

Great Sporting Events

by Steve Morrison

Sports have always seemed to be a large part of my life either as an athlete participating or as a fan. I was raised in a very sports- oriented environment. My father was still a young man when I was born. He was very athletic and as a child, I went with him as he played fast-pitch softball, softball, basketball and sometimes was allowed to go to the golf course with him. As I recall, all of these activities were held at public parks and recreation centers. I think my brother and I got our competitiveness directly from our dad. None of us are sore losers, but we love to win and hate to lose.

Missing Gym Rat

I remember one occasion at the local recreation center where my dad and his buddies played softball and basketball regularly. On this particular night, they were playing some hotly contested pick-up basketball games and I ran all over the rec. center as the night wore on. I was probably 5 years old and my mom had stayed home that night. This obviously allowed me quite a bit of freedom as my dad played ball. Near the end of the night, my dad and another player got into a little scrap. A little fighting was not all that dangerous back in 1970. This was not uncommon and would usually end up with the two combatants shaking hands and later having a beer together. I remember being worried as I watched the scuffle. Afterwards, everyone started playing again so I wandered on off to play in the center. After what seemed like a long time, I entered the gym and to my amazement, it was completely empty. I ran to the lobby of the center and the doors were locked and I saw no cars in the parking lot. It wasn't very long before the man that worked at the center unlocked the front doors and my dad was with him.

It seems when all the games ended, I was in the locker room playing. My dad, preoccupied with the scuffle and winning or losing the ball game, went to his car and headed home. We lived only a couple of miles away. As my dad entered the house to relax for the evening, my mother asked him where I was at and I can only imagine "the Dung hit the fan". He raced back to the rec. center after calling someone to meet him to unlock the building. I was safe and it didn't seem like a big deal to me but I'm pretty sure my mother saw things in a different light.

The Coca-Cola Football Caper

My dad has always been a man of honesty and integrity. Sometimes though, his love of the game can slightly skew his take on these things, as you just read. He has also at times aided in one of my misadventures. The following story also shows yet another example of how far I would go to get what I wanted and still fail.

The University of Tennessee versus Vanderbilt football game every year was a huge rivalry. A fan of either of these teams always wanted tickets to these games. If the game was played at Vanderbilt here in Nashville, tickets were very scarce. Vanderbilt's stadium only seated about 48,000 fans. Tickets were always scarce for the game at Vandy. I was raised a Vandy fan and my friend Glynn was a die hard U.T. fan. By high

school, Glynn and I were both sports fanatics. We even booked bets and ran a football parlay card for other students.

We could usually round up some tickets for just about anything through my dad or one of our many golfing contacts. But one particular year, we had no luck getting tickets to this huge rivalry. A person can always buy tickets off the street at an outrageously inflated price. We didn't have that kind of money, so I devised a plan! I must admit, this was one of my better schemes that I have actually attempted.

I worked at a local grocery store and we had a good friend who worked at a golf course near the football stadium. I knew which night the Coca-Cola deliveries were made to my grocery store. They usually arrived in a large Coke truck and would be in the store for an hour or so. The night before the big game was a scheduled delivery night.

Fortunately, I was working. I made a point to stay in the drink aisle and look busy. Sure enough, my Coca-Cola guys were right on time. We chatted and I slowly drifted out of sight. I quickly made my way to their big truck. It was unlocked and I jumped in. Bingo! Laying right on the front seat was what I was looking for. Two big Coca-Cola winter work coats! I took them and made a bee-line for my car. After stashing them in the trunk I went back in the store, talked to the coke guys and finished my shift. Glynn met me at my parent's house and the plan started to take shape. We would walk right through the main gate of that stadium without a ticket! I explained the plan to Glynn and my dad. I assured my dad the coats would be returned the same way they were taken. He agreed to help. We took the label off a big Dr. Pepper bottle, cut and glued it to the back of a big clipboard. We added some official looking papers and we were almost done. Glynn phoned our golf course friend, told him our plan and he agreed to help.

Early the next morning I picked Glynn up with our Coke coats and my clipboard. We went straight to the golf course and Glynn went inside. I popped the trunk and he returned with three empty Coke canisters. They were light as a feather. This plan just kept getting better! We drove to the stadium full of excitement. By now, the game was secondary, THE PLAN was keeping us going. We arrived and parked about a mile away from the stadium. We put on our nice Coke coats and topped them off with a pair of red stocking caps. We then took the canisters from the trunk. I grabbed one canister and the "official" clipboard. Glynn carried the other canisters.

We walked right up to that main gate. We never broke stride as we walked through those gates and entered the stadium concourse. Two stadium security guards approached us almost immediately. The plan allowed for this development. As they neared us, we stopped in our tracks and I started to really study my clipboard with Glynn looking over my shoulder. Before they had a chance to speak or ask any dumb questions, I had one of my own for them. I studied my clipboard for another second and then asked them if they could point us to the "main" concession stand. Another piece falls perfectly into place! The gentlemen give us directions and tell us to enjoy the game when we are through working. What a rush! We pulled it off! We were trying very hard to keep a straight face as we left those two idiots and headed to the restrooms to stash our props and get ready for a great game.

As luck would have it, those two idiots foiled my great plan! After walking about 25 yards, one of those guys yelled, "hold up boys". That was not part of the plan. We turned around and saw him and his buddy coming towards us. He had yelled just loud enough to gain the attention of other people in the area. We now started to worry, but I was determined to pull this off. Until the next words from this man's mouth brought my

plan to an embarrassing end. He said, not quietly, "we only use Pepsi products at this stadium". My mind went completely blank. As hard as I tried, there was no way to recover from that statement with all this Coca-Cola garb all over us. I simply said, "I'm sorry", and we walked right out that main gate just as easy as we had walked in. We did hear some laughter. To this day, I believe that guy admired our determination and heart. You win some, you lose some. If you don't play, you never will know the result.

We returned to the golf course in time to watch the opening kick-off on T.V. and soon returned all of our "borrowed" items. The failure of that plan still pains me today.