

Tug of War Capers of yesteryear.

My story relates to the period of summer in the year 1975, a part of the year when fetes and carnivals are so popular.

I was Captain of the Swansea Divisions Tug of War team, which was frequently called upon to contest against various other South Wales teams. They often represented licensed premises.

I received a telephone call from the landlord of the Star public house at Fforestfach. John Law was an acquaintance of mine, and a splendid fellow.

John Law informed me that he was involved in organising a Fete and Sports Day in the Blaen y Maes area. He stated that one of the planned events was a Tug of War competition. It seems that the Star Inn already had a team, which consisted of regular customers, and they would be delighted to pull against the police team.

Now although I was pleased at the thought of an afternoon of healthy sport for my police team, I nevertheless had a gut feeling that to venture into the Blaen y Maes territory with my fellow officers was not only a case of pulling on a rope, but also pushing our luck.

Despite my irrational fears I agreed to enter the police team in the Fete. On the allotted day, suitably clad in police issue sports shirts, we presented ourselves at the local church field where already there was a large crowd of local residents gathered including, of course, many young children with their parents.

As I gazed around the crowds I recognised many local bad lads, many of whom I had been obliged to arrest over the years that I policed this northern housing estate. There were also small groups of shady characters chatting together, occasionally pointing toward my team.

My suspicions were aroused at this point that some dastardly plot was being set up but it was too late to withdraw from the event.

Whilst I was anchor man of the police team, the first man in the front of our eight was an officer well known in the Swansea Force, Allan Lloyd. Allan was quite a fit and strong fellow at this time and always could be depended upon to pull his weight. Unfortunately Allan did not attach much importance on sartorial elegance and I saw that he wore a large pair of very baggy track suit trousers.

When I looked at the pub team I saw that they were very much overweight and didn't look very fit. My guess was that most of their training was done at the bar of the Star where their right arms worked overtime, but that was their problem.

The crowds gathered for this top event and I heard lots of obscene and highly insulting shouts addressed toward my team by men in the crowd who had indulged in Ale at the Star. I told my team to ignore the rabble

who were obviously anti police and to provide a decisive win for the forces of law and order.

The pull commenced and my team slowly moved backward with a steady movement. Fitness and long hours of training appeared to be showing its worth.

It was at this point that things started to go egg shaped. I noticed that the Star Inn team had been assisted by several large drunken men. That took their numbers from eight to about twelve or so. In addition I was aware of a cross-bred mongrel dog that was snapping at the feet of every police member that it could reach. I heard a loud voice shouting "Get their bloody ankles, Ranger!"

Despite this adverse and unlawful behaviour, my team was slowly regaining its backward movement BUT it was then that disaster struck. The elastic belt which had held Allan's track -suit trousers up decided that it had had enough. It snapped and the baggy trousers slowly descended to the stony ground of the sports field.

The gathered crowd when confronted with the sight of large police buttocks fully exposed to the sunshine, burst into hearty laughter. The sound of the hilarious guffaws could have been heard at Cockett Police Station I am sure, but of course the situation destroyed our concentration. My team were dragged along on our bottoms and Allan's buttocks were badly lacerated and required attention later to repair the damage.

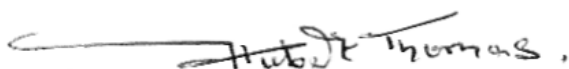
The event judge, a regular customer at the Star Inn, declared his team as winners and commiserated with the police team's defeat in what he described as a "Bloody exciting but fair contest".

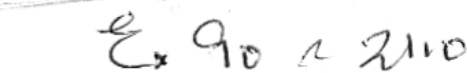
The police team accepted defeat as being "fete accompli" and afterwards accepted a few glasses of ale from John Law at his public house.

Unfortunately Officer Lloyd was unable to sit down on the bar stool for obvious reasons.

If nothing else was achieved on that very special sporting occasion, at least much fun was brought about by the snapped belt and I am sure that relationship between the locals and the police were strengthened.

John Law finally asked me whether I would provide a police team for a repeat contest the following year, to which I replied, "Not unless officer Lloyd gets stronger elastic".


Hubert Thomas.


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