

terback, the coach revamped the whole offense with trick plays that our arch rival hadn't seen when they'd scouted us earlier in the season. When we traveled to Peddie, I'd forgotten all about how I'd dreamed that this was the actual field where all my football fantasies would take place. In the locker room before the game, the coach came up to me and said, forcefully, "You're the captain."

The subtext was *act like it*. I had spent the whole season calling the defensive plays, but during practice week, the coaching staff decided to have Mouse call the plays, and I never understood why—perhaps to spread responsibility around; except, there wasn't enough time for him to learn. He kept calling them incorrectly. He'd call the play, then say, "Joe, what is it, left or right?"

And I'd answer in a pissed-off voice. That didn't help our team spirit.

When we lined up in uniform outside the visitors' locker room, I led the team out onto Peddie's field, but didn't know there was a tradition where the assistant would hand off the ball to the captain. I ran right by him. I was instructed that if we won the coin toss, to receive, and if we didn't, to take the wind in the fourth quarter. We lost the toss and when it came time to choose which end zone to defend, I pointed in the wrong direction. That was a harbinger of what was to come. In the first series, the opposing tackle hit me hard and brought his forearm up into my solar plexus and knocked the wind out of me. He was lighter than I, but could really hit. Peddie drove down the field and scored. When they got the ball again, they did the same thing. The rout was on.

All I could think was that I wanted it to be over. I just gave up. I played miserably, got knocked around, and the other team just ran over us. During the game, the defensive end next to me, a junior also named Chris, started to ride me. He kept saying, "Come on, Joe, you're the man out here. What are you going to do about it?"

I just wanted him to shut up. But he kept repeating it. Recently, while working a 12-step recovery program, I made a list of people I felt I owed amends to. He was on the list. In order to contact him, I tried calling the school to see if I could get his phone number, but they wouldn't give it to me. Finally, I wrote him this e-mail:

Dear Chris,

I've wanted to get in touch with you for a long time. I saw your e-mail address in the Blair Bulletin and decided to contact you. If you recall, we played football together, and I've always regretted our last game in '68. It was the Peddie game where we lost 54-6. I'm in a 12-step program now, and the 9th step is making amends to anyone we feel we may have harmed, or with whom our behavior bothered us. You may not

remember this, but during that game, we were lined up beside each other and you kept saying, "C'mon, Joe, you're the man out here!" At the time, I didn't want to be put on the spot. I felt defeated and couldn't muster the courage to rally myself. I've always regretted that I gave up. On that day, I suspected you could see that, and it was your competitive spirit to get me (the captain) fired up, and maybe the whole team.

I feel I owe you an amends, Chris. I've carried regret for that day, whether conscious or not, for 44 years. Will you accept my amends?

I probably owe an amends to the whole team, but I'll focus on the one person who saw into my heart that day, and say thank you for teaching me about myself. That day was a glimpse into character issues that I've had to face my whole life. Thanks for giving me that early insight to reflect back on.

Sincerely,

Joe Eastburn

Chris never responded to the e-mail. Did he receive it? I don't know. In 12-step parlance, that's none of my business. I made the amends and the rest of it is out of my control. I wish I could do more. I wish I could bend time and relive a day that would haunt me the rest of my life. Sadly, I can't make right what happened that day. What I can do is make today right.