

THE COWARD

by
THOMAS BONTLY

Is a quarterback who plays professional football for fifteen years
without a single injury playing the game a little *too* safely?

When the Commandos obtained Max Luke from the Detroit Lions in exchange for a future draft choice, Max was a fifteen-year veteran of the NFL.¹ A quarterback by trade, Max had slipped imperceptibly from the status of a promising understudy to that of a reliable reserve. Nevertheless, the Commandos thought they had brought off one shrewd deal. Although they were a young team, inexperienced even to the coaching staff, they had talent at every position, and the front office was persuaded that an old pro like Max Luke might be all the team needed to jell into a winner.

When Max reported to the Commando training camp in mid-July, the head coach asked him to come into his office. Max wasn't a big man, but the coach immediately recognized

intelligence, poise, alertness—all the qualities he knew a quarterback had to have. But there was something else in Luke's gray eyes—something the coach had never seen in a football player before, couldn't identify, and therefore distrusted.

"Luke," he said, "we've all been wondering about you. How's the arm?"

"The arm's fine," Max said.

"No problems? Nothing the Lions were hiding from us?"

"No, everything's fine," Max said.

"No problems at all."

"You didn't throw the ball much last year, did you?" the coach asked.

Max smiled. "We had a running game at Detroit."

"Well," the coach said, "we've got some good receivers on this team, Luke, and we intend to use them."

"Fine," Max said, and that something

1. NFL, the National Football League.

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the coach couldn't understand and didn't like seemed to glint a bit brighter in his eyes.

The coach shuffled the papers on his desk and came up with the scouting report on Max. "Something else I meant to ask you, Luke. It says here you had a nickname at Detroit."

"Everybody gets a nickname, Coach," the quarterback said.

"They called you 'Lucky Lukey,' it says here. Why was that? How were you so lucky, Luke?"

The coach watched closely, but could discern no embarrassment in his new player. "Oh, you know how those things get started, Coach. There's nothing to it that I know of."

"I also hear," the coach said, "that the linebackers around the league call you 'The Phantom.' They say nobody's ever laid a hand on you—at least not so's you could feel it."

"That's an exaggeration," Max said. The coach waited for Max to say something more, but the old quarterback seemed content to let his reputation speak for itself.

"One more thing," the coach said. He was a quiet, reserved sort of man. He had served his apprenticeship under a firebrand, a legendary figure in the NFL, and he found it difficult to be as blunt and hard with his players as he thought he should be. "You know we've got a young fellow here by the name of Conway.

All-American.² We paid a bundle for him, and we expect him to make it big. But he'll need at least a year or two to learn the pros. We figure you can be our quarterback till Conway comes of age—and with a team like ours, Luke, that gives you a chance to earn a bundle before you retire. We're thinking championship, Luke. We're thinking Super Bowl!"

He paused to let those grandiose words sink in. He drummed his fingers on the desk top, looked intently at the jumble of papers stuffing his metal wastepaper basket. "But if you don't come through for us, we may have to go with Conway sooner. Is that clear?"

"Sure," Max said. "Sure, that's clear. You want me to work with the kid? Give him a few pointers?"

The coach felt as if his high card had been trumped.³ "Yeah, you do that, Luke. We'd—uh—'preciate that."

For the next several weeks, the coaches kept close watch on Max. The report from the trainer was good. Max was in perfect health. His arm was as strong as a rookie's. His legs were fine. And his passing was consistently impressive. The head coach was beginning to wonder why the Lions had

2. *All-American*, in sports, a player selected as one of the best in the United States at his or her position.

3. *his high card had been trumped*, a figure of speech derived from card games. It implies that the coach felt Max had gotten the better of him.

ever let him go. He wondered why, after fifteen years, Max had never attained stardom. And the better Max looked, the more suspicious the coach became.

During the exhibitions, all of the Commandos' quarterbackbacks got work, and Max Luke soon proved himself the most consistent. His sense of timing, his grasp of the game's strategy, his ability to read the enemy's defenses were all superb. True, Max sparked no excitement and inspired no hosannas in the press, as Conway did, but the head coach was satisfied. He announced that Max would start the first game of the regular season against the Bears in Chicago.

The Bears were famous for their pass rush. On the first play from scrimmage, Max faded back to pass. The Bear front four tore through the Commando line and converged on the quarterback. Max just got his pass away before he was surrounded by black uniforms, then buried beneath them as if sucked beneath the ooze of some primeval swamp. Jefferson caught the ball at the Bear 45 for a gain of thirty yards.

Jim Grady, a defensive end who had played with Max at Pittsburgh, wound up with a knee in Max's abdomen. As he took his time getting up, he said to Max, "What's gotten into you, Lucky? Heroics ain't your style, boy."

Max couldn't speak until the pressure was relieved. "Slowing down a bit, aren't you, Jim? I had all day back here."

"Just give me another chance," Grady said.

But Max did not give him another chance. He turned to the running game, to off-tackle slants and power sweeps, then to draws and screens and short flips over the middle. The frustrated Bear line didn't come near Max, and the harder they tried to anticipate his rare passes, the more holes Max found through which to slip his backs. Short gainers, but they ate up the yardage and the clock. From the stands, it might have looked like a dull game, but the coaches and players knew it was a masterpiece. Max had challenged the famous pass rush, then teased it, taunted it, tormented it, and finally nullified it altogether. The Commandos won, 17-9, and nobody on the team cared to complain that Max had not thrown enough passes.

As the season progressed, Max continued to play impressive football. True, the running backs did grumble a bit at times, because Max made them carry the ball so often. And the pass receivers sometimes got frustrated, running their patterns play after play, with rarely a chance to catch the football. Max displayed no emotion, no team spirit. He made no friends and seemed to scorn his fellow players. He berated his linemen with vicious sarcasm when they missed their blocks. He even seemed to look down on the coaches, and not even the head coach could bring himself to make a

stirring locker-room appeal with Max's cool gray eyes upon him. Yet he won ball games, after all, and that was what mattered.

The Commandos came to San Francisco at midseason with a record of six and one. The night before the 49er game, Jerry Boots, the young Commando fullback, sampled the hospitality of his old teammate from college days, Mike Crawford. Mike was a place-kicker for the 49ers. Last year he had been with the Lions. After dinner they sat in Mike's trophy-filled family room and reminisced about the old days at Ohio State. Then Mike asked Jerry what he thought of The Phantom.

"You mean Luke? Well, until that game last week, I thought he was terrific," Jerry said. "But that game sort of disappointed me. We should have won it, Mike. Luke just wouldn't throw the ball. They had our ground game stopped, and we kept telling Luke to loosen them up by going to the air. But he just kept running us at the line and—well, you know the score."

Mike looked shrewd. "Yeah, I know the score. But do *you*?"

"Do I? What do you mean, do I?"

"Do you know why the Lions traded Luke?"

"Well, they had Steve Dougherty—"

"Nah, it had nothing to do with

Dougherty. Look, I hate to put the rap on a guy, especially when he never did me

any harm, personally. But I guess you've got a right to know."

"Know what?" Jerry asked. In the back of his mind he was thinking that tomorrow, when the Commandos met the 49ers, Mike Crawford would be his enemy and that he probably shouldn't be listening to this.

"Well," Mike said, "the Lions had to get rid of Luke because the whole team said they wouldn't play for him anymore. Morale was terrible last year, especially those weeks when Dougherty was injured and Luke had to start. We didn't win a one of those games, and the players all said it was Luke's fault."

"Yeah? Why was that, Mike?"

"Because he wouldn't throw the lousy ball, that's why. Because he always played it safe and let somebody else take the knocks. Why, do you know, that bum's never had so much as a bruise in this league? No defense has ever got to him—ever! Well, you know that couldn't happen unless Luke's been dogging it all these years. He's not tough, Jerry. He's just not tough. They say he's a coward."

Jerry didn't want to go on with the discussion. He didn't want to think about what Mike had said. He felt miserable. He left the Crawfords shortly thereafter and found it hard to give them his thanks for a swell evening.

He went to bed that night telling himself he wasn't going to fall for Mike

Crawford's story, and woke up the next morning with the sick conviction that it was all true. Luke *was* a coward. Little things about the quarterback that had bothered Jerry in the past now began to make sense—the reliance on a ground attack, the frequent audibles at the line, all the times Luke dumped the ball off to the sidelines just to save himself from a mauling. Sure, sure, it was just like Mike said.

Cowardice was something Jerry found hard to understand. He reacted to it like a missionary confronted with heathen idols. Football was no game for people who loved their own skin, who were afraid of such trifles as a broken bone or a sprained limb. The players Jerry loved and respected were bruised, battered men who excelled in their ability to take punishment, to suffer, to endure. Courage! Sacrifice! That was what football was all about—wasn't it?

That afternoon, as they were suiting up for the game, Jerry strolled over to Max's locker. The old quarterback was stripped to the waist and Jerry noticed no scars or lumps left as mementos of any old injuries. The sight of so much healthy, whole, unmarred flesh struck Jerry as almost obscene.

He sat down on the bench. "How you doin', Max?"

"Fine, kid. How you doin'?"

"Pretty fair. Think we can lick 'em today?"

"Of course." Max pulled on his jersey, adjusted his shoulder pads.

"Hey, Max—you ever get hurt, playin' football?"

He had meant to say it in a casual way, but Max looked at him sharply.

"No," he said quietly, "I guess I've been pretty lucky."

"Lucky Lukey, huh?" Jerry asked.

"I don't like that nickname, Boots," Max said.

"Sorry," Jerry said. "No offense. I was just wondering, you know, how you do it. Stay so healthy, I mean."

Max seemed to think a moment. "Let me ask you," he said. "How many times have you been hurt?"

"Bad? Oh, about three times."

"Three times in five years," Max said.

"What kind of injuries were they, Jerry?"

"Well, there was a shoulder

separation my first year. And last year a busted rib and some torn ligaments—oh, and a couple of concussions—I really don't count those."

Max's face suddenly became stern, angry. "OK, kid, now I'll tell you what I think. I think the object of this game is to score points. I think it's got nothing to do with getting hurt. I think that when a man gets hurt in this game it's because he did something wrong. He made a mistake.

"And I don't make mistakes, Boots.

That's why I'm not only the oldest starting quarterback in the league this year—I'm also the best. So you just think about that

because the next time you come around braggin' about your lousy injuries, I'm going to punch your face in, see?"

Jerry sat stunned as Max jogged out to the field.

That afternoon against the 49ers Max was brilliant. Although he usually passed from the pocket, in the classic manner, he confused the 49er defense by rolling out on a series of option plays. The 49ers fell apart, and the Commandos won easily.

The only misfortune of the game was that Jerry Boots, running the power sweep, was hit from behind and had to be carried from the field. It was a back injury. The trainer judged he would be out for the season.

Without the services of their first-string fullback, the Commandos began to falter. It was obvious that the loss of Jerry Boots, on whom Max had been able to count for three or four tough yards whenever he needed them, hurt the quarterback's game, forced him to take chances, cost him his poise and consistency. After two close losses, the sportswriters began questioning Luke's future as the Commandos' starter. Young Billy Conway was a great favorite with the press and the fans. He was already getting more than his share of hair-oil and razor-blade commercials, and in Los Angeles, after the Ram game, he was seen dating a movie starlet; everybody wanted him to succeed. The head coach spent a nervous week denying rumors of

dissension on the team, lineup changes, a new approach, and finally decided he would have to talk to Max.

"I've been going over the films of the last few games, Luke," he said. "I think you're playing too conservatively. I think there were times when you should have passed, or gone for the bomb instead of the short gainer. I think maybe your game is getting—well, sluggish."

"Really?" Max said. "Well, I thought I was calling the right plays."

"Sure," the coach said. "Sure—but you're very cautious, Max."

"That's how we won seven games," Max said.

"And how we lost three," the coach replied. "The team is down, Luke. The front office is getting nervous. This was supposed to be our year, you know, and now the Cowboys are breathing down our necks."

"Luke"—the coach hated these appeals, felt cheap and corny—"I'm counting on you to bring us through."

Max looked out the window at the vacant sky. "Yeah, OK. I'll do what I can, Coach."

The Dallas game was a nightmare. The Commandos' defense fell apart. Their offense was equally inept. Whenever Max tried to pass, he was chased across the backfield. Most of his passes were incomplete. Many were simply thrown away. Jerry Boots watched the game on TV from his hospital bed. He watched

Max closely and saw many things he hadn't been aware of down on the field.

The old man was a coward, all right. He was selling out the team. Worse yet, he was bad for the game. Why, he was a traitor to the accepted brutality of football.

In the second half Billy Conway took over. His passes were erratic, his timing uncertain, but he had guts, anyway. Jerry watched with admiration from his own bed of pain (he was still in traction) as Billy took his lumps, got hit time and again, and still managed to complete some spectacular passes. It was too late, of course. The Cowboys won 35-17, and were tied with the Commandos for the division lead.

The uproar in the press was considerable. The head coach tried to get his team back the only way he could—by starting Conway as quarterback.

Billy lost the next week at St. Louis. He lost gallantly, but he lost. The Cardinals were not a strong team. The head coach knew that Max Luke would not have lost that game. So much, he decided, for noble experiments. With only two games left to play and the Commandos a game behind Dallas, the coach felt himself helplessly dependent upon a quarterback he didn't understand and couldn't trust. He wondered what his illustrious predecessor would have done in such a situation, and every time he thought of his illustrious predecessor he felt a sharp pain in his stomach. The head

coach became convinced that he was not a well man.

Somehow, Luke won the next game, and somehow, the Cowboys lost. They were tied again, with everything riding on the last game of the season, at home, against Max's old team, the Lions.

The long season had taken its toll—several regulars were out; several others were playing with injuries, their limbs taped and swollen, their bodies full of painkiller. All that week the Commando training room resembled a Red Cross camp outside a disaster area. Men limped, hobbled, winced, looked out through glazed, anguished eyes. Only Max Luke, the untouchable, moved among them with a sane mind and sound body. It was as if a gorgeous Apollo⁴ had descended to Hades⁵ simply to augment the misery of the damned souls.

The head coach went secretly to a doctor in a neighboring city and learned that he had an ulcer. He was seriously considering an offer from a firm that bottled soft drinks. Saturday he watched the Cowboys play the Rams on TV. The Cowboys lost a barnburner, 7-6. Now all the Commandos had to do to win the division title was to beat the Lions the next day. The coach dreamed that night

4. *Apollo* (ə pol'ō), in mythology, the god of the sun, remarkable for his youthful beauty.

5. *Hades* (hă'dēz), in Greek myths, the home of the dead, a gloomy place below the earth.

of being pummeled to death by giant footballs.

Sunday morning he arrived at the stadium early and found Max waiting for him out in front. They stood in the cold sunshine, beneath the massive structure in which their fates would be determined. Scraps of paper, discarded programs, and ticket stubs blew across the deserted asphalt lot. On the nearby freeway, passing traffic made a steady hum.

"Well, Luke, what is it?"

"I want to know," Max said, "who you're starting today."

"I'm not sure yet. I can't tell you." Max squinted into the glare of the sun. "You know, I suppose, that the Lions are out to get me."

"Everybody's out to get the quarterback," the coach said.

"Yeah, but I mean *really* get me," Max said. "Everybody on that team hates my guts, Coach. They think I sold them out last year."

The coach looked up at the immense steel girders supporting the upper deck of the stadium. A few mangy sparrows were flying in and out, through sunshine and shadow. The coach thought that he had always been a lonely, misunderstood man. He thought that he was getting old. "Luke," he said, "are you trying to tell me you're *afraid* to play the Lions? Are you saying that—with a championship at stake—you don't *want* to play?"

"What I'm trying to tell you," Max

said, "is that you need me for the play-offs. Conway can't handle the Colts. If the Lions get me this afternoon, the season will be over for all of us."

"If we lose this game," the coach felt permitted to observe, "it's all over anyway."

"Oh, we can win," Max said. "The Lions have been waiting all season for a crack at me. If you start Conway, it will take the edge off their game. I know that team, Coach. They play on spite. They can't beat a team they don't hate, and on the Commandos they hate only me. Conway might be able to handle them. Give it a try. If we get behind—if it's really necessary—I'll go in. But, frankly, I'd rather save myself for the big money."

The head coach didn't know what to say. He saw that look in Luke's eyes—mocking him, unnerving him. "Max," he said, "I wish I could trust you. But, to tell you the truth, I think you're afraid of getting hurt."

"Of course I am," Max said and walked away.

That morning Jerry Boots was released from the hospital in a brace and on crutches, with strict orders to keep to his bed. The first thing he did was to call his brother-in-law and persuade him to drive him down to the stadium. He arrived while the team was suiting up. Disregarding the greetings of his

teammates, he walked, after his fashion, straight to Max's locker.

"Well, if it isn't the hero," Max said. "Your crutches are most becoming, kid."

"They'd look a lot better on you, Luke," Jerry said. "Now get this straight, you cheap phony. I'm on to you. I know what you are, buddy. You haven't got the guts God gave a worm. But I tell you this—if you let the team down out there today—if you let the game down, you bum—I'm going to personally break every bone in your body. You'll find out what pain tastes like, fella. When I'm done with you, you won't have a tooth in your head or a friend in the world. Do you understand?"

The team had gathered around. Max looked at them and saw their hard, accusing faces. *Just like at Detroit*, he thought.

"Get out of here, Boots," he said.

"Maybe next year you'll get to play some football for a change."

It took several teammates to persuade Jerry to leave without taking on Max then and there—crutches, brace, and all.

Before the game, Max tried to tell Conway a few things about the Lion defense, but Billy pushed him away. "I don't play your kind of game, Luke," he said and left for the field.

When the teams lined up for the kickoff, some of the Lions looked over at the bench where Max was sitting, alone at the end.

"Hey, Lucky—where ya playin' next year?"

"We're gunnin' for you, Luke! We're gonna have fun this afternoon. Hope your insurance is all paid up."

"Hey, Phantom—how many passes did you throw this year? Three? Three whole passes? That must be your record!"

Max stared at the dirt, gazed up at the sunny winter sky. The great stadium vibrated in a steady roar, yet seemed hushed and far away. *Like you hear in a seashell*, Max thought, *when you put it up to your ear*. The sea in a shell, the universe in a stadium. Something big happened out there on those hundred yards of turf. Kings rose and fell. Nations prospered and collapsed. Suns burned out and planets died. Who knew why?

This would have to be his last season, he thought. He was sorry, in a way. He had always loved the game—its intricate strategy, its demanding skills, its cruel logic. And he had always tried to play it *his way*. He had wanted to see if it could be done—if, under all that pressure, amidst the hysteria of the crowds and the savagery of the field, a man could keep his rationality. He saw now that you couldn't—that in the end you wound up as crazy as the rest of them. Ah, well, it was time to quit. He really couldn't enjoy it much anymore—not their way.

When Conway took the field for the Commandos, the stadium reacted with

confusion and dismay. The fans didn't like Luke, but they had wanted to see him play. This game of all games. Boos, jeers, a few stray cups and cushions were directed at Max's end of the bench. Max ignored them.

Conway played well in spurts. For a time it looked as if he would be able to do the job. As Max had predicted, the Lions seemed to have lost interest. They kept looking over at the bench, where their ex-teammate sat like an evil spirit. Their disappointment filled the great amphitheater; it hung in the cold air like the wrong ending to a great drama, like a tragedy without its catastrophic fifth act. The sacrificial victim had declined to appear.

For three quarters it was a slow, dull game, the Commandos clinging to a 6-3 lead. Then an interception, a fumbled kickoff return, and suddenly the Commandos were ten points down with the fourth quarter half gone.

Max got up, put on his helmet, and sent one of the reserve backs down the sidelines to catch his warm-up passes. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Conway arguing with the coach. Billy went over to the bench and sat down.

The Commandos returned the Lion kickoff to the 30 and Max took the field amid a horrendous response from the crowd. In the huddle, he looked straight at his linemen.

"I'll kick the tail of the first one of you

jokers who doesn't stop his man. You slobbs give me protection or you'll never see the lousy Super Bowl, understand? OK, tight-I right—slot over right—fake draw 86—on shift."

The Lions couldn't believe Max would have the guts to pass against them. That gave him just time enough to hit Jefferson at the 45. One of the Lions piled into Max a little late and the official threw his flag. Max limped downfield to the huddle, the ball on the 30.

"That was a beautiful play," somebody said.

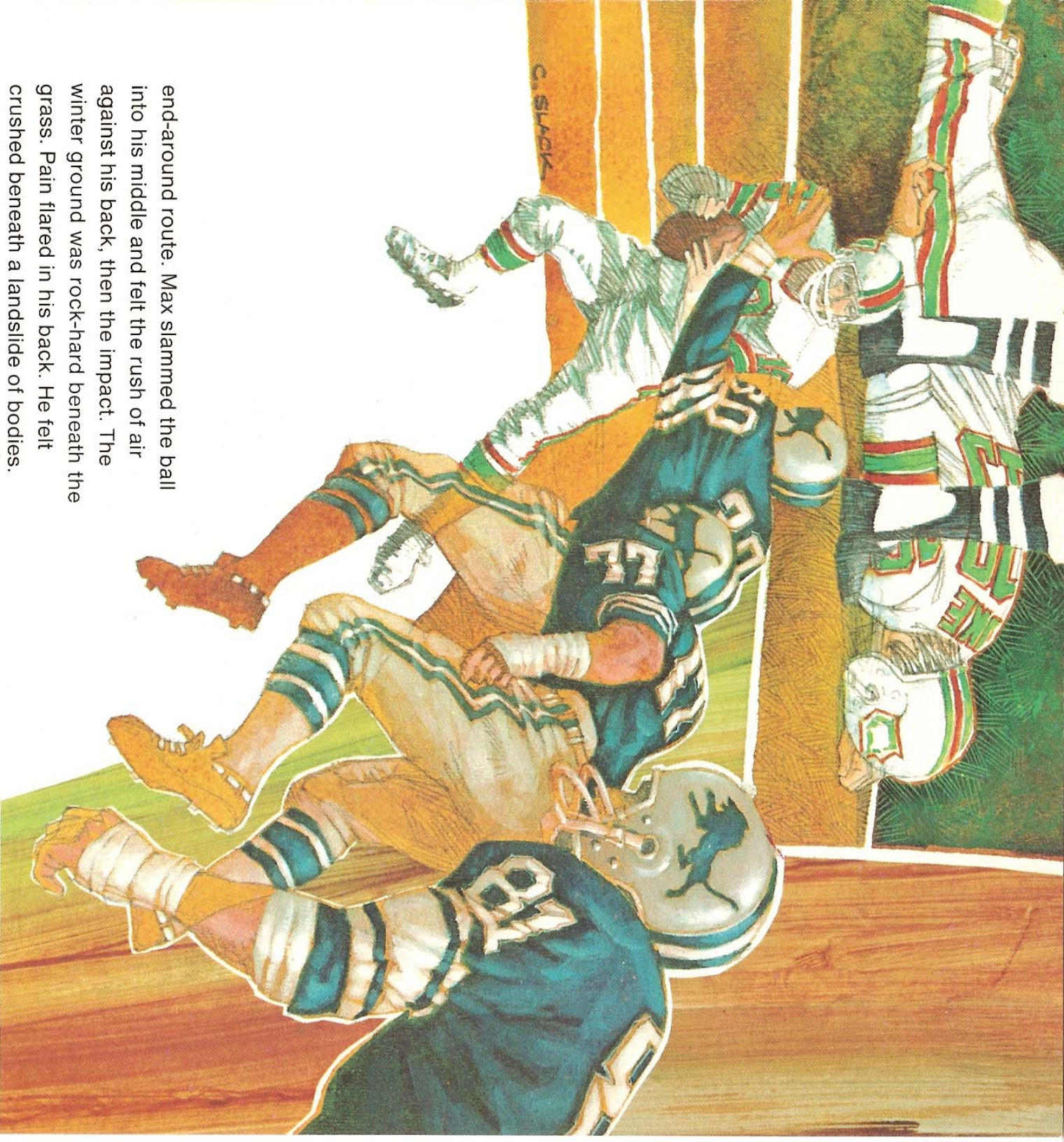
"Shut up," Max said. "You're letting them in. Keep those maniacs off my back, you hear? Tight I—fake 55—52 G O—reverse—on set."

The crowd roared as Max went up to the line. Above the green-jerseyed backs of his linemen he saw the silver helmets glinting in the sun, the huge hunched shoulders of the massive men who would be trying to murder him.

His hoarse voice cracked out the signals. "55!—52!—77!—set!"

The ball whacked into his palms. He spun and faked to the fullback. Behind him he could hear the thud of colliding bodies, the grunts and groans and growls, the smack of leather and slap of flesh, the heavy footsteps on the grass. If the play worked, he wouldn't get hit. But he knew somebody would miss his block. He was not to be spared.

Jefferson plunged past on his



end-around route. Max slammed the ball into his middle and felt the rush of air against his back, then the impact. The winter ground was rock-hard beneath the grass. Pain flared in his back. He felt crushed beneath a landslide of bodies.

By the time he could get to his feet the crowd was roaring, and Max knew they had a big gain. Then he saw the place-kicker coming in and realized Jefferson had scored. His back hurt so badly he could barely hold for the extra

point. After the kick, a charging Lion accidentally ran into him.

Back on the bench, Max waited for the pain to go away. He saw how a man could get used to pain, could even grow to love its intimate companionship, its

insidious flattery. He had always known football players were sick.

There were less than two minutes left, the score still 16-13, when the Commandos finally got the ball back on their own eight-yard line. Max jogged grimly back onto the field.

"OK, you slobs," Max said in the huddle. "I'll be in the lousy end zone, and if anybody so much as touches me, I'll just hand them the lousy football—understand?"

The linemen understood. They dug in. Max called the signals. He took the ball, faked the hand-off, and dropped straight back into the end zone. His receivers were covered. Max waited as green jerseys collided with white, just a few yards away from him. Chunks of sod fell at his feet. Men sprawled on the ground, grappling, reaching out for him. Max thought he saw a hole on the left side. He thought that with the backfield out for a pass he might make the sidelines and a first down.

Ah well, he thought, and tucked the ball under his arm.

As he ran, he heard the wind whistle inside his helmet. He heard the constant throb of the crowd like the blood pounding in his head, like the whispered secrets of the seashell.

At the Lion 40, Max was brought down hard. He rolled over on his side, and saw the sky tilted over him like a dish about to fall from a shelf. When he went

back to the huddle, his right arm was numb and he didn't know if he could throw the ball or not.

Max inched the team downfield, his eye on the clock. The crowd was screaming. Max used his last time out. The Commandos were on the Lion 16, third and six, twenty seconds left in the game.

Twenty seconds, Max thought. A universe could open like a flower or burn to a cinder in twenty seconds. Some lives don't last that long.

Max called the best play he knew. It was suicide, but he called it. His teammates looked at him with dawning love and respect as he rasped out the signals. They knew. The stands knew. The Lions knew. Max would pay for his gesture.

Max crouched over to take the snap. "Sixteen!—83!—Hut! Hut!—Hut!"

He snatched the ball from between the center's legs and rolled out to his left. Out of the corner of his eye Max saw his left guard knocked flat, white jerseys streaming through the hole. Alone and unprotected, his backs running decoy routes, his tight end streaking for the end zone, Max ambled across the turf, waiting.

Jefferson had a step on his man at the 10. Max threw and saw the football leap up into the blue sky, spinning slowly on its perfect trajectory, a beautiful free thing rising far above the chaos of the field.

A face blotted out Max's sky, and his arm snapped as he went down. He knew from the pain flooding his face that his nose was broken. The pain would probably be short-lived because he would quickly lose consciousness.

Jefferson caught the ball in the end zone. The stadium was ecstatic, maddened by joy. His teammates mobbed Jefferson.

Back at the thirty-yard line, Max lay

curled in a fetal position. When the stretcher arrived, he was still unconscious. The stadium thundered its approval as he was transported to the sidelines. He was sprawled on the stretcher with his right arm twisted away from him. His face was stained with blood. But he had a sly, secret smile on his lips, as if he were listening to the whispered secrets of the seashell.

Comment

1. At the beginning of the story, does Max Luke have the personal qualities you would expect to find in a professional football player? Explain.
2. How does Max's personality change during the story? What are the reasons for the changes? Do you think the changes are believable?
3. Which characters in the story have attitudes different from Max's? In what ways are their attitudes different?
4. a. Why is Max called "Lucky Luke" and "Phantom"?
b. How does the title "The Coward" relate to the story?
5. At the end of the poem "Rodeo" (page 83), the cowboy seems to be smiling because he isn't hurt. Max is hurt at the end of "The Coward," but he is smiling anyway. Why?

Activity

Invite several school football players to your class to discuss their reactions to injury and pain. Ask them to explain what makes them want to continue playing, despite the risks.