

THE AVENUE H FIASCO ... BUT WE THOUGHT IT WAS A MIRACLE

This true story asks the question can there be situations that create a moral imperative to cheat?

Once upon a time, in a far away land called Brooklyn, on a bright cool Saturday fall morning about 64 years ago, the Panthers found themselves on a field of honor called the Parade Grounds at Prospect Park. For those of you who are not familiar of this venue it contained at least eight football fields. From 10:00 AM till noon each Saturday in the autumn children were allowed to play on the field. After noon the eighteen year and older 'men' had the use of the fields.

This particular Saturday our opponents were the Avenue H Team. Although they were our contemporaries and lived in our neighborhood they seemed different. Actually I thought all our opponents were different from us. It is only now, as I look back over the years that I understand my blind allegiance to the Panthers was so strong that any and every other group seemed alien or different from us.

This Saturday was less terrifying than most Saturdays because the Avenue H team was a team we could beat. There were not many Saturdays that we played people our own age but this was one of them. It was going well as expected.

We were walking up the field to kickoff to them after scoring our second touchdown. They had yet to score. Our mood was joyous. When we reached the point that we were to kick from and turned around there were no Avenue H players on the field. In their place was a team that was scheduled to play in the afternoon. In other words they were eighteen and older and were in full uniform. We were a "rag-tail" group and most of us had no protective pads. We thought our Panther jerseys were enough to protection. Our collective hearts dropped at the prospects of facing this new team. Nonetheless, true to the pledge that one silently takes when they enter the "Field of Honor" we continued to play.

The dreaded 'Big Guys' quickly scored two touchdowns, tying the score, as they physically beat up the 'Good Guys'.

We were beat, we were dispirited, we were scared and we were in position of the ball. There was no way we, the 'Good Guys', could possibly effectively move the ball. Then as we huddled a 'sneak' play was born out of desperation. To those who follow the bestial 'sport' it was akin to the 'sleeper' play. One of our backs plunged into the line. When the play was over the back pretended he was hurt. We did not have to pretend very much because everybody was hurting. That player was helped to the side line but did not step out of bounds. Actually one of the Big Guys was so concerned he helped our player, who everyone thought could barely walk. No substitute came in as a replacement. On the next play our quarter back ran back with the ball and heaved it as far as he could and the player who pretended he was injured ran down the far side line without any Big Guy being aware that the 'injured' player was eligible to be a receiver.

I'm sure you who were not there guessed the outcome. The Panthers scored their third TD. The other team was so embarrassed that the 'kids' scored that they walked off the field and the game ended with the Panthers winning.

I was going to end with, "scarcely is there a man alive today who remembers or cares about that day" ... yet I am sure that all those Panthers , as well as their three fans that were present, will never forget that day and that victory.