

INVINCIBLE

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FADE IN:

ROLLING CREDITS OVER: A mixture of IMAGES...

The huge statue of William Penn, towering over Philadelphia's City Hall. The grandeur replaced a second later by:

An old, weathered ITALIAN STREET VENDOR hawking discounted pretzels from a stainless steel car.

Sparks flying as steelworkers spot-weld the rib of a giant destroyer at the Philadelphia Naval Shipyard. Rugged, hard labor.

Throngs of exhausted, dirty workers emerging from the huge Westinghouse factory.

The Philadelphia MOUNTED POLICE menacingly patrolling a park, wearing black leather jackets and storm-trooper boots.

TWU (Transport Workers Union) LOCAL 234 PICKETERS marching in front of a bus depot, a blazing steel barrel providing the only warmth. One sign reads: "City of Brotherly Hate."

New Years Day. Downtown streets mobbed with LOCALS, their hands cradling paper cups filled with steaming coffee, as they watch the Mummers Parade (think overweight, full-grown fez-wearing men hunched over in toy cars).

A jobless line stretching long inside a local branch of the Employment Division.

...and over the last couple of images, steadily growing in the background...

THE SOUND OF BOOING, BRONX CHEERS AND CATCALLS. Along with...

RADIO ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
...in a season full of low points,
this is as low as the Eagles have
been, a home loss that ranks among
the worst we've seen in years...

EXT. VETERANS STADIUM - FIELD - DAY

The PHILADELPHIA EAGLES break huddle and straggle to their own 35-yard-line. Banged up, completely beaten; the team can't wait for this game to be over. And it shows.

TITLE: VETERANS STADIUM DECEMBER 1975

The SCOREBOARD tells the story: EAGLES 0, BENGALS 31. :37 seconds remain in the game.

IN THE STANDS

FANS are bundled in hooded parkas, trying to stay warm. A gray roiling mist hangs over the stands as thousands of individual breaths condensate in the 15 degree air.

Faces in the crowd look miserable, less affected by the brutal weather than by their beloved Eagles' dismal performance.

Quarterback ROMAN GABRIEL barks a signal and takes the snap. He drops back, plants, and delivers a swing pass to the HALFBACK coming out of the backfield...

...and the ball hits the receiver in the back of the shoulder pads, a split second before he's leveled by a BENGAL PLAYER. The pass falls incomplete, drawing a symphony of discontent from the spectators. The ball mockingly spins on the turf.

The CAMERA TILTS UP through the stadium, past the disgusted FANS now yelling even louder; past the heckling diehards wearing hard-hats with white wings attached; past the PHILLY COPS escorting two IRATE FANS down the steps...and up to...

THE NOSEBLEEDS

...where we see season ticket holder VINCE PAPALE, 30..Cut and handsome, Vince stands out against the sea of fans who haven't seen the inside of a gym in years.

But when it comes to fans of the Eagles, this is a man who practically bleeds green. Even in this moment, he yells...

VINCE

Come on Eagles! Show some pride
now!

Standing with him are BILLY (late 20's, wiry and Vince's closest friend), JIMMY (30, an out-of-work former jock, pessimistic to the core), and LOUIE (late 20's, tough as nails, with a bit of an angry streak).

BILLY

Pride? What are you talkin' about
man? We lost pride two months ago.

VINCE

They're still our boys Billy.

BILLY

Not this year pally. Not in this
town.

JIMMY
BOOOO!!! BOOOO!!!! WAY TO PACK IT
IN EAGLES! YOU'RE QUITTERS!
(takes a breath)
Thirty one to freakin' nuthin'. To
a team that should be worse than
us.

P-A ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
A reminder Eagles fans to place
your orders now for next year's
season tickets.

A cascade of boos drowns out the last word...

BILLY, JIMMY AND LOUIE
You're crazy! Booooo!

...a COUPLE OF FANS descend the stairs next to Louie's aisle
seat, ready to leave. He stops them...

LOUIE
Hey! Where are you goin'? Game's
not over yet, get back up there.

...and shoves them back up the stairs. The motto holds true:
you can slam the Eagles, but you can't ditch 'em. Vince, who
wants this team to win so badly, stares toward the field...

VINCE
(to Billy)
Maybe next year, yeah?

BILLY
Yeah, maybe...and maybe Louie
here'll cure cancer.

ON THE GAME CLOCK - the final seconds tick down. The EAGLES
PLAYERS - a beaten bunch, heads hung low - walk toward the
locker room. The fans shower them with boos and insults.

EAGLES HEAD COACH MIKE MCCORMACK jogs off the field.

BILLY (cont'd)
Hey Coach! Thanks for the four
wins, ya bum!

JIMMY
Know what NFL stands for McCormack?
Not for long pal! Not for long. See
ya' in the unemployment line!

And as the yelling continues...Vince's gaze holds on the field, on the stands, on another season slipping away.

FADE TO BLACK.

The sound transitions. The booing of thousands fades into the sound of maybe twenty men clapping, yelling and shouting...

EXT. PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Tucked deep in South Philly (next to "The Royal;" a watering hole) lies a playing field: some of it grass, some of it asphalt, *all of it* a reflection of pure blue collar.

TITLE: SIX MONTHS LATER

Surrounding its perimeter: cars parked with their high beams on to douse the field with light.

Two ragtag TEAMS are playing a hard-nosed version of touch football; a game that gives new meaning to the word "touch." In contrast to the chill and cold of December, the players are now covered with sweat and dirt.

Billy takes the snap and hands off to Louie on an end run...

...but just as Louie turns the corner he gets upended by a clothesline to the mouth. He gets up, spitting blood.

OPPOSING PLAYER

Get used to it pal. Next time
you'll be spittin' teeth.

Louie lights out after him. Shouts, recriminations...and a shoving match flares. The two teams get separated (by TWO OVERWEIGHT and UNDERPAID REFEREES), and return to their respective huddles.

LOUIE

I'm gonna kill that guy.

BILLY

Maybe you should worry 'bout
gettin' by him first.

LOUIE

Maybe you should watch your mouth.

A beat-up CHEVY NOVA pulls to a stop, its carburetor coughing up a lung. Jimmy glances over...

JIMMY

Look who decided to show.

Vince gets out of his car; slapping his cleats on and running toward the huddle. He wears an old, faded "PROPERTY OF THE PHILADELPHIA EAGLES" shirt. An OPPOSING PLAYER sees him...

OPPOSING PLAYER #2

No way, not him. You don't show on time, you don't play.

MAX, a burly lineman and owner of Max's Bar, shouts back...

MAX

What? You worried he's gonna run all over your sorry ass again?
(off the player's glare)
Let's play some football.

Vince arrives in the huddle.

MAX (cont'd)

'Bout time you got here.

VINCE

Sorry guys.

BILLY

Alright, let's go with the one where Vince here just kind of runs by everyone. On two.
(claps his hands out of the huddle)
What the hell took you so long?

VINCE

Car was in a bad mood.

Vince runs to the wide-out position, sets up...and we can see just in his expression that he loves being out here, that he is ready to play.

A SERIES OF QUICK CUTS:

Over the course of the sequence, we see these (predominantly) past-their-prime warriors fight tooth and nail for local bragging rights.

-- Vince pulls in a high-thrown ball over the middle, takes a hard lick, and fights for more yardage.

-- Jimmy downs an opposing receiver with an elbow to the chest. The REF throws a flag...which Jimmy picks up and tosses aside with disgust.

-- Vince scampers for a huge gain on a double-reserve, then lowers his shoulder and plows over a much larger defender before finally being dragged down by three players.

-- An opposing player (the one who clothes-lined Louie) runs into the end-zone. As he celebrates, Louie gives him a shove.

-- Billy drops back, gets hit and fumbles. Bodies go flying as these men claw, fight and scramble their way towards control of the football.

-- Vince's team punts. Vince shakes off a blocker and forms a flying wedge with Billy, laying a wicked high-low hit on the punt returner; who gets up like it was nothing.

TIME CUT TO:

BACK IN THE HUDDLE

BILLY

Do your stuff Vince. One more time.

THE OTHER TEAM'S HUDDLE

OPPOSING PLAYER #2

This is ball game boys. You know where they're goin' with it.

Both teams "clap" out of their huddles. Vince lines up wide left. He's covered on the line by two players...and a third plays him ten yards deeper. One of the players on the line growls...

PLAYER ON THE LINE

Dead meat Papale.

Hike! Vince explodes off the line; one defender going high with his block, the second defender trying to take him out low. But Vince shakes it off and heads into the clear...

...and he streaks toward the end-zone with the third defender still on him. The ball is under-thrown, but Vince still has a bead on it. He leaps, then gets popped from the double-team defender. The third-defender easily makes the pick.

Vince lands hard...but instead of staying on the ground, he's up in an instant. The defender is tearing down the sideline, his gaze hard on the promised land in front of him...

...but coming up out of nowhere is Vince, who makes up the lost ground in an instant. He pulls him down from behind, both players tumbling out of bounds.

Vince's teammates swarm him, celebrating that type of play more than they ever would have celebrated a touchdown.

EXT. ROW HOUSE - SOUTH PHILLY - NIGHT

ESTABLISHING SHOT of a run-down neighborhood. Old row-houses and low-rise tenements.

INT. VINCE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Vince opens the door and walks in, a SMALL BAG OF GROCERIES under his arm. He calls out...

VINCE

Hey, it's me.

He sets it down, just as his wife SHARON, a fine-featured brunette walks in from the bedroom. Dirt and sweat (and perhaps even a touch of blood) still cover him.

She shakes her head. Pissed, she unloads the groceries without uttering a word.

VINCE (cont'd)

C'mon, it was only for a few plays.

SHARON

That's great Vince. I feel so much better.

(beat)

You can't be out playing these stupid games of yours when we're out of work like this.

VINCE

We're not out of work.

SHARON

Please.

Their voices rise.

SHARON (cont'd)

The school's given you, what? Two days a week substitute teaching? You tend bar for Max at night? What do you call that?

VINCE

What do you want me to do? You think I don't want to go back teaching full time? It's rough on everyone right now...

A neighbor thumps on the wall. Sharon, knowing the neighbor will hear her, yells out...

SHARON

We'll be done in a minute Mrs. Spagnetti!

(beat)

You don't get it Vince. The rent's late, the phone's been shut off for two weeks. You don't see the McKays' borrowing the neighbor's phone, do you?

VINCE

Things'll turn around. I promise.

SHARON

Yeah? When? When is it gonna turn around?

(pause)

I mean it was okay you wanting to be a teacher when we first got married. I just guess at some point I figured you'd want to get a real job.

He's angry, but he bites his tongue. She tosses the last item in the cupboard and brushes past him...

SHARON (cont'd)

I want more out of life Vince. I deserve more.

INT. VINCE'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Vince and Sharon are in bed. She's fast asleep, but he's wide awake...staring at the ceiling. His eyes reveal all the fears she expressed: doubt about the present, fear about the future.

INT. INTERBORO PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Vince walks into the main office to pick up some papers. He's now sporting a couple of scuff and scratch marks, courtesy of the previous night's football game.

And as he greets a couple of the assistants, the PRINCIPAL steps into the open doorway of his office...

PRINCIPAL
Mister Papale?

VINCE
Hey Jack.

PRINCIPAL
Can I see you for a minute?

VINCE
Yeah, sure.

Vince walks into...

THE PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE

PRINCIPAL
Have a seat.

Vince does, a part of him already fearing the worst. The principal sits against the front of his desk.

PRINCIPAL (cont'd)
Vince, you know you've always been one of my favorite teachers here, you're good with the kids...you know what you're doing.

(pause)
But the economy's just not turning around like we hoped it would. The district's forcing us to make more cutbacks.

VINCE
I thought we'd already done all that.

PRINCIPAL
(waits a beat before...)
I have to let two more teachers go. I'd keep you as a substitute if I could, but...I have to move Julie and Sam to part-time, and they've got more seniority than you do. I might have a day or two for you every couple of weeks, but that's about it.

The news sucks the wind right out of Vince.

PRINCIPAL (cont'd)

...I'm sorry. It's a helluva deal,
I know.

INT. INTERBORO PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Vince talks on an old, graffiti-covered PAY PHONE. Even though we can't hear Sharon...we can feel her.

VINCE

He said it's only for a few weeks,
things should get better after
that.

He listens.

VINCE (cont'd)

Look, why don't we just...why don't
we talk later, okay? I've still got
a couple days left here and I gotta
work at Max's tonight.

(pause)

We'll get through this hon, oka...

But it's apparent from his last couple of words that she's
hung up on him. He hangs up as well. Fading up in the
background as he stares at the phone...

MR. TOSE (V.O.)

As most of you know, this has been
a rough stretch for the Eagles'
organization...

INT. VETERANS STADIUM - PRESS ROOM - DAY

The owner of the EAGLES, LEONARD TOSE (61, tan, sporting an
Italian double-breasted suit) stands before an EAGLES
PODIUM...

MR. TOSE

...the last few seasons have not
lived up to my expectations, or the
expectations of the many fans of
this team.

-(beat)

That changes starting today. The
man who will bring us back recently
guided UCLA to a Rose Bowl win over
Ohio State, and is one of the most
respected young coaches in the game
today.

(MORE)

MR. TOSE (cont'd)

We are very fortunate to have him as the new head football coach of the Philadelphia Eagles. Please welcome Mister Dick Vermeil.

Tose makes way for DICK VERMEIL; 36, a man who is completely commanding for his age. Square-jawed, perfect hair, perfect smile, bullet-proof confidence. He is the quintessential golden boy. Cameras flash.

COACH VERMEIL

Thank you Mister Tose.

His image is in stark contrast to the media that cover the Eagles' beat: ham-fisted, guts over their belts, loosened ties...the very essence of blue-collar Philly.

One of the reporters sits toward the back: a telegenic TV sportscaster by the name of WAYNE CHAMBERS; 35, mustache, sideburns, wide lapels.

REPORTER #1

(whispers to Chambers)

Think he brought his surfboard?

WAYNE CHAMBERS

Which one? The blue one or the yellow one?

The comment gets a couple of chuckles from nearby reporters.

COACH VERMEIL

I want to start by saying what a tremendous honor it is to coach this particular football team. And to coach in this city.

(quick beat)

The Philadelphia Eagles have had a long and very proud tradition of winning and excellence, a tradition that's been lost in recent years. It's a tradition I'm committed to restoring.

WAYNE CHAMBERS

He should be committed for taking this job.

REPORTER #1

Golden boy had it okay back in Cali.

COACH VERMEIL

I promise the loyal fans of this team two things. That you will never see a team play harder than us...and that we will have a team you'll be proud to support.

(beat)

Now, before I take any questions, I have an announcement to make...

EXT. MAX'S BAR - NIGHT

ESTABLISHING SHOT of the blinking sign that announces the South Philadelphia dive to the world, in all its tarnished glory.

INT. MAX'S BAR - NIGHT

Vince is behind the bar, working. His pals are here (some playing pool), along with a number of other blue collar REGULARS. Several of the patrons, like the bar itself, have seen better days.

MICK, 60ish, is waiting for the beer that Vince is now pouring.

MICK

The seven ingredients of a great coney island...

VINCE

Dog, bun, chili...

MICK

I said great. Not good.

VINCE

...onion, cheese...

(hesitates just a bit)

...mustard.

JIMMY

That's only six, numbnuts.

LOUIE

(from the pool table)

Extra cheese, that's two right there.

Vince serves Mick the beer.

VINCE

I'll keep thinkin' about it Mick.
You want that on your tab?

Max walks in, carrying a box full of RATTLING LIQUOR BOTTLES.

JIMMY

Hey, why the hell's Mick get to run
a tab and I don't?

MAX

Because he's got a job, that's why.

JIMMY

That's great Maxie. You'd think a
good dago establishment like this
might cut a guy a break.

MAX

(flares a bit)
You shut your mouth Jimmy.

JIMMY

(as if "what'd I say?")
What?

Max starts shelving the bottles. Vince moves next to him and
asks...

VINCE

Max, any chance I can pick up a few
more hours?

MAX

Sure. Why?

Vince's look says he doesn't want to talk about it.

MAX (cont'd)

I'm givin' my cousin from New York
a few hours, startin' Friday. You
can have the rest if you want.

VINCE

Thanks Max.

Billy calls out from the pool table.

BILLY

Hey, turn the tube up.

Vince does, just in time to catch Wayne Chambers' sports
report.

WAYNE CHAMBERS (ON TV)
...owner Leonard Tose announced the
hiring of UCLA's Dick Vermeil as
the Eagles' new head coach...

LOUIE
A college coach? What the hell...

WAYNE CHAMBERS
...and the new man on the Eagles'
sideline wasted no time before
making this stunning
announcement...

COACH VERMEIL (ON TV)
We'll be holding an open try-out at
Veterans Stadium, Saturday morning,
nine o'clock. Open to all comers.

JIMMY
Open try-out? He's crazy.

COACH VERMEIL (ON TV)
I don't want a team that just plays
in Philadelphia. I want a team that
is Philadelphia.

WAYNE CHAMBERS
There you have it Eagles fans. So
strap on your helmets, throw on
those shoulder pads. Here's your
chance to play in the NFL. Wayne
Chambers, Eyewitness News.

Stunned silence in the bar.

BILLY
Maybe four wins wasn't so bad.

LOUIE
How 'bout it Vince? You're faster
than half those guys anyway. Give
it a shot, what the hell.

BILLY
Vince Papale...at the forty, the
thirty, the twenty...

They all laugh, Louie and Max joining in: "...at the twenty,
at the ten." Even Vince laughs as he pours another pitcher.

EXT. SOUTH PHILLY STREET - NIGHT

Vince walks home after last call; tired from a long and hard day. He heads up the walkway to his apartment, unlocks the door...

INT. VINCE'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

...and quickly finds out his hard day just got worse. Almost all of the furniture is gone. The biggest thing left is the LA-ZEE-BOY CHAIR in the living room.

VINCE

Sharon?

Vince calls her name again. But no Sharon. He glances at the PHONE on the counter...and sees a NOTE.

"YOU'LL NEVER GO ANYWHERE, YOU'LL NEVER MAKE ANY MONEY AND YOU'LL NEVER MAKE A NAME FOR YOURSELF."

Behind the note: an ENVELOPE with the return address for "MARTELLI AND GRAY, ATTORNEYS AT LAW, LLC."

His thoughts reel, uncomprehending; the absolute worst of days now taking full root. Vince grabs the phone, as if there's a phone call he can make...

...but instead, he viciously yanks it out of the socket and hurls it against the wall. And over the next few seconds, Vince loses it, pounding and throwing the few remaining things in the apartment.

EXT. SOUTH PHILLY STREET - NIGHT

We hear the sound of fury being unleashed. One or two of the neighbors' lights come on...

NEIGHBOR (O.S.)

Hey shut up in there!

...but the sound continues on. Until finally...

INT. VINCE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Vince slumps against a barren wall. He looks exhausted and lost, as if the emotion has run completely out of him. The tears don't look to be too far away...but they don't come.

He's still a tough Philly kid. Always will be.

INT. VERMEIL HOUSE - LATE NIGHT

Vermeil walks into a much different home: nice, but still very modest...PACKING BOXES all over the place. His wife CAROL is slowly getting things in order.

COACH VERMEIL

Hey.

CAROL

Hey. Sixteen hour first day. You're not going soft on me, are you?

It's completely good-natured. He kisses her...then helps open a box or two. Among the boxes labeled KITCHEN and BEDROOM, are more than a few labeled OFFENSIVE LINE, SPECIAL TEAMS, SECONDARY.

COACH VERMEIL

So what'd you think?

CAROL

You looked good. You looked strong, decisive, like you weren't gonna take any crap from anyone. You looked like you.

COACH VERMEIL

It's not gonna be easy. This town's gotten too used to losing.

CAROL

That's why you're here.

COACH VERMEIL

Kids okay?

CAROL

They're fine. Asleep since nine.

She can tell he's a little concerned about the kids and the move.

CAROL (cont'd)

They're kids Dick. They always make these moves better than we think they will.

A break. Until she has to ask...

CAROL (cont'd)

So...about this try-out. You don't really think you're gonna find someone, do you?

COACH VERMEIL

Just trying to get people excited again. That's all.

EXT. VINCE'S APARTMENT - DAY

Vince hauls out some of the wreckage from his breakdown the night before, setting it curbside beside the trash cans.

His neighbor, MRS. SPEGNETTI, 72, walks up. Still in her bathrobe.

VINCE

Sorry Mrs. Spengnetti, about last night.

She cuts right to the chase...

MRS. SPEGNETTI

I hear what she says to you Vincenzo. I tell you...she's no good for you.

VINCE

Mrs. Spengnetti...

MRS. SPEGNETTI

You come to dinner this week. Alright? No argue.

VINCE

Thanks Mrs. Spengnetti.

EXT. MAX'S BAR - NIGHT

Vince heads down the sidewalk, the noise from Max's bar already trickling out. Billy's catching some fresh air outside.

BILLY

Hey. Vince. Jesus man, Max just told me.

VINCE

It's nuthin', okay? Forget about it.

Vince heads in. Billy waits a beat before following...

BILLY

Right.

INT. MAX'S BAR - NIGHT

The place is busy. Behind the bar is Max and his cousin...

JANET

...a knock-out blonde, late 20's. Jimmy, Louie, Mick; they're all there. Janet's serving a DRINK to Louie. Jimmy, silent, looks like he's in surly mood...and looks like he's had a half-dozen too many.

JANET

Gin and tonic, light on the tonic.

She cracks a beer for Mick, at the same time answering the question he asked her a moment earlier...

JANET (cont'd)

Okay. Bun, chili, cheese...dog,
onion, mustard...that's six...

(serves him)

...tabasco.

Janet gives him a wink. Mick tells Max...

MICK

She can work here.

...just as Vince moves behind the bar.

VINCE

Sorry I'm late Max.

MAX

No problem. Anything you need,
okay?

He says the words in a straight-forward manner, but the quick look he gives carries a hint of sympathy. There's a short, awkward moment where a few of the regulars glance Vince's way...knowing. Very short.

MAX (cont'd)

Vince Papale, meet my cousin Janet
Cantwell.

They greet each other. Max announces to the bar...

MAX (cont'd)

And just so everyone knows, we have a minor character flaw that we're all gonna have to deal with here...

BILLY

I don't see many flaws.

MAX

Watch it Billy.

(to the bar again)

My cousin, who is from New York, who was born in New York...is a New York Giants fan. A passionate New York Giants fan.

A chorus of disbelief, to which she responds, as she pours...

JANET

Go Giants!

LOUIE

Jesus Mary, what the hell you doin' to us here Maxie?

MAX

I know, I know.

But Janet's got sass to match anyone in the bar. She pours a beer, announcing to everyone as well...

JANET

61 nothing. Giants over Eagles. Two years ago...just in case anyone's forgotten.

(trying to speak over the howls of derision...)

And...and...and...we actually get most of our players through this thing called the NFL draft.

More protests. She grins, loving it.

BILLY

See Vince? One more reason for you to try out this weekend.

VINCE

Nobody's tryin' out Billy.

BILLY

Why the hell not? Come on! You clean up at every one of our games.

MAX

'Cause of my blockin', that's why.

VINCE

Little difference between Mean Joe Greene and Johnny from the "Royal."

LOUIE

Screw Mean Joe, the Eagles don't even play Pittsburgh next year!

Laughter all around. The group (all except for Jimmy) start giving it to Vince ("C'mon!"). Until, finally, Jimmy says matter-of-factly...

JIMMY

Come on sport, why not? Your old lady's not gonna stop you.

The room falls silent.

MAX

Get the hell out of here Jimmy. Right now!

VINCE

What the hell did you say?

JIMMY

You got a problem?

Things are about to flare. But Max steps in.

MAX

I said get out of here!

An uncomfortable silence. Jimmy knocks his drink toward the two of them, spilling it across the bar. He walks out.

MAX (cont'd)

Forget it. He's drunk...he just needs to get some work.

EXT. MAX'S BAR - NIGHT

Billy and Vince are out in the back alley. Vince sits on an empty keg; picking at a bowl of lousy food while Billy stands against the brick wall.

BILLY

It's a helluva mess. You and your thing.

(MORE)

BILLY (cont'd)

Jimmy losin' it 'cause he can't pay a bill.

(beat)

Hell, Louie ain't been right since brother Bobby came back dead from the war.

(another pause)

Look...Jimmy's just pissed 'cause I was talkin' about you and not him. Interboro High's star running back, '62 and '63.

VINCE

How 'bout you? You been hanging in there okay?

BILLY

Long as I got my job at the factory I'm fine.

A break.

BILLY (cont'd)

You know I'm serious about this try-out, don't you?

(beat)

'Course I've had like eight beers tonight.

VINCE

Billy. I played high school ball and that's it. Hell, we didn't even have a football team at Saint Joe's.

Billy waits a moment before continuing...

BILLY

There's nobody I've ever seen who's a bigger Eagle fan than you are Vince. Nobody.

(pause)

We're talking Veterans Stadium here. Where Eagles freaking dare. That's sacred ground pal. Even if you are down there for only one hour man...you are down there.

From inside the bar, the first strains of Sinatra's "Mack the Knife" can be heard.

BILLY (cont'd)
 (tosses the cig)
 Last call pally. Saddest music I
 know.

He pushes himself away from the wall...

BILLY (cont'd)
 Green and white. One day my friend.

...before going back inside. Leaving Vince to ponder as "Mack the Knife" thumps away in the background.

EXT. BLUE-COLLAR NEIGHBORHOOD - SMALL HOUSE - DAY

Vince knocks on the front door. His father, FRANK (nicknamed "KINGIE") - 55, a lifer at the Philadelphia Westinghouse plant - opens the door...

VINCE
 Hey Dad.

INT. KITCHEN - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Vince's father brings TWO CUPS OF COFFEE to the table. It's the same kitchen that a million Americans of moderate means had during the mid-70's.

FRANK "KINGIE" PAPALE
 Well...you deserve better, I'll
 tell you that much. All those
 years, your mother...that was
 nobody's fault. But this...

He shakes his head.

VINCE
 I guess I should've seen it comin'.

FRANK "KINGIE" PAPALE
 Like hell you should've. What'd she
 think? You were the only one out
 there trying to make ends meet?
 (off his look)
 So, about your job...I want to help
 you out here, till things pick
 up...

VINCE
 ...no, Dad...I can't...

FRANK "KINGIE" PAPALE

Don't talk back to me. Not on this, alright? I've worked thirty five years at the factory and there's been times I've needed help too.

(beat)

This is family. We've had some rough times, you and me, but we stick on this one. Okay?

VINCE

(waits a beat...)

Thanks.

And now that the hard part's over, Vince's father shifts to the one subject that has always been common ground for the both of them.

FRANK "KINGIE" PAPALE

So what do you make of this new Eagles' coach?

VINCE

He's never lost. Anywhere. He knows the game...beat Woody Hayes in the Rose Bowl. That's sayin' somethin'.

FRANK "KINGIE" PAPALE

I heard from Maxie the boys were ridin' you pretty good to go to this try-out.

VINCE

Yeah.

(beat)

So whatta you think?

Vince's father smiles, knowing his son's thinking about it.

FRANK "KINGIE" PAPALE

Why not?

(but then adds...)

Just don't go off thinkin' you're gonna end up an Eagle. No sense gettin' your heart broken any worse than it is right now.

EXT. VETERANS STADIUM - DAWN

ESTABLISHING SHOT of the Vet, drenched in the early light of day.

CUT TO:

EXT. VETERANS STADIUM - DAY

From a distance we see a gargantuan line: hundreds of Eagle hopefuls waiting to get on the field.

The line is a mixture of those pursuing the dream, and those just here for a good time. Former players. Fans. Weekend warriors. The scene resembles a Sunday morning tailgate party.

Multiple TV CAMERA CREWS are already getting interviews, including Wayne Chambers...

...who is about ready to interview an Eagle fan; wearing a flowing green cape, swim goggles, and green Converse high tops. He looks smack dab out of Mardi Gras.

WAYNE CHAMBERS

Hello Philly fans, I'm here today with literally hundreds of Eagle hopefuls, waiting for their shot at Coach Dick Vermeil's much publicized open tryout...

A MAN in a rainbow wig creeps into background frame, holding a JOHN 3:16 sign. Chambers asks the cape-clad Eagle fan...

WAYNE CHAMBERS (cont'd)

What's your name sir?

CAPE-CLAD EAGLE FAN

Alice Cooper.

Chambers goes along with it...

WAYNE CHAMBERS

And why are you here today Mister Cooper?

CAPE-CLAD EAGLE FAN

'CUZ I'M GONNA BE AN EAGLE BABY!!
YEAH!

Hoots and hollers from the fans surrounding him. A few of them, including the cape-clad fan, holding a can of beer.

WAYNE CHAMBERS

What makes you think you have a chance out here today?

CAPE-CLAD EAGLE FAN

Well, I played two years of high school football. Varsity. I'm 28. And I'm in the best shape of my life Wayne.

He's clearly not in the best shape of his life.

WAYNE CHAMBERS

Anything else you want to say?

CAPE-CLAD EAGLE FAN

Absolutely.

(bellowing)

I AM THE WALRUS!!

(the surrounding fans join in with...)

KOO-KOO-KA-CHOO!!!

Chambers turns to the camera...

WAYNE CHAMBERS

What more can I say? It'll be an interesting day here at the Vet. Wayne Chambers, Eyewitness News.

INT. VETERANS STADIUM - FIELD - DAY

And suddenly, it's a flurry of motion. Drills. Work-outs. An overpowering scene of hopes and failures.

An EAGLE HOPEFUL sprints hard, hoping for a solid time in the 40. An ASSISTANT COACH clicks the stopwatch...

ASSISTANT COACH

Five-seven. Let's go, next!

A sleek-looking athlete in a color-coordinated ensemble runs an agility drill and gets through it just fine. The next athlete (not quite as conditioned) runs through...

...and gets his feet tangled in the low-lying rope matrix. Thump. Face plant.

INT. VETERANS STADIUM - FIELD - DAY

Another athlete runs the forty. Stopwatch...click.

ASSISTANT COACH

Five-five. Let's find another gear gentlemen.

A COACH on the blocking sled blows his whistle. An enormous (out of shape) lineman throws his weight into it, barely making it move.

INT. VETERANS STADIUM - FIELD - DAY

And as the next athlete drops his hand to the turf of the stadium, ready to run...

...the rest of the line comes into view, dozens deep. And standing in the line, with everyone else...

VINCE

...waiting patiently for his turn. He looks calm, but can't help stealing a glance at his surroundings. Even giving a quick look toward his nosebleed seats...so far away.

INT. VETERANS STADIUM - FIELD - DAY

Watching it all with a pensive expression is Coach Vermeil. Leonard Tose walks up next to him...

MR. TOSE

This is brilliant Dick. We haven't had this many cameras here in ten years...

...with Tose are THREE EAGLE VETERANS who have turned out for the day's proceedings: defensive back WILLIE BANKS, 25, black, ripped and very street; his best friend and gazelle-like receiver RONNIE SAMPSON, 23; and ED GERMAN, 27, white, a massive Nebraska corn-fed linebacker.

MR. TOSE (cont'd)

...I've got a couple calls to make, but I wanted you to meet three of your best players for next year. Willie Banks, Ronnie Sampson, Ed German. Coach Dick Vermeil.

But Vermeil's busy jotting down some notes on a clipboard. He doesn't even shake hands with the players, only glancing up to catch a glimpse of the action on the field.

COACH VERMEIL

Gentlemen.

Tose leaves them so they can talk. For a moment, the three veterans stand there and watch as well. Finally...

WILLIE BANKS

How's it look Coach, you seein' anything yet?

COACH VERMEIL

You're not worried...are you Willie?

WILLIE BANKS

Should I be?

COACH VERMEIL

We had the worst defense in the league last year. The offense wasn't much better. I'd say everyone needs to worry.
(excuses himself with...)
See you boys at camp.

If there was ever any doubt that a new sheriff was in town, that doubt was just wiped out.

EXT. VETERANS STADIUM - FIELD - DAY

An unusually slow player crosses in front of the stopwatch...

ASSISTANT COACH

Six...something.

Vince, still a few players away from running, waits.

EXT. VETERANS STADIUM - FIELD - DAY

A group of FOUR PROSPECTIVE PLAYERS crash into the blocking sled. Some progress.

EXT. VETERANS STADIUM - FIELD - DAY

A set of RECEIVERS run a long post pattern; one dropping the pass, the next one snagging it.

EXT. VETERANS STADIUM - FIELD - DAY

Vermeil moves next to the assistant coach with the stopwatch, who has also been joined by Vermeil's closest assistant: A-C CRANEY, 45, who was with Vermeil at UCLA.

COACH VERMEIL

How we doing A-C?

A.C. CRANEY

I've seen glaciers move faster.

A player buzzes in front of them.

ASSISTANT COACH

Five-eight. Way too slow.

(calls out)

Next!

EXT. VETERANS STADIUM - FIELD - DAY

Next...is Vince. He steps forward and drops his hand to the turf in a set position. And for the very shortest of moments...

...he moves his fingers on the sacred ground of the field. Waiting.

The assistant coach next to him says...

ASSISTANT COACH #2

Set, go!

And Vince takes off like an absolute rocket, exhibiting a perfect and effortless form unrivaled by anyone else.

He flashes by the stopwatch. Click. The assistant looks at it, raises an eyebrow, and shows it to both Craney and Vermeil. Vermeil's expression doesn't change...he merely says...

COACH VERMEIL

Throw him a few.

EXT. VETERANS STADIUM - FIELD - DAY

Now it's Vince's turn to snag a few of the passes thrown on the deep post pattern. One after another is thrown to him; not a single football coming close to hitting the turf.

Catch. Catch. Catch. His patterns flawless and fast. Drills continue all around him...but Vermeil's eyes, as he paces along, are trained more and more on Vince.

EXT. VETERANS STADIUM - FIELD - DAY

Finally, Craney blows his whistle and calls out to everyone...

A.C. CRANEY
Alright, that's it gentlemen! We'll
let you know!

Heads turn. And at least ONE of the WEEKEND WARRIORS yells back...

WEEKEND WARRIOR
That's it? What do you mean that's
it?

Now another TRY-OUT HOPEFUL gets in on it...walking toward Craney.

TRY-OUT HOPEFUL
So we don't even get to find out?

Another HOPEFUL tries to stop him, reaching for his arm....

HOPEFUL
C'mon man, settle down...

TRY-OUT HOPEFUL
...don't tell me to settle down
man.
(yells to Craney)
You're not gonna take anyone, are
you!? This whole thing was a
circus!

Things quickly get to the brink of falling out of control. A few more players join in...with an equal number holding them back. Yelling, shouting, shoving.

While at the same time...

VINCE

...calmly walks away from everything, throwing his bag over his shoulder. Having had his day at the Vet.

EXT. VETERANS STADIUM - FIELD - DAY

And as the shoving and shouting grows, and the TV cameras start rolling, and as Tose mutters to himself...

MR. TOSE

What the...

...Vermeil, through the blur of activity, watches Vince depart.

EXT. PARKING LOT - DAY

Vince approaches his car...opens the door, gets in, and tosses the duffel onto the passenger seat.

He waits a second, shaking his head at everything that happened, then turns the key. The car refuses to turn over...sounding more like a dying horse. Great.

Vince turns the keys again. RrrrRrrrRrrr, click.

VINCE

Come on...

One more time. And one more time...nothing. Pissed, he slams his fist on the steering wheel and springs out of the car; throwing open the hood and staring at the engine.

And it's in that moment that he loses it just a bit, kicking the front grill once...twice...three times; a broken car the very last thing he needs. He slams down the hood...

...and VERMEIL is standing there.

COACH VERMEIL

Don't have much need for a kicker.
Not this year at least.

VINCE

Coach Vermeil.

COACH VERMEIL

But a four-five forty...that's
another story.

(beat)

Got time for a cup of coffee?

VINCE

Sure. Absolutely.

Vermeil starts walking and Vince catches up to him.

COACH VERMEIL
Papale, right?

VINCE
Yeah. Vince.

COACH VERMEIL
Dick Vermeil.

They shake hands. And after a moment in which the two men simply walk along in silence...

COACH VERMEIL (cont'd)
Mind me asking how old you are?

VINCE
How old are you coach?

A hint of a smile.

EXT. MAX'S BAR - NIGHT

ESTABLISHING SHOT of Max's. It's early evening, "Mack the Knife" still hours away.

INT. MAX'S BAR - NIGHT

Right now, it's only Max behind the bar. Jimmy's playing pool with Louie and one of the old WESTINGHOUSE REGULARS. Billy sits bar-side. Mick is silently working a crossword puzzle over on his side of the place.

The TV is on, tuned to the five o'clock news.

TV ANCHOR (ON SCREEN)
...with the bicentennial celebration now in full swing, local health officials are trying to find the cause of a mysterious illness affecting close to 200 visitors to the city. The respiratory ailment appears isolated to participants of this week's American Legion convention here in Philadelphia. Already six deaths have been reported...

Billy can't help but note...

BILLY
 Make it through World War Two and
 you get killed at some convention.
 Figure that one, yeah Maxie?

Vince walks in, carrying the BOX OF BOTTLES this time. The
 bar greets him.

BILLY (cont'd (cont'd)
 There's our boy! Three hours we
 been waitin' here.

VINCE
 Sorry. Long day.

He starts shelving the bottles. Max comes over...

MAX
 What? Are you kiddin'?

VINCE
 What?

MAX
 When you try out for the Eagles, I
 think you got a story to tell, my
 friend.

The regulars have gradually moved over to the bar; Jimmy not
 wanting to interrupt his current run on the table. Vince
 turns to see everyone looking at him...

VINCE
 It was good, y'know. Ran for 'em a
 little bit, caught some passes...

...just as Wayne Chambers sports report comes on. All eyes
 shift to the set.

WAYNE CHAMBERS (ON SCREEN)
 ...it wasn't exactly a banner day
 for the Eagles' organization.
 Former coach Mike McCormack may not
 have run the tightest ship in the
 NFL, but at least it wasn't a ship
 of fools.

The report cuts to the cape-clad Eagle fan:

CAPE-CLAD EAGLE FAN
 ...and I'm in the best shape of my
 life Wayne.

WAYNE CHAMBERS
Anything else you have to say?

CAPE-CLAD EAGLE FAN
Absolutely.
(bellowing)
I AM THE WALRUS!!
(the surrounding fans join
in with...)
KOO-KOO-KA-CHOO!!!

The bar cracks up, not noticing that Vince is filling up pitcher after pitcher. Chambers comes back on screen...

WAYNE CHAMBERS (ON SCREEN)
That player, no surprise, did not get an invitation to fall camp. But...believe it or not, new head coach Dick Vermeil has decided to invite one person, and one person only, to join the big team at training camp. He is Philadelphia native...
(looks at his notes,
butchers the name)
...Vince Pahpale, a former teacher with no professional football experience.

Jaws drop.

WAYNE CHAMBERS (ON SCREEN) (cont'd)
Congratulations Vince...and best of luck...

BILLY
...you are *freakin'* KIDDING ME!!!

The bar explodes on Billy's last word (all except for Jimmy, who doesn't exactly go overboard). Vince grins. Max tousles his hair.

And everything...

SMASHES INTO:

INT. MAX'S BAR - LATER THAT NIGHT

...central party time. The place is rocking, packed tight with regulars and even a few new faces (including Vince's father and some of his WESTINGHOUSE cronies).

Janet and Max are behind the bar, along with Vince; Sinatra's "Saturday Night is the Loneliest Night of the Week" booming away in the background.

Janet's taken things a step further tonight, wearing a red and blue GIANTS BASEBALL-STYLE HAT. Max wears an old and battered EAGLES HAT.

MAX

Next round's on the house! All for my boy Vince here!

Janet serves Louie a beer. He makes a semi-playful swipe for her hat.

LOUIE

Gimme that thing...

JANET

...you touch that hat Louie, you won't have a hand to drink with.

The bar-side boys whoop it up at that comment.

LOUIE

Hey Vince...Maxie's cousin here is disrespecting your team.

JANET

I'm not disrespecting his team, I'm just respecting mine.

JIMMY

Alright sweetheart, you're such a Giants' fan. Name me a Giant. Any Giant.

JANET

Any Giant, huh?

VINCE -

Dangerous game Jimmy.

JANET

Sam Huff.

JIMMY

Jesus...everybody knows Sam Huff.

Janet keeps right on working, and says, without blinking an eye...

JANET

Sam Huff. All-American linebacker
West Virginia. Five Pro Bowls. Led
the Giants to the Championship Game
in 56, 58, 59, 61, 62 and...63.

The bar loves it.

BILLY

How many of those games they win?

JANET

Shut up Billy.
(turns to Vince)
So how 'bout it ace? Teach me
something about your beloved
Eagles.

The game heats up.

VINCE

Something about my Eagles...
(beat)
...Tommy McDonald...

MAX

Vince's boy.

VINCE

...All American running back,
Oklahoma. Led the Eagles to the NFL
Championship in 1960 over Green
Bay...
(shouting it out)
...beating WHAT TEAM to get there?!

A DOZEN GUYS AT THE BAR

THE NEW YORK GIANTS!

Even Janet has to grin. Max grabs a glass...it's time to make
a toast.

MAX

Alright, quiet down...I got
somethin' to say here!

The bar slowly falls quiet.

MAX (cont'd)

Last year or two we ain't had much
to raise our glasses to...but we
sure as hell got it tonight, don't
we?

Max looks at Vince's father.

MAX (cont'd)

To Frank "Kingie" Papale. For teachin' our boy Vince here to love the greatest damn game in the world.

THE BAR

Oh yeah.

MAX

To Billy for gettin' Vince to even show up at this thing in the first place.

(pause)

And to Vince Papale. Neighborhood boy...who startin' next week is gonna be on the field, mixin' it up with Bill Bergey, T-Bone Parker and Frankie DeMaster of the team we still love...the Philadelphia Eagles!

The bar erupts. But as Max mentions the names Bergey and Parker and DeMaster, just a touch of the smile fades away on Vince's face. Because he knows...those guys are the real deal.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Vince has escaped the pandemonium (that can still be heard thumping, muffled, through the door) of the bar for just a moment.

He's just wiped his face dry over the old sink...and looks into the old battered mirror. And in that look, he sees a mixture of doubt, fear and excitement.

The try-out was one thing. But this? Actual training camp? His face says: "What the hell have I just gotten myself into?"

INT. MAX'S BAR - NIGHT

Vince returns to the bar. Max looks over at him...

MAX

You okay?

VINCE

Yeah.

Vince gets back to work. Max waits another second...

MAX

Let's go outside for a minute.

He heads for the front door.

LOUIE

Hey bartender! The drinks flow like
mud around here!

EXT. MAX'S BAR - NIGHT

Max and Vince stand outside; on the front street-side of the
bar. Max is pulling out his CHANGE MONEY...

VINCE

Max, I'm okay...really. I already
got some help.

MAX

Yeah well you're about to get some
more.

He holds the money out, but Vince refuses to take it right
away.

MAX (cont'd)

Come on, it ain't a paid vacation.
It's just so you can cut down on a
few shifts, give you time to work
out more.

VINCE

Max...

MAX

What?

VINCE

Max, it's not like I'm gonna be
makin' this team...

MAX

...don't you talk like that. You go
out there and you play like you're
better than they are, alright?

(beat)

(MORE)

MAX (cont'd)
Play like you did against Billy
Wilson last year.

Vince finally takes the money.

VINCE
I'm gonna make this up to you.

MAX
(with a grin)
You're damn right you are.

Janet exits the bar...

MAX (cont'd)
You headin' home?

JANET
Yeah, it's getting late. You might
want to get back in there...it's
gettin' a little crazy.

MAX
Animals.
(to Vince)
You should go home too. You're in
training, remember?
(re: Janet)
And walk her home while you're at
it. She's on your way.

JANET
I'm fine Max.

MAX
Right, and I'm gonna tell Uncle
Richie I let you walk home at night
in South Philly.

And then Max notices...walking toward his bar: Wayne Chambers
and a TV CAMERAMAN.

MAX (cont'd)
Whoa, whoa, wait a second, are you
kiddin' me?
(shakes his hand)
Wayne Chambers, right here at my
place.

WAYNE CHAMBERS
Is this Max's?

It's the most awkward introduction in the world.

MAX

You're damn right it's Max's. Max Cantwell. My cousin Janet...and the man you prob'ly want to talk to...Vince Papale.

VINCE

No that's okay.

WAYNE CHAMBERS

People want to know who you are Vince. You're a story now. All we need's five minutes.

MAX

You can do it right here, with my sign right over your shoulder.

VINCE

I gotta walk Janet home.

Janet playfully nails him with...

JANET

Naw I can wait.

...and his look back says "thanks a lot."

VINCE

Alright, five minutes.

Wayne grabs the microphone, while the camera-man quickly sets up.

WAYNE CHAMBERS

Pawpaly? Or Papale?

VINCE

Papale.

CAMERA-MAN

All set.

The red-light goes on and Chambers shifts into TV guy...

WAYNE CHAMBERS

I'm here on Franklin Street with Vince Papale, a bartender at Max's Bar and Grill...

Louie, with beer in hand, comes out of the bar and into the background of the shot. With his back toward us...he starts to take a piss against the bricks of the adjacent storefront.

WAYNE CHAMBERS (cont'd)
...and perhaps future professional
football player with the
Philadelphia Eagles...
(turns to Vince)
Vince, tell us about your day at
Veterans Stadium.

In a blur, Max comes into the frame and delivers a colossal
kick to Louie's ass.

LOUIE
What the...
(notices the camera)
...oh.

The camera-man turns the camera off.

WAYNE CHAMBERS
Let's run it again.

EXT. SOUTH PHILLY STREET - NIGHT

Vince and Janet stroll along the darkened streets. She's
still wearing her GIANTS HAT.

VINCE
So how'd you become a Giants fan?

JANET
You mean besides the fact I was
born in New York?
(off his look)
Five brothers. All older. Not much
choice, yeah?

A break.

JANET (cont'd)
That's why I like bartending. It's
like I'm back home listening to my
brothers argue.

VINCE
You worked right there in the city?

JANET
Yeah, but not where you think.

Off his look.

JANET (cont'd)
The Pierre Hotel, next to the park.

VINCE
Pretty big change.

JANET
Not really. Yeah, they got money,
but they still got problems, just
like everyone else. They just never
tell you.
(beat)
That's what I like about Philly. At
least here you know where you
stand.

Nothing for a moment.

JANET (cont'd)
So this is a big thing you've got
goin' here.
(off his silence)
You nervous?

VINCE
I don't even know yet.
(beat)
If it keeps my mind off a few
things, it'll be a good thing.

They approach her apartment.

JANET
My place.

A quick awkward moment.

JANET (cont'd)
Tommy McDonald huh?

VINCE
See you tomorrow.

And as he backs away...

JANET
Hey Vince?
(off his look)
Thanks for not asking.

VINCE
What?

JANET

Why I'm here.

Vince smiles and walks away. Janet watches him go.

INT. VINCE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Vince lies awake on his makeshift bed, still wearing his clothes; his back against the headboard. The window is open...

...and he hears a husband and wife arguing not far away, quarreling in Italian; a car burning rubber out on the street.

The phone RINGS. He reaches to answer it.

VINCE

Hello.

INT. MAX'S BAR - SAME

Billy's on Max's pay-phone.

BILLY

Turn on Channel Three! They're gonna do your interview in a minute!

INT. VINCE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Vince hangs up. Sits up. And realizes he doesn't have a television set.

EXT. VINCE'S APARTMENT - A MOMENT LATER

He heads out the front door. The window of his next door neighbor, Mrs. Spengnetti, is open...the glow of her set emanating out into the street; as is the sound of the television broadcast.

INT./EXT. MRS. SPEGNETTI'S APARTMENT - A MOMENT LATER

Knock, knock, knock. Mrs. Spengnetti opens the door.

MRS. SPEGNETTI

Vincenzo? Why are you up so late?

VINCE

Mrs. Spengnetti, can I watch your TV
for just a minute?

She looks at him for the briefest of moments, as if she'll
say no, then firmly says...

MRS. SPEGNETTI

You watch TV, I get you something
to eat.

INT. MRS. SPEGNETTI'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

On the TV: Wayne Chambers stands next to Vince, who isn't
totally at ease in front of the camera. Mrs. Spengnetti,
already in the kitchen, observes...

MRS. SPEGNETTI

That's you Vincenzo! On the
televisione!

WAYNE CHAMBERS (ON SCREEN)

This is no Tinseltown fairy tale
folks. This is a real-life
Cinderella story with a cleat
instead of a slipper. Right here in
Philadelphia, we've got our own
flesh and blood Rocky Balboa. Vince
"Rocky" Papale...a part-time
bartender who will be at Eagles'
camp in just two short weeks.

(Chambers shakes Vince's
hand)

Good luck Rock, we'll be pulling
for you.

(turns back to the camera)

This is Wayne Chambers, Eyewitness
News.

MRS. SPEGNETTI

Dio Nel Cielo...my neighbor's
famous!

INT. VERMEIL HOUSE - SAME

Dick is in his home office, boxes still everywhere...but his
desk already completely organized. The television is on here
as well.

TV ANCHOR (ON SCREEN)

Thank you Wayne. Certainly a unique
and different approach from new
Eagles' coach Dick Vermeil.

Carol's standing in the doorway. She's been watching the
report as well. Vermeil goes back to scribbling out an
endless supply of scouting reports, etc.

CAROL

Seems like a nice enough guy. Can
he play?

COACH VERMEIL

We're gonna find out.

CAROL

How'd everything else go today?

COACH VERMEIL

Met a few of the veterans.

CAROL

And?

COACH VERMEIL

You know how you told me once how
you can smell complacency. From a
mile away?

CAROL

Lemme guess. You weren't a mile
away.

COACH VERMEIL

Standing right next to me.

A pause.

CAROL

I'd tell you to ease into things,
but I know you won't.

(beat)

Be careful though. It's not UCLA
anymore. These are the toughest
fans there are. They booed Santa
Claus, remember?

COACH VERMEIL

(eyes on the reports)

Mhmm.

He says it as if he didn't really hear his wife...even though he heard every single word. Carol smiles and says...

CAROL

You gonna get some sleep?

COACH VERMEIL

I'll sleep in December.

CAROL

Not if you make the playoffs.

Vermeil glances up. That gets a smile.

EXT. VINCE'S APARTMENT - MORNING

The door opens to Vince's apartment. He walks out and breaks into a light run, heading down the street...

NEWS ANCHOR (V.O.)

...the City of Brotherly Love begins its Bicentennial Celebration in earnest today, the next two weeks packed with wall to wall events...

BEGIN MONTAGE
OF:

EXT. PHILADELPHIA - DAY

The glory and pageantry of Philadelphia's 1976 Bicentennial Celebration. Mixed against...

EXT. PHILADELPHIA - DAY

...images of Vince running alone through the streets: the words of President Ford overlapping with other dignitaries (Charlton Heston, Mayor Rizzo, Governor Shapp), each speaker proclaiming the triumph of Philadelphia...

EXT. PHILADELPHIA - DAY

...as Vince runs.

INT. MAX'S BAR - DAY

...as Vince lifts a full keg up the rickety steps from Max's basement.

EXT. PHILADELPHIA - NIGHT

...as Vince runs at night.

EXT. PHILADELPHIA - DAY

...during the late afternoon; the words and images still intermixing with the resolute look on his face.

EXT. PHILADELPHIA - NIGHT

...and back to night again.

EXT. VINCE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Vince approaches his apartment. Louie's sitting on the front step, waiting for him.

VINCE

Hey Lou. What are you doin' here?

Louie starts out as if it's not that big of a deal.

LOUIE

Aw it's nuthin'. I was over at Ma's for dinner. Figured I'd see if you was here.

VINCE

You been here long?

LOUIE

Naw. Few minutes is all.

An awkward break.

- LOUIE (cont'd)

So...big day tomorrow, yeah?

VINCE

Yeah I guess. We'll see what happens, right?

Louie nods.

LOUIE
This is a good thing Vinnie. No
matter how long it goes, y'know?
Even if it's just a day.

A pause. And then in an almost off-hand manner, Louie says...

LOUIE (cont'd)
I never said good luck to Bobby,
y'know, before he left.

The moment hangs...

LOUIE (cont'd)
Do good out there, okay?

They shake hands. Louie thumps him on the back and walks away.

EXT. WIDENER COLLEGE - DAY

ESTABLISHING SHOT. A brilliant sunrise peeks over the top of a college campus.

TITLE: WIDENER COLLEGE FIRST DAY OF TRAINING CAMP

EXT. TRAINING FACILITY - DAY

Vince sits on a bench, a short distance from the main door. A short, borderline fat MAN fumbles for the locker room keys as he approaches the entrance. It's LES, 50ish, African American; the Eagles' equipment manager.

Vince hops to his feet, duffel on his shoulder, and walks over...

VINCE
How ya doin'? I'm...

LES
...a rook. Couldn't sleep a wink
last night, right? You ain't the
first.

Les opens the door and heads in. Vince follows.

INT. TRAINING FACILITY - LOCKER ROOM - DAY

Vince walks along one of the rows of tall metal mesh lockers, looking for his name. Each locker features PRACTICE GEAR hanging inside, ready for action.

It's not the names, or the practice jerseys (which are very nondescript) that catch his attention. It's the HELMETS. White Eagle wings layered over green.

He reaches for one...holding it for a second, before putting it back; noticing that his locker is the one directly adjacent.

It's marked by a piece of all-too-temporary white tape across the top; his name scrawled in marker. Spelled incorrectly.

P-E-P-O-L-L-I

Vince opens his duffel. Les walks by...

VINCE

Excuse me.

(off the trainer's look)

My name, it's spelled wrong.

LES

Nothing personal, but by the time I get to it? Is it really gonna matter?

...and then walks away again. Vince reaches in his duffel for the first thing he wants to unpack: the LETTER FROM SHARON. He places it on the back of the top shelf, where he'll be able to see it.

EXT. WIDENER COLLEGE - PRACTICE FIELD - DAY

Vermeil and A.C. Craney walk toward the practice field; a few of the players making their way from the locker room as well.

As is the case with all NFL teams, a FEW DOZEN FANS have turned out to watch. They form a corridor of sorts that everyone has to walk through...

A.C. CRANEY

(to Dick)

All set?

COACH VERMEIL
We're gonna hit 'em hard right out
of the gate. See who's who.

A.C. CRANEY
You got it.

And it's at that moment that several of the Philly fans,
instead of welcoming Vermeil with open arms, say...

PHILLY FAN #1
This better be good Vermeil, this
ain't college ball anymore.

PHILLY FAN #2
Not playin' Stanford this year.

PHILLY FAN #3
This is nuthin' but big time now,
Golden Boy.

Vermeil and Craney walk right by...

A.C. CRANEY
Welcome to the NFL.

EXT. WIDENER COLLEGE - PRACTICE FIELD - DAY

Vermeil addresses the entire team; ninety players in all,
some on one knee, some standing. Vince is right up in the
front.

Craney and a HALF DOZEN OTHER ASSISTANTS are also there.

COACH VERMEIL
Gentlemen, you're about to hear me
say a word you will never hear me
say again. A word I will not
tolerate being said after this
moment.

(pause)
The word is "lose." It means to
fail. It means to be reduced. To
surrender. To relinquish.

Most of the players are listening; Vince paying rapt
attention.

COACH VERMEIL (cont'd)
Over the past few years, this team
has surrendered. It has been
reduced. It has failed.
(MORE)

COACH VERMEIL (cont'd)

(pause)

No more. Starting today, we are on a path toward winning. And that'll require more sacrifice and work than many of you are used to. Two straight weeks of two-a-days, three to three-and-a-half hour sessions. We are gonna work hard. We are gonna shake the rust out of those shoulder pads. And we are gonna become winners.

(pause)

I don't care what your story is. Whether you're a veteran, a rookie, or a free agent...you will earn a place here by what you show me on this field. I play no favorites. None. You want a spot on this team? Go out and earn it.

The words settle.

COACH VERMEIL (cont'd)

Let's go.

SMASH INTO:

EXT. WIDENER COLLEGE - PRACTICE FIELD -- DAY

And the sacrifice begins:

-- PLAYERS pounding into blocking sleds.

-- RECEIVERS and RUNNING BACKS high-stepping through agility drills. Vince makes his first run-through. Nervous, he stumbles just a bit, but makes an instant recovery.

-- The TEAM runs suicide sprints. As the whistle blows, more suicides.

-- The blocking sled drills continue, massive players crushing into the pads.

-- The old-style "quarter-eagle" drills; a high school drill that many of these players haven't seen in years. Vince is precise, his knees jack-hammering faster than the players next to him.

-- Another sprint, in profile, Vince emerging ahead of the pack.

-- Several of the veterans are kneeling over, hands on their knees...gasping for breath. Vermeil paces on the sideline...

COACH VERMEIL

No one ever drowned in sweat
gentlemen! Let's go!

-- Sprint. Quarter-eagle. Sprint. Quarter-eagle. The final
sprint of the session...

...and Vince surges for the goal-line, out ahead of the pack.
A whistle blows. Vermeil calls an end to the practice.

COACH VERMEIL (cont'd)

That's it! Back in three hours!

Vince actually begins to jog toward the locker room. Ronnie
Sampson, his helmet now off, watches him go...

INT. LOCKER ROOM - DAY

Vince pulls off his sweat-drenched jersey. Sampson and Willie
Banks approach...

RONNIE SAMPSON

What the hell you doin' out there
Pops?

VINCE

What?

WILLIE BANKS

First day of camp. Might want to
think about settlin' down just a
little.

Banks walks away, but Sampson stays. Vince stares at him, a
hint of a hard edge to his look.

RONNIE SAMPSON

What? You think you're here to make
this team?

(beat)

First cut-down day? You'll be back
at that bar of yours...just like
old times.

VINCE

(waits a beat before...)

Are we done here?

Ronnie waits a moment, neither man breaking his stare.
Sampson finally shakes his head and walks away.

Vince looks around the room...noticing that a few more veterans are giving him the same look.

EXT. WIDENER COLLEGE - PRACTICE FIELD - DAY

The afternoon session. Vermeil prowls the sideline, watching a "nutcracker" drill; a drill in which Vince, playing defense, must get to the running back.

Past two blockers, through a five-yard-wide line of scrimmage. The ball is snapped...

...and Vince gets nowhere fast. Pushed back immediately.

IN THE BLEACHERS BEHIND THE SIDELINE: Max and Louie wince at the collision.

COACH VERMEIL

No! You gotta give me more than that!

Vince pops right back up...

A.C. CRANEY

Again!

...and the blocker calls out to Vince.

BLOCKER

You heard the man Pops.

Vince gets right back into position. The ball is snapped again...he surges hard into the defenders.

EXT. WIDENER COLLEGE - PRACTICE FIELD - DAY

A.C. CRANEY

Carmichael!

A passing drill. HAROLD CARMICHAEL, the Eagles' finest receiver, runs a precise post pattern against Willie Banks...making a picture perfect catch.

EXT. WIDENER COLLEGE - PRACTICE FIELD - DAY

More conditioning drills. Tires. Up-downs.

EXT. WIDENER COLLEGE - PRACTICE FIELD - DAY

A.C. CRANEY

Sampson!

Sampson runs the same pattern that Carmichael ran moments ago, snags the pass and instantly falls into a light jog after catching it. He casually underhands the ball to a defender.

EXT. WIDENER COLLEGE - PRACTICE FIELD - DAY

Players slurp up water from the watering station. They're exhausted...at least one veteran tossing his helmet down, frustrated.

EXT. WIDENER COLLEGE - PRACTICE FIELD - DAY

A.C. CRANEY

Papale!

Vince lines up opposite Willie Banks. The ball is snapped. Vince blows forward and Banks is on him like a cheap suit. But somehow, Vince comes up with the ball, and instead of ending the play like Sampson did...he sprints the extra twenty yards toward the end-zone.

WILLIE BANKS

(yells out)

Hey old man! This ain't high school.

Vermeil counters with...

COACH VERMEIL

Hey Banks! That old man just made you look bad.

(yells out to Vince)

Way to finish Papale!

IN THE BLEACHERS

MAX AND LOUIE

Attababy Vince!

EXT. WIDENER COLLEGE - PRACTICE FIELD - DAY

Vince walks off the field, practice over for the day. Wayne Chambers waits for him, thinking Vince will stop.

WAYNE CHAMBERS

How'd it go out today Rock? You got another five minutes for me?

VINCE

Not today. Talk with some of the guys who've been here.

Vince keeps walking. Chambers falls in next to him.

WAYNE CHAMBERS

Not today?

(beat)

You don't get it, do you? Every day you're here? It's a story. We're celebrating two hundred years of independence in this town and everyone feels like crap.

(off Vince's look)

Like it or not, the town needs a hero.

VINCE

Yeah well I'm not that guy.

He pulls away from Chambers, who watches him go.

INT. VERMEIL'S WIDENER LOCKER ROOM OFFICE - DAY

Vermeil's working at his desk. Craney pokes his head in...

A.C. CRANEY

Well, there's four we don't have to cut.

Vermeil looks up at him.

A.C. CRANEY (cont'd)

Free agents. Just up and left.

Craney walks away.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - DAY

Vince stands in front of his locker; ready to call it a day. Just before leaving, he reaches for Sharon's note...reading it once again. He puts it back, and walks away...

...not realizing that Sampson saw him. Sampson walks over to Vince's locker, reads the note...and smiles. Ed German walks by...

RONNIE SAMPSON
Hey big guy, come here a second.

INT. DORM ROOM - DAY

Vince walks into his dorm room. It's a two-man room, but there's no one on the other side.

He throws his duffel on the mattress, just as one of the TEAM MANAGERS, clipboard in hand, shows up in the doorway.

TEAM MANAGER
Papale.

VINCE
Yeah.

TEAM MANAGER
Dinner at seven. Receivers coach at nine. Lights out by eleven.

He starts to walk away...

VINCE
Hey.
(the manager stops)
Isn't someone else in here?

TEAM MANAGER
Not anymore.

The team manager walks away. Vince notices a PACKAGE on the mattress...with a small note that (anonymously) reads "GOOD LUCK!"

He opens it. It's a care package, filled with food and treats.

And underneath everything: a "PROPERTY OF THE NEW YORK GIANTS" TEE-SHIRT.

INT. DORM - DAY

Vince is on the hallway phone with Janet.

VINCE
Are you trying to get me killed here?

BEGIN INTERCUT WITH:

INT. MAX'S BAR - DAY

Janet, on the phone at Max's, with a sly grin...

JANET

So how'd it go?

VINCE

Not bad. Little different from Max and the boys, that's for sure.

JANET

I'll let 'em know that.

VINCE

Hey...you workin' tomorrow night? I thought maybe, if you're not doing anything. It's not like we'd be, y'know, doin' anything official.

JANET

Well being as you put it that way...

(ever so slight
hesitation)

Sure. Yeah.

VINCE

Great. Hey and thanks for the package. Really.

JANET

No problem.

INT. CAFETERIA - NIGHT

Chow time. The players devour enormous portions of food at the training table. Vince sits at the rookie table, trying his best to maintain a low profile.

Willie Banks has just tapped a ROOKIE on the shoulder. The veterans are cheering and yelling out "C'mon rook...let's hear it."

The rookie, sitting right next to Vince, sheepishly stands up. On his chair.

WILLIE BANKS

Alright rook. What fight song are we hearing?

ROOKIE

S-M-U.

The rookie hesitates, but the veterans urge him on. Finally, he starts singing...

ROOKIE (cont'd)

Here's to the Red and the Blue.
We're the Mustangs from S-M-U.

Instantly, he's drowned out by laughter, shouts of approval, jeers, you name it. He keeps right on singing...until Banks waves him off.

Banks moves to Vince.

WILLIE BANKS

Alright, whatta ya say Pops, you
got anything for us?

Vince shakes his head, hoping Banks will keep right on moving to the next rookie.

WILLIE BANKS (cont'd)

What? Can't remember that far back?

Laughter. Shouts. Vince smiles, playing along with it. Ronnie Sampson calls out...

RONNIE SAMPSON

Pops didn't play any college ball!
Man doesn't have a song to sing!

The shouts and jeers continue, but the smile fades just a bit from Vince's face. And as Banks moves on to the next rookie...

WILLIE BANKS

Alright, alright...

...Vince puts his napkin down and stands up on his chair. The vets hoot and holler, Vince holding his hands out to get them to be quiet. Once he can be heard...

VINCE

Oh the shark babe...has such teeth
dear. And he shows them, pearly
white...

A roar from the room. But Vince keeps on singing...

VINCE (cont'd)
 ...just a jack knife, has old
 macheath babe. And he keeps it out
 of sight...

Slowly, steadily, Vince's voice picks up steam; fighting hard
 against the stream of derision being voiced from the room.

VINCE (cont'd)
 ...y'know when that shark bites,
 with his teeth babe...scarlet
 billows, start to spread. Fancy
 gloves though, wears old macheath
 babe. So there's never, never a
 trace of red...
 (plows ahead)
 ...now on a sidewalk, Sunday
 morning. Lies a body, just oozi-
 n' life. And someone's sneakin' round
 the corner. Could that someone...

And it's in that moment that the first of the rookies begins
 to sing along.

ROOKIE
 ...be Mack the Knife!

A few more of the rookies join in. Even a couple of veterans
 smile...except for Sampson.

The impromptu sing-along continues, and for the briefest of
 moments...there is levity. There are smiles and laughter...

EXT. WIDENER COLLEGE - PRACTICE FIELD - DAY

...which are instantly wiped out by the ferocity of the next
 morning's practice.

Another nutcracker drill. As the ball is snapped, two LINEMAN
 collide with the defensive player; the contact reverberating
 across the field. Vermeil watches from the sideline.

A.C. CRANEY
 Next!

Vince lines up on defense again. Across from him is monster
 linebacker Ed German...who outweighs Vince by close to 70
 pounds. And as they line up helmet-to-helmet...

ED GERMAN
 Your wife was right old man. You
 ain't goin' nowhere.

Before the ball is even snapped, Vince surges forward and rams into German...shoving his hand against his face-mask. Going ballistic. German quickly gets the best of it, but Vince gives no-quarter. It's a furious exchange.

A.C. CRANEY

Break it up! That's enough! German!
Papale!

Four assistants are needed to break it up. And as they're pulled apart: Tose walks next to Vermeil...

MR. TOSE

How far do you plan to take this
Dick?

COACH VERMEIL

What's that Mr. Tose?

MR. TOSE

Papale. Having him try-out was one
thing. Winning games is another.

Vermeil doesn't say anything, but he hears him.

MR. TOSE (cont'd)

I've spent a lot of money on these
players Dick. I'm not gonna be a
laughingstock among the owners.

He walks away.

INT. VERMEIL'S WIDENER LOCKER ROOM OFFICE - NIGHT

Vermeil's still working, but he's taken a moment to talk with Carol on the phone.

CAROL (V.O. ON PHONE)

You're not doubting what you're
doing, are you?

COACH VERMEIL

It's just gonna take awhile to turn
this thing around. It's not gonna
happen overnight.

BEGIN INTERCUT WITH:

INT. VERMEIL HOUSE - SAME

Carol, in the kitchen, talking with him...

CAROL

You're worried they may not have a lot of patience.

COACH VERMEIL

The team's traded away almost all their draft picks. We have to win with what we've got.

His silence answers the question.

CAROL

It'll be fine. Trust me. You're too good a coach.

COACH VERMEIL

Mhmm.

CAROL

Look, you said the same thing when you took over at Hillsdale High fifteen years ago. You said the same thing at UCLA. It's worked out everywhere you've coached. This won't be any different.

Vermeil finally smiles.

COACH VERMEIL

I'll see you in awhile.

CAROL

Not too soon. I don't want to have to worry about you.

EXT. STREET FAIR - NIGHT

A bustling crowd. Vince and Janet, who's eating cotton candy, stroll along.

JANET

I needed a change is all. New city sounded like a good start.

VINCE

You sure you don't want to talk about something else?

JANET

No it's okay.

(beat)

It was my ex.

VINCE

Husband?

JANET

Boyfriend. He wasn't what he said he was.

VINCE

What'd he say he was?

JANET

Single.

Vince let's it go at that. They walk along.

JANET (cont'd)

How 'bout you? If you don't mind me asking.

VINCE

Married five years. Showed up one day, she wasn't there.

JANET

Sorry.

(beat)

And now you're playing football again.

VINCE

I like the "not thinking" part of it.

Off her look.

VINCE (cont'd)

When I'm playing. The only thing I think about is the guy in front of me. It was like that when I was a kid playing.

JANET

Why then?

Another moment of quiet. Before...

VINCE

When my mother was young...she was like the Babe Deidrickson of her day. Great athlete.

(beat)

Then she got sick, had some, I don't know, mental problems...

(MORE)

VINCE (cont'd)

(pause)

I'd come home from school, find her asleep, all this medication.

JANET

Where was your Dad?

VINCE

Working at the factory. He'd come home as much as he could, but it took a lot out of him.

He smiles.

VINCE (cont'd)

We had the Eagles though.

(pause)

He used to tell me the story of Steve Van Buren...

JANET

'48. Championship game.

Vince looks at her for a beat. Impressed.

JANET (cont'd)

Five brothers. Remember?

VINCE

Anyway, he'd talk about Steve Van Buren scoring the only touchdown against the Chicago Cardinals. In this blinding snowstorm...

JANET

And the snowstorm got worse every time he told it, right?

VINCE

(waits another beat)

...he didn't like talking about many things. But he did like talking about that.

They walk.

INT. MAX'S BAR - NIGHT

Billy's on the phone with Vince.

BILLY

They're lazy prima donnas buddy, we saw that last year.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. DORM - NIGHT

Vince back on the hallway phone.

VINCE

These guys are monsters out here
Billy.

BILLY

Screw 'em, okay? Screw 'em all.
(pause)
So when do they start cuttin' down?

VINCE

Tomorrow. If you get a knock on the
door, it's not good. They call the
guy who does the knockin' "The
Turk."

BILLY

Aw you'll be fine. When you come
home, you come home. Alright?

VINCE

So how are things with you?

BILLY

Y'know, same as always.
(beat)
Union guys are blowin' smoke about
goin' on strike end of the year.
It'll never happen.

Vince doesn't say anything. Worried.

BILLY (cont'd)

It's nuthin', okay? It's nuthin'.

INT. VERMEIL'S WIDENER LOCKER ROOM OFFICE - DAY

Vermeil hands a SHEET OF PAPER to each of his assistant
coaches.

COACH VERMEIL

First cut's always the deepest.
(he nods toward ONE
ASSISTANT)
I'll be in my office.

The ASSISTANT nods and walks out.

INT. DORM - HALLWAY - DAY

A knock on a door. A ROOKIE answers the door...instantly, he knows.

THE TURK

Coach wants to see you. Bring your
playbook.

We see it played out again and again; the proverbial kiss of death. Rookies (free agents, etc.) hearing the knock...

THE TURK (cont'd)

Coach wants to see you. Bring your
playbook.

Knock, knock.

THE TURK (cont'd)

Hey. Coach wants to see you. Bring
your playbook.

INT. DORM ROOM - DAY

Vince sits on the edge of his bed, like an inmate waiting for the chaplain to knock on his door and take him away. But all is quiet.

CUT TO:

INT. DORM ROOM - NIGHT

From the darkness outside the window, we move toward the bed again. Vince is still there...as if he's been waiting for hours.

INT. DORM - COMMON ROOM - NIGHT

A bunch of the veteran players are watching the late news; Sampson and Banks among them.

WAYNE CHAMBERS (ON SCREEN)

The biggest news out of training
camp today may very well be that
Philly's own Vince Papale has made
it past the first round of cuts.

(MORE)

WAYNE CHAMBERS (ON SCREEN) (cont'd)

The city's real-life Rocky Balboa remains a long-shot to make the team, but the fact he's even still around, with the pre-season just days away, is amazing in itself.

Vince walks toward the hallway phone, overhearing everything as he reaches for the receiver.

RONNIE SAMPSON

Lotta good players got cut today.
Lotta good players.

Vince hangs up without making a call.

EXT. STADIUM - LATER THAT NIGHT

The stadium's empty, except for a lone figure running up and down the steps. It's Vince, drenched in sweat. Pushing himself. Harder and harder; the image replaced by...

EXT. WIDENER COLLEGE - PRACTICE FIELD - DAY

...Vince sprinting during practice. For a moment, it looks like Vince will finish the suicide before anyone else...

...but Banks catches him. And then Sampson does the same.

COACH VERMEIL

Not fast enough today.

ANOTHER PASSING DRILL: Carmichael cuts into the clear and catches a sharp pass.

COACH VERMEIL (cont'd)

Attaway Harold! Now we're talking!

-- Another sprint drill. Vince comes up a step short.

-- Sampson runs a precise route, his speed apparent. Vermeil nods his approval.

-- Suicides...again. And again...Vince is a beat slower than Sampson and Banks. Sampson turns to Vince after it's done...

RONNIE SAMPSON

Cream's comin' to the top Pops.

EXT. WIDENER COLLEGE - PRACTICE FIELD - DAY

Vince gets set to run a pattern...

COACH VERMEIL

Alright Papale, show me something!

...he makes his cut, but instead of pulling away from the defender; they stay locked together. The pass sails over Vince's head. Vermeil doesn't say a word.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - THE CAGE - DAY

Vince storms into the equipment locker, ripping the thigh and girdle pads from his pants and chucking them aside. He yanks off his jersey and tosses his shoulder pads, scouring the shelves, just as Les walks in...

LES

What do you need Papale?

VINCE

How am I supposed to run wearing all this crap?

LES

That crap protects you. It's there for a reason.

Vince pulls an extra small, flimsy pair of shoulder pads off the shelf. Looks like Pop Warner equipment. He puts them on.

VINCE

That's more like it.

LES

You can't wear quarterback pads. You won't last a month wearing those.

VINCE

Nothing personal...but is it really gonna matter?

Vince walks out. Les watches him go with a look of newfound respect.

EXT. WIDENER COLLEGE - PRACTICE FIELD - DAY

Sprints again. This time Vince hangs in with both Sampson and Banks...the three of them dead even.

But he pays the price in a crossing pattern drill, getting tagged hard as he makes his way over the middle.

EXT. STADIUM - NIGHT

Vince runs the steps. Alone.

EXT. WIDENER COLLEGE - PRACTICE FIELD - DAY

Thump. Thump. Thump. Carmichael, Sampson, Vince...each hold onto a sharply thrown football.

IN THE BLEACHERS: Louie and Billy cheer, as do some of the other fans. Slightly more this time around.

EXT. STADIUM - NIGHT

Steps. Alone.

EXT. WIDENER COLLEGE - PRACTICE FIELD - DAY

Vermeil watches a reverse drill, not far from the line of scrimmage. Vince takes the ball on a pitch, but Ed German comes flying through and drops him hard. Vince gets up, slowly.

ED GERMAN

That's how we do it on the Eagles
Pops.

Vince gets right in his face...

VINCE

You think you know what it means to
be an Eagle?

...shoving the larger lineman.

VINCE (cont'd)

You're no Eagle! You never have
been!

German comes right back at him. A PAIR OF ASSISTANTS are right there to separate them...

ED GERMAN

Back off old man!

COACH VERMEIL

Next up! Let's go.

But the look on his face shows that he heard every word.
Vince gets set to line up again, while...

UP IN THE BLEACHERS

...several of the Philly fans yell out...

PHILLY FANS

Way to give it to 'em 83!

INT. LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

Vince throws his duffel over his shoulder, wincing as he does so. He's the last one in the locker room on this particular night.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

And as he walks out, he sees Les coming out of the cage, ready to take some equipment to a few of the lockers.

VINCE

'Night Les. Hey, I'm gonna get a couple of those pads back, okay?

LES

You know where they are.

Vince holds the door for just a moment, noticing the cracked door to the COACHES MEETING ROOM a few feet away. He hears one of the ASSISTANT COACHES inside...

ASSISTANT COACH #1 (O.S.)

What about Denny Franks?

COACH VERMEIL (O.S.)

His weak side blocking's not what it used to be, that's for sure.

Vince finally walks in; but instead of looking for any of the pads...he grabs some ACE BANDAGES, some ANKLE TAPE.

The door to the COACHES ROOM opens...and Vermeil comes out to grab some papers from a WALL FILE.

He looks at Vince, a battle-weary warrior, for just a moment before going back in.

INT. MAX'S BAR - NIGHT

Vince sits at the bar, working a bowl of soup, the act of even raising the spoon looks as if it hurts him. It's a pretty quiet night at the bar.

JANET

Chicken noodle. Helps everything, right?

VINCE

Yeah. Thanks.

Vince waits a second before asking...

VINCE (cont'd)

So anyone taken you to Tony Lukes yet? Best cheesesteak in Philly.

JANET

Anybody asking?

Jimmy sits at the far side of the bar, quietly taking it all in.

VINCE

Well if Max doesn't have you workin' tomorrow...

JANET

...long as nine o'clock gets you back by curfew.

She smiles and walks away, leaving just Vince and Jimmy at the bar for the moment..

JIMMY

Jumpin' back pretty fast buddy boy.

Vince ignores him.

JIMMY (cont'd)

Only been, what? How many weeks since...

VINCE

(cuts him off with...)

...what the hell's your problem Jimmy? We're just talkin' here.

JIMMY

You think a nice lookin' girl from
New York's gonna start over with
one of us?

(quick beat)

Just 'cause everyone's cheerin' for
you...tough guy, tryin' to be an
Eagle.

Jimmy sips and shakes his head.

JIMMY (cont'd)

You'll still be nuthin' man. When
all this is over and done. Nuthin'
just like the rest of us.

Jimmy gets up and walks away, leaving Vince to consider his
words.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - DAY

Vince stands at his locker. He glances at Sharon's note.

EXT. TONY LUKES - NIGHT

ESTABLISHING SHOT of the restaurant, a Philly landmark.

EXT. TONY LUKES - NIGHT

Vince waits outside for Janet. She walks up, looking great.
It's apparent from her appearance that she took a few extra
minutes in front of the mirror.

JANET

Hey...

VINCE

...hey.

JANET

...so this is it, huh? As good as
it gets.

VINCE

Yeah. Looks a little busy tonight.

A SOUTH PHILLY MAN and his WIFE walk past. The man recognizes
Vince.

SOUTH PHILLY MAN

Hey Papale! Keep layin' into those boys, alright? You're doin' great man.

Vince nods at him.

JANET

Wow. I take it "The Turk" didn't show up today.

VINCE

Not today. He's still got another ten players to visit though.

She can tell something's bothering him.

JANET

What?

Vince hesitates for a moment...

JANET (cont'd)

What is it?

VINCE

I was thinkin', y'know...

(pause)

...I never thought I'd get past the first week of all this. But now that I have...

Reluctance.

VINCE (cont'd (cont'd)

...maybe it's best if I just kind of, y'know, think about one thing instead of...everything else.

JANET

Everything else.

And despite the mutual attraction that's been heating up...

...Janet salvages the moment, for herself, by criss-crossing things.

JANET (cont'd)

Did you think this was like a date or something?

Off his look.

JANET (cont'd)

Vince, look...I'm the last person who wants to start anything right now.

(quick beat)

I mean, look at us, it was barely a month ago you were married and I was still with the wrong guy. Not exactly the best match.

Silence.

JANET (cont'd)

Go do this...I don't want to stand in the way of you taking your best shot.

VINCE

I didn't want it to sound like that...

JANET

...no, no, it's fine. Really.

...and then the knockout punch.

JANET (cont'd)

Y'know, Max was sayin' things might get busy at his place tonight too.

(backs away)

Maybe I'll head over, see if I can help him out...

VINCE

Janet...

JANET

...we'll do this some other time, okay?

(as she backs away)

I'll say hi to everyone for you.

He watches her go.

EXT. SOUTH PHILLY STREET - NIGHT

Vince walks down the sidewalk, taking in the sights and sounds of his hometown.

INT. DORM - NIGHT

Vince enters his room...and finds VETERAN OFFENSIVE LINEMAN DENNY FRANKS in what had been the open bunk. He's reading "Trinity" by Leon Uris.

Vince, worn-out, simply sits down on the side of his bed. Franks hasn't taken his eyes off the book yet.

VINCE
Denny Franks, right?

DENNY FRANKS
Mmhmm. New roommate. Vermeil's tryin' to mix things up. He's puttin' rooks with veterans, veterans with rooks. Crazy.

Vince waits a second or so before saying...

VINCE
Your weak side blocking's not good enough.

That gets Franks' eyes off the page.

DENNY FRANKS
Says who?

VINCE
Vermeil. I heard him talking with the other coaches.

Franks swivels up, so that he's sitting on the edge of his bed too. It's hard to tell if he's pissed or thankful.

VINCE (cont'd)
Just thought you might want to know.

He eyes Vince for a beat before...

DENNY FRANKS
So how beat to hell are you? 'Cause you're lookin' pretty bad out there.

VINCE
Long as I got my playbook...

A hint of respect, barely noticeable, seeps into Franks' expression.

DENNY FRANKS

Lemme show you something...

He gets down in a three-point stance. Poised like a Brahma bull directly in front of Vince.

DENNY FRANKS (cont'd)

...what color are my knuckles?

C.U. on Denny's knuckles: the pressure of his weight making them pearly...

VINCE

White.

DENNY FRANKS

You see white, it's because my weight's forward. Means I'm coming after you. If I'm laying back, the color comes back. I'm tired of watching you get hammered every day.

Franks sits back and grabs his book. He starts reading again.

VINCE

Thanks.

(beat)

Anything else I need to know?

DENNY FRANKS

Yeah. Lose the Giants shirt hanging in my closet.

EXT. WIDENER COLLEGE - PRACTICE FIELD - DAWN

ESTABLISHING SHOT. A peaceful sunrise.

SMASH INTO:

EXT. WIDENER COLLEGE - PRACTICE FIELD - DAY

A nutcracker drill collision. One after another, almost in flash image. Finally, it's Vince's turn...

...he's opposite Ed German once again. German's job is to stop Papale from getting through to the running back. But Vince checks his knuckles. White.

VINCE
 (whispering to himself)
 He's comin'.

A whistle blows...and Vince gives a quick fake that sends German by him like a matador ditching a bull. Vince makes a text-book tackle of the running back.

ED GERMAN
 (pissed)
 One more time Coach.

Vermeil nods toward Craney.

A.C. CRANEY
 One more time.

EXT. WIDENER COLLEGE - PRACTICE FIELD - DAY

The play unfolds again; and again, Vince slips by...slamming hard into the running back.

CUT TO:

The same set of players lining up again, and again...Vince eludes German.

IN THE BLEACHERS

Vince's growing legion of blue collar backers are cheering.

EXT. WIDENER COLLEGE - PRACTICE FIELD - DAY

They set up again. But this time, Vince - waiting for the whistle - is exhausted; having gone to the well too many times.

The whistle blows. And this time...German finally gets to him, sending him to the ground. Hard.

Vince stays down for a second, slowly rising to one knee, unable to get up right away. And while almost all of the players move to their positions for the next drill...

A remarkable thing happens. The hand of one of the veteran lineman reaches down and helps him to his feet: a true expression of respect.

IN THE BLEACHERS:

PHILLY FANS
83!!! 83!!! 83 !!!

Vermeil doesn't allow himself a smile. Not yet.

COACH VERMEIL
Alright! Let's keep it goin' now!

SMASH INTO:

1976 PRE-SEASON MONTAGE: HIGH ENERGY, MUSIC BACKGROUND

INT. MAX'S BAR - NIGHT

Max's bar, packed tight (Janet not there), watches the news; Wayne Chambers narrating the washed-out highlights from the first pre-season game.

WAYNE CHAMBERS (V.O. ON TV)
A less than perfect start for new Head Coach Dick Vermeil, the Eagles losing their pre-season opener tonight to San Diego 20 to 7. Still with the team, for one more week at least, South Philly's own favorite son, Vince Papale....

Cheers from the bar.

EXT. STADIUM - NIGHT

Vince runs the stairs. Almost in silhouette...

INT. WESTINGHOUSE LUNCHROOM - NIGHT

Small TV. More highlights. Vince's father watches with some of the old guard in the lunchroom.

WAYNE CHAMBERS (V.O. ON TV)
New week, same story. The Eagles, losers of their opener a week ago, drop their second straight game tonight, a 14 to 7 decision to the Steelers.

EXT. WIDENER COLLEGE - PRACTICE FIELD - DAY

Sweat drops from the Eagles' faces. Up-downs.

INT. MRS. SPEGNETTI'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

WAYNE CHAMBERS (V.O. ON TV)
If Dick Vermeil was hoping for a
honeymoon, he'll have to win a game
first. Miami handing the Eagles
their third straight pre-season
loss tonight 24 to 6...

MRS. SPEGNETTI
Ah, Vincenzo...

EXT. STADIUM - NIGHT

CLOSE on Vince's legs jack-hammering their way up the stadium
steps. Deep night once again.

INT. JANET'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Another round of television highlights...

WAYNE CHAMBERS (V.O. ON TV)
...with final cuts only days away,
South Philly's Vince Papale saw a
noticeable drop in playing time as
the Eagles lost in Cleveland
tonight 21 to 17; bringing their
pre-season record to oh and four...

...Janet - on her couch, writing in her journal - but
stealing a glance toward the set.

INT. TEAM BUS - NIGHT

The team bus rolls toward home...almost every player sound
asleep. The only two people who appear to be awake are...

VINCE

...staring out the window, alone with his thoughts. And...

VERMEIL

...up front, still working; mapping out play after play.
Still believing.

EXT. WIDENER COLLEGE - PRACTICE FIELD - DAY

The whistle blows. The Eagles are now running set plays in anticipation of the regular season, but Vermeil is putting them through the ringer. Pushing them...

COACH VERMEIL

Set it up! Run it again!

A.C. Craney steps up next to Vermeil...

A.C. CRANEY

You do know we have a whole season in front of us, yeah?

COACH VERMEIL

I'm still looking for the last five players. We're only as strong as our weakest link.

A.C. CRANEY

That may be, but do we have to destroy the first forty to find the last five?

ON THE FIELD: Sampson has his hands on his knees, exhausted. Banks leans down and gets in his ear...

WILLIE BANKS

Stand up. The Turk's still got one more player to visit...

Sampson nods. Craney, having moved closer to the drill, calls out for the next play...

A.C. CRANEY

Carmichael, Harrison. 93 wide.

The Eagles move into formation, while on the sidelines: Tose walks up to Vermeil.

MR. TOSE

How we looking Dick? Got ourselves a final roster yet?

COACH VERMEIL

Just about, Mister Tose.

The play unfolds in front of them. Precise, as Carmichael shows his skills once again.

A.C. CRANEY
Sampson, Papale!

MR. TOSE
You're the coach Dick. But just so
you know...I spent a lot of money
on Sampson two years ago. Be a
shame to let him go this soon.

A defender lines up opposite Vince, while Banks drops back to
play safety.

The ball is snapped. The quarterback rifles a sharp pass to
Sampson, who grabs it and quickly drops into his trademark
jog...

...just as Banks comes up to pop Vince in the middle of his
crossing pattern. A clean hit, but one that Vince wasn't
expecting.

Vince goes down and stays there as Banks stands over him...

WILLIE BANKS
Time to stay down Pops.

...Banks walks away from him. Vince gets up and walks past
him...

VINCE
Nice hit.

Banks stops and shakes his head...realizing that this guy
won't go away.

ON THE SIDELINE: Tose gets in one last word...

MR. TOSE
You'll do the right thing. Give me
a call when you decide.

...before walking away.

INT. WIDENER COLLEGE - COACHES MEETING ROOM - NIGHT

The coaching staff sits around a table; fast-food and about a
hundred scouting reports spread out everywhere. It's crunch
time.

COACH VERMEIL
Alright, so we've got one receiver
slot open. Sampson or Papale.
(MORE)

COACH VERMEIL (cont'd)
 (quick beat)
 Let's go around the table.

The coaches glance at each other as Vermeil stares hard at the sheet below him. SIX COACHES in all take part in the rollcall...

COACH #1
 Sampson.

COACH #2
 Sampson.

COACH #3
 Sampson, but it's closer than I thought it'd be. Papale's been great.

COACH #4
 Sampson.

And so on. Vermeil looks at Craney.

A.C. CRANEY
 Your job's hard enough Dick. Go with a guy like Papale next year, once you've established yourself. You've got Tose, the media, everyone breathing down your neck. A good share of the veterans don't like him...

COACH VERMEIL
 ...I don't care what the veterans think. I've got other things to worry about with the veterans.

A.C. CRANEY
 Like what?

COACH VERMEIL
 Getting 'em to believe they're football players again.

A pause.

COACH VERMEIL (cont'd)
 He's just got so much heart.

A.C. CRANEY
 People don't want heart, Dick. They want wins.

EXT. BLUE-COLLAR NEIGHBORHOOD - SMALL HOUSE - NIGHT

Vince sits on the front steps of his father's house, waiting. Finally..."Kingie" Papale, fresh off a long day and night at work, pulls in. He gets out of his car...

FRANK "KINGIE" PAPALE
Heyyy Vince. What brings you to the
neighborhood? Thought they'd have
you locked up at camp.

"Kingie" stops halfway to his son, seeing the expression on his face...

FRANK "KINGIE" PAPALE (cont'd)
They let you go.

Vince shakes his head.

VINCE
Not yet. They will though.
(beat)
Tomorrow.

Frank sits down next to his son. His lunch-box right in front of him.

FRANK "KINGIE" PAPALE
What makes you say that?

VINCE
I've just been kiddin' myself Dad.
These guys, they don't need some
hack from South Philly.
(looks at his father)
They're playin' the Dallas Cowboys
next Sunday. Roger Staubach. Ed
Jones. Randy White.
(beat)
They need a football player. Not
me.

The words linger for a moment. Frank finally asks...

FRANK "KINGIE" PAPALE
There's something I've been wantin' -
to ask you...
(off Vince's look)
...anytime someone's in over their
head, not sayin' that's what you
were, there's somethin' that's
drivin' him...each day...

Vince waits a second before answering...

VINCE

I'm tired of people sayin' they
don't want me. Sharon. The school.

(beat)

I just wanted to get through each
day without hearing someone say
that again. That's what's gonna
make tomorrow hard.

Frank smiles.

FRANK "KINGIE" PAPALE

You know how I used to tell you
about Stevie Van Buren runnin' for
that touchdown in 48?

(off Vince's look)

That touchdown got me through the
last thirty years at the factory.
Got me through all those years your
mother was sick.

Frank looks right at his son, grabbing the back of his neck
with one hand, holding him tight. He says the next few words
intently...

FRANK "KINGIE" PAPALE (cont'd)

When I told you not to get your
hopes up...

(quick beat)

...it didn't mean I wasn't. Okay?

The best words he could've said.

FRANK "KINGIE" PAPALE (cont'd)

You're a helluva son Vince. That's
all that matters to me.

INT. VERMEIL HOUSE - NIGHT

Carol is working on a massive jigsaw puzzle. Her husband
walks in and stands in the doorway.

COACH VERMEIL

Looks like you and I are doing the
same thing tonight.

CAROL

Cross out the last of the names?

COACH VERMEIL
I'm gonna let Papale go.

That stops her.

CAROL
But you were so high on him. You said he was a character player, the kind of player you could build a team around.

COACH VERMEIL
It's different this time. I've got other things to consider.

CAROL
You sure?

He nods. But she can tell the decision's hurting him.

CAROL (cont'd)
Just remember what you used to say about your kids at Hillsdale...
(quick)
...that character's tested when you're up against it.

COACH VERMEIL
He's got plenty of character, that's not the problem.

CAROL
Who said I was talking about him?

EXT. WIDENER COLLEGE - DAY

ESTABLISHING SHOT. The last morning of camp.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - DAY

Vince approaches his locker...and notices that the white tape that spelled P-E-P-O-L-L-I is gone. He walks closer, just as "The Turk" closes in...

THE TURK
Papale. Coach wants to see you.

Vince nods; hanging up his duffel...pulling out the playbook. As he walks away, Sampson gets a few handshakes and pats on the back.

INT. VERMEIL'S WIDENER LOCKER ROOM OFFICE - DAY

Vince knocks on the open door. Vermeil is at his desk.

COACH VERMEIL

Come on in Vince. Go ahead and shut the door.

Vince does. He sits down.

COACH VERMEIL (cont'd)

Haven't had much chance to talk these past few weeks, have we?

VINCE

Not really.

COACH VERMEIL

You holdin' up alright?

VINCE

Couple of bumps, here and there. Nuthin' bad.

Vermeil waits a beat before...

COACH VERMEIL

Y'know Vince, I knew this job was gonna be hard the minute I took it. Lot of people think I got here overnight, but...I climbed every step of the ladder. High school coach. JC. Assistant coach. Head coach.

(beat)

Every one of those jobs had their own challenge, but you know what I learned from each of 'em?

VINCE

What?

COACH VERMEIL

That when you're tryin' to rebuild something...

(beat)

...you build your foundation on heart.

Vince doesn't say a word, sensing that this meeting is not what he expected it to be.

COACH VERMEIL (cont'd)
What do you say you hang on to that
playbook for a few more months. If
that's alright with you.

Vince nods. He has to fight back the emotion of the moment.

VINCE
I've never won at anything before
Coach. Nothing like this.

COACH VERMEIL
And I've never lost.
(he stands up)
But the way you play? You're gonna
teach me as much as I can ever
teach you.

He shakes Vince's hand.

COACH VERMEIL (cont'd)
Welcome to the Eagles.

CUT TO:

INT. LOCKER ROOM - DAY

Slowly rising in the background: party/celebration music fit
for any bar in South Philly.

The Turk approaches Ronnie Sampson.

THE TURK
Ronnie. Coach wants to see you.
Bring your playbook.

SMASH INTO:

INT. MAX'S BAR - NIGHT

The music now at full volume. Billy, standing on the bar,
yells out to everyone in Max's jammed-full establishment:

BILLY
(in unison with the entire
bar)
He's at the 40! He's at the 30!
Number 83! Vince Papale of the
Philadelphia freakin' Eagles!

The place explodes. Vince is down below, being swarmed by well-wishers. Billy jumps from the bar and lands in the middle of everything.

BILLY (cont'd)
This is huge pal. This is bigger
than when Tommy DiBenedetto came
back from 'Nam with the Bronze
Star!
(sips his beer)
You gonna forget your friends now?

VINCE
Remind me who you are again?

Billy shoves him and shakes his head.

BILLY
You're an Eagle man. A Philadelphia
Eagle. Unbelievable.

Max, behind the bar, calls him over.

MAX
Vince! Over here!

Vince comes over. Max slides him a glass full of coke.

MAX (cont'd)
Nuthin' for you buddy. You've got a
game Sunday. And by the way, you
can pay me back that money you owe
me anytime.

VINCE
First paycheck Max.

MAX
I'm proud of you.

VINCE
Thanks.

Max moves on to another customer. And taking his place right in front of Vince...is Janet, busy at work herself. She strikes a gracious tone.

VINCE (cont'd)
Hey.

JANET
Hey.

VINCE

I was gonna call you this week...

Louie explodes in and hugs Vince hard, interrupting the moment.

LOUIE

EAGGGGGLLLLLLLLLEEEE! You, and Harold Carmichael, and Bill Bergey, unbelievable.

Janet smiles.

LOUIE (cont'd)

Your seats are gonna be so much better than ours this year.

VINCE

Don't go givin' mine away.

He turns back to Janet; but she's busy, the place is noisy.

JANET

Maybe we should talk later.

And at that moment, he hears several voices call his name. He turns, just as his father crushes him with an enormous embrace...a DOZEN OF HIS WESTINGHOUSE BUDS with him.

Frankie pulls away to say...

FRANK "KINGIE" PAPALE

Stevie Van Buren's got nothing on you.

He tells Janet and Max.

FRANK "KINGIE" PAPALE (cont'd)

Line 'em up. It's my turn to buy.

INT. MAX'S BAR - NIGHT

Max brings a pitcher of beer to Jimmy and a couple of the regulars; stationed at the pool table.

JIMMY

From the Eagle's Dad?

MAX

From the Eagle.

Jimmy looks across the way and makes eye contact with Vince. But instead of walking over to say thanks, or to try and settle things; Jimmy gives a slight nod of the head, and lines up his next pool shot.

EXT. MAX'S BAR - LATER

Max sits on the front curb. Vince sits next to him.

MAX

He's scared. That's all. Put yourself in his place.

VINCE

I don't even know what he's thinkin' Maxie. Last few weeks all he's done is ride me.

MAX

Come on.

A pause.

MAX (cont'd)

He thinks you're gonna leave. It's the worst time in his life right now. He's got no job. He's got no family.

(beat)

He's just got us. And you're one of us.

VINCE

What about Billy and Louie? They know I'd never leave.

MAX

People are different. Some people you gotta talk to, some people you don't.

Vince looks at him.

MAX (cont'd)

That's one thing you've never been too good at Vinnie.

VINCE

What's that?

MAX

Tellin' people how you really feel.

Max and Vince share a look...Vince knowing that the advice Max just gave applies to more than just Jimmy.

The sound of an enormous crowd slowly builds in the background...

EXT./INT. TEXAS STADIUM - DALLAS, TEXAS - DAY

A sell-out crowd eagerly waits for their beloved Cowboys to take the field.

TITLE: PHILADELPHIA EAGLES VS. DALLAS COWBOYS - OPENING GAME, 1976

INT. VISITORS LOCKER ROOM - DAY

There's a palpable nervous tension in the Eagles dressing room; the muffled sound of the crowd seeping into the Philadelphia locker room.

Vince, facing his locker, tries to stay calm. He glances at his wife's quote, his touchstone.

We see several players' faces. Hardened, focused. Some engage in prayer. Everyone has their game face on.

Vince scans the room, picking up on a very different energy here; an intensity level he's never felt before as the players prepare for battle. Even Denny Franks seems removed, "within himself." Vince looks across the way to discover...

ED GERMAN

...sitting against his locker; clinching and un-clinching his hands. Tapping his toes rat-a-tat against the concrete floor. Most unnerving of all, German is looking right into Vince's eyes, channeling his hatred of him for the upcoming game.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - BATHROOM - A MINUTE LATER

Vince, sweating, ducks into a stall and kneels before the toilet. In the stall next to him, Vince can hear someone throwing up.

Vince waits to throw up...but there's nothing but cold sweat. He wipes it away and exits the stall, splashing his face with cold water at the sink. The toilet behind him flushes, the door opens, and...

VERMEIL

...heads for the sink next to Vince. He splashes water on his face.

VINCE
Must've been something I ate.

COACH VERMEIL
Room service, definitely.

And then, Vermeil looks Vince square in the eye...

COACH VERMEIL (cont'd)
Know what my first coach told me?

Off Vince's look.

COACH VERMEIL (cont'd)
If you aren't scared...it's not worth doing.

He claps Vince on the shoulder pad on his way out.

INT. TEXAS STADIUM - TUNNEL - DAY

The Eagles jog out onto the field, greeted immediately by a chorus of "boos" from throughout the stadium.

Vince takes it all in; the massive semi-domed structure, the sell-out crowd, the colorful boosters wearing chaps and ten gallon hats.

The predominant experience he's had of football up until this very moment has been from the perspective of a fan in the cheap seats. But this? This is overwhelming.

ANNOUNCER #1 (V.O.)
Blue skies, eighty one degrees. You couldn't ask for a more perfect setting for this year's season opener.

ANNOUNCER #2 (V.O.)
You sure couldn't. Although no one's expecting any miracles, all eyes will be on the Eagles and their new head coach Dick Vermeil, a man...

INT. MAX'S BAR - SAME

The bar watches the game on television.

ANNOUNCER #2 (V.O.)

...who has made a quick rise from high school, to college, to the pros.

ANNOUNCER #1 (V.O.)

And it hasn't been the smoothest of starts, the Eagles having lost all of their pre-season games.

Max spots Vince running on the field...

MAX

There he is! 83!

THE BAR

VINCE!!!

EXT./INT. TEXAS STADIUM - FIELD - DAY

Vince is now on the sideline. He looks across the field and sees TOM LANDRY, wearing his trademark fedora. The players are the legends that he watched just a year ago:

Roger Staubach. Ed "Too Tall" Jones. Randy White. All exuding a sense of confidence and professionalism that only comes with winning. It's "America's Team," one of the most dominant teams of this, or any, era.

Vince paces. And the look on his face reveals a growing sense of nervousness. A growing sense that he's not just nervous, but scared. Craney snaps him out of it by yelling out...

A.C. CRANEY

Alright, kick team! Let's go!

Vince puts on his helmet and heads for the field.

EXT./INT. TEXAS STADIUM - FIELD - DAY

The EAGLE KICKER positions the ball on the tee. Vince lines up a couple of slots behind the kicker...the sound growing louder, and LOUDER.

The kicker raises his arm, waits for the signal, and rushes forward...

...to drive the ball high into the air. Vince runs down the field, but he's running tentatively; we hear his breathing, fast and shallow, as the thunder of 44 feet pound the Texas turf.

All at once, there are collisions all around him. Vince sees a seam toward the KICK-RETURNER, but in the next second he does something he's never done before.

He hesitates. And as he slows...the kick-returner absolutely ditches him, just as one of the blockers on the wedge...

...takes him out with a text-book special teams block. The ball-carrier blurs by him, and Vince is left looking up at God through the open roof of Texas Stadium.

INT. MAX'S BAR - DAY

LOUIE

Oh man, that wasn't good.

EXT./INT. TEXAS STADIUM - FIELD - DAY

Vince jogs back toward the sideline...

ANNOUNCER #1 (V.O.)

Rookie Vince Papale had an absolute bead on Tyler, but he froze like a deer in the headlights...

ANNOUNCER #2 (V.O.)

...and Coach Vermeil doesn't look too pleased.

...and Vermeil's waiting for Vince. He gets right in his face.

COACH VERMEIL

What the hell was that Papale?!

VINCE

Sorry Coach.

COACH VERMEIL

Sorry? I stuck my neck out for you!
You get your head out of your ass
or you're gone!

Vermeil doesn't wait for an answer, storming away from Vince. Vince finds a seat at the far end of the bench...all alone. One of the players a few feet away gets up and heads away.

There are 65 thousand people within a hundred yards of him, but Vince has never been more alone and isolated than he is at this very moment.

ON THE FIELD

Staubach takes the snap, fades back, and finds DREW PEARSON on a post pattern.

ANNOUNCER #1

Staubach back to pass...and finding
Drew Pearson all alone over the
middle! Touchdown Cowboys!

INT. VISITORS LOCKER ROOM - LATER

A deadly quiet that can only mean one thing: complete and total destruction out on the field. The Eagles gather up their things...ready to head back home.

IN A FAR CORNER OF THE LOCKER

Tose is bending Vermeil's ear. Quietly, so as not to be heard, but firmly...

MR. TOSE

I thought I made it clear what kind
of direction I wanted this team to
go in. 27 to 7 is not what I had in
mind.

COACH VERMEIL

I understand your frustration, but
this is only one game...

MR. TOSE

(cuts him off with...)
...I don't want to hear that.
(beat)
I'll hold Papale responsible for
what happened today on that kick-
off. But if it happens again next
week? In front of our fans? I'll
hold you responsible.

He walks away.

EXT. VETERANS STADIUM - DAY

ESTABLISHING SHOT of the stadium. An empty parking lot, the only activity: that of the FOUR EAGLE TEAM BUSES pulling in after a long night of flying from Dallas.

WAYNE CHAMBERS (V.O.)
 Could be another long season Eagle fans. Not only was the team no match at all for the Cowboys, but South Philly's...

EXT. VETERANS STADIUM - DAY

Vince walks away from the bus...no one close to him, no one there to greet him.

WAYNE CHAMBERS (V.O.)
 ...Vince Papale was a total bust in his pro debut. Coach Dick Vermeil's heart may have been in the right place, but as it stands now, last season's four wins are looking pretty good.

But as Vince approaches his car, he looks up at the stadium for just a moment.

EXT. VETERANS STADIUM - BLEACHERS - DAY

A CLEAN UP CREW sweeps the stands. The camera PANS to find Vince, sitting by himself, up high in the seat he's sat in for years.

A JANITOR comes down his aisle, sweeping away, as Vince looks down on the field.

JANITOR
 Hey Mac? Whatcha doin' in here?

VINCE
 This is my seat.

And then, the janitor recognizes him.

JANITOR
 You're Papale, right? Number 83.

Silence.

JANITOR (cont'd)
 Me and the boys been rootin' for you buddy.
 (but then adds...)
 That was a helluva rough start though.

Vince doesn't reply.

JANITOR (cont'd)
You thinkin' of packin' it in?

VINCE
I don't know.

JANITOR
Man I wouldn't blame you if you
did. It's a rough game in this
town.
(off Vince's silence)
Take care pal.

The janitor gets back to his work. Vince sits.

EXT. JANET'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Janet answers the door to find Vince standing there.

JANET
Hey. What are you doing here?

She steps outside.

VINCE
I was just...walking around.
(pause)
You heard about the game?

JANET
Yeah.

Vince hesitates a beat before...

VINCE
I need to tell you something. That
night at Tony Luke's...

JANET
...Vince, you don't need to say
anything.

VINCE
(but he does)
No. Please. It wasn't just that I
was trying to do this one thing...
(beat)
...I was scared. Because I knew the
way I could feel about you. And it
was too soon. For me at least.

She takes in every word.

VINCE (cont'd)
 I don't know what's gonna happen
 with all this...
 (beat)
 ...and even if we never see each
 other again, even if you go off and
 get married and have five kids...I
 just wanted you to know how I felt.

Janet knows what it took for Vince to say all that. She gives him a heart-wrenching sympathetic look...

JANET
 I can't Vince.

A gut-punch.

JANET (cont'd)
 I love what you just said, but...
 (beat)
 ...it's too soon for me.

The capper to a bad 24 hours. Vince nods...

VINCE
 Yeah.
 (beat)
 Well maybe I'll see you at work.

He backs away...

JANET
 Vince...

VINCE
 No. It's okay. It's fine.

And off he goes. She watches him, concerned.

INT. CHALK TALK ROOM - DAY

Vermeil leads a chalk session in front of the offense...

COACH VERMEIL
 ...we'll run a high-low stretch
 pattern against the zone. First
 option's Carmichael, if he's open.
 Go with a five-step drop, but get
 rid of it faster if you have to.

...Vince is trying to listen, but his mind is clearly wandering, and Vermeil's words are almost nothing but background noise...

COACH VERMEIL (cont'd)
 If the linebackers jump, Charlie'll
 be open over the top. Don't
 hesitate going short if the long
 man's not there...
 (pause)
 ...any questions?

EXT. STREET FAIR - NIGHT

Vince walks through the street fair, the same one he and Janet visited weeks ago. This time he's alone...

EXT. PRACTICE FIELD - DAY

Vince at mid-week practice, going through the motions of a punt drill. The ball is snapped...and Vince, lined up on defense, makes a half-hearted rush toward the kicker...

...not even coming close. Vermeil, on the sidelines, keeps his eyes on Vince.

EXT. STADIUM - NIGHT

Vince, in silhouette again, but this time...instead of the relentless running of the stairs...

...we see the outline of a troubled man, his head hung low as he sits on one of the long rows of bleachers.

INT. CHALK TALK ROOM - DAY

This time, it's Craney doing the talking...

A.C. CRANEY
 Special teams, we should be able to
 get after these guys on Sunday. Be
 watching for any gaps in their line
 play...

...while Vince is doing the thinking.

EXT. PHILLY STREET - EARLY EVENING - STILL LIGHT

Vince walks along the sidewalk, passing a movie theatre. Overhead, the marquee practically mocks him...

12TH SMASH WEEK!!!

ROCKY

SYLVESTER STALLONE

EXT. PHILLY NEIGHBORHOOD - EARLY EVENING - STILL LIGHT

Vince approaches an old city park where a GROUP OF KIDS (ten to twelve year olds) are playing a pick-up game of rough touch football.

ONE KID goes out wide, to the receiver slot, and takes off on a fly pattern. The pass looks good, but it falls out of his reach.

And as the youngster picks up the ball and runs back to the huddle...

...Vince notices on the back of the kid's green sweatshirt: the number "83" scribbled in mark-a-lot. A home-made job.

Vince smiles. The moment triggers the slightest of sparks inside, as he watches these kids...one of whom admired everything he was doing.

EXT. PARKING LOT - NIGHT

ESTABLISHING SHOT of the car-lights shining on "The Royal" parking lot once again, glowing forward in profile.

EXT. PARKING LOT - NIGHT

And the image of the kids playing is replaced by the Friday night rough touch game between Max's finest and yet another neighborhood establishment.

Louie's just finished up another argument with one of the opposing players.

LOUIE

I got three words for you. Pass interference.

He heads back to the huddle. Max's crew looks worn out as they gather up for the next play.

BILLY

Nice play muttonhead. I said go right.

The opposing team is ready to call its defense, when one of the players notices SOMEONE walking toward Max's huddle...

ROYAL OPPOSING PLAYER #1

Hey. Isn't that Papale?

Vince, wearing his old PROPERTY OF THE PHILADELPHIA EAGLES SHIRT, walks toward his old huddle; Jimmy watching with a neutral expression. Billy greets him with...

BILLY

You're crazy, you know that?

VINCE

Yeah, I know. Thought you might need another player.

LOUIE

No way pally, you've got a game on Sunday. Guys here'll be teeing off on you.

ROYAL OPPOSING PLAYER #2

(calls out)

You guys gonna play over there?

MAX

(shouts back)

Hey shut up already! We're talkin' here!

He turns back to the huddle.

MAX (cont'd)

What do they think this is, the NFL or somethin'?

But Vince is looking at Jimmy now...

VINCE

Whatta ya say Jimmy? Just like we always do.

Jimmy waits a long moment before...

JIMMY
Let's take 'em.

EXT. PARKING LOT - NIGHT

SEQUENCE OF SHOTS: As the spark returns for Max's team. Hard hits, not the most graceful of plays, but heart that's hard to measure.

Vince sweeps left on one play. Jimmy makes a hard charge up the middle. And the tide begins to turn.

-- Vince lines up in the receiver slot, the defender across from him trying to get under his skin with...

ROYAL OPPOSING PLAYER #2
Hey Papale! Nice game last week!

But Vince ignores him, cutting on a slant pattern that takes him into the thick of the opposition. He makes the catch, taking two or three licks in the process.

Vince pops right back up and heads back for the huddle...

MAX
You okay?

VINCE
Never better.

EXT. PARKING LOT - NIGHT

And as the game continues, something interesting starts to happen. More and more neighbors, workers, fans...begin to show up as word gets around that Vince Papale is playing with the boys again.

Vince continues to take his share of hits, but he's dishing it out as well...all the while, grinning from ear to ear.

Billy, Louie, Max...and yes, even Jimmy are having the best of times once more. The OPPOSING TEAM isn't having quite as much fun, reserving their toughest hits for South Philly's favorite son. But it doesn't matter.

Double and triple-teamed, Vince still executes every play flawlessly; playing with a fire in his eyes, fighting for every inch.

And just when it looks as if it can't get any better...

VINCE

...takes a pitch from Billy, but instead of running himself, he drops back and lofts a pass toward Jimmy; who hauls it in for a huge gain.

Jimmy! VINCE

MAX AND THE BOYS
Jimmy!

EXT. PARKING LOT - NIGHT

The game comes to an end. And as the two teams get ready to head their separate ways, Vince is stopped by the guy who taunted him earlier...

ROYAL OPPOSING PLAYER #2
Hey Papale! Give 'em hell from the boys in the neighborhood, alright?

Vince nods.

EXT. VINCE'S APARTMENT - LATER THAT NIGHT

Scraped, cut and bruised, Vince heads for his front door. He finds Janet sitting on the front steps. She stands up as she sees him approach...

JANET
Hi.

VINCE
Hi.

JANET
(noticing he's banged up)
My God Vince, what happened to you?
Are you okay?

VINCE
No, it's nothing...Max and the boys needed a little help with tonight's game.

JANET
You're the help? What do they look like?

He smiles.

VINCE

So what's goin' on? It's good to see you.

It's Janet's turn, for the first time, to be at a loss for words.

JANET

What you said the other night. I don't know...maybe I needed a couple of days to think...

He moves in and kisses her. And it lasts for more than a second or two. Finally, when it ends...

JANET (cont'd)

I wasn't done yet.

INT. VINCE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT - ABOUT TWO SECONDS LATER

The door flies open. Vince and Janet, almost in silhouette, stumble in...still locked tight. She's obviously decided that...

JANET

I'll finish later.

They continue on, Vince at one point maybe "ouching" as she accidentally hits one of his war wounds from the game.

JANET (cont'd)

Vince?

(pause/kiss)

There's something else we need to talk about, you know...before the game.

VINCE

I know.

INT. VERMEIL HOUSE - KITCHEN - CRACK OF DAWN

CLOSE on A SUNDAY NEWSPAPER being placed down. A hand flips through the sections to the sports page. The headline tells the whole story, in HUGE PRINT:

WEEK TWO - EAGLES VS. GIANTS

The sub-headline reads: "Vermeil hoping for first win"

WIDER TO REVEAL: Vermeil sipping a cup of coffee, standing and reading the article.

Carol walks in, wearing her bathrobe. Vermeil looks like he showered and got ready hours ago.

CAROL

Morning. Happy five o'clock.

She gives him a kiss on the cheek, noticing the headline.

COACH VERMEIL

Morning.

CAROL

Wow. I wonder if "end of the world" would get print that big.

Carol pours a cup for herself.

CAROL (cont'd)

Couldn't sleep?

(off his silence)

Neither could I.

A pause.

CAROL (cont'd)

So how do you feel about things?

COACH VERMEIL

Giants beat this team 61 to nothing two years ago. It's not easy for a player to forget that.

CAROL

There's no one better at helping 'em do that than you.

EXT. VETERANS STADIUM - DAY

ESTABLISHING SHOT of the VET. The TAILGATERS have been out since first light; a sea of green activity set against the black of barbecue grills.

INT. VETERANS STADIUM - LOCKER ROOM - DAY

Vince stands in front of his locker. He's already wearing his uniform pants, but it's too early for the pads and jersey.

He reaches for Sharon's letter one last time; reading it with a confident smile. And once he's done, he crinkles it up in a ball, holding it for a beat. Ready to move on.

EXT. VETERANS STADIUM - BLEACHERS - DAY

Heading up to their seats: Billy, Louie, Jimmy...and Janet; who is, of course, completely and totally decked out in the deep blue and red of her beloved New York Giants.

The Eagle boys are enduring the onslaught of taunts from the Philly faithful, but they stand by their fan.

BILLY

Hey she's with us already! Alright?

Janet doesn't blink at the green storm around her, giving it right back with a good-natured and healthy amount of sass.

INT. MAX'S BAR - DAY

Max is minding the shop, keeping an eye on the pre-game show along with Vince's father and about TWENTY of the WESTINGHOUSE BOYS.

INT. VETERANS STADIUM - LOCKER ROOM - DAY

Vermeil paces in the center of the locker room; sixty players taking up the rest of the room...intense, ready for battle.

He eases his way into his pre-game speech...

COACH VERMEIL

A team with character...will beat a team with more talent.

(pause)

That's why we worked so hard these past few weeks. Not because we're the team short on talent, I promise we've got as much as the team we're about to beat.

(beat)

We need to find the soul of this franchise again. The soul that drove great players, great Eagles. Eagles like Norm Van Brocklin, Tommy McDonald, Steve Van Buren. Those Eagles didn't just play for themselves...they played for a city.

Vince's eyes are glued on Vermeil.

COACH VERMEIL (cont'd)
 My father worked harder than any
 man I've ever known.
 (beat)
 And he had a saying...

Everyone in the room is listening today. Even Banks.

COACH VERMEIL (cont'd)
 The glory of God is man fully
 alive.
 (beat)
 You are never more alive than when
 you are on a football field...and
 you realize you not only have more
 talent than your opponent, but you
 also have more character.

A beat.

COACH VERMEIL (cont'd)
 We may not get there this year, but
 if the words "Eagles" and
 "Champions" don't sound right
 together...you don't belong here.
 (pause)
 We take that first step today.
 (beat)
 Alright, let's bring it in.

The players crowd in, piling their hands together, one atop
 the other.

COACH VERMEIL (cont'd)
 1-2-3...

EAGLES
 EAGLES!

EXT. VETERANS STADIUM - BLEACHERS - DAY

The nosebleed fans are in fine form...

EAGLE FANS
 EAGLES!

JANET
 GO GIANTS!

EXT. VETERANS STADIUM - TUNNEL - DAY

The Eagles stand ready to take the field. Vince looks over at Vermeil...and the two men share a quick look. Vermeil nods his way. Vince nods back.

FIELD ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
Ladies and gentlemen, your
Philadelphia EAGGGGLEEEES!

The Eagles take the field.

EXT. VETERANS STADIUM - BLEACHERS - DAY

EAGLE FANS
VINCE!

Even Janet goes along with that one. Clapping for her guy.

INT. MAX'S BAR - DAY

Max, "Kingie" and the boys cheer Vince and the Eagles on...

COMMENTATOR #1 (V.O.)
Unbelievable as it may sound, this
is a game that is loaded with
pressure. Coach Dick Vermeil is
still in pursuit of his first win
as an NFL head coach...

EXT. VETERANS STADIUM - SIDELINE - DAY

COMMENTATOR #1 (V.O.)
...and Philly fans have never been
overly patient.

Vermeil takes a quick glance into the stands, finding Carol and the kids.

COMMENTATOR #2 (V.O.)
Making matters even worse, it's the
New York Giants they have to go
against...a team that has had the
Eagles number in recent years.

EXT. VETERANS STADIUM - FIELD - DAY

The FOOTBALL IS ADJUSTED ON THE TEE. Vince, lined up on the far left, stands ready to go...loose and relaxed. The EAGLE KICKER moves forward and kicks the ball...

...and it falls into the GIANT RETURNER's hands deep in the endzone.

Vince sprints down the field, shrugging off one defender, juking past another. But instead of being overwhelmed by the cacophony of sound he witnessed in Dallas...

...the sound fades away for him as he draws a bead on the returner. The only sound...that of his footsteps, the returner's footsteps, and his own breathing.

A gap opens. But rather than freeze up as he did a week ago, Vince *surges* for the tiny pocket, lowers his helmet and...

LEVELS THE RETURNER with a picture-perfect tackle. Pinning him on the eleven yard line! The sound rushes back with a fury.

Vince springs to his feet and lets loose with a WAR YELP...

COMMENTATOR #1 (V.O.)

My goodness! What a hit! Vince Papale, the Eagle's walk on, starting this game off with a bang...

IN THE NOSEBLEEDS

The boys and Janet let loose; the boys yelling out with complete abandonment.

INT. MAX'S BAR - DAY

Vince's father gets a few thumps on the back. Big time cheering.

EXT. VETERANS STADIUM - SIDELINE - DAY

Even MR. TOSE (ON THE SIDELINE) acknowledges the play. Vince and Banks run toward the sideline...

WILLIE BANKS

Nice hit Pops.

COACH VERMEIL
Way to go Papale!

EXT. VETERANS STADIUM - FIELD - DAY

GAME SEQUENCE:

- Massive bodies explode off the line of scrimmage, battling in the trenches to establish any kind of edge.
- The Eagles defense clamps down on the GIANTS RUNNING BACK as he tries to pick up a first down. Denied.
- The EAGLES QUARTERBACK hands the ball to an EAGLES RUNNING BACK, who darts through for an eight yard gain.
- The GIANTS QUARTERBACK tosses over the middle to a GIANTS RECEIVER who makes the catch, picking up about twenty yards.
- The GIANTS RUNNING BACK hits the line of scrimmage again.
- The REFEREE signals FIRST DOWN GIANTS.
- The GIANTS QUARTERBACK sends a tight spiral on a crossing pattern. The RECEIVER gathers it in and runs the remaining five yards to paydirt.

COMMENTATOR #1 (V.O.)
...and the Giants draw first blood
on a ten yard touchdown pass.

EXT. VETERANS STADIUM - BLEACHERS - DAY

Janet stands alone against a field of disgruntled green...

JANET
Alright Giants!

...a chorus of "Sit down!" and "Shut up!" echoing all around her. Billy pulls her into her seat.

EXT. VETERANS STADIUM - FIELD - DAY

But now it's the Eagles turn to head down the field. Vermeil cheers his team on...

COACH VERMEIL
Let's get it goin' now!

- The EAGLES RUNNING BACK picks up five yards...

-- ...and another six.

-- The EAGLES QUARTERBACK drops back, finds a receiver on the sideline...

-- ...before sending a tight-spiral to HAROLD CARMICHAEL in the corner of the endzone. Touchdown Eagles!

EXT. VETERANS STADIUM - BLEACHERS - DAY

This time, it's the Eagles' faithful giving it to Janet. She takes it just fine.

EXT. VETERANS STADIUM - FIELD - DAY

Another kick-off. Vince flies down the field as the returner hauls it in at the two-yard line. South Philly's favorite son's legs are a blur as he sprints past two would-be blockers...

...and once again, he buries his helmet into the returner. This time at the 12 yard line. The CROWD ERUPTS; while the Giant's kick-returner yells out at one of his own blockers:

GIANT KICK RETURNER
Man, somebody block that guy!

IN THE NOSEBLEEDS:

BILLY
WAY TO GO VINCE! WAY TO GO!

They're borderline out-of-control...the sight of their buddy manhandling the NEW YORK GIANTS more than they could have ever hoped for...

ON THE SIDELINE: The Eagle players, the veterans, stand and cheer for Papale.

A.C. CRANEY
(to Vermeil)
You seein' this?

COACH VERMEIL
Absolutely.

Craney shakes his head. The celebration on the field is a bit more enthusiastic...as now, two or three Eagle teammates come over to thump Papale on the helmet.

INT. MAX'S BAR - DAY

The celebration continues at Max's bar...

COMMENTATOR #2 (V.O.)

What a turn-around from a week ago
when Vince Papale could do nothing
right...

EXT. VETERANS STADIUM - FIELD - DAY

SEQUENCE OF IMAGES:

- Vince fighting his way through block after block on special teams.
- The crowd cheering. The fever of winning returning to Veterans Stadium.
- Vermeil calling out plays from the sideline. Intense.
- The clock ticking down.
- Carol in the stands, almost unable to watch.
- Another frenetic collision at the line of scrimmage as the Eagle running back slams into the defense, his legs continue to jack-hammer for any last bit of yardage.

EXT. VETERANS STADIUM - FIELD - DAY

The REFEREE signals for a time-out to measure. The clock now reads:

EAGLES 14 GIANTS 14 4TH QUARTER TIME REMAINING: 0:41

COMMENTATOR #1 (V.O.)

...the Eagles needing a first down
to keep any hopes of winning this
game alive...

The chains stretch out. Short, by maybe six inches...

COMMENTATOR #1 (V.O.) (cont'd)

...and they are short.

THE CROWD moans. Vermeil gives the signal to the punting unit. Vince runs out on the field.

COMMENTATOR #2 (V.O.)

This is absolutely the right choice by Coach Vermeil, but unless the Giants make a huge mistake...the Eagles have just seen their last chance at victory slip away.

Vince lines up wide left, double coverage on him this time. The line sets up, one of the DEFENDERS growling at him...

GIANT DEFENDER

We're comin' in baby.

COMMENTATOR #1 (V.O.)

...still a huge play for the Eagles new head coach, his team deep in its own territory. You can't win the game on this play, but you sure can lose it...

But Vince looks at the player's KNUCKLES. They're not white, which means their weight is on their heels.

VINCE

(whispers to himself)
They're stayin' back.

UP IN THE BLEACHERS:

The roar is steady and deafening. The Eagle boys chanting...

EAGLE FANS

VINCE, VINCE, VINCE!!!

ON THE SIDELINE: Tose paces...

IN HER SEATS: Carol Vermeil can barely breathe...so caught up in the moment.

BACK IN THE NOSEBLEEDS:

Janet, proudly wearing her Giants blue, whispers the unthinkable to herself...

JANET

Come on Vince...get after 'em.

...rooting against her team. The noise, the images; all build to an amazing crescendo.

EXT. VETERANS STADIUM - FIELD - DAY

The ball is snapped and as the linemen smash forward, Vince takes off like a shot, completely ditching any notion of staying back to protect his punter.

The Eagles punter lofts a beauty off his right foot, deep into Giants' territory.

Vince roars down the field, zeroing in on his target: the RETURNER...stationed at his own forty.

COMMENTATOR #1 (V.O.)
Papale, with a tremendous break on
the ball...

The ball descends. Vince approaches.

INTERCUT WITH: Spectators on edge, glued to the play.

And just as the ball drops into the returner's grasp...

...Vince arrives, driving his shoulder right where it needs to be; as perfect a special-teams play as one could execute.

THE BALL POPS LOOSE.

COMMENTATOR #2 (V.O.)
...FUMBLE!

An explosion of sound from the crowd, which gets louder when Vince pops up and scoops up the ball. And starts to run.

And it's in that moment that Vince Papale suddenly becomes Steve Van Buren...

HIS FATHER GAZING IN SILENCE AT THE TV SCREEN

...and the joshing play-by-play that Billy and the boys chanted twice during the past few weeks, suddenly becomes very real:

COMMENTATOR #1 (V.O.)
...Papale, with the ball! He's at
the forty, the thirty, the
twenty...

Pandemonium. Everywhere. Vermeil watching, not believing. Willie Banks and Ed German yelling out...

WILLIE BANKS AND ED GERMAN
Go, Pops, go!

...as Vince surges toward the endzone.

COMMENTATOR #1 (V.O.)
...TOUCHDOWN EAGLES! The most
incredible, improbable ending to a
game that I can remember!

COMMENTATOR #2 (V.O.)
Unbelievable! Absolutely
unbelievable!

INT. MAX'S BAR - DAY

Max reaches across the bar for Vince's father...

MAX
That's your boy Frankie.

EXT. VETERANS STADIUM - DAY

-- Louie...and Billy...and Jimmy...all are completely beside themselves. Janet is just as excited, hugging Eagle fans she doesn't even know.

-- Tose shakes his head and raises his arms skyward, letting loose with a yell.

EXT. VETERANS STADIUM - SIDELINE - DAY

Vermeil turns to look into the stands, finding his wife through the sheer pandemonium. She shakes her head...

...the look on his face saying everything.

EXT. VETERANS STADIUM - FIELD - DAY

P-A ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
The Eagles touchdown...scored by
number 83, Vince Papale.

A collective roar of: "VINNNNNNNCCCCCEEE"

Vince, approaching the sideline, looks and points toward the nosebleeds. It can't get any louder, but it somehow does...

...as Vince is swarmed by his teammates. By the veterans. Banks, Denny Franks, Ed German, Harold Carmichael.

Finally, he reaches Vermeil...

COACH VERMEIL
 Helluva play Pops, helluva play.

The image holds. Player and coach. Coach and player. The chanting of "Vince, Vince, Vince" continues unabated...

TRANSITION TO:

ACTUAL HIGHLIGHTS of Vince Papale delivering the special team hits that made him famous, including his hit and touchdown against the New York Giants.

TITLE: Vince Papale played four seasons with the Philadelphia Eagles, becoming the first player in Eagles' history to be unanimously elected as Captain of Special Teams.

ACTUAL FOOTAGE of Dick Vermeil prowling the sidelines, exhorting on his players.

TITLE: Dick Vermeil guided the Eagles to their first Super Bowl appearance...just four years after taking over as head coach.

FADE TO BLACK.

FADE UP ON: A PHOTO of the real Vince on the sidelines, celebrating arm-in-arm with Denny Franks (the original photograph resides in the Football Hall of Fame).

ROLL CREDITS

FADE OUT.