

NFL EXTRA

Week 20

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01:57:00 - LIKE A ROSE, PART 1

FOOTBALL IS THE ODDEST, MEANEST, SWEETEST GAME. IT PULLS THE SAME PERSON IN 2 DIRECTIONS: ANGER AND JOY. MY NAME IS RICK TELANDER. MY LIFE HAS BEEN FULL OF FOOTBALL. I'M OLDER NOW BUT THOUGHTS OF THE GAME ARE NEVER MORE THAN AN EYE-BLINK AWAY. I'VE BEEN A SPORTSWRITER FOR 40 YRS., AND WHAT I'VE SEEN IS THAT AMERICA IS FASCINATED BY FOOTBALL. CONSUMED BY FOOTBALL. AMERICA WORSHIPS FOOTBALL. BUT IT DOESN'T PRAISE FOOTBALL. IT'S AS THOUGH WE ARE EMBARRASSED BY OUR PASSION.

HI ..., HOW YOU DOING? DOING GOOD, RICK. HOW ARE YOU? NOT BAD AT ALL. MAN, GOOD TO SEE YOU. GOOD TO SEE YOU. YOU KNOW THE DRILL HERE, RIGHT? OF COURSE I DO.

YOU READ ABOUT FOOTBALL IN 2 WAYS. FOOTBALL IS ABOUT HEROES AND CHAMPIONS. FOOTBALL IS ABOUT NASTINESS AND PAIN. BOTH ARE HALF-WRONG. FOOTBALL IS A PARADOX. IT IS THIS AND THAT. ONE THING AND THE OTHER. MANY THINGS AT THE SAME TIME.

RADIO – CUTLER ON 1ST DOWN BEING CHASED BY SUH. SUH'S GOT HIM AND HE'S GONNA GO DOWN. THAT'S A CLEAN SACK. IT'S JUST A BIG MAN COMING DOWN ON TOP OF YOU.

JAY HAS BRUISED RIBS. THAT WAS A GUTSY EFFORT BY HIM. HE WAS IN SOME PAIN BUT HE FOLLOWED THROUGH IT.

LOVIE, WAS THERE ANY DANGER WHEN HE CAME BACK IN OF DOING MORE DAMAGE?

NO. WE WOULDN'T PUT A PLAYER OUT THERE IF THERE WAS ANY DANGER INVOLVED OT IT. NO MORE THAN JUST FOOTBALL IN GENERAL. COME ON, RICK. YOU'VE PLAYED BALL. YOU KNOW ABOUT THAT.

WHAT I WANT TO SAY NOW IS WHAT I THINK THE TRUTH ABOUT FOOTBALL IS. WHAT I WANT TO SAY IS THAT FOOTBALL IS LIKE A ROSE. I WANT TO SAY THAT FOOTBALL HAS CUT ME AND HURT ME AND CONFUSED ME AND ADORNED ME, AND SWEETENED THE AIR I BREATHE. I WANT TO SAY THAT I KNOW NOW IT IS SOMETHING SPECIAL AND THAT I LOVE IT.

JUNE 24TH, 1971. DEAR RICK, THIS LETTER WILL SERVE AS YOUR OFFICIAL NOTIFICATION TO REPORT TO OUR TRAINING CAMP SITE BY NOON, JULY 20TH AT WILLIAM JEWEL COLLEGE, LIBERTY MISSOURI. A FINE OF \$500 WILL BE IMPOSED ON ANYBODY ARRIVING LATE. ALL PLAYERS MUST REPORT CLEANLY SHAVEN. NO MUSTACHES, GOATEES OR EXAGGERATED SIDEBURNS WILL BE PERMISSIBLE. PETS AND FIREARMS ARE ALSO NOT PERMISSIBLE.

YOU'VE SEEN MY BASEMENT IN HORROR MOVIES. I TRY TO AVOID GOING DOWN THERE AT NIGHT. A FEW YEARS AGO I WENT DOWN IN BROAD DAYLIGHT AND ATTEMPTED TO FIND SOMETHING IN THE OLD TRUNKS THAT LINED THE SHELVES. I WIPED WAY THE DUST AND RUMMAGED THROUGH SEVERAL BOXES. AND THEN A TINY NOTEBOOK. "K.C. CHIEFS DIARY" IT SAID. MY GOD, I WROTE THIS. EVERYBODY'S HERE. AT THE MEETING WE INTRODUCED OURSELVES AND SAID OUR COLLEGE NAME.

IT MADE SENSE FOR THE ROOKIES BUT TO HEAR LEN DAWSON SAY, "PURDUE UNIVERSITY IS TOO MUCH.

I HAD NEVER PLAYED QB IN TACKLE FOOTBALL. IN HIGH SCHOOL I PLAYED WIDE RECEIVER, SAFETY, AND FOR A BRIEF TIME, DEFENSIVE END. AND THEN, IN A TWIST THAT STILL AMAZES ME, I WAS ABRUPTLY THE STARTING QB FOR RICHMOND'S HIGH SCHOOL. IT CHANGED MY LIFE.

MY COACH, TOM PEELER TAPPED ME, PERSONALLY, HANDS ON, TEACHING ME EVERYTHING I DIDN'T KNOW. PEELER'S 81 YRS. OLD NOW AND HE LOOKS THE SAME AGE HERE AND HE'S 35. I BECAME THE QB. I LED OUR TEAM TO A HOMECOMING WIN. TOOK 5 STITCHES IN MY CHIN AND SQUIRE TO THE HOMECOMING DANCE THE PRETTIEST GIRL IN OUR CLASS. WOW, WHY WAS I MADE INTO THE QB? I NEVER THOUGHT TO ASK.

THE CHICAGO SUN TIMES: "N.U.'S TELANDER HAS HIS OWN VIEW OF FOOTBALL" BY BILL GLEASON. SO LONG AGO. BUT I REMEMBER COLUMNS GLEASON WELL. IN 15 YRS. OUR PATHS WOULD CROSS AGAIN WHEN GLEASON WOULD ASK ME TO BE ONE OF THE ORIGINAL MEMBERS OF THE SPORTSWRITERS ON TV SHOW. WHAT HE DIDN'T REALIZE AT THE TIME OF OUR EARLIER MEETING, WAS THAT HE SAID SOMETHING INCREDIBLY MEANINGFUL TO ME. "YOU SHOULD BE A WRITER."

02:02:40 - LIKE A ROSE, PART 2

OUR DECISION IN KEEPING MEN WILL BE MADE STRICTLY IN THE ACCORDANCE WITH WHAT WE FEEL WILL BEST HELP THE K.C. CHIEFS. REPUTATION MEANS NOTHING WHEN IT COMES TO MAKING THIS FOOTBALL TEAM.

YOU'LL BE A TOUGH COMPETITIVE FIGHT, AND ONLY THOSE WHO ARE WILLING TO SACRIFICE THEMSELVES, BOTH MENTALLY AND PHYSICALLY, WILL SURVIVE. THESE ARE THE PRINCIPLES THAT WE VALUE IN FOOTBALL. KINDEST REGARDS, HANK.

TODAY WAS THE FIRST REAL DAY OF DOUBLE PRACTICE SESSIONS. WE WERE TIMED IN THE 40 YD. DASH AND I HAD A DISGUSTING 4.7. IF I WANT TO MAKE THIS TEAM I CAN'T AFFORD SUCH THINGS AS 4.7 40'S. THE SPIRAL NOTEBOOK, 15 CENTS. 32 PAGES, 6 INCHES X 4 INCHES EACH. WHY DIDN'T I BUY A BIGGER NOTEBOOK FOR SUCH A MAJOR EVENT IN MY LIFE? I KNOW WHY. IT WAS AUDACIOUS TO THINK I COULD BE AN NFL PLAYER BUT IT WAS PREPOSTEROUS TO THINK I COULD BE A WRITER.

IN SPRING PRACTICE OF MY FRESHMAN YEAR I WAS STRUGGLING AS A WIDE RECEIVER. BALLS SAILED THROUGH MY HANDS. MY MIND DRIFTED. I WORRIED ABOUT THE WAR. IT SEEMED TO ME THAT A WAR SHOULD BE FAR CLEARER THAN A GAME, AND VIETNAM WAS MERCK. A NIGHTMARE OF UNCERTAINTY. BUT I COULD MAKE THIS GAME CLEAR AS GLASS. IT COULD BE MY ANTI-VIETNAM. IN FOOTBALL YOU COULD BE THE AGGRESSOR. RUN THE PATTERNS, CATCH THE BALL; OR YOU COULD PLAY DEFENSE AND REACT. I WANTED TO REACT. THERE'D BE NO DOUBT FOR ME.

IN MY VERY FIRST GAME AS A CORNERBACK, I STEPPED IN FRONT OF THE WIDE RECEIVER ...

RADIO – TELANDER STOPPED ANOTHER BUCKEYE DRIVE WITH AN INTERCEPTION.

IT FELT LIKE A DREAM. 1 PASS, 1 INTERCEPTION. IT COULDN'T BE THIS SIMPLE, COULD IT?

MY FIRST PIECE IN ANY PUBLICATION ANYWHERE CAME IN THE DAILY NORTHWESTERN APRIL 20TH, 1971. I WAS DONE WITH COLLEGE PRACTICE. I WAS REFLECTING. YOU MAY BE AGAINST THE WAR IN VIETNAM. YOU MAY DISLIKE RICHARD NIXON. YOU MAY HATE FASCISM, RACISM AND MALE CHAUVINISM. YOU MAY POSSIBLY NOT EVEN LIKE YOUR MOTHER. BUT YOU

DO, SOMEWHERE DEEP INSIDE, WANT TO EXCEL AT ONE THING IN LIFE – FOOTBALL.

I WAS JUST 22 THAT SPRING. I WAS REMINDING MYSELF OF CERTAIN THINGS. TRYING TO STAMP OUT MY OWN DOUBTS. I FELT GREAT.

YOU GOT CLEATS ON YOUR SHOES? (NO.) WHAT? GEEZ, YOU LOOK LIKE YOU GOT BEDROOM SLIPPERS ON.

OLD HANK MUST'VE CALLED THE SUN IN FOR THIS AFTERNOON'S PRACTICE. IT WAS LIKE A STEAM BATH ON THE FIELD. WE'D BE MUCH COOLER IF WE COULD PRACTICE WHEN THE SUN ISN'T RIGHT OVERHEAD. DISCIPLINE IS THE EXCUSE FOR THIS MADNESS.

OLD HENRY'S PLAYING WITH OUR MINDS, USING THE STRATEGY OF BRAINWASHING. HE HAS TAKEN AWAY ALL OF OUR NORMAL PRIVILEGES AND THEN GIVES A FEW BACK. IS IT FROM KINDNESS AND UNDERSTANDING? SLY BASTARD. AND I KNOW, YES INDEED, I AM POSITIVE THAT MR. STRAM, OUR HEAD COACH AND BRAINWASHER, WEARS A TOUPEE.

I DRIVE SLOWLY PAST MY OLD HIGH SCHOOL. NOT FAR AWAY IS MY OLD COACH'S HOUSE. I HAVEN'T SEEN TOM PEELER IN 36 YRS. I FEEL NERVOUS. I'M THE HIGH SCHOOL QB AGAIN. THE ONE HE MADE.

I'VE COME BACK TO HIM, I REALIZE BECAUSE, TO ME, HE IS GANDALF, MERLIN, THE ___ONE KENOBI WHO GAVE ME SKILL AND CONFIDENCE AND POWER.

I'VE TOLD MY COACH ALL ABOUT MY WORK AND FAMILY, AND THIS OLD KANSAS CITY DIARY I FOUND. BUT NOW I ASK, "WHY DID YOU MAKE ME THE QB?" I GUESS I SAID YEA BUT, I MEAN I WAS THRILLED BUT WHY?

WELL, THERE'S SEVERAL REASONS. YOU WERE A GOOD ATHLETE. YOU'RE SMART, AND YOU HAD SOME PIZZAZZ.

YOU HAD TO TEACH ME HOW TO BE A QB. I DIDN'T EVEN KNOW HOW TO TAKE THE SNAP.

YEA, YEA. I DON'T KNOW. THERE'S JUST SOMETHING, YOU HAD AN AURA OF COMPETITIVENESS.

I TELL COACH HOW MUCH THE QB EXPERIENCE MEANT TO ME. THE INSURANCE HE GAVE ME WITH A SIMPLE NOD OF THE HEAD AND THEN THE QUIET, PLAIN AS PRAIRIE GRASS, GO GET 'EM RICK.

FOOTBALL HAS DEFINITELY BROUGHT A NEW DIMENSION TO MY LIFE. COMPETITION WITH ALL THINGS IN A SORT OF MANIACAL RACE TO BE THE

BEST. I FIND IT HARD TO LIVE IN HARMONY WITH MY SURROUNDINGS SOMETIMES SIMPLY BECAUSE I FEEL EITHER DOMINATE OR BE BEATEN. WINNER OR LOSER, THAT'S ALL THERE IS.

THIS PHOTO'S THE WORST. I'VE STUDIED THE SHOTS THAT CAME MOMENTS BEFORE. ME IN THE EAST/WEST SHRINE GAME TUMBLING TO THE TURF AT OAKLAND COLISEUM WAVING AT THE PASS FROM DAN PASTORINI THAT WILL SOON NESTLE IN MEL GRAY'S OUTSTRETCHED HANDS FOR THE WINNING TOUCHDOWN. THIS IS THE 100 YARD STARE. I LOOK LIKE A GUY WHO'S FOCUSED ON SOMETHING OUTSIDE THE STADIUM.

MY ROOMMATE LOOKED AT ME THE OTHER DAY. SAID, "RICK, WHAT IN THE WORLD AM I DOING HERE?" HIS MEANING WAS MUCH THE SAME AS EVERYONE ELSE'S WHEN THEY QUESTION THE REASONS FOR PLAYING IN THE VIOLENT, INSECURE, NERVE-RACKING WORLD OF PRO FOOTBALL. I CAN'T ANSWER THEM BECAUSE I OFTEN ASK MYSELF THE SAME QUESTION.

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 4TH. AT BREAKFAST TOM PETTIS, THE D.B. COACH, CALLED ME ASIDE. OH CHRIST. A HOT FLASH WENT THROUGH ME LIKE AN EARLY MORNING KNIFE. "RICK, COACH STRAM WANTS TO SEE YOU AFTER BREAKFAST. OH, AND RICK, TAKE YOUR PLAYBOOK WITH YOU." IT WAS OVER FOR ME, AND THAT WAS THE SAD UNFORTUNATE TRUTH.

EMILY DICKENSON IS A POET I ADMIRE. SHE WROTE ABOUT BEES AND CLOUDS AND DAISY'S; AND WITHIN HER QUIET REALM SHE UNLOCKED THE UNIVERSE. FOR EACH ECSTATIC INSTANT WE MUST IN ANGUISH PAY, IN KEEN AND QUIVERING RATIO TO THE ECSTASY.

I THINK OF ALL THE THINGS FOOTBALL HAS TAUGHT ME. THE OBVIOUS THINGS. DISCIPLINE, THE IMPORTANCE OF LISTENING TO INSTRUCTIONS.

YEA, I LIMP BECAUSE OF FOOTBALL. BUT IF IT WEREN'T FROM FOOTBALL, I WOULD LIMP BECAUSE LIFE MAKES EVERYBODY LIMP. THERE WERE OTHER LESSONS TOO. COLLIDING WITH THINGS IS JUST A WHOLE DAMN LOT OF FUN. TESTING YOURSELF IS NECESSARY. PAIN DOES NOT HAVE TO BE EVIL. FOOTBALL ENDS LIKE EVERYTHING YOU CARE ABOUT. THE CLOCK RUNS OUT AND YOU WILL LOSE.

IMAGINE DICK BUTKUS AND GALE SAYERS, 2 OF THE GREATEST FOOTBALL PLAYERS IN HISTORY NEVER PLAYED IN A POSTSEASON GAME. AND SO YOU HAVE TO ACCEPT LOSING. OR RATHER YOU DON'T. YOU PROCESS AND STORE AND SIFT IT. YOU TURN IT IN YOUR HANDS AND LOOK AT IT FROM ALL ANGLES. YOU SEE THAT LOSS IS INEVITABLE AND THAT YOUR THIRST CAN NEVER BE QUENCHED; AND THAT EVERYTHING WILL SOMEDAY WITHER AWAY. AND YOU DECIDE WHAT THAT MEANS TO YOU.

YOU CAN THINK ABOUT HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL THE REST OF YOUR LIFE. I KNOW THIS. IT'S 40 SOME-ODD YEARS AFTER I PLAYED HERE. IT'S LIKE IT WAS YESTERDAY. ENJOY THIS GAME. ENJOY EVERYTHING. AND JUST REMEMBER, MAN, THIS STUFF IS, IT'S AWESOME. IT'S GREAT YOU GOT IT IN YOUR SCRAPBOOK FOR ALL TIMES.

JOSEPH CONRAD SAID, "WE LIVE AS WE DREAM, ALONE." AND THAT IS TRUE. BUT SOMETIMES WE COME TOGETHER IN TEAMS WHICH IS A FOOTBALL GIFT FOREVER.

(END)