

Eddie, The Collegiate Freshman

Chapter Eight The Dust Clears

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Provost Athena Leighton really is a nice person. Dean Grimsby is not. Provost Leighton will go to great lengths to get Eddie back on the track team. Dean Grimsby will go to great lengths to cover his own butt. It has been said that Dean Grimsby will spend eight hours giving the illusion that a task has been completed, even though it would have only taken thirty minutes to actually complete the task. As a result, he usually gets nowhere with difficult problems, or any problems for that matter.

After track practice, Kathy can't wait to give Provost Leighton the news. Eddie's requirement for coming back to the team might be a long shot, but it's certainly worth a try. Immediately after track practice, Kathy searches the administration building for Provost Leighton's office. Having only one hour between track practice and her first class of the day, Kathy sincerely hopes that the provost can somehow fit her in.

Finally finding Provost Leighton's office, Kathy asks the secretary, "can I talk with Provost Leighton please?" The secretary informs Kathy, "Provost Leighton is a very busy woman. Do you have an appointment?" Kathy replies, "no." The secretary tells Kathy, "you'll have to make an appointment to see her. It's not like you can just walk up and be seen." Not taking "no" for an answer, Kathy brashly asks the secretary, "can't you just ask her?" The secretary grudgingly asks, "okay. What's your name?" Kathy replies, "Katarina Karakova." The secretary asks, "are you, by any chance, Dr. Karakova's daughter?" Kathy replies, "that would be me." Kathy was hoping that, by throwing her maiden name out on the table, a door will open, and apparently it did.

The secretary calls Provost Leighton, telling her, "Katarina Karakova is here to see you, if you have a moment." Provost Leighton instructs the secretary, "please send her right in." The secretary tells Kathy, "she said you can go right in." Kathy replies, "thank you," and walks into the

provost's office, without an appointment. The secretary is quite amazed at the provost rolling out a red carpet for Kathy.

After a few minutes of catching up, Kathy tells Provost Leighton, "I might have some good news." Provost Leighton replies, "honestly, right now, any news at all is welcome." Kathy tells Provost Leighton, "well, I'm glad you're sitting down. Eddie said he'll consider coming back to the team. But, Eddie has a serious problem with Dean Grimsby. To use Eddie's words, 'with a stroke of a pen, Dean Grimsby can throw all of Eddie's work and training into the toilet.' That really bothers Eddie. Dean Grimsby has no idea how much work Eddie, or the rest of the team, puts into training every day." Provost Leighton interjects, "Edward does have a point. Trust me. I know first hand the intensity of training you do out on that track, and after practice."

Explaining Eddie's terms and conditions, Kathy continues, "so, if Eddie is to come back, he wants Dean Grimsby to drag the training sled on the sand track for 440 yards with 50 pounds on it. Eddie says Dean Grimsby might then understand all the work we put into our training. Eddie also said that, the next time, Dean Grimsby will think twice about pulling any of that crap like he did when he suspended Eddie."

Surprising Kathy, Provost Leighton smiles, and energetically replies, "I've heard about the training sled that you use during practice. Actually, I kind of like that idea!" Kathy is quite relieved to hear Provost Leighton's response, but wonders how Provost Leighton knows about Eddie's training sled. Kathy adds, "oh, and Eddie wants to watch when Dean Grimsby drags the sled up and down the sand track."

Provost Leighton picks up the phone and immediately calls Dean Grimsby, which is quite the surprise to Kathy. While the phone is ringing, Provost Leighton tells Kathy, "I really wish you could hear both ends of this conversation." Kathy never expected immediate action from Provost Leighton. But, Provost Leighton is not stupid. She realizes that Dean Grimsby is way over his head in formulating a solution to the problem. So, she decided to take matters into her own hands.

When Dean Grimsby answers the phone, Provost Leighton opens the conversation, stating, "Athena here. By any chance, have you made any headway on getting Edward back on the track team?" Dean Grimsby responds, prompting Provost Leighton to reply, "oh, I see. None at all. Well, I have. Edward said he would rejoin the track team if you drag the team's training sled for 440 yards on the sand track." Dean Grimsby apparently questions Provost Leighton, prompting Provost Leighton to inform him, "the training sled is one of the pieces of equipment they use when they train. You put on a harness, and you drag it along the sand track." Dean Grimsby apparently asks Provost Leighton why, and she

explains, “because Edward wants you to fully understand what they go through when they practice out there for two hours a day. You might want to give serious consideration to Edward’s proposal because, make no mistake about it, you’re still responsible for getting Edward back on the track team one way or another. So, unless you have a plan of your own, Edward’s proposal might be your only option.” Even Dean Grimsby realizes he’s been handed what seems to be an easy out on a silver platter.

Kathy waits, as Dean Grimsby talks with Provost Leighton. Provost Leighton tells the dean, “hold on for a moment.” Putting the dean on hold, Provost Leighton asks Kathy, “he wants to know when and where.” Kathy smiles, and replies, “any morning during track practice should work.” Provost Leighton relays to Dean Grimsby, “any morning during track practice. They start at 7:00 a.m.” Dean Grimsby sets the date and time with Provost Leighton, who writes it on her calendar, not that she’s going to forget. Provost Leighton wants to see Dean Grimsby drag the team’s training sled first hand.

Provost Leighton hangs up the phone, and tells Kathy, “tomorrow, 7:00 a.m. He said he will do it.” Kathy confesses, “wow! And, I really thought it was a long shot!” Provost Leighton explains, “it’s not like he has much choice. I’m not letting him off the hook, so this is his easy out. Even he can see that. I will be there tomorrow morning myself to watch this.” Kathy tells the provost, “I’ll tell Eddie. He wants to see it too.”

Provost Leighton tells Kathy, “thank you so much for coming by.” Kathy tells the provost, “and, thank you for getting this to work out!” Provost Leighton explains, “I fully understand Eddie’s reasoning. This case was mishandled from the beginning, and I’m very sorry Eddie had to go through all that he did.” Provost Leighton adds, “I will notify Dr. Braun of the event myself. In fact, I’m going to do that right now.” Provost Leighton and Kathy will meet again tomorrow morning on the track.

The next morning, Eddie arrives at track practice with Kathy. By now, the entire tribe knows what is going down on the track. While the team is sitting on the bleachers, Provost Leighton, who is still dressed in her workout clothes from her morning workout, walks in. Looking as if she is ready to run herself, Provost Leighton takes a seat with the team.

As Dr. Braun begins his brief presentation announcing the agenda for the day, Dean Grimsby walks into the arena, and takes a seat next to Provost Leighton. After Dr. Braun’s address, the team heads out to the track, accompanied by Provost Leighton and Dean Grimsby.

On the way to the track, Kathy introduces Eddie to Provost Leighton. Eddie and Provost Leighton exchange no words beyond a formal introduction. Eddie has already met Dean Grimsby.

Dean Grimsby asks Eddie, “so, if I drag this training sled for 440 yards, I have your word that you will return to the track team?” Eddie replies, “yes sir. And, as an added bonus, I won’t kick the shit out of McCrutchen or lug nut.” Dean Grimsby reminds Eddie, “you’ll be happy to know that I’ve expelled them both.” Eddie tells the dean, “wow! You let them off really easy compared to what I would have done.” Eddie’s comment leaves Provost Leighton wondering about the history behind Eddie’s last remark. Knowing Provost Leighton, she will make an effort to find out later.

Once they get to the sand track, Dean Grimsby asks, “now, exactly what am I supposed to do?” Provost Leighton tells him, “you’re dragging the team’s training sled for 440 yards. It appears that would be to the end of the sand track, and back.” Believing that his task is going to be an easy one, Dean Grimsby replies, “okay, let’s get this over with.”

Eddie announces, “I’ll even show you how it’s done.” Eddie planned all along to demonstrate to the dean how easily he is able to drag the training sled to the end of the track and back. From what the dean hears, he gets the false impression that dragging the training sled will be a simple task.

Eddie puts on the harness, and begins his run to the end of the sand track. Dr. Braun, Provost Leighton, Dean Grimsby, the tribe, and a few other team members watch, as Eddie drags the sled. Watching Eddie work, Dean Grimsby gets the impression that this exercise can’t be too hard.

Provost Leighton asks Dr. Braun, “by the way, when did we get this equipment?” Provost Leighton has heard about the training sled, but does not know where they came from. Dr. Braun explains, “Eddie built them for us. We have a few of them.” Provost Leighton, with her athletic background, can clearly see and understand the benefit of the training sled.

Eddie, dragging the training sled for 440 yards, returns to the starting point, and tells Dean Grimsby, “that’s how it’s done. That’s what I do out here for hours. Now, it’s your turn. Good luck.” Kathy instructs Dean Grimsby, “it’s simple. All you have to do is put one foot in front of the other, and run.” As Dr. Braun helps Dean Grimsby into the harness, Provost Leighton tells Dean Grimsby, “440 yards is to the end and back.” With bloated confidence, Dean Grimsby announces, “here I go!” Kathy and

Eddie stand together, watching as the dean jogs away, dragging the sled behind him.

At 25 yards, Eddie tells Kathy, “he’ll be lucky to make it the 440 yards.” Kathy asks, “what if he doesn’t make it?” Eddie replies, “then, I guess we’re on to plan B. Three minutes in the ring with Braden.” Provost Leighton asks, “what’s this about a plan B?” Kathy explains, “we were joking the other day. Eddie’s original plan was that he’d come back to the team if Dean Grimsby got in the ring with Braden for three minutes.” Provost Leighton laughs, and tells Kathy, “I really shouldn’t laugh, but that is very funny.”

On the track, Dean Grimsby is still moving, albeit very slowly. Realizing that Dean Grimsby will take a half hour to complete his assigned task, Dr. Braun tells the rest of the team, “okay, now it’s time for us to get working. The distance team, go ahead and start the interval drill. And, the sprinters, hit the sand track. And, try not to run over Dean Grimsby on your way down the track.” Eddie and Kathy stay with Provost Leighton, as Dean Grimsby strives to make his first 100 yards down the track.

Barely making it to the middle of the track, Dean Grimsby can hardly put one foot in front of the other any longer. Eddie tells Kathy, “it looks like he’s giving out.” Kathy asks, “do you want me to go and rescue him?” Eddie replies, “sure. He won’t even make it 220 yards. They’ll have to call an ambulance soon.” Kathy runs to the middle of the sand track, off to rescue Dean Grimsby.

Provost Leighton tells Dr. Braun, “Dean Grimsby is really having a difficult time.” Dr. Braun replies, “the team drags that sled up and down the sand track for an hour every day. When they’re done, then they run drills. He barely made it 100 yards before he gave out.” Provost Leighton asks Dr. Braun, “how far did Addison actually make it?” Seeing that Dean Grimsby is almost to the midpoint of the track, Dr. Braun replies, “from his position, I’d say generously 80 yards but, during his last 30 yards, he’s been flailing.”

Eddie, Dr. Braun, and Provost Leighton watch from a distance as Kathy takes the harness off Dean Grimsby and puts it on herself. Kathy drags the sled back to the starting point, and Dean Grimsby walks slowly back to the end of the track. Along the way, the dean stops a few times to rest, likely thinking of excuses why he couldn’t even make it to the end of the sand track. Eddie now wonders how he ever thought that the dean could drag the sled for 440 yards. But, if Eddie originally suggested 220 yards, the dean obviously couldn’t have made that either.

Kathy returns to the finish line, dragging the sled. Provost Leighton asks Kathy, “do you mind if I give that a try?” Kathy replies, “no. Go right

ahead.” Kathy helps Provost Leighton with the harness, and tells her, “okay! You’re ready to go!” Provost Leighton takes off down the sand track and, much to Kathy’s surprise, she is moving along very well.

Dean Grimsby, now at about the 50-yard mark, is intentionally moving very slowly. Following his failure, the dean clearly fears facing Provost Leighton or Eddie. Waiting for the dean to return, Eddie is wondering whether Dean Grimsby has learned anything at all.

Eddie watches, as Provost Leighton drags the sled to the end of the track. Eddie tells Kathy, “I’ll bet you that Provost Leighton makes it back here before Grimsby.” Kathy replies, “I’m not making that bet! She’s moving along pretty good!” Provost Leighton has clearly kept herself in good physical condition over the years.

Provost Leighton passes Dean Grimsby, and makes it to the finish line first. Provost Leighton exclaims, “wow! If I had one of these years ago, I might just have beat that girl!” Kathy gives Provost Leighton a high-five and tells her, “you did awesome!” Provost Leighton asks Kathy, “does George use these over at the high school?” Kathy replies, “yeah. Eddie made a few for the high school too.” Provost Leighton exclaims, “whatever we paid for these, they’re definitely worth it!” Kathy informs Provost Leighton, “Eddie gave them to the University and the high school. He’s never charged anyone for them.”

Still all out of breath, Dean Grimsby finally makes it to the finish line informing everyone, “that’s really hard!” Provost Leighton replies, “I agree. That’s what makes it a pretty good workout.” Dean Grimsby exclaims, “I can’t make it 440 yards!” Eddie replies, “I can see that. That’s just too bad.” Thinking about Eddie’s comment, Dean Grimsby asks, “does this mean you won’t run?” Eddie firmly replies, “I don’t know yet. You have to admit, though, you turned in a very pathetic performance. In fact, it sucked. And, worst of all, Grimsby, you just gave up! Winners don’t give up. But, I’m thinking about it.” Eddie just handed Dean Grimsby a dose of his own medicine. And, Eddie boldly told everyone that Dean Grimsby is a loser.

Hearing Eddie’s last remark, Provost Leighton tells Dean Grimsby, “you know, Addison, you couldn’t even make it 100 yards before giving out. These guys are out here for two hours a day, dragging that sled up and down the track and running drills. When they are done, they go to their classes. After class, they train on their own. And, it may interest you to know that Eddie built numerous training sleds, and gave, not sold, them to both this University and his former high school. I hope you now fully realize the effort these students put in for this University. And, to unjustifiably wipe away all of their training and effort with the stroke of your pen is an outright disgrace. And, let me remind you. If you had

followed protocol, neither of us would be standing here right now.” Finally recovering from his run, if it can even be called that, Dean Grimsby replies, “I see that. That was hard.” The dean, still a bit oxygen deprived, might now have a better insight into the training efforts put forth by the team.

After listening to Provost Leighton lecture Dean Grimsby, Eddie announces, “okay, I’ll run next year.” Provost Leighton has saved Eddie the trouble of hitting Dean Grimsby with a reality stick. Everything Provost Leighton said, Eddie was going to say, but in his own words.

Addressing Dean Grimsby, Eddie tells him, “you’d better remember this moment for the rest of your life. And, for the record, I’m cutting you a whole lot of slack, even though you cut me absolutely none.” Having made his point, and not wanting to hear any rebuff by the dean, Eddie walks away, taking a seat on a bench in the team bench area 150 yards away.

As Eddie walks away, Provost Leighton asks Kathy, “does this mean you’ll run next year too?” All excited, Kathy replies, “it sure does!” Kathy and Provost Leighton exchange a high-five, clearly indicating to Dean Grimsby that he has been removed from the chain of command between Kathy and the provost.

As Paula approaches the starting point, dragging another sled, Kathy yells out to her, “Eddie’s back!” Paula yells back, “woo-hoo! Yes! I’ll tell Mark!” Paula, quickly turning around and dragging the training sled for another run, sprints ahead to give the news to Mark, who is currently at the other end of the track.

It doesn’t take Provost Leighton very long to realize that Eddie is a driving force within the track team. She gets the same impression of Kathy, Mark, and Paula. Not to mention, what Provost Leighton saw of Braden during the divisional meet was unprecedented. Never in her life has she seen such an energetic and unrestrained charismatic personality on the track.

Provost Leighton missed her chance to meet Eddie after the divisional meet. Wanting to finally have a conversation with Eddie, Provost Leighton excuses herself and walks over to the bench where Eddie is seated.

Provost Leighton takes a seat next to Eddie and asks, “so, Eddie. What’s your story?” Eddie asks, “what do you mean?” Provost Leighton replies, “well, to start with, you came out of nowhere this year, and ran a qualifying time for the Olympics.” Eddie replies, “I just work out and train.” Provost Leighton really wants to hear more than the obvious from

Eddie. Anyone who works out and trains is bound to improve their performance over time. Provost Leighton knows there's much more.

Provost Leighton, clearly perceiving a wall between her and Eddie, asks the open-ended question, "how about in high school? Your coach, Mr. Frazier, and I have known each other since our college days." Eddie replies, "Kathy said something about you and Mr. Frazier being at the Olympic trials together. Mr. Frazier is the best track coach around." Provost Leighton has the wisdom not to ask whether Mr. Frazier is better than the coaches at the University. Eddie has definitively answered that question. In Eddie's mind, Mr. Frazier is a better coach than any of the University's coaches. And, in Eddie's mind, so is Mr. Zunde, for that matter.

Digging a little deeper, Provost Leighton asks, "what makes Mr. Frazier such a good coach?" Eddie explains, "when it comes to training, he's top notch. But, he assigns events to win every meet and to get as many athletes to the State competition as possible. Mr. Frazier always says, 'only one person wins the race. But, they hand out medals for second and third place.' A lot of people think that coming in fourth place, especially in a big meet, is something to be proud of. Not with Mr. Frazier. Mr. Frazier always says things like, 'if you come in second place, congratulations. You're the first loser.' When I was a freshman in high school, I went to the State meet in the 40-yard dash. Well, I came in second place. That made me the first loser. That was my first, and my last, silver medal. I put all my gold medals in a box, but I kept my silver medal out where I could always see it. It reminded me to work harder. A lot harder. Only one person really wins a race. Everyone else is a loser."

Treading lightly, Provost Leighton asks, "how about here at the University?" Not exactly understanding the question, Eddie replies, "when I was a senior in high school, our track team could have beaten the University team in every event, except in the mile. Darryl Stone is good, really good. But now, Mitchell and Akinmola are faster than he is. It's not that Stone is bad at all. He's not. If you ask me, if Stone had Mr. Frazier as a coach, he'd be running a 3:50 mile, or better, by now. But, because of how Mr. Frazier trained everyone, Mitchell will get to 3:50 before Stone will. And, so will Akinmola. With Mr. Frazier, losing is not an option."

Provost Leighton tells Eddie, "if you don't mind, please tell me more about how Mitchell and Akinmola beat Stone." Now realizing that Provost Leighton is not your typical pain in the ass administrator, Eddie turns toward Provost Leighton, and explains, "before we were on the University track team, me, Mitchell, and a few others, were watching one of the divisional meets. Mitchell had us time each one of Stone's quarter-mile intervals. Mitchell studied exactly how Stone ran. That helped Mitchell beat Stone when Mitchell tried out for the team. Watch Mitchell during

the meets sometime. He's not just watching the races. He's studying the runners. In high school, Akinmola learned from Mitchell and Mr. Frazier. And, now Akinmola is even beating Stone. And, it wouldn't surprise me if Akinmola beats Mitchell someday. They're getting to the age where their age difference doesn't matter anymore." Provost Leighton quickly realizes that Eddie is no idiot.

Provost Leighton asks, "so, if Darryl Stone wanted to improve his performance, how would you see that happening?" Eddie replies, "have Mitchell train him. I don't mean replacing the other coaches with Mitchell. But, Stone could learn a lot from Mitchell. Mitchell knows more about how Stone runs than Stone does." Provost Leighton asks, "please give me an example." Eddie explains, "Mitchell knows that, if Stone runs his first lap too fast, his last quarter of a mile will be a lot slower. Stone doesn't know that about himself." Provost Leighton asks, "how do you know Stone doesn't know that?" Eddie replies, "it's simple. If Stone knew that about himself, he wouldn't let it happen. So, what happens on the track is that Mitchell will push Stone very hard during the first quarter-mile. Stone should run his own race, not Mitchell's."

Eddie continues, "to win, we do other things too. It's not just our performance on the track. When I was a freshman, we were up against a guy named John Brady. He was a senior, and the fastest guy in the State. I remember it like it was yesterday. Brady was in lane three, I was in lane four, and Mark was in lane two. Before the meet, me, Mark, and Johnson loosened up the gravel in Brady's lane. We twisted our spikes in the gravel, loosening it up really good. We all warmed up in that lane and really worked that lane over good. There's no rule against three runners all running warmups in the same lane for twenty minutes. When the race started, Brady couldn't get any traction. So, I came in first place, Mark came in second, and Johnson came in third. Brady came in fourth place." Provost Leighton laughs hysterically, and tells Eddie, "I shouldn't be laughing, but that is really funny." Eddie informs Provost Leighton, "that's only the beginning."

Getting back on track, Provost Leighton asks Eddie, "getting back to Stone. Who's faster, Stone or Mitchell?" Eddie replies, "Mitchell. But, that doesn't mean that Stone can't beat him in a race. Look at Barbara. Barbara burns out the other runners during the first two laps. On her third lap, she takes it easy, re-evaluating her strategy as she maintains the lead. On her fourth lap, no one has ever outperformed her, and she knows that. She has a lot left into the last lap. So, assuming they were at the same skill level, if Mitchell ran against Barbara, he'd use a totally different strategy. And, Barbara would adjust her strategy as well. It would be just as much of a mental competition as a physical one. Look at it this way. If two athletes are perfectly matched, the one who wins will most likely win by strategy."

Provost Leighton asks Eddie, “please tell me more about why you brought up Barbara.” Eddie explains, “okay, so follow this. Barbara’s quarter-mile time is right up there with Kathy, Paula, and Erika. Barbara’s top end is better than all the other woman milers. The same is true for Mitchell. While Mitchell can’t beat me, Mark, Johnson, or Braden in a 440-yard dash, Mitchell can break a 50-second quarter-mile. So, on the last lap, all the milers have the endurance. That’s what makes them distance runners. Barbara wins because her top end is far beyond everyone else in the race. The same is true for Mitchell. You simply can’t run a 54-second quarter-mile on the last lap if your fastest quarter-mile is 54 seconds. Oh, and if anyone paid attention, Kathy and Paula always run faster when they are running against each other. That’s how they both beat Liz Duncan last year.”

While she has Eddie’s attention, Provost Leighton asks, “tell me more about Todd McCutchen.” Eddie replies, “McCrutchen is a loser. His times are erratic. He can’t hand off or receive the baton and, if he does manage to grab it, he drops it. The times I ran in eighth grade were better than what McCrutchen runs today. But, that’s not his biggest problem. His biggest problem is that he’s a sucker.” Provost Leighton is getting a lot of information from Eddie, most of which she would otherwise not find out.

Provost Leighton asks, “Todd McCutchen is a sucker? How so?” Eddie continues, explaining, “yeah, he’s a real sucker. Listen to this. During his senior year in high school, Mark told McCrutchen that the track is infested with ticks. Mark, and the other runners, kept checking their legs. McCrutchen kept checking his legs too. Then, McCrutchen goes and tells his whole team. By the end of the meet, everyone on the Centerville team was constantly checking their legs for ticks. Their team was too concerned about ticks, that they lost their focus on the meet.” Hearing the story, Provost Leighton laughs, amused that anyone would even believe that a track would be infested with ticks.

Eddie continues, “it doesn’t stop there. Two years ago, Mark told McCrutchen that there’s a Prickly Sea Spider bite on his calf, and that it was going to cause his tendons to rot away. After that, McCrutchen’s times went down the toilet. And now, when McCrutchen went bald, Mark told him that it’s stage three of the Prickly Sea Spider bite. McCrutchen believes all that crap, so that pretty much makes him a sucker. And, that’s only the beginning. Mark could write a book about how he’s messed with McCrutchen since eighth grade. It would be called *Messing with McCrutchen*.” Recalling the facts surrounding McCutchen’s expulsion, Provost Leighton tells Eddie, “I can see that. I’d say there’s something not quite right about him.” Eddie is at least glad to hear that Provost Leighton shares his assessment of McCutchen.

Provost Leighton asks Eddie, “do you believe Mitchell is open to sharing his training knowledge with Darryl Stone?” Eddie asks, “what’s all this about Darryl Stone?” After a pause, with a soft look of concern on her face, Provost Leighton quietly tells Eddie, “he’s my son. Leighton is my maiden name.” Eddie replies, “wow! No one ever said anything about that.” Provost Leighton informs Eddie, “only the coaches know. And, now you.”

Provost Leighton spent considerable time training for the Olympics in her younger years. She has come to the realization that Eddie, Mitchell, and Mr. Frazier might hold the keys for her son, Darryl Stone, to realize his dreams of competing in the Olympics someday. Time, however, is running out. The next Summer Olympics is only two years away. If Darryl does not make this Olympics, the chances of making the next one are slim. In their short conversation, Provost Leighton must have gained a good level of trust in Eddie to share her secret that Darryl Stone is her son. The reason for the secret is simple. Like Eddie, Mark, and Bobby B., Stone does not attend classes.

Eddie tells Provost Leighton, “we could ask Mitchell.” Not knowing Mitchell at all, Provost Leighton asks Eddie, “do you think we can do that now?” Eddie replies, “sure.” At the moment, the sprinters are headed over to the sand track, and the distance team is headed to the track to run the interval training drill. Eddie yells out, “yo, Mitchell,” and waves for him to come over. Mitchell walks toward the bench, wondering what Eddie wants.

Mitchell walks up and asks, “what’s up?” Eddie introduces Mitchell and Provost Leighton. To prove his point, Eddie tells Mitchell, “tell Provost Leighton what you know about how Darryl Stone runs.” Wondering why Eddie would ask such a question, Mitchell replies, “he usually runs in the 3:59 to 4:00 minute range.”

Eddie tells Mitchell, “details, bro. Give me all the details.” Mitchell continues, “well, to begin with, he really hates when I draft off of him. If he were faster, I’d run a better time. If I push him really hard during the first quarter-mile, his times will be slower, slightly more than four minutes. During his second quarter-mile, he usually runs 61 to 62 seconds. On the third lap, he runs 62 or 63 seconds. If he runs the third lap any faster than 63 seconds, his fourth lap will be slower by whatever he gained on the third lap. Now, here’s his problem. On his last lap, he can only deliver a 58-second quarter-mile at best. I can deliver a 55-second quarter-mile during the last lap. Each second at that speed is about seven and a half yards. That means that I can be 20 yards behind him in the bell lap, and I could still beat him. Oh, and if Akinmola, or anyone else, is coming up behind him, he gets worried, and loses a few

steps by looking back.” Mitchell asks, “more?” Getting the point, Provost Leighton replies, “no. That was very enlightening. Thank you.”

Provost Leighton asks Mitchell, “if Darryl were to improve his times, what would you say is the number one thing he should work on?” Mitchell replies, “his best quarter-mile is around 52.5 seconds. He needs to get that down to 47 or 48. It would also be nice to get his 100-yard dash time down as well. Basically, he should train with the sprinters for a while. For his endurance training, he can do that on his own. He’s a really smart guy. He knows how to train for distance. He’s one of the best around.” Mitchell adds, “improving my 440-yard dash time is what I’m working on myself.” Mitchell, now being able to break 50 seconds in the quarter-mile, has a distinct advantage over Stone.

Provost Leighton comments, “this is all very interesting to me. Please explain your logic, if you don’t mind.” Mitchell replies, “no problem. When Stone runs one mile, he does it in, say, four minutes. When he runs two miles, he can do it in about eight minutes and fifteen seconds. Endurance is clearly not his issue. Top end is his issue. If he can take five seconds off his quarter-mile, that’s theoretically twenty seconds off his one-mile time, but you can’t realistically expect that. But, if you can translate that into even a five-second performance increase over one mile, that would improve his performance capacity down to three minutes and fifty-two seconds. That would be a competitive time on the world stage.” Provost Leighton is amazed at what she hears from Eddie and Mitchell. Eddie and Mitchell are not coaches. But, they’ve learned a lot from Mr. Frazier and Mr. Zunde over the years. And, what Mitchell explained is only the tip of the iceberg.

Provost Leighton asks Mitchell, “what else have you observed that you believe no one else knows?” Mitchell replies, “my life might be in danger if I tell you.” Eddie laughs, as Provost Leighton tells Mitchell, “don’t worry, your secret will be safe with me.” Mitchell tells Provost Leighton, “I’m willing to bet that Braden can run a four-minute mile, or close to it. But, he hates running distance.” Thinking about what Mitchell said, Eddie comments, “you know, you might be right about that!” Mitchell asks, “about what? My life being in danger or Braden running a four-minute mile?” Eddie laughs, and replies, “both.”

Provost Leighton asks, “please explain to me how you can know that.” Mitchell explains, “Braden can run a 45-second quarter-mile. He can run the half mile faster than anyone on the team. He clearly has the top end to do it, and no one can tell me that he doesn’t have the endurance. When we run the interval drill in the arena, he’s running a sub-50 second quarter-mile the whole time. The guy runs like a machine. But, he hates running distance.” Eddie adds, “the best way to get Braden to run a four-

minute mile is to tell him that he can't do it." Mitchell laughs, and tells Eddie, "that's all Braden needs to hear."

Eddie then throws out, "Kathy could probably tell you within a few seconds how fast Braden can run the mile, and how fast he'll run each lap." Provost Leighton tells Eddie, "stop this! Seriously? How can she possibly know?" Eddie explains, "Kathy has been Mr. Frazier's team statistician for years. Kathy knows the statistics of everyone on the high school team. She knows the statistics of everyone going to State this Spring. At the State meet that's coming up, she knows who will place in each event, and in what order they'll place. All the information is in her head. If you think she doesn't know every last little statistic about the University team, guess again." Provost Leighton replies, "wow! I would have never guessed that George Frazier has such a high tech organization behind him. I'll have to talk to Kathy about this sometime."

Going out on a limb, Provost Leighton asks Mitchell, "would you be willing to explain to Darryl what you were speaking of with me today, and help him improve his times?" Mitchell replies, "sure. I'd be glad to." Getting Mitchell's cooperation was a lot easier than Provost Leighton ever thought possible.

The ease of getting Mitchell to help prompts Provost Leighton to ask, "I'm just curious. Why doesn't the team share and discuss this information among themselves?" Mitchell explains, "I'm not the coach. The coaches have their agenda and ways of doing things. Mr. Frazier always told us that we should never question the coach's decisions." Eddie adds, "but, if we wanted an explanation of Mr. Frazier's decisions, he was always more than glad to give it to us. And, he was always open to suggestions." Mitchell mentions, "every time I think that Mr. Frazier has taught us everything he knows, out comes a whole lot more. He's the best coach around." That's the second time in thirty minutes Provost Leighton has heard that Mr. Frazier is the best coach around.

Eddie and Mitchell have a long discussion with Provost Leighton about Mr. Frazier and the training program at the high school. After her talk with Eddie and Mitchell, Provost Leighton realizes that Mr. Frazier has certainly come a long way since the Olympic tryouts. Mr. Frazier is largely responsible for the talent on the University team today. What Athena Leighton does not know is that Mr. Frazier and Mr. Zunde have a training program that surpasses that of most colleges and Universities. And, with Mr. Harris at the middle school implementing Mr. Frazier's training protocols, the high school is bound to have a superior team every year.

As practice comes to an end, Eddie sees Kathy walking up to the bench where he, Mitchell, and Provost Leighton are having their discussion. Since he has to go to class after practice, Mitchell excuses

himself and heads back to the locker room. Eddie tells Provost Leighton, “watch this.” Kathy walks up, and says, “hey! It looks like you had a strenuous workout today.” Eddie replies, “yeah. Carry me back to the locker room.” Kathy replies, “I would, but you’re getting too fat sitting around talking during practice.” Provost Leighton is pleasantly surprised at the playfulness between Kathy and Eddie.

Eddie then asks Kathy, “hey, if Braden ran the mile in competition, what would you expect to go down?” Provost Leighton requests, “down to every last detail, please.” Kathy asks, “well, who else is in the race?” Without hesitation, Provost Leighton replies, “Stone, Mitchell, and Akinmola.” Clearly a difficult question, Kathy replies, “wow! Okay! So, let me think about this.” Kathy thinks for a moment, visualizing the race in her head.

Kathy explains, “so, first, Braden will tell everyone that he’s going to kick their ass. He’ll go on for a minute or so. Assuming a 440-yard track, on his first lap, he’ll run right behind the leader, who I’m guessing will be Stone. And, if Mitchell is right behind Braden, Braden will run an erratic stride to really mess up Mitchell’s race. Braden won’t let Mitchell draft off of him. On his first lap, Braden will probably run a 55-second quarter-mile. That’s because he knows that Stone will have a slower time if he is pushed too hard during the first lap.” That’s the third time Provost Leighton has heard that about Stone’s first lap in the last hour.

Kathy continues, “on the second lap, it will be more of the same. Stone will be in first place, Braden will be in second place, and Mitchell will have dropped back because Braden will be speeding up and slowing down, messing with Mitchell. By the third lap, Stone would have to drop back into second place because Braden’s half mile pace would have been too fast for Stone. At this point, Braden has already won the race.” Provost Leighton is amazed at Kathy’s understanding of how the various runners run.

Kathy explains, “with Braden now in front, he’ll remain there. If Mitchell approaches, Braden will speed up and not let Mitchell draft off of him. Braden knows that, if Mitchell can’t draft, it will slow him down. So, Mitchell will draft off of Stone instead. But, the problem there is that, if Mitchell drafts off of Stone, Braden will be gaining ground on both of them. If Mitchell is bold enough to take the lead, Braden will draft off of him, and chant something like, ‘gonna kick your ass,’ which will annoy Mitchell to no end. But, if Mitchell does happen to take the lead on the third lap, he’s done, and he knows that. He’ll burn out.”

Amazed at what she is hearing, Provost Leighton asks, “wait! Hold on! How do you know this?” Kathy replies, “I can see the race in my head.” Kathy has watched these runners run for years. Kathy continues, “okay,

so then, on the last lap, Braden will start the sprint at the same time Mitchell does. Braden will win, with a time of around 3:55, because Mitchell will not be able to catch Braden on the last lap. That's because no one in this race has a faster top end than Braden. Mitchell and Stone will fight it out for second place. But, Akinmola will pass them both as they are fighting it out, and take second place. That's because Akinmola has been running his own race the whole time. Mitchell will take third place, and Stone will take fourth place."

Amazed at Kathy's analysis, Provost Leighton asks, "is there anything else interesting that you would see happening?" Kathy replies, "if, say, this was a divisional meet, and someone was drafting off of Braden, I wouldn't put it past him to come to almost a complete stop, taking the other runner out. But, he wouldn't do that to his own team members. He'd do it to McCrutchen or lug nut, though."

Convinced more than ever that there is more than meets the eye to Mr. Frazier's training protocols, Provost Leighton asks, "I wonder if Dr. Braun or Dr. Paxton will be up to actually hosting that competition someday." Kathy replies, "I'm sure they would. Monday would be the best day, since everyone will have had the weekend off." Provost Leighton tells Kathy, "I might just mention it to Dr. Braun."

Provost Leighton thanks Eddie and Kathy for taking the time to talk with her. Everyone heads out on their way to their next destination. Kathy goes to class. Eddie goes to work. Provost Leighton heads to her office, amazed at what she learned today.

Monday morning, at 7:00 a.m., Provost Leighton is sitting among the athletes on the bleachers. This can only mean one thing. Dr. Braun has arranged the race between Braden, and the University's three distance stars. Braden was forewarned by Kathy what may happen on Monday morning. Braden is not only ready to run, but ready to win.

Walking out of the locker room and into the arena, Kathy sees Provost Leighton sitting on the bleachers with the team, with a stopwatch in her hand. Quickly heading back to her locker, Kathy retrieves a piece of paper she had prepared in advance for Provost Leighton. The paper outlines Kathy's perception of the race in detail, as she described last week to the provost.

Walking back into the arena, Kathy hands the paper to Provost Leighton, telling her, "hey there! I'm guessing that you're here because there's going to be a race. Here's my summary. I wrote it out for you." Provost Leighton replies, "thank you. Dr. Braun was nice enough to arrange the race between Braden and the other milers." Kathy comments, "I can't wait!" Provost Leighton echoes the sentiment, "me either!"

Dr. Braun walks in, and the team takes a seat on the bleachers. After his usual announcements, Dr. Braun informs everyone, “today, we will continue to run a few time trials outside of your normal events. We did this last week, and we’ve all learned a few things. When we get out to the track, the first event will be the one-mile run. I want Stone, Mitchell, Akinmola, and Braden on the track first.” Heading out to the track, the rest of the team is wondering what may be in store for them today.

Out on the track, the runners in the first event warm up. For now, everyone else gets a short break. With her summary sheet in hand, Provost Leighton walks over to Kathy. In an especially good mood today, Provost Leighton takes out a pen, and tells Kathy, “I’m checking off each item with my pen if and when it happens.” Kathy mentions, “I thought about this over the weekend. I really can’t see this ending any other way. Oh, and if you put Eddie and Mark in the race, they’ll break a four-minute mile too.”

Dr. Braun blows his whistle, and the runners head to the starting line. Provost Leighton tells Kathy, “I’m going to stand in the center of the oval. I want to see the race from the best possible position.” Kathy tells Provost Leighton, “I’ll join you.” Paula, Eddie, and Mark also head to a place in the center of the oval track to watch the race, everyone being careful to stay out of the red zone. From the center of the track, they hear Braden exclaim, “here we go! I’ve kicked ass in all my races. Now I have to kick everyone’s ass in their own race too! Let’s get this ass kicking underway! Somebody fire that gun! Wait! Where’s McCrutchin’s fat ass? Oh, yeah! I helped kick his ass out of this University! How could I forget? Somebody fire that gun!” Provost Leighton checks one item off the list.

The Starter announces, “set.” The gun is then fired. At 50 yards, before they enter the curve, Stone assumes the lead. Braden, blocking Mitchell, drops in right behind Stone. Mitchell drops in behind Braden. Akinmola drops in behind Mitchell, just as Kathy predicted. Mitchell attempts to draft off Braden but, on the back straightaway, Braden unpredictably steps out one lane and immediately steps back into lane one. Braden then momentarily slows down, almost causing Mitchell to collide with him. Braden suddenly speeds up his pace again, drafting off of Stone. With the first lap completed, the pace is 54 seconds, set by Stone. Stone was pushed very hard by Braden, which will affect his performance during the last lap. Provost Leighton checks off a few other items on the list.

On the second lap, Stone is still in first place, and Braden in second place. Halfway through the lap, Mitchell again tries to draft off of Braden, but Braden suddenly puts on the brakes. Mitchell then speeds up his pace, attempting to catch Stone. Braden will have nothing to do with Mitchell’s move, and sprints ahead of Mitchell. Braden, now drafting off of

Stone again, is right where he wants to be, for now anyway. In fear of a collision, Mitchell dares not draft off of Braden at the moment. The second lap comes in right at 61 seconds for the pacesetter.

During the third lap, Stone is getting fatigued, and noticeably slowing his pace. Halfway through the third lap, Braden moves into the lead, stepping up the pace. Mitchell takes advantage of the situation, and drafts off of Stone for a while. Akinmola comes up behind Mitchell, running on his heels. Stone momentarily looks back, keenly aware that he is doing all the work. Stone looks back a second time and, not seeing the opportunity he was hoping for, takes a chance and steps out, allowing Mitchell to pass him. Mitchell takes the opportunity, and passes Stone. Stone drops in quickly, right behind Mitchell, not allowing Akinmola to seize the opportunity to draft off Mitchell. Meanwhile, during the cat and mouse game, Braden has gained a little ground. Provost Leighton checks yet another two items off the list.

Into the fourth lap, Braden is listening closely to the runner's footsteps behind him. If Mitchell is to win, he must make a move soon. On the back straightaway, Mitchell finally makes a move, and picks up his pace. Braden follows suit, and also picks up his pace. With a four-way sprint to the finish, Provost Leighton checks off a few more items on her list. Out of the back curve, Braden has gained a little more ground. Mitchell and Stone are side by side, as Akinmola drafts off of Stone. Provost Leighton, along with everyone else standing in the center of the oval, moves toward the finish line to get a better view of the finish.

As the runners approach the finish line, Akinmola breaks away, passing Mitchell and Stone. Braden crosses first, taking first place. Akinmola, who had the benefit of drafting off someone during most of the race, takes second place. Mitchell, edging out Stone, takes third place. As Stone crosses the finish line, Provost Leighton checks another item off the list. Kathy, as bubbly and happy as she can be, tells Provost Leighton, "see! He won! I knew it! Braden won!" Amazed at Kathy's accuracy, Provost Leighton replies, "I can clearly see that!"

A bit impatient, Provost Leighton asks, "what was the winning time?" The Timekeeper clocking Braden, looks at her stopwatch, and tells the provost, "3:56.2." The provost was too excited watching the race, and forgot to stop her own stopwatch when Braden crossed the finish line. Provost Leighton tells Kathy, "well, that was amazing! It's like you wrote the script!" Kathy replies, "I just read it ahead of time. And, any moment now, you'll hear Braden telling everyone how he kicked everyone's ass." Provost Leighton tells Kathy, "President Caldwell is really impressed by Axel Braden's energy level."

Sure enough, once Braden recovers, he exclaims, "I am the supreme ass kicker of all time! Ain't no one better at kicking ass than me! Who's next? Who else wants their ass kicked today?" Provost Leighton turns toward Kathy, giving her a high-five. Kathy was spot on in her prediction of what would happen on the track. Most of all, Provost Leighton is amazed at Kathy's accuracy. Kathy, however, left out one thing. Mitchell is obviously ticked off that he lost the race to not only Braden, but to Akinmola. Perhaps Mitchell taught Akinmola the race strategy too well.

After the race, when everything calms down, Eddie mentions to Provost Leighton, "that was a really good run. Akinmola even broke four minutes! I'm not sure, but that may have been his first time doing that." Kathy interjects, "Akinmola broke four minutes once before." Provost Leighton asks, "did Akinmola also train under George?" Eddie replies, "yeah. For three years. His family moved from Nigeria when I was a junior. His father picked our high school because of its track and field reputation. His father knew track was important to Adekunle, so he searched for the best track coach around. Last year, he was the number one seed in the State. And, look at him now. He just beat Mitchell."

Provost Leighton asks Eddie, "which of our team members came from your high school?" Eddie replies, "let me think. There's me, Kathy, Mark, Paula, Barbara, Braden, Johnson, Mitchell, Bobby B., Hoffer, Erika, and Akinmola." Eddie asks Kathy, "is that everyone?" Kathy replies, "I think so." Provost Leighton takes no time figuring out that the list of names Eddie mentioned are the ones always taking the gold medals home. Kathy excuses herself, now having to run the mile with the other female sprinters.

Eddie then informs Provost Leighton, "Amber Amy and John Davida sound like they want to run for the University next year. Amber is Mitchell's girlfriend. And, Davida's father moved to the school district so Davida would have the best coaching available." Provost Leighton asks, "how good are they?" Eddie replies, "as far as women go, Amber is number one in the State in the mile. And, Davida is the number two seed in the short sprints this year." Provost Leighton curiously asks, "who's number one?" Eddie replies, "my brother, John. He'll be a senior next year. John won't let Davida beat him. It's kind of like a game with John."

Eddie then mentions, "Tessa would be on the track team, but she got a swimming scholarship." Provost Leighton asks, "but, Tessa ran track in high school under George?" Eddie replies, "yeah. She ran during the indoor track season. She's every bit as fast as Erika is. Erika and Tessa were always competing with each other. It's hard to say who is actually faster. But, Tessa would rather swim."

Provost Leighton, who is no foreigner to track and field, realizes Eddie, Kathy, Mitchell, Braden, and everyone else who came from the Northside High track team, stand on a higher tier, both literally and figuratively. There is no longer any question in Athena Leighton's mind that the one who built that tier is George Frazier. Athena is a bit sad that she has not kept in touch with George Frazier and his wife, Dawn, over the years. But, there is no time like the present to make that change.

With practice now over, the team heads inside, and Eddie has to go to work. Now all alone, Athena walks out onto the track, recalling her years of competition many years ago. Walking around the track down memory lane, Athena realizes the 440-yard oval track looks a lot longer now than it did when she competed.

On the back straightaway, Athena sprints for 50 yards, recalling when George Frazier once told her, "Athena, it's simple. All you have to do is put one foot in front of the other faster than the other girl," words she has never forgotten. That seemed simple enough at the time. Mr. Frazier's wife, Dawn, who first met George at the Olympic tryouts, was the girl who had longer legs than Athena. Dawn ultimately made the Olympic team.

As Athena walks around the back straightaway into the final curve, tears roll down the provost's face. Realizing that she misses dearly what she loved so much many years ago, Athena wonders whether there is a way for her to somehow participate in track and field again at some level. When Athena was reunited with George Frazier during the divisional meet, she realized how happy the high school coach seemed to be. In the past few days, the fruits of George Frazier's coaching abilities have been made clear to Athena.

Athena hears a lot of discussion of Mr. Frazier by his former team members, but not much mention of their current coaches. There is no question in Athena's mind that Eddie, Kathy, and the rest of the team members coached by George Frazier, have something special. Eddie's comment, "only one person wins the race. But, they hand out medals for second and third place," ring through Athena's mind. What Eddie said could not be more accurate. It is that attitude, Athena reasons to herself, which makes Mr. Frazier a good coach.

As she walks toward the finish line, Athena breaks into a sprint, raising her arms over her head as she crosses. As she walks back toward the main part of campus, Athena recalls George Frazier sitting on the track at the Olympic trials after they both failed to qualify. Athena remembers sitting beside George, and asking him, "are you okay, George?" George's response was, "all this work, for nothing. I lost. But, I've given it my best. If I can't win myself, the least I can do is to teach others to win." George Frazier was true to his word. With seven track

athletes running qualifying times for the Olympics, and three athletes who are close to qualifying, he has equipped others to win, even though he did not.

Standing at the finish line to the sprinting track, Athena clearly remembers when she won the gold medal in a divisional meet, also setting the University record. Looking back at the starting line, 100 yards looks a lot longer now than it did back then. Gazing over at the stands, Athena sees the place where her mother was seated during that meet. Athena could hear her mom's cheer over all the cheering of the crowd. Athena breaks into a big smile, just as she did when she crossed the finish line that day.

Walking into her office, Athena Leighton realizes that George Frazier has earned far more than an Olympic gold medal. He has taught athletes how to win, and to win. What Athena does not know is that, over the years, hundreds of gold, silver, and bronze medals were won under George Frazier's coaching. Looking out her window, Athena has a view to the track off in a distance. In retrospect, Athena knows exactly the level of competition she witnessed this morning.

As Athena sits behind her desk staring out her window, the secretary walks in and hands her a piece of paper indicating that Dean Grimsby had called while she was away. Taking the position of provost six years ago, Athena wonders who the idiot was that hired Addison Grimsby before she got here. Provost Leighton looks at the paper, crumples it up, and tosses it into the trash can. Closing the door to her office, the provost chooses to be alone for the remainder of the day.