

Eddie, The Junior Year

Jimmy O'Brien on the Track

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Author's Note: This outtake could have made it into any of the books covering the high school years. With so many convoluted Jimmy O'Brien stories, this one never made it.

Mr. O'Brien, wanting his son, Jimmy, to get a fair shake at trying out for the track team, sits on the bleachers, carefully watching the first day of tryouts. Sitting alongside Mr. O'Brien is Mr. Crum. Why Mr. Crum is present today is anyone's guess. Mr. Frazier, well aware that Mr. O'Brien and Mr. Crum are watching, does not care in the least. To Mr. Frazier, the only thing that matters is performance, not political pressure from the administration to add someone who is clearly unqualified to the team. Needlessly adding a weak link to a powerhouse team makes no sense at all. But, for some reason, Jimmy O'Brien, who is not competent at much of anything, fails to realize he is unqualified as one can get to run track.

Mr. Zunde walks over to Mr. Frazier, informing him, "by the way, Mr. Crum and Mr. O'Brien are sitting in the bleachers." Mr. Frazier, who spotted Mr. O'Brien and Mr. Crum earlier, tells Mr. Zunde, "I know. I saw them. I hope they enjoy the show." Mr. Zunde replies, "I suspect they're here to make sure Jimmy gets a fair shake." Mr. Frazier tells Mr. Zunde, "and, why that other clown is here at tryouts is anyone's guess. Good luck with him." Mr. Zunde replies, "he'll be out of here after today. I'd cut him now, but I'd rather not deal with the blowback from Crum when we have real work to do." The other clown to whom Mr.

Zunde is referring is Charles Black, otherwise known as Chuckie. Today, Chuckie is trying out for a field event, and hoping to dethrone Bobby B. as the doctor of the shot-put.

Eddie, Mark, Braden, Johnson, and Hoffer are up in the first heat of the 100-yard dash. The star sprinters get ready, and will set today's performance standard. Mr. Frazier is ready too, anxiously waiting to see what his star athletes can deliver this Spring. So are Kathy and Paula, who are well aware of how much training their guys have been putting in over the last year.

With the first heat behind the blocks, Erika, who will be running in the second heat, announces, "on your marks." Taking their time to get ready, the sprinters get positioned in the blocks. Erika announces, "set." Erika fires the gun, and the A team is out of the blocks with lightning speed. Mr. Frazier pays very close attention to each of his star sprinters as they fight it out down the track. As they approach the finish line, Mark, with one of his better runs, follows Eddie closely. Mr. Frazier, who is somewhat worried, wonders why the rest of the field is lagging so far behind. As Eddie and Mark cross the finish line, Mr. Frazier captures their times. Kathy and Paula capture the times of the other runners and, looking at their stopwatches, know their guys had an awesome run.

Mr. Frazier stares at his stopwatches as Eddie and Mark take a cool-down walk. In charge of recording the results, Kathy asks Mr. Frazier, "what do you have?" Mr. Frazier, still staring at his stopwatches, remains silent. Paula whispers to Kathy, "it must have been good. I clocked Johnson at 9.6, and Eddie and Mark both beat him." Kathy asks Mr. Frazier again, "what did you clock them at?" Not believing what he is seeing, Mr. Frazier exclaims, "I clocked them both at a 9.5! Can you believe it? A 9.5!" Mr. Frazier exclaims, "Eddie and Mark just might break the State record this year!" As they record the times, Kathy and Paula smile, knowing that the hard work the guys have put in has paid off.

In the final heat of today's 100-yard dash tryouts is Jimmy O'Brien, who is joined by two freshmen. Seeing

three open lanes, Eddie asks Mr. Frazier, "can me, Mark, and Braden run in this heat?" Mr. Frazier asks, "why?" Eddie replies, "just for fun." Figuring that it can't hurt, Mr. Frazier tells Eddie, "sure. Go ahead." Eddie walks over to Mark and Braden, and tells them, "we're on." The three star sprinters walk over to the starting line, discussing their strategy for their second 100-yard dash of the day.

Seeing the group approach, O'Brien asks Eddie, Mark, and Braden, "hey! How come you guys are running again?" Messing with O'Brien, Mark replies, "because our times sucked, junior. Mr. Frazier's giving us a second chance." Eddie adds, "yeah. We've been slacking off too much." Mark tells Eddie, "you shouldn't have been taking all that psycho Chubin." Now on top of the world, O'Brien plans to show his adversaries how it's done.

The Starter announces, "on your marks." As the sprinters get into the blocks, Mark quickly thinks of a way to mess with O'Brien's head. The Starter announces, "set", and Mark looks over at O'Brien, telling him, "you don't have regulation shoelaces, junior. You're going to trip." As the gun goes off, O'Brien is caught looking back at his sneakers, wondering why his laces are not regulation. O'Brien leaves the blocks late but, to everyone's surprise, is not the last one out of the blocks. Eddie, Mark, and Braden stand up, but do not start running. Ten yards down the track, O'Brien comes to the conclusion that he is finally beating Eddie.

As O'Brien finally gains the upper hand on the track, Mark counts, "one one-thousand, two one-thousand, three one-thousand, four one-thousand." Waiting four long seconds while the other three runners sprint down the track, Eddie, Mark, and Braden finally take off. With twenty to twenty-five yards to make up, three of Mr. Frazier's star sprinters have a lot of ground to recover. At about the fifty-yard mark, Eddie passes the first of the last-string wannabe sprinters. At seventy-five yards, Eddie, Mark, and Braden have long passed all of their competition. At the finish line, Eddie, Mark, and Braden cross four seconds before O'Brien decides to show up for his participation trophy. As O'Brien crosses the finish line, Braden exclaims,

“it’s about time your ass showed up, junior! We’ve been waiting for you all day!”

Mr. Frazier looks at his stopwatch, and whispers to Kathy and Paula, “now I know why they wanted to run another heat.” Paula replies, “they’ve been in a mood all day. I don’t think they’re done messing with O’Brien yet.” Mr. Frazier whispers, “good. I won’t get in the way.” Kathy replies, “yeah. But, here comes Mr. O’Brien and Mr. Crum. I’m no expert, but it looks like they’re going to get in the way.” Mr. Frazier laughs, and tells Kathy, “I’ll deal with them in a minute.”

Mr. Frazier then yells out to the group, “the first 440-yard dash heat, warm up!” Braden yells out, “I am warmed up! I just jogged 100 yards and kicked ass!” Braden’s comment is not overlooked by Mr. O’Brien. Seeing Mr. O’Brien heading toward Mr. Frazier, Mr. Frazier’s laughing has not been overlooked either. Mr. Zunde also walks over to Mr. Frazier to observe the free entertainment he suspects is coming.

Mr. O’Brien asks Mr. Frazier, “may I have a word with you?” Mr. Frazier replies, “no. I’m busy at the moment. It will have to wait.” Mr. Crum interjects, “this can’t wait! We have a few questions.” Not getting off the hook so easily, Mr. Frazier tells Kathy and Paula, “take over for me, and get Erika to help. This will probably take a few minutes.” Kathy, who has about had it with Mr. Crum, replies, “sure. But, I really wish I could stay around and watch the shit show.” Mr. Frazier cracks a smile, waiting for Mr. Crum’s comment to Kathy’s remark. Unfortunately, no such comment comes.

Mr. Frazier asks Mr. O’Brien, “so, what’s your problem?” Mr. O’Brien replies, “I don’t think it was very fair how you treated Jimmy on the track just a minute ago. I don’t think there’s any need to embarrass anyone like you’ve clearly done. Do you think that was really necessary?” Avoiding the question and any confrontation, Mr. Frazier replies, “yes. It was. Now, I have a lot of work to do. So, please leave.” Not intending to leave anytime soon, Mr. Crum exclaims, “that’s not how races are run, and you know it!

What I saw out here is clearly some form of hazing. And, as you know, hazing of any type is not allowed in school." Disputing Mr. Crum's claim, Mr. Frazier replies, "it's not hazing. So, let me get back to work."

Trying a slightly different angle, Mr. O'Brien points out to Mr. Frazier, "Jimmy really wants to be on the track team. Every time he tries out, you go out of your way to embarrass him, as you've clearly done out here today. Jimmy can't perform at his best under these circumstances. Now, do you really think that's fair?" Mr. Frazier bluntly replies, "if he's embarrassed, that's his problem. Now, I have work to do. So, please let me get back to it." Wanting to get to the bottom of the situation, Mr. Crum tells Mr. Frazier, "I want to see Eddie, Mark, and Axel in my office, right now!"

Hearing Mr. Crum cross the line, Mr. Zunde calmly asks Mr. Crum, "why do you want to see them in your office? Is there a problem?" Mr. Crum exclaims, "of course there's a problem! There is clearly some form of hazing going on out here. And, as you know, Mr. Zunde, hazing of any type is not allowed in school!" Mr. Zunde replies, "I see. But, this is not school. It's track tryouts. So, you have no case. And, even if school was in session, you'd still have no case." Mr. Zunde, responding in an intentionally vague manner, is waiting for Mr. Crum to blow up, which Mr. Crum does.

Mr. Crum yells out, "Edward Bogenskaya, Mark Svoboda, and Axel Braden, get over here right now!" Mr. Frazier tells Mr. Crum, "they're on their way. They're running a 440-yard dash. From where they are on the back straightaway, I'd say they'll be here in about twenty seconds." Without even thinking, Mr. Crum exclaims, "I can't wait that long! Get them here now!" Pointing to the guys coming around the curve, Mr. Frazier replies, "there they are. If you have an issue with them, go get them yourself." During the ten-second wait, Mr. Zunde whispers something to Mr. Frazier, which clearly bothers Mr. O'Brien. Once the group crosses the finish line, Mr. Crum again yells out, "Edward Bogenskaya, Mark Svoboda, and Axel Braden, get over here immediately!"

Eddie, Mark, and Braden jog up, wondering what the big emergency is. Eddie asks, "what's up?" Mr. Crum explains, "I want to see you three in my office right now!" Mr. Zunde admonishes Mr. Crum, telling him, "it will have to wait until the morning. School is not in session, so you have little or no authority out here. Personally, I'm leaning a lot closer toward no authority. So, why don't you go inside and make sure no one is smoking in the restrooms." Mr. Crum replies, exclaiming, "hazing is not allowed on school grounds at any time!" Mr. Zunde asks Mr. Frazier, "I haven't seen any hazing out here. Have you?" Mr. Frazier replies, "no. I can't say that I have."

Braden asks, "what's all this shit about hazing?" Mr. O'Brien steps in, and slyly explains, "I saw what you guys did when you were racing Jimmy a few minutes ago. Don't think for a minute that I don't know what was going on out there. The three of you intentionally embarrassed Jimmy during that race. Do any of you think that was really necessary?" Mr. Crum adds, exclaiming, "what I saw was clearly some form of hazing!" With enormous energy, Braden exclaims, "what's the matter with you? That wasn't no hazing! And, yeah! It was necessary! That's part of our training, junior!" Mr. O'Brien, Mr. Crum, Mr. Frazier, and Mr. Zunde all wonder where Braden is going with this. Mr. Zunde, seeing that Braden is all fired up, allows Braden to take control of the situation.

Mr. Crum sarcastically asks Braden, "will you please explain to me how what happened a few minutes ago is part of your training?" Braden, more fired up than before, explains, "because, junior, when you're way behind in a race, you gotta learn how to step it up! Since I'm the chief ass kicker, I ain't never behind! So, what do I gotta do? I gotta get in a race, and give someone a head start! Then, I gotta chase their ass down and kick their ass like it was a real race!" Pointing to Jimmy O'Brien, Braden exclaims, "so, we gave junior, here, a four-second head start. If I knew his ass was gonna be that slow, we would have given him eight seconds!" Mr. Crum thinks of how to respond, but comes up with nothing. Breaking the five or so seconds of silence, Eddie tells Mr. O'Brien and Mr. Crum, "the only thing O'Brien is up against out here is the clock, just like

the rest of us. Who's on the track shouldn't matter to him."

Mr. Zunde asks Mr. Crum and Mr. O'Brien, "does that answer your questions?" Mr. Crum exclaims, "no! It still seems like that there was some form of hazing going on out here!" Mr. Zunde instructs Mr. Crum, "Crum, I'm sure there are a few students that have overdue library books that need your attention. Perhaps overdue library books are some form of clandestine hazing. You may want to ask the librarian if she is under stress hunting down overdue library books all by herself." Now unhinged, Mr. Crum exclaims, "Mr. Zunde, that's not the point!" Mr. Zunde bluntly informs Mr. Crum, "Crum, you have no point. And, even if you did, it would be a very dull one. Now, either get back on the bleachers or go inside, and let us get back to work."

Mr. Crum relents, telling Mr. Zunde, "I'll be watching the rest of this session. I'll have my eyes on everyone! And, I don't want to see any funny stuff." Mr. Zunde replies, "fine. And, you'll see exactly what you saw during the 100-yard dash when Jimmy's heat comes up in the 440-yard dash. I strongly suspect that Axel Braden will give those in the last heat approximately a 200-yard head start, and then attempt to chase them down and beat them. That, by any stretch of the imagination, cannot be construed as hazing. As Braden explained to you, it's part of their training. And, if Jimmy or anyone else in the last heat doesn't like it, that's their problem, not mine."

Mr. Crum and Mr. O'Brien waddle back to the bleachers, getting a front row seat for Jimmy O'Brien's next embarrassment. And, Mr. Zunde gave Braden the green light to go ahead and embarrass Jimmy O'Brien once again. But, it doesn't matter. Jimmy O'Brien's performance will not afford him a spot on the team.