

Before Quitting the Football Team

Poetry • Zach Hughes

He's yelling again, but it's not his fault.
He's a good man.
He even put Bible verses and a C.S. Lewis quote
At the start of the offensive playbook.

From experience, he knows we must be better than we are
If he's to keep his job and not explain to his wife and 12-year-old
That they must move again,
To a new town after only one year in this new town.
It's not his fault.

So I listen, obediently chopping my feet
And slamming my plastic-protected pectorals
Into the turf, 10, 15, 20 times.
Anymore would have been counterproductive.
He still needs us to run plays.

And win.
That is the point after all
Of dark winter mornings spent vomiting into pine needles
And uncounted practice-time concussions
What really defines a concussion anyway?
I can't remember.

I remember to look for the signal
Wing Right Over.
Remember OVER. Last time you didn't, and he yelled more.
Jet Al Flood.

This call is relayed through choreographed motions
Of redshirt freshmen quarterbacks
Who are more likely to quit or transfer
Than ever play in a game.

My mind translates their signals into a picture
In which the X, that's me—
Might as well be 24601, but it's 37 on my jersey—
MUST outside release.

I won't get the ball but should still run as hard as I can
And expect it.
That's just what you do.
This is just what I do.
I love it.
(I love it.)
I love it.