

Men receive sentences for smuggling

BROWNSVILLE (AP) — A federal judge sentenced two men convicted of smuggling 1,260 pounds of cocaine into the country to 40 years each in prison Tuesday, saying the Rio Grande Valley should not become a drug corridor.

Jose Donato Berlanga-Hernandez, 26, and Rodolfo Cordova-Sanchez, 28, pleaded guilty earlier this summer to smuggling 19 suitcases filled with kilo bags of Colombian cocaine across the Rio Grande on June 11.

U.S. Customs agents said they believed the two men were "mules," paid to transport narcotics into the United States for distribution by another party.

"This may be considered a harsh sentence, but there are some harsh realities involved with cocaine," Hinojosa said. "South Texas should not become a drug corridor."

Assistant U.S. Attorney Chris Milner asked Hinojosa to assess the 40-year sentences. Milner claimed the defendants supported drug lords and participated in "an organized assault of narcotics traffickers on the fabric of our society."

"The court is well aware of the seriousness of the offense and the magnitude of the narcotics," Milner said.

Cordova pleaded guilty this summer to one of four smuggling counts and agreed to testify against his co-defendant in August. But after a half day of testimony, Berlanga agreed to plead guilty to one smuggling count on the grounds he be allowed to appeal on a specific point.

Berlanga and defense attorney Heriberto Medrano maintained that Berlanga was wrongly charged with cocaine trafficking because he believed the drug shipment to be 50 pounds of marijuana. A smuggling conviction involving less than 111 pounds of marijuana is punishable by a maximum five years in prison and up to a \$250,000 fine, plus a two-year special parole term.

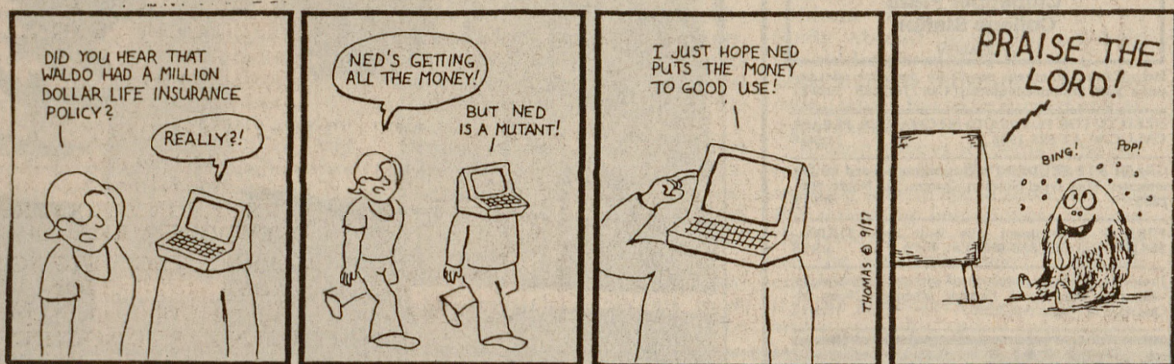
Warped

by Scott McCullar



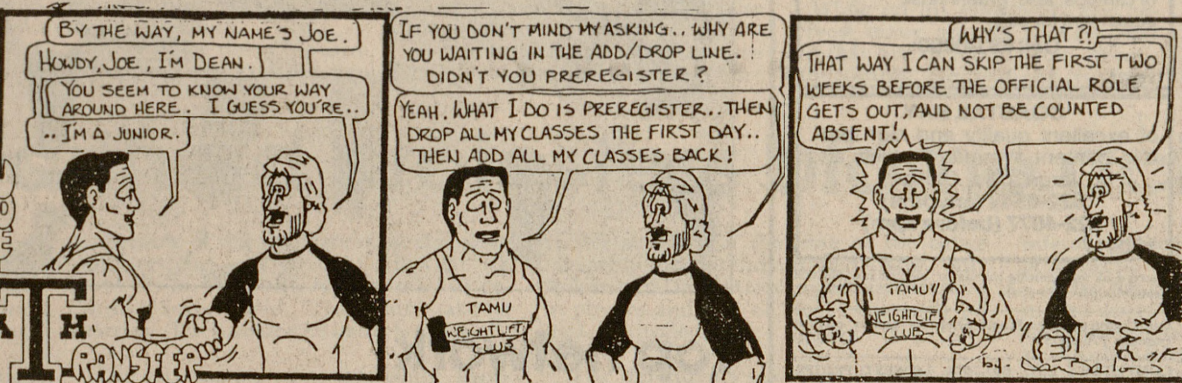
Waldo

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Joe Transfer

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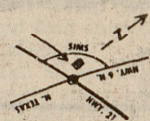


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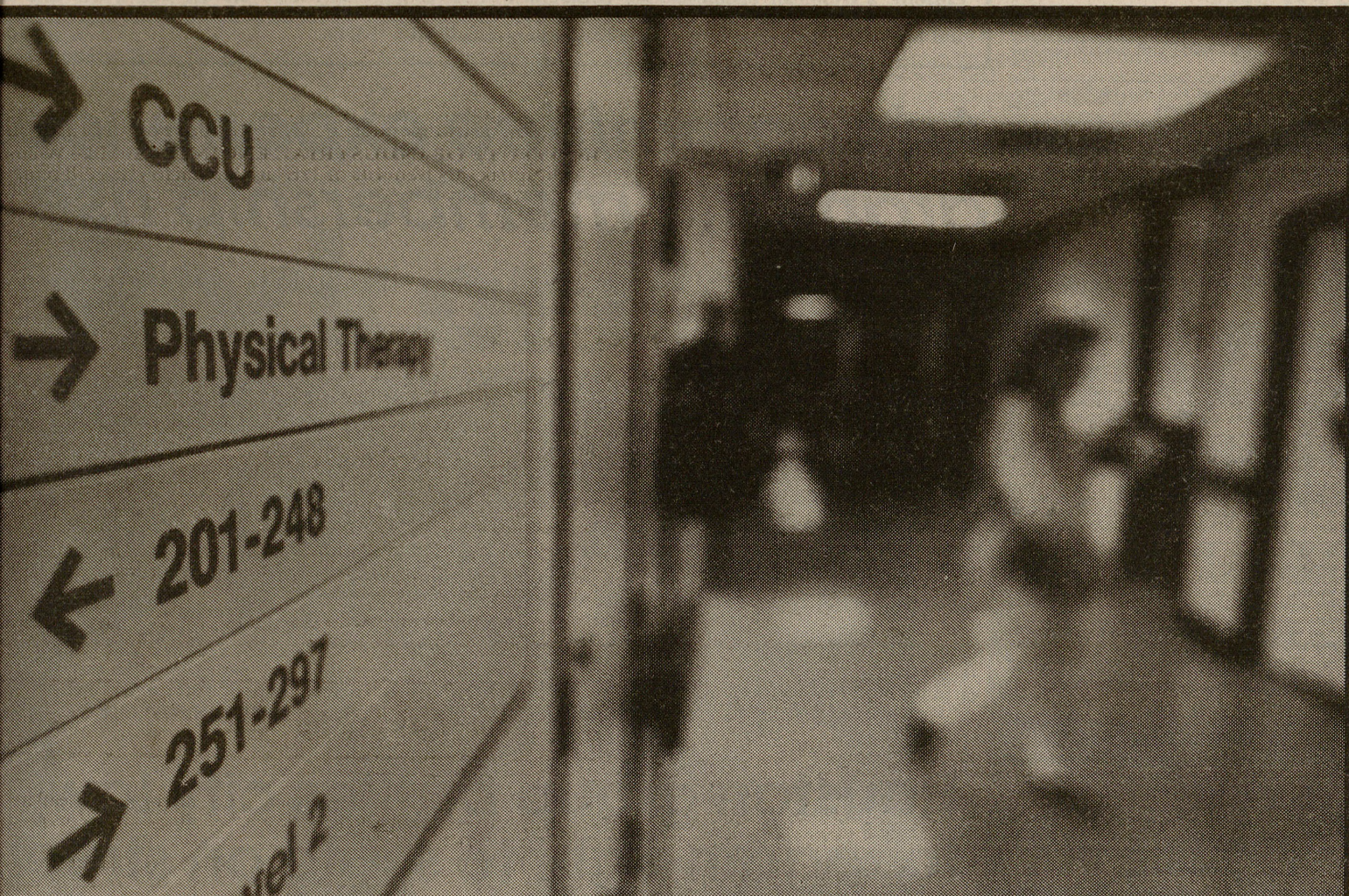
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