

Eddie, The Collegiate Freshman

Chapter One School Starts Yet Again

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Kathy and Paula are now beginning their third year at the University. Barbara is now a senior, and Johnson is a sophomore. Not in school for the last year, Eddie, Mark, Braden, Mitchell, and Bobby B. are all incoming freshmen at the University. Erika, Hoffer, and Akinmola are also part of the freshman class, bringing much of the tribe together again. This year, once again, Eddie and most of the tribe are the new guys on the block. Eddie, Mark, Braden, Mitchell, and Bobby B. have all practiced with the team on many occasions, but they have not yet competed at the collegiate level.

Todd McCutchen, who lives on the University campus with no car, is now a sophomore. Being a sophomore does not make him any faster on the track than he was last year or when he was in high school. Neither does it grant him any seniority on the track team. McCutchen is still bothered by Eddie's MGB, Kathy's Porsche, Mark's Jeep, and Paula's Jeep. And, with Kathy and Paula now having matching Dune Buggies, McCutchen is more miffed than ever. And, as if that wasn't enough, Eddie and Kathy's house in the woods, and Mark and Paula's house in the woods a mile away, really ticks off McCutchen.

But, the tribe and McCutchen are now on the same team. There have already been a few signs of contention between McCutchen and the tribe but, with any luck, they will all get along once the track season starts. Last year, McCutchen seriously compromised his integrity by running in his brother's place for Centerville High School during the State invitational meet. And, with McCutchen and Leggett crashing Mark and Paula's wedding last year, getting along with the tribe might be asking a bit too much. A month ago, Mark vowed to pay back McCutchen and Leggett for their nasty deed.

During the first week of classes, early on Wednesday morning, Eddie, and the rest of the tribe, heads to the track. Practice starts at 7:00 a.m. sharp, which is when everyone is expected to be dressed and ready to run, not when they stumble into the locker room to change. Since the earliest classes start at 8:00 a.m., the parking lot is virtually empty when the tribe arrives for practice. Arriving one by one, it's easy for the tribe to find where everyone else is parked. With an empty parking lot, the tribe has just assigned themselves a place where they will all park together in the future. By 6:40 a.m., Eddie's MGB, Kathy's Dune Buggy, Mark's Jeep, Paula's Dune Buggy, Bobby B's. BSA Starfire motorcycle, Erika's BSA motorcycle, and Mitchell's Opel 1900 are all parked at the end of the parking lot adjacent to the track.

Hoffer and Tessa have chosen to live on campus in the dorms. Akinmola, who has dual enrollment status, chose to live at the University simply because track practice starts early in the morning. Braden, who is employed as a campus police officer, has been given a complimentary private dorm suite on campus as part of his package. This benefits both Braden and the University. Braden gets a free place to live, and the University has a back up officer on campus 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Well, almost. All students occasionally leave campus, especially to get a good home cooked meal or pizza. And Wendy, who has transferred to the University this semester, is Tessa's roommate.

The tribe heads to the locker rooms, getting ready for their first practice session of the school year. On the way in, Erika comments, "I think I've been here a few times before." And, she has. The University track is where the State invitational meets are held. Erika has won many medals on this track. Kathy tells Erika, "by the way, you're replacing Genise in the 440-yard dash. And, you'll probably be on the mile medley relay team with me, Paula, and Barbara." Erika comments, "I wonder if I'll be fast enough." Reassuring Erika, Kathy tells her, "trust me. You're fast enough. Just run your best."

With the team assembled in the arena, the head coach, Dr. Braun walks in, along with Dr. Paxton, the distance coach, Coach Herndon, the sprinting coach, and Dr. Bonamo, the field events coach. Seeing the coaching team walk in, the team heads over to the bleachers, and everyone takes a seat. The freshmen, who will understand the drill after today, follow the upperclassmen. The tribe all sits together, reminiscent of a few years ago.

While they are waiting, Mark sees that McCutchen is eavesdropping on his conversation with Eddie. Mark whispers to Eddie, "hey, pretend to get into an argument with me. Say, 'it's in Italy.'" Following Mark's instruction, Eddie exclaims, "it's in Italy!" Mark replies, "it's not in Italy!" Eddie replies, "yeah, it is! It's in Italy!" Mark and Eddie exchange a few

words for a minute or so, as McCutchen seems to be paying even more attention to the makeshift argument.

Mark announces, “maybe McCutchen will know.” Catching his attention, Mark asks McCutchen, “hey, are you smart?” McCutchen replies, “yeah!” Mark asks him, “if a plane crashes on the border of Italy and Switzerland, where do they bury the survivors?” Thinking about it, McCutchen replies, “they bury them in whatever country they were from.” Mark nods his head, and replies, “really?” McCutchen replies, “yeah.”

Overhearing the conversation, Kathy starts laughing, and blurts out, “they don’t bury survivors! I haven’t heard that one since like the third grade!” Mark has often compared McCutchen’s performance on the track to that of a middle school student. Today, Mark has reduced McCutchen’s cognitive abilities down to that of a third grader.

McCutchen is saved by the bell. Dr. Braun, the head coach, blows his whistle. Dr. Braun gives a welcome message to the team, and introduces the other coaches, informing the athletes of their function with the team. After the opening announcements, Dr. Braun announces, “today we are running time trials. I want to see exactly where everyone’s performance stands. We will all head out to the track, where Mrs. Owens, the events coordinator, is waiting for us outside. She will be compiling and analyzing your times. The distance team will meet with Dr. Paxton, and the sprinters will meet with Coach Herndon. The field athletes will meet with Dr. Bonamo. Okay, let’s head outside and give it our best!” The team heads out to the track, ready to start the season.

Once outside, Coach Herndon, the coach to the sprinters, looks over the field of runners she has to work with this year. McCutchen proudly stands in front of the group, while Eddie and the tribe all stand in the back. Coach Herndon announces, “everybody listen up. The 100-yard dash time trials are up first. You must run to the best of your ability today. Everyone warm up, and we’ll start in just a moment.”

Eddie, and the tribe, stretches and takes a lap around the track to warm up. McCutchen and Leggett, on the other end of the spectrum, see no real reason to warm up. This is because they are aerobically deficient from slacking off over the Summer, and are conserving what little energy they have.

Once everyone is warmed up, Coach Herndon announces, “okay! You will run in groups of six. The first heat, get behind the blocks! I’m sorry, ladies. Today, the men are going first.” The first heat usually brings the fastest runners. No names were intentionally called because Coach Herndon wants to know who has the guts to step up first. No freshman in their right mind would dare get behind the blocks right now, but that

doesn't stop the tribe. As they are lining up, Eddie whispers to Braden, "take lane one. Trust me." As they get behind the blocks, the tribe pushes McCutchen over to lane six.

Behind the blocks are Eddie, Mark, Braden, Hoffer, Johnson, and McCutchen. Leggett is wise enough to wait until the second heat. Leggett already knows that all the guys behind the blocks will probably beat him, except for McCutchen. So, instead of coming in last place, Leggett decided to wait for a heat where he will come in first place. But, as Leggett will quickly find out, you cannot hide from the clock.

The tribe exchanges fist bumps, encouraging each other, as they mostly ignore McCutchen. Mark, the lone holdout, asks McCutchen, "hey loser! How was your night in the slammer?" McCutchen, who spent two nights in jail after crashing Mark and Paula's wedding last Summer, has just been put on notice that he is treading on thin ice. Braden exclaims, "here we go! The beginning of the ass kicking season! And, I got a bunch of new asses to kick this year! Let's get it going!" Kathy is very glad to hear that verbiage once again.

Once Coach Herndon is at the finish line, the Starter announces, "on your marks." The runners get into the blocks, waiting for the signal. The Starter announces, "set." The Starter fires the gun, and five of the six stopwatches at the other end of the track begin to record this year's standard of performance in the 100-yard dash.

At 25 yards into the race, Eddie is clearly in front. Mark, Braden, and Johnson are right up there with him, with Hoffer holding his own. With his official debut performance, Eddie has something to prove, and has been looking forward to this moment all Summer. Eddie pushes it harder than he ever thought possible. Halfway through the race, everyone knows exactly what they are witnessing. Knowing that they must deliver the best performance of their career, the tribe pushes each other hard. At the finish line, Eddie takes first place, and Mark takes second place. Third place goes to Braden and Johnson who, as best as can be determined, tied. Hoffer, taking fifth place, delivered a great performance worthy of the scholarship he received. And, as expected, McCutchen finished in last place, significantly behind the pack.

Coach Herndon paces back and forth, anxiously awaiting the report from Mrs. Owens. Receiving each of the runner's times from the Timekeepers, Mrs. Owens adds the times to their corresponding performance statistics page. She then does some rudimentary verification, such as making sure the first place runner's time is faster than that of the second place runner. Coach Herndon already knows it was a good run but, as a spectator without a stopwatch, it is difficult to

differentiate a 9.2-second 100-yard dash from a 9.8-second 100-yard dash, especially if the field is close.

Finally receiving the report, Coach Herndon screams out, “everybody listen up! Edward Bogenskaya, 9.2 seconds! Mark Svoboda, 9.3 seconds! Axel Braden, 9.5 seconds! Eric Johnson, 9.5 seconds! Jimmy Hoffer, 9.6 seconds! Todd McCutchen, 11.0 seconds. Did everyone hear that? 9.2 seconds! That’s faster than the fastest college time reported last year! And, that is an unofficial divisional record!” The tribe exchanges high-fives and fist bumps. Mark cannot resist commenting to McCutchen, “wow! Eleven seconds. You must have been training really hard over the Summer.”

Standing at the finish line, Dr. Braun is quite amazed. At that very moment, he feels justified for the scholarship money he vehemently fought for. Dr. Braun tells Eddie, Mark, Braden, Johnson, and Hoffer, “that was an amazing run. Speaking for the entire University, I can say that we are all very, very impressed.” Eddie, speaking for the group, replies, “thank you. Thank you.” Dr. Braun is quite satisfied that he actually got what he paid for, and then some. Dr. Braun is equally as happy that he is not spending any money on McCutchen, who is not on scholarship.

The tribe knows that the 440-yard dash is next. Since this is his event, Braden is getting all psyched up. Before the 440-yard dash, however, a few more heats of the 100-yard dash will be run. The next heat brings the first string women. Kathy, Paula, and Erika are among those behind the blocks. While the women are getting ready, Eddie, pointing to McCutchen out in the field kicking the grass, mentions to Mark, “hey! Take a look at that! Déjà vu. McCutchen is kicking the grass like he did back in eighth grade.” Mark comments, “wow! He’s having a nice little temper tantrum.” Eddie suggests, “maybe that’s his way of getting psyched up for the 440-yard dash.” Mark responds, “let him get psyched up. I’ll just psych him back down again.”

Kathy wins her heat, with Paula taking second place and Erika taking third place. Erika, not used to finishing in third place, is nevertheless very happy with her time. She was up against the gold and silver medal winners in the division for the last two years. But, Erika’s best race is the 440-yard dash. The tribe congratulates Kathy, Paula, and Erika, exchanging high-fives, fist bumps, and hugs. Dr. Braun and Coach Herndon, seeing the post-race celebration, are amazed at the level of camaraderie among some of the newer team members. This is something they’ve not seen in recent years.

The time to run the 440-yard dash finally arrives. Walking over to the track, Mark moves in the direction of McCutchen, who is strolling along with Leggett. Giving McCutchen some words of encouragement, Mark

tells McCutchen, “wow! Eleven seconds flat in the 100. I ran faster than that in the sixth grade.” Trying to give Mark some words of wisdom, Leggett informs Mark, “hey! Chill out! You guys are on the same team now.” Mark emphatically informs McCutchen and Leggett, “let’s get something straight. If you crash my wedding, we’re not on the same team.” Mark then tells McCutchen, “good luck in the 440. I hope you finish.” McCutchen asks, “just what is that supposed to mean?” Mark stares at McCutchen, not elaborating any further, then walks away.

As Mark walks away, Leggett tells McCutchen, “he’s just getting us back for crashing his wedding. You heard what he said, something about paybacks.” McCutchen replies, “yeah. I guess you’re right.” Leggett assures McCutchen, “just ignore him, and he’ll stop.” If Leggett and McCutchen believe that Mark’s comments are paybacks for crashing his wedding, they are sorely mistaken. The payback will come later.

The sprinters get a short break, so they can watch the one-mile run. Mitchell, Akinmola, and Stone will be fighting it out for the title of the University’s fastest distance man. This is Mitchell’s and Akinmola’s official debut performance with the University team. Watching a race such as this is likely to get the team fired up and motivated, so the five-minute break is worth it to the coaches. Also of importance, this is one race Coach Herndon does not want to miss herself.

The gun is fired and, right off the starting line, Mitchell, Akinmola, and Stone give the distinct impression that they are running the 440-yard dash. After 100 yards, Stone assumes the lead. Mitchell drops in right behind Stone. Right on Stone’s heels, Mitchell is gauging the leader’s pace. Akinmola, who has not run against Mitchell in a year, clearly notices the faster pace. For the first 440 yards, Mitchell drafts off of Stone, with his legs perfectly synced to the leader. Mitchell is following Stone so closely that, if Stone would suddenly change his stride, they would both likely go down.

During the end of the second lap, Mitchell sprints ahead of Stone. Mitchell, using the reserve he acquired by drafting off of Stone, waited until he felt he could take a significant lead. This move was intentional on Mitchell’s part, preventing Stone from drafting off of him. Mitchell, who is doing his best to stay a few yards ahead of Stone, is having a very good run. Akinmola, surprisingly, is now right behind Stone. During the third lap, Mitchell is gaining over Stone, albeit slowly.

Entering the final lap, someone will win this race, and none of the front runners will be accepting of losing. Akinmola, not used to being in third place, is chasing down Stone, but losing ground. To complicate Stone’s strategy, Stone does not know whether he is having a bad run or Mitchell is having an exceptionally good run. With more than just a time

trial at stake, each of the three front runners is out to prove a point. As the runners come out of the final curve and approach the finish line, all eyes are on the three distance stars battling it out for the title of the University's best distance man. At the finish line, Mitchell crosses first. Stone crosses second, roughly four seconds behind Mitchell. Finishing in third place is Akinmola, crossing the finish line about five seconds after Stone.

While everyone is waiting for the times to be compiled, Mark comments, "well, at least they're all still alive. That race looked like it was a killer." Eddie comments in return, "I don't know. Akinmola looks a little rough." Mark replies, "yeah, I see that. Well, they all look a little rough if you ask me." Paula, offering her words of wisdom, informs them, "they're all fine. Just look at them. They're all lying on the ground ready to take a nap." Kathy asks Paula, "hey, is that what you think about me when I lay on the ground to catch my breath?" Paula replies, "every time!" Kathy starts chasing Paula, running in circles, just like they have many times before. Kathy's short lived pursuit of Paula is interrupted by Dr. Paxton, who prepares to make the long awaited announcement.

The words from Dr. Paxton, heard by all, are, "Mitchell, 3:56.2. Stone, 3:59.9. Akinmola, 4:05.0. Great job, guys! Great job!" As Dr. Paxton announces the rest of the times, Akinmola asks, "what did I just hear? 4:05.0? Did I hear my time right?" One of the runners assures Akinmola, "that's what he said." Akinmola, although he came in third place, is ecstatic because he just beat his previous personal best by about five seconds.

But, in this race, Mitchell takes the prize. Beating Stone by 3.7 seconds, or roughly 35 yards, Mitchell is convinced that Eddie's training sled, which he and Akinmola have been using over the latter half of the Summer, has been a big help. But, Mitchell is also aware that strategy played an important part in the race today. Closely drafting off of Stone for more than a quarter of a mile conserved a lot of energy, preserving more energy for the latter part of the race. Mitchell also knows that he would have run a faster race if Stone were faster. This is because, for two laps, Mitchell kept pace with Stone, but knows he could have run slightly faster.

Now that the one-mile run has been completed, Coach Herndon announces to the sprinters, "you will now run the 440-yard dash. You will run with the same group that you ran with in the 100-yard dash. And, you will take the same lanes." Coach Herndon's decision to keep everyone in the same group and lanes is purely to keep the record keeping easier for Mrs. Owens. Coach Herndon announces, "okay! The first heat, get behind the blocks." Braden takes lane one, courtesy of Eddie's earlier recommendation, and looks over at Eddie and smiles. Braden just figured

out that Eddie knew in advance that whoever was in lane one during the 100-yard dash will also get lane one in the 440-yard dash.

With his first official appearance in the 440-yard dash, Braden exclaims, “here we go! Here comes the ass kicking of the day! Everybody, get out of my way! The chief ass kicker is back! Back on the track, and ready to attack!” Braden, pulling up his shirt as he is dancing around, exclaims, “back on the track, and showing off my six pack!” Braden then points to McCutchen and exclaims, “back on the track, and cutting you no slack!” The tribe very much enjoys listening to Braden’s rants. So does Coach Herndon and Dr. Braun, who are quite amused at Braden’s pre-race performance. McCutchen and Leggett, however, are not exactly amused.

The Starter announces, “on your marks.” Mark looks over at McCutchen, and yells out, “go!” McCutchen leaves the blocks, incurring a false start. The tribe laughs at McCutchen and, surprisingly, Coach Herndon even laughs herself. Braden exclaims, “the race ain’t even started, and that’s one ass kicked already! And, now I get to kick it a second time!” Coach Herndon yells out, “McCutchen! Did you hear a gun? I didn’t! Now, let’s try this again!” The Starter announces, “on your marks,” quickly followed by, “set.” The gun is fired, and Braden is out of the blocks, kicking ass as he promised.

As the guys set out to break the world record in the 440-yard dash, Kathy tells Paula, “see that? Braden’s back, and just look at how different everything is! And, did you hear that? He’s been practicing his rants!” Paula replies, “yeah! I can definitely see that! That was a really good one, choreographed and all!” Halfway through the race, Kathy exclaims, “wow! Check it out. Eddie, Mark, and Braden are all nearly tied.” Paula adds, “and, Johnson and Hoffer are doing pretty good themselves.”

As they come out of the final curve, Kathy grabs Paula, telling her, “come on, girl, we got to see this.” Kathy pulls Paula closer to the finish line, positioned for a perfect view of the finish. Kathy and Paula watch intently as the runners rapidly approach. In the sprint to the finish, McCutchen, far behind the pack, crashes to the ground, but no one immediately pays him any attention. The finish is far more important at the moment. At the line, Braden finishes right alongside of Eddie, with Mark only one or two steps behind. Johnson finishes behind Mark, with Hoffer following Johnson. McCutchen gets up, and walks slowly to the finish line.

Waiting for the times to be compiled, Coach Herndon paces back and forth, nervously waiting for the results. After Mark walks off his run, he hears from Paula that McCutchen went down on the track. Mark jogs over to the Timekeeper assigned to lane six, and asks her, “is your watch still running?” The Timekeeper replies, “yeah.” Mark tells the Timekeeper, “do

me a really big favor and catch his time.” The Timekeeper grins, and tells Mark, “sure thing.” The Timekeeper is certain that Mark is up to something.

Presented with the results, Coach Herndon wants everyone to hear the times. With everyone gathered around, Coach Herndon announces, “Axel Braden and Edward Bogenskaya tied, with a time of 45.4 seconds! Mark Svoboda, 45.6 seconds! Eric Johnson, 46.8 seconds! Jimmy Hoffer, 48.5 seconds! Todd McCutchen, DNF,” which stands for Did Not Finish.

Correcting Coach Herndon, Mark, who got McCutchen’s time from the Timekeeper, announces, “he finished. It was three minutes and eighteen seconds.” Everyone laughs at Mark’s comment, except for McCutchen and a few of his buddies. Coach Herndon is beginning to understand the interesting dynamics among some of the team members. But, with her military background, she purposely allows it to continue.

Mark’s comment clearly annoyed McCutchen. During the next heat, McCutchen walks over to Mark and angrily asks him, “hey! What’s your problem, anyway?” Mark tells McCutchen, “hey, it’s you that has the problem, not me. When you got bit by the Prickly Sea Spider, I told you that it will make your tendons rot away. It’s starting. Your body’s starting to fall apart.” McCutchen tells Mark, “that’s a bunch of bull.” Mark replies, “oh, really? You’re the one that went down on the track, not me. And, by the way, you’d better stay off Eddie’s training sled. Using it really stresses your tendons. And, just look at what happened. You’ve been using it, and you went down. That’s because all your tendons are falling apart. I told you! Prickly Sea Spiders are really bad news!” Mark walks away, instilling great fear into McCutchen’s highly programmable mind.

Mark meets up with the rest of the tribe, joining them as the remainder of the heats are run. Referring to Mark’s discussion with McCutchen, Eddie asks Mark, “what was that all about?” Mark replies, “I told him his tendons are all rotting away from the Prickly Sea Spider bite he got a few years ago.” Eddie asks, “did he believe it?” With great confidence, Mark answers, “if he didn’t, he will. And, it will make him fall down again. And now, his times are going to go down the toilet.” Eddie comments, “Jimmy O’Brien might have beat him in that race.”

After practice, everyone heads to the locker room. The conversation revolves around how good the team might be this year, and that a few good wins might be in the team’s future. Eddie asks Mark, “so, what are you up to for the rest of the day?” Mark replies, “I really want to finish the landscaping around the pool.” Eddie inquires, “what are you guys doing around your pool?” Mark replies, “I’m putting in a six-inch layer of pea

gravel on the back side. It will keep the weeds down. Nothing is ever going to grow through that.”

McCutchen, still green with envy at Eddie’s and Mark’s apparent financial success, walks by slowly, eavesdropping on Eddie and Mark’s conversation. As McCutchen walks by, he intentionally drops his shampoo bottle, as to delay the trip back to his locker. Mark notices how slow McCutchen is to pick up the bottle. Delaying the trip to his locker even further, McCutchen pretends to not be able to find his locker. Eddie and Mark finish their conversation, pretending as if McCutchen does not exist.

On his way home, Mark runs a few errands. With Paula in classes, running errands, such as grocery shopping, are on Mark’s list of things to do. Once he arrives home, he spends the rest of the morning completing the landscaping around the pool. Mark then gets a shower, and makes his lunch. While Mark is eating, Paula comes home. Mark tells Paula, “wow! You’re home early!” Paula lets Mark know, “this semester, on Wednesdays, I get out of class early! I’m done for the day.” Mark replies, “good! Maybe we can go in our pool.” Paula makes her lunch, and joins Mark.

After lunch, Mark gets a few of the items he bought at the store. As Mark is pouring some shampoo down the drain, Paula asks, “what are you doing?” Mark explains, “I’m making a present for McCutchen.” Repeating what Mark said, Paula says, “you’re making a present for McCutchen. Really? This has got to be good. Out with it!” Showing Paula the bottle of shampoo, Mark replies, “so, this is McCutchen’s brand of shampoo.” Showing Paula the other bottle, Mark explains, “and, this bottle is hair remover gel for women’s legs. I’m going to mix them together in the shampoo bottle. Then, when McCutchen is not watching, I’m going to swap shampoo bottles with him.” Paula laughs hysterically, and exclaims, “you’re so good! I can’t wait!” Mark tells Paula, “his hair is going to slowly fall out.” Still laughing, Paula adds, “it serves that jerk right for crashing our wedding.” Paula, fully onboard with Mark’s plan, steps in and helps Mark with his project.

Early during the Autumn semester of high school, tryouts for the Autumn sports begin. Everyone trying out for a team heads to the locker rooms after school. The upperclassmen know the drill, but the freshmen, as usual, are totally lost. As instituted last year, track practice will be held three days a week during the Autumn. Kathy, Paula, and Barbara will be working with the track athletes during the Autumn, each working one day a week. Eddie and Mark will be primarily working with the field athletes until Winter, when they will start working with the track athletes as well. Kathy and Eddie will be working together on the same days, as will Paula

and Mark. Since it is the first meeting of the year, all the team assistants are present.

Mr. Frazier, Mr. Chubin, along with the team assistants, all walk into the auxiliary gym, where the athletes are already waiting. With a lot of new faces this year, Mr. Frazier's team assistants from the University don't recognize many of the high school students. After sorting out the athletes, Mr. Chubin, the cross country coach, takes the cross country team out for a training run. The track team members who are not on the cross country team remain in the gym.

This year, two of the familiar faces are George Livingston and Tom Davidson, who are also on the cross country team. They just left with Mr. Chubin, along with Amber Amy, who are all running distance for the track team. John Bogenskaya, Paul Davida, and John Elliot are the school's star sprinters this year. And then there's Lucius Hill, who competently runs any race from a short sprint to the one-mile run. Eric Blankenship, a utility runner who can be expected to place in just about any race, is also returning this year.

Mr. Frazier takes the floor and, after his introductory message to the team, announces, "this year, we are again working out three days a week during the Autumn." Mr. Frazier then instructs the athletes, "if you are a distance runner, Barbara will be your coach today." Barbara identifies herself by waving to the athletes on the bleachers. Mr. Frazier then instructs the athletes, "if you are a sprinter, Kathy and Paula will be your coach." Kathy and Paula wave to the athletes, identifying themselves. Mr. Frazier continues, "if you are a field athlete, Eddie and Mark will be working with you today, and for the rest of the semester. They will also be working with the sprinters on occasion." Eddie and Mark both wave to the athletes, many of which already know who they are. Mr. Frazier then instructs everyone to head out to the track.

On the way to the track, Mr. Frazier instructs Barbara to have the distance athletes run a mile for time after everyone takes a warm-up lap. And, for the sprinters, Mr. Frazier asks Kathy and Paula to time everyone in the 100-yard dash. This will give Mr. Frazier a good indication of what he has to work with this year. With a few months of practice before the season begins, there is no reason for Mr. Frazier to rush.

Out on the track, the runners all take a warm-up lap. Mr. Frazier, Eddie, and Mark gather the field equipment from the storage building. While they are moving the equipment, Eddie tells Mr. Frazier, "I built something for you over the Summer." Mr. Frazier asks, "oh yeah? What's that?" Eddie replies, "it's a variation of my training sled that can be used on a gravel track. I tried it a few times, and I think I have it just right. It's in my trunk. Let me go and get it." Mr. Frazier tells Eddie, "I'd love to see

it!” Eddie walks over and asks Kathy for the keys to her Dune Buggy. Driving the Dune Buggy, Eddie can more easily deliver the sled, and its four associated 25-pound weight plates, to the track. And, Kathy’s Dune Buggy drives a bit better off road than Eddie’s MGB.

Eddie loads the training sled into the Dune Buggy, and drives through the service entrance to the schoolyard. While Eddie unloads the training sled along with the four 25-pound weight plates, Mr. Frazier and a few of the athletes come over and check out Kathy’s Dune Buggy. Everywhere Kathy’s Dune Buggy goes, it seems to attract a lot of attention. Once everyone has had a good look, Eddie returns the Dune Buggy to the parking lot and returns to the track.

As the sprinters are doing their time trials in the 100-yard dash, and the distance runners are running a mile for time, Eddie shows Mr. Frazier the training sled, and demonstrates its use. The newer version, designed to be used on a gravel track, provides resistance through its numerous cross members rather than vertical components that dig into the sand.

Mr. Frazier, fully understanding the concept of resistance training, decides to give it a try himself. Running up the track wearing the harness, it becomes very clear to the seasoned coach why Eddie is so fast. Mr. Frazier turns around, dragging the sled back to where he started.

Mr. Frazier exclaims, “this is awesome! I know exactly what the team will be doing today!” Eddie is very happy that Mr. Frazier is satisfied with the new training sled. Eddie tells Mr. Frazier, “hey, it looks like the sled even smoothed out the gravel on the track. It’s kind of like a Zamboni¹, but for the track!” Mr. Frazier comments, “yeah. I can see that. This track is going to be looking really good in an hour.”

Once the time trials are completed, Mr. Frazier calls the team over, and has a few of the runners give the training sled a try. John, who has his own training sled, which is built for the sand, is the first to give it a try. One by one, the runners get their chance to experience one of the ways in which Eddie became the fastest high school sprinter in the nation.

After a few of the runners have given the training sled a try, Mr. Frazier glances toward the school. Seeing Mr. Crum headed out to the track, Mr. Frazier comments to Eddie and Mark, “I wonder what he wants this early in the year.” Eddie tells Mr. Frazier, “maybe he wants to try the training sled.” Mr. Frazier laughs, and responds, “I’ll be glad to put that harness on him. Does anyone have a whip?” Eddie laughs, and is glad to

¹ Zamboni: An ice resurfacing vehicle to smooth the surface of an ice rink.

hear some humor in the situation. Since he now reports to Mr. Zunde, Mr. Frazier has become much less tolerant of Mr. Crum.

Near the finish line, Kathy mentions to Paula, “here comes that old Crum again. I wonder what he wants this time.” Paula replies, “he probably wants to suspend someone for cutting in the lunch line.” Seeing trouble headed their way, Kathy and Paula, who are working with some of the sprinters, come over and join Mr. Frazier and the other team assistants. They figure there’s more safety in numbers.

Mr. Crum, as he is walking up, yells out from twenty yards away, “who drove that yellow thing into the schoolyard?” Mr. Frazier ignores Mr. Crum, as he waits for the runner currently using the training sled to return to the starting location.

Kathy, remembering the incident from last year, steps onto the track, and blows her whistle, acting like a traffic cop. Blowing her whistle again, Kathy yells out, “everyone, please stop! Fool approaching the track! Code red! This is not a drill! Code red! This is not a drill! Everyone, stop!” Kathy, again blowing her whistle, announces, “fool approaching at 90 degrees, ten yards out, closing in at one foot per second! Red alert!”

Mr. Frazier turns around and laughs hysterically, asking Eddie, “how does she come up with this stuff?” Eddie laughs, and replies, “I don’t know. That one surprised me too!” Paula tells Mark, “this one is not going to end well. I can feel it.” Mr. Frazier tells his assistants, “well, here he comes. Let’s see what his problem is this time.”

Mr. Crum approaches Mr. Frazier and his team assistants and asks, “who drove that yellow thing into the schoolyard?” Eddie sarcastically replies, “yellow thing? Thing? Really, Crum?” Eddie clearly is ticked off at Mr. Crum calling Kathy’s Dune Buggy a “thing”. Mr. Crum exclaims, “yes! That’s what I said!” Eddie informs Mr. Crum, “there are yellow vehicles that could have been driven into the schoolyard, but not ‘things’.” Attempting to circumvent any confrontation, Mr. Frazier tells Mr. Crum, “just get out of here already. You’re going nowhere with this, and you know it.”

Mr. Crum, in a demanding tone, tells Mr. Frazier, “I demand to know who drove that yellow vehicle, as Eddie put it, into the schoolyard!” Mr. Frazier tells Mr. Crum, “Eddie did, and I allowed it. So what? Now, just leave. Go back to your office and push your pencil around.”

Ignoring Mr. Frazier’s advice, Mr. Crum asks Eddie, “so, you drove that thing into the schoolyard?” Eddie replies, “no. I didn’t drive ‘that thing’ into the schoolyard. I drove a high precision, custom built, high

performance Dune Buggy into the schoolyard. And, for your information, you pepocita head, the Dune Buggy is street legal.”

John tells Amber and Elliot, “oh, man! Eddie is really ticked off now!” Amber asks, “how can you tell?” John replies, “he just called Mr. Crum a pepocita head.” Amber asks, “what’s a pepocita head?” John explains, “no one is allowed to curse or use bad words in our home. So, Eddie made up ‘pepocita head,’ a long time ago. Calling someone a ‘pepocita head’ is worse than all the four-letter expletives you can ever think of. Nothing is worse than being called a pepocita head.” Amber comments, “I’ll have to remember that. Pepocita head. Yeah, that’s a good one.”

Mr. Frazier tells Mr. Crum, “Crum, get out of here. As I said, you’re not going anywhere with this, and you know it.” Mr. Crum, ignoring Mr. Frazier, angrily yells at Eddie, asking, “what did you call me?” Kathy tells Eddie, “just ignore the pepocita head.” Eddie replies, “yeah, seriously. I’m getting back to the drill. I don’t have time for his shit.” Eddie turns around, and walks back to the starting line, where the training sled is. Mark follows Eddie, as they both intend to continue the training exercises. An irate Mr. Crum yells out to Eddie, “you! I’m talking to you! Get back here!” Eddie ignores Mr. Crum, but Mr. Crum follows Eddie and Mark to the starting line.

Mr. Crum, who is now extremely angry, runs up behind Eddie, and places Eddie into a choke hold. Eddie quickly grabs Mr. Crum by the neck, and flips him over his shoulder, slamming his body to the ground with an enormous amount of force. Great silence comes over the team, as they all witnessed the incident. Laying on the ground, gasping for air, Mr. Crum seriously wonders whether he will live or not. Kathy runs over to Eddie, asking him, “sweetie, are you okay?” Eddie replies, “yeah. I’m just sick of that piece of shit laying on the ground.”

The team gathers around, watching the principal flail on the ground. One athlete comments, “look at him! It looks like he’s dying.” Mr. Frazier tells everyone, “he’s okay. He just got the wind knocked out of him.” Mr. Frazier tells Mr. Crum, “Crum, get up! You’re acting like a little pussy!” Beginning to catch his breath, Mr. Crum says, “he, I think he broke my backbone! I think he broke it!” Eddie is quick to reply, “Crum, you have no backbone. You’re nothing but a jellyfish. Get up, and get your ass out of here.”

Five minutes after being slammed to the ground, Mr. Crum is finally able to stand up. Mr. Crum, in obvious pain, tells Eddie, “you’re not getting away with this!” Eddie replies, “and neither are you. The next time you attack me, you won’t be so lucky!” Eddie then sternly looks at Mr. Crum, and exclaims, “pepocita head!” As Mr. Crum hobbles back to the school, Mr. Frazier announces, “okay, everyone back to the workout!”

As Mr. Crum heads back to the school, the team gets back to their workout. All the sprinters get a few chances to use the training sled, and the gravel on the track is now in pristine condition. Barbara returns with the distance team, who were out on a long training run. A few of the distance team members try the training sled and are assured that, during the next workout, they will get their chance to use it.

Just as all of the day's excitement is about to wind down, Mr. Crum is headed out to the track again, this time accompanied by two police officers. Kathy exclaims, "shit! Here comes more trouble." Mr. Frazier, seeing Mr. Crum approaching, announces to the team, "that guy just does not know when to quit. I'll take care of this." Everyone waits in anticipation to see what Mr. Crum has up his sleeve this time.

Mr. Crum and the officers approach Mr. Frazier. The senior officer, Officer Richard Hayes, who knows Eddie well, tells Mr. Frazier, "I understand from Mr. Crum that there was an altercation out here on the field earlier today." Mr. Frazier, sounding a bit like Braden, replies, "there certainly was. It was a pretty good ass kicking if you ask me! You really should have been here to see it! I'm sorry you missed it." Eddie and Kathy look at each other, quite surprised at how Mr. Frazier answered the officer. Mark looks at Paula and, hearing Mr. Frazier's response, grins.

Officer Hayes tells Mr. Frazier, "tell me what happened out here." Pointing to Mr. Crum, Mr. Frazier responds, "Mr. Crum, the principal, put Eddie, who is one of my team assistants, into a choke hold." Mr. Crum exclaims, "I did not!" The whole team replies to the effect, "yeah, you did. We all saw it." Taking advantage of the team's participation in the questioning, Mr. Frazier adds, "all of the sprinters saw it when it happened. The distance team was out on a training run." Mr. Frazier continues, "so, as I was saying, Mr. Crum put Eddie into a choke hold, and Eddie body slammed him to the ground."

Already having Mr. Crum's private statement, Officer Hayes calls Eddie aside to get his statement. Officer Hayes asks Eddie, "tell me what happened." Eddie, pointing to the training sled, replies, "I built a training sled for the track team. Since it weighs 25 pounds, and I had four 25-pound weight plates to bring to the track, I drove Kathy's Dune Buggy through the service entrance to drop it off. Fifteen minutes later, Crum comes out and starts ranting that I drove into the schoolyard. I ignored him, and went back to my training drill with Mark and the runners. He came up from behind and put me in a choke hold. So, I body slammed him to the ground."

Officer Hayes, who already has the situation figured out, calls Mr. Crum and Mr. Frazier over. The officer asks Eddie and Mr. Crum, "okay, which one of you started the altercation?" Eddie boldly replies, "Crum

did." Mr. Crum yells out, "I did not! He started it!" Mr. Frazier tells Officer Hayes, "everyone saw it. Mr. Crum started it by putting Eddie into a choke hold." Officer Hayes then elaborates, "okay. Let me ask the question this way. Who touched who first?" Eddie describes to Officer Hayes, "Crum put his arm around the front of my neck first." Officer Hayes asks Mr. Crum, "is that true?" Mr. Crum replies, "well, yes! But, he called me a name!" Officer Hayes asks Eddie, "what did you call him?" Eddie replies, "I called him a pepocita head. Then, I walked away." Officer Hayes then asks Eddie, "and, after he put you in a choke hold, is that when you body slammed him?" Eddie replies, "yeah."

Standing in front of Mr. Crum, Eddie, and Mr. Frazier, with the rest of the team watching, Officer Hayes summarizes, "so, let me get this straight. Eddie called Mr. Crum a pepocita head. Mr. Crum then puts Eddie into a choke hold. Eddie then body slams Mr. Crum into the ground. Am I correct?" Eddie replies, "yes." Sternly looking at Mr. Crum, Officer Hayes asks, "am I correct?" Mr. Crum reluctantly replies, "yes. But, he started it!"

Calling Mr. Crum, Eddie, and Mr. Frazier aside, Officer Hayes explains, "there is no law against calling someone a pepocita head, whatever that is. There is, however, a law against putting someone in a choke hold. It's called assault. Any subsequent action taken by the person assaulted is called justifiable self defense." Addressing Mr. Crum directly, Officer Hayes explains, "putting Eddie in a choke hold was not the best decision you could have made. If he wanted to, Eddie could have you arrested." Hearing the bad news, Mr. Crum yells out, "but, he started it!" Officer Hayes tells Mr. Crum, "let me put it to you this way. If Johnny calls Billy 'stupid,' and Billy beats up Johnny, in your book, who started the fight?" Mr. Crum is silenced. Officer Hayes continues, "so, as I was saying, Eddie could have you arrested."

Addressing Eddie, Officer Hayes asks, "do you want to press charges and have Maurice Crum arrested?" Eddie asks, "can I decide tomorrow?" Officer Hayes informs Eddie, "yes. The statute of limitations in this State is two years. You have two years to decide whether you want to press charges." Eddie informs the officer, "I don't want to decide right now. I'll have to think about this." Mr. Crum is relieved to a slight degree, but knows that he is still in hot water.

Officer Hayes tells Eddie and Mr. Crum, "I'm going to file my report. If there are any other questions, here's my card with your case number written on it." Having enough of Mr. Crum already this school year, Officer Hayes hands Eddie and Mr. Crum his card.

Before he leaves, Officer Hayes privately talks with Eddie. Unknown to Mr. Crum, since Eddie has been working at Angelo's Service Station, he

has a good working relationship with Officer Hayes. Officer Hayes tells Eddie, "I really don't know what's wrong with that character. This is not the first time I've been out here this year, and school just started." Eddie replies, "he was definitely out of control. I tried to ignore him, and I think that's what really set him off. He was kind of acting like Paul Mahoney, or the Chuckie, when they were on drugs. And, he lives on Second Street. Kathy and Paula think Second Street is haunted." Quite startled, Officer Hayes replies, "really? Mr. Crum lives on Second Street? How do you know that?" Eddie explains, "we found out from Mr. Zunde once. Mr. Zunde said that Mr. Crum bought a house on Second Street, thinking the area would go commercial, but it never did." Without realizing it, Eddie just gave Officer Hayes some potentially valuable information. Officer Hayes heads out, and Eddie calls it a day.

Once Officer Hayes is gone, Eddie tells Mr. Crum, "tomorrow, at 2:30 p.m., I will be at your office. I suggest you make the time to meet with me. Otherwise, I will have you arrested. Got it?" Mr. Crum replies, "yeah, yeah. I'll be there." Eddie firmly replies, "you'd better be there." Mr. Crum heads back to the school, wishing now that he'd never called the police.

Once Mr. Crum is gone, Eddie asks Mr. Frazier, "hey, can you and Mr. Zunde be there too?" Mr. Frazier replies, "I wouldn't miss it for the world." Wanting to be clear, Mr. Frazier asks, "you said 2:30, right?" Eddie replies, "yeah." Mr. Frazier assures Eddie, "we'll be there."

The next day, after work, Eddie heads to the high school for his scheduled meeting with Mr. Crum. Walking into the administration area, Eddie sees that Mr. Frazier and Mr. Zunde are already waiting outside Mr. Crum's office. Eddie says hello to Mr. Zunde, who already found out about yesterday's altercation from Mr. Frazier. Eddie asks Mrs. Marlowe, the school secretary, "is Crum ready?" Mrs. Marlowe replies, "he's been nervously waiting all day. He doesn't look too good." Using the intercom, Mrs. Marlowe tells Mr. Crum that Eddie is waiting.

Mr. Crum opens his door, and invites Eddie in. Seeing Mr. Frazier and Mr. Zunde, Mr. Crum asks, "why are these two here?" Eddie rebukes Mr. Crum, telling him, "really, Crum? 'These two'? That sounds a bit disrespectful, don't you think?" Eddie then bluntly informs Mr. Crum, "if you remember correctly, this is my meeting. I invited them. If you prefer, we can hold the meeting in the auxiliary gym." Mr. Crum, forgetting that he is not the chairman of today's meeting, tells Mr. Frazier and Mr. Zunde, "okay, everybody please come in." Mr. Frazier is shocked to hear Mr. Crum use the word "please".

Eddie takes a seat, while Mr. Frazier and Mr. Zunde assume their normal position in front of the bookcase, near the door. Eddie opens the

meeting by telling Mr. Crum, “wow! You still haven’t got a new desk. What’s up with that?” Mr. Crum sarcastically replies, “and, the bookshelf hasn’t been replaced either.” Eddie comments, “wow! I hear from John that the furniture I broke in the library has already been replaced. I wonder how they got ahead of you on the list.”

Eddie puts his greasy shoes up on Mr. Crum’s desk and tells him, “let’s get down to business. If you heard what the officer said yesterday, I could have you arrested.” Mr. Crum brashly responds, “I don’t think we have to go to that extreme.” Eddie calmly replies, “Crum, I really don’t care what you think. I invited you to this meeting so you can hear what I think. And, for the record, what you think doesn’t matter to me at all. So, get your pencil and start pushing it around on your pad of paper.”

Mr. Zunde whispers to Mr. Frazier, “I can’t wait to hear this.” Mr. Frazier whispers back, “I don’t know what Eddie is going to say, but this is going to be good.” Mr. Zunde and Mr. Frazier stand with their arms crossed, as Eddie prepares to figuratively kick Mr. Crum’s ass. The literal ass kicking was yesterday.

Eddie continues, “first of all, I’m not too appreciative of you attacking me. And, for the record, if you ever attack me again, you will resemble the Chuckie after I kicked the shit out of him. So, write that down so you never forget it. But, that’s not why I’m here.” Mr. Crum angrily replies, “so, get to the point, already.” Eddie tells Mr. Crum, “and, stop acting like a conceited little asshole. I had to listen to your shit for four years. Now, it’s your turn to shut up and listen, and start taking notes.” Eddie has all the cards, and he clearly knows it.

Eddie continues, telling Mr. Crum, “the good news is that I am not having you arrested right now. However, if you heard the officer yesterday, I have two years to make that decision. So, here’s the deal, junior. If you interfere with the track team in any way, I’m having you arrested, plain and simple. So, keep your ass out of the way, and stay inside and push your pencil around. Am I clear?” Mr. Crum, changing his tune, replies, “sure. I can do that.” Eddie, however, is not entirely convinced that Mr. Crum is being sincere.

Not playing any games, Eddie tells Mr. Crum, “say it! Say you’ll stay out of the way of the track team. Say it!” Unwillingly, Mr. Crum repeats, “okay, okay, I’ll stay out of the way of the track team.” Eddie then turns to Mr. Frazier and Mr. Zunde and asks, “and, you heard him say it, right?” Mr. Frazier replies, “I did. And, it was like music to my ears.” Mr. Zunde replies, “I heard it. And, I fully expect him to be true to his word.” Eddie tells Mr. Crum, “I hope you wrote it down, so you can remind yourself every day. And, you’d better not screw up, otherwise I’ll have you arrested.”

Eddie tells Mr. Crum, “well, then we’re done with this meeting. That’s all I wanted.” Pointing to Mr. Crum, Eddie instructs him, “and remember, if you screw up, I’m having you arrested.” Eddie walks out of Mr. Crum’s office. Mr. Frazier and Mr. Zunde, not wanting to spend any additional time with Mr. Crum, quickly follow.

Eddie, along with Mr. Frazier and Mr. Zunde, head to the physical education office for a moment. Mr. Frazier tells Eddie, “that was brilliant. You backed him into a corner, and gave him only one choice.” Eddie comments, “he’ll stay out of the way for a while, but I’m sure he’ll forget soon enough.” Mr. Zunde adds, “we’ll just remind him that he could be arrested should he get out of line. That should keep him at bay for a while.” Eddie, Mr. Frazier, and Mr. Zunde exchange fist bumps, hopeful that Mr. Crum will stay off the track team’s back for a while. Eddie then heads home to clean up from work, and will be back for track practice shortly, along with Kathy.

The body for the third Dune Buggy finally arrives, and Eddie gets working on it in the afternoons when he gets back from work. Having assembled three Dune Buggies, Eddie can now get the job done quickly. All that’s left to do is to drop the body on, and install anything attached to the body, such as the lights, windshield wipers, and various accessories, which does not take too long. For Braden’s Dune Buggy, Eddie added a few additional accessories that are not found on Kathy’s and Paula’s Dune Buggies. Progress moves along quickly and, in one week, Eddie completes the project.

One afternoon, after installing the seats, Eddie drives to the service station to do the wheel alignment. Having already done two alignments, Eddie already knows the specs. Pulling into the station, Angelo gets a good look at Eddie’s most recent project. Angelo yells out to Eddie, “hey! Is that one for me?” Eddie replies, “I can build one for you, if you want.” Eddie pulls the Dune Buggy into the service bay, and tells Angelo, “I need to do an alignment. The guy’s getting it tomorrow.” Angelo looks over the Dune Buggy, noticing that it is meticulously assembled. Needless to say, Angelo is quite impressed with Eddie’s work. Angelo goes back to work, as Eddie begins the wheel alignment.

When Eddie is finished, he asks Angelo, “hey, do you want to take it for a spin?” Angelo figures why not, and replies, “sure.” Angelo is almost done for the day and, if the Dune Buggy looks that good, maybe it drives just as good as it looks. Eddie hands Angelo the keys, and Angelo takes it on a test drive.

While Angelo is away, Eddie looks around the shop, manning the station. Eddie contemplates that, someday, the station will be his. From what Eddie can remember, that will be in about two years, when Angelo

moves back to Greece. Eddie also remembers that he partially paid for the station with gold, which he has acquired a lot of recently.

Angelo returns from his test drive. Getting out of the Dune Buggy, Angelo yells out, "hey! This handles great!" Eddie replies, "yeah, I noticed that! It handles better than I ever expected. I think the guy will be happy with it." Angelo tells Eddie, "if he's not, let me know. I might want it." Eddie tells Angelo, "they're not hard to build. All you need is the frame, a wrecked 911, the body, and a VIN plate." Eddie adds, "Kurt did a really great job with the suspension angles. And, the 911 front end and drive train drop right in."

Angelo asks Eddie, "can we put it up on the lift?" Eddie replies, "sure." Angelo drives into an empty bay, and gets out of the Dune Buggy. Eddie lifts the vehicle, and they take a look underneath. Looking at the rear end, Angelo comments, "well, take a look at this. This is a 911 on a square steel frame." Angelo has heard about Kurt Richter's design, seen Kathy's and Paula's Dune Buggies, but has never taken a close look.

As Angelo examines the front end, Eddie comments, "it looks like you found the counterbalance weight." Angelo tells Eddie, "yeah. If that wasn't there, it would under steer and pop a wheelie every time you take off." Eddie mentions, "the weight is 150 pounds, and I was wondering if that was enough, but apparently it is." Angelo points out, "the weight is positioned right behind the front suspension. If it was any farther back, the weight would have to be heavier. Any farther forward, and the car will handle like shit." After examining the underside, Angelo is even more impressed. Angelo tells Eddie, "I'd love to have one, but I really don't know what I'd do with it."

Angelo tells Eddie, "well, I'd better get back to work. Oh, and by the way, my stocks are doing great!" Eddie reminds Angelo, "since it's the end of the quarter, we need to sell some of them at the end of September." Angelo confidently replies, "just let me know which ones and when." Angelo has made a lot of money in the stock market over the last year, courtesy of Eddie. Eddie drives home, where he will finish working on some last minute details on Braden's Dune Buggy.

Over dinner, Kathy asks, "so, how are we going to give Braden his Dune Buggy?" Eddie suggests, "we could just bring it over to the campus, and park it in our little corner of the lot." Kathy exclaims, "I like that idea! He'll be driving around in his police car, and he'll see it." Eddie comments, "then, we can pretend like we have no idea where it came from." Kathy replies, "yeah, right. He'll never believe that." Eddie mentions, "who knows, though. He might not even see it."

After cleaning up after dinner, Eddie drives Braden's Dune Buggy to the University. Kathy follows in her Dune Buggy, so she can bring Eddie home. Driving into the nearly empty parking lot, Eddie backs the vehicle into the parking space in the tribe's corner. Backing into a parking space is not legal to do on campus, but Eddie figures it might attract more attention from law enforcement that way. Kathy and Eddie drive home, wondering what tomorrow will bring.

The next morning, Kathy heads to practice in her Dune Buggy, followed by Eddie in his MGB. They plan to arrive early, not wanting to miss any surprises. When they arrive, no one else is remotely around. They decide to head inside, and let the news spread in a natural way. Once they are finished getting dressed for practice, Kathy and Eddie meet in the arena. Sitting on the bleachers, they relax as the team slowly trickles in.

When Mark and Paula arrive in the arena, Paula asks Eddie, "what's this? Braden bought a Dune Buggy?" Eddie replies, "well, not really." Paula asks Eddie, "how is that? His name is on it." Kathy tells Paula and Mark, "we're kind of giving it to him, but he doesn't know it yet." Paula exclaims, "wow! Really? I don't want to miss that." Eddie comments, "we don't know if he's seen it yet or not. We brought it by last night." Mark asks, "does anybody else know about it?" Eddie replies, "no. Just us." Kathy adds, "and, anyone else who drove up this morning and saw it."

Bobby B. is the next member of the tribe to walk in. That means Erika is probably right behind him. Bobby B. makes no mention of the Dune Buggy that has Braden's name on it. Perhaps his mind is elsewhere so early in the morning. Erika walks in a minute or so later, also making no mention of Braden's Dune Buggy. Braden walks in next, taking a seat with the tribe.

Mark looks at Eddie, who looks at Kathy. Kathy comments, "I guess he hasn't seen it yet." Eddie asks, "who's going to tell him?" Mark suggests, "why don't you tell him?" Bobby B. asks, "what are you guys talking about?" Kathy replies, "it's in the parking lot. You must have missed it." Bobby B. asks, "what's in the parking lot?" Kathy vaguely replies, "the Dune Buggy."

Braden, hearing the conversation, chimes in, "those are some fine looking kick ass Dune Buggies Kathy and Paula have." Paula mentions, "there are three of them out there now." Braden asks, "whose is the other one?" Avoiding the question, Eddie replies, "the owner's name is on the back." Braden asks, "whose name is on the back?" Wondering how much time they have, Eddie asks Mark, "how much time until practice?" Mark replies, "fifteen minutes." Eddie tells Braden, "let's go and take a look."

As Eddie, Kathy, Mark, and Paula walk out with Braden, Barbara walks in, and gives Braden a high-five. Braden thinks Barbara is congratulating him on his fine performances over the last few weeks. Braden thinks nothing special about the high-five. But, Barbara saw Braden's Dune Buggy when she drove in this morning. Johnson walks in next, and heads to the bleachers. Kathy whispers to Eddie, "no one's figured it out yet." Eddie whispers to Kathy, "Barbara might have figured it out. I think that high-five gave it away."

When they get outside, Braden can clearly see three Dune Buggies parked side by side. As they get closer, the blue Dune Buggy in the middle is backed in, so the name on the back is not immediately evident. Braden exclaims, "somebody got a blue one! Just take a look at that! That's a fine-looking Dune Buggy!"

Braden walks around the back, and sees "Braden's Kick Ass Dune Buggy" painted on the back. Braden looks at Eddie, who tosses Braden the keys. Eddie tells Braden, "it's yours, bro. We built it for you." Braden, who is rarely at a loss for words, is speechless. Finally getting some words out, Braden asks, "you mean, this Dune Buggy is mine? It's for me?" Kathy replies, "yeah, it's all yours. And, it's blue, just like you wanted." Braden exclaims, "wow! Thank you guys! I don't even know what to say!"

Braden looks over the Dune Buggy, which is a dark metallic blue. Eddie added a few police options, such as a small gumball style light on the hood, and a search light on the driver's side. Braden's Dune Buggy also has a two-way radio, just like Kathy's and Paula's Dune Buggies. And, across the top, attached to the front windshield and rear roll bar is a Bimini top, with side windows that can roll down in the rain. Kathy's and Paula's also have a Bimini top, but they prefer to drive with their tops off.

Eddie jokingly tells Braden, "I was cleaning up my garage, and I came across an extra Dune Buggy. I thought you might like it." Braden again tells Eddie, "thank you guys so much! I don't even know what to say." Braden comments, "ain't no one ever given me anything like this before!" Eddie gives Braden a brotherly hug, telling him, "you deserve it, bro." Kathy also gives Braden a hug, telling him, "now, you and Wendy can go and get pizza whenever you want." Kathy is glad to see Braden so happy with his gift.

They all head back inside, walking in slightly late. But, the meeting has not officially started yet since the coaches have yet to arrive. Leggett, however, finds it fit to comment, "wow! These guys think they're perfect, or something." Raising his voice, Braden tells Leggett, "I ain't perfect! I admit it! My biggest fault is I don't know how good I really am! When I look in the mirror, sometimes I ask myself, 'am I really this good?' Then, when I finally come to my senses, I tell myself, 'I am the greatest ass

kicker of all time!” Everyone in the area laughs and cheers, as Braden clearly puts Leggett in his place. It’s not hard for anyone to tell that Braden is in an elated mood today.

With the team in the arena and ready to go, the head coach, Dr. Braun, walks in, along with Dr. Paxton, the distance coach, Coach Herndon, the sprinting coach, and Dr. Bonamo, the field events coach. Seeing the coaches walking in, the team heads over to the bleachers, and everyone takes a seat. The tribe all sits together, and there is some whispering about Braden’s new Dune Buggy.

Dr. Braun, the head coach, blows his whistle getting everyone’s attention. Dr. Braun tells everyone, “before we head out to the track, I have a few announcements to make. First, since the weather is nice today, we are all heading out to the sand track, and running sprints with the training sled. For the first 45 minutes, the sprinters will be on the sled, and the distance group will be doing the interval drill. Then, for the next 45 minutes, we will swap.” Mitchell, Akinmola, and Stone are particularly glad to hear that they will be using the training sled today. An unofficial competition has arisen among the three distance stars.

Continuing with his announcements, Dr. Braun informs his team, “tonight, at 7:00 p.m., our campus radio station will be airing the program Waves. For those of you who don’t know, Waves is a program in which students who are making waves on campus are interviewed. Tonight, Angela Meadows, the host, will be interviewing Eddie Bogenskaya. I suggest that you take the time out and listen to the program. Who knows, one of you may be next on Angela’s list to be interviewed. So, tonight at 7:00 p.m., tune in to 89.1 on the FM dial. And, I might add, many of the faculty members routinely listen to the campus radio station.” The group cheers, many of them apparently having no idea that Eddie will be on the radio tonight.

Now that he is finished with the announcements, Dr. Braun tells everyone, “okay! Let’s get out there and get to work!” The distance team heads out with Dr. Paxton, and the sprinters head out with Coach Herndon. On the way out of the arena, many of Eddie’s teammates give him a high-five for his radio interview. Braden asks Eddie, “is there a radio in my Dune Buggy?” Eddie replies, “yeah. It has an AM/FM stereo, and a two-way radio.” Braden tells Eddie, “good! I’m gonna sit in my Dune Buggy and listen to the show tonight!”

On the way out to the track, Braden takes a slight detour to take another peek at his Dune Buggy. Braden can’t wait until practice is over, so that he can take it out on a drive. When Braden rejoins the group, Eddie tells him, “the only thing that you have to be concerned about is that the Dune Buggy is way overpowered. It has a Porsche 911 engine,

but weighs half as much as a 911. It does zero to sixty in five seconds or less. And remember, it will go 140 miles per hour, but I wouldn't take it that fast." Braden replies, "you won't have to worry about that. I might be fast on the track but, on the road, I'm kind of slow."

Arriving at the sand track, the sprinters begin their workout. With four training sleds, Eddie is among the first group, along with Mark, Braden, and Johnson. Braden glances over at McCutchen, who is going bald, and asks, "yo, junior. Where's all your hair going? What's wrong with your head?" Answering for McCutchen, Mark tells Braden, "he's going bald. It's a delayed effect of getting bit by a Prickly Sea Spider. He won't listen to me." Paula comments, "yeah. It's the South African Prickly Sea Spiders that cause that. They're really bad." Kathy whispers to Paula, "what's up with him? Pretty soon, he's going to look like Mr. Freeze." The runners all sprint down the sand track, leaving McCutchen wondering whether Mark is actually right.

While the guys are headed down the sand track, Paula pulls Kathy aside, and tells her, "McCrutchen is going bald because, okay, so get this. Mark bought a bottle of the same shampoo McCrutchen uses, and he mixed hair removal gel in with it. And, a week ago, when McCrutchen wasn't looking, Mark swapped shampoo bottles. Now, all of his hair is falling out." Kathy laughs hysterically, and exclaims, "no! Tell me he didn't! You've got to be kidding me!" Paula tells Kathy, "yeah, he did! And, that will teach that asshole a lesson for crashing my wedding." Kathy gives Paula a high-five, and exclaims, "good one!" They then rejoin the sprinters, waiting for their turn.

When the guys return, they get a break, and some of the other sprinters take a turn. The rotation gets into a good rhythm, but Mark notices that McCutchen has not been taking a turn. After all, according to Mark, using the training sled after getting a Prickly Sea Spider bite causes tendons to tear and fall apart. So, Mark decides not to comment, and allows McCutchen's physical fitness to deteriorate simply by not working out. Apparently, McCutchen has swallowed the Prickly Sea Spider story hook, line, and sinker. And, after McCutchen crashed Mark and Paula's wedding, Mark would be glad to get rid of him. So would Paula.

After their 45 minutes on the sled, the sprinters head over to the track to run the interval training drill. The distance team heads over to the sand track, with some of them anxious to run the drills with the training sled. While they are waiting, Braden is staring out into the parking lot, counting down the minutes until he gets to take a drive in his Dune Buggy. Although Braden is fast, time runs very slowly for anyone when a new vehicle awaits you after practice.

The runners perform the all too familiar drill. For most of the drill, the tribe runs together. During one of their recovery laps, Mark comments to Eddie, “check out McCrutchen. He hasn’t sprinted a single lap yet. He’s slacking off.” Paula adds, “yeah. It’s South African Prickly Sea Spider Syndrome. He’s definitely sick.” Kathy tells Paula, “once all his hair falls out, he’ll have a really aerodynamic head.” Eddie asks, “what’s up with that, anyway?” Paula tells Eddie, “I’ll tell you once this next group passes us.”

Waiting until no one can hear them, Paula tells everyone, “okay, it’s got to be a tribe secret.” Eddie replies, “no problem with that.” Braden comments, “I got to hear this one.” Checking once again that no one else is around, Paula explains, “okay, so Mark bought a bottle of the same shampoo brand McCrutchen uses, and he mixed hair removal gel in with it. And, when McCrutchen wasn’t looking, Mark swapped shampoo bottles.” Kathy adds, “and, so that’s why McCrutchen’s going bald.” Eddie laughs, gives Mark a high-five, and tells him, “that’s your best one yet!” Mark replies, “that’s what he gets for crashing my wedding.” With it being time to sprint again, the tribe drops to the inside of the track, and sprints for 440 yards. McCutchen, however, has been jogging around the track all morning.

When practice comes to a close, Braden is the first to hit the locker room. Showering and changing in record time, Braden is more than ready to try out his Dune Buggy. All during his shower, Braden is energetically exclaiming, “gonna try out my new Dune Buggy! Braden’s Kick Ass Dune Buggy is getting on the road!” Every guy on the track team now knows that Braden has a new Dune Buggy. In fact, nearly every one of the team members wants to see Braden’s new Dune Buggy, so they head out to the parking lot with him.

Out in the parking lot, Braden’s Dune Buggy becomes the center of attention. Everyone, to say the least, is quite impressed. One team member, referring to Kathy’s, Paula’s, and Braden’s Dune Buggies, comments, “all three of these look identical.” Kathy informs him, “they are. Me and Eddie built all three of them.”

Once everyone has had their look, Braden jumps in, and starts the engine. The characteristic sound of the 911 engine starting is one of unmistakable power, surprising everyone standing around. Braden exclaims, “here I go!” Braden, with the biggest smile one could imagine, cautiously drives through the parking lot. As Braden drives away, Kathy tells Eddie, “I think he likes it.”

Everyone heads to their classes, including McCutchen who came outside to check out Braden’s new toy. McCutchen, who stood back watching from a distance, is quite puzzled. Wondering how this group, all

originally from Northside High School, not only seems to rule the track, but the world as well. The wheels begin to turn in McCutchen's head, again likely coming to all the wrong conclusions. And, with the rumors of another group of athletes coming up next year from Northside, McCutchen wonders how such great success by a select few can even be possible. McCutchen realizes that what he saw while he was in high school was only the tip of the iceberg.

Returning to campus an hour later, Braden is more than happy with his Dune Buggy. Braden parks his Dune Buggy at the campus police station, which is a 2,500 square foot building, with a radio tower and parking lot in the rear. Braden figures his Dune Buggy will be safe in the law enforcement lot. Braden then heads off to class, resuming his life as a student, at least for a while.

As the end of the Autumn practice season draws near, the University athletes await the announcement of which events they will be running during the upcoming season. To some, the announcement will come as no surprise. Yet, to others, a big surprise, good or bad, might redefine their destiny.

It's no secret to anyone that the 4 by 440 relay team, comprising of Eddie, Mark, Braden, and Johnson, will remain together. With a composite time in the one-mile event of just over three minutes, they are unbeatable.

And, it's no secret that the performance of certain athletes has been below par. But, as in previous seasons, they perhaps expect to rely on reputation rather than performance. The clock, however, cares not about one's reputation, only performance.

On the morning of the expected announcement, Eddie and the tribe take a seat together on the bleachers. Barbara, in 50 words or less, fills the tribe in on what they should expect today. Today's meeting will amount to a twenty-minute dissertation on who will run in each event, a brief pep talk, followed by a practice session where everyone will talk about the results while they train. Eddie and the tribe are ready. They all expect good news.

While they are waiting, Mark, fully knowing the answer, comments, "why is McCutchen always wearing that hat?" Eddie replies, "it's getting colder out. He only functions between 68 and 72 degrees." McCutchen is now fully bald, and the doctors at the campus infirmary cannot seem to find out why. They've attributed McCutchen's condition to stress, which could make his hair fall out. But, so could a depilatory, which is used to intentionally remove hair.

Much to everyone's surprise, The Dean of Students, Dean Addison Grimsby, is present at today's team meeting. The dean tuned into the program Waves when it was aired earlier in the semester, and heard Eddie's interview with Angela Meadows. Wanting to get a first hand look at the University's track team, Dean Grimsby takes a seat on the bleachers along with the team. The dean is very interested in who will be running in which event. Today, along with the team, he will find out.

Dr. Braun walks in along with the other coaches. Silence falls over the arena, somewhat analogous to the silence in the classroom during the final exams that some of the students are taking this week. Dr. Braun announces, "wow! You guys are all quiet today. I can't imagine why." Dr. Braun is not stupid. He knows the student athletes are all nervous. Today, they are getting their grades for their last ten weeks of work, which are their event assignments. He also knows some athletes will be jubilant, yet others will not be happy campers. But, nevertheless, he will be delivering news that is intended to benefit the team as a whole, and not any specific individual.

Before he begins, Dr. Braun mentions, "I see we have Dean Grimsby with us here today. Please give a warm welcome to our Dean of Students." Dean Grimsby waves to the team, and the team members clap, welcoming the administrator. Dr. Braun is wondering why the dean is present today. Eddie whispers to Kathy, "I was wondering who the suit was."

Dr. Braun then announces, "I know you've been waiting, so without further ado, here is the lineup to start off the season. And remember, everything is subject to change." The athletes are not stupid either. They all know that, if they do not perform, they will be pulled from whatever event they are deficient. While Dr. Braun announces each individual and their events, he occasionally may also make comments regarding their performance over the last semester of training. The meaning behind these comments is clear. And, if they don't know the intended meaning behind the comments, they certainly will by the end of today's practice session.

Dr. Braun begins, announcing, "okay, here we go. First, the women. Kathy, the 40-yard dash, the 220-yard dash, and the mile medley relay. Paula, you will also be running the 40-yard dash, the 220-yard dash, and the mile medley relay. You've got to really hand it to these two women. They have been undefeated for the last two years. Then, we come to Barbara. Wow, Barbara. Barbara is the number one woman in the division in the mile, and possibly in the country this year. Barbara, you will be running the mile, 880-yard run, and the mile medley relay. Erika, you will be running the 440-yard dash, and the mile medley relay. And, I'm going to step out on a limb here and also assign you to the 220-yard dash." By putting Erika in the 220-yard dash, Dr. Braun is putting her up against the

toughest competition she could possibly encounter. Erika knows that, and she doesn't care. Once Dr. Braun is finished assigning the rest of the women to their events, he moves on to the men. The twenty three women on the team seem to be happy with their assignments.

Moving on to the men, Dr. Braun announces, "now, for the men. The men's team is looking a lot better this year. Eddie, you will be running the 40-yard dash, the 220-yard dash, the 4 by 440 relay and the mile medley relay. Mark, you will also be running the 40-yard dash, the 220-yard dash, the 4 by 440 relay and the mile medley relay. In the mile medley relay, Eddie and Mark will be running the 220-yard legs. I'll let you guys decide who leads off." By allowing Eddie and Mark to decide who will lead off is the biggest compliment they could receive by the coach.

Moving on, Dr. Braun announces, "Axel Braden, who I understand is our chief ass kicker, will be running the 440-yard dash." Dr. Braun has to wait for the applause to settle down following his comment. Continuing, Dr. Braun announces, "Axel Braden, you will also be running the 4 by 440 relay, and the mile medley relay. In the mile medley relay, you will be running the 440-yard leg, but you've probably already guessed that. And, for those of you who don't know, Eddie, Mark, and Axel are all about one or two seconds off the world record in the 440-yard dash." Applause rises again, as Dr. Braun gives recognition to a job well done.

Dr. Braun then announces, "I can put Eric Johnson in just about any event, and expect him to come out with a win. Eric will be running the half mile, the mile, the 4 by 440 relay, and the mile medley relay. In the mile medley relay, Johnson will be taking the 880-yard leg." Johnson is glad to hear the compliment given to him by Dr. Braun. Although Johnson's times are not quite as fast as Eddie, Mark, or Braden, he is highly competent at any distance.

Coming to Hoffer, Dr. Braun announces, "Hoffer, you'll be running the 40-yard dash, the 220-yard dash, and, as you've requested, the 440-yard dash." Hoffer, for some reason, wants to dethrone Leggett from the 440-yard dash. That should not be too hard for him to do. But, the flip side is that Hoffer is simply not going to beat Braden in that race.

Moving on to the distance team, Dr. Braun compliments Mitchell, stating, "Gary Mitchell, you really surprised me. You'll be running the mile, the 880-yard run, and the 4 by 880 relay, and anything else you want to run. Darryl Stone, you'll also be running the mile, the 880-yard run, and the 4 by 880 relay. And, Adekunle Akinmola, you've also surprised me. You'll be running the mile, the 880-yard run, and the 4 by 880 relay." Dr. Braun continues making assignments to the twenty eight members of the men's team.

Coming to Leggett, Dr. Braun announces, "Leggett, you'll be running the 440-yard dash, and you'll be an alternate in the 40-yard dash. If you think you can handle it, I'd like to give you a shot at the 4 by 880 relay." Leggett was offered the position in the 4 by 880 relay, and perhaps some other distance events, by Dr. Paxton. Making today's offer is Dr. Braun's way of telling Leggett that he has lost some confidence in him as a sprinter. Leggett takes the challenge, and replies, "sure, I'll go for it." Leggett will have to step up his game. If he doesn't perform, he will be replaced. Leggett is glad to take the challenge. Mitchell, Akinmola, and Stone, however, are not too happy to hear the news that Leggett will be on the 4 by 880 relay team.

Coming to McCutchen, Dr. Braun announces, "Todd McCutchen, you'll be one of my alternates. Your events will vary from meet to meet." Assigning a runner to be an alternate is a nice way of telling them that they are less than competent on the track, and that they will not be competing. An alternate is someone who will fill in for another runner in a race if, for some reason, that runner cannot run. For example, if a runner is injured, an alternate will take their place. Hearing the news, Braden comments, "I'm glad to hear that. I was hoping I wouldn't have to shove that baton up his flimsy ass."

In the field events, no announcements are made. There is no question who will be participating in which events. High jumpers don't seem too good at the shot-put. And, it's not likely that anyone will be seeing Bobby B. high jumping or pole vaulting. There are, however, a lot of people, Eddie and Mark included, who would love to see Bobby B. pole vault. But, that's not going to happen anytime soon. After the announcement, most of the twenty eight men are satisfied with their assignments.

After the announcements, Dr. Paxton privately mentions to Dr. Braun, "it's clear that McCutchen isn't working out too well as a sprinter. He has, however, turned in a few good times in the 440-yard dash. If you don't mind, I'd like to give him a chance with the distance team. Who knows? Maybe he'll work out." Dr. Braun replies, "sure. Give it a try. But, do this for me. Let McCutchen and Leggett continue to work out with the sprinters during the daily workouts and let him do his distance work on his own. Coach Herndon has been doing a good job cracking the whip with both of them. I just don't want them to get any lazier than they already are. Maybe there'll be a place for him someday." Dr. Paxton smiles, and tells Dr. Braun, "you got a deal." Dr. Braun is at a loss about what to do with McCutchen. McCutchen's times are erratic. He bungles handoffs. And, Dr. Braun has clearly noticed that McCutchen has been slacking off. Perhaps Dr. Paxton is right, thinking both McCutchen and Leggett might be a little better at running distance.

Today, the practice session is held in the indoor arena. The runner's times are already well documented in their individual events. But, the performance of the assigned relay teams is not quite as clear. With the relay teams finalized, Dr. Braun will be gauging their performance on the 220-yard track. After today, the coaches will all know exactly where they stand.

While the events are being organized, the tribe has a brief celebration, exchanging high-fives, fist bumps, and hugs. Celebrating with the tribe is Stone, who is glad to see some newer talent come to the team this year. The coaches see the celebration, wondering why the rest of the team does not have the same excitement.

The women's mile medley team is called to the track to perform. Eddie tells Kathy, "good luck," as he sits back to relax. Mark also sits back with his legs crossed, wondering if he will be running today. Braden and Johnson join them, as they watch the women perform. For some reason, McCutchen takes a seat near the tribe, but keeps a safe distance. Mark, however, knows the reason McCutchen has moved. McCutchen has nothing better to do than to listen in on the tribe's conversations.

Knowing exactly what McCutchen is up to, Mark asks Braden, "so, how's the Dune Buggy running?" Braden replies, "awesome. Me and Wendy took it out a few times to get pizza. Then, we took a couple of trips to her parent's house, and my parents, mostly over the weekends. It's nice to be able to get around." Mark tells Braden, "awesome, bro! When the Spring comes, you guys can hit the beach with us." Braden accepts Mark's offer, telling him, "we'd love to. I'll have to bring an umbrella for Wendy, though." Wendy is as fair-skinned as one can get, and burns easily in the sun.

Since it's getting a little cooler outside, Eddie tells Braden, "by the way, Dune Buggies don't have heaters." Braden asks, "they don't?" Eddie replies, "no, they don't. They're not for people who can't take it when the temperature gets outside of 68 to 72 degrees." Eddie's comment was fully intended to irritate McCutchen, which it does. Braden exclaims, "that's okay! I'm tough! I can take it!" Mark comments, "there's no reason why the cold and the heat should keep us from doing things." Coming up with an idea, Braden tells everyone, "and, now I know what I'm getting Wendy for Christmas." Eddie asks, "what's that?" Braden replies, "a ski suit." Eddie comments, "that's a good idea, bro. I'm sure she'd like that."

Dr. Braun calls up the men's mile medley relay team, which consists of Eddie, Mark, Braden, and Johnson. Braden stands up and exclaims, "I'm back on the track! I'm gonna kick someone's ass and turn it into grass!" Braden has certainly been fired up. Mark, with his playful personality,

asks Eddie, “heads or tails?” Eddie replies, “heads.” Without a coin in sight, Mark tells Eddie, “sorry, bro. It was tails. You lead off.” Being duped by Mark, Eddie laughs, and replies, “no problem.” For some reason, Mark wanted to run the second leg.

Eddie takes the baton, and waits for the buzzer. The buzzer is sounded, and Eddie is out of the blocks, running the first 220-yard leg. Mark gets onto the track, and points directly at McCutchen. McCutchen catches Mark’s eye, and Mark makes a few gestures, such as pointing and running in place. It is now clear why Mark wanted to run this leg. Last year, the second leg of this race belonged to McCutchen, who ran it in a dismal 35 seconds. Eddie approaches the transition zone and hands off to Mark. Mark takes off, proving to everyone that McCutchen is not worth his salt. Mark takes about 23 seconds to finish his lap, and hands off to Braden. The energy from Braden’s verbal excitement is now channeled through his legs. Braden turns in the expected performance, covering 440 yards in the 46-second range. Braden hands off to Johnson, who ran the 440-yard leg in this race last year. This year, Johnson is the anchorman, running 880 yards. Since he and Barbara have been working out together, Johnson prefers to run distances of 880 yards and above.

While Johnson is running his leg, Eddie and Mark take a seat on the bleachers. Braden walks off his run, and heads over to join them. Eddie asks Kathy, “do you know what the mile medley team ran last year?” Kathy replies, “a mile.” Eddie, and everyone else around, laughs. Eddie tells Kathy, “well, that’s a good one. First Mark gets me, and now you!” Mark tells Eddie, “that means she doesn’t know how fast they ran.” Mark then tells Kathy, “thanks! I’m going to use that one someday.” Although she has many statistics in her head, Kathy cares little about any race McCutchen was in.

About to finish his last lap, Johnson knows he’s on the clock. Sprinting to the finish, Johnson is glad to get this race over. He knows he ran well, and he knows the relay team had a great run. Walking off his run, he heads to the bleachers to await the relay team’s time. Approaching the tribe, Johnson passes by McCutchen, and tosses the baton to him. McCutchen tries to catch the baton, fumbles with it, then drops it, causing a bit of laughter from the tribe. Johnson takes a seat, receiving high-fives and fist bumps from his relay team and the tribe.

The announcement is made by Dr. Braun, “the composite time of the mile medley team was 3:21.3! The individual times were all exemplary. Okay, let’s get the men’s 4 by 880 relay out on the track.” Eddie comments, “he didn’t tell us our times.” All bubbly, Kathy replies, “that’s because your times were all exemplary. See? You wanted all A’s, and you’re getting them!” Eddie tells Kathy, “wow! You’re in a good mood today.” Kathy tells Eddie, “that’s because we’re all back together again!”

Kathy then informs Eddie, “don’t worry. The Timekeepers have your times. You’ll find out later.”

Seeing the success of the tribe, McCutchen becomes irate. While the 4 by 880 relay is underway, the tribe overhears McCutchen disputing Dr. Braun’s assignment decisions with Coach Herndon. McCutchen asks Coach Herndon, “can’t I just run in one of the sprints?” Coach Herndon explains, “to qualify for an event, you must be in the top three or four in that event during time trials. Your times were simply not competitive enough this year.” Awards are only given for first, second, and third place. Assigning an athlete to an event that they are not competitive at is somewhat pointless.

McCutchen, displaying his anger, asks Coach Herndon in a demanding tone, “how come I was good enough last year, but not this year?” Getting frustrated with McCutchen, Coach Herndon explains, “there are a few athletes new to the team who are a lot faster than you are. You’re an alternate. Deal with it.” McCutchen takes a seat, knowing exactly why he is an alternate this year.

After practice, everyone heads to the locker room. Mark sees McCutchen heading to the shower, wondering why, since McCutchen didn’t even run today. Noticing McCutchen’s special bottle of shampoo is nearly empty, Mark decides to have mercy on McCutchen. Mark tells McCutchen, “I know you’re not going to believe me but, if you’re bald because of a Prickly Sea Spider bite, your hair will start coming back again soon. The baldness only lasts about three months.” McCutchen asks Mark, “oh yeah? How do you know all this?” Making up a bunch of bull, Mark replies, “when I was in tenth grade, in biology class, we had to write a three-page paper on an organism. Mine was on the Prickly Sea Spider. So, I read a lot about them.” Finally walking away with some encouraging news, McCutchen has something to look forward to.

With more finals ahead of them this week, the team will be very busy in the academic realm. Well, except for Eddie, Mark, Bobby B., Stone, and perhaps a few others. During final exam week, Eddie will be at Angelo’s Service Station working. Mark and Bobby B. will be completing a few final details of the landscaping at Mark’s house. And, Stone will be playing a few gigs over the next month.

At the high school, the end of the Autumn semester brings the annual faculty Christmas party, which is traditionally held in the teacher’s lounge. In past years, Mr. Crum has been the recipient of a few gifts that have been quite embarrassing. This year, Mr. Crum is again very apprehensive, and justifiably so. Mr. Crum thinks that, if he does receive any gifts, he will not open them in front of everyone. Mr. Crum is becoming just as paranoid about Christmas gifts as he is about the legal system.

As the physical education staff is getting ready to attend the party, Mr. Zunde asks Mr. Frazier, "by the way, is Eddie's other track medal still in the office?" Mr. Frazier replies, "to be honest, I've completely forgotten about that. Let me check." Mr. Frazier searches his desk drawer where the medal was, and does not find it. After looking in a few other places, Mr. Frazier tells Mr. Zunde, "it's gone. I don't see it anywhere." Mr. Zunde informs Mr. Frazier, "well, at least we have the heads up on what Mr. Crum will be getting this year for Christmas." Mr. Frazier replies, "I can't wait!" Mr. Zunde and Mr. Frazier head to the party, looking forward to the entertainment that awaits.

During the party, Mr. Crum is actually attempting to act sociable, and for a very good reason. He has found out that there is a present under the tree with his name on it, and that the gift giver is Mr. O'Brien, who is Mr. Crum's buddy. Mr. Crum figures that he is safe this year, and happily mingles with the crowd. The word that Mr. O'Brien gave Mr. Crum his sole present under the tree gets back to Mr. Frazier and Mr. Zunde. Mr. Frazier and Mr. Zunde are now sure that one of the students or a faculty member must have stolen the medal. They have also figured out that it is unlikely that Mr. O'Brien actually gave Mr. Crum the present but, instead, Mr. O'Brien's name was craftily written as the gift giver as a joke.

When it comes time to open the presents, Mr. Chubin takes it upon himself to distribute all the gifts. When it comes time for Mr. Crum to open his present, he proudly unwraps it, knowing that he is safe this year because he and Mr. O'Brien are buddies. Inside, Mr. Crum finds another gold medal hung on a blue ribbon. Having a good idea what the present might be, Miss Hamilton and Miss Paterno get up out of their seats and walk over to get a good look. Taking a close look at the medal, Miss Hamilton starts laughing, seeing another beautifully crafted medal that has been modified.

This year's medal depicts a high-relief image of a runner's ass, with a leg and foot kicking the ass. The unneeded body parts have been removed from the runners, and it appears that a leg has been removed and repositioned to kick the ass. The work again appears very professionally done, and polished to perfection.

Mr. Frazier, Mr. Zunde, and Mr. Chubin rush over to get a closer look. Seeing the medal, and pretending to believe that Mr. O'Brien is the gift giver by the name on the tag, Mr. Zunde tells Mr. Crum, "at least you know who has been giving you these presents." Mr. Zunde clearly knows that Mr. O'Brien lacks any of the technical or artistic skills needed to modify the medal. If you ask Mr. Zunde, he will tell you that Mr. O'Brien is not even qualified to get out of bed in the morning. And, even if Mr. O'Brien could modify the medal, he would not be able to get anywhere near the physical education office. Mr. Crum, not so sure that Mr. O'Brien gave him

the medal, exclaims, “he did not! I am going to find out who is behind this!”

Mr. Frazier thinks back to last year, when Mr. Zunde mentioned, “if there was a foot on the medal about to kick that ass, I would suspect Braden. But, he’s graduated. So, it must have been Mr. O’Brien.” Mr. Frazier also thinks back to who was present when Mr. Zunde made that comment, but cannot recall exactly who was standing around. Mr. Frazier has brilliantly deduced that it is a teacher who is responsible for crafting Mr. Crum’s present this year.

Miss Amherst and Miss Starr do not want to be left out of the action. Miss Amherst asks Mr. Crum, “may I see that, please?” Mr. Crum shakes his head and hands the medal to Miss Amherst. Upon seeing Mr. Crum’s medal, Miss Starr and Miss Amherst both burst out laughing. Miss Amherst exclaims, “this one is even better than last year’s!” Mr. Crum brazenly tells Miss Amherst, “it sounds like you might know who did this!” Miss Amherst cordially replies, “actually, I don’t have the slightest clue. But, you have to admit, it is kind of funny.” Miss Amherst hands the medal back to Mr. Crum, but Mr. Crum refuses to accept it. He’d rather not be in possession of this year’s less than thoughtful gift. Since Mr. Crum does not want his medal back, Mr. Zunde asks Miss Amherst, “do you mind if I keep that?” Miss Amherst replies, “no. Not at all. Here, take it.”

After the party, the entire physical education staff heads back to the athletic office before they go home. Mr. Zunde asks them all, “would any of you know who is behind Mr. Crum’s award?” Mr. Frazier comments, “I really wish I knew who it was.” Miss Paterno adds, “yeah, me too. They’re getting better every year.” Mr. Chubin casually asks, “I wonder what would happen if someone found out.” Mr. Zunde replies, “well, if it is a teacher, I’m sure Mr. Crum would have something to say. But, since you guys don’t report to him any longer, you’re all in the clear. And, honestly, I can’t exactly see Dr. Brooks being bothered with this. In fact, she’d probably think it’s as funny as we do.”

Miss Hamilton suddenly comments, “I know who it is.” Mr. Zunde asks, “oh, really? Who might that be?” Miss Hamilton explains, “last year, we all were laughing at Mr. Crum’s medal. Someone, however, conspicuously commented, ‘nice work.’” Before anything else is said, Mr. Chubin remarks, “I’m busted. Guilty as guilty gets. And, before you ask, yes. I’m responsible for the certified mail sent to Mr. Crum from the law firm Goda, Helen, Bach, and Burnham last year too.” The other gym teachers give Mr. Chubin a high-five, reassuring him that his secret is safe.

The rumor around school among the students is that Mr. Chubin is a little on the crazy side. With the athletic students, Mr. Chubin pushes them beyond their athletic limits, developing their abilities even further. As a cross country coach, Mr. Chubin always has a winning season, and the team is often undefeated. His inherent personality, however, can be quite intimidating to the students who have below par athletic ability, often pushing them beyond their emotional limits. Apparently, Mr. Chubin is also good at pushing Mr. Crum beyond his emotional limits. And, Mr. Chubin's brother is a jeweler.