

Eddie, The Early Years

Chapter Five Flashback

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Early in the Spring, many teenagers can be found 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, suggesting that they sat inside all Summer. 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. Unfortunately, some people try to get a whole Summers' tan in one day. That never ends too well.

The end of the Spring semester of eighth grade also brings the second one-mile run of the year 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 their performance 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 Autumn run will result in a grade of F for this particular exercise. Eddie, Mark, and Braden will all 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, if that were the case, they would only have to run the mile on another day.

On the way to the track, Eddie notices that the class clown, Charles Black, also known as Chuckie, has a really bad sunburn. Knowing that he will receive no less than a sarcastic answer from Chuckie, Eddie tells Daniel Gaspari, known as Gump to his close friends, "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." Staying inside most of the time, Chuckie apparently has very 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." Eddie assures Braden, "they don't come any dumber." Braden is quick to reply, "unless you're talking about Jimmy O'Brien."

Arriving at the track, Mr. Harris announces to the class, "go ahead and get warmed up. We'll 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, Braden, and Gump appropriate the inside lanes. Even though this is gym class, the three middle school track stars are not messing around. Gump, while not as fast as the track stars, takes this exercise seriously and will give it his best effort.

Once everyone is in position, Mr. Harris announces, "get set." Two seconds later, Mr. Harris 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 quite 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 a little 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 final track meet of the year, and Eddie knows that 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 most of the rest of the class crosses the finish line over the next nine minutes. Taking fourth place is Gump, delivering a respectable time for an eighth grader. 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 barely 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 any worse.

Braden, still hyperenergetic from the one-mile run, suggests to Mr. Harris, "if his ass has a problem taking his shirt off, I'll trade him to the other team." Mr. Harris looks over at Mark, asking, "are you up for that?" Dampening any of Braden's hopes, Mark, the other team captain, replies, "I ain't taking him." Braden asks, "not even for O'Brien?" Mark smiles, telling Braden, "sorry, bro. He's your problem today." Braden exclaims, "this just ain't my day!" Quickly reconsidering, Braden exclaims, "wait a second! Yeah, it is! I just won the mile!"

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 any 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 a word 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 really 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. That idiot should have used some of that Solarcaine stuff for his sunburn. Or,

better yet, he should have bought some Bain de Soleil or Coppertone.” Eddie comments, “not laying out in the sun for eight hours straight might have helped too.” Mark laughs, replying, “you might have a point.”

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 with the BENGAY. Totally unaware of the fact that her son, Charles, is an unrelenting bully, Kathryn informs Nina that Eddie is a bully. Nina also has 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.

Eddie’s problems with Chuckie go way back to the sixth grade. Back then, in the late Autumn, the bell rings, and math class is over. It’s now off to lunch for Eddie, Mark, and Braden. As they walk out into the hallway, Braden asks the guys, “are we gonna play Kill the Man with the Ball today?” Mark informs Braden, “of course we are. What else is there to do?” Braden replies, “that’s a good point. There ain’t much else to do around here after lunch.” Doing homework or studying are not exactly on Braden’s list.

Eddie informs Mark and Braden, “I’m trying out for the track team in the Spring. So, I want to get as much running in as I can.” Playing Kill the Man with the Ball is an excellent way for Eddie to get a lot of running in. Braden replies, “I might just try out for the track team too.” Mark confidently replies, “count me in.” Arriving at his locker, Eddie tells Mark and Braden, “I’ll catch you guys in the lunchroom.” Mark and Braden head to their respective lockers to dump off their books, and pick up their lunch.

Meeting in the lunchroom, Eddie, Mark, and Braden take a seat along the window only because it affords a better view of outside. Opening the paper sack containing his lunch, Eddie pulls out a chicken breast, a bag of mixed vegetables, some homemade bread, and an apple for dessert. Forgoing the standard school lunch, Mark and Braden have also brought something healthy to eat.

Over lunch, Mark comments, “there’s that shithead again. He’s headed this way.” Looking clear across the lunchroom and seeing the problem, Eddie replies, “there’s something seriously wrong with that guy. I think he’s retarded or something.” Taking a seat at a table in the next row over, Charles Black sits alone eating his burger and French fries. Occasionally staring in the direction of Eddie and his friends, Eddie suspects that Chuckie, a nickname given to Charles Black by Mark earlier this year, will somehow find a way to be a pain in the ass once again today.

Hearing thunder in a distance, Mark mentions, "it's getting kind of dark out there." Eddie optimistically replies, "well, it ain't raining yet. We can still get a game of Kill the Man with the Ball in." Just then, a flash of lightning brightens up the lunchroom accompanied with a simultaneous crack of thunder. Braden exclaims, "I don't know about that! That was real close!" Still hopeful that they will get to go outside after lunch, Eddie optimistically replies, "we still have time. Hopefully, the storm will blow over."

Eddie's optimism fades when a sudden downpour dampens any thought of playing Kill the Man with the Ball today. Mark mentions, "this really sucks. I guess we'll be staying inside for gym class, too." Braden mentions, "it sure looks like there ain't gonna be any football in gym today." Eddie asks Braden, "why not? The pros play in the rain. Why can't we?" Braden replies, "I can see it now. We come in from gym class all soaking wet and full of mud. That ain't gonna go down too good." Eddie tells Braden, "that's why they make showers, washing machines, and dryers."

Interrupting the conversation, Mark informs Eddie and Braden, "here comes trouble." Chuckie walks up, telling Eddie, "what's the matter with you? Why don't you get a burger and fries like the rest of us?" Eddie tells Chuckie, "shut up, asshole." Chuckie boldly tells Eddie, "what did you just call me?" Eddie firmly tells Chuckie, "an asshole, junior. What? Are you deaf or something? Is the fat growing inside your ears now?" Chuckie shoves Eddie in his back, then slaps Eddie in his head. Eddie stands up, prompting Chuckie to quickly walk away. Eddie takes his seat, hoping to finish his lunch in peace.

Chuckie is the class bully and class dunce all rolled into one. When in elementary school, Chuckie used to pick on those who are a few years younger than he is, especially the girls. Apparently, in middle school, the seventh and eighth graders are too formidable an opponent for Chuckie. Since school started this year, Chuckie has been bullying Eddie and Mark on a daily basis. Eddie and Mark have been ignoring Chuckie, which, for some reason, makes Chuckie even more antagonistic. Eddie and Mark have no idea how they became Chuckie's prime targets.

Braden asks Eddie, "aren't you gonna kick his ass?" Eddie replies, "no. Not right now." Braden suggests, "you ought to drag his fat ass behind the school, and rough him up a little. Somebody needs to show that asshole who's boss." Eddie replies, "someday I will. Not right now, though." Braden reminds Eddie, "that guy is getting away with way too much shit. Don't you remember during the first week of school, when he pulled the chair out from under you?" Eddie replies, "yeah. I told him I was going to kick his ass someday. And, I will. Just not right now." Pressing the issue, Braden asks, "why not?" Eddie replies, "I don't want to

get suspended. I'll kick his ass when he's off school grounds." Agreeing with both Eddie and Braden, Mark mentions, "yeah. Kick his ass off school grounds. That makes a whole lot more sense."

Eddie, Mark, and Braden sit back and relax, watching as the storm dumps an entire inch of rain in one hour. It is now obvious that there will be no game of Kill the Man with the Ball today. And, there will be no football game outside in gym class. With not much else to do, the three guys talk among themselves, and watch as others in the lunchroom do their homework, talk with their friends, or, as in the case of a few guys at the other side of the lunchroom, have an arm wrestling contest.

The bell rings, and it's off to gym class for Eddie, Mark, and Braden. As they are walking down the hall, Eddie stops at his locker, and tells Mark and Braden, "I'll catch you guys in the gym." Again pressing the issue, Braden reminds Eddie, "I still think you should have kicked that guy's ass." Eddie assures Braden, "his time is coming." Braden and Mark continue down the hall, discussing between themselves what an ass Charles Black is.

In the gym, the class is seated on the bleachers waiting for the physical education instructor, Mr. Harris, to walk in. While they are waiting, Eddie asks Daniel Gaspari, "who won the arm wrestling contest at lunch?" Gaspari replies, "some guy named Gerald Beck. He's on the football team. He also throws the shot-put for the track team. And, his older brother, John, is on the high school football team." Daniel Gaspari is also on the football team, and plans to try out for the wrestling team in the Winter. Like Eddie, Mark, and Braden, Daniel Gaspari is one of the better athletes in the sixth grade.

Mr. Harris walks in and blows his whistle, gaining the immediate attention of the class. Stating the obvious, Mr. Harris announces, "today, since it is raining outside, we are going to be staying indoors. First, we will have a quick game of dodge ball. Then, we will break up and have two games of basketball. There are 24 of you in this class. The first twelve to be eliminated will be in one basketball game. The last twelve will be in the other basketball game." Mr. Harris is trying to keep the competition fair by having the less skilled students play in one game, and the more athletic students play in another game. The game of dodge ball is how he will differentiate between the two groups. Mr. Harris announces, "Edward Bogenskaya and Mark Svoboda, you are the team captains."

Eddie and Mark walk onto the gym floor. Using rock - paper - scissors to see who chooses first, Eddie puts out a rock, and Mark puts out scissors. Eddie announces, "I pick Braden." Mark announces, "I'll take Gaspari." Selections continue for a minute or two, until one person is left.

That lone person is Charles Black, who will be on Mark's team. Eddie whispers to Mark, "save the Chuckie for me, and don't let him get hit. If it looks like I'm the last man standing, I'm taking his fat ass out." Mark asks, "so, you want me to go out before the Chuckie?" Eddie replies, "yeah. I'm taking his ass out." Mark smiles, gives Eddie a fist bump, and tells him, "you got it."

Returning to his team, Eddie whispers to Braden, "Mark is going to make sure the Chuckie doesn't go down early." Braden asks, "why?" Eddie replies, "because I'm going to take his fat ass out of the game in a big way. And, we'll take him out on the basketball court next." Braden grins, and replies, "I like that idea!" Eddie then tells his team, "whatever you do, don't go after the Chuckie." Eddie's team agrees, having no idea what Eddie has up his sleeve.

The dodge ball game begins. As in any middle school dodge ball competition, a few of the less athletic types are quickly eliminated. Once the requisite twelve have fallen, Mr. Harris assigns two team captains, and the B team begins their basketball game on the other side of the gym. As the dodge ball game continues among the A team, the more athletic students are eliminated much more slowly compared with the first group. Chuckie cannot figure out why he has not yet been eliminated.

The end of the dodge ball game draws near. On one side, Eddie and Braden remain. On the other side, Mark and Chuckie are still standing. Eddie hurls the ball at Mark, who evades getting hit. Braden, who wants a front row seat when Eddie takes out Chuckie, whispers to Eddie, "I'm gonna go out, and let you take his scrawny fat ass down." Mark throws the ball at Braden, who pretends to evade the ball, but gets hit. With Braden eliminated, Eddie takes the ball, bounces it a few times, and hurls it straight at Mark. Mark attempts to catch the ball, but intentionally drops it. With Mark now eliminated, it is Eddie versus Chuckie.

Chuckie procures the ball, and throws it across court to Eddie as hard as he can. The ball takes a few lame bounces before reaching Eddie, indicative of Chuckie's total lack of athletic ability. Eddie scoops up the ball and bounces it a few times, carefully examining his target. Eddie takes aim and, with all his strength, hurls the ball straight on at Chuckie. Seeing the ball about to hit him, Chuckie evades the ball by dropping to his knees and ducking. Great fear comes over Chuckie as he sees the ball about to strike his face. Chuckie turns his head to the left and puts his hands over his eyes. The ball violently smashes into Chuckie's head, which, in turn, slams Chuckie's head against the concrete wall. Chuckie goes down, and goes down hard. Seeing Chuckie laying motionless on the ground, Eddie announces, "we won!"

Mr. Harris rushes over to aid Chuckie, finding that he is unconscious. Eddie walks over to Mark and Braden, who exchange a high-five among themselves. As Mr. Harris is trying to arouse Chuckie, Braden whispers to Eddie, "he ain't moving. It looks like to me that his ass is dead." Eddie replies, "that's his problem. He shouldn't have ducked." Mark replies, "yeah. That was kind of stupid of him." As expected from sixth graders, many students are wondering whether Chuckie is still alive. Others are wondering whether an ambulance should be called.

Mr. Harris announces, "I'll be right back," and rushes to the locker room. Returning with a cup of cold water, Mr. Harris splashes the water onto Chuckie's face. Chuckie slowly regains consciousness, at a loss to figure out what just happened. In a stupor, Chuckie attempts to stand up, and is barely able to stay vertical. Suspecting that Chuckie has suffered a concussion, Mr. Harris instructs two students to escort Chuckie to the nurse's office.

Once Chuckie is gone, Braden tells Eddie, "I thought that was the end of the road for Chuckie! I can't believe his ass just blacked out like that." Eddie replies, "he's weak. It doesn't take much." Whispering to Eddie and Braden, Mark points out, "now we know how to get that asshole back without getting suspended." Eddie replies, "yeah. We'll just keep taking him out in gym class." Also being bullied by Chuckie for the last two months, Mark tells Eddie and Braden, "next time, he's mine." Eddie replies, "you got it, bro."

Later that evening, Chuckie's mother, Kathryn Black, calls Eddie's mother, Nina, on the phone. Giving Nina a piece of her mind, Mrs. Black, over and over again, boldly informs Nina what a bully Eddie is. Eddie listens to the conversation from the living room as he does his homework, hearing Mrs. Black yelling and screaming at the other end of the phone. From Eddie's perspective, Mrs. Black seems to be upset that Eddie threw a ball at her son, and knocked him out. Nina holds the phone in the air, letting Mrs. Black scream at the wind.

Having enough of the one-sided conversation, Nina finally tells Mrs. Black, "why don't you jump in a lake, Kathryn? Wait. No. On second thought, you'd better not do that. It might cause a tsunami." Not liking Nina's comment in the least, Mrs. Black continues to rant and carry on. Nina hangs up the phone, not wanting to deal with Mrs. Black's temper tantrum any longer.

Eddie continues to do his homework, waiting for his mother to say something to him. Fifteen minutes go by, and Eddie hears not a word. Eddie walks into the kitchen to get something to eat, asking his mother, "who was that yelling on the phone?" Eddie's mother replies, "that was the Kathryn Black. She was upset that her son lost the dodge ball game in

gym class today.” Eddie calmly replies, “yeah. His team lost.” Eddie gets back to doing his homework, clearly knowing that he is not in any trouble.

In effect, when Eddie was in the sixth grade, Eddie’s mother gave him a green light to take care of any bullies in what ever way he sees fit. Eddie’s father was in full agreement. If anyone were to attack Eddie, Eddie is to respond in any manner which he feels is appropriate.

Chuckie is not the only bully in the middle school. During their last week of middle school, while Eddie and the tribe are playing a game of Kill the Man with the Ball, over on the baseball field, a girl’s gym class is in the middle of a softball game. Eddie nor Mark pay much attention to the softball game, for they are way too consumed with keeping the peewee sized football away from the others. Unknown to Mark and Eddie, some major league bullying is occurring over on the baseball field between a few of the girls.

Deviating from their normal playing style, Eddie, Mark, Braden, and Gump monopolize the ball among themselves. In a vague game of follow the leader, the four athletes run in unison on the grass around the inside periphery of the track. Tossing the ball to one another in a rapid fashion, Eddie and his three buddies leave the others to guess who will get the ball next. Whenever anyone gets too close, the four athletes simply speed up, quickly evading those who are after them. For the others in the game, taking down any of the four athletes would be the trophy of a lifetime.

Halfway through lunch period, Eddie yells out, “break time,” and tosses the ball high into the air. Brave enough to catch the ball is some seventh grader named Jay, who makes a run for it. Within no time, seemingly coming out of nowhere, an eighth grader named Tim blind sides Jay, taking him down hard. Eddie mentions to the three guys, “ouch! That must have hurt.” Mark replies, “yeah. That didn’t exactly go as planned.” Tim wrestles the ball away from Jay, and sprints to the other side of the field. Tim has a good run, but is eventually taken down by a guy named Robert Bradshaw, also known as Bobby B., who just happened to be in the right place at the right time to deliver the punishment. Bobby B. procures the ball, and makes a run for it.

Gump asks, “is our five minutes up yet?” Braden laughs, and replies, “it don’t matter none. It’s time for us to get that ball from Bobby B.” Mark laughs, commenting, “yeah. Who does he think he is?” The four superstars of Kill the Man with the Ball sprint toward Bobby B., who quickly realizes what is about to happen. Seeing Eddie and the group rapidly approaching, Bobby B. tosses the ball high into the air. Grabbing the ball out of mid air is Braden, and the four athletes again run in unison on the grass around the inside periphery of the track, keeping the ball from the others.

The bell rings, and today's game of Kill the Man with the Ball is over. As the guys head inside, Mark asks Eddie, "what's today? Wednesday?" Eddie replies, "yeah, bro. It's Wednesday. We have gym class next." If it were Tuesday or Thursday, the guys would be sitting in health class, bored to tears, wishing they were in gym class. Braden comments, "he never knows what day it is." Mark replies, "Monday through Friday are all the same to me. Saturday and Sunday are not." Gump replies, "Mark does have a good point."

Following the girl's gym class toward the school building, Mark suddenly announces, "wow! Did you see that?" Eddie replies, "yeah! That girl just threw the softball at that other girl's back! That must have hurt." Gump asks, "who are those two?" Mark replies, "I don't know. I'm guessing they're sixth or seventh graders." Forcefully throwing the ball at Erika Gabriel's back is a chronic troublemaker named Terry Haynes.

Eddie exclaims, "oh, shit. Here it comes!" Watching as Erika takes down Haynes, Gump, who is on the wrestling team, exclaims, "that was a good two-point takedown!" Erika repeatedly pulverizes Haynes at will in her mid section. Crying out in pain, Haynes repeatedly screams out, "stop! Stop! Please stop!" Others in the gym class step back, giving Erika and Haynes ample room to fight. Truth is that everyone wants Erika to kick the crap out of Haynes. Eddie and his buddies stop and watch the fight, wondering who the two girls are. Pounding Haynes' face, Erika relentlessly beats Haynes to a bloody pulp.

Finally catching wind of what has happened, Mrs. Crystal, the gym teacher, turns around, and yells out, "hey! You two! Break it up!" Braden exclaims, "ain't no one breaking that up! That's a pretty good ass kicking if I've ever saw one!" Erika ignores Mrs. Crystal, and continues to kick the crap out of Haynes. Yelling louder, Mrs. Crystal exclaims, "I said, break it up!" Erika stands up, kicks her foot into Haynes' ass several times with as much force as she can deliver. Haynes goes from crying to letting out a loud scream, but Erika is not finished. Erika forcefully kicks Haynes in her rib cage, yelling out, "you piece of shit!" Finishing off Haynes, Erika stomps Haynes' right arm several times, making sure Haynes will not throw a softball for the remainder of this school year. Erika walks away, back to the locker room, leaving Haynes lying on the ground.

Eddie comments, "whoever that girl is, she really took care of that girl laying on the ground." Mark replies, "yeah. I'd say." Braden exclaims, "I was thinking about breaking that fight up! I wasn't gonna get in the middle of that one! I might have got my ass kicked!" Braden, of course, is not too serious. Braden would not have gotten his ass kicked by any stretch of the imagination. If the right person is winning the fight, it's not likely anyone is going to step in and break it up. Referring to Erika, Gump

suggests, “that girl ought to try out for the wrestling team.” Mark replies, “yeah, seriously!”

Mrs. Crystal, already having found out who instigated the fight, yells at Haynes, “you! Get up, and get to my office immediately!” Barely able to move, Haynes attempts to sit up, but is not too successful. Seeing Haynes in dire straits, Mrs. Crystal tells one of the students, “you! Go get the school nurse.” The student, who is among those who are glad that Haynes lost the fight, walks inside to get the school nurse. Not surprisingly, the student charged with notifying the school nurse takes her time accomplishing the task assigned to her. She is well aware that she’ll be awarded a late pass for her efforts in helping out. But, that’s the way students think in middle school. Getting out of class is of utmost priority.

Eddie tells the guys, “well, it looks like the party’s over. We’d better get to gym class.” Mark replies, “yeah. I bet she’ll still be laying on the ground when we come out.” The guys, already dressed for gym class, head inside so they are marked as present when attendance is taken. They’ll be back outside in a few minutes, when Mr. Harris will either have them play a game of softball or time them in a few track events.

Ten minutes later, the guys walk out to the field with their gym class. From a distance, Braden observes, “it looks like that girl got her ass kicked big time! Her ass is still laying on the ground!” Mark suggests, “after that shit the Chuckie pulled in the lunchroom today, maybe we can take him out again. We can make it a two for one special.” Braden brilliantly replies, “that sounds good to me! Whoever gets him on their team, put his ass at second base, and put someone good at shortstop. Then, someone can take Chuckie’s fat ass out.” Mark smiles, telling the group, “yeah. Let’s do that. We haven’t taken the Chuckie out in three weeks.” Braden replies, “his ass is long overdue.”

Earlier today, in the lunchroom, Chuckie intentionally spilled water all over Eddie, Mark, and Braden. Chuckie claimed he tripped and maintains that it was an accident. No one believes Chuckie, who has had three such accidents this year. And, as if that was not enough, when Chuckie tripped, his elbow slammed into the side of Braden’s head. It’s no wonder that the guys want to take Chuckie out again.

Seeing the school nurse, Mrs. Crystal, the assistant principal, and a few other students congregate around a student laying on the ground, Mr. Harris comments, “I wonder what the big commotion is out there.” Braden answers, “that girl laying on the ground got her ass kicked by some other girl! That was the best girl fight ass kicking that I’ve seen in a long time!” Mr. Harris asks, “who was the other girl?” Eddie replies, “some girl who

was really well built.” Mr. Harris asks, “it wasn’t Erika Gabriel, was it?” Eddie replies, “I don’t know. I’ve never seen her before.”

Mr. Harris tells the group, “Eddie and Braden are the team captains. Let’s get moving!” Using rock - paper - scissors to see who chooses first, Eddie puts out a rock, and Braden puts out paper. Without hesitation, Braden, who immediately knows Chuckie will be on Eddie’s team, announces, “I pick Mark.” Eddie announces, “I’ll take Gaspari.” Selections continue for a minute or two, until Charles Black, otherwise known as Chuckie, remains, who will be on Eddie’s team. Eddie whispers to Mark and Braden, “I’ll make him play second base, and I’ll play shortstop. You guys take him out.” Braden suggests to Eddie, “if you’re gonna be at shortstop, you can take his ass out too!” Eddie nods his head, and replies, “that’s a good point. Thanks, bro.”

At the bottom of the second inning, Mark is first up at bat. Hitting a line drive between first and second base, Mark should have been thrown out, but Chuckie failed to procure the ball and throw it to the first baseman. The ball rolls into right field, and Mark gets a single. Up second is Braden, who motions something to Mark. The pitcher pitches the ball, and Mark sprints toward second base where Chuckie is standing. The catcher quickly throws the ball to Chuckie, who is at a complete loss to figure out what he should be doing. Seeing Chuckie blocking second base, Mark plows into Chuckie like a runaway train. Chuckie goes down, sliding a few feet before coming to rest near Eddie.

Eddie looks down at Chuckie, and yells out, “that play sucked, junior! You were supposed to catch the ball and tag him out!” Chuckie, however, doesn’t hear a word Eddie said. For the third time this year, Chuckie has been knocked out cold. Seeing Chuckie motionless, Eddie yells out to Mr. Harris, “hey! The Chuckie got knocked out again!” Mark yells out, “delay of game! Five-yard penalty!” Eddie informs Mark, “that’s football, bro.” Mark replies, “yeah, I know. But, he flew five yards when I hit him.”

Mr. Harris runs over, seeing that Chuckie is not responsive. Mr. Harris jogs over to the school nurse, who is waiting for the ambulance to arrive to take Haynes to the hospital. The school nurse walks over and attends to Chuckie as Mrs. Crystal attends to Haynes.

While Chuckie lies on the infield, Mr. Harris walks over to Eddie and asks, “why did you put Charles on second base instead of right field?” Eddie explains, “it was Braden’s idea. Last gym class, I hit the ball to the Chuckie in right field. He took so long to get to the ball that I managed to get a home run out of something that should have been a single. So, I decided to put him on second base, figuring I could take up the slack at shortstop.” Mr. Harris raises his eyebrows, telling Eddie, “actually, that makes a lot of sense.”

Eddie then informs Mr. Harris, “that guy is seriously dangerous.” Mr. Harris shakes his head, and replies, “I know. But, there’s not much I can do about it. Maybe he learned something out here today.” Mr. Harris, the track coach, is no idiot. He knows how difficult it is for students to play a sport when the spread of abilities ranges from the most athletic to the least athletic in the school. Mr. Harris also knows that Chuckie is the school bully, and will be glad to get rid of him next year.

Chuckie finally comes to, and sits up, asking, “where am I? What happened?” Mark informs Chuckie, “you died and came back to life, junior.” Chuckie asks, “I did?” Mark replies, “no, you idiot. You were blocking the base, and got knocked out.” Chuckie asks, “I was?” Mrs. Crystal and Mr. Harris help Chuckie off the baseball field so the game can go on.

The ambulance arrives, and the paramedics attend to Haynes. The paramedics also do a cursory check of Chuckie, finding out that his vital signs are fine. Not so fortunate is Haynes. Suspected of having a broken wrist and a broken rib or two, Haynes is transported to the hospital. As the paramedics drive away, Mrs. Crystal walks over to speak with Mr. Harris, informing him of what happened earlier.

Following an abbreviated three-inning game, Mark boasts, “we won!” Eddie rebuts, “yeah. But, we were down one player. You took out our second baseman!” Mark laughs, and replies, “I was just helping you guys out. You should be thanking me!” Pretending to act serious, Eddie tells Mark, “you never know. Today could have been the Chuckie’s day. He could have hit a home run.” Braden interjects, “that don’t make no difference. His fat ass couldn’t make it around the bases before the end of class.” The guys head inside, in absolutely no trouble for a so-called accident that occurred during gym class.