

Line of Scrimmage

Written by

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Based on "Raye of Light"

by

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EXT. NEW BRUNSWICK, NEW JERSEY FIELD - DAY

SUPER: NOVEMBER 6, 1869 - RUTGERS CAMPUS

A small contingent of curious, well-dressed SPECTATORS observe two twenty-five man TEAMS competing in a near-prehistoric version of football.

Rutgers PLAYERS wear scarlet turbans and matching handkerchiefs while their College of New Jersey (later to become Princeton) OPPONENTS, sport black shirts. No helmets or pads. One Rutgers PLAYER hurls a black rubber ball over a rope strung between two posts. A whistle blows ending the contest.

ANNOUNCER

(via megaphone)

Please give a warm round of applause to Rutgers, our hometown winner of the inaugural intercollegiate football match.

Polite applause while two DANDIES walk away disinterested.

DANDY #1

Fifty men on the field? Utter chaos.

DANDY #2

Half the student body is playing.

DANDY #1

I won't attend the next game - if there is one. I see no future in it.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. SPARTAN STADIUM - MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY - AFTERNOON

SUPER: NOVEMBER 19, 1966

Gray skies hover above the over-capacity crowd of eighty thousand gathered in below-freezing temps. No cheers. No roars of approval. Only sobbing and disbelief. Time has run out on this, the 'Game of the Century,' between number one ranked Notre Dame and number two ranked Michigan State.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. RAYE HOME - FAYETTEVILLE, N.C. - DAY

SUPER: JANUARY 1, 1962

Negro high school junior JIMMY RAYE tosses a football up and down while watching Rose Bowl player introductions for the University of Minnesota Gophers and the UCLA Bruins.

His GRANDMOTHER sits nearby, seemingly reading a book.

Multiple white PLAYERS state their names, positions and hometowns. But when the Gophers' Negro quarterback, number 15, steps in front of the camera, Jimmy stops tossing the ball and stares in amazement.

STEPHENS

Sandy Stephens, quarterback.
Uniontown, Pennsylvania.

JIMMY

Holy sh--

Jimmy stops himself from swearing in front of his grandmother. But when she looks up from her book, she's equally surprised.

GRANDMOTHER

Holy shit.

INT. JENISON FIELD HOUSE - MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY - DAY

SUPER: LATE SPRING 1963 - COACH DUFFY DAUGHERTY'S OFFICE

HUGH "DUFFY" DAUGHERTY, Michigan State's football coach, slips a 16mm film into a well-worn briefcase. He's a stocky Irishman in his late forties, with a twinkle in his eye.

Duffy is surrounded by proof of his years of gridiron success; two National championship trophies from the mid-1950s, and a framed 1956 *Time* magazine cover. Team photos and memorabilia adorn the walls.

Among them: a 1913 photo of their sole Negro player, GIDEON SMITH, from the then-named Michigan Agricultural College players. A 1940s era team portrait shows eight Negro players. A Michigan State College team photo from 1952 shows their first Negro quarterback WILLIE THROWER.

DREE (O.S.)

Where you going this time, Daddy?

Duffy looks up to see his fifteen-year-old son DAN, nine-year-old daughter DREE and wife FRANCIE in the doorway.

DUFFY

Georgia, honey.

DREE

Why?

DUFFY

Several Negro coaches, and one white coach, invited me to their schools. They think I can offer good advice.

EXT. ATHENS ACADEMY HIGH SCHOOL - GEORGIA - MORNING

A white COACH escorts Duffy inside past a "Whites Only" sign. Duffy's seen that sign far too many times.

INT. ATHENS ACADEMY HIGH SCHOOL GYM - LATER

The MSU team film ends. Lights come up. Duffy stands before a chalkboard filled with the "X's" and "O's" of football. A Confederate flag hangs behind him.

DUFFY

This game - our game - has to continue to grow. Every single year, kids are getting faster. They're getting bigger. It's up to us coaches to realize that and embrace it.

COACHES applaud enthusiastically. He looks out over the assembled audience - an unbroken sea of white faces.

INT. NEGRO HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOM - AFTERNOON

Duffy diagrams plays to a rapt audience of Negro COACHES. They hang on his every word.

DUFFY

Three things can happen when you put a football in the air, and two of them are bad.

Coaches chuckle, knowing all too well how true that is.

EXT. ANOTHER NEGRO HIGH SCHOOL - FIELD - MORNING

Duffy talks with Negro COACHES seated in the bleachers.

DUFFY

One last story. An old coach once told me it'd be interesting if we had an all-star game between Heaven and Hell. Those up above would look down and say, 'We're gonna win because we have all the good players.'

Coaches nod in agreement. An 'amen' is heard.

DUFFY (CONT'D)

But those down below would be every bit as confident. Because they'd have all the coaches and referees.

That brings the house down.

DUFFY (CONT'D)

I'll leave you with the most important thing I've learned. The word "coach" matters. What we do matters. Right or wrong, you are the church for these boys. You're the ones changing young lives with your humility and your strength.

As he closes his briefcase, several COACHES approach.

NEGRO COACH #1

Duffy, I can't thank you enough for coming to see us. Again.

DUFFY

These clinics benefit both of us.

NEGRO COACH #2

Well, you're the only white coach who thinks so.

NEGRO COACH #3

It's like you're the conductor on the 'underground railroad' of college football recruiting.

DUFFY

I wonder if that will fit on my business card. I appreciate that, Coach. I'm not without an ego but I think Harriet Tubman might object.

NEGRO COACH #2

Coach, I know a great football player who should play for you.

DUFFY

I never say no to that. Who is he?

NEGRO COACH #2

George Webster. Plays football, basketball and runs track for Westside out of Anderson, South Carolina. He's 6'6" and 220.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - THAT NIGHT

Duffy completes individual letters to his players.

DUFFY (V.O.)

I'll wrap up my first summer letter to you with this: stay in shape and be ready for practice on day one.

SFX: PHONE

DUFFY (CONT'D)

Hello?

It's fellow coach, MSU's "Doctor of Defense," HANK BULLOUGH.

INTERCUT

BULLOUGH

Duffy, how are things?

DUFFY

Another good trip, Hank. I'm guessing you've got more on George Webster.

BULLOUGH

If anything, that coach's description was too modest. I followed up with Clemson's Frank Howard. I'd barely mentioned Webster's name when he said if he could only take one Negro player, it'd be Webster.

DUFFY

He *could* take him. But we both know he won't.

BULLOUGH

Webster's dad told me they've already been contacted by other schools. Then he suggested another South Carolina Negro senior, Jimmy Summers. Double letterman in football and track. Duff, I want Webster. Can we get him?

DUFFY

He's a Negro. Who else do you think is playing Negroes?

BULLOUGH

Except for Negro schools, almost no one. Eddie Robinson's got a great program at Grambling but how do we make our case? I bet a guy like Webster would like to play against white players.

DUFFY

I think he'd like to play *with* them, too. I'm off to Texas tomorrow. Finally meeting that Carver High hurdler.

BULLOUGH

Oh, yeah. The one who's beating white college guys.

INT. GENE WASHINGTON'S HOME - LA PORTE, TEXAS - EVENING

Duffy pitches 6'3", 210 pound high school senior GENE WASHINGTON and his FOLKS. They each hold a packet along with MSU swag.

DUFFY

Michigan State is different. We have a long tradition and history of integration. Our president, John Hannah, served on Eisenhower's Civil Rights Commission and has initiated sweeping changes including integrating dorms. He's also made it clear to other schools: if you object to Negro athletes, we won't play you. Period.

Gene and his parents are pleasantly surprised.

MR. WASHINGTON

Coach, Gene runs track. Never played football. I'm sure you don't hand out scholarships to just anybody.

DUFFY

Your son isn't just 'anybody,' Mr. Washington. Gene's speed, power and competitive instincts will help our program in multiple ways. And he'll still be eligible to run track.

Mrs. Washington nods to her husband.

MR. WASHINGTON

I don't want to sound naive but if you do grant us that scholarship, is all of this free? Will we have to pay anything?

DUFFY

No, Mr. Washington, your family won't have to pay for anything except a bus ticket to East Lansing.

MR. WASHINGTON

(good-naturedly)

Coach, we know all about busing. The white high school is ten blocks away. But Gene's bussed 15 miles to and from Carver.

Duffy can only shake his head at the insanity of it.

DUFFY

Thanks again for that delicious dinner, Mrs. Washington. When you're on the road as much as I am, you appreciate a good home-cooked meal.

Duffy senses Gene's parents doing their best not to stare.

DUFFY (CONT'D)

Is there something in my teeth?

MRS. WASHINGTON

Oh, God no. My apologies. It's just --

MR. WASHINGTON

-- You're our first white visitor.

DUFFY

Then I'm honored.

So are they.

EXT. JENISON FIELD HOUSE - MSU CAMPUS - DAY

Duffy wraps up a summer coaching clinic for Negro coaches. A limping WILLIE RAY SMITH, SR. approaches with a note-filled pad and a worn copy of Duffy's book, "*First and 10.*"

WILLIE RAY SMITH

Coach Daugherty!

DUFFY

Coach Smith, it's Duffy, remember?

They shake hands enthusiastically.

DUFFY (CONT'D)

How've you been? You keeping the guys at Charlton-Pollard in line?

WILLIE RAY SMITH

I'm sure they'd tell you I am. Just not so politely.

Duffy notices the beat-up copy of his book.

DUFFY

You drive over that with your car?

WILLIE RAY SMITH

(laughing)

Let's just say I read it often. After the Bible, it's the *other* good book.

DUFFY

That's one I haven't heard before.

WILLIE RAY SMITH

I was wondering if you'd take a chance on my middle son, Bubba.

DUFFY

We both remember what happened with your eldest son. We recruited him heavily but he chose Iowa. You sure Bubba wants MSU?

WILLIE RAY SMITH

Yes. Besides, I could use your help in getting him under control. Making a man out of him.

DUFFY

Willie Ray, you're his father *and* his coach. If you can't do that, how do you expect me to?

WILLIE RAY SMITH

At 6'8", it's not just his height that makes Bubba a handful.

INT. ROANOKE TIMES AND WORLD NEWS - LOBBY

Sportswriter BOB MCLELLAND is on a pay phone.

INTERCUT

INT. MSU FOOTBALL OFFICE

MSU Defensive backs Coach VINCE CARILLOT'S on the phone.

CARILLOT

You know what Duffy says, "More football games are won from December to September than the other way around."

MCLELLAND

That's why I'm calling. I've got a major prospect for you.

CARILLOT

We've never taken scouting reports from sportswriters, Bob.

MCLELLAND

And it's the first time I've ever offered. Listen.

(MORE)

MCLELLAND (CONT'D)

Charlie Thornhill is Roanoke's Addison High Back of the Year. The first Negro player ever picked for this award. Had three straight thousand-yard seasons, three straight league titles, a twenty-five game winning streak and he led the city and county high schools in scoring his junior *and* senior years. You've gotta get film on this kid. You can thank me later. Bye.

INT. DAUGHERTY HOME - EVENING

Dree pores over her homework while the network news plays in the adjacent living room.

ON TV

Birmingham, Alabama civil rights PROTESTERS are attacked by police dogs, fire hoses and baton-wielding COPS.

DREE

Mom, why do the dogs do that?

FRANCIE

It's not the dogs, honey. It's the men who train the dogs and the adults who trained those men when they were little boys.

(sotto to Duffy)

I don't think she should be watching this.

Francie turns the TV off.

DREE

Why'd you do that?

FRANCIE

That Civil War book report is due tomorrow, right? You have a desk in your room. No distractions there.

Dree reluctantly picks up her loose-leaf binder.

DREE

Yes, mom. But it looks like that war isn't over. Or is this a new war?

INT. MSU FILM ROOM - LATE NIGHT

Coaching staff watches grainy silent 8mm film of Addison High star CHARLIE "MAD DOG" THORNHILL. The reel ends.

DUFFY

Impressive. Great speed and power.

BULLOUGH

But?

DUFFY

He's only 5'10," right?

CARILLOT

But he plays like he's 6'10." Duff, he's built like a Mack truck. Never lifted weights in his life. Just looks like he has. We've got other film on him from track.

Duffy's still on the fence.

STOLL

He's worth a scholarship.

INT. MSU PRESIDENT JOHN HANNAH'S OFFICE - DAY

Stately, subdued with a prominent photo of JOHN HANNAH and former President Eisenhower. He's the very model of a progressive teacher, administrator and university president.

HANNAH

What if I were to tell you that Father Hesburgh called yesterday? He wants to talk with you about the Notre Dame opening.

DUFFY

I'd tell him I already have a job.

HANNAH

Even though they're the most famous college football team in the country?

DUFFY

Well, Bear Bryant might quibble.

HANNAH

I'm serious. He wants permission to speak with you.

DUFFY

I told you.

HANNAH

As of today, I'm offering you a five year contract as the new Director of Football, reporting only to me.

(MORE)

HANNAH (CONT'D)

And a ten thousand dollar raise. The only person who can fire you is you.

The two men stand and shake hands warmly.

HANNAH (CONT'D)

I really need you to beat the Irish.

DUFFY

Yes, sir.

Duffy's almost out of Hannah's office.

HANNAH

And Michigan.

DUFFY

Yes, sir.

INT. DAUGHERTY HOME - NIGHT

Duffy and Francie get ready for bed.

FRANCIE

I'll never understand why so many parents want their sons to play for Notre Dame.

DUFFY

Their history. And that damn movie.

FRANCIE

More people should know you've got the most integrated team in college football. All these other schools? They have the chance to do right and they don't.

No argument from Duffy there.

EXT. OHIO STATE STADIUM - LOCAL TRACK MEET - DAY

Breathing hard, 6', 215 pound Negro high-schooler CLINTON JONES carries a victory bouquet. He hands the flowers to his mom EMMA, proudly waiting track-side.

STADIUM ANNOUNCER

How about another hand for Cathedral Latin's Clinton Jones who just swept state titles in high *and* low hurdles?

Jones is met by WOODY HAYES, Ohio State football coach.

HAYES

Clinton, Coach Hayes. Son, what you did today is not just impressive. It's outstanding. I'm offering you a football scholarship.

EMMA and Clinton exchange looks.

JONES

Coach, I really appreciate you wanting me to be a Buckeye. It's a dream someone like me almost can't imagine.

HAYES

I'm glad we're on the same page. So when can we make this official?

JONES

Actually, I won't be able to do that, Coach. I'm going to Michigan State.

Deadly silence - until Hayes erupts.

HAYES

It isn't even close, Michigan State versus Ohio State. Jesus Fucking Christ.

Clinton is dumbstruck; his mother appalled.

EMMA

What kind of man talks like that to anyone, let alone a high school student? Who the hell do you think you are?

They walk off.

HAYES

You'll regret that decision. Mark my words.

INT. DUFFY'S OFFICE - SUMMER DAY

A pile of envelopes sits next to Duffy.

DUFFY (V.O.)

I'll close my third and final letter, with this: be willing to work hard, accept discipline, place team above self and bring an overwhelming desire to excel, giving everything you have in every practice and every game.