

Action overshadows darkness

Even in the pursuit of victory, there comes a time when you have to say enough is enough.

May 15, 1912, should have been one of those times.

On that spring afternoon, at Hill Top Park in Manhattan, the Detroit Tigers came to town to face baseball rival New York.

The stadium seats were filled, mostly by New York fans who wanted to see Detroit's Ty Cobb, who had already become a legend.

Cobb, the most-abled hitter and base-stealer in the game, had become accustomed to being heckled by opposing fans. And for the first 3 1/2 innings of that particular game, Cobb endured the vicious jeers of the New York crowd.

One of those hecklers — Claude Lueker, a New York fan who was also handicapped — was particularly enjoying giving Cobb a hard time.

In the top of the fourth, as Cobb warmed up in the batter's circle, Lueker yelled a barrage of insults at the ball player, directly from the front row.

Cobb continued his warm-up swings, paying no attention to his loudest critic. But Cobb was an unabashed racist, and Lueker knew how to get him to react.

"Cobb, you're gonna strike out!" cried Lueker. "Did you hear me, you half-nigger?"

It took about three seconds for Cobb to throw down his bat, jump the railing, knock down the heckler and begin stomping the man with his steel cleats.

When the infuriated crowd shouted that the fan was helpless because he had no hands, Cobb glared them back and yelled, "I don't give a damn if he doesn't have any feet," and continued to kick and spike Lueker until he was restrained by several park police.

It was baseball's darkest day.



Jamie Karl

"Athletics are about building quality and class, even more so than about building winners. Sports are more than games; they teach us about life, about ourselves."

Within hours of the incident, commissioner Ban Johnson banned Cobb from professional baseball for life.

But when the rest of the Detroit team refused to play any more games until Cobb was reinstated — for fear they wouldn't win as much without him — the commissioner and team management reneged. Cobb was back playing ball within two days.

In his career, Cobb hit a lifetime .366 average, a record to this day. He won 12 batting titles. And when he retired he was the all-time major league career leader in games played, at-bats, runs, hits, and stolen bases.

Indeed, Cobb was a gem on the diamond. But as a man, the "Georgia Peach" was anything but.

He was notoriously racist, constantly in fights, often times in trouble with the law, and abusive

towards teammates and opponents. He was the great black mark of baseball.

"Cobb gave us some extraordinary ball," says baseball historian and writer Daniel Okrent, on the PBS documentary "Baseball."

"But there comes a moment when you have to say it's not worth it. I think Cobb and his vitality is an embarrassment to the game."

Cobb's actions were tolerated, his behaviors accepted. Despite all his greatness on the field, he should have been expelled, forever, from the game he loved.

Last Sunday was one of Nebraska football's darkest days. The story is one that needs not be repeated.

Here at Nebraska, the game of the gridiron is loved; the will to win is cherished and constantly pursued.

But what separates NU from so many other athletic programs, past or present, is that the will to win doesn't come at the top of the priority list.

Building character does. Athletics are about building quality and class, even more so than about building winners. Sports are more than games; they teach us about life, about ourselves.

When a ball player, or any athlete, continuously oversteps his bounds — loses perspective on who he is and what he does — he becomes a black mark to his coaches, to his teammates, to an entire program.

He becomes an embarrassment.

On Sunday, the moment had come when all the glory and greatness that one man brought on the field was no longer worth it.

Coach Osborne and the UNITY Council are to be commended for what was surely a difficult, but honorable decision.

Karl is a senior news-editorial major, Daily Nebraskan wire editor and columnist.

...doomed to repeat it.

1992

Assault by I-backs a recurring tragedy

This story ran on the front page of the Daily Nebraskan, Jan. 20, 1992. It caused quite a stir at the time, as did the accompanying photo. The headline read "Football player cited for assault."

The condition of a 23-year-old woman who allegedly was assaulted Saturday evening by a Cornhusker football player was upgraded from critical to serious Sunday, a Lincoln General Hospital nursing supervisor said.

The woman, whose name has not been released, allegedly was assaulted by Andrew Scott Baldwin of 2513 S St., Lt. Albert Maxey of the Lincoln Police Department said.

Baldwin is an I-back for the Huskers.

Maxey said the alleged assault occurred about 5:15 p.m. while the woman was walking her dog outside of an apartment complex at 545 N. 25th St. He said a nearby car's windshield was smashed during the incident.

Maxey said several witnesses were on the scene and some tried to help the victim. But, he said, none of the witnesses reported being attacked.

Baldwin, 22, was naked when police officers arrived.

Maxey said Baldwin would be charged with felony assault and assaulting a police officer. After Baldwin was booked into Lancaster County Jail, he was taken to Lincoln General Hospital for treatment of cuts to his hand, Maxey said.

Maxey declined to provide further details of the incident.

A witness who asked not to be identified said he saw the suspect and another man wrestling before the alleged assault. The man appeared to be restraining the suspect, the witness said.

The suspect removed his clothes and ran into the street, where he kicked several passing cars, the witness said. He said he did not know what happened to the other man.

Then, the suspect approached a woman who was leaving the apartment building with her dog, the witness said. He said the suspect prevented her from re-entering the building and began to beat her.

The suspect dragged the woman into the street, knocked her down and threw her up against the car, the witness said. He said the suspect did not throw the woman through a windshield, as was reported.

The suspect then dragged the woman back onto the sidewalk, where he beat her head on the

"He always liked to go out and have a good time. He was never out to get anyone, or anything like that."

GEORGE ACHOLA
Senior I-back

cement, the witness said. Another man attempted to stop the assault, the witness said, but the suspect paid no attention to him.

When a police car arrived, the suspect approached the officer with raised fists, the witness said. He said other police cars soon arrived.

Baldwin, a junior from Roselle, N.J., was listed as the football team's top I-back at the beginning of last season, but sprained his ankle in the season's first game and did not return to lineup until the Missouri game, Oct. 26. Against Missouri, Baldwin dislocated his shoulder.

Nebraska coach Tom Osborne could not be reached to comment Sunday.

George Achola, a senior I-back from Omaha, said the news of the incident shocked him.

Baldwin "has always been quiet and introverted, and likes to have a good time," he said. "But you can never really tell what's going on in someone's head who's like that."

Achola said he first heard about the alleged incident at the football team's Big Eight championship banquet Saturday night at Agricultural Hall on the State Fairgrounds.

He said Frank Solich, the Nebraska football team's running backs coach, told him during the banquet that Baldwin had been involved in an incident, but Solich did not give details about the incident.

Achola, who said he had known Baldwin for four years, said Baldwin rarely displayed any violent behavior.

"He always liked to go out and have a good time," Achola said. "He was never out to get anyone, or anything like that."

Achola said he couldn't think of any reason for Baldwin's alleged behavior.

"I don't quite understand how something like this could happen," Achola said. "That's just not Scotty."

Latch-key kitty leads fast life

According to Republican child-rearing experts like Newt Gingrich and Bob Dole, children of single working mothers are more prone to violence, crime, alcoholism and drug abuse. They are more likely to drop out of school and grow up dysfunctional than children from abusive two-parent homes.

When I heard that, I knew my cat was doomed.

As a single working mother of a 3-month-old kitty, I could see the writing on the wall.

Unlike normal, healthy kitties from two-parent homes, Flannery lashes out with his little paw, rather than seeking peaceful solutions to his problems.

These violent tendencies have also come from too much TV. Because I am not home enough to monitor his viewing habits, Flannery developed a taste for violent TV shows with car chase scenes. He often hisses at the set, clawing the police officers as they race into burning buildings. Sometimes he lunges after them, waving his little paws.

"He needs more discipline," said the vet, when I dragged Flannery to the animal clinic after he peed on my briefcase.

I knew what the peeing meant. Flannery had once again lashed out, sensing that if he peed on my briefcase, I would have to stay home from work and be a proper mom.

It was a kitty cry for help.

"It's just so hard," I said, overcome with my own inadequacies. "I can't spend as much time with him as I ought."

I decided not to mention the water pistol I used to keep Flannery from swinging on the stereo wires. Since the pistol had a range of thirty feet, I could snag Flannery from clear across the apartment. The



Debra Cumberland

"Because I am not home enough to monitor his viewing habits, Flannery developed a taste for violent TV shows with car chase scenes."

emotional satisfaction I got when he yelped was probably a sign of my own violent tendencies. No wonder Flannery was already dysfunctional.

"Does he have any older male cat figures in his life?" asked the vet, frowning. I could tell he was checking me out for signs of dysfunctionality and depravity.

"Well, there's little Eliot, who lives next door," I said slowly. "But Flannery beats him up. He says Eliot is weak and neurasthenic and writes bad poetry."

The vet shook his head sorrowfully, running a thin, bony hand over his scruffy beard. I stared at the tips of my scuffed shoes, remembering that I had once again forgotten to change the litter box. I decided not to mention this to the vet.

"Does Flannery still get up in the middle of the night to write?" asked the vet, his eyes narrowing.

"Oh, yes, doctor." My voice

shook. Once again, Flannery had copied my bad English major habits. "It's bad, isn't it? He writes such violent stuff. All the cats die in his stories."

"You need to monitor his reading and his television," said the vet. "I'm warning you. Cats in his situation often grow up to be convicts or — even worse — catnappers."

Instead of going home immediately to tend to my cat, like a good mother, I decided that what I needed now was a good, stiff margarita.

Accompanied by one of Flannery's dysfunctional uncles, I headed out to a den of sin and vice.

I stared into my drink and thought about my inadequacies. I was a bad mom. I drank margaritas and raised latch-key kitties. I was a bad graduate student. I drank margaritas instead of researching nineteenth-century British women writers seething with pain and rage.

I ordered another margarita, thinking about how bad they were for me, and how only last week I let Flannery have a little taste. He didn't like it, but no doubt it was going to be the start of a lifelong battle with alcohol and drugs.

"I have to go home to my cat," I said, slowly getting up from the bar stool. "It's late. Flannery will be home alone, watching a mouse-slasher film."

"Flannery will be okay," said the dysfunctional uncle. "Have another."

But when I crawled home, Flannery was lying on the floor, his eyes dilated, his little Rainbow Peace T-shirt caked with beer stains, a tiny kitty reefer clutched in one paw.

The nightmare had begun.

Cumberland is a graduate student in English and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

BE OUR GUEST

The Daily Nebraskan will present a guest columnist each Monday. Writers from the university and community are welcome.

Must have strong writing skills and something to say. Contact Mark Baldrige c/o the Daily Nebraskan, 34 Nebraska Union, 1400 R St., Lincoln, NE 68588. Or by phone at (402)-472-1782.