'Cat Tracks

Linfield Magazine Staff

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Baseball play shapes life

By Mike Avery '82

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I’ve often wondered if my teammate, Ron Webb ’72, felt the same transformational impact of The Play. Only a single glance of mutual respect passed between us afterwards: “Good job.”

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Ron was the Linfield catcher and everyone looked up to him. I was a timid freshman on a team of seasoned players on their way to a national title. Only a single obstacle stood in the way – a Tennessee team threatening to end our quest with a late rally. A lead-off double in the eighth had left them in an enviable position in a 7-7 game. In all likelihood they would score. But fate intervened with The Play.

It was the boldest, yet most dangerous call anyone could make. Over the course of 60 years we had practiced it a few times and had even tried it on occasion when a game was well in hand. But this was no ordinary game – it was the title game of the 1971 NAIA National Championship.

The odds of The Play succeeding were minimal and there was considerable risk. I doubted that Coach Ad Rutschman ’54, with his years of experience, would have agreed.

Ron’s throw was perfect. The look of surprise and horror in the runner’s eyes said it all. The tag caught him nearly a foot off the base. We held them scoreless that inning and went on to win the game, 9-8 in 10 innings. It was The Play that shifted the momentum that the nation had expected them to eclipse. Ron and I knew it; Vince knew it, too.

Unfortunately, I did.

A pitch-out was called. Nervously, I held my breath as Vince finished his delivery. In a single, swift, graceful motion, Ron caught and released the ball. I found myself on “soul time,” watching a white blur of a ball pass through the air, practically invisible to everyone but those in that game.

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At every turning point in my life, The Play revisits me. “Buck the Odds,” it says. “Go for it.” For 25 years, it has inspired me. Why the urgent need to write it down? What turning point is this on the road of life?

As I lie awake this springtime evening listening to the wind testing the new maple leaves outside my window, I hear a faint, yet familiar voice from deep inside my being. “Call it,” it urges gently, yet insistently. “You can do it. Call The Play.”

(Editor’s note: Mike Avery, shortstop on that 1971 baseball team that beat Lipscomb University of Tennessee 9-8 for the national title, returned to complete his degree in 1982 and is a water quality specialist in the Portland area and owns a publishing firm, Susan Creek Books.)

Athletes team up to fight world hunger

Joe Murray ’08 has a new appreciation for grilled cheese sandwiches.

Murray, a Linfield College soccer player, has organized the Linfield chapter of Feel Good, a group with ties to the World Hunger Project. Grilled cheese sandwiches are the national organization’s signature fundraiser representing the 1.2 billion people worldwide who live on less than $1 a day.

“I could eat a grilled cheese sandwich every day of my life,” said Murray, who became interested in the project last summer during the Semester at Sea. During a stop in South Africa, he partnered with the World Hunger Project, working with malnourished children.

“The experience changed my outlook on life,” said Murray. “This is a way of showing others what my eyes have seen.

Murray set to work organizing the chapter when he returned to campus last fall. Word spread quickly among friends, many of whom are athletes, and representatives from every Linfield sport contacted him to express interest.

Organizers hope to raise awareness of world hunger, along with funds to help stop it. They are selling Feel Good T-shirts and photographs, taken by Murray and Lance Nelson ’09 during the Semester at Sea. This spring, the group will hold Feel Good Fridays, during which members can wear the shirts. Murray is also planning a Feel Good day featuring a concert and $1 grilled cheese sandwiches.

“This has been very fortunate,” said Murray, who will earn a marketing degree in June. “I attend a private college and have all the amenities. Linfield offers. People live on $1 a day and I open my wallet and have $10 sitting there. It’s easy to help.

‘Cat Tracks