

KNIGHTS RISE

Written by

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Based on a true story.

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1st Draft

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OVER BLACK:

A CARD:

BASED ON A TRUE STORY

QUARTERBACK (O.S.)

Ready!... Down!... Set!... Hut!

The cacophony of a football play: the snap, the SCRAPING and POPPING of pads, GRUNTS of players in combat, cleats churning earth, hard contact of defender meeting ball carrier, meeting earth. A shrill WHISTLE.

FADE IN:

EXT. THUNDER STADIUM - NIGHT

Hillcrest Knights and Blackfoot Broncos uncoil from each other, pick themselves up, and head towards their side of the line of scrimmage, as an official spots the ball.

SUPERIMPOSE:

OCTOBER 19, 2007
HILLCREST vs. BLACKFOOT
AMMON, IDAHO

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

That'll bring up 4th down for the Knights, with just under 30 seconds to go.

The Knights quarterback, MATT ASTEL, is frantically motioning for his teammates to huddle up. A well-built senior, with all-American good looks, Astel looks the part.

ASTEL

Let's go! Get it in here!

Astel leans in to call the play. A scan of the huddled Knights sets the stakes: muddy uniforms, sweaty faces, intense eyes.

ASTEL (cont'd)

Trips Right - Fake Jet Left - Black
14 - On One.

Astel glances at JUSTIN WEATHERS, the Knights' hulking right tackle. Weathers is panting, beads of sweat running down his ebony face, but his eyes are clear and focused.

ASTEL (cont'd)

They're gonna crash the B-gap again -
you gotta give me time.

WEATHERS

I got you.

Astel turns to JAKE BELNAP, the Knights' fullback. Belnap's a man-child cut from granite - big, hard, and tough. A stream of blood runs down the bridge of his nose - a smear of red blots the chest of his white jersey.

ASTEL

They're bringing the house. The Sam's coming off the edge - you gotta pick him up.

Belnap nods.

ASTEL (cont'd)

This is it. Make it count.

The Knights break huddle with a CLAP and come to the line. Broncos' linemen, big and nasty, dig in. Their linebackers read the formation and make adjustments, chattering and swapping positions.

Belnap eyes the strong-side linebacker. The backer's set up wide, crouched like a man-made missile, ready to fire.

ASTEL (cont'd)

Ready!... Down!... Set!...

The jet bolts left in motion.

ASTEL (cont'd)

Hut!

The line collides with the violence of a car crash, as Astel takes the shotgun snap and fakes a handoff to the streaking jet. As Astel drifts right, the strong-side linebacker explodes off the edge.

Belnap meets the linebacker with a crushing block, as Astel finds space and looks upfield.

His receivers covered, Astel starts dancing. One cut right, one left, but there's nowhere to go. He's met with a jarring hit, another, then crumples under a wave of Broncos.

The whistle blows, as the SCOREBOARD comes into view:
HILLCREST 0, BLACKFOOT 39, 00:00 on the clock.

Knights rise and stagger, battered, beaten, and disappointed, as Broncos celebrate around them.

Weathers reaches down and offers a hand to Astel.

Belnap rips off his helmet, blood now pouring freely from the gash on his nose.

EXT. THUNDER STADIUM - CONTINUOUS

SCOTT MILLER, the principal of Hillcrest High School, stands alone to the side of the end zone. He takes in the scene: Knights players slowly leaving the field, coaches pulling off headsets, fans quietly climbing down the bleachers.

Miller pulls his glass off and pinches his eyes shut with one hand.

INT. PRINCIPAL MILLER'S OFFICE - DAY

A nameplate on a desk: "SCOTT MILLER, PRINCIPAL". An arm reaches over the nameplate and places a blank check on the desk.

Principal Miller looks at the check, then up at the man standing before him.

PRINCIPAL MILLER

What's this?

MATT MORGAN, early 40s, stocky, light beard, settles into a chair on the other side of the desk.

MATT MORGAN

Whatever you want it to be. A new weight room. New gear. Hell, it's a turf field if you want it to be.

PRINCIPAL MILLER

A turf field?

MATT MORGAN

Well, that may be stretching it. Point is, it's whatever you need.

Scott smiles.

PRINCIPAL MILLER

I appreciate the offer, but you know that's not how it works. I can't accept a blank check from a booster.

MATT MORGAN

Well, what can you do then? I mean it's one thing to have a losing season - even a losing program, but this? 22 straight losses? Two-and-a-half years without a win? This isn't just kids losing a few football games, this is our... community... Please, take the check.

Scott looks him in the eye - his smile's gone.

PRINCIPAL MILLER

I'm painfully aware of the situation, Matt.

MATT MORGAN

Well, where's the search at then? You narrow it down?

PRINCIPAL MILLER

You could say that.

Matt doesn't react, just starts ticking off names...

MATT MORGAN

I know you're looking at Mancek, the defensive coordinator over at Skyline. And that guy from Eagle - what's his name? - the guy that runs the 7-on-7 camp in the spring...?

Scott let's him continue.

MATT MORGAN (cont'd)

I also heard Roger might be interested in coming back... I know he's got a lot of history here, but he's been out of the game for a long time...

Scott clears his throat.

MATT MORGAN (cont'd)

What?

PRINCIPAL MILLER

We've got our guy.

MATT MORGAN

What?

PRINCIPAL MILLER

We narrowed it down to six names - including Roger Gleason... and we've made our decision.

MATT MORGAN

What? What about the panel? You picked a guy in a vacuum?

Scott leans back in his chair, raises his hands in defense.

MATT MORGAN (cont'd)

Who?

EXT. OWENS' RANCH - DAY

DARIN OWENS leans against a four-board fence. A big man, mid-40s, bushy mustache, he might be mistaken for a cowboy if it weren't for the ball cap pulled tight and the wrap-around shades he's wearing.

Owens stares out at a small field where his preteen daughter, Brianna, sits atop a horse. Hannah, his fourteen-year-old daughter, is leading the horse by the reins. The rolling hills of the Diablo Range, Northern California, fill the view.

LEANORA OWENS walks up behind Owens and joins him at the fence. She's holding some papers.

OWENS

What's the verdict?

Leanora hands him the papers. He scans the first page, quickly flips to the second.

OWENS (cont'd)

Are you kidding me? We're upside down?

Leanora dips her head, as Owens hands the paper back.

OWENS (cont'd)

No way they're gonna let us refinance - not with those numbers.

Leanora wraps an arm around Owen's shoulder, looking up at him. His eyes are back on his daughters.

OWENS (cont'd)
 I thought they'd grow up here...
 Maybe we can hang on - make the
 payments as long as we can...

Leanora pulls her arm away, resolute. They stand together in
 silence for a moment.

LEANORA
 Are you sure we're doing the right
 thing?

OWENS
 What choice do we have? It's one
 season... if we can go out there and
 make some noise, maybe something
 opens up back here.

LEANORA
 When do you go out?

OWENS
 The meeting's the 4th.

LEANORA
 And Jason's on board?

Owens nods.

LEANORA (cont'd)
 Well, here we go again.

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Matt Morgan, KIRK ASTEL, and LARRY BELNAP pick at appetizers
 and sip drinks.

Kirk, quarterback Matt Astel's dad, is frozen, chip in hand,
 in mid-conversation...

KIRK ASTEL
 California?

MATT MORGAN
 Yep. Outside of San Francisco.

Kirk lets out a moan.

MATT MORGAN (cont'd)
 Scott called him a fixer - a
 turnaround guy.
 (MORE)

MATT MORGAN (cont'd)
Said he's brought several different programs back from the dead.

KIRK ASTEL
I know something's gotta change, but really? A "fixer"? From out of state?

MATT MORGAN
I'm telling you, to hear Scott tell it, this guy's some kind of legend.

KIRK ASTEL
Oh, now he's a legend?

Matt laughs lightly.

KIRK ASTEL (cont'd)
And why exactly would a "legend" want to set up shop here, with a program that hasn't won a game in two-and-a-half years?

Matt shrugs.

KIRK ASTEL (cont'd)
Exactly.

Silence descends.

Matt glances around, decides now's as good a time as any...

MATT MORGAN
He wants to start camp early.

KIRK ASTEL
How early?

MATT MORGAN
July 1. Two-a-days, from the get-go.

KIRK ASTEL
Seriously?

Matt Morgan gives a "don't shoot the messenger" raise of his hands. He eyes Larry, fullback Jake Belnap's dad.

MATT MORGAN
You talked to him, what do you think?

Larry's in his 40s, broad-shouldered, square jaw, graying goatee - the former college defensive end looks like he could still be playing. He's not one for small talk, but it's clear his words carry weight.

LARRY BELNAP

He just called to ask if I wanted to stay on the staff. Told him I've been on the sidelines with Jake since he was seven and wasn't planning on stopping now. That was it... There's no doubt the guy's all business.

EXT. I-80 - DAY

Owens' aging Jeep Cherokee cruises east on I-80 and begins its climb into the Sierra Nevada.

SUPERIMPOSE:

MARCH, 2008

INT. JEEP CHEROKEE - DAY

JASON ANDERSON, late-30s, is sitting in the passenger seat beside Owens. The former D-1 lineman is holding a half-eaten burrito in one giant paw, a cell phone in the other. He's reading on the phone.

ANDERSON

Did you know they have the largest concentration of nuclear reactors in the world?

Owens glances over.

ANDERSON (cont'd)

I'm serious! Outside of Idaho Falls. They call it "The Site"... Mormans, potatoes, and nuclear waste - that's a wicked combination, man.

Anderson takes a huge bite of his burrito, keeps reading to himself.

ANDERSON (cont'd)

(through a mouthful)

Holy moly, get this: it's also the miniature cow capital of the world.

OWENS

What?

ANDERSON

(reading)

"Bonneville County is home to several of the world's top miniature cow breeders."

OWENS

What in the hell's a miniature cow?

ANDERSON

Uhh, a really small cow? According to this they're "safe, efficient, and affordable"... I'm guessing they just can't grow to full size on account of all the nuclear waste.

OWENS

I know they have some of the best hunting and fishing in the country.

ANDERSON

Hunting and fishing? I'm a SoCal boy, Coach. You know that.

Owens looks over at him, takes in Anderson's huge frame, as the man stuffs the last bite of burrito in his mouth.

OWENS

Yeah, you're a real surf rat, aren't you?

INT. JEEP CHEROKEE - NIGHT

Owens is navigating the Jeep through a snowstorm whipping across the high plains of Nevada. Anderson's staring out the window nervously.

ANDERSON

What are the facilities like?

OWENS

Nice. Decent... Practice field's at the school, but games are at a stadium we share with a cross-town rival.

Anderson stares at him until Owens finally glances back.

OWENS (cont'd)

What? It's a great stadium.

Anderson huffs, but let's it drop.

OWENS (cont'd)
Have you watched the film?

Anderson snorts.

ANDERSON
Hey, I tried. Might as well have
knocked back an entire bottle of
Ambien. Two offensive touchdowns in
an entire season?

Owens nods through pursed lips, he can't deny it - they have
their work cut out for them.

OWENS
Yeah, and they ran spread - not much
to look at.... Well, we've been here
before. At least their hungry.

A gust of wind shakes the Jeep. The snow's really coming
down now. Owens leans forward in his seat, peering through
the windshield. The highway's covered. The Jeep fishtails a
little, and Anderson throws his hands up on the dash.

Owens laughs.

OWENS (cont'd)
Trust me, it's God's country. You're
gonna love it.

INT. SCHOOL GYM - NIGHT

Players sit together in the center of the bleachers, some
wearing white Knights jerseys. Parents and other family sit
behind and around the players. Principal Miller's holding a
microphone, addressing the audience...

PRINCIPAL MILLER
So, without further ado, I'd like to
welcome Coach Darin Owens, the new
head football coach of our Hillcrest
Knights.

Miller hands Owens the mic as the gym breaks into polite
applause.

OWENS
Thank you Principal Miller. Well, I
have to say that's a little warmer
welcome than the weather coming in.

A few soft laughs from the audience.

OWENS (cont'd)

As Principal Miller said, I've been a head coach at the high school level for about fifteen years now, and I'm absolutely thrilled to join the Knights' family. I'd like to start by introducing the rest of our staff.

Turning to five coaches, standing off to the side.

OWENS (cont'd)

Jason Anderson, our line coach, has been with me for the past seven years. I doubt we could squeeze Coach Anderson into a fighter jet, but I'd guess you could call him my wing man.

Anderson smiles and nods. Light laughter and a smattering of applause from the crowd.

OWENS (cont'd)

And I'm sure you know Coach Belnap, Coach Worster, and Coach Simmons, from last year's staff.

The applause is more even this time, even a few WHOOPS.

OWENS (cont'd)

And, finally, Coach Roger Gleason, whom many of you know was the first coach of the Knights when the school opened in 1992, and coached, I believe...

(turning to Gleason)
through the 2001 season?

Gleason, early 50s, throws a serious nod at Owens, and waves to the audience. More even applause. But before the clapping even ends, a question rings out...

MAN #1

Is it true you're planning on starting camp July 1?

OWENS

Well, I guess we're moving straight on to the Q&A session...

Owens laughs lightly, but the audience doesn't join in.

OWENS (cont'd)
Yes, that is true. We'll be beginning camp a little earlier than you have in previous years, as I understand--

WOMAN #1
What about summer break? What about family plans? Vacations...? Is July 1 mandatory?

Owens takes a deep breath, meets eyes with Principal Miller for a moment.

OWENS
No, technically speaking, participation isn't mandatory until August 1... But I have to tell you now, any player who expects to be a productive member of this team, will be ready to roll on July 1.

Light murmurs from the crowd - a few bordering on moans.

OWENS (cont'd)
I know this program's been on a rough stretch, folks, but I'd like to ask each of you a question...

The murmurs cease. Owens surveys his audience, taking in the faces: he's got their attention.

OWENS (cont'd)
The past couple of seasons, going into each game, have you expected to win?

Owens lets the question settle in for a moment.

OWENS (cont'd)
(eyeing the players
in front of him)
In the locker room, suiting up before each game, have you expected to go out there and win?

Blank faces stare back at him. Owens scans the crowd beyond - the parents.

OWENS (cont'd)
Parents, have you taken your seats in the bleachers, looked out as your boys took the field, and expected to win?

Still no response from the crowd - the gym is silent.

OWENS (cont'd)

Starting July first, we are going to start expecting to win... And we are going to prepare to win... And we are going to believe. Believe in one another, and believe in ourselves... But it won't be easy. It's going to take commitment. It's going to take hard work. It's going to take--

Owens is interrupted by a light snort of laughter. He locks eyes on the player, FRANKIE VOGEL, a rising senior running back with shaggy, unkempt hair and dark eyes. Vogel's whispering something to Astel. Astel looks irritated.

OWENS (cont'd)

It's going to take discipline...
(staring down Vogel)
Rule number one, son, when a coach is talking, your eyes are on him, and you're silent.

Vogel's face goes blank. The gym's as silent as a graveyard.

OWENS (cont'd)

Now I want every one of you to take a look to your left...

Heads swivel slowly.

OWENS (cont'd)

Now take a look to your right... Now look behind you... Now back up here at me. That's the last time we all, as a program, and you as athletes, parents, and fans, will look back at the past. From this moment on, our eyes will remain focused on the future. We will expect to win. We will prepare to win. And we will believe...

INT. SCHOOL GYM - LATER

Parents and players walk about, some leaving, some lingering. Matt Astel is standing off to the side, conferring with his dad, Kirk.

Owens is standing with Anderson, receiving a few parting handshakes. Anderson leans in...

ANDERSON

Pulling out the big guns early. I like it.

Owens is scanning the crowd before him, a friendly smile on his face - trying to ignore Anderson.

ANDERSON (cont'd)

I mean, speech number 129 and 204? Combined? C'mon!

Owens lets out a little laugh this time, as Matt Morgan and Principal Miller stroll up. A few other parents and players stand a few feet away, listening.

PRINCIPAL MILLER

Coach, this is Matt Morgan.

Matt Morgan sticks out a hand - he and Owens shake.

PRINCIPAL MILLER (cont'd)

Matt's son, Travis, is on your roster.

Owens glances over Matt's shoulder. TRAVIS MORGAN offers a sheepish nod.

PRINCIPAL MILLER (cont'd)

Matt here chairs the booster club, Darin.

MATT MORGAN

That was a helluva introduction, Coach - great speech.

Anderson coughs.

MATT MORGAN (cont'd)

I know we're all excited to have you join us.

OWENS

Thanks, I appreciate that.

Matt Morgan leans forward just a hair, looks Owens in the eyes, sincere.

MATT MORGAN

You might not believe this, Coach, but this team means a lot to this community...

(MORE)

MATT MORGAN (cont'd)
And you're absolutely right, the last couple of years have been pretty rough. But we're ready. Whatever you need, you let me know.

OWENS
Thanks.

WEATHERS (O.S.)
I'll be there, Coach.

Owens looks over. Matt Morgan and Principal Miller step away, as Justin Weathers walks up and offers his hand. He's huge - Owens has to look up to meet his gaze.

Justin flashes a big, brilliant smile. Justin's mom, TERESA WEATHERS, hangs back, purse over one shoulder, arms folded.

WEATHERS
Justin Weathers, Coach. Right Tackle.
I'll be there July 1.

Matt Astel breaks away from his dad, walks up, and offers a hand too.

ASTEL
Me too, Coach. I'll be there. Matt Astel, Quarterback.

OWENS
That's great guys. Looking forward to it.

ASTEL
Coach, I'm just wondering, can you tell me what kind of offense we'll be running this year?

Owens glances at Anderson. Anderson dips his head. Owens turns back to Astel, puts a hand on his shoulder.

OWENS
We'll get there. You just get yourself ready. It's going to be a special year.

As Astel and Weathers drift away, Anderson leans in again.

ANDERSON
There really isn't a speech for that one, is there?

INT./EXT. MONTAGE - DAY

--Sun's barely up - Astel's in his backyard, working on his throwing mechanics - he's on one knee, throwing darts to his dad

--Vogel stumbles out, sleepy-eyed and disheveled, into the clutter-filled living room of his tiny, run-down house - a man's passed out on the couch

--Weathers, clear-eyed, laughing with his mother - he's eating a huge breakfast

--Belnap in his driveway - he and Larry are loading gear in their pickup

EXT. PRACTICE FIELD - DAY

SUPERIMPOSE:

JULY 1, 2008
FIRST DAY OF CAMP

Knights are forming two loose lines on the practice field. Owens and Anderson stand at cones 40 yards downfield.

OWENS
(booming voice)
Two at a time, on Coach Worster! All the way through, now! You'll be assigned a group as you finish. Listen for your assignments!

Players eye each other, hesitant, confused.

OWENS (cont'd)
Let's go! Let's see what we got!

Jake Belnap and BRYCEN BLACKBURN, the Knights all-conference safety, step up to the cones and take their stances. Coach Worster raises one hand, pauses, and lets it drop. Belnap and Blackburn bolt.

As they come across the line, Blackburn in front, Owens and Anderson hit their stopwatches...

OWENS (cont'd)
Blackburn, quarter-horse!

ANDERSON
Belnap, thoroughbred!

Blackburn and Belnap look at each other, confused.

OWENS
Let's go! Next two!

SERIES OF SHOTS:

--Players running 40s, Anderson and Owens, hitting their stopwatches, calling out groupings: quarter-horses, thoroughbreds, Clydesdale.

--Coach Randy Gleason stands watching, arms folded, a "this is ridiculous" look on his face.

END OF SERIES

Weathers and Astel line up, dialed in, intense. They bolt on the signal.

Weathers and Astel cross the line dead even. Weathers has a good fifty pounds on Astel, but he still matched the quarterback, who isn't slow.

OWENS (cont'd)
Astel, thoroughbred!

ANDERSON
Weathers...

Anderson makes eye contact with Owens, and shakes his head.

ANDERSON (cont'd)
Weathers, Clydesdale!

Weathers smiles and throws his arms out.

WEATHERS
What?! I don't know the difference between a quarter-horse and thoroughbred, Coach, but I know I'm faster than a Clydesdale!

ANDERSON
Sorry big boy. But I'm gonna need those quick feet with me!

The final two players, juniors DEVIN DROGHEI and JORDAN SPEIRS line up. The rest of the players move closer to the finish line in anticipation.

Droghei and Speirs share a smile and take picture-perfect sprinter stances.

As the watching players let out a few WHOOPS, Owens and Anderson look at each other.

Coach Worster drops his arm. Droghei and Speirs explode out of their stances and fly down the line with perfect form.

Owens and Anderson hit their stopwatches simultaneously. They stare down, then at each other, as the players behind them erupt.

ANDERSON (cont'd)

Uhh... we got a cheetah group, Coach?

OWENS

Droghei, Speirs, quarterhorses!
All right. Let's go! Quarterhorses
with Coach Simmons. Thoroughbreds
with Coach Belnap. Clydesdales with
Coach Anderson. Let's get to work!

EXT. PRACTICE FIELD - LATER

Owens is walking between rows of players doing up-downs on Anderson's WHISTLE.

OWENS

Afternoons, we get to play some
football... but mornings? Mornings
are about work...

SERIES OF SHOTS:

--leg's chopping through a high-stepper ladder

OWENS (O.S.)

Work on your body, work on your
character, work on your will...

--players shuffle-stepping through lateral tackling dummy
jumps

OWENS (O.S.) (cont'd)

Win or lose, we will be the best-
conditioned team in this state...

--big boys in the weight room

OWENS (O.S.) (cont'd)

We will work. And we will suffer. And
we will endure...

--players, soaked in sweat, hands on hips, lining up at a water trough

END OF SERIES

INT. COACH'S OFFICE - DAY

Owens and Anderson, working the position board roster, as we see shots of the players they're discussing at practice...

EXT. PRACTICE FIELD - DAY

SERIES OF SHOTS:

--Belnap discards a blocker and lights up a back in an Oklahoma drill...

OWENS (O.S.)
Belnap's a beast. Fills well, and he's got enough speed to play sideline-to-sideline.

--Brycen Blackburn in a cover drill, reads, breaks, and separates the receiver from the ball...

ANDERSON (O.S.)
Yeah, and Blackburn at safety... I like that kid. We're strong up the middle.

--Weathers, taking his stance, wild look in his eyes, then crushing the pads on a double-team blocking drill...

ANDERSON (O.S.) (cont'd)
We got some Clydesdales to work with. We get Weathers pulling - imagine that getting downfield on blocks.

--Running backs hammer through the gauntlet...

ANDERSON (O.S.) (cont'd)
Where are we on backs?

--Droghei and Speirs running sprints...

OWENS (O.S.)
I like Droghei and Speirs for our wingbacks.

ANDERSON (O.S.)

Two guys on the state 200-meter relay team carrying the ball? Yeah, I bet you do. Who you got in the backfield?

--Vogel fumbles a handoff, then gets lit up...

OWENS (O.S.)

Still open. Vogel's a mess... He's tough, but lazy--

--Vogel's in the face of the guy that lit him up, now - jawing, then throwing a hand shiver...

ANDERSON (O.S.)

Not to mention a pain in the ass... What about Astel?

--Astel takes a snap, pitches, rolls, and misses a block. Owens reacts animatedly. Astel hangs his head, hands on hips...

OWENS (O.S.)

(sighs)

I don't know... He's a hard worker - good kid - but I just don't know yet.

END OF SERIES

EXT. OWENS' HOUSE - DAY

Owens steps off the stoop of his ranch house rental, as a sedan pulls into the drive. Brianna and Hannah Owens pour out of the car, staggering.

OWENS

Hey! You made it.

The girls wrap their dad in hugs and look around. The house is on the outskirts of Idaho Falls - it's beautiful country, but can't match the mini-ranch they left in Northern California.

Leanora Owens exits the car and pulls off sunglasses. She hugs Owens, and plants a kiss on his lips.

OWENS (cont'd)

God, it is good to see you.

LEANORA

So this is it, huh?

OWENS
This is it. Come on. Let me show you.

INT. OWENS' HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The girls are walking the halls, checking things out.

OWENS
Huh? Not too bad, is it?

The girls hesitate. Hannah looks at Brianna...

HANNAH
It's good dad.

OWENS
Let me show you the view.

EXT. OWENS' DECK - CONTINUOUS

They walk out onto the back deck, and take in a view of the fertile, high plateau with the rolling foothills of the Blackfoot Range in the distance.

LEANORA
Wow. It's beautiful.

BRIANNA
Can we have horses?

The ranch house sits on two acres, a dilapidated fence separates their backyard from the farmland beyond.

OWENS
One step at a time. One step at a time.

EXT. OWENS' HOUSE - NIGHT

Owens is sitting on the back deck, bottle of beer in hand. The back screen door opens, and Leanora walks out, takes a seat beside him.

OWENS
They settled in?

LEANORA
Yep. Beat from the drive.

They sit in silence for a moment.

OWENS
We all buttoned up back home?

Leanora lets out a quick sigh.

LEANORA
Renters move in next week, but...

OWENS
But what?

LEANORA
But it's gonna be tight. I mean I'm still not sure how we're going to make it work... I guess what I'm saying is... maybe we should start thinking of this as home.

This catches Owens attention, but he let's it slide without responding.

LEANORA (cont'd)
How's the team?

OWENS
Same story, different town. Got a few parts to work with, but we got a long way to go.

Another moment of silence. Owens is staring off into the darkness, until he feels her looking at him. He turns to her.

OWENS (cont'd)
It'll work out. We turn this thing around, and the calls will come.

Leanora stares back, holding her cards close, offers a slow nod.

INT. PRINCIPAL MILLER'S OFFICE - DAY

Miller's sitting behind his desk, when Owen's gently raps on the open door and walks in.

OWENS
Nothing like that pit-in-the-stomach feeling you get when you're called to the principal's office. What'd I do?

Miller laughs, but not as convincing as Owens would like.

PRINCIPAL MILLER

It's not what you did. It's what you didn't do.

Owens takes a seat.

OWENS

What?

PRINCIPAL MILLER

Football Fest.

OWENS

What about it?

PRINCIPAL MILLER

I got a call from Coach Haskins at Skyline. He said, you said, we're not participating this year.

Owens offers a so-what raise of his hands.

PRINCIPAL MILLER (cont'd)

We've been doing it for fifteen years, Darin. Four local schools - a few hours of light scrimmage. It raises funds, and the community loves it.

OWENS

I know what it is, and it's not a good idea.

PRINCIPAL MILLER

With all due respect, I don't think this is a call you can make. We've got relationships, traditions.

OWENS

Don't take this the wrong way, but the only tradition I can see is the one where the other three teams in this city kick our butts, year-in and year-out.

Miller tries staring him down for a moment, but quickly realizes it's a losing battle.

OWENS (cont'd)

Look, you brought me in here to do one thing: win.

(MORE)

OWENS (cont'd)

The last thing I'm going to do, three weeks before the season starts, is show damn-near half our schedule what we're running.

EXT. PRACTICE FIELD - DAY

Owens is running the Knights' first team offense vs. the defense, full contact.

Matt Morgan, Kirk Astel, and several other men are watching from the fence by the field. The Owens girls are sitting in the bleachers.

The offense, Owens' double-wing, looks like something out the leather-helmet days: a center, two guards, two tackles, two tight ends, crammed in tight on the line. A pair of wingbacks are positioned on the hips of each tight end. Astel's under center, with Vogel, the lone back, in a three-point stance behind him.

OWENS

Foot to foot on your splits!

Exhausted linemen raise up and tighten their splits. They are literally standing on top of one another.

OWENS (cont'd)

Vogel, step up! When you drop into your three-point, I want your helmet practically resting on the quarterback's ass!

Vogel rises lazily, steps up.

Astel takes the snap, spins, and pitches to the right wing, Droghei, as Weathers and the right guard pull. Astel continues his spin until he's done a complete three-sixty, and heads into the hole behind the pulling linemen.

Vogel kicks out on the defensive end.

Belnap, playing middle linebacker, blows by Astel's block. The defensive end does the same to Vogel, and both defenders crush Droghei.

It's all Owens can do not to throw his clipboard.

Roger Gleason, hands on hips, shakes his head.

OWENS (cont'd)

Run it again!

Kirk Astel, Matt Morgan, and the other men at the fence share looks of doubt and disgust.

KIRK ASTEL
Looks like a damn rugby scrum.

MATT MORGAN
Give it time.

KIRK ASTEL
When's the last time you saw a
quarterback hand off and then block?!

MATT MORGAN
He's won two state championships with
this offense.

Kirk Astel spits and shakes his head.

The Owens girls watch the exchange, glance at each other warily.

Astel runs the same play. He finds the Mike this time, but Belnap quickly shucks him and makes the tackle. Vogel fairs even worse -- the defensive end de-cleats him.

OWENS
That's it! Give me two lines.
Everybody with a birthday January
through June over here! July through
December over there!

Owens drops a single cone between the two lines.

OWENS (cont'd)
We will not be soft, gentlemen! Win
or lose, we will not be soft. First
two up. Vogel, you're one of them. On
the cone. You go to the whistle - you
don't stop 'til you hear it again.

The first two players, Vogel and a huge LINEMAN are a clear mismatch, 30-40 pounds between them easily. Owens BLOWS the whistle. The lineman quickly drives Vogel back, then eases up.

OWENS (cont'd)
(to the lineman)
Did you hear a whistle?!

The lineman looks at him. Owens holds the whistle up.

OWENS (cont'd)
Did I blow this whistle?!

LINEMAN
No, Coach.

OWENS
I know he's your teammate. I can see that you're big enough to eat him for lunch. But did you going easy on him make him better?!

LINEMAN
No, Coach.

OWENS
(addressing the team)
There's a reason I didn't separate by position! You play this game, you're gonna face mismatches! Do you think your opponents are going to take it easy on you?... Run it again, same two!

Vogel and the lineman line up and fire off on the WHISTLE. The lineman quickly gets the advantage again, drives Vogel back, and pancakes him.

Owens BLOWS the whistle. The lineman pulls Vogel up - Owens is already in Vogel's ear.

OWENS (cont'd)
Do you want to play football son?!

Vogel yanks his chinstrap off, and struts to the back of the line.

OWENS (cont'd)
Next two!

Belnap and Brycen Blackburn step up. It's another mismatch, weight-wise.

The players explode on the WHISTLE. A CRACK of pads. Belnap quickly gains an advantage, but Blackburn's having none of it. He struggles with everything he's got, a stream of guttural grunts pouring out of him.

Owens lets the struggle play out, three seconds, five seconds, ten seconds. When he finally BLOWS the whistle, Belnap's gotten the better, but just barely.

OWENS (cont'd)
That's what I'm talking about! That's
what I'm looking for! Next two!

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

As a HOSTESS seats the Owens family, Owens notices Kirk Astel, and several other men, including Roger Gleason, at a booth in the bar area. The men are laughing - when they see Owens they throw nods and waves his way.

LEANORA
Who's that?

OWENS
Couple of dads... and one of my
coaches.

Leanora waits for more, but Owens begins scanning the menu.

INT. RESTAURANT - LATER

A waitress swings by.

WAITRESS
Can I interest you all in dessert?

The girls practically jump out of their seats.

OWENS
Looks like it. Can you tell me where
the restrooms are?

WAITRESS
(pointing)
Sure. They're back around the bar
there, to the right.

Owens pushes back and leaves their table. When he walks by the booth with Kirk Astel and the others...

KIRK ASTEL
Hey! How's it going, Coach?

OWENS
Gentlemen.

MAN #2
So, how are we looking?

OWENS

I think we look fine. The boys have been putting in good work - got a ways to go still.

MAN #3

Opener's barely a week away - gonna have to get there fast.

Owens laughs lightly - he can see where this is going.

KIRK ASTEL

That's some offense you got there, Coach. Double-wing - cram it down their throats, right?

OWENS

That's the idea. Overwhelm them at the point of attack. It's tough to defend when it's run right.

The men look at each other, smiling. Owens looks at Roger Gleason, waiting for him to weigh in.

KIRK ASTEL

Still, not exactly something you see on Sundays, is it?

OWENS

Well, thankfully we don't play on Sundays.

ROGER GLEASON

I think what he's saying is, we probably ought to open things up at some point.

Owens stares at Roger, nodding slowly - so that's how it is.

ROGER GLEASON (cont'd)

I mean let the boys have a little fun, right?

OWENS

It's been my experience that a football team has the most fun when it's winning...

Roger Gleason clears his throat. The other men fidget. Owens walks away.

INT. SCHOOL CAFETERIA - DAY

Players line the lunch tables, joking, laughing, horsing around. Hannah and Brianna are with Owens and the other coaches. Owens stands up, and silence quickly descends.

OWENS

Gentlemen. You should be proud of the fact you're sitting here today. We've asked a lot of you over the past two months... Has it hurt?

The players look at each other, unsure how to respond.

OWENS (cont'd)

It's okay. You can say it. You're damn sure it's hurt.

The players relax a little, smile, laugh.

OWENS (cont'd)

But you're here - you made it through. We asked you to give us everything you've got, and you responded. We asked you to prepare to win, and you have. Tomorrow night, we embark on a new journey together... Now, we've got a little surprise for you. When I call your name, you're gonna come up here, one-by-one, and answer a question...

The players look at each other, expectantly.

OWENS (cont'd)

Brycen Blackburn...

Silence, as Blackburn rises from his table and steps up. When he's in front of Owens, the coach locks eyes with him.

OWENS (cont'd)

Do you expect to win?

Blackburn takes in the question, his eyes focusing...

BLACKBURN

Yes sir, Coach.

Owens nods, then turns to Hannah, who pulls something from a large, cardboard box. She hands it to Owens. He turns and hands it to Blackburn.

Blackburn holds the jersey by the shoulders, lets it unfurl, stares at it.

He turns to face his teammates, holding the jersey up for them to see. It's jet black, the white number 2 trimmed in red, the word "Knights" in red plastered on the chest plate above the number.

The cafeteria erupts in WHOOPS and CHEERS.

SERIES OF SHOTS:

Players answering the same question and getting their jerseys...

--Matt Astel (#11)

--Jordan Speirs (#13)

--Devin Droghei (#38)

--Jake Belnap (#40)

--Justin Weathers (#78)

END OF SERIES

INT./EXT. MONTAGE - DAY/NIGHT

--empty Thunder Stadium

--streets of Ammon

--sun dropping over farmland and foothills

--stadium lights coming on

--parking lot filling up

--locker room sign:

EXPECT TO WIN
PREPARE TO WIN
BELIEVE!

EXT. THUNDER STADIUM - NIGHT

SUPERIMPOSE:

AUGUST 29, 2008
HILLCREST VS. MADISON

The Hillcrest stands are packed. Face-painted students are being led in a cheer by the Knights' mascot. Cheerleaders bounce and sway.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

Welcome to Thunder Stadium folks! We hope you're ready for a great night of football, as our own Hillcrest Knights look to open the 2008 campaign with a win against the Madison Bobcats.

Owens and Anderson take in the scene.

ANDERSON

Twenty-two straight losses, and look at this. You'd think we were coming off a state championship.

OWENS

Yeah. There's nothing like a Friday night in fall.

Anderson eyes the goalposts...

ANDERSON

Wait, why are our goalposts green?

OWENS

It's Bonneville's stadium too. Whoever wins the Civil War gets to spray paint the posts their colors.

ANDERSON

You're kidding me.

OWENS

Nope. Right after the game - the winning team paints.

Anderson raises his eyebrows.

OWENS (cont'd)

That's game six, Coach... Let's worry about game one for now.

Madison players slap pads and helmets on the sideline. They're all business.

The Knights stand shoulder-to-shoulder, staring across the field at their opponents, their eyes focused and intense.

Astel, Belnap, Blackburn, and Weathers walk out to the center of the field for the coin toss.

EXT. THUNDER STADIUM - LATER

It's a back-and-forth battle, sloppy, ugly, violent...

SERIES OF SHOTS:

--a Madison back pounds through the line, bouncing off tacklers, until Belnap rides him down

--Droghei's hammered out of bounds on the Madison sideline, and flies into the chain crew - Madison players cheer and jaw at him as he gets up

--Blackburn breaks on an out pass and dives to knock it down.

--Weathers pulls through a hole and levels a linebacker

--Vogel gets stuffed on a dive play

--Madison runs a reverse for a long touchdown

END OF SERIES

EXT. THUNDER STADIUM - LATER

We see the SCOREBOARD: Hillcrest is down 10-3, midway through the 3rd quarter.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

That's going to bring up fourth down for the Knights... fourth and about eight it looks like, at their own thirty-two yard line.

Owens signals a play in to Astel.

ROGER GLEASON

Coach, it's 4th and eight. It's still a one-score game...

Owens ignores him.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

It looks like the Knights are gonna go for it.

In the stands, Kirk Astel locks eyes with Matt Morgan and shakes his head.

Astel huddles the Knights up. They're sweating, panting, exhausted.

ASTEL
Power 26, Pull, on two.

Astel takes the snap, pitches to the left wingback, Speirs, spins and hits the hole behind the pulling tackle and guard. It looks like there's plenty of green for Speirs to work with, but Vogel misses his block on the defensive end, and the end blows Speirs up.

Anderson throws his clipboard down.

ANDERSON
God almighty! That was there!

MOANS, head shakes, frowns from the Knights' stands.

Owens looks on, stoic, as Roger Gleason throws his hands up and walks back to the bench.

SERIES OF SHOTS:

Madison has the momentum now, and pours it on...

--a deep wheel route for a Madison touchdown

--Astel on a keeper, stood up at the line, then crushed by a scraping linebacker

--Weathers being cut block at the line - he's slow to get up

--Vogel gets lit up, fumbles - Madison returns it for another score

END OF SERIES

EXT. THUNDER STADIUM - LATER

The final score comes into focus: HILLCREST 3, MADISON 30.

Dejected fans stumble out of the stands, as we hear...

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
Well, that'll do it folks. A
disappointing opener for the Knights,
and a rough start for new head coach,
Darin Owens.

Principal Scott Miller, stands in his spot to the side of the end zone, watching, as Owens slowly pulls his headset off, and players pick up gear and make their way off the field.

Kirk Astel runs into Matt Morgan coming out of the bleachers.

KIRK ASTEL
Give it time, huh?

INT. LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

Players idle about, some sitting already, some still pulling off pads, listening to the muffled conversation unfolding in the coach's office...

INT. COACH'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Owens is sitting on the edge of his desk, his arms folded, listening to a worked-up Roger Gleason.

ROGER GLEASON
We ran the same look every play!... A single formation! The entire game!

Owens motions with his hands for Gleason to lower his voice.

ROGER GLEASON (cont'd)
(barely lowering his voice)
How can you expect to win, running a grand total of six plays out of one formation?... And no punts? We went for it on 4th down three different times in our own territory?!

Owens stares him down before responding - not threatening, but he wants to be absolutely clear...

OWENS
Are you finished? I understand your frustration, and I respect your history at this school, but this team only has one head coach, and you're not him. If you can't handle that, then I'd start reconsidering your decision to be here.

Roger Gleason shakes his head slowly, then locks eyes with Owens.

ROGER GLEASON
I believe I have.

Roger Gleason swings the office door open...

INT. LOCKER ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Gleason comes out, takes a look around. Players and coaches avoid eye contact. Gleason walks out of the locker room without a word.

Owens walks out of the office, steps to the center of the locker room, takes in the scene.

Most of the players are sitting now, heads hung. Astel's angrily pulling tape off his wrists.

Vogel's up on a table, a trainer looking at his ankle. Owens steps over.

OWENS
What's going on?

VOGEL
Rolled my ankle, Coach.

Owens looks at him, nods slowly, turns back to the team.

OWENS
Alright, bring it in, boys.

The few players still messing with gear stop and move closer. No one utters a word. Owens stands silent for a moment, before continuing...

OWENS (cont'd)
Tough loss tonight... I actually saw a lot of good things out there. Especially in the first half.

A few players' heads are still hung.

OWENS (cont'd)
Eyes on me, now...
(waiting until he has complete attention)
But, I also saw acceptance. Acceptance of mediocrity. Acceptance of "good enough". Going into the third quarter, I saw guys that were happy just to be in the game...
(MORE)

OWENS (cont'd)

I can tell you right now, that's not going to cut it. There is no "good enough"... There is no "good enough"... Now, this one's behind us - we do not look back... Captains, is there anything you'd like to add?

Belnap and Blackburn shake their heads. Owens looks at Weathers.

WEATHERS

No sir, Coach.

OWENS

Matt, you have anything to say?

Astel doesn't meet his gaze. He's looking off in space. He shakes his head and drops the balled up tape in his hands to the floor.

Owens stares at him for a moment.

OWENS (cont'd)

Alright then. Back to work on Monday. Let's get after it.

INT. JEEP CHEROKEE - DAY

The Owens family is driving the backroads west of Idaho Falls.

The girls are in back. Hannah's staring out the window, taking in the rolling grasslands, forested foothills and higher peaks in the distance. Brianna's staring at a phone screen.

BRIANNA

(without looking up)

Where are we going, again?

OWENS

We're not going anywhere.

LEANORA

We're just taking a drive, baby.

Owens turns up the radio.

TALKING HEAD (O.S.)

... You're damn right I oppose the bailout.

(MORE)

TALKING HEAD (O.S.) (cont'd)

What we really need when we have a bursting of the bubble - like what we're seeing right now in the housing market - is some degree of pain to the overall marketplace. We have to face facts and just rip the band-aid off...

BRIANNA

Can we at least listen to music?

Leanora looks at Owens, frowns - he staring at the road, eyes hidden behind sunglasses. She changes the station.

BRIANNA (cont'd)

Wow.

Leanora glances back. Brianna's still glued to the phone.

LEANORA

What are you doing?

BRIANNA

(laughing)

I'm just reading what people are saying about the team.

Leanora whips her head around again.

LEANORA

Okay, enough with the phone. Give it back to me.

Hannah tries to grab the phone away from her sister.

BRIANNA

Hold on!

OWENS

Wait - what's it say?

Brianna raises her eyebrows.

BRIANNA

Well, this guy says you stink, and you suck, and you're horrible, and all that, but every time he spells your name, he spells it O-WINS, like zero wins, instead of Owens. Get it?

OWENS

Yeah, we get it.

HANNAH

What is wrong with people - it's one game!

BRIANNA

Then this other guy - this is funny - this guy says watching your offense is like watching a dog with one of those cones on his head trying to lick his own balls.

LEANORA

Brianna!

Owens actually cracks up a little.

BRIANNA

What?

LEANORA

Give me my phone!

Brianna hands the phone over. They sit in silence a few moments.

LEANORA (cont'd)

What is that?

Cows in a pasture, but something's not right - they're half-the size of regular cows.

BRIANNA

What the heck? They look like they've been shrunk by a ray-gun!

OWENS

Miniature cows.

LEANORA

What?

OWENS

Miniature cows... Apparently they're safe, efficient, and affordable.

Leanora stares at the side of his head.

EXT. PRACTICE FIELD - DAY

Players are milling about, gearing up, before practice starts.

Vogel's not dressed. He's on crutches, ankle wrapped. Owens and Anderson are watching him horse around, spraying water on other players.

Hannah and Brianna are on the far sidelines, throwing a football back and forth. They're really zipping it, and the players are taking notice.

VOGEL

Hey, Astel!

Astel looks up.

VOGEL (cont'd)

Maybe we'd run spread again if you could throw like that!

Astel frowns, but takes it in stride.

Vogel keeps yucking it up, as Anderson turns to Owens...

ANDERSON

You saw the film. If he rolled that ankle, I'm a swimsuit model. What are you gonna do?

OWENS

We play with the guys that want to play.

Owen's steps forward, BLOWS his whistle.

OWENS (cont'd)

Let's go!

EXT. PRACTICE FIELD - LATER

They're running the double-wing against the defense again - full contact.

Speirs bounces it outside before hitting the hole.

Owens closes his eyes, pinches the bridge of his nose.

Players trot back, without a lot of energy - particularly Astel.

OWENS

Backs, you have to get me three!
Three yards, and it's all yours - you
can run straight into the stands if
you want... The big plays will come,
but get me three, first. Let's go!

They run it again, but Astel fakes the pitch this time,
drops back, scrambles, and throws a dart at a tight end
who's blocking up field. The tight end sees it at the last
second and throws his hands up - the ball zips through them.

OWENS (cont'd)

What the hell was that?!

ASTEL

The end's coming wide. They know what
we're doing every time.

Owens BLOWS his whistle - let's it whine on for a full five
seconds.

OWENS

Water!

The players jog off. Owens picks up the ball and marches
down to the three-yard line.

EXT. PRACTICE FIELD - LATER

The players gather at the end of the field. Owens addresses
the team.

OWENS

This isn't rocket science, boys.
Trust the play. Know your job. Do
your job. It's that simple.

A smattering of "Yes, Coach."

OWENS (cont'd)

Now, we're going to line this up at
the three-yard line, and run this
thing until we get it right. We're
going to run it until it becomes
muscle memory - until the last thing
you think about right before you fall
asleep, and the first thing you think
about every morning when you wake up,
is your individual assignment out of
double-wing power...

SERIES OF SHOTS:

--Belnap filling hole, meeting Speirs with a POP, driving him back and dropping him

OWENS (O.S.)
Trust the play. Know your job. Do your job...

--close-up combat at the point of attack - vicious, desperate

OWENS (O.S.) (cont'd)
I don't care if the defense knows what we're doing...

--Droghei battling near the goal line, pushing, spinning, diving

OWENS (O.S.) (cont'd)
If we run it right, it won't matter...

END OF SERIES

EXT. DRUG STORE - NIGHT

Owens finishes up at the checkout counter and runs into Weathers and his mom, walking into the store.

WEATHERS
Hey, Coach!

Weathers flashes his electric smile.

OWENS
Hey, Justin, how you doing?

WEATHERS
I'm good. I'm good.

Teresa Weathers stands beside her son - eyeing Owens.

WEATHERS (cont'd)
Coach, this is my mom.

Owens sticks out his hand. Teresa takes it, offers just a hint of a smile.

OWENS
Hi, Mrs. Weathers. It's nice to meet you. Darin Owens.

TERESA WEATHERS

Ah, yes. Expect to win, prepare to win, believe.

OWENS

Yes, ma'am.

Teresa's still smiling, but her eyes remain locked on Owens' - a slow-burn look.

TERESA WEATHERS

Well, you sure got this one believing.

OWENS

That's good. That's good.

Awkward silence descends. Owens hesitates, a little unsure now...

OWENS (cont'd)

He's a great kid. He's a real pleasure to coach.

TERESA WEATHERS

Yes, he is... I sure hope all of this is worth it...

The comment hangs in the air. Owens is smiling, but his mind's in "read and respond" mode. Justin coughs to break the moment.

TERESA WEATHERS (cont'd)

Well, it was nice to meet you, Coach.

OWENS

Nice to meet you, too.

Justin tries on another smile, before following Teresa into the store.

Owens is left holding his bag, already re-playing the exchange over in his head.

INT./EXT. MONTAGE - DAY

Pre-game montage, as we hear radio coverage...

--Leanora face-painting the girls...

RADIO BILL (O.S.)

Welcome back to Z103's East Idaho Game Night, folks. Bill and Dan coming to you from Idaho Falls this week, where tonight, Skyline will look to improve to 2-0 versus the Hillcrest Knights.

--Brycen Blackburn's little brothers donning matching Blackburn jerseys...

RADIO DAN (O.S.)

Yeah, it'd be nice to say we've got a real rivalry on our hands, here, but despite the fact you've got two of the four Idaho Falls teams lining up--

--Larry and Jake Belnap picking Weathers up - Teresa Weathers watching from her open door...

RADIO BILL (O.S.)

Well, yeah... the Hillcrest program is just a mess - just a heap of ashes, at this point. I mean 22 straight losses coming into this season!

--Astel sitting in his car in the parking lot - flipping through a playbook, before tossing it down on the passenger seat - we see:

2007 HILLCREST KNIGHTS

RADIO DAN (O.S.)

Exactly! The last time the Knights won a varsity football game, half of their roster was in middle school!

--Owens sitting at his desk in his office, listening to the radio...

RADIO BILL (O.S.)

Yeah, so they went out and brought in new a new head coach, Darin Owens, with a history of winning in his native California. And then they proceed to get absolutely drummed by Madison in the opener--

Anderson flings the door open and walks in. Owens reaches up and flips the radio off.

ANDERSON

You ready?

INT. LOCKER ROOM - DAY

Owens steps to the center of the locker room, surveys the troops. The players are dressed, focused, quiet. He doesn't have to raise his voice...

OWENS

Gentlemen, we spent all summer preparing to win... And when you came up and got your jerseys before the first game, I asked each of you if you expected to win. And to a man, you said yes. And you want to know what? I believed you. I looked into each of your eyes, and I believed you... You prepared to win, and you expected to win... But tonight, you're going to have to believe. Believe in yourselves... Believe in your teammates... And believe in us.
(motioning to his coaches)

Owens lets this sink in, nodding slowly.

OWENS (cont'd)

Know your job. Do it to the best of your ability, with everything you've got, each and every play. You do that, and I promise you: We. Will. Win. Tonight...

Weathers is nodding.

OWENS (cont'd)

Believe.

Belnap raises his head.

OWENS (cont'd)

Believe.

Blackburn's eyes lock in on Owens.

OWENS (cont'd)

Do your job, and believe.

Astel reluctantly lifts his eyes to Owens.

EXT. THUNDER STADIUM - NIGHT

SUPERIMPOSE:

SEPTEMBER 5, 2008
HILLCREST VS. SKYLINE

Skyline quickly gets the upper hand... we see clips of action and hear pieces of the the Z103 Game Night coverage...

SERIES OF SHOTS:

--the ball floats out of evening sky, skyline returner receives it and takes off

--Skyline QB completes series of passes...

RADIO BILL (O.S.)
... Johnson is really picking apart
the Knights secondary...

--Skyline receiver cradling over-the-shoulder touchdown pass...

RADIO BILL (O.S.) (cont'd)
... Touchdown, Skyline!

--Leanora biting her lip in stands, she and girls worried

--Droghei met at the line, bounces outside, pulled down for a loss...

RADIO DAN (O.S.)
... You know I'm a fan of smashmouth
football, Bill, but this Hillcrest
offense is just--

--Astel on a keeper, nothing there, bottled up at the line of scrimmage...

RADIO BILL (O.S.)
Yeah, you have to admire Coach Owens'
commitment, but you know the saying,
insanity is doing the same thing over
and over and expecting different
results...

--Owens pacing on the sidelines, hand stroking his face, as Anderson screams instructions

--Skyline back chewing up yardage

--Skyline jet sweep, breaks for long touchdown

--SCOREBOARD: HILLCREST stuck on 0, SKYLINE CHANGES FROM 14 TO 21...

RADIO BILL (O.S.) (cont'd)
 ... Well, Hillcrest is going to have to find a way to keep Skyline's offense off the field, or this thing is going to get out of hand, quickly...

--Hillcrest fans becoming despondent, Matt Morgan stoic, Principal Miller hanging his head

--Coach Belnap, dressing down the defense on the bench

END OF SERIES

EXT. THUNDER STADIUM - CONTINUOUS

The Knights are huddling up, when Astel breaks away and takes a few steps towards the sideline. He's got his arms raised in the air, shouting.

ASTEL
 We only have ten!

Owens starts counting.

ASTEL (cont'd)
 We only have ten!

Owens turns and finds Coach Worster...

OWENS
 Where in the hell is Fuller?!

WORSTER
 His shoulder popped! He thought he could go, but the trainer won't clear him!

Disgusted, Owens, signals for a timeout.

RADIO DAN (O.S.)
 ... Looks like the wheels are coming off a bit now for Hillcrest...

Owens pauses for a second, turns to the defense - they're still on the bench, getting chewed on by Coach Belnap.

OWENS
Belnap! Get up here!

Both Belnaps look up. Owens points at Jake.

OWENS (cont'd)
Let's go!

Belnap grabs his helmet, jumps up. Coach Belnap watches his son bolt to Owens.

OWENS (cont'd)
You're going in for Fuller.

Belnap stares at him.

OWENS (cont'd)
You played some fullback last year,
right?...

Belnap hesitates.

OWENS (cont'd)
We run six plays! You've been playing
backer against them all summer! Let's
go!

Belnap straps on his helmet and takes off.

The Knights huddle up.

ASTEL
Power 43, Pull, on one!

Before they break...

WEATHERS
Know your job! Do your job!

The Knights come up to the line. Belnap's eyes are focused, intense.

ASTEL
Ready!... Down!... Set!... Hut!

Astel takes the snap, spins, pitches to Droghei. Weathers and the right tackle pull. Weathers punches through the hole and picks up a linebacker. Belnap explodes towards the end, crushes him.

Droghei squirts through the hole, bounces off a tackler, lowers his pads, and plows ahead for a seven yard gain.

OWENS
That's what I'm talking about!

SERIES OF SHOTS:

--Weathers plows the field

--Droghei and Speirs chew up 3, 4, 5 yards a carry

--Belnap pounds the end...

RADIO BILL (O.S.)
... Well, folks, it looks like the
Knights are starting to gain a little
steam here...

--the ref signals another first down

--Astel on a keeper

--Belnap battles for short yardage on a dive

END OF SERIES

The SCOREBOARD tells the tale: 4th and 1...

RADIO DAN (O.S.)
... That's going to bring up 4th and
short for Hillcrest, on Skyline's
eighteen yard line.

RADIO BILL (O.S.)
Well, let's see if they try to get
some points on the board with a field
goal... No, it looks like they're
going for it...

Power to the left, Droghei hits the hole, cuts off Weather's
down-field block, and suddenly he's in the open - untouched
for a touchdown.

RADIO DAN (O.S.)
Touchdown, Knights! How about that!

Hillcrest fans and players go nuts.

Owens stares out to the field, a smile growing on his face.

EXT. THUNDER STADIUM - LATER

Hillcrest gets going...

SERIES OF SHOTS:

--Droghei, Speirs chewing up big yardage

--Belnap on the dive, carrying tacklers into the end zone

--Matt Morgan cheering, cheerleaders flipping, Owens girls screaming

--Brycen Blackburn picks off a pass

--The Blackburn brothers, in big-brother jerseys, jump and scream in the stands

END OF SERIES

EXT. THUNDER STADIUM - LATER

The SCOREBOARD comes into view: HILLCREST 21, SKYLINE 24, 4th quarter, 00:16 on the clock, ball on their own 42 yard line.

RADIO DAN (O.S.)
... Looks like Hillcrest is gonna
have time to run one, maybe two
plays...

Fans from both teams are rabid. It's a loud, chaotic environment.

Owens is three steps out on the field, signaling to Astel.

Astel nods, starts back for the huddle, as Owens turns back to the sideline.

Suddenly Owens turns back around...

OWENS
Astel! Matt!

Astel turns around, and Owens frantically changes the call...

OWENS (cont'd)
Black 14! Black 14!

Astel stares. Raises his hands, like he can't hear or doesn't understand. Owens cups a hand to his mouth...

OWENS (cont'd)
Black 14!

Owens slowly backs back to the sidelines, watching as Astel huddles the Knights up.

Astel takes the snap, spins to pitch to Speirs...

Close-in action: Droghei breaks off from right wing, looping behind Speirs to take another pitch - a reverse play. We're seeing the choreography, but no ball - it's all a mirage...

Astel's still got it. He faked the first pitch, tucked the ball on his hip and took off for the edge.

Astel's in the open, sprinting down the sideline now. He cruises right by the Hillcrest bench, players jumping, screaming, going nuts.

Owens stares, open-mouthed as Astel bolts by.

The Hillcrest fans explode - screaming, jumping - as Astel goes sixty yards for the winning touchdown.

RADIO BILL (O.S.)
Can you believe that?! Can you
believe that?! Astel takes it to the
house on the fake reverse!

Hillcrest players storm the field, coaches, and fans not far behind them.

RADIO BILL (O.S.) (cont'd)
The Hillcrest Knights have risen from
the ashes! Their first win in nearly
three years!

Owens is still standing on the sideline, staring, his mouth closed now, as fans, players, and coaches hit him with backslaps, as they run by.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREETS - DAY

Owens is driving through a suburban - not old, but established - neighborhood. He's reading street signs. He pulls up to the curb across from the address he's looking for. He sits for a moment...

EXT. ASTEL'S HOUSE - DAY

Owens steps up on the front porch, rings the doorbell.

JANNA ASTEL, middle-aged, pretty, answers. She offers a warm smile as she recognizes the visitor...

JANNA ASTEL
Coach Owens. Hi.

Owens shuffles a little, rethinking this unplanned visit.

OWENS
Hi... I hope you don't mind an
unannounced visit--

Kirk Astel appears beside his wife. Offering a hand...

KIRK ASTEL
Coach! How's it going? Great game,
huh?

OWENS
It sure was. Real exciting... I was
just hoping I might chat with Matt
for a few minutes, if he's around.

Kirk holds his smile for a moment, processing...

KIRK ASTEL
Sure. Yeah, he's here...

EXT. ASTEL'S HOUSE - LATER

Owens and Astel are sitting on the front porch.

OWENS
...Yeah, that was quite an ending,
wasn't it?

Astel's grinning.

ASTEL
Yes sir, Coach.

Owens leans forward, stares out at the quiet street.

OWENS
(laughing lightly)
I mean, when I saw you turn up the
sideline...

Astel's still grinning, but he's doesn't respond - fidgets a little. Owens waits a moment before...

OWENS (cont'd)
You know I changed the play.

ASTEL

What?

OWENS

I changed the play. I called it, then I changed it... Black 14.

ASTEL

Yeah... I mean, it was crazy...I couldn't hear...

Owens glances back, looks Astel in the eyes.

OWENS

I don't think so.

Astel's smile disappears.

OWENS (cont'd)

I don't think you couldn't hear me. I called the fake reverse. Then I changed my mind--

ASTEL

Coach...

Owens looks away. His smile's gone now, too.

OWENS

I think you heard me. You understood. You ran the fake anyway.

Astel furrows his brow. They sit in silence for long moment.

OWENS (cont'd)

What do you want, Matt?

Astel pauses, thinking of the right answer...

ASTEL

I want to win, Coach.

Owens nods slowly.

OWENS

Of course you do. We all want to win. That's not what I mean.

There's no avoiding it now, and Astel's done with saying the right things.

ASTEL

I want to play quarterback--

OWENS
You are playing quarterback--

ASTEL
I want to throw the ball.

Owens looks at him again.

ASTEL (cont'd)
I've been a quarterback since I was ten years old. A quarterback throws... I mean it's my senior year. I wanted to play at the next level.

OWENS
Matt, I'm going to be honest with you. I'm not sure you have the arm talent to play at the next level... But even if you did, you wouldn't be throwing much on this team.

Astel looks like he's been slapped in the face - hard.

OWENS (cont'd)
You want to know why I'm here? You want to know why I took this job - why I left the school I was at?... We turned that program around. Had a great season last year. Playoffs, regional championship - finished sixth in the state of California...

No response from Astel. His head's hung, eyes distant.

OWENS (cont'd)
I had an A.D. whose son happened to be our quarterback. He was a junior last year. The A.D. said if I wanted to keep my job, I'd have to change the offense this season. Open it up...

Astel's wringing his hands now.

OWENS (cont'd)
You want to be quarterback?

Astel can feel Owens' eyes on him, but he still doesn't look up.

OWENS (cont'd)
Well, this team needs more than a quarterback.

(MORE)

OWENS (cont'd)

This team needs a leader. We may have won one game, but I can tell you right now, this isn't going to work without one... I need a leader...

EXT. PRACTICE FIELD - DAY

The team's drilling the double-wing against the defense again. Belnap's in at fullback. Coming off the win, the mood's upbeat. The offense is looking crisp, efficient.

Weathers pulls and springs Speirs for a long one...

OWENS

Very nice! Very nice!

Vogel, back in pads, steps up from the substitution pool...

VOGEL

Can I get in, Coach?

Owens barely acknowledges him.

OWENS

We'll rotate in a bit.

Vogel, clearly pissed, drifts away.

Belnap seals the end on the next play - it's another big gain.

ANDERSON

Looking good, Coach. Looking damn good!

Coach Belnap's standing a few feet away...

LARRY BELNAP

Whatdya expect? You stole my Mike. I'm going to need him on Friday.

OWENS

You'll have him.

Coach Belnap looks behind him. FULLER, the backup fullback who hurt his shoulder, is dressed in street clothes, arm in a sling. Vogel's standing in the sub pool, arms folded. Larry turns back to Owens.

LARRY BELNAP

Yeah, how's that?

OWENS
I'll give him back, but we may need
him to play both ways a bit.

Owens looks over at him.

OWENS (cont'd)
You okay with that?

Larry nods slowly.

Something catches Owens eye. One of his players, a tall, gangly kid holding a football in his hands, is standing like a statue, off to the side. The kid's back's to practice - he's staring at Hannah and Brianna in the near distance.

Hannah looks up. The kid smiles at her.

OWENS (cont'd)
Peterson!

The gangly kid turns, startled.

OWENS (cont'd)
What are you doing?!

PETERSON
Uhh, nothing, Coach!

Players are setting up for another play, but they stop to watch.

OWENS
What year are you, Peterson?!

PETERSON
I'm a sophomore, Coach!

OWENS
Then why are you on my roster?!

PETERSON
Uhh, I'm the punter coach!

OWENS
And since the first day of camp,
through all these practices, and
through two games, have we set up the
punt formation one time?!

Peterson's frozen, a stupid look on his face.

Anderson raises a hand to cover a laugh.

PETERSON

No, Coach.

OWENS

Because this team does not punt, does it?

PETERSON

No, Coach.

OWENS

Therefore, we don't need a punter, do we?!

Players are smiling, laughing, enjoying the show.

PETERSON

I can play safety too, Coach!

Owens stares at him.

OWENS

You don't say?
 (turning back to the
 players)
 Blackburn, out! Peterson, in!

Peterson stuffs his mouthpiece in and lopes onto the field.

Hannah watches him go, a little unsure.

Owens steps towards Astel, calling the play so the defense can't hear...

OWENS (cont'd)

Gold 7, on two.

The defense sets up, as the offense comes to the line.

LARRY BELNAP

Step up, Peterson! Your fifteen yards off the line of scrimmage, for God's sake! You think they're gonna throw all the sudden?!

Peterson steps up. He's chopping his feet, hands out, chomping on his mouthpiece like a madman.

Astel runs the play - a quick dive to Belnap. The Mike bites on Droghei, thinking they're running Power Left for the hundredth time of the day.

Belnap's through the line before the defense can hardly react - Peterson's the only man left...

Peterson squares up, high and flatfooted. Belnap lowers his pads... CRACK!

Peterson wraps, and for a split moment he looks like a giant crab, riding the front of Belnap. But Belnap's momentum is unfazed, his tree-trunk legs churning, as Peterson slides off. Belnap runs right over him and keeps going.

Hannah covers her eyes. Players fight back giggles.

Owens nods at Brycen Blackburn, and Blackburn trots back out, offers a hand to Peterson.

Peterson bounces up, shakes the cobwebs out, and grins.

Players break out laughing. Owens shakes his head.

INT./EXT. MONTAGE - DAY/NIGHT

The Knights are on a mid-season roll...

--Weathers pulling, exploding through the hole - fierce, fast, deadly

--Speirs cutting into the open, nothing but green

--cheerleaders flipping

--Droghei bouncing off a tackler, breaking away

--Droghei and Speirs walking the halls of school in their letter jackets - high fives and backslaps

--Blackburn breaking on an out, intercepting, taking it to the house

--Blackburn boys, in jerseys, going crazy

--Belnap sacking opposing quarterback

--Belnap dragging tacklers into the endzone

--Vogels, arms folded, standing on sideline, despondent look, as rest of bench erupts in celebration

--Owens on the sidelines with a grin - Anderson pumping fist beside him

--Leanora and the girls, cheering in the stands

--Belnap on bench, sweaty, exhausted, gasping, getting hand taped

--drive-by shots of store windows with "GO KNIGHTS", "BELIEVE!" signs

--Weathers eating breakfast, alone in the kitchen, flips paper open: "KNIGHTS KEEP ROLLING!"

INT. ASTEL'S BASEMENT - NIGHT

Astel and Weathers are lounging in the basement rec room, flipping channels. Astel's on a couch, soda in hand, feet kicked up on a table. Weathers is in full lazy-boy mode, tearing through a family-size bag of chips.

WEATHERS

I don't know what your problem is.

ASTEL

I just feel like I'm wasting my senior year. You know how many pass attempts I've had this season?

WEATHERS

Yeah, but I mean, we're winning - winning big.

ASTEL

Take a guess.

Weathers' freezes - he pulls an empty hand out of the chip bag and gives Astel a roll of the eyes.

ASTEL (cont'd)

Twelve... Twelve pass attempts... In five games.

Weathers laughs, his hand's back in the bag.

WEATHERS

Damn! Really? Twelve? That's over two a game!

It's Astel's turn to roll his eyes.

WEATHERS (cont'd)

I mean, how many times a game do you want to throw? Three? Four?

ASTEL
 You're an offensive guard, and you're
 a bigger star than I am.

WEATHERS
 (points a chip at
 Astel)
 Yeah but I pull, baby. I plow the
 field.

Astel's shaking his head - it's useless.

WEATHERS (cont'd)
 Besides, since the dawn of man, the
 quarterback's gotten all the love.
 It's about time the big men got a
 little recognition.

Weathers flashes his smile, but Astel's not buying it - he
 turns back to the television. Weathers drops the chips
 beside the chair, wipes the crumbs off his hands.

WEATHERS (cont'd)
 Look. We're winning. That's all that
 matters. We all gotta make
 sacrifices.

Astel's still not looking at him.

WEATHERS (cont'd)
 My mom moved to Washington.

ASTEL
 What?

WEATHERS
 They're cutting back at the Site.
 They offered her a job up in Pasco.
 She had to take it.

Astel's dumbfounded.

ASTEL
 She moved?

WEATHERS
 Yep.

ASTEL
 Wait, where are you living?

WEATHERS

At home - we're keeping the house for now. She's coming back on the weekends when she can.

Astel's still trying absorb this...

ASTEL

So you're living by yourself?

WEATHERS

I'm eighteen years old! The point is, I knew we could have something special this season, and we do... It's my senior year, too, you know.

Astel processes for a moment...

ASTEL

How far away is Pasco?

WEATHERS

Six hundred miles.

EXT. THUNDER STADIUM - NIGHT

SUPERIMPOSE:

OCTOBER 10, 2008
HILLCREST VS. BONNEVILLE
CIVIL WAR

The parking lot's full. Tailgaters line the aisles - a sea of red/black and green/yellow attire and face-paint.

RADIO BILL (O.S.)

... Well, it really doesn't get any bigger than this! The Hillcrest-Bonneville Civil War!

Signs are everywhere: green and yellow "BEE-STING!", "KILLER BEES", "GO BONNEVILLE!" for the Bonneville Bees; red and black "KNIGHTMARE!", "KNIGHT TIME!", "BELIEVE!" for Hillcrest.

RADIO DAN (O.S.)

Oh, yeah! The annual paint-the-posts game! The winner gets to paint the goalposts their team's colors, and the loser has to stare at those colors every home game, for an entire year!

Students from both schools carry cans of spray paint - "PAINT THE POSTS!" signs in both teams colors are everywhere.

RADIO BILL (O.S.)

That's right! And Hillcrest's been staring at green goalposts for five years running now--

RADIO DAN (O.S.)

But this game's not just about goalposts, Bill! With a win tonight, Hillcrest will secure a spot in the playoffs for the first time in ten years!

EXT. THUNDER STADIUM - LATER

Vicious, brutal action - both teams fighting for their lives every play...

SERIES OF SHOTS:

--closeup action of linemen, battling in the trenches

--Speirs getting held up in traffic, pushed back in a pile, pancaked

--Blackburn lighting up Bonneville receiver over the middle

--Belnap, wild-eyed, chasing down and edge run and making a diving tackle

--Bonneville player getting half-carried off the field, one leg held up off the ground, head hung

--Droghei clawing his way into endzone

--Bonneville receiver catching short touchdown

--Players from both sides panting, hands on hips

--Belnap puking into a trash can on the sideline

EXT. THUNDER STADIUM - LATER

The SCOREBOARD comes into view: HILLCREST 21, BONNEVILLE 17, 4th quarter, 1:47 on the clock.

Hillcrest runs the quick dive to Belnap. He plows through the center of the line, stiff-arms one tackler, is met by another - he's battling, spinning, trying to pull out of the tackler's grasp, before he's swept under by a wave of Bees.

Belnap's on his back, clutching his hamstring.

A TRAINER takes the field. Owens pauses, then steps out.

When he reaches Belnap, the trainer's rubbing the back of Belnap's upper leg. She's bending and extending the leg.

BELNAP
I'm sorry, Coach.

TRAINER
He's just cramping up.

Belnap's chest is heaving. Owens looks down at him.

BELNAP
I'm sorry, Coach.

The trainer gets Belnap to his feet. His head's hung low, one arm draped over the trainer's shoulder. As he hobbles to the sideline, the stands erupt in applause.

Owens is walking off, too. His lips pursed, eyes narrow, he reaches the sideline...

OWENS
Vogel!

Vogel's standing flat-footed, dumbstruck. His uniform looks like it just came off the clothesline.

OWENS (cont'd)
Let's go!

Vogel grabs his helmet, straps up as he jogs out onto the field.

Astel huddles the Knights up.

ASTEL
Power 45, Pull and Seal, on two!

Astel takes the snap, spins left to pitch to Droghei. But Vogel goes the wrong way and cuts in front of the pitch. The ball's on the ground, a mad scramble for it, a pile...

The official's pulling players off, trying to get to the bottom... comes up signaling Bonneville recovered...

RADIO BILL (O.S.)
 ... Bonneville ball! A broken play -
 a fumbled exchange - and now it looks
 like Bonneville's going to get one
 last chance to win this thing...

The offense is trotting off the field. Vogel tries to steer clear of Owens, but Owens walks him down.

OWENS
 Power 45! 45! What were you doing?!

Vogel, head hung, walks right by Owens. Owens lets him go.

The defense is on the field now - exhausted, backpedaling, as Bonneville drives...

SERIES OF SHOTS:

--a short out completion

--a jet sweep for decent yardage

--Belnap's laying on the sideline, craning to see what's going on on the field, as the trainer tries to stretch him out

--an inside slant completion

--quarterback keeps it on the option, picks up big chunk

END OF SERIES

Owens calls a timeout - calls his defense over, meeting them at the hashes.

The stands are going crazy - an electric atmosphere. Owens scans the eleven faces staring back at him: wild-eyed, cornered animals...

OWENS (cont'd)
 Listen to me! You gotta make a stand,
 here! The offense has been getting it
 done all season! But now it's your
 turn! You gotta pick them up! Right
 now! Make a stand! Bring us home!

The SCOREBOARD: 00:21 on the clock...

Bonneville comes to the line. The quarterback reads the defense, as the Knights shift.

Bonneville's quarterback takes the snap, a three-step drop, then begins rolling to his right.

Blackburn reads the far inside receiver breaking up-field on a wheel route... The quarterback releases...

Blackburn breaks on the pass, snatches it, and takes off...

The stands erupt, as Blackburn flies untouched down the sideline.

EXT. THUNDER STADIUM - LATER

The field's covered up with Hillcrest fans. Leanora and the girls find Owens and hit him with hugs and kisses.

LEANORA

This is crazy!

OWENS

I know! I know!

Kids, including some padless Knight players, are scaling the goalposts. Sprayed paint floats through the air - wild streaks of red hitting green, covering it up.

Matt Morgan runs into the Owens, lands a huge slap on Owens' back, as they watch...

Astel's standing on a crossbar. Travis Morgan tosses a can up to him. Droghei's wrapped around an upright, a spray paint can clutched in one hand - he's trying to shimmy higher...

OWENS (cont'd)

(to Morgan)

Is this is safe?! I mean, should we stop it?!

Morgan's got a huge grin on his face.

MATT MORGAN

No way! Not this year!

EXT. THUNDER STADIUM - LATER

The stadium lights are still on, but the parking lot's nearly empty. We hear laughter, car doors slamming. We see the last of the cars driving out of the lot.

One car, a beater sedan, remains at the far end of the lot.

INT. VOGEL'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Vogel sits low in the driver's seat. He's alone, bitter. The lights of the stadium go black in stages.

INT. COACH'S OFFICE - DAY

Owens is sitting at his desk, rifling through papers. Principal Miller appears in Owens' doorway.

OWENS

What, we start winning, and now you
have to come to me?

Miller laughs, takes a seat.

PRINCIPAL MILLER

I'm afraid we have a problem.

Owens looks up.

PRINCIPAL MILLER (cont'd)

Seems one of our players got a little
carried away with the celebration
Friday night.

OWENS

Who?

PRINCIPAL MILLER

Frankie Vogel... You know how both
schools have monument signs at the
stadium?... Well, Bonneville's is red
now.

Owens leans back in his chair now, sighs.

OWENS

So what happens?

PRINCIPAL MILLER

I don't know if he's going to be
charged yet, but he's definitely
suspended.

OWENS

That kid's a mess. What do his folks
say?

Miller scoffs.

PRINCIPAL MILLER

There's not much there... Anyway, I just wanted to let you know. He'll be out all week, and you won't have him against Wood River.

OWENS

I think we can manage.

Miller takes this in. He's watching Owens, who's already looking at the papers on his desk again.

EXT. PRACTICE FIELD - DAY

OWENS

Power hour! Let's go!

They're running power from the three yard line again - crisp, efficient, unstoppable.

Owens BLOWS his whistle.

OWENS (cont'd)

Give me two more on D, Coach!

LARRY BELNAP

What?

OWENS

Let's make it tougher! Richards, Morgan! Go in at linebacker!

RICHARDS and Travis Morgan trot out onto the field. They line up with the other linebackers - a moment of confusion as they all jostle for position.

Astel runs power right. The extra bodies on defense make little difference, as Speirs pops through a sliver of a hole and crosses the goal line.

OWENS (cont'd)

Smitty! Welsh! Get in there! Outside the ends.

Larry Belnap stares out at his defense - now fifteen players strong.

Astel runs power left - close-quarters combat, bodies flying, falling, trampled. What looked crisp a few moments ago, now looks like a mad riot - a hand-to-hand fight for survival...

When the dust settles, Droghei is lying on his stomach, cradling the ball just over the goal line.

Owens smacks his hands together.

OWENS (cont'd)

That's it!

EXT. PRACTICE FIELD - CONTINUOUS

A lone figure watches practice from behind a high, chain-link fence in the distance. It's Vogel, a blank look on his face, hands hanging in the fence wire.

EXT. VOGEL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Vogel's sitting alone on a dilapidated front porch. It's dark, save for a few streetlights and the cigarette he pulls on. He's staring out into the distance - we can see the lights of Thunder Stadium a few blocks away.

Raucous, drunken laughter spills out of the house. The screen door opens, and a middle-aged woman, VOGEL'S AUNT, practically falls out. A tatted-up SLEAZEBALL follows close behind her. Vogel's Aunt notices Vogel.

VOGEL'S AUNT

Hey, baby!

Vogel looks away.

VOGEL'S AUNT (cont'd)

What you doin'? Why you sittin' out here in the dark?

The sleazeball laughs, wipes at his nose. Vogel turns and eyeballs him. The sleazeball's smile fades to a hard look in an instant.

SLEAZEBALL

You got a problem, boy?

Vogel's Aunt grabs the sleazeball by the arm, pulls him to the porch steps.

VOGEL'S AUNT

Ahh, let him be. Let's go.

Vogel turns away as his aunt and the sleazeball stumble down the steps. We hear the faint CHEERS of the stadium crowd in the distance...

EXT. THUNDER STADIUM - NIGHT

SUPERIMPOSE:

OCTOBER 17, 2008
HILLCREST vs. WOOD RIVER
AMMON, IDAHO

SERIES OF SHOTS:

--Droghei breaking into the open
--Weathers steamrolling downfield
--Speirs chugging down the sideline
--Hillcrest fans cheering
--Belnap on his hands and knees after a tackle - slow to get up, limping
--Blackburn blocking a Wood River Punt
--Astel diving for the pylon
--Owens pumping his fist
--SCOREBOARD final: HILLCREST 54, WOOD RIVER 7

END OF SERIES

INT. LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

Owens is addressing the players...

OWENS

I liked what I saw out there tonight,
boys! I saw a machine! Great
execution! Very few mistakes!

Players are smiling, laughing. Owens holds his hands up,
gets serious.

OWENS (cont'd)

But we got a tough one next week...
(looking into their
faces for effect)
Blackfoot... Defending state
champions. And we gotta go to their
house... It's gonna take everything
we got...

A few murmurs. Owens waits for silence...

OWENS (cont'd)
Have we prepared to win?...

The murmurs become answers: "Yes, Coach."

OWENS (cont'd)
Do we expect to win?...

The answers become emphatic statements: "Yes, Coach!"

OWENS (cont'd)
Do we believe?...

The locker room erupts - wild faces, yelling. A cheer breaks out: "Believe!" "Believe!" "Believe!"

INT. COACH'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Owens is at his desk, when Larry Belnap opens the door. A few players are still storing gear, milling around the locker room outside. Larry shuts the door behind him.

OWENS
Coach.

Larry steps up to the desk. Owens stops what he's doing and looks up.

OWENS (cont'd)
How's Jake?

Larry takes a seat.

LARRY BELNAP
How's Jake? He's banged all to hell.

Owens laughs.

OWENS
I have no doubt.

LARRY BELNAP
You can't keep running him like this.

Owens' smile fades.

OWENS
What's he got? I saw him holding his shoulder...

LARRY BELNAP

His shoulder. His hip. His ribs. His ankle. We got him playing almost every snap, both sides of the ball, every game.

Owens meets eyes with Larry. Larry's not the kind of man you stare down.

OWENS

C'mon Larry. It's football.

LARRY BELNAP

Jake's gonna do whatever you ask him to. You know that. You say "gimme what you got," he's gonna give you what he's got. But he's got a future too. You know he's gonna be playing on Saturdays next year... Now, we all want the same thing. We all want to keep this thing going. But you have to find another answer. You want him to go both ways, I'm okay with that. But you can't keep running him like a sled dog.

Owens' nods slowly.

INT. PRINCIPAL MILLER'S OFFICE - DAY

Owens swings the door open, walks straight up to Miller's desk.

OWENS

I need you to give Haskins a call, over at Skyline.

Miller's shuffling papers, doesn't look up.

PRINCIPAL MILLER

Hello, Coach.

Owens stands in front of the desk, leans down on it.

Miller keeps reading, organizing, putting papers into their correct folders. When he's done, he looks up.

OWENS

Can you give Coach Haskins a call?

PRINCIPAL MILLER

What's the problem?

OWENS

I need the Blackfoot film, but he's not returning my calls.

Miller leans back, sighs.

OWENS (cont'd)

I thought we had an arrangement. Hillcrest, Skyline, Bonneville, Idaho Falls - we share film on all common opponents outside of the four schools.

Miller stares at him.

PRINCIPAL MILLER

Have you tried Bonneville and Idaho Falls?

OWENS

Yeah! I'm getting the same runaround!

Miller holds his hands up.

OWENS (cont'd)

C'mon Scott. They run this spread-option variation. We haven't seen anything like it all year. I need that film.

PRINCIPAL MILLER

So now you're a fan of our relationships and traditions?

Owens stands up straight - he looks like a teenager who's just had the car keys taken away.

OWENS

Really?

Miller shakes his head.

PRINCIPAL MILLER

Look, I can't just snap my fingers and fix this. I can't make them give up the film - it's not like we have a contract...

INT. OWENS' HOUSE - NIGHT

Owens walks through the front door.

OWENS

Hello! I'm home!

He heads down the hall... The living room's dark, save the light of the television. Hannah and Brianna are curled up on a couch, watching. They don't look up.

Still no response from the girls - they're riveted. Owens raises his hands up, tries again.

OWENS (cont'd)

Hello?

Hannah manages a brief glance back, as Owens steps closer.

OWENS (cont'd)

Where's mom?

Hannah points a finger to the deck door.

Owens walks over, peers through the glass. The sun's set - there's just a hint of light still smeared across the sky.

Owens reaches over and flips the outside light on, sees Leanora sitting in a chair, wrapped in a blanket, her back to the house.

EXT. OWENS' DECK - CONTINUOUS

Owens steps out onto the deck.

OWENS

Hey.

LEANORA

Hey, yourself.

OWENS

Damn it gets cold up here early...
When that sun goes down...

Owens plops down in the chair beside her. Leanora is silent.

OWENS (cont'd)

You just out here meditating in the dark?

Leanora lets slip a tired laugh, but doesn't answer. She's still staring out into the dark fields behind their house.

Owens leans forward, as if to get in front of her gaze.

OWENS (cont'd)

Hello?

LEANORA

We're losing it.

OWENS

What?

LEANORA

The ranch. The bank's going to force us to short-sale.

Owens takes a breath.

OWENS

But we've been making payments--

LEANORA

Partial payments. Late payments. It's not enough. We're over four month's behind, and we're not living in the home...

Owens slumps back in his seat, closes his eyes with a moan.

INT. RESTAURANT BAR - NIGHT

Owens passes through the two-tops in the bar area. It's a generic, suburban, chain-restaurant - half-empty and quiet on a weeknight. Owens takes a seat at the end of the bar, away from the couple and the lone man at the other end.

BARTENDER

What can I get you?

OWENS

Coors Light.

The bartender grabs a bottle, opens it, puts it on a coaster in front of Owens, and walks away.

Owens takes a pull, looks up at the third-tier college game on the television.

Roger Gleason, the lone man at the other end of the bar, notices him. Gleason gives it a second, scoops up his drink and walks over. Owens does a double-take, as Gleason sits down beside him.

ROGER GLEASON

How you doing, Coach?

OWENS

Not bad, Roger. Yourself?

ROGER GLEASON

Oh, pretty good. Staying busy.

Owens strokes his mustache, turns back up to the game.

ROGER GLEASON (cont'd)

You really got that offense clicking, don't you?

Owens glances at him - this could go in one of two directions...

OWENS

Hey, I'm sorry for the way things ended. I shoulda--

Gleason raises a hand, shakes his head.

ROGER GLEASON

Nah - life's too short. I learned a long time ago that when you reach an impasse, sometimes it's best just to be on your way... You got Blackfoot on Friday - gonna be a tough one. They're gonna be dialed in on the double-wing for sure.

Owens nods.

OWENS

I'm less worried about them dialing in on us, than us stopping the spread-option.

ROGER GLEASON

Oh, no doubt. That quarterback's got wheels - he'll carve you up.

Owens looks at him.

OWENS

I don't have film.

ROGER GLEASON

What?

OWENS

I can't get any film on them.

Gleason takes this in.

ROGER GLEASON
Skyline just played them couple of
weeks ago...

Owens take another pull from his beer, looks back up at the
game on the television.

OWENS
They don't want to give it to me.

Gleason hesitates...

ROGER GLEASON
Well, I can get it.

Owens looks at him.

ROGER GLEASON (cont'd)
I'm serious. Give me a day, and I'll
get you the film - I'll even break it
down with you.

Owens stares into his eyes, reading...

OWENS
Nah. That's alright.

ROGER GLEASON
What? C'mon.

OWENS
No, really. We'll manage.

Owens turns back up to the game. Gleason stares at the side
of his head for a long moment.

ROGER GLEASON
You really are something, aren't
you?... You're getting ready to play
the defending state champions, and
you don't have film to prepare. I
tell you I can get it for you, and
you're too stubborn to take it...

Owens steals a glance. Gleason waits for him to respond - to
give in - but Owens just looks away again. Gleason stands up
slowly, shakes his head, reaches for his wallet...

ROGER GLEASON (cont'd)
The man with all the answers. Three
teams in the last seven years - no
wonder.

OWENS

What?

ROGER GLEASON

Yeah, I know your story. Burned one bridge too many, huh? Got yourself a one-season sentence in Backwater, U.S.A... We were never anything but a stepping stone to some place better, right?

Owens is staring up at him now - Gleason stares right back.

ROGER GLEASON (cont'd)

You know, I've been a part of this community for thirty years. The only reason I stopped coaching was because I lost my wife...

Gleason drops a bill on the bar for his tab.

ROGER GLEASON (cont'd)

You? You're just a hired gun. An outsider... That's all you are, and that's all you'll ever be.

Gleason walks away, leaving Owens alone with his beer.

INT./EXT. MONTAGE - DAY/NIGHT

Pre-game montage, as we hear radio coverage...

--Hillcrest bus rumbles down a two-lane highway, surrounded by farmland, as the sun sets...

RADIO BILL (O.S.)

...Hey, it's Z103's East Idaho Game Night, folks. The last Friday of the regular season, and we have got a real doozy on our hands--

--Knights on the bus - quiet, serious, focused...

RADIO DAN (O.S.)

Yeah, it's no surprise that Blackfoot, the defending state champions, has only one loss on their record, but who would have guessed the Hillcrest Knights would be in the exact same position...

--Knights disembarking at the stadium - Blackfoot fans chanting wildly...

RADIO BILL (O.S.)

Well, the secret's out on Hillcrest's double-wing - they have just been steamrolling opponents since that week one loss to Madison. But Blackfoot? Winners of four state championships over the years?... You can bet they aren't the slightest bit intimidated...

--the rearing-Bronco statue - ten feet tall, flanked by massive travertine slabs - outside Blackfoot's Bronco stadium

INT. LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

The Knights' locker room is quiet, serious: Belnap on the trainer's table, getting his ankle taped; Weathers praying to himself; Astel walking around, gently slapping a few pads; Vogel sitting by himself, a distant look on his face.

Owens looks at his watch. Anderson's standing across from him, arms folded, stonefaced. Owens looks up, makes eye contact with Anderson, and nods.

ANDERSON

Alright, boys. Let's go...

EXT. BRONCO STADIUM - NIGHT

Bronco stadium is packed - a rowdy sea of Blackfoot's green and black. A girl on horseback's racing back and forth in front of the home team stands - she's holding a state championship banner.

SUPERIMPOSE:

OCTOBER 24, 2008
HILLCREST VS. BLACKFOOT

Players from both teams are wrapping up their on-field warm-ups, making their way the sidelines before the coin toss, when the head REFEREE waves at Owens and motions for him.

Owens meets the referee on the hashes.

REFEREE

I don't want to see your tight ends blocking below the waist tonight, Coach. Understood?

OWENS

What?

REFEREE

I've seen your film - it's not going to fly here.

OWENS

But we don't have splits! Our tight ends are linemen!

REFEREE

I don't give a damn what you call them. I want them blocking up inside the pads.

OWENS

But--

The referee cuts Owens off with a quick BLOW of the whistle. He turns away...

REFEREE

Let's go!

Owens looks around, stunned.

EXT. BRONCO STADIUM - LATER

The ball floats out of the night sky. Blackfoot's return man fields it, makes one cut, and explodes through a seam. He cuts to the outside, and is off to the races.

Blackburn's got a nice angle on him, but just as he's about to chase him out of bounds, he's hit from behind by a Bronco blocker - it's as blatant as can be.

Blackburn slides face first on the turf as the Blackfoot returner bolts up the sideline.

Owens is looking for a flag, but there is none. He sprints down the sideline, screaming at an official.

OWENS

What was that?! How can you miss that?!

Owens is left open-mouthed, holding his hands up.

RADIO BILL (O.S.)
 ...Wow! Blackfoot takes the opening
 kick back for a score, and just like
 that, the Broncos have taken an early
 lead--

RADIO DAN (O.S.)
 Yeah, that is a dagger for Hillcrest!
 Fourteen seconds off the clock, and
 the Knights are already in a hole...

EXT. BRONCO STADIUM - LATER

Owens watches Hillcrest return the ensuing kickoff to their
 own thirty. Astel is waiting beside him.

OWENS
 Power 28, Tunnel, on one. Shove it
 down their throats!

The offense takes the field.

Hillcrest runs their first play from scrimmage. Droghei
 picks up four, but the referee tosses a flag.

The referee looks directly at Owens...

REFEREE
 Illegal block, 15 yard penalty.

Owens explodes...

OWENS
 Are you kidding me?! He's inside the
 zone! We just went over this!

RADIO BILL (O.S.)
 ...That's gonna push Hillcrest
 back...

An official starts stepping off the penalty yardage...

Owens is five yards out on the field, trying to get the
 referee's attention.

OWENS
 Hey! Hey!

Now he's ten yards out. Then fifteen. The referee abruptly
 turns and tosses another flag straight up in the air.

RADIO BILL (O.S.)
 ... Oh my! We've got another flag...
 I think he's calling that on Coach
 Owens...

REFEREE
 Unsportsmanlike conduct, Hillcrest.
 Fifteen-yard penalty.

The official who stepped off the first penalty is holding the ball - looking at the referee.

The referee turns back and nods to the official. The official starts walking off another fifteen.

RADIO DAN (O.S.)
 Wow! Look at this! I guess the
 penalty on Owens was a dead-ball
 foul -- they're gonna hit 'em with
 both...

Owens is still standing on the field - he looks like someone just shot his dog. The referee takes a few steps towards him.

REFEREE
 You step out on this field again,
 Coach, you're outta the game.

EXT. BRONCO STADIUM - LATER

It's a back and forth battle - as nasty as it gets - hard hits, brutal combat, and more than a few cheap shots from Blackfoot...

SERIES OF SHOTS:

--Speirs being pulled down by his facemask - no flag

--two Blackfoot players jawing in Weathers' face after a play

--Belnap battling in traffic, fighting into the endzone

--Blackfoot's quarterback running the option, faking, slicing upfield, then streaking down the sideline for a score

--Droghei being hit out of bounds, flipping over the bench - no flag

--Owens shaking his head

--Astel scoring, then being leveled a full second after touchdown signal - no flag

--Anderson and Coach Belnap going crazy on the sideline

--Blackfoot's tight end getting lit up by Blackburn in the end zone - but he holds on for the score

--Belnap coming off the field, wasted - Vogel subbing in for him

--Blackfoot linebacker, shoving Weathers from behind after a play

--Vogel running the dive, both hands on the ball, fighting for short yardage

--Droghei stiff-arming tackler, breaking away for a touchdown

EXT. BRONCO STADIUM - LATER

The SCOREBOARD comes into view: HILLCREST 28, BLACKFOOT 27, 4th quarter, 00:24 on the clock - Hillcrest has the ball, 3rd and 1, on their own 32.

RADIO BILL (O.S.)

... Blackfoot's gonna use another timeout... This place is going absolutely crazy... but if Hillcrest can pick up the first down here they can kneel this thing out.

Hillcrest comes to the line. Both sides dig in for battle. Blackfoot's linebackers step in close, practically on top of their defensive linemen.

Astel takes the snap, pushes forward into the line, head down, churning his feet. He falls forward into the pile...

RADIO DAN (O.S.)

... He got it! He got it!

The referee signals a first down.

The Blackfoot crowd releases a collective MOAN and more than a few BOOS. Blackfoot defenders are dejected, pissed.

RADIO BILL (O.S.)

Yes he did, and that's gonna do it.
Blackfoot's gonna use their final
timeout, but Hillcrest can run the
clock out from here...

Owens raises his arms over his head, clapping the heels of his hand in a "V" to signal the Victory formation.

Astel brings the offense to the line.

As Blackfoot defenders wearily line up opposite, the same linebacker that's been jawing with Weathers all game takes a legit stance - his eyes narrowing on Weathers.

Astel takes the snap and immediately kneels.

As both teams' linemen reach out for each other, engaging gently, the Blackfoot linebacker fires out of his stance, makes a beeline for Weathers, and throws a hand shiver up high under Weathers' chin.

Weathers is thrown back, but doesn't go down. He lifts his arm, a "what-the-hell" look. But the linebacker keeps coming, jawing in Weathers' face.

Flags fly, as whistles BLOW. The linebacker keeps running his mouth, clashing his face mask into Weathers'.

From out of nowhere, Vogel takes three quick steps, accelerates, and launches himself into the side of the linebacker - it's the kind of clock-cleaning hit that would draw a flag and a serious fine in the NFL - up high, with bad intentions.

The linebacker flies off his feet, landing hard on his side. Vogel's over him in an instant, pointing down, jawing. Blackfoot players react, encircling Vogel - Hillcrest players do the same.

As the linebacker gets to his feet, another Blackfoot player yanks Vogel back by the collar of his pads. Vogel turns and swings. Chaos ensues...

Officials are blowing WHISTLES, trying to separate players. Coaches rush the field to try to stop a full-scale riot from breaking out.

Most players just have their hands on each other, controlling each other, but Vogel is full-on throwing hands with several Blackfoot players. For a moment, it looks like a gang-initiation beating, but Vogel's holding his own.

Coaches and officials wade in, separating players. Coach Belnap grabs Vogel and yanks him back.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

The Knights have won, but the mood in the locker room is somber. Exhausted players sit on the benches and floor, heads down, silent, waiting for Owens, who's standing in the middle of them, to speak.

Owens pulls off his cap, rubs his head, resets it...

OWENS

Congratulations, boys.
 Congratulations on pulling off a
 tough win. Congratulations on running
 off seven straight. Congratulations
 on beating the defending state
 champions, in their own house...

A few players look up, but they know better - this is no celebratory speech.

OWENS (cont'd)

And congratulations on embarrassing
 this program that you've worked so
 hard to build...

Vogel looks up, meets Owens' gaze, then drops his head again.

OWENS (cont'd)

The first time I met you - the first
 time I addressed this team - I stood
 in that gym and told you what it was
 gonna take... I told you it was gonna
 take commitment. I told you it was
 gonna take hard work. And I told you
 it was gonna take discipline... What
 I just saw out there was anything but
 discipline...

Vogel lets a sneer escape.

OWENS (cont'd)

You got something to say?

Players look up, look around, see Owens eyeing Vogel. Vogel looks up again.

OWENS (cont'd)
Do you have something you'd like to say?

VOGEL
I was protecting my teammate.

OWENS
Oh, protecting your teammate. I get it... Stand up Weathers.

Weathers slowly rises to his feet.

OWENS (cont'd)
Does he look like he needs protecting?... That was stupid! That could have cost us! That thing escalates, and next thing you know we're heading into the playoffs with half our freaking team suspended!

Weathers sits back down. Vogel looks away, but as Owens turns back to address the whole team again...

VOGEL
They come at one of us, they come at all of us.

OWENS
What? What'd you say?

VOGEL
I said, they come at one of us, they come at all of us.

Owens stares him down, shaking his head.

VOGEL (cont'd)
They were coming at him all day - at all of us. I did something... What'd you do?

This stops Owens in his tracks - he's frozen in disbelief.

Anderson coughs. The other coaches lower their heads, brace for impact.

OWENS
Get out of here.

VOGEL
What?

OWENS

I said, get out of here. Get dressed,
leave your gear, and get out of here.
You're no longer a part of this team.

Shock washes over Vogel's face.

Players glance at each other. Anderson stares at Owens,
unsure.

Owens' eyes are burning a hole right through Vogel. Vogel
rises slowly, starts unbuckling his pads...

INT. COACH'S OFFICE - DAY

Owens is watching film, taking notes, when his phone rings.
he answers, but his eyes and mind are still on the film.

OWENS

Hello?

Owens shifts in his seat, puts his pen down, as he listens -
the caller's got his attention fast.

OWENS (cont'd)

Good. Real good. How are things your
way?

Owens is listening intently...

OWENS (cont'd)

Well, yeah, thanks... Thanks. They've
really responded, you know. A few
bumps getting airborne, but we're
firing on all cylinders now.

More listening. Owens is nodding.

OWENS (cont'd)

Absolutely... Uh-huh... Uh-huh...
Yeah. That sounds great, John...
Okay, I'll look to hear from you
then... Okay, bye.

Owens hangs up, sits back in his seat.

EXT. PRACTICE FIELD - DAY

The Knight players are gathering in their stretch lines.
Coaches Belnap, Worster, and Simmons are standing together
talking. Owens walks up, practice plan in hand...

OWENS

I think we're gonna stray from our routine a bit today. These guys run mostly pro-set, but they'll spread it out too - kind of a modified run and shoot...

Owens keeps talking, looking at his plan. The coaches are standing silent, arms folded, heads down...

OWENS (cont'd)

...We're gonna have mismatches all day long...

Owens looks up - the coaches are listening, but they're distant... He pauses before continuing...

OWENS (cont'd)

(to Worster)

I'm thinking we get through stretches and agilities, and then move straight into some DB drills - back to fundamentals stuff - cone work, breaks, hip drills...

WORSTER

Sure, Coach.

Owens pauses for a moment, waiting for any other input, but the coaches are silent. Owens walks towards the players, gives a quick whistle BLOW.

OWENS

Let's go. Line 'em up.

The players tighten their lines. Astel stands at the front, begins leading them in their stretch routine. Owens is walking up and down the lines, addressing his troops.

OWENS (cont'd)

We've got Century this Friday. It's playoff time, baby! A whole new season. Starting right now, we are zero-and-zero...

The players come out of their hamstring stretch, drop into a crouched groin stretch. Owens looks around. No one's speaking, no one's looking at him.

OWENS (cont'd)

We're climbing without a rope from this point on! One slip, and it's all over!

The players rise, begin their quad stretches. The silence is deafening...

OWENS (cont'd)
 I'm not feelin' it boys! What's the
 problem? Somebody's heart get
 broken?...
 (eyeing Anderson)
 You feelin' it, Coach?

Anderson's standing off to the side, arms folded, eyes hidden behind sunglasses.

ANDERSON
 Little light on the pep today, Coach.

OWENS
 I'll say.
 (eyeing Weathers)
 What about you, Weathers? You feelin'
 it?

Weathers is looking straight ahead, one leg pulled back to his butt.

WEATHERS
 Yes, sir, Coach.

Owens surveys his players for a moment, nodding slowly, then slaps his hands together.

OWENS
 Alright, then. Let's go! Let's get
 after it!

INT. OWENS' HOUSE - NIGHT

Owens is leaned back on the living room couch, flipping through diagrammed plays, scribbling notes. His cell phone buzzes on the table in front of him. He picks it up, looks at the number.

OWENS
 Hello?

EXT. MATT MORGAN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Owens pulls into a driveway, takes in Matt Morgan's massive brick and stone McMansion. He steps out of his Jeep, strolls to the front door and rings...

Justin Weathers opens the door...

OWENS
Justin... What are you doing here?
You okay?

WEATHERS
Yeah, Coach. I'm good.

Owens is staring at him, waiting for more...

WEATHERS (cont'd)
My mom took a job up in Pasco last
month. I've been couch surfing some
during the week.

OWENS
Pasco?

WEATHERS
Yeah, it's up in Washington. She
comes back most weekends.

Owens is still looking at him, nodding, but utterly
confused.

Matt Morgan walks down the hall. Weathers steps away...

WEATHERS (cont'd)
Coach.

Matt Morgan waits for Weathers to leave, sticks out his
hand.

MATT MORGAN
Hey Darin. Sorry to drag you out.

OWENS
What's going on?

MATT MORGAN
Why don't you come in?

INT. MATT MORGAN'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Owens follows Matt Morgan down the hall...

INT. MATT MORGAN'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Matt leads Owens into his office. Owens looks around - it's rustic, but impressive - mahogany desk and built-in book cases. They settle into seats opposite each other.

OWENS

His mom moved? So, what, he's living with you, now?

MATT MORGAN

Not exactly. Technically he's still living in their house. It's just... he's still a kid, you know... The Astels, a few of the other families, we're all just looking out for him a bit.

Owens takes this in, nodding slowly - how did he not know this?

MATT MORGAN (cont'd)

Thing is, I didn't ask to see you tonight to talk about Justin... I've got another one of your boys here...

OWENS

What? Who?

MATT MORGAN

Vogel...

OWENS

What happened?

MATT MORGAN

He got into it with some guy who's been living with him and his aunt. I don't know, the guy was knocking her around, and Frankie jumped in. Busted the guy up pretty good, but took his fair share too.

OWENS

Did they arrest him?

MATT MORGAN

Frankie? No. Apparently they've had a half-dozen domestic disturbance calls there since... I don't know, it's a bad situation all around. Anyway, they arrested the boyfriend... But then the aunt kicked Frankie out.

OWENS

Jesus. There's always one. There's usually a lot more than one, actually.

It's Matt's turn to take things in. He sits, looking at Owens.

MATT MORGAN

Well, I don't know what you've dealt with in the past. I mean most of the kids here are too busy planning their mission trips to get into much trouble, but not all of them... Look, you were brought here to win. The kids needed that, the school needed that, the whole damn town needed that. And you've given us everything we asked for, and more. But there are some things winning can't cure...

Owens looks up.

MATT MORGAN (cont'd)

This kid? I know, to you, he's just a pain in the ass. But if you knew what kind of life he's had... He's got nothing. It doesn't matter if we win every game or lose every game, he needs this team... He doesn't have anything else... You understand what I'm saying?

EXT. OWENS' DECK - NIGHT

Owens is sitting in the dark. He takes a pull off a bottle of beer and sets it on the deck beside him - the bottle clinks against one of the empties already there, as...

Leanora, sleepy-eyed and dressed in a robe, walks up to the deck doors. She holds her hands up to block the inside light, as she squints out into the darkness. She slides the door open and steps out, pulling her robe tight around her.

LEANORA

Your turn to meditate?

Owens doesn't respond - just rubs his brow.

Leanora sits down beside him, tucks her arms in against the cold.

LEANORA (cont'd)
What's going on?

Owens sighs, let's the question hang for a moment.

OWENS
What are we doing here?

LEANORA
What?

OWENS
What are we doing here?

Leanora looks around into the darkness, shivers.

LEANORA
That's a really good question. What are we doing here?

OWENS
No, I mean here. I mean, how do you feel about this?... All of it. Moving here. The town. The girls. All of it.

Leanora sits up now, looks at the thousand-yard stare on Owens' face.

LEANORA
It's fine. I mean it's what we do. I'm fine, the girls are fine, it's all fine... What's happening?

OWENS
I was over at Matt Morgan's. Justin Weathers is living there - I mean kind of. His mom moved to Pasco, Washington.

LEANORA
What?

OWENS
Yep... But that's not all. Frankie Vogel was over there, too.

LEANORA
The kid you cut?

OWENS
Uh-huh... He got into a fight with his aunt's boyfriend... Then she kicked him out of the house.

LEANORA

Where are his parents?

OWENS

He hasn't seen them since he was four... Kicked around in foster homes most of his life - ended up with the aunt... You wouldn't believe the stories Matt told me - physical abuse, sexual abuse...

Owens drops the distant stare and looks at Leanora.

OWENS (cont'd)

Matt said when Vogel was six or seven, he was removed from one place after a neighbor called social services... They found him chained to a toilet.

LEANORA

Oh, my God.

They sit in silence for a moment. Owen's eyes drift away again.

LEANORA (cont'd)

So what happens to him now?

OWENS

I don't know. The Morgans are going to take him in - try to get him some help... From the sound of it, Matt had it pretty rough growing up himself.

More silence - him staring into the dark, her, huddling from the cold.

OWENS (cont'd)

I got a call from John Foster today... head coach position at Riverside King's opening back up next year.

LEANORA

Oh...

Owens shifts, shakes his head.

OWENS

I mean it's what we wanted, right? Get back to California?...

(MORE)

OWENS (cont'd)
Maybe the bank'll work with us if
they know we're coming home.

LEANORA
Maybe.

OWENS
God, I don't know. What a mess...
Feels like the whole machine's
breaking down, you know?

LEANORA
The machine?

OWENS
Vogel, Weathers... Just what we need,
heading into the playoffs.

Leanora lets out a light laugh.

LEANORA
You're talking about the team? You've
won seven straight...

She leans in to look at him...

LEANORA (cont'd)
But it's not a machine, honey.
They're kids. Kids with lives. Kids
with problems - beyond blocking
schemes, and knowing which hole to
run through... It's life...

Owens is still staring straight ahead, but he's paying
attention now.

LEANORA (cont'd)
When we met, you told me the best
thing about coaching high school
football was that you got to play a
role in guiding boys on their
journeys to becoming men.

Owens looks at her now...

LEANORA (cont'd)
You asked what we're doing here? I
know what we're doing here. We're
here for you. We're here with you...
You have to ask yourself why you're
here...

INT. LOCKER ROOM - DAY

Players, in street clothes, mill about, quiet, subdued, waiting. The coaches, minus Owens, glance at watches, steal looks at each other.

Owens' office door opens, and he walks to the center of the locker room.

OWENS

Bring it in here, boys. Take a seat...

Owens waits a moment for players to settle, eyes on him...

OWENS (cont'd)

We've got Century Friday night - first round of the playoffs. I know we've got a lot of work to do, but as I said in the announcement, there will be no practice today... We've got some other business to take care of...

Owens clear's his throat, scans the eyes of his players...

OWENS (cont'd)

Nine months ago, when I got on the phone with Principal Miller, and agreed to coach this football team, I was asked to do one thing - to turn this program around... I brought Coach Anderson with me, along with a new offense that none of you had ever seen before, and that sign right there...

Owens points to the "EXPECT TO WIN. PREPARE TO WIN. BELIEVE!" sign. Players glance back at it.

OWENS (cont'd)

I asked you to trust me. I asked you to give me every thing you had. I asked you to commit, fully, to one, common goal... And you did... You did it... Together, we have turned this thing around.

A few players are nodding, others, along with the coaches, are just staring, hanging on Owens' words, waiting to see where this thing is going. Owens takes a long pause, before continuing...

OWENS (cont'd)

But I ran into a guy a few weeks ago who wasn't such a fan of what we're doing - not such a fan of me, really... He told me no matter how many speeches I give, how many yards we pile up, how many games we win, I'll never belong here... He said I was nothing more than a hired gun, a mercenary...

Any player who wasn't looking up, does now. Astel, Weathers, Belnap, Coach Anderson, Coach Belnap... furrowed brows, focused eyes, complete attention...

Owens let's the silence linger... drops his head, nodding.

OWENS (cont'd)

Well, truth is, I'm starting to think maybe he was right... I'm not from this town. I don't know your families... And, I'm ashamed to say, I don't know you - at least not as well as I should... The fact of the matter is, this isn't my team. This is your team... Now, I cut one of your teammates Friday night... And since then, it's come to my attention that that player wants back on this team - needs back on this team. I've already spoken to Principal Miller. He said it's my call... But it's not. This is your team. This is your decision to make... Now, I want you guys to take today and talk it over... Captains, you guys let me know in the morning.

Absolute silence, as Owens walks back into his office and shuts the door behind him.

EXT. JEEP CHEROKEE - DAY

Owens' Jeep's cruising on an empty back road west of town, surrounded by wide-open rolling hills of pale yellow farmland. The sun, blotted out by the overcast fall sky, is setting...

RADIO BILL (O.S.)

... Hey, it's Bill and Dan! Welcome back to this special edition of Z103's East Idaho Game Night, folks.

(MORE)

RADIO BILL (O.S.) (cont'd)
 There are no games tonight, of course, but it's coming up on trick-or-treat time, and you know what that means--

INT. JEEP CHEROKEE - DAY

Owens is alone in the Jeep, half-listening to the radio...

RADIO DAN (O.S.)
 That means playoff time, Bill! We are coming at you every night, 6-to-7 to talk high school football, and next up on the docket... we've got Hillcrest, at home, taking on Century... Who you got?

Owens glances down, turns the volume up a hair...

RADIO BILL (O.S.)
 Well, it may be trick-or-treat season, but I wouldn't let the kids out of the house just yet! It's Knight time baby! And that Hillcrest offensive line has been absolutely mauling everything in its path!

Owens glances out at a distant pasture coming up on his right - a herd of miniature cows grazing...

RADIO DAN (O.S.)
 Oh, no doubt about it Bill! That double-wing gives me the chills! But the Knights' armor may have a few chinks in it, if you know what I mean--

RADIO BILL (O.S.)
 I hear you - I hear you. Everybody loves a Cinderella story, but you gotta wonder when the clock's going to strike midnight. When you have an offense that can only do one thing - run - and a defense that has had trouble handling wide-open offenses, that spells trouble--

Owens is coming up on the herd of miniature cows. He slows down, eyes fixed on the cows, and pulls over on the shoulder of the road...

RADIO DAN (O.S.)

And they don't punt! I don't think they've lined up in the punt formation one time this season! What happens when they run into a team like Mountain Home or Jerome, and they start going for it on 4th down from their own territory--

Owens flips the radio off. He sits for a moment, staring out at the cows.

EXT. SIDE OF ROAD - DAY

The Jeep door opens, and Owens climbs out. A cold wind hits his face, as it begins to flurry. He walks around the vehicle and towards the fence line.

EXT. FENCE LINE - CONTINUOUS

Owens arrives at the fence, stares out at the cows. A handful are grazing just a few feet away - they're barely up to his waist. We leave him leaning on the fence, looking at the cows...

INT. COACH'S OFFICE - DAY

Owens is sitting at his desk, waiting in silence.

The office door opens, and Astel, Weathers, Belnap, and Blackburn walk in.

OWENS

Gentlemen.

Astel takes a step forward, hands Owens a scrap of paper. Owens looks at it.

ASTEL

We took a vote. It was unanimous - all 47.

Owens begins nodding.

OWENS

Thanks, Matt.

Astel glances at the other captains, then turns back at Owens...

ASTEL

It is our team, Coach... but it's
your team too. You built us...

Astel pauses for a long moment, clears his voice.

ASTEL (cont'd)

I believe.

Owens is frozen in his seat - taken aback. Astel turns to
walk out, as Weathers looks Owens in the eyes, nods...

WEATHERS

I believe.

Owens sits back, as Weathers walks out.

BLACKBURN

Me too, Coach. I believe.

Owens locks eyes with Belnap.

BELNAP

I believe, Coach.

EXT. PRACTICE FIELD - DAY

Players are milling about, gearing up, getting ready. The
weather has turned - it's a cold, gray, fall day.

Owens is going over the practice plan with Anderson and
Coach Belnap, when Anderson sees something over Owens'
shoulder and points it out to Owens with a quick nod.

Owens turns...

Weathers, Vogel, and Travis Morgan, fully dressed, helmets
in hand, are walking towards them across the far side of the
field.

As they pass, Owens steps away from the other coaches and
catches Vogel's attention. Vogel's left eye is swollen, and
black as night underneath - the white part is smeared red
with burst blood vessels.

OWENS

Can you go with that eye, Frankie?

Vogel nods. Owens looks him in the eyes, nods back...

OWENS (cont'd)

Okay, then.

Owens gives two quick PUFFS on his whistle...

OWENS (cont'd)
 Alright, let's go! Stretch 'em out!
 It's power hour day!

EXT. PRACTICE FIELD - LATER

Astel's got the offense lined up on the 3-yard line again, drilling power...

SERIES OF SHOTS:

--close-in combat, linemen battling

--Astel taking the snap, turning, pitching, spinning, blocking

--Weathers pulling through the hole

--Droghei pounding, fighting, spinning for yardage

OWENS
 Two more!

--Coach Belnap pushes two more players from his defensive substitution pool into battle

--Belnap crashing into the line on a dive

--Astel runs a bootleg, cuts just inside the pylon

--Belnap subs out - Owens sends Vogel in from his offensive sub pool

--Owens nods at Coach Belnap

--Two more defenders from the defensive substitution pool sprint onto the field

--Vogel blocking two defensive ends, holding his own

--Speirs falling forward, diving for the goal line

--Matt Morgan, Kirk Astel, and two other dads leaning on the fence, smiling

END OF SERIES

The players are muddy, panting, hands on hips - but enjoying every minute of it.

Owens turns to Coach Belnap...

OWENS (cont'd)
Gimme two more!

Coach Belnap looks at what's left of his defensive sub pool - three third-string defensive backs that weigh less than Weathers combined.

LARRY BELNAP
We've got 19 defensive players on the field, Coach!

Owens stops and looks out. The 11 offensive players are standing ten yards off the play, staring at him, waiting for the next play call...

On the other side of the line of scrimmage, an utter mob of defenders - 19-strong are gathering around the goal line.

Owens pauses, spins...

OWENS
Where's Peterson?

Players and coaches look around.

Peterson, the sophomore punter, is standing off in the distance, stamping his feet, his hands stuffed in the hand warmer clipped around his waist... He's chatting up Hannah. Brianna's sitting on the bench nearby, huddled under a blanket.

OWENS (cont'd)
Peterson! What are you doing?!

Peterson turns...

PETERSON
Sorry, Coach!

OWENS
What are you doing?!

PETERSON
I'm talking to your daughter, Coach!

OWENS
Why?!

Peterson hesitates, but only for a moment...

PETERSON

Because I intend to marry her one day!

Owens is dumbstruck.

OWENS

Get your ass out of here! Go punt some in the parking lot!

PETERSON

Yes sir, Coach!

Peterson turns and runs off the field, as players and coaches bust out laughing.

The sun's set - the sky's turned an inky gunmetal gray.

OWENS

Okay! Last play! Give me all of 'em, Coach.

Coach Belnap shakes his head, turns to his three remaining defenders, and sends them in.

OWENS (cont'd)

Power 32, Double Tunnel!... Against a full second defense! Let's see it!

Astel brings the offense to the line. A virtual sea of defenders lines up opposite.

Astel takes the snap, turns and hands off to Vogel, straight up the gut.

A wave of defenders crash into the line. Vogel lowers his pads, churning his feet, pushing forward into the mass. His helmet's on Weathers back, as the big man drives...

Vogel finds a tiny seam, surges, stretching the ball out... and lands with the tip just over the goal line.

Owens explodes in celebration. Coach Belnap smiles reluctantly.

Matt Morgan, Kirk Astel, and the other men shake their heads, laughing, amazed.

INT./EXT. MONTAGE - DAY/NIGHT

The Knights roll through the playoffs - intermittent radio coverage...

--Droghei flying down the sideline untouched...

RADIO BILL (O.S.)
 ... He is gone! He is gone! Devin
 Droghei, sixty-seven yards,
 untouched...

--Belnap up the gut - gashing defense for big yardage

--Knight mascot pumping up student section

--Blackburn reading an out pattern, intercepting...

RADIO DAN (O.S.)
 ... Oh, what a read by Blackburn!
 Read, break, pick...

--Astel faking pitch, ball on hip, fooling defense, taking
 it into the endzone

--SCOREBOARD: KNIGHTS 42, DIAMONDBACKS 7...

RADIO BILL (O.S.)
 ... And an absolutely dominant
 performance by Hillcrest, as they
 advance to the second round...

--Principal Miller pumping up students at pep rally in gym,
 Owens and other coaches standing beside him

--Belnap blindside sack, crushing quarterback...

RADIO DAN (O.S.)
 ... Wow! Belnap came off the edge - I
 mean he just lit him up...

--Speirs stiff-arming defender, breaking away, long
 touchdown

--Vogel, on sideline, raising fist in air, teammates
 celebrating around him

--Belnap fighting off blockers, filling hole, stuffing run

--Owens subbing Vogel in for Belnap

--Belnap, gassed, panting on bench, trainer working on
 shoulder

--Vogel on a dive, fighting his way into the end zone

RADIO BILL (O.S.)
 ... Frankie Vogel with his first
 touchdown of the season, and
 Hillcrest is pulling away from
 Pocatello...

--Knights celebrating in locker room

--"Believe!" everywhere: signs in storefronts, fans holding
 signs, on t-shirts...

RADIO DAN (O.S.)
 ... A couple of one-loss teams in the
 semi-finals, as Mountain Home and
 Hillcrest look to battle it out for a
 trip to the big game...

--Weathers pulling through hole, crushing linebacker

--Droghei going airborne at goal line, scoring

--Leanora cheering in stands with girls - all three wearing
 face paint

--Speirs hurdling would-be tackler in open field...

RADIO BILL (O.S.)
 ... Did you see that?! I mean he
 looked like a hundred-meter hurdler
 who just happened to have a football
 in his hands...

--Owens fist-pumping, Anderson dancing

--Knights storming the field as the game ends...

RADIO DAN (O.S.)
 ... There you have it! We've got our
 matchup! The Hillcrest Knights have
 advanced to the state championship
 where they'll take on the Jerome
 Tigers...

INT. OWENS' HOUSE - DAY

Brianna walks through the front door, with Hannah and
 Leanora not far behind. They're holding shopping bags.

BRIANNA
 Dad?... Hey, Dad?

No answer. They make their way into the kitchen. Leanora glances through the window, sees Owens out on the deck.

LEANORA
He's out back, honey.

Brianna opens the door leading out to the deck...

EXT. OWENS' DECK - CONTINUOUS

Owens is leaning on the deck railing, his back to Brianna. Brianna walks up behind him, sees what he's looking at, a grin appearing on her face.

INT. OWENS' HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Hannah is pulling groceries out of bags. Leanora is putting stuff away in cabinets, the fridge.

BRIANNA (O.S.)
(muffled, from
outside)
No way!

Hannah and Leanora look at each other, confused. They head for the deck door...

EXT. OWENS' DECK - DAY

Hannah and Leanora walk out onto the deck, see Owens leaning on the railing, looking into the backyard. Brianna's out in the yard already, laughing...

They walk up to Owens, look past him, into the yard, where Brianna's petting a very small cow... Hannah bounds down the steps to join her sister.

LEANORA
Are you kidding me?

OWENS
It's a miniature cow.

LEANORA
I can see that. Why is it here?

Both girls are with the cow, stroking it's back.

BRIANNA
Oh, my God, it is so cute!

Owens is smiling. Leanora is shaking her head.

HANNAH
Is it ours?

Owens laughs.

OWENS
Yep.

LEANORA
So we used to have Arabian horses,
and now we have a single, miniature
cow?

OWENS
Hey, we gotta start somewhere.

INT. MATT MORGAN'S HOUSE - DAY

Matt opens the door...

MATT MORGAN
Hey, Coach! C'mon in.

Owens follows Matt down the hall...

MATT MORGAN (cont'd)
I'm glad you could swing by. You're
gonna love this.

INT. MATT MORGAN'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

As they pass by the living room, Owens sees Weathers, Vogel,
and Travis. The boys are dialed into the video game they're
playing - they barely glance up at Owens.

OWENS
Boys.

Matt and Owens continue on, to Matt's office...

INT. MATT MORGAN'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

MATT MORGAN
Have a seat... Check this out...

Owens sits. Matt opens the flaps of large cardboard box on
his desk, pulls out a hat, and shows it to Owens.

It's jet black, with the red/black/white Knights logo - a Knight's armored helmet - on the front. Beneath the logo:

HILLCREST KNIGHTS
2008 IDAHO STATE CHAMPIONS

Owens stares at the hat - Matt might have well pulled a severed head out of the box.

MATT MORGAN (cont'd)
What'dya think? Pretty sweet, right?

Matt sticks the hat out for Owens to take...

OWENS
No, no, no! I wouldn't touch that thing with a ten foot pole!

MATT MORGAN
I got t-shirts, too. Five hundred of them - bulk discount.

OWENS
You're crazy.

MATT MORGAN
I had to order them ahead of time so we'd have them... Now, you gotta win...

Matt sticks the hat back in the box, closes the box and sits down.

OWENS
(nodding in the direction of the living room)
How's he doing?

Matt takes a deep breath...

MATT MORGAN
He's doing... okay. We're getting him help, but it's gonna be a long road... I'll be honest with you, the kind of stuff he's been through... you can't just undo it.

Owens nods. They sit in silence for a few moments.

MATT MORGAN (cont'd)
Hey, Scott told me about the offer you got...

OWENS

Yeah...

MATT MORGAN

Must have been hard to pass up.

Owens looks at him for a beat.

OWENS

I think I'm where I belong.

Matt smiles.

MATT MORGAN

So you got us ready?

OWENS

Getting there. Jerome's a different animal, though - we just haven't seen anything like them all year. I mean, they are fast, and they spread the ball around all over the place. Averaging 40-plus points a game... I got film on them against Century, but it was an early-season blowout - doesn't show much. I'd love to see their last two against Nampa and Minico...

Matt considers this...

MATT MORGAN

I bet I know someone who's got it...

EXT. ROGER GLEASON'S HOUSE - DAY

WIDE --

Owens pulls up to a decades-old ranch. He turns the engine off, looks at the house for a moment, before opening the Jeep door.

Owens climbs the porch steps, walks up to the door, rings the doorbell, waits...

The door finally opens - it's Roger Gleason.

Owens is talking to him... Gleason's listening.

Owens sticks out his hand. Gleason looks at it for a moment, then takes it.

They talk for a few more moments before Gleason leads him inside.

INT./EXT. MONTAGE - DAY

--garbage man, jumping off back of truck - a cold, gray dawn, a dusting of snow - he's loading garbage... we see he's wearing a "BELIEVE!" t-shirt over his warmer clothes

--a steaming cup of coffee - Owens picks it up, takes drink, looks out back window

--Belnap sitting on edge of bed, yawning, lifting his arm, testing his shoulder, opening and closing his fist

--Astel sitting in his house, lost in thought

--Weathers, Vogel, Travis Morgan, quietly eating breakfast in Matt Morgan's kitchen

--Coach Belnap and Jake Belnap driving

--town storefronts, gas stations, offices, all with "BELIEVE!", "KNIGHT TIME!", and other signs

--Matt Morgan, with Weathers, Vogel, Travis Morgan, driving

--cars and trucks pulling into school parking lot

--Owens and Anderson checking Knights onto a nice coach bus

--players on bus, silent, serious

--bus driving under over-pass - "KNIGHTS BELIEVE!" banner hanging

--coverage of key characters on bus, all lost in their own thoughts

--I-15 exit sign:

POCATELLO
IDAHO STATE UNIVERSITY
HOLT ARENA

--players getting off the bus at Holt Arena, Idaho State's dome stadium - a large crowd of Hillcrest fans is there to greet them, holding signs, cheering

--Brycen Blackburn's brothers, in their jerseys, cheering

--Matt Morgan and Kirk Astel smacking players shoulders as they walk by

--Weathers' spotting his mom, sharing a big hug

--Owens gets off, takes in the fans, students, cheerleaders, and families

--Owens catches Roger Gleason's eyes in the crowd - Gleason's holding a "BELIEVE!" sign - they make eye contact, share a nod

--the team enters the arena

INT. HOLT ARENA, LOCKER ROOM - DAY

A D-1 locker room - much nicer than what they're used to. A few players are finishing suiting up. Owens is walking around, surveying...

He makes his way to Belnap, sitting on a trainer's table. Coach Belnap's standing nearby, arms folded. Belnap's already got one ankle taped high and a sleeve on his opposite knee. The trainer's working on his shoulder, now, massaging.

OWENS
(to the Trainer)
How're we looking?

The trainer offers a quick "I don't know.." smile and shake of the head, but keeps working.

BELNAP
I'm good, Coach.

Owens glances up at Coach Belnap, back to Jake.

OWENS
You know we wouldn't be here without you, Jake...

BELNAP
Thanks, Coach.

OWENS
... You're gonna be playing right here, in this stadium, for the next four years... Maybe you've done enough for us...

Belnap is shaking his head before Owens can even finish.

BELNAP

No way. I'm playing.

Owens looks back up at Coach Belnap. Coach Belnap gives him a silent nod.

Owens looks back down to Belnap, puts a hand on his good shoulder, smacks it lightly.

Owens walks to the center of the locker room...

OWENS

...It's time... All eyes on me...

Silence descends - all eyes turn to Owens...

OWENS (cont'd)

I thought a lot about what I might say to you guys if and when we got to this moment. You know how I like my speeches. Coach Anderson even claims I have a speech catalog - that I got 'em all numbered - so I can pull out just the right one at just the right time...

A few smiles, a light laugh from Anderson...

OWENS (cont'd)

(turning serious
again)

... Well, not today. Today, I'm just gonna tell you what's in my heart, and tell you what I know to be true... I've been lucky enough to be a part of a lot of great programs over the years. But I've never been a part of anything like this team right here. We started this season - just three months ago - ranked dead last in the entire state. And now, here we are, playing for the state championship... There is not a single soul on Earth, outside of this room, that thought that was possible... You are a special bunch, and I know I'm blessed to be taking that field with you today...

Owens scans the room, taking in the faces...

OWENS (cont'd)

Now, I look around this locker room, and I'm reminded that you're just kids - that you still have your whole lives out in front of you... Well, believe it or not, that future's gonna come and go in the blink of an eye. One day, you're gonna be looking back at your life, and you're gonna realize there are just a few days that really stand out... Today is one of those days... For most of you seniors, this is the very last time you will ever put on a football uniform. And for the rest of you, odds are, you'll never get to play in a game like this one again... Ten, twenty, thirty years from now, you'll still be waking up, in the middle of the night, from dreams about what happened on this day... Make no mistake, there are no moral victories out there.

(points to the door
to the field)

Three hours from now, you will either be champions, or you won't. But I can tell you this: for the rest of your lives, each and every time you look back and remember this day - this game - the one thing that will matter most, will be what you gave... What. You. Gave.... You come off that field today knowing you gave all you had to give, and for as long as you live, I promise you you'll be able to remember this day with pride... Now one last time... do you believe?

A chorus of "We believe!"

OWENS (cont'd)

Do you believe?!

The chorus grows louder: "We believe!"

OWENS (cont'd)

Do you believe?!!

Knights in a frenzy now: "We believe!"

INT. HOLT ARENA, STATE CHAMPIONSHIP - DAY

SUPERIMPOSE:

NOVEMBER 21, 2008
HILLCREST VS. JEROME
IDAHO 4A STATE CHAMPIONSHIP

Pre-game, with radio coverage...

SERIES OF SHOTS:

--Astel leads the Knights through the tunnel - they explode through a giant banner

--cheerleaders flipping

--Weathers hopping, waving his arms, pumping up the crowd of thousands...

RADIO BILL (O.S.)
... Buckle up, folks! We're in for a helluva ride! We've got a match made in heaven for you - winner take all, in this Idaho state 4A championship...

--Leanora and the girls in the stands

--Matt Morgan, Kirk Astel, Weathers' mom in the stands

--Principal Miller standing at end of field by himself, nervous...

RADIO DAN (O.S.)
Oh, there's no doubt we're gonna have a shootout on our hands. With both teams averaging over 40 points a game, this one could come down to who has the ball last!

--Larry Belnap talking to Jake Belnap back by the bench

--Owens and Anderson on the sidelines going over a play sheet

--Captains taking the field for the coin toss...

RADIO BILL (O.S.)

Well, the real question is which team's arsenal's going to win the day: Hillcrest's nearly-unstoppable ground and pound double-wing, or Jerome's wide-open, gunslinging spread...

END OF SERIES

INT. HOLT ARENA, STATE CHAMPIONSHIP - LATER

Jerome kicking off. The ball floats end-over-end through the air.

The Hillcrest returner receives it at the goal line, takes off, one cut, through a seam...

Owens on the sideline, getting excited, anticipating...

The returner is forced outside, gets bottled up at midfield. He tries to cut back, but he's swarmed under...

The ball pops out, is suddenly bouncing across the turf.

RADIO BILL (O.S.)

...The ball's out! He lost the ball!

A panicked scramble... a pile of players from both teams diving, crawling...

A Jerome player comes out of the pile with the ball, holding it up, celebrating. Jerome players jumping, bounding, as the official signals Jerome's possession...

RADIO DAN (O.S.)

I don't think his knee was down. No sir! Wow! Jerome comes up big on the opening kickoff! That's the kind of play that could change the the outcome here...

Owens closes his eyes, lifts his head the sky.

Jerome's offense comes to the line, in full spread. A receiver motions...

RADIO BILL (O.S.)

...And Jerome is gonna spread them out right from the get go - a five-receiver set...

Coach Belnap is screaming...

LARRY BELNAP
 Double-double! Double-double! Drop!
 Drop! Drop!

A Hillcrest defensive back looks over, confused, starts backpedaling, as Blackburn shifts over.

The Jerome quarterback takes the shotgun snap, drops, as five Tiger receivers bolt on routes...

RADIO BILL (O.S.)
 ...Stauffer takes the snap - pump
 fakes left - he's looking upfield...

Hillcrest confusion: Belnap's in the middle of the field looking for someone to light up, but he's frozen by two crossing Jerome receivers. The dropping defensive back panics, biting on a curl route.

A Jerome receiver is suddenly streaking up the sideline. Blackburn sees him, breaks out of his coverage, starts sprinting across...

The Jerome quarterback plants, and let's it fly...

Blackburn never stood a chance - the Jerome receiver cradles the perfect spiral without breaking stride. He flies in for a touchdown...

RADIO DAN (O.S.)
 Can you believe that?! Hillcrest
 fumbles the opening kickoff, and
 Jerome makes them pay on the first
 play from scrimmage!

Coach Belnap throws his clipboard. Owens looks on, stone-faced.

Knights defenders come off the field, stunned, frustrated. They gather back by the bench. Coach Belnap's already lighting into the defensive back who bit on the curl...

LARRY BELNAP
 Double-double! That's two deep!
 You've got deep-half on that!

INT. HOLT ARENA, STATE CHAMPIONSHIP - LATER

Astel breaks the huddle, brings the Knights to the line.

RADIO BILL (O.S.)
 ...Let's see if Hillcrest can answer,
 now. That was a brutal first - what,
 thirty seconds - for the Knights...

Power 28: Speirs takes the pitch off the edge, cuts inside
 the crashing defensive back for six yards.

OWENS
 There you go! There you go!

Owens is pacing back and forth, clapping as...

SERIES OF SHOTS:

--Droghei between the tackles for eight yards

--Belnap chewing up another chunk on the dive

--Astel on the bootleg, pushed out of bounds after picking
 up another ten

END OF SERIES

Astel's at the line, calling out the cadence. He pitches to
 Droghei running left. Weathers flies through the C-gap, and
 mows over a linebacker. Droghei cuts off the block and turns
 it outside, stiffarms the safety, and is off to the races...

RADIO BILL (O.S.)
 ... Droghei bounces it out - oh, what
 a stiff-arm!...

Anderson's jumping out of his shoes...

Droghei's out in space, flying down the sideline...

RADIO BILL (O.S.) (cont'd)
 ... He's at the 40 - the 30 - the
 20... Devin Droghei takes it all the
 way - Fifty-two yards for a Knight
 touchdown!...

Owens is pumping his fist in the air, as the sideline
 celebrates.

Leanora and the girls are going crazy in the stands...

RADIO BILL (O.S.) (cont'd)
 ... And just like that, Hillcrest
 strikes back! Oh my...

RADIO DAN (O.S.)

I tell you what, I feel like I'm watching a heavy-weight championship fight, and both guys have just come out throwing haymakers...

INT. HOLT ARENA, STATE CHAMPIONSHIP - LATER

SERIES OF SHOTS:

--Jerome completing a tunnel screen, Knights defender desperately chasing, diving, missing

--Droghei pounding it up the middle, carrying tacklers for a big gain

--Jerome running a flea flicker for a long touchdown pass

--Speirs juking in space, slipping between tacklers, off to the races

END OF SERIES

INT. HOLT ARENA, STATE CHAMPIONSHIP - LATER

SCOREBOARD: Knights 21, Tigers 27, 2nd quarter, 0:00 on the clock...

RADIO BILL (O.S.)

...Their gonna head the locker rooms, with Jerome up by 6, folks! It's been a see-saw battle--

WIDE--

Both teams are making their way off the field to their locker rooms...

RADIO DAN (O.S.)

Yeah, well, Hillcrest has completely dominated time of possession up to this point. They're chewing up huge chunks of clock on each drive, but their defense has been unable to stop Jerome's passing attack...

INT. HOLT ARENA, LOCKER ROOM - DAY

Knights mill around the locker room - the mood's serious, but not down.

Owens is front-and-center...

OWENS

... Offense, keep doing what you're doing. They're gonna make adjustments, but we keep executing like that, it won't matter... Defense. Listen. Settle down, now. Settle down. We knew they'd make some big plays, but, we don't look back. You understand? We don't look back. Now, they're going to keep coming at us. They're going to move the ball. Just know your job, do your job. One big play on D - one stop, and we've got 'em...

INT. HOLT ARENA, STATE CHAMPIONSHIP - DAY

SERIES OF SHOTS:

--Droghei burning down the sideline, smashing into a defender, regaining his balance, and taking it in for a score

--Jerome carving up the Hillcrest defense with short to medium pass completions

--Knight defenders, Blackburn and Belnap, hands on hips, panting

--Jerome receiver leaping in the back of the end zone, tapping one foot inbounds for a touchdown

--Droghei, Speirs, Belnap chewing up yards

--Astel on a keeper, diving across the goal line

END OF SERIES

The SCOREBOARD: Knights 49, Tigers 48, 4th Quarter, 2:55 to play...

RADIO BILL (O.S.)

... Hillcrest is trying to hang on here, with a little under 3 minutes to play, and I tell you what, neither team has been able to stop the other's offense...

The Knights defense is taking the field...

LARRY BELNAP

One stop, now, boys! One stop!
Somebody make a play!

RADIO DAN (O.S.)

That's right! No punts! No field goals! Fourteen touchdowns, between the two teams! The difference right now is that one missed extra point by the Tigers back in the 2nd quarter--

Jerome breaks the huddle, comes to the line, as the Knights defense take positions...

RADIO BILL (O.S.)

Yeah, but you said it earlier, Dan, this thing is gonna come down to whichever team has the ball last, and right now Jerome's got it, with 80 yards of green between them and the state championship...

Jerome begins methodically marching down field...

SERIES OF SHOTS:

--a short pass over the middle

--a jet sweep for another chunk

--another short crossing pattern completion

--a quick out, stopping the clock

END OF SERIES

RADIO BILL (O.S.) (cont'd)

... And just like that, Jerome's into Hillcrest territory...

Jerome's head coach is screaming instructions to his quarterback.

The Knights defense is on the ropes - exhausted, in full retreat.

The crowd is in feverish state. Tiger fans, smelling blood, are cheering wildly. Knight fans are screaming, begging their boys to hold the line...

RADIO DAN (O.S.)

And this place is going absolutely crazy, Bill!...

OWENS

Let's go!

Jerome lines up in full spread. Knights scramble to make adjustments...

Jerome's quarterback takes the shotgun snap, drops, begins rolling to his right.

Receivers break, defenders give chase.

The quarterback stutter-steps, looking to set up for a moment, then tucks the ball and takes off.

RADIO BILL (O.S.)

... Stauffer's gonna keep it!...

Belnap spots the quarterback, breaks off his receiver...

RADIO BILL (O.S.) (cont'd)

... He's got room to run!...

The quarterback's got a seam right down the middle of the field, but Belnap's giving chase...

Belnap catches him at the fifteen, dives straight out, hammering his right hand down as he wraps...

RADIO DAN (O.S.)

... He lost it! The ball's out!--

Blackburn scoops the ball up, mid-bounce, wraps it in both hands, returns it ten yards - he dives on the turf, as soon as Jerome players converge.

RADIO BILL (O.S.)

Hillcrest recovered it! Oh, my God!... Jake Belnap stripped the ball, and Blackburn shot in and scooped it up!

The Hillcrest sideline explodes...

Owens glances at the clock...

SCOREBOARD: 1:19 remaining...

In the chaos, Owens looks and finds Astel, grabbing him.

OWENS

A minute-19! They've got all three timeouts left! We need one first down! Finish this thing!

Astel brings the Knights to the line. Belnap's slow to set up. He's looking rough - his jersey's untucked, blood's running down one arm from an open turf-burn on his elbow...

Power 32 Dive: Belnap takes the handoff - straight up the gut. He's immediately stood up by a linebacker - a momentary stalemate.

Belnap keeps churning his legs, as other Tigers wrap him up. He's pushing, fighting, struggling for every inch, until the scales are tipped, and he falls back under a wave of tacklers.

Jerome signals a timeout.

Tigers come off the pile... leaving Belnap, who's rolling on the turf, trying to right himself like a prize fighter trying to beat the count.

Astel sticks out a hand, tries to pull him up, but Belnap drops to all fours. Weathers steps in and grabs him, pulls him to his feet.

Belnap's head is slung low. He's trying to stagger back to the huddle. Weathers has him by the arm - he's looking at Owens...

Owens steps onto the field - a trainer follows him. Weathers sees this, starts pulling Belnap towards the sideline.

Belnap's hands are on his hips. His chest is heaving. He's barely able to stand. Owens and the trainer reach him...

TRAINER

What's going on, Jake? Did you take a shot to your head?

Belnap shakes his head.

TRAINER (cont'd)

Let's get you off - have a look.

BELNAP

No.

The trainer steals a glance at Owens.

Owens puts a hand on Belnap's shoulder.

OWENS

You taken us as far as you can, Jake.

BELNAP

No.

Belnap tries to turn away, but Owens wraps his arms around him - like a cornerman stepping in and stopping a fight to protect his man.

OWENS

C'mon. We'll finish this.

Owens gently pulls Belnap towards the sideline. Belnap staggers off, with Owens and the trainer guiding him...

RADIO BILL (O.S.)

... It looks like Jake Belnap's coming out of the game...

The crowd erupts in applause.

RADIO DAN (O.S.)

... Well, he's the only player on the field who's played both ways the entire game - he is just absolutely spent...

Owens looks up, signals Anderson.

Anderson turns to Vogel...

ANDERSON

Vogel. Let's go.

Vogel jogs onto the field, slowing to check on Belnap as they cross paths.

Astel huddles the Knights up. Vogel is wide-eyed.

ASTEL

Power 24, Tunnel.

They break the huddle with a clap. As they come to the line, Astel turns back to Vogel...

ASTEL (cont'd)

Relax. You got this.

Vogel nods.

Astel takes the snap, pitches to Speirs coming right. Vogel comes out of the backfield, lays a textbook block on the defensive end, as Speirs slips through the hole for two yards.

Jerome calls another timeout...

RADIO BILL (O.S.)
 ... That's gonna bring up 3rd down,
 and it looks like... about seven...
 for Hillcrest.

RADIO DAN (O.S.)
 Yeah, and they can't take a knee
 here - not yet! Jerome's still got
 one timeout, and there's just under a
 minute on the clock...

Owens signals the play in to Astel.

Belnap's sitting on the bench, now, hunched over. The
 trainer's kneeling, talking to him.

The Knights come to the line. Jerome sets up their D tight,
 stacking the box.

Astel takes the snap, pitches right to Droghei coming left.
 Jerome defenders sell out, guess correct, closing the hole
 with traffic. Droghei's forced to bounce it wide...

There's room to run, and it looks like he's going to get the
 edge, but a Jerome defensive back stretches out in a full
 dive, catches Droghei's foot with one hand. Droghei
 stumbles, trying to keep his feet, then goes down...

RADIO BILL (O.S.)
 ... What a tackle! Droghei is tripped
 up in the backfield for a loss, and
 this thing just got very interesting!

RADIO DAN (O.S.)
 Yeah, Jerome's gonna use it's final
 timeout, but there's still 43 seconds
 on the clock, and that's gonna bring
 up 4th and 11 for Hillcrest!

The tension in the arena is electric - the crowd shouting
 themselves hoarse...

RADIO BILL (O.S.)
 Yeah, 4th and 11 from their own 24
 yard line! Any coach in the country
 would punt it away here, but Jerome's
 offense has been nearly unstoppable
 all game, and Owens does not want to
 give them the ball back!--

Owens frantically motions Astel over, takes a few steps onto the field...

RADIO DAN (O.S.)

And he doesn't punt! Hillcrest does not put the ball, period! But to go for it here is absolutely crazy!

Anderson and the other coaches look like they're about to puke.

Kirk Belnap, standing beside Matt Morgan in the stands, holds his hands to his face.

Owens meets Astel, leans in, practically screaming over the noise in the dome.

OWENS

28 Bootleg Pass, Scissor...

Astel is nodding.

OWENS (cont'd)

Forget the playside tight end - the curl's too short. Your two reads are backside tight end, deep corner, playside wing, out.

ASTEL

Got it!

Owens reaches up, puts his hand on Astel's facemask and pulls him close so he can speak straight into his earhole.

OWENS

We need 11 yards! If it's not there, you tuck it! You understand! You tuck it and go! And you don't stop until you get us 11!

Astel pulls away, looks Owens in the eyes, nods...

RADIO BILL (O.S.)

... Absolutely unbelievable! Owens is gonna go for it on 4th down from his own 24 yard line. They pick it up, they kneel this thing out! They don't get it, Jerome's dang near already in field goal position to win it!

Astel sprints back to the huddle.

Owens returns to the sideline. Anderson is staring at him.

OWENS

It's believe time for real now,
brother...

The Knights come to the line. Jerome's defense is fired up, salivating.

ASTEL

Ready... Down... Set... Hut!

The line erupts in violence... Astel opens left, fakes the pitch to Speirs, spins and begins rolling right... Jerome's right side defensive end crashes... Vogel picks him up, sells out on the block, as Astel side-steps...

Astel's out in space, behind the line of scrimmage now, floating to his right, looking upfield...

Droghei has come off a block and is breaking toward the sideline, but a defensive back's tight on his heels...

The backside tight end fights through traffic, takes off deep right, but the safety rolls and goes with him...

Astel's running out of room... he looks to throw, but both his reads are shut down... he plants his right foot hard, tucks the ball on his hip, and takes off back towards the middle of the field...

Astel's met by a linebacker, spins out of his grasp, makes a cut, is met by another Jerome defender... Astel lowers his pads at the point of contact, flattening the defender...

Astel regains his momentum, as another Jerome defender closes in... Weathers picks the defender off with a crushing block...

Astel's closing in on the first down marker, when a Jerome defender wraps him up high from behind... Astel has the ball cradled with both hands... he's chugging forward, the defender riding his back...

Another Jerome defender crashes into Astel, wraps... then another... Astel's head's down, his legs churning - he's plowing forward with three defenders clawing, fighting, pulling him down...

Astel's falling forward now, desperately trying to keep his feet... As he goes down, he stretches out in one last attempt to make it...

Astel crashes to the turf... three Jerome defenders on top of him...

Astel tilts his head right, trying to find the first down marker... He eyes it... the ball's a good half-yard past it.

Anderson explodes on the sideline, jumping on Owens' back. Owens shakes him off, cranes his head, looking, waiting...

The official spots the ball... signals first down.

The sideline goes nuts. The crowd goes berserk. The noise is deafening...

RADIO BILL (O.S.)

He got it! He got it! Hillcrest got the first down! Oh, my God! What an effort by Matt Astel to pick up the first down!

Players are jumping, screaming, celebrating.

Leanora and the girls are going crazy in the stands.

Kirk Astel is grinning from ear-to-ear, holding his head.

Astel brings the offense up to the line, in victory formation. He takes the snap, kneels, then throws the ball up in the air with both hands.

The Knights storm the field, as do their fans...

INT. HOLT ARENA, STATE CHAMPIONSHIP - CONTINUOUS

COVERAGE:

--Weathers picking his mom up in a bear hug

--Kirk Astel hugging his son

--Matt Morgan greeting Travis Morgan and Vogel, slapping them on the pads, handing out state championship hats

--Larry Belnap walking with Jake Belnap, half-holding him up - they're both grinning, laughing

--Droghei, Speirs, Blackburn

--Owens and Anderson celebrating

--Leanora and the girls finding Owens, hugging and kissing...

FADE OUT

EPILOGUE

Coverage of all main characters: Still shots (of actual characters) with outcomes SUPERIMPOSED:

TEAM: THE HILLCREST KNIGHTS MADE HISTORY IN 2008, COMPLETING ONE OF THE GREATEST TURNAROUNDS IN ALL OF SPORTS... EN ROUTE TO WINNING THE 4A IDAHO STATE CHAMPIONSHIP, THEIR DOUBLE-WING OFFENSE AVERAGED OVER 500 YARDS PER GAME.

DARIN OWENS: COACH DARIN OWENS STAYED AT HILLCREST FOR THREE MORE SEASONS, LEADING THE KNIGHTS TO THE PLAYOFFS EACH YEAR... HE CONTINUES TO TURN AROUND STRUGGLING PROGRAMS, AND IS CURRENTLY COACHING THE INDIAN SPRINGS COYOTES, IN SAN BERNARDINO, CALIFORNIA, AND WORKING TO ESTABLISH A FOUNDATION TO SUPPORT ORPHANAGES WORLDWIDE

MATT ASTEL: MATT ASTEL HAD ONLY 27 PASS ATTEMPTS HIS SENIOR YEAR... BUT HE WILL FOREVER BE KNOWN AS THE QUARTERBACK WHO LED HILLCREST TO ITS FIRST STATE CHAMPIONSHIP... HE CURRENTLY LIVES IN AMMON, IDAHO.

JUSTIN WEATHERS: JUSTIN WEATHERS CURRENTLY LIVES IN PASCO, WASHINGTON... NEAR HIS MOTHER.

JAKE BELNAP: JAKE BELNAP WENT ON TO PLAY COLLEGE FOOTBALL FOR SEVERAL TEAMS, INCLUDING THE IDAHO STATE BENGALS... HE CURRENTLY LIVES IN AMMON, IDAHO.

MATT MORGAN: MATT MORGAN WENT ON TO FOUND BUILDING HOPE TODAY, A NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION DEDICATED TO CREATING AWARENESS OF, AND SAFEGUARDING AGAINST, CHILDHOOD SEXUAL ABUSE. TO-DATE, BUILDING HOPE TODAY HAS HELPED HUNDREDS OF SURVIVORS OF CHILDHOOD SEXUAL ABUSE... MATT CURRENTLY LIVES IN IDAHO FALLS, IDAHO.

HANNAH OWENS/JUSTIN PETERSON: HANNAH OWENS DID EVENTUALLY MARRY JUSTIN PETERSON... THEY CURRENTLY LIVE IN LARAMIE, WYOMING.

IN MEMORIAM:

JORDAN SPEIRS: NOVEMBER 13, 1991 - NOVEMBER 3, 2015
BRYCEN BLACKBURN: AUGUST 3, 1991 - SEPTEMBER 20, 2009