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One thing most people don't understand about track and field is that it's a heavily team oriented sport. Every time you compete you compete *against* yourself but *for others* wearing the same jersey as you. And at my high school Lake Braddock was even more so the case. We had a reputation for being great winning state titles, breaking national records, producing Olympic champions and the pride of being the winningest team in Northern Virginia. Another thing most people don't tell you about track and field is that there's an event called the triple jump. God knows I didn't as a sophomore thrown into the event to fill in the shoes of two graduating seniors. But as a triple jumper you learn a few things pretty quick: you'll constantly have to explain that you're not a hurdler or high jumper, as much as you clean you'll never get rid of the beach worth of sand in your shoes and bags, you'll be well acquainted with shin splints, there are no good pictures of you competing, and of course the mounting pressure that comes with not wanting to let your team down on your last jump of the competition. And that last one decided to show up ten fold at the indoor regional championships as I stood on the runway 137 feet away from the sand pit waiting for the official to drop the white flag.

After about a dozen times of competing at the Prince George's Sports and Learning Complex's indoor track my routine started to become almost robotic. Everything we did after we got through those doors was about being first: first to the good spot in the bleachers, first to the spike and equipment check stations, and first on the track to start warm-ups. So as soon as the doors open I corralled the other triple jumpers and hurried them inside, partially to be ready to compete as soon as possible and

mostly to be out of the chilling February air. I made my way into the stadium as fast as humanly possible threw my bag into the stands and raced to the equipment check line behind the last curve. But despite how fast I moved there was already a line of at least 50 people. Even with the four officials at the table the line couldn't move fast enough. My heart was beating like a jackhammer as I frantically looked around for my teammate Nahom but only saw more spots taken up on the track and the big red digital clock on the far side of the track showing we only had 90 minutes until showtime. After getting my spikes looked at I stood on the fence and waited for Nahom. As athletes from different schools ran by, I allowed myself to zone out and think about a few things: what the state championship meet would be like, how unsatisfied I felt after winning districts the week before in this very stadium and what I needed to do to win again this meet. Just before I became completely unaware of my surroundings, I felt a tap on my back that almost caused me to jump into the rafters. I whipped around to see Nahom grinning at me like a cheshire cat.

“Ready to go boss”, he asked?

“I’ve been ready to go,” I retorted trying to stifle a smile “the hell did you run off to”?

“Man I had to use the bathroom”.

“For twenty minutes!?! Man you need to lay off on the pre-meet McDonalds, now hurry up and get on the track!”

We finally made our way into warm-ups, going through our 800 meter jog and skip warm-up, our drills, and my favorite part, partner stretching. We took our spot behind the the first curve near the boys jump pit.

“Who’s turn is it to get stretched first?”, he asked.

“Definitely yours man, get on your back.”

Part of what made partner stretching so fun for me was you got to torture your teammates and it was all part of warm-ups. As I brought his knee up to his chin I noticed the veins on his forehead we call the Nile due

to it shapes weren't popping out and his face looked relaxed, so I pushed a little harder and just like that the veins appeared.

"And the Nile flows!" I laughed.

"Ow man! Why?"

"Gotta stretch you out good man, today's the last day to make states you know"

"Man don't worry I got you"

He extended his hand for me to help him up and I met him with the same unsatisfying clapping sound we'd been getting all season. As we switched places Nahom glanced over to the pit just in time to see a jumper from the other region mark a good jump.

"DAAAAMN man did you see that?"

"Yeah", I lied, "probably wasn't all that good anyways. Besides we'll be jumping way farther"

"I know man but still..."

"Hey" I said pretending the last stretch wasn't hurting me "we got to focus on us today. Be a little selfish, after all you've worked too hard not to go to states. Just go in, don't think, and compete".

"I got you man, gravity can't stop us today", he said as he pulled his hand back to help me up.

I met him and *clap* the sound we'd been waiting for since November.

As the previous flight finished up, we finally we're allowed to get on the runway and begin run throughs. Shivers of adreneline whtnstright down my spine and I strapped on my spikes and took my spot with nine other jumpers on the runway.