

Tournament Legend

by Larry Strattner

“OK, OK, I'm a little messed up. I don't need you to tell me. It's my prescriptions, you know. Or maybe the booze. It seems like you can't get the good stuff anymore. Stuff where you don't get messed up. Shit, I don't know. Maybe I'm not watching where I get my stuff close enough. I need it when I need it and I don't have time to do product testing. You know what I mean? Anyway I am getting a little tired of feeling shitty. I'm not old and I feel, you know, old.

Course it could just be this bar. Henry's is about nine million years old and the guys in it have been here since it opened. Look at the grease on the wall behind the grill. Look at the clothes on the bums in here. I'll bet you there are ten years of dust on that shitty plant in the window. Course Henry didn't make it the whole nine million years cause Solly's been behind the stick long as I remember; and believe me he goes back to when I was fifteen. As long as I stayed at the back end of the bar, away from the door Solly didn't give a shit. Times have changed haven't they?

I know I look a little different now but I'm still Billy Godziewski. The Billy Godziewski I always was. Man I can hit a shot from forty feet. Snap! No rim. You can't. You got your Phi Beta Bullshit fraternity. Well, I got my own. My fraternity has guys like Jack the Shot and Dean the Dream. We don't think about stuff. We do it. While you're off dredging around in your shit, we're flying. I told my buddy Phil down at Bobo's the other day. “Man, we was jammin” We still jammin' I just hit a flat spot lately, you know. A bump. Everybody hits a bump here and there.

I figure when I get off the pain pills I'll walk on to a couple of tryouts. When they see my shot I should be in. I won't expect many minutes on the floor. Just get in games for a minute or two. Maybe just for the buzzer shot. Man, in seventy two I won five games with buzzer shots, Five! On the sports news they called the first one a Hail Mary. Hail your own Mary, you assholes. It was a sweet one from about thirty five feet. Snap! No net. And the shot didn't have a

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lot of arc to it either. People about shit when those flat ones go through. I know Tech did. It was a big game. You could hear the collective turds drop into their shorts when I hit it. "We'll be going to the playoffs" I thought "and you, oh you, you'll still be here on the platform. We'll see you. Our train is leaving now. Yeah!"

Most people love me , you know? To them I'm the edge. I'm out where the blade cuts. Out where most people would puke before they could make themselves do anything. Out in the pressure zone. I like being there. It all rises up around you. It's the dragon. The big bad wolf. And the hell with all of 'em. They're all the demons I fight off that you can't. I stare 'em in the eye and bring the ball past 'em. I shoot over 'em. I can see the basket when most guys can't see anything but the sweat in their eyes.

Lately I've been thinking about my game, you know? On a kind of higher level if you know what I mean. Beyond the ball handling and head fakes, you know. Thinking into the flow. I mean, why is it I'm so good? So I'm thinking about it and all of a sudden I realize something really strange, like I see it, like I'm some kind of Buddha-type guy you know? My shoes never squeaked on the floor like other guys. You always hear shoes squeaking during a game. But it isn't me bro. It must be I'm real soft on my feet and into the flow. I'm not forcing any turns or cuts or angles. I only jump an inch or two when I shoot and I never go inside. I've never dunked a ball, even in practice. I guess I can, but I never have. Dunking shit is for the punishment guys who have more muscles than brains. I'm about the points not about the showboating. I rarely get closer than the free throw line. From there, either hand, high or low, I've got you. But even as far out as the line I have to watch out for the rough stuff. Some guys can't play if they can't hurt you. I never let them see even if they do hurt me. I stare at them. Turn away. If the ref catches them I make the free throws I get. While I shoot I look at them. Most of those kind of guys have played a lot of street ball. They know I'm looking at them so they know they've cost themselves the points. Maybe even the game. They don't let up on me cause hurt's who

they are. But they do think twice the next time they take a run at me. I'm in their head. I get an edge.

Shit. I left my wallet in the car. You got enough there to spot me another drink? I'm good for it. Right Solly? Aren't I good for it? See I told you. Solly will tell you straight.

I can handle a couple more, no problem. I got no issues with handling a couple more. I've got experience, you know what I mean? Once in a while it gets me down. The trouble I had last year. The dead chick? Nobody knows what happened. Hell, I don't know what happened but they found us next to each other, you know. But nobody gave a shit because she was black. Nobody gives a shit about a black chick. Guys I play ball with are on the Force. They marked her off to an OD. Fine with me. I'm a player. I play ball. Know what I mean?

Thanks for the drink, man. I can use it today. I'm feeling a little down. My Mom came at me this morning. She gets a little crazy sometimes. I had to knock her down. I hate when rough stuff happens. It makes me feel bad. I don't know where she gets off with that shit. You'd think I done something wrong. I only slept a little late. I didn't hit her very hard. It was just an elbow like guys do under the rim. For chrissake she was beating on my chest. She's half as tall as I am. I think my elbow got her in the forehead. While she was sitting on the floor I got a few bucks from her jar on the counter and left. You need a little walking around money, you know what I mean? She'll get over it. She'll be over it by the time I get home.

Snowing pretty hard out there isn't it? It always snows during tournament season. Man, it's my favorite time of year. Time to find out whose balls are biggest. Who doesn't crack. Who can make the buzzer shots. And you know what? It's me, that's who. It's who I am. The buzzer shot boy. The boy with the balls. I remember when we caught that little cheerleader Mindy or Cindy or whatever her name was under the stands the year we beat Holy Name for the city title. She acted hot all the time. But we made the buzzer shot. We had her satin pants down in about two seconds and took the game right to her. I got to do her first. She was pretty shocked. I could see it in her

eyes like when you beat a guy to position, fake him out of his jock. Well, we faked old Cindy Mindy right out of her pants. They were still screwing her brains out when I left. They had some tape on her mouth but I could hear her yelling.

Jesus Christ you don't have to look at me that way. Don't be an asshole. We did it to those bitches all the time. They were more interested in being a cheerleader than they were in seeing us swing for porking them. Ole Cindy Mindy just put a little Vaseline on her snatch and left it all behind her. I'll bet we did at lest six or eight cheerleaders while I was playing and none of them ever said a word. Fuck them and their peer pressure. You know what I mean? You get what you can when you can. You'd do it too if you thought you could. And don't ever try and tell me different.

It all comes back to me when it snows like this. Making those buzzer shots, forcing the defender by me, getting clear, screwing those cheerleaders or any of the other little heifers we could cut out of the herd. Drinking. Smoking a little dope. Tournament days. There's nothing like 'em. And man, I was king of 'em. I was. I still could be you know? Just need to run some laps. Get in shape a little. Not too much 'cause I shoot from so far out I don't need to cover as much court going down. Then, Snap! No rim. You hear it? Nothing but net. One time in practice I side-stepped all the way around the three point line and took a shot each time I took a step. Made every single shot. Nothing but net. There's some shooting for you. Try it sometime. Forget stupid shit like Horse. Horse shit is what Horse is. Out on the three point line you find out who's a shooter real quick.

I remember the year I got the center from Bay West after the game. He worked me over bad at the top of the key but we still beat 'em. I beat him too, later in the parking lot. One nice stiff shot to the kneecap with an aluminum bat. Got an early start on softball season. I'll bet he wasn't giving anybody a hard time for a while. You know I said I hate rough stuff from those schoolyard players. He might think twice about that shit in the future. You think?

Hey! Look who's here! My bro's Petey and Lil' Mel. How's it goin' dudes? This here's my frien...What's your name again? Right, Larry.

This here's my friend Larry. Larry's been spotting me a few drinks. I'm a little light on cash. You won't be able to tap into me today, you dirt bags. Unless...What do you say Larry? Stand up a couple of rounds for Petey and Lil Mel here? They played ball with me for a couple of years. Good inside but no shot like mine. I'm the tournament legend, you know. They know some stories though. I'll bet they know some ones you'll like.

Hey! Where you goin'? Whaddya mean you've got to "run"? What kind of pussy ass bullshit is "got to run?" At least spot us a round here. Hey. You limp dick, cheap ass motherfucker. Damn! People just don't have any respect anymore..."

