

Eddie, The Early Years

Chapter Six Getting Ready

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Before their first day of high school, Eddie and his friends decide to get together for an afternoon at the county pool. Riding past Mark's house, Eddie rides up the driveway seeing Mark getting ready to head to the pool. Mark asks Eddie, "is everyone going to make it?" Eddie replies, "that's what I hear. I guess we'll find out soon enough." Mark tells Eddie, "well, let's get on the road." Eddie laughs, telling Mark, "the pool is only a mile from your house, bro. You're making it sound like we're headed to the beach or something." Mark replies, "oh, yeah," and rides down the driveway with Eddie.

Arriving at the pool, Mark and Eddie find Axel Braden and Eric Johnson have already arrived, and sitting at a table near the deep end of the pool. Eddie yells out to Braden, "yo, bro! Where's Wendy?" Braden explains, "she's out school shopping with her mother. She wants to make sure she has the right clothes for high school. So, she ain't gonna make it today." Eddie replies, "that's too bad."

Braden asks Mark, "where's Sharon?" Mark replies, "she moved away at the end of the Summer." Braden exclaims, "dang! She was really nice. I'm gonna miss her." Braden asks Eddie, "how about Claudia? Is she gonna be here?" Eddie replies, "no, bro. She was just my date for the Fourth of July. We're just friends. She rides her bicycle a lot, so we went out on a few rides together this Summer."

Taking a seat, Mark asks Braden and Johnson, "where's everyone else?" Johnson replies, "Mitchell is right behind you." Turning around, Mark sees Gary Mitchell walking up, and yells out, "yo, bro! It's about time you got here!" Mitchell replies, "I ran here. I got to get as much training in as I can. Next year is the big time." Hoping to make both the track team and cross country team in high school, Mitchell has been working out quite extensively over the Summer.

Taking a seat, Mitchell asks, “where’s Bobby B.?” Mark jumps at the opportunity to reply, and tells Mitchell, “he said he’ll be here. But, in case you haven’t noticed, he’s not exactly the fastest guy around.” Eddie comments, “he’s probably walking here with two dumbbells in his hands, doing curls and overhead presses on the way.” Mark replies, “you might be right about that.” Hearing that Bobby B. is on his way and doesn’t exactly move very fast, Eddie announces, “well, I’m going to swim a few laps before lunch.” Mark joins Eddie in the pool as the rest of the group sits and talks around the table.

Twenty minutes later, Bobby B. finally arrives, taking a seat with the rest of the group. Eddie and Mark get out of the pool and, walking up to the table, Eddie announces, “yo, bro! What took you so long?” Bobby B. replies, “I rode my bicycle here. I got lost.” Mark replies, “that’s really kind of funny. The pool is in the same place it was last Summer.” Bobby B. explains, “well, I went a different way. I took a short cut.” Eddie tells Mark, “don’t listen to him. He rode to the beach and back, and then headed to the pool. He wanted to get some training in because he’s trying out for the 100-yard dash next year.” Braden laughs, and comments, “yeah, I really wanna see that!”

Saving Bobby B. from further teasing, Johnson announces, “now that we’re all here, let’s get some lunch.” Seconding the motion, Braden replies, “that sounds good to me.” In unison, the group stands up and heads to the concession stand to get pizza.

Over lunch, Eddie tells Mark, “tell them what you heard about the high school track team, bro.” Too busy eating his pizza, Mark replies, “oh, yeah. I heard all that from Mitchell when we ran into each other when we were out on a run. Mitchell can give you all the details.”

Quick to tease the others back, Bobby B. asks, “what? You guys ran into each other? Weren’t you watching where you were going?” Also quick with a comeback, Mark replies, “yeah. That’s it. I rear-ended Mitchell because he wasn’t running fast enough.” Mitchell tells Mark, “yeah, right. At least I never ran into a tree.”

Bobby B. laughs, and asks, “what’s this? Mark ran into a tree?” Mitchell explains, “yeah. It was during track practice last year. You missed that one because you were throwing the shot-put. Mr. Harris sent the team out on a long-distance run off school grounds. We ran up into your neighborhood, around the loop, and back. And, on the way back, Mark saw a really pretty girl and looked back at her when he was running. He went off the sidewalk and ran right into a tree.” Mark is quick to point out, “the only reason Mitchell saw that is because he was way behind me.” Eddie boasts, “that’s a good point. I missed that because I was out in front.” Braden adds, “me too! I wished I could have seen that!”

Moving right along, Johnson asks Mitchell, “so, tell us what you heard about the high school track team.” Mitchell explains, “as far as the distance runners go, most of their better guys have graduated. But, there’s some guy named Louie who is supposed to be good at any distance. He’s also on the cross country team. From what I hear, he’s like a really brilliant runner.” Mark asks, “what year is he in?” Mitchell replies, “he’s going to be a junior this year, I think.”

Johnson asks, “how about their sprinters? What do they got?” Taking a bite of his pizza, Mitchell explains, “their best sprinter is a guy named Paul Mahoney. He’ll be a senior next year.” Before Mitchell can finish, Johnson impatiently asks, “how fast is he?” Referring to the 100-yard dash, Mitchell replies, “he can run a 10.4 consistently, but he’s never beat that time. Everyone else on the team runs in the upper ten-second range. They had two guys who were supposedly faster than Mahoney, but they both graduated.”

Eddie tells Johnson what he told Mark earlier in the Summer, “it sounds like we’re all in, bro!” Johnson cautions Eddie, telling him, “those were last years’ times. They’re all probably out training right now.” Mark comments, “that’s right! I never thought about that!” Bobby B. is quick to point out, “and, just look at you guys! You’re all sitting here eating pizza!” Mark tells Bobby B., “it’s part of our training, bro. We’re loading up on the carbs for when we swim laps later.” There is absolutely no shortage of the guys messing with each other every chance they get.

Wanting to know more about his potential internal competition, Johnson asks Mitchell, “what else do you know about this Mahoney guy?” Mitchell replies, “the only other thing I heard about him is that the guy is pretty much an asshole.” Mark responds, “oh, wonderful. One of those.”

Now curious, Braden asks Mitchell, “what do they got in the 440?” Trying to keep a straight face, Mitchell replies, “they got three guys who can run a 50-second 440.” Knowing that Mitchell is pulling Braden’s leg, Eddie smiles, but says nothing. Braden is quick to respond, “shit! I’m in a whole shit load of trouble! I’m gonna get my ass kicked!” Mitchell laughs, and tells Braden, “no, you’re not. I was just messing with you, bro. The best guy they got up there runs the 440 in just under 60 seconds. All the better guys have graduated.” Breathing a sigh of relief, Braden tells Mitchell, “wow! I was getting worried there for a second!” Mark is quick to respond, “yeah, bro. We all kind of saw that.”

Feeling left out in a way, Bobby B. asks Mitchell, “how about in the shot put? Do they got anyone good?” Mitchell replies, “yeah. Some guy named Matt. I forget his last name. I hear he’s really good.” Eddie replies, asking, “Matt Wood?” Mitchell replies, “yeah. That’s the guy.” Bobby B. asks Eddie, “how did you know?” Eddie explains, “Matt lives

around the corner from me. Matt Wood was supposedly the strongest guy in middle school a few years ago before we got there. I heard he was always winning the arm wrestling contests in the lunchroom. And, he was on the middle school football team. But, I don't think he plays football anymore." Bobby B. asks Mitchell, "do they got anyone else good?" Mitchell replies, "not that I know of." Bobby B. is relieved, hoping to take the number two slot in the shot-put.

Seeing that Mitchell seems to have all the inside information, Johnson asks Mitchell, "what do you hear about Mr. Frazier?" Mitchell replies, "I hear he's a really good coach. Mr. Harris uses all of Mr. Frazier's training protocols. So, our workouts probably won't be too much different. And, I heard that Mr. Frazier almost made the Olympics once." Braden replies, exclaiming, "dang! It sounds like we're hitting the big time!" Mark tells Braden, "yeah, bro. We ain't bullshitting our way through this." All of a sudden, the guys get the distinct impression that high school track is not one, but a few notches above middle school track.

Hearing that Mitchell is a goldmine of interesting news, Johnson asks Mitchell, "how did you find all this out, anyway?" Mitchell replies, "from my cousin. She's going to be in eleventh grade next year. She's all into sports and that kind of thing. She helped out with the track team last year, so she knows what's going on."

Only getting part of the story from Mark earlier in the Summer, Eddie asks Mitchell, "how's the team overall?" Mitchell replies, "from what I hear, last year it was really good. A few guys even went to State. But, most of the better runners have graduated. So, I hear the team may not be as good this year." Johnson points out, "that gives us a better chance of making the team." Analyzing the entire conversation, Eddie confidently tells Johnson, "we'll make it, bro. All the guys that Mitchell has been telling us about are their best." Mark comments, "that's a good point."

Braden asks, stating, "now, I'm wondering how good the other teams are." Mitchell logically deduces, telling the group, "the other teams in our division are probably going to be about what they have been for the three years we've been running. When we're juniors and seniors, we'll be up against the same guys we were for the last three years." Braden exclaims, "we ain't lost a meet in three years! We're gonna be kicking ass big time!" Agreeing with Braden, Johnson concludes, "it sounds like we're going to have some really good seasons coming up." Braden exclaims, "you got that right!"

Thinking about what Johnson said, Mark laughs, prompting Johnson to ask, "what's so funny?" Mark replies, "if we're going to be running against the same guys, that means we'll be up against that McCrutchen guy again." Johnson asks, "who's McCrutchen?" Mark explains, "he's this

really crazy dude from Centerville who me and Eddie beat in the 100-yard dash last Spring. After the race, he was kicking the ground and throwing a temper tantrum. He kind of lost it.” Johnson replies, “oh, that guy. Yeah. I guess we’ll see him again.”

Mark suggests, “we should all get together in the Fall and work out before the season starts.” Braden replies, “count me in. I gotta get my ass in high gear.” Johnson replies, “count me in, too.” Mitchell tells the group, “I’m right there with you guys. But, I’ll be training with the cross country team in the Fall.” Mitchell appears very confident that he’ll make the cross country team. But, after all, he does have some inside information from his cousin.

Bobby B. informs the group, boasting, “I’m already training. I hit the weights six days a week.” Johnson comments, “and, he still ain’t any faster than he was last year.” Mark reminds Johnson, “but, he did manage to make it to the pool today.” Bobby B. should have seen a comment like Johnson’s coming from a mile away, but he didn’t.

Although he sounds very confident, Eddie has been relatively quiet, thinking to himself of what Johnson pointed out earlier, that the high school track team members are probably out training at the moment. Eddie decides, at that moment that, if he is to make the team, he had better step up his training even more. After all, the seniors will be three years older than Eddie is. And, at Eddie’s age, three years can make a very big difference. But, what Eddie does not know is that only a hand full of athletes on the track team train over the Summer. The rest of them sit on their ass, as Braden would put it.

Eddie sits back, contemplating that he can now go into the future. Figuring out that he can take a trip into the future and ask his future self, the mechanic, whether he made the track team or not, Eddie realizes the power of the portal. Eddie also realizes that he can probably go into the future and watch a track meet, and see if he is on the team. Deep in thought, Eddie wonders whether any of his friends would believe him about the portal.

Catching Eddie daydreaming, Johnson asks Eddie, “so, are you in?” Eddie replies, asking, “what?” Johnson explains, “we’re all going to train together in the Fall. Are you in?” Eddie replies, “of course, bro!” Bobby B. tells the group, “he’s falling asleep from eating all that pizza.” Eddie replies, “yeah, that’s it. It’s the rest and recovery part of my training.”

After a while, Eddie, Mark, and Johnson hit the lanes and swim a few laps. While half the group is in the pool swimming and getting in a good workout, the other half of the group stands in the corner of the pool cooling off.

Among the lazy group, Braden asks Mitchell, “what else did your cousin tell you?” Mitchell replies, “not too much more. But, she did tell me how Mr. Frazier cuts half the distance guys who are trying out.” Braden asks, “how does he do that?” Mitchell explains, “he has them run a mile for time, and anyone who can’t run the mile faster than a certain time gets cut. The cutoff time is usually in the six-minute range.” Braden exclaims, “six minutes? I can do that when I’m sleeping!”

Remembering last year’s track season, Braden comments, “I wonder if that Jimmy O’Brien guy is gonna try out for track this year.” Hinting of some disgust with O’Brien, Mitchell replies, “if he does, he’s not going to make the team. That guy can’t run worth a shit.” Braden recalls, “his father is supposed to be some hot shot social studies teacher in the high school.” Bobby B. comments, “I hope we don’t get O’Brien’s father for social studies. If he’s anything like Jimmy O’Brien, all we’ll hear is complaining and dragging people down.” Mitchell replies, “yeah, seriously.”

Always at the field events area during a meet and often missing the action on the track, Bobby B. asks, “did O’Brien ever win anything?” Mitchell replies, “no. He runs the 440-yard dash in something like two minutes.” Braden points out, “O’Brien’s ass is about as fast as that Chuckie guy. O’Brien ain’t never won anything and was always telling us how good the other team was.”

A half hour later, Eddie, Mark, and Johnson swim over to the corner of the pool, joining the other guys. Mark tells Mitchell, Braden, and Bobby B., “it’s time for the second shift to hit the lanes.” Braden replies, “yeah, right. I was lifting weights all morning. I had my workout for the day.” Mitchell adds, “me too. I got a few miles in this morning.”

Bobby B. comments, asking, “they call splashing around in a pool a workout?” Braden is quick to reply, “that’s exactly what I was thinking.” Mark tells Braden, “it’s hard work, bro.” With a marginally sarcastic tone, Braden replies, “I can see that. Those kids down at the other end of the pool look like they’re having a great workout.” On the shallow end of the pool, there are a dozen elementary school kids screaming and splashing each other.

Changing the subject, Braden asks the group, “did anyone else get their schedule in the mail?” Eddie replies, “I got mine, but I didn’t really take a look at it.” Mark replies, “me, too. I figure I’d look at it when I got to school.” Johnson curiously mentions, “I wonder if we’ll be in any of the same classes.” Mitchell assures everyone, “some of us will probably be in the same classes. I have social studies first period.” Johnson replies, “wow! So do I. I bet we’re in the same classes.” Bobby B. informs

everyone, "I have English first period. I guess we'll all have to wait and see."

Interrupting the conversation, Johnson, pointing to the diving board, mentions to the group, "isn't that Jimmy O'Brien over there on the diving board?" Recognizing O'Brien as he leaves the diving board, Braden replies, "that's his scrawny ass, all right. I wonder what he's doing here." As O'Brien enters the water at an angle far from vertical, Johnson mentions, "maybe he's going to try out for the diving team." Eddie asks, "does the high school have a diving team?" Mark replies, "I don't know. If they do, O'Brien just got cut. That dive kind of sucked."

The group watches as another diver attempts a dive. Making his approach, the diver takes two strong bounces on the board and, getting a lot of altitude, does two and a half somersaults in mid air. Entering the water vertical, the diver leaves very little splash on the surface. Johnson comments, "well, that was a whole lot better than O'Brien's dive." Braden replies, "yeah. O'Brien's ass ain't no good at nothing."

Johnson corrects Braden's English, telling Braden, "that was a double negative, bro. What you said means his ass is good at something." Mitchell, the honors student in the group, points out, "'O'Brien's ass ain't no good at nothing' is a triple negative, so it's actually saying what Braden meant to say." Carefully wording his sentence, Braden replies, "it don't matter none. O'Brien's ass is not good at anything. How's that?" Mark replies, "I don't know, bro. I can't make any sense out of you when you use proper English."

As O'Brien makes his approach on the diving board, Eddie announces, "here he goes again." Eddie and the group watch as O'Brien attempts to make a fool out of himself once again. O'Brien springs off the board and, attempting to do a somersault in mid air as did the previous diver, is unexpectedly greeted by the diving board on his way down. Mark yells out, "man down in the pool!" The lifeguard, witnessing the entire incident, dives into the water to rescue O'Brien. The other lifeguard blows his whistle, instructing everyone to get out of the pool immediately.

As O'Brien lies unconscious in the water, the other lifeguard grabs the aquatic backboard located on the fence behind the lifeguard's station. Throwing the board into the water, the two lifeguards work quickly to strap O'Brien onto the board. With O'Brien now immobilized, the two lifeguards move O'Brien onto the deck.

Seeing O'Brien has been knocked out, Mark comments, "well, that didn't go exactly as planned." The other diver, who is far more skilled than O'Brien, walks by, overhearing Mark's comment. Since the pool is temporarily closed, the diver takes a seat with the group, and tells Mark, "I

don't know what that guy thought he was doing. He took a few dives earlier today. None of them were even remotely skilled." Mark replies, "that guy is not exactly too skilled at anything, except breaking his head open."

Introducing himself, the diver tells the group, "by the way, I'm Bill Deutsche." The group introduces themselves to Bill, and find out that Bill graduated from Northside High two years ago, and now attends college. The group informs Bill that they will be freshmen at Northside High School this year.

Bill mentions to the group, "that guy was here earlier this week. I'm surprised he hasn't killed himself on the diving board yet." Braden comments, "his ass ain't any better on the track." Bill asks, "do you guys know that clown?" Braden replies, "yeah. He's in our class. And, he was on the track team. But, he ain't no good at that either."

Bill asks the group, "so, you guys run track?" Eddie replies, "yeah." Bill asks, "what year are you in?" Eddie replies, "we're going to be freshmen." Thinking that the guys were juniors or seniors, Bill mentions to the group, "Northside always has a good track team. Mr. Frazier is an awesome coach. The football and wrestling teams are unstoppable. But, watch out for that principal, Mr. Crum. He's not a fan of any sports. Oh, and the baseball team kind of sucks. They can really use some help." Johnson tells Bill, "we just run track. We're not really into any of those other sports." Braden is quick to add, "but, it seems to me like we're always beating them at their own game." Just looking at the physique of the six track athletes, Bill has no reason to doubt Braden's comment.

Braden tells Bill, "those were some pretty good dives you were doing out there." Bill replies, "thanks. I'm on my university's diving team. This is the only public pool around with a regulation diving board. So, over the Summer, I get out here and practice some. It's just too bad that there's not a regulation high board anywhere around here." Eddie, who has ridden his bicycle to the beach a lot, informs Bill, "there's a regulation high board down at Lido Beach." Bill replies, "really? I'll have to check it out sometime." It is clear to the group that Bill is quite a skilled springboard diver.

Interrupting the conversation, Mark announces, "it looks like they're taking O'Brien away in an ambulance." Braden replies, "that's because his dumb shit ass ain't woken up yet." Bill comments, "when his head hit the board, he probably got a pretty bad concussion." Braden tells Bill, "that don't matter none. There ain't nothing up there in his head to damage anyway." It is now clear to Bill that he is sitting with the A crowd, and O'Brien is not even qualified to be part of the D crowd.

The lifeguard blows his whistle, announcing that the pool is now reopened. Bill tells the group, “hey. So, it’s really nice meeting you guys. I’m going to take a few more dives, then I’m out of here.” Eddie tells Bill, “it’s nice meeting you too. Maybe we’ll see you around sometime.” The rest of the group echoes Eddie’s sentiment as they sit back and relax for a while.

As the ambulance drives away with Jimmy O’Brien, Mitchell comments, “that guy ought to just stay away from all sports. He’s dangerous.” Mark replies, “yeah. I’d say. Gump said O’Brien tried out for the wrestling team once. He got pinned in like under ten seconds.”

Eddie comments, “O’Brien is worse than the Chuckie.” Braden replies, exclaiming, “ain’t nobody’s ass worse than Chuckie!” Eddie tells Braden, “yeah, he is, bro. We take Chuckie out in gym class all the time. O’Brien takes himself out, just like he did here today. He doesn’t need our help.” Mark mentions to Braden, “Eddie does have a point.” Braden replies, “yeah. I see that now.”

Eddie recalls, telling the group, “yeah. Just like that time last year when O’Brien took himself out in gym class during that softball game.” Johnson tells Eddie, “I must have missed that. What happened?” Eddie tells Johnson, “it was all Mark’s fault. I’ll let him tell you.” Mark laughs, telling Eddie, “yeah, well, it was still his fault.” Mitchell mentions, “I haven’t heard this one either.” Johnson and Mitchell were in a different gym class last year, and missed this and a few other incidents.

Mark explains, “last year, me, Eddie, Braden, and Gump were in the same gym class. Chuckie and O’Brien were also in our class.” Eddie interjects, “lucky us.” Mark continues, “we were playing a softball game, and Eddie’s team was winning by one run. So, we were up. We had two guys on base, and O’Brien was up with one out. So, I told O’Brien, ‘you better get your ass on base, junior, or I’m making you play first base next inning.’ So, Gump pitches the ball right down the center. Anyone could have hit that pitch. But, no. O’Brien steps out over the plate and intentionally gets hit by a pitched ball.”

Braden exclaims, “I remember that! His ass went down! They had to take his ass to the nurse’s office! I was glad our team got rid of him!” Mark replies, “yeah. He got hit in his head. He was laying on the ground holding his head and crying. What a sucker.” Mitchell laughs, exclaiming, “what an idiot.”

Mitchell asks, “what’s this about making O’Brien play first base if he didn’t get on base?” Eddie laughs, and replies, “because we’ll take him out. But, we didn’t have to do that. He took himself out.” Braden exclaims, “I see what you mean! That guy’s a real idiot!”

Johnson asks, “what happened after that?” Mark explains, “even though it was obviously intentional that O’Brien got himself hit, someone took first base. So, now the bases were loaded. The next guy struck out. Then, Braden was up and hit a double and we scored three runs. So, we won.” Eddie replies, “yeah, bro. Because O’Brien cheated.”

Mark then informs those who were not present during the softball game, “so, O’Brien was absent from school for like two days because they said he had a concussion. And, he even missed running in a track meet.” Braden replies, “I remember that! His ass was standing around watching the meet, acting like he was the coach! It didn’t make no difference anyway that he was out. We still won everything!” Mark replies, “of course, bro. He’s never won anything. We’re the ones who won all the time.”

Thinking back, Braden comments, “I can’t believe all the shit we’ve been through in middle school. Now, I’m wondering if high school is gonna be any better.” With some encouragement, Mark replies, “it’s got to be better, bro. I mean, like, in high school, the juniors and seniors are almost adults.” Eddie jokingly comments, “maybe the Chuckie will grow up.” Mark quickly replies, “that ain’t happening.” Seconding the sentiment regarding Chuckie, Braden agrees, saying, “ain’t that the truth. His ass ain’t never gonna grow up.” Mark replies, “neither is O’Brien.”

Johnson puts his feet up onto the table, and announces, “well, one more week, and we’ll be in high school.” Mark tells Johnson, “the way you say that, it sounds like something magical is going to happen on that day.” Mitchell replies, “the only thing that’s going to happen is that we’ll be sitting in class again, waiting for the bell to ring. Otherwise, it’s going to be the same as middle school.” Mark tells Mitchell, “you might be right about that.”

With the sun beginning to go down, the group packs up their stuff, and begins to head out for the day. Eddie mentions, “I’m taking Bobby B’s. new short cut home, and get in a training ride.” Mark replies, asking, “do you mind if I come with you?” Eddie replies, “no. After listening to Mitchell, I got to get some more training in.” Braden replies, “me too. I’m coming.” Johnson also decides to join Eddie, and go out on a training ride. Mitchell, who ran to the pool today, will run home the long way. Bobby B., already hitting the weights once today, heads home to hit the weights for a second time.