

Swing Low

The next week is an off week for us. It's the vagaries of the amateur game that in the heat of the season, coming down the final stretch, we are off two weeks in a row. We still have training and try to keep the intensity up. That is hard to do. Many of the Caballero family, seeing the gap in the schedule, have made other plans and are unavailable.

The week slogs on. We go to practice but it seems almost pointless. Those that are there get some fitness work in. There aren't enough numbers, though, for any meaningful unit drills. Just basic skills and fitness are the order of the day. Lug's gone, with Nancy, for the whole week back to Tennessee to visit family. Derrick's out letting an injury heal. Michael, dedicated leader that he is, stays for the week to manage the Tuesday/Thursday practices. Then, he and Ana are gone to Padre for a spring break weekend.

I'm left feeling more or less on my own, contemplating the final run up to the Texas championships. We've got to win out to control our own destiny. That's something that we can do. It just requires focus. It's a wonder to me, that everyone is taking a break. It seems time to ratchet it up, not ease off. Maybe everyone works, and thinks, a little differently. I can't worry about it. I take Sam's Saturday night shift at O'Malley's. A little extra cash in the pocket won't hurt.

Come Sunday, I head round to Geoff's. The usual derelicts are there, at least the ones that don't have the ways and means to be somewhere else. Cy's there with Sharon. Looks like they might be in for an extended hook-up. Dopey and big Darryl show up. We lull away the afternoon, watching a basketball game on television. The NBA is winding down its season. This is very low-key, especially with the main instigators away. A respite. Maybe it's what we need before the coming inundation.

Mid-afternoon, Jason comes in. Jason is our flanker, number seven. He had stepped up to the role after Denny was knifed in New Orleans. New to the club, this was his first year with the Gents, he was really fitting in, doing yeoman's work filling the gap. While Lug and Nancy were away for the week, he has been staying in their house, watching the dogs.

He's got the look of death on his face – long, drawn and wide eyed. He

immediately gets our attention.

“Nancy called,” he starts. “They’ve been in an accident.”

“Oh, Jesus, no,” is the collective response. “Are they okay?”

“Nancy’s okay, just some bumps and bruises,” and a pause, “Lug’s in the hospital.”

That took the air out of the room. We all knew it was going to be bad. At least no one was dead, yet.

“Is he going to be okay?”

What else could we say? We’re at a loss, stunned into silence. Only for a moment, though.

“They don’t know. He’s in the ICU. They’re doing what they can.”

Cy starts off, “When?”

“Last night,” Jason answers, “They were driving back through Arkansas.”

“Do they know what happened?” I ask.

“Someone crossed the road into their lane. It was a head on collision. Really bad. Nancy was driving. They took Lug to a hospital in Little Rock.”

“It can’t be that bad. You can’t hurt that big oaf,” Dopey says. “He’ll be all right.”

Denial. We were all feeling it. At the same time we knew it was true, and bad. Your gut tells you it’s real. Your head fights it, doesn’t believe the gut, or the senses, and tries to work out a way around it. What else can you do? It’s how we cope.

Jason goes on, “Nancy says he’s in really serious condition. He’s got head trauma and back injuries. He was thrown through the windshield. She was driving. She’s feeling guilty. Thinks she should have avoided it. She’s barely holding together.”

“She can’t beat herself up about it,” Sharon says. “It was an accident, right? I’m sure it was unavoidable.”

“Yeah, somebody coming across the median.... How are you going to avoid that?” Cy adds.

“I’m sure she couldn’t do anything,” Carrie says.

After we’d talked through, around and over it for a while, we’d gone through our own mini-process and started to come to terms with it. We knew that we couldn’t change it. We had to deal with the reality of it.

Geoff started calling people to spread the word.

It wasn't long before they started showing up at Hawkins'. The clan was gathering to share their concern. We would handle it together and get through it. It's how we did everything.

Derrick arrives. And then Jerry. Soon we are all together. And we cope through action, or at least the talk of action.

"Maybe we should drive up there," Carrie suggests. "Nancy probably needs some support."

"Sure," I say. "We can get up there in five or six hours. She's probably alone right now."

"She is," Jason says. "Lug's parents are coming over from Nashville, but right now she's on her own."

Geoff volunteers, "I'll have Hal take charge of the Robinson job tomorrow. He can run it for a couple of days. They won't miss me. We can leave now and be up there by dinner time."

"Count me in," adds Dopey.

So we had come up with a plan to go visit Lug, not that it would help him much, but it would help Nancy, and us. Some action to distract us from the shock we were feeling.

Then we had thoughts of a fund raiser. There will be medical costs and we can help, anything to raise a few bucks. We'll set up a fund and ask for donations. We can help.

"I don't think Lug has insurance right now, does he?" I offer. "Maybe we can organize a fund raiser? They're going to need help with the medical costs."

"I've got some sites that need clean-up," Geoff says. "If the club wants to do it, I can just pay the club instead of the contractor."

"How about mowing yards?" Dopey offers. "I know a bunch of people that need some yard work done."

"We can do a car wash," adds Sharon. "We always used to do car washes in school when we needed to raise money."

No, we didn't have any grand ideas or big plans. We couldn't, and wouldn't, come up with anything to raise big money. We never did. We immediately went to the things we knew. Small things that would add up. It wasn't much, but it was what we could do.

A lot was just talk. Some would pan out and some wouldn't. Right now it was about dealing with the news. Talk was action, of a sort, and a distraction

from the reality. We had mostly just gathered for the support of the clan. Being together and feeling together makes it easier to accept. Talking it through let the feelings out, released the pressure and made the news bearable.

We had always thought Lug would go early. The way he lived, out over the edge all the time, made it obvious he couldn't go on long. He was taking too many chances. The drinking and aggression, there were too many opportunities for things to go wrong.

He'd led a charmed life, though. In spite of his disappointment regarding a football career, things otherwise seemed to go well for him. Look at his marriage to Nancy. It seemed to be settling him down. Now, this accident was a major set back. Just when he was getting it together, coming to some acceptance. It was a comeuppance that came, not from being way out over the edge testing fate, but simply being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Yes, it was fate, but fate coming out of left field, coming down with the hammer blow, pounding everything back into a place of its choosing. We can only hope that Lug will survive it.

Swing low, sweet chariot,
Coming for to carry me home.
Swing low, sweet chariot,
Coming for to carry me home...¹

¹ [Sweet Chariot](#), op. cit.