

THE OLDEST ROOKIE

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TITLE: *JONES FARM, WESTFALL, IOWA, SUMMER 1966*

EXT. JONES FARM - DAY

Three young boys run through the yard. 12-yr old MARK JONES leads his brothers, MITCHELL (MITCH) (10) and MICHAEL (MIKE) (7). Mark hollers over his shoulder to Mitch.

 MARK
 Hey, Mitch, bet ya can't catch me.

 MITCH
 Okay. You're on!

The boys race into a large barn, Mark leading the way.

INT. JONES BARN - CONTINUOUS

They run up a flight of steps and run across a large open hay loft, with Mark and Mitch hurdling a row of HAY BALES. Mike slows to climb over the hay bale.

Mark approaches the edge of the loft, grabs a ROPE and shimmies up the rope, using his hands and feet, to get to another smaller loft running perpendicular to the large hay loft.

Mitch is close behind. Climbs the rope using only his hands (no feet). Mike stops at the rope.

 MIKE
 (shouting at his brothers)
 Hey, Mark... No fair!

 MARK
 Oh, don't be such a baby.

Mark grabs ANOTHER ROPE and SWINGS (Tarzan style) across the open middle section of the barn, over a TRACTOR AND WAGON, and landing on another loft on the opposite side of the barn.

Mitch waits until Mark has landed and swings the rope across the great abyss to him; then he, too, swings across the gap to the far side.

Mark, in the meantime, slides down ANOTHER ROPE to the main loft. Mitch follows, and Mike joins Mark and Mitch as the two race back down the stairs and back out into the yard.

EXT. JONES FARM - CONTINUOUS

Mitch inches past Mark as they enter the front yard, and STOMPS on a WOODEN BASEBALL HOME PLATE.

MITCH
(to Mark)
Gotcha again.

MARK
(sly grin on his face)
Yeah, but you're just lucky I'm
letting you win.

Both boys pick up their ball gloves laying on the ground, and begin tossing a baseball. Mike arrives shortly thereafter.

MIKE
(gasping for breath)
Not fair. You guys cheated.

Mike turns and walks towards the house. Mitch and Mark look at each other with big grins on their faces.

MITCH
Nice throw!

Mitch tosses the ball back to Mark.

MOM (O.S.)
Boys . . . time for dinner.

MARK
(responding with a holler)
Alright. Just a couple more.

WILLIAM JONES (DAD) (45), the boy's father, passes by heading for the house. He's a tall, thin, gentle man with a farmer's deep-tanned face and calm demeanor, and warm friendly eyes.

DAD
Time for dinner now. You boys have
played enough ball for today. Don't
you guys do anything else but play
baseball all day?

The boys jog to their dad and they all walk towards the house.

MARK
Gee, Dad. You know we do other things.

MITCH
Yeah, Dad.

MARK
We do our chores and other stuff.

DAD
(chuckling)
I know, I know. But you do play a lot of baseball every day.

MITCH
So...?

MARK
And we're not hurting anything. And we're not getting into any trouble. And what else is there to do?

DAD
(rubs both boy's heads)
I know, I know.

INT. JONES KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Dad and the boys enter the kitchen.

DAD
Go wash up.

Both boys run to the bathroom.

MITCH
I win! I win!

MARK
I wasn't racing you.

After washing their hands they return to the kitchen just as Dad returns from washing up in a different bathroom.

As they take their seats around the LARGE FARM TABLE, we see PLENTY OF FOOD in bowls on the table. Dad takes his place at the head of the table.

PATRICIA JONES (MOM) (42) is seated at the other end of the table, holding an infant boy (MAVERICK), feeding him a bottle. MASON (2) sits in a high chair near Mom. Mitch and Michael sit on one side of the table, with Michael closest to Dad. Mark and MELVIN (Mel) (5) sit on the other side of the table with Mel sitting beside Dad.

DAD
Who's turn to say grace?

Mark points to Mitch.

MARK
Mitch's turn.

MITCH
(points to Michael)
Na huh! It's Mike's.

DAD
Mitch, I think it's your turn.

MITCH
Oh, alright.

Everyone folds their hands and bows their heads.

MITCH (CONT'D)
God is great. God is good. Let us
thank Him for our food. Amen

ALL
Amen!

DAD
(to Mitch)
Thank you.

MOM
(to Dad)
Can you dish up Melvin's and
Michael's plates? I'll be done with
Maverick in just a minute, then
I'll get Mason.

Dad begins filling the boys' plates while Mark and Mitch put
food on their own plates.

MITCH
Dad, I think I'd like to be a big
league baseball player. Can I do
that?

DAD
(fighting back a chuckle)
Mitch, you can be anything you'd
like to be. But if you want to be
professional ball player, you're
going to have to work real hard to
get there. It takes a lot of talent
and a lot of hard work.

Mitch grins as he takes a big bite.

DISSOLVE TO:

TITLE: *FRANKFORT, KENTUCKY, SPRING 2026*

EXT. CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL BASEBALL STADIUM - DAY

A new large BASEBALL STADIUM (as large as many university stadiums) filled with SPECTATORS in the stands.

Two SIGNS ON THE WALL behind the stands:

Central High School Baseball

*Conference Champions 2002, 2004, 2005, 2007, 2008, 2010,
2012, 2013, 2014, 2017, 2018, 2020,
2021, 2022, 2023, 2024, 2025*

*State Champions 2005, 2008, 2010, 2014, 2017, 2021,
2023, 2025*

A PORTABLE PODIUM stands on the field between the pitcher's mound and home plate, facing the stands behind home plate. There is a large rectangular item covered by a tarpaulin immediately behind the podium.

70-year old MITCH JONES (wearing a Central HS windbreaker) and his wife CONNIE (66) (wearing a stylish sweater and skirt), their son MITCH JR (38) and his WIFE (38), and four GRANDCHILDREN (ages 4-12) stand between home plate and the first base dugout (where the Central HS team is located). Although Mitch and Connie are showing signs of graying, they still look 20 years younger.

With them is the school District Superintendent ADAMS (male, 60) and Principle RIVERA (female, 45).

ADAMS

(to Mitch)

Thanks for coming today to the season opener.

MITCH

(glances at Connie)

No problem. We wouldn't have missed this day for the world.

ADAMS

It's a beautiful day for a dedication ceremony. You knew, of course, that the field is being named the "Mitch Jones Field".

MITCH

Yeah, so I heard.

ADAMS

Let's see, you've been with the district for what... twenty-five years?

MITCH

Yeah, something like that.

ADAMS

Wow. How the time flies by. Well, I'll introduce you and you can make some remarks, then just cut that yellow ribbon there...

(points)

And the new sign will be revealed.

MITCH

Okay.

ADAMS

Oh, and Mitch, please stick around after the game. There's some people who want to speak with you.

MITCH

Okay, I guess.

ADAMS

Well, let's get this thing started.

Superintendent Adams walks up to the podium and, of course, TAPS on the microphone, which of course squeals momentarily.

ADAMS (CONT'D)

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen.

(looks around)

It is a beautiful day and this sure is a beautiful ballfield - one that any school would be envious of having - and it's all due to Coach Mitch Jones and his championship teams.

Applause breaks out from the spectators.

ADAMS (CONT'D)

(waits for the applause to diminish)

Today, we're dedicating this field to honor Coach Jones as he is retiring from the district. Coach, come on over here and say a few words, won't you?

Mitch walks over to the podium and addresses the CROWD.

MALE SPECTATOR (O.S.)
Way to go, Coach!

FEMALE SPECTATOR (O.S.)
We love you, Coach!

Mitch smiles and nods to the spectators.

MITCH
I want to thank each and every one of you for being here today. It brings such great joy to my heart to see such a large crowd coming out to support our boys and this team and this great game of baseball. Simply put, it is because of our love for baseball that you made all this possible. Thank you.

Superintendent Adams hands Mitch a gigantic pair of scissors. Mitch turns and with both hands, cuts the ribbon. The drape falls to the ground, unveiling the NEW SIGN for the ballpark - "Mitchell Jones Field". A ROAR goes up from the CROWD.

MITCH (CONT'D)
(to Adams)
Mitchell?

ADAMS
(chuckling)
Well, it is your name, isn't it?

Mitch and his family leave the field and a crew of WORKERS remove the podium and sign. A CHANT begins in one corner of the CROWD - then spreading throughout the entire stadium.

CROWD
First Pitch . . . First Pitch . . .
First Pitch

The Central HS BASEBALL PLAYERS also join in on the chant.

Superintendent Adams looks at Mitch.

ADAMS
Looks like you're being called out.
You up for it?

MITCH
I guess. But I haven't thrown a ball in quite some time.

Mitch looks at Connie. She smiles and shrugs her shoulders.

As Mitch turns and walks out to the pitcher's mound, the crowd erupts with CHEERING.

Mitch motions for the Central HS CATCHER to come to home plate.

The catcher jogs out to the pitcher's mound, tosses Mitch a ball, who catches it barehanded, then jogs over to home plate.

Mitch stands just off of the pitcher's mound and stretches his shoulder and arm. He then assumes his place on the mound.

The spectators become quiet.

The catcher stands at home plate. Mitch motions for him to crouch. He complies.

Mitch cleans the rubber with his foot and peers towards the catcher to get a SIGNAL. The catcher puts one finger down.

Mitch grins broadly, winds up and delivers a strike. The RADAR GUN SIGN on the scoreboard reads 89 mph. The crowd erupts again with CHEERING.

The catcher shakes out his gloved hand, hops up, jogs towards the mound, hands Mitch the ball, and shakes his hand.

CATCHER

That one sort of stung.

MITCH

(grins and winks)
Sorry about that.

Mitch pats him on the shoulder, then turns and walks off the field to the ROAR of the fans in the stadium, waving to them as he strides. He walks over to a BEAMING Connie, now in the stands, and gives her a big hug.

CONNIE

I hope you didn't hurt yourself.

MITCH

(shrugs his shoulders)
Eh.

Mitch turns to his grandchildren, in the row behind him, and HIGH FIVES each of them before he and Connie take their seats. Superintendent Adams sits on the other side of Connie.

More than a dozen REPORTERS flock around Mitch and Connie as the Central HS BASEBALL TEAM takes the field. Cameras FLASH, news cameras roll, and reporters all compete with each other by SIMULTANEOUSLY BOMBARDING Mitch with QUESTIONS as he and Connie sit in the stands.

REPORTER 1
How's it feel to be done with baseball?

REPORTER 2
Mitch, what are you going to do now?

REPORTER 3
Connie, how do you feel about
Mitch's retirement?

REPORTER 4
Are you going to stay in the area
or move away?

Mitch stands, smiles, and waves his hand at the reporters.

MITCH
Gentlemen... Gentlemen...
Gentleman...
(nods to a female reporter)
And ladies... We're all here to
watch this game and cheer for our
home team. It's their time now.
Grab a seat and watch the game and
I promise you that we will address
all your questions after the game.

With some murmuring, the group of reporters dissipates.

Superintendent Adams smiles and nods his approval. Mitch's face beams as he sits, and he begins to focus on the game in front of him.

UMPIRE
Batter up!

The Central HS catcher makes a throw to second base... The SHORT STOP tosses it to the FIRST BASEMAN, who sends it back around the horn. The THIRD BASEMAN tosses the baseball back to the PITCHER. Meanwhile, the BATTER takes his position in the batter's box.

UMPIRE (CONT'D)
Play ball!

CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL BASEBALL FIELD - LATER

Mitch and his family stand at the end of the bleachers with reporters circled around them. Other spectators are leaving the bleachers and ball park.

REPORTER 2

So, Mitch, what are you going to do now?

MITCH

Oh, I don't know... Maybe go home and take a nap.

Everyone chuckles.

REPORTER 3

How did this all begin? Tell us a little about your early life.

MITCH

Well, it all began way back when I was a kid, growing up on our family farm near Westfall, Iowa.

I was the second of six boys.

Now anyone who ever grew up on a farm knows that there isn't a whole heck of a lot to do... socially speaking. So we played a lot of baseball - especially my older brother, Mark, and me.

REPORTER 1

But, a lot of kids, including city kids, play a lot of baseball when they're young, but they never make it to the pros. What set you apart? What was different for you?

OLD MITCH

I can't give you a precise answer to that question. Maybe it was an gift from Almighty God. Maybe it was all the other stuff we did on the farm.

REPORTER 2

Like what?

The camera slowly zooms in on Mitch's smiling eyes.

DISSOLVE TO:

MONTAGE.

-- Mitch (10), climbs a tree.

MITCH (V.O.)
Like maybe climbing trees...

-- Mitch (10) swings on a rope in the barn.

MITCH (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Or hanging around with ropes.

-- Mitch (10) races Mark (12) on their bikes on the country road in front of their house.

MITCH (V.O.)
And then we ran a lot and rode our bikes all over the place. Shoot, it was three miles to ride to school - and we rode nearly every day.

-- Mitch (10) hits stones with a wooden lath.

MITCH (V.O.) (CONT'D)
When I was by myself, I would often take a stick... a wooden lath... and hit stones from our gravel driveway with it. I would try to hit them over our barn roof. I did that a lot and I got pretty good with it.

-- Mitch (14) and Mark (16) stack hay bales on a wagon as they come off the baler conveyor. Dad drives the tractor.

MITCH (V.O.)
Or maybe it was hefting bales of hay...

-- Mitch (14) shoveling grain in a wagon during harvest.

MITCH (V.O.)
Or all the shoveling we did... harvesting grain, and shoveling snow... and don't forget, it sometimes snows a little in Iowa.

Chuckles are heard

-- Mitch (14) throwing snowballs at his brothers during a family snowball fight.

MITCH (V.O.)
And of course with all that snow, there were many, many snow-ball fights.

-- Mitch (14) playing catch with Mark (16), Mike (11), and Mel (9), and Mason (6).

MITCH (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 But mostly, I think it was just all
 the time I played baseball with my
 brothers and other guys. I guess I
 started pretty young.

END MONTAGE.

FADE TO:

TITLE: *SUMMER 1966*

EXT. WESTFALL COMMUNITY BASEBALL FIELD - NIGHT

Decent CROWD attending a little league BASEBALL GAME in the rural town of WESTFALL, IOWA.

Mitch (10), in his little league uniform, stands in shallow center field, swatting at some evening butterflies and chewing on one of the leather laces to his ball glove.

A ball is hit in the air in his direction. Mitch begins to run in, then stops, holds up his glove, and watches the ball sail over his head and roll to the fence.

Seeing the error, the opposing team's FIRST BASE COACH (33) WAVES the BATTER on to second base. The batter sprints towards the bag.

Mitch turns around, races to the ball, grabs it with his non-gloved right hand, turns and rifles a strike right to second base. The shortstop (JIMMY) (10) catches the ball and easily tags the batter out - third out of the inning.

The FIRST BASE COACH shakes his head in amazement.

FIRST BASE COACH
 Impossible!

The fielders trot off the field towards their dugout (3rd base side). Jimmy waits up for Mitch and slaps Mitch on the back with his glove.

JIMMY
 Nice throw.

MITCH
 Yeah, but I should've caught the ball.

JIMMY
 Well, you got him anyway.

MITCH
Yeah, but I still should've caught it.

JIMMY
Next time.

As Mitch and Jimmy approach the dugout, COACH WILLIAMS (34) pats both on the back while walking out to the third base coach's box.

COACH WILLIAMS
Jimmy, your up first. Hustle up.
Nice throw, Mitch. You're on deck.

Mitch dons his helmet, grabs his bat, and takes his position in the ON-DECK CIRCLE. Jimmy is at bat and hits the first pitch to the SECOND BASEMAN, who scoops it up and tosses it to the FIRST BASEMAN.

The UMPIRE, jogs a few steps towards first base and gives the "out" hand SIGNAL.

UMPIRE
Batter's out!

Mitch looks over to Coach Williams for a hitting sign. Getting no sign, Mitch takes his place in the batter's box and the umpire takes his position behind the CATCHER. The umpire signals the PITCHER to pitch.

The first pitch is in the dirt in front of home plate.

UMPIRE (CONT'D)
Ball one!

The pitcher winds up and throws his second pitch. Nearly hitting Mitch, he is able to duck just in the nick of time.

UMPIRE (CONT'D)
Ball two!

The pitcher winds up for his third pitch.

Mitch's eyes SQUINT, focusing on the pitched ball. He swings his bat - CRACK - and sends the ball deep into right-center field, between the RIGHT FIELDER and CENTER FIELDER. The ball bounces off of the chain-link fence.

Mitch sprints towards first, then races towards second base, but he doesn't stop there. He rounds second and hustles towards third base, easily beating the cutoff throw from the second baseman.

Coach Williams taps Mitch on top of his helmet.

COACH WILLIAMS
Nice hit! By the way, be prepared
to pitch this next inning. OK?

MITCH
(nods his head)
Okay.

The next two batters strike out and the side is retired.
Mitch grabs his glove and trots out to the pitcher's mound.
The coach walks to the dugout.

Mitch gets ready to warm up. Once the CATCHER (10) is in
place, Mitch does his best Juan Marichal HIGH-KICK DELIVERY
and sends a fastball over the heads of the catcher and umpire
- about fifteen feet up into the backstop.

The catcher chases down the ball and tosses it back to Mitch.

The coach calls out to Mitch from the dugout.

COACH WILLIAMS
Let's try to bring it down just a
little.

Mitch nods his head.

Mitch does another perfect Juan Marichal HIGH-KICK imitation,
and once again sends another fastball high into the backstop.
The catcher once again chases down the ball and tosses it
back to Mitch.

Coach Williams calls "Time" and walks out to the pitcher's
mound.

COACH WILLIAMS (CONT'D)
(pats Mitch on the shoulder)
Well, I think we'll wait and try
another time. With your power and
inaccuracy, I don't want to risk
killing a batter. Why don't you
head back out to center field.

Mitch hands Coach the ball and trots back out to center field,
switching places with the BOY that Coach now wants to pitch.

Tears form in Mitch's eyes as he angrily kicks at a dandelion.

EXT. WESTFALL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - DAY

Mitch (10) puts his bicycle in the bike rack at the school,
along with Jimmy (10) and other CLASSMATES.

JIMMY
How long did it take you today to
ride to school?

MITCH
Uh, I think it was about ten minutes.

JIMMY
For all three miles?

MITCH
Yeah.

JIMMY
Wow. Cool.

INT. SCHOOL CLASSROOM - MOMENTS LATER

A classroom of about twenty STUDENTS. All sit in various chair-desks aligned throughout the room. Mitch is one of the tallest - and thinnest - kids in his classroom.

JIMMY
(whispering)
Do you know anything about the
teacher?

Mitch shakes his head.

The teacher (MRS. BRADLEY), a short stocky lady in her mid-50s, enters the room and a sudden hush hits the students.

MRS. BRADLEY
(like a Drill Sergeant)
Alright. You 6th graders who had me
last year, you know the routine.
6th graders take your seats on this
side of the room
(points)
Those of you in the 5th grade, take
your seats on this side.
(points)
Now!

The room suddenly jumps with movement and Mitch and Jimmy both get up and find desks on the 5th grade side.

EXT. WESTFALL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, LATER

Mitch and Jimmy toss a baseball back and forth.

Two larger 8th grade boys, PETE COLE (13) and DENNY MARTIN (13), approach Mitch. Pete is the biggest and toughest kid in the school and he lets the other kids know it. Both are carrying their ball gloves with them.

PETE

Hey, you... with the PATCHED PANTS.

MITCH

Who? Me?

PETE

Well, you're the only one wearing patched pants.

MITCH

So.

PETE

Aren't you Jonesy's little brother?

MITCH

Who? Mark?

PETE

Yeah.

MITCH

Yeah. What of it?

PETE

Well, on this end of the school for recess, when we play catch, we play "burn out". You know what that is?

MITCH

Yeah. I've played it with Mark.

PETE

Good. So let's you and me have at it.

Pete throws the baseball hard at Mitch. Mitch catches it with no difficulty. Then throws it back at Pete, a little faster.

PETE (CONT'D)

Is that all you've got? You throw like a girl.

Pete throws another hard one at Mitch and Mitch catches it with no difficulty.

This time, Mitch lets loose with a rocket at Pete. POP! The ball nearly rips the glove off Pete's hand. After catching it, he WINCES slightly.

PETE (CONT'D)
You think that was fast, sissy?
Take this one.

DENNY
Yeah, give it to him, Pete.

Pete GRUNTS this time as he throws the ball to Mitch. Mitch once again catches it with no difficulty.

In return, Mitch again rifles one towards Pete. Again, the glove POPS when the ball hits it. Pete shakes out his gloved hand afterward.

PETE
You think you're hot stuff? If recess time wasn't about over and I had more time to warm up, I'd have you crying with a sore hand, I would.
(turns toward Denny)
Come on, Denny, let's leave these two sissies alone so they can practice their throwing and catching.

They turn and walk away and Mitch and Jimmy continue tossing the baseball back and forth.

JIMMY
I think you hurt his hand.

MITCH
Maybe, but he sort of asked for it.

JIMMY
Yep. But I hope they don't start picking on us now.

MITCH
We'll just have to see.

JIMMY
Oh, and cool pants! I like the patches on patches. Where'd you get them.

MITCH
They were Mark's. Mom and Dad can't afford to buy us all new clothes so I always get Mark's hand-me-downs.

JIMMY
Oh... anyway, they're different. I think they look cool.

MITCH
Thanks.

TITLE: *Spring 1967*

INT. JONES BARN - DAY

RAIN pelts the barn. Mark and Mitch play catch in the barn loft. Dad, in his overalls, works on the tractor below. Dad hears the baseball frequently BANGING into the wall of the barn and ROLLING on the loft floor. Dad gets a puzzled look on his face, sets down his tools, and heads up the SQUEAKY stairs to the loft.

DAD
What's up, guys?

MARK
Mitch is trying to pitch, but he's all over the place.

MITCH
And Mark can't catch anything.

MARK
(somewhat defensive)
I can't see the ball very well.

MITCH
(also somewhat defensive)
Well, my foot keeps slipping.

Dad glances at the floor by Mitch and sees SHORT SKID MARKS in the dust and straw. He also looks around and sees ONE NAKED LIGHTBULB overhead.

DAD
Tell you what guys, why not call it a day and let's see what we can do about this.

They both AGREE and Dad tousles both boy's heads as they walk to the stairs. Dad turns around and glances back at the loft with critical eyes as he reaches over and flips off the light.

EXT. JONES FARM - NEXT AFTERNOON

It's still WET and DRIZZLING outside when Mark, Mitch, and Mike get off the school bus at their home. They run into their house with their backpacks and lunch boxes.

Moments later Mark and Mitch race out of the house with their ball gloves and run into the barn.

INT. JONES BARN

They get to the top of the stairs to the loft and flip on the light switch. The loft is ILLUMINATED ALMOST LIKE DAYLIGHT - four large fluorescent shop-light fixtures have replaced the single bulb. Mark and Mitch are completely awestruck for a few moments before walking to their places to play catch.

As Mark gets to his location, he notices a 16" x 16" SQUARE PIECE OF PLYWOOD, painted white, resting on the floor. When Mitch gets to his location, he notices a PIECE OF WOOD 18" x 4" x 1/2" nailed to the floor as a pitching rubber.

They take their positions and Mitch begins pitching some balls to Mark. Each pitch POPS in Mark's mitt.

Moments later, they hear FOOTSTEPS on the SQUEAKING stairs leading to the loft. They stop throwing the ball and look in the direction of the stairs. Dad appears. Mitch and Mark stop their catch game and give Dad a big grin.

MITCH

Thanks, Dad!

MARK

Yeah, thanks, Dad!

DAD

You're welcome. How's it working.

MITCH

It's working great - my foot's not slipping anymore.

MARK

And I can see the ball when he throws it now.

DAD

Great. So, let me see.

The boys resume their positions - Mark behind home plate and Mitch at the pitching rubber. Mitch winds up and throws a couple pitches - both are a little wide of the plate.

DAD (CONT'D)

Time out!

(to Mitch)

Let's see what we can do about your accuracy.

Dad walks over to the hay bales, grabs one and carries it to home plate - standing it upright about a foot to the left of home plate. He grabs a second bale and stands it upright about a foot to the right of home plate, creating a narrow crevice for Mitch to throw through.

DAD (CONT'D)

Now, these here are batters. You need to learn to not hit the batters. Let's see what you can do.

Dad moves out of the way and Mitch winds up and delivers two pitches, each one NAILING one of the hay bales.

DAD (CONT'D)

Time out!

(to Mitch)

OK, Sandy Koufax, I see you've gotten rid of the high kick, now let's slow it down some. Learn how to throw accurately first, then increase your speed. You need to practice until it becomes automatic - where you don't need to think about it. You need to pitch by feel.

(pause)

When you're in the outfield and you're throwing the ball to second base, do you stop and think about where and how you're going to throw it?

Mitch shakes his head.

DAD (CONT'D)

No, you just throw it. You've done it so many times that you don't have to think about it - it just happens. It's the same thing with pitching. Learn to pitch right down the heart of the plate every time, *then* you can work on learning how to move it around within the strike zone.

MARK

I didn't know you knew baseball.

DAD

I know a little. I was a pitcher in high school.

MARK

Were you any good?

DAD
I guess so, yeah.

MITCH
Teach me.

DAD
Well, it's been a long time, but
I'll see what I can do.

Mitch grins broadly.

MITCH
Gee, thanks, Dad.

DAD
Okay. Well, I've got things I've
got to get at and you need to just
keep on practicing.

MITCH
I will.

DAD
(to Mark)
Oh, and Mark... if you're going to
be a catcher, you need to give the
pitcher a good target to hit. Hold
that mitt out in front of you right
where you want the ball to end up.
(to Mitch)
And Mitch, you need to aim for and
learn to hit that mitt. It's really
that simple.

MITCH
Okay. Thanks heaps, Dad.

MARK
Yeah, thanks Dad.

Dad turns towards the stairs.

MITCH
Hey, Dad.

DAD
What, Mitch?

MITCH
Can you teach me how to throw a
curve ball?

DAD

Yeah, sure son. But not today.

MITCH

Okay. Thanks, Dad.

Dad exits the loft via the stairs.

EXT. WESTFALL COMMUNITY BASEBALL FIELD - AFTERNOON

The elementary school BASEBALL TEAM is on the field tossing baseballs to each other. They're not dressed in uniforms, but rather just blue jeans and t-shirts and sneakers.

COACH MACKINZIE (35) exits the dugout and BLOWS HIS WHISTLE.

COACH MACKINZIE

Everyone take a lap!

The boys all drop their gloves and begin running around the perimeter of the field. Mitch is running faster than the other boys, and is soon near the front of the pack. He passes Mark and Denny and soon pulls up even with Pete, Pete begins running faster. Mitch picks up his pace and is soon edging ahead of Pete, who speeds up some more.

As the two boys round the left field foul line and are in the home stretch, Mitch speeds up and beats Pete to home plate.

PETE

(HUFFING and glaring at Mitch)

Think you're hot stuff, don't you.

Mitch ignores the comment and walks towards the dugout.

COACH MACKINZIE

(to Mitch)

Jones, since you're still struggling with fly balls, I'm going to start having you learn first base.

RICK PLYMIER, an 8th grader - tallest player on the team - is fetching the school's first baseman's mitt.

COACH MACKINZIE (CONT'D)

(to Rick Plymier)

Rick, I want you to take Jones here out to first base and teach him that position. Alternate plays, and show him the ropes. Teach him!

RICK
 Sure, Coach.
 (to Mitch)
 Come on, Jones.

They jog out to first base.

Rick shows Mitch how and where to stand and position himself at first base.

How to offer his mitt as a target.

How to tag a runner.

How to field a ground ball (using his body to block a ball from getting past him).

Pete alternates plays at third base with ANOTHER PLAYER. It's Mitch's turn. Coach MacKinzie hits a grounder to Pete, who easily scoops it up, then fires a fast ball to Mitch, however, in the dirt.

To everyone's surprise (even Mitch's), Mitch DIGS OUT the errant throw, examines the ball in his mitt, and tosses the ball to Mark, the catcher.

MARK
 Good catch, Mitch!

RICK
 Yeah. Nice job!

Mitch grins broadly while Pete KICKS third base and MUTTERS to himself.

PETE
 Just lucky.

TITLE: *FALL 1970*

EXT. JEFFERSON HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

MITCH (14), now 6' tall and weighing in at about 120 lbs, walks from the bike rack towards the front entrance of the high school. JIMMY (14) trots up from behind and SLAPS him on the back - sort of surprising him.

JIMMY
 Hey Mitch. How ya doin'?

MITCH
 Hey, Jimmy. I'm okay.

JIMMY
Don't be so excited. Today is the
first day of high school.

Jimmy gives Mitch a playful shove.

MITCH
Yeah, I guess.

JIMMY
Hey, did you hear? Kenny and his
family moved away to Davenport this
summer. His dad got a new job in
some factory there.

MITCH
Yeah, I heard.

JIMMY
Anyways... You ready for football
tryouts this afternoon?

MITCH
I thought tryouts were already
done. Hasn't the team been
practicing already?

JIMMY
Yeah, but freshmen get to try out
today. You gonna?

MITCH
No, I can't.

JIMMY
Why not?

MITCH
Because it's gonna be harvest season
soon, and I'll need to help my dad
with the harvest. It's going to be
bad enough with Mark and me both in
school all day.

JIMMY
But Mark's going to play football
again this year, isn't he.

MITCH
Yeah, probably. He loves football,
and he's pretty good at it. And I
think Dad sort of likes having a
starter on the team. Me... I would
just be riding the bench.

JIMMY

Maybe not.

MITCH

Well, it doesn't matter. I'm not all that into football anyway.

Just then, PETE (18) and DENNY (18) and a COUPLE OTHER BOYS, walk by, all wearing their varsity LETTER JACKETS (even though it's 90 degrees outside). The jackets of Pete and Denny were adorned with a large "J" with multiple football, basketball, and baseball pins.

DENNY

(elbowing Pete)

Hey look.

PETE

Well, if it isn't Jonesy's brother.

DENNY

Yeah, little Jonesy.

PETE

Look here, pipsqueak, you may have gotten away with being a hot-shot in grade school, but you're in my domain now. You're not going to get any preferential treatment here, and Mark's not going to be around to protect you all the time.

Pete, an inch taller than Mitch but much heavier, GRABS Mitch by the front of his shirt and pulls Mitch close to him.

PETE (CONT'D)

You try any of your stuff here at Jefferson, and I'll ensure you're dead meat. My name's going up on the wall as this year's baseball MVP - just like last year - the first two-time winner in school history, and nobody's gonna stop that - not even you. Got it? So stay outta my way, loser!

DENNY

Yeah, loser!

As Pete releases Mitch, he gives Mitch a slight SHOVE backwards. But Mitch holds his ground and merely stares expressionless back at Pete. Pete and Denny walk away, CHUCKLING.

JIMMY
Don't let him get to you. You know
you're better than him anyway.

MITCH
Yeah, whatever.

TITLE: *SPRING 1971*

EXT. JEFFERSON HIGH SCHOOL BASEBALL FIELD - DAY

It's a bright afternoon and the high school baseball game is underway - Jefferson vs. Marshalltown. Mr. & Mrs. Jones (Dad and Mom) are in the bleachers. Mitch (now 15) sits on the bench as his team is in the field. Pete is on the mound pitching and MARK (17) is catching. Pete gets the signal and delivers his pitch.

UMPIRE
Ball four.

Pete KICKS the mound in disgust as the BATTER trots down to first base.

PA ANNOUNCER (OVER LOUD SPEAKER)
That loads up the bases.

COACH CASE (42) walks from the dugout to the pitcher's mound.

COACH CASE
Time!

PA ANNOUNCER (OVER LOUD SPEAKER)
Uh oh. Looks like Coach Case might be
thinking about a pitching change.

Mark joins the coach on the mound.

COACH CASE
(to Pete)
Well, I think you're done for today.

PETE
Coach, I can finish this.

COACH CASE
Naw... You held them for a few
innings. Let's bring in a fresh arm
to close it out.

The coach turns to the dugout and signals to Mitch.

COACH CASE (CONT'D)
Jones! You're up.

Mitch jumps up, grabs his glove and trots out to the pitcher's mound.

PA ANNOUNCER (OVER LOUD SPEAKER)
It looks like Mark Jone's little brother, Mitch, who... let's see... is a freshman this year, is going to be coming in to pitch.

As Mitch approaches the mound and passes by Pete, Pete BUMPS into Mitch and GROWLS at him

PETE
You'd better not blow this! This is my win!

Mitch gets to the mound, accepts the ball from the coach, and immediately begins stretching his arm and shoulder.

COACH CASE
It's all yours, Jones. Let's see what you can do.

Coach Case turns and walks back towards the bench.

MARK
You can do this. Just like Dad said. Just hit my mitt.

Mark turns and trots back to home plate.

As Mitch tosses a few warm up pitches, Dad YELLS from the stands.

DAD
Go get 'em, Mitch!

Dad immediately begins coughing heavily. Dad reaches into his pocket and withdraws a white handkerchief and wipes his mouth with it. As he pulls it away, he and Mom notice blood on it.

MOM
(to Dad)
Bill, you need to get that checked out.

DAD
Yeah, I will.

PA ANNOUNCER (OVER LOUD SPEAKER)
Alright, looking at Mitch Jones's statistics this year. Hmmm...

It doesn't look like he has any stats yet. Well, it's only the second game of the season and we'll soon see what he can do. Regardless, he'll have his work cut out for himself. It's the top of the ninth, score tied, with one out, but the bases are loaded and Marshalltown's top hitters due to bat.

UMPIRE

Play ball!

A TALL LANKY BATTER (18) steps up to the plate. Three fastball strikes quickly retire that batter.

Then, a LARGE MUSCULAR BATTER (18) steps up to the plate and gives Mitch a wink and a fake distant kiss. Mitch ignores him. Mitch checks the runners at first and third base, then delivers a rocket with a POP into Mark's mitt. The batter doesn't swing.

UMPIRE (CONT'D)

Strike!

Mark tosses the ball back to Mitch.

MARK

Nice throw, Mitch!

Mitch again checks the runners, and delivers his pitch. The batter swings, but the ball is already in Mark's mitt when his bat crosses the plate.

UMPIRE

Two!

Mark tosses the ball back to Mitch

MARK

(to the batter)

Wow, that one had some zing to it!
You know, he's only a freshman and not all that accurate. I'd be careful, if I were you.

The batter angrily STRIKES home plate with his bat and really DIGS IN his rear foot. Mitch again checks the runners, and delivers his pitch - a slider that begins its path looking like it will hit the batter.

The batter initially begins to back away from home plate, then freezes in place as the ball breaks suddenly over the heart of the plate and SLAMS into Mark's mitt.

UMPIRE
Three! Batter's out!

The batter glares at Mitch as he walks back toward the dugout.

Mark rolls the ball to the mound as the team jogs off the field. Mark slaps Mitch on the back as they walk to the dugout.

MARK
Nice pitching!

Mitch glances at his parents in the stands. Mom is CLAPPING excitedly and Dad is GRINNING and gives a big "thumbs up".

Coach Case slaps Mitch on the butt.

COACH CASE
(to Mitch)
Grab a bat. You're up first.

Mitch grabs his bat, and walks out to the on-deck circle and begins warming up his swing while the PITCHER throws his warm up pitches.

UMPIRE
Play ball!

Mitch takes his place in the batter's box and focuses on the pitcher - the tall lanky batter who Mitch had just struck out.

MITCH
(to himself)
I'll bet he'll try to strike me out
right away like I did him.
Fastball...? Yeah, fastball.

The pitcher winds up and delivers. Mitch swings and CONNECTS with the ball.

A startled crow CAWS and leaps off the telephone wire just beyond the left field fence a split second before the baseball flies by.

As Mitch trots around the bases, his teammates (all but Pete) JUMP WITH JOY. Coach Case once again SLAPS Mitch across the back as he rounds third base. Mitch's teammates excitedly POUND on him as he works his way back to the dugout after stepping on home plate.

Pete sits alone on the bench, glaring angrily.

Mitch's Mom is JUMPING up and down, passionately CLAPPING her hands. Dad is standing there GRINNING from ear to ear while also CLAPPING. He nods his approval to Mitch.

FADE TO:

TITLE: *JUNE 1974*

INT. JEFFERSON HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

CAMERA PANS along the school's trophy case and slowly ZOOMS IN on a plaque "Varsity Baseball Most Valuable Player". Mitch's name is listed as the Baseball MVP for 1971, 1972, 1973, and 1974.

An announcement is broadcast over the school PA system.

PRINCIPAL JENSEN (OVER LOUD SPEAKER)

Well, it's been another great year here at Jefferson. For everyone except our graduating seniors, I hope you have a wonderful summer and return in the Fall ready for another good year. For you graduating seniors, as you depart Jefferson, the faculty and staff here all want to wish you great success in all your future endeavors. Remember, *Carpe Diem!*

The BELL RINGS and the hallway floods with STUDENTS.

MITCH (18) and JIMMY (18) pass by Coach Case, who stands in the hallway.

COACH CASE

Hey Mitch, you sure I can't change your mind about playing ball at Iowa? I'm sure I can still get you a scholarship for baseball there.

Jimmy, with a smirk, gives Mitch a big nudge.

MITCH

Thanks, Coach. But I can't. I gotta help Dad with the farm now that he's gotten sick.

COACH CASE

Yeah, I understand. And I'm sorry about your dad. But look, if things change, just let me know.

You're the best ball player I've ever coached and I think you've got what it takes to make it to the pros.

MITCH
(nodding meekly)
Thanks, Coach. I'll see ya around.

COACH CASE
Okay. I'll count on that.

Jimmy and Mitch weave their way down the CROWDED HALLWAY.

JIMMY
See, I'm not the only one who thinks you could get to the big leagues.

MITCH
Even though I dream of that, I don't think it'll happen.

JIMMY
You still gonna try to attend Marshalltown?

MITCH
Yeah, probably - at least to start.

JIMMY
What about after that?

MITCH
I've been thinking about Iowa State after that. It's still close enough so that I could help with some of the farm work and if I could get an ROTC scholarship, I'd probably go there after Marshalltown.

JIMMY
How about playing ball with them?

MITCH
I don't know. Ball season pretty much hits planting season. I'll just have to wait and see. You still planning on Marshalltown?

JIMMY
Yeah. It's the only place I've been accepted.

MITCH
 Hey, at least we'll both be there
 together.

JIMMY
 Yeah.

They exit the school building.

TITLE: *AUGUST 1974*

INT. WESTFALL FUNERAL HOME - DAY

Mitch stands stoically in front of Dad's CASKET, staring blankly at the casket.

He turns and walks from the main room to a smaller room reserved for family. There are some tables with food on them and a couple sofas.

Most of Mitch's family is gathered in that room with Mom sitting on one sofa being CONSOLED by her SISTER. MARK (20) stands near one of the food tables.

Mitch PLOPS down on one of the empty sofas. Seeing this, Mark walks over and joins Mitch on the sofa.

MARK
 You gonna eat something?

MITCH
 I don't know. I'm not really hungry.

They both sit there quiet, Mitch staring at the floor and Mark taking a couple bites from his plate.

MARK
 I know this is tough for you.

MITCH
 Yeah.

MARK
 It's tough for all of us, especially Mom.

MITCH
 Yeah, I know.

MARK

You know, Dad said that he thought you had what it takes to play college ball... and maybe go pro.

(pause)

And I agree.

Mitch glances as Mark.

MARK (CONT'D)

I talked it over with Mom and we all want you to go to college and to play ball.

MITCH

But, the farm....

MARK

I'll handle the farm. I've got my Ag degree from Marshalltown and can take this on while you go to school. You've basically taken care of Mom and the farm these past two years, and it's my turn now.

MITCH

But you'll need help.

MARK

Mitch, I'm 20 yrs old, and with help from Mike and Mel, we can handle it.

MITCH

Mark, I can't... We can't afford for me to go to college now.

MARK

Look, you've already been accepted at Marshalltown. You'll be able to live at home and commute to school. I'm sure you'll be able to carpool with others... maybe Jimmy. And you'll be able to work here on weekends. And there's all sorts of scholarship money available, especially for someone with your grades. Mitch, I've been there. I know. It'll be alright. We can make this happen. You've got more potential than any of us.

MITCH

I don't think...

MARK
 (interrupting)
 Hey, I'm the man of the family now,
 and that's what you need to do.

Mitch just sits there silently looking at the floor as a TEAR
 silently rolls down his cheek.

MARK (CONT'D)
 Think about it.

Mark TAPS Mitch on the knee, stands up, and leaves the room.

TITLE: *IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY, FALL 1976*

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD, IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY - DAY

An tall square-jawed elderly gentleman COACH TIMM (68),
 wearing black horn-rimmed glasses and an Iowa State
 University cap and windbreaker, leans on the chain-link fence
 watching TWO INTRAMURAL TEAMS play.

MITCH (20) strikes out the last batter to end the game.

As the PLAYERS are gathering up their gear, the Coach
 approaches Mitch near the dugout.

COACH TIMM
 (calling to Mitch)
 Son!

Mitch, hearing the Coach, turns his head and looks at him.

MITCH
 Who? Me?

COACH TIMM
 Yeah, you. Come here, son.

Mitch, in grey sweat pants and a t-shirt, walks to the Coach.

MITCH
 What can I do for you, sir?

COACH TIMM
 Two nice home runs and a three-hit
 shut-out. That's quite impressive.

MITCH
 It's really nothing.

COACH TIMM

Yes, it is. You've a natural swing and a strong arm - that's something any team would like to have.

MITCH

Thank you, sir.

COACH TIMM

(offers his hand to Mitch)
I'm Coach Timm, coach for the baseball team. I was just walking by when the crack of the bat on your first homer caught my attention.

Mitch shakes Coach Timm's hand.

COACH TIMM (CONT'D)

You have any experience with organized ball?

MITCH

I played a couple years at Marshalltown Community College.

COACH TIMM

Oh, for Coach Brown?

Mitch nods his head.

COACH TIMM (CONT'D)

Were you on that championship team?

MITCH

Yes, sir. Both years.

COACH TIMM

Odd. He didn't talk to me about you.

MITCH

I asked him not to.

COACH TIMM

Why?

MITCH

I play baseball just for fun. I knew I wouldn't have the time to commit to playing on the ISU team.

COACH TIMM

Tell you what... Why don't you swing over to the Athletic Department and look me up. I think you can help me and I think I can help you while you're at ISU... sort of a symbiotic relationship.

MITCH

Thank you, sir. I'm flattered. But I don't think I can. With my job and ROTC, I don't think I'd have the time needed.

COACH TIMM

But, how about if I was to offer you a scholarship?

MITCH

That sounds very tempting... and I thank you. But I'm a firm believer in loyalty and I've already committed to ROTC and have a scholarship with them.

COACH TIMM

You sure?

MITCH

Yes, sir. Sorry.

COACH TIMM

No, no. Don't apologize. Loyalty is a very important virtue that I try to instill in all my players. And I admire you for your stand.

(beat)

I, myself, took four years off of baseball to serve with the Navy during World War II. It did me good.

(beat)

You're sure I can't change your mind?

MITCH

Yes, sir.

Coach Timm offers his hand.

COACH TIMM

Son, I wish you great success. By the way, what's your name?

MITCH
 (grasps Coach's hand)
 Mitch Jones, sir.

COACH TIMM
 Well, Mitch Jones. If, by chance,
 your situation should change,
 please stop by the Athletic
 Department and chat with me.

MITCH
 Sure. Thanks, Coach.

They go their separate ways.

TITLE: *NORTHERN PAKISTAN 1988*

EXT. NORTHERN PAKISTAN - DAY

A pick-up game of baseball on the dusty ground of the MILITARY BASECAMP. The SOLDIERS, including Mitch (32), are wearing their desert field uniforms with their blouses off. Mitch is pitching.

A SOLDIER runs up and SHOUTS to Mitch.

SOLDIER
 Sir, COLONEL DUBOIS wants to see
 you ASAP!

Mitch nods his acknowledgement of the message and tosses the baseball to ANOTHER PLAYER. He jogs over and puts on his uniform blouse and cap and jogs away.

INT. COLONEL DUBOIS' OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Mitch, in his field uniform, removes his hat and knocks on the door.

COLONEL DUBOIS
 Enter!

Mitch enters the room, stops a couple paces in front of the colonel's desk, and snaps a sharp salute.

MITCH
 Captain Jones reporting as directed.

COLONEL DUBOIS (44), a French military officer exuding aristocratic arrogance, returns the salute.

COLONEL DUBOIS
Stand at ease.

Mitch moves to a modified parade rest position.

The Colonel stands and walks over to a large map on the wall.

COLONEL DUBOIS (CONT'D)
Captain Jones, we've received reports of harassment actions by the Moujahedeen against Pakistani troops in this vicinity.
(points to a spot on a map)
This is a violation of the peace accord. I would like you to take your unit up there tomorrow and ensure there are no violations. Comprene?

MITCH
Yes, sir.

COLONEL DUBOIS
The area is now considered unsecure. So, be careful.

MITCH
Yes, sir.

Mitch gives a crisp hand salute, does an about-face, and exits.

EXT. NORTHERN PAKISTAN - MORNING

A group of half a dozen SOLDIERS, including LIEUTENANT RIVERS (23), LIEUTENANT WHITSON (24), and LIEUTENANT DREHER (24), all in combat gear and flak jackets, and blue UN peacekeeper helmets, gather around Mitch as he stands beside an easel holding a map board.

MITCH
Once again, gentlemen, we're merely looking for signs that the peace agreements are being properly enforced. Lieutenant Rivers, your platoon will patrol along the East, here.
(points using a pointer)
Lieutenant Whitson, your unit will be on the West, here.
(points with his pointer)
I'll be accompanying Lieutenant Dreher as he patrols up the center, here.
(points with his pointer)
We move out in two hours. Questions?

Everyone shakes their heads.

MITCH (CONT'D)
OK, let's get it done.

EXT. DIRT ROAD LEADING INTO A PAKISTAN VILLAGE - DAY

The patrol of TWELVE SOLDIERS are tactically spaced while walking along the road. Mitch is near the rear of the line, walking beside him is his radio man, PFC THOMAS (19).

An EXPLOSION at the front of the column, followed by SMALL ARMS FIRE and BULLETS LANDING ALL AROUND the group of soldiers. Everyone in the group dives into the ditches to the right and left of the dirt road while bullets WHIZ by.

PFC THOMAS
(shouting to Mitch)
Bravo 1-3 reports that the road is mined and snipers are firing from behind the wall to their left... He also reports that the snipers are outside hand grenade range and the wall is not conducive to using a 203 or LAW. He requests permission to call in an air strike.

MITCH
No. Tell him I'll be up there in a moment. You wait here.

Mitch removes his rucksack, gets up, and sprints up the road, weaving as he runs. BULLETS HIT THE GROUND around him as he runs. He jumps into the ditch beside a SOLDIER.

MITCH (CONT'D)
Where's Lieutenant Dreher?

SOLDIER
Up ahead about twenty meters, on the left, I think.

MITCH
Okay. Thanks.

Mitch takes off again and sprints ahead about twenty meters with BULLETS again landing around his feet and jumps into the ditch beside Lt. Dreher.

MITCH (CONT'D)
What's going on?

LT DREHER
 We're pinned down by snipers over
 there (points) and there (points).
 PRIVATE SAMUELS, our point man
 triggered the ambush when he
 tripped an IED.

MITCH
 Where is he?

LT DREHER
 Um... Samuels? He's over there
 (points).

PRIVATE SAMUELS (19) lays motionless in the middle of the
 road.

MITCH
 What's his status?

LT DREHER
 What?

MITCH
 What's his status? Is he dead?
 Alive? Wounded? What's his status!?

LT DREHER
 Um... I don't really know.

Mitch glares at Dreher.

LT DREHER (CONT'D)
 Um... The snipers are shooting at us.

MITCH
 No shit! And you're just going to
 leave him there.

Mitch raises up a little and looks out over the road.

MITCH (CONT'D)
 (sternly)
 You stay here!

LT DREHER
 Sir?

MITCH
 You stay right here where it's
safe.

Lt. Dreher watches as Mitch jumps up and begins sprinting the 50 meters to where PRIVATE SAMUELS (19) lies. BULLETS again land all around him.

An RPG heads directly for him. He jumps as the grenade EXPLODES at his feet.

He stumbles and falls, rolling over, then immediately gets up and sprints again towards the wounded soldier.

Not stopping, Mitch reaches down and grabs onto Samuels' equipment harness, and DRAGS him towards a nearby ditch. They both collapse in the ditch, Mitch on top of the private.

MITCH (CONT'D)

Samuels... Hey, Samuels... You OK?

PRIVATE SAMUELS

(stunned)

Captain Jones?

MITCH

Yeah. You OK?

PRIVATE SAMUELS

Yes, sir. I think my arm is broke... and I think they might have ruined my vest and ruck.

Mitch helps Samuels remove his tattered rucksack and sees him bleeding from just above his left elbow.

He opens his first aid pack, removes a bandage, and wraps Samuels' arm with it.

MITCH

Unfortunately, I don't have anything to use as a splint, but I'll wrap this tight which should help immobilize it some...

Samuels nods his head.

MITCH (CONT'D)

And should help stop the bleeding.

(chuckling slightly)

It's a good thing you played possum out there. Everyone thought you were dead... even the snipers.

PRIVATE SAMUELS

When the IED went off, I blacked out for a short while, then decided to play dead, thinking that they wouldn't shoot a man who'd already been blown up. I came to just a few moments before you dragged me away.

Mitch rises slightly to scout the snipers. Bullets land around him.

Samuels looks down and sees Mitch's left boot is severely damaged - his boot toe shredded and blood is covering the lower part of the tan boot. He also sees Mitch's left leg is bloody, below the knee.

Mitch lowers his body.

PRIVATE SAMUELS (CONT'D)

Sir, you're bleeding.

Samuels nods his head in the direction of Mitch's injury.

MITCH

Yeah. I'm okay. Got any grenades?

PRIVATE SAMUELS

Yeah. Why?

MITCH

Give me a couple.

Samuels hands two grenades to his Captain.

Mitch again sticks his head up to glance over the roadway and BULLETS again around him.

MITCH (CONT'D)

You gonna be alright if I leave you for a for a little bit?

PRIVATE SAMUELS

Sure. But what about you?

MITCH

I'll be fine. I'm going to take out those bastards.

PRIVATE SAMUELS

Sir, want me to lay down some suppressive fire?

MITCH

With that arm?

PRIVATE SAMUELS

Yeah, sure. That's my non-firing arm anyway.

MITCH

Okay. Thanks. But don't expose yourself. They've got this site pegged. Wait 'til I give you the signal.

Private Samuels nods his head.

Mitch slides along the ditch about twenty feet, looks at Samuels, and nods his head.

Samuels immediately raises up slightly and begins FIRING HIS WEAPON blindly in the direction of the snipers.

Mitch leaps out of the ditch and zig-zags to the ditch on the opposite side of the road, nearer the snipers, as BULLETS fly all around him.

Once in the ditch, things quite down again.

MITCH (CONT'D)

Samuels, you still there?

PRIVATE SAMUELS

Yes, sir.

MITCH

When I give the signal, give 'em another burst, OK?

PRIVATE SAMUELS

Yes, sir.

Mitch pulls the safety pins from two hand grenades - one in each hand - still squeezing the spoon handle against the round body of the grenades.

MITCH

Alright... Ready... Go!

Samuels begins FIRING again while Mitch kneels in the ditch and throws the grenade towards the wall of the snipers. It clears the wall and DETONATES.

Mitch immediately switches the other hand grenade to his throwing hand and throws it over the wall of the other group of snipers, DETONATING immediately after clearing the wall.

Everything goes QUIET. After a few moments, Samuels is heard.

PRIVATE SAMUELS
Sir, I think you got 'em.

MITCH.
Yeah, maybe. You still OK?

PRIVATE SAMUELS
Yes, sir.

Mitch reaches down and grasps his bloodied left leg and WINCES. Then he lifts his head to look towards the snipers' positions. Nothing but quiet.

With an audible GRUNT, he leaps up and sprints up the slight rise to the wall, pauses, then quickly vaults over the wall.

He discovers a three bodies and he FIRES A COUPLE ROUNDS from his rifle into each of them to ensure they are indeed dead.

He then moves over to the second position and REPEATS THIS PROCEDURE with the two bodies he discovers there.

After carefully looking around, Mitch climbs back over the wall and walks back to Samuels' position, limping.

MITCH.
How about let's get you out of here.

Mitch helps Samuels to his feet, grabs his rucksack, and together they limp down the road towards the rest of the unit, Samuels with his bandaged arm hanging loosely at his side.

After just a short distance, a couple other TROOPS, one a MEDIC, run up and take hold of Private Samuels and his rucksack. The medic sees Mitch's blood-soaked leg and boot.

MEDIC
Sir, your leg...

MITCH.
Yes, I know. But tend to Samuels here. I'll be alright.

As they're escorting Samuels from him, Mitch calls out.

MITCH
Private Samuels!

Samuels turns back towards Mitch.

MITCH (CONT'D)
(nods and winks)
You did real good, son! Thanks.

Samuels squirms free from the grasp of his escorts, gives a big grin and snaps a salute with his good right arm. Mitch proudly returns the salute.

PFC Thomas runs up to his Captain, stops, and looks at Mitch's damaged lower leg.

PFC THOMAS

Sir, your...

MITCH

I know, I know. I'll be fine.

PFC THOMAS

I've called in a medevac which should be here any moment now.

MITCH

Good. Thanks. Is everyone else OK?

PFC THOMAS

Yes sir. As far as I know. There have been no other reports of injuries.

MITCH

Great. Thanks, Thomas.

(beat)

Get Lieutenant Whitson on the horn and let him know what's gone on and that he's now in charge.

PFC THOMAS

Yes, sir.

As they walk down the road, with Mitch severely limping and Thomas ON THE RADIO, they pass by Lieutenant Dreher.

Dreher takes a couple steps towards Mitch, but he holds up a hand and glares at Dreher, and continues his walk down the road towards the medevac helicopter LANDING on the road.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM, WALTER REED MEDICAL CENTER - DAY

Mitch, wearing an Army PT shirt and shorts, lies in his hospital bed, left leg in a cast from toe to knee and elevated in a traction sling. A white sheet covers his good leg and his waist. Jimmy (30) sits in a chair beside the bed.

JIMMY

So, have you seen your family yet? I heard they were coming to visit you.

MITCH

Yeah, Mom, Mark, and Mike came by yesterday and again this morning. The other brothers couldn't make it due to school. They're heading back to Iowa this afternoon.

JIMMY

You know, they were really worried, especially your Mom, when they heard that you'd been wounded.

MITCH

Yeah, that's what they told me. But I think they were pretty much relieved when they saw that I'm actually doing okay.

JIMMY

Doing OK?

MITCH

Yeah. Nothing life threatening... and I'll be as good as new soon.

JIMMY

Let's hope so.

(beat)

Man, you've been gone a long time.

MITCH

Ten years.

JIMMY

And things haven't changed a bit in Westfall in all that time.

MITCH

How much longer you going to be there?

JIMMY

Shoot, I was born there and I'll probably die there. I'm not the world traveler like you.

MITCH

Thanks to my Uncle Sam.

They chuckle then go silent as a NURSE (20) enters and records Mitch's vital signs onto the clipboard.

JIMMY

Hey, man, I've got to split. Got a flight departing in a couple hours.

MITCH

Hey, thanks for visiting me.

Jimmy stands up and leans forward in a very awkward attempt at giving Mitch a hug, then gives up on that and merely grasps Mitch's hand in a wrestler handshake.

JIMMY

You take care now, and don't be such a stranger to Iowa.

MITCH

(grins)

Sure. No problem. Thanks again. And take care of yourself.

JIMMY

You too.

Jimmy leaves the room and the nurse returns the chart to the hook at the foot of the bed and leaves right behind Jimmy.

Mitch picks up a crossword puzzle book laying on the tray beside his bed and begins working on a puzzle.

An arm in a white labcoat reaches out and the hand grabs Mitch's chart. Mitch is oblivious to this because of the frequency with which this happens.

His attention is quickly refocused when he hears a female voice with a definite New England accent - the voice of CONNIE (27), a very attractive, self-determined young woman.

CONNIE

Good morning, Captain Jones. My name is Captain Williamson, and I've been assigned to help you with your rehab. I see by your chart that you underwent some repair to your lower left leg and major reconstructive surgery on your left foot.

MITCH

Yes, Ma'am.

CONNIE

Although the surgeon had to amputate three toes, the prognosis for you is quite positive. However, you will have to undergo some lengthy rehabilitation to learn how to walk properly, and it's likely that you'll never be able to run again.

Mitch just sits there staring at Connie.

CONNIE (CONT'D)
Where are you from, Captain?

MITCH
The 82nd Airborne Division.

Connie attempts to stifle back a snicker, but does so poorly.

CONNIE
Not your unit... Where are you from?

MITCH
Oh, sorry, Ma'am. Iowa... I'm
originally from Iowa.

CONNIE
Well, Captain Jones... from Iowa...
You don't have to call me Ma'am.
I'm not your superior officer.

MITCH
(somewhat embarrassed)
Oh, I'm sorry Ma'am... Oops.

CONNIE
No problem.

MITCH
Are you my doctor?

CONNIE
No. I'm your physical therapist.

MITCH
I see... And may I ask, where are
you from?

CONNIE
From the Walter Reed Department of
Rehabilitative Services.

MITCH
(snickering)
Not your unit. Where are you from?

Connie gives a little chuckle.

CONNIE
Good one.

MITCH
Yes, Ma'am.

CONNIE
I'm from Maine.

MITCH
Maine?... Never been there, but
I'll definitely have to visit there
if all the girls in Maine are as
pretty as you.

CONNIE
Well, we'll see, but we've got to
get you back on the road to
recovery first... Tomorrow
morning... Ten AM. Someone will
bring you down to the Rehab Center
and we'll begin. OK?

MITCH
(big grin)
Yes, Ma'am. Looking forward to it.

CONNIE
(smiles back)
And stop with all this Ma'am garbage.

MITCH
(nearly laughing)
Yes, Ma'am.

Connie leaves the room and Mitch just lies there smiling.

INT. REHAB CENTER - DAY

Mitch, wearing Army Physical Training (PT) shorts and t-shirt, lies face down on a table and winces in pain. His leg no longer in a cast, but his calf and foot are still heavily bandaged. Connie works on his left ankle as his left leg is flexed to a 90-degree angle.

CONNIE
You doing OK there, soldier?

MITCH
(significant wincing)
Yeah.

SERIES OF SCENES

Mitch, in Army sweatpants and t-shirt, GRIMACES as he walks along a walkway with two waist-high parallel bars to help support his weight. Connie stands beside him.

Mitch wipes sweat and some tears from his eyes as he sits cycling on a stationary bike. Connie's in the background.

Mitch swims laps in an indoor swimming pool. Connie watches from the sidelines.

Mitch walks down a hallway, using a cane and with a significant limp. Connie walks alongside him.

Mitch GRIMACES as he steps up and down wooden stairs, holding onto the adjacent handrail. Connie looks on.

Mitch, GRIMACES while walking slowly on a treadmill. Connie smiles as she makes some annotations on his chart.

INT. REHAB CENTER - DAY

Mitch, attired in his PT uniform, leg and foot still bandaged, lies on his stomach on a work table with Connie stretching his leg and ankle.

Private Samuels, wearing Army sweats, enters with his arm in a cast and sling, and sees Mitch.

PRIVATE SAMUELS
(grinning)
Captain Jones?!

Mitch looks up to see Samuels grinning in front of him.

MITCH
Private Samuels?

PRIVATE SAMUELS
Corporal now.

MITCH
Hey, congratulations!

PRIVATE SAMUELS
Who's your girlfriend?

Mitch looks at Connie with a puzzled look. She blushes while simultaneously smiling. Mitch looks back towards Samuels.

MITCH
Samuels, this is Captain Williamson,
my physical therapist... the best in
the Army.

Mitch glances at Connie and sees her blushing even more.

PRIVATE SAMUELS
(nods towards Connie)
Captain. Nice to meet you.

Connie returns the nod.

CONNIE
Thank you. Nice to meet you, too.

PRIVATE SAMUELS
(to Mitch)
Well, don't get too attached.
You'll soon be leaving here, like
me. I'm heading home tomorrow.

MITCH
Hey, that's great. How's your arm?

PRIVATE SAMUELS
It's good... They say it'll be as
good as new. How's your leg?

MITCH
It's great. Connie's... Captain
Williamson... is working hard to
get me back into shape. She's a
real miracle worker.

PRIVATE SAMUELS
Hey, well, it's great seeing you.
By the way, I heard you got a
Silver Star for your exploits,
saving me and all.

MITCH
Yeah, I guess. Did you get your
medal for your actions?

PRIVATE SAMUELS
Yeah, I got a bronze star with V-
device.

MITCH
I'm glad to hear that. I doubt that
we would have been successful had
you not been able to do your part.

PRIVATE SAMUELS
I don't know about that. But thanks
for putting me in for it.

MITCH
No problem... You earned it.

CONNIE
(looks at Samuels)
Silver Star?

PRIVATE SAMUELS
Yup. Your boyfriend... Um, Captain Jones here is a real hero. He saved my life and took out two enemy sniper positions. Have him tell you about it sometime.

CONNIE
(looks at Mitch)
Ayuh, I will.

PRIVATE SAMUELS
Well, I gotta go. Sir, thanks again for all you've done for me... and I'm glad you're doing alright.

MITCH
Yeah. Same here. Take care of yourself.

Samuels nods his head, turns, and walks away.

CONNIE
Silver Star?

MITCH
Yeah, I guess.

CONNIE
So what went down?

MITCH
I'll tell you about it, but only if you'll join me for dinner sometime.

CONNIE
You mean, like a date?

MITCH
Um... I guess so.

CONNIE
Okay.

MITCH
Really?

CONNIE
Yup. How about tomorrow night after I get off work?

MITCH
I'm already looking forward to it.

Connie grins slyly as she gives Mitch's ankle a good bend.

CONNIE
Uh huh. We'll see about that.

MITCH
(wincing)
Ouch!

INT. FINE DINING RESTAURANT - EVENING

Mitch, wearing a pair of slacks and a Hawaiian shirt, sits at a small table. Connie, attired in a very sharp evening dress, enters the lobby of the restaurant and Mitch immediately stands and limps over to meet her.

MITCH
I guess I under-dressed for this occasion. But this is about the fanciest outfit I have in my wardrobe right now.

CONNIE
I'm sorry. Perhaps, I over-dressed.

MITCH
Oh no. You look like you could easily be a pork princess.

CONNIE
(quizzical look)
Uh... Pork princess?

MITCH
Oh... A pork princess is a beauty queen contestant in Iowa... You look... breathtakingly beautiful. Really.

CONNIE
(blushing)
Well, thank you, Captain Jones. And aren't you cunnin?!

MITCH
Cunnin?

CONNIE
Oh, sorry... adorable or cute.

Mitch assists Connie with her chair.

MITCH
Thank you. And it's Mitch... call
me Mitch.

CONNIE
Only if you call me Connie.

Mitch smiles and nods his head.

SERIES OF SCENES

The server pours some wine into Mitch & Connie's wine glasses. Mitch holds out his wine glass in a toast. Connie clinks her glass to Mitch's.

During their meal, Mitch is talking, quite serious, using his hands to illustrate the point. Connie listens, clinging to every word.

Mitch and Connie laugh at something Mitch said.

Mitch is enthralled with Connie as she is talking.

Connie holds out her wine glass in a toast and Mitch clinks his glass to her's.

EXT. QUIET ROWHOUSE NEIGHBORHOOD STREET - NIGHT (LATER)

Mitch and Connie walk on the sidewalk, Mitch uses his cane, while Connie holds onto Mitch's other arm. They stop.

Connie nods her head towards a nearby row house.

CONNIE
This is where I live.

MITCH
Nice.

They turn and look in each other's eyes for a few moments.

CONNIE
I really enjoyed myself tonight.

MITCH
Me too.

They stand there, awkwardly, gazing into each other's eyes. Mitch leans forward a little and Connie reciprocates. They kiss, very gently - awkwardly - almost apprehensively.

CONNIE
You know, this is going to be
difficult.

MITCH
What do you mean.

CONNIE
As your care provider, I'm not
supposed to fraternize with my
patients.

MITCH
(beat)
Don't think of it that way... You're
not fraternizing with me... I'm
fraternizing with you.

Connie shakes her head and smiles.

CONNIE
Oh, Mitch Jones. What am I to do
with you?

MITCH
I'm sure you'll think of something.

They kiss again.

MITCH (CONT'D)
Well, I'd better let you go. I've
got a busy day ahead tomorrow with
my physical therapist.

Connie grins broadly and nods her head.

CONNIE
Good night, Mitch.

MITCH
Good night.

Connie turns and walks up the flight of steps to the door of
her row house. Mitch stands and watches her.

She unlocks the door, turns back, smiles at Mitch, and enters
her house, closing the door behind her.

Mitch walks away, grinning from ear to ear.

INT. WALTER REED CAFETERIA - DAY

Mitch, dressed in sweat pants and Army PT t-shirt, sits at a table, reading the Army Times newspaper after finishing his breakfast.

He turns the page and sets the paper down, focusing on something that just caught his eye.

He abruptly gets up and leaves the dining room, with newspaper.

INT. REHAB CENTER (CONNIE'S OFFICE) - MOMENTS LATER

Mitch glances in through the window and sees Connie working on some paperwork in her office. Her co-worker, SUSAN (25), is at a nearby desk. He knocks on the door and opens it just enough for him to stick his head in.

MITCH
Captain Williamson, do you have a
moment?

Connie glances at all the papers sprawled across her desk.

CONNIE
I guess so. What is it?

Mitch places the newspaper on top of the papers on the desk.

MITCH
I just saw this in the Army Times.

Connie glances at the newspaper.

CONNIE
What?

Mitch points to an article in the paper.

MITCH
This.

Connie scans through the article.

CONNIE
Okay. The Army ten-miler. What of it?

MITCH
The Army ten-miler. I'm going to
run in it.

Connie holds out her hands in front of her.

CONNIE

Hey, slow down there, Bub. I don't want to burst your bubble, but you're no way ready to run a race like that.

MITCH

Why not?!

CONNIE

First, you're injured... you're still needing a cane to walk....

MITCH

But I am getting better each day. Right?

CONNIE

Yea... but you might never be able to run again.

MITCH

Sure I will... With your help.

(beat)

Will you help me.

CONNIE

You can't be serious. Doing something like this so soon could cause further damage or set you back in your rehabilitation.

Mitch gets a puppy-dog pleading look on his face.

MITCH

Help me... Please?!

Connie shakes her head in surrender.

CONNIE

I'll see what I can do. And I make no promises. It's only six weeks away. It will be hard work... very hard work, and there's no guarantees.

MITCH

(face now beaming)

You're the best! Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Mitch turns and begins to exit, then turns back and grabs the newspaper from Connie's desk and gives her a wink before departing and closing her office door behind him.

Connie looks over at Susan and gives a frustrated look.

CONNIE
Ugh! What can I do?

Susan just smiles and shrugs her shoulders.

INT. REHAB CENTER - DAY

SERIES OF SCENES

Mitch sweats profusely as he rides the stationary bike. Connie walks by and glances at his effort.

Mitch sweats significantly with tear lines on his cheeks as he walks at a very brisk pace on the treadmill. Connie walks by, patting him on the shoulder as she passes.

CONNIE
Only two more miles to go.

Mitch sits on a weight bench doing leg extensions. He GRUNTS and STRAINS with each repetition. Connie walks by and adds two 2-pound weights to the weight bar.

Mitch swims laps in the swimming pool. Connie watches from the side of the pool.

CONNIE (CONT'D)
(calling out)
That's twenty laps. You're half way there.

Mitch sweats profusely and GRIMACES with every other stride as he jogs on the treadmill. Connie walks by and nudges up the speed by another tenth of a MPH.

INT. REHAB CENTER - DAY

Mitch, attired in his sweatpants and t-shirt, sits on a bench in the Rehab Center, soaked with sweat and wiping the perspiration from his face and brow.

Connie enters and sits beside him. She is carrying a large shopping bag.

MITCH
What's in the sack?

CONNIE
Sack? It's called a shopping bag.

MITCH
Oh, okay. Sorry. What's in the
shopping bag?

CONNIE
I've got something for you.

MITCH
For me? Really?

Connie reaches into the bag and pulls out a gift-wrapped shoe box and hands it to Mitch.

Mitch gets a surprised expression on his face.

MITCH (CONT'D)
What is it?

CONNIE
Well, open it and find out.

Mitch begins to carefully unwrap the gift.

CONNIE (CONT'D)
(jokingly)
Oh, come on. Don't unwrap it like a
sissy... unwrap it like a man.

Mitch gives a big grin then rips the paper off, wads it up into a ball and playfully tosses it at Connie. Mitch now holds a plain shoe box.

MITCH
What's this?

CONNIE
Open it and see.

Mitch opens the box and pulls out a pair of New Balance running shoes. With a puzzled look on his face, he looks at Connie.

CONNIE (CONT'D)
The race is only ten days away and
you've worked so hard to prepare
for it. I thought you should have a
decent pair of shoes to wear.

Mitch holds up the shoes and admires them.

CONNIE (CONT'D)
 These are especially designed for
 you and your foot - to provide the
 support necessary for you to run
 more comfortably.

TEARS begin to well up in his eyes.

MITCH
 That's really Iowa nice.

CONNIE
 Huh? Well, go on... try 'em on.

Mitch puts on the right shoe first, then carefully the left
 shoe and laces them up snugly.

CONNIE (CONT'D)
 How do they feel?

Mitch stands up and takes a few steps.

CONNIE (CONT'D)
 (impatiently)
 Well???

Mitch looks down at Connie as a tear rolls down his cheek.

MITCH
 They're wonderful. Absolutely,
 amazingly wonderful.

Connie beams with pride.

CONNIE
 You'll need to start wearing them
 right away to ensure they're broken
 in before the race and to ensure
 that they'll work.

MITCH
 How can I ever thank you? Here,
 stand up.

Mitch offers Connie his hand, and she accepts it as she
 stands. Mitch immediately wraps his arms around her and gives
 her a big bear hug. Connie, caught by surprise, attempts to
 push him away, but he won't let go.

CONNIE
 Mitch Jones... you're all sweaty.

MITCH
 I know.

Mitch gently grabs Connie by both shoulders and looks into her eyes.

MITCH

(calmly)

Connie, I'm stretched and ready.
You helped me, remember? Don't
worry. I'll be okay.

CONNIE

I know. But I worry anyway. I don't
want you to injure yourself.

MITCH

I won't. I had the best trainer.

Mitch glances up as an announcement comes over the
loudspeaker.

ANNOUNCER (OVER LOUD SPEAKER)

All runners to the starting line.

Mitch carefully removes his sweat pants, revealing a long
reddish scar along his lower left leg.

MITCH

Well, I gotta go. Wish me luck!

Connie and the OTHERS all pat him on the back and WISH HIM
LUCK.

Mitch and all the other RUNNERS are soon lined up at the
starting line, standing at attention as the NATIONAL ANTHEM
concludes.

ANNOUNCER (OVER LOUD SPEAKER)

Runners, stand by... Runners, GO!

A single GUNSHOT is heard as the runners (including Mitch)
cross the start line and begin the course.

Connie stands there apprehensively and CALLS OUT.

CONNIE

Go Mitch!

Connie turns towards Susan, her colleague.

CONNIE (CONT'D)

I hope, dear God, that we're doing
the right thing.

SUSAN
 I'm sure it'll be okay. He's
 strong, smart, and in great shape.
 He'll be fine.

EXT. PENTAGON PARKING LOT - LATER

Hundreds of SPECTATORS crowd near the finish line of the Army Ten-Miler. Connie, Susan, and her other COLLEAGUES are standing there CHEERING for Mitch as he crosses the finish line. The large digital clock reads 1 hr 12 min 42 sec.

SUSAN
 (to Connie)
 He was only 20-minutes behind the
 winner.

CONNIE
 (fighting back some tears)
 I know... I know.

Drenched in sweat, Mitch places his hands behind his head as he walks, now LIMPING a little and GASPING for breath. Other runners continue to cross the finish line behind him.

Mitch hears CONNIE'S CHEERING, turns towards her, and a big grin comes to his face. Susan and Connie's other colleagues SLAP Mitch on the back and CONGRATULATE him. Mitch is oblivious to them and focused only on Connie.

As Mitch gets to Connie, he wraps his arms around her and gives her a huge bear hug, lifting her off the ground.

Connie half-heartedly attempts to push herself free.

CONNIE (CONT'D)
 Mitch, you're all sweaty!

MITCH
 I know.

Connie, relaxes and enjoys the moment, but only for a few seconds. Then she pushes back and looks him in the eyes with a very serious expression. Mitch slowly releases her.

CONNIE
 How's your foot... and leg? You're
 limping.

MITCH
 (smiling)
 They're fine... just a little sore
 and tired... but fine.

CONNIE
Wow! Just over seven minutes per
mile... You did it!

MITCH
But not without your help.

CONNIE
You earned this.

MITCH
Let's celebrate tonight. How about
I pick you up at seven? I'm in the
mood for a Maidrite and pop. How
about you?

CONNIE
Maidrite and pop?

MITCH
(kiddingly)
Oh, yeah, you New Englanders don't
speak American very well... In
Iowa, that's what we call sloppy-
joe sandwich and a Coke.

CONNIE
Oh... Okay... Sure.

Connie nods her acceptance.

INT. D.C. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Mitch, donning a sport jacket, and Connie, wearing a nice
dress, sit at a table after completing their meal.

CONNIE
Maidrite and pop, right?

MITCH
Yep. And how was it?

CONNIE
Very tasty. Thank you.

MITCH
Good. Next time, maybe I'll take
you to get some gas station pizza.

CONNIE
What's that?

MITCH

Oh... in Iowa gas stations frequently have some of the best pizza around. That's why we call it that... and it's quick, cheap, and tastes great!

CONNIE

Next time? Well maybe next time I'll take you to Maine for some real food... lobster tail and champagne.

MITCH

Yeah, okay. So, where in Maine are you from?

CONNIE

Well, when I was younger, we lived way out in the willywacks. But then we moved Down East.

MITCH

Willywacks? Down East? What's that in English?

CONNIE

(snickering)

Living in the willywacks means living way out in the woods... away from the coastal area. And Down East is Maine's Eastern coastal region.

MITCH

I see.

CONNIE

(jokingly)

And you? From whence dost thou hail?

MITCH

(snickering)

Madam, I hail from a small town called Westfall in Central Iowa. Our farm was located along the Grand Ridge crick.

CONNIE

(snickering)

What's a crick?

MITCH

Oh, sorry... Creeeeek.

CONNIE
(laughing)
Oh, I see.
(pauses to stop laughing)
Anyway, how's your leg and foot?

MITCH
Just fine. And how are you doing?

CONNIE
I couldn't be happier than a clam
at high tide?

MITCH
What?

CONNIE
(chuckling again)
Oh, that's right, you Midwesterners
don't speak proper English yet. What
I said was, "I'm still thrilled at
your accomplishment."

MITCH
Oh, I see. While I was running this
morning, I got this idea in my
head.

CONNIE
Yeah, what kind of idea?

MITCH
A good idea.

CONNIE
Okay. So what is your idea?

MITCH
I think I might try the Ironman
competition.

CONNIE
(laughing)
You're kidding... right?

MITCH
No. I think I want to try to do the
Ironman and I would like for you to
help me train for it.

CONNIE
(now serious)
Oh, I don't know if I...

MITCH

(interrupting)

You're a miracle worker! Look at what you've done already.

CONNIE

But that was just the Army ten-miler. The Ironman is a whole nother ball game. It's a 2-mile rough water swim, a 100-mile bike race, and a full 26-mile marathon.

MITCH

I know. But I think I can get there and do it... but only with your help.

CONNIE

My help?!

MITCH

Yeah. You inspire me.

CONNIE

No, it's you who inspires me.

MITCH

Anyway... If I can finagle an assignment here with the Old Guard, you could train me.

CONNIE

I don't know. My tour with the Army is just about up and I need to be thinking about what I'm going to do once I get out.

MITCH

When is that?

CONNIE

In about eleven months.

MITCH

Well, that gives me at least eleven months to prepare with you.

(gives his best sad puppy dog look)

Come on... Please?!

CONNIE

Oh, Mitch Jones, stop that... I'll have to give it some thought.

Mitch reaches into his suitcoat pocket, pulls out a small ring box, and places it on the table by Connie.

MITCH

Okay. So while you're thinking about that, would you also think about marrying me?

CONNIE

(shocked, but not unhappy or angry)
Whoa there, Bub. Where'd this all come from?

MITCH

(smiling)
From my pocket... and my heart.

CONNIE

I'll have to give this some thought, too.

MITCH

(still smiling)
I know.

CONNIE

Mitch Jones... You're the everlasting optimist.

MITCH

Yes, ma'am. I am.

Connie just chuckles.

INT. REHAB CENTER - EVENING

Connie, wearing her white lab coat, holds a clipboard, and a stop watch, while Mitch swims laps in the pool, using a kickboard.

CONNIE

Come on, Mitch, you need to use your legs more when swimming. You can't just use your arms or you'll never get there.

Connie's colleague, Susan, walks into the pool room and stands next to Connie.

SUSAN

How's he doing?

CONNIE
 Not bad, but we've a long way to go
 before he's ready, and time's
 quickly running out.

Connie turns her wrist to look at her watch. A diamond ring
 comes into view on her left hand.

CONNIE (CONT'D)
 (to Susan)
 Speaking of time, we've got about
 thirty minutes more. I'll lock up
 when we're done.

SUSAN
 Okay. Thanks. Good night.

CONNIE
 Yeah. See you tomorrow.

Susan exits the pool room.

CONNIE (CONT'D)
 (shouts to Mitch)
 Come on, Mitch. Kick! Kick! Kick!

Mitch just GRUNTS and kicks harder.

TITLE: *KAIULA BAY, HAWAII - OCTOBER 1990*

EXT. ALI'I DRIVE, KAIULA BAY, KONA, HAWAII - MORNING

Mitch nervously stretches. Connie assists and appears even
 more nervous than Mitch. Clad only in his swim suit, he has
 the number 136 greased onto his upper arm and on his swim cap.

CONNIE
 How are you feeling? Are you loose yet?

MITCH
 Yeah.
 (beat)
 Where's the nearest kybo... port-a-
 potty?

Connie points.

CONNIE
 Over yonder.

MITCH
 Thanks.

A horn sounds and the mass of bodies all start swimming at the same time, looking like a great school of salmon attempting to negotiate a small salmon run. Soon all that is seen are ARMS FLAILING and water SPLASHING.

EXT. ALI'I DRIVE, KAIULA BAY, KONA, HAWAII - LATER

About an hour later, contestants exit the water, running to take a quick fresh-water rinse, change into their biking attire, and hop on their bikes.

Mitch is in the middle of the pack. As he runs from the shower area and into the changing area, Connie hands him his towel, bike clothes, and shoes.

As he runs out of the changing area and gets to his bike, he tosses his towel and swim attire to Connie and she hands him his helmet and sunglasses and helps him get on his bike.

CONNIE

You're doing wonderful!

MITCH

Thanks.

About two minutes has elapsed between leaving the water the starting out on the bike.

EXT. ALI'I DRIVE, KAIULA BAY, KONA, HAWAII - LATER

Mitch coasts in to the transition point between the cycling and the marathon run. He doesn't appear to be having any difficulty, unlike many of his other competitors.

Connie hands him a bottle of Gatorade and his running clothes and shoes as he runs into the changing tent.

Exiting the tent about a minute later, heading out onto the running course, Connie shouts some encouragement to him.

CONNIE

Mitch, you're doing great. Just keep putting one foot in front of the other and focus on the man in front of you. Just stay with him... And drink - stay hydrated to avoid cramping!

EXT. ALI'I DRIVE, KAIULA BAY, KONA, HAWAII - EVENING

The sun is beginning to set as Connie sees Mitch jogging out the last yards of the race - limping noticeably.

The large digital clock reads, 10 hrs, 52 min, and 38 seconds as Mitch crosses the finish line. Many runners are still far behind him.

He is immediately mobbed by PEOPLE, one placing a flower lei around his neck, another handing him a bottle Gatorade, and, of course, Connie, giving him a towel and a big hug.

CONNIE
(excited with tears forming)
You did it! Mitch, you did it!

MITCH
I'm all sweaty.

CONNIE
(crying and clinging to him)
I know.

INT. REHAB CENTER (CONNIE'S OFFICE) - DAY

Mitch, dressed in his usual sweatsuit, and now sporting a wedding band, gives a courtesy knock on the door to Connie's office as he enters. Boxes are stacked in various locations. Connie is standing behind her desk looking intently at a framed PHOTO of the rather large wedding party for their wedding.

Mitch walks to Connie and gives her a quick kiss on the nape of her neck, then standing behind her, he glances at the photo she's holding. He then wraps his arms around her.

MITCH
Great wedding, wasn't it.

CONNIE
Ayuh, it was... even though we had to wait because someone suddenly had to visit the men's room.

MITCH
(looking at Connie)
I couldn't help it. I was very nervous.

CONNIE
Wow, that sure was a large wedding party, though... six groomsmen.

MITCH
Yeah, but I had to allow all of my brothers to participate... and with Jimmy as my best man....

CONNIE
(interrupting)
And because of that, I had to find
enough ladies to accompany them all.

Mitch turns Connie around so that they are facing each other.

MITCH
But you are happy now?

CONNIE
Yes, very much so.

She leans forward and kisses him.

MITCH
You're sure this is the right thing to
do? Getting out of the Army, I mean.

CONNIE
Yeah, I think so.

Susan enters the office with a roll of package tape.

MITCH
Susan, is Connie doing the right
thing by leaving the Army?

SUSAN
Yes, it's the right thing. After
Sports Illustrated wrote about your
success in the Army Ten-miler and
Ironman, and how you attributed it
all to Connie, the phone's been
ringing off the hook with pro
athletes wanting her to work with
them. Something about being a
personal trainer... whatever that is.

MITCH
(to Connie)
Is that true?

CONNIE
Yeah, I guess.

MITCH
(excited)
Honey, that's great! That's a
perfect job for you!

CONNIE

But we'll be moving to different locations every couple years due to your assignments.

MITCH

I don't think that will be a problem. If they want you to work with them - and I'm confident they will - they will be willing to come to you... wherever you are.

SUSAN

You know he's right.

Connie shrugs her shoulders.

MITCH

I'm sure you'll be working with them during their off-season. And I'm sure we can find or even build you a gym to use, regardless of where we are stationed. You're too talented to waste all your time just working with me.

CONNIE

Now wait just a min....

MITCH

(interrupting Connie)

And pro athletes have money... and you know we can sure use that.

SUSAN

Amen!

Mitch and Connie both look at Susan with questioning expressions. Susan shrugs her shoulders, then tapes boxes.

Mitch gently grabs Connie by each of her shoulders and looks deeply into her eyes.

MITCH

It's all going to be fine! Trust me on this.

Mitch nods towards the boxes.

MITCH (CONT'D)

Now, what needs to go?

Connie points to some boxes. Mitch picks them up and exits the office with them.

TITLE: *FRANKFORT, KENTUCKY - SEVEN YEARS LATER*

INT. CONNIE'S HOME OFFICE - AFTERNOON

JORDAN TOMAS (African-American, 32), shortstop with the Cincinnati Reds, attired in a grey silk suit, walks around Connie's office, admiring all the PHOTOS on the wall and Mitch's AWARDS, including THREE CERTIFICATES for completing the Ironman Competition - one indicating (Top Ten Finisher).

Connie (38) enters and takes a seat behind her desk and motions Jordan to a seat in front of her desk. Jordan sits.

CONNIE

Jordan, how nice to finally meet you. I apologize for being late, but I ran into a little traffic after dropping Mitch Jr. off at his soccer practice.

JORDAN TOMAS

No problem. And I'm so happy to finally meet you. I want to thank you for agreeing to talk with me. Chris and Landon and Reggie all rave about how you've helped them.

Connie glances at some papers on her desk.

CONNIE

Let's see... you're the shortstop for the Reds?

JORDAN TOMAS

Yes, ma'am.

CONNIE

So, how can I help you? What exactly are you looking for?

JORDAN TOMAS

Well, the season's over and I'm not as young as I used to be... obviously. I want to play baseball a few more years, so I need to build my strength and stamina and shave a second or two off my base running or I'll be gone soon. The younger guys are just too strong and fast now.

CONNIE

I see.

JORDAN TOMAS
Do you think you can help me?

CONNIE
How much time do you have?

JORDAN TOMAS
(confused by the question)
Huh? What?

CONNIE
When do you need to reach your
target?

JORDAN TOMAS
By spring training.

CONNIE
That would be mid-to-late February,
right?

JORDAN TOMAS
Right.

CONNIE
And how much time can you commit?

JORDAN TOMAS
As much as you need.

CONNIE
Are you single or married?

JORDAN TOMAS
(puzzled expression)
Single. Why?

CONNIE
Are you willing to reside with us, here?

JORDAN TOMAS
What?

CONNIE
For the best bang for your buck, it
would be best if you stayed right
here with us while you're training.

JORDAN TOMAS
I can do that... What about your
husband?

CONNIE

Mitch? He's all for it. As a matter of fact, you'll be working out alongside him just about every day.

Jordan glances at a PHOTO of Mitch crossing the Ironman finish line.

JORDAN TOMAS

What's he do?

CONNIE

Mitch is the head of the Army ROTC department at the University of Kentucky... in Lexington.

JORDAN TOMAS

Don't get me wrong... You're the expert here... I mean Mitch and his accomplishments are admirable... but isn't he a little old?

Connie leans forward, resting her elbows on her desk.

CONNIE

Oh, trust me, Jordan. He may be 42 years old, and he may not beat you in any sprint races, but he'll sure give you a good run for your money.

(beat)

Jordan, you said you wanted more longevity to your baseball career. Mitch is the epitome of longevity and remaining physically fit. You'll be lucky if you can hang with him during the workouts.

Connie stands, walks to the front of her desk and sits on it.

CONNIE (CONT'D)

Look, Jordan, Mitch and I are a team. I wouldn't be successful without him, and he wouldn't be as successful without me. He trains alongside my clients. That's the way we do it... and it works.

Connie walks back around to her chair behind her desk.

JORDAN TOMAS

Okay.

CONNIE

So, when can you start?

JORDAN TOMAS
 Since the season is over... just
 about any time you want.

CONNIE
 How about next week... Monday? Can
 you be here by 6:00 AM?

JORDAN TOMAS
 I guess so.

CONNIE
 Jordan, is that a Yes? or No?

JORDAN TOMAS
 Yes, I can be here at that time.

CONNIE
 Alright. We'll plan on beginning
 next Monday morning. I'll email you
 with other details.

JORDAN TOMAS
 Sounds good.

Connie stands and offers a handshake. He stands and takes it.

JORDAN TOMAS (CONT'D)
 Thank you. I'll see you next week.

Connie escorts Jordan to the door.

MONTAGE.

- Mitch (42) and Jordan in sweaty sweatsuits, jog along a back road. It's a crisp Autumn morning and we see their BREATH as they exhale.
- Mitch and Jordan knock out pushups.
- Mitch and Jordan knock out situps.
- Mitch and Jordan do pullups on a chin-up bar. Mitch shifts to one-handed chin-ups.
- Mitch and Jordan toss a weighted medicine ball to each other.
- Mitch and Jordan work battle ropes.
- Mitch and Jordan cycle fast down a back road.
- Mitch and Jordan swim laps at a YMCA pool.

-- Mitch and Jordan and MITCH JR. (8) play catch.

-- Mitch and Jordan, both quite sweaty, sprint at the end of a long jog; both GASPING for breath.

END MONTAGE.

TITLE: *MAY 1998*

EXT. SOFT BALL FIELD - NIGHT

Connie and Jordan sit in the bleachers along with about a couple dozen other SPECTATORS, watching a softball game. Mitch's TEAM is in the field, with Mitch playing center field. Jordan's arm is in a sling.

JORDAN TOMAS

Thanks for helping me with my injury.

CONNIE

Sure, no problem. That was some brutal collision you had.

JORDAN TOMAS

Yeah, neither one of us saw each other when we were going for the ball.

CONNIE

It happens more frequently than one would think.

JORDAN TOMAS

How long do you think it will take me to get off the disabled list and back in the lineup?

CONNIE

I think only a couple weeks. Good thing you didn't have anything broken or any tears - just some strained ligaments and tendons, according to the doctors' reports.

JORDAN TOMAS

Yeah, I guess it could have been a lot worse.

CONNIE

We'll get you back into form in no time.

A RUNNER slides into third base with a high throw from the LEFT FIELDER.

MITCH JR. (age 8) runs up and taps Connie on the arm.

MITCH JR.
Mom, can I go play ball with the
other kids?

Connie looks and sees a group of YOUNG BOYS tossing a
football around in an open area near the left field fence.

CONNIE
I guess. But go easy on them.

She tousles his hair as he turns to run off.

JORDAN TOMAS
Good kid!

CONNIE
Thanks. He definitely takes after
his dad.

The next BATTER swings at the first pitch and hits a fly ball
to center field. The runner on third tags up.

CONNIE (CONT'D)
Oh no. That idiot's going to try
and take home.

Mitch catches the ball and rifles a throw to the CATCHER who
tags the runner out by a couple steps.

JORDAN TOMAS
Holy shit!

Jordan glances at Connie and puts his hand over his mouth.

JORDAN TOMAS (CONT'D)
Sorry about that.

CONNIE
(snickering)
Well, that guy was an idiot.

Later, Mitch is at bat. The pitcher lobs a nice slow pitch
towards the plate. Mitch swings and connects. The outfielder
doesn't even bother to try to go after it... it was that far
over the fence.

JORDAN TOMAS
Wow! That's his third homer
tonight.

CONNIE
 (between bites of popcorn)
 Yep. And he didn't even get all of
 that one.

JORDAN TOMAS
 Unbelievable!

CONNIE
 Yep.

INT. MITCH JONES' HOUSE - EVENING

Mitch, Connie, Mitch Jr., and Jordan are sitting around the
 dining room table, finishing their meal.

MITCH JR.
 Mom, can I go watch TV?

CONNIE
 Yes, but nothing inappropriate. Got it!?

Mitch Jr. nods his head and runs off into the other room.

JORDAN TOMAS
 (to Connie)
 That was delicious! What'd you call it?

CONNIE
 (grins and glances at Mitch)
 Maidrite.

JORDAN TOMAS
 Well, it certainly was made right.

JORDAN TOMAS (CONT'D)
 (looks at Mitch)
 Mitch, I heard you were a good
 baseball player when you were young.

MITCH
 Who'd you hear that from?

JORDAN TOMAS
 (glances at Connie)
 A little bird told me.

Mitch glances at Connie, than back at Jordan.

MITCH
 Yeah? Well maybe.

JORDAN TOMAS
So, why'd you give it up?

MITCH
I guess I felt a higher calling
than baseball.

JORDAN TOMAS
That's admirable, but you've done
your duty. Why not see about
playing ball again.

MITCH
I do. You were at the game last night.

JORDAN TOMAS
Yeah, and that was something else!
But I'm talking about real baseball.

Mitch gives Jordan a puzzled look.

JORDAN TOMAS (CONT'D)
You know, the Reds will be holding
open tryouts in early June, and I
think you should try out.

Mitch briefly looks at Connie before responding.

MITCH
I'm too old now.

JORDAN TOMAS
Maybe... maybe not. You won't
really know unless you try out.

Mitch again looks at Connie.

CONNIE
Like Jordan said, you won't really
know unless you try out. And if you
don't at least try out, you may
have regrets sometime down the
road. And honey, I don't want you
to have any regrets.

JORDAN TOMAS
Hey, if you'll feel more comfortable,
I'll try to ensure I'm there.

MITCH
I'll think about it. Anyway,
(chuckling)

How can you be there if you're playing in a game somewhere else and preparing for the All Star Game?

JORDAN TOMAS
(glances at his arm in his sling)
Well, that's not going to happen this year.

Mitch gives Connie a quick smile.

MITCH
Ayuh. Sorry about that.

JORDAN TOMAS
No problem... Seriously, think real hard about it.

Mitch again looks at Connie and she gives him a nod and a warm smile.

EXT. RIVERFRONT STADIUM, CINCINNATI - DAY

Mitch stands in the line for the registration table, located near the first base dugout, along with about thirty YOUNG MEN between the ages of 16-22.

A hand reaches out and taps Mitch on the shoulder. Mitch turns around to find Jordan standing there.

JORDAN TOMAS
Hey, Mitch. Glad to see you came today.

They embrace in a "man-hug" and pat each other on the back.

JORDAN TOMAS (CONT'D)
I've got someone I'd like you to meet.

Jordan nods in the direction of a man (mid-50s) clad in a Cincinnati Reds polo shirt standing about forty feet away and dissecting with his eyes the line of REGISTRANTS.

Mitch follows Jordan as they walk to the man.

JORDAN TOMAS (CONT'D)
Coach, this is Mitch Jones, the guy I've been telling you about. Mitch, this is MILTON BAGLEY, senior scout for the Reds.

Mitch extends his hand.

MITCH
Nice to meet you, sir.

Bagley shakes Mitch's hand, and without letting go, quickly examines Mitch from head to toe.

MILTON BAGLEY
You've got a good firm handshake.
You look fit. But Jordan tells me
you're forty-two.

MITCH
Forty-three now, sir.

MILTON BAGLEY
I have to tell you, I have my
doubts. But I'm allowing you to
tryout solely based on Jordan's
recommendation. You'll get no
breaks during this tryout. You'll
be treated just the same as all the
twenty-year olds. You understand?

MITCH
Yes, sir. And I wouldn't expect
anything less.

MILTON BAGLEY
Okay. We'll see.

MITCH
Thank you, sir. And nice meeting you.

Bagley turns and walks away. Mitch looks at Jordan, who shrugs his shoulders.

JORDAN TOMAS
He may not be the friendliest guy,
but he's a good scout.

Mitch nods his head and returns to the registration line.

Later, two lines of HOPEFULS are formed in the outfield. A HORN sounds and two individuals race each other through a sixty-yard course.

Mitch, now clad in sweats, stretches while moving up in line. Finally, it's his turn.

The HORN sounds and Mitch and his opponent (OTHER RUNNER, age 23) are in a wild sprint. Although Mitch is nosed out, the STOPWATCH records a time of 6.7 seconds.

The OTHER RUNNER turns to Mitch following the race.

OTHER RUNNER
Nice job. You're pretty fast.

Mitch give the other runner a friendly slap on his back.

MITCH
Yeah, but you're faster.

Later, Mitch is loosening up in the outfield, tossing a ball with another HOPEFUL PITCHER. OTHER REGISTRANTS look on and talk amongst themselves with their gloves hiding their mouths.

HOPEFUL PITCHER
Don't mind them. They're just curious of who this old man is and what he's doing here.

MITCH
Yeah, me too.

HOPEFUL PITCHER
Talk is that it's just another Reds' publicity stunt.

MITCH
Yeah, well it could likely be just that.

HOPEFUL PITCHER
I heard that if you can't break ninety, you're going home right away.

MITCH
That's pretty harsh.

HOPEFUL PITCHER
Yeah, but we don't make the rules - they do.

MITCH
You OK with that?

HOPEFUL PITCHER
Yeah, I think so. What about you?

MITCH
Yeah, I hope so... Well, good luck.

HOPEFUL PITCHER
Yeah. You too.

COACH BRYANT, Reds' pitching coach and attired in a Reds uniform, calls out from his position near the pitching mound.

COACH BRYANT
Jones! You're up.

Mitch jogs to the mound, does a final stretch of his arm and shoulder, and picks up a ball out of a five-gallon bucket while Coach Bryant gives the instructions.

COACH BRYANT (CONT'D)
You've got fifteen pitches... five fastballs, five breaking balls, and end with five more fastballs. You've got five warmup throws, then you're recorded. Got it?

MITCH
Stretch? Or windup?

COACH BRYANT
Although stretch is preferred, you can wind up if you want.

Mitch nods his head, scrapes the rubber with his right foot, then throws his five warmup pitches - about 3/4 speed.

COACH BRYANT (CONT'D)
OK, you're on the record now.

Mitch again nods his understanding. He sets up from the stretch position, then fires a fastball right over the heart of the plate. The ball POPS when it hits the catcher's mitt. The radar gun display reads "93" mph.

Mitch sets up again, and throws his second pitch - "97" mph.

His next pitch registers "99" mph.

Most eyes in the stadium are fixed on Mitch as he delivers his next pitch - "100" mph.

The REGISTRANT who was talking behind his glove about Mitch earlier looks to the other player.

REGISTRANT
Impossible!

Mitch throws his fifth fastball, another strike, this time with an audible GRUNT. The POP is more pronounced as the ball hits the catcher's mitt.

All activity in the stadium has stopped as everyone eyes the wall-mounted speed display - "101" mph.

REGISTRANT (CONT'D)
(to his playing partner)
And that was from the stretch?

COACH BRYANT
Okay. Let's see some breaking balls.

Mitch sets up and throws a 88-mph curveball that appears to have dropped off of a table, bouncing right on top of home plate.

He then throws a slider that looked like it broke 3-feet.

Another two curveballs and another slider.

COACH BRYANT (CONT'D)
Okay. Give us the heat again.

Mitch throws five more pitches from the stretch, each one POPPING the mitt and exceeding "100" mph.

It's afternoon now, and the number of hopefuls has dwindled significantly. The dozen or so REMAINING HOPEFULS are awaiting their turn in the batting cage. A double-tire PITCHING MACHINE is set up on the pitcher's mound and rifles pitches to the batters.

COACH BROWN, Reds batting coach stands near the batting cage.

COACH BROWN
Jones! You're on deck!

Mitch grabs his bat, adjusts his helmet, and walks to the on-deck circle, where he begins swinging and loosening up, timing his swing with the release of the ball into the pitching machine.

Soon, it's his turn.

COACH BROWN (CONT'D)
You get ten pitches... all eighty-five miles per hour. Every pitch counts. Got it?!

Mitch nods his head, then steps into the batter's box.

The first pitch, Mitch checks his swing as the ball zips through the heart of the strike zone. The next pitch, he rips a foul ball down the third base line.

The third pitch, Mitch hits a line drive right through the pitching mound, nearly hitting the INDIVIDUAL manning the pitching machine. The next pitch, Mitch sends into the seats behind the left field wall.

The fifth pitch, Mitch sends a screamer down the first base line and into the right field corner. The sixth pitch is hit over the wall in center field. The next, over the wall in left field.

It looks like he has found his groove because the last three pitches, Mitch crushes into the seats behind the outfield walls.

COACH BROWN (CONT'D)

Okay. That's enough. Next!

Mitch is stowing his gear in his bag when Jordan walks up.

JORDAN TOMAS

Well, that was some show you put on out there today.

MITCH

Was it?

JORDAN TOMAS

Yeah! Six homers on ten pitches. No one else came close to that.

MITCH

Well, they were feeding me softballs out there.

JORDAN TOMAS

Yeah... and no other pitcher broke a hundred. You impressed a lot of people today.

MITCH

Well, we'll see.

JORDAN TOMAS

I'm sure they'll be talking it over, but I'd bet a paycheck that you'll be getting a call from them in a couple days.

MITCH

Well, if it happens, it happens. But I'm not going to hold my breath waiting for a call.

JORDAN TOMAS

How can you be so stoic all the time? Man, you're a rock... You never show any emotion.

MITCH

That's just the way I am - the way I was raised - not to get too hyped up because you might not get what you want and then get angry. It's better just to not get your hopes up in the first place.

JORDAN TOMAS

Well, that's not me.

MITCH

(breaks into a big grin)
And I'm glad it's not. You have enough hope for both of us. So, I don't need to worry about that.

Mitch SLAPS Jordan on the back.

JORDAN TOMAS

Thanks... I think.

MITCH

You're welcome.

They walk out of the ballpark together.

INT. MITCH JONES' HOUSE - DAY

Mitch and Connie sit in chairs in their living room. Milton Bagley of the Reds sits on the sofa.

MILTON BAGLEY

Mitch, I have to say that in all my years scouting, I've never seen anything like the demonstration you put on last Saturday.

MITCH

Well, I could have done better.

MILTON BAGLEY

I don't know how. Of all those youngsters who were trying out that day, I'm only visiting one... You, Mitch.

MITCH

What about the others? There were some fine ballplayers there.

MILTON BAGLEY

Yes, and maybe someone will get picked up by a team somewhere down the line. But not this time. You were the only one who met, or should I say, exceeded the standards we had set for those tryouts. You impressed a lot of people.

MITCH

That's very kind of you to say.

MILTON BAGLEY

Mitch, we'd like to offer you a contract to play in the Reds' franchise. Of course, you'll have to spend some time in the minors first and work your way up, just like everyone else. Like I said, we can't cut you any slack. You'll be treated just like everybody else.

Mitch nods his head.

CONNIE

When would he start?

MILTON BAGLEY

We'd like Mitch to begin as soon as possible. We'd like for him to start with our double-A team in Chattanooga. We need to ensure that he can withstand the day-to-day rigors of baseball.

CONNIE

That won't work! If Mitch is going to play with the Reds, he needs to start no lower than the Louisville Bats.

MILTON BAGLEY

That's International League... triple-A.

CONNIE

Yep, I know. And Mitch is more than good enough for that team. And he can withstand the rigors of day-to-day baseball. Look, he's a lieutenant colonel in the Army and withstands greater daily rigors than what baseball entails. Baseball is fun-time... play-time for him, it's not work... and it's definitely easier than Army life.

MILTON BAGLEY
You're firm on this?

CONNIE
(looks at Mitch)
Yes. We're firm on this.

MILTON BAGLEY
Okay. I'm pretty sure I can arrange that.
(looks at Mitch)
When can you start?

MITCH
I'll have to put in my retirement paperwork. I'm not sure how long it will take to be approved, but with all the excess leave time I've accrued, I imagine I could be available in a couple weeks.

MILTON BAGLEY
That sounds good. That gives me enough time to make the necessary roster changes to get you on board. I'll have a contract sent to you as soon as I get things firmed up.

Mitch nods his head.

CONNIE
Thank you, Mr. Bagley.

They stand and Bagley shakes everyone's hands. Mitch and Connie escort Bagley to the front door. Bagley turns as he's about to pass through the doorway.

MILTON BAGLEY
We'll be in touch.

After the front door is closed, Mitch and Connie stand there, looking at each other in disbelief. Suddenly, Connie springs forward and wraps her arms around Mitch.

CONNIE
You did it, Mitch. You did it!

Mitch pushes Connie away slightly.

MITCH
You handled that so well in there.
I was a nervous wreck.

We see perspiration all over his forehead and neck.

MITCH (CONT'D)
I'm all sweaty.

Connie re-wraps her arms around him and squeezes him tightly.

CONNIE
I know.

INT. MITCH JR'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Mitch Jr. (now 9 years old) lies in his bed, reading a comic book. Mitch softly knocks on the door, opens it, enters the room, and sits on the edge of the bed.

MITCH
I need to talk to you about something.

MITCH JR.
Yeah, Dad? What?

MITCH
It looks like there's going to be a few changes happening around here.

MITCH JR.
Like what?

MITCH
Well, I'm going to quit the Army.

MITCH JR.
And what are you going to do then?

MITCH
Well, I've been asked to play baseball for the Cincinnati Reds.

Mitch Jr. just stares at his father as he processes what was just said.

MITCH (CONT'D)
That means that during the baseball season, I'll be away from home a lot... especially when we have games in other cities. When we have home games... in Cincinnati... I should be able to come home to live.

Mitch Jr. still doesn't respond other than his blank stare.

MITCH (CONT'D)
 And after the season is over, I'll
 be able to come home and stay here
 until the next season begins.

Still no response from Mitch Jr.

MITCH (CONT'D)
 What do you think of that?

Mitch Jr. simply shrugs his shoulders.

MITCH (CONT'D)
 I know it's going to be a lot
 different around here... a lot
 harder for all of us... with me
 being gone much of the time. But I
 hope you understand that it's just
 for a while... not forever.

Mitch Jr. merely looks at his dad with a blank expression.

MITCH (CONT'D)
 And I'll try to call every day and
 come home whenever I can.

Mitch Jr. shrugs his shoulders again

INT. JONES' BEDROOM

As Mitch enters the bedroom and slips into bed, Connie is
 already sitting in the bed, reading a book.

CONNIE
 So, how'd that go?

MITCH
 Rough.

CONNIE
 What do you mean - rough?

MITCH
 I don't think he understands what's
 going on. I thought he'd be excited.

CONNIE
 I'm sure it'll sink in as time goes on.

MITCH
 I'm afraid.

CONNIE
About what?

MITCH
Afraid that I'm making the wrong
decision here.

CONNIE
Nonsense! You've never been afraid
of anything in your whole life.
(looks deeply at Mitch)
Have you?

MITCH
(begins to tear up)
Yes.

CONNIE
When? You've never shown any fear.

MITCH
When my dad died... When I was in
battle Afghanistan... And after I
got wounded. When I entered the
Army Ten-miler and the Ironman for
the first times.

CONNIE
Really? How so?

MITCH
That I wouldn't be able to finish and
would let you and everyone else down.

CONNIE
That's nonsense.

MITCH
Then, when you were getting out of
the Army, I was afraid that I'd
forced you into a bad decision.

CONNIE
Rubbish!

MITCH
And now this... I gambling with
giving up a good career. And I
don't want my personal desires to
adversely affect our family. This
family is my life.

Connie sets aside her book and turns and embraces Mitch.

CONNIE

And baseball is your passion. We've thought this through and I firmly believe you're doing the right thing.

MITCH

But what if I fail? I've never failed at anything in my life.

CONNIE

At least give it a try. If it doesn't work out, then it doesn't work out... and we'll move on from there.

MITCH

And what about you and Mitch? I'll be gone a lot.

CONNIE

Mitch and I will both be fine. You'll just need to focus on playing your best.

Mitch hugs Connie and they kiss passionately.

TITLE: *LOUISVILLE SLUGGER FIELD*
 HOME OF THE LOUISVILLE BATS

INT. LOUISVILLE BATS LOCKER ROOM - DAY

TEAM MEMBERS converse while suiting up for today's game.

Team manager, RICH SWEET (40), enters the room with Mitch following close behind. Mitch carries a large duffle bag.

RICH SWEET

Listen up!
 (pauses until it gets quiet)
This here is Mitch Jones, just signed with the Reds as a pitcher, and assigned to play with us.

A voice (PLAYER 1) from the back of the room is heard.

PLAYER 1 (O.S.)

Hey, gramps, did you bring your grandson with you to be our batboy?

The room fills with CHUCKLES. Mitch smiles.

RICH SWEET

Okay. Enough. Mitch's going to be with us, starting today. So get to know him. Jeff, show Mitch his locker.

Rich Sweet pats Mitch on the shoulder and exits the room.

JEFF ZURICH (24) walks up to Mitch and offers his hand.

JEFF ZURICH

I'm Jeff.

MITCH

Mitch.

JEFF ZURICH

Where'd you play your college ball?

MITCH

Marshalltown Community College.

JEFF ZURICH

(surprised)

Really?

MITCH

Yeah, really. Two years, back in the late 70s.

JEFF ZURICH

Oh....

Jeff points to a locker with Mitch's uniform hanging neatly inside it - number 43.

JEFF ZURICH (CONT'D)

Looks like you'll be over there.

MITCH

Okay. Thanks.

Jeff walks away, and Mitch begins taking items out of his duffle bag.

EXT. LOUISVILLE SLUGGER FIELD - DAY

Mitch sits, watching the game from the bullpen. The phone on the wall RINGS. The PITCHING COACH answers it, listens briefly, then returns the handle to the receiver.

COACH

(shouts)

Jones, start warming up.

Mitch jumps up, begins stretching his arm and shoulder, picks up a ball from the five-gallon bucket nearby and walks to the bullpen mound. He starts throwing easy tosses to the CATCHER, each one gaining more speed.

The phone rings again. The coach listens, then hangs up.

COACH (CONT'D)

You'll be going in at the start of the next inning.

Mitch nods his head in acknowledgement.

A few minutes later, Mitch is on the mound throwing some warm-up pitches while the PA ANNOUNCER drones through the amplified system.

PA ANNOUNCER (OVER LOUD SPEAKER)

Well, folks, it's the top of the ninth and it looks like the Bats have called in their newest member, Mitch Jones, to try to close out this ballgame. As a matter of fact, Jones just arrived with the team just this morning. Let's all give Mitch Jones a warm Louisville welcome as he attempts to salvage the Bats' 6-4 lead.

Following the last warm-up pitch, the catcher, JOSE MARTIN (28), trots out to the mound. Mitch is digging at the pitching rubber with his cleated foot.

JOSE MARTIN

You ready, Mitch?

MITCH

Yeah, I guess so.

JOSE MARTIN

Well, don't hurt yourself. You've only got to get three outs with less than two runs scoring. You up for that? You know the signals?

MITCH

Yep.

JOSE MARTIN

Okay. Let's give 'em hell.

Jose turns and trots back to his position behind the plate.

The batter steps up to the plate and the umpire gives the "Play ball" signal.

Mitch's first pitch - a 98 mph fastball down the heart of the strike zone - Jose's mitt POPS when the ball hits it. The BATTER doesn't even attempt a swing at that pitch.

His second pitch - a 87 mph curveball that took a nose-dive just before it reached the plate. The batter swings wildly, and misses wildly.

Mitch's third pitch is another fastball, this time clocking in at 101 mph - POP! The batter swings, but is way too late.

The NEXT BATTER steps up to the plate. Mitch winds up and delivers a 102 mph fastball that the batter merely watches go by. POP!

His next pitch is a slider that starts towards the right-handed batter, freezing the batter in his shoes, then breaks over the plate for strike two.

Mitch's third pitch is another 101 mph fastball which the batter hesitates too long - POP! - and swings too late.

The THIRD BATTER - a lefty - steps up to the plate. Mitch's first pitch to him looks like it will be well outside, but then breaks across the plate. The batter checks his swing. Strike one.

Mitch's second pitch is a 102 mph fastball high in the zone. POP! Although the batter swings, he misses it by a mile.

Mitch's third pitch is a 85 mph curveball that Mitch disguised as a fastball heading for the heart of the strike zone, but then suddenly takes a nose-dive right as it reaches home plate.

The batter, expecting a third-pitch fastball, swings and misses the ball by at least a foot.

JOSE trots out to the mound and hands Mitch the ball.

JOSE MARTIN (CONT'D)
Nice pitching!

MITCH
Thanks.

As they walk off the field, the PA announcer is heard.

PA ANNOUNCER (OVER LOUD SPEAKER)
Well, how about that folks! The Bats
win with a nine-pitch ninth inning by
Mitch Jones. I'm not sure where Jones
has been, but welcome to Louisville!

INT. LOUISVILLE BATS LOCKER ROOM - DAY

Mitch is getting dressed after showering following a ball game. Jose Martin, the catcher, has ice-packs on his knees as he sits on the bench watching Mitch. He sees Mitch's damaged foot (even though covered by a sock) and ugly scar running up the length of his lower leg.

Jose nods his head towards Mitch's foot.

JOSE MARTIN
Hey, Mitch. What's up with that?

MITCH
What, my leg and foot?

JOSE MARTIN
Yeah.

MITCH
Nothing really... just an old war injury.

JOSE MARTIN
War injury? You were in the Army?

MITCH
Yeah.

JOSE MARTIN
What happened?

MITCH
I got blown up.

JOSE MARTIN
Blown up?

MITCH
Yeah.

JOSE MARTIN
Did it hurt?

MITCH
Then? Yeah... some.

JOSE MARTIN
How'd you get through that?

MITCH
I just wouldn't think about it.

JOSE MARTIN
What about now? You're old and I don't never see the trainers working on you. How come?

MITCH
(chuckling)
I am old... but I have my own private trainer at home waiting to take care of me.

JOSE MARTIN
No, seriously, Mitch.

Mitch thinks for a moment than looks directly at Jose.

MITCH
Pain is an element of the mind. When my leg and foot got injured, I told myself that if I could overcome that pain, I could overcome any pain. I just don't let pain affect me.

JOSE MARTIN
Wow... Okay.

MITCH
(chuckles)
Plus, I do have my own personal trainer at home. And she does take good care of me.

JOSE MARTIN
Okay. Can you show me..? Teach me how to do that? My knees....

MITCH
(shrugs his shoulders)
Yeah, I suppose we can try.

JOSE MARTIN
Thanks, man!

INT. JONES' BEDROOM - NIGHT

Mitch and Connie are in bed, both reading. Mitch puts down his book and looks at Connie.

MITCH

You know, most of the Bats players make less than twenty thousand a year.

CONNIE

Yes, but they get their housing free, and they only play for about seven months each year.

MITCH

Maybe, but that's still not enough to live on for a whole year. A bunch of them pick up side jobs during the off season.

CONNIE

Such as?

MITCH

Some mow yards and do some landscaping work. Some work as bus boys in restaurants. Some work as baggers in grocery stores. One even drives a taxi cab. I mean, they're all over the place, pulling odd jobs.

CONNIE

And your point is..?

MITCH

Oh, I don't know. I just wish we could do something for them... to make life a little easier for them.

CONNIE

Honey, you're so tender-hearted. But you can't change the world. There's too many minor league players in the game. And what could you - one person - do?

MITCH

(thinking hard)

Really, not much. But maybe we could bring them here a few times, since we live close by, and give them a good meal and a chance to relax. Give them a family away from their family. Maybe provide them with some free advice regarding strength conditioning and staying in shape. Maybe celebrate their birthday or treat them to a party... at least help them feel special.

CONNIE

Honey, let's think about this some more before we act. I don't want you to start something that you won't be able to finish. But I do want you to know, though, that whatever you decide, I'll support you.

MITCH

Thank you, dear. Good night.

Mitch leans over and gives Connie a kiss. They both put their books away and turn out their respective lamps.

SERIES OF SCENES

-- A ball player blowing out twenty-one candles on a large birthday cake in the Bats' locker room. Mitch and many other players hold bottles of beer. Mitch offers the player a beer.

MITCH

Here's to being twenty-one. You're legal now.

ALL

Here, here! Hooray! Yeah! etc.

Mitch buys tickets for a couple ballplayers at a movie theater.

Mitch and Connie and Mitch Jr. host a couple ballplayers at their house for a meal.

Mitch plays putt-putt with Mitch Jr. and two other ballplayers.

Connie showing a handful of players some conditioning drills in her gym at her home.

Mitch and Mitch Jr. play catch with a couple of players.

INT. RIVERFRONT STADIUM, CINCINNATI - DAY

CARL LINDER (80), owner of the Cincinnati Reds, sits behind his large executive desk. JIM BOWDEN (40), the general manager of the Reds and Milton Bagley (55) sit in two chairs in front of the desk.

CARL LINDER

I just read a blurb in the Digest about a player in Louisville tearing up the International League.

JIM BOWDEN
Really? I didn't see it.

MILTON BAGLEY
Me either. But I would assume that
it's about our new player there -
Mitch Jones.

CARL LINDER
Yeah, that's him. How come I hadn't
heard of him before?

JIM BOWDEN
(looks at Bagley)
Isn't he that new rookie we just
took on?

MILTON BAGLEY
Yeah. He's been with the Bats for
about six weeks.

CARL LINDER
Where'd he come from?

Bowden and Bagley look at each other.

MILTON BAGLEY
From the Army.

CARL LINDER
The Army?

MILTON BAGLEY
Yeah.

CARL LINDER
And we put him directly into the
Bats mid-season with no prior
experience?

MILTON BAGLEY
Yeah. That was my decision.

CARL LINDER
Says here, he's pretty old.

MILTON BAGLEY
I think he's forty-three.

CARL LINDER
Forty-three?! Ball players are
retiring before that age.

MILTON BAGLEY
Yeah, but you should see this guy play.

CARL LINDER
What position?

MILTON BAGLEY
Well, he's a pitcher.

CARL LINDER
(interrupting)
Yeah, but a forty-three year old
pitcher? Come on, Milt, what were
you thinking.

MILTON BAGLEY
Hey, he throws over a hundred and
has the best ERA in the league.

CARL LINDER
Hundred..?

MILTON BAGLEY
Yeah, and he hits, too.

CARL LINDER
Says here that he's hitting four-
twenty-two with seventeen home runs.

MILTON BAGLEY
That doesn't surprise me.

CARL LINDER
And all in six weeks? How's that
possible for a pitcher?

MILTON BAGLEY
About that. On days he's not
pitching, he's the DH.

CARL LINDER
Why the Bats?

MILTON BAGLEY
I wanted to vet him to make sure he
could handle the daily play.

CARL LINDER
And is he?

MILTON BAGLEY
Looks that way.

CARL LINDER
 (to Bowden)
 Can we bring this guy... Jones... up
 here on the expanded roster before
 the September deadline?

JIM BOWDEN
 I don't see why not.

CARL LINDER
 (to Bagley)
 Think he'll make it?

MILTON BAGLEY
 He plays like someone half his age.
 Yeah, I think he'll make it.

CARL LINDER
 (to Bowden)
 OK, let's get it done... before he
 gets any older.

INT. LOUISVILLE BATS LOCKER ROOM - DAY

The players celebrate after another victory on the field.
 Rich Sweet, the GM, enters the room and walks over to Mitch,
 who sits on the bench in front of his locker.

RICH SWEET
 Mitch, can I see you for a minute?

MITCH
 Sure, skipper.

Rich nods towards his office.

RICH SWEET
 In my office.

Mitch stands and follows Sweet into his office.

RICH SWEET (CONT'D)
 Close the door and take a seat.

Mitch closes the door and sits in the chair in front of
 Rich's cluttered desk.

One-by-one, the other players stop what they were doing and
 look towards the office to try to ascertain what was going
 on. The silence in the locker room becomes palpable.

MITCH
 What's up?

RICH SWEET
 (very somber)
 Mitch, you've been a great asset to
 our team... putting us in
 contention for the championship.

MITCH
 Well, it's been a team effort.

RICH SWEET
 Yes, it has. And you've been a
 great leader in this effort.
 (beat)
 But, as you know, I'm paid to make
 tough decisions.

Mitch gets a concerned look on his face.

Outside the office the players crowd around the office
 window, studying what is playing out in the office.

JOSE MARTIN
 (whispers to Jeff)
 What's going on?

JEFF ZURICH
 I don't know, but it looks pretty serious.

RICH SWEET
 Mitch... I've got to let you go.

Mitch's expression changes to confusion. He sits there stunned.

JEFF ZURICH
 (to Jose Martin)
 I think Mitch just got fired.

JOSE MARTIN
 What? No way! He's just the best
 player on the team.

Back inside the office.

RICH SWEET
 I'm sorry.

MITCH
 I'm sure it's not your fault.

RICH SWEET
 No, you're right about that.

MITCH
 Can I ask... What happened?

RICH SWEET
I got a call from the front office just a few minutes ago... and I was ordered to cut you from our roster today.

MITCH
But why? Did they tell you?

RICH SWEET
Yeah. It seems that you can't be on our roster and the Red's roster at the same time. I guess there's some rule against that.

MITCH
Huh?

RICH SWEET
(grinning now)
You've been called up to the Reds.

MITCH
What?

RICH SWEET
You're going to Cincinnati to play for the Reds.

MITCH
What? When?

RICH SWEET
You're to report there tomorrow.

MITCH
No way!

RICH SWEET
Yes, way! And congratulations!

Sweet stands and offers his hand. Mitch stands, comes around to the side of the desk, grasps Sweet's hand and pulls him into a big bear hug.

MITCH
(somewhat choking up)
Thanks, coach! Thanks for all you've done.

Sweet separates himself from Mitch slightly and looks him directly in the eyes.

RICH SWEET

You know, you didn't quite handle this like I thought you would. Normally, when I tell a player I'm releasing them, they shove all the stuff on my desk onto the floor and cuss me out royally. But you didn't do that. You were honorable the entire time. I'll really miss you.

MITCH

Thanks, coach.

RICH SWEET

No, thank you. Come, I've got an announcement to make to the rest of the team.

They exit the office and face a silent and curious team.

RICH SWEET (CONT'D)

Guys, I've got some good news... and some bad news for you... Mitch is leaving us.

Audible MOANS and GROANS are heard from the team.

PLAYER 1

That's a load of shit, man!

RICH SWEET

That was the bad news. But the good news is that Mitch is going to the show. He reports to the Reds in Cincinnati tomorrow.

CHEERS break out throughout the locker room. Players slap Mitch on the back and congratulate him. Jeff and Jose approach Mitch.

JOSE MARTIN

Hey, Mitch, congratulations! You'll do good.

JEFF

Yeah, congratulations! It seems like just a couple weeks ago I was showing you where your locker was. Now, you've got to start all over again.

Mitch chuckles and gives them each a big hug.

MITCH

Thanks, guys. You've been great!

EXT. RIVERFRONT STADIUM, CINCINNATI - MORNING

Mitch meanders on the infield grass. All is peaceful and quiet.

He turns around, exploring the stadium with his eyes.

He reaches down and strokes the grass and a tear falls from his cheek.

Suddenly, the silence is shattered.

JORDAN TOMAS
(walking from the dugout)
Mitch! Mitch Jones! Is that you?

Mitch quickly wipes the tears from his face and faces Jordan.

JORDAN TOMAS (CONT'D)
Man, what a pleasant surprise this is!
I knew you could do it!

Jordan gives Mitch a big "man-hug".

MITCH
I'm sure glad you did, 'cause I had
my doubts.

JORDAN TOMAS
What? No way, man! You belong here.

Jordan sees Mitch's teary eyes.

JORDAN TOMAS (CONT'D)
What's with the water fall?

MITCH
This has always been my dream -
playing big league ball - but I
didn't think I'd ever make it.

JORDAN TOMAS
But you did, man, and I'm thrilled
for you. Now, let me give you an
insider's tour of this place.

They walk off towards the dugout.

EXT. KAUFFMAN STADIUM (HOME OF THE ROYALS) - DAY

Mitch, in the dugout, warm up jacket over his throwing arm.

Jordan Tomas comes up and gives a playful punch on Mitch's non-throwing arm.

JORDAN TOMAS

Good game today. Only three hits off you on your first start. Not bad for a rookie.

MITCH

Yeah, just lucky.

JORDAN TOMAS

Yeah, sure... Hey, isn't your family here today?

MITCH

Yeah. We're all going to meet at the hotel then go out to dinner. You want to join us?

JORDAN TOMAS

(thinks for a moment)

Naw. I think I'll pass today. I'll let you enjoy your time with your family. But thanks for the offer.

MITCH

No problem. Maybe next time.

JORDAN TOMAS

Yeah, sure. Thanks.

INT. FANCY RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Mitch and Connie sit at a table along with Mitch's MOM (now 75), MARK (45) and his WIFE (44), and MIKE (40) and his WIFE (40). Mitch Jr. (9) and five of his COUSINS (ages 7-10) sit at another table nearby. While the other cousins are talking and laughing, Mitch Jr. merely sits there and really doesn't interact with them.

MARK

Wow! Great game today, Mitch.

MIKE

Yeah. You were really throwing some heat today.

MITCH

Well, I'm happy to have you guys here and celebrate with me today. Thanks.

Mitch glances over to Mitch Jr. and sees him withdrawn.

MARK

Wouldn't have missed it for the world.

MOM

Mitch, I just want you to know how proud I am of you... for all you've accomplished. And your father would be so proud, too. I only wish he could have seen you play today.

MITCH

Thanks, Mom. Me too.

MIKE

Yeah.

(begins snickering)

But Dad would have been yelling at you when you nearly walked that batter in the second inning.

Everyone chuckles. Mitch glances at Mitch Jr. - no change.

MARK

Too bad we didn't get to see you bat today, though.

MIKE

Yeah.

MITCH

Well, that's okay. I'm sure there'll be plenty of other opportunities for you to laugh at me when I strike out.

Everyone chuckles again.

MIKE

Can you get us tickets to a Cubs game?

MITCH

Probably, but we'll have to see.

MARK

So, what's it like... living your dream... playing big league ball?

MITCH

Oh, I don't know. I'm excited to be playing, but it's tough being away from Connie and Mitch when we're on the road.

Mitch looks at Connie and she smiles.

MITCH (CONT'D)

It's not necessarily all the glamour that many think it is. There's a lot of pressure for us to constantly perform well.

MARK

But you've handled pressure before.

MITCH

Sure, but this is a little different.

MIKE

Different than being shot at?

MITCH

(chuckling slightly)

Yes... Different.

MARK

Well, don't let the pressure get to you. You're really good and we're all excited to see you playing where you belong.

Others at the table voice their agreement.

MITCH

Thanks.

Mark holds up his wine glass and offers a toast.

MARK

To Mitch... may your arm mow 'em down while your bat finds its mark.

Everyone clinks their glasses together while saying "Here here", "Amen", or "to Mitch".

Mitch sits there looking at everyone while wearing a huge grin, then glances over to his withdrawn son.

EXT. BUSCH STADIUM - DAY

Jordan Tomas takes a seat beside Mitch in the dugout while the Reds are at bat. They're wearing their "Visitor" uniform.

JORDAN TOMAS

Man, you've been here only a few weeks and you're tearing things up. No other pitcher also serves as the DH when he's not pitching.

And not only that, but you're the oldest rookie in the major leagues... maybe even in the history of the major leagues. You're gonna be in the record books, for sure.

MITCH

Well, it's just luck.

JORDAN TOMAS

Luck, my ass! Your ERA is among the lowest in the league and your batting average is over 400 - that's not just luck.

Just then, one of the bat boys delivers a folded note to Mitch. Mitch opens the note and reads it.

JORDAN TOMAS (CONT'D)

What? A love note from a love-stricken fan?

MITCH

No, it's a just a note stating that Connie had called and that I need to call her back after the game.

JORDAN TOMAS

Like I said a note from a love-stricken fan.

MITCH

I hope it isn't any thing serious.

JORDAN TOMAS

Trust me, it's not. Mitch, I'm sure she's just missing you.

MITCH

Yeah, hopefully that's all it is.

JORDAN TOMAS

Yup. Trust me.

INT. RIVERFRONT STADIUM LOCKER ROOM - SEPTEMBER - DAY

The team celebrates their victory, but Mitch just sits on the bench in front of his locker, quietly staring at the floor. Jordan Tomas approaches.

JORDAN TOMAS

Sorry about your game today, Mitch. Hey, Bowden wants to see you in his office.

Mitch looks up at Jordan and nods his head in acknowledgment.

INT. BOWDEN'S OFFICE - LATER

Mitch stands outside Bowden's office and knocks on the door. Bowden waves Mitch in. Mitch enters and closes the door.

JIM BOWDEN

(motions Mitch to take a seat)
Hey, Mitch, how's it going?

MITCH

Oh, OK, I guess.

JIM BOWDEN

Mitch, I need to ask you what's going on inside your head. These last few days you haven't been the same person you were when you first got here. You had a great batting average going up 'til this week, but you haven't gotten on base - shoot, you haven't even hit the ball this week. And I hate to say it, but the game you pitched today was dismal. That's why I had to take you out so early. What's going on?

MITCH

(thinks for a moment)
Coach, I know what it's like to have subordinates who have some type of problem going on that's affecting their performance. And I know how one individual's poor performance can adversely impact on the entire team's performance. I've experienced that as a leader in the Army.

(beat)

I think that's what's happening here and it's obviously affecting the whole team's performance.

JIM BOWDEN

What is?

MITCH

My problem.

JIM BOWDEN

So, what's your problem? And let's see what we can do to fix it.

MITCH

That's the hard part... I don't think you or the Reds can fix it.

JIM BOWDEN

How's that?

MITCH

(after a pause)

I spoke with Connie, my wife, the other day. She told me that our son, who's nine years old, is having some problems at home and school. The school psychologist suggests that his behaviors are quite common among children who are in single-parent families... with absent father figures.

JIM BOWDEN

Well, that's a simple fix. We'll bring him to all the home games so that he can spend more time with you.

MITCH

Yeah, I've thought about that. But I don't think that will solve the problem. Our remaining schedule has us on the road for nearly all of the remainder of this season. And, if by chance we should make it into the playoffs, since we'd be the low man on the totem pole, we'd be away more than at home.

JIM BOWDEN

Well, there's got to be some other option that would work.

MITCH

I was hoping so, too. But I've been giving this a lot of thought, and that's probably why my mind hasn't been in the game lately, causing my poor performance... I don't see any successful option but one.

JIM BOWDEN

And that is...?

MITCH

I need to resign so I can be with my son and help him.

If I resign now, you should still be able to backfill my slot with another player from Louisville or one of the other farm teams.

JIM BOWDEN

I don't know, Mitch. That sounds rather drastic, doesn't it?

MITCH

Yeah. But I think it's the only viable option.

JIM BOWDEN

You know that if you resign now, it would be impossible to get back on with the Reds, and maybe even with any other team. This was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for you.

MITCH

Yeah, I understand that... and I'm grateful for this opportunity. But, I have to look at it this way, too. I'm one of the oldest players in the major leagues. If I'm lucky, I might have a couple more seasons left to play. But I have a lifetime ahead of me with my family. I can't afford to place my desires... to misplace my priorities. The legacy I leave with my family is much more important than any legacy I leave with baseball. I hope you understand.

JIM BOWDEN

I know I'm not as old as you, nor do I have the wisdom you've acquired. You are an inspirational man. And everyone who comes in contact with you benefits from your wisdom and spirit. Although I don't really like it, I can understand your reasoning and desire. But you're sure this is the only option?

MITCH

Yeah, I'm pretty sure.

JIM BOWDEN

When would you leave us?

MITCH

I don't think I should delay your opportunity to get someone else on the roster who can help you with the rest of this season... and hopefully, the team's post-season. And I'm definitely not helping the team in the funk I'm currently in. I think I need to resign immediately... now... so I can get home as soon as possible and your team can get on with the season.

JIM BOWDEN

Mitch, you know that you've been a great asset to the Reds' organization and you will be missed.

MITCH

Thank you. It's been a terrific experience for me. Thank you for giving me this dream-come-true opportunity.

JIM BOWDEN

Mitch, you've earned it. I wish you God's best for you and your family.

MITCH

Thank you.

Mitch stands up, shakes Bowden's hand, and exits his office. As Mitch walks away, we again see his SMILING EYES.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL BASEBALL STADIUM (2026) - AFTERNOON

Mitch's SMILING EYES. As the camera PULLS BACK, we see the reporters still gathered around Mitch and Connie and their family. Many other SPECTATORS have joined with the reporters, just eavesdropping to what Mitch is saying.

REPORTER 3

Mitch, do you have any regrets?

MITCH

Well, I honestly think that if I had stayed in the Army, I likely would have progressed further up in the Army ranks, but other opportunities arose and I opted for them. Yeah, I often wonder if I would have made Colonel or General.

But no one will ever know, and we can't dwell on the past with what could have been.

REPORTER 4

Do you regret leaving the Reds before completing your first season?

Mitch briefly glances over to Connie and the rest of his family standing beside her.

MITCH

No. Family is much more important. My family needed me at that time and so that's what I did. I was fortunate to get a great job teaching and coaching here at Central - things I love anyway.

REPORTER 2

You went through the "Troops to Teachers" program, right? What do you think of that program?

MITCH

It's a terrific program. The military teaches many skills that can be extremely effective in classroom environments. All the soldier needs is some help with some of the technical things...

(chuckling)

like remembering all the things he forgot from junior high and high school.

Everyone chuckles.

Superintendent Adams comes up to Mitch, interrupting the reporters.

ADAMS

Mitch, there are some people dying to meet with you... Guys?!

A group of seven young men weave their way through the crowd towards Mitch, each one nicely dressed in slacks and wearing a major league team jersey loosely over a polo shirt.

ADAMS (CONT'D)

I think you know these young men.

Mitch's face beams as he recognizes each player.

ADAMS (CONT'D)
 (to the reporters)
 Each one of these young men played baseball here at Central under the coaching of Mitch Jones. Mitch taught them success then, which they carried with them into the major leagues.

As each player approaches, Adams announces his name to the reporters and Mitch gives each one a big hug.

ADAMS (CONT'D)
 TOM (30) here plays for the Oakland A's.

ADAMS (CONT'D)
 AARON (28) plays with the White Sox.

ADAMS (CONT'D)
 MIGUEL (29) plays with the Diamondbacks.

ADAMS (CONT'D)
 TREVON, (26) plays with the Mets.

ADAMS (CONT'D)
 JASON, (25) plays with Astros.

ADAMS (CONT'D)
 MARSHALL (28) plays with the Twins.

TOM steps forward to address Mitch and the reporters.

TOM
 You know, Coach. If it weren't for you, none of us would be where we are today. It was your teaching, your coaching, your perseverance and patience in mentoring each of us, that we're what we are today. Thank you.

MARSHALL
 Yeah, and Tom here... it was his idea for us to come here today. And it was his idea that we all chip in to help get this new stadium.

TOM
 There were more... but unfortunately, Luis, Niko, and Trey couldn't make it today. They wanted to be here, but couldn't due to their games today.

As everyone looks on, each one of the players takes off his jersey and hands it to Mitch.

With his arms now full, and as cameras CLICK away, a tear breaks free from Mitch's eyes and trickles down his cheek.

MITCH

Thanks, guys. This is so wonderful...

Just then, Mitch's youngest grandchild, ANNA (4) steps up beside Mitch and tugs on his pants leg.

ANNA

I've been waiting for a long time.

Can we go get ice cream now?

Mitch hands Mitch Jr. the armload of jerseys and reaches down and scoops Anna up into his arms.

MITCH

Yes, Anna, we can.

(to the reporters)

I think it's time to say good bye.

Thank you.

Mitch turns and guides Connie and the rest of his family away from the crowd of reporters, towards a nearby parking lot. Mitch carries Anna and holds hands with Connie, who has her arm around one of the other grandchildren.

REPORTER 1

(shouts out)

So, Mitch, any regrets about leaving baseball behind and with that, your legacy?

Mitch stops momentarily, causing the rest of the family to also halt. He turns, grins, and responds.

MITCH

My legacy...? Naahh.

He turns back, puts his arm around Connie, and pulls her close to him as the family continues their exit. He leans over and kisses Connie on the top of her head and Connie snuggles in under his arm.

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END