

New Sponsor

By Plokishmok3

Leo glanced up at the shot clock hovering above the backboard and noted the waning seconds quickly ticking down. Though he was aware of the roaring crowd and flashing lights around him, he ignored them and instead focused on the court before him as he slowly dribbled the basketball in his hand. He saw Donnie cutting up along the wing on his left before quickly diving back toward the baseline, his spry, long legs carrying him swiftly toward the other side of the court; Leo recognized the play. He gave the defender in front of him a fake to the right before dribbling left, seeing Donnie screen Raph's man on the other side of the court. With rehearsed timing, Leo tossed the ball up toward the rim as Raph sprinted down, planted both feet and jumped into the air. For a moment, the world seemed to move in slow motion for Raph as he floated into the air, seemingly weightless. He caught the ball in his two hands and slammed it through the hoop with a loud clunk followed by the sound of the buzzer.

Raph could feel the adrenaline rushing through him as the crowd erupted into a unifying roar. As he landed, he turned to see Leo and Donnie rushing toward him and Mikey sprinting from the sidelines.

"It's all over folks!" the announcer called. "The Turtle Titans defeat the Jackson Jaguars 55-54!"

"Just like we practiced!" Leo said, giving Raph their signature double-double high five.

"Solid screen," Raph said as Donnie wrapped his arm around his shoulder as they wandered toward the sideline.

"Bro!" Mikey said, wrapping his arm around Raph's waist and hosting the turtle into the air with surprising strength before plopping him back down. "That was incredible!"

"Leonardo, Leonardo!" A reporter said, rushing up to the turtles. Leo peeled away from his brothers as they continued into the locker room.

"Are you sure you don't want to take to the game-winner himself?" Leo asked, pointing toward Raph.

"Off that picturesque assist from you," the reporter said with a wink before glancing down at her notepad. "Leonardo, as the leader of the Turtle Titans, what does this win mean for you?"

"Well, we're still in the middle of the season but it's good to get a win like this to find a rhythm before heading into the playoffs later in the year," Leo said with poise.

"As a young upcoming team in the Three-on-Three Circuit, do you think you're ready to take on the pillars of the league, like the Lauderdale Loggers or the Houston Hydros?"

"I think if we continue to utilize our natural speed and quickness, we can outpace anyone in this league," Leo said.

"That unique style of play has garnered you and your brothers a rather sizable following among fans of TOTC," the reporter said with a smirk.

"Yes, we thank every one of our supporters who come out every night and cheer us on, you mean the world to us," Leo said with a genuine smile.

"Thank you, Leonardo and congrats on the win!" The report said before running off toward the losing team heading off the court. Leo chuckled as he turned toward the locker room, grabbing his sweat towel from the bench on his way. He rubbed it along the back of his neck and on his face as he pushed through the door and suddenly froze in the entryway.

"Oh Leo there you are," Donnie said, stepping forward as Leo gazed upon the large table set up in the middle of their locker room. The table was covered in large, colorful cartons with a large sign dangling from the front with a large, green logo. The logo was a caricature silhouette of a stereotypical ice cream Sunday hovering over the outline of a barbell with the name Power Cream written in bold text beneath.

"What is this?" Leo asked just as he noticed a short weasel in a slick suit standing off to the side of the table step forward.

"Hello, Leonardo, my name is Brett Henderson and I have an exciting opportunity for you and your Turtle Titan team," the weasel said, stepping forward and holding out his hand. Leo hesitantly shook it as he turned back toward Donnie with a confused look. The weasel seemed to recognize the look.

"Now I know what you're thinking," Brett said suavely, "what am I doing here and what is this opportunity you speak of? Well, I was just telling your teammate here that we at Power Cream would love to become the official sponsor of your team."

"Sponsor?" Raph asked as he stood up from the bench to the side with a towel draped over his neck.

"A corporate entity that would help provide funds to help our team operate in exchange for advertising rights with our team and individual players," Donnie said.

"Exactly, dictionary dude," the weasel said, pointing a finger gun at the purple-banded turtle.

"Well, what exactly is Power Cream?" Leo asked.

"We are a recent startup that specializes in healthy ice cream and frozen yogurt products that contain essential nutrients necessary for athletes, including pro athletes such as yourselves, to recover and perform at the highest level possible."

“Healthy ice cream?” Leo asked with tones of skepticism in his voice.

“Precisely,” the weasel said.

“With all due respect, I don’t think that being sponsored by an ice-cream company is exactly what we’re looking for...” Leo began to say before Donnie pulled himself aside. “What gives?”

“Look, Leo,” Donnie said frankly. “I’ve been crunching the numbers and even though we’ve had a successful season so far, due to the parameters of the collective bargaining agreement with the other teams in the league, we aren’t pulling in a ton of revenue. In fact, when factoring in facility costs for training, equipment, and travel as well as expenses back home in the lair, we’re barely breaking even.”

“So?”

“So, if we want to stay in this league, we need to have some financial security. All the other teams have sponsors in some form or another and some are a lot worse than Power Cream. The Springfield Settlers have Burger Palace as a sponsor. A burger joint! Understand? So let’s do away with that snobbish pride for just a second and consider our future,” Donnie said.

“Alright, fine,” Leo said. “Say we partner with them, what’s in it for them?”

“These sorts of deals are very lucrative for companies, especially start-ups who just want to get their names out there and want to be associated with something considered culturally relevant, hip, and cool.”

“Did you just call yourself hip and cool?”

“Not directly and not the point,” Donnie continued. “What I’m saying is that they’ll pay a boatload of money for very little effort on our parts.”

“Like what?”

“Like having their logo on our uniforms, and maybe a commercial here or there. Effectively we do what we usually do and we get paid for it because their little ice-cream barbell logo is on our shirts and shorts.” Leo considered the matter for a second before something behind Donnie caught his eye. He tilted his head and saw that Mikey was standing at the table with one of the cartons open in front of him. He took a large scoop and pulled out a heaping spoonful of chocolate ice cream crammed it into his maw.

“Mikey!” Leo said, causing the younger turtle to freeze and turn toward his brother.

“Whathhf?” Mikey said through his full mouth before swallowing. “it’s really good!”

“Glad you noticed,” the weasel said, stepping forward. “Though we worked hard to fortify our ice cream with all the protein, carbohydrates, and other nutrients to help an athlete perform their best, we worked harder to achieve irresistibly delicious flavors that no one can say no to.” The weasel grabbed a handful of scoopers from the table and handed them to the turtles. “Please, try some!” Raph and Donnie

shrugged and stepped forward, popping open their own ice cream containers while Leo stood watching them. Raph scooped out a vanilla fudge took a small bite of the edge of the large spoonful, smacked his lips, before stuffing the rest of ice cream into his mouth.

“Wow, that is really good,” Raph admitted.

“I’ll say,” Donnie said, scooping a hunk of blue raspberry into his maw while giving Leo a knowing glare. Leo sighed, stepped forward, and took a small scoop from the container in front of Raph. He simply licked the ice cream and let the flavors settled on his tongue. He had to admit, it did taste pretty incredible. Donnie gave him another glare before motioning toward the weasel. Leo sighed and turned toward the grinning mustelid.

“We would love to be sponsored by you,” Leo said, holding out his hand which the weasel immediately grasped with both of his paws and shook violently.

“Fantastic,” the weasel said. “I know this will turn into the best partnership in the entire league!”

“I’ll say,” Mikey said, scooping out the remains of his carton, having already inhaled the entire pint before reaching for another. Though he was still skeptical of the deal, Leo couldn’t help but scoop a little more ice cream for himself; the stuff was damn tasty...

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“Good games guys,” Leo said as the turtles wandered into the locker room wiping the sweat from their brows.

“A few more wins like that and we’ll lock up the third seed no problem!” Donnie said excitedly. “That is if Loggers lose two of their next four and the Falcons beat the 35ers on Friday. If the Loggers win three we’ll only be up half a game on...”

“Donnie,” Raph said, sitting down the bench and pulling off his jersey, “give it a rest with the numbers.”

“He’s right,” Leo said. “We need to focus on winning ourselves, we can’t let ourselves get distracted by other teams and...”

“Score!” Mikey yelled from the other side of the locker room. He was standing by a table in the corner of the room. Usually, they had Gatorade and recovering shakes there for half-time and post-game nourishment, but instead, there were cartons of Power Cream ice cream. Ever since they had become their sponsor just two months ago, there was almost always Power Cream ice cream waiting for them after they left the court; even at some of their practices, all provided by the company themselves. They often saw a young red panda running around setting up the Power Cream refreshment table. Though Leo was glad they had an extra hand to take care of that menial task, he was a little disappointed to see that

in recent weeks their usual protein shakes had been replaced with just Power Cream milk; regular and chocolate. Leo had thought about mentioning it to the young panda who was obviously an intern, but Donnie had convinced him that the milk was just as good a recovery drink as the protein shakes; more natural or something like that. Despite that, Leo still saw his brothers leaning more toward the post-game desserts with each passing week, especially Mikey.

They had just finished their game and immediately Mikey had made a beeline for the ice cream, taking off his sweaty jersey and slinging it over his shoulder as he scooped himself a large bowl of the chocolate fudge treat. Leo watched his younger brother dump six large scoops into his bowl before sitting on the far bench and going to town on the dessert. It was a heaping helping to be sure as Leo knew that Mikey often worked up quite the appetite playing, and for good reason. Recently, the youngest turtle had been on fire. Tonight he had gone 10/10 from the floor, most of which were surprisingly strong drives to the hole for several power layups. Normally, Mikey stayed on the outside with his hot shooting hand as he was a little undersized and often got pushed around down low, but tonight he had moved like a tank; no one could stop him! He deserved a little reward after that performance, but Leo wasn't so sure that his brother should be relying on ice cream to appease that hunger. He seemed drawn toward the stuff like a bee to honey, actively longing for it in the middle of practice or even in games; he just couldn't get enough of the stuff! Granted, the others also partook in the ice cream, including Leo himself, as it was pretty tasty, but none of them could match Mikey's fixation.

Before Leo had even slipped off his own shorts, shirt, and knee and elbow pads to hit the showers, he saw Mikey going back for another round of ice cream. It wasn't uncommon for him to pack away a gallon of the stuff after a game, and that was before they went out for celebratory pizza after wins or sorrowful pizza after losses where he'd still chow down like he hadn't seen food before in his entire life. Then when they finally got home, he'd relax on the couch with more ice cream that Power Cream had sent to their lair, commenting on new flavors or simply indulging in his favorites. He wasn't alone, Leo had to admit that they all had been indulging in Power Cream a fair amount as of late, but it was supposed to be healthy right? *Both irresistible and good for you*, Leo thought, know he'd definitely seen that tagline on their advertisements or labeling or somewhere.

Still, as he watched his brother hound another bowl of ice cream, Leo couldn't help pause; was there something different about Mikey. Maybe he was just tired or dehydrated, but Leo swore that Mikey was looking a little bigger than normal, not necessarily taller, but just thicker. His arms and legs seemed to have more girth than they used too, no longer looking necessarily lithe and scrawny, and his rump seemed a little more filled out. Had he bulked up recently? It'd make sense as to why he was suddenly

able to body his way into the paint as of late; maybe this Power Cream stuff was helping after all? Of course, his brother's head was looking a little rounder than usual and what was that small divot beneath his chin along his neck... Leo didn't have much time to consider the matter as he heard the door open behind him.

"...Yes, put the home jerseys in home lockers and the away jerseys in the away lockers, what's so hard about that?" a weasel said as he wandered into the locker room, herding a crew of foxes that rushed in behind him: Brett Henderson. After directing the vulpines, the weasel turned his attention to the turtles. "Another great win tonight, guys!"

"Thanksgfph," Mikey called from the corner of the room, raising his spoon into the air.

"What are those?" Donnie asked, noting the large green apparel in the foxes' paws.

"Why, it's your new uniforms!" Brett said.

"New uniforms?" Raph asked. "What's wrong with our old ones?"

"They weren't exactly on brand with our new marketing scheme. We want to remind potential customers..."

"Fans," Raph interjected.

"Sorry, fans," the weasel said, rolling his eyes, "about what Power Cream is about: the chilly taste of impeccable ice cream with twice the nutrient density of regular ice cream and that stays cold for up to four times as long as regular ice cream, leaving your tongue and insides so cold and satisfied for so long that you'll need to bundle up even on the hottest of days..." the weasel said, motioning for one of the foxes to bring one of new jerseys over to Leo. The fox held up the apparel and to the turtles' shock, it wasn't a normal jersey and shorts. Instead, it looked more like a full body snowsuit fit for someone trekking through the arctic circle. It was a one-piece suit with full-length pant legs and sleeves that were made a thick puffy material. A long zipper ran down the front a large, fluffy hood sagged off the back. The only part that resembled a jersey in any way was the name Turtle Titans with their team emblem on the front and their jersey numbers plastered on the back. There was also a large Power Cream logo plastered across the back just beneath the numbers and small logos plastered strategically across the front of the suit.

"They're pretty great, right?" Brett asked seemingly ignoring the skeptical looks on all the turtles.

"Don't you think they're a little too," Leo said, trying to sound constructive, "uh, constrictive?"

"Not at all," Brett said. "They're lined with proprietary form-fitting high-performance moisture wicking material. It's the same stuff every winter Olympic athlete wears... eh, how does that sound? Olympic athlete approved!"

“But these aren’t basketball jerseys...” Raph said his eyebrows furrowing.

“They just seem like,” Leo jumped in, cutting off his brother before he blew his fuse out of frustration, “they’re maybe a bit too much for basketball.”

“Eh, basketball, snowboarding, what’s the difference really?” Brett floated, waving his hand dismissively. “Anyway, once y’all try them out, I think you’re going to like them, and because it’s in our contract that you have to wear jersey’s that we approve...” Brett said, implication dripping from his lips.

“Contract...!” Raph shouted, standing up abruptly, but Donnie stepped in front of him.

“Cool it, big guy,” Donnie whispered.

“This guy can’t be serious,” Raph muttered under his breath.

“Just think about the money,” Donnie said. “Think about that new TV we’re going to get. Think about that massage hammock that you’ve always wanted. Without them, there’s no way we can afford that stuff. Let’s just play ball now, okay?”

“Okay,” Raph grunted, sitting back down with a huff. Donnie turned toward Leo and gave him a similar commanding look.

“Okay,” Leo sighed, “we’ll give them a shot.”

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Leo panted as Mikey passed him the ball from out of bounds. Sweat poured from his brow, both from the pressure of the moment as he looked up at the clock and saw the seconds ticking away and from the bulbous uniform enveloping his entire frame. The turtle had never felt so hot in his life except for the last dozen or more games he and his brothers had worn the full body white coat like attire. The soft fur lining the hood that wrapped up and around his head soaked up much of the sweat, but the internal thermal layers were keeping the rest of his frame hot and steamy. Leo tried to catch his breath as his chest heaved, trying to focus on the dying moments of the game before him; he couldn’t let the championship game slip away from him because of a little heat!

The Turtle Titans had made a historic run through the tournament as only a 6th seed and now they were facing the defending champions: The Houston Hydros. Even though Leo wasn’t a big fan of the new Power Cream uniforms, ever since they had put them on, they hadn’t lost a game; The Turtle Titans had been on a tear! Maybe having all that bulky material was aiding their athletic performance? Leo was doubtful figuring it was probably that defenders slipped off the polyester material with sweaty arms and hands. Plus, Leo didn’t feel more athletic in the uniform. He felt slow, clumsy, and frankly out of shape, though that was for a reason beyond the uniform.

As Leo plodded down the court, biding his time to take the last shot of the tied game, he could feel his torso jostling. Though he didn't want to think about it or admit it, he knew that he was sporting a small paunch, a product he outwardly knew was from all that Power Cream ice-cream. Leo was starting to get a hunch that the stuff wasn't as healthy as it was advertised to be, yet despite that, even he couldn't seem to help himself chowing on a bowl or five after a game; it was just so good!

Leo justified his and his brothers' excessive ice-cream consumption, trying to convince himself that the dairy protein and vitamins were helping despite the obvious sugary calories that came with them. When that line of thinking faded as his torso had started bulging out, he then figured that since they were on a winning streak, that maybe the Power Cream and the uniforms were good luck; why fix something that wasn't broken? Of course, that reason butted heads with the other part of him that cried out as the definition on his arms had started to fade and his thighs began to jiggle as he ran up and down the court. He ignored the cries from his lungs that burned only a few minutes into the game and then left him gasping on nearly every play of the game, and Leo himself hadn't even borne the major brunt of the Turtle Titan's recent indulges.

As Leo dribbled above the three-point line at the top of the key, he glanced toward his left at Mikey who had just inbounded the ball. The turtle's tongue was hanging out of his mouth and despite the fluffy hood obscuring his face, Leo could tell his cheeks were poking slightly out the side of his face and his chin and grown its own partner in crime. His once scrawny frame had taken on a more bulbous appearance and though many might have attributed it to simply the puffy nature of their unorthodox uniforms, there was still a clear bulge around the turtle's middle and a bulkiness to his limbs that hadn't existed just a month or so ago.

Leo locked eyes with Mikey, signaling that it was time to move. This was their only shot! There was no way they would be able to keep up with the Hydros in overtime, if fact, it was wild they had kept up with them at all. Mikey huffed before plodding down the key at a labored jog. Leo hesitated for a second, knowing Mikey needed a little more time than usual to run across the paint, before faking a dribble to the right, crossing over and with every ounce of strength he had left drove down the lane to the left. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Mikey set a screen on Raph's man as the red banded turtle shuffled down the lane. Leo could see the confused look on the Mikey's defender's face as he switched onto Raph. The Turtle Titans had lost badly to the Hydro earlier in the season as their stronger defenders were often able to keep the turtles out of the lane, now though, Raph simply barreled down the lane, his momentum seemingly pushing the defender back as Leo tossed the ball into the air.

The world seemed to slow as Raph stepped into a power stance and launched into the air, his green polyester uniform glistening as much as his sweat-drenched forehead in the overhead lights. Almost immediately, Leo could tell that Raph wasn't going to make it up high enough for his usual dunk, but just as the look of worry crossed his face, Raph grabbed the ball and simply tapped the ball in from beneath the rim. As the turtle landed with a thud on the floor the ball shot gracefully up into the air and as the buzzer sounded, the ball fell gently through the hoop.

Two points.

Turtle Titans: 52

Houston Hydros: 50

They had won!

The crowd erupted in cheers, drowning out the cheers from the sound of the confetti canons. Leo couldn't believe it. They had won! Leo rushed forward as Donnie and Mikey stormed Raph beneath the hoop. Mikey went to lift his brother into the air and strained for a second before realizing that the turtle wasn't going to budge from the floor. That didn't stop them from jumping up and down as much as their tired legs would let them in celebration. It didn't stop them from holding out their hands in triumph as confetti rained down on them. It didn't stop the overjoyed smiles and sense of elation rising up within them, and it didn't stop them, at least in the back of their minds. Leo didn't care that he was soaked in sweat and felt like he was walking in his own personal oven and he didn't care that he could see two large sets of dimples on Donnie's face when he took off his hood and smiled, his lips pursing his chubbier cheeks, and he didn't care that even at that moment, in the back of his mind, he felt a sudden excitement for the Power Cream ice-cream celebration they were going to have back at the lair.

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Leo sighed heavily as he poured the pot of hot water into his mug on the counter. He dabbed the tea bag inside before raising the steaming mug to his lips, instantly sighing as the warm fluid filled his insides; it was cold. After their championship win just over a month and a half ago, the turtles had been spending their time trying to make it through one of the chilliest winters in recent years. Leo could hear the sounds of the Knicks game on the television, making him envious that the more popular five on five league had their season during the winter where they could run around nice, heated buildings instead of their cold underground lair. Most winters it wasn't an issue as the earth itself had a fairly constant temperature, but lately, with sub-zero temperatures on the surface, the chill had worked its way down to them and they only had one space heater at the moment; Donnie was in the process of fixing their two

others. As such, the turtles had all been wearing their team uniforms of all things, with the insulation serving to keep them fairly warm when venturing further than the couch in the living room.

Leo looked across the room from the kitchen toward Mikey who was sat on the couch with Raph watching the Knicks game on the television. Despite the chill in the kitchen, Leo could see the red radiating heat from the space heater and the beads of sweat on his brothers' foreheads as they sat baking in their uniforms; their personal saunas. Ironically, despite the cold, both Raph and Mikey had large gallon containers of Power Cream ice cream in their laps, with Raph absentmindedly scooping some into his mouth and Mikey absolutely hounding his carton. There was a stack of cartons right behind the couch, beyond the range of the space heater, keeping them chilled and within reach whenever the turtles' wanted something sweet and cold to cool them off from the blast zone. Several empty gallon containers were strewn about the floor by Mikey's feet, causing Leo to sigh again; things were getting out of hand.

Though the thrill of winning the championship had distracted Leo, after a few weeks, when things had settled, Leo once again found himself focusing on the weight of his brothers and himself. It was beyond clear that they were overdoing it on the ice cream but Leo felt like he was going crazy being the only one that seemed concerned about the accumulating pudge on their frames. At first, he had blamed that initial naivety on the fact that it appeared that their full body, puffy uniforms were the cause of their bulging appearance, but now though there was no denying the weight each of them harbored.

There was a basketball-sized bulge jutting out of Raph's midriff, resting gently on the backside of his lap, taking up space from the rest of his lap on which to balance his carton of ice cream. His frame had grown wider than it once had been, with his rump nearly taking up an entire cushion on the couch. Leo could see the curvature of his middle out to the sides and the bloating of his brother's chest as his once hardened pecs had softened into a set of plush moobs. A set of chubby cheeks rounded out the side of Raph's face, joining a prominent second chin under his jaw and the bloated appearance of his neck. Raph was looking more than just plump, but Mikey beside him looked even bigger.

That came as no surprise to Leo, even though Mikey had once been the smallest of the brothers, as he more than any of them seemed to be the most obsessed with Power Cream. There was hardly a moment that Leo didn't see the orange-banded turtle snacking on some Power Cream ice cream, frozen candy bars, or simply drinking Power Cream's Amped Milk which was by far the thickest chocolate milk that Leo had ever tried; in all honesty, it was incredible. Though he tried to limit himself, Leo found himself sneaking sips of the sugar loaded drink, hence his own plump frame, but with the gallons that Mikey seemed to chug, even when he wasn't hungry or thirsty had led to him putting a significant amount of pudge.

His stomach was easily the size of a beach ball, jutting of his middle and resting heavily in his lap, outsizing his brothers sitting next to him. His thighs were pressed together at the base and slowly angled out, allowing some room for his stomach to start to droop between his legs due to its own weight, all buried beneath the surprisingly stretchy layers of his uniform. The form-fitting material lining the inside molded around the love handles along his side and outlined his own set of melon-sized moobs. His neck seemed to have shrunken, growing stubbing as his chest and doughy shoulders seemed to rise up to meet his thick jostling jowls and a trio of soft chins dangling beneath his buried jaw.

Part of Leo wondered to what degree Mikey's uniform itself played in getting him warm and making him sweat as he often saw the turtle huffing and glistening when in the kitchen himself; all that fat was probably a good insulator. It was because of that latter point that Leo had held off about confronting his brothers yet again about their weight; anything that helped them get through this winter blast. At that moment, however, it was Mikey finishing a carton, letting it drop to the floor, and immediately grabbing another that seemed to remotivate Leo. He took another sip from his tea and marched over, stood beside the television, staring at Raph and Mikey. Raph only briefly glanced up toward Leo before shifting his attention back to the game.

"You're missing out," Raph said. "The Knicks are actually up by twelve heading into the fourth."

"Wait, really?" Leo said, bending forward to see the score but immediately refocused. "Speaking of basketball, we need to start training again."

"Already?" Mikey garbled through a mouth of chocolate mousse tracks.

"The season starts in just a few months," Leo said.

"Yeah, a few months," Raph said. "We just won the championship. Let us relax and indulge a bit in celebration, I think we've earned it."

"Well, I think we've been indulging a little too much," Leo said, motioning to Raph's middle.

"Hey," Raph said. "It's not that much weight, really it's just some bloating this uniform and...." Leo crossed his arms over his chest and gave Raph an exasperated look. "Hey, at least it's not as big as Mikey's!"

"Hey!" Mikey said. "Excuse me for taking advantage of all the free Power Cream products. If anything, with all the nutrients or whatever in this stuff, I'm probably healthier than all of you!"

"Mikey, you're fat, okay," Raph said, patting the side of his brother's bloated middle, causing the mound of pudge to jostle for an extended second. "But it's really not that much weight. We can easily work this off..."

"That's what I'm saying..." Leo said. "We need to start working the weight off now."

“Work it off in preseason in February, not December,” Raph said. “You really want us to start training and dieting and whatever during the holiday season? With the Power Cream holiday party coming up?”

“I hear they’re going to have ice-cream sculptures that you can!” Mikey said excitedly.

“You hear that?” Raph asked. “Ice cream sculptures! You want us to pass all that up and basically spit in the face of Power Cream, after how generous they’ve been?”

“All I’m saying...” Leo started to say, noting the offseason hubris in Raph’s voice.

“What you should be saying,” Raph interjected, “is: ‘hey guys, proud of your hard work this past season and pulling out the win. We’re clearly the best team in the league so we can take it easy for a while, recuperate and be fresh for when the season starts IN MARCH!’ That’s what you should be saying...” Raph huffed, turning his attention back to the television and scooping another bite of ice cream into his mouth. Leo just stood speechless, his mind drawing a blank. With his brothers so adamant about staying on their butts, he knew that pursuing the topic further was a moot point. Leo sighed, defeated and went and took a seat on the floor in front of the couch, brushing aside the empty cartons of ice cream.

“That’s it,” Raph said. “Now let’s watch the game in peace and worry about all that training stuff later. We’ve got plenty of time...”

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Leo wheezed as he tried to will his body forward. His steps fell heavily on the floor as he dribbled up the court, his body feeling bloated and clumsy. The turtle’s gut jostled with each plodding step as he not so much ran but waddled into position. Sweat poured from his face as a sense of intense heat encapsulated him; these uniforms felt even warmer than before and it didn’t help matters that it was the end of August. His lungs burned and his body ached, yet despite all of that he tried to focus. He saw Donnie on the wing cutting across the lane, his hobbling frame looking more like a meandering, green wrecking ball than the agile, lanky athlete he had been just a year ago. Once he got across the court, Leo began to move down the lane on the left but he didn’t make it very far until his defender easily stepped in front of him. Leo went to pass the ball to Raph who was huffing down toward the middle with his tongue lolled out the front of his mouth but as he did so Leo’s defender with comparatively lightning speed, stole the ball and ran down the court along with his teammates, leaving the turtles shuffling and lagging behind. The guy tossed the ball into the air and as the buzzer sounded, his teammate threw down a raucous windmill alley-oop dunk.

“And that does it, folks,” the announcer said over the speakers. “Another devastating loss for the defending champions the Turtle Titans, putting an end to their tough, winless season.” Leo clutched his

back as he grabbed his water bottle from the bench and waddled toward the locker room, the sting to his pride from the loss having dulled over the course of the season; it had been rough and in a way, Leo was glad it was over.

Leo had had a hunch the season would play out like this all the way back during their spring practice. Having finally dragged his brothers out of the layer and into the gym, it was clear that they were incredibly out of shape, getting winded from just a few laps up and down the court. Their bodies just felt clumsy with all their winter pudge altering their running and shooting mechanics. Donnie's silky smooth mid-range jumper simply bricked off the backboard while Raph's power dunks had turned into labored layups during which his stubby feet barely left the ground. A full month of practice did little to improve their [dulled] skill and as the season started, it was clear they had fallen off from their championship form. Teams were blowing them out by twenty, thirty, or even forty points a game and literally running circles around their wheezing frames. As the losses mounted and with not even a glimpse of progress back toward their once dominate forms, it became clear that they were playing out of their league; basketball was not a sport designed for four hundred and five hundred pound lumbering behemoths.

As the four turtles meandered into the locker room, sweaty and dejected, they were met with the surprisingly cheery face of a familiar weasel: Brett.

"Great work out there, boys," the weasel said.

"Was it great though?" Raph muttered under his breath.

"And I know that it was a tough season and I know that because of your, shall we say, recent play style and now nonexistent fan base, that the league is pressuring you all to disband the team, but I think I have some good news for y'all!"

"What could possibly be good news about any of that?" Raph asked. "Without this team, we aren't going to have any money to keep the lights on in the lair or keep really anything on!"

"It won't get that bad," Leo tried to reassure.

"Well, actually..." Donnie started to chime in before Leo gave him a death glare.

"Well, I think I can help you all avoid that," Brett said. "Even though y'all aren't making much money from your basketball prowess anymore, you all are actually still the main drivers of Power Cream sales! People still associate your faces with the brand and love it! We'd love to keep you all on, as the Turtle Titans, to be our official spokesman as we take the brand to national and international heights!" Brett tried to wrap his arm around Mikey's shoulder but gave up the impossible task and simply placed a hand on his bloated shoulder. "We'll turn all that blubber into a positive. I can see it now: Power Cream,

the world's most addictingly delicious ice cream. So good that it reshaped the careers of basketball champions! Then bang, your faces! It's perfect!"

"Won't us being fat blobs of our former selves turn customers off from that healthy tagline you all have?" Donnie asked.

"Well, uh," Brett sputtered, tugging nervously at his collar, "due to new FDA guidelines, we cannot legally call something with up that high of fat and sugar content, healthy. In fact, it just barely qualifies as ice-cream in the traditional sense..."

"Traditional sense...?" Donnie asked.

"But, we've found that there are huge, untapped markets for people that want high-calorie food like that..."

"High calorie...!?" Raph asked.

"Sorry, good catch," Brett said. "Wouldn't want the Feds to come down on us. What I mean to say was that we're going to make "ultra" calorie food the next big thing! So what do you y'all say?" Leo sighed, once again giving Donnie a look who gave one back that conveyed how little choice they had before shrugging.

"At this point..." Donnie figured, hefting his middle.

"Might as well," Leo said, turning and shaking the weasel's hand. "If the people want to see some fat, sweaty turtles selling them sugar-incarnate, who are we to deny them?"