

INT. WESTMINSTER HIGH -- POOL -- DAY

The score is tied as PARENTS cheer on a water polo match.

SUPER: "Westminster High, Orange County, Fall 1974"

With only seconds left in the game, 40-something BUDD EATON stands, revealing his 6' 10" slender frame and claps loudly.

BUDD

Come on, Mark. Defense.

Westminster players MICKEY, MIKE, FRANK, BURD, and MONTY aggressively dive and bob. Budd's son, MARK EATON, a gangly kid with shaggy, blond hair and long arms, plays goal keeper. Mark's body sticks out of the water like he's standing on a stool. His eyes follow the ball as he guards his goal.

LINDSEY ERICKSON, a 6' 1", lean, Nordic-looking blond player, slams the ball toward the goal. Mark blocks it.

Lindsey re-shoots. It looks good, but this time Mark catches the ball and heaves it to the other end of the pool. Frank catches it, scores. Budd jumps up clapping. A BUZZER sounds. Westminster wins. The CROWD explodes with joy.

INT. WESTMINSTER HIGH -- CLASSROOM -- DAY

MR. STOCKHAM, a 30-ish, hip social English teacher with dark hair and a mustache, lectures to his STUDENTS.

STOCKHAM

"Greatness is the fulfillment of a natural tendency in each man. A tonic to a young soul." When Ralph Waldo Emerson said this he wasn't referring to soldiers or politicians. He was talking about regular people seeking self-respect...

He happens to turn toward a 6' 5" high bank of windows just in time to see a head with bushy hair walk by.

STOCKHAM

Excuse me. I'll be right back.
Read page 76 of your text book.

EXT. WESTMINSTER HIGH -- QUAD -- CONTINUOUS

Mr. Stockham scans the sea of students until he sees the bushy head poke up above the throng.

EXT. WESTMINSTER HIGH -- CLASSROOM -- LATER

No one is around but Mr. Stockham and Mark.

MR. STOCKHAM
 (points to windows)
 Any kid I can see through those windows needs to be on one of my teams.

MARK
 Coach Stockham, you know I go out for basketball every year, but the best I ever do is JV.

MR. STOCKHAM
 You've grown at least half a foot since last year. How tall are you?

MARK
 Six-eleven.

MR. STOCKHAM
 We could use a six-eleven center.

MARK
 I don't want to be a JV senior.

Stockham remains silent. Mark turns to leave.

MARK
 I gotta get to water polo practice.

MR. STOCKHAM
 Hang on. I didn't say...I mean, of course I'll put you on varsity.
 (they shake on it)
 This'll be great. There isn't a kid in the state who can guard you.

EXT. MARK'S HOME -- DRIVEWAY -- DAY

A tract home neighborhood that sprung up post WWII.

Mark, Budd and Lindsey bend over the open hood of a green '65 Chevy half-ton pick-up.

LINDSEY
 (to Mark)
 I can't believe you blocked my shot!

BUDD
 I can.
 (to Mark)
 Hand me that nine-sixteenths wrench.

Mark gives it to Budd, who uses it on a water pump.

LINDSEY
 That's okay. I'll score next time, since you're not on the team anymore.

Budd stops working. He looks at Lindsey, then Mark.

BUDD
What?

LINDSEY
Uh...I gotta go. See you at church.

Lindsey hurries off. Budd gives his son the parental stare.

MARK
I quit water polo to play basketball.

BUDD
I thought you loved water polo.

MARK
I do. But it's *varsity* basketball, Dad. I finally made the team!

BUDD
(unenthusiastically)
That's great.

Mark studies Budd, trying to get a read on him.

MARK
Was I that bad?

BUDD
I didn't think so. But they hardly played you. Do you really want to go through all that again?

MARK
This time I'll be the tallest guy on the team, maybe even in the league.

BUDD
And that means they'll play you because...?

MARK
I'm closer to the basket.

INT. WESTMINSTER HIGH -- GYM -- DAY

The varsity boys BASKETBALL PLAYERS do lay-ups. Mark's uncoordinated gangly limbs make him move like a puppet on strings. TWO PLAYERS watch Mark stumble to the basket.

PLAYER 1
How can a guy with legs the length of telephone poles be such a klutz?

PLAYER 2

Come on. He can practically dunk
without leaving the ground.

Mark trips over his own feet and falls.

PLAYER 1

Not if he can't get near the basket.

MONTAGE -- MARK AT PRACTICE

GYM -- Mark awkwardly dribbles when A QUICK GUARD easily
steals the ball.

GYM -- Mark drops the ball when someone passes to him.

GYM -- Mark gets a rebound, takes a shot, misses.

INT. WESTMINSTER HIGH -- GYM -- AFTERNOON

In practice BRIAN, a skinny forward, shoots, but Mark blocks.
The Forward's face smashes into Mark's elbow. He goes down.
Stockham blows his whistle.

STOCKHAM

Mark, what're you doing?

MARK

I blocked his shot.

(to Forward)

Sorry Brian, I didn't mean to...

Brian holds his eye, which swells by the second.

BRIAN

Basketball is not a contact sport,
ya big freak!

Mark recoils in embarrassment.

STOCKHAM

All right, that's enough. Brian, go
get some ice on that eye.

(to Mark)

We've been over this a million times.
You can't hit the other players.

MARK

I didn't hit him! He ran into me!

STOCKHAM

Doesn't matter. When you and another
guy collide and the other guy ends
up like that, it's a foul on you.

MARK

All I did was hold up my arms.

STOCKHAM

Just try to stay out of the way.

INT. WESTMINSTER HIGH -- GYM -- NIGHT

Westminster plays Marina High. FANS fill the bleachers. Mark's mom DOLORES (a 6' woman in her early forties with short blond hair) and Budd sit high up in the stands.

With three minutes and no time-outs left, Westminster leads, 52 to 46. Mark plays, but no one passes to him. JOEY, a 6'10" beefy Marina guard shoots, Mark blocks, but Joey's nose smashes into Mark's chin and explodes in a bloody mess.

The Referee blows his whistle.

REFEREE

Foul, number 35.

(to Mark)

That's your limit, son. You're out.

Mark slumps with disappointment.

From a courtside desk on the Marina High side a cute, petite 5'2" girl of 18 with dark hair and creamy skin, observes Mark as he offers a hand to Joey, who pushes him away and curses. She's MARCIE NEPO, stat girl for Marina High.

Mark bends over and whispers to Joey. He shakes his head. The Crowd BOOS as Mark walks to the bench.

Dolores and Budd can hardly watch their son's humiliation.

Marcie's eyes stay on Mark as Joey hobbles to take his free throw. A TEEN BOY next to Marcie nudges her.

TEEN BOY

Hey Marcie. Joey made the shot.
You need to mark it.

MARCIE

Oh yeah. Thanks.

Marcie writes on her paper, then looks back at Mark who shrinks on the bench while getting chewed out by Stockham.

Mark peeks up into the bleachers at Budd. Their eyes meet. Budd's empathetic expression is more than Mark can bear. He blinks back tears and quickly looks away.

INT. MARK'S HOME -- MARK'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Strands of beads hang in the doorway of a small room dominated by a single bed. A black light sits on a desk, next to a lava lamp and an incense stick. The stereo turntable holds court on a dresser surrounded by albums (Steely Dan, Chicago, Emerson Lake & Palmer).

Mark enters, plops on his bed, feet hanging off the end. On his nightstand is a framed picture of his water polo team.

INT. WESTMINSTER HIGH -- STOCKHAM'S OFFICE -- AFTERNOON

Mark sits across a desk from a fidgety Coach Stockham.

STOCKHAM

As you know, we have two games left and then the play-offs. When I was making up the game rosters I, um...

MARK

What?

STOCKHAM

I'm sorry, Mark. But some of these kids have a shot at college ball.

MARK

Are you kicking me off the team?

STOCKHAM

No, no. You're just not playing in the last two games...or the play-offs.

MARK

But this is the end... Can't I at least play in one game?

STOCKHAM

We just can't risk the fouls. But we'd still like you to be there, of course. On the team bench.

MARK

Coach, riding the team bus, but not being allowed to play feels...weird.

STOCKHAM

Oh. Well, if you like you can drive yourself to the game.

(hands him a paper)

Here are the directions.

EXT. WESTMINSTER HIGH -- QUAD -- MOMENTS LATER

Mark exits the building red-faced with anger. He tears up the directions, shoves them in a trash can, stomps away.

EXT. WESTMINSTER HIGH -- FOOTBALL STADIUM -- DAY

The class of '75 Westminster GRADUATES throw their mortarboard caps in the air amid CHEERS and camera FLASHES.

SUPER: "Westminster High, June 1975"

ON THE FIELD

Kids and their families chat and take pictures.

Budd stands next to Dolores as she snaps a photo of Mark (whose graduation gown is way too short) and his two younger sisters, CHERYL, 15, a statuesque, 5'10" blond, and DENISE, 11, a cute middle-schooler who at 5'7" stands taller than most of the boys in her class.

DOLORES

Okay, now one of just your brother.

The girls join Dolores and Budd. As Mark smiles KIRSTEN and SUZANNE, two California babes in graduation gowns, walk by.

KIRSTEN

What a stork.

SUZANNE

Don't you mean, dork?

KIRSTEN

He's totally freakish. Could you imagine dancing with him...

Mark hears every word. His smile fades to a pained expression just as Dolores snaps the picture.

INT. BACK YARD -- NIGHT

A pool surrounded by tiki torches is the epicenter of a graduation party with tons of TEENS. Rock music plays loudly.

Marcie enters, sees Mark chatting with Lindsey, joins them.

MARCI E

So Lindsey, they let you graduate?

Mark averts his eyes in the presence of this pretty girl.

LINDSEY

(playfully)

Yes, Marcie, even without a head as big as yours, I finished high school. In fact, I'm going to Arizona Automotive Institute with Mark.

MARCI E

Oh? They have a basketball team?

Mark rolls his eyes in disgust. It's a weird moment.

MARCI E

Um, I went to Marina with Lindsey. I kept the game stats. I've seen you play.

MARK
Excuse me, I, um, I gotta... thing.

He leaves.

INT. HOME -- KITCHEN -- CONTINUOUS

Mark sits alone drinking a soda. Marcie enters.

MARCIE
You know, being booted off the court
is not the end of the world.

MARK
Not until it happens to *you*.

MARCIE
There's something I've been wanting
to ask you.

MARK
We don't even know each other.

MARCIE
At the last Marina game what did you
say to Joey after you fouled him?

MARK
HE ran into me!

MARCIE
Yeah, okay. But after he pushed you
away, you whispered something to
him. What was it?

Mark hesitates before he answers.

MARK
I was the only guy there bigger than
him. I told him... if he wanted, I
could help him off the court.

MARCIE
It looked like he swore at you right
before that.

MARK
Called me an asshole freak.

Marcie watches Mark fidget with a bottle cap.

MARCIE
Can we start over?
(extends her hand)
I'm Marcie Nepo.