

Eddie, The Collegiate Sophomore

Chapter Four The Indoor Track Season

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On the first day of practice of the indoor track season, the team meets in the indoor arena, wondering what will be in store for them today. Everyone on the team knows by now of the changes that were made to the coaching staff. To much of the team, however, Mr. Frazier is a black box. Most of the athletes on the team have had some interaction with him last semester, but many of the team members do not know what to expect having Mr. Frazier as their head coach.

Eddie and the tribe are really looking forward to the upcoming track season. The tribe knows exactly what to expect now that Mr. Frazier is the head coach. The team is more prepared than ever and, with the new additions, the team will likely do better than last year. Sitting with the tribe on the bench today is Tessa. By an executive decision made by Provost Leighton earlier this year, Tessa will get to run track during the Winter season.

With Dr. Paxton nowhere to be found and Dr. Braun now retired, Mr. Frazier has a lot of work ahead of him. Coach Herndon, who is part of the school's ROTC program, has stepped down from her coaching position. Coach Herndon only took the position because Dr. Braun was getting up there in years, and needed some help until a suitable replacement for Dr. Jensen could be found. Truth be known, Coach Herndon didn't really want the job. She just took the job for some extra money. After her first year of working with the sprinters, Coach Herndon found that she really likes coaching. But, she did a great job, and everyone knows it. And, over the years, Coach Herndon's efforts were greatly appreciated by all.

Mr. Frazier walks into the arena, joined by Dr. Bonamo and Provost Leighton. Seeing the provost walk in, the team members wonder if there is yet another controversy with the team, such as the one with Eddie's and Mark's locker last year. McCutchen, in particular, is quite worried that he

might again be in some kind of trouble. Silence falls over the arena, as Mr. Frazier officially addresses the team for the first time as their head coach. Team members who have known Mr. Frazier for a long time know exactly what to expect. Others, however, are in the dark.

Mr. Frazier begins his address, “good morning. As you all know, I am George Frazier, and I have been appointed the head coach of this University’s track team.” The team applauds and cheers, making Mr. Frazier feel very welcome. Mr. Frazier continues, “standing next to me is Dr. Bonamo, who will continue to be your field events coach. Standing on my other side is Provost Leighton, who some of you may already know. Provost Leighton will now be coaching this team, along with Dr. Bonamo and myself.” The team cheers, making all the coaches feel welcome. The mystery behind Provost Leighton’s presence today is now revealed, far from the reasons anyone thought.

Mr. Frazier continues, “now, let’s get down to business. I’m going to start with the basics. There are only two events that are run in track. The two races are the 100-yard dash and the 440-yard dash.” Every time Mr. Frazier makes this comment, the athletes can be heard making comments such as, “he’s crazy,” or, “what is he talking about?” Today is no different.

Mr. Frazier explains, “the 220-yard dash is nothing more than a prolonged 100-yard dash. The 40-yard dash is nothing more than a short 100-yard dash. The strategy is the same, which is to run as fast as you possibly can. If you can run one of those races, you can run the others.”

Increasing the energy behind his presentation as he moves along, Mr. Frazier, explaining the distance races, continues, “the 880-yard run, the mile, and any distance race less than two miles is just a 440-yard dash! The last 440 yards is where the race is won or lost! There is only one difference between any of the distance races. That difference is how much of a warm-up you must take before running the last 440 yards!”

Speaking of a few other events, Mr. Frazier explains, “and, if you run the hurdles or the steeplechase, the only difference is a few obstacles are placed in your way! But, they are only obstacles if you let them be obstacles!” Mr. Frazier’s explanation, while simple, makes a lot of sense to the team. Referring to Dr. Paxton, Mr. Frazier then adds, “and, as far as the coaching around here goes, we recently got rid of one of those obstacles. Now, maybe the distance athletes will stand a chance at winning something.” The distance athletes chuckle, easily relating to Mr. Frazier’s innuendo.

Lowering the boom, Mr. Frazier explains, “now that we have an understanding of the two races we will be running, listen up. If any of you are willing to settle for second place, please get up, walk back into the

locker room, clean out your locker and go home.” Clarifying himself, Mr. Frazier raises his voice and says, “I did not say that, if second place is the best you can do, then get up and leave! I intentionally used the word ‘settle’ because once you settle, you’ll lose. When you settle, the problem is not with your body, it is with your mind! If you’re here to win, and I hope that all of you are, then settling and losing should not be an option! We are a team! It should not surprise you to know that your teammates want to win!”

Mr. Frazier continues, “and, if you do come in second place, congratulations! You are the first loser! They give medals for first place, second place, and third place. Where in the world did that come from? Only one person wins the race! If you have ever read the Bible, in the book of First Corinthians, in chapter 9, verse 24, it states, ‘Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you win.’ Make no mistake about it! There is only one winner! I’m going to say that again. There is only one winner! If you walk away with second place, learn something! Work harder, learn from the situation, and figure out what you need to change to do better next time!”

Mr. Frazier gives an example, telling the team, “all of you, I’m sure, know Eddie Bogenskaya. When Eddie was a freshman in high school, Eddie won the silver medal in the 40-yard dash at the State invitational meet. After that, Eddie won the gold medal in the 40-yard dash for the next three years. And, Eddie won the gold medal in the 100-yard dash at the Spring State invitational meet for four consecutive years! But, here’s what you probably don’t know. Eddie put all his gold medals in a box, where he couldn’t see them, except for the one he gave to Kathy. Left out on his dresser was his silver medal, where it served as a constant reminder to work harder. Second place was not acceptable to Eddie! Second place should not be acceptable to you either!”

Provost Leighton is amazed at what she is hearing. She has heard hints and rumors of Mr. Frazier saying such things, which she now hears for herself. Provost Leighton is not only impressed by what Mr. Frazier is saying to his team, but the energy behind what he says. But, Mr. Frazier is not finished, but merely getting warmed up.

Mr. Frazier continues, “for some of you, the reason that you do not win is because of that thing between your ears they call a brain. Someone has programmed you and told you that you can’t win. And, some of you actually believe it!” Mr. Frazier then chuckles, and tells everyone, “if any of you ran against my high school team, that person telling you that you can’t win was probably Mark.” The tribe laughs hysterically, knowing that Mr. Frazier is talking about McCutchen, and perhaps a few others.

After the laughter dies down, Mr. Frazier continues, “you may have heard that you can’t beat Eddie Bogenskaya. You can’t beat Axel Braden. You can’t beat Gary Mitchell. Kathy is the fastest woman in the division. Can any of you hear Braden telling everyone before a race, ‘I’m not so sure about this. I don’t think I can win this time. These guys look faster than me, and they’re going to kick my ass.’ No! You can’t! If you think that way, you will never win! The clock that’s timing you, and the person running next to you is nothing compared to your own mental obstacles!” Mr. Frazier, raising his voice, exclaims, “and, the clock does not care one bit about your reputation, only your performance!”

Mr. Frazier starts citing a few examples, stating, “they said no one can run a mile faster than four minutes. Roger Bannister did not believe that for a minute! They said a man cannot run 100 meters in less than ten seconds. Jim Hines did not believe that for a second! No one thought that the shot-put could ever be thrown farther than 22 meters. That’s a little over 72 feet for those of you who have never heard of the metric system. In 1976, Aleksandr Baryshnikov threw the shot-put using the discus technique, and did exactly what everyone said couldn’t be done! And, talking about technique, in 1968, Richard Fosbury won the gold medal at the Olympics by going over the high jump bar backwards, using the technique now known as the Fosbury Flop. Everyone doubted his technique would be successful. Fosbury had no doubt at all! And, today, nearly everyone is using his technique! What’s stopping you? What’s in your way? Whatever is in your way, if you want to win, you must get rid of it!”

Mr. Frazier then asks the athletes, “I have a question for all of you. Who is the greatest boxer of all time?” Everyone who answers, which is about half the team, replies, “Muhammad Ali.” Mr. Frazier informs the group, “well, maybe he is, and maybe he isn’t. But, I can tell you this. Muhammad Ali has announced to the world that he’s the greatest! Have you ever heard anyone dispute him? No! Anyone who steps into the ring with Muhammad Ali has already been preprogrammed to believe that they will be up against the greatest! And so have all of you! And, if anyone believes Muhammad Ali is the greatest, when they step into the ring with him, at best, that makes them number two! They’ve already lost! When you believe that you are better, faster, and stronger than your opponent, then, and only then, will you win!”

Mr. Frazier then tells the group, “the divisional meet is coming up. Is there any reason why this team can’t walk away with the gold medal in every event? No! There’s not!” Looking around, Mr. Frazier adds, “there’s no reason why we can’t walk away with all the medals! If you find you’re up against someone who has beaten you in the past, do something! Mess with their head! Some psychological warfare just might be the difference between winning and losing!”

Giving the athletes an example, Mr. Frazier instructs them, “when we get to the coliseum for the divisional meet, start a rumor that the structure under the track¹ has termites and it’s weak. Tell them that it may collapse at any moment. Just do something!”

Mark smiles, whispering to Eddie, “I’m going to do that.” Eddie tells Mark, “I’m going to tell them the water in the coliseum tested positive for lead too.” Mr. Frazier, hearing Eddie and Mark laughing and whispering, asks, “okay, you guys. What’s going on over there? I know this has got to be good.” Mark tells Mr. Frazier, “Eddie said he’s going to tell the other teams that the water in the coliseum tested positive for lead.” Mr. Frazier exclaims, “see that? That’s exactly what I’m talking about! If they believe it, that’s their problem! And, by the way, don’t any of you fall for any of that shit! Don’t be the sucker that someone else takes down.”

Changing the subject, Mr. Frazier tells the team, “some of you are here at this University to get a degree in business, communications, exercise science, or some field that you plan to work in when you graduate. What do they teach you in your classrooms? Knowledge and problem solving. That’s about it. And, let me tell you this. None of what they teach you in the classroom will get you anywhere when you graduate!”

Mr. Frazier, now having the attention of the student athletes, Provost Leighton, and Dr. Bonamo, explains, “there are only three degrees offered by any college or university. The three degrees are a degree in memorization, a degree in problem solving, or a degree in the arts. But, many degrees are a combination of the three. A degree in history is nothing more than a degree in memorization. A math degree is no more than a problem solving degree. If you have a math degree, when you graduate, you will be getting a job solving problems using math. And, a degree in music is a degree in the arts. So, you sit in class and take tests for four years. Then, when you’ve passed enough tests, they give you a piece of paper that tells the world that you’ve passed enough tests.” Mr. Frazier then raises his voice, and exclaims, “nothing they teach you at this University will determine whether you succeed when you get out!”

The arena becomes so silent that you can hear a pin drop. Mr. Frazier now has everyone’s attention, including the complete attention of Provost Leighton. Mr. Frazier then tells his team, “I am now going to tell you how to succeed at anything you do. Whether it is on the track, in the classroom, at your job when you graduate, the one principle leading to success is the same!” Provost Leighton, with all of her immense academic knowledge and experience, is at a complete loss as to what Mr. Frazier is

¹ At the time of the storyline, indoor tracks were often banked hardwood tracks.

about to say. So are the athletes, who are about to hear something that they will never hear in a classroom.

Mr. Frazier exclaims, “are you ready to hear it?” Most members of the team exclaim, “yes!” Mr. Frazier pauses, then exclaims, “the one, and only one, attribute that will determine your success at anything you attempt is you must attack the challenge you face with no fear! Did you get that? No fear! And, that is a character attribute of everyone I’ve mentioned today. Roger Bannister. No fear! Jim Hines. No fear! Aleksandr Baryshnikov. No fear! Muhammad Ali. No fear! Richard Fosbury. No fear! And, many of you sitting here today have no fear!” Learning something herself today, Provost Leighton claps her hands, with the entire team following suit.

Provost Leighton quickly realizes the difference between Dr. Braun and Mr. Frazier. Provost Leighton quickly concludes that quadrupling Mr. Frazier’s salary was definitely worth it. Mr. Frazier has more than four times the energy level of Dr. Braun and Dr. Paxton combined. It is hard for anyone not to understand why Eddie, Mitchell, and a few others have made mention that Mr. Frazier is the best coach around. It is now becoming evident to Provost Leighton why.

As Mr. Frazier continues with his address, sitting at the edge of the bleachers is Todd McCutchen, who now realizes the difference between his high school coach, Mr. Ruff, and Mr. Frazier. It is no longer any secret how Northside High delivered blow after blow to Centerville year after year. Compared to Mr. Frazier, Mr. Ruff, the Centerville coach, is about as energetic as a half-dead snail. McCutchen, even though his mind is weak, as Mark puts it, can clearly see where the energy of the Northside track team comes from. McCutchen now feels cheated in a way, missing out on what could have made him the track star that he always wanted to be.

Mr. Frazier announces, “now, some of you men are going to run a mile in just a few minutes, and the rest of you are going to watch.” Mr. Frazier then raises his voice, and asks, “who is my fastest miler here?” Mitchell stands up, and exclaims, “that’s me!” Akinmola, remembering that he once beat Mitchell, stands up, and offering a different opinion, exclaims, “not anymore! I beat you once, and I’ll beat you again, my friend! Do you understand me?” Mr. Frazier exclaims, “that’s it? No one else? Does every other miler here plan to be the first loser?” Stone, and a few others, stand up, taking the challenge. Mr. Frazier instructs the distance team, “I want my milers, and anyone else on the distance team who dares to challenge these guys, to get up off the bleachers, and warm up. And, leave your fear on the bench!”

While the runners warm up, Mr. Frazier continues, “now we’re going to see who’s the fastest miler here. Some of you might just be surprised.”

Mr. Frazier then exclaims, “Braden! Why are you sitting on the bleachers?” Braden replies, “you asked for the milers.” Mr. Frazier tells Braden, “get off your ass and warm up!” Mr. Frazier chuckles, then informs Braden, “but, don’t worry. You won’t have to run the mile in competition. I know you don’t like running distance. You can take it easy during this race if you want.” Mr. Frazier smiles, and tells the rest of the team, “now, we’re going to see what happens. This is going to be interesting.”

Once the runners are warmed up, Mr. Frazier announces, “Axel Braden, please come up here.” As he is taping two one-hundred dollar bills to Braden’s back, Mr. Frazier announces to the athletes in this race, “I am taping two-hundred dollars² to Braden’s back. Your job is to catch him, and grab the bills! If you grab them, you can keep them! If you can’t catch Braden and grab the bills, then Braden gets to keep them! But, here’s the catch. You are only eligible to grab the bills during the last quarter of a mile. Am I clear?” The distance athletes indicate that they all understand, and are now much more motivated than they were a few minutes ago.

Mr. Frazier asks Braden, “now, I know you don’t like running distance, but, are you okay with this?” Braden exclaims in a military tone, “yes, sir!” Braden’s energetic tone clearly indicates that he wants the two-hundred dollars. The tribe, seeing this drill a few times before, knows that this is going to be an awesome race.

On the bench, Kathy tells Eddie, “it looks like Braden is going to be two-hundred dollars richer.” Eddie replies, “all four of them are going to break four minutes.” The tribe is no longer sitting back and relaxed on the bleachers. At the edge of their seat, they are all discussing among themselves who will win. Before the race begins, the consensus is that Braden will win, for they all remember well when Braden won the mile last Spring. But, with two-hundred dollars at stake, the money could be a game changer.

Mr. Frazier tells the Timekeepers, “please get me very accurate times on everyone. And, get everyone’s quarter mile split times, and please report them immediately to Mrs. Owens.” Noticing that there are not enough Timekeepers to record everyone’s composite and split times, Mr. Frazier asks Kathy and Paula to assist timing this race, which they are glad to do.

While the distance athletes are getting warmed up, Mr. Frazier informs the entire team, “Kathy has been my team statistician at the high school

² At the time of the race, \$200.00 is the equivalent of \$800.00 on or near the date of this publication.

for many years. Kathy knows the statistics of everyone on the high school team and the athletes going to State better than anyone. She even knows the statistics of every one of you!"

Turning toward the seasoned milers, Mr. Frazier exclaims, "and Gary Mitchell, who expects to win this race, understands exactly how each one of you on the track runs. He knows more about how you run than you do yourself!" Provost Leighton has heard that Mitchell understands how her son, Darryl Stone, runs better than Stone does. Now, she hears it directly from Mr. Frazier. Mr. Frazier then exclaims, "to win, you must know your competition! So, start paying close attention!"

Mr. Frazier then tells the runners in competition for the two-hundred dollars, "okay, everyone line up. And, Braden gets the inside position. The rest of you, you're on your own." Mr. Frazier is watching carefully to see who fights for the better inside positions. Once they are in position, the Starter announces, "set." The buzzer sounds, and Braden immediately takes the lead, setting the pace for the two-hundred dollar mile.

During the first quarter mile, Braden takes the lead, knowing that, if he burns out the other runners, he is two-hundred dollars richer. Provost Leighton mentions to Mr. Frazier, "in all my days, George, I can't say I've seen a training exercise like this." Mr. Frazier explains, "I don't know who is going to win, but I can tell you this. They're all going to run their best time so far this year. Now, we'll finally see what they can really do." Provost Leighton clearly sees that this training exercise involves the mind just as much as the physical body.

During the second quarter mile, everyone manages to keep pace with Braden, who is running a faster pace than the distance athletes are accustomed to. The runners are well aware that, if they fall too far behind, they will be out of contention for the two-hundred dollars. Right behind Braden is Stone, who is followed by Mitchell and Akinmola. A freshman, Julius Bailey, is slowly dropping behind, but nevertheless running a good time. And, McCutchen, now part of the distance team, is in last place.

As the second lap comes to completion, Mrs. Owens informs Mr. Frazier, "that was the fastest first quarter mile this year for all the milers." During the third lap, Mitchell, Stone, and Akinmola are still right behind Braden. Braden is getting concerned for the simple reason that two-hundred dollars are at stake. Mitchell, however, knows that Braden will begin sprinting somewhere just past the three-quarter mile mark. It's not hard for Akinmola or Stone to figure that out either. They've seen it happen before, and expect that it will happen again.

Provost Leighton is somewhat worried because she had heard multiple times that, if Darryl runs too fast during the first quarter mile, he usually does not run a good race. Expressing her concern to Mr. Frazier, Provost Leighton remarks, "they tell me that Darryl's time suffers if he runs the first lap too fast." Mr. Frazier laughs, and replies, "that depends on how much he wants the two-hundred dollars. If I'm not mistaken, he will run a superb fourth quarter mile." As they approach the three-quarter mile mark, Braden, along with a few others, laps McCutchen. Mr. Frazier tells Provost Leighton, "now, we're really going to see what Darryl has on his last lap!"

As expected, just past the three-quarter mile mark, Braden starts sprinting and begins to slowly separate himself from the pack. Mitchell, Akinmola, and Stone follow suit, and chase down Braden. Braden steps up his pace, giving it all he has, and then some. With 220 yards remaining, everyone's eyes are glued on the finish. As they close in on the finish line, Braden still has a few yards over the seasoned distance men. With 110 yards to go, Braden begins to slow down, but not by intention. Mitchell, Stone, and Akinmola begin slowly gaining on Braden. A few yards from the finish, the three distance men fight for position to grab one of the Benjamin Franklins on Braden's shirt. At the finish, Braden edges out the others by a few feet, profiting two-hundred dollars from today's monumental effort.

Mr. Frazier, obviously impatient, exclaims, "what were their times? Did everyone see that? What's on the clock? What do we got?" Mr. Frazier is used to instant answers. At the University, however, the times are compiled and recorded before they are announced. Braden walks off his run, not caring in the least about his time. Braden takes both one-hundred dollar bills off of his shirt, and heads to the locker room to place them safely away in his locker, graciously thanking Mr. Frazier on the way.

Returning just in time to hear the results, Braden hears Mr. Frazier exclaim, "Axel Braden ran the mile in 3:54.8! Can you believe it? Mitchell, 3:55.1. Stone, 3:55.3. Akinmola, 3:55.6. Bailey, 4:12.5. Can everyone believe it? Four of you just broke Roger Bannister's record from 1954! Four of you just ran qualifying times for the Olympic trials!" The runners are all happy hearing their times, but very unhappy that they were not able to grab the two-hundred dollars from Braden's back. After announcing the other runner's times, Mr. Frazier tells everyone to have a seat on the bleachers, as he and Provost Leighton review the performance statistics.

Grinning ear to ear, Mr. Frazier announces, "Stone, 3:55.3. That's your personal record! And, your last quarter mile was your fastest quarter mile of all four of your laps. What's stopping you? Two-hundred dollars is

nothing compared to the endorsement contracts you'll receive if you win an Olympic gold medal someday!"

Moving on, Mr. Frazier announces, "Mitchell, that was a great run! Last year, I understand you ran a 3:54.51. If you had drafted off of Stone instead of chasing down Braden for the first two or three laps, you might be two-hundred dollars richer right now! Focus on running your own race next time!"

Moving on to Akinmola, Mr. Frazier announces, "Akinmola, you didn't think you can run that fast, did you? What was stopping you before? Two-hundred dollars?"

Addressing the newcomer to the team, Mr. Frazier exclaims, "Bailey, you ran a 4:12.5! When we broke for Christmas break, you were running a 4:30. I wonder what happened." What happened was not only the two-hundred dollars taped to Braden's back. Mr. Frazier's training protocols are also due much credit.

Mr. Frazier concludes, "for the next few weeks, and maybe longer, I am suspending all distance training. I don't know what Paxton was doing, but it wasn't working. The problem with our distance team is lack of speed, not endurance. That is exactly why Braden beat every single one of you! The distance team will now be working with the sprinters." The team is now waiting for an explanation, which is coming. But, before Mr. Frazier gives an explanation to his team, Mr. Frazier takes a moment to review each runner's recent statistics on Mrs. Owens clipboard.

Addressing the distance team, Mr. Frazier continues, "according to the past year's statistics, Axel Braden's fastest quarter-mile time is 44.93 seconds. For the rest of you milers, your best quarter-mile time is in the mid to lower 50-second range, except for Mitchell. Endurance is not your problem. Top end is your problem! How are you going to run a 45-second quarter mile if you can only deliver a 54-second quarter mile? You can't! How are you going to deliver a 55-second quarter mile during the last lap of the mile if 55 seconds is your best quarter mile time? You can't! So, if you expect to win, you need to get your quarter-mile time below 50 seconds."

Mr. Frazier, delivering evidence of his claim, expounds, "now, let me say this. Eric Johnson started off as a sprinter many years ago. He started running distance when he met Barbara Wyngate, who many of you know. I can put Johnson in just about any race and expect him to place! Everyone here probably knows that by now! That's because Johnson can run the quarter mile in 46 seconds."

Mr. Frazier grins, and tells the distance team, “but, don’t think you’re getting out of your endurance training. You’ll be doing that on your own in the evenings, between classes, and on the weekends. If you want to win, that’s the price you’re going to have to pay. Now, let’s all get to work running the interval training drill. And remember, until further notice, everyone is now a sprinter!”

As the runners get moving on their drills, Provost Leighton tells Mr. Frazier, “George, I’ve only been here a half hour, and can tell you’ve already made a big difference.” Mr. Frazier explains, “I’m just doing what I’ve done for years. They’re the ones doing the work.”

Being new to coaching, Provost Leighton asks, “so, what am I doing?” Mr. Frazier replies, “after they finish this drill, we’ll move on to practicing relay handoffs. Most of the freshmen are new to the technique, so they’ll need some instruction and a lot of practice.”

Provost Leighton inquires, “what technique are you using?” Mr. Frazier replies, “a nonvisual-nonverbal exchange, with an up sweep delivery. And, the baton never changes hands. It’s a bit smoother transition between runners of different heights. With the up sweep delivery, the runner delivering the baton doesn’t have to significantly alter their arm movement during the transition. And, the runner receiving the baton doesn’t have to reposition the baton in their hands.” Provost Leighton smiles, as she knows the technique well.

After the team is worn out from the interval training drill, Mr. Frazier moves on to practicing relay handoffs. Everyone is familiar with the drill, and quickly lines up and gets ready. The drill begins, as Mr. Frazier explains the procedure to his new coach. Understanding exactly what Mr. Frazier is trying to accomplish, Provost Leighton is quick to catch on.

As the drill is underway, Mr. Frazier tells Provost Leighton, “watch this. Kathy is about to hand off to Erika.” As Kathy approaches, the handoff is the most seamless transition anyone could imagine. Provost Leighton comments, “that was really smooth.” Mr. Frazier explains, “what I’m looking for now are those who need more help with the technique. For those who need some additional work, after the divisional meet, we’ll arrange an extra half day each week for them to practice their handoffs. They’ve got to get this right. A lot of times the handoff is the difference between the gold medal and the silver medal.”

Watching an exchange, Provost Leighton asks Mr. Frazier, “who was that who just delivered the baton?” Mr. Frazier replies, “that’s Karen Corey. She’s a freshman on full scholarship.” Provost Leighton comments, “I can see her problem.” Mr. Frazier asks, “what did you see?” Provost Leighton explains, “her palm was facing down when she handed

off. Her palm should have been facing to the right to get the up sweep motion correct. And, if I am correct, she's probably left-handed." Mr. Frazier tells Provost Leighton, "go ahead and pull her aside and see if you can help her." Then, pointing out Amanda Drake, Mr. Frazier tells Provost Leighton, "and, when you're done with Karen, pull Amanda Drake aside, and explain the technique to her as well. She needs a little work."

Provost Leighton calls Karen aside, and explains the technique to her. Karen comments, "in my high school, we were always watching the other runner when we handed off." Provost Leighton explains, "with the technique we use here, you'll run much faster times. There's no way you can be running your fastest if you're looking behind you." Provost Leighton asks, "by the way, are you left-handed?" Karen answers, "yeah, how did you know?" Provost Leighton replies, "I saw it in your handoff." Provost Leighton and Karen practice the technique a few times. With a little extra attention, Karen gets the technique perfected. Karen gets back into the queue, ready to follow through with what she just learned.

Mr. Frazier and Provost Leighton watch, as the team continues the drill. Karen is up to receive the baton, as Provost Leighton watches closely. Provost Leighton tells Mr. Frazier, "here she goes. Oh, and she is left-handed." Mr. Frazier mentions, "we'll just use that to our advantage, if we can." Karen receives the baton, sprinting 110 yards to the next transition zone. Handing off the baton, Karen's technique is a lot smoother. Karen looks over at Provost Leighton, who smiles and gives her the thumbs up. Provost Leighton then pulls Amanda Drake aside, helping her with the technique.

With the handoff technique the University team uses, the baton never switches hands while the runner is running. Under the right circumstances, a left-handed runner can be a slight advantage in a relay race. Over time, however, everyone is expected to be equally proficient handing off and receiving either left-handed or right-handed.

When practice is over, Provost Leighton becomes aware that the team is running like a well-oiled machine. Darryl Stone ran the fastest mile of his life. Braden is two-hundred dollars richer. Akinmola didn't know he can run so fast. Karen's and Amanda's handoff technique has improved. And, of most importance, the team, after hearing Mr. Frazier's introductory address, is much more motivated. The team heads to the locker rooms, more convinced than ever that they'll win, and win big, in the upcoming divisional meet.

Outside of track, having built seven Dune Buggies for a few other people, Eddie finally gets around to putting the finishing touches on his own Dune Buggy. Now that it is completed, Eddie decides to drive his Dune Buggy to practice one day, right before the divisional meet. Since

the meet will be on this upcoming Saturday, the workouts on Thursday and Friday will be light.

Driving onto campus, Eddie parks his Dune Buggy in his usual spot along with the rest of the tribe. Bobby B., driving up right behind Eddie, yells out, “so, you finally built one for yourself!” Eddie replies, “yeah. Today is its first day on the road.” Except for the wheel alignment, perhaps, which Eddie did earlier in the week. Bobby B. comments, “it’s gold!” Eddie replies, “yeah! Metallic gold, to match all my medals. And, the engine is a little different.” Bobby B. checks out Eddie’s Dune Buggy, complimenting Eddie on his fine work. Kathy then drives up in her Porsche 914, and they all head in together.

After they get dressed for practice, the tribe takes their usual seat on the bleachers. Bobby B. asks Eddie, “so, you were saying your engine is different?” Eddie replies, “yeah. I got the engine out of a Porsche 930. The engine is a 3.3-liter turbocharged engine, and it has 300 horsepower.” Now having the attention of the tribe, Eddie adds, “I put in the bigger engine because I welded in a class three trailer hitch, for towing stuff. And, I reinforced the frame, so I had to add 50 pounds to the counterbalance weight.”

Offering his opinion, Mark adds, “he built his Dune Buggy for towing stuff so he doesn’t have to call me anymore.” Eddie laughs, and replies, “yeah, that’s it, bro. Except for the fact that I don’t have a trailer, so I’ll still have to call you anyway.” Mark replies, “no, you don’t. The trailer is in our storage yard. Just use it whenever you want.” Eddie gives Mark a fist bump, and tells him, “thanks, bro. Is there anything you need towed?” Seeing McCutchen walking in, Mark gestures with his head toward McCutchen, and replies, “yeah. Tow McCutchen to the auto crusher.” Eddie catches the drift, laughs, and replies, “I bet he’ll crunch instead of going thud like Mr. Crum.”

Mr. Frazier, Dr. Bonamo, and Provost Leighton walk in, and the athletes standing around take a seat on the bleachers. Mr. Frazier opens by saying, “this Saturday is the divisional meet. Every single one of you are ready! Today, I want you to take a moment and think about where you personally need some work. We will then break into groups. You will join the group who needs work in the same area as you. That group will be your training partners for today.” Giving the athletes some latitude regarding their workouts today surprises the team. Mr. Frazier’s reasoning is that the athletes have a very good idea where they may need some improvement.

Giving some suggestions, Mr. Frazier announces, “if you feel you need to work on your relay handoffs, please meet in lane one of the main track. If you need to work on your start out of the blocks, please meet at the

starting blocks on the sprinting track. If you are unsure of your block settings, please speak with myself, Coach Leighton, Kathy, or Paula. If you want to practice drafting off your opponent, or teammate, please do that on the outside lane of the track. But, remember. The meet is in two days. So, please do not deplete your carbohydrate levels! And, if you think you need work in another area, meet on the right side of the bleachers and discuss it.” Mr. Frazier blows his whistle, and tells the group to get working.

Kathy asks the tribe, “so, what are we going to work on?” Mark replies, “how about thinking of more ways to mess with the competition.” Eddie asks Mark, “what? Not ways to mess with McCrutchen?” Mark replies, “I wonder what Mr. Frazier would say if I just sat back on the bleachers and thought about ways to mess with people.” Paula comments, “maybe we all can do that.” Knowing that Mark’s suggestion is not going to fly, Eddie then mentions, “I think I want to work on my starts.” Mark agrees, telling Eddie, “yeah, we can discuss messing with people at the starting line.”

The sprinters in the tribe decide to join Eddie, and head to the starting line on the sprinting track. Mitchell, Akinmola, and Stone decide to practice drafting and strategy, and are joined by most of the distance team. Bobby B. decides to toss the shot-put along with Fabio Cinquegrana and Pete Mendenhall, rather than hitting the weight room today. And, the freshmen Karen and Amanda work on perfecting their handoff techniques along with a few others.

At the starting line, many of the other sprinters join the tribe. Included among them is McCutchen, who likely showed up at the blocks to irritate someone in the tribe. Eddie, Mark, Braden, and Davida start by having a competition to see who can get out of the blocks the fastest. Kathy, Paula, Erika, and Tessa will be the judges, as they will be up next. Mr. Frazier and Provost Leighton join the sprinters first, and will rotate through the groups.

The guys get in the blocks, and the Starter announces, “on your marks.” The judges watch intently, as the Starter announces, “set.” The buzzer sounds, and the four sprinters leave the blocks with lightning speed. After sprinting for ten yards, they return to the starting line. The consensus among the four judges is that Eddie was the fastest out of the blocks, and Braden was out of the blocks last. The chief ass kicker was not too happy to hear that he was the last one out of the blocks.

After seeing the start, Mr. Frazier yells out, “hold up! Hold up!” Mr. Frazier inverts the block settings for Braden’s lane, having Braden start with his left foot in front instead of his right. Mr. Frazier tells the group to get back in the blocks, and try it again. The four guys get in the

blocks, and the Starter again announces, “on your marks,” followed by, “set.” The buzzer sounds, and the four sprinters again leave the blocks, sprinting for ten yards. Again, the consensus is that Eddie is out of the blocks first, but Braden is no longer noticeably the last one out.

Braden asks, “was I last this time?” Mr. Frazier replies, “no. You were out faster. That’s a tenth or two off your time!” Braden exclaims, “that’s why they’ve all been beating me in the 40! Watch out! The chief ass kicker is now gonna be faster than ever!” Braden has just learned that, by reversing his leg positions in the blocks, he is out of the blocks faster. But, the story does not end there.

Mr. Frazier continues, explaining to the sprinters, “there are two things that are important in the start. The first is getting out of the blocks as fast as possible. The second is getting up to your top speed as fast as possible. Before we make that change in competition though, we need to get some times on Braden.” Mr. Frazier then tells Braden, “take a short rest, and we’ll do that in a few minutes.” The time to the finish line is the real, and only, issue. Mr. Frazier will make the final determination of Braden’s optimal block settings with his stopwatch.

A few of the other sprinters attempt the drill. Mr. Frazier notices that a few of the sprinters do not appear to be setting the blocks properly. Mr. Frazier pulls Kathy aside, asking her, “do you mind explaining to the group how the blocks are set? Some of the freshmen apparently have never learned.” Kathy cheerfully replies, “sure, no problem.” Kathy has done this for Mr. Frazier for seven years at the high school. No one explains the procedure better than Kathy. Truth be told, Kathy really enjoys teaching anything that has to do with track and field.

Mr. Frazier tells the group, “okay, everybody listen up. Some of you are not setting the blocks optimally. Kathy is going to explain how to properly set the blocks.” Kathy tells Eddie, “Eddie, please come up here.” Kathy announces to the group, “I am going to use Eddie as an example.” The group stands around the starting line, with some of them about to learn something new.

Using Eddie as an example, Kathy explains to the group, “the position of the front starting block should be one-and-a-half to two times the length of your shoe from the starting line. The position of the rear block depends on the height of the runner, which is typically going to be two-and-one-half feet to three feet from the starting line.” Kathy initially positions Eddie in the blocks using Eddie’s block settings.

Kathy further explains, “the front leg should be bent to 90 degrees at your knee, and the back leg should be at 120 degrees when you are in the ‘set’ position.” Kathy then instructs Eddie, “Eddie, please now get into the

'set' position." Eddie gets into the "set" position, as Kathy tells the group, "notice that Eddie's front leg is bent at 90 degrees and his back leg is bent at 120 degrees. If they were not at the proper angle, I would make adjustments to the blocks until the angles are correct."

As Kathy is explaining how to properly set the blocks, McCutchen is having a vivid flashback to his sophomore year in high school. McCutchen recalls Mark explaining to Kathy, Paula, and Tessa what the starting blocks are used for right before the first four-way meet of the year. McCutchen thinks back to when the girls fumbled with the blocks, tripping over themselves when they began to run, as if it were their first time running. McCutchen clearly recalls Mark shrugging his shoulders as he was commenting on the girl's abilities, telling McCutchen, "what can I say?" Getting angrier by the minute, McCutchen clearly sees how he, and his high school team, were thrown under the bus by Mark and the rest of the former Northside sprinters standing around.

Kathy continues, explaining to the group, "the last thing that we want to make sure of is that Eddie's hands are three inches in front of his shoulders and three inches outside of his shoulders, which they are. And, optimally, his waist should be bent to 45 degrees, which it is. And, please do not forget to have your hands behind the starting line." Having done this for years, Eddie's hands are in the correct position. Finishing up, Kathy tells the group, "once you've found your optimal position, look at the blocks, and memorize your block settings."

Mr. Frazier tells the group, "okay. We're taking a short break from the drill and everyone is going to find their optimal block settings." Kathy and Paula, along with Mr. Frazier and Provost Leighton, work together, as the sprinters get into the blocks, one by one. Some of the runners already know their settings, and are reassured that they are correct. Others never learned how to properly set the blocks, and learn something new today. And McCutchen, as angry as he can be, realizes that the block settings he has been using are not even remotely correct.

Mr. Frazier moves on to the group working on their handoffs, as Provost Leighton continues to work with the sprinters. Provost Leighton gets into the blocks a few times herself, delivering starts that are quicker than some of the freshmen, and much faster than McCutchen. The drill moves along well, with everyone feeling more confident about the meet this coming weekend.

After everyone has discovered their optimal block settings, Provost Leighton arranges a few time trials. Braden discovers that, with the revised block settings, he has trimmed a tenth of a second off his 40-yard dash time. Eddie and Mark realize that they are faster now than ever. Kathy and Paula learn that they are sure to take first place in their events

for the fourth consecutive year. McCutchen's deficiencies again become quite evident, as Mark was quick to point out a few times during today's training session.

Mr. Frazier blows his whistle, signaling the end of practice for today. He tells the team to arrive at the arena at 8:00 a.m. tomorrow, instead of 7:00 a.m., and to not dress for practice. Tomorrow, Mr. Frazier will go over the final event assignments. The team heads to the locker rooms, with a renewed confidence going into the divisional meet.

The Friday before the divisional meet, Mr. Frazier has a short team meeting with the athletes. There is, however, no practice today. Some of the athletes arrive a bit early, including the tribe, who congregate at the far end of the bleachers. As they are waiting, Mitchell asks Johnson, "do we know anything more about the event assignments?" Johnson explains, "no, not yet. But, I think Mr. Frazier is going to reassign some of the relay races. He wasn't too happy about some of Dr. Paxton's decisions." Mitchell replies, "good. Some of the relay teams made no sense to me." Johnson agrees, telling Mitchell, "me either." Dr. Paxton's assignments didn't make too much sense to Mr. Frazier, Provost Leighton, or Officer Hayes either.

The bleachers fill up slowly and, as 8:00 a.m. approaches, everyone is present. Mr. Frazier, Dr. Bonamo, and Provost Leighton walk in, and silence falls over the arena. Many of the team members are wondering what Mr. Frazier is going to say today. Those who have been coached by him over the years already know most of what he will say. Everyone, however, figured out that Mr. Frazier's presentation will be a great departure from that of Dr. Braun.

Standing behind a small lectern, Mr. Frazier welcomes the team and tells them good morning. Mr. Frazier then gets down to business. Beginning his address, Mr. Frazier tells the team, "everyone, please remember to bring a water bottle with you tomorrow, just in case a rumor starts that there is lead in the water. And, what was the other rumor?" Eddie yells out, "termites in the track." Mr. Frazier laughs, and continues, "that's right! That was it. Someone please start that rumor too. And, don't any of you fall for anything that you might hear!"

Going over a few administrative details, Mr. Frazier announces, "some of you may already know this, but I need to mention it. The track in the coliseum now utilizes electronic timing devices. The new electronic timers are very similar to the system that is installed in the University's outdoor track. The electronic timers have the ability to measure your speed to one hundredth of a second but, for this meet, they will only be timing you to the tenths of a second. This is because the electronic timers are new, and they will be verifying the times against the

Timekeepers, who will be using stopwatches. Now, here's the problem. There are electronic sensors in the starting blocks that will detect any false start! Do not attempt to anticipate the gun! You will be caught!" This is not good news to Eddie, who is the master of anticipating the gun.

Getting to what the athletes are waiting to hear, Mr. Frazier then announces, "some of the event assignments have been revised. The new assignments are based upon your performance over the last few weeks, your handoff abilities, and your mental fitness and ability to compete in a particular event. Provost Leighton and I have worked hard over the last few days refining these assignments. Another reason we have changed some of your event assignments is because I want to bring home the bulk of the gold medals." Raising his voice, Mr. Frazier asks, "is there any reason why we cannot take home the majority of the gold medals?" In unison, many of the team members exclaim, "no!" Mr. Frazier smiles and responds, telling the team, "I didn't think so."

After a few more announcements, Mr. Frazier begins assigning the events, proclaiming, "first, the men's events. In the 40-yard dash, Eddie, Mark and Hoffer. In the 220-yard dash, Eddie, Mark, and Hoffer. In the 440-yard dash, Braden, Davida, and Bull. In the 880-yard run, Johnson, Stone, and Mitchell."

As Mr. Frazier continues announcing the event assignments, Eddie whispers to Mark, "I wonder what he's going to do with McCrutchen." Mark whispers back, "nothing. He's benched." Eddie whispers, "Dean Grimsby said he wants McCrutchen in at least two events." Mark reminds Eddie, "Mr. Frazier kicked Dean Grimsby out of the arena. I don't think he cares what Dean Grimsby wants." Eddie replies, "you might be right about that." Eddie and Mark whisper back and forth, as they are carefully listening for their name.

As they again focus their attention on Mr. Frazier, who is finishing up announcing the men's assignments, Mark and Eddie hear, "in the 4 by 440 relay, Eddie, Mark, Johnson, and Braden. And, that 4 by 440 relay team has never lost a race! In the 4 by 880 relay, Mitchell, Stone, Akinmola, and Johnson. In the mile medley relay, Eddie, Davida, Braden, and Johnson. Now, for the women's events." Hearing the announcements, Mitchell gives Johnson a high-five. Stone and Akinmola are also very glad to hear that Johnson is assigned to the 4 by 880 relay.

As Mr. Frazier continues speaking, Mark points out, "he left out McCrutchen." Eddie replies, "good." Braden whispers, "his ass ain't no good anyway." Mark points out, "and, look at that. McCrutchen just left. I wonder where he's going." Braden tells Mark, "to take a dump. He's full of shit." Eddie comments, "maybe he's throwing in the towel." Mark replies, "we can only hope." Mr. Frazier continues announcing the

women's events, which reflect a slight departure from those assigned by Dr. Paxton.

As Mr. Frazier finishes up announcing the women's events, McCutchen walks back into the arena and takes a seat. Mark tells Braden, "McCrutchen's back. You were right. He must have taken a dump." Braden replies, "that don't matter none. He's still full of shit." Eddie asks, "has that guy ever won anything?" Mark replies, "not when he was running against us." Johnson adds, "and, not since he's been here either."

Mr. Frazier informs the team, "with these assignments, I believe we can take home the bulk of the gold medals. If Provost Leighton and I are wrong in our assignments, we will make adjustments as the season progresses. We will make changes as necessary because, in the Spring, I want this team to take home all the gold medals!" The team cheers, and is now fired up to win. Mr. Frazier informs the team, "if any of you can think of any improvements that can be made to our assignments, we are always open to your suggestions. Our doors are always open to every one of you."

As Mr. Frazier continues with his address, Dean Grimsby, who snuck into the arena a moment ago, announces, "I have a few suggestions." As Dean Grimsby approaches the lectern, Mr. Frazier sarcastically exclaims, "oh really? And, just what are your suggestions?" Dean Grimsby tells Mr. Frazier, "the administration would prefer that Todd McCutchen run in at least one, preferably two events in the upcoming divisional meet." Ready for some free entertainment, Mr. Frazier replies, "please explain to me why."

Dean Grimsby, seeing Provost Leighton present in the arena, assumes that she is attending Mr. Frazier's meeting for the same reason he is, which is to insure that McCutchen participates in the meet. McCutchen was instructed to call Dean Grimsby immediately if he were removed from his event assignments. While Braden thought that McCutchen had stepped out to take a dump, McCutchen actually stepped out into the hallway to call the dean. Hearing the news that McCutchen has been removed from his events, Dean Grimsby decided to take it upon himself to intervene, and attend Mr. Frazier's meeting.

Dean Grimsby bluntly tells Mr. Frazier, "I would like to defer to Provost Leighton regarding this issue, if I may." Provost Leighton walks up to the lectern and, in a professional administrative tone, tells Dean Grimsby, "thank you, sir, for giving me the floor and bringing this issue to Mr. Frazier's and the team's attention. When an athlete delivers a qualifying time during multiple training sessions and, for whatever reason, is unable to remotely deliver the same competitive performance during an actual

competition, they are considered mentally unfit for competition.” Mark whispers to Eddie, “I think she just said that McCrutchen is retarded.”

Provost Leighton continues, “whether it be the stress of the competition itself, stress induced by the competitors, various fears, or any other reason for that matter, those issues must be addressed and dealt with before the athlete is deemed qualified and fit to compete at any level. Mr. Frazier and I have taken this, and various other factors, into consideration when making the event assignments for the divisional meet this weekend. In order for Mr. Frazier or I to make any further revisions to the event assignments, we will have to be entertained with tangible evidence as to why the change is beneficial to the team as a whole.” Obvious to the team, Dr. Leighton, speaking as an administrator, has quite an eloquent delivery style compared with how she speaks in her role as a track coach.

Dean Grimsby, not knowing what to make of what he is hearing, asks, “am I hearing correctly that you participated in making these assignments?” Provost Leighton informs Dean Grimsby, “yes, sir. That is correct.” Dean Grimsby asks, “and, may I ask why?” Provost Leighton replies, “I am now the assistant coach of the track team. I guess you didn’t get the memo.” The team cheers for Provost Leighton, for whom they have a very high regard.

As the cheering dies down, Dean Grimsby asks Provost Leighton, “when did this come about?” Provost Leighton answers, “two weeks ago. And, for the record, you weren’t on the distribution list to get the memo. With all due respect, sir, athletics at this University is not within your jurisdiction. While I am standing here in the capacity as assistant coach, I report directly to Mr. Frazier, who reports directly to Dr. Karakova. You, sir, are not in the chain of command. If you have a complaint, please feel free to discuss your issue with Dr. Karakova.” There is not much Dean Grimsby can say. Dean Grimsby reports directly to Provost Leighton, and which athlete runs in which event is none of his business. And, Dr. Karakova will probably tell Dean Grimsby to take a hike or jump in a lake.

Knowing Dean Grimsby’s presence can lead to nothing constructive, Mr. Frazier exclaims, “Grimsby, get out of my arena! I’m sure there are some overdue library books or students cutting class that need your attention!” Laughter emanates from where the tribe is sitting, especially from Eddie, reminiscent of how Mr. Zunde often dealt with Mr. Crum. Even Provost Leighton laughs at Mr. Frazier’s remark. Dean Grimsby, a bit unnerved, tells Mr. Frazier, “please show a little respect, coach. You can’t talk to me that way!” From the bleachers, a voice is heard, exclaiming, “oh yes, he can!” Dean Grimsby asks, “who said that?” Eddie stands up and proudly answers, “I did, junior.” Many of the athletes on the bench clap, unnerving the dean even more.

Dean Grimsby tells Eddie, “I want to see you in my office right after this meeting!” Eddie, playing games with the dean, replies, “hey, junior. We had a deal, and you broke it. Do you remember the words, ‘if you would like to rejoin the track team, I can assure you that Todd and Steve won’t ever be back.’ Those were your words. If you can’t recall saying that, maybe you can recall that you were supposed to drag my training sled for 440 yards, and you couldn’t even drag it 100 yards! That’s because your fat ass is out of shape. And, now that I’m thinking about it, if I remember correctly, I forgot to kick the shit out of McCrutchen. I think I’ll do that right now.”

Braden exclaims, “McCrutchen was overdue for an ass kicking anyway!” Eddie stands up, and walks slowly toward McCrutchen. McCrutchen also stands up, and runs out of the arena. Mark exclaims, “wow! I’ve never seen McCrutchen run so fast.” The tribe laughs at Mark’s comment, as Eddie returns to his seat.

Again, remembering some of Mr. Zunde’s tactics, Mr. Frazier tells Dean Grimsby, “Grimsby, you are full of more shit than an overfed elephant. Now, get your pencil pushing ass out of my arena. Otherwise, I’ll have my team carry you out!” Provost Leighton turns away from Dean Grimsby, trying to conceal her laughter. The team, however, sees the provost laughing hysterically. Braden stands up and, in a military tone, asks Mr. Frazier, “would you like for me to remove him, sir?” Dean Grimsby, knowing that Braden is a campus police officer, decides to leave on his own. The dean clearly knows he will get absolutely nowhere with this group today.

Mr. Frazier tells the team, “now that we’ve gotten rid of that problem, maybe I can finish. Now, where was I. Oh, yeah. As Provost Leighton said very clearly, many of the assignments were based, in part, on your mental fitness to compete. What you have just witnessed in the last ten minutes demonstrates that a certain person is mentally unfit to compete.” Braden comments, “yeah. McCrutchen should have stayed around for his own ass kicking.” Mr. Frazier pauses and laughs at Braden’s remark, essentially telling the team that it’s okay to be yourself.

Mr. Frazier continues, “when you get out on that track tomorrow, I want you to tell yourself, and believe, that you are the greatest! And, remember this. There is no one, and I repeat, no one in this University better at your event than you are! You are the best! Get out there and perform like it!” The team cheers, and Mr. Frazier adjourns today’s meeting.

After the meeting, when the students have left for class, Provost Leighton tells Mr. Frazier, “I’m so sorry you had to deal with Dean Grimsby. Well, no. Actually I’m not. In a way, that was quite funny.” Mr.

Frazier asks, "what is his problem, anyway?" Provost Leighton replies, "genetics." Mr. Frazier asks, "what does that guy do around here, anyway?" Provost Leighton explains, "he's the Dean of Students, which means he serves as a liaison between college administrators and student organizations, such as the student council, the Panhellenic council, the campus newspaper, radio station, and so on. I inherited him seven years ago when I took the position of provost. And, you were right earlier. He's a pencil pusher. But, he pushes a pencil so I don't have to."

Mr. Frazier asks, "I'm curious. Why does he think that he can tell us how to assign events?" Provost Leighton explains, "Todd McCutchen's father. Wow! They got me saying it now. Todd McCutchen's father donates a lot of money to this University, so he thinks he is entitled to have his son run on the track team. There is no liaison between the alumni association and the athletic department, so Dean Grimsby thinks he can assume that role. If he looked at his title, he might just understand that he is the 'Dean of Students.' The word, 'students' might just give away where is jurisdictional responsibility is. He is not the 'Dean of Alumni.'" Mr. Frazier mentions, "maybe, now he'll stay out of the way." Provost Leighton assures Mr. Frazier, "he won't. But, you apparently have no problem taking care of him."

As they are walking out of the arena, Provost Leighton tells Mr. Frazier, "you know, I'm going to require that Dean Grimsby attend the meet tomorrow. Then, just to irritate him, I'll ask him for his synopsis of the events on Monday." Mr. Frazier replies, "the only thing he'll see is who isn't running." Provost Leighton replies, "you're probably right about that." Mr. Frazier tells Provost Leighton, "I'll guess I'll see you tomorrow morning at the coliseum. Oh, and get a good night's sleep. By the end of the meet, you'll be exhausted." Mr. Frazier heads to his office, and Provost Leighton heads to hers. Neither of them can wait for tomorrow.

Early on Saturday morning, the track team heads over to the coliseum. For those without a vehicle, a bus has been provided to transport them. Since it is very cold outside, Eddie and Kathy take the Porsche 914. Mark and Paula take Mark's Jeep, leaving their Dune Buggy at home. Bobby B. and Braden, however, drive their Dune Buggies, mostly because they have no other choice. Tessa also drives her Dune Buggy today, which is much better than sitting on the back of Hoffer's motorcycle. Today, because of the cold weather, Hoffer is even hitching a ride in Tessa's Dune Buggy. They could have taken the bus but, after the meet, they will all likely land at the pizzeria, and the bus isn't going there.

The tribe hangs around with the team, sitting on the bench, waiting for the meet to begin. Seeing McCutchen walk up, Kathy whispers to Eddie, "I didn't think he'd even bother to show up." Paula comments, "he's up to something. Everyone better watch out." Kathy asks Paula,

“superpowers?” Paula replies, “oh, shit. I think so.” Paula tells the entire tribe to watch McCutchen like a hawk.

Mark tells Eddie, “let’s go spread some rumors.” Mark and Eddie, recruiting Johnson, Braden, and Hoffer, walk around the venue, and head to the water fountain. Mark hangs around, talking with Eddie. After a few minutes, a member of another team, wearing number 832, takes a drink of water. Mark asks number 832, “you haven’t heard?” Number 832 replies, “heard what?” Mark tells him, “the water has lead in it. You shouldn’t drink it. Lead causes brain damage. You might want to tell your teammates.” The guy walks away, and Mark tells the group, “that takes care of team number eight.” Johnson, Braden, and Hoffer walk off to man another water fountain, as Eddie heads off to test the track.

At the curve in the track, Eddie bounces up and down a few times, testing the structural integrity of the track. Catching the attention of two runners, Eddie is asked, “what are you doing?” Eddie replies, “one of the maintenance guys told me that the structure under the track has termites. A couple places feel a little weak. He’s afraid the track might collapse.” One of the runners tests the track himself, and tells Eddie, “I see what you mean.” Seizing the moment, Eddie tells him, “you might want to spread the word.” As he is asked a few more times, Eddie recruits a few more athletes to spread the rumor.

As he is walking back to his bench, Eddie is intercepted by the recruiter who wanted to give Eddie a full scholarship two years ago. The recruiter asks Eddie, “hey! Do you remember me?” Eddie replies, “no.” The recruiter tells Eddie, “I met you at an invitational meet two years ago. I tried to get you to sign up with our university.” Eddie replies, “I still don’t remember you.” The recruiter reminds Eddie, “you told me that you wanted to be a mechanic.” Eddie replies, “and, I am a mechanic. Do you need your car fixed?” The recruiter doesn’t know what to make of Eddie.

Wondering what’s up with Eddie, the recruiter asks, “so, you’re running for another university now?” Eddie replies, “yeah. You guys weren’t in the running. Your university didn’t pay enough.” While the recruiter wants to ask more questions, Eddie tells him, “I got to run. My event, the 40-yard dash, is up first. Come and watch me win.” The recruiter walks away, wondering what kind of deal Eddie struck with his university.

Returning to the bench with his cohorts, Mark tells Mr. Frazier, “don’t drink the water. It has lead in it.” Mr. Frazier laughs, and asks, “you guys really did that?” Mark replies, “yeah. Me, Eddie, Braden, Johnson, and Hoffer. And, Eddie found termites in the track.” Mr. Frazier tells the group, “good job!” Mr. Frazier tells Mark, Eddie, and Hoffer, “you guys are up in about fifteen minutes. You’d better warm up and get ready.”

The meet begins with the men's 40-yard dash. The call is made and, since the heats move along quickly, all of the contestants in this event head to the starting line. Eddie, Mark, and Hoffer walk to the starting line together, with Mark discussing how he will mess with Major Nachlobrocklin. The Starter lines the contestants up according to their heat number, with Eddie, Mark, and Hoffer all in the first heat. Along with them in the first heat is Major Nachlobrocklin, who is starting to get nervous just seeing Mark.

Eddie's heat is called, and he steps up to the blocks along with Mark and Hoffer. Pointing to Nachlobrocklin, Mark tells Hoffer, "that's Colonel Nachlobrocklin. Watch out for him." Overhearing Mark's comment to Hoffer, Nachlobrocklin exclaims, "my name is Major Nachlobrocklin! Get it right. It's Major Nachlobrocklin!" Mark replies, "yeah, that's it. Captain Nachlobrocklin. Got it. I'm sorry. I forgot." Nachlobrocklin exclaims, "I said my name is Major! It's Major! Major Nachlobrocklin!" Eddie whispers to Mark, "he's a little cranky already." Mark replies, "I guess he didn't take his medication." Eddie laughs, as Nachlobrocklin knows they are laughing about him.

The Starter announces, "on your marks," then announces, "set." The buzzer sounds, and the runners are off. Eddie, taking an early lead, can tell Mark is right behind him. In third place is Nachlobrocklin, with Hoffer right behind. At the finish line, Eddie crosses first, winning this heat. He is followed by Mark, Nachlobrocklin, then Hoffer. The runners in fifth and sixth place deliver a reasonably good performance. The runners in seventh and eighth place, however, will not likely make the final. After the race, Eddie, Mark, and Hoffer head back to the team bench, knowing that they are in the final.

After the men are finished with their preliminary heats, the women are up in the 40-yard dash. Kathy and Paula are in the first heat today. Erika joins them this year, but is in a later heat. Kathy has won this event for the last three years. This year, Kathy and Paula have no real competition in this race.

As Kathy and Paula are headed to the starting line, Mark tells Eddie, "I really got to think of a way to mess with Nachlobrocklin. It looks like he's going to beat Hoffer." Eddie replies, "just tick him off. He seems to be a ticking time bomb." Mark replies, "good point. I'm going to do that. I'll have to think about how to do this."

The Starter announces, "on your marks," and the women get into the blocks. The Starter announces, "set," and the runners get in the "set" position. The buzzer sounds, and Kathy and Paula both let out their primal scream as they leave the blocks. Kathy's primal scream startles one of the opponents, causing her to lose a few precious tenths of a

second. At the finish line, with a repeat performance of the last few years, Kathy crosses the finish line first, with Paula finishing second, right behind her. As they head back to the bench, both know they have made the final. Nearing the bench, Kathy and Paula hear another primal scream as another heat begins, which was not Erika's. Paula mentions to Kathy, "it sounds like the Amazon war cry is catching on."

After a few more events, the call is made for the men's 440-yard dash. Up for the University are Braden, Davida, and Bull. Braden is expected to win, but Davida and Bull are not to be underestimated. They have been training harder than ever. This is the event that Braden has been waiting for. Braden, in the first heat, is the clear favorite in this event.

Braden walks up to the blocks and, by now, everyone at the starting line knows who he is. Braden exclaims, "good luck to everyone! Have fun fighting it out for second place!" Braden then starts dancing, exclaiming, "I'm gonna kick your ass, and land it in the grass! This race is all mine, 'cause I got the fastest time! 440 yards, and you're going down hard!" Getting behind the blocks, Braden then exclaims, "okay! Let's get this ass kicking over with!" Bull does not know what to make of Braden, for he's never seen anything like Braden's activities at the starting line before.

The Starter announces, "on your marks," as Braden spins on one foot, jumps over the blocks, and drops right in, ready to go. Braden gives the distinct impression that he has practiced this move many times before. The Starter announces, "set," and the buzzer sounds shortly after. Braden takes off, and is out of the blocks faster now that he is using his new block settings. All eyes are on Braden, who has the potential to break some sort of record whenever he is on the track.

Braden is clearly dominating this race, and everyone in the arena is very aware of it. At the halfway mark, the second place runner is four seconds behind Braden. Coming around the final turn, Braden has no competition in sight. Crossing the finish line with a time of 45.2 seconds, Braden wins his heat, and setting yet another personal indoor record. The crowd cheers, knowing that they have just witnessed a world class performance.

As Braden returns to his bench, Braden is greeted with high-fives, fist bumps, and a special congratulation from Mr. Frazier, who informs Braden that he just set a divisional record. Letting everyone know, Braden exclaims, "ain't no one faster than me! I'm still the chief ass kicker!" Pointing to McCutchen, Braden exclaims, "and, your scrawny little ass was kicked!" Braden receives more high-fives, and fist bumps from the tribe and some of the other team members.

The focus now shifts to the 4 by 880 relay, an event that was surrounded by controversy at the end of the Autumn semester. Mitchell, Stone, Akinmola, and Johnson head to the starting line. McCutchen, who was supposed to run in this event, is sitting on the bench. And, Dr. Paxton, who was supposed to be coaching the distance team, is sitting on Seven Mile Beach in the Cayman Islands. Provost Leighton is very interested in the outcome of this race. She has chosen the members for this relay team, and the order in which they are running today.

Mitchell is on the track, awaiting the signal. The Starter announces, “set,” and Mitchell is focused on not only winning, but to deliver a time worthy of recognition. The four relay team members have realized that they, like the 4 by 440 relay team, have the potential to dominate their event this year. The buzzer sounds, and Mitchell is out to win.

After two laps, used to seeing high school performance levels, Mr. Frazier exclaims, “he’s clocking! What did you clock him at?” Wendy replies, “his 440-yard split was 55 seconds.” Mitchell has left the rest of the field in the dust. During his last quarter mile, Mitchell maintains his pace, as Mr. Frazier and Provost Leighton watch carefully. Approaching the transition zone, Mitchell picks up his pace, and flawlessly delivers the baton to Stone.

Provost Leighton has her own stopwatch running, timing Darryl’s leg. Widening the lead, Stone shows no signs of weakness. Neither does the track, but some runners still think the track has termites. Mr. Frazier exclaims, “he’s clocking too! Where did these guys come from?” Checking the 440-yard split time, Provost Leighton exclaims, “this could be Darryl’s best half mile yet!” Ready to receive the goods, Akinmola gets on the track. Stone delivers the baton, and Akinmola is off to show everyone that he is not the weak link.

Provost Leighton steps away from the team bench for a moment. Wiping a tear of happiness from her eye, the assistant coach can immediately see the results of Mr. Frazier’s training protocols. Her son Darryl’s time of 1:47.6 represents his best half mile run of his life. Provost Leighton has heard from both Mitchell and Eddie that top end, and not endurance, is the issue. When Braden beat all of the milers in their own race, Provost Leighton strongly suspected that the runners top speed is the real issue. Today, she can clearly see that Eddie, Kathy, and Mitchell were all correct. Not surprisingly, that information originally came from Mr. Frazier. Again focusing her attention on the race that she, herself, put together, Provost Leighton watches, as Akinmola delivers the baton to Johnson.

No one in the arena is faster than Johnson in the half mile. And, in a relay race, Johnson gets a running start. After speaking with Mrs. Owens,

Mr. Frazier exclaims, “these guys might just break the divisional record!” Giving Mr. Frazier a bit of encouragement, Braden exclaims, “no. They are gonna break it! Johnson’s got the baton.” All eyes are on Johnson, who crosses the finish line, delivering a composite time of 7:15.8, setting a new divisional record.

When they return to the bench, everyone gives the 4 by 880 relay team a generous supply of high-fives, and offer their congratulations. Stone can immediately tell the difference in his performance after training with Mitchell for a few months. Akinmola, as Mr. Frazier said, didn’t think he can run this fast. With Mitchell and Johnson at their all-time best, it is not surprising that the 4 by 880 relay delivered such an outstanding performance.

The call is made for the 40-yard dash final. Eddie is the top seed, and Mark is number two. Unfortunately, Hoffer, who ran his best in the preliminaries, is the fourth seed. In the final, Eddie, Mark, and Hoffer are up against Major Nachlobrocklin yet again, who had the third best qualifying time of the day. Mark has been doing his best to gain a psychological advantage in this race. Mark’s goal is to distract Nachlobrocklin so that Hoffer can place in this race.

Walking up to the blocks, Mark casually comments to Eddie, “well, it looks like we’re up against Minor Nachlobrocklin again.” Nachlobrocklin, overhearing Mark, immediately becomes unhinged, and exclaims, “that’s Major Nachlobrocklin! That’s my name! Major Nachlobrocklin! And, don’t you ever forget it!” Mark replies, “I’m sorry about that. I was wrong. I got it right now. Your name is Major Nachlocrocklin, not Minor Nachlobrocklin. I’ll remember that from now on.” Nachlobrocklin exclaims, “what did you just call me?” Mark ignores Nachlobrocklin, as Nachlobrocklin becomes even more unhinged. Eddie laughs, as Mark clearly takes the gold medal in messing with heads today.

Nachlobrocklin approaches Mark, and pushes him, exclaiming, “what did you call me?” Mark grins and steps back, as Nachlobrocklin begins chasing Mark. Mark runs in circles, evading Nachlobrocklin’s every move. One of the officials tells Nachlobrocklin, “hey, you! Calm down!” Nachlobrocklin ignores the official, and continues to yell at and chase down Mark. A few more officials come over and try to restore the peace, but to no avail.

With five officials now around, Nachlobrocklin has no choice but to calm down to some degree. The Head Timekeeper asks Mark, since he seems to be quite calm in comparison to Nachlobrocklin, “okay, please tell me what’s going on here.” Mark replies, “I couldn’t remember his name, and I guess I got it wrong when I was talking to Eddie. I wasn’t even

talking to that guy. Then, he started yelling at me and chasing me. His name is hard to pronounce. Just ask him.”

The Head Timekeeper, raising his voice, asks Nachlobrocklin, “why were you chasing him?” Nachlobrocklin, who has become very unhinged, replies, exclaiming, “he’s messing up my name. He was messing it all up!” The Head Timekeeper asks, “okay, so what’s your name?” Nachlobrocklin exclaims, “my name is Major Nachlobrocklin! And, he messed it all up! He’s messing up my name!” Even the Head Timekeeper can see that Nachlobrocklin’s name is quite unusual, and perhaps difficult to pronounce. The Head Timekeeper dares not attempt to pronounce Nachlobrocklin’s name himself, in fear of messing up the pronunciation.

The Head Timekeeper tells Nachlobrocklin, “just calm down, and focus on the race. That’s why you’re here.” Nachlobrocklin tries to calm down as he stands behind the blocks. The Head Timekeeper remains close to the starting line, observing the competitors closely, making sure everyone remains calm. As the competitors get back into position behind the blocks, Nachlobrocklin keeps turning his head, looking at Mark, which is clearly noticed by the officials. Mark, however, completely ignores Nachlobrocklin.

After the officials get back to their positions, the Starter announces, “on your marks.” As the runners get into the blocks, Nachlobrocklin repeatedly looks over at Mark. Mark catches Nachlobrocklin out of the corner of his eye as he is getting into position. Evading any notion of wrongdoing by the officials, Mark whispers, “minor,” and laughs under his breath. Nachlobrocklin steps out of his lane, and pushes Mark, who embellishes a bit, and prat falls into Eddie’s lane. Seeing what Mark is up to, Eddie also falls over.

The Head Timekeeper runs over to break up the instigation started by Nachlobrocklin. Mark, pretending to have trouble standing up, tells the Head Timekeeper, “I’ve had enough of that guy, whatever his name is. If you guys can’t keep him under control, the next time he touches me, I’m going to have to take him out myself.” The Head Timekeeper clearly sees Mark’s point. From the Head Timekeeper’s perspective, Mark was getting positioned in the blocks, Nachlobrocklin was staring at him, and suddenly became aggressive. And, the Head Timekeeper can clearly see that Mark could easily take out Nachlobrocklin with no problem at all.

Seeing what is happening from the bench, Mr. Frazier runs over to the starting line. Attending to Mark, Mr. Frazier asks, “what’s going on here?” Mark and Mr. Frazier walk aside, as Mark explains, “I was talking to Eddie, and I mispronounced that guy’s name and he lost it.” Mr. Frazier asks, “what’s his name?” Mark replies, “Major Nachlobrocklin.” Mr. Frazier asks, “what did you call him?” Mark replies, “Minor Nachlobrocklin.” Mr. Frazier,

knowing exactly what Mark is up to, laughs, and tells Mark, “that was a good one.” Mark explains, “but, I corrected myself, and I called him Major Nachlocrocklin. Then, he kind of got mad.” Mr. Frazier tells Mark, “I can see he’s a little more than just upset. He must have some other problem.” Mark replies, “yeah. I’d say. Me and Eddie keep beating him, and he’s about to lose his scholarship. That’s his problem.”

The Head Timekeeper comes over to Mr. Frazier and Mark, and tells them, “I’m going to have Major Nachlobrocklin, or whatever his name is, removed from this event. But, either way, he left his lane once I started the command sequence. So, he’s technically disqualified.” Mr. Frazier replies, “thank you. I really wasn’t expecting this today. I can’t believe you guys actually have to deal with this kind of crap.” The Head Timekeeper agrees, telling Mr. Frazier, “you and me, both.” In the presence of the Head Timekeeper, Mr. Frazier asks Mark, “are you okay to run?” Mark replies, “yeah, now that what’s his name is gone.” Pointing to Nachlobrocklin, Mark exclaims, “look at him! Now he’s attacking that other guy!”

Nachlobrocklin has really gone off the deep end, and is physically attacking another competitor, who was laughing over the situation at the starting blocks. The Head Timekeeper calls security over, and Nachlobrocklin, who is now totally out of control, is escorted to the security office. On the way out, Nachlobrocklin fights with the security officers, continually yelling, “that guy messed up my name! And, that other guy was laughing at me! They’re all messing up my race!”

Mark comments to the Head Timekeeper, “well, this race didn’t start off exactly as planned.” The Head Timekeeper replies, “there is something seriously wrong with that guy. I’ve been doing this for fifteen years, and never have I seen anything like this.” Mark and Eddie are reasonably assured that they will not have to contend with Nachlobrocklin in a relay race later, not that it would matter. And, Hoffer has been just assured of third place in the 40-yard dash, which was Mark’s ultimate goal.

With one empty lane, the Starter announces, “on your marks.” The Starter announces, “set.” The buzzer sounds, and the runners are off. Eddie and Mark take a slight lead right out of the blocks. After ten yards, Eddie and Mark break away. Hoffer is in third place, with a runner chasing him down. At the finish line, Eddie crosses first, taking the gold medal. Mark, taking second place, finishes right behind Eddie. Hoffer takes third place, sweeping the event for the University. And, Nachlobrocklin will hear about the race when he returns to practice next week, unless he’s been admitted to a sanitarium somewhere.

Once the men’s 40-yard dash final is over, the call is made for the women’s 40-yard dash final. Kathy and Paula have the best qualifying

times and, again, have no real competition in this event. With eight finalists, six women will be battling it out for third place. Hoping to take third place is Erika, who marginally beat out Tessa in this event all season. Tessa, however, will be running in the 220-yard dash along with Kathy and Paula a little later.

The Starter announces, “on your marks,” followed by, “set.” The buzzer sounds, and Kathy’s and Paula’s primal scream echoes through the arena, announcing to everyone who is back for another season. Kathy and Paula quickly procure the lead, but another runner is chasing down Erika. At the finish line, in a repeat performance of last year, Kathy takes first place, and Paula takes second place. Finishing in third place is Erika, who came out of nowhere this year. Kathy, Paula, and Erika have a group hug, and head toward the bench.

On the way to the bench, another contestant asks Erika, “who are you? Where did you come from?” Answering for Erika, Paula tells the girl wearing number 734, “we borrowed her from another university.” Knowing that Paula is up to something, Kathy tells Paula, “we were told not to say anything about that!” Number 734 angrily tells Paula, “I have half a mind to report your team!” Paula replies, “wow! A half a mind. How did you get into college with only a half of a mind?” Number 734 gives Paula a dirty look, screams in frustration, and heads in the other direction.

Kathy asks, “what was that all about?” Paula explains, “that girl, who’s wearing number 734, was one of the babies from last year who was throwing a shit fit that someone was in her lane.” Kathy exclaims, “that’s right!” Paula explains, “it can only throw her off later if we’re up against her again. And, yes, I’ve been learning from Mark.” The women have a good laugh, wondering what kind of train they just wrecked.

With the 40-yard dash finals now over, it’s on to the men’s one-mile run. On the track, in the first heat, are Stone, Mitchell, and Akinmola. This year, any of the three distance stars can win this race. Based upon past statistics, Mitchell is today’s favorite. But, the statistics are from last year. Everyone has been training hard, and Mitchell knows this will be the hardest race of his life. Akinmola now knows how fast he can run, and Stone knows that he is at his best ever.

The buzzer sounds and the one-mile run begins. As expected, Stone sprints the first few yards to secure the leading position. After the first lap, Mitchell attempts to drop in closely behind Stone, but Akinmola will not allow it. Instead, Mitchell drops in behind Akinmola. Stone knows exactly what Mitchell and Akinmola are up to but, this year, he doesn’t care.

During the second quarter mile, the field spreads out, which is expected. Akinmola, in second place, and Mitchell, in third place, have not yet made a move. Also, as expected, during the third quarter mile, Mitchell passes Akinmola, and tries to pass Stone. Akinmola, knowing exactly what Mitchell is up to, drops in behind Mitchell, hoping that Mitchell will make a move and pass Stone. Stone, however, makes Mitchell work hard, not letting him pass.

The final quarter mile is the proverbial fight to the finish. Stone is currently winning this race, and having the best performance of his life. With 220 yards left to go, finding a third wind, Stone slightly widens his lead. Mitchell and Akinmola respond, and give it all they have in a sprint to the finish. With 50 yards to go, Mitchell and Akinmola are gaining on Stone. As the finish draws near, Mitchell does not have enough distance left in the race to pass Stone. The crowd cheers as Stone takes first place. This time, Mitchell takes second place, and Akinmola takes third place. The runner in fourth place crosses the finish line twenty seconds later.

Stone, Mitchell, and Akinmola return to the bench, receiving high-fives, and congratulations from the coaches and their fellow team members. Provost Leighton takes the liberty to announce the times, which are posted on the electronic scoreboard, “Stone, 3:54.2! Mitchell, 3:55.0! And, Akinmola, 3:55.2! Great job, guys! Awesome!”

Today, Stone, Mitchell, and Akinmola all ran the best race of their lives. No one, however, is happier than Provost Leighton. Walking over to Kathy, Provost Leighton tells her, “I just want to thank you so much for all you’ve done for this team.” Kathy asks, “how do you mean?” Provost Leighton explains, “you went through great lengths to help get Eddie back on the team last year. If you gave up, none of us would be standing here right now. And, just look at how the meet is going so far!” Kathy is quite aware that the University’s team is winning nearly everything.

Provost Leighton and Kathy continue to talk, as the call is made for the men’s mile medley relay. Eddie, Davida, Braden, and Johnson head over to the starting line. Provost Leighton continues, and tells Kathy, “I wonder what would have happened if Dean Grimsby wouldn’t drag the training sled last year.” Kathy confidently replies, “first, Eddie wouldn’t have come back, and McCrutchen would have been running in the 4 by 880 relay today. They would have lost. And, Mr. Frazier wouldn’t have taken the job as the coach. And, I’d be eating pizza with Eddie, Mark, and Paula at the pizzeria right now. Oh, and Dr. Paxton would still be fixing the races.” Provost Leighton is amazed at Kathy’s wisdom, knowledge, and ability to understand the future consequences of a minor change in events.

Kathy then mentions, "Eddie really doesn't like Dean Grimsby." Provost Leighton replies, "believe me. I can see that. Eddie was quite disrespectful to Dean Grimsby yesterday during the team meeting and, for the record, I enjoyed every minute of it. It's not everybody who calls the dean 'junior'." Kathy informs Provost Leighton, "trust me, Eddie was just getting warmed up. You haven't seen Eddie get mad yet." Provost Leighton laughs, telling Kathy, "I hope I'm there for the main performance." Provost Leighton pretty much just informed Kathy that Eddie is off limits when it comes to Dean Grimsby's manipulative tactics and tirades.

Focusing their attention back to the track, Kathy mentions, "it looks like the guys are about to win the mile medley relay!" Kathy and Provost Leighton watch, as Johnson approaches the finish line, with the closest competitor 100 yards behind him.

Provost Leighton tells Kathy, "okay, I feel a lot better now." Kathy asks, "about what?" Provost Leighton explains, "I suggested to Mr. Frazier that we put Davida in the mile medley relay, and use Mark in the 4 by 220 relay. Now, I know this is going to work out." Kathy tells Provost Leighton, "Mark is pretty much the best guy on the team at the 220-yard races anyway." Provost Leighton tells Kathy, "speaking of which, your mile medley team is up in a few minutes. You'd better warm up." Kathy goes to warm up, as Provost Leighton walks over to Mr. Frazier, who is talking with a meet official.

Seeing Mr. Frazier in a discussion with the Assistant Meet Clerk, Provost Leighton walks over and asks, "is there a problem?" Mr. Frazier explains, "a report was made that Erika was borrowed from another university." Provost Leighton tells the Assistant Meet Clerk, "that's nonsense." The Assistant Meet Clerk asks, "and, who are you?" Provost Leighton replies, "I'm Dr. Athena Leighton, the provost of the University and the assistant track coach. I can assure you that Erika Gabriel attends our University, and that she has passing grades in all her courses. Please present to me your evidence to the contrary, and I'll entertain it. I'm sure you're aware of the official channels to properly investigate a complaint of this nature. Until then, you do not have a complaint."

At a loss of what to do next, the Assistant Meet Clerk tells Provost Leighton, "one of the competitors said." Before the Assistant Meet Clerk can finish, Provost Leighton interrupts, and tells him, "'one of the competitors said.' I see. I can't wait to hear where this one is going." Realizing that he has no evidence at all, the Assistant Meet Clerk tells the two coaches, "well, a report was made, and I had to check it out."

Provost Leighton informs the Assistant Meet Clerk, "if you have a concern regarding Erika Gabriel's eligibility to compete, please contact

me, and the University will be glad to provide you with her official enrollment status.” The Assistant Meet Clerk replies, “I’ll see what they want to do,” which will likely be nothing. Rumors do not constitute evidence. The Assistant Meet Clerk walks away, hoping not to have to address this issue again.

Provost Leighton asks Mr. Frazier, “what was that all about?” Mr. Frazier replies, “hold on a second.” Mr. Frazier calls Erika over, and asks her, “do you know anything about you supposedly being borrowed from another university?” Erika replies, “yeah. Paula told one of the losers in the 40-yard dash that after the final.” Mr. Frazier laughs, and tells Provost Leighton, “I can’t wait to hear this one.”

Mr. Frazier calls Paula over, who saw Mr. Frazier speaking with a meet official a moment ago. Seeing Mr. Frazier and Provost Leighton standing with Erika, Paula thinks she might be in some sort of trouble. Paula asks, “what’s up?” Mr. Frazier asks, “what’s all this about Erika being borrowed from another university?” Paula replies, “oops. Well, this girl, number 734, is a real bitch. So, she asked Erika, ‘who are you?’ and ‘where did you come from?’ She was really angry, so I told her we borrowed her from another university. I figured I’d mess with her head a little, being that we might be up against her a little later.” Mr. Frazier gives Paula a high-five, telling her, “that was a good one!” Hearing the call for the women’s mile medley relay, Mr. Frazier tells Paula and Erika, “there’s your call. Good luck!”

As the mile medley relay team heads to the starting line, Provost Leighton tells Mr. Frazier, “actually, that was kind of entertaining.” Mr. Frazier tells Provost Leighton, “you’d better get used to it. You wouldn’t believe some of the stuff these guys make up.” Provost Leighton observes, “they really seem to enjoy it.”

As they are watching the final leg of the final heat of the men’s mile medley relay, Provost Leighton asks Mr. Frazier, “tell me one of the better things they’ve come up with.” Mr. Frazier explains, “one of Paula’s best ones was during a meet with Centerville High School. That’s McCrutchin’s high school, by the way. They pulled the same stunt later in the season with Riverdale. Mark and Paula started a rumor that the track was infested with ticks. Both times, the other team was checking their legs for ticks during the whole meet.” Provost Leighton laughs, and tells George, “I recall Eddie telling me about that once. That was hilarious!” Mr. Frazier replies, “but, wait. Right before a race, Paula told the Riverdale runners that a guy from another team had ticks on his balls, and that they could have crawled up his butt.” Laughing hysterically, Provost Leighton exclaims, “in all my life, George, I never thought track and field could be this entertaining!” Mr. Frazier replies, “me either. Trust me. You ain’t seen nothing yet.”

Provost Leighton asks Mr. Frazier, “okay, so now I have to ask. What’s the story behind McCutchen?” Mr. Frazier explains, “you came in at the tail end of that one. The rivalry between Mark and McCutchen goes back to when they were in the seventh grade. Mark and Eddie beat him in every competition. Over the years, Mark has messed with no one more than McCutchen. I really should cut McCutchen from the team because he’s not competitive enough. But, he provides way too much entertainment value to the guys. I shouldn’t really say this, but it will be interesting to watch where this goes next.”

Provost Leighton mentions, “when we were going over the performance statistics to redo Dr. Paxton’s assignments, I noticed McCutchen’s times were extremely erratic, and all over the chart.” Mr. Frazier replies, “I’ve noticed that too. Right now, we really can’t risk putting him on the track.”

Mr. Frazier and Provost Leighton watch, as the buzzer sounds, and Kathy begins the team’s heat in the women’s mile medley relay. Today, the sound of the buzzer is nothing compared to Kathy’s primal scream. Mr. Frazier tells Provost Leighton, “watch these girls. They’re amazing.” Mr. Frazier and Provost Leighton watch, as the women are in search of gold.

The University’s women’s mile medley relay team is the top seed. But, with Amber replacing Barbara this year, they all may just have to work a little harder to retain that position. As Kathy hands off to Paula, Provost Leighton tells Mr. Frazier, “I really wish I were on that track right now.” Knowing that running with this team would be awesome, Mr. Frazier replies, “I know. This is the best group of runners I’ve ever seen in my life.”

Watching as Paula hands off to Erika, Mr. Frazier tells Provost Leighton, “watch this. Paula’s going to hand off to the girl we borrowed from another university.” Provost Leighton laughs, and replies, “it sounds like you’re having fun with this too.” Mr. Frazier explains, “that stunt that Paula pulled earlier is one of the reasons these guys are so good. They’re all having fun out there.”

Erika hands off to Amber, which goes smoothly, and now all eyes are on the track. This is Amber’s first 880-yard run in collegiate competition. Inheriting a significant lead, Amber knows she cannot let her guard down.

Mitchell walks over to reassure Mr. Frazier and Provost Leighton, “don’t worry. Amber is going to win.” Provost Leighton asks, “how do you know?” Mitchell replies, “Amber has a twelve-second lead.” Provost Leighton then asks, “explain your logic, please.” Mitchell explains, “on average, Amber can run this in 2:24, and Barbara in 2:13. If no one has

ever caught Barbara, with a twelve-second lead, they'd have a really hard time catching Amber."

The girl in second place is gaining on Amber, which is obvious to everyone watching. Mr. Frazier is getting concerned, but Mitchell remains calm. With one quarter of a mile left to go, Amber's lead is now only six seconds. But, Amber is a freshman, and is up against a senior. With 220 yards remaining, and a four-second lead, Amber sprints to the finish. Amber crosses first, a mere two seconds ahead of the team taking second place in this heat. But, with a few more heats to be run, everyone will have to wait to see which team takes the gold medal.

Mitchell cheers, confident that Amber, and the mile medley relay team, will place in this event. Provost Leighton tells Mitchell, "I'm quite impressed that you knew that." Mitchell replies, "I had an advantage. I've run with Amber for seven years. I know what she can do."

Provost Leighton asks Mitchell, "what would happen, say, if they were tied halfway through their leg?" Mitchell explains, "Amber would draft off her and, when there is about 50 to 100 yards left, she would give it all she has and sprint to the finish. But, based upon the girl who took second place, if they were tied at 440 yards, Amber probably would not have won this one." Provost Leighton quickly realizes that some members of the University's track team know each other very well.

After a few more events, the call for the 220-yard dash is made. Eddie, Mark, and Hoffer head to the starting line. On the way, Mark tells Eddie and Hoffer, "oh wonderful. Look who's back." Eddie and Hoffer, looking at the starting line, sees Major Nachlobrocklin once again. Apparently, Nachlobrocklin was only removed from the 40-yard dash, and not the meet.

Mark asks Eddie, "how much time do we have?" Eddie replies, "at least five minutes, maybe a little more." Mark looks around, seeing that several officials have their eyes on Nachlobrocklin. That will make it quite difficult for Mark to antagonize Nachlobrocklin before the race.

When they arrive at the starting line, Mark tells Eddie, "watch this." Mark, in lane four, stands in his lane and gives Nachlobrocklin a cold, hard stare. Nachlobrocklin looks at Mark, then looks away. Mark continues staring at Nachlobrocklin out of the corner of his eye, who catches Mark again looking his way. Nachlobrocklin is getting very nervous, and paces from lane to lane. Mark continues to stare at his competitor out of the corner of his eye, tracking Nachlobrocklin's every move. Mark is quite aware that, in this situation, the first person to say anything or react will be the loser of the mind games.

Nachlobrocklin takes the bait and, looking at Mark, exclaims, “what are you looking at?” Mark remains silent, as Nachlobrocklin begins to become even more irate. Nachlobrocklin gets in front of Mark, and again exclaims, “what’s your problem?” Mark tells Eddie, “I think we have a minor problem here,” emphasizing the word “minor”. Eddie looks at Nachlobrocklin, and tells Mark, “a minor problem. I can see that.” Nachlobrocklin exclaims, “are you making fun of me?” Mark tells Eddie, “it’s turning into a major problem,” emphasizing the word “major,” but says nothing to Nachlobrocklin. Lunging at Mark, Nachlobrocklin attempts to take Mark down. Mark, however, was expecting Nachlobrocklin to attack, and quickly moves away, as Nachlobrocklin trips and face plants onto the ground.

Mark quickly steps back, as Nachlobrocklin again has now attracted the attention of the officials. In a heated rage, Nachlobrocklin again runs toward Mark, who runs in circles evading him. A Lane Judge tells Nachlobrocklin, “hey you! Calm down!” Mark tells the Lane Judge, “hey! Get this guy out of here!” Nachlobrocklin, however, continues to pursue Mark. Several officials tell Nachlobrocklin to calm down, but Nachlobrocklin is too focused on pursuing Mark to hear what they are saying. Mark stops, standing next to Eddie and Hoffer.

Seeing nearly a dozen officials now involved, Eddie tells Nachlobrocklin, “if you touch him, I will level you, and you can be sure that you’ll never run again.” Hoffer advises Nachlobrocklin, “you’d better take him seriously.” At six feet, five inches tall, and 260 pounds, it’s obvious to everyone around that Eddie can make good on his promise. So could Mark or Hoffer for that matter. The officials take advantage of the situation, and surround Nachlobrocklin.

Nachlobrocklin exclaims, “he was looking at me! He was staring me down!” Mark tells the officials, “yeah, I was looking at him! And everyone else too! I wanted to see who I was up against. Geesh.” Nachlobrocklin exclaims, “he was looking at me and messing up my name!” Acting disgusted, Mark comments, “not this shit again. Just ship his crazy ass off to the loony bin in a bus.” Nachlobrocklin yells out, “there ain’t nothing wrong with me! You’ve been messing up my name!” In a heated rage, Nachlobrocklin attempts to attack Mark again, but there are too many officials between him and Mark. The officials block Nachlobrocklin, realizing they have a major problem on their hands.

Mr. Frazier arrives at the scene, exclaiming, “what is going on here?” The Head Timekeeper pulls Mr. Frazier aside, telling him, “one of the contestants, this Major Nachlobrocklin guy that we had a problem with earlier today, started chasing after your runner again. I had my eye on that guy since he walked up.” Even the meet official failed to pronounce Nachlobrocklin’s name correctly.

Mr. Frazier asks, “what happened this time?” The Head Timekeeper explains, “he lost it again. I was half expecting something to happen with that guy today. I can assure you that your guys had nothing to do with it.” Embellishing a bit, Mr. Frazier tells the Head Timekeeper, “I don’t know how my team is supposed to run at its best if this keeps happening.” The Head Timekeeper responds, “if you’d like, we can delay the first heat, and let the second heat run first.” Mr. Frazier tells the Head Timekeeper, “hold on,” and calls Mark over.

Mark walks over, along with Eddie and Hoffer. Mr. Frazier asks, “are you guys okay to run, or do you want to delay your heat?” With his adrenaline levels quite high after his confrontation with Nachlobrocklin, Mark replies, “let’s get this over with.”

Mark asks the Head Timekeeper, “can’t you do something about that guy?” The Head Timekeeper tells Mark, “we’ve never come across anything like this before. This time, I’m ejecting him from the meet.” Mark replies, “good, because if that guy ever touches me, I’m ejecting him from the planet.” After Mark’s comment, the Head Timekeeper whispers to Mr. Frazier, “it will save me the trouble.” After the commotion, Mr. Frazier takes the liberty to hang around the finish line.

The Starter announces, “okay! Now, let’s get back to business.” The runners get behind the blocks and the Starter announces, “on your marks!” Seven runners get ready in the blocks, with Nachlobrocklin again conspicuously missing. The Starter announces, “set.” The buzzer sounds, and the runners are out of the blocks.

Shortly after leaving the blocks, Eddie, Mark, and Hoffer are head to head. At 50 yards into the race, Eddie and Mark take a slight lead. By 100 yards, Mark takes a slight lead over Eddie, making good use of the extra adrenaline he acquired during his run in with Nachlobrocklin. As they approach the finish, Mark crosses first this year, followed by Eddie, and then Hoffer. Hoffer’s finish was good, and it is difficult to tell whether Nachlobrocklin would have placed in this race should he have run.

Mark, Eddie, and Hoffer, sweeping the event, exchange high-fives. Mr. Frazier exclaims, “you guys were clocking!” Looking at his stopwatch, Mr. Frazier exclaims, “that was your best run yet!” The times are posted on the electronic scoreboard, but Mr. Frazier still relies on his own mechanical stopwatch. Heading back to the bench, Mr. Frazier tells Eddie and Mark, “one more to go for you guys! One more to go!”

Dr. Bonamo, Bobby B., and the field events crew return to the team bench, having a good day. Mr. Frazier asks Bobby B., “so, how did you do?” Bobby B. grins, replying, “I won! Mendenhall took second place.

Cinquegrana fooled the Attaway, and took third place.” Mr. Frazier replies, “Cinquegrana fooled the Attaway? The Attaway? What’s that all about?” Bobby B. replies, “yeah. Douglas Attaway. Cinquegrana told him that he didn’t make the final, so he didn’t show up. We call him ‘the Attaway’ because he’s dumber than the shot-put.” If Attaway had shown up at the final, Cinquegrana would have likely taken fourth place.

Mr. Frazier asks, “did Attaway actually make the final?” Bobby B. replies, “yeah.” Mr. Frazier laughs, and asks, “so, what happened?” Bobby B. explains, “Attaway fouled once, so Cinquegrana told him that there’s a new rule. He told Attaway that the average, not the longest throw, determines if you get into the final³. So, Attaway didn’t show up.” Mr. Frazier laughs hysterically, hitting his thigh, and tells Provost Leighton, “see! You just can’t make this stuff up.” Laughing herself, Provost Leighton blurts out, “I can’t believe that shit worked! Oops. I’m sorry.” Mr. Frazier tells Provost Leighton, “that’s okay. You can be yourself around these guys.”

The call is made for the final event of the day, the 4 by 440 relay. With twelve teams, and two heats, the winner will quickly be decided. The first heat brings the undefeated team of Eddie, Mark, Braden, and Johnson. The first heat also brings Nachlobrocklin’s team, which has an alternate running in Nachlobrocklin’s place.

Mr. Frazier has decided that, for today, they will run in the order that, in the past, has delivered the best performance. Mark will lead off, followed by Johnson, Eddie, and then Braden. Looking around at the opposing teams, Braden exclaims, “it looks like we’ve already won this race! I’ve already kicked half their asses once today, and now I have to do it again? I’m gonna get down! Gonna shut ‘em all down, and watch ‘em break down!” Braden couldn’t be more correct. Between the 440-yard dash and the mile medley relay earlier today, Braden has already defeated half the athletes waiting for the heat to begin. The other half have not yet run against Braden today.

Hearing Braden rant, one of the athletes asks his teammate, “what’s wrong with that guy?” Hearing the comment, Braden points to his critic, and exclaims, “there ain’t nothing wrong with me! Your problem is you! You’re standing there holding a baton, looking at the ground like you’ve already lost the race! And, you already did lose! And, when I win, you tell me there’s something wrong with me?” Braden’s critic points out, “you haven’t won yet.” Braden replies, “then, let’s get this ass kicking started!”

³ In the shot-put competition, the longest throw, not the average, determines whether a contestant enters the final.

Back at the bench, Provost Leighton tells Mr. Frazier, "I can hear Axel Braden all the way over here." Mr. Frazier laughs, and replies, "he's telling everyone how our team is going to kick their ass."

With the first heat in the blocks and ready to go, the Starter hits the buzzer. Mark takes off, delivering on Braden's claim that they are going to win. Mr. Frazier tells Provost Leighton, "watch this race closely. It will be over in three minutes." Provost Leighton replies, "that would be fast." The last time this 4 by 440 relay team ran in competition, they ran it in 2:59.82, which was on an all-weather outdoor track.

Provost Leighton watches as Mark approaches the transition zone. Johnson takes off, and no speed is lost during the transition. Mr. Frazier exclaims, "did you see that!" Provost Leighton replies, "that was a perfect handoff!" Looking at one of his stopwatches, Mr. Frazier exclaims, "that was a 45.2-second quarter!"

As Johnson is running his leg, Mr. Frazier explains to Provost Leighton, "let me explain my thinking in this relay. I had Mark hand off to Johnson because Mark can instantaneously sprint well at the end of his leg, and be up to Johnson's speed at the end of 440 yards. Johnson is very strong at the end of the 440 yards. That's why he's handing off to Eddie, who is not only the fastest sprinter on the team, but the fastest out of the blocks. And, Braden is the anchor because, once everyone sees him on the track, they'll throw in the towel. He's the best 440 guy around, but I strongly suspect Eddie can beat him." Provost Leighton suggests, "we'll have to see about that someday. That should be an interesting competition."

As they watch the transition from Johnson to Eddie, Provost Leighton mentions, "that handoff went seamlessly as well." Mr. Frazier explains, "these guys have been working together since the seventh grade." Continuing their earlier conversation, Provost Leighton asks, "so, Eddie can beat Braden in the 440?" Mr. Frazier replies, "he has before. But, then again, I have to wonder what would have happened today if Braden was running in the mile." Provost Leighton comments, "our University's team is far better than I ever thought." Mr. Frazier replies, "yeah, especially now that Paxton is gone."

Mr. Frazier and Provost Leighton stare at Mr. Frazier's stopwatch as Eddie hands off to Braden. Seeing the composite time, Mr. Frazier exclaims, "they might just break their old record!" Out to make good on his promise to kick ass, Braden takes off in search of gold. Passing a few trailing runners on his last lap, Braden sprints toward the finish. Crossing the finish line, the electronic timer reads 3:02.9. The undefeated 4 by 440 relay team has set yet another personal indoor record and another

divisional indoor record. Mr. Frazier and Provost Leighton exchange a high-five, as the divisional meet comes to an end.

The end of the meet brings the awards ceremony. The Meet Announcer introduces today's officials, and recognizes the coaches and athletes for their participation today. Moving on to the main event, the presentation of the awards begins. Mr. Frazier and Provost Leighton are both anxious to hear the overall results of the meet. What is of interest to the two coaches is identifying the stronger events of the other teams. By knowing the other team's strengths and weaknesses, Mr. Frazier and Provost Leighton can better assign events for future meets.

Mr. Frazier and Provost Leighton stand behind the bench, watching as the medalists are called to the stage to receive their awards. With the University sweeping the 40-yard dash, Kathy is called to the stage to receive the gold medal in the women's 40-yard dash. Standing to one side of Kathy is Paula, who takes the silver medal. To the other side of Kathy is Erika, who takes the bronze medal.

As Kathy and Paula are heading back to the bench, hearing their names again, they turn around. They take the stage once more, and are joined by Tessa. Paula takes the gold medal in the 220-yard dash, Kathy takes the silver, and Tessa takes the bronze. Knowing that Kathy and Paula have medaled in other events, the Meet Announcer jokingly tells them they might want to take a seat near the stage.

In other events, Kathy, Paula, Erika, and Amber take the gold medal in the women's mile medley relay. Kathy, Paula, Erika, and Tessa take the gold medal in the women's 4 by 220 relay. Once all the women's medals are distributed, it is revealed that the University took more than half the medals. This is a significant accomplishment, considering there were twelve teams competing.

In the men's events, Eddie takes the gold medal in the 40-yard dash, and is joined by Mark, taking the silver medal, and Hoffer, taking the bronze medal. In the 220-yard dash, Mark takes the gold medal, Eddie takes the silver, and Hoffer takes the bronze. In the mile, Stone takes the gold medal, Mitchell takes the silver, and Akinmola takes the bronze. Braden takes the gold medal in the 440-yard dash, which was to be expected. Bull takes the bronze, and unfortunately Davida took fourth place. And, in the 880-yard run, Johnson takes the gold medal, Mitchell takes the silver medal, and Stone takes the bronze medal. In other individual events, the remainder of the University team takes home a good number of medals today.

In the men's relay events, Eddie, Davida, Braden, and Johnson take the gold medal in the mile medley relay. The University's 4 by 220 relay team

takes the gold medal, and the 4 by 110 relay team takes the silver medal. Of no surprise to anyone, the acclaimed 4 by 440 relay team of Eddie, Mark, Johnson, and Braden remains undefeated, taking home the gold medal. In the big ass kicking of the day, the men's 4 by 880 relay takes the gold medal. Standing on the stage is Mitchell, Stone, Akinmola, and Johnson, who are very happy to win this event. Provost Leighton is personally happy to see that her decision to assign Johnson to this event has paid off.

And, while the track athletes celebrated their victories, Bobby B. earned the gold medal in the shot-put, beating out the silver medalist by more than fifteen feet. Ironically, the silver medal in the shot-put went to Pete Mendenhall, also from the University. And, in the upset of the day, Fabio Cinquegrana takes the bronze medal.

As Bobby B. and the University's shot-put team walk up to the stage, Provost Leighton mentions to Mr. Frazier, "you did it, George! The team took the bulk of the medals." Mr. Frazier replies, "they did it. All I did was tell them that they can do it. But, I can see that sweeping the meet at the college level is a little more difficult than it was in high school. We have a lot of work to do before the Spring."

As Bobby B., and the rest of the shot-put team, is walking back to the bench, Mr. Frazier tells Provost Leighton, "I don't think Monday is going to be easy." Provost Leighton asks, "why? What's up?" Mr. Frazier explains, "Mitchell got beat. He's not going to be happy. Bull wanted the silver medal in the 440-yard dash. Davida was expecting to place in that race, but he's a freshman. In high school, Davida was number two in the State. He's not used to losing." Provost Leighton asks, "what do you have planned?" Mr. Frazier replies, "we'll have to discuss nutrition, sleep, mental attitude, and that sort of thing. Most of them know how to train. They have no problem in that area." Provost Leighton, offers, "if you'd like, I can help with that." Accepting Provost Leighton's offer, Mr. Frazier replies, "I'd love for you to."

After the awards ceremony, the tribe heads to the pizzeria for dinner, with the rest of the team, including their coaches, deciding to join them. Mark takes the liberty to tell McCutchen that he's not invited, not that anyone would miss him. Everyone manages to hitch a ride with someone, leaving the bus driver driving McCutchen back to the University alone. After dinner, everyone goes their own way, most probably home for a nap.

Mid semester, since Eddie will be at the University running track for two more years, Kathy decides to pick up an application for graduate school. Paula had the same idea, since Mark will still be running as well. Heading over to the admissions office between classes, Kathy and Paula

pick up their applications and head to the student center to begin filling them out.

While Kathy and Paula are filling out their applications, Mitchell walks up, and asks, “what are you guys up to?” Paula replies, “we’re applying to graduate school.” Mitchell comically asks, “so, you’re coming back for another year of torture?” Kathy replies, “nope. We’re applying to graduate school so we can come back and crack the whip on you guys at practice!” Mitchell comments, “and, here I was, thinking that you guys wanted to learn something.” Kathy sarcastically asks, “oh? Is that why we’re here?” Paula replies, “so they say.”

Mitchell comments, “I learned a few things here.” Paula adds, “yeah, like the best ways to mess with McCrutchen.” Mitchell mentions, “actually, I learned something today.” Kathy asks, “oh, yeah? What did you learn?” Mitchell replies, “I learned the difference between marketing and sales.” After a pause, Kathy asks, “well?” Mitchell explains, “the professor told us that marketing makes up the lies, and sales tells them.” Kathy laughs, and mentions, “that’s not far from the truth!” Paula exclaims, “seriously!” Mitchell also mentions, “and, we learned that, if you manufacture something, you don’t want to make it too reliable, otherwise you’ll never sell service contracts.”

Kathy laughs, and asks Mitchell, “so, that’s what they teach you over there in the communications department?” Mitchell replies, “yeah. And, those questions will show up on the test.” Paula laughs, telling Mitchell, “you’ve got to be kidding!” Mitchell explains, “no. That’s how the professor knows who attends class. Those kinds of questions are a giveaway. They’re worth 20 percent of the test grade. So, if you weren’t in class, you start off with pretty much a low B.” Kathy comments, “and, I thought we had it easy.”

Kathy and Paula finish as much as they can on their applications, then head out to class. Mitchell joins them on the walk, where the group discusses track and field. Kathy mentions to Mitchell, “at the high school, we caught Brad Evans spying on the team again. Word is that he’s the new assistant coach at Centerville.” Mitchell suggests, “Mr. Ruff must be worried about something if he keeps sending his spies over.” Paula comments, “Evans is probably wondering where Mr. Frazier is.” Kathy nonchalantly mentions, “he’s off in the Amazon, picking up some more Amazon women.” Paula laughs, and exclaims, “not this again!” Kathy comments, “well, Mr. Ruff is pretty much a sucker.” Paula replies, “you got that right.” Everyone gets to their class, including McCutchen, who was following closely behind, listening in on Kathy, Paula, and Mitchell’s conversation.

A week later, at track practice, as they are waiting for the coaches to arrive, Paula mentions to Mark, “McCrutchen is acting kind of weird. He’s definitely up to something.” Mark replies, “he’s always acting weird.” Paula explains, “he’s been looking over here all morning.” Mark suggests, “he’s probably still ticked off because I told him he couldn’t get pizza with the team after the divisional meet.” Paula comically replies, “you should have let him join us. Then, Braden and Bobby B. would have dumped him in the dumpster.” Mark exclaims, “dang! I forgot about that. My mistake.”

Mr. Frazier walks in announcing, “good morning. Today, for the first half of your workout, Coach Leighton will be addressing you regarding nutrition, sleep, and your mental attitude. It doesn’t matter how much you train if you don’t eat properly and, wait. Hold on. Coach Leighton was going to discuss this with you, not me.” The team laughs a little bit, mostly because Mr. Frazier inadvertently started Provost Leighton’s discussion. Mr. Frazier announces, “let me just turn this over to Coach Leighton right now, before I get carried away. And, when she is done, we’ll hit the track and practice our relay handoffs.”

Provost Leighton begins, telling everyone, “thank you for giving me the opportunity to discuss this very important topic with you. I will first start with a discussion on nutrition. When we speak of nutrition, we are mainly concerned with food. The terms diet and nutrition, however, are not synonymous. Diet refers to the choice of foods a person consumes. Nutrition refers to how the foods of the diet supply the needs of the body and react with the body. For example, a diet of junk food hardly constitutes nutrition. With a better understanding of nutrition, better choices can be made regarding the diet, ultimately leading to a healthier state of the body, and better performance on the track.”

Now having everyone’s attention, Provost Leighton continues, “first, a little history. Until the early twentieth century, people were forced to eat foods that were readily available and in season. Refrigeration was nonexistent. Transportation of food was limited. Short term preservation was done with salt, and any long term preservation was done by canning. Consequently, most foods were consumed shortly after being harvested. Crops were rotated on the land on which they were grown. And, at the end of the season, the dead plant material was recycled and used as fertilizer for next year’s crop. Food was not highly processed, and most often sold fresh. And, artificial chemicals, such as dyes and preservatives, were never used. In addition to the fresh produce available in the local market, many people grew their own fruits and vegetables, providing a constant supply of fresh food for the duration of the growing season.”

Eddie sits back, listening as Provost Leighton introduces today’s topic. Hoping that he will hear something more to increase his performance on

the track, Eddie thinks back to when he started taking the vitamins, methylfolate, and other supplements to increase his athletic performance. Kathy is wondering how pizza fits into a good nutritional program, hoping to hear some good news. And McCutchen, sitting at the edge of his seat, is listening for the nutritional secret that will raise his performance level to that of the tribe's.

Later in her discussion, Provost Leighton lectures, "in order for food to be digested properly, foods must be eaten in the proper amounts, in the correct order, and combined correctly with other foods. Certain foods should be avoided completely because they are no benefit to the body. Highly refined foods, which overload not only the digestive system, but the biochemistry of the entire body, leads the list of foods that should be avoided completely. Other foods contain artificially synthesized chemicals to mimic the taste of sugar. These sugar substitutes have no nutritional value, are detrimental to the body, and should also be avoided completely."

Interrupting Provost Leighton, McCutchen, having a question, raises his hand. Provost Leighton addresses McCutchen, asking, "yes? Do you have a question?" Underhandedly singling out the tribe, McCutchen responds, "yeah. A lot of team members eat pizza. Is that good?" Booming and jeers come from the bleachers, making McCutchen the most unpopular guy on the team right now, not that he wasn't before. Mark yells out, "hey, junior! Shut up!" The team laughs, as McCutchen's attempt to gain an upper hand lands him a figurative slap in the face.

Provost Leighton, perceiving McCutchen's malice, defers answering his question, stating, "today, I am presenting to you the knowledge that you'll need so you can make your own personal choices. When I finish my discussion, let's see if you can apply the information I provide to you to your own personal circumstances, and come to your own decision. And, as a side note, I am not here to tell you what to eat and what not to eat." Snickering comes from many of the team members on the bench, especially where the tribe is seated. Provost Leighton continues her discussion of nutrition, mentioning that, "I will say this. If you eat a healthy diet all week long, an occasional pizza, or slice of cheesecake is not a problem." Provost Leighton then discusses making optimal food choices.

Moving on to the subject of vitamins, Provost Leighton tells the team, "while we're on the subject of nutrition, taking a good vitamin and mineral supplement is also imperative for good performance on the track. Let's look at an example. To run distance, your body needs oxygen, lots of it. That is why running distance is termed an aerobic activity. To deliver oxygen to your cells, you need red blood cells. To create superior oxygen-carrying red blood cells, your body needs three things. Those are

iron, vitamin B-12, and folic acid. Without an adequate supply of those three nutrients, you can potentially develop some form of anemia. Anemia, even mild anemia, is not consistent with superior performance on the track.”

Hearing Provost Leighton’s discussion regarding the oxygen carrying capacity of the blood, Kathy whispers to Eddie, “ain’t that the truth. Been there, seen that, done that.” Eddie whispers back, “it sounds like she’s a lot smarter than those doctors you were going to back then.” Kathy whispers to Eddie, “speaking of vitamins, do we need any?” Eddie replies, “no. We have a few months’ supply right now.” Eddie and Kathy listen closely, as Provost Leighton discusses other vitamins and minerals, and why it is important that no deficiencies exist.

Later in her presentation, Provost Leighton begins talking about another subject that seems to be applicable to many college students. She continues, “stress is becoming more of an integral part of our modern day society. Let’s just look at what happens here at this University. With all the students in direct competition with each other, in class all day, and studying for long hours, almost no time can be found for leisure or rest. In general, the university environment has become more competitive than a professional sports contest. Fierce competition exists among students to obtain the highest grades. Since all students have the desire to get an A in any class, students can be found studying and working longer and longer hours, thus setting a new and higher standard of performance. When it comes time to assign grades, students are quite shocked when all those extra hours yield nothing more than ‘average’ performance. Does this sound familiar?” Most members of the team reply, “yes,” which gives the team assurance that Provost Leighton knows where they’re coming from.

Applying her illustration of academic competition to the track, Provost Leighton reminds the team, “the other teams in the division are training hard, just like we are. If you train equally as hard as they do, then do not expect any better than average performance during your race or field event. And, I’m sure that Mr. Frazier and Dr. Bonamo will both agree with me when I say that average performance during a divisional meet is losing the race and coming home empty handed. If there are twelve teams in the 440-yard dash, with each team having three contestants, that would be 36 contestants. Average would be coming in somewhere around eighteenth place. Who wants average? The goal is to be the best and, to accomplish that, you must go far beyond standard training protocols.” Provost Leighton knows this first hand from her own training.

Moving on, later in her presentation, Provost Leighton explains, “three types of stress are known to exist. These are chemical stress, emotional stress, and physical stress. All three types of stress produce the same

biochemical and physiological responses in the body. These biochemical and physiological responses are initiated by the engagement of the fight or flight mechanism. For those of you in the exercise science program, the area of the brain responsible for the fight or flight mechanism is the amygdala. The body, contrary to what we may have been taught, does not substantially differentiate between any of the three types of stress. No matter the type of stress, the end result is essentially the same.”

Seeing an opportunity to mess with McCutchen, Mark asks, “what kind of stress would a really serious bug bite be, like a Prickly Sea Spider?” Provost Leighton explains, “first of all, any type of tissue damage is classified as physical stress to the body. So, a Prickly Sea Spider bite would be considered a type of physical stress. In addition, any type of bite is often accompanied by some sort of venom. Venom would constitute chemical stress to the body. Venom can also travel throughout the body, and cause additional tissue damage elsewhere in the body. And, if there is pain due to tissue injury, that would be a form of emotional stress.”

Mark then asks, “can stress make someone’s hair fall out?” Provost Leighton replies, “it most certainly can. If someone’s hair falls out due to stress, it would most likely be in the latent stages of stress, when the body can no longer adapt to the stress. In the late stages of stress, the adrenal glands begin to atrophy. When that happens, damage is occurring to the body faster than the body can heal the damage.” Provost Leighton asks Mark, “does that answer your question?” Giving Provost Leighton a thumbs up, Mark replies, “yeah.” With a worried look on his face, McCutchen looks over at Mark. Mark smiles, shakes his head, and points to McCutchen’s leg, reminding McCutchen of his Prickly Sea Spider bite.

Provost Leighton continues, “now, what differentiates good stress from bad stress is one and only one thing. When the fight or flight mechanism is engaged, physical activity is expected to follow. If physical activity follows stress, the body appropriately metabolizes the excess adrenaline and norepinephrine resulting from the stress. If there is no physical activity, adrenaline and norepinephrine remain elevated, causing detrimental effects to the body. And, as Mark mentioned earlier, when someone’s hair falls out due to stress, it is a long term consequence of a persistent unchecked stressor. Unrelenting chronic stress often leads to various chronic diseases, such as diabetes and heart disease.” Mark smiles, and looks over again at McCutchen with a look that clearly says, “I told you so”.

Coach Leighton further speaks to the team about stress, moving on to explaining why it is necessary to get adequate sleep. After her forty-five minute presentation, the team is ready to work off any excess adrenaline

they may have. The team applauds, appreciative of the information Provost Leighton presented to them today.

Mr. Frazier walks up, telling the team, "I think we've all learned a lot today. If you've paid attention, you've probably learned more here today than you will in any of your classes." The team applauds again, making Provost Leighton feel very much appreciated.

Mr. Frazier then announces, "now, we're going to run the relay drill for the rest of our practice session." Mr. Frazier randomly tosses four batons to the athletes, and instructs the group, "okay! Women, take lanes one and two, and form a line on the inside of the track. Men, take lanes three and four, and form a line on the outside of the track. Let's get to work!"

Once the relay drill is fully underway, all four lanes are running like a well-oiled machine. Mr. Frazier and Provost Leighton watch carefully, looking for any flaws in the athlete's handoffs. Perfect handoffs can be the difference between a gold and silver medal, so Mr. Frazier wants every athlete's handoff skills perfected.

During the drill, Provost Leighton comments to Mr. Frazier, "Karen's and Amanda's handoffs have improved tremendously." Karen and Amanda are on the 4 by 220 relay team along with Leslie Collins and Michelle Harris. That relay team took the silver medal during the indoor track divisional meet, being marginally beaten by the team taking the gold medal. Michelle Harris, by the way, is the daughter of Mr. Harris, the middle school track coach. Mr. Frazier then predicts, "the 4 by 220 relay team just might take the gold medal in the Spring." Provost Leighton replies, "they really have been working hard."

In lane four, Mark receives the baton from Bull, and takes a lap around the track. While Mark is on the back straightaway, Johnson takes possession of the baton, and takes off in lane three. Braden gets in lane four, preparing to receive the baton from Mark. As Mark approaches the transition zone, Braden takes off. McCutchen, looking over the well-built body of Amanda Drake, crosses lane four to get into lane three. Paula exclaims, "oh, shit!" as Mark violently collides with McCutchen, tossing him off the track like a rag doll. McCutchen goes down hard, and tumbles for a few yards, prompting Mr. Frazier to blow his whistle, halting the drill.

Braden turns around and, seeing McCutchen laying on the track, looks at Mr. Frazier, exclaiming, "it looks like you got another Jimmy O'Brien!" Paula whispers to Kathy, "that was a take down if I ever saw one." Kathy whispers back, "yeah. I saw that. McCutchen should have been paying better attention." Paula whispers to Kathy, "he was paying attention. He was paying attention to Amanda." Learning from Provost Leighton's

lecture earlier today, Kathy whispers to Paula, “it looks like McCutchen’s physical stress is about to turn into emotional stress.”

Mr. Frazier whispers to Provost Leighton, “I can’t wait to hear this one.” Mr. Frazier yells out, “McCutchen! Stand up!” McCutchen stands up, barely able to move. Hoping to prevent future collisions on the track, Mr. Frazier yells out, “McCutchen! Please explain to the rest of the team, Coach Leighton, and myself what just happened!” McCutchen exclaims, “he ran me over!” Mr. Frazier yells back, “we know that! We all saw it!” Accusing Mark, McCutchen explains, “he did it on purpose! It was kind of obvious, don’t you think?” Mr. Frazier exclaims, “the only thing that was obvious to me was that your eyes were glued to Amanda’s ass! Now, get your ass back in line, and pay attention!”

McCutchen limps back to the line, hoping to get some sympathy, but gets none. Amanda gives McCutchen the evil eye, and is bothered by the fact that McCutchen was paying her way too much attention. Recalling when McCutchen crashed his wedding, Mark whispers to McCutchen, “since you like to crash things, I hope you had fun, junior.” McCutchen tells Mark, “I know you did that on purpose.” Mark replies, “so what if I did? What are you going to do about it, junior?” McCutchen says nothing, perhaps learning that he will lose any argument with Mark.

The rest of practice goes rather well, with no further collisions on the track. As the team heads to the locker rooms, it is clear that McCutchen is a bit miffed at Mark. Walking behind Mark, McCutchen asks, “so, it was on purpose?” Mark tells McCutchen, “shut up, junior.” McCutchen informs Mark, “I’m going to report you to Dean Grimsby.” Mark replies, “go ahead, junior. Ask me if I care.” McCutchen doesn’t quite get it. It has been clearly established that Dean Grimsby is not in the chain of command upwards of the track coaching staff. But, nevertheless, McCutchen heads to the dean’s office after practice to report Mark.

Toward the end of Winter, Kathy comes home from class, seeing Eddie deep in thought on the sofa. Kathy asks, “what’s up?” Eddie replies, “nothing. I was just thinking.” Kathy asks, “really? About what?” Eddie replies, “the portal. There’s something wrong.” Kathy asks, “oh, really? What’s that?”

Eddie explains, “we can go back in time, and we can go forward in time. So, I was thinking that, I go into the future to exchange the newer bills for older ones at the service station. If that’s the case, then I should be saving older bills right now in case I come back from the past to exchange them.” Kathy comments, “okay. So, where’s the problem?” Eddie continues, “okay, so follow me with this. I don’t think that, in the future, I’ll be coming from the past to the service station, like we do now,

to exchange older bills for newer ones. That's already happened." Kathy agrees, telling Eddie, "I think I see where you're going with this."

Eddie elaborates, "but, the me in the future stores lots of old bills in the safe so they'll be there when we come from the past to exchange them. So, I'm guessing that I'm not going to see myself coming from the past to get older bills. So, there's something totally wrong." Kathy pauses, and tells Eddie, "wow! That's really interesting."

Eddie then explains, "when Mr. Crum sent you home for wearing your cutoffs, I sat in chemistry class, staring out the window. I watched through the window, as you and Paula drove away. Mr. Madre caught me daydreaming, and he said, 'isn't that right, Eddie?' I had no idea what he was talking about. So, I told him that I was thinking about something. He asked me to tell him what I was thinking about. And, I told him, 'last class, you said opposite charges attract, and like charges repel, right?' And, he said that they did. So, then I told him, 'if like charges repel, I'm just trying to understand why the nucleus of an atom with, say, seventy or eighty positive charges in it, doesn't just fly apart.'" Kathy mentions, "that's a good point. I never thought about that."

Eddie goes on, "so, since they have no explanation, chemists and physicists just say something else holds it together. They make up a bunch of bullshit to explain it." Kathy asks, "so, what are you thinking?" Eddie explains, "the only thing that would explain it is parallel universes. Something in a parallel universe must hold the atom together. So, when we go into the future to exchange the bills, it's not really our universe. It must be a parallel universe of some sort. It has to be. I can almost guarantee you that we will not be coming from the past to exchange bills, because we're at this time now. The past is done with. But, we do that now, and the me in the future has the bills at the service station. But when I get to that year, I won't."

Eddie continues, "oh, and here's another thing. Last year, during the get-together at the pool, we went back into the past, and changed the outcome of when Goldshit hit Braden with the baseball bat. And then, when we returned to our time, it's like none of it happened. But, in a sense, it did happen. We have a memory of it, but no one else does. So, we have the memory of our experiences in two separate universes. But, everyone else never entered that universe, so they only have one memory, which was the ultimate outcome. It's like we rewound the tape, and recorded something over it."

Kathy exclaims, "hey! That might explain why no time elapses when we go through the portal! We go to a parallel universe for a while, and return to ours right where we left off." Eddie comments, "there's something weird here, Katarina." Kathy replies, "yeah, I'd say." Eddie

suggests, “I wonder what would happen if we went into the portal, and told it to bring us to right now, but if Germany won World War Two. Or, bring us to right now if I never tried out for track. And remember, there was that alternate future where you didn’t make it.” Silent for a moment, Kathy quietly exclaims, “that is really weird! I’ll have to think about this.” Eddie suggests, “maybe you and Paula can figure it out.” Kathy replies, “yeah. But, I can’t figure out anything without food right now. So, let’s make dinner.” Eddie and Kathy make dinner, with something more to think about.

At the end of the semester, right before Christmas break, the University track team decides to get pizza after a Saturday meet. The whole team attends, including McCutchen, who hitched a ride to the meet from Harry Dulaney. McCutchen would rather have gone back to the University, but Dulaney wanted to get pizza with the team. Eddie doesn’t seem to care that McCutchen, for some reason, has decided to join the group today. If necessary, Bobby B. will take out the trash, and dump McCutchen in the dumpster.

When Eddie and the tribe arrive, Joe yells out from behind the counter, “you guys look like you won again!” Kathy yells back, “we did win! Our team won all the gold medals! It must be the pizza!” Today’s meet included four teams, and the University won the gold medal in every event. Joe seats the group in the formal dining room since the 80 or so hungry track stars and team assistants won’t easily fit in the informal side of the establishment. While the team is waiting, the discussion centers on the meet, and the unprecedented victory the team had today.

When the waitress, Arianna, arrives to take the order, Kathy, ordering for herself and Eddie, tells her, “me and Eddie are going to have a discus with shot-puts. And, we want to split a salad, but we don’t want any drill bits on it. And, we want some of those javelins on the side with some garlic butter.” A few of the newer team members look at Kathy like she’s a little on the crazy side, but Arianna writes down Kathy’s order and moves on to the next person. Using the same lingo, Paula places her and Mark’s order. While Arianna takes everyone else’s order, Kathy and Paula explain to some of the newer team members how they rewrote the menu years ago. Once everyone has placed their order, conversation again shifts to the meet.

During lunch, Pete Mendenhall mentions to Bobby B., “since Mr. Frazier took over as head coach, it sure looks like the runners are doing a lot better.” Bobby B. laughs and replies, “yeah. They’re finally catching up to us.” In the shot-put, Bobby B., Mendenhall, and Cinquegrana have been walking away with first, second, and third place all season. Cinquegrana’s only problem this year is Douglas Attaway. But, Cinquegrana is confident that he will beat Attaway come the Spring.

Michelle Harris, a freshman, mentions to another freshman, Leslie Collins, “our University’s team is like so good. I can’t believe today!” Leslie energetically replies, “seriously! We won everything! Can you even believe it?” Michelle tells Leslie, “and, our coaches! Mr. Frazier and Coach Leighton are like so awesome!” But, being Mr. Harris’ daughter, Michelle already knew Mr. Frazier is an awesome coach. Looking at the two medals she won today, Leslie replies, “and, I can’t believe I actually won these!” Michelle and Leslie both suspect they have only seen the beginning of the team’s victories.

Listening to the individual conversations going on around the tables of how well the team did today, McCutchen begins to get sorely irritated. Not running in any events today, McCutchen feels like he has been not only physically shoved aside by Mark, but emotionally shoved aside by the team as well. Even Dulaney, one of the least skilled members of the team, walked away with a medal in the 4 by 110 relay today. Bothered by the team’s up lifted mood, McCutchen vows to do something. Unfortunately, McCutchen cannot figure out what to do. Training harder would be top on the list, but that’s not McCutchen’s style.

Once everyone is almost finished with dinner, Barbara announces, “now that everyone is together, I have an announcement!” Kathy whispers to Eddie, “I know what this is!” Before Eddie can respond, having everyone’s attention, Barbara announces, “I know many of you were waiting to hear this for a long time. Eric and I are engaged!” The team claps and cheers, many expecting that Barbara and Johnson were eventually going to get married. Barbara walks around the room, showing everyone her ring.

Once everyone in the room has quieted down, Bobby B. announces, “well, now is as good a time as any. Me and Erika are getting married too!” Clapping and cheering rises up again, prompting Joe and Arianna to walk into the dining room to find out what they’ve missed. Hearing the news of the two engagements, Joe and Arianna offer their congratulations. All the women want to see Erika’s ring, so Erika walks around the room showing off her treasure.

As everyone gets ready to leave, Amber hints to Mitchell, “all of our friends are getting married. They look so happy!” Mitchell comments, “they’ve all known each other for a long time.” As they are walking out, Amber, dropping another hint, bumps Mitchell’s hip with hers, telling him, “not as long as we’ve known each other.” Mitchell and Amber have known each other since before they started elementary school. Amber knows that Mitchell got the hint a while ago. Amber’s hope is that he asks her soon.

The team heads out for the evening, everyone kind of exhausted from the meet today. Kathy tells Eddie, “let’s go home. I want to listen to my song.” Eddie replies, “we can do that.” Kathy suggests, “then, we can go to bed early tonight.” Eddie and Kathy walk to Eddie’s MGB, calling it a day, and beginning their evening.