

JAKE MADDUX

FREE THROW



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center, has little confidence in Derek and will not pass him the ball.

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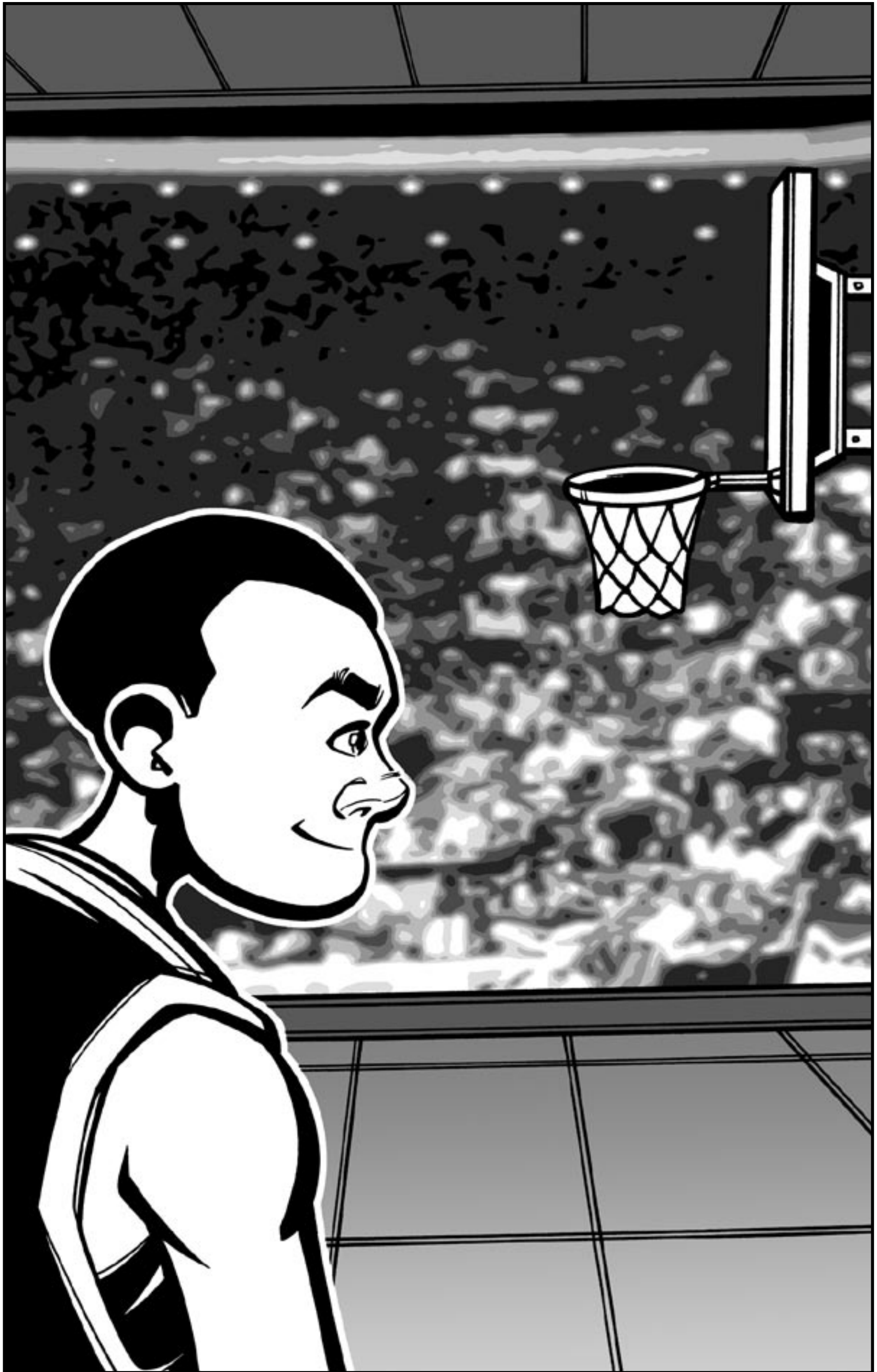
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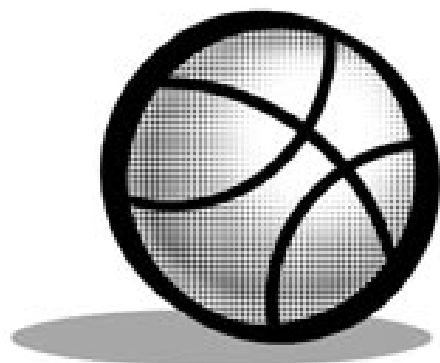
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Chapter 1



DEREK PHELPS, CENTER

Derek watched as people came into the gym and sat on the bleachers. The fans for his team, the Hornets, sat on one side, and the visiting team's fans from Renner sat on the other. I can't wait for the season to start! he thought. Last year Jason was center, but I'm taller than he is now, so Coach changed the roster.

Coach Taylor called the team over.
"Derek, I want you to do the tip-off."

“Okay, Coach,” said Derek.

“But, Coach,” said Jason. “I always do the tip-off!”

“Derek is taller than you this year,” said Coach Taylor. “That’s why I made him the center and moved you to forward.”

“But he’s never done it before,” said Jason.

“I’m sure Derek can do it,” said Coach. Then he looked at each member of the team. “I’m sure you can all do your job. This is the first game of the season for the Hampton Hornets,” he said. “I know you’ll make me proud.”

Derek, Jason, and the other players put their hands into the circle. Coach Taylor put his hand on top. Everyone shouted, “Go, Hornets!”



Derek walked out to center court and waited for the referee to start the game.

Jason walked up to Derek. "You think you're so great," he said.

"What?" said Derek.

"You think you're better than I am," said Jason, "but you're not."

"I never said that!"

"I'll show you who's great and who's not," said Jason. "Just watch your back." Then he turned and walked away.

Great, thought Derek. I grow a few inches, and our star player hates me.

The ref came over with the ball. He looked at Derek and the center from Renner. "Ready, boys?"

"Ready," said Derek.

“I’m ready,” said the other boy.

“Then let’s get this game started,” said the ref. He threw the ball up into the air.

Derek jumped up. But the Renner center hit the ball before Derek could reach it. Derek watched the ball fly to the other side of the court.

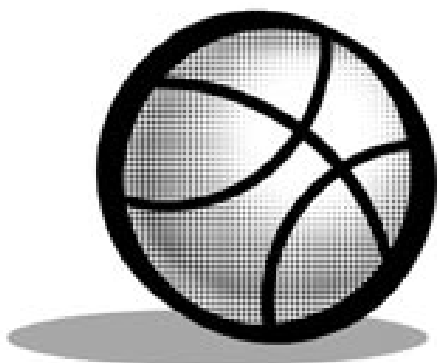
One of the Renner guards caught it and ran toward the basket.

Jason ran past Derek. “I knew you couldn’t do it,” said Jason.

What a way to start a game, thought Derek. He ran toward the basket.

As Derek reached the key, the free throw lane, the Renner center was already in the air. How did he move so fast? Derek watched as the ball dropped into the basket. Renner scored.

Chapter 2



PASSING GAME

The score was 25 to 14, and Renner was ahead. Coach Taylor had called a time-out, but he didn't seem upset. He was talking to Cody about the next play.

Cody ran back onto the court. The ref handed Cody the ball. Cody took the ball out of bounds behind the basket.

Then he passed the ball to Garrett. Derek ran over to the key and turned around. He raised his hands into the air.

Garrett passed the ball to Ryan. Derek ran up to the low post by the basket.

Ryan passed the ball to Jason. Derek put his hands out, ready to catch the ball. Then a Renner guard stole the ball from Jason. Jason ran after him.

Derek ran to the other side of the court. I can't let them score again! he thought quickly.

As he ran toward the basket, the Renner players passed the ball. It moved closer and closer to the basket.

I have to hurry, thought Derek. Their center is already in the low post, just outside the free throw lane. Derek ran toward the basket.

Just in time! One of the Renner forwards passed the ball to their center.

The center started to jump.

Derek jumped too. He waved his arms to block the shot.

Whap!

The ball flew back toward center court. Cody grabbed the ball and then passed it to Garrett.

I did it! It's ours again, thought Derek happily. He headed back toward the other basket.

It was the Hornets' turn to score. Garrett passed the ball to Ryan. Ryan dribbled toward the basket.

The Renner players surrounded Ryan, so he did a left fake. Then he passed the ball to Cody.

Cody was on the wing, but the Renner players were all over him.



Cody faked right and passed to Ryan on his left.

The Renner team ran toward Ryan.

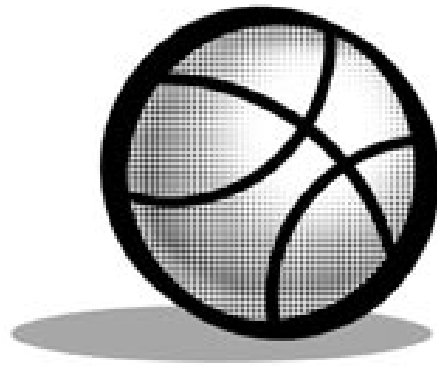
Ryan pivoted and passed to Jason.

Derek waved his arms at Jason. Jason looked at Derek and shook his head.

I'm open, thought Derek. Jason can see that.

But Jason wouldn't pass. He just jumped and shot.

Chapter 3



CATCHING UP

Derek looked at the scoreboard. Renner was beating Hampton, 37 to 35. They were catching up.

It was Renner's turn to have the ball. One of the Renner guards threw the ball in. Derek turned around so he could see where the ball was going.

A quick pass. Derek ran closer to the basket. Another pass. The ball was at center court.

A third pass, and now the players from both teams were over by the basket. Derek watched as the Renner players passed the ball again.

The Renner player jumped and so did Derek. Derek waved his arms as he defended the basket. Whap! Derek hit the ball away. Garrett ran after the ball.

Derek ran past Garrett to the other basket. Ryan stopped at center court. He turned around to face Garrett. Garrett passed the ball to Ryan.

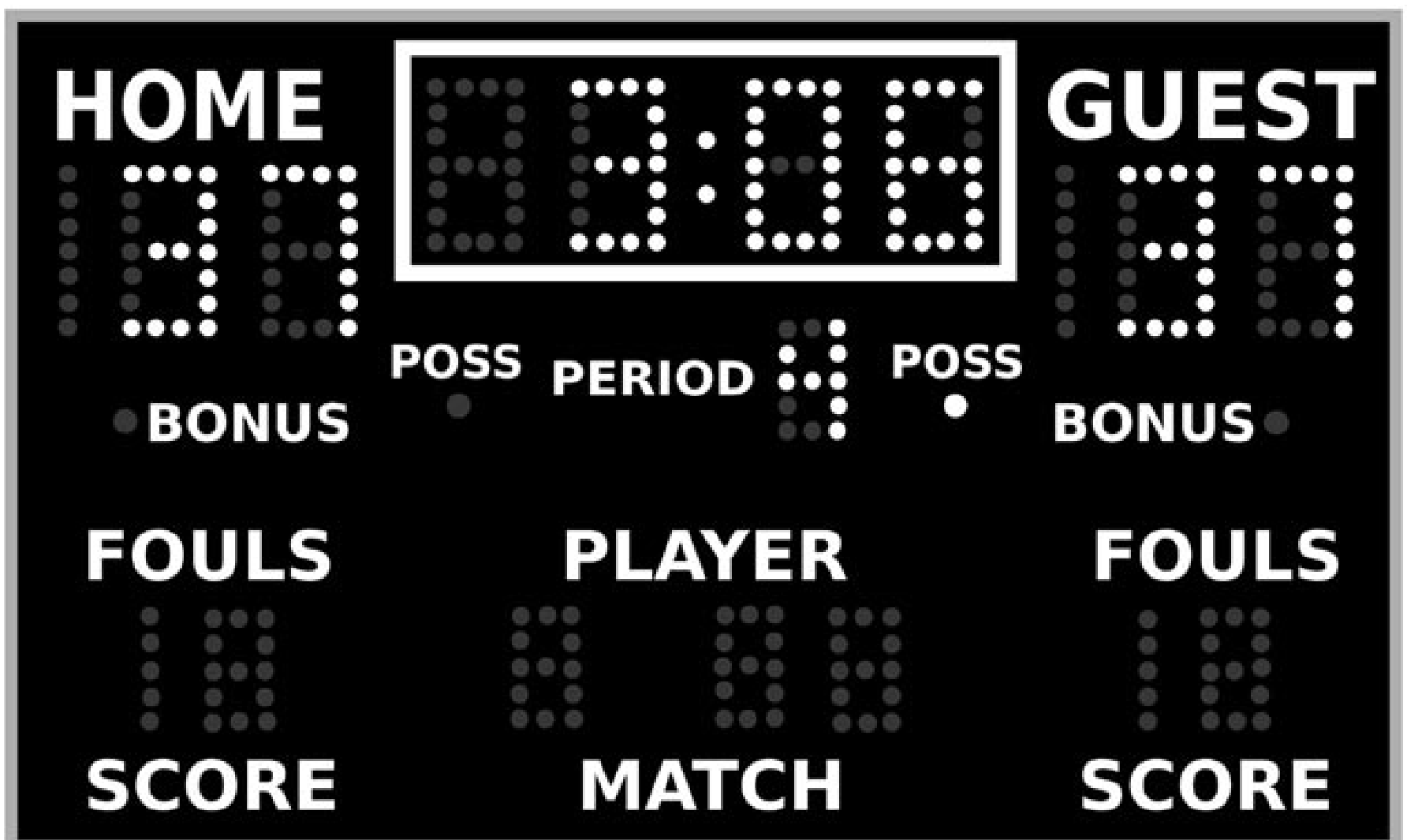
Derek raised his hands. No one is here but me, he thought. Ryan turned and looked at Derek. Ryan passed the ball to Derek.

Derek caught the ball. Then he turned and jumped.

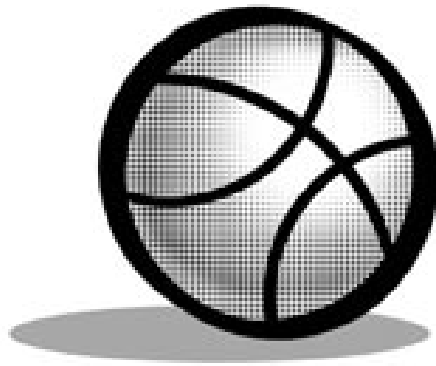
The ball sailed through the air.

It hit the rim and dropped into the basket. Two points.

Now the score was tied at 37! Derek looked over at Coach Taylor. "Atta boy!" said Coach. Then Derek saw Jason. Jason was frowning. What's the matter with him? Derek thought. Doesn't Jason want us to win?



Chapter 4



PERSONAL FOUL

Derek jumped up to block yet another shot, but the Renner center faked his jump. Instead he threw the ball to one of the Renner forwards. Before Derek could reach him, the Renner forward tipped the ball into the basket. Now the score was 39 to 37.

The ref handed the ball to Cody. Cody stepped out of bounds and looked at the court. Then he threw the ball.