

KING RICHARD

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written by
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OVER BLACK

SUPERIMPOSE: THIS IS A TRUE STORY.

FADE IN:

EXT. BEVERLY HILLS, CALIFORNIA - 1989 (ESTABLISHING)

Mansions. Palm trees. Bentleys. Benzes. The dream.

EXT. PALOS VERDES COUNTRY CLUB - VARIOUS SHOTS - MORNING

A majestic, rolling golf course. Pristine tennis courts. Rich WHITE PEOPLE living the life.

INT. PALOS VERDES COUNTRY CLUB - MORNING

Inside, UNIFORMED STAFF vacuum opulent locker rooms and clean the framed photographs that line the club walls:

ANCIENT TENNIS GREATS. TILDEN. KRAMER. AUSTIN. SHRIVER. All legends. All white. All viewed by:

RICHARD WILLIAMS (47). A tall, powerfully-built black man with broken teeth, a graying beard, and a lifetime of rejection and resentment.

Richard stands in the pro shop in his TENNIS ATTIRE, when a TENNIS PRO arrives with a SHOPPING BAG.

TENNIS PRO

Grounds crew threw out most of 'em. Got a few here but they look pretty dead.

RICHARD

They not dead to us.

Richard looks in the bag. It's filled with RATTY OLD TENNIS BALLS. Richard takes it thankfully and without shame, heading out with his bounty as we hear --

RICHARD (V.O.)

Where I grew up, in Louisiana, Seedy Grove. Tennis was not a game peoples played. We was too busy running from the Klan. But here it is...

EXT. PALOS VERDES COUNTRY CLUB - VARIOUS SHOTS - MORNING

Richard's garbled Louisiana drawl continues as he strolls the manicured grounds, collecting stray balls as he goes. He plucks them from trash as WHITE CLUB MEMBERS play.

RICHARD (V.O.)

...when I'm interested in a thing,
I learn it. How it works. How the
best people in the world do it.
That's what I did with tennis and
the girls.

INT. RICHARD'S VW BUS - DAY

Richard's now at the wheel listening to a homemade tape as he drives to another club through postcard L.A.

BUD COLLINS (V.O.)

*If you look at the biggest
servers. Sampras. Lendl.
Connors. You'll see the break of
their wrists is like a smack.
Like a high-five. That's what
you're looking for when you hit
it. That pop.*

Richard practices as he drives in his van, which is a character itself.

Part mobile tennis clinic, part mobile home, it's filled with schoolbooks, cassette tapes, audiobooks on parenting and self-help like *RICH DAD, POOR DAD*, along with a ridiculous accoutrement of tennis shit. Drill cones. Broken rackets. Milk crates filled with hundreds of collected USED BALLS. Like Richard, it's charming and one-of-a-kind.

RICHARD (V.O.)

Now all we need is a club.

EXT. FANCY TENNIS CLUB - DAY

We now understand we've been hearing a sales pitch, which Richard is giving to an UNINTERESTED PRO at another fancy club. He hands him a HOMEMADE BROCHURE.

RICHARD

For training. And Clinics. The
whole deal. Everything the girls
need to go from prodigy to pro.

EXT. ANOTHER FANCY TENNIS CLUB - DAY

Richard's presentation continues to BUD COLLINS (60), the Bob Hope of tennis, listening graciously, poolside.

RICHARD

I wrote me a 78-page plan for their whole career before they was even born.

Bud laughs, quite amused and --

EXT. ANOTHER FANCY TENNIS CLUB - DAY

Richard continues at another FANCY CLUB, following a very DISMISSIVE PRO.

RICHARD

It was 1977 and I had watched this tennis match, and I seen them give this girl - Virginia Ruzici -- 40 thousand dollars for four days work, and since I knew I'd only made \$52,000 all year, I knew I was in the wrong business. Went home that night, told the wife we need to make two more kids.

OFF the DISMISSIVE PRO, just fucking flabbergasted and --

RICHARD (PRE-LAP)

So that night I wrote up the plan.

EXT. ANOTHER FANCY TENNIS CLUB - DAY

Richard's now cornered ANOTHER BAFFLED PRO at practice.

RICHARD

One for Venus. One for Serena. Covered their tennis. Educations. Foreign languages. Everything. And now that plan says it's time for us to come see you so you can help turn them into champions.

He hands the pro the brochure and --

EXT. COUNTRY CLUB - POOLSIDE - DAY

Bud flips through it too. A HOMEMADE PAMPHLET FULL OF NUMBERS, GRAPHS, and CHARTS. The girls' "FUTURE EARNINGS." Bud reads it in disbelief as --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RICHARD

Now, I know what you're thinking.
This family is from the ghetto.
How they going to pay old me?

EXT. ANOTHER FANCY TENNIS CLUB - DAY

Richard's on the court with the Baffled Pro.

RICHARD

Well, don't you worry 'bout that.
We're not here to rob you. We're
here to make you rich.

EXT. FANCY TENNIS CLUB - DAY

The Uninterested Pro hands the brochure back to Richard.

UNINTERESTED PRO

You ever think about basketball?

EXT. COUNTRY CLUB - POOLSIDE - DAY

-- and Bud hands it back too.

BUD COLLINS

Best of luck to ya.

RICHARD

OK. You making a mistake but I'm
gonna let you make it. Them pants
look expensive.

BUD COLLINS

Oh, they are.

EXT. ANOTHER FANCY TENNIS CLUB - DAY

-- and finally, the Baffled Pro returns Richard's
pamphlet as well with some last words of advice.

BAFFLED PRO

If I had a dollar for every crazy
parent who told me their kids'll
be number one, I'd be a rich man.

RICHARD

You look pretty rich to me.

BAFFLED PRO

Well, there you go.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The Baffled Pro serves. His STUDENT returns it. Richard can't help but pipe in.

RICHARD

You need to open up your stance a little more. Your stance too closed.

Off Richard's frustration, heading off the court back to--

EXT. COMPTON, CALIFORNIA - VARIOUS SHOTS - DAY

A different world. A diverse, working-class neighborhood made infamous by gangs, drug wars, and NWA.

Richard's bus drives past the Compton Swap. D&K Donuts. Louis Burgers. Liquor stores on the corners. Cops on the streets. Lowriders booming the latest tracks of the day.

And right in the heart of it, we meet --

EXT. WILLIAMS' HOME (COMPTON) - DAY

TWO young BLACK GIRLS (8 and 9) lugging PHONE BOOKS from their front lawn.

Both are adorable, in braids and glowing smiles. The TALLER one carries THREE BOOKS. The LITTLE one, not to be outdone, carries FOUR, barely seeing over the top.

VENUS (TALLER GIRL)

Serena, what are you doing? Those books are bigger than you are.

SERENA (LITTLE GIRL)

No, they're not. I can do it. I can carry more than you.

VENUS

And break your back while you're at it.

SERENA

Wanna bet?

The little one takes off running, her sister letting her win as they race around, dropping phonebooks into their neighbors' yards. These are VENUS AND SERENA WILLIAMS.

Venus is nine but already tall, regal, selfless, and preternaturally self-possessed.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Serena is eight and a rascal. She's confident, irrepressible, and has an insatiable need for attention. More than all else, though, she idolizes Venus.

Winded, Serena reaches their neighbors' house first where A MIDDLE-AGED BLACK WOMAN greets them in a housecoat. Her name is MS. STRICKLAND.

MS. STRICKLAND

Girls.

SERENA

Told you I'd win. Hi, Ms. Strickland.

Serena hands her a phone book.

MS. STRICKLAND

Thank you. Now you need to go tell your father to stop working you so hard. Seen y'all practicing in the rain. That man is crazy.

On cue, Richard steps out of his bus parked behind them.

RICHARD

Hey girls. Go head back in the house. Tell your sisters we leavin' in a few minutes. We'll deliver the rest of them books later.

The girls do as instructed as Richard crosses to Ms. Strickland's fence.

RICHARD

Not gon' tell you again. Do not talk to them kids.

MS. STRICKLAND

Excuse me, they came on to my lawn. And somebody's gotta, as hard as you working 'em.

RICHARD

They work as hard as they need to to stay off these streets. I'm in the champion-raisin' business. Got a book about it bout to come out soon. Maybe I give a copy to your daughter. Remind me which corner she working on again?

MS. STRICKLAND

Get off my property.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

ORACENE

Richard, leave that nosey woman alone.

He turns to see his wife, ORACENE "BRANDI" WILLIAMS (41). A tall, funny, private, hardworking woman in SCRUBS in the driveway of their SMALL, GREEN, STUCCO HOUSE.

Richard starts walking over to her, still calling back.

<p>RICHARD Stop talking to my kids.</p>	<p>MS. STRICKLAND Got those booty hugging shorts. You need some bigger shorts!</p>
---	--

Richard returns to his house, giving Oracene a kiss.

ORACENE

You know she just trying to rile you up. I gotta get to work.

RICHARD

Think you riling me up with them little nurse shoes on. You know I love these little nurse shoes.

ORACENE

(laughs)
Get these girls off to practice. The laundry's all done and I talked to Tunde's teachers about those A.P. classes she wanted.

RICHARD

All right. Have a good day.

They kiss again and Richard heads to his van, now filled with his 5 DAUGHTERS. Venus. Serena. YETUNDE (Tunde), 16 and a scholar. ISHA. 13 and an athlete. And LYNN. 12 and a princess. Oracene waves goodbye from her car.

ORACENE

Keep turning those hips if you want to get power.

Before she can go, Serena runs out of the van to give her one more hug. They are close. Richard calls out --

RICHARD

Come on now. Slow walker's a slow thinker.

INT./EXT. RICHARD'S VW BUS (MOVING) - MOMENTS LATER

Richard's at the wheel. Five girls piled in back, doing homework and joking. Tunde's deep in a schoolbook.

LYNN

Tunde, dang, you're a nerd. Why you doing homework on a Saturday?

TUNDE

'Cause I wanna get an A. You should try it with your B-PLUS.

Her other sisters laugh, continuing to pile on Lynn as --

VENUS

Where we practicing today, Daddy?

SERENA

Yeah. Where we practicing?

RICHARD

At the club. And Serena, stop saying everything Venus say.

LYNN

Hope they don't steal our balls again.

ISHA

Lynn, you probably told them to do it so we wouldn't have to practice.

The sisters laugh.

RICHARD

We got us a van full of balls. And you don't need to be worrying about what other folks is doing anyway. You need to worry about what you doing. We out here getting great. That's what we need to be worried about. You understand that?

ALL THE SISTERS

Yes, Daddy. We do.

RICHARD

All right.

Then Richard lays on the HORN as they drive past a cemetery. A ritual of Richard's.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RICHARD

Say hi to the peoples that's gone.

ALL THE GIRLS

Hi, to the peoples that's gone.

The girls all wave as they pass by the tombs, before they finally arrive at --

EXT. EAST COMPTON PARK - DAY (VARIOUS SHOTS)

A small municipal park which Richard lovingly, ironically has dubbed: EAST COMPTON HILLS COUNTRY CLUB.

Basketball courts. Concrete playgrounds (which the LOCAL GANGS use as their personal drug bazaar).

RICHARD

Who's ready to work?

In clown-car fashion, the whole Williams gang unloads tennis gear from the bus. TWO OVERSIZED TENNIS BAGS for Venus and Serena, each bigger than them as they approach:

TWO of the worst-kept TENNIS COURTS you'll ever see. Nets sagging. Surface pockmarked with gunfire, littered with dime bags and liquor bottles.

Impervious to it all, Venus and Serena begin their unorthodox business of warming up.

Richard carries his milk crates of balls and dumps them inside a locked SHOPPING CART already full of used balls.

Richard uses this cart as his ball basket to feed.

We can see Richard guards his cart with a makeshift padlock, almost as old and rusty as he is. Charming.

The three older girls help Richard unload and set up CONES for his drills as Venus and Serena jog laps.

RICHARD

Stay up on your toes, you make too much noise.

They keep at it while Richard methodically cleans the courts, sweeping up the Baggies and bottles with a BROOM, chatting up PARK WORKERS and VAGRANTS like the mayor of Compton. An apostle to the world's WEIRDOS and OUTCASTS.

A 45-year-old BLACK MAN walks by calling out...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

OLD PATRON (BLACK MAN)

King Richard. Don't get much rest
ever, do ya?

RICHARD

Don't nothin' come to a sleeper
but a dream.

When the cleaning is done, Richard pushes the girls in
the shopping cart full of balls as they laugh and --

Venus and Serena throw FOOTBALLS and toss BROKEN RACKETS
from the baseline as far as they can in a peculiar drill
Richard's concocted. It looks... unusual and --

Richard continues prepping, hanging up HOMEMADE SIGNS:

"If you fail to plan, you plan to fail."

"You are a winner."

"Be humble -- Say Thank you."

Finally, they are ready to practice. Richard calls out,
placing four balls into a pyramid.

RICHARD

First drill. Whoever hit that --
one dollar.

They hit ball after ball at the target as Isha, Tunde,
and (a very bored) Lynn shag balls at the fence.

RICHARD

Yes! Yes, that's good power.
Serena Williams. There you go.
Great power, Venus Williams.
Speed that racket head up. There
you go.

They are out here for hours, all working their asses off
but whatever they do, Richard instills them with
confidence and fun and we see it.

There's something intangible here. Even at 8 and 9, the
girls' athleticism, tenacity, and drive are
stratospheric. When Venus just misses the target --

RICHARD

OH! Almost Venus Williams!
Almost Venus Williams. Very good.

Venus steps up again, an incredibly diligent student and -
BOOM! -- she nails it exactly.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

RICHARD

There you go. There you go.
Yes, you keep that stance open or
I'm gon' come down there and
tickle you.

Their practice continues for hours with Richard's nonstop encouragement.

RICHARD

Get to it. Get to it. Yes, very
good. Don't wait for that ball.
Go get it. Good depth there.
Good depth. Don't get too
excited. This is your game. Make
sure you controlling that ball on
every shot.

Richard watches as they rally, while Tunde sits on a milk
crate, doing homework by the fence. Behind her, a GROUP
OF YOUNG MEN play basketball on the court and --

SAME SCENE - A SHORT WHILE LATER

Richard stands at the fence as the girls serve.

RICHARD

Get all the way up to that cotton-
picker. All the way up to that
cotton picker. There you go!
Yes, yes. Yes, Venus Williams.

Venus thunders a final, empathic serve to end the day.

RICHARD

Come on in here.
(once they join him)
That's a very, very good day
today. You did good work.
(then)
Venus Williams, who is your best
friend?

VENUS

You, Daddy.

RICHARD

Serena Williams, who is your best
friend?

SERENA

Venus... then you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RICHARD

(laughs)

Unbelievable. That's unbelievable.
Give your Daddy a kiss.

The girls plant two on his cheek as Richard now spots:

Tunde, at a distance, head in a book, doing her best to ignore a tall, good-looking 18-year-old boy who calls himself ROC, chatting her up through the fence.

RICHARD

(to Venus and Serena)

Go and get all the balls up --

The girls hop to it as Richard watches Roc chat up Tunde.

ROC

How you doing? I'm sorry. What's your name?

(off her silence)

You don't gotta act like that, yo.
We just trying to talk to you.

Richard calls out from afar.

RICHARD

Tunde! Pick your things up, get your sisters, go ahead to the bus.

ROC

Tunde, that's your name? Hey the homie said he wanna talk to you. Tunde, you ain't gotta be acting like that, love.

Tunde tries to ignore him as she heads off the court.

ROC

Don't drop your backpack, baby.
Hold on to your shit.

Richard wraps out, but his dander is up, eyes focused on Roc, laughing with his boy in the park and --

EXT. EAST COMPTON PARK - TENNIS COURTS - LATE AFTERNOON

Practice complete, the girls are already in the van as Richard exits the court, hearing --

Roc, still hollering at Tunde from the park.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROC

Yo, Tunde! The homie's still
right here!

Richard's seen enough. He heads over to the men.

RICHARD

Young man, I asked you a couple
times. That girl there is only 16
years old. She's out here to
work. Just leave her alone.

ROC

I'll talk to whoever I want homie.

RICHARD

Just leave these girls at peace.

With that, Richard walks off. Roc follows, but a boy, TD,
steps in.

TD

Yo, Roc, come on. Leave his old
ass alone.

ROC

(still at Richard)

Yo, what up? You feel like you
better than us or something homie?
Hey homeboy. I know you hear me
talking to you.

He catches up with Richard, who turns to face him.

ROC

What's up homie. You got something
you wanna say?

RICHARD

I done said what I wanna say.
Just mind your business. She not
interested in you.

Richard starts to move toward the bus when --

CRACK!! Roc sucker-punches him hard in his stomach. A
vicious body-blow that takes out his wind and then --

BOOM!! Roc hits him hard in the face, dropping Richard
again.

Hunched on all fours and gasping, Richard watches as Roc
retreats, laughing and mocking him to his friends --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

ROC (O.S.)

See your Daddy now, Tunde? Keep
your old ass at home.

Richard musters the strength to get back to his feet.

Beaten but not broken, Richard gathers his pride, licks
his wounds, and he heads off to the bus.

INT./EXT. RICHARD'S VW VAN - DUSK

Richard drives home, face already swelling. Everybody is
quiet. Tunde checks on him from the backseat.

TUNDE

Daddy, are you ok?

RICHARD

That wasn't nothing.

SERENA

You did really good out there,
Daddy, but next time you swing
remember to keep your stance open.

Despite his pain, Richard laughs.

RICHARD

That's funny. That was funny.
When I was your age, I used to
have to fight every day. If it
wasn't the Ku Klux Klan or police
or the white boys from the next
town, somebody was always beatin'
on me for something. And I didn't
have no daddy to stand in their
way.

(beat)

This world ain't never had no
respect for Richard Williams, but
they gonna respect y'all. They
gonna respect y'all.

The girls listen, quite solemn as --

EXT. WILLIAMS' HOME (COMPTON) - NIGHT (LATER)

They finally arrive home. 1117 East Stockton Street.
Their quaint, green, stucco, one-story house marred by
black graffiti where -- Richard pulls up.

They exit the VW to see the lights of a COMPTON P.D.
CRUISER flashing past, the NEIGHBORS all watching.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MS. STRICKLAND

Somebody oughta call the cops on
you.

MS. STRICKLAND yells from across the street.

VENUS

Daddy, what's happening.

RICHARD

Nothing, Junior. Go ahead in the
house.

Richard regroups, following his girls inside into --

INT. WILLIAMS' HOME (COMPTON) - NIGHT

-- the tiny, well-kept home where the five girls barrel
inside, with their book bags and tennis gear, giving hugs
to their mom, still in her nursing uniform, just come
home from work, busy finishing dinner. Family chaos.

ALL THE GIRLS

Hi mom / Hey mom!

ORACENE

Hey, girls. Dinner's ready. How
was practice?

SERENA

It was good!

LYNN

(sarcastic)
Daddy got beat up again.

Before Oracene can process that, her daughters start
setting up for dinner.

TUNDE

If we eat fast enough, we probably
have time for the talent show.

SERENA

Hold on! I'm going first. I
already know what I'm singing.

LYNN

Let me guess.

In unison, her sisters all chime in together, singing --

ALL THE SISTERS

Because the greatest love of all --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SERENA

What's so funny? It's a good song.

They crack up laughing as Oracene brings out the food.

ORACENE

You all go wash up.

The girls run off to the bathroom, leaving the parents alone for a moment in the kitchen.

ORACENE

What happened?

RICHARD

That same boy was sniffin' 'round Tunde.

Oracene hands him a bag of FROZEN PEAS from the freezer. Richard takes it, grateful. Pressing it to his face.

RICHARD

I got to get to work.

Oracene watches concerned as he returns to the girls, now fixing plates at the table.

RICHARD

Ok, girls. Half hour, finish your homework, then get to bed.

TUNDE

(noticing the bag)
Daddy, are those peas?

RICHARD

Yeah, you like peas? Who wants some peas?

The girls laugh as Richard goes. Oracene following into --

THEIR VERY SMALL BEDROOM

-- where Oracene arrives in the doorway, regarding:

Richard, still sore from his beating, starting to change out of his tennis clothes for a shower. His SECURITY GUARD UNIFORM hangs on the door.

ORACENE

Something has to change.

RICHARD

Whatchu mean?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ORACENE

We can't keep up this pace. Me nursing all day. You working all night. Coaching in between. Now look at your face...

RICHARD

I done already put this behind me. We just gotta stick to the plan. Got champions in the other room.

ORACENE

Richard, we have done a great job with them. They are great but they're not going to Wimbledon like this. Not hitting with you and me on those raggedy courts.
(keeps rolling)
-- They need better surfaces. They need -- better everything. And not playing with you with your busted up feet.

RICHARD

My feets are fine, ok? Ok, actually, they was hurting out there a little bit today.

She laughs. They soften a little.

ORACENE

Richard, you're playing. I'm serious. I'm serious.

RICHARD

You are right.

ORACENE

I know I'm right.

RICHARD

You shoulda seen Venus out there today. Something clicked in her mind. She is so ready. Ready for that next level.

ORACENE

She's ready.

RICHARD

So you just got to trust me.

ORACENE

I do.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

RICHARD

I'm going to get us some help.
Venus and Serena gon' to shake up
this world... least they better,
'cause they not gon' to make it as
singers.

The parents laugh, listening to Serena, singing at the top of her lungs. She's no Whitney Houston. Richard then grabs the uniform --

RICHARD

I gotta get to work.

-- and kisses her on the way to the bathroom, passing the girls signing in their room --

RICHARD

You gon' shake up this world.

INT. HOUSE (COMPTON) - GIRLS' BEDROOM - LATER

Talent show is over. The girls, in their pajamas, are playing charades in their cramped, little bedroom, when Richard -- showered and changed into his SECURITY UNIFORM -- appears in the door.

RICHARD

10 o'clock girls. Time for bed.

The girls finish their game and file into their beds.

RICHARD

You all wrote in your journals?
Made your plans for tomorrow?

ALL THE GIRLS

Yes, Daddy.

RICHARD

'Cause you gotta have a plan.
Every day. Else what?

ALL THE GIRLS

You fail to plan. You plan to fail.

RICHARD

That's right. And we not failing,
are we?

ALL THE GIRLS

No, Daddy.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RICHARD

All the way to the top.

The girls nod, sorting out sleeping arrangements. One room, four beds, five girls. Serena gets in with Venus.

RICHARD

One day, not too long, someone's gon' hand you girls a check for one million dollars. You gon' buy as many beds as you want.

VENUS

In one check? Really?

RICHARD

Maybe even a couple of 'em. We not gon' be like this forever. Ok?

ALL THE GIRLS

Ok.

RICHARD

All right. You girls go to bed.

ALL THE SISTERS

Goodnight, Daddy.

Richard shuts the lights off and leaves. We STAY a moment with the girls, the two sisters in bed and --

EXT. SWAP MEET (COMPTON) - NIGHT

It's late when Richard's bus rumbles into a bleak Compton strip mall and parks outside a local swap meet where --

INT. SWAP MEET (COMPTON) - AISLES/OFFICE - NIGHT

Richard walks down the aisles as merchants close their shops for the evening before he finally arrives at --

A cluttered little office. Richard unlocks the desk drawer, removing a PISTOL which he holsters on his belt. And then Richard sits down, exhausted.

For a moment, it looks like he might fall asleep but he fights the urge. Instead, he turns on a light, takes out his things, and gets down to work.

Not billing or paperwork for his security job, but tennis. MAGAZINES. ORDER FORMS. Even the HOMEMADE, now legendary, 78-PAGE PLAN (we heard about earlier).

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Richard combs through his research, and opens a copy of:
WORLD TENNIS MAGAZINE. AN INSTRUCTIONAL ARTICLE. A PHOTO.

VIC BRADEN -- the legendary, portly tennis coach smiling
on the pages. The title: "THE MAN WHO MADE TENNIS FUN."

Richard studies the pages and writes down Vic's name as --

RICHARD (PRE-LAP)
-- as you notice, Vic, uhh --

INT. L.A. COUNTRY CLUB - VIC BRADEN'S OFFICE - DAY

We're close on a SMALL TV playing a HOMEMADE VIDEO: Venus
and Serena, wearing jeans, hit on the ratty court as
Richard narrates O.S.

RICHARD (O.S.)
-- hopefully they have very good
form. And, uhhh, and you can see
that the serve looks very good,
hopefully.

Abruptly, the video cuts to find Venus wearing a long fur
coat in the middle of spring.

RICHARD (O.S.)
Raise you hand, Serena.

Serena waves.

RICHARD (O.S.)
Venus Williams.

Venus waves. The tape FREEZES over a moment.

RICHARD (O.S.)
Uhh, we have your tape, 'Tennis
Our Way' and we've been viewin'
it. However, the tape says you'll
be good by Friday. Guess what,
Vic, we got good by Tuesday.
That's how good your tape is.

Pull out to reveal we're watching this in --

VIC BRADEN'S OFFICE.

Behind his desk, VIC BRADEN (60s), watches dumbfounded,
in awe, completely speechless as Richard, standing in his
office before him, mouths along with the tape.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RICHARD (ON THE VIDEO)

These girls is looking for some coaching and we think you'd be great so you want to relax, take it easy, and get a chance to see some real good tennis players.

RICHARD

Ok. That's it.

The video ends. Vic takes a beat to digest what he saw.

VIC

I guess you made this yourself?

RICHARD

Yes, I did, yes. When the girls were young, I had bought me a camcorder. And I would film myself in the mirror asking questions and doing things like that. And then when they got older, I did it with them. I call that their media training.

VIC

Oh, I see. That's very industrious.

RICHARD

Well, I'm a businessman, Vic.

Vic nods, looking for the softest way to explain this --

VIC

This deal that you're asking for, all this for free, Richard, no one's taking that bet. Tennis is a technical sport. Probably the most and if you haven't grown up around the game, then --

(taking Richard in)

It's like the violin. It takes hours and hours a day, year after year of expensive, expert instruction just to hold the thing right. And even then, even for a family with unlimited financial resources, the chances of achieving the kind of mastery and success you're talking about -- *with one kid, let alone two* -- well, that's like asking someone to believe you got the next two Mozarts in your house.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

VIC (CONT'D)

It's just very, very unlikely.
I'm sorry. That's just my two
cents. Maybe you'll prove me
wrong.

Vic offers his hand. Richard takes it, just gutted and --

EXT. EAST COMPTON PARK - TENNIS COURTS - LATE AFTERNOON

With nowhere else to turn, they are back on the courts.
Venus and Serena hitting in the glow of the streetlights
as Richard looks on, for once, saying nothing, looking
very wrung out. We PUSH IN ON him, simmering as we hear -

RICHARD (PRE-LAP)

Dear Heavenly Father. Jehovah
God. We thank you for this food.

EXT./INT. FAST FOOD RESTAURANT - MAGIC HOUR

As seen THROUGH the window, the entire Williams clan,
five girls, two parents, sit at a booth, praying before
their meal.

RICHARD

We ask you to bless the hands of
the people who prepared this food.
Thank you for this opportunity as
a family to come together. And we
ask you to please, please don't
let nobody get fat from eating all
this food. In Jesus name we pray.
Amen.

THE WHOLE FAMILY

Amen.

And they dig in, chatting animatedly as they go, except
for Richard. His thoughts far away. Oracene clocks him.

ORACENE

You're not eating?

RICHARD

Actually, I got some - uh - got
some work I got to do so -- you
all ride home with your mother.

ORACENE

Everything ok? You all right?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RICHARD

Everything great. Yeah, it's fine. Y'all bring my food home when you come.

Richard gets up from the table and heads for the door.

ALL THE GIRLS

Goodbye, daddy.

RICHARD

Goodbye.

Richard goes. The girls, joking about who's going to eat his food, while Oracene watches him, concerned and --

EXT. EAST COMPTON PARK - TENNIS COURTS - NIGHT

Standing alone on the dark, empty courts, Richard swats balls with a racket, taking stock of his life. His dreams, utterly unreachable, and at that very moment --

ROC

Hey, where's Tunde at homes?

Richard's aware of Roc, TD, and TWO OTHER GANG MEMBERS, getting out of their LOWRIDER and approaching the courts.

ROC

Did I stutter, nigga?

Richard hopes to avoid this. So does TD, Roc's friend.

TD

Roc, yo. Let's roll. That chump Chauncey's at Swap. We bounce now, we can smoke him. Leave this old dude alone.

But Roc doesn't budge. Steps into Richard's space.

ROC

Know what my daddy taught me? How to smoke a blunt and how to smoke a bitch nigga too. I'm real good at both.

Then Roc pumps like he's gonna hit Richard, who naturally flinches. He tries to walk away.

ROC

Scared, homie, huh? Tell Tunde me and the homies might come by later and run on a train on her.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BAM! -- that's the last straw. Richard hits him with the racket and Roc goes down as Richard wails him again.
CRACK! CRACK! CRACK! A few more shots before --

TD jumps in, throwing Richard to the ground and -- WHAM!
The guys all surround him, stomping the absolute shit out of him until --

ROC

Get the fuck out the way.

The flurry of kicks stops and Richard peers up from the ground to see --

Roc, looming above him, a GUN in his hand. He puts it to Richard's temple.

GANG MEMBER #3

Smoke that fool, dawg. Smoke him, homie. He came to disrespect you in our hood?

Roc stills the gun. The muzzle right above Richard and --

ROC

Don't nobody give a damn about you, homeboy. Nobody.

And then Roc pulls the gun away. The misery seemingly over until --

BOOM! Roc rears back and hits Richard with the gun.
LIGHTS OUT. Richard's unconscious on the ground as --

Roc and his boys trash his shit. Smash his cart, scattering his ball on the court that roll by Richard's motionless body like waves on the shore as we --

FADE OUT.

FADE IN ON:

INT./EXT. RICHARD'S VW BUS (MOVING) - NIGHT

Back at the wheel, Richard cruises through Compton, busted up and bleeding, searching for the gang as we see --

THE GUN (from his office drawer) on the passenger's seat.

Richard drives on, hunting, only there's no sign of the boys. Richard broils, about to give up, until at last --

He spots them: Roc and crew in the windows of D&K DONUTS.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Richard puts on the brakes. Pulls into an alley and gets out of his car, walking back toward the shop to see --

EXT. D&K DONUTS - NIGHT

Roc and his crew exit the shop.

Richard waits across the street behind a car, gun in his hand as --

Roc has a last word with TD, before splitting up with the rest of his crew. The other guys heading off toward the parking lot, while Roc heads off alone in the other direction.

Richard seizes his moment. With the gun in his hand, he starts crossing the street when suddenly --

PTPTPTPTP! A MACHINE GUN suddenly erupts, exploding like fireworks, SHATTERING THE DONUT SHOP WINDOW.

Richard jolts back in horror only he hasn't fired. It is a DRIVE-BY tearing past, AK firing out the window, the CAR tearing past him and driving off down the street.

IN THE MAIN PARKING LOT, Roc's boys hear the shots and come running, discovering their friend's body.

TD

Call an ambulance! Call an ambulance. Fuck!

They search around for the shooters as --

Richard, frozen there on street, considers the violence he was very nearly the cause of. Backing away into the shadows, getting back in his van and finally driving away, considerably shaken as --

INT. WILLIAMS' HOME (COMPTON) - NIGHT

The house is dark and all is quiet when Richard creeps in, very shaken. He heads to the sink to try, wetting a towel for his wounds when --

Oracene enters, awakened and worried, seeing the blood on his head. She takes over immediately, grabbing the towel.

ORACENE

Give me this. Give me this.

Richard says nothing, but his emotion is naked as she tends to his wound. After a beat --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ORACENE

How many fingers am I holding up?

RICHARD

How you get all nine of those fingers on one hand?

ORACENE

You funny.

RICHARD

I'm gonna go take a shower.

Oracene watches him go, living to fight another day and --

INT./EXT. RICHARD'S VW BUS (BEVERLY HILLS) - DAY

Dressed in their best tennis whites, Venus and Serena look out the windows, confused where they are, as Richard drives, determined.

VENUS

Where we practicing today, Daddy?

SERENA

Yeah, where we practicing today?

RICHARD

We going some place special today.

SERENA

These houses are huge.

VENUS

That one looks like a castle!

They are passing through: Beverly Hills.

RICHARD

You all like these houses?

SERENA

Yes! That one looks like the White House.

RICHARD

Which one is your favorite?

They point at houses at the windows.

VENUS

I like that one.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SERENA

If that was my house, I would put a pool in the front and a slide on the roof.

RICHARD

You'd put your pool in the front?

SERENA

And have a huge pool party. Everybody's going to want to hang out at my house.

RICHARD

Oh, you just gonna be the crazy lady on your block?

SERENA

I'm going to be the coolest person on the block.

VENUS

That one has a tennis court!

RICHARD

Well that's the one then. That's the one. You're gonna have any of these houses that you want. Beverly Hills. Hollywood Hills. Any of these hills, 'cause you got a plan and you gon' stick to it. When I was a little boy, my mom used to say: Son, the most strongest, most powerful, the most dangerous creature on this whole earth is a woman who know how to think. Ain't nothing she can't do. Y'all know how to think?

SERENA AND VENUS

Yes, Daddy.

RICHARD

Now these people we about to go see, you gonna show 'em how dangerous you are?

SERENA AND VENUS

Yes, Daddy.

RICHARD

Let me see your dangerous face. That's your dangerous face?

Venus roars. Richard laughs.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

RICHARD

Ok. Don't do that but --

They all laugh, spilling over with determination and --

EXT. AGOURA SPRINGS HOTEL - DAY

OFF Richard's van as it rolls through the gates and --

EXT. AGOURA SPRINGS HOTEL - DAY

Amped with nerves, Richard and the girls cross through the club, catching a couple strange looks from guests.

RICHARD

That's a nice shirt.

SERENA

(in English accent)

Top of the morning to ya.

She and Venus crack up laughing, moving on without slowing, finally approaching the tennis courts to find:

TWO MEN sweating in a heated practice, crushing the ball with absolute fury. The Williamses slow in recognition.

RICHARD

You see who that is?

VENUS

That's John McEnroe.

RICHARD

And who's that?

SERENA

That's Pete Sampras.

And it is. JOHN McENROE, getting all he can handle from a tall, hirsute TEEN with a serve like a Howitzer. PETE SAMPRAS.

RICHARD

One day, they gonna be braggin' about the time they met the two of you.

The girls smile, steeling themselves as Pete blasts an ace down the T, leaving Mac whiffing and pissed.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Their coach, PAUL COHEN (50's), watches close by. Imagine Elliott Gould if he had thighs like cannons and a forehand that could put you on your ass.

PAUL

What are you doing?

MCENROE

What!

PAUL

I told ya he's a smoker. Get off your frickin' heels.

MCENROE

Screw you!

Mac storms off court, bringing practice to a pause.

PAUL

Why are you guessing early? Read the toss.

MCENROE

It looked like it was going outside.

PAUL

No, it didn't.

RICHARD

Excuse me. Mr. Cohen?

Richard approaches with his girls out of nowhere. Everyone stops.

RICHARD

Richard Williams. We spoke on the phone.

PAUL

Yeah. Yeah. The brochure. I remember.

RICHARD

Yeah, I brought you another one, 'case you didn't get it the first time and --

PAUL

No. I got it. What can I do for you?

Paul looks at the girls. They smile. Very cute.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

RICHARD

I figured you was busy so that's why we came to you. Anyway I still got these two great tennis players and we still looking for a coach.

PAUL

Look. Mr. Wilson, I'm sorry but --

RICHARD

It's Williams. This my daughter, this Venus. This my other daughter, Serena.

PAUL

Nice to meet you all. I'm sorry, but --

RICHARD

I won't take but a minute for you to watch them hit a few balls.

PAUL

I'm sorry, I'm not taking any juniors right now and we're in the middle of a very serious practice.

RICHARD

I don't mean to interrupt. Pete, Mac --

(to the pros)

We don't mean to interrupt. Tough break at Wimbledon, by the way. I seen what happened to you. You're gonna win it again, just keep your head up.

McEnroe, walks off incensed. Paul considers the family.

PAUL

Mr. Williams, this is not a good time.

RICHARD

Mac is gone, the way Pete whooping up on him, he may never come back. Pete, you don't mind if he watch them hit a few balls, do you?

PETE

It's ok with me.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

RICHARD

See. Mac is gone. Pete's ok. We ready. You're the only person got a problem with this. Come on, watch em hit a few balls.

Paul, no way out --

PAUL

You girls are pretty good, huh?

VENUS AND SERENA

Yes, sir.

RICHARD

Oh, they're better than good.

PAUL

Alright. A few balls.

RICHARD

Alright, a few balls. Show him this magic.

As the girls take the court, Richard hands Pete a brochure.

RICHARD

Have a look at that, I'm gonna have them sign it for you later.

Pete flips through it as Paul sets up with the girls.

PAUL

So tell me your names again?

VENUS

I'm Venus.

SERENA

I'm Serena.

PAUL

Venus and Serena, I'm Paul.

Richard calls out from the sidelines.

RICHARD

You not Paul, you Mister Cohen.

PAUL

Mr. Cohen, alright. Serena, why don't you start at forehand. Venus, backhand. We'll hit some down the line, alright?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

RICHARD

That's good Paul, that's how I usually start with them too. That's real smart.

PAUL

(unbelievable)
Good. Alright, ready?

Paul begins a standard drill. Both girls on the baseline. Serena on the deuce court. Venus on the ad, hitting backhands.

Paul feeds from a basket as we've seen Richard do. Forehand, Serena. Backhand to Venus. Again and again. They both hit the ball well, but Paul betrays no reaction. Simply picks up the intensity and pace.

He feeds them further out wide, forcing them into the alleys. Serena hustles all out, chasing down every ball.

PAUL

All right. Really nice. Great job.

(then, to Serena)

Why don't you go grab some water. I wanna hit with your sister. Venus, you wanna try something a little different? Start in the middle, okay?

Serena steps off (reluctantly) as Venus steps to the T.

PAUL

I want you to get every ball. I'm not gonna say where it's going. But don't stop until we're done.

Paul now begins to feed a much more intense drill, moving Venus side-to-side from forehand to backhand. He hits a drop shot, then a lob, moving her all over the court and -

Venus just runs her ass off, ripping some great shots but missing some others. She's balletic and ferocious and her intensity's clear but --

It's still not clear what Paul thinks. Richard doesn't know, either, watching nervously when --

The drill finally comes to an end as Paul feeds a ball into the alley which Venus flies to retrieve, sliding into a split that leaves all the men wincing.

Her shot bounces long, but the effort's incredible. The hopper finally empty, Venus bends over, exhausted.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

Everyone stands there in silence. Richard. Serena.
Even Sampras and Mac until Paul finally speaks --

PAUL

Girls, come here and talk to me a
second?

RICHARD

Hustle, Hustle!

The girls jog to the net, no idea of his reaction.

PAUL

Let me ask you both something.
What do you want out of this? I
know what he wants, but what about
you?

The girls look at each other. It's Venus who speaks up.

VENUS

I'm going to win Wimbledon. As
many times as anyone's won it.

PAUL

You think you can do it?

VENUS

I know I can.

PAUL

And what about you? Who on the
tour do you want to play like?

SERENA

Well, I'd like other people to
want to play like me.

PAUL

(laughs)

I bet they will. Go pick 'em up.

The girls run off to collect the balls as Mac and Pete
start to return to the court.

PAUL

You taught 'em all this?

RICHARD

Yeah, me and my wife, Brandi, we
both athletes so... what do you
think?

Paul considers. A mask. Leaving Richard just hanging and -

INT. WILLIAMS' HOUSE (COMPTON) - DAY (A FEW HOURS LATER)

Oracene is sewing and Lynn's doing homework when Richard and the girls arrive, holding their cards, the mood very low. Oracene, prepared for the worst and then --

VENUS

We got a coach.

The room explodes in celebration. The girls huddle off with their sisters. Oracene hugging Richard.

ORACENE

Pete Sampras' coach? So he's going to do it for free.

RICHARD

Well -- he said he can't do two for free. He's only gonna teach Venus.

That hits like a brick. They look back to see Serena, celebrating with her sister, reliving the scene --

SERENA

You all shoulda seen Venus. Pete Sampras was there. I don't think he could beat her at all.

Oracene understands.

ORACENE

Did you tell Serena?

RICHARD

(shakes his head)
You want to?

She does not, watching Serena, unaware of the blow coming, dancing around with her sisters singing --

ALL THE GIRLS

We gotta coach! We gotta coach!

Oracene watches her. It's bittersweet because --

EXT. WILLIAMS' HOME (COMPTON) - MORNING

A few mornings later, Serena, now aware, watches sadly as Richard and Venus load their tennis gear into the van.

SERENA

It's not fair. I wanna go with you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VENUS

I know. I want you to, too.
 Meeka, Daddy said he's gonna
 record everything and then we can
 watch it together. He has a plan,
 OK?

SERENA

(under her breath)
 Yeah, for you.

The girls hug on the steps when Richard comes over.

RICHARD

Ok, Meeka. Your mom ready. Y'all
 gon' to practice today.

SERENA

I can't practice on her court.
 She always hits slices.

RICHARD

That ain't nothing but a few minor
 adjustments. You got to stay
 prepared for whatever is
 unpredictable. Ok, now give your
 Daddy a kiss. Don't put no mean
 on my face. C'mon Venus, let's go.

Serena kisses his cheek and then watches sadly as he and
 Venus pull off in the bus and --

INT. WILLIAMS' HOME (COMPTON) - MOMENTS LATER

Serena enters to find Oracene with a crate of balls,
 dressed for practice, ready to leave.

ORACENE

I know you're feeling left out,
 but you're not left out. You got
 something great too.

SERENA

What?

ORACENE

Me. Come on, we got work to do.

SERENA

Right now?

ORACENE

Yeah, right now. I didn't raise no
 poop butts. We got work to do.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Off Serena, a little lifted as --

EXT. AGOURA SPRINGS HOTEL - TENNIS COURT - DAY

SCREECH! SCREECH! SCREEH! The SQUEAKING OF SNEAKERS echoes across the court where --

Paul leads Venus through a grueling sprint work out. Suicides and sweet sixteens.

PAUL

What you're going through is the Paul Cohen First Strike Strategic Tennis System. It's gonna make you a killer. You're going to learn to think of this tennis court as a chess board, with 228 shots. You will learn to perfect them all.

Venus sees why. She's gasping for air.

PAUL

Go, go, go! Did I say stop? Center.

Venus looks to her father who sets up his CAMCORDER on the sidelines. A new situation for them both. He nods his support and she takes off sprinting again and --

EXT. EAST COMPTON PARK - TENNIS COURTS - DAY

Serena's running ball-less drills on the court with her racket in hand while Oracene shouts out encouragement.

ORACENE

Fast! Side to side. I need you to be faster, Serena. I want to see you explode. Ok, that's great. Go again.

Serena runs harder as --

EXT. AGOURA SPRINGS HOTEL - TENNIS COURT - DAY

Richard watches from the sidelines as Paul hits cross-court with Venus in a difficult drill.

PAUL

Come on. 50 in a row. You miss, start again. Back to the middle each time.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Richard can't help but interject, mouthing to Venus.

RICHARD

Remember, keep your stance open.

PAUL

Please, Richard.

Venus nods to her father. Paul bites his tongue, until Venus hits an error.

PAUL

Oh! Blame your Dad.

Richard catches Paul's look and --

EXT. EAST COMPTON PARK - TENNIS COURTS - DAY

Serena practices on her serve toss at the baseline. Oracene encourages through a couple miss-throws until --

ORACENE

(Serena nails it)

That's it... Better!

And Serena hi-fives her mom as --

EXT. AGOURA SPRINGS HOTEL - TENNIS COURT - DAY

Richard's on the sidelines, filming on the camcorder as Venus works with Paul, smashing serves at cone targets. Again, Richard can't help it.

RICHARD

Lemme see a little more pronation
on that wrist, right at the end.

Paul's right in her ear, trying to tune out her father. Venus's head on a swivel, caught between the two men.

PAUL

You just focus right here. You
wanna be the best? You can do it.
You're a killing machine. You're
a goddamn attack dog, so bite!

RICHARD

Talk a little louder, Paul. I
can't hear you.

PAUL

That wasn't for you, Richard.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RICHARD

I'm trying to record though, Paul.

PAUL

You can interview me later.

Venus obliterates a serve. Richard watches as it scorches the line --

RICHARD

That's what the pronation gets you. Right there.

Paul holds his tongue once again as --

EXT. EAST COMPTON PARK - TENNIS COURTS - DAY

Oracene coaches Serena through another tough work out, pumping her all the way and --

EXT. AGOURA SPRINGS HOTEL - TENNIS COURT - DAY

Paul feeds Venus at the baseline. Forehand down the line. Sprint back to the T. Forehand down the line. Sprint back to the T. Again and again and again, as Paul feeds balls and stays on her to move, until --

Richard can't stay silent. He steps right on the court and pauses Paul's practice.

RICHARD

Hold on, Junior. Paul, one second. You just got a little closed up that time. You're doing real good, you just gotta keep that stance open. Plant that right foot and --

PAUL

What are you doing? Richard. What are you doing?

RICHARD

Talkin' to my daughter, something wrong with that?

Again -- Venus' heads on a swivel.

PAUL

No. Nothing wrong with that, but you want me to fix her stance and I can't do that if you keep telling her to hit open.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RICHARD

-- well there's no reason to fix something that's not broke. You been hollerin' at the girl all day long to get back to the middle, get back to the middle. That's all I hear you doing, but I hear you instructing her to close her stance. How she supposed to get back to the middle with her stance all closed up? Ok, if she stay open, she can plant that foot, more power, more speed and --

PAUL

No! That's not how you get power. You want power in your stroke, you square your shoulders. You close your stance, hold your head right at contact and blast through it. You do not hit open stance, ok. Could we please get back to it?

Paul's walking back to the basket --

RICHARD

Just keep your mind open, just in case you not the smartest person in the whole world.

PAUL

Richard, it would be really helpful if we could actually hit a few, cause I got about 18 minutes left and I'd like to finish this practice.

RICHARD

It just don't make no sense what you saying, Paul. If she keep her stance, closed, feet all jumbled up --

PAUL

Richard, Richard. I'll get my lesson from you when we're done, but right now I'd like to focus on Venus.

RICHARD

I keep forgetting you know everything.

PAUL

Seventeen minutes now!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Paul shakes his head, resuming the drill with Venus.

PAUL

That's it.

Paul shakes his head in disbelief. These men could do this forever, both trying to get the last word. Venus watches in silence, waiting to continue and --

EXT. AGOURA SPRINGS HOTEL - PATIO - (WEEKS LATER)

Paul presses play on a VCR as --

Venus and Richard finish up their lunch. Grilled cheeses. Oranges. Coke. Fanta. Turning their attention to the screen where:

A TENNIS MATCH PLAYS: THE 1990 FRENCH OPEN. A brown-haired, 14-year-old American girl pulverizes the ball, blowing MARY JOE FERNANDEZ right off the court.

VENUS

Dang. That's Capriati?

PAUL

She's a freakin' killer. Won the Junior Orange Bowl in Miami. U.S. 18 and under -- she was twelve. Just went pro last year. That's her coach, Rick Macci. He's in Florida. Not as dumb as the rest.

On screen, RICK MACCI watches. Rick's 35, with a mustache and a bowl cut and the demeanor of a Labrador retriever.

PAUL

She's the youngest pro ever to get ranked in the top ten and guess what she just did. She just beat Steffi Graf. How you think she learned how to do that? Juniors. That's where the fight is, that's where you face adversity, competition. That's also where *you get noticed by agents who can help pay for your training and introduce you to sponsors --*

(then; to Richard)

Capriati signed a two-million-dollar contract with Diadora before she played a single pro match.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PAUL (CONT'D)

How you think that happened?
Juniors.

(a long beat)

So what do you guys say, you wanna
play Juniors?

Richard looks at Venus, who's giddy --

RICHARD

I think I could add that to the
plan --

EXT. CARBON MESA HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

A BANNER sways in the sky, announcing the:

"WESTWOOD JUNIOR TENNIS OPEN & CHALLENGER"

It hangs in an L.A. HIGH SCHOOL PARKING LOT where --

RICH WHITE TENNIS PARENTS escort little PRODIGIES toward
the courts where a TOURNAMENT is underway. A few of them
gawking in curiosity as they pass --

The growling VW BUS parking beside the luxury sedans,
where Venus steps out, dressed in her best tennis outfit,
flush with excitement to play her first match.

Richard and the ENTIRE WILLIAMS CLAN pile out after and
take in the scene. They've arrived. But --

EXT. CARBON MESA HIGH SCHOOL - JUNIOR TOURNAMENT - DAY

-- as they walk through the tournament courts --

All eyes are on them, the only black faces here. WHITE
TENNIS PARENTS and their TENNIS KIDS can't help staring.

Richard turns to his family, smiling.

RICHARD

It's ok. They just not used to
good-looking people like us.

ORACENE

You don't worry about them. Let
them worry about you, Venus.

RICHARD

This is you right here.

Venus says goodbye to her sisters, then Richard escorts
her to the gates of the court. Just before she heads in --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RICHARD

You just focus on that ball. You are Venus Williams. You gonna win Wimbledon. These girls ain't gon' never want to see your name in their draw.

VENUS

OK Daddy.

RICHARD

You just go on out there and have fun.

VENUS

I know. I got this. I love you.

RICHARD

I love you.

EXT. CARBON MESA HIGH SCHOOL - TENNIS COURT - TOURNAMENT - CONTINUOUS ACTION

THE CAMERA leads Venus onto the court, as her Dad watches her go. Venus's opponent, STACEY, a TALL TEN-YEAR-OLD BLONDE in high-end TENNIS GEAR, unpacks a racket from her pricey tennis bag that holds six others.

Venus pays no mind, unpacking her beat-up racket and joining Stacey at the net where a LINE JUDGE beckons with a new can of BALLS.

LINE JUDGE

Best of 3 sets. Tie-breaks at 6-all. I'm covering three courts, so keep your own score and call your own lines. Good luck.

The Judge departs, leaving Venus and Stacey at the net.

STACEY

Okay. Up or down?

VENUS

Up, I guess. Thanks.

Stacey spins the racket.

STACEY

Down. You can serve.

She hands Venus the balls and heads to her side of the net, trying to play head games. Venus hardly notices.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She passes her family's seats as she begins to warm-up and --

We land on Richard. A ball of nerves pacing beside the stands. Oracene sees. Knows her husband. And her daughter.

ORACENE

She knows who she is. We've done our job. She'll be fine.

Richard tries to relax as --

ON THE COURT, the match is starting. Venus prepares to serve. She stands on the baseline, bouncing the ball when -- the moment suddenly hits her.

The deafening noise of the MATCHES on the neighboring courts. The intimidating eyes of white parents. It's a lot to block out, so --

When she hits her first serve, it goes right in the net.

TREVOR

She's nervous. Take a step up.

Richard glares at Stacey's Dad, TREVOR, a COUNTRY CLUB A-HOLE, goading from the stands. Oracene puts a hand on her husband. Don't. Richard restrains. For now.

RICHARD

Have fun out there, Venus Williams. That's all that counts.

Venus listens. Regroups. Remembers her training but --

Richard can't take his own advice. Too nervous to watch, he turns his back to the court, anxiously listening when --

Venus crushes the ball with a clinical BOOM! that can only be --

AN ACE! Not a safe second serve, but a rocket that hits the line, flying past Stacey's backhand so fast, she does not even swing.

Stacey is stunned. So is her father.

He looks over at the Williamses cheering to see --

Richard, meeting his eyes with a little helpful advice.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

RICHARD

Maybe she oughta take a few more
steps up. Just get some place
safe.

This time, Stacey's father says nothing, shrinking away
as Richard turns to the court, smiling proudly at Venus.

This moment is monumental. A star has arrived.

Full of confidence and poise, Venus steps back up to the
line to serve to Stacey again. She tosses the ball and
off the smack of her racket we --

MATCH CUT TO:

CARBON MESA - ANOTHER MATCH - SAME DAY (BEGIN A MONTAGE)

-- where Venus's serve rockets into the box against
another opponent, GIRL 2, who manages to push a limp
return into the middle of the court where --

Venus puts it away easily with a deep forehand into the
corner which GIRL 2, running hard, still can't reach.

GIRL 2

You are so frickin' stupid!

She smacks her head. Richard cops her frustration while
watching apart from his family. (This now is his custom
to escape his nerves.)

CARBON MESA - NEXT DAY - NEXT MATCH

- Venus (in a new outfit) sprints to her left, ripping a
backhand down the line to her next opponent, GIRL 3, who -

Hits a soft, short return. Venus sprints to the net,
reaches it easily, and slaps a forehand cross-court that
wrong-foots GIRL 3 who has guessed the wrong way.

The Williams' family clap in the stands (which are still
sparsely occupied) while GIRL 3'S FATHER hurls his WATER
BOTTLE across the court.

GIRL 3

You're so bad!

Richard clocks this uneasily as --

CARBON MESA - SAME DAY - OUTSIDE THE COURT

A frustrated MOTHER speaks intensely with her DAUGHTER (8) who looks about to break down.

MOM

I am talking to you. Do you even want to be out there right now? Do you? Because the way that you just played, it's hard to believe that you do.

The girls holds back her tears and --

TENNIS VENUE #2 - NEXT DAY - END OF NEXT MATCH

Venus (another outfit) is presented a GOLD 1st PLACE TROPHY as GIRL 6 holds up a smaller, silver, clearly 2ND PLACE TROPHY.

A HANDFUL OF SPECTATORS (Paul included) clap in the stands as Venus is embraced by her family but Richard watches uncomfortably as --

GIRL 6 walks off the court with HER DAD, who is still coaching, still expressing his disappointment and --

TENNIS VENUE #3 - THREE WEEKS LATER

Venus is at another TROPHY CEREMONY, receiving another (slightly bigger) GOLD TROPHY in front of a SLIGHTLY BIGGER AUDIENCE while --

Richard watches GIRL 7 storm off the court without her 2nd PLACE TROPHY which her FATHER grabs for her as --

Richard snaps another photo, but he's clearly unsettled.

TENNIS VENUE #5

-- where THE BALL sizzles across the net, hitting the baseline, and bouncing off the outstretched frame of GIRL 8's racket who can't quite get there as we see:

We're in ANOTHER JUNIOR TOURNAMENT a few weekends later. Word is out now about Venus and 15 or 20 NON-FAMILY SPECTATORS have come out to watch as --

Girl 8 stares at the line where the ball clearly hit only her FATHER, watching behind the fence near her, yells --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GIRL 8'S FATHER

It was out, Kelly. Call it!

Sheepish, but obedient, Girl 8 raises her finger, indicating it's out.

Richard and Venus share a look. He nods for her to play on and she takes her spot in the DEUCE court, waiting for Girl 8 to serve.

RICHARD

That's OK, Junior. Just do what you do.

ORACENE

She's cheating.

RICHARD

That's alright. Just watch this one.

GIRL 8

30-40.

Venus waits as -- BOOM! -- Girl 8 ropes a serve hard out wide but Venus gets easily to it (open stance) and rips a forehand deep, aggressive forehand up the line --

Girl 8 just gets to it, slapping a backhand slice floating short over the net that --

Venus, charging, takes out of the air, smacking a forehand winner that bounces a foot inside the line and --

Smacks the fence right in front of Girl 8's cheating father.

As the Williams girls cheer, Richard watches as Venus and Girl 8 shake hands at the net, aware her father is upset.

RICHARD

You can smile, that was good. A little adversity.

From somewhere in the crowd, Richard hears --

WOMEN IN THE CROWD (O.S.)

There's no way that girl's 12.

Richard looks back to see a WASPY WOMAN staring straight at him with contempt and --

TENNIS VENUE #5 -- ANOTHER MATCH - THE NEXT DAY

Another opponent, GIRL 9 races to the net to reach Venus' drop-shot, getting there just in time, only to dump it into the net.

She fumes, tossing her racket in frustration into the net. Richard and Venus take it all in and --

TENNIS VENUE #5 -- SAME DAY - ANOTHER MATCH (THE FINALS)

GIRL 10 serves to the AD COURT where Venus returns a deep forehand down the line that hits right on the baseline and --

Girl 10 gets there late, shanking a forehand too hard that skies into the air.

Venus watches it sail like an Aaron Judge homer over her head, whacking the fence way behind her as --

The Williams family erupts in the CROWDED STANDS. Venus runs to the net, perfunctorily shaking her hand, neither girl meeting eyes.

Richard watches Venus celebrating with Oracene and her sisters as --

GIRL 10 sits down on her bench alone, burring her face in a towel, probably choking on sobs.

Richard is saddened, but Venus is unaware, hugging her mother, realizing Serena's not there.

VENUS

Where's Meeka? She ok?

LYNN

She's fine. She's just bored.
Said she knew you would win.

Venus chuckles at that as --

TENNIS VENUE #5 -- OUTSIDE THE COURTS - JUST LATER

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! We find Serena hitting balls against a practice wall by herself when she notices her family exiting Venus' court in celebration. Venus holds her trophy up to Serena.

SERENA

Told you that girl was a pusher.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VENUS

Paul calls that playing paddy-cake.

SERENA

That's why she got moded!

That triggers a laugh. They immediately break into --

VENUS AND SERENA

"You're moded / corroded / your booty got exploded!"

Venus laughs as Serena runs off to join them. Richard watching, not pleased and --

EXT. PALOS VERDES COUNTRY CLUB (VENUE #6) - DAY

The premiere junior tennis event in the state. The SC JUNIOR SECTIONAL 12 and UNDER CHAMPIONSHIPS.

THE CHAMPIONSHIP MATCH AT THE PALOS VERDES COUNTRY CLUB. Bigger court. Better competition. Bigger crowds. 75 PEOPLE have come out to watch --

Venus, locked in an endless baseline rally with a TOWERING BLONDE (Jamie) who looks like she's 17. The best player she's faced.

Jamie hits the corners well, running Venus back and forth until Jamie drills a backhand down the line which --

Venus stretches to reach, hitting a short cross-court forehand that makes Jamie's mouth water.

Three feet inside the line, Jamie steps into it, tee-ing up a rocket and rips a cleanly struck forehand that should be a down the liner winner only --

The ball clips the tape -- pops up in the air -- and drops the ground on Venus' side of the net. A fortunate fluke that still should be Jamie's point but --

Venus is an athletic marvel who has trained for this moment and -- already sprinting across the baseline towards the ball's intended path --

Venus jams on the breaks, stops on a dime, and flies to the net, getting her strings under the dying ball just an inch off the ground and --

-- carves a wicked cross-court slice backhand just out of Jamie's sprinting reach. It's a masterful play.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The CROWD can't believe it. Jamie can't either but, unlike other girl's Venus has vanquished, Jamie does not explode or complain. She raises her racket to Venus, tapping it with her hand in a gesture of praise.

Richard is surprised by her composure and grace and --

As Venus and Jamie shake hands at the net, accepting their FIRST (Venus) and SECOND PLACE TROPHIES --

Richard takes a photo of the whole family with Jamie, both girls holding their trophies.

VENUS

Nice meeting you!

RICHARD

You did real good. You should be very proud of yourself.

Richard watches his family celebrate excitedly while Jamie, head held high, walks off stoically with her parents and her runner-up trophy.

A moment of quiet dignity that effects Richard deeply.

END MONTAGE

INT. RICHARD'S VW BUS - DAY

Richard drives home, still uneasy. His family is piled in the back, passing around the trophy, giddy for Venus.

SERENA

The first place Junior Tennis tournament is presented to...

The girls drumroll in back.

SERENA

Venus Williams!

The girls laugh and cheer for Venus from the back seat. Oracene smiles on. Richard does not.

SERENA

Were you nervous at all, V?

ISHA

Why's she nervous? That last girl looked like she was 18 and Venus still whooped her anyway.

Most of the family laughs, but Richard's reaching a boil.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RICHARD

Ok, that's enough of that back there. No more tennis talk, and stop all that bragging.

Oracene cuts him a look.

LYNN

Daddy, we're not bragging.

RICHARD

Oh, you're not? Whatchu doing?

LYNN

It's just the truth, here's the proof!

RICHARD

Alright now, I done said what I'm saying, now stop all the bragging.

ORACENE

Richard, they're not bragging. They're having fun.

RICHARD

I'm listening to them. I know what bragging sounds like.

ORACENE

She's just happy.

RICHARD

Junior won. That girl lost. Everyone did their best. I don't wanna hear no more about it.

ISHA

(can't help herself)
If that was that girl's best, she needs to practice some more.

That gets a few laughs but not one from Richard, who spots a BODEGA ahead, pulls into the lot. Steaming.

INT./EXT. RICHARD'S VW BUS/BODEGA - PARKING LOT -
CONTINUOUS ACTION

RICHARD

All right, big shots. Here's five bucks. Go practice getting me something to drink. Give the money to Tunde.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The girls take the money, step out of the van, and run off toward the store, unaware that --

As soon as they're out of the car, Richard throws the van back in gear and drives off down the street.

ORACENE

Richard! Where are you going?

RICHARD

They wanna brag, let 'em brag how they walked three miles home.

ORACENE

Richard, you can't leave those girls like that.

RICHARD

I done told them I didn't wanna hear nothing about no tennis...

ORACENE

Richard. RICHARD! Stop it! You can't leave them back there like that, leaving them in the streets. You can't do that.

Finally, he does, and he slams on the brakes. Silence.

RICHARD

Listen to me.

ORACENE

I'm listening. You go back and get my girls.

RICHARD

When these matches are done, I don't want to hear nothing about tennis. They can talk about dinosaurs or space or Kingdom Hall, but tennis is over for now.

ORACENE

Space!? Why is it that you have to ruin everybody else's day. You go get my girls!

RICHARD

They coming now, they comin'. They right down the street.

The girls finally return, catching up with the car.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

VENUS

Where were you going? I thought you were leaving us.

RICHARD

Yeah I was. Thank your mother. She made me come back. Who got my change?

The girls pile in, eyes rolling, afraid of what's coming.

INT. WILLIAMS' HOME (COMPTON) - AFTERNOON

A few minutes later, the girls are sitting glumly on the couch as Richard stands by the TV.

RICHARD

Family meeting. We gon' watch something. We going to watch. We gon' learn.

ISHA

Is it 'The Cosby Show'?

RICHARD

No. Bill Cosby done made his money. We don't need to watch his show. You need to be worrying about how you gon' to make your money.

Richard puts in a VHS and hits play. The girls, a little nervous what's coming -- until the titles come up. Disney. *CINDERELLA*.

ORACENE

Cinderella?

The girls are relieved. Oracene, bewildered. But they all cozy up together to watch. Off Richard's face --

SAME SCENE - LATER

The movie ends. The girls clap. Richard hits pause.

RICHARD

Ok, what'd you learn? Tunde?

ISHA

To be polite.

RICHARD

Ok. That's good. Lynn?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LYNN

To be brave.

RICHARD

Brave? Explain how you mean?

LYNN

(can't help herself)

Well, you gotta be brave to take a
ride in a pumpkin.

The girls laugh. But Richard points to the bedroom.

RICHARD

Ok. Got to your room.

(when Lynn resists)

No, 'cause you're foolin' with me
and I'm not foolin' so go.

Lynn hurries out off... probably just what she wanted.

RICHARD

Okay. Junior.

VENUS

Never stop dreaming, I guess.

RICHARD

That's good. Come on, Meek.

SERENA

Remember your shoes?

RICHARD

OK, that's good, but everyone's
wrong so we going to watch the
film again.

ORACENE

No, Richard. No.

RICHARD

Lynn, come on out here. We
watching this film again, 'cause
wasn't none of you listening.

The family all protest and Richard finally relents.

RICHARD

Okay. Point is -- she was humble.
No matter how them people treated
her, she stayed calm. She kept her
heart clean. She was humble.

(beat)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

RICHARD (CONT'D)

Now we going to go out here and we're going to play these matches and we gon' compete, but we gon' to stay humble less we not gon' to do it.

(then, satisfied)

Y'all go ahead with yourself.

The girls head off. Richard sits down next to Oracene.

ORACENE

Feel good about yourself?

RICHARD

I think they got the point --

ORACENE

Never drive off on my kids again. Ever.

RICHARD

Oh, that's where you still at?

ORACENE

Yes it is.

And she gets up and walks out, leaving Richard alone as --

THE SOUND OF POURING RAIN BEGINS THUNDERING OVER --

EXT. EAST COMPTON PARK - TENNIS COURTS - NIGHT

Where Venus and Serena practice with Richard in the rain. They're soaked. The court's slippery but just like Richard's hoped, they're having a blast. It looks fun.

RICHARD

Now these ball is wet and they heavy so you can't let them hit the ground cause they not gon' bounce. If they hit the ground, they gon' skid. That means take it right out the air. Take it right out of the air.

Richard feeds them and the half-volley in the rain.

RICHARD

There you go. I like that. Don't let it bounce. Boom! There it is. That's the shot right there gon' to make me call the police.

Venus and Serena laugh, playing into the night and --

EXT. EAST COMPTON PARK - A SHORT WHILE LATER

Practice is done. So is the rain. Richard leads his daughters back toward the van. All sopping wet.

RICHARD

Well, at least don't nobody have to take no bath tonight.

Just then, TD and two other gangsters pull up the van in their black lowrider. Everyone freezes. Richard places himself in between the men and his daughters, readying for a fight, but TD looks at Venus --

TD

I see what you all doing out there. Keep bringing those trophies home to Compton.

Off Richard and the girls surprise --

EXT. WILLIAMS' HOME (COMPTON) - NIGHT

The VAN arrives home. Still wet, the family heads inside when Richard sees a SHERIFF'S VEHICLE parked in his spot.

VENUS

RICHARD

Why are the police here? I don't know.

His dander up, Richard heads for his door and --

INT. WILLIAMS' HOME (COMPTON) - THAT MOMENT

-- they enter the house to find --

2 DEPUTY SHERIFFS and A SOCIAL WORKER going through their kitchen. Searching the refrigerator while Oracene waits in the living room, ready to snap.

RICHARD

What's goin' on? Everybody OK?

ORACENE

They got a call, said there was trouble in the house and we were being rough with the girls and they needed to look.

RICHARD

Gotta call from who?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ORACENE

(they both know; but)
Not at liberty to say.

RICHARD

Oh, OK. You all need to look around? You can check in the cupboards. Maybe you can check under the beds. Make sure there's no monsters.

SOCIAL WORKER

A little wet for practice, don't you think? Don't they have school work to do?

ORACENE

They do their homework. Tunde's first in her class. Isha and Lynn are too.

RICHARD

Girls, spell civilization.

ALL THE SISTERS

C-I-V-I-L-I-Z-A-T-I-O-N

SOCIAL WORKER

Mr. Williams? This isn't really necessary.

RICHARD

You wanna check on the kids? Let's check on the kids. We got future doctors and lawyers, plus a couple tennis stars in this house. Now, I understand you got to do your job, even if some crazy-ass neighbor do call talking foolishness, and I don't even mind you saying we hard on these kids, you know why? 'cause we are. That's our job. To keep them off these street. You wanna arrest us for that, fine. But what you not gon' never do is come knock on this door to say you blew our daughters' damn brains out 'cause they been hanging with hoodlums and doing drugs and things. That's what you not never gon' say in this house. You wanna arrest us for that? That's fine. You need to be arresting the parents at them tennis matches.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

RICHARD (CONT'D)

That's who need to be gettin'
arrested.

OFF the officers, realizing they got a bad lead --

EXT. WILLIAMS' HOME (COMPTON) - NIGHT

A short time later, Richard and Oracene are united on their porch watching the Sheriffs pull away revealing Ms. Strickland, watching from her lawn, then disappearing inside. Oracene's already heading that way.

RICHARD

Hey, where you going?

ORACENE

I'll be back.

And Oracene marches across the street and knocks on her door. Ms. Strickland reluctantly opens up.

ORACENE

Hey Betty.

MS. STRICKLAND

Oracene.

ORACENE

I've never been over here before.
That's a shame.

MS. STRICKLAND

It is.

ORACENE

I know you know how hard it is
raising a daughter. I have five
of them. Five. Don't make me
come back over here again.

With that, Oracene strides back home and enters his house. Richard closing the door behind her and --

EXT. CALIFORNIA UNIVERSITY - JUNIOR TENNIS OPEN - DAY

Another tournament. The family's checking in with Venus at the REGISTRAR. Serena is milling about behind them.

TOURNAMENT OFFICIAL (REGISTRAR)

All right, Venus. You're running
a little late, it's about to
start. So you're on Court Three.
Good luck out there.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VENUS

Thank you.

RICHARD

C'mon, c'mon. Can't be the only
black peoples here *and* be late.

The family heads to her court. Serena lingers behind and as soon as they're gone, she approaches the sign-in table. The OFFICIAL looks up.

SERENA

Serena Williams. Ten and under.
I'm signing in, too.

The OFFICIAL looks at her curiously.

TOURNAMENT OFFICIAL

Let me just find your form.

EXT. CALIFORNIA U. - JUNIOR OPEN - TENNIS COURT - LATER

ON COURT: Venus is mid-match, trouncing a GIRL. She drills a winner, putting her opponent out of her misery.

Richard claps in the stands.

RICHARD

Great shot, Venus Williams. Great
decision.

Another FATHER approaches Richard.

FATHER

Daughter looks good out there.

RICHARD

Yeah, thank you. She a little
tight today.

FATHER

No, I mean your little one. Looks
like a champ, too.

(off Richard's
confusion)

You coulda warned us, man. I
didn't know you had two.

EXT. CALIFORNIA U. - JUNIOR OPEN - COURT 2 - MOMENTS
LATER

Richard hurries through the grounds to another COURT where a small crowd has begun to gather.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He can't see it yet, but the POP coming off the balls doesn't sound normal. Not at this age. It's FEROCIOUS. He arrives as the crowd APPLAUDS to see:

Serena, playing a match. Richard's first instinct at being disobeyed is to physically pull her off the court but Oracene, arriving there, too, stops him.

ORACENE

May as well let her finish.

Richard's slowed for a moment as -- he watches Serena race around the court, finally let off the leash.

She's in a cross-court rally. Four cross-court backhands until BANG! Serena rips the fifth up the line. Winner.

SERENA

C'mon!

Serena smiles. There's magic even Richard can't deny but --

When Serena spots her father in the crowd -- the music stops. The magic over. Believing she's in trouble, Serena starts off the court when --

RICHARD

What you doin'?

(as Serena pauses)

You done started now, you might as well finish. Go on, just make sure you have fun. That's all we here to do.

Surprised, Serena smiles, hustling back to the court.

ORACENE

Serena Williams!

Richard turns as Oracene catches up to him.

RICHARD

Did you know about this?

ORACENE

No.

Serena tosses the ball and off the CRACK of her serve --

EXT. CALIFORNIA UNIVERSITY - JUNIOR TENNIS OPEN - LATER

Venus and family celebrate with ICE CREAM by the courts. Serena, holding a small SILVER TROPHY of her own, eyes Venus' towering GOLD TROPHY enviously. Venus sees.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VENUS

You want it? We can swap. I like silver better, anyway.

SERENA

Good. I like gold.

Serena beams, swapping the trophies before her sister can change her mind. Venus is all smiles as --

INT. WILLIAMS' HOUSE (COMPTON) - EVENING

Several weeks later. Venus is at the table with a copy of *The New York Times*, reading from the article aloud. The headline reads:

"TENNIS; STATUS: UNDEFEATED. FUTURE: ROSY. AGE: 10."

VENUS

(reading)

'At a time when tennis prodigies seem to be surfacing every week, the latest hot prospect is Californian Venus Williams.

(as everyone cheers)

Last weekend, Williams captured her 17th singles title in less than a year by winning the age-12-or-under Southern California Junior Sectional Championships.'

TUNDE

Listen to this, y'all.

The whole family is here, each with their own copy of the paper, marveling over the article.

TUNDE

'Her game had everything. She was fast, she had a spin serve, she ran to the net -- boy, did she wax me.' That's Dorothy Cheney.

ISHA

Dang, Venus. You're famous.

SERENA

(reading in a huff)

This doesn't even mention me once.

Serena scowls in disbelief as we look over to Oracene and Richard, distracted by a NEWS STORY ON TV.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NEWS REPORTER (V.O.)

...the investigation into Police brutality in Los Angeles. CNN's Robert Vito has the story but first, this word of caution. Some of you might be disturbed by the violent nature of the pictures contained in this piece.

The footage is of course: THE BEATING OF RODNEY KING.

NEWS REPORTER (V.O.)

It appears to be a group of Los Angeles police officers beating the suspect with nightsticks and kicking him as other officers look on. George Holiday who works for a drain company and taped this...

The parents watch this, disturbed, when the PHONE RINGS.

SERENA

I'll get it.

She stomps off to the KITCHEN. Oracene turns to Richard.

ORACENE

Least they got them on tape for once.

SERENA

(answering the phone)
Samson Security Service.
(listens; then calls out to her dad)
Daddy, phone's for you. Guy's an agent. Says he wants to talk about representation --

Off Richard, eyes fixed on the television. Very wary as --

NANCY REAGAN (V.O.)

(pre-lap)
This slogan -- 'Just say no.'
That wasn't something we just sat down and dreamed up, that came about by accident.

EXT. RIVIERA COUNTRY CLUB - DAY

A "JUST SAY NO TO DRUGS" CHARITY TENNIS EVENT is underway in the posh Pacific Palisades tennis club.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ON THE TENNIS COURT, NANCY REAGAN is surrounded by a group of INNER-CITY KIDS who have been bused in for the event -- well really, for the photo-op. Venus and Serena among them.

NANCY REAGAN

I was at a clinic in Oakland when a young girl asked me, 'But what do we do when our friends pressure us to do drugs?' And, without thinking, I said, 'Just say no!'

The crowd claps. PHOTOGRAPHERS snaps pictures. And we --

LAND ON RICHARD, watching the exploitation incredulously from the TRELLIS in a crowd of very, self-satisfied BLUE BLOODS. He's at the ball, but he's the entertainment.

Paul stands at his side, with a different perspective.

PAUL

It's pretty remarkable, Richard. Your girls are standing with the First Lady of the United States. You did that.

Off Richard, quite skeptical and --

EXT. RIVIERA COUNTRY CLUB - DAY (LATER)

Richard sits under the trellis trying to watch Venus and Serena play an exhibition against TWO NOTABLE PROS when -

Paul arrives with TWO SMARMY, SUITED HUCKSTERS.

PAUL

There's the man. Richard, this is George MacArthur and Laird Stabler.

RICHARD

George. Laird.

LAIRD, a blue-blood agent, sticks out his hand. Richard shakes, clocking GEORGE, a sixty-year-old man, who looks and dresses like a Kennedy.

LAIRD

George is the head of the agency right there.

RICHARD

We got the big boss. I can tell by the cigar.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LAIRD

Heck of a girl you got there.
Just incredible. Love to help you
take her to the next level.

A waitress approaches as they all sit.

WAITRESS

Can I get you anything?

GEORGE

Usual.

GEORGE

Thanks for coming, Richard. What
do you think of the club?

RICHARD

Yeah, it's real great. We
appreciate everyone taking off
their hoods before we came in.

(enjoys watching them
freeze; then)

I'm kidding. We've been here a
couple times.

They exchange a look -- this guys is nuts. Nevertheless --

LAIRD

Well, Richard, first of all, we
just wanna congratulate you on the
great job you've done so far. I
mean, honestly, it's incredible.

RICHARD

It's incredible?

AT THE COURT, CROWDS APPLAUD as the MATCH wraps up.

GEORGE

I'm sure you know, but Laird
here is the best. He discovered
Capriati when she was 10. Mary
Pierce, too. And we believe Venus
can be bigger than both.

RICHARD

I'm sorry. You said two times
already that it's incredible. Why
is what we did so incredible?

Laird is confused.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

LAIRD

I just mean with your resources
and experiences --

Paul jumps in trying to salvage this.

PAUL

Richard, I think he's just saying
that you've done an incredible job
with the girls --

RICHARD

Hold on. Hold on, Paul. That is a
full grown adult man. He don't
need you to say what he said. If
you were going to say what he
said, you coulda said it back at
the house. We coulda saved
everybody the trouble of coming to
this meeting. Now I done asked
this man a simplified question. He
overemphasizing how incredible it
is what we did. I see all these
white kids around here and he
ain't saying how incredible that
is. Let him answer the question.

PAUL

Ok, that's why we're here. We're
here to ask questions.

RICHARD

Why is it so incredible what we
did?

LAIRD

I'm sorry, -- I certainly did not
mean any offense, Mr. Williams.
I'm very sorry. I just meant with
your background --

RICHARD

My background? Of course what you
mean is our race.

(Laird is silent)

That's ok. We get it. Little black
girl in an all-white sport, that's
why we picked tennis. Little
ghetto Cinderella. Ghetto-rella.

This is going sideways fast. George steps in to save it.

GEORGE

Well, Richard, that's exactly what
we're talking about.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

GEORGE (CONT'D)

We think Venus could be inspirational to a whole group of people who, frankly, as an industry, we have not done enough to reach. Venus could open a lot of doors and we'd like to help her do it.

RICHARD

(baiting them)

So, what are you offering?

LAIRD

Whatever you need. Shoes.
Coaches. Rackets --

RICHARD

Rackets? They offering rackets? We wouldn't even be sitting here if you hadn't seen what they'd done with their rackets.

LAIRD

Yes. Fair enough.

RICHARD

C'mon. You sure you're the best?

LAIRD

I don't know, he said it.

GEORGE

Richard, can I be frank?

RICHARD

You can be whoever the hell you want.

GEORGE

What Venus needs now is more court time. The right training and tournaments and exposure. That's a hundred grand a year easy, but that's what our agency does. You sign with us, and we'll help you carry that burden. Let us take it from here. Let us make this a sure thing. You don't want to risk all that, do you Richard?

Beat. Richard farts. Everyone's frozen.

RICHARD

I think I'm gonna go get in the pool. We'll talk later.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

And Richard gets up and exits, leaving Paul on his own.

LAIRD

Lovely to meet you.

GEORGE

What the hell was that?

EXT. RIVIERA COUNTRY CLUB - POOLSIDE - DAY

Still quite hot, Richard searches the club for his girls. Finally, he spots them:

BY THE POOL where we see a decadent spread of hamburgers and French fries.

Wrapped in a t-shirt and towel, Venus and Serena eat with a few WASPY GIRLS from the club. They're having the time of their lives.

Richard arrives with a head full of steam.

RICHARD

What you all doing?

VENUS

Hey, Daddy! You hungry?

SERENA

You want something to eat?

RICHARD

Where's the food I packed for you?

SERENA

Don't worry. It's all on our tab.

RICHARD

It's on your tab?

The girls laugh. Richard does not.

ANOTHER GIRL

It's no big deal, Mr. Williams.
All the food here's for free.

RICHARD

Nothing's for free. Somebody's payin' for it. Put it down. Don't you bite that cookie one more time. Get up. Let's go.

Embarrassed, the girls comply, leaving their friends and following their father, who's caused quite a scene, and --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

They follow Richard through the event toward the exit, hurrying to keep up, confused by what's happening, as Richard keeps steaming --

SERENA

Daddy what's wrong?

RICHARD

... Sittin' at the country club with your legs crossed, eatin' a burger on a tab, like you're Queen of Sheba. Never take anything from anybody for free. Everything in this place got hooks in it.

EXT. WILLIAMS' HOUSE (COMPTON) - LATE AFTERNOON (SAME DAY)

The girls are playing tag in the backyard. Serena's wearing Richard's RED UNDERWEAR pulled up over her pants, chasing after her sisters --

VENUS

No! Don't touch us, panty man!

They run off screaming through the yard passing Richard and Oracene, who greet a very frustrated Paul.

PAUL

What are we doing here, Richard?
The hell was that back there?

RICHARD

We not gonna do any of this.

PAUL

Not doing any of what?

RICHARD

We not signing with these agents.
We not playing no juniors. We ain't going to do none of it.

This is a bomb. And it's news to Oracene too, but she hides her surprise, and her anger, for now.

PAUL

Have you lost your mind? Venus is 63-0, you pull her out of Juniors now, you're going to ruin her. Those girls need to play matches or they're going to die on the vine.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RICHARD

Look, I've heard all the risks,
but the Junior circuit's worse
than the ghetto. Kids cracking up.
Burning out. Their parents oughta
be shot.

PAUL

What are you talking about? Your
daughters are fine.

RICHARD

Yes, they fine now, but we sign
with these agents, you heard 'em --
they gon' to race them up the
ladder. Nationals. Internationals
-- they don't need all that
pressure. They'll play matches
when they're pro but right now,
they need to be kids.

PAUL

There won't be any pros! And even
if there were, you don't sign with
an agent, how are you going to
afford all their training till
then!?

RICHARD

Let me worry about that.

PAUL

(to Oracene)
Did you know about this?

Oracene holds her tongue and from a distance, we can see
Venus who, like Oracene, hears the news for the first
time. She's not pleased.

PAUL

Richard, don't do this. Every
American player who's ever done
anything got good following this
path. Mac. Traci. Agassi. Pete.
This window you've got is so small
and it will close, I know you
don't wanna believe me --

RICHARD

Yeah, I hear everybody talking
about this window, but peoples
like us, we get shot goin' through
those.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

RICHARD (CONT'D)

So I'm thinking we just gonna pause right here and then when the time is right, we just gonna walk right through the front door.

Paul laughs. Can't really argue with that but --

PAUL

I don't understand. You have no frickin' clue. You are pissed off because some guy insulted you today so now you wanna walk away. You are the most stubborn person I ever met in my life. And I coach McEnroe!

RICHARD

We appreciate everything, Paul, but this part of our relationship is done. And we will no longer require your services any more.

Venus, listening nearby, can't believe what she hears.

PAUL

Richard -- no good coach'll take them for free if they're not playing juniors.

RICHARD

You did, remember. And I think you a pretty good coach.

Paul laughs, resigned. Nothing to do now but leave.

PAUL

I just pray you don't screw this up.

RICHARD

We appreciate your prayers Paul.

That's it. The end of an era. Paul exits, saying goodbye to Venus on the way out.

PAUL

See you at Wimbledon, kid.

He gives her a high five, leaving Venus with her sisters, considerably shaken as --

We stay on Richard and Oracene, who is understandably upset. Aware of Venus's pain. To Richard --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

ORACENE

Are we a team?

RICHARD

Are we a team? We're a family.

ORACENE

So we're a team? And you don't think that was a decision you should have discussed with me? Discussed with Venus?

For once, Richard has nothing to say.

ORACENE

Richard, my faith dictates that I stand by your side, but don't mistake my silence for agreement. You do that again and I will not stay quiet. Don't make me look like a fool.

RICHARD

Who made a fool out of you?

ORACENE

You. You made a fool out of me.

And Oracene walks, leaving Richard alone as we cut to --

EXT. RICK MACCI TENNIS ACADEMY - NIGHT (ESTABLISHING)

A teeming, athletic paradise in the Haines City, Florida where a raucous, nighttime tennis practice is underway.

On side by side courts (#9 & #10), EIGHT TEENAGE PLAYERS play a fast paced game called 2-on-2. It's over seen by:

RICK MACCI, the boyish, bowl-cut tennis coach, whooping it up on the court like a kid!

MACCI

Sherwin-Williams, baby! Paint those lines!

When one PLAYER dinks a weak shot --

MACCI

That's too soft. That's a marshmallow. You know what happens to those, right? They get roasted.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The guy is a character. His commentary's interrupted when BARRY, his assistant, calls out from THE PATIO BY THE CLUBHOUSE overlooking the courts.

BARRY
(hand over the
receiver)

Rick! Rick. This guy Richard Williams keeps calling. It's like 10 times in a row. Told me to tell you it's urgent.

MACCI
What's so urgent -- his backhand? Who the heck is this guy?

BARRY
Some father in California. Says he's got two daughters, they're the best in the state.

MACCI
Lemme guess, the next Jennifer Capriatti's? His girls are so great, how come I've never heard of them?

BARRY
They're from Compton.

MACCI
Compton?

OFF Macci, surprised. His interest suddenly piqued and -

EXT. RICK MACCI TENNIS ACADEMY - PATIO - NIGHT

Rick arrives at the PATIO where PLAYERS and COACHES chat and eat snacks. He passes a TEENAGER eating cheese fries.

RICK
You eating that? You put crap like that in your mouth, your game's gonna go South. Hey, Barry what line is it?

Macci now at the bar picks up the phone. His eyes still on the courts where his players practice as --

MACCI
Hi, this is Rick Macci.

Off Rick on the phone, attention immediately grabbed and--

EXT. WILLIAMS' HOUSE (COMPTON) - DAY

Lynn reads outside in the yard, yelling excitedly when a TAXI appears on their street.

LYNN

He's here! He's here!

She runs to the house where Richard leads the whole family out onto the porch to greet their guest.

RICHARD

Ok, ok. Everybody come here and get in position.

They align themselves at the door as Richard greets --

RICHARD

Mr. Macci. Welcome, welcome.

Rick Macci stepping out of the cab, tennis bag in hand.

MACCI

Hello everybody.

Richard shakes his hand and introduces him to the family.

RICHARD

Richard Williams. This is my wife. This is Brandi.

MACCI

It's an honor.

ORACENE

Glad to see you.

RICHARD

This is all of our kids. This our family. This is Venus, Serena, Tunde, Lynn, Isha. Thanks for coming. We know you've come a long way, so don't want to waste your time. Wanna get over to the club?

MACCI

Let's get it started.

Venus and Serena head off to the bus.

ORACENE

Be good. Be great.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

A little shell-shocked, Macchi follows them to the van and sits shotgun next to Richard, looking back at the girls.

MACCI

So uh, tell me one more time.
Which one of you is uh --

RICHARD

Big one Venus. Little one Serena.

MACCI

Ok. I think I can handle that.

Macchi tries to put on his seatbelt as Richard pulls out. It doesn't work.

RICHARD

Oh don't worry about. Don't need that.

(honks the horn)

We got Rick Macchi in Compton!

Macchi, starting to realize, he's in for a hell of a ride.

EXT. EAST COMPTON PARK - DAY

Parked at the courts, Richard starts to unload the van.

MACCI

Close her down, Richard?

RICHARD

Yeah, you can close it up.

Macchi lends a hand, following Richard onto the court when the gang members roll up in their car, like security.

TD

Hey hey hey! Slow down haircut.
Hell you think you're going?

Macchi turns.

MACCI

Just uh, came to play some tennis.

TD

Hey Richard -- this Jimmy Connors-looking cracker with you?

RICHARD

Uh yeah yeah, white boy's with us.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TD

Ok, he's cool.

RICHARD

Yeah, he just white.

The gang steps aside, allowing Macchi to pass.

RICHARD

See. Promised you wouldn't get shot, Rick.

MACCI

Appreciate it. This is it, huh?

RICHARD

This is it. Compton Country club.

Macchi's just wide-eyed as the girls take the ratty courts, throwing footballs, tossing rackets, while Richard sets up his camera.

The scene is surreal but Macchi's full of excitement, here on a quest. A prospector on the hunt and...

A FEW MOMENTS LATER

Macchi drills with the girls and once they start to hit, Rick knows he's struck gold.

MACCI

Forehand. Get there, good!
Backhand. Hey! There you go, excellent. Come on youngster, let's see what you got. Put some mustard on that hotdog. Go get it. Forehand. Backhand. Move! Fast feet. Good recovery! Good, good, again! Hey, I like it! Find the slot, rip the shot!

He's a goofball and they like him immediately. Richard watches, stepping behind the lens of his camcorder.

RICHARD

(to the his camera)

This is Rick Macchi. Macchi rhymes with crazy.

MACCI

Hey! Where'd you get that power from? I'm sorry, was it something I said. I think it's the stash. I think she doesn't like a guy with a stash.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

The drill comes to an end with an overhead, Venus slams. Macci's just gobsmacked. He meets the girls at the net.

MACCI

Oh! I like it. Excellent work.
Hey, I love what you're doing.
Excellent job. Put it right
there. Do you guys have fun?

VENUS AND SERENA

Yeah.

They high-five him at the net.

MACCI

I tell ya, that father of yours,
he's done a heck of a job so this
was a lot of fun for me too so,
thank you girls. Thank you.

The girls go off to get water. Macci returns to Richard.

MACCI

Richard. I'm impressed. They're
terrific. I think you might just
have the next Michael Jordan on
your hands.

RICHARD

Oh no, brother man. I gots me the
next two.

Macci laughs, shaking Richard's hand.

MACCI

I like the way you think.

INT. WILLIAMS' HOUSE (COMPTON) - DAY

Rick's sitting in the living room facing the entire Williams family. Oracene and her five girls. Richard sits in the center, a lion with his cubs.

Macci presents them with a PAPER. His offer.

MACCI

That's my standard agreement.
Same one I made with Jennifer.
Instruction. Housing. Food.
Education. You won't pay for a
thing. Tickets to Disney World,
which is right down the road. But
mostly my personal time, which I
promise is what you'll get.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MACCI (CONT'D)

When you train at Rick Macchi, you train with Rick.

ORACENE

Sounds expensive. What's in it for you?

MACCI

My fee is 15% of their future earnings. If you make nothing, I make nothing. But I can tell you one thing, we're not gonna make nothing.

Macchi's excited. Everyone's impressed. Except Richard.

RICHARD

Whatchu know about Nick Bollettieri? He's a real famous tennis coach.

MACCI

Sure.

RICHARD

The boy keep calling. Can't get him off the phone.

MACCI

Nick? Well -- Nick's a good coach. He's had a lot of success. But you go to Bradenton to train with Nick, you won't get Nick, you'll get whatever hitting coach he's got available. You'll get a factory. You train with me, I'm your coach.

RICHARD

Lotta people say Nick's the best.

MACCI

I'd ask Andre Agassi what he'd say about that? Lotta people say he's not the happiest guy in the world. Doesn't love it on the court. I think these girls, I think they gotta love it. Kids gotta drive this thing whether it's Rick, Nick, Tom, Dick, or Harry. If it's their dream to be a champ, there's a chance. If it's yours, mine, then -- crash and burn.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

MACCI (CONT'D)

It's not gonna happen but, hey --
if you wanna go with Nick then uh -
that's your prerogative.

RICHARD

No, we want to go with you.

MACCI

Oh, thank heavens.

RICHARD

We just wanted to hear you say
what you had said.

MACCI

Well done.

Macci sighs with relief as --

RICHARD

Tunde.

-- Tunde hands Macci a paper of their own.

RICHARD

Now, that's *our* standard
agreement. You take these girls,
you take us all. The whole
family.

MACCI

You all want to come to Florida?

ORACENE

Not Tunde. She just graduated,
Valedictorian so, her life is
here.

This is emotional for all of them.

MACCI

Congratulations.

TUNDE

Thank you.

RICHARD

Yeah, but all that other stuff
that's in that contract, we need
that. We need a house. The best
schools. A job for me on your
staff. A --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

MACCI

(reading)

Says here, a mobile home?

RICHARD

Yeah. Got to get there, don't we?

You believe in these kids or what?

MACCI

You bet I do.

RICHARD

Ok. Then why we still sitting here. We're supposed to be in Florida.

MACCI

Let's go to Florida.

Here goes nothing. Off the shake of their hands --

EXT. DESERT (ARIZONA) - DAY

A RIBBON OF HIGHWAY cuts through the Arizona desert as a brand-new MOTOR HOME speeds down the road. At the wheel:

MONTAGE - I./E. MOTOR HOME - VARIOUS SHOTS - DAY/NIGHT

Richard Williams drives, moving his family cross-country.

They see the sunrise beyond the GRAND CANYON.

They see it set over the NEW MEXICO DESERT.

Richard drives through the night, crooning "THE GAMBLER" by Kenny Rogers to Oracene while Isha, Lynn, and Serena sleep. But Venus, focused as always, watches the country pass by out her windows until finally --

The family all cheer passing on a sign on the road that reads: "WELCOME TO FLORIDA - THE SUNSHINE STATE" and we --

EXT. WEST PALM BEACH, FLORIDA (ESTABLISHING)

SOAR OVER West Palm Beach, ARRIVING AT --

EXT. RICK MACCI TENNIS ACADEMY (ESTABLISHING)

The BRAND-NEW MOTOR HOME pulls through the gates of Rick's Florida academy and --

EXT. RICK MACCI ACADEMY - VARIOUS SHOTS - DAY

Moving at his quick, puppy-dog clip, Macci greets the Williams' family warmly --

MACCI

There they are. Wow, look at that.
Hello everybody. Welcome to the
Sunshine State. Gosh it's great to
see you guys. How was the trip?

VENUS AND SERENA

Long!

But everyone's just staring, mouths agape, at the club.

MACCI

(re: a golf cart)

Richard, you see that blue bad boy
there? I call it the comet. I
like to ride it around, makes me
feel like I own the place, which
is crazy, 'cause I do.

OFF their excitement, Rick leads The Family (everyone except Tunde) through his impressive facilities, passing PLAYERS and COACHES on the way, CHATTING everyone up as they pass:

COURTS #7 AND #8 where YOUNG STUD MEN and WOMEN drill in the heat. FOUR PLAYERS to a COURT. PROS feeding from shopping carts.

The pace is grueling and it looks like a boot camp. The boys practice shirtless as JOCK ROCK SONGS blare.

MACCI

That's Tommy Ho over there. Won
the U.S. JUNIOR NATIONALS at 15.
He's a top 50 pro. Over there's
Eric Taino and John Roddick. Both
top 5 in the country for their age
group. Now Johnny's got a little
brother named Andy who's a savage.
He breathes fire. He's good, but
wait til I get my hands on him.

The Williamses look on in awe, arriving now at --

COURTS #9 AND #10

Where a fitness session's underway. Sweat-dripping PLAYERS run through ladders, doing sprints, jumping rope.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MACCI

This is it right here. You hear that sound? That sound is effort. I love effort. That's my happy place.

Very impressed, the family moves on to --

EXT. THE PATIO AREA - MACCI'S ACADEMY - MOMENTS LATER

Snacks. Food. Drinks. You name it, it's here.

MACCI

This is where we eat. Best french fries in Florida. Now look, this place will always be open and available to you guys. You help yourselves to whatever you want.

LYNN

Good, cause I'm hungry.

ISHA

(running after her)
For real? We just ate.

ORACENE

Quite a place you have here Rick.

MACCI

It just got a lot better today.

Oracene, Lynn and Isha head towards the food but --

Venus and Serena can't think about food. They've got tennis on the brain. Macchi sees.

MACCI

Come on, let me show you something.

Macchi leads them to the edge of the patio, now overlooking his kingdom, where they see --

COURTS #14 AND #15

Which are currently empty. From the patio, Macchi turns to admire them as to his left, Richard sees some... LESS IMPRESSIVE PLAYERS drilling on COURTS #9 and #10.

RICHARD

Whatchu got over there? Chum?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MACCI

Good eye. You know how it works. You need a few cheeseburgers to pay for the sirloin. You sell enough sirloin, you get to the filet mignon.

(pointing to courts
#14 and #15)

This is Mecca. Where you will be living and breathing. Every day. You and me. And the best pros we got. This is where we hit the horn and pop the corn. And when we pop it, we pop with extra butter, right?

They have no idea what this means, but it's all incredibly exciting as finally --

MACCI

Now, I got a little surprise for ya. This won't happen every day, but since she's here, I thought you might like to hit.

Macci turns to the left where on CENTER COURT, a 15-YEAR-OLD GIRL takes a water break from her practice. She's on court with a HITTING PARTNER and a COACH.

MACCI

Jennifer!

Venus and Serena recognize her immediately. #6 in the World, JENNIFER CAPRIATI. They greet her by the court.

CAPRIATI

Hey, I hear you guys can play. Wanna hit?

Venus and Serena look at Richard, smiles bursting.

VENUS AND SERENA

Yeah! Can we?

RICHARD

Have fun. Just go easy on her.

MACCI

Have fun girls.

The girls join Jennifer on CENTER COURT and begin to play doubles. We STAY WITH Richard and Macci watching nearby.

RICHARD

This is really special.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

MACCI

This is special for her too. I told her all about the girls and she wanted to meet Venus and Serena.

RICHARD

You know how to throw a party.

MACCI

Well it's good you guys are here.

Rick and Richard watch over the court and Jennifer and her partner and the girls warm up.

MACCI

That's the model right there. We follow Jennifer's path. We start with the Easter Bowl, then the Orange Bowl, just how Jennifer did it. They're good tournaments.

RICHARD

(interrupting)

I'm thinkin' we not gonna play the Easter Bowl.

MACCI

You got another tournament in mind?

RICHARD

No. I meant to tell you. We not playing no more Juniors. They'll play matches again when they turn pro.

Macci laughs.

MACCI

When's that?

RICHARD

When I say they're ready. We not rushing this, Rick. Everything's going good. We not gonna start rushing now.

Macci realizes Richard's serious. Not laughing anymore.

MACCI

What are they gonna do, play Ping-Pong?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

RICHARD

Practice with you. Go to school.
Go to the Hall. And be kids.

MACCI

That is not how it works. I can't
do that. I can't mold her like
that. No player -- not one -- has
ever gone pro without playing
Juniors. It's impossible.

RICHARD

Not for you. You're Rick Macci.
That's why we're here. Nothing is
impossible for Rick Macci. But if
you can't do it, we can go talk to
Nick --

Macci is furious, realizing he's been played. Venus,
distracted from her match, watches the argument, wary.

MACCI

(livid)
You might have mentioned all this
in Compton.

RICHARD

I might have, I guess. But then
you might not have made the
greatest decision of your life.

For Richard, the conversation's over. Starts to head off.

RICHARD

This is great, Rick. Oh, and I
need 'em hitting open-stance
strokes. That's the most
important. We gon' make this go
boom, like you said!

MACCI

I said Bang.

RICHARD

Bang, Boom, we gonna make it make
some noise. I gotta get the
family. They need to see this. I'm
gonna grab a burger you want
something?

(as he goes)

Don't be scared Rick. I wrote the
plan.

Richard leaves Macci in the wake of that bomb. Only day
one and he's already behind the 8 ball, watching --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

Venus, for this last moment -- still a kid, tossing the ball for a serve and we --

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. RICK MACCI TENNIS ACADEMY - COURTS #14 AND #15 -
(THREE YEARS LATER)

BOOM! A strong, 14-YEAR-OLD GIRL smashes the serve out of the air as we reveal --

It's Venus, pulverizing the ball like a pro. In the three years that have past, she's grown a foot and is now muscled and lean. She has a mouth full of BRACES and new BRAIDS in her hair.

Serena's here too, serving on the next court. She's 13 and strong. Sporting BRACES as well. They are powerful athletes, not little kids anymore.

Macci stands at their side, rocking a new 90's style, while PROS return the girls' serve.

MACCI

Come on! Use your legs. Get low.
You need to explode into the
court. Bang!

She crushes another serve. Another ace.

MACCI

There you go! Holy smokes. What'd
you hit that with? A bazooka?
There's no one on the tour, gonna
wanna get in front of that. Let's
go again.

(to his assistant)

Hey Barry! This time, rifle one at
her. I wanna Penn 1 tattoo on her
forehead

(to Venus)

That's one way to get sponsored.

Venus laughs, then crushes the serve, crashing the net, taking a LOW VOLLEY out of the air, continuing to close as the PRO feeds a HIGH HARD VOLLEY right at her head, that Venus, with excellent footwork, puts away.

MACCI

Alright. Come here. That wasn't a
good practice. Know why?

VENUS

Cause it was excellent?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MACCI

Exactly.

Macci gives her a high-five. It turns into a hug. In the time that has passed, these two have grown close. Macci then notices --

MACCI

Who's your old man got booked for today?

Richard (3 YEARS OLDER AS WELL and LOOKING WELL KEPT) riding outside the courts in his very own GOLF CART with a suited, JEREMY SCHAAP-like reporter while a CAMERAMAN films them.

ON THE BALCONY OUTSIDE THE CLUBHOUSE, Macci can see a CAMERA CREW setting up for a sit down interview.

VENUS

ESPN, maybe, I think. I'm getting interviewed next.

MACCI

Think there's enough film in that camera for both of you?

OFF Richard, enjoying the spotlight as we hear --

ESPN REPORTER (PRE-LAP)

You've faced a lot of criticism in the last three years since you pulled your daughters out of Junior Tournament tennis...

THE PATHWAY BETWEEN CENTER COURT AND COURT 14 - LATER

Richard is now walking with the reporter and cameraman.

ESPN REPORTER

You've been called controversial, overbearing, a self promoting distraction. How do you respond to all that?

RICHARD

Peoples can think what they want but I know that when somebody come to me and tell me how good my daughter is, that she should be playing matches, the only reason they see good is 'cause they see money that could go in their pocket.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ESPN REPORTER

But you've certainly said a lot of provocative things. You've said tennis parents should be shot. You said you're brokering a deal to purchase Rockefeller Center...

RICHARD

Truth is I've got so many businesses now, I hardly think about tennis.

ESPN REPORTER

And you're not concerned all that is holding them back? Most top prospects their age, like Martina Hingis for example, are about to turn pro, but your daughters haven't played a match since 1991.

RICHARD

No, we been pushing them forward. Venus' speaking four languages. Most of 'em fluently, almost. How many languages you speak?

(off his stunned
silence)

Exactly. Not even good at this one. Look, I've been broke all my life, and Venus doesn't want to be poor, but nobody going to push our daughter into anything.

(Richard "breaks"
from the interview)

What'd you think of that last one? Maybe we should try that again. I liked your other take best.

The Reporter, dumbfounded. They arrive outside Court 14 where Venus practices with Macchi. Richard yells out.

RICHARD

Junior. You got an interview. C'mon, Let's go.

ON COURTS #14 AND #15 - SAME

Venus hears, puts away a last serve. Starts packing up.

MACCI

Are you kidding? Come on! We got another two hours! You walk out right now, your sister's taking this court!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Venus just shrugs, knowing it's not really her call and keeps packing up as Rick looks to Richard, displeased.

RICHARD
Sorry, Rick. Showtime.

MACCI
It's always showtime, isn't it
Richard?

Macci just throws up his hands and --

MACCI
Hey Meek. Let's go, I know someone
wants to be here.

ON THE CLUBHOUSE BALCONY, OVERLOOKING COURTS - LATER

Venus now sits calm and collected with the Reporter for a sit down, ON CAMERA interview. Richard watches behind the monitors.

ESPN REPORTER
Do you want to turn pro?

VENUS
Yes.

ESPN REPORTER
A lot of people are excited to see
how you'd do against players like
Seles. Do you think you can beat
her?

VENUS
I know I can beat her.

ESPN REPORTER
You know you can beat her? Very
confident.

Venus smiles.

VENUS
I'm very confident.

ESPN REPORTER
You say it so easily. Why?

VENUS
Because I believe it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ESPN REPORTER

But you haven't played a match it almost 3 years.

RICHARD

Alright! Hold it right there, if you don't mind. And let me tell you why.

And suddenly Richard steps out from behind the equipment and gets straight in the Reporter's face and his frame.

ESPN REPORTER

Richard, we're doing an interview--

RICHARD

What she has said -- she said it with so much confidence the first time, but you keep going on and on.

ESPN REPORTER

But we can't keep interrupting. If you want to try and finish --

That is not going to happen. Richard towers above him.

RICHARD

You've got to understand that you're dealing with an image of a 14-year-old child. And this child going to be playing when your old ass and me gonna be in the grave. When she has said something, we done told you what's happening. You're dealing with a little black kid. And let her be a kid. She done answered it with a lot of confidence. Leave that alone!

The Reporter is silent. His trousers probably wet. Richard is frothing but --

We END ON Venus, who's attention has drifted off toward --

CENTER COURT below her where Venus can see there's a buzz in the air. ALL THE OTHER COACHES AND KIDS at the academy have surrounded CENTER COURT. A MATCH UNDERWAY.

Off Venus, intrigued --

EXT. RICK MACCI TENNIS ACADEMY - COURTS 14 AND 15 - A FEW MOMENTS LATER

Her interview over, Venus returns to the court where Serena is SPARRING with MacCI, holding a punching bag.

MACCI

Keep moving those feet or I'm gonna pop you.

Pow! Serena sneaks in a blow when MacCI's attention is turned by Venus' return.

MACCI

How'd it go up there, Shakespeare? You think you got the part?

Venus is not in the mood. She looks to Center Court.

VENUS

What's going on over there?

MACCI

Big Junior Tournament's coming up. Continental Cup. Kournikova came in town to practice.

That gets her attention. From a distance, she now sees 14-year-old ANNA KOURNIKOVA, tennis' Lolita, preening around Center Court. Venus brims with envy.

VENUS

She's going pro next month in Russia at a Fed Cup event. Hingis announced, too.

MACCI

You wanna go to Russia? The food stinks there. It's freezing.

Venus rolls her eyes.

VENUS

I'm serious. I wanna play.

MACCI

Hey, you're preaching to the choir.

VENUS

You think I'm ready right?

MACCI

I know you're ready.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VENUS

OK. Will you talk to my Dad?
Please.

MACCI

What? You're trying to throw me to
the wolves, huh?

VENUS

Rick, just talk to him. Please.
(Rick hems and haws)
Is that a yes?

MACCI

It's that face, I can't...

VENUS

So yes?

MACCI

Yes. Yes. Alright.

Venus hugs him happily.

MACCI

All right. All right. Let's just
hope he doesn't actually kill the
messenger.

EXT. RICK MACCI ACADEMY - PATH NEAR COURT 7 - ANOTHER DAY

Richard leads Venus, Serena, and a DOZEN YOUNG INNER-CITY
KIDS through Macci's grounds toward the court.

Macci watches from afar as Richard speaks to a NEWSPAPER
REPORTER who is trailing along, taking notes.

RICHARD

-- And that's why we not rushing.
With no education, as good as they
are, they won't keep their money.
They'll be broke by 18 and have 50
more years to live like a fool. We
not doing that.

The reporter is speechless as Macci approaches.

MACCI

What's going on everybody?

RICHARD

There's Rick Macci. Rick owns
everything you see.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MACCI

True... Richard, do you think I could bend your ear for a minute?

Richard slows. To his daughters --

RICHARD

Go ahead and get started. I'll be right there in a minute.

They do as they're told, leading the kids onto COURT 7 where they begin setting up for the clinic. Once Macchi has Richard alone --

MACCI

There's a tournament in Oakland in October. Bank of the West Classic. I talked to the director. They'll give Venus a wildcard if we committed now, and my friend Patrick, he's from Nike, he's gonna be there and he's available for a sit down.

RICHARD

I don't like that Rick. Don't talk to peoples behind my back.

MACCI

Richard, she's fourteen. Hingis just turned pro. Kournikova's going soon. I don't understand why we would give them a head start. Jennifer'd already been on a friggin' Wheaties box by now and Venus is twice as good as Jennifer ever was.

RICHARD

You mean, Jennifer who just dropped off the tour?

MACCI

She didn't drop off. She's taking a break. A vacation.

RICHARD

I hear she's burnt out.

MACCI

Richard, Jennifer's fine. But we're not talking about her. We're talking about Venus. Let's get this show on the road. She's ready. I can see it in her eyes.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

MACCI (CONT'D)

She's hungry. She's got the fire.
C'mon Richard, what do you say?

RICHARD

Did she send you up here to talk
to me?

MACCI

It's not just my idea.

RICHARD

Rick, I don't say this to you too
often. You are not wrong. But
that's all you getting from me
today. Ok? Let me think about it.

MACCI

I'll take it. Thank you for your
time, Richard.

For once, it appears Richard might be listening but --

EXT. RICK MACCI TENNIS ACADEMY - CAFE - EVENING

A couple nights later, Richard sits at the cafe counter
with a burger when --

RICHARD

My wife thinks I got a girlfriend
down here I come eat your burgers
so much. She don't know I'm
cheating on her cooking.

A BREAKING NEWS REPORT COMES ON THE TV at the cafe. ON
SCREEN: Outside THE GABLES INN. A \$50-a-night, fleabag
motel in Southern Florida.

NEWS BROADCASTER (PRE-LAP)

Jennifer Capriati now faces her
most serious court battle. The 18-
year-old was arrested this weekend
at a Florida motel and charged
with possession of marijuana. Two
of her companions faced other
charges relating to cocaine and
heroin. It was the second arrest
for the troubled tennis star in
only six months.

Capriati's infamous MUG SHOT fills the screen. A troubled
18-year-old kid, screaming for help.

Richard views it, disturbed, watching his girls play on
the court beneath him and --

EXT. RICK MACCI TENNIS ACADEMY - COURTS 14 AND 15 - DAY

Arriving for practice, Macci walks on the court to find Barry and another assistant serving balls to each other.

MACCI

Let's go! What do ya say, what do ya say, it's time to get sharp for L.A. Little steps, big results. Where is everybody?
(as nobody speaks up)
Somebody know something? What's going on?

BARRY

(reluctantly)
Disney World. Richard said practice was canceled for today.

Macci shakes his head in disbelief, hitting a ball out of frustration that soars off to the moon and then --

EXT. WILLIAMS' HOUSE (FLORIDA) - DAY

Macci leans against the hood of his NISSAN 300Z, parked outside, waiting as Richard's MINIVAN pulls up the drive.

Richard, Oracene, Venus, Serena, Lynn, and Isha get out of the car. The girls wear MICKEY MOUSE EARS.

MACCI

Everyone have fun?

SERENA

I rode on Space Mountain.

MACCI

Space Mountain? That's great. Richard, a minute.

ORACENE

Come on, girls. You've got homework.

Oracene leads the girls away, leaving Richard with Rick. Aware a decision is looming, Venus lingers to eavesdrop.

MACCI

We had a practice scheduled. Tournament's just a few weeks away. So we gotta practice.

Venus and Oracene listen in.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RICHARD

Yeah. I decided we not playing that tournament.

VENUS

Daddy, what? Why, what happened?

RICHARD

It's ok Junior. I'm not letting him burn you out like he did with Capriati.

MACCI

I'm sorry. Like I did with what?

RICHARD

You were her coach, right? That's all you been saying. Look at Jennifer. Look at Jennifer. Well, we looking. She on TV. Shoplifting. Arrested. Venus is not gonna be cracked out in some alley 'cause she got pushed there by you.

Venus, not wanting her father to see her cry, heads off toward the house. Oracene follows her in.

Richard clocks their exit as he continues with Macci.

MACCI

You proud of yourself, now? You just broke her heart.

(about to leave it at that, but then)

I'll tell you what, man. You got a better curve ball than Greg Maddux.

RICHARD

Nothing personal, Rick. Just gotta keep 'em off balance.

MACCI

Not your teammates, you don't. I'm pretty tired of these games.

RICHARD

What games?

Macci shoots him a look -- are you serious?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

MACCI

You showed up here, first thing you did, you pull 'em out of Juniors. Now you pull them out of practice for music lessons or homework or church or --

RICHARD

They gotta get A's if they want to play tennis. That's the rules.

MACCI

-- or you pull 'em out to train with other coaches behind my back.

RICHARD

They needed work on their volleys.

MACCI

I'M WORKING ON THEIR VOLLEYS! I'm their goddamn coach!

RICHARD

I'm roundin' out their game, Rick. They're not gonna get there doing drills that every Junior in America is doin'. I'm just lookin' out for my kids.

Macci just shakes his head. Unbelievable.

MACCI

You're looking out for yourself. All I hear from you is pressure, pressure, pressure. Know what I see, every day, on TV? 'The Richard Williams Show.' A million dollars. Number one. The greatest ever. You don't think that adds pressure?

RICHARD

It's confidence.

MACCI

It's bullshit. And it's about you. You wanna jerk my chain, jerk it. But do not do it to those girls.

RICHARD

With all due respect, Rick, you're a very good coach. You're like a member of our family. But you workin' for us.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

RICHARD (CONT'D)

I wrote *the plan* and I said she's not playin'. I'm calling the shots. I'm sorry if you don't like that.

Macci heads away broiling, yelling --

MACCI

Screw your frickin' plan. You don't know what you're doing.

(beat)

Nice house, by the way. Remind me who pays for that?

RICHARD

Don't do that. You're better than that.

Macci gets in his car, SLAMS the door, and peels out, leaving Richard in the shadow of his home.

INT. WILLIAMS' HOME (FLORIDA) - MOMENTS LATER

Richard enters. He walks towards to living room already having put the conversation behind him.

Oracene clocks him. Angry. More so when Venus walks out the door with her tennis bag and Richard pays no mind.

ORACENE

You going after her?

RICHARD

Let me sit here a minute. She'll be fine.

ORACENE

No, she won't! You need to fix this.

Richard gets up and starts to walk to the kitchen.

RICHARD

I put this whole thing together and now everybody thinks they know better than me.

Oracene follows him in.

ORACENE

Oh. You think you did this by yourself?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RICHARD

From the moment we met, on that bus stop. You didn't even tell me your real name. You thought I was just another dumb nigga. Just like them white boys. You never believed in none of this.

ORACENE

When did I not believe? When?! You're not the only dreamer in this family. There would be no dream if it wasn't for me. I carried those girls, inside me and on my back. And I carried you too. I worked two shifts putting food on our table. That open stance stroke -- you got that from me! I fixed Serena's serve when you kept messing it up!

RICHARD

When you what?

ORACENE

Yeah. That's right. I fixed that toss you messed up. I've been here dreaming and believing the whole time, just like you. You just don't want to see me.

RICHARD

Whatchu want? A thank-you?

ORACENE

That's all right Richard. I don't need your thank you. Unlike you, I don't need the world to tell me I'm great.

At that, Richard starts to walk off.

ORACENE

That's right. Go ahead. Walk away. You are good at that. That's what you do, right? When things get hard, you just quit. Like you did with your cement business and your cleaning company. And all your other kids.

RICHARD

Oh, you got something you need to get off your chest?

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

RICHARD (CONT'D)

Well don't let God stop you. Say what you wanna say.

ORACENE

I just said it! You don't think I remember your son showing up in his red Nissan truck and knock on our door, and all you had to say was, 'Look, it's my son. He found me' -- or when your other kids came after. See, another woman would have left, but I stayed 'cause I don't quit. You're the one who leaves.

RICHARD

Go ahead then.

ORACENE

I'm gonna stay right here until the job is done.

RICHARD

Don't do me no favors.

ORACENE

Richard, you think I'm staying here because of you?

(beat)

I'm staying her because of my girls. I'm staying here cause I answer to something higher than you. If was staying here because of you, I would have been gone a long time ago.

RICHARD

Look where you live! Look at this house! Look at that pool! Where would you be if it wasn't for me? In some apartment with three kids with their daddy gone.

ORACENE

That's your ego and bragging. You're just scared you will fail. Scared that the world will look at you and see another dumb nigga.

(beat)

And you think they might be right!

Richard finally quiets and Oracene knows she's hit him close to the bone. She takes a moment. Comes to him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

ORACENE

I have never thought that about you. Richard, you've done your job. And I've done mine too but this is Venus's life and you have to let her decide. 'Cause if you don't do that, she's going to be the one who leaves you.

OFF Richard, laid low. Oracene standing by his side.

EXT. RICK MACCI TENNIS ACADEMY - TENNIS COURTS - NIGHT

POP! POP! POP! Venus is alone on the court, hammering forehands against the ball machine. Letting out her frustration in a fury -- Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom! -- until she sees:

Richard, approaching the court.

RICHARD

You hit them balls any harder, you gon' break 'em in half.

Aware what he's doing, Venus doesn't engage. Just continues to hit. Trying her teenager best to ignore him. But, he won't let her do it. Instead --

Richard picks up a racket and steps on the court. He turns off the ball machine and, just like old times, begins to feed her from the basket.

Venus is pissed. She draws her hand across her face (like Richard does in his moments of stress) and takes her place on the baseline, bristling with frustration.

Richard feeds her a ball and Venus -- BOOM! -- blows it past him on the court. It's a challenge. Richard feeds her another and -- BANG! -- Venus fires it back him so fast he has to duck out of the way.

Richard's starting to realize. He feeds again and again and each time that he does --

Venus hits the shit out of the ball with more fury and grace than he's ever seen in his life and it's clear she's not still just a kid on that court back in Compton.

By the time Richard stops, Venus' eyes spill with tears.

RICHARD

What? You think you should play?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VENUS

I don't know why you won't let me.
'Less you think I'm not ready.

Richard waves her forward and they stand like opponents,
on opposite sides of the net.

RICHARD

When I was a little boy, I grew up
in Shreveport. One day my father
took me to town. He gave me this
money to pay this white man for
something. Back in them days,
black folks wasn't allowed to
touch white peoples. So I went to
give the man this money and I
accidentally touched his hand and
he start beating on me. He knocked
me down. His friends come over,
they all start stomping on me,
beating on me. And I look up and
see my father in the crowd, and he
took off running. Left me there
with these grown men beating on
me.

(as Venus listens)

Now, I haven't been no great
daddy. But I've never done nothing
but try and protect you. This next
step you 'bout to take, it would
be hard for anybody. But for you,
you not just gon' be representing
you. You gon' be representing
every little black girl on earth.
And you gonna be the first one
going through that gate, and I
just never wanted you to look up
and see your daddy running away.

Richard smiles a little. Venus takes a long beat.

VENUS

Daddy, you always said I'd be
number one in the world. Let's go
show all these people I can handle
what's coming. I will not let you
down.

RICHARD

Junior, how the hell could you?

Richard and Venus embrace, beaming with excitement as --

EXT. BANK OF THE WEST TOURNAMENT - DAY (VARIOUS SHOTS)

A drone shot pushes in on the bustling grounds of a PROFESSIONAL TENNIS TOURNAMENT as we hear --

ESPN REPORTER (V.O.)

Welcome to Oakland, California, for the Bank of the West Classic, where tomorrow, world number one and reigning US Open champion, Arantxa Sanchez Vicario, will face a tough draw of challengers all hoping to take home the \$400,000 purse.

An ESPN REPORTER broadcasts as we see --

- TICKETED FANS entering the event through the turnstiles, making their way excitedly into --

- The massive event. PACKED PRACTICE COURTS where PRO PLAYERS warm up. THEIR COACHES looking on. PRESS covering the event. FANS watching, getting AUTOGRAPHS as --

INT. TUNNELS -- OAKLAND COLOSSEUM - DAY (VARIOUS SHOTS)

A Madonna-esque, BLEACHED-HAIRED WTA OFFICIAL - (ANNE - CEO WTA TOUR) - leads Venus and her entire family through the backstage tunnels of the ARENA as the report continues --

ESPN REPORTER (V.O.)

Among them, 14-year-old Venus Williams, who takes the court in her first ever professional match.

On their walk, they pass -- ARANTXA SANCHEZ VICARIO, the Spanish superstar and #1 seed, speaking to a TOURNAMENT OFFICIAL, who treats her like a queen as --

ESPN REPORTER (V.O.)

In fact, it will be the first match Williams has played at any level in over three years since her father made the controversial decision to pull her out of junior tournament tennis, which is the normal conduit to Tennis Superstardom.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - OAKLAND COLOSSEUM ARENA - DAY

Venus makes her way through a locker room filled with A DOZEN OTHER VERY ADULT, INTERNATIONAL PLAYERS and TOURNAMENT OFFICIALS waiting for their matches to begin, speaking ALL DIFFERENT LANGUAGES. The record scratches when they see --

The teenager, looking a lot like a kid. Venus pans over their skeptical faces and --

EXT. PRACTICE COURTS - DAY (VARIOUS SHOTS)

The scrutiny and attention continues as Venus (wearing a RAIDERS HAT) practices on the courts with Macci while PRESS and FANS watch intently.

ESPN REPORTER (V.O.)

And many questions remain about how this talented youngster will now fare under the pressure and spotlight of the professional tour against veteran players after so long away from competition. A worry even her outspoken father cannot hide.

Among the onlookers, land on Richard, coaching from the sidelines as we cut to:

EXT. PRACTICE COURTS - OAKLAND ARENA - DAY

Richard, interviewed ON CAMERA by the ESPN REPORTER.

RICHARD

You've been working for this day for nine long, hard years and you be saying, well, we gonna get there. We gonna get there and, finally, you get there like today and you find out -- WOW! -- we don't belongs here. We belongs someplace else. We belong back in the ghetto!

Slowly, we back to reveal --

INT. MARRIOTT HOTEL (OAKLAND) - WILLIAMS' SUITE - NIGHT

We are viewing the NEWS REPORT on a TV inside a hotel suite where Richard and Macci watch the segment wrap up.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ESPN REPORTER (V.O.)

A genius? A huckster? Tomorrow, we'll finally see. Is his dream only hype, or is his daughter, in fact, what the tennis world has been waiting for?

MACCI

You light a heck of a fire man.
(flicking off the TV)
Last year this tournament gave out 24 media credentials. This year, 200. They should hire you to promote it.

His self-satisfaction is paused by a KNOCK on the door. Everyone jumps to action.

MACCI

We should get Venus, right? It's go time guys. Look alive.

RICHARD

The Nike man's here. Get in your positions.

Macci opens the door to reveal PATRICK, A NIKE REP.

MACCI

Good to see you, my man.
(then - introducing)
Richard Williams --

Patrick and Richard shake hands as he introduces the family.

RICHARD

This is my wife Oracene.
(then Venus)
You know who that is. That's who you brought the briefcase for.

PATRICK

(taking a seat)
I'm sure it's been a long trip and you've got a big day tomorrow so I am not going to take up too much of your time. I hope it's clear how highly we regard your daughter. We'd love to take her off the table right now.

Patrick presents them with AN OFFER.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

PATRICK

That's THREE MILLION DOLLARS. A signature line, a signature shoe. We'll build our women's brand around Venus and make her a marquee player. How does that sound?

Patrick looks for an answer from Richard, who for once, confers with Oracene. They're in silent agreement and --

RICHARD

I don't know why you're looking at me. She's the one you're pitching.

He's pointing to Venus. Pat's wrong-footed, recalibrates.

PATRICK

What do you think, Venus? That's a generous deal. That's one million more than Capriati got before she went pro, plus a real commitment to invest in the charity and outreach programs you and your family support. We believe you are going to have a tremendous career and we'd like to help you start building it today.

Sounds great. Venus is silent. Patrick thinks he's got her. But Venus and her family aren't jumping. A long beat. Macchi turns to the rep.

MACCI

Maybe give us a minute.

PATRICK

Of course. Think it over. But just so we're clear. That deal's for tonight only. It's off the table once you step on the court tomorrow.

MACCI

Understood. We'll get back to you.

Macchi shows Patrick out, leaving the family alone. Oracene's disapproval is clear.

RICHARD

Just fix your face until the man leaves.

ORACENE

What does he mean by that?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

Once Patrick has gone, Macci returns hoping for answers.

MACCI

What is going on?

ORACENE

What did he mean by 'one night only'?

RICHARD

Oh, he's just trying to scare us.

MACCI

That's right, he's trying to scare us and guess what? I'm scared. I'm frickin' terrified! That's three million dollars! What's the problem?

RICHARD

They haven't even seen her play yet.

MACCI

They don't need to! You did it. I thought you were nuts, all the talking and the interviews and the nonsense, but you were right. She's a star. We won. That's check mate. Why is everyone so glum?

For once, Richard's silent. Macci does not understand.

MACCI

Oracene, help me out here.

ORACENE

You need to be talking to Venus.

Rick turns back to Venus.

MACCI

What are we doing here, V?

VENUS

I just wanna go out and prove what I can do. I know it's a good offer but --

MACCI

Good? It's unbelievable. This is money that changes your lives.

Macci turns to Richard, who, for the first time, is wavering, unsure what to do -- but Venus is not.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

She looks to her father, saying: "Come on. I got this."
So Richard follows her lead, summoning bravado and --

RICHARD

You're asking this girl to take
all the hard work she don' did for
ten years and take the first damn
offer that comes through the door?
That's not right and you know it.
She wants a chance to compete.

MACCI

We haven't even seen the draw. We
don't know who she's playing!

RICHARD

She don't care about that.
(to Venus)
Venus Williams, do you care who
you play?

VENUS

No, Daddy.

RICHARD

Venus Williams, you gonna beat
whoever it is?

VENUS

Yes, Daddy.

RICHARD

Venus Williams, do you wanna take
this deal?

VENUS

No.

RICHARD

(to the others)
Well, that's it. She ain't
signing. Let's get something to
eat. Rick, you hungry?

Rick's incredulous.

MACCI

No.

RICHARD

Come on Rick. You got to pay for
this food.

Richard's up to his feet, trying to round up the troops
when --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

TUNDE

Hey y'all.

Tunde steps through the door and the family all hug her.
A joyous reunion only --

We stay on Macci, still licking his wounds and --

EXT. SATELLITE COURT - OAKLAND COLOSSEUM ARENA - SAME

Finally, it's game day and we're right into the match.

On a SATELLITE COURT packed with SPECTATORS - Serena,
Lynn, Isha, Tunde, Oracene, and Macci among them --

Venus is battling #52 in the world and former NCAA Champ,
SHAUN STAFFORD, and it's not going well.

In point after point, Stafford displays a veteran's
poise, controlling the match with ease.

After an easy put away at the net --

CHAIR UMPIRE

Game, Stafford. Stafford leads two
games to love.

BEHIND THE FENCE AT THE BACK OF THE COURT

Richard stands away from his family, back turned to the
court, only listening to the sounds as --

EXT. SATELLITE COURT - OAKLAND COLOSSEUM ARENA - DAY

Venus steadies her breath in the flash of the cameras,
tosses the ball, and BOOM! -- she cracks her first serve.
LONG. She sets up again -- WHACK! Into the net. Double
fault.

CHAIR UMPIRE

Love 15.

HER TEAM REACTS, just nerves. THE CROWD (Patrick from
Nike among them) REACTS: Oh, no.

RICHARD paces nervously with his toothpick --

RICHARD

(to himself)
Come on, Junior. You got this.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

A little cautious now, Venus hits a safe serve. A short rally ensues, but Venus hits a short ball that Stafford steps into and puts away for a winner.

CHAIR UMPIRE

Love 30.

VENUS LOOKS TO HER TEAM. They shout encouragement.

ORACENE

Come on, Venus! Just breathe.

Now Venus gets in her first serve but after a short rally, she misses a ball into the net.

CHAIR UMPIRE

Love 40.

BESIDE THE FENCE, Richard tries to will her himself but --

Facing three break points, Venus hits another safe serve leading to a baseline rally that finally ends when --

Stafford hits a well disguised drop shot that paralyzes Venus.

CHAIR UMPIRE

Game, Stafford. Stafford leads, three games to love.

Venus can hear the crowds murmur as she goes to the changeover. She looks to her FAMILY. Serena's urging her on. Her FATHER'S seat empty. Macci, nerves bare as --

PATRICK

(arriving)

She's looking a little tight out there, but she's gonna loosen up. I'm gonna check out another match, but I'll talk to you later. OK?

Macci and the family watch as Patrick, the meal ticket, departs and --

CHAIR UMPIRE

Game Stafford. Stafford leads four games to love.

It feels like the air has been let out of the bag.

Venus can feel all their eyes on her, already writing her off. Ruling her a bust. It's not making her nervous. It's making her mad and --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

MACCI

Let that go. Next game. Let it go.

Venus tries to reset. Walking back to the baseline, she meets eyes with her father.

He gives her a look -- motioning her to relax and --

Venus takes a long beat. Bouncing on the sidelines, calming herself, determination boiling over and --

When she finally retakes the court, there is steel in her eyes so this time when Stafford serves --

Venus doesn't hold back. She nails a wicked return and begins a long rally. Feeling cocky, Stafford goes for another drop shot.

It's a beauty, dropping just over the net. It looks like a winner only --

This time Venus explodes, sprinting up from the baseline, getting there just in time to hit a wicked slice past her.

THE CROWD OOHS. THE FAMILY CLAPS. Stafford takes notices.

CHAIR UMPIRE

Love - 15.

A little confidence now, Venus takes Stafford's next serve, ending a long baseline rally with a backhand winner up the line that leaves Stafford frozen and --

RICHARD

There you go! There you go!

We can feel the tide shifting. Stafford can too. She serves again, trying to blast her but --

Venus hits a deep return and moves into the court, taking Stafford's next ball out of the air -- ripping a swinging forehand volley for a winner and --

The family's now on their feet! Stafford searches for answers but there are none to be found as --

Over the next several points, Venus takes control of the match, showing all of her weapons, stealing the game and Stafford's confidence and serving notice to everyone --

To Nike, the press and the crowd -- that this girl is for real and there's no stopping her now as --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

Venus locks eyes with her father, stepping up to the line, ready to serve the next game. Now brimming with confidence.

She tosses the ball and OFF THE SMASH OF HER RACKET --

INT. HALLWAY -- OAKLAND COLOSSEUM ARENA - DAY

BAM! The match is over. Victorious and beaming, Venus returns to the tunnel, met by THE ESPN REPORTER and a CAMERA CREW for her post match interview.

They walk and talk with her, moving down the hall toward the locker room.

REPORTER

You were great tonight, Venus.
Were you surprised how you handled
your nerves?

VENUS

I was somewhat surprised and
somewhat not surprised. I guess,
since I haven't played a
tournament, I was surprised I
wasn't nervous or jumpy but I
wasn't surprised because I know I
can play and no one's going to
stop me.

REPORTER

Tomorrow you play the top seed,
Vicario. She's number one in the
world. A three-time Grand Slam
champ. How do you think you'll
hold up?

VENUS

I think I have the game to beat
anyone. I just have to play it.

RICHARD

All right. She's done. You said
a few, that's enough.

Richard and Venus leave the reporter in the hallway and enter the corridor that leads to the locker room where --

Macci is waiting.

MACCI

Let's go! What did you do out
there? I can't believe it. It's
like she's a hired assassin.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Laughing, Venus exits toward the locker room as Macchi stays behind with Richard.

MACCI

I talked to Dougherty. They're upping their offer. Four million. You believe it?!

RICHARD

We'll keep our chips on the table.

MACCI

You're gonna lose 'em, man. The deals'll be gone. Richard, she can't beat Vicario. She's the best player on the planet.

RICHARD

Yeah, but what if she do?

Richard leaves with a wink, passing Bud Collins (the Bob Hope of tennis who Richard pitched many years ago).

RICHARD

Nice to see you again, Bud. You still got them pretty pants on. Told you so.

It takes a minute after Richard's gone for Bud to remember. Holy shit. That was him. Off Bud's shock.

MACCI

You know him?

BUD COLLINS

Rick, if she beats Vicario -- a 14-year-old who's never played a match just walks off the street and beats the top player on the planet. Forget Ali-Frazier. It'll be the greatest upset in the history of sports.

Macchi smiles, just dizzy at the thought of it while --

INT. LOCKER ROOM - OAKLAND COLOSSEUM ARENA - DAY

Venus enters the locker room, passing through a mix of congratulatory / and jealous PLAYERS, holding her composure together until --

INT. BATHROOM - LOCKER ROOM - COLOSSEUM - THAT MOMENT

She enters the bathroom, locking the door. Finally a moment alone and then --

VENUS

YES!

Venus explodes! Finally letting it out. Celebrating in a uninhibited joy *until* -- BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

Someone knocks on the door. Venus freezes, embarrassed.

VENUS

Sorry! One second.

Covering her mouth with her hand, Venus stifles a laugh. Once her heart has stopped racing, she again pumps her fist, only this time in silence and --

INT. HALLWAY - OAKLAND COLOSSEUM ARENA - THAT MOMENT

While waiting for Venus in the hall, Richard spots a small figure, standing alone, silhouetted in the mouth of the huge stadium court.

It's Serena. Richard approaches.

RICHARD

Hey Meeka, come on.

Richard considers his daughter, now aware what she's viewing. The enormous stage. The blazing sun. Her future.

RICHARD

Oh. I get it. Ok. You think you the only one who sees that?

Despite her attempts to show otherwise, Serena betrays that he's right.

RICHARD

I know you love Venus, and this is very exciting, but I'm sure it's hard for you, too. Feel like nobody's watching? No one sees?

Serena nods, maybe starting to realize what he's up to.

RICHARD

Let me tell you a secret. Your sister will be number one in the world. There's no doubt about it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SERENA

I know that.

RICHARD

But you -- Meeka, you gonna be the best there ever was. The greatest of all time. You know how I know? 'Cause I planned for it. You've been in Venus' shadow 'cause I knew it would make you tough. I know it would make you a fighter and look at you now. Meeka, your time's going to come.

Serena is smiling and fighting back tears.

SERENA

That really what you've been doing?

RICHARD

I know I tell a lot of tales, but I don't tell 'em to you. C'mon now. Move your feets.

Serena looks at the court. At her future. Just blinding.

ORACENE (PRE-LAP)

Whatever happens tonight, you remember that you come from a rich history of people.

INT. MARRIOTT HOTEL (OAKLAND) - WILLIAMS' SUITE - DAY

The next day, Venus and Serena sit in front of their mother playing paddy cake as she works on their hair. It's incredibly intricate, but we can't see the results.

ORACENE

Like Sojourner Truth. You remember what she said?

VENUS

Yeah. She said, "ain't I a woman!"

ORACENE

That's right. And what did she mean?

SERENA

That she was strong. That she could do anything.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ORACENE

Exactly. That she was a young black woman just like you guys. And she deserves to be seen and deserves to be heard. So tonight I want you to remember who you are, remember where you came from. Stand tall and be proud.

Her work finally finished, Oracene pauses to admire it.

ORACENE

You look beautiful.
(beat)
You are beautiful Venus. You too Serena.

The girls smile. They are gorgeous. Full of pride as --

EXT. OAKLAND COLOSSEUM ARENA - NIGHT (ESTABLISHING)

A DRONE SHOT CREEPS OVER and INTO the center court arena.

The STANDS ARE PACKED. The BALL KIDS waiting like young cadets at their posts. The atmosphere is electric as --

MALE TV ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

Hello and welcome back to Oakland on a beautiful night for our second round match between --

INT. ANNOUNCERS BOOTH, OAKLAND COLOSSEUM ARENA - SAME

High above the court, the TV ANNOUNCERS set the stage.

MALE TV ANNOUNCER

-- reigning French and US Open Champion Arantxa Sanchez Vicario and Venus Williams, the heralded 14-year-old from Compton, California making her center court debut before a sold-out crowd tonight.

The anticipation's at a fever pitch as --

INT. COURT / HALLWAY - OAKLAND COLOSSEUM ARENA - NIGHT

Venus -- steps out of the shadows of the tunnel and for the first time we see:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HER HAIR IS BRAIDED IN THOSE FAMOUS WHITE BEADS that swing and click as they move. The look's legendary and powerful -- Batman donning his first suit.

THE MOMENT IS ICONIC.

Watching in the tunnel, Richard's profoundly moved.

RICHARD

Love you Junior.

VENUS

Love you too, Daddy.

He watches as his daughter makes her way toward the court, followed closely by her opponent, Vicario.

RICHARD

Good luck tonight. Hope you win.

Vicario is stupefied as she joins Venus, bouncing at the entrance like a Gladiator, trying to calm her emotions. Vicario's calm. She has been here before and --

TENNIS ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

Making her center court debut here tonight, in just her second professional match, please give a warm Bay Area welcome to the 14-year-old phenom from Compton, California, Venus Williams!

Venus heads onto the court and waves at the crowd. The scale is immense. The bright lights at night. The entire stadium, full. She's calmed to find --

Oracene, Macci, and her sisters cheering IN THE STANDS. Serena on her feet -- HER HAIR IN BEADS TOO.

TENNIS ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

Now, please join me in welcoming to the court, hailing from Spain, a three-time Grand Slam Champion and the number one seed, Arantxa Sánchez Vicario.

Vicario takes the court and they begin to warm up as --

IN THE HALLWAY, Richard turns his attention to a MOUNTED TV ON THE WALL BROADCASTING THE MATCH. He settles in for a long night and --

MONTAGE - EXT. OAKLAND COLOSSEUM ARENA - NIGHT

BAM! WE'RE INTO THE MATCH. INTERCUTTING BETWEEN RICHARD, watching on the TV in the tunnels and --

VENUS ON COURT, who comes out just smoking. In midst of a rally, Vicario hits a short forehand that Venus rips for a winner. 15-0.

She pounds an ACE up the tee, leaving VICARIO whiffing. Venus looks to her box. 30-0

She serves and volleys, wins the point at the net. 40-0.

She hits an aggressive second serve, then a deep approach shot, then a swinging volley for a winner.

CHAIR UMPIRE

Game, Williams. She leads one zero, first set.

THE WILLIAMS FAMILY CHEERS.

SERENA

Yeah, Venus!

RICHARD nods. Chews his toothpick. Allows a smile.

IT'S NOW THE SECOND GAME. Vicario's preparing to serve, already facing two break points.

CHAIR UMPIRE

15-40.

Vicario cracks a good serve but Venus hits a deep return, taking control of the rally - hitting through every ball, while Vicario loops and slices until --

With ice in her veins, Venus rips an OPEN STANCE FOREHAND cross-court for a winner.

CHAIR UMPIRE

Game, Williams. Williams leads two games to love. First set.

The crowd applauds. The family claps.

IT'S NOW THE THIRD GAME and Venus ends it with a scorching ACE in the corner.

CHAIR UMPIRE

Game, Williams. Williams leads three games to love. First set.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

In the hall, Richard turns to A SECURITY GUARD watching beside him.

RICHARD

You see flames come off that ball?

IT'S NOW THE FIFTH GAME. Venus is serving again, this time drilling an ACE down the T.

In the hall, Richard slaps hands with the guard.

RICHARD

My wife taught her that. That's Venus Williams. Remember that name. You see how she do that open stance? That's what we worked on.

IT'S NOW THE EIGHT GAME of the set and it's clear Venus is feeling it. She's leading 5-2 and there is steel in her eyes. She's in total control. Bouncing on the baseline, waiting to rip the cover off the ball.

Vicario, on the other hand, is sweating, trying just to stay in the set. Down 30-40 right now. Counter-punching in a rally. It's what Paul would call paddy-cake. Venus is not here to play.

She runs her all over the court, hitting hard, clean, and deep. Vicario finally runs out of steam and sails a forehand long.

Brimming with confidence, Venus demurely pumps her fist to her box.

CHAIR UMPIRE

Game. First set, Venus Williams.

Vicario can not believe it. She throws her hands up toward her team in disgust as --

The players head to the chairs. The CROWD ROARS. The Williams' box, Serena mostly, jumps out of their seats.

IN THE TUNNEL, Richard can hardly contain himself.

Vicario sits, searching for answers in her towel while Venus, once again, just bounces at the line like a heavyweight champ who can't wait for the toll of the bell. Here it is.

CHAIR UMPIRE

Time!

AND THEY'RE BACK AT IT.

And to Vicario's dismay, it's more of the same. The scoreboard's already reading: 1-2. Vicario's serve.

She's running Venus side to side, trying to be more aggressive. She hits a big forehand and comes in behind it but --

Venus gets to it, uncorking an open stance forehand passing shot for the winner. Vicario's stunned.

CHAIR UMPIRE

Game. Williams. Williams leads
three games to one.

The CROWD GOES FUCKING NUTS. The Williams family explodes. Venus is on the brink. Bud Collins looks to Macci. "Holy shit, she's gonna do it."

And that's when it happens.

The players walk off for the change over. Venus stands bouncing, like always as --

Vicario fumes, searching for answers. She looks over at Venus, then up to HER OWN BOX. An idea beginning to form.

Vicario approaches the CHAIR UMPIRE. Says something unheard. The Umpire nods and Vicario walks off the court, disappearing into the tunnel, leaving Venus confused, bouncing on the court by herself.

The umpire waves her over to explain.

CHAIR UMPIRE

She's using the toilet.

Venus nods, watching her opponent head off into --

INT. HALLWAY - OAKLAND COLOSSEUM ARENA - NIGHT

The tunnels where Richard watches on the TV. He sees Vicario exiting the court ON THE SCREEN just as --

Vicario, in the flesh, escorted by SECURITY, passes by him in the tunnel with surprisingly little urgency.

She approaches the locker room, pausing a moment to re-tie her shoe, before slipping inside.

Richard cops her, suspicious as --

EXT. OAKLAND COLOSSEUM ARENA - NIGHT

Back in the arena, Venus still bounces in place, watching the COURT CLOCK TICK. 5 minutes... 6 minutes...

Oracene turns to Macchi in the stands.

ORACENE

What's taking her so long?

MACCI

She's icing her.

ORACENE

What?! She can't do that?! There's not a rule?

MACCI

There's nothing they can do. She can just say that she's in there using the toilet. It's a dirty old trick.

The family steams. The crowd bristles. Venus hops up and down, alone on the court, with nothing but her thoughts for what seems like an eternity. A lifetime to consider and to start getting tight as --

The clock just keeps on ticking. Sucking the energy and momentum right out of the stadium until finally --

Venus does something she hasn't done yet. She sits.

INT. HALLWAY - OAKLAND COLOSSEUM ARENA - NIGHT

Back in the tunnel, Richard watches his daughter killing time on TV, growing increasingly angry.

RICHARD

That's eight minutes already.

Eight minutes.

(still nothing)

Nine minutes. Come on, Junior. Get up.

Because Richard understands exactly what's going on and --

He's shaking with anger when Vicario finally exits the bathroom, looking calm and unhurried as she heads back to the court.

Richard just shakes his head as --

EXT. OAKLAND COLOSSEUM ARENA - NIGHT

The crowd claps as Vicario returns, feigning apologies.

CHAIR UMPIRE

Time! Let's go.

Venus looks at the clock. 10 minutes have passed. It feels like an eternity.

She rises up from the bench, but when she steps back up to serve, the energy has changed. It's clear that she's tight.

She manages to get in her first serve, starting another long rally, but it ends when Venus -- very tight, short arms a backhand into the net.

Richard watches, tries to clap, show support, but he's attuned to a change and --

On the next point, Venus pockets the first serve into the net and carves in a slow second which --

BOOM! -- Vicario blasts it off the court for a winner. A message shot. Venus gets it. So does the crowd. The air's gone from the building. Macci can feel it.

Richard can too, knowing where this ends. Trying to will Venus on.

RICHARD

You still got this. You fine.

And Oracene claps her up too only --

As Venus prepares for her serve, we see the nerves have arrived. She misses the first badly. Carving in a slow second. Vicario returns hard to her forehand and --

Venus misses badly in the net.

CHAIR UMPIRE

Game. Vicario. Williams is leading three games to two.

But it doesn't feel quite like she's leading.

The crowd can sense blood. Macci can too. And two very quick games later --

Venus is serving again, trying to regain her composure, but her mojo is gone. Vicario's taken it. She's waiting on the other side of the net with a scowl.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Venus tosses her serve, smacks it clean but Vicario's there -- winding up, salivating, ready to knock the cover off the ball and --

WE COULD FREEZE IT RIGHT THERE. Because Venus doesn't win another game for the rest of the match.

IN THE TUNNEL, Richard watches Vicario take control, winning point after point and game after game.

CHAIR UMPIRE

Game, Vicario.
 (again)
 Game, Vicario.
 (finally)
 Second set, Vicario.

Venus never stops fighting, taking a nasty fall on the court, rising back to her feet, but knows the moment has passed.

IN THE TUNNEL, Richard hurts for his daughter. Knowing it's slipping a way. His eyes turn to the exit as --

ON COURT, Vicario moon-balls her way through another long rally that Venus finally ends, sailing a backhand long.

Venus shakes her head in disgust. Feeling frustrated and alone until Venus looks up in surprise to see --

In the stands, there's her father -- taking the empty seat beside Oracene for the rest of the match. Watching, not running.

Venus understands. So does Oracene. She takes Richard's hand and together, they support their daughter as --

In what feels like no time, the score reads: 6-2. 3-6. 0-5. Venus is serving but it's match point Vicario. After the return, Venus sails a forehand long and, like that, it's all done. She has lost.

Just like that dignified girl back in juniors, Venus walks graciously to the net and shakes Vicario's hand. It's a moment of chivalry and Richard is proud, only --

The rug still has been pulled out. The crowd is applauding but the bubble's been burst. The defeat feels enormous. They bet the house and they lost.

HOLD ON Richard, clapping stoically, applauding his daughter, but knowing she's hurting and --

END MONTAGE.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - OAKLAND COLOSSEUM ARENA - NIGHT

Once she's inside, the door's closed, her disappointment pours out like the 14-year-old kid that she is. Her parent arrive, cloaking her in their arms as she cries.

VENUS

I shoulda won tonight. All the deals, the respect. You were counting on me.

RICHARD

Don't you worry about those deals. I bet outside out that door, the hallway's full of fools just fighting to hand you a check but that's not what's important.

(beat)

Look at me. You just went toe to toe for two hours with the best player in the world and you made her knees shake and you did it with grace. You don't have respect for yourself now, you ain't gon' never have none. You're a champion, Venus Williams, and the whole world knows it. Walk out with your head up.

(finally)

I have never been more proud of a person in my whole life.

Venus smiles for her father's sake, but she's holding back tears, afraid he isn't right and --

RICHARD

Let's go.

Richard grabs Venus' bag and they head for the door but --

VENUS

Daddy. I'll take my bag.

RICHARD

I'll carry it Junior.

VENUS

No. I got it.

Richard understands. He hands Venus her bag and she carries it herself out into --

EXT. OAKLAND COLOSSEUM ARENA - MOMENTS LATER

The now empty arena where Venus reunites with her sisters, waiting for her in the stands. Richard leads his family across the vacant court, STADIUM LIGHTS beginning to shut off above them as --

They scale the steps of the empty arena, arriving at the exit where they open the arena doors to discover --

EXT. PLAYERS' EXIT - OAKLAND COLOSSEUM ARENA - NIGHT

A MASSIVE CROWD OF FANS, many of them YOUNG BLACK GIRLS, wait outside just for a chance to see Venus. They explode in applause as she appears, chanting her name.

CROWD

VENUS! VENUS! VENUS! VENUS!

(and then seeing)

SERENA! SERENA! SERENA!

Venus is moved to tears at the sight. Serena is, too.

RICHARD

It looks like they know. Go ahead,
don't keep them waiting.

Full of gratitude, Venus kisses her father and heads out to meet her fans. Serena follows, too.

Richard and Oracene watch in amazement as their little girls shake hands, sign autographs, and inspire.

They are moved to tears themselves. And to cap it all off, Macchi appears, flushed with excitement.

MACCI

Richard! Richard. Nike's back on the line. They're coming out of the woodwork. Puma. Fila. Reebok. They all wanna meet and they wanna meet first.

(off Richard's
silence)

I'm gonna tell 'em they can kiss my backside.

Finally, Richard smiles. He watches his daughters, swelling with pride, everything he's predicted come true.

RICHARD

No, I think we'll talk to those peoples. We're gonna talk to 'em.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MACCI

Thank you, Richard. She did it.

RICHARD

Oh yeah, she did it.

FREEZE ON RICHARD as these words appear on screen:

SUPERIMPOSE: NINE MONTHS LATER, VENUS SIGNED A CONTRACT WITH REEBOK FOR 12 MILLION DOLLARS. SHE WAS 15.

CUT TO:

VENUS WILLIAMS SIGNING EVENT (ARCHIVAL VIDEO FOOTAGE)

Venus and Serena, decked out in fly '90s REEBOK GEAR, hit balls at a promotional event in the heart of NYC.

SUPERIMPOSE: SERENA JOINED HER ON TOUR TWO YEARS LATER. AS THEIR COACH, RICHARD CONTINUED TO PLACE PATIENCE, FAMILY, AND EDUCATION ABOVE EARLY SUCCESS.

NEARLY EVERYTHING HE PREDICTED FOR HIS DAUGHTERS BACK IN COMPTON CAME TRUE.

CUT TO:

WIMBLEDON - CENTRE COURT - THE SISTERS (ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE)

Two black girls in white braids taking the court before an all-white crowd, curtsying to the QUEEN of ENGLAND.

SUPERIMPOSE: VENUS AT 40, HAS WON WIMBLEDON 5 TIMES. SHE WAS THE FIRST AFRICAN-AMERICAN WOMAN IN THE OPEN ERA TO BE RANKED NUMBER ONE IN THE WORLD.

SERENA AT 39, IS 23-TIME GRAND SLAM CHAMPION. SHE IS CONSIDERED BY MANY TO BE THE GREATEST FEMALE PLAYER IN THE HISTORY OF THE SPORT. JUST LIKE RICHARD PREDICTED.

CUT TO:

THE REAL RICHARD WILLIAMS (ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE)

He cheers in the stands at the 1999 Lipton Open, holding up a homemade sign that simply reads: "I TOLD YOU SO."

FADE OUT.

THE END