearing aid so far into your head you'll be able to hear yourself forget."

NORMAN: Them's fighting words here at the home I guess.

MUSSO: You bet. Then someone throws a walker and all heck breaks loose.

NORMAN: Did you get that busted chin in the rumble?

MUSSO: No, I did that this morning getting out of the tub.

NORMAN: What happened to Joe Cirroni?

MUSSO: Nothing. He couldn't get down off the scorer's table. I waited for him for a while but I must have dozed off.

NORMAN: Sounds like quite a Donnybrook. Thank you, Mr. Musso, for bringing us yet another example of the ever escalating violence in sports. Back to the studio.

THE PRINCE OF VULGARITY

NORMAN: I am here with a young man who was spotted by the Only A Game staff at a college basketball game recently, not because of his on-court play, but because of what was printed on the back of his jersey. Tell us what that was, son.

BARNHARD: The symbols asterisk, ampersand, number sign, the "at" sign and an exclamation mark.

NORMAN: What is the significance of those symbols?

BARNHARD: That is my last name.

NORMAN: How do you pronounce asterisk, ampersand, number sign, at sign, exclamation mark?

BARNHARD: You can't as far as I know.

NORMAN: How does your family pronounce it?

BARNHARD: Barnhard.

NORMAN: I knew I smelled a story here somewhere.

BARNHARD: The family legend is that my great, great grandfather Barnhard saved a bottle of rye for when the steamer from the old country spotted Ellis Island. The immigrations officers asked him his name at the same time they confiscated his bottle. They wrote down the resulting vulgarity as his legal name, in symbols, as was the custom in that day.

NORMAN: I might point out that this was all well before the singer formerly known as Prince did the same thing.

BARNHARD: Well, I don't know for a fact that Rye was involved in Prince's name change.

NORMAN: I'm curious. What vulgarity exactly did your great grandfather use? ... Oh, it's okay. They'll bleep it out at the studio.

BARNHARD: (bleep)

NORMAN: Yikes! I'm surprised they let him stay in this country. Anyway, what does the basketball announcer say when you score?

BARNHARD: Luckily, I haven't scored yet.

NORMAN: Right. If he pronounces your name like your great granddaddy did on Ellis Island, it could cost him his job.

BARNHARD: It won't do me much good either.

NORMAN: Well son, best of luck to you. I know I will never be able to hear that word again without thinking of you. Back to you, Bill.

ORGANIZED SPORTS CRIME TASKFORCE

NORMAN: As an exclusive Only A Game brings you this late breaking story that could well have playoff implications for the Boston Red Sox. Within the last hour, the bludgeoned body of Joe Joe Wilson's girlfriend was discovered in his mansion. I am the first reporter allowed in the mansion and hope to get the latest news from one of the many policemen still pouring over the crime scene.

OFFICER: Watch where you're walking, peckerwood!

NORMAN: Perhaps we can get a word from this uniformed officer who appears to be cleaning up.

OFFICER: I'm dusting the murder scene for fingerprints, Sherlock.

NORMAN: Of course. Officer, could you identify yourself for our listeners.

OFFICER: I am Special Agent Lance Woolington of the organized Sports Crime Task Force.

NORMAN: You are the guys paid by the players union to investigate crimes involving professional ballplayers.

OFFICER: Well, I can neither confirm or deny that this murder involves a professional ballplayer. The fact that Mr.

Wilson's alleged girlfriend was found murdered in Mr. Wilson's home is not proof of anything.

NORMAN: Your agency has recently drawn a lot of criticism in the media as appearing to try harder to clear the players than develop evidence objectively.

OFFICER: We've heard that criticism and let me assure your listeners nothing could be farther from the truth. The Organized Sports Crime Task Force is made up primarily of former professional law enforcement agents. Some of us are still eligible for rehire. Rest assured, we will follow the trail of evidence wherever it leads, even to one of the ballplayers who are responsible for paying our salary.

NORMAN: Well, nothing personal. I just bring it up because of the general perception that the Organized Sports Crime Task Force is crooked.

OFFICER: I understand. No offense taken. By the way, do you mind handing me that blunt object on the floor there.

NORMAN: This thing here by the chalk outline on the floor?

OFFICER: That's right. Do you mind flipping it around there so I can see all sides?

NORMAN: Sure. Like this? Do you think this blunt object could be a clue.

OFFICER: Well it's hard to say before I dust it for fingerprints. Do you mind dropping it here in this evidence bag? I don't want to contaminate it.

NORMAN: Glad to help.

OFFICER: One more favor. Do you mind turning around and putting your hands behind your back.

NORMAN: Wait a minute. What's ...

OFFICER: You have the right to remain silent. You have...

NORMAN: Bill, call my Uncle Louis. He's a notary. He'll know what to do.

OFFICER: ...one will be appointed for you. Ed, call the commissioner. There's no reason Joe Joe can't play tonight.

THE ED BURKE SHOW

NORMAN: This is Rick Norman, backstage here between acts, with Ed Burke, former second team all-American, who has written, directed, produced and stars in a one man musical tribute to himself entitled: "Everyone Thinks I'm Conceited Because I'm So Good -- The Ed Burke Story."

BURKE: Greetings, Rick. I hope you enjoyed the first four acts.

NORMAN: Yes, I can't wait for the ending.

BURKE: The other fellow in the audience seems to be enjoying himself.

NORMAN: Yes, I was talking to him after the third act. We knew from the hand-painted marquis that you were second team all-American, but neither of us remembered you also made the honor roll in the third and fourth grades.

BURKE: You're not surprised, are you?

NORMAN: Not at all. He remarked that he particularly enjoyed your tap dance tribute to the Veer offense.

BURKE: My eight track was dragging a little and it threw off my timing.

NORMAN: Well, we certainly couldn't tell.

BURKE: Did you enjoy the re-enactment of my touchdown run against Auburn?

NORMAN: The one where you acted like you were in slow motion and stiff-armed the mannequin at the goal line?

BURKE: Right. Six yards goes too fast in real time, especially as fast as I am. But when I run in slow motion, I can stretch six yards out for four minutes.

NORMAN: Really, it seemed longer.

BURKE: Thank you.

NORMAN: Looking around I would guess, Ed, you're not doing this for the money.

BURKE: No indeed, Rick. I feel I've been blessed and must share my talents with the world.

NORMAN: Well, I, for one, am glad to know you're here.

BURKE: Rick, do you mind if I give your audience the address for the theatre and the daily show times?

NORMAN: Ed, they'll do that back at the studio. You better start act five. I noticed the other audience member looking at his watch.

BURKE: Right, okay. Wish me luck.

NORMAN: Break a leg. Back to you, Bill.

I THOUGHT THAT GUY'D BE DEADY BY NOW

(SINGING BOXER)

NORMAN: I am here today in Belzona, Mississippi with Clyde
"Cut Bait" Gragson. How are you Cut Bait?

CUT BAIT: A little better than splendid.

NORMAN: Some of our boxing fans will remember you from the
Gillette Friday Night Fights back in the fifties.

CUT BAIT: That's right, I was a pretty consistent fighter...

NORMAN: Welterweight?

CUT BAIT: Early on, then I was a middleweight. I had a record
of 116, 58 and 6.

NORMAN: That's a lot of fights.

CUT BAIT: I would rather fight than train. There's more money
in fighting than in training.

NORMAN: I can't argue with that, Cut Bait. Who were some of
your opponents that our radio audience might remember?

CUT BAIT: I guess my biggest fight was against Rock and Roll
Bostwick in the Garden in '58. That was on TV. I
still have people come up to ask me how it was I could
take such a pounding and still answer the bell for the
second round.

NORMAN: Well, you don't appear to be any worse for
wear...except for your face and that ear, whoa!

CUT BAIT: Thanks.

NORMAN: What did you do after you hung up the gloves?

CUT BAIT: My last fight at the YMCA here in Belzona was what you might call a turning point in my life. Glass Jaw Guthridge, you might remember him...

NORMAN: No I can't...

CUT BAIT: He knocked me down early in the first. But I was still game. In the second he caught me with an uppercut that put me flat on my back.

NORMAN: And it was at that moment you decided to retire from boxing?

CUT BAIT: Well, it was a little stranger than that. I sat up and before the referee had counted me out, I started singing the score from South Pacific. The weird thing was I had served in the South Pacific during the war but I didn't know they had wrote a musical about it.

NORMAN: That certainly is strange. What did you do?

CUT BAIT: I finished a couple of songs and the crowd here loved it. I hadn't been cheered like that since I came out for the third round against Hatchet Hankins in '47.

NORMAN: So you stayed in Belzona?

CUT BAIT: That's right. I started a dance ministry. And I've been singing and dancing ever since.

NORMAN: Well, Cut Bait, your fans will be happy to know that you're not dead yet and that through a neurological malfunction, you found a life after boxing. Would you share a little South Pacific with our audience?

CUT BAIT: (starts singing) Some enchanted evening....

NORMAN: Back to you, Bill.

"C" AVERAGE

A while back I was summoned, along with my wife, to a conference with my son's teacher. He's in the 5th grade and in the preceding few weeks his grades had dropped like a Shaquille O'Neal dunk.

I sat there quietly while my wife and my son's teacher went round and round, trying to identify some psychological trauma that might explain the bad grades. I was quiet. Not because I didn't care. I did. I was quiet because I knew what the problem was. I knew because my son and I are more alike than I care to admit. You might think I say that proudly, but you'd be wrong. It's a curse. It's like knowing how and when you're going to die. You see, I've seen him looking at me like I looked at my father. I know the trouble he's going to put me through. But luckily I've still got a little time left before that.

My son's grades had merely changed with the season. Basketball season that is. He was on his first school team and had his first real uniform. I had looked in his room one night after he had gone to bed and had seen his basketball uniform laid out on the floor like the invisible man was in it. Jersey tucked in shorts, knee pads on top of socks, socks tucked in

shoes. Exactly how I laid out my uniform when I was his age. So I knew.

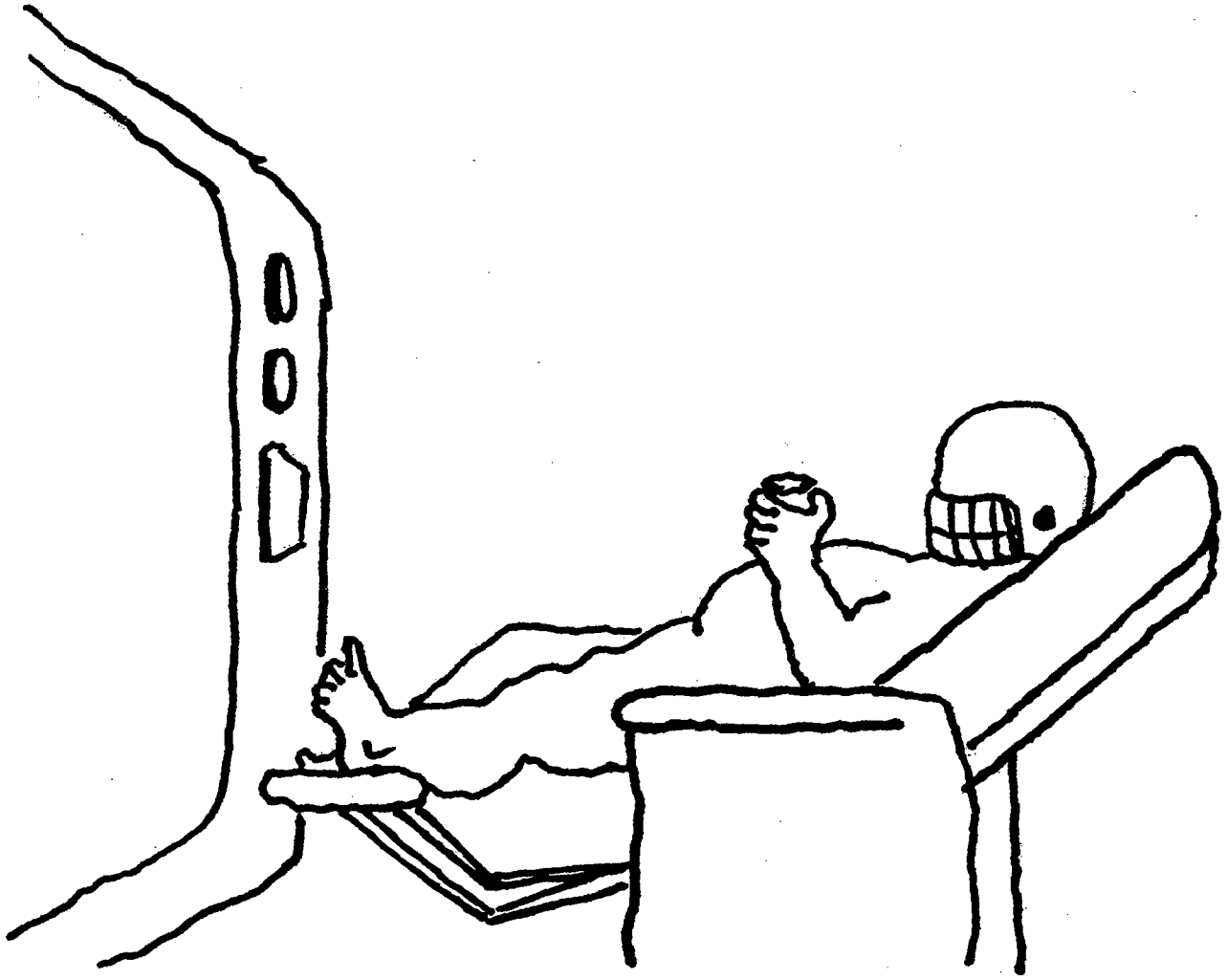
That night after the teacher's conference, my wife outlined in a one hour lecture the prescribed plan for the academic rehabilitation of our son. It included more quality time, positive reinforcement, and a system of points, bonus points and demerits that involved charts with stars, moons, comets and black holes. And women complain the rules of baseball are complicated.

I didn't want to steal my wife's disciplinary thunder, but I was concerned there might be a little overkill here. So, later that night, I tucked my son in bed and solved our problem in less than 10 seconds. I said: "Son, you bring home another bad grade, you're off the basketball team. No more practice. No more games. No more uniform." I explained I couldn't save him from his mother's new system, she had already made the charts. That was the price he was gonna have to pay for his past sins.

The next morning, he was reading his Science book at the breakfast table. His next batch of papers would have made Einstein's folks proud.

His mother is doubly thrilled because she thinks his turnaround is due to her charts. You can't fault her. Mothers

always mean well. But they've never been a 10-year-old boy in love with a game. How are they gonna know?



KKK

THE HAND BASKET

A recent shopping trip for a catcher's mitt for my 10-year-old son got me to thinking about where our civilization is headed, and the hand basket it's headed there in.

Back in 1962, I rode my bike to the neighborhood Five and Dime to buy my first catcher's mitt. But in 1999, I had to drive my 10-year-old son to a sporting goods superstore ten miles and several demilitarized zones away. If I had let him ride his bike, I would have been subject to arrest for child endangerment.

At the Five and Dime I had one catcher's mitt to choose from. At the superstore, there were dozens, including one specifically for catching knuckle balls.

For me, it was an added bonus years ago that the only catcher's mitt available was a Yogi Berra model. At age ten, I never would have thought to insist on a particular make, model and color like my son did.

My mitt was stiff, but I had some neat's-foot oil at home, and even at age ten, I had learned from the older kids at the local sandlot how to oil a mitt. By contrast, the Superstore offered to board my son's mitt for a week and break it in professionally for only an additional \$20.00 over the \$200.00 retail price. In 1962, my catcher's mitt didn't cost \$20.00.

Now I've got to admit, my son's glove is better than mine. If I'd had his glove in 1962, I might be enshrined in Cooperstown today. Or maybe not. Equipment wasn't really my problem. Early on I got caught in the Adams apple with a foul tip and, after that, every time a batter started to swing, my mitt involuntarily slammed shut as did every orifice in my body. I don't think even my son's \$200.00 glove could have helped me catch with my eyes closed.

So forty years later, I'm thinking maybe things weren't so good back then and maybe aren't so bad now after all. Or maybe it's vice versa. Or maybe it doesn't really matter much. Because somehow, despite the generation gorge, when my son and I get out in the front yard and our mitts start popping, we are both ten years old. Except, luckily, I'm not afraid of the ball any more.

WWF WRESTLING

A couple of weeks ago I came home to find my teenage son and his friends huddled around the TV, grunting and flexing like cave men around a mammoth pit. They were watching professional wrestling, or rasslin' as the fans here in Dixie call it.

The notion had never crossed my mind before, but I concluded that one of a father's many thankless duties is to make sure his son doesn't go through life believing that rasslin' is real.

Being sensitive to the tenuous relationship I have with my son since he got bigger than me, I was careful not to embarrass him in front of his friends. I was also careful because his friends eat every crumb of food in my house whenever they come over. I'm afraid if I ever run out of food, they'll eat my sofa cushions.

The next afternoon, when he finally woke up, I explained to my son in my "Father knows best voice": "Son," I said, "that wrestling looks real but it really isn't. Everyone knows who's gonna win. It's just a show carefully orchestrated to get your adolescent adrenaline pumping."

He didn't disagree. He never disagrees. He just gave me the "look" and walked out of the house. I hated to bust the boy's bubble but that's a father's job.

A couple of nights later, I was watching a John Wayne war movie on TV. My son walked into the room and turned off the set. I was startled, not because he disturbed my war movie, but because he is usually careful never to be in the same room with me.

Standing in front of the TV he said: "Dad, I hate to tell you, but that John Wayne war stuff ain't real. Everybody knows whose going to win. It's just a show to get your geriatric adrenaline pumping."

He turned the TV back on and walked out.

I couldn't disagree. I couldn't finish the movie. I haven't been able to watch a war movie since. But when my son isn't home I have started watching rasslin'.

THE BOY, THE DOG AND THE UMPIRE

The other night my ten-year-old's heart was broken by an umpire. This affected me greatly because he is my favorite child for the simple reason that he still loves me.

To my teenage kids I am merely an annoyance. If tomorrow I dropped dead in the kitchen they would step over me for days hoping that the dog would eventually eat me, which would probably happen because they would never think to feed him.

But to my ten-year-old son I am still relevant. So when he made the last out on a terrible third strike call, he looked to his dad to explain his first exposure to injustice.

All I could think of was what my father had told me at a similar time in my life: The parable of the three umpires. When asked how they tell balls from strikes, the new umpire says: "I call them like I see them." The experienced umpire says: "I call them like they are." The old veteran umpire says: "They ain't nothing 'til I call them."

But my boy is still too innocent to understand my point. I am glad. My teenagers are jaded enough to understand that truth and justice are often no more than what the person in charge says they are. But to my youngest there is truth, and right, and dad. The big three. And I want to stay in that number as long as I can.

So I told him I would have a serious word with the umpire before the next game. That was enough to get me a hug around the neck and him a large snow cone. And we brought popcorn home for the dog.

THE SPORTS SCIENCE DOCTOR (BIG GRANT)

NORMAN: Only A Game is back at Spring Mesa Vo-Tec to talk to the man who unapologetically refers to himself as the Sports Science Doctor. Do I have to call you doctor?

DOCTOR: You can call me millionaire if you'd rather.

NORMAN: No, that's even harder to stomach. I guess doctor it is.

DOCTOR: Thank you. You're so kind.

NORMAN: You and your school have recently been the beneficiaries of a rather large grant.

DOCTOR: That's correct, Mr. Norman. As soon as that 60 million-dollar check cleared, Spring Mesa Vo-Tec became Spring Mesa University and I became chancellor and treasurer.

NORMAN: Tell us how your school fell into this money.

DOCTOR: Well, I like to think my reputation as Sports Science Doctor here on Only A Game played a large part. When the class action suit against the Little Leagues of America was settled...

NORMAN: Remind our listeners about that lawsuit.

DOCTOR: That was the suit brought against all the Little Leagues around the country by the little leaguers who claimed they didn't get enough playing time in the

infield because they were athletically challenged. They claimed mental anguish and the loss of opportunity to play professional sports.

NORMAN: That case was settled eventually.

DOCTOR: That's correct. The attorneys got 100 million and 60 million was put into a trust fund for research to make sports equipment safer.

NORMAN: What did the kids get?

DOCTOR: They get safer sports equipment, eventually.

NORMAN: That's where you come in, I suppose.

DOCTOR: I am the trust fund. I use my expertise in sports science and the research and development facilities here at the university...

NORMAN: This looks like the same air conditioning repair shop you've always used.

DOCTOR: We're still in the process of conversion.

NORMAN: Yeah, converting 60 million dollars to your personal use.

DOCTOR: Let me show you some of the ultra-safe sporting equipment we have recently designed. This is an ergonomically designed catcher's helmet and mask. Notice the polished metal, the slits for air. It's space age.

NORMAN: It looks just like a medieval helmet you'd find on a suit of armor.

DOCTOR: Now that you mention it...

(sound of tapping on a tin pot)

NORMAN: A little leaguer gets hit with a foul tip wearing that thing his ears will ring 'til he graduates high school.

DOCTOR: Now here is a shot put designed not to roll but to stay exactly where it lands, thus avoiding accidents and making it easier to measure throws.

NORMAN: That thing has spikes on it. It's a medieval mace...

DOCTOR: And for archery...

NORMAN: That's a crossbow. You haven't done any research. You just watched a King Arthur movie.

DOCTOR: Well, our research continues. We still have 40 thousand dollars left.

NORMAN: This is criminal!

DOCTOR: Please, this is criminal Mr. Millionaire Doctor.

NORMAN: I give up. Back to you, Bill.

FRENCH BREAD

I told you the last time about how, way back in 1970, I had started the basketball shoe craze but that I was getting miffed because I haven't gotten the first thank you from Mr. Nike, much less a royalty check. A listener turned me on to an "intellectual property lawyer" who, for only \$6,500 told me positively that I probably did not have too much of a mediocre case. He told me for another \$2,500 he would guarantee I didn't have a case. I told him that was okay, I would just go with his off-the-cuff first impression.

However, not to be cut off completely from the sports marketing explosion, I have developed my own piece of designer athletic equipment that every boy on the planet will soon be wearing.

You're probably asking yourself, how come Norman got his big break and I'm still stuck here with her and the kids? Well, I'll share my thought process with you so you can get a glimpse of how the mind of a creative genius works.

What's the biggest marketing problem for sports equipment companies? Too many kids quit playing about the time they reach puberty. Why? Everyone thinks it's because of burnout, or peer pressure, or girls. Wrong! Most kids quit the very year their coaches start doing jock checks to make sure they're wearing

their athletic supporters. Those things are so uncomfortable, most kids will give up their dream of playing in the major leagues rather than wear such a medieval contraption. The main problem with jocks is that within the first 5 minutes of wear, the two side straps combine to form one central flossing strap which makes running about as comfortable as riding a bicycle with a rope seat. And it might be different if anyone knew what function a jock strap serves. As far as I know, all human anatomy is permanently attached. I've yet to see a kid come in from a game, find something in his sock and say, "Oh no, I must have forgot to wear my athletic supporter." The athletic cup, the athletic supporter's helmeted cousin, has the additional drawback of making you look like you're trying to smuggle a loaf of French bread into the game.

So, through the miracle of modern science, I've solved all these problems with the Norman, One-Size-Fits-All, Cross-Your-Heart, Jock with Airbag (patent pending). My lawyers says that until we send the prototype to the patent office, I shouldn't describe it in too much detail. That tidbit of advice cost me another \$1,500. But I can tell you the unheated model is made of Kevlar, velcro and freezer tape and a titanium alloy.

Hah-hah, I'll let you know how life is on Easy Street.

NEAT'S-FOOT

I have received "the look." I knew my son would give it to me eventually, I just didn't know he would give it to me before he reached puberty.

The occasion was the purchase of my 9-year-old son's first real baseball glove. He had progressed from the primary-colored, inflexible plastic glove through dozens of simulated "leather" gloves each snatched within the first week of life by the evil glove fairy, who makes sure no little leaguer keeps the same glove more than three games in a row. Having proven to me that he was responsible enough to not lose his glove for one month, my son was finally ready for a real glove made from a real cow.

Now, first booties and first haircuts, those are for mothers. First glove, that's Dad's first chance to show that the slow process of killing himself by earning a living has definite and direct advantages for his children.

To demonstrate to my son how important I thought this moment was, I announced to the striped-haired sporting goods clerk that we wanted the best fielder's glove he had. At the time, I didn't know it would cost more than the set of tires I had been eyeing for the last 15,000 miles but, a dad can't scrimp at a seminal moment like this. I suppressed the mental

image of my van skidding out of control and off a cliff, swallowed hard and told the clerk we'd take it.

It was truly a bonding moment. For the first time in his life, my son told me "thank you" without his mother having to elbow him. And the look he gave me bordered on admiration. But that's not the look I'm talking about.

At the register, while I counted out the twenty dollar bills, the striped-haired clerk, having sized me up as one of the Rockefeller heirs, began to hawk a ten-dollar can of foam leather-conditioner that he insisted we needed to help us properly break-in the glove. But being down to my last twenty, I conveniently assumed the air of a baseball connoisseur and waived him off, saying that I, like the pros only used neat's-foot oil. The clerk looked at me like I had asked for a left handed athletic supporter. Neither him nor the store manager knew what neat's-foot oil was or where to get it.

Now when I was nine years old, my bed reeked of neat's-foot oil. I oiled my glove at least weekly and slept with it under the corner of my mattress so it would keep the shape I needed to be able to flick the ball out of the pocket with just a flip of my wrist. My son, although far richer in material wealth, had never sniffed the sweet incense of baseball. Surely me, a good father, could not let such deprivation stand.

After quite a few stops, I finally located a bottle of the lubricant-of-the-gods at an old shoe repair shop. The smell brought back a flood of memories for me, but, had little apparent affect on my son.

When we got home I showed my son how to lovingly lubrify his glove, how to wedge a ball in the pocket, how to tie the whole thing shut with twine and, finally, how to place it just right under the corner of his mattress so that it would adopt the perfect form and be able to catch a baseball, with or without a human hand inside.

The next afternoon, while I was car-pooling the pack to practice, his friend sitting next to him in the back seat saw his new glove and remarked "Cool glove. Why does it stink?" That is when he gave me "the look." I saw it in the rear view mirror. I saw my son point at me and roll his eyes. The universally recognized facial expression meaning "My father is senile, be quiet and I will give you the details later." The same look I gave my father when he tried to show me and my friends how to play a game in the street with just a rubber ball and a broomstick.

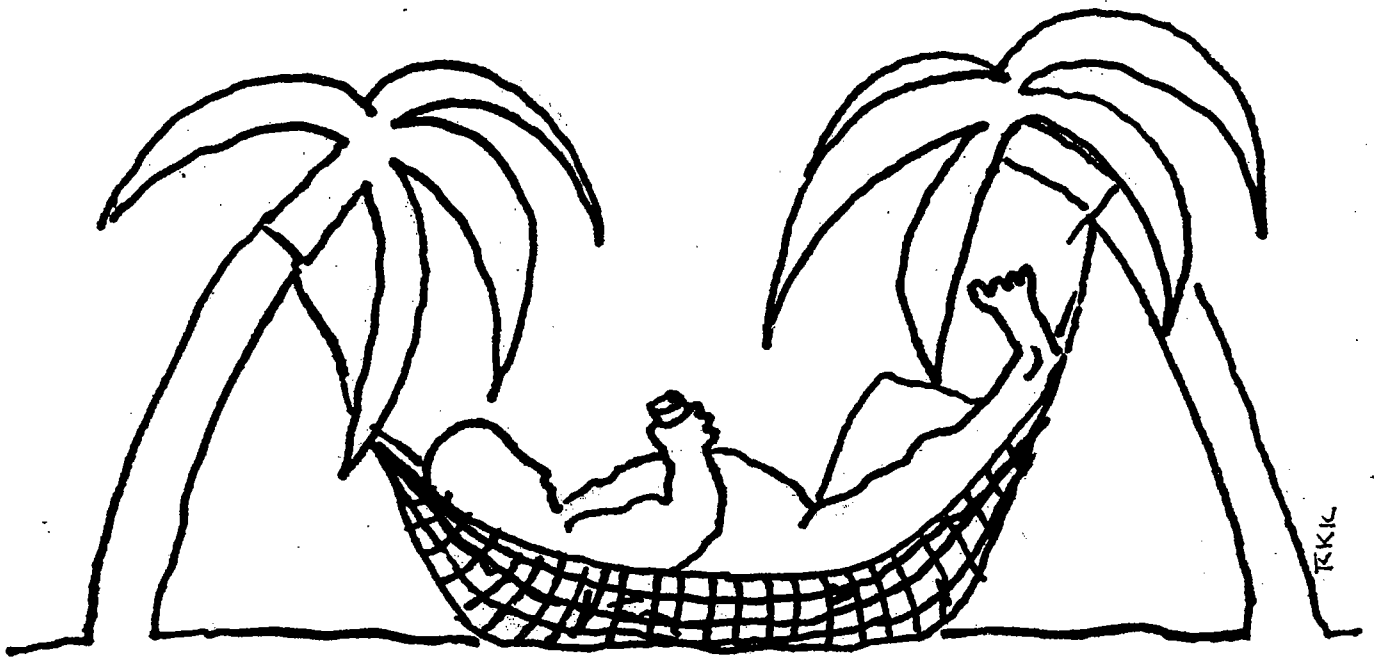
DAMNED STATISTICS

In response to my attempts to stress the importance of math and science to my 12-year-old son, he assures me that school is "irrelevant" because he is destined to play in the NBA. There are a number of arguments I could use to burst his naïve bubble, not the least of which being genetics. Other than Dennis Rodman occasionally, I can't think of too many blondes in the NBA. Neither of my son's parents are over five foot six and if he grows to be over six foot his mother will have to take a polygraph. Statistically, his chances of playing in the NBA are roughly equivalent to getting hit by lightning on the day he wins the lottery.

But as a parent you want your kids to think they can conquer the world, to become president, to win the Noble Prize, to get on Oprah. Should we tell them the odds? Would they believe us if we told them? Is it just one of those things like your mortality that you're never gonna acknowledge until it walks up and grabs you in the prostate. So maybe the kindest thing is to say nothing and let them believe the world is their oyster. But is it any kinder that they find out the truth themselves, like I did, on a high school football field when I came up to tackle an all district fullback and he blew through me like a freight train through a snow man. If you decide it's

better to tell them, what do you tell them? Statistics mean nothing to kids who can't add with their shoes on. Genetics are just statistics that can be fixed by using better equipment. Too short? Get a more expensive pair of tennis shoes so you can jump higher.

So I did what a good father should: I opened my heart. I told him that once I too had big dreams. I thought I was going to play in the NFL. He fell out of his bed laughing. He laughed at me just like 30 years from now his kid is going to laugh at him. He was still giggling when I turned out the lights.



KKK

ENDOCRINOLOGIST

NORMAN: Only A Game is here today at the National Basketball Association Laboratories in Whalehole, Maine. I am speaking to Doctor Ernst Meyer, an endocrinologist. Doctor, I would bet most NBA fans have never heard of the NBA lab.

MEYER: That may well be, Mr. Norman. We are funded by the NBA but have no direct connection with the players or fans.

NORMAN: So what does NBA Labs do exactly?

MEYER: We began in 1992 developing better shoes, ankle supports and that sort of thing. But we have expanded our research greatly in the last few years with genetic engineering and hormone therapy.

NORMAN: Sounds like that may be against the rules.

MEYER: We are not trying to enhance performance but to grow taller people.

NORMAN: Seven foot isn't tall enough?

MEYER: There is always room for growth in any industry. As you can see, we had great success enlarging laboratory mice.

NORMAN: We used to call those rats.

MEYER: Our research on humans is going slower, as we expected.

NORMAN: Whoa! Who is that guy?

MEYER: That is our volunteer subject, Mr. Wharton. He was five foot four when he began our experimental treatments six weeks ago. Now he is six one and a half.

NORMAN: But it looks like the only thing that has grown is his head from the ears up.

MEYER: Yes, but he is taller.

NORMAN: Why is he wearing a whiplash collar?

MEYER: His neck has not developed as fast as his cranium and he kept toppling over doing lay-ups.

NORMAN: I don't know, Doc.

MEYER: Well, despite setbacks our research shows great promise.

NORMAN: Here's a great promise, Doc. I promise not many people want a light bulb shaped head, even if it means a shot at pro basketball.

MEYER: Well, as long as the NBA continues to fund our research and Mr. Wharton can stand, we will continue.

NORMAN: Thanks for showing Only A Game the cutting edge of sports science.

MEYER: Would you like to take one of our jumbo NBA headbands
 as a souvenir?

NORMAN: Hey, I can use that to tie my canoe to the roof of my
 car. Thanks. Back to you, Bill.

INSTANT REPLAY

A couple of Sundays ago, we were having one of those rare, extended family, sit-down dinners that the South used to be famous for. I had required my teenage son to attend, which made him mad because it cut short his normal sixteen hours of sleep.

It wasn't long after grace, that he pulled the pin and tossed a grenade down towards my end of the table. "Dad," he asked me, in an Eddie Haskell voice, "I was wondering where it is you keep your stash of girlie magazines?"

Needless to say, 18 family eyeballs sighted in on me, including the four that belonged to my in-laws. My extended family waited politely for me to swallow.

I cleared my throat and said, honestly, that I never look at 'em. I also flashed my steak knife at my son to let him know that I would deal with him after company was gone.

I explained that I didn't look at girlie magazines for the same reason I don't watch the classic sports channel on TV. That's the one that replays the old games. Personally, I would rather remember Mickey Mantle the way I saw him through my ten-year-old eyes on Dizzy Dean's Game of the Week. His speed, his grace, his wings and halo. If I looked at him now through my bloodshot, middle-aged eyeballs, I'm not sure what I'd see, but I'm sure it would erase some of my childhood.

And as for girlie magazines, I said I'd rather remember the female form the way I saw it back before I discovered it could give birth to something seemingly innocuous that would eventually mutate into a teenager.

The eighteen eyeballs then settled on my son. He smiled, tipped his steak knife to me and said: "Touché, Pop."

And for a minute there, the way he flashed those orthodontically straightened teeth at me, I thought maybe he loved me again, like when he was little. But it was probably just some corn stuck in his teeth.

ECHO

The other night, after my teenage son's big game, I had a heart-to-heart talk with him. I wanted to impart some of the wisdom I have garnered through my illustrious sports career.

His team had lost, despite my coaching from the stands, and my boy had ignored his genes and had played a very forgettable game.

But as I tried to lecture him I kept hearing another voice; it sounded like my father or God or Darth Vader.

Son - I began - a game is won on the practice field.

What do you know about winning? You never played on a five-hundred team in your life.

You can't expect to just walk out on the field and win a game.

You couldn't expect to walk out on the field at all. You usually rode the pine.

There's just no substitute for hard work.

Listen to Mister "Let me sleep just five more minutes."

When I was your age, I ran two miles to school every morning.

That's because when you were his age, you couldn't tell time well enough to catch the school bus.

Son, when Abe Lincoln was your age he was spitting logs ten hours a day.

When Abe Lincoln was your age he was president.

My son wasn't listening. It breaks my heart to think how good he could be if he would just listen to his father.

Tell me about it.

Did you hear that?

OLD SCHOOL COACH

NORMAN: This is Rick Norman here today outside of the Clark County School Board meeting room. The School Board has just gone into executive session to decide the fate of high school football coach Bill Rawlings. Coach, you looked pretty nervous up there groveling for another chance.

COACH: I've been a coach for 35 years. It's all I know.

NORMAN: Groveling?

COACH: No, coaching is all I know.

NORMAN: How could an experienced coach like you forget all your years of training and actually raise your voice to a player on the football field?

COACH: I don't know. The kid was popping the team's footballs with his switchblade. The next thing I know I'm yelling.

NORMAN: Out loud so that his other teammates could overhear your criticism?

COACH: I know. I know. But I came from the old school where if the parent signed a permission slip, the coach could actually make the player run wind-sprints as punishment...

NORMAN: After a written warning.

COACH: Right. I knew when the School Board first implemented the mandatory counseling rule...

NORMAN: That's the rule that the home team had to provide a trauma counselor to the losing team?

COACH: Right. I remember saying, next they'll quit keeping score altogether.

NORMAN: Well Coach, that was very prophetic. I guess it was three or four years ago that they tore down all the high school scoreboards.

COACH: Yes. Everyone goes home a winner now.

NORMAN: Things have certainly changed.

COACH: But I still love working with the kids, and the counselors, and the trial attorneys.

NORMAN: Well, best of luck, Coach. We'll be pulling for you.

NO RULES

I am telling you guys, Little League Baseball is going to go the way of bare-knuckle boxing unless somebody changes one of the more recent rules that requires every kid to play at least two innings per game. I didn't know about this rule until my buddy got called offshore and asked me to coach his Little League team for a game.

He tells me how important this game is, and how the main-most-rule is the one that every kid's gotta play and, if they don't, we forfeit the game. But he doesn't think to leave me a list of kids, much less a lineup.

On game day, 15 kids show up, all exactly at game time, most either named Shawn or Justin, all screaming at me, telling me the positions they want to play. They've all got that puffy, transparent, Nintendo zombie look to 'em. But every one had a major league quality glove and enough sweatbands to sop up the Great Salt Lake. So I just shoved out onto the field the nine kids who most looked like they'd been outside in the last week.

During the game, despite my instructions to the contrary, the kids wandered in and out of the dugout, back and forth to the concession stand and to and fro the portable toilet. I gave up on any thought of strategy. Worrying about winning was out

of the question. My mental efforts were concentrated solely on getting all 15 players in the game for at least two innings.

I called for a kid named Michael Paul to go in the third inning, and then again in the fourth but he was nowhere to be found. I didn't get worried until a lady who identified herself as Michael Paul's mother, scaled the dugout fence during the fifth inning and demanded to now where her son was. I said: "Lady, I ain't sure where I am."

The kids were yakking at me and pawing me trying to get me to put them into the game and I'm thinking seriously about taking up a 28" graphite bat and solving my substitution dilemma by ridding the world of a few Shawns when I am hit in the nose with the worst smell I've smelled since I quit changing diapers. Michael Paul comes staggering into the dugout, crying, smelling like a one-man paper mill. It turns out one of the Shawns had locked Michael Paul in the portable toilet for 45 minutes. Now, in Louisiana in the summer, portable toilets reach 250 degrees and the smell has been known to kill passing birds. Michael Paul had unintentionally shattered the old Louisiana endurance record. My keen coach's eye quickly identified the guilty Shawn. It wasn't difficult, everyone was slapping him on the back. I told him to take a seat, he was out of the game. I told Michael Paul to go home and take a shower, and get some

counseling. The poor kid looked like he had been poached in a septic tank.

I was quickly informed however, that both the guilty Shawn and Michael Paul hadn't yet played their second inning and, this being the last inning, if I dared to take the only real disciplinary action a coach has, that is, to bench his players, I would forfeit the game. Well, they had me.

So in an unprecedented managerial move, I had the guilty Shawn and Michael Paul switch jerseys so that they reeked about equally, and I stuck Shawn in right field as far away from my dugout as I could. I put Michael Paul in at catcher. He didn't catch too many pitches but he definitely bothered the hitters. And he backed the umpire up against the backstop.

We lost the game but you will be happy to know everyone played the mandatory two innings.

All I gotta say is "long live boxing!"

BABY BIRDS

I was asked by the coach of my daughter's 8th grade basketball team to take over the team for the rest of the season so she could have a baby. Or at least that was her excuse. They hadn't won a game all season and it didn't take John Wooden to diagnose their problem. They were just too nice. The girls were genuinely thrilled when someone scored, whether it was them or their opponent. On the rare occasion when they fouled somebody they used the occasion of lining up on either side of the lane to apologize profusely.

I decided my only chance at turning things around was to teach the girls to play the game like it was meant to be played. Aggressively, like boys play it. It became my goal in life.

I started with the rebounding. I explained to them that they had been rebounding like baby birds sitting in a nest with their mouths open waiting for a ball to drop in. They needed to hunt the ball like eagles, swooping across the lane, talons slashing. I told them not to be afraid to throw a wing now and then. It was part of the game.

At practice, among themselves, I might have got them to the level of young blue jays. But the next game they reverted back to featherless sparrows. I did everything short of steroids to

make them more aggressive. I even encouraged them to play video games and watch more TV. Nothing worked.

Then one afternoon, as I was about to start practice, a teacher came in the gym with the news that one of the girls would not be at practice. Her father had a heart attack. Being the mature male adult I am, I quickly punted. I asked the teacher if she wouldn't mind speaking to the girls and walked off to weigh the pros and cons of calling off practice. I turned back to see the team, spontaneously closing like a fist, each player locked in an embrace with the others. At that moment, they were the strongest team I had ever seen.

The rest of the season I concentrated on perfecting the baby sparrow rebounding technique. You shouldn't mess with perfection.

A FAREWELL TO COACHING

I quit coaching little league this year. After fifteen years, I conceded defeat and hung up my fungo.

It used to be a coaches' game. We loved baseball, liked the kids and tolerated the parents. The game taught the kids life's lessons. The worst thing about the job was the annual confrontation in the parking lot with an irate father who insisted, generally steadied by distilled spirits, that Junior, who I know would rather be watching cartoons than playing baseball, should be starting at shortstop instead of sharing time in right field.

Often, the way to disarm the situation was agreeing to let Junior play shortstop. A ground ball off the shins or a pop fly off the forehead usually helped dad's perspective.

Then, when I wasn't looking, the Egalitarians took over. Everybody got to play. Everybody got a trophy. Coaches were expected to cater to kids and their parents like politicians groveling for votes.

And somewhere along the way we coaches lost control of the game.

My little league coach hit the beach on D-Day. When he got mad, we used our cleats to dig foxholes. But using the game he

taught us a lot of the lessons his generation learned the hard way, through a depression and a world war.

Last season I had a kid say something to me that I didn't say until I was in college. But the league rules wouldn't allow me to bench him.

Now maybe this whole business of learning life's lessons through sports is overrated, but maybe it isn't. I just hope this next generation is never called upon to save the world from tyrants. They won't even try unless everyone is guaranteed a trophy.

THE BURKE MOBILE

NORMAN: This is Rick Norman here in Elks' Hole, Wyoming inside the Burke Mobile, which looks to be a converted Winnebago. Here to give Only A Game a guided tour is none other than Ed Burke, All-American.

BURKE: Good to see you again, Rick.

NORMAN: The last time we saw you, Ed, was at your one-man theatrical tribute to yourself entitled: "Everyone Thinks I'm Conceited Because I'm So Good - The Ed Burke Story."

BURKE: I remember. I looked for you after the sixth act but you were gone.

NORMAN: Yes, the other fellow in the audience asked me to help him find some migraine medicine. But tell us about the Burke Mobile.

BURKE: I decided to convert a Winnebago into a traveling museum.

NORMAN: Dedicated to your career as a second team All-American at Tulane in the 1960's?

BURKE: Yes, it's full of my football trophies and other mementos of my fabulous career.

NORMAN: I particularly enjoyed seeing your first bow tie.

BURKE: Did you see the cleats I was wearing when I won the neighborhood track meet in the sixth grade?

NORMAN: I went back for a second look. Ed, what kind of people are you able to lure into the Burke Mobile?

BURKE: In the summer it's slow, but when the weather turns cold, I get a lot of people asking for soup.

NORMAN: What would you say is the general reaction to this shrine to yourself?

BURKE: I would say mostly stunned silence.

NORMAN: I can see that. I'm sure anyone visiting the Burke Mobile would appreciate all the trouble you've gone to make your life seem interesting. Where to next, Ed?

BURKE: Well, with gas prices rising, I think I'll winter here in Elk's Hole. I'm pretty confident I'll be awarded a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.

NORMAN: Well, it will certainly compliment your other awards here in the Burke Mobile, including my favorite, your second grade penmanship award.

BURKE: Look at that "W".

NORMAN; And you did excellent "E"s and "F"s I noticed. Ladies and gentlemen, be sure to be on the lookout for the Burke Mobile. If you've ever wanted to see the ribbon they give for being second team All-American, you're in for a real treat.

EXCLUSIVE

NORMAN: I couldn't be more excited that Only A Game has been granted an exclusive interview with the world's most popular professional athlete, Jack Jackson. In case anyone in our listening audience lives in a cave, Jacko was named the best football player of the century. The same day he accepted the trophy as this year's Most Valuable Player he announced to a stunned national TV audience that he was retiring from football and moving to Monrovia. He has said this will be his last public appearance, and I am personally thrilled to have been selected by Only A Game and National Public Radio to conduct this historic interview.

First, Mr. Jackson, let me say how deeply appreciative I am that you would allow me to conduct your final interview. May I call you Jacko?

JACKSON: (silence)

NORMAN: Mr. Jackson, after fifteen NFL seasons you finally got a Superbowl ring this year. How does it feel?

JACKSON: I thought it would erase the guilt, the horrible guilt. But it has only made my crimes so much more felonious.

NORMAN: What was a greater thrill? Being this year's season MVP or Superbowl MVP?

JACKSON: It was the mob; the mafia. They said: "Play ball with us or you won't play ball at all." I gambled. I threw games. I didn't need the money. Why did I do it?

NORMAN: Are you retiring with any goals left unfulfilled?

JACKSON: Do you understand? I threw last year's Superbowl. The game was fixed.

NORMAN: Finally, what do you say to the youngster who wants to follow in Jacko Jackson's footsteps?

JACKSON: (scooting chair, footsteps, door shutting)

NORMAN: Well, I guess what they say is true. You always think you'll have more time after you retire, but obviously Mr. Jackson has a busy schedule. And I'm personally very sorry he left before I had a chance to tell him how much this interview will mean to my journalistic career. He's my hero and I know he's yours. Back to you, Bill.



SOUVENIR SALESMAN

(shop bell at front door rings)

NORMAN: Sir, can we have a moment of your time, please.

SMITH: Who are you?

NORMAN: I'm Rick Norman, radio reporter for Only A Game and defender of sports fans in most states and Canada.

SMITH: Never heard of you.

NORMAN: You, sir, are the owner of Major League Memorabilia here on Grant and First Avenue.

SMITH: What of it? You come to buy something?

NORMAN: Sir, would you identify yourself for our radio audience?

SMITH: Smith. John Smith.

NORMAN: You have memorabilia for sale?

SMITH: Sure. We got baseballs, bats, jerseys, cleats, -- if its authentic memorabilia, we got it or can make it while you wait.

NORMAN: Who says it's authentic?

SMITH: I says. Every item comes with a certificate of authenticity signed by me. And I'm a notary.

NORMAN: Sir, do you recognize this cap?

SMITH: Let me get my glasses here. Yes, it looks to be, yes, this is Ty Cobb's hat.

NORMAN: Or so you say. You sold it yesterday to an 11-year old child whose father just happens to work at the radio station.

SMITH: Read the sign. Well there was a sign. It said, "All sales final!"

NORMAN: Well, sir, our sports researchers back at the station tell me that when Ty Cobb played, there was no such thing as 100% polyester and no such thing as South Korea.

SMITH: Who made you Commissioner of Baseball?

NORMAN: Sir, I doubt this cap ever saw the top of Ty Cobb's head.

SMITH: Well, maybe I won't be on your radio show again either.

NORMAN: Don't worry. Remember, folks. That's Major League Memorabilia on Grant Street.

SECURITY GUARD

NORMAN: The big NFL game ended almost an hour ago and most fans are stuck in traffic on their way home. But I remained at the north end of the stadium where a small but enthusiastic group of fans waits behind a barricade, hoping for a glimpse of their favorite players as they leave the locker room.

Let's talk to this uniformed security guard who looks like he's in charge of keeping the fans at bay.

Sir, you are?

WORNAT: Special Security Officer Tom Wornat, Stadium Crowd Control.

NORMAN: That's probably the biggest badge I've ever seen.

WORNAT: That was one of the things that attracted me to the job.

NORMAN: Is that a real gun?

WORNAT: Let one of those kids crawl under the barricade and we'll see.

NORMAN: Tom, can you tell our radio audience exactly what you do here at the players gate?

WORNAT: Well, Mr. Norman, my job is to make sure the players get from their cars to the locker room and vice versa,

without getting hassled by the riffraff, as the players refer to them.

NORMAN: They refer to themselves as fans.

WORNAT: O.K. Fans. I keep the fans behind that barricade. I also go out to the players' cars and turn on the climate control for them, mostly, that is, for the rookies who don't have a chauffeur.

NORMAN: How did you get a job where you get to be around the biggest names in sport?

WORNAT: Well, Mr. Norman, my sister dates several members of the defensive line.

NORMAN: How exciting. How long do the fans stand out here waiting for the players?

WORNAT: Oh, hours. You should see how excited they get when one of the players looks in their direction.

NORMAN: Do the players ever sign autographs?

WORNAT: No, generally there is no one to collect the money for the autographs or make change. But a couple of times since I've been here a player has waived to the riff uh...the fans. That's a thrill for the kids.

NORMAN: Do you yourself get many autographs?

WORNAT: No, I'm trying to save my money.

NORMAN: It looks like you love your job.

WORNAT: I love the interaction with the fans. Excuse me please. I need to make an announcement.

Ladies and gentlemen: If you've come to idolize Bam Watkins from afar, he asks that you not look directly at him as he enters his limousine. As you know, he dropped that punt in the fourth quarter and says he really doesn't want to have to deal with the little people today. His agent says that you are, however, welcome to buy his new rap C.D. instead, and enjoy Mr. Watkins talents for years to come.

NORMAN: Bam Watkins sounds like a real prince.

WORNAT: He gave me a \$100 tip last week.

NORMAN: A hundred bucks.

WORNAT: Yes, he said he appreciated the way I pistol-whipped a fan who tried to touch him.

NORMAN: Well, he has the reputation for being generous.

WORNAT: A prince.

NORMAN: Tom, since I am a member of the press and all, do you think you could let me into the locker room?

WORNAT: Well, I don't know. I really shouldn't. I tell you what I will do. I'll turn my stun gun down to three and if you make it, you make it.

NORMAN: Thanks Tom. The players' generosity is rubbing off on you.

WORNAT: I hope so.

NORMAN: It's good to know our beloved players are being
protected. Good luck Tom. Back to you, Bill.

BLACK HOLE

I just finished reading A Brief History of Time by Stephen Hawking. Well, the truth be told, I finished reading everything I could understand, which wasn't a whole lot. I even had trouble with the pictures, and that's my forte. Hawking is the English physicist confined to a wheelchair with Lou Gehrig's Disease. He is supposed to be the smartest guy since Einstein and I didn't see anything in his book to prove any different. The one thing I did glean from looking at the pages was that Hawking has shown for certain that time only runs in one direction. There ain't no going back.

This is the ammunition I have been looking for to settle a running argument with Big Dan, a guy I played ball with in high school. Over the past several years, Big Dan has gone from a mere sports fan to a sports "collector," losing his wife and son in the process. He subscribes to the popular Sports-Time Continuum Theory advocated by the sports memorabilia marketers. Their theory goes that if you have legal title to a piece of matter that was formally in close proximity to a sports icon, it is possible to go back in time and be part of a sports legend.

Our dispute heated up a while back when Big Dan bought a 1927 World Series ring at a baseball card show. He paid a large percentage of his annual salary for it, an amount almost equal

to what it would cost him to put his son through college. When he came by my house to show it to me, I asked him whether him owning the ring meant that he actually played in the 1927 World Series. He said, no, but he was now part of the history of that event. I tried to explain to him that you can't buy history any more than you can buy time. You've got to live it. He just couldn't understand why I got so upset.

Big Dan's 10-year-old son, who luckily is now living with his mother, is into collecting baseball cards. The kid keeps a calculator with his card collection so he can keep an up-to-the-minute tally on its current monetary value. Now to me, Sandy Koufax was a great left hander who I saw pitch in the Astro Dome when I was a kid. I remember that trip like it was yesterday. But to Dan's kid, Sandy Koufax is a \$55 card. He doesn't know what a curve ball is much less how to throw one. Big Dan has his boy subscribing to the same sports memorabilia time-travel theory: that not only can you buy a memory, you can sell it later at a profit.

I told Big Dan that if he really wants to own a memory what he needs to do is this: sell his World Series ring and put the money into a college account for his kid; sell his big screen TV and beg his wife to come home; and since he's just gotta buy something, buy a couple of baseball gloves, get off the couch and into the yard and teach his son how to throw a curve ball.

Live some real home-grown memories rather than telemarketed ones.

I am sure my argument is consistent with Professor Hawking's theory and with Lou Gehrig's life.

I know they both would've liked more time in the backyard playing with the kids.

CONCESSIONAIRE

NORMAN: Sir, when you are finished ringing up that youngster, I'd like to ask you a few questions about your job.

BRUNO: Hold your water, Bub! Listen kid, you gave me a ten. I know the difference between a ten and a twenty. Okay, go tell your mommy. Tell her that she'll have to identify that twenty with serial numbers.... Oh, boo-hoo to you to..

Alright Bub, what's with the microphone? Am I on the air? You ask me anything about taxes and, so help me, you'll wish you never set foot in my souvenir shop.

NORMAN: No sir, I'm Rick Norman, and you're on "Only A Game," America's favorite sports radio show. What's your name sir?

BRUNO: Bruno Torre.

NORMAN: Mr. Torre, I understand you have operated this souvenir shop here in the stadium for almost fifty years.

BRUNO: What of it?

NORMAN: Well, I'm sure you've sold a lot of pennants and T-shirts over the years.

BRUNO: No kidding. Hold your water for a second.

When did your family crash-land here on earth kid?
George Brett ain't played since before your mother had
a mustache. O.K. Now what?

NORMAN: Have you seen a big change in the last fifty years in
the sports souvenir business?

BRUNO: Listen. When I started, the kids came to the park to
watch the game. If they was lucky, their old man
would buy them a 50 cent pennant. If they wasn't so
lucky, their old man would sock 'em for asking. Now
the kids spend more time in here than they do watching
the game. They come in here with hundred dollar
bills, acting like little Wall Street tycoons. They
try to bargain with me.

Hold on. It would be in mint condition except for the
blood on it from the last kid who tried reaching in
there.

NORMAN: You were telling us about the evolution of the
souvenir business.

BRUNO: Right. Baseball cards used to get clipped to bicycle
spokes. Now they're kept in a safety deposit box.

NORMAN: How much longer do you see yourself doing this?

BRUNO: If I'm lucky...uh oh!... No sir, I'm terribly sorry
for any misunderstanding. If your son says he gave me

a twenty, I'm sure he did. The customer is always right.... Come again.

NORMAN: That was a big man.

BRUNO: I've learned that when their eyes get red like that and they get that spittle in the corners of their mouth, it's best not to haggle over a few pennies.

NORMAN: That's good advice for all our listeners. How much longer will you be selling souvenirs, Mr. Torre?

BRUNO: As long as I can work with children. They keep me young. Hey kid! What part of don't touch the glass don't you understand?

NORMAN: You're an inspiration, Mr. Torre.

For Only A Game, this is Rick Norman.

TO THE MANOR BORN EVERY MINUTE

BILL: Rick Norman has found for us what he believes may just be the largest private collection of Babe Ruth memorabilia anywhere.

NORMAN: Only A Game has found for us what the staff believes may be the largest private collection of Babe Ruth memorabilia anywhere. I am standing in the west wing...

PENDERGRASS: The northwest wing.

NORMAN: Sorry, the northwest wing of the Pendergrass mansion on the Pendergrass estate outside of Boston with Mr. Hugh Pendergrass, heir to the Pendergrass fortune.

PENDERGRASS: Sole heir.

NORMAN: Right, congratulations.

PENDERGRASS: I am pleased to welcome the Only A Game audience to my humble abode.

NORMAN: Yes, it's quite a spread. You ever hit a golf ball in the foyer there? ... No, probably not.

PENDERGRASS: I invited you here to be the first commoner to view my Babe Ruth collection.

NORMAN: Thank you, your grace. I must say our staff researchers could find no record of your collection.

PENDERGRASS: Well, we Pendergrasses are modest, if nothing else.

NORMAN: This certainly is a lot of stuff. All of this belonged to Babe Ruth?

PENDERGRASS: Seven hundred sixty-two articles. Most priceless.

NORMAN: How did you amass such a collection?

PENDERGRASS: That is an interesting story, Rick. As a lad I loved baseball but was prone to exhaustion. My father would pay the kids from town two dollars a day to play their sandlot games on our south lawn so I could watch from my balcony.

NORMAN: Sounds like a swell old man.

PENDERGRASS: Yes. Soon I became great friends with the boys, despite the disparity in our social status.

NORMAN: I'm sure they appreciated the two bucks, too.

PENDERGRASS: One day one of the boys, knowing my love for Babe Ruth, offered to sell me this!

NORMAN: ...it looks like an old leather glove.

PENDERGRASS: You're looking at the Great Bambino's first glove.

NORMAN: I thought Babe Ruth was left-handed?

PENDERGRASS: Yes, eventually. But not when he started.

NORMAN: (skeptical) How much did your friends sell you
that glove for?

PENDERGRASS: Well, let's just say I felt the glove was well
worth asking Daddy for an advance on my allowance.

NORMAN: What about this other stuff you have in the
showcase here: Babe Ruth's blender, Babe Ruth's
ice pick, Babe Ruth's ashtray from the Majestic
Hotel in East Pilgrim, Maine.

PENDERGRASS: Once the boys saw how much I loved Babe Ruth, they
scoured the countryside for artifacts.

NORMAN: And offered them for sale to you?

PENDERGRASS: Oh, we'd dicker on the price, but money has never
been an object.

NORMAN: Not to you, yeah.

PENDERGRASS: The boys are grown now, my age, but they still come
back when they run across a gem. I bought this
last week. ...Don't touch please.

NORMAN: It looks like a cigar butt.

PENDERGRASS: This is the cigar that the Babe was smoking when he
heard that Pearl Harbor had been attacked. He
threw this cigar at an oriental looking gentleman
and said, "This better not bring back prohibition."

NORMAN: I never heard that story. How much would you say you've paid "the boys" over the last fifty or sixty years?

PENDERGRASS: A small fortune, I'd guess, but worth every million. I guess now that the world knows about the collection, I need to have it appraised for insurance purposes.

NORMAN: I don't think I'd do that, Mr. Pendergrass. Take it from me, your collection is priceless.

PENDERGRASS: Thank you and thank you for coming. Please come back. I don't get many visitors.

NORMAN: We will, Mr. Pendergrass. Back to the studio.

INTERGALLACTIC BONDING

Recently, somebody gave me tickets to a Houston Astros game, so I took my family. Not having had the foresight to gamble with my life's savings in the stock market, I could not otherwise afford to take five people to a professional sporting event.

On our way to the game we decided to visit a Houston mall to buy the inevitable souvenir team caps and T-shirts at retail instead of the extortionate prices you pay at the Astrodome kiosks.

The mall just so happened to be hosting an intergalactic Star Trek convention. There were thousands of characters in full costume milling around the shops. I've got to tell you, it was somewhat unsettling. Seeing dozens of people in the same place dressed as Captain Kirk, even little kids, is enough to give a grown man nightmares. It was as close as I had been to a freak show since I snuck under the frog-boy tent at the 1966 Louisiana State Fair. My kids were bug-eyed.

We found a sporting goods store and I outfitted myself and the rest of the family in official major league licensed, Houston Astros T-shirts and caps and we headed for the mall exit.

Just outside the doors stood three, pointy-eared Dr. Spocks taking a smoking break. As we approached them they smiled at me and one gave me the thumbs-up sign. I turned around to see if there might not be a Scotty or Sulu behind us but, for some reason, they had intended to communicate with me.

The first thing I thought was maybe they had noticed my ears. When I was a kid I worried that my ears were pointy. One time I asked my father if my ears were abnormal. He said to me: "Why are you worried about your ears? Your head's shaped like a potato." I hadn't thought about the shape of my ears again until that moment.

Seeing my bewilderment, one of the Spocks yelled: "Go Astros!" The other Spocks gave me the Vulcan peace sign. The make-belief Spocks were Astros fans too. That's all it was. They had seen our T-shirts and caps.

But during the Astros game I couldn't help thinking about the three Spocks and the rest of the Star Trek convention. What would make people dress up in costumes and act like that?

It was the sixth inning when the Astros took the lead on a three run homer. The whole dome was on its feet cheering when I just happened to catch the eye of a fan across the aisle from me. His family was also dressed in full Astros regalia. He gave me the thumbs up sign.

Then it hit me. I had merely gone from a Star Trek convention to a pro sports convention. And I realized: People probably aren't much different, whatever they're pretending. So I gave the fan across the aisle the Vulcan peace sign. Because, as a make-believe Astro, I'm in favor of home runs and intergalactic harmony.

INVENTOR OF THE MODERN BASEBALL

NORMAN: Only A Game is here at Rocking R Ranch and Retirement Community to talk with Mr. Jeffrey Warton, inventor of the modern baseball. I'm having a little trouble catching up with Mr. Warton. He appears to be pretty active for a man in his nineties. Mr. Warton?

WARTON: I don't eat big green peas. I fought the Kaiser so I wouldn't have to eat big green peas.

NORMAN: No, I'm a radio reporter, Mr. Warton. I wanted to ask you about your inventing modern baseball.

WARTON: Cat hair.

NORMAN: You can't hear?

WARTON: No. Cat hair. When I was young, baseballs were made of cat hair. Cat hair covered with lunchmeat.

NORMAN: I thought ...

WARTON: The more expensive balls had a center made of silly putty.

NORMAN: I didn't think silly putty ...

WARTON: I have seen Babe Ruth eat 6 or 7 balls on a hot day and wash 'em down with two gallons of Milwaukee's finest.

NORMAN: Uh... when did you get the idea that horsehide and yarn might be better than...

WARTON: Let me show you a picture of me and The Babe. Look at this.

NORMAN: That's last week's TV Guide. Mr. Warton, can you please tell our radio audience about how you invented the modern baseball?

WARTON: Baseball? I invented the internet. Ha, Ha, Ha.

NORMAN: Hey, does anybody know if this guy is really Jeffery Warton. I don't know Bill, you might check the address again.

Back to the studio.

FOUL BALL

NORMAN: It's visiting hour at Memorial Hospital and Only A Game is here in room 267 with Edgar Smoot. How do you feel today, Mr. Smoot?

SMOOT: Ten times better than I felt Wednesday night, that's for sure.

NORMAN: I see quite a few ropes and tubes and things all leading to and away from you. What's the word from the medical staff here?

SMOOT: Nothing life threatening. A few broken bones. A chipped tooth or two. The doctor said in six months I'll be laughing about the whole thing.

NORMAN: Do you remember Wednesday night?

SMOOT: Perfectly. And even if I didn't, ESPN has showed the replay a hundred times. I was sitting right behind the upper deck rail at Shea Stadium. Someone hit a foul ball into the stands. I leaned over the rail to get it and leaned too far I guess.

NORMAN: And fell twenty-eight feet into the stands below.

SMOOT: Twenty-eight? I would have said fifty, minimum. I wouldn't think a man my size could turn three and a quarter flips in twenty-eight feet.

NORMAN: Our staff has studied the game highlight film and there are still a few unanswered questions about your fall. The replay shows you came nowhere close to catching the ball. It actually landed two sections over from you.

SMOOT: You know, as a kid I had trouble judging fly balls. I guess you just don't outgrow it.

NORMAN: Obviously not. The one question a lot of people are asking is why you risked death for a ball on ball night, when every fan, including yourself, received an official major league ball as they entered the stadium?

SMOOT: I don't know. Everyone had one. I thought if I had two...

NORMAN: In the land of one ball, the two-balled man is king.

SMOOT: Exactly.

NORMAN: How is the man you fell on?

SMOOT: I already got served with the lawsuit. It says that me falling on him ruined his hair transplant.

NORMAN: Well, Only A Game can't help with your legal defense, but we do have a gift to cheer you.

SMOOT: A ball?

NORMAN: An autographed official major league ball.

SMOOT: Whose autograph is that?

NORMAN: It looks like Juan McMillan or maybe Jullian Millican.
We don't know. It was behind the desk of someone at
the station who got fired recently.

SMOOT: It's not even round...

NORMAN: No need to thank us, Mr. Smoot. We hope you have a
speedy recovery. Back to you, Bill.

WOMEN OF BALINSK

NORMAN: Only A Game is here outside of the Olympic village in what I guess you would call the street vendor section. There are hundreds of kiosks selling everything from kangaroo burgers to Carl Lewis cologne. I am standing here at the kiosk of Vladmir Bostov. Did I say that correctly?

BOSTOV: Da, comrade.

NORMAN: Mr. Bostov, you have one of the more unusual souvenirs for sale here. It's a pinup calendar featuring female athletes from your home country, Lestonia.

BOSTOV: That is correct, Mr. Norman. Seven fifty American. Ten dollars Australian.

NORMAN: Now Lestonia is not competing in these Olympic games, as I understand it.

BOSTOV: That is correct, comrade. With the temporary demise of the Soviet Union and the devaluation of the ruble, the Lestonian Olympic Committee found itself without the necessary funds to send the team. So it was proposed to create and sell these calendars to raise money for the next Olympics. It is my country's first capitalistic venture.

NORMAN: And a very enthusiastic first attempt it is too. Let me ask you, Miss May here...

BOSTOV: Da. A favorite.

NORMAN: Is that a real tractor she is lifting there?

BOSTOV: Da! That tractor has been used every day on the commune for 68 years.

NORMAN: By Miss May?

BOSTOV: Nyet. Lestonian winters are harsh and Lestonian women tend to mature early.

NORMAN: Now Miss August here appears to have just thrown this steer to the cement but the steer has its eyes closed and I'm wondering if this picture wasn't staged with a dead cow.

BOSTOV: Nyet! Nyet! Let me assure you, in Lestonia if this cow was dead it would be burger.

NORMAN: From the calendar it appears sideburns are in fashion in Lestonia.

BOSTOV: Da. Last year it was goatees.

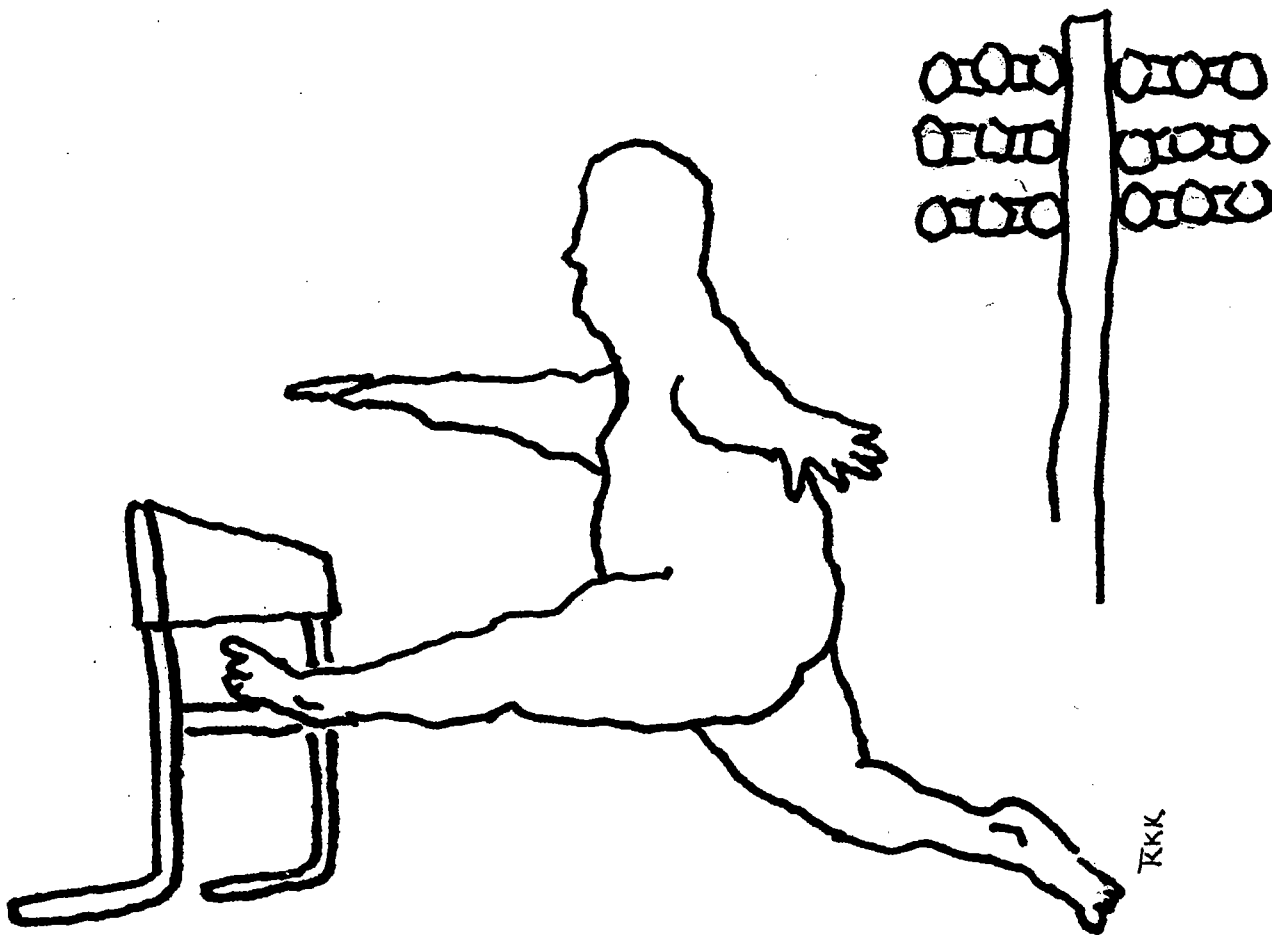
NORMAN: One question the people back at the studio wanted me to ask you was whether you have been accused of exploiting these women but now that I've seen the calendar...

BOSTOV: Never!

NORMAN: I believe you. Are you selling many calendars?

BOSTOV: Frankly, Comrade Norman, if it weren't for mail order sales to Canada and Alabama, we would not have recaptured our printing costs.

NORMAN: Well, we certainly hope Lestonia can find a benefactor before the next Olympics and does not have to resort to another calendar. Uh...Bill, I know what you said but I really don't think you want to let him give out that mail order address on the air. Trust me on this. Back to you.



TKK

ATHLETIC ART EXHIBIT

NORMAN: Well, Bill, you told me to come so I'm here. I'm at the National Sports Art Gallery here in Seattle. The curator, Mr. E. Wallace Nieset, has been kind enough to show me around.

NIESET: We're thrilled to have Only A Game visit our gallery.

NORMAN: Well, Mr. Nieset, I can tolerate art as well as the next guy but I'm having a problem with some of your exhibits.

NIESET: We hear those type of complaints a lot. Most people come expecting to see Roy Neaman prints and Sports Illustrated glossy photographs...

NORMAN: What's wrong with that?

NIESET: True art is so much more.

NORMAN: What is that? It looks like a basketball goal, but someone took the net off and hung socks around the rim.

NIESET: That piece is entitled "Fast Break." The artist said he was trying to show the futility of the 24-second clock. By the way, all our artwork is for sale.

NORMAN: I have a goal at home. Over here, that looks like a shot put in a jar...

NIESET: Yes, a jar of Gatorade. It's entitled "Put This."

NORMAN: Who concocted...

NIESET: Created.

NORMAN: Who created that thing?

NIESET: The artist doesn't use a name, he uses a symbol.

NORMAN: I bet it's not a dollar sign.

NIESET: Actually, he does quite well. Here is another work of his.

NORMAN: It looks like a giant athletic supporter holding a dozen or so football helmets.

NIESET: Yes it's called "Too Many Men on the Field." Do you like it?

NORMAN: I think I'm gonna have nightmares. Now, I like that, there in the corner.

NIESET: That is not an exhibit; that is a baseball bat we confiscated from a crazed man who was threatening to destroy our artwork.

NORMAN: Image that....I'll give you 20 dollars for three swings. ...50 dollars....

NIESET: Good day, sir. (receding footsteps)

NORMAN: Bill, my mother backed over my catcher's mask when I was a kid. If I can find it, I may start a gallery. Back to you.

IDAHO IDIOTS

NORMAN: I am here in Wallisburg, Idaho to speak with Mr. Jacob Millic who has chained himself to a fence to protest the name taken by the new minor league team here in Wallisburg, the Central Idaho Idiots. How is your protest going so far, Mr. Millic?

MILLIC: Well, to be quite frank with you, Mr. Norman, I was expecting more support from the community. I've been here all day (sound of rattling chains) and you are the first person who has showed the slightest interest. Most people when they see me just cross to the other side of the street.

NORMAN: For our radio listeners who don't have the benefit of seeing the expression on your face, please tell us what it is you personally have against the name "Idiots."

MILLIC: I just think it's sensitive.

NORMAN: You mean insensitive.

MILLIC: (silence)

NORMAN: I notice you brought a protest sign. It says: "Idiots have feelings t...(tuh)"

MILLIC: That's "too." I ran out of poster.

NORMAN: I also couldn't help noticing your shirtsleeve is burned there.

MILLIC: Yeah, I accidentally stuck my house key into a wall outlet this morning.

NORMAN: Gee, you O.K.?

MILLIC: Yeah, it wasn't as bad as last time, but it gave me a really bad headache. And that song - "It's a Small World" - keeps going through my head. It sounds like Jerry Lewis is singing. You don't hear it do you?

NORMAN: Mr. Millic, do you have any other ideas for getting the team to change its name? That is, assuming the public support doesn't materialize.

MILLIC: My strategy is I intend to stay chained here to the stadium gate until the team picks a less sensitive name.

NORMAN: Uh...Mr. Millic, this is not the stadium gate. This is the gate to the city recycling plant. The ballpark is one block over.

MILLIC: (sound of rattling chains and a frustrated grunt)

NORMAN: Can I give you a hand?

MILLIC: I seem to have left my key to the padlock in the wall socket at home. You wouldn't want to run by my place and

NORMAN: No, I'm allergic to AC current. But, if I pass a locksmith on the way back to the airport, I'll let him know where you are.

MILLIC: Thanks.

NORMAN: Good luck to you, Mr. Millic. And good luck to the Idiots, wherever they may be.

CLOCK KEEPER

NORMAN: We've traveled this afternoon to let's just say an average apartment on an average four-lane just outside an average town to speak to a man who just recently changed his name. We have promised to protect his anonymity.

MAN: Thank you, Mr. Norman. Since that fateful game, I've gone to great effort and expense to protect my new identity.

NORMAN: The plastic surgery certainly looks like it's going to take.

MAN: Yes, the doctors made a small mistake and put the moustache under my lip and I had to have day surgery to straighten things out.

NORMAN: If I wasn't in the same room with you I'd think that was a real face.

MAN: Thank you.

NORMAN: Tell our radio audience why you are a fugitive.

MAN: At the state championship high school football game this past year, I was the official timekeeper. It was a close game and in the last minute of play, I guess I got carried away and forgot to start the clock.

NORMAN: Yes, I understand the visiting team ran 12 plays in 22 seconds.

MAN: And scored the winning touchdown just as the Booster Club was storming the press box, trying to get me to start the clock. It was just one of those things.

NORMAN: Just one of those things that made you Public Enemy Number One in your former home town.

MAN: Yes. That night at the stadium the State Police had to use K-9 dogs and rubber bullets to protect me until the lynch mob dispersed.

NORMAN: I understand that the mob marched from the field to your home.

MAN: Right, when I turned down my street, the Booster Club was burning goal posts in my front yard. On the advice of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, I never went home again.

NORMAN: I guess you are lucky there is a referee-relocation program in your state.

MAN: Yes, I've been able to start over again under my new name. Although I doubt I'll ever referee another game.

NORMAN: We certainly understand. It's a lesson to all of us as to how one exceedingly stupid moment can change one's life forever. Thank you for having the courage

to talk to us today, Mr. Truman...er...Trumaninski.
Mr. Trumaninski.

MAN: Idiot!

K-9 REVENGE

NORMAN: This is Rick Norman, Only A Game's legal correspondent. This country has never heard such a fierce debate as the one that has raged this week between the animal rights advocates and the human rights supporters. The broohaw stems from the end-zone incident which occurred towards the end of the NFL game in Atlanta last Sunday.

RICHARDS: You mind if I stand up?

NORMAN: Go right ahead, Zip.

RICHARDS: (Zip groans)

NORMAN: Obviously we couldn't interview Sarge, the police dog involved in the incident, so we are here in the physical therapy ward of Country Memorial Hospital to talk to a pretty uncomfortable looking Zip Richards, wide receiver for the Falcons.

RICHARDS: Can we get on with it? My agent said five minutes.

NORMAN: Sure. How is your recovery going?

RICHARDS: O.K. My stitches come out tomorrow.

NORMAN: Well, the question most asked this week is whether you had any prior experience with dogs. Did you have a dog as a kid?

RICHARDS: No, we were a hamster family.

NORMAN: Well, I ask that because from the highlight film it looked like after you scored you actually ran towards Sarge and his K-9 patrolman handler.

RICHARDS: Yes, I knew that if I ever scored late in a game, the K-9 cops would be in the end zone. So I had been rehearsing my zonabration...

NORMAN: Your end zone dance...

RICHARDS: Right. I call this particular zonabration "burying the bone." It was an excellent metaphor for the moment.

NORMAN: There at the end of your dance, after you...I guess you were baying at the moon?

RICHARDS: That's right.

NORMAN: Did you intend to hit Sarge when you spiked the football?

RICHARDS: No, I think the replay clearly shows the ball took a bad bounce.

NORMAN: Well, unfortunately for you Zip, Sarge didn't wait to review the replay.

RICHARDS: I don't blame the stupid dog so much as the cop who turned him loose.

NORMAN: Was there ever a moment there when you actually thought to yourself: "Hey, I might be able to scale the end zone wall before this dog catches me?"

RICHARDS: I never imagined a dog could out jump me.

NORMAN: Were those tear-away pants you were wearing?

RICHARDS: You a comedian?

NORMAN: I guess that split-tail gown the hospital has you wearing doesn't bother you like it does most people.

RICHARDS: There's nothing showing that 50 million people haven't already seen.

NORMAN: There are rumors out of Hollywood this week that Sarge is filming a TV pilot.

RICHARDS: That's just great. I'm on the blooper tape and a dog gets his own show.

NORMAN: Well, so did Bill Littlefield if that's any consolation.

This is Rick Norman reporting.

PLAYING (WITH) POSSUM

I was looking at the pictures in my "Science-Lite" Magazine the other day, trying to keep abreast of the latest scientific theories, when I was suddenly face-to-face with what must be the fattest twins in the universe. Thinking it's an ad for a two-for-one steak house, I started reading.

It turns out, these scientists are studying twins trying to find the fat gene. That's g-e-n-e. The theory being that since twins, even twins separated at birth, usually have the same jean size -- that's j-e-a-n -- the reason has to be in their genetic makeup rather than because of their eating habits. I don't understand all I know about genetics, but these scientists were sure that if they could find this fat gene, they could fix it.

I'm thinking, who cares about whether twins are fat or not. Why don't scientists turn their I.Q.s onto something that would benefit all humanity. Why don't they figure out how a guy like Bill Buckner could let that lazy grounder trickle through his legs in the World Series? Why don't they isolate and fix the choke gene? Well, it's because those eggheads never played ball. They were too busy playing with their slide rules and chemistry sets.

But you know me, I'm not one to sit back and wait on legitimate Science, so I decided to take their research and save the world.

Now where you are you probably have squirrels. Down here we have possums. The main-most characteristic of a possum is that when put under stress it will faint dead-out away. (That's where you get the term "playing possum" from.) Now here's where I make the quantum leap in human knowledge. Ergo, the possum must house the ultimate choke gene. And like the article said about the fat gene: "If we can find it, we can fix it." Do you realize what such a discovery would mean to the Boston Red Sox alone?

So like any good scientist, I set up an experiment to prove my theory. I bought a \$65 large-rodent trap and after catching every poodle in the neighborhood twice, finally caged a possum. I took the possum, humanely still in the trap, down the street to the ball field and started hitting grounders at him. Sure enough, every time the ball hit the case, he fainted faster than a fat woman at a funeral.

About this time, the dog catcher drives up. In our parish he's got the irreconcilable jobs of protecting animals from cruelty and catching dogs so they can be gassed. He says: "Boy, when I saw a 2-headed collie I thought I'd seen everything. What in the name of God Almighty are you doing with a bucket of

hard balls, a fungo bat and a caged possum? This looks an awful lot like animal cruelty."

I pleaded with him not to impound me. I explained to him that I was a free lance scientist looking for the Bill Buckner choke gene.

But I shouldn't have panicked. This being Louisiana and him being a public official, he was just looking for some quid pro quo. He told me that there might be an exception for legitimate animal experimentation and in the same breath how much he admired my poodle trap. So I donated the trap to him. In the process of the extortion, he extricated the fainted possum and handed it to me by the tail. That's when I learned that this possum had both the Bill Buckner gene and the Billy Martin gene because it promptly came to life, ran up my arm and around my head 3 times, scratching and biting all the way.

I bet Einstein never had to take rabies shots.

STEAKING FAN

NORMAN: I'm here today at the Country Day State Penitentiary. I have interviewed many players in the big house but this is the first time I have come here to interview a fan. Hello, Mr. Walmsley.

WALMSLEY: Hello, Mr. Norman.

NORMAN: College football fans may not remember last year's Soybean Bowl, but they should remember the halftime highlights, thanks to Mr. Walmsley.

WALMSLEY: You know, Mr. Norman, it was one of those things that seemed like a good idea at the time...

NORMAN: Yes, well let me finish my lead-in here. During the game last year, Mr. Stanley Walmsley imposed his 15 seconds of fame on the television audience when he ran across the field during the halftime Salute to Sprayed Pesticides wearing only his socks and shoes and Tulane University beanie.

WALMSLEY: I have apologized and been a model inmate.

NORMAN: I'm sure you have. Did you get a chance to see the replay before they locked you up?

WALMSLEY: No, it's really not something I like to...

NORMAN: Well, we have a surprise for you today, Mr. Walmsley. I brought a VCR with me today and I just happen to

have your little escapade on tape, compliments of ESPN.

WALMSLEY: (pause) Is that me?

NORMAN: You took quite a risk jumping that hedge.

WALMSLEY: Whoa! I never realized my thighs looked that fat.

NORMAN: Now, you doubled back here at the majorettes. What was your thinking?

WALMSLEY: I don't know if it was their flaming batons or what, but about here I was having second thoughts.

NORMAN: Yeah, you're no longer smiling. And here comes the first policeman. Did you slip down?

WALMSLEY: No, it was the pepper spray.

NORMAN: Now the rest of the police arrive.

WALMSLEY: Well, that explains one thing. They hit me with a stun gun.

NORMAN: I don't think I've seen a human body do that before.

WALMSLEY: I didn't realize it before this incident, but when you're naked and being pistol whipped you really need to decide what you're going to protect.

NORMAN: It looks like you kept changing your mind.

WALMSLEY: I'll be the first one to admit the whole thing wasn't well-planned.

NORMAN: That's about it. You don't move much after that. What's the last thing you remember?

WALMSLEY: I remember the crowd chanting: "Hit 'em again. Hit 'em again."

NORMAN: Well, you certainly brightened up the holiday bowl season for a lot of sports fans. And to show our appreciation "Only A Game" would like you to have your own copy of this VHS tape.

WALMSLEY: We don't have a VCR player here.

NORMAN: No need to thank me. Have a nice day Mr. Walmsley.
Back to you, Bill.

TOP PLATE

NORMAN: We have an unusual baseball story for you today, even for us. We're here to witness a man reunited with his teeth. First let me introduce Mr. Neville Root who is presently bicuspidly challenged.

ROOT: (obviously missing his top plate) Hullo, Mr. Rick. This is really exciting. I never thought I'd see my top plate again.

NORMAN: Why don't you tell our radio audience how you lost your dentures.

ROOT: I ran late for an Astros game and didn't use glue on my top plate. I was sitting on the rail in the upper deck and towards the end of the game there was a particularly questionable call by the ump. So I stood up and started screaming.

NORMAN: You pointed out his mistake?

ROOT: Yeah, well one of the words I yelled started with "F."

NORMAN: Foolish?

ROOT: Yeah, something like that. And the next thing I know my top plate is shooting out of my mouth down into the stands below.

NORMAN: Well, certainly you went down to look for your teeth?

ROOT: Why sure. I had just bought a six-dollar tub of popcorn.

NORMAN: No luck though.

ROOT: I didn't know it then, but my teeth had cleared the mezzanine level and fallen into a guys lap two sections below.

NORMAN: That was some "F"!

ROOT: Yeah, well I leave the game thinking, what am I gonna tell the wife. As soon as I walk in she notices I'm gummin'. (imitating nag) "You'd lose your head if it wasn't bolted on." Yeah, I really caught it that night.

NORMAN: Well, we don't want to get into your domestic misfortunes, Mr. Root. As far as Only A Game is concerned, this story has a happy ending. So let me bring over Mr. Ronald Wilberforce.

WILBERFORCE: Here's your teeth, buddy.

ROOT: Thanks, man. Here's your money.

NORMAN: That's great.

WILBERFORCE: Make sure they still fit. They've been in my pocket all week.

ROOT: These are mine all right. Fee, fy, fo, fum.
 (sound of clamping teeth).

NORMAN: Mr. Wilberforce, what did you think when Mr. Root's
 dentures fell in your lap?

WILBERFORCE: I was shocked. (deliberately) I had caught a foul
 ball once but never a plate.

ROOT: (laughing) That's a good one.

WILBERFORCE: One of the guys at work made that up.

NORMAN: Yes. What did you do with Mr. Root's teeth?

WILBERFORCE: Well, a souvenir is a souvenir. I took them home.
 The guys at the plant got a big kick out of them.
 My buddy Charley tried 'em on. He looked just like
 Jim Carey.

NORMAN: How did you and Mr. Root finally link up?

WILBERFORCE: On the internet. I offered the teeth for auction
 on E-bay.

ROOT: That's right, and I was high bidder.

NORMAN: If I may ask, what does a top plate bring on E-bay?

ROOT: Normally you can pick 'em up for five bucks if you
 ain't real particular.

WILBERFORCE: But you know you always have to pay a little more
 for sports memorabilia.

NORMAN: So everyone appears happy. Mr. Root can eat
 popcorn again.

ROOT: Call me Kernel.

NORMAN: Mr. Wilberforce got...?

WILBERFORCE: Twelve dollars, less commission.

NORMAN: And we got to see the value of the internet. Back
 to the studio.

NOBEL LAUREATE

I am working on my first Nobel prize in science. Not only do you get instant respect from the type of people who read books but there's a million dollar prize that goes with it. You are saying: "Wait a minute Norman, don't you realize that to collect your award and money you've got to go to a European country (one without a nude beach by the way) and wear a tuxedo." Sure, I'll admit if you just look at it objectively, no one in their right mind would want a Nobel prize. But ever since I was a little kid and cut open my first frog with a dull knife, I've wanted to be a scientist. Had math and science not been required subjects, I'd probably be a scientist today. I do try to keep up with the latest scientific goings on by subscribing to the science journal "Science Illustrated."

Well, on this particular Saturday, I'm looking at the pictures in my "Science Illustrated" magazine while driving to the LSU football game to watch the Tigers teach some yankee team that football, at least the way it's played in the SEC, is a full contact sport. This one picture that catches my eye is of two thigh bones. One is from a homo sapiens human like us, and it looks like a piece of ½" PVC pipe. This other thigh bone is from a Neanderthal. It looks like a 3" diameter concrete column with a piece of steel rebar running through the middle. My

first thought was to wonder what LSU would pay under the table to have a guy with this kind of bone structure suit up. Then I started actually reading the article and learned that no one knows what happened to these Neanderthal guys. They've gone extinct.

One group of scientists believe they died off because homo sapiens, us, were so much smarter and basically outsmarted the Neanderthals into extinction. This seems plausible. You go on a snipe hunt in the stone age and you're gonna get eaten. The other theory is we humans bred with Neanderthals and they just blended in with us over the centuries. This theory is favored by another group of scientists, which I gather are your even bigger nerds, who can only get dates with big hairy women themselves.

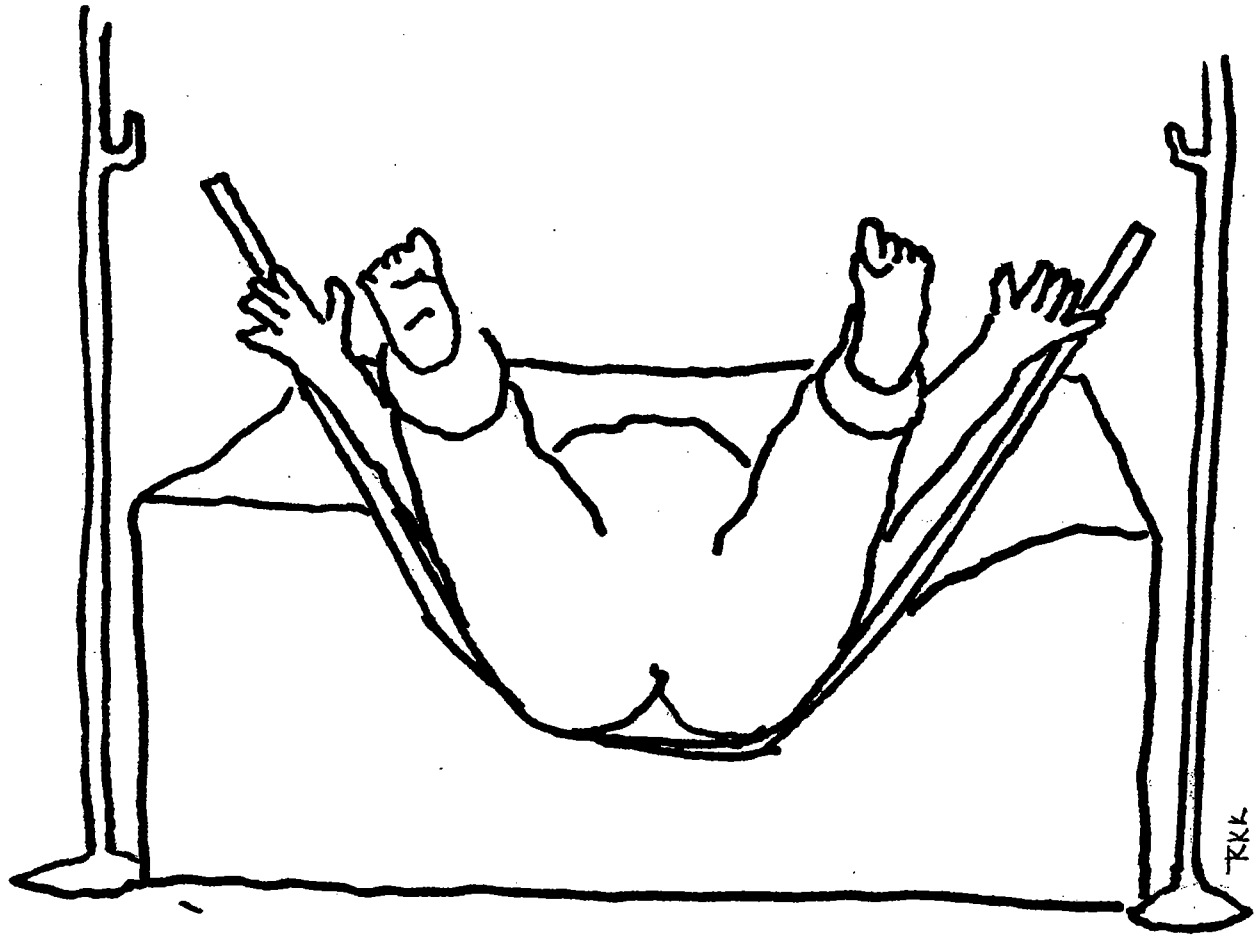
I was pondering this enigma into the 4th quarter when some guy down the row from me, who evidently had started celebrating LSU's victory the night before, throws up onto some woman's mink coat in front of him. This was not an unusual occurrence for an LSU game, nor was the section-wide riot that usually follows. What was unusual was that someone in Louisiana would let his wife go buy a mink coat, and more curiously, that he would let her wear it to an LSU game, not exactly your society gala. But that's another mystery. Inspired by the gang fight, I solved

the easier one, the reason for the extinction of the Neanderthals.

It was obvious to me, although I am working from an unfair advantage, that Neanderthals were built to play contact sports. Undoubtedly, they played rough and were probably rabid fans, too. Without a well-trained campus police force backed up with tactical nuclear weapons, Neanderthals would have likely killed themselves off during sporting events over a very few seasons. Their being extinct let us Homo sapiens come out of the caves (where we had started doing art stuff on the walls for Heaven's sake), and onto the playing fields where we belong.

I am gonna send my article off to "Science Illustrated" magazine as soon as I get the pictures of the gang fight developed and my wife checks my spelling.

I wonder if they rent tux's in Europe. Maybe I can take in a soccer riot while I am there.



SHOPPING FOR THE MEANING OF LIFE

I am very conscious of the "dumb jock" stereotype. Not because I think there's no such thing as a dumb jock, I just believe that in these modern times everyone needs a pseudo-injustice to rail against, no matter how trivial.

Nowhere is the dumb jock stereotype more evident than at a national sporting goods store.

I happened to be at one recently, shopping for a baseball bat for my son which, incidentally, cost more than my wife's engagement ring, when there, staring at me from the shelf next to the team water coolers was a rubber sweatsuit. This sweatsuit was designed, according to the packaging, to induce maximum perspiration. Small print on the label warned to discontinue use if you turn crimson and your eyes roll back in your head.

No store would offer these for sale to non-jocks. Clearly the product is an attempt to take advantage of the athletically gifted.

Incensed, I headed for the exit. But these stores are designed so that you have to pass through the checkout line to leave.

From the evil eye the linebacker operating the cash register gave me, a purchase was not optional. It was a prerequisite to being allowed to leave the store.

I quickly grabbed the closest, least expensive item within reach - a pack of gum that is supposed to quench your thirst. Yeah, I see it now. I come out of the game, my rubber sweatsuit under my uniform, my body temperature well into triple figures, and I reach for - a stick of gum. I may be a dumb jock, but in that situation gum would be way down on my list of thirst quenchers, well below mop water.

They'd never try to pawn that stuff off on Phi Beta Kappas.

The linebacker rings me up - two dollars and fifty-nine cents. I give him three dollars and nine cents. He sits there staring at my money like I just handed him Brazilian cruzeiros.

After the lapse of the time it takes for me to say $E=MC^2$ and explain what it means, he finally sought help from the young lady running the next register. So help me, he hollers: "Yo, Adrienne!"

The moral of this story being not every heavily muscled man unable to make change is a dumb jock. But if he's in a rubber suit chewing thirst-quencher gum, you'd do well not to ask him for directions.

RUNNING BULL

NORMAN: This is Rick Norman in Quonset Hut, Alabama. I am standing here with Mayor Hadley in the midst of a surreal scene that reminds me of the railroad station scene from "Gone with the Wind."

HADLEY: I don't think any of these fellers is hurt too bad. I think most are more tuckered out than actually paralyzed. We had put tennis balls on the horns of the bulls as a safety precaution.

NORMAN: If you can, tell our radio audience what just happened here.

HADLEY: Quonset Hut just held its sixth annual Running of the Bulls.

NORMAN: Like they do in Spain?

HADLEY: Exactly. Now in years past, we used pitbull terriers and let them chase the local deliverymen down Main Street. But this year we decided we'd try to draw the international tourists.

NORMAN: So you used real bulls?

HADLEY: One dozen, fire-snorting, rodeo bulls.

NORMAN: Versus one hundred or so locals.

HADLEY: Eighty-six of Alabama's finest plus two Koreans and a fat fellow from Nebraska. I haven't seen him. I hope he's okay. We don't need no international incident.

NORMAN: I've never been, but I think in Spain the idea is to run away from the bulls.

HADLEY: Well, hindsight being 20/20, I think it was probably a mistake to hold the mint julep drinking contest right before the running of the bulls. It looked like some of the boys decided rather than run they would stand and fight.

NORMAN: Things changed pretty quickly when the first bull hit the staggering crowd.

HADLEY: Yes, the replay of them screaming like women and climbing the light poles ain't gonna do much for international tourism.

NORMAN: Do you think Quonset Hut will go back to using pitbulls next year?

HADLEY: More than likely. At least a pitbull will leave you alone if you play dead.

NORMAN: I think they need us to move to let the stretchers by. Only A Game hopes to see you next year.

HADLEY: Y'all come back.

NORMAN: Returning it back to the studio.

THE SECRET OF BABE RUTH'S POPULARITY

You also may have wondered why Babe Ruth is still considered the greatest baseball player ever, even though most of his records have now fallen. An article I was reading in one of my science magazines may explain why. A cultural anthropologist has supposedly proven this profound scientific theory: that certain human body shapes are more attractive than others. As usual, what took a college educated Ph.D. 10 years and a big grant to figure out, I knew instinctively the first time I saw a Sports Illustrated swimsuit issue. According to this egghead, his theory also has two corollaries: first, that certain body shapes are unattractive, which I knew the first time I saw my Aunt Beatrice in a swimsuit. And second, that body shapes are perceived by us humans as either threatening or non-threatening.

I believe that too. I worked with a woman one time that had a threatening body shape. It was a body Ray Nitschke wished he had, and it was coupled with a meaner disposition. She was a big advocate of women's rights. Possibly the biggest advocate they had, if you follow me here. One time I quite innocently asked her: "Why do you keep harping on this women's rights nonsense? Aren't you satisfied with your height and weight

advantage?" Well, she sprang out of her high heels and chased me down the fire escape trying to spray me with mace.

Anyway, this scientist's theory explains why Babe Ruth is still the most popular baseball player ever. Unlike the chiseled modern players, Babe Ruth set his records with the non-threatening body shape of your old grandmother. How could you not love him, the big lug. This also explains the popularity of Santa Claus, Dave on the Wendy's commercials and Hoss Cartwright. It's the reason that, despite his considerable acting ability, Sylvester Stallone, who has a threatening body shape, will never be recognized as the world's greatest actor. That title is forever reserved to a guy with a non-threatening body shape, Curly Howard of the Three Stooges.

NBA SCHEDULER

NORMAN: I'm here today at the Iowa City International Airport with Roger Canton. Mr. Canton, would you please tell our radio audience your occupation.

CANTON: I am currently an air traffic controller here in Iowa City.

NORMAN: Now, until last year, you worked as an executive for the National Basketball Association.

CANTON: Yes, for sixteen years I was vice president in charge of league scheduling.

NORMAN: I understand you personally prepared the team schedules for all of the NBA pre-season, regular season and playoff games.

CANTON: Yes, I was responsible for coordinating arena availability, holidays, airline flights, and a number of other logistical factors. I scheduled about 2,378 regular season games per year.

NORMAN: How did you handle so many variables? Is there a computer program that you schedulers use?

CANTON: There might be, but I'm what you call computer-illiterate. I am committed, however, to the next revolution. I just got too far behind in the computer revolution. I use 3 x 5 note cards. And put ...

Excuse me. Toledo Airlines six, niner, niner. Hold at 500 feet. (pause) Well, if it comes around again, I suggest you get out of its way. Over.

I'm sorry, what were you asking?

NORMAN: How did you come to get fired by the NBA?

CANTON: Laid off.

NORMAN: Okay, sorry. Laid off by the NBA.

CANTON: Well, it started with what has come to be called the Peach Basket Game. I accidentally scheduled an NBA playoff game at the YMCA gym in Sioux City. It was the bigger of the two gyms there.

NORMAN: Is that in Iowa?

CANTON: It's on the Iowa-Idaho border. One of the NBA teams had played an exhibition game there earlier in the season against the local radio station. It was my mistake.

NORMAN: So they laid you off?

CANTON: No, they put me on probation. The next season, I mistakenly scheduled Lakers games in Detroit.

NORMAN: I know there used to be an NBA team in Detroit. L.A. and Detroit weren't supposed to play?

CANTON: No, they were supposed to play. But Shaquille O'Neal doesn't like Detroit's locker room. He says the smell of the carpet makes him lightheaded. So he had it

written into his contract that he doesn't have to play in Detroit. I just misfiled my index card with that information on it.

NORMAN: So they let you go?

CANTON: Laid me off. Excuse me again. Delta Zebra Tango Seven. When it says empty on the instrument panel, you still have another ten gallons. Over.

NORMAN: Sounds like you are well-suited for your new job.

CANTON: I love it. 9-to-5. No pressure.

NORMAN: Good luck, Mr. Canton. I'm sure our listeners will be thinking about you the next time they fly over the Midwest. For Only A Game, this is Rick Norman, over and out.

AMNESIAC

NORMAN: This is Rick Norman here at Yankee Stadium. The game is over and a man who was struck in the head by a foul ball has asked to be interviewed. Sir, you are?

MAN: (a strong Bronx accent) I can't remember. I must have amnesia.

NORMAN: I understand you were hit in the head with a foul ball. How do you feel?

MAN: I can't remember how I felt before, so I really have nothing to compare it to.

NORMAN: Do you have any identification on you that might identify you?

MAN: No, nothing. My wallet and all my money are gone. This is what on Oprah they call a real tragedy.

NORMAN: I notice you have a tattoo there. Was is it? "Born to mulch"? Maybe someone out there listening might recognize...

MAN: I doubt it. The only memories I have are of a tropical island, you know, palm trees, volcanoes, pina coladas.

NORMAN: Maybe you're from Hawaii?

MAN: I remember more like Tahiti. And I remember wearing a white coat and operating on people's heads. I think I'm a brain doctor.

NORMAN: From Tahiti?

MAN: Right. Maybe your listeners would want to start a fund to buy me a ticket back home to my medical practice in Tahiti.

NORMAN: Okay. That's enough. Sorry, Bill, I thought I smelled a story. What I smelled was a Yankee fan. Back to the studio.

BIGGEST FAN -- PRIEST

NORMAN: This is Rick Norman, Only A Game's theological correspondent reporting from the major league game of the week. I'm here to discuss the role of religion in sports with Father Martin Broderick. Padre, if you have a moment?

PRIEST: Yes, my son.

NORMAN: Do you get to many baseball games, Father?

PRIEST: Every time they leave the north gate unattended.

NORMAN: You sneak in?

PRIEST: Just kidding. Your eyes lit up like a televangelist. No, I hear the manager's confession sometimes and he is afraid not to send me free tickets. No, just kidding.

(screaming) Throw it in his ear next time he crowds the plate!!

NORMAN: Father, I couldn't help but notice your hat. Did you make it yourself?

PRIEST: Yes, I did, except for the electrical motors which I salvaged from an old bingo ball basket. Your standing on my cord, my son.

NORMAN: Sorry. Do all those little baseball players actually run around your head?

PRIEST: I can make them run, rotate, revolve or breakdance. Stick around for the next home run. Here, pass this hot dog down.

NORMAN: That squirrel climbing down the back of your hat looks alive.

PRIEST: It was at the start of the season. Squirrels do not live by beer nuts alone.

NORMAN: Being a man of the cloth and all, is it okay for you to wear such a hat?

PRIEST: I don't bother the Pope about his hats and he doesn't bother me about mine.

NORMAN: Do the fans sitting behind you ever complain about not being able to see past your hat?

PRIEST: Are you kidding? You know what can happen to you if you aggravate a priest, don't you? You could end up with a hump on your back, ringing bells at Notre Dame Cathedral. Just kidding.

NORMAN: Father, let's talk about religion in sports. Where does spirituality come into the picture?

PRIEST: (screaming) What?! That's a balk, ump. Remember who made the blind see. Maybe you should come to church now and then.

NORMAN: Father, maybe we should try this on another day.

PRIEST: Notre Dame plays Marquette Tuesday.

NORMAN: I'll call you back. Back to you, Bill.

MASCOTS R US

NORMAN: I'm here today to talk with Mr. Hernando Jergenson, proprietor of Mascots R Us.

JERGENSON: Welcome.

NORMAN: Tell our listeners about your unique business.

JERGENSON: Well, Rick. We supply live mascots to college and professional teams around the world.

NORMAN: You obviously keep a large inventory of animals here.

JERGENSON: Yes, we are standing in our 20,000 square foot warehouse that we have nicknamed The Arc. We like to say we have two of every kind.

NORMAN: Well from the smell in here I certainly wouldn't disagree with that. How does the business work? Let's say the big game is Saturday and for a prank some fraternity boys need to turn the school lion loose.

JERGENSON: Well, a school or team needing a live mascot calls us and we fill the order and ship it out guaranteed next-day delivery.

NORMAN: What are you working on today?

JERGENSON: Oh, come see. I was just putting the finishing touches on a war eagle for one of the professional soccer teams.

NORMAN: I'm no ichthyologist, Mr. Jergenson, but that war eagle looks a lot like a common pigeon.

JERGENSON: Well, technically yes. But if I paint some mean eyebrows on a pigeon, like so. There, a stadium full of soccer hooligans won't know the difference.

NORMAN: I don't doubt that. We mentioned lions earlier. Do you have any lions?

JERGENSON: We do but to you they would probably look a lot like collies with a lot of styling mousse. But again, where else can you get a lion next-day for under eighty dollars?

NORMAN: Well, I'm sold. Do you mind a little friendly advice Mr. Jergenson?

JERGENSON: Certainly. What is it?

NORMAN: It's time to change the kitty litter.

JERGENSON: The lion litter.

NORMAN: Whatever. Back to the studio.

BIGGEST FAN -- CLOWN BEHIND HOME PLATE

NORMAN: Our search for the most fanatic fan brings us to the major league game of the week. I'm behind home plate today to talk to what has become a familiar figure at televised major league games, especially to the TV audience. Sir, you are?

FAN: I'd rather not say if it's all the same to you.

NORMAN: It's customary for interviewees to identify themselves for the radio audience.

FAN: Well, I get enough death threats as it is without publicizing my name on national radio. Thanks anyway.

NORMAN: Do you feel those death threats have anything to do with your sitting behind home plate in the middle of the TV picture with that rainbow wig, shaking bones and generally making a spectacle of yourself, annoying anyone trying to watch the game on TV?

FAN: A death threat is a death threat. Who knows in this day in time what makes the sick mind work? All I want to know is whatever happened to free speech?

NORMAN: Well, what exactly is the message you are trying to convey with your asinine behavior?

FAN: First of all, I don't agree that it's asinine.

NORMAN: Well, sir, millions of viewers can't all be wrong.

FAN: I consider myself a sports mime.

NORMAN: Where did you get the idea of imposing yourself on an innocent TV audience?

FAN: I was watching a State of the Union address on TV and noticed that I paid more attention to the Vice President sitting behind the President saying nothing. I decided to become the vice president of baseball.

NORMAN: What possible social value is there in making faces and shaking bones?

FAN: Well, everyone has their own idea of art. Hold on, this could be a close up. A-la-la, a-la-la.

NORMAN: Well, in this election season, maybe art does imitate life. Thank you Mr. Vice President, whoever you are. This is Rick Norman, continuing our search for the most fanatic fan.

HOT HEADS

NORMAN: I'm Rick Norman, your faithful courtroom reporter, here outside the federal courthouse with Dixon Walters, the defendant standing trial this week in the case of "The Association of Little League Umpires versus Walters". Mr. Walters, you looked a little bit uncomfortable on the witness stand today.

WALTERS: I'm an inventor, Mr. Norman, not a criminal.

NORMAN: Well, I guess that's for the jury to decide. When did you first have an inkling that your homemade radar gun used for measuring the speed of pitched baseballs might be defective?

WALTERS: Well, I tested it the better part of one summer. I timed the Little League pitchers at the local ballpark. I sat right behind home plate so I heard some of the umpires complaining. But, as you know, umpires are complainers by nature.

NORMAN: Most people will complain when their body temperature tops 150 degrees.

WALTERS: I never made the connection between the umpire's screaming and my radar gun until the nights got a little cooler and I actually saw smoke rising off of an umpire's head.

NORMAN: You never thought that pointing a 6000 watt, homemade microwave device in the direction of a human being might perhaps be a health risk?

WALTERS: Like I stated today in court, hindsight is 20/20. Remember, I was actually pointing the gun at the little pitchers. The umpires just happened to be in my line of fire.

NORMAN: I guess that was lucky for the kids. The evidence presented in court today seemed to suggest that you continued using your radar gun even after three umpires had actually caught fire.

WALTERS: Well, Mr. Norman, I spent a lot of my own time and money developing my radar gun. I work out of my garage. I don't have a seven-figure research and development budget. I just wanted to make sure there wasn't some other reason for the head flames. As you are no doubt aware, there have been reports for centuries of people just suddenly catching fire.

NORMAN: Yes, I understand Mr. Walters that your defense is based on the theory of spontaneous combustion. As a biased observer, how do you think your trial is going?

WALTERS: Well, it's hard to tell what with me not being a lawyer and trying to represent myself. That grandmother on the jury seemed to smile at me this

morning when the judge told me to quit wasting the court's time with my asinine questions.

NORMAN: Do you feel your decision today to demonstrate to the jury the safety aspects of your radar gun might have backfired?

WALTERS: Well, I still believe it was a sound tactical decision. I just had no idea that the judge had a pacemaker. I've had no formal legal training and didn't realize that him banging his gavel on the floor meant he wanted I should turn my radar gun off.

NORMAN: Hopefully for your sake, the jurors didn't hear what the judge was yelling at you when the paramedics brought him back around with the electric paddles.

WALTERS: Well, I'm a big fan of our American legal system. I'm confident the jurors will weigh the advantages of a low cost radar gun against the alleged, minor side effects.

NORMAN: Good luck, Mr. Walters. We'll be anxious to hear how your case turns out.

WALTERS: Thanks. Can I give the web address for my radar gun company?

NORMAN: Why don't we wait and see if the judge pulls through. Back to the studio.

THE MISSING JOCKEY

(computer keyboard sounds)

NORMAN: You might remember a few shows ago we gave Wally Warton -- Web Surfer, the challenge of using his internet sleuthing skills to solve the mystery of Johnny Williams, the jockey who disappeared in 1976, shortly after being disqualified from the New Jersey Garden Stakes. Wally, what did the web tell you about this lost sport?

WALLY: Well, I started at BLOOPERS.COM. That sight has the video of the 1976 Garden Stakes race and shows clearly Johnny Williams jumping off of his horse in the back straight away and onto the horse ridden by Angel Calderaro.

NORMAN: Now I know there has been a lot of debate on this point, but does the video actually show Johnny Williams biting Calderaro?

WALLY: Yes, computer enhancement proves the track officials were correct. Calderaro did not fake the teeth imprints. For reasons we may never know. Johnny Williams appears to have just gone berserk.

NORMAN: I guess even little bombs can explode. But the mystery remains whatever became of Johnny Williams?

WALLY: Well, secret New Jersey State Police files show that Carlo Carlotta, a day-care center magnate, had several fortunes wagered on the horse ridden by Calderaro. His losses resulted in the failure of the proposed merger between his day-care business and the toxic waste incinerator venture.

NORMAN: Uh...wait a minute Wally, this is a sports show, not Sixty Minutes. We asked about Johnny Williams. I don't think we should get into Mr. Carlotta's business.

WALLY: Yes, well I hacked my way into Carlotta's mainframe. His secret diary shows that the day after the race he sent six of his biggest hall monitors to visit Johnny Williams. The last trace of Johnny Williams was the state police found a pile of his teeth on the levee.

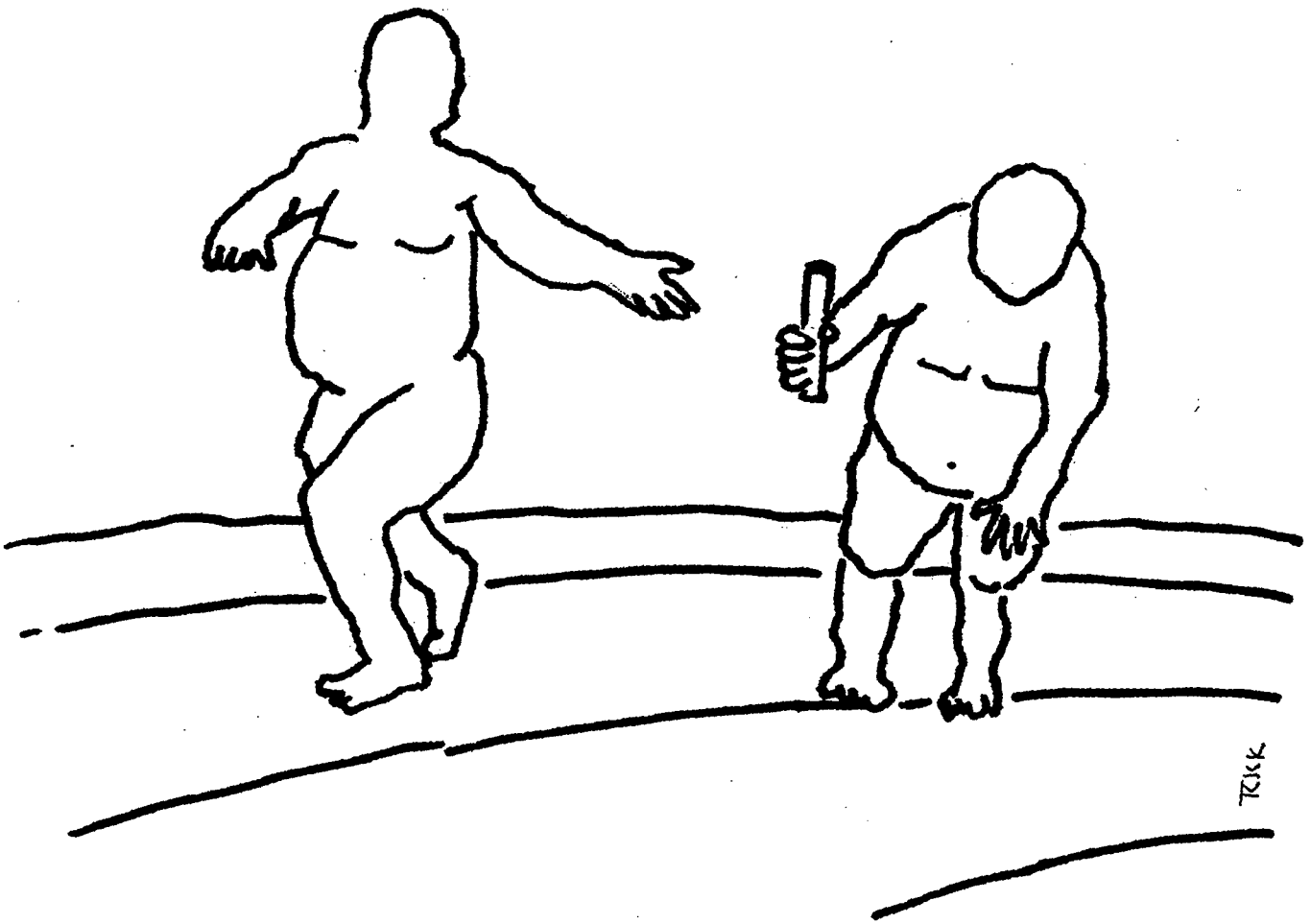
NORMAN: Hold on, Wally! You must have a virus or something. Do you know who Mr. Carlotta is?

WALLY: The FBI files show him as the head of a large organized...

NORMAN: WHOA! Stop right there. I just want to take this opportunity for myself and for Only A Game to say that the opinions expressed by Wally Warton, web surfer, are not our opinions and are obviously false and not even well-founded. We apologize to Mr. Carlotta and

his large, well-armed family for any inconvenience.

Back to the studio. Good luck, Wally.



BONUS BABY

NORMAN: The sports world is one replete with reversals of fortune. One day you're on top of the world, the next day you're hawking autographs on the home shopping network. But reversals of fortune happen in the real world too. Today we are talking to the victim of such a real world reversal, Dr. Walter O. Hopkins. Is it still okay to call you doctor?

HOPKINS: Yes, I was fired. They didn't take my license to practice medicine.

NORMAN: Well, doctor it is then. Doctor, you are here today at the Twins game trying to sell your season tickets. But your story is not really a sports story.

HOPKINS: I was fired last month from my job as physician recruiter at the Mayo Clinic after the press reported that I had paid a twenty thousand dollar signing bonus to recruit a pediatric surgeon for the hospital.

NORMAN: Twenty thousand dollars! To sign a doctor? What were you thinking?

HOPKINS: This was not just any surgeon. This surgeon has developed a procedure which shows great promise for curing a lot of children.

NORMAN: Well, I'm sure a hospital has to sell a lot of tickets to make up for that kind of bonus.

HOPKINS: I guess that's what the Board of Supervisors was thinking when they let me go.

NORMAN: So you won't be watching Ken Griffey Junior work his magic in the outfield today.

HOPKINS: No. Money's a little tight right now. I just hope to sell my tickets and return home.

NORMAN: How much you asking?

HOPKINS: Face value. Twenty-two hundred for the pair.

NORMAN: Well, Doc, good luck to you. In the future you might do well to try to remember the value of a dollar.

HOPKINS: Thank you, I will.

NORMAN: This is Rick Norman. Back to you, Bill.

WHY AIN'T YOU RICH

My fifth grade son and his pack of running buddies surrounded me the other day and asked for my help in determining who was better, Deion Sanders or Emmitt Smith. For a moment it brought back fond memories of when I was his age, the season-long debates me and my friends had about who was better: Hornung or Taylor, Mantle or Maris. But these computer-age kids weren't looking for statistics or even to argue the issue; they wanted the answer. According to today's youth and modern American culture, there is no need for comparison. The issue is easily and objectively decided: Whoever makes the most money is best.

In every other culture in the world there are legends of poor men who are greatly revered for their wisdom or honesty. Not in the U.S. of A. This being the land of opportunity, if you're not rich it is assumed that something is wrong with you. Like the illuminating bumper sticker declares: "If you're so good, why ain't you rich?"

Now how is my son going to feel about his old daddy when he finds out the guy next door makes more money? I might have a smaller income, but I'd wager my paycheck against his that he couldn't spend a weekend on a camping trip with that same pack of fifth graders. So who's better?

DIAMOND JIM

NORMAN: This is Rick Norman in Patterson, New Jersey. For all you kids out there we have a special treat today. Diamond Jim Wilkinson will be our guest. He's a professional sports gambler.

DIAMOND: I bet you are Rick Norman...Pay up! Ha! Ha!

NORMAN: Diamond Jim, tell the studio audience how you make your living.

DIAMOND: I wake at noon.

NORMAN: I'm jealous already.

DIAMOND: Seven sports pages from around the country are on my breakfast table.

NORMAN: This is almost decadent.

DIAMOND: At four I call my bookie. Or he might call me.

NORMAN: I bet you use code, right?

DIAMOND: I can't say. The Feds might be listening.

NORMAN: Oh, right. That certainly sounds like a great life. Something for the kids to strive for. How does one become a professional sports gambler?

DIAMOND: Taking chances runs in my family. My grandfather had the first alligator farm in Vermont. My father tested safety goggles at the Army's thermonuclear test site after the war. My son is a day-trader.

NORMAN: What an inspiration. Do you spend a lot of time handicapping the teams?

DIAMOND: No, I have developed an easy system. I bet the mascots.

NORMAN: Mascots? Like the Golden Gophers?

DIAMOND: Exactly. It's not complicated. I bet only the games where there is a clear dominance. When the Jets play the Seahawks, I bet the...

NORMAN: Jets?

DIAMOND: Pay the man. You've never seen a Jet get sucked into a Hawk.

NORMAN: I get it.

DIAMOND: I always pick the Lions over the Saints. When there's uncertainty, like the Cowboys versus the Patriots, I don't bet.

NORMAN: And this system has made you independently wealthy?

DIAMOND: Well, I've had my Sundays.

NORMAN: I'll bet you have.

DIAMOND: Pay the man.

NORMAN: So, you support yourself solely with your sports gambling?

DIAMOND: With that and my night job. I paint bridges and overpasses. You see this?

NORMAN: It looks like a watch.

DIAMOND: That's a \$500 Tolara. I can let you have it for \$100.
If anyone in your audience is listening, they can page me.

NORMAN: I have a watch.

DIAMOND: For you, seventy-five.

NORMAN: Is it waterproof?

DIAMOND: My bookie once had me thrown in the East River over a little interest rate dispute. This watch didn't lose a minute.

NORMAN: Well, I'm afraid I've lost several minutes here, and I'm never going to get them back. Back to you, Bill.

THE MEN FROM S.P.I.N.

NORMAN: This is Rick Norman, here today on the 31st floor of the corporate offices of the National Football League to speak with Mr. T. Buford Wilson...

WILSON: Esquire.

NORMAN: Yes, Esquire. Concerning the NFL's office of SPIN, Mr. Wilson. Could you tell our radio audience what SPIN stands for?

WILSON: Certainly, Mr. Norman. I would be delighted. SPIN is simply an acronym for Support for Players In Need. We are a tax-exempt organization jointly funded by the NFL and the Players Union. Our sole purpose is to offer support to players who may have suffered...er ...setbacks.

NORMAN: Like their house burning down?

WILSON: No, more likely an arrest, however unwarranted. SPIN is there to give the player's explanation.

NORMAN: Why can't the player give his own explanation?

WILSON: Well sir, why not hire a professional so that you know you have the best possible explanation?

NORMAN: Are you a lawyer by any chance?

WILSON: I was an attorney and may soon be readmitted to practice if my appeal goes as expected.

NORMAN: So Mr. Wilson, say for example a player gets caught red-handed stealing a chicken - what happens?

WILSON: Assuming his union dues are paid up, SPIN would spring into action and issue a press release with the best plausible explanation. In your example, perhaps SPIN would state that he had merely forgotten to pay for his breakfast. That's just off the top of my head. With some time I could think of a better excuse.

NORMAN: Okay, let's say a player punches a referee on national TV?

WILSON: Now that's tougher. The referees have their own similar organization-FRAUD. That's Fellowship for Referee And Umpire Defense.

NORMAN: That's the same organization that passes the hat at the games collecting for the umpire and referee eye bank?

WILSON: Right. Well, if a player would allegedly punch an umpire, FRAUD would put out their own slanted story so SPIN would have to use a double-barreled approach. First we would use sympathy, letting it be known that the player was distraught because of something tragic-for instance, his stock portfolio had lost value or his dog had been electrocuted, you know, something like that. Then we would hit them with what we call

the "boys will be boys" excuse - his violent nature is merely youthful exuberance.

NORMAN: I see. That sounds effective.

WILSON: Yes. You see it's been proven scientifically, Mr. Norman, that any excuse that evokes images of childhood cannot be questioned without making the questioner look worse than the offending party.

NORMAN: So what your telling us is that SPIN works?

WILSON: It's proven with every public election.

NORMAN: Maybe that's why so many professional athletes were elected to office last November.

WILSON: Bingo!

NORMAN: Back to the Only A Game Studios. Man, somebody hose me down.

FIGHT SONG PROGRAMMER

NORMAN: I am here today with Mr. Edgar Rumley who recently left a good paying job with a dot com to start his own business. Why don't you explain it to our audience, Mr. Rumley.

RUMLEY: I have invented a computer program that writes school fight songs.

NORMAN: Don't most schools already have a fight song?

RUMLEY: Yes, you are correct. But the average fight song was written in 1962 and is much too graphic for schools nowadays.

NORMAN: What do you mean too graphic?

RUMLEY: With all the recent school violence, there is a concerted effort by A.S.P., that's the Association of School Principals, to rewrite fight songs so they are less provocative. My program does just that.

NORMAN: Give us an example of a fight song you have been asked to rewrite.

RUMLEY: Certainly. Here is the fight song for Roosevelt High School written in 1964:

Fight, Fight for Old Roosevelt
Hit them above or below the belt
We will not fight the urge
To go thermonuclear
We will not retire
'til our foes expire

Advance, attack Aardvarks.

NORMAN: Not exactly Gershwin is it?

RUMLEY: No, the average fight song writer is in the eleventh grade with no prior musical training.

NORMAN: I believe it. So what does your computer program do?

RUMLEY: The principals give me the mandatory words that the song must contain. I feed them into the computer and it composes a politically correct fight song.

NORMAN: Can you show us?

RUMLEY: Certainly. For Roosevelt High the only mandatory words are Roosevelt and Aardvarks, the mascot.

NORMAN: I wondered about Aardvarks.

RUMLEY: I'll just put the data in here...(computer sounds) and here we are.

NORMAN: That was fast. Let's see...(reading)

Old Roosevelt contests today
And we may well be there, cheering away
Knowing that the greatest victory
Is not as important as emotional stability
We will try our best
To meet the test
Without causing injury
Or emotional distress
Our hopes for all Aardvarks are that
They may remain in their rainforest habitat
Stay safe, live long, Aardvarks
(pause)

That would certainly kick the props out from under a goal stand.

RUMLEY: Exactly. Everyone goes home a winner.

NORMAN: Thank you, Mr. Rumley. Good luck. Back to you, Bill.

EVENS OR ODDS

Now this is scientific research that means something to the everyday man. A couple of scientists in Arizona have proven that the eyes of a batter watching a pitch come at him, his eyes cannot physically move fast enough to see the baseball actually make contact with the bat; at least not a baseball thrown at a good clip.

This is great news for me because all through high school my coaches would prescribe the same platitude for all my hitting problems. "Watch the ball hit the bat, Peckerwood." It sounded so simple, like now when the kid on the infomercial tells you how easy it is to get rich. But back then my problem wasn't so much I wasn't seeing the ball hit the bat. I couldn't see the ball at all until it was a few feet in front of the plate; much too late to think about swinging. So I would decide ahead of time in the on-deck circle whether I was gonna swing at the even numbered pitches or the odd numbered pitches, irrespective of where they might be.

I'd ask the guys in the top of the order questions that were cleverly worded to conceal my shortcomings, to see if they were actually seeing the ball hit the bat. Like: "Hey Moose, when I see the ball hit the bat like we all do, it looks like I'm always hitting the ball on the laces. Is that bad?" Moose

would answer, "No, Univac. It ain't bad so long as you want to hit to left center. If you want to go to right just hit it on the Rawlings label."

To think, all these years I believed they were seeing the ball hit the bat. Why not? Their averages were 200 points higher than mine. And they certainly seemed to have firsthand knowledge about a lot of other things that I had only seen in magazines. So when I read this article in my science magazine, I couldn't help but do the hully gully around the house.

They were lying! They never saw the ball hit the bat. And they were probably lying about that other stuff too. I should have suspected something when they told me those stories about the cheerleaders.

THE FRENCH CONNECTION

In case you haven't heard, one fashionable boondoggle at the municipal level is for an American town to adopt a foreign "sister" town. Not coincidentally, the sister town is usually located on the French Riviera and your mayor just happens to spend a couple of weeks there each year sunning himself at taxpayer expense.

The mayor of my town, being a Louisiana politician and, by definition, not shy about feeding at the public trough, recently invited a French mayor to visit Lake Charles, hoping he could cut a deal.

I got invited to a banquet honoring the French mayor, I guess because I sometimes talk on the radio and our mayor figured maybe I could make our town sound like a promising adoptee.

They introduced me to the French mayor like I was a national sports celebrity. In better English than the Cajuns around here talk, he asked me whether I believed our "futball" program would ever become respectable. Well, I got a little aggravated at that remark because I knew he wasn't talking about football. And he knew he wasn't talking about football. Why didn't he just say soccer? If I ever found myself in France, I wouldn't ask to see a

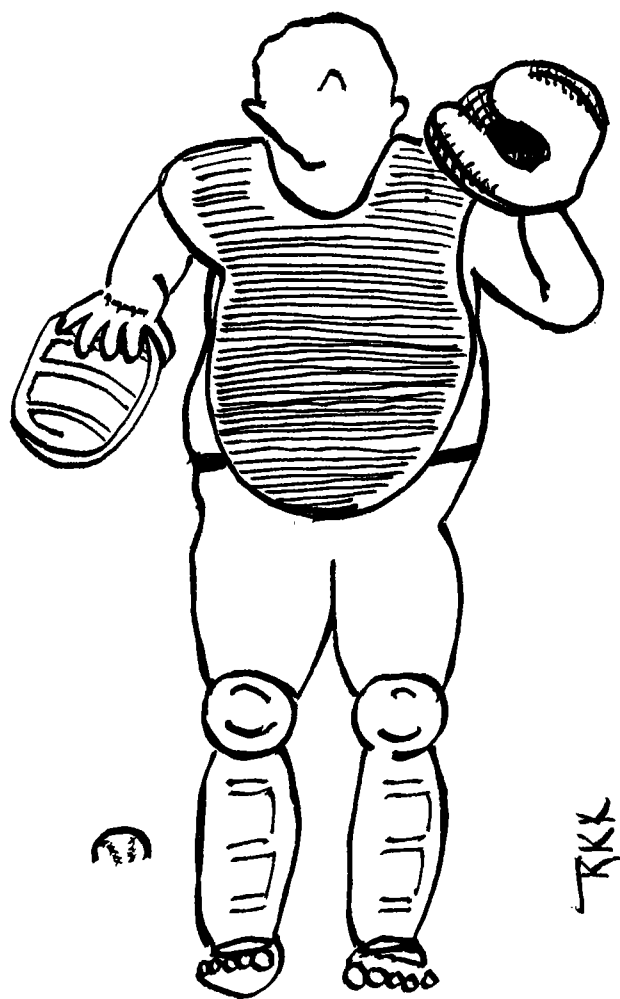
Ripple list. No, he was definitely playing the Euro-snob soccer card.

I was going to let it slide for the sake of international harmony but he wouldn't let it go. He said he'd heard of one or two American professionals in France, trying to play football at - quote "the next level" - unquote.

I said I had never heard of any Frenchmen playing professional sports anywhere in the Western Hemisphere, unless they count Canadian hockey players as French. But I didn't think Frenchmen went in for a contact sport unless it was coed.

He countered by pointing out that French athletes concentrate on football and cycling. I told him I too had concentrated on cycling for a while, but then I turned fifteen and got my driver's license.

About that time, one of the several local women who had been swooning over the French mayor asked him why it was soccer was the world's most popular sport. Well, he started going on about the beauty and grace and athleticism, but after the fourth time he mentioned that France had won the last World Cup, I cut him off, and offered the growing crowd my own opinion of the sport.



KKK

I said watching soccer is like watching a basketball game if they were to raise the goal from ten feet to thirty. Lots of running back and forth but not a lot of points on the board. About as fulfilling as auto racing without the crashes.

The French mayor stiffened a little and said our problem, meaning America's problem, isn't our athletes, it's that our coaches don't understand the game. He said an American coach's idea of football strategy is to kick the ball harder. Ha! Ha!

Now, having coached kid's soccer myself and having expended most of my coaching efforts trying to get the kids to kick harder, I took offense.

So I expanded our discussion outside the realm of sports and asked the French mayor to settle a long-running dispute we have here in the States. I asked him: Exactly how many times have the French surrendered this century?

Well, needless to say, my town didn't get a sister city. So the mayor of Lakes Charles will have to drive to Astroworld for his vacation, just like the rest of us.

PREDICTIONS

Everyone's spouting predictions about the new century. Nobody has bothered to ask me for mine, so here goes.

Early on in this century everyone lived on a farm and was pretty much a hick by today's standards. Hicks can watch nothing happen for hours. What was the national pastime? Baseball, a slow, pastoral game.

Then, our military and industrial effort made us the leader of the free world and football, a game rooted in military tactics and teamwork, became America's game.

Then came the individualistic, confrontational sixties and seventies and freewheeling, in-your-face basketball took over.

What will be the sport of the new century? I'll give you a hint. It'll be added to the next Olympics. And the participants wear less clothes than Olympic swimmers. If you guessed sumo wrestling, you are smarter than you appear. What better sport for a nation of couch potatoes with ten second attention spans.

I can see it now. Instead of tee shirts and tennis shoes, Nike and Reebok will have the teenagers wearing mawashi. Then we'll know it's time for the apocalypse.

SPIN DECADE

If the nineties are known as the "spin" decade, nineteen ninety-nine will, I predict, seem like the "list" decade. Expect not only the usual decade and century lists but also millennium lists.

Don't be surprised if Americans don't dominate the sports millennium lists. Our country is only two hundred years old but sports have been around since the first rock was thrown to a caveman waving a club.

Boxers fought in ancient Babylon for the amusement of the king, and I'm not talking about Don King.

Cal Ripkin and Lou Gehrig are in the top ten on almost every ironman list, but the consensus number one ironman might well be Eric the Everyready who, between ten fourteen and ten thirty-nine A.D., participated in three hundred twenty-seven consecutive coastal village pillagings, and with bad ankles at that.

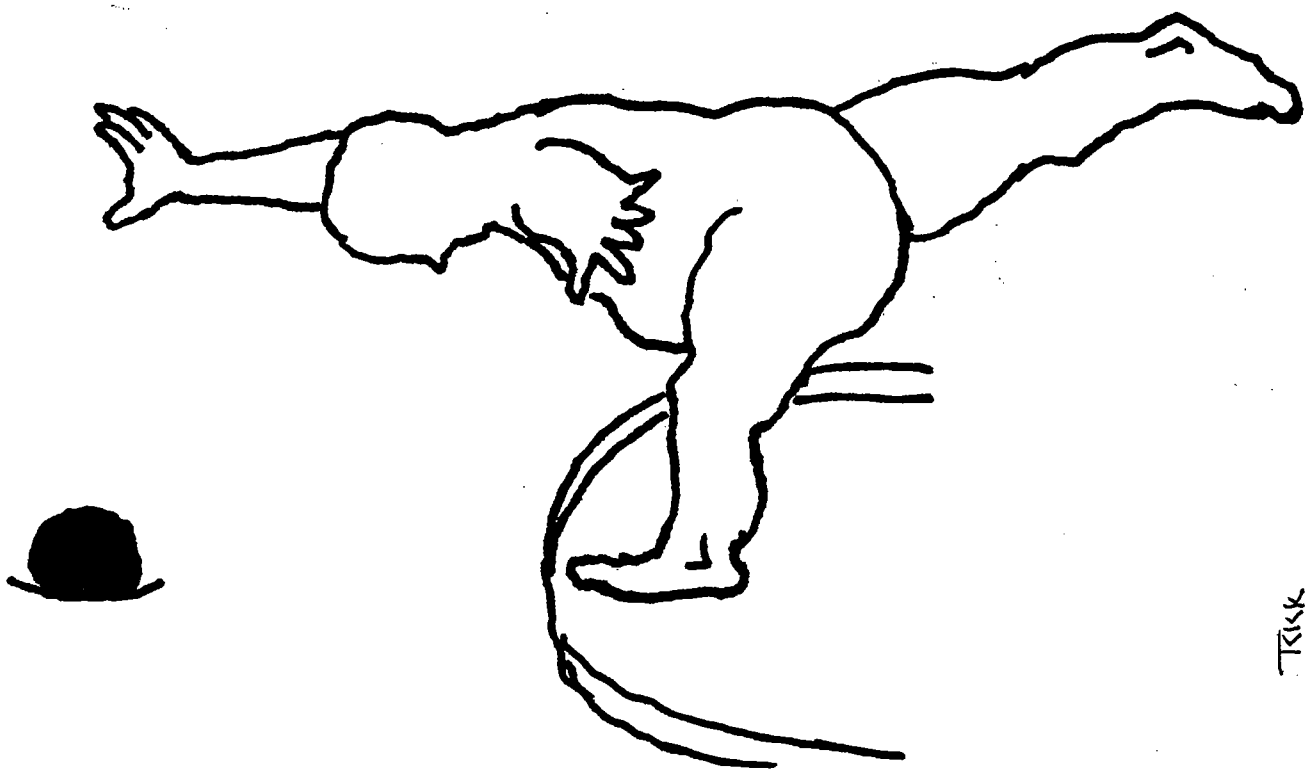
If mercy prevails, the millennium lists will allow Bill Buckner a reprieve from the number one spot on the list of biggest chokes. That dubious honor should go to Sir Gawain of Leads who lost the "All Holy Roman Jousting Championship" for England in thirteen sixty-six in the final match by steering his steed the wrong way and skewering the Queen Mother. You think

Buckner had it bad after blowing the World Series in 1986. Sir Gawain couldn't buy a beer on a whole continent.

When considering the last thousand years, Michael Jordan, a favorite in this century, should come in a distant second to the English archer, Robin Hood. Like Jordan, Mr. Hood expropriated large sums from the owners. But, unlike His Airness, Mr. Hood distributed his wealth to his fans.

But then Robin Hood didn't belong to a players' union.

Have a happy, list free new millennium.



TRICK

CONGRESSIONAL AIDE

NORMAN: This is Rick Norman in our nation's capitol. Today we're not on a farm but we will be talking to the man in charge of COWS. Believe it or not, the man in charge of COWS is here in the basement of the Congressional Office in Washington, D.C.

WALLACE: Very clever, Mr. Norman. I see speech writing potential.

NORMAN: Well, maybe we can talk later. First, tell our listeners who you are and what you do here on Capitol Hill.

WALLACE: I am Vernon W. Wallace, the Undersecretary to the Secretary of the Office of Congressional Information and Quasi-Information.

NORMAN: Is that an elected office?

WALLACE: No, I was appointed by a political action committee.

NORMAN: Tell us about COWS.

WALLACE: COWS is an acronym for the Congressional Office of Weekend Scores. This agency was established by Act number 66,758 and signed into law by President Clinton as part of the budget surplus spending act of 1999.

NORMAN: Mr. Wallace, how big is your agency?

WALLACE: We have 86 employees and an annual budget of 57 million dollars.

NORMAN: What does COWS do?

WALLACE: Well, a poll taken in 1990 by the Congressional Office of Public Opinion and Sneaking Suspicions showed that 87% of males likely to vote cared more about the weekend ball scores than they did about anything going on in Washington. Although only 4% knew who their congressman was, 84% could name the third string quarterback on their favorite football team.

NORMAN: Amazing.

WALLACE: Yes, Congress thought it important that they be able to converse with their constituency on the matters that mattered most. So COWS was established and charged with collecting the weekend ball scores and distributing those scores to each senator and representative.

NORMAN: Why not just buy a Monday edition of USA Today?

WALLACE: Since the Lewinsky affair Congress has been reluctant to rely on the press. Consequently, COWS goes directly to the sports information director for each team and gets the scores in affidavit form.

NORMAN: Is that why the congressional score sheet doesn't come out until the following Friday?

WALLACE: Primarily, yes.

NORMAN: I was looking at an old copy. Here you've got the Rams playing the Yankees.

WALLACE: Yes?

NORMAN: Well, Mr. Wallace, the Rams don't play the Yankees. Ever! Those teams play different sports.

WALLACE: I'll have to check on that.

NORMAN: You don't have to check on it, ask any sixth grader.

WALLACE: We don't claim our publication is perfect. But we are proud of our record. Our accuracy rate is 88%, higher than any other government publication and six times more accurate than the average campaign speech.

NORMAN: With an annual budget of almost 57 million dollars, it sounds like a boondoggle to me, Mr. Wallace.

WALLACE: We don't use that word here on the hill.

NORMAN: Well, maybe you should. Back to...

WALLACE: When's the last time your taxes were audited?

NORMAN: This is Rick Norman in Washington. Back to you, Bill.

ROAD TRIP

A buddy of mine in high school had an old Rambler that's timing was so far off it sounded like the African Queen. When asked why he never got it tuned up, he would expound on his theory that if he drove it long enough, it would eventually work its way back into time.

I finally played baseball long enough to see athletic training come full circle. It turns out the training regimen of Babe Ruth -- a lot of pull-ups -- to the table that is -- makes for better ballplayers than does modern athletic conditioning.

It was this past November at the Men's Senior League Baseball Championship in Clearwater, Florida that I realized I had wasted much of my life trying to stay in shape. My team, along with a hundred or so other baseball teams from around the country, travels to Clearwater every fall to participate in the week-long tournament. We had trained hard during the 51-week off season, refusing to go gentle into that good night, trying to squeeze a few more days of summer out of the year and a few more fast balls out of our middle-aged arms. The fall air was cool and there was a constant breeze blowing off the Gulf that diffused the smell of Ben Gay.

Rodney Guilbeau, our 70-year old manager and trainer, confirmed that we were fit.

I. p. 6

"...they play with their heart, and there's none of them that's under 30. They're all over 30. There's five of them over 40. One's as old as 48, one's 47, and they're good folks. They're in good shape...."

One reason we play hard ball is that the conditioning we inflict on ourselves distinguishes us from the bacchanalian sloth of softball. Hardballers generally disdain softballers, just as softballers generally disdain exercise. Unlike your average softball tournament, at the Fall Classic, the fat guy you see walking around trying to remember what his feet look like is the hot dog vendor, not the pitcher. That, at least, is what we hardballers like to believe, and what I believed too until we played him.

After seeing him in action, Coach Guilbeau, like the rest of us, started rethinking our emphasis on minimizing body fat.

II. p. 8

"There's a lot of them that are little, and there's a lot of them that are big. We don't have any of them that are huge. We played against one team that had a catcher, he had to be, what, 390, 400, I don't know.

He was a big one. He was a big one. He
threw three of us out stealing second."

Now, I know it's politically incorrect to say someone is fat so let me just say this guy was challenged gravity-wise. His double-knit uniform was stretched to the point that it was uncomfortably transparent. We were taking bets in the dugout as to whether he could tie his own cleats. The odds-on money was with the big fellow because somebody noticed his laces were tied on the inside of his feet.

We laughed at him like we would have no doubt laughed at a middle-aged Babe Ruth upon seeing him for the first time. But we didn't laugh long. He hit the ball so hard we had to take the married men out of the infield. He played catcher like a mongoose on diet pills. After catching seven innings he came in in relief to pitch the last two. He struck me out on three pitches. I wasn't so much fooled by what he was throwing; I was distracted by the possibility that one of his fatigued jersey buttons would pop off during his wind-up and kill me.

This guy could have probably tied his shoes while eating a ham hock and running the hundred meter high hurdles. So much for years of conditioning.

Another thing I learned at the tournament this year is that there is no longer any such thing as pain-free fun. Todd Griffin, one of our pitchers described it eloquently:

III. p. 17

"The other night I felt great. Yesterday I was a little sore. Today I feel like somebody stepped on me, chewed me out and spit me, whatever."

Johnny Friar, now 49, pitched for the Boston Red Sox in the '60s. He has to bring his wife to Florida each year to take care of him after he pitches.

IV. p. 26

"I'm telling you. She has to wash my hair and everything."

But, if you bring your wife to administer first aid and to cut your food just so you can eat it, it's a lot harder to convince her that you are, or once were, a big league prospect. She can see the errors and strike outs for herself.

Opy Cheek is the groundskeeper at Jack Russell Stadium, where the Philadelphia Phillies train during the spring. He watched the senior leaguers play all week. Opy suspects that instead of has-beens, some of us just never were.

V. p. 3

"...no, these guys the basic fundamentals ain't all there yet. I think they're a little sore out there today too. I think it's just catching up to them."

As Opy knows, baseball fundamentals are like teeth, once you're forty, you probably have all you're ever going to have.

But, next November, we'll be back anyway - maybe a little heavier - maybe with wife in tow. We'll all be a year older but those guys on the other teams will be a year older too, and maybe by then that catcher slash pitcher slash pig-in-a-polyester blanket will have done us a favor and discovered that his game is basketball.

BIG JOCKEY

NORMAN: We are here this afternoon at the fairgrounds, not to watch the thoroughbred races, but to talk to a jockey, Mr. Ricardo McNabb.

McNABB: I am an angry jockey, Mr. Norman.

NORMAN: So you are. You filed a discrimination suit this week in Federal Court.

McNABB: Yes, I've been a licensed jockey for 16 years. I have ridden thousands of racehorses. I've won hundreds of races. Now that I've gotten older, they will not let me ride. That is discrimination.

NORMAN: Has anyone told you you couldn't ride?

McNABB: No, it is a silent conspiracy. No owners will hire me.

NORMAN: Well, Ricardo, I must admit when I read about you in the paper this week, I was sympathetic, but now that I've met you, I'm not so sure about your claim of discrimination.

McNABB: I am only 31 years old. I am still fit. Feel this.

NORMAN: No thanks, I can see fine. And looking at you here, you've got to weigh, what 230 - 240 pounds? You put that on a five-foot frame and you're talking about a load for a Clydesdale.

McNABB: But I have experience. I know when to make my run. I know when to hold back.

NORMAN: Well, if you knew when to push away from the table, you might still have a job.

McNABB: I intend to pursue my legal rights.

NORMAN: I hope someone is there to argue the horse's side. Good luck with your lawsuit, Mr. McNabb. I hope for your sake you get the O.J. jury.
Back to the studio.

MY ARM

I just got back from the orthopedist. He said he could explain my problem to me in medical terms but the long and short of it is I can't throw any more. No more ball.

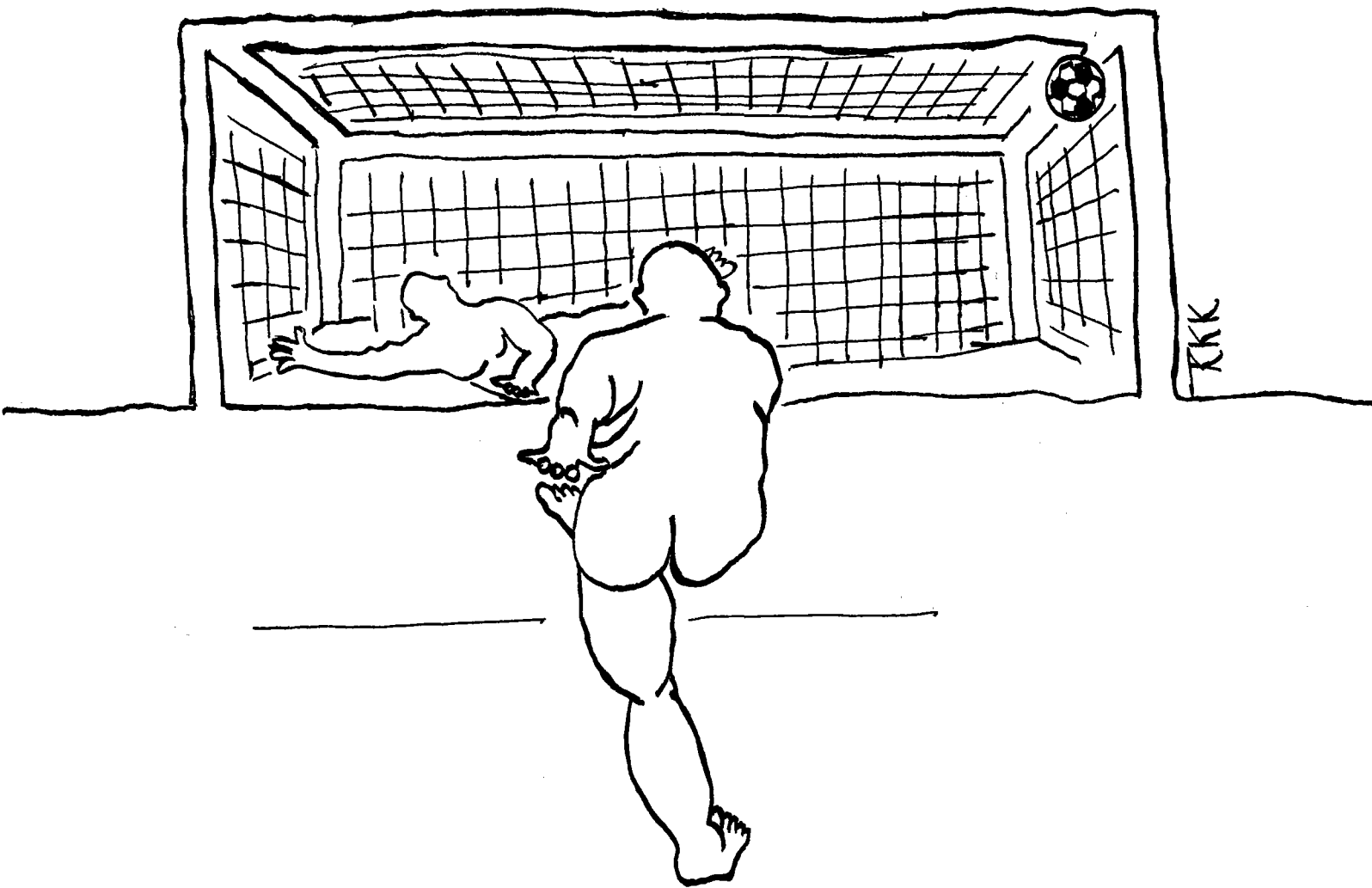
This probably wouldn't affect another middle-aged man as much as it does me. Not just because I have to retire from our local baseball team, but throwing is how I keep score.

Most people keep score with money or power or social status. But early on I realized that if I kept score that way, I'd never get into the game, must less win. So, when I met somebody, I'd know he'd be thinking that he had more money than me or a better pedigree, while I'd think - I bet this guy couldn't reach the cutoff man on the roll. But now, I couldn't throw a canary out of a coal mine.

I remembered what my old granddaddy told me back when I was a teenager. He must have been in his seventies and had recently been diagnosed with cancer. We were cutting down a little pine tree in his backyard with a hatchet. We traded turns chopping at the tree and I was amazed that I couldn't match his power or stamina, even though I was in great shape. He whacked at the tree so ferociously that I

asked him if he was mad about something. He said no, not mad, disgusted. He said the worst thing about getting old is that your body disgusts you.

I had to get old and disgusted myself before I could learn what my granddaddy was saying. If you keep score with your body, you're destined to lose. So now, I'm looking for a different way to keep life's score. I wonder if I'm still good at state capitals?



EL NATURELLE

NORMAN: This is Rick Norman here today in Stunted Grove, Georgia, the home of the minor league Possums. The Possums are in the rookie league, which is the lowest of all minor leagues. I'm talking with the Possums' oldest player, Royce Hobson. Royce, you're somewhat of a legend in the rookie league.

HOBSON: That's right, Rick. At 44 years old, I'm the only player to have played rookie league ball for 25 years without ever being called up to Class A ball.

NORMAN: That's quite an accomplishment.

MAN: Thank you. I beat the old record by 21 years.

NORMAN: Well, Royce, over the last two decades, certainly you've asked yourself: "Am I cut out to be a professional baseball player?"

MAN: I'll never quit, Rick. When I was a boy, my dad said to me: "Royce, you've got a gift."

NORMAN: It must be great to have such a supportive father.

MAN: Well, now he calls me a middle-aged idiot. He wants me to abandon my dream and get a job.

NORMAN: Are you married?

MAN: No, but I do like girls.

NORMAN: That's good. That's good. Royce, if you don't mind me asking, what exactly is your dream?

MAN: Someday, I want to be able to walk down the street and have the people say, "There goes Royce Hobson. He was the best that ever was."

NORMAN: Well, Royce, I don't know what they'll say exactly, but I'm sure people will be talking about you for years to come.

MAN: Thanks, Rick.

NORMAN: Thank you, Royce. Back to you, Bill.

MY HAPPIEST MOMENTS

The other day my wife met me at the door with a rolled up women's magazine. I've been married long enough to generally know when I'm in trouble, even though I seldom know why.

I should have been expecting trouble. It was the time of the month when the latest edition of the women's magazine arrives in the mail, filled with articles exposing my shortcomings.

She wasted no time, insisting I sit right down and list any ten most memorable moments -- the events which have filled me with the most pure joy. When I tried to take my shoes off she cut my assignment down to three events, but the look in her eyes made it clear this exam was not optional.

Even as tired and disinterested as I was, I didn't have any trouble with the test.

My third most memorable moment was Larry Byrd stealing the inbound pass from Isaiah Thomas in the 1987 NBA playoffs. Number two was the ninth inning homerun that won LSU the college world series in 1996. Number one had to be my high school football team winning the district championship.

Proudly, I signed my paper and handed it to the front of the class. My wife coolly studied my list, then took out her list and tossed it at me.

I hadn't got halfway through her list when I felt a chill. Her top ten consisted of births, weddings, first Christmases and such, but nary a sporting event. There was no reference to Larry Byrd whatsoever.

Instantly, my survival instincts took over. Using what I call my "destined for a hearing aid" defense, patent pending, I pointed out to her in a surprised voice that her list contained no sporting events. Digging my finger in my ear I said, "Oh, you must have said "Joyous moment." It sounded to me like you said "sporting event."

Now, I look forward to receiving the women's magazine in the mail. I've been cooking for myself a lot lately and I enjoy the recipes.

CRYSTAL PALACE

NORMAN: I'm here at the grand opening of the Crystal Palace to talk to the new owner, Buzz Waltrip.

BUZZ: Good afternoon, Rick.

NORMAN: Crystal Palace is an unusual name for a health club.

BUZZ: Yes, but we feel it's an appropriate name for a health club with over 3,500 one, two and three-way mirrors.

NORMAN: I feel like I'm at the Norman family reunion standing here. I can see multiple reflections of myself. There must be a reason for the reflective power.

BUZZ: Yes, Rick. Industry studies show conclusively that people who join health clubs are less concerned about exercising than they are about watching themselves in the mirror.

NORMAN: I've noticed mirrors in health clubs before but nothing like this.

BUZZ: You're obviously very observant, Rick. Here at the Crystal Palace, we've invested, not so much in the latest workout equipment, but in the best mirrors.

NORMAN: As we stand here I can see oh, seven, eight, nine images of myself holding a microphone.

BUZZ: Eleven images to be exact. The Crystal Palace was designed by the county's leading refractologist.

NORMAN: I don't know. Call me sane, but something seems odd about people looking at themselves that much.

BUZZ: Some people are self-conscious about their body. Some of you for better reasons than others.

NORMAN: I'm not self-conscious about anything.

BUZZ: The human body is a beautiful, natural thing. Does naturality bother you, Rick?

NORMAN: No, Buzz. I'm natural enough, O.K.?

BUZZ: Obviously you have a hang-up of some sort.

NORMAN: I don't see much natural about that road kill glued to the top of your head.

BUZZ: Well, I'm canceling your free trial membership so don't try to come back.

NORMAN: Why should I. I know what I look like. Bill, the Crystal Palace is the best argument I've seen yet for being fat and ugly.

Back to you.

IT'S THE GAME, STUPID

Yet another body part gave out on me recently. My orthopedist says that all the braces, all the lineament, all the ibuprofen in the world will not put Humpty Dumpty back in the game. It doesn't really matter any more which part has failed. The cumulative effect of middle age is there are no more games I can play.

Sure, I could probably take up golf or tennis or darts. But those aren't games to me. Those are hobbies. Games are the things we played with our friends when we were kids, and when you play with your friends even now you're kids again, if only for a few hours.

For me, my last games were basketball and baseball. I lost basketball to sprung ankles a couple of years ago: Baseball finally passed away this summer.

My wife doesn't understand my loss. She sees it as a fitness issue. She can't understand why I can't be just as enthusiastic about aerobics or tai-bo.

I understand her concerns about my fitness. She probably doesn't relish the thought of being married to someone who is middle-aged, short, bald and fat.

I tried to explain to her that I didn't play games to stay in shape. Staying in shape is merely an incidental benefit to playing games.

She came home the other night with the latest fitness contraption "as advertised on national TV." From what I can tell from the directions, it's a stick you wiggle back and forth until you look like Arnold Schwarzenegger - which happens in 21 days or your money back. She said it looked fun.

I can't expect her to understand. To my knowledge she never made a reverse lay-up or threw someone out trying to steal second.

But who am I kidding? I'll never be a kid again. If she wants me to wiggle a stick, I'll wiggle 'til I drop. If she wants me to wear a toupee, I'll wear it. Why not? At least with my new, sedentary lifestyle, I won't need any of that scalp epoxy to hold my rug on. Lucky me.

WORLD SERIES GOAT

NORMAN: I'm here in the alley behind the ballpark with Buzz Wascomb. Buzz, not an afternoon that you nor the fans here will soon forget.

BUZZ: Hey! I'm not the first guy to make an error in the seventh game of the world series.

NORMAN: I'm sure that is correct, Buzz. But our statisticians could not find another case where a player missed what would have been the series winning catch because he tried to catch the ball in his cap.

FAN: I catch balls with my cap all the time at practice.

NORMAN: You've actually caught balls with your hat after they've traveled 400 feet?

FAN: Well, it gets a big laugh at practice.

NORMAN: Well, Buzz, the home fans aren't laughing today.

FAN: How was I to know the bill of my cap would tear off so easily. I think maybe my cap was defective.

NORMAN: I'm sure right now, Buzz, your defective equipment is the subject of a lot of discussion.

FAN: Shhhh!!!! Quiet! (footsteps go past)

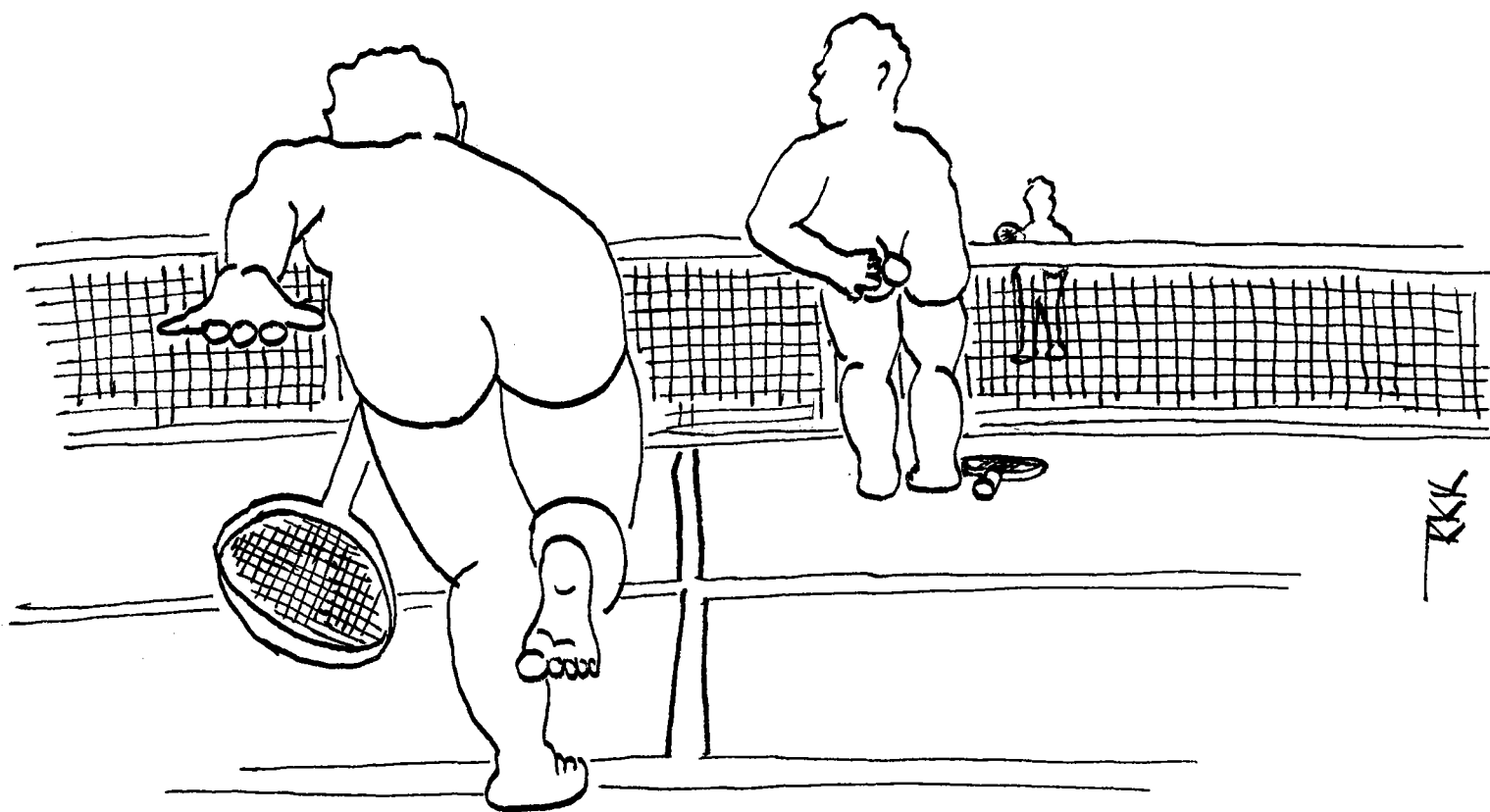
NORMAN: How long do you intend to hold up in this alley?

FAN: I'm hoping that if the fire department can get through the mob surrounding my Mercedes and put the fire out,

the parking lot will thin out a little and I can make my way to the canal and float downstream to the lake.

NORMAN: Sounds like a plan, Buzz. I'd love to stay and talk but it sounds like the lynch mob may be on the move again.

Back to you, Bill.



ANOTHER HUNCH

BILL: This is usually the time of our show when Rick Norman calls in with his weekly interview. But Rick didn't pick up his assignment this week. We don't allow Rick to freelance anymore. There have been problems... What?... OK. ...Rick is calling in... Do we want to take... OK, we'll accept the charges. Come in Rick Norman.

NORMAN: Thank you, Bill. I am very excited. I spent the week doing some investigative journalism.

BILL: We didn't hire you to do investigative journalism. We asked you to cover a story about the new bowling ball wax. You didn't call...

NORMAN: Bill, I have been working on the Jacko Jackson mystery.

BILL: What mystery? Jacko Jackson started serving his prison term last month for his part in a sports gambling syndicate.

NORMAN: That's right, but I believe I can prove he is innocent.

BILL: He pled guilty to the charges.

NORMAN: Yes, but I believe he only pled guilty because he had given the police that signed confession.

BILL: Is this another one of your hunches?

NORMAN: Let me go with my journalistic instincts on this one, please Bill.

BILL: You remember your last hunch. You reported that the New Orleans Saints' place kicker was a woman.

NORMAN: It was steamy in the locker room. The guy was wearing his towel pretty high. Anyone could have made that mistake.

BILL: Well, I'm not holding another pledge drive to pay for the defamation defense lawyers. I strongly suggest you proceed to Shamrock Bowling Alley, ASAP.

NORMAN: This is Rick Norman, for Only A Game.