

The Danville News
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"Running Clock"
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What was most surprising were all the media time-outs. Five of us, friends since High School, rendezvoused at Madison Square Garden to watch two Big East games, Xavier versus U Conn, Seton Hall versus St. John's. Coyne and I, in the same trade, chuckled while watching the Roman Catholic priests circle their teams during time-out.

The tickets were freebies. Coyne's son organizes the Big East tournament. It was my first basketball game above High School level, but I'm jock enough to appreciate how mature team players adapt and adjust within the time allotted them. My only gripe about basketball is how the final minutes can drag into six hours. I'm a soccer guy. Give me a running, continuous clock, with added stoppage time at the discretion of the referee.

What you don't see from TV sport highlights are the number of time-outs in tournament basketball. Freshmen 'go-fers' rush to unfold the chairs on the court for the players to sit and listen to coach. Nor do you see the number of missed shots, nor the pep band going wild, drones flying throughout the arena, nubile cheerleaders doing backflips when a free throw is made, gimmicks staged to amuse the crowd during the time-outs, fans selected to play musical chairs. Round they dribble, music stops, they rush to make a basket, when they do they race back to claim a chair. The last person exits, a chair removed.

There should have been a sixth joining us for the games and dinner afterwards at the Tick Tock Diner, but Bill Lasher died in March, 2015. A chair removed. My diary reports how Murano phoned me twice. Bill's wife, another friend from High School, was one of the teammates, me the rookie. Judy helped navigate two of us who have lost our inner Jersey through the Iselin Metro Station into Penn Station. Lasher was the most gifted among us. Artist, lawyer, brilliant, with a wit that never quit. His obituary lauds him as generous, caring. Ignoring the Vice-principal's threats, Bill and I ditched school to attend the January 10, 1969, ticker-tape parade celebrating the Apollo 8 crew. Borman, Anders, Lovell -- first to risk orbiting the moon.

The Big East Tournament was merely an excuse. You can spend 53 years with minimal contact. With valued friends 53 years is a day. We all had changed. We all were the same. Now 70, we teased about bum knees, gray hair, arrhythmias, yet we recognized the same 17 year old smiles and impish eyes from those dancing days of discovery, the same personalities in frames weathered by plus 19,345 sunrises of memories. Each has seen plenty of losses and struggles, challenges and changes, fouls and free throws, missed shots and three pointers: divorce, cancer, relocation, phoning a mother who gets confused answering an iphone (the last with a living parent), children breaking up with boyfriends, Oliverie's daughter soon to give birth, another daughter planning a wedding, grandchildren to visit whom we miss because they live far away, Murano's son on the road with Trombone Shorty. Each of us has been called upon to adjust, adapt, sometimes facing a scarcity of optimism and a dearth of hope, other times receiving contentment and joy.

Today is the Christian holy day called Maundy Thursday, which means Mandate Thursday. It refers to when Jesus at the last supper mandates, coaches, his disciples to love one another just as he has loved

them. Somber, sacrificial Maundy Thursday reminds me how blessed I am that my Jesus wasn't concerned with happiness. Let's face it, Jesus was a loser. Jesus wasn't successful by worldly standards. He failed, executed alongside two other rejects. How weak. He disappointed his friends who wanted him to be a winner. What Jesus did instead was love and show us how to love. At a church meeting one of our leaders raised eyebrows by praying for Jews to accept Jesus. I told her afterwards that my Jewish friends know Jesus better than many Christians. They love truer. I'd rather we pray for Christians to be more like Jesus.

The older you get the more you realize how you get to Easter through Maundy Thursday, through Good Friday, through that trembling, silent, awful Saturday. Do you want to know the secret to happiness? It begins with not being concerned about your happiness.

Basketball might allow time-outs called by coach or required by media. How many time-outs, clock stoppages, have you had in life? We play with a running clock.