

FORUM

Run, Jake, run



Nigel Alston
Motivational Moments

*I wonder why, I wonder why,
I wonder why I wonder.
I wonder why I wonder why,
I wonder why I wonder?*
— Richard Feynmann

"Act of kindness speaks volumes about football's spirit," read the headline of a story written by James Walker in the Herald Dispatch in Huntington, W.Va. I had received the story forwarded to me by a co-worker after she had received it from a friend, saying, "You will really like this." She was right.

"The Jake Porter Story" is a personal story that opens your heart and rekindles your spirit, a human interest story that is sweeping the country and drawing national attention. The story has all the ingredients to move you emotionally, excite you and give you goose bumps, and has made Porter, a high school senior, a celebrity overnight.

Porter scored a touchdown on the last play of a football game with time running out, covering 49 yards in about 10 to 12 seconds. He plays football for Northwest High School in McDermott, Ohio. Actually he is more a member of the team than a player.

According to the story by Walker, Porter is a "player with endless amounts of energy and a

glowing personality." On the surface, that doesn't sound so significant, but it is when you consider Porter is mentally handicapped and is an unlikely candidate for this kind of attention. However, his personality fits it perfectly, and it couldn't have happened to a more deserving young man, according to the reports, articles and interviews with coaches, friends and school officials.

I watched a video of the touchdown run and felt myself cheering for Porter as he initially hesitated to run through a hole wide enough for a tractor-trailer to drive through. I replayed the video several times, watching the players step aside after the ball was snapped, pointing Porter toward the goal line and running behind him, some with tears in their eyes. It was quite an emotional moment.

Porter's initial instinct was to kneel down as he had practiced his special play with the team during the week. Because he had never officially taken a snap in a game, his coach had worked it out with the opposing coach — if the game was not on the line — for him to take a snap, kneel down and end the game.

What happened next proved to be a magical moment. The game wasn't close and the opposing coach, his team winning 42-0, changed his mind, deciding to allow Porter to run for a touchdown. His players were instructed to step aside as Porter's play was called, "84-iso." Lined up in position as the tailback, he took the ball, hesitated, started to kneel,

started to run again, thought about kneeling again, and then was off to the races. The opposing players didn't care about the shut-out and years from now I'm sure they will remember this special night for reasons other than the box score.

As I watched the touchdown run, I wondered what Jake was thinking about, running to cheers from fans of both teams, encouragement from his teammates and the opposition. Maybe he is a player, I thought, as I watched a replay of the run showing Porter looking back over his shoulder once, as if to say, catch me if you can. He then crossed the goal line, turned around and handed the ball to the official, threw up his hands and celebrated. He was on cloud nine.

Porter, is "the type of kid that will follow you around the entire day — as long as he's having fun," according to the story, "and the type that will leave the room as soon as he's getting bored. He's always seeking a thrill, and undoubtedly this touchdown run was the biggest thrill in his young life." He stayed up all night after that run into the spotlight and is still talking about it.

We all can learn a lesson or two from him too. While he had not taken an official snap in a football game, he still showed up on time for practice every day and dressed in full gear during games. And his personality positioned him for this special moment, according to his mother, who told his coach once that, "One day, with Jake's personality, he's going to make national news."

This act of kindness by a football coach reminds me of the poem "One."

- One song can spark a moment.
- One flower can wake the dream.
- One tree can start a forest.
- One bird can herald spring.
- One smile begins a friendship.
- One handclasp lifts a soul.
- One star can guide a ship at sea.
- One word can frame the goal.
- One vote can change a nation.
- One sunbeam lights a room.
- One candle wipes out darkness.
- One laugh will conquer gloom.
- One step must start each journey.
- One word must start each prayer.
- One hope will raise our spirits.
- One touch can show you care.
- One voice can speak with wisdom.
- One heart can know what's true.
- One life can make the difference.

you see it's up to you!

One act of kindness has captured the nation's heart. I wonder why?
Nigel Alston is a radio talk-show host, columnist and motivational speaker. Visit his Web site at www.motivationalmoments.com.

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Rep. Larry Womble
NC House of Representatives
71st District
Tel. (336) 784-9373
Fax (336) 784-1626
E-Mail: LWism@aol.com
Home Address:
1294 Salem Lake Road
Winston-Salem, NC 27107

Fear over Bush and high court



Earl Ofari Hutchinson
Guest Columnist

In a recent interview near octogenarian Chief Justice William Rehnquist coyly hinted that he might retire now that President Bush has the Republican majority he needs in the Senate to get more conservative judges on the federal bench.

Before and during the 2000 presidential election, civil rights and women's groups repeatedly warned that Bush would pack the U.S. Supreme Court with more conservative judicial hard-liners such as Rehnquist, Clarence Thomas and Antonin Scalia. During the campaign he lavishly praised them as the judges with the right judicial stuff. While Rehnquist may be the first to go, illness or age could also force one or more of the other justices to step down in the next couple of years.

If Bush demands that his high court appointees adhere rigidly to the standard conservative litmus test, and they are confirmed, they could wreak colossal damage on civil rights and civil liberties protections, totally ignore consumer protections, give away the company store to big business and fulfill the long cherished dream of ultrarightists to topple Roe vs. Wade. A Bush appointee potentially could serve decades on the Supreme Court. Rehnquist has served on the court for 30 years. Their decisions would profoundly influence, for good and bad, law and politics in America long after Bush has left the White House.

But if Bush tries to ram another Thomas or Scalia onto



President Bush may get an opportunity in the next two years to pick his first Supreme Court nominees.

the court, there are political risks. While it takes only a simple majority in the Senate to confirm a judge, which Republicans now have, Democrats would almost certainly mount a filibuster against a Thomas or Scalia type. It would take 60 votes to cut it off and force a vote. A filibuster could breathe life back into a party battered and bruised by the Bush juggernaut and written off by many voters as a beaten and spent party. Even if the Democrats lost the fight, they would send a strong signal that they are still willing to fight hard for political and ideological principles.

Civil rights, civil liberties and women's groups praised them for their fighting spunk in scuttling, at least for the time being, U.S. District Judge Charles Pickering Sr. and Texas Supreme Court Justice Priscilla Owen, and delaying or denying confirmation hearings to some of Bush's other nominees. If Bush re-nominates them in the next Congress, they will have yet another chance to rally the troops.

Bush also must be mindful of the debacle that befell his father

when he picked Thomas to replace civil rights icon Thurgood Marshall in 1991. It ignited a national firestorm of protest by civil rights and women's groups. During the Senate Judiciary Committee's confirmation hearings, they stormed the Capitol and demanded that Thomas be rejected. Their protests stiffened the spines of committee Democrats, who subjected Thomas to the most intense, and grueling testimony in living memory. Although Thomas squeaked through by a narrow margin in the Senate, several notable Republicans broke party ranks to vote against his nomination.

Bush will be watched even closer than his father was by civil rights and women's groups and many Democrats. Any hint that he plans to nominate a judicial partisan would trigger a tidal wave of national rage, inflame Democrats outside Congress and permanently tar Bush as a petty ideologue more concerned about advancing a narrow conservative agenda than building bipartisan political consensus.

Bush railed against Senate

Democrats for polarizing and poisoning the atmosphere by holding his court nominees hostage. This is hyperbole mostly for public and political consumption. The majority of his appointees have been approved, and they have been approved with no public rancor or bitter political warfare. They were quietly and quickly approved because they did not fit the doctrinaire Thomas and Scalia image. They are moderate Republicans from varied ethnic and gender backgrounds.

Senate Democrats also remind Bush that they have confirmed more of his court nominees in the past year than Republicans did of Clinton's court nominees in any single year of Clinton's second White House term when they controlled the Senate.

While many of Bush's federal court appointees don't fit the mold of a Thomas or Scalia, this does not mean that he won't be sorely tempted to pick judges to the U.S. Supreme court whose avowed mission is to torpedo civil liberties, civil rights and abortion. Bush will be under monumental pressure from hard-right groups to impose their retrograde judicial philosophy conservative litmus test on his picks.

There's no guarantee that he will show political good sense and pick non-agenda obsessed, moderate judges rather than another Thomas or Scalia to the high court. But if he does pick another one like him, civil rights and women's groups will stampede to the barricades to oppose him. And hopefully, the top Democrats will be there with them.

Earl Ofari Hutchinson is an author and columnist. Visit his news and opinion Web site: www.thehutchinsonreport.com.

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CONTACT US:

phone number: **336 / 722-8624**
fax: **336 / 723-9173**
Web site address: **www.wschronicle.com**
e-mail address: **news@wschronicle.com**

Copy Editor 723-8448 PAUL COLLINS
Circulation 722-8624
Sales Staff 722-8628
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