



THE DARK SIDE OF SPORTS. A PERSONAL TRAGEDY

By Kerry Schmidt 02-13-2005

We are now in what I call the “dark time” in sports.

Football is over until late summer. The NBA means zilch until June, the steroid boys of baseball don’t really get warmed up until about the time training camps open, and only March Madness, for two weekends, give us any ray of light.

Actually there is one other. There in no hockey! Bet you did not even notice. To me, this is a good thing. I can turn on ESPN and not have to listen to hours of boring hockey info. Hockey games of TV had ratings lower than the Poker shows and even lower than the Westminster Dog show.

But this column is about a very dark personal, dark side of sports.

Except for the Patriots, who defy the logic of parity in the NFL, we have seen teams on top one day, in the tank the next.

In 2003, the Raiders were butt-kicked by the Buccaneers. Since then, neither team has made the playoffs.

But the personal and really dark side concerns one particular former Raider player.

Some of you may remember the story that broke on January 26, 2003, the day of the Super Bowl between the above-mentioned teams.

The Raiders’ All-Pro 6’ 3, 360 pound center, Barrett Robbins missed the game. The team tried to hush it up, but it came out that he had gone down to Tijuana, Mexico on a drinking binge, and spent SB Sunday in a hospital’s psychiatric ward, under a suicide watch.

Fast forward to today. Robbins again lies in a hospital bed, this time strapped down, tubes everywhere, in stable but critical condition after being shot in the heart and lung. There are two policemen on guard outside his room.

He was shot by police after they responded to a burglary call in an office building housing a night club. They found the burly Texan hiding in a women’s bathroom. Trying to apprehend him, the four cops were body slammed and trashed by Robbins until one shot him.

What caused this terrible tragedy?

Robbins suffers from a severe mental illness. He is bi-polar.

His condition can be traced back to his college days at TCU. In addition to the mental illness, Robbins ingested heavy amounts of steroids and was “since high school,” according to his family, a heavy drinker.

His dangerous diagnosis can be treated with several medications, but Robbins would often not take them. Add in the alcohol and other drugs, and, doctors say, you have a very dangerous equation.

The first obvious sign of this came when he was in college. He was found wandering incoherently in an auto dealership lot. He was admitted to a psychiatric hospital and treated for mental illness. There were other such incidents.



The Raiders drafted him in the second round in 1995. Bruce Allen, then a Raiders senior assistant, was asked if they knew of his problem(s). "Let me just saywe're aware of everything in this era," said Allen.

The Raiders, known for signing questionable players, liked his toughness. "He had a real mean streak," said Allen.

Robbins met his future wife, Marisa in 1995 and they married in 1997. They have two daughters, four and six.

She tells of one time in 1996 when he was sent home before a game versus Denver when he was found dazed and confused. Incoherent, he did not even know what city he was in. They put him on a plane which stopped in Salt Lake City, where he ate a meal and was arrested when he failed to pay for it. "When I got there," Marisa said, "he had peas in his ear and was saving them for me. He alternately thought I was his wife, a teacher or his best friend, 'Jimbo.'"

On the way to the airport, when they would stop at a red light, "he would get out and say, 'thanks for the ride,'" she said.

He missed several other games in the next five years. The Raiders said he had the flu.

In 2002, he had several major incidents, and he failed a drug test.

In 2003 – he was no longer in the NFL - he again stopped taking his meds, and the downhill descent was swift.

Teammates, friends and family tired to reason with him, with no success.

His wife finally moved out in the summer of 2004, took their two daughters, moved back to Southern California and got a restraining order. She filed for divorce in November. He would call her and talk of suicide.

He agreed to go to a detox center in Malibu after being arrested in San Francisco.

He never made it. Instead, he took off to South Beach in Miami where his friend Jimbo was, and imbibed in several days of heavy drinking and barhopping. Jimbo tried to get him to stop, but when that failed, he flew to L.A., leaving Robbins, off his med, drinking heavily and alone.

The sad scenario ended with the altercation in the women's bathroom.

Marisa flew down and saw him in Florida. With tears in her eyes, she said, "I want to remind everyone that Barrett is not a bad man. He is not a potential murderer, he's not a burglar or a vandal. He's just a very sick man."

When he was on his meds, friends say he was a gentle giant, friendly and warm.

But whatever demons beckoned, he succumbed.

His attorney says mental illness will be the defense in whatever trial is held, if Robbins lives.

For all the great, positive stories that came from last week's SB and throughout all sports, there also is the dark side. In Robbins' case, it was like a black hole in space, an abyss that led to ruin.