

Eddie, The Mechanic

Chapter Six The Spring Track Season

Copyright © 2018 by Dr. Robert E. Zee

Tryouts for the high school Spring track team this year are expected to go quite well. Now that the physical education staff no longer reports to Mr. Crum, everything has been very quiet. The first day of tryouts arrives, and Kathy, Paula, and Barbara are all ready to get the team prepared for the first meet.

At the University, the majority of the track team members are a group of supposedly elite athletes on scholarship. Except for, perhaps, the McCutchen brothers and a few others, who should not have been allowed to be on the team to begin with. The scholarship package offered to the athletes depends on performance. In high school, however, everyone is offered the opportunity to try out for the team. Sadly, the majority of the high school students trying out don't make the cut.

Eddie has agreed to help out Mr. Frazier during tryouts, and drives up as the equipment is being brought out to the field. While the athletes walk out to the track, Eddie sees Kathy and Paula unloading the equipment. Eddie walks into the storage building and exclaims, "stop!" Kathy asks, "what's wrong?" Eddie points to the bed of the Cushman, laughs, and tells her, "just look at that! Bobby B. would be appalled! The shot-put is in the Cushman with the other equipment. It's going to get contaminated." Kathy replies by giving Eddie a kiss, and telling him, "yeah, I can see that. And, it's a bit dirty too." Eddie helps out with the equipment, as Barbara begins the one mile run to eliminate the aerobically deficient distance runners.

Glancing over toward the school, Kathy tells Paula, "it looks like you just got your wish from last season." Paula asks, "oh yeah? What's that?" Kathy tells her, "look over toward the school. You'll see." Walking from the parking lot, Paula sees Mr. Crum walking out to the track. Paula comments, "I wonder what he wants." Kathy replies, "I'm sure we'll all find

out soon enough.” Kathy and Paula are in the clear for the moment. Mr. Crum is headed straight toward Mr. Frazier.

An irate Mr. Crum tells Mr. Frazier, “someone here squirted super glue in my car door lock! I want to know who did it!” Since he can’t get his key into the lock, Mr. Crum assumes someone has squirted super glue into the lock mechanism. Mr. Crum vividly recalls an incident years ago where someone squirted super glue into his office door lock. He was locked out of his office for the entire day before the maintenance department was able to get by to replace his lock. They could have got there a lot sooner but, since it was Mr. Crum who was having the problem, he received special treatment.

Mr. Frazier asks the bitter principal, “how do you know it was someone here?” Mr. Crum replies, “I just know it was! The whole team passed by my car on their way out to the track. And, the baseball team and tennis team aren’t practicing yet!” Mr. Frazier tells Mr. Crum, “so, then call a locksmith.” Mr. Zunde, overhearing the conversation, allows the exchange of words to continue, only because it is amusing. But, seeing that he is not getting anywhere with Mr. Frazier, Mr. Crum approaches Kathy and Paula.

Kathy tells Paula, “trouble at twelve o’clock. That old Crum is headed this way.” Paula replies, “oh, great.” Mr. Crum walks up, exclaiming, “did one of you put super glue in my door lock?” Kathy insipidly replies, “no. Have a nice day.” Kathy goes about her business, and Mr. Crum exclaims, “I’m not done here!” Kathy replies, “well, I am. So, have a nice day.” Mr. Crum informs Kathy, “you can’t talk to me that way!” Kathy, rebuffing the irate principal, exclaims, “I can talk to you any way I want! You’re the one with the problem here, not me! So, get out of my way! I have work to do.” Mr. Crum tells Kathy, “I want.” Interrupting him, Kathy screams, “I said, get out of my way! Now! Unless you want me to have someone belt your ass to the fence, leave!”

Mr. Zunde walks over and calmly tells Mr. Crum, “Crum, get away from the track. I’m sure you recall what happened last time you were on the track. If you don’t remember, I’m sure John and Erika will be glad to remind you.” Mr. Crum informs Mr. Zunde, “someone put super glue in my door lock!” Mr. Zunde tells Mr. Crum, “that would be your problem, not mine. Now, get away from the track.” Mr. Crum, knowing that he is getting nowhere, heads back to the school.

Kathy tells Mr. Zunde, “you know, I’m really getting sick of him.” Mr. Zunde explains to Kathy, “don’t let him bother you. Let me tell you a secret. The calmer you reply to him, the more irate he gets. Try that sometime. For some reason, he can’t handle it. If you’re calm, eventually

he'll blow a gasket, and just leave." Kathy grins, and replies, "yeah, I'm going to do that next time."

The next time didn't take long to arrive. After practice, Kathy, Eddie, Paula, and Barbara walk toward their vehicles. Mr. Crum, standing in the parking lot, is at a loss what to do about his car door lock. Kathy puts her stuff in her trunk, and Mr. Crum yells out to her, "so, you claim you don't know anything about this?" Kathy smiles, and calmly replies, "exactly." Mr. Crum exclaims, "I can't get in my car!" Kathy, learning from Mr. Zunde, calmly replies, "that would be your problem, not mine." Kathy starts to get in her car to drive away. Mr. Crum exclaims, "can't you guys help me out here?"

Kathy looks at Eddie, who asks Mr. Crum, "what seems to be the problem?" Mr. Crum exclaims, "someone on the track team put super glue in my lock! I can't get my key in the door lock." Eddie asks Mr. Crum, "what makes you think someone on the track team put super glue in your door lock?" Mr. Crum replies, "the key won't go in. And, they were the only ones around!"

Messing with Mr. Crum, Eddie acts surprised, telling Mr. Crum, "wow! The track team was the only ones around. That about says it all. It must have been one of them." Mr. Crum tells Eddie, "I know it was one of them!" Eddie replies, "and, you know what? I know who it was." Mr. Crum demands, "who was it? I want to know who it was!" Eddie confesses, "it was Braden." In the middle of an amygdala hijack¹, Mr. Crum exclaims, "see! I knew it! I knew it was one of them!" Eddie bluntly tells Mr. Crum, "I'm shittin' you, Crum. Braden graduated last year. He was nowhere around." Eddie then tells Mr. Crum, "let me see your key."

Mr. Crum hands Eddie his key, and Eddie finds that the key will not easily go into the lock. Eddie gets a can of spray lubricant out of his trunk, and lubricates Mr. Crum's door lock. Putting the key into the lock, Eddie turns it, and unlocks the door. Eddie opens the door, and tells Mr. Crum, "there you go. Please have a safe trip home. And, don't forget to change your oil at the recommended interval, otherwise the warranty on your new engine will be void."

Kathy, after seeing Eddie open Mr. Crum's door, tells Paula, "Crum must really be a special kind of stupid." Paula replies, "yeah. I can see that. And, it's getting more obvious every year. Kathy mentions, "you

¹ Amygdala Hijack: An immediate and very disproportionate emotional response to a perceived threat. I.e., inappropriate engagement of the fight or flight mechanism.

know. He could have put the key in the other door, and got in from the other side.” Paula sarcastically comments, “brain damage. It’s got to be.” Kathy replies, “yeah. From running into the discus.”

Kathy gets in her car to leave, and Eddie tells her, “I’ll see you at home.” Kathy and Paula drive off, leaving the irate Mr. Crum stewing about what a fool he made of himself. Eddie hangs around for a minute or so, wanting to hear how badly Mr. Crum’s bearings are grinding.

Mr. Crum starts his engine, and Eddie thinks back to Angelo’s comment last year about how Mr. Crum expects his serious engine problems to be solved with a bottle of liquid moron engine repair concentrate. Today, Mr. Crum’s engine, once again, sounds like it could use a bottle or two. But, Eddie heads home, knowing that Mr. Crum will show up at the service station needing another engine rebuild someday soon.

Over at the University, things are looking up for the track team. The team has been practicing using the resistance sleds, and running interval training drills on a regular basis. As much as some of the athletes hated the resistance sled when it was first introduced, they can now clearly see improvements in their performance. Practice is now held outside, regardless of the temperature and humidity. One day, over the Winter, just to prove a point, Dr. Braun had the team drag the resistance sled up and down the sand track in the snow. Over the last few months, the coaches can all see dramatic improvements in the team’s performance.

With a big meet coming up in a few days, Dr. Braun is hopeful that the men will perform better than in previous meets. The women, though many of them are top notch athletes, perform better now than earlier this year. And, in the upcoming meet, the team will be up against the same twelve schools as during the Winter season. The coaches are very interested to see whether using the training sleds and the interval training workout has made a noticeable difference.

Eddie, Mark, Braden, Mitchell, and Bobby B. all got official word that they will be eligible to compete during the next academic year. While they are not required to do so, they have all chosen to work out with the team at 7:00 a.m. every day. Working out with the team in the early morning leaves the rest of the day for doing other things.

Now that Eddie is officially on the team, on one day, Kathy takes it upon herself to visit the University’s radio station between classes. Kathy plans to inform them that Eddie, the high school National record holder in the 100-yard dash, will be joining the University’s track team. She also plans to inform them of the other athletes that will be joining the team, hoping to spread the publicity and raise some awareness of how good the

track team will be next year. Kathy really liked the great amount of attention the track team received in high school. At the University, however, not too much attention is paid to the track team.

Walking into the campus radio station, Kathy is amazed at all of the equipment mounted in several nineteen-inch racks, each one being seven feet high, all in a room behind a glass window. To Kathy, the equipment looks sophisticated and complicated enough to send a man to the moon. In the racks are equipment to monitor the transmitter, reel to reel tape machines, cart carousels, and even a computer with many blinking lights.

But, the awe of being impressed by the equipment abruptly comes to an end when Angela Meadows, the operator on duty, greets Kathy, saying, "hi! You must be our new DJ. You're on the air in five minutes. You'd better get ready! I've got to run, or I'll be late to class." Pointing to the studio, Angela tells Kathy, "the studio's over there. Make yourself at home. Gotta run." Quite startled by Angela's introduction, Kathy replies in a panic, "no, wait! I just came here to give you guys some information!" Quickly changing her disposition, Angela smiles, telling Kathy, "I'm only teasing. We greet everyone that we don't recognize that way." Kathy fell for that one, hook, line, and sinker. Kathy thinks to herself that Mark may just have some competition in messing with people.

Angela invites Kathy into the radio station, where they have a seat at a table. Now that the ice is broken, Angela asks Kathy, "okay, so you mentioned you have some information for us. What's up?" Kathy asks, "first, I was wondering if you guys do interviews with athletes?" Angela replies, "all the time! What do you got for me?" Kathy is very surprised to see a very energetic personality off the track but, to be on the radio, being an extrovert is definitely an asset. Kathy explains, "Eddie Bogenskaya, who was the fastest guy in the country last year in track, will be running track for the University next year. I thought it might be some good publicity for the University."

Angela, who is a communications major, tells Kathy, "sure! I can do that." That is good news to Kathy, who was suspecting she would have to go through a lot of red tape to even get to the right person. Angela asks, "so, can you tell me more about Eddie?" Kathy explains, "first, he never loses. He runs the 100-yard dash in 9.2 seconds, which is the National high school record. And, Eddie holds the State record in the discus. Oh, and next year, Mark Svoboda, Axel Braden, Robert Bradshaw, and Gary Mitchell will also be joining the University's track team. They are all really awesome!" Seeing the potential for more interviews, Angela is suddenly very interested.

Angela asks, "what's their story?" Kathy replies, "Mark is also a sprinter, and runs the 100-yard dash in 9.3 seconds. Mark holds the high

school State record in the 220-yard dash. Braden holds the high school State record in the 440-yard dash, which is 46.6 seconds. Mitchell can break a four-minute mile. And, Robert Bradshaw holds the high school State record in the shot-put. These guys are top notch, and they're all joining our track team next year. They really are quite amazing."

Not wanting to leave herself out, Kathy adds, "and, I hold the women's high school State 100-yard dash record." Angela exclaims, "oh, wow! Nice Porsche, by the way!" Angela winks, then whispers to Kathy, "I saw your plate on the front of the car. I've been wondering whose car that was." Kathy tells Angela, "thank you! Eddie made the plate for me."

Angela explains to Kathy, "all this sounds really good! I can definitely do something with this." Kathy asks, "so, you're going to do the interview yourself?" Angela replies, "sure! I'm a communications major. This is what I want to do when I get out of here." Kathy can clearly see that Angela has no problem expressing herself, speaks clearly, and has a very bubbly and outgoing personality. And, like is heard in many universities, instead of using the term, "when I graduate," Angela used the phrase, "when I get out of here."

Angela goes on to explain, "here, at the campus radio station, we have many communications majors, like myself. We're usually the ones who get on the air. Some of us are DJs, some of us do interviews, and some of us do the campus news. I like doing interviews. There are also producers who edit the tapes of the interviews, and produce the program. Occasionally, we do live shows and broadcast concerts. Then, there are the technical guys. They keep the station running and on the air. And, there are people who do other things around here too." To Kathy, it sounds like she ran into the right person today, quite by accident.

Angela sets up the interview with Eddie to be sometime right before the semester begins. Angela asks that Kathy bring her a list of Eddie's accomplishments in track, and any information that would be helpful for the interview. Angela explains to Kathy that, since the interview will be taped, the station will have the opportunity to play it on multiple occasions. The first airing will be during the Autumn semester. The second will be when the track season begins. Angela also mentions to Kathy that she would also like to interview the rest of the incoming athletes at some time. Best of all, Angela invites Kathy to sit in on Eddie's interview.

When Kathy gets home, Eddie is working on Kathy's Dune Buggy. Kathy walks into the detached garage, and asks Eddie, "what are you working on?" From underneath the vehicle, Eddie replies, "your Dune Buggy." Kathy replies, "oh, yeah. I see that. Is it almost done?" Eddie

replies, “no. But, it’s getting there. It will definitely be ready by the beginning of the Summer. But, it depends on what else comes up.”

Kathy then tells Eddie, “I went by the campus radio station today.” A minute later, Eddie emerges from underneath the Dune Buggy and asks Kathy, “okay, Katarina Karakova. What did you sign me up for this time?” Kathy asks, “what makes you so sure that I signed you up for something?” Eddie explains, “well, let me think. First off, I don’t think your trading in your future career of being a gym teacher for a career in broadcasting. So, let’s see. What else? Maybe I think you signed me up for something because you were waiting for me to ask the next question.”

Kathy smiles, and replies, “well, I did sort of sign you up for something. And, by the way, it’s Katarina Bogenskaya now.” Eddie replies, “yeah, but Katarina Karakova just sounds so cute. So, what did you sign me up for?” Kathy replies, “okay, so there’s this communications major, Angela, who wants to interview you about track. Then, they’re going to put it on the air when school starts, and again when track starts. And, she might want to interview Mark, Braden, Bobby B., and Mitchell too sometime. But, she wants to start with you.” Eddie smiles, wondering how Kathy comes up with some of the things she gets him involved in.

Eddie starts joking, depicting how the interview will go, eloquently orating, “so, Eddie, I hear that you’re a freshman?” ‘Yeah, I am.’ ‘So, Eddie, what do you think of the University so far?’ ‘Well, I really wouldn’t know. I don’t go to classes.’ ‘Oh, so you just run track?’ ‘Yeah, that’s it. I just run track. Well, I’m also a mechanic.’ ‘Really, you’re a mechanic?’ ‘Yeah, I’m a mechanic and I get class credit for fixing cars.’”

Kathy laughs, and tells Eddie, “hey now! That’s not what they’re going to ask you!” Eddie replies, “well, I’ll go ahead and do it. Just make sure they don’t bring up anything about classes, my major, and that sort of stuff.” Kathy mentions, “yeah. I can see that being a problem.” Well, it’s set. Eddie will be interviewed by Angela at the campus radio station sometime before the Autumn semester begins.

Back at the service station, Angelo, who has made a considerable amount of money in the stock market, now opens the service station at 9:30 a.m., after Eddie gets out of track practice. By reinvesting his profits, Angelo is on his way to finally getting a bit of rest. Angelo has even been planning a vacation, something he has not done in a long time. Angelo is also a bit more laid back and relaxed after seeing his profits over the last few months.

Braden is now working at the University campus as a police officer, working full time until classes begin. The University had an open position, and Braden just happened to show up at the right time. While

he is not at work, Braden is in the University's gym, out on the track running laps, or finding a way to visit Wendy.

And, to get his and Paula's house completed faster, Mark put Mitchell to work. Mark's crew now includes Paula, Bobby B., and Mitchell, and occasionally Erika. Paula has put herself in charge of getting the pool installed, which is in progress. Paula has also been spending a lot of time planning her and Mark's wedding.

The day of the big Spring divisional meet arrives, and the University team is more confident than ever that they may take home a few more medals. Hosted at the University's outdoor stadium, where the tribe has won many victories, the turf is familiar to all. Braden, who is working in an official capacity today, attends the meet in his police uniform, enjoying a front row seat to the action. With a stopwatch hidden in his pocket, Braden plans to time a few events himself. Eddie, Mark, Mitchell, and Bobby B. are in the stands relaxing, enjoying the nice weather.

While they are waiting for the meet to start, Eddie curiously asks Bobby B., "so, what does the University team have in the shot-put?" Bobby B. replies, "they have Pete Mendenhall, who is not too bad. And, there's Fabio Cinquegrana. He's not too bad either. One of them will probably take home a medal today. Mendenhall won the bronze medal at the indoor meet this year." Joining the conversation, Mark asks, "where do you fit in?" Bobby B. boasts, "I can beat them both. They each throw around 55 to 58 feet. I can throw more than 67 feet. They're both nice guys." It is good to hear that the University has some strength in the field events compared with the other schools in the division.

After the preliminary heats of the men's 100-yard dash are finished, the women are up next in that event. With a reunion of the annual girl fight, Kathy and Paula are in the first heat today, along with the other highly seeded runners. Liz Duncan, who is now a graduating senior, has her last chance to win the coveted gold medal in a divisional meet. Kathy and Paula plan to prevent her from doing so.

Seeing Liz and a few other runners from last year, Kathy smiles, sighs, and says, "wow! Here we all are again. Good luck to all of you!" This time, for the moment, Liz is silent. She has learned that saying anything at all will get her nowhere. Kathy, who has not lost a short sprint since she's been in college, is not about to start now.

The Starter announces, "on your marks," followed by "set," as the runners get in the "set" position. The gun is fired, and Kathy and Paula, leaving the blocks, both let out a loud primal scream. Within a few yards, Kathy and Paula are tied for the lead, with Liz right on their heels. At the halfway point, Kathy, Paula, and Liz break from the pack, but Liz appears

to be losing a little ground over the two leaders. Kathy crosses the finish line first, with Paula finishing right behind her. Liz finishes in third place yet again, but this is not the final. Liz has one more chance to win the gold medal. Without a doubt, Kathy, Paula, and Liz know they have all made the final. The other finalists will be determined after the remaining heats.

During mid morning, the call is made for the men's 440-yard dash. Braden, who is working security detail, makes his way to the starting line. The 440-yard dash often brings with it the most intense competition of the meet. No other race on the track attracts Braden's attention more than the 440-yard dash. Braden, also wanting to know the 220-yard split time of the leader, has his own stopwatch in hand. Braden clearly suspects the leader, and winner, will be Johnson.

Up in the stands, the tribe has their eyes on this race. Solely interested in who places in each heat, Eddie, Mark, and Mitchell will time only the first, second, and third place winners. Until, of course, when McCutchen or Leggett run. Although neither of them are any competition for Eddie, he is interested in whether his training sled has improved either McCutchen's or Leggett's performance.

The first heat of the 440-yard dash brings a winning time of 46.1 seconds, by none other than Johnson. On his stopwatch, Braden clocked Johnson at about a 23-second split, indicative of a constant pace. Second place, which will be up for discussion in the next few heats, is held by a runner with a time of 50.3 seconds. In the following heats, it is revealed that no one is able to beat Johnson's time.

Braden, standing near the Timekeepers, gets the inside scoop on what is coming up in each heat before anyone else. Braden wants to know where he will stand next year when he is eligible to compete, and who the key players are. So far, the afternoon brings Braden only good news.

The third heat brings Leggett, who stands behind the blocks in lane three. Eddie announces, "hey! The lug nut is out on the track. He's in lane three. I'm clocking him," as he winds up his stopwatch signifying that his stopwatch may be running for a while. The gun is fired, and Leggett appears to be among the frontrunners in his heat. As the sprint progresses, Eddie, who is quite surprised, comments, "wow! The lug nut is actually running today." When Leggett crosses the finish line, Eddie announces, "wow! I clocked the lug nut at 54.2 seconds." Eddie watches as Leggett returns to the bench. From a distance, Eddie can clearly see that Coach Herndon appears to be happy with Leggett's performance today.

McCutchen walks on the track, and is in lane two for the fifth heat. Mark comments, "here goes McCutchen." Eddie, who is kind of laid back at the moment, tells Mark, "you time him. My stopwatch only goes to fifteen minutes. After that, I might doze off and lose track of time." Mark laughs, and exclaims, "and, just look at him! He's checking his shoelaces!" Eddie replies, "I think he's damaged for life." The gun is fired, and Eddie starts counting out, "one McCutchen, two McCutchen, three McCutchen." At the end of the race, McCutchen surprisingly crosses the finish line in second place. Mark announces, "wow! He actually broke 60 seconds! He ran a 55.2!"

Eddie then exclaims, "wow! The training sled and the interval training workout actually works!" Since Eddie delivered the four training sleds, Coach Herndon has had the sprinters dragging the sleds two days a week, on Monday and Thursday, putting them through a grueling workout. On Tuesday and Friday, the sprinters hit the track, running the interval training workout. And, on Wednesday, when the distance team is using the training sleds, the sprinters polish their handoff skills. A 55.2-second quarter mile is McCutchen's personal record. And, 54.2 seconds is Leggett's personal best.

Right before lunch, the call is made for the women's 100-yard dash final. Kathy, Paula, and Liz have all qualified, and head to the starting line for their reunion. Kathy remembers last year when Liz coldly asked her and Paula, "so, you're the freshman?" So, this year, Kathy smiles, and casually mentions to Liz in a calming voice, "I'm a sophomore this year." Liz brashly replies, "so, what's it to you?" Kathy sweetly replies, "that means you're a senior. I'm going to miss you next year." Liz, now infuriated, tries to respond, but she is tongue tied. Abruptly turning away from Kathy, she unexpectedly stares right into Paula's face. Paula calmly comments, "I'm a sophomore too, you know." Liz, who is done with Kathy and Paula, screams, "shit," and walks a few yards away.

The Starter announces, "this is the 100-yard dash final. Good luck to everyone. On your marks." Announcing, "set," the Starter waits as everyone gets into position. The gun goes off, and the runners are out of the blocks. Kathy's and Paula's primal scream burns into Liz's memory, and the eight runners fight it out for the title of the fastest female in the division. Kathy pushes herself toward the finish line harder, both wanting another gold medal and wanting to deny Liz the gold medal. At the finish line, Kathy takes first place, and Paula takes second place. Liz, who could not manage her emotions at the starting line, finishes in fourth place, right behind a junior wearing number 902.

The girl wearing number 902 jumps up and down, and exclaims, "I got third! I got third!" Seeing the girl's excitement, Kathy walks over and gives number 902 a high-five, telling her, "great job! You're awesome!"

Paula then walks over, also giving number 902 a high-five. Kathy asks number 902, "what's your name?" The girl replies, "Adrianna." Kathy replies, "I'm Kathy, and this is Paula. That was a really great run!" Adrianna replies, "thank you! I really wasn't expecting to win anything today. I'm so happy!" Paula tells her, "you did good, girl!" The women head back to their benches, as Liz bitterly stands off to the side, with her hands on her hips.

When they return to the bench, everyone gives Kathy and Paula a high-five. Not paying too much attention to their winning times, Kathy and Paula find out that, today, they have both set a personal best. They give each other a high-five, now wondering what the time of the third place runner was. But, with the 100-yard dash final now over, Kathy and Paula can now get lunch. Eddie, and the rest of the incoming freshmen for next year, join the team for lunch. With them today, as they head to the University cafeteria, is Dr. Braun.

On the way to lunch, Dr. Braun mentions to Eddie, "since we've been using your training sleds, a lot of the runner's times have come down." Eddie replies, "yeah, I've noticed that. Leggett looks like he had a good run today." Dr. Braun, giving Eddie some good news, reveals, "so far, everyone has run a personal best in today's divisional competition. The only explanation I have is the change in the workout methodology and your training sled." Eddie comments, "Mark even noticed that McCrutchen had a decent run." Dr. Braun admits, "I saw that. That was quite a surprise to all of us." Eddie is so accustomed to mispronouncing McCutchen's name, that it now comes out "McCrutchen" automatically.

After lunch, the call is made for the men's one mile run. After his conversation with Dr. Braun, Eddie is interested to see if Stone's performance has also improved. Stone, who has hit a performance barrier, has been looking for any way at all to break through. Expected to win the mile today, Stone is on the track, waiting for the gun.

Mitchell, who has been training with the team, is also interested to see how well Stone performs today. Mitchell, who is studying Stone, has Eddie and Mark catch a few of Stone's quarter mile times. After all, if Mitchell and Stone will be on the same team, one of them will have to settle for second place. Mitchell prefers that second place goes to Stone.

The gun is fired, and the first heat of milers are off. As expected, Stone sprints the first few yards, securing the leading position. The end of the first lap reveals Stone ran the first quarter mile in 57.4 seconds. At the half mile mark, Eddie informs Mitchell, "his second quarter mile was 59.8 seconds." Stone, who is out to set his own personal best today, does not care about the competition or race strategy. He knows his only real competition, Mitchell, is sitting in the stands with a stopwatch in his

hand. At the end of the third quarter mile, Mark announces, “not bad. He clocked a 60.3 third quarter.” Without any direct threat behind him, Stone crosses the finish line, as Eddie announces, “the last quarter mile was also 60.3 seconds.” During this run, surprisingly, two of Stone’s quarter mile split times were better than average.

Using the approximate split times, Mitchell calculates Stone ran a 3:57.8 mile. Eddie, however, brought both of his stopwatches, and tells Mitchell, “Stone ran a 3:58.1.” Eddie hands the stopwatch to Mitchell, who realizes he now has some competition. Stone realized the same thing a few months ago when Mitchell arrived on the scene.

Mitchell asks, “what year is Stone in anyway?” Eddie replies, “no one really knows.” Mitchell, who is now curious, asks, “okay. Now, explain this to me. How can anyone not know what year he’s in?” Eddie whispers, “it’s some sort of secret, so you can’t make it public. Stone plays in a band. He’s getting a music degree to run track. But, this is the real secret. He doesn’t go to any classes. So, that’s how come no one knows what year he’s in.” Mitchell replies, “wow! I wonder how they get away with that.” Eddie, who got the same deal as Stone, explains, “I guess if you’re fast enough, they can do anything they want.”

The call is made for the women’s mile medley relay. This is Kathy, Paula, Genise, and Barbara’s event. No one has beat them this year or last. On the track again with Paula is Liz Duncan. Liz gives Paula a dirty look, but Paula does not even notice. Liz, apparently wanting some attention, gets none. Evidently, Liz wants a verbal competition in addition to the physical competition on the track. The truth is that Liz will win neither. Also on the track is number 902, who took third place earlier in the 100-yard dash. Number 902 is smiling, ready to run, and waves to Paula.

Once everyone is behind their blocks and settled down, the Starter announces, “on your marks.” The Starter announces, “set.” The gun goes off, and Paula is out to show everyone why the 220-yard dash is her race. During the first 50 yards, with a repeat performance of the divisional meet earlier this year, Paula is again in the lead. Paula hands off to Kathy, with everyone in the stadium knowing who just started running. Kathy’s primal scream has become her personal signature. Kathy increases the lead, and hands off to Genise.

Back up in the stands, Eddie times Genise’s leg. Eddie is wondering if Genise’s 440-yard time has improved. Genise can reliably run a 55 to 56-second quarter mile but, last season, had trouble breaking that barrier. Eddie is impressed, noticing her split time is somewhere near 26 seconds. Genise hands off to Barbara, with Eddie timing Genise’s leg at 54.5 seconds.

Barbara, who has been handed a seventeen-second lead on a golden platter, knows she has the race wrapped up. As Barbara runs her half mile leg, the ice princess, Liz, silently stares at Barbara. Barbara, along with the rest of the mile medley relay team, has just about wrapped up denying Liz of another gold medal. As Barbara crosses the finish line, Liz is denied yet another gold medal in a divisional meet. Kathy, Paula, Genise, and Barbara exchange high-fives and hugs, and head to the team bench.

At the end of the meet begins the awards ceremony. The Meet Announcer introduces today's officials, recognizes the coaches, and commends the athletes for their superior performances today. The ceremony then moves on, recognizing the winners. In a divisional meet, winning a medal is a significant accomplishment, as there can be up to 36 competitors in the individual events, and 12 competitors in the relay events.

In the women's events, Kathy is called to the stage to receive the gold medal in the women's 100-yard dash, standing next to Paula, who takes the silver medal. And, standing to the other side of Kathy is Adrianna, taking the bronze medal. In other events, Paula takes the gold medal in the women's 220-yard dash, with Kathy taking the silver medal. Genise again wins the gold medal in the women's 440-yard dash, setting a personal record. Genise also takes the bronze medal in the half mile. Barbara wins the gold medal in the half mile and in the mile. And, Kathy, Paula, Genise, and Barbara are called to the stage to receive the gold medal in the mile medley relay.

In the men's events, Johnson, with a repeat performance of the divisional meet earlier this year, takes 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, setting a personal record and a record for the University. Darryl, of course, held the previous record for the University. And, Pete Mendenhall takes the silver medal in the shot-put today.

Of other interest, many of the University team members have significantly improved their performance. This is encouraging to the team, especially to those who will return next year. Nearly every team member has set a personal record in their event during this week. This is particularly encouraging to the coaching staff who, aside from a few specific team members, has only a marginally competitive team.

After the meet, Eddie and Kathy head out to the pizzeria for dinner, with the rest of the tribe joining them. Today, however, a good number of the track team members join in on the celebration. Among them is Genise who, after having an awesome day, really didn't feel like going back to her dorm room to be by herself.

When they arrive, Joe yells out from behind the counter, “hey Kathy! It looks like you won again today!” Kathy replies, “yeah! Me and Paula got three medals each! And, this is our friend, Genise. She won a few medals too today!” Genise quickly notices a few of the tribe’s pictures on the wall.

Since they are a large group, Joe comes over and takes their order. Kathy, ordering for her and Eddie, tells Joe, “I want a discus! And, I want some of those little discus thingies on it. Oh, and some of those cut up javelins with garlic butter. And, we want a salad, but no drill bits.” Genise asks Paula, “what was that she ordered?” Paula explains to Genise, “this goes way back. A discus is a pizza. The ‘little discus thingies’ are pepperoni. And, the ‘drill bits’ are those spiral pasta things they put on salads. Oh, and a ‘cut up javelin’ is a bread stick.” Genise laughs, and replies, “that is really funny that he knew exactly what Kathy was ordering.”

Oddly, among the group who is getting pizza are McCutchen and his older brother. The fact that the McCutchen brothers even bothered coming to the celebration dinner puzzles Mark and Paula. While they are eating, Paula tells Mark, “McCrutchen is not here for the celebration. He has an ulterior motive.” Mark asks Paula, “how do you know?” Paula replies, “my superpowers. I just know.”

Hearing the word “superpowers” coming from Paula, Kathy whispers to Paula, asking, “hey, what’s up?” Paula whispers to Kathy, “McCrutchen is up to something. Just watch him. He’s not here to celebrate. He’s here for some other reason.” McCutchen, constantly looking around the table, is preoccupied trying to figure out the dynamics between certain people. Mark whispers to Paula, “he might be on your team, but he’s not on your side.” Paula replies, “you got that right.”

After lunch, everyone walks out to the parking lot. Since everyone drove to the meet separately, everyone heads to their own vehicle. McCutchen, who hitched a ride from another team member, watches carefully as Paula gets into her Beach Patrol Jeep. McCutchen thinks back to a while ago, when he saw Mark, Eddie, Kathy, and Paula driving Paula’s Jeep on the beach. A light suddenly goes on in McCutchen’s head, albeit a very dim one. McCutchen finally figures out that Mark was feeding him a bunch of bullshit that day on the beach about being part of the beach patrol. McCutchen then sees Kathy, along with Genise, get into Kathy’s Porsche 914. McCutchen sees Eddie get into his MGB, and Mark get into his brand-new Jeep pickup truck, complete with a new service body. As if that wasn’t enough, the sound of Bobby B. starting his BSA Starfire bike is the icing on the cake.

McCutchen thinks back to all the rumors he's heard over the years that many of the Northside High School track team members got paid to run. Recalling all the rumors that Bobby B. makes his tuition money to throw the shot-put, the words of Mr. Ruff's official complaints echo in his head. Watching envy and jealousy pour out of every orifice and expressed from every appendage of McCutchen's body, Paula is sure McCutchen is up to something. Paula knows now to keep a close eye on McCutchen.

Back at the high school, the Spring semester brings Mr. Crum another flavor of a problem waiting for him one Monday morning. The Postal carrier walks into the school, delivering the daily mail as usual. Today, however, Mr. Crum is the lucky recipient of a piece of Certified Mail, which he reluctantly signs for. No one typically sends Certified Mail to deliver good news, especially when the return address is the name of a law firm. This is really not what Mr. Crum wanted to walk into on Monday morning.

Mr. Crum opens his envelope, which contains a letter that states,

Mr. Maurice Crum:

Please be advised that this law firm represents the Northside High School track team.

You are hereby commanded to appear for an injunction hearing, scheduled at 9:00 a.m. on April 31, at the County courthouse.

If you fail to appear for this hearing, a warrant will be issued for your arrest.

Sincerely,
Willie Burnham, Esq.

Receiving the legal correspondence, Mr. Crum, to say the least, is very distressed. Mr. Crum's fear of the legal system goes back many years ago when he suspended John Davies, who was the high school's star football quarterback. Davies, who was on target to get a scholarship to a major university, was suspended by Mr. Crum for drinking a beer on school grounds. Even though Davies was of legal age, and school was not in session, Mr. Crum suspended him anyway. When Davies was not allowed to play in the divisional semifinals, his father took the issue to the school board, and threatened to take legal action. Shortly afterwards, Mr. Zunde, hired by the school board, arrived on the scene to keep Mr. Crum in check.

Further fear of the legal system plagued Mr. Crum when Erika's father, a police captain, showed up at his office two years ago when Erika was in

an altercation with Chuckie. Captain Gabriel was again called out to the school this year when Terry Haynes and her two cohorts attacked Erika. Mr. Crum, for some reason, has clearly developed an irrational fear of the police and legal system.

As a result of receiving today's letter, Mr. Crum haphazardly organizes a meeting to get to the bottom of the situation. At the beginning of the day's last period, the announcement comes over the public address system, "will the entire indoor and Spring track team please report to room 105 immediately. Mr. Frazier and Mr. Zunde, please report to room 105. Mr. Harrison, please report to the gym."

Hearing the announcement, Mr. Frazier asks Mr. Zunde, "do you know what that's all about?" Mr. Zunde replies, "I can only imagine. Perhaps the entire track team is being investigated to see who may be missing a gold medal." After Mr. Harrison, the permanent substitute, arrives at the gym, Mr. Frazier and Mr. Zunde head to room 105.

Being the last to arrive, Mr. Frazier and Mr. Zunde see Mr. Crum pacing the floor in front of the classroom. Mr. Crum tells the two coaches, "please have a seat." Mr. Zunde replies, "I prefer to stand, thank you. What is this all about? Oh, wait! Since it is so late in the year, I'm guessing there must be an epidemic of overdue library books." Mr. Crum brazenly replies, "no, it's not! I'm sure you already know what this is about!" Mr. Zunde instructs Mr. Crum, "actually, I don't have the slightest idea what this is about. This is a school, so why don't you educate us." Erika, who treads in deep water when it comes to Mr. Crum, comments, "yeah! Educate us. Waiting." But, Erika doesn't mind treading in deep water because Mr. Crum would surely drown in anything deeper than a puddle.

Turning on an overhead projector, Mr. Crum displays the letter he received from the attorney's office. Mr. Crum takes the time to read the letter aloud to the track team, not understanding that the track team is quite literate and can all read it for themselves. Mr. Crum announces, "first of all, I want to know who is behind this legal action!" The room falls silent, apparently inferring that no one knows anything about the letter. The team members look at each other, wondering why Mr. Crum is extremely irate.

Not getting any response from the team, addressing Mr. Frazier and Mr. Zunde, Mr. Crum brashly asks, "do either of you know what this is about?" Mr. Zunde looks at Mr. Frazier with a look suggesting that Mr. Crum is from a different planet. Wanting to throw Mr. Crum off track, Mr. Zunde replies, "no. So, what's your point?" Mr. Crum exclaims, "what's my point? I want to know what this is all about!" Mr. Zunde instructs Mr. Crum, "you can always attend the hearing and find out." But, Mr. Crum

won't sleep at night knowing that he is in some sort of legal trouble, so he cannot wait that long.

As Mr. Crum addresses the team, Mr. Zunde whispers to Mr. Frazier, "Crum is far dumber than I ever thought. The first problem I see is that April has only 30 days, not 31. And, do you see the law firm name on the letterhead? Also, take a look at the address of the law firm." Mr. Frazier looks at the law firm name and starts laughing hysterically. Trying to get the words out, Mr. Frazier whispers back to Mr. Zunde, "no one can be that stupid." Mr. Zunde points out, "well, I'm afraid Crum apparently is that stupid, and then some. Let's have some fun with this."

Mr. Crum, interrupting his own meeting, in a demanding tone, asks Mr. Frazier and Mr. Zunde, "and, just what is so funny over there?" Mr. Zunde, taking control of the meeting, replies, "Erika, will you please read the name of the law firm on the letterhead to Mr. Crum?" Mr. Zunde could have read it himself, but he figures why pass up the chance to have Erika read it to him, since Erika is perhaps Mr. Crum's least favorite student.

Erika reads the name of the law firm to everyone present, saying, "Goda, Helen, Bach, and Burnham." Erika starts laughing hysterically. A few members of the track team also start laughing. Mr. Zunde tells Erika, "now, please read the address of the law firm to Mr. Crum." Erika reads the address, announcing, "69 Rock Hard Drive," and laughs hysterically, as she hammers her fist on the desk. By now, nearly the entire track team has caught on that the letter is obviously a prank.

Mr. Crum, however, fails to see what is so funny. Mr. Crum brashly asks, "will someone please explain to me what is so funny? This is no laughing matter!" Mr. Zunde calmly explains to the school's principal, "Crum, regarding the letter you received, the first problem I see is that April only has 30 days, not 31. You're the principal. You should have known that. The second problem I see is that the law firm name is a pun on 'go to hell and back and burn him.' What should be quite embarrassing to you, however, is the law firm's address, which is 69 Rock Hard Drive. And, look at the name of the attorney who signed the letter. That's another pun, but I'll leave you something to figure out for yourself. It appears the entire track team can see this, but you're still in the dark. And, if you can't see any of this, I suggest that you hire the law firm of Shackle, Bind, and Lei to represent you." The entire track team is laughing hysterically at Mr. Crum, realizing what a sucker he really is. Mr. Crum starts sweating, knowing that someone has succeeded at really making a fool out of him.

Backpedaling, Mr. Crum exclaims, "the reason I called this meeting is because I want to know who sent this letter!" Mr. Zunde calmly replies, "that information should be easy enough to ascertain." Mr. Zunde

addresses the track team, asking, “did any of you send this letter to Mr. Crum?” The track team is totally silent. After fifteen seconds, Mr. Zunde tells Mr. Crum, “well, it appears that no one here sent the letter to you. Perhaps you should interrogate the golf team, or perhaps the baseball team. They may have had the balls to send that letter.” Mr. Crum, who is quite disturbed, replies, “someone here sent me this letter! And, it wasn’t anyone on the baseball team!”

John asks Mr. Crum, “how do you know it wasn’t your secret Santa?” Mr. Crum, focusing his attention on John, brashly asks, “and, just how do you know about that?” Playing dumb, John replies, “know about what?” Mr. Crum replies, exclaiming, “the Christmas presents I’ve received!” Making Mr. Crum answer more questions, John asks, “what kind of Christmas presents did you receive?” Mr. Crum, who does not realize that John is in the middle of outsmarting him, exclaims, “you know exactly what I’m talking about!” Lowering the boom, John explains, “well, if it’s about the medal you received last Christmas with the ass on it, everyone in the school knows about that.” The whole team laughs hysterically, as Mr. Frazier whispers to Mr. Zunde, “John is almost as witty as Eddie.” Mr. Zunde whispers back, “just wait two years.”

Mr. Crum, getting absolutely nowhere with his investigation, concludes, “okay. I know one of you is behind this. I have my eye on every single one of you.” Erika interjects, “that’s because Dr. Brooks told you that you have to come to all the meets. We all heard about that too.” Mr. Crum tells Erika, “young lady, I’ve had enough out of you.” Erika asks, “does that mean I can leave now?” Mr. Crum, who is apparently quite angry, replies, “I’m running this meeting, not you!” The inevitable sarcastic comeback, “waiting,” is expressed by Erika, the meaning of which is now known by the entire track team, Mr. Zunde, Mr. Frazier, and even Mr. Crum himself. Mr. Crum, who has had enough embarrassment for today, tells everyone, “enough of this for now. And, as I said, I have my eye on every single one of you.”

The students head back to their last class of the day, as Mr. Frazier and Mr. Zunde walk over to the gym. On the way, Mr. Zunde tells Mr. Frazier, “I really wish I knew who was behind that letter. These pranks are really good, and they’re getting better every year.” Mr. Frazier explains, “I’ve thought about this. Unless one of the teachers has the equipment to rework one of the track medals at home, that medal was probably modified in the shop. But, I’ve never seen either Mr. Malik or Mr. Anderson anywhere near the athletic office.” Mr. Zunde suggests, “maybe one of the students took it and gave it to one of them. You can be sure that whoever got the first medal knows the second one is there. Perhaps it will disappear next Christmas.” Mr. Frazier replies, “then, I’ll leave it right where it is. I’ll be looking forward to it disappearing.”

Wondering what track and field will be like many years from now, Eddie and Kathy decide to go into the future to watch a track meet at the high school. They invite Mark and Paula, who decide to take a break from working on their house, which is almost finished. Meeting at Mark's house, they talk about how many years to go into the future. After a long discussion, and reviewing future calendars, they decide twenty years into the future, on a Friday, will be a good time. In case there is no track meet on the day they picked, Kathy writes down the dates of every Friday in the Springtime, twenty years from now. There is sure to be a meet on one of those days.

Arriving into the future at their chosen date and time, they ride their bicycles to the high school, passing by Mark's parent's house. By the equipment that is parked in the driveway, Mark can tell his parents are still living there. On the way, they pass by Eddie's Service Station. Kathy yells out, "hey, look! You're closed!" Eddie yells back, "I see that. I wonder where I am." Mark mentions, "maybe you guys are at the beach." Kathy replies, "or, maybe we're at the track meet." Driving by Kathy's parent's house, Kathy is quick to notice that her dad got the Porsche that he always wanted. The Porsche, however, is not a 914, but a 911. They then ride to the high school.

Entering the parking lot, they notice that there is, in fact, a track meet today. They walk with their bicycles through the South gate. Mark casually comments to Eddie, "there's where you always belted the Chuckie to the fence." Eddie replies, "that's one person I'm glad I don't see anymore." Mark throws out the question, "I wonder what the Chuckie is doing now." Eddie replies, "he's probably sucking up taxpayer money in a jail somewhere." Mark returns the serve, stating, "maybe there's a little Chuckie on the track team throwing the shot-put." Paula exclaims, "stop it, you guys! There's no little Chuckie throwing the shot-put." Yanking Paula's chain, Kathy replies, "you might be right. The Chuckie, Junior, could be running the 100-yard dash." They then head toward the track, finding a place under the bleachers to lock their bicycles.

Walking toward the track, Kathy exclaims, "wow! They got a new track, and new stands! This place has been completely redone!" Paula replies, "I can see that!" Eddie comments, "it looks pretty good." As the new track comes into view, Mark mentions, "this place looks really awesome! Somebody put a lot of money into this place."

Looking around carefully, they search for someone who might know them, like Mr. Frazier or Mr. Zunde. Hopefully, Mr. Crum is nowhere around. They know they must steer clear of anyone who might know them from the past and recognize them. Seeing that the coast is clear, they find a seat that would afford a quick getaway if need be. They watch,

as the team assistants move the equipment from the storage building to the field, preparing for the meet.

Mark comments, "I wonder how long they have been mistreating the shot-put like that. Look at that! It's laying in the dirt!" Eddie answers, "Twenty-one years. That's how long. That's when Bobby B. left." Paula then asks, "I wonder if they ever took care of the tick infestation on the track." Mark replies, "wow! We really did mess with everyone." Paula reminds Mark, "and, you're not done yet!"

As they are sitting back relaxing, they see the bus from the opposing team drive up. Paula exclaims, "aren't we in luck!" Kathy asks, "what?" Paula exclaims, "we're running against Centerville!" Mark reminds everyone, "that was always my favorite meet of the year." Eddie comments, "I missed that one my senior year." Paula tells Eddie, "that's when the ticks showed up on the track." Kathy mentions, "yeah, the ticks were on the track during that whole Spring season."

As the Centerville team makes their way toward the track, the Northside team emerges from the locker room. They quickly spot Mr. Zunde, walking out with the field athletes. Mr. Zunde is kind of hard to miss. Seeing no sign of Mr. Frazier, Mark asks, "does anyone see Mr. Frazier?" Kathy replies, "not yet. He usually walked out after everyone else." With the whole team congregating around the bench, there is no sign of Mr. Frazier anywhere.

Looking around, Eddie spies the team's head coach. Eddie points out, "there's the new coach." Kathy asks, "where?" Eddie replies, "that big guy who keeps pointing to the starting line." Mark asks, "I wonder who that is." Confidently, Eddie replies, "it's Johnson." Paula exclaims, "really? How do you know?" Eddie explains, "I went to the future once to pick up some vitamins, and I was talking with the doctor. He mentioned that he was talking with Coach Johnson one day. So, Johnson is our team's coach now." Paula remarks, "yeah, I can see that now! It kind of looks like him."

Mark asks, "I wonder where Mr. Frazier is." Eddie replies, "another time when I was in the future, I remember hearing that he took some sort of job at the University." Mark mentions, "I wonder why he took a job there." Eddie surmises, "maybe he got sick of dealing with Mr. Crum." Paula comments, "yeah, I can definitely see that."

As the meet begins, they all take out their stopwatches, curious to see how well the runners perform twenty years into the future. Once the hurdlers are out of the way, the runners line up for the 100-yard dash. For Eddie and the tribe, this is when the meet really begins. The runners, all lined up, wait for the gun as anxiously as Eddie, Kathy, Mark, and Paula. Four stopwatches in the stands start as the gun is fired. After 25

yards, it is clearly a two-person race. Two Northside runners break away, leaving everyone in the dust, taking first and second place in the event. Third place goes to Centerville, which was a very distant third.

Eddie, who timed the first place runner, comments, "I must have really messed up. I got 10.5 seconds." Kathy, who timed the second place runner, exclaims, "wow! I clocked second place at 10.7 seconds." Eddie replies, "wow! These guys are really slow. Poor Johnson. It looks like he doesn't have much to work with." Mark and Paula, timing the third and fourth place runners, reported equally as dismal times.

Kathy suddenly exclaims, "wait! I know why their times are off! This is a new track! They're running 100 meters now, not 100 yards!" Eddie replies, "yeah, now that you mention it, I see that!" Paula comments, "that's really interesting. Sometime in the last twenty years, the events were converted to meters." Paula, reminding Mark of the past, tells him, "see? You should have brought your metric stopwatch." Mark, the master of messing with people, grins, remembering how he fell for that one hook, line, and sinker.

Kathy, desperate for information, takes a walk down the moderately populated bleachers, and asks one of the spectators, "so, the track is measured in meters now, and not yards?" The spectator replies, "it is. I don't ever remember the track being in yards." Kathy replies, "okay, thanks." As an afterthought, Kathy asks the spectator, "and, the coach is Coach Johnson, right?" The spectator replies, "that's him, himself. Coach Johnson. He's a legend around here, along with a few others who occasionally show up for the meets." Kathy wants to ask more questions, but decides to wait.

As the second heat is out of the blocks, the runners in the first heat return to the bench, and take a seat. As expected, the second heat brings with it the slower runners. Eddie, who was timing the first place runner, states, "I got 12.2 seconds for the winner." Looking at her stopwatch, Kathy comments, "I should have brought a calendar. I clocked the guy at 12.9 who came in second place." Neither of those times represents a competitive time. Mark mentions, "at least the guys who took first and second place today are really good."

The meet moves on to other events. Mark glances over to the field events, where Mr. Zunde accompanies the field athletes. Mark tells everyone, "hey. Check it out. The shot-put guy is about to throw." On the pad, the Northside athlete throws the shot-put, hurling it into a region of worn away grass where it appears to have landed many times before. The Field Judge makes the measurement, yelling back to another Field Judge, "forty-four, eight and a half." The other Field Judge repeats the measurement, followed by the Field Judge making the measurement

giving him a thumbs up, signaling that they properly communicated the measurement. Mark comments, “not bad. But, he’s no Bobby B.” Unknown to the group is that Bobby B. still holds the school record in the shot-put. And, Eddie still holds the State record in the discus and the National record in the 100-yard dash.

The call is made for the 400-meter dash. This is one of the events the group has been waiting for. Kathy points out, “hey! The same two guys that ran the 100-yard dash, oops, the 100-meter dash, are running the 440-yard dash.” Eddie tells Kathy, “you probably mean the 400-meter dash.” Kathy replies, “yeah, that’s it. It’s going to take me a while to get used to this metric stuff.” Paula predicts, “I bet they’ll win. They didn’t have any competition in the 100.” The stopwatches are ready, waiting for the gun.

The gun is fired, and the Northside runner who won the 100-meter dash earlier is quickly in the lead. For the first 100 meters, the competition pushes him hard. By the 200-meter point, the two Northside runners have the race wrapped up, as the competition rapidly loses ground.

As the winner crosses the finish line, Eddie tells everyone, “I clocked him at 49.4 seconds.” Eddie then asks, “is that good?” Kathy informs Eddie, “400 meters is less than 440 yards by like two and a half yards.” Eddie replies, “then, that’s really good.” The second place runner, from Northside, comes in at 50.2 seconds. Taking third place, also running for Northside, is a girl, delivering a time of 55.9 seconds. Apparently, women are still allowed on the track team.

Kathy is now very curious. She walks down the row again and asks the spectator whom she spoke with before, “I hate to bother you again, but do you know who just won the 400-meters?” The spectator replies, “that’s Eddie Bogenskaya. He wins every race he runs in.” Kathy about chokes when she hears the news of who won. Kathy, managing as best as she can, tells the spectator, “thanks,” and walks back to the group.

When she gets back to Eddie, Kathy tries to tell Eddie who just won the race, but just cannot get the words out. Suddenly concerned about Kathy, Eddie asks, “hey! Are you okay?” Paula exclaims, “what’s wrong? Are you okay?” Choking on her words, Kathy replies, “Eddie. That’s Eddie.” Suddenly more concerned about Kathy, Eddie asks, “what? Kathy! Are you okay?” With tears flowing down her face, Kathy replies, “no, Eddie! Eddie Bogenskaya just won! That’s our son!” Eddie holds Kathy, and takes another look out on the track at the winner. Kathy takes a while to compose herself, but now is waiting to see if Eddie, Jr. will be running in another race today.

Mark tells Paula, “wow! There’s an Eddie, Junior, out there.” Paula mentions, “I wonder if Eddie and Kathy are here somewhere watching.” Kathy, who is not thinking right, replies, “we’re right here!” Paula tells Kathy, “no. Not you. The you in the future. You could be here watching somewhere.” Kathy asks Mark and Paula, “then, how do you know that you guys aren’t here either?”

Eddie looks around, not seeing anyone in the moderately populated bleachers that resembles the mechanic. At the other side of the track, Eddie notices a few people sitting on a smaller set of bleachers. The bleachers across the track have actual seats, rather than a bench, and seem to be reserved for special guests and VIPs. Best of all, the bleachers across the way have a great view of the starting and finish line for both the sprints and distance races, the relay transition zone, and the field events. Eddie whispers to Kathy, “hey, there we are. Across the way on the other bleachers.” Kathy replies, “dang, we can’t like just walk over there.”

Hearing that Kathy and Eddie’s future counterparts are across the way, Paula asks, “so, who’s that with you?” Kathy replies, “I don’t know. How am I supposed to know?” Paula replies, “oh, yeah. I thought that you would know because it’s you that’s over there.” Eddie tells Mark and Paula, “if I had to take a wild guess, I would say that it’s you guys.” Taking a closer look, Paula puts her hand over her mouth, and exclaims, “oh my! That really is us! Wow! And, I love my haircut!” Kathy replies, telling Paula, “duh. Of course you like your haircut. That’s why you got it.” Also taking a look, Mark tells Eddie, “I think you might be right. It looks like that’s us.”

The call is made for the final event of the day, the 4 by 400 meter relay. Eddie and Kathy watch closely, as the relay team assembles at the starting line. Three guys and one girl make up the Northside High School 4 by 400 relay team. Mark whispers to Paula, “if that is us over there, we’re sitting at the edge of our seat. I wonder if one of those could be our kid.” Paula, realizing the possibility, cannot even get words out.

Kathy, now wanting more information, again walks down the row and tells the spectator, who is now sitting at the edge of her seat, “hi. It’s me again. I’m sorry to keep bothering you.” The spectator, somewhat excited, replies, “hi. My son is in this next race. He won the 800-meter earlier!” Kathy replies, “awesome!”, and asks, “can you tell me who the runners are in this race?” The woman responds, “my son, Bernard Lowe, and there’s Dawn and Mark Svoboda, and Eddie Bogenskaya.” Kathy, now anticipating surprises, replies, “hey, thanks!” Kathy has now heard more than she ever expected to hear today.

When Kathy returns, Paula asks, “what did you find out?” Kathy asks Paula, “are you sure you want to know?” Not expecting what she is about to hear in the least, Paula replies, “try me.” Kathy informs Mark and Paula, “one of the runners in the 4 by 400 relay team is Bernard Lowe. That’s his mother sitting over there that I talked to. The other runners are Dawn Svoboda, Mark Svoboda, and Eddie Bogenskaya.” Paula screams, “what? Are you serious?” Kathy replies, “as serious as it gets. That’s what she said.” Mark and Paula look at each other, and are at a loss for words. So, instead, they hug and kiss each other.

The gun is fired, and the focus immediately shifts to the race. Mark, Jr. is apparently the lead off man, and takes the lead. Mark, timing his son, has not realized yet that Mark, Jr. is the runner who took second place in the 100-meter dash earlier today. Mark clocks Mark, Jr. at 49.1 seconds as he hands off to Bernard Lowe. As Lowe runs his leg, Kathy notices the woman down the row on the bleachers is bouncing up and down on the edge of her seat. Eddie tells Kathy, “I clocked that guy at a 49.8.” The baton is passed to Dawn, causing Mark and Paula to both start their stopwatches. With a significant lead, Dawn holds her own, extending the lead over the opposition. Dawn’s leg comes in at 55.3 seconds, as she hands off to Eddie, Jr. As Eddie, Jr. makes his way around the track, Mark exclaims, “he’s pulling a Braden!” Eddie, Jr. rapidly approaches the finish line, fully intending to finish the race before Centerville’s anchorman receives his baton. Eddie, Jr. crosses the finish line with a time of 48.9 seconds, two seconds before the Centerville runner receives his baton. Some things just never change.

With the meet now over, the group heads out quickly to avoid being spotted. As they exit the field at the South gate, Kathy tells Paula, “hey! There’s your Jeep!” As the group rides by Paula’s Jeep, Kathy mentions, “hmm. I don’t see my 914 or Eddie’s MGB anywhere.” Eddie tells Kathy, “maybe we bought something else. After all, it’s not like you can fit three people in your 914 or my MGB.” Kathy replies, “you do have a point.”

As they are about to leave the parking lot, Paula tells Mark, “I can’t believe I still have my Jeep!” Mark asks, “how do you know that one of our kids ain’t driving it?” Pointing to a car he knows Paula would absolutely hate, Mark tells Paula, “hey! Maybe that four-door sedan over there is your car.” Paula, who doesn’t even look, exclaims, “never!” By now, everyone knows that Paula absolutely hates four-door sedans. After looking over the different types of cars available twenty years into the future, they head back to the portal.

Arriving back at their time, they head back to Mark’s parent’s house. Paula anxiously tells Mark, “well, we’d better get busy.” Mark asks, “doing what?” Paula, who is about to panic, replies, “we’re going to have kids! We have to get our house finished! And, we have stuff to do for our

wedding! All this stuff to do! When am I going to find the time to do it?" Paula is panicking, feeling as if she has to do something.

Mark puts his bicycle away, and tells Paula, "okay, let's go." Paula asks, "where?" Mark, repeating Paula's suggestion, replies, "to the house. We have work to do." Eddie comically suggests, "maybe you should add on a bedroom." Kathy assures Paula, "everything's under control. Just breathe! Breathe!" Getting herself together, Paula sighs, and tells everyone, "yeah. The house is almost finished, and our wedding is mostly all planned."

Kathy then points out to Paula, "we were twenty years into the future. The oldest your kids could possibly have been is like eighteen years old. That means that you have at least two or three years before you'll even be pregnant." Paula sighs and replies, "yeah. I guess you're right." Kathy then reassures Paula, "you have lots of time."

Since Paula just wants to do something, Kathy suggests, "why don't you go to your house and put more water in your pool. Then, go and buy patio furniture. After all, Summer is right around the corner." Paula exclaims, "I'm going to do that!" Mark and Paula's pool is complete but, since they have well water, they have to add the water slowly, as to not run the well dry.

Mark suggests, "and later, we can spread the rest of the pea gravel. Then, after I finish a few more things, the house will be ready to move in." Eddie asks, "are you that far along?" Mark replies, "yeah. I have a few cosmetic items left to do, but it's almost ready to move in." Paula asks, "really?" Mark assures her, "yeah. It's mostly all done." Paula, not realizing their house is so far along, is relieved.

At the end of the semester, Kathy decides she wants to have a party for the entire University track team, including the coaches. After everyone's performance improved over the last half of the year, team morale has improved tremendously. And, since Eddie, Mark, Mitchell, Braden, and Bobby B. will be part of the team next year, Kathy figures what could be better than a party to build up the team spirit even more. Erika, who applied to the University, will be attending with Bobby B. And, Kathy simply couldn't leave out Hoffer, Tessa, and Akinmola, who are graduating this year. Kathy has persuaded Hoffer to apply to the University, which he did, hoping that he will also join the team next year.

The day of the party arrives, and Kathy is all prepared. Since everyone enjoyed pizza after the divisional meet this Spring, Kathy decided to have Joe, from the pizzeria, cater the party. The pool is up to temperature, and there is not a dead frog in sight. Inside, the three oak boards installed by Mark and Eddie proudly display all of Eddie's and Kathy's track medals

earned over the years. The extensive medal collection will likely be of interest to some of the athletes. Mark manufactured a matching fourth oak board, suggestive of Eddie's and Kathy's future medals. And downstairs, Eddie and Kathy's home gym will probably attract a lot of attention.

The guests arrive a few at a time. Not everyone in college has a car, so they arrive in groups. Kathy gives those who are interested the grand tour of her and Eddie's home. Eddie and Kathy's house is sparsely, but beautifully, decorated. With more open space, the home is perfect for socializing and hanging out. The gym downstairs attracts a lot of attention from the athletes. Not a single member of the team who sees Eddie and Kathy's gym can resist doing a set of bench presses or a few curls.

While the guests are arriving, Mark is outside with Paula, relaxing in a chaise lounge by the pool. Paula asks Mark, "you've been quiet. Is something up?" Mark replies, "I was just thinking of new ways to mess with McCutchen, if he even decides to show up." Paula comments, "go for it. Be my guest." For some odd reason, McCutchen really irritates Paula. McCutchen has been grating on Paula's nerves for some time, mostly since they have been on the same team together. Every once in a while, as he is thinking, Mark grins. Paula knows that, from Mark's expression, he is contemplating some new and innovative ways to mess with McCutchen.

When Tessa arrives, on the back of Hoffer's new motorcycle, she makes a beeline downstairs to the gym. Eddie is already downstairs, where he, Bobby B., and Erika are getting in a quick workout. A few of the other team members, impressed with Eddie's home gym, try out some of the equipment. Having seen Eddie and Kathy's home gym many times before, Tessa looks around carefully, searching for anything that may be new. Tessa is concerned that Eddie may have invented another piece of training equipment, and is holding out on her.

Tessa asks Eddie, "so, nothing new in the gym?" Eddie replies, "no. Not since you've been here last." Tessa is relieved, knowing that Eddie has not been holding back on any training secrets. With nothing new in the gym, Tessa heads out to the pool to jump in. Eddie also heads out to the pool, letting Bobby B. and Erika get back to their workout.

Out at the pool, Mark mentions to Paula, "here comes McCutchen squared." Paula, who remembers quite vividly when McCutchen was checking out everyone's cars after the divisional meet, replies, "I see that. Just watch. He's going to give this place a good looking over." McCutchen heads toward the pool, and congregates with a few familiar

faces from the team. Mark and Paula, who are sitting back and relaxing, are not among them.

Seeing McCutchen and a few of the other team members hanging out by the pool, Eddie tells them, “hey. If you guys want to jump in, you can change inside.” A few of the team members take Eddie up on his offer. Among them are Todd McCutchen and his older brother, who head inside to change into their swimsuits.

Eddie and Tessa then walk over to where Mark and Paula are seated. Mark comments, “I didn’t expect that McCutchen would make it today.” Eddie replies, “me neither. I wonder why he’s even here.” Paula replies, “to check out your house. He’s already ticked off that we have cars.” Mark comically mentions, “wow. We have cars. Aren’t we special. Oh wait! Mine’s a truck! Does that count?” Eddie, replying in an equally comical manner, reminds Mark and Paula, “it’s all that money we made running track in high school.” Remembering the Centerville meet during McCutchen’s senior year, Paula replies, “yeah, we have cars, trucks, and motorcycles, and McCutchen has ticks up his ass.” Eddie then heads inside to help Kathy, as Tessa wastes absolutely no time jumping into the pool.

Inside, Kathy is talking with Genise. The group eager to change into their swimsuits walks in, and Kathy tells them they can use either one of the spare bedrooms to change. As McCutchen is waiting to change, he looks over Eddie’s and Kathy’s vast medal collection hanging on the wall. Along the wall displaying the medals, McCutchen sees a Harman Kardon stereo, complete with JBL speakers. McCutchen, overhearing Kathy and Genise’s conversation, learns that Kathy and Eddie bought the house a year ago. According to McCutchen’s calculations, Eddie and Kathy bought the house when Eddie was still in high school.

McCutchen counts the medals on the wall, recalling the three-thousand dollar figure purported to be paid for first place. With a lot of gold medals earned by Eddie and Kathy, McCutchen can clearly see that there is a lot of money hanging on that wall. Worst of all, McCutchen knows Kathy is a college student and, as far as he knows, Eddie has nothing going on at the moment other than his part time job as a mechanic. Going into the bedroom to change into his swimsuit, McCutchen is at a loss to figure out how Eddie and Kathy can afford to live in an area unofficially reserved for millionaires.

McCutchen heads out to the pool area, where most of the action is going on. Paula, who is still relaxing in the chaise lounge next to Mark, whispers to Mark, “see that? McCutchen is checking everything out.” Mark replies, “it’s time to start messing with him.” Paula approves, telling Mark, “be my guest.”

As McCutchen gets into the water near where Mark and Paula are relaxing, Mark asks him, “so, what do you think?” McCutchen asks, “about what?” Mark replies, “Eddie and Kathy’s house. What do you think?” Without any discretion put into his answer, McCutchen replies, “it looks really nice. But, now I’m really wondering how college students can afford a place like this.” Resurrecting an old rumor, Mark comments, “I guess if you run fast enough, you get paid really well. Think about it. Eddie holds the National high school record in the 100-yard dash.” McCutchen cannot dispute that fact. Adding fuel to the fire and to really irritate McCutchen, Mark adds, “me and Paula are building a house about a mile from here. It’s almost done. I’m paying cash for it too, just like Eddie did for his.”

The wheels start turning in McCutchen’s head. The veil has suddenly dropped and McCutchen now clearly sees the other side of the coin that has been hidden from him for years while he was in high school. Hearing what Mark just said, McCutchen is now livid. With all of the rumors over the years, all the evidence is now right in front of his face. While he attempts to hide his anger and jealousy, McCutchen does not do a very good job of it. McCutchen swims to the other end of the pool, joining his brother and a few other track buddies, likely to discuss what he just learned.

Paula, who is always amused by Mark’s messing with McCutchen, whispers to Mark, “I can’t wait to see where this goes.” Mark whispers back to Paula, “he would have come to all the wrong conclusions anyway. I just helped him get there a little faster.” Paula laughs, and tells Mark, “well, here comes the pizza. Let me go and help Kathy out,” as she stands up and goes inside to help out Kathy with the food and refreshments.

Mark follows Paula but, before he walks away, he tells Hoffer, who is in the pool, “watch out for Eddie’s pet piranhas. They hang out near the skimmers when people are in the pool.” Hoffer replies, “will do, bro!” Hoffer, who knows there are no piranhas in the pool, easily catches on that Mark is again messing with McCutchen. Overhearing Mark, McCutchen quickly moves away from the skimmer. And, Hoffer calling Mark “bro,” for some reason, bothers McCutchen. There seems to be a great camaraderie between many of the current and future track team members, which is quite foreign to McCutchen.

Inside, Eddie, also seeing Joe’s catering truck through the window, heads to the door to greet Joe and Arianna. Mark walks in, and tells Eddie, “I got you in trouble.” Eddie laughs, and asks, “oh really? What did you do?” Mark replies, “McCrutchen was wondering how you could afford this house. So, I started up the rumor again that we got paid when we were running in high school.” Paula also mentions, “it doesn’t stop there. Mark told McCrutchen you paid cash for the house, and he also told McCrutchen that we’re building a house a mile from here, and paying cash

for it too.” Kathy laughs, and exclaims, “tell me you didn’t!” Mark tells Kathy, “well, I haven’t messed with McCrutchin in a long time. I guess the mother lode came out all at once.” Eddie gives Mark a high-five. Kathy comments, “he was staring at our medal collection on the wall earlier.” Paula replies, “yeah, he was counting all that money on the wall.” Mark points out, “he’s going to self destruct.”

Bobby B. and Erika, who were working out downstairs, perfectly timed the arrival of the pizza. As they come up the stairs, the spread of pizza is all out on the table, ready for everyone to indulge. Once Kathy, the hostess, reaches for a slice, everyone around digs in. Paula momentarily steps outside to the pool area, and informs everyone that the pizza has arrived. Genise, since meeting Kathy and Paula, is now a pizza connoisseur. Genise is among the first to come inside to get a slice or three.

In between bites of pizza, Erika blurts out, “guess what?” Paula guesses, “you got your own motorcycle?” Erika replies, “that’s on the list. But no, not yet.” Not able to wait for anyone else’s guesses, Erika announces, “I got accepted to the University! And, I got a track scholarship!” Kathy exclaims, “awesome, girl!” Both Kathy and Paula awkwardly give Erika a high-five with their hands that are not holding pizza. Kathy is particularly happy that Erika will join them next year. Genise asks Erika, “what race do you run?” Erika replies, “mainly the 440-yard dash, and also the sprints. Oh, and I throw the shot-put too.” Genise, who will graduate in a few weeks, comments, “wow! It sounds like you might be my replacement.” Paula adds, “I bet so!”

Quickly realizing that the University has sent out its acceptance letters, Kathy asks, “how about Hoffer? Where’s Hoffer?” Paula replies, “he’s probably still out by the pool with Tessa.” Thinking for a moment, Kathy exclaims, “and, where’s Akinmola? Where is everybody?” From across the room, Eddie answers, “he’s not here yet. Knowing him, he’s probably running here.” Genise asks, “who’s this Akinmola guy that I’m always hearing about?” Kathy replies, “he runs distance. He’ll take the gold medal in the mile at State this year. Oh, and I bet he’s going to shit a brick when he finds out Mitchell can break a four minute mile.” Kathy is apparently in the process of assembling next year’s additions to the University track team.

And, as Kathy is in the process of discussing what next year’s team may be like, the coaching staff happens to walk through the door. It’s quite unusual for the University track team to meet outside of practice or a meet. The coaches decided they will show up at the party at least for a while because, after all, they were all invited. And besides, team morale has definitely improved this year. And, it’s nice to get to know the team better outside of an official capacity.

Hearing Kathy mention that Akinmola will take the gold medal in the mile at the State invitational meet, Dr. Braun announces his entrance by asking, “so, did I just hear that there’s a future gold medalist among us?” Kathy replies, “almost. Akinmola is running here and is on his way. He’s one of the guys I told you about back in January. He won the gold medal in the mile during the indoor season, and he’s going to win at State again this Spring.” Dr. Braun, who has a great respect for Kathy, informs her, “I’ve not heard anything more about him. We’ve approved two scholarships based upon films and stats from the scouts this year, but we haven’t heard back from either of the candidates. Akinmola wasn’t one of them.” Kathy now knows for sure that one of them is Erika, for Erika has already spilled the beans. She suspects the other one might be Hoffer, but she also knows that it’s not her place to ask.

Erika was offered a scholarship by the University because of her consistent 440-yard dash in the 55-second range. Erika, however, has not yet met the team’s coaches. Erika’s times are right up there with Genise’s times, who won the 440-yard dash in the divisional meet this Spring. Kathy and Paula can now run the 440-yard dash in the lower 50-second range, and it looks as if one of them might also be running in that event next year. Erika, Kathy, Paula, and Genise all attribute their improved performance in the 440-yard dash to Eddie’s training sled and returning to Mr. Frazier’s secret workout.

Dr. Braun, and the rest of the coaching staff, grabs a slice of pizza and mingle with the team. There are a few people with whom he is not familiar, Erika being one of them. Kathy, knowing that Erika received an offer from the University, and that Dr. Braun has not yet met her, takes it upon herself to introduce them. As Erika goes for another slice of pizza, Kathy, seeing that Dr. Braun and Coach Herndon are standing together, tells them, “hey, I’d like you guys to meet Erika. Erika is a sprinter at Northside.” Coach Herndon asks, “Erika Gabriel?” Erika replies, “that’s me. It’s nice to meet you guys.” Dr. Braun asks, “so, you’re the runner who we extended the offer to?” Erika replies, “that’s me! And, I’m going to take it!” Hearing that, Kathy grins ear to ear. Dr. Braun and Coach Herndon both shake Erika’s hand, welcoming her to the team. With Bobby B. also on the team next year, Erika will definitely make sure that he takes proper care of the shot-put.

After their conversation with Erika, Coach Herndon whispers to Dr. Braun, “well, I wasn’t really expecting that.” Dr. Braun whispers back, “you know, I’m usually a little leery when we make an offer based on statistics but, now that I’ve met her, I really feel good about it.” Erika, who now stands five feet, ten inches, and weighs 185 pounds, is built like a brick house. She has been working out with Bobby B., who will be throwing the shot-put for the University next year. Strength, as well as speed, is one of Erika’s greatest assets, as Chuckie and Terry Haynes very well know.

Making a four-mile run to the party, Akinmola finally arrives, and heads right for the pizza. Eddie, who has previously asked Akinmola if he needed a ride, tells him, “you know, bro, one of us could have picked you up and driven you here.” Akinmola replies, “no. That’s okay. I’d rather run.” Eddie has offered to pick up Akinmola on many occasions, but Akinmola always declines. Akinmola takes every opportunity to train, which is part of the reason he is the top seeded high school miler in the State.

Seeing Akinmola, Mitchell walks over joining the conversation, and exclaims, “hey! It’s been a while! How have you been?” Akinmola replies, “I’m good! And, I’m winning everything now that you’re gone. How have you been?” Mitchell informs Akinmola, “I’m back for a while. I’m running for the University next year.” Akinmola replies, “that’s great, my man! Congratulations! I wish you luck. I’m sure you’ll do well.” Mitchell and Akinmola converse for a while, catching up on the last year.

Hoffer and Tessa walk in from the pool, and head for the pizza. Kathy, wanting to find out whether Hoffer is the other runner who was offered a scholarship, comes up with a quick plan to find out. Kathy quickly positions herself near Coach Herndon, who is enjoying a slice of pizza with Dr. Paxton, the distance coach. Kathy slyly yells from across the room, “hey! It’s Jimmy Hoffer and Tessa Klement! You guys finally got out of the pool!” Tessa yells back, “yeah! I got to do everything I can to beat Eddie in the rematch this year!”

As Kathy fully hoped, Coach Herndon mentions to Kathy, “did you say Jimmy Hoffer? He’s the other guy we extended an offer to.” Kathy yells out to Hoffer, “hey! Come here for a minute! I want you to meet someone!” Hoffer walks over with Tessa, and Kathy, introducing the coaches, tells Hoffer, “this is Coach Herndon, our sprinting coach, and this is Dr. Paxton, our distance coach.” Coach Herndon tells Hoffer, “it’s really good to meet you.” Kathy lets Hoffer and Coach Herndon talk for a while, as she walks over and talks with Paula.

Coach Herndon and Hoffer talk for a few minutes. After discreetly looking over Hoffer’s well-built body, Coach Herndon tells Hoffer, “I really hope you give some consideration to our offer. We’ve only offered two scholarships this year in track. Yours was one of them.” Hoffer replies, “you don’t know how much I appreciate that. I’m just waiting to see if Tessa is going to the University too.” Coach Herndon asks, “Tessa? Does she run too?” Hoffer replies, “yeah, but she wants to swim. She’s hoping for a swimming scholarship, but she hasn’t heard anything yet. Tessa is going to State next week. I guess they’re waiting to see how she does.” Coach Herndon comments, “I can understand that. The good news is that, if she applied and hasn’t heard yet, they’re considering her. They’re probably waiting to see her performance at the State meet.” That was

good news to Hoffer. He and Tessa want to be in the same college together, if at all possible.

After lunch, everyone heads back out to the pool. Eddie and Kathy take a few minutes to tidy up inside, consolidating the left over pizza into a few boxes. Knowing that Kathy has delivered in the past, Dr. Braun asks her, "has this Akinmola guy shown up?" Kathy replies, "yeah. He did. He's outside. Did you want me to get him?" Dr. Braun replies, "sure. I'd like to meet him sometime if it's not too much trouble." Kathy goes outside and finds Akinmola, on her mission to further expand the track team.

Kathy returns with Akinmola, and also manages to bring Dr. Paxton along with her. Kathy, introducing Akinmola, tells the coaches, "this is Adekunle Akinmola. He's the top high school distance guy in the State." Kathy then introduces her coaches to Akinmola, knowing that Dr. Braun and Dr. Paxton know where to take it from here. Akinmola's 4:10 minute mile speaks for itself. While not as fast as Mitchell or Stone, Akinmola is still in high school. Kathy wisely steps aside, letting the coaches discuss business.

Outside, at the pool, Erika and Mitchell somehow end up in an arm wrestling contest. Mitchell, seeing Erika much more developed than a year ago, made the comment that Erika looks like she's been slacking off in the gym. Mitchell, of course, was only teasing. But, Erika made the challenge. As Erika and Mitchell fight it out, the table is surrounded by the track team. The women are cheering for Erika, with the guys supporting Mitchell. In no easy contest, neither of them relents. After a long and drawn out battle of five minutes, they decide to call it a draw.

McCutchen comments to his older brother, "geesh. He couldn't beat the girl." Erika, hearing McCutchen's comment, sternly tells him, "sit your ass down, junior." Mitchell stands up, offering McCutchen his seat. McCutchen tries to get out of arm wrestling Erika, telling her, "I don't want to embarrass you in front of all these people." Erika replies, "don't worry about that. Sit down, and let's get this started and over with!" Reminiscent of many past track meets, Braden exclaims, "yeah, just sit your puny ass down and let's get this ass kicking underway!" With the peer pressure increasing, McCutchen now has little choice but to take a seat and arm wrestle Erika.

McCutchen takes a seat, and Erika and McCutchen lock in. Bobby B., starting the competition, announces, "okay. Here we go. On three. One, two, three." Erika and McCutchen go at it, and it takes Erika less than one second to defeat McCutchen. McCutchen claims, "she cheated! She started early!" Erika calmly replies, "okay, then, let's do it again." Truth is

that Erika has much faster reflexes than McCutchen. McCutchen is not very fast out of the blocks either.

They lock in one more time, and Bobby B. announces, “on three. One, two, three.” This time, instead of immediately defeating McCutchen, Erika holds her arm in the neutral position for about ten seconds, as McCutchen tries his best to defeat her. As McCutchen struggles, Erika asks him, “is it okay to start yet?” Braden interjects, “yeah, kick his ass!” Erika, in an instant, pins McCutchen, telling him, “what’s next? The bench press? Dead lift? Squats?” McCutchen does not answer, so Erika tells him, “well, I guess I’ll see you on the track next year. Good luck, junior!” McCutchen is beginning to get the feeling that he doesn’t quite measure up, not that he ever did with this group.

During the arm wrestling match, Kathy spoke with Akinmola, who has applied to a University that does not have a track team. Akinmola has expressed that he wants to run track, but the seminary to where he applied does not have a track team. Wanting to preach the gospel when he graduates, Akinmola’s career path is non-negotiable and, unfortunately, he could not find a suitable university with a track team. Akinmola mentioned to Kathy that one of his favorite Bible verses is 1 Corinthians 9:24, which states, “Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you win.” Kathy is quite familiar with that verse. A plaque with that same verse is hanging over her and Eddie’s medal collection.

As the guests head in and out of the pool, and mingle at the tables, Eddie, Kathy, Mark, and Paula have their own private conversation in the back corner of the pool. Hanging out against the pool wall, Eddie mentions to Mark, “I’m really glad they’re going to let me run and I don’t have to take any classes. I’m kind of done with school.” Mark replies, “yeah, me too. I know what you mean.” Eddie comments, “you know, I just think back at all that crap we had to do in school, and I just can’t see myself going through that for four more years.” Mark replies, “yeah, and how about elementary school. Half the day was a waste of time.” Thinking back at elementary school, Eddie starts laughing hysterically, saying, “yeah. Elementary school.”

Mark asks, “so, what’s so funny?” Eddie replies, “it’s really stupid.” Mark tells Eddie, “try me.” Eddie explains, “when I was like in the third grade, the teacher was talking about history, and that sort of thing. They taught us that Michelangelo was a really good painter, and that he painted the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. So, I thought that Michelangelo was like a jobber, or that he was like a painting contractor or something.” Mark laughs, commenting, “seriously?” Eddie replies, “yeah. I thought he was a really good painter because he didn’t drip paint, and got like full coverage on the ceiling or whatever he was painting. And besides, if

they're going to hire a painter to paint the ceiling of a famous church, you probably want really good painters. I had no idea he was an artist." Mark laughs hysterically, and comments, "that's kind of funny!" Kathy and Paula also laugh hysterically, none of them apparently hearing that story from Eddie before.

Eddie then asks Mark, "so, what's the dumbest thing you ever thought in school?" Kathy and Paula now suspect their turn is also coming. Mark replies, "that's an easy one. But, it wasn't really in school. When I was in like first grade, my dad was working on the car. I was standing on a 5-gallon bucket, looking at the engine. There was a lot of stuff under the hood, and I didn't know what any of it was for. But, I found the fan. So, I figured out that the way the car moved forward was that the fan blew the car forward."

Eddie laughs, and comments, "really? That's hilarious!" Mark explains, "it made perfect sense to me. If a large propeller makes a plane fly, I figured out that, in a car, the fan is like a small propeller. So, if there's a big engine and a big propeller, you can go really fast or even fly. But, you wouldn't want to make a car go as fast as a plane, so they put in a small engine and a small propeller, which is the fan." The group laughs hysterically at Mark's understanding at how a car moves forward along the road. Eddie, being a mechanic, finds Mark's story particularly funny.

Eddie tells Kathy, "it looks like it's your turn." Kathy replies, "I kind of suspected my turn was coming." Mark tells Paula, "I guess that would make you next." Hearing the comedy, Braden dives into the pool and swims over to join the group. Braden asks, "what's so funny over here that I'm missing?" Eddie replies, "we're just telling funny stories." Braden joins the group, wanting to hear what could possibly be so funny.

Kathy explains, "okay, so me and my parents were sitting in church one day, and we were sitting next to Paula and her parents. And, so the priest was giving the sermon. I think I was like just starting middle school. And, so the priest was talking about the book of Revelation." Paula starts laughing, and Kathy tells her, "okay, I know. You already know this one." Paula tells the group, "yeah! This is really good!"

Kathy continues, "okay, so the priest was talking about the book of Revelation and the end times. And, so he started talking about the beast that comes out of the sea. And, the priest kind of said that we don't know exactly what the beast that comes out of the sea is but, when we see it, we will definitely know. So, I whispered to Paula, 'I know exactly what the beast that comes out of the sea is.' So, Paula whispered back to me, 'what is it?' So, I told her, 'it's the Loch Ness Monster. It's got to be.' So then, I asked Paula, 'how can they not see this? It's so obvious.' So, Paula told

me something like, ‘you might be right. Yeah, seriously. It seems kind of obvious to me too.’”

Eddie starts laughing so hard, that he can’t say anything. Mark drops underwater for a second, comes up from under the water, claiming, “I’m the Loch Ness Monster,” and chases Paula for a moment. Braden laughs, telling everyone, “I ain’t never heard that interpretation of the Bible before. Who knows, you might be on to something!” Once Eddie regains his composure, he looks at Kathy, and starts laughing again. Kathy tells Eddie, “well, at the time, it made perfect sense to me!” Paula adds, “it all did seem logical at the time!”

Once the laughter dies down, Paula knows that it’s her turn. Kathy has no problem telling everyone, “Paula has a list a mile long. Let’s see. There’s the putting down ‘220-yard dash’ on her learner’s permit application where it asked for her race. There’s a million boogie man stories. Oh, and there’s that time that she.” Paula, who can only imagine what is coming, splashes Kathy, and tells her, “stop it, girl! We know all of that!” Kathy splashes Paula back, starting a splashing contest between the two girls.

Once the splashing contest is over, Mark asks Paula, “what’s this about the 220-yard dash? I hadn’t heard that one.” Paula exclaims, “no! That was so stupid!” Kathy interjects, “really? Ya think?” Paula splashes Kathy again, but Kathy was expecting it, and dropped underwater for a second. Mark tells Paula, “okay. I got to hear this one.” Braden adds, “me too. I ain’t heard this one before.” Paula knows there is no way out of explaining her experience of getting her learner’s permit.

Paula tells everyone, “okay. So, this is so stupid. So, I went to the driver’s license building to fill out my application for my learner’s permit. And, all the people behind the counter looked so stern like, if you mess up, they’ll send you to jail. Those people made Mr. Crum look like Santa Claus. So, I get the application, and started filling it out. And, on the line where it asked ‘race,’ I put ‘220-yard dash’. I don’t know what I was thinking.”

Mark, Eddie, and Braden start laughing hysterically. Paula splashes Kathy again for making her tell that story. But, Kathy and Paula are both laughing too. Paula then finishes her story, telling everyone, “okay, so the lady behind the counter tells me, ‘hon, your race is not a number or a distance. It’s usually a color.’ I can still hear her saying that as if it were yesterday.” Mark tells everyone, “no wonder I’ve never heard that one before. That’s kind of funny.”

Wanting to hear more comedy, Eddie asks Braden, “yo, bro. It looks like it’s your turn. So, what’s the funniest thing that happened in the

police academy?” Braden starts laughing, prompting Mark to comment, “this has got to be good.” Braden explains, “you ain’t gonna believe it.” Eddie tells Braden, “go for it.”

Braden explains, “our class of police recruits had to build this really large shed where we did our training exercises. They’ve been working on building this training center for a while. Each class of recruits has to build something new or repair something. But, we had a problem. The wood to build the shed never arrived. So, our commander knew about a place where the fire department had a bunch of wood that was just delivered. The wood was sitting on the side of the road at their training center. The fire department was gonna use the wood to build something in their training grounds. All the fire department was gonna do with that wood was to build something and then burn it down.” Eddie and Mark wonder how this is going to have a funny ending, but have no clue where Braden is going with this story.

Braden continues, “we moved out about 2:00 a.m., and went to the location with three trucks. There were about ten of us. When we got there, the commander told us, ‘I want you to start loading the wood onto the trucks. And, if I give you a new set of orders, I fully expect all of you to immediately obey my orders. And, do not question me during this operation.’ So, we start loading all the fire department’s wood into the trucks. About ten minutes went by, and the commander blew his whistle, and told us, ‘okay, men. Start throwing the wood out of the trucks.’ So, we started throwing the wood out of the trucks, just like he said.” Mark comments, “that doesn’t make any sense.” Braden replies, “yeah, but it will. Hold on, bro.”

Braden explains, “so, the security guard for the fire department drives up, and asks our commander, ‘what are you guys doing here?’ Our commander told him, ‘we’re dumping this wood here. What does it look like we’re doing?’ The security guard yelled at him and told our commander, ‘no, you’re not! Nothing doing! Get that wood back on those trucks immediately, and get it out of here!’ So, our commander told us, ‘okay, guys. You heard the man. Get the wood back on the trucks.’ So, we started putting the wood back on the trucks. The security guard left, and we drove off with all the fire department’s wood.”

Mark laughs, and comments, “that’s seriously funny!” Eddie also laughs, and mentions, “that commander was a genius.” Braden tells them, “yeah! And, it worked! So, we used that wood to build another building in the training grounds.” Mark mentions, “yeah, bro. And, instead of burning it down, I bet you guys shot it up with bullets.” Braden laughs, telling them, “actually, we did. And, that was a lot of fun. I’m really glad we got to build something.”

While Eddie and his group are exchanging funny stories, the McCutchen brothers and Leggett occasionally look over, wondering what could possibly be so funny. The fact that the tribe's energy is so light and airy is somehow disturbing to McCutchen. But, McCutchen's observation of the group does not go unnoticed. Braden caught McCutchen out of the corner of his eye several times watching with a disturbed look while Braden was telling his story.

After spending an hour or so in the pool, many of the team members head downstairs to the gym. A few team members, enjoying the sun, remain in and around the pool side. Dr. Braun and the rest of the coaching staff want to take a look at Eddie and Kathy's gym before they leave. They are quite impressed at the arrangement that Eddie has put together in his basement. The 1,500 square foot workout facility is quite impressive, with a few pieces of equipment that Eddie built himself. Among the equipment is Eddie's squat rack that he designed himself and built with Angelo's help when he first entered high school. A few team members work out for a while. After seeing the gym, the team's coaches head out for the day, and were grateful that they were invited.

All afternoon, the team members have been checking out Eddie and Kathy's house. Braden is no exception. On the far end of the pool, Braden is checking out the hard scape, particularly where it meets up with what looks to be a beautiful Jasmine wall. The wall is actually made of metal framework, with Jasmine vines growing on it. From the other end of the pool, the Jasmine wall provides a good amount of privacy, and appears as if it is tied into the hard scape. But, as Braden takes a closer look, he finds that there is actually a few feet between the hard scape and the Jasmine wall.

While Braden is on the other side of the Jasmine wall, he overhears Todd McCutchen telling his older brother, Scott, "I'm going to take Eddie and Mark down. I don't know how I'm going to do it, but they've got to go." McCutchen's brother advises him, "if you don't get rid of them, you won't have a place on the team. You saw what happened when Barbara, that Eric Johnson guy, and the Kathy and Paula duo showed up, didn't you?" McCutchen replies, "I know that. I've put up with Mark and Eddie for seven years. And, their group keeps getting bigger every year. Next year, I can already see it. They're all going to take over. And, it seems like Eddie and Mark are the boss." McCutchen's brother frankly tells him, "well, if you don't do something, you're screwed. You'll lose more than your position on the team, if you know what I mean. And, you know what that will mean for dad."

Braden stays quiet for a while, and waits for McCutchen and McCutchen to move to the other side of the pool. Sneaking to the other end of the long Jasmine wall, Braden avoids any suspicion that he was

even nearby. Braden then approaches the pool from the other side, giving the appearance that he just came out of the house. Braden's training at the police academy has taught him well. Today, he was able to put his training to work.

The party begins to wind down in the early evening. The tribe, however, hangs around into the evening hours. Once the rest of the team is gone and only the tribe remains, Braden tells everyone, "I hate to say this, but I think we got a really big problem." Mark asks, "really? What's that?" Braden explains, "I heard McCrutchten telling his older brother, Scott, that he's planning on taking you and Eddie down. But, he said he doesn't know how he's gonna do it." Mark laughs, and asks, "McCrutchten's going to take us down? Really? I want to see that." Braden continues, telling Mark, "he told his brother that, if he doesn't get rid of you guys, then we're all gonna take over next year." Mark comments, "take over? Geesh. We're just running track." Kathy adds, "yeah, and a whole lot better than they do."

Eddie comically comments, "I'll just belt his ass to the fence." A couple of the members of the tribe laugh at Eddie's comment, but Braden is still somewhat concerned. Braden tells Eddie, "from what I heard McCrutchten saying, this guy's a lot bigger problem than Chuckie. He said he's put up with you and Mark for seven years." Mark comments, "and, we ain't done with him yet." Paula mentions, "that guy really ticks me off. What a piece of shit." Kathy informs everyone, "when he was inside, he was really checking out the inside of our house. I caught him counting the medals on the wall. That guy definitely has a problem."

Johnson, who has been on the University team with McCrutchten for the last year, mentions, "you know, I watched McCrutchten blow a relay race last year on purpose. Me, Leggett, Stone, and McCrutchten were running the mile medley. McCrutchten ran the second leg, and he messed up both handoffs. His 220 leg was like 40 or 45 seconds. And, right after that race, Stone called him a loser. Then McCrutchten grinned like he thought it was funny or something." Kathy exclaims, "I remember that! Stone was really ticked off!" Paula mentions, "it sounds like McCrutchten wants to be the top dog." Mark comments, "if he can't run with the big dogs, he should just keep his ass on the porch." Eddie corrects Mark, saying, "or, under the porch, with his tail between his legs."

Braden tells the group, "I just wanted everyone to know. I'd be really careful around that guy." Mark assures Braden, "McCrutchten will just self destruct. He's really good at that." Eddie remarks, "and, I'm sure you'll be right there to help him." Mark replies, "you got that right." Paula suggests, "from now on, let's all call them both 'McCrutchten.'" Everyone certainly thinks that's a good idea.

The tribe agrees to keep a watchful eye on McCutchen, knowing that there's nothing McCutchen can do until next year anyway. And, until next year, the tribe has decided, for the most part, to ignore McCutchen, pretending that he doesn't even exist.

As everyone heads out, Eddie and Kathy head inside for the evening. The sun set a while ago, and Katarina's star appeared a long time ago. As they are tidying up, Kathy mentions to Eddie, "that McCutchen is really going to be a problem next year." Eddie replies, "maybe he'll just quit. By the way, are all of our medals still on the wall?" Kathy laughs, telling Eddie, "yeah. I counted them. Stealing one is the only way he'd ever get one anyway."

As she is throwing away pizza boxes, Kathy comments, "well, we don't have any left over pizza." Eddie mentions, "you weren't really expecting any leftover pizza with this group, were you?" Putting her hands on her hips, Kathy replies, "no. But, now what am I going to have for breakfast?" Eddie replies, "well, tomorrow is Sunday. The pizza place opens at noon." Kathy laughs, explaining, "I was only kidding!" Eddie replies, "yeah, right. You're going to wake up late tomorrow morning anyway, and skip breakfast." Kathy replies, "yeah. You're probably right."

Looking around, Eddie comments, "well, it looks like we're about done." Kathy replies, "good. We're going to bed really late tonight, so I don't wake up too early tomorrow morning."

A week later, Kathy wakes up early on Saturday morning because she has to go to work. Today is the high school State invitational meet. Eddie, however, will not be working, but rather watching the meet from the stands with Mark and Bobby B. Working security detail today at the University, Braden has the luxury of watching the meet from where the action is. Eddie drives Kathy to the high school, so she can take the bus with the team. Eddie, however, drives to the University, where he will meet up with Mark and Bobby B.

Easily finding each other in the University parking lot, Eddie, Mark, and Bobby B. head out to the stadium to find a good seat. Only a few athletes have arrived so far, and the stands are nearly empty. Eddie mentions to the group, "hey, there's Braden. It looks like he has a whole crew going." Mark suggests, "let's go see what he's up to." The group heads over to say hello to Braden, who appears as if he will have a long day ahead of him.

Braden, along with two paramedics, is setting up the security tent. Braden will be out in the heat all afternoon, so the tent will give him a place to periodically cool off. Braden's tent, shared with the paramedics, is home to many coolers with refreshments, ice, and food. A large electric

fan and a few chairs for relaxing will keep the support staff cool in the mid afternoon heat. Backed up to the tent is the emergency response vehicle, with any equipment the paramedics may need.

As he is walking up Eddie yells out, “yo! Can I get a pizza?” Carla, one of the paramedics comments to Braden, and the other paramedic, Mike, “wonderful. It’s starting early today.” Braden turns around, and exclaims, “yo, bro! What are you guys doing here?” Eddie replies, “we came to watch, since Hoffer and Erika will be running for the University next year.” Braden, referring to the 4 by 440 relay, replies, “I want to see how they do in our race.” Mark mentions, “Paula thinks they’re going to take it.”

Braden then introduces the paramedics, Carla and Mike, to Eddie, Mark, and Bobby B. Carla and Mike quickly realize the group that approached is not a bunch of clowns. Letting Braden get back to work, Eddie, Mark, and Bobby B. make their way to the stands, finding a seat with a good view of the finish line.

The Northside bus arrives, and the team heads to their designated bench area. Eddie mentions, “here comes the team.” Bobby B. mentions, “Mr. Frazier looks happy.” Mark replies, “he should be. He’s got a really strong team again this year.” The spectators from Northside head up to the stands, some of them finding Eddie and his group. Eddie’s parents, here to watch John today, find Eddie in the stands and also sit with the group.

Once the athletes are settled, the call is made for the 100-yard dash. Eddie mentions, “John, Hoffer, and Davida are all in the 100. This is going to be a good race.” Since they are among the top seeds in the State, the three Northside runners are in the first heat, along with Sokolov, who is the number one seed. After checking John’s, Hoffer’s, and Davida’s block settings, Kathy heads over to the finish line to join Mr. Frazier. After Kathy leaves, Hoffer and John seem to be arguing with Davida about something.

As the first heat is about to get underway, Eddie tells Mark, “I’m timing John.” Mark mentions, “I’ll get Hoffer and Davida.” Bobby B. asks, “do you want me to time someone?” Mark asks Bobby B., “have you washed and sterilized your hands?” Bobby B. asks, “why?” Mark replies, “because the stopwatches have been cleaned and they’re sparkly bright.” Bobby B. is surprised that Mark remembered the reference to a sparkly bright stopwatch from two years ago. Eddie hands Bobby B. one of his stopwatches, and tells him, “time John. Let’s see how accurate you are.”

The runners are set, and the gun is fired. John, Hoffer, and Davida are all off to a strong start. At 50 yards, the three Northside runners and Sokolov clearly lead the pack. As they approach the finish line, John

crosses first, followed by Hoffer, Davida, and Sokolov, who all appear to nearly tie. Eddie watches, as Mr. Frazier and Kathy each give the three finalists a high-five. Eddie is quite impressed that his brother just beat the number one seed in the State by a yard or so.

Eddie exclaims, "wow! I clocked John at 9.5 seconds." Mark adds, "Hoffer ran a 9.6 and Davida also ran a 9.6." Eddie asks Bobby B., "what did you clock John at?" Bobby B. replies, "my stopwatch reads 10.4 seconds." Eddie tells Bobby B., "let me see that." Eddie takes a look and, sure enough, Bobby B.'s stopwatch reads 10.4 seconds. Mark tells Bobby B., "you'd better leave working these highly precision stopwatches to the professionals. You should stick to reading surveying tapes." Eddie, however, lets Bobby B. use the stopwatch, giving him something to do during the meet.

The events move along quickly, getting to the 440-yard dash. Braden moves over to the finish line, wondering what the competition will bring this year now that he's gone. Seeing a familiar face, Braden walks over to talk with Mikhail Sokolov, now a senior running for Liberty High School. Braden already suspects that Sokolov will win this race. Braden is very interested in what Sokolov will deliver at the finish line this year.

The first heat of the 440-yard dash lines up, and Sokolov, the number one seed in the State in this event, is up against Lucius Hill and Paul Davida in the first heat. While they are waiting, Mark mentions, "there's Mr. Ruff, at the Meet Director's tent. He's obviously not happy about something." Eddie asks, "I wonder who they have in the meet today." Mark replies, "probably no one. He just came to complain." With the gun about to go off, Eddie, Mark, and Bobby B. get their stopwatches ready.

The first heat of the 440-yard dash is ready to run and the gun is fired. Braden, at the finish line, secretly started his stopwatch hidden in his pocket. Sokolov takes an early lead, followed by Davida. Hill, a sophomore, is in fourth place. Halfway through the race, it is clear that Sokolov will win. Davida, however, is giving him a run for his money. And, Hill is attempting to overtake the runner currently in third place. At the finish line, Sokolov crosses first, followed by Davida. Hill, taking third place in this heat, managed to beat out his direct competition right before the finish line. On Braden's stopwatch, Sokolov delivered a time of 48.9 seconds. With other heats to be run, everyone will have to wait and see where Davida and Hill ultimately place.

Right before lunch brings the 100-yard dash final. John, Hoffer, and Davida have all made the final, along with Sokolov, who ran a 9.5 in this event last year, taking third place. Today, in the preliminaries, Sokolov did no better than last year.

While the runners are setting their blocks, Mr. Frazier is talking with Sokolov's coach, Mr. Pushkin of Liberty High. Mr. Frazier and Mr. Pushkin have kept in touch over the last year, sharing information of their respective divisions with each other. While Mr. Frazier and Mr. Pushkin are having a friendly conversation with each other, an argument seems to have developed at the starting line among the Northside finalists. Eddie and Mark know that, whatever the argument is about, its intent is purely to distract the other runners.

The gun is fired and, at 25 yards, there is no clear leader. Eddie is at the edge of his seat, waiting for someone to break from the pack. At 50 yards, John and Hoffer take a slight lead over Davida and Sokolov. At 75 yards, Hoffer overtakes John by a slight margin. Eddie tells Mark, "catch Hoffer." As they approach the finish line, the stopwatches held by Eddie, Mark, and Bobby B. seem to click simultaneously.

At the finish, Hoffer takes first place and John takes second place. Vying for third place were Davida and Sokolov, and was too close to call. The officials will have to resort to examining the photographic evidence to determine third place. On the way back to the bench, Mr. Frazier and Kathy give Hoffer, John, and Davida a high-five. Mr. Frazier clearly thinks Davida took third place, but Mr. Pushkin has a differing opinion. They will have to wait a while to find out.

Watching as Kathy approaches the bench, Eddie sees her looking up into the stands. Eddie and Mark stand up and wave, seeing Kathy pointing to the cafeteria. Eddie mentions, "it's lunchtime." Eddie, Mark, Bobby B., and Eddie's parents head to the cafeteria, and will meet up with Kathy and Paula. They will now get the inside scoop on what is going on during the meet.

Over lunch, Eddie mentions to Kathy and Paula, "it seems like it's pretty quiet down there today." Kathy replies, "not on your life. The whole meet has been status dramaticus since it started." Eddie asks, "oh yeah? What happened?" Kathy explains, "Mr. Ruff is complaining that his 4 by 440 relay team should be in the second heat, and not the first." Eddie interrupts, mentioning, "the first heat are the better teams. Why would he want to be in the second heat?" Kathy replies, "probably because Mr. Ruff doesn't want his team to run against ours. So, my dad let him run in the second heat." Eddie laughs, and replies, "yeah. Probably just to get rid of him." Mark and Eddie laugh, not too surprised that Mr. Ruff managed to find something to complain about.

Kathy continues, telling the group, "and, Mr. Rogers, the Parkview coach, was yelling and screaming that Davida should not be allowed to run for our team." Mark points out, "he moved!" Kathy continues, explaining, "yeah, but for some reason, Mr. Rogers was insisting that

Davida still lives in the Parkview district. So, Mr. Rogers is on the warpath about it. And, Davida's father even came down from the stands to try to clear things up." Mark comments, "wow! Some things never change." Eddie also comments, pointing out, "well, if they can't win by performance, they have to resort to looking for technicalities." Mark adds, "and making shit up."

Kathy informs the group, "oh, and it doesn't stop there. In the 4 by 220 relay, one of the teams transferred the baton outside the transition zone. The Lane Judges all saw it, and so the coach tried to say the transition zone wasn't clearly marked. So, that coach was yelling and screaming at all the officials. So, they told him to go back to his bench and file a complaint." Mark comments, "well, everyone else can find the transition zone. It sounds like it's their problem." Kathy replies, "yeah, I'd say."

With lunch over, Kathy mentions, "I need to bring Braden a pizza." While Kathy gets back in line to get Braden's pizza, Mark asks Paula, "so, what was that big argument at the starting line during the 100-yard dash final?" Paula explains, "Davida was telling Hoffer and John that he was glad that Northside picked him up this year." Mark asks, "how would that be an argument?" Paula continues, "John, Hoffer, and Davida were messing with the competition. Davida told them that he still lives in the Parkview district. And, so John pretended to get mad, and told Davida that he is not eligible to run. Apparently the word got around. And, that's why there's a controversy about Davida." Eddie and Mark laugh, now making sense of what Kathy explained earlier.

After a few more events, the time for the final event of the day, the 4 by 440 relay, arrives. Running for Northside is John, Davida, Erika, and Hoffer. Hill could have just as easily made this team, but Davida was a little bit quicker in this event over the regular season. The relay team heads over to the starting line, along with Mr. Frazier, Kathy, and Paula. Mr. Frazier talks with Braden for a moment before the race begins. Mr. Frazier informs Braden that his team should take first place, but the team is not as fast as last year's team. Braden already suspected that.

Paula tosses the baton to John, the lead man, who gets behind the blocks. The Starter announces, "on your marks." Once the six runners are ready, the Starter announces, "set," followed by the gun. John quickly takes the lead, running a lower 50-second pace. Approaching the transition zone, John hands off to Davida. Seeing Davida on the track prompts the Liberty coach, Mr. Rogers, to rehash the question of Davida's eligibility with the officials.

Davida, currently in first place, takes off and is widening the lead slightly. In the stands, Eddie mentions, "John ran a 54-second quarter

mile.” Mark replies, “he’s almost as fast as you were when you were his age.” As Davida approaches the transition zone, Erika gets on the track. Davida hands off to Erika, handing her a considerable lead along with the baton.

During her leg, Erika knows she must deliver a good time. Erika has already been accepted to the University, but she is very aware that the University’s scouts and coaches are watching the race. During Erika’s leg, Dr. Karakova, the Meet Director, approaches Mr. Frazier regarding Davida’s eligibility. Erika hands off to Hoffer, who sets out to seal the victory.

During Hoffer’s leg, Dr. Karakova informs Mr. Frazier, “I know there’s nothing behind this but, Mr. Rogers, the Parkview coach, has lodged a complaint against your team. So, I’m pretending to check it out.” Mr. Frazier asks, “oh yeah? What’s he complaining about this year?” Dr. Karakova explains, “Mr. Rogers thinks Paul Davida still lives in his old district, and is ineligible to run for your team. I’ve already spoken to Steve Davida, the father. His driver’s license checks out. He lives over on Oxford Street.” Mr. Frazier laughs, and replies, “that’s really funny! Davida started that rumor himself during the 100-yard dash preliminaries, and again during the final. He pretended to argue with Hoffer and John. They were messing with the competition.” Dr. Karakova laughs, and tells Mr. Frazier, “they’re all still at it, I see.” Mr. Frazier replies, “yeah. Mark taught them well.”

Hoffer approaches the finish line, taking first place in this heat, and likely winning the gold medal in the event. Mr. Frazier, Kathy, and Paula give the relay team members a high-five, and head back to the team bench. Dr. Karakova, however, hangs around the finish line, talking with Officer Braden, catching up on the last year.

The second heat approaches the starting blocks. Mr. Ruff was granted his wish, and his team is running in the second heat. As Dr. Karakova and Braden talk, Braden hears Mr. Ruff give the Centerville relay team the usual pep talk, trying to convince his team to run faster than they actually can. This year, however, Braden gives Mr. Ruff’s hot air no attention.

The gun is fired, and the second heat is out of the blocks. During the race, Dr. Karakova asks Braden, “so, what is your quarter mile time down to these days?” Braden replies, “my best is 45.3 seconds. I can run a 46 without any problem.” Quite surprised, Dr. Karakova informs Braden, “with a time like that, you’re sure to win that event in the University’s divisional meets.” Not the least bit bashful, Braden replies, “I’m looking forward to it. I can’t wait!” Dr. Karakova and Officer Braden talk for a while longer, as the last leg of the second heat gets on the track.

Glancing over at the transition zone, Officer Braden tells Dr. Karakova, "sir, I believe we have a problem." Dr. Karakova asks, "what's that?" Braden replies, "don't make it too obvious when you look, but the guy who just stepped into lane one is Todd McCutchen. Oops. I mean McCutchen. He ain't supposed to be on the track! He graduated last year." Dr. Karakova glances over at the finish line, seeing McCutchen on the track. Dr. Karakova asks Officer Braden, "are you sure?" Officer Braden replies, "I'm 100 percent sure. There ain't no doubt about it. We kicked his ass for seven years, and he's on the University's track team." Using his radio, Dr. Karakova tells the Meet Clerk to bring the roster for the 4 by 440 relay to the starting line immediately.

While Dr. Karakova is awaiting the arrival of the Meet Clerk, Todd McCutchen takes delivery of the baton, and takes a lap around the track. From the stands, Eddie is repeatedly yelling out, "hey! That's McCutchen!" Mark joins in, reinforcing the claim. Eddie and Mark catch the attention of Dr. Karakova and Braden, who signal that they are aware of the charge. Eddie and Mark walk down to the fence, getting a better view of what is about to transpire.

The Meet Clerk arrives with the roster, which Dr. Karakova carefully examines. According to the roster, running for Centerville are Thompson, Miller, Sanchez, and McCutchen. The problem is that Jeff McCutchen is on the roster and Todd McCutchen is on the track. Dr. Karakova asks Officer Braden, "the guy on the track, you said that was Todd McCutchen?" Officer Braden tells Dr. Karakova, "yeah. That's him. I'm 100 percent sure." Dr. Karakova asks, "then, who's this Jeff McCutchen on the roster?" Officer Braden explains, "that's his younger brother. The last I knew, he runs distance. Last year, he ran a quarter mile in something like 75 seconds. That ain't him on the track. The one that's supposed to be running weighed like 100 pounds the last time I saw him."

As McCutchen, who is leading this heat, approaches the finish line, Dr. Karakova takes a good look at him, vaguely recognizing him from past invitational meets. McCutchen crosses the finish line, and is quickly intercepted by Dr. Karakova. McCutchen is told by Dr. Karakova to follow the Meet Clerk and the Lane Judge assigned to the transition zone to the Meet Director's tent. Dr. Karakova asks Braden to accompany the officials and McCutchen. On the way, McCutchen says nothing. He knows he has been busted. Oddly unable to find Mr. Ruff in the coach's area, Dr. Karakova also heads to the Meet Director's tent. In fact, the rest of Centerville's 4 by 440 relay team is nowhere to be found.

The announcement is made over the public address system, "will Mr. Ruff and the Centerville 4 by 440 relay team please report to the Meet Director's desk immediately." Mr. Ruff frequents the Meet Director's desk

during every invitational meet, so he should have no complaint about today's special invitation.

While Mr. Ruff makes his way to the Meet Director's desk, Dr. Karakova instructs the Meet Clerk, the Lane Judge, and Braden to take Todd McCutchen twenty feet away, detaining him in the security tent. Dr. Karakova instructs the Meet Clerk to return Todd McCutchen to the Meet Director's tent when he waves.

Mr. Ruff approaches the Meet Director's desk, along with Thompson, Miller, Sanchez, and Jeff McCutchen. Before Dr. Karakova can explain his concern, Mr. Ruff exclaims, "what's this all about?" Referring to the runners who accompany Mr. Ruff, Dr. Karakova asks Mr. Ruff, "is this the 4 by 440 relay team that just took first place in the second heat?" Mr. Ruff replies, "yes, it is." Dr. Karakova sarcastically asks, "oh, really?" Mr. Ruff exclaims, "of course they are! Is there a problem?" Dr. Karakova calmly replies, "yes, sir. There is a problem. And, the problem is of a very serious nature."

Dr. Karakova waves over to the Meet Clerk, instructing him to escort Todd McCutchen back to the Meet Director's tent. Braden accompanies the Meet Clerk, the Lane Judge, and McCutchen. As McCutchen enters the Meet Director's tent, Dr. Karakova asks Mr. Ruff, "and, is it your position that this gentleman was not running in the race?" Mr. Ruff exclaims, "no! Of course he wasn't! He's one of our team assistants!" Dr. Karakova then asks, "can you explain to me why he is still holding the baton?" Mr. Ruff brashly replies, "I don't know! One of the runners must have handed it to him!"

Dr. Karakova frankly tells Mr. Ruff, "Mr. Ruff. Officer Braden and the Lane Judge, both standing right here, and myself, all saw Todd McCutchen on the track, running with the baton that he is still holding. He has been in our custody since he crossed the finish line." Mr. Ruff exclaims, "there must be some sort of mistake!" Dr. Karakova replies, "sir, mark my word. There is no mistake. Your team is now disqualified. You will be receiving official correspondence from me regarding this situation by the beginning of the next academic year. You, and the entire Centerville team, are officially ejected from the meet. Please gather up your stuff immediately, and go home. And, if I see you again today, I will double any sanction that the committee decides." Knowing he has been busted, Mr. Ruff walks away, throwing his hands in the air, exclaiming, "how in the world did this happen!"

Heading back to his bench with his relay team, Mr. Ruff knows exactly how this happened. By having his relay team run in the second heat, Mr. Ruff thought he could sneak Todd McCutchen into the race, taking the place of Todd's slower brother, Jeff. Should Todd McCutchen had run in

the first heat, as originally assigned, Mr. Frazier, and the Northside team, would have surely recognized him. By the rest of the Centerville 4 by 440 relay team making themselves scarce at the finish line and immediately heading back to the bench after running their leg, little attention was paid to the Centerville team. And, Mr. Ruff's absence at the finish line when the race was over was certainly puzzling.

The awards ceremony brings many Northside athletes to the stage. In the 100-yard dash, Hoffer takes the gold medal, John takes the silver medal, and, in a photo finish, Davida took the bronze medal. In the 440-yard dash, Davida takes the silver medal, and Hill takes the bronze. John takes the gold medal in the 220-yard dash, surprising Mr. Frazier. Akinmola wins the gold medal in both the 880-yard run and in the one-mile run. Tom Davidson walked away with the bronze medal in the mile. George Livingston, who has come a long way, takes the bronze medal in the 880-yard run.

In the relay events, Erika, Tessa, John Elliot, and Lucius Hill take the gold medal in the 4 by 220 relay. In the 4 by 880-relay, Amber, Livingston, Davidson, and Akinmola take home the gold medal. And, in the 4 by 440 relay, John, Davida, Erika, and Hoffer take the gold medal. For the University scouts who were evaluating Erika's and Hoffer's performance, they certainly passed their tests with flying colors today.

In the field events, Bobby B. was sorely missed, except by, perhaps, the competing teams. For Northside, Joe Sepulveda, a high jumper, takes the silver medal. Undefeated in regular season meets this year, Sepulveda will likely take the gold medal next year.

After the meet, Eddie, Mark, Bobby B., and Eddie's parents come down to meet the team. They are joined by the parents of a few other team members. Braden also walks over to the team bench, offering his congratulations to Mr. Frazier and his team. John, Hoffer, and Davida are having their own celebration after sweeping the 100-yard dash and taking the 4 by 440 relay. Erika disappears with Bobby B. for a while, as Bobby B. heads over to the Meet Clerk's desk to find out what the winning throw in the shot-put was.

It doesn't take long for Eddie to ask Braden, "so, what was McCrutchen doing out on the track?" Braden explains, "I can't believe that shit! They tried to sneak his ass into the race! His brother was on the roster, but McCrutchen ran in his place!" Now having everyone's attention, Braden continues, "and, Mr. Ruff pretended not to know anything about it. We caught them red handed." Kathy exclaims, "you can't be serious!" Braden tells Kathy, "your dad really took care of Mr. Ruff. He even kicked Mr. Ruff, and his whole team, out of the meet."

Mr. Frazier smiles, and comments, "I guess we won't see Mr. Ruff here next year." Tessa asks, "why not?" Mr. Frazier explains, "knowingly having an ineligible runner participate in an event is a serious infraction of the rules. Ejecting Mr. Ruff, and his team, from the meet is only the beginning. Centerville will probably be sanctioned for at least a year for that kind of infraction." Braden adds, "Dr. Karakova mentioned something about some official correspondence coming down. I'd love to be there when that goes down!" Mr. Frazier laughs, knowing that Mr. Ruff will not be a problem in the upcoming year.

After the meet, Kathy takes the bus back to the high school with the rest of the team. Eddie arrives at the high school, meeting up with Kathy and the rest of the team. Mark and Bobby B. also drive up, since there will likely be a pizza party afterwards. Unfortunately, Braden is still on duty and will be missed. The team heads inside, where Mr. Frazier will get a photograph of the medalists. After the photograph, the team heads out to get pizza, which appears to now be a tradition.

After the pizza celebration, Eddie and Kathy head home, where they sit by the pool with Mark and Paula. During the conversation, Paula comments, "can you believe that shit that Mr. Ruff and McCutchen tried to pull today? I mean, that was kind of blatant." Mark replies, "well, that didn't go exactly as planned." Eddie adds, "nothing Centerville ever does goes as planned, unless they plan to lose." Kathy laughs, never remembering Centerville actually winning much over the years.

Paula, who has absolutely no respect for McCutchen, asks Kathy, "so, what do you think your father is going to do about Mr. Ruff?" Kathy explains, "Mr. Ruff is a pain in the ass every year. We heard what Mr. Frazier said. Centerville will probably be sanctioned for at least a year." Mark comments, "that sounds like they're being suspended." The group laughs, and Kathy mentions, "trust me. If my dad could get rid of Mr. Ruff for a year, he'll do it."

As the evening turns into night, Mark and Paula head out. Kathy tells Eddie, "it's been a long day. Let's go to bed early." On their way inside, Kathy looks up at the sky to find her star. Finding her star overhead, Kathy sighs, and tells Eddie, "all those stars. I'd really better get busy."