

Eddie, The Collegiate Freshman

Chapter Three The Reunion

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With the indoor track season at the high school about ready to get underway, Eddie, Mark, Braden, Mitchell, Johnson, and Bobby B. all head to the high school to say hello to their former coaches. With them are Kathy, Paula, and Barbara, who will be again working during the indoor season as Mr. Frazier's assistant coaches. The tribe takes a seat in the main gym, along with Eddie's brother John and a few of the other senior members of the team. Many of the freshmen discuss among themselves whether Eddie, along with the rest who have graduated, is trying out for the team.

Mr. Frazier and Mr. Zunde walk into the gym, surprised to see the group they've missed so badly. The former team members and the coaches have a brief reunion party, leaving the other athletes wondering if they've perhaps missed something. Mr. Frazier has to begin his meeting, and asks the group if they can hang around for a while after the meeting. The group indicates to Mr. Frazier that they will stay, but every one of the former team members fully intended to hang around anyway. They are even dressed to run should the opportunity present itself. With Mr. Frazier about to address the athletes, Mr. Zunde excuses himself for a moment, and heads back to the athletic office.

While Mr. Zunde is away, Mr. Frazier announces, "welcome to tryouts for the indoor track team. I am Mr. Frazier, the head coach. Mr. Zunde, the school's athletic director, will be joining us again in a moment. For those of you who were not training with us over the Fall semester, Barbara is our distance coach." Barbara waves to the team. Mr. Frazier continues, "Kathy and Paula are our sprinting coaches, and will also work with you on your relay handoffs." Kathy and Paula then wave to the team. Mr. Frazier then announces, "this year, Eddie and Mark, who many of you already know, will be also working with us." Eddie and Mark stand and wave to the team. The team applauds, knowing well Eddie's and Mark's past accomplishments.

Mr. Frazier then introduces the school's former track stars to the athletes who will be trying out this afternoon. In front of the group, Mr. Frazier asks Eddie, "Eddie, please tell the group your average 100-yard dash time these days." Eddie tells the group, "officially, it's about a 9.3 on average these days. I ran a few faster than that. In competition, I can deliver a 9.2." The group of athletes claps and cheers, many of them surprised at what they heard. Mr. Frazier is even astounded at what he just heard.

Mr. Frazier then announces, "and, many of you know Axel Braden, our chief ass kicker." Braden stands up, and exclaims, "that's me! The master of the track, and ready to attack!" Laughing at Braden's rant, Mr. Frazier exclaims, "and, believe me! He delivers!" Having no idea what the answer will be, Mr. Frazier then asks Braden, "please tell the group your best 440-yard dash time." Braden tells Mr. Frazier and the group, "I'm running for the University this year. I ran it in 45.5 seconds during my tryout. My best so far was 45.3 seconds. I ran that last year when some of us ran against the football players." Silence falls over the room, as Mr. Frazier exclaims, "and, that's why Braden is known as the chief ass kicker! Can you believe it? 45.3 seconds! That's faster than the National high school record!"

Mr. Frazier then tells the group, "Gary Mitchell was our star distance man for four years." Again, not even remotely knowing what the answer might be, Mr. Frazier asks Mitchell, "so, please tell the group how fast you can run the mile these days." Mitchell replies, "I've been doing a lot of training. My last timed run was 3:56.2. That was last semester at the University." Dead silence falls over the room, broken by Mr. Frazier exclaiming, "can you believe it? Gary Mitchell can break a four-minute mile! Can you guys believe it?" Mr. Frazier is quite amazed at what he is hearing but, in a way, he is not surprised.

Mr. Zunde returns from the athletic office and, walking up to Mr. Frazier, whispers, "I had this medal engraved for Braden a while ago. I was hoping he'd show up again someday." The medal Mr. Zunde had engraved is the medal of a high-relief image of a runner's ass, with a leg and foot kicking the ass. Mr. Crum rejected the medal at the Christmas party, but Mr. Zunde saw a much better use for it.

Mr. Frazier takes a look at the medal, smiles, and tells Braden, "Axel Braden, please come up here." Braden walks up to the front, as Mr. Frazier announces to everyone, "we have a very special award for our chief ass kicker!" Mr. Zunde then announces to everyone, "it's now official. The back of this medal is inscribed, 'Axel Braden, Ass Kicker in Chief'. I invite every one of you to come up and take a look at Braden's medal before you head out to the track. Be sure to take a good look at it." Mr. Zunde drapes Braden with the medal. Looking at the medal, Braden exclaims,

“wow! This is awesome! Thank you guys very much! Thank you!” Braden is very appreciative of his special award, wishing that he had it earlier when he was in high school. Mr. Zunde is equally as happy that he was able to give the medal to Braden.

Since the weather is nice today, Mr. Frazier takes advantage of the situation, and holds practice on the outdoor track. As the athletes head out to the track, they all stop by and take a look at Braden’s medal. Everyone is impressed by Braden’s special medal, especially by the high-relief image of a runner’s ass, with a leg and foot kicking the ass. Seeing the medal motivates some of the high school athletes who also aspire to have the title of Ass Kicker in Chief.

Mr. Zunde whispers to Mr. Frazier, “what a difference in the reaction between Braden and Crum.” Mr. Frazier replies, “Braden was always telling everyone during the meets that he was going to kick the opponent’s ass. I just wish I had that medal when he was running for the school. He would have shown it to the competition before every race.” Mr. Zunde laughs, and tells Mr. Frazier, “I would have loved to have seen that. But, you can be sure he will do that very thing over at the University.” Mr. Zunde was often over at the field events area during a meet, and unfortunately missed a lot of Braden’s rants. But, Mr. Zunde was well aware of Braden’s title of being the chief ass kicker.

Mr. Frazier and the former team members walk outside to the track. Eddie and Mark will begin helping with the team this semester. On the way out to the track, Eddie sees Officer Hayes, the police officer who patrols the area, sitting in his patrol car. Parked next to Eddie’s MGB, Officer Hayes is inconspicuously parked in the corner of the lot. Eddie excuses himself for a few minutes, and walks over to say hello to Officer Hayes.

Eddie walks up, and tells Officer Hayes, “hey. I saw you parked here, and I just thought I’d stop by and say hi.” Officer Hayes mentions to Eddie, “it looks like track is starting again. Are you helping out with the team this year?” Eddie replies, “yeah. And, if you see Mr. Crum headed to the track, it can only spell trouble.” Officer Hayes replies, “trust me. I already know that. With that crazy principal running this school, I’m going to be hanging around here a lot more, doing my paperwork.”

Officer Hayes then asks Eddie, “by the way, do you know which car is Mr. Crum’s?” Pointing to Mr. Crum’s dilapidated vehicle, Eddie replies, “yeah. It’s that Volkswagen Beetle over there. You’ll hear it when he cranks it. All the bearings are shot.” Eddie then tells Officer Hayes, “hey, it’s nice to see you. But, I have to get to work.” Officer Hayes informs Eddie, “if I see that Crum character headed to the track, I’ll cover you.”

Eddie gives Officer Hayes a fist bump, and replies, “thanks!” Eddie heads to the track, joining the other team assistants.

Out on the track, the former team members join this year’s team for today’s practice session. Since practice began in the Autumn, there is no need to have formal tryouts as in previous years. There are, however, a few newcomers to the tryout session today who were not present during the Autumn training sessions. Mr. Frazier, already knowing the abilities of most of the athletes, decides to have only the newcomers run time trials. Aside from that, the training sled will get a lot of use today.

When Eddie joins up with the group, Kathy tells him, “I know why you made that little detour.” Eddie replies, “really? Tell me why.” Kathy replies, “you just wanted to get out of dragging all the equipment out of the storage building with the rest of us. Look at you. It’s the opening day of the indoor track season, and you’re already slacking off.” Eddie replies, “dang. I’m busted already.”

Looking around and seeing the shot-put laying in the dirt, Eddie tells Kathy, “now, I see your point, Katarina! Just look at that! The shot-put is laying in the dirt! I can clearly see, Katarina, that I should have been here to prevent its mistreatment. Bobby B. would be appalled!” Kathy replies, “I was just testing you to see if you caught that.” Kathy then informs Eddie, “by the way, buddy. You’re working with me today, and I’m cracking my whip.”

Interrupting Eddie and Kathy’s exchange, Mr. Frazier announces, “okay. Everybody listen up. Everyone who was not present during the Autumn training session, please meet with Kathy, Paula and Barbara. The rest of you, please follow me.” Identifying themselves in case someone does not know who they are, Kathy, Paula, and Barbara wave their hands. A dozen athletes gather around the assistant coaches.

Kathy asks the group, “were any of you on the cross country team?” George Livingston and Tom Davidson raise their hands. Kathy tells them, “you guys go and join Mr. Frazier.” Livingston and Davidson were on the team last year, and are excellent distance men. Their abilities are well known. They do not need to prove themselves again, and have already made the team.

Mr. Frazier sends the distance team on a training run along the three-mile path along the roads behind the school. For the sprinters who were present during the Autumn training sessions, Mr. Frazier instructs them to take turns on the training sled, but to stay on the outside of the track on the back straightaway. This will keep the sprinters out of the way of the time trials. Mr. Frazier then joins Mark, and will be timing the new distance guys in the one-mile run.

Kathy asks the ten athletes who remain, “okay, who’s trying out for distance?” Three athletes raise their hands, and Kathy tells them, “you guys will follow Barbara.” Mr. Frazier and Mark will time the new distance candidates in the one-mile run. Joining them in the run, just for fun, will be Barbara, Johnson, and Mitchell. There will, however, be an unofficial competition between the seasoned stars.

Kathy then tells the remaining group of seven athletes, “okay, you guys warm up. You’ll be running a 100-yard dash for time. After that, we’ll be running the 440-yard dash, also for time.” The guys all warm up, as Eddie stands around watching.

Kathy tells Eddie, “hey, buddy. What are you waiting for? You’re running with them!” Eddie replies, “I don’t know about this. This job is beginning to sound way too hard for me. I’m all confused. Listening to your complicated explanation of where everyone should go really wore my brain out.” Kathy replies, “that’s why I’m the boss!” Eddie gets his spikes out of his gym bag, and warms up.

Once the runners are warmed up, Kathy arranges two heats of four runners. Eddie will run in the first heat. Kathy figures she and Paula can work two stopwatches apiece for the first heat. For the second heat, Kathy will have Paula playing the role of the Starter, and Eddie will be the other Timekeeper. But, for the first heat, the job of the Starter is left to one of the runners, who is handed the gun and given some minimal instruction. Oddly, the Starter had to be reassured that there are not real bullets in the gun.

Once everyone in the first heat is ready, the Starter announces, “on your marks.” After a long delay, the command, “get set,” is given. The gun is fired, and the runners are all out of the blocks. The race quickly becomes a one-man race, but everyone kind of expected that. At the mid way point, the runners have quite a wide spread. At the finish line, Eddie crosses first, and Kathy catches Eddie’s time and, along with Paula, the other runner’s times.

Kathy announces each runner’s time, including Eddie’s time, which is clearly in a different league than the rest of the field. Running a 9.3 100-yard dash, it was not Eddie’s best run. But, nothing was at stake today. The athletes in that heat were quite amazed at how difficult it was to not lose ground running against Eddie. But, at the end of the race, one runner is heard saying to another, “wow! We actually got to run with Eddie Bogenskaya!” Apparently, Eddie still has a great reputation around the high school, except for, perhaps, with Mr. Crum.

Before the second heat of the 100-yard dash, Kathy tells everyone in her group, “the milers are just entering their last lap. Let’s watch the

finish before the second heat runs.” The group walks over to the finish line, where Mr. Frazier, Mark, and Paula will catch their times. Mitchell comes around the curve first, with Barbara not too far behind him. Mitchell and Barbara have already lapped one of the runners, and Mitchell is about to lap another right before the finish.

At the finish line, Mr. Frazier catches Mitchell’s time, and Mark catches Barbara’s time. Quite excited, Mr. Frazier is yelling out, “what did you clock her at? What did you clock her at?” Before Mark could answer, Mr. Frazier exclaims, “I clocked Mitchell at a 3:58.8!” Mark tells Mr. Frazier, “Barbara ran a 4:21.8! She is fast!” Hearing the news, Mr. Frazier exclaims, “wow! I can’t believe it. Did you hear that?” The rest of the field comes around the curve, delivering times in the five to seven-minute range. Mr. Frazier and Mark record the times of the other runners as they cross the line. Mark, witnessing the contrast between college and high school level competition, remembers the days when he ran on this track.

Mitchell was running today for one reason, and one reason only. He wanted to see what his time in the one-mile run was without having the benefit of drafting off his opponent. With no direct competition in this race, Mitchell took the lead and held it. With no one to draft off of, it was Mitchell against the clock. Giving it his absolute best, Mitchell found out exactly what he wanted to know.

The second heat of the 100-yard dash gets ready. Paula will be the Starter, and heads to the starting line. Kathy hands Eddie his two stopwatches. Kathy tells Eddie, the first year team assistant, “these are stopwatches. We use them to time the runners.” Playing around, Kathy then asks Eddie, “have you used one of these before?” Playing dumb, Eddie replies, “I can’t remember. They look so complicated.” Looking at his stopwatches, Eddie asks Kathy, “what’s this button for?” Kathy exclaims, “hey! Be careful! That’s the detonator! When you push it, the stopwatch will explode in ten seconds.” Eddie replies, “got it. Where’s McCrutchen? I want to try it out.”

As they are waiting for the second heat to get started, Kathy tells Eddie, “oh, by the way. You’re even today, and I’m odd. I’ll catch first and third. You catch second and fourth.” Eddie asks the rhetorical question, “so, you’re odd?” Catching Eddie’s drift, Kathy replies, “hey now!” Eddie smiles, and tells her, “okay. I got it. I was just checking.” Kathy informs Eddie, “by the way, we do the even and odd thing to give you more time between the runners. It’s easier to work the stopwatches that way.” Eddie replies, “got it.”

As the second heat is out of the blocks, Eddie and Kathy each start two stopwatches. During the heat, Eddie asks Kathy, “now, what am I supposed to do with the stopwatches again?” Kathy replies, “press the

detonator, and toss it at the loser. That will teach them to run faster.” Enjoying his first day on the job, Eddie replies, “got it.”

The runners cross the finish line, and Eddie and Kathy catch their times. Kathy records the times on her clipboard, as Eddie tells her, “wow! This is grueling work, Katarina. I’m not sure I can handle it.” Kathy tells Eddie, “well, you and Mark are the track bouncers. The real work will start when that old Crum walks out to the track.” Eddie replies, “I think I took care of him last semester. I don’t think we’ll be seeing him again. Unless, of course, he really likes to be body slammed.” Eddie then adds, “oh, and by the way, Crum doesn’t bounce. He goes thud.” Kathy replies, “yeah, we all heard that.”

In the next event, the seven athletes will run the 440-yard dash, again for time. Kathy tells Eddie, “don’t worry. You won’t have to run in this one. It’s Braden’s turn.” Playing along, Eddie replies, “good. I’m getting really tired. This job is wearing me out. Oh, and by the way. There’s something wrong with my stopwatch. It didn’t blow up.” Kathy tells Eddie, “we’ll just have to send it back to the factory and get it checked out then.”

The runners get ready for the 440-yard dash, and are joined by Braden today. Seeing that Braden is a bit on the quiet side today, Kathy tells him, “hey! Show this group how to get fired up!” Recalling his rants from the Autumn, Braden starts dancing, and exclaims, “here we go! I’m gonna show you guys how to kick ass! So, when you get on the track, you don’t cut them any slack! When their ass is on the track, you get ready to attack! Then you kick their ass, and land ‘em in the grass! And, when you cross the line, you listen to them whine!” Kathy is quite amazed that Braden has not only stepped up his performance on the track, but has developed perfectly choreographed rants as well.

The gun is fired and the 440-yard dash gets underway. Everyone, including Mr. Frazier, stops to watch the race. Braden, not caring that nothing is at stake, is out to kick ass anyway. As Braden leaves the pack behind, Mr. Frazier exclaims, “take a good look! Everyone, watch this!”

Mr. Frazier moves toward the finish line, not wanting to be the last to learn Braden’s time. Kathy tells Eddie, “remember, I’m odd, and you’re even. So, I’m catching Braden’s time.” Eddie asks, “how do you know Braden is going to win? The race ain’t over yet.” Kathy bumps Eddie’s hip with hers, and tells him, “the first day of track practice, and listen to you! You’re questioning everything! Braden could walk the rest of the race and still win.” Eddie comically replies, “okay. If you say so, boss.”

Braden approaches the finish line, and Kathy catches his time when he crosses. Before Kathy and Eddie can catch the rest of the runner’s times,

Mr. Frazier is already exclaiming, “what did you clock him at? What do you got?” Once the last runner crosses the finish line, Kathy tells Mr. Frazier, “45.7 seconds!” Mr. Frazier exclaims, “45.7 seconds! Can you believe it? Can anyone believe it? Braden was clocking!” Needless to say, everyone around is amazed at Braden’s performance.

Once he’s walked off his run, Braden asks, “what did I get?” Mr. Frazier informs Braden, “45.7 seconds! If you were still in high school, your run would be the new National record!” Braden receives high-fives, fist bumps, and a lot of admiration from those witnessing the run.

As practice comes to a close today, Mr. Frazier calls the team together and, taking advantage of the moment, tells them, “do you hear the energy level? Did you hear Braden before the race? That is how you get fired up before a meet! I want to see more of that!” Missing the energy of the tribe, Mr. Frazier is trying to get his team’s energy level up. Any increase in positive mental energy will translate into better performance on the track.

Calling it a day, Mr. Frazier and the team head back toward the school. Mr. Frazier tells his former team members, “I’m really glad that you guys came by today! And, I’d like to thank you for instilling some motivation into my team. Hopefully, they’ll be all fired up by the first meet.” Braden tells Mr. Frazier, “we’re glad to come by. It’s been fun.” Mr. Frazier tells Mitchell, “by the way, as far as I know, yours was the only sub four-minute mile ever run on that track!”

Johnson comments, “I forgot how much I like this track.” Mr. Frazier tells Johnson, “well, it was home for four years. Come back here in ten years. You’ll be surprised at what you’ll remember. I did that once. Right before I took the job here at the high school, I went back home and visited my parents. I went over to my old high school to take a look at the track, and all the memories came back.”

The group, Mr. Frazier, and Mr. Zunde hang out and catch up for a while, then everyone decides to head out for the evening. Before they leave, Kathy asks, “so, now what are we doing?” Paula replies, “do you have to ask?” Kathy exclaims, “pizza!” Everyone agrees to pizza, with Mr. Frazier and Mr. Zunde joining the tribe for dinner tonight.