

Lincoln Park Caper Goes Unsolved 40 Years Later

By Kathy Jordan

Homecoming festivities for Grand Junction High School had started on the afternoon of Thursday, Oct. 7, 1971, with a spirit march from the school to Main Street, where a pep rally was held.

Friday afternoon the homecoming parade wound its way down Main Street with marching bands performing for the crowds. The Tiger Homecoming queen and her attendants, riding on one of the colorful floats decked out in their formal attire, had performed without a hitch. Festivities had Grand Junction Tiger fans psyched and ready for the big homecoming game scheduled that evening.

Well before game time, more than 3,000 fans gathered in the stands at Stocker Stadium. Both teams were dressed in their uniforms, their warm-up routines done, and ready to play some football.

But the night game needed lights – and, as scheduled, the stadium and scoreboard lights were turned on. Switches were flipped, then flipped again – but not one light blinked on. There were no “Friday Night Lights.”

Grand Junction High School head coach, Ron Stoneburner’s had a sick feeling in his stomach, thinking the homecoming game was going to be cancelled.

According to Stoneburner the players and most of the fans waited more than an hour to see if the lights could be fixed and the game could continue. Then the announcement was made that the homecoming game had been reschedule for the next day, Saturday, at 2 pm. - during daylight thanks to the generosity of the late Sam Suplizo who paid the opposing teams expenses to stay overnight.

Technicians determined that the problem was not due to a power outage, since the lights for the adjacent baseball field worked just fine. Public Service Co. of Colorado, (now Excel), worked for a couple of hours that evening trying to figure out the problem. No luck.

On Saturday the city called Kendall Electric Co. to work with the City Forestry Service to try to solve the dilemma. Workers ran wires in every possible combination. Still no lights. Estimates of thousands of dollars to repair or replace wiring were discussed. Where would the money come from?

Then one of the City of Grand Junction employees happened to touch a bulb in its socket, and, to everyone's amazement, the bulb lit up. Another was twisted, then another. It was soon evident that some daring prankster or pranksters had climbed light poles on pegs and had unscrewed all 128 bulbs. The lights were 85 feet – eight stories -- above the ground.

Jim Wysocki, City Parks and Recreation director, was quoted in a Daily Sentinel story saying, "It took some daring people, all right. It must have taken at least two hours to accomplish the job, even if there were a half dozen people on the poles."

It was reported in the same story that the caper was not taken lightly by some. However, others found humor in the practical joke. Other marveled that "such a thing could have really happened".

Stoneburner was one of those not amused. The Tigers had had a rough start to the season. Stoneburner said the first game against Fort Collins had been cancelled, and when they played Cortez, the scoreboard didn't work.

Despite the delay Stoneburner's Tigers trampled the Gallup, N.M. Bengals with a 40-0 win.

Later, the city cut the pole pegs up to the 40-foot level making it more difficult for someone to try that prank again.

No one was ever arrested for this prank. Even after more than 40 years -WAY past any statute of limitations for possible charges - no one has ever come forward and publicly confessed to the prank.

When the subject comes up occasionally, several names have been mentioned, but nothing concrete has ever been proved.

It is an amazing thing that this caper remains a "whodunit" in a small town after all these years.

