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Hubris Was My Hamartia

It was supposed to be an exceptional evening. No homework. A dark, rainy, but oddly warm October day: perfect soccer weather. We were playing the Pennfield Panthers, notoriously one of the worst teams of the I-8. We, the great and mighty Beavers, were just beginning to hit our stride—the score 2 to 0—and I was in an irreversibly happy mood... or so I thought. Funny how easily things can turn around.

A Little Long Note About Me

I'm a center defender, so one of my responsibilities is to shut down the other team's attacking plays before they become dangerous. So when the other team sends a ball up the field, I have to stop it. That means taking headers. A lot of headers.

It happened with five minutes left in the first half. Their keeper had just stopped a great shot, and the Pennfield crowd was electric. He booted the ball back up the field. It was a beautiful punt; the ball took a high, fast, and linear path... right towards me. I felt the sickly sweet rush of adrenaline as I realized the ball was headed my way. The ever-present thought that *my soccer career depends on this play* surfaced and started to scream at me. It wasn't a new thought—this was its sixth or seventh rehearsal just this evening—but it still had the ability to make my entire body go a little tingly. Okay, a lot tingly.

While my mind and body were bickering about what to do, my eyes followed the ball... until it slipped behind the curtain of blinding stadium lights. A wave of panic washed over me as I frantically scanned the sky for the ball. *DANG IT! You stupid ball! You ugly black and white Brine.* My panic turned into outrage. *How dare that ball think it can get away like that!* I was determined not to let it best me. I squinted and looked as directly into the light it had disappeared into as I could. I saw a small round silhouette emerging. *The ball.*

Uh-oh. The soccer ball was moving much faster than I thought it would be. I started backpedalling as quickly as I could on the slick, mushy ground. I kept my eyes on the ball, determined not to lose it again. The ball was still high. *Too high*, my mind kept protesting. *Too high!* But I wasn't going to let it past me; I was too committed to go back now. So I leapt. I launched myself into the air higher than I had ever jumped before. It didn't feel like jumping. It felt like flying. Very unsteady backwards flying. And I hit it. My forehead made contact with the soccer ball.

A Little Long Note About Taking a Header

When heading a soccer ball, it is important to do it correctly. This makes it more safe and allows the player direct the ball more effectively. Coach Kunji even spent an entire practice one year going over how to correctly head the ball. So why am I mentioning this? Because when I made contact with the ball that night, I threw every bit of knowledge I had about how to head a soccer ball to the side.

My head snapped back from the impact. I had been so focused on getting to the ball that I hadn't prepared myself to hit it. I landed on my heels, off balance, arms flailing. My feet could only keep up with my momentum for three short steps before I tumbled. I landed the way I always did, using my arm to break my fall. As I was getting up, my eyes found the ball again; it had gotten to Cameron, our center midfielder. I was eager to get back up and into the play. Quite frankly, my mind wandered a bit. I hoped that we would watch the game film later so I could see myself stop the ball. We didn't do that too often.

Get your head in the game, Kenton. I stood up and shook myself loose. Then I realized I couldn't. My arm refused to move. Confused, I looked down at it. My left arm was bent at the elbow, but something else looked off.

Coach Kunji brought my attention back to the game, where the ball was coming my way, this time with a green player attached to it. I tried to reposition myself to receive the attacker. *Something's wrong.* I still couldn't move my arm. Then I realized what looked strange: my shoulder. My arm wasn't in its socket.

I looked over to the bench, which was about 10 yards away. *Man, I must have really been focusing on the ball*—I was all the way over into the right defender's territory. "Kunji, I think I just dislocated my shoulder," I said with a strange calmness... one that would not last for much longer.

I got down to one knee—the referee has to stop the game for a player that is on the ground and not getting up. The referee blew his whistle, and Kunji and Diego, my team's ever-curious foreign exchange student, ran over.

"Stay put, Brittany is on the way," Kunji told me. Brittany was the athletic trainer.

"Whoa, can I touch it?" Diego asked. He was looking at the empty socket where my arm used to be; it was now popped out and shifted down about three inches.

"Uh... sure."

I didn't feel a thing as he lightly poked my shoulder. *This won't be so bad,* I thought. When Brittany arrived, she didn't waste any time. She kept my arm from moving as we walked off the field. As we were walking, she began riddling me with questions. Had I dislocated my shoulder before? No. Could I feel anything? No. Could I move my fingers? Hmm.... yes.

"Since you haven't dislocated your shoulder before, I'm not going to attempt to put it back in. If it isn't done right, it could lead to permanent damage. You should go to the nearest ER," Brittany informed me. I was relieved that the pain wasn't going to come yet. That would very soon change.

Everything around me faded into the background. My arm started to burn. The pain shot down my arm and worsened with any movement. My mom and Mr. Greenman appeared on a golf cart. They helped me onto it and gave me ice to put on my shoulder. My mom held my arm still as we drove toward the parking lot; she always seemed to know what to do in these situations. Every bump we went over, the pain would

race up and down my arm and centralize in the place that my humeral head was digging into my front deltoid.

A Little Lesson in Anatomy

The humeral head, which is part of the humerus (upper arm bone), is rounded off into a semi-sphere. The humeral head is attached to the rest of the humerus via a constricted neck, which creates a sharp edge. The front deltoid is the shoulder muscle that wraps around the front of the shoulder socket. Sharp bones pinched on soft muscle = not good.

When we finally got to the front gate, my dad was there waiting in his truck. I felt a thankfulness that words could not do justice to; my parents are some of the most organized and deliberate people in an emergency. The moment I was in, he took off and headed for the closest urgent care. It was absolutely the longest nine minutes of my life.

When we got into the parking lot, my dad whipped into the closest spot he could find. He hurried over to open my door and help me out. When I tried to stand up straight, it felt like my shoulder was on fire. I found the most relief bent over almost to a 90 degree angle. *This must look hilarious*, I thought as I ran-shuffled to the glass building, my cleats clacking loudly and quickly on the pavement.

There was no line to the front desk. As my dad and I hurried across the warm-colored room, I found it hard to believe that it was a medical facility. It was a little off-putting to say the least. *Ah, here we go*. Behind the lady at the front desk, I could see white walls and tiles flooded with fluorescent light. So close, yet so far. Before we even said anything, the lady told my dad he needed his insurance information. Grumbling about what a load of malarkey this was, he hurried back out to his truck to grab it. While he was gone, I asked the lady if there was anything I could do to make this all go faster. I was in a lot of pain.

“Actually, we can’t relocate your shoulder here,” she said.

I wanted to scream. Why didn’t she just say that in the first place?! I said “thank you” through gritted teeth and did some more run-shuffling back to the truck. I met my dad halfway out.

“What’s going on?” my dad asked, not sure why I was headed in the opposite direction.

“They can’t put it back in here,” I said, trying to hold back an outcry of disgust (and agony) welling up inside me. *Why did you have to do this to yourself*. The thought repeated itself several times before it was completely interrupted by the pain.

He was about as pleased as I was to hear the news. A bit angrily, we took off for Oaklawn hospital. My dad put his emergency flashers on as we sped down the freeway. I tried to do some of the breathing exercises my mom showed me—she had stayed in Battle Creek with my four siblings. She said that focusing on breathing would help with the pain. Breathing techniques might help when delivering a baby, but they don’t do a thing for a dislocated shoulder.

Although my dad generally opposes the radio, he tuned it to a heavy rock station and blared it. I was a bit surprised by this, but “T.N.T.” by AC/DC was playing, so I didn’t question it. I sang every word of it as loud as I could; it seemed much more dignified than crying the whole time. Slipknot came on next, and so my dad turned it down a bit. I was sure that my shirt would catch fire at any moment; my arm burned so bad that it was difficult to keep it still, even though moving it only meant more pain.

I began to talk about everything I could think of. I hardly waited for my dad’s response, I just bounced from one topic to another. Obsolete facts about cars, sports, governments, wars, and other history flooded out of my mouth. My right hand was beginning to get tired. Every time we went over a rough patch, my helpless left arm would jostle around slightly, sending me into faster and louder conversation, though it was hardly two-sided. “Black Betty” by Ram Jam came on. I asked my dad to turn it up and I sang to that one, too. After it was over, I fell silent. We were getting off at the Marshall exit.

My humerus seemed to recognize where we were and tried to make a run for it. It didn’t want to go back into its socket. That, or the exit was a whole lot rougher than I imagined it would be. I writhed in pain, wishing that we were already at the hospital.

“I’m sorry, buddy,” my dad said. “We’re almost there.”

As we rushed from the street to the emergency room entrance, I felt both relief and impatience. I had been here many times, and I felt much better about my prospects of being treated here than the other place. Yet part of me imagined a long line and a full waiting room. I didn’t think I would be able to go on much longer with so much pain. *Please let there be no line*, I wished.

When we got through the two automatic sliding doors, I was hit with fluorescent lights. There were a few people in the waiting room. My heart sank. *Oh no, how long is this going to take?* My dad described the situation to the lady at the desk. When he was done, she handed him some paperwork and told him to just bring it with when we got to the room.

“Don’t you need our insurance card?” he asked, a little bitter from the urgent care experience.

“We can worry about that later,” she responded. My dad was pleased by this—he has an appreciation for things that make sense.

Another woman came up behind her and told us that the people in front of us wanted us to go ahead of them. They had noticed my arm and the pain it was causing me just standing there. My dad and I both thanked them and just seconds later a nurse showed us to a room. He sat me down in a chair and helped me position myself so my arm wouldn’t move as much. The doctor came in and asked some verifying questions about the incident. He said the only way they would be able to safely relocate my shoulder was to take some x-rays to find out how they needed to twist it back in. They got me onto a rolling bed, put a lead blanket on me, and took me into another room. All I can say is the man taking the x-rays didn’t seem to understand the meaning of the word “ouch.”

After that brutal experience, I was more than ready to have the whole thing be over with. We had been at the hospital for nearly an hour, and I was in just as much pain as when we had arrived. Once the x-rays were taken, they put an IV in. They gave me a strong medicine, and it wasn't too long before the pain, and any of the feeling I had left in my arm, started to slip away. A short time after the IV was put in, the doctor to came back and suggested a conscious sedation.

"We'll give you a cocktail of drugs that will relax your muscles and block all of your pain," the doctor said. "Once we give it to you, you will have no recollection of the following 60 seconds, but you will be awake and able to talk."

My dad said it was up to me, and I agreed to it. The doctor left and I started talking with my dad. He told me stories about when I was little, and while I listened, I was thankful that we had gone here to have it relocated. They were methodical and meticulous in their way of going about this. Anywhere else, they might have just popped it back in on the spot without much thought about the future.

I began to get very, very sleepy. My dad's voice became blurry and I could only hear clearly in spurts. *The IV. They must have started giving me the drugs.* I felt like I was in a movie; I felt an uncanny resemblance to the way that people in the hospital go in and out of consciousness in the movies. I closed my eyes and continued to listen the best I could. I only opened my eyes again when he stopped speaking. The doctor and a few of the nurses had walked in. *What... what's going on?* I began to wonder. But I was too far gone; I lost consciousness mid-thought.

Next thing I knew, I was spasming in an unfamiliar bed and enjoying every moment of it. Every convulsion made me feel tickled all over. That itchy, pent-up feeling kept building up and I just had to let it out. I smile, laugh, and look around. I see my dad, the doctor, the nurses.

"A lot of people would love to get ahold of the stuff you're on," my dad said.

The only response I had was "I think I'd be fun drunk!"

And with that, I blacked out again.

All in all, my shoulder was out for about two and a quarter hours. When I woke up, my dad was still sitting by my bed. I was in a black sling. The first thing he did was grin and say that I said a lot of interesting things while I was consciously sedated. Naturally, I freaked out. I had been so high I couldn't remember being awake, so how far off was it to assume that I told some giant embarrassing secret? I tried to get him to spill the beans, but he wouldn't budge.

Great. This is just fantastic. What did I say?? The doctor came back in. He said that things should be all taken care of in about forty minutes. *Forty minutes? What time is it anyway?* Time was not exactly top priority when I came in, so I had no idea what time it was. I asked my dad; he said it was a little bit after 9 P.M.

For a while, my dad told me about how they relocated my shoulder.

“Once you were out, they had to tie you down to the bed with the bedsheet, and then the doctor put his foot on the bed frame and pulled on your arm until it popped back in. It took him two or three yanks to get it back in. It’s a good thing you were out, that’s for sure.”

Professional job, I thought. But just for a moment. I was glad my shoulder got put back in and I could only imagine how badly it might have turned out if they had not performed all of the steps beforehand.

I kept falling asleep up until it was time to go. The doctor gave me a bottle of steroids to take for the pain. He told me that it would be pretty rough once the heavy drugs wore off. We thanked them and headed out the door to go home. I was unable to wait any longer.

“What did I say?” I tried not to sound like I was too concerned, but my voice deceived me.

My dad paused for a second. It felt like an eternity.

“Oh, you didn’t say anything. I was just messing with you.”

Relief flooded over me. *Worked up over nothing*. It was a lot better than being worked up over *something*, though.

“Really?” I said. “Nothing?”

“Well... I guess you did say that you thought you’d be fun drunk, but that’s about it.”

Looking back, I often wonder about my choice to take that header. We won the game in a shutout—that could not have been absolutely guaranteed if I didn’t take it—but I had to have surgery. I have gone through six-plus months of physical therapy and I still don’t have my strength back. The drugs made me sick and delirious, and I still went through a lot of pain. On the other hand, I got to skip school for two weeks straight and watch movies. I also got a cool cast and was the talk of the soccer team for a while. So, if I could go back, would I have taken the header?

NOPE. I would have let it bounce over my head, pass it back to our goalkeeper, let him get it up the field, and take the heat for it later. If there would have been any heat, that is. Anyhow, I can’t go back. I often wonder to myself why I even took the header. All I can think of is that it was out of my own pride. Stupid, stupid pride.

But, hey, it *was* pretty cool.