

by William Meiners

Friends of *Sport Literate*,

Amidst these bread and circus days, I'll take an October afternoon any time. The convergence of baseball playoffs, football in full swing, and basketball beginnings provide pleasant distractions from a world seemingly off its *effing* rocker. And with this October morning, we've got some news to share.

Throughout mid-October, I'll be making postal runs to put *Sport Literate's* "Fall Body Work 2026" issue in the mail. It's packed with 136 pages of powerhouse writing and poetry from a handful of *SL* vets and a bunch of new folks. Two baker's dozen in all, including Christopher Barry, Mark Brazaitis, Nora Edgeworth, Jimmy Estrada-Hannigan, Ryan Fightmaster, Thomas More Garrett, Gillian Kemmerer, Jay Kopfer, Don Lankiewicz, Robin Michel, Steve Midway, Thorpe Moeckel, Thomas Mosely, Scott Palmieri, Robert Paviour, Rebecca Powell, Bruce Pratt, Phil Raisor, Terry Rumsey, Cecilia Savala, Morgan Sheehan, Ron Smith, Henry Stimpson, Stefan Sullivan, Kareem Tayyar, and Robert Wallace. If you're not on our subscriber list, you can fix that for a mere \$20 [here](#).

For some strange reason, our fall issue doesn't have a stitch of football in it. We'll make amends for that in this e-letter. Ben Giamo, a longtime *SL* contributor and one of our "[Best Americans](#)," put a bit of satirical spin on the college football season with "The Wink & Wow Report." Of course, that reminded me of Rus Bradburd's satirical novel, *Big Time*, so we're resharing my interview with him from two years ago. Around about April 2024, with football primarily sidelined except for college spring practices, we published two poets, Joel Glickman and James Connolly, back-to-back in our "Spring Possibilities 2024" issue. I'd say both of their poems are kind of beautifully sad if you could say such a thing.

Here's wishing you and yours well in autumn.

SL SATIRE

The Wink & Wow Report:

Season 1, Episode 1
by Ben Giamo

Wink: Well, it's time.

Wow: And how!

Wink: As I was saying, it's time for another round of Big Time College Football.

Wow: Hard to believe. I've been waiting with bated breath ever since the big game last January.

Wink: Yes, that final matchup settled things. For the time being.

Wow: And then they start up all over again.



Wink: Indeed. We all had to wait for seven long, agonizing months before the Big Bang boomeranged.

Wow: I'm apoplectic. Welcome to Pregame ForePlay! We greet all of you: players, coaches, fans, faculty, administrators, alumni, boosters, gamblers, TV viewers, radio broadcast listeners, social media followers, and tailgaters — drunk, bloated, and tipsy.

Wink: Every Saturday is a Roman holiday, and we're here to bring it to you livestream, courtesy of YouBet.

Wow: It's a whole new ball game.

Wink: Actually, one might call it a paradigm shift.

Wow: Let's not get too academic.

Wink: Let's not get academic at all. I mean, what's that got to do with anything? The university is now hereby established to serve athletics, primarily football, and, of course, endowments.

Wow: A capital idea.

Wink: That's what I'm talking about. Money doesn't talk, it swears. So now we not only have NIL, the Transfer Portal, and Third-Party payments to the best and the strongest, but — drumroll — direct payments to our beloved athletes.

Wow: Cold, hard cash. It makes the world go round.

Wink: And it makes the idea of the university sustainable.

Wow: The sky is the limit.

Wink: And the result is parity. Of course, you've got to pay up to play up.

Wow: That's the spirit.

Wink: I mean it's only logical.

Wow: It's pure reason.

Wink: As pure as money can buy. You know, the top ranked football teams spend the most money for their respective rosters. And, in the year of our Lord 2026-2027, schools in the Power-Four Conferences are allowed to spend up to 21.58 million directly to support their elite athletes. But wait, there's more: 82% of Division I universities have chosen to opt in to this revenue sharing arrangement. Sadly, there's much less revenue to go around for most of these schools.

Wow: As you say, you pay to play.

Wink: Well, let's face it. These lower-revenue schools must find a way. Compete or get beat.

Wow: When there's a will, there's a way. Tough it out. You know, this country was built on competition, the free market, innovation, and investment. The puny colleges and universities must step up to the challenge.

Wink: It's survival of the fittest. Capitalism always finds new markets. Soon, private equity will own the majority share of athletic departments.

Wow: Imagine the equality that equity will bring.

Wink: Parity will soon extend to the top 25, and soon enough to the top 50.

Wow: Oh, what a wonderful world it will be.

Wink: Just think of the odds, the over/under, the huge betting profits, hooking ever more fans with skin in the game.

Wow: Not to mention the huge TV contracts.

Wink: And with the boundaries between pro and amateur eroding, we will have a very fluid situation.

Wow: How enriching! We'll all benefit from the monumental feats of champions, financial and otherwise.

Wink: As football programs become a thing of the past, the urgency of teams will take precedence.

Wow: It's like magic. Poof: each year a new team appears. A real challenge for the coaching staff.

Wink: With an average of 15 to 30 new transfers per year spilling from the Portal onto any one school's gridiron, coaches will have to mesh the new players with the old.

Wow: And the old will become new somewhere else.

Wink: Coaches must stitch it together. They must bob and weave so to speak.

Wow: I can't wait to see what happens. How offenses and defenses come together for the glory of gory.

Wink: Teamwork, my friends. Good old teamwork.

Wow: Well, let's get started.

Wink: Game on.

Wow: I'm all in.

Wink: So too our viewers, I trust.

Wow: You pays your money, and you takes your chances.

Wink: That's the way it is in the new millennium.

Wow: The best of all possible worlds.

Wink: Here's the kickoff.

Wow: The foot meets the ball.

Wink: And we're off and running.

Wow: Let's hope they play like a speeding bullet.

Wink: With violence and velocity.

Wow: One more thing.

Wink: Oh, yes. We're under contract. Let's give everybody their money's worth.

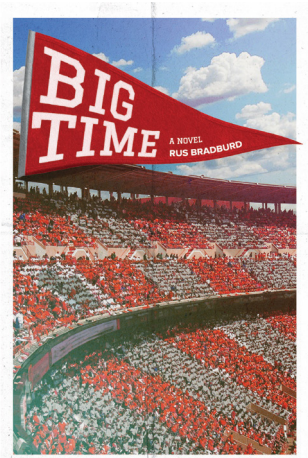
Ben Giamo is professor emeritus of American Studies at the University of Notre Dame. He has published literary studies on William Kennedy and Jack Kerouac as well as books on both contemporary and historical homelessness. He is a regular contributor to *Sport Literate*, which ran "Played Out," earning him a notable nod in *Best American Essays*.

Rus Bradburd's *Big Time* by William Meiners

Rus Bradburd is taking a swing at big-time college athletics. *Big Time*, his aptly named satirical novel, is all at once purposely absurd, laugh-your-ass-off funny, and probably not that far off base from the present-day reality. I can tell you what I like about the book in around 750 words. He seems to be having a go at football, the gargantuan monster on campus, while also taking the stuffing out of higher education itself.

When I spoke to Bradburd in August 2024, he joked about being recently retired from New Mexico State University. Just in time to take the proverbial bite from both hands who fed him through a 30-year career. Ironically, Bradburd spent nearly equal time as a Division I assistant basketball coach (14 years) and a tenure-track professor (16 years). So from bench to classroom, recruiting road to faculty meeting, he paints these landscapes well.

This won't give it away on a book you should buy and read, but *Big Time* begins at Coors State University, where the beer sponsor seized naming rights of a Colorado university, and football, undoubtedly, is king. In fact, the football coach fires the president. The History Department faculty is reduced to selling popcorn at games. Professors from Foods and Nutrition deliver training tables to all the players. The Criminal Justice folks are campus cops. And the English Department, aside from a crusty old poet and a hip new one, has been completely sidelined. Though a handful of them are keeping up with the committee work in a largely ignored "tent city" protest in the middle of campus.



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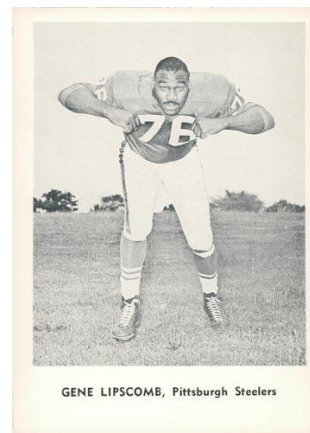
SL POETRY

Life and Other Contact Sports

(for Big Daddy Lipscomb, 1931-1963)

by Joel Glickman

You can take someone down
then step on them a couple times
for good measure just to make a point
or, as frequently happens, out of pure rage,
or else
you can reach down and help them up
again like Gene "Big Daddy" Lipscomb
used to do on the football field
playing tackle for Los Angeles
then Baltimore and Pittsburgh.
Big Daddy had higher ups but lower downs
than most. He never went to college,
so maybe didn't know the word, empathy,
but simply lived it.



I believe I used to see him help those guys up
on TV in the 50s, watching with my dad.
I didn't know then that his mother
had been stabbed 47 times,
at a bus stop — by her boyfriend.

His life worsened with cruel grandparents.
Still, and troubled, he kept his heart of gold.

I prefer not to see him sliding along
in the ever-jammed up traffic on the river
of whiskey and worse where
he died of course but rather

after practices wandering the streets
of Baltimore looking for poor kids
whom he took into the stores
and bought them what they needed.

Here's yet another sermon to the choir:
You can take someone down
or just take them downtown.

Joel Glickman is a retired professor of music at Northland College where he still teaches part-time, plays saxophone and clarinet in the jazz band and spends considerable time in the joyful endeavor of writing poetry. His poems appear in numerous journals, including *Jerry jazz Musician* (online), and the baseball-specialized tandem — *Spitball* and *Minor Trips*. His book of poems, *Critters*, was published by Aji Press in 2022. Aji also released his poetry chapbook, *Finding Sibelius*, in 2024. He grew up in Green Bay which kindled his love of football which has given him a life rich in football memories, not limited to the Packers. He lives in Ashland, Wisconsin, with his wife Susan, empty nesters now, save for their small Bichon, Madeline.

November 22, 1963

by James Connolly

When Sister Vincent explains the beauty of the urn, its meter and rhyme, you are kept in the sound of her kind voice — and you fall into the dream of winning Friday night's game, the division championship — and then the killing: Sister Benigna on the classroom intercom, her voice announcing the death of the President in Dallas. You visit your father in his Y.M.C.A. room. He tells you that the history of the world is killing. He is dying. He says that he loves her, his wife, your mother. You are seventeen, too young to grieve lost love and assassination. The game, postponed, is nothing more than the snap of the ball, the clack of the helmets and the yards to gain. In five years, you will don fatigues and cradle an M-16. You will learn that what you need to know is how to survive and that all you know is what the Sisters have taught you.



James Connolly is the author of *Picking Up The Bodies*. He has published 100-plus poems and 18 short stories. He taught English for 48 years and played high school and college football.