

A Pregnant Chad Meets The Pine Tar Rule

by John Farrow

You don't have to get snippy about it! Perry Pettifogger thought he had heard and seen it all, but little did he know what was yet to come.

As a general rule, runners were as easy-going as they come. Measure the course, start the race on time, have something to eat and drink afterwards, hand out medals based on finish order.

He especially liked a race scored with plain old index cards. Number the cards for however many runners there were in the race and hand them out one by one as they crossed the finish line. Then all they had to do was write their name on the card and drop it in a box for their age group.

And using computer punch cards, something suggested by a kid at the university, was a big improvement. The runner didn't even have to write his name on the card (some always did have trouble with that one) -- they just punched out their race number, put the card in the right box and the computer did the rest.

Lately, however, Perry had noticed some subtle changes. Not changes like the turning of the leaves in the Fall or the rainbow in the sky after a storm. Those he never grew tired of and, in a small way, they seemed to say to him that things were right in the world.

No, it was changes like runners who showed up for races with their attorneys. This, Perry knew, was generally not a good sign.

As a race director, Perry especially did not like dealing with runners who reminded him of Benjamin J. Doverington III from school - Ben Dover to those who knew him - the smarmy, goody-goody teacher's pet from hell. *Oh, Teacher. Do we get extra credit for turning in our term paper early? I'm already finished.* Perry, of course, generally didn't even have a term paper topic until the week it was due.

But now the Ben Dovers of the world were showing up at his races. Would he never be rid of them? Where was the justice in all of this? Where would it all end?

Take last week. Clyde Siedenstucker had been in town from Florida and couldn't understand how to fill out the finish line card. All he had to do was punch out his three-digit race number on a computer card. However, after lingering over it for the better part of an hour, and without a word to anyone, he finally turned it

in without any numbers punched. There were, however, a lot of dents all over the card. *That's the way we do these things in Florida*, he announced.

But when he wasn't listed in the final results, he noisily claimed that he had been disenfranchised and threatened a Civil Rights lawsuit. *You should be able to figure out what I meant*, he said.

Now Clyde was someone who could play 10 bingo cards at one time without missing a number, handicap a dozen horses in the Trifecta at Hialeah Park, and every morning take 37 different colored pills in varying quantities and never mess up, but he could not for the life of him figure out how to punch a three-digit number on a computer card.

To top it off, he claimed that to be fair to everyone, the race should be run all over again. But Perry, remembering the Pine Tar Rule, disallowed the protest.

The Pine Tar Rule comes from baseball, but it has universal application. Simply stated, it says that any complaint must be brought while something can still be done about it. It seems that a few years ago, George Brett of the Kansas City Royals hit a home run against the Yankees. After Brett rounded the bases, Billy Martin, the Yankees manager, complained that Brett's bat had too much pine tar on it, was therefore an illegal bat and the home run should be disallowed. (The rules require that pine tar be at least 14" from the fat end of the bat.)

The umpire measured the bat, found that the pine tar was indeed too close to the end, called Brett out and disallowed the home run, whereupon Brett went ballistic with his best imitation of Mike Tyson. But the commissioner of baseball (they had one then) promptly reversed the umpire, saying that you had to complain about something you can see on a bat before the bat is used in the game.

That was good enough for Perry. Clyde had run the race. He hadn't asked anyone for help with his finish line card. It was just too late. Plus, no one is that stupid.

Sometimes Perry wondered if a growing society truly needed more rules, and hence more lawyers. Probably it just needed more common sense and personal responsibility. □

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