

Athletic Taste

Ben Giamo

It was like a vision. There in the distance, amid the early morning brightness stood Tim Holycross on the 50-yard line of our practice football field, 20 minutes before August two-a-days commenced. With his arms dangling at his sides, he looked relaxed, appearing contrapposto as if stepping out of one of Michelangelo's marble designs. His long golden locks were not yet shorn for the American way, and his smooth square shoulders, bronzed by the sun all season, made a sharp contrast with his white tank-top shirt. He was wearing cut-off jeans and biblical sandals with leather straps that laced crosswise around each flexed calf. He stood at 6 feet and 180 pounds. His body was gracefully muscular like those ancient statues you see in the classical section of museums. He sported a sturdy neck, strong jaw, and a Greek nose that his baby-blues looked over. All the chicks said his face was like an Adonis, and half of the guys agreed.

He was gazing up over the goal posts and crossbar as if making out something in the sky. The shape-shifting clouds were immense that summer day with folds upon folds of cumulus roiling in and out of the mass. For all I knew, Tim was sorting out the Throne-Chariot of God up there, locating the wheel within a wheel: the inner wheel of faith, and the outer wheel rolling out the grace of our Lord. Or maybe he was beseeching his celestial Father for the fruits of a glorious fall season in general and, in particular, if the Triumvirate could see to it, a full scholarship for the starting Firebird QB to play Big Time College Football at Ohio State for Woody Hayes. Was that too much to ask for the son of man?

Tim was the son of woman as well. As far as I was concerned, his parents might well have been an old riverboat captain and a beautiful maiden uprooted from the woodland glens. Looking back, I always pictured Holycross calling plays into the offensive huddle, running and passing to beat the band, striding in perfect paces over the low hurdles, and walking along the gleam of school hallways with a cool virile swagger. Wherever I saw him, though, he was always among others — teammates, opponents, classmates. Only once do I recall being alone with Tim. Just the two of us, and it took me by surprise. On a hot, summery day in late May, he cajoled me into playing hooky from track practice with his reassuring smile, a smile that said, *I'm on your side*, and that this little escapade



The author in his senior season, taking over as quarterback in fall 1971.

was *entre nous*. We weren't going to miss a thing that day anyway because the practice session was loosely scheduled — a stamina routine whereby we simply ran around the town at a steady rate. This was the spring of 1970 when I was soon to be a rising junior and Holycross a senior, a rising star in the universe of our Crown Conference.

We look around surreptitiously for the coaches, then duck into Tim's used, slightly dented Skylark convertible and head for the Big Falls by way of the friendly liquor store, where he picks up a six-pack of Hop'n Gator (lemon-lime lager), an inventive combination of beer and Gatorade. Clearly, an athletic taste. On the way, we drink at our leisure. After we arrive at the Falls on the outskirts of town, Holycross, always the pathfinder, climbs down the side of the 50-foot cliff, wades in, and angles down to check the depth of the swimming hole at the base of the cataract for any rocks or obstructions. All clear, he

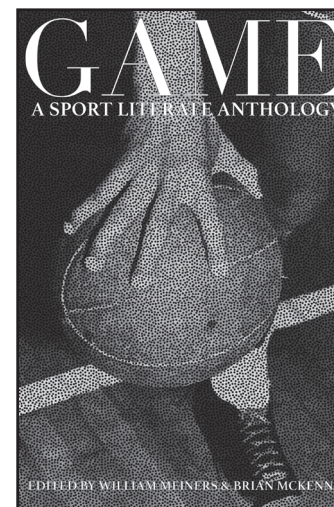
signals upon surfacing. Back at the top, he executes a swan dive. Halfway down, arms spread sideways, his body bends into a skillfully maneuvered convex curve, which he straightens into an arrow before hitting the water, arms brought together to slice the entry. I cup my hands over my mouth and yell down to him, “9.5” (out of 10). Then, inching over to the edge of terra firma, I gather myself for a few moments and jump, arms swinging in wide circles to keep me balanced and in position for a coiled, feet-first landing, which I stick, all the way to the muddy bottom.

Then we try out all the strokes for the fun of it and end up floating on our backs, sipping the Gator, separate yet linked. We talk sparingly about this and that — summer vacation, the upcoming football season, school, hit records, and little women. When we reach the shallows, we stand and stare at our reflections in the turbid water. I can see the outline of a shape and a few coarse features. Holycross stares long and hard at his own substantial form as though something is calling him closer, closer still. I sense his urge to merge. After a while, our stomachs begin to growl and we take heed of the supper bell ringing within. This breaks the spell, pulling us back into the scheme of things.

Tim Holycross, b. 1953, d. 2007. RB/QB, St. Peter Chanel High School (Firebirds), Class of 1971; RB/WR, Ohio State University (Buckeyes), Class of 1975. R.I.P.

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