

Eddie, The Mechanic

Chapter Five The Winter Track Season

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One Saturday afternoon, Eddie and Kathy, along with Mark and Paula, get their usual pizza. After lunch, Paula, who drove everyone today, decides to take a different route home. Seeing that Paula is traveling away from their homes, Kathy asks, “where are you going?” Paula replies, “I just want to see something.” Kathy asks, “see what?” Paula replies, “nothing.” Kathy ingeniously asks, “so, we’re going to be seeing something that is really nothing?” Paula, who does not want to answer Kathy’s questions, replies, “exactly.” Kathy hypothetically surmises, “then, if we’re seeing nothing, I wonder how we’ll know when we’re seeing it.” Mark looks at Eddie, and comments, “I hear a lot of Akinmola talk going on.” Both Eddie and Mark at a loss to figure out what Paula has on her mind.

Catching that Paula is driving toward the other side of town, Eddie comments, “I think I might know where we’re going.” Kathy asks, “where?” Paula interrupts, telling Eddie, “don’t tell her.” Eddie replies, “well, now I’m 100 percent sure I know where we’re going.” Paula tells Eddie, “oh no, you don’t.” Paula makes a right turn, also cluing Kathy in to exactly where she is driving to. Kathy and Eddie start laughing, suggesting to Paula that her mystery side trip has been found out. Mark, at a loss to figure out what is going on, asks, “will someone please tell me where we’re going?” Kathy confidently replies, “we’re going to Second Street.” Paula makes another right turn, and they drive down Second Street.

Paula exclaims, “wow! This is the spookiest road I’ve ever seen.” Kathy sits back, relaxes, and replies, “I told you so. The houses are haunted.” Pointing to a house on the right, Mark comments, “look at that one. The siding is falling off and the roof is caving in.”

Kathy asks, “I wonder which one is Mr. Crum’s house.” Eddie, pointing to the first house on the left, which has the back of the house facing the

road, replies, "it's probably that one." Kathy asks, "how do you know?" Eddie replies, "by the dirt tracks going to the back of the house. They're about the right width for his Volkswagen Beetle." Looking at Mr. Crum's house, Kathy replies, "that place is really creepy." They get to the end of the road, and Paula turns around.

Eddie, pointing to the house between Mr. Crum's house and the recycling plant's property, mentions to Mark, "hey! There's the perfect place for our junkyard." Mark, taking a closer look, mentions, "it looks like it's abandoned."

Paula announces, exclaiming, "you guys are not buying anything on this street! It's haunted!" Kathy comments, "I don't know. It's nothing that a bulldozer can't fix." Paula replies, "yeah. The whole street needs a bulldozer, and an exorcist to go along with it. I'm getting out of here."

On the way out, Kathy asks Paula, "do you see that ugly house on the left?" Paula replies, "yeah. That's the ugliest house in the world." Kathy tells Paula, "that's where the boogie man lives." Paula quickly replies, "is not! There's no such thing!" Kathy smiles, and explains, "sure there is. Every kid in the world has seen the boogie man. Billions of kids can't be wrong." Paula exclaims, "stop it, girl!" Kathy replies, "okay. I'll stop. But, that doesn't change the fact that the boogie man lives there." Paula drives away, wanting never to return to Second Street. And, Kathy is having a great time yanking Paula's chain, especially about the boogie man.

On the way back, Kathy asks Paula, "so, what do you think of Second Street?" Paula exclaims, "it's haunted! And, it's really spooky! That place gives me the creeps!" Kathy calmly tells Paula, "I told you it was haunted. And, so now you know. The boogie man lives on Second Street. And, now you've seen his house." Paula exclaims, "yeah, right! And, his name is Mr. Crum!" Mark comments, "I guess we're never moving to Second Street." Paula replies, "you got that right!" Mark tells Paula, "so, I'm guessing you want me to finish up our house in the woods." Paula exclaims, "yeah! The farther away from Second Street, the better!" Paula has her curiosity satisfied. They're all convinced that they'll never get Paula on Second Street again.

Practice and tryouts begin for the indoor season at the high school, and many of the team members have already been selected from the Autumn practice season. Kathy, Paula, and Barbara are all present on the first day of tryouts. The drill is the same as in previous years. The candidates all head down to the indoor arena, where the weeding out process will begin.

This year, at the high school, a new core team forms. Eddie's brother, John, and Jimmy Hoffer are the team's two star sprinters. They are joined by Paul Davida, a transfer student. Tessa and Erika are the 440-yard dash stars, also running competitive times in any sprint. Akinmola and Amber are the two distance stars, with Tom Davidson, a sophomore, joining the group of core distance runners this year. John Elliot and George Livingston have demonstrated superior ability in the 880-yard run and in the mile. Elliot is also a reasonably good sprinter. And Lucius Hill, a sophomore who seems to be filling Braden's shoes, can run the 440-yard dash quite well, often performing in the lower 50-second range. By the time Hill is a senior, he might be brushing up against Braden's State record in the 440-yard dash.

As Kathy and Paula are arranging the time trials for the sprinters, Kathy mentions to Paula, "you know, Mitchell is going to come to practice when we start up at the University next week." Paula asks, "really? Are you serious, girl?" Kathy replies, "yeah. Mitchell came by to visit me and Eddie right before Christmas. He said he's tired of living out of suitcases and traveling. Oh, and he said that he misses Amber." Paula replies, "yeah, Amber. That's probably the real reason he's coming back." Kathy tells Paula, "I can't wait to see Dr. Braun's and Dr. Paxton's reaction when they see Mitchell break a four-minute mile." Paula exclaims, "he can break four minutes? Are you serious?" Kathy grins, and replies, "uh huh."

After the 40-yard dash heats are completed, Kathy and Paula move on to the 440-yard dash. While the runners are getting lined up with their group, Paula tells Kathy, "you're up to something. Out with it, girl." Kathy asks, "how is that?" Paula tells her, "I know you, girl. Right now you're wondering where Braden is." Kathy quickly replies, "am not." Paula replies, "well, that about says it. Yeah, you are." Kathy tells Paula, "okay, you're right. But, you have to admit, it's just not the same without the whole group around." Paula replies, "yeah, you're right about that."

Mr. Frazier comes by a little later, asking Kathy and Paula, "so, how are we doing?" Kathy replies, "John, Hoffer, and Davida are your top sprinters, in that order. Erika and Tessa are right up there with them, off a tenth or two. So, you have five good sprinters this year. The bad news is they're not quite up to last year's gold medal standard at State yet."

Mr. Frazier asks, "how about in the 440?" Looking at her clipboard, Kathy replies, "John is the fastest at 54.4. Hoffer, Davida, Tessa, and Erika are all about a second or two off." Mr. Frazier replies, "not bad!"

Kathy, with an off the wall question, asks Mr. Frazier, "hey, when someone joins the military, how long is it usually for?" Mr. Frazier replies, "it's usually a two-year minimum contract," wondering why Kathy even

asked that question. Mr. Frazier walks over to start another heat, sadly missing Eddie, Mark, Braden, and Johnson himself.

When Mr. Frazier walks away, Kathy comments, “darn.” Paula asks, “what?” Kathy replies, “two years. That means Braden isn’t coming back anytime soon.” Paula tells Kathy, “you’re really trying to get everyone back together again, aren’t you.” Kathy explains to Paula, “well, just listen. What do you hear? Nothing. Absolutely nothing. You can’t tell me that you don’t miss Braden telling everyone how he’s going to kick ass. And, just wait until the meets start. It’s going to take you less than five seconds to miss Mark messing with everyone. And, look over there at the shot-put. Have you ever seen it so mistreated in your life?” Paula replies, “yeah. I hate to admit it, girl, but you’re right.” Kathy tells Paula, “it would really be nice if they could all run for the University.”

After practice, Paula quickly realizes that Kathy is right. Something is not quite the same. Everyone quietly walks up the stairs to the locker room. Braden’s not around to fire up and encourage the team. No one is going out to get pizza after practice. There is no Amazon controversy. They’ll all be back tomorrow, and practice will be exactly the same as it was today.

On the way out of the high school, Paula mentions to Kathy, “you know, I was half hoping that Mr. Crum would walk down the stairs and cause a scene. It’s just way too quiet.” Kathy replies, “don’t worry. He’ll be back. After that collision on the track last semester, he has a score to settle.” Paula comments, “I can’t wait.” Kathy and Paula both get in their distinctive vehicles, and head home.

And, sure enough, Mr. Crum is back, but Kathy and Paula are not present to witness today’s confrontation. On Friday, before the first meet, the announcement is made over the loudspeaker, “will Erika Gabriel please report to the administration office.” Erika heads to the administration office, this time knowing exactly why she is being called there. In the gym, Mr. Zunde tells Mr. Frazier, “I bet this is fallout from that fight last semester. I’m going to go and see what this is all about.” Mr. Frazier tells Mr. Zunde, “I think I’ll come with you.” It looks as if, in the gym, Mr. Chubin will be refereeing two basketball games alone.

Mr. Frazier and Mr. Zunde walk over to and wait in the administration area for Erika to arrive. Mr. Zunde asks Mrs. Marlowe, the secretary, “do we know what this is all about?” Mr. Zunde already suspects that he knows why Erika is being called to Mr. Crum’s office. Mrs. Marlowe tells Mr. Zunde and Mr. Frazier, “I’m not really sure. Mr. Crum just told me to call Erika to his office.”

Mr. Zunde suggests to Mr. Frazier, "Mr. Crum must be right on top of it this semester. He's starting early tracking down overdue library books." Mr. Frazier replies, "that must be it, unless Erika has been late to class." Mrs. Marlowe, who now understands the dynamics between the coaches and Mr. Crum, suggests, "who knows? Erika could have used the restroom without permission." Mr. Zunde smiles, and replies, "I'm sure that's it."

Erika walks into the administration area, seeing Mr. Zunde and Mr. Frazier waiting. Mr. Zunde asks Erika, "it's a little early in the semester to have an overdue library book. Were you late to class today?" Erika replies, "no." Mr. Zunde comments, "I can't imagine, then, what this is all about." Erika adds, "it's probably about the fight last December," but Mr. Zunde already knew that. Mr. Zunde assures Erika, "if it is about the fight, there's nothing Mr. Crum can do about it anyway." Mr. Zunde whispers to Erika, "go ahead and see how badly you can annoy him, and push him over the edge." Erika smiles, knowing she is off the hook.

Mr. Crum walks out of his office, telling Mr. Zunde, "this has nothing to do with athletics. I'll take care of this." Mr. Zunde informs Mr. Crum, "unless Erika was using the restroom without permission, I'm exercising my right to sit in on this meeting today. We've been over this before, Mr. Crum. I'm sure you remember that the school board gives me the right to be present when your disciplinary action involves an athlete. Or, perhaps you lost your memory when you lost the argument with the concrete last month." Mr. Crum replies, "all right, all right! But, this is my meeting! I don't want any interference." Mr. Zunde replies, "I'm sure the track athletes don't want any interference when they're running on the track either. So, go ahead and get on with it. You're holding up your meeting."

Erika, Mr. Zunde, and Mr. Frazier enter Mr. Crum's office. Before the meeting begins, Mr. Zunde asks Mr. Crum, "it's been what? Three years, I think, and your desk hasn't been replaced yet?" Mr. Crum fails to acknowledge Mr. Zunde's comment, but is clearly distressed by the inference. Since Mr. Frazier no longer reports to Mr. Crum, he adds, "it doesn't look like his bookcase has been replaced either." With Mr. Crum now unnerved, he is ready to begin his meeting. And, Erika is feeling a bit more relaxed after Mr. Zunde and Mr. Frazier verbally worked Mr. Crum over a little.

Mr. Crum opens the meeting by stating, "Erika, I suppose you're wondering why I have called you to my office." Erika replies, "let me think. If I had to guess, I'd say that it has something to do about my invitation to join the National Honor Society." Mr. Crum exclaims, "don't get smart with me!" Erika replies, "then, no. I have absolutely no idea why you called me to your office. None at all. And, just to let you know, I have no overdue library books." Mr. Zunde whispers to Mr. Frazier, "Crum is apparently very mad about something. I guess he didn't like his

Christmas present this year.” Mr. Frazier whispers back, “I think you’re right. He’s not even wearing it.”

Mr. Crum announces to Erika, “well, then, let me explain it to you, young lady. Last December, you were involved in an altercation when school was in session.” Erika interrupts, telling Mr. Crum, “it was before school started.” Mr. Crum exclaims, “that doesn’t matter! And, please don’t interrupt me again, am I clear?” Erika replies, “no.” Mr. Crum pauses, and sarcastically asks, “what part of what I said are you not clear about?” Erika replies, “it was before school started but, if you want to make shit up, go right ahead. Waiting.” Mr. Frazier whispers to Mr. Zunde, “she is beginning to sound like Kathy.” Mr. Zunde reminds Mr. Frazier, “well, they all hang out together. After all, iron sharpens iron.”

Mr. Crum instructs Erika, “okay. I’ve had enough of your attitude already. Tell me what happened during the last day of school back in December.” Erika tells Mr. Crum, “wow! That was a long time ago. Let me think. I woke up. I got dressed. I did my crunches. Then, I had breakfast.” Mr. Crum interrupts, telling Erika, “young lady, I’m talking about the fight that you were involved in!” Erika replies, “oh, that. The police are taking care of it. You don’t have to worry about that.” Mr. Crum replies, “nevertheless, I want to hear your side of the story.” Mr. Zunde whispers to Mr. Frazier, “I think she’s going for the record in avoiding answering Crum’s questions.” If Erika is avoiding answering Mr. Crum’s questions, she likely learned it from Mr. Zunde, who makes a sport of diverting Mr. Crum off course.

Erika continues being evasive, telling Mr. Crum, “I gave my statement to the officer in charge. The case is under investigation, so that’s all I’m saying.” Mr. Crum is now hot under the collar, getting absolutely no cooperation from Erika. Mr. Crum tells Erika, “I’m going to give you one last chance to answer my questions.” After an uncomfortable pause, Erika asks, “which question?” Mr. Crum replies, “tell me what happened during the last day of school last semester.” Erika replies, “that’s not a question. It’s a request for a statement, which I already gave to the police.” Mr. Frazier whispers to Mr. Zunde, “yeah, Kathy trained her well.” Mr. Zunde whispers back, “and, her father too.”

Mr. Crum, having enough of Erika, announces the expected words, “Erika, you have been very uncooperative with me. I really wish you had been more respectful while I am conducting my investigation. So, since I can’t get a statement out of you, I’ll have to make my decision with the facts that I do have. And, with the facts that I have right in front of me, I have no choice but to suspend you.” Erika replies, “fine, then. I’ll have you arrested. It sounds like a fair trade to me.” Uncomfortable silence again comes over the room, which Mr. Zunde allows to continue. It’s Mr. Crum’s move and Mr. Zunde is perfectly happy to wait for his response.

Erika breaks the silence, stating, "I guess it's quiet time. The last time we had quiet time was in kindergarten." Mr. Crum, sincerely believing that Erika is bluffing, informs Erika, "you're not having me arrested, and you know that." Opening her notebook to the last page, Erika reviews the notes given to her by her father, the police captain. Referring to her notes, Erika tells Mr. Crum, "I am running for a track scholarship this year. You are getting in the way. If you suspend me, I will get you out of my way once and for all." Now reading from her notes, Erika informs Mr. Crum, "and then, my father will file a civil case against you for tortious interference with a student's future educational prospects. If you don't know what that means, my father suggested that you contact an attorney." Erika announces, "so, I'm going to give you ten seconds to change your mind. Otherwise, I'm having you arrested. Ten. Nine. Eight. Seven."

Mr. Zunde has had enough. Making a "T" symbol with his hands, Mr. Zunde tells Erika, "time out," and Erika momentarily stops counting. Addressing Mr. Crum, Mr. Zunde announces, "Mr. Crum, you are not suspending Erika. Again, this is a case of self defense prompted by a physical attack. And, if you haven't read your policy manual recently, section five, which refers to physical altercations, specifically does not address physical altercations when a person involved is not a student. I'm sure that's because it is well outside your jurisdiction. If you really want to suspend Erika, feel free. I'm sure Mr. Shapiro would welcome the opportunity to hand Erika her diploma this Spring."

Mr. Crum sits back, contemplating what Mr. Zunde just told him. Hearing that Mr. Shapiro could possibly be handing Erika her diploma in the Spring struck fear into Mr. Crum. Knowing that he has again lost the battle, Mr. Crum announces, "okay. For now, I am not going to take any action against Erika. However, I am very concerned that this is the second time during this school year that Erika has physically struck me." Mr. Zunde interrupts, telling Mr. Crum, "the first time, you were warned to stay off the track. That would make it your problem, not hers. And, what happened last month was your own fault." Mr. Crum, not wanting to hear Mr. Zunde's lecture, announces, "okay, okay! We're done here for now." Erika, Mr. Zunde, and Mr. Frazier leave Mr. Crum's office as fast as they can, and meet in the school lobby.

Mr. Frazier tells Mr. Zunde and Erika, "again, he basically just said nothing, and wasted everyone's time. It's the same old psychobabble. You'd think it would end at some point." Erika asks, "what's his problem, anyway?" Mr. Zunde replies, "I wish I knew. Ever since the track team started dominating the sport in the region, he's been after the top performers. Since he's now apparently after you, consider it an honor." Mr. Frazier adds, "you do have a point. He always seems to be after the top performers. I'm sure that John Davies will attest to that." Mr. Zunde

assures Erika, “don’t worry about Mr. Crum. There’s nothing he can do about this anyway.” Erika, happy to hear that Mr. Zunde and Mr. Frazier have her back, heads back to class. Mr. Zunde and Mr. Frazier head to the gym, wondering what Mr. Crum will dig up next.

Track practice at the University starts as soon as the semester begins. Eddie and Mark, although their administrative paperwork has not been completed, are invited to attend track practice for three days. The first practice is held on a Wednesday, at 7:00 a.m. Eddie drives up in his MGB right behind Kathy, and they head inside. Mark arrives in his Jeep and, seeing that Eddie has already arrived, heads to the locker room. Bobby B. arrives on his BSA Starfire motorcycle, and is well dressed for the cold weather. Mitchell, who borrowed his parent’s automobile today, is the last one to arrive. They meet up with Johnson, who is already inside and ready to go.

While in the locker room, with a bit of *déjà vu*, Eddie comments to his friends, “they’re all checking us out, just like when we were freshmen in high school.” Mark comments, “yeah, I can see that.” Eddie mentions, “well, at least Paul Mahoney isn’t here.” Mark replies, “yeah. But, they have two McCrutchens to make up for it.” Eddie replies, “and, one McCrutchen is staring at us.” Johnson informs Eddie and Mark, “they’re probably wondering why you guys are here.” Mark adds, “and, worrying.”

The group heads to the indoor track, on which they’ve never run on before. Entering the arena, it has a strange resemblance to the track they ran on for four years at the high school. Mark comments, “wow! It looks just like home.” Mitchell asks, “I wonder how good these guys are.” Eddie mentions, “I hear their miler is good. He runs a little over four minutes. But, their sprinters aren’t too fast.”

Bobby B. mentions, “I don’t see their shot-put team.” Mark points to the weakest looking guy that he can find, and tells Bobby B., “there he is. Over there.” Not missing a beat, Eddie adds, “I hear they signed a new shot-put guy named Chuckie.” Apparently the high school track stars have not lost their sense of humor in the least after graduation.

Kathy, Paula, and Barbara enter the arena, and head straight for the new guys on the block. Kathy, seeing most of the tribe together again, asks, “hey! Where’s Braden?” Mitchell replies, “he got back very late on Monday night.” Kathy screams out, “what! Are you serious?” Mitchell, repeating himself, says, “yeah. He got back Monday night. I talked to him yesterday.” Kathy yells out, “are you for real? You’re not shitting me, are you?” Mitchell replies, “no. He’s back. The Navy wouldn’t take him.” Kathy, wondering if she is dreaming, screams, asking Mitchell, “what?” Mitchell explains, “Braden is color blind, so he failed the physical examination. So, he went to a police academy somewhere in the city

where he was, and he graduated last week. So, he's back in town." Mark exclaims, "wow! He must have been really disappointed!" Mitchell replies, "he didn't seem that upset about it when I talked to him." Hearing the news, Kathy is suddenly in a really good mood.

Off to the side, congregating with a bunch of upperclassmen, is Mark's adversary, Todd McCutchen, and his older brother, Scott, who is now a senior. With them is Steve Leggett, who has the reputation of being the fastest sprinter on the team. The conversation among that group of upperclassmen is anything but synergistic to the team. McCutchen knew that Johnson is attending the school from the Autumn practice sessions. Why Mark, Eddie, Bobby B., and Mitchell are all at today's practice session is leaving them wondering. And, what Kathy is so excited about is a big mystery to McCutchen.

Dr. Braun, the head coach, walks in, and blows his whistle. Everyone who knows the drill, heads over to the bleachers and takes a seat. Those who don't know the drill follow those who do know the drill. Dr. Braun announces, "welcome back. I hope you all had a wonderful break but, today, it's back to work. As you've probably guessed, today we are running time trials to see where everyone stands. When I am done speaking, the distance team will meet with Dr. Paxton. The sprinters will meet with Coach Herndon. The field athletes will meet with Dr. Bonamo. Mrs. Owens, the events coordinator, will be compiling your times today, so I want everyone to give it their best. Okay, let's go!"

Kathy points out Dr. Paxton to Mitchell, who heads over with Barbara joining the distance group. Kathy then points out Dr. Bonamo to Bobby B., who heads over to join the field athletes. The thin and wiry guy Mark pointed out earlier is among the field athletes, but he is a high jumper, and a reasonably good one at that. Eddie, Mark, and Johnson walk over together with Kathy and Paula, joining the sprinters.

On the way to the blocks, Eddie tells Mark, "this is our college admission test. They want to see what we can do. There's no paperwork holding anything up." Mark replies, "you do have a point." Eddie's and Mark's adrenaline levels have just shot through the roof. If they want to run track at the University, now is the time to demonstrate their competence.

Coach Herndon addresses the sprinters, telling everyone, "okay, we're running the 40-yard dash for time. Form groups of four, with someone of your own skill level." Mark mentions to Eddie, "that sounds familiar." Coach Herndon tells Eddie and Mark, "I want both of you running with Johnson." Eddie, Mark, Johnson, and Leggett are all assigned to the same group and, for some reason, are up in the first heat. Coach Herndon obviously wants to see what Eddie and Mark can deliver.

After the first heat is warmed up and behind the blocks, the Starter, who is a student assistant, announces, "on your marks." Eddie and Mark are ready for part one of their admissions test. The Starter announces, "set." The buzzer sounds, and the runners are out of the blocks as if their life depends on winning this race. Halfway through the race, Eddie and Mark take a clear lead. Johnson is not far behind. Leggett, wearing his heavy sneakers and ski socks, trails significantly, which would not surprise Eddie were he able to see Leggett. At the finish, Eddie crosses first, with Mark right behind. Johnson finishes in third place, with Leggett, the school's star sprinter from last year, finishing in last place.

Coach Herndon, getting the times from the Timekeepers, announces, "Edward Bogenskaya, 4.4 seconds. Mark Svoboda, 4.5 seconds. Eric Johnson, 4.6 seconds, Steven Leggett, 5.2 seconds." Coach Herndon then announces, "that's today's standard. 4.4 seconds. The next heat, get behind the blocks." Coach Herndon, who rarely shows any emotion, walks over to Eddie, Mark, and Johnson, telling them, "that was a really, really good run. I am impressed."

As the other heats are underway, Eddie glances over at the oval track, watching as Mitchell is running the mile. Eddie notices that Mitchell is conspicuously not in his preferred position of right behind the leader today. Instead, Mitchell leads the pack, followed by a long-haired hippie type guy who is giving him a run for his money. Eddie, pointing at Mitchell, tells Mark, "hey! Take a look! Mitchell's out in front." Mark points out, "well, at least it's a two-man race." Eddie remarks, "yeah, but there are eight men on the track. And, this is college. I thought they're supposed to be good."

A few more 40-yard dash heats are run, then Kathy and Paula are up. Somehow, they managed to finagle their way into racing McCutchen and McCutchen. This is perhaps to provide Mark and Eddie some amusement. Or, remembering all the trouble Scott McCutchen caused during last season, perhaps Coach Herndon wants to make a point. Mark and Eddie, sitting on the bleachers, are grinning ear to ear. Mark comments, "watching this race is definitely worth the price of admission."

The buzzer sounds and, by Kathy's primal scream, everyone knows who just left the blocks. Kathy and Paula quickly claim the lead, leaving McCutchen and McCutchen in the dust. Halfway through the race, it's a fight to the finish between Kathy and Paula. At the finish, it's Kathy taking first place and Paula taking second place. The elder McCutchen marginally beats out his younger brother. Todd McCutchen, or McCutchen as Mark calls him, finishes in last place, a position with which he is quite familiar.

While the times are being compiled, no small disturbance arises at the other end of the arena. Eddie mentions to Mark, "it looks like Mitchell won the mile. I bet he got a good time." Mark replies, "yeah. All that yelling and screaming is definitely about something." But, Eddie and Mark will have to wait to see how Mitchell did in the mile. They know Mitchell won. Mitchell's time is what they are waiting to hear.

Coach Herndon announces, "Kathy Karakova," and after a pause, "oops, Bogenskaya, 4.8 seconds. Paula Giovani, 4.9 seconds. Scott McCutchen, 5.5 seconds. Todd McCutchen, 5.7 seconds." Eddie tells Mark, "Kathy and Paula did good." Mark mentions to Eddie, "yeah, I see that. But, you know, McCutchen squared really sucks." Eddie comments, "yeah, I can see that. It must run in the family."

Word has gotten around the arena that Mitchell has just beat the school's star miler, Darryl Stone. Stone, who has not lost a race in the last two seasons that he participated in, was just handed a big surprise when he was beaten by Mitchell. Coming in two seconds ahead of Stone, with a time of 3:57.5, Mitchell is ecstatic. So is Dr. Paxton, the distance coach. Hearing the news, Eddie and Mark are even more fired up to deliver a superior performance during the 440-yard dash. Neither Eddie nor Mark is willing to let Mitchell steal the whole show today.

Eddie reminds Mark, "well, the 440-yard dash is the second part of our admissions test. It looks like we passed the first part. And, Mitchell just passed his test." Mark mentions, "I wonder if they'll make him some sort of deal too." Eddie replies, "I don't see how they can't. He just beat that hippie guy, who is supposed to be the fastest distance guy in the division." Mark deduces, "that would make Mitchell the fastest distance guy in the division."

A few more heats are run, and then it is on to the 440-yard dash. Eddie, Mark, Johnson, Leggett, and the McCutchen and McCutchen team will be in the first heat. Coach Herndon is not stupid. She has caught on quickly, and is well aware of the rivalry between Mark and Todd McCutchen. She knows how to stir up internal competition and get the adrenaline flowing. Better internal competition leads to better performance on the track during the season.

As they walk to the starting line, Eddie and Mark both know this is part two of their admissions test. If they deliver a good time, they'll get to run for four more years. If they deliver a bad time, their so-called paperwork will get lost in the shuffle.

Mark looks over at Todd McCutchen, and smiles. That is all it takes to throw McCutchen off base, but Mark doesn't stop there. Mark asks McCutchen, "what's a qualifying time to make the team?" Now that they

are potentially teammates, McCutchen cordially replies, “they seem to prefer that everyone can break 60 seconds.” Mark replies, “oh good. The first time I broke 60 seconds I was in the seventh grade.” Mark did it again, whittling McCutchen down to the skill level of a seventh grader.

Coach Herndon, hearing Eddie’s and Mark’s times from Kathy over Christmas break, assigns them to the inside lanes. Johnson, who has the best qualifying time of the remaining athletes, is in lane three. Leggett, Scott McCutchen, and Todd McCutchen are in lanes four, five, and six respectively. The Starter announces, “on your marks.” Eddie and Mark both know that this race is do or die. The Starter announces, “set.” The buzzer sounds, and everyone in the arena is at a complete stand still, except for the six runners.

Not surprisingly, Eddie, Mark, and Johnson lead the field. This race, however, is purely against the clock. Eddie thinks to himself that he is running this race for Kathy. Kathy really wants Eddie to be on the track team. After the first lap of the two-lap race, Eddie is in the lead, Mark is in second place, and Johnson in third place. Leggett and the McCutchen brothers trail significantly. As the runners are on their second lap, Dr. Braun makes his way to the finish line, along with Dr. Paxton, the distance coach. Coming around the curve first is Eddie, with Mark and Johnson right behind him. Eddie crosses first, followed quickly by Mark and Johnson. Leggett finishes in a distant fourth place, followed by Scott McCutchen. Mark’s nemesis, Todd McCutchen, finishes in last place.

Eddie lies on the track to catch his breath, just like Kathy does after she runs a 440-yard dash. After the times are compiled, Coach Herndon announces, “okay, everyone listen up!” Coach Herndon apparently wants everyone to hear the results. Coach Herndon, deviating from the normal order in which she reports the results, announces, “Todd McCutchen, 63.7 seconds. Scott McCutchen, 61.9 seconds. Steve Leggett, 57.7 seconds. Eric Johnson, 47.5 seconds. Mark Svoboda, 46.1 seconds. Edward Bogenskaya, 45.5 seconds.” Silence falls over the arena, broken by Kathy who cheers, “way to go, Eddie!”

Coach Herndon whispers to Dr. Braun, “at least you got what you paid for.” Dr. Braun replies, “I can clearly see that.” Looking at his clipboard, Dr. Braun informs Coach Herndon, “and, if you haven’t already heard, Gary Mitchell ran a 3:57.5 mile.” Seeing Bobby B. walk up to the shot-put pad, Dr. Braun tells Coach Herndon, “and, here goes the other new guy. Excuse me for a second, but I really want to see this.” Dr. Braun walks over to the shot-put pad to see what Bobby B. can deliver.

Dr. Bonamo, already knowing what Dr. Braun wants to know, reports, “this is his third throw. So far he’s thrown 65 feet, 10 inches and 66 feet, 5 inches.” Dr. Braun replies, “I understand from Dr. Karakova that he’s an

amazing guy.” Seeing Dr. Braun, the boss man, watching, Bobby B. gets a bit of extra adrenaline. Intending to deliver the best performance of his life, Bobby B. takes the shot-put and, with everyone watching, throws it farther than he ever has. The measurement comes in at 67 feet, 5 inches. Bobby B., at that moment, knows his day is done. He, too, has passed his admissions test with flying colors.

Once everyone returns to the bench, Dr. Braun announces, “today was what I would call an enlightening workout. Tomorrow, as you probably have already guessed, we will be running relay drills. We will be also running some relay events for time. I hope everyone has a wonderful day, and we’ll see you all back tomorrow.”

Dr. Braun takes the time to personally invite Eddie, Mark, Bobby B., and Mitchell back for another workout tomorrow. Everyone knew they were coming back tomorrow but, seeing their performance today, Dr. Braun wanted to make sure.

The best performances of the day have been delivered by four athletes that are not even part of the team. They are in attendance today solely by invitation from the coaching staff. The University has no reason to not follow through with the offer made to Eddie and Mark. The big question of the day is what to do with Mitchell and Bobby B. Mitchell has turned in a better performance than Darryl Stone, the school’s star distance runner. And, Bobby B. delivered a performance in the shot-put that is certain to win every meet. But, the big questions of the day will be answered in the next hour behind closed doors. As the coaching staff discusses the results of the practice session, the athletes now become students and head off to class.

As most of the team heads to the lockers, Kathy and Paula hang around for a few minutes talking with Eddie, Mark, Bobby B., and Mitchell. Kathy tells Eddie and Mark, “by the way, you guys will be running relay races for time tomorrow.” Eddie asks, “how are we so special?” Kathy replies, “really, now? Do you even have to ask?” Mark points out, “that means we might be back on the track with McCrutchen.” Mitchell comments, “that’s something I wouldn’t want to miss.” Everyone heads to the locker room, knowing tomorrow will be a much more interesting day.

Later that day, Kathy secretly gets on the phone and calls Braden. After catching up on the last few months, Braden explains to Kathy that he failed the physical examination because he is color blind, so he cannot join the Navy, but that he is not upset. Braden informs Kathy that he considered the Marine Corps, but the Navy does their physical exam, and he will fail that too. Braden also mentions that he asked the recruiter about whether he’d be qualified for the Air Force. Braden explains that, in order to join the Air Force, you can’t be color blind either.

Braden tells Kathy that he went to the police academy instead, and is now looking for a job as a police officer. Braden also mentions that he has kept in shape, and can run faster now than he did at the State invitational meet. Braden, in fact, makes it a point to tell Kathy that he broke the high school National record in the 440-yard dash once during his training at the police academy. Kathy then fills Braden in on the recent events at the University. Kathy explains to Braden the deal that Eddie and Mark received, and that Bobby B. and Mitchell have both worked out with the team today.

Kathy persuades Braden to make a showing tomorrow during relay drills. She explains to Braden that Eddie, Mark, and Johnson will be timed in the 4 by 440 relay, and that the other runners are well below par. Kathy asks Braden if he is up for an ass kicking session. Braden, who cannot turn down the chance to kick ass on the track, agrees without any hesitation. Kathy, however has a plan. She really wants this group back together again, and is doing her best to make it happen. So, Kathy explains her secret plan to Braden, who is fully onboard.

The next day arrives and, right before practice, the tribe meets in the gym. Kathy, who informed Eddie what will be happening on the track today the night before, asks Johnson and Mark, "you guys do know that you will be running a relay race for time, don't you?" Mark replies, "yeah. I figured that. I guess they're still checking us out." Johnson mentions, "they know we've all run together before. I suspect they want to see us in action first hand."

Kathy explains to Eddie, Mark, and Johnson, "I'm guessing that they're going to put Leggett in your race. Do not cut Leggett any slack. He's slow out of the blocks, so don't slow down during the handoffs to accommodate him." Eddie comments, "that's why I call him lug nut. Because he's slow out of the blocks, and during the rest of the race too." Kathy reiterates, "just don't cut him any slack at all." Kathy knows that Leggett is not even remotely up to par, and wants the coaches to see it.

The coaching staff walks in, and everyone takes a seat on the bleachers. Dr. Braun blows his whistle, and announces, "welcome back again! Today we are running relay drills and a few time trials. The field athletes will again meet with Dr. Bonamo. The rest of us will all work together today. Okay, let's get going." This is college. College athletes all know what is expected of them, and know the drill well. Minimal instruction is all that is needed.

The relay drills begin, with Dr. Braun and Coach Herndon evaluating the athlete's skills. Eddie, Mark, and Johnson are again put under the microscope, and have their handoff skills carefully evaluated when they are handing off to each other. They have been handing off the baton to

each other for seven years and, as a result, no one is able to detect any flaws in their handoff skills. Kathy watches, and is very happy to see that their handoffs are still perfect. On the track herself, Kathy is practicing with the women.

Kathy notices that, when Eddie, Mark, or Johnson hand off to Leggett, the handoff goes poorly. Even worse, was a handoff between Mark and McCutchen, where McCutchen could not obtain the baton before leaving the transition zone. McCutchen could not blame the poor transition on Mark, for McCutchen seems to be unable to transfer the baton to anyone today. McCutchen's gross incompetence may be simply because Mark is present.

After a half hour of observing transitions, Dr. Braun blows his whistle, announcing, "okay! Everyone on the bleachers. We're running a 4 by 110 relay. The following athletes, please get on the track. You will run in the order I call you. Johnson, Svoboda, Leggett, and Bogenskaya." On the way to the track, Mark whispers to Eddie, "this isn't going to go too well. He stuck that clown between us." Kathy also knows this race is not going to go too smoothly, which sits perfectly well with her. Kathy secretly hopes that Leggett fails miserably. The baton is handed to Johnson, and everyone is ready to go.

The buzzer sounds, and Johnson is off. Mark is on the track, waiting for the baton. Johnson hands off to Mark, which goes smooth as silk. Mark comes around the corner, and sees Leggett on the track. Leggett leaves late, causing Mark to significantly slow down to transfer the baton. The bungled handoff is evident to all. Leggett takes off and, on the other side of the track, Eddie is waiting. As Leggett approaches, Eddie takes off. It is obvious to all that Eddie has to adjust his speed and technique to accommodate Leggett's lack of skill. Eddie sprints 110 yards and crosses the finish line, not exactly happy having to work with Leggett.

During the race, Kathy just happened to be strategically standing next to Coach Herndon. Coach Herndon comments to Kathy, "well, that wasn't exactly what anyone was expecting." Kathy, waiting for the opportunity all day to say it, boldly replies, "that's because Braden isn't here." Coach Herndon asks the inevitable question, "who's Braden?" Kathy replies, "he's the State record holder in the 440-yard dash. He even broke his own record last year. He runs about a 45-second quarter mile." Coach Herndon remarks, "oh yeah? Wait! That's right! You mentioned something about him last Summer." Kathy then proudly announces, "I can have him here in twenty minutes, if you want."

Coach Herndon, who has been quite disgusted at some of the men's handoffs in the last half hour, replies, "with all the shit I've seen in the last half hour, go for it. What can I lose?" Coach Herndon realizes by now

that Kathy delivers exactly what she promises. Coach Herndon figures that this Braden guy might be a long shot but, if anyone can run a 45-second quarter mile, they certainly deserve at least some attention.

Kathy runs out into the hallway to the phone, and calls Braden. Already dressed in his running clothes, Braden is home, anxiously waiting for Kathy's call. Braden picks up the phone, and Kathy tells him, "you're on!" Braden replies, "I'm out the door." Hanging up the phone, Braden heads to the University. Before she reenters the arena, Kathy throws her hand into the air and exclaims, "yes!"

Kathy walks into the arena and tells Coach Herndon, "he's on his way." Coach Herndon replies, "good. You guys are up next. Show me something good out there today." Apparently, Coach Herndon is not happy with some of the performances she's seen in the last two days. It could be perhaps that Eddie, Mark, and Mitchell outshine the University's team.

Kathy, and her mile medley relay team, get on the track. Paula, the lead-off runner, has the baton. The buzzer sounds, and Paula leaves the blocks. Kathy gets on the track, and knows she must deliver a good performance. Paula hands off to Kathy, which goes seamlessly. Genise gets on the track, and awaits Kathy's arrival. Kathy delivers the baton perfectly to Genise, who begins her 440-yard leg. After Genise's first lap, Barbara, who is up next, gets on the track. Genise hands off to Barbara, which also goes well. Barbara, running the 880-yard leg, delivers a performance far better than expected after seeing Mitchell's one-mile run yesterday. Barbara crosses the finish line, with the mile medley relay team delivering a great performance, both in time and handoff skill.

While the other heats are in progress, Kathy occasionally glances toward the door to the arena, anxiously waiting for Braden's arrival. She finally sees Braden enter the arena, exactly eighteen minutes after their phone call.

Walking in, all dressed and ready to run, Braden energetically exclaims, "I'm here for the ass kicking! Whose ass am I kicking today? I'm all fired up! Let's get this show on the road!" Kathy smiles and runs over to greet Braden. Kathy is very glad to see Braden's highly energetic entrance. But, anyone who knows Braden wouldn't expect anything less.

Eddie, Mark, Johnson, and Mitchell all stand up and move quickly toward Braden, wondering what just happened. They exchange fist bumps, high-fives, "yo bros", and hugs. As the guys are having a brief reunion, Kathy walks over to Coach Herndon, telling her, "that's Braden." Coach Herndon replies, "somehow, I've guessed." Kathy tells Coach

Herndon, “and, that’s the relay team that won State last year, and have been running together for seven years.”

Coach Herndon goes over to talk to Dr. Braun. Dr. Braun, who was given the heads up that Braden was on his way, blows his whistle. Dr. Braun announces, “Leggett, McCutchen, McCutchen, and Stone, get on the track. You are running a 4 by 440 relay. Warm up, and take lane two.” Kathy, in the meantime, takes a seat on the bleachers, grinning ear to ear, with a few tears of happiness flowing down her cheeks.

Dr. Braun asks Braden, “am I right in assuming you’re Braden?” Braden replies in a military tone, “that’s correct! Sir! Axel Braden, the one and only ass kicker in chief, reporting for duty! Sir!” Dr. Braun, giving the star relay team as much latitude as they want, tells Eddie, Mark, Braden, and Johnson, “okay, you’re running a 4 by 440! Warm up, and get out there and show me what you can do! Run in any order you want, and take lane one.” This relay team, who has been together for seven years, can run in any order without affecting performance. They know each other well.

As everyone is warming up, Coach Herndon walks over to Dr. Braun, telling him, “I like this Braden guy already.” And, she should. Braden entered the arena with great confidence and no fear, displaying his charisma to all around. And, Coach Herndon certainly recognized that Braden spoke to the coaches as if they are commanding officers in the military. Compared with what she’s had to work with before, Braden seems to be a welcome relief. Dr. Braun replies to Coach Herndon, “well, let’s see what these guys can deliver.”

Taking the baton, and heading to the starting line, the undefeated Northside High School 4 by 440 relay team is reunited, fired up, and ready to go. It is decided that Mark will lead off since Todd McCutchen is holding the competition’s baton. The Starter announces, “on your marks,” words that Braden has not heard in six months. The Starter announces, “set.” The buzzer sounds, and Mark is out to kick McCutchen’s ass.

Eddie quickly realizes that Mark is not playing games. Mark clearly has something to prove. Halfway through Mark’s leg, Coach Herndon tells Dr. Braun, “he just ran a 22 split!” Dr. Braun replies, “good. It seems that I’m really getting my money’s worth with these guys. It’s about time we got what we paid for.” Mark hands off to Johnson, who is long gone before Stone receives his baton from McCutchen.

The Timekeeper who had the watch on Mark tells Dr. Braun and Coach Herndon, “he just ran a 46.3 quarter mile!” Coach Herndon asks the other Timekeeper, “what did McCutchen run?” The Timekeeper replies, “he ran it in 64.8 seconds. Not exactly his best.” Meanwhile, back on the track,

Johnson is taking care of Stone, widening the lead. After Johnson's first lap, Eddie gets on the track. Johnson approaches the transition zone, and Eddie takes off, demonstrating yet another seamless handoff.

During Eddie's first lap, Braden exclaims, "we're kicking ass! This is the best ass kicking I've seen in a long time!" The coaching staff is quite surprised at Braden's unusual style of enthusiasm, which is something they've not experienced before. The tribe, hearing Braden, is even more fired up. Eddie completes his first lap, and Braden yells out, "go, go, go," and gets on the track. By Braden's appearance on the track, it's easy to come to the conclusion that he's done this a few times before. Eddie comes around the curve, and all eyes are now on Braden. Braden takes the baton, and the ass kicking is once again in high gear.

Braden takes off, delivering exactly what he promised. Although the race has already been won, Braden is out to break some sort of record. On his second lap, Braden has everyone convinced that he is not messing around. Off the track, Kathy is standing up, in front of the bleachers, jumping up and down as if she is trying to help Braden run. Approaching the finish line, Braden crosses right before Leggett receives his baton. Cheers ensue from the tribe, with everyone knowing exactly what just happened. Braden knows he just kicked ass, and kicked it hard. Now, Braden must wait around to find out just how badly he kicked ass.

Everyone waits while the times are compiled by the Timekeepers. Kathy, who has seen her share of races, knows the tribe's individual times and the composite time are both awesome. Kathy sits back on the bleachers, trying to hide her tears of happiness.

After walking off his run, Braden walks up to the rest of the relay team, exclaiming, "the chief ass kicker is back! Back on the track! That was the best ass kicking in a long time!" Not too many people know what to make of Braden, except for, perhaps, Todd McCutchen. McCutchen thought he had seen the last of Braden after high school. For some reason, McCutchen is not exactly too fond of now having to work with Braden, Mark, Johnson, or Eddie.

The Timekeepers hand the performance statistics to Coach Herndon. Coach Herndon blows her whistle, basically saying that she wants everyone to hear the statistics. The room falls silent, as Coach Herndon announces, "the composite time of the winning team was 3:03.6. That would be an average of 45.9 seconds per leg. The approximate individual times are Mark Svoboda, 46.3 seconds. Eric Johnson, 46.6 seconds. Edward Bogenskaya, 45.4 seconds. And, Axel Braden, 45.3 seconds. Great job, guys!"

Kathy, joined by Paula, gets off the bleachers and runs over, giving the relay team high-fives. Braden exclaims, "that was a mighty good ass kicking! I haven't felt this good in a while! Who's next? I ain't done yet! I'm only getting warmed up!" Barbara walks over, telling Braden, "I can't even begin to tell you how much I've missed you. I'm so glad you're back!" Braden replies, "I'm glad to be back!"

Coach Herndon announces, "and, for the second place team, the composite time is four minutes and twelve seconds. Darryl Stone, you ran a 52.5. Leggett. Never mind. I will spare the rest of you the embarrassment of announcing your times." A four minute and twelve second composite time for a 4 by 440 relay race is quite pathetic for this level of competition. Mitchell or Stone could have beaten the relay team running solo.

Coach Herndon tells Dr. Braun, "forget about Kathy's internship. She should be the team recruiter." Dr. Braun replies, "that's a good point. But, we'll keep them as interns, and add being a talent scout to their job description. They're always where the high school action is anyway." Coach Herndon comments, "I really don't know where Kathy comes up with all these athletes."

Dr. Braun now has an interesting problem. Braden is just as qualified as Eddie and Mark. Mitchell is faster than Stone. And, Bobby B. is a sure bet to take first place in every meet. The problem is, as of today, Bobby B., Mitchell, and Braden have not even applied to the University.

As the practice continues, Dr. Braun calls Braden, Mitchell, and Bobby B. aside. Dr. Braun tells them, "Kathy told me that you guys were good but, to be quite honest, I never expected this level of performance. So, what I'd like to do, if any of you are open to it, is set up a short meeting to discuss running for the school. As you might already know, many of our athletes are offered full scholarships, and receive other benefits as well." Mitchell, who has had enough of traveling for the last few months, is the first among the group to accept Dr. Braun's offer. Bobby B. and Braden quickly follow suit, finally glad to see all the work they have put in for many years is appreciated. Dr. Braun, inviting them to attend practice tomorrow morning, sets a time after practice when they will discuss any potential offers.

Once the meeting with Dr. Braun is over, Braden, Mitchell, and Bobby B. all meet in the hallway outside of the arena, and talk for a while. Braden asks, "do you guys think they'll let us be on the team?" Mitchell replies, "I don't see how they can't. We're all better than their best guys. And, honestly, Johnson is the best guy they have right now." Bobby B. adds, "their best shot-put guys can throw around 55 feet. I can beat them both." Braden then mentions, "we were really lucky to have Mr. Frazier

and Mr. Zunde as our coaches. I don't know if I'd be here right now if it wasn't for them." Everyone agrees that Mr. Frazier and Mr. Zunde prepared them well for higher level competition.

Dr. Braun walks over to Kathy, telling her, "may I see you for a moment." Kathy and Dr. Braun walk over to a corner of the arena, where Dr. Braun asks her, "where did Braden suddenly come from?" Kathy replies, "we found out that he just graduated from the police academy, and he got back in town Monday night." Dr. Braun asks, "so, he's qualified to be a policeman?" Kathy replies, "I guess so." Dr. Braun is happy to hear that, since the University offers a degree in Criminal Justice.

Dr. Braun then asks, "is there anyone else with this level of talent that you know of?" Kathy, who is always full of energy after she runs, replies, "not immediately. But, Hoffer, at Northside, is graduating this year. He can run the 100 in the mid to upper nine-second range and the 440 in the lower 50-second range. And Erika, she's also at Northside, and can run the 440 in about 55 seconds. So can Tessa, but she wants a swimming scholarship. Good luck getting her. Oh, and Erika is really good at the shot-put too. And, there's a guy, Mikhail Sokolov, who runs for Liberty. He's a sprinter and is the number one seed in the State, but Eddie's brother, John, is going to beat him sometime this year. Oh yeah! I almost forgot! And, there's Akinmola. He's the number one seeded miler in the State, and he's a senior this year. Last year, he always finished right behind Mitchell." Dr. Braun asks, "how do you know all this?" Kathy tells him, "I was the Northside team statistician. Well, I guess I still am the team statistician."

Kathy, now having Dr. Braun's full attention, asks, "how does Northside manage to produce such exceptional talent?" Kathy explains, "well, the middle school coach, Mr. Harris sends up some really good athletes up to the high school. Mr. Harris uses the same training protocols as Mr. Frazier. They work together and talk about training a lot. Mr. Harris like never loses a meet. All of the other middle schools are always afraid of his team. And, when they get into high school, Mr. Frazier takes them, and develops their talent with Mr. Zunde."

Dr. Braun, knowing Mr. Zunde from the past, asks, "what exactly does Dr. Zunde do?" Kathy replies, "he mostly keeps Mr. Crum out of the way. But, he works with the field athletes, along with Miss Amherst. And, Mr. Zunde works with the football players and the wrestlers in the weight room."

Dr. Braun asks, "who is Miss Amherst?" Kathy replies, "she's the physics teacher, but she also teaches math. Actually, it's Dr. Amherst. She has a Ph.D. in mathematics. I think she's some sort of genius or something. She takes the field athletes out to the field with Mr. Zunde,

and they throw the shot-put and the other field implements. Miss Amherst takes pictures, and records the distance at different release angles. Then, she goes through a lot of calculus and differential equations, and finds out the individual optimal release angles. That's how Eddie and Bobby B. broke the State records last year." Dr. Braun tells Kathy, "it sounds like they have a real high-tech organization going on there." Kathy replies, "oh yeah! They do!"

A bit puzzled, Dr. Braun asks Kathy, "what field record did Eddie break?" Kathy replies, "the discus. He threw a little over 222 feet." Dr. Braun asks, "with the 1.6 kilogram discus?" Kathy replies, "no, with the mother lode. The two kilogram." Dr. Braun mentions, "Eddie never mentioned anything about the discus." Kathy puts her hand over her mouth, and replies, "oops." Dr. Braun asks, "what?" Kathy informs him, "neither did I. When I was a senior, I threw the discus around 150 feet."

Learning a lot, Dr. Braun asks Kathy, "let me just throw this out. Is there anything else I should know?" Kathy giggles, and replies, "yeah. Eddie says Leggett needs new running shoes. He can explain why better than me. Oh, and you should get Eddie to make a few of his training sleds for the team. He made one for John, Tessa, and Erika. They said it helped them a lot." Dr. Braun asks, "what is this training sled?" Kathy replies, "it's a resistance sled, and it's probably in his trunk right now. He uses it to train." Dr. Braun replies, "whatever it is, I'd like to see it sometime." With practice now over, Dr. Braun then tells Kathy, "well, I've certainly learned quite a lot in the last two hours. I am very encouraged. Thank you very much."

After practice, Eddie has to head to work. Mark and Bobby B. head over to work on Mark's house. Mitchell and Braden head home, wondering what the meeting tomorrow after practice will bring. Kathy, Paula, Barbara, and Johnson head to class. And, Dr. Braun has a lot of talking to do with administrators, trying to convince them to come up with a lot more money for the very expensive red carpet he plans to install for Braden, Mitchell, and Bobby B.

Later that night, Kathy comes home after working with the high school team. When she walks through the door, Eddie already has dinner waiting for her. They sit down to eat, and it doesn't take Eddie long to mention, "so, that was really kind of interesting how Braden just happened to show up today." Kathy replies, "yeah, that really was. I'm glad he's back." Eddie comments, "yeah, me too. It seems like he was all ready to run." Kathy agrees, telling Eddie, "yeah, he was. And, he ran pretty good too, don't you think? He ran a whole lot better than Leggett did." Eddie mentions, "I wonder how he knew exactly when to show up." Kathy replies, "I kind of called him." Repeating what Kathy said, Eddie laughs, and says, "you kind of called him."

Eddie laughs, and finally asks, “okay, Katarina Karakova, what were you up to today?” Kathy asks, “what makes you think I was up to something? And, by the way, it’s Katarina Bogenskaya now.” Eddie replies, “maybe it has something to do with you working really hard to get Bobby B. and Mitchell to try out for the team. I’d have to wonder why you would leave Braden out.” Kathy explains, “well, he came back. We couldn’t leave Braden out, can we? And besides, I did it for you.”

Eddie asks, “you did it for me? How is that?” Kathy replies, “well, if Braden wasn’t around, you’ll be handing off to lug nut and McCrutchen. You saw how well that went. And, if you’re handing off to McCrutchen, you’d better learn how to lose a race. Oh, and besides, someone is going to have to shove the baton up McCrutchen’s ass, and Braden is really good at that. That McCrutchen guy sucks big time. Paula really doesn’t like him.” Eddie agrees, telling Kathy, “well, you do have a point. But, Mark can probably shove the baton up McCrutchen’s ass just as well as Braden can.”

Kathy tells Eddie, “by the way, Dr. Braun is going to want to see your training sled tomorrow.” Eddie tells Kathy, “the next thing you’re going to tell me is that he wants me to build one for the team.” Kathy replies, “he might.” Eddie comments, “hmm. The price just went way up.” Kathy explains, “if you build a few, that would be a whole lot of class credit.” Eddie begins to think, and tells Kathy, “oh, so that’s how all this works. They’ll grade my welding job, as if they would even know what they’re looking at. Then, I get an A in Training Sled Engineering 101.” Kathy replies, “yeah. See there! That’s exactly how it works.”

Eddie thinks a little more, and tells Kathy, “you know, I’ll have to make a special training sled just for McCrutchen. It will have a pivoting device on the bottom, constantly changing the resistance. It would be really good at causing muscle strains.” Kathy replies, “you’re so bad. And besides, he doesn’t need any help. His performance got a lot worse the day that Mark showed up.” Eddie replies, “he never had much performance to begin with.”

Kathy then informs Eddie, “you know, McCrutchen could get the gold medal for the most erratic performances over a track career.” Eddie agrees, and explains, “all throughout high school, that guy ran horrible times against our school. But, what I can’t figure out is, how did his 4 by 440 relay team always make it to State? I mean, the guy is all over the board.” Kathy informs Eddie, “his brother is the same way. He runs really erratic times as well.” Eddie mentions, “well, now that Mark is around, he may not be quite as erratic. He’ll just suck all the time.” Kathy laughs, and replies, “you’re right about that.”

Kathy and Eddie clean up after dinner. Kathy then puts on her song, *The Power of Love*, and they dance to the music. While they are dancing, Kathy whispers to Eddie, “now, I can listen to my song whenever I want to.” Eddie whispers back, “and, we can take the long way home whenever we want too.” Kathy whispers, “we haven’t taken the long way home in a while.” Eddie replies, “that’s because we haven’t been staying out late a lot.” Kathy tells Eddie, “that’s because we go to bed early a lot now.” Kathy’s song ends, and Kathy and Eddie go to bed early tonight.

The next day, practice is again at 7:00 a.m. The usual announcements are made, followed by the sprinters working with Coach Herndon, the distance team working with Dr. Paxton, and the field athletes working with Dr. Bonamo.

Heading to the sprinting track with the sprinters, Eddie is intercepted by Dr. Braun, who asks him, “yesterday, Kathy mentioned something about a training sled that you designed and built. Can you tell me what that is?” Eddie replies, “yeah. It’s a resistance sled. It’s in my trunk. Do you want to see it?” Dr. Braun replies, “sure, if it’s not too much trouble.”

Eddie puts on his warm-up suit, since it’s cold outside. Dr. Braun and Eddie head outside, and Eddie gets his resistance sled out of the trunk of his car, along with a 25-pound weight plate. They head over to the sand track, where Eddie loads the sled with the 25-pound weight plate. Eddie then demonstrates his resistance sled, running 100 yards to the mid point of the sand track and back. Dr. Braun puts on the harness, and gives it a try. Dr. Braun then sprints 100 yards to the midpoint of the track and back. Eddie watches, wondering if his invention has any worth or recognition with the experts.

Dr. Braun returns, and exclaims, “this thing is awesome!” Eddie, to say the least, is relieved to hear that. Eddie’s deficiencies were often made evident by Mr. Crum. Should Eddie have brought the resistance sled to the high school, Mr. Crum would have likely accused him of making it in the school shop, and attempt to suspend him. Dr. Braun’s reaction is a welcome departure from the childish behavior of Mr. Crum.

Dr. Braun asks Eddie, “how did you come up with this?” Eddie explains, “I tried running on hills to get faster, but it seemed to work my quads more. And, running on hills is not the same as running on the track. So, I was at the beach one day, running, and it was very windy, like when there’s a big storm over the ocean. Running in the sand and into the wind gave me a really good workout. That’s when I thought of the sled. I use the same muscles as I do when I’m sprinting, but I’m going against a lot of resistance. And, you can’t exactly duplicate the resistance in the gym.”

Dr. Braun quickly realizes that Eddie is no idiot. Dr. Braun, who is an avid runner himself, can clearly see how Eddie's resistance sled can improve an athlete's performance on the track. And, with Eddie running a 9.2-second 100-yard dash, his training methods are not really up for too much discussion.

Dr. Braun asks Eddie, "how many of these have you built?" Eddie replies, "four. This one, and I made one for Tessa, one for Erika, and one for my brother, John. They got the newest model." Dr. Braun asks, "the newest model? How is the newer model different." Eddie replies, "yeah. I've been improving it since the Summer of my junior year." Showing Dr. Braun the improvements, Eddie explains, "I added these longitudinal members, which are on an angle. They help make the sled go straighter. And, I added these parts to dig a little deeper into the sand. The original ones weren't long enough. And, I moved the weight stack to the back of the sled. It used to be in the middle. And, when I finally got it the way I wanted it, I welded it together."

Dr. Braun asks Eddie, "do you mind if some of the other runners try this out?" Eddie replies, "no. Not at all." Dr. Braun tells Eddie, "I'll be right back," as he heads into the arena to round up a few runners to try Eddie's invention. While Dr. Braun is away, Eddie wonders how his training sled will be viewed by the other runners. Eddie then quickly realizes that he doesn't care. Eddie is the fastest guy around, and he got there by his own training methods, not by following someone else's training protocols.

Dr. Braun returns with a group of runners in their warm-up suits. Eddie is glad to see Kathy, Mark, and Paula among them. Dr. Braun asks Eddie to explain to the group what he explained to him earlier, specifically about how he developed the training sled, which Eddie is glad to do.

After Eddie's explanation and brief demonstration, Dr. Braun asks, "okay, we're all going to try this out. Who's first?" With McCutchen among the group, Mark, who has used the sled many times in the past, volunteers to go first. Mark fully intends to intimidate McCutchen one way or another.

Mark puts the harness on, and sprints 220 yards to the end of the sand track. Turning around, he then sprints 220 yards back to the starting line. Sprint, however, is not quite the word for it. In dragging the sled, a runner is nowhere near their top speed. When he returns, Mark comments to Eddie, "you changed it. It's a lot harder now." Eddie replies, "I improved it when I got it back from Erika. She mentioned that it was getting too easy." Kathy goes next, followed by Paula, Braden, and then Johnson. Running 440 yards and dragging the training sled seems to be a decent workout for everyone who tries.

McCutchen is next in line after Johnson. Mark, standing alongside of Eddie, whispers, “this is going to be interesting.” Eddie replies, “yeah. And, I’m going to have to disinfect it when he’s done with it.” Correcting Eddie, Paula whispers to Eddie and Mark, “forget disinfecting it. You’ll need an exorcist.”

McCutchen puts the harness on, and attempts to sprint to the end of the track, slowing his already slow pace as he runs. McCutchen tries to make it to the end of the track, but he runs out of juice. Braden, stating the obvious, comments, “it looks like his puny little ass gave out.” Mark replies, “not only his ass. The rest of him too.”

Braden runs to where McCutchen stalled out, puts on the harness, and returns the sled to the starting line. Braden then runs to the end of the track and back again. Mark whispers to Eddie, “watching this kind of shit makes it worth being on the team.” McCutchen, walking back to the starting line, now gains a bit of understanding why his ass has been kicked on the track for the last seven years.

Leggett takes a turn, and does a little better than McCutchen. He is at least able to get the sled to the end of the track and back to the starting line, albeit quite slowly. McCutchen’s older brother, Scott, gives it a try. Like his younger brother, Scott is not able to get the sled back to the starting line. A few more runners give it a try, many amazed at how difficult it is to drag the sled.

Last to go is the distance man, Darryl Stone. Stone runs to the end of the track, and back. When he returns, Stone quickly asks, “where can I get one of these?” Eddie replies, “I’d have to build one for you.” The team’s star distance runner is also very good at the half mile and 440-yard dash. He can clearly see how the training sled can improve his sprints.

Once everyone has had a few runs, Eddie and Kathy put the sled back in Eddie’s trunk, as everyone else heads inside. Eddie asks Kathy, “I wonder what everyone thought.” Kathy replies, “it seems like everyone likes it, except for McCutchen. But, he doesn’t matter.” Eddie tells Kathy, “before you guys came out, Dr. Braun tried it, and he seemed to like it.” Kathy replies, “good. He’s probably going to ask you to make a few for the team.” Eddie and Kathy rejoin the group, and head inside.

Dr. Braun asks the runners who have tried the sled to have a seat on the bleachers. Dr. Braun asks for everyone’s feedback. The reception to Eddie’s invention was overwhelmingly positive. Stone suggests, “I think it’s really great. I think it would be better, though, if there was a way to modify the resistance.” Eddie informs Stone, “there is. That’s what the weight plates are for. We had 25 pounds on it out there. I usually work

out with 50 or 75 pounds. I begin stripping the weight when it starts getting too hard.” Stone gives Eddie a thumbs up, indicating his approval.

When asked for his feedback, McCutchen offers a differing opinion, stating, “I really don’t think it will help with my training. I don’t think it’s worth too much.” Braden, offering his opinion of McCutchen’s comment, interjects, “what ain’t worth much is you. We kicked your team’s ass for seven years. You can probably still see my footprint on your ass from all the ass kickings you got.”

Dr. Braun, who was quite impressed with Braden’s performance yesterday, lets Braden’s comment fly. After all, Braden demonstrated he can run a quarter mile in 45.3 seconds. McCutchen takes 64.6 seconds to cover the same distance. Also, fresh in Dr. Braun’s mind from yesterday is how Eddie, Mark, Johnson, and Braden finished the 4 by 440 relay before the anchorman of the opposing team received his baton.

Dr. Braun then instructs everyone to join the practice session, which is in progress. The events out on the sand track are the first inklings that Dr. Braun received that their might be just a bit of a rivalry between some of the runners. Coach Herndon picked up on the contention a little earlier. But, sometimes rivalries are good. It stirs up internal competition, such as that between Eddie and Mark, Kathy and Paula, Hoffer and John, and Erika and Tessa. And, better internal competition leads to better external competition.

Back on the track, Dr. Braun wants Braden timed in the 440-yard dash. Yesterday’s time of 45.3 seconds was during a relay, which is not quite indicative of true performance. He asks Coach Herndon to arrange the race before everyone leaves, preferably at the end of the training session. Dr. Braun has Eddie, Mark, Johnson, Braden, Leggett, and Todd McCutchen rest on the bleachers for a while before the 440-yard dash time trials.

Practice comes to an early end, when Dr. Braun has the team take a seat on the bleachers. Coach Herndon announces, “before we leave, there will be one more time trial, which will be a 440-yard dash. Braden, take lane one. Bogenskaya, lane two. Svoboda, lane three. Johnson, lane four. Leggett, lane five. Todd McCutchen, lane six.” The athletes head to the blocks, knowing that, once again, they are under the microscope.

At the blocks, Braden looks over at McCutchen and exclaims, “see, junior? I kick your ass free of charge! And, you assholes thought we get paid! Let’s get this ass kicking started!” Dr. Braun is now certain that there is something going on behind the scenes between the velocity-challenged McCutchen and Braden, the professional ass kicker. And, Dr. Braun is quite amused by Braden’s enthusiasm. But, with Braden’s

performance thus far, Dr. Braun does not seem to care that Braden antagonizes McCutchen.

On the bench, Kathy tells Paula, “wow! Listen to Braden! And, we thought he’d have to change his tactics if he was going to run in college.” Paula replies, “he ain’t changing, girl. And, neither is Mark.”

As the runners are getting into the blocks, Coach Herndon, referring to Braden, tells Dr. Braun, “you know, I really like that guy, even more now than I did yesterday.” Dr. Braun replies, “so do I. Hopefully we can sign him.”

The Starter announces, “on your marks,” followed by, “set.” The buzzer sounds, and Braden’s free of charge ass kicking is underway. Eddie, however, is not about to let Braden steal the entire show. Neither is Mark. Halfway through the race, two groups have clearly formed. It appears that Braden has a slight lead, with Eddie, Mark, and Johnson right up there with him. Leggett and McCutchen trail, losing ground as the race progresses. During the second lap, the tribe fights it out, leaving McCutchen and Leggett in the dust. Coming out of the final turn, Braden is clearly in the lead. Braden crosses the finish line first, quickly followed by Eddie, then Mark and Johnson. Far behind, taking fifth place is Leggett. And, as Braden predicted, McCutchen, finishing in last place, got his ass kicked free of charge.

After the times are compiled, Coach Herndon announces, “Todd McCutchen, 64.3 long and drawn out seconds. Steve Leggett, 57.5 seconds. Eric Johnson, 45.9 seconds. Mark Svoboda, 45.5 seconds. Edward Bogenskaya, 45.4 seconds. And, Axel Braden, 45.3 seconds.”

After hearing his time, Braden exclaims, “look at that! I’m even kicking my own ass now! Ain’t nobody beating me in my race!” Braden then looks over at McCutchen, telling him, “and, it looks like everyone’s kicking your ass, junior! Maybe you should get your ass in gear! You’re stuck in neutral!” Eddie, the mechanic, yells back at Braden, “his gears are stripped.”

While Braden’s time of 45.3 seconds is the same time that he ran yesterday during the 4 by 440 relay race, today’s race was from a standing start. During a relay race, the clock starts on an individual leg when the runner receives the baton and stops when he or she delivers the baton. Yesterday, as the anchorman, Braden had the benefit of being at nearly his top speed when he received the baton. So, today’s time of 45.3 seconds in the 440-yard dash is actually a significant improvement over yesterday’s performance.

As Braden goes on ranting, Coach Herndon whispers to Dr. Braun, "Johnson is running a lot faster since these guys showed up." Dr. Braun replies, "I can see that. I can't wait to talk with these guys after practice." On the flip side, McCutchen's performance has gone down the toilet since Mark has arrived. Quite impressed with Braden's performance, Coach Herndon tells Dr. Braun, "we've got to see if we can sign this Braden guy somehow." Dr. Braun agrees, replying, "hopefully, we can sign them all." Dr. Braun, who will meet with Braden in a while, suspects the meeting will be quite interesting.

After practice, as they are heading to the locker rooms, Kathy tells Eddie, "see that? Look how energetic everyone is!" Eddie replies, "yeah, I can see that. Braden really gets people fired up." Mark comments, "except for McCutchen. Braden is more like a fire extinguisher to McCutchen." Paula laughs, and exclaims, "you got that right!" Mark is right. Somehow the presence of Braden, and the rest of the tribe, most notably Mark, has always dampened McCutchen's performance. Braden's rants, however, often crush the opponent's confidence before the race even begins. Perhaps McCutchen still sees himself as the opposition.

Braden catches up with Eddie and Kathy, and informs them, "I got a meeting with someone in an hour. I wonder what that's going to be about." Kathy tells Braden, "so does Mitchell and Bobby B. They're going to try to figure out a way for you guys to run for the University." Braden replies, "I'd really like to run track again. I hope they think I'm good enough." Kathy tells Braden, "trust me. There's no problem in that department."

Two seconds off the world record in the 440-yard dash is definitely good enough to make the team. Braden knows he's good enough for the team. His question was whether he is good enough academically. After all, this is college. Braden's understanding is that only straight-A students go to college, and he had a high-B average in high school. Everyone heads to the locker room, wondering what will become of the last three days of workouts. The tribe decides to get pizza tomorrow at lunch to share any news.

With Braden, Mitchell, and Bobby B. suddenly appearing on the scene, Dr. Braun has a lot of work to do convincing the administration to sign the new guys. The problem is that the University has already given quite a few full track scholarships in the past two years. Barbara, Genise, Stone, Kathy, Paula, and now Eddie and Mark are among those on full scholarship. While full scholarships are commonplace in some sports, such as football, in track and field they are quite rare and are only granted to those with exceptional talent. Fortunately, for Dr. Braun, he has Dr. Karakova in his corner.

Later that day, at the high school, while Kathy and Paula are working with the sprinters, Kathy mentions to Paula, “you know, I can’t wait until lunch tomorrow. I really hope there’s good news.” Paula reassures Kathy, telling her, “there will be. Just like you mentioned a few times when Mark and Eddie had their meeting, they don’t call you in for an interview to show you the door.” Kathy replies, “yeah, you’re right. They’re going to offer them all a package. They have to.” Kathy can’t wait to hear the news. She really wants the tribe back together again, and has been doing her best to make that happen. All she can do now is to sit and wait.

The next day, the tribe meets for pizza. Kathy cannot wait to hear whether Braden, Mitchell, and Bobby B. have received an offer to join the team. Kathy and Eddie sit in the parking lot, waiting for Mark and Paula, who are picking up Braden and Mitchell. Ten long minutes go by. Kathy sighs, and says, “finally,” as Paula drives up with Mark, Braden, and Mitchell. Eddie replies, “it hasn’t been that long. McCrutchen could have run a quarter mile in the time we were waiting.” Kathy laughs, but now wants to hear the news.

Once they are together, Kathy asks, “well, well? Are you guys on the team?” Paula answers, “they won’t say anything until everyone is together. You ain’t getting anything out of them. Trust me. I’ve already tried.” Kathy can tell that it’s good news, purely by the smile on Braden’s face.

Johnson and Barbara arrive next. While everyone is waiting, they catch up on what they’ve been up to during the last six months. During mid conversation, Eddie comments, “here comes Bobby B.” Kathy, not seeing any sign of the shot doc, asks, “where?” Eddie replies, “I hear his engine.” In a moment, the shot doc rolls up on his BSA motorcycle, with Erika on the back. They all head inside, and find a table.

Joe, not having seen Braden and Mitchell for a while, comes over to the table to say hello. Joe talks with everyone for a few minutes, so Kathy has to suffer through another delay in finding out the news. Joe is particularly glad to hear that Braden is back in town. During the conversation, Joe takes everyone’s order, then heads back behind the counter to begin making pizza.

Kathy asks, “well, well? How did the meetings go?” Braden tells everyone, “I’m gonna go first. They gave me a really good deal! They gave me a job as a campus police officer! And, I can start right now! I wasn’t really expecting that!” Kathy asks, “but, are you on the team?” Braden replies, “oh yeah! And, they gave me a full scholarship too! And, they said I can get a degree in Criminal Justice. And, my work on the force will count as class credit.” So, Braden will receive class credit for

keeping fraternity and sorority parties under control. Braden receives high-fives and fist bumps from the tribe.

Eddie asks, “what made you decide to go to the police academy anyway?” Braden explains, “when all that shit went down last year when Chuckie threw the javelin at you, that Goldshit guy tried to run away. The officer chased him, but Goldshit was faster. So I chased down Goldshit, and handed him over to the officer. That was a good feeling, handing that asshole over to the officer! Since then, it’s been in the back of my mind.” Officer Hayes probably could have caught Goldstein, but the officer was weighed down with about twenty pounds of equipment strapped to his body, and a belt that severely restricts movement.

Kathy, wanting to get all the news on the table, asks, “who’s next?” Bobby B. looks at Mitchell, and says, “me, I guess. They want me on the team too! But, we still have to figure some things out.” Kathy asks, “like what?” Bobby B. explains, “I still want to work with Mark if I can because the money is good.” Erika mentions, “good, because I can be an expensive date.” That would be the primary reason why Bobby B. wants to continue working. He does not want to lose his good income to just throw the shot-put. And, going to class was not exactly high on Bobby B’s. list of things to do.

Bobby B. continues, “they said Mark is getting a degree in Construction Management, so I was thinking of the same thing.” Eddie replies, “that is so awesome, bro!” Kathy asks, “did they give you a scholarship?” Bobby B. replies, “yeah. They said they’ll pay for everything.” Since Erika is present, Mark asks Bobby B., “so, do you have to inspect the shot-put and keep it clean, or do they have someone to do that for you?” Not wanting to go there, Bobby B. replies, “we didn’t really talk about that.” And, the coaches probably won’t talk about that at the University, but you can be sure that Eddie and Mark will bring it up again at some point in the future.

Moving along, not wanting to hear anything about keeping a shot-put clean right now, Kathy tells Mitchell, “it looks like you’re next! Spill the beans.” Mitchell replies, “they gave me a full scholarship, and I’m getting a degree in communications. I figure I can use it if I ever organize races again. It sounds like a great deal.” Kathy exclaims, “awesome!” Kathy then asks, “are you going to classes?” Mitchell replies, “yeah. I wanted to go to college when I got out of high school. But, I didn’t want to borrow money and go the student loan route.”

Paula asks Mitchell, “so, no university offered you a scholarship last year?” Mitchell explains, “well, some of the scouts tried to get me to go to their colleges, but they’re not colleges that I really wanted to go to. And, all they offered were partial scholarships. So, I’d have to borrow money.

Borrowing money, and going to a college or university that I didn't really want to go to, didn't seem like a good deal to me." Kathy replies, "you do have a point."

Now all excited, Kathy exclaims, "the team is back together again!" Mitchell replies, "well, almost. They said that we'll be enrolled next year, so that means we won't be running until next year. The problem is something about funding." Braden adds, "yeah. They told me the same thing, but I can start my job immediately." The same holds true for Bobby B. They will all be enrolled in the next academic year.

Kathy throws out the question, "I wonder what the deal is with the funding." Paula mentions, "I suppose there's only so much scholarship money to go around. Maybe your dad would know." Bobby B. comments, "yeah. I bet he'll know. That gives us until next year before we can compete. But, they said we can work out with the team. And, I get to use the University's gym whenever I want." Braden adds, "me too. And, that's exactly where I'm gonna be after work every day. At the gym."

Wondering how everything will fall into place, Kathy mentions, "so, now I'm wondering when Eddie and Mark will actually be on the team. They never really said." Paula comments, "if they all start at the same time, then they'll have everyone for four years. If Mark and Eddie run this year, they'd only have the group together for three years." Kathy replies, "you do have a point, but Johnson is already running. And, Dr. Braun was asking me about the runners in high school. Maybe he'll have his eye on someone else, like maybe Hoffer, John, Davida, or maybe even Sokolov." Apparently Kathy and Paula have learned a lot working as a team assistant to Mr. Frazier for several years.

Eddie mentions, "hopefully, we'll get to start next year. I still have a lot of stuff to do around the house." Mark adds, "yeah, me too. I have to finish building our house." Bobby B. will be helping Mark, so they will both be tied up working for a while. Braden mentions, "I really like the deal I got! I can work for a year and save up some money for a car." Kathy, seeing that everyone is ecstatic, exclaims, "I was hoping this would happen! I'm so glad we're all back together again!"

After lunch, everyone goes their own way for the afternoon. Kathy is very happy to hear that the group is back together again. Best of all, it looks like the 4 by 440 relay team that has been running together for seven years will be back on the track. And, it is especially good to hear that the University's coaches like Braden's energetic personality. McCutchen, however, doesn't, but that's his problem. McCutchen will have a few years of dealing with the tribe on a daily basis, instead of only a few times a year.

The next week, on Saturday, right before the twelve-team divisional track meet begins, Dr. Braun asks Kathy, “what will it take for Eddie to build a few of those resistance sleds for us?” Kathy explains, “I’ll ask him when I get a break. He’s up in the stands watching today, along with Mark, Braden, Mitchell, and Bobby B. I’m sure he can build a few for you. He built one for Erika, Tessa, and John, which didn’t really take too long.” Dr. Braun asks Kathy, “see what it will take. I’d like to get a few for the Spring when we can train outside.”

Dr. Braun then asks Kathy, “so, they all came to watch the meet?” Kathy replies, “yeah. And, they have their stopwatches in hand. They’re checking out the competition.” Dr. Braun tells Kathy, “with their times, they could easily win something here today.” Kathy thinks to herself that Eddie, and the rest of the group, could easily win everything out there today. But, she refrains from saying it.

Eddie, Mark, Braden, Mitchell, and Bobby B. all meet up in the stands, waiting for the meet to begin. Erika and Amber are with them, wanting to see what college level competition is like. They spot Kathy, Paula, and Barbara standing among their teammates. Mark points out, “hey, there’s McCrutchin, standing with that other guy.” Eddie interjects, “yeah, the lug nut.” Mark replies, “yeah, that guy. And, Johnson is nowhere near them.” Eddie catches Kathy and Paula searching the stands, and he gets everyone to wave. Seeing the guys, Kathy and Paula now know where the tribe is seated.

The meet begins with the men’s 40-yard dash. Watching as the 40-yard dash is underway, Mark mentions to everyone, “everything is going to move along really quickly.” Braden asks, “are these guys fast?” Mark replies, “last year, they weren’t as fast as we were.” Braden can’t wait to see the 440-yard dash and the relay races. Eddie times a few of the 40-yard dash heats, realizing that he could have won that event today. So could have Mark or Braden.

After the men are finished with their preliminary heats, the women are up in the 40-yard dash. The women’s 40-yard dash has come to be known as the girl fight. Kathy and Paula are in the first heat today with the other highly seeded runners. Running with them are a few familiar faces from last year. One of the familiar faces is Liz Duncan, who is now a senior.

Seeing Liz, and a few other runners from last year, Kathy mentions, “wow! I’m so excited! We’re all running together again.” Liz, who thinks Kathy’s gold medal in this event last year should have been hers, replies, “you’re going down this year, bitch.” Kathy giggles, looks at Paula, and tells her, “oh, how sweet! It looks like we’re running against the ice princess!” Paula replies, “good. The heat coming from my sneakers will melt her fat ass.” Paula sounds as if she has been taking lessons from

Mark. Paula's comment did not sit well with Liz, who is in the lane next to Paula.

The Starter announces, "on your marks." All the women get into the blocks and, for some reason, some of them are looking at their opponents rather than focusing on the race. The Starter announces, "set," and the runners get in the "set" position. Paula whispers, "melt," under her breath, causing Liz to look toward Paula. The buzzer sounds, and Kathy and Paula both let out a primal scream as they leave the blocks. A few yards out of the blocks, Kathy and Paula have a distinct advantage over Liz, and lead the pack. Kathy crosses the finish line first, with Paula finishing right behind her. The rest of the pack finishes in a bunched-up group. Determining third and fourth place will take some time to be determined by the officials, who will have to resort to photographs.

Kathy and Paula know they have made the final. Liz, however, is not so sure whether she has qualified. Finishing in the middle of the pack, Liz looks over at Kathy and Paula, giving them both the evil eye. Kathy tells Paula, "it looks like the ice princess is turning into boiling water." Paula, glancing at Liz, replies, "I can see that. She's really ticked off. I wonder why." Until Kathy and Paula arrived on the scene, Liz was the fastest female athlete in the division. Liz does not like the fact that her title has been usurped. Kathy and Paula walk back to their team bench, and await the final.

After a few more events, the call is made for the men's 440-yard dash. This is the event that Braden has been waiting for. The first heat, which brings with it the better runners, is lined up, and ready to go. Braden is also ready, sitting at the edge of his seat with his finger on his stopwatch. The buzzer sounds and, from a distance, the runners appear to be running slower than they actually are. As the first runner approaches the halfway point, Eddie comments, "that was a 25-second split," which would translate, at best, to be a 50-second quarter mile. Hearing what Eddie just said, Braden is exhilarated, knowing that he would be winning this race if he were on the track. As the first runner crosses the finish line, Braden clicks his stopwatch, exclaiming, "52 seconds! I beat that when I was a junior in high school! I could have kicked his ass!" Braden was, in fact, a junior in high school when he first broke 50 seconds in the quarter mile.

The third heat brings with it a few familiar faces. Eddie announces, "hey! Our man is in this heat." Johnson, who is a freshman and therefore an unseeded runner, is running in this heat. Eddie then tells Mark, "McCutchen and the lug nut are also on the track." Mark replies, "I'm going to clock McCutchen." Eddie asks, "where's your calendar?" Braden tells everyone, "I'll clock Johnson. I'm gonna see what Johnson can do."

Eddie then announces, "I'll clock the lug nut. Wake me up when he gets near the finish line."

The buzzer sounds, again accompanied by the sound of a half dozen stopwatches starting. Johnson takes the lead, with no one remotely close to him. Leggett appears to be in the middle of the pack, as McCutchen loses ground as the race progresses. Halfway through the race, Braden announces, "Johnson clocked a 23 split! He's kicking ass!" Eddie announces, "I clocked lug nut at a 28-second split." A few seconds later, Mark announces, "McCrutchen's not even going to break 60." Crossing the finish line first is Johnson, with a time of 46.3 seconds according to Braden's watch. Johnson, an unseeded runner with the best time so far, has raised a lot of unrest on some of the team benches. Leggett delivers a mediocre performance, with a time of 56.3 seconds. And, as Mark predicted, McCutchen did not break 60 seconds.

Standing up, walking up and down the stairs, Braden exclaims, "I can't wait! I'm kicking ass! The chief ass kicker is gonna be back!" Braden now knows he can beat everyone out on the track. Eddie tells Braden, "I don't know, bro. You never know. McCrutchen could be holding back." Braden exclaims, "bring it on! McCrutchen is the new Jimmy O'Brien!" Braden, after seeing the 440-yard dash, is fired up, and ready to compete. Winning, however, is not enough for Braden. Winning the race, and demonstrating that he had no competition is Braden's real goal.

Sitting back, enjoying the entertainment, is Mark, thinking of new and improved ways to mess with McCutchen and perhaps a few others. To Mark, McCutchen is a noncompetitive athlete, and should not even be on the track team. It didn't take Mark long to realize that McCutchen is mentally vulnerable to every trick in the book. So, over the years, Mark has used that to his advantage. McCutchen's high school coach, Mr. Ruff, was equally, if not more, vulnerable. Mark is contemplating whether he will have to modify his tactics next year.

Before lunch, the call is made for the 40-yard dash final, for which Kathy and Paula have both qualified. So has Liz Duncan, albeit with the slowest qualifying time of the day. In her mind, Liz blames Paula for her poor performance in the preliminaries, for Paula distracted her at the starting line. But, that would be Liz's problem, not Paula's.

Watching from the bleachers, the tribe is sitting at the edge of their seats. Kathy and Paula wave to the tribe, who all wave back. Liz catches sight of Kathy and Paula's fan club in the stands, and remarks, "they're all going to watch you lose." In response to Liz, Paula mentions to Kathy, "I thought there was a rule against running when you're on your cycle." Paula's comment infuriates Liz, who apparently has a short fuse that is easily lit.

The Starter tells the 40-yard dash finalists, “this is the final for the 40-yard dash. Good luck. On your marks.” The Starter announces, “set,” as everyone gets into position. The buzzer sounds, and the runners are off. Kathy’s primal scream echoes through the arena, as she moves into first place. Right behind her is Paula, who is not about to be beaten by Liz. Wanting another gold medal, Kathy pushes herself toward the finish line harder. In a repeat performance of last year, Kathy takes first place, Paula takes second place, and Liz, finishing one yard behind Paula, takes third place.

With the 40-yard dash over, Kathy and Paula are now free for a while, and head up to the stands to find the tribe. Today, Johnson, Barbara, and Genise join the group for lunch. Kathy and Paula’s next race, the mile medley relay, will be in the afternoon. When they meet up, everyone gives Kathy, Paula, and Johnson a high-five, congratulating them on their individual victories.

Genise, who is now a senior, comments, “it’s too bad you guys aren’t down there. The guys can definitely use some help.” Braden comments, “I can’t wait. There needs to be a major league ass kicking down there! Somebody’s got to do it. My grandmother can run faster than some of those guys!” Johnson replies, “we’re waiting for you, bro.” Genise is amused by Braden’s enthusiasm, something that is clearly missing from the college team. Kathy clearly noticed the lack of energy and exuberance among the team members over the last year, which is why she is glad the tribe is getting back together again.

During lunch Kathy tells Eddie, “Dr. Braun said he wants a few of your training sleds. He wanted to know what it would take to get a few.” Eddie asks, “how many does he want?” Kathy explains, “he really didn’t say, but he said he wanted them for the Spring.” Quick with the answer, Eddie tells Kathy, “well, it takes less than a day to build one. Wait, wait! It takes four days to build one. I’m married now.” Kathy exclaims, “hey, now! What’s that supposed to mean?” Eddie explains, “we have other things we do now. Oh, and I have a job. So, just ask him how many he wants. I’ll start on them this week.”

Eddie then asks, “why does he want them for the Spring? Why not now?” Kathy replies, “he said, ‘I’d like to get a few for the Spring when we can train outside.’ I guess he’s waiting for it to get warmer out.” Eddie mentions, “that’s the problem with that team. They have to run between 68 and 72 degrees, it has to be 50 percent relative humidity, the wind can’t be more than 2 miles per hour, and you can’t get them wet. Then, at the track meet, it’s 75 degrees, and they all pass out from heat exhaustion. Or, it’s 63 degrees outside, and they’re all shivering and looking for a heater. No wonder most of them suck. They need to be training outside now!” Kathy thinks about what Eddie said, and replies,

“yeah, we ride our bicycles in the heat and in the cold, and the weather never stops us.” Eddie replies, “exactly.”

After lunch, the tribe heads back up to the bleachers, and the team members head back to the bench. Up right after lunch is the men’s mile, which Mitchell has been waiting for. Mitchell will have his eye on Darryl Stone, the miler who is on full scholarship, and doesn’t go to any classes. Mitchell beat Stone a week ago in the mile, but that was a time trial, not an intercollegiate competition.

The call is made for the men’s one mile run. On the track, in the inside position, is Stone, who is expected to win the event. Stone, who can now consistently break a four minute mile, is not to be taken lightly. Mitchell, who has the race down to a science, assigns the rest of the tribe to time each one of Stone’s quarter mile splits. Mitchell is not only interested in how fast Stone really is, but how he runs.

The buzzer sounds and the one-mile run begins. Stone sprints the first few yards to secure the leading position. Had he been in this race, Mitchell would visualize himself as being right behind Stone at this time, gaining the benefit of drafting. A few runners are trying to keep pace with Stone and, during the first lap, manage quite well. At the end of the first quarter mile, Mark informs Mitchell, “in the first quarter, I clocked Stone at 58 seconds.” Stone, who has demonstrated he is capable of running a 52.5-second quarter mile, would be considered near his limit at his current pace for this distance.

During the second quarter mile, the field spreads tremendously. Halfway through the race, Eddie tells Mitchell, “his second quarter mile was 61.5 seconds.” Braden, starting his stopwatch, exclaims, “that’s a two-minute half mile! At least they got one guy who can run!” A 1:59.5 is not a bad 880-yard split time for the mile. On Stone’s heels is another runner, wearing number 194, who is pushing Stone to his limit. This is good news to Mitchell, who is gauging Stone’s performance. If Stone were not being pushed, he may not run at his best.

The third quarter mile brings an interesting development. Number 194 passes Stone, who drafts off the new leader for a while. At the end of the third quarter mile, Braden announces, “he’s slowing down. That was a 62-second quarter! He’s running out of gas!” Mitchell, however, sees the race a bit differently. If Mitchell’s thinking is correct, Stone will make a move during the last part of the race.

About 100 yards into the last quarter mile, Stone easily passes number 194. For the final lap, the gap between Stone and number 194 widens slightly. Observing carefully, with 100 yards remaining in the race, Mitchell notices the gap between the two front runners is now static.

Another runner, number 392, is gaining on number 194. Mitchell is confident the three front runners are all at their limit. Stone crosses the finish line, and Erika announces, “the last quarter of a mile was 58.2 seconds.”

On Mitchell’s watch, Stone ran a 4:00.2 minute mile. Using the approximate split times, Mitchell calculates Stone ran a 3:59.7 mile. Number 194, in second place, was about three seconds slower. Number 392, taking third place, crossed the finish line on the heels of number 194. Mitchell assesses that Stone, running at his limit, is just barely capable of breaking a four minute mile. And, Mitchell would be correct. Stone’s official time is posted as 4:00.1. Now confident that he will be not only competitive at this level of competition, Mitchell also realizes he stands a good chance of winning this event. Mitchell also now fully understands why the University gave him such a great deal. Stone is the best the University and the division has, and Mitchell is better.

The call is made for the woman’s mile medley relay. Kathy, Paula, Barbara, and Genise all return this year in this event. Kathy and Paula will each be running the 220-yard legs, Genise will be running the 440-yard leg, and Barbara will be running the 880-yard leg. Last year, the women’s mile medley team took first place in every meet they attended. This year is not expected to be any different.

Once again on the track with Paula is Liz Duncan, who still has not gotten over losing the 40-yard dash earlier today. Liz gives Paula a dirty look, whispering, “bitch,” just loud enough for Paula to hear. Paula responds by saying, “meow,” pretty much calling the ice princess a pussy. Paula beat Liz badly in the first leg of the mile medley relay last year, which Liz certainly remembers.

The Starter announces, “on your marks.” Paula is ready, but Liz is angry and has a score to settle. The Starter announces, “set.” The buzzer sounds, and Paula takes off, again showing Liz who’s the boss. During the first 50 yards, in contrast to last year, Paula is in the lead. Giving it her best, all that Liz can deliver is not enough to threaten Paula’s position. Paula hands off to Kathy, who leaves the transition zone letting out a primal scream that echoes throughout the arena.

Kathy takes off, widening the fifteen-yard lead she inherited from Paula. Walking to the inside of the track, Paula is watching and cooling down as Kathy maintains control of the race. Paula grins, as she watches Kathy hand off to Genise. Paula verbally counts the seconds between Kathy handing off to Genise and Liz’s team’s handoff. For some reason, Paula, counting the seconds, irritates Liz, who blurts out a few obscenities and flips Paula a bird, albeit quite discreetly.

Genise, who now averages a 55-second quarter mile, is not likely to be caught. Since Genise was handed a ten-second lead, Braden, Eddie, or Mark would have to be on the track if she is expected to be caught. Paula, knowing they have the race wrapped up, walks over to Kathy, giving her a high-five. Still in first place, Genise hands off to Barbara.

Barbara, now with a fourteen-second lead, allows the other runners to battle it out to determine the first loser. No one has ever passed Barbara on the track in this event before. With a fourteen-second lead, the team in second place will have to break the women's world record in the 880-yard run by about eight seconds in order to win. That is simply not going to happen. On her last lap, Barbara sprints toward the finish line, taking first place in their heat. The relay team members exchange hugs, and head to the team bench.

The final event of the day is the 4 by 440 relay, which spurs a lot of interest for Eddie, Mark, and Braden. This has been their race for seven years. Their competition, however, has been at the middle school and high school level. This is college. With a recent composite time of 3:03.6, and an average of 45.9 seconds per leg, where they would stand in college competition is about to be seen.

With twelve teams, and two heats, the winner will quickly be decided. The first heat brings the University team, comprising of Johnson, Stone, Leggett, and, for some reason, McCutchen. Mark, evaluating the field, comments, "this is going to be interesting." Eddie, taking a closer look, replies, "wow! McCutchen and lug nut. I feel sorry for Johnson." The group decides who will time whom, as they await the beginning of the race.

The buzzer sounds, and Stone is out of the blocks. The tribe all moves to the edge of their seat in anticipation. Mark, referring to Stone, comments, "he looks strong." After the first lap, Stone is clearly in the lead. Eddie mentions, "lug nut is getting on the track," as Leggett enters the transition zone. As Stone, who is currently in the lead, approaches the transition zone, Leggett takes off. Stone hands off to Leggett, who was not remotely close to full speed during the transition. Mitchell announces to everyone, "Stone ran a 53.2-second leg." Eddie comments, "I thought they said lug nut was their best 440 guy. It looks like Stone is faster." The clock doesn't lie. Stone is clearly faster than Leggett in a 440-yard competition.

Leggett gets off to a slow start, being passed by another runner 100 yards into the leg. Eddie comments, "well, there goes the lead." Mark replies, "and, here goes the race, right down the toilet. McCutchen just got on the track." As Leggett approaches the transition zone, McCutchen takes off. McCutchen, who left too early, has to slow down to receive the

baton. Not getting a good grip, McCutchen fumbles the baton, quickly retrieving it. Fortunately, for the team, the baton did not leave McCutchen's lane. Mark comments, "well, that didn't go exactly as planned."

Eddie announces, "I clocked lug nut at about 62 seconds." Mark asks, "what do you mean, 'about 62 seconds?'" Eddie replies, "it took them three or four seconds to hand it off, and then it spent a lot of time on the ground. I don't know who's responsible for the time the baton was on the ground." Mark laughs, and replies, "that's kind of funny. That handoff kind of sucked." Braden comments, "I wouldn't even call that a handoff."

After the bungled handoff, McCutchen is now in fifth place. McCutchen makes his way around the track and, at the halfway mark, is passed by the last place runner. McCutchen, now in last place, has carved out a lot of work for Johnson to do. As McCutchen approaches the transition zone, Johnson grabs the baton, and takes off. Mark announces, "with the bungled handoff, McCutchen ran a 68-second quarter mile." Eddie comments, "wow! That's not even a good middle school time."

Johnson, with a lot of work to do, is up against the rest of the anchormen. The anchorman is typically the fastest member of the relay team. Halfway through his leg, Johnson manages to move up to fifth place. During the last lap, Johnson has his eyes on fourth place. As he approaches the finish line, Johnson edges out the other runner, taking fourth place in this heat. Braden announces, "I clocked Johnson at 47.7! He kicked ass!" Mark comments, "yeah, McCutchen's ass. McCutchen is why they lost."

Disgusted with his team's performance, Johnson tosses the baton to McCutchen. McCutchen tries to catch it, but it again falls to the floor, prompting a little laughter from the crowd.

The winning time of the meet in the 4 by 440 relay was 3:22.4, a far cry from the tribes performance last week. Johnson, and the rest of the University team, turned in a time of 3:53 according to Erika's stopwatch. Allowing ten seconds for the bungled handoff, which is generous, the time would have been 3:43, which is still not a good time. Even Erika knows the relay team's performance is far below par. Fortunately, for Johnson, taking first place in the 440-yard dash, he will not walk away from this meet empty handed.

The end of the meet brings the awards ceremony. With twelve teams competing, winning a medal is far more difficult than it was in high school. The Meet Announcer introduces today's officials, and recognizes the coaches and athletes for their participation today. The ceremony then moves on to the delivery of the awards.

In the women's events, Kathy is called to the stage to receive the gold medal in the women's 40-yard dash. Next to her, is Paula, who takes the silver medal in that event. Liz Duncan must again settle for the bronze medal, and is not happy at all. Paula takes the gold medal in the 220-yard dash, with Kathy taking the silver medal. Genise, who is happy as she can be, won the gold medal in the 440-yard dash this year. As expected, Barbara wins the gold medal in the mile and in the half mile. And finally, Kathy, Paula, Genise, and Barbara are called to the stage to receive the gold medal in the women's mile medley relay.

In the men's events, Johnson takes home the gold medal in the men's 440-yard dash, and in the half mile. In the men's mile, Darryl Stone wins the gold medal. In the field events, Pete Mendenhall takes home the bronze medal in the shot-put. In internal competition within the University, it appears that the women walked away with the win today, taking home many more medals than the men.

When the awards ceremony is over, Braden exclaims, "well, I'm glad I came!" Bobby B. replies, "me too." Braden continues, "if I was down there on that track, I could have won three gold medals!" Mark asks, "oh yeah? Which ones?" Braden replies, "the 40-yard dash, the 220, and the 440!" Eddie replies, "not if I was down there, bro!" Mark adds, "or me!" But, Braden does have a point. He would have taken those three events if he were on the track today. But, so could have Eddie or Mark. After the meet, the group is much more confident that, when they finally get on the track, they will win.

After the ceremony, the tribe meets up with the team and decides to head to the pizzeria for dinner. Kathy, Paula, and Johnson all had a good day, but didn't get much to eat since they had to run. Since this is Johnson's first college meet, he is glad to walk away with two gold medals. Eddie and his group head out, with everyone glad to see that they will all be competent at college level performance.

A few days after the track meet, Kathy tells Eddie, "my leg muscles are really sore. I think it's from the meet." Eddie tells Kathy, "you could take a warm Epsom salt bath. That might help." Kathy replies, "yeah, I might just do that. Maybe I'll find a massage therapist too. After I had that massage on the ship, I couldn't believe how easily I could move." Kathy heads to the bath tub, wasting no time getting her warm bath.

When Kathy gets out of the bathtub, Eddie tells her, "I got you an appointment with a massage therapist." Kathy exclaims, "really! When?" Eddie replies, "in an hour from now!" Kathy exclaims, "awesome!" Eddie tells Kathy, "it's not too far away. The place is in the same office complex as Davies and Rice, the attorney we used for our house. The massage therapist's name is Valeriya. She said she works a lot with athletes."

Kathy replies, “that sounds like just what I need.” Kathy heads to the massage therapist’s office, leaving a little early because she is so excited. Eddie heads out himself, to the hardware store, to pick up some steel components and other parts to make a few training sleds for the University.

When Kathy arrives, Valeriya greets her, and has her fill out a little bit of paperwork, mostly to find out what today’s problem is. Kathy tells Valeriya that she is on the University track team, and runs sprints. Valeriya asks Kathy, “do you, by any chance, know Dr. Braun?” Kathy tells her, “yeah. He’s our head coach.” Valeriya tells Kathy, “he’s sent a lot of athletes to me over the years.” Kathy now knows she is in good hands.

Kathy gets on the massage table, and Valeriya knows immediately why Kathy is looking for a massage. Many of Kathy’s muscles are clearly overworked. Valeriya works out Kathy’s muscle knots, and does a lot of stretching of Kathy’s muscles. After an hour and a half of massage therapy, Kathy doesn’t want to get off the table. But, all good things must come to an end. Before she leaves, Kathy makes another appointment for herself, and one for Eddie, both for next week.

In his spare time, Eddie built four resistance sleds for Dr. Braun. Eddie was careful to make them all identical. He even had Vinnie, at the body shop, powder coat them, giving them a clean professional look. The powder coat finish is scratch and chip resistant, improving durability. Eddie even bought eight 25-pound weight plates, two for each unit, powder coated them, and threw them in as a bonus. With the four perfectly crafted units ready for delivery, Eddie loads two units into his MGB, and two units into Kathy’s Porsche, as they head out to practice.

Arriving at practice earlier than usual on Monday morning, Eddie and Kathy move the four resistance sleds into the gym, and place them on the bleachers. Eddie asks Kathy, “do you think the welds look okay?” Kathy replies, “they look fine to me.” Eddie comments, “it seems like these four units are my final exam in a class or something.” Kathy replies, “then, you’ll will definitely get an A.” Eddie hangs around for a few minutes, talking with Kathy as the team members slowly trickle into the arena.

Since Eddie is not practicing with the team today, he starts to head out, telling Kathy, “well, I guess I’ll see you later this afternoon.” Kathy asks, “aren’t you going to wait until Dr. Braun gets here?” Eddie replies, “I wasn’t. But, I can wait if you want me to.” Kathy tells Eddie, “yeah. Hang around. You don’t have to be at work until nine o’clock anyway.” Eddie stays around a little longer, talking with the other tribe members as they wait for practice to begin.

Dr. Braun walks into the arena along with the other coaches. The head coach announces, “may I have your attention, please. For the next few weeks, we all have a lot of work ahead of us. During the last two meets, we have turned in some dismal performances. Some of you, however, have turned in some exemplary performances. You know who you are. We have another big meet coming up in two weeks. So, are we ready?” A few of the athletes reply, “yeah,” but the general feeling is one of apathy. Dr. Braun continues, telling the athletes to meet with their respective coaches. Perceiving the lack of energy of the team, Eddie tells Kathy, “well, I guess I’m going to go. Tell Dr. Braun that the four units are free.”

Eddie kisses Kathy goodbye, and heads to the door. Kathy walks toward Dr. Braun to tell him that Eddie finished the resistance sleds. Dr. Braun, seeing Eddie walking toward the door, yells out, “hey, Eddie! Do you have a moment?” Eddie turns around, and replies, “yeah. What’s up?” Dr. Braun tells Eddie, “I just wanted to say hi. If you, Mark, Braden, and Bradshaw want to join us for practice anytime, feel free to come by.” Eddie responds, “yeah, we’d really like to do that sometime,” meaning that Eddie and the tribe would like the chance to kick someone’s ass every once in a while, especially McCutchen’s.

With unmistakable enthusiasm, Kathy tells Dr. Braun, “Eddie finished his training sleds!” Pointing to the end of the bleachers, Kathy tells him, “they’re over there.” Dr. Braun’s eyes open wide, as he says, “wow! Let me take a look!” Dr. Braun walks over and examines the units, exclaiming, “wow! These look really great! They look very professionally made.” Kathy interjects, “yeah! By Eddie, the Mechanic.”

Dr. Braun, also with a lot of enthusiasm, yells out to Coach Herndon, “hey, come and take a look at this,” getting the attention of the sprinters as well. Coach Herndon walks over, joined by a few of the sprinters, and takes a look at Eddie’s masterpieces. Coach Herndon comments, “wow! These look really great! I can’t wait to put them to use.” Looking at Eddie, Kathy smiles, assuring him that his work is greatly appreciated. And, Eddie is happy that his welds are not rejected.

As a few of the sprinters look at the units, McCutchen comments to his older brother, “not those pieces of shit,” heard by all standing around. Eddie turns around, and boldly asks McCutchen, “what did you just say?” McCutchen, trying to gain the upper hand, replies, “I said, ‘not those pieces of shit.’ I really don’t think they’re worth anything.” Silence falls over the arena in response to McCutchen’s derogatory comments.

Angered by McCutchen’s comment, Eddie replies, “the only thing around here that’s shit, McCutchen, is your performance on the track! You can’t hand off a baton. You can’t break 60 seconds in the 440. And,

I ran the 100-yard dash faster when I was in eighth grade than you can now! And, when you run, you never win! Then, when you come in last place, you sob like a little pansy in a hurricane.” Pointing to the resistance sled, Eddie exclaims, “that piece of equipment is how I can run 100 yards in 9.2 seconds! And, until you can do that, just shut up! And, don’t you dare call my work of art a piece of shit again!”

Dead silence remains over the arena. Apparently, Eddie has the floor, so he continues. Recalling what he told Kathy during the track meet a few weeks ago, Eddie exclaims, “and, that’s the problem with you, McCrutchen! You can only run when it’s between 68 and 72 degrees, and it has to be 50 percent humidity! The wind can’t be more than two miles per hour, and you won’t run in the rain because you’ll get wet. And, when it’s snowing, you cuddle up in your little blankie. Then, at the track meet, when it’s 80 degrees, you pass out from heat exhaustion! And, if it’s 60 degrees outside, you stand there shivering, looking for a heater! No wonder you suck, and you never win!” Genise whispers to Paula, “did he just call him ‘McCrutchen?’” Paula whispers back, “yeah. You heard that right.”

With some advice, Eddie continues, “you should be out there dragging that sled up and down the sand track, in the heat, in the cold, in the rain, and in the snow! When it’s hot outside, you should be wearing sweat pants! And, when it’s cold out, you should be running in shorts! In the snow, you should be running in your bare feet! You need to toughen up your little pussy ass! Then, when you can barely stand up anymore, that’s when you should start running your laps!” Eddie just whittled McCrutchen down to the level of a spoiled little brat.

As if that wasn’t enough, Leggett starts laughing at Eddie, and comments to someone, “he’s not even in college. He doesn’t know anything.” Looking sternly at Leggett, Eddie, calling him out, tells him, and everyone around, “and, you’re laughing at me? When we’re watching you in a meet, and see you running high school times, we’re all laughing at you! I’ve timed you! I ran better times than you when I was in tenth grade! And, if you’d take those lead weights off your feet, and lose your heavy socks, maybe you’ll run times worthy of the scholarship they gave you. Oh, and by the way. That was a wonderful handoff during the divisional meet!”

Dr. Braun starts clapping, followed by a few of the sprinters. After a few seconds, the other coaches and the entire team are clapping their hands, except for McCrutchen and Leggett. Eddie, reiterating Dr. Braun’s introductory speech given earlier today, said it in an unmistakably clear way. And Johnson, sitting back on the bleachers, enjoyed the whole show.

Darryl Stone, the team's star miler, taking advantage of the brief intermission, asks, "hey, can I take one of those out to the sand track and use it today?" Dr. Braun replies, "we're all going out to the track right now, and using them today. So, let's go." On the way out, one athlete asks, "how are we getting them out there?" Picking up two of the units, one in each hand, Eddie replies, "like this! And, if you're carrying the weight plates, do curls with them on the way." Eddie carries two of the four sleds out to the track, using his hands. Manual labor appears to be somewhat foreign to some of the athletes. The other two sleds, and the eight weight plates are carried out by a few of the other team members.

Out on the sand track, half of the runners are positioned on one end of the 220-yard track, and the other half are positioned at the other end. Dr. Braun tells the athletes to load each sled with 25 pounds. With Dr. Paxton and Mrs. Owens at one end, and Dr. Braun and Coach Herndon at the other end, everyone is now ready to train.

Stone, who can't wait to try the sled, volunteers to be in the first group. Alongside him is Johnson, Kathy and, by Dr. Braun's choosing, McCutchen. The group takes off, struggling to run 220 yards down the sand track, dragging behind them a sled that is designed to provide unmerciful resistance.

Once at the other end of the track, three of the four athletes take off the harness, and another group of three are strapped in. McCutchen should arrive in a few minutes. The second group runs their 220 yards, dodging McCutchen on the way down the track, then getting in line at the other end for their next heat. The team will be doing this for the next hour, or until they drop dead, whichever comes first. As the exercise continues, some of the runners are not able to complete the 220 yards. Dr. Braun instructs the 25-pound weight plate to be removed from two of the sleds, and for the runners to continue without weight. Unweighted, the sled still provides significant resistance.

Dr. Braun takes Eddie aside, and tells him, "I want to thank you for what you said in there. I believe what you said got through to all of them." Eddie explains, "I really don't get it. McCutchen ran faster a few years ago than he does now. His high school, Centerville, even sent spies to our high school to watch our workouts. Their spies never did find out our secret workout."

Dr. Braun asks, "what workout is that?" Eddie explains, "the workout is a variation of Fartlek training, which has its origins in Sweden. It's a structured mixture of distance work and sprinting. It's kind of like interval training." Dr. Braun comments, "I've not heard of Fartlek training," which surprises Eddie. Eddie would have thought that the head

track coach of the University would have heard of Fartlek training, at least in theory.

Eddie, describing the distance runner's workout, explains to Dr. Braun, "during the drill, the distance runners run on the outside of the track for about an hour. After every mile, they drop to the inside of the track, and sprint 440 yards as fast as they can as if it was the final lap of the race. They will then drop to the outside of the track again, and run another mile."

Explaining the sprinter's workout, Eddie continues, "the sprinters sprint on the inside of the track for 440 yards, then drop to the outside, taking a recovery lap with the distance group. After their recovery lap, the sprinters sprint for another 440 yards. Once they can't sprint for 440 yards any longer, the sprinting distance is dropped to 220 yards with a 440-yard recovery lap. And, when 220 yards is too hard, the sprinting distance is dropped to 110 yards." Eddie adds, "oh, and we get a five-minute water break every so often."

Amazed at what he is hearing, Dr. Braun comments, "that must be some workout." Eddie replies, "it is. No one likes it. Mr. Frazier always says that there are only two races that are run in track. The first is the 100-yard dash, and the second is the 440-yard dash. He says that any distance race is nothing more than a 440-yard dash with a long warm-up run before the final sprint. The 220-yard dash is really a prolonged 100-yard dash, and the 40-yard dash is really just a short 100-yard dash."

Dr. Braun tells Eddie, "I might try that workout on the group tomorrow." Looking at the runners on the sand track as they struggle, Eddie replies, "most of them won't be able to walk tomorrow. The workout is highly anaerobic. From what I can see, some of them might need a day off." Dr. Braun, seeing some of the runners barely able to move, replies, "I think you might be correct in your assessment."

As Eddie and Dr. Braun are talking, Coach Herndon exclaims, "get moving! Some of you are really slacking off!" Coach Herndon can see that the team is getting a good workout, and wants to maximize their efforts, and therefore results on the track. Many of the team members seem to dislike the workout, which is a good sign that they are making progress. And, from Coach Herndon's vantage point, the workout clearly separates the skilled athletes from the not so skilled athletes.

Stone, who perceives he is getting a great benefit from the workout, asks Eddie, "hey, what do I have to do to get one of these?" Eddie replies, "I'd have to build one for you. I can do that if you want." Stone, with a consistent mile time just barely under four minutes, has hit a performance barrier. Getting ready to run another 220 yards, Stone tells Eddie, "let's

talk about it sometime.” It appears that Eddie will be building a few more units in the near future.

After practice, the resistance sleds and weights are carried back to the arena by the team members who still have some semblance of life left in them. Dr. Braun mentions to Coach Herndon, “well, just take a look at that. The ones carrying the equipment back to the arena are the ones who consistently win.” Coach Herndon replies, “I see that. I should make the ones who didn’t carry any equipment back run a few laps when we get back inside. But, we’re out of time.” Dr. Braun grins, and suggests, “we’ll do that next time.”

The next day, many of the team members were too sore to run or work out, so Dr. Braun cancelled practice. The day after the team’s day off, however, brings a different story. With the athletes sitting on the bleachers, Dr. Braun addresses the group, announcing, “now that everyone had a vacation yesterday, today it’s back to business. How many of you enjoyed the workout two days ago with the training sled?” Not a peep is heard. Dr. Braun exclaims, “good! That means everyone had a great workout! We’ll be doing a lot more of that in the future.” That is not exactly what some of the runners wanted to hear. But, you don’t train in order to lose, which many of them have been doing all too often.

Moving on to today’s workout, Dr. Braun explains to the team the interval training workout Eddie described to him two days ago. The team then heads outside to the track to run the drill. Some of the team members are happy not to see the resistance sled today. What awaits them out on the track, however, is equally as unmerciful as the workout they had two days ago.

As the team runs the drill, Dr. Braun, Coach Herndon, Dr. Paxton, and Mrs. Owens pay close attention to each runner, making sure no one slacks off, and does their sprints at the proper time. Why the runners are running outside today, as opposed to in the arena, is simple. Dr. Braun was convicted by Eddie’s comment regarding how McCutchen can only run when the temperature is between 68 and 72 degrees at 50 percent relative humidity. Some of the team members need to be toughened up.

During the drill, an unofficial competition seems to develop between some of the team members. The two distance runners, Barbara and Johnson, seem to push each other to their limit. Stone has joined them, adding synergy to the group. Kathy, Paula, and Genise run the sprinting drill together, also pushing each other to their limit. Yet others, such as the McCutchen brothers, are sandbagging, putting in less than the desired level of effort.

In response to those who are not seemingly working too hard, Coach Herndon yells out, “some of you are slacking off, and don’t think I don’t see you!” Calling out a few names, Coach Herndon yells out to them, “if you don’t start moving faster, you’ll be back on the resistance sled inside of five minutes!” Not surprisingly, the McCutchen brothers were among the slackers. After Coach Herndon’s announcement, everyone’s pace picks up considerably. With the majority of the team on partial scholarship, they have little avenue for complaints. The students on full scholarship, such as Kathy, Paula, Genise, Johnson, and Stone, seem to have no problem pushing it to the limit.

After the workout, Kathy tells Paula, “it’s nice to be back to getting a real workout.” Paula replies, “yeah. Eddie really worked over McCutchen on Monday. Maybe the guys will win something come the Spring.” Kathy points out, “well, at least Johnson and Stone will win.” With some good news, Paula comments, “and, some of the guys are a lot better than they were last year. Maybe some better workouts are all they need.” Kathy informs Paula, “when Eddie was here on Monday, he told Dr. Braun all about Mr. Frazier’s workouts, which are kind of like the ones Mr. Harris also does at the middle school.”

Abruptly changing the subject, Kathy stretches her arms overhead, and mentions, “I can’t wait for my next massage. I am sore!” Paula asks, “what’s this? You get massages now?” Kathy replies, “yeah. And, Eddie gets them too sometimes. I got one during our honeymoon on the ship. And, Eddie found a massage therapist who works with athletes. Her name is Valeriya, and her office is not really too far from here. And, after I get a massage, I can move a lot better.” Paula tells Kathy, “yeah, I remember you told me you got a massage on the ship. You’ll have to give me her phone number. I suddenly need a massage myself.” As they are leaving the locker room, Kathy gives Paula Valeriya’s card. Knowing Paula, she will be making the call in no time.

Eddie, Mark, Braden, Mitchell, and Bobby B. have been taking up Dr. Braun on his offer to join the team for track practice. Since they will all be members of the team next year, by attending the practice sessions, they will get to know the team members better. They will also be able to practice their relay handoff skills, and stay in top shape. The coaches also prefer to keep on top of gauging each athlete’s performance. Today, the new recruits head to the locker room to join the team for a workout.

At the University, the football team also has a few practice sessions during the week. Today, the football team heads out to their practice field as the track team heads out to the track to practice outside. After hearing Eddie’s lecture a few weeks ago, addressing McCutchen about the virtues of running in adverse conditions, Dr. Braun has been holding practice outside a bit more this Winter.

While out on the track, Dr. Braun looks over at the football team, recognizing that the football players practice in the Autumn, Winter, Spring, and Summer. Weather is not an issue with the football team, which plays in all types of adverse conditions. Dr. Braun reasons that weather should not be an issue with the track team either.

As they are headed out to the track, Eddie and the tribe hear the football coach tell his team, “everyone, take a few warm-up laps around the track before we get out on the field. Let’s see if we can get in a mile or two before we begin practice today.” The football team heads to the track, where the track team is receiving today’s instructions from Dr. Braun.

Hearing the football coach’s announcement, Mark asks Coach Herndon, “hey, can I go mess with the football team when they’re running their laps?” Coach Herndon, who is quite amused with the dynamics of the new recruits, replies, “sure. Go ahead. Take Eddie, Braden, and Mitchell with you, if you want.” Since Mark, Eddie, Braden, and Mitchell are not officially on the track team yet, Coach Herndon figures she’d let them have some fun. Besides, Coach Herndon is annoyed when the football team invites themselves to use the track during track practice. Perhaps Mark and his wrecking crew can mitigate that situation.

Mark informs Eddie, Braden, and Mitchell about Coach Herndon permitting them to mess with the football team. Mark suggests, “let’s talk with them a little first. We’ll figure out who their top dogs are. Then, we’ll mess with them and see how out of shape they are.” Mark figures that, since the track team was not quite up to their expectations, perhaps the football team is also a little on the deficient side as well. Mark, and his crew, heads over to the track, where the football team is just getting started taking their first lap.

As the football team starts jogging on the track, Mark suggests, “let’s catch up to the leaders. They’re probably the top dogs.” Braden mentions, “that shouldn’t be too hard. My great grandmother can run faster than these guys, and she died a few years ago.” Running along the outside of the track, Mark and the others easily pass the football players, catching up to the leaders.

Once they have caught up to the front runners, Mark asks, “hey! Who are you guys?” One guy proudly responds, “we’re the football team. I’m Kent Sanford, the running back.” With Kent taking center stage, Mark figures this guy is among the alpha males. Setting the guy up, Mark replies, “wow! You guys must really run fast then.” Mark’s strategy is to raise the football players up to the level of being an elite athlete, then show them that they are not. Just for fun, of course.

Another player chimes in and offers, “yeah. We are fast. I’m the free safety. And, I’m a lot faster than Kent.” Kent looks over at the free safety, whose name is Tom Davis, and gives him a dirty look. Eddie astutely recognizes that there might be a little rivalry between Kent and Tom. Eddie comments, “yeah, I hear that free safeties are really fast.” Mark comments, “running backs are usually faster.” Sooner or later, Mark and Eddie’s dialog will hit a weak point in the runners, and cause a little bit of friction. And, it doesn’t take too long for Kent to comment, boasting, “I’m the fastest guy in this school.” Mark replies, “wow. Really? How fast are you?”

Braden chimes in, exclaiming, “wait a second! You shouldn’t even be asking them that question! There ain’t nobody around here faster than me!” Kent, displaying his superiority, boasts, “oh yeah? Who are you guys?” Braden exclaims, “I’m the chief ass kicker! Ain’t no one can beat me on this track! No one!” Intending to add fuel to the fire, Eddie interjects, “except for me.” Mitchell suggests, “well, we’re all on a track. Let’s see who the top dog is.” Eddie tells Mitchell, “I don’t know. These guys look really fast.” Tom, always wanting to prove that he is faster than Kent, who purports to be the fastest guy in the University, proclaims, “well, let’s settle the score then.”

Braden, who is ready to race, exclaims, “good! Let’s get this ass kicking underway! Ain’t no one faster than me!” As they approach the starting line, Mark asks, “what distance?” Since running backs and free safeties are best at short sprints, Kent suggests, “a hundred yards! And, I’m going to win.” Mitchell, pointing to the sprinting track, tells the group, “there’s the track. Let’s go for it.”

The group walks off the oval track, and onto the sprinting track. Looking down the track, Eddie comments, “wow! A hundred yards. Isn’t that how long the football field is?” Mark, intending to irritate Kent and Tom, replies, “yeah. But, football players never run in a straight line. And, they run through obstacles.”

Mark yells out to Coach Herndon, “hey! Can we borrow a Starter?” Coach Herndon tells one of her student assistants with a starting pistol, to go and see what Mark wants. Coach Herndon suspects she knows exactly what is about to happen, and excuses herself for a moment. Seeing a sprinting competition about to erupt, Coach Herndon heads to the finish line, with her stopwatches in hand.

Braden exclaims, “let’s get this ass kicking underway!” Braden’s comments do not go unchallenged. Kent yells back, “whose ass do you think you’re kicking? I can tell you it ain’t mine!” Braden hammers his fist on his chest, exclaiming, “I’m the chief ass kicker around here! No one kicks my ass!” Eddie exclaims, “unless I’m around! This is my race.

Yours is that little insignificant 440-yard dash.” Braden exclaims, “then, we’re running the 440-yard dash next!”

Eddie and Braden continue messing with each other, but the football players are totally unaware that they are joking around. Mark informs Eddie and Braden, “these guys are football players. You’d finish the race in half the time they do.” Braden exclaims, “the talk is over! Somebody, fire that gun and let’s get this ass kicking underway!” For some reason, Coach Herndon really likes Braden’s energetic personality.

At the starting line, the football players are ready to go, positioned as they would be as if on the offensive line. The Starter announces, “on your marks.” Kent and Tom are looking over at the Starter, while Eddie, Mark, Braden, and Mitchell get focused. Announcing, “set,” the Starter waits for the football players to get set in the blocks, which it appears they’ve never done before. The gun is fired, and the six runners, with way too much adrenaline, are explosively out of the blocks.

The track athletes take a quick and early lead, prompting the football players to respond quickly, and step up their game. At 50 yards, Eddie leads the pack, with Mark right behind him. Braden trails Mark by a yard or two, with Mitchell slightly behind Braden. The football players lag far behind. At the finish line, Eddie crosses first, with Coach Herndon documenting his time. Mark finishes in second place, with Braden taking third place. Mitchell, who is not a sprinter, delivers a respectable performance, and manages to beat both Kent and Tom. Kent beats out Tom by a few tenth’s of a second, being demoted to the alleged fastest man in the school, which he is not.

Coach Herndon yells out to Eddie, “that was a 9.3! Great job!” Coach Herndon, showing some positive expression regarding Eddie’s time is a clear indication that she is impressed. She is usually a bit more reserved. Eddie and the rest of his buddies exchange high-fives.

Walking over, Kent and Tom also give the track stars a high-five. Braden boldly informs Kent and Tom that they will be running the 440-yard dash next. Kent, the dethroned alpha male, dare not decline. To decline would be worse than losing, telling everyone they chose to forfeit rather than compete. The word ‘forfeit’ is not in Kent’s or Tom’s vocabulary.

The football coach, Coach Larry Morris, walks over and asks the football players, “what do we got going on here?” Coach Herndon answers for them, “a little bit of unofficial competition, I would think.” Braden chimes in, telling Coach Herndon, “and, we’re not done yet! We’re running the 440-yard dash, and I’m gonna kick everyone’s ass!” Coach Morris asks, “who won the 100?” Braden replies, “Eddie did. But, I’m

winning the 440! Ain't no one beating me in my race!" Coach Morris asks Kent, "are you guys racing them again?" Kent replies, "yeah."

Coach Morris, up for a little competition himself, asks Coach Herndon, "do you have any objection?" Coach Herndon proudly replies, "not at all, sir. We can put Johnson in too, unless anyone objects." No one objects, so Coach Herndon blows her whistle, and yells out, "Johnson! Get over here!" Coach Morris tells Tom, "go get Schmidt. We'll put him in too." Apparently, Daniel Schmidt, a wide receiver, is the best the football team has to offer in a 440-yard competition.

Coach Morris blows his whistle, telling his team to leave the track, and to stand off to the side. Unlike a certain school principal, the football team is smart enough to stay out of the red zone and off the track when a competition is in progress. Schmidt, wearing number 11, and Johnson arrive at the starting line. Both are informed that they will be running a 440-yard dash. Joining them is Eddie, Mark, Braden, and Mitchell from the track team, and Kent, wearing number 25, and Tom, wearing number 44, from the football team.

Coach Herndon tells her Timekeepers, "get times on our guys, and get me very accurate times! Get times on the football players too." Each Timekeeper has two stopwatches, so catching their times should be easy. The Starter announces, "on your marks." The football players look over at the track stars as if they are waiting for the ball to be snapped. The track team, however, is very focused, knowing that there is a lot at stake in this race. The Starter announces, "set," as she waits for the football players to get set in the blocks. Braden exclaims, "here we go!" The gun is fired, and the eight runners are out of the blocks.

Surprisingly, the football players are out of the blocks quickly but, at twenty yards into the race, the track team has clearly taken the lead. As the runners are a quarter way around the track, they have the full attention of both the track team and the football team. At the halfway mark, Braden is clearly in front, perhaps running his best race ever. Eddie and Mark are right up there with Braden, giving Braden the impression he is not running quite as fast as he thought. Braden steps it up, as Eddie pushes him to his limit.

As the runners come out of the final curve, Kathy and Paula anxiously wait at the finish line. Next to them is Coach Herndon, who is timing Braden herself. For some reason, Coach Herndon is most interested in Braden's time. The five Timekeepers focus intently at the finish line, as the runners rapidly approach.

In the race to the finish, Braden leads the pack, not relenting in the least. Braden crosses first, kicking everyone's ass just as he announced

earlier. Eddie finishes in second place, with Mark on his heels. Johnson, finishing in fourth place, delivers an awesome time. And, Mitchell, the distance star, delivers an exemplary performance that impresses everyone. Kathy, peeking at one of the Timekeepers watches, cheers wildly.

As expected by some, the three football players trail the track team, fighting it out among themselves as to who will win within their group. Daniel Schmidt, finishing in sixth place, takes the title of being the fastest football player at this distance. Kent finishes in seventh place, and Tom finishes in eighth place, a little farther behind than they were expecting. As the football players look over at the track stars, they wonder where these guys came from.

As the Timekeepers compile the times, Braden exclaims, "ain't nobody faster than me! I'm the chief ass kicker around here!" Braden knows he ran a great race. Braden continues to rant, "now, it's time for me to show everyone how to kick a football! Ain't nobody better than me at that either!" Braden's rant can be heard by all, including John Smith, the kicker for the football team. One of the other players tells Smith, "it looks like he's throwing you a challenge." Smith laughs, and replies, "let him bring it on. He can't kick farther than me."

Provided with the compiled times from the Timekeepers, Coach Herndon blows her whistle, yelling out, "everyone listen up. Here are the times. Braden." Coach Herndon, having trouble containing herself, tries again, "Braden, 45.3 seconds." What Coach Herndon is impressed with is that Braden can consistently deliver a time of 45.3 seconds in this race. Coach Herndon continues, "Bogenskaya, 45.5 seconds. Svoboda, 45.6 seconds. Johnson, 45.9 seconds. Mitchell, 49.8 seconds. Number 11, you ran it in 58.9 seconds. Number 25, 67.3 seconds. And, number 44, you ran 68.3 seconds."

Braden exclaims, "where's that football. Ain't nobody can kick that football farther than me!" John Smith, the kicker, looks over at Coach Morris, who tells him, "what are you waiting for? Are you just going to stand there and lose by default?" Braden exclaims, "yeah! Are you just gonna stand there? Let's get this ball ass kicking underway!" Some of the football players don't really know what to make of Braden. Braden is more fired up than they've ever gotten during a football game.

Coach Herndon tells her sprinters, "okay! I want half of you on the track, running your favorite drill! The other half, get on the training sleds! Braden, get over to the practice field, and let's see how far you can kick the football!"

Braden heads through the tunnel and over to the practice field, and is joined by Eddie and Mark. Johnson and Mitchell forgo the entertainment, and train with the team. Coach Herndon tells Dr. Braun, "I'm going to go and watch this, sir, if you don't mind." Dr. Braun informs Coach Herndon, "go right ahead. Let me know how he does. I'm kind of curious myself." Coach Herndon is now curious how far Braden can kick a football, but is more interested in whether Braden will deliver in kicking a football as well as he promised.

After Braden trades his spikes for a more appropriate shoe, Eddie and Mark join Braden and Coach Herndon on the way to the football practice field. On the way, Eddie asks Braden, "do you think you can beat that guy?" Braden replies, "I'm kicking his ass and the ball at the same time!" Mark reminds everyone, "I remember when you tried out for football. You kicked the ball clear into the end zone." Braden replies, "I'm even better now. When I was in the police academy, we played a lot of football games. It was the recruits against the officers. We beat them. Then, they wanted a rematch. And, we won again. We played them a few times, and they never beat us."

On the practice field, John Smith proudly announces, "I'll set the standard for today." Braden replies, "go ahead. I'll set the next standard." Braden informs everyone, "we're putting the ball on the 20-yard line 'cause otherwise it's going past the end zone." Both Smith and Coach Morris strongly suspect that Braden is bluffing, but they humor Braden, and place the ball on the 20-yard line. Coach Herndon, however, has learned that Braden does not bluff, but rather delivers.

Smith gets ten yards behind the ball and, with his whole team watching, is ready to deliver. As Smith gets set, Braden comments, "my grandmother can kick farther than that!" Smith, somewhat annoyed, looks at Braden, and exclaims, "I hadn't kicked it yet!" Braden, all fired up, replies, exclaiming, "it don't matter none." Smith, not at all familiar with psychological warfare, gets set a second time. The coach blows his whistle, and the kickoff competition is underway.

Utilizing the standard football kickoff technique, Smith jogs a few steps, quickly picks up the pace, and connects with the ball. The ball soars through the air, with everyone around watching as it returns from the air. Landing on the 23-yard line, Smith's kick comes in at 57 yards. A lot of the team members clap, as they all know 57 yards is quite a good kick. It was not, however, Smith's best kick.

Now it's Braden's turn. Braden visualizes the ball as McCutchen's ass, Jimmy O'Brien's ass, and Andy Goldstein's ass all rolled into one tidy leather case. With three asses to kick, the ball will be kicked and it will be kicked hard. With the ball set, Braden takes a few practice steps to get

his timing perfect. Braden thinks to himself, “okay, that’s McCrutchen’s, O’Brien’s, and Goldshit’s ass. And, I’ll add in Mr. Crum for an extra point. That’s their asses, and I’m kicking them all.” Braden is now ready.

Coach Morris blows the whistle, and Braden takes off from a position that is a far cry from the normal kickoff position. Getting up to speed quickly, Braden quickly breaks to the left, approaching the target. Braden, visualizing the ball as the ass caravan, kicks the ball with all the strength he has. The ball soars through the air, passing clear over the 23-yard line, passing through the uprights, and landing beyond the end zone. Braden exclaims, “how’s that! This ass kicking is over! I did it again!” Eddie and Mark each give Braden a high-five, celebrating Braden’s victory.

Coach Morris shakes his head and exclaims, “I can’t believe it!” Walking over to Coach Herndon, Coach Morris exclaims, “I can’t believe it! Who is that guy?” Coach Herndon proudly replies, “that’s Axel Braden, sir. He’s our chief ass kicker.” Still not believing what he saw, Coach Morris asks, “is he on scholarship?” If Braden were not on scholarship, Braden would be fair game to be recruited by the football team. Coach Herndon replies, “he is. We signed him this year.” That was the last thing Coach Morris wanted to hear, but it is what it is.

Meanwhile, as the coaches are talking, Braden yells out to Eddie and Mark, “that was one of my better ones!” Eddie yells out to Braden, “yo, bro! You must have been practicing!” Braden walks over, and confesses, “yeah, a little. And, I also bought a shot-put. I’ve been throwing it for fun. When I was in the police academy, all I did was work out.” Mark suggests, “maybe you should go over and try out Bobby B’s. shot-put.” Eddie adds, “we should all go over there and make sure he’s been taking proper care of it.” Braden laughs, not hearing this line of discussion in a long time.

Coach Morris, joined by John Smith, comes over to congratulate Braden, telling him, “I still can’t believe it. That was the farthest kickoff I’ve ever seen, and I’ve been around this sport my whole life.” Braden replies, “thank you! Thank you!” Coach Morris asks, “how did you ever learn to kick like that?” Braden replies, “I’ve been practicing, but I got really good at it after taking physics class last year.” Puzzled, Coach Morris asks, “physics class?” Braden replies, “yeah. Miss Amherst explained that, the greater the wind resistance of an object moving through the air, the lower the angle should be. I think I got my kickoff angle down just right.”

Braden continues, “so, I’m watching football on TV. These guys punt the ball, trying to keep it in the air for a long time. Then, they wonder why they can only punt it 35 yards. Yeah, it’s up in the air for a long time, but what good is a 35-yard punt? It’s gonna end in a fair catch. And, everyone thinks that 45 degrees will get you the longest punt or kick off.

It won't. The angle is a lot less than 45 degrees because of wind resistance. I got my angles down!"

Impressed with Braden's understanding of physics, Coach Morris asks, "what's the optimal angle?" Braden replies, "it depends on how far you can kick it. The drag force is proportional to the square of the speed. So, my angle is different when I punt the ball compared to when I kick off." Braden goes on, explaining the physics behind kicking a football to the football coach, who should already know what Braden is explaining, but does not.

During Braden's dissertation, Eddie comments to Mark, "Braden sounds smart." Mark replies, "yeah. He remembered all that shit from physics class." Eddie comments, "he does have a point. Punters always go for a long hang time, but that's at the expense of distance. It seems like the whole purpose of punting the ball is to get it as far down the field as you can." Mark replies, "yeah. You would think. And, if the players are fast enough, the kicking team would get there before the punt is caught." Eddie adds, "Miss Amherst really knew what she was talking about." Of course she did. Her valuable information helped Eddie and Bobby B. break the State record in the discus and shot-put.

While Eddie and Mark were discussing physics, Braden is now getting ready to show the football team how to punt the football. Eddie mentions, "it looks like Braden is getting ready to punt." Mark replies, "well, he's always been good at kicking things, especially asses."

Calling the play by play, Mark announces, "here we go. It's fourth and twenty. They call in the special teams to get rid of the ball. You know, they really have little choice in this situation, Eddie. Braden is standing on the ten-yard line, and he looks confident. The ball is snapped, right into Braden's hands. Braden sets up, and, wow! Eddie, can you believe it? Did you hear that? When he connected, it sounded like a cannon went off! Check out that hang time! And, look at that! They're going to let it take a bounce!"

Braden punted from the ten-yard line. The ball lands clear across the field on the 29-yard line, giving a distance of 61 yards in the air. The ball rolls toward the end zone, but the bounce and roll is not what anyone is interested in. Coach Morris, seeing where the ball landed, is quite amazed. So is Smith, whose average punt is in the upper thirty-yard range. But, no one is more impressed with Braden's punt more than Braden. Exclaiming, "that's three ass kickings in one day! I'm the chief ass kicker on the track, and on the football field too!"

Braden tells Smith, "it's your turn!" Smith knows he cannot match Braden's punt, but nevertheless is pressured to try. Smith gets positioned ten yards behind the center.

Mark, standing with Eddie, again gives the play by play, announcing, "again, it's fourth and long, and they're in a sticky situation. The ball is snapped. Smith almost bobbles the ball, but he gets it off right before he is greeted by three defenders trying to crash the party and block the punt. What's this? Wow! It looks like the ball just might cross mid field! Oh no! Wait! It didn't quite make it. The ball looks like it landed just shy of the 50-yard line. They've marked it at the 49-yard line. With 39 yards in the air, we can't exactly put that one in the record books, Eddie." Eddie laughs, and asks Mark, "do you want to try out for football again?" Mark replies, "if I try out, it will be just to mess with them. I don't want to play."

Hearing exactly what he wanted to hear, Coach Morris is quite amused as Braden exclaims, "is anybody up for another ass kicking? How about a field goal? Who's ready to get their ass kicked?" Braden then looks at Smith, exclaiming, "I'll even let you go first! Go ahead! Set the standard! We'll see how long it stands!" Coach Morris, curious of what Braden can do, looks at Smith, telling him, "what are you waiting for?" Coach Morris whispers to Coach Herndon, "do you know if he can kick a field goal?" Coach Herndon whispers back, "I've never seen him not deliver what he promises, sir. He's never let me down."

Coach Morris yells out to his team, "set up for a field goal at the 39-yard line! I want to see a 46-yard attempt! Second string will be playing defense." Coach Morris, wanting to push Smith to his limit, knows that Smith's longest field goal of last season was 45 yards. Taking advantage of the current circumstances, the coach wants to push his kicker to the limit.

As the team gets set, Braden laughs and tells Coach Morris, "I already won! But, go ahead and have him kick the ball anyway. Somebody needs to break that ball in." Coach Morris wishes that, somehow, he could instill Braden's confidence and attitude into his team.

Smith positions himself five yards behind the 46-yard line, knowing that he must deliver. As Smith gets set, Braden stands with his arms crossed, not the least bit concerned about his competition. Smith, attempting a personal best, is quite nervous. But, losing to Braden in both the kickoff and punt, Smith knows he must deliver. The coach blows his whistle, and the center prepares to snap the ball.

The ball is snapped. The holder quickly positions the ball, which is carefully watched by Braden. Smith approaches and, with perfect timing, connects with the ball. With everyone's eyes on the ball, the ball soars

through the air as it approaches the uprights. Clearing the bar by just inches, Smith's attempt is the success Coach Morris was looking for. Smith, walking away with a renewed sense of confidence, is very encouraged to hear his team cheer.

Coach Morris asks Braden, "how far do you think you can kick it?" Braden energetically replies, "gimme 65 yards! I'm kicking ass today! Ain't nothing stopping me!" Making a big mistake, Coach Morris tells Braden, "you can't kick a 65-yard field goal!" Braden exclaims, "what are you talking about? I already kicked that ball through the uprights from 80 yards away!" Coach Morris, informs Braden, "this is different! This is a field goal! Accuracy matters!" Braden exclaims, "I want you to tell me something! What's the difference if that ball is in a tee or being held by somebody? There ain't no difference, except for maybe one! That tee ain't gonna flinch when it sees me coming!" Coach Morris tells his team, "okay! You heard him! Set it up for a 65-yard attempt!" Now even more fired up, Braden tells Coach Morris, "forget that shit! Set it up for 70 yards!"

Eddie and Mark watch as the football team gets set. Again calling the play by play, Mark announces, "here we go again, Eddie. It's fourth down and eighteen yards to go. They're calling in the special teams to punt. No! Wait! What's this? I don't believe it, Eddie! They're calling in the field goal unit! I don't know what the coach is thinking here Eddie, but it looks like they're going to attempt a 70-yard field goal! This really makes no sense this early in the game. It's only their first possession, and they're going to attempt a 70-yard field goal! Is that crazy, or what?"

The football team gets set, with the holder positioned for a 70-yard field goal. Braden tells the holder, "I want you to hold that ball steady, and don't you dare flinch!" The holder confidently replies, "you got it!" Braden then gets into position. Breaking standard protocol, Braden stands at the 16-yard line directly behind the ball. Fully expecting Braden to fail, Coach Morris shakes his head, wondering whether Braden even knows what he is doing.

Getting into position, Braden visualizes the ball as Mr. Crum's ass, and the goalpost as a jail cell. Braden verbalizes, "okay! That's Mr. Crum's flimsy ass, and I'm sending his fat ass to prison! This is my one and only chance of putting Mr. Crum's ass away for good! I'll teach his ass to send me to detention!" Braden is now ready. Coach Morris blows his whistle, and the center gets ready to snap the ball.

Resuming the play by play, Mark announces, "I still don't believe it! They're really going for the field goal, Eddie! Braden is standing on the 16-yard line, and he looks very confident. Here we go. The ball is snapped. The holder quickly positions the ball as Braden approaches the

ball like a lightning bolt. Wow! Can you even believe it? Did you hear that? It'd be a wonder if that football even survived that kick! I can't believe it, Eddie! The kick is dead center. But, does it have enough distance? And the kick is ... good! Axel Braden just delivered a 70-yard field goal! This is one for the record books!"

Braden exclaims, "what did I tell you! Seventy yards by the chief ass kicker!" Smith looks over at Braden, wondering how it is that Braden just unofficially broke the collegiate and NFL record. Braden walks over to Eddie and Mark, who both give him a high-five.

Coach Morris shakes his head and exclaims, "I just can't believe it! Who in the world is this guy?" Coach Herndon proudly replies, "I told you, sir. That's Axel Braden. He's our one and only chief ass kicker." Coach Morris repeats, "I just can't believe it!"

Coach Herndon tells Braden, "good job! Good job!" In a military tone, Braden replies, "thank you! Thank you!" Coach Herndon tells Braden, Mark, and Eddie, "let's go get a workout in." Again, in a military tone, Braden replies, "yes, ma'am!" As the track stars and their coach head to the track, Coach Morris is quite disappointed that he cannot sign Braden.

Not happy that his place kicker falls a bit short, Coach Morris tells his team, "okay! We have a lot of work to do! Let's get out there on the field and get to work!" Coach Morris, hearing of the talent that has been recruited by the track team, sincerely wishes the University could share that talent with the football team.

With the sideline entertainment now over, Eddie, Mark, and Braden, along with Coach Herndon, head back to the track, where the sprinters are running the interval training drill. As Coach Herndon approaches the track, she sees some of the runners slacking off, while others are training hard. Mark comments to Eddie, "it looks like McCutchen gave out." Eddie replies, "I can see that. You weren't even around to mess with him." Coach Herndon, listening to Mark and Eddie's exchange, is taking it all in, clearly seeing that she is not the only one frustrated with McCutchen. When they all get to the track, Eddie, Mark, and Braden join the workout.

After the workout, the team heads to the locker room. Since they are not officially on the team yet, Eddie, Mark, Braden, Mitchell, and Bobby B. all used unassigned lockers in the corner of the locker room. As they are getting dressed, Braden hears Leggett whisper to McCutchen, asking, "so, those guys are good at everything?" McCutchen replies, "yeah. If I knew they were going to this school, I would have gone somewhere else."

Knowing that Mark is the king of psychological warfare, McCutchen warns Leggett, "watch out for that Mark guy. That guy is like a wrecking

ball during a meet.” Leggett asks, “so, what does he do?” McCutchen explains, “he messes with everyone, and he always wins. But, he’d probably win anyway without messing with anyone. So, he only messes with everyone just to be a pain in the ass.” Braden files what he hears, adding it to the other suspicious activity he has seen with McCutchen and Leggett.

When Eddie, Mark, Braden, Mitchell, and Bobby B. were granted admission to the university and given track scholarships, they were encouraged to work out with the track team. They were also granted permission to use the University’s gym. After all, the University would hate for them to get out of shape, and it costs the University literally nothing to allow the incoming freshmen track stars to use the gym.

Eddie, Mark, Braden, and Bobby B., who have all been working out together, head to the University gym one afternoon. The nicely appointed gym is a far cry from the gym at the high school. With ten thousand square feet of free weights, machines, rowing machines, treadmills, and stair climbers, the gym is a state of the art facility. But, this particular gym is closed to the general University population and is only for the use of athletes on a University team and certain select individuals whose parents give huge sums of money to the school.

Entering the gym, Bobby B. asks, “what are we working today?” Mark, who has been laying brick, answers, “I think I’m working my lower body. I’ve been using my upper body a whole lot working on the house.” Bobby B., who has no shortage of quick comebacks these days, replies, “really? I thought working on your house was a leisurely break from working out.” Mark answers Bobby B.’s sarcasm, replying, “I’ll give you some of the heavy work tomorrow. We’ll see how that goes.” Bobby B. replies, “yeah. I’ll carry a pallet of bricks up to you on the scaffold.”

The verbal wrestling match between Mark and Bobby B. comes to a quick end when Eddie comments, “we’re definitely doing lower body today.” Pointing to one of the squat racks, Eddie informs everyone, “there’s McCutchen, lug nut, and two other guys doing squats.” Immediately, a smile comes across Mark’s face. Just seeing someone to mess with raises the group’s energy level.

Braden reminds everyone, “this looks like it’s gonna be a reunion of when we messed with Ambrosini in gym class that day when we were freshmen.” Eddie replies, “yeah! I remember that. We really worked them over good!” The group is now ready for some competition. Whether it be physical or psychological is yet to be seen.

As Eddie, Mark, Braden, and Bobby B. approach the squat racks as if they own the gym, McCutchen gets a sudden burst of energy. McCutchen

has been beaten by Mark on the track, and in the arena of psychological warfare for seven years. He is not about to be beaten by Mark and his buddies in the weight room. McCutchen sees this as an opportunity to redeem his psyche, and level the playing field a bit.

As he sees Mark approaching, Leggett tells McCutchen, “here comes the wrecking ball that you talked about.” McCutchen replies, “and, he brought half the wrecking crew with him.” Greg, one of McCutchen’s other buddies asks, “who are those guys?” McCutchen explains, “they’re going to be on the track team next year. They’re sprinters.” Greg informs McCutchen, “sprinters have nothing but fast-twitch muscles. They may be fast but, generally speaking, they’re weak. There’s a tradeoff between strength and speed.”

Greg Anderson, an exercise science major, just gave McCutchen a little bit of encouragement. Greg, however, really should be spending more time studying, for he is not exactly correct in his assessment regarding sprinters and fast-twitch muscles. Greg’s brother, Michael, who is working out with McCutchen and Leggett, is a liberal arts major, and is always trying to keep up with his younger brother. Neither Greg nor Michael is on a sports team, and are using the gym today courtesy of Leggett who, breaking the school rules, let them through the door.

Ready to mess with McCutchen, Eddie and his buddies walk up to the squat rack. Eddie asks, “how much are we going to start with?” Looking over at McCutchen’s group and seeing 135 pounds on their squat rack, Mark replies, “how about 135 pounds.” Eddie comments, “wow! That’s a lot of weight.” Mark tells Eddie, “you can probably do it.” Eddie loads the bar with two 45-pound weight plates, and Bobby B. goes first.

Getting under the bar, Bobby B. does a few warm-up repetitions at 135 pounds. Eddie follows suit, and is followed by Mark and Braden. This weight is nothing for the tribe, who squatted far more weight than this when they were in the ninth grade. McCutchen discreetly looks over, wondering how much weight Eddie and Mark can squat. Once Braden finishes his set, he exclaims, “now, it’s down to business! It’s time to get down!” Eddie comments, “it was kind of light. But, it was good for a warm-up.”

Mark and Eddie raise the weight to 225 pounds. McCutchen comments to his group, “here it comes. They’re going to show off.” Leggett stares at Bobby B. as he walks up to the squat rack. Momentarily looking over at McCutchen’s group as they stare, Bobby B. asks, “what are you looking at.” McCutchen answers with a question, asking, “are you going to squat that?” Bobby B. replies, “no.” Bobby B. lifts the bar off the squat rack, and presses the 225-pound bar overhead ten times. Bobby B. then gets under the bar, and does ten repetitions of squats.

Stepping away from the squat rack, Bobby B. tells McCutchen, "it's your turn. Step right up." McCutchen ignores Bobby B., but glances over from time to time as Eddie and Mark do their sets of squats with the 225-pound bar. While Braden is doing his set, McCutchen and Leggett raise the weight on their bar to 155 pounds. Bobby B. asks McCutchen, "are you going to squat that?" McCutchen replies, "yeah." Bobby B., stepping up the psychological warfare game, tells McCutchen, "why? You've already done your warm-up set." Leggett tells McCutchen, "just ignore them."

With the weight raised to 315 pounds, Bobby B. walks up to the bar, looks over at Leggett, telling him, "yeah. Ignore us. And, ignore this too." Bobby B. places his hands on the 315-pound bar, and presses it over head a few times. Getting under the bar, Bobby B. then does his requisite set of squats. Eddie goes next. While Eddie is doing his set, McCutchen watches intently, not believing what he is seeing.

Not wanting to be shown up, McCutchen gets under the 225-pound bar on his squat rack, attempting a personal record. Mark watches as McCutchen raises the bar off the rack. Seeing McCutchen's unsteadiness, Mark tells Eddie, "he's going down. Watch this." McCutchen lowers the bar into the squatted position and, halfway down, he loses his balance. Falling to the right, McCutchen loses control of the bar, dumping the weights off the bar as he falls to the ground. Crashing to the floor, McCutchen is slow to get up. Mark comments to Eddie, "well, I guess that didn't go exactly as planned."

Directing his attention to Eddie and Mark, Leggett gets angry and exclaims, "hey! What's wrong with you guys?" Mark replies, "it looks like McCutchen is the one with the problem. He's kind of dangerous in the gym." Eddie comments, "yeah. And, he's kind of dangerous on the track too." Finally, after five years, McCutchen steps up, yelling at Mark, exclaiming, "what did you just call me?" Mark calmly replies, "McCrutchen." McCutchen exclaims, "it's McCutchen!" Mark replies, "that's what I said, McCrutchen."

Turning up the heat a bit, Eddie mentions to Mark, "I thought his name is McClutching." Mark tells Eddie, "no. It's McCrutchen. McClutching is his brother, Scott." Eddie replies, "oh, yeah! That's right. McCrutchen and McClutching. Got it." Bobby B. laughs at Eddie and Mark's exchange, realizing what he has been missing during the meets.

Getting a little bent out of shape, McCutchen attempts to take a quick and meaningless jab at Mark's shoulder. With superior reflexes, Mark quickly steps back and to the side, avoiding the jab. Mark exclaims, "this is called the rope-a-dope!" Eddie, who is loading the bar with more weight, tells Mark, "that would make McCrutchen the dope."

Braden steps up and, sounding a bit like Mr. Zunde, tells McCutchen and Leggett, “hey! Chill out! If you guys have any differences with anyone, settle it on the track or on the squat rack!” Leggett bluntly tells Braden, “hey! Shut up!” Braden informs Leggett, “you’re the one who better shut their ass up. We kick your fat ass on the track, and now in here too!” Realizing that they are out classed, McCutchen and Leggett’s buddies tell them, “hey, let’s just get back to our workout.” Braden interjects, “that would be a good idea. Get your ass back to your workout.” Mark adds, “yeah. Get that chicken fat back to the chicken, junior.” Leggett and McCutchen say nothing more, realizing any further discussion will not end well.

Bobby B. approaches the squat rack and, getting under the bar, prepares to squat 405 pounds. McCutchen, and his crew, watches as Bobby B. lowers the bar. From the full squat position, Bobby B. raises the bar. As if that is not enough, Bobby B. does a few more repetitions. Fear is struck into McCutchen seeing Bobby B. squat 405 pounds several times. But, Bobby B. is obviously nowhere near his limit. And, providing even more entertainment for McCutchen, Eddie gets under the 405-pound bar, and is able to squat the weight. Mark and Braden follow suit, leaving McCutchen wondering why he is able to only squat in the 185 to 200-pound range on a good day.

Eddie, Mark, Braden, and Bobby B. move on to doing leg extensions, hamstring curls, and calf raises. McCutchen, Leggett, and their two friends steer clear of Eddie and his group. McCutchen, however, keeps a watchful eye on his competition. Braden catches a glimpse of McCutchen staring their way several times, most notably when Eddie or Mark are doing their set. Braden is certain that McCutchen is more of a problem than he originally thought.

On the way to the locker room, McCutchen thinks to himself that Eddie, Mark, Braden, and Bobby B. can all squat a weight that McCutchen cannot lift by any means at all. Recalling that Eddie can run 100 yards in 9.2 seconds, McCutchen’s mid ten-second range in the same race doesn’t quite measure up. And, as best McCutchen can recall, Eddie, Mark, and Braden can all run the 440-yard dash in the 46 to 47-second range. And Johnson, who is part of this group, is currently the fastest sprinter on the team. McCutchen quickly realizes that he will not win against this group, on the track or off. McCutchen’s jealousy and envy are clearly out of control.