

**JOHNSON AND JOHNSON**  
*A Short Story about Athletics and Academics in College Sports*

By Larry LaForge

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Smashwords Edition

*Two unrelated men work on the same campus, share the same last name, and have the same driving passion for professional success. One is a coach and the other is a professor. An ethical dilemma ensnares them both and threatens to derail their careers. Who will do the right thing? What is the right thing? All characters, locations, and events are fictional, but the underlying issues are real and cause for reflection.*

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**JOHNSON AND JOHNSON**

**[Meet Coach Johnson](#)**

“Get *low*. Get *low*. Get *low*.” Coach Brackston Johnson repeats a familiar refrain, yelling louder each time. It’s his signature coaching command, and he knows what he’s talking about. As a former standout offensive lineman, Brack Johnson knows that good line play in football is all about leverage.

As preseason practice continues in the stadium, Coach Johnson takes a moment to reflect on his surroundings. The massive new scoreboard and ultra high-tech video board under construction in the north end zone dominate his view. To him these are symbols of his school’s

unwavering commitment to football. As the head coach of the Southeast State University (SSU) Jaguars, he greatly appreciates the support, but is wary of the high expectations and the ultimate consequences of not meeting them.

Brack Johnson always knew he would be a football coach some day. He just didn't think he would be the head coach at a major college so soon. He was only 39 years old when he was named SSU's head coach. Now at 42 he needs a breakout season to convince the naysayers that he is the man to take SSU to football glory.

Coach Johnson experienced big-time football glory in his playing days, and he is on a mission to get there again as a coach. He was an All America offensive tackle in college and a genuine big man on campus, for all the right reasons. An outstanding student, Brack was destined for numerous college awards and a career in the pros. Then something happened that changed everything.

After making every All America squad as a sophomore, Brack's playing career ended on the third play from scrimmage in the first game of his junior year. On a short yardage situation on third down, his left leg went one way and his right leg went another. The resulting knee injury required major reconstructive surgery, sidelining him for good and leaving him with a limp still noticeable today.

As he tells the story now, it was the best thing that ever happened to him.

Brack Johnson learned that football doesn't last forever, and you better be ready when it ends. This means that you need an education and a plan for life after sports. He has done his best to impart that message to every player he has recruited and coached during his entire career. In this regard, Coach Johnson has always been a true role model for SSU football players.

After getting over the emotional distress of his career-ending injury, Brack worked as a student assistant coach while completing his college studies. He never considered dropping out of school because he was there to get a college education, not just to play football. Setting his sights on a coaching career, Brack soaked up everything he could from his college coaches during his last two years.

He studied football technique, practice organization, game planning, media interaction, recruiting strategies, player relations, and everything else he could get close enough to observe. As a psychology major, he was most interested in how coaches and players interacted on and off the field.

He saw things he liked and wanted to emulate, and things that disturbed him greatly. As an understudy, Brack quickly began to formulate his philosophy of coaching. He understood that you had to be a salesman to be an effective college football coach, and he knew he could do that.

But more importantly he wanted to be an honest broker, treating players with respect and putting their best interests first. And he never wanted to waiver from his belief that it is in the best interests of every player to earn a college degree. Therefore, Brack reasoned that you have to recruit players who want to be college students and have sufficient academic potential to succeed at whatever school you are coaching.

Brack Johnson's career path has been typical for a young man trying to break into the coaching ranks. He had to go where the jobs were, first as a graduate assistant and then as a full-time assistant coach when the opportunity finally came. He spent a couple of years here and there at various schools, gradually moving up to major college programs as an assistant working with the offensive line. He developed a national reputation as a solid line coach and a great recruiter.

Eventually he received an offer that he couldn't refuse as offensive line coach at SSU, a major program that made no secret of its desire to move up in the football world. His wife, Marie, and three daughters hoped this stop would be for the long haul.

When Charley Paulson, SSU head coach at the time, brought in Brack Johnson as an assistant he probably had no idea that he had just hired his replacement. But that's what happened four years later when the Jaguars continued to wallow in football mediocrity. Athletic Director (AD) Janice Smathers knew she had to make a change when donations from boosters began to plummet and the bloggers started the death knell for poor Charley Paulson.

Janice Smathers didn't have to look far for her new head coach and moved quickly to seal the deal. It was a popular move among the boosters and bloggers, as Brack Johnson was highly regarded, had two years under his belt as the offensive coordinator, and seemed ready to take over the program. The new head coach energized the fan base, and pundits across the country heralded the appointment. Many observers considered Brack among the top assistants in college football, and his lack of head coaching experience didn't seem to be a major concern. As one television commentator put it, "Every legendary head coach was once an inexperienced assistant."

Smathers gave Coach Johnson some good advice to start his head coaching tenure. Janice Smathers is an outstanding administrator and a straight shooter, and Brack Johnson respected her opinion. "Don't fall into the same trap as Charley," Smathers advised. "Charley went in fifty different directions at the same time with endorsements, outside appearances, television commercials, foundations, and the like. He was worn out by the time football season started." Smathers continued, "Concentrate on building your program first. If you build a successful football program at SSU all the endorsements, fame and fortune will come your way.

Be patient. Build from the ground up.”

Brack listened to his AD and tried to follow the advice, which he considered to be completely consistent with his own philosophy.

Surprisingly, Coach Brack Johnson’s first three seasons as head coach were disappointing to many (including himself), and the honeymoon period was definitely over by midseason in his second year. The team wasn’t bad by any stretch of the imagination, but it couldn’t seem to get over the hump. Consecutive records of 8-5, 7-6, and 8-5, with two lower-tier bowl losses in the past two years, hardly qualified SSU as the football power that it openly aspired to be.

Boosters, bloggers, and pundits were on Brack Johnson pretty hard during the last two seasons. They derisively referred to his offense as the “Brack Attack” and claimed it was unimaginative and woefully behind the times for college football. As a former offensive lineman, Brack still believed that running the football was critical. “You know you have a football team when you can run on an opponent who knows it’s coming,” Brack often said to his staff and players. By his own definition, Brack Johnson had yet to field a real football team at SSU.

From the very start of his head coaching tenure, Brack met regularly with AD Smathers and a few close associates in the SSU athletic department to discuss the current and future challenges of building the football program. During Brack’s first year they all realized that better recruiting was critical to their success. They also realized that if SSU really wanted a championship caliber football program the school would have to be flexible in the admission process.

SSU had public goals to improve its academic rankings, and upping its admission standards was part of the game plan to climb the rankings. Over the past decade the school’s admissions standards increased dramatically, with every freshmen class producing a higher average SAT score and higher average high school class rank than the previous year. As a result, SSU made a significant jump in the ranking of public universities and was gaining momentum as a major institution of higher learning.

Long time AD Smathers didn’t sit on her hands while this was happening. She raised funds to build an academic support facility for student athletes to keep pace with the higher academic demands on campus. By the time Brack was named head football coach, the SSU Student Athlete Academic Center had become a model program for its state-of-the-art facilities and highly trained professional staff. With other facilities improvements made to the stadium, team rooms, and coaching offices, all the elements were in place to ratchet up recruiting.

Janice Smathers increased the football recruiting budget, allowing greater use of the

school airplane for recruiting trips. She also worked with the SSU administration to gain the needed flexibility in admissions so Coach Johnson would not be in the awkward position of signing a player who could not get in school. The SSU administration cooperated with the football plan under the condition that the academic results for football remained at an acceptable level. Coach Johnson found this arrangement perfect since this has always been his philosophy. He vowed to recruit only players of high moral character who wanted to be college students and had sufficient academic skills to meet SSU requirements for graduation. He asked SSU to recognize that having the academic potential to graduate did not necessarily mean having the same academic credentials as regular SSU students.

With all these elements in place, Coach Johnson turned recruiting around in a hurry. SSU suddenly was included among the announced favorites of highly recruited high school players, although quite a few ultimately chose other more established programs. Brack got his share of top players though, and to his credit he never used lack of talent as an excuse for his team's performance.

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As his fourth season approaches, Brack Johnson is on the hot seat and he knows it. He reminds himself that he has never failed at anything in his professional life and that he just needs to stay the course. To most observers his program appears to be rock solid academically, but not ready for prime time when it comes to competing against big-time college football teams.

As many have learned in recent years, appearances in college sports are sometimes misleading. In reality, Coach Johnson had quietly recruited many good players who fit his system, and his program is loaded with young talent ready to break out on the field. Unfortunately, the academic foundation wasn't rock solid after all, and Coach Johnson would soon learn that his star player – considered the face of the program – is anything but a legitimate college student.

### [Meet Professor Johnson](#)

“Please pull up the fall semester reading list,” Professor Carson Johnson politely says to his graduate assistant. “We need to make some changes to reflect all the crazy things going on in the world of finance.” Professor Johnson is busy preparing for the rapidly approaching fall semester and looking forward to teaching his favorite course, Personal Finance. Carson Johnson created the course a few years ago, and it has become one of the most popular elective courses at

Southeast State University.

The course usually fills up quickly with students majoring in subjects throughout the entire university. Professor Johnson thrives on the academic diversity in his Personal Finance class, and tells students the need for good financial planning cuts across all disciplines and career paths.

Carson Johnson never expected to be a college professor. He is the first person in his family to graduate from college, and he didn't see any possibility of continuing on in graduate school after completing his undergraduate business degree. His grades were definitely good enough for grad school, but he had no money, was already saddled with student loans, and needed to get a job.

His first job was with a brokerage firm that required him to make cold calls to potential investors. He despised the hard sell routine but was intrigued by the inner workings of the financial system. Carson held on for several years, did quite well financially, but started looking for something else in his field.

He found his niche in personal finance. He caught on with a small division of a national firm specializing in personal financial planning. Carson thrived in his new environment and felt he was performing a valuable service to his clients. He loved helping people sort through their life objectives and creating a financial plan that would allow them to meet their goals. His clients saw him as very knowledgeable, trustworthy, and likeable. Carson Johnson soon became the star of his division and was getting the attention of the corporate office.

After several years Carson took advantage of his firm's graduate school assistance program and enrolled in a night MBA program at the local college. The firm picked up the tab as long as Carson made good grades and agreed to stay with the company for at least five years after graduating. He fulfilled those commitments and more.

The MBA program changed Carson Johnson forever. He thrived on the classroom challenges, enjoyed the discussions and had much to contribute through his professional experiences, and was fascinated by the many articles students were required to read. For the first time, he could envision himself as a teacher in front of the class and as a researcher writing those articles he was reading. Somewhere down the line he could see himself making a major career change.

Carson was definitely getting the bug to go back to school to earn his Ph.D. and launch an academic career. However, there was one major hang-up. He was married with two small children. His wife Karine was a devoted stay-at-home mom, and it would be very risky to make such a major career change at this point. In effect he would be starting over.

Karine Johnson was apprehensive but supportive. Ultimately she knew that her husband would not be happy unless he made this move, and they agreed that he should apply to some graduate programs and try for a fellowship of some kind. It took a while, but things finally fell into place.

When the right fellowship came along at a school with a top doctoral program in finance, the Johnson family sold their house, packed up, and moved across country to start a new adventure. As is typical for him, Carson fit in well in his new environment and quickly distinguished himself as up-and-coming scholar.

The four years Carson Johnson spent as a doctoral student laid a solid foundation for his new career. He worked with several faculty members on major research projects, and had some top publications on his resume before leaving grad school. He taught several different undergraduate courses, and was well liked by the students. His dissertation on the effects of fiscal policy on individual wealth was well received and had the potential for further development and funding.

Carson's last year in the doctoral program was spent finishing his dissertation and looking for his first job as an assistant professor. He wasn't left to his own devices to find employment. His professors thought very highly of him and offered advice on the type of school he should pursue. They also introduced him to several schools and gave him glowing recommendations.

When Clinton Bowers from the Finance Department at Southeast State University saw Carson Johnson give a research presentation at a conference, he thought this guy would be a great fit for the vacant position in his department. Bowers introduced himself to Carson and they had a nice chat, a sort of preliminary interview. SSU subsequently contacted Carson, invited him to campus for a formal interview, and then followed up with an invitation for him to come back with Karine for a second visit. Karine fell in love with the place, and SSU was on top of Carson's list for his first academic job.

Carson's doctoral program professors were not thrilled that he was dialed in on SSU. They felt he could do better, and that he should aim higher for his first position. Carson respected their advice, but felt that SSU was the place for him, Karine, and the kids. To a certain extent he thought the advice of his professors was self-serving. They would look good if their student was placed at a better school.

He doesn't regret the decision, but Carson wishes he had listened more to his old professors.

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As you are reading this, Professor Carson Johnson is preparing for the start of his sixth year at SSU. In academic parlance, this is known as the penultimate year -- the year that the tenure decision is made. At 42 years of age, Carson will soon find out if his career and job choices were correct.

Karine and the kids love the SSU community. Karine is an active volunteer in the local school system, and the kids are thriving with many new friends. Carson feels he has done more than enough in research, teaching, and service to earn tenure, but he is wary of the process after seeing a few junior colleagues sent packing over the past five years. One thing is certain. If he doesn't earn tenure Carson Johnson will have failed for the first time in his professional life and his family will have to move.

More than likely Carson will earn tenure if recommended by the senior colleagues in his department. One of them is Clinton Bowers, now the department head. Bowers made the initial contact with Carson and started his recruitment at SSU. Other senior professors with significant clout are Toby Chowsky and Sam Brothers. They are all highly respected professionally and will be key players in the critical faculty recommendation on Carson Johnson.

Carson feels that he has gotten along well with all of them, but finds them a strange lot. Bowers and Chowsky both wear SSU Jaguars apparel on a daily basis. It seems kind of strange to Carson, but there doesn't seem to be any harm in it. These men are top-notch scholars, and Carson figures maybe they do it because it helps students see them as regular guys.

For reasons that Carson never understood and doesn't feel comfortable asking about, Clinton Bowers travels with the football team to away games at least two or three times a year. Carson knows this because Bowers is always bragging about his connections with athletics.

Sam Brothers is constantly roaming the hallways taking friendly wagers on upcoming games. There is no money involved, and it all seems for fun. Still, it makes Carson a little uneasy. "Boy, sports are really important around here," Carson Johnson thinks to himself as Brothers passes by looking for a little action another hot dog bet.

Toby Chowsky has served for 12 years on the Faculty Athletics Board, a group charged with providing oversight of athletics on campus. He alternates between an elected slot, which has a three-year term limit, and an appointed slot. In years when he is eligible for election there is rarely any opposition. It seems that no one wants to run or vote against him. In years when his elected term is up, he is appointed by the dean to fill one of the at-large slots. As the dean explains it, experience is critical for such an important committee.

Professor Johnson has noticed these things but not really dwelled on them. He finds it



refreshing that nationally known scholars like Bowers, Brothers, and Chowsky can be regular guys who talk sports around the water cooler. They seem very fair and objective in all academic matters, and Carson remains confident that the quality of his work will carry the day when his tenure application is processed.

“Let’s get this reading list updated,” Professor Johnson says to his graduate assistant. “Classes will be starting before we know it.”

And football season will be starting too.

### *An Unforgettable Start to the Season*

“4 and 0! 4 and 0!”

The chant from delirious fans is deafening.

The SSU Jaguars are off to their best start in years with four dominating victories to open the season. Their punishing ground attack appears unstoppable, even when everyone knows what’s coming. Give the Jags the ball with the lead in the fourth quarter and it’s game over. They will line up and pound away, methodically moving the chains as the clock runs down and all hope for the opponent fades. All four games ended with the Jaguars taking a knee inside the opponent’s red zone. They could have scored again, but that’s not Coach Johnson’s style.

Fickle critics from the past few years now call the Brack Attack a thing of beauty. It’s the antidote for those fancy spread offenses that are all the rage in college football. Keep the ball away from them!

“Now hold on,” Coach Johnson says emphatically while quieting and addressing his troops in the dressing room after the most recent victory. “We haven’t done anything yet.”

*“But we sure are looking like a football team!”*

The players erupt in hollers, screams, and chants that are not understandable to most adults in the room.

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Quarterback Stan Rogers is the toast of the town. The senior signal caller has been named southeast region player of the week for three consecutive weeks. After a shaky season last year, his first as the starter, Stan the Man has come into his own. He knows the system frontwards and backwards, and has become adept at reading the defense and executing the Brack Attack to perfection. Some pundits are calling him the best all-round QB in college football today, pointing out that he can hurt the defense with his intelligence, poise, running ability, and passing skills.

Rogers is easily the most recognizable face at Southeast State University. He is more famous and more revered than his coach, the university president, and school's top professors.

Stan understands the fame that comes to a successful college football player at a school like SSU, but seems to keep it all in perspective. His likability comes in large part from his modesty, good manners, and pleasant disposition. Stan Rogers cheerfully participates in every public service activity the team sponsors, and he goes out of his way to greet and sign autographs for kids after each game, win or lose. Lately, they have all been wins.

Stan is the youngest member of a well-to-do family. Both his parents and his two older siblings are college graduates. Unlike his family members, Stan has never really been a strong student, and doesn't like to study. His parents have been very proud of his academic progress at SSU, though. He has earned much better grades at SSU than they ever anticipated.

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“6 – 0 Jags ranked 12th!”

The front-page headline of the local paper says it all after two more rousing victories for the SSU Jaguars. The offense continues to roll, showing not only its solid ground attack but also the ability to throw when the defense stacks the line. With solid special teams play and a defense that bends but doesn't break, the Jaguars look like a team that has put it all together.

“Keep focused and keep working,” captain Stan Rogers yells to his teammates above the din in the dressing room after the last win. He has had another stellar game but makes sure the game ball goes to one of his teammates.

In the press room at the stadium Brack Johnson is playing the classic role of worried coach. “We have a lot of work to do to become a really good football team,” Coach Johnson tells the largest gathering of reporters he has ever seen at a postgame press conference in his SSU tenure. “Our record is good, but right now we're very, very average.”

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“Stan Rogers from Southeast State was planning to call in this hour, but had to cancel because of his class schedule,” Sports World radio host Ace Kitchens reports on his Wednesday afternoon college football show, broadcast nationwide. His radio panel of college football experts has just reviewed SSU's 6 - 0 start and given it high praise. They see Rogers as the straw that stirs the drink, and find it refreshing that his class commitments took priority over their talk show.

“We're disappointed Rogers couldn't join us, but it's good to know that a college football

star has his priorities straight,” Kitchens tells his listeners.

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Two more wins, one a blowout and the other a close call, put the Jaguars squarely in the national limelight.

“The 8 – 0 Southeast State Jaguars have taken the football season by storm with their popular head coach and star quarterback,” says the lead article in *College Football Today*, the weekly pigskin bible. The cover photo of Coach Johnson and Stan Rogers will be the first thing seen by the four million subscribers in this week’s edition. “If they get by Northern Tech in week 9, it should be clear sailing for the Jaguars,” the article projected.

At his midweek press conference, which had to be moved to the coliseum annex because of the large number of credentials requested, Coach Johnson continues his cautious approach with the media. “We were lucky to survive last week,” Johnson says about the 20 – 17 nail biter. “We have to do a better job of controlling the line of scrimmage. We can’t get into a passing contest with anybody, especially Tech this week.”

Coach Johnson is referring to the biggest game of the year. His Jaguars, now ranked 5th in the country go on the road to face the 6th ranked Northern Tech Tigers. The Tigers have the most prolific offense in the country, averaging over 600 yards and 43 points per game.

Many are calling it the biggest game in SSU Jaguar history.

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The noise is deafening and it’s nearly impossible to hear signals at the line of scrimmage. Coach Johnson is not surprised by the frenzied atmosphere at Northern Tech and has his players ready. They practiced all week with loudspeakers blaring and are using hand signals to call formations and plays.

It’s working.

The Jaguars have the Northern Tech Tigers on their heels and are not letting up. The Tech offense is not getting anything close to its usual number of possessions, and the frustration is starting to show. Coach Johnson and his staff sense that the Tech offensive coaches are getting impatient in their play calling and are going for the home run on each possession. The Jaguar defensive backs are up to the task, and Tech is playing right into their hands.

Two long Jaguar drives in the first half ate up the clock, and helped SSU post a 14 – 3 halftime lead. No other team has held Northern Tech to less than 17 points in the first half this season.

The second half is a different game and provides all the drama the national television audience could want. Tech connects on three long touchdown passes in the second half, but SSU comes back with two more long, methodical scoring drives. With under eight minutes left, SSU leads 28 – 24 with Tech on offense facing a 3rd down and 7 from their own 22-yard line.

Tech tries to find its go-to receiver on a slant, but the SSU defender bats the ball away. The Tigers have to punt the ball back to the Jaguars. SSU makes a fair catch of the punt on their 38-yard line with 7:22 left on the clock.

What happens next is what Coach Brack Johnson has been preaching and teaching for the four years he has been the head coach of the SSU Jaguars. They line up and run the ball down the Tigers' throats.

The last drive consumes the remaining time and involves three 3rd-down conversions when everyone in the stadium knows what is coming. The Tigers cannot deal with the powerful line surge from SSU and are helpless to stop the Jaguars. The game ends with SSU in victory formation taking a knee at the Tech 18-yard line for a landmark 28-24 victory.

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There is no euphoria in the Jaguar dressing room after the game.

On the last snap Stan Rogers tripped over the leg of his center while trying to take a knee to end the game. The television replays show that the QB and center got tangled up and Rogers went down the wrong way on his right ankle. It looked like both players anticipated the celebration that would follow the play, and it affected their timing.

Coach Johnson tells reporters in the postgame press conference that he cannot speculate on the extent of the injury until the medical staff has an opportunity to evaluate Rogers.

But he already knows it's a high ankle sprain that can only be treated through rest.

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“Costly victory for SSU?” the headline of one national publication says of the big win. The article continues: “With their landmark victory over Northern Tech, the SSU Jaguars jumped to number 3 in the rankings, but may have lost their starting quarterback due to a freak injury on the last play. Will this be the end of their dream season?”

The injury to Stan Rogers is the talk of college football, and SSU finally acknowledges publically that it is a high ankle sprain. The school declines to say how long, if at all, Rogers will be sidelined. “It's a day-to-day thing,” the SSU sports information director tells reporters. However, most people know this is a serious injury that requires time to heal.

What they don't know is the injury to Stan Rogers is nothing compared to what is about to happen.

### *An Unforgettable End to the Season*

"We've got a problem," Professor Carson Johnson's graduate assistant says to him with some apprehension. She knows he is stressed about his tenure application and has been working night and day to complete the three notebooks he must submit documenting his accomplishments. "I know you're very busy and wouldn't bring this to you if it wasn't really important."

"What's up," Carson replies without looking up from the pile of papers on his desk.

"I've been posting grades in the Personal Finance class as you requested and saw something that just doesn't look right."

"What is it?" Carson says.

"There's one student whose in-class test and quiz scores are extremely low, but his out-of-class exercise grades, papers, and extra credit reports are excellent."

"That's typical. Most students do a lot better on work completed out of class," Carson replies, seeming a little annoyed and preoccupied.

"Not like *this*," his graduate student emphatically states.

"OK. Who is it? I'll take a look."

"His name is Stanley Edward Rogers."

Professor Johnson instantly recognizes the name and looks up to make eye contact for the first time in the conversation. "He's the football player who couldn't take the midterm exam a few weeks back because he was being interviewed on some national radio show. I asked you to give him the make-up exam."

"I gave him the make-up test and proctored it as you told me," replies the grad assistant. "He barely scratched on the midterm but later turned in nearly perfect financial analysis reports and completed two extra credit papers that were outstanding."

Professor Johnson thanks his assistant for her thoroughness and says he will follow up. "I'll take it from here," he says.

The graduate assistant leaves a little confused and wondering if she did the right thing in bringing up the matter to her very busy mentor.

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"Damn. I don't need this." "Not now," Professor Johnson thinks to himself as he

watches his grad assistant walk away. He knows he can't ignore what he has just been told, but hopes he will find a reasonable explanation.

His first step is to confirm the grade disparity. He pulls up his electronic grade book and immediately sees the grade differences that alarmed his assistant. Carson looks over the entire grade book and confirms that most students are doing better on the outside assignments than in-class tests and quizzes. But there is no denying the disparity is far greater for Stan Rogers than any other student in the class.

As he stares out in space pondering the appropriate action on his part, Carson is distracted by a conversation just outside his office. It's Professor Sam Brothers making the rounds to let everyone know that all hot dog bets are off until further notice. "With Rogers hurt and maybe out, it's a different ballgame," he says with a good-natured laugh. He is clearly making sure no one is holding him to any previous friendly wagers about upcoming games. Out of view of the hallway conversation, Carson shakes his head and smiles.

While Carson is still sitting there pondering his dilemma, he hears a beep from his desktop computer. He looks down at the monitor to see an incoming email message from his department head, Clinton Bowers. Dr. Bowers wants to know who is planning to attend the campus tour of athletic facilities he is organizing for interested faculty. It's another reminder of the importance of sports at SSU.

"Damn."

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Professor Johnson spends that evening at home reviewing tests, papers and assignments submitted by Stan Rogers. He has cause for concern, but still hopes that there is a reasonable explanation for what he is seeing. After all, Carson remembers his undergraduate days when he could really polish a paper if given time, but would often make silly mistakes when rushed on a timed test in class. The last thing he wants to do is jump to conclusions or accuse an innocent student who is trying to improve himself.

Carson knows this doesn't look right and he has a responsibility to do something. But he isn't sure exactly how to proceed. That will be answered for him the next morning when he arrives at his campus office.

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As Professor Johnson boots up his desktop computer the next morning, an email message comes up from Robert Paxon, Director of the SSU Student Athlete Academic Center. It is the

routine semester grade check sent to all teachers with athletes on their class rolls. The Center routinely requests grade information and other feedback about the academic performance of the athletes.

Some SSU professors resent the grade check and give Paxon a hard time about it every semester. They feel it amounts to babysitting that isn't done for other students. Some even claim it is illegal because it violates privacy rights of the student athletes.

Paxon politely explains every semester that the athletes sign waivers allowing their grades and academic performance to be reported to the Center, and that participation is optional on the part of the faculty member. He also emphasizes that this is the most effective way to monitor academic integrity.

Carson Johnson was never offended by the grade report requests from the Center, but he never bothered to respond before. This time is different. He opens the secure online reporting form on which he can view only the athletes listed on his class rolls. He focuses on the record for Stan Rogers. There are fields in the record where Carson can report grades and a large block labeled "Comments."

Professor Johnson does not enter any grades. Instead he types this comment in the record for Stan Rogers:

*Have concerns about discrepancies between performance on in-class work and outside assignments.*

Professor Johnson hits the submit button, closes the file, and heads off to a meeting.

Within an hour he has a voice mail from Robert Paxon.

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Coach Brack Johnson is somber but upbeat as he addresses the media at his midweek press conference. "Rogers is out this week," he says. "He's doing fine and the training staff is working with him. The last thing we want to do is rush him back before the ankle is healed."

"We're not a one man team," Brack continues. "We have confidence in William Grenshaw and everyone else will have to pick up the slack. We expect to play well this weekend."

True freshman William Grenshaw has seen plenty of action this year as the backup QB, but it has all been mop-up duty. The Jaguars have had several blowout victories, and that has allowed Grenshaw to get game action. But he has never been under center at crunch time. And it is crunch time for the 3rd ranked and undefeated SSU Jaguars.

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Professor Johnson doesn't know what to think of the quick response from Robert Paxon. The voice mail acknowledged the academic concern that Carson expressed in the grade report, and asked for a call back to schedule a meeting.

Carson has had no prior direct contact with Paxon or anyone in athletics. He suspects his comment in the grade report offended Director Paxon by insinuating that the Center was providing improper assistance to Stan Rogers. When he reaches Paxon by phone and later meets with him, Professor Johnson finds the exact opposite of what he expected.

Robert Paxon comes to Professor Johnson's office for the meeting. He immediately thanks Carson for reporting his concerns, and says integrity of the Center depends on faculty providing prompt notification of academic issues with athletes.

"We have a process we go through when a faculty member expresses a very serious concern like yours," Paxon explains. "We will meet separately with the student, and with every staff person, tutor, and mentor who has worked with him this semester. We have records of every advising and tutoring session, including required logs by tutors, and video surveillance in the tutor rooms. If there is an issue with the support our staff has given Rogers, I promise you we will find it and fix it, and we will hold accountable any staff member involved with any improper assistance."

Director Paxon continues, "Of course, as a faculty member you have the right to proceed against the student with a charged violation of the academic honor code based on any information you believe justifies the charge. The university academic grievance board deals with that if the student denies the charge."

Professor Johnson takes it all in. He is comforted by the professionalism and sincerity of the man seated across from him, and has no doubt that Robert Paxon will conduct the thorough review as promised.

Professor Johnson also realizes that he has no evidence that Stan Rogers, or anyone else, has done anything wrong. All he knows is that some numbers in his grade book look fishy.

"One more thing," Robert Paxon says before leaving. "Because it's such a high profile athlete I need to notify AD Smathers and Coach Brack Johnson that we are reviewing our support of Stan Rogers in light of your concerns." Professor Johnson feels a little unsettled about it because he doesn't have any direct proof of anything, but Paxon assures him that it is routine procedure.

After the meeting Carson Johnson sits still in his office chair and takes a deep breath. Suddenly he feels a huge sense of relief. He convinces himself that he has fulfilled his



responsibilities by reporting the issue. “What more can I do than report it?” he says rhetorically to an empty room.

Now he can get back to working on his tenure dossier and worrying about more important things -- like his future.

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Game 10 is played before a packed house in the SSU stadium, but it isn't the Jaguars' day. William Grenshaw plays well, but makes some key mistakes that only the coaches know about. Grenshaw has several misreads on option plays at critical times in the game that stymie the offense and require the Jaguars to punt the ball away. These are plays that Stan Rogers has learned to make in his sleep.

In this game, all Stan Rogers can do is limp on the sidelines carrying a clipboard and make all kinds of hand signals to his backup QB on the field.

Without the consistent rushing attack the Jaguars seem out of synch and demoralized. They fight hard but lose 28 – 14.

“The dream is dead,” a national paper says of SSU's bid for an undefeated season.

At the postgame press conference Coach Johnson is upbeat and optimistic. “We still have a lot to play for,” he said.

He dodges questions about the status of Stan Rogers for the next game.

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On Sunday afternoon after the first loss, Stan Rogers is summoned to a meeting in Coach Johnson's office. As he limps into the spacious office he notices AD Janice Smathers seated at the table with Coach Johnson.

They exchange a few pleasantries, but Brack gets right to the point. “Are you involved in any academic irregularities?”

“No sir. No ma'am,” Stan responds immediately, sitting perfectly still and making direct eye contact with his coach, and then his athletic director. “I met with Mr. Paxon Friday afternoon and answered all his questions. As I told him, school is really tough for me and I have to work extremely hard to keep up. I know I have to do a good job on all the outside assignments because I have never done well on timed tests in class. I have knocked myself out on the extra credit and take-home assignments to keep my head above water in some classes.”

Smathers and Coach Johnson listen carefully, ask a few other questions, and tell Rogers they are just doing their job in following up. Rogers says he understands, and limps out to go

down the hall for treatment on his ankle.

When the door closes behind Rogers, Coach Johnson looks at his boss and says: “I believe him.”

Smathers replies, “Me too. Please follow up with Paxon tomorrow to see if he has uncovered anything that conflicts with what we heard from Stan.”

“Will do.”

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The phone rings in Coach Johnson’s office at 6:30 AM on Monday. Everyone knows Brack gets in early and answers his own phone before the administrative staff arrives. It’s Robert Paxon calling.

“I was going to call you this morning,” Brack says as he hears Paxon’s voice. “Do we have any academic issues with Rogers that I need to know about?”

Paxon gives him the short answer first. “I don’t think so, but we are continuing to monitor the situation.” Paxon explains that the advising staff at the Center has questioned Rogers several times over the past few years about his academic work outside of class. They have also noticed the quality difference that created a red flag for Carson Johnson’s assistant. Paxon says that Rogers has always been able to explain how he did a paper or a project, and he has always been able to answer basic questions about the work.

“We have double checked all our support systems, interviewed all advisors and tutors working with him, and examined tutor logs and surveillance video from the Center,” Paxon continues. “We don’t find any irregularities with our academic support services to Stan, but are still concerned with the discrepancy between his test grades and outside work. Only one professor has ever raised this as an issue, but we are going to continue to monitor things closely.”

“He’s a great kid,” Coach Johnson replies. “Great kid.”

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After Robert Paxon finishes his thirty-minute conversation with Coach Brack Johnson, he dials the office number of Professor Carson Johnson to report the results of his investigation. Paxon suddenly remembers what time it is and hangs up the phone before it rings. He chuckles at himself for calling a professor at 7:00 AM. (It turns out that Professor Johnson had been in his office since 5:00 AM working on a research paper before his early morning classes.)

Later that morning Paxon reaches Carson Johnson and tells him everything that he told Brack Johnson a few hours earlier. Carson continues to feel relieved that he reported the incident

and that everything appears to be OK. Professor Johnson is feeling a little foolish after learning that he is the only professor ever to raise these concerns about Stan Rogers, a campus icon who has taken classes at SSU for four years.

Robert Paxon is not relieved. He has done his best to get to the bottom of the issue, but it is not his nature to assume that everything is OK. He continues to think about ways to improve the Center and preserve its integrity.

Coach Brack Johnson calls AD Smathers to tell her that the academic question about Stan Rogers is not an issue. He didn't know that Smathers and Robert Paxon already had multiple conversations about the issue and the AD was fully apprised of the situation.

Brack quickly puts the episode behind him so that he can prepare for this weekend. He has two more regular season games in what could still be a breakout year for the Jaguars. It looks like Brack will have to develop a game plan without his star quarterback for at least another week. His focus is now squarely on game 11 with no distractions.

It would only take about 24 hours for his focus to change completely.

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At 7:30 the next morning Brack hears a knock on his office door. As he looks up, he sees the big frame of Stan Rogers in the doorway.

"Coach, we need to talk," Stan says in an unusually subdued tone.

"Come in. Have a seat."

Brack notices that Stan is not limping at all as he closes the door and walks through the office to take a seat on the couch near the coach's desk. He is pleasantly surprised to see Stan moving so well, and gets excited about the prospect that he could play this weekend.

"How's the ankle? It looks like you're moving great."

"Coach, my ankle feels fine. I could have played last week."

Brack Johnson gives his star player an incredulous stare and then says: "What are you talking about?"

What happened next is hard to describe.

A six-foot five-inch physical specimen, known for his poise and coolness under pressure, is sobbing like a baby. He is unable to speak right away, and has to collect himself.

Coach Johnson is stunned and doesn't know what to do. He waits patiently for Stan to regain his composure and assures him that whatever it is they will deal with it. At this moment, Brack Johnson is a parent every bit as much as a coach.

"I'm living a lie," Stan finally musters enough courage to say.

At this point Coach Johnson begins to realize there is much more to the academic issue than anyone thought. Brack stares straight at Stan and says: "Go on."

"Coach, I can't do college work. It's not my fault. I have tried harder than anything, but I can't do the work here. I wanted to come clean the other day, but I couldn't say anything in front of the AD."

Brack's sympathy for the suddenly pathetic figure before him turns to anger, and he pauses a moment in an attempt to remain calm. "What exactly are you saying?"

Stan stares at the floor, unable to look his coach in the eye. "I've had a study buddy for years and wouldn't be eligible to play without the help."

"What the hell is a study buddy?"

Stan finally looks directly at Brack and answers his question. "You know. Someone to help me complete assignments."

Coach Johnson immediately seeks clarification of what he is hearing. "Do you mean a tutor at the Center?"

"No Coach. It doesn't have anything to do with Mr. Paxon or the Center. It's more than that. It's help I am getting on my own."

"We don't do that here," Brack says sharply. "Robert Paxon would not stand for that; Janice Smathers would not stand for that; and I won't either. I don't believe it. What the hell is going on?"

Stan feels the wrath of his coach. He has never before heard Brack Johnson say the word *hell* twice in one day. "Mr. Paxon and his staff don't know anything about it," Stan explains. "They would run me out of here if they knew."

Brack still doesn't get it. "How could this happen? How could you do this?"

Stan is more composed now and answers in a matter-of-fact style that reflects his usual poise. "The academic support staff can't monitor us 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. It's a matter of survival."

Coach Johnson sits up straight in his chair. "Us?"

"Me, Coach. Me."

Brack Johnson is fuming and he needs to find out more, but it will have to wait. He has a press conference this morning and then is flying to a luncheon speaking engagement before returning for practice this afternoon.

"Alright Stan. Listen to me. You will never play for SSU again. You are suspended. Do not show up for practice this afternoon. I want you in my office at 6:00 AM tomorrow and you better come clean on everything you know."

“I understand, Coach. But I need to explain to you more about my situation and why I had to do this. I don’t want to hurt anyone. Please let me explain tomorrow before you tell anyone about this.”

Brack reluctantly agrees to hold off on reporting anything until he can meet with Stan again tomorrow morning and find out more. He will use the injured ankle to explain Stan’s absence from practice this afternoon.

Stan Rogers gathers himself, apologizes profusely to Brack, and moves slowly toward the door, limping severely as though the ankle is very sore. He knows the sports information folks are waiting outside the door to escort Brack to the press conference.

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Reporters at the morning press conference have one thing on their mind: the status of Stan Rogers for game 11.

Coach Johnson tells them the ankle is still very sore and the healing process will take time. He says he plans to hold Rogers out of practice for a while, and is not sure when he can play.

The training staff is somewhat puzzled by Coach Johnson’s remarks about Stan’s ankle injury. They thought he was making good progress and could not see any issues on x-rays and tests of the ankle.

“We are encouraged by William Greshaw’s performance last week, and feel he will be even better this week with the experience he gained,” Brack tells the reporters.

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The next morning Stan Rogers shows up at Coach Johnson’s office at 6:00 on the button. There is no small talk, and Brack wants answers.

What he hears causes him to question his most basic beliefs about his profession.

“Coach, let me start by saying how much respect I have for you and all the staff members.”

“Cut the crap. I want answers.” Coach Johnson is in no mood for brown nosing.

“OK,” says Stan. “When you recruited me you knew my academic record and standardized test scores. You told me I was a good fit for SSU even though the university was ranked among the best public colleges in the country. At the time I didn’t even have the grades and test scores to qualify for a scholarship anywhere. Some of the top students at my high school were denied admission by SSU, yet I got in despite being way down in the lower half of my

graduating class.”

Coach Johnson sits back and listens intently.

“When I got here I tried my best to keep up academically, but I just didn’t have the background to do it on my own. Mr. Paxon and the Center have been great, but they draw a strict line on what they will and will not do. I had a study buddy in high school that helped me get the qualifying grades I needed, and that person is also at SSU now. It was natural that we hooked up again.”

Brack shifts uneasily in his chair but allows Stan to continue uninterrupted.

“But it’s not what you think, Coach. I don’t just hand my assignments over and get the completed work back to turn in. I try to do everything on my own first, straight up. I get some feedback from tutors at the Center and, if I can’t fix the problems on my own, I get help from my study buddy. I never turn in a paper or project without studying what my friend has done so that I can understand the assignment. I am trying my best and I have learned a lot doing it this way. It’s my way of learning.”

“But it’s not your work,” Brack says.

“I know. I know. It’s wrong,” Stan admits.

“Why are you telling me now. You have been here for four years.”

Stan looks directly at his coach and says, “How long could you live a lie?”

It’s a question that Coach Brack Johnson will ponder later.

Brack tells his star player once more: “You will never play for SSU again.” He then asks Stan the question that has been in the back of his mind during the entire meeting. “Are other players doing this?”

“I don’t know, Coach. I only know what I have had to do to survive here.”

“Coach, I am totally responsible for my situation and I understand completely that you must suspend me. But please consider what impact public reporting of this will have on innocent people. Mr. Paxon and his staff know nothing about this and couldn’t have prevented it without around-the-clock monitoring of my activities. The football team has received academic awards, the athletic department has a great reputation for academic integrity, and the entire university is on the rise. Why hurt everybody for my stupid actions? And you Coach; you don’t deserve the stigma of this. You didn’t do anything wrong.”

Coach Johnson asks, “What are you suggesting?”

“Coach, please hear me out before you decide on anything. I have given everything I have to this program and school. Let me go out with my injury. No one else has to get dragged into something they had nothing to do with. No one even knows about it. Nothing good can

happen if my mistake drags everyone through the mud. I am the loser here. I won't be able to play anymore."

Stan Rogers doesn't stop there. "Let's be honest, Coach. SSU has made millions of dollars from my sweat on the football field. I have helped SSU sell thousands and thousands of tickets and pack the stadium for every game. Kids and adults all over the country are wearing my jersey this year, and SSU is collecting the royalties. You probably make \$2 million a year (it's actually only \$1.5M) because of guys like me who project the image that SSU wants. I didn't ask to come here; you recruited me and said I could do the work and would be fine. No offense, Coach, but I'm living a lie because of you."

After what seemed like a very long pause, Brack Johnson ends the conversation. He tells Stan the meeting is over without committing to do, or not do, anything. He has a lot to think about. His concerns go beyond what he has just learned from his QB.

Stan Rogers apologizes again to his coach and leaves the room with an exaggerated limp.

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That night is the longest, and probably the most important, of Brack Johnson's life. He and his wife, Marie, have a long talk about the pressures and family demands of being a big-time college football coach. The Stan Rogers case brought the issue to a head, but it's much more complicated and involved than this one situation. They've talked about it before, but it seems really serious this time.

Brack wonders if he has been true to his values when recruiting kids with limited academic skills to SSU to play football. He has always been optimistic about the academic potential of young men. But now he questions whether he got too caught up in the heated recruiting battles that dominate the news and result in the seemingly all-important ranking of recruiting classes. He knows the recruiting rankings mean nothing and should not influence his choice of kids to recruit to SSU.

Even though it is his chosen profession, Brack is increasingly uncomfortable with the importance of college football. His head is swimming as he recalls issues that have added to his discomfort.

He can't justify to himself the inflated salary he receives or the perks that come with coaching. In an austere period on the SSU campus, coaching bonuses, raises, and staff additions continue while the rest of the university endures cutback after cutback.

Coach Johnson is amazed that SSU proceeded with projects for his football program after halting construction plans on several academic buildings because of budget woes. He appreciates

the support but wonders how people on campus feel about it.

Brack was shocked when he recently attended an event at an academic building on campus. He couldn't believe the poor condition of the building compared to the lavish facilities of his football operation. He understands the economics of major sports and the revenue generation of his program, but somehow it didn't feel right to him.

Coach Johnson feels partly responsible for the football culture on campus. He feels now that he should have used his position to help keep football in perspective within the academic environment of the university.

Brack is haunted by one particular incident when he should have done something but didn't. It was a few years ago when he was walking down the hallway of the football offices. He overheard his recruiting coordinator in a phone conversation with the admissions office. Brack paused in the hallway and heard his recruiting coordinator say to the admissions officer: "Well that's fine. But he *will* get in school." He knew this wasn't the way for his staff to interact with university officials, but he kept on walking and never said anything to his top recruiter. He figured at the time recruiting was going great and he didn't want to thwart the efforts of his most successful assistant.

Brack and Marie discuss several other incidents that have given them discomfort, and they readily admit that the issues are mostly their own doing. Despite advice from his AD, Brack allowed himself and his family to get involved in some product endorsements at the insistence of his agent. It seemed innocent and fun at the time it was taped, but Brack and Marie were horrified when they saw their kids in a television ad hawking pizza for a local establishment. It didn't help when their youngest daughter laughed at seeing herself on TV and declared: "I don't even like that pizza!"

"What were we thinking? Have we lost our bearing?"

On this night they seriously consider whether the current state of college coaching is the best thing for them and their kids.

They talk for hours.

Finally they make a decision about their future, and agree to sleep on it and then revisit it in the morning.

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That same evening Carson and Karine Johnson are opening a bottle of champagne to celebrate. Professor Johnson completed his tenure file today and also received acceptance of an article in the top academic journal in his field. The timing couldn't be better with his tenure



review coming up. The prized publication should be the icing on the cake.

Professor Johnson has already received email congratulations from Professors Bowers, Chowsky, and Brothers on having his article approved for publication in a journal with a 2% acceptance rate. This puts Carson among the top publishers in his department.

It's party time at the Carson Johnson household!

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The next morning Brack and Marie Johnson embrace as they confirm the decision they made a few hours ago. (There wasn't much time for sleeping.) They are even more certain that their decision is the right thing for them and SSU.

Coach Brackston Johnson will resign his position as head football coach at Southeast State University at the end of the regular season.

QB Stan Rogers will be out of action indefinitely due to serious unforeseen complications from his ankle injury.

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Brack heads directly to the office of Janice Smathers to tell her in person of his decision to resign at the end of the regular season.

Smathers is surprised but not totally shocked that Brack wants to make a change in his life. She tries to talk him out of it but quickly realizes that he has thought about this for a long time and it is a family decision. They talk for some time about all the things going on in college sports, and Smathers tells Brack how much she respects him and the decision he has made. She gives him the opportunity to change his mind, but Brack says his decision is firm.

Janice Smathers then asks Brack to keep a lid on his plans until after the final regular season game. There are too many distractions now, and she thinks it is best if they wait until after the last game to make the announcement. She thanks Brack for his professionalism in letting her know.

Brack has no problem in keeping it quiet for a few more weeks. In fact, he prefers it that way. He doesn't want to be the focus of attention in the two remaining regular season games. He still has a chance to go out with 11 wins, and the football coach in him is eager to get back to the practice field to get ready.

Brack and his athletic director discuss no issues other than his resignation plans.

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Within minutes after Brack Johnson left her office, Janice Smathers is on the phone. She is a savvy AD and knows you have to be prepared for sudden coaching changes. In a locked drawer in her desk, Smathers has a list of possible coaching candidates for every sport at SSU.

She quickly checks with SSU President Blake Tomlinson to inform him of the developments and get approval to approach a person she thinks would be a top candidate. President Tomlinson gives approval for her to make preliminary contact with the prospect, although he expresses some reservations and makes it clear the hiring decision must have his final approval.

An hour later Janice Smathers and Reginald Dyer are talking on the phone. Dyer is out of coaching this year due to some issues at his previous school. He has done his penance and said all the right things, and appears ready to be accepted back into the coaching ranks. Dyer is considered an offensive mastermind, and Smathers knows a lot of schools will be interested in him. She also knows that SSU will have the jump if she moves quickly.

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Game 11 is a disaster for William Grenshaw and SSU.

In his second start Grenshaw plays with less confidence than his first start, and makes many more mistakes. This time the problems are not just misreads. Three fumbles and two interceptions make it nearly impossible for the Jags to have any continuity on offense.

The usual steady play of the defense is missing as well. SSU falls behind 13 – 0 at halftime, and manages to do only slightly better in the second half. The final score is 20 - 7, giving the Jags their second straight loss and dropping their season record to 9 – 2.

The only saving grace about this game is that it was played on the road and SSU fans were spared from witnessing the debacle.

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At the postgame press conference, Brack Johnson seems demoralized and is hard pressed to find anything positive about his team's performance. Coach Johnson squashes questions about Stan Rogers by telling reporters that complications from the ankle injury prevented Stan from making this trip and will keep him out next week as well.

With the last home game coming up, Coach Johnson promises the players and coaches will put this disappointment behind them and get back to work.

“We want to send our seniors out on a winning note and position ourselves for a great bowl bid.”

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Stan Rogers is among the seniors recognized at the last home game. The applause is deafening as he hobbles out on the field with his parents to receive a plaque and hug from Coach Johnson.

The game is worse than the previous week.

William Grenshaw can't be blamed for this one. He plays brilliantly and keeps his team in the game with great reads on the option, accurate throws, and some shifty running of his own.

Two blocked punts and a porous defense ruin this day. The defense plays its worst game of the year, giving up big plays all afternoon. A close game turns into a rout in the fourth quarter, and the Jaguars are beaten badly 42 – 21.

Disgruntled fans let their feelings be known as the SSU team heads to the locker room.

The regular season record of 9 - 3 seems like a failure now.

### *The Aftermath*

Reporters are notified that there will be a press conference at the athletic complex on Sunday afternoon at 4:00 PM. Some think it is a wrap-up session for the season, but experienced reporters know you don't do that on the Sunday after the last game.

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An overflow crowd of reporters and onlookers eagerly awaits the start of the press conference.

Coach Brack Johnson walks in accompanied by AD Smathers and President Tomlinson. They have already met with the football team. Now it's time for the press.

The sports information director makes the introductions and says that Coach Johnson would like to address the group first and make an announcement.

“I have submitted my resignation today as head football coach at Southeast State University. My family and I have enjoyed our time here, and will always be Jaguar fans. I want to thank everyone for their support and patience, especially AD Smathers and President Tomlinson. This was a family decision for us, and we look forward to the next phase of our lives. Go Jaguars.”

AD Smathers and President Tomlinson follow with glowing praise for the work of Coach Johnson. They emphasize that the resignation was his decision, and that they tried to talk him out

of it.

In less than fifteen minutes it's all over for Brack Johnson.

There is a short break, allowing Brack to leave the press conference before the AD and President take questions. Coach Johnson shakes many hands as he leaves the room, and a splattering of applause turns into a rare standing ovation from the reporters as he exits the press conference.

When things resume there aren't any questions about Coach Johnson and his decision. The reporters want to know about the search and prospects for the new coach. After some comments by AD Smathers, the first question is: "Are you considering Reginald Dyer?"

Smathers obviously dodges the question, saying they are not going to comment on any candidates. A few reporters in the room are way ahead of her. During the break they accessed the state government web site and learned that the school plane landed two days ago in an airfield in Purgatory, Arkansas, where Reginald Dyer is known to have a home.

Smathers and Tomlinson will only say that they expect to move quickly and another press conference will be held at the appropriate time.

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Two days later SSU receives an invitation to the Copper Bucket Bowl. It wasn't what they hoped for when the record was 9 – 0, but it's a good bowl and a chance for redemption. Janice Smathers says the school is delighted with the bid and expects a huge turnout from loyal Jaguar fans.

Speculation is rampant about who will coach the team in the bowl.

The question will be answered very quickly.

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A hastily called press conference occurs three days after receiving the bowl bid. AD Smathers and President Tomlinson enter the room with the new coach.

Reginald Dyer is presented as the 14th head football coach in SSU history. He is a household name in college football, known for his innovative offense and his brushes with the NCAA. Dyer has worked hard to rehabilitate his image over the past year, and he readily agreed to a contract that requires strict rules compliance and academic success. He is humbled by his appointment, and calls it a dream job.

Dyer says he will coach the Jags in the bowl game, but he won't tinker with the system in place. He says he may add a few wrinkles that he is sure the fans will like.

A huge crowd outside the building is heard chanting:

“Reggie, Reggie, Reggie.”

\*\*\*\*\*

The Copper Bucket Bowl has never seen anything like this. With Stan Rogers back in the saddle, the stadium is filled with Jaguar fans. They are rocking the place.

Reginald Dyer put in more than a few new wrinkles in the offense, and Stan Rogers hasn't missed a beat. With more freedom to roll out and pass, Stan is having the best day of his career. Fans are amazed at Stan's mobility after his very serious ankle injury.

Stan sets a Copper Bucket Bowl record with 220 yards passing and 165 yards rushing, leading the Jaguars to a lopsided 35 – 7 victory. He is the unanimous choice for most valuable player, and is carried off the field by his teammates.

It's the first 10-win season at SSU in 27 years.

The SSU crowd alternates its cheers:

“Stan the Man, Stan the Man, Stan the Man.”

“Reggie, Reggie, Reggie.”

\*\*\*\*\*

Carson and Karine Johnson watched the Copper Bucket Bowl at home on television with their family. They are happy for the team and the school, but just don't get all the hoopla about football.

After the kids go to bed, Carson and Karine are watching the awards ceremony as Stan Rogers collects his MVP trophy.

Karine says to her husband: “Can I ask you something?”

“If I say no you'll ask anyway, so go ahead,” Carson replies playfully.

Karine says, “It's about Stan Rogers. Are you convinced that he did his own work in your class?”

“I reported it and they did a thorough investigation,” Carson replies matter-of-factly.

“That's not what I asked,” Karine says, a little annoyed at the canned response from her husband.

“Do *you* think he did his own work?”

Carson looks at her for a moment.

He shrugs his shoulders without saying anything.

She knew not to ask again.

### Five Years Later

“Get *low*. Get *low*. Get *low*.” It’s the unmistakable voice of Brack Johnson doing what he loves best on the football field.

As preseason practice continues in the stadium, Coach Johnson takes a moment to reflect on his surroundings. The much needed paint job on the scoreboard is just about finished, with the bright green letters spelling out ‘Valley Middle School Jaguars.’ Brack is very thankful to the school’s Parent Teacher Organization and its president, Marie Johnson, for raising the funds to spruce up the scoreboard.

Brack Johnson is in his dream job, serving as head of the social studies department at the school and coaching its football team. He knows he is working with kids in their formative years both academically and athletically, and he has never been happier or more fulfilled. It’s the most important job he has ever held.

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“Can we move that desk over here?” Professor Carson Johnson is politely giving directions to the crew moving him into his new spacious office. The new office comes with his promotion to Southeast State University Distinguished Professor, the top faculty honor at the school.

His department head, Clint Bowers, made sure Carson got the better of the two corner offices that were available. This one overlooks the football stadium, and is Clint’s favorite office in the building. He thought it only right that the best office should go to the new superstar professor.

After everyone but Carson leaves, Karine Johnson stops by to help arrange things for her husband. She looks out the window and sees the enormous stadium.

“Yuck!” Karine says in disgust. “You would think they’d have a prime office with a decent view.”

Carson looks at her for a moment.

He shrugs his shoulders but doesn’t saying anything.

### Epilogue

*Brack Johnson* taught and coached at Valley Middle School for 21 years. He was named *National Middle School Educator of the Year* during his 10th year at the school. The Valley

Middle School Jaguars now play their home games on Brackston Johnson Field.

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*Carson Johnson* became Dean of the SSU Business School only six years after being named Distinguished Professor. He is one of the highest paid administrators at Southeast State University. Karine helped him redecorate the Dean's Office, which overlooks a beautiful quadrangle on campus.

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*Stan Rogers* graduated from SSU the semester after Coach Johnson left. Undrafted by the pros, he signed a free agent contract but was cut. He has worked ever since for one of the automobile dealerships owned by his parents. Ten years after graduation, in his first year of eligibility, Stan Rogers was inducted into the SSU Athletic Hall of Honor. The inscription on his plaque reads: "*A model citizen, student, and athlete.*"

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*Janice Smathers* retired four years after Coach Johnson resigned. During retirement she served for 10 years on the Day Commission on College Sports, a watchdog group advocating reform in college athletics. Ironically, she championed reforms on the Commission that she strongly opposed as a working AD.

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*Robert Paxon* left SSU exactly one year after Brack Johnson resigned. Paxon did not feel comfortable with the new football staff, and he made a career change. He created an online business distributing electronic books and became a multimillionaire.

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*Professor Clinton Bowers* retired from SSU two years after Carson Johnson took over as dean. Bowers remained a faithful Jaguar fan but was disappointed he was no longer invited to travel with the football team.

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*Professor Toby Chowsky* ended his service on the SSU Faculty Athletics Board after 24 years. He wanted to continue but wasn't eligible for re-election. Dean Carson Johnson declined to appoint him to an at-large seat, saying that maybe the Board needed some new blood.

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*Professor Sam Brothers* ran successfully for a seat in the state legislature. He retired from SSU and served 10 years in the legislature, becoming a strong advocate for better funding of higher education in the state.

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*Charley Paulson* never coached again after Brack Johnson replaced him at SSU, but he continued to seek the limelight. Paulson suffered a minor heart attack during dress rehearsal for *Dancing With the Stars* and had to withdraw from the competition. His agent tried unsuccessfully to get him a seat on the panel of judges on *American Idol*.

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*William Grenshaw* became an All America quarterback at SSU under the tutelage of Coach Reginald Dyer. After graduating with honors, he was the eighth overall pick in the first round of the professional draft, the highest SSU draft pick ever. Grenshaw played for nine seasons in the National Football League. His career came to a sudden end following, of all things, a severe ankle injury.

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*Reginald Dyer* coached at SSU for 12 seasons and won more games than any football coach in school history. His program was recognized for outstanding academic achievement on nine different occasions and was never involved in any major rules infractions.

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To this day, *Brackston Johnson* and *Carson Johnson* have never met.

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### [About the Author](#)

Larry LaForge spent thirty-five years in higher education as a teacher, researcher, and active member of the academic community. He taught business management courses at every level from undergraduate students to doctoral students, received major research grants, published in top journals, directed dissertations, and served on editorial boards. He also advised student organizations, chaired major campus committees, and worked closely with athletics as a faculty representative to the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA).

Dr. LaForge received significant professional awards during his academic career. Clemson University named him *Alumni Distinguished Professor of Management* for his work with undergraduate students. The Clemson faculty recognized him with the *Class of 1939 Award for Excellence*, their highest honor. Student government at Clemson honored him with the *Prince Award for Innovation in Teaching*, and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching named him *1995 South Carolina Professor of the Year*.

He received his B.S. from Clemson, and his MBA and Ph.D. from the University of Georgia.



As an independent writer, Larry LaForge draws on his experiences in higher education and college sports to create stories that illustrate interesting issues and dilemmas in our times.

Visit his Facebook Page: [\*Larry LaForge Short Stories\*](#) for information about his writing activities and other works.