



Zeke III leaps to catch a frisbee inside Spartan Stadium (photo by Nick Robinson).

Crack Shot

by NICK ROBINSON

Part of being a journalism student is experiencing the trials and tribulations of the profession, but sometimes things go so badly that all you can do is swear.

The alarm blares at 7 AM, on the dot. Still drunk after only 4 hours of sleep, I forget that I have a roommate. “GODDAMNSONOFASFUCKINGBITCH!” I yell to the world before closing my mouth and scurrying down my loft, trying not to wobble it too much, and run to the bathroom. Shower, teeth, contacts, and I’m out the door, pulling on my Michigan State hoodie and plugging my iPod into my ears to drown out the road noise. I’ve still got a long walk ahead, and time is against me.

In the twenty minutes to Wilson Hall, I remind myself I need to get to Matt’s room to pick up the video camera, then back to the stadium by eight to meet up with Pam, find Jim and Terry Foley, and tape the new Zeke – that is, Zeke the Wonder Dog III – making his first appearance at a MSU football game. Zeke III is part of a tradition that dates back to 1977 when the first Zeke made his debut, followed by Zeke II (real name: Dexter), and now ZIII (whose name happens to be Boo Coo). I volunteered to film him for my online magazine, and the Foleys, the owners, invited me to watch him practice at 8 AM, before the game.

Five minutes from Wilson, I phone Matt – apparently his first call of the morning as he tries to

remember who I am – who reluctantly agrees to meet me in the lobby. When I arrive, the building is still locked tight and I slam into the door, cracking my head hard against the glass. Matt comes out to meet me, still too groggy to laugh out loud at my stupidity. He hands me the camera, with a warning:

“Yeah, man, I don’t know. I couldn’t get it to work right for me last night, and I think the battery might be dying.”

Are you fucking kidding me! I want to slap his hung-over ass square in the jaw, but I settle for gentlemanly restraint; I take the camera, say thanks, and walk over to the stadium. 7:45: I still need to hustle so I don’t miss the Foleys.

I fiddle with the camera to see if I can actually work it, but Matt was right. The battery is essentially dead, its memory chip completely full. My camera chip isn’t the same type, and there are no spares. I won’t be able to get the video onto my computer, even if the battery holds up long enough. I might as well be stuck in the Stone Age, carving on a fucking tablet.

At the stadium, there’s no sign of Zeke III, so I call Pam, who’s actually writing the story. I had invited her to come along, meet the trainers, and pet Zeke, as I’m sure all Spartans dream of doing one day. She was very excited and, in fact, I was somewhat surprised she wasn’t already there. Her phone rang, she finally picked up, also sounding sedated. I ask her if she was coming and she says no.

“I didn’t get off work until one this morning, and I can’t make it. I’ll just talk about Zeke at the game. That should be enough. Sorry.”

Well, that’s just great. Not only do I have a malfunctioning camcorder, but the writer isn’t going to show either. My head hurts and I’m still a little tipsy. It is now 8 AM, and no sign of the new Zeke or the Foleys. I manage to reach Terry.

“Oh, hi Nick. Yeah, we’re running a bit late. We are still on the highway, and we should get there around 9 or so. Is that OK? I hope that’s not a problem.”

What can I say? I scream bloody-fucking-murder in my head, but I keep my anger under control – gentlemanly restraint again. It isn’t their fault; it is mine for being born. I tell her it would be fine, that my camcorder didn’t work, but I could take pictures, and the



girl writing the story won't be able to make it. I feel like a jackass, displaying just how shitty a young, inexperienced journalist could be.

I call my mom, trying to repress the drunkenness of my words, and vent. I wander over to a convenience store and buy a hot chocolate. I'm freezing, tired, and pissed off at the world. I've done so little for the magazine already, and if I do a shitty job of this, I feel I will be letting everyone down. I wrote a straight news story the previous year, the complete opposite of the magazine's goal to be alternative and cynical; I was mainstream and bland.

The Foleys show up around 9:30. I spot Boo Coo, I mean ZIII, a beautiful young Yellow Labrador, anxious and excited. I am struck by how grizzled Jim looks. He has a five-o'clock shadow, rough and gray, and a cigarette hung loosely from his chapped lips. Terry is warm and inviting, shaking my hand. I thank them for letting me come out here with them, and they apologize for taking so long. I play it off like it is no big deal, and I think they believed me. At least, they probably want to believe me.

We walk onto the field, Terry carrying a small, black duffel filled with Frisbees. I have my camera ready, snapping whatever shots I can with a crappy zoom. Jim takes the leash off Zeke, grabbing a handful of discs, and walks onto the field, Zeke yapping and jumping at his feet.

He tosses a few short throws, just to test out the wind. I take what pictures I can, running down the field, trying to get different angles of the catches and runs. Then it comes time for the big throws; Zeke maxes out at around 35 yards. Jim asks me, as a student, if I think that would look good. I try to retain a sense of journalistic integrity, but I tell him that Zeke looks great, and that the students will love him.

Jim notices that Boo Coo needs to go to the bathroom, so we gather up the Frisbees and head out of the stadium. Terry takes the dog, and a woman approaches Jim and me, warning us to stay off of the painted letters on the field. We say we will try to be more careful in the future. As she walks away, Jim asks me what her name was. I say I have no clue.

We both laugh as we walk out the tunnel, and Jim handed me one of the Official Zeke the Wonder Dog

Frisbees. To keep. I am awestruck, grateful. It isn't until the game when I realize they throw many of the discs into the crowd, but at the time I feel honored. At that point, I feel that the day has been a complete loss. But now I am ready to tackle this awful day and make something good out of what I have.

When Zeke III finishes his business, we walk back towards the tunnel. The cheerleaders are sitting outside, and they get all excited when they see the new Zeke. He stops and pants, basking in his newfound fame. I snap a few pictures, and I'm not ashamed to admit that I take advantage of the situation and hit on a couple cheerleaders.

We stroll back into the tunnel, walking through the same entrance that the MSU football team, the marching band, and the mascot Sparty come through every game. How many students get to do this, if they're not part of the team or band or cheerleading squad? Very few, I would imagine, and I am going to rub it in all my friends' faces when I get back.

I take a few more pictures, and even attempt a video of a run and catch. Jim feels like Zeke is getting the hang of it, when he turns to me and says, "Do you want me to throw one to you?"

Words can not describe how excited I am. He is offering me an amazing shot, on a silver platter, and I snatch it up almost before the words leave his mouth. I bolt to the other side of the field, being careful not to step on any of the painted lines, and brace for the throw. Jim yells to me, asking if I'm ready, and I give him a thumb's up.

The Frisbee flies from his fingers in a perfectly straight line, aimed right at my head. Zeke III springs into action, zooming after it with all his might. Boo Coo was nervous and jittery, but when he becomes ZIII going for the Frisbees, he is all business, pounding down the field like a horse on the last stretch. He jumps and snatches it out of the air just as the shutter snaps on my camera. I got the shot.

I run back to Jim and Terry, and thank them so much for letting me come out here. They say it isn't a problem, and if I need anything else to just give them a call. With that, I say goodbye to the new Zeke, and walk back to my dorm to eat breakfast and meet my friends before the game.



10 AM. I decide to take a quick glance at the pictures I have taken. I had been too busy on the field to look at them, and thought this would be a good time to check out which ones were good and could be sent in. I start at the beginning, and there are a few decent shots. Many are blurry, unfocused messes, but some look all right. I skip ahead to the last shot, the one with Zeke running straight at me, and I finally let the heavens, fate, and anyone else responsible for this day have it:

“GODDAMNFUCKINGCHRIST!!!” Do I need to say more?

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