

Frosty

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Frosty

Jarod Lipson

Until December 2016, I had never met the man that cleaned the bathrooms of Bad Daddy's Burger Bar. Having been a frequent visitor of both the establishment and of public restrooms, however, I was very familiar with his work. The walls of the bathroom were adorned with the wonted black and white pictures of women from decades prior and assorted signs placed haphazardly, finished in wood as the entire restaurant was. I had even seen him performing the task once, providing me the only small glimpse into an even smaller part of this man's world. At the time, I didn't speak to him, and his presence didn't remotely cross my mind as I washed my hands, the cleanliness of which has always been important to me. After all, the hands are essentially the eyes of the arms. I'm sure he didn't notice me either, I was one of hundreds of patrons that frequented the eatery on a daily basis. As we contemporaneously existed, it was as if we were not in the same place.

My soccer career had come to an unceremonious terminus thirteen years prior at the age of four. Disinterested in a sport in which I could not use the hands that I was so fond of, releasing as much energy as possible became my primary objective. While basking in the glory that was my emancipated sprint of passion, I would be corrected, told to run towards the ball instead of away from it, to at least try to kick it. The indoor field on which the exhibitions took place, surrounded by boards and nets, was reminiscent of a prison, the existence of which I had only recently become aware. It was no wonder then, that I was more interested in the frosty that my father would always share with me after games, or the latest episode of whatever TV show it was that I had recorded that

night. With my mind elsewhere, and no intention of ever making what could be described as a soccer move, I quickly moved on to other sports and on to other things.

Both Bad Daddy's Burger Bar and XL Soccer World were located in the town in which my childhood resided. Cary, North Carolina is predominantly white and is exclusively upper-middle class. Grocery stores seem to outnumber people there, the parking lots of which inherently bounteous with Mercedes-Benzes, Audis, and BMWs. Every road in Cary is freshly paved, and every building is pristine. The vast majority of the population is in their homes by 10 p.m., and crimes are virtually unheard of there, so in our minds the town belonged to us at night.

The hyperborean wind late on the night of December 23, 2016 prompted the removal of my shirt, for the sole purpose of deviating from the expected attire given the weather. Driving for its own sake, blasting Kidz Bop on its intended maximum volume, onlookers may have mistaken us for annoyances, but we didn't care. Entering the retail shopping center of Park West Village to check on the made-up parking garage college that had been so cleverly dubbed Park West University, we drove by the adjoining Bad Daddy's Burger Bar to exit. The parking lot was normally empty at this hour, but tonight it wasn't. As we approached, however, the image of people, not cars, filled the space. Under the brightly lit parking lot lights, were all of the employees of Bad Daddy's, more recognizable as we approached. Spread out among a hundred yards or so, they were contained by a dumpster on one side and a rather large cardboard box on the other. A soccer ball lay betwixt them, constantly in motion as they aimed for the makeshift goals on either side. Without vacillation, I turned down the Kidz Bop, and yelled over it, asking if we could join in their game. Begrudgingly one responded sure, garnering looks from the litany of other athletes. I parked my brand new car among the experienced vehicles that were scattered among the remainder of the lot.

The first thing that I noticed upon exiting the vehicle was not the insufferable glacial chill, but the immediate overpowering murmur that collectively beckoned for the adornment of my shirt. I obliged, ready to do anything to partake in this celestial endeavor. After they split me and my friends among the teams, the game continued seamlessly, the disparity in skill level immediately making itself clear. Each team had about two or three members that would simply stand by either goal, engaged in conversation in a foreign language with a fellow athlete, mimicking the level of interest in the game that I had shown so many years prior. It was here that I recognized the man who cleaned the bathrooms, although I was pretty sure that he didn't recognize me.

Among the crowd of these men in their thirties and even older, all of the same race and socioeconomic status lay two that strayed from the norm set by the rest of them. Two teenaged girls were intermixed in the game, but in a noticeably different dynamic than that of me and my friends. They weren't accepted begrudgingly, they were embraced as if they were one of their own. These girls were two of the most skilled players in the game, no doubt due to years of Saturday morning soccer games from an early age, surrounded by the suburban parents and the luxury vehicles that populated a substantial proportion of Cary. The setting here could not be any more different, yet they seemed to be excelling both athletically and socially in this strange situation. After one of them scored an impressive goal, she was embraced lovingly by her teammates, all of a different race, gender, age, and socioeconomic status than her, all of these factors seeming far from relevant at this moment. I wondered why she was so accepted here, while we remained outsiders, looked upon begrudgingly as if we were mocking them. I decided that it must have been her athletic prowess, so I became determined to score one goal in this game, in spite of my lack of experience and skill in the sport.

I ran vehemently from side to side, simply following the ball. I touched it a few times, making some good passes, some bad passes, and falling more than once. Eventually, however, I stole the ball, rendering the field open before me. I had to beat only the goalie. As I inched closer to the goal, several of my teammates begged me to pass the ball, but I could not be deterred. The goalie made the mistake of attempting to steal the ball from me before my shot, a maneuver that gave me a clear shot of the goal. Upon hearing the ball bounce off of the dumpster that acted as goal, I was filled with jubilation, and I expected my teammates to feel the same. When I turned around, however, there was no one to congratulate me, no one to partake in the glory that we had achieved as a team together. The man who cleaned the bathroom simply stared me down as I ran back to play defense, alienating me to the point that I could not stay, prompting our exit soon.

I still see all of the members of this game at the restaurant, but the dynamic has not changed. They don't acknowledge me, and I don't either. I've been known to wave at them now and again, but the hands that I value so highly go unseen and unacknowledged in this world. Sometimes when eating there I wonder if they even remember me and my miraculous goal, but I soon exit the restaurant, back into my own world.