

## Why do Giraffes Have Long Necks?

Tom Baker, starting quarterback of the Carson College Giraffes, awoke at 6:30am hung over from last night's wild card party and drinking, a pre-opening game tradition at Carson. He reached for a cigarette, lit it up, lay back against the light blue cinder block walls behind his dorm room bed and blew the smoke towards the ceiling. A lean 6' 4", Tom had the look of a proto-typical big school quarterback but he was slow afoot, and, let's face it, his passes lacked accuracy: His completion percentage hovered around 35%. But he could throw the ball through the side of a barn; he kept a picture on his smart phone to prove it, too. You can see why he was enrolled at a Division III school that no one had ever heard of. That is, no one other than the scheduling people at Stillwater State, a Division I national powerhouse. The Spear Chuckers had played for the national championship in last year's Rose Bowl against the Nebraska A&M Prairie Dogs. Yes, Spear Chuckers. Stillwater held on to their nickname proudly, despite the obvious slap in the face to "political correctness" that the term manifested. In last year's first game they led Carson 70 to nothing at the end of the first half. Given the condition of his players in the locker room, Coach Pete Peterson (weirdly, his nickname was also "Pete") wanted to call off the rest of the game before someone got killed; that would have been the responsible thing to do but the alumni wouldn't have liked that. They would have liked even less missing the large cash payment that the game earned for the school. Of course, the players would not see a penny of that. This is "cupcake" schedule making at its root. The final score of 100 -0 did not dampen VIP spirits. Carson was such a small school that it was not easy to find enough men to fill out the football team's roster. So, every eligible man was offered a tuition reduction for signing up for the team. Many of the players suffered from PTSD for some time afterwards.

The week after last year's game against Stillwater, male attendance at Carson classes had been extremely low. The professors complained, but frankly no one paid attention to them. Raising the stakes, a large group of Faculty led by members of the English Department in their jeans and lumberjack shirts, was trying to hold a protest sit-in against football but was shooed away from the president's office by campus security. Faculty were a drain on resources, whereas the alumni made donations. And a game against the Spear Chuckers was guaranteed to fill the stadium, and produce a national television audience. The chance to see a big time team play was worth the carnage wreaked on Carson's student/athletes.

Finishing his cigarette, Tom threw back the covers and swung his feet onto the cold linoleum floor. He wrapped a towel around his waist and walked down to the team's communal showers. Many of the other players were there, and they greeted each other with all of the enthusiasm of men awaiting a proctology exam on a cold morning. After his shower, Tom moved to the chipped porcelain sinks for a shave. With his face good and lathered up, Tom stuck another cigarette into his mouth in the midst of all that lather and lit it.

Jarrold James, the team center, looked at him and said, "Are you sure that smoking is the best thing to do on game day?"

Tom said, "What harm could it do? Worse things will happen on the field later on today. Besides, how many Big Macs did you have to stuff down your gullet to get big enough to play your position? That is dangerous too, especially for me. I got sacked forty-five times last year, and most of those were yours."

Jarrold said, "I couldn't help it. They kept sending that double A-Gap blitz; I didn't know which guy to block."

Tom said, "So you didn't block any of them."

Benny Moses, at 180 lbs the team fullback, chimed in, "*Play* is a term a bit too optimistic to describe what Jarrod does."

Jarrod replied, "What do you want? I am a nursing major, and I don't have a scholarship except for playing football, which I never played in high school. I snap the ball to Tom here then fall down in front of the guy facing me. They call that a cut block, then I get trampled and piled on by half the guys on the field. I damn near suffocated a couple of times last year. Plus, someone tried to feel up my ass in the last pile up!"

Tom said, "That was just your imagination, man."

"No it wasn't! That hand was definitely exploring my butt," Jarrod said.

Benny said, "Yours is so big that a complete exploration would have caused a delay of game penalty."

Tom finished his cigarette and his shave. Walking back to his room Tom thought fondly about getting thrown out of a bar with his friends last night. As usual, the drinking and card playing had gotten out of hand. Someone had put Kid Rock's *I want to be a Cowboy, Baby* on the jukebox and everyone had gotten really excited, dancing and prancing around the tavern dance floor, knocking over chairs and tables. The memory actually brought up a warm feeling that reduced the pain of his hangover.

He dressed and joined the general exodus to the home team locker room underneath the stadium. The weather was raw and windy for September. Walking through the parking lot, tail-gating was going on full blast amidst the Cadillac SUVs, the Mercedes sedans, the Range Rovers, and so on. Pungent smoke from roasting meats rose from numerous portable grills cooking up ribs, burgers, and hot dogs. Many tail-gaters were already three sheets to the wind from consuming every type of alcoholic beverage imaginable. There was a festive atmosphere rampant through the crowd, with a lot of laughter that seemed inappropriately loud for it being so early in the day. Few paid attention to the players on their

way to the field of honor. Those who did notice were heard to mumble words such as “Poor bastards,” “Take one for the school!” “Is that my son?”

Once girded for battle in yellow jerseys with brown spots on the shoulders and brown pants, the team gathered around Coach “Pete” for his pre-game speech. He stubbed out his cigarette butt and put down his coffee. He looked at his charges and began, “Grief counselors will be available immediately after the game. Ha, ha, I didn’t really mean that,” he laughed.

“Thanks coach,” Benny said. “I’m encouraged already.”

Coach “Pete” said, “You all know that I do not approve of this schedule but I don’t have any say in the decision. The Spear Chuckers are big, fast and tough. We don’t have the horses to stay with them. Try to stay out of harm’s way, keep your heads down, watch your asses, etc.”

Jarrold said, “You can say that again.”

Coach “Pete” said, “Okay, let’s get out there and get loose, get warm!”

We jogged out of the dressing room and onto the field. Our appearance was met with a smattering of applause from a few of our supporters who weren’t too drunk to wander over from the parking lot and find their seats. The Spear Chuckers were already out doing their warm ups in their red and black uniforms with the black helmets and the image of a spear on each side. Our brown and yellow helmets had Giraffe horns painted on the side. Tom made some warm up throws to the wide receivers and actually completed the first few. This got a few Spear Chuckers to stop and watch; they went back to work when he missed the next five passes. No threat of an upset today.

The stands were rapidly filling up as the teams took their places along the opposite side lines. The captains met in the middle with the refs for the coin toss. Carson won and special teams took their places for the kick off. Benny Moses dropped back to our goal line to receive the kick, which soon

enough came tumbling through the air, high and fast against the gray sky. Benny caught it and began running up the field, his lips drawn tight in a kind of rictus that froze on his face. The team formed a wedge and Benny ran to it but the Spear Chucker gunners each took out two of our guys leaving Moses alone in the middle of the field, naked as a Jaybird facing six or seven of their players bearing down on him, Benny dropped the ball. Seeing he no longer possessed the ball Benny fell to the ground writhing and clutching the back of his leg. The Spear Chuckers swarmed him and fell on the ball. Stillwater State players recovery on the Carson ten yard line, first and goal.

Benny limped to the sidelines absorbing the sneers of the defense as they ran onto the field much sooner than they had desired: "You could at least have held on to the ball, asshole!" middle linebacker Johnny Jones said.

Benny said, "You've got to be kidding, my hamstring...: Do you know what happens under a pile up? If there were police down there they would make arrests."

Jarrold said, "You can say that again: Some for sex crimes!"

Benny ceased his limp as soon as he crossed the sidelines and strolled over to sit on the bench. The defense lined up in their "46" or "bear" defense, a version of eight in the box, with four down linemen, two linebackers with a hand on the ground, two more in linebacker position and three defensive backs. They expected that the Spear Chuckers would try to run the ball down their throats. The Giraffes were not disappointed. Stillwater State lined up with their 230 tailback in the I formation with two tight ends. Trash talking began. The offensive line down in their stances began to snicker and laugh: "We're going to carve Highway 66 right up your assholes!"

Johnny Jones said, "Let's drop the hammer on these dicks!"

The center snapped the ball followed by a mass of humanity shoving and grunting. The quarterback handed off to the tailback who took the ball and ran right up the middle ten yards to the end zone. Not one Giraffe hand was laid on him. It was like Moses parting the Red Sea in Cecil B. DeMille's *Ten Commandments*. A roar of approval went up from the Stillwater side of the stadium. The Carson faithful sat silently admiring the power and precision of the Stillwater team.

The defensive players trailed off the field, and the Coach said to them "Ladies, it isn't enough to line up right, you got to tackle too."

Johnny Jones said, "We'll get 'em next time, Coach!"

Coach "Pete" said, "You still owe me from last year. Do it this time!"

The teams lined up for the next kick off. Stillwater went for an onside kick, catching the Giraffes completely by surprise. Spear Chucker ball at their 45 yard line, first and ten.

"We got 'em this time!" Johnny shouted as the defense went out for another round.

This time eight in the box meant that the strong safety pressed the line of scrimmage, with four down linemen and three linebackers. Stillwater lined up in a spread formation with five wide receivers. The Giraffes were expecting run but they got the pass instead. Their quarterback, MVP of last year's championship game, took a five step drop and winged the ball deep down the right side line. Their 6'4" wide out with the 4.3 speed had broken way past the five foot eight defensive back (he was a mechanical arts major) on a straight fly route. Touchdown!

The Stillwater quarterback yelled at the Giraffe defense as he ran off the field, "Time to hike up your skirts girls! It's coming!"

The Giraffes received the next kick off and touched it down in the end zone. The offense came out led by quarterback Tom to start on their twenty yard line. Benny Moses had recovered from his injury and lined up in the slot as the outlet receiver. With the snap of the ball the Stillwater defense blitzed two safeties and Tom turned to throw the ball to Benny, his “hot” receiver. He fired a bullet, a beautiful spiral five feet over Benny’s head, and as he jumped up in a vain effort to get to the ball he was blasted in the ribs by the Stillwater defensive back. Benny hit the ground and rolled over several times before coming to a frighteningly still stop. Injury time out. The trainers ran out to where Benny lay motionless on the field. Suddenly a woman in a tan rain coat ran out of the stands from the Carson side onto the field, wine glass in hand, screaming “My son, my son!” The sound of his mother’s voice brought Benny around to consciousness. Two security guards swept out from the sidelines and scooped her up fearing that she might be a streaker; she might have nothing on under that rain coat. In fact, they kind of hoped that she didn’t. If Benny could have spoken he would have said, “That’s just my mom; leave her alone.” But he could not speak. In fact, he was scarcely breathing.

Meanwhile, well above field level in the president’s luxury box Giles Ledbetter presided over his klatch of well-heeled guests. Ledbetter had retired from Congress where he had held a seat representing a coal mining district in the House for 25 years. In fact, he had worked in the mines himself as a young man, before going to university, and then law school. It took him years to get the ground in coal dust out from under his fingernails and the creases of his hands. Up until that point his fellow law-makers considered him to be something of a hick. His early role as chief of the United Mine Workers of America local took him a long way in the political game. He continued to carry the reputation of a defender of the working man long after he had switched to management side by taking their lobbyists’ money and their issues.

President of Carson was the easiest gig Giles had ever had. He was accorded intellectual prestige that his JD alone would not have provided him. His lack of scholarly credentials was no impediment, though; his

job was to convince the well off to open their wallets to Carson's benefit. While college president did not afford him compensation like he would have received with a K Street lobbying firm, his congressional service was presumed to have left him extremely well connected to possible government money. The Faculty was not his peer group, and that suited the Board of Trustees just fine.

Some trustees and big-wig alumni jabbed their elbows each other's sides crowded into the VIP box. The big game always got them to campus. They drank, ate little hors d'ouvres of Vienna sausages on Ritz crackers, fake crab dip spread on whole wheat crackers, and much prized shrimp—jumbo shrimp!—in some red sauce. Around the world the presence of jumbo shrimp tells you that your reception is important. This repast was washed down with goblets of Chardonnay, or scotch and bourbon for the hardcore. Trustees were local business men and women, donors to one political party or the other, who were named by the Governor for their financial loyalty. The trustees were either exploiting their positions to their own financial advantage or fielding various half-baked ideas about how to “restructure” the university. Carson College did a lot of business locally.

Giles, whiskey sour in hand, looked out of the window onto the field for the first time to see the woman with the wine glass being escorted off by the security guards.

“My god, is that Martha Moses? Jack, is that your wife?” Giles stood pointing towards the field with his drink hand. Jack Moses was a trustee, in fact, Giles' boss. “Yeah, W-T-F is she doing down there?”

Mrs. Jessica Ledbetter, a local girl from an undistinguished family whom Giles had married when he was working in the mines said, “Maybe she wanted to watch the game.”

Jack said, “W-T-F would she want to do that?” Jack Moses owned a lumber company that was doing quite well in the tri-state area; he had little interest in football though. His association with Carson looked good on his resume and on his business cards. **Moses Lumber** was one of the sponsors of the



president's strategic campus building program. Everyone was very excited by the coming campus spruce up. Giles knew that new buildings provided the chance to offer new naming opportunities for a price. Hiring Faculty to teach Carson's students was a distant priority in comparison.

Chuck Barnes, another of the trustees, looking through a pair of binoculars at the injured player said, "Jack, that is your boy injured down there!"

"Jesus H. Christ! I told him he didn't have to play but he insisted on putting on the uniform."

Chuck's wife Minnie was there as usual, high on Adderall to which she and several other wives, Jessica included, were addicted. Minnie usually carried in her purse a sampler pack of different prescription drugs—valium, vicotin, amphetamines, a couple of joints, you name it—so that one was bound to match her mood. Chuck and Minnie were partners in a jewelry store unpretentiously named **Universe of Diamonds**, located in a dusty nondescript strip mall on the outskirts of town. They were both licensed as reverends which allowed them to marry people. The jewelry store had a small chapel attached to the opposite end of the building. The linkage between marriage and diamonds, they believed, was natural, so performing a marriage was a big help in selling rings. They were reliable donors to the Governor. Minnie was still a good looking woman but she was bored with her life. Boredom led to an affair with Giles that had made life more tolerable for each. Jessica and he did not have much in common anymore. The more Giles left her alone, the more she came to appreciate the quiet, and time to herself.

Back on the field Benny was helped to his feet and walked bent over to the sideline. Carson's offense huddled up. Barry Bosworth the right guard said to Tom, "You know that a pass like that is almost sure to get the receiver hurt!"

Tom said, "I didn't mean to overthrow Benny like that."

Barry said, "You should be confined to handing off the ball; you're a menace when you throw it."

Tom said, "Shut up so I can call the play!"

Barry said, "I'd feel safer if you didn't say anything."

A whistle blew and Tom thought, *What now?*

The Umpire signaled "delay of game" on Carson. Then he walked over to the huddle and said, "You guys better get it together. I can hear you arguing from where I am."

Tom said, "It's cool. I got it under control."

The Umpire said, "Okay, let's play some ball."

Tom called a play, "Spider, wide banana, on three. Break!"

The players lined up across from the Stillwater defense, and each took their stances. Tom dropped back into the shotgun formation and surveyed the defensive alignment. After counting the opposition to see that they did not have more than eleven, Tom prepared to call out the signal to snap the ball but his mind was suddenly a blank. *What was the snap number?* "Ready set!" he shouted. A line of seven butts dropped simultaneously; it was beautiful to see. Out of the corner of his eye Tom saw the Ump reaching again for his yellow flag. Tom thought, *I will take the delay of game penalty and call a different snap number.* A yellow flag wafted through the damp air a second time. Carson huddled up again and left tackle Digger Splitrail looked at Tom and said, "You forgot the snap count again, didn't you?" Tom said, "Of course not! Same play on four."

The teams lined up again facing each other, Carson in the shotgun formation. One of the defenders laughed and said to Tom, "Pick a number between one and ten."

Tom shouted "Four!" Jarrod snapped the ball and dived to the ground. The ball popped straight up in the air, and the Stillwater defense came across like Hannibal's elephants rampaging through the Roman

Legions. Tom said, "Godamn it," and dived trying to corral the fugitive pigskin but a bipartisan group of players burst past him before a Stillwater player got to it and it bounced right up into his hands. Without breaking stride he began to run towards Carson's goal. No one on the Carson team could catch him even though he was a 300 pound defensive tackle. No one even tried. Touchdown Stillwater!

Pete Peterson looked at his offensive coordinator, Slacks Bieber, and asked, "How much time we got left?"

Slacks said, "We're at 9:50 left in the first quarter."

Coach said, "You better do something about this offense or we'll get run right out of the stadium."

While Special Teams players got ready to receive the next kick off, Slacks gathered the offense around him back near the benches. Slacks was part-time Faculty in the English Department when he wasn't tutoring the Carson offense. He specialized in the English opium smoking or laudanum drinking poets of the eighteenth century, with whom he felt a visceral connection. He loved the laudanum dosed poetry of Thomas De Quincy; Slacks held seminars on his *Confessions of an Opium-eater*. Samuel Taylor Coleridge was another favorite even though his drug dependency ruined his health. These were visionary men who had changed his perspective on life. His offensive concepts, coming from his drug induced dreams, sometimes escaped his players' comprehension. Gathered in the midst of his shell shocked players, Slacks felt the need for inspiration.

"Okay guys who has the joint?" he said.

Jilly Jackson, one of the wide outs, said, "I got a couple." He passed one to Slacks who lit it up. A few puffs later he said, "I see it now. " The whites of his eyes turned red and then glassed over. "Okay, we're going with play action passes. Spider wide banana, Spider wide banana."

Tom said, "We haven't got a running game. They just carried Benny off the field on a stretcher."

Slacks said, "Who is the next guy up?"

Tom said, "That would be Basil Brown but he doesn't have any experience. He's never carried the ball."

Basil tried to avoid looking anyone in the eye. Basil was transgender and the last thing he wanted to do as a woman trapped in a man's body was to carry a football, but he could not turn down the scholarship help that playing offered. Otherwise he had no hope of becoming a fashion designer.

Slacks said, "Where are you Basil?" Not hearing a response he began to move the players around in search of his back-up running back. Basil was finally revealed standing with his helmet off so as not to mess up his perm. Slacks said, "Put your helmet on and let's go!" Basil turned cold inside as he placed the plastic shell on his head.

Slacks looked Basil over and said, "What are those things on your feet?"

Basil looked down at the ballet slippers he was wearing and said, "I don't have any tennis shoes, and I thought these would help me leap out of tackles."

Slacks said, "God in heaven. Get out there! The rest of you pray."

Basil went out with the offense. Tom figured that the best thing to do was to get Basil out of the game as quickly as possible.

"Listen up! Trey, right side, tail-back wheel route, on five."

Basil stood to Tom's right while Tom received the snap, then he ran right around the defensive end who had been left unblocked in the hope that he would run too far up field. Tom tossed a short pass which Basil surprised everyone by catching. Then he set out running with his slipper clad feet splaying out behind him. Ahead, Basil could see two defensive backs closing in on him from either side; behind him he could hear pounding feet. Just as the three Spear Chuckers closed in on him, an extra shot of

adrenalin induced by fear allowed him to leap high and far leaving the enemy clutching at air where once he had been. All that was left was the fragrance of his cologne. Basil landed and finished his sprint across the Stillwater goal line. Touchdown Carson!

The stunned crowd fell silent. Then the students in the end zone bleachers began to go wild. No one had expected Carson to score. Many in the stands felt cheated given how much a ticket cost; they expected Stillwater to pitch a shutout.

Coach "Pete" turned and sought out Slacks, giving him a big slap on the back. "Man that was a great call! Did you know that kid was so fast?"

Slacks lied, "Sure I did. That's why I called that play. Anybody got a candy bar?"

"Pete" said, "Why are your eyes so red?"

Slacks said, "Crying for joy, boss."

The offense came jubilantly off the field while the special team went out for the extra point conversion.

Basil was still being mobbed by his team mates.

Tom said, "Get me a pair of ballet slippers; I don't need these cleats anymore!"

Basil said, "Wow! I want to do that again. It was so exciting being chased by all those young, strong men!"

Coach Slacks said, "Let's not get carried away."

Play resumed its more normal rhythm with the Spear Chuckers scoring on each of their possessions, and sometimes on Carson's too.

The contest provoked a show down between the two team mascots. The Carson team mascot was a freshman in a giraffe costume with a three foot neck nicknamed "Drink of Water" because he was so tall. The Spear Chucker mascot was, embarrassingly enough, a white fellow in black face dressed in a grass skirt, with a full Afro on his head, and carrying a fake spear. He enacted a frenetic "war" dance every time his team scored, hopping around as though he had stepped on a fire ant mound. By half-time his makeup was running from sweat, leaving white stripes in the black paint. His nickname is "Sambo." Stillwater had been challenged many times to change the team's name and get rid of what many considered this racist display but their Board of Trustees responded that they would keep their tradition, and not give in to "political correctness." For them this was all just good clean fun. But what seems good clean fun one moment can change in an instant into something ugly.

As half-time approached and Sambo was absorbed for the umpteenth time in his war dance, the giraffe ran up behind him and swung his neck wide and hard at Sambo, striking him and knocking him to the ground. The giraffe then began his own "war" dance, stamping around in a crazed way that no real giraffe would. The student section clapped and cheered this blow struck against racism. An angry Sambo jumped to his feet and charged the giraffe with his spear outstretched, shouting "You're going to wind up as steaks on someone's tail gate grill!" The giraffe grabbed the spear as it approached and began to swing around; both mascots orbited around each other like model planets in a planetarium. "Drink of Water" let go first. Sambo kept spinning then dropped to the ground once again. His wig fell from its perch on his head. "Drink of water" jumped on top of him, and they tussled on the ground before being separated by security guards. There was a chorus of boos from the student section: This was the most fight Carson had ever shown and they wanted it to continue.

Half time finally came and both teams exited the field for the locker rooms. The Giraffes were accompanied by an entourage of wheelchairs, crutches, and the walking wounded. Coach "Pete" wrote

the score on the blackboard—60 to 7. Then he said, “Much improved from last year.” A team of volunteer medics came in to begin triaging the players. Benny was ruled out of the game. Justin Barnes, the second wide out, had gone out with a suspected concussion but he thought he was okay. He said, “It was one of those hits you don’t see coming. All of a sudden you’re on the ground and you see the shadow of something large above you moving away out of the corner of your eye. The force was so strong it went right through my nervous system before it could react. So by the time I could feel, it was already gone, so I didn’t feel anything.” After speaking these words, Justin fainted. Slacks asked, “How should we list his status?” Coach “Pete” said, “List his status as questionable to return.” Justin was ruled doubtful to return pending a concussion exam; this meant that he might play if he woke up before the game ended. Other players were treated according to their bumps and bruises.

Coach “Pete” called his minions together for his usual inspirational half-time speech. “Ladies,” he began, “it is all too often that I need recourse to this kind of address. I did not hear Pericle’s Funeral Oration for the first Athenian dead of the Peloponnesian War in the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C., in which he extolled the value of democracy to his slave-holding brethren. I did not hear Lincoln’s Gettysburg address commemorating the dead of the Civil War. But I know about them, even though I cannot scale those rhetorical heights I can take a step up that road.” Coach paused to hear an annoyed sounding voice say, “Get away from me, I ain’t got no potato chips!” He saw Slacks scurry towards the back of the group.

“As I was saying,” Coach continued, “Ladies, I call upon you to think of the honor of Carson College. Think of our loyal alumni cheering you on from the president’s VIP box. You are latter day Roman gladiators!”

Jihad Abdulramen, the kicker, said, “Let’s cut the pseudo-imperialistic imaginings and get real: How do we survive the second half?”

“That is a question only god can answer,” said the team chaplain, who had just entered the room.

Jihad said, "Then we are in a hell of a lot of trouble!"

Coach "Pete" said, "Listen to what Father George has to say, girls. Don't judge lest ye be judged, or something like that."

Because the team was multicultural each religion had to be served or the Board felt that they risked an audit from the Justice Department. But a representative of the three major faiths could not be found in this small town set in the middle of a corn field. Consequently, George was Father one week, Pastor the next, and Rabbi the week after, the only difference being his dress. To buttress his limited knowledge of these different religious practices, Father George bought the on-line equivalent of Cliff Notes from university courses on the history of religion. Apparently, in his reading George had missed any mention of Reformed Judaism, so he thought that on his rabbi days he should wear a black suit, including a black hat, a fulsome wig, and a full beard. There were, however, no Hasidic Jews in town, so he seemed strange. Somehow, despite the costume of the week, his speeches always turned out to be pro-Catholic, critical of the stubbornness of the Jews and Muslims in refusing to convert.

Today "Father" George looked sternly about the faces gathered around him, thrust his arm forward, and said, "It takes the cry of a heathen infidel to wake us up!"

Jihad blushed red and flipped Father George the bird.

"You young men *are* in a world of hurt. Pain flows through your limbs and joints. Some of you may have broken bones; so be it! Buck up and play on. College football is the only excitement we got in this town, so don't let us down! Praise God from whom all blessings flow! Let us pray. God, extend a helping hand to these valiant lads as they battle for victory against the cursed Spear Chucker team. Football is life to us; it is much more than just a game. It teaches us that the goal of any endeavor is to win at all costs.



Come together and slay—I mean, defeat the enemy!” Finishing with a flourish Father stalked out of the dressing room.

Jihad said, “I’d rather be in a coma from a concussion than have to listen to that man.”

Benny Moses said, “Keep your hopes up; there’s still the second half to play.”

Meanwhile, up in the crowded president’s box, the VIPs had almost finished the catered delicacies that they had been provided. A few picked over the remaining jumbo shrimp determined not to leave one precious morsel on the platter. Martha Moses had been rounded up and delivered back to her husband’s care. She immediately refilled her glass of Chardonnay.

Jack said, “Honey, don’t you think you’ve had enough of that already?”

Martha said, “I need to recover from the shock of seeing my son lying motionless on the football field.”

Jack stuck his nose briefly into his scotch glass then said, “Well how is he?”

“He isn’t going to play the second half,” Martha said.

Bayless Bartles, an alumnus, asked, “Giles, we need some more food!”

“Hold your horses and have another drink,” Giles replied.

There was a general movement as the crowd moved towards the window onto the field as the teams came out for the second half. The weather worsened as a rain storm passed overhead. On the sidelines the Giraffes discussed among themselves if weather would improve their chances or at least soften their landings when the Spear Chuckers bowled them over. When they started warming up, the Carson players found that they were slipping and sliding all over. No mud cleats.

The two teams lined up for the kick off. Jihad saw the signal from the Spear Chuckers that they were ready to receive the ball. He ran forward and kicked the pigskin off of its tee and it flew down to the goal-line where it was gathered in by the returner. The Giraffes advanced down the field and moved to corral the runner. Jihad tackled him at the thirty yard line, then jumped up and let out a series of ululations that startled all of the players. When he returned to the sidelines he saw Father George, red in the face, staring at him.

Jihad said, "Given my name, what did you expect? Allah Akbar!" and continued on to take a seat on the bench.

The rain had given way to a kind of mist or fog on the field. The defense trudged back out onto the field. The Stillwater offense resumed pushing them backwards in huge chunks towards their goal before busting a run up the middle for a score on their fourth play. Touchdown Spear Chuckers! The Stillwater players were seemingly born to play on mud—maybe they had web feet.

Sambo the mascot did his wild dance. "Drink of Water" looked on with a baleful glare. When the Carson defense limped to the sidelines it was clear that several players would not be able to continue.

Watching with increasing alarm from high in a corner of the end zone bleachers was a contingent of Carson Faculty occupying the only seats that the administration made available to them. They could not afford to buy tickets; the Faculty hadn't had a raise in ten years. Many, of course, were attending this annual "slaughter of the innocents" to support their students. By the second half, most could no longer bear to watch, averting their eyes as though from some terrible car accident. Among them was a petite professor of Classics named Mona Dishingam, who served on the Athletics Committee of the College. Mona was about four and a half feet tall, or short, but she had actually won the friendship of "Pete" Peterson, the coach, being the only Faculty member of the Committee to take her work seriously. But this was too much: Year after year she had been witness to this blood ritual which made it nearly

impossible for her students to study not only in her classes but in many others, so that their time at Carson would pay off with better lives. Suddenly she had an idea: Turning to her colleagues she said, "We have to stop this!"

Christopher Bronfman, Professor of Mathematics said, "Yeah, but how?"

Mona said, "We have to confiscate the footballs so that they can't play anymore."

Bronfman said, "That is an absurd idea. The refs will simply provide others, and we will be arrested."

Mona said, "Do you have a better idea? Do you want to sit here and watch the carnage continue? Try to teach to empty seats in your classes instead of students? There are enough of us here to grab all of them. Getting the one they are using on the field will be difficult I grant you but let's try. Come on let's go down to the sidelines." The group of self-styled "Scholars with a Conscience" left their cold bleacher seats and gingerly picked their way down to the field through the raucous crowd of inebriated students. On her way down Mona heard a female student shout, "Hey, there's my Classics prof: Is she a pygmy or what!" followed by guffaws all around. Mona kept her chin proudly elevated.

Biff Buckingham, a newbie in the History Department said, "How, if it requires the consumption of so much alcohol, can football be counted as fun, rather than just another excuse to get drunk?" Perhaps Biff didn't really understand the vital importance of football in American life, which goes well beyond simple "fun." Some Trustees certainly would have said so. His hire to teach "Social History" had been controversial. The Board of Trustees still had a couple of elderly stalwarts of the John Birch Society hanging on. Birchers believed that the rise of "social sciences" and "social studies" plainly proved that Socialists were taking over the American educational system. The field of "social history" echoed those earlier fears, thus Biff's hiring had just squeaked through. Socialists cannot understand how college

football, with its “win at all costs” value system, prepares students for life in our country. As Casey Stengel said in another way, sportsmanship is for losers.

On the other hand, Biff did have a firm grasp on the importance of drinking in the country’s life.

This group of probable “subversives” moved around the sidelines until they found the large wooden box where were kept the balls destined for use that afternoon. Up in the VIP box president Ledbetter looked down at the field for perhaps the first time and saw the furtive group of Faculty, from his point of view, skulking around the sidelines. He said to no one in particular, “What are they doing down there? Why weren’t they still in their seats? The game isn’t over.” His fellow VIPs gathered around to see where he was looking. With the referees occupied with the game, the Faculty decided it would be easier to move the wooden box than to grab armfuls of footballs. Having moved it well underneath the stands the group took the air pump used to inflate the pigskins and deflated every ball, then turned their attention to the one ball remaining in play on the field. Mona said, “Let’s get the mascot to take it.”

At the next time out he ran out onto the field and grabbed up the ball, then raced towards the sidelines. The referees, thinking this to be nothing more than a prank to amuse the crowd during the break, did not try to stop him. The umpire went to where the extra balls had been left but found that the box was no longer there. Looking around for it, he finally found it under the stands. When he opened it he found it full of deflated footballs, and the air pump was gone. They had to catch that mascot! If the game were halted with Stillwater only up 70 to 7, their national ranking and Championship Bowl placement could be affected. Stillwater had to reach the century mark in points. Perhaps Stillwater would not agree to continue the series with Carson if they did not. The umpire took out his cell and phoned president Ledbetter to explain what had happened. He reminded Giles that this game was on national TV as the national champion’s season opening game.

Giles called security and ordered them to catch the mascot at all costs. Security managed to corner him in the Carson locker room and retrieve the game ball. Seeing that the game would go on, the Faculty left the stadium and resolved never to return.

When it was all over, and Stillwater had not only reached but surpassed its goal (the final score was 120-7, a record), the Carson squad found itself once again thoroughly pummeled and sitting silently in its locker room. Coach "Pete" said, "Cheer up girls. Next week we play in our own league at the Audubon University Birdwatchers. Then, **we** will be the big dogs!" The players responded with a roof-rattling cheer, and sounds mimicking barking dogs! Testosterone levels roared back and overflowed their banks. Next weekend they would be able to celebrate their guaranteed victory by overturning and burning a couple of automobiles. That would be big time!

Life was good after all, in this, the best of all possible worlds!