

The Trainer—Jug Shannon

By Freddy Gonzales

The author was walking in downtown Menard by the Menard National Bank. He saw a black man mowing the grass, when all of a sudden, he got a cramp. The black man ran over to him and started to rub his right calf. The author was relieved by the black, magical hands of Douglas “Jug” Shannon. The author asked the black man, “How did you do that?” Then they started talking about the black man’s life story.

The author learned Jug was the best trainer Menard ever had in football. The purpose of this paper is to recognize him and his contributions to the Menard athletic program.

Douglas Mason Shannon was born on January 2, 1917, in Menard County, on the Will Jenkins ranch, where his parents, Mr. and Mrs. J.W. Shannon were living. When he became of school age, he lived with his grandmother, Mrs. Mat Mason, in Mason, Texas, where he attended school.

Jug moved to Llano in 1936. He lived and worked in Llano until entering the military service in 1945, with the rank of steward’s mate.

In 1946, Jug moved back to Menard and married Minnie Mae Snell on December 9, 1957 in Brady. They are the parents of four wonderful children: Jessie Mae, Frank, Carol Lynn, and Harry. Minnie Mae was born on May 31, 1930, in Menard. Her parents were Isom and Jessie Snell. She attended public school in Menard and obtained a degree from the State University of Florida by correspondence.

Jug would go to see the football players at practice and games. One day, Jug was watching the guys practice, when coach Guy Wheeler asked this question, “You know, you might be able to help me.” Jug asked, “How?” Coach Wheeler needed a trainer. Jug had some experience in Llano and Mason. While Wheeler was discussing the situation with him, Jug was willing to accept the job immediately. He started in 1947, and was trainer for seventeen years, all without pay.

“I didn’t get no money, for my job, but I got the love and respect of the kids at school. To me that was worth more than money,” Jug said.

When the players were admitted to the hospital, Jug would visit them frequently. He would be like a second father to all the players and students. He was also a counselor. “He’d bawl and squall, and the team would do anything for him.”

Being a trainer, therefore, wasn’t very easy work. Jug, however, had some techniques that were very surprising. One technique that was amazing was his technique for relieving charley horses. Jug would put both thumbs together, find the charley horse, and then massage it out. He would also ice down the charley horse after he found it. He also worked with twisted knees. Jug could have a player with a twisted knee in the first quarter of the game, and have the same person playing at the beginning of the second half. “I don’t remember who we were playing, but I had three boys with twisted knees in the first half, and I had them boys playing the second half.”

Aspirin and other common painkillers might be able to stop the rapid muscle-weight loss often caused by injuries and infections, researchers say, but Jug didn’t have the facilities of modern medicine. He just made the best of what he had.

In summary, Jug contributed long hours and hard work to the Menard athletic program. He gave his abilities, and above all, his love and respect to the players, as depicted in the poem, “The Trainer.” This author was overwhelmed by the contributions and love Jug gave to the students, which earned him their respect in return.

The author, in closing, visualized football about twenty years ago. He appeared upon the football field, suited up and ready to go. He got into his position and was hit very hard. As the author came to, he saw a black man rubbing his calf. The author immediately passed out. As he came to again, he heard Coach Rech’s [Menard football coach in 1984] voice saying, “Let’s get to work.”

The Trainer

*A hush rose from the stands, as he lay there on the field
 A mother's face grew tense and white, her lips were grimly sealed
 The coach in red rushed to the boy and knelt close on the ground
 He quickly breathed the life into the fallen player's mouth
 Another woman in the crowd stood silent at the scene
 Grateful her man was working there so fiercely on the scene
 To care for boys who played for him, and gave their best to win
 They'd never fully realize how he too, gave all for them
 He'd seen them all, the blisters, scrapes, and sprains and broken
 parts
 He'd taped them all a million times, and cared for broken hearts
 When all was left, a losing score, a drooping helmet low
 "Heads up, you guys, stay hot because there's still two downs to go!"
 "He's on his feet! Somebody yells, applause is heard once round
 As player leans on coach, and both rise steady from the ground
 Two women in the stands unseen, thank God for him tonight
 That coach is red, the unseen man, for him the praise not light
 "Sunday at three, lemme see that knee," or the hospital rides he's
 seen
 Icing, or spraying, or gently calming, agony and screams
 And there are those who question the worth of a sport so brutal as
 that
 But the boys grow up and a tale will tell someday as they each come
 back
 "Coach, you taught me so much in sports about things that mat-
 tered in life
 And I always forgot, but I meant to say 'thanks' for the time I got
 hurt that night"*

[Poem written by Patty Miller in 1983 and referred to by the author in this story.]