

The Bathroom Reader

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“Outside of a dog, a book is man’s best friend. Inside of a dog it’s too dark to dark to read.”

Groucho Marx

**Reprinted from the manuscript “The Bathroom Reader” by
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Number 37

It was the last minute of the last quarter of the last game of the 2019 college football season. It was the championship. The score of the two teams tied for first place throughout the season was the University of Narragansett 17, John Tyler University 16. Head Coach Abe Marcus has been the playmaker of Tyler's football program for 29 years. With a championship record of 24 and 5 he is painfully aware that the team finishing second for the season fades into obscurity. They remain there until such time as victory is theirs, if it ever comes. The fact that John Tyler University has reigned supreme 24 times in the past is of monumental indifference to everyone except the alumnae, unless they win this game, their 25th championship.

So here we are waiting for Tyler U's last timeout to expire. Their offensive team is on Narragansett's 48 yard line and its 4th and 8 with 7 seconds remaining in the game. Coach Marcus knows that a field goal from that 48th yard line needs to be kicked from 7 yards back from the line of scrimmage to the 45 yard line in his team's territory. That makes the total distance to be covered a hair over 65 yards. Coach paced back and forth in front of the player's bench running options through his head. All scenarios came up losing the game and this season's championship. He knew his field goal kicker could never make the distance. His quarterback could make the distance throwing a Hail Mary pass but what receiver would be picked? Narragansett's defensive coordinator would send everyone, including the water boy, to guard the end zone. The coach found himself silently mouthing a prayer his mother taught him when he was very young. She told him to repeat it several times and the stressful situation he was enduring would soon go away. *It couldn't do any harm*, he thought what the hell. It was short and in Hebrew and he didn't understand a word of it. He repeated it several times.

“What’s our play Coach?” the quarterback asked nervously.
“Coach?”

“Send in the field goal unit,” Marcus said.

“We don’t have anyone that can make that distance,” the quarterback said in frustration.

“I know,” The Coach said, “I know.”

“I can make that distance,” said a voice from the end of the bench.

The Coach looked toward the direction of the voice and saw a young man over six feet and solid. He was seated and his uniform was fairly clean despite the mud on the natural turf field from last night’s rain. Marcus could not place him at first then he did. With a slight sneer, he said, “Dubrowski, you’re a fair second string defensive back. You can’t play offense, especially at this moment, now sit down!”

“I am sitting Coach and it wasn’t me that said anything, it was him,” Dubrowski said leaning back and pointing to the last person on the bench.

Coach Marcus stared at the boy sitting at the end of the bench. Then he took his glasses off and placed both hands on his hips. *I have no idea who this kid is*, Marcus thought. *I can barely make him out. He’s covered head to toe with mud from the field.* “Stand up son,” Marcus shouted.

The lad stood and was still unrecognizable.

“What position have the assistant coaches been playing you in practice” Marcus asked.

“I play all different positions, offense and defense. You know, wherever I’m needed, like now.”

Coach Marcus rubbed his chin and said, “Have you ever kicked a field goal during a game?”

“Yes sir,” the boy said, “once before; one decisive moment, in time, similar to this when I was needed.”

“Why, the hell, do you think I’ll send you in here now at this crucial time in the most crucial game of the season with one field goal to your name?” The Coach asked.

“Because you need me to do this and I can.” The boy replied simply.

“What are you five feet ten inches, if that; two hundred pounds maybe?” The Coach said. He was bewildered by his player’s determination and the inference that the success of the next play was a foregone conclusion.

“Today, right here, right now Coach I can make that distance and place the football through the uprights. No one else on this team can do it, not today and not at this moment. You of all people know why I am here today. It is my destiny, do you not agree, sir?”

“Yea sure,” the Coach said but he had not a breath of an idea of what the young man was talking about.

Any play he called, Marcus knew, was doomed. His team would lose the championship. *Well what the hell, might as well go out in a blaze of stupidity*, he thought. He turned to one of his assistant coaches and said, “Get the field goal unit on the field. Our time out has ended. We’re sending in a substitute placekicker, number ah,” he could barely read the jersey through the dirt and mud, “number37.”

The kicking squad ran onto the field and took their place at the line of scrimmage. The quarterback was 7 yards back in position to hold the ball for number 37. The game clock will resume with seven seconds remaining in the game as soon as the center hikes the ball to the quarterback. The quarterback's job on this play was to hold the football in place for the kicker.

The center was in position leaning forward with his hands on the ball. The quarterback took his position in preparation of holding the ball at ground level. He would steady it nearly straight up in preparation of letting go the moment number 37's foot came in contact with the ball. Signals were called, the center snapped the ball, and it flew the seven yards perfectly into the quarterback's hands. He placed it in position just as the front of number 37's foot came in contact with the ball. The front of his foot, not the arch which is what soccer trained kickers use! The quarterback was astounded that anyone would use this style to kick a field goal these days. *That ball will go high but it won't go 25 yards down field,* he thought. *"What the hell was he thinking?"*

Coach Marcus, watching every movement from the side lines, placed both hands on his head and was believed to have muttered *"Vey iz mir"*.

The football took flight and just as the quarterback predicted it went higher than anyone had even seen a fourth down punt go. A unified gasp came from the John Tyler University's side of the field. Cheers were heard from the Narragansett University team on the opposite side of the field. Their euphoria was short lived. The ball did not drop to the playing field but rather maintained its altitude and flew through the uprights. No one deployed the catch net and the ball continued and landed in the seats at the back of the end zone. The two officials at the goal posts threw their arms straight up above their heads giving the sign the kick was good. John Tyler

University had won the game and the championship by one point.

The noise from the fans was deafening. Their astonishment at the feat they had just witnessed and winning the National Collegiate Championship, added to their now blown state-of-mind.

Coach Marcus clutched the arm of one of his assistants and shouted, “Did you see that? Did you see that?” he said again shaking the man’s arm as he pointed to the area in the stands where the ball landed. “He cleared seventy yards if it was a foot.” After the usual barrage of sportscasters and print news questions, Coach Marcus made his way to the locker room.

“Where’s our hero?” he shouted above the din in the locker-room to no one in particular. “And I want that game ball, get me the ball!” This time he directed his request to Stanley Warren, the team statistician. Stanley was a freshman, a math whiz, a straight A student and a consummate nerd. He was great at his job and the Coach loved this kid.

“I’m on it Coach” Stanley said; then left the locker room to pursue his assigned task.

After what seemed like an hour to the Coach, but was no more than twenty minutes, the young freshman returned with a smile on his face and the game ball held tightly to his chest.

“Here it is Coach safe and sound,” he said as he handed the coveted prize to Coach Marcus.

“Great, good work. Now where is he?” Marcus asked.

“Where’s who?” Stanley answered the Coach’s question with a question of his own.

“Where is the man of the hour? The MVP of the game; the boy with the golden leg! Where the hell is number 37?” The Coach shouted and the locker room went silent.

“Sir,” Stanley began, “I have the team roster here,” raising his right hand holding a computer tablet. “All the records from all John Tyler University football teams dating back to 1939 have been computerized and are right here in my hand.”

“We all know how well organized you are Stanley, now where’s number 37? He’s on your list, right?” The Coach asked impatiently.

“Yes Coach he is.” Stanley answered.

“Then why the hell am I talking to you instead of him?” Coach Marcus asked in a tone Stanley had never heard the Coach use, not with him at any rate.

Stanley blurted out his answer as soon as the Coach finished his rant. “Number 37 doesn’t play for this team, not in 2019 anyway!” The last time that number was used at this school was in 1939 and it was never seen again, until it showed up on the field today. That was JTU’s first National Championship victory and it was won by a single point over the University of Narragansett, scored from a field goal.”

“You mean to tell me that today’s field goal was kicked by someone, or something, that did it eighty years ago as well?” The Coach asked no one in particular. No one in the locker room dared answer.

The Coach asked Stanley, “You said there’s no number 37 on the 2019 roster?”

“That’s right sir.” Stanley answered nervously.

Coach Marcus thought for a moment then asked, “What’s the name next to number 37 on the 1939 roster?”

The young man scrolled through eighty years of data and said, “Here it is, “number 37 Golem.”

“Golem, what?” the Coach asked.

“Just Golem sir, no last name,” Stanley answered.

Abe Marcus scratched his chin like he always did when he was deep in thought, then his eyes widened. *“You of all people know why I am here today. It is my destiny, do you not agree, sir?”* He thought of what number 37 said to him shortly before the play. He didn’t understand it then but he does now.

A large grin came across his face as he looked up at the remainder of the locker room’s visitors and exclaimed, “Number 37’s name isn’t Golem.”

“He is a Golem!”

END

Golem def: look it up!

