

Aging Lifestyles: They just don't write 'em like they used to

by Joe_Volz

There are those youngsters under 30 who firmly believe that us senior citizens over 65 spend too much time trafficking in nostalgia.

In fact, they argue, that nostalgia is our most important product, that we spend too many days romanticizing the past and not enough time in the present.

Well, I would not, for a minute, debate that today's youngsters are better educated, stronger and more affluent than my generation was - even if their vocabularies and attention spans have shrunk a bit.

However, it is difficult to assess the advantages of the past if you have not lived in it or studied it in history classes, which are almost defunct in some schools.

Let us return to yesteryear for a second and focus on one small part of the past - one small step backward - sports writing.

In the first half of the last century, the most colorful writing in the country was consistently found on the nation's sports pages. Sports was a metaphor of life. Many of the writers used sports writing as a training camp for later careers in fiction - writers like John Lardner and Paul Gallico.

The writers had actually read the classics and classical references were featured prominently in their writing. There were the Four Horsemen of the great Notre Dame backfield of halfback Jim Crowley, halfback Don Miller, fullback Elmer Layden and quarterback Harry Struhdreher, an invention of a sportswriter familiar with the classical Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. It is hard to believe that the sports commentators of today, often retired athletes, who have trouble distinguishing between when to use "he" or "they" in a sentence, ever heard of the Apocalypse. The sentence from the past that I liked best was written about a good Dartmouth team whose line suspect. It read, "Anyone who thinks that Dartmouth did not have a great line is guilty of committing a base canard." How many of today's scribes have a clue about what a canard is?

I suspect that one reason the retired athletes have taken the color out of the game is that they don't view sports as a game. Having played it, they envision it as a military mission, nothing fun about it even though they are always saying that the coaches tell their players to "have fun" as they ram the other player's teeth down his throat. Professional sports, where big, big bucks are involved, is a business, not fun. And is it hard for an ex-player with a graduate degree in basket weaving to write anything worth reading.

I was wondering the other day, as I watched my beloved alma mater, Rutgers, which invented football more than a century ago, being slaughtered 31-3 by West Virginia. What kind of "lede" would Paul Gallico or John Lardner or Grantland Rice would have put on the story.

The New York Times used the standard 21st century "lede": "Running Back Ray Rice began the season as a Heisman Trophy contender and his team, Rutgers, had an eye on the Bowl Championship Series. But yesterday, as sixth-ranked West Virginia condemned the No. 25 Scarlet Knights to their third defeat of the season, Rice was outshone - and outrushed - by a quarterback."

Well, that's fine.

But the giants of the past might have evoked some imagery, sadly missing from today's sports reporting.

Something like this: "Even 3-in-One oil would not have prevented the mighty ironclad Scarlet Knight from rusting right there on his horse as he sauntered around Rutgers Stadium yesterday. It was hard to tell who pelted Rutgers harder - the rain or West Virginia.

So, yes, I am nostalgic about certain things and picking up the sports page on Sunday mornings and reading some good writing is one of them.

I know I shouldn't take it all that seriously, After all, nobody ever died for dear Old Rutgers.

TV pundits Howie Long and Terry Bradshaw were great athletes but they will never provide a threat to Lardner and Gallico. Anyone who insists otherwise is committing a base canard.

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