

Sports Night

"Cliff Gardner"

by

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Directed by

Bob Berlinger

UPDATED FINAL

9/20/99

#N327

SPORTS NIGHT

"Cliff Gardner"

#N327

Cast

Dan.....Josh Charles
Casey.....Peter Krause
Isaac.....Robert Guillaume
Dana.....Felicity Huffman
Jeremy.....Josh Malina
Natalie.....Sabrina Lloyd
Kim.....Kayla Blake
Elliot.....Greg Baker
Chris.....Timothy Davis-Reed
Will.....Ron Ostrow
Dave.....Jeff Mooring
Sam.....William H. Macy
J.J.....Robert Mailhouse
Mitchel.....Tim Dekay
Tasker.....Bari Hochwald

SPORTS NIGHT - "Cliff Gardner"
FINAL DRAFT 9/14/99 (YELLOW)

TEASER INT. STUDIO/CONTROL ROOM - NIGHT - (NIGHT 1) (Dan, Casey, Dana, Jeremy, Natalie, Kim, Elliot, Chris, Will, Dave, Sam)	1		
ACT ONE Scene A INT. NEWSROOM/CORRIDORS/DAN AND CASEY'S OFFICE - MORNING - (DAY 2) (Dan, Casey, Jeremy)	11		
Scene B INT. DANA'S OFFICE-11:45AM- (DAY 2) (Dana, Natalie)	17		
Scene C INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - 12 NOON - (DAY 2) (Dan, Casey, Dana, Jeremy, Natalie, Kim, Elliot, Chris, Will, Dave)	22		
ACT TWO SCENE D INT. CRAFT SERVICE TABLE - DAY - (DAY 2) (Jeremy, Sam, Atmosphere)	28		
Scene E INT. DANA'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON - (DAY 2) (Dan, Casey, Dana)	30		
Scene H INT. ISAAC'S OFFICE/EXECUTIVE CORRIDOR - MAGIC HOUR (NIGHT 2) (Isaac, J.J., Sam, Mitchel, Tasker)	37		
Scene J INT. ISAAC'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS - (NIGHT 2) (Isaac, Sam)	43		
Scene K INT. CONFERENCE ROOM/NEWSROOM/CORRIDORS/STUDIO/ CONTROL ROOM - NIGHT - (NIGHT 2) Dan, Casey, Isaac, Dana, Jeremy, Natalie, Kim, Elliot, Chris, Will, Dave, J.J., Sam, Mitchel, Tasker)	46		
Scene L INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - NIGHT - NIGHT 2 (Dan, Casey, Dana, Jeremy, Natalie, Kim, Elliot, Chris, Will, Dave, Sam)	59		

TEASER

INT. STUDIO/CONTROL ROOM - NIGHT - (NIGHT 1)

(Dan, Casey, Dana, Jeremy, Natalie, Kim, Elliot, Chris, Will,
Dave, Sam)

THE SHOW IS UNDERWAY--

DAN

Donovan McNabb was 14 for 19 passing
for a total of 163 yards and no
touchdowns. He also ran for 19 yards
in his second appearance for the
Eagles with--

DANA

Could the show be any stiffer tonight?

NATALIE

It's pretty stiff.

DANA

Yes it is.

JEREMY

It'll loosen up.

DANA

It can only loosen up, Jeremy, 'cause
I don't think it's possible for it to
be any stiffer.

DAVE

Stand by 55.

DANA

I thought last night was as bad as we
could get. But it turns out we had
unexplored potential for stiffness.

DAVE

Go 55.

CHRIS

No wait.

WILL

Go 55.

CHRIS

That's wrong.

DAVE

Now!

DANA

Dammit, Dave, get it together.

DAVE

Stand by 56.

DANA

That's what we need right now. We need
the control room to fall apart too.
That's just what the doctor ordered.

NATALIE

He's gotten in everyone's head.

DANA

Like a virus.

JEREMY

Or like a tiny electrode that's been
surgically placed in the cerebral
cortex in the middle of the night by,
like, I don't know, something from
Invasion of the Body Snatchers.
(PAUSE) More like a virus. (BEAT) See,
I'm totally off my game.

DANA

He gets his way.

NATALIE .

Yes.

DANA

No matter what, he seems to get his
way.

NATALIE

He does seem to be in control.

DANA

After a week.

KIM

Eight days.

DANA

Who cares. It took me two years to
figure out how to run this show.

(MORE)

DANA (CONT'D)

He comes in here, he gets in our heads
like a virus, or like whatever it is
Jeremy said, and we're so stiff we're
making the McNeil-Lehrer Report look
like Woodstock.

SAM DONOVAN ENTERS--

SAM

Hey.

DANA

Good evening.

SAM

Show seems a little stiff tonight,
don't you think?

DANA

Yes I do.

SAM

Maybe even stiffer than last night.

DANA

I believe it is.

SAM

You know why?

NATALIE

'Cause you're freaking everyone out?

SAM :

Could be.

DAVE

Stand by 57 and 58.

SAM

You know what I'd do if I were you?

DANA

Kill myself?

SAM

Nah. I'd whisper in their ear.

DANA

I beg your pardon?

SAM

The two of you. Whisper something in
their ear.

DANA

What are you talking about?

SAM

Men like the sound of a woman
whispering in their ear. They get
playful.

DANA

Why don't we just get 'em a lap dance?

SAM

We don't have that kinda time, but I
like your thinkin'.

DANA

Listen--

SAM

Whisper in their ear.

DANA

I am not whispering in their ear. Natalie
is not whispering in their ear--

KIM

If you want--

DANA

Kim is not whispering in their ear.
You've gotten everything you've
wanted. We've been totally
cooperative. But I'm afraid that from
eleven to twelve, this is my show, and
I'll deal with things the way I deal
with things.

SAM

Okay.

CHRIS

We're in commercial.

DAVE

Two minutes back.

DANA

Excuse me.

DANA GETS UP AND STOMPS INTO THE STUDIO--

DAN

I believe we're about to get a pep talk.

CASEY

Yeah.

DANA

(TO DANA AND CASEY) I've seen brighter performances by inmates, you mind telling me what the hell is going on?

DAN

We're--

DANA

I don't want to hear about it. This show's supposed to be fun. You guys sound like you're giving stock quotes. Is there a reason I'm not aware of?

CASEY

We think--

DANA

Don't make your excuses. We've got 18 minutes of show left, and I'd like you guys to start earning your money. Do you have anything to say?

DAN

We should--

DANA

Good.

DANA GOES BACK INTO THE CONTROL ROOM. SAM, WHO'S KINDA
WANDERED IN BEHIND HER AND LINGERED IN BACK, STEPS TO THE
ANCHOR DESK. AS HE SPEAKS, HE'LL CASUALLY START TO SHUFFLE
SOME SCRIPT PAGES ON THE DESK.

SAM

Donna seems pretty mad.

CASEY

Dana.

SAM

Hm?

DAN

Her name is Dana, not Donna.

SAM

Is that right?

CASEY

Yes.

SAM

Dana's a better name.

CASEY

I'm sure she appreciates that.

SAM

You know what I think? I think my
presence in the studio and control
room is intimidating people, and I
think it's preventing you from doing
your best work. So I'm gonna go watch
the rest of the show in the newsroom.

CASEY

I'm sure Dana'll appreciate that too.

SAM WALKS AWAY, CASUALLY TAKING THE SCRIPT PAGES WITH HIM.

DAN

(TO CASEY) See? He's weakening. He
doesn't always get his way.

CASEY

Did he just take our script?

AS SAM WALKS BY A TABLE IN THE BACK, HE YANKS A PLUG FROM A
LAPTOP, FOLDS UP THE LAPTOP AND TAKES IT AWAY.

NATALIE

We just lost the TelePrompter.

DANA

What?

ELLIOT

We lost the TelePrompter.

DAVE

15 seconds back.

DANA

Casey/Dan, we lost the TelePrompter,
work off your script.

DAN

Sam Donovan stole the script.

DANA

Well then. No problem. I'm in control.
Natalie and I will...feed you bullet
points. We'll whisper 'em in your ear.

DAVE

In three...two...

DAN

Welcome back...

END OF TEASER

ACT ONE

(A)

INT. NEWSROOM/CORRIDORS/DAN AND CASEY'S OFFICE - MORNING -
(DAY 2)

(Dan, Casey, Jeremy)

DAN AND JEREMY ARE WALKING--

JEREMY

I'm frightened every time I'm near him.

DAN

You gotta face that fear.

JEREMY

I know.

DAN

You gotta face it head on.

JEREMY

I shake.

DAN

It's the fear.

JEREMY

I lose my ability to speak. And you
know me, Dan, I'm a fairly smooth
conversationalist.

DAN

Yes.

JEREMY

Face the fear?

DAN

I'd face the fear.

JEREMY

You think it'll help?

DAN

No, but it'll give you something to
do.

JEREMY

Then I shall face it.

DAN

Excellent.

DAN CONTINUES INTO--

INT. DAN AND CASEY'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS - (DAY 2)

CASEY IS LYING ON THE COUCH

CASEY

What's goin' on?

DAN

Jeremy's gonna face his fear.

CASEY

Yeah?

DAN

I think we should watch.

CASEY

You know, among the many unhappy by-products of Sam Donovan's arrival, is that it's taken attention from the serious problem I'm having with Dana.

DAN

The dating plan.

CASEY

The dating plan.

DAN

Casey, don't kill me for this, but I gotta say something.

CASEY

What.

DAN

I'm not quite seeing the problem.

CASEY

You're not quite seeing the problem?

DAN

No.

CASEY

After 15 years of dancing around each other, Dana and I are poised to start a relationship, only she decides that due to what she perceives as a limited experience with women, she's requiring me to date other people for six months before I can date her.

DAN

Okay. Dude. First of all, it's not just what Dana would perceive as a limited experience with women, it's what pretty much any jury of reasonable people would perceive to be a limited--

CASEY

So I got married young. I married my college sweetheart. That doesn't make me Okey from Fanokey.

DAN

No it doesn't, but using the expression Okay from Fanokey sure does the trick.

CASEY

I'm in pain here. I'm in anguish.

DAN

A woman you have strong feelings for, you get to work with, side by side, for twelve hours a day, six days a week. She has told you, after a decade and a half, that she's interested in a romantic relationship with you, but that she wants you to date other women. She's requiring you to date other women. To be with them on dates with their perfume and their nice shoes while they try and be as interesting to you as possible. Because you are a television star, these women, very likely, will not be from the bargain basement. And because these women won't know you very well, there might just be an opportunity for you to have sex. Now I grant you, somewhere, somehow, Dana has obviously lost several of her marbles, but I don't think that should stop you from gettin' busy.

CASEY

I want Dana. I don't want a series of meaningless relationships with women who want to sleep with me because I'm on television.

DAN

(PAUSE) I don't follow you.

CASEY

Danny--

DAN

I'm just saying--

CASEY

We got bigger problems.

DAN

I know.

CASEY

Shouldn't we be talkin' about them?

DAN

Let's just write, okay?

CASEY

Yeah.

CUT TO:

ACT ONE

(B)

INT. DANA'S OFFICE - 11:45 AM - (DAY 2)
(Dana, Natalie)

NATALIE IS SITTING ON THE COUCH AS DANA SLAMS THE PHONE DOWN.
THE CONVERSATION, DUE TO FRUSTRATION AND FRAYED NERVES, WILL
QUICKLY GET LOUD.

DANA

They're coming here.

NATALIE

When?

DANA

Eight o'clock.

NATALIE

They want to give notes.

DANA

Yeah.

NATALIE

Dana--

DANA

I know.

NATALIE

The wheels are comin' off the wagon,

Dana.

DANA

I know.

NATALIE

They want to come give notes?

DANA

Yeah.

NATALIE

Just gather us up and give us some
notes.

DANA

They're very serious about it.

NATALIE

Who's coming, J.J. and the boys?

DANA

Yeah.

NATALIE

Good, 'cause they're qualified to tell
us how to write and produce a
television show given their many years
of experience neither writing nor
producing television shows.

DANA

What do you want from me, Natalie, we
work for a network.

NATALIE

How did this happen?

DANA

Look--

NATALIE

How did Sam Donovan happen? Why are we getting network notes? How did this place turn into a morgue so fast?

DANA

We're in third place, Natalie. We're getting our asses kicked by ESPN and Fox.

NATALIE

Those guys have been around forever, we're three years old.

DANA

We're still in third place.

NATALIE

Every show on this network's in third place. It's a third place network. It doesn't mean we weren't doing the show well.

DANA

Isaac had a stroke.

NATALIE

I know that. So what?

DANA

So I'm doing the best I can!

NATALIE

No one's blaming you.

DANA

Everyone's blaming me! And knowing me
as you do, Natalie, I thought you
—might consider cutting me a little
slack!

DANA LEANS BACK AGAINST HER DESK AND RUBS HER EYES...

DANA (CONT'D)

Natalie, if this keeps up I've gotta
look seriously at some offers.

NATALIE

(BEAT) Really?

DANA

I can work anywhere I want. Who wants
to stay for this?

NATALIE

(PAUSE) Well you're not leaving me
here.

DANA

No.

NATALIE

You're taking me with you, Dana.

DANA

Of course.

NATALIE

I mean, I don't care if it's a station
in Altoona, you're taking me with you.

DANA

I'm taking you with me, I'm taking
you.

NATALIE

(PAUSE) Jeremy has to come too.

DANA

Fine.

NATALIE

And you're not gonna be happy unless
Casey's there.

DANA

Casey can come.

NATALIE

Casey needs Dan.

DANA

(BEAT) I know.

NATALIE

Nobody's blaming you, Dana.

DANA

(BEAT) We've got a run down meeting.

DANA AND NATALIE HEAD OUT THE DOOR AS WE

CUT TO:

ACT ONE

(C)

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - 12:00 NOON - (DAY 2)

(Dan, Casey, Dana, Jeremy, Natalie, Kim, Elliot, Chris, Will, Dave)

CASEY, DAN, JEREMY, KIM, ELLIOT, CHRIS, WILL AND DAVE ARE SITTING AROUND THE TABLE. NOBODY'S TALKING.

DANA AND NATALIE ENTER. DANA PUTS HER PAPERS DOWN AND SITS IN HER SPOT AT THE HEAD OF THE TABLE.

DANA

That's what I like to see at the noon
run down: Some lively chatter. The
place is alive with energy and ideas.
Ah, the creative process.

JEREMY

Dana--

DANA

Stow it. Let's take care of business.

ELLIOT

There's a memo from building
maintenance that one of the legs on
the craft service table is wobbly, and
we should be careful while getting
ourselves food.

DANA

(LONG PAUSE) What?

ELLIOT

There's a memo from building
maintenance.

DANA

That one of the legs on the craft
service table is wobbly?

ELLIOT

Yeah.

THERE'S A LONG SILENCE BEFORE EVERYONE SIMPLY BREAKS UP
LAUGHING. A WEEK'S WORTH OF TENSION IS EXPLODING IN WAVES OF
GALLOWS LAUGHTER.

DANA

(THROUGH HER LAUGHTER) Elliot...this
show is sinking like a slab of
granite. I've never seen something so
good fall apart so fast. It's almost
hard to believe there aren't senior
members of the Dukakis campaign
involved with this. I don't think a
wobbly leg on the craft service
table...

DANA'S LAUGHING SO HARD SHE CAN'T FINISH THE SENTENCE...

DAN

(STILL LAUGHING) I disagree. I think
we gotta get right on it.

CASEY

The show's important, but first things
first: There are bagels on that table.

WILL

And very good danish.

CHRIS

We gotta secure the coffee.

DAVE

Absolutely.

THE LAUGHTER DIES DOWN ALMOST AS QUICKLY AS IT STARTED. THEY
SIT IN SILENCE FOR A MOMENT AS THE REALITY OF THEIR SITUATION
TAKES OVER AGAIN.

DANA

J.J. and some people from the network
want to meet with us at--

DAN

I knew it.

DANA

--at eight o'clock, they want to give
us some notes.

DAN

Oh man.

DANA

Danny--

DAN

The network wants to give us notes.

DANA

Yes.

DAN

I thought we were finished with that..

DANA

Apparently not.

DAN

And may I ask--

DANA

No.

DAN

May I ask what you're doing about
this?

DANA

I'm having them arrested, Danny. I'm
telling their parents, I'm telling the
teacher, I'm gonna go to my room and
lock the door.

DAN

I'd accept any of those before I'd
believe you'd just show these people
in.

DANA

I'm doing the best I can.

DAN

The fact that that might be true
absolutely terrifies me.

NATALIE

Danny--

DANA

You've turned into a malcontent,
Danny.

DAN

And you've turned into a secretary,
Dana.

CASEY

Hey!

DANA

(GETTING UP) Let's do this later.

NATALIE

It's okay, we can--

DANA

Meeting's over.

DANA'S OUT THE DOOR. EVERYONE STARTS TO GET UP...

CASEY

That was nice, man.

DAN EXITS. THEN CASEY, ALONG WITH ELLIOT, KIM, CHRIS, WILL
AND DAVE.

NATALIE AND JEREMY ARE LEFT IN THE ROOM...

JEREMY

(AFTER A MOMENT) We're in trouble.

NATALIE

I know.

THEY STAND THERE A MOMENT WITH NOTHING LEFT TO SAY, BEFORE
THEY EXIT OUT SEPARATE DOORS.

WE HOLD ON THE EMPTY ROOM A MOMENT BEFORE WE--

FADE TO BLACK

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

(D)

INT. CRAFT SERVICE TABLE - DAY - (DAY 2)
(Jeremy, Sam, Atmosphere)

JEREMY IS SURVEYING THE FOOD WHEN SAM COMES UP ALONGSIDE HIM.
SAM DOESN'T SAY ANYTHING, BUT STARTS TO PUT TOGETHER A LITTLE
PLATE FOR HIMSELF.

JEREMY

(AFTER A MOMENT) Hello.

SAM

Hi.

JEREMY

I was gonna get myself a snack.

SAM

Okay.

JEREMY

I can come back later.

SAM

Okay.

JEREMY TAKES A FEW STEPS AWAY, THEN TURNS BACK--

JEREMY

No. I'm going face my fear.

SAM

Okay.

JEREMY

I'm going to stand right here and make
a sandwich. Why? Because I'm hungry.

(MORE)

JEREMY (CONT'D)

And while I'm making my sandwich, I'm going to talk to you. Why? To face my fear. So here I go. I've got some bread, and on it I place some turkey, like so, a lettuce leaf for roughage-- and notice how all the while I'm talking to you no problem--a little mustard? Absolutely. Some potato chips? Don't mind if I do. There. Not only have I faced my fear, I have conquered it.

AND JEREMY PUTS THE PERIOD ON THE SENTENCE BY SLAPPING THE TABLE IN TRIUMPH, WHICH SENDS THE CRAFT SERVICE TABLE AND ALL ITS CONTENTS CRASHING TO THE GROUND.

JEREMY AND SAM STARE AT THE WRECKAGE FOR A MOMENT...

JEREMY (CONT'D)

We were talking before about making that wobbly leg a priority.

SAM

Okay.

SAM WALKS OFF WITH HIS PLATE OF FOOD, LEAVING JEREMY STANDING THERE AS WE

CUT TO:

ACT TWO

(E)

INT. DANA'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON - (DAY 2)
(Dan, Casey, Dana)

DANA SITS AT HER DESK WHEN THERE'S A KNOCK ON THE DOOR--

DANA

Who is it?

DAN

I have some gifts for you.

DANA

That wasn't necessary.

DAN OPENS THE DOOR AND STEPS IN. HE'S CARRYING A GROCERY BAG.

DAN

I think it was. You once took a
vacation in Napa and visited a small
vineyard there. You said you tried
some wine that you loved and you've
never been able to find it anywhere. I
thought I remembered the name but I
wasn't sure.

DAN TAKES A BOTTLE OF WINE OUT OF THE BAG...

DAN (CONT'D)

Is this it?

DANA TAKES THE BOTTLE OF WINE AND LOOKS AT IT...

DANA

(QUIETLY) Yes.

DAN

Good.. I always like wine and cheese.

DANA

I know.

DAN

I wanted to get you some cheese.

There's a great cheese place over on
Second Avenue. I went over there after
I got the wine, but it's gone. There's
a hardware store there now.

DANA

That's okay.

DAN

(REACHING INTO THE BAG AND SHOWING
HER) I got you some spackle.

DANA LAUGHS. IT'S BETTER THAN CRYING.

DANA

Thank you.

DAN

I'm sorry.

DANA

I'm sorry too.

CASEY TAPS ON THE OPEN DOOR--

CASEY

Hey.

DANA

Hey.

CASEY

— Everything all right?

DAN

Yeah. I'm lookin' at tape.

DANA

See you later.

DAN EXITS...

CASEY

You got some wine?

DANA

And some spackle.

CASEY

(BEAT) You needed spackle?

DANA

No. But, you know, it's good to have
around.

CASEY

How you feeling?

DANA

Terrible.

CASEY

I've got an idea.

DANA

What?

CASEY

You're gonna say it's against the rules, but I think it's a really good idea.

DANA

What?

CASEY

Let's go on a date tonight.

DANA

I think that's a great idea.

CASEY

But.

DANA

It's against the rules.

CASEY

Yeah, yeah.

DANA

Maybe today's not the best day to talk about it.

CASEY

No.

DANA

Thanks.

CASEY

Hey, is there anything I can do for you?

DANA

You can stay cool during the notes
meeting. Keep Danny in his chair, too.

CASEY

Yeah.

DANA

We've gotta remember it wasn't the
network who brought in Sam Donovan, it
was Isaac. That makes things a little
more--

CASEY

Yeah.

DANA

Thanks.

CASEY

I was talking to Danny about the
dating plan--

DANA

And he thinks you should be psyched.

CASEY

Yeah. Which I thought was crazy, but
maybe I'm the one who's--

DANA

Casey, I want you to date other women.
I don't want you to enjoy it.

CASEY

Ah.

DANA

You see?

CASEY

Not really. Maybe you could explain
it better to me if we had a date
tonight.

DANA

I want us to have a real chance.

CASEY

I understand.

DANA

Do you?

CASEY

No, but what choice do I have?

DANA GIVES HIM A SOFT KISS...

DANA

None.

CASEY

I didn't think so.

DANA

You'll stay quiet with the network?

CASEY

Yeah.

SPORTS NIGHT "Cliff Gardner"
UPDATED FINAL - 9/20/99

36.
(2/E)

DANA

And Danny too?

CASEY

Yeah.

DANA

Thanks.

CASEY EXITS AS WE...

CUT TO:

ACT TWO

(H)

INT. ISAAC'S OFFICE/EXECUTIVE CORRIDOR - MAGIC HOUR -
(NIGHT 2)

(Isaac, J.J., Sam, Mitchel, Tasker)

A BRIEF MEETING IS ABOUT TO GET STARTED. ISAAC IS BEHIND HIS DESK. J.J., AS WELL AS TWO OTHERS, MITCHEL AND TASKER, ARE THERE. SAM ENTERS AND WILL LEAN AGAINST THE WINDOW AND NOT REALLY PARTICIPATE MUCH IN THE MEETING.

ISAAC

J.J., you know Sam Donovan?

J.J.

We haven't met yet. It's a pleasure.

SAM

Hi.

J.J.

This is Ray Mitchel, director of
program development.

MITCHEL

Hi.

J.J.

And Billy Tasker senior V.P. of
current programming.

TASKER

Hi.

SAM

Hi.

J.J.

Isaac, we know you're busy, so we'll cut to the chase. Sports Night's been underachieving. It's not an exaggeration at this point to say the network's concern is extreme. Ray and Billy have been writing memos and giving notes to the staff for a year, and they've fallen on deaf ears. It's simply time for us to step in.

ISAAC

I'm sorry you feel that way.

J.J.

Excuse me?

ISAAC

I said I'm sorry you feel that way. That the notes have fallen on deaf ears. I've always felt they were given their due consideration.

J.J.

They weren't.

ISAAC

You mean because we didn't take them.

J.J.

Excuse me?

ISAAC

I'm sorry, with a stroke your diction
is the first to go.

J.J.

Yes.

ISAAC

I don't mind not being able to get
around fast, but I do miss language.

J.J.

You were saying?

ISAAC

I was saying that just because we
didn't execute all the network's
suggestions, doesn't mean we weren't
listening, it just means we didn't
agree. (BEAT) You didn't expect me to
substitute your judgement for mine,
did you J.J.?

J.J.

Not then, no.

ISAAC

But now.

J.J.

Yes.

ISAAC

(PAUSE) Will it keep everyone here
from losing their jobs?

J.J.

I don't understand.

ISAAC

If I allow you three to go in there
and mess with my show...will it keep
my staff from losing their jobs?

J.J.

I can't make promises.

ISAAC

J.J.?

J.J.

Yeah.

ISAAC

I've never liked you.

J.J.

I know.

ISAAC

We're done.

J.J., MITCHEL AND TASKER GET UP...

J.J.

Sam, can we see you a second outside?

(MORE)

SAM GETS UP AND FOLLOWS THEM INTO--

INT. EXECUTIVE CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS - (NIGHT 2)

J.J. LEADS THEM DOWN THE HALL A LITTLE BIT SO THAT THEY'RE NOT STANDING RIGHT OUTSIDE ISAAC'S DOOR.

J.J. (CONT'D)

It doesn't seem like he's recovering
as fast as we'd hoped.

SAM

Really?

TASKER

Yeah.

SAM

You guys want to exert more control
over the show, right?

MITCHEL

Yeah.

SAM

Then it seems like he's recovering
exactly as fast as you'd hoped.

J.J.

(BEAT) I think our point was that he's
no longer able to do the job.

TASKER

To tell you the truth, it's not clear
that he was ever able to do the job. He
was a bit of a sentimental choice, but--

J.J.

What we're saying is that for whatever reason, you seem to be able to exert some authority around here, and we like the idea of a more sales-oriented executive at the top of the pyramid, so we were hoping that when things settled down here, you'd consider sitting down and talking to Luther Sachs about making it permanent.

SAM

(PAUSE) Was there anything else?

J.J.

No.

SAM

(BEAT) Okay.

J.J. AND THE BOYS DON'T QUITE KNOW WHAT TO MAKE OF THIS ODD MAN, BUT THEY SAY--

J.J.

Okay.

TASKER

Great.

MITCHEL

Good to meet you.

THEY GO OFF AS WE

CUT TO:

ACT TWO

(J)

INT. ISAAC'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS - (NIGHT 2)
(Isaac, Sam)

ISAAC IS STANDING IN FRONT OF THE WINDOW AND LOOKING OUT AS
SAM STEPS BACK IN.

ISAAC

This is my favorite time of day, and
my favorite time of year in New York.

SAM

Mine too.

ISAAC

Did they offer you my job?

SAM

No. They were talking to me about some
numbers I'd put together on the mid-
West. The small market teams--

ISAAC

Don't lie to me, Sam.

SAM

(PAUSE) They offered me your job.

ISAAC

(PAUSE) You should play ball with 'em,
son. You shouldn't mess 'em around.
You could have a big future at this
network.

SAM

I appreciate the advice.

ISAAC

Don't brush me off. I know you like being a gunslinger. Bopping from job to job. But you're better than that and you know it. Also, you're a grown man now and you don't have 30 cents in your pocket.

SAM

Yeah.

ISAAC

Think about what I said.

SAM

Are you going to this meeting?

ISAAC

Nah. I'm gonna go sit in the control room and watch a color test.

SAM

You're the Managing Editor, you're gonna sit in the control room and watch a color test?

ISAAC

I feel like doing something that has something to do with television.

SPORTS NIGHT "Cliff Gardner".
UPDATED FINAL - 9/20/99

45.
(2/5)

SAM

Okay.

SAM EXITS AND ISAAC GOES BACK TO THE WINDOW AS WE

CUT TO:

ACT TWO

(K)

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM/NEWSROOM/CORRIDORS/STUDIO/CONTROL ROOM -
NIGHT - (NIGHT 2)

(Dan, Casey, Isaac, Dana, Jeremy, Natalie, Kim, Elliot,
Chris, Will, Dave, J.J., Sam, Mitchel, Tasker)

CASEY, DAN, DANA, JEREMY, NATALIE, ELLIOT, KIM, CHRIS, WILL,
AND DAVE ARE SEATED AROUND THE TABLE, BEING TALKED TO BY
J.J., TASKER AND MITCHEL.

TASKER

See? And that gets us back to the same
thing we were talking about with Note
22 on Page 6.

MITCHEL

It really all boils down to the same
thing.

J.J.

Not all, but--

MITCHEL

No, but we're saying--and I think I
speak for all of us--

J.J.

Yes.

TASKER

But that the problem's in the writing.

J.J.

And when we say that, you should bear
in mind that we're huge fans of yours.

TASKER

Yes.

MITCHEL

We appreciate the style--

TASKER

Absolutely.

MITCHEL

But you gotta remember that not
everyone is as smart as we are.

J.J.

We want you guys to write the show
more like--who?

TASKER

Keith and Kenny are a good example.

J.J.

Yes.

MITCHEL

Or Craig.

TASKER

Yeah.

J.J.

Now we've been sending you their
scripts and we've been making notes
and we've been talking to you 'till
we're blue in the face and--

DANA

They've been trying.

J.J.

No they haven't, Dana.

DANA

I'd like to do the rest of this meeting in my office, please. This isn't fair to the staff.

TASKER

We find that when we give the notes to you, they don't make their way to the staff.

JEREMY

That's not true. She--

DANA HOLDS A HAND UP INDICATING TO JEREMY THAT IT'S OKAY.

DANA

J.J., Dan and Casey are professional writers. They're not waiters in a restaurant. You can't tell them what you'd like and how you'd like it prepared.

J.J.

This show is bought and paid for by my network, Dana, I'm afraid that's exactly what I can do.

DANA

I'll ask you again. Please. Let's have
this meeting in my office.

J.J.

And I'm telling you we're past that.

DANA

J.J., I was hoping this meeting would
go differently. I was prepared to eat
whatever I had to for Isaac's sake,
and I asked the senior staff to do the
same, which, by the way, is the only
reason why Dan, Casey, Jeremy, Elliot,
Chris, Will and Dave haven't beaten
the crap outta you guys by now. I've
changed my mind. At this point you
have two choices: Fire me or shut the
hell up.

J.J.

Dana, sad to say, your attitude over
these past three years combined with
these totally unacceptable ratings make
that a very easy choice for us to--

DAN

Hang on.

J.J.

Look--

CASEY

Yeah.

J.J.

—What.

DAN

We can try harder.

DANA

Danny--

CASEY

We can.

DAN

Nobody needs to lose their job over
this. We can try harder.

CASEY

Let's get to the rest of the notes.

THERE'S A LONG TENSE SILENCE IN THE ROOM...

J.J.

(TO TASKER) Get to the rest of the
notes.

TASKER

(BEAT) Turning to page--

DANA

Let's take five.

J.J.

Dana--

DANA

Please.

J.J.

We're getting through these notes.

DANA

Do what you want, but for five
minutes, you're talking to an empty
room. (TO HER STAFF) Take five.

EVERYONE BUT THE NETWORK GUYS GETS UP AND LEAVES THE ROOM.

J.J.

Unbelievable.

TASKER

I'm losing my patience for this, J.J.

THE DOOR OPENS AND SAM ENTERS--

SAM

Hey.

J.J.

Hi, Sam.

SAM

How's it goin'?

J.J.

It's going fine.

SAM

I just came in here to get some
coffee.

J.J.

There's coffee at the Craft Service
table.

SAM

Hmm, not so much. I'm sorry, is it Jim-
Bob?

J.J.

J.J.

SAM

Really?

J.J.

Yeah.

SAM

I thought it was Jim-Bob.

J.J.

No.

SAM

Take a walk with me, would ya?

J.J.

Where?

SAM

It's a surprise.

SAM HEADS OUT THE DOOR AND THE OTHERS FOLLOW HIM INTO--

(MORE)

INT. NEWSROOM/CORRIDORS/STUDIO - CONTINUOUS - (NIGHT 2)

SAM (CONT'D)

Do you guys know who Philo Farnsworth was?

J.J.

(BEAT) Philo Farnsworth?

SAM

Yeah.

J.J.

What's going on?

SAM

He invented television. I don't mean he
invented television like Uncle Miltie, I
mean he invented the television.

THEY'VE ARRIVED IN THE STUDIO AND SAM STANDS BY THE ANCHOR
DESK.

SAM (CONT'D)

In a little house in Provo, Utah. At a time
when the idea of transmitting moving
pictures through the air would be like me
saying I've figured out a way to beam us
aboard the Starship Enterprise.

J.J.

Yeah, look--

SAM

He was a visionary and he died broke and without fanfare. The guy I really like though was his brother-in-law, Cliff Gardner. He said to Philo, "I know everyone thinks you're crazy, but I want to be a part of this. I don't have your head for science, so I'm not gonna be much help with the design and mechanics of the invention. But it sounds like in order to do your testing, you're gonna need glass tubes."

TASKER

J.J., I don't think there's really--

SAM

See Philo was inventing a cathode receptor, and even though Cliff didn't know what that meant or how it worked, he'd seen Philo's drawing and he knew they were gonna need glass tubes and since television hadn't been invented yet, it's not like you could get 'em at the local TV repair shop.

(MORE)

SAM (CONT'D)

"I want to be a part of this", Cliff said, "and I don't have your head for science. How would it be if I taught myself to be a glassblower? And I could set up a little shop in the backyard.

(MORE)

SAM (CONT'D)

And I could make all the tubes you'll
need for testing." (BEAT) There oughta
be Congressional medals for people
---like that.

MITCHEL

Maybe so--

SAM

I've looked over the notes you've been
iving over the last year or so, and I
have to say that they exhibit an
almost total lack of understanding of
how to get the best from talented
people.

TASKER

Excuse me, but--

SAM

I've also read pieces that Dan and
Casey have published in magazines from
Sports Illustrated to The New Yorker,
and it's hard for me to understand why
anyone would want them to write like
Keith or Kenny or Craig. We're gonna
ask Dan and Casey to write like Dan
and Casey for a while, see if that
doesn't help us out.

MITCHEL

I don't think it's up to you to
decide--

SAM

Day to day creative decisions'll be
made by the show's Executive Producer,
Dana Whitaker. She's the most capable
and interesting producer I've met in
live television and if she goes
someplace else she'll bury you.

TASKER

Mr. Donovan--

SAM

Her two chief associates could easily
have the top spot on another staff.

(MORE)

SAM (CONT'D)

The crazy guy-- Jeremy-- If you asked him where he lived, I don't think he could tell you within three streets. He never goes home. The brunette? Natalie? She prays before a show. She doesn't know I've seen her, but I have. I think it's nice, but she needn't bother. There's nothing anyone can do for her that she's not capable of doing for herself. You said before that for whatever reason, I seem to be able to exert authority around here. I assure you, it isn't because they like me. It's because they knew two minutes after I walked in the door that I'm somebody who knows how to do something. I can help. I can make glass tubes. That's what they need. One last thing: The first and last decision making authority on this show will rest with Isaac Jaffee until Isaac Jaffee says otherwise. And if you disrespect him again in my presence, I'll re-dedicate the rest of my life to ruining the rest of yours.

(MORE)

SAM (CONT'D)

If you think I'm just mouthin' at you,
ask around about me, I have absolutely
no conscience about these things.

J.J.

Sam, why did you bring us out here?

SAM

'Cause the exit's right there. That's
all. The meeting's over.

SAM TURNS AND HEAD BACK VIA

INT. CONTROL ROOM - CONTINUOUS - (NIGHT 2)

ISAAC (OS)

You're a lunatic, you know that?

SAM TURNS AND SEES ISAAC SITTING IN A CHAIR AT THE CONTROL
PANEL.

SAM

(BEAT) You were watching?

ISAAC HOLDS UP A PAIR OF HEADPHONES AND MOTIONS TO THE PANEL
OF MONITORS...

ISAAC

The color test.

SAM

Yeah...well...

ISAAC

(MOTIONING TO THE CONFERENCE ROOM) You
should've said it in front of them.

SAM

(BEAT) It's not what I do.

SPORTS NIGHT "Cliff Gardner"
UPDATED FINAL - 9/20/99

58.
(2/K)

ISAAC

Okay.

CUT TO:

ACT TWO

(L)

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - NIGHT (NIGHT 2)

(Dan, Casey, Dana, Jeremy, Natalie, Kim, Elliot, Chris, Will, Dave, Sam)

THE GROUP HAS RE-ASSEMBLED AS SAM WALKS IN.

DANA

Where's J.J.?

SAM

They're gone. I don't have to like you, you don't have to like me. I have two priorities. The first is getting from the beginning of the day to the end of the day without having a drink. The second is raising this show's ratings to the point where it's no longer in danger of what almost happened here today. Trust me and I won't make fools outta you.

SAM EXITS...

DANA

Well...let's do the show.

FADE TO BLACK.

END OF SHOW