



YOU DON'T KNOW

Episode 5: Unnecessary Roughness – PART 1

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Transcript by Christabel Smith and Lizzy Turner

Intro:

LT: Hello. Welcome to episode five of You Don't Know. I'm Lizzy Turner and with me...

DT: Hello, I'm David Turner.

LT: Unnecessary Roughness is an audio collage based on two parallel sets of writing. The first one, a series of found poems constructed by me and based on commentary from NFL games, and a series of passages written in response to these by David. We'll come back to that in more detail later. The episode is accompanied by a print publication. This issue is a spiral-bound book containing all of the texts that the audio is based on and the book is available on our website for £8 plus postage and packaging. As always, 10% of our sales will go to the Eat or Heat foodbank in Walthamstow.

We've released this episode in two parts. Part one, which you're listening to now, features a condensed version of the text and part two features the text in full. Just to note that part one has any swear words bleeped out, whereas part two does not. A full transcript of the episode is also available on our website to download. We'll be back after the upcoming track for a conversation about how we made the episode and the book.

Before we go, just a content warning. The episode refers to and discusses various forms of physical and verbal violence throughout, sometimes with graphic imagery and injury detail.

It also refers to various types of discrimination against marginalised groups and also refers to mental illness.

DT: We'll be back in 32 minutes.

Unnecessary Roughness:

[00:02:23]

[Note: many sections of text throughout the track are 'spoken' by various computer-generated voices, with different 'accents' and 'genders'. They are referred to as **CG American Male**, for example. In some of these sections the tone of the voice varies to indicate multiple speakers.]

[The sound of a large crowd cheering and applauding fades in. This sound is used at various points throughout the track as a linking sequence, and from here is referred to as such. The crowd sequence cross-fades with an archival sound clip which begins with a squad of cheerleaders chanting, then features a voiceover by Jim Lampley, who says the following:

"Looking back, I think sound really captured the innocence of the era. Listening in on strategy sessions, you realised the game had a special language, a sort of verbal shorthand. Here Earl Morrall and Johnny Unitas let us eavesdrop as they make changes in the gameplan."

During and after the voiceover, footage of the players he is discussing can be heard. In this footage these and other players are on the field, speaking in American Football 'jargon' about the game taking place. Sounds of the crowd can be heard behind them.]

[The crowd linking sequence fades back in, and continues beneath the following section before cross-fading with the next sound clip.]

CG American Male:

There shall be no unnecessary roughness.

Note: If in doubt about a roughness call or potentially dangerous tactics, the covering official(s) should always call unnecessary roughness.

Rule 12, Section 2, Article 8
(Unnecessary roughness) in the NFL rulebook

[Another archival sound clip begins, with a voiceover by Jim Lampley, who says the following:

“Dick Butkus, he was a notorious curser, but this conversation with an assistant coach is ‘G-rated’.”

After the voiceover, the coaches mentioned can be heard with others arguing on the field during a game, shouting encouragement to the players and whooping. The sound of the crowd can be heard throughout, and continues beneath the next section.]

CG American Male:

*‘Most fight fans would not spend a dime to watch Van Gogh paint *Sunflowers*, but they would fill Yankee Stadium to watch him cut off his right ear.’ – William Nack*

[The Jim Lampley voiceover continues, with continued game footage beneath:

“Every Sunday on the sideline it was like a mini drama. A subplot to the action on the field. Every emotion was there. The sound showed how players reacted to pressure, how tough guys played with pain.”

The end of the clip cross-fades with the crowd linking sequence, which continues for a short time before fading out.]

[Another archival sound clip fades in. A voiceover by a former player speaks over the sounds of football players colliding, grunting and shrieking on the field, and a crowd cheering. He says the following:

“You’ve gotta be able to play with pain. It’s just a reality of our sport, you know, it comes with the territory.”

The background sounds of the footage continue beneath the next section, along with one further section of the voiceover, until the sound fades out.]

CG American Male:

*if you’re squeamish you may want
to look away now*

injured?

[“If you came out of the game every time you got a twinge or a burner up your neck, or your knees got a little sore on that play, you know, you wouldn’t last very long and you certainly wouldn’t have anybody’s respect.”]

*he comes into the room looking like that
he is who he is
he's authentic*

get thunderpunched in the throat

boom right there on the ground

*this is a bludgeoning upfront right now
a really nice execution*

I think it looks a lot worse than it actually was

David:

And you hadn't been out long and it was awkward dating in your mid-thirties and living at your mum's because when they look at you like *that* it doesn't really help to say *don't worry, I'm there as I recently had a massive emotional breakdown and spent some time (again) in a secure psychiatric hospital, it's not weird or anything*. And outside that caff on Tooley Street, on your way back with S to her place in ~~Blackheath~~ Lewisham those lads made a comment to or about her or at least you convinced yourself they did. But of course the only thing that really mattered was that one shouted *fuck off mate before you get yourself hurt* and you'd never felt so seen. And it was all uncoordinated limbs and none of them hit very hard and two of them were only into it because they thought it would be over quickly, but they did at least keep going. So that's something, right?

[An archival sound clip fades in, beginning with fast tempo music typical of 80s / 90s sports documentaries or newscasts. The music continues beneath the next section, with sounds of players colliding and grunting in pain on the field, before cross-fading with the crowd linking sequence.]

CG American Male:

*a violent runner
he is vicious
with his good speed, nasty yards*

*choppin' down legs
gettin' busy*

look at the power

*you see him rolling up there
getting his nose in
stickin' his foot in the ground*

*just mowing people down
get his hands inside*

that's just vicious

[Crowd linking sequence continues for a short time before fading out.]

David:

And we never consider 'let's get to the root of *that...* but *also...*' It's always just *let them run it off or get them in the ring and teach them how to do it properly*. Never combined with asking *why so angry?* – At 13 you're told you've got a natural talent for chasing an unpredictable bouncing egg around a water-logged field. And you don't notice the biting November Fenland wind when the reward is getting to put your shoulder into the thigh / hip / stomach / chest of another boy. And all it takes is a reversible shirt (fuck the hoops) to create enough distance between you and him to want to stop him with enough force that he struggles to rise from the mud and limps away from you. And you don't notice that in January you might as well be throwing yourself around on tarmac. And when you get caught taking a swing at the boy holding the ball the former army PT instructor screams into the wind that he *doesn't want to see that again*. Or when the studs of that kid from the private school near / in Cambridge gouged meat from the back of your hand and your fascination in seeing the flecks of fat exposed for the first time was sharply broken by the misshapen ball being thrust into your midriff. *Here, this will take your mind off that.*

[A short montage of archival clips fades in and continues beneath the next section before fading out. It features sound of coaches discussing plays in code, and shouting instructions to players on the field. The crowd can be heard in the background.]

CG American Male:

he sees angles in his sleep

the symmetry of the pylons

*let's listen to the whistle
just really good in rhythm
you've just gotta snap it*

open in the middle

*what? where?
looking, looking*

about a yard short

a long yard to go

please reset the game clock

David:

There's a lottery here, your shoes are letting in the rainwater that seeps up from the mud of The Green, the war memorial is off to your left and the two English market-town pubs are there to choose from. The trick is to be able to judge the laughter / shouts / screams drifting out from the still-divided bars and lounges. Are the spirits of the strangers inside still rising or has the evening already peaked and it's only the descent left? The landlord of the pub that me and L held our wedding reception in told me (pork scratchings and dry roasted peanuts in view over his right shoulder) that he'd never seen so many people drink and laugh that much without collapsing into a brawl. It seemed to be the laughter that bothered him the most. What goes up...

[A documentary sound clip fades in, beginning with a voiceover of a former football player, which is then interspersed with sound clips of players colliding violently and grunting in pain on the field, with energetic drum music underneath. The former player says the following:

"There's things that are going on in there that it would be illegal off the football field. I mean, you can literally kill somebody, the things that we're doing in there."

The clip continues beneath the following section, with further voiceover interspersed, before fading out.]

CG American Male:

that was a heck of a hit!

["And you're talking about guys who are 300lbs, and who can move, who know how to use their bodies to their advantage, and who are very mean and intense during the course of a game."]

*he comes down on his neck
the head/neck area*

["So, there's things going on inside the pit that people in the stands don't realise. It's mean, it's tenacious, it's the most incredible thing you could ever imagine if you're down in there."]

*he's such a valuable weapon
and that's what's hard
he still puts his head in play*

["It's like getting into a car wreck, 80 times a ball game."]

[A sequence of three sound effects of car crashes can be heard, with the noise of impact and breaking glass each time, timed with the following three words.]

*illegal
violent
concussion*

["If you can just imagine, putting yourself in a car and running into the wall, at let's say 30 miles an hour..."]

there is no need for it

["80 times in a row, with 30-second thrusts in-between, then that's what it'd be like. I think, to be a success over a period of years, you've actually got to like beating up on somebody. You don't ever go into the game, at least I don't, with the idea of hurting somebody or taking them out, but you want to physically intimidate somebody."]

*you don't wanna take it to the disrespect level
swing your hand into the face*

once again, that's where they're susceptible

David:

The Australian and the Norwegian are excited by the singing in the other side of the pub. Me and the northerner exchange looks acknowledging that there can't be long before it all kicks off. It's not the kind of laughter that puts a smile on the face of any of the other customers. It's the kind of laughter that makes the bar staff uneasy. The landlord is unmoved though – broad shouldered, hands like shovel blades, creased but tight-fitting leathery scalp giving him the look of Bronko Nagurski in those old-style helmets – I focus on him. Let him lead. A scream tears through the paper-thin laughter and a pint glass crashes into the wall above the dartboard. I'm sure I just hadn't noticed them before but the fruit machines seem to light up in excitement, *holds* and *spins* flashing in time to the smashing of glasses. Young mums escape the madness clutching their little ones to their chests as furniture is launched to the theme

tune of *bonus rounds*. The Australian and the Norwegian slide down into their chairs as the raised voices lose their appeal. Me and the northerner relax slightly as the pressure of the situation hisses out through the chaos of punches, kicks and bites. Between the screaming and the smashing and the people running we gather that the issue is between a brother and a sister. Her (the sister)(‘s) husband (in the nick) (for something serious) should have *cut* him (the brother) when he (the husband) had the chance (at a child’s christening). And I watch the landlord, unmoved, as everyone lets it play out and she screams that *she(the sister)’ll* do now what *he (the husband)* should have done years ago. Apparently, the respectful thing to do is let brother and sister push blades into each other until they feel they’ve made their point. Eventually, friends / siblings / uncles step in and relatives are dragged outside through separate doors and into waiting cars and vans. I chat briefly to the stoical landlord who had traded in the bar of a rough-arse Glasgow pub for this sleepy Kent village and *while it doesn’t kick off like this often, when it does it makes me feel like I never left home.*

[A short sequence of archival sound clips begins, with the sound of a quarterback shouting plays to his team on the field, and a commentator commentating excitedly. The sound of a crowd cheering loudly can be heard alongside. Different clips of crowds, commentators and players colliding continue beneath the next section, before cross-fading with the crowd linking sequence.]

CG American Male:

*He’s been known to carry people
up and down the field*

off to the races

doing what he does best

*he just lifts him in the air
and slams him to the ground*

he was pointing out and yelling

*he said he likes the trash talk
like the playground, the movies, the comedy*

[Crowd linking sequence continues for a short time before fading out.]

David:

At 14, you and the other miscreants are once again lined up in front of the Head-of-Year and Deputy Head. Only, this time you're all being praised after being selected for trials for the county rugby side. And it wasn't that long ago that you were all being chewed out for jumping the lads from the posh school after they hammered you in a midweek game. The pure surprise and audacity put them on the back foot and they never recovered. (Something we took for granted growing up on council estates and traveller sites.) After they were bundled into their minibus you *waved goodbye* to them, their uniforms in flames halfway up a lamppost (something we must have seen in an American film). Now just a few weeks later you're being encouraged to knock these same lads on their arses (teachers' rules). But even this praise comes coupled with the patronising air that they're somehow doing you a favour. As if it isn't your natural athletic ability and dedication that has presented this opportunity. As if you're too young to realise that your aggression and fearlessness is only acceptable when channelled toward their goals. But you're all sons of generations that have already rejected (seen the consequences of) the idea of dying for king / queen and country. But if you've accepted that they're no longer preparing you for anything then you need to ask yourself what they're attempting to keep you from.

[An archival sound clip fades in, beginning with a coach giving instructions to a team on the field. The crowd can be heard in the background. The coach says the following:

"Now listen! They've got three of their starting defensive linemen down. Right now you go for the jugular. You go right at 'em. The game is on the line right now, but maybe the damn season. Now put yourself in that position. Right now!"

The clip continues beneath the next short section before fading out.]

CG American Male:

go ahead

take one in the teeth

you can handle it!

David:

What would these kids do without boxing?

What could they focus all that energy on without it?

[A sound clip fades in, with coaches on the field discussing and then shouting plays, in code. A crowd can be heard in the background. This clip continues beneath the following short section before fading out.]

CG American Male:

*it's pretty amazing his story
brilliantly incomplete*

his original story

David:

[Note: the redacted name in the following section is replaced with a censoring beep.]

The lad from school that boxed for England Schoolboys (or had a trial (or maybe only a handful of amateur fights)) bled out, surrounded and alone on a front lawn, somewhere in the Cambridgeshire Fens. (Who knows (or cares) if he recovered the debt he was there to collect?) [REDACTED] blamed himself for years (and maybe still does) but you can't really help anyone that doesn't think they need helping. And the lad was only doing what he'd been told he was good at.

[A sound clip of a game fades in, with a crowd cheering loudly and two commentators saying the following between them:

"Now this is kinda crazy. Last week, 6,700 people sounded like 67,000. We're here, and I gotta tell you something, it does sound like almost 67,000! I have never seen human beings cheer harder when a ball hits the uprights than what happened in this stadium twice tonight. I mean, it's a party in here!"

The clip continues beneath the next section, with the commentators conversing over the crowd, before fading out.]

CG American Male:

*he had a nice career
good power run*

*even more amazingly
he was really good at coming back to you*

and maybe a little too good

*he ends up getting himself
he vacates
that's the extra gear that most don't have*

and he...?

*I think he was short
a little hitch in his giddyup
he wasn't that far out
but nonetheless*

David:

And you're in The King's Head and it's all Irish fellas singing rebel songs and the Norwegian loves it, again. And why wouldn't she? The songs aren't *anti-you* exactly, more anti what you represent to them. Which is not what you expect and it'll take several years (unfortunately) to realise exactly why you hadn't ever experienced feeling othered. And you were out with another Norwegian and it was all MDMA and you got chatting to a group from Ireland who were impressed when you guessed their accents were from Donegal. And the gear gets everything real deep and eventually *the troubles* come up and they all talk about how they were brought up to hate the English and you talk about how you were taught to hate a cartoon version of a fella from Belfast in a balaclava. And it's all fathers-to-sons and mothers-to-daughters preaching hatred. And the difficult thing is that there always seems to be a sound reason. Actual living memories of people shot dead on the streets of Derry or blown to bits in Manchester. And this might be turning into an extremely bad example but this hate and anger that's pumped into us by previous generations ingrains itself so deeply that maybe it won't ever actually leave. And maybe the only way to deal with it is to bury it for a couple of generations until the anger is forgotten, but not the causes. But there's the problem, how do you (deal with) push down the anger but not the initial trauma? Asking for a friend, you know.

[An archival sound clip of a game fades in. Cheering crowds, commentators, coaches and shouting players can be heard. The clip continues beneath the next section, before cross-fading with the crowd linking sequence.]

CG American Male:

*vroom, there he goes
he's got such acceleration
and such sharp, precise cuts
he's in such total control
and he's strong
and he's the bull in a china closet*

*he got him with an elbow right to the face
and that is one big elbow too!*

*good pressure
keeps grinding
herky jerky, being more unpredictable*

blows it up, uncorks a deep one

[Crowd linking sequence continues for a short time before fading out.]

David:

Me and J ran together every day after school to try and get his 1.5-mile time down for the army physical. I was spun some rubbish about being an individual and most likely being based in Cyprus with the Royal Signals. J was egged on with promises of boxing for whichever infantry regiment he was talking to. Neither of us mentioned during our application that we just wanted to leave home (and its memories) as soon as possible. I had a lucky escape when the medical found traces of the hole in my heart that I vaguely remembered being told I was born with. The time it took to rearrange the medical gave me room to think about how I'd wanted to smack every soldier at the testing centre that spoke to me like a child and it proved enough space for me to reconsider. J lasted only a few months (if that) beyond basic training and the fact that one of the things which bonded us most as teenagers was wanting to smack every grown man that ordered us about probably means it should never have been a surprise. We didn't speak for a few years but it turned out he was collecting debts from drug dealers – presumably for other drug dealers - with the son of a legendary, former (dead) bare-knuckle fighter. One of the perks of this set-up was being allowed time in the gym to focus on his boxing. Doing just what he'd always been told he was good at. It was incredible to hear our friends and his relatives talk about how this new 'career' path was so much worse than enlisting but to see too how it carried a much more tangible weight of respect. But when you're seven or eight pints in it's hard to concentrate on the nuances of how 'just' wars are only portrayed from the perspective of the victors / righteous and by their own media interests. Or in the eyes of some, how it's actually okay to be breaking the bones of and robbing people selling drugs to kids. I suppose it's all just a question of how honour is ascribed to what is socially acceptable. I suppose J (and me) only ever wanted respect to help deal with the crushing lack of self-worth.

[A documentary clip fades in, with the sounds of players colliding, and typical sports documentary or newscast music underneath. A voiceover of a former player can be heard saying the following:

“Playing in the pit is like being in an alley at 3 or 4 in the morning, on a rainy night, and you’ve got a couple of Doberman Pinschers, and you don’t know which one gonna bite you, or you don’t know if you’re gonna bite them back.”

The clip continues beneath the next short section before cross-fading with the crowd linking sequence.]

CG American Male:

yeah, I’m gonna break some ankles

everybody has a plan until they get hit in the jaw

[The crowd linking sequence continues for a short time before fading out.]

David:

A recurring thought that doesn’t involve any *old bill* or exes is so uneventful that it feels too embarrassing to talk about. No violence. Or, that bit had happened before the story starts. It’s just me standing at the door of an east London pub trying to talk the bouncer into letting me back in to retrieve the jacket that had disappeared during a minor set-to with a group of lads from Essex. I’d been knocked into them by someone in the crowd, but I was only too happy to accept their invitation so didn’t even try to explain. Back on the beer-soaked step I tried to convince the fella in the black bomber jacket that if I went back in and caused any more trouble I’d let him give me a hiding. He just kept repeating *stop trying to get me to hurt you*, and that’s what’s most embarrassing – that my desire to get hurt (or worse (and it not look like my fault)) was so transparent. Shameful.

[A sound clip of a game fades in and continues beneath the next section before cross-fading with the crowd linking sequence. The sounds of players running around, yelling, colliding and grunting heavily can be heard. The sound of coaches shouting instructions can be heard interspersed.]

CG American Male:

*using their hands, using their arms
he is swarmed, nowhere to go*

*it could be one of those intimidation things, right?
we see something that’s usually
drawn up in the parking lot*

["Right now you go for the jugular! You go right at 'em!"]

*he has to realise
I am about to get hit right in the mouth
I'm going to step right into the teeth
of the pressure*

*and that takes tremendous courage
a guy who is not afraid
to give up his body*

[The crowd linking sequence continues for a short time, and beneath the following sentence, before fading out.]

CG English Male:

"You hate to see that. You really do. Here's a replay, let's take another look."

David:

36 seconds into the tenth round Daniel Dubois slowly lowers all 244lbs down onto his right knee. Joe Joyce has stuck relentlessly to what most of the experts said was his best option – staying resolutely behind his jab he moved imperceptibly from professionalism toward spite in the early rounds. Daniel took a knee after the repeated blows switched the hazard lights on so brightly he could no longer lie to himself that they were flashing in warning to someone else. Carl Frampton (holding the comically large Sky Sports mic) was the first to use the word... *Q****... but then all world champions and possibly all professionals have earned that right. He wouldn't be the last to pass that judgement but one of very few that was qualified. Trusting the recipient to interpret my message as intended I text the words *the best thing that can happen for his reputation is for it to turn out he's got a seriously damaged eye socket*. But for some it wasn't enough. The only honourable outcome for them was blindness, or worse. Bodies as commodities. We paid for our ticket / viewing pass and we want to see blood. We watch men from mostly desperate backgrounds risk their lives because men before them from even more desperate backgrounds did so, or worse. And we praise Katie Taylor for her speed and aggression but more so because she justifies our understanding of how the concept of *equality* means encouraging in women the very worst of what we encourage in men. And we sit on plastic seats on sanitised terraces and hurl abuse at opposing players because they shouldn't have turned professional if they can't put up with what we shout. And we run campaigns in national newspapers when prominent cricketers publicly admit to normal levels of emotional distress and need to leave international tours to recover. Because we are

consumers and these people are the product we buy into. And they shouldn't have turned professional if they can't handle that.

[A sound clip begins of Cincinnati Bengals coaches conversing in code about plays and then shouting to players on the field. The clip continues beneath the next section before fading out. Sounds of a cheering crowd, referee whistles blowing and players shouting can also be heard.]

CG American Male:

*let's draw it up in the dirt
let's go full-on old skool*

*we've got ourselves a slugfest that's
about to happen*

*what's he doing?
he's getting mad
he's twisted down*

he's getting punched in the face

that's where your eyes trick ya

*as long as you're not getting physically whipped
you know you've got a chance to come back*

trying to get some attention

he's bleeding from the face

David:

The most famous quote attributed to Mike Tyson (on a par possibly with the child-eating-stuff and aggressive homophobia) is *everyone has a plan until they get punched in the mouth* but the one section of an interview that sticks with me is *Iron Mike* being asked about whether he was ever scared in the ring. His answer focused on how fear was his main motivation. He channelled his fear into a desire and ability to seriously hurt his opponents. He talked about growing up in his neighbourhood and the fear of getting into the ring with grown men at the age of thirteen. And all I can remember thinking is *how is the interviewer still surprised that The Baddest Man on the Planet is scared of anything*. How is he working around boxers and unaware that it's in this fear that we all learn to be the aggressor? He talked about the fear of being embarrassed

or shown up in front of a crowd. Found out for not being the man he'd been promoted as. And he shared that glassy-eyed, juvenile stare with Diego Maradona when he spoke about the fear of letting down his country or the people of Naples. It can't be that hard to see how the impossible enormity of this expectation will begin to push the hero in one direction?

[Crowd linking sequence fades in and continues beneath the next section before fading out.]

CG American Male:

the drama's building

and now they don't have much time to work with

we can handle this, let's stay tough

the word is conflict

he creates conflict for you

he is pummelled

he gets popped

it was great pressure

they didn't give him the full ten

entirely too much trickeration and he muffed it

this has taken away the manhood right here or did he scoop it off the ground?

David:

Army PT hall / amateur boxing club / prison gym – all too often interchangeable terms. Because, you know, *it's an outlet for their aggression* and you (they) just repeat this phrase and ignore the causes of the aggression. And it's all just *love your country* and *fight for the flag / badge / insignia* but too few people mean it when they ask *what can we do to change all this or how can we make their lives better?* And socialist movements in the UK let you down time and time again. And (whisper it) some of the older heads wear their anti-(whatever) as their own flag / badge / insignia and give the distinct impression they'd have claimed anything as their own as long as it set them apart from 'that lot' on the other side of town / the river / the Pennines. And they ask (get asked) why there aren't more women / queer / black / disabled / brown people standing with them. And the simple fact that the angry men on both sides all too often look and sound the same represents something that

terrifies so many people so much that what they're saying (shouting) simply gets lost in the noise. And how do you square this knowing how good it would feel to whack one of those EDL-(or whatever)-fools in the head -> because you know how much this would scare so many of the people you love -> because you've been praised and punished in equal measure for finding outlets for your aggression.

[An archival sound clip of a football game fades in. Cheerleaders can be heard in the background chanting, and shouting players and a cheering crowd can be heard. This cross-fades with a sound clip of a stadium band playing a rousing fast-tempo tune, which continues beneath the next section and rises to a crescendo with the final lines of the section, where the CG voice becomes more high-pitched and excited. This culminates with applause from the crowd, which then cross-fades with the crowd linking sequence.]

CG American Male:

*they kind of set it up didn't they?
they know they're in the battle*

the physical wear and tear starts to show

*look at the pain on the field
you don't know it until you see it*

those are some vicious, nasty hits

and you see the repercussions

*he is ready to die for this stuff right now
push and shove*

almost a uh-oh moment

you just ride that, it's like going downhill

you absolutely have to go for the jugular

and in such dramatic fashion!

I can feel it

[Crowd linking sequence continues for a short time before fading out.]

Conversation:

[00:34:48]

DT: Welcome back. Thanks for sticking around. We're going to start off with Lizzy giving a brief explanation as to how Unnecessary Roughness started as a project and why.

LT: So I think it was in the end of 2018, that we decided it would be fun to start a collaborative writing project based on the NFL and watching the games, which we do every season and which we love doing every year. We sat down at the beginning of the season with our notebooks. Very quickly, David found that it was ruining his enjoyment of the game.

DT: Half a game!

LT: Half a game.

DT: No, it might even have only taken me one quarter, which is like 15 minutes of game time, nearly an hour in real time and it was ruining my enjoyment of the game completely.

LT: Whereas I quite enjoyed it and decided that I would carry on. I think actually the idea started with the title. Unnecessary Roughness, as you will have heard from the beginning of the track, is a rule in the NFL rule book and I have always found that name quite amusing and thought it would make an interesting title for a piece of writing.

DT: Yeah, just the idea of when roughness becomes unnecessary is quite an interesting idea, isn't it? Talking in terms of how we collaborate and the way we think about what we make, it's probably quite a simple but important definition, in that you don't find, or rather you find introducing writing into projects quite a fun thing to do and I find it ruins almost everything, introducing writing to something.

LT: Also, I find it, because the games are more or less three hours long, quite hard to concentrate on that, so to have something else to do alongside it made my enjoyment of the games better.

DT: And you started by collecting phrases from the commentary.

LT: Yeah, so for anyone who hasn't ever seen an American football game, the commentators are very enthusiastic and energetic and speak in quite a ridiculous way a lot of the time, so I quickly decided that I would just take the best and funniest and weirdest bits of what they were saying and just write them down, without really knowing what I would do with them. Then in the end, I did that for pretty much every game and just selected the best bits and reordered them into these found poems.

DT: Originally, when Lizzy gave me the, I don't know, manuscript always seems like a grand term, the writing in a file, I was going to illustrate it because through this project, or when we work collaboratively, Lizzy's always done a lot of visual work, so I thought it would be a good opportunity for me to do more visual stuff. Every time I illustrated stuff, or once

I'd done about 10, it kept verging towards looking like Marvel comics, not that there's anything wrong with that, but it didn't feel right.

Eventually, I scrapped it. I can't remember which pieces I wrote out first, but once I started writing prose responses to Lizzy's writing, it all made a lot more sense and felt like a more important thing to spend my time on because I was working a lot making furniture and it felt like I didn't really have time to do this kind of writing. It's by far the longest project we've done as part of You Don't Know. Not that I need to excuse making anything, but sometimes you need a reason for exhausting yourself.

I think because, as Lizzy mentioned, the commentary is quite ridiculous anyway, it leans towards a tendency to make the game seem more violent because historically, that's what's set the NFL apart from sports like basketball and baseball, there's this inherent violence built into the game, it's quite a severe contact sport.

Through different rule changes over the last 20 or 30 years, because of the rightful concerns about concussion, it's no longer anywhere near as violent as it used to be in the 70s and 80s and earlier, but the language, quoting sections from boxing commentary and using war imagery both in the commentary and the play calls, there's lots of talk about blitzes and firing and shooting and stuff. As you will have heard, there's a lot of talk about killing and dying and smashing.

LT: I should say, that was immediately the sort of language I focused on with pulling the poems together, it was all the overblown violent imagery, all the talk of people getting punched in the throat, that's not happening at all.

DT: No and we've talked to a lot of friends about this recently, haven't we? Whenever the commentator's talking about there being a fight on the pitch, it very rarely is because they're basically in suits of armour and if you were to punch someone in the head, you'd break your hand on their helmet. There's very rarely a fight, it's normally just pushing and shoving.

I should add, we don't watch the NFL for the violence. It's more like for entertainment than sport, but it was interesting to see the parallels between my experiences of what masculinity meant when I was growing up and its ties with violence and aggression, what it meant to be a man and how that reflected towards maintaining, I'll do air quotes here, but maintaining the 'correct' level of anger.

I think that's where I drew the parallel, this idea of unnecessary roughness, that idea of what that kind of masculinity is, is tied in heavily to...There's a certain amount of anger and aggression that's allowed, but once you overstep the mark, you're demonised for it and often rightly so, because it's probably important to point out that neither of us feel that violence is the right answer to anything, but it is unfortunately a lot of people's response because of the way they're brought up and the pressures on them.

I've been feeling quite reluctant about putting the episode out because I don't want it to seem like I'm glorifying the violence or the fighting or even the shouting or the swearing, it's

not really the point. I don't know, unless you talk honestly about things, you don't really get anywhere, do you?

LT: No. One of the strongest themes in the passages you wrote is obviously the contradiction surrounding all of these violent scenarios and how you can't ever win in that position, depending on who's influencing you to behave in that way.

DT: Yeah, especially when you look at young people. The writing I did is very much focuses around young men and boys because it reflects most on my experiences, but it's been interesting in the last couple of decades to see young women growing up in more of an equal world and how that often, rather than encouraging men to be calmer and more sensitive, has just encouraged women to be more violent.

This isn't really a gender thing anymore, it's just that the gender aspect of it has been my experience. Quite often, when young boys, or if we say young people for the moment, are demonised for being violent or aggressive, it's always overlooked as to where that has come from and how it has been encouraged. This idea has always stuck in my mind about letting boys punch themselves out, that if you just make them tired enough, they will behave, which doesn't seem like the solution to anything because it doesn't address any problems.

It's been interesting as well, because both Lizzy and I, I started boxing training about five months ago and Lizzy started a couple of months ago, so we've been engaging in this controlled aggression. Since I was a kid, I've always loved boxing and I suppose that conflict exists there as well because if you speak to most boxing fans, a lot of them will have their doubts as to whether that sport should even be allowed, considering how bloody it can get and seemingly, the point of it is the aggression.

Once you get involved and you're training, it's not really there. It's sort of a long-winded way of going around how class comes into this as well and how young, working-class men particularly, regardless of their family background, talking purely class here, on the one hand they're demonised for being aggressive in any way when it doesn't suit the establishment, but actively encouraged to join the army or the police and act as state-funded arseholes really. Then suddenly it's all right to bash someone on the head or worse.

LT: Their rules.

DT: Yeah, their rules. I don't necessarily know whether the prose pieces I wrote for this project are coherent, but nothing about it is coherent in the moment or when you reflect on it.

LT: That might be a nice place for you to talk about the overall process of writing those because it took quite a long time once you decided to write instead of illustrate.

DT: Well, it wasn't very nice. Like I said, I don't find it very enjoyable and I don't mean I'm some sort of martyr to my art, whatever. You know, I can't get away from the fact that this thing, a lot of time I feel compelled to do, causes me a lot of angst and anxiety. Particularly with this, the fact is these things regularly happen, and worse happens, these aren't even

bad stories really, to a lot of people these wouldn't even be considered to be that traumatic, but especially having been involved in poetry for the last seven or eight years, I find talking about this kind of violence and aggression brings a lot of judgement onto you, because it understandably freaks a lot of people out.

It's not very nice thinking that you're going to share something then people, friends, might change their opinion on you. I suppose we're lucky that not many people listen to the podcast.

LT: Can you imagine? That's reflected in one of the passages, which I think is only in the full version, about the sobriety discussion.

DT: It's funny what society rewards and how you can be a reformed character, as long as you're reformed from what's socially acceptable.

LT: Should I explain what I mean by that?

DT: If you want.

LT: It's one of the shorter stories. I'll call it a story, I think of them all as individual stories. It's a table of poets, I think, who are all talking about sobriety from alcoholism and then the protagonist talks about how he has not punched anyone for three years and everyone goes quiet, seemingly unaware of the parallels between those two things.

DT: I've spoken to a lot of writers, I'm not going to name anyone, I'm not too sure how they would feel about being named in public talking about these things, but that kind of violence, I had a lot of friends when I was younger, you could clearly see they were addicted to that kind of energy and the fact that things might explode at any minute. In the same way that other friends were clearly addicted to drink or drugs or sugar, whatever, or sex, it's so tied in with self-destruction.

I suppose it's where the class issue comes in. People at the bottom of the pile are so desperate for control over their lives, it often manifests itself in ruining their lives because they're not in a position to make their lives any better, but they can have control, they can choose the way in which it gets worse and they can choose to get hurt through fighting.

A lot of this comes down to, there's a common phrase, that people really fight to get hurt. Very few people fight to hurt other people, it's normally an instigation to get hurt themselves, especially when alcohol is involved and people get down throughout the evening and it starts to drag up feelings of lack of self worth.

LT: That's another common image through the text, isn't it? People who are willing to sacrifice their bodies in various ways.

DT: Yeah. We're still heralded, particularly as men, for being willing to put our bodies on the line. In society, that was considered a really important thing because people, nations, were constantly going to war and that involved sending huge battalions of infantry troops to

fight hand to hand. Now that doesn't exist as much, except people are getting bombed and things are still horrible, it all gets replaced elsewhere and it seems that, especially with sport, that has always been a proxy for war and used for propaganda.

I don't know enough about American politics, but it wouldn't be that difficult to take a leap towards the USA's national mentality, being concerned they are no longer a massive military and capitalist power around the world, to try and hold on to this by acting as if they still ruled the world through sports, and they're the biggest and the toughest. We probably don't have enough time to get into the concept, but when you win the Superbowl as an NFL team, you're labelled the World Champions, even though the sport isn't played in that form elsewhere.

LT: Are there any aspects to this particular project which you feel are more positive?

DT: Not at the moment. I like the way the book turned out, so we should probably talk about the book a bit. The book, the spiral-bound document, is supposed to look like an office document and it was influenced heavily by NFL team playbooks. Very briefly, because I know some people will know a lot about the NFL and some people will know absolutely nothing and probably won't even want to know much about it, but when you first sign to an NFL team as a rookie, you get handed a massive document which contains all the plays you are supposed to learn for your positions and possible positions.

We wanted to introduce that idea to the book, so Lizzy's parts of the commentary and found poems made up by commentary are overlaid over play drawings, which are very basic illustrations of what will happen after the moment the ball gets snapped from the Center to the Quarterback, and he looks up and reads his free passing options and possibly a couple of running options as well.

It felt important to have that, because otherwise, it would have got so heavy with what I'd written and probably would have pulled away from it too much as well. It's interesting to see, now we're five episodes and publications into the project, how different all the print publications have been. I still feel like everything is too much in chapters though.

LT: Yeah.

DT: It's hard to avoid that. I was thinking about this this morning. You might hear it in my voice, I'm not very well at the moment, I had a bit of a fevered night and it came to me when I was dreaming about the boxing we went to last night, that because all the podcasts, the recordings we're doing, are so heavily tied into books and print publications, you can't help the fact that you're turning pages and even though scripts for audio are often written on pages, that's only a limitation of how you make a document on a computer or you might print something out.

They're not divided into pages or into chapters or into stories in the way that typically the kinds of books we might write are, especially with the poetry and short stories. I feel the next episode we've got in the planning, episode six, which will be out in December, will be moving away from that.

We won't go on any longer, I think we've said enough. I think the episode talks enough for itself anyway.

This is probably one of the clearer audio pieces that we've made anyway and hopefully, you do get a chance to check out the book. As Lizzy said at the start, the full recording, which is an hour long, will feature in part two of this episode and it won't have any of the swearing bleeped out. We chose to have a shorter version of the recording and to bleep the swearing out, just to make it a bit more accessible to people who might find the content and themes of the work overwhelming.

It's been an interesting process since my book *Contained* came out in 2018, I'm less concerned with, I don't really feel it's censorship as much now to cut stuff out. As long as the full version is available somewhere, why go out of your way to upset people? Because this stuff is really heavy. Like we were just saying, it was hard enough to make and write, never mind for people to perhaps listen to, but that will be in part two.

Me and Lizzy will be back in December with episode six, which is the final episode of the planned project, but we have got a couple of ideas for 2022 already, so it looks like it will probably continue. But we might stop. Who knows?

LT: We'll see.

DT: Anything else?

LT: I don't think so. Have a lovely day.

End of transcript.