

The Football Experience

In the beginning, there was football. The official said, Let the stadium lights come on, and they came on. The football players came onto the field, and they saw the light was good. Other teams started to show up and practice on the battle ground, otherwise known as the "playing field." Fans shouted, and cheerleaders went on about their playful acts. Parents, brothers, sisters, and close friends all piled into the stands to see the game of the year. The official stepped out onto the moist grass at Williams Stadium in Plano, Texas. The time was seven o'clock p.m. on a Thursday night. He paused for a moment, looked at his stopwatch, and blew his whistle. Gigantic muscular men came from out of nowhere as the fans began to cheer, waving various flags, and clanging cow bells. The bells sounded like a wind chime in an April shower, all different sounds at different times.

The players ran out to the middle of the stadium. A smell of hatred and resentment came about in the air. The crowd came unglued from their seats. The sounds of various noisemakers filled the air once again. Parents and grandparents alike came to their feet in the stands. Cars stopped on the street in front of the stadium, as they honked their horns, and cheered for their team of choice. As the two burly men stood in the middle of the field, many thoughts ran through their heads. They both knew someone was going to die, but defeat was out of the question. The official tossed a polished silver quarter into the air. The coin hit the wet grass with a shiny face of George Washington clearly showing. The home team will receive the ball. Both anger infested players shook hands and ran back to their sideline. The fans began to cheer as the players took the field again. Little did the fans know of how the players practiced all week long.

The Clark Cougars had a very intense practice, while the Williams Warriors slacked off, and took an easy week, since their opponent was not that good of a team. The kick-off approached for both teams, almost instantaneously. Memories of past football games, and practices were rushing through our heads. The time clock read fifteen minutes even; time outs were at three a piece, and it was the first quarter. Suddenly, a whistle blew, and brown bundle of pigskin went flying into the air. Running to the ball, one of the Clark Cougars quickly caught the football, stepped left, then to the right, covering positive yardage. Soon after, the ball carrier was brought down by a pack of Warriors, and the ball was first down for the Cougars.

I had been waiting for this moment all of my life. The match up of the century was about to begin. The Clark Cougars have lost 14 years straight to the Warriors. Coaches only daydreamed of beating the undefeated Warriors. As the quarterback called the play, I smiled with joy. The first play of the game was to me. I played running back for the team, so I was going to run the ball. First play, up the middle of the field, I ran for a fifteen yard gain. The next play was to one of my fellow team mates, which he also ran for another large gain of 26 yards. I could not believe my eyes. After all these years, the game was finally here. We, as a team, were slowly tearing apart the Warrior's defense.

Our offense was dominating the ball, and they could not score against our defense. Shortly after the first quarter, the Cougars took the lead going into the second quarter, fourteen to zero. The start of the second quarter came as a shock to our team. We were starting to get tired, and make

little mistakes that cost us a touchdown. One of the cornerbacks was not on the right coverage, and that led to six points, followed by an extra point after the touchdown. Our team fumbled again on offense, and turned the ball back over to the Warriors, resulting in another Warrior touchdown. We all hung our heads as the Warriors celebrated their score, and taunted our players. As we approached our sideline, the coach had a few words of his own to share with the team. "Listen up here boys, it ain't over yet. If you give up now, you are going to lose. That is the sport of football. If you give up, you lose." I was not going to let 5 years of previous football experience go to waste, just because I was tired. We as a team knew our coach was serious, as a tiny tear drop formed in the corner of his eye.

Half time came about, as we all headed to the locker room for a sip of cool water, and a long speech made by the coaches. To my surprise, the coach was very calm with us as he drew out plays with a piece of white chalk on the board. The coach mainly concentrated on the linemen, and the quarterbacks. As I sat there in the locker room, I knew what I had to do. I knew that the team was depending on my skills. Visions of victory ran through my head. I visualized the opponent as a measly bowling pin, and myself as the bowling ball. My imagination started to run wild. As I felt the adrenaline running through my veins, my body started to tremble with anger. I thought to myself, "They really do think we can't win, and I have to prove them wrong."

The next quarter, our team took the field. With anger and rage in my eyes, I was ready. I was a true lean, mean, killing machine. Nothing was going to get in my way. My head steamed a white smoke. The weather slowly began to get colder as a cold front moved in. The sky, covered with clouds, grumbled at us as we called our plays, and ran them. As the end of the third quarter approached us, both teams were overcome with fatigue. The score remained at fourteen to fourteen.

The weather began to get cold, and small droplets of water started to fall from the ocean-like sky. I felt the nervousness of the crowd, as the clanging of the cow bells came to a halt. Coaches paced back and forth, as we headed into the fourth quarter. Each team got two possessions on offense. Neither team had the strength to penetrate the defense. Three minutes remained on the time clock. The weather took over the game, pouring down with rain from the black sky. It was first down and ten for the Clark Cougars. The play was called in the huddle, and the players sprinted up to the line. The play consisted of me running to the right, and the quarter back was going to toss the ball to me. "Down, set, hut, hut, hike!" As I took off to the right side of the field, I suddenly felt a burst of energy. My bones felt relaxed, and my muscles replenished. The quarterback tossed me the ball, as I ran frantically to the outside of the playing field. I couldn't believe my eyes, as I viewed the hole made for me to run through. Fifteen yards down the field, I met up with one of my old friends. The cornerback slipped and fell onto the turf in his attempt to tackle me. As I darted up the sideline to the endzone, I smiled with joy. The crowd went wild. Popcorn spilled onto the wet ground. Cow bells once again sounded as the raindrops still poured down. I will never forget that moment of my life. The smile on my face was literally being pulled up by strings that wouldn't seem to let go.

Our kicker went on to kick the extra point, as only one minute remained on the time clock. The Clark Cougars went on to beat the Williams Warriors. I could see it now on the front page of the town news paper. "Clark demolishes Williams for the first time in 14 years!" We finally beat the

best team in the world! As we celebrated, and jumped around on the soggy grass, a tear came to my eye. It was all hitting me now. I finally achieved the goal of my life! I could not control the tremendous smirk on my face. As I watched the coach from the opposing team cry in agony, I thought to myself, "That must be what they call the agony of defeat." I knew that the moment of my life I had long waited for, was gone. Only memories are left in my mind, and I cherish every single one of them.

An Ocean Adventure

As I watch, the waves from the shore look fun and almost innocent as they crest and then crash over one another. I can taste the salt in the air and watch little rainbows glisten through the prisms of the ocean's spray. The warm ocean water toward the shore is covered with foam and bubbles from the rumbling waves as children and their families play in the gritty tan colored sand. I think to myself, "This is perfect".

I make the final preparations on my Yamaha Waverunner. All of the fluid levels check full and there is a faint smell of gasoline mixed with the aromas of salt and fish in the air. I am now ready to brave and jump the mighty ocean waves of South Padre Island!

Before the truck backs the trailer into the warm waters at the dock and lowers the Waverunner into the blue-green abyss, I crank the engine for a final systems check. It roars powerfully, drowning out the sound of the birds circling overhead, as thick black and gray smoke initially pours from the exhaust and then slowly drifts away on the wind's light breeze. I turn the impressive machine off to finish my final preparations.

As I put on the Jet Pilot lifejacket and tighten the thick blue straps, I remind myself to stay calm and not to make stupid or impulsive decisions during my journey into the ocean. It is easy to push oneself to the limits and lose track of reality. I must remember to respect Mother Nature at all times and keep in mind that I am not invincible.

I climb aboard the Waverunner and grab hold of the handbars, warm from the bright sun. Now the truck begins to back up, gently lowering me on this powerful machine into the calm waters of the docking area. As I drift from the trailer, I take a moment to look around and enjoy the peaceful serenity of the smooth, almost glass-like, water.

As I push the start button and the Waverunner roars to life, the power vibrates my seat at first and then settles into a soft rumble. I navigate my way through the docks until I am in the channel. I can now press the throttle and hang on for a fun ride! While the waves through the exit channel are only half of the size of the ocean's mighty waves, this gives me time to warm up and get in sync with the powerful 135 horse powered Waverunner. I am now ready to take on the Gulf of Mexico!

I drive out far enough to stay out of the foamy white surf. Suddenly, the ocean begins to crest around me. As I drive into the waves, I am careful to only depress the throttle to a maximum of half power. Any more would be foolish and could cause a wipeout. I approach a wave with a perfect peak and at the ideal time. I gently squeeze the throttle and the loud roar of the engine fills my ears as the power pushes me up to the foamy white crest of the wave.

In an instant, I am no longer floating on the water, but I am soaring like the beautiful white birds through the misty air. In one brief moment, I look down and estimate that I am eight to ten feet in the air for a split second before I begin my descent back to the briny waters. In a flash the back

end of the Waverunner sits down into the ocean with the front following in a rocking motion. All around me is a fine spray of the salty water. I have landed!

Salt and sweat mix to run down my face and into my mouth. I swallow some of the brackish mixture as I wipe my face with my hand and then run my hand through my dripping hair to dry it out. I think to myself, "What a way to spend an afternoon".

Soon, I notice that the sun is slowly fading in the west so I decide to turn back toward the docks. As I enter the entrance channel, I decide to return at a slower pace to enjoy my last few minutes at sea. The sun reflects off the water in brilliant colors of gold, orange and red. The beads of sweat and water glimmer on my bronze skin in the vanishing rays of light.

To my surprise, I look out and see smooth gray hump with a dorsal fin surface about twenty feet in front of me. It is a dolphin! What a beautiful sight. As this intelligent creature slides back under the ocean's surface, I spot two more dolphins and then another joins them. The first dolphin emerges again to make a total of four. They are swimming in front of me, playing in the surf. It is almost as if they are leading me to shore. As I idle through the channel, they slowly disappear back to their home in the Gulf.

Once the dolphins are gone, I gently squeeze the throttle and head back to the docks. With a final look back, I see the sun's reflection off of the glassy smooth water as the ripples of my wake break the surface behind. I think about what a wonderful experience this day has been.

Approaching the boat trailer, I realize how physically tired I am from the constant rush of adrenaline brought by my adventures. I have the memories of the exciting jumps of the waves and the vivid pictures in my mind of the graceful dolphins swimming in the sunset. I am ready to go home.

Mother Nature

Tornadoes are one of the deadliest and most unpredictable villains mankind will ever face. There is no rhyme or reason, no rhythm to its madness. Tornadoes are one of the most terrifying natural events that occur, destroying homes and ending lives every year. April 29th, 1995, a calm, muggy, spring night I may never forget. Joey, a buddy I grew up with, just agreed to travel across state with me so we could visit a friend in Lubbock. Joey and I were admiring the beautiful blue bonnets, which traveled for miles like little blue birds flying close to the ground. The warm breeze brushed across the tips of the blue bonnets and allowed them to dance under the perfectly clear blue sky. In the distance, however, we could see darkness. A rumbling sky was quickly approaching.

We continued down the infinitely long interstate towards our destination. Thunder clouds continued to rumble in, like an ocean tide rolling closer and closer to the beach front. Within minutes the entire landscape was calm and dark. It looked like a total eclipse of the sun, and the once moving blue bonnets were now completely still and somber. The rain began to trickle down out of the sky. The sound of the rain, as it hit our car, was like that of pins dropping on a metal surface. The intensity of the rain increased as we ventured further into the eye of the storm.

As we approached an overpass, we noticed a parking lot of used cars piled underneath. By now, the rain had created a wall of water, which surrounded our car. We decided to pull over and sprint to the underpass to join the other frightened observers. What Joey and I were unaware of, what we couldn't possibly know, was that a tornado was already on the ground frantically spinning its way towards our position.

The twister had just hit the ground and was gaining power and strength as it devoured everything in its path. We found ourselves even more frightened than we were just moments ago. The whirling "finger of God" was approaching us at a tremendous rate. The sound surrounding us was outrageous, it sounded something like a steam locomotive roaring towards us, whining and whistling with an awful high pitched roar. As the rumbling cloud of darkness approached us, we started to realize its outstanding power. This event would be one that we wouldn't soon forget. The rain had almost completely stopped, but the wind was nearly blowing us off the ground as we huddled together under the overpass. We could hear the screeching sounds of car tires as they started sliding across the rain-soaked cement pavement. Electrical explosions lit up the darkened sky as the tornado ripped over power lines, snapping them as if they were toothpicks. Screams erupted from the crowd as the tornado crossed directly over us, smashing large objects into the overpass pavement. We were terrified as the twister rumbled over the roadway leaving us untouched.

Shortly thereafter it vanished from the sky, leaving only shattered pieces of falling fence posts and telephone poles. Everyone slowly unraveled from the huddle that had protected them moments earlier. The sun started poking holes in the dark rumbling sky; the wind and rain had completely ceased, leaving it morbidly calm. The sun burned away every trace of lingering darkness in the sky. It was amazing to look back and see a mile long trail of destruction surrounded by homes and fences that were left totally untouched.

I remember thinking to myself how amazing this moment was, and how grateful I was to be alive. Anytime I look back on those few moments of my life, it makes me realize that I must cherish every single moment of it.