

FORTY MINUTES IN MARCH

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Based on True Events

John Wells Productions

FADE IN:

EXT. UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI - NIGHT

Superimpose: **September 30, 1962. University of Mississippi.**

A clear Southern night. The sky dotted by countless stars. But below that tranquillity -- unrest. HUNDREDS of WHITE STUDENTS pack the oak and magnolia tree filled campus. CONFEDERATE FLAGS wave proudly. 'Dixie' BLARES from radios.

A MAN wearing a CONFEDERATE SOLDIER'S UNIFORM HURLS a BOTTLE across the road--

Where it SHATTERS at the feet of a FEDERAL MARSHAL. The crowd ROARS in approval. Venom in their voices.

The Marshal stands his ground, joined by THREE DOZEN OTHERS surrounding the picturesque Lyceum Building. GAS MASKS cover faces. CLUBS and TEARGAS GUNS hang menacingly from waists.

The tension is thick. A pressure cooker ready to explode...

INT. BAXTER HALL - ROOM - LATER

News reports emanate from a RADIO. A MARSHAL stands guard when there's a KNOCK on the door. He checks the peephole then lets a rattled SCHOOL OFFICIAL in, quickly shuts the door.

SCHOOL OFFICIAL

Crowd's fuming. We can't get you out, James. It's too dangerous.

We see JAMES MEREDITH, a 29 year old BLACK MAN, gazing calmly out the window. Over the RADIO--

ANCHORMAN (V.O.)

We now take you to Jackson where Governor Ross Barnett is addressing the crisis at Ole Miss.

BARNETT (V.O.)

...To the officials of the federal government, I say: Gentlemen, you are trampling on the sovereignty of this great state...

EXT. UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI - CONTINUOUS

ARMED KLANSMEN now stand opposite the Marshals. The Students push forward as one, emboldened by the Klan's presence.

BARNETT (V.O.)
 You are destroying the Constitution
 of this great nation...

The Marshals stand tall but they're greatly outnumbered.
 Their intimidating masks hiding nervous eyes.

BARNETT (V.O.)
 My convictions do not waiver.
 Mississippi will continue to fight
 any forms of integration through
 the courts to restore her honor and
 respect...

A MOLOTOV COCKTAIL BURSTS into flames! The crowd HOWLS. Faces
 twisted in anger. Fists in the air. More projectiles follow.

BARNETT (V.O.)
 May God have mercy on your souls.

A METAL PIPE STRIKES a Marshal in the helmet! He drops. His
 comrades rush to his aid. Looks exchanged. Then--

Instincts kick in. Precise movements. Clubs readied. Teargas
 guns loaded. The crowd senses it, goads, teases--

POP! POP! POP! Canisters land amongst the crowd! SCREAMS and
 SMOKE fill the air! Some in the crowd retreat. Others engage.

All hell has broken loose.

INT. MEMORIAL HALL - JOE DAN'S ROOM - LATER

Superimpose: **Mississippi State University. 95 miles south of
 Ole Miss.**

JOE DAN GOLD (21) sits at his desk, head buried in a book. A
 country boy. Rugged but there's a benignity in his eyes.

Strewn about the room we see a variety of BASKETBALL
 EQUIPMENT: A ball. Chuck Taylors. Practice uniform. On the
 desk, a TEAM PHOTO with Joe Dan front and center. Then--

DOUG HUTTON (20) and STAN BRINKER (20) spill into the room.

DOUG
 Look alive, Joe D!

JOE DAN
 Get out.

STAN
 I told you.

DOUG
 You ain't mean that.

JOE DAN (CONT'D)
Yeah I did. Both y'all. Get.

STAN
I told you.

DOUG
How're you studyin'?
(to Stan)
Shut. Up.

JOE DAN (CONT'D)
I don't wanna end up ineligible.

DOUG
Shit. Like Babe'd let that happen.
I meant how're you studyin' now?

JOE DAN
(exasperated)
What're you talking about, Doug?

DOUG
(incredulous)
...You ain't heard?

Joe Dan looks to them both. *What?* The mood becomes serious.

STAN
Meredith enrolled at Ole Miss.
They're rioting. It's bad, Joe D.

DOUG
(turns on a RADIO)
Kennedy's speakin' on it now...

Joe Dan processes the news when from the RADIO we hear--

JFK (V.O.)
The eyes of the nation and all the
world are upon you, and the honor
of your University and state are in
the balance. Let us preserve both
the law and the peace. And then--

VOICE (O.S.)
Y'all know he's forcin' that coon
on Ole Miss.

The boys turn and find a burly STUDENT in the doorway, a real REDNECK. He steps inside. The seriousness shifts to tension.

REDNECK
And if we ain't do nothin' to stop
it, he's gon' force 'em on us next.
(switches off radio)
So. Y'all comin'?

EXT. MEMORIAL HALL - MOMENTS LATER

Our boys emerge, walking straight into the path of a storm.
CONFEDERATE FLAGS. 'Dixie'. Cars HONKING.

Joe Dan's struck by the fervor of his fellow classmates. He stops and watches as an EFFIGY of James Meredith is IGNITED! Redneck notices his hesitation, moves towards him.

REDNECK

What's the problem?

(LOUD)

Are y'all basketball boys a bunch
of nigger lovers!?

The taunt grabs the attention of the crowd. Judgemental eyes dig into Joe Dan, awaiting his response. The wrong one could prove costly. *Even deadly.* As he struggles to reply--

A car pulls up to the curb. The door FLIES open and JAMES 'BABE' MCCARTHY (39) rushes out. He frantically scans the crowd and sees the boys surrounded. Beelines for them--

The EFFIGY continues to burn, illuminating the indecision on Joe Dan's face. The crowd gets restless. Doug and Stan grow uneasy. Redneck steps closer, menacing, intentions unclear--

BABE (O.S.)

Y'all should be at the gym!

Our boys are both relieved and terrified to see Babe coming their way. He tactfully positions himself between them and Redneck. His 'anger' clearly for show.

BABE (CONT'D)

Y'all are getting too fat!

(to crowd)

Believe them? Skipping workouts
with the season about to start.
Thank y'all for calling 'em out.

Redneck eyes Joe Dan a moment longer--

REDNECK

No problem, Coach McCarthy.

He walks off and the crowd disperses. The boys exhale. Babe faces them. His faux anger replaced by true disappointment.

BABE

Get inside and stay there. Tell the
rest of the boys to do the same.

The boys retreat to the dorm with tails between their legs.

BABE (CONT'D)

Joe D...

Joe Dan stops. Faces Babe.

JOE DAN

Coach, I--

BABE

You're the captain of this team. I expected more.

Those words slice through Joe Dan worse than any shouting ever could. He drops his head and walks back to the dorm.

With his players safely inside, Babe exhales. He watches with concern as the EFFIGY of James Meredith continues to burn--

COLVARD (V.O.)

Mississippi State's economic prospects have never been greater than at the present time.

INT. BANQUET HALL - DAY

Superimpose: **Six Weeks Later**

PRESIDENT DEAN COLVARD (50), studious with black glasses and thinning but neatly combed hair, stands at a podium, addressing a room full of dignified MISSISSIPPI STATE ALUMNI.

COLVARD

This results from three conditions. First, enrollment is at an all time peak. Second, research programs are rapidly expanding. And third, the largest physical expansion in our history is under way.

The crowd APPLAUDS. Colvard sips from a glass of water.

COLVARD (CONT'D)

Fifteen million in construction has already been completed or is in the planning stage, with another six million requested in state funding.

(then)

But it is due to the continued donations made by spirited alumni such as yourselves that Mississippi State is able to capitalize upon its progress of its first eighty years.

APPLAUSE. He folds his speech notes, speaks sincerely.

COLVARD (CONT'D)

She is a sleeping giant. There is greatness in her future. As long as I have the privilege of serving as president, I pledge my full efforts to achieving that greatness. Thank you.

LATER: Alumni mingle. WAITERS walk around with trays of appetizers, champagne. We find Colvard making his rounds when BILLY MITTS (60), a stern-faced state senator, approaches.

MITTS

Dean.

COLVARD

Billy. Good to see you again.

They shake hands, a noticeable rigidity between them.

MITTS

I like what I heard earlier.

COLVARD

It's certainly an exciting time.

MITTS

Indeed it is. But what's all this ugliness about our accreditation being at risk.

COLVARD

Well, after the Meredith incident all Mississippi schools were placed under probation. The Association of Colleges and Schools wanted to deter any more unruly behavior.

MITTS

I expect that you won't let it reach that point. Oxford's troubles and my standing with the Governor have us in a very prosperous position here.

COLVARD

And we're very appreciative of all the support from the state senate.

MITTS

I bleed maroon and white. I just want to see my school succeed.

A WAITER walks by. Mitts takes a glass of champagne.

MITTS (CONT'D)

And speaking of success, I'm looking forward to seeing Babe's boys take the court again.

COLVARD

Yes. Fingers crossed for another conference championship.

MITTS

Fingers crossed indeed.

He sips his champagne, sizes Colvard up for a moment.

MITTS (CONT'D)

Dean, do you mind if I ask you a personal question?

COLVARD

Of course not, senator.

MITTS

What's your stance on segregation?

(off Colvard)

I know North Carolina isn't Mississippi, but surely you can appreciate our way of life. Can't you?

A beat. Colvard notices a CLUSTER of ALUMNI across the room looking his way, clearly talking about him. Judging.

He looks back to Mitts, forces a smile, uncomfortable.

COLVARD

I'll do all I can to prevent any violence from occurring on campus.

Mitts holds his look, thoroughly unimpressed by the answer, plunging the conversation into awkward silence.

EXT. PRESIDENT'S HOME - PORCH - NIGHT

Colvard sits in a rocking chair, gazing out to the manicured lawn, exhausted. His wife, MARTHA (49), intellectual, emerges with drinks in her hands, book under her arm. She sits.

COLVARD

They still don't trust me.

MARTHA

And they haven't even played bridge with you yet. Left one's yours.

COLVARD

(takes his mug)

Mitts in particular hates me. He'd love nothing more than to replace me with a native Mississippian. Then mount my head on his wall.

MARTHA

You knew dealing with the alumni would be challenging.

COLVARD

Yes, on administrative issues.

(then)

I had hoped we would avoid more sensitive matters.

MARTHA

We both know that wasn't going to happen.

(off his concern)

Give it time, Dean. They'll realize you're the right man to lead them.

COLVARD

I'm entirely uncertain that I am.

The admission catches her off guard. She takes a moment then closes her book and wordlessly heads for the front door.

COLVARD (CONT'D)

...Martha?

MARTHA

If you're going to resign then I'm getting a head start on packing.

He's rendered speechless. She crosses back, takes his mug from his hand and sits on his lap. She eyes him lovingly, sees a man with a heavy weight on his shoulders.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

They chose you. Remember that.

COLVARD

Sometimes I wish they hadn't.

(then)

All I wanted was to build something that would still be here after I'm--

She takes his face in her hands, won't hear the word.

MARTHA

And I'm entirely certain you will.

She gives him a kiss then nestles into his shoulder. He wraps his arm around her as uncertainty mounts on his features.

INT. NEW GYM - BABE'S OFFICE - DAY

Joined by ASSISTANT COACH JERRY SIMMONS (35), Babe watches an interview with legendary coach ADOLPH RUPP on a small TV. Babe's a handsome man. Sharp dresser. Big personality.

SPORTSCASTER

You're entering your thirty-third season as head coach at Kentucky. What keeps you motivated?

ADOLPH RUPP

I enjoy winning.

COACH SIMMONS

Smug sombitch.

SPORTSCASTER

Is a twenty-second conference championship on the way?

COACH SIMMONS

Hell no it ain't!

ADOLPH RUPP

It's our league to lose.

SPORTSCASTER

What about a fifth national title?

ADOLPH RUPP

It'd be an honor just to be invited back to the NCAA tournament.

That prompts a glance from Coach Simmons. Babe ignores it.

SPORTSCASTER

Well, a fifth and your legacy as the top coach in the South -- in the nation -- would be secure.

That hits Babe square in the gut. Coach Simmons quickly shuts the TV off.

COACH SIMMONS

Can you believe that?!

BABE

No! Thirty-three years? That son-of-a-gun's older than dirt.

Coach Simmons laughs. Babe has that ability, although it's more of a defense mechanism, masking a deep rooted envy.

BABE (CONT'D)

Let's go put these boys to work.

He exits, passing by two PLAQUES: **Southeastern Conference Coach of the Year: James 'Babe' McCarthy. 1960-61. 1961-62.**

INT. NEW GYM - LATER

Skylights bathe the court in SUNSHINE. Babe and his STAFF oversee a scrimmage. STARTERS v. RESERVES. The starters: Joe Dan, Doug, Stan, RED STROUD (22) and LELAND MITCHELL (22).

There's nothing flashy about this team. Just fundamental basketball. Max effort. Hard nosed defense. Their plays are simple, methodical. Communication precise. A cohesive unit.

Off Babe, focusing on the STARTERS, satisfaction on his face--

INT. NEW GYM - LOCKER ROOM - LATER

Players gather themselves, sweat drenched and exhausted. Hanging on the wall we spot a BANNER: **Southeastern Conference Champions: 1958-59 1960-61 1961-62**

Babe and Coach Simmons enter. Babe wordlessly heads for a chalkboard. Players watch as he writes: 1-Cincinnati 2-Duke 3-Kentucky 4-Loyola 5-West Virginia 6-Miss State

He turns and faces his players, taps the chalkboard.

BABE

The AP's preseason rankings.

Pride and excitement hit the boys as they see their name--

Until Babe SWIPES his hand across the board, erasing it.

BABE (CONT'D)

It don't mean nothing if we don't live up to it. And it won't be easy. No, sir. Teams are gonna wanna beat you *so bad* they're gonna come at you like a biting sow.

He moves throughout the room, animated with his gestures.

BABE (CONT'D)

They're gonna try to get under your skin! Try to get y'all mad! And when they do, all I want y'all to do is *smile at 'em*. Stay in control. Act. Don't ever react.

(walks back to chalkboard)

That's how you get the advantage, boys. And that's how we...

He rewrites *Miss State* on the board, but this time above the others. He SMACKS the board then pauses. *His team above the rest*. It's struck a nerve. He looks to the BANNER.

BABE (CONT'D)
Y'all have given this school so much. Especially you seniors.

His focus turns to Red, Leland and finally, Joe Dan. A beat. We can see the gears grinding. An idea forming. Then--

BABE (CONT'D)
So how about we make a deal. You boys win the conference again, and I'll do all I can to get us to the NCAA tournament.

A stunned silence comes over the room. *That was a bombshell.*

BABE (CONT'D)
Come hell or high water we'll be there. If y'all earn it.

Challenge issued. He exits. Coach Simmons scrambles after--

INT. NEW GYM - CONTINUOUS

And hurries to catch up, crossing through beams of sunlight.

COACH SIMMONS
You think it was a good idea getting their hopes up like that? You know what the policy is, Babe.

BABE
Let me worry about the damn policy.

INT. NEW GYM - LOCKER ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Babe's statement still hangs in the air. Finally--

LELAND
It'll never happen.

The ice broken, players go about changing, showering, etc. A confused RESERVE PLAYER goes to speak--

LELAND (CONT'D)
Doug. You still messin' around with what's her name?

STAN
(taunting)
Annie.

DOUG
No. Her daddy looked like he
was fixin' to kill me.
(to Stan)
Least I can get a girl.

STAN
I got one.

DOUG
What's her name then?

STAN
...None of y'all's business.
(over their LAUGHTER)
She don't go here anyway!

More LAUGHTER. The Reserve Player sees an opening and blurts--

RESERVE PLAYER
What's the deal with the NCAA
tournament?

Silence. Leland throws his towel at him for dampening the
mood. The Reserve Player shrugs. *What'd I say?*

STAN
We can't go 'cause of the unwritten
law.

RESERVE PLAYER
...The what?

DOUG
Boy I reckon if you threw yourself
on the ground you'd still miss. *The
unwritten law.*

LELAND
No team from Mississippi can play
against an integrated team. And the
NCAA's an integrated tournament.

RED
(re: banner)
That's why Kentucky took our spot
each one of them years.

RESERVE PLAYER
That ain't fair.

Joe Dan thinks of chiming in but remains silent.

RED
Welcome to Mississippi, freshman.

DOUG
Imagine how Babe feels. He beat
Rupp and Rupp still took his place.

STAN
...What if they *did* let us go?

LELAND
They won't. Babe was just tryin' to
motivate us so we play good.

STAN
But what if they did? What if we
had to play against blacks?

A heavy beat.

LELAND
I ain't doin' it. Playin' might
encourage 'em to come here. And
look what happened at Ole Miss.

STAN
But we could win a national title.

Uncertainty abounds. The dilemma these boys face is a
daunting one. *Follow aspirations or societal pressures?*

STAN (CONT'D)
Joe D? What're we s'posed to do?

Joe Dan looks to his teammates. A dozen faces staring back at
him, seeking guidance--

A QUICK FLASH of the earlier demonstration. CONFEDERATE
FLAGS. Burning EFFIGY. Joe Dan surrounded by leery STUDENTS.

JOE DAN
We do what we're told. It ain't our
place to do otherwise.

It's said with a discernible lack of conviction, *but it's the
safe answer*. He finishes gathering his things and exits,
passing by Leland, who seems unimpressed by his answer.

EXT. MCCARTHY HOME - NIGHT

A modest home on a quiet suburban street. Well kept garden.
BASKETBALL HOOP over the garage.

INT. MCCARTHY HOME - DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

LAVERNE MCCARTHY (36), forthright, sits at the table with her TEENAGED SONS (13,14). They all hold hands, heads down.

LAVERNE

Thank you, Lord, for the food we
are about to receive--

She hears Babe breeze by, breaking her concentration.

LAVERNE (CONT'D)

Babe?... James.

Her Sons steal a glance. *They've heard that tone before.* A beat -- then Babe reappears. Laverne shoots daggers at him.

BABE

I got scouting reports to go over.
Heat my supper up later for me.

And he's gone. Laverne purses her lips and stands.

LAVERNE

Finish Grace before you eat, boys.

EXT. MCCARTHY HOME - CONTINUOUS

Babe's halfway to his car when Laverne emerges, furious but composed.

LAVERNE

They were looking forward to
spending time with you tonight.

BABE

(not stopping)
They'll understand.

LAVERNE

That the team comes first?

He stops, turns. She doesn't budge. It's tense.

LAVERNE (CONT'D)

You said this season would be
different.

BABE

We have expectations.

LAVERNE

You have obligations.

BABE
(exasperated)
You know how this goes, Laverne.

LAVERNE
Don't I ever.

A beat -- then she smirks to herself.

LAVERNE (CONT'D)
You know what? Just go, Babe. Scout
away.
(walks back towards house)
But you heat up your own supper!

She SLAMS the front door behind her, leaving Babe in the driveway, accompanied only by the SOUNDS of insects. A beat--

Then he continues to his car. The headlights shine across the HOOP above the garage. He backs out then drives away. We STAY ON the HOOP, slowly PUSHING IN until it's all we see. Then--

A BALL swishes through the net. We PULL BACK to--

EXT. HOUSE - BACKYARD - NIGHT

Superimpose: **Chicago, Illinois.**

A BLACK MAN shoots at a similar looking HOOP above a shed. He's athletically built. Handsome. But there's something undeniably bashful about him. This is JERRY HARKNESS (23).

MUSIC comes from the house, a party no doubt, but Jerry's more comfortable here. His smooth left handed jump shot is evidence of that. After hitting a half dozen straight--

LES HUNTER (21, black) emerges from the house, panicked.

LES
Jerry! We got problems!

INT. HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Despite Chris Montez's *'Let's Dance'* spinning on a record player, the party is at a tense standstill. Jerry and Les see VIC ROUSE (20), a debonair looking black man, surrounded by an ALL WHITE CROWD. Jerry sighs. *Not again.*

They work their way closer until they come across Vic in the midst of delivering an impassioned speech to a WHITE MAN.

VIC

--will do no act or acts to repress
such persons--

JERRY

Hey, Vic. We all good, brother?

VIC

Copacetic. I was informing our
friend that me being a negro
doesn't mean I can't be here.

WHITE MAN

(re: two GIRLS)

He was harassing these girls.

VIC

They said hello. I responded in
kind. Don't let jealousy distort
your perception of reality.

WHITE MAN

Don't get smart, boy.

VIC

Boy? Ah'm a-pick the cot'n real
good fur' ya, Massa'.

JERRY

(stepping in front of Vic)

OK. Let's all stay loose.

WHITE MAN

You can "stay loose" somewhere
else. You don't belong here.

VIC

And again; The Emancipation--

JERRY

He's an honor roll cat, likes to
show it off. Tune him out. We do.

The White Man isn't amused. Les notices two other MEN working
their way through the crowd. Hostile faces. He gets uneasy.

JERRY (CONT'D)

Let's just forget about all this.
Get this jam going again. Cool?

WHITE MAN

Didn't you hear what I said?

The record comes to an end and a SCRATCHING fills the room.

JERRY

We just want to have a good time,
man. Our campus gets boring. And
we're not welcome in Rogers Park.

WHITE MAN

I'm from Rogers Park.

A tense beat. Les watches the other Men near and notices one of them has a SWITCHBLADE. His breath catches in his throat.

LES

Jerry. We need to make tracks.

Jerry notices the Men. Sighs. *An all too familiar sight.* He puts on a good face, careful not to incite anything.

JERRY

OK. We'll split. No hard feelings.

He extends his hand, but the White Man just lets it hang there. Jerry covers with a smile and pulls his hand back.

He leads Vic and Les through the crowd and towards the door. Vic tips his short-brimmed hat to the girls. They blush.

VIC

First game's on Saturday.

EXT. TRAIN PLATFORM - LATER

Our three wait on the dimly lit platform, breaths visible in the crisp air. Vic eyes a NEWSPAPER stand.

LES

Vic, man, I thought you were going
to recite the whole Proclamation.

VIC

White folks need to be educated.

He drops some change into the stand and takes a NEWSPAPER.

JERRY

Won't change anything.

VIC

You must have faith, Lonely Face.
We ain't what we oughta be, but we
ain't what we was.

Just then, an ELDERLY WHITE COUPLE walks up the steps. Vic politely smiles. They respond with a quickened pace.

JERRY
Sure about that?

He glances to the couple, now at the far end of the platform.

JERRY (CONT'D)
We'll always be the same to them.

INT. TRAIN - LATER

The car is empty except for our boys. Vic turns the page of his newspaper, notices something. He looks to Jerry.

VIC
When are they going to stop putting
your ugly mug in this paper?

Jerry and Les lean over to get a look. Jerry's face drops when he sees the page.

LES
What they say about me?

VIC
They're not going to talk about the
second leading rebounder.

LES
That's because you steal rebounds.

VIC
Same shit you said in high school.

LES
Same shit you *did* in high school.

Brakes SQUEAL. The train pulls into a stop. Vic tosses the newspaper onto Jerry's lap then heads towards the doors.

Jerry reads the article, growing more uncomfortable with each word.

LES (CONT'D)
(teasingly)
Don't they know you ain't nothing
without us, Lonely Face.

Jerry plays it off with a smile. He tosses the newspaper aside and joins Les and Vic in stepping off. As the doors close behind them, we finally see the article--

Jerry's PHOTO accompanying the headline: **Loyola's Hopes Hinge on Harkness**

GEORGE (V.O.)
Jerry is a credit not only to his
race, but to our entire school.

INT. ALUMNI GYM - LOYOLA UNIVERSITY - DAY

A small, cozy gym. Head coach GEORGE IRELAND (50) sits in the bleachers, a REPORTER next to him. He's a husky man. Short-tempered. And not at all a people person.

GEORGE
And I think the fair treatment by
our fans is reflected by Jerry and
the others in the way they play.

We see the TEAM practicing. Their athleticism and quickness is striking. Their offense is poetry in motion. But they also carry an undoubtable meanness. A swagger. And what stands out most are the FIVE BLACK PLAYERS dotting the court.

REPORTER
A lot's been made of your methods.

George grits his jaw, annoyed. He takes a piece of HARD CANDY from his pocket, pops it into his mouth.

GEORGE
It's no secret I have a direct line
to New York and Nashville recruits.

REPORTER
And playing two -- three -- negroes
is accepted. You play *four*.

George CRUNCHES his candy.

GEORGE
I play my best players.

REPORTER
Some have called it a gimmick.

GEORGE
Ed Jucker starts three at
Cincinnati. I don't see you all
over his ass.

REPORTER
He's won two national titles. Four
seasons ago you only had ten wins.
People think you're desperate--

George SHOOTs to his feet.

GEORGE
Then they don't have to watch the
fucking games!

His voice reverberates off the walls. Players stop at once.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
DID I TELL YOU TO STOP?!

The Players quickly resume activities. His face red, George storms off, leaving the Reporter frozen in place.

INT. ALUMNI GYM - LOCKER ROOM - LATER

Players cool down after practice. Blacks on one side, whites the other. Despite the lack of chatter there's no sense of hostility. The thick wooden door CREAKS opens and George enters along with ASSISTANT COACH JERRY LYNE (30).

GEORGE
Everyone out but the starters.
(gets impatient)
Now goddamnit!

The RESERVES scurry out, leaving us with the STARTERS: Jerry, Vic, Les, RON MILLER (21, black) and JOHN EGAN (20, white).

GEORGE (CONT'D)
It's become clear to Coach Lyne and I that our bench is going to be unreliable this season. Too big of a drop off in talent. So that means heavy minutes for you five.

VIC
Now I can dig that!

GEORGE
It's not so you can show off! It's out of necessity for the team.

Vic loses his smile, but slips some skin with Les.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
This is why we run cross country in the offseason. So you're conditioned to play forty minutes.
(then/pointed)
This team will only go as far as you five take it.

The weight of expectations settles onto the boys.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
 Alright. That's it.
 (to Jerry, Vic, Les)
 You three. Stay.

Ron and John quickly gather their things, wanting no part of whatever's coming. George waits until they're gone then looks to the remaining three. Coach Lyne stands nearby.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
 Do you know who the athletic
 director of this school is?

LES
 ...You.

GEORGE
 That's right, Les. And that's on
 top of coaching you.
 (fury rising)
 So you can imagine my displeasure
 when an hour of my day was wasted
 listening to a nun from Mundelein
 berate me for not instilling better
 manners in my black boys!

LES
 We didn't--

GEORGE
 SHUT UP!

A heavy silence. George gathers himself.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
 What happened, Jerry?

JERRY
 Girls showed us attention. Few cats
 didn't like it. It was nothing.

George sighs, would rather not be dealing with this.

GEORGE
 You can't... people aren't ready
 for that. Maybe ten years from now
 they will be but not today.

VIC
 So the next time a pretty girl says
 hi to me I should ignore her?

GEORGE
 A white one? You're damn right. And
 there won't be a next time anyway.
 Not at Mundelein. You're banned.

Vic shakes his head in disgust, mutters something inaudible.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
What did you say?

VIC
I said that's prejudiced! White
players can go wherever they want.

GEORGE
Spare me the back-of-the-bus
bullshit!

Vic glares at him. George knows that was too far but he's too stubborn to backtrack. A tense beat.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
Stay around campus. That's final.

He exits. Coach Lyne gives the boys a sympathetic look before following.

INT. ALUMNI GYM - GEORGE'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

George takes a seat behind his cluttered desk, pops a piece of candy, contemplates something. Coach Lyne enters. Then--

GEORGE
Think you could find a few more
black girls to go to the dances
here? Keep the boys happy.

Coach Lyne looks to him in a state of disbelief.

COACH LYNE
I'm not a pimp, George.

George realizes it's not the best idea. There's good intentions there but they are severely misguided. He clears his throat and opens a playbook.

GEORGE
I'm not happy with our defense.
Let's work on it before Saturday.

Coach Lyne holds his look for a moment then takes a seat.

EXT. ALUMNI GYM - MOMENTS LATER

Jerry, Vic and Les emerge. The campus is quaint, clean. The waters of Lake Michigan glistening nearby.

VIC

You up for a slice at the Inn,
Lonely Face?

JERRY

You two go ahead. I'm beat. Just
going to hit the sack.

VIC

I can dig. Stay cool, brother.

They all slap skin. Jerry watches them off then heads in the
opposite direction.

INT. STUDENT UNION - MOMENTS LATER

CHATTER and MUSIC fill the air. Jerry enters and glances to a
CLOCK on the wall. **3:59**. He spots an empty table and heads
for it.

The Students are overwhelmingly WHITE, except for a lone
BLACK STUDENT studying. He and Jerry exchange a nod.

Jerry takes a seat at the table. A STUDENT at an adjacent
table reads a NEWSPAPER. Jerry glimpses a headline:

Segregationists Promise Fight in Mississippi

The Student notices a friend and heads off, taking the paper
with him. Jerry nervously adjusts his attire, takes a breath.

JERRY

(sotto)

What's happening?

(then)

Hello. I'm Jerry.

(then)

Jerry Harkness. Captain of the
basketball team.

He shakes his head when he notices the clock now reads **4:00**.
His eyes dart expectantly to a set of double doors. A beat--

Then a CROWD of STUDENTS pour through the doors, LAUGHING,
CHATTING. Jerry stands, searches the faces until he spots--

A beautiful BLACK WOMAN (22). The only black woman in the
group, she chats with a FRIEND, a pile of books in her arms.

Jerry wipes his sweaty palms on his shirt, readies himself.
The Black Woman nears. Their eyes meet. Jerry smiles--

But freezes and the words don't come. He watches as she
continues on and disappears around the corner. He deflates.

He murmurs, disgusted with himself. He SNATCHES his bag off the table and exits through the double doors.

RED RUSH (V.O.)
This is Red Rush with the Loyola
Running Ramblers, running left to
right on your radio dial...

INT. ALUMNI GYM - NIGHT

PACKED with 3,000 spirited FANS. CHEERLEADERS perform. A PEP BAND jams. There's excitement in the air along with a thin haze of smoke from the cluster of PRESSMEN sitting courtside.

RED RUSH (36), the energetic play-by-play man for Loyola, speaks into a mic.

RED RUSH
The most anticipated season in
Loyola basketball history kicks off
tonight as the Ramblers host
Memphis Tech here on WCFL.

We see the ALL WHITE Memphis Tech TEAM warming up.

RED RUSH (CONT'D)
Coach Ireland's squad begins the
season ranked fourth in the
country, and that has fans dreaming
of a national championship.

INT. ALUMNI GYM - LOCKER ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The crowd noise has been reduced to a dull roar. The players sit at their lockers, focused, intense. The thick wooden door CREAKS open to George, Coach Lyne and the STAFF.

GEORGE
Listen up. I want aggressive
defense. John, Ron, you pressure
the ball nonstop. Force them into
mistakes. On offense you know the
drill: Run, run, run, run, run.
(then)
Tonight sets the tone for the
entire season. Make it count.

He glances to the team's CHAPLAIN who then steps forward.

CHAPLAIN
Dear gracious God...

INT. ALUMNI GYM - MOMENTS LATER

The team jogs onto the court to a loud OVATION. George, Coach Lyne and the rest of the staff follow. George meets the Memphis Tech COACH by the scorer's table.

MEMPHIS TECH COACH

And the grind begins again, Coach.

He looks past George and focuses on Jerry, Vic, Les, Ron and reserve RICH ROCHELLE. Five BLACK FACES.

MEMPHIS TECH COACH (CONT'D)

Tell me somethin'. You do all your
recruitin' in Africa?

George grits his jaw.

MEMPHIS TECH COACH (CONT'D)

Just make sure they behave. Got it?

He walks back to his team. George to his. He pops a candy in.

COACH LYNE

What'd he have to say?

GEORGE

Just wanted to wish us luck.

Off George, observing his team, eyes tight with anger--

OPENING TIP: The REFEREE tosses the BALL into the air. Vic taps it back to Ron. Jerry SPRINTS down court and Ron hits him with a perfect pass. Jerry takes one dribble then rises up for a shot. SWISH! The crowd ROARS!

RED RUSH

And Jerry Harkness scores the first
basket of the season! Bee-yootiful!

And the blitzkrieg commences...

SERIES OF SHOTS: The Ramblers are superior in every phase of the game. John and Ron play smothering defense. Vic and Les are unstoppable down low. The lead balloons: 10,15,20...

But the star of the show is undoubtably Jerry. Offensively. Defensively. He has it all. There's no sign of the bashful man we've met. On the court, he's all confidence.

LATER: Loyola: 73 Visitors: 43. The Memphis Tech Coach calls timeout. His team drags back to the bench, demoralized.

One of the WHITE RESERVES on Loyola unzips his warmup jacket.

GEORGE
Did I call for a sub?! SIT DOWN!

The White Reserve quickly sits, avoids George's fierce eyes.

VIC
We're up thirty, George.

GEORGE
Make it forty!

The STARTERS know better than to argue and head back onto the court. The Reserves quietly fume.

Off George, no mercy in sight--

LATER: The final BUZZER: Loyola: 114 Visitors: 58. George meets the Memphis Tech Coach for the postgame handshake. It's brief then the Memphis Tech Coach walks off in a huff.

George makes his way to his wife, GERTRUDE (48), kind, supportive, waiting for him by the Loyola bench.

GERTRUDE
You didn't need to run the score up like that.

He grunts. His go-to response when he knows he's wrong, but is too stubborn to admit. Coach Lyne crosses over.

COACH LYNE
Good start, Coach. Staff's heading out for a brew. Join us.

GERTRUDE
That sounds fun, George. You--

GEORGE
Good start? We missed sixteen free throws. Practice is an hour earlier tomorrow so we can fix that.

Gertrude gives Coach Lyne a look. *You tried*. She and George then walk through the crowd and out the door.

INT. HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - LATER

A postgame house party. Amongst the ALL WHITE CROWD we find John and the WHITE RESERVE PLAYERS mingling, drinking, etc.

STUDENT 1
Hey, John. How'd it feel being the minority out there tonight?

LAUGHTER. John flips the Student the bird.

STUDENT 2

What's Ireland thinking? Four
negroes? We're Loyola Chicago not
Loyola Congo.

RESERVE PLAYER 1

He's afraid they'll leave him if he
doesn't play them.

RESERVE PLAYER 2

Which means no minutes for us.

John feels for them, but knows the truth. *They're not good.*

STUDENT 1

At least he starts one white man.
Hell, if it weren't for Egan those
blacks would just be running wild.

The other Students murmur in agreement. John grins to himself
as he swirls his drink around in his cup.

JOHN

Actually, Jerry's the mastermind.
And he's a negro! Imagine that.
(finishes drink)
Damn. Now that's a good drink.

He walks off, leaving the Students confounded and his
teammates amused.

INT. RAMBLER INN - LATER

A near-campus hot spot. A lively mixture of BLACK and WHITE
Students. Vic, Les, Ron and the black reserve Rich Rochelle
hold court. Jerry's at a table alone, bashfulness returned.

ANCHORMAN (V.O.)

In college basketball, the Loyola
Ramblers took home a 114-58 win.

Vic motions for quiet. Turns the RADIO up.

ANCHORMAN (V.O.)

They were led by Jerry Harkness'
nineteen points and Vic Rouse's
sixteen rebounds.

Vic raises his arms in triumph. Les shakes his head,
dismissive.

ANCHORMAN (V.O.)

In other action, Mississippi State defeated Arkansas A&M 90-55. And number one Cincinnati began their title defense with a resounding 91-42 win over Virginia.

The Cincinnati score dampens the mood temporarily. Vic turns the dial and Mary Wells' *'You Beat Me To The Punch'* comes on.

He pulls a BLACK GIRL up to dance. Others follow suit. Jerry remains seated, watching his more socially adept teammates enjoy themselves, when an enthusiastic WHITE FAN advances.

WHITE FAN

Wicked game, man! You're taking us all the way this year, right?!

Jerry nods, uncomfortable with the attention. The Fan walks off. Another GROUP enters. Jerry double takes when he sees--

The same beautiful Black Woman from the Student Union!

She and her friends find a table. She notices Jerry, says something to the group then heads his way!

His throat tightens with nervousness. She sits across from him. And waits. And waits. And--

JERRY

...What's happening?

BLACK WOMAN

He *can* talk.

Jerry blurts out a nervous laugh. An awkward beat.

JERRY

I'm Jerry Har--

BLACK WOMAN

I know. Don't you want to know who I am?

He nods. She looks at him, eyebrows raised. *Well?*

JERRY

Who-- what's your name?

BLACK WOMAN

Judy Carroll. Now you can say hi to me in the Union rather than stare.

He searches for an excuse but comes up empty.

MARY WELLS (ON RADIO)
*You came up to me and asked me to
 be yours/You beat me to the punch*

Jerry squirms, having a hard time keeping eye contact. Judy's enjoying this. She's a confident woman. Stylish.

Across the room, Les notices the pair and alerts the others.

VIC
 Looking choice, Lonely Face!

Jerry cringes as his teammates tease him for all to hear.

JUDY
 Why do they call you Lonely Face?

JERRY
 Just a dumb nickname.

JUDY
 Dumb nicknames come from somewhere.

A beat. He glances to her, deciding how open he wants to be.

JERRY
 I guess sometimes I'm more
 comfortable when I'm alone.

JUDY
 Funny thing for the captain of the
 basketball team to say.

JERRY
 ...I'm most alone when I'm playing.

JUDY
 Are you?

She holds her look on him, finding his shyness endearing. Mary Wells ends and 'Green Onions' by Booker T & the MG's comes on. The crowd SHOUTS in approval.

JUDY (CONT'D)
 Aren't you going to ask me to
 dance, Jerry?

He finally holds her gaze. Sparks.

JERRY	JUDY
You want--	Yes.

He takes her hand and leads her over to the rest of the group and they join in, their eyes never breaking from each other.

EXT. RAMBLER INN - LATER

Closing time. The players exit along with a large group of Students, ready to take the party elsewhere.

JUDY

I have to go. Walk me to the El?

JERRY

(to others)

I'll catch up.

That's met with more teasing. We stay with Jerry and Judy as they stroll down Sheridan Road. He removes his jacket and drapes it over her shoulders. She smiles her thanks.

They continue on, looking alternately from each other to the street and back, neither of them in a rush to break the silence. There's no need. The attraction is palpable and this is just the beginning. This moment is all that matters now.

EXT. TRAIN PLATFORM - MOMENTS LATER

The two sit on a bench, their hands tantalizing close, skin almost touching. Just when it seems they'll connect, a TRAIN arrives. She returns his jacket. The train's doors open.

JUDY

The next time you see me doesn't
have to be in the Union.

He nods. She steps aboard. Just as the doors are closing--

JUDY (CONT'D)

Work on your free throws.

The doors close, the train departs. He smirks, appreciating her candor. He heads down the stairs, a pep to his step.

INT. CAMPION HALL - LOBBY - MOMENTS LATER

The players are still going strong. Jerry enters and gets hit with good natured teasing. He breaks free and heads towards an elevator. Steps inside, hits a button. A smile crosses his lips as the doors close. We STAY ON them for a beat. Then--

INT. MEMORIAL HALL - LOBBY - NIGHT

The same COLORED DOORS open and JOE DAN steps off his elevator, bag over his shoulder. The walls adorned with NEW YEARS DECORATIONS.

FRONT DESK ATTENDANT
Give 'em hell, Joe D!

Joe Dan gives a wave on his way out the door--

INT. TEAM BUS - CONTINUOUS

Parked outside the dorm, engine running. Leland, Red, Stan, Doug and the rest of the team horse around in the back while Babe and Coach Simmons sit up front. Babe reads a NEWSPAPER: **State, Kentucky Move Out Front In Heated SEC Title Race**

Joe Dan steps aboard. Babe harmlessly hits him with the paper, motions for him to take a seat.

BABE
This Russell boy on Vandy likes to do him some scoring. He's yours. I want you to cloud him up.

JOE DAN
Yes, sir.

Babe taps him with the paper again and Joe Dan joins the rest of the team. Babe stands and faces them.

BABE
Hush up. They're telling me that this is gonna be the largest crowd to ever watch a college basketball game in Mississippi. That don't mean the game's any different. Just play the way y'all know how.

He sits then turns back once more.

BABE (CONT'D)
And they all wanna see me anyway.

LAUGHTER. Babe nods to the DRIVER. The bus departs.

INT. MISSISSIPPI COLISEUM (JACKSON, MS) - LATER

The brand new arena is filled to capacity with 6,500 FANS. The court shines brilliantly. The Bulldogs warm up on one end, the VANDERBILT COMMODORES on the other.

IN THE STANDS: Colvard and Martha find their seats. Martha spots Laverne and her two Sons nearby.

MARTHA
Laverne! Hi, sweetheart.

LAVERNE
Evening, Martha. President Colvard.

COLVARD
This is something, isn't it, boys?
You think your daddy's nervous?

ON THE COURT: Babe stands with Coach Simmons, looks around.

BABE
This place sure is nice. I hope we
don't suck, might not ask us back.

ACTIVITY across the arena draws his attention. A BUZZ spreads throughout the crowd. POLICE clear a path for a group of MEN.

PA ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
Please welcome the Governor of
Mississippi, Ross Barnett!

The crowd CHEERS and we see GOVERNOR ROSS BARNETT (65) flanked by his ENTOURAGE. Glasses. Greying hair parted to the side. He walks with an aura of celebrity. Arrogance. A MAN hands him a small CONFEDERATE FLAG. Barnett waves it proudly, prompting an even bigger CHEER from the crowd.

IN THE STANDS: Colvard and Martha watch as the display of Southern pride hits a fever pitch.

MARTHA
He makes it look so patriotic.

ON THE COURT: Babe, arms crossed, watches Barnett take his seat, not sharing in the crowd's enthusiasm.

JACK CRISTIL (37), the silky smooth voice of Mississippi State, speaks into a mic courtside.

JACK CRISTIL
Good evening Bulldog fans and
welcome to another night of
Mississippi State basketball.
Tonight, the Dogs take on the
Commodores of Vanderbilt in an
important SEC battle from the
beautiful new Mississippi Coliseum
here in Jackson.

FIRST HALF: We're thrust into the action. MSU: 17 Vandy: 11. Doug dribbles up court, glances to Babe. Babe holds up his hand: '5'. Doug nods, returns the signal to his teammates.

JACK CRISTIL (CONT'D)
Seems Babe's calling for the stall.

The 'stall' commences: A game of keep away to milk the clock and frustrate opponents. *Which it does.* After what seems like endless passing -- Joe Dan puts up a hook shot. GOOD!

JACK CRISTIL (CONT'D)
It may not be the prettiest thing
to watch, but it sure is effective!

SERIES OF SHOTS: The Bulldogs keep Vandy at arms length with their deliberate style. Red hits his jump shots. Leland battles for rebounds. Joe Dan plays smothering defense on Vandy star JOHN RUSSELL. Halftime BUZZER: MSU: 36 Vandy: 31

INT. MISSISSIPPI COLISEUM - CONCESSION STANDS - MOMENTS LATER
Colvard purchases a bag of boiled peanuts, readies to leave--

MITTS (O.S.)
Looking strong out there.

Colvard turns and sees state senator Billy Mitts.

MITTS (CONT'D)
Kentucky. The conference is ours to
lose if you ask me.

COLVARD
Let's hope so.

He politely smiles then starts off. Mitts steps in front.

MITTS
Have you put any thought into how
you'll respond to an NCAA bid
should we earn one?

COLVARD
I've been busy with the expansion.
I'm sure you can understand that.

He tries to leave again, but is impeded once again.

MITTS
Just because it's an unwritten law
doesn't mean it should be ignored.

Colvard sees the seriousness on Mitts' face.

COLVARD
Well. If we receive a bid then I
will give the matter my full
attention. You have my word.
(re: peanuts)
(MORE)

COLVARD (CONT'D)

Now if you'll excuse me, Billy.
Martha's waiting on these.

MITTS

Make no mistake about it, Dean. You
saw what happened in Oxford. It
would be a tragedy to put our boys
on equal footing with negroes. You
don't want that kind of publicity.

A threat? A tense beat -- then Mitts breaks into a smile.

MITTS (CONT'D)

Now let's go finish off this win.

He exits. Colvard gathers himself and heads back to his seat.

INT. MISSISSIPPI COLISEUM - LATER

The pro Bulldog crowd is tense and the scoreboard tells us
why: MSU: 53 VANDY: 55 Time: 00:25. The Bulldogs huddle
around Babe, heads down, sensing defeat.

BABE

We've been down further than this
with less time and still won! We're
OK! So what do y'all wanna do?

A brief pause. Then--

RED

Set me a double pick. I'll score.

BABE

That's it then. Red's gonna score!

IN THE STANDS: The Colvards and McCarthys watch with bated
breaths as the starters retake the floor.

ON THE COURT: Play resumes. 25...24...23... Red runs to the
corner. Doug calls out the play. Joe Dan sets a pick and Red
races to the foul line where he gets free from Stan's second
pick. He receives a perfect chest pass from Doug, shoots--

SCORES! The crowd RAGES! Vandy races to the other end but
they're unorganized. Russell forces a bad shot. The ball
bounces HIGH off the rim. Just when it seems like the VANDY
CENTER will grab it -- Joe Dan SNATCHES it out of the air and
gets fouled! MSU: 55 Vandy: 55 Time: 0:04.

JACK CRISTIL (V.O.)

Joe Dan will head to the line with
a chance to win it for the Dogs!

The crowd goes deafly silent as Joe Dan steps to the line. If he's nervous, we wouldn't know it. He takes a breath. Shoots--

GOOD! A ROAR ripples through the arena. It's just as quickly quiet again as he lines up the second shot -- GOOD! MSU: 57
VANDY: 55

The crowd's in a frenzy as Vandy hurries down court. Russell heaves a contested shot over Joe Dan. For a second it looks good -- but it CLANGS off the rim as the BUZZER sounds!

JACK CRISTIL (V.O.)
And that's it! You can wrap this
one in maroon and white!

IN THE STANDS: The Colvards and McCarthys celebrate together. Barnett and Mitts applaud from their front row seats.

ON THE COURT: Joe Dan is mobbed by his teammates. Babe exhales. Shoots Coach Simmons a look. *We got lucky.*

IN THE STANDS: Laverne and her Sons work their way closer to the court, trying to get Babe's attention. But he's swarmed by a group of REPORTERS and he doesn't see his family as he disappears into the locker room. Laverne purses her lips. She covers with a smile to her Sons then leads them through the crowd and towards the exit.

EXT. MISSISSIPPI COLISEUM - PARKING LOT - MOMENTS LATER

As the crowd spills from the exits, still riding high, we find Colvard and Martha heading to their car.

VOICE (O.S.)
President Colvard.

The pair turn and see a Man we recognize as one of Barnett's AIDES. He motions towards a limousine.

AIDE
The Governor would like a word.

Colvard and Martha steal a glance. She straightens his tie then gives him a kiss. He follows the Aide to the limousine. The Aide opens the door. Colvard exhales his nerves then climbs into--

INT. LIMOUSINE - CONTINUOUS

Where he finds Barnett waiting for him, looking quite intimidating in the cramped space. They shake hands.

COLVARD
Mr. Governor.

BARNETT
Dean. That game damn near killed
me.

COLVARD
We're glad the boys pulled it out.

BARNETT
They're a hell of a squad. Babe's a
hell of a coach. You better do
everything you can to keep him.

COLVARD
We'll do our best, sir.

BARNETT
Alright. Drink?

Colvard declines. Barnett makes himself one. Bourbon. Rocks.

BARNETT (CONT'D)
I've been looking to find time to
talk. It hasn't been easy with
those goddamn Kennedys so far up my
ass I can taste the clam chowder.

COLVARD
I can imagine it's been difficult.

BARNETT
Running a campaign is difficult.
Fighting the Krauts was difficult.
This is inconvenient.
(takes a drink)
They have the balls to bring
criminal contempt charges on me.
Fucking Bobby. I'm not the one who
deployed hundreds of federal
marshals. *Federal*.
(another drink)
I tried to stop that goddamn riot.
So as far as I'm concerned, that
blood is on their hands! They
should be brought up for murder!

He pounds his drink, clearly on edge. Colvard sits quietly.
Barnett gathers himself and rolls the window down.

The Aide hands him a folder. Barnett rolls the window back
up. Takes his time reading the folder's contents.

BARNETT (CONT'D)
Your enrollment's expected to
double by 1970?

COLVARD
Yes, sir.

Barnett nods. *Impressive*. He goes back to the folder. Colvard
wipes some sweat beading on his brow, tries to stay calm.

BARNETT
You're only asking for six million
next legislative session?

COLVARD
Well, Mr. Governor, we felt--

BARNETT
How about I double it?

COLVARD
...Mr. Governor?

BARNETT
You got big plans here, Dean. I
respect a man with aspirations. And
I want to help you make them a
reality. Every last one.

Colvard is speechless. Barnett tosses the folder aside.

BARNETT (CONT'D)
Today I heard the name John Frazier
for the first time. A negro, he's
planning on enrolling at Southern
Miss. Monkey see, monkey do.

Colvard keeps his composure, but he's growing increasingly
uneasy. Barnett looks him in the eyes.

BARNETT (CONT'D)
Our heritage -- the very thing the
men of the Confederacy, men like my
daddy, fought for -- is under
attack. And that is why we need
Mississippi State to be the symbol
of resistance. We need her to keep
alive the values and customs that
the people of this state hold dear.
We need her to stand up to this
totalitarian government and say NO
MORE!

An uncomfortable beat.

COLVARD

Mr. Governor. With all due respect,
I never intended to get involved--

BARNETT

A sleeping giant with greatness in
her future. That's what you said?

Colvard nods. *His own words used against him.*

BARNETT (CONT'D)

That greatness can be assured of.
You just need to prove to me that
you're deserving of my help.

Off Colvard, the storm bearing down, nowhere to hide--

INT. PRESIDENT'S HOME - BEDROOM - LATER

Colvard lies in bed, wide awake. The *tick-tick-tick* of a
grandfather clock tells us it's **3:15**. He quietly climbs out
of bed, careful not to wake Martha, and heads--

INT. PRESIDENT'S HOME - STUDY - CONTINUOUS

And takes a seat at his desk. BLUEPRINTS of new campus
buildings scattered across it. He unlocks the bottom drawer
and finds a PILL BOTTLE labeled: **Secobarbital**. He downs one.
Sees a GAME PROGRAM from the Vandy game laying next to the
blueprints. He flips through it, thoughts unknown to us--

INT. NEW GYM - BABE'S OFFICE - DAY

Babe and Coach Simmons pour over scouting reports on their
next opponent. Leftover food and coffee cups laying about.
They've been here a while. A RADIO on in the background--

ANCHORMAN (V.O.)

Top teams in college basketball
were in action last night. Duke
beat Louisville 76-75. Loyola won
its tenth by blitzing Wyoming 93-
82. And number one Cincinnati
remained undefeated with a 72-46
win over Davidson.

COACH SIMMONS

Them Cincinnati boys sure can play.

BABE

You should be worried about Tulane.

ANCHORMAN (V.O.)

In SEC news, Mississippi State's AD Wade Walker poured cold water on any hopes of the team going to the NCAA tournament when he announced that the school would abide by the state's 'unwritten law'. The Bulldogs lead the conference by one game over rival Kentucky.

Babe tosses his pencil down, sits back in his chair.

COACH SIMMONS

Sombitch! Why's he saying that now?

BABE

He wants to get out in front of it.

He spots a NEWSPAPER on his desk. Eyes twinkle mischievously.

BABE (CONT'D)

Time we put the pressure on 'em.

He grabs his phone, dials. Holds it to his ear. After a beat--

BABE (CONT'D)

Hank! It's Babe. I got a story for you. But you ain't hear it from me.

CUT TO:

A NEWSPAPER dropping onto a table: **Will Babe Leave State If Denied Another NCAA Trip?**

We PULL BACK to--

INT. LEE HALL - PRESIDENT'S OFFICE - DAY

Babe sits across from a tired looking Colvard and a ticked off WADE WALKER (40), the school's Athletic Director.

WALKER

Did you know about this?

Babe glances to the paper, feigns shock. Badly.

WALKER (CONT'D)

This type of story reflects poorly on our entire athletic department.

BABE

I'd say the football team's doing a fine job of that already.

WALKER
This ain't funny, Babe.

BABE
I ain't laughing. They can't score!

Walker isn't amused.

WALKER
I want you to release a statement saying that you're committed to this school and this program.

BABE
No... you *wanted* a good program.

WALKER
Coaches. You win a few games and think you're bigger than God.
(pointed)
You were an oil salesman before we hired you. Mississippi State *made* Babe McCarthy.

BABE
1916. That was the last time this school won the SEC. Now that gym's packed every night. How much you think that success's been worth? And Mississippi State *made me*?

He and Walker lock eyes like two gunslingers.

BABE (CONT'D)
This 'policy' went to hell the moment James Meredith stepped foot in Oxford. Yet here we are. Why is that, Wade? Do the alumni--

COLVARD
I told him to say it.

That catches Babe off guard.

COLVARD (CONT'D)
I'm not convinced an NCAA bid is worth the risk. We have to keep the school's best interests in mind.

Babe absorbs that. He glances to a table lined with MODELS of the planned expansion. *Best interests.*

BABE
As long as the alumni are happy.

COLVARD

I understand your frustrations. God willing, you will have other opportunities at the NCAA's.

BABE

Which Adolph Rupp will steal out from under me!

(gathers himself)

Success is fleeting. When you have a chance to win, you take it.

He stands.

BABE (CONT'D)

We're gonna win the conference. What happens after that is on y'all's conscience.

He walks out, leaving Colvard and Walker in silence.

EXT. CAFETERIA - DAY

A REPORTER paces, eyeing each STUDENT that emerges. After a moment -- he spots Joe Dan and bum-rushes him.

REPORTER

Joe Dan! Any comment on Babe potentially leaving?

Joe Dan picks up his pace. The Reporter follows.

JOE DAN

We're just focused on winning.

REPORTER

You can do better than that.

Joe Dan turns a corner. The Reporter remains on his tail.

REPORTER (CONT'D)

Is the team looking to make a political statement?

JOE DAN

What?

REPORTER

What're your thoughts on Oxford?

JOE DAN

REPORTER

I--

Do you believe in segregation?

JOE DAN
Sorry. I gotta get to practice.

He breaks into a jog, leaving the Reporter behind.

INT. NEW GYM - LOCKER ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Leland, Stan, Red, Doug and the Reserves dress for practice.

STAN
Y'all think Babe'd really leave?

LELAND
Shit. They might fire him if he
keeps talkin' like he is.

STAN
No way. That'd never happen.

RED
It would if the politicians got
involved.

DOUG
Barnett would burn the school down
with Babe in it before he let us
play against blacks.

STAN
Well Babe seems hell bent on it.

RED
Won't matter none if we don't win
the conference.

LELAND
If we do, shouldn't we get a say in
all this? I think we should make it
known that we don't wanna play.

STAN
But Joe D said we should stay
quiet.

LELAND
...I think Joe D's scared.

IN THE HALLWAY: Joe Dan stands at the door, listening.

LELAND (O.S.) (CONT'D)
If we just go along with things
like he says and end up playin',
we're gonna make ourselves targets.

IN THE LOCKER ROOM: Players exchange worried looks.

LELAND (CONT'D)

Either some negro's gonna take your
knee out or a Klansman's gonna show
up on your doorstep. That's what
happens if we follow Joe D.

The door opens and Joe Dan enters, plunging the room into awkward silence.

He reaches his locker, changes. No one says a word. The tension is finally broken when Coach Simmons steps inside.

COACH SIMMONS

Let's go! Pick up the pace!

Players exit, leaving only Leland and Joe Dan. A beat.

LELAND

It ain't personal.

JOE DAN

What isn't?

They catch eyes, Joe Dan wanting no part of a confrontation. Leland exits. Joe Dan goes back to changing then stops, exhales, feeling his leadership slipping away.

As he sits quietly, the sound of a crowd grows LOUDER, taking us into a:

MONTAGE

1. Int. New Gym - 5,000 raucous FANS CLANG cowbells, a Mississippi State tradition, as the Bulldogs battle TULANE. The Bulldogs play their deliberate style to perfection. Babe watches a relatively stress free victory.

2. Int. Alumni Gym - Jerry, Les, Vic, Ron and John sit on the bench as George, veins protruding, SCREAMS at them. The scoreboard shines: Loyola: 92 Visitor: 62

3. Ext. Loyola University - Jerry and Judy sit on a bench, watching the moon and stars over Lake Michigan. She rests her head on his shoulder. He takes her hand.

4. Int. New Gym - Mississippi State battles TENNESSEE. It's a tense game. Joe Dan leads the Bulldogs with his superb play on offense and defense. Final BUZZER: MSU: 63 Visitor: 59

5. Int. Colvard's Study - Colvard behind his desk, blueprints all around him, listening to Babe on the RADIO.

BABE (V.O.)

I think it'd be an outright shame
for a team capable of playing as
well as our boys have this season,
not to get a chance at the NCAA.

Colvard switches the radio off then fishes out his PILLS.

6. Int. Alumni Gym - As Judy and Gertrude watch proudly from the stands, Jerry and the Ramblers dismantle IOWA with a barrage of baskets and their trademark aggressive defense.

7. Ext. McCarthy Home - Laverne retrieves the PAPER, sees a headline: **Babe Wants State Team In Playoffs**. She scans the street, *as if worried someone is watching*, then heads inside.

8. Ext. Rambler Inn - Jerry, Vic, Les and Ron emerge after a night of fun. A car SPEEDS down the street towards them. A WHITE MAN hangs out the passenger side window. They tense.

WHITE MAN

Go back to Africa, spooks!

The car speeds off. The boys exchange concerned looks.

9. Int. Anderson Arena - Jerry and the Ramblers play an uncharacteristically bad game against BOWLING GREEN. They're outworked. Their offense is poor. Their defense nonexistent.

RED RUSH (V.O.)

And the Ramblers quest for a
perfect season goes up in flames
with a 92-75 loss to Bowling Green.

Players walk off the court. A fuming George following after.

10. Ext. Mississippi State - Joe Dan walks to class when he notices a MAN shouting and handing out flyers.

MAN

The NAACP is controlled by the
Communist party!

He stuffs a FLYER into Joe Dan's hands: **What have I personally done to MAINTAIN SEGREGATION?**

11. Int. Florida Gym - Babe watches helplessly as Joe Dan and the Bulldogs are undone by their own bad offense and the hot shooting of FLORIDA. Final BUZZER: Florida: 73 MSU: 52

JACK CRISTIL (V.O.)

The Dogs are now tied with
Kentucky, making their showdown
next week winner take all.

Babe leads his demoralized players off the court, pressures mounting.

END MONTAGE.

EXT. JUDY'S HOME - NIGHT

Middle class. Jerry, wearing a crisp shirt and tie, rings the doorbell. Thinks. Then checks his breath--

When Judy opens the door, catching him in the act. She smiles and leads him inside.

INT. JUDY'S HOME - DINING ROOM - LATER

Well decorated but not ostentatious. At the table, Jerry eats dinner with the Carroll family. Nervous energy abounds. The CLINKING of forks the only sound. Then--

JUDY'S FATHER

Where in New York you from, Jerry?

Jerry gets caught mid bite. He swallows, clears his throat.

JERRY

Harlem, sir.

JUDY'S MOTHER

How have you liked being at Loyola these past four years?

JERRY

It's real pretty. I like the lake. We only got the Hudson back home.

JUDY

He almost didn't come.

JUDY'S MOTHER

No? Why's that?

JERRY

I had a scholarship to Texas Southern. But the dorm burned down.

JUDY'S MOTHER

How awful.

JERRY

So I played summer ball for a man named Walter November in Harlem. He told Coach Ireland about me.

JUDY'S FATHER
We're sure glad you're on our team.

JUDY'S MOTHER
Do your folks get to see you play?

JERRY
Only when we played at St. John's.

JUDY'S MOTHER
I'm sure they're very proud
regardless. What's your mother do?

A beat. Jerry sips his water, clearly self-conscious.

JERRY
She was sixteen when she had me. So-

JUDY
His father works maintenance at the
UN building.

JUDY'S MOTHER
A commendable occupation. More
exciting than working for the IRS.

She smiles. Jerry steals a look with Judy. *Thank you.*

JUDY'S FATHER
You thought about playing pro ball?

JERRY
Actually, sir, I'm more concerned
about graduating on time first.

JUDY'S MOTHER
What's your major, honey?

JERRY
Sociology.

JUDY'S FATHER
You on track to graduate?

JERRY
Yes, sir. In the spring.

Judy's parents exchange a look. Impressed.

JUDY'S FATHER
How you liking that chili?

JERRY
Best chili I've ever had.

JUDY'S FATHER
You damn right it is.

LAUGHTER. Judy gives Jerry a smile. This is going well.

INT. JUDY'S HOME - DEN - LATER

As Judy looks through a record collection, Jerry takes in a wall of PHOTOS: Judy's Father with the likes of White Sox great Minnie Minoso, Globetrotter owner Abe Saperstein and Hall of Famer Ernie Banks.

JERRY
What's your pops do?

JUDY
He's the chef at the Bards Room at Comiskey. Bob Elson talks about his cooking during Sox games.

JERRY
My man.

He keeps his attention on the photos. Then, absentmindedly--

JERRY (CONT'D)
I met Jackie Robinson once.

JUDY
What?! And you kept that until now?
Boy, you all types of mysterious.

JERRY
It was just for a few minutes. I was in high school. I was shooting around at the Y and all of a sudden this cat says, 'Hey, kid. You're not half bad.' I turned around and there was Jackie Robinson.

JUDY
What a trip! What did you say?

JERRY
Nothing at first. He probably thought I was some snap case. But then I thanked him for doing what he did. Told him how much he meant to negro athletes like me.
(then)
He told me I was good enough for a scholarship. No one had ever told me that before.

He smiles as he plays back the memory in his mind.

JUDY

Maybe one day there'll be a kid who
looks up to you the same way.

He smirks. *Yeah right.* He then sees large stacks of neatly organized *Chicago Daily Tribunes* and heads for them.

JUDY (CONT'D)

Daddy loves his papers. 'They're
keepers of history, Judy.'

He flips through them. Sees a recent one: **Harkness Leads Loyola Into National Spotlight.** He digs deeper until one catches his eye. The front page: **2 DIE, 75 HURT IN MISS. RIOT**

Judy finally finds the album she was looking for, puts a record on. 'Try Me' by James Brown. She smiles, sways her body in rhythm to the melody. Turns towards Jerry.

JUDY (CONT'D)

Dance with me, Lonely Face.

He puts the paper down and meets her in the center of the room, takes her in his arms. They begin to slow dance.

JUDY (CONT'D)

One more win qualifies you for the
NCAA's. Nervous?

He shakes his head, but all he can think about is her.

JERRY

What if I can't make you happy?

JUDY

Too late.

They look at each other for a prolonged time. Their bodies in rhythm. Close. Intimate. Then they kiss. She rests her head on his chest as they continue gently moving to the music.

INT. JEPPESEN FIELDHOUSE (HOUSTON, TX) - LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

Jerry, Vic, Les, Ron, John and the rest of team sit quietly at their lockers. George, Coach Lyne and the staff stand against the wall as the Chaplain finishes his prayer.

CHAPLAIN

And finally Lord, we ask that we
play with confidence and unity. In
your name we pray. Amen.

THE GAME: The Ramblers struggle, spooked by the hostile crowd. They commit uncharacteristic turnovers and force bad shots. Houston adds to their misery by playing physically. A livid George calls a timeout. Loyola: 10 Houston: 21

GEORGE
WAKE UP GODDAMNIT!

He continues exhorting, but the SOUNDS of the CROWD AMPLIFY until that's all that we hear and will hear for the rest of the scene. The boys retake the court. Jerry inbound, standing inches from the crowd. Just the sight of him enrages them. He stands tall, but his eyes betray him. They're filled with fear. He passes the ball to Ron and the game resumes...

SERIES OF SHOTS: By sheer talent alone, Loyola gets back into the game. Jerry's shot falls. John and Ron answer Houston's physicality with their own. Vic and Les get mean underneath.

With the outcome still hanging in the balance, Jerry hits consecutive baskets, John comes up with a huge steal and Vic cleans up the glass. The final BUZZER: Loyola: 62 Houston: 58

RED RUSH (V.O.)
The Ramblers have stamped their
ticket to the NCAA tournament!

But there's no celebration. The boys hurry for the locker room, dodging more threats and objects from the Fans--

INT. TEAM PLANE - LATER

Silence except for the HUM of the plane's engines. We find Jerry staring out the window, lost in his own thoughts.

Les emerges from the lavatory and takes a seat next to him.

LES
You were right. We'll always be the
same to them.

Jerry stays quiet. He returns his focus to the window, the MOON shining brightly above the clouds. We PUSH IN on it--

JACK CRISTIL (V.O.)
Welcome to another night of
Mississippi State basketball.

EXT. NEW GYM - NIGHT

Off the MOON we PAN to find Laverne and her Sons exiting their car. They head towards the gym.

JACK CRISTIL (V.O.)
The Dogs are one win away from
their third straight SEC title.

They walk through the front doors and into--

INT. NEW GYM - CONTINUOUS

Pandemonium. Cowbells RINGING incessantly. Occupancy levels pushed to their limits. The kind of heightened anticipation that brings chills.

JACK CRISTIL
All that stands in their way is the
Baron of the Bluegrass, Adolph Rupp
and his Kentucky Wildcats.

KENTUCKY emerges from their locker room, greeted with BOOS that grow LOUDER the second ADOLPH RUPP steps onto the court.

INT. NEW GYM - LOCKER ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Deafly quiet. Players at their lockers, Coach Simmons and the staff nearby. But no Babe. It remains like this to the point we start thinking he might not show at all -- but finally--

The door opens and Babe steps inside. Looks his boys over.

BABE
Kentucky's here.

And he's gone. The staff follows. The players' eyes meet. Adrenaline building. *It's time*. They rise and rush out.

INT. NEW GYM - MOMENTS LATER

Babe watches his team warmup but can't help himself and glances to Rupp. But Rupp never turns his way, as if Babe isn't worth the energy it takes. Instead, he talks strategy with his All-American COTTON NASH.

Seeing this, Babe motions Joe Dan over. They huddle together.

BABE
They say Cotton Nash's one of the
best players in the country. I say
twenty bucks you can't hold him
under ten points. Got a bet?

Joe Dan nods. *Challenge accepted*. He rejoins the team. Babe throws another look to Rupp, but gets nothing in return.

SERIES OF SHOTS: The Bulldogs come out tight, succumbing to nerves, letting the stakes of the game get to them. Kentucky takes advantage. The air is sucked out of the gym. Babe calls timeout. MSU: 9 KENTUCKY: 20.

BABE (CONT'D)

I ever tell y'all the mule story? --
No? -- Well, back in the war I was
flying this load of mules over the
Himalayans. All that weight kept
shifting back and forth in the
cargo hold. I thought, 'Shoot. This
flight ain't gonna end well for
me.' So I popped the hatch and let
them mules drop.

The Players exchange bewildered looks. *What the hell?*

BABE (CONT'D)

I don't know what made me think
about that. Prob'ly because I'd do
the same to y'all after that start.

Coach Simmons suppresses his laughter. The Players crack
smiles of their own. Tension broken. Babe gets serious.

BABE (CONT'D)

Listen. Just because it says
Kentucky on their jersey don't mean
they're better than you. Remember:
Act. Never react. Let's go now!

SERIES OF SHOTS: The Bulldogs regain their confidence. The
game intensifies. Both teams giving maximum effort. Trading
baskets. Babe and Rupp stalk the sideline, arguing with the
Refs. The crowd reacts to everything in FULL THROTTLE.

As the tension rises, Joe Dan shines. His leadership calms
his teammates. His defense frustrates Cotton Nash.

The Bulldogs unleash the 'stall'. Kentucky wilts. The fans
can sense it. Cowbells CLANG loud enough to register on the
Richter scale. Final BUZZER: MSU: 56 Kentucky: 52

Fans flood the court in celebration. In the midst of it all,
Babe meets Rupp by the scorer's table.

ADOLPH RUPP

I'll be sure to send you a postcard
from the tournament.

IN THE CROWD: Laverne watches the exchange. She sees Babe
walk off and can tell by the look on his face he's upset. She
knows immediately. *He won't be home anytime soon.*

INT. NEW GYM - PRESS ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Babe strolls into the room full of REPORTERS.

BABE

Before we start somebody tell me
how many Cotton Nash had tonight.

REPORTER

Eight.

BABE

Shit.

He takes a seat, kicks his feet up. Motions to *bring it on*.

REPORTER 2

Elephant in the room, Babe. You
want the team in the NCAA's. Wade
Walker said y'all won't go. A bid's
now officially coming. Any comment?

INT. PRESIDENT'S HOME - STUDY - CONTINUOUS

Colvard listens intently to Babe on the RADIO.

BABE (V.O.)

It makes my heart sick to think
that these players will have to put
away their uniforms after what
they've just accomplished.

Colvard sighs. A beat.

BABE (V.O.)

And I hope that those who have the
decision to make, make the right
one.

Colvard tosses his glasses onto the desk next to a pile of
BLUEPRINTS. He grabs his PILLS. Washes one down with his
cocktail, never noticing Martha watching from the doorway.

INT. MEMORIAL HALL - JOE DAN'S ROOM - LATER

Joe Dan lies in bed, unable to sleep. He reaches over and
opens the top drawer of his night stand, pulls out a WORN
GAME PROGRAM: **1962 NCAA Basketball Tournament. Mideast
Regional Final. Kentucky v. Ohio State**

He flips through the pages, looking at the team photos,
player profiles, etc.

JOE DAN
Starting forward, number thirty-
three, Joe Dan Gold!

He mimics the sound of a cheering crowd. He spots a BOTTLE CAP on his night stand. He shoots it towards his TRASH CAN -- and it rattles in.

JOE DAN (CONT'D)
And the Bulldogs win the national
championship!

More 'cheering'. His innocence is pure, yet heartbreaking. *This may be the closest he ever gets to the tournament.* As he reaches that realization he goes silent. He lies back down, hoping against hope that his imagination becomes reality--

EXT. LEE HALL - DAY

A FLOCK of REPORTERS loiter by the stairs. The moment Colvard rounds the corner they swarm, SHOUTING questions about the team's chances of playing. Colvard politely declines to comment and continues up the stairs and into the building.

INT. LEE HALL - PRESIDENT'S OFFICE - LATER

Colvard looks over BLUEPRINTS with another SCHOOL OFFICIAL.

SCHOOL OFFICIAL
If we plan to break ground on the
women's dorm or the union by
spring, we're going to need that
money. Any word from Barnett?

COLVARD
No. They're in session next month.
Budgets will have to be submitted.

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
President Colvard. The Conference
commissioner is on line one.

The School Official gives Colvard a look then exits. Colvard walks to his desk. Exhales. Then hits the blinking button.

COLVARD
Commissioner.

COMMISSIONER (V.O.)
Dean. Congratulations on another
championship. I smell dynasty.

COLVARD
Thank you, Bernie.

COMMISSIONER (V.O.)
I know you're busy so I'll get to it. I need an answer on the NCAA's by March fifth. We need to give the second place team an opportunity to practice in case they're needed.

Colvard sees his calendar: **February 27th**. He then notices TWO STACKS of ENVELOPES. One TWICE the size of the other.

COMMISSIONER (V.O.)
Unless you have an answer now...

A beat.

COLVARD
I'll get back to you, Bernie. Give the family my best.
(hangs up/then)
Darlene.

His assistant, DARLENE (30s), enters. He grabs the envelopes.

DARLENE
Letters about the tournament, sir.
Organized into 'pro' or 'con'.
(then)
The larger stack is 'pro'.

Off Colvard, taken aback by the unexpected show of support--

INT. PRESIDENT'S HOME - DEN - NIGHT

A fire CRACKLES in the fireplace. As Martha reads a book, Colvard reads through BOTH stacks of letters. Then--

The faint sound of VOICES emanates from outside, steadily getting LOUDER. They both grow wary and head out to--

EXT. PRESIDENT'S HOME - PORCH - CONTINUOUS

And are stunned to see HUNDREDS OF STUDENTS spread across the expansive lawn. Signs read: **LET THEM PLAY! GO STATE GO!**

STUDENTS
We want to go! We want to go!

Martha, hands to her mouth, can't believe it. Colvard raises his hands, eventually drawing quiet.

COLVARD

This... This is quite the scene.

MALE STUDENT

Let 'em play, President Colvard!

The crowd CHEERS. CHANTS resume. Colvard motions for quiet.

COLVARD

I appreciate your enthusiasm. I'm going to give this matter careful consideration. I would be more than happy to sit down and discuss it--

A STUDENT towards the front of the crowd sits down. Then a SECOND. A THIRD. And then Colvard and Martha watch in awe as the entire crowd sits down in the yard.

Off Colvard, his decision just made more difficult--

INT. CITY AUDITORIUM (JACKSON, MS) - BALLROOM - NIGHT

A fundraiser for the Mississippi Symphony Orchestra. We find Colvard and Martha amongst the formally dressed CROWD. His eyes shallow from inadequate sleep. She takes a glass of champagne off a passing tray when she sees Barnett advancing.

BARNETT

Martha, you're putting us all to shame tonight.

MARTHA

That's very kind, Mr. Governor.

BARNETT

Would you mind if I stole your husband for a minute?

MARTHA

As long as you bring him back.

Barnett laughs as he throws his arm around Colvard.

INT. CITY AUDITORIUM - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Colvard and Barnett emerge to find Mitts waiting. Two Barnett AIDES shut the doors behind them, *as if trapping Colvard in*.

BARNETT

Dean. Billy tells me that you haven't rejected the NCAA bid yet. You care to tell me why that is?

Tense beat. Colvard swallows his anxiety.

COLVARD

I'm weighing my options, Mr.
Governor.

MITTS

The mere fact you're even
considering this is a slap in the
face to the people of Mississippi!

COLVARD

I disagree, Billy.

MITTS

Senator Mitts.

COLVARD

It's my feeling that people's
sentiments are changing.

MITTS

Your *feeling*?

COLVARD

People are embarrassed to drive out
of state with a Mississippi license
plate. So yes, Senator Mitts, it's
my feeling that people want this
state to be perceived differently.
And letting go of the unwritten law
may be a start.

MITTS

So a few students got together and
you think they represent the views
of the entire state? They'd vote to
disband classes if you let them!

COLVARD

It's not just students. My office
has been flooded with letters from
regular Mississippians. 3-to-1 in
favor of the team playing. We
cannot ignore that.

MITTS

What the hell do you know about
regular Mississippians?

COLVARD

I know they want change!

Even Colvard surprised himself with that outburst. A beat.

COLVARD (CONT'D)

Oxford was the tipping point. Now we can latch on to what is rapidly becoming an antiquated way of life, or we can move forward. Mississippi State can be the symbol of a new Mississippi. One that is welcoming and supports equal opportunities and justice for all races.

MITTS

My God... You're a nigger lover.

Colvard shifts in his shoes, uneasy. Mitts steps closer.

MITTS (CONT'D)

My university will never give in to the whims of the central powers.

He drills into Colvard with simmering eyes.

BARNETT

Get yourself a drink, Billy.

Mitts keeps his eyes on Colvard a moment longer then exits. Barnett motions towards a pair of chairs. He and Colvard sit.

BARNETT (CONT'D)

Back in fifty-nine I had this catchy campaign jingle.

(sings)

Roll with Ross/Roll with Ross, he's his own boss/For segregation, one hundred percent/He's not a moderate like some of the gents/He'll fight integration with forceful intent.

He smiles, remembering better times. It slowly fades.

BARNETT (CONT'D)

I failed on that promise when Meredith arrived in Oxford. I failed my voters. But more importantly, I failed my daddy.

COLVARD

Mr. Governor--

BARNETT

But I still have time to rectify it.

(then/loaded)

Just like I still have time overseeing all appropriations for our universities.

No more needs said. *The threat clear enough.* Barnett stands.

BARNETT (CONT'D)

When my daddy died, he left me his
Confederate uniform. When I see it,
I remember what a great man he was.

(then)

You need to think about how you
want history to remember you, Dean.

He buttons his tux and walks back to the ballroom, leaving
Colvard looking as diminutive as we've ever seen him.

INT. PRESIDENT'S HOME - STUDY - LATER

It's late. Colvard crosses to his desk, opens the drawer but
his pills are gone. As he rummages -- he hears a RATTLE. He
looks up and sees Martha in the doorway, BOTTLE in hand.

COLVARD

They're meant to help me sleep.

A long silent beat. Tears blossom in the corner of his eyes.
He's quick to deal with them but they're just as quickly
replaced with more. He's breaking. She places the bottle down
and goes to him. Takes his distressed face in her hands.

COLVARD (CONT'D)

I don't know what to do.

MARTHA

Darling. You've always known. Your
heart remains pure despite your
pain. And your convictions remain
strong despite your doubts. All you
must do is trust them.

INT. LEE HALL - PRESIDENT'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Colvard stands at the window, looking out to campus. Darlene
sits at a TYPEWRITER, hands ready. Martha and Walker stand
nearby. A long heavy beat. And then, without turning around--

COLVARD

There is obscurity about the
unwritten law. Some say it is one
thing; some, another...

Keys begin HITTING paper--

INT. UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI GYM - LATER

The Bulldogs battle OLE MISS in the regular season finale.

COLVARD (V.O.)
 Be that as it may, there is
 precedent for the President to act
 in the matter of participation in
 the NCAA competition...

It's a tight fisted affair. Babe implores from the bench.

INT. LEE HALL - AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

The Mississippi State STUDENT SENATE holds a vote--

COLVARD (V.O.)
 The student senate passed a
 resolution in favor of our
 basketball team competing. Letters
 from alumni and friends of the
 school convey a similar attitude...

Breaking into APPLAUSE when the motion overwhelmingly passes.

INT. GOVERNOR'S MANSION - DEN - LATER

Barnett hosts a fundraiser for the WHITE CITIZENS' COUNCIL.

COLVARD (V.O.)
 In response to this interest, I, as
 President of Mississippi State
 University, have decided to send
 our team to the NCAA competition...

An AIDE enters and crosses to Barnett, whispers in his ear.

COLVARD (V.O.)
 I arrive at this decision freely
 and independently...

Barnett's face drops. Fills with rage.

INT. MITTS HOME - LIVING ROOM - LATER

Mitts' WIFE answers the phone then hands it to Mitts.

COLVARD (V.O.)
 I am cognizant of the hazard of
 this action and am fully reconciled
 to the possible consequences of it
 upon my professional career...

Mitts SLAMS the receiver down.

INT. MCCARTHY HOME - KITCHEN - LATER

Laverne washes dishes in the sink--

COLVARD (V.O.)

But by Coach McCarthy and through
my knowledge of the players, I am
convinced that Mississippi will
have reason to be proud of their
representation in the tournament...

Watching, sadly, as her Sons play one-on-one in the driveway.

INT. UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI GYM - LATER

Time winds down. Final BUZZER: MSU: 75 Ole Miss: 72

COLVARD (V.O.)

I am further convinced that the
spirit of fair play on the part of
all concerned will transcend any
prejudices or biases...

As Joe Dan leads the team into the locker room, they pass Ole
Miss FANS waving CONFEDERATE FLAGS.

INT. UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI GYM - LOCKER ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Coach Simmons speaks to Babe. Babe looks back in disbelief.

COLVARD (V.O.)

My hope for the team is an
enjoyable time, good, clean
competition, and victory.

He faces the players and a smile crosses his lips.

CUT TO:

INT. STUDENT UNION - DAY

Superimpose: **Five Days Later**

Loyola STUDENTS socializing, studying. We find Judy reading a
NEWSPAPER: **NCAA Field Set; Loyola Begins Drive For Title.**

INT. ALUMNI GYM - LOCKER ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Jerry, Vic, Les, Ron and John change into their uniforms.
It's quiet. A heaviness in the air. Then--

JOHN

All I know is if one of those
hillbillies calls me an Albino, I'm
decking his ass this time.

VIC

You're not the one they want.

RON

At least the game's in Michigan.

LES

Crackers still got cars, right?

RON

Maybe it won't be that bad then.

LES

You're tripping. They riot when one
brother tries to go to school.

RON

Not at this school.

LES

Same state. Same state of mind.

VIC

I'll tell you what they won't do.
Get one rebound over me. You dig?

He slaps skin with Les and Ron, lightening the mood.

VIC (CONT'D)

I might even leave you some, Les.

LAUGHTER. Except from Jerry. He sits quietly, something
weighing on his mind.

LES

You all good, Jerry?

Jerry covers with a smile, masking whatever trepidations he's
harboring. He shuts his locker and follows his teammates out.

INT. ALUMNI GYM - MOMENTS LATER

George and Coach Lyne watch as a PHOTOGRAPHER snaps photos of
the starters. George pops a piece of candy in.

COACH LYNE

Are you going to talk to them?

GEORGE
About what?

COACH LYNE
The fact that we're playing a team
from the south. The deep south.
(off George)
And with what happened in Houston--

GEORGE
We're four wins from a national
championship. That's all they
should be worried about.

He CRUNCHES his candy and walks off.

WITH TEAM: The Photographer guides John between the others.

PHOTOGRAPHER
On my mark, dribble towards me.

He points. They dribble forward. As his camera FLASHES we--

CUT TO:

CLOSE ON the PHOTO of the Loyola starters in a NEWSPAPER:
Mississippi State's Opponent At NCAA Tourney

We PULL BACK to--

INT. MEMORIAL HALL - JOE DAN'S ROOM - DAY

Joe Dan is joined by Doug, Leland and Stan. Each rapt with
attention, anxiety on their faces, as Red reads the paper--

RED
All the hysterical harpin' over a
crack at a mythical national
championship isn't worth subjectin'
young Mississippians to the
switchblade knife society that
integration inevitably spawns.

STAN
Mythical national championship? So
he's saying we can't win?

LELAND
He's sayin' playin' them negroes is
a bad idea. Just like I've been
sayin' this whole time!

He SNATCHES the paper from Red.

LELAND (CONT'D)

Ain't no one thought to ask us what we want! It's like we don't matter!

(re: photo)

Say we beat them. Then a bunch of their negro fans is waitin' for us.

STAN

C'mon, Leland. We don't know that.

LELAND

It's right here in the paper!
Integration means violence.

A beat. Worried faces all around.

LELAND (CONT'D)

Segregation's been around since before we was born. Who are we to go against it?

STAN

But we're this close to a national title. Ain't that what we play for?

LELAND

Is it worth dyin' over?

STAN

You know what? You say Joe D's scared, but I say you are. Maybe you think you ain't as good as these Loyola boys.

Leland SHOVES him! Stan returns it! They CHARGE each other, grappling for a moment, before the others pry them apart.

DOUG

Both y'all knock it off!

A beat. Tensions are high. Heated. Leland looks to Joe Dan.

LELAND

You need to talk to Babe or I will.

He shrugs free and storms out, leaving the team in silence. Their bond being tested. Their cohesiveness being pulled apart by outside forces beyond their comprehension.

INT. PRESIDENT'S HOME - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Martha's at her vanity, removing her makeup. Colvard gets out of his suit. A RADIO plays--

ANCHORMAN (V.O.)
Governor Barnett tonight issued his
first public remarks regarding
Mississippi State's NCAA bid--

BARNETT (V.O.)
I feel that it is not for the best
interest of the school, the state,
or either of the races.

MARTHA
Well, we knew he would--

A BRICK suddenly SHATTERS the window! Martha SCREAMS! Colvard
races to the window, sees a dark FIGURE running off. He heads
for Martha but she waves him off. *I'm OK.* He looks to the
BRICK, sees a FLYER rubber banded around it. He removes it:

A PHOTO of five ARMED AFRICAN AMERICANS running through a
jungle: **I have contributed \$1.00 in your name to the NAACP.
Congratulations! You are now an HONORARY NIGGER.**

INT. PRESIDENT'S HOME - STUDY - LATER

Martha stands at the window, watching Colvard conclude a
conversation with a POLICE OFFICER then return towards the
house. After a moment -- he steps into the study.

COLVARD
They're going to station some
officers around the house.

MARTHA
Any idea who it was?

COLVARD
Klan maybe. Martha, I want you to
get out of town. Head to Memphis.

MARTHA
I will do no such thing.

COLVARD
It'll be safer--

MARTHA
I'M NOT LEAVING!

She steps to him, evincing a strength and centeredness.

MARTHA (CONT'D)
I appreciate your concern for my
wellbeing, but I've made it through
childbirth and I've raised a
family. I'm more than capable of
handling a few bricks.

They lock eyes -- then the phone RINGS. He glances to it then back to her. She stands straight, as if to punctuate her resolve. He knows there's no point arguing. *She's staying.*

He crosses to the desk, answers the phone, face dropping as he hears the news on the other end.

INT. LEE HALL - PRESIDENT'S OFFICE - LATER

Colvard's at his desk, still rattled but hiding it well. Walker's on the couch. A ticked off Babe paces the office.

BABE

This just makes my ass itch. Dean made his decision. Why're we here?

WALKER

Because the College Board has authority over all state schools.

BABE

Then what's the point of having a President?! No offense, Dean.

COLVARD

None taken. I've been wondering the same thing myself lately.

The door opens to VERNON SATCHER (55). Colvard greets him.

COLVARD (CONT'D)

(to Babe and Walker)

This is Vernon Satcher. Attorney.

The three shake hands.

COLVARD (CONT'D)

What do you have for us, Vernon?

SATCHER

Well, you sure as hell ticked them off. The vote's on Saturday. It was called by M.M. Roberts. He's a Barnett appointee.

WALKER

What're we up against?

SATCHER

Including Roberts, there are five Barnett appointees. It takes a six-to-five vote for a motion to pass.

BABE

Then we got the majority.

SATCHER

Don't be so sure, Babe. I've made some calls and it seems support for Dean is unreliable at best.

The room deflates.

SATCHER (CONT'D)

But -- Dean was right to go about this the way he did. By granting the team permission himself -- which he is *completely* in his right to do -- the Board has to decide whether or not they want to reverse a decision made by the President of the state's largest university. That's a dangerous precedent to set. After Oxford, I'm not sure they want to set it.

WALKER

Can we trust they'll respect the presidency enough? Or Dean?

Satcher can only answer that with a shrug.

BABE

What about Barnett?

SATCHER

He hogtied himself after that mess he made in Oxford. Bobby Kennedy's all over his ass. He can't be out there making a scene.

COLVARD

He has other means at his disposal.
(off Babe and Walker)
He's threatened to withhold our funding if the team plays.

Babe and Walker are stunned, having had no idea of the risks Colvard has taken on.

SATCHER

Essentially, what Dean has done here is call all their bluffs.

COLVARD

And if the Board overrules me? What is our doomsday scenario, Vernon?

SATCHER

Immediately following the vote they will make a motion to have you removed. It will pass. If your student support is as strong as you say it is, the news will be met with demonstrations. Those will violate the school's probation and the Association of Colleges and Schools will strip you of your accreditation. A mass exodus of faculty will follow. Enrollment will plummet. Donations will dry up. And in one year from now, Mississippi State will be nothing more than a cow pasture.

The gravity of that hits the room hard. Walker crosses to Colvard, leans close, speaks softly.

WALKER

Maybe we need to rethink this.

Colvard's eyes land on the MODELS and BLUEPRINTS. A beat.

COLVARD

I always believed my legacy would be as an institution builder.

(then)

I'd rather be remembered for having failed at that than for failing to have done the right thing.

Walker sighs then walks out.

SATCHER

I'll make some calls, see if I can't do some persuading.

He exits. Babe gives Colvard a look, a new found respect for him, then follows. Colvard remains at his desk, focused on the BLUEPRINTS and MODELS. He then he crosses his office, turns the lights off and closes the door behind him, sending us into COMPLETE DARKNESS. Then--

JUDY (V.O.)

Follow my voice. Stop. Ready?

INT. JUDY'S HOME - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Judy removes a BLINDFOLD from Jerry's eyes and he's SURPRISED by Vic, Les, Ron, Rich Rochelle and Judy's Parents. A BANNER reads: **Congrats, Jerry! Consensus All-American!**

Jerry's simultaneously embarrassed and grateful. His teammates converge. Hugs exchanged. He shakes hands with Judy's Father, embraces her Mother. Judy gives him a kiss.

JUDY
Congratulations, Lonely Face.

LATER: As Judy's Father holds court with the others around the dining room table, Jerry remains in the living room, picking at his plate full of cake. Judy joins him.

JUDY (CONT'D)
I stayed up all night making that banner. And here you are sulking.

JERRY
I love it. Really.

JUDY
So why the lonely face, Lonely Face? You're worried about playing Mississippi State, aren't you?

JERRY
...I hope this vote goes against them and they can't play.

She wasn't expecting that response. He picks at his cake for a moment.

JERRY (CONT'D)
Ever since the Houston game I've been having the same nightmare. We're playing some faceless Southern school. It's tip-off when all of a sudden everyone disappears and I'm alone. Then the fans start coming onto the court after me. They got torches and guns and nooses. So I run. But there's too many of them. Just when they're about to catch me I wake up.

She watches him, concerned, when LAUGHTER from the dining room breaks the silence.

JUDY
Have you told the boys?

JERRY
No. The All-American captain has to look the part, don't he?

She can feel the heavy burden he's placed upon himself.

JUDY

I shouldn't have thrown this party.

JERRY

No. It's OK. I'm just in my own head. The party's great. Thank you.

She holds her look, worried nonetheless. She curls into him as the party continues in the other room.

INT. ALUMNI GYM - DAY

George watches a scrimmage between the starters and reserves. His focus on Jerry. He's sluggish, *distracted*. After back-to-back errors he BLOWS his whistle and storms onto the court.

GEORGE

What the hell are you doing?!

JERRY

...Sorry. Guess I'm tired.

GEORGE

Should we have nap time? You practice poorly, you'll play poorly. And in the NCAA's, one mistake and you're done!

He glares at the players then catches eyes with Coach Lyne.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

And let me say this. If any of you are more concerned about who we are playing rather than winning, you can get the fuck off of my court.

The black players exchange looks, but none of them move.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

Fast break! And do it right!

He walks back to the sideline, breezing past Coach Lyne. Vic crosses over to Jerry.

VIC

You good?

(off Jerry's nod)

Come on then. Let's get it.

He pats Jerry on the chest and jogs to his position. Jerry exhales, trying to clear his mind. Practice resumes. Les outlets to Ron who ZIPS a pass to Jerry. Jerry dribbles to his left and shoots. We track the BALL through the air and--

INT. NEW GYM - NIGHT

Another BALL SWISHES through a hoop and we find Joe Dan practicing free throws, lit only by the moonlight falling obliquely into the gym through skylights. After a few shots--

BABE (O.S.)
Ain't you got a girl to take out?

Joe Dan turns and sees Babe emerging from his office.

JOE DAN
Hey, Coach. This OK?

Babe waves him off. *Of course.* He takes out his wallet and removes a twenty dollar bill.

BABE
You swindled me.

He stuffs the twenty into Joe Dan's hand then stands under the basket, passing the ball back after each shot.

JOE DAN
Any word how the vote's gonna go?

BABE
Your guess is as good as mine.
How're the boys holding up?

JOE DAN
...They're worried.

BABE
Y'all are just as good as Loyola.

Joe Dan dribbles a few times out of avoidance. Babe notices.

BABE (CONT'D)
Joe D. Do y'all not wanna play?

JOE DAN
...We hear what people say. About
integration. And after Ole Miss...

He takes another shot. Makes it. Babe holds onto the ball this time, stung by what he perceives as disloyalty.

BABE
I see. We'll just stay home and
tell everyone we're the best.

He FIRES the ball back, catching Joe Dan off guard by his hostility. He heads for his office.

Just when we think Joe Dan will let another opportunity go--

JOE DAN

Last year I drove up to Iowa City to watch the regional finals. Kentucky and Ohio State. Atmosphere was something special. I got chillbumps just being there. But as I watched the game the more jealous I got. We should've been on that court. Not Kentucky.

Babe softens, sensing just how conflicted his star is.

BABE

I named you captain because you remind me of my captain back in the Air Force. Before we'd leave for a mission he'd always say, 'I'll see you when you're back.' I believed him because I could see it in his eyes that he believed it.

(then)

This team looks up to you the same way, son. You have to decide if you want to be the type of man that follows, or the type that leads.

Off Joe Dan, a moment of decision--

INT. MEMORIAL HALL - HALLWAY - LATER

Red knocks on a door. A beat before a groggy Leland opens it.

RED

Joe D wants us all in his room.

INT. MEMORIAL HALL - JOE DAN'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Leland and Red enter to find Doug, Stan and the RESERVES all crammed inside. Joe Dan stands facing them all.

DOUG

What's goin' on, Joe D?

JOE DAN

...I think we should come out and say we wanna play Loyola.

That's met with sideways glances and silence.

JOE DAN (CONT'D)

I know we've been hearing all the bad things that'll happen if we play. But just because the people saying it are the ones speaking the loudest don't mean it's true.

Uncertainty abounds. The fear rhetoric has a firm grasp. Joe Dan picks up a nearby NEWSPAPER, not to be deterred.

JOE DAN (CONT'D)

Says here John Egan's one of the best defenders in the country. Red, I say you can score on him anytime.

Red smiles.

JOE DAN (CONT'D)

Ron Miller averages thirteen points a game. He's never been guarded by you, Doug.

Doug straightens up. *No he hasn't.*

JOE DAN (CONT'D)

Vic Rouse and Les Hunter combine for twenty-three rebounds. Leland, Stan, I say y'all can take 'em.

Stan grins. Leland remains expressionless, still wary.

JOE DAN (CONT'D)

Truth is, that's all we know about these boys. Black. White. It's just a ball game. Our chance to prove we're the best team in the country.

His teammates are into it now, feeding off his confidence. All but Leland. He stands -- and walks out. The boys go quiet. Joe Dan thinks. Then goes for his night stand--

IN THE HALLWAY: Leland's at the elevators when Joe Dan jogs out of his room to catch up, something in his hand.

JOE DAN (CONT'D)

Hold up. Do me a favor. Give this a look tonight.

He holds out the 1962 NCAA TOURNAMENT PROGRAM he was looking at earlier.

JOE DAN (CONT'D)

This is what we're missing out on.
(off Leland)
(MORE)

JOE DAN (CONT'D)
 We're all scared. And that's OK.
 But whatever we do, we're gonna do
 it as a team. So if you read this
 and still don't wanna play, we
 won't. But for me, read it over.

DING. The doors opens. Leland looks to the program -- then
 grabs it and steps inside. The doors close.

EXT. MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY - LATER

Leland sits on a bench, reading through the PROGRAM. The
 pageantry and prestige of the tournament coming to life on
 every page, through each photo. And despite his reluctance to
 accept it, he knows Joe Dan was right. *They're missing out.*

INT. MCCARTHY HOME - BEDROOM - DAY

Babe gets dressed when Laverne storms in and tosses a
 NEWSPAPER onto the bed.

LAVERNE
 Did you put them up to that?

Babe looks to the paper: **It's Unanimous: State Players Want
 Trip To NCAA.** Below that we see PHOTOS of EACH PLAYER next to
 their quotes in favor of playing.

BABE
 No. But now those Board members
 know just who this vote affects.

He gets started on his tie. Sees Laverne in the mirror, arms
 crossed, fierce eyes looking at him.

BABE (CONT'D)
 Everything's fine, Laverne.

She marches over to her dresser. Opens the top drawer and
 pulls out a STACK of LETTERS. She reads--

LAVERNE
 For a coach to insult those white
 boys by asking them to play against
 negroes is most disgusting.
 (drops it/reads next)
 If my son were on the team he would
 be removed and the coach fired.
 (drops/read)
 Here's hoping the niggers beat
 Mississippi State by a humiliating
 score.

She throws the rest into the air, they flutter to the ground. And everything she's been holding inside explodes--

LAVERNE (CONT'D)

Everything is not fine! Your actions have consequences, Babe. Every newspaper quote, every radio interview, everything you say makes this family a target! But you go ahead and do it anyway, and leave the rest to me! I stay up all night worrying about our boys' safety. I watch every car go by, wondering who's in it. I get the sideways looks at church. Me! It's all on me! All because of a goddamn game!

She takes a breath. He looks to the letters, unaware they existed. She sees a WEDDING PHOTO on the dresser. A beat.

LAVERNE (CONT'D)

I didn't even want to go on our first date. I liked another boy. But I didn't want to be rude.
(then)
I fell in love with you that night. You were funny. And the way you could talk. But it was your confidence that stood out the most. I knew then that you were going to make something of yourself.

She blinks back her tears. He doesn't know what to say.

LAVERNE (CONT'D)

And I was right. You have two beautiful sons. Fans who adore you. You've built this program up from nothing. You've had a good career--

BABE

I want a great one! I've beaten Rupp four times! But he gets all the accolades. He gets all the attention. I want my respect!

She regards him sadly as tears flow silently down her face.

LAVERNE

Well you just lost mine.

She walks out. He turns to say something but sees his Sons looking at him from their room. His heart sinks. A beat -- then they retreat inside, leaving Babe completely alone.

EXT. STATE OFFICE BUILDING (JACKSON, MS) - DAY

Hundreds of SPECTATORS. PICKETS in the air for both sides: **GO STATE GO. IT'S NCAA NOT NAACP. SEGREGATION FOREVER. CURSED IS THE MAN WHO INTEGRATES.** POLICE OFFICERS do their best to keep the sides apart. REPORTERS wait anxiously for news.

INT. STATE OFFICE BUILDING - HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

A brief calm -- then a CROWD BURSTS from a room. Voices RAISED. Fingers pointed. Accusations. It's heated. Tense.

From somewhere in the midst of it all comes Darlene. She scampers down the hallway, her heels CLICKING against the marble floor. She reaches a PAY PHONE.

INT. PRESIDENT'S HOME - STUDY - CONTINUOUS

Colvard's at his desk, waiting. And we wait with him. Then-- his phone RINGS. Hearing it, Martha steps into the room. They both know what awaits on the other line. Another two RINGS--

COLVARD
...Dean Colvard.

INTERCUT:

INT. STATE OFFICE BUILDING - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

With the COMMOTION continuing behind her, Darlene speaks LOUDLY into the phone.

DARLENE
They upheld your decision! Eight to three! The team can play!

Colvard glances to Martha and nods. She beams and joins him.

COLVARD
That's wonderful news, Darlene.
You have a safe trip back.

He hangs up, finally exhaling for the first time in what seems like forever. The weight lifting from his shoulders. Proud, Martha gives him a kiss on the cheek.

MARTHA
I'll go fetch us some drinks.

She exits. He takes a moment to digest the news, can't believe it's over. He opens the top drawer and pulls out a single piece of official Mississippi State STATIONARY:

I resign from my position as President of Mississippi State University effective immediately.

He RIPS it down the center and drops it into the trash can.

EXT. GOVERNOR'S MANSION - LATER

Surrounded by his usual ENTOURAGE, Barnett heads for his waiting car as a gaggle of REPORTERS fling questions his way.

REPORTER

Governor, any comment on State
being allowed to play in the NCAA?

BARNETT

I have expressed my views. The
Board made their decision and we
must respect that. Thank you,
gentlemen.

He smiles and waves. He and an Aide climb into--

INT. CAR - CONTINUOUS

As soon as the car pulls out of view from the Reporters--

BARNETT

Those goddamn yellow-bellied dogs!
How in the hell did we lose that
vote so bad? I put damn near half
of them on the Board myself!

AIDE

The majority disagreed with
Colvard. But they felt repudiating
him would lead to more harm.

BARNETT

Christ. You see? This is those
goddamn Kennedys. They've got
everyone spooked. Now people are
abandoning values that have been in
place for hundreds of years!

He's on the brink. He takes a moment to gather himself.

BARNETT (CONT'D)

When does the team leave?

AIDE

Three days. You can't be seen
interfering in this, Ross. You
still have the contempt charges--

Barnett waves him off, continues to ponder. After a moment--

BARNETT

Find me Billy Mitts.

INT. NEW GYM - LOCKER ROOM - LATER

Joe Dan, Red, Doug, Stan, Leland and the rest of the team sit at their lockers. Anxious faces. Deafly silent. A long beat -- then Babe steps into the room with Coach Simmons.

BABE

We got a game to prepare for.

The team ERUPTS in jubilation!

BABE (CONT'D)

What're y'all waiting for!

Eager to make up for lost time, the team races out the doors and take us into--

INT. ALUMNI GYM - DAY

Where a PEP RALLY is underway. FANS PACK the bleachers. Each STARTER is announced to the crowd. Jerry's last, receiving the LOUDEST ovation. He shyly waves, sees a SIGN bobbing up and down: **LOYOLA + JERRY HARKNESS = NATIONAL CHAMPIONS!** *The hopes of an entire school resting on his shoulders.*

INT. CAMPION HALL - LOBBY - NIGHT

The elevator opens and Jerry, Vic, Les, Ron and Rich Rochelle step out. Each one dressed to the nines.

FRONT DESK ATTENDANT

Jerry. You got some mail, man.

The other four continue on. Jerry hangs back, opens an envelope. He pulls out a piece of PAPER with a crudely drawn picture: A black man being lynched from a basketball hoop. Below that reads: **You if you play State, nigger!**

His face drains of life. *His nightmare becoming reality.*

RON

Judy writing you love letters now?

Jerry snaps out of it, puts on the best face he can. He CRUMPLES the drawing and envelope in his hand then tosses them into the trash. He catches up with the others and exits.

INT. TRAIN - LATER

While the other four clown around, Jerry sits quietly next to Judy, looking forlorn as he stares out the window.

VIC

Judy! You promise there's going to be some sisters at this jam?

JUDY

Not just any girls, Vic. Nurses.

Vic beelines to her and picks her up, swings her around. She laughs and playfully hits him in the arm. He puts her down. She takes her seat next to Jerry, who still seems miles away.

JUDY (CONT'D)

Hey. Lonely Face.

He comes to, gives her a kiss as a cover.

JUDY (CONT'D)

Where did you go?

JERRY

Nowhere. I'm here.

(off Judy)

I'm good. Promise.

She holds her look, unsure she believes him. He puts his arm around her and pulls her close. His eyes go back to the window, watching as the Chicago skyline ZIPS by.

INT. HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - LATER

'Do You Love Me' by The Contours BLARES through speakers at a lively party in which ALL the ATTENDEES are BLACK.

Vic, Les, Ron and Rich Rochelle dance with the plethora of NURSING STUDENTS. Judy and a GIRLFRIEND enjoy themselves.

Jerry stands against the wall, watching. His sober demeanor in stark contrast to the atmosphere around him. A MAN and WOMAN maneuver closer, excited by Jerry's presence.

MAN

Hey, Jerry! We're all going to be rooting for you on Friday!

WOMAN

Those Southerners don't got a shot!

Jerry notices the Man is wearing a NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY sweater. He forces a smile then makes his way to--

THE KITCHEN: And works his way towards the punch bowl. As he pours himself a glass, others in the room whisper. He tries to ignore it. Another WOMAN then taps him on the shoulder.

WOMAN 2

Don't let us down.

He feels the looks from the room and gets uneasy. He heads back for the living room, leaving his glass behind.

LIVING ROOM: '*Unchain My Heart*' by Ray Charles now plays. Jerry moves his way through the crowd and finds Judy.

JERRY

Let's get out of here.

The SCRATCH of the record needle catches everyone's attention. The music stops. Another MAN stands on the table.

MAN 2

Listen up! I want to welcome our guests, the Loyola Ramblers!

The crowd CHEERS. Vic, Les, Ron and Rich Rochelle love it.

JUDY

Everyone's here for you.

JERRY

That's the problem.

Her face falls, sensing something is wrong.

MAN 2

We want to say good luck. Even though we know you're going to blast those honkey, racist motherfuckers from Mississippi!
(over CHEERS)
And show them exactly what the black man is capable of!

More CHEERS. Judy's eyes never leave Jerry's distressed face.

MAN 2 (CONT'D)

And! And! I know we're going to win
because we got an All-American on
our side. Jerry Harkness!

CHEERS switch to CHANTS of *Jerry!* The hopes of an entire
community thrust upon him. It's smothering. The walls close
in. His breathing quickens, heart hammering through his ribs.

JUDY

Jerry?

He can't take it. He PUSHES his way through the crowd--

EXT. HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

And races down the steps, throws his weight against a tree.
He gulps in air as quickly as he can, on the verge of panic.

Judy scurries down the steps and to his side. Vic, Les, Ron
and Rich Rochelle emerge on the stoop, concerned looks.

JUDY

Hey. Talk to me. Jerry!

JERRY

I can't do this.

JUDY

Everyone's just excited that's all.

JERRY

No! Those people think this is
going to change things. *It's just a
game!* It won't change a damn thing!

VIC

Jerry. It'll be alright, brother.

JERRY

You don't know that! You remember
how they were in Houston. They're
worse in Mississippi.

RON

But we're not playing in
Mississippi.

Jerry could explode or dissolve into tears.

JERRY

That doesn't matter! We're niggers
to them no matter where we play!

Judy reaches for him but he SHRUGS free and walks off, leaving everyone in stunned silence. A long beat.

Then Judy takes off her heels and SPRINTS after him--

WITH JERRY: Already around the corner, walking underneath elevated train tracks. Judy appears behind him.

JUDY

Hey!

He keeps walking. She picks up her pace and pulls in front of him, forcing him to stop. She PUSHES him in the chest.

JUDY (CONT'D)

You're just going to abandon your teammates? When you're this close to achieving your goals? You think Jackie Robinson would've done that?

JERRY

I'm not Jackie Robinson!

JUDY

You're damn right you're not!

He's taken aback.

JUDY (CONT'D)

He was alone. You never were. Not on the court and not now. You have four teammates back there who know exactly what you're going through -- look at me.

He does but it's hard for him. His eyes well.

JUDY (CONT'D)

And you have me.

A beat. Shadows from the tracks crisscrossing their faces.

JUDY (CONT'D)

Do you know why they want you to win so bad? Because if you win, Jim Crow loses. You're right, it might not change a damn thing in the end. But in that moment, every one of us who's ever been called a coon or spook or been told to go back to Africa or that we can't sit here or eat there, every one of us will be able to hold our heads high. Because if you win, we win.

She extinguishes her tears and steps aside, freeing his path.

JUDY (CONT'D)

If you want to go, go. But if you want to be the captain of this team then you take my hand and you bring me back to that party.

He contemplates. Everything hanging in the balance. Then--

He takes her by the hand. A train ROARS by overhead. Its lights casting their SHADOWS against a brick wall. We STAY ON the SHADOWS, watching as they transform, taking us--

EXT. LEE HALL - NIGHT

Where the SHADOWS of CHEERLEADERS are projected against the brick facade. The PEP BAND plays the Mississippi State fight song. Hundreds of STUDENTS sing along. Signs read: **BEAT LOYOLA! GO STATE!** The pep rally's in full swing.

INT. NEW GYM - BABE'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Babe's at his desk, scribbling notes onto a piece of paper, when there's a tap on the door and Colvard pops in.

COLVARD

Have a minute, Babe?

BABE

Of course. C'mon in.

Colvard steps in and notices the RUMBLED SHEET and PILLOW on the floor. Embarrassed, Babe comes around to straighten up.

BABE (CONT'D)

Been working late scouting Loyola.
Didn't wanna wake up Laverne.

Colvard sees through that but would never call him on it.

COLVARD

How do they look?

BABE

On paper like the best team we've ever played.

COLVARD

I'm sure the boys will be up to the challenge. I saw them off at the dorm. They're eager to play.

BABE

They'll give it their all. Ain't no question about that.

COLVARD

Well I'll let you get to it. I just wanted to wish you luck. I have a speaking engagement at Auburn but I'll be listening to Jack's call.

The shake hands, share a meaningful look.

BABE

I admire your heart, Dean.

COLVARD

You want to make me look even better? Go win.

INT. PRESIDENT'S HOME - STUDY - LATER

Colvard gathers documents into his briefcase. He opens a drawer and freezes. Pulls out the taunting NAACP flyer from earlier. He holds his gaze on it when suddenly--

A LOUD INTRUSIVE KNOCKING comes from the front door.

Concerned, he drops the flyer and heads--

INTO THE HALLWAY: The KNOCKING continues, getting more ominous by the second. Martha steps from the kitchen.

MARTHA

Dean...

COLVARD

Stay there, Martha.

He slowly makes his way to the door. KNOCK! KNOCK! KNOCK! He spies an UMBRELLA against the wall, grabs it.

KNOCK! KNOCK! KNOCK! He swallows his fear and advances, pulse throbbing, hand white knuckling the umbrella. His free hand grabs the door handle. He readies the umbrella to strike--

Then SWIFTLY opens the door--

WALKER

NO! It's me, Dean! It's me!

MARTHA

Wade!

COLVARD

Damnit!

WALKER (CONT'D)
 I'm sorry. I needed to talk to you.
 There's a problem.

Colvard senses the urgency and steps aside. Walker enters.

WALKER (CONT'D)
 I just got word that Billy Mitts
 filed an injunction to prevent the
 team from leaving the state.

Martha brings her hand to her mouth in disbelief.

WALKER (CONT'D)
 It names you, Babe, myself and the
 team. Sheriff's on his way from
 Hinds County to serve it. He left
 about an hour ago.

Off Colvard, everything he risked on the brink of collapse--

EXT. MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY - LATER

Superimpose: **Michigan State University. East Lansing, MI.
 Site of the Mideast Regional.**

Establishing.

INT. LOYOLA TEAM HOTEL - ROOM - CONTINUOUS

As Gertrude reads a book in bed, George goes through scouting reports on the small desk by the window. She senses something amiss.

GERTRUDE
 What is it, darling?

GEORGE
 I don't like this match-up. State
 plays a slow down game. That gives
 us a trouble. Always has.

A KNOCK. George gets up and opens the door to PHILLIP FAIRLY (50s), a stressed out looking NCAA Tournament official.

FAIRLY
 George. Mrs. Ireland. Sorry to
 bother you.

GEORGE
 What is it Phil?

FAIRLY

Uhm. We're not entirely sure.
Apparently an injunction was filed
and the MSU team might not arrive.

GERTRUDE

Good gracious.

GEORGE

Jesus Christ.

GERTRUDE

Who would do that to those boys?

FAIRLY

There's quite a few people down
there who would, Mrs. Ireland.

GERTRUDE

That's just awful.

GEORGE

(more importantly)

What happens if they don't show?

FAIRLY

It's too late to bring in the
second place SEC team. So you would
get a bye then face the Bowling
Green/Illinois winner.

GEORGE

That makes it look like we're
getting preferential treatment.
That tarnishes *anything* we
accomplish.

FAIRLY

There's no other options, George.

George grits his jaw. Fairly glances towards Gertrude then
motions for George to come closer. He speaks softly.

FAIRLY (CONT'D)

If State does show, we don't know
who they're bringing with them.
We've spoken to local authorities
and it's been agreed that your boys
should just stay in the hotel.

GEORGE

(incredulous)

You want my boys to stay inside?

FAIRLY

The NCAA can't risk disrupting this
tournament's momentum.

George fumes.

GEORGE
Thanks, Phil.

Fairly gets the hint and exits. George shuts the door in a huff then returns to the desk.

GERTRUDE
Maybe you shouldn't be so hard on the boys. It sounds like they have it hard enough as it is.

George grunts and gets to work, but finds it hard to focus.

INT. PRESIDENT'S HOME - STUDY - MOMENTS LATER

Colvard, Walker and Martha have been joined by Darlene and Satcher. Satcher finishes a phone call then hangs up.

SATCHER
Mitts found a sympathetic Chancery Judge out of Newton County to grant the request. It was issued out of Chancery Court in Rankin.

WALKER
He's scouring the whole damn state. This is Barnett, ain't it?

SATCHER
You can bet the farm on that.

MARTHA
The lengths they'll go. Can we appeal, Vernon?

SATCHER
We could, ma'am. And we'd win. But the game'll have passed before we'd get a ruling. And Mitts knows that.
(loaded)
By signing that injunction, the court is ordering the team to stay in the state.

Silence comes over the room as defeat becomes inevitable. For a few beats there is only the sound of a clock TICKING. Then--

COLVARD
No.

All eyes go to Colvard.

COLVARD (CONT'D)
As leaders we should unite, not
divide.
(then)
We need to find Babe.

EXT. LEE HALL - MOMENTS LATER

Babe's on the steps, speech in one hand, mic in the other.
The large CROWD before him. Coach Simmons stands nearby.

BABE
And we appreciate all the support
y'all have given us this season...

Darlene hastily works her way through the crowd, getting into
Babe's eye line. She subtly motions for him to wrap it up.

BABE (CONT'D)
...And we're gonna play real hard
and make y'all proud. Go State.

The crowd breaks into CHANTS of *Babe! Babe!* He hands the mic
off then meets Darlene on the side of the building.

BABE (CONT'D)
What is the matter, Darlene?

DARLENE
You need to come with me.

EXT. WATER TOWER - MOMENTS LATER

On the fringes of campus. Secluded. Colvard, Walker and
Satcher wait underneath the imposing TOWER.

The area is then LIT UP by the headlights of Darlene's sedan.
Babe's out the door before its completely stopped.

BABE
The next time I see Barnett
me'n'him are gonna mix. I--

COLVARD
Babe! For once, just hush up!

Babe's caught off guard by his tone, but admires it. Darlene
and Coach Simmons exit the sedan.

COLVARD (CONT'D)
We have an hour, maybe less, before
the Sheriff arrives to serve us.

BABE
So what's the plan?

COLVARD
We leave the state now. Darlene
will take me to Auburn for my
speaking engagement.
(to Babe and Walker)
You two head to Nashville, meet the
team at the airport tomorrow.

WALKER
Tomorrow? The injunction names the
entire team. They have to get out.

COLVARD
I don't believe Barnett will serve
the players. That risks too much
backlash. He's after me.

Looks get thrown around. *A risky gamble.*

WALKER
I understand you're upset, but is
this really the time for a game of
chicken with Ross Barnett?

Colvard softens. *Pride comes before the fall.*

COACH SIMMONS
We could split the team up.

BABE
What?

SATCHER
A decoy? That's not half bad.

BABE
No. No. No.

COLVARD
How would we do it?

BABE
I said no.

SATCHER
A law school buddy has himself a
plane. Could be here at dawn.

BABE
Hey...

COACH SIMMONS

It could wait in Columbus for the starters.

BABE

Hey...

COLVARD

Decoys head to Starkville airfield as planned. If they're served--

WALKER

Starters take off from Columbus.

BABE

HEY!

A tense beat.

BABE (CONT'D)

Y'all thick? We are not splitting my team up two days before the biggest game of their lives!

SATCHER

If you want to be assured of even having a team, they must split up.

Babe wipes his face with the palm of his hand, not believing it's come to this. A long beat. Everyone awaits his decision.

BABE

(to Coach Simmons)

Use the freshmen and the back end reserves.

SATCHER

I'll give you a ride to campus.

Satcher and Coach Simmons head off for Satcher's car. Colvard crosses to Babe, can see the shame he's carrying.

COLVARD

They'll be alright, Babe.

He then joins Darlene. They drive off. Walker heads for his car. Babe stands alone, the WATER TOWER looming above him. He glances skyward, whispers a prayer then joins Walker.

INT. MEMORIAL HALL - JOE DAN'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

The entire team crammed inside, anxious faces. Red scrolls through the radio for any news. Confusion abounds.

LELAND
The hell's an injunction anyhow?

RED
It's like a court order.

STAN
So we could get arrested?

RESERVE PLAYER
My mama'll kill me if I'm arrested.

LELAND
Let's drive to Michigan ourselves.

STAN
What about Babe? Our equipment?

Leland realizes that might not be the best idea.

DOUG
(looking out window)
Somethin's goin' on, boys.

Joe Dan joins him and looks outside, sees hoards of STUDENTS flooding from the dorm and towards campus.

JOE DAN
Y'all stay here.

EXT. LEE HALL - MOMENTS LATER

Having followed the group from the dorm, Joe Dan arrives and is once again struck by the fervor of his fellow classmates.

But this time it's different. Confederate flags have been replaced by MISSISSIPPI STATE ones. The FIGHT SONG plays rather than 'Dixie'. Then--

COACH SIMMONS (O.S.)
Joe D!

Joe Dan turns and sees Coach Simmons rushing towards him. Both men then watch as EFFIGIES of BILLY MITTS and ROSS BARNETT are strung up on the flagpole! The crowd ROARS!

COACH SIMMONS (CONT'D)
Wait for me at the dorm. Go!

Joe Dan SPRINTS off. Coach Simmons RACES towards a PAY PHONE, frantically digs through his pockets for change as CHANTS of *LET THEM PLAY!* emanate from the crowd. Its rage boiling...

INT. PRESIDENT'S HOME - STUDY - MOMENTS LATER

Martha stands with the phone to her ear, growing more concerned as the seconds go by.

MARTHA

I understand. Thank you, Coach
Simmons. Keep the boys safe.

She hangs up, eyes landing on the BLUEPRINTS covering the desk. She grabs a nearby set of CAR KEYS and exits.

INT./EXT. WALKER'S CAR - MOMENTS LATER

Walker drives. Babe's in the back, eyeing each passing car with intense scrutiny. The RADIO plays--

MITTS (V.O.)

We filed this injunction because
the team is trying to participate
in athletics that are in violation
of the policies of the state of
Mississippi. Furthermore--

WALKER

(switches off radio)
Asshole. You know he was a
cheerleader while he was here?

BABE

He sure does have a funny way of
showing his school spirit.

The car crosses through an intersection, passing a POLICE CRUISER. The cruiser turns, follows behind.

Walker sees it in the rearview, stiffens.

WALKER

Local police. Get down.

Babe drops to the floor, crammed between the rows of seats.

The cruiser keeps a distance, sirens off.

Walker sees an approaching light turn yellow. He thinks of flooring it, but realizes he's too far back. He slows.

BABE

Why're you stopping?

WALKER

It's a red light.

The car comes to a stop. The cruiser pulls up behind. The streets otherwise empty. Only the sounds of engines running--

EXT. LEE HALL - CONTINUOUS

Martha arrives and lays eyes on the crowd. Sees the EFFIGIES. *It's a far cry from the peaceful sit-in earlier.* Then--

A Student ignites a TORCH! The crowd EXPLODES with approval.

Martha panics. She spots the PA SYSTEM from the pep rally and DASHES for it, but it's been unplugged! She scrambles to make sense of the tangled mess of wires as the TORCH burns--

INT./EXT. WALKER'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Still at the light. Babe makes himself as small as possible, sweat trickling down his face. Walker keeps his eyes on the cruiser through the rearview, hands gripping the wheel tight.

Each second that passes feels like a lifetime. Uncertainty mounts. It's excruciating. Finally--

The light turns green. Both cars glide down the dark road--

EXT. LEE HALL - CONTINUOUS

Martha continues to struggle with the wires. The crowd and torch near the effigies, which sway gently from the flagpole. She connects the right wire. Amp awakens. She grabs the mic--

MARTHA

Stop!

But her voice can barely be heard! She frantically searches for the VOLUME knob. The torch only fifty feet from the effigies, anticipation in the crowd reaching fever pitch--

INT./EXT. WALKER'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Still traveling down the road. Both Babe and Walker control their breathing, making for complete silence. Then--

The cruiser's sirens go on!

Babe feels the JOLT as Walker hits the gas.

BABE

Don't.

Walker gives Babe a quick glance over his shoulder, and both men come to the same conclusion. *It's over.* Walker taps the brakes and pulls to the side of the road--

When the cruiser ZIPS by! Its sirens fade into the distance.

A beat. And then both men break into relieved laughter.

EXT. LEE HALL - CONTINUOUS

Martha locates the VOLUME KNOB, turns it ALL THE WAY UP--

MARTHA

STOP IT!

Her voice and feedback causes the entire crowd to shrink back as one. She turns the volume down a notch.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

I know you're upset. I'm upset. But this behavior will only harm the school. And we're better than this.

The crowd falls deafly silent. Accreditation, expansion, all hangs in the balance. Then--

A WOMAN walks calmly through her classmates, weaving in and around. She takes the torch from the Student holding it and pours a cup of water over it. Steam rises into the air.

Martha sits on the steps and exhales.

INT. DARLENE'S CAR - MOMENTS LATER

Darlene drives, Colvard sits passenger. Thick silence between them. The headlights illuminate a SIGN on the side of the road: **Welcome to Alabama**

Darlene lets out a breath but Colvard remains expressionless, knowing there's one more hurdle to climb.

INT. MEMORIAL HALL - HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

All is still -- then Red comes SPRINTING around the corner, gym bag over his shoulder. He ducks into--

INT. MEMORIAL HALL - JOE DAN'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

And joins the rest of the team, all with BAGS by their sides. Joe Dan shuts the door behind him.

RED

Now we know how those East
Berliners feel when they sneak past
the wall.

LAUGHTER. A brief reprieve from the pressures surrounding them. Doug's at the window, scanning the street below. Then--

DOUG

Van's here!

The boys grab their bags. Joe Dan opens the door halfway--

But stops when he sees the same REDNECK from the open! He's joined by TWO OTHERS. He holds up a NEWSPAPER with the players' quotes from earlier and reads Joe Dan's--

REDNECK

I think our goin' to the NCAA would
make the whole state of Mississippi
look less prejudiced and it would
make it appear the state is tryin'
to work out a solution to its
problem...

(then)

I knew you was nothin' more than a--

Joe Dan opens the door the rest of the way, allowing the Rednecks to see THE ENTIRE TEAM behind him. A unified front.

LELAND

We got a problem here?

It's now the Rednecks who are intimidated. They move aside, allowing the team out. Joe Dan locks the door behind them, gives a nod to the Rednecks and follows after his teammates.

EXT. MCCARTHY HOME - LATER

A local police cruiser pulls up followed by a Hinds County Sheriff's cruiser. SHERIFF GROTH (61), stern, steps out. A copy of the INJUNCTION in hand.

He and the local Officer head to the front door. KNOCK. A moment passes until the lights come on. Laverne, in her nightgown and none too pleased, opens the door part way.

SHERIFF GROTH

Mrs. McCarthy. Apologies for the
late call. I need your husband.

LAVERNE

I don't know where he's at.

A beat. She opens the door completely and steps aside.

LAVERNE (CONT'D)
Just don't wake my boys.

Groth glances to the local Officer. The Officer heads inside, gives Laverne an apologetic look as he passes.

We stay with Laverne and Groth. No small talk. She notices the INJUNCTION, pretends it doesn't terrify her. He knows it does. He appraises her, hoping she'll give Babe up. She doesn't. The tension is palpable. Finally--

The local Officer returns, shakes his head towards Groth.

SHERIFF GROTH
You have a good night, ma'am.

They head back to the cruisers. The local Officer reaches for his RADIO. Speaks into it--

OFFICER
Hey, Joey. Any luck with Colvard?

VOICE (V.O.)
Wife said he wasn't home and
couldn't be contacted.

SHERIFF GROTH
They're long gone.
(then)
We'll nab the team at the airport.

WITH LAVERNE: Watching the Officers, a mixture of worry and resentment for Babe. After a moment, she closes the door and turns off the lights.

INT. COACH SIMMONS' HOME - LIVING ROOM - LATER

A radio plays softly. Players sleep in chairs, on the couch, floor. Except for Joe Dan. He stares out the window, keeping watch.

Off his REFLECTION in the glass we slowly--

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. LOYOLA TEAM HOTEL - ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Jerry's REFLECTION in his window. Jenison Fieldhouse lit up in the distance. Jerry's focus on a large BANNER advertising the Mideast Regional: **Loyola v. Mississippi State**

There's a KNOCK on the door. Jerry glances to the CLOCK:
1:17. He crosses the room and opens the door to Ron.

RON
George wants us downstairs.

INT. LOYOLA TEAM HOTEL - CONFERENCE ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Jerry and Ron join the equally as groggy Vic, Les and Rich Rochelle at a table. George sits at another.

VIC
What's the deal, George? They
actually going to let us outside?

GEORGE
That's what I wanted to talk about.

He takes a moment, clearly uncomfortable in this setting.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
Four years ago I won ten games.
Fans hung me in effigy. That's when
I realized all people really cared
about is winning. So I recruited
you that summer, Jerry. The rest of
you the following summer. I did it
because I wanted a good team.
(then)
When we run the score up I tell
myself it's because we're making a
stand against racism, segregation.
But it's for me. It's my way of
getting even with people.

They boys are speechless, thrown by seeing him this raw.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
I'm tough on you because you need
it. And when you're older, you're
going to thank me for it.
(then)
But maybe I could've been more
considerate of your circumstances
off the court. And I'm... There's
no reason a black athlete can't do
everything a white one can.

He looks to the boys and they know that's the closest thing
they'll get to an apology. He clears his throat, stands.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
Practice is at ten. Get some sleep.

He heads for the door. The boys exchange looks, unsure how to respond. Just as George reaches the door -- Jerry stands.

JERRY

Coach...

(off George)

We'll always appreciate you giving
us a chance to play.

A beat. These five young black men and this one white man couldn't be further apart. But without each other, they wouldn't be here. And they both know it. George nods, exits.

Off Jerry and the boys--

EXT. MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY - DAY

The morning SUN breaks through some clouds. Dew glistens on the grass. MOCKINGBIRDS serenade the campus with songs.

INT. COACH SIMMONS' HOME - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The mission is underway. Coach Simmons and team trainer DUTCH (40s) ready the freshmen team and back end reserves.

No words are spoken. Everyone's on edge. Good luck hugs are exchanged. Joe Dan, Red, Doug, Leland and Stan then watch as their teammates follow Dutch to the van parked outside.

EXT. STARKVILLE POLICE DEPARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Sheriff Groth, INJUNCTION in hand, and the same local Officer from earlier head for Groth's cruiser. As they reach it--

OFFICER 2

Sheriff! The Governor's on the line
for you!

INT. STARKVILLE POLICE DEPARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Groth picks up the phone, hits the hold button.

SHERIFF GROTH

Mr. Governor.

INT. GOVERNOR'S MANSION - OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Barnett sits behind his large oak desk. Mitts across from him. The call is on speaker.

BARNETT

Sheriff. I just wanted to make sure everything's ready to go.

SHERIFF GROTH (V.O.)

Heading to the airfield now, sir.

BARNETT

Good. I trust there won't be a repeat of the incompetence that was exhibited last night.

SHERIFF GROTH (V.O.)

...Incompetence? Mr. Governor we--

BARNETT

You let Colvard and those other sonsabitches get out! Now hear this, Sheriff: If those boys get on that plane there's no telling what'll happen. To the school, to the state or to your goddamn career. So get it done!

He POUNDS the phone, ending the call.

WITH GROTH: Taken aback by the threat, doesn't appreciate it. He calmly places the phone down and exits.

INT. HOTEL (NASHVILLE, TN) - ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

As Walker listens for any news over the radio, Babe paces anxiously.

BABE

What time's the flight at?

WALKER

Eight-thirty.

Babe glances to a CLOCK: **8:07**. Suddenly -- the room phone LIGHTS UP. Babe hurries over to answer.

BABE

Dutch?

INTERCUT:

INT. STARKVILLE AIRFIELD - TERMINAL

Dutch's at the front desk, head on a swivel, on the phone.

DUTCH
I'm here with the decoys but there
ain't no police.

BABE
You a hundred percent on that?

Dutch looks around once more, glances out the window and sees a Martin 404 Aristocrat getting fueled but nothing else.

DUTCH
Ain't no one here but us, Babe.

Babe contemplates something, makes Walker uneasy. Then--

BABE
Call Simmons. Have him bring the
starters and y'all fly out
together.

WALKER Dutch! It's Wade. Don't--

BABE Do it now, Dutch.

Babe hangs up before Walker can get any closer.

WALKER
Damnit, Babe! That's exactly what
the sheriff could be waiting for!

BABE
It's my team! They stay together!

WALKER
If they get served it's on you.

INT. COACH SIMMONS' HOME - LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

The starters watch with bated breaths as Coach Simmons finishes a call. He hangs up, takes a moment to process.

COACH SIMMONS
Load up. We're heading to
Starkville Airfield.
(off their silence)
On your horses!

The starters **SPRING** into action.

INT./EXT. SHERIFF GROTH'S CRUISER - MOMENTS LATER

Groth drives. The local Officer shotgun, the INJUNCTION on his lap. A TRAIN CROSSING lights up ahead, bells RINGING.

Groth has ample time to make it through -- But slows the cruiser to a stop. The barricades lower.

SHERIFF GROTH
Better safe than sorry.

The Officer glances to the CLOCK on the dashboard: **8:21**. He throws Groth a look as a train RUMBLES past.

EXT. STARKVILLE AIRFIELD - TARMAC - MOMENTS LATER

Reunited, the team files into the plane. Coach Simmons keeps a lookout, expecting to be ambushed at any moment. With the team aboard, he hurries up the stairs, passing the PILOT.

COACH SIMMONS
Soon as y'all are ready.

INT. SHERIFF GROTH'S CRUISER - MOMENTS LATER

Passing a SIGN for the airfield ahead. The Officer sees the CLOCK: **8:28**. He throws a worried look to Groth, but Groth keeps his eyes forward, continues his deliberate pace.

INT./EXT. MARTIN 404 ARISTOCRAT - MOMENTS LATER

The plane slowly taxis, getting into position for takeoff.

Inside, excitement mounts. *Holy shit they pulled it off!* Red then spots something in his peripheral. Looks out the window--

RED
Police!

On cue, the entire team RUSHES to the right side of the plane and sees Sheriff Groth's cruiser approaching!

WITH CRUISER: The Officer peers through the windshield and his eyes go wide when he notices the plane picking up speed!

WITH PLANE: The Players remain huddled on the right side.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT
Return to your seats immediately!

WITH CRUISER: Pulls over. Groth and the Officer exit, watch the plane ROAR down the runway. The Officer grabs the radio. But before he can make a call, the plane's wheels LIFT OFF--

WITH PLANE: Feeling the plane ascending, the team releases their fear, relief, pressures and excitement with a ROAR!

WITH CRUISER: The Officer watches helplessly as the plane continues to climb and finally disappears into the clouds.

SHERIFF GROTH

Damn. Should've beaten that train.

Off the Officer's panicked face--

INT. GOVERNOR'S MANSION - OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Barnett and Mitts wait for news when suddenly an Aide enters.

AIDE

The team departed ten minutes ago.

MITTS

That scoundrel Groth!

BARNETT

The injunction?

AIDE (CONT'D)

The Mississippi Supreme Court is going to dissolve it.

Furious, Mitts leans over the desk.

MITTS

I'll have my staff start on the proposal. A substantial decrease in appropriations for universities that encourage integration.

AIDE

I'd advise against that, Governor.

MITTS

What?

AIDE

The support won't be there.

MITTS

The hell it won't!

BARNETT

He's right, Billy.

Mitts spins back to Barnett, can't believe what he's hearing.

BARNETT (CONT'D)

The College Board, the Supreme Court, they all went against us. The writing's on the wall.

His eyes find a CONFEDERATE SOLDIER FIGURINE on his desk.

BARNETT (CONT'D)
We've lost our Southern way of
life.

INT. 404 ARISTOCRAT - LATER

Now landed, the players focus on the front door. A beat --
And Babe steps aboard.

BABE
Y'all going to Michigan?

The team goes WILD!

INT. HOTEL (AUBURN, AL) - ROOM - LATER

Colvard finishes a call. Darlene anxiously waits nearby.

COLVARD
Thank you. Take care.
(hangs up/to Darlene)
They got out!

Overjoyed, he wraps Darlene up in a hug.

INT. 404 ARISTOCRAT - LATER

Mid-flight. Babe moves towards Joe Dan who's sitting in a row
by himself. He sits, looks around to the players.

BABE
I guess you chose to be a leader.

They catch eyes. Babe's look says *I'm proud of you*. And
nothing else needs said on the matter.

BABE (CONT'D)
I did some thinking on how we're
gonna guard these boys. All year
I've asked you to take on the other
team's best player. But Jerry
Harkness is something else. You
think you can handle him?

JOE DAN
Yes, sir.

BABE
I thought you might feel that way.

He pats Joe Dan on the chest.

BABE (CONT'D)

But we ain't betting this time. I'm
not making that mistake again.

EXT. AIRPORT (EAST LANSING, MI) - TARMAC - LATER

A crowd of REPORTERS loiter, awaiting Mississippi State's arrival. POLICE OFFICERS are positioned around the tarmac, keeping a close watch of the situation. *Just in case.*

We find Fairly making his way through the crowd. A REPORTER notices him and follows. Fairly picks up his pace.

FAIRLY

We'll release a statement later.

REPORTER

There's rumors the plane was
diverted mid-flight. This is going
to be an ugly black eye for the
NCAA. Any comment?

Fairly stops, faces the Reporter. Before he can respond--

VOICE (O.S.)

There they are!

All eyes look skyward and see the Aristocrat descending, its exterior glistening in the bright sunlight. Fairly gives the Reporter a smile then continues on.

INT. 404 ARISTOCRAT - MOMENTS LATER

The players peer out the windows, in awe of the large crowd, when Fairly steps aboard. He meets Babe in the aisle.

FAIRLY

Coach McCarthy. On behalf of the
NCAA, welcome to Michigan. We're
damn glad you're here.

BABE

We're happy to be here.

FAIRLY

Shall we? There's a lot of people
out there looking for you.

BABE

There were quite a few people
looking for us back where we came
from, too.

EXT. AIRPORT - TARMAC - MOMENTS LATER

Fairly leads Babe and the team down the stairs. Babe's immediately swarmed by Reporters. He loves it. The players are led towards an awaiting bus, wide eyed at the commotion.

Joe Dan then spots a POLICE OFFICER, a SHOTGUN in hand, and the reality of the situation comes rushing back. He keeps his eyes on the Officer until he steps onto the bus.

EXT. MISSISSIPPI STATE TEAM HOTEL - LATER

Joe Dan, Doug, Leland, Stan and Red lead the rest of the team off the bus and into the hotel, separated from a group of BLACK LOYOLA FANS by a wall of POLICE OFFICERS.

No words are exchanged between the team and fans. Only looks. But there's distrust in those looks. Uncertainty. As if each side is sizing the other up. The team disappears into the hotel and the Officers stand guard at the door.

EXT. JENISON FIELDHOUSE - NIGHT

The red brick building lit up for the night. The Mideast Regional BANNER displayed prominently out front.

INT. JENISON FIELDHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The calm before the storm. Babe walks the pristine court, taking it all in. The NCAA Tournament banners. Game programs ready for distribution. Dozens of radio station placards.

GEORGE (O.S.)
Quite the view, isn't it?

Babe turns and spots George.

BABE
She's something alright.

They come together in a handshake.

GEORGE
It's a pleasure, Babe.

BABE
Pleasure's all mine, George.

They walk the court together.

GEORGE

I heard what you and boys went through. It's a disgrace.

BABE

I was proud of how they handled it. But something tells me your boys have had it worse.

(then)

But if y'all wanna spot us ten points for our troubles we'll gladly take it.

GEORGE

You're the ones who beat Kentucky.

BABE

That game took a few off my life.

GEORGE

I know the feeling.

(pats his stomach)

Had four-fifths of my stomach removed after a ten win season.

BABE

Ain't no more of those seasons for you. You got a hell of a squad. I respect what you're doing.

GEORGE

Feeling's mutual.

They come to a stop at midcourt. Babe looks around.

BABE

This is what it's all about. It's a shame one team has to lose.

They catch eyes and share a knowing look. It's what all coaches know. That after the grind of a season it all comes down to one game. Winner moves on. Loser goes home.

BABE (CONT'D)

I wish you all the luck, George.

GEORGE

Same to you, Babe.

They shake hands then walk off in opposite directions, leaving the court empty once again. We slowly--

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. JENISON FIELDHOUSE - DAY

Superimpose: **March 15, 1963. NCAA Mideast Regional.
Mississippi State v. Loyola**

Twelve-thousand FANS now pack the gym. But because of the uncertainty surrounding the team's arrival, there are no Mississippi State fans.

Dozens of REPORTERS and PHOTOGRAPHERS line the court. POLICE OFFICERS dot the crowd, guard the exits, adding a touch of tension to the already palpable anticipation in the air.

We spot Judy and Gertrude taking their seats amongst the Loyola contingent, both struck by the atmosphere.

INT. JENISON FIELDHOUSE - MSU LOCKER ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Babe, Coach Simmons and the staff enter to complete silence. Babe looks to each of his starters: Red. Leland. Stan. Doug. Joe Dan. All concentration and seriousness.

BABE

They don't need me to say a word.

He and the staff exit, leaving the players to their thoughts.

INT. JENISON FIELDHOUSE - LOYOLA LOCKER ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Jerry, Vic, Les, Ron, John and the rest of the team sit with their heads down. George, Coach Lyne and the staff stand.

CHAPLAIN

And finally, Lord, we ask that the only colors of significance today are those of the teams' jerseys. In your name we pray. Amen.

George and the staff file out. The Chaplain follows. Jerry stops short of the door and faces his teammates.

JERRY

I just wanted to say that whatever happens out there, I'm glad you cats are with me.
(towards white teammates)
All of you.

He holds his hand up. His teammates join.

ENTIRE TEAM

RAMBLERS!

INT. JENISON FIELDHOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

A BUZZ spreads throughout the gym as both teams hit the court for warmups. RADIO ANNOUNCERS all going at once. PRESSMEN feverishly typing. And Police Officers watching over it all.

WITH MSU: Leland and Stan glance down court to Loyola, see their sheer athleticism on display. And color of their skin.

STAN

They look bigger than their photo.

LELAND

And meaner.

WITH LOYOLA: Vic and Les notice Leland and Stan's gaze.

LES

What're they thinking?

VIC

Not sure I want to know.

Jerry lays a ball in then comes around the line of his teammates. He scans the crowd and finds Judy. She gives him a look, *can you believe this?* He smiles, shakes his head.

WITH MSU: Babe watches George receive a good luck kiss from Gertrude. He scans the crowd behind his bench, looking for Laverne, but sees only STRANGERS. It stings -- until a HORN signaling the end of warmups brings him back. Both teams head to their benches.

REFEREE

Captains.

Joe Dan lets out a breath and starts towards midcourt.

WITH LOYOLA: Seeing Joe Dan, Jerry does the same.

AT MIDCOURT: The two captains converge. After all the build up they now stand mere feet apart. The Referee launches into his pregame instructions but we don't hear him. We're locked in on Jerry and Joe Dan who are locked in on each other. Like two boxers anticipating the opening bell. Perspiration beading on their faces. Uncertainty mounting. *Is this just another white racist? Is this just another angry black man?*

REFEREE (CONT'D)

...So let's have a good game.

A beat. Then Jerry extends his hand. Joe Dan regards it--

Then reaches out and takes it. The moment black skin touches white, the entire gym LIGHTS UP. Camera bulbs POPPING nonstop, illuminating the two captains in a brilliant light.

What happens next happens simultaneously. To George and Coach Lyne. To Vic, Les, Ron and John. To Judy and Gertrude. To Babe and Coach Simmons. To Leland, Stan, Doug and Red. And most of all, to Jerry and Joe Dan.

This is bigger than egos and championships. This is history. As the bulbs continue to FLASH we--

CUT TO:

OPENING TIP: Stan wins it over Vic. Joe Dan passes ahead to Doug who rises over Ron for a 15-footer. SWISH!

JACK CRISTIL (V.O.)
And the Dogs strike first!

SERIES OF SHOTS: The Ramblers play tight and the Bulldogs take advantage. Leland and Joe Dan hit baskets. Red a free throw. Babe signals for the 'stall'. The Ramblers aggressive defense is nowhere to be found. *It's as if they're afraid to touch a white player.* Timeout. MSU: 7 Loyola: 0

GEORGE
Stop being polite! Make them feel
you or they will control the game!

SERIES OF SHOTS: The Ramblers respond. Their defense picks up, thwarting the Bulldogs stall. Les and Leland go after a loose ball, COLLIDING in the process. Both players CRASH to the hardwood. A tense hush comes over the crowd. But then--

LES
You good?

Leland nods. They both help each other up and play resumes--

SERIES OF SHOTS: Individual battles -- John playing stifling defense on Red. Leland and Stan battling with Vic and Les. Ron and Doug trade baskets. And Jerry and Joe Dan match wits.

Babe and George exhort and argue with Referees from their benches. The halftime BUZZER: Loyola: 26 MSU: 19

INT. HOTEL (AUBURN, AL) - ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Colvard and Darlene sit before a radio.

COLVARD
We still got time. We're alright.

INT. JENISON FIELDHOUSE - LATER

SECOND HALF: Jerry gets the best of Joe Dan with back to back buckets. The Ramblers defense forces the Bulldogs into a string of bad possessions. Timeout. Loyola: 30 MSU: 20

BABE

They hit you in the mouth now we
hit right back!

SERIES OF SHOTS: The Bulldogs do just that. Red scores over John. Leland over Les. Joe Dan picks off Jerry's pass and finds a wide open Stan for a layup. Loyola: 30 MSU: 27

GEORGE

They can't keep up with you. Run
them into the goddamn ground!

SERIES OF SHOTS: In a blur, Jerry scores over Joe Dan. Les tips in a missed shot. Jerry drives for a layup. Judy and Gertrude cheer wildly from the stands. Loyola: 41 MSU: 31

BABE

Give me everything you have!

SERIES OF SHOTS: The Bulldogs rally once more. Leland hits back to back shots. Stan grabs rebounds over Vic. Joe Dan tightens his defense on Jerry. Loyola: 41 MSU: 38

RED RUSH (V.O.)

You have to give credit to the
Bulldogs. They won't go away.

SERIES OF SHOTS: It's good, clean basketball. Competitive. Hard fought. Just two teams pouring everything they have into every possession, playing like this is their last game.

Loyola: 51 MSU: 48. Doug dribbles up court with Ron all over him. He passes towards Joe Dan--

But Jerry intercepts and takes it in for a two handed SLAM! And the Bulldogs' spirits break. They're exhausted. Mentally and physically. And Loyola is too talented. Defeat becomes inevitable. The final BUZZER: Loyola: 61 MSU: 51

Babe and George meet by the scorer's table, exchange praise. All around the court, black and white players do the same. The mutual respect is abundant. *The final score irrelevant.*

IN THE STANDS: Judy and Gertrude watch in awe as the crowd rises in appreciation for the effort displayed by both teams.

ON THE COURT: As the players head for their respective locker rooms, the cheers grow LOUDER and flash bulbs POP--

INT. JENISON FIELDHOUSE - MSU LOCKER ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Silence except for the occasional SNIFFLING. Babe pulls a chair into the middle of the room and takes a seat. Then--

BABE

Y'all have nothing to hang your heads about. That team we just played is one of the best three teams in the entire country and y'all went toe-to-toe with 'em.

That's of little comfort to this room. A beat.

BABE (CONT'D)

I thought winning was all that mattered. But I was wrong. Y'all accomplished something special. From now on, every Mississippi State team will have a chance to play for a title. Not just in basketball. Football. Baseball. Track and field. Because of you, they'll get to compete against the great teams like Loyola. That's how an athlete should be measured. By how they play. Not how they look.

He looks to his teary eyed team. It hits him that for the seniors -- Red, Leland and Joe Dan -- this is the final time they'll be together as players and coach. His eyes well.

BABE (CONT'D)

Y'all are the best team a coach could ask for. And I love y'all.

He stands and makes his way towards the door.

JOE DAN

Coach...

Babe turns. Joe Dan stands, his face flushed with emotions.

JOE DAN (CONT'D)

Thank you.

In a show of respect, the rest of the team STANDS UP. Babe and Joe Dan share a meaningful look. And no more needs said.

INT. PLANE - DAY

The sting of defeat is still fresh. Leland rests his head against the window when he notices something outside.

LELAND

Boys. Take a look at this.

The other players join him in looking out the windows.

DOUG

You think they're here to welcome
us or send us back?

We then see what they see -- cars lining the road leading
into the airfield, and a MASSIVE CROWD on the tarmac.

EXT. AIRFIELD - TARMAC - MOMENTS LATER

Led by Babe, the team exits the plane and is serenaded by a loud OVATION. MISSISSIPPI STATE FLAGS wave proudly. The PEP BAND rocks the FIGHT SONG. The pride is overwhelming.

The players are swarmed by the adoring crowd. They sign autographs and take photos, loving every minute of it.

Babe shakes hands with well wishers and watches as the players soak in the attention. He sees Coach Simmons embrace his WIFE then watches Dutch do the same.

VOICE (O.S.)

Babe!

He turns, expectant, but deflates when he sees Walker advancing through the crowd.

WALKER

Can you believe this?! We've been
getting requests for interviews
with you left and right. You're the
coach everyone wants to talk to.

Babe's focus remains on the crowd around him.

WALKER (CONT'D)

This will help with recruiting ten
fold. And Babe, we want to talk
extension.

Babe processes that. The recognition he's craved now finally at his fingertips. But as he takes in the crowd, his players, his staff, he feels no satisfaction. Only emptiness.

BABE

Not right now, Wade.

He walks off, leaving Walker at a loss.

EXT. MCCARTHY HOME - LATER

Babe pulls up to the curb, seeing his sons playing one-on-one in the driveway. He then sees Laverne emerge from the house. He checks his appearance in the rearview then exits his car.

BABE

Hi, boys. You give me a minute and
I'll be back to referee this game.

The boys smile, nod. Babe meets Laverne at the front door.

LAVERNE

We listened to Jack's call. Boys
played a good game.

BABE

They gave it everything they had.
(then)
I missed y'all at the airfield.

She knows. That was the point. He shuffles nervously.

BABE (CONT'D)

None of this matters without you or
the boys, Laverne. None of it. And
I'm sorry I put this all on you.
But I'll be better. I promise. If
you'll take me, I'll be better.

They catch eyes. There's still love here despite it all. Her eyes well. A beat -- then she reaches out and takes his hand.

SON 1

C'mon, dad!

Both Babe and Laverne dry their tears.

BABE

We're coming.

LAVERNE

We? No. I'm getting supper ready.

But Babe's not having it. He leads her to the driveway. And under the late afternoon sky, and through fits of laughter, the McCarthys enjoy a game together.

EXT. PRESIDENT'S HOME - PORCH - NIGHT

Colvard sits in his rocking chair, enjoying the peaceful night. Martha emerges with drinks in her hands, a NEWSPAPER under her arm. She sits next to him, hands him his drink.

MARTHA

Did you see the paper today?

He slips the paper from under her arm. Unfolds it: **Miss. State's NCAA Tourney Debut Memorable, Rewarding, Satisfying**

A feeling of pride washes over him. She kisses him on the cheek. He places the paper down. As they enjoy their drinks--

FADE TO:

INT. MEMORIAL HALL - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Superimpose: **One Week Later**

We slowly PUSH DOWN the hallway, a TINNY RADIO BROADCAST steadily getting LOUDER--

RED RUSH (V.O.)

Loyola and Cincinnati are tied with
one minute to go in overtime here
in the national championship!

We glide into--

INT. MEMORIAL HALL - JOE DAN'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Where we find Joe Dan, Leland, Stan, Doug, Red and the rest of the Bulldogs huddled around a RADIO. Nervous. Excited.

RED RUSH (V.O.)

It all comes down to this! Can the
Ramblers pull it off!

JOE DAN

Jerry's got this. He's got it.

INTERCUT:

INT. FREEDOM HALL (LOUISVILLE, KY) - CONTINUOUS

The national championship before nearly TWENTY THOUSAND FANS. Jerry, Vic, Ron, Les and John huddle around George. They're exhausted, looking like they've just been through battle. George glances to the scoreboard: Loyola: 58 Cincinnati: 58

GEORGE

We're going to stall.

JERRY

Like Mississippi State?

GEORGE

You get the ball with ten seconds
then make your move. Listen to me:
There's no better place for four
black starters to win a title than
Freedom Hall. Let's finish this!

IN THE CROWD: Judy and Gertrude can barely breathe as they watch the Ramblers retake the floor opposite the CINCINNATI BEARCATS and their THREE BLACK STARTERS.

ON THE COURT: Jerry takes his position. He looks to Vic, Les, Ron and John. He smiles. *He's not alone.* John passes in to Ron and the stall commences. The Bearcats are stunned. 45...

RED RUSH (V.O.)

Isn't this a twist! Loyola is
running the stall!

The Cincinnati Coach hollers, but they don't want to risk gambling for a steal. 20... Les passes to John. 15...

IN JOE DAN'S ROOM: The Bulldogs are hanging on every word.

RED RUSH (V.O.)

I guarantee you this, they'll give
it to Harkness when the time comes.

IN FREEDOM HALL: John passes back to Ron. Ron to Vic. 10...

GEORGE

NOW!

Vic shovels it to Jerry...9...8...7... He drives left, rises up, but the Cincinnati GUARD gets a finger on the ball, throwing off his rhythm! He sees Les in the corner of his eye and throws a pass. 6... Les hurries a shot. 5...

As the ball heads towards the basket, Vic battles the Cincinnati CENTER for position underneath. 4...

The ball bounces off the rim and kicks right. 3... With everything he has, Vic leaps...2... and taps the ball off the glass. 1... It falls through the net as the BUZZER sounds!

RED RUSH (V.O.)

It's over! We won! We won! We won!

The Loyola reserves SPRINT off the bench, joining the starters in mobbing Vic! George hugs Coach Lyne. Jerry breaks from the celebration for a moment and looks--

IN THE STANDS: Where he finds the tear streaked face of Judy. She smiles, beaming with pride, heart full.

IN JOE DAN'S ROOM: Complete PANDEMONIUM. As if they'd just won. Joe Dan breaks away to gather his thoughts and heads--

INTO THE HALLWAY: And takes a breath, smiles to himself.

JERRY (O.S.)

Joe Dan!

As he turns around we're taken back to--

INT. JENISON FIELDHOUSE - HALLWAY - FLASHBACK

Where he sees Jerry waiting for him post the MSU/Loyola game.

JERRY

You white boys can play.

JOE DAN

(laughs)

I appreciate that. Y'all too.

A beat. A black man and a white man. Two people society had decided should hate each other, should remain separate, now stand face to face, brought together by the game they love.

JERRY

It was a pleasure being on that court with you.

JOE DAN

Pleasure was all mine, Jerry.

They shake. It's filled with warmth. Respect. Friendship.

JOE DAN (CONT'D)

Do me a favor. Go win the whole damn thing.

Jerry smiles. Nods. Joe Dan waves and walks away.

Off Jerry--

CUT TO:

CLOSE ON Jerry, his face now wrinkled with age. PULL BACK to--

INT./EXT. CAR - DAY

Superimpose: **Benton, Kentucky. April 18, 2011**

Jerry (now 70) wears a black suit, collecting his thoughts. After a moment, he opens the door and steps out.

INT. FUNERAL HOME - CONTINUOUS

The soft whispers of conversation. We immediately notice every attendee is WHITE. A MAN notices Jerry and comes over. He whispers something to Jerry then leads him into--

INT. FUNERAL HOME - PRIVATE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Where Jerry finds three ELDERLY MEN. Although the years have passed, we'd recognize them anywhere: DOUG. STAN. LELAND. They greet Jerry with warm hugs that are coated with sadness.

INT. FUNERAL HOME - MOMENTS LATER

Along with Doug, Leland and Stan, Jerry makes his way towards an ELDERLY WOMAN receiving condolences by a CASKET. She spots him and smiles. They embrace. She takes him by the hand and leads him towards the casket. To the right, a large bouquet of flowers surrounds a sign: **In Loving Memory of Joe Dan Gold**

To the left is a large black and white PHOTO of Jerry and Joe Dan shaking hands before their game in East Lansing.

The sight of it triggers tears in Jerry's eyes. He places his hand onto the casket. *One final handshake with his friend.*

LATER: A SPEAKER finishes his eulogy and returns to his seat. Jerry exhales then takes his place behind the podium. A beat.

JERRY

Joe Dan Gold was a kind man. I knew that the moment I looked into his eyes all those years ago.

(looks to PHOTO)

When I think back on that game I remember all the forces that were trying to keep us apart. But that's the beautiful thing about sports. They will always bring us together. No matter how hard those forces may try to keep us apart.

(gathers himself)

I'll be forever grateful for those forty minutes in March. Because without them, I would have never found my friend.

He returns to his seat next to Doug, Stan and Leland. He wipes a tear from his eye and looks to the PHOTO. We slowly PUSH IN on it. And just when it's all we see, we--

CUT TO BLACK

Jerry and Joe Dan remained close friends until Joe Dan's passing.

During the 1963 NCAA Tournament, Jerry averaged 21.2 points a game. That led the team.

After a brief professional career, Jerry would devote his life to civil rights, working with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the Indianapolis Chapter of 100 Black Men.

In June 2013, he was awarded the Muhammad Ali Athlete Award.

Joe Dan Gold would go on to become head coach at Mississippi State and actively recruited black players. He was enshrined in the Mississippi State Athletic Hall of Fame in 1996.

Babe McCarthy left Mississippi State after the 1965 season to coach in the American Basketball Association. He became the first coach in the ABA to win 200 games. The gymnasium where he led the Bulldogs to four SEC titles is now named McCarthy Gymnasium.

Dean Colvard left Mississippi State in 1966 and returned to his home state where he became the first Chancellor of the University of North Carolina-Charlotte. Mississippi State tried to lure to stay by offering a ten-thousand a year raise and new Cadillac. Buildings on both campuses now bear his name.

George Ireland would remain at Loyola until his retirement in 1975. He would later volunteer at the Center for Enriched Living, helping children with intellectual and developmental disabilities. His 1963 Ramblers remain the only team from Illinois to win a national championship.

Ross Barnett left office in 1964. He attempted a comeback in 1967 but finished a distant fourth. He remained unrepentant about his actions until his death in 1987.

In 1965, Richard Holmes became the first black student to enroll at Mississippi State University. He did so without incident.

In 2018, the Loyola Ramblers made a Cinderella run to the Final Four. It was the first time they had advanced that far since 1963.

Babe Wants State Team In Playoffs

'Unwritten Law' May
Keep Champs At Home

STARKVILLE, (UPI) — Coach have five conference games re



Chicago Daily Tribune

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2 DIE, 75 HURT IN MISS. RIOT

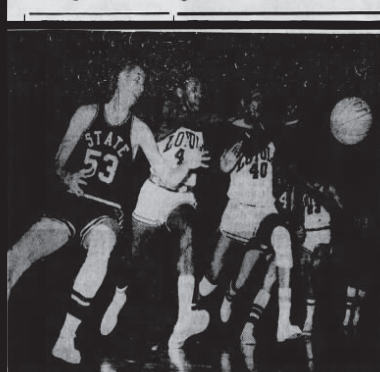
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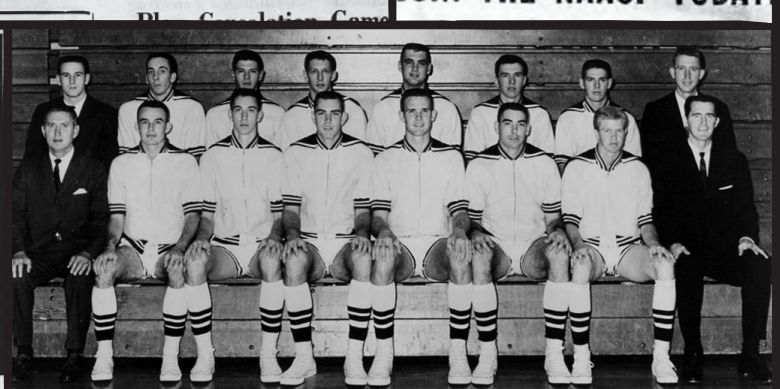
Board Votes In Favor Of Playing In Tourney



Miss. State Cagers Defeated By Loyola In NCAA Tourney



STATE PLAYS IN NCAA TOURNEY



Gov. Barnett Opposes State Playing In NCAA

