

Drunk On SPORTS



Tim Cowlishaw
FOREWORD BY CHARLES BARKLEY

DRUNK ON SPORTS

By

TIM COWLISHAW

Smashwords Edition

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To Willis

*He taught me what every good father should teach his son:
The love of good books and the proper use of the mulligan.*

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Prelude

TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY OFFENSE REPORT

DATE: July 21, 2007

TIME: 3:18 A.M.

COUNTY: Hunt.

PLACE: I-30 SFR, E of FM 1565.

SYNOPSIS: On 7-21-2007, I stopped a vehicle for driving on the wrong side of the road. Upon contact with the vehicle a strong odor of alcoholic beverage was detected. I got the driver out of the vehicle and detected an odor of alcohol coming from him. When I asked the driver if he had anything to drink he said some beers. After performing SFST's the driver was arrested for DWI. The driver was transported to Hunt County Jail and released to jailers on duty.

DETAILS

1. I, James Ammons, am a commissioned peace officer in the State of Texas employed by the Texas Department of Public Safety as a State Trooper in the Texas Highway Patrol Service.
2. I was working a STEP shift of 3 am - 7 am.
3. I was in a marked black and white car.
4. I had stopped at a sign at the intersection of FM1565N and the Interstate 30 South Frontage Road preparing to turn left onto the SFR when I observed a vehicle traveling east on the SFR that had stopped on the shoulder of the SFR right in front of me. I observed the driver moving around in the vehicle. The driver then looked in my direction, put his seat belt on and pulled back on to the south frontage road. I then turned left behind the vehicle. I then observed the vehicle drift into the west bound lane of the SFR traveling east and the vehicle continued on the wrong side of the road.
5. I immediately got in behind the vehicle and activated my emergency overhead lights to initiate a traffic stop.
6. The vehicle, a black Toyota Highlander (sport utility) bearing Texas Registration 704-XYT stopped partially on the road and partially on the shoulder of the SFR East of FM 1565.
7. I made a driver side approach and as I approached I detected the strong odor of an alcoholic beverage coming from the vehicle.
8. I identified myself and told the driver my reason for the stop.
9. The driver stated "I know" and said something else but his speech was slurred and I could not understand what he said.
10. At this point I also observed that the driver's eyes were blood shot and glassy.
11. Before I asked the driver for his driver's license and insurance he gave it to me.
12. The driver was identified as Cowlshaw, William Timothy by his Texas Driver's License.
13. I asked Cowlshaw where he was headed and he said home. His driver's license showed a Coppel address which if that is where he still lived he was going in the wrong direction. I asked the driver where he lived and he said Coppel.

FOREWORD

By

CHARLES BARKLEY

It was the spring of 2006 and the TNT crew was on its way to Dallas for the Western Conference Finals when I gave the producers an unusual request. I told them I wanted to meet Tim Cowlshaw.

I don't usually go out of my way to meet members of the media. As a player, I used to have friends in the press. But the media in today's 24-7 news cycle is always trying to get somebody, trying to bring someone down. And I pay very close attention.

I watch "Around the Horn" all the time and, unlike some people on that show, I feel like Tim always tries to play fair. I don't agree with everything he says, but he doesn't have an agenda when he's out to get some people he doesn't like or protect people that he likes. And, you know, I take television and newspapers very seriously. People see something on television or they read it in the newspaper and they think it's gospel.

There are some writers that I have known for years. Michael Wilbon of the Washington Post, well, he used to be at the Post, now he's on TV more than I am - and David Dupree who was at USA Today and Bob Ford at the Philadelphia Inquirer. These are great friends. These are all nice guys and they have something in common. They just want to do their job. They're not operating with hidden agendas.

Being fair is all I try to do on TNT. Guys have gotten mad at me. Kobe got mad at me after the playoff game in 2006 when he wouldn't shoot in the second half. He texted me like 100 times, called me every name in the book. I said, "First of all, I've called you the best player in the world for the last three years and you didn't exactly call and thank me. But I didn't like what you did. And I knew what you were doing."

I had never seen Tim trying to go after someone he didn't seem to like or protect someone who was his friend. So I was in Dallas in 2006 at one of my favorite steakhouses, Nick and Sam's. I was talking to some people at the bar and Tim happened to be there. He came walking up to introduce himself but before he could do that, I told him, "Dude, I really appreciate what you do on ESPN because you're fair."

I was leaving the bar when I spoke to him that night, but we met for drinks a lot over the next two years. When I came to Dallas - I was taping the golf show with Hank Haney there that next summer - he would text Tim and we would go out. We went out drinking in Scottsdale, too, when he was in town for a Cowboys-Cardinals game.

And we went out in LA. And we went out in New York. We drank a lot of beers and more than a few vodka-and-cranberries. It was like it used to be when I was a player, just friends out drinking. Back in the '80s, we would go to the hotel bar and run into the Philly writers there. Now I don't think you can do that anymore. If you don't play well, it would be "Charles was out drinking last night" all over the news.

I think Tim's job is tougher than mine. When you're a local guy, fans want you to say 100 percent positive things about the team all the time. How can he do that? When's the last time the Cowboys were really good? I can't even tell you.

Besides our honesty and our love of sports, Tim and I have one other thing in common. We both got arrested for DWI in recent years. His didn't quite make the big news that mine did. I know he's grateful for that, but I applaud him for telling his story here.

Mine took place on New Year's Eve, 2008. I have a big party in Scottsdale every year and w

were leaving the bar. There were three or four cars in a line and I was the fourth car. We all slowly rolled through a stop sign and when I did it, the flashing lights came on and the cop cars came out of the woodwork.

I did a sobriety test, walking the line and all that stuff, and I thought I did pretty good. The cop said, "You did all right." At that point, I knew I was going to jail.

The thing that bothered me was I wasn't driving down the highway weaving or out of control. I rolled through a stop sign. But there were times I'd been driving where I was worse; I know that for sure.

When I had to spend a weekend in jail due to the laws in Arizona, I was just mad at myself. I couldn't believe I fucked up like that. I had never thought about drinking and driving until I got arrested. I never thought about the consequences. And I wasn't even drunk that night; I've been much worse behind the wheel of a car. I'm not bragging about this by any means, but I've had cops follow me home before to make sure I got there OK.

The other thing that really bothered me was how the "blow job" story made national news. That was 100 percent a joke. People think I told the officer who pulled me over that I was in a hurry to get a blow job. I said that three hours later when I had already posted bail and was waiting on a ride. I was just joking around with the officers there who treated me great, by the way. But someone decided to put it in the report and so everyone thinks I said it seriously to get out of the arrest.

But I did learn my lesson. Even though I usually took taxis or hired drivers before, I do it all the time now.

I do find it ironic that the same people who were slamming me, crucifying me or wanting me to get fired are the same people who are fine with the selling of alcoholic beverages at sporting events. I said, wait a minute, I admit that I was wrong here. But you depend on alcohol sales at sporting events. If you let people tailgate for hours in your parking lots at NFL games and drive home drunk, so don't play God over me. I accept the fact that I screwed up. But don't make me out to be the worst person in the world unless you are willing to cut off alcohol sales at sporting events.

It was a couple of months after my DWI that I met Tim at one of my favorite places in Dallas, called Primo's. He told me that night how he had been arrested for DWI a year or so earlier and how he had kept it quiet but that he wondered if there wasn't something the two of us could do to speak to people with drinking problems.

We didn't figure it out that night. It was maybe a year later that Tim told me he had gone through a lot more than a DWI, that alcohol had nearly killed him and that he had stopped drinking. He told me a little about what he wanted to say in this book and asked if I would write the foreword since our relationship, even though it was based on sports, had been developed by meeting up in bars.

He said there is this bond between sports and drinking that's unlike anything else. People don't get hammered when they go see a movie. They might drink at home while watching their favorite TV show but, for the most part, they don't gather in one public spot to watch it and get drunk.

I've always liked what Tim has to say about sports but, after what he has been through, I admire what he has to say about drinking. It's a lot like what I think about social media.

When we got together in Atlanta in April, 2012 for the foreword of this book, Tim kidded me about still not being on twitter. I told him you just can't make mental mistakes when you're famous. You can't joke on twitter. You can't get mad at people on twitter.

I said, "Let me limit the amount of times shit can happen to me."

That's how Tim looks at drinking now. He told me, 'Drinking is something people do; it's not who you are. But when it becomes who you are, you need to think about becoming something else.'

In this book, he's as honest about his drinking as he has always been about sports and I appreciate him for that.

.266.

For most of my life, that's looked like a batting average to me. Maybe during my three-year run as a hockey beat writer, I would see that figure and think of a really, really efficient power play. But for most of my first 50 years - starting at age six while studying the backs of baseball cards — .266 looked like a batting average.

I know now it to be something else as well.

It was my blood alcohol level on Christmas night, 2008 - actually, the early hours of Dec. 26, 2008 - that would be accurate. That was the night I went to Parkland Hospital with a fractured skull, possibly spilling some of those batting averages and other sports-related numbers that have been spinning around in my brain for so many years along with, yes, an amount of blood the hospital report lists as "significant...can't stop." I

Considering that the legal limit for operating a motor vehicle in the state of Texas is .08, some people might consider .08 to be a significant amount of alcohol. Honestly, I don't think it's that much even to this day. I think you set the law at .08 to try to keep people from driving when they're at .14 or .15. But .266 - that's, shall we say, in another ballpark.

It's a figure I wasn't certain that I had reached until the summer of 2011 when I started working on this book. I remembered someone in the hospital talking to me shortly before I checked out on Dec. 29, saying that a .26 blood alcohol level was extremely dangerous and that I needed to curtail my drinking immediately.

I thought maybe it was a ploy. I don't even remember what the man looked like but he wasn't anyone who had consulted with me or spoke to me the previous three days. I'm not sure he was a doctor, seemed more like an administrative type. I thought maybe this was something that all the drunks were told as they were leaving the hospital, sort of Parkland's own "scared straight" tactic.

Not that I completely doubted its veracity. But it wasn't until a neurologist friend was able to find it in Parkland's records one summer afternoon in 2011, two years into my self-imposed sobriety, that I knew for sure that I had, in fact, been hauled out of an ambulance — just a few hours after celebrating a completely sober Christmas with my kids - with a .266.

The way I saw it: Slightly higher than Roger Maris' career average.

The way my neurologist explained it, honest to God: "That's a very respectable blood alcohol level."

Thanks, Doc. I tried.

This is not an anti-drinking book. I wouldn't care to read a book of that type and I surely wouldn't know how to write one. I was in love with alcohol for 35 years. It was a love affair that lasted longer than either of my marriages and certainly longer than any of my affairs. We had a good run, me and beer, from the early days when pounding down those cans of Budweiser made the hangover worthwhile to that last great run with Stella Artois.

Oh, Stella. I first met her in New York City at P. J. Clarke's and at the bar that took over the new Runyon's spot on 2nd after the old Runyon's had closed around the corner. It seems like I drank it on visits to Washington, D.C. for Cowboys-Redskins games as well, but the Belgium brew wasn't distributed nationally at the time. When you look forward to Stella's arrival date in Dallas (February 2005, select bars) as enthusiastically as I did, it might have been time to recognize that there was a problem.

But that would take four more years, a trip to one hospital with a fractured skull, time missed from work, a trip to another hospital following a seizure, and, oh yeah, did I mention some time

behind bars - not in that order - before I would decide that this was an affair that really needed to cross the finish line.

I can't blame that on Stella. Put that one on her more dangerous half-sister, Stoli.

If I was in love with beer for most of my adult life, I became a serial stalker of vodka in my late 40s and early 50s. It didn't have to be Stoli, that's just what I usually ordered in bars because it was a buck cheaper than Grey Goose. But it could have been the Goose. Could have been Svedka (real reasonably priced and just as good as the premium brands, I highly recommend...oh, wait, that's going to have to be a different book) or even the tasteless Skyy. Hell, at home it was frequently the plastic 1.75 ML (??) bottle of Gordon's that did the trick which, basically, consisted of putting me to sleep one night.

But like I said, it was mostly a good run because I was mostly a good drunk. Funny most of the time. Even charming to some. Dare I say sexy? Why not? It's my book.

But not violent, not in the least. Much, much more likely to simply walk out of a party or a bar than to turn angry even in the slightest sense.

That's probably why it lasted as long as it did. If I had been waking up on a regular basis in jail with cuts and bruises covering my body from a lost fight, I might have figured out that drinking - for me - was a lost cause much sooner.

This is not a self-help book. I am by no means a regular reader of self-help books, so why would I attempt to write one?

Now I don't doubt that there are people who can derive some benefit from hearing what a life fueled by alcohol, initially, did for me. In fact, I saw drinking as something that helped me in my work on many occasions. I know this to be a fact...before the bastard turned on me and sent me to jail and nearly killed me on Christmas night, 2008, and, yes, played a role in a marriage gone off the rails.

I know there are people who can benefit simply from the reaction I received from writing one column in the Dallas Morning News in the summer of 2009 after the news of the Texas Rangers' Jose Hamilton's relapse became public knowledge. It was overwhelming.

Normally, anything I write about the Cowboys is going to get 3-4 times the response of anything I write about the Rangers. But this was huge, the emails, the text messages and the personal comments dwarfing the usual reaction to anything about the Cowboys and Rangers put together. Because this was about something else.

I was not even three months into my self-imposed sobriety at the time, so I was fully aware that I was barely out of the starting blocks. I had been reluctant to mention it publicly for that reason, but in this case with Hamilton's story having taken another turn, I thought the timing was right.

The point then and the point now is that you don't have to be an All-Star center fielder with a past history of alcohol and drug abuse. You don't have to be the completely-out-of-your-mind star of "Two and a Half Men." You don't have to have a history of crime or violence, you don't have to produce a resume of life in and out of rehab facilities to recognize that what once was perhaps a reasonable level of social drinking meant to help you fit into your circle of co-workers, sorority sisters, high school buddies, etc. can reach an entirely different and more damaging level.

The fact that you can point to a friend and say, "He's way worse than me," doesn't necessarily mean you should feel good about taking yourself off the hook. The fact that you aren't the drunkest guy at the party or you aren't the girl who always seems to have the easiest access to drugs doesn't mean you don't need to pull back on the reins just a bit.

And, if my last few years have indicated anything, if you are scared of the idea of rehab clinics and don't really gravitate towards the camaraderie of AA meetings, maybe this can be for you, too. I never went to rehab and my only trip to an AA meeting in 2010 was to support a friend.

Don't get me wrong. I would be more out of my mind now than I was on Christmas night, 2008.

to say I'm against rehab clinics or Alcoholics Anonymous. Without a doubt, rehab facilities have turned around thousands of lives. I know for a fact that AA has added years - good, quality years - to my father's life.

I'm saying only that what works for one person might not necessarily benefit the next one. My decision to stop drinking didn't have anything to do with a team of medical professionals working to get me sober. It wasn't about 12 steps, a support group or a belief in God.

Before I had become a drunk commenting on sports in the Dallas Morning News and on ESPN, I had been drunk on sports at a very early age. I needed to find a path back to those days.

Back to when .266 was nothing more to ponder than the batting average on a lazy, summer day.

That's where this journey began. In Tulsa, Oklahoma. With one really bad baseball card trade.

Based on other personal decisions I would make in life, not to mention more than a few failed prediction columns over four decades, some might have called that trade a sign of things to come

Chapter 1

OKIES

"Memories can be distorted. They're just an interpretation, not a record. And they're irrelevant if you have the facts." - Leonard Shelby (Guy Pearce) in "Memento"

My memory is not as fucked up as you might think it would be after 35 years of drinking. It has its gaps to be sure. Mostly that's the hours of 1 to 3 a.m. on any given night from about 2002 to 2007. Let's say give or take a year on the front end of that, OK? For me, that's the closing time on the part of the brain that stores memories called the hippocampus, which sounds like something you might find in the Big Ten, but I didn't say that.

Anyway, in the film cited above, Shelby had anterograde amnesia. He couldn't form new memories.

That's a rare problem and it's not mine. I'm just one of the millions out there who have destroyed a number of brain cells through countless hours spent with drink in hand at pubs and lobby bars and yes, by myself on my own cushy sofa.

But, more recently, I earned extra credit on the brain damage front, and that's why I've spent some time in the last year or two gathering facts about my behavior, about acts I do not remember.

Found some. Still searching for a few of the more important ones, like:

...Where exactly did I think I was going on the night of July 20, 2007 that I wound up in Caddo Mills instead of Coppell? For those not entirely familiar with the geography of the Dallas-Fort Worth area, those two towns are separated by about 34 miles. You have to go north and west from downtown Dallas to get to Coppell. You travel south, then east and cross a long bridge over Lake Ray Hubbard to reach Caddo Mills.

Driving alone, I thought I was headed home to one city.

Instead, I wound up handcuffed on the side of the road in the other.

...After spending a great afternoon with my kids, my brother, his kids and our parents on Christmas Day, 2008 - consuming no alcohol during this time, mind you - how long could I have even been at a McKinney Ave. bar watching Blazers-Mavericks with friends before I found myself riding in an ambulance to Parkland Hospital with an open head wound?

And how did I achieve a blood alcohol level of .26 so fast?

...On May 7, 2009, during a commercial break of a local radio show with my good friends Bob Rogers and Skin Wade, how did I end up on the floor, suffering from a seizure? Was it triggered by the damage I had done in fracturing my skull the previous Christmas as predicted by my doctor?

Even now I can only provide answers to some of the above. I have obtained only a few facts that they relate to these incidents. I have some scattered memories of these moments that, better late than never, brought a conclusion to my 35-year drinking career.

As any alcoholic can tell you, it's a conclusion that could become a temporary one at any time. With one raised index finger towards a bartender, one single request for a Stoli-soda-splash cranberry, it could be put on hold.

Let's be honest about this whole "no more drinks" thing. We could be talking about nothing more than a stay of execution here.

Like most people who drink far more than they should, this is not the first time I've stopped drinking. It's merely the first time I have attempted to quit.

The only difference between those two is...well, everything.

I stopped for 100 days once in the late 1990s when I was still covering the Dallas Stars as a beat writer for the Dallas Morning News. My regular drinking partner on the road, the Stars' travel director

quit with me.

~~We tried going to movies instead of pounding pints. In LA one Saturday night, we saw "As Good As It Gets."~~

As a lifestyle, this wasn't. So when the 100 days were up, I went to Vegas.

Later, after being promoted to lead sports columnist, I quit for the entire 2000 NFL season.

(Not the pre-season, naturally. Be serious. Everybody needs a couple of stiff drinks to make the way through the pre-season).

In Tampa prior to the Baltimore Ravens-New York Giants Super Bowl that concluded the season, I wrote an advance column inspired by Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven."

I offer you the column here in its entirety. It ran in the Sunday Morning News in the days when spending money was the only way to get newspaper content (what a concept!), and yet here you have it are getting it free of charge. Or possibly free on top of what you paid for the book, I suppose. Still, it's your lucky day.

*

With all due respect to my old friend, Ed Poe, for whom the Ravens were named:

*

Once upon a Super Sunday, dreaming of an idle Monday,
Pondering many a quaint and curious quote sheet filled with future lore,
Just before I fell to napping, suddenly there came a tapping,
As of someone gently rapping, rapping at my 22nd floor door.
" 'Tis some beat writer," I muttered,
"And how'd he get on the concierge floor?"
"Housekeeping," said the voice. And nothing more.

*

This intrusion I recall now, for it forced my thoughts to halt, how
So many fine defenders would descend on offenses poor,
And the poorest was the Ravens' whose attack was all but cravin'
For the presence of a passer, a passer to become the toast of Baltimore.
"Can it be this man named Dilfer is equipped to slam the door?"
Doubt the Ravens? Nevermore.

*

For it seems this team of transplants, former Browns and one-time miscreants,
Is the team destined to win the Super Bowl after XXXIV,
Scoring points may be the rage now but Kurt Warner's left the stage now,
And the NFC's owned by Giants, far from meek at 14-4.
Run and pass they hope to balance but through the wall of Baltimore?
Bet the Giants? Whatever for?

*

There was little notice taken when this new club called the Ravens
Took to building up a defense like one never seen before,
Men like Lewis and McCrary did not falter, did not tarry
As the backs they coldly buried could not help their teams to score.
By year's end, there was one number to show what Ravens had encumbered,

How their enemies had slumbered.

~~Shutouts - four by Baltimore.~~

*

So I sense the Jints are dreaming when they say that they are scheming
Ways and means to put a beating on the heads of Baltimore.
For it's not the arm of Dilfer and the balls the Giants pilfer
Or even Sehorn's looks to kill for that will help the Giants score.
It's the ghost of John Unitas that will carry Baltimore. (In overtime once more).
Doubt the Ravens? Nevermore.

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I bring you this column (or almost half of it, actually), not simply because I correctly picked the Ravens to win. I wrote this column in the final week of a five-month period in which I consumed nothing more dangerous than a non-alcoholic beer. I wrote it when I had time to write it. It took about 20 hours total and required staying in my room a couple of nights when Super Bowl party passes were calling me.

This is not to brag about how much effort I put into writing a column. I am trying to convey the opposite here. I exhausted about 19 more hours than I normally require to write a column because suddenly, with no beers to be consumed and no vodka to chase it with, I had a lot of god damn time on my hands at a Super Bowl, of all places.

Don't get me wrong, I'm not here to tell you that this is the greatest sports column ever penned or even one of the finer efforts at sports-page poetry (although you gotta know Jay-Z wishes he had been the first to rhyme "Dilfer, Giants pilfer and Sehorn looks to kill for").

I'm just saying that it would have been nice had it occurred to me back then that with a little less drinking (or maybe a lot less), some extra time for writing would have appeared out of nowhere on a regular basis.

But, shit. That didn't happen. When I got home from the Super Bowl, I had proved to myself - and no one else was remotely interested - that I could go an entire season without a drink. That could only mean that I did not have a drinking problem.

That's the kind of accomplishment that called for a few shots, don't you think?

I did.

Long before I knew what it was to be drunk, even before my father gave his 8-year-old son a shot of Rheingold beer (pretty nasty stuff to a regular drinker, just imagine what a warm Rheingold tastes like to a second-grader on the beach at Montauk Point), I was drunk on sports.

My older brother, Pat, sparked my interest in sports. He was the better athlete, and by athlete, I'm using that word as it applies to your average suburban white kids of the 60s. Let's put it this way.

As a senior at Richardson High School just outside of Dallas, he quit the basketball team because he was too busy studying his way to becoming salutatorian in a graduating class of over 900 to put up with coming off the bench.

That same coach, Jerry Stone, who would later achieve the minor degree of fame that he deserved as Spud Webb's junior college coach, cut me as a sophomore. I remain convinced my release was more latent hostility that Stone had built up towards my brother than any misgivings he had about my total disregard for anything that resembled bending over or moving my feet to play defense.

I was momentarily devastated but angry mostly that my two best friends had not yet been cut. When they came walking into study hall a week later, sheepish grins barely hiding the pain of their basketball careers also lying in ruins, I was OK with it.

After a junior high career that produced just one point (on a technical foul), I had pretty much given up on the idea of becoming a 5-foot-11 version of John Havlicek, anyway.

But long before my basketball career and my brother's unraveled separately in the RHS Gym, we cultivated our love for the game together in the basement of our New Providence, N.J. home. We played 1-on-1 full court which, I believe, measured about 35 feet.

I was in first- and second-grade, Pat in fifth and sixth. Certain concessions were made on my behalf. He was not allowed to block my shots which seemed fair since I sure as hell wasn't about to leap up and block any of his. The baskets, attached directly to concrete basement walls with no backboards were roughly seven feet high.

When we weren't down in the basement playing sports, we were in the den watching them.

Now if you want to develop a serious interest in sports, try becoming aware of the game of baseball when the team that's on TV every day is the '61 Yankees.

But I have gotten ahead of the story here, jumping all the way to age six.

(I told you that my memory wasn't that fucked up).

Before arriving in New Jersey in March of '61, the Cowlishaws were just a bunch of happy Okies. I was the big city kid, having been born in Tulsa on March 31, 1955. My brother was born in Muskogee, my mom in Bartlesville and my dad...well, you don't even want to go there. It was called Wolco and hasn't been on a map since maybe the Eisenhower administration. If you are determined to place his roots, put him in Skiatook, where he actually drove the school bus as a high school junior before heading off to the Pacific in WW II.

(I'm thinking school districts were a little less anxious over liability in those days, my dad driving the muddy farm roads to pick up his friends en route to school each morning).

I had been only vaguely aware of sports being televised when we lived in Tulsa. I was five, giving me a break.

At that point, sports meant only two things to me - baseball cards and electric football.

I'm not sure if the one and only baseball card trade of my kindergarten year was a sign of horrible fantasy deals I would make later in life, a precursor of awful investments I would seek or a combination of both.

Somehow I traded a 1960 Mickey Mantle card for a 1960 New York Yankees team card convinced by a ruthless neighbor that we shall call Jimmy Blackburn (because we think it was him) that I was getting "all" the Yankees while he was settling for one in return.

Now none of us knew that Mantle cards would one day be worth hundreds, some of them even thousands of dollars. Otherwise, I would not have made a regular habit (brace yourself, card lovers, this is going to hurt) of thumb-tacking my favorite cards to a bulletin board or writing in ink on the backs of the cards to update statistics.

Ouch.

Whatever is the opposite of 'Mint Condition,' that's what became of most of my cards. That was the case with the great players, anyway.

Still, on the day of that fateful trade, I quickly learned both the value of superstar cards and having a big brother who could visit the neighbor's house and, um, rescind ill-conceived trades I had been suckered into. Nine-year-old Pat made a quick visit to the Blackburn house. I got my Mickey Mantle card back (one of the few I still have).

I'm sure that football cards had made their way into Tulsa five-and-dimes by 1960. But I don't recall having any in my possession until the move to New Jersey. Besides, football was about something else entirely.

Somewhere up our block there was an older boy named Wayne Lehman. When he wasn't painting model airplanes or cars, he was painting electric football players in glorious detail.

My San Francisco 49ers were gorgeous with their red jerseys and silver helmets. The silver numbers of the offensive starters were painted on front and back, so I could easily identify quarterback Y.A. Tittle.

(I'm not entirely certain what purpose it served to know which of your men was quarterback. If you think the New York Jets make the passing game appear difficult in today's world, you should have seen an electric football player attempting to launch a tiny ball of cotton with any accuracy 50 years ago).

My brother's team was the Philadelphia Eagles. I suppose that meant he got to celebrate the championship win over Green Bay that season. All I know is it meant he had Ted Dean in his backfield.

Dean's face was painted brown. The NFL was mostly a white man's game in 1960, but Good ol' Wayne was a stickler for accuracy. If there were Negroes on NFL offenses, then by God there would be Negroes in electric football in this all-white neighborhood of Tulsa, OK.

That, along with a few faces on baseball cards my brother allowed in my care after the dubious Mantle trade, was my limited introduction to race.

(This sounds crazy, I know, but I have memories of my 49ers not being able to catch Dean in the open field).

The NFL was a long way from America's game at that stage. Once we made the move to New Jersey in 1961, I can recall watching an NFL highlights show on Saturday nights featuring a announcer (identified through the magic of the Internet as Jim Leaming) who would open each show saying, "There's action a-plenty, so let's get with it."

Mind you, this action consisted of watching highlights from the previous Sunday's games several days later.

Even if Tittle, somehow seeming to move with me to the New York metropolitan area, was elevating the Giants to the top of the NFC East, their games weren't televised in New Jersey on Sunday afternoons.

While the NFL was carefully limiting its TV audience, the Yankees were not. Day or night, home or road, the Yankees dominated our living room. My brother, displaying skills he would only refine years later at Stanford Law School, claimed the Yankees as his sole property.

Whether on TV or in the backyard whiffle ball games, I settled for the Detroit Tigers. And by settling, I mean I had a team with Norm Cash hitting .361, Rocky Colavito driving in 140 runs, Yankee-killer Frank Lary collecting 23 of the Tigers' 101 wins in 1961.

And they lost to the Yankees by eight games.

Even if I was not inclined to root for the Yankees, I was lucky enough to see one of Mariri record-breaking 61 home runs in person.

OK, it was only No. 7 in an early season Sunday game against the Baltimore Orioles. And I am told I slept through the last five innings.

That's why I'm going to skip the part where, as a dutiful baseball writer, I spend three or four obligatory paragraphs telling you how I remember coming out of the subway and into this giant Stadium, its steel edifice reaching towards the sky, and then I looked down and saw the greenest grass in the world, a thing I had never imagined while watching games at home on our black-and-white Motorola.

Instead, I'll be honest. Yes, it was fun to go to Yankee Stadium that first time and the two or three other visits that we made before moving to Texas in the summer of 1963. Yes, we had only a black-and-white TV at home.

But you know what? Walking into the stadium, I was a pretty bright kid and I already knew there was going to be a shitload of green grass out there, so I wasn't entirely moved by the experience.

Although our stay in New Jersey was a mere two years-plus, it is a shame (in this one case anyway) that we were not yet part of the completely crazed picture-snapping society we inhabit today.

We went to Yankee Stadium, we visited the Polo Grounds to see the Mets in the summer of '63, we saw a Rangers-Maple Leafs game at the old Madison Square Garden on 49th street and saw the Harlem Globetrotters play there, too, as part of a doubleheader with a Knicks game.

There are no pictures, programs, ticket stubs to record these events.

It would be fun to see pictures from those formative years. It might spark something in the memory banks that are basically limited to knowledge of a Maris homer and a memory of Mantle hitting one out on a rainy day against Cleveland. Oh, and this I recall, too. The hockey game was delayed quite a while after a goalie took a puck in the face.

Seriously, why the fuck didn't that happen all the time back then? Could no one launch a puck with those weak-ass uncurved Northland sticks in 1962?

But when I think about how I got started down this sports-writing, sports-talking path, there's no question that those early trips to some of the greatest sports landmarks in our nation played a pivotal role.

It's not like I had an Al Pacino as Frank Serpico moment where I saw a gathering of cops investigating a crime and said, "I wanna know what they know." I didn't look at the press box at Yankee Stadium or Madison Square Garden and think any such thing. I doubt I knew that a press box existed.

But it was that fascination with sports that drove me to the newspapers for late scores, for the updated standings, for the TV guide that would tell me when I could watch the next week's games. My parents - God bless 'em - always subscribed to at least two newspapers both in New Jersey and then in the Dallas suburbs where we moved in the summer of '63.

I was too young to read and appreciate the great New York sportswriters of that time. By junior high in Dallas, though, I sure as hell knew the difference between Blackie Sherrod and anyone else at the Times Herald or the Morning News.

And I determined long before getting the ax from the 10th grade basketball team that my future in sports was not as a player or a coach but as a reporter, a writer, maybe if I got really, really lucky even as a columnist.

The notion of battling Woody Paige in showdowns wouldn't enter my beer-soaked brain - or anybody else's troubled mind — for some time.

THE LIQUOR CABINET

"I know, I know, many questions. But first, (drink) the tranya." — Star Trek, "The Corbomite Maneuver"

To the rest of America, 1969 was the Summer of Love or the Summer of Woodstock or the summer that the Cubs almost got the job done but ultimately failed because the Mets' pitching was crazy and the Cubs did what they always do.

It was all of those things to me, too, I guess although the Woodstock part would not register until I was sitting uncomfortably next to my parents in the gone-but-not-forgotten Preston Royal theatre north Dallas.

Uncomfortable because you just didn't see a lot of nudity in the big screen in 1970. Hell, you don't see that much of it now, either, and if you do, at least someone on the screen is likely to be marginally attractive.

But for me 1969 was something very different. It was the summer that we buried my mother Wanda. Dead of breast cancer at 42.

I'm not sure I spent enough time reflecting on her death at the time. I don't think I've ever truly reflected on what it has meant to me even four decades later.

But in 1969, I was 14. She had been quietly battling cancer for six years without complaint. We had learned to make do without her at certain times for certain things.

But your mom being unavailable for dinner or for attending the occasional Cowboys game in the Cotton Bowl is different from your mom just one day being gone. For good.

My brother, four years older, left for Stanford in the fall of '69. A house that had been a happy home for four was suddenly half full.

My father, successfully working his ranks through the Zale Corporation at the time - the founder Morris B. Zale, would refer to him as the company's "highest ranking Gentile" - was a busy, busy man. He put in long hours five days a week, almost always at least half-days of work on Saturdays and there were frequent road trips to jewelry stores across the country.

I didn't quite live by myself and almost never spent the night alone, usually staying with friends or at my cousin's house in Plano.

But when you're 14 and you feel like you've been a little screwed over in having lost your mom at a young age, you think whatever side benefits you can discover are rightfully yours.

I was a good kid. I did not go wild. But having been left to fend myself now and then, I merely got creative.

If I wanted to see one of the Mets games in the World Series - they had become my Mets since you recall my brother had the Yankees locked down — there were no DVRs to rely upon. The World Series was still two years away from its first night game.

I can't tell you why I skipped school and stayed home to watch Game 4 instead of Game 5 which proved to be the clincher. Maybe I had a test the next day. Maybe we had a basketball game the day of Game 5 (not that my skills were needed during the game — only my ability to produce a shot chart on a clipboard afterwards).

Regardless, I skipped school the day that Tom Seaver helped the Mets to a commanding 3-1 lead over the heavily favored Orioles. Maybe I skipped a couple of other days here and there, using my early writing skills to forge my father's signature on notes a day later.

If it was all in the sake of researching events for a lifetime to be spent chronicling the sports world, surely that was justified.

Leading a more solitary existence than most ninth-graders also gave me access to my father's liquor cabinet. Again, I didn't go wild with it. That would come later in life.

My father was primarily a scotch drinker and not much of one at that. The bourbon was there mostly for show, I guess, or perhaps for some potential dinner party that never quite materialized.

Thus, as long as I slowly reduced the quantity of Jim Beam available, there was minimal chance of discovery. Mix that with the long hours my father was working to go with the misery and loneliness that must have invaded his life without Wanda, his wife of 22 years, and I was home free.

But really I think tracing the roots of my love affair with alcohol to the occasional bourbon-and-coke in 9th grade is going back just a bit too far. I never got anywhere close to drunk on the stuff and frankly didn't really care for the taste. It just seemed like part of the process of growing up in addition to being something I could do that separated me from a more focused and accomplished older brother.

I tend to think a more accurate (and, by chance, sporting!) beginning to my drinking days came two years later.

In 1971, the drinking age in Texas was 21. It would soon become 18 but that was a couple of years away. I can't speak for other Dallas area high schools, but around the hallowed halls of Richardson High, it was well known that a convenience store called Pedigo's down in the Oak Lawn area was willing to provide beer to younger consumers.

No fake IDs necessary. Just bring cash.

I was 16 in the fall of '71 but I looked 14. At best. If I was shaving, it was with an electric razor and strictly for practice.

By this time, I had sipped a Budweiser or two. But never more than that. With a weekend trip to Lake Tawakoni with friends looming, it was time to grow up. Or at least this was what I thought growing up entailed.

Although "American Graffiti" would not come out for a couple more years, I must have been channeling Toad as he attempts to buy liquor without an ID ("Yeah, uhh, let me have a Three Musketeers, uhh, a ball point pen there, a comb, pint of Old Harper, couple of flashlight batteries and some of that beef jerky...") because, on a Friday night before leaving for the lake, I nervously lined up several objects for purchase along with a six-pack of...could it be?

Yes. Ballantine beer.

There were two primary beverages that served as sponsors on Yankee games in the early '60s. One was a truly awful chocolate product called Yoo-Hoo. The only thing it had going for it was the cartoon figure of Yogi Berra making a sensational catch in left field.

(Announcer: "Look at Yogi. He's running straight up the wall!")

Yogi: "Me-hee for Yoo-hoo, too-hoo.")

The other was the beer sponsor. The Mets had Rheingold. The Yankees, I figured at the time, had chosen the classier beer.

("Baseball and Ballantine, baseball and Ballantine...What a combination...All across the nation...Baseball and...Ball-an-tine!")

It would be several hours, not much food and five cans of Ballantine, the last two a bit on the too-warm side, before I was leaning out the driver's window of my '66 Cutlass convertible parked somewhere along the shores of Lake Tawakoni to puke my guts out.

While learning the next morning exactly what a hangover involves, I could have gone a few different directions. Could have vowed to never drink again (but doesn't everyone do that during their first miserable "day after"?). Could have vowed to monitor my drinking a little more closely.

Instead, I decided that Ballantine was one horseshit beer - an opinion seconded by a friend I had talked into getting his own six - and I was going back to Budweiser...if and when this monstrous headache ever went away.

Growing up, I was never as focused as my brother when it came to...well, just about everything. He graduated second in a class of more than 900 in 1969. I graduated somewhere in the 200-300 range of a slightly smaller group at Richardson High School in 1973.

In fifth grade, Pat wrote on a class paper, "I plan to grow up to be a lawyer."

By God if he didn't.

By the time I was in high school, I thought enough about being a sportswriter that I took journalism classes and wrote sports stories for the Talon, the school paper. To all the e-mailers who think I suck as a columnist today, if only you could have seen me then...

But you can't, and I'm not going to help you. If any clippings remain in an attic somewhere, I'm sure as shit not hunting for them just to prove I had a mountain of clichés to fight through just to get to mediocre.

I grew up assuming I would go to the University of Texas in Austin for two reasons. One, I was a huge fan of the football team. If you think that hype and trash-talking had not been invented in 1969, clearly you weren't a ninth-grader dealing with rabid Arkansas fans (really, what the hell were they thinking?) on a daily basis for months leading up to The Shootout. That's the game where Texas escaped Fayetteville with a 15-14 win as President Nixon congratulated Darrell Royal, who looked to be in a state of disbelief after his team's fourth quarter comeback.

By the way, even Nixon said he would have been a sportswriter if he hadn't had gone the politician route. If you think that might have made for a better country, hey, that's a different book. And it's been done.

The second reason I figured I would be a Longhorn was that it was one school I knew I could get into.

Yes. Times have changed drastically on that front.

But Sara Scott, my high school journalism teacher, had talked up Missouri and its long history of producing successful reporters. When I got the letter saying that I had been accepted, I figured I was bound for Columbia, even though I had never been there.

(Turns out I was off by 36 years as my daughter Rachel would become the first Cowlshaw to take any journalism classes there in the fall of 2009. M-I-Z...!)

But a few days later, a surprising acceptance letter arrived from the University of Colorado. I said surprising because after being rejected by North Carolina, I figured Missouri to be the only out-of-state school likely to offer its services.

Now I had what I might have called a conundrum, although guessing from my 530 Verbal SAT score, I might not have.

Missouri offered a future in journalism.

Colorado offered 3.2 beer.

That sounds like something I might fabricate, a scenario that fits a little too snugly into a book about someone whose rise in the media world would cross paths with, maybe even occasionally benefit from, his love for malt-based beverages.

It also happens to be true.

And so with "Baba O'Riley" blaring from the 8-track speakers of my '71 Montego, I set off for Boulder.

I mean, Colorado had to have a student paper, too, right?

My time as a Buff was a good time, but it lasted only a year. I drank as much 3.2 beer as the new freshman, nothing outrageous. I made friends with a number of CU's football players, many of who

lived in the dorm.

~~At the Saints-Colts Super Bowl, I reminded Colts defensive backs coach Rod Perry of a winning touchdown pass he threw me the one day in spring after we talked a number of the players into joining us for a game of two-hand touch.~~

Shockingly, that pass proved more memorable to me than it did to Perry.

The next year I like to think of as my redshirt year. I worked at a sporting goods store in Dallas, a trendy new (at the time) NorthPark mall and took nine hours of night school classes at Richland Junior College.

We liked to call it searching for ourselves back then. In the meantime - yes, this was a different era - I met two Cowboys' players who took summer jobs as salesmen at the sporting goods store.

Defensive end Harvey Martin sold shoes in the back. Other than to meet him, I did not get to know him well. But customers came in and laughed and loved it as the 6-foot-5 Martin lowered his frame to straddle the stool and sell them running shoes.

Wide receiver Drew Pearson worked in the athletics department in the center of the store with me. Mostly, he stood around and told stories. He was gracious, humble and not overly interested in selling merchandise. I even got him to help me take the trash out back to the dumpster one day.

Harvey and Drew were making \$3.20 an hour. This is the God's honest truth. I remember that because the rest of us were making \$2.25 and kind of pissed off about their starting salaries.

Over the years, Drew and I have had lots of laughs about those days. And if I have written more than once that he deserved a spot in the Cowboys' Ring of Honor - finally gaining that reward in the fall of 2011 — it's because he did, dammit, not because we used to sell jocks and socks alongside each other in the summer of '75.

* *

When I finally arrived on the UT campus in the fall of '75, it was as a Radio-TV-Film major, not a journalist.

I had taken an "Introduction to Film" class at Richland in the spring taught by the late, great Allan Calkin. Although I was certainly a movie buff at an earlier age, Big Al taught me an entirely new way to look at film. We talked for hours about movies and had many cocktails at the old Knox Street Pub, the one that was actually on Knox Street.

Al was also the first gay man I ever slept with and...

(READERS: Timeout! Whoa, Tim, hold on there. That sort of came from out of left field. We expected to read a few confessions about your drinking and maybe some really inappropriate misadventures behind the wheel of a car while drunk, but just exactly where are you going with this thing?)

...and the reason that happened is because one night while watching movies at his apartment I knew I'd had too much to drink, too much Rum-and-Gatorade if you must know, to drive back to my apartment on Park Lane, so he insisted I stay.

On his couch. I wasn't his type.

Seriously, Al was a great friend for years. He was in the closet then, but came out later and became an activist in the Democratic Party before contracting AIDS and dying of liver failure in 1988.

Al pushed me to stop selling ping pong tables and gym shorts at NorthPark and get down to UT to study film, critique film, and do something in the film industry. And that truly was my intention right up until the moment that I realized students had to spend all night in the halls of the Communication Center to sign up for a basic RTF class as an indication of their dedication and desire.

An all-nighter or two outside the Erwin Center in order to secure sixth-row tickets to Springsteen in 1979? Not a problem. I could handle that.

An all-nighter to study for a test or to simply sign up for a class?

~~Motivation wasn't one of my strengths in the '70s.~~

But in the summer of '76 as I stayed in Austin to attend summer school and begin making up a few of those hours lost during my redshirt campaign, I saw an ad in the Daily Texan seeking staff writers for the summer.

Pretty much just like that, I was back in journalism.

* *

Two moments stand out from my last two years at UT that would serve as signals for what was to come later in life.

One was that as a senior in the fall of 1977, I was allowed to write columns.

And so the opening paragraph of the first column I authored for the Daily Texan began: "On the day the game into Earl Campbell's senior season, his Heisman Trophy hopes are all but gone."

OK, let me explain something to those who would suggest I have followed this inauspicious start with 30 more years of God-awful predictions.

One is that the Longhorns had gone 5-5-1, a fifth-place team in an eight-team Southwest Conference, the previous year. The relatively unknown Fred Akers had not only replaced Darrell Royal but scrapped our hallowed Wishbone offense in the process.

Two, Campbell had averaged fewer than 1,000 yards rushing his first three seasons as a Longhorn. It was only under Akers that Campbell was forced to lose 25 pounds, to display speed to go along with all that power. And it was hardly evident in that season-opening win over Boston College as to exactly what Earl was about to become.

So there. It was a prediction with a strong foundation. It just happened to be wildly wrong.

A month later, my Yankees were in the World Series.

Yes, my Yankees. Somehow during all the lean years of Bobby Murcer, Roy White, Horacio Clarke and that still troubling family swap between Fritz Petersen and Mike Kekich, I had been allowed to adopt what was no longer a championship franchise from my brother who was otherwise occupied in Stanford Law School.

With my roommate Mike Donovan having spent formative years in Upper Montclair, N.J., we watched the Yankees win Game 1 over the Dodgers while consuming many beers. It seemed important to us to see just what sort of headline was being prepared for the Yankees' first win of a World Series game in 13 years (they had been swept by the Big Red Machine in '76), so we drove to the Daily Texan to find out.

Smoking victory cigars, our behavior was considered a bit too obnoxious by the earnest student journalists in the Texan office, so we decided to take our celebration to a bar. As I was driving down The Drag (Guadalupe St.), my roommate instructed me to stop so he could grab a newspaper and see what bands might be performing nearby.

While he stood outside the car flipping through the paper, I took off.

It might have been customary to my friends later in life to see me just wander off from a bar, a party, wherever when I determined I had had enough to drink. It was not something Mike expected since we lived about five miles away on Lamar.

I decided to drive to our favorite dive bar, the Posse, but somewhere along the way I clipped the curb. By clipped, I mean I destroyed both the right-side tires on my yellow Malibu Classic and drove the last three or four miles home on the rims.

Waking up to look for my car in the morning is something I probably did 15 or 20 times in my life. Waking up to inspect the damage is something I did three times in my life.

For some, that sort of embarrassment along with the realization of the more serious damage that

one might have inflicted can be a life-changing event.

~~For me, other than the time that I forced an angry college roommate to call another friend to get a ride home, it was something I became pretty damn good at hiding from the world.~~

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