

MY SPORTS CAREER or HOW TO BE A MISERABLE FAILURE

BY PHILIP PETERSON

(WHO HAS NOT PLAYED FOR UNB RED BOMBERS, FREDERICTON VIKINGS OR BALMY BEACH CANOE CLUB)

One fateful day in 1954 our family got their first television set. I was very excited, and took all the characters portrayed on the screen very seriously, being but five years of age. Having witnessed my first western, a very wild and woolly one as they say, I strapped on my new set of six guns, set out for our next door neighbour's territory and within the hour was seen by several people to be pistol-whipping the girl next door into semi-unconsciousness. It was at this point that my career in track and field began. Indeed it became the very necessity for my further existence to outrun the little girl's father and various other enraged neighbours.

Somehow I have managed to survive to the present date, but don't doubt one iota that this state will not be continued if I stay somewhere in the realm of sports.

There are three main sports in which I participate to varying degrees. These three will be described in succession to give you a clear idea of just how fine and athlete I really am. Perhaps my build should be mentioned first, so that you can mentally ridicule me in my absence if you so wish. I am 6'2" tall and weigh 187 lb. My chest norm is 36" and if I take a really gigantic lungful of air, it usually deflates about a quarter of an inch. The doctors are partially agog at this. My right eyeball is bigger than my left, giving me the strange appearance of a straining glance to the right. Finally, I have two birthmarks, one on my left hip and one on the right. When put together they spell "mother".

Having described myself, I would like to describe my football career which must number among the shortest on record. When I was in high school we had no football team as such, but rather we congregated on the old ballfield when we got out in the afternoon. But sometimes we did play other towns on the weekend and called ourselves the Fredericton Junction Nostrils because we always blew all our chances. In fact, our style of play was such that our championship became known as the Toilet Bowl.

I once threw a football 79 yards on the fly (missing my intended receiver by 34 yards) and concluded I would try out for the Red Bombers.



My first morning (also my last) in training camp proved rather disastrous. Not only was I cut that day, but bruised, abraded and almost killed. For soon one learns that one must under no circumstances "Ever Walk, I see you walkin' again, and it's the last time you do it!" And true to that coach's words, I walked very little in the weeks to follow. The heat that day made players sick and they threw up, but not me, largely because I didn't happen to eat any breakfast that morning, so I just staggered around and croaked.

When I finally got to throw the ball I acquired some further embarrassments due to

Illustrated by Mac Haynes

my peculiar habit of smearing molasses on my passing hand to get a better grip. At this point the white stripe on the ball came off on the palm of my hand. But all the players were not bunglers like I was, especially the tight end who continually fired down shots of scotch and staggered very tight indeed all over the field.

My disillusionment was complete, and since that time I have been working night and day on some new rules for football which will help detract from its popularity. Here are my ideas to date.

RULE 1 Only guards are allowed to carry the ball and they must not weigh more than 187 lb. (counting the weigh of the ball).

RULE 2 There is no scoring and penalties will be given to any team attempting offensive plays.

RULE 3 Players are to be more polite and say "May I?" to the referee before each play, and "Excuse me, please", after tackling an opponent.

RULE 4 No publicity will be given the game at all and all, spectators must sit with their backs to the game.



My next field of endeavor has been baseball. In this area I am more experienced but on the other hand am more deadly as well. I am what you might call a converted outfielder-infielder-pitcher-catcher. I have been converted into a spectator.

I started out as an outfielder but had some trouble at that position. I remember one game in particular and in particular an important playoff match. I was in leftfield when late in the game with the score tied a screeching line drive came my way - at least they tell me it came my way, and I did HEAR it. Apparently it went through my legs and hit the fence. This I heard and turned around to field it in its carem from the wall when it went through my legs again toward the infield. At this point the runner was laughing - very hard I might add, and I even got a few chuckles from my own centre-fielder. But I would not be denied, and now being able to see the ball because it had stopped, I charged it quickly and hit a fan in the third row of seats between the eyes. Seeing the arm I had the coach made me into a pitcher and my nickname became "The Wild-Man from Borneo". I was not offended in the least, in fact, I thought the term "Wildman" was rather mild, considering.

In one game I retired the side permanently. All told I had struck out the side twice and knocked it out three times. One very large first baseman I hit in the chest with a screwball (this is another one of my nicknames) three times in a row. He swore at me the first time, shook his fist at me the second and probably would have clubbed me to death after the third, if he had had enough strength to get up.

In fact I was so wild I brought about the invention of a new baseball term, the pitch and

run in which I would pitch and the batter would run, anywhere to get away. In truth I once actually hit the man in the on deck circle and got the opposing third base coach in the ricketchet.

Here are my statistics for my final season: Games 12; Innings Pitched 1; Strikeouts 77; Walks 116; Wild Pitches 161; ERA 261.28; Deaths 3; Maimings 7; Relatively Minor Injuries 1 (the opposing coach).

Here are the league records I hold:

1. Longest bounce from a batting helmet.
2. Loudest scream from an opposing player.
3. Fastest sprint by a pitcher from the pitching rubber out of the park.
4. Most pitches thrown in one game (6672).
5. Most balls thrown in one game (6671).

My final sport, and most proficient is volleyball. However volleyball affects my psyche different than the other two - it makes me nervous. I get so nervous that I do crazy things. I hold the conference record for getting my ear caught in the net in one game. I was also voted one of the three goats of the game most often in Our home gym.

One time early last year we were to play our first games of the season, against Fredericton Junction, the best team in the Maritimes and their coach had been my coach in high school. Just before game time our coach realized to his dismay that he had not as yet selected a captain and needed one for the toss of the coin. As luck would have it I was sitting closest to the coach at the time and have never actually decided whether I got the tap on the shoulder as a result of a nervous spasm of his arm or a fit of temporary insanity, but soon I was there, in the middle of the court with my former coach glowing confidently at me. He even had a slightly satisfied look on his face, very probably relieved that I was on the other side. The flip for serve was to be made which I eventually won, and no doubt misled by all the football I had been watching recently, said confidently "We'll receive". My old coach seemed disbelieving at this turn of events and he said in a very high-pitched voice "You'll receive!?" I had to think fast but said that we had such a good team I would spot him the serve.



Back at the bench the coach said concernedly "How'd it go?" I had the heart only to say that they had won the toss and the serve, the lucky sons of guns.

I might just add that I am no longer captain.

So now I am retired and write poetry. Maybe you've read some of it, like "The Ballad of the Furry Crow", "You'll Wonder Where the Yellow Went When You Drop the Bomb on the Orient", and "It's not Easy Being a Frog". Somehow I have a feeling my track and field may again come in handy.