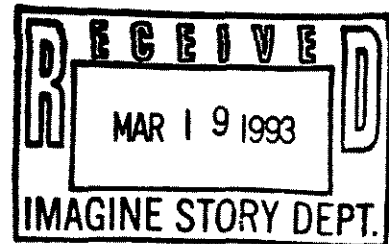


FRIDAY NIGHT LIGHTS

by

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FADE IN

EXT. WEST TEXAS - PRE-DAWN

as we glide over the darkened landscape past vast chunks of barren earth.

IN THE DISTANCE

The sun POPS UP like a giant flaming aspirin, illuminating signs of life.

Mesquite, telephone poles, and abandoned oil fields.

A silver Greyhound bus FLASHES against the horizon, and crawls down the ribbon of Interstate 20.

INT/EXT - THE GREYHOUND - TRAVELING

This is KYLE HONEYCUTT (17), blue eyes, fresh crewcut, an athlete's body, tensed, expectant. He looks out the window:

Idle oil derricks lay on their sides like toppled launch towers from Cape Canaveral.

Parking lots full of out-of-use pump trucks and tankers.

The road sign whips by: "WELCOME TO ODESSA."

EXT. DOWNTOWN ODESSA - DAY

A MAN (39) sits behind the wheel of a blue Chevy pick-up, not a big man but a hard man, all forearms, fists and jaw. His eyes are bloodshot. He smokes, sucking the life out of a Lucky Strike.

Lyle Lovett CROONS on the radio.

ON MAIN STREET

the Savings and Loan is bankrupt but the Clock/Temp. sign inexplicably still works:

6:36 A.M. 83 DEGREES

EXT. RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOOD - SAME TIME

A modest ranch house. Inside an alarm clock is RINGING.

INT. THE BEDROOM - A HAND

reaches over, silencing the alarm. DOYLE HUCKLEBY stares at the ceiling, his face stained with worry, looking older than his forty years. He starts to get up. A female voice MOANS from underneath the sheet.

VOICE
(langorously)
Doyle honey...

CLAIRE HUCKLEBY (38) peels back the covers on her half-naked body, stretching out both arms to her husband. She winks.

CLAIRE
Last chance till Christmas.

He rolls on top of her and into a kiss.

INT. SHACK HOUSE - DAY

A rusty stovetop overflows with breakfast: eggs, bacon, hash browns and pancakes. LAMARR ATLAS (44) is the short-order cook, a broad black man with a gentle smile. His wife PAULINE (38) whisks past him with a frown, grabbing a piece of fruit on her way out.

PAULINE
Gonna spoil that boy.

The front screen CREAKS shut. Lamarr turns back to the stove. He piles two of everything onto a plate and carries it over to a closed bedroom door. Knocking:

LAMARR
Spinner? You up yet?

EXT. THE DOWNTOWN BUS STATION - KYLE

steps off the Greyhound, dufflebag in hand. He looks around, sees no one. His face drops.

A DOOR SLAMS

on the Chevy truck. The man with the Luckies, CALEB HONEYCUTT, stares straight into Kyle's blue eyes. His expression is blank. Kyle freezes, unsure what to do.

CALEB
That all your stuff?

KYLE
Yessir.

EXT. AN ODESSA MANSION - DAY

An OSTRICH races across the vast front lawn, then pulls up short before crashing into its wire pen.

The house boasts six chimneys, all of them shimmering in the mid-August heat.

INT. THE MANSION WEIGHT ROOM

Red-headed BUDDY CRANKSHAW (17) strains beneath the weight of a 300 pound barbell, his soft eyes and baby face FLUSHED from the effort.

Children's VOICES are heard off camera:

VOICES
EIGHT! NINE! TEN!

Buddy's elbows lock and deliver the bar into the manicured hands of BETTY CRANKSHAW (late 30's), whose skin-tight workout clothes show off a staggeringly beautiful body. She spots for him, guiding the weights to their place on the stand.

BETTY
Just gorgeous, Pumpkin. Gorgeous.

Buddy stands, the muscles of his upper body heaving. A ten inch vertical SCAR spans his left thigh. He smiles at his younger brothers, LIONEL (12) and PEE-WEE (9) who have burst into APPLAUSE. Buddy plays cheerleader:

BUDDY
Where we goin?

LIONEL AND PEE-WEE
STATE!

BUDDY
What're we gonna do?!

LIONEL AND PEE-WEE
WIN!

BUDDY
WHAT'RE WE GONNA WIN?

EXT. "YUKON JACK" TRAILER COURT - DAY

The sign is rusting. So are the trailer homes. A gravel road bisects the court. Front yard junk has obliterated the lawns. The blue Chevy pick-up rests in front of trailer #6.

INT. CALEB'S TRAILER - KYLE

drops his duffle in a dusty corner. A huge stuffed MOOSEHEAD dominates the narrow living room, his antlers brushing the low ceiling.

Empty beer bottles describe a line that runs from the kitchenette to the dog-eared laziboy and back again.

Kyle unzips the duffle, starts to unpack. Clothes. Cleats. A small framed photograph of a football player wearing early seventies sideburns, one hand stuck straight out in the stiff arm position. Kyle stares at the face in the picture.

INT. THE ATLAS KITCHEN - POST-BREAKFAST

Not a scrap of egg, pancake or potato in sight. Lamarr is washing dishes.

A THUMPING sound comes from the direction of the bedroom door. He looks back, shakes his head, smiles.

INT. A DARKENED BEDROOM

CLOSE-UP

on ROBERT, aka 'SPINNER' ATLAS,

eyes GLOWING like power stations against the smooth black skin of his 18 year old face.

His mouth SHOUTS OUT the words as he lip syncs Public Enemy:

SPINNER
(and Terminator X)
ATTITUDE! WHEN I'M ON FIRE
JUICE ON THE LOOSE, ELECTRIC WIRE...

WIDER

On Spinner's underwear-clad body: six two, 210 pounds that travel 4.4 in the forty. He dances over to the closet, and opens the door on an impressive array of name brand athletic equipment, all this while continuing the song:

SPINNER (CONT)
SIMPLE AND PLAIN, GIMME THE LANE
I'LL THROW IT DOWN YOUR THROAT LIKE
BARKLEY...

The MUSIC continues as we move:

EXT. THE ATLAS HOUSE - SPINNER

exits the front door in Nike sweats, and black Air Jordan's, his ears fused to a pair of Walkman headphones.

There's a large white sign in front of the clapboard house:

"GO MOJO! NUMBER 32, TAILBACK, SPINNER ATLAS" and beneath it, a drawing of a football player spinning the earth on his finger.

Lamarr follows right behind, carrying the gym bag. They hop into a waiting car, as Public Enemy continues on OVERLAP.

TERMINATOR X
YOU KNOW THE RHYTHM, THE RHYME
SO THE BEAT IS DESIGNED...

EXT. BUDDY'S VAN - BARRELING

Black and chrome and jacked up to the sky on five foot high monster wheels that HUM down the blacktop. Public Enemy has given way to GUNS'N'ROSES.

INT. BUDDY'S VAN - THE MUSIC

rocks from 20 inch speakers. BUDDY'S hands pound the steering wheel as he SHOUTS along with Axel Rose. His t-shirt reads: "PROPERTY OF PERMIAN FOOTBALL DEPARTMENT."

EXT. CALEB'S TRUCK - PATCHING OUT

of the trailer park. Hard rock melts into country.

INT. THE TRUCK - GARTH BROOKS

WARBLES on the airwaves. Caleb snaps off the radio. He's driving. Kyle is next to him.

They turn off Andrews Highway onto 42nd Street.

CALEB
What do you play?

Kyle listens to the question.

KYLE
Tailback. Sir.

Long pause. Caleb pulls hard on his Lucky Strike.

CALEB
Don't believe anyone's ever walked on
and started. Not at Permian.

BUDDY CRANKSHAW, like Coach Huckleby, quietly in control, the quarterback/captain who leads by example.

KYLE HONEYCUTT, the outsider, an unknown quantity with a famous (in Odessa) last name. By Permian standards, Kyle appears way out of shape.

BETTY CRANKSHAW, queen of the sideline crowd, the sexy/mom/cheerleader who knows both her football and how much people like to watch her watching the boys.

Everyone (and everything) on the field boasts some combination of the Panthers school colors of black & white.

PART TWO / IMAGES

The drills change from conditioning to scrimmages, and we notice now that the players are wearing pads, and there is a growing intensity about the workouts. Part of it derives from Buddy, who challenges his teammates (like a coach would) to push themselves farther than their bodies will allow. Buddy's counterpart on defense, and the defensive captain is CHUCK MARTINEZ, the herculean middle linebacker, who leads the charge from his side of the field. Spinner seems to have his own training methods, which include lying still during critical exercises, or "accidentally" missing his place in drill lineups. The coaches do their part by pretending not to notice what, for any other player, would invite a serious reprimand. Kyle, fresh from throwing up into one of the "Panther Pots" (empty oil cans sprinkled along the sidelines for that purpose) is repeatedly knocked on his butt during contact drills, hammered unmercifully in what amounts to a West Texas welcome.

In the distance, next to the parking lot, we see CALEB watching the proceedings, but taking pains not to be identified.

PART THREE / IMAGES

The pace quickens with "gassers" - full-pad sprints from one sideline to the other and back again. The crowd off the field has thinned out and changed. Die-hard regulars like Betty and Lamarr have been joined by a few college scouts, all of whom whisper and watch as Spinner jukes and glides his way through the defensive teams with the supreme confidence of a prince born to the throne. Everywhere there are murmurs about "State," "goin' to State," "winnin' State," and the "S" sound spreads like a virus through the crowd and beyond. And now the intensity level of the practice climbs up another notch, to an impossible point that has the players on the outside envelope of physical collapse. Then, just as suddenly, it is over (as is the sequence) and we retire with the players, back into real time, to the shelter of:

INT. THE PERMIAN LOCKER ROOM - DUSK

An oversized shrine for the high priests of Odessa: white walls, black benches, black metal lockers and, to complete the school color decor, WALL-TO WALL black carpeting with the Permian Panther woven into the center.

The players stumble in, and alternately fall onto the benches or the floor, SWEARING if they can manage words, or uttering prayerful SIGHS of relief.

Buddy enters with a near unconscious TEAMMATE in his arms, and lowers him gently onto the trainer's table. Two MEDICAL PERSONNEL take over and prep him for an I.V.

Kyle is lying prostrate on the magic black carpet, unable to move, or even consider the thought.

Spinner skips by, sees Kyle, then drops nimbly down to the carpet, one elbow propping up his head. Hamming:

SPINNER

Say, aren't you Mr. Walk-on? Or is it
Crawl-on?

In a supreme act of will Kyle pulls himself up into a sitting position.

SPINNER

You coming to the Feed, Crawl-on?

KYLE

The what?

SPINNER

The Watermelon Feed. (clowning) It's
kind of a black thaaang, you know what
I'm saying? Cause we just luuv to eat
that --

A foot KICKS into Spinner's midsection. It belongs to BUDDY.

BUDDY

You missed some push-ups out there,
Robert.

Buddy, one of a select group who dares call Spinner by his proper name, drops down into push-up position.

BUDDY

Thought we might catch-up, see what kind
of shape you're really in. You ready?

Cornered, Spinner smiles and picks up the gauntlet.

THE CONTEST BEGINS

While they match each other, push-up for push-up, we travel around the locker room where:

The other PLAYERS root them on, with CHEERS and CATCALLS.

WILLY HANSEN is a 140 pound good ole boy who looks like he's 14. Willy's taking bets.

WILLY
I got the Captain, Captain Crunch, who's
taking Spinner at 2 to 1?

Lots of takers, as the two bodies continue to PUMP up and down, in perfect rhythm.

At the far end of the room behind a large glass WINDOW is:

INT. THE COACHES OFFICE

Huddled around the depth chart that hangs prominently on the inside wall, they now turn to watch this in-house battle.

Huckleby is the last to look up. The contest plays out like a silent movie beyond the glass screen.

Assistant Coach BOBBY DALTON is a lanky wide receiver type who fancies himself a comedian.

DALTON
I dunno, Doyle. I got to go with the
Ne-gro.

Assistant Coach J.T. STUTZ, the former lineman, nods his head.

STUTZ
Buddy's gonna break his own heart one a
these days.

Doyle says nothing as we move back inside:

THE LOCKER ROOM

CLOSE UP ON THE TWO BOYS

straining now as the crowd SCREAMS. Buddy's showing signs of collapse. His co-captain, Chuck Martinez, GROWLS at him to go on.

Spinner is focused, in another zone, his whole body alive to the challenge.

Kyle watches, frozen in the same spot where everything began.

Buddy DIPS, and struggles to push himself up. Spinner's already up, elbows locked, waiting to see if he has to dig out one more. No.

Buddy DROPS to the carpet, pounds it with both fists, then springs up and EXITS toward the showers.

Spinner CRUMPLES to the ground with a huge smile, as the players SHOUT OUT their applause.

EXT. THE TRAILER PARK - EVENING

Kyle drags himself up the steps and through the front door.

INT. CALEB'S TRAILER - SAME TIME

The living room has changed for the neater. No stray long necks. Empty ashtrays. A clean kitchen sink.

KYLE

Hello?

Kyle tosses his gym bag on the sofa that is also his bed.

The door to Caleb's bedroom opens:

VOICE (OC)

Whadja forget?

A WOMAN (33) with long blonde hair hangs on the door, wearing French-cut bikini underwear, and nothing else. Her breasts sway.

Kyle stares, then STAMMERS something.

The woman crosses her arms, savoring Kyle's embarrassment. She's got a nice smile.

SISSY

God knows you're not the first man to see me in the altogether.

She slips behind the door.

SISSY (OC)

My name's Sissy. Who are you?

KYLE

Kyle, mam.

Sissy reappears in one of Caleb's shirts. It barely covers the top of her thighs.

SISSY

Howdy Kyle. You a friend of Caleb's?

Kyle can see black roots spiking out of her head. He focuses there, trying to block out the other sights.

KYLE

No, mam.

SISSY

Then I better jump into my dress and get outta here.

She waits for him to laugh, but he's still flustered by her anatomy. Recovering:

KYLE

I'm his son.

SISSY

Now ain't that the berries...

She pats the shirt pocket, finds cigarettes, lights one.

SISSY

You live with your mama?

(Kyle shakes his head no.)

With him, here?

(He shakes yes.)

Roommates, huh? Where's your mama?

KYLE

Oklahoma.

SISSY

Whatsamatter, evil stepfather?

KYLE

I came here to play football. For Permian.

SISSY

Go on.

KYLE

It's the truth.

SISSY
 (teasing him)
 You don't look like no football player.

How Kyle looks is insulted.

SISSY
 That's a compliment, silly.

INT. TELEVISION SCREEN - SLOW MOTION

A RUNNING BACK cuts upfield, faking left, right, then SPINNING 360 degrees into the arms of the oncoming linebacker.

VOICE (OC)
 Right there. Your negatives on the scouting reports. "He's a juker. Needs to put his head down and take the short yards. Punish some people."

LAMARR

holds onto the remote like a pointing stick. He's sunk onto the thrift shop couch, with SPINNER, all ears, next to him.

Lamarr fast forwards. Another play. We recognize Spinner's number. There's the handoff.

LAMARR
 Broken play, it's your call. Get what you can. But look (pointing), you see the alignment on D, you know where your blockers are, you got to tuck your chin and eat some dirt.

Instead, on the tv, Spinner twirls, breaks a tackle, sidesteps outside and runs down the left sideline for a touchdown.

Spinner's face PROTESTS. Lamarr rewinds. It's a rebuke.

LAMARR
 Man won't miss that tackle at A&M.
 (breaking a smile) Not at USC neither.

INT. THE CRANKSHAW DINING ROOM - EVENING

There's a crowd around the feast of food that covers the massive oak table: Betty, Buddy, his two brothers, Lionel and Pee-Wee; Chuck Martinez from the football team, and at the very far end, the oversized head of the family, BIG AL CRANKSHAW (40's), fatter than he is tall, cigar-faced and balding. Big Al is not a handsome man, but he knows and gets what he wants, and this quality makes him attractive to women.

He talks on his cellular phone while eating, issuing guttural commands. It's as if he were dining at another table.

Chuck finishes the last morsel on his plate.

BETTY

-- Chuck, come on now honey, you got to have some more steaks. (calling)
Conchita! (to Chuck) Don't be comin up bashful at my table.

CONCHITA (20's), the homely housekeeper, enters through the pantry door. She drops two more steaks on Chuck's plate. Buddy grabs three more steaks himself. Everyone but Betty is stuffing themselves silly.

CHUCK

Best chicken-fried steaks I ever ate,
Mrs. C.

Betty smiles, and stands up. Buddy chimes in with a full mouth.

BUDDY

Just wait til practice tomorrow. Get to taste these a second time.

Passing, Betty runs both her hands through Buddy's thick red hair, and whispers into his ear.

BETTY

Don't you be talking filthy at my table
Buddy Crankshaw. Or I'm gonna freeze
you out of dessert.

She kisses him, and catches Chuck looking jealously on.

BETTY C.

That goes for you too, Mr. Martinez.

Al Crankshaw looks up from his phone as Betty's hand TOUSLES Chuck's crewcut.

INT. THE TRAILER - NO ONE

but Kyle. He heads into the kitchenette and opens the refrigerator. Top to bottom, it's all BUDWEISERS.

INT. CALEB'S BEDROOM - KYLE

enters, beer in hand. A king-sized bed dominates cramped quarters. Bare walls. A plug-in Budweiser clock.

Kyle pokes around the recessed closet. Some work overalls, an old suit, winter coats, and

THE LETTER JACKET

Black wool, worn black leather sleeves and a big ivory "P" on the chest. There are patches everywhere, in the shape of the state of Texas: District Champs, Regional Champs, Quarters, Semis, and State. They fill up the sleeves. Gold stitching above the big "P" spells "Honeycutt, C."

Kyle tries it on over his bare chest. It fits. He studies himself in the closet mirror.

TIME CUT

Kyle sits on the sofa, tearing open SUGAR PACKETS, and pouring them into his mouth. He looks at the empty wrappers: there's a name, MAGGIE MAY'S, and a phone number. He DIALS.

VOICE (OC)

Maggie's.

KYLE

Caleb...?

There's a pause. Lots of background NOISE. People SHOUTING.

CALEB'S VOICE

I told you never to call me here.

CLICK. Kyle stands and walks out the door.

INT. COACH HUCKLEBY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Claire is at the kitchen table with her two daughters, SHEILA (14) and LEANNE (11), who sit staring at the steaming plates of food. There's one more place setting, but the chair is EMPTY. Claire glances at the front door, then at the telephone. Irked:

CLAIRE

Ohhhh... go on and eat.

INT. THE COACHES OFFICE - NIGHT

Wendy's (hamburger) bags litter the gunmetal desks. The 4 COACHES chew while staring up at the DEPTH CHART where magnets bear the names of each player and his position, all color coded according to offense and defense. Reserve players are lined up on the bottom.

Assistant DALE CHEEVERS has the biggest gut on the staff.

CHEEVERS

Hate this fucking food.

He scarfs down some french fries.

STUTZ

That's cause you're not paying for it.

The others LAUGH. Huckleby studies the chart. He whispers in his low voice, forcing the others into silence.

COACH HUCKLEBY

What about Caleb's boy? Bobby?

Doyle toys with Kyle's magnet, pushing it up out of the reserves pile.

DALTON

I tried, Coach. Flat out refused to play defense.

CHEEVERS

Another fuckin head case.

COACH HUCKLEBY

J.T.?

STUTZ

Got a lot to learn, besides a playbook fatter than Cheever's belly.

CHEEVERS

Tell you one thing, you cut that boy, I wouldn't wanna run into ole Caleb, not without some shock troops.

DALTON

Send Spinner after him.

Dalton breaks into his SPINNER IMITATION: head and shoulders dipping and swaying like a prizefighter in the ring.

DALTON

(imitating Spinner's voice)

You baad alright, but you shoulda fucked a black girl, Honeycutt. Sired yourself a reeeeeal running back, you know what I'm sayin?

The guys are on the floor, in stitches. All but Huckleby.

EXT. A SERIES OF INTERCUTS - NIGHT

FULL MOON

A male figure RUNS across an empty field.

He CLIMBS a chain link fence, DROPPING down on the other side.

Now he moves in the darkness, steps ECHOING as if inside a tunnel. The figure disappears through an opening and:

EXT. THE FOOTBALL STADIUM - KYLE

stands alone on the fifty yard line, looking up at the 22,000 empty seats.

The twin, 200 foot high light banks tower in the moon-lit sky.

He turns around, and around, slowly.

INT. THE HIGH SCHOOL CAFETERIA - EVENING

Packed to the gills with the Permian faithful, all of whom dress in some combination of the black & white school colors. Mojo hats. Permian t-shirts. Buttons. You name it. The concession stand in back is doing land office business.

Buddy's father BIG AL strides up to a podium, cigar in mouth. He's president of the Booster Club.

Above him is a large banner: "WELCOME TO THE WATERMELON FEED"

BIG AL

Let's give a big West Texas hello to
last year's MVP, our one and only number
42, JOE BOB SIBLEY!

The partisan crowd stands up on its feet as a short, squat 19 year old in polyester pants waddles over to the mic.

Two MEN in the shadows have an exchange.

MAN #1

Sibley get that scholarship?

MAN #2

Nothin.

MAN #1

What's he doin'?

MAN #2

Says he watches lots of teevee.

Joe Bob, shy as a puppy, can barely raise his eyes to the APPLAUSE.

JOE BOB

Thank ya all I wanna wish this years
Panthers all the luck in the world in
bringin the state title home to Odessa.

And he is back in the wings. More CHEERS. Big Al reassumes control of the mic:

BIG AL

Here he is, head panther - Coach Doyle
Huckleby!

APPLAUSE. Big Al corners Doyle while relinquishing the podium. Under his breath:

BIG AL

Short and sweet.

Huckleby utters a few words in his gravelly Godfather voice. The crowd HUSHES.

COACH HUCKLEBY

My Daddy was a cotton farmer. And on
those years when the rains came and the
floods stayed away, he'd take me out to
the fields and say, "Son, we have a good
season in the ground."

ON BIG AL

annoyed, scanning the crowd. There's BETTY, in a stunning blue dress, on her lapel a PHOTO-BUTTON of Buddy in uniform.

Big Al finds the object of his attention, a dark-haired BEAUTY (20's) in pink spandex. Doyle's voice RUMBLES on, off-camera:

COACH HUCKLEBY (VO)

To you good people who make this program
what it is, who sacrifice and volunteer
and chip in even when you're flush out
of chips, I say...

The Spandex beauty meets his stare. Big Al WINKS.

COACH HUCKLEBY

..."We got a good season in the ground."
Let's go get 'em.

APPLAUSE. To Doyle, underneath the SHOUTS.

BIG AL
You do that son.

He's back behind the mic.

BIG AL
Ladies and Gentlemen! The very best
football team in the State of Texas!

FIFTY TWO BOYS

in black football jerseys MARCH like bridegrooms down the center aisle of the cafeteria, filing in from the rear. As each name is called out, a condensed version of the high school band POUNDS OUT a drum beat.

ON CALEB

dressed up in a bolo tie, nervously twisting a gold RING.

BIG AL'S VOICE
Jess Stone... Pete Sanford... Robert
"Spinner" Atlas... Lawrence McNally...

The crowd CHEERS WILDLY on both sides of the aisle. Caleb turns back and sees KYLE coming, two players behind Buddy Crankshaw. The boys move forward.

Across the aisle, Betty STANDS UP, clapping for her son. As Buddy walks by, Caleb comes directly in her sight.

A LOOK passes between them, freezing Betty's hands in mid-air.

BIG AL'S VOICE
Brent Wooford... Buddy Crankshaw...
Chuck Martinez... Kyle Honeycutt...

And we are with KYLE, walking the aisle, catching his father's gaze turning towards him.

Caleb's eyes BRIGHTEN. He stands a little taller as:

The players take seats at the front of the hall behind a long row of cafeteria tables butted end to end.

BIG AL
And now, the moment you've all been
pinning for: (in his loudest voice)
PEPETTES! BRING ON THE WATERMELON!

52 GIRLS in numbered white football jerseys and black and white miniskirts come pouring down the same center aisle, wheeling carts full of RED RIPE WATERMELON SLICES.

Each Pepette sets a slice of watermelon in front of the football player WHOSE JERSEY NUMBER MATCHES HER OWN.

JEANNIE, a cute blow-dried blonde with pouty lips, is wearing Kyle's number - 23. He stares at her.

KYLE

Who are you?

BIG AL'S VOICE

READY GIRLS? SET! FEED!!!!

En masse the Pepettes grab forks and deposit watermelon into the GAPING MOUTHS of their assigned players. Kyle, caught off-guard, dribbles part of the slice down his chin. Jeannie catches it, nimbly, and returns it to his mouth.

JEANNIE

You think you're gonna start this year Kyle Honeycutt? Cause it'd make me real happy. I'm Jeannie. I'm your Pepette.

A SERIES OF INTERCUTS

ON CLAIRE HUCKLEBY,

bored to tears between a posse of Junior League WOMEN.

JUNIOR LEAGUER #1

For Friday? I bought this stunner of a dress yesterday in Dallas...

ON BUDDY

watching his father whisper something to his SPANDEX GIRL. A BOOSTER MOTHER interrupts with her two-cents worth.

MOTHER

I'll tell you what happened in the semis last year. Your coach busted his nuts. Can't win the big ones, Al. Never will.

ON CALEB

surrounded by a bunch of guys like CODY (40), wide and beaten looking, his hand stretched out in greeting.

CODY

Where you been, Cutter? My gawd, it's 20 years.

The others chip in with their long lost HELLOS. Caleb pulls hard on a Lucky. Deadpan:

CALEB

Hell of it is Cody you don't look a day over 60.

ON SPINNER

flirting openly with KAYLENE SIMMS, a shoo-in for homecoming queen, her golden tresses flecked with silver highlights. Some of the parents look on, trying to control the GRIMACES that flash across their (white) cheeks.

ON DOYLE

unhappy in this public spotlight, finally catching a private moment with his wife, CLAIRE, who flirts with him, unabashedly.

CLAIRE

Say, weren't you captain of the football team, Lubbock Lions, class of 69?

ON KYLE

watching the coach KISS his wife, then seeing JEANNIE in a circle of Pepettes.

VOICE

I ever show you this?

It's Caleb, next to him, holding out one fist. There's the brown gold RING, set with a ruby, on his ring finger. He slips it off, hands it to Kyle.

CALEB

State Champions, 1973.

Kyle cradles it like the crown jewels.

CALEB

They can take your house, your car, your money, but you win one a those, ain't nobody can take it away from you. Nobody.

KYLE

You beat Plano. Twenty three twenty. You scored the winning TD.

CALEB

Yeah, well, Friday you get your chance.

And the CAMERA begins to hopscotch around the room, dropping in and out of CONVERSATIONS spoken by children, players, parents, elders and school officials, catching the ECHO of the same word on everyone's lips. "Friday" "Friday night" "Thank God it'll be..." "Friday" "See ya on..." "Friday!" "Let's warm up the lights against..." "AUSTIN, FRIDAY!"

AS WE FADE INTO:

FRIDAY TIME CLOCK SEQUENCE

(At each scene change, a TITLE will appear on the screen, with the exact time, and day.)

INT. THE LOCKER ROOM

TITLE: FRIDAY, 7:20 A.M.

Coach Huckleby addresses the team, standing next to a diagrammed chalkboard.

COACH HUCKLEBY

Okay, 29 cover 5 versus 1 back or no back, we're just stayin' straight 29 unless you get a swap call, okay, right? Get a swap call and then you play a foot technique, that's all it means. Bump to 8 flip, like always, check loose to B over, not strong set. Any questions?

None, as we cut to:

INT. THE HIGH SCHOOL GYMNASIUM

TITLE: 8:43 A.M.

2000 SCREAMING students, parents and teachers form an SRO crowd in the wooden bleachers. It's the PEP RALLY:

CHEERLEADERS & CROWD

WAY TO GO PANTHERS! WAY TO GO!

BOOM BOOM. 4000 feet pound the stands. There's BETTY, LAMARR ATLAS, and the coaches' WIVES lined up like ducks in a row.

Assembled on the gym floor are the 247 members of the marching band, 8 majorettes, 8 cheerleaders, 52 Pepettes, and the 52 members of the Permian Varsity Football team; starters in black jerseys, subs (like Kyle) in white.

Captain Buddy stands behind the podium, reading from a crumpled piece of paper. His voice THUNDERS from the P.A.:

BUDDY
 If you work hard,
 If you pay the price,
 If you make the ultimate sacrifice,
 Then victory so sweet and gay,
 (He looks up. Crowd LAUGHTER.)
 Will be yours tonight,
 The American Way.

INT. THE HIGH SCHOOL HALLS - THE BELL RINGS

TITLE: 9:02 A.M.

LAMARR hurries down the hall, looking out of place among all the teenagers. He catches SPINNER on his way into class, SHOVES a thick clump of envelopes into his hand.

LAMARR
 Special delivery.

And the camera FLOATS down the hall to where KYLE AND JEANNIE stand in front of Kyle's locker. She hands him a metal tin.

KYLE
 What's this for?

JEANNIE
 Open it.

He does. Chocolate chip cookies. Touched:

KYLE
 Thank you, Jeannie.

JEANNIE
 And there's a surprise for you out at your trailer. (beat) Think you might get into the game tonight?

KYLE
 Maybe.

JEANNIE
 That'd be real fine.

INT. ENGLISH LITERATURE CLASS - DAY ✓

TITLE: 11:46 A.M.

The teacher, FRANK CHALMERS (30's) is a mass of energy, filling the blackboard till it bursts, punctuating his words with TAPS of the chalkstick. He waves a copy of Lord Of The Flies.

MR. CHALMERS

...Children, playing an adult's game,
with deadly consequences. What's the
moral of the story? Buddy?

He's leaning forward in his seat.

BUDDY

There's a wild streak in everyone. Push
em hard enough, and they'll blow.

RIP! It's the unmistakable sound of an envelope tearing open.

Chalmers looks up, past several GRINNING students, to the last
row, where SPINNER sits, kinglike, in front of his special
delivery pile.

Chalmers journeys over. Hamming it up:

MR. CHALMERS

Take me for example. I may look like a
cool, calm and collected teacher of
English literature...

Spinner SMILES broadly, in love with the attention.

MR. CHALMERS (CONT)

But when it comes to bad-assed football
players....

The class TITTERS. Chalmers reaches over to scoop up the stack
of letters, but Spinner is faster.

HE JUKES AROUND CHALMERS

and cuts up through the rows, fanning out the envelopes in his
hands like a deck of cards.

SPINNER

Scholarships, scholarships, who wants a
scholarship?

All the letterheads on the envelopes bear the names of
university athletic departments.

SPINNER

Got a four year, full, Texas Tech... (He
drops one on Buddy's desk) There ya go,
Captain. A&M plus a sports car... (He
slaps it on Chuck's desk), drive safely
now, and (reading) Podunk Junior
College, free beer on the weekends...

He scans the class, finds KYLE next to a window.

SPINNER

That'd have to be you, Crawl-On.

As he reaches Kyle's desk, Chalmers INTERCEPTS, swiping the whole pile this time. He points Spinner back to his seat.

MR. CHALMERS

Thank you. Thank you, Robert. (He walks back to the head of the class) Just remember that the path to your free football heaven leads through the gates of Literature, 202.

He DROPS the whole pile of letters into the trash.

INT. THE COACHES OFFICE

TITLE: 2:50 P.M.

They are all present, cross-checking their crib sheets for offensive and defensive play calling.

COACH HUCKLEBY

Bobby, let's hear some numbers...

DALTON

(winking at the others)

Well, we're nine point favorites going into the game, and I just got word from the Boosters, sayin' you better beat the goddamn spread...

Doyle looks up, sees them all GRINNING like schoolboys.

DALTON

... or they got a job waiting for you coachin' Little League. (beat) That's baseball, Doyle.

He still doesn't smile.

EXT. THE TRAILER COURT

TITLE: 3:52 P.M.

Kyle stops short at the sight of the SIGN in front of Caleb's trailer. Big black letters on top of a crudely drawn panther:

"KYLE HONEYCUTT. #23 TAILBACK.
GO PERMIAN! MOJO FOREVER!"

INT. THE MASTER BEDROOM - BETTY

TITLE: 4:15 P.M.

in bra and panties, slides open the doors to her clothes closet, a walk-in job about the size of a trailer. She skims past dozens of dresses to a section filled completely with outfits and accessories in combinations of black and white.

A child's VOICE interrupts.

VOICE

Hey Betty...

It's Pee-Wee, one half of his face painted white, the other, black. Across his cheeks is the word: "MOJO."

PEE-WEE

How do I look?

EXT. FROM THE SKY - LOOKING DOWN ON ODESSA

TITLE: 6:22 P.M.

A scene out of Close Encounters of the Third Kind: thousands of cars close in from the north, south, east and west, drawn like magnets to the incandescent GLOW of Ratliff Football Stadium.

ODESSA STREETS - FRIDAY NIGHT RUSH HOUR

TITLE: 6:37 P.M.

HONK! HONK! HONK! HONK!

The cars march to the stadium in long, crawling lines, adorned with Permian bumper stickers or painted "MOJO" windshields, in an endless caravan of fans.

EXT. THE STADIUM PARKING LOT

TITLE: 6:48 P.M.

As the Permian faithful approach the stadium gates, we get a sense of a community gathering. People calling out "hello," greeting old friends and family, fans of all races and ages.

IN THE R.V. SECTION

Dozens of tailgate parties are winding down: barbeques, picnics and kegs of beer, set up inside or around the huge Winnebagos and motor homes.

INT. THE LOCKER ROOM

TITLE: 7:11 P.M.

RIP RIP RIP go the rolls of athletic tape, binding wrists and ankles.

Locker doors CLANG, shoulder pads CLACK, aspirins TUMBLE out of bottles.

SPINNER, a great black gladiator in full pads and uniform, checks himself in the mirror, his body TWITCHING to the muted sounds of his Walkman.

BUDDY is down on the carpet, meditating in silence.

From off-camera comes the unmistakable sound of RETCHING, which passes with some STARES from the other players.

ON KYLE

white-faced, hand on his chin, entering seconds later from the bathroom stalls.

EXT. SUNSET FROM THE TOP OF THE STADIUM

TITLE: 7:23 P.M.

The sky beyond Odessa explodes into a day-ending dance of CRIMSON and ORANGE.

INT. THE STADIUM TUNNEL - DUSK

TITLE: 7:45 P.M.

Fifty two Panthers in black uniforms MARCH in near silence, their rubber-soled shoes PADDING off the concrete floor. On a silent cue, like a platoon of soldiers, they pick up speed, JOGGING through the end of the tunnel.

EXT. FOOTBALL STADIUM - TUNNEL GATE

They enter the stadium on a RUN, and BURST THROUGH a huge twenty foot banner held up by the Pepettes.

A ROAR ERUPTS

from the SRO crowd.

LOOKING DOWN FROM THE PRESS BOX - 10 STORIES HIGH

and over the shoulder of local Odessa sportscaster BURT BENSON:

BURT BENSON (OC)
 Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome to the
 biggest church in Odessa, twenty two
 thousand worshippers strong....

LAST TITLE: 8:00 P.M.

THERE'S THE KICKOFF

The FOOTBALL spirals high against the backdrop of the teeming stands. It signals both the END of the Friday sequence, and the beginning of

THE FIRST GAME SYMPHONY

And a symphony it is:

TIME CUT

THWACK!

as the FOOTBALL lodges next to SPINNER's gut. He tightens his grip and

SLOW MOTION

BURSTS through the front line, leaving defensemen grasping at air. He's beautiful to watch, all grace, speed, and agility.

Doyle Huckleby CONDUCTS the symphony in impassive silence - a nod here, a whisper there to Dalton, Stutz and Cheevers. The strength of this Permian team is not in its stars, but in the seamless execution of prescribed battle plans.

ON OFFENSE

BUDDY IS MR. MACHINE

directing each drive with robotic precision, an athlete in complete control of his hard-earned skills.

SPINNER

remains a show in his own right, whose potential for exploding on each play keeps the audience glued to his number. (With each touchdown run the marching band ERUPTS into a one-verse rendition of the Spinner Atlas theme song: "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands...")

CHUCK MARTINEZ

propels the DEFENSE, with a sixth sense for tracking down and NAILING the ball carrier.

*For
 each*

As the Panthers roll over a solid Austin team, their performance reaches BLOWOUT proportions, and leads to the evening's only discordant note.

KYLE

watches the score balloon upwards. He waits on the sidelines, head down, helmet between his knees.

There's Coach Dalton, tapping him on the shoulder.

DALTON

You run the triple wing in practice?

KYLE

Yessir.

Dalton signals. Kyle JUMPS up, fumbles with his helmet snap and runs to the edge of the sideline. A Permian player jogs off the field. Kyle sprints on.

PA VOICE

Number 23, Honeycutt.

CHEERS rise from the crowd, who react to the familiar name.

ON CALEB

in the stands, sucking indifferently on a Lucky, getting his back slapped by some compatriots.

IN THE HUDDLE

Kyle is greeted with hand slaps.

BUDDY

Your call, Okie Smoke.

KYLE

Triple Wing Left 82 on Three.

They line up. The ball is SNAPPED. Buddy executes a perfect fake to Spinner, then hands off to...

POV: LOOKING OUT OF KYLE'S HELMET

We SEE what he sees, MOVE as he moves. SLOW MOTION:

The ball SMACKS into Kyle's stomach and POPS OUT of his fingertips, FLOATING in front of him as he churns forward.

He reaches out desperately to grab it back, but his hand DEFLECTS it up into the air.

THUMP!

Kyle is flattened by a charging linebacker.

A 2nd linebacker CATCHES the fumble in mid-air and RACES twenty yards into the end zone, for the only Austin score.

ON THE COACHES

Doyle doesn't blink. Dalton hangs his head. The defensive coach STUTZ kicks the turf in anger over his lost shutout.

CHEEVER is next to him. Ironic:

CHEEVER

I think we got a big assed choke-dog on our hands.

the calm to be not highest

INT. THE LOCKER ROOM - KYLE

Nobody will meet his eyes. The players stare at him with sidelong glances. From the looks of it, you'd think he had lost Permian the game.

Kyle sits on the bench, putting on his street shoes. Buddy is next to him. In calm, even tones:

BUDDY

Just throw it away somewheres you won't ever find it. Doesn't mean shit. You read me?

He waits for Kyle to meet his eyes. Done.

BUDDY

Next week you'll be a hero.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE LOCKER ROOM - MINUTES LATER

Blow-dried football players spill out into the waiting crowd.

A CHEER sounds as Spinner glides through the door in a black L.A. Raiders jacket and a fresh pair of Air Jordans.

KYLE FOLLOWS

hugging the shadows of the concrete wall. He checks to see if someone's waiting for him. Negative. Instead he watches as:

✓ SPINNER disappears into a SEA of black faces. They hug him, kiss him, claim him as their own. Lamarr lifts him off the ground with a huge bear hug. Spinner's features turn suddenly boyish inside the embrace.

BUDDY EXITS and is immediately peppered with kisses from Betty.

BETTY

36 Right Twins Fly! You were gorgeous
out there pumpkin. Gor-geous!

BUDDY

We tore em up, Ma. Chewed em good, huh?

Buddy looks past her. Big Al is nowhere in sight.

More bodies surge out of the locker room, displacing Kyle from his shadow. He gets pushed toward an oncoming TELEVISION CREW.

Kyle freezes, caught like a buck in the BLINDING LIGHTS, convinced that they are coming after him.

THEY PASS RIGHT BY

and set up to interview Spinner.

EXT. HOUSE PARTY - NIGHT

A sedate, suburban-looking split-level whose lawn has disappeared under an avalanche of cars and trucks.

PARTYGOERS stream up the sidewalk.

The front door opens to a SHOCKWAVE OF SOUND.

Chuck Martinez CHARGES OUT into the air, carrying little Willie Hansen over one shoulder, himself ATTACHED BY THE LIPS to a dishwater BLONDE, with her arms around Willie, her own legs dragging across the front lawn.

INT. HOUSE PARTY - WALL TO WALL TEENAGERS

fill every room, drinking, holding drinks or looking for refills. The faces are all familiar: Pepettes, players, cheerleaders. HEAVY METAL MUSIC makes talking an extra-curricular activity.

INT. THE BATHROOM - BUDDY

in close-up, eyes closed, concentrating on the task at hand. From off-screen comes a loud KNOCK and then a drunken voice:

VOICE

Open up y'awl I'm gonna piss through the
keyhole.

Buddy lets out a long SIGH, and then opens his eyes. His pupils are dilated. He rises off the closed toilet seat.

WIDER

There's a GIRL down there, between his legs, wiping her lips. She looks up worshipfully, hoping for some kind of sign.

Buddy zips up his zipper, his face blank, and walks out of the room.

INT. THE LIVING ROOM - KYLE

stands squeezed between some B team players, talking to no one while sipping on a beer. He looks around, sees:

SPINNER

up on the second floor, leading KAYLENE the beauty queen down the hallway. His face is cool, supremely confident as he ushers her into a vacant bedroom. The door closes.

KYLE

turns back, sees Jeannie the Pepette staring at him from across the room. Something holds her there. Kyle sees it in her eyes. It's that look. Pity.

INT. THE COACH'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Lights out, in bed. Doyle exhales, long and hard.

DOYLE

You know why God rested on the 7th day?
Cause he had a football game the night
before.

CLAIRE

Why, Doyle Huckleby! You remembered a
joke.

DOYLE

We're good Claire. We're even better
than good. Lord dealt me one heckuva
hand.

CLAIRE

You go ahead and play it then.

DOYLE

I aim to.

A silence settles in.

CLAIRE

Just promise me one thing.

DOYLE

What's that?

She rolls on top of him, running her hands across his chest.

CLAIRE

When it's all over, and you've won state, and the college job offers are falling thicker than rain....

DOYLE

Um hmm...

He's drifting off.

CLAIRE

Take me on a cruise somewhere, just the two of us, no headsets, no whistle...

She leans over to kiss him, but Doyle's FAST ASLEEP.

INT. THE TRAILER - NIGHT

Friday night poker. Five card draw. Three other PLAYERS share the table with Caleb, their faces familiar from the stadium stands. EARL MATTHEWS (40) has a weightlifter's upper body, and somebody else's tiny head. He's a cop.

MATTHEWS

Word is Huckleby's gotta win by at least two touchdowns. Otherwise the wife don't put out. (pushing some chips forward) Bump ya two.

SAM STRUM (38) was a skinny kid with pimples. He's grown up now: beer belly, acne scars, sour expression.

SAM

I'd bump her a few times myself. Shit. You seen that Austin defense, Cutter? Folded up like a K-Mart suitcase.

A stonefaced Caleb parks chips in the pot.

DEKE KENDALL (35) looks like a leatherneck, a larger, friendlier Caleb clone. He FOLDS.

DEKE
Hey you remember Billy Henderson, deals them nigger shacks on the south side?

MATTHEWS
(making fun)
3 per cent of a three hundred dollar house, let's see....

CALEB
`Bout what I'm gonna raise you, Earl.

Caleb slides more chips into the center pot, then pours himself another finger of Jack Daniels.

SAM
Weren't you ballin his twins one summer?

DEKE
The happy Hendersons! Debbie and Dawn.

CALEB
Identical pussies.

SAM
Naw?!

MATTHEWS
Got to call you on that one.

Caleb lays down aces and eights, RAKES IN the pot.

KYLE WALKS IN THE DOOR

There's a moment of silence. Those same locker room looks, only now directed at Caleb.

DEKE
(the ice-breaker)
Well if it ain't the Oklahoma kid.

Kyle enters the kitchenette, pulls on the refrigerator door.

DEKE
Lemme guess: five guys for every girl
and no more beers after an hour.

Kyle sits down with a long neck in Caleb's laziboy.

MATTHEWS

Shit, they got so much coke and dope and south side acid it don't make a cunt hole's worth a difference. Ain't that right, Kyle? Gimme a search warrant and I'd bust the whole fucking team.

SAM

They'd re-tire your ass, Earl.

DEKE

Retread the motherfucker.

They're all waiting for Sam to bet.

MATTHEWS

Let's go, Strummer. Pick up the ball.

His words HANG on the table. Matthews, Deke and Sam share a conspiratorial CHUCKLE.

Kyle disappears into the bathroom, beer in hand. The guys draw new cards, half-listening to Kyle's TINKLE.

DEKE

Sounds like they had plenty beer.

The toilet FLUSHES. Kyle exits. Sam catches his eye.

SAM

Hey cowboy, long as you're up, pass me a Bud would ya?

Kyle FIRES his open beer in the direction of Sam's sour face.

Sam DUCKS. The bottle CRASHES into the wall.

Caleb doesn't even blink. He slides some chips into the pot.

CALEB

Weren't no niggers playing when I went to school. Your bet, Earl.

EXT. THE ATLAS HOUSE - MORNING

Lamarr walks out like a man going to church but unused to his Sunday clothes. Pauline follows in a pretty green dress. She looks even thinner alongside his girth.

PAULINE

C'mere, you.

She straightens his tie as they walk towards the car.

INT. THE CAR - WAITING

Pauline HONKS the horn. SPINNER lopes out of the house, in a suit that fit him two years ago, and a Chicago Bulls hat.

INT/EXT. THE CAR - TRAVELING

There's something pregnant in the air. Pauline drives. Spinner leans forward from the back seat.

SPINNER

Go on past the school.

PAULINE

Don't start with me now.

SPINNER

I just wanna see.

Pauline turns down 42nd Street. There's the high school.

ON THE PRACTICE FIELD

the football team runs laps under the watchful eyes of the Saturday morning sideline crowd.

LAMARR AND SPINNER

stare longingly, wanting to be there. The field drops away from sight. They drive on in silence. Then:

LAMARR

Big day, Pauline.

PAULINE

And that it is.

EXT. 358TH DISTRICT COURT, ECTOR COUNTY - DAY

Lamarr takes Pauline's hand. She offers one to Spinner. They enter the courthouse together.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

JUDGE TYRONE RUSK (50's) administers the proceeding. Lamarr is on the witness stand, being questioned by the attorney, TONY CHAVEZ (40's).

MR. CHAVEZ

Mr. Atlas, you have petitioned the Court requesting adoption of a child. Please state your relation to this child?

LAMARR

I am his father's brother.

MR. CHAVEZ

The Court needs to know if you understand that once this adoption is consummated, it will be just as though the child was naturally born to you.

Spinner sits on the back bench, next to Pauline, very much out of his element.

LAMARR

Yes sir. I understand.

MR. CHAVEZ

Your honor, I pass the witness.

Another man rises from the back bench, white haired, in his early sixties. He is HACKER, the AD-LITEM.

JUDGE RUSK

Mr. Hacker, as Attorney-Ad Litem, inform the court if you will as to the suitability of the Petitioners.

HACKER

Your Honor, we have a special case here. This child was shuffled back and forth between foster homes for a period of 5 years. The Petitioners sought out and assumed responsibility for a nine year old boy who had been both abandoned and abused. I think it's clear to everyone in Ector County that Mr. Atlas has given his nephew a new direction in life.

ON SPINNER, raising his eyes now. They're glistening.

JUDGE RUSK

Thank you. Mrs. Atlas, would you please join your husband on the stand?

Pauline stands, kissing Spinner before she goes.

JUDGE RUSK

Mr. and Mrs. Atlas, do you understand that this action, if granted, is forever binding, that it cannot be undone, even by yourselves?

LAMARR AND PAULINE

We do.

JUDGE RUSK

And that your biggest responsibility is to love, and to provide love to your child for so long as you shall live?

Spinner bites his fingernails. Lamarr puts one broad arm around Pauline.

LAMARR

Yes, your honor.

ON THE ATLAS'S

as the judge reads his decree. Pauline beams. Lamarr chokes up. Spinner BLUSHES.

JUDGE RUSK (OC)

In the 358th Judicial District Court for the state of Texas, County of Ector, I do herewith create a parent-child relationship between Lamarr C. Atlas and Pauline Atlas and the minor child Robert Atlas. (RAPS his gavel) Adoption is granted. Congratulations.

They step off the stand. Spinner rushes over like a little kid. Hugs. Kisses. It could be a wedding. The judge exits from behind the bench to shake Lamarr's hand.

JUDGE RUSK

I want to thank you, personally.

LAMARR

Got that backwards, Judge.

JUDGE RUSK

It's not just what you've done for Spinner, but for all the people of West Texas. You're making us proud, Mr. Atlas, damn proud.

There's Spinner. The judge POUNDS his back.

JUDGE RUSK

And we're a prideful lot.

INT. ODESSA MEMORIAL HOSPITAL - AFTERNOON

Junior League WOMEN, hospital ADMINISTRATORS, and Permian football STARS roll through the children's ward. They move in a loose pack from bed to bed.

There's BUDDY (and members of the offensive front line), pumping flesh, signing autographs, and spreading good cheer, all in their white shirts and ties. The sick kids are ecstatic. Troy Aikman couldn't do any better.

A PHOTOGRAPHER from the Odessa American clicks off a few frames, his strobe/flash stinging Buddy's eyes.

BETTY hovers close behind in a revealing dress and matching handbag, enjoying her son's main attraction status.

MRS. JOHNSON (40's), dyed blonde hair, seems to be vaguely in charge. She speaks to the entire group.

MRS. JOHNSON

If I could just have your attention...

Nobody's listening. She fusses with some placards that detail the days events. "MEMORIAL HOSPITAL CHILDREN'S WING" "16 BED ADDITION" There's the familiar pie-chart in three colors: "Projected Budget" "Monies Raised" "Monies Needed."

SNIPES sound from the perfumed League ladies, whose made-up faces ring familiar from the Watermelon Feed. RE Betty:

LADY #1

I heard Big Al wouldn't even put out for a bed.

LADY #2

Not unless he could bang one of the nurses on it first.

Buddy makes eye contact with a ten year old black BOY in a full body cast who looks like a chunk of white metal welded to the hospital bed. Buddy smiles. No response. He breaks off from the pack and pulls up a chair next to the boy's bed, checking his medical chart on the way.

BUDDY

Hey Cornelius, you know how I know you're gonna be okay?

Cornelius can't move anything but his eyes. They ask how.

BUDDY

Says so right here.

Buddy draws an imaginary line across the center of the boy's forehead. Cornelius watches, listens, wants to hear more. In a soft voice:

BUDDY

Ninth grade, JV practice I got hit hi-low on a kickoff return. Snapped my femur - that's your thighbone (pats it). Was on crutches for a year. I got a steel plate inside with eight bolt holes. They leave any hardware in you?

Cornelius simulates a nod.

A MURMUR flies through the crowd. The TV crew has arrived, Burt Benson plus Beta-Cam man. In a hurry, they start ORDERING people around. Mrs. Johnson tries again.

MRS. JOHNSON

This won't be but a minute. Ladies! Y'awl want to make the 6 o'clock news?

Burt Benson scans the room, sees Buddy and the boy.

BURT BENSON

There's the money shot.

BUDDY AND CORNELIUS, friends now, in their own private world, oblivious to the camera crew setting up around them.

BUDDY

Now listen up, a lot a people are gonna be telling you what you can do and when.

Buddy pauses, squeezing one of the boy's fingertips that protrudes from the cast.

BUDDY

Don't pay em no mind. You're the quarterback. You'll know.

The t.v. lights FLASH ON. Buddy doesn't even look up.

BUDDY

How soon you want to walk and how fast and how far.

BURT BENSON

Hey, Captain!

CLOSE-UP ON BUDDY

as we watch him effortlessly change gears from caring good guy to media star, all in the space of a split-second.

He raises his head, breaks a big smile, and WINKS.

BUDDY
Howdy boys! Let's roll VTR.

His hand reaches into Burt Benson's shirt pocket, pulling out a magic marker. As the camera begins to WHIRR Buddy turns back to Cornelius, and SIGNS the boy's body cast with a big "B. CRANKSHAW."

INT. CALEB'S TRAILER - SUNDAY AFTERNOON TV

The Cowboys are on, beating up the Redskins.

Caleb watches from the laziboy, longneck in hand. Sissy's in the kitchenette, melting cheese over nachos.

SISSY
You like onion?

Caleb stares at the screen, annoyed. He doesn't answer.

SISSY
Well there ain't any.

She chuckles, bringing out the food.

There's Kyle draped across the couch, lost somewhere between self-denial and sleep. Sissy nudges him with one knee.

SISSY
Hungry?

He mumbles something.

CALEB SPRINGS UP, AND FLIPS THE COUCH OVER
trapping Kyle underneath.

CALEB
Lady's talking to you.

He sits back down to watch the game.

Kyle WRIGGLES out from beneath the hide-a-bed, wide awake now. Sissy's still holding the nachos.

KYLE
No thank you Mam.

He rights the couch and flops back down as if nothing happened. Sissy has a laugh.

SISSY

Suit yourself. (to Caleb, hamming a waitress) And you sir --

Caleb SHOOTS back out of the chair and TIPS OVER the couch again. Kyle escapes this time on his feet.

Caleb jumps over the couch, and KICKS Kyle with his boot. He keeps on kicking, not to hurt him, but to push him outside.

KYLE

Hey... Hey... Whoah...

He stumbles, banging through the screen door.

EXT. THE FRONT PORCH - CALEB

follows to the edge of the steps. Kyle keeps his distance, like a dog suddenly wary of his master.

CALEB

They teach you that in Oklahoma? How to sit on the bench?

KYLE

No sir.

Kyle GLARES at him, his pride wounded. Caleb shakes out a cigarette, lights it, inhales.

CALEB

What's your mama think?

KYLE

About what?

CALEB

You being a quitter.

KYLE

She knows better.

CALEB

Not what I see.

He turns and re-enters the house.

The sound of the Cowboy's game DRIFTS outside.

Kyle studies the dirt driveway. Kicks at it. Then he looks up and MARCHES back into the trailer.

INT. THE TRAILER - CONTINUOUS

Sissy's back at the stove. Caleb's sunk in the laziboy, mouth STUFFED with nachos.

KYLE

You got a lotta nerve giving me advice.

Caleb chews slowly, folding the uneaten nacho corners into his mouth, and washing the whole thing down with some beer. A SMILE dawns on him.

CALEB

Thing of it is, I ain't gave none yet.

This strikes Caleb as uproariously funny. He LAUGHS from the boots up, a deep roll of thunder. It's infectious. Sissy chimes in, her breasts heaving.

Kyle swallows his indignation. Caleb takes note. Suddenly serious:

CALEB

You want advice? Do ya?

Kyle hesitates, unable to read his father. Caleb is already standing, on his way out the door.

CALEB

Well, let's go then.

EXT. AN EMPTY FIELD - AFTERNOON

Kyle, in helmet and pads, FIRES OFF against Caleb, who wears no equipment whatsoever.

Caleb lands a fake, draws Kyle off-center and stops him cold with an ELBOW to the WINDPIPE. It hurts just enough to command his attention. Caleb's teaching, not demolishing.

CALEB

They ain't no better than you boy. They just know some things.

A SERIES OF INTERCUTS

Caleb shows him more moves. Off the block, out of the backfield, out of the option. A mixed bag of dirty tricks.

They barely exchange any words. Kyle watches, listens, imitates. His face is glowing.

LATER ON:

The sun is lower. They are both drenched with sweat. Caleb shows signs of tiring. Short breaths. A cramp in his side. He bends down on his haunches.

KYLE

You okay?

Dad doesn't like the question.

CALEB

Line up. Practice's over. Contact.

Caleb jumps up into position. Kyle watches him. Troubled.

KYLE

Ain't fair. You got no equipment.

Caleb ignores the talk, lowers himself into a 3 point stance.

Kyle throws off his helmet. Dumps the shoulder pads. They face each other, father and son.

CALEB

Fire off!

Kyle charges. Caleb ERUPTS on contact, knocking Kyle flat.

This is no manicured practice field. His head BUMPS DOWN next to a rock. Caleb picks him up.

CALEB

You know what they've been sayin, don't you? That Honeycutt, he ain't a hitter. Nothin like his old man.

Kyle spits out dirt as they face each other again.

CALEB

Fire off!

Kyle charges. Fakes. But Caleb is better. WHOMP! Kyle HITS THE DECK. Pulls himself upright.

CALEB

A real live piece of Okie-bred chickenshit. It's a wonder Cutter even let him in his house. Fire off!

Kyle charges. They parry. Caleb spins and WHACKS an elbow into Kyle's gut. He stops, breathless, bent over. Caleb KNOCKS him to the ground. He's gasping himself now.

Kyle crawls back into the stance, angry, smoking.

CALEB
Maybe them stories about his mama are true.

Kyle "Fires off!" without a cue, catching Caleb with a HEAD SHOT to the belly.

Caleb clutches his stomach, sucking air.

Kyle scrambles to his feet for another drive.

Caleb steps TOWARDS Kyle, still grasping his stomach.

Kyle pauses for a split second.

CALEB BUTTS KYLE'S HEAD WITH HIS OWN

knocking him flat out. Standing over his son.

CALEB
You're a hitter or a quitter. Ain't no skinny in between.

*What the hell
are we thinking
flin?*

EXT. SPINNER'S HOUSE - NIGHT

A shiny new Buick is parked outside in front of a junked sedan.

INT. SPINNER'S HOUSE

JAMAL ROBINSON (36), a tall black man in an elegant suit sits on a folding chair opposite Spinner and Lamarr.

ROBINSON
No, go ahead.

Lamarr is embarrassed, conscious of the younger man's sophistication.

ROBINSON
I want to hear.

LAMARR
We got plans, don't we Spinner?

Spinner smiles, nervously, and stares down, his foot drawing a line in the worn carpet.

SPINNER
Umm hm.

He stifles a GIGGLE.

ROBINSON
What kind of plans?

Spinner steals a look up at Lamarr, as if to say: "You tell him." Lamarr's still struggling.

LAMARR
For the future.

ROBINSON
The future?

LAMARR
Yes sir. Umm hmm.

ROBINSON
That's why I'm here, gentlemen. To make your future plans come true.

He checks in, feels like he's losing his audience.

ROBINSON
Spinner at USC our offense is configured around running backs like... (sees their faces) What? What is it? Tell me.

They're doing their shy smile act again.

LAMARR
The plan.

ROBINSON
The plan?

LAMARR
The plan.

SPINNER
Um hmm.

Robinson takes a deep breath.

ROBINSON
Just spell it out for me. Could you do that, Spinner?

SPINNER
Naw...

ROBINSON
Please.

Spinner looks over at Lamarr for the okay. Lamarr NODS.

SPINNER
Damn. (pausing) "H", "I", "G" umm... (to
Lamarr) "H"?

LAMARR
"H".

SPINNER
Highz... (to Robinson) "Z", "Z", M A N.
Silence. Robinson takes it all in.

ROBINSON
The Heismann.

Spinner and Lamarr nod, grinning at him.

ROBINSON
The Heismann trophy.

SPINNER
Um hmm.

Lamarr holds his big palm out, four feet off the ground.

LAMARR
Ever since he was so tall.

EXT. SAN ANGELO STADIUM - FRIDAY NIGHT ✓

The Panthers huddle.

BUDDY'S VOICE
On two. Ready, BREAK!

SPINNER lays claim to his deep setback position. KYLE lines up
in front of him.

ON THE SIDELINE

Coach Huckleby stares at the scoreboard, his eyes glassy:

SAN ANGELO 14, PERMIAN 10.

The clock ticks away. Fourth Quarter. 9:26 remaining.

SLOW MOTION

The ball is SNAPPED. Buddy fakes to Kyle, hands off to
Spinner, who SHOOTS forward.

POV: OUT OF SPINNER'S HELMET

We see Kyle CLOTHESLINE a charging linebacker twice his size, then DROP HIM with an elbow to the windpipe.

A huge hole opens as we THUMP forward. Two more backs close in. They go hi/lo on a gang tackle. Spinner talks to himself on the run:

SPINNER (OC)

Come on. Come on. Come and get it.

Our ARM SHOOTS OUT, knocking down Back #1. Then we SPIN, 360 degrees, up and out of the grasp of Back #2, and sprint down the sidelines into the END ZONE.

PA ANNOUNCER (OC)

Touchdown Permian. Penalty on the play.

Heads whirl around. There's the FLAG in the backfield.

PA ANNOUNCER (OC)

Number 23, Offense. Personal Foul.

Kyle hangs his head, guilty as charged.

Spinner SPIKES the football in anger, and stalks back toward the line of scrimmage.

There are SHOUTS from the sideline. LOOKS among the coaches. The game is slipping away.

UP IN THE STANDS an angry Booster DAD leans over to Big Al:

BOOSTER DAD

What the fuck is going on? We should be thirty points up their asses by now.

KYLE returns to the bench, avoiding everyone's gaze.

Coach Dalton shuttles in the play with EUGENE MACKALY, the other (black) tailback.

DALTON

GUT CHECK! GUT CHECK MEN!

Buddy hands off to Spinner. He's stopped for a loss. The white San Angelo LINEMAN helps him up off the ground.

LINEMAN

Whatsamatter buck? Them suitcase lips slowing you down?

SPINNER CHARGES THE GUY

The other players split them apart.

On the sideline Kyle dares to raise his eyes. Coach Huckleby's STARING straight at him, face expressionless.

COACH DALTON
Weak side, Robert! Weak side!

The ball is hiked. SPINNER takes the pitch and sweeps the weak side. He JUKES left, and SPINS towards the sideline where the same lineman DIVES for his legs.

Spinner TWISTS his body, fighting for a first down, directly in front of the Permian bench.

Simultaneously:

His shoe FALLS OFF, SPLAYING his leg out at an awkward angle, as the San Angelo MIDDLE LINEBACKER leaps on a dead run

FALLING ON TOP OF SPINNER'S EXPOSED KNEE.

SPINNER
AHHHHHHHHHHHHH!

IN THE STANDS:

LAMARR rushes through the rows, his huge body suddenly weightless as he LEAPFROGS the fence leading to the field.

ON THE SIDELINES:

KYLE watches stonefaced, listens to Spinner MOANING, sees

BUDDY bend down and take Spinner's hand into his own, fingers interlaced, his grip tight.

HUCKLEBY is on the ground, SOOTHING Spinner as the team DOCTOR performs a preliminary check.

COACH HUCKLEBY
Stay still now. Stay still.

Spinner's frightened eyes follow the doctor's fingers as they trace the outline of his knee. His voice is tiny.

SPINNER
Is it bad, huh? Is it bad?

LAMARR arrives, pushes his head through.

DOCTOR
Let's move him. Bring the stretcher.

It's already there. WOODSY, the trainer, clears the area.

SPINNER
How long I'm gonna be out?

They lift him up.

LAMARR
Doc?

The whistle BLOWS, restarting the game. Buddy releases Spinner's hand.

BUDDY
We'll be waiting, Robert.

They carry him off. The San Angelo crowd CHEERS.

BETTY watches the processional, one hand covering her mouth. Next to her, BIG AL puffs hard on a cigar, flips open his pocket cellular, and dials.

His voice BARKS off-camera as we follow LAMARR skipping next to the moving stretcher, his eyes suffering Spinner's pain.

BIG AL (OC)
Ray, I want you to call Stiles. Get the West field chopper... Uh huh. Got an errand for him to run.

TIME CUT - BUDDY

PROWLs THE SIDELINES, shouting encouragement to the defense.

BUDDY
Let's stick 'em, "D". Stick 'em!

COACH STUTZ
Rotate the break! Be on station!

There's a handoff. Chuck reads it, NAILS the ballcarrier.

Buddy RALLIES his troops. They WHOOP IT UP on the sidelines.

PA ANNOUNCER
Fourth down, six.

BUDDY
We're going in. We're gonna beat these chumps.

San Angelo punts, still ahead by four. The Panthers take over at the 50 yard line. 2:06 remaining.

Buddy leads them downfield, in a classic two minute drill. Outs, sideline patterns, sweeps out of bounds. He is everywhere, passing, running, blocking for his backs.

Kyle returns to the game, RUNS a handoff behind a Crankshaw block for an eight yard gain out of bounds.

Four yard line. Twenty five seconds to go. Buddy lines up behind center, looks left, right. And there it is, RISING above the high school stadium:

BIG AL'S CHOPPER

carrying Spinner away, the Crankshaw logo clearly visible on the doors.

Buddy STARES UP, as do the others. It's like watching the victory suddenly take wing.

Huckleby SIGNALS for a timeout, as the helicopter disappears between the lights.

Buddy reaches the sideline in a daze.

COACH HUCKLEBY

Buddy! BUDDY!

The coaches STARE. They've never heard Huckleby shout. He POUNDS his fists on the quarterback's shoulder pads.

COACH HUCKLEBY

They're looking right, strong side. Run the bootleg. (beat) You hear me?

Buddy SNAPS out of it.

BUDDY

Yessir.

He CALLS out the count. HUT HUT. HIKE.

SLOW MOTION

The front line pulls right. Buddy fakes to Kyle out of the backfield, tucks, turns and is

STOPPED HEAD ON

by two linemen blitzing the left side. Buddy screams.

BUDDY
ARRRRGHHHHHHHH!

and starts PUMPING his thighs, DRIVING THEM BOTH BACK towards the goal line in a superhuman effort.

Pushing this four hundred pound human sled he

FALLS INTO THE END ZONE, as the ref signals: "Touchdown."

INT. THE TEAM BUS - TRAVELING

The coaches huddle in the front row, whispering.

Behind them the troops are silent, licking their wounds.

Woodsy, the trainer, moves slowly down the center aisle, passing out pain killers.

Kyle gulps down two Darvacets, then regrets it, when he sees Buddy DECLINE the offer.

There's an empty seat next to Eugene Mackaly.

SPINNER'S SEAT

Everybody tries not to look at it.

EXT. A GAS STATION - NIGHT

The bus rolls into the Garden City station to refuel.

Coach Huckleby exits, and walks over to a pay phone.

ON THE BUS

The players are watching. Those on the other side push into the aisle to catch a glimpse of his face.

THE COACH nods, mumbles something and hangs up the phone.

INT. THE BUS - HUCKLEBY

steps on board, sees sixty pairs of eyes waiting for an answer. He clears his throat.

COACH HUCKLEBY
Well they still got some tests to do,
but Doc says it's only a sprain.

The players erupt into CHEERS.

INT. CLAIRE'S CAR - DRIVING

home from San Angelo. Checking her mirror: LEANNE, the youngest is sound asleep, curled up against the back door. SHEILA, Claire's world-weary pre-teen, meets her mother's gaze.

SHEILA

Daddy's going to be pissed, huh?

They're already inside Odessa.

CLAIRE

I think "disappointed" is the word he might use. They did win, for God sakes.

Claire drives through a residential neighborhood.

CLAIRE

Do you like it here, honey?

SHEILA

Well, you know what they say, Mom. It's not a job. It's an adventure.

They reach the corner. The car turns. Claire GASPS, braking at the sight illuminated by her headlights:

Strewn across the front lawn are the entire contents of their living room: COUCH, CHAIRS, LAMPS, BOOKCASE.

A large SIGN looms over the pile, its letters handwritten.

"MOVING SALE"

Leaning against the sign's wooden stake is a framed family portrait: Doyle, Claire, Sheila and Leanne, all smiling into the camera.

EXT. MAGGIE MAY'S STRIP JOINT - NIGHT

A half-lit neon sign: GIRLS GIRLS TOTALLY NUDE REVUE

INT. MAGGIE MAY'S - NIGHT

Framed between a pair of high heeled legs that rock back and forth to the rhythm of a HONKY TONK, we see CALEB, the bartender, in a haze of cigarette smoke. Red and green lights flash in front of him, along the edge of the runway.

Caleb pours Jack Daniels into a glass tumbler and slides it skillfully down the formica to:

SISSY, surveying the near empty joint.

SISSY

Chicken one day, feathers the next.

A television DRONES silently above them all, a tape delay broadcast of the Permian/San Angelo game. About as many customers watch the football as are following:

SALLY (20's) the stripper, who gyrates along, collecting dollar bills, naked from the toes up.

THE SALOON FRONT DOORS OPEN

like some kind of "B" Western.

KYLE freezes, drawing momentary STARES from everybody inside. Sally TWIRLS on her pole, winks at him. There's Sissy.

SISSY

Come on in, bashful. About time you showed up.

Her arms spring open and SMOTHER Kyle in a hug. He steps back, looks from Sissy to Sally and back to Sissy's chest.

KYLE

You work here?

SISSY

Probably'd take home more if I did. No, I just own the place.

The news THROWS Kyle, who catches sight of Caleb, washing glasses behind the bar.

KYLE

Well who's Maggie?

SISSY

Oh you know them West Texans...wouldn't sit right drinking at "Sissy's Bar."

Kyle sneaks another look at Sally.

SISSY

Now gimme your hand, Romeo. Come on.

Kyle holds out his hand. She reads his palm.

SISSY

Oh yes. Yes. Yesss.

SATCH (60's), an old geezer regular, has one ear on Sissy, one eye on the game.

SATCH

You see any state titles scratched in there Sissy cause I could give two shits about the boy's sex life.

SISSY

Palms don't predict the future, Satch.

SATCH

(turning back to the tv)

Well, somebody ought to.

Sissy leads Kyle over to one of the barstools. Caleb's watching the t.v. The score flashes. Permian's still losing.

SISSY

Look I know he don't talk to you about none of this, but... it's been a helluva plus having you here Kyle.

*- this is hard
to help even. we
aren't up*

Kyle can't quite let go of the game. He stares at the screen, knowing full well what play is coming. Sissy motors on.

SISSY (CONT)

Settled him down some. It's a shame he didn't do no faterin ten fifteen years ago. Woulda helped you both out, from the look a things.

She's holding open his palm again, retracing the lines with one extra-long red fingernail.

SISSY

I see your mama's bout as stubborn as the rest of you Honeycutt's.

There it is, Spinner's called back touchdown run.

ON THE TELEVISION, replaying the moment of Kyle's foul.

ON CALEB, filling a beer, his eyes still glued to the set.

Kyle turns. Their eyes meet.

CALEB SLIDES THE BEER THE LENGTH OF THE BAR.

It stops right in front of Kyle.

Sissy smiles, very pleased.

SISSY

A helluva plus.

EXT. THE HUCKLEBY HOUSE - DOYLE AND CLAIRE

hug goodbye on the doorstep. He breaks away, and walks past the front lawn, now empty and green.

A LIMOUSINE

waits by the curb, rear door beckoning. The DRIVER whisks Doyle into the back seat.

INT/EXT. THE LIMO - DRIVING

Coach stares out the window, anxious. The driver interrupts:

DRIVER

You're a ten and a half, right?

Doyle hasn't got a clue.

COACH HUCKLEBY

Say what?

DRIVER

Your shoe size. Ten and a half?

EXT. ODESSA HILLS COUNTRY CLUB - MORNING

The limo parks at the club entrance, in between a bevy of luxury cars.

Doyle steps out of the open door. The driver hands him a black gym bag, and a set of golf clubs on wheels.

DRIVER

Go on and get changed. He'll meet you on the front tee.

INT. THE LOCKER ROOM - DOYLE

laces up his ten and a half golf shoes, thoroughly uncomfortable in a powder blue La Coste outfit.

MEMBERS pass by, glance, and MURMUR among themselves.

EXT. THE GOLF COURSE - DOYLE

loiters by the front tee, feeling everybody's stares. The VOICE surprises him from behind.

BIG AL

Glad you could make it, son. Let's tee off. (pause) You play golf?

EXT. THE GOLF CORSE - INTERCUTS

Big Al drives the golf cart. Nothing but small talk.

BIG AL
Daughters, right? Two of em?

Doyle nods, waiting for the axe to fall. But it doesn't.

IN THE ROUGH

the coach struggles. This isn't his game. He duffs. Big Al CHIPS perfectly on to the green. He is one of those graceful fat men, whose athleticism surprises. It dovetails with a fierce desire to win at everything.

They play on through. Big Al sparkles. Doyle manages, sweating in the sun.

EXT. THE 18TH HOLE LOUNGE - THE TWO MEN

tally up the scorecards in the shade of the outdoor bar, drinks on the table in front of them.

BIG AL
Ninety.

He looks over at Doyle's.

COACH HUCKLEBY
One oh two.

BIG AL
Let's go for a drive.

EXT/INT. BIG AL'S LINCOLN - DRIVING

A black Continental. The license plate reads: "AC."

Doyle's back in street clothes. Big Al's in his leisure suit, talking on the car phone. Lots of monosyllables.

The coach looks out the WINDOW: Somebody's ranch. A few horses. A broken corral.

Big Al hangs up, punches the car lighter, and leans over towards the glove box.

BIG AL
What happened last night up at your house... Smoke?

He flips open the door: all cigars. Doyle declines.

BIG AL
Travesty. You know it. I know it. So
do most people in this town. (lighting
up) Where you from, Dallas?

COACH HUCKLEBY
North of there.

BIG AL
You got to understand something.

They pass through an oil field. Pump jacks on either side, the
majority of them idle.

BIG AL
Only two things in Odessa: oil and
football.

Big Al rolls down his window. Flicks cigar ash.

BIG AL
And the oil's gone.

They drive along to the sound of RUSHING WIND.

BIG AL
Hell, you might as well be coaching
every man woman and child in Ector
County.

He SPITS, nodding his head.

BIG AL
You hearing me, son?

COACH HUCKLEBY
I hear you Mr. Crankshaw.

Al smiles, pleased with the lesson plan. It's a fleeting grin.

BIG AL
Then you don't have to be no Jew lawyer
to figure why folks wanted to smoke your
butt out of town. (angry) We should have
kicked San Angelo's all the way back to
Killeen, with or without the Atlas boy.
Coaching failure. Pure and simple.
Your team was flat out unprepared.

Big Al bites the cigar, spits again.

BIG AL
 Now in my business, when somebody screws
 up, they're gone. History. What are
 you gonna do, Huckleby?

Doyle leans forward, takes a breath. In his gravelly voice:

COACH HUCKLEBY
 Win football games.

AL SLAPS HIM HARD ON THE BACK.

BIG AL
 That's the spirit!

Doyle's head nearly BUMPS the windshield.

INT. PERMIAN HIGH - DAY

A GIANT PENDULUM

swings down the hall, gobbling up linoleum, ten feet at a time.
 It's SPINNER, the crutch master, speeding through fourth period
 traffic, his knee encased in a blue plastic air cast.

SPINNER
 Clear the decks! Battle stations!
 Prepare to dive! Dive!

One last SWING brings him dead even with Kaylene. He RAPS to
 her, as they move along:

SPINNER
 Kaylene queen, here's the scene,
 You be a member, just remember,
 of my permanent dream team.

No comment. Not even a smile. She just turns sharply at the
 hall end, and disappears down a flight of stairs.

INT. ENGLISH LIT. CLASS - DAY

Kyle sits glumly in the empty classroom as Frank Chalmers lays
 down the law.

MR. CHALMERS
 It's a simple rule, Kyle. No pass, no
 play. So I suggest you get your butt in
 gear. Read. Do your homework. Show up.

KYLE
 Yessir.

MR. CHALMERS

Personally, it wouldn't bother me if you were declared ineligible. Might just give you some time to think about what you're going to do with your life when you retire from breaking people's heads.

EXT. THE PRACTICE FIELD - THWACK!

Kyle knocks over the defenseman with a bone-crunching HIT that REVERBERATES across the practice field.

FACES:

DOYLE, STUTZ, DALTON; LAMARR and BETTY on the sidelines, all with the same "What was that?" expression.

SPINNER watches on his crutches, face impassive, teeth chewing on one fingernail.

KYLE reaches out his hand to help the player up. It's CHUCK MARTINEZ, shaking out the cobwebs.

KYLE

You okay?

CHUCK

Huh? (dazed) Yeah. Sure.

But he's walking towards the offensive huddle. Some of the linemen spin him around.

Kyle re-enters the huddle. Buddy's sporting a sly grin.

BUDDY

What the hell was that?

KYLE

A block.

Coach Dalton SHOUTS out a play from the sidelines. They line up. Buddy SWEEPS right, pitches to Kyle. The defensive back closes. Kyle lowers his shoulder, and

CRACK!

HEADBUTTS the back, who falls like a bowling pin. Kyle carries for a ten yard gain.

THE COACHES EXCHANGE GLANCES

SPINNER watches, sees their interest spark.

DALTON
Way to stick em, Kyle!

CHEEVERS
That'll clean your plow.

Coach Huckleby stares, impressed. Behind him, in the sideline crowd, Betty gives her two cents worth.

BETTY
He's a Honeycutt alright.

INT. THE LOCKER ROOM - BUDDY

is doing PUSH-UPS again, while the rest of the players struggle with their pulse rates.

Kyle pulls himself off the bench, and DROPS on to the black carpeting. Wordlessly he joins in, pumping up and down in sync with his captain.

SPINNER ENTERS

from the annex, looks and SEES.

EXT. THE SCHOOL PARKING LOT - DUSK

Buddy's monster van SQUEALS out of the parking lot, crosses 42nd Street, JUMPS the center island, and FISHTAILS down in the Westbound direction.

INT. THE VAN - SPEEDING

as Metallica BELLOWS from the three-ways. Buddy's behind the wheel in the captain's chair. Kyle, next to him, has to SCREAM to be heard:

KYLE
COPS NEVER STOP YOU?

Buddy nods his head. Smiles.

BUDDY
TO WISH ME LUCK.

They cruise along, 2 thinkers in a SONIC CLOUD of Heavy Metal.

BUDDY
YOUR DADDY... HE WAS THE BEST EVER, YOU
KNOW THAT DON'T YOU?

Kyle listens, takes his time answering, and NODS as they drive on down 8th Street, past Motel Strip.

The light turns RED. Buddy stops for a change, gazes out the window, sees a black LINCOLN CONTINENTAL parked in one of the motor courts. Inching forward, he looks back to catch the license number: "AC."

Green light. He FLOORS IT, snapping Kyle back in his seat.

INT. THE CRANKSHAW DINING ROOM - SPAGHETTI

everywhere, mounds of it, with three different sauces spread out on the massive table.

Pee-Wee and Lionel, Buddy and Kyle, and an empty plate over on Big Al's side of town.

Conchita makes the rounds with a fresh wedge of Parmesan and a grater.

Betty's dishing out the sauce. She leans over and heaps some on Kyle's plate, her breasts practically in his face.

BETTY

Starving you to death now isn't he?
Only so far you can grow on beer and
potato chips.

Betty whisks one hand up the back of Kyle's crewcut, then returns to her seat. He SHIVERS, digs into the spaghetti.

BETTY

Where's that pepper mill? (Conchita
EXITS to the kitchen.) You know your
father and I were high school
sweethearts.

Kyle looks up, CHOKES momentarily on his pasta.

BETTY

For about two weeks. He was a
hellraiser. Then your mama come along
and settled him down some, for a while
anyway. How is Flo? She remarry?

KYLE

No mam. She works for the phone
company.

BETTY

Well, I bet he's faithful.

The joke sails right over Kyle's head. He's too busy admiring everything: the house, the food, the maid, the mother.

PEE-WEE

Were you a cheerleader, Betty?

Pee-Wee is SPELLING with his spaghetti strands. Betty SWOOPS over, and starts tickling him.

BETTY

Was I a cheerleader?! Why, they went ahead and invented the Pom-Pom just for me.

LIONEL

Did not.

BETTY

Did too.

LIONEL

Did not.

She moves over, starts TICKLING him also.

BETTY

Did too.

LIONEL

(laughing)

Not not not.

He collapses into giggles. Betty THRUSTS both fists into a mound of spaghetti, and pulls out two PASTA POM-POM'S, as the boys watch, eyes agog.

Shaking them back and forth, she breaks into an old CHEERLEADER ROUTINE, complete with hi-kicks.

BETTY

DON'T MESS WITH ODESS-A
CAUSE YOU'LL FESS-UP
ALL YOUR --

BIG AL ENTERS, briefcase in hand.

Betty FREEZES, but only for a second. She walks over to his plate, dumps the spaghetti/Pom-Pom's on top and spoons over a heap of sauce.

BETTY

I don't know what's getting into your father lately. And he wonders why his food is cold. (cueing them) Boys.....

Pee-Wee and Lionel chime in with what can only be a familiar household refrain.

PEE-WEE AND LIONEL
DINNER'S AT SEVEN SHARP, BIG AL.

Big Al walks over and PECKS Betty's cheek, then TOUSLES the hair of his two youngest sons. BUDDY gives him a look, not of anger, but sadness. It's all that transpires between them.

BIG AL
Welcome, Kyle. Nice to have you.

KYLE
Thank you sir.

Betty pastes on a big smile. There's something pathetic about her performance, but Kyle doesn't see it.

BETTY
You know what little Buddy's first word was, don't you?

KYLE
No mam.

BUDDY
(protesting)
Betty.....

BETTY
No, not "Betty." (to her sons) Boys....

PEE-WEE AND LIONEL
(old hands)
HUT-HUT!

Kyle LAUGHS. Big Al sends him a fatherly WINK.

BUDDY
That's two words. (To Kyle) You see what I got to put up with?

BETTY
Now his second word... that's when we knew he was going to be a --

Pee-Wee and Lionel STAND, pre-empting their cue. They lift their arms straight up to the 30 foot cathedral ceiling.

PEE-WEE AND LIONEL
TOUCHDOWN!

EXT. THE TRAILER COURT - NIGHT

Kyle trudges home to the dark trailer. Caleb's truck is gone. He opens the screen door. From the shadows:

VOICE

TSSSSST!

Kyle turns, sees a figure hiding by the porch. It's JEANNIE.

JEANNIE

Hi Kyle.

KYLE

Howdy.

She hesitates. It's his move, only he's not moving.

JEANNIE

Your daddy home?

KYLE

Nope. Bring me some more cookies?

INT. CALEB'S TRAILER - KYLE AND JEANNIE

KISSING with teen-aged intensity, mouths CRUSHED together, as they tumble around on the couch.

Kyle's hand feels up Jeannie's breast. He slides his other hand under her shirt, and starts to lift it off.

Jeannie breaks out of the kiss, SLAPPING DOWN Kyle's wrist.

JEANNIE

Stop it!

The spell is broken.

JEANNIE

I'm not one of them football whores.

Kyle stands, walks into the kitchenette, and opens the fridge, leaving her on the couch. Miserable.

KYLE

Want a beer?

JEANNIE

No thank you.

He returns with a Bud. Sits down. Drinks. They're on opposite ends of the hide-a-bed.

Jeannie looks around the trailer, jumpy now.

JEANNIE
Where's your room?

KYLE
Right here.

JEANNIE
You mean (at the couch)...

KYLE
Uh huh.

JEANNIE
Oh... So, uh, where's your Mama live?

KYLE
Burns Flat.

JEANNIE
That Oklahoma? (He nods.) What's it
like there?

KYLE
Well, I got my own room, for one thing.

Jeannie LAUGHS. She really likes this guy.

JEANNIE
What else?

KYLE
On the football team...

JEANNIE
Yeah...

Kyle chugs down his beer.

KYLE
I was a big star. (exaggerating) I'm
talking... HUGE.

Jeannie rolls with laughter.

JEANNIE
For real? (Kyle nods.) Then why'd you
come here?

KYLE
To be with you.

For a split-second she believes him. Then she BLUSHES. Then she smiles.

JEANNIE

You're not like all the others, Kyle.

He slides over, leans in and... THEY KISS.

EXT. A FOOTBALL GAME - KYLE

CRASHES

into the linebacker, BOUNCES OFF his own blocker and STUMBLES forward across the line of scrimmage.

The STRONG SAFETY closes. Kyle lowers his helmet.

THWACK! They connect like two rams on a dead run. Kyle FALLS backwards, FUMBLING, as the crowd MOANS.

A Permian player JUMPS on the football.

LOOKING OUT OF KYLE'S HELMET:

Grey skies, dancing in a circle. A helmeted face leans over.

SAFETY

Regards from Lubbock, Okie Fuck.

UP IN THE STANDS

CALEB tilts a brown-bagged bottle to his lips, eyes BROODING.

PA ANNOUNCER

Fumble on the play, number 23. Permian retains possession. 2nd Down seven.

COACH DALTON

Ain't gonna have much brain left runnin through everybody.

CHEEVERS

Like carryin a chicken to Sunday School.

Huckleby watches, then WHISPERS to Dalton, who shuttles in the next play with the wide out.

SPINNER

stands behind them, leaning on his crutches, an open LETTER in his hand. LAMARR is next to him, holding the envelope.

SPINNER
 (reading out loud)
 "Resume our discussions when you
 successfully return to active - "
 Motherfuckers! Who are they jivin
 Lamarr? I sprained my knee!

ON THE FIELD

Buddy takes the hike, pitches to Kyle, who sees daylight on the
 sideline. He turns the corner, SPRINTING for the end zone, on
 a collision course with the same strong safety.

DALTON
 JUKE! JUKE!

But he just torpedoed on. The safety THROWS his entire body
 like a surfboard at Kyle, whose feet are LAUNCHED skyward from
 the impact. He tucks his head and

SOMERSAULTS OVER THE SAFETY

landing flat on his back, IN THE END ZONE. Somebody pulls him
 to his feet, facing the hometown crowd:

THEY ARE ROARING, JUMPING, SHAKING THEIR FISTS IN ECSTASY.

Buddy HUSTLES over to greet him.

BUDDY
 Can't run worth a damn but at least you
 can score.

As they JOG off the field, Kyle searches the stands.

ON CALEB'S SEAT: Empty. He's gone.

ON THE SIDELINE: more greetings, high fives. He sits down on
 the bench. There's SPINNER at the end of the line.

SPINNER
 How's it feel? Good?
 (Kyle nods.)
 Next week, Midland Lee.

KYLE
 Yep.

SPINNER
 You keep that seat warm, Crawl-On, cause
 that's where you gonna be.

INT. SPINNER'S ROOM - NIGHT

RAIN beats down on the cracked window pane. It drips onto the unpainted sill.

Spinner sits on his bed, eyes FOCUSED on the air cast. He's wearing oversized gym shorts and nothing else.

MUFFLED VOICES

drift in from the living room. Lamarr and Pauline, WHISPERING. Spinner can't quite make it out.

Carefully, he peels back the Velcro straps, removes the blue cast and STARES at his left knee. It looks... just like the other one.

Spinner rests one hand on each joint, and TRACES their outlines with his fingers - probing, comparing.

INT. PALOMINO BAR - A BOTTLE SHATTERS

on a COWBOY's head. CALEB holds the broken neck. Two LEATHERNECKS rush in. He SLASHES one, KICKS the other in the groin, then casually retakes his seat at the bar.

CALEB

(calling for another drink)

George.

GEORGE the bartender (50's) hangs up the phone, shaking his head from side to side.

GEORGE

Leave it be, Caleb.

His eyes DART to a spot behind Caleb, who SPINS and HEADBUTTS the rising cowboy back down into a heap.

Caleb tries LEAPFROGGING the bar, but his drunken leg hooks the counter. He CRASHES down at George's feet, then rises, phoenix-like, to pour himself another whiskey. Now he SLIDES back over the counter and down into his seat where

MATTHEWS THE COP IS WAITING

Caleb swallows the shot, turns, and FIRES OFF a punch to Earl's midsection. He might as well have hit a board.

MATTHEWS

God dammit Cutter.

Matthews CLUBS him with his nightstick. Caleb falls.

INT. THE POLICE STATION - MARCHING

down the dingy corridor is SISSY, chest HEAVING in anger.

SISSY

Let him piss on somebody else. Let him stew.

Matthews lopes along behind her, holding a big key ring.

MATTHEWS

C'mon, Sissy. Don't make me call the boy.

They reach the main lobby. She makes a beeline for the exit.

SISSY

Selfish bastard. So what if he lost his job. I lost my goddamned business!

She barrels outside into the pouring RAIN.

INT. THE OUTER JAIL - MATTHEWS

unlocks a door, leading KYLE inside. He flips him car keys.

MATTHEWS

You can drive home. I'll pick it up later.

They walk past a block of cells occupied by CRIMINAL TYPES.

There's CALEB, handcuffed, on the bench, staring nowhere. Matthews opens the cell door. Walks in.

MATTHEWS

I'm gonna take these off Cutter if you promise not to kill anyone.

Matthews removes the cuffs, eyeing him warily. Caleb fixes Kyle with his angry drunk-look. He stands.

MATTHEWS

Go on. Get outta here.

INT. THE CAR - KYLE

drives through the storm, windshield wipers beating the glass.

Caleb smokes, stretched out across the back seat. He catches Kyle STARING through the rear view mirror.

CALEB
Your mama ever whip you boy?

Kyle looks away. The rain is falling in SHEETS. He struggles with the car.

Caleb SPITS in disgust.

CALEB
My daddy cut up a bullwhip tied thirteen knots I remember every fucking one. SHE NEVER TOUCHED YOU, DID SHE?!

KYLE
No sir.

He drags on the cigarette. It seems to relax him.

CALEB
Never had to.

He looks back in the mirror, catching Kyle's eyes again.

SMASH! HIS BOOT SHATTERS THE REAR PASSENGER WINDOW.

CALEB
Know how to drown an alligator, boy? DO YOU?

The rain POURS IN. Kyle shakes his head.

CALEB
Wedge a steel bar between his jaws then drop em back in the water. He'll just keep swallowing and swallowing 'til his stomach bursts. You read me?

Kyle is silent, his neck and back SOAKED from the blowing rain. Caleb leans forward with his whiskey breath.

CALEB
She sent you here, didn't she?

KYLE
No sir.

CALEB
Make a man outta you. Football Star. (He laughs) Hell, you'd still be sitting on the bench if that nigger hadn't busted his knee.

Kyle shakes his head back and forth. No. No. No.

CALEB
 You think winning state is gonna put
 hair on your chest? Shit.

He pulls off his championship RING and
 CHUCKS IT OUT THE WINDOW.

Kyle turns, incredulous, then SCREECHES THE CAR to a halt.

EXT. THE POURING RAIN - KYLE

JUMPS out into a sea of puddles, SLIPS, FALLS, rights himself,
 his hands SPLASHING through the water, searching for the ring.

KYLE
 You drunk son-of-a-bitch.

He scoops through the mud, panning for gold. His TEARS mingle
 with the rain.

CALEB exits the back door. CLINK! Some last pieces of the
 broken window sprinkle the ground.

He sucks one final hit out of his cigarette, defying the
 buckets that drop from the sky. Into the blackness:

CALEB
 FUCK YOU! FUCK THE WHOLE LOT A YOU, YOU
 HEAR ME?!

INT. COACH HUCKLEBY'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Sunshine peeks through the curtains. The alarm clock TICKS.
 Doyle lies awake, arms folded across his chest. Claire
 is snuggled next to him, asleep. Or maybe not.

CLAIRE
 What?

DOYLE
 I got a bad feeling.

CLAIRE
 About what?

DOYLE
 Tonight. Midland Lee.

CLAIRE
 One of those bad bad feelings or just
 the usual?

DOYLE

Bad bad.

She OPENS her eyes. They lie still like that.

DOYLE

You win and win and win and the whole season still rides on one damn game.

CLAIRE

Hey, Doyle?

DOYLE

Yeah?

CLAIRE

Maybe it's time. Your father's waiting.

Doyle exhales. Closes his eyes.

DOYLE

I'm no farmer Claire. I coach football.

INT. THE HIGH SCHOOL GYMNASIUM - PEP RALLY

The camera CIRCLES as 3000 standing people CHANT the Permian Alma Mater with religious fervor:

THE CROWD

All hail to Alma Mater
We'll always loyal be...

BETTY'S SINGING HER HEART OUT.

BETTY AND CROWD (CONT)

Where'er the future leads,
Our thoughts will return to thee...

TRACKING

down the varsity row, past BUDDY, CHUCK, WILLY, and KYLE...

THE BOYS

On every field of battle,
Will our banner ever wave...

There's an EMPTY SEAT where Spinner should be.

EXT. LIMOUSINE - DRIVING

The license plate reads: "AC2", as the song crescendos on OVERLAP.

CROWD (OC)
 There'll be a glorious victory
 For Permian High always.

INT. BIG AL'S LIMOUSINE - SPINNER

holds court in the back seat with Lamarr.

SPINNER
 Get me one of these too, why not, huh?
 Pick you and Pauline up, bring you all
 the way to Texas Stadium. 'Course away
 games... we take "The Lear," you know
 what I'm saying?

He ribs Lamarr, whose smile barely covers his concern.
 Spinner is oblivious, on a roll:

SPINNER (CONT)
 Be the first NFL rookie to fly to work
 man, get my jet license in the off-
 season.

He pushes the SPEAKER button for the driver.

SPINNER
 Wus up, you got any videos back here?

The driver shakes his head. They're TURNING, into a large
 complex of buildings. The sign says: "MIDLAND MEDICAL CENTER."

Spinner peers out, the confidence DRAINING from his face.

SPINNER
 Oh man... Midland?

LAMARR
 Best damn hospital in Texas.

EXT. THE LIMO - THE DRIVER

escorts them up to the front door. Aside, to Lamarr:

DRIVER
 Don't you worry now. Mr. C's taking
 care of everything.

INT. MRI MACHINE - SPINNER

in his underwear, lays inside the giant tube. He cranes his
 neck, spots:

Lamarr, behind a glass window, his expression BLANK as he listens to the stocky, bearded DOCTOR (late 40's).

INT. THE DOCTOR'S OFFICE - LATER

The same man, DR. ROGERS, collects X-rays into an envelope.

DR. ROGERS
My boy Jed played for Midland back in
87. He's out east now. Princeton.

Spinner's up on the exam table, dressed now, legs hanging free.

SPINNER
Playing football?

Lamarr watches the condescension PASS over the doctor's face.

DR. ROGERS
Medical school, I'm afraid.

He turns to Spinner, placing one hand on the injured knee.

DR. ROGERS
Do you have any pain? How does it feel?

SPINNER
(lying)
Okay, okay. Can I suit up tonight Doc?

Rogers fires a SCOWL at Lamarr, who SQUIRMS in his chair.

DR. ROGERS
What are you talking about?

Spinner CHECKS Lamarr for an explanation. He looks away.

SPINNER
Well, Doctor Spence said "three weeks"
and that was... three weeks ago.

DR. ROGERS
It's out of the question.

SPINNER
Hey, don't lay that "outta the question"
stuff on me. I'm gonna suit up. My
team needs me, I'm ready to play.

Spinner slips off the table, and into his shoes.

DR. ROGERS
The only thing you're ready for young
man --

SPINNER
(to Lamarr)
We're splitting.

DR. ROGERS
-- is the surgeon's scalpel.

Spinner is halfway out the door when the words HIT HIM. He turns, hurt and then ANGRY.

SPINNER
You're just saying that, man. (to
Lamarr) He's just saying that! Know
why?! Cause he's from Midland. CHUMP!

Lamarr rushes over, BACKING Spinner out of the office. The attack continues:

SPINNER
HE'S JUST TRYING TO KEEP ME OUTTA THE
GAME! THAT'S ALL!

They BACK INTO the crowded hallway. LOOKS. STARES.

SPINNER
HEY DOC!

Rogers leans out of his doorway, sees Lamarr PUSH towards the elevator.

SPINNER
HOW MUCH YOU PUT DOWN?! HOW MUCH YOU
GOT RIDING TONIGHT?

The elevator doors OPEN.

SPINNER
CAUSE WE'RE GONNA STOMP YOU RICH MIDLAND
FUCKS!

Lamarr LIFTS Spinner and SLAMS him into the back of the car. The doors CLICK shut.

INT. THE ELEVATOR - DESCENDING

Spinner SOBS, his head cradled in Lamarr's broad arms. .

EXT. ODESSA STREETS - FRIDAY NIGHT

HONK! HONK!

The traffic jam is back, stretching two solid miles to the stadium.

DRUM BEATS from the marching band ECHO in the distance.

EXT. TV INTERVIEW - A MAN

speaks into the microphone in front of him, his eyes squinting from the television lights.

MAN

...Always been a lot of rivalry between these two towns. Y'awl know what they say: "Go to Midland to raise a family, and Odessa to raise hell."

INT. THE LOCKER ROOM - KYLE

lurches out of the bathroom stall, past the knowing glances of his teammates. Wiping his mouth off, he exits into:

INT. THE LOCKER ROOM ANNEX

where Buddy stands, staring at:

THE "WALL OF FAME"

Large black letters declare:

TEXAS STATE FOOTBALL CHAMPIONS AAAAA

1965 `70 `73 `80 `84 `87

Beneath each number is a framed team picture, and lower still, a smaller photograph featuring the most valuable player from that year's team.

Buddy's studying the picture from 1973. Kyle leans over.

The peeling label reads: "M.V.P. CALEB HONEYCUTT." It's the same photograph Kyle unpacked earlier from his duffel.

BUDDY

Hasn't changed much.

KYLE

Guess not.

They walk together past the far end of the Wall of Fame. There's one last BLANK picture frame. Inside are the words:

"ARE YOU GOING TO BE NEXT?"

BUDDY

You wouldn't believe what Big Al looked like twenty years ago.

KYLE

How's that?

BUDDY

Just like me.

INT. THE FIELD HOUSE - THE WHOLE TEAM

is gathered around Coach Huckleby, helmets in hand. They STARE anxiously at each other.

Spinner is nowhere in sight.

HUCKLEBY

Y'awl know me, know I'm not the rah-rah type. We got a mission men. To win this football game. Simple as that. If we play to our potential, I have no doubt what the outcome will be. Now it's up to you.

EXT. STADIUM - THE PANTHERS

BREAK THROUGH the giant Pepette banner. The crowd BELLOWS.

A SERIES OF INTERCUTS:

Pre-game hoopla. The fans. Parents. Big Al and his pocket phone. Betty in black and white. Caleb and his brown-bagged bottle. Claire and the other wives.

Permian wins the TOSS. They line up for the kick-off.

Suddenly a MURMUR passes through the hometown crowd. It snowballs into a CHEER as we look:

THROUGH THE TUNNEL

A lone FIGURE in full pads and uniform enters the stadium, head held high like a prince:

IT'S SPINNER

The cheers swell into a ROAR.

ACROSS THE FIELD

the Midland coaches watch his progress. Assistant CLANCY KENT turns to the man with the phones, Head Coach BUTCH SAUNDERS.

CLANCY

Hey Butch, maybe we ought to refigure that rushing alignment if...

COACH SAUNDERS

Ain't gonna play.

CLANCY

What?!

COACH SAUNDERS

I said, he ain't going to play.

The whistle BLOWS. There's the kick-off and return.

SPINNER stands in Huckleby's line of sight, waiting for the signal. It doesn't come. Buddy leads the offense onto the field. The coach holds him back a second.

COACH HUCKLEBY

It's your game, Buddy. Take it to em.

EXT. THE FOOTBALL FIELD - WAR ZONE

On the line of scrimmage, looking out at the helmeted players across the great divide.

HIKE! HIKE! HIKE!

Each time the ball is snapped, it's a WAR IN THE TRENCHES, players fighting to control their own piece of turf, BASHING heads, shoulders and elbows in an effort to gain control.

There's BUDDY, backpedalling behind a black line of gladiators. He THROWS a swing pass out in the flat that HANGS UP a little too long, and DROPS into the hands of the defensive LINEBACKER:

WHO RUNS UNTOUCHED INTO THE PERMIAN END ZONE.

The Midland Band BREAKS OUT with the fight song.

BUDDY

Jesus Buddy. Jesus Christ.

He splits a sea of FACES and HANDS to sit down on the bench, still muttering. Looking up, he sees:

BIG AL, plowing through the sidelines towards Huckleby, arms Gesticulating, teeth BARED in anger.

BIG AL
What the hell is that shit? PASSING ON
FIRST DOWN?!

Buddy drops his head in shame.

Spinner PROWLs nearby, a wounded lion, watching, waiting.

GROUND ZERO, 50 YARD LINE

The game action feels more like organized CHAOS that tests the physical punishment each player can dish out and receive.

BUDDY sacked after releasing the ball...
CHUCK knocking helmets at full speed...
WILLY being carried off on a stretcher...

THE SCOREBOARD READS: MIDLAND 13, PERMIAN 12.

KYLE takes a handoff, cuts, and is PINNED to the carpet

LIKE A GIANT THUMB TACK,

somebody's head STUCK in his midsection. He rolls on one side, GASPING, unable to catch his breath.

A VOICE somewhere, off-camera.

VOICE
I hate it. I hate it when they're
pussies.

SPINNER, sensing the desperation, has converted himself to a one-man cheering section.

SPINNER
DIG! DIG! MOJO! MOJO!

He turns around, arms PUMPING up the crowd.

SPINNER AND FANS
MOJO! MOJO! MOJO! MOJO!

And we come OUT OF THE WAR ZONE, like a diver up for air,

RISING ONE HUNDRED FEET ABOVE THE FIELD TO:

INT. THE PRESS BOX - WHERE

the dozen or so reporters are on the edge of their seats.

REPORTER #1
Doyle's getting boiled.

REPORTER #2
Time for a little Mojo magic.

BACK DOWN IN THE TRENCHES, BUDDY

is still MUTTERING to himself, searching for the confidence that's never left him before.

BUDDY
Execute. Execute. Execute.

Dalton BARKS out instructions as the offense retakes the field. The clock reads: 1:21.

20,000 rabid fans serenade them with their cry: "MOJO! MOJO!"

INSIDE THE HUDDLE

KYLE
I see your picture Buddy. It's on the Wall of Fame.

HIKE! He drops back, throws a twenty yard pass COMPLETE to one of the wide receivers.

Another pass play, another COMPLETION, this time to KYLE coming out of the backfield. He SQUIRMS out of bounds.

ON THE SIDELINE

the field goal kicker BLASTS footballs into his practice net. SPINNER is nearby, keeping up his patter.

SPINNER
STICK A FORK IN, MIDLAND! YOU'RE DONE!

BURT BENSON (VO)
Fifteen more yards, they're in field goal range. 35 seconds to go.

IN THE HUDDLE

Confidence seeping back. Kyle seeks out Buddy's eyes.

KYLE
Let's go, Pumpkin. Lock and load.

CROWD
MOJO! MOJO! MOJO! MOJO!

Buddy's eyes glaze back over, fighting off the demons.

The ball is SNAPPED.

SLOW MOTION

He drops, pump fakes, looks downfield. The wide receiver has BEAT HIS MAN on the slant out.

Huckleby RAISES his voice for the second time, shouting from the sidelines.

HUCKLEBY

GUN IT!

Buddy HESITATES, throws a WOBLER that drifts through the air.

KYLE WATCHES as the charging Midland safety INTERCEPTS.

INSIDE KYLE'S HELMET:

running to cut him off, a SCREAM surging out of his belly.

KYLE

NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!

THWACK!!!!

He ERUPTS with a clothesline tackle that KNOCKS the safety's helmet off, SNAPPING his body back to the ground. But he holds on to the ball.

THE ENTIRE MIDLAND LEE TEAM RUSHES ONTO THE FIELD

as their marching band plays "Dixie".

INT. THE PERMIAN LOCKER ROOM - SILENCE

broken only by the sound of 17 year olds WEEPING.

BUDDY sobs like a baby, BANGING the back of his head against the wall, his broad chest heaving. Next to him:

KYLE sits on the carpet, head in hands, purple facial bruises peeking out between his fingers.

CHUCK slumps in front of the lockers, his features frozen into tight-lipped shock.

Little WILLY lies on the bench, grin gone, tears on their way.

WILLY

It ain't over. Ain't over. Can't be...

THERE'S SPINNER

smaller suddenly, more vulnerable without his pads.

Buddy sees him, turns. They EMBRACE. Buddy continues weeping on Spinner's shoulder.

BUDDY

I'm sorry, man. I'm sorry.

The tears ROLL DOWN Spinner's face.

BUDDY

We missed you.

COACH HUCKLEBY enters, eyes alert, his face ashen-gray.

The players GRAVITATE inward, unembarrassed by their tears, more family to each other than flesh and blood.

They encircle him, holding hands, shoulders, elbows. The SOBBING continues as the rest of the COACHING STAFF files in.

He drops to one knee. The players, instinctively, bow their heads. Huckleby's voice sinks lower and lower:

HUCKLEBY

Heavenly Father, we pray that you would help each one of us to overcome this setback, that you lessen the hurt, give all of us strength and comfort that only you can give. We thank you for these young men that it's been our pleasure to coach. We thank you for the opportunity to work with this great football program. (barely audible now) No matter what the future may hold, we know you're here for us, our rock and our redeemer.

THE PLAYERS

Amen.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE LOCKER ROOM - THE CROWD

waits patiently. No surging forward, just muted meetings between players and girlfriends, parents and sons. It is all eerily QUIET.

Spinner DRIFTS outside, limping, directionless. LAMARR shepherds him into a waiting car. His voice is hollow:

LAMARR

We'll get em, son. Get em next time.

Buddy EXITS straight into Betty's outstretched arms. The tears start flowing again. She strokes his head.

BETTY

Shhhh. Shhhh. That's my baby.

Kyle stands listless, like a sailboat in dead calm, his face hidden behind the exit wall, watching everything.

KYLE'S POV:

There's JEANNIE, anticipating his exit, eyes just the right shade of mournful.

A BLUE TRUCK SCREECHES TO A HALT

just beyond the waiting crowd. CALEB stands on the running board, eyes squinting towards the locker door.

KYLE WALKS OUT

as we get a first real look at his BLACK AND BLUE FACE.

Jeannie GASPS, but Kyle isn't in the mood for hugs or pity.

JEANNIE

Oh my God you okay?

He MOVES towards Caleb's truck, drawn like a moth to the flame. Jeannie sidesteps to keep up, not understanding, until she stumbles and sees his father.

JEANNIE

Call me... I'll, I'll call you.

Caleb slides back behind the steering wheel just as Kyle reaches the truck.

INT. CALEB'S TRUCK - SAME TIME

Caleb starts the engine, then takes a SWIG from his bottle, avoiding Kyle's eyes.

INT. CALEB'S TRUCK - DRIVING

The whiskey and silence fuel Kyle's anger. They drive on. Caleb steals a look at his face.

CALEB

Hurt much?

INT. THE TRAILER - ENTERING

Kyle heads straight for the bathroom, closes the door. Caleb pops open a long neck. He settles into the laziboy.

IN THE BATHROOM - KYLE

breathes heavily, hands on the sink, face pressed against the mirror. He stares at his bruises, opens the medicine cabinet.

The television SQUAWKS from the other room. It's Caleb, FLIPPING channels.

Kyle's hands shake as he spills out some pain killers, bending his head under the water faucet to wash them down.

LISTENING: one channel now, the local news. A familiar VOICE delivers the sports.

BURT BENSON'S VOICE

And a stunning upset it was. Could be the first time in 12 years that a Permian team doesn't qualify for state--

Kyle OPENS the door.

BURT BENSON (OC)

Unless --

Caleb sees him, then ZAPS off the t.v.

CALEB

Siddown. Want a drink?

Kyle plunks down on the hide-a-bed. A long silence. Caleb struggles to speak.

CALEB

You know I was thinking... maybe now (beat) you might wanna go back home to Oklahoma... I mean...

The hurt starts to register in Kyle's eyes.

CALEB

I'd understand...

It's like a sharp pain spreading slowly...

CALEB

You wanting to be back with your ma...

...through Kyle's body.

CALEB
...and all your friends...

Kyle's eyes mist over. He steels himself.

CALEB
Sissy's been buggin me to move into her
place, ever since Maggie's closed down.

He is not going to cry. Not now. Not in front of Caleb.

CALEB
Probably can't wait to have your own
room back, anyway...

Caleb tries out a CHUCKLE. It doesn't work.

CALEB
I tell you one thing son, this town
don't take too kindly to losers --
(realizing how that sounds) I mean....

Kyle stands, grabs his letter jacket, and walks out the door.

INT. CRANKSHAW LIVING ROOM - THE FAMILY POW WOW

BETTY's suddenly looking middle-aged, her hair and make-up
askew. She circles the life-sized glass replica sculpture of
ROGER STAUBACH that dominates the coffee table.

BETTY
And Left Strong Pro 18? Any fool could
see they were stacking the weak side.
Is he blind? Stupid? You ran it all
week in practice.

BUDDY sits on the oversized leather couch, shock stamping his
features into an icy mask.

BIG AL works the cellular, his face flushed this side of angry.

BIG AL
Yeah... (seething) You bet.

He flips the phone shut, considers slipping it back in his
pocket, then:

BIG AL
12 years. 3 state titles. And we hire
a goddamn cotton farmer for a coach.

*Caleb
Believes Caleb
words*

HE HURLS THE PHONE INTO THE GLASS SCULPTURE

which SHATTERS into a thousand pieces.

Betty swallows hard. She loved that Roger.

BETTY

Looks kinda like your ego, Al. After
the Bust in 83.

BUDDY

It's my fault.

BIG AL

(turning on him)

Shuttup!

BETTY

Remember how you couldn't get it up?
(beat) I'm gonna call Neiman-Marcus
right now, order a new one.

Al's face turns the color of cranberry juice.

BUDDY

It's my fault.

BIG AL

SHUTTUP!

BUDDY

Stick was wide open. I threw a quail.
Coach's call was right on the money.

BIG AL

He blew it.

BUDDY

No.

BIG AL

Went belly up, big time.

Buddy stands, shaking his head, and GRABS his father's arms by
the wrists. Tears roll down his face.

BUDDY

You're wrong, Al.

Big Al tries moving his arms, but Buddy holds them stiff next
to his side. It's a test of strength. The father, beet-faced,
sweating from the effort, and son, inches from his nose, crying
silent tears.

BIG AL KNEES BUDDY IN THE GROIN

One arm breaks free. He WHACKS Buddy across the face.

BUDDY CHARGES LIKE A LINEBACKER

tackling Big Al on the thick carpet. They roll around, perilously close to the scattered shards of glass. Buddy's hands close like a vise around Al's throat, CHOKING him.

BETTY SCREAMS, then bursts into tears. Small-voiced:

BETTY

Stop it. Stop it Pumpkin. Please.

A VOICE interrupts from above. He's on the stairway, in his MOJO pajamas.

PEE-WEE

Let em go, Buddy.

INT. THE HUCKLEBY HOUSE - NIGHT

Doyle, Claire, Sheila and Leanne huddle in the living room. We see them, not what they see, as they face the picture window.

CLAIRE

I called the police.

DOYLE

Girls, go on. Get in the kitchen.

Sheila starts to protest.

DOYLE

DIG!

They turn and go. Doyle is LAUGHING.

CLAIRE

What's wrong with you?! What!

REVERSE POV, LOOKING THROUGH THE LIVING ROOM WINDOW:

The front lawn looks like the aftermath of a political convention. Dozens of SIGNS stick in the grass or lie half-poked at odd angles. "FOR SALE!" "GO HOME!" "LOSER!"

The family car has been wounded by a barrage of smashed pumkins. Figures BLURR by, in and out of their pick-up trucks.

An egg SPLATTERS across the top window pane.

ON DOYLE

The worry stain on his face has magically disappeared. He pulls out a CIGAR, and lights up.

DOYLE
Honey, it's time to celebrate.

CLAIRE
I'm calling the fire department. (She stops, watching him puff.) Doyle!

DOYLE
Hey we still got that bottle of champagne Big Al sent last year after we won Districts?

SMACK! Another egg drips down the window.

CLAIRE
I threw it out.

DOYLE
(mock protest)
Huh-ney!

Claire looks at him, sees something she likes.

CLAIRE
You're a strange bird, Coach Huckleby.
(beat) And I love you.

They KISS. The girls pop in from the kitchen.

SHEILA
You people are sick, you know that.

The grown-ups disengage.

LEANNE
Mom, are we moving again?

Doyle, at the window, sees a familiar VEHICLE pulling up in front of the house.

CLAIRE
Isn't that Bobby Dalton's car?

DALTON runs up to their front door. Doyle opens it.

ON BOBBY: face crushed with excitement. He can hardly speak.

DALTON
San Angelo beat Abilene.

DOYLE
What?!

DALTON
It's a three-way tie. Us, Midland,
Abilene. We're flipping a coin.

Doyle's voice changes back to its low, gravely hum.

DOYLE
Where? When?

DALTON
Get in the car.

He looks at Claire. She sees it - the worry stain's back.

DALTON
They're gonna broadcast live, on the
radio, Claire. KGGC.

Doyle has already grabbed a coat. Under his breath:

DOYLE
And God showed his Mercy. A-men.
(pecking Claire's cheek) Wish me luck.

But she can't, as we cut to:

INT. 7-ELEVEN - KYLE

stalks over to the cooler, window-shopping for beer. He sneaks
a look behind the counter at

THE CLERK (19)

eyes glued to a ceiling-high portable t.v.

Kyle slips out a long neck, twists off and starts to CHUG-A-LUG
in the shadow of aisle number three.

EXT. "THE RED STAR" TRUCK STOP - NIGHT

The coaches car SCREECHES into the parking lot. Doyle, Dalton,
Cheevers and Stutz pile out.

Double-parked in front of the truck stop is the "BIG 2 ACTION
NEWS" van, satellite dish pointed at the stars.

COACH HUCKLEBY
I thought this was supposed to be a
secret...

INT/EXT. BUDDY'S MONSTER VAN - SPEEDING

For once, the stereo is silent. Buddy's hands grip the wheel as he motors down Highway 80, going nowhere fast.

INT. THE 7-ELEVEN - KYLE

tosses the empty longneck into a trashcan by the Slurpee station. RATTLE RATTLE.

The clerk looks down from the television, his face familiar. It's JOE BOB SIBLEY, star of last year's team, who spoke at the Watermelon Feed. He eyes Kyle, notes the letter jacket.

Kyle opens the cooler, pulls out another longneck and brazenly drinks it down. Sauntering over, he DUMPS the bottle in the trash can behind Joe Bob's counter, then turns and heads for the exit without paying.

JOE BOB
Tough luck.

Kyle stops, flying now on his beer and pain killer cocktail.

JOE BOB
I know just how ya feel.

He stares at Joe Bob, unable to place the face. It just makes him angrier. Suddenly, he

FIRES OFF down the main aisle,

KNOCKING OVER EVERYTHING IN HIS PATH.

Oreos, Evian, Ritz cracker boxes CRASH to the ground.

Joe Bob stares at the destruction, unfazed. Kyle is shaking.

A VOICE from the television breaks up the silence.

VOICE (OC)
We interrupt this program for a special
Channel 2 news update...

INT. "THE RED STAR" - SAME TIME

A red-boothed greasy spoon now bathed in the unflattering light of live television.

In between the tripods, extension cords and Klieg lights stands Burt Benson, mic at his mouth, voice hushed:

BURT BENSON
 ...somewhere between Big Spring and Sterling City, waiting for three men to throw some coins in the air.

DOYLE, BUTCH SAUNDERS, and the Abilene coach, bald-headed SAM BATTLE (50) stand by the formica countertop, comparing coins and looking embarrassed.

EXT. THE HIGHWAY - A POLICE SIREN WAILS

Here comes the cruiser, lights flashing, pulling over Buddy in his monster van.

EARL MATTHEWS

hurries out of his patrol car, and CLIMBS the five feet up to the van window. Buddy's staring straight ahead, face flushed.

BUDDY
 Lemme go Earl.

MATTHEWS
 Turn on the radio.

BUDDY
 What?

MATTHEWS
 Turn on the goddamned radio.

INT. "THE RED STAR" - THE TRUCKDRIVERS

Grim-faced men in white cowboy hats, look up from their steak fingers to watch the bizarre proceedings.

The three coaches sweat like pizzas under the hot lights. KENT OLCOTT (40's) is the Class 5A sports administrator:

OLCOTT
 Call it Doyle.

COACH HUCKLEBY
 One, two, three, go.

SIMULTANEOUSLY:

They FLIP their coins, bouncing them off the drop ceiling.

Butch Saunders' coin lands next to somebody's shoe.

BUTCH

Heads.

Sam Battle's lucky silver dollar rolls under a booth near Burt Benson. A VOICE calls out:

VOICE

Heads.

All eyes are on Doyle, his face paler than the white formica. He tracks down his quarter, wedged beneath a tv tripod.

DOYLE

Heads.

The room BUZZES.

BURT BENSON

Three heads means they're going to have to re...

Benson stops, mid-sentence. He's staring at Sam Battle's silver dollar.

BURT BENSON

Is that a heads on this one?

Butch Saunders HUSTLES over.

BUTCH

What is thaaat, tails? Thaaaaaat's tails, ain't it?

Sam Battle slowly bends down, his fifty year old face suddenly holding the short end of the stick. In a whisper:

SAM BATTLE

Tails it is.

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. STANDING ON THE HIGHWAY - A SCREAM

echoes from Buddy's lips, as he LIFTS the 240 pound Matthews into the sky.

BUDDY

STAAAAAAAATE!

INT. THE 7-ELEVEN - KYLE AND JOE BOB

stand on the counter, fists shaking at the television:

KYLE AND JOE BOB
STAAAAAAAAAATE!

INT. THE ATLAS HOUSE - LAMARR

holds Spinner in his arms, as he DANCES in front of the t.v.

LAMARR AND SPINNER
STAAAAAAAAAATE!

INT. CALEB'S TRAILER - CALEB

SNORES in the laziboy, empty bottle between his legs, as the television DRONES on.

BURT BENSON (OC)
That Mojo magic holding up, once again,
as the Panthers now mobilize for their
march to...

EXT. "THE RED STAR" TRUCK STOP - DOYLE

bursts out the front door to the cheers of a small crowd:

CROWD
STATE! STATE! STATE! STATE!

He raises one arm in a salute, then looks up at:

A HELICOPTER

touching down for a landing in the parking lot, its flashing lights illuminating the familiar logo.

BIG AL

strides out, ducking the twisting blades, one beefy hand extended in greeting.

BIG AL
HOWDY COACH!

Doyle is a changed man, his eyes burning, his voice SHOUTING over the din of the blades.

HUCKLEBY
WE'RE GOING, MR. CRANKSHAW. GOING ALL
THE WAY. CHRIST HAD A SECOND COMING.
NOW IT'S PERMIAN'S TURN.

And we are RISING in the chopper above the blackness, Burt Benson's VOICE just audible beneath the SWISHING rotors.

BURT BENSON (OC)
 16 teams will be gunning for the state
 championship, in this single elimination
 tournament...

POV: FROM THE SKY

Scattered FIREWORKS break the black horizon as the lights of
 Odessa trail into view.

Car horns BLARE, police sirens WAIL, celebrating the miracle of
 Mojo's deliverance.

BURT BENSON (OC)
 First up against the Mojo, a solid Port
 Arthur team...

THERE'S RATLIFF STADIUM

A big, empty concrete bowl that suddenly fills with TWENTY TWO
 THOUSAND PEOPLE as we jump cut to:

EXT. THE FOOTBALL FIELD - KYLE

BARRELS through the line, his shoulders hammering the off-
 balance TACKLE.

SPINNER

watches from his place on the bench as Kyle CUTS upfield, and
 runs smack into a bevy of DEFENDERS. They converge.

CRUNCH!

He keeps on PUSHING forward until smothered by a pile of limbs.

At the bottom of the pile, KYLE squirms out, and in a
 lightning-fast move that no one sees

KNEES THE GROIN

of the SAFETY holding his legs. The boy doubles over in pain
 as Kyle trots back to the huddle.

IN THE STANDS two girls hold up their sign:

"HONEYCUTT IS SWEETER!"

The marching band CHIMES IN with Kyle's own theme song (to the
 tune of "Born to Be Wild"), sung out by the Pepettes:

PEPETTES
 BORN TO BE KAH-AH-AY-YLE!

INT. THE LOCKER ROOM - HALFTIME

The players sit in silence, exchanging puzzled looks while Coach Huckleby circles around them, working up to a shout:

COACH HUCKLEBY

...not gonna win a state championship
playin' that way! WE ARE NOT GONNA WIN
A STATE CHAMPIONSHIP PLAYIN' THAT WAY!

Dalton looks at Stutz who looks at Cheevers who signals "thumbs up" on the new Doyle Huckleby as we cut to:

INT. HOUSE PARTY - NIGHT

Another post-game victory celebration. Wall-to-wall football players, Pepettes and the like.

There's KYLE, suddenly the straw that stirs the pot, surrounded by a Greek chorus of female admirers. His face looks harder, more handsome now, the vulnerability buried beneath a sly grin and some Jack Daniels.

INT. THE BATHROOM - ON BUDDY

close-up, eyes shut tight. From off-screen comes a loud KNOCK:

VOICE (OC)

Already pissed in the dog bowl. Now
open up!

Buddy OPENS his eyes.

WIDER

He's sitting ALONE on the closed toilet, hands interlocked, head frozen straight ahead.

VOICE (OC)

Puh-leeeeeze....

INT. THE PARTY ROOM - CINDY

a voluptuous brunette, dangles a set of car keys in front of Kyle's face.

He GRABS for them but Cindy's faster, swiping her arm to lead him outside, in full view of the adoring public.

As he passes the guys SLAP his shoulder, or BUMP forearms. The girls PINE for eye contact.

THERE'S JEANNIE

Her eyes FLASH, angry and hurt. Kyle looks down into his beer, but Cindy's keeping score:

CINDY
Don't forget your curfew, honey.

EXT. THE PARTY HOUSE - KYLE

takes the keys as Cindy KISSES him against the door of her brand new black Thunderbird. Then she interrupts.

CINDY
Let's go. My place.

INT. THE T-BIRD - BACKING OUT

Kyle spins out of reverse, and GUNS down the street.

KYLE
You got your own apartment?

CINDY
More like a suite. Oh look...

POV: THE WINDSHIELD

SPINNER, in his black Raiders jacket, walks away from the party, a hint of a limp in his stride.

CINDY
You hear the joke yet? (beat) What do you get when you cross an oil can, a black running back, and a bum knee?

KYLE
What?

CINDY
Janitor in a drum.

Nobody laughs. Kyle SWIGS at his beer.

CINDY
Poor boy.

EXT. CINDY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

A two-story, six bedroom "suite." They giggle their way across the opulent front lawn.

INT. CINDY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The PARENTS are hosting a dinner party, Junior League style. Cindy pulls Kyle right through the crowded living room.

CINDY

Mom, Dad, this here's Kyle Honeycutt, scholar, gentleman and star athlete.

They beeline for the second floor spiral staircase.

KYLE

Howdy. Hello.

CINDY'S DAD

Heckuva game, Kyle. Heckuva game.

CINDY

Now if you'll excuse us, we have a biology final to study for.

LOUD LADY

(to Cindy's mom)

Charlette, that daughter of yours, SHE IS A CUT-UP!

LAUGHS

Cindy and Kyle circle upwards. Kyle teeters, rights himself. They reach the landing. VOICES drift up.

PARTYGOER (OC)

Like hell he's an Okie. Born right here in Odessa. Ole Doctor Johnson did the delivery...

INT. CINDY'S BEDROOM - A SHORT TIME LATER

A huge four poster with endless pillows. Somewhere in the midst of things, Cindy lies naked beneath Kyle's body, eyes staring upwards. She's crying.

CINDY

You wanna know something?

We can hear Kyle breathing. Steady. Even. He's asleep.

CINDY

Being a girl really sucks.

INT. THE COACHES OFFICE - DARKNESS

The projector WHIRRS, flashing silent images.

ON SCREEN: Number 23 (Kyle) CLOTHESLINES a linebacker, SNAPPING his head to the ground.

CHEEVERS (OC)
Somebody lit a fire under his ass.

REVERSE. The linebacker UNSNAPS. FORWARD. He BUMPS the ground again. The coaches are mere VOICES in the dark.

DOYLE (OC)
Where are those Big Spring game tapes?
(annoyed) Bobby!

DALTON (OC)
Big Al's flying in the scout and the film. Breakfast tomorrow.

STUTZ (OC)
Not breakfast! Marge is gonna kill me.

DALTON (OC)
(his "black" voice)
Better straighten out that bitch, J.T.

VOICE (OC)
Hey Coach....

FREEZE FRAME. Somebody turns on the light.

SPINNER

stands in the doorway, hands dug deep into his Raider's jacket.

SPINNER
You got a minute?

The assistants exchange LOOKS. Dalton rises.

DALTON
We're gonna head over to the Pizza Hut,
'fore they close.

The three of them file out without a word.

HUCKLEBY
Siddown, Spinner. (beat) You can turn
off that light.

Spinner seats himself next to Huckleby (who's holding the remote control unit). He flicks the switch.

Darkness. Huckleby RESTARTS the game film.

LOOKING FROM BEHIND:

Two pairs of heads and shoulders watch the tiny screen.

SPINNER (OC)

Can ya gimme a chance Coach? I just want another chance.

(Offensive lineman BATTLE the charging tackles.)

HUCKLEBY (OC)

We got all those doctors for a reason, Spinner.

SPINNER (OC)

I can run. I show you. Put on that brace and FLY.

(The quarterback drops back and throws a long spiral that JUST MISSES the outstretched arms of his receiver.)

HUCKLEBY (OC)

You get hurt now, you'll make it worse for later. When's the surgery?

(Number 23 carries the ball for a fifteen yard gain.)

SPINNER (OC)

Forget that. Forget that, man!

In the silence that follows the camera

CIRCLES AROUND SLOWLY to the opposite side.

ON SPINNER

shoulders slumped, hands hiding beneath the massive thighs, his face a maze of black shadows. The confidence is gone but the words remain. Hushed:

SPINNER

I'm Spinner Atlas. The best blue chip prospect in the State of Texas. Here I go. FOOOMP. Breakin tackles, first down, keep pumping my legs. FOOOMP, FOOOMP. Spin out of it. Juke. Go for a touchdown. Go as far as I can go.

Spinner's voice slows down to a crawl. His eyes water.

SPINNER

I'm unstoppable, coach. A person like me can't be stopped.

ON HUCKLEBY

back erect, palms pressed to the table, his features locked on to the flickering screen.

INT. THE LOCKER ROOM - EARLY MORNING

A LIGHT flicks on, exposing

KYLE

asleep on the carpeting that is his new found home. Two "Permian Athletic Department" blankets form his makeshift bed.

EXT. THE TRAILER PARK - MORNING

Kyle walks up to the trailer and opens the door.

INT. THE TRAILER - KYLE

looks around, sees the bedroom door shut.

He pulls his dufflebag out of the closet and starts to pack. Clothes, shoes, school books. There's not much.

VOICE

Where you off to?

It's Sissy, in a short nightgown, closing the door gently behind her. Kyle doesn't answer.

SISSY

Mind your manners now.

KYLE

Caleb in there?

SISSY

Last I looked.

KYLE

Sleeping off a bender, prob'ly.

SISSY

(with her great smile)

You know you don't look so hot shit yourself, Mr. Football Hero. Where you been bunkin' down?

Sissy walks over just as Kyle picks up Caleb's MVP picture. Quickly, he flips it over and stuffs it in the bag.

KYLE
I thought he was moving in with you.

SISSY
What?!

KYLE
That's what he said.

SISSY
Honey, I'm backed up living with my Mama
as it is. I don't think she'd take
kindly to another roommate.

Kyle zips up the duffle. Sissy watches, senses his hurt.

SISSY
Your daddy's in a low loop, Kyle. Hell,
we all are. He'll bust out of it. You
just wait.

Kyle picks up and heads for the door.

KYLE
I reckon seventeen years is long enough.

EXT. THE FOOTBALL FIELD - DAY

SMACK!

KYLE plows through the line. He's got running room. We are
inside his helmet, seeing what he sees:

KYLE'S VOICE
(short breaths)
Freight train locomotive cannonball --

THWOCK! The field TILTS, rights itself. Harder BREATHS. We
see our CLEATS tap dancing the grass.

There's a goal post in the distance. Some silver helmets.

KYLE'S VOICE
I'm a freight train locomotive --

CRUNCH! A slice of crowd, blue skies.

SNAP! We're looking straight down at

A WHITE LINE and

TWO PAIRS OF GLOVED HANDS pulling at our knees.

PUMP PUMP

We fall across the line, our face slapping into the green:

BLACKNESS

The ROAR rises out of the dark. We stand. Stare out at:

THIRTY THOUSAND SCREAMING FANS

FANS

MOJO! MOJO! MOJO! MOJO!

EXT. THE AUSTIN CLUBHOUSE - DUSK

A crowd of people CRUSH forward as the Permian players EXIT the double doors. Print reporters, radio and t.v. people from Dallas and Houston.

They SWARM around Buddy and Kyle who walk out, FISTS RAISED.

FANS

MOJO! MOJO!

Betty Crankshaw muscles her way into Buddy's arms.

BETTY

Strong Twins, 8 Option Loaded! What a spiral on that ball, Pumpkin! Tight!

She kisses Buddy, who FLINCHES, just as Burt Benson nabs them with his Odessa Betacam crew. He thrusts his mic forward.

BURT BENSON

...Kyle, you beat a physically superior Big Spring team, on the road, in convincing fashion. How does it feel to be heading for the state finals?

And we PULL BACK to:

INSIDE A TELEVISION SCREEN - MUTE

There's Betty, half out of frame, next to Kyle whose lips MOVE briefly in reply. He listens now, eyes roving, waving to someone off-camera, as we

PULL BACK FARTHER into

THE TRAILER HOME

ON CALEB: his body frozen on the laziboy, the ash on his Lucky Strike an inch and a half long.

INSIDE THE T.V.

Kyle stares straight out at

CALEB

who coughs. The ASH flutters down.

EXT. BUDDY'S VAN - MOVING

SHOUTS thump from inside. The monster wheels roll.

INT. THE BACK OF BUDDY'S VAN - SAME TIME

Chuck and two other PLAYERS slurp beers on the carpeted benches running along each wall. Between them is a mattress/bed, complete with pillows. Little Willy is lying down on it, SINGING into an empty beer bottle. It's their own version of Kyle's theme song:

WILLY

Get your MOJO running...

Chuck and the others POUND the sides of the van for drumbeat.

THE BOYS

Da da da da DA da....

WILLY

OKIE on the highway....

THE BOYS

Da da da da DA....

Now Willy rises like Lazarus, screaming into the mic.

WILLY

Lookin for some PUS-SY...

THE BOYS

Da da da da DA da....

WILLY

We ain't never gonna PAY...

IN THE FRONT SEAT

Buddy drives, oblivious to the song. Kyle is in the other chair, facing his fans, drink in hand.

THE BOYS (CONT)

Oh Lord we're gonna make it happen,
Going to State, better hold our place...

Underneath the "singing":

BUDDY

Kyle.....

He turns. Buddy's staring straight out the windshield.

BUDDY

What if we lose?

THE BOYS

GOING TO KICK SOME ASS IN DALLAS,
STICK IT RIGHT IN THEIR FAAAAACE...

KYLE

What?

BUDDY

What if we lose?

Kyle looks at Buddy, SENSING for the first time that something is wrong. Backstage, Willy CAPS the song:

WILLY

Bornnnn to be KYYYYYYLLLE!

INT. THE LOCKER ROOM - MORNING

The players are just starting to file in.

BUDDY stands in front of Spinner's locker, visibly upset. Chuck is next to him.

KYLE, wearing only a towel, walks out of the showers.

CHUCK

They took Spinner's jersey.

A reserve player's WHITE JERSEY hangs in the locker.

KYLE

That's the rule, ain't it? Starters wear the black.

BUDDY

It just ain't right.

KYLE

(flashing a smile)
You're a hitter or a quitter, captain.

Buddy GLARES at him.

EXT. AN EMPTY FIELD - NIGHT

Spinner, in his Permian sweats, rocks back and forth, warming up for a test flight.

Lamarr makes some final adjustments to the knee brace, then stands back. He CLICKS his stopwatch to zero.

ON SPINNER: deep breaths, shaking his legs out.

LAMARR (OC)

On your mark...

He picks up the FOOTBALL, hugging it tight with one hand.

LAMARR (OC)

Get set...

Bending down into setback position, he lifts his head and sees:
A shimmering FULL MOON bounce over the horizon.

LAMARR (OC)

Go.

SPINNER SPRINTS FORWARD

legs kicking, knees pumping high.

TICK TICK TICK TICK

Lamarr lifts his eyes to the heavens.

LAMARR

Shoot me a star, Lord. Shoot me a star.

ON SPINNER'S FACE

eyes burning, confidence rushing back as he races toward the --
POP!

Suddenly he ROLLS, bouncing off mesquite and rock, both hands locked on the damaged knee.

SPINNER

Nooooooooooooooooo!

LONG SHOT:

Lamarr lopes across the empty field, then scoops Spinner up into his arms as the moon GLOWS above them.

EXT. DOWNTOWN ODESSA - DAWN

Spray-painted across the windows of the out-of-business department store are huge white letters that read:

"GOIN' TO STATE!"

A banner stretches across Main Street, from side to side.

"GOOD LUCK PANTHERS! MOJO #1"

Reindeer hang from the traffic lights. It's almost Christmas.

INT. SPINNER'S HOUSE - MORNING

Two thick scrapbooks cover the living room floor. Lamarr's hand SHAKES as he cuts out a photo of Spinner, gluing it in next to dozens of others. He looks up at Spinner's closed bedroom door.

LAMARR

Come on. Won't take but a minute.

No answer. Lamarr STARES at the door.

LAMARR

Spinner....?

He jumps up, and PUSHES open the door:

INT. SPINNER'S BEDROOM - IT'S EMPTY

Lamarr looks and knows that Spinner is gone.

INT. PERMIAN HIGH - FRANK CHALMERS

enters the principal's office, carrying a single typed page.

INT. THE PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - THROUGH THE ANNEX WINDOW

Chalmers ARGUES with the PRINCIPAL, waves the sheet in front of him, and drops it on his desk. He storms out.

The principal spins around in his chair as:

DOYLE HUCKLEBY

exits from his hiding place, looking displeased.

INT. THE HIGH SCHOOL CAFETERIA - DAY

Kaylene the homecoming queen sits at a table with her new boyfriend, the BASKETBALL STAR. Cindy is there too.

CINDY

Mary Maybeth said she heard he held up a liquor store in Monahans.

KAYLENE

Spinner'd never do something like that.

BASKETBALL STAR

Yeah, he's too stupid.

KAYLENE

You never even spoke one word to him your whole life.

BASKETBALL STAR

I say shoot the poor bastard, put em out of his misery.

EXT. THE ODESSA COUNTRY CLUB - AFTERNOON

Not a lot of cars on a weekday.

INT. THE CLUB LOUNGE - BIG AL

hosts dessert and drinks with Coach Huckleby.

HUCKLEBY

Boy's got to have a 70 average or he's automatically ineligible.

BIG AL

What's his score?

HUCKLEBY

62.

BIG AL

Would you mind tellin me what the hell we're payin all those tutors for, son?

Huckleby MEETS Big Al's eyes, head on.

HUCKLEBY

Don't matter now much, does it? Chalmers won't budge. Said Kyle Honeycutt hasn't done a lick a work since before Midland Lee.

Big Al swallows one last bite of cheese cake.

BIG AL

So what do you want me to do?

Huckleby stands up, pushes in his chair.

HUCKLEBY

Handle it.

EXT. PARADISE MOTEL - LOOKING THROUGH A WINDSHIELD

Big Al exits room #8 with the Spandex girl. She GOOSES him and walks off. He slides into his Continental.

REVERSE ANGLE:

BUDDY watches from his perch in the monster van. He waits a minute, then slips into traffic behind Big Al's car.

DRIVING

He follows the Lincoln to the poorer south side of town.

EXT. BEATEN LOOKING HOUSE - DUSK

Big Al pulls in front, where three little kids play in the dirt. One of them is SCREAMING.

50 yards down the street Buddy is parked, watching.

THROUGH THE WINDSHIELD - IN MUTE

Big Al approaches the door. A woman appears with a baby on her arm, then disappears.

FRANK CHALMERS

walks out, wearing a food-stained kitchen apron.

Big Al motions. They walk over to the side of the house. Al's back is to Buddy. Only Frank Chalmers' face is visible.

BUDDY WATCHES

as Chalmers listens, starts to get angry, then starts to sweat, like a man who has just received a very bad piece of news.

A BROWN ENVELOPE

appears in Big Al's hands. He gesticulates with it, while talking. Chalmers' eyes jump back and forth from the envelope to Al, who keeps up a steady patter. Al PRESSES the envelope into Chalmers' hands, whose fingers finally close around it.

ON BUDDY, eyes closed, hugging his steering wheel.

INT. THE HUCKLEBY RESIDENCE - NIGHT

A dark house. The front door opens. Doyle tiptoes in.

INT. THE BATHROOM - DOYLE

stares at his face, the black circles etched like charcoal beneath his eyelids.

CLAIRE THROWS OPEN THE DOOR

CLAIRE

You used to work for them, Doyle. But now they own you.

HUCKLEBY

Honey...

CLAIRE

You used to be a religious man. You don't even have time to go to church anymore, let alone pray.

HUCKLEBY

Claire....

CLAIRE

And if you did pray, God knows it'd be for the Permian Panthers.

HUCKLEBY

Those boys get one shot. That's all they get. It's my job to make sure they're ready.

Claire is near tears.

CLAIRE

No. That was your old job. In Ranger they paid you to coach. In Kerrville. Nocona. Here they pay you to win Doyle. (Her voice BREAKS.) And the funny thing is you're earning every penny.

Claire sobs. Doyle moves to embrace her. She STEPS BACK, shaking her head, wiping away the tears.

CLAIRE

I can live with the pumpkins, petitions, the whispers in the supermarket, even with a lousy sex life six months out of every year, but I refuse to stay here and watch you turn into one of them.

EXT. THE FIELD HOUSE DOOR - NIGHT

Caleb wedges a crowbar in the door jamb. He looks left, right, then KICKS the bar. SNAP! The door opens.

INT. THE LOCKER ROOM ANNEX - PITCH BLACK

FOOTSTEPS. The faintest hint of a body moving, stopping.

CALEB'S VOICE

I know you're in here.

More FOOTSTEPS.

CALEB'S VOICE

Kyle....

CLICK! The lights FLASH ON, exposing Caleb against the background of the Wall of Fame.

HE'S WEARING HIS OLD LETTER JACKET.

Kyle stands in the doorway, STARING at the coat.

CALEB

(by way of explanation)

All screwed up cold out.

Caleb BLINKS, adjusts to the light. He sees the Wall of Fame.

KYLE

What you want?

CALEB

Your mother called.

Kyle is silent.

CALEB

You shouldn't worry your mother Kyle.
(beat) I told her you was okay.

He turns to leave. Kyle sees the crowbar in his back pocket.

KYLE

That's it?

CALEB

What?

KYLE

You broke in here to tell me that?!

CALEB

Well maybe you'd rather I sent a letter.
Or how about a telegram? I don't see
you livin' at home, boy.

KYLE

What home?

Caleb swallows his anger. He turns and walks out.

CALEB

Hell with it.

EXT. SPINNER'S HOUSE - MORNING

Lamarr looks up the street, and down the street, then bends to
fetch the morning paper.

INT. THE KITCHEN - LAMARR

sits over coffee at the table, his face a blanket of worry.
Pauline comforts him.

PAULINE

Seven years the boy's never had a day
off. (beat) Give him some time.

INT. BUDDY'S BEDROOM - MORNING

A poster gallery: Troy Aikman. John Elway. Bon Jovi.

Buddy finishes packing his bag. Big Al OPENS the door.

BIG AL

Howdy.

He looks around, like someone walking in for the first time.
Foreign turf. He's uncomfortable. Sweating.

Buddy isn't making things any easier.

BIG AL

Got everything?

Buddy nods, keeping away from eye contact.

BIG AL

Saw your van out at Frank Chalmers
yesterday.

It's like a SHOT to the stomach. Buddy sits down on his bed.

BIG AL
We didn't come this far to lose it all
on a technicality.

Buddy stares up, hate in his eyes.

BIG AL
Everybody's got his price. Better to
learn it sooner than later.

BUDDY
(quietly)
How much am I worth to you, Al?

Big Al moves to touch him, but Buddy FLINCHES. He stops,
stares at the ground. Slowly:

BIG AL
I'm your father, Buddy. I've always
wanted you to have what's best.

EXT. THE SCHOOL PARKING LOT - DAY

The doors CLOSE on an Ector County schoolbus carrying the
entire Permian football team out of Odessa.

INT. THE SCHOOLBUS - DRIVING

ON HUCKLEBY: beyond haggard, consumed now by the task ahead.

ON BUDDY: eyes closed, breathing deep.

ON KYLE: tense, expectant, looking out the window in a pose
reminiscent of the very first scene.

He watches a Greyhound bus PASS from the other direction.

INT. THE GREYHOUND - SPINNER

doesn't look up, doesn't see his teammates. He's hunched
forward in his chair, head resting on his hands.

INT. MIDLAND REGIONAL AIRPORT - THE PLAYERS

head through the passenger tunnel leading to their airplane.

EXT. ODESSA STREETS - SPINNER

walks through town with his gym bag, limping slightly.

INT. THE 727 - JUST BEFORE TAKEOFF

Bobby Dalton works the aisle, reassuring the nervous faces.

DALTON
 Men, just think of it as a business trip. We're gonna get there, do our job, and come back home (pausing, big grin)... State Champs.

EXT. THE ATLAS HOUSE - DAY

Spinner drops the bag, raises his chin and KNOCKS on the door.

From inside, the SOUND of a large man crossing the floor.

VOICE (OC)
 Pauline! Pauline!

In an instant, Lamarr OPENS the door. They stare at each other, unsure how to proceed. Softly:

LAMARR
 Where you been, Spinner?

He talks down to the "Welcome" mat.

SPINNER
 Lookin for something.

LAMARR
 Didja find it?

Spinner slowly raises his head, then

FALLS INTO LAMARR'S OUTSTRETCHED ARMS

squeezing for all he's worth. Pauline beams over his shoulder.

LAMARR
 Welcome home son. Welcome home.

EXT. TEXAS STADIUM - MORNING

A CRASH OF CYMBALS

The marching band EXPLODES into the Permian fight song, as they move in formation across the vast playing field...

HIGHER - THE STADIUM

Sixty five thousand empty seats, and a few television crews, setting up their big cameras.

A light DRIZZLE is falling.

over the top...

WILLY

Don't ya have to go to the bathroom?

INT. THE FIELDHOUSE - DAY

A dark room. The players lie stretched out or sit propped against the walls. Waiting.

Willy is hooked to a Walkman, mainlining Van Halen.

Chuck's good-natured face is gone, replaced by something harder, slitty-eyed and angry.

Kyle faces the floor, his cheek hugging the cool concrete.

KYLE

We made it, Pumpkin.

Buddy twists his right fist into his left palm, watching his bicep pop up and down.

BUDDY

I wonder what Spinner's doin.

THE COACHES ENTER

and split off, assistants to the back, Huckleby to the center. Silently, the players form a ring around him. His voice DRUMS:

HUCKLEBY

52 brothers men. 52 brothers are hard to beat. When we're in this locker room, or out on that field, 52 people pulling together.

Huckleby SCANS their faces, his VOICE rising another notch.

HUCKLEBY (CONT)

We're gonna break em down mentally.
We're gonna break em down physically.
Whatever it takes to beat these guys,
that's what it takes. That's what we'll
do. Can we give a great effort, and
give just a little bit more?

Fifty two VOICES answer as one.

THE TEAM

YES SIR!

HUCKLEBY

Then let's go win it for West Texas!

EXT. TEXAS STADIUM - POURING RAIN

TRENCH WARFARE:

the WHITE Permian army battles the REDS of Dallas Carter.

IT'S A VIOLENT MUDBATH

body against body, helmet against bone, as the players
SMASH THE LIVING SHIT OUT OF EACH OTHER.

There's CHUCK, steamrolled by a gargantuan GUARD.

WILLY, swatted like a dog flea by the 6 foot 6 TIGHT END.

BUDDY, crushed under the weight of a 250 pound TACKLE.

He pulls himself slowly over to the sidelines. KYLE joins him.

BUDDY

I don't feel like it today, Kyle.

KYLE

You what?!

And we are BACK INSIDE KYLE'S HELMET, seeing what he sees:

MUD - SPLAT!

as we motor forward, the red Dallas Carter uniforms already
brown-grey blips on a murky screen.

KYLE'S VOICE

Freight train locomotive cannon --

UMMMPH!

And we PLUMMET into the darkness. SQUISH!

BURT BENSON (VO)

Weather's gonna shut down the passing
game for both these teams... And that's
more bad news for Permian.

CRACK! Shoulders COLLIDE, helmets BUTT.

BURT BENSON (VO)

This Dallas Carter squad outweighs the
West Texans by 45 pounds per man...

THWACK!

VOICE
 AHHHHHRRRRRGH!

BURT BENSON (VO)
 There's a fumble! There's a fumble!
 Third one of the day, let's see...

Arms PUNCH OUT inside a compressed heap of human flesh.

Cleats KICK, CLAW. Teeth BITE.

BURT BENSON (VO)
 Looks like Permian held on. Yes.

VOICE
 Get you next time, Okie-fuck.

BEHIND THE SCRIMMAGE LINE

Buddy and Kyle wait for the others to huddle up.

BUDDY
 Used to love this game...

The crowd is CHANTING:

CROWD
 BUD-DY CRANK-SHAW, HE'S OUR MAN,
 IF HE CAN'T DO IT, NO ONE CAN!

BUDDY
 7th grade, suitin up for Pop Warners...
 I had a silver uniform, same as Roger
 Staubach.

He LOOKS UP at the thirty thousand SCREAMING fans.

THUMP!

WE'RE BACK INSIDE KYLE'S HELMET:

Our CLEATS slog through the mud. Pick up speed. Pieces of RED
 UNIFORM approach.

THWACK!

Grey skies. Raindrops. PING PING PING on our helmet.

BURT BENSON (VO)
 OH! Honeycutt laid out flat on his
 back.

AND WE RETURN TO REAL POV:

The Dallas Carter LINEBACKER who made the stop adds a vicious KICK to Kyle's stomach.

Kyle rolls over, sucking air, then VOMITS into his helmet.

WILLY has seen the whole thing. He PUSHES the linebacker who is literally twice Willy's weight.

WILLY

You fuck! You're gonna be sorry!
YOU'RE GONNA LOSE NOW, CUNTFACE!

A FIGHT BREAKS OUT. The REFS move in, as we

DROP DOWN IN THE MUD

where BUDDY tends to Kyle, gently wiping his face off with a hand towel. Kyle is in serious PAIN.

KYLE

Help me up. Help me up.

BUDDY

Spinner got hurt, you know they threw him away...

KYLE

Buddy...

BUDDY

...like a day old loaf a bread. (beat)
He could run like the wind, couldn't he?

KYLE

PICK ME UP!

ON THE PERMIAN SIDELINE

STUTZ stalks up and down, cupping his hands to the defense.

STUTZ

BEAR GUT! WEAK COVER 3!

HUCKLEBY passes by on the leash of his headset wires, worry stain growing LARGER by the minute.

Dalton runs up with his play marker board, pulling BUDDY with his other arm.

Kyle's on the bench, still doubled over, his white uniform unrecognizable.

DALTON

Now listen you guys! LISTEN TO ME!
They're coming back with the zone, Jesus
Buddy, WAKE UP! You got to read that on
the set. (He diagrams a play) Kyle,
there's a gap on this strong side every
time they blitz. We're gonna run it,
right up their assholes! You with me?!

OUT ON THE FIELD, CHUCK

blindsides the Dallas Carter quarterback. BOOM!

STUTZ

SWARM THAT BALL! SWARM IT!

INT. BENEATH THE GRANDSTANDS - CONCESSIONAIRES ✓

hawk food, ice cream or beer to the sounds of the P.A. system.

PA ANNOUNCER

Dallas Carter ball. Third down. 9:50
to play in the fourth quarter.

Betty reaches the counter, buys a pack of cigarettes. She
lights up, hand shaking, gazes around and sees

CALEB

leaning against a concrete piling, hugging his elbows, eyes
closed. He's listening to:

PA ANNOUNCER

Martinez on the stop. Gain of three.
It'll be 4th down, six.

She walks over. Stands next to him.

BETTY

Nervous?

Caleb blinks open his eyes. Looks at her, his body glued to
the piling.

BETTY

Well it's one way to watch a game.

She inhales, deep. LAUGHS a nervous laugh.

BETTY (CONT)

Oh you'd love it up there in the skybox,
Caleb. Wall to wall bimbos who don't
know a football from a pinto bean...

PA ANNOUNCER
13 yard runback. Permian takes over on
its own 27.

BETTY
...Only thing they do know is that Big
Al's buyin the drinks.

Caleb looks at her. She averts his eyes.

PA ANNOUNCER
Honeycutt on the handoff from Crankshaw.
Gain of five.

A wave of emotion breaks across Betty's face.

BETTY
Never thought about our kids back in
high school, did we?

CALEB
Too busy makin' em.

Betty laughs and then, bursts out CRYING: big hot tears that
float down her cheeks.

She drifts into Caleb's arms. He HOLDS her.

BETTY
(into his shoulder)
Twenty years... And it all went by like
a New York second.

Caleb wipes away her tears. She sniffles.

BETTY
You're a hard man, Caleb. You're gonna
kill that boy a yours.

CALEB
He's got a strong wad. He's gonna do
just fine.

EXT. THE SIDELINES - THE COACHES

pace, shouting out more instructions as the whistle BLOWS.

DALTON
GUT CHECK! GUT CHECK! LET'S HIT IT,
OFFENSE!

THEY WALK OUT ON THE FIELD

the rain thick like a waterfall. Buddy shakes his head slowly:

BUDDY

Put a bunch a hogs out here Okie Smoke,
and nobody'd know the difference, so
long as they won State.

KYLE

Goddammit Buddy, shut up!

THUMP!

INSIDE KYLE'S HELMET:

The ground is rolling, big sloppy patches of field, cleats,
hash marks and mud.

WHACK!

A grey gap, red uniforms falling.

ZIG ZAG

and the gap narrows, there's an orange pole, a chain, a

WOMP!

T.V. CAMERA, and a pile of BODIES on top of us, cutting out
almost all of the light.

BURT BENSON (OC)

Honeycutt for a BIG gainer, whoosh!
Just got out of bounds.

UP IN THE STANDS:

CALEB sits, eyes fierce, his body stiff as a board.

SISSY stands next to him, SCREAMING:

SISSY

MOJO! MOJO! MOJO! MOJO!

REVERSE ANGLE

as the Panthers stagger out of the huddle, sloshing through the
ankle-deep mud. To Kyle:

BUDDY

What am I gonna do, huh? This is all I
know how to do.

A SERIES OF INTERCUTS - PEOPLE WATCHING THEIR TV SCREENS
as Burt Benson continues the play-by-play.

CORNELIUS in his hospital bed:

BURT BENSON (VO)
Crankshaw with the fake, drops back...

JUDGE RUSK in his study:

BURT BENSON (VO)
Oh he's scrambling now, look at that --

THE USC RECRUITER in his coaches office:

BURT BENSON (VO)
-- pursuit, he gets it off downfield...

FRANK CHALMERS in his dingy house:

BURT BENSON (VO)
CAUGHT! YES, CAUGHT! ON THE DALLAS --

EARL MATTHEWS in the police station:

BURT BENSON (VO)
-- CARTER 3 YARD LINE. Time out!

JOE BOB in the 7-Eleven:

BURT BENSON (VO)
Time out, Permian. 10 seconds to go!

AND SPINNER

on the couch with Lamarr, rooting his heart out.

BURT BENSON (VO)
This is it. This the last play.
Permian must score a touchdown to win.

ON THE FIELD, Kyle shouts at Buddy as the rain BUCKETS down.

KYLE
WIN AND IT'S OURS BUDDY! IT'S YOURS!
IT'S MINE! AIN'T NOBODY CAN TAKE IT
AWAY FROM YOU! NOBODY!

AND WE ARE BACK INSIDE KYLE'S HELMET:

Buddy, barking out the count, steals a look back, then:

BUDDY
HUT HUT HUT --

WHACK! There's the hand-off.

SLOW MOTION

Raindrops, swathes of red uniforms, hands GROPING, GRASPING as we HUNCH down and step forward, cleats SQUISHING through mud.

ZIG ZAG - we TWIST sideways, push off our thighs,

SLAPPED by a red arm, SLIP,

the ground rushing towards us, a white uniform just below.

WE STEP, digging cleats into flesh,

LEAP SKYWARD, turning, catching a glimpse of clouds, and

LAND, SLOWLY, OVER THE WHITE LINE,

OUR FACE PLUMMETING INTO THE MUD --

Blackness. The ROAR rises.

EXT. THE END ZONE - KYLE

hugging the football as the umpire signals: TOUCHDOWN.

The crowd EXPLODES into a frenzy. Pandemonium.

KYLE

looks up at all of them, and SPIKES THE FOOTBALL,

as the fans pour onto the field in an unstoppable flow.

CALEB

runs down the stadium steps, three at a time, bowling over a security guard.

COACH HUCKLEBY

gets DOUSED by the water can, even in the pouring rain. Two linemen LIFT HIM UP onto their shoulders.

CLAIRE

pushes through to greet her husband. Closer. She's almost there. She reaches out a hand.

CLAIRE

DOYLE!

He TURNS, arms raised, his face SINGED with victory. Their eyes meet for a split second:

ON CLAIRE

shaken, seeing a stranger, not the man she loves.

THEN HE IS GONE

carried off by the herd, who touch his hands like the faithful anointing their king.

BUDDY

holds the STATE TROPHY in his arms, resisting the efforts of all who want to lift him skyward.

He watches: BIG AL AND BETTY

finally in the same square foot, rushing over to greet him. Betty SMOTHERS him with a kiss.

BETTY

You're a man now, Pumpkin. One helluva man.

Big Al SMILES, readies himself for a hug. Instead,

BUDDY PRESSES THE TROPHY INTO AL'S HANDS.

BUDDY

(blankly)

Here. This is yours.

And he disappears into the crowd where

KYLE

gallops on someone's shoulders, the FANS around him jumping, SCREAMING, tearing off pieces of his uniform.

HE SEES CALEB

marching straight towards him.

CALEB stares, not at Kyle but at the MAN upon whom he rides.

They face off, in a bizarre duel. Caleb closes and

HEADBUTTS THE FAN

knocking him clean over, SPILLING Kyle to the ground.

IN AN INSTANT

Caleb's head dips down, and resurfaces with

KYLE, HIGH ON HIS SHOULDERS,

wearing a smile that could have ended the Cold War.

CALEB RUNS THROUGH THE CROWD

picking up speed, his own smile breaking into a SHOUT, then a

SCREAM OF JOY

as he spins Kyle around and around.

AND WE ARE RISING

above the stadium,

Caleb's dancing figure a tiny dot among the thousands.

HIGHER STILL

on the horizon

where the SUN winks behind thick black clouds of rain.

FADE OUT

THE END

*This is
really
what an artist
is fully
concerned -*