

COMMON GROUND

Written by Josh Haber

Produced by Devon Cody

Story editing by Nicole Dubuc, Josh Haber

Supervising direction by Jim Miller

Directed by Denny Lu, Mike Myhre

Transcribed by Alan Back (ajback@yahoo.com)

Note: The characters of Clear Sky and Wind Sprint are referred to by others as “Sky” and “Wind” during this episode, respectively. However, I have previously used those speaker tags to refer to the characters of Sky Stinger and Wind Rider in “Top Bolt” and “Rarity Investigates!” In this transcript, I will therefore denote both characters by their full names.

Prologue

(Opening shot: a black screen, against which a newspaper spins into view from the center and toward the camera. The black-and-white photo on the front page displays a ball in flight toward a pole-mounted buckball basket, and an energetic male announcer’s voice is heard.)

Announcer 1: Highlights in the world of sports.

(Dissolve to a game in progress during the day, seen from the upper-level seats of a stadium filled with cheering fans decked out in team colors. The blue-clad Ponyville team of Fluttershy, Pinkie Pie, and Snails is one of the two contenders, and a referee stallion has ball in hoof, ready to start the action.)

Announcer 1: Buckball fever has swept Equestria.

(As he continues, the ball is bounced for a buck-off and the opposing team’s earth pony gets in the first kick. Fluttershy catches the ball in a wing and spins in place to sling it down to Pinkie, who bucks it hard enough to force the other pegasus to duck.)

Announcer 1: What started as a backyard hobby for fruit farmers and the like has blossomed into a literal phenomenon, with something for everypony. *(Snails levitates his basket, catches for a goal, and rolls it smugly in midair.)* Unicorns, pegasi, and earth ponies alike can’t get enough of this breakthrough sport.

(Overhead shot of the stadium on the end of this, zooming in slowly, then cut to a row of Ponyville fans doing the wave. A dissolve shifts the view to a stretch of desert terrain; here, Cherry Berry flips a ball in a mouth-held pot while Bon Bon gets fitted out with a baseball cap equipped with a juice box holder and spiraling straw.)

Announcer 1: And with its popularity still on the rise—

(Bon Bon winks and holds up a themed mug. Zoom in on this as a second, different one is clunked against it for a toast.)

Announcer 1: —buckball fans want— *(Cut to Fleur, who magically secures a bal/basket pendant around her neck.)* —nay, demand an institution catering to their new obsession.

(On the end of this, zoom in on the bauble and cut to an exuberant Ponyville supporter waving a “#1” foam-finger hand. A cluster of sport-decorated balloons rises past the camera, the view shifting behind them to a bare stretch of land. Pan slowly across the area, new bits of construction popping into view from the ground up to form a brand-new stadium with peripheral buildings. The whole stands on a platform elevated several steps above the hardpan.)

Announcer 1: And the ponies of Appleloosa answered the call, delivering a state-of-the-art locale where fans Equestria over can celebrate their passion—the Buckball Hall of Fame!

(A ball is swept across the screen, held in Fluttershy’s tail, and pulled back to return the action back to the game. As the narrative continues, she whips it down to Pinkie for a shot on goal; the opposing pegasus dives backward in midair but fails to intercept, and the ball drops into Snails’ basket.)

Announcer 1: Though, given the game’s recent nature, the only inductees so far will be the members of the current championship team from Ponyville.

(The defeated squad members hang their heads as three vertical panels slide into view, each framing one winner in close-up. The camera zooms out from this tableau to put it on the screen of a movie theater auditorium—this entire sequence has been a newsreel, and the team has been watching it from the front row. On the next line, cut to a close-up of them, Snails munching placidly from a bag of popcorn. They are not wearing their jerseys.)

Pinkie: *(to Fluttershy, whispering loudly)* Do you think they know we’re here? *(Rainbow Dash, one row back, leans forward to her.)*

Rainbow: I think they have a pretty good idea.

(Zoom out to frame the entire audience. Every seat is filled, and all eyes are turned eagerly toward the trio regardless of the individual ponies’ team allegiances.)

Snails: A pretty good idea about what?

(As he chomps obliviously away, the three mares exchange puzzled glances that might translate as “He can’t really be that dense, can he?” Fluttershy offers a humoring grin and shrug before the view fades to black.)

OPENING THEME

Act One

(Opening shot: fade in to a slow pan across the Appleloosa complex, with a few ponies milling around the stadium. The Ponyville four are among the crowd emerging from one of the outbuildings—the theater that ran the newsreel. Snails is a bit farther back.)

Fluttershy: I can't believe the ponies of Appleloosa built this place!

Pinkie: Yeah! Especially after their team lost to us. They must *really* love buckball.

(An earth pony colt in Ponyville blue races up excitedly.)

Colt: *(stammering, trotting in place)* Oh, my gosh! It's you! I can't believe you're you—I-I mean, here! I mean, Team Ponyville, yeah!

Snails: Yep, it's us!

Colt: How much for an autograph? *(He fishes out a sheet of paper and holds it forth.)*

Snips: Bits for autographs, eh?

(Zoom in to an extreme close-up of his beady eyes, which ring up dollar signs to replace the pupils, then zoom out as they return to normal and he turns to his buddy.)

Snips: *(whispering)* Snails! You thinkin' what I'm thinkin'?

Snails: *(normal volume)* What's the sound of one hoof clapping?

Snips: *(ditto)* Yeah! I mean, uh, no! *(to crowd)* How many of you would pay for an autograph from my best friend Snails?

(The plethora of waving hooves, clamoring voices, and proffered legal tender answers that one in a big hurry.)

Snails: *(awed)* Wow. That's a lot of writing.

(Fluttershy, Pinkie, and Rainbow leave him to it and extricate themselves from the throng.)

Fluttershy: I'm so proud they've decided to honor us. I never thought I'd get to be in anything like a hall of fame.

Pinkie: Me neither! Unless you count a Royal Order of Party Planners Memorial Library, which— *(Dismissive chuckle.)* —I don't, because every party planner gets one of those eventually.

(They pause in their perambulation at the sight of a team getting in a bit of practice in a clearing beyond the edge of the complex. Earth pony buck, pegasus catch/throw, unicorn basket control for the score—all are done expertly, and the three trade high fives, taking no notice of the worry

and mild hostility coming their way from the mares. Fluttershy shifts her attention to Snips/Snails and their autograph enterprise. Cut to them, the former colt taking the bits from customers and the latter stamping an inked hoof onto whatever they set before him: ball, cap, even a stallion's bared chest.)

Fluttershy: *(from o.s.)* I hope Snails finishes signing autographs soon. *(Back to her, Pinkie, and Rainbow.)* We can't play without him, and if we lose or forfeit one game, we'll be out of the tournament.

Rainbow: *(grumbling, pacing)* Well, he better get his flank over here, then. You have to win the first few games without me cheering you on.

Fluttershy: Oh! Why?

Rainbow: *(sighing)* Applejack was too busy to come, so— *(pulling out/unfolding a brochure)* —she made me promise to go to *all* the museum exhibits and tell her about them. *(Put it away.)* I'm gonna try and get in first and beat the crowd so I can get back to the tournament faster.

Pinkie: Ooh! Then you'd better hurry! *(pointing)* Looks like there's already a line! *(Rainbow swivels her head to see.)*

Rainbow: *What?!?*

(Cut to the front entrance of the Buckball Hall of Fame museum, as seen in the newsreel. The doors are closed, and two items have been set up at the base of the front steps: a folding lawn chair and a tent emblazoned with the eight-point compass rose that is Daring Do's cutie mark. Rainbow flies into view toward the doors; extreme close-up of one handle as she tugs mightily but fails to budge it, then cut to her again on the start of the next line.)

Rainbow: The doors aren't even open yet.

(Zoom out to frame the tent and chair, the latter now holding a red/white/blue baseball cap and short red scarf.)

Rainbow: *(landing by these)* What kinda sports fan camps out for a museum?

(She gets her answer when the tent's occupant backs out into the light—it is Quibble Pants, the nitpicking earth pony stallion she met in "Stranger Than Fan Fiction." He has traded the bush shirt he wore in that episode for a golf shirt with blue trim at the hem and red at the sleeves.)

Quibble: The real question is, what kind of sports fan *doesn't*?

Rainbow: *(gasping, stunned)* Quibble Pants?!

Quibble: *(donning cap)* Rainbow Dash! Fancy meeting you here! *(He drops to his haunches and adjusts it just so.)*

Rainbow: Fancy meeting me? *(He stands and nips up the scarf, draping it around his neck.)* I-I'm a sports pony. Of course I'd be here. What's fancy is *you* being here—if "fancy" meant "confusing."

Quibble: There's nothing fancy *or* confusing about it. Y-You can't keep me away from that—that buckball rink. I'm-I'm the biggest fan there is.

(He delivers the preceding line with a noticeable degree of forced enthusiasm, which is further underscored by the strained grin he tacks on at its end. Rainbow aims a quizzical glance at him, then the stadium.)

Rainbow: Uh, it's a buckball field. And...you are?

Quibble: Oh, pfft, sure. Wh-What with all the bu-bucking, and the balling, o-on the buckball field, wh-which is where they play buckball.

(Close-up of Rainbow, who begins to regard him with a healthy degree of skepticism; both again on the start of the next line.)

Quibble: I-I-I s—I wanted to be first inside to experience the grand history of the sport. *(sitting in chair)* I-I guess only a real fan would understand that.

Rainbow: Whaaaa...?

Quibble: *(standing, moving toward edge of platform)* Oh, perfect timing.

(Coming up the steps toward him is Clear Sky, a bright pink unicorn mare with light blue-green eyes and whose straight mane/tail are striped in white and pastel shades of pink and blue. A short, pale blue scarf is tied around her neck, and her cutie mark is a paired sun and crescent moon. With her is Wind Sprint, a sour-looking pegasus filly: medium blue coat with a slight violet tinge, straight blue mane/tail shot with pink streaks, gray-violet eyes framed by birdcatcher spots at the outer corners and the bridge of the nose, cutie mark of a horseshoe within a fireball.)

Quibble: Rainbow Dash, I'd like you to meet Clear Sky— *(tenderly, taking her hoof)* —the most amazing pony I've ever met.

Rainbow: Um, you've met Daring Do, so that's probably an exaggeration. *(to Clear Sky, chuckling)* No offense.

Clear Sky: None taken. When it comes to describing your special somepony, a little exaggeration's normal. *(to Quibble, touching his shoulder)* And I feel the same way about you.

(Her voice is quite pleasant. Mare and stallion happily rub noses, prompting Wind Sprint to let her tongue loll out in disgust at the sappy display before Rainbow leans down to her.)

Rainbow: And who is this?

Clear Sky: This is my daughter Wind Sprint.

Quibble: *(chuckling, scooping Wind Sprint up)* And she is pretty amazing too.

(In close-up, he settles her on his shoulders.)

Clear Sky: *(from o.s.)* Wind... *(Zoom out to frame her.)* ...did you thank Quibble for camping out so we'd be first in line?

Wind Sprint: *(woodenly)* Thanks.

(On the first part of the next line, he sets her down, the camera cuts to a close-up of her being put in the lawn chair, and a zoom out frames him now sitting alongside and peering closely at a brochure.)

Quibble: No problem. I-I-I probably would've done it anyway. I mean, I—I can't wait to see the... *(reading from page, forcing a chuckle)* ...“Evolution of the Buckbasket: From Farm to Field”! That—that sounds just—I mean, oh, wow! *(showing it to her)* There—there is a lot to see.

(A round of wild cheers draws the filly's eyes toward the upper reaches of the stadium, full to brimming with spectators. A pegasus player darts up from within to intercept a ball, pitches it back down toward the field, and zooms after it.)

Wind Sprint: *(pushing brochure away)* I'd rather see the game. *(She hops off the chair and hurries off.)*

Quibble: Oh! *(deflating, folding it up)* Well, I-I mean—sure, that-that makes sense. We could just go to the tournament instead. *(Set it aside; zoom out to frame him, her, Rainbow, and Clear Sky.)*

Clear Sky: *(firmly, magically dragging Wind Sprint back)* No, Quibble planned this whole thing for us, and *you* could be a little more appreciative.

(The youngster gets upright just as the museum doors are opened. Quibble gestures hopefully toward them, but the mood is lost on Wind Sprint, who looks as if she would rather eat a ton of bricks without salt. Dissolve to the four walking through one of the exhibit galleries inside.)

Rainbow: *(to Wind Sprint, scoffing)* I kinda wanted to skip the museum too. *(Quibble shoots her a dirty look; she hastily changes her tone, then briefly shows off her brochure as she continues.)* Buuuut I promised a friend that I'd check out all the exhibits.

Wind Sprint: *(stopping, rolling eyes)* Ugh! All of them?

(Concerned glances from the three adults.)

Quibble: *(crossing to her)* You know, I-I'd like a chance to catch up with Rainbow Dash. Why don't we split up? *(She slinks off.)* We'll-We'll cover more ground that way and...

(Only now does he notice that she has cleared out and is skulking away through the gallery. Clear Sky trots after her as Rainbow doubles back to Quibble with a knowing smile.)

Rainbow: Soooo... *(nudging him; he smiles)* ...you and Clear Sky, huh?

Quibble: Oh, yeah, she's great. *(glancing toward Clear Sky/Wind Sprint)* Honestly, I've never been happier. *(frantically, grabbing at Rainbow)* Which is why I need your help!

(He whisks her away behind a display case; on the next line, zoom out to frame more of the hall as he indicates its contents in general.)

Quibble: I don't know what any of this stuff is! *(Close-up.)*

Rainbow: What do you mean?

Quibble: S-See this?

(He stands up and moves to a collection of shelved items; she follows.)

Quibble: *(stammering, picking up a ball)* I-I don't know what it is!

Rainbow: *(puzzled)* A ball?

Quibble: *(dropping to haunches, grabbing a basket, stammering)* A-and this? No idea!

Rainbow: It's a basket. How do you not know what these are?

Quibble: I'm not even a hundred percent sure what bucking is! I-I literally know nothing about buckball, or any other sport!

Rainbow: *(smiling)* Well, I figured you weren't the sportiest pony in Equestria.

Quibble: *(setting basket on floor)* But Wind Sprint is, and her dad was some big athlete too! I c—I-I can't compete with that.

(A weak toss of the ball bounces off the rim and rolls away, and a vexed Rainbow trots after it.)

Quibble: I really want things with Clear Sky to work out, but if Wind doesn't like me, I-I-I might as well give up.

(He picks up the basket on the end of this and is mildly surprised to see the ball land neatly inside, having been tossed from an angle. A longer shot frames one bewildered blue pegasus hovering just in front of him, the source of the toss.)

Rainbow: Uh, why?

Quibble: They're a family. *(He sets the basket down as she lands.)* Even if it's okay with Clear Sky—*(Stand up.)*—I wouldn't ask them to make me a part of it if Wind Sprint isn't on board.

(A smiling wave from Clear Sky jolts him out of this blue funk; in close-up, he puts on a big grin and waves back before turning away in Rainbow's general direction.)

Quibble: I thought if I could convince Wind I was some big buckball fan, we'd have something to bond over, but I'm...I'm pretty sure she's on to me.

Rainbow: *(from o.s.)* Here.

(The ball is tossed into view toward him. Hooves scrabble on red rubber but fail to gain a purchase, and it bounces off the floor to clip him under the chin before he throws himself flat to pin it. Cut to Rainbow, hovering with the basket poised for a catch.)

Rainbow: Give it a shot. It's easy.

(The stallion rises to his hind legs. Pulls back for a mighty throw. Loses his balance and topples backward o.s., a crash marking his introduction to one of the displays as the dropped ball

bounces back into view. Setting the basket aside, Rainbow flaps across to where he has fetched up—stuck rump-first in a basket on a stand.)

Rainbow: *(dryly)* Yeah, I don't think she's fooled.

(His questing look toward Wind Sprint is met with a flat glare.)

Quibble: *(to Rainbow)* Could—could you talk to her? I-I mean, you're a famous sports pony. Y-You'd know what to say. Maybe...you could...talk me up a little. *(Pleading grin; Clear Sky doubles back to the pair.)*

Rainbow: Heh. No problem. I've totally got your flank.

(She zooms away as pink forelegs latch onto orange-brown and pull mightily; the effort fails to dislodge Quibble, but does succeed in flipping him over. Now on all fours and wearing the basket like a turtle's shell, he offers a weak grin. Across the way, Rainbow flies lazily backward to catch up with a still-unenthused Wind Sprint.)

Rainbow: *(landing by her)* Hmph. Trust me, the game's a lot harder to play with apples.

Wind Sprint: *(a bit surprised)* You play?

Rainbow: *(pointing across gallery)* Who do you think taught them?

(Cut to a framed photo of Fluttershy, Pinkie, and Snails in their jerseys, Pinkie lifting a ball on a front hoof. On the start of the next line, zoom out to frame it hanging on a wall with a descriptive plaque beneath; Rainbow and Wind Sprint approach it.)

Rainbow: Of course, being a Wonderbolt takes up most of my time, so I don't get to practice as much as I'd like.

Wind Sprint: *(smiling)* Wait. You're Rainbow Dash? *(Cut to Rainbow; she continues o.s.)* The Wonderbolt? *(Both again.)* Whoa, my dad was a great flyer too.

Rainbow: Hm. You don't say. *(draping a wing across Wind Sprint's shoulders, leading her away)* You know, Quibble's pretty sporty too.

(They stop short, disbelief spray-painting itself across both faces, and the camera zooms out to present a good clear view of the reason. Quibble has a death grip on the nearest countertop and is bracing himself so that Clear Sky can exert the full strength of her field to yank at the basket jammed onto his rump. It snaps free after a long moment's strain; he is thrown forward and o.s., knocking off every loose item, and the resulting crash makes the two mares' eyes bug out.)

Wind Sprint: *(sourly)* If you say so.

(Rainbow claps a disgusted wing over her own face. Wipe to the foursome in the museum's gift shop; Clear Sky has put aside the basket and has a shopping bag under her control, while Wind Sprint stares disinterestedly at a bin of balls.)

Rainbow: (*chuckling a bit*) I think I've seen enough of this museum for three Applejacks. Let's go watch some buckball!

Quibble: That sounds awesome! Oh, but first... (*singsong; Clear Sky maneuvers the bag down*) ...I got you a little surprise.

(*The filly eagerly digs in, only to extract a book thick and heavy enough to act as a better-than-average doorstep. Her face falls.*)

Wind Sprint: Oh. A book. (*She drops it, crushing the bag flat, and stands up.*)

Quibble: (*sitting, laughing, picking it up*) Oh, not just a book. (*showing cover—a ball in a basket*) It's a buckball almanac! (*Flip pages.*) This thing has every buckball fact and statistic ever recorded!

Wind Sprint: Wow.

Quibble: I know! I-I never realized there was so much math in buckball! I-I mean, this game's got more numbers than Ogres and Oubliettes! (*Snorting laugh; he shuts the book and holds it out to Wind Sprint. Long pause.*)

Wind Sprint: (*tentatively*) Thanks?

Quibble: (*deflating*) I-I-I guess I could...hold it for you...you know, so you don't have to carry it.

Wind Sprint: Can we go to the game now?

Clear Sky: Sure, honey. (*Wind Sprint starts away, smiling; she addresses Quibble.*) Listen, Q, this trip was a lovely idea and the book was sweet, but— (*Close-up of his crestfallen visage; she continues o.s.*) —you don't have to try so hard. (*The three adults again.*) Everything's gonna be fine.

(*Planting a kiss on his cheek that fails to raise his spirits, she trots off after her daughter.*)

Quibble: (*to Rainbow*) Not even my presents are in the ball court. (*He puts the almanac down.*)

Rainbow: Uh, do you mean "ballpark"?

Quibble: Do I? I don't know! (*stammering*) One thing's for sure—Wind is never gonna like a pony like me!

(*With that, he flops resignedly to the floor so that his chin ends up resting on the massive volume in close-up. Zoom out as a now-hovering Rainbow hoists him up to a haunch-sitting position by his shoulders.*)

Rainbow: Of course she will. (*Land.*) She just needs to see your sporty side.

Quibble: I don't *have* a sporty side.

Rainbow: Everypony has a sporty side— (*Close-up of him; she continues o.s.*) —and we're gonna find yours!

(*A sky-blue hoof jabs into his chest; cut to frame both.*)

Rainbow: By the end of the day, I am gonna turn you into the sportiest pony in Equestria!

(Her assertion touches off a round of panicked shivers and a minor tidal wave of sweat from beneath the grayscale mane. Fade to black.)

Act Two

(Opening shot: fade in to a long shot of the stadium, seen from outside in an overhead shot, as fans make their way toward the entrances. Zoom in slowly and cut to Rainbow, Clear Sky, Quibble, and Wind Sprint among them, the filly lifting off and flying ahead.)

Quibble: *(to Rainbow)* Look, I'm not saying it's a terrible idea, but it's a terrible idea! *(sweating)* You can't turn *me* into an athlete! It's impossible!

Rainbow: *(scoffing)* It's either that— *(smirking)* —or be yourself and bond with Wind over comic books and role-playing games.

(A glance ahead informs them that Wind Sprint has thrown herself into a grunting loop-the-loop; she lands at the end of the entrance queue with a laugh as Clear Sky crosses to her.)

Quibble: *(to Rainbow, laughing disdainfully)* Uh, I have a seventeen Charisma, right? Don't you think I tried? *(rattled)* She doesn't even like Daring Do. She thinks she's not athletic enough! *(Rainbow pops into a startled hover.)*

Rainbow: *What?!?* *(composing herself, pushing him o.s.)* Wow. We need to get started on Operation Sportify ASAP.

(Pronounced "A-sap." Dissolve to a long overhead shot of a buckball field set up on a desert plain and bisected by a short running track that runs perpendicular to the midfield line. The baskets stand on poles at opposite ends of this, and Rainbow and Quibble are at midfield. He has changed into a sleeveless jersey and sweatbands on his forehead and forelegs; she now wears a baseball cap and a whistle on a lanyard around her neck. The blue feathers work a ball back and forth over the hunched-down ace flyer's back as the camera zooms in.)

Rainbow: To figure out what your sporty side is— *(Stands up; roll it from side to side.)* —we just need to see what your skills are. Everypony's got something.

(Quibble has barely enough time to adjust his headband before she flies into his face, having set the ball aside.)

Rainbow: Speed...

(She jumps straight to high gear, leaving a multicolored contrail and a thick cloud of dust in her wake as she flies several dozen laps around him. Once she stops and the haze begins to clear, she drifts over to get a firm grip on his back.)

Rainbow: ...strength...

(Now he finds himself being hefted over her head and lifted several feet off the ground to boot, prompting a fearful cry. Cut to a clump of cacti; Rainbow flies into view, no longer carrying him, and cuts a quick string of impossibly tight hairpin turns to thread among them without brushing a single needle.)

Rainbow: ...agility...

(With a chuckle, she pulls into a lazy hover before him.)

Rainbow: ...course, some ponies can do it all.

Quibble: You're amazing, but what about me?

Rainbow: Right. *(Land.)* We should probably start small. I'll pass the ball to you, and you just pass it back to me. Okay? *(She moves off.)*

Quibble: *(to himself)* Okay, uh-huh.

(The self-appointed coach circles to stand behind the ball she was using and gives it a gentle push. The red sphere rolls slowly along the track toward the trainee, who muscles down his raging case of nerves and crouches down as if preparing to tear it limb from limb. The approach continues...he raises a foreleg as high as it will go...the ball keeps rolling...extreme close-up of the limb.)

Quibble: *(from o.s.)* Aaaaand... *(Long shot of both; he goes for the kick.)* ...buckball!

(The only wrinkle is that he utterly fails to make contact and ends up flopping onto his belly as the ball comes a stop near his tail.)

Quibble: Ow.

(A close-up picks out the sweat that is now rolling down his face and dampening his clothing. He raises his gloomy face as Rainbow's shadow falls over him.)

Rainbow: *(from o.s.)* Ooo-kay... *(Cut to frame both.)* ...maybe agility's not your thing.

(Wipe to a long shot of the two and Snips at the far end of the track. Rainbow is hovering, and the colt is wearing exercise gear similar to Quibble's; these two are standing in adjacent lanes.)

Rainbow: Ready?

Quibble: If I say no, do I still have to run?

Rainbow: Yep.

Snips: Can we get on with this? Snails and I did so well with the autographs, we decided to expand.

(He points ahead; pan quickly in that direction and stop on his friend, sitting on the parched desert soil amid piles and baskets of merchandise bearing his likeness. He is holding a stack of pictures in his magic and blithely stamp-signing his way through them.)

Snips: *(from o.s.)* And these souvenirs are not going to sell themselves. *(Snails waves; cut to Rainbow and Quibble.)*

Rainbow: Remember, think speed. *(She backs off.)*

Quibble: Got it.

Rainbow: On your marks... *(Cut to Quibble and Snips, tensing for the start; she continues o.s.)*
...get set... *(Zoom in to an extreme close-up of Quibble's determined face.)*

Quibble: Speed. *(Eyes close.)* Speed... *(Back to Rainbow.)*

Rainbow: GO!!

(Accompanied by a blast on her whistle and a cut to a profile close-up of the unlikely athlete, who springs into a mad gallop as dust boils up and sweat pours down.)

Quibble: Speed, speed, speed, speed, speed, speed, speed, speed...

(The murk fills the screen for a moment, then clears to present a head-on view of him, now standing still.)

Quibble: Whoo! Okay! What a race, right?

(His elated mood swiftly melts away into dejection as the camera zooms out quickly. The reality is that he has barely made it off the starting line, while Snips is now at the other end—the dust kicked up was his.)

Quibble: Oh. So much for speed.

Snips: *(removing headband; Snails levitates the souvenirs)* Uh, this was fun, but I've gotta get back to work.

(The two unicorns amble away as a signed souvenir card drifts past the camera. Behind it, wipe to a close-up of a sweaty Quibble lying on his back atop a stack of books and straining to lift something cut off by the top edge of the screen. A hovering Rainbow hunkers down close by.)

Rainbow: Come on, Quibble. You got this!

Quibble: *(with effort)* I...got...this!

(Zoom out; the weight is a stack of two medium-thickness tomes, and this workout is taking place on the platform outside the museum.)

Quibble: I...

(His forelegs wobble under the strain before giving out entirely, and he lets them tumble with a weary groan.)

Quibble: *(covering face, sitting up)* This is hopeless! I...I don't have any skills! Not agility, not speed, I...I can't even lift more than one book, a-and I love books!

Rainbow: If we had time to train, I know I could mold you into the perfect sports pony.

(Savage grin; Quibble stands up and steps away from the literary weight bench, only for his tail to drag a portion of it loose.)

Rainbow: Uh...or at least a sportier pony.

Quibble: *(trying to kick books back into place)* Who knows how long that would take? *(stomping)* I...I need to get Wind to like me now! *(Cheers drift in from the stadium.)*

Rainbow: Maybe you're not the best athlete in Equestria, or the most coordinated, or the fastest, or, uh...even a little bit strong. *(He bristles at each bit of this assessment; she lands facing him.)*

Quibble: I-I'm sorry, wait. Is this supposed to be making me feel better? Because it's not.

Rainbow: *(hooking foreleg around shoulder, pulling him close)* Buuut none of that matters, because I just figured out how to sportify you!

(He manages a very wobbly grin before the view dissolves to a long overhead shot of the stadium and zooms in slowly. Every seat in the house is once again filled, and a cut to field level frames Pinkie standing at midfield and dribbling the ball back and forth between her front hooves. Ponyville is playing against the team seen practicing outside the stadium in Act One, whose earth pony starts to sweat a bit as he bobs from side to side to mirror the ball's motion. Finally he gathers himself and rushes Pinkie, only for the mare to flip it high over the midfield line, jump to his side of it, and deliver an expert buck. Fluttershy makes a tail-assisted catch and spinning pass, which zooms past the outstretched forelegs of her opposite number and thunks into a basket levitated by Snails—who has bent down to smell a flower and is not even keeping an eye on the game. He has finally had a chance to clean the ink off the hoof he was using to sign the masses of souvenirs brought to him by Snips. A whistle blast from the referee, cheers from the Ponyville supporters in the stands, and an announcer stallion's voice is heard over the loudspeakers.)

Announcer 2: And with that score, the stars of Team Ponyville advance to the next round. *(Said team gathers at midfield.)* If they keep winning like this, they'll never get off the field!

(On this second sentence, they pile up one front hoof each in the space between them and their defeated opponents hang their heads in dejection. Up on the stands, both Clear Sky and Wind Sprint are intently following the proceedings.)

Wind Sprint: Wow! The players from Ponyville are so good!

Quibble: *(from o.s.)* They sure are.

(Her delight turns to stony apathy in less time than it takes to say "buzzkill"; here he comes down the aisle steps toward their seats, now back in his golf shirt, cap, and scarf.)

Clear Sky: Quibble! Where have you been? I was hoping we'd all watch the tournament together.

(Rainbow peeks into view from the top of the steps, having shed her cap and whistle, and throws an encouraging gesture to the stallion.)

Quibble: (*casually*) Oh, I've just been arranging for us to hang out with a few of my close friends—from Team Ponyville. (*Wind Sprint grins broadly.*) That is, if Wind's up for it.

(*The youngster's mood is not shifted one whit by the concern that has come over her mother's face. Wipe from Quibble's hopeful grin to a closed door in the wall that runs around the perimeter of the field. It is opened from the other side by Rainbow, who strolls out as Wind Sprint gallops ahead.*)

Clear Sky: (*walking out with Quibble*) This is wonderful, Q— (*Close-up of these two.*)—but I still feel like you're trying too hard to get Wind's approval. (*Zoom out to frame a hovering Wind Sprint on the following.*)

Wind Sprint: This is so great! (*looping-the-loop, landing*) Pinkie Pie and Fluttershy are the best players out there!

Rainbow: Well, you can thank Quibble. (*Cut to him; she continues o.s.*) Wonderbolts? Buckball stars? (*He grins, a touch evasively.*) He's friends with the sportiest ponies around. (*All four again; she nudges Wind Sprint.*) So he must be pretty sporty too, right?

Pinkie: (*galloping up to Quibble*) Ooooh! So this is Quibble Pants! (*poking him lightly*) Rainbow Dash told us all about how you two spent a whole Daring Do convention geeking out together about books!

(*Fluttershy descends to land near them as he bashfully adjusts his cap.*)

Fluttershy: And even though at first she thought you were the most annoying fan-pony she ever met, you two eventually became friends.

(*This bit of the account rankles him somewhat and throws a monkey wrench into Wind Sprint's brain. Long pause.*)

Quibble: (*scratching back of head*) Uhhhhh...

Clear Sky: I guess even sports ponies agree. Quibble's a pony you like more and more over time.

Wind Sprint: (*rolling eyes*) Ugh. Knowing sports ponies isn't the same as being one. (*to Fluttershy/Pinkie, smiling*) What's it like, playing in front of all those fans?

Fluttershy: Ummmmm... (*Pinkie grins unsteadily.*)

Rainbow: (*to Wind Sprint, thinking fast*) I guess you'll find out!

Wind Sprint: What do you mean? (*Cut to Quibble on the next line.*)

Quibble: (*suspiciously*) Yes, what do you mean?

Rainbow: I think it's time we told Wind about your next surprise.

Clear Sky: Q, Wind *really* doesn't need any more surprises. (*He grins and tugs at his collar; cut to Wind Sprint.*)

Wind Sprint: (*surlly*) Is it another book?

Rainbow: (*from o.s.*) A, books are awesome— (*Longer shot, framing all xix.*)—and B, this is way more awesomer than that. For the tournament halftime show, you and Quibble are gonna play a game of buckball against Team Ponyville!

Quibble: *(aghast)* We're what?!?

(Terrified sweat trickles down around the bugged-out blue eyes before he view snaps to black.)

Act Three

(Opening shot: fade in to a long overhead shot of the stadium, zooming in slowly, then cut to a freaked-out, sweaty-faced Quibble on the field. He has shed his cap and scarf and traded his shirt for a white jersey trimmed in red and light blue, and a smiling Wind Sprint comes in for a landing as Snips steps up to fill the goalie position. They wear jerseys to match his, and he offers a frightened wave. Wind Sprint sets her features in steely resolve, plucks a ball from a waiting bin, and rises into the air for a mighty throw. Snips calmly floats up his basket to catch the ball, both foals wave cheerfully, and Wind Sprint scoops up a few more balls. Spinning in place like a blue-violet tornado, she launches these into a cluster of high, tight arcs; Snips has no trouble catching every shot and nods tranquilly. Quibble, on the other hand, adopts the look of one who has just come to the full, horrible realization of exactly how far out of his depth he really is. He offers a very scared grin and wave as Rainbow swoops down to him, decked out in her cap and whistle.)

Rainbow: *(grabbing/stretching one of his legs at a time)* Uh, you should probably stretch.

Quibble: No amount of stretching is gonna make this okay! What were you thinking?! *(Close-up of Rainbow.)*

Rainbow: Look, you wanted to impress Wind Sprint, and this just made sense.

Quibble: *(from o.s., bitterly, yanking leg away)* Really? *(Cut to frame both.)* How does me making a fool of myself in front of her, Sky, and a billion buckball fans make sense?

Rainbow: Don't worry. I've got your flank. I already talked to Pinkie Pie and Fluttershy. They're totally gonna make you look good.

(She winks to him and flips a signal to the two blue-clad mares at the opposite end of the field, who acknowledge in like manner.)

Quibble: Oh. Okay. *(smiling)* Well, maybe this isn't the absolute worst idea ever.

Announcer 2: Mares and stallions, foals and colts! Put your hooves together for today's halftime presentation, as buckball's biggest stars take on a team of fans just like you!

(During this line, the two squads gather at midfield and Wind Sprint claps on an ecstatic grin; Quibble, though, instantly loses any shred of composure as the crowd goes ape. A pennant is swung across the screen, the view wiping behind it to a close-up of the referee with ball in hoof and whistle in mouth. Pinkie and Quibble are standing ready at midfield, the camera zooming out to frame them, and the ref sounds a blast and throws the ball down for the buck-off. Quibble's eyes shift from it to the hovering Wind Sprint; across the way, Pinkie maintains an enigmatic smile. The scarlet spheroid reaches its apogee and begins to descend, but Quibble fails to pay it any mind. Seeing that the exhibition is about to go straight down the toilet, the pink mare reaches across and levers one of his hind legs up to the horizontal. The ball bounces off it, he smiles at

having “won” the buck-off—and the ball sails toward the Ponyville basket, held aloft by Snails as he sits meditating. An effortless catch snaps him back to the here and now, and all three Ponyville players frown worriedly as Wind Sprint shoots a nasty look down toward Quibble amid the crowd’s hearty vocal response.)

Announcer 2: And that’s one for the Ponyville champs. *(Pinkie grins, embarrassed, and slowly lowers Quibble’s leg.)* Looks like these fans don’t know what they signed up for.

(Wipe to a long shot of a new buck-off and zoom in slowly to the sound of the ref’s whistle. Fluttershy snags the ball with her tail in close-up, whirls it behind herself like a sling, but quickly shifts gears with an easy toss and a flick off the end. It drops toward Pinkie, who snaps her forelock to send it backwards over her head; at it homes in faultlessly toward the team’s goal, Wind Sprint hurls herself up to intercept. This move earns her a round of cheers from the spectators, but her joy sours upon noticing Quibble’s enthusiastic “I’m open” wave.)

Fluttershy: *(from o.s., slightly stilted)* Oh, no! *(Cut to her, pointing down toward him.)* Quibble’s wide open and I’ll never get there in time to block!

(She takes her time with her descent, giving the filly plenty of opportunity to aim carefully and let fly. The ball hurtles toward Quibble and his sweaty, cringing countenance; he squeezes his eyes shut and raises both hind legs for a blind buck, the action shifting to slow motion as the ball passes cleanly between his hooves. Normal speed immediately resumes to the sound of disappointed groans, and the ball bounces past a surprised Fluttershy and stops when Rainbow plants a hoof on it. Quibble’s jersey is now showing more than a few sweat stains.)

Announcer 2: Ooh! Looks like our fan team needs to work on their passing.

(The uncoordinated stallion aims a placating grin up to Wind Sprint, who just flaps away in wordless contempt; his offering rebuffed, he lets his head droop. Wipe to a new buck-off, Pinkie now balanced on the end of her tail and smiling down at Quibble. The whistle sounds, the ball ends up in Fluttershy’s tail, and she whirls in place to build up momentum and sends down a red rubber rocket. Wind Sprint leaps to midfield and bucks it away herself, earning an ear-to-ear grin from Quibble; he gets on the move, tracking its high, narrow flight path, and adjusts his position just a bit before taking his stand. Three panels slide into view to fill the screen, divided by diagonal lines and each presenting a close-up a different player: Left to right: Fluttershy gasping in fear, Pinkie grinning and giggling, Wind Sprint showing almost zero interest or support.)

(From here, cut to an extreme close-up of Quibble’s tensing haunch, then to the plummeting ball, then to an overhead shot of the panicked pony. The hind legs lash up and score a direct hit, sending it in a long arc downfield and over the head of a thunderstruck Wind Sprint. Fluttershy and Pinkie gasp in turn as the ball plops into Snails’ basket, setting off a multitude of cheers and leaving the young unicorn completely stunned. Quibble just grins over his feat.)

Announcer 2: And the fan team finally scores! *(Pause.)* For the other side.

(These last four words drive home the full weight of his blunder; he recoils and risks an over-shoulder glance that presents him with a good clear view of Wind Sprint's disapproving scowl.)

Announcer 2: That makes three! Team Ponyville wins!

(Rainbow claps a hoof to her face in complete disbelief at how badly her plan has gone off the rails. Wipe to an extreme close-up of the midfield line as Quibble throws down the almanac he bought at the gift shop in Act One, then cut to him and the referee.)

Quibble: *(flipping pages; the other players gather around)* It says very clearly on page six-forty-seven of the expanded buckball tournament rules that a goal is scored when an earth pony sends the ball into a basket.

(Close-up of the book on the end of this, a hoof jabbing at one particular section, then cut to him.)

Quibble: But it doesn't say *which* basket! *(Pan slightly to frame a hovering Rainbow on the next line.)*

Rainbow: *(landing)* Yeah, I'm pretty sure everypony knows you're not supposed to score in the other team's goal.

Quibble: *(lifting/pointing at book)* But the rules don't say that! *(Leaving it aside, he advances on her.)* If that goal is ours, it's only two to one and we can keep playing.

Wind Sprint: *(from o.s., petulantly)* I don't want to!

(Here she comes, a worried Clear Sky close behind.)

Wind Sprint: You're not a sports pony. *(stomping)* It's not fun playing this game with you!

(As she gallops off the field, Clear Sky shoots a venomous look at Quibble.)

Quibble: *(crushed, crossing to her)* I was just...trying to get her to like me.

Clear Sky: I know! *(Stomp.)* But I told you you didn't need to! You and I have to rethink all of this.

(She takes her leave, Quibble managing no response aside from a choked little noise of fear at the back of his throat followed by a heavy sigh. He plods away as Fluttershy, Pinkie, and Rainbow trade glances of profoundest concern. Dissolve to an extreme close-up of the almanac, held open by Quibble with the camera aimed at the cover. On the next line, he lowers it to expose a look of complete surprise.)

Rainbow: *(from o.s.)* What are you doing out here?

(Longer shot: he is sitting on one of the sets of steps leading up to the complex's platform. She stands at their base, facing him and without her cap and whistle. He is back in his shirt, cap, and scarf. A lone tumbleweed rolls past.)

Quibble: Apparently this book is as close to sports as I'll ever get.

Rainbow: Come on. That goal you scored for the other team was amazing! *(He groans; cut to him.)*

Quibble: Thanks for trying, Rainbow Dash, but I think we can both agree the whole "sportify" idea was a big flop.

(To emphasize this last word, he forcefully closes the covers and sets the thing aside.)

Rainbow: What?! *(His eyes pop; cut to frame both.)* We haven't even gotten started! *(hovering to sit next to him, throwing foreleg across shoulders)* I've got, like seven more top-notch ideas to turn you into a super-sporty pony!

Quibble: *(groaning)* Wind's already made up her mind, and...so have I. *(standing, walking off)* Time to throw up the towel.

Rainbow: It's "throw *in* the towel." *(following)* And that's ridiculous! You can't just give up!

Quibble: Wind and Sky deserve a pony they both like in their lives. Besides, Sky wants to rethink things, so I'm just beating her to the lunch.

Rainbow: It's "beating her to the punch," and it's barely a sports reference. How do you not know that?

Quibble: *(emphasizing every word, backing her down)* Because I don't know anything about sports!

(By the time he reaches the end of the outburst, she has dropped to her haunches and been treated to a nose-to-nose view of his popping eyes and the sweat streaming around them. He backs off, all the fire instantly going out of him.)

Quibble: And pretending I did just made things worse.

Rainbow: *(standing, moving closer)* So you should stop pretending! Look. You are *terrible* at sports. *(circling to poke his chest)* You're uncoordinated, slow, weak— *(He slaps her hoof away.)*

Quibble: *(scratching back of head)* Okay, again, not really making me feel better.

Rainbow: And you're completely clueless about anything having to do with athletics. But maybe I'm not the pony you should have come to for help?

Quibble: *(smiling, catching on)* Oh.

(Dissolve to one of the museum galleries, in which Clear Sky is chaperoning a sulky Wind Sprint; the filly has shed her game jersey.)

Wind Sprint: I wish we didn't even come here.

Clear Sky: Quibble thought you'd like it.

Wind Sprint: Well, I don't. And I don't like him. Why do *you* like him?

Clear Sky: *(smiling)* Because he's kind, and smart, and his friends certainly seem to care about him, which is always a good sign.

Wind Sprint: I don't care how many ponies care about him. (*stomping*) They're not gonna make me forget about Dad. (*She turns away.*)

Clear Sky: (*resting a hoof on her back*) Oh, sweetheart. I know Quibble's trying too hard, but he doesn't want you to stop loving your dad. He just wants you to like him. And I think maybe there's enough room in your heart to do both. (*Sound of approaching hooves.*)

Quibble: (*from o.s.*) Hey there.

(*Zoom out slightly to show him now facing Wind Sprint, then cut to frame Rainbow walking in.*)

Quibble: Glad I found you, because I have a confession to make. I...know it's hard to imagine, but I'm... (*Scratch back of head.*) ...really not all that sporty. (*Big dumb grin; Clear Sky affects a gasp of faked shock.*)

Clear Sky: No! (*Wind Sprint smiles; slow pan across the four.*)

Quibble: I'm sorry I was trying so hard to convince you otherwise. I just really wanted us to get along, but... (*Deep breath.*) ...I guess it backfired. (*stammering a bit*) Do you think we could start over?

(*The youngster scowls confusedly up at him.*)

Quibble: (*smiling hopefully*) Maybe we could watch some of the tournament together and...*you* could teach me some sports stuff?

(*After glancing back at her mother and getting an encouraging nod in return, Wind Sprint offers a small smile to Quibble. Dissolve to Pinkie on the field, bouncing a ball off her rump and sending a drive across the midfield line. The opposing team's pegasus puts up a hoof to stop it but gets only air, and the shot whumps into the basket under Snails' control in close-up.*)

Wind Sprint: (*from o.s.*) Okay.

(*Zoom out to put her in the fore, watching the game from the stadium's lower level.*)

Wind Sprint: (*pointing*) That's their goal.

(*Head-on shot: she is hanging onto the perimeter wall, and she and Quibble have front-row seats.*)

Quibble: (*as she takes hers again*) I'll try to remember that if I ever decide to play buckball again—but I probably won't. (*pointing*) Oh, look. Pinkie Pie's gonna flip and triple-bounce the ball into the goal.

(*Pinkie proceeds to do a backflip while galloping forward, bounce on her tail three times as if it were a pogo stick, and slam the flying ball with her head. A desperate dive gets the defense a whole lot of nothing, and the shot hits home to send the crowd into a frenzy of cheers.*)

Wind Sprint: (*surprised*) How did you know that?

Quibble: *(pulling out/opening almanac, showing her a page, stammering a bit)* It-it's right here. *(reading)* "Pinkie flips and triple-bounce-bucks over eighty-three percent of her shots from the northwest section of the field when the wind is blowing from the east."

(On this last, he holds up a leaf that bends in the breeze as a direction gauge.)

Wind Sprint: Huh. *(He puts it down; she takes the almanac.)* I guess this book's kind of cool after all.

(Gray-violet eyes bore into the pages as he wipes away a happy tear at having finally found a bit of shared interest. He turns to his other side, the camera panning slightly to bring Clear Sky into view—sitting and slurping from a soda held in her magic.)

Quibble: Look, Sky, I know you're thinking of calling it quits between us, and after today, I don't blame you. *(excitedly, smiling)* But Wind and I just made a connection!

Clear Sky: Calling it quits? What are you talking about?

Quibble: You said you wanted to rethink things.

Clear Sky: *(smiling)* Yeah! *(glancing to her other side; Rainbow sits here)* Things like having your friend help you pretend to be a sports pony so Wind would like you.

(The Wonderbolt is very slightly needed at this dig.)

Quibble: *(stammering badly)* Wha—? I don't—I—oh! I didn't—what? *(Dopey grin.)*

(Clear Sky aims her sly smile at him, then at Rainbow.)

Rainbow: *(stammering, flapping, scratching back of head)* Wha—? Nah.

Wind Sprint: *(crossing to them, opening almanac)* Mom! Look what Quibble showed me! *(reading; close-up of her and Clear Sky)* "When Fluttershy flies higher than the other pegasus, Pinkie scores ninety-two percent of the time." And it just happened!

Clear Sky: Wow! *(rubbing Wind Sprint's head)* You better watch out, or you're gonna start to like books.

Wind Sprint: I guess that wouldn't be so bad. *(She tucks herself in between Clear Sky and Quibble.)*

Clear Sky: *(to Quibble)* Huh. Looks like you didn't need sportiness, famous ponies, or lavish gifts to bond with Wind after all. *(Cut to frame Rainbow on the next line.)*

Rainbow: Technically, he still needed to buy her the book, but that's it.

(Gentle laughter spreads from Clear Sky to Wind Sprint to Quibble, the filly getting her mane tousled by her mother, throwing a chummy foreleg around the non-sporty stallion, and getting one in return. Fade to black.)