

Eddie, The Early Years

Chuckie's Suntan

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With the Summer approaching, many teenagers are getting a head start on their suntan. After all, when school starts again in the Autumn, no one wants to return to school with a pasty white complexion. Unlike many people, Eddie is outside all Summer long, and returns to school in the Autumn with quite a dark suntan. So does Mark, who often works with his father outdoors.

The Spring semester also brings the second one-mile run that the students have to perform in gym class. Each student's time for the Spring run will be compared with their time for the Autumn run. The students are expected to improve over the year. For those who improve their times, a 5 percent improvement will earn a grade of A. A 3 percent improvement will earn a grade of B. And, a 1 percent improvement will earn a grade of C, or average. Failure to improve yields a grade of D, denoting below average. Delivering a time 2 percent slower or more in the Spring compared with the fall will result in a grade of F for this exercise. Eddie, Mark, and Braden will easily earn a grade of A.

Mr. Harris walks into the gym where the class is seated, and tells the class, "today, we will be running a mile for time. You are expected to deliver a time far superior to that which you delivered in the Fall. Today, I want your best effort and nothing less. For those of you who do not remember, one mile is four laps around the track. Let's head out to the track, and get started." The class heads out to the track, many wanting to get this exercise over

with as soon as possible. A few students wish they stayed home sick today. But, they would have to run the mile on another day.

On the way to the track, Eddie notices that Chuckie has a really bad sunburn. Knowing that he will receive no less than a sarcastic answer from Chuckie, Eddie tells Daniel Gaspari, "Chuckie looks like a pink elephant. Go and ask pinkie how he got so sunburned." Wanting to hear the story himself, Gaspari jogs up to Chuckie.

Catching up to Chuckie, Gaspari asks him, "hey. How did you get so sunburned?" Chuckie replies, "I laid out in the sun for eight hours on Saturday." Gaspari asks, "why did you do that?" Chuckie replies, "I was trying to get a suntan." Gaspari exclaims, "you can't get a suntan in one day! You have to lay out a little at a time." Kind of embarrassed, Chuckie replies, "yeah. I know that now." Chuckie apparently has little experience in the sun.

Gaspari slows down a bit, waits for Eddie and Mark to catch up, and relays to them, "that idiot laid out in the sun for eight hours over the weekend! He was trying to get a suntan." Mark comments, "well, that didn't go exactly as planned." Eddie laughs, hearing more evidence that Chuckie is about as dumb as they come. Braden comments, "that guy is a real dumb ass."

Arriving at the track, Mr. Harris announces to the class, "go ahead and get warmed up. We will start the race in a few minutes." Since Mr. Harris is also the track coach, Eddie knows he cannot slack off during this run. Mr. Harris already knows Eddie's, Mark's, and Braden's performance level quite well, for all three are on the track team.

Mr. Harris blows his whistle, and announces, "okay! Everyone, line up!" Eddie, Mark, and Braden appropriate the inside lanes. Even though this is gym class, the three middle school track stars are not messing around. Once everyone is in position, Mr. Harris announces, "get set." Two seconds later, he blows his whistle again, and the one-mile run is underway. Eddie, Mark, and Braden quickly claim the lead, leaving the rest of the class in the dust. At

the 220-yard mark, the three track stars are head to head, clearly in competition with each other. At 440 yards, Eddie comes in at 67 seconds, followed immediately by Mark, then Braden. Needless to say, Mr. Harris is impressed. But, Eddie, a sprinter, cannot keep that pace up for the entire run.

During the second lap, the three track stars lap a few runners. The first to be lapped is Chuckie, who is saving his energy by jogging slower than a typical walking pace. Perhaps Chuckie will break out during the second lap, but it's not likely. Eddie, a sprinter and not a distance runner, drops back to a more reasonable pace. Mark and Braden follow suit, not wanting to burn themselves out.

The end of the race draws near, at least for the front runners. During the last 220 yards of the one-mile race, Braden takes control and moves into first place. Mark follows closely in second place. Eddie, who does not care about any race longer than 440 yards, is in third place. But, next week is the last track meet of the year, and Eddie knows Mr. Frazier, the high school track coach, will be at the meet. That track meet, when the middle school will be up against their arch rival, Centerville Middle School, will be the most important meet of the year.

Braden crosses the finish line first, winning the competition, that is if it was even a competition. Mark follows in a close second place. Eddie, who could have done much better if he wanted, takes third place. Mr. Harris announces, "Axel Braden, you ran a 5:18. Mark Svoboda, a 5:20. Eddie Bogenskaya, a 5:22. Great job, guys! Great job!" Eddie, Mark, and Braden stand off to the side watching as the rest of the class crosses the finish line over the next nine minutes. Last to cross the finish line is Chuckie, delivering an exceptional time of 14:34.

Mr. Harris admonishes Chuckie, telling him, "Charles Black, you ran a 14:34. That's a walking pace! You should have been able to do a lot better than that!" Chuckie replies, "I have a really bad sunburn. My shirt rubs against my body, so every step I take hurts." Mr. Harris informs Chuckie, "that's no excuse. You could have run with your

shirt off." Back talking Mr. Harris, Chuckie exclaims, "if I ran with my shirt off, my sunburn would get worse!" Mr. Harris again admonishes Chuckie, "eight more minutes in the sun, which is what you should have been able to run the mile in, won't make that much of a difference. Do some research, and find out how to ease your sunburn pain." A few students in the class recite the words from a popular television commercial, "ease sunburn pain with Solarcaine," but Chuckie does not hear their advice.

Since there is not enough time remaining in the class period for a softball game, Mr. Harris organizes a quick soccer match. Mark and Braden, since they came in first and second place, are today's team captains. Mark wins at rock - paper - scissors, and picks Eddie first. Braden quickly picks Daniel Gaspari. As usual, picked last is Chuckie, who ends up on Braden's team.

Since Mark got to choose first, Mr. Harris asks Braden, "do you guys want shirts on or off?" Since they'll be doing a lot of running, Braden replies, "shirts off." Braden's team removes their shirts, gaining a slight advantage out in the heat. Mr. Harris again has to admonish Chuckie, exclaiming, "Black! Off with your shirt. And, I don't want to see you slacking off out there!" Chuckie reluctantly takes off his shirt, hoping his sunburn does not get worse.

Mark's team wins the match by a score of one to nothing, and the class heads to the locker room. On the way inside, Eddie points out to Mark, Braden, and Gaspari, "no matter what we do, we're always on different teams. If the four of us were on the same team, we'd always win." Gaspari replies, "Mr. Harris knows that. That's why two of us are always the team captains." Mark comments, "I wish, that just once, we were all on the same team." But, middle school is almost over. The four athletes will have no such luck of being on the same team this year.

In the locker room, taking Mr. Harris' advice, Chuckie yells out, "does anybody know how to get rid of sunburn pain?" Hearing no one else offer advice, Eddie replies, "yeah. Put some BENGAY on it, and take a really hot shower. Here, use mine." Eddie tries not to laugh as he

tosses his tube of BENGAY to Chuckie. Chuckie puts the cream on his shoulders, arms, and legs, hoping to get some relief from the sunburn pain that has caused him so much misery in the last few days. Eddie figures it's payback time for the three years of bullying he had to put up with from Chuckie. Mark whispers to Eddie, "no one can be that stupid." Eddie whispers back, "guess again." Seeing Chuckie head for the showers, Eddie tells Mark, "here it comes. Cover your ears."

About two minutes later, Chuckie lets out the loudest scream imaginable, echoing through the locker room, and heard all the way down the hall in the school lobby. Eddie heads out of the locker room to class, and yells back to Chuckie, "keep the tube, junior. It's yours!" Screaming in pain, Chuckie does not hear what Eddie said.

On the way to class, Mark asks Eddie, "why did you give him your BENGAY?" Eddie explains, "it's payback for all his bullying for the last three years. Besides, I have another tube at home. I was training really hard, and my calf muscles were sore. It works really well for sore muscles." Mark replies, "I'll have to get me a tube." Eddie tells Mark, "it's really good stuff, except for sunburn pain." Mark replies, "yeah. He should have used some of that Solarcaine for his sunburn. Or, better yet, he should have bought some Bain de Soleil or Coppertone."

Later that night, Chuckie's mother, Kathryn, phones Eddie's mother, Nina, giving Nina a piece of her mind. Using quite a colorful vocabulary, Kathryn tries to convey how bad and inconsiderate Eddie was in pulling that stunt. Totally unaware of the fact that her son, Charles, is an unrelenting bully, Kathryn informed Nina that Eddie is a bully. Nina also had something to convey to Kathryn, which is how stupid Chuckie must have been to put BENGAY on a sunburn. Nina hangs up the phone in mid conversation, leaving Kathryn complaining to the air.