

Black Swans

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600 words

(written for, and published in the Beacon Herald
several months ago – now slightly dramatized).

What a breath of fresh air to read Mike Savage's article, May 16, about the Black Swans Rugby Club. I went to a 'rugby' school where we executed any soccer sympathizers who entered our hallowed halls.

The Duke of Wellington said that the battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of (a school with impeccable credentials, but whose name has regrettably slipped my memory). During a short but spectacular military career, when I was listed among the fallen - of the other side, I once played rugby against a squadron of New Zealanders who removed their teeth and wrapped them in their handkerchiefs before kickoff. We assumed their teeth had all been knocked out during previous rugby seasons and sown in furrows to produce new players.

Many years after the military, I played recreational rugby with a famous rugby club. Our insignia was a white swan and the under 18s, those just learning such rugby choral works as 'Poor Little Angeline,' 'The Wild West Show,' or 'Abdul the Bull, Bull-Amir,' were called Cygnets. Unlike the Black Swans, we never lacked bodies – they ended up on stretchers outside the clubhouse. What we lacked were players.

Our club motto, 'Vini, vidi, vici', translates freely into Anglo-Saxon as 'Kick ahead, any head.' Indeed, as your article mentions, 'The thing about rugby is the camaraderie.' I specialized in this camaraderie every Saturday afternoon until I met my wife. We have now been married for fifty years and I haven't played rugby since she caught me naked singing 'The Muffin Man' standing on a table in the nurses lounge.

The romance started when I was caused to run into a goal post, face first. My future wife, who was picking over the wounded and slightly shop soiled, made the remark that the goal post had molded my facial bones into a more pleasing expression. As she had nursing experience I immediately accepted her assessment in the matter and we were duly married.

I doubt if I will ever play rugby again. At the age of 76, I have a delicate condition and my speed on the playing fields has gone with the wind. Recreational rugby has its limitations; you frequently lack bodies, you invariably lack players and you often lack a referee when the gentleman designated to officiate the game between thirty hooligans, suddenly abdicates and goes home.

Under such circumstances the social activities begin rather early and sometimes result in tragic consequences. One such episode occurred when we were homeward bound on the team bus from the Royal City of Windsor. Our acting captain had sniveled about our rotten performance (we had lost to Windsor, 85 to nil), when somebody yelled, "Debag the blighter." Which we did - dragging his pants off and confiscating them. When we stopped for tea, our acting captain came with us into the restaurant, sans pants. It is noteworthy that his lingerie was pastel in shade and edged with Honiton lace. We explained to the management that we didn't know who he was, keeping a straight face as we did so, and then handed him over to two officers of a rural constabulary who were thoroughly bewildered. The officers filled their notebooks with our statements that he had escaped from a lunatic asylum.

The thought of rugby in Stratford caused me to remark to my wife that the game was a great character builder. "And I assume you are one of the characters it built," she said, handing me my lunchtime pills and a glass of water.