

EXCERPT FROM THE SIX O’CLOCK RULE

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Excerpt from Police Department Policy Manual

03-16 DEFINITION: THE SIX O’CLOCK RULE

Prior to taking any action, both professionally as well as personally, all employees should consider the following: If your action becomes the lead story on the six o’clock news,

- Will you be proud?
- Will your police department and your community be proud?
- Will your family and friends be proud?

Interpretation of the Rule by a field training officer to his rookie partner:

“If you’re thinking of doing something that might make you look like a dumbass on the six o’clock news, here’s a tip. Don’t.”

Chapter 1

It was almost midnight as Clay Randall low-crawled through sea oats covering the sand dunes. A major drug deal was about to go down under the fishing pier, and Clay was part of the takedown team. Their target, Dante Brown, was a violent drug dealer known to carry a pistol. The twelve-gauge shotgun Clay packed gave him a tactical advantage and a level of comfort he didn't feel with his handgun.

At thirty-seven years old, Clay could pass for a much younger man. Happily married to Dana Cappella Randall, he was the proud and loving father of Catarina LeeAnn, or Cat, as she was called. The precocious three-year-old had both her parents, but especially her daddy, wrapped firmly around her little finger.

Clay was the youngest division commander in the history of the Jacksonville Beach Police Department. Normally, commanders spent their days reviewing paperwork, monitoring budgets, and overseeing the actions of their personnel from afar. But not Clay. When he heard a robbery or other major crime dispatched, he would race from his office, responding at high speed to back up his officers. And when one of his detectives served a search warrant, Clay was there to provide support.

Tonight, he had insisted on being part of the takedown team of detectives when told the drug dealer they were after was Dante Brown. Three people, including a seventeen-year-old high school cheerleader, had died after injecting a lethal mix of cocaine and heroin known as a speedball.

For Clay, taking Brown off the street was personal. Until a few months before, Michele Wilson had seemed to have everything going for her. An academic scholarship to Florida awaited her upon graduation from Fletcher High. Head cheerleader, Michele was well liked by everyone. However, a disastrous breakup with her boyfriend sent her on a downward spiral of depression that eventually led the teenager to fall in with a group of kids experimenting with drugs. Her grades dropped, and she began skipping school to hang out with her new circle of friends. Her grandfather, Police Chief Mike Wilson, asked Clay, a family friend since she was a child, to talk to her. But she wouldn't listen. A week later, she was dead.

As the pastor ended her graveside service, Chief Wilson pulled Clay to the side. Speaking quietly but intensely, his eyes filled with tears, the chief told Clay to find the man responsible for

selling the drugs to his granddaughter and make sure he never got the opportunity to kill another child.

The detectives put their informants on notice that they wanted the name of the guy dealing speedballs. And they wanted him now. Within a week, tips began coming in about a dealer named Dante Brown who had just moved into the area from Atlanta. Detectives pursued the information, and the operation tonight would be the culmination of their exhaustive investigation.

“Ty,” Clay spoke softly into his radio, “I’m in the sea oats south of the pier about forty yards. Any sign of Brown?”

“Not yet,” said Sergeant Ty Honchen, supervisor of the drug unit known as the Community Response Team, or CRT.

“You have eyes on Danny?” Clay asked, referring to the undercover detective, Danny Malone.

“Roger that, boss,” Ty said. “Malone’s waiting under the pier. Soon as he makes the deal, Dante Brown is goin’ down.”

“Danny, you copy? Any sign of him yet?” Clay asked.

“I copy, Commander. Nothing yet.”

“Where’s Jeremy?” Clay asked.

“I’m just north of the pier, Commander. I’ll have a clear view of the exchange,” Jeremy Rivers responded. The veteran detective, known as “Three” to his fellow officers, was nicknamed after the old Three Rivers Stadium his beloved Pittsburgh Steelers called home for decades. “When Danny gives the signal, we’ll jump on Brown like a Steeler linebacker on a Jaguar fumble,” Rivers said.

“Three,” Detective Rafe Santos responded, “Does everything in your world revolve around Steelers football?”

“Nah, just the important parts,” he answered.

“Cool it, guys,” Clay interrupted. “Let’s remember why we’re here. Keep your head in the game.”

“Brown just pulled into the parking lot in his white Mercedes. I’ll advise as soon as he heads your way,” Rafe said.

“Okay, guys, it’s show time,” Ty said. “Santos, check him close. See if you can spot a gun.”

“I’m on him, Sarge,” Rafe said.

The detectives waited nervously for Rafe to report, aware of Brown’s penchant for ripping off his customers.

“He just took a black bag out of the trunk,” Rafe said. “It looks kinda like a laptop case. I can’t tell if he’s got a gun in the bag or somewhere on him . . . okay, he’s heading Danny’s way. He’ll hit the beach on the north side of the pier.”

“Three, stay down,” Ty said. “Brown will pass close by you. Danny, activate your wire so we can hear the deal. Everybody else, keep a sharp eye out, and be ready to move.”

Danny Malone leaned casually against a pier support, his right hand gripping a subcompact pistol in his pocket. Watching the drug dealer approach, he called out, “Yo, Dante, whassup?”

Brown glared at the detective. “You ain’t black, Duncan, so don’t be talkin’ no honky ass street with me,” he said, using Danny’s undercover name. “Let’s just take care of business. You got my money?”

“Right here,” Danny said, opening a paper bag at his feet. He tilted it to show five thousand dollars in bundles of twenties, each held together with rubber bands. Brown moved closer, lifting the bag and riffling through each stack of bills. Satisfied, he dropped the computer bag on the sand.

“Here’s the stuff,” he said, unzipping and reaching inside the bag.

Danny tensed, his hand tightening on his gun. Brown pulled out a clear plastic bag containing two smaller bags, each full of white powder. Looking in all directions for anything suspicious, Brown seemed satisfied, tossing the bag to the undercover detective.

Danny caught it one-handed and dropped to his knees in the sand, pulling cocaine and heroin field testing kits and a small mirror from his pocket. Tearing the cocaine test kit open, he removed a plastic tube and a strip of collection paper.

As Brown watched, Danny opened a corner of the bag marked with a “C” and slipped out a tiny amount of the white powder on the edge of a penknife. Balancing the knife on the mirror, he peeled away the protective covering from the collection paper and touched it gently to the powder, being careful to avoid contaminating the paper with the knife blade or his fingers.

Placing the collection paper back on the mirror, Danny picked up the plastic tube and squeezed gently so that the glass ampoule inside broke open, releasing a liquid. He then shook the tube for several seconds to mix the contents before removing the cap and applying a few drops to the powder residue. Almost instantly, the residue turned a bright, bluish-green color, a signal the powder was cocaine. Using the heroin test kit on the powder in the other bag, Danny got a second positive result.

“Awright, man, you satisfied?” Brown demanded impatiently.

“Yeah, I’m good. Hey, man, I gotta do this, you know? I trust you, but my boss, he don’t trust nobody. He’d bust a cap in my ass if I brought back some dope that wasn’t righteous. You know what I’m saying?”

“Yeah, well that ain’t my problem,” Brown said as he stuffed the cash into his bag.

Danny stood up. “As always, man, nice doin’ business with you,” he said, the phrase that served as a signal for the takedown team.

“Yeah, right,” Brown responded, turning to head back the way he had come.

Suddenly, Three Rivers came bounding through the sea oats, gun in hand, yelling, “Police! Get on the ground!”

As the detectives raced toward Brown, he spun and charged full speed at Danny, who was just drawing his pistol. Dropping his right shoulder, Brown slammed into Danny sending him sprawling onto his back. The drug dealer ran south, heading straight toward Clay’s hiding place, the computer bag filled with cash banging against his leg. He fired his pistol twice over his shoulder to slow his pursuers.

Clay knew he was facing a man who wouldn’t hesitate to kill him if he had the chance. When Brown got within forty feet, Clay flipped on the flashlight mounted to the shotgun, targeting the man’s face to blind and disorient him. He screamed, “DROP THE GUN!”

Without aiming, Brown snapped off a shot at the source of the light. The round struck the flashlight lens, jamming the weapon into Clay’s shoulder. His trigger finger involuntarily jerked, sending double-ought buckshot harmlessly over Brown’s head into the surf. But Clay was not so lucky. A piece of bullet shrapnel from Brown’s shot deflected off the flashlight, striking him in the neck and buckling his knees.

Dazed, he keyed his radio mic, “I’M HIT! HE’S HEADED BACK AT YOU!”

Continuing to shoot at the detectives running toward him, Brown suddenly veered toward the sea oats, his headlong flight slower as loose sand pulled at his shoes. Breathing in ragged gasps, he made it almost to the Boardwalk when he heard a shout behind him.

“Drop the gun, Brown!” Danny yelled.

The drug dealer stopped, his weapon pointed at the ground.

“I said drop it, asshole!” Danny commanded.

Brown looked over his shoulder at Danny, hate filling his eyes. “Fuck you!” he screamed, spinning around as he brought his gun up. Before he could fire, Danny pumped five rounds into his body, center mass, and the drug dealer pitched backward, dead before he hit the sand.