



Paw Talk

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I want to begin this issue of PAW TALK with one of the best “Clemson stories” I have ever heard. It’s about love, loyalty, and commitment, all for Clemson. It’s the latest story about Al Cameron. Al was manager of the 1939 Clemson football team which defeated Boston College in the 1940 Cotton Bowl. Al will walk down “The Hill” prior to the Boston College game this fall (October 8). He will be 96 years old the next day.

Walking down “The Hill” is a serious matter for Al. When you talk to him about Clemson football, the 6-3 win over Boston College in 1940, or his unconditional love for Clemson, he gets a little “teary”. Al is already “preparing” for his October 8 walk down “The Hill”. Vanna, his wife, tells me that they have a regular, weekly, regimen in which they are “getting in shape”. I use the word “they”, because Al’s preparation includes not only Al, but also Vanna and several health-care professionals. They have frequent appointments with a physical therapist, a cardiac nurse, an orthopedist, and a geriatric specialist, and the sole purpose of this “team” of six is to get Al in shape to walk down “The Hill”.

I’ve seen grown men get emotional and cry when they tell how they felt as a player, standing at the top of “The Hill”, just prior to running down it to Frank Howard Field in front of a sell-out crowd of people in orange. I know how I feel each year as I host reunion teams and walk down “The Hill”. Consequently, when I talk to Al Cameron and look into his determined eyes, there is absolutely no doubt that he will be in his “best shape” on October 8 as he walks down “The Hill”. To say that Al Cameron is a Clemson Tiger would be a gross “understatement.”

Since the inception of PAW TALK, several articles have discussed “team work”, “teammates”, etc. George Bennett passed me a copy of the Spring 2011 issue of “Inside AnMed Health” recently. It includes an excellent article titled “UnlikelyTeammates”. It’s the story of Jake Nicolopoulos and speech therapist, Andrea Storie, and how the two became a “winning team.”

The article begins, “Since signing up for YMCA sports at age 6, Jake Nicolopoulos has always been part of a team. Normal talent, hard work, and a love of sport made him a standout linebacker at T.L. Hanna High School. He drew attention from scouts, and during

his senior year, he received an offer to play football for his dream team, the Clemson Tigers. But when Jake suffered a stroke in December 2009, just after his 18th birthday, he became an unwitting member of a new team. This team was comprised of health care professionals, family and friends, bound not by athletic prowess, but by the common goals of, initially, saving Jake's life and later, helping him regain lost abilities and independence."

The article continues, "One of the most constant members of 'Team Jake' has been Andrea Storie, a speech language pathologist, at AnMed Health Rehabilitation Hospital. Storie began working with Jake in April 2010."

"From the time I first heard about Jake, I just had this feeling and hope that we were meant to work together," Storie said. Jake's Mom, Ann Louise, recalled, "Everyone who was familiar with the severity of Jake's stroke and who knew of Andrea Storie would send messages to us about her."

"Andrea adopted a real-world approach with Jake's therapy by using topics and items from his life, rather than workbooks," the article continues. "The two talked about sports and Jake's friends, and Andrea read sentences from 'Sports Illustrated' and reviewed their meanings with him. They examined super market ads to associate pictures and words, and as Jake improved, read and ordered from restaurant menus."

Eventually, Jake was ready for more intensive therapy in a group setting, and Storie recommended the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago. In October 2010, Jake spent a month there, and Storie was confident that the individual, group and computer based sessions would "tap into Jake's competitive spirit."

Today, "Jake understands complex spoken paragraphs and can communicate in complete phrases. When he starts school at Clemson this fall, he'll support his Tiger teammates from the sidelines." The article emphasizes that, "In preparation for his role as a team encourager, Jake and Storie have mastered a number of football axioms." The article points out that key to Jake's recovery has been his fearlessness, his determination, and also Andrea Storie. "When asked about the obvious respect she and the Nicolopoulos family have developed for each other, Andrea remarked, 'I guess that's just our team spirit'"

In a June 24 issue of "Family Matters", I briefly mentioned the "Wounded Warriors" and the tour they had been given of Clemson athletic facilities on June 23. I promised a more complete description at a later date, because it is always a very moving experience, and a "reaching out experience" that everyone needs to know about. It is most appropriate that these "heroes" were on our campus just a few days before we celebrate our nation's independence. Last Thursday, 39 Marines (37 male and 2 female) and a Navy Corpsman were given a tour of the West Endzone facilities, and then we enjoyed a short program and nice lunch together. Immediately after lunch, they departed for Camp Lejeune. This is the third consecutive year that we have hosted the "Wounded Warriors", and I can state with a high degree of confidence, that while they enjoyed themselves, had a great time, and appreciated our efforts on their behalf, all of us who served as their hosts were the real beneficiaries of the many "blessings" of the day.

Again this year, the folks at Keowee Key and surrounding areas opened their homes to "Wounded Warriors", many of whom had just returned from Afghanistan with severe wounds. Tim Callahan and Joyce Tarman were co-hosts, representing the Keowee Key

folks. Things started happening on Monday, June 20, when the “Warriors” were led through Clemson by 404 motorcycles, occupied mostly by veterans. The City of Clemson, Pickens County and Clemson University gave them a royal welcome, as every intersection was blocked, people stood on the sides of streets, sat in lawn chairs along the way, and the University Fire Department hoisted a gigantic American flag, so everyone passing down Highway 93 onto the campus passed directly beneath it. Joyce and I managed a ring-side “seat”, as we parked at the top of the 123/93 ramp and watched the procession. As the long caravan passed through, everyone stood, many saluted, we all waved, and a good number let the tears flow. 40 “heroes” were passing our way, and we gave them a “Clemson welcome.” Monday through Wednesday was a time of “R and R”(rest and recreation) for the “Warriors”, as they fished, swam, water skied, and ate lots of fine food. The last day, Thursday, has traditionally been reserved for a tour of Clemson Athletics, and Bill D’Andrea always makes sure the resources of Clemson Athletics are made available to honoring these “heroes.”

Coach David Abernethy gave demonstrations on several strength training machines in the “weight room”, and a couple of the Marines assumed the role of a defensive tackle in hitting the machines. When David hit the machine with the force of his 300 plus pounds, even the toughest of the Marines was impressed. In the WestZone Club of the 4th floor, Athletic Director, Dr. Terry Don Phillips, welcomed the group, and John Seketa pulled his “magic” again and had each of the names of the “Warriors” continually scrolling through the gigantic screen of PAW VISION.

Col. (Ret.) Sandy Edge told the group of Clemson’s military heritage as well as the significance of The Scroll of Honor Memorial. It was pointed out that of the 479 names now listed on the Scroll as having made the ultimate sacrifice, 52 were student-athletes during their days at Clemson. Mathematics Professors, Dr. Joel Brawley and Dr. Brad Russell, then sang a “moving” song written by Brawley, titled “We Remember”. Sung to the tune of “The Ballard of the Green Beret”, the song tells the story of those Clemson students who served and died for their country in years past.

Defensive Football Coach, Dan Brooks, followed with his welcome and a few words relative to his experiences when he served in Army Special Forces. Because the Marines knew Dan had “been there”, he was a big hit.

During an excellent meal provided by ARAMARK, the 4th floor televisions showed a video of last year’s Military Appreciation Day activities, including the 4-ship F-16 fly-by. There was a lot of good natured kidding with 3 Marines who admitted to being Gamecock fans. Andrew Smith, a Marine whose home is Liberty, was one of the group, and his parents were also our guests. Andrew exemplifies our young people who are patriotic and committed to serving our country, and told of being a rising senior at College of Charleston when he felt a “call” to join the Marines, so he could “give back” to his country. He was wounded in Afghanistan recently, and had a very severe leg injury as evidenced by numerous stitches from his upper leg to his ankle. Andrew will return to College of Charleston, graduate and then attend law school. Our “old” friend, Gunnery Sergeant Chris Ovanek, was also in attendance. “The Gunnie” was with the group last year, and it was good to renew friendships.

Prior to their loading the bus for their trip back to Camp Lejeune, John Seketa gave each of the “Warriors” an orange Military Appreciation Day T shirt. In turn, they all autographed a large Clemson Corps flag, which will be given to The Clemson Corps for their display.

Pictures were made of the group, and they have been forwarded to the “Warriors” and Keowee Key families.

I wish every Letterwinner could share in the “Wounded Warrior” event at least once. The lessons which we all learn through our participation in sports pay huge dividends in every walk of life. Many of the “Warriors” were probably not athletes, but they all possess the virtues of commitment, dedication, loyalty, and team work. It makes one proud of Clemson Athletics and Clemson University to be a part of such an event. The bond between Clemson academics, athletics and its military heritage remains strong and inseparable.

I hope you have a happy, safe July 4th. GO TIGERS!!!

**GO TIGERS!!!
Charlie Bussey**

