

Hooked On Recovery

November 9, 2007

Greenhead

The Greenhead Problem: The salt marsh greenhead fly, *Tabanus nigrovittatus*, is an abundant and bothersome summertime pest along our coastal marshes. Because the females bite during daylight, and because they occur in large numbers, have a long flight range, and attack persistently, they interfere with the enjoyment of coastal areas throughout much of the summer. –from the Rutgers University website (there are actually people who study this stuff)

When you spend any amount of time on the beach, you will inevitably become familiar with the sound of “hand slapping skin”. This is usually accompanied by a loud “Oooooowwwwww!!!!” When the slap is successful, it’s not unusual to hear “I got you!” Personally, I prefer something along the lines of “Ha ha ha ha, die you bastard!” Then you’re left to attend to the bleeding welt that will irritate you for several hours.

Greenheads love ankles and calves and they go for blood. I’ve been bitten as soon as I’ve stepped out of the truck onto the sand, or while sitting in a beach chair, or while paddling the kayak or when I’m airing up. Greenheads must serve some useful purpose, but I haven’t discovered it. When I do get stung, it’s an immediate reflection of my emotional barometer. One time, I was floating around off Race Point in the kayak, dangling a sand eel off the bottom, fishing rod held in my feet for a few hours, completely relaxed, enjoying the day. When a greenhead flew in from off the beach, assaulted my ankle, and I responded with a, “that wasn’t very nice” and I shoed her away. But there have been other times, when I responded with an intensely hot response followed closely by some profane language. “Time to check what’s going on inside, Phillip”. Serenity is an inside job.

Life throws all kinds of stuff at me that tests my serenity. This fall, I returned to coaching after a year off. My son Joshua now plays on both a premier soccer team and a travel team (when his schedule allows) that I coach. Now this travel team, the All Stars, played in the Connecticut State Cup tournament that started with 47 teams in the U13 (under 13) age bracket. The All Stars got on a run and we ended up in the final where we played really well and lost 1-0. The boys walked off the field in tears while I stood and gave them a standing ovation. I put up a brave front: I smiled, I encouraged them, I congratulated them on their run. Most of me believed it, but I tossed and turned that night and wondered if I could have done anything different. I think I replayed the game several times. But that’s soccer, sometimes you play really well and lose. That’s life, too. It is all about the effort. I guess I measure my recovery and my relationship to God by how quickly I pick myself up after a setback. Incidentally, the very next day the All Stars had another game, a friendly match and showed up all smiles, ready to play and won convincingly.

My son Joshua drove home this lesson for me this past summer. He played on a 3v3 team (the Titans), a very quick action packed type of soccer where 3 players take the field against 3 players. The field is smaller, the goal is smaller and it really puts an emphasis on individual skill, passing and movement. Joshua’s team was really skilled and really good. In this tournament the Titans played a year up. In their first game, they went up against a team that didn’t have a lot of skill but had some serious size. They were huge! One player was not a boy; he was a man way bigger than anyone else. He accentuated his size with a wild mop of hair that

he had painted green - Greenhead. He wasn't a soccer player, he was a football player, American football who decided to play this tournament for "kicks".

The Titans got off to an early lead and Greenhead decided to take out his frustration on my son. Greenhead charged from the blind side, at full speed lowered his shoulder into Joshua's back and hit him so hard that Joshua flipped in the air and landed in a heap. I held my breath and bit back my anger. The referee appropriately red-carded Greenhead. He was kicked out of the game. Joshua staggered to his feet, went to the sideline and slowly recovered. He went back into the game after several minutes.

It didn't end there. Joshua's team made it into the finals and they were to face Greenhead's team. Greenhead had sat out 2 more games but by tournament rules he was allowed back for the final. I was standing on the sideline before the game and Greenhead was trying to intimidate the referee, a boy probably the same age as him but a lot smaller. It seemed like they knew each other. "Hey, don't be calling any red cards like the other guy, let me play." So I quietly walked over to Joshua's coach, let him know what I heard and he took action. They changed referees and Greenhead's plan was thwarted.

When the game started both were on the field. Joshua and Greenhead faced off. I could tell Joshua was nervous, but when he got the ball his instincts and training took over and he blew by Greenhead twice and scored twice. I reacted with a quiet fist pump and a hushed "yes!" after each score. That set the tone for the game and the Titans won easily. Greenhead, to his credit, did not retaliate and the game was played cleanly.

As I watched the awards ceremony, I tried to put myself in Joshua's position – he weighs 110 pounds soaking wet and Greenhead probably went 170-180. Greenhead was aggressive, strong, unskilled and had nearly knocked Joshua out. I'm not sure what I would have done; I might have asked the coach to sit me out. Yet Joshua started the game, went right back at him and prevailed.

I learn a lot from my children.

Hooked on Recovery is a biweekly message from CCAR Executive Director Phillip Valentine, person in recovery since 12/28/87, devoted husband, a father of five and just another surf fisherman. These thoughts, views and opinions reflect on his personal recovery and are not meant in any way to speak for the entire recovery community. He welcomes all your comments and suggestions on this column, email him at phillip@ccar.us. Visit the website at www.ccar.us to read the entire series.