

Chapter Five

Monday morning when I arrived at school, Dalton McCoy and his parents are already sitting inside Mr. Ortega's office. I am glad that he is finally enrolling. Just as soon as we see each other, big wide smiles break out across our faces. This is the first time that I have seen him since the blowout at the skateboard park. The McCoys are getting the usual spiel about what Mr. Ortega expects from Del Cielo High students. The moment Mr. Ortega finishes speaking Mr. Phish joins them for his part of the discussion. I played both Little League and Pop Warner with Dalton, and I was really impressed by the show he put on at the city skateboard championships. I think that he could have won it if we had had a chance to finish.

Finally, after another 10 or 15 minutes passes, Mr. Ortega opens his office door, and we can hear him tell Mr. and Mrs. McCoy, "It has been a pleasure meeting with the both of you. I'm sure that Dalton will enjoy going to school here."

At the very same time Mr. Phish can be heard telling Dalton, "I saw you skate at the city tournament. It's too bad about what happened because you could have won the whole thing."

I can tell that Mr. Phish has completely taken him by surprise.

Dalton rolls his eyes, and says, "Tiny cost me that trophy. I practiced all year for the city tournament, and to see it all disappear like that was hard."

Suddenly Mr. Phish's face lit up like a light bulb, like he has something important to say.

Smiling from ear to ear he tells Dalton, "The Rosehaven Volleyball Tournament is in a week. We sure can use another tall player. Adding you to the roster will make us real contenders. We can dominate the nets."

"I've played city league volleyball for four years. My mom and dad both

played on a team,” Dalton replies.

“This is great news. Wait till I tell Mr. Ortega,” says the excited Mr. Phish.

Wednesday, when we arrived at school the volleyball roster was already posted in Mr. Phish's classroom window. My name appeared on the very first line followed by Chico, Dalton, Chili, Mambo, Wendell, Katrina, and Eddie. However, it doesn't take long before I realize that the students whose names did not appear on the list are deeply disappointed. At the same time they are really angry because Dalton McCoy has just enrolled in the school and he is already on the team. They had practiced and he hadn't.

I was really surprised when Katrina Cortez scored high enough on her diagnostic tests to get into my algebra class. Even better, she and Dalton has joined our study group. Wendell Chung, Eddie Cruz, and Veech Martinez make up the rest of the study group. Every day this week, I have been forced to stay after school to receive help on my math assignments.

This week, Veech was placed in a foster home, and he is having a tough time. Wendell's family wants him to stay with them, but Veech says that there just isn't room for him. For me, Wendell is God-sent. He's the reason that I haven't lapsed into depression and completely given up hope. Wendell organized the two things that right now make me want to come to school. He recruited me for both the volleyball team, and the math study group. Without either of them my life would not be the same. When I took algebra at Patterson High I was always on my own, and being on my own meant disaster. Math just doesn't come easy for me, but now I feel like I have a chance and passing algebra has become the most important part of my life. If I pass algebra I can get my old life back, my old friends, football, and maybe even Leticia. I've made up my mind. I don't want to be a disappointment to my parents any longer.

My parents want me to be the first person in my family to go to college. If I fail, I'll end up at Del Cielo High until I graduate. None of the graduates from here go to college. Success here means that you enlist in the military. The United States Marines sign the majority of the students that graduate from here. The recruiters stop by here on a regular basis, and they know every student by name, including mine.

My dad says that the kids that graduate from Del Cielo High and don't enlist, end up with their picture in the stolen car section of the Modesto Examiner Newspaper. According to Mrs. Purdy, my dad is right. She says that over the years there have been a lot of Del Cielo High graduates in the newspaper for a wide variety of crimes, including bank robbery, rape, and murder.

Thursday, the day before the tournament, I decide to walk Katrina home. Katrina lives in the Walnut Acres Migrant Farm Camp, which is over the railroad tracks and on other side of Highway 33. When the final bell of the day sounds, I am waiting outside her classroom. Soon afterward, when she gingerly exits the classroom I can tell by her smile that she was expecting me. Before long, we're giggling at things that most people probably wouldn't think are funny.

Shortly after we cross over the rail road tracks, we stop at the park near her house and sit down on a bench. The park is empty, except for a man who is cutting the grass. Just as soon as we sit down, Katrina opens up her backpack and removes the flash cards that Mr. Phish has given her. The cards contain 20 of the most frequently used verbs in the English language. They have the verbs written in Spanish on one side, and the English translation on the other side. We flash the verb cards until we head to her house to get something to eat.

The streets in Walnut Acres Camp are dotted in neat leaf piles. The camp is very clean and during the day it is really quiet because everyone that lives here is either working or in school. My dad says that the people that live here work as hard as anyone on the face of the planet Earth. He says that they all work in agriculture in some capacity. I can tell you from personal experience that during the summer they face some very hostile working conditions because the temperature here can reach 114° F.

When we first enter Katrina's house, we discovered her mother hunching over the stove warming tortillas that she has filled with beans and melted cheese. Starving, the two of us are about to sit down at the kitchen table when her mother reaches out to shake my hand.

Mrs. Cortez says, "Mucho gusto."

"And it's a pleasure to meet you too, Senora Cortez," I politely answered.

Veech had told me that she would like me calling her senora, and Katrina's mom is grinning from ear to ear. I am surprised how much they look alike. Katrina is the spitting image of mother. Mrs. Cortez is wearing a blue apron that is tied around her back, and her black hair is neatly tied in pig tails. She has the rosiest cheeks that I have ever seen.

The moment the tortillas have warmed Mrs. Cortez asks, “¿Tienen hambre?”

“Claro que si,” Katrina answers.

The second Katrina finishes answering, her mother hands us each a bean and cheese filled corn tortilla wrapped in a paper napkin. I am really hungry, and the warm beans and melting cheddar cheese are delicious together, so it all went down pretty fast. When Mrs. Cortez sees how hungry I am, she quickly returns to the stove and removes the top off of a large pot that is cooking on top of the stove. Steam pours from the pot the second the lid is removed. It's a soup of some kind, almost orange in color. Mrs. Cortez fills a bowl to the top, and smiles as she hands it to me.

She calls it, “Menudo.”

After I finish the delicious soup, once more the two of us sit down on the front porch and resume flashing verb cards. Before long, I am learning Spanish as fast as she is learning English. They don't offer Spanish classes in the Patterson schools until high school. I guess it's because everyone here speaks it except for me.

After we have been flashing cards for almost a half an hour, a Walnut Acres Security car drives up. Behind the wheel of the security car is a close friend of my mother, Officer Betty Suarez. Mrs. Suarez looks pretty official in her uniform and badge. I can tell that she is happy to see me.

She rolls down her window, and says, “Tyrell Walker, my how you have grown. You're so tall that I can hardly believe it, and look at those carpet cleaner biceps. My goodness! I remember when you were only up to my waist. How are your mama and papa?”

“Why they're great Mrs. Suarez, and thank you for asking. My dad is

working all of the time. I help him whenever I'm not in school. My mom is staying busy volunteering at the church," I reply.

Mr. Suarez smiles, and then continues, "I haven't seen your parents since last summer at the Apricot Festival. I see that you have already met the Cortez family. They're new to Patterson."

I said, "Yes, Mrs. Cortez is the best cook ever."

"Tyrell, a week from Saturday we're celebrating my daughter's quinceanera. It's in the Walnut Acres Conference Center at noon. Tell your mom and dad that I want your whole family to come," she said.

"Thank you for the invitation, Mrs. Suarez. I'm sure that my parents would love to come."

She then turns to Katrina, and in Spanish tells her that the invitation extends to her family. It is nice of her to invite all of us like this. Matter of fact, this is the first time anyone besides Sal has invited me anywhere since I got kicked out of Patterson High.

Friday, the drive to Rosehaven High in Turlock takes 50 minutes. The tournament starts at 8:00 AM sharp. At the same time, Mr. Phish wants to make sure that we will have plenty of time for warm ups, so he tells us to arrive at Del Cielo High no later than 6:30 AM. The morning of the tournament, my dad surprises me and volunteers to drive me to school. When we pull in front of the main building, some of the team has already arrived, and Mr. Phish is busy loading up the school mini-bus with bottled water, volleyball equipment, and uniforms. He is both coach and driver.

Just as soon as everything is inside the mini-bus, Mr. Phish shouts, "Everybody get on the bus. It's a long way to Turlock."

The road to the Rosehaven High is through the heart of dairy country, and over and over we find ourselves stuck behind hay haulers, tractors, and manure spreaders. You can tell from the energy inside the mini-van that everyone is excited because the chatter is nonstop. Most of us rarely have an opportunity to venture outside of the city limits of Patterson. After we are about half way to Turlock, I was surprised when Wendell asks me about my visit to Katrina's house.

I said, "Wendell, Katrina's mother is an amazing cook. She made us the most incredible soup that I have ever eaten, called menudo."

All of a sudden, Wendell looks at me like I am crazy.

He says, "Tyrell, do you know how menudo is made?"

"No, I sure don't. This was the first time that I have ever had it. All I know is that it is delicious."

Wendell replies, "Tyrell, you ate cow intestines. Menudo is cow intestine soup."

I shook my head no, and said, "I don't believe you, Wendell. How can someone from China know about a Mexican soup? Are you serious, Wendell? You better not be lying to me."

"I swear to you, Tyrell, I'm telling you the truth. I know about food. Have you forgotten that my family owns a restaurant? People from all over the world eat all kinds of things. You should try Chinese food sometime."

I don't know if I should believe him or not.

When we are just a short distance from Rosehaven High, Mr. Phish announces, "You guys are the best team that I've had since coming to Del Cielo High. You can win this thing as long as you play team ball. They are expecting 20 teams today. Remember to use all three hits, and play as a team. We can improve our chances of winning by just getting our serves over the net. We don't have to do anything fancy, just get the ball over the net."

Katrina has no idea what he is saying, and doesn't seem to care. Everything is new and exciting to her, including me. The entire drive her eyes have glared out the bus window at the passing landscape. Just as soon as we drive onto the Rosehaven High campus we are met by an armed security guard. The guard directs Mr. Phish to park next to the other school buses.

The moment Mr. Phish turns off the engine, he hands us our uniforms. The

new black Del Cielo High uniforms have our school mascot, the Bulldog, on the front, and our numbers on the back. The matching baseball caps are emblazoned with a big D.C.H. Most of us pull the t-shirts over our existing clothes because it is still a little cold. Then, the next few minutes we all remain on the bus petrified.

From our seats on the mini-bus we can see a dozen schools warming up on the volleyball courts. Many of the teams have professional looking uniforms, and their warm ups include some impressive drills that none of us have ever seen before. I count 10 courts in all, 4 on asphalt, and 6 on grass.

Finally, Mr. Phish starts yelling at us to get going, he says, "Come on Del Cielo, let's go out there and win this one. You guys have prepared for this, and now is the time to show it. I expect the best out of everybody today. This is no time for heroes. We play together and win together. Let's go, Del Cielo High!"

Straight away in unison we let off a short barrage of Bulldog barks, and then one by one we began to exit the bus. Every school bus in the parking lot has the name of its respective school emblazoned across its side. Many are from as far north as Sacramento and Davis, while others are from as far south as Fresno and Visalia. I believe that it is now or never and that we are as prepared as we are ever going to get. This is probably the best chance any of us will ever have to win a tournament of this size.

After about twenty minutes of warming up there's a call over the loud speaker for a coaches meeting, but before Mr. Phish takes off for the meeting, he tells us, "You guys continue to practice your serves while I get our schedule and a copy of the rules. Whatever you do, don't get into any trouble."

Before long we're surrounded by teams in every colored uniform possible. Then while we wait for Mr. Phish to finish his coaches meeting, we continue to take turns practicing our serves. Over and over, Katrina tries to serve the ball overhand, but is entirely unsuccessful. Collectively, we all decide that she is has to serve underhand.

Before long, Mr. Phish arrives from the meeting with a copy of the tournament schedule.

He says, "Everybody, gather around. Our first game is against Ceres Continuation School."

Mr. Phish is as serious as I have ever seen him.

Just as soon as we circle around him, he tells us, "It is rally serve to 25, just like we play at home. You guys know how it's done. They're going to try to slam the ball down our throats. It's up to us to respond. We can win this thing. Mambo you're going to serve first. Chili you're our starting setter. You'll be on the front row between Tyrell, and Dalton. I want to start, Chico, and Katrina in the back row. Eddie and Wendell, we'll rotate you guys into the game. We start on Court 6."

The second we walk out onto Court 6, the referee tosses the coin, and we win. Mambo wastes no time delivering the first serve. He is hoping to catch them off guard, and it does. The ball fell untouched for our first point.

Mambo shouts the score, "1-0."

His next serve goes straight into the net and drops at Chili's feet. The score is now even at 1-1, and it's their serve. Their first server is a tall skater type with long dread-locks, with a wicked serve. Before we know it, the score is 7-1 in their favor. Then finally Dalton stops one at the net and it is again our turn.

This time it is Katrina's serve, and I can tell that she's a little nervous.

In her thick Spanish accent, Katrina yells "2-7", before socking the ball underhand with everything she has in her. Then we are all amazed as the ball soars so high in the air that Ceres loses it in the Sun. Miraculously, the ball fell untouched on their side of the court. We score 3 more points behind Katrina's serves until she trips and delivers one into the net. Once again, it is Ceres' turn to serve the ball. The score is 8-6 in their favor.

Mr. Phish is going crazy pacing the sidelines. He is nervous as I have ever seen him, and ever y time a rally ensues his arms are flailing in all directions.

He shouts, "Come on Del Cielo! We can win this one. Don't let these guys

get the best of us.

Unfortunately, their next server is really tall, and he launches the ball like a missile. His serves come at us so fast that the girls are scared to get in front of it. We try everything we know, but it's hopeless, and he is mowing us over like bowling pins. By the time we stop him they are so far ahead that there is no catching them, and we lose 25-15. On the sidelines, Mr. Phish is trying to not to show his disappointment, but we can see it painted across his face.

While making every attempt possible to conceal his disappointment he tells us, "Come on Del Cielo there are plenty of more games. We're still in this thing. Let's get going, Elk Grove is waiting for us on Court 2. We beat them last year. I want Wendell to replace Chili as the setter for this game. Otherwise it's the same starting lineup. Tyrell, you're serving first, just get the ball over the net. You can't score if the ball doesn't go over the net."

Once more, we win the toss. This time, Mr. Phish tells me to serve first. Only this time when I serve, I take my time so I can look for weakness in the Elk Grove defense. Then when I am sure I have spotted it, I take a deep breath and toss the ball way over my head, timing it perfectly when it descends. The ball warps over the top of the net and drops for an ace.

Mr. Phish yells, "One more time, Tyrell. Hit it with everything you have."

"1-0," I yell.

Again, I toss the ball in the air, and again I connect with it perfectly. Only this time a huge rally ensues, and it ends with our second point. Then before I know it the momentum is on our side, and we pull ahead 12-1. Their first serve went straight into the net, and now it is Mambo's turn to serve. Only this time he is in his groove and unstoppable. Not only is he accurate, but his ball roars over the net in a totally unpredictable manner. At the same time, their setter is struggling to set up plays. The game is never close, and we win 25-6. The result is that our self-confidence is building, and before we knew it we are on a roll, defeating both Los Banos and Lodi Continuation Schools.

However, our joy is short lived when we realize that our next opponent is the largest school in the tournament, Elliot Continuation High School of

Modesto. Then when we walk out onto the court we all realize that Mambo already knows some of the guys in their starting lineup, and he embraces one guy like he is his long lost brother.

Proudly, he introduces the guy to the team, he says, "Everybody, I want you to meet Enrique. Can you believe it? He was my celly in juvenile hall when they had me locked up for that Latin King thing. I can't believe that he is here, we are like brothers. I thought that he was locked up in Stockton at the California Youth Authority. I'm really amazed that he's already out."

Almost before he's done introducing Enrique, the referee blows his whistle for the start of the game. This game Mambo delivers the first serve, only this time he hits it straight into the arms of their setter, who sets the ball up perfectly, placing it just above the net for the kill. Immediately, Enrique reacts, and he unleashes a wicked overhand assault that rockets directly into the side of Chili's head knocking her to the ground. It hit her so hard that she fell to the ground and scraps up both her arms and knees. Immediately, Mambo explodes. He can't believe what he has just seen, and he has no problem forgetting about their friendship. Without warning, he lashes out in anger and charges toward Enrique to extract vengeance, but Mr. Phish sees it coming, and he quickly grabs Mambo from behind before he can get near him.

"Calm down, Mambo," Mr. Phish insists, "If we get kicked out of the tournament for fighting then they win. You need to calm down."

"Let me go, Phish. Let me go," Mambo shouts.

"I will let you go, if you promise me that you'll calm down."

Finally, Mambo shakes his head in agreement, and Mr. Phish cuts him loose. The second he does, Mambo rushes to Chili's side. At the same time, Mr. Phish calls for a timeout.

"Pepper, are you alright?" he asks.

Obviously she isn't alright. Her lower right cheek has been cut by the ball. Without hesitating, Mr. Phish goes for our first aid kit, removes some gauze and then places pressure on the wound. Then just as soon as the wounds stop bleeding he cleans and bandages her wounds as best he can. The

moment he finishes he tells us to gather around.

Mr. Phish says, "Chili's pretty torn up. We're going to have to rotate her out, but keep her in the lineup."

According to the tournament rules we will be forced to forfeit if we don't have 2 girls in the lineup, and we don't have an extra girl. Either Chili stays in the lineup or we're out of this thing.

Just as the timeout ends, Mr. Phish shouts, "Wendell, you're in for Chili."

The Elliot server is a small Asian American who they call Shrimp Boy.

Then, just as soon as Shrimp Boy is about to serve, Mambo yells, "Come on, serve it here, Shrimp Boy. I like to eat shrimp."

Mambo, Eddie, and Dalton are all on the front row when Shrimp Boy unleashes what can only be described as a wicked serve. After he scores two aces, we have no idea how we're going to stop him. The ball is just coming over the net too fast. Then finally, Wendell figures out where his next serve is going, and he is there waiting for it. Wendell sets Eddie up perfectly for the kill, and the ball hits the back line for a point.

Both teams are fired up and it seems like each rally is longer than the one before. The game goes back and forth until the game is tied at 23-23, and it is Eddie's serve. Eddie puts the first one into the far right corner, and when they return the ball Dalton, Chico, and Mambo all leap above the net at the same time, creating an iron wall. Mambo is still looking for blood, and somehow he manages to get a piece of the ball with his closed fist and it rockets towards the Elliot players for the kill. It is now game point. Eddie's next serve clips the top of the net and then drops untouched on their side of the court for the final point. We are 4-1, and it is time for lunch. At the same time, we have no idea if we have made it into the finals.

We have been smelling hamburgers cooking on the barbeque for the last 30 minutes, and I am anxious to eat. While we stand in line to get the food we watch as the coaches rush their results over to the judges table so that they can total their points. The entire team is gathered at the same table together. In anticipation of the results, we barely said a word to each other as we ate our hamburgers.

Halfway into his burger, Wendell speaks up, "We played great. I think we made it into the Final Four."

Eddie responds, "We would have beaten Ceres, if Mr. Phish had started me."

I replied, "I don't think that you would have made a difference, Eddie. We were nervous and not yet warmed up. Besides, they were really good."

The second I finish talking, the Rosehaven coach's voice came over the intercom.

The coach announces, "I have the results. I want to thank all of the schools for coming. The level of competition this year is the highest that I have ever seen. This is our 32nd year of holding the tournament and each year it gets better and bigger. Congratulations to Ceres and Tracy Continuation High Schools. They both emerged undefeated with 5-0 records. After lunch, they will play for 1st and 2nd place trophies on Court 1. Playing for 3rd place trophies will be Peterson Juvenile Hall of Stockton, and Del Cielo High of Patterson. They will be playing on Court 2 for 3rd place trophies. 4th place receives ribbons."

We are so excited that we all jumped out of our seats.

"Say what! Did you hear that?" says a stunned Wendell, "We're playing for trophies. I knew we could do it!"

Shaking her head in disbelief, Chili can barely speak.

Finally she utters, "I don't believe it. Del Cielo High has never been in the finals of anything. We have to win. We have to win so that we can prove to the people in Patterson that we're not a bunch of losers."

Nothing like this had ever happened to any of us. Eddie is right, Del Cielo High has never won anything, anywhere.

Then when we get up and start walking toward the permanent asphalt volleyball courts, I told the team, "We didn't come this far for a ribbon. We can go home with a trophy. Make every serve count."

They all nod their heads in agreement I can't help but notice the maturity of the other team. They look like adults compared to us. Some of the guys on the Stockton team have tear drop tattoos which means that they have spent a lot of time locked up. One of them is bald, and two have full beards. They make Mambo's First Street Boyz look like boys. Then before we get started Mr. Phish asks us to again all gather around.

"These guys are all from the San Joaquin County Juvenile Hall in Stockton, and from what I hear they play volleyball all day long. They also lost to Ceres. Let's win this thing for the school. Play team volleyball, and use all 3 hits."

Mambo can barely contain his excitement, "Mr. Phish, let us at them. That trophy is already mine."

It has been warming all morning, and it is now almost 80° F. Consequently, both sides are walking onto the court with a lot less clothing than they have been wearing. Again, we gathered around for the coin flip, only this time we do not win. I can only hope that this isn't a trend. The guy who has lost his hair starts the game with a nice jump serve and the game is on. The ball is sailing back and forth until we were all tied at 12-12. Now, it is Mambo's serve.

Mambo wastes no time tossing the ball as high as he can over his head, and then smacks it on the way down. He hit it as hard as I have ever seen hit the ball. The ball rockets only an inch over the net before slamming into the asphalt, untouched. Mambo is on fire like I've never seen him. We then score 7 more times behind his serving before he gets over confident, and hits one too long. The referee immediately calls it out, but everyone quickly realizes that Mambo really doesn't like the call.

He screams in the referee's face, "What's wrong with you? Are you some kind of idiot?"

Without a moment of hesitation, I grab him by the waist to stop him from getting too close to the referee, and as I do Mambo continues let loose with a whole lot of four letter words. The next thing I know he turns his anger in my direction.

Now he's screaming in my face, "Let go of me, Tyrell."

I said, "I'm not going to let you wreck this for us, Mambo. We've worked too hard."

At this time, the referee has seen and heard enough, and he responds by throwing Mambo out of the game. In turn, Mambo becomes even angrier, and he lets loose with another barrage of four letter words.

Finally, Mr. Phish enters in the fracas, "Mambo, that's enough out of your mouth. Go sit on the bus before things get worse."

However, Mambo isn't in a listening mood, and he acts like he hasn't heard anything that anyone is saying. It's at this time that we all realize that the entire episode has been witnessed by the school's security officer, and he has heard enough.

The security guard is insistent, "You heard your coach. Pack your things and get on the bus."

Mambo knew that he is outmatched. Angrily, he starts walking toward the bus, followed closely by his escort. Things can't get any worse. We have just lost our best player and the only substitutes we have are Eddie and Chili, and Chili isn't going back on the court any time soon.

The score is 20-13 in our favor, and their turn to serve. Their next server is tall and lanky, and his body is completely covered in jail house tattoos. We all watch in suspense as he tosses the ball high in the air, and then hits it on the way down as hard as he can. His first serve flew over the net like lightning, and it doesn't take long before the score 7 quick points. Finally, he hit the ball long and we let it go. The score is now 21-20 our favor, and Mr. Phish decides to put Eddie in the game.

Our front row now has Chico, Katrina, and Dalton, and I'm playing the back row with Wendell and Eddie. At this point, the rallies are becoming longer and longer and every single point is harder to earn. Nobody wants to give up. Finally, the score is tied 23-23, and their tallest girl is serving. Dalton was waiting for it, and he met the ball as it was just clearing the net with a hard overhand spike. The ball smacked the ground untouched.

This is what we have been waiting for, and it's my serve. Sweat is pouring down my face, the sun is in my eyes, and I'm as exhausted as I have ever been. I just need to make this serve good. On the sidelines, Mr. Phish is about to lose his mind.

"Just get the ball over the net, Tyrell," he shouts, "Just get the ball over."

I took a deep breath, and shout, "Let's go, Del Cielo Bulldogs."

The entire team responds by barking in unison, and once more I toss the ball high over my head and met it as it came down. Only this time, when it comes down I don't try to kill it. Instead, I barely punch the ball, and it clips the top of the net and then drops to the ground on their side. Mr. Phish screamed as we won the match.

We had won third place and a trophy. Just as soon as the game ends, we all line up to shake hands with the other team. Then as soon as we finish shaking hands, we all follow Mr. Phish over to the trophy table.

Then as we walked to the table, Wendell gloats, "Nobody believed me when I told you guys that we could do this."

"You were right about this one, Wendell," I said, "I didn't think we could do it."

It is only after we went to the staging area for the awards that we learned how close we had come to winning the whole thing. Ceres has won the entire event. I can't help but think that if we hadn't played them first that we could have finished higher.

We each got a trophy of a volleyball player on a platform that is about a foot tall. At the same time, the school receives an enormous one. Mr. Phish looks pretty elated. It is now 4:00 PM and just as soon as Mr. Phish gets the school trophy he calls Mr. Ortega, and from the sound of the conversation, they sounded really excited by the news.

Soon after we board the mini-bus we all call home to tell our families about our victory. All the way back to Patterson we are talking non-stop about our success. That is everyone, but Mambo, who is still angry at me for getting in his way. I tried to talk to him, but it doesn't do any good. Then as we get

closer to town I forget about him, and start worrying about my impending algebra test. This one is going to make me or break me. I'm going to have to study as soon as I make it home.

When we finally arrive back at Del Cielo High it is dark, and Katrina's mother is nervously waiting for her in front of the school in the family pickup truck. At the same time, I can't help but notice that Joey Galvan's Chevy Lowrider is waiting for Mambo across the street.

I said, "hello" to Katrina's mother and then went inside the school to get my algebra book so that I can complete my homework assignment. Mr. Phish is putting away the ice chests, uniforms, and volleyball equipment. He also needs to clean the mini-bus.

He looks at me and asks, "Would you and Wendell mind giving me a hand emptying the mini-bus?"

We both nod our heads, and then Wendell replies, "Of course we will, Mr. Phish."

Just as soon we are finished putting everything away Wendell and I grab our trophies, cross the street, and start walking home. We are both grinning from ear to ear and proud of our accomplishment. Then just as soon as we cross at the light on M Street, we separate. Wendell took a right turn to head to his house while I proceeded along the southern edge of Middleton Park to my house. The park is always empty at this time of night. It is also poorly lighted because of city cutbacks.

It isn't long after I entered the park before Joey Galvan's Chevy Lowrider appears at the far end of the park. Not realizing that I am being watched, I continue walking into the darkest section of the park. Then all of a sudden Joey made another quick pass, and I start getting a little nervous. Making things even worse, the windows in the car were so darkly tinted that I couldn't tell who or how many were inside. The only thing I know for sure that Mambo is inside.

Immediately, I looked around for help, but I am all alone. I ran as fast as I can through the park with my heart beating out of my chest. At the same time, Mambo and Jesus Reyes got out of the car and they are right behind me. When out of nowhere Joey pulls up next to me in his car. Then when

he slams on his brakes, Tiny Garcia gets out and tackles me to the ground. I am trapped like a rat, and they waste no time kicking the heck out of me.

Scared for my life, I scream for help, but it is to no avail because no one can hear me. Then, suddenly a set of headlights heads in my direction. At first I'm certain that it's more members of the First Street Boyz, but it's not. It's my dad, and he is driving like a desperate man in my direction. Then, when he is almost on top of us he slams on his brakes and gets out of his van swinging a shovel like a madman. His first swing almost takes Mambo's head off, and the second hits Tiny square in the back. They couldn't get back into Joey's car fast enough.

The moment they are out of sight, my dad grimaces, "Are you ok, Tyrell? I was afraid they would try something after the skateboard tournament. It looks like they beat you pretty good, son."

My nose and mouth are bleeding, the rest of my body is aching, and I am having trouble opening my eyes. I search around in the darkness for a few minutes until I found my algebra book. My poor trophy is in a dozen pieces, and the pieces are scattered everywhere. After my father catches his breath, and is sure they were gone, he puts the shovel away in the back of the van before returning to help me. It reminded me of when I wrecked my skateboard.

After we get in the van, my dad tells me, "I think that we should call the police and report this."

I shake my head no, before replying, "Let's not call the police. It will only make things worse for me, and besides the juvenile hall is full, and they will be out in no time."

"OK, Tyrell. It's your choice, but if it were up to me, I'd go to the police."

I pleaded with him to understand, "I don't want to be labeled a snitch at that school. We have our second algebra test on Friday and I'm going to pass it, and get my life back. Dad, I like sports. I want to play sports for the rest of my life. I had a great time today, you should have seen us. We got third place out of 20 teams. I want to play next year with Sal, on the Patterson High football team. I miss it."

“Wow, I want you to turn it around too son. I don't want you graduating from a continuation school, and I don't want you cleaning carpets or laying floors all your life. It is hard work, and a hard life. Your mama and I want you to go to college and become someone.”

We're home in a couple of minutes, and I ran straight upstairs and into the bathroom because I don't want my mom to see me how badly I have been beaten. The second I shut the door, I take off my clothes and open the door to the shower. Once in the shower, I start cleaning up my bloodied body. One by one I wash the worst wounds, and then as soon as I'm out of the shower, I cover them with bandages. I am in so much pain that I can't believe it.

Tyrell Walker Chapter Five Questions

Answer using complete sentences

1. Why is Mr. Phish so excited about Dalton enrolling?
2. Why does Wendell say that Wendell was God-sent?
3. According to Mrs. Purdy and Mr. Walker, what happens to the graduates who do not join the military?
4. Who is Enrique, and how does he enrage Mambo?
5. Why does Chili have to stay in the game?
6. Why does Chili tell everyone that they have to win?
7. How does the Stockton Juvenile Hall team differ in appearance?
8. Why does Mambo get kicked out of the game?
9. How does Mr. Walker save Tyrell in Middleton Park?
10. Do you think that Tyrell should have called the police?