



Title: N/A

Author: N/A

Form: Script

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Genre: Teen Comedy/Sports

Logline: A group of teenage losers get a once-in-a-lifetime shot at the popularity they've always dreamed of when they're asked to fill in for their high school's suspended varsity football team—only to discover that there's no substitute for real friends and self-worth.

Recommendation: Pass

	EXCELLENT	GOOD	FAIR	POOR
CONCEPT			X	
PLOT		X		
COMMERCIAL APPEAL		X		
CHARACTERS			X	
DIALOGUE			X	

SYNOPSIS:

High school in Port Pacific is like anywhere else in America: on any given day, students like band geek CHEESECAKE or diminutive SQUEAKS are tortured by popular football jocks MATT TAYLOR and his friends SWANSON, JONES, HARPER and JUMBO, much to the chagrin of fellow losers LLOYD, TERRENCE, JABIR, CONSUELO and, most of all, Matt's younger brother ADAM, who secretly dreams of popularity and perhaps a date with gorgeous cheerleader AMBER.

No one ever misses a game, so that night Adam, his friends and his mother REBECCA watch as Matt leads the Pirates to another overwhelming victory. Despite a crippling injury that leaves Harper out for the season, Matt won't stop, determined to break the school's all-time scoring record; finally the game runs out with Matt still one touchdown shy. On the bus back home, the team's delighted to find cases of beer stashed under their seats, too late realize they've been set up.

The cop that pulls them over and the judge hearing the trial are both fans of Roosevelt High, which conveniently happens to be scheduled to play the Pirates the following week for a playoff berth. The team is sentenced to a week's suspension, and just like that, the school's hopes for a state championship are crushed.

Only one not upset by the news is Adam, who confesses to his friends that he's tired of seeing Matt sail through classes, date cheerleaders and pick on nerds. Adam comes up with a brilliant idea: he'll convince the FOOTBALL COACH to allow him and his friends to fill in for the varsity team for one week so they won't be forced to forfeit. Talking the coach into the deal isn't easy, but there's no other alternative, and once he's promised his friends popularity and dates, they reluctantly go along with it too.

The losers enjoy their newfound power over the varsity team, until they show up for their first practice. Jabir fails miserably as kicker, Lloyd can't hold onto a pass; only Adam shows some natural talent as QB. Next day the losers consider quitting, but none can resist the allure of having the varsity team forced to obey their every command.

Practice continues, but Adam's poor quarterbacking earns him a lecture from the coach; that night he recruits his friends to help him learn technique. He finds an unlikely coach in Consuelo, whose uncle is an NFL offensive coordinator, and suddenly Adam's skills reach new heights. In his joy, he doesn't notice that Consuelo is obviously head over heels for him.

Everyone's amazed by Adam's new skills on the field the next day; embarrassed to admit that he learned from a girl, he fails to credit an insulted Consuelo. All minds are on the next day's scrimmage game against varsity in preparation for Friday's game against Roosevelt—for the first time, the losers begins to hope that they might actually win. That night Adam, Terrence, Lloyd and Squeaks score dates with Amber and her friends, much to Consuelo's dismay; over dinner the cheerleaders warn the boys about the Roosevelt team, including their most dangerous player, ZABRANSKI. But when Adam gets a goodbye kiss from Amber, Zabranski is the last thing on his mind.

Next day at lunch, Adam laughs down Consuelo's observation that they've begun to act just like the jocks they always hated, picking on hapless Matt and his friends; when the others side with Consuelo, an offended Adam won't listen and pays the price that night, when he's hammered hard in the scrimmage game. At the last moment Coach realizes the team's helpless without defense; fortunately he's able to recruit overweight band members, led by Cheesecake, to provide an impenetrable defensive line. Adam earns more ill will when he picks on Lloyd for dropping a touchdown pass, and by the end of the game, not even Consuelo will speak to him.

The day of the big game, Adam decides he'll sit it out. The team's disappointed, but at school a mysterious thing's been happening: jocks and losers have begun socializing, and when the jocks admit they'd be proud to cheer for their substitutes on the field that night, the losers vow to play with or without their star quarterback.

As Adam plays board games that night with a clueless Rebecca, who thinks the game's been canceled, his friends are mercilessly pounded by Zabranski and the Roosevelt team; by the end of the first half they're down 21-0 with little hope of recovery. When Rebecca sees stadium lights on and realizes the game's being played, she drags Adam to the stadium; newly contrite, Adam asks for forgiveness and pledges to lead the Pirates to victory.

With new life (and some help from varsity players who've snuck onto the cheerleading squad to shout advice from the sidelines), the Pirates make an incredible comeback and score the tying touchdown with moments left, thanks to a selfless play by Adam, who sacrifices himself to the mercy of Zabranski and the Roosevelt team with a trick play that leaves him squashed flat. In the game's final seconds, Jabir recovers Squeaks' fumbled snap and runs it into the end zone for the win.

Later as the team celebrates, Matt gives Adam sincere thanks for leading the team to victory and ensuring that the Pirates will go to the playoffs; the brothers reconcile. All that's left is for Adam to claim Amber, his rightful prize, but he's finally realizes who he truly wants: his secret coach and good friend, Consuelo.

COMMENTS:

It's a story (MEAN GIRLS, CAN'T BUY ME LOVE, THE NEW GUY) that's been told a dozen times. An unpopular teenage loser gets one shot at achieving the popularity, respect and power he/she has always dreamed of, only to realize in the end that the cool kids don't really have all the answers, and that the key to true happiness lies in honest friendships and self-acceptance. With an original conceit, likable characters, a briskly paced and enjoyable story and nothing too serious to chew on, this script is a good, capable take on a predictable formula. Underdeveloped character relationships and an overly family-friendly tone (more KICKING AND SCREAMING than REMEMBER THE TITANS) are what currently remove this script from the pool of viable high school sports projects—but the potential for improvement is there.

This is that rare breed of high school comedy: sweet without being saccharine, funny without resorting to the easy, no-brainer laugh, light and upbeat enough to entertain, but ultimately an earnest story with an honest message of acceptance at its core. A strong story conceit, following a group of geeky teens over the course of one fateful week as they risk their own physically well-being to step in for their high school's suspended varsity football team, sets it apart from the same-old, same-old underdog high school football story and places it firmly in the realm of escapist comedy.

Standing in script's way, currently, are a few key weaknesses and logistical problems. While the premise in and of itself is fine, it would take more effort to convince us that a football-obsessed school would voluntarily allow a group of students who know nothing about the game (who aren't even athletes, for that matter) to step into the shoes of a championship team just before the most important game of the year. The natural question becomes, why not recruit the JV team, or even a group of kids who play football in their spare time, to fill in instead? Why rely on self-admitted geeks who know nothing about the sport?

The basis for strong, solid characters is here, but Adam and his friends seem to stop short of who they could truly become, and script misses out of multiple opportunities for good comedy by making these kids a little more harmless, family-friendly and innocent than they should be. Jabir, who reads at first glance like the stereotypical ethnic kid you expect to talk with a thick accent, only to bust out in pure Noo Yawk slang, is great—but script holds back from making him the truly gutter-mouthed

smartass he wants to be. Instead it falls back on the tamer choice of having him simply sound like an extra from "The Sopranos" and never really allows him to let loose and shock the reader.

Matt and the other varsity players (aside from Jumbo, whose unlikely friendship with Squeaks is one of the strongest subplots in the story) have the tendency to fade into one faceless mass, rather than standing out as distinct personalities. Amber and Consuelo, as the only major female characters besides Rebecca, don't jump off the page as clearly as do Adam and his guy friends. Adam, initially a very appealing character in the vein of "The O.C." 's Seth Cohen, a quick-witted, sardonic type who provides commentary on everything going on around him, strays into asshole territory midway through the script, around the time that he develops a big head about his newfound popularity, and never recovers from it. While this is fine to an extent (he's got to have some sort of fully realized character arc, after all), the point at which he actively begins picking on the varsity players--and chews out his best friend Lloyd for dropping a pass during a scrimmage game--is where our opinion of him changes from sympathy to dislike. Writing doesn't give us enough time to come around on that opinion before being compelled to wrap up the story with Adam's last-minute change of heart, just in time for the Pirates to pull out an amazing, against-all-odds, come from behind victory.

All throughout the story, we never see what makes Adam and Matt brothers. They seem to have no connection outside of a general tolerance of each other, but if they really are brother who have spent their entire lives trying to get past their differences, why don't we see more of that? What are they like at home, when they're forced to occupy the same space? What are their in-jokes and references? What was it like for Adam to grow up in his brother broad-shouldered shadow? More attention, too, ought to have been paid to Matt, who at first seems like the most natural choice for the villain in this story, but all too quickly fades into the background, and never does anything especially memorable from that point on. Why not play off of Matt's initial bad reaction to the news that his wimpy younger brother's about to take his place as most popular guy in school, and allow him to explore some truly diabolical plot to undermine him?

There has some great off-the-cuff dialogue and sight gags: Voiceover from the Judge, claiming he's a "fair and impartial man," leads to a shot of him covered in Roosevelt paraphernalia,

etc. That joke sets a standard that proves comic timing is alive and well throughout the script. But we do get the feeling that writers are holding back on purpose, not wanting to get too offensive, too raunchy, or push the boundaries too far, and that weakens the script overall, giving it the feel of a kid-friendly family film, rather than a balls-out comedy that will appeal to pre-teen and teen audiences.

The aspect that really helps script stand apart from the many, many unsuccessful stabs at the high school comedy released year after year in hopes that something will stick (does anyone really remember GET OVER IT or DRIVE ME CRAZY? Would anyone put SHE'S THE MAN on their top-10 list?) is its tone. The confident, breezy, enjoyable tone of the writing, at its best, strikes a good balance between broad silliness and seriousness. Yet script doesn't do enough with what it has. The potential is here to bridge the gap between throwaway underdog teen comedy and raunchy, AMERICAN PIE-inspired sex farce, in a way that not many films do nowadays. To get there, however, it would need some considerable story and character development to work out the kinks, and make the jump from family film to hilarious teen comedy.