

FOOTBALL IN THE MIDDLE AGES

Or

"He was the 'Man with the Golden Arm' and the Giants gave him a one-way ticket to Palookaville."

Scene from THE CAROUSEL

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EXT. NJ STREETS - CONTINUOUS

ETHAN CROSSE (50) and his chauffeur MARCUS (42) are on their daily commute to work. The quiet suburban streets are coming to life. Children pile into SUV's to be driven by sleepy mothers. Dark suited men with portfolios run to their cars to beat the traffic on their daily commute to the big city.

INT. LIMOUSINE - CONTINUOUS

MARCUS

Sleep OK last night, Mr. C.?

ETHAN

Nah! Today's meeting with the mayor must have been on my mind. No matter how many times you do it, you still wonder if this will be the time you reach into the top hat and find the rabbit missing.

MARCUS

You've always managed to come out on top, Mr. Crosse. I've never known you to lose at anything! Why worry?

ETHAN

Oh Marcus ... you, a former boxer, should know better than anyone. Fear is a powerful motivator. The more you succeed ...
... the more you fear losing.

EXT. STREET - TENAFLY, NJ - CONTINUOUS

Marcus spots former client, BO BELLINO (42) standing in front of his driveway, looking up the block with one hand shading his eyes, the other holding a football. Marcus slows down to a crawl and gawks at Bo's odd pose.

INT. LIMOUSINE - CONTINUOUS

MARCUS

What the bajeezus is Bo doin'?

ETHAN

At least the man with the golden arm has a grip on it ... this time!

MARCUS

Who can forget those two fumbles against the Rams in the playoffs?

ETHAN

(spoken like Brando)

Yeh ... twice in the last three minutes and the Giants gave him a one-way ticket to Palookaville.

Marcus giggles.

EXT. STREET - TENAFLY, NJ - CONTINUOUS

Bo is dressed in a dark suit, suspenders and power tie. Marcus rolls down his window to tease about the pose and Bo responds with a sheepish grin and a wave.

MARCUS

Hey, Bo! It looks like your split-end forgot to turn in!

Ethan opens his window to chime in with a friendly taunt.

ETHAN

That'll make a helluva photo in the Giant yearbook! I can see the caption now ...

It's been twenty years and Ole' #13 is still waiting for his receivers to get open!

BO

Hey, gimme' a break! My car won't start and I'm waiting for AAA to get a jump.

ETHAN

I guess you're holding the football just in case the tow truck guy doesn't recognize you.

BO

Very funny! I've been waiting for over a half-hour and I got a meeting in Fort Lee in just twenty minutes. Hey, Do I know you?

ETHAN

Sort of ...
Hop in, we'll drop you off.

BO

I wouldn't want to take you out of your way.

ETHAN

Are you kidding? Anything's better than work. We'll let the mayor wait. Come on!

BO

OK, thanks. Hey, Marcus!!

Bo walks toward the limo.

ETHAN

No ... wait a minute!!

BO

Really ... if it's a problem --

ETHAN

-- No, that's not it. You still got that football in your hand!

Bo looks down at his hand and is surprised to find that he is still clutching the football.

ETHAN

I think we need some closure.
You should complete your pass
before we go.

BO

You gotta' be kidding?

Ethan jumps out of the car prancing with a schoolboy bounce
and signals Bo that it's time to play.

ETHAN

Its third and long, the clock's
running --

BO

-- What the??

ETHAN

Come on! Come on!
I'll do a post pattern.

Bo eyeballs Ethan's strikingly white hair.

BO

Do you think this is wise? It's
probably been a while since YOU'VE
been thrown a pass!

ETHAN

Hey, leave my love-life outta'dis!

Just give me twenty yards and I'll
run under it! Come on!
Call the signals!

Bo shrugs, walks to the far side of the street, then
crouches, holds the ball in position as if it were to be
received from a imaginary center.

BO

Ready ... set ...
... 19, 19 ... red 49, red 49 ...
... hut, hut.

Bo pulls the ball in and drops back to pass. For those few
seconds, the intensity of a pro quarterback returns. In a

classic football stance, he follows the path of his receiver like a steely-eyed hawk.

Ethan stretches his six foot three inch frame into long galloping strides, a paradoxical vision of a man in an elegant suit. His wingtips barely touch the ground as they make a SANDPAPER SOUND on the asphalt.

MARCUS

Go, go Mr. C!

Ethan flies effortlessly; Bo rears back and heaves the pigskin mightily with a DEEP GRUNT. The ball sails deep, spinning perfectly, seemingly far beyond his grasp.

MARCUS

Go Mr. C!! Go, you can get it!

Ethan looks back just once, increases his stride and the ball sails over his shoulder onto his fingertips. He pulls the football into his gut, strides another ten yards and spikes the ball in triumph!

Bo and Ethan pump their fists in the air and ROAR with male pride. Marcus lunges halfway out his window.

MARCUS

Whooo ... hooo!! What a catch!
Great catch Mr. C! Whooo ... hooo!!

Ethan turns around and catches his breath with hands on knees. He directs Bo to the middle of the street. Bo follows his signal but throws his hands in the air to question Ethan's purpose. Ethan aligns himself in a punter's stance, takes three steps and booms a punt in perfect spiral. It is kicked so high that Bo looks up in amazement. He is overcome by a determined look and drifts back to catch it.

MARCUS

Holy Jesus!! What a punt!

Bo backpedals, fades to the left, feeling his way onto the sidewalk and his neighbor's front lawn. Bo has a beat on it when the neighbor's hedges interrupt his backward path. Bo tumbles over the hedges onto his back, the ball landing just beyond his reach. It bounces high off the lawn and

caroms off the neighbor's house. An angry lady shakes her fist from her front door.

Bo lies motionless on his back, legs draped over the hedges, seemingly unconscious. Marcus and Ethan come running to Bo's aide.

ETHAN

Bo, are you OK?

MARCUS

Wake up Bo! Come on! You OK?

ETHAN

Hey, don't fool around!

Bo ... this is not funny ... wake up!

Ethan pats Bo's cheek. A sly smile forms on Bo's face, then his eyes snap open widely and he laughs boisterously! They are overcome with the contagion of his laughter.

Ethan extends a hand to help and Bo grabs it, pulls Ethan tumbling to the ground behind him. In one unbroken motion, Ethan rolls through the fall and bounces up giggling. Marcus is convulsed in laughter. Bo lets Ethan help him up and they all laugh heartily.

They playfully shadowbox, lightly punching one another about the shoulders. Bo waves apologetically to the neighbor, who is still watching them closely.

MARCUS

Let's go Bo, we'll get you to your meeting. It's too bad about the suit. I know a dry cleaner --

BO

-- That's all right!
People are used to seeing me with grass stains on my back.

They chortle at Bo's self-deprecating joke. Bo and Ethan try to dust each other off without much success. Ethan escorts Bo to the limo, still with football in hand.

ETHAN

What's with the football, anyway?

BO

My kid left it in the driveway.

In high school I walked around with a football in my hands all the time; I was told it would condition me not to fumble.

ETHAN

Oh-h-h-h.

BO

As you probably know ...
... it didn't work!

ETHAN

Hey man ... that was just one game.
Everybody fumbles.

INT. LIMOUSINE - CONTINUOUS

Bo and Ethan get in the back seat, the journey continues. Ethan notices a scrawny teenager in old-fashioned sweats, canvas sneakers and an old Brooklyn Dodger baseball cap. The lad is watching them intently with a sullen, lifeless expression on a face marked by dark circles under the eyes.

ETHAN

By the way, I'm Ethan Crosse.

BO

I met you at a Giants alumni dinner, a few years ago. I don't remember your hair being so white!

ETHAN

(spoken like Karloff)
Life demands its price! You have yet to learn, my friend ... white hair grows as a black heart fades!

BO

Strange answer!

ETHAN

What you been doin' these days?

BO

I'm a sports agent, doin' pretty well! Got a few high-profile clients, but forget about loyalty, they'll be gone tomorrow.

Nice to see you again, Marcus.

MARCUS

We had some wild times back then.

BO

Yeh wild, but not profitable! A first round pick and I was lucky to make a few extra bucks for an occasional car dealer promo.

Seems like even that ended before I broke in my first razor!

ETHAN

It's tough playing in New York. You never got a chance to show your stuff. You deserved better.

BO

Yeh, thanks. I'm doin' OK though, making a real nice income and I still get to hang with the jocks. The downside is that alot of 'em can be real tiresome prima donnas.

Speaking of jocks ...
Where the hell did you learn how to punt like that? You blasted it over sixty yards ... if a foot.

ETHAN

By the way, where are we going?

BO

To the Holiday Inn on Route#4.
Is that OK?

ETHAN

Not a problem.

BO

You had to play some college ball.
Few pros can put that much air
under a punt. Were you drafted?

EXT. HIGHWAY - PALISADES PARKWAY - CONTINUOUS

They navigate the pleasant, tree-lined highway bordered by
grassy islands and tall trees exploding rainbows of color.

INT. LIMOUSINE - CONTINUOUS

ETHAN

Do 'ya think the Giants could use
a middle-aged punter?

BO

Why the false modesty?
I'm tellin' you ...
... that was NFL hang-time!

ETHAN

OK, OK! It's actually a bit of a
story from my college days ...

I never played organized football,
it's too regimented; I'm not well
suited for team sports --

BO

-- Is there a short version?

ETHAN

Ok, Ok! I bet two of my friends
that I'd make our college team as
a walk-on. Foolish bet ... they had
been starters in high school.

Never having played football, I
figured, better learn how to kick.

EXT. STREETS - ENGLEWOOD CLIFFS, NJ - CONTINUOUS

They exit the parkway and the George Washington Bridge
looms in the horizon. The only sound is the THUMPING of
the tires over the expansion joints of the street.

INT. LIMOUSINE - CONTINUOUS

ETHAN

I practiced all summer, made the team and my friends were cut, but there was a downside to winning! Our first game, Penn State gave us a licking and the starting punter got creamed in the second quarter, so ... on my first and last punt ...

EXT. QUICK FLASH: COLLEGE STADIUM - FALL 1979

Ethan, the punter, muffs the snap, chases after the ball, picks it up and runs helter-skelter, from sideline to sideline with exhausted linemen in frantic pursuit. Ethan's comical high-kicking style of running is whipping the intoxicated crowd into frenzied cheering.

INT: QUICK FLASH: BROADCAST BOOTH - CONTINUOUS

A football BROADCASTER excitedly does rapid fire play-by-play into an old style microphone. He is laughing and shaking his head as he speaks.

BROADCASTER

Young went down the last time ... the second string punter is in ... he's waiting for the snap and sure looks awful nervous. The way State's been busting into the backfield, I'll bet he's wishing Brad Young was still in there!

The snap ... uh-oh ... it's right through his hands! He chases it down ... picks it up ... he's got linemen closing in from both ends and he's thirty yards behind the line ... with nowhere to run. Morris and Grable got him lined up ... no wait ... he spins ... circles back ... he's running for the right sideline ... Johnson and Lewis converge ... he spins again ... he's high-kickin' it to the other

(MORE)

(BROADCASTER - CONT'D)
 sideline! Holy cannoli ... look at
 him go! He's not gaining any
 yards ... but he's burning up the
 field! Penn State's gonna need
 Wily Coyote to bring him down!
 There he goes again ... reversing
 field ... he's leavin'em in a cloud
 of dust ... MEEP, MEEP!

INT. QUICK FLASH: STUDENT UNION - FALL 1979

Ethan runs into some college mates in the student union and
 gets a ribbing. They tease him with the tucked in wings
 and the signature MEEP MEEP of the Roadrunner character.

END QUICK FLASH

INT. LIMOUSINE - THE PRESENT - CONTINUOUS

ETHAN

From that day on ... I was known as
 The Roadrunner. Whether it was in
 the cafeteria, hallways or in
 class, no one referred to me by
 name, not even my professors! I
 was simply acknowledged by the
 MEEP, MEEP honking of the cartoon
 character ... nothing else.

EXT. HIGHWAY - FORT LEE, NJ - CONTINUOUS

They progress to near the GW Bridge, get on the highway,
 make the turnaround to drop Bo at the Holiday Inn.

INT. LIMOUSINE - CONTINUOUS

BO

Hey Marcus ... is this guy always
 such a windbag!

MARCUS

No ... not usually! I mean --

BO

-- I know there's an ending.

ETHAN

Ok, Ok! I quit the next day!

INT. QUICK FLASH: COLLEGE CAFETERIA - FALL 1979

Ethan's two friends appear in the college cafeteria in a Mongolian warlord look, with shaved heads, braided ponytails and Fu-Manchus. Their college-mates whistle, cheer and stomp their approvals of this daring new look.

ETHAN (V.O.)

My friends paid the bet, as agreed, by shaving their heads, but embellished the humiliation with ponytails and Fu-Manchus. They unveiled their Taras Bulba getup in the cafeteria ...
... to a standing ovation.

END QUICK FLASH

INT. LIMOUSINE - THE PRESENT - CONTINUOUS

ETHAN

The look became the new rage and my pals were Big-Men-On-Campus, invited to all the parties, rushed by every frat. My winnings were \$200.00, spent on books and a semester of MEEP, MEEP's to endure wherever I went.

EXT. HOLIDAY INN - CONTINUOUS

The car pulls in front of the Holiday Inn and Bo hops out.

INT. LIMOUSINE - CONTINUOUS

Bo smiles, laughs and leans back in to thank Ethan.

BO

Thanks for the ride. One wouldn't know by lookin' at ya, but you're a real fun guy! Let's get together sometime and drive a few golf balls.

ETHAN

I'll drive a bucket of balls
anytime, but don't expect me to
don the pantaloons.

Hey, what'd you mean by wouldn't
know by lookin' at ya?

EXT. HOLIDAY INN - CONTINUOUS

Bo walks to the front door of the Inn, stops and turns to
face the car. He is surprised to find the football still
in his hand. Bo rears back and throws a perfect pass right
through the open rear window of the limo.

INT. LIMOUSINE - CONTINUOUS

Ethan catches the pass and makes the touchdown sign.

EXT. HOLIDAY INN - CONTINUOUS

Bo tucks his arms in tightly, flips his hands out like
little wings and juts his neck forward like a bird.

BO

MEEP, MEEP!

INT. LIMOUSINE - CONTINUOUS

The car pulls away with Ethan and Marcus guffawing.

MARCUS

It's a shame what happened to Bo.

ETHAN

I know that Bo didn't get a fair
shake at football, but who's to
say he's not better off?

He makes a good living and as you
once told me, he has a beautiful
wife that still adores him.

(MORE)

(ETHAN - CONT'D)

If Bo had extended his NFL days,
living the transient life of a
moderately talented quarterback,
he might've lost those things far
more valuable than a journeyman's
football career.