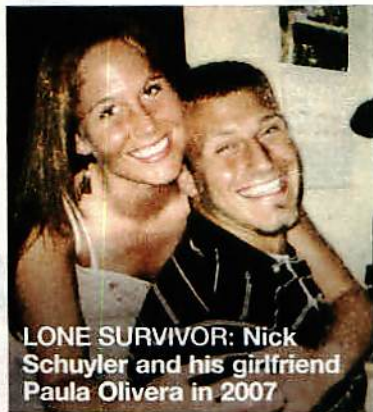


Authorities have not released all the details of what really happened out there, but at one point, all four men were safe and out of the water

In a terrifying bout of madness, one of the NFL players lost at sea snapped and got into a furious fistfight with his friends. The ENQUIRER has learned exclusively.

After the exhausted men struggled to defend themselves from the punches of Oakland Raiders linebacker Marquis Cooper, he suddenly tore off his life jacket and dove off their upturned boat into the frigid water, never to be seen again.



LONE SURVIVOR: Nick Schuyler and his girlfriend Paula Olivera in 2007

That's the horrifying story survivor Nick Schuyler has told authorities – who say panic and madness doomed two star NFL players and a friend to watery graves off the Florida coast.

While the nation's press painted a picture of four men battling bravely to survive, an in-depth ENQUIRER investigation has gone beyond the media coverup to find out what REALLY happened during the fishing excursion gone dreadfully wrong.

OAKLAND RAIDERS LINEBACKER Marquis Cooper, Detroit Lions defensive end Corey Smith and their friend Will Bleakley lost their lives in the tragedy. The lone survivor, fitness trainer Nick Schuyler, has told authorities and those close to him about their struggle to stay alive.

"Authorities have not released all the details of what really happened out there, but at one point, all four men were safe and out of the water," a source close to the Coast Guard investigation told The ENQUIRER.

ENQUIRER EXCLUSIVE



"Unfortunately, three of them went mad with fear and exposure. If they had just sat on the capsized boat and waited, they could have survived."

The doomed fishing trip began when the four friends set off in Cooper's 21-foot boat at 6:30 a.m. on Saturday, Feb. 28. They headed out from a marina in Clearwater Pass to fish for amberjack in the Gulf of Mexico.

Three hours later, they were about 50 miles off Tampa when a storm blew up. The men decided to head back, but found their anchor was stuck on the bottom.

"They put on their life jackets and storm gear, but the storm kept getting worse. Waves 12 feet high

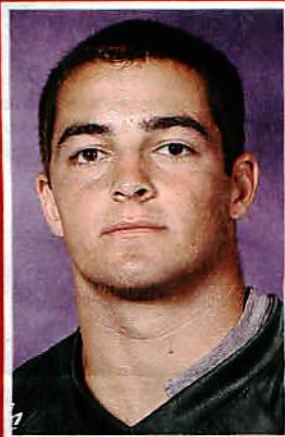
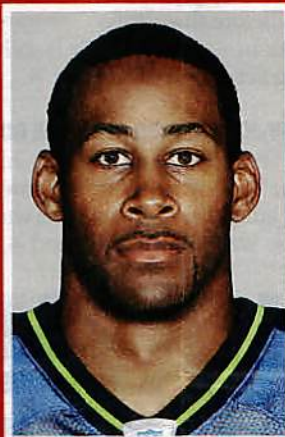


COVERUP EXPOSED

NFL BOATING TRAGEDY

WHAT REALLY HAPPENED

LEFT TO RIGHT:
Oakland Raiders
linebacker
Marquis Cooper,
Detroit Lions
defensive end
Corey Smith and
their friend Will
Bleakley lost
their lives in
the chilling
accident



Fistfight on capsized boat LED TO DEATH!

began to wash over the boat, which was rocking from side to side. They tried to radio for help, but the radio wasn't working," the source told The ENQUIRER.

"Before they could unfasten the anchor, a huge wave crashed into the boat. It capsized, and all four men were tossed into the water."

The men managed to get under the boat, where they were able to ride out the storm in an air pocket beneath the boat's hull. When the storm passed, they climbed back on top of the boat, said the source.

All Saturday night, the shivering men dozed in the dark and waited, praying that help would arrive,



U.S. Coast Guard
Timothy Close
briefs the media
on March 3

according to Schuyler. But by Sunday morning, 29-year-old Smith was incoherent with despair and lost control.

"SCHUYLER TOLD THE COAST Guard that Smith became hysterical, screaming, "No one is coming to help us! We will never be saved!" said the source.

"As the men watched, begging him to stop, Smith took off his life jacket and threw it into the water. He slipped into the sea and began swimming away from the boat. He swam out into the open water, headed nowhere. Soon, the others couldn't see him anymore."

On Sunday night, the three

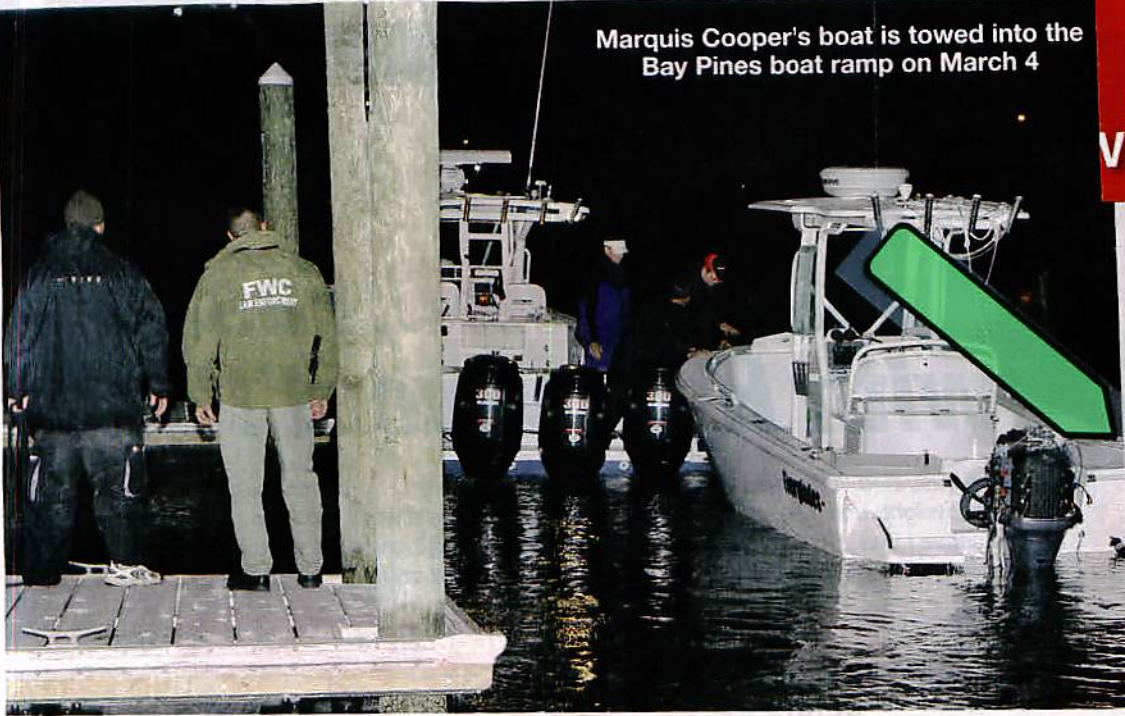
remaining men rested atop the overturned boat, sometimes dozing off. During the night, 26-year-old Cooper became unhinged and violent, according to Schuyler.

"Cooper woke up and just flipped out. Schuyler said he was acting 'insane,' screaming and throwing punches at him and Bleakley," said the source.

"Schuyler couldn't explain why Cooper was angry – just that he went nuts and threw punches at them for about five minutes. Schuyler said he and Bleakley tried to defend themselves, but Cooper's punches didn't seriously hurt them.

Continued on page 2

Marquis Cooper's boat is towed into the Bay Pines boat ramp on March 4



HYPOTHERMIA & STRESS drove victims to madness

— experts

THE effects of hypothermia, coupled with the stress of being lost at sea, most likely drove the doomed fishermen to madness and death, experts say.

"As your body temperature drops, your mind becomes confused, similar to dementia," Dr. Jacob Teitelbaum, an expert in internal medicine based in Hawaii, told *The ENQUIRER*.

"In cases of extreme hypothermia, the brain becomes deprived of adequate blood flow and cannot function adequately. You can become totally irrational and prone to rage and violent behavior."

Dr. Samuel Jacobson, a critical care expert in Boca Raton, Fla., with vast experience in the field of hypothermia, told *The ENQUIRER*: "As the body temperature drops below 98.6 degrees, the brain's neurotransmitters malfunction, causing delirium, erratic behavior and possibly violence. People may do things totally against their character."

THE EXTREME STRESS OF BEING LOST AT sea can also lead to mind-numbing panic, according to a psychologist who specializes in trauma.

"These men were under massive stress. Under stress like that, people panic," Dr. Stuart D. Perlman, a specialist in the psychology of trauma, author of "The Therapist's Emotional Survival: Dealing with the Pain of Exploring Trauma," and former UCLA psychology professor told *The ENQUIRER*.

"People are surprised that NFL players would crack like this. After all, they're supposed to be the toughest of the tough. But remember, they are in control on the football field. Here, they were helpless and powerless.

"Plus, they were suffering from hypothermia, dehydration and sun exposure, and all of these can cause people to become delusional. For example, someone lost in the desert may see hallucinations of water and shade trees.

"Many factors are involved here — physiological factors and the stress of facing death. Put them all together, and you have a recipe for disaster."

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NFL BOATING TRAGEDY

WHAT REALLY HAPPENED

Continued from page 21

"After the barrage, Cooper went calm and stopped attacking them. Schuyler said that it was eerie how calm he got after his violent outburst.

"Then, Cooper suddenly stripped off his life jacket and dove into the water. The other two never saw him come up. He never resurfaced."

AFTER THAT, SCHUYLER AND Bleakley huddled together on the upturned boat, fighting powerful waves to stay on the boat and out of the 68-degree water.

Despite published reports that Bleakley died in his arms, Schuyler told Coast Guard investigators that's not what happened.

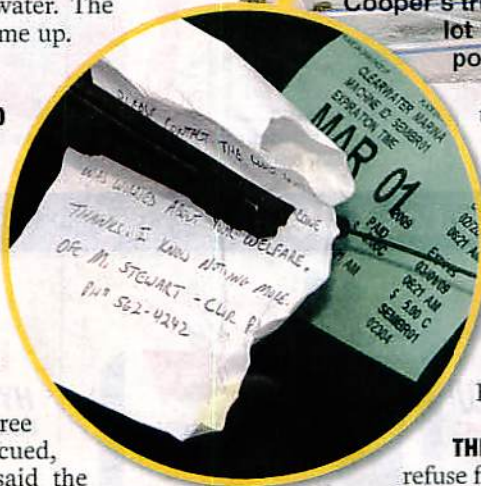
"Schuyler said that just three hours before he was rescued, Bleakley lost his mind," said the source. "Imagining that he saw lights in the distance, perhaps a passing ship, Bleakley started yelling and jumping up and down. Then he jumped into the water to swim to the light.

"About 15 yards away from the boat, he removed his life jacket, yelling to Nick that he couldn't swim with the jacket on. Nick begged him to get back on the boat. Then, Bleakley swam about 50 more yards and disappeared under the water. Nick never saw him again."

Just hours later, a Coast Guard cutter spotted Schuyler sitting on the boat's overturned hull. He was hoisted to safety by a helicopter and



Cooper's truck was parked in the empty lot with a note and ticket from a police officer on the windshield



transported to a Tampa hospital. His body temperature was just 89 degrees, and doctors called it a miracle that he survived after 46 hours of exposure in cold water. He is expected to recover fully.

On March 7, Schuyler, walking with a limp, attended a memorial service for Will Bleakley.

THE COAST GUARD FOUND BITS OF

refuse from the boat, including a cooler and an XXL-sized life jacket with food stuffed in the pockets. Despite a days-long search, the three missing men were not found.

"It was a tragedy that never should have happened," said the source. "The boat had no emergency beacon, a device that would have enabled the Coast Guard to find them in minutes.

"They were too far out to sea in a boat that was too small. They could not cut the anchor to head for shore, and they obviously should not have removed their life vests."

by JOHN BLOSSER

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