

Funniest Football Ever

Written by {ga=jerryroche}

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With the official start of the National Football League season less than two weeks away, I'm beginning my annual July ritual -- that is, digging through the detritus of a year's worth of living to find my yellowed, dog-eared copy of Dan Jenkins' irreverent *Semi-Tough*.

The only reading material that might be more hilarious than this 1972 novel is a history of the Cleveland Browns from 1999 to 2009.

For the uninitiated, the book's main character is Billy Clyde Puckett, who dictates the story in the first person to Jim Tom Pinch, a sportswriter for the *Fort Worth Light & Shopper*. Billy Clyde is a rookie running back who is hell-bent on taking the New York Giants to the Super Bowl. Marvin "Shake" Tiller is his high-school and college (S.M.U., of all places) buddy who's also drafted by the Giants as a wide receiver. Both are Texas-bred rednecks. Both are white, which was just as rare back in 1972 as it is now. And Barbara Jane Bookman, their main squeeze, is the first woman (to my knowledge) ever referred to as a number, predating Bo Derek's "10" by seven years.

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Both Billy Clyde and Shake love to carouse between Sundays when they're making mincemeat of other NFL teams. "I've been known to have me some good times some surprising places," B.C. tells Jim Tom. "Akron wore my ass out once, and so did Omaha."

Roger Kahn, author of *The Boys of Summer*, called the Jenkins book "funny, dizzying and wonderfully vulgar."

The Players

Some of the other colorful characters to cross paths with Billy Clyde, Shake and Barbara Jane are:

*** Shoat Cooper, head coach of the Giants. Billy Clyde describes him as "Big. He doesn't have much hair left. He looks like he's got about 12 six-packs of Pearl in his belly. And he's always looking for somewhere to spit."

*** Big Ed Bookman, Barbara Jane's daddy, who's in the oil bidness. Big Ed was once quoted as saying, "It's people like me that made this country what it is. I employ about 10,000 people, one way or another, and I pay 'em good, too, as long as they work their ass off."

*** T.J. Lambert, a defensive end at S.M.U. who once interrupted a team meeting when he "hiked his leg and made a noise like a watermelon being dropped on concrete out of a four-story building."

*** Defensive back Obert Kimberly "Dreamer" Tatum of the dog-ass Jets, who the Giants end up playing in the Super Bowl. "The only Obert I ever knew," Billy Clyde writes, "was so dumb he

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couldn't figure out a ballpoint pen. And the only Kimberly I ever knew was an interior designer."

*** Elroy Blunt, a former NFL player who grew his bank account by wagering on games. He once threatened to bet "Mama and Papa and Sister Marvene and the kids and the trailer rent and all."

*** Cissy Walford, a football groupie who latches onto Billy Clyde. On one occasion, he describes her thusly: "She's wearing a pair of those expensive, crotch-tight, thigh-grabbing pants that must be made out of skin, and she also has what obviously is a whole bunch of dandy lungs underneath a silk blouse."

A One

Nearly a whole chapter is devoted to Barbara Jane arguing with the boys about their numerical ranking system for women, from a Ten down to a perfect One.

For instance, a Two is a Her. With a capital H. "You might marry the same Her twice. Or three times," Billy Clyde writes.

But a One is something else altogether.

"A One had to be extremely gorgeous in all ways from the minute she woke up in the morning until she fixed a man his cold meatloaf sandwich after love practice at 4 a.m. Hair color and eyes were optional, but streaked butterscotch hair and deep brown eyes weren't too bad, along with a semi-sleepy look and the ability to sweat daintily."

"I'm a One," Barbara Jane contends.

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“Nope,” B.C. says. “You hit the tape at the same time. Probably both run a nine-one. But you ain’t a One because there’s no such a thing as a One that we know of.”

Laugh Out Loud

The book is divided into three sections. The first third (Good Old Pals) serves as an introduction to the characters and their backgrounds. The second third (The Wool Market) not only sets up the football season but details some almost unbelievably wild parties. And the last section (Game-Face) chronicles the Giants’ build-up to the Super Bowl, culminating in the game itself.

If you’ve never read a book where every sentence -- *every sentence*, mind you -- is laugh-out-loud funny, then you haven’t read *Semi-Tough*

NOTE TO MITCH CYRUS FANS: Don’t pre-judge the book by the 1977 movie “Semi-Tough” that starred Burt Reynolds, Kris Kristofferson and Jill Clayburgh. The film version is an unfunny atrocity with an inexplicably and wildly inappropriate subplot about a self-help guru.

NOTE TO CHEAPSKATES: You can get either the hardcover or the paperback version of *Semi-Tough* at Amazon.com for a penny. Which, sadly, goes to show you just how our values have eroded over the years.