

FADE IN:

Along a riverbank in Kansas.

EXT. WHEAT FIELD - DAY

In a clearing, two young boys play baseball. One pitches as the other bats.

The batter is BRIAN MCGREGOR. He is 8. The pitcher is WILLIS ARMSTRONG, 8, Brian's best friend.

Brian hits every ball pitched to him, solidly, and with great distance. An extraordinary feat for a boy his age.

We hear a loud whistle. The boys stop dead in their track.

WILLIS

That's my dad. I've got five minutes left.

BRIAN

What happens if you're late?

WILLIS

Then he whoops my ass.

Willis starts to leave.

BRIAN

Wait. One more pitch.

Brian reaches into his duffel bag and pulls out an autographed baseball enclosed in glass.

BRIAN

A Joe DiMaggio foul ball, September 2, 1953.

He throws it against a tree, breaking the glass.

They prepare for one final toss.

Willis delivers the pitch--

CRACK

Brian blasts the ball over the trees toward the bank of the river.

WILLIS  
Holy shit, DiMaggio.

They run to retrieve the ball.

Brian arrives first and spots the ball along an incline next to the river's edge. As he reaches for it, he loses his footing and falls into the swift current.

Willis runs up and sees Brian being pulled downstream.

Without hesitation, he sprints along the bank and dives into the water. Together they fight to stay afloat.

Up ahead they spot a large tree branch sticking out from the shoreline.

They grab it and try to hold on, but the current is too strong. They are pulled back into the water.

Brian spots another branch downstream.

BRIAN  
Look.

They grab a hold of the next branch.

Willis, closest to shore, works his way to safety. Brian reaches for his outstretched hand. Willis pulls him out.

They sit along the riverbank, exhausted, but relieved.

Brian reaches into his pocket and pulls out the ball. They smile.

Then they hear whistle number two.

SUPER: "Thirteen years later,  
early Spring."

EXT. THE KANSAS LANDSCAPE - DAY

Amber waves of grain as far as the eye can see. It is silent, majestic, with a slight breeze. Dark clouds loom in the far distance.

Like an oasis sits a small college campus.

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD - DAY

From beyond the rooftops we lower upon PLAYERS during practice.  
The first of the upcoming spring season.

IN THE DUGOUT

is the team COACH, 50's, large, standing tall. Watching over the  
troops like a proud army general.

Next to him is his ASSISTANT, chubby, lax.

COACH

Barring a catastrophe, I think we  
should have another banner year.

ASSISTANT

I agree, absolutely.

COACH

We're more mature, refined,  
confident.

ASSISTANT

Definitely more focused.

COACH

Good.

The coach takes in a deep breath of fresh air. Then spits.

The surrounding bleachers are sparsely populated.

Of those in attendance is an official for a major league baseball  
team. JOHN BURKLE is 52, gray hair, chiseled features.

He has his eye on one player--

BRIAN MCGREGOR, now 21. Mature, good-looking, star player.  
Not overly stout, or burly. But he is natural and fluid.

He steps up to home plate.

COACH

Looks like he's put on some

weight.

The PITCHER throws a fastball.

Brian swings--

CRACK

over the center field fence.

COACH

Weight is good.

Brian adjusts his helmet, marks his spot over home plate and readies himself for another pitch--

CRACK

over the left field fence.

ASSISTANT

Damn!

COACH

Let's not wear 'em all out at once.  
Bring 'em in.

ASSISTANT (OS)

Okay people let's shower up.

With practice ending John makes his way to the field as players head for the locker room.

JOHN

Excuse me, Brian McGregor?

BRIAN

Yes.

JOHN

John Burkle. I'm with the Los Angeles Dodgers.

Brian's eyes open wide.

JOHN

Some very impressive hitting.

BRIAN

Thanks.

JOHN

I noticed you practice using a wooden bat.

BRIAN

I hate aluminum. Lumber's the only way to go.

JOHN

Is that even allowed in college ball?

BRIAN

They never said I couldn't.

JOHN

It's the first I've heard of it in 30 years.

More impressed than ever.

JOHN

What are your plans after college?

BRIAN

I'd like to play baseball.

JOHN

Our farm team in Las Vegas can use a bat like yours.

Brian glares, dumbfounded.

JOHN

You are familiar with the Los Angeles Dodgers?

BRIAN

Sorry. You caught me a bit off-guard.

JOHN

Do you live close?

BRIAN

My parents run a farm in Collinsbrook, about twenty minutes west of here.

JOHN  
West? I think I would need a  
compass to find my way around here.

His gentle demeanor puts Brian at ease.

BRIAN  
You came all this way to see me?

JOHN  
I think you are one of the finest,  
most purist hitters I have ever  
seen.

BRIAN  
Thanks again.

JOHN  
I was lucky to find you--all the  
way out here. A smaller school in  
another division.

He hands Brian his business card.

JOHN  
I want you to meet my boss,  
Mark Warner. He'd like you.

EXT. PARKING LOT - DAY

Brian walks to his truck following practice.

As he crosses the street a black pick-up truck bolts towards him,  
skidding to an abrupt stop just inches from him. It is--

WILLIS ARMSTRONG, now 21. Unreserved and gregarious.

He leans his head out the window.

WILLIS  
Yo, DiMaggio.

BRIAN  
Willis.

Angered, Brian goes up to the driver's side of the car.

WILLIS

Just hold on now, relax.

Willis slides to the passenger side of the car, away from Brian.

BRIAN

You almost ran me over.

WILLIS

Come on, I wasn't even close.

Brian's been through this routine before.

BRIAN

Whose car is this? Did you steal it?

WILLIS

Do I look like a thief?

BRIAN

Yes, you do.

WILLIS

It's my Uncle's. I worked on his brakes.

BRIAN

The next time you test brakes, use a telephone pole.

WILLIS

Okay, okay.

Brian gets in, eager to share the news.

BRIAN

You are not going to believe what happened to me today.

WILLIS

What?

BRIAN

A guy from the Dodgers came by to see me.

WILLIS

No way.

BRIAN

Said I was one of the best hitters he's ever seen.

WILLIS

I've been tellin' ya that shit for years.

BRIAN

Yeah, but you're not a major league baseball scout.

WILLIS

This is your out dude. What else did he say?

BRIAN

Told me their farm team in Vegas could use another bat.

WILLIS

Another big bat! What the hell we waitin' for?

BRIAN

What do you mean, we?

WILLIS

You can't go this alone. People in L.A. are frickin' crazy.

BRIAN

I'm not going to L.A. I'm going to Las Vegas.

WILLIS

Now that's why ya need a manager.

Shakes his head.

WILLIS

You still need to sign a contract. The head honchos are all out west, they don't hang in Vegas.

BRIAN

Maybe you're right.

WILLIS

Of course I'm right. You can hit a ball 500 feet. We start in L.A.

BRIAN

Never been there before.

WILLIS

It's a jungle, like a giant zoo. Which is why I'm comin' along. Your sort a manager.

Brian laughs.

BRIAN

You are many things, Willis, but manager is not one of 'em. I'll hire you as my bodyguard, though.

The pair exchange a "high-five."

EXT. MCGREGOR FARM - DAY

THE CAMERA CASCADES onto a large parcel of land on the outskirts of Collinsbrook.

In view we see a large home.

A bountiful crop of mature wheat gives way to the unusually strong afternoon winds.

Adjacent to the home is a large barn. There is a pickup truck, tractor-trailer and the usual assortment of farm animals, including cattle, swine and fowl.

It is the home of the McGregor's. ROBERT MCGREGOR is 47, Brian's father. A third generation farmer.

MARION MCGREGOR is 43, Brian's mother.

The family dog, a German Shorthair named Buford, sits quietly on the porch.

At the

HEAD OF THE DRIVEWAY

leading to the house is a mailbox. It reads: "1701 Route 4."

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For the complete script please contact Jennifer Brooks at  
[info@filmmakers.com](mailto:info@filmmakers.com)