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First-Year Seminar

4 October 2023

Dirty Socks and 9 Additional Reasons Why Football Rocks

My high school football team—after years of embarrassingly terrible losing seasons—finally stopped playing like a pee-wee team during my senior year. We had a D1-bound quarterback (we'll ignore the fact he was an utter asshole), and a loaded defensive line, so, naturally, we were winners. Well... we thought we were.

Before I explain what, exactly, ended the team's newfound glory, I'll elaborate on the concept of "boys." Boys maintain the humor and rationality equivalent of grade-schoolers; they pull stupid, premature stunts (such as stuffing the school water fountain with gummy worms, because it's... funny?). I'm not a psychological expert, or male, therefore I can only offer an outside opinion. Just a preface: it's important to note that mature teenage and adult guys exist, and I have several of them in my life. Mistakes are human—regardless of how easy it is to assume all mistakes are at the hands of boys. My football team just happened to make... a big, big, big ol' little boy mistake.

The up-state team my school played for state championship qualifiers was none other than George Washington High School, commonly referred to as "G-Dub." The students that called GW their home turf came from the wealthiest families in the capitol, earning them a few other super sweet aliases including "rich pricks" and "classless stacks." Did money allow them more

opportunities and academic advantages? Yes. But barely any of the school actually fit into the snobbish stereotype; I had made a few amazing friends from G-Dub at state events that seriously changed my view of their school. In fact, we laughed together over the ridiculous names outsiders called their school.

My school friends, family, and I traveled to George Washington for the big game. I was really excited to see my GW friends, and this was the first time any of us had hope the team would actually do something good. Well, (plot twist) they did the opposite. My school's team was all too familiar with being sore losers, and when G-Dub started crushing them, the trashy behavior came naturally. George Washington had stored several boxes full of brand-spanking-new Nike basketball gear in the visiting locker room. In the minds of sore-losing football boys: what better way to lift some spirits at halftime than to joke around? They laughed, they whooped and hollered, and recorded thousands of dollars of GW gear being shoved into the bags of nearly every player on the team. Here I was, happily cheering for our team despite the inevitable loss, completely oblivious to the fact they'd just carried out the most embarrassing thing in school history. In the days following the game, they had the audacity to soak several white jerseys in pink dye, throw a few items into a fire to watch them burn, and finally, don the socks and run through the mud until they were filthy and ruined. A few players took those same socks and wore them. . . to *school*. Like, seriously?

Not every player participated in the stunt. Some only stole the gear and uninvolved themselves from there, and then there were others who unashamedly vandalized G-Dub's new things as if there was nothing funnier. Here's where I came into the picture: I saw a video posted on social

media of one of our players wearing a GW basketball shirt on the bus back from the game. I'll admit, I was laughing about it. But as I sat in my mom's car, on the way back from the game myself, I decided to ask around to figure out why the hell he was wearing that. After messaging countless people, no one came clean. I eventually received a confession a few days later from a player in my calculus class, and to his credit, he was one of the few that had nothing to do with the joke. I felt bad for the guy, because he was terrified of unfairly suffering the consequences. At a low whisper, he rattled off everything they had done, and to say my mouth dropped is an understatement. I felt disgusted and ashamed. I immediately texted my George Washington friends to apologize on my school's behalf. I didn't even consider that they might not know about the stolen gear. Unfortunately, I was the bearer of the bad news, and after I relayed the details they couldn't believe it either. In fact, no one at GW had even noticed yet; basketball didn't start for several weeks and the gear had been in storage.

This was my "damn it" moment. It became evident that it was now my job to inform my principal before our school got sued or something crazy, and my GW friends... they had to notify their own administration. And oh my gosh, they were more than pissed. What's worse? Our football coach knew about the stolen items and was trying to quietly return what was left and withhold the knowledge from administration. Sorry coach, unfortunately your star players can't be criminals under the radar. *They posted everything on social media, for crying out loud.* I'd be lying if I said I didn't roll on the floor laughing when coach resigned a few weeks post-season. He claimed he needed "more time to spend with family," but everyone saw right through his bullshit excuse.

When I entered the principal's office, Ms. Z had a wide smile on her face, especially since the times I frequented her office were hardly ever negative. But I sat down in front of her desk, pursed my lips into a thin line, and we stared into each other's souls until Z had a similar "damn it" epiphany. At this moment, she knew something was terribly wrong. It didn't matter that she was still in the dark concerning the details—the look on my face told her enough to know she should be concerned. I commenced to show her several videos in which the football boys blindly and stupidly broadcasted their offenses to the public, and she was devastatingly disappointed. We both shook our heads in disbelief as we parted ways.

G-Dub (graciously) didn't press legal charges, and I don't know the details outside of rumors, but I know the police were involved, everyone was angry, and over a thousand dollars worth of the gear was unsalvageable or had failed to be returned. Each involved member of our team had to write their own version of a half-assed apology letter, wash the stolen gear, and hand it back to G-Dub in person. You'd think there would be more consequences, but, alas, they were off the hook. QB jerk-face still went D1 without a blemish on his record.

Considering this epic fail, here's my list of reasons why football really freaking rocks:

1. Dirty socks: nothing brings people together like wearing matching, stolen, muddy socks to school to commemorate game day.
2. Sweaty-ass boys ramming into more sweaty-ass boys... for fun?
3. Wonderful encouragement from coaches to motivate players to be the best version of themselves: convicted felons.

4. Respect for every player, no matter the color of their jersey or the logo on their helmet (except for when it's not their own color and logo, of course).
5. Awesome souvenirs, straight outta the locker room.
6. Washing the opposing team's gear as a kind gesture—the thoughtful stains make them way more trendy.
7. Social media hype videos (bonus points for wearing the other school's merch).
8. Bonfires fueled by expensive fabric!! Only the best, for the best.
9. Representing the character and passion of your hometown, on and off the field.
10. Football careers are the best reason to excuse consequences of any kind; the people need something to cheer for, so who cares what the players get away with?!!

As any sane person can plainly see, this situation seemed hilarious, but in the end, it wasn't something to laugh at. The boys are lucky they walked away with clean records. Several of them were terrified of ruining their careers. How are boys supposed to learn to act mature if society trains them to excuse their behavior and we give them the laugh they're vying for? It's okay to snicker and giggle (I'm guilty), but what I learned from this experience is that while something may be humorous, it could also be incredibly harmful—not only to the victim, but also to the joker. I just wonder: did the stupid sport lessen the consequences, or did everyone decide “boys will be boys”?

I adopted a new perspective after reading about the psychological aspect of humor. One passage that stood out to me was Martin & Ford's insight that “humans are social animals that require close relationships in order to survive.” They elaborate by stating that “positive emotions play a

role in accomplishing three fundamental tasks required for relationships: (1) identifying potential relationship partners; (2) developing, negotiating, and maintaining key relationships; and (3) collective agency (i.e., working together with others to achieve goals that could not be accomplished alone)” (26). Football is a tribe, and this tribalism drives them to work together and value the bonds made with their teammates. Maybe the sport did allow them to get away with it, but the idea of a team, just as Martin & Ford mention above, is an interpersonal relationship that means a lot to many people. Maybe it was because “boys will be boys,” but guys just want to make others laugh so they feel connected with people and have a sense of acceptance—their own form of collective agency. They’re using humor to maintain key relationships with their “dudes” and “bros.” I’m not excusing the football boys’ behavior, but I think the more important question now is this: do we know enough about boys to understand why they behave the way they do, or are we immediately faulting them? Maybe they wouldn’t go to such extremes to make jokes if people understood and validated their thought processes. There are many things we do to feel included or closer to others, and for boys, that thing is humor.

“I certify that this assignment represents my own work. I have not used any unauthorized or unacknowledged assistance or sources or tools in completing it including free or commercial systems or services offered on the Internet.”

Works Cited:

Martin, Rod A., and Thomas Ford. “Introduction to the Psychology of Humor.” *The Psychology of Humor: An Integrative Approach*, Academic Press, an Imprint of Elsevier, London, 2018, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/pitt-ebooks/detail.action?docID=5457186>.

Lester, Jacob. (My fiancé who taught me about tribalism as I was finishing this essay).

<https://www.diffchecker.com> – Used following completion of this essay to ensure my revision was different enough from the original. The output shows how many cuts/additions were made.

“No content generated by AI technologies has been used in this assignment.”