

Zeitschrift: Der Kreis : eine Monatsschrift = Le Cercle : revue mensuelle
Band: 33 (1965)
Heft: 9

Artikel: Seize the day
Autor: Ramp, Jim
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-570344>

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SEIZE THE DAY

by Jim Ramp

Dundee Drake (Migawd whatta name, everyone said) although his nickname was Dun—which only confused the issue, was a perfect miniature. From the neck down, that is. His compact body was perfectly proportioned, a Discobolus in model, but a small one. Even his small, high-arched feet were perfect and winged as Mercury's. Above the neck it was another matter. True, he had the tight red curls of a Greek athlete (if you are to believe Praxiteles—who probably had a thing about curls), but he had big ears, blotches of freckles, green eyes and uneven teeth. His nose, from youthful brawls, was not a thing of beauty. The epithet «runt» was usually the trigger to Dun's temper, and his was not the only nose bent.

When he went out for track at the University, the towering, bulging muscled coach looked at him in disdain. «Sorry! We don't have a midget act in this circus. Grow up a little!»

«Listen, you meat-head!» growled Dun in a surprisingly deep baritone, «you run a speed factory here, don't you?»

«Yeah, but you haven't got the wind for it. It takes stamina, staying power in the stretch to make a runner. That's what you want, isn't it?»

«That's what I *am*, not what I want!»

«Well, speed demon, ever break any records?»

«No. My high school was too small to have a track team. I did my running to and from school. I broke several world's records for the mile—only I had to run two each way, morning and afternoon.»

«With the wind filling your sail-ears?» joshed the coach. «We need men not boys.»

«Leave us shuck and compare who's the most man!»

The coach looked . . . and gulped: «No argument! But look: you'll be running against long legged guys, with barrel chests.»

«Packing around a ton of bone and muscle,» agreed Dun. «Chauncey» (the coach's front name) «give me a try. Alone or against one of your boydy long legs. If I poop I won't pester you again.»

«O. K. Timmins, you and Drake here for the mile. Get set. Go!»

Chauncey punched his stop watch, and if his chin had been that long it would have dropped to his belly-button. Dun ran like a jet, Timmins like a thrashing machine, all pistoning arms and legs. When Dun crossed the line he was not even panting. Timmins pounded in and collapsed. «Gee-zus!» he gasped, «teach me to run like that!»

«Can't!» Dun chuckled. «You'd have to lose seventy-five pounds, and you'd be a skinful of bones. Well, coach, how did I do?»

«I dunno!» confessed Chauncey, «I forgot to clock you at the end.»

«Shall I do it again?»

«God, no! I don't want you wind broken,» said Chauncey.

«Here», said Dun, taking the stop-watch. «Look! I set it and start . . .» and he tore away . . . «and I punch it and stop» he said a few minutes later, handing it back to Chauncey.

The coach stared at the watch in disbelief. «Oh man! Oh boys! We got us a champion runner. Olympics for sure!»

«Hey, not so fast!» protested Dun. «I'm a student first, an athlete second. Don't rush me. I run for fun.»

«Oh Lord! A brain truster,» groaned Chauncey. «What else can you do?»

«Jump, swim, vault.»

«Hurdles?»

«I'm a bird,» said Dun modestly.

«How many events can you participate in at one meet?»

«All of them.»

«That I can't believe. Good Lord! What do you eat? Dynamite?»

«No, gunpowder,» grinned Dun.

«How in Hell can you keep in training and be a book-eater too?»

«If I told you I do it in my head, you wouldn't believe me—so I won't tell you.»

«Alright. After running two miles, I don't suppose you'd care to try the pole vault?»

«I will, but I can't vault over three times my own height,» admitted Dun.

«How tall are you?»

«Five feet six.»

«And that's the best you can do? 16' 6"?» Chauncey snorted. «Only a lousy world's record?»

«Well, give me a couple of years to grow—I might make it seventeen.»

«Couldn't you make it seventeen today—just to please me?» entreated Chauncey.

«Nope. I know my capacity without strain.»

«Boys!» called Chauncey, «set the bar at 16' 6".»

«What?» yelled Timmins. «Who for, a sea gull?»

«Yeah! Set it.»

Dun ignored the scoffing asides as he hefted the pole and walked lightly to the starting line. There he did a strange thing, jabbing the pole upright in the ground and backing away, sighting past it to the cross bar. Satisfied, he took the pole, ran, vaulted and swung easily over the bar, landing on his feet with a little bounce.

«My God!» exclaimed Chauncey. «How long did you practice vaulting?»

«I don't practice,» Dun said, grinning. «Takes too much time and energy. That's one thing I wanted to tell you, Coach: if you want me on the team, I can't report for work-outs. I have to seize the day.»

«What do you mean: 'seize the day'?»
later on.»

Dun lowered his voice. «I'll try to explain, if you have time later on.»

«What next—high jump or hurdles?»

When they left the field together after try-outs, Chauncey shook his head in awe.

«It's not possible for one small man to have so much precision steel. How in Tunket do you manage without bursting your heart?»

«I told you—I don't practice. I just do it. You see I have clips of champions doing the things I do. I study their techniques, improve on them in my mind, then just go and do them better.»

«Could you teach others?»

«I suppose I could, but I don't have time. As I told you, I have to seize the day.»

«Explain that, if you please.»

«It's a phrase from «*Midsummer Night's Dream*». I read the play when I was ten and it stuck in my mind.»

«Exactly what does it mean?» asked Chauncey.

«In context it meant: 'make the most of time given you'».

«Another way of saying that time flies?»

Dun grinned. «More than that. To me it was a command to make the day stand still while I filled it with as much knowledge, experience, joy, sensation as possible.»

«Have you always been a Brain?» murmured Chauncey.

«I'm not a Brain!» chuckled Dun. «I suppose I sound like a Hedonist, but I'm not. I live for the attainment of perfection—if that is possible. I won't ever know, of course, whether I've achieved it.»

«Do you have a girl?» asked Chauncey curiously.

«Me?» exclaimed Dun happily. «No, of course not! There isn't time in any day I seize for the silly ritual of the love dance. I abhor the vacuum of the average woman's mind. The average college man's too, for that matter. I must admit, some of my professors need a better education, but I have to go through the motions to achieve the stigmata of a University Degree.»

«Then why bother?» Chauncey said sarcastically.

«Because it's part of the pattern I must follow in cutting the cloth of my life. Excuse me now, I must earn my daily doughnut.»

«How?»

«I teach a class in acrobatics at the Y. Nice to talk to you, Chauncey.»

«Hey, wait! Are you coming to the track field tomorrow?»

«Nope. You let me know if you want me at the next meet, but don't expect me to practice.»

«But how in Hell do you keep in shape?» demanded the Coach in exasperation.

«Muscular tension,» said Dun solemnly. «You ought to try it between your ears, Chauncey.» After the first track meet of the year, which Dun won for his University practically single-footed, his team-mates mobbed him in the showers, then stood in amazement. Finally Timmins croaked: «Fellas, Drake is no longer Dun! I dub him Dunkey. Tell us, Dunkey, was it hand-raised?»

«Nope,» grinned Dun. «I used to sing myself to sleep: «Wishing will make it so!»

At the end of the school year Dun consulted his faculty adviser. «Mister Davis, I'd like to graduate next June.»

«So would we all! You're a freshman, Drake? *Dunkey* Drake, isn't it?»

«Yes,» admitted Dun demurely. «You want to make something of it?»

«Oh mi Gosh No!» flustered the adviser. «Now . . . you were saying . . . what were you saying . . . Oh yes! About graduating next year. How in the world could you do that?»

«I want a degree in Belly Letters. I've read—or will read the Sophomore, Junior and Senior squatulæ, write the required papers, pass the finals all in one swell foop!» — «Why the rush?» inquired the adviser.

«Matter of getting out in the world, walking up and down in it. The Halls of Learning make my bunions bark.»

«But Drake, you are our prize athlete, and you'll make Phi Beta Kappa».

«That's not the key to my world, Mister Davis. Anyway, Phi Beta has already been *made*.»

«Well, you may try, if you wish. Don't take it too hard if you don't make the grades.»

«I always take things hard,» said Dun. «A challenge to my ability for softening them up.» His adviser blushed and fumbled while Dun regarded him innocently. «Did I say something a-mister?» he murmured.

«No . . . no, Drake. Please . . . I'm busy now.»

When Chauncey—who had joined Dun's class in acrobatics at the Y—heard of his intention to graduate the following June, he protested. «Look, Dunkey, you could bring home the Olympic Bacon in Tokyo. I've been counting on you.»

«Stop counting before you run out of fingers and toes. I will *not* compete with professionals, even though I can beat the Russians asses up in track. I am ashamed of you! Isn't there any integrity left in this blasted world?»

»Not much, I guess. Won't you contribute to the lack?»

«I will not! I'm ashamed of you for asking. By the way, you can raise the cross-bar to seventeen next spring. I'm going to make 5' 8"».

«Sometime,» threatened Chauncey, «*sometime* you are going to show me, tell me, how you keep in training!»

«That I will!» promised Dun, «That I will!»

During the first spring meet, when Dun vaulted seventeen feet, Chauncey demanded to know his secret. Dun laughed: «I can only demonstrate it in bed.» — «Won't a rubbing table do?»

«No, it's too hard. Only a firm mattress meets my specifications. Want to come to my apartment after the acrobatics class?»

Chauncey expected to find exercise gadgets, but none were in evidence. There was a study table, piled with books, a leather lounge chair, a studio couch, bath and tiny kitchenette.

«Do my own cooking,» said Dun. «High protein diet. Sit down while I look at my mail.» He scanned a couple of letters, ripped open a brown envelope. «Ever read these?» He tossed a copy of *Mattachine Review* into Chauncey's lap.

«I've *heard* of them,» confessed Chauncey. «Do you belong to the Society?» — «Yes. Surprised?»

«Well . . . I didn't suspect you were homosexual.»

«I haven't had time for anything sexual yet—except masturbation—but I have an open mind.»

Chauncey grinned and trotted out an old cliché: «No wonder you are so small! Self abuse has stunted your growth.»

«Bull shit! It didn't stunt yours,» chuckled Dun. «It helps me relax and concentrate, or sleep without dreaming. Now: you came to see a demonstration.» He stripped naked and lay on his back on the couch. «Don't watch for froth, since I'm not having an epileptic fit!»

His body grew rigid. He clasped his hands together and tensed his arms, as he «walked», straight-legged, stretching first one foot downward, then the other, his narrow hips a see-saw. His back and belly

muscles where pulled and then relaxed by the action, and he rocked his chest without raising his buttocks from the mattress. He relaxed and then repeated the routine, while Chauncey watched in fascination, realizing that he was seeing one of the most perfect specimens in his long experience as a coach. As Dun's magnificent male equipment flopped about, Chauncey glanced away, with a surge of desire. Dun closed his eyes, smiling, breathing deeply. When he felt Chauncey's hand on him he murmured: «You'd better strip. . .»

Later Chauncey sighed and chuckled: «Look's like I seized the day this time!» Occasionally, in the following months Chauncey visited Dun, but nothing was said about love or a possible permanent arrangement.

In June Dun amazed his advisor by passing all examinations with straight A's, and was awarded his B.A. Degree. «Now what?» said Davis.

«Now I take a Master's at Christmas, get a job as track coach and teach Lit at a small college.»

«Had any offers?» asked Davis sceptically.

«A few,» said Dun modestly, «mostly from schools interested in my athletic record. Brawn before brains!»

When Dun received his Master's Chauncey announced that he had accepted a position with another University, chiefly on the strength of Dun's track triumphs. «Would you consider trying to get a teaching job there—so that we could be together?»

«No Chauncey. Our bed adventures have been fine and I have learned much, but now that I am a teacher and can no longer compete in track meets, I want to coach too.»

«You called me a meat-head once. Is that why you don't love me?» Chauncey asked sadly.

«No. And you don't love me, Chauncey. You love your wife. I've just been a wistful experiment, though I appreciate it.»

«Shall I recommend you for my replacement here?»

«No thanks. The boys I competed with might resent me. I'll find a smaller school.» But Chauncey was not satisfied. He talked with other members of the track-team and found that they had both liking and respect for Dun. The Dean of Men opined that the Athletic Committee, of which he was Chairman, would be delighted to hire Dun as track coach, and that there would be an opening in the English Department. He sent for Dun and urged him to accept. «I know you are only twenty, but Chauncey says the track team wants you for a coach, and the Dean of English wants you as an instructor.»

«One one condition,» said Dun, «and I know this will sound insufferable, but I want a contribution from the Athletic Department to take motion pictures of me contending in track events. I want to use these pictures in my training program.»

«An excellent idea!»

At the first training session, Dun said: «You'll be surprised at a theory of mine: that most athletes go stale from too much practice. I want you to try my method of keeping in shape without violent exercise. Although I'm going to wear a jock-strap, I want you to practice muscle-tension naked, on a firm mattress.»

Dun demonstrated, describing the benefits of each movement. Then he showed the moving pictures in slow motion.

«Notice, in each sport, the tight economy. When you run, don't run all-over, it takes too much energy. Breathe deeply and as slowly as possible. When you jump don't fling your body. Feel springs under your feet.» He maintained a running commentary on the pictures. «You'll come to hate the sight of my ugly puss. Don't look at it. Watch instead what I am doing with my legs, torso, arms. Learn to control the body as a unit and you will be more proficient. Practice today will be limited to half an hour, less five minutes each day until we are down to fifteen. You'll find the muscle-tension exercise will supply the needed exercise.»

Dun approached his first class in American Literature with more trepidation, aware that he would have many students older than himself, and that many who knew him might presume on his friendship to relax discipline.

After calling the roll he turned and wrote on the black-board: «Seize the Day.»

«Many of you know,» he began, «that I completed the courses for my Bachelor's in two years, for my Master's in six months. I am not boasting. I did it by concentrating on the subject at hand, shutting out all extraneous thought. When you read or study, do it with total dedication, using your knowledge and experience to color and expand the ideas presented. See the author in his proper setting of history and culture of his time, as opposed to the world scene . . .» He talked easily and became aware of quickening interest, as he thought irrelevantly, «I am here as a direct result of bedding Chauncey!»

The track-team shaped up rapidly, and Dun grew impatient for the first meet. He watched his men closely, suggesting, demonstrating, praising, and when Timmins called him Dunkey, almost shyly, he grinned and let it pass. From then on he was Dunkey and never Mister Drake.

The Athletic Department was doubtful about his training methods, but when the team brought home the bacon from the first meet, they complimented on his muscle-tension exercises and suggested it be used in other sports.

Settled into routine, Dun began to miss his occasional sexual release with Chauncey. His appearance and behavior, his quiet masculinity were such that no one suspected his desire to find a personal relationship. As a bachelor he was in demand at Faculty parties and dinners, only to find himself partnered by a taller, older woman. One evening, when a social science instructor was blasting his ear with her definite opinions, he glanced across the table at a young Math professor and received a little grin of commiseration. Dun beamed and the lady thought she had made a witticism, but the professor's eyes lighted up with personal warmth. The next day Dun found a note in his faculty pigeon-hole: «Have dinner with me at my apartment? Tonight?» Max Borden. «Address: 10 High St., Apt. 6. Sevenish.» Dun scribbled acceptance and popped the note into Borden's box.

He enjoyed the dinner and the offer of friendship. «You're a hard guy to get to know,» said Max, after they had talked all around the subject uppermost in their minds.

«Me?» Dun was astonished.

«Yes, you! At first I thought it was egotism, you being such a successful coach and instructor. Then I saw how helpless you were in the grip of Hannah Poobah at dinner last night, and I realized how vulnerable you are. One of our mutual students was telling me about your slogan: «Seize the Day» and I decided you were a totally dedicated man.»

«I am in the class room, on the track field. Otherwise I'm lonesome as Hell.»

«So am I,» confessed Max. «I have tickets for the Opera tomorrow night. Care to go?»

«Live opera? Lord, yes. I have recordings of most of the melodic ones, but deliver me from the whooping, gasping orgasms of Wagner.»

«Amen! Tomorrow's hors d'œuvre is The Barber.»

«Then have dinner with me first. Sorry I can't ask you to my place. I haven't moved into more commodious quarters yet, and eat off a bridge table, out of the pot.»

Dun squirmed in boyish delight as the Barber unfolded its banners of lovely song, and charming comedy. He found himself gripping Max's knee, and felt the warm pressure of a hand on his. He murmured: «I'm sorry!» and withdrew his hand.

«Don't be!» said Max, «I know how you feel . . .»

«Like Hell you do!» thought Dun.

As they walked away from the Opera House, Dun said: «Now that I can afford it, I'd better begin looking for a larger apartment as befits a combiner of brains and brawn.»

«Don't hurry,» said Max, obliquely, «I might know of something by the first of the month. Probably a vacancy where I live.»

«Lunch with me tomorrow?» suggested Dun. «I want to talk about the Opera—after I simmer down and collect my star-spangled wits.»

They spent leisure time together, probing, exploring, savoring the growing bond between them. Toward the end of the month Max said: «Timmins has been telling me about your muscle-tension training. I could use something like that. I'm too damned busy to go to a gym or the Y, and I'm beginning to develop a pot.»

Dun looked at him, grinned, and thought: «You wonderful liar! Setting a velvet trap? O.K., I'll step in it.»

«You come up to my apartment soon, and I'll demonstrate.»

«What about tonight?»

«It will have to be late. I'm preparing the team for a meet tomorrow.» — «Ten?»

«Fine. Leave your prudery at home!»

Max watched Dun's muscle-tensions, sighed, and said: «O.K. I get the message! I've found an apartment for you?»

«Where?»

«Mine, but you'll have to accept me as a muscular-tension devotee. Right now I am all tied up in one . . .»

«Then say it! No, I'll say it first: I love you. Maybe not forever, but I'd like to try!»

«Amen!» murmured Max against his lips, «Amen . . .»

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