"... Any man's finest hour -- his greatest fulfillment to all he holds dear -- is that moment when he has worked his heart out in a good cause and lies exhausted on the field of battle -- victorious."

Vince Lombardi
FADE IN:

EXT. "SHARK" STADIUM (MIAMI, USA) - LATE DAY

MUSIC sets a mood of mystery, verdure, sky... Grass sways gently in the wind, silence to the world... Then a football is placed in the grass. The large, taped knuckles of a center grasp the football for the snap. The world is still, coiled like a spring...

CREDITS RUN...

GAME 1 MINNESOTA AMERICANS AT MIAMI SHARKS - FIELD #1 - CONTINUOUS ACTION

An EXPLOSION on the field -- as bodies crash against each other like armies. The game as played and felt in "the pit".

A swift, short pass over the middle... A tight end (Miami) takes the hit... Then the quarterback (Miami) goes down hard. A blur of motion. A WHISTLE BLOWS and referee #1 signals first down; chains are moved.

HELIICOPTER #1

A steep view of the proceedings -- godlike, evoking ghosts, wind; as if the football gods look down on their human combatants and vote for first downs, touchdowns, careers, lives... These overheads punctuate the film... The silence lingers briefly -- before the Announcers' voices bring us back to the media reality of the late 20th Century...

TUG KOLOWSKI (V.O.)
(on TV)
... And what a beautiful day for football it is here in South Florida!! It's Sunday, and the sun is shining and playoff berths are on the line. It doesn't get much better than this! Don't you think so, Kevin?!

KEVIN BRANSON (V.O.)
(on TV)
That's the one thing you and I can agree on, Tug. You can almost feel religion in the air here at Miami's 'Shark' Stadium.

The MUSIC THEME -- a blend of martial, choral, and rock and roll -- is now swallowed in the ROAR of the CROWD...

SMASH CUT TO:
... the technicolor eyes of quarterback JACK "CAP" ROONEY, hostage to anger and pain, as his aging frame crashes on the dirty grass.

HEAD COACH TONY D'AMATO, a striking, intense man in his 50s, moves in a five-yard swath of the sideline, his eyes flicking worriedly to his fallen alter-ego.

TONY
I've been doin' this for too many years...
(at McKenna)
You mother...!!! Goddamn ass...!!!

He's giving it to Leslie McKenna, the right guard, and the other linemen, as he senses the game is now shifting momentum -- against him.

TONY
... 'mother!... you candy ass...
no blockin' bitches!... 68?!
McKenna, get your brain-dead head out of your ass!! You're not blocking, you're tip-toeing through the tulips!!...

DR. ALLIE POWERS, 30s, the new internist with the team, grabs his doctor box and starts onto the field.

TONY
Powers! Get the hell back here!
Where you going?! He's fine!

Powers sheepishly u-turns back to the sideline where DR. HARVEY MANDRAKE, the grey-haired team orthopedist, gives him a second scolding.

MANDRAKE
What are you thinking, Allie?!
There's 1:43 on the clock! You walk on that field after the 2-minute warning and we automatically lose a time-out. Wake-up! You been here almost a goddamn season!

POWERS
Sorry -- I thought he was hurt.
As LESLIE McKENNA (#63), the big right guard, helps Cap up, knowing he's blown the block.

TUG (V.O.)
Yes, sir! That's the real deal right there. Cap Rooney... Two Pantheon Cups. Almost 50,000 passing yards. More touchdowns than I care to remember...

CAP
(rising, to McKenna)
McKenna, you fat bubble of lard! One more block like that, you'll end my career!

TUG (V.O.)
... our computers rank Jack Rooney one of the top five quarterbacks of all time when it comes to pressure situations... At 39 he may be a step or two behind -- 12 off-season operations have a way of doing that to you -- but he still stands head and shoulders above these new kids...

WIVES' SECTION #1 (VIDEO)

CINDY ROONEY, a sweet-looking blonde, waves back as she notices the electronic eye gazing down on her; other wives join in.

BRANSON (V.O.)
.. Without a doubt, Tug! 'Rock' Rooney also happens to be married to a heckuva nice gal sittin' down there in the stands just like the star struck fan she's been since their college days together at Michigan -- that's Cindy Rooney, folks, and I can tell you...

TUG (V.O.)
Stop boasting, Kev! But beautiful she certainly is, un-hunh!... And a mother of three beautiful children...

SIDELINE #3

Coach D'Amato fumbles with his newly-mangled headset, consults his plastic-coated single-page game plan, into his mouthpiece:

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

TONY
Nick, where the hell are we here?!
Whatta ya think -- Ace Right 90
Cadillac?  60-40 against?

INTERCUT WITH:

COACH'S BOOTH #1

NICK CROZIER -- 40s, star offensive coordinator, in his
first year here, handsome, a comer -- studies the game
below through instant computer printouts. In the booth
are several offensive and defensive assistants.

TONY (V.O.)
... they been giving Sanderson the
inside. If we roll Cap left, Les
and Madman can handle the backside.

CROZIER
(into headset)
I'd say 75-25. But let's try --
slot right switch and if they
bring the bandit, we check to 99
max...

(relays call)
Okay! Slot Right Switch 90 or 99
Cadillac.

SIDELINE #4

TYLER CHERUBINI, the stoic, 32-year-old perpetual back-up
quarterback relays the telex signal from upstairs, on his
headset to the field via walkie-talkie -- in addition to
various body signals, both legitimate and deceptive.

HUDDLE #1

QB Cap Rooney bangs on his helmet; something in the
electronics is off. He glares at his teammates, and
though at times he chews them out like a Marine sergeant,
there is an unmistakable affection for his line. He
tries his hardest, like an aging Boy Scout, not to curse,
not always successfully.

CAP
Damn headset! Never goddamn works
when you get hit!! Every damn
time! Damnit, Madman! That
sonofabitch is headhunting!

(MORE)
CONTINUED:

CAP (CONT'D)
Hold him, rip out his goddamn eyes, but don't let him mess with me! I'm too goddamn old!

PATRICK KELLY, his massive right tackle, known around the league as "MADMAN," bleeds from his nose, but adores his QB.

MADMAN
Cap, I'll keep him off ya even if I gotta bite off his thumb!

CAP
You do that!
(to SANDERSON, the star wide receiver)
... Get yourself open, goddamnit, 'Sandman.' If you gotta coldcock him, I'll find you.

SANDERSON
Hey I'm there, Cap! In the wind. Just fling it, baby!

CAP
(to the second wide receiver)
'Zonker'! You're number two, get open, run your dig route at 15...
(to the huddle)
Okay, listen up, Slot Right Switch 90 or 99 Cadillac, check with me, and kill any sonofabitch tries to cross that line before his time!
On three. Ready!

They clap and break. With 15 seconds to play time, the constant barrage of "voices" inside Cap's helmet ceases.

MEDIA BOOTH #1

TUG KOLOWSKI -- in the flesh -- is a boisterous, boozy, veteran sportscaster, alongside KEVIN BRANSON, a young and upcoming TV-type who seems Tug's opposite, bland and safe.

TUG
... But not all is paradise here in Miami. Cap Rooney may be on his way into the record books, but for Coach Tony D'Amato it's been a dismal season with attendance sliding, as the crosstown Dolphins prosper...

INTERCUT WITH:
Reveals the stadium at two-thirds capacity.

Tony, on TV display, talking intensely into his headset, takes us past defensive coordinator MONTEZUMA MONROE -- 60s, a monument of a man, former star linebacker, now limping noticeably. He glares strongly, rarely moves. With him is 34-year-old vet LUTHER LAVAY, linebacker and the captain of the defense, black, built, and a total predator. His nickname: "SHARK."

TUG (V.O.)
... With three straight losses and a slide from four years ago when they won two Pantheon Cups in a row, D'Amato's going to have to struggle to get his aging team into the playoffs! But today is looking good for the Sharks, leading the Americans in the second quarter, 21-17.

BRANSON (V.O.)
... They still got those holes in that offensive line, Tug, but the biggest problem has got to be the defense, and Montezuma Monroe knows it...

An ASSISTANT offers Monroe a set of digitally-produced enhancements of the Minnesota offensive formations.

MONROE
Get that shit outta my face! Shark -- what the fuck's goin' on out there?! We gotta get more pressure on the goddamn quarterback! That motherfucker's splitting our seam 15 yards every goddamn time. Now fix it!

SHARK
I'm on it, Coach.

He stomps toward the defensive unit.

BRANSON (V.O.)
... there's also of course the impact of management decisions on the Sharks' turn in fortunes...
As seen on TV, several family friends and VPs mill around, but we only see the back of elegantly-attired blonde President and co-owner, CHRISTINA PAGNIACCI.

TUG (V.O.)
No question, Kev! Since the death of 'Big Daddy,' Art Pagniacci -- his daughter and new President of the team, Christina Pagniacci has made some -- many people think -- questionable financial decisions in letting three All-Pro Bowl selections leave town for free agency.

BRANSON (V.O.)
... although she did bring Julian Washington in from K.C. A big 1500-yard back...

JULIAN WASHINGTON, 27, an extremely strong, sexy, solidly-built, 230-pound running back, sets, his teeth blazing with jewelry and facial paint on the far edges of the Association's rule book (The Associated Football Franchise of America). He presently goes into play-motion.

TUG (V.O.)
... who can be great when he's not hurt. And his heart's in it. And here we go!

Rooney barks out the numbers, "hot reading" the coming blitz. The clock slows, as his eyes flick from the key safety to his own team. Can they handle the confusion of the audible?

ROONEY
(audibling)
Set! Blue 83... check, check...
Arizona 99 Cadillac, Arizona 99 Cadillac! Hut! Hut! Hut!

The Shark linemen read the shift... but Madman is clearly confused... blocking assignments are missed.

Cap takes the snap and fades back to pass, but he's an inch too slow and a year too old -- his arm in the air, about to release, he is brutally blind-sided by a fast reptilian defensive end. Simultaneously, a blitzing safety hits him in the lower back with his helmet. Cap goes down hard again, landing on his own blocker's helmet at an awkward angle -- he screams loudly -- and this time, nothing moves.
Tony is looking at his worst fear come true. An eerie quiet momentarily pervades the stadium. D'Amato breaks it, yelling at Dr. Powers.

**TONY**
Get the hell out there! Move! Can't you see he's hurt?

Cindy Rooney shares the uncertainty.

Still standing with her back to the window, Christina talks to a friend.

**CHRISTINA**
... well, until I'm on the finance committee, I have zero say on network negot...

As she becomes aware of the hush in the stadium, she turns to look -- then up at the TV for the slo-mo replay.

**BRANSON (V.O.)**
... Every Shark fan has a sickening feeling in the pit of their stomach at this moment. I know I do. Cap Rooney is down and in obvious pain.

**CHRISTINA**
Dammit! Who was on the weakside safety?! Was that McKenna, you f -- ?

She reaches for a red phone.

**TUG (V.O.)**
Man oh man! Did you see that collision?! His body went in five different directions!

**INTERCUT WITH:**

shows the injury in slo-mo. Xs are drawn over Cap's knees by Tug's finger on the telestrator. A big O goes over Cap's back.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

TUG (V.O.)
Ouch! I've been there and that is a world of pain!

MEDIA BOOTH #2

Branson covers his microphone and hisses at both a technician and Tug:

BRANSON
Stop showing that for Christ's sake!...

(on camera)
We'll be right back with Cap's condition after this word from our sponsors.

FIELD #5

Drs. Mandrake and Powers, and Trainer #1 attend to Cap as he rolls back and forth, in intense pain.

SANDERSON
Suck it up, Cap...

CAP
My back!

MANDRAKE
(Feeling for the injury)
Straighten your legs. Wiggle your toes. Alright, Cap, they cut to the commercial. You can get up now.

CAP
(through clenched teeth)
I must've broke my back!!

MANDRAKE
Come on, babe, you're still moving your feet. There's no way you broke your back!

POWERS
Where does it hurt?

CAP
(screaming)
Right where you're touching, you...!! I swear... I can't breathe...

(CONTINUED)
MANDRAKE
Neither can I -- it's the humidity. Do I gotta get you a stretcher now? You that old?

CAP
(shakes it off, pulls up)
Dammit! I'm walkin' outta here!...
(rising)
Oww -- my butt! It's like a knife in it!

The stadium applauds as Cap hobbles up to his feet.

SIDELINE #7
Back-up QB Tyler Cherubini nervously jams index cards with play calls under the clear plastic holders inside his special wristband, intersecting Coach D'Amato.

TONY
Nice and easy, Ty, okay. We're up 21-17. Hold on. Steady 'em.

Cherubini AD LIBS and jogs onto the field. Fans stomp their feet in sync with the driving beat of the inspirational "Shark Theme."

BRANSON (V.O.)
We're back! And Cap Rooney looks to be all right. Listen to that crowd!

Cap crosses towards the bench on the shoulders of Powers and Trainer #1. Tony intersects briefly, but he doesn't seem to want to confront this, makes light of it.

TONY
You all right, 'Rock'?

His sometime nickname for Cap.

CAP
(winces)
Yeah! Hurts like a...

TONY
Way to hold on to that football, kid! Take it easy, we'll finish this up without you --

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

BRANSON (V.O.)
Back-up quarterback Tyler Cherubini hasn't seen a lot of action recently!

FIELD #6
From the BOOTH POV -- the team claps and breaks from the huddle.

TUG (V.O.)
Hate to tell you, Kev, it's a little scarier than that. Tyler Cherubini hasn't thrown for a first down all season!... but it's going to take a nail and a coffin to keep Cap down on the farm warming the pine. This may only be a game but to Cap Rooney it's the only game in town.

FIELD #7
Tyler Cherubini scans the defense, sees all the signs for another impending blitz.

CHERUBINI
(long count)
Set! Red 14 Ace, Red 14 Ace!
Check, check! Black 90 Razor, Black 90 Razor! -- Hut! Hut!

Minnesota attacks with everything they've got... Cherubini never even sees the light of day as he is buried, coughing up the ball -- which bounces into the hands of a surprised Minnesota safety -- who sprints 20-some yards into the Miami end zone for a touchdown!

The fans go wild with rage, booing the fallen Cherubini.

BRANSON (V.O.)
Oh my gosh! Touchdown! And the Americans go up 23-21. Man-o-man! Did they nail him! He's... Cherubini's not getting up!

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

TUG (V.O.)
Two quarterbacks down, one after the other. This is crazy! I think they just lost Cherubini, too! My God! I haven't seen this since... the Aztecs and Pharaohs in '88 -- or was it '78?

OWNER'S BOX #3

Christina watches the fiasco with her husband, ANDY MATTER, a young handsome lawyer, and two VPs of the team -- JOHNNY POLITO, in his 50s, and ED PHILLIPS, in his 60s -- a distinguished man with a comforting aura, the family advisor from her father's era.

CHRISTINA
(into the red phone)
Oh, Jesus! Vincent, get me the names of who's available out there in the quarterback market right away, would you?... and how 'bout every available line coach -- maybe somebody who can actually teach this line how to block!!

A young woman raised to appreciate football, her outburst quiets the dozen people partying in the box. Her mother, MARGARET PAGNIACCI, an elegant older woman, who looks out of it, mostly quasi-drunk or drugged, though she does a superb job of concealing this with her fixed and dignified expression, inquires:

MARGARET
What is it, honey...?

CHRISTINA
(ignores her)
... find out about Malloy. Why'd Denver cut him? Where is he?

SIDELINE #9

WILLIE BEAMEN, third-string QB, 26, black, sits on the bench, as accustomed, not expecting to be called on.

QB COACH
Beamen! What the hell are you doing? I told you to warm up five minutes ago! Look at your wristband -- it's upside down. Take your head out of your ass. Let's go, you're up!
Drs. Mandrake and Powers enter the locker room tunnel with Cap Rooney when TRAINER #2 yells after them:

**TRAINER #2**
Doc! They need you back!
Cherubini's down!

MANDRAKE
Cherubini! What -- he fall off a bench? What the hell's next?!
Stigmata!
(to Powers, re: Rooney)
... Just sit him out and don't touch him till I...

**TIME CUT TO:**

**28 OMITTED**

**29 FIELD #8**

The Americans kick off.

**30 SIDELINE #10**

As the kick returner downs it in the end zone, D'Amato huddles with Willie Beamen, who is adjusting the speaker sound in his helmet.

**TONY**
Beamen, it's you now. Left Deuce Zig 22 Tomcat. Easy hand-off to Julian, okay?

WILLIE
Right.

**CROZIER (V.O.)**
(on helmet)
Willie, can you hear me? You're gonna be all right. The Americans got no profile on you. Use it...
surprise 'em.

Willie looks for Crozier upstairs in one of those anonymous boxes, lost in the roar of sound and the sea of faces.

(Continued)
WILLIE
(difference hearing)
... do what?

TONY
You're gonna do fine. Look at me, son. You're gonna do fine...
(tapping over Willie's heart)
You hold it all inside. Stay there. Stay focused.

WILLIE
Right...

Tony slaps Willie on the shoulder and sends him out.

MEDIA BOOTH #3

TECHNICIANS and assistants frantically adjust as Tug and Kevin rifle through papers during the commercial break.

BRANSON
Get me more stats on Willie Beamen now!

TUG
Cap's out... Man, I can't believe this...

BRANSON
You know anything about Willie Beamen?

TUG
Who the hell's Willie Beamen?

TECHNICIAN
We're back in five, guys!

HUDDLE #2

Willie is ignored in the huddle, hesitant -- he tries to shut out the stadium noise.

BRANSON (V.O.)
As we wait for word on Cap Rooney's condition, Miami's sending in third-string quarterback Willie Beamen. Willie is 26 years old.

(MORE)
BRANSON (V.O.) (CONT'D)
A 'mystery man,' seventh-round draft pick out of Dallas, he went to the University of Houston. In his fifth year, his first year with the Sharks, he's seen four teams in his professional career...

Willie tries to hear the QB Coach's voice in his helmet.

VOICE (V.O.)
(helmet)
Left Deuce Zig 22 Tomcat. Watch the mike backer, he'll probably be coming. Relax and show me you got it!

Willie turns and waves to the sideline.

VOICE (V.O.)
(helmet)
No... tell them!

WILLIE
Awright, guys! Come on listen up!... the call is Left Deuce Zig 22 Tomcat.

McKENNA
(to the rest)
HEY! SHUT THE FUCK UP! On?

TUG (V.O.)
(during this)
... D'Amato's gotta be losing his mind -- a 14-point turnaround, lost his starter, his back-up, and maybe the game in two plays! What a disaster! It's an absolute...

WILLIE
On?

WASHINGTON
(intense)
SNAP COUNT!

Willie is trying to suppress dry heaves.

WASHINGTON
You all right? Holy...!

WILLIE
Augghh... Ugghh...

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED: (2)

Willie suddenly rips off his helmet and vomits.

SANDERSON
(leaping back)
Oh, shit -- !

SIDELINE #11

Shark Lavay, the middle linebacker, is standing next to Monroe.

SHARK
Did he puke?! Did he just puke on the sacred turf?!

MEDIA BOOTH #4

Tug is laughing heartily.

TUG
(to Branson)
Oh, man! Hey, Kev' -- shades of you the night we went out after the Cleveland game.

Kevin shoots him a look, and rifles through some papers.

BRANSON
... Beamen even played cornerback for a while when he was at San Diego, where he was injured in his third year...

OWNER'S BOX #4

Christina is now on a black field phone:

CHRISTINA
Soon as you know, you call! If this is serious, Harvey, I need to know yesterday, you understand what I'm saying?!

HUDDLE #3

WASHINGTON
(to Beamen)
Fuck, man! I've got to get into a three-point stance in your puke?! Get it together, nigra...

(CONTINUED)
SANDERSON
(cleaning his shoes)
You puked on the logo, my man!

REFEREE #1
(intersecting)
Come on, son, let's play ball!

VOICE (V.O.)
(helmet)
Would you run the play already!

As they move towards the ball, Willie glances in several directions -- it's terrifying -- the Minnesota defense is shifting position, confusing him; the crowd is deafening, the cameras zooming in, the sun blazing.

MINNESOTA TACKLE
(greeting Willie)
Better get ready, motherfucker!
I'm coming and I'm gonna be picking peanuts out of your ass!

MADMAN
Come to Mama first, loudmouth!

MINNESOTA TACKLE
Oh yeah! Through you, 'round you, upside down you, you useless mother...!

Willie intensely scans the defensive alignment. All talk ceases when he yells:

WILLIE
Set Red 378! Red 378! Hut! Hut!

Willie steps back a little too fast and too far. He spins towards Washington, awkwardly handing the ball off on a delayed slant... Washington shoots into a different hole than assigned -- a dangerous runner, gaining ten yards from nothing.

In the backfield, the taunting defensive end slaps Willie's helmet hard as the whistle blows. Willie barely has time to breathe before he hears "the voice of God" in his helmet speaker:

VOICE (V.O.)
(in helmet)
Thunder Left Smoke 90 Sally.

TIME CUT:
in motion, of the speed and confusion of the game as giant defensive linemen close on him. He sees a brief opening onto Sanderson 15 yards downfield -- throws far too high -- almost intercepted by the safety.

Tony, concerned, beckons to his tight end, talks to him and sends him out onto the field. Tony continues to yell something into his headset at Crozier.

The tight end yells something lost in the crowd. Willie has to look up the play on his arm band.

WILLIE
Aright, Deuce Right Split 24
Barrel Clear. On one.

WASHINGTON
I'll be coming in fast on your left, boy -- don't make me wait!

WILLIE
On one!

At the line, Miami players immediately sense the defense is stacked up to the right for Washington's run.

WASHINGTON
(urgently, under)
Audible, man -- change the play --

Willie realizes it too -- audibles too quickly and too softly to communicate accurately.

WILLIE
Set! Green 41 -- um -- switch, switch...
Red 70 Blackstar, Red 70 Blackstar
... Hut!

The snap -- Miami is hopelessly confused. There is no such play as "Red 70 Blackstar" and players run this way and that. After several athletic moves, Willie is bounced out of bounds, eight yards behind the line of scrimmage.
Tony is having a really bad day, about to throw his mangled headset away again.

TONY
(to Crozier and QB coach)
What the hell was that?! What's he doing out there? Does he know any of these plays?

CROZIER (V.O.)
Tony, he knows the basic package but he's only taken a few snaps.

Washington yells at Willie on the way back to the huddle:

WASHINGTON
What the fuck is Red 70 Blackstar, homes!? There is no such fucking play!!

WILLIE
(coolly)
I just figgered that out, J Man...
(his nickname)
but there oughta be...

TIME CUT:

Tony has one more chance at a field goal at the Minnesota 45-yard line.

TONY
Come on! Hurry it up! Let's go... let's go!

Willie eyes the defense as he sets, but mistakenly lines up over right guard Leslie McKenna instead of his center...
'Less you tell me you love me, sugah, get your hands outta my ass!

The defense picks up on it instantly and goes after Willie loudly. Embarrassed, he makes his adjustment -- but too late. A flag flies. Delay of game penalty.

Tony throws up his hands and rolls his eyes. There goes the field goal!

a sportswriter with his own local TV show, makes an acid comment on this bone-headed move to a colleague as he works his laptop. Coming off Beamen's throwing up, the press knows it has a story!

Christina leans forward to watch. Willie fades back to pass.

The rush is on again. Willie, scrambling out of the pocket, avoids several tacklers, but his eyes give away the 25-yard pass... The defensive back steals it from Sanderson and runs it back 10 yards. The crowd roars with disappointment. Referee #1 whistles -- ending the half.

Coach D'Amato shakes his head, picked up by the TV cameras.

That was bound to happen, the way this kid's movin'. Too fast, just too fast. He's gotta be nervous out there! He's ahead of his receivers... Thank God that ends the first half with the sun going down on this delayed and chock-full-of-surprises game...
INT. SHARK LOCKER ROOM - LOCKER ROOM #1 - HALFTIME - NIGHT

With 10 minutes to go, the offense is concentrated in one part of the room on chairs, the defense in the other -- listening to analyses and looking at video pictures from their respective coaches.

TRAINER'S AREA #1

Madman's got the flu, and is dehydrated enough to require two I.V.s in either arm. Dr. Powers reads his thermometer.

POWERS
101... You light-headed?

MADMAN
I was light-headed at kick-off, Doc. Now I'm at the 'one foot in the coffin' stage.

POWERS
You're a couple of quarts low, Madman, you just need an oil change...

MADMAN
Yeah, then why are my legs one big knot, Doc!? I need some cyclobenzaprine...

Powers sees Dr. Mandrake hurry past, follows him.

POWERS
Harvey, just a sec...!

Mandrake barely breaks, waits.

POWERS
I'm worried about Cap -- he's losing ankle strength. I think he's got...

MANDRAKE
(surprised)
What'd you do? Examine him? Look, Allie, you're actually one of the few relatives I can stomach, but you're the internist. I'm the orthopedist, remember? You leave my people alone...

POWERS
I just think that...

(CONTINUED)
MANDRAKE
Need a job description review?
Bone, muscle, joint -- me. Runny
nose, diarrhea, pink eye, gonorrhea
-- you. Sports injures me;
anything that drips, sticks, or
stinks, or stinks, you. Okay?

heads toward a small exam room where Cap waits alone --
bypassing Cherubini, the forgotten QB, waiting to have
his knee examined, attended to by TRAINER #2, a
stutterer.

TRAINER #2
Doc, what about Rhodes? He's
really in p-p-pain...

MANDRAKE
He's a hypochondriac. Give him
some ibuprofen.

TRAINER #2
He doesn't wanna put that sh-shit
in his body. He wants Demerol.

MANDRAKE
You think I want to be banished to
Siberia as an ice hockey doctor?
Tell him to clench his teeth.

CHERUBINI
Doc, what about my knee?

MANDRAKE
What about it?

TRAINER #2
Well, I think m-m-maybe I can get
him to t-t-take some Alka-Seltzer.

EXAM AREA #1
Mandrake closes the door on Trainer #2. Cap is with
Trainer #1. He puts Cap's x-ray up on the screen.

MANDRAKE
Bad news, Cap, you're okay, it's
just a bruise. No ribs broken.
Back's normal.
... something's definitely wrong, Doc! My butt's killing me... I think it's a...

MANDRAKE
... I'll send you over for an M.R.I. in case.
(to Trainer #1)
Lou, prep me 20 C.C. two percent lido with marcaine...

TRAINER'S AREA #2
Powers attends to Madman, who suddenly has an urgent look on his face.

VOICE (O.S.)
(yelling out)
Three minutes!

MADMAN
Doc! Pull the pipes! I gotta go!

POWERS
Can you...

MADMAN
I mean... I gotta go! Call of the wild, man!

He goes, IVs trailing, Powers calls out to Trainer #1 for help.

LOCKER ROOM #2
With shouts of "Get out of the way!", "Coming through!", Powers and Trainer #2, protecting the I.V.'s, follow a surging Madman into the bathroom.

BEAST MAN
(as they go past)
Whoo-hoo! Shark football!
Whatever it takes!!!

Other players chorus in, hooting and hollering, till the coaches shut them up.

BATHROOM #1
The stalls are filled.

(Continued)
Madman kicks open a broken stall and finds an unlucky rookie staring back at him.

MADMAN
Rookie, this is reserved! Get the fuck out!

Terrified, the rookie runs out; then Madman forces his way in, managing to squeeze Powers, Trainer #2 and himself into the stall.

POWERS
Don't bend your elbows...

Crozier, studying a stack of computer printouts, enters.

CROZIER
Madman? Yo! You there...?

He whacks on the door, which opens on Madman sitting with his pants around his ankles, I.V.s entering each outstretched arm, ministered to by Trainer #1 and Dr. Powers. Crozier is amused but hardly surprised; to Madman:

CROZIER
The three technique is really getting up field on you. We're gonna rub him with a fullback this half.

MADMAN
Coach, let's run the draw or let me cut his ass on the screens. That'll slow the motherfucker down. And show them what I truly am! A genius!

The players are gathered around Coach D'Amato, who now addresses both offense and defense.

(CONTINUED)
TONY

Look, you the offense, why do you think we work on the blitz package all week? We've lost two quarterbacks in one half of football 'cause our line can't pick up a goddamn backside bandit on max protection!! You and I know this is goddamn stupid football, and you're stressing this shit outta me! We've worked on the calls over and over again but you have no goddamn focus or concentration! McKenna, keep your head on a swivel, you've got to slide out there and pick up that robber -- roll up those outside linebackers! Beamen, know your site adjustments! Sanderson and Fox will break off their routes but you have to deliver it on time. We've had two goddamn turnovers this half, you guys are dumping on my turnover ratio.

You the defense, you've got to create something out there, you've got to start flying around the fucking ball and hitting somebody. Don't let these assholes chew up the clock on us! On first down, they're killing us with the weakside slant. Corners, when we put eight in the box, you've got to jam the receivers, take 'em on, you're hesitating! If you're gonna make a mistake, go on! Make it a big one! I'm not gonna eat your lunch for that, but don't fuck around like pussies at a pee party, you hear me?!... P.J., Mac, Beast Man, Horny, Shark! One, two yards less each time and they'll be two and eight instead of two and six! Stuff the goddamn run. They're killing us!

No more stupid penalties, okay?! Concentrate. Focus. We're only down by three points. We can win this mother! I'm sick and tired of losing! Are you?! Three losses in a row.

(MORE)
TONY (CONT'D)
Are you guys sick and tired of this?!
Stand up if you're not! Raise your hand! Raise your hand if you're a pussy! Stand up, let's go!

The team is poised, clenching up, except for Washington who rises laconically.

TONY
What the hell you doing, J?!

JULIAN
I didn't want you to be the only one standing, Coach.

A tense moment -- then all bust up laughing, including D'Amato.

TONY
Gentlemen, this is our house!
We live here. Don't let them fuck with us in our own house! We're gonna get some points on the goddamn board if I gotta get out there myself and throw the goddamn ball! Now let's go and kick some second-half butt!

SHARKS
(as team)
Football, ahhhhh!!! WHATEVER IT TAKES!!!

BATHROOM #2

As the team roars out of the locker room, Madman is eager to rejoin his crew.

MADMAN
Doc, I gotta go!

POWER
No! Stop! Your I.V.s! Don't bend your elbows!

MADMAN
(a sweet baby look)
Doc?... Do you mind?

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

Powers understands that if he can't bend his elbows that he... he sighs and wraps a stretch of tissue paper around his hand -- as Mandrake pokes his head in the stall, enjoying the view of Powers wiping Madman's ass.

MANDRAKE

Say, Allie, you want to get a little Chinese food later and talk about this...?

EXT. TUNNEL - NIGHT

Winter's night has now fallen as the team hollers, exiting a narrow tunnel onto the field. The stadium is charming but decayed (1930s WPA architecture) and in need of significant renovation...

Jimmy Sanderson, the young star wide receiver for the Sharks, repeatedly adjusts his shoulder pads, talking to himself as he walks; he is all hands and nerves, a thoroughbred with a sweet personality.

SANDERSON

I am precision-honed, muscular-tempered steel. My moves are cosmic. Time to save the day. My legs, torso and arms are energized powerthrust dominant weapons... I can save the day!

SHARK

(bypassing Willie)

Who's that you're throwing to, kid? The receiver or you got some other shit on your mind?

Willie gets the message. Several fans, intoxicated, hurl profanities, peanuts, beer, seat cushions at the Sharks. One OBSESE FAN in particular:

FAN

You stink! Hey, Beamen! If you could chuck a football like you chuck vomit, you'd be an all-pro, ha ha ha!

Willie ignores him, but when the Fan throws his beer at him, it empties on Madman, who is rushing out last, his IVs gone. Enraged, Madman roars and tries to go up into the stands after the unlucky Fan, but is restrained by teammates. AD LIBS...

(CONTINUED)
Continued:

MADMAN
You think that's funny, asshole!
I'm gonna eat your fucking lunch,
buddy!! (etc.)

Time Cut:

Scoreboard #2

Third Quarter. Minnesota 31, Miami 21. 7:14 remaining. Minnesota has increased its lead by one touchdown.

Sideline #18

Tony paces anxiously.

Field #14

The Miami defense tries to stop a long gainer by the Minnesota running back, propelling his 230 lbs. right at Shark Lavay, who upends the running back, one on one... Shark is the best open-field tackler on the Sharks, but as he takes those few extra beats rising, adjusting his shaken frame, congratulated by teammates, his expression reveals the wearying price he pays -- at 34, going on 50 -- for this leadership role.

Sideline #19

Powers now kneels next to the defensive end, Beast Man, coming off the field onto the bench with an agonizing, dislocated finger.

Powers
(to Trainer #2)
Lou, get him X-rayed before I set this!

Beast Man
(vehement)
How 'bout sometime next week, Doc!
How long you been here! I don't give a fuck if I'm blind, deaf, and fuckin' dumb, get me back out on the motherfucking field...

Powers hesitates as Mandrake passes by, sees the problem, and makes the adjustment without thinking.

(Continued)
MANDRAKE
(to Powers)
Oh for God's sake, Allie! It's just a...
(to Beast Man)
Beast Man, concentrate and think of pussy.

POP! Beast Man's FINGER CRACKS back into place. Beastie hardly winces.

POWERS
(to Beast Man)
You're still gonna need an X-ray after the game, Beast Man, okay?

Beast Man mutters something venomous under his breath, and moves off.

FIELD #15
Using his bare white foot, the smallish Eastern European Miami kicker drills a graceful 38-yard field goal through the uprights.

TIME CUT:

FIELD #16
Everything moves fast in the big leagues. Too fast. Willie again too quickly breaks from the pocket, scrambling the offensive and defensive lines up and down the field, tiring them... Unable to find his receiver, he takes off running; makes it over the middle of the field for a first down plus another five or ten yards before he is pulped in two different directions.

SIDELINE #20
Tony, hiding his eyes as if from a car accident, shakes his head, to Crozier on the headset.

TONY
... Kid's fast, but he ain't gonna last, Nick!

CROZIER (V.O.)
He was an alright corner at San Diego till he got hurt. Watch the feet. Genius ankles, like Julian.

(CONTINUED)
TONY
He may be a ballerina, but where's the brain? He just called another play that doesn't exist! Goddamn! Settle him down, Nick!

FIELD #17
Willie drops back, and without any pressure, throws a perfect 10-yard interception over the middle into the arms of a Minnesota linebacker. The stadium turns really sour, booing Willie as he walks off.

BRANSON (V.O.)
... No word yet on Cap Rooney. The only thing we do know is, he's being X-rayed at the hospital, but right now I'd say it doesn't look good for the Sharks...

SIDELINE #21
Tony is waiting for Willie, like Ahab himself.

TONY
What the hell was that?! You just don't fling the goddamn ball downfield into traffic like...

WILLIE
... Sorry, Coach, I thought it was man-free and he looked open.

TONY
We called Go Z Read! What the hell are you doing changing the play when you feel like it, without even knowing who the hell you're...

WILLIE
They was waitin' for the hitch, Coach. They was there. I had to go for it. I saw daylight!

TONY
(seething)
Daylight? Shut the fuck up and listen to me! Listen to me now!... You're a new player on this team. You got me?

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)
64 CONTINUED:

TONY (CONT'D)
You are nobody to me or anybody else here till you prove yourself.
And you start that by doing what you're fucking told! You got that?

WILLIE
I got that.

TONY
Now get out of my face and next time you're out there, control the goddamn ball!

He stalks off. Willie, closed off by Tony's intensity, moves to the bench.

A64 ON TV
Tony is saying some pretty rough things.

BRANSON (V.O.)
You read lips, Tug?

TUG (V.O.)
Hell yeah. That was a major at Nebraska.

65 OWNER'S BOX #6
The box has been thinned out of associates and friends, who've obviously sensed Christina's mood on the phone.

CHRISTINA
I don't care if you have to chopper the guy in off his yacht, Harvey -- bring him out here right away!
And get me the names of the top neurosurgeons in the country. I want the best!

INTERCUT WITH:

A65 TV MONITOR
Willie now fumbles a simple hand-off to Julian Washington... The fumble is recovered and Willie calls a time-out.
slams her hand down in frustration, sharing a look with Ed Phillips. She is a strong, energetic executive in her late 20s, raised by her deceased father, founder Art Pagniacci, to be a son and gain the respect of a man's world, to the point of acquiring a "take no prisoners" attitude. She calls up to:

INTERCUT WITH:

Crozier is polite, though bothered by her interference.

CHRISTINA (V.O.)
Why?! Why is he calling these plays?... Nick? He's got to take a chance... Nick! Tell him!

CROZIER
I'm doing my best, Miss P. I can't just...

CHRISTINA (V.O.)
Make some noise.

Willie, coming off the field, moves towards D'Amato, expecting the worst. Instead D'Amato throws an arm around his shoulders and walks him along the sideline -- in a paternal tone:

TONY
Okay, what's wrong, Willie? What's wrong?

WILLIE
It's moving fast, Coach... but I know I can do it. I can do it.

TONY
Just take a breath now. Believe me when I say you can only get better, kid -- and you don't have to worry about getting the hook -- 'cause I got no one left, okay?

He grins.

WILLIE
I stink. I'm not myself.

(CONTINUED)
TONY
Look at me. Look at me, son...
You know how to play the game.
You been playing it all your life, right?

WILLIE
Right.

TONY
You grew up in Dallas, right?

WILLIE
Yeah.

TONY
Okay, maybe you're back in Dallas right now. You're enjoying yourself. You're back in the "'hood," right before your mama calls you for dinner. Go to the Buick, turn around and I'll throw it to you, you throw it back. A game of catch, remember that?

WILLIE
... somethin' like that, yeah...

TONY
My point is -- Willie -- just forget about the crowd and the formations and the audibles and the whole goddamn playbook. Just focus on this one next pass. (carefully)
Willie -- go to the Buick and turn around.

There's a special, soothing tone to the way D'Amato expresses himself, when he wants. A voice that makes you believe.

TIME CUT TO:

FIELD #18

Willie walks up to the line. A fierce new concentration occupying him. ALL SOUND DRAINS AWAY. He is distracted by nothing! The crowd has become a semi-real phantasmagoric beast with a thousand eyes. On his own face there is an extraordinary, savage look -- primordial.

(CONTINUED)
He barks out the signals, SILENT... Soundless, he
backpedals, cocking his arm, fingers tight on the laces,
fingernails digging in... his eyes like radar... the
read... one receiver... two receiver... a quick, strong
release... a fast, clean spiral -- yet it seems to sail
for hours through the air.

... Caught by Sanderson at the 20! The beginner's luck
holds when the two Minnesota defensive backs collide into
each other, falling down, and Sanderson runs freely into
the end zone for a TD!... Now -- an EXPLOSION OF SOUND.
The first TD of a career.

D'Amato allows himself a small smile of pleasure -- a
long time coming. The offense is cheering -- alongside
Montezuma Monroe and his defense, who now pay the offense
a little attention.

Players slam a stunned Willie on the back.

WASHINGTON
... 'less you wanna kick the extra
point, you better get off the
field, dawg!

The Shark mascot -- a guy dressed in a huge foam shark
costume -- dances the "Shark dance"... As Madman trudges
up to Dr. Powers with blood dripping from his mouth.

POWERS

Madman?...

MADMAN
One of those cheap mothers
fishhooked me in the mouth with
his thumb... I tried to bite it
off but he jammed my mouth guard
up and ripped up my gum... Hurts
like the lambs, man!

Willie's eyes looking for D'Amato -- who acknowledges him
from a distance.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

Sanderson disrupts the moment, in Willie's face, twitching as he repeats himself over and over.

SANDERSON
(repeating)
Hey, you git it, money! You gat the magic!

TIME CUT TO:

SCOREBOARD #3

MINNESOTA 31, MIAMI 31. FOURTH QUARTER. 12:00...

FIELD #20
Willie, playing with some real confidence, runs an option pass right, and completes a 17-yarder to the second receiver.

FIELD #21
This time Willie heads left, faking well off his right shoulder to keep the DBs deep, then takes off on an adventuresome run through the Americans. He's a natural-born athlete, but the Minnesota defense exhorts a price for making them look bad -- pounding him hard after a 13-yard gainer.

INSERTS
At the bottom of the pile, the linemen wrestle one another, going for the eyes and nuts, anything for the edge (AD LIBS)... Close to Willie, at the bottom, Madman growls:

MADMAN
Boy, do we got a dental plan for you, buddy!... Payback time!

We hear the crunch of his elbow and a painful grunt from the abused party, who presumably "fishhooked" him earlier.

REFEREE #2
Get out of there, guys! Come on! Knock it off! Climb out!

FIELD #22
The shoeless wonder boots a 45-yard field goal dead center through the uprights -- a thing of beauty as the fans revive their hopes, starting to pick up on Willie Beamen.
SCOREBOARD #4

MINNESOTA 31, MIAMI 34.

SIDELINE #26

Tony is just a little bit happy, finally, but can't show it.

OWNER'S BOX #7

So is Christina, turning to Johnny Polito.

CHRISTINA
Can you believe this? A third-string quarterback...? Who found him, Johnny?

POLITO
I think Arnie spotted him before he left...

This sticks in her craw -- she fired "Arnie."

PRESS BOX #2

Even in the cynical media, there is an appreciable shift of interest in the young quarterback.

JACK ROSE
(to colleague)
Can you believe D'Amato's luck? He's looking at four losses in a row and his ass is saved by this nobody? What a story!

Back to his laptop...

TIME CUT TO:

OWNER'S BOX #8

Christina seems more relaxed on the phone, discreetly to the side. The game is meandering toward conservatism, close to won, and friends have slipped back in. AD LIB chatter, food, drinks.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

CHRISTINA

... Van Ness?! Dominic, he's a hundred years old, for God's sake! Find me a quarterback who's under fifty, who's solid, been around and can get us to the playoffs...

(pause)

No, it looks like some surgery on his lower back, an L-5 I think, but there's a chance he can get back by the playoffs...

ON TV

Miami's offense is on the field at their own 29, 2nd and 8. The score reads: MINNESOTA 31, MIAMI 34, FOURTH QUARTER, 1:54 left. It looks good.

SIDELINE #27

Yet Tony prowls nervously... Trainer #2 adjusts the air in ICE HAWKINS' (tight end) helmet, who complains to Powers about the large black and blue bite on his neck.

ICE

... Goddamn motherfucker bit me on the neck!

POWERS

(examines it)

... You're lucky, he doesn't have AIDS, Ice.

(grins)

Get me a Band-Aid and some hydrogen peroxide, it'll be gone in a week or so.

ICE

My old lady ain't gonna believe that shit! She gonna think some hoe jumped on my dick.

POWERS

I'll give you a note.

ICE

She don't believe nothing she reads anyhow.
Crozier is a little nervous.

TONY (V.O.)
Deuce Left 22 Red Beast Read.

CROZIER
Come on, Tony, they're giving us the flat. Let's run smoke and...

TONY
Maybe they're looking for the pick. I'm not taking chances. Not with this ballerina.

A bulldozing straight-ahead three-yard run by Washington. Third down and five.

CROZIER
(insistent)
I know Willie, Tony! They're screaming for him to dump it out there!... It's wide open!

INTERCUT WITH:

TONY
That's just it. I know this coach, Nick! And he's a prick. It's a set-up. Run it again. Deuce Left 22 Red Beast Read.

CROZIER
Tony, they're stacked up for the run --

TONY
You heard me.

Crozier relays the call.

Willie hears "the voice," doesn't like the call either.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

WILLIE
Okay, same, same, Deuce Left 22
Red Beast Read. On two.

WASHINGTON
Money time, boys. Get me five and
we are home and dry and flyin' high.

SANDERSON
Let the D win it, J-man, we don't
need no first down. Punt gets us
out of here.

WASHINGTON
That's how come you don't score
with the ladies, 'Two Race,' you
got no showmanship.

WILLIE
Cut the bullshit! Red Beast Read.
On two -- Ready!

WASHINGTON
(to Willie)
I'll be flyin' my F-16, dawg,
don't fuck me up!

The team breaks, Washington with a particular strut about
him, tasting victory already.

SIDELINE #29
Tony sees the Minnesota defense stacked against the run
right.

COACH'S BOOTH #5
Crozier sees the same thing. Especially from this
height, the defensive adjustments are clear.

CROZIER
... Tony, take a time-out... come on!
(as Tony's VOICE
BREAKS UP
momentarily; under
his breath, to Willie)
Audible left, kid! Just do it.

TONY (V.O.)
Time-outs are for TV. Negative!
Willie hands off to Washington, who powers into the line, seeing nothing -- his eyes wild like a horse around fire -- He rolls along the line searching for the hole -- thinks he sees one -- goes for it.

Swack! He is blindsided by the tall, reptilian defensive end, who hatchets him from high, then drives his helmet into the ball, which pops out high and loose and crazy. It is a spectacular fumble -- the kind of fumble all running backs have nightmares about -- Washington desperately dives back for it -- but everyone else is diving too, including Willie.

A swift Minnesota safety makes the snag -- racing past confused Miami players -- some 24 yards, into the end zone. Touchdown.

BRANSON (V.O.)
Oh my God! Oh no!

TUG (V.O.)
Oh yes! Your worst nightmare as a running back!

BRANSON (V.O.)
Washington was looking for that first down. Big mistake!

Willie is on his knees, unbelieving... Washington drops his head, the loneliest man in the world. A gash of blood crawls down inside his helmet from his forehead.

Tony is not so much stunned as resigned, believing now that nothing can change his luck.

Christina and everyone else in the box mutter quietly, in retreat...

The fans turn ugly, throwing things onto the field.

flashes the new score: MINNESOTA 37, MIAMI 34, 1:32...
The Americans are ecstatic.

Whereas Miami is devastated! Their very life-force threatened by this fourth straight defeat... the gods have voted. Despair and self-pity commingle.

Christina watches the replay of Washington going through the line.

CHRISTINA
Two hands, you showboat! Two goddamn hands -- you...

INTERCUT WITH:

The fumble as highlight... Utilizing her cane, Margaret Pagniacci leaves the room with her small, doting entourage and two white Schnauzer dogs, absorbing her daughter's passion with a detached amusement.

MARGARET
Oh, it's not so bad, honey. You'll wake up in the morning. We once lost a game -- two seconds to go on one of those stupid 'Hail Mary' passes. My lord, it just stayed up there forever and this tall Negro gentleman jumped up so high like a basketball player and picked it right out of the air... I thought your daddy was gonna have a heart attack. He was so upset, you have no idea!

(laughing)
You know, he just lost years of his life here...

(kissing Christina on the cheek)
He died because of this. Don't take it all too seriously, darling, it's just a game...

CHRISTINA
(really pissed)
Good night, Mother.

(CONTINUED)
She turns to her husband, Andy, who is accompanying her mother home, and kisses him.

CHRISTINA
Make sure she gets home all right, would you, Andy? No stops.

... makes a drinking motion.

ANDY
(nods)
How 'bout me? Shall I wait up? I have plenty of homework.

CHRISTINA
Nah, don't bother. I'd be in a lousy mood anyway...

ANDY
(squeezes her hand)
I'm sorry... Don't forget I'm in Boston tomorrow for two days.

CHRISTINA
(having forgotten)
Oh!?

ANDY
Maybe three. Complicated deposition -- insurance company. I'll call you.

CHRISTINA
(sadly, as he leaves)
Kick their asses!

INT. LOCKER ROOM #4 - NIGHT

D'Amato walks through like an undertaker.

D'AMATO
(yelling)
All right, everybody, let's huddle!

As the men slowly assemble in various stages of dress, pre and post-shower, some totally nude, D'Amato crosses to Willie's locker, who seems off in his own world, undressing slowly.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

D'AMATO
Let it go, Willie. You played strong.

WILLIE
I can't believe we blew it. I shoulda kept the ball myself.

TONY
Listen to me, kid...
     (waits till Willie gives him his eyes)
On any given Sunday you're gonna win or you're gonna lose. The point is -- can you win or lose like a man?... Out there today you played like a man. That's what counts.

It's hard for Willie to accept a compliment of any kind.

WILLIE
I'm sick of losing, Coach.

Tony doesn't quite understand the motivation there; the rest of the team is waiting.

TONY
When you're my age, kid, you get used to it.
     (to all)
Awright, everybody, lissen up! You played your hearts out! No blame... nobody! Let's get on our knees... Father...

The team assumes a collective prayer position; Tony signals the team CHAPLAIN.

CHAPLAIN
Tough one today. I know how you're taking this. I went to my play book and the book says: The rain falls on the just and the unjust alike. You're not specifically cursed. Joy comes in the morning. There are no atheists in foxholes. Let's pray. Our Father who art in Heaven...

INT. EXAM ROOM #2 - NIGHT (LATER)

On a cell phone, Dr. Mandrake stitches an uneven, buckled suture onto Julian Washington's forehead -- who yelps out in pain.

(CONTINUED)
MANDRAKE
I was using a seven iron...

WASHINGTON
Ow! How 'bout another number, Doc! This hurts.

MANDRAKE
(reaching for the novocaine)
Doctor Caine on the way, you pussy! No you, I was talking...

Powers, in the b.g., observes Washington's budding scar, concerned, says nothing.

TRAINER #2
(to Mandrake)
Doc, 'Horny' won't shut up. Can we get him some...

MANDRAKE
(irritated)
You tell 'Horny' his perk days are over! He knows Association policy -- it's a 'schedule 5' drug. Give him two Motrin and tell him to go to a 'witch doctor'...
(as "Horny" suddenly makes an appearance on his behalf)
You know you're gonna sue me anyway for the Motrin, you skinny fuck!

HORNY, a white, runty defensive back and punter, is rather upset at the large flap of skin hanging from his foot, which he proudly displays.

HORNY
Look at my fucking foot! Come on, Doc! Would you want to go on a double date with 'Tank Top' looking like this?

MANDRAKE
(seeing the wound)
Get that out of here.

HORNY
How do I get some attention round here?

(CONTINUED)
Mandrake

(rolls his eyes)
Try suicide.

(rushing to leave; to Powers)
I gotta get down to Cap at the hospital. They did the M.R.I., looks like the disc ruptured. They're going in tonight. Could you finish Julian for me?...

Knowing what he's left behind, Mandrake rushes out with the phone; Powers sidles up to Julian's suture.

Powers
Hey, J, I'm not gonna shit you. I know this guy, he's a top plastic surgeon... I think I can get him to see you tonight.

Julian
What the fuck for?!

Powers
(how to say this?)
You got a TV contract, don't you?

Julian
You know I got a fucking television contract.

Powers
... It is on-camera?

Washington
(suddenly looking for a mirror)
M'fucker... I'll sew his asshole to his lips!

94 COACHES' OFFICE #1 - CONTINUOUS ACTION - NIGHT

In progress, a dozen or more press -- among them Jack Rose -- are gathered around Tony, in a lousy mood, giving out his postgame interviews from his cramped office.

Rose
(pseudo-amicable)
... So, Coach, what's on your mind when you run the exact same running play twice deep in your own territory? You nervous about your quarterback's arm?

(Continued)
TONY
You know, Jack, I've always loved
the running game, but I read so much
about it 'cause of you, I decided
I'm gonna give it up.

ROSE
I beg your pardon. The running
game?

TONY
No, reading you.
(as they all
laugh at Jack)
The pass is great, but it's 2-3
guys involved. But a sweep --
y'ever really study a sweep,
Jack --

ROSE
Student of the game, Coach.

TONY
Eleven men pulling together,
concentrating... like a mind
machine in perfect sync,
hitting every block and hole,
it's so damn beautiful!
Football, Jack, at its purest.

ROSE
Does that mean you're in
disagreement with management,
Coach?

TONY
(looks at his watch)
No, it means I'm late to see
management. Tell you what, if I
don't have the job tomorrow,
you'll be the first one to know,
Jack, okay?

He leaves abruptly.

P.R. GUY
All right, folks, that's it for
today...

Grumbles all around...
The quiet of the empty stadium fills the humid air. Distant ECHOES of the roaring fans fall off into BIRDSONG and FROG CROAKS out of the swamps.

INT. ROONEY'S HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Coach D'Amato enters to find Cap Rooney in bed, his lower back and legs supported, a morphine drip in one arm and an IV in the other, unnaturally white and swollen from the hits -- doing his stoic best to abide the searing pain in his back. Flowers fill the crevices of the room.

He's on a speaker phone with the boss, Christina -- while Cindy, his concerned and devoted wife, acknowledges Tony with a head nod.

CINDY
(to Christina)
... but did you see the wires? I mean, why is this being played up like it's the end, Christina? I just don't understand -- it's a minor injury. That's all. Can't the front office control the spin?

CHRISTINA (V.O.)
Cindy, look, stop worrying about this! The important thing is this thing, this... microdisectomy, went well, it's under control. We'll make a strong statement in the morning, okay?... Cap?
(as Cap acknowledges)
I've been researching vertebrae. And guess what? -- There's a great doctor in Minnesota. Rosen. A specialist in rehab. I'm gonna fly him out tomorrow. I found out two important things... Cap?

CAP
(mutters)
Yes?

CHRISTINA (V.O.)
One -- you can live without the L-5 disc, and two...

CAP
That's good news...

(CONTINUED)
Tony quietly tucks in Cap's sweaty, strewn bed sheets, preferring not to signal his presence to Christina. He notices a large black and blue discoloration around the point of surgical entry in Cap's lower back.

CHRISTINA (V.O.)
... And two, it all depends on you. We got the bye week. You could be ready as early as San Francisco.

CAP
That's really good news.

Tony gives Cap some water.

CHRISTINA (V.O.)
I want you to rest up for tonight and we'll talk tomorrow, okay. Night, Cap... Cindy.

She hangs up. Cindy disconnects the call.

TONY
How ya doing, Rock?

CAP
(dopey)
Man, I thought that guy's helmet would come out through my ass. I thought I was going to die! They went in -- took out my L-5 disc. No big deal ... Did we win?
(as Tony shakes his head)
The kid didn't cut it?

TONY
Nah, Beamen did okay. It was Julian fumbled, they beat us by three.

CAP
Shit! Julian, man...
(shakes his head)
... What'd the kid throw?

TONY
9 of 14, for 176.

CAP
TDs?

TONY
Two.
CAP
Holy moly!
(awkwardly tries to
sit up, screams)
Oh God, shit!!...
(then calmer)
I can beat this!!...

TONY
The pain's bad, kid.

CAP
Comes and goes. I can control my
morphine intake... but I can't get
enough.

TONY
I could use a drink myself.

He pours himself some water distastefully, as Cap plays
with his pump.

CAP
(yelling with pain)
Cindy, did you call the nurse!? Is this working! Jesus, tell 'em
I'm a football player! Pump up the goddamn volume!
(laughs)
... and Christy thinks I'll be ready to play in three weeks...

CINDY
(on phone)
We've been waiting...

TONY
She's dreamin'.

CAP
What is her deal? All these flowers. I've known Christy since
she was in braces, man. If Art was alive he'd be here, not a bunch of
flowers.

TONY
She's President now -- what's more to say.

CINDY
She just didn't want to bother you.

(CONTINUED)
CAP
Montana, he had something like this. I'm in better shape. A few weeks of rehab and I'll be there, Tony. Playoffs for sure.

TONY
You just gotta get over this Montana thing, Rock. You're never gonna be that good.

CAP
Screw you. If I had a decent coach, I'd be...

TONY
Take it easy, will ya! Don't overachieve. Breathe. Even at 50 percent, there's nobody better out there...

CAP
Playoffs... I'll be ready.

Tony touches Cap gently on the head.

TONY
It's late. I'll stop by in the morning. Get some rest. 'Night, Cindy.

She acknowledges him.

CAP
Tony...
(as Tony turns back)
Don't give up on me.

TONY
(beat)
You're like a son to me, Cap. I'll fight for you till the day I die.

He exits as the PHONE RINGS and Cindy follows Tony out.

CAP
Cindy! Can you get the phone!

CINDY
Finally! What do you do for heart attacks? Wait till they pass? 20 minutes ago we rang...

Cap closes his eyes. He can't find a spot of stillness -- the pain boiling up again.
INT. WILLIE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

In a high-rise apartment above the bay, sporting a glorious view of the curve of the city against the ocean, shadows play off the balcony from the TELEVISION within -- a MUTED "End Zone Weekly" plays (NOTE: This is not Jack Rose's "Sports Corner," rather an ESPN-type national show).

WILLIE
(on the phone)
Mom, I didn't know I was going in... sure I woulda called you...
She wants to talk to you.

He laughs and hands the phone to his attractive girlfriend VANESSA STRUTHERS on the couch next to him -- a longtime sweetheart, she is studying marketing.

VANESSA
(into phone)
Mrs. Beamen, hi!... Yeah he was great!... No, I think he was just nervous...

WILLIE
(UN-MUTING the TV)
Tell her I'm on again!

VANESSA
Oh, Mrs. Beamen, right now! It's on! You gettin' it?
(to Willie)
I don't think they have that cable channel in East Texas, honey.

WILLIE
Here it is. I'm about to do it.

INTERCUT WITH:

ON TV

Shots of Tyler Cherubini going down... Shots of Willie stepping in.

TV VOICE (V.O.)
... in stepped third-string QB Willie Beamen, and after a very shaky start, Beamen hung in to deliver a surprising game, coming up just short in the fourth on Julian 'The Slicker' Washington's catastrophic fumble. Not that Willie didn't have his own nauseating moments!

(CONTINUED)
A98 CONTINUED:

The infamous vomit in the huddle on national television. Willie covers his eyes. We also hear upset SCREAMING from MOM on the phone.

VANESSA
You didn't tell me you threw up!

TV VOICE (V.O.)
... the Sharks are now looking at a 7-6 record with a very tough schedule comin' up, but Tyler Cherubini with an ankle sprain looks like he'll be ready next week. Let's hope in any case that Willie Beamen remembers his Tums for the Chicago Rhinos next week!

Willie MUTES the TV, taking the phone back from Vanessa.

WILLIE
... It was moving so fast... you're a cruel woman, Mama!
(more serious)
Uh-huh... No probably not... No, I don't know yet.
(growing tenser)
Mama, I... look, I'm number three, there's nothing I... They don't wanna look!... Yeah, yeah... you keep prayin', okay. Say hi to everybody... Uh-huh, you too, right...
(hangs up, looks at Vanessa, deflated)
She wants me to start.

VANESSA
Oh, baby, she just wants the best for ya.

She hugs him like his Mom might.

99 INT. BAR/RESTAURANT - NIGHT (10:30)

Dark walls in this high-class hangout are filled with celebrity photos, especially the Sharks and Dolphins. Caricatures of the football crowd hang over the bar where D'Amato, Nick Crozier, and Montezuma Monroe drink.

(CONTINUED)
ON TV

Jack "Ripper" Rose, the local expert on the Sharks, who seems to prove that the more you know about a team, the less you really understand, interviews a guest on his local "Sports Corner."

ROSE (V.O.)
(on TV, to guest)
... Frank, Frank, Frank, you gotta wonder why D'Amato called that play when everyone knows J-Man likes to pick his spot when he runs... and you're running the same play twice in a row? Come on! There's a reason this team has lost four in a row. Forget about the offensive line and Cap Rooney. Forget about money-grubbing greed-head Christina Pagniacci who sold three of last year's stars. And forget about the defense -- there is none! This team is just not in sync. They remind me of my 'ex.' She had 21 different personalities. Seven of them hated me...
(as his guest laughs)
No kiddin', I think D'Amato's play books have consisted of the same 11 plays since 1971. It's gotta be a shorter list than 'The History of Jews in Sports,' but lucky for him, the Sharks have a couple of teeth left in their head, otherwise these guys would be bottom-feeding at 2-14 instead of thrashin' at 7-6...

BACK TO SCENE

Glancing away from the omnipresent television (several others dot the bar space, all tuned to sports), Tony drinks Scotch -- one of several -- his thoughts depressed and fatalistic tonight. Four losses in a row is a phenomenon that has never happened to him before.

MANDY, a young glamorous woman, sitting down the bar with a girlfriend, catches his eye.

TONY
(re: TV)
Glad he's not talking about me.

(CONTINUED)
CROZIER
(during this)
... you play safe, you lose. It's just not a theory, they can prove it. You feed a computer all the games where a coach protected a modest lead -- 10 points or less -- 300 games, 10 years, there's this guy he did this study at Harvard... it came out the coaches lost... 71 percent of the time!

MONROE
71 percent my ass! It can't be more than 40 percent, probably less. What's the information they put in those damn things?!
Shit, what're you guys gonna do next -- stick computer chips up my players' butts so you can monitor what their shit's thinking?

CROZIER
(sweetly)
That's a great fucking idea, Monty -- if you had any neuronal connections left after what -- 20 concussions? -- I might actually take that as an insult, but...

TONY
(signals the bartender)
You get any more stats in those goddamn computers what the hell you need a coach for anymore? I mean it's like we're all rushing forward here -- faster, bigger, smarter. We're all thinking too damned much... we're not even looking around at what we're passing by, leaving behind...
You know what I mean?

MONROE
I sure do.

The BARTENDER pours another Scotch, beers for the others.

BARTENDER
Here you go, Coach.

(CONTINUED)
TONY
Thanks (nickname)...
(to all, noting his
 caricature above)
Y'know, I'm starting to look like
that guy. That's what's fucking
scary.

MONROE
Yeah, a little.

Crozier clears his throat, needs to talk business.

CROZIER
Y'know, Tony, I think we gotta
simplify the playbook for
Cherubini. These Rhino
linebackers are fast little ATVs.
We gotta pick 'em apart with
precision -- Cherubini to two
tight ends; ask the wideouts to
go short over the middle... More
screens, traps...

TONY
Nick, I'm not re-doing the whole
goddamn game plan for Cherubini
with three more games. The
linemen aren't that quick, y'know
what I mean?... and when Cap comes
back for the playoffs, he's gonna
go crazy with a whole new calling
scheme, different rhythms,
shit!...

CROZIER
Tony, what I'm saying is if we
don't redo the game plan, we won't
make the playoffs... and what
happens if Cap doesn't come back
this year?

TONY
(starting to anger)
Hey, Nick -- when you get your
team, you do it your way. But
don't let me catch you telling
anyone Cap Rooney's not comin'
back, okay? I don't care what
Mrs. Pagniacci Junior says. Stay
out of it!... I've seen Cap do
this for years.

(MORE)
TONY (CONT'D)
When he sets his mind to it,
he'll walk right in there -- maybe
'gainst the Emperors -- and he'll
shine just like a new dime, that's
how fucking great this guy is!
Never underestimate 'Rock'
Rooney, okay?...

CROZIER
I'm sorry... But we need a game
plan, Tony, that...

TONY
(changes subject)
... y'know every time I drink more
than two of these, I think of
Jeanette...

MONROE
How is that gal?

TONY
(grimaces)
We try talkin' but we sound like
two undertakers talkin' shop...

MONROE
Great lady, Jeanette. You gave
her up too easy.

TONY
Y'ever try living with her,
Monty...? She was nuts. Went
fundamentalist on me.

MONROE
(finishes his beer,
to Crozier)
They say a coach needs three
things in this life -- a wife who
shuts up, a dog who licks him
whenever he wants, and a
quarterback who don't get hurt...
So, this turkey's wife took a hike
on him, his dog got run over, and
his quarterback ruptured his
goddamn back, talk about luck.
Gotta piss...

He leaves.

CROZIER
Mind if I join you?

(CONTINUED)
MONROE
Only if you hold your own dick, kid.

CROZIER
So tell me, Monty, did you really play with leather helmets in the good old days?

TONY
(chimes in)
You forgot the fourth thing, Monty -- a defense! I know it's old-fashioned to keep the other team from scoring, but it's effective.

MONROE
Kiss my ass, D'Amato. Lemme tell you something, kid, those leather helmets were fucking great! They held our brains in, 'cause back then men knew how to hit and get hit. When they allowed face-guards for you punks, that was the end of the game that I knew...

As they move off:

CROZIER
Do you defensive guys ever move your lips when you speak? Or is it true you all like grunting better...?

MONROE
I like grunting better than that techno-babble bullshit you offensive weenies talk...

Tony's eyes wander, against his will, back to the TV.

INTERCUT WITH:

ON TV
Jack Rose continues to talk a mile a minute -- on camera and then in background V.O. as we return to Tony.

(CONTINUED)
ROSE (V.O.)
... I tell you right here and now -- Chicago's gonna wipe us out! They got a playbook with 200 variations on the pass for chrissake! Sure D'Amato likes to act tough and 'keep it simple, stupid' for our Sharkies, and some people even think he's a genius with his book of 75 plays, but hey, a lot of us think, you know, like this is no longer the '70s and the '80s -- hey we're talking the late '60s when this guy started coaching -- and you all know by now how much of a fan I am of D'Amato getting himself a lobotomy or maybe cloned with some goat because anything... even Jack Kevorkian, would be better than what we got! Give me some smack!
(high-fives his guest)
Give me a pound. Give me some love...

Tony's eyes have shifted back to the caricature of himself on the wall, a man fatter, older, and more degenerate than he actually looks. Mandy, the young woman he noticed earlier, slides up next to him, sits, sipping a non-alcoholic blue-ice number with a straw.

MANDY
You're that coach, aren't you?

TONY
Yeah, Tony D'Amato.

He shakes hands.

MANDY
Wow! Hi. I'm Mandy Murphy. I can't believe it. I thought it was you but I wasn't sure. You look different on TV.

TONY
You think so?

MANDY
Yeah. You look much better in real life. You're always yelling at people on TV.

(CONTINUED)
TONY
(pointing to the caricature)
Yeah well at least I look better than that old fart... I think?

MANDY
You do...

TONY
(starting on another Scotch)
Thanks. How old are you, Mandy?

MANDY
How old do you want me to be?
(as he shrugs; smiles)
I don't think age matters. I really don't. I think older guys have a certain thing.

TONY
Oh yeah?

MANDY
Yeah. Older guys are the nicest guys. At least in my experience...
(she gently touches his hand)
You know, I always wanted to meet you... ever since I was about 17, I was going with this football jock -- and I saw you on the sidelines. You were winning this big game...

TONY
You mean the Pantheon Cup...?

MANDY
Yeah, that's it! That was wild.
(as Tony laughs)
I'd never repeat this -- only to you, you promise to keep this a secret -- ?

TONY
I promise.

(CONTINUED)
MANDY
(whispers into his ear)
... I uh... started masturbating
to football games watching you...
(also: AD LIBS)...

Tony's taken aback. She touches his knee, goes further.

MANDY
... you wanna go out with me...
'Coach'?

TONY
You mean like on a date?

MANDY
Yeah, like on a date...
(leaning close)
I got a place -- close by,
quiet... It's a thousand... five
thousand for the night. You won't
regret it...
(pause)
What do you say, handsome?

TONY
Thank you. I'm flattered, but...

MANDY
You sure? I got friends.
(indicating Monroe
returning alone
from restroom)
I could do your friends too.

TONY
Thanks, Mandy... some other time
maybe.

MANDY
(disappointed)
Fair enough. Hey, good luck with
the team. I'll be rooting for
you... 'Tony'

A plucky kiss on his cheek.

She slinks away, as Monroe sits, enrapt by her legs.

MONROE
Mmmm! Dang! Don't tell me you
passed on that, D'Amato?

(CONTINUED)
TONY
... I must really be drunk.

MONROE
... I heard sex helps your coaching instincts. But let's get genius boy to run a stat on coaches who like hunting and fishing better than snatch, see what he comes up with...?

TONY
(laughs, segues)
... you think we're slowing down, Monty?

MONROE
Shit, we're not getting any younger. These are long days, 16 hours, something's gotta give.

TONY
... you think you can lose your coaching instincts?

MONROE
(chuckles)
You never had 'em anyway, so how can you lose 'em?

TONY
Well, that last play today, there was a moment when... I didn't know what to call... that's never happened to me like that before... in 22 seasons...

MONROE
Come on, we were on our third quarterback, Christina was throwing plays at us every five minutes, and Julian's about 10 years old upstairs.

TONY
All I have are my instincts. I lose them... I got nothin'...
(noticing)
Say, what'd you do to Crozier? Stuff him in the toilet?
The letter "L" is written with a black marker next to the Americans on the season schedule (Miami is now 7-6). There are only three games left in the regular season: Chicago, California and New York. Tony cradles a cordless phone while drinking Scotch, as a COMPUTERIZED VOICE introduces Jeanette's voice on the answer machine.

JEANETTE (V.O.)
Please leave your full name and a message after the tone and we'll get back to you.

TONY
(into his cordless)
Hi, Jeanette, it's Tony... I was hoping you'd still be awake. What time is it out there anyway? I tried to call earlier but things got... never mind. Listen...

He walks into his bedroom, emptying his pockets on the dresser. Pictures of the past confront him -- Jeanette, a boy and a girl; another of Tony with Cap Rooney and Art Pagniacci winning the "Pantheon Cup."

TONY
... tell Tommy we gotta game in L.A. In a couple of weeks. I'm hoping we could maybe get together?... I don't have his new number but... the thing is I'd like to see him and... and you...? (he weaves, stumbles as he looks for something he dropped on the rug)
I really miss the shit outta Timmy and Melinda... Y'know, love to see them, Jesus! Grandkids, Jeanette, we got grandkids... Anyway, what's there to say? Cap got hurt Sunday. Just another heart-breaking Sunday right? (pause)
Okay, well, bye...

He has crossed to the toilet, where he unsuccessfully tries to urinate -- all over the place. A COMPUTERIZED VOICE suddenly cuts in to tell him:

VOICE #1 (V.O.)
... Your call has been cancelled. Please leave your full name after the tone and record again.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

TONY

Aw shit!

EXT. PRACTICE FIELD #1 - NEXT DAY

(NOTE: Potential one of three football practices -- a brief montage set to music, that leads us to:)

EXT. CHRISTINA PAGNIACCI'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS ACTION - DAY

Tony drives up to a beautiful mansion on one of Miami's bays in an older, elegant car. As he talks into an audio-video monitor, the gates roll open.

INT. CHRISTINA PAGNIACCI'S OFFICE/HOUSE - CONTINUOUS ACTION - DAY

In a large cross-shadowed private office, Christina and Johnny Polito listen to Ed Phillips on the phone -- noticing Tony's drive-up on the indoor monitor... The walls reveal pictures of Christina with various high-powered individuals in the city; an MBA from Stanford; others that are competitive at tennis and golf, on safari and skiing with her husband; shots of her as a young girl with her dad. In these images of fishing, riding, hunting, perhaps one senses that Christina was raised as an only son by Art Pagniacci and forever embodies the hardness of that fate.

ED PHILLIPS (O.S.)

(into phone)

Well, we think 100 million is extortion too, Governor... Then will you file a friend-of-the-court brief on our behalf if we go up against the League's transfer fee?... Great!

CHRISTINA

... you're sure? No public bond issues -- no extra tax assessments?

ED PHILLIPS

(waves her off, nodding)

... couldn't ask for more than that... good talking to you, Governor. Say hi to Teresa. And Christina sends a big kiss! Okay.

(CONTINUED)
Hangs up.

CHRISTINA
(excited)
So let me get this straight: the Governor of California's saying there's nothing for the public to vote on, right?

ED PHILLIPS
(pleased)
That's what he's saying. He's got a way to finance a new stadium in Hawthorne, with lottery and casino money! As long as we partner with this realty company he's pushing...

JOHNNY POLITO
Sure. He owns all that shit land he wants to get rid of.

CHRISTINA
... he gives us the full concession, parking, signage, sponsorship money?

ED PHILLIPS
(nods)
... and 100 percent from the luxury boxes and club seats!

CHRISTINA
(amazed)
My God, L.A. is a dream! You realize they're giving us the world, Ed?!

ED PHILLIPS
(downplaying it)
Well, it's certainly good enough to leverage the City of Miami into a new stadium.

CHRISTINA
Oh, Ed! It's more than that...
(pause, seeing Tony's car pull up)
I just don't trust Smalls backing this stadium bond. Dad always said he was a thief in a tuxedo...

She glances at a picture on her desk of her late father. Beneath it in the silver frame she has had engraved: "Whatever It Takes."
ED PHILLIPS
What do you expect? Smalls is an asshole, but he'll deal. He always has. And he knows we've got a big glitch anyway.

CHRISTINA
We don't really, Ed, we can...!

ED PHILLIPS
You keep underestimating the power of the franchises, Christina. They don't want us! They want an expansion team in L.A. which they can make a lot more money with!

JOHNNY POLITO
Bullshit! They want an established team with a fan base. A new stadium with a multiplex theater shopping mall. We're in the entertainment business, Ed. Think football in the 21st Century.

ED PHILLIPS
Johnny, have you got some sleazy little side deal I don't know about yet?

JOHNNY POLITO
Ed, you're getting old.

ED PHILLIPS
... And you're getting greedy, Johnny.

CHRISTINA
The Association will listen to reason. L.A. is an entertainment empire! It can easily handle two teams. Here, what? The wrong fan base. No Hispanic players, no Hispanic fans...

(off silence)
Ed, if ever you owed Dad a favor, make it this one! This team will be born again in L.A.!

ED PHILLIPS
What about the Rosenthal bid?

CHRISTINA
(thinking about it)
$250 million?... It's so low.

(continued)
ED PHILLIPS
Wasn't so low when your dad and I started.

JOHNNY POLITO
With a new stadium and a winning team, Ed, we could sell the team for 800 million.

ED PHILLIPS
(disbelieving)
You're like your father that way, darling -- a dreamer... My advice to you is, sell the goddamn team. You don't really want to own a football team, Christina. You're still young -- start a family.

Christina, conflicted, watches as her housekeeper shows Tony in.

CHRISTINA
I still like this business. Let's keep this quiet for now, Ed, can we?

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS ACTION - DAY

Tony looks hungover and bumps into something, as Christina crosses into the giant-sized living room.

CHRISTINA
Come in... Morning, Tony.

TONY
Christina... Ed. You know, I keep looking for the A.T.M. machines in these houses...

JOHNNY POLITO
I never find one that works.

CHRISTINA
Alka-Seltzer?

TONY
(rolls his eyes)
No. I already had breakfast... at four this morning.

CHRISTINA
... Hell of a loss, we were so goddamn close.

(CONTINUED)
Remote in hand, she flicks on a state-of-the-art video screen.

The shot of Washington fumbling in excruciating slo-mo.

**CHRISTINA**
You know, I can see why my mother somehow got herself into a drunken stupor watching football games all her life... but this kind of play makes you want to jump out the fucking window!

**TONY**
You can run that play a million times, Christy, but it ain't gonna change a thing. On any given Sunday...

**CHRISTINA**
(overlapping)
'You either gonna win or you gonna lose. The point is can you win or lose like a man?' Dad said a lot of catchy things.

**TONY**
Actually I said it, but...

**CHRISTINA**
But he never could stand losing, could he!

(as Julian fumbles again)
... But J. just couldn't resist going for his bonus yards?

**TONY**
Blame me, not Julian. It was my call.

**CHRISTINA**
... I know it was, Tony -- but I'll tell you this -- Julian wasn't thinking about you, he was thinking about the extra million dollars he gets when he hits 1500 yards...

(glancing at Ed)
Which, by the way, definitely helps blow out our fucking salary cap for next year...

(continuued)
TONY
You're the one who negotiated his incentive clause.

CHRISTINA
... which is why I'd like you to sit him out -- then maybe he'll get his head into the game. And save us some dollars in the bargain.

TONY
Pretty smart move, Christy. You want me to bench my All-Pro back? Any other suggestions?

A testy edge to the dialogue, as Christina freezes the image of Julian fumbling. She shows him the sports section of USA Today -- folded to a condemnation of the team, specifically Tony. Although raised to treat Tony like an "uncle" in a large Italian-American family, the team comes first and foremost.

CHRISTINA
Sarcasm is not a solution. Four in a row, Tony. They want your head. Without Cap, it's gonna take a miracle to make the playoffs.

TONY
(re: the newspaper)
... Your father'd laugh at this jerk, Christy. We're a solid team, and we're gonna get to the playoffs. This is not the time to panic.

CHRISTINA
I'm not 'panicking' -- but no surgeon I know in the country is saying Cap'll be back by playoff time -- even with the bye week...

TONY
(waves it off)
Doctors are like lawyers, always protecting their asses against malpractice!

(CONTINUED)
ED PHILLIPS
Tony, without the playoffs there's no more TV money. And frankly, I don't think we have a chance in hell of getting this new stadium bond issue through...

CHRISTINA
(wearying of Tony)
... the economics just don't work -- the fact is this season is a disaster, a write-off. It's over!

Now Tony's headache is getting worse.

TONY
It's 'over'!? The hell it's over! We been there before -- I can pull this out. I always have. Worse things than this have...

CHRISTINA
Dad used to say, 'No intensity, no victory.' Where the hell is your intensity, Tony!? We were always in the playoffs. Four years ago the only thing we worried about was winning a third Pantheon Cop! Now what? We're a second-tier team, Tony, that's what!

(as he objects)
... No, admit it! You're not being honest, we're the fifth, sixth team in this league. We just don't get the respect anymore. For chrissake, Tony, just four years ago we won the Pantheon Cup! Do you remember! We beat the pants off Massachusetts! Dad would be shocked to see this mess we created...

Tony is fuming, but a part of him knows she's right.

TONY
(darkly, pacing)
I was there, Christy -- remember? We're solid, we're just not inspired. We got too many free agents...

(MORE)
TONY (CONT'D)
(indicating the frozen tape)
... Julian's a 'merc' who's here for the money and he brings that attitude with him to the team. The end of the season, he goes. And we rebuild our running game and...

CHRISTINA
(pissed)
Running game!? Okay -- you always talk about a running game. But who cares as long as you win! People want to watch passes, touchdowns, high scores! That's the game now, Tony!... We paid a lot of money to get Nick Crozier here from Minnesota specifically to modernize this offense. But when I look down at the field I don't see any new play calling, I don't see him doing what he does best. And frankly, what is most disturbing, is I don't see you even listening to his calls from the booth...

TONY
Football is played on the field, Christina, not in the goddamn boxes! You knew that when you had candy stuck in your braces. When'd you forget it?

CHRISTINA
(bristles)
So you know everything about everything, right, Tony?

Another silence. Ed coughs. Christina regrets the atmosphere, throws up her hands and paces.

ED PHILLIPS
(excusing himself)
Listen, why don't you two...

CHRISTINA
(in a yielding tone)
Ed, stay...
(to Tony)
You gripe about Julian Washington but you completely ignore the problems with Cap and Shark? I don't get it.

(CONTINUED)
TONY
If we'd gotten the linemen I wanted in the first place, our first two quarterbacks might still be walking.

CHRISTINA
Think about the future. Do you know what we could get for Cap right now? Probably a first and a third draft choice. He's still got an arm, and people respect him. We know he's finished but if we're smart, we can...

TONY
No, I don't know that, Christy, I don't! Cap's got two, maybe three great years left in him. This is football. Today guys in their 40s are playing...

(a silence)
Do I gotta remind you he helped build this franchise, which you benefitted from? That he's a hero to the working people of Florida. And one of the greatest pressure players of all time. You just don't cut a man like Cap Rooney!

CHRISTINA
Excuse me -- Cap and Shark were great, but memories don't pass and tackle like they used to...

TONY
Shark changed linebacking forever! He made a quantum leap in the game!...

CHRISTINA
... And we can say good-bye to both of them with dignity! With class! We'll give 'em positions in the front office, retire their numbers. A going-away day that...

TONY
(angry)
That goes without saying. But I am not cutting Cap Rooney or Shark Lavay. No matter how much 'class' you do it with.

(MORE)
TONY (CONT'D)
My contract is very clear on this point, Christy. I coach my way. I never tolerated interference from the front office and your father never interfered when...

ED PHILLIPS
(politick)
Tony, Art spent money like water. He never really cared about the bottom line. He wanted to win at any cost. In the modern game, with marketing costs high as they are...

CHRISTINA
Tony, I am not re-signing a seven-million-dollar-a-year, 39-year-old quarterback no matter how big he was.

(pointing to a stack of budget sheets on her desk)
I crunch those numbers every month till my fingers bleed. We make less money than 90 percent of the other teams. The economics simply don't make any sense!

TONY
(intense)
Fuck the economics! Your father, you hear me! Your father never interfered! He made it work!

CHRISTINA
(equally intense)
... Because you were a fighter then! You had intensity, Tony! But today he'd cut your ass! Because that's just the way the game is now. I love this team as much -- if not more -- than you. I was born into this goddamn business, so don't try to make me out to be some heartless bitch in a skybox bleeding my players dry...

TONY
What's your point, Christy?

(CONTINUED)
CHRISTINA

(drawing up)
The point is... as much as I respect... my famous 'Uncle Tony' -- the team's just not responding to you, and I'll be damned if I'm going to let everything my father fought for slide down the drain with you at the helm. I will do anything -- you hear me, anything -- to bring this team back to greatness!

TONY

I guess I had nothing to do with that. It was all your dad... Am I excused now?

He throws a hard look at Ed, who looks away. Tony stalks to the door.

CHRISTINA

(after him)
Who's playing the child now, Tony? Do I have to remind you of what kind of ground you're on? Everybody's got to negotiate... you too.

TONY

(at the door)
Are you saying my contract's up at the end of the year? And the 'economics aren't there'? Is that what you're saying, Christy?

CHRISTINA

... You know, you're not offering me a whole lot right now, Tony... 'Whatever it takes.' I'm just doing it the way he did it.

TONY

You're not even close... You know how your dad and I used to negotiate my contract? We had a beer and we shook hands.

CHRISTINA

I don't drink beer, Tony.

TONY

(exits)
No, I guess you don't.

Christina shares a look with Ed. She shakes her head: "Beer?"
Miami QB Tyler Cherubini releases his throw far over the head of Sanderson. The crowd boos.

**TUG (V.O.)**
... this has been a tough start for Tyler Cherubini, who has yet to find his rhythm.

**BRANSON (V.O.)**
... only two for eight so far and sacked three times. Ouch! 14-3 Chicago. Second quarter. Eight minutes left...

Shark fans are sullen. Signs read: "D'Amato is a Dinosaur"... images of D'Amato in Thanksgiving turkey feathers, etc. The capacity, again, is at best two-thirds.

Coach D'Amato talks quietly with Tyler Cherubini and Cap Rooney, using a cane in civilian clothing.

Willie, ignored, watches from the bench, not warming up. As Cherubini wanders off, the QB Coach fetches Willie. D'Amato's eyes now flash on him...

**TONY**
Get Beamen.

Shark rages up and down the defensive line, faking a blitz, baiting the young Chicago QB.

**SHARK**
Hey you, white-bread! Got your cup on? 'Cause I'm gonna runneth it over!!
(to Chicago lineman)
I'm gonna stomp you, B.J., and then I'm gonna stomp your million-dollar bonus baby white-ass quarterback and then I'm gonna go up in the stands and stomp both your mommas!

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

The Chicago QB, made a little nervous by Shark, bobbles the ball slightly... Shark, reading the trap, finds a lane through the Chicago line for a crushing hit on the baby-bonus QB, who pops the ball loose... Miami's "Beast Man" instantly pounces on it.

Shark, congratulated by his teammates, rises hurting, and hiding it... In a brief, micro-moment:

HIS POV

reveals: BLURRING (SPX) ON teammates and stadium.

SIDELINE #2

Willie, in his oddball way, walks up to the edge of the sideline, with Tony.

TONY
How do you feel?

WILLIE
I always feel good.

TONY
Feel like throwin' up?

WILLIE
Hell no!

TONY
Hey, last time you puked you had a hell of a game.

WILLIE
That was last time.

TONY
Make a ritual out of it and people'll respect it... Go right at 'em. Go with the spread. What I want from you is concentration. Focus. Downfield. Every inch. See it before you do it. You see it, you do it.

WILLIE
I got it. I feel it.

TONY
So... What are you waiting for? Make me a believer.
CONTINUED:

107

Willie heads out onto the field.

TIME CUT TO:

FIELD #3

108

WILLIE

Set Black 33, Black 33, go!

Willie, on a play action pass, takes off running, gesturing to his blockers, directing his flow like an experienced back... He is slammed hard after a big 32-yard gain to the Chicago 43 yard line; the crowd roars with lusty approval.

Julian Washington eyes Willie wearily as he bounces up. Is this kid going to be another runner in his backfield?

COACH'S BOOTH #1

109

Crozier on the headset upstairs:

TONY (V.O.)
Will you teach the kid how to slide, for Chrissake, Nick! Before he kills himself! How many times I gotta tell you, I don't need another Julian out there --

TUG (V.O.)
There must be a reason why this kid was cut from so many teams. Sooner or later these kinds of quarterbacks get themselves hurt with wildman stuff like that! For a few extra yards it sure doesn't make sense... but that they gotta learn...

TIME CUT TO:

FIELD #4

110

At the Chicago six-yard line, Willie surveys the defensive alignment.

WILLIE
Set, Green 68, Green 68, go!

Julian rushes forward left of Willie for the hand-off -- but Willie doesn't give him the ball -- Julian breaks for a confused micro-moment, then throws himself forward into the pile -- as Willie races right, as if to run, then loops a high, curving pass to the second wide-out in the end zone. Touchdown!
The stadium PA SYSTEM explodes a triumphant "SHARK THEME" as Willie jogs past Tony on his way to the bench, crossing the kicking unit on their way in...

CROZIER (V.O.)
(into helmet)
Good play, baby! Good call!!

TONY
(to Willie)
What the hell was that?!

WILLIE
Bootleg.

TONY
I know it was a goddamn bootleg!

Julian passes Tony, shaking his head... Willie gulps down Gatorade as Tony comes after him.

TONY
... Bootleg? Very creative. I never thought of that in a million years. In fact, I didn't call that! I called a goddamn Double Tight Regular 22 Fox. You know what that is, son?

WILLIE
Yeah, I know what that is.

Tony gets right in his face, indicates the game plan in his hand. There is no backing down.

TONY
You run the plays I call -- you with me, son?!

WILLIE
I'm with you, boss.

TUG (V.O.)
Glad we don't have a microphone down there, folks, 'cause I wouldn't want to be on Tony D'Amato's dark side now, would you?

(CONTINUED)
As Tony stalks away, Willie's expression is one of quiet anger.

TONY
(on headset)
Is he fucking with me, Nick, or doesn't he know the play!?

MONTAGE #1 (WILLIE BEAMEN AS QB)

MUSIC is UPBEAT, as Willie slices and dices the L.A. defense:

FIELD #5

Willie steps back and throws a precise 25-yard spiral, aimed for the pocket on Chicago's 5-yard line -- it sails perfectly to a place where Jimmy Sanderson accelerates to reach that sweet spot in time where ball and man meet -- sailing right PAST US into the end zone, the Chicago safety trailing. Touchdown!... Willie races down to the end zone for a celebration.

SCOREBOARD #2

CHICAGO 17, MIAMI 17. FOURTH QUARTER. 7:03...

MONTAGE #1 - FIELD #6

Willie fires a crisp bullet of a pass to the tight end in the chancy seam of the zone.

HUDDLE #1

VOICE (V.O.)
(helmet)
Hustle Right Switch 60 Bravo.
Hustle Right Switch 60 Bravo.

WILLIE
(to team)
Okay, Switch 60 Bravo -- hold it.
What's Switch 60 Bravo?

WASHINGTON
Sprint draw regular group.
It's moneytime.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

WILLIE
'Sandman,' your guy's laying back --

SANDERSON
All day.

WILLIE
How about 88 Turbo?

SANDERSON
That's what you want, money, that's what it is.

WASHINGTON
Hold it -- that my play.

WILLIE
That was your play. These guys are done! Let's kill some Rhinos. Twins Right 3 Zig 88 Turbo. On two. Ready?

They clap and move to the ball, Washington upset.

SIDELINE #4

Tony watches the new formation, amazed.

TONY
(headset)
... Now what in the holy see is he doing... Crozier?!

COACH'S BOOTH #2

CROZIER
(actually delighted)
Hell if I know, Tony...

MONTAGE #1 - FIELD #7

WILLIE
Set, Red 88, Red 88, go!

Sanderson races for the left corner -- Willie not taking his eyes off him, he pump fakes the ball to him -- but once the Chicago defense commits to his sleight of hand, Willie bootlegs it towards the right end zone. Two defensive backs reverse and run right at him. It's going to be a race to the wire.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

STUNT

The DBs have him beat by a yard or so. But Willie leaps into the air at the 2-yard line to avoid the diving tacklers. Then, finding himself having to go yet higher, he flips in mid-air, taking himself over their heads, pads and all, into a somersault, landing scot-free in the end zone. TD! Amazing!

OWNER'S BOX #1

Christina can't believe what she just saw, looking at the:

TV REPLAY

Willie's somersault is something that is going to make the highlight reel for a long time to come -- his second week in a row!

TUG (V.O.)
Kev, did you see what I just saw?!

BRANSON (V.O.)
I sure did, Tug! And Miami goes ahead, 23-17.

CHRISTINA
(to Ed, genuinely puzzled)
Where's this kid been all this time? In D'Amato's doghouse?

PRESS BOX #1

Jack "Ripper" Rose also senses a turn in the destiny of his team.

HIS POV
downstairs AT Willie --

BACK TO SCENE

-- inspires him to rap excitedly at his laptop, a poet in disguise describing a new major athlete... Insert (TBD).
Willie trots off the field, looking for D'Amato, about 15 or 20 yards away, with daring in eyes that say, "You want to win or not? Go fuck yourself!"... Cap, next to Tony, reads the situation, but the rest of the team, standing and milling, is simply awed by this new discovery.

TUG (V.O.)
If I'm Tony D'Amato right now I'm looking to the football gods saying, 'What did I ever do to deserve this?'

BRANSON (V.O.)
You bet! Tony must've been good to a lot of widows and orphans over the years. A back-up quarterback like this?

Tony watching, deeply perturbed at having his plays changed by this young, arrogant enigma. He keeps it inside.

END OF MONTAGE #1.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. MANSION (MIAMI) - BOAT DOCK - NIGHT

The stars are out tonight. Establishment Miami meets football jocks meets business supporters meets politicos, meets sex and alcohol. It's also a charity event, designed by the Sharks' P.R. Department to deliver a Children's Needy Fund some million dollars a year, most of which is being raised tonight -- with, naturally, the colorful Mayor Tyrone Smalls in attendance.

Julian Washington ROARS up to the dock in a dramatic CIGARETTE BOAT -- product logos for his sponsors all over it. Four gorgeous girls cling to him. Flashbulbs explode, the paparazzi eating this up as much as Julian.

Cap Rooney and his gorgeously-attired wife Cindy now enter, the glamour couple of the party, though Cap still struggles with a cane. The photographers descend on them, clicking.

(CONTINUED)
Watching all from a discreet corner is Tony, interrupted by three FANS/BUSINESSMEN coming up to him for autographs; unsuccessfully, he tries to duck away.

FANS
Hey, Tony!... Coach!... How 'bout an autograph? etc.

EXT. MANSION - PODIUM - CONTINUOUS ACTION

A banner reading: CHILDREN'S FUND OF MIAMI. Flashbulbs and camera idolize Christina presenting a check to MAYOR TYRONE SMALLS, a boisterous Afro-American in his 60s.

CHRISTINA
... So, on behalf of the Art Pagniacci Foundation, (with a glance to her mom) I'm glad to present D.A.R.E. with this $250,000 contribution...

Much applause.

MAYOR SMALLS (dramatic)
The city of Miami would like to thank Christina Pagniacci, you are a great Miamian! You have done as much as anyone to eliminate drugs and crime from our city streets... ... and your Sharks have provided wonderful role models for our inner-city youth to look up to. I'm all for it, honey, now let's get down and party!!

Raucous laughter. People have long come to accept the Mayor's idiosyncracies. Smalls greets Christina's mother, a blitzed Margaret, on the podium, escorted by Ed Phillips. Also there is Andy, Christina's yawning, tired husband.

Observing this in the crowd are Willie and Vanessa, who feels herself out of place and underdressed for this affair. She excuses herself to the ladies' room... as Willie walks over to Sanderson and Julian.

WASHINGTON (at Christina)
Definitely some nice hams -- like to pork her when she ain't lookin'...

(CONTINUED)
SANDERSON
She don't want your ass, man! That husband dude of her's got her snatch locked up like Fort Knox anyhow...

WILLIE
... If you gonna be with a white girl, might as well pick the right one, got some pull, the one on top.

WASHINGTON
(overlapping)
I'm already on top. I just want to fuck her.

SANDERSON
(re: Margaret)
The ghost, baby. The High Priestess of the Paycheck! Oooh, tell me there aren't some fine-looking 'dimes' here! I gotta get me some phone numbers 'fore Heather closes me down. What about you?
(looking)
Vanessa policing your ass?

WILLIE
Don't worry your little brain none, 'Sandman,' I got a skeleton key end of my dick fits all locks.

Fans now envelop them, singling out Julian... Vanessa, returning from the bathroom, her makeup even worse now, can't help but notice Willie openly gazing at women of beauty, with finer clothes and jewels.

TIME CUT TO:

A124  EXT. MANSION - GARDENS OFF VERANDA

Shark sits next to Dr. Mandrake's girlfriend TRISH, a buxom 20-year-old, talking with a very rich ELDERLY COUPLE and several OTHER COUPLES, who don't notice Shark's hand finding its way beneath the table between Trish's thighs...

SHARK
(to Elderly Couple)
... The point of the game, see, is really about contact -- the more intense the better.

(CONTINUED)
OLDER WOMAN (V.O.)
Does it really hurt when you hit someone?

SHARK
Sometimes, but it's all good!

Trish squirms in her chair.

OMITTED

INT. MANSION - BAR AREA

Christina is trying to get the Mayor's attention, surrounded by his entourage.

CHRISTINA
So, Tyrone, can we talk now...?

MAYOR SMALLS
(for all)
So, where is that bold and beautiful quarterback of yours, Christina?

Christina, put off, turns impatiently to Cap and Cindy, approaching.

CHRISTINA
Cap, say hello to his Honor.

CAP
Pleasure to see you again, sir. You know Cindy...?

They shake hands, AD LIB. As photographers snap pictures.

MAYOR SMALLS
(to Cap)
Show me some love!...
(to Christina, sotto)
... I meant the other quarterback. You know -- the black dude.

CHRISTINA
Who?

CAP
(overhearing)
He means Willie.

(CONTINUED)
CHRISTINA
Oh, of course.
(sweetly)
Cap, do you think you could find him...? Thanks. Cindy, you look beautiful.

Cap and Cindy share a look of disappointment as they go.

INT. UPSTAIRS GALLERY
Tony and Margaret Pagniacci, leaning against an upstairs railing, take in a view of the party below; Margaret commenting on the AFFA Pantheon Cup ring that Tony wears tonight, part of his formal wear.

TONY
... These kinda places I keep looking for an A.T.M. machine...

MARGARET
... do you wear it often?

TONY
(offering her the ring)
Nah. Just special occasions. Looks too weird. I get on a plane, I gotta check it...

MARGARET
(holds it lovingly)
Art wore his in bed. You know he spent hours designing it himself...
(ambiguous)
... he cut my cheek with it once. I bled.

Tony is unsure how to respond.

TONY
Margaret, we need someone... a football person out front who can...

MARGARET
Tony, stop. Christina’s in charge now. It’s the way Art wanted it.

This catches Tony off guard.
S H A R K
... it's like, have you ever seen
a woman giving birth? -- lotta
blood, sweat, and tears, right? --
Well, football's a man's way of
having that baby!

Trish's hot, flushed face says it all. She adjusts her
panties under the table, allowing better access for
Shark's hand. The others listen intently to Shark.

E L D E R L Y  M A N
(impeccable accent)
What was your best hit, Mister
Lavay?

S H A R K
... Well, one time playing in
pouring rain, I'm deep...
(his hand moves)
... deep in the zone... They're
on top, driving. Their fullback
is stuffing the ball down our
throat every play...

Murmuring slightly, Trish stretches, wrapping her lips
around a strawberry from her dessert plate.

S H A R K
He comes inside again... I'm
jamming full force into the
hole... wham! Fumble!

T R I S H
(breathless)
Ohhh! Right there...!

S H A R K
Oh yeah, right then and there!...
Now the ball's bouncing free. I'm
groping for it, fingers all
slippery wet...

Dr. Mandrake approaches the table.

S H A R K
The fumble comes my way... only a
few seconds left on the clock
and...

He sees Trish's look. He sees Mandrake's distance.
Racing the geometry!

(CONTINUED)
ELDERLY MAN #2
... Well, did you score?

Trish orgasms just in time -- sinks into the chair, muffling her sounds with a napkin.

SHARK
Hell yeah, I scored!

Mandrake sits next to Trish, sensing something. Trish conceals her expression when he fondles her.

MANDRAKE
What do you say we hit the road, hon?

TRISH
... Oh come on, Harvey, don't be a fuddy duddy! You're always in pajamas by...

Mandrake protests. Shark has removed his hand, but notices Madman nearby, coming on strongly to one of the local society dames who impresses him with her face jobs and jewelry. His pregnant, pathetic mouse wife sits alone in a corner, wanting to cry.

SHARK
(rising, to the table)
Don't go away!
(indicating Madman)
This guy's turning into my night job. I'll be right back.

He moves towards the dance floor...

MADMAN
(to the lady, AD LIB)
... What's wrong, let's you and me cut the rug, honbun!
(pause)
C'mon, I'm not good-looking enough for you? What do you think, I'm a damage case...?

Shark grabs him by the lapels and smacks him fairly hard across the face -- not discreetly. Madman registers it, then wants to kill, but when he sees Shark, he grunts docilely...

(CONTINUED)
SHARK
Yo, Madman! I can't take your ass nowhere!...

(emphatic, as if to
a schizophrenic)
Patrick's wife is in the corner,
Patrick! It's not the time to be
'Madman,' is it?

Shark looks sheepish.

INT. MANSION - BAR AREA

Mayor Smalls embraces Willie in an extravagant bear hug, as Christina and others look on.

MAYOR SMALLS
Be proud! You are the future of football in this country, son!
You are a model for your people now, Willie Beamen! A black man unafraid! Stand tall and gimme some sugar, boy!

Willie laughs, hugs the Mayor back.

WILLIE
You're pretty cool yourself, Mayor...

A photo op develops. Vanessa goes unintroduced -- She feels very hurt, not understanding why Willie would ignore her or is he that embarrassed by her? She wanders for the wrong solace over to Cindy and the other wives, chatting in a small group.

INT. MANSION - BATHROOM

The once pristine bathroom has deteriorated. Guest soaps are crushed on the floor, towels in the tub. Julian and Sanderson cavort with some girls.

EXT. GARDENS OFF VERANDA

Drs. Powers and Mandrake walk together.

POWERS
Sanderson's been after me for stuff?

(CONTINUED)
MANDRAKE
He's like Jell-O. Just say no and he'll ooze off. Guy's got an insecurity complex the size of China.

POWERS
What's he on?

MANDRAKE
(shrugs)
I don't know. Rits, vikes. End of the season I'm gonna put him in 'the laundry bin'
(off Powers, puzzled)
... clinic...
(for Powers' benefit)
... quietly, Allie...

Mandrake senses Powers doesn't understand his approach.

MANDRAKE
Y'ever play hurt, Allie?
(off his puzzled look)
College, high school, whatever?

POWERS
Not really. I played baseball at U.C.L.A.

MANDRAKE
Ugh! I hate baseball. Nothing happens. Bunch of farmers standing around scratching their nuts looking for fly balls. In football, we all go one way till we get there.

POWERS
Where's that?

MANDRAKE
Who the hell knows, but what counts is...

POWERS
Sounds like socialism. Y'ever see spikes fly in your face, Harvey -- or a line drive coming at you 100 miles per hour?
MANDRAKE
(teasing)
U.C.L.A. baseball, ooh, brutal sport!
(seriously)
Allie, we gotta work together more
-- make sure the guys get there,
know what I mean?

POWERS
(pause, concerned)
... We've always kept our patients
informed, Harv, it's part of the
deal...

MANDRAKE
Where, in Palm Beach? This is Zaire
here! These guys are stealing
hubcaps while you're writing
prescriptions. They have four years
to make a million dollars, that's it.
A short life but it's a goddamn
glorious one! -- as long as you
don't mess with their minds!

POWERS
I don't understand. What'd I do?

MANDRAKE
You messed with Zanucky telling
him he'll be ready in two weeks.
What if he's ready in one week?
Then because of you he'll be
thinking he's not really ready.

POWERS
Well, he asked me, and I...

MANDRAKE
You what?! You know, Allie, I
know young guys would die for this
job. You're making me think I
made a stupid mistake, and I'm
gonna be embarrassed here...

POWERS
Oh, come on, Harvey! I gave up a
lot of income to come here, I...

(CONTINUED)
MANDRAKE
Did you now? You still don't get it, do you, sport? This is not F. Scott Fitzgerald in white bucks time! This is a privilege to be here! This is a spectacle of gladiators with brains for the masses! It's a fucking brilliant concept! And I don't care if every one of 'em has to play hurt -- you, me, the team, we all play hurt, that's life, sport...! So do me a real favor and get off your high horse, and get down where the worms feed...!

INT. MANSION - LOGGIA

Crozier tries to snag Christina's attention span.

CROZIER
(changing subjects)
... Can I be honest with you, Christina? It's a waste of my time. I come up with the edge we need -- the stats, the probabilities -- and he just looks at them and shrugs -- it's like he doesn't believe it.

CHRISTINA
I know.

CROZIER
It's really frustrating. It's all gotta be him -- little Napoleon with his 'instincts'!

CHRISTINA
(looking for the Mayor)
Be patient, Nick, when the time comes --

CROZIER
I just want you to know I'm getting offers, Christina, you gotta know that. I want to stay, but I won't waste another season under Tony.

She now sees the Mayor free! and goes quickly.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

CHRISTINA
(cryptic, to Crozier)
You won't...! I promise.

INT. MANSION - TEA ROOM - NIGHT

The WIVES hold court.

HEATHER
If my husband doesn't get it five or six times a week, we have problems at home.

PREGNANT WIFE
We were at that pace, but we've slowed down a little.

ANOTHER WIFE
Except on game day.

CINDY
That's when I want it most -- but with everything he's on...

WIFE #1
Dexamethasone?

CINDY
And extra-strength hydrocodeine.

HEATHER
Oooh, that mix makes Jimmy crazy. Can't get it up.

MARY
Count your blessings. What's it called again?

Cindy, at the top of the food chain, takes notice when Vanessa appears.

CINDY
Willie managing to keep his food down tonight?

VANESSA
(doesn't get it, smiles)
He's just fine! Hi. I'm Vanessa Struthers.

(CONTINUED)
CINDY
Jack had such a laugh about that!
I'm Cindy Rooney.

HEATHER
Jimmy had to order new shoes.
(shaking hands)
Heather Sanderson.

Vanessa now understands the reference to her fiance.

CINDY
Are you and Willie married?

VANESSA
No, but we've been together for --

CINDY
Doesn't count until you're married, honey -- and your name appears in the paper as 'and wife.'

MARY
And not even then, most of the time.

They all laugh.

CINDY
Do you have a job?

VANESSA
No, I'm still studying for an M.B.A. in sports marketing. At Dade Community College. But Willie and I have had to move so many times to...

CINDY
Marketing? You're a smart one, I can tell.

VANESSA
And what do you do?

CINDY
Me? Oh, I'm married to the best quarterback in the A.F.F.A., that's all. I consider myself part of a team really...

VANESSA
(not sure of her attitude)
Oh, that must be very fulfilling for you...
Christina is at last alone with the slightly-inebriated Mayor.

CHRISTINA
Why have you been ducking me?

MAYOR SMALLS
I always forget how pretty you are, Christina.

CHRISTINA
Cut the crap, Tyrone.

MAYOR SMALLS
What's this bug you got?

CHRISTINA
... I want the 250 million you promised me...

(he looks like a sphinx)
You know I can get the rest with the bond. You said you'd give me 100 percent support and now you're getting cold feet just because...

MAYOR SMALLS
... how you gonna pay it back, darlin'?

CHRISTINA
I already told you -- we'll split revenue on the club seats, the corporate boxes, all the concessions, the stadium-naming rights, and the increase in ticket sales. There'll be 10,000 new parking spaces. And we'll be pulling in almost 40 million in personal seat licenses over ten years... The concept of a new stadium, T.J., funds the whole deal. Without it, no...

MAYOR SMALLS
(mocking)
'Personal seat licenses' -- that's the biggest bunch of bullshit! -- how the hell can you sell the same seat twice? I seen some pretty smooth scams in my time, but only a white man could come up with that one. The fans gonna burn you, honey.

(CONTINUED)
CHRISTINA
(patiently)
... All the fans really care
about, Tyrone, is winning. And if
I don't have the money I need to
stay competitive, then this team
is finished! That's the bottom
line!

MAYOR SMALLS
There ain't no bottom line, baby.
It's an endless fucking pit!
(genuinely)
Your team's not doin' what the
Dolphins are doin'. The schools're
howling for money, roads need
redoing, a new stadium's the last
thing on the city council's mind...

CHRISTINA
I'm not asking you to vote, T.J.
I'm asking you to deliver! We've
been backing you since Dad's time,
getting your people passes and
money they never dreamed of. We
were there for you, and...
(delicate)
... and if you're not there for us,
T.J., I'm telling you this... we'd
seriously consider leaving this
town.

MAYOR SMALLS
(smiles infuriatingly)
Sweetheart, you outta here when
the city and the county says you
outta here. Your lease ain't up
for two years so don't start
setting fires you can't put out...

CHRISTINA
(sure of herself)
Oh, there's 'loopholes,' Tyrone.
Like the goddamn stadium is
falling apart, you know -- you
haven't contributed one fucking
penny to maintenance on that
relic! I remodeled the practice
facility out of my own pocket.
I...

(CONTINUED)
MAYOR SMALLS
(smiles)
Now that's the Pagniacci I believe! I see your teeth!
Get down, girl!

CHRISTINA
(resisting)
... We're a pro team, T.J., and we're playing in a college stadium built in the '30s, and we're losin' a ton of fucking money. When are you...

MAYOR SMALLS
Yadda, yadda, yadda! Daddy's girl, you are a relative baby in this town. Go slow. First you get along... then you go along...
(puts an arm around her)
Come on, honey, you and I known each other too long. Your roots are here in Miami. Why would you want to leave? Your dad created such love, such a foundation...

CHRISTINA
Tyrone, I'm telling you again -- time is running out and you are playing with fire.

MAYOR SMALLS
(grins)
That's the only way I play it.

CHRISTINA
(grins back)
Then we'll see how you like it.

She leaves, pissed. It looks like L.A. for sure.

TIME CUT TO:

EXT. GARDENS OFF VERANDA

The party is getting rowdy as Julian, Sanderson, Madman, Shark, and others heat up the dance floor.

Cindy turns to a NASTY WOMAN whose breast implants are as big as her hair.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

NASTY WOMAN
Nice dress. Nice party.

CINDY
(bored)
Thank you. Did you come here with Julian?

NASTY WOMAN
(threatened)
No, but I'm leaving with him. So don't even think about it, honey!

CINDY
Oh please.

EXT. BOAT DOCK VERANDA - NIGHT (FOLLOWING)

Montezuma Monroe intersects Mayor Smalls; they know each other.

MONROE
Hey, Ty.

MAYOR SMALLS
What's up, brother?

MONROE
(indicating Christina)
Hi, Ty... Couldn't help hearin' that Christina conversation...

MAYOR SMALLS
(shaking his head)
Same old story, brother. Owners crying broke, y'ever met an owner who ain't losin' money? These guys make extra sure the team loses money.

They share a knowing laugh.

MONROE
I tell ya I wish I had a fraction of those stadium rights -- I'd take the concessions and parking and tickets -- that's some real bread there...

(CONTINUED)
MAYOR SMALLS
Stadium's where it's at. Now they invented these 'naming rights' and 'P.S.L.s'. It's all tricky doo. We don't have the money for that stadium. You guys gotta fight through it till you have a successful season. That's the reality... 'Lady Di' there thinks she's pulling the wool over my eyes and going to L.A.

He laughs.

MONROE
(cautiously)
... Now I did hear somethin' about that?

MAYOR SMALLS
(grins)
... She ain't going nowhere. Keep it tight, Monty. Either way, you got a job here a long time to come.

The Mayor returns to the party as Monroe looks down into the gardens for Tony. MUSIC WAFTS OUT from the party.

EXT. GARDENS OFF VERANDA
Margaret Pagniacci's holding onto Tony's AFFA ring, alone with him; he's had a little too much to drink.

TONY
'Life begins with a kick-off,' Art used to say that... He was a great man, Maggie. He was there at the beginning. His kind, forget it! -- dust! Now they're all...
(sees Christina approaching)
know-it-all-E.S.P.N. analysts.

CHRISTINA
Hi, Tony... We better get going, Mom. It's getting late.

Margaret rises, handing the ring to D'Amato.

MARGARET
Yes it is...
(to Tony)
... too late.

(CONTINUED)
Christina wants to connect with Tony as he toys with his ring.

CHRISTINA
... I remember when my dad designed that...
(an awkward silence)
I guess I'll have to wear mine on a chain around my neck, huh?

TONY
How 'bout you win one first?

CHRISTINA
I was just trying to --

TONY
(getting up)
No. Win one first.

He walks away.

EXT./INT. WILLIE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Willie and Vanessa are fighting, tension in the air. The TV is ON to the Jack Rose's "Sports Center" as Willie tries to analyze his playbook, an icebag wrapped tight around his right shoulder.

INSERT - PLAYBOOK
Shows the complexity of the system, the number of plays, the mumbo-jumbo, which would be tough enough for any student of the game to learn -- but for Willie, who is unschooled, it comes hard; his frustration mounting, as is Vanessa's.

BACK TO SCENE

VANESSA
(volatile)
... were you embarrassed by me, were you ashamed to introduce me to the Mayor? Is that it... Willie?
(as he doesn't respond)
Was it my dress...? ... what the... Willie?!

Willie changes the subject, indicating the playbook.

(CONTINUED)
WILLIE

Goddamn book! Thinking is dying on that field. Doing is feeling. Feeling is what it's all about...

(ﬂipping pages)
I think like this, I'll get killed out there! I gotta play my way -- like 'I'm the shit'! You don't believe that, you are...

A138 ON TV

Meanwhile, the deranged Jack Rose is going on and on to his guest.

ROSE (V.O.)

... At his press conference yesterday -- and with a straight face -- Coach D. says that there was no problem with the plays and that Beamen audibled only twice during the game. Uh-huh!... We all know Tony the Tiger's a demonic dude who combs his hair every which way but up, but I tell ya this guy could put a positive spin on toxic waste. Is he for real? Or is it just me who feels he was probably coaching the day Ray Nitschke dislocated Y.A. Tittle's shoulder? Scary? You starting to get the picture here, Joe?...

VANESSA

... You're 'the shit' all right, Willie, lemme tell you joined a whole lotta shits on that team! Did you see the way that Cindy Rooney talked to me? Was my dress too cheap? Did you give a shit!... She just about made me feel like a field hand! Who the hell does she think she is!

WILLIE

What's her ass gotta do with your ass? Jealousy look ugly on you, Vanessa.

(CONTINUED)
VANESSA
(stung)
Oh? What was I so jealous of her about?

WILLIE
I tell you what -- you're jealous of anything! You're jealous any woman who walk in a room with a better rap or a bag or a fuckin' hairdo! 'Cause it's always 'bout class with you.

VANESSA
Class!? You're talking shit! I got more class than 90 percent of those skinny wrinkled bitches in that bullshit party of yours!

WILLIE
Sure you do...

VANESSA
Oh, Mr. Bad Ass Willie! I seen you in action tonight, chasing the tail on that Heather Sanderson.
(as he protests)
Why didn't you introduce her to the goddamn Mayor, Willie, you too ashamed to introduce me...
(near tears)
... after all these years!
Goddamn your ass, Willie Beamen...

WILLIE
Baby, I wasn't even thinkin' about the Mayor. And I don't care about any of those crackhead hoes! I got one thing on my mind and one thing alone! I gotta concentrate on the game or I ain't gonna be around too much longer, ya hear! It's my shot, baby, I've gotta grab these chips while I can.

VANESSA
So whatcha really saying, 'baby' -- I don't look so good to you anymore?

(CONTINUED)
WILLIE
No, you ain't listening, you...
I'm sayin' this is my time -- now!
I gotta rope the ring and that
means I can't be fucking dealing
with you running these bullshit
numbers in my head.

VANESSA
No! What you mean is I'm not good
enough for you, Willie, that's
what you mean!

WILLIE
There you go again! Man, for a
college graduate you are plumb
dumb! 'V,' you got so many damned
problems, you gotta blame everybody
else but yourself -- Cindy Rooney,
Heather Sanderson, me! Baby, you
gotta learn to chill!

VANESSA
(infuriated)
'Chill'!? Jesus Christ, Willie,
you know when you get finished
sucking your own dick and playin'
'bad ass football nigger,' give me
a call sometime?

WILLIE
(blowing up)
You mean your ex-fiance give you a
call! You wanna come at me now!
When I'm facing this...
(hits the playbook)
Get the fuck outta here!

Willie stands, slams the playbook shut, stalks to his
bedroom. She tries to grab him and they struggle.

WILLIE
Watcha want!... Don't touch my arm
like that or I'll bust your ass!

VANESSA
You gonna hit me? Oh it's like
that now? Yeah! Go ahead -- get
real, motherfucker!

WILLIE
'Real'!? Gimme a break! Lemme
the fuck alone! (AD LIB)
VANESSA
I see you turning into one of them 'shits'! I tell you this, I'm gonna call your mama!

Willie looks at her, disgusted.

WILLIE
Tell my mother what! Don't let my success get to your head, bitch. (as she protests, "bitch!")
Go right ahead! And while you're at it, go find yourself some 'wigger' who'll put up with your petty, 'educated' hype, 'cause you gettin' on my nerves!

VANESSA
Yes I am educated and you can't even read a goddamn playbook, Willie Beamen, 'cause you're nothing but a big-ass Mama's boy and you can take your football -- it's the only ball you got anyhow! -- and shove it up your stuck-up ass! 'Cause my big, beautiful ass you can kiss good-bye, baby!
(at the door)
And you know what! -- I will find me a smart, m'fucking gentleman! I'm gonna be sleeping at Darlene's from now on. She might fuck better'n you anyhow!

WILLIE
You got an ugly mouth on you, woman! I'm real glad I gotta chance to see it 'fore our kids heard it. Get your lesbian ass outta here!

She slams the door violently on her way out... Willie is really upset.

INT. CHARTER PLANE - DAY

D'Amato wanders back from the first-class section through the aircraft. Some nap, others mingle in a subdued atmosphere. He spots Willie sitting near the back of the players' section by himself, wearing his headphones. He approaches, waits.

(CONTINUED)
Willie finally sees him, or pretends to, takes his headset off, clears his CDs from the empty seat.

TONY
Mind if I sit down?
(as Willie nods,
Tony sits)
Whatcha listening to?

WILLIE
Rap.

TONY
Anyone I know?

WILLIE
Biggie.

TONY
(shakes his head)
Y'ever listen to jazz?
(as Willie shrugs "who?")
... Coltrane, Monk, Miles Davis,
Billie Holiday?

WILLIE
(doesn't know them)
Don't go much for that old stuff.

TONY
Maybe I'll put together a tape for you -- my favorites...?

WILLIE
I don't use no tapes. I got CDs.

TONY
So, we'll forget about that... How 'bout your mama, she ever gonna come to a game?

WILLIE
... She thinks Sunday's for church.

He waits on Tony, who goes the extra yard.

TONY
... I don't know if you know this,
I lost my dad when I was young, too...
(waits)
... in World War Two...
(waits again)
... if you ever want to talk about stuff like that, I'm around...? Okay.

(CONTINUED)
139  CONTINUED:  (2)

WILLIE
I'll get at 'cha.

TONY
You know where to find me...

Willie nods, mumbling something incoherent.

140  IN FRONT SECTION

D'Amato rejoins Dr. Mandrake, reading his Wall Street Journal.

TONY
Hell if I can figure him out.

MANDRAKE
Who?

TONY
Beamen. I look in his eyes and I see... nothing.
   (beat)
Man never even heard of Miles Davis.

MANDRAKE
Tony, he probably never heard of Joe Namath. You look like shit. You sleeping?

TONY
I'm too tired to sleep.

MANDRAKE
I got some great new samples for that.

TONY
I bet you do.

141  INT. HOTEL COFFEE SHOP (CALIFORNIA) - SUNDAY

Tony, in his game suit, has breakfast with his son, TOM, a bland mid-level executive in his late 20s, with a Christian fish on his lapel.

TONY
... Really, it's no problem getting tickets?
TOM
(uneasy)
Well, he's really more into basketball now.

TONY
(defeated)
... Yeah? How old is Timmy now -- nine, ten?

TOM
Eight. But we don't really call him Timmy anymore...

TONY
Oh, okay... and Melinda? How's she?

TOM
She's fine...

TONY
You look good.

TOM
I'm trying.

TONY
You talk to your mom lately?

TOM
Dad -- what do you want?

TONY
What do I want? I wanted to see you. You're my son, for chrissake. What do you mean?

TOM
I haven't talked to you for a year. A year ago Christmas...

TONY
... Christ, gimme a minute, Tom, okay? I haven't seen you in what...

TOM
Six years.

TONY
You never picked up the phone either -- so don't...

(CONTINUED)
TOM
Why would I?

TONY
All I ever did was...

TOM
(on edge)
Please don't!... When you do that
you sound like a broken record,
Dad. I get really upset...

Tony looks at him, wondering what he's wrought. They
hush as the WAITRESS brings coffee and danish.

WAITRESS
Coffee, danish? Why the long
faces?
(off no response)
Enjoy your breakfast.

She leaves.

TONY
... You know I'll never forget a
big mistake I made once as a
couch. I hurt someone and... I
couldn't change what I did, so I
denied it. Threw some money at
it... and then tried to forget it,
block it out.
(beat)
You know what? It never goes
away.

TOM
(now he's upset)
No it doesn't and it's too late,
goddamn it, okay! It's too --
excuse me for my foul thoughts,
Lord! They come not out of me --
but it's too goddamn late for that!
My son and daughter are doing
fine and you had nothing to do
with that, and that's all there
is.

TONY
Tom, come on, I... I'm sorry.
I...

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED: (3)

TOM
Where were you on my Sundays, when I was playing ball? Just... just don't even try, okay!

TONY
(now at the end of his rope)
Can I just... see them? They're my grandkids, Tom!... Please?

TOM
(a grim pause)
... With a child psychiatrist...

INT. CALIFORNIA STADIUM - DAY

Game 3. Miami Sharks at California Crusaders.

FIELD #1

The Crusaders' wide receiver runs deep against the Miami DB, nearly catching a 50-yard pass at the Miami 5-yard line... A yellow penalty flag flies through the air.

SCOREBOARD #1

MIAMI 7, CALIFORNIA 14. SECOND QUARTER. 4:49...

BRANSON (V.O.)
Interference on Miami. That will hurt! A tight game here! Looks like a man's down now... At the line of scrimmage, it looks like the 'Shark' -- Luther Lavay!

SIDELINE #1

Tony is livid at REFEREE #1, not noticing Shark.

TONY
Where was the interference??!!... Do you realize... No!... You are giving away 45 yards! Get the replay! I'll trade you a time-out for it, you... ugh, ugh!

REFEREE #2 trots by Tony, who jogs alongside, to get his attention.

(CONTINUED)
TONY
Charlie, give me a goddamn break. I know this is L.A., I don't know nobody here, but give us a chance anyway!
(indicating Referee #1)
Where's that guy from? El Cajon, Hawthorne, Beverly Hills, what?

REFEREE #2
Get back in the coaching box...

Tony shares his frustration with Cap Rooney, in street clothes for the game, and Crozier upstairs; Cherubini is relaying the signals to Willie on the field.

TONY
What can you do? What can you do? The system's fucked! I mean games are being decided by zebras in stripes. It's just not fair!
(then)
What the fuck is 'fair' anyway?

FIELD #2
Shark lies on the field, moaning. Mandrake, Powers and Trainer #1 test his joints.

MANDRAKE
Squeeze my fingers.
(as Shark does so)
Great! Do you know where we are?

SHARK
(woozy)
... I know it ain't Munchkinland.

MANDRAKE
Who we playing against?

SHARK
Those ugly motherfuckers.

MANDRAKE
Who's your quarterback?

SHARK
That pretty motherfucker.

(CONTINUED)
MANDRAKE
Well you don't see me playing possum, do you, Shark? I think you can get up now.

SHARK
Fuck, this is embarrassing! Doc, don't let me pull a Willie Beamen.

Powers and the Trainers help drag Shark to his feet.

SIDELINE #2
The crowd cheers for Shark, coming off, as...

TONY
(at Monroe)
What the hell is going on, Monty! They're leaking and you don't know where. Fix it, goddamnit. Don't yell and don't make faces and all that bullshit! Just fix it!

He leaves Monroe a study in total, betrayed frustration...

HUDDLE #1
Willie feels loose.

WILLIE
(singling out Sanderson)
Okay, 'Sandman,' they should show cloud coverage here and lock Ice on the cross. The middle will be open. Right deuce gun, F-shoot, 60 Snake Eyes. On three. Ready!

WASHINGTON
Hey, man, we can't run Snake Eyes in the red zone!

WILLIE
J-man, you can get on my page or you can shut the fuck up! On three. Ready!

They break. Sanderson hangs back a beat.

SANDERSON
How the hell you see that?

(CONTINUED)
WILLIE
I see things better, brother. I see the future. Your guy trailing you on your inside route. Bend a little and hit the slim post.

As they move to the line of scrimmage, Madman is lost.

MADMAN
I block the outside backer? Les'... help me?

McKENNA
You got the nose guard.

MADMAN
Nose. Face. Yeah.

WILLIE
Set Blue 468, Blue 468! Hut! Hut!

SIDELINE #3

Montezuma Monroe is rampaging up and down before his unit, pissed beyond words.

MONROE
They think you're a bunch of low-brow Neanderthal shitheads! They think they're gonna gut you and leave you lying on the highway with your insides hanging out for the buzzards -- !

SHARK
(a huge migraine of his own)
Coach, you're gonna have a stroke.

MONROE
I don't GET strokes, motherfucker, I GIVE 'em!

A cry of grief from the crowd stops him. Monroe spins to the field to see a mad brawl of players for a Shark fumble -- a Crusaders player comes up with the ball!

And worse! At the line of scrimmage, Leslie McKenna, the right guard, is down.
As REFEREE #3 signals the California first down to a joyous echo from the home crowd, Tony is screaming at Referee #3 who jogs over to him.

REFEREE #3
(wearily)
What is it with you, Coach?!

TONY
Goddamn it, Sammy, his knee was down! He was down by a mile. Both knees were down. Give me a goddamn break in this town -- that was no fumble!

REFEREE #3
To be honest, Tony -- I didn't really see it.

TONY
(a beat, shrugs)
To be honest, Sammy, neither did I.

Referee #3 shakes his head and runs back to the field as Mandrake hurries over to Tony.

MANDRAKE
Tony -- bad news! Looks like McKenna's got a distended knee, torn everything, bloody nightmare -- he's out!

TONY
How long?

MANDRAKE
If he's lucky -- Easter.

Tony hurries towards Leslie McKenna in great pain -- being helped off the field by Dr. Powers and trainer #2.

Julian and Willie are going at it hotly.

WASHINGTON
The play was Snake Eyes Right -- Right!

WILLIE
I knew the goddamn play! -- Couldn't you see them adjusting?!

(CONTINUED)
WASHINGTON
You didn't audible shit!

WILLIE
I called the color, man! You just missed it 'cause of that wax in your ears. Hey, 'Sandman,' didn't I audible?

SANDERSON
I dunno, man. Don't get me involved.

Tony approaches, dominates.

TONY
Knock it off -- all of you! This goddamn screw-up cost us McKenna for the season! Why don't you both think about that for one goddamn minute! Sit down -- the bunch of you!
(walking away, to Crozier, on the headset)
Goddamn it, Nick, you do your job and get him under control before he gets anyone else hurt!

He notices a film crew in his face, recording all of this; this brings him to the very edge.

TONY
Whatta you doing!! Get outta here before I kick your butts!!... Get 'em out!

Security quickly closes down the lens.

TIME CUT TO:

SIDELINE #6

The Crusaders sweep towards the Miami sideline, its big offensive line leading. This time the Miami defense penetrates them and gang-tackles the running back.

TONY
(to Monroe)
Awright! More like it! You look alive!

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

He turns away, eyeing the scoreboard, as his offense runs out.

MONROE
(sarcastic)
Thank you, boss.

SCOREBOARD #2
CALIFORNIA 21, MIAMI 10. THIRD QUARTER 8:57...

HUDDLE #2
Willie suddenly breaks from it and pukes quietly, into the turf, clears his throat.

TUG (V.O.)
Oh my God. He's done it again!
(needling Kevin)
You know, that reminds me of the night...

Willie walks back to the huddle, to his teammates.

WILLIE
I apologize -- I had to get that out of my system.

WASHINGTON
Hey, man, if that's your thing, just stay off my shoes...

WILLIE

SANDERSON
Right. Don't force it in if --

WILLIE
I got it! I'm there! I'm a righteous motherfucker! On three! Ready?

FIELD #3

They break and move to the ball. Willie scans the defense, loose, enjoying himself.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

WILLIE
Set Green 21! Green 21! Hut!
Hut! Hut!

Willie checks off his receivers as they speed downfield, pumps once; the offensive line protecting him strongly.

Two L.A. corners blanket Sanderson -- but Julian is open, waiting in the flat.

WASHINGTON
Willie!!

Willie ignores him, his eyes downfield -- a Crusaders' lineman is almost on him when Madman slams him aside at the last moment... Willie takes the shot -- it's a dead perfect pass, threading the microscopic gap between two Crusaders' defenders. Sanderson spins in midair so that the nose of the ball crosses the goal line just as he is slammed backwards by the backs -- too late -- the Ref's arms shoot up -- touchdown!

Willie races down the field and grabs Sanderson, both of them breaking into a funky dance.

A152 FIELD #4

Upfield, Julian, not very happy, heads for the sideline.

153 SIDELINE #7

As Willie comes off, Tony hugs him in a familiar, paternal way, which surprises Willie. Cap Rooney witnesses.

TONY
Don't fuck with a man's ritual, right?

WILLIE
'Blaze the hot sands.'

TONY
I never understand a goddamn word you say.

WILLIE
It's all good, boss.

TIME CUTS TO:
Willie runs an option pass for 26 yards, and when he is pounded into the turf, jumps right up and taunts the defense.

**WILLIE**

*You gotta hit harder than that, baby! I can't feel it!*

Which makes them want to kill him -- but Madman and several others step in to separate Willie.

**FIELD #6**

Willie, pursued by linemen and almost off balance, throws an incredible long bomb, hitting his third receiver; the ball travels almost 60 yards in the air. The receiver runs it in for a touchdown!

**TUG (V.O.)**

Wow! As the Sharks go into their bye week, the story here has got to be Willie Beamen! He's running -- he's throwing -- he's rockin' and rollin' and shuckin' and jivin'. He's flat out steamin'.

This magic Sunday, he's 'Steamin' Beamen'!

**GUEST OWNER'S BOX #1**

Christina, with local friends, studies her new phenomenon.

**SCOREBOARD #3**

MIAMI 24, CALIFORNIA 21.

**INT. VISITOR'S LOCKER ROOM (L.A.) - LOCKER ROOM #1**

The Shark locker room seems too small to contain the combustible energy of these larger-than-life men. Sanderson and other "Dawgs" rally to the BOOM BOX. Perhaps Willie joins in briefly...

Coach D'Amato circulates, congratulations all around... Cap doesn't have much to do, hanging. In the b.g., the doctors and trainers are busy.

(CONTINUED)
Madman opens a locker which is a shrine to the band Metallica. Madman puts one of their CDs on a portable player.

**SHARK**
Oh, man, not that shit again!... I don't know why I even acknowledge this m'fucking psycho!

**MADMAN**
(to Shark)
Metallica are gods! We live to serve them! We should bow!

As the MUSIC of "SO WHAT" CRANKS, others protest loudly (AD LIB). Madman ignores them all, banging out the rhythm on his locker.

Elsewhere, Smitty, the Christian, walks up to Willie.

**SMITTY**
(coming up to Willie)
Say, Willie, some of us guys, we have a little Bible study group that meets every Monday. It's no big deal, we just read some and talk. They say 'There's no atheists in foxholes.'

(chuckles)
We'd sure like it if you could join us?

**WILLIE**
No.

**SMITTY**
Oh super!... May I ask if you're a Christian?

**WILLIE**
Fuck you, Smitty.

**SMITTY**
What!?

**WILLIE**
How long I been on this team -- six months? In all that time you ever spoke to me? Now I win two games and you want me to join your Bible study group? Fuck you.

Smitty moves off...
is throwing on his $3,000 suit, busy on his cell, while Willie watches nearby.

WASHINGTON
Forget Doritos! I can do Ruffles, too. One's a corn chip and the other's a potato chip, don't you get it? Tell them I got two different burger franchises and they don't give me no static like that!

Willie catches Julian before he exits.

WILLIE
Hey, J-man, can I talk to you a sec?

(off no response)
Say, good game today. You know if I'm faking the hand-off to you, it looks stupid you don't act like you're getting the ball, money...

WASHINGTON
Whatcha you saying, you...

WILLIE
Y'ever see a movie? You know, there's the king, right? But he ain't no king till the other actors bow when he walk in the room, right? He's just this actor dude... same with us, J. I'm the Q.B., but you gotta act like I am the Q.B., you get it, 'cause if you ain't pretending, it's a fake, it make me look like some dumb-ass turkey out there runnin' around trying to throw a pass they all know is comin'...

WASHINGTON
Who you talkin' to, you afro m'fucker! You a king in your own mind, bitch! You out there 'bowing' to settle your own bullshit, don't ever approach me again, faggot!!

Dr. Mandrake stitches Sanderson's cut chin, pulling out a tray of bandages:

(CONTINUED)
SANDERSON

(agitated)
I gotta come down, Doc. My teeth are ice cubes, man!

MANDRAKE

Try sex, you're making me look bad. League's already questioning my benzo prescriptions.

SANDERSON

Man, you're useless! What the fuck we need a doctor for then?

MANDRAKE

You don't! We're just corporate automatons anyway. No fault. No choice. No lawsuit. The way all society is going. It's you overpaid m'fuckers wrecked the party anyway -- 'my body is worth 50 million in bones, muscle, and tissue, blah blah blah!' You prescribe some spoiled crybaby the wrong thing and you're on your way to re-education camp in Hanoi.

SANDERSON

Hanoi?

MANDRAKE

Vietnam?... Never mind. Or is it New York now? Corporate culture, baby! I'm actually one of the few good guys left -- I stretch it a bit for you boneheads.

SANDERSON

(reacting to stitch)
Ow!! You sure stretching this stitch, man!

MANDRAKE

(musing aloud)
You have no idea what it was like in the old days, 'Sandman' -- nobody'd give a shit. I mean we were kings. No goddamn random urine tests, no 'spook police'...

(laughs)
Shit we'd force you to take the pills -- like candy. You could walk onto the field with a syringe in your ass and nobody'd notice... but it's over -- like the weather.

(Continued)
SANDERSON
Weather?

MANDRAKE
El Nino!... Current change? Global warming?... Hello?

SANDERSON
You out of your mind.

MANDRAKE
... All 'cause the association's worth too much money -- now it's bigger than Coca-Cola or Disney...
(as Sanderson is puzzled)
Forget it.
(re: the bandages)
So what do you want -- Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck, Tweety?

SANDERSON
You got Spiderman?

MANDRAKE
If I had Spiderman I woulda said I had Spiderman. I got Batman.

SANDERSON
(brightening up)
Oooh, fox alert at 4 o'clock!...
Daddy's girl ambulating... Queen Christina is here!

LOCKER ROOM #2

The mood in the locker room shifts quickly as Christina Pagniacci enters, escorted by two security guards in suits with earphones -- along with her VPs. In a good mood, she passes most of the no-name players, signalling or calling out to some of her stars (AD LIB)... Cap notices her not "seeing" him; Joe Polito makes up for it, coming over to him, as she approaches Willie.

CHRISTINA
(at her charming best)
Willie, congratulations, you were great! Really exciting to watch out there!!

(CONTINUED)
WILLIE
(a winning smile)
I thrill to chill, ma'am.

CHRISTINA
Two in a row! 'Whatever it takes'
-- right. You make me excited
about the future again...

Others look on at the two of them.

Willie, in his jockstrap, is coming on to Christina in a
cheeky, street way, showing off his muscles. Christina,
accustomed to locker rooms and not seeing her players in
any way as competitive with her husband, ignores the fact
he doesn't add one stitch of clothing to his jock.
Willie senses this gulf and will come to resent it as
another synecdoche for the owner/player class structure.

WILLIE
(quietly)
... I hope you don't mind, but you
handle yourself real good in
business and all. I don't B.S.,
Miss Pagniacci, but you do it to
me. How'd you like to hook up for
a drink, or something quiet...?

CHRISTINA
(a little surprised)
... I'm flattered, Willie, I
really am, but I'm married. I've
just never dated players. It
gives the wrong impression.

WILLIE
You mean you're influenced by what
other people think?

CHRISTINA
I think we all are, in business,
Willie... So, come by tomorrow and
we'll talk. I think you'll like
what you're gonna hear... okay?
(smiles, corrects
his punctuation)
Pagniacci.

She exits. Her eyes catching Tony, on the fly, through
a cubicle window -- huddled with Rooney, Crozier,
and Julian in the cramped visiting coach's office.
WASHINGTON
... Reebok got this whole ad campaign ready to go the minute I hit 2,000 yards. But it's ABC, man, I don't get the ball -- I don't get my stats -- I don't get my money -- and I like gettin' my money.

CROZIER
This team isn't about your damn stats!

TONY
For that matter, you're lucky we're not keeping track of your blocking 'stats,' J...

WASHINGTON
What's that mean?

TONY
What's that mean? It means y'ever try blocking for a change, J? It's not that bad an idea...

WASHINGTON
I'm sick of hearing that shit! I'm tryin', but blocking's for those Clydesdale horses, man. You don't use a thoroughbred to block. You run his ass.

TONY
That's a winning attitude, kid.

WASHINGTON
How much you payin' that 300-pound blocker, man? Let him block, 'cause he sure can't run.

CAP
(to Tony)
... Look, J-man's got a point -- Beamen's not doing his homework. He isn't studying the playbook, he doesn't come in to look at any films, he doesn't even know the damn names of the defensive players he's facing. He doesn't give a geewhiz about anything or anybody! He just wants to make the plays by himself --

(CONTINUED)
CROZIER
He's young! He doesn't know how to 'read' like you do, Cap.

WASHINGTON
Fuck that! He's changing the plays, man -- all the goddamn time!

TONY
What? What do you mean he's changing the plays?

WASHINGTON
I said he's changing the plays -- in the huddle. The plays you designed that I loved. Just does what he likes.

TONY
In the huddle?

WASHINGTON
I'm not talking audibles, Coach. Today he did it all day long. Kid's dissing this play, that play, saying, 'I gotta better play.'

CROZIER
Hey, guys, we won. What's the point here?!

Tony's thinking about it.

SHOWERS #1
Players dance to a BOOMBOX PLAYING in the shower... Madman tries to join in but looks ridiculous and they trash him cruelly. Willie showers next to Shark, who, unseen, seems to lose his balance, grabs onto a shower head...

WILLIE
(to Shark)
So guess what? Coach suddenly asks me to dinner. Orders me morelike.
SHARK
(after a pause)
Hey, that means you made it, kid!
When Coach D. thinks you're the
real deal he brings you over to
his house and shows you his
trophies and shit and makes the
most godawful jambalaya you ever
tasted. One thing though, you
better bring flowers -- Coach gets
really pissed off if you don't
bring flowers.

WILLIE
Flowers?

SHARK
Some petunias or something. Trust
me... When?

WILLIE
Saturday.

SHARK
That's cool, I'm having a bash at
my place for bye week. Wife and
kids are up North. Gonna be a
lotta trim, so don't go bringin'
no sand to the beach, dawg...

WILLIE
Hey, I'm a born again ladies man!

Madman now retaliates, throwing a baby ALLIGATOR into
the shower, the tiny reptile terrifying most of these
behemoths with its HISSING jaws.

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LOCKER ROOM #4

Cap Rooney catches Willie's eye as the latter throws on
some frayed jeans, a beeper and cell phone hooked to his
belt. Adjusting his shades and headphones, he's about to
leave when:

CAP
The thing about a team, kid, is
you can try to lead 'em. But
will anyone follow? You don't
play for the team, the team's not
gonna play for you. Go out there
on your own, you'll die out there
on your own... 'kimmo sabe'?
WILLIE
Say, Cap, how old are you now?

Willie rolls on out -- barely avoiding the press -- who gather around Shark. Shark, in his underwear, puts his sunglasses on, bothered by the camera lights.

SHARK REPORTER
Say, Shark, what were you thinking when you came out of that concussion?

SHARK
What was I thinking? What're all these white guys doing standing around here looking at me, that's what I was thinking, what a dumb-ass question! Next?

Which cracks up the reporters.

TRAINER'S OFFICE #1
Cameras mounted, the room lit, Jack Rose has the first go at Tony, a tiny tape recorder in his palm.

ROSE
So what were you telling Beamen on the sideline, Coach?

TONY
(warily)
I was telling him how much I loved him.

They laugh.

ROSE
("friendly" smile)
Follow-up question. You think your boys could've won the game without him, Coach?

TONY
Why is it every time you ask me a question, Jack, it sounds like, 'So, did you beat your wife?' You goddamn know I don't have a wife, Jack, and you know I don't play golf and I hate fishing, barbecuing, and boating. I guess... wall-staring, I'm pretty good at that.

(CONTINUED)
ROSE
You still didn't answer the question, Tony...?

It's like a routine between them -- on the edge of danger.

TONY
No I didn't because I tell you what, this is what I got to say to you about the game, Jack: Fuck you, you stink, you know you stink, you wouldn't know the truth if it was in your own shit -- so go talk to one of these poor innocent schmuck kids you can misquote and destroy... Okay?!

(loud, walking away)
Hey, didn't we win! Didn't we beat L.A.! Two in a row! We're back!

The reporters are somewhat stunned by Tony's erratic behavior.

INT. TUNNEL - TWILIGHT
Dr. Mandrake is exiting quickly, but Dr. Powers manages to catch up to him.

POWERS
(to Mandrake)
... There's something wrong with Shark.

MANDRAKE
Wow! Brilliant deduction! Did you go to medical school for that?

POWERS
He's having trouble focusing. His hand-eye coordination's deteriorating and his memory, when I...?

MANDRAKE
He's fucked up! They're all fucked up! Their job is getting fucked up! The crazier they get, the more the crowd likes them.

(CONTINUED)
POWERS
(undeterred)
Harv, this is not professional wrestling. He needs a head M.R.I. and M.R.A.

Mandrake stops.

MANDRAKE
You're not even here six months, Allie! You're gonna order a 20 thousand dollar test for every nutcase on this team?

POWERS
He could have a subdural hematoma, intracranial bleeding...

MANDRAKE
Or he just could be a crazy fucker, okay! Listen, every Sunday these guys walk out onto that field, they only got one thing and one thing alone going for 'em -- their confidence!

(beat)
You start chipping away at that with a bunch of unnecessary testing and we can kiss the playoffs good-bye.

POWERS
Who's 'we,' Harv?

MANDRAKE
'We'! The team! Heading into the playoffs, you... you innocent! Television income triples. Yes! Bonuses! B.M.W.s! 'We,' -- the team, what's wrong with that?!

Mandrake, agitated, resumes walking. Powers follows.

POWERS
Are you saying I can't give Shark the tests?

MANDRAKE
Jesus Christ!... I'll take care of it, I'll get you the results!
(as Powers starts to object)
I've earned their trust, Allie. You haven't. Good night.
EXT. CALIFORNIA CRUSADERS STADIUM - TWILIGHT

Madman now walks out, wearing an upside-down jockstrap around his forehead. The waiting fans and miscellaneous REPORTERS love it, snapping pictures... Willie, following, is surrounded and held back by a mob of fans and shouted questions, requests, photographs (AD LIBS). He tries to accommodate, but is overwhelmed.

TUNNEL REPORTER #1
Willie!... You got 100 yards rushing today, how 'bout that?

WILLIE
(over the kids)
Ain't it amazing how fast a human body can move when it's being chased by 4.6 raptors who weigh more'n my mama!

They're laughing.

TUNNEL REPORTER #2
Hey, Willie! What's it feel like one day to be nobody, next day the whole world knows you?

The question gives Willie pause. He fields it gracefully.

WILLIE
I was always a star, you just didn't know it. But who says it's 'the whole world'? -- How important's football when two billion Chinese never even heard of it?

He has a natural charm and the press seems to like him for now... Other players walk by, ignored -- Shark among them, with Monroe, spotting Willie.

SHARK
Baby, the sharks are in the water.

MONTAGE #2 - WILLIE BEAMEN'S RISE

Set to a RAP SONG, "I'm Willie Beamen."

EXT. SOUTH BEACH - DAY

The Met-Rx image tied to Willie appears on the side of a Miami bus as Willie exits a beautiful hotel, two babes in tow, and enters his shiny new yellow Suburban, accompanied by a new agent, Wayne Mercer. Pointing to the moving bus:

(CONTINUED)
MERCER

Y'see, while you're sleeping I'm working. There he goes! Bus boy!... Creamin' Beamen!

They can't help laughing at the hugeness of it all.

MONTAGE #2 - EXT. SOUTH BEACH - CONTINUOUS ACTION - DAY

As the SONG CONTINUES, our players fool around at a touch football game against a group of sexy beach girls. Goofing off, Willie -- the cynosure of many eyes -- suddenly pulls up, grimacing, his throwing shoulder cramping on him. He conceals the pain and continues on.

MONTAGE #2 - INT. MEDICAL FACILITY - CONTINUOUS ACTION - DAY

The flash and THROB of MEDICAL MACHINERY as Dr. Mandrake supervises Shark undergoing his MRI...

MANDRAKE

American women don't fuck 'cause they're too fucked up to begin with...

(removing the comic book Shark's reading)

We don't want to confuse your brains with Spawn's, now do we?

MONTAGE - INT. CAP ROONEY'S HOUSE - GYM - CONTINUOUS ACTION - NIGHT

In his state-of-the-art home gym, a sweating Cap Rooney is going through an intense workout -- fly- motions and windmills on a Swiss ball. A supervising, sleepy trainer #3 reads a magazine in the corner, as Cindy Rooney enters in a sexy nightgown.

CINDY

Yo, Rocky, enough! You're gonna hurt yourself...

Cap ignores her.

CINDY

You're gonna hurt yourself...

(CONTINUED)
Cap comes off the ball, checks his body fat and heart rate on an intricate sports computer showing him at 7.5 percent body fat.

**CAP**
(finally)
... kid's breathin' down my neck.

**CINDY**
(confused)
He's not even close! You're the man.

Cap looks at her hard, his look saying: He's closer than you think.

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**MONTAGE #2 - INT. MIAMI PRACTICE CENTER - GYM - CONTINUOUS ACTION - NIGHT**

Willie works out with a crew of powerful teammates...

Later, he is still there, alone. His eyes burn into the wall-size mirrors with compulsive determination.

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**MONTAGE #2 - EXT. HOTEL SWIMMING POOL - CONTINUOUS ACTION - DAY**

Willie now shoots a "Met-Rx" commercial. He's in a bathing suit, body beautifully chiseled as girls by the dozen surround him... singing his own rap song.

**WILLIE**
(song TBD)
'My name is Willie... Willie Beamen... an' I keep the ladies screamin', oh yeah!... creamin' for my semen. Say hey, I'm Willie Beamen! etc...

As the SONG and MONTAGE #2 END AT...

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**EXT. PRACTICE FIELD #2 (#2 OF 3) - DAY**

Coach D'Amato and the QB Coach watch Willie and Rooney throwing side-by-side. Cap is still feeling pain in his lower back and legs; his passes are off, and he realizes it; whereas Willie's passes are on the money, sometimes too much so. One bullet pass bounces out of Sanderson's gut, burning his fingers, cursing.

(Continued)
TONY
(to Willie)
... less on the ball, Willie! You want a cool, tight spiral... and don't pat the ball, you...

WILLIE
Tight as fish pussy, Coach. 'I'm the man'!

'You're the man.' I repeat, don't pat the ball so much. They can see it!
(to QB Coach)
What'd he say?

WILLIE
Said I'm as tight-ass cool as the other side of my pillow, Coach...

Tony shakes his head as Willie this time completes a hard, precise spiral to his tight end.

TONY
(to QB Coach)
I need an interpreter... Awright, Cap, sit it out.

CAP
I'm fine.

TONY
You got the balls, we all know that -- now take a rest.

Rooney, pissed, moves to the sidelines, Tony, sensing his unrest, follows... as Christina, keeping an eye on her new star, arrives with Willie's agent in tow...

TONY
What do you want! You're off, but...

CAP
Hey, I've been on for twelve years and two rings, gimme a break. I've played hurt before. No big deal.

TONY
We're gonna go with Willie against the Emperors...

(Continued)
CAP
Are you kidding me?! Are you...
(wants to swear)
kidding me -- ?

TONY
Rock...

CAP
I'm ready to play, Tony!
Goddamit!

TONY
Listen to me. I want you to rest up until the playoffs. It doesn't mean enough against the Emperors for you to risk...

CAP
Home field advantage don't mean enough? Since when...?

TONY
It's not the big one, Cap. We can win at home or on the road with you. You know it's the smart thing to do. And one thing you always were was smart, Cap -- smarter than you were dumb.

CAP
Is this how it starts, Tony? I know the way your mind works, man. 'Rest up.' Let the kid take a few games. You were great, but time marches on, huh?

TONY
That's not what I'm saying --

CAP
The heck it's not! I know the game of football!

Cap walks away, crossing Willie on his way off the field. He slaps the back of his helmet hard.

CAP
Get all pretty for the cameras, poster boy!

WILLIE
What the -- ?!

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED: (3)

CAP
... They love you today but a season's 16 games, kid. It's how you live through the bad ones that makes you a quarterback, not a punk!

INT. SHARK CENTER LOCKER ROOM - CONTINUOUS ACTION - DAY

Mandrake walks alongside Christina, through an empty locker room.

MANDRAKE
... the bottom line is Rooney's some kind of medical miracle. He really could be ready for New York.

CHRISTINA
You told anyone, Harvey?

Mandrake, thinking she would be pleased, shakes his head, realizes what she's really thinking.

MANDRAKE
... 'Course he'd have to take a lot of pain and his ankle's not 100 percent. But he will. He's got the mind of an ox. He's so freaked about Beamen stealing his job, he'd probably play with a fractured neck.

CHRISTINA
Harvey... could you slow him down? Tell him he's not responding to rehab well enough -- just till the playoffs. Give Beamen his shot...?

MANDRAKE
(pause)
Well... everyone knows herniated discs are 'iffy.' I could recommend...

CHRISTINA
(moves on)
What about Shark?

MANDRAKE
He's still woozy, got bad migraines. Post-concussive syndrome.

(Continued)
CHRISTINA
Can you clear him?

MANDRAKE
(almost laughs)
... you mean which shell is the real peanut under?
(hesitates)
Three concussions the last five months? There's no way to predict what another head-hit would do, Christina...

CHRISTINA
How come Dallas had their quarterback practically in a coma last month just before he played one of the greatest games of his life...?

MANDRAKE
(backtracking)
... Well no question he wants his tackle and sack bonus bad. Theoretically, his brain's at increased risk, but it's theoretical, and I can pump him full of cortisone to catch the swelling and let him finish out the season... without a malpractice suit of course --
(off her look)
I'm joking. I don't really think anything's gonna happen... but I'm not a complete prick, you know, Christina, I do have some kind of conscience.

A168 EXAM ROOM #1
If she thinks so, Christina stays cool-eyed about it. They enter a small exam room.

CHRISTINA
I'm not looking to screw him, Harvey. But I gotta have him in the playoffs -- and he wants to play for chrissake, so everyone comes out...

MANDRAKE
... long term?... What are you thinking?

(CONTINUED)
CHRISTINA
(a beat, eye to eye)
I'm thinking we'll probably cut him in the off-season. The word's already out there, everyone's seen him take the hits. No one's gonna take him at his price... I think he'll be happy just to have his old job back at 30 percent of what he makes. That's if we want him back.

(off Mandrake's waiting look)
Dad always used to say, 'To make money, you got to spend money.' You do the math, Doctor. What you help save us we won't forget at contract time.

MANDRAKE
Smart man, Art. But you got him beat by a Miami mile, Christina...
What do I tell Tony?

CHRISTINA
(exiting)
Tell him what he needs to know. Shark can play. Cap can't.

AT FRONT DOOR
Willie waits, carrying flowers.

WILLIE
Hi, got you flowers.

He thrusts the flowers forward. Tony looks at them, a little taken aback; then takes them and shows Willie into the living room.
TONY
For me? Thanks... I guess I better put these in water or something. Come on in.

Tony goes to the kitchen, looking at the flowers. Willie now gets it.

WILLIE
(to himself)
Shark, you motherfucker!!

TONY
Sit down.

WILLIE
Nice place.

TONY
You wanna beer?

WILLIE
Sure.

TIME CUT TO:

SAME SCENE - LATER

Tony brings beers to Willie, glancing at Ben Hur on television; the irony slave ships and gladiators is not lost on Willie.

WILLIE
The gladiators of their time...
(to Tony)
Cute apron.

TONY
/removing it/
My ex-wife got it for me. It was a joke. I don't cook so great -- so don't expect anything too...

WILLIE
Don't worry. I'd be happy with a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. When'd you divorce her?

(CONTINUED)
TONY
Almost twenty years now...
(off silence)
Same old story, she got fed up
with me working so hard. You know
where they served the divorce
papers? On the sidelines of the
divisional playoff game in New
York.

WILLIE
(chuckles)
That's cold.

TONY
Fuck her, we won the game.

WILLIE
That's what it's all about.

TONY
You ready?

Tony leads Willie into a dining room, Willie glancing
around, noting many football photos that grace the walls.

TIME CUT TO:

DINING ROOM

Tony and Willie eat from two steaming plates of jambalaya.

TONY
... my own recipe. Sort of
adapted from Paul Prudhomme's.
Ever been to his place in New
Orleans?

WILLIE
(disguising his
distaste)
No.

TONY
Maybe get 'em next season. Like
no place on earth, New Orleans.
How you like it?

WILLIE
Hot! It's terrific, thanks.

TONY
... Well, thanks for coming by.

(CONTINUED)
WILLIE
You're going to yell at me, aren't you?

TONY
No... no. I just wanted to talk...

(a beat)
Willie, look, if I've been an asshole I'm sorry. Cap going down was really tough for me and maybe I've been taking some of that out on you. I know you're still learning the system and the pressure's incredible --

WILLIE
I can handle it.

TONY
I know. But we need to talk about this. I think you got a great future in football but first off we gotta deal with some basics. Like if the play book is too complicated we can simplify it for you --

WILLIE
Man, that book is too slow. When I am out there on the field I just gotta feel it. I can't be thinking about nothing but the juice. I got to let it out.

TONY
Listen, you're too fast out there as it is. You need to wait for the plays to develop. Our offense was built up over years, it's like Chinese water torture, taking apart the other team a little at a time, it's the death of 1,000 cuts.

WILLIE
I like things I guess a little more muscular, suits my style...

TONY
(stops eating)
Is that why you been changing the plays?

(continues)
WILLIE
I'm trying to read the defense, Coach, it's...

TONY
I'm not talking about audibles... Look, I know you like making the big plays. I understand that. But our game plans are the result of a lot of work and a lot of experience.

WILLIE
I know that --

TONY
I know you do. When you change plays you're showing disrespect to a lot of people in this organization --

WILLIE
I don't mean to --

TONY
People who've worked for years in this club and around the League. People who've sacrificed more than you will ever know to be in this game.

Willie sees where this is going.

WILLIE
I'm trying to win, Coach! I been warming the bench ever since I got to the pros, and I don't plan on going back there. I don't wanna disrespect nobody but... winning is the only thing I respect.

Tony looks at Willie with a singular, quiet intensity.

TONY
Okay, son, listen to me very carefully and remember what I'm going to tell you. You can forget every other goddamn thing I ever said if you remember this, because someday you're going to realize it's the truest thing you ever heard: This game has got to be about more than winning.

(CONTINUED)
Willie says nothing.

TONY
(relaxes a little)
...I guess that's what I wanted to say. You're part of something here! A tradition. Lombardi, Unitas, Tittle, Sammy Baugh, hundreds of great players! Those men on the wall, you're part of that now. And along the way I want you to cherish that... 'cause when it's gone, it's gone forever, and...

WILLIE
You know, I look at all these pictures and trophies and stuff and it just makes me... sad. Like the room is full of ghosts. When I'm done with the game, or the game is done with me, I don't wanna be no ghost up on a wall. I want more'n that.

Tony takes a long moment.

TONY
...Looks like Cap's gonna make it back in time for the playoffs... I'm gonna start him.

WILLIE
(long icy pause)
Yeah, I figgered. That's why I'm here, right? I knew you was gonna sell me out.

TONY
Cap's a leader... a team player. You need a team to win in the playoffs.

WILLIE
Bullshit! He's not half the athlete I am! Look me in the eye, Coach, and tell me Cap's the better player...

TONY
Cap's the better player.

(CONTINUED)
WILLIE  
(derisively)
Sure! I guess that was another
guy winning the last two games. I
put points on the board! He lost
four in a row. I lead by doing!

TONY
You kicked ass, kid, but Cap
Rooney has been 'doing' it for
years and he goddamned deserves his
day in the sun, so don't start...

WILLIE
And I deserve the bench, right?!

TONY
... He's been the quarterback of
this team as long as...

WILLIE
And his time is over! And yours
is too... 'less you start taking
some risks! Start playing the
game the way it is now. It ain't
all those pictures on the wall
anymore --

TONY  
(seething)
I've lived this game for three
decades, kid, I know football.
Those men --

WILLIE
Wanted to win -- just like you do!
You can feed the press and the fans
all that 'sacrifice and glory,
grand ol' man of the game' crap!
You sell it good, everyone bought it.
But I been there, Coach, I seen a
long line of guys like you from
college on with that bullshit
halftime speech!

TONY  
(furious)
It's bullshit, huh! You think
you...

(CONTINUED)
WILLIE
Yeah, it is! And you know it is! 'Cause it's really about money. Rakin' in the TV contracts, fat-cat boosters sittin' in their skyboxes and coaches uppin' their salaries, all of 'em looking for the next black stud to get 'em in the Top Ten, put 'em in the bowl games -- It's just like the pros, 'cept in the pros, the field hands get paid...

TONY
Don't play the race card with me, kid. Twenty-five years I've worked with men of your color. You're good because you're different, not because...

WILLIE
Maybe it's not racism, maybe it's placism, but the black man still gotta know his place, right, Coach?

TONY
What are you saying? You don't trust anybody 'cause of what happened to you in college? You knew the rules, Willie, you broke 'em.

WILLIE
Broke 'em?! How'd I break 'em?

TONY
You broke 'em. That's how you broke, 'em.

WILLIE
Man, I lost a million-dollar signing bonus 'cause a booster gave me a three-hundred-dollar suit to go to his kid's wedding. I didn't even know the guy. Hell, everybody was getting something! How's a black man supposed to get through college when he don't got the money to get clothes, go on a date? They all had their hands out but it was me they suspended.

(MORE)
WILLIE (CONT'D)
I dropped six rounds in the draft 'cause of that. And the coaches rapping me 'troublemaker,' 'arrogant,' 'won't play ball,' all that corporate shit they hit the brothers with when they won't kiss the money. Shit, I coulda made millions of dollars if I'd kissed that big ass Julian's kissing all the time. You talk about 'sacrifice'? I sacrificed about ten million dollars is what I sacrificed, 'cause of those dumb rednecks like your coach friend at San Diego who makes me corner back 'cause I got fast feet! It was him separated my shoulder, fucked up my throwin' arm tackling some 250-pound bullmother. I was a great football player but nobody gave me the time of day or the season I needed to heal that shoulder. They traded me right outta there!

TONY
Blame anybody but yourself, Willie! Y'see, that's what a leader is about, the times he's gotta sacrifice because he has to lead by example, not by fear or...

WILLIE
(challenged)
Fear?! Who you talking to?! I hung in there when nobody gave a shit about me. I rode the bench for five fucking years! And now I get my one lousy shot, I'm 26 years old -- half my football life is over -- and now you tell me 'You go on back to the bench, son. 'Cause you gotta sacrifice for the greater glory of Cap Rooney.' Well, fuck you, Coach! I'm not buying that brand, 'cause you're some scared old man who won't let me play my way 'cause I might just win! And then what the fuck was your life all about?!

Tony fights to control himself. Outside, the evening crawls through the twilight.

(CONTINUED)
TONY

(quietly)
You're not some flash-in-the-pan receiver or corner back or even Julian Washington, kid, you're a goddamn quarterback! You know what that means? It's the top spot, kid, the guy that takes the fall, the guy who everybody's looking at first, the leader of a team, who will break their ribs and noses and necks for you 'cause they believe! 'Cause you make 'em believe! That's a quarterback.

WILLIE

(caustic, overlapping)
Yeah, I'm the leader of your team till Cap's back up! Then I'm back on the bench. Shit, you ain't said two words to me all season 'til Cherubini went down -- then it was...

(imitating D'Amato)
'Son, just pretend you're throwing a pass on the street in the 'hood and your mama's ringing the dinner bell' -- all you done is talked at me, man, never listened to a goddamned thing I said! So don't have no coronary 'cause I'm gonna stay who I am -- 'Steamin' Willie Beamen'! 'Cause with the time I got left I'm gonna play my way and I'm gonna get my dollars up there so's when you motherfuckers trade me, waive me, injure reserve me, or whatever the fuck you do to me, I'm gonna be worth ten times what I was worth before!

A long pause. Tony's eyes, moving past ego, scrambling to understand.

TONY

I don't know... you are a very, very young man. And you are very, very stupid.

WILLIE

Tell me I'm wrong.

(_CONTINUED)
TONY
You're wrong. I know better than you think, Willie...

WILLIE
You don't know one thing about me... You couldn't even begin to imagine me.

He leaves Tony -- drained.

EXT. SHARK'S HOUSE - THAT NIGHT

Valet parkers attend to the numerous expensive cars and limos that pull into a circular driveway, unloading beautiful laughing women and exuberant football players...

Willie drives his Suburban right up onto the front lawn, enraging the valets.

INT. SHARK'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS ACTION - NIGHT

Willie is met with a ferocious explosion of MUSIC and mayhem; players dance and drink and pursue the opposite sex through the house... Shark bounces up to him:

SHARK
Make yourself at home in 'The Pit,' Dawg! Blowjobs upstairs. But if you want to hit the skins, trawl the beach. Whatever you do, don't mess up my sheets, cause my old lady's comin' back Tuesday and she gonna kick my butt she see any semen or blood round here!!

In a lively mood, Shark stumbles off. Willie makes his way through a packed living room... women immediately perk when they see him, whispering, some predatory...

INT. SHARK'S HOUSE - UPSTAIRS BALCONY - CONTINUOUS ACTION

Willie gravitates to Washington, Sanderson, a few others: The dialogue is fast, overlapping.

SANDERSON
What up, Willie B?! Coach give you the Vince Lombardi speech?

(CONTINUED)
WILLIE
He's in my face like I lost the
goddamn game! Mother...

SANDERSON
Told you! Hey, he's having a shit
year, what do you...

WILLIE
You know straight up we'd be top
dog this season if the defense
would step up --

WASHINGTON
Hey, lay off the D, man. Shark
hear that shit he'll tear you a
new asshole.

WILLIE
You think I give a fuck! Hey, I
wanna win games, not kiss some
overrated loser's ass. But what
do you care anyway, J? You ain't
playin' for this team. You
playing for yourself, like
everybody else round here...

WASHINGTON
Who you talking about, punk?!
Watch that mouth of yours or I'll
kick your fucking ass! You gotta
earn the right to diss someone on
this team, boy!

WILLIE
Team? Shit. All I see of this
team is a bunch of rich superfly
brothers tripping in this white
man's world, driving their BMW,
getting their dicks sucked by
100 dollar hair jobs... and the
clock's running and no one's
giving a shit 'cause they're
all dying inside... You were a
great athlete, J, but you become
a joke! You're playing, but it's
like you're dying inside.

Willie walks off -- his thoughts contradicting what he
said at Tony's place; a troubled man, his confusion
brewing to the surface. Julian, on the other hand, is a
furious man, restrained by Sanderson and the others.

(CONTINUED)
WASHINGTON
What the fuck you mean 'dying inside'?! Kiss my Armani ass, m'fucker! Talking to me like that! Who the... does this nigra know WHO I AM?! What I done for this team?! I'm gonna kill you, motherfucker!

EXT. SHARK'S HOUSE - BACK YARD - CONTINUOUS ACTION

In the hot tub, players are cavorting with the women, and Shark is telling stories, as Powers listens in.

SHARK
... So then Madman loses it -- starts reaming this guy out and then decides this hotel has GOT TO DIE! Stomps into the hall, grabs a fire ax and starts chopping through the wall. By now Styne, he grabs him, he's about to eliminate Madman right then and there, so I gotta jump in, I got to protect my baby, be the hero and save the fuckin' guy, when whap! thwack! Styne throws two quick punches that weigh about 150 pounds each and nails me right in the fucking head! Cracks my fucking skull! Check it out... (indicates his temple area) ... Bitch! From then on, guess what? Styne and Madman are like this dynamic evil duo who...

POWERS
(interrupting)
He cracked your skull?

SHARK
Yeah. So those two sonofabitches decide they're gonna rule the world...

POWERS
Hold on, Shark. He actually cracked your skull?

(CONTINUED)
SHARK
Yeah, Doc. I hate when that shit happens... So now we got these two locos on the offensive line and Coach D'Amato is about ready to call an exorcist when...

Dr. Powers, disturbed, leaves without being noticed.

A175 INT. SHARK'S HOUSE - BATHROOM - SAME TIME
A dozen beauties are lined up at the giant mirror, making themselves up, "doing blow," chatting, gossiping...

B175 EXT. SHARK'S HOUSE - BACK YARD
Julian, still angry, slides up to Shark.

WASHINGTON
Beamen disrespecting you, talking shit about you and the D...

SHARK
Are you kidding me? Are you fucking kidding me?! He goes after my D, I'm gonna break him off!

WASHINGTON
Motherfucker punkin' every damn one of us. We need to smack the m'fucker!

Shark thinks a beat, then:

SHARK
What's that motherfucker drive?

RAY FIELDS, former star linebacker, now using a set of canes, approaches, Crozier, talking to Willie. Fields' wizened face and eyes are a little too desperate for attention.

(CONTINUED)
Hey, Nick. How's it hanging?

Young and hung, Ray.

Steamin'! My man -- lookin' good. Does my heart proud to see a young brother in the pocket.

(interrupted, doesn't know him)

Havin' fun, baby.

(checking out Willie's chick)

Yeah, yeah, havin' fun. I hear ya. Say, Nick, I was meaning to talk to you 'bout some new plays I got --

Not now, Ray. It's party time, okay?

Willie notices the dominant Pantheon Cup ring on Fields' hand.

Yeah, yeah -- party time, uh huh -- not the right time...

(catching Willie's eye)

Yeah, Pantheon Cup twice -- '79, '81.

Fields emits a strange, oxen-like laughter -- they split looks, Willie horrified; Fields knows it, refers to his emaciated fingers.

Gotta get a chain for this one, try to buy 'em off me all the time. Had to sell one of 'em, but no way I was gonna let this sucker go. Without this, shit! You wouldn't even know who the fuck I was, now would you? I been there, Willie. Done that. You steamin' now but this is one dance they all play the same last song...

(Continued)
Hey, Ray, give it a rest, willya -- enjoy the party. It's his time... You had your time, it's his time.

Sure, Nick, but you a coach -- (pointed)
If you ain't helping him, you're hurtin' him...
(to Willie)
Don't bull with the shit, righteous, there's plenty of it.
(again that humongous laughter)
Ha ha ha ha!
(high fives)
Stay cool, little brother...

(gives it back)
You too, Ray...

His eyes burning like candles, Ray shifts his intense, almost blind gaze off Willie, and staggers back into the chaos of MUSIC and flesh on his canes.

That really Ray Fields?

Used to be Ray Fields.

Man! I watched him on TV growing up. Every Sunday. Like Tarzan. He was huge!

Yeah. Like he said, he was just too long at the dance. Like the rest of 'em... Thank God, those days are over...

He give you plays?

(shrugs, dismissive)
... I humor him. Gives him something to do.

(MORE)
CROZIER (CONT'D)
Guy took a lotta hits -- lost everything to booze, painkillers -- his family, all his money, typical shit... was out on the street for a while, then the press got hold of it and management gave him a few bucks. He gets by... Don't get down, Willie... I'm pushing real hard for another OT or pulling guard in the draft.

Moved, Willie's eyes remain on Fields, talking to someone else; he's also rethinking Crozier's attitude towards the players.

WILLIE
I like it, sounds like some big changes coming next year, Coach. Maybe you be stepping up...

Washington strolls up to him.

WASHINGTON
Say, Willie, that your 4 X 4 outside?

WILLIE
You mean my Sub? What's up?

WASHINGTON
Well, it's more like a 4 X 3 now.

Smiling, he strolls back out the front door. A beat. Willie follows fast.

EXT. SHARK'S HOUSE - DRIVEWAY - CONTINUOUS ACTION

A LOUD, GRINDING, BUZZING sound. Partygoers are assembled.

Shark bestrides Willie's Suburban with an enormous CHAIN SAW in his hands, literally SAWING the VEHICLE in two halves. Sparks shoot out, upholstery, plastic, and metal fly... Willie can't believe, then rushes Shark, wanting to kill him! (AD LIBS)... but others jump him; it takes several strong players to restrain him.

The car now tears open at a jagged angle. Shark TURNS OFF the CHAIN SAW, removes his safety goggles... to Willie:

(CONTINUED)
SHARK
Kid, in football you got an offense...
   (jumping down, points
to the severed front
of the car)
And you got a defense...
   (indicates the back
half)
You don't got one without the
other, do you...? Respect will be
paid. Now call this m'fucker a
cab and get him the fuck outta my
house!

INT. BAR - SIMULTANEOUS ACTION - NIGHT

Tony sits with Monroe at his favored sports bar. Monroe
is drunk.

TONY
... I just can't get through.
Used to be I could take anyone --
rookie, vet, bad-ass parolee --
didn't matter -- I could make
them... see what I see.

MONROE
  (more revealing than
  usual)
It's a new world, Tony! In my day
we were just happy to have the
goddamned job. I shoveled liquor
in the off-season, used cars,
insurance. Some guys used to
wrassle... Now, shit -- Prima
dawgs! Bodies are year-round
great but break like china!

Mandy, the young beautiful woman who approached Tony
previously, enters with a friend. Tony notices, as does
Monty.

TONY
TV... It changed the way we think
-- forever. First time they
stopped the game because they had
to cut to a commercial was the end
of it. I mean it was our
concentration that fucking
mattered, not some fruitcake
selling insurance...

(continuation)
MONROE
... Getting those big salaries, the bonuses, these rooks come in here thinking they deserve respect before they play a goddamn down --

TONY
(passionate)
Damnit, Monty, I don't know what more I can do. I've sweated blood for these men. I've given up my wife and my children for these men. I've given up everything I have to be on that sideline every Sunday. Everything! The game is all that matters to me. 'Cause it's pure! Four quarters. You cross a line, you score. It's sane. Life isn't, it isn't... It doesn't make sense for me not to have a home, a life... you tolerate the madness for the game... but if that's not enough, then this game is asking for too goddamn much!

MONROE
It always did, Tony... I coulda held on another two, three seasons. But one day in Chicago, the wind was blowin' off the lake -- man was it cold! I cracked my head right up against that frozen turf, and I knew -- right then -- I wasn't gonna do this anymore... shit, it wasn't any fucking fun! -- You gotta know when to get out, Tony. 'Fore it takes your soul.

A180 ON TV #1
Willie's commercial explodes over the bar, with LOUD MUSIC -- stylish, slick, sexy.

MONROE
-- Speaking of the devil!

180 BACK TO SCENE
They watch for a moment, then Monroe drains his beer.

MONROE
Gotta get out of here...

(CONTINUED)
TONY
Come on, Monty, one more.

MONROE
Can't, Tony. Lady's got a curfew out on me.

TONY
(snorts)
Curfew! How the hell do you and Sheila do it anyway?

MONROE
Well, we came to an agreement early on. All day long I live, breathe, and shit football. The moment I come home, I live, breathe, and shit family.

TONY
(shakes his head)
... It's impossible!

MONROE
(rises)
Hey, who the hell wants to think about blitzes and crossblocks when you're holding your grandkids in your arms...?
(pointed)
You gonna miss your boss embarrassing you in front of your players?
(as Tony doesn't acknowledge this memory)
That's why I want to coach high school, it's back to basics, the kids don't want nothing but to play. Like you say, it's pure... See you tomorrow, my friend...

He goes. Tony sits for a moment, and then glances at Mandy.

INT. TONY D'AMATO'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT
Tony gazes at one of three wall TV's; Mandy on an exercise bike in the corner, semi-naked in his pajamas.
TONY

... So Jeanette was 20, 21, I was just making it as a lowball assistant with San Diego -- Jock Harris was running the place then -- and one day we been romancing a year about and I says to her, 'So what about marriage?' And she says, 'What about it?' And I says to her, 'Well, I gotta see you backpedal first.' And she says...

MANDY

Backpedal?

TONY

You know. Quarterback gotta be able to drop back -- ? Run backwards? You shoulda seen Jeanette's face. She gets up -- bless her Albanian soul! And she does it! She backpedals for me. In high beautiful heels too! All the way! Jeanette! Can you do it? Don't try -- I'll marry ya!

MANDY

(crossing to bed)

Your genes, her genes... did you get a quarterback out of it?

TONY

Nah. Not even close. I had an insurance executive.

(as they both laugh)

How can you have one of them? Came out with a briefcase.

(beat)

... Nah, he's a beautiful kid.

MANDY

(props herself over Tony)

You know what you need?

TONY

... yeah, a pump.

MANDY

You need to be... young again!

She attacks him, tickling him all over. Like a boy, Tony giggles; it's been a long time since he'd been tickled.

INTERCUT WITH:
Willie, wearing gold chains and a new diamond stud earring, is being interviewed by Jack Rose on "Sports Corner."

WILLIE (V.O.)
(on TV)
... The coach in Houston didn't dig black quarterbacks too much, he was kind of a redneck dude...
(laughs)
Thought black people's brains were about the size of his dick (bleeped)... Then at San Diego -- that coach was a real genius -- he makes me into a corner 'cause he says I got fast feet...
(a bitter edge to his laughter)
Then I got injured and that screwed up that year. By the time I got to Oakland my third year, they didn't know what the fuck (bleeped) I was!

ROSE (V.O.)
(on TV)
Sounds like 'a conspiracy,' Willie! Are you saying black people are being dissed here?

WILLIE (V.O.)
(shakes his head)
'Conspiracy'?
(laughs)
Man, you is media-believing. Just let the facts speak for themselves, Jack -- 70 percent of the League is Afro-American and how many black head coaches? A few. How many black owners? Zero. You do the math, my man... But I ain't bitchin'. Fair's not what I'm looking for. 'Cause nothing's 'fair' in this here life.

ROSE (V.O.)
Come on, kid! It's a free country! Black dudes can buy teams. You have the green, you can buy a team. Black, white, or inbetween.

(Contiuned)
WILLIE (V.O.)
Football teams are corporations, Jack, but black kids are raised to be individuals, stars -- they don't learn to work together...

BACK TO SCENE

Tony, made happy by Mandy, gets out of bed, puts on a robe with his name emblazoned, like a fighter's, on the back, about to turn off the TV.

MANDY
Leave him on. He's cool.

TONY
(mocking)
'Cool'? My quarterback? He thinks he's Joe Montana already.

MANDY
I like him. He doesn't buy into the bullshit... I like his eyes. He's sure of himself -- makes him sexy.

Tony looks at Willie, wondering. Being with someone as young as Mandy permits him to understand. He pulls a blank check from his robe.

TONY
Thank God I'm old. Check alright?

MANDY
(laughs)
Is it good? Prefer credit card or cash, but this one time -- okay...

TONY
(filing it out)
You want a nightcap or something?

MANDY
(starting to dress)
No, I don't think so, but thanks...

TONY
How 'bout some coffee then?... Just stay for some coffee. Five minutes.

(CONTINUED)
MANDY
(senses his need)
Okay. Coffee'd be great.

He goes as she continues to dress, watching.

WILLIE (V.O.)
... I like looking downfield, Jack. I'm a big play guy. That's what the fans want. Sometimes the old timers like 'Coach Stone Age,' they don't go for that, but the scoreboard don't lie, Jack...

ROSE (V.O.)
'Coach Stone Age'?, that's terrific!

WILLIE (V.O.)
That's my little nickname. Don't mean no disrespect to the man, but to me it's all about winning. That's what this country's all about. Being number one. Every kid can grow up to be President, right? Who the hell wants to grow up to be Vice-President? There ain't no number two in football. You tell me who lost the Pantheon Cup last year? You tell me who came in second in the 100 at the Olympics? Where I come from you're number one or you ain't shit (bleeped)! This country was built on kicking immigrant ass. African ass, Chinese ass -- don't-matter-who ass. Only reason I made it out of Dallas is I wanted it more than the other guy. There ain't no grey area! Either you make it and get the big car and the nice home or you're on the bus and in the funeral home, 'cause losin' is dying!

ROSE (V.O.)
... But 'Coach Stone Age,' you smack me! So truthful, brother... Gimme a pound.

He tries to high five Willie, who doesn't respond...

Meanwhile, Tony crosses back with the coffee.
Mandy is on a cell phone to her service (AD LIB), brushing her hair, closing the phone as Tony enters.

TONY
I hope you like cream with your coffee... Mandy...? I like you. I'm wondering if we could maybe make this a more regular thing?

MANDY
Sure. I've got a few clients like that. We can book a regular time. I'll give you my service number and they can set it up direct with...

Writing...

TONY
I sort of meant... not like that. Without money.

MANDY
Oh, honey...

TONY
I know, but --

MANDY
You don't really wanna do this.

TONY
I really like you.

MANDY
I like you too, Tony, but you really don't want to do this.

A beat. She gives him her business number in lipstick.

TONY
You got pretty hair, you know...

Tony lingers for a moment, then sets his coffee down and leaves. Mandy watches after him in the mirror.

TONY'S BEDROOM #2

Tony crosses OUT past:

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

ON TV

ROSE (V.O.)
No doubt you're chewing up the
gridiron, but on the sidelines it
seems like you and Julian
Washington got pretty heated
during the Texas game?

WILLIE (V.O.)
No, J-man and me are just fine.
I'll bet you a hundred bucks and
that ugly tie that he'll have
another 2,000-yard season.

INTERCUT WITH:

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EXT./INT. JULIAN WASHINGTON'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Sanderson talks on a cell phone, feeding the numerous
sharks in J-Man's specially-designed pools, as he heads
inside, accompanied by a frightened beauty... At the
party, there are no men -- only some 20 beautiful women,
most in lingerie, dancing and making out among themselves.

A182 INT. JULIAN'S BEDROOM - FOLLOWING

Upstairs, at the controls is Julian, propped on his bed,
with several more girls, watching Willie on TV coolly.

WASHINGTON
Not without getting the ball, you
lying prick!

INTERCUT WITH:

ON TV

ROSE (V.O.)
... But isn't this an awesome
Emperor pass rush coming up Sunday?
I mean these guys don't need much
of an invitation to eat the
greenery? Is there fear there?

WILLIE (V.O.)
Jack, I told you, they ain't gonna
touch me, ain't gonna see me,
ain't gonna smell me. Don't
matter if it's T-Rex or Terminator
out there, I'll just turn on the
invisible juice and steam right by
'em!
INT. MADMAN'S HOUSE - FOLLOWING

ROSE (V.O.)
Willie, you are indefatigable!

Madman, on his cell phone, is heated as he watches the TV, amid an atmosphere of CRYING BABIES, BARKING PIT BULLS, and a pregnant, miserable wife.

MADMAN
You selfish asshole! If you don't think you're gonna get touched, I'm dancin' on a moonbeam!

INT. TV STUDIO - FOLLOWING

ROSE
(in closing)
... Well good luck to you, 'Steamin' Willie Beamen' -- what a great young kid!

EXT. SHARK STADIUM - NIGHT (RAIN)

(Game 4. New York Emperors at Miami Sharks.)

FIELD #1

Willie goes smashing into the mud, taking the hit on his throwing shoulder. A painful sack, he drags himself up... Dazed, Willie goes after the linebacker who nailed him... The 49er players sprint over to protect their teammate, but the Shark team does nothing to help their QB.

TUG (V.O.)
Welcome back to the Monsoon Bowl, folks! The Emperors have been eating Shark patties all night long. Smashmouth football -- this is what it's all about!

On the way to the huddle, over the DRIVING sound of RAIN.

WILLIE
Can I get some fuckin' protection here! If you're not going to block -- could you at least stay the fuck out of my way?!

Madman goes for him, Sanderson and the others holding him back.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

MADMAN
Loudmouth, showboating,
MOTHERFUCKER! Where's your steam
now?

SCOREBOARD #1
EMPERORS 25, SHARKS 7. FOURTH QUARTER. 5:13...

OMITTED

SIDELINE #1
Coach D'Amato glares at the field, the rain pouring over
his face.

TONY
(to line coach)
Get 'em to stand up and block,
goddamnit, Hank! What's going
on?!

TIME CUT TO:

FIELD #2
As the Emperor offense sets up, Shark urgently calls for
a defensive realignment -- Miami players hustle for new
positions -- the veteran Emperor QB sees this and quickly
barks out an audible --

A quick handoff -- the Emperor running back shoots
through a hole in the confused Miami defense -- Shark
tries to make the diving tackle but his knee gives and
he goes facedown in the mud, as the running back
splashes right past him for 25 yards. Touchdown!

TUG (V.O.)
What is with the Miami D of late?
They are going belly up, fins
flapping. Glug-glug-glug!

BRANSON (V.O.)
Shark Lavay just can't find the
old magic down there.

The running back turns back to the downed Shark and his
D, and points his fingers like a gun -- Bang! Bang!
Bang! The trainer and doctors run out to Shark,
grabbing his knee in fierce pain.
EMPERORS 32, SHARKS 7. FOURTH QUARTER. 1:33...

Willie, reading a signal from Cherubini on the sideline, takes the team on with a dead stare.

WILLIE
Y'all want to make it tough okay, I can take it, m'fucker! 'Cause I know come contract time there gonna be some big changes round here -- and, baby, it's either gonna be you or me! The call is Twins Right 90 Ringo Slide. On one! Ready!

Willie splashes back through the mud to pass -- an Emperor defensive end slips through full speed -- Willie is blindsided, his helmet goes flying off, he crashes to the turf, his face slammed once more into the mud.

D'Amato is wholly demoralized, can't look... Neither can Cap Rooney, now in uniform, recognizing something he'd rather not. Or something he'd perhaps forgotten -- the sheer, frightening violence and improbability of the QB position.

CAP
They won't play for him, Tony.

Tony looks at him, frustrated.

TONY
(walks away)
Then let him fucking learn!

The visiting Mayor Smalls shares his feelings with Christina.
CONTINUED:

MAYOR SMALLS
Shucks! There goes that black
dynasty you been promising me,
darling...

FIELD #4

Blood seeps down Willie's face from a scalp contusion as
he pulls himself slowly to his feet.

BRANSON (V.O.)

... And there goes home field
advantage for the Sharks!
Although their season ends on a
low note, there is still life
after death. Two weeks from now,
look for the underdog Sharks in
the playoffs in 'Toughtown U.S.A.'
-- Dallas, Texas -- football
capital of the world -- on that
fast astroturf that never forgets
to break a bone or two!

INT. LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

The locker room is silent and depressed as players
undress and shower.

BATHROOM/SHOWER #1

Willie, dazed and steaming with anger, crosses Shark.

SHARK
You lead. But did anyone follow,
nigga?

Willie ignores him, but not Julian on his other side,
when:

WASHINGTON

Whatsa matter, boy -- forgot your
'invisible juice'?

Willie explodes, takes a wild swing at the big man.
They struggle. They slip... players pull them apart,
Willie bleeding.

Tony storms into the shower with Monroe, sizes up the
situation.

(CONTINUED)
TONY
All right! Stop this now! Stop it!

Players freeze. Showers continue to run.

TONY
This kind of bush league crap doesn't cut it with me! Anybody who thinks otherwise can pack their bags right now! 'Cause this shit is never gonna happen again! Ever! Is that clear...? You don't do that out there! Men get killed out there!

(pause)
... Thirty years in football, I never seen something that stinks like this! This is a violation!
... Today -- out there, you embarrassed yourselves and you embarrassed me. Today I am ashamed to be your coach!

He stalks out.

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EXT. PRACTICE FIELD #1 (3 OF 3) - DAY

Unnaturally bright lights are on Willie and Cap Rooney in pads, side-by-side. They wear TV smiles, surrounded by a gang of children in Shark jerseys. Willie's cheek is stitched.

CAP
... So please give generously to your Child Fund of America.

WILLIE
... And let's make every kid feel like a superstar!

CAP
Because giving -- like football -- is a team sport. Thank you.

They smile. And smile. Finally:

VOICE (O.S.)
That's a wrap, thanks, guys.

Rooney and Willie split in different directions... we PULL BACK to reveal a small TV crew shooting a public service commercial. Christina talks with the Sharks' PR director and a TV producer.

(CONTINUED)
Julian Washington watches the shoot from the bleachers, brooding, upstaged by Beamen.

The children from the commercial follow Willie for autographs. Willie's agent notes this to Christina as they leave.

Rooney crosses to Cindy.

CINDY
You should've fought for that superstar line.

CAP
No -- 'giving' -- 'team sport' -- those are the lines.

CINDY
(noting the kids around Willie)
Meanwhile... You used to do this spot alone.

CAP
(uncomfortable)
Okay... you finished?

Walks away.

In the bleachers with the rest of the media, Jack Rose observes with his two-man TV crew.

Julian studies the kids, who seem to adore Willie. An OLDER KID, 11 years old, intersects.

KID #1
Hey, J-man! Is it true you making 10 million a year?
   (as J-man smiles, nods)
   ... That true then 'bout you not blocking no more? It's part of your contract? That's what my Dad says. He says you don't have to catch no passes over the middle either 'cause you don't want to get hurt? It's also in your contract...
Right, J?

WASHINGTON
(a look)
... Yeah, your dad's got it down, kiddo...
Tony sits with Dr. Powers, Monroe and Shark Lavay -- his MRI's spread on Tony's desk, the mood glum.

TONY

... So what are the odds?

POWERS

There's no telling. It's an 'odontoid fracture'...

(off their looks)

Basically, he broke his neck and it never healed right. Coming after the 20 to 30 concussions he's had over 14 years, you can't predict this type of thing, but I can say this: the wrong hit could result in paralysis, Parkinson's... even sudden death.

SHARK

Hey, what else is new...?

POWERS

In my opinion, he shouldn't be out there...

(pointed at Shark)

You could be braindead, your speech slurred or you could have weird personality changes for the rest of your life... you understand what I'm telling you, Luther?

SHARK

(offset by his sanctimony)

Luther do, but 'Shark' don't, Doc! I been playing with fire since you was shitting in your diapers, and right now I need one sack and three more tackles and I get my bonus. Then we'll talk, okay, motherfucker!

MONROE

(to Shark)

Y'ever seen an old punchdrunk boxer, stumbling around and drooling -- no memory of what he done in his lifetime... you want that life, Luther?

(CONTINUED)
Shark looks from Monty to Tony, who is conflicted, holding his feelings close.

TONY
I can't make this decision for you, Shark.

SHARK
I don't believe this... You need me against Texas, Coach?

TONY
(pause)
'Course I do, Shark, but no, not at this price... no.

SHARK
(pleading to play)
Look, you goddamn know well as me she gonna cut my ass anyhow in the off-season! And no one's gonna pick me up for any kinda money. I'll be back here begging to play for field wages, Coach...

Tony doesn't deny it, silent.

SHARK
I gave you 13 years of my best, Coach, you know you owe me...
For a million bucks, shit! I'll shake like a coconut tree the rest of my life if I got to... just lemme play... please?

TONY
(pause)
You'll have to sign a waiver, Shark.

SHARK
(relieved)
Bring it on...

Monroe shakes his head, disappointed. As he goes out with Shark:

POWERS
(to Tony)
We need to talk about Harvey, Coach...

He pulls out an envelope with X-rays.
Mandrake's on a cell phone on the sidelines with his new girl friend COURTNEY, when Tony walks up on him, furious, followed by Powers. Christina has long left the practice field.

MANDRAKE

(into phone)
... honey, don't believe a word your mother says... don't ever say your Pappa didn't believe in you -- Me too. I...

TONY

You evil motherfucker -- !

MANDRAKE

Tony, what are you...?
(to daughter)
I'll call you later, princess.

Tony pulls him out of ear-shot.

TONY

Shark's film! I know what you pulled, switching the results so Powers wouldn't pick up on it!

MANDRAKE

(realizing)
... Granted. It could look like that to a lay person, but to be honest, Tony...

TONY


MANDRAKE

Oh, I see -- you're taking the high road! Who's bullshitting who here, Tony?

TONY

Did you bother consulting him! He could get killed out there!

MANDRAKE

(overlapping)
I knew his answer!... And getting killed? Maybe, maybe not! It's one chance in a thousand, 'but nobody blitzes like the Shark,' right, Tony?

(CONTINUED)
TONY
You walk off this field and you get into your car and you go far away -- I never want to see you near one of my players again. Do you understand me? Never.

MANDRAKE
Come on, Tony, most of them couldn't piss in the morning without pills.

TONY
No more -- !

MANDRAKE
So now you're gonna play innocent?! You know something -- fuck your innocence!

This explosion draws looks from the team. Jack Rose tries to move closer to hear, but is blocked by Monroe.

MANDRAKE
You're better than me all of a sudden?! You're better than me?! What about Beyer?! What about Nielstrum and Manzicki... and Logan... and Krause?! All these years you been turning a blind eye!

TONY
I will not have this discussion. Get out!

MANDRAKE
Sure, Tony, don't ask the question if you don't want the answer, right?

Mandrake glares at Powers.

MANDRAKE
... And you, you fucking snitch! Did you ever think about him putting food on the table? Or his kids going to college?

POWERS
You lied to me!

(CONTINUED)
MANDRAKE
(mocking)
Oooh, I lied! The President lies all the time, Allie!

POWERS
... and you lied to the players, and doping them, changing X-rays and --

MANDRAKE
And making them heroes! That's what I been doing. Who am I to tell these men they can't live their dream? These are big boys. This is triage out there, asshole! Let the man die a goddamn hero if he wants.

POWERS
Oh, Christ! You didn't give him a choice, Harvey, you gotta give him his choice. It's a doctor's ethics.

MANDRAKE
Since when?

POWERS
The Hippocratic Oath, that's when...

MANDRAKE
You mean the one that starts: Do no harm...? With all due respect, I didn't have to ask him. I knew his choice. Was there any doubt whatever what this man must do? These players are freaks of nature -- they will not live with shame like you. These men are gladiators, warriors! And long ago they made that choice, not me. Or you! And I'm not taking that responsibility of standing between them and...

(switching the approach)

Did you ever have a fucking dream, Allie?

POWER
(a beat)
... I'm living it, Harvey.
TONY
(quietly)
This I mean -- get out.

Mandrake is genuinely sad to leave; he looks at Tony, not without affection.

MANDRAKE
(quietly)
... Oh fuck it! But hey, we won the Pantheon didn't we, Tony? See you around the nursing homes...
(to his girl friend watching)
Come on, sweetie.

COURTNEY
No, I wanna stay, Harvey... Please.

Dr. Harvey Mandrake smoothes out his expensive jacket and walks away with some dignity, leaving Courtney behind.

EXT. PRACTICE FIELD #3 (3 OF 3)

Tony heads back to his office, unfortunately intersecting Jack Rose with his crew, and several other reporters.

ROSE
So, Coach D., what's up now -- mutiny in the medical ranks?

TONY
(blind and sudden)
Get the hell out of my way, you piece of...!!

He shoves Rose out of his way and storms past. Rose slips into the dugout, smacking his head on the bench. Tony doesn't turn around, but everyone else tenses, expecting trouble.

ROSE
Hey!... Hey!... That's just great!...
(to his crew)
Did you get that!?

HUDDLE #2

Cap Rooney claps his hands, breaking the spell. Madman and Sanderson have been watching this, worried and confused, their doctor suddenly exiled from their lives.

(CONTINUED)
Awright, guys, wake up!

They move to the ball. The team is running light contact scrimmages, Crozier supervising on the sideline... Rooney scans the defense.

Blue 44. Blue 44. Hut!

The snap -- the red-shirted D comes with a blitz. Rooney paralyzes, showing a moment of pure terror in his eyes as "Beast Man," the DB, pulls up short; the WHISTLE SHRIEKS.

(reassuring him)
C'mon, baby, nobody's gonna hit your pussy ass!

Yeah -- shucks -- I know. Got happy feet. Must be gettin' old.

But Rooney's grinning eyes speak of a sea change churning in him.

Willie makes his way through layers of steam. There is only one other player in the bath -- Shark Lavay. Willie considers leaving but sits... Shark gazes dispassionately at Willie, who won't look at him.

... You know punks come and go in this league. They get picked up right out of the 'hood 'cause they can run or fight, 'cause they're fast and strong and big. And suddenly they got all the money and the foxes that chase the money -- and they get to live 'the dream.' But for every sucker who makes it -- for every Jerry Rice and Barry Sanders -- there are a hundred nigras you never heard of.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)
SHARK (CONT'D)
And when they get a step too slow or a year too old -- baby, the game tosses them back onto the street with nothing and just keeps on going like nothing happened. Sure, the game's taught 'em how to strut their shit and talk trash and hit -- but what else?...
Suddenly there's no more money, no more women, no more applause... No more 'Dream.'

Shark knows it's ending for him.

SHARK
(quietly)
This is what I'm saying to you, Willie: when a man looks back on his life, he should be proud of all of it. Not just a few years in pads and cleats. Not just memories of when he was... great. That he gotta learn in here...
(indicating his heart)
... or he ain't a man. He just another punk.

Willie listens, lets it sink in.

EXT./INT. CAP ROONEY'S HOUSE - NEXT DAY

Cap Rooney cooks hot dogs on the outdoor barbecue of his massive suburban home. The lawn is far removed, as most of the outdoor activity takes place on concrete. The three Rooney kids (two boys, one girl) are tricycling, screaming, running through doll houses -- as a busy Cindy Rooney surveys it from an upstairs balcony on the cell phone.

TONY
(entering)
Hey, kids are growing, Cap. Johnny's already got big hands
(the kid corrects his name, TBD).

JOHNNY
My name is Johnny, Coach.

TONY
I forgot, Johnny, sorry, I got so many names in my head.

(CONTINUED)
JOHNNY
You never remember my name, Coach.

TONY
Don't shoot me.

CAP
Keep your hands off my kids willya! I'm gonna teach 'em some golf...

The kids mumble chaotically, as Rooney serves early dinners on some strange space-age plastic table.

CAP
Who wants the mustard on their hot dog...? You see the news? This guy Rose says he's gonna sue you for a million bucks!

(laughs, shakes his head)
If it was me, I would've left him so he couldn't remember zip -- in a coma. Think they're gonna suspend you, Tony?

TONY
... Do me a favor. I'd get some sleep... So, Doc Powers cleared you for Sunday.

CAP
Yeah? Great!

(calling out for help with the kids)
Cindy? A little help!

Cindy acknowledges.

EXT. CAP'S HOUSE - SUNSET

Tony and Cap walk around the edges of a man-made lake facing the house. During the dialogue, they approach a veranda area.

TONY
Papers got us as six point dogs, you believe that? I can't wait to strap it on and stick it to Dallas like we used to. Show 'em what this game is all about. Right there in the playoffs!

(CONTINUED)
Tony picks up on a vulnerability in the air.

TONY
You okay?

CAP
Sure --

TONY
(suddenly)
The Doc got it wrong about your back?!

CAP
My back hurts a whole lot more than I thought, Tony, I pushed it too hard.

TONY
We all play hurt, Cap. You just need the needle.

CAP
Yeah, I'm sure that's it.
(laughs)
Maybe you oughta go with Willie though? You know, I been off -- my passing -- the whole deal --

TONY
I seen you in practice, Cap. You're ready now. What is it?

EXT. VERANDA - TWILIGHT

Cap doesn't respond or look at him. He sits on a swing. Tony is stunned as the realization hits him.

TONY
Cap, you don't want to go in? What is it?

CAP
Tony, it's not that, it's that...

(CONTINUED)
TONY
... You didn't get any phone calls
I didn't know about did you?...
from Christy?
(as Cap shakes
his head)
... You seeing a psychiatrist or
something?

CAP
No...

TONY
Then where the hell is this coming
from, Rock?
(raising his voice)
You wanted to play. I fought for
you! Why didn't you tell me
something, do you realize what I...

CAP
I'm sorry... I didn't know.

TONY
... I went out on a long limb for
you, man! I took on Christina. And
Willie. And the media. And you
do this to me?!? I had four weeks,
I woulda gone another way...

Rooney swinging back and forth, proceeds with great
difficulty:

CAP
I didn't know! I didn't know...
You don't know how much I wanted
to come back, Tony. You have no
idea. This is all I have in my
life. Everything. It's not fun
anymore. I'm not what I was.
Tony, the first time I got hit in
the pros I thought my heart was
going to stop. You're never the
same after that. After all the
hits and concussions, I have these
blank spots in my memory. I
haven't been able to straighten my
good leg for years, even on a good
day I shake... Sometimes I can't
even hold a spoon right.

(MORE)
CAP (CONT'D)
And I'm on pain killers all the time 'cause of my elbow and my ribs and my neck and my torn thigh and now my ruptured disc. But even now, with all that, I'd go back in a second... if I could only be what I was. But if I go out there, I'm gonna fold... in front of everybody. The team. My family... You.

(struggling)
I just can't do that. It's my body. It's my body.

Tony's disgusted and moved at the same time; relents and puts a comforting hand on Cap's shoulder; his quarterback's breaking down right in front of his eyes -- he's never seen him like this. But Tony, ever the coach of men, won't allow Cap -- or himself -- to quit.

TONY
The things you're saying are in your head, Rock -- they're not real... You know you've got it in you, because I know you do!

CAP
Tony... if I could only be what I was? It's my body, Tony, it's just not there... Please...

TONY
I need you, Rock -- to lead this team. The team needs you. I need you...

Cap dries his eyes, looks at Tony hard.

TONY
One last time. You and me. Together... Trust me.

CAP
(finally)
... You need me, Tony, I'll do it for you.

Ridden with doubt, Tony hugs his boy, tightly.
In their screening room, alone:

CINDY
(carefully)
I don't get it... Jack?

CAP
I'm saying... I got my rings, we took care of our money, the kids are all right -- we had a good run... I just think it's time for me to get out... after the season...

CINDY
And do what?

CAP
I talked to the guy from one of the networks --

CINDY
You're a football player.

CAP
Cindy -- will you hear me out?

CINDY
You are a football player and you have two, three years left in you!

CAP
Honey, you're missing the big picture --

CINDY
There is no 'big picture'! You are the goddamn quarterback of the Miami Sharks! You are a legend and you're talking about quitting?!... You know what that means to the kids! To me!

CAP
My whole fucking life I've always done what other people told me to. Ever since college... what do I do? This is my decision, not yours!!!

She suddenly slaps him across the face.

CINDY
I will not hear this bullshit from you! I will not!
Four sexy women in short killer skirts sway like vampires into the next club... Miami. A world outside American culture.

Willie entertains his agent, Mercer, at an outdoor club overlooking the beach. Two beautiful models accompany them. Attractive people stroll by. Various ETHNIC MUSIC PLAYS, a warm, highly-artificial setting that Willie senses, as he listens absently to the dialogue at the table, a vocabulary reduced to words of expansion, contracts, and greed. On the table are covers of Sports Illustrated and ESPN sports featuring Willie.

MERCER
... they'll do it, you know why? They want you!... and we'll make 'em swallow the beer distributorship too... the thing is no one really knows how good you are, man, Willie. You get in the playoffs and you score, you get your moment? -- You can forget about this team -- they gonna lose anyhow -- but you get that one shining moment when they notice you, 'money, when they really see you -- then you are a 'star' in this culture, baby, and you are looking at five million serious dollars next year someplace, anyplace! Maybe L.A. I'm talking intensely to L.A. Shit, Christina'll extend you right now at two million for the year... but we're gonna wait! That's why you got me, Willie B. To think about these things...

MODEL #1
(to Wayne)
Honey, let's go dancing... I'm bored.

Willie muses at the passing parade.

WILLIE
(absently)
I hope you're doing a lotta that, Wayne, 'cause what if I'm not made of steel?

MERCER
Say what?

(CONTINUED)
WILLIE
You know, what if my arm starts hurtin'?

MERCER
(flummoxed)
Where you coming from with that?

MODEL #2
Baby, that arm's gonna last you forever.

Willie suddenly spots his old girl friend, Vanessa, moving towards the ladies' room. He jumps up, follows.

WILLIE
(catching up to her)
Vanessa...?

VANESSA
(turns, afraid)
Willie...?

WILLIE
(shy)
Hi... been a while.

VANESSA
(awkward beat)
Yeah... So, congratulations!...

WILLIE
Yeah...!

VANESSA
You getting what you wanted...?

WILLIE
Yeah, but I was pretty stupid about it...

VANESSA
No, I don't think so. You were just...

WILLIE
I blew it, Vanessa. I was a fool... I'm sorry. You know it all happened so goddamn fast. I just wasn't ready for it...

Vanessa looks over Willie's shoulder. He realizes, follows her glance to a well-dressed, middle-aged African-American businessman waiting at a table.

(CONTINUED)
WILLIE
... Vanessa, I'd really like to
talk to you -- when you have a...

VANESSA
I don't think so, Willie. No.

WILLIE
Okay. I understand... or do I?...

VANESSA
I really don't think we belong
together, you're just too volatile
for me, Willie. I'm a simple
girl, I like simple things. Truth
be told, I don't like football. I
just liked you... I'm sorry.

She goes, sadly. After a brief moment of indecision,
Willie follows.

INT. RESTAURANT - LADIES' ROOM - CONTINUOUS ACTION

Vanessa sort of expects Willie to follow.

VANESSA
Willie, get the... outta here!

WILLIE
Vanessa, listen to me, please!

At the mirror, an older woman, with a bushel of white
hair, looks disapprovingly at Willie.

WILLIE
Whoa, Barbara Bush!? Willie
Beamen. You know, I always wanted
to meet you 'cause I always had
this thing for...

Despite herself, Vanessa laughs. "Barbara Bush" exits in
a huff.

WILLIE
That's it, baby -- let me see that
smile!

VANESSA
(smiling)
You are such a jerkoff...!

(CONTINUED)
WILLIE
I know. Just tell me I can call you, Vanessa, come on! You gotta tell me here and now -- or I'll leave you here alone and never call you again...

VANESSA
(laughs)
You bullshitter! Alright, call me -- if it'll get you the hell out of here!

WILLIE
(jubilant, goes)
I'll be callin' you, sweetpea, you hear me? 'Cause that date of yours...

(makes a face)
... look like a pallbearer and that worries me...

VANESSA
At least he's tall. You're just jealous... Oh, I'll just be sitting by the phone, waiting...!

She laughs to herself when he's gone, delighted.

INT. SHARK CENTER - D'AMATO'S OFFICE - LATE NIGHT

Tony's desk is covered with play diagrams. He's drawing new routes, as an old JAZZ RECORDING plays softly on the CD PLAYER... Crozier enters with a pile of computer printouts.

CROZIER
I took the probabilities on Texas. Some really promising stuff on the weak zone coverage. They run left 85 percent in the red zone when...

(noticing the diagrams)
What's this?

TONY
(snorts)
Nothing! I been trying to come up with some plays that Willie can't possibly fuck up.

(MORE)
TONY (CONT'D)
(as Crozier laughs, sits)
Nick, I don't know what the hell to do? I've tried talking to him every way I know -- yelling at him, reasoning with him, inspiring him -- the whole bit.

CROZIER
Have you tried listening to him? Try to be sensitive to what he's --

TONY
'Sensitive'? I don't know from 'sensitive'! I only know one way to coach. Sooner or later they've got to start acting like men.

CROZIER
... Someone comes at you with a chop block, chief, and you stiffen, you gonna get hurt. You gotta bend... like bamboo in a monsoon.

Tony doesn't answer, fingers Crozier's printouts.

TONY
All these fucking numbers -- he runs left 18 percent faster than he runs right. He plays better on odd numbered days. Next we're gonna calculate the angle of his dick! What're we here for, Nick? We're technicians!

Unexpectedly, HEELS CLICK down the corridor, and Christina suddenly walks in, furious -- throws USA Today Sports across the desk.

CHRISTINA
Congratulations! Was I the last to know? My own team?

TONY
If you're talking about Rose, I'm gonna bar his ass from here to fucking...

(CONTINUED)
CHRISTINA
We'll see about that! I'm talking about Willie! What the hell are you doing startin' Rooney? He hasn't played in six weeks and you're going to throw him into the playoffs against the best pass rush in the league?!

TONY
Cap's my starter, Christy.

CHRISTINA
And if we lose this game because...

TONY
(raising his voice)
I'll do you one better: in the off-season I'm gonna trade Willie!

CHRISTINA
(stunned)
You what?! That is not your option!

TONY
Yeah, it is. The kid can sell a lot of T-shirts, Christy, but he is tearing this team apart!!

CHRISTINA
Then you hold it together.

TONY
I can't! Not with him.

CHRISTINA
Then I'd say we have another problem!

CROZIER
(standing)
I think I'll --

TONY
(rising instead, to the door)
Sit down, Nick! You want the big chair, get used to it first...! Hey if you feel that way about it, Christy, I don't know what the hell I can do for you -- except take a leak.

(CONTINUED)
CHRISTINA
Will you stop this... posturing!
Where are you going? I'm not
finished. The Commissioner just
called me.

(as Tony stops)
He's gonna fine you a 100 grand...

TONY
(stunned)
For what?! Shoving that talking
turd out of the way? A hundred
G's!

CHRISTINA
... And he wants a public apology
from you to Jack Rose!

TONY
That'll be a cold day in hell,
baby!

CHRISTINA
You will apologize, Tony. The
days when 'Uncle Tony' could just
do what he wants -- calling all
the shots, firing Mandrake when he
wants, smacking sportswriters --
those days are over! You start
Willie on Sunday and you make the
adjustment to modern times -- or
you're out, Tony! And that's...

TONY
(explodes)
You think you're gonna tell me
what to do?! Your father never
told me what to do! AND YOU'RE
NOT GONNA START NOW, YOUNG LADY!

CHRISTINA
(not backing down)
Will you stop using my father as a
scapegoat! Do you think you don't
have to deal with me by raising my
father all the time? When are you
going to listen to me! 'Cause I'll
tell you this right now -- I'd
cut my father's ass if we were
losing like this!

TONY
I bet you would, too!

(CONTINUED)
CHRISTINA
... And you know what? I wouldn't lose a night's sleep over it. 'Cause like you he was sentimental. And I can't afford to be. I'm in the business of holding this team together. That means selling! Selling tickets, skyboxes, players. Selling. That's why Willie works for me. He sells tickets. And that's why he's starting Sunday.

TONY
You know, I'm really sick and tired of you calling me an old asshole! Your father was no genius. He acted like he was. And he took a lot of credit for things he didn't do. But let me tell you something, he at least respected me and he respected the concept of the coach coaching and the owner owning. I can't even imagine what he'd think of you right now with this... 'act' you're putting on, but my hunch is he'd be ashamed!

CHRISTINA
(in a danger zone)
Here we go again! You don't listen, do you --

TONY
Ashamed!

CHRISTINA
Why the hell do you think he left me in charge, you bullheaded moron?! He could've made you General Manager -- but he didn't, did he? Why? Because he knew you didn't have the guts to do it without him when he was gone alright! He told me so himself. Right there on his deathbed. That's why, Tony -- because he didn't trust you anymore. Because you got old!

These words cut Tony hard. He puts on his game face.

(CONTINUED)
TONY
(deadly quiet)
Well, this old asshole has a playoff game in two days. A game which Cap Rooney is going to start and finish. Both of you -- get out.

Crozier stands, a glance to Christina. They go. Tony is alone.

A207 EXT. PAGNIACCI MANSION - NEXT DAY
Christina walks along the tennis court and enters the house through the back door, bypassing the housekeeper.

CHRISTINA
(to housekeeper)
Beatriz, I'll be in Dad's office... Don't bother Mom.

B207 INT. PAGNIACCI MANSION - FATHER'S OLD OFFICE - DAY
Christina sits at her father's desk, living in the past. We FLOAT PAST a large portrait of her father TO the living room, where we overhear the VOICES of Tony and Margaret.

208 INT. PAGNIACCI MANSION - PARLOR - DAY
Tony consults with Margaret. The thick velvet drapes are always drawn tight here -- banishing the blazing Florida sun and permanently shrouding Margaret's elegant parlor in shadows... Today she burns with an oracular power.

MARGARET
What is it you fear...?
(pause)
You have so much fear, Tony.

TONY
I'm losing the team, Maggie. I'm losing control. Everything in my life is about control. I lead men. I control men.
(a pause)
Did Art think I was past it?... Is that why he made Christina President? Did he think I couldn't win anymore?
MARGARET
I don't know.

TONY
Do you care?
    (a silence)
I need your help, Maggie. Christina is going to destroy this team.

MARGARET
    (cryptic)
Yes. In order to save it.

TONY
    (bewildered)
We can't let that happen. We owe that to Art.

MARGARET
You never understood Art, Tony... He wanted a son more than anything in the world...
    (a considered pause)
When you truly contemplate what Christina is, it really is a tragedy. Believe me, she will fire you and sell the soul of the team -- and everything her father stood for will die... and that is as it should be... and neither you nor I, or maybe even Christina herself, will ever understand her real motives...

Her intensity is unnerving.

MARGARET
... What will you do, Tony? After football? What's out there for you? With no one to control?

TONY
Stop it.

MARGARET
    (quietly)
... I blame you for a lot of things. You were, like Art, a monster. You've gotten older... better, but for a long time I hated you.

(MORE)
MARGARET (CONT'D)
(as Tony is taken aback)
Yes, that game took my husband, my daughter, and my youth and left me... with what?
(looks around, the drapes drawn)
The memory of a blazing sun all those Sunday afternoons out there at the stadium...
(disconnected)
Where time just slipped away.

Tony looks away, betrayed, hurt.

INT. PAGNIACCI MANSION - FATHER'S OLD OFFICE - SIMULTANEOUS ACTION

Christine cries quietly, also devastated by her mother's revelation of her character.

INT. D'AMATO'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

A SONG plays through the house, ghost-like. Tony drinks whiskey, pausing, as he goes through his personal mementoes in his chest of drawers, the TV turned to:

INTERCUT WITH:

TV

On "Sportscorner," Jack Rose, sporting a dramatic bandage across his head, similar to a Revolutionary War icon, talks to Sanderson.

ROSE (V.O.)
... Thanks, 'Sandman,' for asking -- my head is still hurting, got some migraines... and the ribs are sure sore.
(grins)
But hey, I play hurt! If you look at your monitor...

The station runs the famous "shot" again, the ending blurry with Tony "pushing" Rose into the dugout.

(CONTINUED)
... You know this 'punch' was more than just aggression, it was a sign of decay I think, because...

Tony roars at the TV.

Aggggh! If I'd punched you, you'd be shitting out your teeth right now -- you vampire prick!

He picks out Mandy's lipsticked telephone number on a piece of paper and, after a pause, tears it up.

... To tell you the truth -- this is me speaking from the heart now -- I feel a little sorry for Coach D'Amato. I always hoped he'd leave this game with a little dignity left.

Rose continues to rattle on in the b.g., but Tony ignores the babble of our time, removing from the drawer a small wooden box and a framed picture of a younger Tony with Jeanette, Timmy, and Melinda.

He sets the box aside and picks up the picture. It is clear now that he is crying. He looks at it for a long and difficult moment, then sets the picture down and opens the box -- in it are two glimmering Pantheon Cup rings.

DISSOLVE TO:

The MUSIC THEME moves over a deserted field -- the night TURNING to dawn.

IMAGES slowly move. Ghosts. Men who once played the game, heroic and shimmering, a thing of glory... We don't know who these ghosts are, but we sense what they represent. Some in old leather helmets, the '30s, '40s, '50s, each era unfolds its changes... le plus ca change, le plus ca reste le meme... the diving catches, the magnificent tackles and blocks, the astounding runs and passes become really the same through time -- accompanied now by the GROWING ROAR of the FANS...

The MUSIC reaches a CRESCENDO with the dawn breaking, and the ghosts fade, and the stadium enters time present...
EXT. DALLAS KNIGHTS STADIUM - DAY

Game 5. Playoff. Miami at Dallas.

STADIUM #1

The Dallas Knights stadium, with its artificial, exaggerated green Astroturf, is spectacular. The fans are stomping in anticipation.

INGO McNAUGHTON (V.O.)
(Dallas anchor)
... Controversy swirls around the six point Shark underdogs. Willie 'Steamin' Beamen, the sensational third-string miracle-mile quarterback who's held the sinking Sharks together these last four weeks, is not starting and is said to be feuding with his beleaguered Coach, Tony D'Amato -- who is being investigated by the League for having 'hit' local reporter Jack Rose at practice earlier this week... Meanwhile, immortal but vulnerable Cap Rooney -- only six weeks off a microdiskectomy on his lower back -- is definitely starting for the Sharks against the toughest pass-rush in the league. Watch for the sparks that are gonna fly! We'll be right back!

INT. TEXAS STADIUM - BASEMENT - COACH'S ROOM - SAME TIME

Coach D'Amato stands at a podium in front of the large press corps. Jack "Ripper" Rose accepts his apology with a smug smile and a nicely-dressed bandage on his forehead.

TONY
... Well, clearly the tension of the season got to me and I overreacted to an innocent question from a journalist we all know to be of the highest caliber... I only hope that one day I'll truly be able to show Jack Rose just how much I treasure his invaluable contribution to the sport of football. Thank you.

(CONTINUED)
213 CONTINUED:

He leaves the podium, eyes down... Christina and the tall, dignified AFFA COMMISSIONER, PHIL JOHNSON, are not exactly pleased with the apology.

214 INT. SHARK LOCKER ROOM - LOCKER ROOM #1 - FOLLOWING

Everything we see suggests uncertainty, doubt, and tension... Willie reads X-men... Cap Rooney is stretched out, towel over his head, asleep...

215 MONTAGE #3 (MADMAN’S PREPARATION)

A brief MONTAGE of JUMP CUTS shows Madman's tape preparation: Ankles, knees, shoulders, jock and shorts, wrists and fingers, shoes and socks -- are heavily taped by trainer #3. In his final stage, Madman is the complete zombie warrior...

Another player (OTIS), finishes praying, crosses himself, turns to Madman.

    OTIS
    Hey, Madman, do you really think
    God’s on our side these days?

    MADMAN
    (in his growliest voice)
    No! Goddamnit, God's on the side
    of those who love themselves!!
    Har raa!

214 BATHROOM #1

In the mirror, Sanderson is a wreck, eyes closed, whispering to himself.

    SANDERSON
    I'm the best wide receiver that
    ever lived! I can catch anything
    ... I'm the best wide receiver
    that ever...

214 LOCKER ROOM #2

Trainee #1 wakes up Cap Rooney from his slumber. He rises, stoic.
The door is closed. As the huge CROWD upstairs makes its presence known, STOMPING and ROARING, the ECHOES surging through the tunnels and pipes of the inner stadium, Dr. Powers, in temporary charge, inserts a large 18-gauge needle of cortisone directly into the swollen, scarred knee of Shark, who winces in great pain. Powers drains a straw-colored liquid into a Dixie cup.

SHARK
(hissing)
God, I hate Texas!

HORNY
(poking his head in)
Whoa! What the fuck they doing to you, man!

SHARK
M'fucker, they're taking a cyst outta my ovaries!! Now get the fuck outta here... please...

Powers now shines a beam of light into Shark's eyes, moving his finger back and forth in front of his eyes.

POWERS
How's that headache?

SHARK
It was okay till you started doing that shit...

POWERS
What about your balance?

SHARK
You talkin' my check balance? Look p-h-a-t, baby -- 'phat.'

Powers retracts the needle.

POWERS
... you're done.

SHARK
Gimme another one.

POWERS
(astonished)
Shark, you don't need it, it doesn't make any sense medically.

(CONTINUED)
SHARK
(seriously grips Powers)
I don't give a fuck about medical, Doc! Give me another one. Just for this game... please!

A moment passes between them, then Powers relents, goes to get a fresh syringe. Ironically, he begins perhaps to understand Mandrake's dilemma as both a doctor and a human being.

Omitted

LOCKER ROOM #3

Trainer #1 harnesses Cap Rooney into a flak jacket, as creaky as El Cid in his armor, stuffed and mounted for the last battle.

ALL TRAINERS
All right, everybody! Three minutes!... Gather 'round! Coach D. got something to say...

TIME CUT TO:

SAME SCENE - LATER

Coach D'Amato stands before the team, humbled, hiding nothing.

TONY
I don't know what to say really. We got three minutes left till the biggest battle of our professional lives... It all comes down to today. We either heal as a team or we crumble, inch by inch, play by play -- until we're finished. We're in hell right now, gentlemen, believe me. We can sit here and get the shit kicked out of us, or we can fight our way back into the light; we can climb out of this anger and this doubt and this uncertainty -- we can climb out of hell -- one inch at a time, or...

(MORE)

(Continued)
TONY (CONT'D)

(pause)
... I wish I could do it for you, but I can't. I'm too old. I look around at your faces and I see young men and I think I made every wrong choice a middle-aged old man can make -- my life is a long list of rookie mistakes. I pissed away all my money, chased off everyone that loved me... lately I can't even stand the face I see in the mirror.

This team has never heard their Coach take it to such a personal level.

TONY

... As we get older, some things are taken away... well, that's part of life, but you only learn that when you lose something. You find out that life is this game of inches! So's football. Because the margin for error in either game, football or life, is so small... so small, guys. One half-step too late or too early and you don't quite make it. One half-second too slow or too fast and you don't quite catch it 'cause it's half a fingertip away. The inches we need are everywhere around us, they're in every break of the game, every minute, every second. Mandrake forgot that. He was grabbing for miles when he only needed inches. And on this team there are no shortcuts. There are no more Doctor Mandrakes. On this team we fight for that inch! We tear ourselves and everyone else around us to pieces for that inch! We claw with our fingernails for that inch 'cause when you add up all those inches, that is what makes the fucking difference between winning and losing -- between living and dying... In any fight I can tell you this, it's the guy who's willing to die who's going to win that inch.

(MORE)
TONY (CONT'D)
And I know if I'm gonna have any
kind of life anymore, it's because
I'm still willing to fight and die
for that inch...
(beat)
That's what living is.
(sweeps the team
with a look)
The six inches in front of your
face. I can't make you do it.
You have to look around -- look at
the guy next to you -- look into
his eyes -- and I think you'll see
a guy you know will go that inch
with you. You'll see a guy who'll
sacrifice himself for this team
because when it comes down to it,
he knows you would do the same for
him! That's a team, gentlemen!...
And either we will heal now as a
team -- or we will die as
individuals...

Willie listening to these words, with new meaning.

TONY
That's football, guys.
(pause)
That's all it is.
(then)
Now what are you going to do?

Silence... The team, as if one mind, emits a roar of
approval. The players hug and slap each other on the
back. It is a joyous moment of sudden unification and
affection, a savage release of tension.

Julian jumps up onto a table, grabbing their attention.

WASHINGTON
Listen up, listen up! I got
somethin' to say!

The team falls quiet again.

WASHINGTON
Thank you, 'Coach Stone Age'!
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)
WASHINGTON (CONT'D)

(laughter)
But you're right! Hey, you all know what I've been through. You all know about the money I get. I been hearin' all about people sayin' this and that about me. But lemme tell ya something: I'm sick and tired of it... I love this game. I want to play this game with you people -- as part of a team!!

(as the team cheers)
And I know this sounds corny but I want to thank Willie Beamen, in his own fucked-up way, for makin' me care about this game again.

(turns to Willie)
Come here, you little bastard!

He grabs a smiling Willie into his bear-like hug and swings him around. This is another moment of significance. The team goes wild to see these two finally connecting... And now Monroe feels he must leap on the bench to speak his piece:

MONROE
Coach put his heart and soul out for us. Give me that nasty D!

TEAM
Nasty D!

MONROE
I want psychodrive -- I want mad dog, drooling, rabid, teeth-bared, balls-out, limb-tearing, face-shredding INTENSITY! What -- do -- we -- live -- for, defense?!

TEAM
Turn-over! Turn-over! Turn-over!

MONROE
What -- do -- we -- live -- for offense?!

TEAM
Touch-down! Touch-down! Touch-down!

MONROE
Team! What do we live and die for?!

(CONTINUED)
TEAM
Victory! Victory! Victory!

The team runs roaring from the locker room. When most of the team has exited, Monty climbs down from the bench.

MONROE
(to Tony)
Goddamn! I'm too old for this shit!

TIME CUT TO:

MEDIA BOOTH #1

Tug Kolowski and Ingo McNaughton are on the air.

TUG
And here we go, ladies and gentlemen, get ready for a classic! Here in Texas, they say God made it so big and flat so everybody could play football!

INGO
(laughs)
... That's right, Tug, years ago when Dallas was one and 15, they blamed it on God, said he was on vacation that year...

VIDEO FROM MEDIA BOOTH POV – FIELD #1

The opening kickoff as McNaughton calls it.

INGO (V.O.)
It's a huge boot from Croft... Scanlon takes it in the end zone... He's running it out...

TUG (V.O.)
Dangerous move...

INGO (V.O.)
Scanlon skirts a tackle... he's got a block... He's got some running room...

TUG (V.O.)
(laughs)
Uh-oh! Watch out...!
CONTINUED:

INGO (V.O.)
He's at the thirty... the thirty-five!... He's got some
daylight!... He's broken loose!
He could go all the way!!

The Dallas runner (Scanlon) races through Shark defenders and into the end zone. Dallas fans leap to their feet -- an enormous, pounding celebration, the sound heightened by the ECHOEY nature of the stadium.

LUXURY BOX #1

Christina, Ed Phillips, Joe Polito and others watch, their hopes suddenly dashed.

CHRISTINA
It's gonna be a long day...

SIDELINE #1

Coach D'Amato claps his hands and walks down the sideline, talking to his troops, coming to a stop at Cap Rooney -- Willie close by.

TONY
Awright, awright, no big deal. We still block and tackle.
(to Rooney)
Stick with the game plan, Cap.
You set on the first series?

CAP
... Piece of cake, Coach.

TONY
Then bring it home, Rock!

Rooney strides onto the field.

STANDS #1

The Miami section unleashes a great stomp of recognition and adoration. Huge booing from the Dallas side...

SIDELINE #2

The Shark mascot dances. Cap Rooney is back! Two Pantheon Cup rings, anything can happen in the memory. Anything!! Willie applauds as well, looking over to see:
His mom -- with an older lady friend and a younger sister at the 50-yard line. She waves to him, in her Sunday best, proud of him.

Cindy Rooney -- with a retinue of loyal wives -- clamor for Cap.

CAP
Guys, I missed your ugly mugs.

SANDERSON
Whoa!... Old times, baby! Howszat disc of yours? Still spinning?

CAP
Like Jerry Lee Lewis! Okay, Blue Twins Right Ace 90 Seam. On two. And don't let that corner take away the inside, Sandman.
(grins)
Trip him, tickle his nuts, I don't give a darn.

SANDERSON
Same old, same old. He is nonexistent!

CAP
On two. Ready?

The ball is snapped... and we go into a SERIES OF CUTS of Cap Rooney's return -- four plays, all quick, on-the-money passes, inside and out, Cap in control, moving the team like a whipmaster.

TIME CUT TO:
On the fourth play, Cap finds the second wide out (Owens) for a TD!

A Dallas fan decks an overenthusiastic Miamian...

TIME CUT TO:

Shark sacks the Dallas QB -- jumping up and doing his "sack dance."

TUG (V.O.)
There he goes! Sack number 12 of the year -- a personal high for Luther Lavay.

But Dallas stays right in the game. A short, broken-field run, 22 yards for a touchdown. (Ingo AD LIBS.) Each man obviously rooting against the other.

TIME CUT TO:

Answered by a Miami 32-yard field goal...

INTERCUT WITH:

Willie listens and watches closely as D'Amato confers with Rooney, studying Cap's style on the field. He -- not Cherubini -- is calling in the plays, which puts him in the heart of the conflict.

MIAMI 10, DALLAS 14. FIRST QUARTER 2:48...

Sharks are poised to score on the Dallas 11...

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

Cap fades back -- a Dallas defender breaks through the line -- Cap scrambles out of the pocket -- no one can get open -- he tucks the ball and decisively charges the goal line.

The "old man" will not be denied in a race to the goal line. A Dallas defender zeroes in on him. Rather than slide, Rooney hurls himself into the air, inspired possibly by the younger Willie and collides head-first with a Dallas defender -- a thunderclap of sound.

The ball, tight in Rooney's grasp, is planted firmly beyond the goal line -- touchdown!

SIDELINE #4

The Sharks taste the old glory!

FIELD #8

Rooney pulls himself slowly to his feet, accepting the congratulations of his teammates, inwardly numb, outwardly ecstatic.

INGO (V.O.)
That is the meaning, in one sentence, of 'Captain' Jack Rooney. He will not take 'No' for an answer. I deeply admire a man of that caliber.

TUG (V.O.)
Ingo, I never seen you that moved by anything.

INTERCUT WITH:

SIDELINE #5

D'Amato watches Rooney intently, sensing the worst, but basking in the glory of it -- the aging charioteer pauses in the end zone, opens his breast to the roar of the crowd. His moment in time.

TIME CUT TO:

SCOREBOARD #2

MIAMI 17, DALLAS 14. SECOND QUARTER. 11:12...
Rooney's significant pain carries over. His teammates keep a respectful silence, but he sweats and breathes with difficulty.

**CAP**
Awright, come on. Second and two, gang. Let's get it. Pro Left Y Switch Zig 90 Fade. On two. Ready?

As they break:

**SANDERSON**
(urgent, drawing a blank)
What's the color?

**WASHINGTON**
What?

**SANDERSON**
The live color? I can't remember the color --

**WASHINGTON**
Red for Chrissake! On two! If you're fucked up, Sandman? Take yourself out, man.

**SANDERSON**
(panicked)
Can't remember the plays!

Cap fades back, a fake screen to Julian which deceives Dallas, then he flings it far downfield -- headed for Sandman...

Rooney thinks it's a lock... But the pass, 45 yards in the air, is overthrown by inches! -- Sanderson, perhaps a half step late on his own, stretches but cannot grasp it -- missing by an inch -- the ball implodes, incomplete, as the Miami fans moan and the Dallas fans roar.

As Cap walks to the sideline, crossing his punting unit, an eerie feeling invades a mind already fragile in confidence.

**TIME CUT TO:**

**A241**
**SCOREBOARD #3**

MIAMI 17, DALLAS 14. SECOND QUARTER. 03:57...
Rooney scans the defense, sees the signs for a full blitz. Under the center, his hands shake.

**CAP (audibles)**

Set! Black 45... razor, razor...
495 max, 495 max... Hut! Hut!

The full blitz at the Miami 35 -- two Dallas speedsters come from either side -- Rooney fakes a handoff to Julian and turns upfield -- but both Dallas defenders slam into him, a devastating double hit -- his body crumples into the grass.

The ball sails from his hands -- a Dallas lineman snatching it up on the bounce and sprinting to the Miami 17.

The crowd, which a few short minutes ago loved this man, has turned surly and unsure. Time is swift.

Cindy Rooney knows it's over.

So does Christina.

**CHRISTINA**

(to Phillips and Polito)

I'm going down...

ON TV: The score reads Miami 17, Dallas 21.

In a dark and solitary storeroom, Sanderson is shaking and sweating, pathetically pleading to Dr. Powers:

**SANDERSON**

Doc, you're my man. I'm just asking you this one time... Look at me.

(Continued)
POWERS
Stop begging, Jimmy. You're making me nervous. You'd make water nervous.

SANDERSON
It's like that, okay? It ain't right, Doc, I never asked you for nothing! M'fucker! Look at me, look at my goddamn hands...
(shaking)
Man, i live to catch passes, you understand that?! Ritalin, diet shit, anything!

POWERS
Jimmy, we been through this. I can't, I won't...

SANDERSON
You're lettin' me die out there! I can't beat 'em anymore! Half a step, it's all I'm sayin', half a fuckin' step! I'm 28, man, I'm an old man out there!

POWERS
There is a line, Jimmy. I won't cross it. You don't need it. You can win without it.

SANDERSON
Who you shittin'! It's over... If you could run, catch, feel what I feel, you'd be a whole different person, Doc. You're just trying to hold me down. It's all right, man, I'll make it without you! I'll make it without you, m'fucker...!

TRAINING AREA #2

Trainers #1 and #2 work on Cap Rooney, re-taping his bruised ribs and back, as Tony crosses in.

TONY
Can you play?

CAP
... Banged up, but I'm okay...

(CONTINUED)
TONY
Can you play?

CAP
Yeah... you bet.

TONY
Rock -- look at me -- can you play?

Rooney looks at him. His face tells the story.

TONY
You fought like a son-of-a-bitch out there, Rock... I will never forget this.

CAP
... Go do your job, Coach.

LOCKER ROOM #4

Tony moves around the locker room, studying his team. He locks eyes with Willie, who comes over. They speak quietly.

TONY
This isn't about you and me anymore. You've got to lead them, Willie. When they look in your eyes, they gotta believe.

WILLIE
I know...

Christina -- surprising everyone -- enters the locker room, moving quickly past the players. With Ed Phillips and Joe Polito backing her, she seeks out Tony.

CHRISTINA
What do you think you're doing?

TONY
(seething)
You got no business here -- I told you not to come here!

CHRISTINA
Don't you see what's going on, you...

Tony sweeps Christina by the elbow, into the small visiting coach's locker room.
Tony
(as intense as he can get)
Leave here before I lose my temper, Mrs. Pagniacci, do you hear me?!...

Christina
I don't care what your problem with him is -- alright!? Cap Rooney is over! You're the only one that's failed to see...

Outside, the players listen silently.

Tony
NEVER -- NEVER -- talk that way in front of my players! Do you understand!... or I'll spank the living shit out of you, little girl!!

Christina
(scared)
Don't talk to me like that! It's MY team too! And I don't give a fuck if Willie's changing the plays! You let your ego get in the way of this team, and it is going to cost us the game!

Tony
GET OUT! GET OUT NOW! Before I...

He throws a chair. Willie enters tentatively...

Willie
Miss Pagniacci...? I'm sorry but...
(as Christina waits)
... Coach D'Amato -- he already told me I'm going in.

A pause. They all share looks.

Tony
(quietly)
Jesus Christ, Christy... What the hell happened to you...?

Christina exits, her dignity intact.

(continued)
CHRISTINA
(nods to Willie)
Good...! Prove 'em wrong, Willie...

She crosses to the main locker room, her entourage following.

EXT. DALLAS STADIUM - TUNNEL - NIGHT (SECOND HALF)

Tony is talking fast to Willie as they move down the tunnel. The sound of the CROWD GROWING...

TONY
... Take control of the huddle, get 'em in and out quick. Take advantage of the box while the speaker's hot.

WILLIE (TBD)
Yup.

TONY
Keep an eye on the front four. Make them work sideline to sideline, they'll slow down, and when you see them, take a knee, lookin' for some air, they're losing it. Then you go right at 'em. Control the line of scrimmage, and you're gonna control this game.

WILLIE
Yup.

TONY
Stats don't mean shit to me. Get me five yards on first, and they'll have to worry about stopping both you and Julian. Possession of the ball -- that's all I want. Move those chains.

WILLIE
Yup.

TONY
Read the safety's drop, if he's flat footed or in his backpedal, we go downtown. Keep 'em honest with your eyes. The longer you look them off, the tougher it is for them to make their break. Surprise 'em, make it sudden, Willie.

(CONTINUED)
WILLIE
Yup.

TONY
What are you, Gary Cooper?

WILLIE
Who?

TONY
Forget it. Remember, keep them off balance with the hard count. That will slow the pass rush and buy you more time. If you see their arms shaking and their asses up in the air, they're coming... Control the line of scrimmage, you're gonna control this game, Willie

WILLIE
Coach, you said that already...

TONY
... And don't forget to look for the mismatches!
(as Willie sighs; he repeats)
Look for the mismatches. You'll find one... One more thing!
(carefully)
Right out of the gate, let it fly. Go 999, and shock the shit out of 'em.

He grins at a surprised Willie.

As they now break from the tunnel, the ROAR of the Dallas crowd, and the excitement of the sportscaster's voices overwhelms all.

INGO (V.O.)
Well, everyone knows it's 'crunch time' for Steamin' Beamen. Cagey old veterans have been known to crack under playoff pressure -- so you gotta wonder how this rather volatile kid'll stack up...

TUG (V.O.)
No, sir! Prisoners will not be taken in this second half! The surviving team goes to Minnesota next week for the Conference Championship.
Willie steps to the side, alone -- and vomits quietly... then he jogs out onto the field for the second half.

**TUG (V.O.)**
Oh boy! Dallas is in trouble now 'Willie's Ritual.' You know, Ingo, in Tampa Bay one time you looked just like that after...

Ingo finally laughs.

Willie, totally focused, assesses his teammates. He spots Cap Rooney, in uniform, signaling in the play!

**WILLIE**
Okay, Strong Left Zig 90 Gun, on three, serious -- it's their call. And by the way, guys --

(beat)
I apologize for having a big head back there -- but that wasn't me. It was the Devil Red 6-6-6.

(as they laugh)
Now let's get this bitch before they know what hit 'em! On three. Ready!

They clap and break, believing it. Over Willie:

**CAP (V.O.)**
(helmet)
Watch for the robber on the right... you know it's a beautiful thing to watch you throw, kid!

**WILLIE**
Good to hear you say that, not-so-old-man.

Willie steps back, flings it far... 50 aerial yards... Interception!... An upset roar from the Dallas fans.
Willie jogs back, past Tony, loose about it.

TONY
(into headset)
... hey at least he ran the play I called!

WILLIE
(to Tony)
One inch to the left, it would've worked.

The AFFA Commissioner, with a small entourage, is watching part of the game in Christina's box.

CHRISTINA
... Let me on the Finance Committee, Phil, and I know I could make a difference with the networks. I know New York, I...

COMMISSIONER
Your mother looks great, by the way...

CHRISTINA
Thank you. She's always loved Dallas. Loves Neiman Marcus.

COMMISSIONER
Great lady. And your golf?

CHRISTINA
I'm about an 11 now... from the whites. Think you can take me?

COMMISSIONER
Whoa! Not bad! I'm afraid I'm not in your class, Christina.
(rising to leave)
Good game. Good team.
(crossing to Margaret with her two pet dogs in hand)
Margaret...

MARGARET
It's nice to see you, Phil.

COMMISSIONER
Still miss Art.

(CONTINUED)
MARGARET
I do, too...
    (displaying her new
dog)
Have you met Gabrielle?

COMMISSIONER
    (a beat)
... so I have.

He moves, with great dignity, to the door.

CHRISTINA
    (following him,
unsatisfied)
Phil, I'd really like to...

They're out of earshot at the door. The Commissioner, obviously under some pressure of his own, decides to
tell her now.

COMMISSIONER
Christina, the owners would like
you to come up to New York for a
meeting. Sometime before the
first of the year... if possible?

CHRISTINA
    (surprised)
Oh? About what, sir?

COMMISSIONER
Well... there's a concern that's
been voiced about some moves that
were made... mmm, on your behalf,
for another Los Angeles franchise
... Several of the Association's
rules may have been violated on
this. We've heard that...

CHRISTINA
    (stunned)
Who! Who said this? Who's been
saying this...!

She checks herself.

COMMISSIONER
Is Wednesday this week too soon?

CHRISTINA
Not at all. That'll be fine, sir.

(CONTINUED)
COMMISSIONER
Good. Then the best of luck to
you today...

He exits.

A261 CORRIDOR OUTSIDE BOX
The Commissioner, on the way out, shakes his head, to
an associate.

COMMISSIONER
... I honestly believe that woman
would eat her young.

261 LUXURY BOX #4
Christina, staggered, turns to Ed Phillips and Johnny.

CHRISTINA
What the hell happened!?

ED PHILLIPS
I don't know, but somebody opened
his big mouth. And I'll bet you
it was our friend the Mayor!

JOHNNY POLITO
You're missing the point, Ed.
This guy definitely doesn't want
her in L.A. That's the point.

Christina is worried.

A254 SCOREBOARD #4
Reads: MIAMI 17, DALLAS 28. THIRD QUARTER. 4:27...

255 SIDELINE #7
Dallas has added another TD! It looks dicey.

TONY
(to Willie)
Branco's aching to nail ya. He's
playing for the cameras. Go Split
Left 90 Hitch, but if you think
Branco's gonna bite, audible a
fade right to 'Sandman.'

(CONTINUED)
WILLIE
You gonna let me check off?
Where's the coach I know and love?

TONY
If Branco bites.

WILLIE
You git it, Coach.

FIELD #12
Willie scans the defense. As predicted, the Dallas player (Branco) is tensed for the blitz, his knuckles white to the astroturf.

WILLIE
(audibles)
Set!  Blue 22... razor, razor... 955, 955... Hut!

Branco breaks through! Willie, expecting it, throws a classic screen pass to Julian, who rumbles for 15 plus yards.

Branco lies on the field, bleeding. His eyeball lies several feet away. It is shocking, and quickly covered up by the TV cameras.

TUG (V.O.)
Time out. And we'll be right back, folks, after a word...

TIME CUT TO:

FIELD #13
A classic sweep follows, run by Washington, thundering towards Tony on the sideline; he turns the corner with a great block from Madman, and picks up another 20 yards to the Dallas 12-yard line.

SIDELINE #8
Tony, rediscovering the purity of the sweep, smiles to himself. Monroe catches Tony’s expression and gives him the "up."

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

FIELD #14

Willie hands off to Sanderson, who hands it to the second wide receiver, Owens, who runs a reverse 20 yards in for a touchdown!

TIME CUT TO:

SCOREBOARD #5

MIAMI 24, DALLAS 28. FOURTH QUARTER. 12:57...

FIELD #15

The Dallas QB answers right back. Running in for a TD!

SIDELINE #9

It's now Dallas 35, Miami 24 -- 11 points. We PULL DOWN FROM the scoreboard to:

WILLIE
(re: Dallas QB, to D'Amato)

Whatsamatter with this guy? Doesn't he know I'm gonna whip his ass?

TONY

Maybe no one's told him yet.

CAP
(to Willie)

You can beat him, Willie. I know his mind... If you hit for another score now, quickly, he'll fold, I know it.

Cap's eyes are solid, supportive. Willie believes.

CHRISTINA'S LUXURY BOX #5

In a quiet moment, Christina notices most of her associates talk business on cell phones or to each other, only watching the game in quick eyebursts -- she hears a buzzing chorale of "increasing market shares" and "merchandizing revenue streams" and "league relocation protocols..." Margaret sits in a quiet corner with a friend, sipping on a Bloody Mary. She smiles over at her daughter.
The Shark offense is on the Dallas 25, third and seven. Willie is over the ball. His eyes focus... A Dallas safety has his "go to" foot a slight inch ahead of the other. Willie smiles.

WILLIE
(audibling)
Set! Zorro, Zorro... Red 66, Red 66... Hut!

Willie spins back and hands the ball off to Washington on a counter. Washington shoots through the line with room to run.

WILLIE
Go, baby!

Downfield, a Dallas defender tries to force Washington out of bounds, but spinning on a dime, Washington cuts back towards the center of the field -- Dallas defenders tackle him -- one, two, three at a time -- but he drags them for another five yards -- into the end zone. Touchdown!... Willie is the first downfield to jump all over him.

TIME CUT TO:

MIAMI 31, DALLAS 35. FOURTH QUARTER. 02:00... Miami time-outs remaining: 2. A WHISTLE BLOWS. The clock runs.

The Dallas offense at the Miami 24 -- Third and seven.

Tony talks closely and intently with Willie...

The Dallas QB pitches to the flat -- his running back snares the ball and cracks back for a few extra yards -- tired tackling from the exhausted Sharks.
Fourth down and one. Miami 18-yard line. Tony looks...
The Dallas field goal unit is not coming out. They're going for it!

Tony calls a time-out... Shark runs off the field to sidelines. Tony and Monroe converse with Shark.

TUG (V.O.)
... And Dallas is goin' for it!
They're takin' as much time as they can in their huddle. The clock is tickin'. One minute fifty. Whew, am I feeling this in the pit of my stomach! Oh, boy!

INGO (V.O.)
Gutsy move on Dallas's part!
Fourth and one, they're taking a big chance here. They could take an easy field goal and even if Miami got a touchdown, the game would go into overtime. But 'Coach U' smells victory now, not a tie, a real gambler...

TUG (V.O.)
... Hey, I'd do the same thing, Ingo. That's the kind of play calling I like! It wins ball games!

Tony and Willie stand close as we hear:

INGO (V.O.)
This is the game, Tug! If Miami can hold them here, Willie Beamen will have one last chance.

Jack Rose is outside himself, rooting.

TUG (V.O.)
This is it, guys and dolls, this is where the famous rubber meets the famous road!
MIAMI DEFENSIVE HUDDLE #1

Shark, bloody and exhausted, yells at his defensive unit:

**SHARK**

Y'all gonna make this tackle, bitches! Everything we done for is on the line!! This play! Right now! Right here! Forever! Be proud!

DALLAS HUDDLE #1

**DALLAS QB**

Make the first here, take a knee and it's hello Minnesota. On one. Ready?!

They clap and move to the ball.

FIELD #19

As the Dallas QB scans the defense, Shark calls for a shift in the Miami defense.

**DALLAS QB**

Go! 47 Tiger... Monday, Monday... 48 Bandit, 48 Bandit... Hut!

**SHARK**

(simultaneous to Dallas QB)

Roll-left! Roll-left! Orbit Wheel! Strong right! Edge back! Orbit Left! Omaha Orbit Left!

The defensive players scurry to new positions.

The Dallas QB shoots back, handing off to the running back. Shark waits, poised to fill the hole. The back powers forward, no running lanes -- he bounces to the outside, sees daylight, speeds for it...

Shark runs desperately to the same hole on his bum and swollen knee. The runner is almost to the first down marker -- inches! -- He dives for it!

Shark dives at the exact same time -- an all-out lunge of sheer faith to stop the first down -- at any cost!

Shark and the runner collide, a loud crash! The runner is stopped! An inch or two short of the first down marker! The Miami 18.
Tony and Monroe go nuts in each other's grasp. Just like the old days!

Clock stops for the change of possession. 01:34...

But Shark lies there like a dead man -- no motion! Dr. Powers and two trainers race onto the field.

Shark's wife and kids look on, terrified.

Tony hurries out, as does Monroe. In b.g., Willie and Cap wait in the grip of fear. The entire team waits. Tony and Monroe now run out.

TUG (V.O.)
Shark Lavay is down and it looks bad, but he definitely squashed Dallas's first down, and it's now Miami's ball. I can't think of a finer way to take a hit like that for your teammates!

INGO (V.O.)
No, sir! What a great tackle! One for the record books!

ON TV: The tackle replayed... Then the medical cart is shown on the field. Nothing is said. The stadium is hushed.

INGO (V.O.)
Well, Miami has one time-out remaining. They're down by 4 with 1:34 left. Nothing less than a touchdown will...
Shark is definitely not moving. The ambulance waits near the goalpost. Tony, Powers, Monroe, and the trainers wait helplessly.

MONROE
Shark, talk to me please!
(to others)
Jesus Christ, is this the way it starts...? Is he ever gonna...?

They ease him onto a stretcher when suddenly Shark's eyes open, falling on Tony with a glazy smile -- and a huge headache!

SHARK
(weakly)
... I... stop 'em?

TONY
(deeply relieved)
Oh, Shark! You stopped 'em cold, baby! Godammit!

MONROE
You got the bonus, baby! A million bucks!

SHARK
(dreamy)
A million dollars...!
(sees Powers)
Say, Powers...?

Powers AD LIBS.

SHARK
Are you still white?

Both sets of fans roar their appreciation for his valor, as he tries to acknowledge them with a weak wave of his arm, as they cart him off.

Shark's family, next to Willie's mom, reacts with great relief and joy.

(CONTINUED)
TUG (V.O.)
He's okay! He's okay! Shark Lavay, one of the greatest the game has ever seen, has probably played his last game, but I can think of no...

SIDELINE #15
Tony clasps Willie by the shoulders.

TONY
He gave you the shot, Willie. Now take it.
(as Willie nods)
... It's your time.

Willie runs out, the crowd going nuts!

FIELD #22
First and ten on the Miami 18. 82 yards to go. 1:34...

WILLIE
drops back in the shotgun formation -- no pass lanes open, all covered, Willie drops a short screen to Julian, who dazzles on a 16-yarder out of bounds.

TIME CUT TO:

SCOREBOARD #8
MIAMI 31, DALLAS 35. FOURTH QUARTER. 00:55...

TUG (V.O.)
Second and ten. 66 yards to go. 55 seconds. One false step and that's all she wrote, my friends.

INGO (V.O.)
Coach D'Amato is gonna need every blessed one of those seconds.

HUDDLE #4
Willie notices Sanderson is rattled, his eyes closed, sweating a storm.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

WILLIE
Fourth Quarter. 55 seconds left. It's do or die. Pro Left Red 88 Bronco. On two... You tight, 'Sandman'?

Eye to eye.

SANDERSON
Tighter than pussy on pre-wedding day...

WILLIE
(grins)
That's why you're the best! You like pussy as much as I do! Okay then, let's show these big-ass Texas boys what road-kill looks like! Keep it lethal, 'money. We're through on two.

FIELD #23
Willie in shotgun formation -- Three wide outs.

WILLIE
(scans the defense, audibles)
Set! Red 44... Razor, Razor... 88 Sally, 88 Sally... Hut! Hut!

Willie again sees nothing, the receivers all expertly covered. But then he sees -- a chance -- a desperate chance -- Sanderson is slanting free downfield --

SIDELINE #16
Tony sees it as well:

TONY
Do it! Do it!

FIELD #24
Willie takes that cubic centimeter of chance; he flings it deep... In breathless suspense, the ball sails. Sanderson, sweating like a pig in his helmet, sees it, adjusts his route mid-stride... It's as if it is his soul flying towards him, which he now catches! And then runs it in another 15 yards into the end zone! A miracle! Jimmy Sanderson feels himself freed of the demons!
A frenzied celebration on the Miami sideline -- in the stands -- they've won! But suddenly... Tony is crestfallen.

A yellow penalty flag lies on the field... Holding!

REFEREE #3
No touchdown. Holding on offense #69. Repeat second down. Ten yards.

Madman furiously shoves Referee #3 in argument, and the Referee ejects him from the game (AD LIB).

INGO (V.O.)
Oh, that might just be the back-breaker right there!

TUG (V.O.)
That would take the air out of any tire. It's gonna take an enormous amount of will now to...

Christina and her guests groan.

THEIR POV
The entire field stretches before Willie and the offense in the huddle. Never has 76 yards looked so long.

BACK TO SCENE
Christina sits down next to her mother; they talk AD LIB -- a new attitude shaping between them.

39 seconds.

WILLIE
Okay, this is the way I like it -- we got 'em just where we want 'em.

WASHINGTON
You are such a punk!
WILLIE
Watch your mouth or I'll take it in myself.

WASHINGTON
I liked you better when you were puking.

WILLIE
Nice and easy, boys. One play at a time. Keep the routes sharp and kiss the sideline like it's the hottest momma you ever seen and we are there! Lemme hear it, brothers!

(as the team roars)
Lemme hear it again!
(louder, even more inspired)
Now let's see the swagger, motherfuckers!

The team claps, breaks, and starts to the line. The Dallas defense is worn by the swagger and trash-talking coming right at them.

CAP (V.O.)
(helmet)
... take another pop at that weakside safety. He's pretending.

FIELD #26
A flurry of plays -- Tony firmly in control -- each play well-called and quickly executed -- relayed from Tony to Crozier, to Cap to Willie. A chain of minds. Every person doing their job.

QUICK CUTS AND FLASHES
Subjective -- A caught pass -- a runner leaps out of bounds -- a screen pass slanting out of bounds...

COACHES' BOOTH #1
Crozier reeling off the plays in conjunction with Tony.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

HIS POV

The Sharks moving downfield like a ravaged but hungry 4th quarter machine. Sanderson is back to his natural glory, playing without the help of substances.

SCOREBOARD #9

MIAMI 31, DALLAS 35. 35 yards to go. 13 seconds.

FIELD #27

Willie, gazing over the defense at the line, doesn't like what he sees, calls his last "time out."

TUG (V.O.)

That's it! The last one! Something seems to be wrong!

SIDELINE #18

Willie jogs over to Tony.

WILLIE

They had it cold.

TONY

Smart move. How ya doing?

WILLIE

I'm ready to win.

TONY

You know, there's something important I gotta ask you...

WILLIE

What's that?

TONY

That day you came over to my house, I made dinner for you?

WILLIE

(wary)

Yeah?

TONY

Did you not like the jambalaya?

Willie looks at him and laughs.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

WILLIE
Well, frankly, Coach, it sucked -- needed more seasoning... That's why I been throwing up every week.

TONY
(smiles)
I thought that. Just go out and kick their ass and win the game!

TIME CUT TO:

FIELD #28
Willie scans the end zone -- would love to take a shot -- but there's nothing -- he throws the ball away, spikes the clock.

SCOREBOARD #10
Now reads 35 yards, 9 seconds left...

SIDELINE #20
Tony stares at the field, at Willie, deep in thought -- it seems the biggest decision of his career is always now.

TONY
(to Crozier)
Comanche.

INTERCUT WITH:

COACH'S BOOTH #2
CROZIER
You're kidding!

TONY
Let the kid do his thing!

CROZIER
Jesus Christ, Tony, we got nine seconds -- ! You're banking on...

Tony casts his eyes skyward at Crozier in the box.

(CONTINUED)
TONY
This is what coaching's all about, Nick. You up to it?

Crozier breathes and relays the play to Cap, on to Willie.

CROZIER
Okay you got it. Spread West Hustle 60 Comanche Right. Remind him he's got the option -- rifle or spread formation, check at the line...

HUDDLE #5
Willie hears it from Cap and looks over at Tony in amazement. Tony nods... Willie shakes his head. Okay!

WILLIE
(loose)
Okay, guys, it can't get more fun than this! I swear to God I didn't call this one. Spread West Hustle 60 Comanche Right, check with me. On one. Ready.

WASHINGTON
Man has balls of iron.

WILLIE
Tony is the man! We together on this, J-man?

WASHINGTON
Dynamic duo, brother.

WILLIE
I feel you. Let's see that all-pro strut, baby! Ready? Check with me on one. Ready?

FIELD #29
They break and line up over the ball. Willie scans the defense.

WILLIE
Set, Rifle 22, Rifle 22! Hut!

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

Willie pump fakes a pass to Sanderson -- the Dallas defenders flinch left to cover him -- Willie immediately takes off right with the ball, skimming the outside of the line -- Madman delivers a devastating block -- Julian runs slightly behind Willie, ready to throw his block --

... but Willie sees some daylight, and tears down the sideline -- the Dallas safety is racing him -- Just as he zooms in on Willie, he laterals the ball to Julian just behind him...

Julian snags the ball -- leaps around the safety, who slams Willie out of bounds --

Julian races against time down the sideline, turning on the afterburners -- the game clock.

SCOREBOARD #11:

Game clock ticking down... 00:07... 00:06... 00:05...

INTERCUT WITH:

SIDELINE #20

Faces: Tony, Cap, Monroe, others...

INTERCUT WITH:

STANDS #10

Faces: Cindy, others...

FIELD #30

A Dallas corner is moving fast onto Julian -- but Julian, flashing the clock, plays smart -- without selfishness -- no dazzling spin moves -- no evasions -- he dives out of bounds.

SCOREBOARD #12

The clock freezes. Three yards to go. No penalty. Four seconds. One play.

TUG (V.O.)

Oh my God! My heart is up in my mouth right now! Ingo! This is what football’s all about... Torture!
TONY
(to Crozier, re: Willie's running)
He's still holding onto that thing
like a loaf of bread. Someone's
gonna take it from him.
(to Cap and QB coach;
looking at Willie)
... Is he okay?!
(to Julian)
Way to run!
(to Cap and staff)
He did it for once! He thought
with his head, not his balls --
unselfish! Great move... let's
go... four seconds. One time.
I love this game!

Jack Rose is as excited as any 11-year-old kid, praying
to more worldly gods.

Christina and her Mother share the moment of together,
rooting for once as a family.

Willie now huddles with Tony, forehead to forehead,
talking low, confidently, as Cap listens.

TONY
Take a breath...

WILLIE
Okay... okay...

TONY
You set?

WILLIE
Yeah.

TONY
Then make 'em believe, Willie.
This time. Now.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

CAP

Remember: See it before you do it, kid.

Willie nods and runs back onto the field, as there are no time outs left!

SCOREBOARD #13

MIAMI 31, DALLAS 35. FOURTH QUARTER. 00:04...

STANDS #11

The fans are in an uproar, stomping, screaming! A man in a gorilla suit with a placard: "I've gone ape over Willie!" is pushed and mauled by irate Dallas fans. Off flies his ape head!

HUDDLE #7

WILLIE

Well, it's our time in the sun, guys.

(looks into each face)

One on one, man on man, together!
Left Tank Stack 421 Rhino. Lean and mean. On three. Ready!

They break and line up over the ball at the four yard line. Willie scans the defensive alignment. The play clock marches...

STANDS - DAY (LAST PLAY)

The breathless crowd...

FIELD #31 - POV - DALLAS DEFENDERS

pointing, shifting positions, trying to confuse Willie.

SIDE LINE #23

Players kneeling on the sidelines, some praying, barely daring to watch, some chewing nails, others screaming encouragement... Cap Rooney whispers a silent prayer for Willie. Coach D'Amato -- the picture of a man at a zenith in his life...
WILLIE
Set Black 66, Black 66.  Hut!
Hut!  Hut!

A sudden torrent of movement -- Miami slams forward --
Dallas slams back -- in SLOW MOTION, Julian reaches for
the handoff -- the ball slaps into his stomach -- a
convincing fake -- as Willie keeps the ball -- Julian
leaps left -- Dallas defenders surge to cover him -- at
that moment Willie chooses to go right back over the hole
Julian has collapsed.

High over the goal line -- he seems to sail through the
air for suspended moments -- he is almost there -- almost
across the plain of the goal line, almost to glory -- as
a wall of Dallas players rise up to meet him like a
breaker at sea... Willie crashes into it...

A BRIEF SHOT OF GHOST
whoever he be -- from another time -- diving with him.

Willie seems to bauble the football as he disappears into
"big Wednesday."  All SOUND CEASES.  Wind plays off the
grass... In the silence of the major pileup, bodies
draped and intertwined like smoking car wrecks, referee
#2 digs out the players, one by one, looking for the ball
... the tension rising to extraordinary heights!  Where
the fuck is it?

A SIDELINE #24
Tony waits silently...

TUG (V.O.)
I think he lost it, Ingo!

A player peels off, revealing Willie smiling, the ball
held awkwardly up around his neck, but firmly in his
possession... Referee #2's arms now shoot up in SLOW
MOTION -- touchdown!  The Miami players go absolutely
nuts!  The Dallas players are stunned, protesting!... Willie
is hauled into the air by his ecstatic teammates.
The Dallas crowd is stunned and silent; Miami fans are
ecstatic!

TUG (V.O.)
I've seen Mecca, Ingo!!  I have
seen Mecca!  I am redeemed!
PRESS BOX #2

Even Jack Rose is in love with the Sharks again.

ROSE
(into his TV camera)
'Never say never.' My Sharkies have done it! A few short weeks ago, who'd've believed Willie Beamen...?

SCOREBOARD #13

MIAMI 37, DALLAS 35. FOURTH QUARTER. 00:00...

SIDELINE #25

Pandemonium on the Shark sideline. Tony falls to his knees in a prayer-like position... then finally rises, and runs across the field to hug the Dallas coach.

INT. SHARK LOCKER ROOM - LOCKER ROOM #4 - NIGHT

Jubilation in the locker room... Willie gives and receives congratulations from all...

Cap Rooney searches out Willie in the chaos. Their eyes meet, with respect.

CAP
Great game... whoever you are.

WILLIE
Thank you, Cap.

They nod to each other. Simple as that.

SERIES OF DISSOLVES: The players and reporters and team personnel gradually disappear until Coach D'Amato and Rooney are left in a corner of the quiet locker room.

CAP
I'm calling it quits.

TONY
You sure?

CAP
I'm sure.

A beat.

(CONTINUED)
308 CONTINUED:

TONY
I'm sorry I put you in, Cap.

CAP
Oh, hell!
    (actually swears, relieved)
I'm not. They needed to see me fail. So I did! And I'm glad Cindy got a taste of it. Now maybe I can get on with my life... I'll see you around the pasture, old man.

He exits.

309 OMITTED

310 COACH'S LOCKER ROOM #2 - LATER

Christina reenters the same small room where she fought with Tony at halftime.

CHRISTINA
Congratulations!

TONY
Thanks.

CHRISTINA
How's Cap?

TONY
He's okay. He'll be leaving after the season... So will I...

She nods, not surprised.

CHRISTINA
(nods)
I'm sorry it ended up this way, Tony, I know you don't believe it but I really am... Seeing the team out there today -- it was like going back in time...
    (remembering)
God, it was beautiful football!

TONY
It was. It was beautiful.

A beat.

(CONTINUED)
This used to be a hell of a sport, didn't it?

It still is.

He walks on. Christina watches after him.

Tony walks out onto the field where Willie stands alone, a football in hand, watching as the groundskeepers unroll the large tarps and stadium personnel pick through the stands. The stars are abundant this night.

Tony walks together across the field.

Mmm... Can't get over Cap. I learned more watching him in the first half than I did in five seasons... Next week I'm gonna win it just for him.

Glad to see success hasn't gone to your head too much, kid...

Steamin' Beamen...? Never.

Don't pat the ball.

Coach...?

Don't pat the ball before you throw, it's getting to be a habit, and they're seeing it too easy...

This is your moment, Willie. Savor it.
TONY (CONT'D)

(beat)
But _never_ forget: on any given Sunday, you're either gonna win or you're gonna lose. The point is...

WILLIE
'... Can you take it like a man?' I got it, Coach!

Tony gazes around the stadium, taking it all in.

TONY
Next year I'm out of here.

WILLIE
... I figgered...

TONY
I'm not the right guy for this team anymore. I wanna see my grandkids. I wanna start living again... I wanna wait on a grocery line. I wanna walk on a sidewalk. I wanna do nothing... As long as it's not fishing...

WILLIE
(laughs)
... I don't think there's anything else you _could_ do, Coach.

TONY
... There was this great quarterback in the '70s I knew. This guy was one tough sonofabitch. Fought for every inch he got. Didn't have your natural skill, this guy, but he made it happen, he won... So time went by and he didn't know it, but his day was over. He couldn't go deep like he used to and he started missing the easy underneath routes... the game was just passing him by... Anyway, I ran into him a few weeks ago in L.A. and we had a few beers, we started talking and you know what he said?

(MORE)
TONY (CONT'D)
He said that when looked back at those 200 whatever-they-were Sundays, he didn't really miss the Pantheon Cups or the girls or the money or even the goddamned glory! What he missed were those other guys looking back at him in the huddle. Those eleven guys -- their names he could hardly remember -- but it was their faces he remembered... every one of 'em seeing things the same way. Looking downfield. Together.

(beat)
That's what he missed... I'll miss you, amigo.

Tony pats Willie affectionately on the arm and walks off. Willie's expression is gentle, appreciative. He drops back three quick, lithe steps, and sails a long, perfect spiral down the empty field.

WILLIE
So... my arm, y'know, Coach, I met with this specialist and...

He turns to look for Tony. But he's already gone.

WILLIE
(quiedy, to himself)
I'm scared...

EXT. VERANDA (MIAMI VILLA) - DAY

Press conference.

SUPERIMPOSE: ONE MONTH LATER

TONY
(as if in response to Willie)
... Hey, we're all scared. If you think any coach these days got himself a secure visa out of Casablanca, you need a Mandrake X-ray.

(off laughter)
I'm a triple-decker stress sandwich right now...

(CONTINUED)
REPORTER #1
Why's that, Coach? The 32-13 loss to Minnesota?

TONY
(smiles)
Not even close... try fishing, Johnny.

He's responding off-handedly to a FEMALE REPORTER'S question on the stairs leading up to the veranda of an Italian-style villa housing the Pagniacci Foundation. The group mills nervously; something's in the air.

TIME CUT TO:

CHRISTINA

stands before the assembled press corps -- Coach D'Amato moving to her side on cue. Nick Crozier sits close by. Margaret Pagniacci and the Mayor attend.

CHRISTINA
(reading)
Thank you all for coming today... I guess you've heard all the rumors about the Sharks leaving for Los Angeles because Mayor Smalls was reportedly unable to get City Council approval for stadium improvements...
(as Smalls tightens)
... but let me make this as clear as I can to you: We -- the Sharks -- have no intention of leaving Miami. We love this town, and we love our Shark Stadium -- and we will continue to remodel it, at whatever cost, to make it a home away from home for our fans!
(looking pointedly at the Mayor)
And we have great confidence at the final hour that our Mayor will be there for us...

The Mayor accepts the applause, but some in the press mutter among themselves, believing they know the real story.

(CONTINUED)
CHRISTINA
... You know, I came to a
revelation recently. I realized
how much I love this game, and I
want to live up to what my father
left me: a legacy, a feeling
that this is our house -- the
Pagniacci house... I am resolved
therefore to stick it out here in
Miami because the Pagniaccis
are not quitters and we will never
let this town down!

As they applaud, Christina turns to Margaret. United
behind the family name, they seem to have discovered
each other again.

CHRISTINA
Nick...?
(sees Nick standing)
Nick Crozier -- our new Head
Coach. Welcome!
(as Crozier nods in
response to the
polite applause)
Tony D! Thank you!... Always!
Wherever you go, know this: you
will always be a 'Shark' in your
heart. You will always be
remembered with great respect and
love. 'Whatever it takes,'
right?... And Tony...? Thanks
for making me understand what I'd
forgotten -- that football is more
than a game. It's a way of life!
Tony D'Amato, everybody, give him
a hand!

She hugs Tony as he steps to the podium.

TONY
Thank you, Christy... I really am
sorry I've not been able to
deliver to you and the fans
another Pantheon Cup. San
Francisco sure took care of that
for me...
(off good-natured
laughter)
It's been way too long not to win
the Big One. But in football, as
in life, things change and fresh
blood is needed...
(MORE)
TONY (CONT'D)

(beat)
... So I guess it's time for me to get the hell outta the way. Bring in the new. I think Nick Crozier is gonna do a great job...
(nods to Crozier)
... Most of all, I wanna thank the people of Miami for their long support over these last 20-something years... Geez, it flew by like... like any other Sunday, but it's meant everything to me and I've had a great ride. Too good a ride for any one man. I'm gonna miss you all. Thank you...

There is significant, heartfelt applause from some, not all. Rose, in spite of himself, is regretful to see his nemesis depart, muttering to a colleague.

ROSE
I'm gonna miss that arrogant S.O.B...
(studying Crozier)
Crozier's a wimp compared to D'Amato.

Tony acknowledges the applause, about to leave the podium -- but then seems to change his mind.

TONY
... I almost forgot... In thinking about change, I guess I felt it was time for me to change, too. Y'know, like an old vampire, I need a new blood supply...
(some laughter)
it was Willie Beamen who taught me how... to give it another shot.
(as the press is murmuring, wondering)
... So, starting today, I am taking over as Head Coach of that new expansion team in Albuquerque, New Mexico, the Aztecs.
(as a wave of questions roll across the balcony)
Why? 'Cause they're giving me full management control. How can I pass that up? I guess the bigger I get, the more ridiculous!
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)
TONY (CONT'D)
(off laughter)
... But hoping not to make a fool out of myself out there, I have just signed Willie Beamen as starting Quarterback and 'franchise player' for the Aztecs...

Now there is pandemonium on the veranda. Christina's expression drops, crossed. Crozier looks like he's going to throw up. Tony grins. That's the way it goes.

TONY
So, Miss P., I look forward to seeing you next year across those sidelines... and calling it what it always was and still is: a game. Let's keep it that way...
So long, everybody.

He waves and walks out -- leaving Christina and Crozier to deal with a bewildered and upset press corps.

FADE TO:

EXT. PLAYING FIELD #1 - DAY

The same image that opened the story:
A football field. Any football field.
Grass sways in the wind.

THE END