



YOU DON'T KNOW

Episode 5: Unnecessary Roughness – PART 2

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Transcript by Lizzy Turner

Intro:

DT: Hello and welcome to part two of episode 5 of You Don't Know, the full version of Unnecessary Roughness. If you've listened to part one, and you're back for part two, well done. You've really gone above and beyond.

This episode is made up of found poems that Lizzy wrote based on the commentary of NFL games, throughout the 2018 season. And then prose pieces that I wrote in response to those found poems.

The audio version in this episode runs alongside a print publication that we've made, which is available for £8, plus postage and packaging over on our website. A transcript for this episode is also available on our website.

Just as a note, there are various content warnings for this episode. There's lots of talk of violence, aggression and drug use and there's some swearing which we haven't bleeped out in this, part two.

There isn't really much more to say. If you want to know more about the episode and you haven't yet listened to part one, then do so. The second half of that episode is where we discuss the project.

And to any hardcore NFL fans tuning in... I'm really sorry for what we've done to your sport [LAUGHS].

Unnecessary Roughness:

[00:01:48]

[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.]

[The crowd linking sequence continues for a short time before cross-fading with another archival sound clip of a football game, which features sounds of players colliding and grunting, players and coaches talking, referee whistles, and a cheering crowd. This clip continues beneath the next section.]

CG American Male:

first blood

*you wanna hit someone, right?
you’ve been waiting all summer*

*you might get into it with someone
trying to squeeze through a crease*

and you might get hit

a kick to the head

this could get dicey

[00:05:35]

[Crowd linking sequence fades in and continues for a short time, before fading out.]

[Note: in the sections of text spoken by David, light background noise can be heard, of wind and birds outside.]

David:

It was outside London Bridge Station – or more precisely outside the caff on Tooley Street outside LBS – where eventually you’d be ordering breakfast with L when the GP(’s secretary) phoned, put you through to one of the doctors on constant rotation at the Manor Place surgery (the one that thinks it’s a positive thing to be part of one of the largest medical trusts in Britain (as if being passed from one GP to the next is a sign of progress)). This turns out to be the doctor that said you’d only have to worry about your kidney function if you were taking particular medications, following up that statement with sternly warning you that you would be barred from the surgery if you continued to swear or get angry after you’d replied to the first bit by shouting *I take fucking Lithium, are you not looking at my fucking notes? It’s all in my fucking notes.* L called but you were already up by the nondescript, illuminated sign of Prospero House, determinedly heading toward one of the places promising an open door anytime you needed it. Office hours only. *You’ve got those numbers we gave you at our first meeting? In case of emergency.*

[Crowd linking sequence fades in and continues for a short time before fading back out.]

[Another archival sound clip fades in. A voiceover by an American man 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?

[00:09:17]

[An archival sound clip of football players on the field fades in and continues beneath the next section before fading out. Sounds of players colliding, panting and shouting can be heard, as well as coaches speaking and the crowd cheering.]

CG American Male:

he was moving around very well before that

he gets slammed down

*and this crowd has gone silent
not a great sign*

*he was grabbing his left leg immediately
that doesn't look good*

*it does change your philosophy defensively
walking the tightrope
the stumble and the drop*

and he will walk gingerly

he doesn't do that often

David:

Because it's so much of who you *are*. There's a way of behaving that's just linked to your identity (that you have linked to your identity). And if you're told enough times that this is how it is and this is who you are, well... And the men you looked up to simply ask, *did you give him a slap?* when you mention any bother. But they never ask with as much venom as the women around them. And it's exhausting just fighting the impulse. And authority figures appear everywhere if you look / pretend hard enough. Something to rut up against. And it becomes who you are. And it attracts. And it repels. Because it's set so deep. And if it's all left unchallenged, then... [Google] *Parasite that gets laid into the brain takes over the brain controls the animal* and bingo! you're off the hook.

[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 sound clips fades in and continues beneath the next section, before fading out. The montage features sounds of players and coaches shouting instructions, whistles blowing, and crowds cheering.]

CG American Male:

*it was frightening on thursday night
he was unabated*

you see him just get a little hand in there

*worst case scenario
he gallops out of bounds*

so what do they do? dial up man-beaters

*he is sandwiched
by the legion and another couple of raiders*

*a lot of effort to bring him down
it hurts. especially when you're down there*

and this is the end result

this should go upstairs

David:

You get used to things going ‘up the wall’ and the tension waiting for everything to explode and it’s different at other families’ houses but then you tell yourself that everything’s a bit different. Like the biscuits. As you get older you realise that things maybe only seemed calmer in your friends’ houses when or, more likely, because you were around. We just push it all deep down and don’t let anyone know what’s actually going on. Everyone’s mum had the same laugh which you assumed was simply *a mum’s laugh* but now you know it as being rooted in anxiety and anger. It’s the same laugh you hear as another friend / acquaintance / stranger at the bus stop tells you they’ve been discharged from the care of their community mental health team before any of the promised help has been delivered. And you’re left trying to find ways to explain to people that it’s not a lack of sociability for never wanting large gatherings in your home. It’s just the deep and haunting fear – and the nausea that trails behind – attached to raised voices in a domestic setting. How you’re just waiting for the tone of the laughter to change. The amount of energy it takes to monitor *their* changeable moods leaves you empty – and you don’t need any more holes to fill. You leave the company of the people you love and there is nothing left. And it’s not them (of course) but the expectation of violence and chaos. Of things going ‘up the wall’ and not coming down again.

[00:14:38]

[Another short montage of archival clips fades in and continues beneath the next section. 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.*

[00:19:59]

[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.

[A sound clip fades in, with the noise of a crowd cheering. The cheering sounds echo-y, as though recorded inside of a large stadium. The clip continues beneath the next section before fading back out.]

CG American Male:

even worse than wrong? inconsistent

*when you're winless
all kinds of time
all kinds of time overthrows*

*it gets harder to thread the needle
a little hitch and it's incomplete*

you are becoming the team you are going to be

he's just gonna control what he can control

*figure it out
going forward*

David:

I never know how to reply when people say *that'll be fun* when I tell them I'm going down to the football. I don't know anyone that visits English football league grounds to have fun. I should say that I don't know anything about the Premier League but that disinfected *product* has very little to do with the normal footballing experience anymore. I have no memory of Stamford Bridge without an electric fence but then I'm too young to have known anything but the *new Den*. And working-class men laugh at alternative therapies and the *Primal Scream* is a regular trope on TV shows ridiculing what they do in California - but then they work 42-hour weeks and round them off by shouting / screaming for 90 minutes (mostly still) on the Saturday afternoon without realising that this leaves them too exhausted to shout about the things that really matter. At the people who really deserve it. Also, I've never understood how anyone could claim to not be interested in politics but become so engrossed in the soap opera of how *their club* is run by its board of directors.

[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.

[A sound clip fades in, of a crowd cheering, players colliding heavily, and the voiceover of a former player. The clip continues beneath the following section, with the voiceover interspersed, before fading out.]

CG American Male:

and he gets slammed immediately

["It really is survival of the fittest."]

*and he was victimised earlier
and he was about to get crushed*

["Make no mistake about it. You have a rules-maker, but they arbitrarily intervene."]

*and I'll bet he got eager to get up and go
and when you consider what a machine he's been
and he doesn't stutter step at all does he*

and more pressure coming, he's in trouble

["So, if you're participating in that, you have to be the judge..."]

and then he's more physical

["The jury..."]

*and he got it back but look how far back he is now
and he is dropped*

["And the executioner. All rolled in one."]

*and he is absolutely destroyed
and they say he is down*

CG American Female:

"You know I love that violence / that you get around here / that kind of ready-steady violence" – Fontaines D.C.

David:

And you move to a small Scandinavian coastal town and it's all different cultural signifiers. And it's all exactly the same in that it's all Premier League games on big screens and pissy lager (we need to talk one day about what they put in this stuff) at premium prices. And when they're hammered and they throw lager at you / rip your shirt / pick up your 5'1" girlfriend and run off with her on their shoulder it's suddenly inappropriate for things to end in a slap. And if they do, *you're* the one who's overreacted. And as you sit and write in what used to be your favourite bit of Islington you know they're right. It's never the answer. To anything. But you'll never get your head around how the same people (men) that claim it's immature to resort to violence are the same people (men) that will pick up a tiny woman they don't know and run away into the night. And you were brought up believing that it was up to you to protect those (women) you love. And it ain't half hard to get into who needs protecting and from what in the heat of the (drunken) moment.

[00:30:45]

[A documentary clip fades in, beginning with a crowd cheering at a game. It continues beneath the next section, with sounds of coaches and players, and voiceover by a former player, interspersed. The voiceover describes the code language used for plays by the Cincinnati Bengals football team, and footage clips of what he is describing can also be heard. The clip fades out before the section which follows after.]

CG American Male:

looking, looking, looking

*and not finding
much of anything*

*and it is beyond
outside of the intended target*

there was no twist and grab

["What we have in Cincinnati is a totally different language. I mean, we have words that mean things that... you wouldn't even believe what they mean. I mean, we use all kinds of words."]

*the way his head moved
the way his body moved*

["In our playbook we have a whole entire page of 2,000 words called Bengal Terminology. For instance we'll say 'butt-naked', and that one word has a meaning all of its own, and that one word probably means about two sentences-worth of words for me to say in the huddle. It's more like word-association, and we use words like 'Baker Bruce', 'pepper', 'flip', 'calibre', 'motown', 'happy', 'jolly', 'drunk', 'buster', 'tiger'..."]

you would assume there was

David:

These people get up on stage, and between poems, tell us how many months they've been sober and everyone applauds. Later everyone at the table looks at you awkwardly when you tell them it's been three years since you punched anyone. They don't see the significance. Or the similarities. How it's important for everyone to avoid what's destructive in their lives. They just wish you were holding a pint of lime and soda too.

[A sound clip fades in of a football game. The sounds of coaches and players talking, shouting plays, running and colliding can be heard, as well as the crowd cheering. A stadium announcer can be heard echoing over a tannoy. The clip continues beneath the next section before fading out.]

CG American Male:

*he had his head turned the wrong way
you can't have those kinds of mistakes*

*that is a strike indeed
that was a missile
and now he is hurt here*

*it's crazy, you can't predict anything
he had five body parts down
and just getting up to speed as well*

something he said about fresh legs

*and obviously the red flag
you don't go for the kill shot*

*time for young guys is over
awareness of when they have to get body parts down*

so hopefully it's not serious

David:

Someone on a documentary or the Channel 4 news – no doubt lecturing people on how the body functions in activism – said you never forget the first time you get pepper sprayed. That's rubbish though because it's like a fresh bolt every-single-time it comes back to me. But then I've always been good at burying that kind of swirling chaos. Or so I thought. The older I get the more I realise I've only dug shallow graves and sometimes all I've really done is kick leaves over the lump on the ground. Though, as with so many situations, it's hard to separate the physical sensations from the overarching shame of having lost control so badly and finding yourself going at it with batons and boots. There's always comedy too (if you want to see it (which you do because it eases the embarrassment)), and this time it's your friends shouting at the police *don't hurt him, he's not well...* but in Norwegian. And you tell yourself that if they'd only sent two officers instead of eight it would never have escalated so quickly. But you have to tell yourself something. And you love a challenge.

[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 fading out.]

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

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 sound clip of a game fades in, and continues beneath the next section before fading out.]

CG American Male:

the fake did not work

*strong side or weak side
it's no good and it's not close*

*he's pushed that one
and they're putting it on*

*watch the penetration here
he's going to trip*

maybe everybody's a little amped up for this one

*and now he's dropped
like a ragdoll he got thrown down
suffered a concussion*

and he'll get it, and more!

David:

It's become increasingly difficult to control my verbal tics and at home we support and even encourage this in each other. It's not always possible but me and L try to laugh at these things. It's healthier. That's what we tell each other anyway. Because the energy burnt up in trying to bury these intrusions is just too draining. The claustrophobia of living through a pandemic and the blurring of the (usually very well defined) line between *home me* and *work me* has meant that these impulses have begun creeping into the workshop. For context, it's normally difficult to shout for my colleagues' attention over the din of our woodworking machinery. My outbursts have started to turn heads even through this haze of noise. And the embarrassment at being overheard really does not help when it's just layered up on whichever intrusive thought is currently jumping around in your periphery, screaming for your attention. Part of taking care of myself is trying to stay put. Resisting while accepting the inclination to escape. But part of staying put is being an easy target for your own self-loathing... and then you cut a mitre too short or sand through a layer of veneer and there it is in front of you. Undeniable. Tangible proof that you are in fact useless.

[A documentary sound clip fades in and continues beneath the next section. The sounds of players colliding heavily and shouting can be heard, with a cheering crowd in the background. A voiceover by a former player is interspersed. The clip fades out before the section which follow it.]

CG American Male:

this is big boy time right here

and he is gonna be stuffed

["I don't think I really hear anything but things that I try to lock in on, like the quarterback's voice."]

*even when they're not blitzing
they are showing blitz
whoa, baby!
really pursuing*

["The sound is kind of what makes it really look intense I think."]

*chased
and he gets tripped up
boom, right there!
there's the grab*

["But I don't really notice that when I'm out on the field."]

*you wanna be the hero
and you wanna take the shots*

it's just not available

David:

At least now the tics are mostly verbal and rarely become physical anymore. I spend barely any time targeting the spots above my temples with my knuckles and my eyes are in far less danger of permanent damage. The vivid flashed memories spark immediate urges to dig out eyeballs. But that's how sharp the shame can be – drawing up the deep-rooted embarrassment attached to the countless times you lost your rag in front of people whose respect you always craved. I always maintained that no matter how heavy and destructive my depressions were, they would never prove to be *the end point*. I always knew that would be the result of the guilt I carried with me. I was just so caught up on how the depression and guilt seemed to feed each other, I (ridiculously) didn't notice how guilt and shame dovetailed so neatly. Or maybe that's why I didn't notice? The shame you feel for losing control of your emotions leads so quickly to feelings of guilt about not being the man that some people want you to be, and of course guilt for being exactly the man others encouraged you to be. It's infuriating that it took so long to realise this. You / I / we,

of course, need to focus very hard to stop this realisation inducing enormous amounts of shame.

[00:42:42]

[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.

[Energetic music typical of a sports newscast begins and continues beneath the next section before cross-fading with the crowd linking sequence. Sounds of players shouting, running, colliding and grunting in pain can be heard from the middle of the section alongside the music.]

CG American Male:

what jitters for the young guy

anxiousness and jitters!

he is wiry

and he is twitchy

get to him, hit him hard

make him very skittish

he's an emotional player, as we know

but he runs a lot bigger than that

gettin' skinny and then staying alive

he could make you miss in a phone booth

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

David:

A lad at school stabbed his mum and it was never a very big deal. It wasn't a very big knife and she was ok in the end. (Physically.) By the time the police turned up he was on the roof of their house. It's over 25 years ago now but I'm sure the reason he gave me was that he'd had enough of being pushed around and bullied. It had been

happening every day and the sense of powerlessness had led to him stabbing his mum. He stabbed his mum. He was only little and probably seemed like an easy target to the bigger lads (all big tie knots and gaping *Kickers*) trying to 'behave like men'. Trying to be men by physically and emotionally breaking down a boy deemed too feminine. Boys trying to be men by ruining the life of a boy they believed was acting like a girl. Everyday. For four years. He stabbed his mum. And, at 24, it's assumed I'm telling a funny anecdote when I tell a room full of budding artists that 50% of the time I'm in a pub I'd have men offer me out for a fight – every single time they'd mutter something about me having hair down to my shoulders – waving a glass, bottle or cue in my direction. And the overwhelming hideousness of listening to trans women talk about the regular abuse they receive in public sucks the last remaining breaths of defensive laughter out from the poetry open mic audience. A simple truth that femininity in men is incendiary under a White gaze and it all feels so impossible. But it's easy to trace back. You have to (should) ask why we turn a blind eye. And you have to (should) ask why they were allowed to push him to the point of stabbing his mum.

[00:49:40]

[A sound clip begins of the 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 cross-fading with a sound clip of players colliding, grunting and panting in pain during a football game. A cheering crowd can be heard. This continues beneath the next section, before cross-fading with the crowd linking sequence.]

CG American Male:

'They said I lacked the killer instinct – which was also true. I found no joy in knocking people unconscious or battering their faces. The lust for battle and massacre was missing. I had a notion that the killer instinct was really founded in fear, that the killer of the ring raged with ruthless brutality because deep down he was afraid.' – Gene Tunney

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

End of transcript.