



FENCE-SETTER

Late in my sophomore year of high school, the Defensive Line coach was recruiting me pretty heavily. I'd played the year before, but I was really too skinny and not very good. After season, though, I put on a good twenty or thirty pounds by lifting weights and eating these 'mother-sized' heavily glazed sweet rolls from the school cafeteria. Two—every day. I wasn't huge, by any means, but big enough for an outside linebacker spot. Big enough, at least, to make me a worthy adversary.

So I thought sure, why not. I'm older, bigger, smarter. I can do this game. Bust some heads. Kick some ass. Maybe work out some sexual frustration that a coming of age adolescent gets when he's not getting any.

I decided to sign on the dotted line. The head coach's office was in the bowels of the Physical Education building. I swaggered down the never-ending stairs and thru the sweat perfumed corridor armed with the cojones of an ancient Gladiator prepared to do battle. And it was there, in the deep recesses of that jock-stenched arena, I learned about The Franklin Philosophy of Fences.

"You're not one of them Fence-Setters, are ya son?"

He was referring to my alleged inability to apply myself in certain situations.

"I'm sorry. A Fence-What?"

I knew damn well what he said. I was just kinda hoping I could get him to say it again. *Fence-Setter*. I liked the way he said it.

"A Fence-Setter. Someone who always sets the fence. Never can seem to establish himself in any blah blah blah ..."

Immediately I thought to ask Coach Franklin what kind of Fence he meant. Wood, Steel, Barbed, Spiked? An extremely important piece of information, I thought, to determine whether I was going to 'set' the Fence, or whether I was going to take up a tactical position on one side or the other.

Also, the length of time I was to 'set' said Fence. Would this be a daily routine, say Monday thru Friday—Nine to Five? Or one of those 'round the clock' gigs—Twenty-Four Seven? Big difference between the two.

"...think you're gonna just come in here and throw on a jersey..."

Could I stand up, or walk around on the Fence. Would I have to sleep on it. You'd gotta give me breaks, right? And if I were, say, on one side of the Fence, would I have to stay on that side. Or could I possibly jump over to the other side of the Fence. Or would I then just be stuck on that new side of the Fence...

“...take action, bust your hump. Hustle, Hustle, Hustle!”

Whoa. What'd he just say? Do the—What ?? No way. Too much. I cut him off.

“Hey Coach, thanks and all. But I really don't think this game is right for me.”

I thanked him for his time and 'sorry to have bothered you' stuff. Then closed the door behind me and started down the hallway.

I don't even know 'The Hustle.'