

The Cleve Laubinger Story

by Phillip W. Weiss

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Synopsis: an ex-pro football player is experiencing progressive loss of mental functioning. Who is responsible for his care?

Tagline: Football players are people too.

Characters:

Cleve Laubinger – a former professional football player

Nadine Laubinger – Cleve’s wife

Delvin – Cleve’s next door neighbor.

Donald “Deke” Pirkowski – Cleve’s high school football coach

Frank Laubinger – Cleve’s father

Mildred Laubinger – Cleve’s mother

Dr. Lawrence V. Kenyon – a pediatrician

Ralph “Hammerhead” Clayton – Cleve’s college football coach

Dr. Calvin Clayborn – Cleve’s team physician at college

“Fearless” Frank Di Capistrano – Cleve’s pro football coach

Dr. Bruce Sheldonson – an emergency room physician

Lou Leffington – a reporter

Morris O. “Moe” Stanton – pro football commissioner

Rip Rappington – president of the players’ association

Judge Harold Irman

Police Officers, reporters, court officials, a nurse.

Although inspired by actual events, this play is a work of fiction.

Football isn't a contact sport, it's a collision sport. Dancing is a contact sport.

Duffy Daugherty

Winning isn't everything, it's the only thing.

Vince Lombardi

Pro football is like nuclear warfare. There are no winners, only survivors.

Frank Gifford

Don't matter what they throw at us. Only angry people win football games.

Darrell Royal

Scene 1

Time: The present

Place: a living room in a house located somewhere in the United States. In the room is a middle aged man and a middle aged woman. The man's name is Cleve Laubinger; the woman's name is Nadine. They have been married for twenty-five years. Cleve is 48 years old. He is a former professional football player. His position was defensive lineman.

CLEVE

What the hell is going on inside my head?

NADINE

I told you: go see Doctor Grant.

CLEVE

I've seen him a dozen times. All he does he give me pills. Meanwhile my head is feeling like it's ready to blow up.

NADINE

I hate seeing you like this. It's making me crazy.

CLEVE

Making YOU crazy? All you can think about is YOU? What about me? Don't you care about ME?

NADINE

Oh, honey, I didn't mean it like that.

CLEVE

Yeah, right. You never mean it. I CAN'T STAND WHEN YOU SAY THAT!

NADINE

You're scaring me, Cleve. You really are.

CLEVE

I DON'T CARE! Don't you understand that I'M IN PAIN! I CAN'T STAND IT!

NADINE

I'm gonna call Doc Grant.

CLEVE

Go ahead! Call that damn quack! He doesn't care about me. No one cares!

NADINE

(crying)

Sweetie, please! I do care! Please stop yelling.

CLEVE

(Gripping his head with his hands, in pain)

Oooooohhhhh!!!!

NADINE

Oh, God, help me! Please!

From off stage comes the sound of knocking followed by the sound of man's voice.

VOICE *(off stage)*

This is Delvin! I heard shouting! What's going on in there?

NADINE

Nothing Del!

DELVIN

Open the door!

Nadine opens the door. Delvin enters. He is Cleve and Nadine's next door neighbor.

CLEVE

(enraged)

WHO ARE YOU?

DELVIN

Cleve, don't you know me? I'm your next door neighbor!

CLEVE

Get out! Get out! Before I KILL YOU!

Cleve picks up a chair and smashes it against the wall.

NADINE

(crying, terrified)

Cleve, please stop! Please stop!!! (to Delvin) Call an ambulance!

DELVIN

Ambulance, nothing! I'm calling the police!

CLEVE

I CAN'T TAKE IT ANYMORE!!!

Cleve smashes through the door. From off stage come sounds of Cleve yelling loudly and incoherently.

DELVIN

(talking rapidly into his cell phone)

Hello, 911? ... Yes, this is an emergency ... Get me the police!

End of scene 1

Scene 2

Time: Thirty-three years earlier.

Place: A high school locker room. Inside the room is a group of teenagers and a middle aged man. The teenagers are wearing football uniforms. They are members of the Midgeville High School football team. One of the players is Cleve. He is 15 years old and already is six feet tall and weighs 250 pounds. The middle aged man is the coach, Donald "Deke" Pirkowski. Deke is delivering a pep talk.

DEKE

Gentlemen, this game is all about winning. Do you understand?

TEAM

Yes!

DEKE

Louder, gentleman, so I can hear you!

TEAM
(louder)

Yes!!

DEKE

That's better. You know, there are some who say it's not whether you win or lose but how you play the game. That is garbage! Pure balderdash! Football is war! It's win or lose, period, and nobody likes a loser. Nobody remembers a loser. They only remember the winner. So, what we?

TEAM

Winners!

DEKE

Louder, gentleman!

TEAM

WINNERS!

DEKE

And what are we going to do?

WIN!!!

TEAM

DEKE

That's right, win! And don't forget that! Now, your opponent is going to try to stop you from winning. You won't let that happen. Right?

RIGHT!

TEAM

DEKE

That's the spirit! When you go out on that field, your one goal will be: to win! You will hit your opponent as hard as you can and as fast as you can. Nothing will stand in your way and nobody will stop you because you guys are THE BEST!!!! Now go out there and WIN!!! (*The meeting breaks up.*)

TEAM

(*Screaming hysterically as they exit*)

Yeah!!!!!!!

End of scene 2

Scene 3

Time: The next day

Place: the kitchen in the Laubinger home. Seated at the table are Cleve's father, Frank Laubinger, his mother Mildred, and Cleve. They are eating dinner.

FRANK

Quite a spread today, Mildred.

MILDRED

Thank you. I made it special for Cleve.

FRANK

(to Cleve)

That was some game yesterday. How many times did you sack the quarterback?

CLEVE

(sullen)

Five.

FRANK

Five times. *(to Mildred)* Our son here is quite a football player.

MILDRED

Yes, but I don't want him to get hurt.

FRANK

It's only a game, Millie.

MILDRED

But it looks awfully violent to me.

FRANK

Stop being over protective. The boy wants to play football, and he's good at it. *(to Cleve)* Isn't that right, Cleve?

CLEVE

Is what right?

FRANK

That you want to play football?

CLEVE

Yeah, dad, I want to play football. Make you proud of me.

FRANK

You've certainly done that.

MILDRED

(to Cleve)

But don't forget: your school work comes first.

CLEVE

Who cares about that?

FRANK

Son, football is important but you still got to do well in your studies.

CLEVE

(flairs up)

Hey, will you get off my case, dad?

FRANK

(shocked)

I'm not on your case.

CLEVE

Yes, you are! You and mom!

MILDRED

Cleve! How can you say that?

CLEVE

(agitated)

All you do is nag me! Do this! Do that!

What are you talking about? FRANK

What's gotten into you? MILDRED
(to Cleve)

LEAVE ME ALONE! CLEVE
(explosive)

Cleve jumps up from his chair, picks up his plate of food, smashes it against the wall, and then runs off the stage. Frank and Mildred are bewildered, shocked and terrified.

What the hell just happened? FRANK

Oh my good Lord (Mildred starts crying). MILDRED

I think we need to talk with someone, fast. FRANK

End of scene 3.

Scene 4

Time: The next day.

Place: Coach Deke Pikowski's office. Present are Deke, Frank and Mildred.

DEKE

What can I do for you?

MILDRED

We want to talk to you about our son, Cleve.

DEKE

Outstanding young man. You should be proud of him.

FRANK

We are. That's why we're here.

DEKE

I don't quite understand.

MILDRED

Yesterday Cleve exploded while we were eating dinner. He smashed his plate of food on the wall, stormed out of the kitchen, then went into his room and wouldn't come out. He's never acted that way before. He's always been mild mannered. This happened just one day after the football game and we're concerned that maybe this may have something to do with him playing football.

DEKE

Mrs. Laubinger, I care about every young man that plays on my team and I can assure you that we would never have Cleve or any other player do anything that would be detrimental to their health.

FRANK

Yes, we understand that, but, you know, football is a contact sport.

DEKE

I know what you're driving at. Because of the nature of the game, it puts players at risk. I've heard that before and I can assure you that is wrong. If anything, football builds character. It promotes teamwork, sportsmanship, and builds self-confidence and leadership.

MILDRED

We don't mean to suggest that there is something wrong with playing football itself. But Cleve is still a child and playing football may be too much for him. We don't want to see him get hurt or lose control over himself.

FRANK

If you had seen how Deke blew up you'd understand our concern.

DEKE

I do understand your concern. You're his parents and you're looking out for your son's best interest. But it would be a shame for you to pull Cleve from the team. He's already one of the top high school linemen in the state and he has an excellent chance of going on to college on a full athletic scholarship which, I'm sure you know, is worth a lot of money.

MILDRED

But we also want him to stay healthy.

DEKE

The school wants that for him too. We want to build men ... and women, not destroy them. One of the best ways to do that is through organized sports. You being his parents, whether Cleve stays on the football team is ultimately your decision to make. I would suggest that if you have any concerns about Cleve's health or fitness to play football, you should have him evaluated by a physician. If there's anything else I can help you with, just give me a call. It's been a pleasure meeting you.

End of scene 4

Scene 5

Time: a week later.

Place: the office of Doctor Lawrence V. Kenyon, a pediatrician. Cleve, Mildred, and Frank are having a discussion with Dr. Kenyon.

KENYON

I've run all the tests and I have found no organic cause for Cleve's explosive outburst.

CLEVE

There's nothing wrong with me!

MILDRED

Are you sure, doctor?

KENYON

Yes, I'm certain. All the tests come up negative.

CLEVE

(to Mildred)

Come on, mom, let's get out of here. The doc says that I'm okay.

FRANK

(to Cleve)

Hold on, son. We're still talking.

CLEVE

(to Kenyon)

See how they talk to me! No wonder I go batty.

KENYON

(to Cleve)

Cleve, your parents are concerned about you.

CLEVE

There's nothing to be concerned about.

KENYON

Cleve, do you ever have black out spells?

CLEVE

No.

KENYON

How about dizziness?

CLEVE

Sometimes after a scrimmage.

KENYON

You get dizzy?

CLEVE

Yeah but it goes away.

KENYON
(to Mildred)

I really don't know what else I can say.

FRANK
(to Kenyon)

So you're saying that it's okay for Cleve to still play football?

KENYON

I don't see why he can't.

CLEVE

Wow, that's great. Wait till the coach finds out! Will he be glad!

MILDRED

He'll be glad but I won't.

CLEVE

Come on, mom, don't say that!

MILDRED
(to Cleve)

Don't you know how much we worry about you? You like getting smacked around like a rag doll?

CLEVE
Mom: it's part of the game. I want to win!

FRANK
We want you to live.

CLEVE
Holy cow! Doc! Talk to them, will you?

FRANK
Maybe we should withdraw our permission to let you play.

CLEVE
(blows up)
NO WAY!!!!

MILDRED
(to Kenyon)
And you think this is normal?

FRANK
(to Cleve)
Son! Calm down. We're just talking.

CLEVE
NO YOU WEREN'T! YOU MEANT IT!

FRANK
(to Kenyon)
This is what we have to put up with.

KENYON
I can refer you to a family therapist.

FRANK

Family therapy? Is that the best you can offer?

MILDRED

(to Kenyon)

Are you saying that Frank and I are the problem?

KENYON

No, I'm not saying that. All that I'm saying is that there could be more than one way of dealing with Cleve's outbursts.

FRANK

Doctor, I know you mean well but all you're doing is putting the problem on us, when in fact it's my son who's having the problem.

CLEVE

I don't have any problem. All I want to do is play football.

FRANK

(to Mildred and Cleve)

Let's go.

(to Kenyon)

Thank's for your time.

End of scene 5

Scene 6

Time: Five years later.

Place: the locker room at State College. Coach Ralph "Hammerhead" Clayton is giving a pep talk to members of the football team, one of whom is Cleve. Cleve is now six feet five inches tall and weighs 325 pounds.

HAMMERHEAD

In my twenty years of coaching I have never coached a finer bunch of players than you. Right now we're nine and oh and have a chance to go all the way to the finals. You guys make me feel proud. I'll tell you, before the start of the season I didn't think you guys had what it takes, but you guys sure proved me wrong. I love you guys.

PLAYER

Hey, coach, we love you too! How about we all take a shower together.
(laughter)

HAMMERHEAD

(chuckling)

Knock it off. None of that sissy talk here. It may give you some weird ideas.
(laughter) But seriously, the reason why we've won thus far is because of all your hard work, both on and off the field. Showing up for practice, listening to your coaches, and above all, executing on the field – all that has come together to make us winners! And that's we are: Winners! Right?

TEAM

Damn right!!!

HAMMERHEAD

Winning means not just going through the motions, but giving it all you've got! It means not being afraid to take a hard hit and give it back, with interest. Because that's what football is about: who can hit the hardest and most often. So, gentlemen, before we take the field, I want to wish you all the best because you are the best. Now, what are you gonna do today?

TEAM

Win!

HAMMERHEAD

Say it louder!

TEAM
(louder)

Win!!!

HAMMERHEAD
This time say it like you mean it!

TEAM
WINNNNNNNNNN!!!!

HAMMERHEAD
That's right! Now, go out there and make it happen!

TEAM
(incoherent screaming)
YEAH!!!!!!!!!!!

End of scene 6

Scene 7

Time: After the game. Four hours later.

Place: the team physician's examination room under the stands. Present are the team physician, Doctor Calvin Clayborn, Coach Hammerhead, and Cleve. Cleve is lying on a stretcher. He's conscious but groggy.

CLAYBORN
(to Cleve)

You took a lot of hard hits today.

CLEVE

Awe, it was nothing.

CLAYBORN

You got knocked out.

CLEVE

I did?

HAMMERHEAD

You were great today, kid! Just great!

CLAYBORN
(to Cleve)

Have you considered giving up football?

HAMMERHEAD
(to Clayborn)

What are you saying to him, doc? He's the number one college defensive lineman in the nation today. You want him to quit?

CLAYBORN

I want him to be healthy and stay alive.

HAMMERHEAD

I want that too for him, and for all my boys. But I also want for them to have an opportunity to make some real money, something that I missed out on when I was their age.

CLEVE
(to Hammerhead)

Hey, coach, don't worry about me.

HAMMERHEAD
(to Cleve)

That's the spirit!

(to Clayborn)

See, he wants to play.

CLAYBORN

Of course he wants to play. He doesn't know any better. And you keep pushing him! It can get him killed!!

HAMMERHEAD

Hey, doc, you better can that talk right now because you don't know what you're talking about and it's demoralizing. We don't teach young men to play football to get them killed.

CLAYBORN

Then what's Cleve doing here on a stretcher? He got smacked in the head! Hard! I saw it from the sidelines!

HAMMERHEAD

It's a contact sport, doc, so players get hurt. But they recover and go out there and play again, which shows character.

CLAYBORN

And extremely poor judgment.

CLEVE

Nothing wrong with my judgment.

CLAYBORN

Cleve, I have to tell you straight. If you keep on playing and taking more hard hits, you are at risk of sustaining irreversible brain damage.

HAMMERHEAD

Doc, this is football we're talking about, not boxing. Tackling is not the same as throwing or landing a punch. Sometimes you get knocked cold but you get up, shake it off and get out there and play again.

CLEVE

Doc, I want to play.

HAMMERHEAD

You hear that, doc? He wants to play. So, are you gonna clear him or what? If you don't you'll be ruining his career.

CLAYBORN

You guys are incredible.

End of scene 7

Scene 8

Time: Eight years later.

Place: The locker room of the Rocky Mountain Wildcats of the Continental Football Conference. Team coach, "Fearless" Frank Di Capistrano, is delivering a pep talk to members of the team, which includes Cleve. Cleve now weighs 350 pounds.

FEARLESS

Last week we lost a heart breaker, a game we should have won. I know it and you know it. Some of you complained about the refs. They had nothing to do with us losing. We only had ourselves to blame. Now, if we don't win today we're out of the playoffs. Do you want that?

TEAM

No!

FEARLESS

Not loud enough.

TEAM
(louder)

No!!!

FEARLESS

That's right! You don't want that! You wanna win! But wanting to win is not enough. You gotta make it happen. You gotta play like it's the last game of your career, or of your life. You gotta play like your lives depend on it, because it does! Football is more than just a game. It's life itself. When you win it's the greatest feeling in the world, but when you lose everything goes dark. You ask yourself: why do I even live? If you don't feel that way, you have no business playing football.

TEAM

We wanna win, coach!

FEARLESS

Then prove it! Last week you guys became complacent. That's why we lost. You had the momentum but gave it away. You stopped hitting hard and let the other team run all over you. Will that happen today?

No! TEAM

I didn't hear you! FEARLESS

NO!! TEAM

FEARLESS
That's right! That will not happen today. Today you will play with heart!
You will stay focused! You will hit hard! You can't let up, even for a second!
That's how you will win! Are you with me?

Yes! TEAM

I didn't hear you! FEARLESS

YES!!! TEAM

Now, go out there and WIN! FEARLESS

(Players, now psyched up, rush off the stage screaming incoherently)

End of scene 8

Scene 9

Time: Six years later

Place: Executive office of the Rocky Mountain Wildcats. The room is packed with reporters. Standing behind a podium is Cleve. It's a press conference.

REPORTER 1

Are the rumors true that you are retiring?

CLEVE

Yes. I'm calling it quits.

REPORTER 2

When did you decide to retire?

CLEVE

A while back.

REPORTER 2

How far back?

CLEVE

I can't remember exactly when. Is that really important?

REPORTER 1

You've played for the Wildcats for fourteen years. What was the greatest game of your career?

CLEVE

That's a hard question to answer. You know, after a while, it all became a blur.

REPORTER 2

A blur? Could you explain what you mean?

CLEVE

After a while, it became hard for me to remember one game to the next.

REPORTER 1

But there must be one game that stands out.

CLEVE

I'll get back to you on that.

REPORTER 2

What are your plans now?

CLEVE

I don't know. See if I can get a real job. (*reporters chuckle*) All I know is playing football.

REPORTER 1

You set the record for the most games played by a defensive lineman. Is that something you're proud of?

CLEVE

To tell you the truth, after a while I lost count. I played each game one at a time. I wasn't looking to set any records.

REPORTER 2

Do you still have bad feelings about the incident with Willie Jones?

CLEVE

That was a long time ago.

REPORTER 1

He almost killed you with that hit.

CLEVE

That's football. Sometimes things get out of hand.

REPORTER 2

How's your family feel about you retiring?

CLEVE

My wife's very happy about that. She wanted me to retire years ago.

REPORTER 1

Yet you continued playing.

CLEVE

Yeah, I did. My team needed me.

REPORTER 2

And maybe you needed them?

CLEVE

Now you're trying to get inside my head. Please don't go there.
(more chuckles from the reporters)

REPORTER 1

Last year it was reported that you were seen by a neurologist who recommended that you stop playing. Is that true?

CLEVE

I was having some headaches, that's all. My retiring has nothing to do with that. It's just hard for me to concentrate now.

REPORTER1

When did that start?

CLEVE

What are you now: my doctor? *(more chuckles from the reporters)*

REPORTER 1

No, I'm just a reporter trying to do his job.

CLEVE

Well, mister reporter, here's your story: Cleve Laubinger is quitting after fourteen years of playing the roughest, toughest game in the world. I've played against the best and I've given all I have. I've taken hits and dished them out and never ducked a game. My only goal was to win.

REPORTER 2

You feel that you're going out a winner?

CLEVE

Yes, I do.

REPORTER 2

Why?

CLEVE

Because I had the chance to do what I always wanted to do, play football ... and because I'm still alive. Take care, guys. *Cleve limps off the stage.*

End of scene 9

Scene 10

Time: The present

Place: The interior of a police station. Cleve is in a holding cell. Outside are two police officers.

CLEVE
(angry, yelling)

Let me outta here! I want outta here!

POLICE OFFICER 1
(to Police Officer 2)

I think we ought to call an ambulance.

POLICE OFFICER 2

I told you what the sarge said. He said keep Laubinger locked up for the time being until he calms down.

POLICE OFFICER 1

But he's not calming down.

POLICE OFFICER 2

I know that, but if we dump him onto a hospital, who knows what he'll do.

POLICE OFFICER 1

They have doctors to deal with that.

POLICE OFFICER 2

What do you want from me? We're following orders.

Cleve is pacing back and forth in the cell.

CLEVE
(angry, agitated)

Hey, what am I doing here?

POLICE OFFICER 1
(to Cleve)

Quiet down!

CLEVE
I WANT TO KNOW WHAT I'M DOING HERE!

POLICE OFFICER 1
(to Cleve)

Shut up!

CLEVE

Who you telling shut up?

POLICE OFFICER 2
(to Police Officer 1)

Let him gripe.

POLICE OFFICER 1

The guy's beginning to get on my nerves. It's hard to believe that he was once a star football player. Now he's a fruit basket.

CLEVE

Hey you guys: I want out of here NOW!

Cleve starts banging his head on the wall.

POLICE OFFICER 1
(to Cleve)

Stop that head banging!

Nadine enters.

NADINE

I'm Nadine Laubinger, Cleve's wife. Where's my husband?

Cleve sees Nadine and stops banging his head.

CLEVE

Nadine, get me outta here!

NADINE
(to Cleve)

You need to go to a hospital.

CLEVE

Hospital? There's nothing wrong with me! I just got a headache. Give me a couple of aspirins and a shot of whisky and I'll be all right.

NADINE

Don't you remember what you did at the house?

CLEVE

What did I do?

NADINE

You lost control. You busted down the door and almost hit me.

CLEVE

That's a lie! I would never hit you, but you gotta get me outta here. I can't stand being caged like an animal.

NADINE

(to the police officers)

He doesn't remember anything. I think he needs to go to the hospital. There's something wrong with him.

POLICE OFFICER 1

(to Nadine)

First he has to be arraigned.

NADINE

Arrested? He's sick!

POLICE OFFICER 2

(to Nadine)

Yes, we know that, but while he's in our custody we have to follow our procedures.

NADINE

Okay, look, I'm not gonna file charges, okay? Now will you call an ambulance or should I?

POLICE OFFICER 1
(to Nadine)

Let me call my sergeant first. *Police Officer 1 picks up the phone and makes a call.* Hello, sarge.... I'm calling about Laubinger. ... His wife's here. ... She doesn't want to press charges. ... She wants to call an ambulance and have him taken to a hospital. ... Okay, sarge. I'll tell her. *Police Officer 1 hangs up the phone and speaks to Nadine.* We'll release your husband once an ambulance arrives. You make the phone call.

NADINE

Thank you. *(Nadine takes out her cell phone and makes a call).*
Hello ... 911? ... My name is Nadine Laubinger. ... I'm calling for my husband, Cleve Laubinger. ... He's at the downtown police station. ... He's lost control of himself. ... Please send an ambulance now!

End of scene 10.

Scene 11

Time: Two hours later.

Place: An emergency room in a hospital. Cleve is strapped on a stretcher. He is in a stupor. Nadine is conferring with a young male doctor, Bruce Sheldonson. Standing next to the stretcher are two emergency medical technicians.

SHELDONSON

What's the problem?

NADINE

It's my husband. He lost control of himself. The police were called. He was taken to a police station and from there by ambulance to here.

EMS Tech 1

When we entered the patient's cell at the police station he became combative. It took the two of us plus two police officers to hold him down so we could sedate him.

EMS Tech 2

Here's the paperwork. *He hands the paperwork to Sheldonson.* The patient's vital signs were normal. He was in a highly agitated state.

SHELDONSON

(to the EMS techs)

Thank you. You can go now.

Both techs exit.

SHELDONSON

(to Nadine)

When did he lose control of himself?

NADINE

Earlier today.

SHELDONSON

Anything happen to set him off?

NADINE

No. Nothing. He just blew up and smashed the door of our house.

Was he drinking?
SHELDONSON

He drinks very little.
NADINE

Is he on drugs?
SHELDONSON

He's been on pain medication for at least thirty years.
NADINE

For what?
SHELDONSON

Pain.
NADINE

Mrs. Laubinger, this is no time to be cute.
SHELDONSON

I'm not trying to being cute. My husband is in constant pain. It's from all the injuries he sustained while playing football.
NADINE

What kind of injuries?
SHELDONSON

A broken hand, a cracked sternum, three broken ribs, a severely bruised left hip, a broken nose, a dislocated shoulder, several lost teeth, several sprained ankles, and lots of hits to the head.
NADINE

Cleve starts regaining consciousness.

Where am I?
CLEVE

SHELDONSON

You're in a hospital emergency room. My name is Doctor Sheldonson. Your wife, Nadine, is here too.

CLEVE

Oh, Nadine.

NADINE

How are you feeling?

CLEVE

Out of it.

SHELDONSON

(to Cleve)

I understand that you had some problems earlier today.

CLEVE

What problems? *(to Nadine)* What's he talking about?

NADINE

Don't you remember? You busted down the door of the house. Then you were taken to the police station.

CLEVE

(angry)

What did the police want with me? *Cleve starts getting more agitated.*
Let me off this stretcher! I want to go home!

SHELDONSON

Mr. Laubinger, we want to run a few tests on you.

CLEVE

No tests! There is **NOTHING WRONG WITH ME!** I just have a headache. That's all! Now let me off this contraption!

SHELDONSON

Your wife is very concerned about your behavior.

CLEVE
(enraged)
THERE'S NOTHING WRONG WITH MY BEHAVIOR!

Cleve violently struggles to loosen the straps causing the stretcher to almost tip over.

SHELDONSON
(yells)
I need a nurse in here, stat!

A nurse enters.

SHELDONSON
(to the nurse)
Give this patient 50 cc midazolam IM. I also want a complete blood work up, stat. *The nurse administers an injection. (to Nadine)* Please go to the waiting area.

NADINE
I want to stay with my husband.

SHELDONSON
Please do what I ask. I can't argue with you right now.

NADINE
(to Cleve)
I'll be outside waiting for you.

CLEVE
(still struggling)
What the hell is going on here?

SHELDONSON
That's what we want to find out.

Nadine exits. Sheldonson takes out a stethoscope and begins physically examining Cleve.

End of scene 11.

Scene 12

Time: One month later.

Place: A room in the locked section of The North Star State Psychiatric Treatment Center. Cleve is lying on the bed. He is conscious, able to communicate, but sedated. He is connected to the bed by a strap fastened to his left ankle. Nadine is seated next to him.

CLEVE

When can I get out of here?

NADINE

When the doctors think that you're ready.

CLEVE

Ready for what?

NADINE

To take care of yourself.

CLEVE

I'm able to take care of myself. What do they think I am, a cripple? I played football for twenty years. I didn't need anyone to babysit me.

NADINE

Nobody is babysitting you.

CLEVE

Then why am I tied to this bed?

NADINE

Oh, Cleve, don't you understand? You're sick!

CLEVE

I feel fine! I just have a few headaches now and then.

NADINE

Oh, baby! I'm worried!

CLEVE

About what? Headaches can come from anything. It's like a pain in the butt, except it's in my head. I just wanna go home.

NADINE

I want you home too, darling, but not right now.

CLEVE

What about if I sign myself out?

NADINE

They won't let you leave. You know that.

CLEVE

If my parent were still alive they'd get me outta here. Maybe I oughta call some of my old teammates.

A man enters. His name is Lou Leffington. He's a reporter for Sports America Network News.

LOU

(to Cleve)

Hello. What a struggle it was to find you! How are you?

CLEVE

Who are you?

NADINE

Yes, who ARE you?

LOU

(to Cleve)

My name is Lou Leffington. I'm a reporter for Sports America Network News. I want to do a story on you.

CLEVE

A story about what?

LOU

About you!

NADINE

I think you need to leave now. *(to Cleve)* I'll call an attendant.

CLEVE

(to Nadine)

No, don't do that. I like this guy. *(to Lou)* How'd you get in here?

LOU

This may shock you, but I told them the truth. That I was a reporter. One of the nurses heard of me and let me in. I'm here by myself. I heard that you were hospitalized and I wanted to see how you were doing. You think they'll let me out of this place? *Cleve chuckles.*

CLEVE

If they do, take me with you. The food here stinks and they keep plying me with pills.

LOU

What happened? How could one of the greatest players in history of pro football wind up in a state mental hospital?

NADINE

Is that really any of your business?

LOU

(to Nadine)

Yes, it is. A lot of people are interested in your husband. You're his wife, right?

NADINE

Of course I am.

LOU

I figured that much, but I just wanted to make sure. Anyway, when a ten-time all-star, two-time MVP and three-time football champion winds up in a state mental hospital, that's news. Because if it can happen to Cleve Laubinger, then it can happen to any player, meaning that every player is at risk, and that makes it even more of a news story.

NADINE

So, you're here to use Cleve to peddle a story.

LOU

No ... what's your name again?

NADINE

Nadine.

LOU

No, Nadine. That's not it at all. I'm not here to peddle anything. I'm here because I'm interested in Cleve. Now, what exactly is wrong with Cleve?

CLEVE

Nothing. That's what!

NADINE

We're not sure yet.

LOU

You mean, nobody has told Cleve what's wrong with him?

NADINE

One doctor said it's a behavioral issue, another said that Cleve had some underlying psychological issues that were boiling to the surface, another one said that it could be due to the pollution in the air, another said it has to do with exposure to chemical cleaning solvents. One even said that it could be due to intimacy issues with me.

LOU

In other words, nobody knows for sure. Has the football commissioner's office been in touch with you?

NADINE

No. Why should they be involved?

LOU

Because your husband played in their league for fourteen years.

CLEVE
(to Lou)

And loved every second of it.

LOU
(to Cleve)

I know you did, and I was your number one fan. (to Nadine) Do they know that he is hospitalized?

NADINE

I don't know.

LOU

Who's paying his medical bills?

NADINE

Cleve has health insurance through the players' union, but it only covers medical, not mental, conditions.

LOU

You mean that the CFC is not picking up the tab?

NADINE

No, they're not. Why should they?

LOU

Because Cleve's condition may be related to injuries he sustained while playing football.

NADINE

But nobody really knows what's wrong with him.

LOU

That makes no difference. Are the doctors still running any tests?

NADINE

Yes, they are.

LOU

Looking for what?

NADINE

At this point I really don't know.

LOU

So, when is Cleve expected to be well enough to be discharged?

NADINE

That's still up in the air. I know that right now I couldn't care for him at home without assistance and that I cannot afford.

LOU

What happened to Cleve's money from all those lucrative contracts?

NADINE

Gone, mostly due to bad investments in failed businesses, such as the Hungarian goulash franchise in Scotland that went belly up and the factory in China that manufactured toy football referees. They never caught on.

CLEVE

(to Lou)

Could you get me something to eat? I'm really hungry.

LOU

(to Cleve)

I'll see what I can do for you. *(to Nadine)* So the CFC is leaving Cleve high and dry. That doesn't seem right to me.

CLEVE

Aw, c'mon somebody, get me a sandwich!

NADINE
(to Lou)

He gets cranky when he's hungry.

LOU
(to Nadine)

Don't we all. I guess it's time for me to leave. It was a pleasure talking with you. (to Cleve) and to you too. *Lou exits. (off stage)* Could you please get the guy in room 327 a sandwich? He's starving.

NADINE
(to Cleve)

I wonder what he wanted.

CLEVE

Who?

End of scene 12

Scene 13

Time: Later in the evening

Place: the Sports America Network News sports desk. Lou Leffington is sitting behind the desk. He is about to report the news.

LOU

Hello, and greetings to all my friends in America and around the world. I'm Lou Leffington and here is today's top stories in the world of sports. Number one on the agenda: Cleve Laubinger. I recently learned that the one-time football star who led his team to three conference titles is currently a patient at a psychiatric hospital located on the west coast. Earlier today I had a chance to speak with Cleve and his wife, Nadine. What I learned shocked me. The man who for years was the face of football itself has been virtually forgotten by the very league that had benefitted so greatly from his presence on the field. Practically broke, Cleve now languishes in the hospital facing an uncertain future. His funds gone and his wife unable to afford the services needed to care for her husband at home, this man, this champion, is now a virtual prisoner in the hospital that now serves as his surrogate home. I for one am appalled that the entire football community has done nothing to assist one of their own in his time of need, and call on the league to act now on behalf of their onetime star.

End of scene 13

Scene 14

Time: The following day.

Place: The executive office of the commissioner of the Continental Football Conference. The room is packed with reporters. Standing behind a podium is the commissioner, Morris O. Stanton, known throughout the sports world as Moe.

MOE

Ladies and gentlemen of the press. I want to welcome all of you. I'm Moe Stanton, commissioner of the Continental Football Conference. I've called this press conference to make a statement about Cleve Laubinger. Afterwards, I'll take questions. Since yesterday my office has been inundated with calls and emails concerning Cleve. We have sent a card to Cleve wishing him all the best and a speedy recovery. Cleve was a great player, a hall of famer, a man who brought credit to his team, to this conference, to the game of football and to sports in general. The question is: who bears responsibility for Cleve now? Is it the conference? Or the union? Or ultimately Cleve himself? After consulting with a team of medical and legal experts, I have come to the conclusion that although we sympathize with Cleve and wish him the best, there is little that the CFC can actually do to ease his plight. Because if we take responsibility for Cleve's current condition, then we will have to assume the same responsibility for the many other players who are currently retired and experiencing problems too, both now and in the future. That would impose on the conference a financial burden that would force us out of business, an outcome that naturally we wish to avoid. I'll take questions now.

REPORTER 1

Cleve played for fourteen years. Doesn't the league owe him anything?

MOE

When a player retires it is with an understanding that the league is no longer responsible for that player's welfare.

REPORTER 1

Yes, I know that, but still is there not a moral obligation?

MOE

Football is a business, and like any business, we employ people in order to sell a product. That defines the nature of the relationship.

REPORTER 2

Are you saying that when a former player is in dire need, there is nothing the league can do for him?

MOE

No, I am not saying that. What I am saying is that we cannot take on financial responsibility.

REPORTER 2

But isn't it a fact that Cleve Laubinger's problems may be due to injuries he sustained while playing?

MOE

Absolutely not. There is no evidence linking football with functional deterioration. Football is a clean sport. We care about our players. When they get injured we provide them the best medical care available.

REPORTER 3

Mr. Commissioner, doesn't it stand to reason that given the nature of the sport itself, there is a relationship between the punishment the players sustain on the field and problems they experience after they play?

MOE

No, that does not stand to reason. Football is a great sport. It builds men. It does not destroy them. Players do get injured but their injuries do not go ignored. And when a player retires, he leaves the game knowing that he has been provided the best medical care in the world.

REPORTER 1

But aren't there conditions that the doctors may miss?

MOE

Let me repeat myself: our players get the best medical care in the world. And let me add something further: if we thought that any player was at risk of developing some kind of cognitive impairment, we would not let him on the field. But no such risk exists. Injuries are transitory in nature.

REPORTER 2

Even head injuries?

MOE

Even head injuries. Sure, players get struck on the head. It's part of the game. But they are treated, evaluated and returned to the field only after they are given a clean bill of health.

REPORTER 3

What about Cleve? Was he given a clean bill of health?

MOE

I don't know the details of Cleve's injuries. But what I do know is that no player is allowed to play if he has a condition that will put him at risk.

REPORTER 1

What do your medical consultants have to say about the relationship between the head trauma and the onset of behavioral disorders?

MOE

I'm not a physician, but I can tell you this: If a player has a head trauma, he is not allowed to play until that trauma is resolved. As for linking behavioral problems with head trauma sustained while playing football, that is a cause and effect relationship that cannot be established with absolute certainty.

REPORTER 2

So, if a player has been hit on the head let's say one thousand times and then after he retires loses his mind, there's no connection between the two?

MOE

That's right. An absolute cause and effect relationship cannot be established.

REPORTER 3

Don't you think that's stretching things a bit far?

MOE

No, I do not. Look, we value our players. Because of them football is the number sport in the United States today. We care about them. It would make no sense for us to knowingly set them up to become invalids. I hope you believe me when I say that.

REPORTER 1

We believe you, commissioner. But when a player like Cleve Laubinger is now destitute and in dire need of help, we have to wonder whether the league is willing to take any responsibility to ensure he receives proper care.

MOE

Our hearts go out to Cleve and his family, Cleve was a great player. I can personally attest to that, having seen him play. What has happened to him is unfortunate and my office will continue to monitor his case. And with that said, this news conference is over.

REPORTER 2

(shouting)

Wait, commissioner! What do you actually plan to DO for Cleve?

MOE

I'll be answering no more questions at this time.

REPORTER 3

(shouting)

Is it true that the family is considering suing the league?

MOE

That's news to me.

REPORTER 1

(shouting)

Well, if they do sue, what will you do?

MOE

Gentlemen. That will be all! *Moe exits.*

End of scene 14

Scene 15

Time: The next day

Place: Cleve's room at the North Star Psychiatric Center. Present are Cleve, Nadine, and another man, Rip Rappington, a former football player and current president of the players' council, a labor association representing current and former football players.

RIP
(to Cleve)
How ya doin', pal?

CLEVE
Do I know you?

RIP
(feigning joviality)
Do you know me! Stop your joking. We used pal around every year at our annual get together.

CLEVE
We did?

RIP
Of course we did, pal.

NADINE
(to Rip)
You see. I told you. His memory is shot.

CLEVE
Hey, shut up! There's nothing wrong with my memory.

NADINE
(ignoring Cleve, to Rip)
He gets very irritable.

RIP
What do the doctors say?

NADINE

Not much. I watched the commissioner's news conference. He says he cares. What a crock!

RIP

It is a crock. But that doesn't surprise me. Paying lip service is all he's good for. He's just a front man for the owners, that's all.

NADINE

I know that, but I would think that basic humanity would dictate that he take a more compassionate attitude.

RIP

You're confusing football the game with football the business. In the business of football, there is no place for compassion.

NADINE

You're not telling me something I don't already know. But if that's all you have to say, you're just wasting my time.

RIP

Why you barking at me? I'm not the problem.

NADINE

I didn't say you were. But you're not the solution either. It seems like nobody really wants to help. It's depressing. Cleve is a human being, not a piece of machinery to be discarded after it breaks.

RIP

The players' association is aware of that.

NADINE

Then show it. Is the union willing to help?

RIP

That's up to the executive board to decide.

NADINE

But you're the president of the union. Can't you act on your own?

RIP

No, I can't.

NADINE

You're no different than the commissioner. All talk, no action.

RIP

You're wrong.

NADINE

Actually, you're worse. At least the commissioner has an excuse. He was never a player, so he can't really understand what Cleve is going through, but you did play, just like Cleve, and that what happened to Cleve can also happen to you.

RIP

I don't need to be reminded of that.

NADINE

I think you do. Cleve and I are flat broke. If it weren't for Cleve's pension, I'd be on welfare. I had to quit my job so I could be here to take care of Cleve. There's nobody else. We never had kids. Cleve's parents are dead and my parents, forget them. They wrote me off after I decided to marry him. They wanted me to marry a lawyer or a doctor, someone more ... stable. I was a clerk in a hardware store when I met Cleve. I was a small little thing and he was so big. I think my parents were scared for me. They were always intimidated by Cleve's size. Maybe they were right. Maybe I shouldn't have married him. Look at him now.

RIP

So you regret having married Cleve?

NADINE

No way! I love this lug! I love him so much! I don't want him to die. (*Nadine starts weeping*)

CLEVE
(to Nadine)

Hey you! Stop your bawling.

NADINE
(to Cleve)

Yeah, you're right. What's the point of crying? *Nadine stops weeping.*
(to Rip) This is my life now. For better or for worse. Well, anyway, thank you for taking the time to visit.

RIP
(to Cleve)

Hey, buddy, I'll be leaving now. (to Nadine) I'll see what I can do. Good bye.
We'll be in touch. (*Rip exits*)

CLEVE

Who was that guy?

NADINE

Nobody. Try to go to sleep.

End of scene 15

Scene 16

Time: a week later.

Place: Cleve's room at the hospital. Cleve is lying in the bed. Nadine is seated next to him. Standing next to the bed is Doctor Clayborn.

CLAYBORN

When I learned the news of Cleve's situation, I felt it my responsibility to pay him a visit. It's the least I can do, and maybe the most.

NADINE

Thank you for being here. However, I don't quite understand why you feel obligated to visit.

CLAYBORN

I'll be honest with you, Mrs. Laubinger. I feel that Cleve is here because of me. I failed him.

NADINE

How could you have failed him? You haven't seen him in years.

CLAYBORN

I've been wanting to get this off my chest for a long time, and now is as good a time as any. You see, Mrs. Laubinger, I had a chance to stop Cleve from playing, but I didn't. I was Cleve's team physician in college. I knew he was already having problems but I cleared him to play anyway. I caved in to the pressure. I didn't have the guts to say no.

NADINE

That was a long time ago.

CLAYBORN

But what we do in the past has a way of catching up with us years later. (*contrite*) I should have never signed those papers clearing him to play.

CLEVE

(*to Clayborn*)

Who are you?

CLAYBORN
(to Cleve)

I'm Doctor Clayborn. Don't you remember me? I was your team physician in college.

CLEVE

Really? What school was that?

CLAYBORN
(to Nadine)

Oh my, his memory seems severely impaired.

NADINE

His memory is getting worse. Meanwhile I don't know what to do.

CLAYBORN

What are your options?

NADINE

I really don't know.

CLAYBORN

No one has talked you about Cleve's post-hospital care?

NADINE

One or two of the doctors have mentioned it, but nothing definite has been discussed.

CLAYBORN

Is he ready to be discharged?

NADINE

I don't know. All I know is that I can't take care of Cleve at home.

CLEVE

I want to go home.

NADINE
(to Cleve)

We're working on it. (to Clayborn) His mind is shot. He's like a child. What can I do for him?

CLAYBORN

Has transfer to a long term rehab facility been discussed?

NADINE

It has. Applications have sent to facilities in every part of the state but no one will accept him. They say that he's not appropriate for their facility.

CLAYBORN

If I had only told the coach no and not listened to Cleve.

NADINE

Did Cleve do something wrong?

CLAYBORN

No, Mrs. Laubinger, please, you misunderstand me. After the game I examined Cleve and told him, and his coach, that he should stop playing, but Cleve said he wanted to play. I shouldn't have listened to him. I should have followed my better judgment and done what was right.

NADINE

I don't know what to say, Doctor Clayborn. I wasn't there.

CLAYBORN

But I was. It is just a matter of common sense that if a player gets hit hard on the head, it could cause permanent damage to the brain. All I had to do was refuse to sign that report clearing Cleve to play and all this could have been prevented.

NADINE

He would have found another doctor to give him a clean bill of health.

CLAYBORN

Maybe you're right. But at least my conscience would have been clear.

NADINE

So your being here is really more about you than about Cleve.

CLAYBORN

That's not true. I care about Cleve.

NADINE

I think not. Maybe you should leave.

Rip enters.

RIP

Hello, Nadine.

NADINE

Oh, Mister ...

RIP

Rappington.

NADINE

I didn't expect to see you here again.

RIP

I said we'd be in touch.

NADINE

Oh, let me introduce you. This is Doctor ... Clayborn?

CLAYBORN

(to Rip)

Yes, I'm Dr. Calvin Clayborn. I was Cleve's team physician at State University.

RIP

(to Clayborn)

Glad to meet you. *(They shake hands)*

CLAYBORN

I heard about Cleve's situation and thought I'd pay him a visit.

RIP

I'm the president of the players' association and we are greatly concerned about Cleve. We believe that the CFC has a responsibility to ensure that all players have access to whatever medical and mental health services they need after their playing days are over.

CLAYBORN

I agree with you. The question is: does the CFC feel that way too?

RIP

That's something that has to be further explored.

NADINE

More talk. That's all I ever hear from you guys: talk.

RIP

(to Nadine)

I'm not here just to talk. I'm here to help.

CLAYBORN

That makes two of us.

RIP

(to Nadine)

You see, Mrs. Laubinger, you do have allies.

NADINE

Some allies.

RIP

Let me remind you: The CFC won't give anything without a fight.

CLAYBORN

You know, Rip, Cleve was already at risk of serious mental deterioration when he was playing in college.

RIP

That's not surprising. A player can sustain a serious head trauma at any time, even at the sandlot level. But it's hard to tell a player, especially a young man who has a chance to live his dream and make a bundle of money in the process that his dream is finished. That all his work has been for nothing.

CLAYBORN

But to withhold the truth can lead to other problems.

CLEVE
(to Nadine)

Who are these guys?

NADINE
(to Cleve)

Two friends. They're here to help us.

CLEVE

Help us? For what? I'm hungry! Get me some food!

NADINE

Right away, sweetheart. (to Rip and Clayborn) You see what I have to deal with? (to Clayborn) You're his doctor. What should I do?

CLAYBORN

I WAS his doctor. I can't advise you now.

NADINE
(to Clayborn)

You were Cleve's doctor and can't give me advice? (to Rip) What about you? You're his union rep.

RIP

I don't do casework anymore.

NADINE

If you two guys can't help me, then who can?

RIP

That brings me to why I am here. I informed the executive board of Cleve's situation, and the board voted to provide Cleve legal representation if he decides to sue the conference.

NADINE

If Cleve decides to sue the conference? Is that supposed to be good news? He can't even remember where he is.

RIP

Then you will have to make the decision for him.

NADINE

After all the talk, now it's all on me.

RIP

Yes, I guess it is.

NADINE

What do you mean "guess"? It is. How would suing the conference help Cleve?

RIP

It would bring the matter before a judge who could then rule that the CFC has responsibility for Cleve's care and order the league to act.

CLAYBORN

Of course, presuming that you win. (*to Rip*) Isn't that right, Rip?

RIP

Yes, that is correct. But we'll provide you the finest legal counsel.

NADINE

Instead of suing, couldn't the union help pay for home care services?

RIP

No, the association doesn't have a fund for that.

NADINE

You guys are really something. If I agree to sue, then Cleve will be stuck in here for who knows how much longer while his case is in court, and if I don't agree to sue then nothing gets done. What a crock!

RIP

Mrs. Laubinger, try to look at it like this: Cleve retired over a decade ago. He's no longer a marketable star and so the conference has little incentive to act. Going to court is the only way to get the league to take an interest in Cleve's case and hold the league accountable.

NADINE

The CFC was good to Cleve. They gave him a chance to play and because of that he became a star, became famous, and made money. And now you want me, or should I say him (*gesturing to Cleve*), to sue them?

RIP

What you said about the CFC is true while Cleve was playing for them. Once he retired, they couldn't care less about him.

NADINE

I don't know who's worse: the CFC or you guys.

RIP

(to Nadine)

Mrs. Laubinger, I know that this is a tough decision for you to make. Take some time to think it over. If you want to discuss this further, give me a call. I'll be in town for a couple of more days. *(to Clayborn)* It was a pleasure meeting you.

CLAYBORN

(to Rip)

Likewise.

RIP

(to Nadine)

So, like I said, think it over and let me know what you decide. *(Rip exits)*

CLAYBORN

Here's my card. (*Clayborn gives Naomi his business card*). I'm sorry I couldn't be of more help. *Clayborn exits.*

CLEVE

Who were those guys?

NADINE

The bad news brothers.

End of scene 16

Scene 17

Time: One month later

Place: A court room. Seated behind a desk is a court clerk. In front of the desk and to the audience's right are seated Naomi, Cleve and their attorney. To the left are seated a team of attorneys representing the conference.

COURT CLERK

Order in the court! The Honorable Harold Irman presiding. All rise!
(*Everyone rises as Judge Irman enters. Irman sits.*)

IRMAN

(*to all present*)

You may be seated. (*Everyone sits*)

COURT CLERK

On the calendar today is the case of Laubinger versus the Continental Football Conference, Commissioner Morris O. Stanton, et al.

IRMAN

Are all the parties present?

CLEVE'S ATTORNEY

Present, your honor. Representing the plaintiff.

STANTON'S ATTORNEY

Present, your honor. Representing the respondents.

IRMAN

All parties are present. I read your filings and motions. The crux of this case is as follows. The plaintiff, Cleve Laubinger, a former professional football player, is suing the respondents, namely the Continental Football Conference, Commissioner Morris O. Stanton, and twenty-seven other CFC officials, individually and collectively, for one hundred fifty million dollars in actual and punitive damages for injuries sustained while playing professional football in the CFC and for serious debilitating conditions resulting therefrom. The respondents, both individually and collectively, deny all responsibility. As the moving party, the burden of proof is on the plaintiff to prove his case based on a preponderance of the evidence. The respondents have waived their right to a trial by jury. Accordingly, this case will be heard and decided by the bench. (*to Cleve's attorney*) Mister Attorney, your opening statement.

The end.

