

Full Body Contact
By Chris Zell

About twenty years ago, I'm riding in the passenger seat of Kevin's car, we had just finished playing hockey and were on our way home.

"Man," Kevin said as he turned on to a two lane highway. "The refs really screwed you today." I nodded in agreement and stared at the ice covered trees. I had to agree, the refs had a case of the hard ass for me today.

Early in the game this guy is entering my zone with his head down. So I did what any defense man would have done. I rode him to the boards hard enough to change his sex. If you've never had the pleasure of strapping knives to your feet and rapidly sliding towards an unsuspecting person, you haven't lived. Your goal in this situation to hit him hard enough to make the people behind the protective glass feel the hit. And run for cover. I am proud to say that I accomplished that goal.

"Tweeeet." The referee blows his little whistle. At first I think he's blowing an injury time out. I assume this because the guy was crawling in circles mumbling. Looking for his balls, I guessed. "Two minutes, charging, number 6."

"What?" I scream and my mouth guard (this was the days before you had to wear salad bar protectors) snaps into my mouth. I hated those things. I tear off my helmet and smack my shin. "It was a clean hit." I circle the ref.

"More than three strides." He says pretending that I'm not standing behind him with a stick.

"No, come on, you can't even count to three." Here is where I'll point out to the children in the audience, never say things like that to a person wearing a stripped shirt. Or a badge. Or any of those official looking clothes. Just some free advice.

"You're on thin ice, young man." Was that some type of referee humor? I'm always amazed at the rapist like wits that official type people have. I know that arguing with refs and other pigheaded people is a waste of time so I slide away and say,

"Blow me."

"What did you say?"

"Blind and deaf, you must get serious government assistance."

"That's it, five minute major." He says to the record keeper, who by now has writers cramp. Now let me ask you, what did I do that was so wrong? I didn't bring his mother or the rumor of his fondness for little boys into it or anything. "One more word from you, you little shit and I'll toss you out of this game." By now a teammate is pushing me away.

"Come on, Chris, go sit in the naughty box and feel shame." So I go to the box of eternal damnation and flirt with a girl in the first row.

I get back on the ice with a mission, to take the ref out of my misery. Not that I'll kill him or anything, that would be too obvious, but maybe just make it tough for him to conceive.

I'm in the corner digging a puck out with this prison reject kicking at my skates and sticking the butt end of his stick in my armpit. I'm about to leave and I lift a skate so gently into his groin area that he yelped. But it let me escape.

I'm about to pass to a forward when I feel this sharp pain across the back of my legs. In rule breaking parlance, this is called a slash. On my body this is called a serious pain infusion. When I regain the ability to push off, I fully expect a whistle.

After all, if my check was a charge (and I'm not saying it was, my lawyers have requested that I not talk about this situation), this was definitely attempted manslaughter. But, as if you couldn't see this coming, no whistle. All's fair in love and hockey, I guess.

The next time I'm carrying the puck forward I attempted a pass in the general direction of my favorite referee. Unfortunately, our forward misread the puck and this hard, black, rubber bullet bounced off the refs helmet. OK, so maybe the pass was a little high. But just a little.

"Whoops, sorry." I say to no one because I'm standing at center ice trying not to laugh. I turn and head to the bench.

"You'd better watch yourself." Another member of the impeachment hearing says.

"Just have him call the game not take out personal vendetta's." I say slowly crawling over the boards.

"And what do you call what you did to him?"

"Bad aim." The coach leans over to give me some coach like advice.

"You whacked him good." He laughs in my ear. It's times like this that I realize it pays to have a coach that knows his way around the rink. "Once I realized what you were doing I almost pissed my pants." He pats me on the shoulder and wipes tears from his eyes.

"Glad to make your day." I say as my shift is getting ready to go back out.

I'm not on the ice for more than a minute when we're caught with a three on two. For you people who don't understand hockey, let me explain. Imagine that you and a friend are walking down the street and a roaming gang of three maniacs is running at you with sticks. Add the fact that you're pretty sure they all have rabies, and you'll understand what's happening.

Two of the maniacs, oh sorry, players, head towards me. They know that they will have to draw blood by tearing my head off my body to get a penalty called. I'm aware of this disturbing fact also. But so is my defensive partner. He's a lovely man, that just so happens to be an escapee from the home of the perpetually crazed. That's a plus for me.

They keep moving towards me, the puck carrier is concentrating on scoring and the second one is there to take me out. The third member lays back to act as the clean up man. Ready to clean any loose body parts off the ice, I think that's where the phrase clean up man comes from.

My defensive partner spots this and zeros in on the puck carrier. I fake my potential killer out and head towards the puck carrier. This is where he makes his first mistake. He concentrates on me. This gives my partner a chance to move in and hit him. Hard. All I saw was a surprised expression as his body did the dance of the severed spine. He looked like those cartoon characters that bend and twist just before his head explodes. I laughed as I picked up the puck and heard.

"Tweeet." OK, this one may have deserved a penalty. "Cross check, number six."

"What?" The only contact I had with this guy was trying to keep his intestines off of my shirt. "Are you gone?" I rush up to the ref who has this little smirk on his face. My defensive partner rushes up, grabs my shirt and doesn't look too happy.

"I make this guy swallow a couple of teeth and you get the credit." This is one sick dude. And I'm sure glad that I'm not going to be the next guy he hits.

"Yeah, some people get all the luck." I turn my attention back to the ref who is giving me that 'I am the great and powerful ref' look. So I give him that 'I know where you live' look. I think my look was better. And anyway, I'll get

some more time with that girl. There's good in everything, you just have to look for it.

I start my next shift with the moral rejuvenation of a televangelist after he's caught with a farm animal and a Multi-Mixer. I'm going to forget about the ref and get back to winning the game.

During the next play I covered the puck up between my legs and waited for the whistle. After a few seconds, it became a slashing good time for the opposing team. And after a few seconds of that, and after I looked the ref right in the eye and he just laughed at me, I reached between my legs, found the puck and threw it down the ice.

Now in a normal hockey game, this is not recommended behavior and does result in a penalty. But like I said, boys and girls, this is only in a normal hockey game. I fully expected to sit on the bad behavior bench for a couple of minutes. I broke the rules and was prepared to pay my debt to society.

Of course this wasn't a normal hockey game, the ref just smiled and skated away. In the ten seconds that it took for me to get up (no matter how much padding you have on, it still hurts to have someone use your thighs for kneading practice) we lost the puck and I was being converged upon.

The puck went into the corner, and as my job description said, I went after it. Within seconds, this Lizzie Borden disciple rode me into the boards and tried to pick my nose with his leather gloved hand. Now some of you may be saying that doesn't sound too bad. Considering what's been happening during the game so far. Oh, you just don't pay attention, do you?

Let me explain. It's cold. I'm standing on ice. A mad man with a glove made of leather and steel is trying his damndest to tear the flesh from my face. OK, I'll put it in a situation that even you will be able to understand. On the next sub zero day, stay outside for an hour or so and let me take my middle finger and flick your nose. If you don't fall to your knees and offer me enormous sums of money to put you out of your misery, you have no nerve endings at all.

I'm not in a very comfortable situation and feel that I should return the favor. So I take my padded elbow and give him a dental exam (I found two cavities). Needless to say,

"Tweeet." I turn and skate away taking slivers of teeth out of my elbow.
"Where are you going?" The third member of the ref crew asks.

"To the land of the naughty boy."

"The call wasn't against you." Ain't that a kick in the cup?

During a time-out I'm talking to a member of the opposing team, "Do me a favor."

"What's up?" He says wiping his nose on my shoulder.

"Don't do that." I look at my shoulder and wonder if I can poke my eye out with that thing. He just nods and does it again. "When I get the puck around the ref I want you to knock me into him."

"My pleasure." He says as the face off is dropped. There's one thing about hockey players, you don't have to ask them twice to try to knock you senseless.

It took awhile to set everything up. The good part is that by then all the players knew what was happening. It's times like this I believe in the brotherhood and character building of sports. Because no matter how much one player hates another one, it can't compare to the hatred we feel for the zebras.

I'm skating down the left wing and my target is twenty feet in front of me. Out of the corner of my eye I can see my hit man laughing and easing into correct hitting position. I'm beginning to have second thoughts about this. I just realized that this is going to hurt no matter what happens.

Ten feet. I turn and am just about to unload the puck as I cross the blue line. Just as the pass is off, I'm hit with a shot that makes the helmet pop up and slam back down covering my eyes. Before I lose consciousness, I smacked the ref in the face, stuck my elbow in his ribs and dragged him to the ice with me. He made the sound of a sealed container opening. I think it was his lung.

"Gee, sorry. He sure took me for a ride, didn't he?" I say to the ref as he grabs his face and gets a handful of blood.

"You're going to be sorry for this." He says trying to focus.

"It wasn't my fault." I say trying to untangle my skates from his. I couldn't help but rip his pants as I pull away. It's the little things that make your day.

"You're out of here." He says pushing me. So I stuck my glove in his face. Here is the final installment of free advice. Never touch these people. It is frowned upon in gentle society. "That's it, you're going down for three." No, that isn't some weird sexual thing, he's telling me that I am on a three game suspension. I figure I can use the time off, so I smile and skate away.

The coach has one of these 'you really shouldn't have done that, but, damn that looked like fun' looks on his face. I walk past him and walk down the rubber hallway to the locker room. Another day of fun and frivolity.

"Yeah," I say to Kevin as a light snow blows across the road. "He sure did have a boner for me."

"But you got him good." I chuckled and had to agree. It was almost as good as the time we were playing street hockey in a gym and I suckered this guy and checked him into a set of parallel bars. Boy did he look surprised. "What the . . ."

I looked at Kevin and he seemed a little nervous. I followed his eyes and saw the reason. A car was spinning across the highway and causing other drivers to try their own version of the highway ballet. Within seconds, there were cars sliding everywhere. So, Kevin, being a follower, started spinning counterclockwise.

I look out the side window and see a tree. Not seeing a way out of this, I close my eyes in one of those 'if I can't see you, you can't see me' kid logic plays. When I open my eyes, the tree is gone.

"Hey, maybe there's something to this." I say to Kevin but he's too busy strangling the steering wheel to pay attention to me. I'm pretty confident now as I see this car coming straight towards us. I close my eyes knowing that we were safe.

When the car hit us and bounced my head against the side window I thought, 'Well, that's the last time I try closing my eyes.' Within seconds, we were the silver ball in the pinball game of life. Cars that weren't even on the road bounced into us. And you want to know something, for some reason each car we hit seemed to speed us up. What that means is by the time we hit the woods and started flipping over we deserved a moving violation.

Up to this point I wasn't all that concerned. I think that's because the self preservation wing of my brain closed down years ago. But when the car flipped and I smashed my face into the windshield and knee into, I'm not all that sure but I think I banged it on a rather pissed off woodchuck, I was, wait a second, thinking about it, I wasn't concerned during this time either. I was unconscious.

After the car rolled over a birdie condo development, it came to rest in a pond of mud. Kevin crawled from the wreckage and had a tougher time with the mud than his stunt driving. Every step he made was connected to this horrid sucking sound. The kind that's made when you accidentally vacuum up

the cat.

Other people are running/sliding/falling down the embankment to us. Someone helps Kevin to my side of the car, which after all the tumbles, looked like a sculpture of man's inhumanity to man in this decadent industrialized society. Well, that's what I named it when I sold it for some serious bucks to some knowledgeable patron of the arts.

Half my body is laying in the car, a hockey stick wedged between my spine and the accelerator. My head is sinking in the mud. All in all, I'd rather be watching big time rasslin'.

"He's dead." Someone says. "Look at all that blood. No way he could have lived through that." Oh great, just what I want to hear.

"Hey look, he's moving."

"Maybe it's just a death twitch." I was thinking of finding out who this doom sayer is and staple his lips to his eyelids.

"No, look, he's trying to get up." I'll show you.

"Oh well." It's great to know that you can always count on the kindness of strangers. Now that he knows I'm not dead, he leaves. I'm still going to find out who he is and bring my stapler.

I slowly become among the standing and my head does the rag doll drop. Just a flopping in the breeze.

"Must have hurt his neck." Oh, thank you, Mr. Einstein. What is your next revelation? I was just doing a high speed make out with a window. What would you expect? Splinters?

"Chris," Kevin yells in my ear. My head bops from side to side. "Are you OK?" I don't know, let's take an inventory. Nope, can't feel a damn thing. Yep, I'm injured.

"You'd better have him lay down, he seems out of it." How come no one ever says anything intelligent at the scene of an accident. I've actually heard someone say, 'Was there an accident here?' when there was this car with a telephone pole on top of it. No, you living void, this is a fashion statement.

As two people try to put me back down into the mud (and I'm resisting as much as a guy with skin flapping on his face can) a woman slides down the hill and takes control.

"Have the accident victims lie down and undo their pants." That's exactly what she said. But in my bruised brain state I heard,

"Hey, Chris, take off your pants and do a little dance towards the highway." So, that's exactly what I did. Not wearing any underwear sure made it a little chilly, but I figured she knew what she was talking about. After all, she said she was a nurse. Or did she say that she watched a Marcus Welby, M.D. rerun earlier that day? As you could expect, the details are a little hazy for me.

After they stopped me from accepting tips from passing motorists, they put me down on the side of the road and pulled up my pants. Within seconds I was back on my feet and I found Kevin and asked,

"What happened here?" Oh great, I'm about to enter the stupid guy hall of fame. "Was anyone hurt?" That's it, I'm about to reach legendary status.

"By the looks of it Chris, you're pretty banged up."

"Cool." I think that I'm having some trouble with comprehension right about now.

The ambulance showed up and I wondered why they wanted me. You see, I'd forgotten that there was an accident. I thought we were just hanging around doing guy things and freezing our balls off. Yeah, it struck me as pretty stupid too, but you know how guys are.

I get to the hospital and the first thing I hear is,

"I don't need this on my first night." Go ahead, build my confidence.

"Ummm, I'd like to have another doctor work on me." I try to lift my head up. It's getting much tougher now. "I hope you don't mind." I smile at the doctor. It must have looked pretty funny, a guy with a gaping hole down his forehead and across his cheek smiling. I mean, how could you tell? It's just one more hole.

"No one else is here and won't be for quite some time." The man of medicine says getting out his mother's sewing kit.

"That's OK, I'll wait." With that he laughs and anesthetizes my face. Or tells a joke about a farmers daughter. Some of these facts are a little skewed.

"Hey, don't I have a say in this matter?"

"Not really, now shut up so I can concentrate." He says and give me a little

pop on the mouth (it was the only place that wasn't bleeding). Now considering what I've been through, that little pop shouldn't have caused my head to explode with enough force to destroy a small independent country. But please believe me when I say that it was more than enough.

"Oh, man when I get up from here I'm going to operate on you." The doctor laughs, calls in two orderlies to hold me down and puts a stitch right on the tip of my nose. It took me two days before I could focus and find out that a small gibbon hadn't crawled into my nose during all the confusion. I saw this one little lonely stitch on the end of my nose. So I ripped it out. Oh come on, it's not that disgusting. It was either that or risk losing all my friends by continually asking them if they saw a small gibbon up my nose.

After I'm glued back together I wander through the hall looking for the doctor. I may have a concussion, but I still follow through on my threats. I see the doctor at the end of the hall.

"Oh, doctor." I sing out. He sees this Frankenstein walking towards him and locks himself in an office. I wander down and bang on the door until I forget why I was there. A friend of mine shows up to take me home and without hesitation, I get into another car.

I wake up the next day and remember that I have a date tonight. And, of course, it's a first date. I guess this is the perfect test to see if she likes me for me or my looks. Before I can find the two brain cells that aren't bruised to rub together, the telephone rings. I slowly get off the bed to answer it and my head doesn't follow. I don't know about you, but I rarely travel without my head. I'm yanking and pleading, but I guess it wants to sleep for a little while longer. Finally I grab my head and snap it to attention.

"Hi Chris," It's the girl. "Ready for tonight?" How come everything echo's in your head when you have a headache?

"Let me ask you, what do you think of horror movies?"

"Ummm, well. . ." I can tell she's not sure where this line of questioning is going.

"You see, I kind of look like a grave diggers sick experiment."

"I don't get it."

"I was in a little car accident last night and got a few stitches in my face." The next sound that she made sounded like Kevin walking through the mud. "It's OK, I'm just a little sore."

"How many stitches?" I've never understood why people ask that question. How would the person know? Most of the time the stichee is lying there in some discomfort, as the medical profession says. But I search my brain because I know that someone told me how many.

"60." I say scratching my nose.

"Oh my God." Just then something dawned on me. 60 stitches is quite a few for a face. This bang up may not be as much fun as I had expected. We talked for a minute and I told her that we'd just postpone it for a week or so. She agreed and I never heard from her again. I guess it was my looks. Live and learn.

For the entire week all I could do was watch TV and give silent prayer to the inventor of TV remote controls. One night I'm flipping through some channels and see this new TV show, Mork & Mindy. This Mork guy is making me laugh so hard that I have to grab my face because I'm splitting the stitches. At the end of the half hour, I've split all the stitches in my cheek and my shirt is covered in blood. Have you ever laughed and felt severe pain at the same time? Pretty much a one of a kind experience, I'd say. As much as I wanted to turn the channel, I couldn't because, after all, comedy is my life. Or is my life comedy? It's that bruised brain thing again.

A couple of minutes after the show, the telephone rings and I forget that my head is now an independent and hostile nation. It snaps back and I gingerly adjust the tuning.

"Yep." I have such a moving phone manner that bill collectors won't even bother calling.

"How's it going?"

"Cool, coach. How'd the game go?" This was the first game after the accident and they had dedicated it to me. I think that Kevin convinced them that I was dead. Oh, speaking of Kevin, he bruised his shoulder and lost a pair of shoes.

"We won. I have a puck for you."

"Oh, gee, this is so sudden." He talks about the game and other boring stuff. I spend most of the conversation trying to get my cheek to stop bleeding. After a while he asks me when I'm going to be back.

"I figure in 10 days." I think for a minute and start laughing. "Hey, that means that this accident came at a perfect time."

"What are you talking about?" People often ask me that question.

"My suspension is over in 9 days. So I couldn't have played anyway." I smile and realize that it is all in how you look at it. "You can fight the establishment and win."

"Yeah," the coach says with very little conviction. "And all you have to do is French kiss a window."

"A small price to pay, Coach." I sit back with that satisfied, crooked grin of the mentally unstable. "It's all in how you look at it."