

Chapter 62

A carpet was rolled out onto the ice leading to the blue line at one end of the hockey rink. Pistachio bounded out on the carpet, leapt onto the ice, and slid a short way sitting up, spinning in a slow circle waving to the cheering of the crowd. A microphone was sticking out of his right pocket. He scrambled back using his claws as a student was led out with a hockey stick. Barriers were placed in front of both goals with a small opening in the bottom center of each.

Rick pulled the microphone out. “What’s your name?” Rick asked as he stood-up on his hind paws and then held the microphone to the student.

“Jerome Kensington.”

“And your major and year?”

“I’m a sophomore majoring in physical therapy.”

“Let’s hear it for Jerome Kensington, everyone!” The crowd cheered.

“Alright, so you’re the lucky winner whose program number was drawn. You’re going to get two shots, one at each goal from this blue line. You’ll first try for the close one and then the far one. If you make both goals, you win a full semester scholarship. There are other prizes for making one or the other goal and for hitting the board just like this.”

Rick dropped a puck, sat back down, wigwagged his tail, knocking the puck with it. It coasted towards the far goal. It tapped against the board blocking most of it. The crowd cheered. A referee skated by and retrieved the loose puck.

He stood back-up. “I’ll confess I’ve been practicing that. You’ll get to use a hockey stick instead of my tail. Let me get out of the way and you can take your two shots when you’re ready.” Rick tucked the microphone into his pocket and scampered back along the carpet towards the sideboards out of the way.

Jerome gently swished the puck back and forth with the hockey stick a few times. He then took his shot at the close goal. The crowd seemed to hold their breath. The puck slipped through the opening and the goalie referee lit the goal light and sounded the goal horn. The crowd roared! Jerome shook the stick in the air yelling in excitement. He then faced the other goal. He lined up the puck and slid it towards the goal with his stick. It coasted down the ice and slapped the edge of the opening before ricocheting into the goal. The goal horn roared as the goal light was lit. The crowd was on their feet, redoubling their roaring cheer in excitement! Jerome pumped both hands in the air and started jumping up and down yelling and screaming in excitement.

Rick’s squirrel side quickly did calculations as he charged out without consciously realizing he was doing so. He leapt onto the ice dropping the microphone on the carpet as Jerome came down off the carpet onto the ice and slipped. As Rick slid by Jerome fell on him. Rick sprawled-out at

the same time absorbing and cushioning the student's fall. He grunted from the weight as the two of them slid a short way on the ice. The crowd fell silent.

"Holy shit!" Jerome exclaimed. "How did you get next to me so quickly?" he stammered.

Rick panted a moment and then replied calmly. "Does it matter? Are you alright, Jerome?"

Jerome was quiet a moment. "Yeah, I'm fine, Stash. Thanks."

"Good. Wave to the crowd so they know you're fine but stay on my back or at least hold on as I bring us back to the carpet." Jerome complied as Rick using his claws brought them back over. Jerome crawled off the giant squirrel and then stood-up on the carpet. Rick joined him, retrieved the microphone, stood-up on his hind paws, and hugged the student.

"Despite that small mishap, that was incredible, Jerome!" Rick shouted into his microphone as the crowd cheered again. "I've worked here at WMSU for the past eight or so years. The last time someone made both goals was, I think, three or four years ago. Let's hear it for Jerome Kensington who just won a full semester scholarship!"

The crowd roared again. Jerome waved. Rick lead him off the ice. He stood-up briefly and leaned into Jerome just before they exited the rink. "Congratulations, again. As a winner though, you'll need to talk to the press." Rick pointed to a small group with his tail who were waiting for them. "I'll be by your side to ensure they behave. I'll do my best to not steal the limelight from you, though they try to question me more."

"Welcome back to the National Sports Network. We're now going to show you the Play of The Week. We're calling it our double-play. This week our choice isn't from a professional or college player. It did take place at Division C White Mountain State University in Groton, New Hampshire this past weekend between the first and second periods in their men's hockey game versus Springfield University. Like at many basketball and hockey games, they hold a shooting contest between periods. This student, Jerome Kensington, won the draw."

The newscaster pauses while footage of Jerome making both shots is shown.

"And there's the first part of the Play of the Week. Incredible shots! Maybe the WMSU Squirrels Hockey team should sign him up..." he pauses as Jerome falls, landing on Rick as they both slide across the ice. "though he may need a little practice keeping upright on the ice. And that's the second part as WMSU's back-up mascot, Pistachio, catches him as he fell. Both Jerome and Pistachio were uninjured. Jerome won a full semester scholarship for his feat. After our next break, we'll have an interview recorded right after the feat with both Jerome Kensington and the Pistachio. By the way, that's not a mascot costume, folks. Pistachio has an interesting story to tell. We hope you'll stay tuned for that..."

Dr. Canatori looked over the x-rays. “You got lucky, Rick. Nothing broken or cracked, just some very bruised muscles.”

“I had hoped that was the only issue. I charged out there by instinct to help that student. I could see in my mind what was about to happen before it did. He’s a physical therapy major. Maybe I could have him work on me.” Rick gigglechittered.

“I’m giving you a written order to pass on to your employer. You need to take it easy for the coming week to give things time to properly heal. No tree climbing either.

Rick drooped his tail.

“I’m serious about that last bit.” Dr. Canatori stated. “Perhaps I’m being overcautious, but better safe than sorry.”

“Understood, Doc.”