

WJZ & NETWORK

NELSON OLMSTED 'S STORY FOR TODAY

PERMANENT
PROGRAM #
FILE COPY

THE HERO

BY

MARGARET WEYMOUTH JACKSON

() ()
11:00 - 11:15 A.M., EST

APRIL 6, 1949

WEDNESDAY

(MUSIC: . . . ORIGINAL THEME . . . UP, THEN TO B.G. . .)

OLMSTED: This is Nelson Olmsted, with your Story for Today. This is a narrative by Margaret Weymouth Jackson, and it concerns a tall, lanky boy who was a whizz at basketball, his father, who was even more of a whizz as a spectator, and a small town where high school sports are taken more seriously than life itself. Listen while I tell you about "The Hero."

(MUSIC: . . . SIMULATE HIGH SCHOOL ALMA MATER SONG . . .)

OLMSTED: Mr. Whalen came into the kitchen by the back door and closed it softly behind him. He looked anxiously at his wife. "Is Marv in?"

"He's resting," she whispered. Mr. Whalen nodded. In the front room, the boy stirred. "Dad?"

"Yes. I'm sorry if I wakened you. How do you feel?"

"Swell, dad. I feel as though I'm going to be lucky tonight."

"That's fine! That's wonderful!"

"I couldn't even hit the backboard in short practice yesterday. That means I'll be hot tonight. Red-hot!" The boy rose from the couch, turned on a lamp and put on his shoes. He was thin, with a nose a little too big, and with clear blue eyes and a pleasant mouth and chin. He was not especially handsome, except to his father, who thought him the finest looking boy in the whole wide world. They went into the kitchen, where supper was laid on a small round table. There was steak and potatoes and salad and chocolate cake for Mr. and Mrs. Whalen, toast, tea, and coddled eggs for the boy.

"I don't think you ought to put the cake out where Marv can see it, when he can't have any," fussed Mr. Whalen.

"It's okay, dad. I'll eat some when I get home."

"Did you take your shower? Dry yourself good?"

OLMSTED: "Sure, dad. Of course."
(CONT)

Mr. Whalen wasn't eating a bite of supper. It just gave him indigestion to eat on game nights. He got too excited. He couldn't stand it. But the boy was eating calmly - four coddled eggs, six pieces of toast, four cups of tea with lemon and sugar. Mr. Whalen went to the boy's room and checked the things in his bag - the white woolen socks, the clean folded towel, the shoes with their arch supports, and so on. There, alone in Marvin's room, Mr. Whalen felt a little ill. He pressed his hand over his heart. He mustn't show his anxiety, he thought. The boy was calm and he felt lucky. Mustn't break that feeling. Mr. Whalen went back into the kitchen with an air of cheer, a plump, middle-aged man with a retreating hair line and kind, anxious brown eyes. He was a few inches shorter than his wife. But he had never regretted marrying a tall woman. Look at this boy! 6 feet 4 inches tall!

Marv was looking at the funnies in the evening paper. Mr. Whalen took the sport page and read the news that Hilltown High was to play Sunset High of Stone City at the local gym that evening. The Stone City team hadn't lost a game. They were grooming for the state championship. Mr. Whalen felt weak. He hoped Marvin hadn't read this. Indignation grew in the father, as he read down the column, for the odds were against the local team. How dare the editor print such nonsense for the boys to read - to discourage them?

(MORE)

OLMSTED:
(CONTD) Perhaps Marvin had read it and believed it! Everything was so important -- the psychology wasn't good.

The time came for Marvin to go to the gym. "I'll see you at the gym. Sit where you always do, will you, dad?" A shrill whistle sounded from the street. "There's Johnny," and he left at once.

Mr. Whalen looked at his watch and reminded his wife that the game started at seven. But Mrs. Whalen shook her head.

"I'm not going to the gym at half past six, we'll be there in time. If you don't calm down you're going to have a stroke at one of these games."

"I'm perfectly calm! I'm as calm as -- as calm as a June day. That's how calm I am. You know I'm not of a nervous temperament. Just because I want to get to the game on time, you say I'm excited. You're as up in the air as I am." "I am not." Mrs. Whalen sat down at the cleared table and looked at the paper. Mr. Whalen looked at his watch again and fidgeted.

She said, "We'll walk. It will do you good -- quiet your nerves."

"I'm not nervous!"

Mrs. Whalen looked at him with pity. He couldn't help it, she knew. While she was getting ready to go to the game, Mr. Whalen stood at the front door, his overcoat on, his hat in his hand. He was almost frantic by the time she joined him on the front porch.

OLMSTED:
(CONTD)

In the gym the Hilltown eighth grade was playing the Sugar Ridge eighth grade. The boys scrambled, fell down, got up and threw the ball, panted and heaved and struggled on the floor. A group of smaller children were seated in a tight knot, and two little girls whose only ambition in life was to become high-school cheer leaders led a piercing yell:

"Hit 'em high,
Hit 'em low;
Come on, eighth grade,
Let's go!"

Their voices were almost piping. Mr. Whalen remembered how he had suffered when Marvin was in the eighth grade and they had to go to the games at six o'clock to watch him play.

Mr. and Mrs. Whalen found their regular seats unoccupied, halfway between the third and fourth uprights which supported the lofty gymnasium ceiling. Mr. Whalen sat down a little weakly and wiped his forehead. Mrs. Whalen began at once to visit with a friend sitting behind her, but Mr. Whalen could not hear what anyone said. He noticed Mr. Leach, the coach, talking to the timekeeper. He was a mighty good coach -- Hilltown was lucky to keep him here. Some of the high school coaches felt that their teams had to win, no matter how. It would be very bad to have his boy under such an influence, thought Mr. Whalen, who simply could not bear to see the team defeated, and who was always first to yell "Thief!" and "Robber!"

The officials came out in their green shirts, and Mr. Whalen almost had heart failure.

(MORE)

OLMSTED: There was that tall thin man who had called a foul on
(CONTD) Marvin every time he had moved in the tournaments last year. He was always against Hilltown. He had been so unfair that Mr. Leach had complained about him to the state association. The only time Mr. Leach had ever done such a thing. Oh, this was awful. Mr. Whalen twisted his hat in his hands. The other official he had seen often. He was fair -- very fair. Sugar Ridge had complained about him for favoring Hilltown, but Mr. Whalen thought him an excellent referee.

The gymnasium was filling fast now. On one side the students were packed in the cheering section.

The rest of the space was filled with townsmen, from toddlers in snow suits to gray-bearded dodderers. On the opposite side, the visiting fans were filling their seats. Big crowd from Stone City. They must feel confident of winning, Mr. Whalen thought. Hilltown's cheer leaders, Beth and Mary, appeared in blue satin slacks with white satin shirts. Mary was Marvin's girl; the prettiest girl in town. She had personality, and vigor, too. The girls leaped into action.

"Hello, Stone City, Hello, Stone City,
Hilltown says Hello-o-o".

Not to be outdone, the Stone City Leaders, returned the compliment:

"Hello, Hilltown -----".

(MORE)

OLMSTED: The whistle blew and the eighth grade teams were at it again. Mr. Whalen closed his eyes and sat still. He prayed, his lips moving a little, that Marvin wouldn't get hurt tonight. Suppose he had a heart attack and fell dead, like that boy at Capital City years ago? Suppose he got knocked against one of the steel uprights and hurt his head -- damaged his brain? Suppose he got his knee injured? He opened his eyes. He mustn't think of those things. He had promised his wife he wouldn't worry so.

At last the preliminary game was over. The Hilltown eighth grade had won. Mr. Whalen thought that was a bad omen. It was too much. The big team would lose.

If the others had lost, he would have considered that a bad omen, too. Every omen was bad to Mr. Whalen at this stage. The floor was empty. The high school band played Indiana, and Onward, Hilltown and everyone stood up and sang. Then there was a breathless pause, and suddenly a crashing cheer hit the ceiling of the big gym and bounced back as The Team came out on the floor to warm up. Everything was quick now, almost professional in tone and quality. But there was really only one boy on the floor for Mr. Whalen, a tall thin fair boy with limber legs. Mr. Whalen did not even attempt to tear his eyes from Marvin, until the Stone City team came out. Mr. Whalen studied them, picking out the first-string men, not by their skill or their height, but by their faces.

The referee blew his whistle and then the pug-nosed captain for Stone City and Marvin, who was Captain for Hilltown, talked with the referee.

(MORE)

OLMSTED: The Cheering section roared:
(CONTD)

"We may be rough,
We may be tough,
But we're the team
That's got the stuff!
Fight! Fight! Fight!

Marvin stood back out of the center ring until the referee, ball in hand, waved him in. The ball went into the air as the whistle blew, and the game was on.

Marvin scored a basket and Stone City also scored in the first two minutes of play. Mr. Whalen stopped breathing.

He was in a state of suspended animation. The game was very fast -- too fast. Stone City scored a second and third time. Then Hilltown tried a new trick play and Marvin made the score four to six. He played with a happy romping abandon. He was skillful, deft, acute, but he was also gay. The youngsters screamed his name and Mr. Whalen saw Mary's rapt, adoring look. At the end of the quarter, the score was fourteen to ten in Stone City's favor. At the end of the half, it was still Stone City's favor, but only fourteen to thirteen. Stone City didn't score in the second quarter.

Mr. Whalen felt a deep disquietude. He had been watching the tall center of the other team who had fouled Marvin twice in the first half. Mr. Whalen was sure he had tripped Marvin that time Marvin fell on the floor and cracked his elbow. The Stone City center was a dirty player and ought to be taken off the floor. Mr. Whalen was very upset. He felt hot under the collar, desperate.

(MORE)

OLMSTED:
(CONTD)

During intermission, he went outside and smoked two cigarettes as fast as he could. He couldn't stand it in the gymnasium. He would wait here until the game was over. If Marvin was hurt, he wouldn't see it. But when the whistle blew and he heard the burst of cheering, he rushed back into the gym like a man going to a fire.

The second half began. Again the big center fouled Marvin. Marvin got two free throws and put Hilltown ahead by one point. The crowd went wild.

The game got very fast again. Mr. Whalen watched Marvin and his opponent like a hawk. There! It happened. He was on his feet, yelling, "Watch him! Watch him!" The Stone City Center had driven his elbow into Marvin's stomach and Marvin doubled up on the floor. Mr. Whalen started out on the floor but his wife had a firm grip on his coat-tails. She gave him a smart yank and pulled him unexpectedly down on the bench.

"He doesn't want you on the floor," she said fiercely.

Mr. Whalen was very angry, but he controlled himself. Marvin was all right and made two more points. Then Stone City got three quick baskets, putting them ahead again three points. A foul was called on Marvin, for pushing. Mr. Whalen yelled.

"Why he never did at all! He couldn't stop fast enough -- that's not a foul!"

(MORE)

OLMSTED: The game was tied three times in the last quarter. With five minutes to play, the big center fouled Marvin again, his fourth personal, and he was out of the game. The Hilltown crowd booed him, but none so loud as Mr. Whalen, who often talked long and seriously to Marvin about sportsmanship. Then Marvin got hot. He couldn't miss and when the final whistle blew Hilltown was twelve points ahead.

Mr. Whalen was a wreck. He could hardly stand up. Mrs. Whalen took his arm and half supported him toward the stairs. The Stone City fans were angry. A big broad-shouldered man with fierce black eyes complained in a loud, quarrelsome voice:

"That skinny kid -- that Whalen boy -- he foul my boy! Who cared? But when my boy protect himself, what happens? They put him off the floor. They put by Guido out, so Hilltown wins. I get my hands on that tall monkey and, I'll fix him!"

Mr. Whalen's strength returned and he was strong as a lion. He said: "Be careful. That's my son you're talking about. Before you do anything to Marvin, you'd better do something to me. Your son fouled repeatedly."

"That's a lie!" yelled the other, and Mr. Whalen hit him, right in the stomach as hard as he could punch. Instantly, there was a melee. Someone screamed. Something like a bolt of lightning hit Mr. Whalen and he struck back.

(MORE)

OLMSTED:
(CONTD)

The town marshal shouldered good-naturedly between the combatants, but the big man was dragged back up the stairs by others from Stone City. Finally Mrs. Whalen hustled her husband out in the cold night air.

In the kitchen, Mr. Whalen looked in a small mirror at his reflection. He felt wonderful, he felt marvelous. He was going to have a black eye. He grabbed his wife and kissed her soundly.

"They beat them! They beat **Stone** City!"

Marvin came in an hour later after his date with Mary at the soda parlor. He was cheerful and amused.

"Did you really have a fight, dad? Someone told me you popped Guido's father... Boy, are you going to have a shiner!"

"I want it to get black."

"We sure fixed Guido."

"Did you have a fight?"

"Heck, no! I'm going to get him a date with Betty. Their team went downtown for sodas because Guido wanted to meet her. I wasn't sore at him. I knew right away that I could make him foul me, give me extra shots, get him off the floor. It's very easy to do with a big clumsy guy like that."

Mr. Whalen fingered his swelling eye and watched Marvin eat two hot ham sandwiches, a big slab of chocolate cake and drink a quart of milk.

(MORE)

OLMSTED: "You must sleep late in the morning. Maybe you got too
(CONTD) tired tonight. Now, don't eat too much cake."

His eye hurt. Mrs. Whalen got him to bed and put a cold compress on it. "Old ninny," she murmured and stooped to kiss him. Mr. Whalen sighed. He was exhausted. He was getting too old to play basketball, he thought confusedly.

(MUSIC: REPEAT HIGH SCHOOL SONG)

ANNOUNCER: You have just heard a short story by Margaret Weymouth Jackson, entitled, "The Hero". Now here is Nelson Olmsted with a closing word:

OLMSTED: Tomorrow, I hope particularly you can be with us, because I want to tell the story which created such a stir when I first presented it, that you've never ceased asking that it be repeated. It's by Nelson S. Bond, and concerns a fantastic race of supermen on an Island in the Pacific who can, among other things, walk through walls. "Conqueror's Isle" is the title, so try to be with us to hear it. Until tomorrow then, this is Nelson Olmsted saying good bye and good reading.

(MUSIC: ... THEME UP: THEN_OUT...)

ANNOUNCER: ABC has presented Nelson Olmsted with Your Story for Today.
This is ABC -- The American Broadcasting Co.