

STEALING FIRST

FADE IN:

INT. LOUISIANA SUGAR CANE MILL -- DAY (1957)

A sign reads "HOUMA SUGAR JUNE 1957 36 DAYS WITHOUT AN ACCIDENT".

17-year-old boys work at menial jobs. All of them are drenched with sweat.

BILL MAGEE and brother BUTCH MAGEE paint a railing. Butch puts paint on his face like war paint.

BILL

You gonna wear it like that?

Butch nods, and paints Bill's face the same way.

LYN ANGELL pulls his head out of a tank to show a shiner.

PINK BELLEW passes by, carrying a load of scrap metal.

PINK

Wow. He got you good.

LYN

Yeah, but this time I got him back.

CAL KING fixes a boiler door while CRIP CORMIER looks on. Supervisor ALONZO CASTILLE, 30's, calls from an upper deck.

ALONZO

Hey! Summer job or no, you finish up or I'll put you in the fields!

CRIP

I ain't doin' darkies' work! Jesus!

CAL

Careful! 'Lonzo started out in the fields. And don't go blaming Jesus.

RONNIE LE BLANC, 17, good looking, buff, moves a dolly of sugar sacks to a loading dock. He starts to unload sacks, but stares out at the cane in the fields.

A STEAM WHISTLE blows. End of shift. Bill, Butch, Lyn, Pink, Cal and Crip find Ronnie on the dock. Two of them carry baseball bats.

RONNIE

Ready?

PINK

Where's your dad?

RONNIE

Comin' from the cane field. He's
always late. C'mon! Are we ready?

THE BOYS

Ready!

EXT. SUGAR MILL LOADING AREA -- DAY

A pickup truck with "HOUMA SUGAR" on the side pulls up to the dock. Its driver, GUY LE BLANC, 30's, leans out the window.

GUY

Hop in. Ronnie, up here with me.

RONNIE

I'll ride with the guys.

GUY

Get in the damn truck. I want to
talk to you.

Ron does. Wide-eyed, the others climb in the bed.

Guy drives off the lot.

EXT. LOUISIANA ROAD -- DAY

The truck rolls down roads lined with cane fields and oak trees.

Dust plumes up behind the truck. The boys are covered with it.

INT. TRUCK -- DAY

Ronnie turns the radio knob as he drives.

RONNIE

Where's KMOX? The Cards are playin'
the Dodgers.

Guy reaches out to punch a button. Ronnie swats his hand away.

RONNIE (CONT'D)

I'll get it.

GUY

Listen for Joe Garagiola.

RONNIE

I'll get it! Wha'd you wanna talk
about?

GUY
You playin' Breaux Bridge?

RONNIE
Then Crowley, Perry, Breaux Bridge
again, and then the quarterfinals.

GUY
You think you can beat people like
them?

RONNIE
Like the Braves? Heck, yeah!

GUY
People with savings accounts and
front porches. Lucky people.

RONNIE
So they have front porches. So?

Guy takes a pack of cigarettes from his sleeve and lights
one.

GUY
It's all we can do to stay one step
ahead of the colored folk.

RONNIE
I'm 4 and 0. Don't have to be lucky
when you're good.

GUY
I hope so, son. I do.

EXT. LOUISIANA ROAD -- DAY

The truck turns onto another road. Past shanties and shotgun
houses. Then into a dry plain and up to a municipal baseball
stadium.

INT. TRUCK -- DAY

Guy pulls to a stop.

GUY
Knock 'em dead.

RONNIE
Gee. Thanks for the pep talk.

They exit the truck, Guy to the stadium, Ronnie to the boys.

EXT. STADIUM PARKING LOT -- DAY

BUDDY HUVAL, 17, and his father, VERNON HUVAL, get out of a
truck that says "HUVAL & SON" on the side.

Vernon puts his arm around Buddy before they split up: Vernon to the bleachers, Buddy to the team.

ANDY GUIDRY, 17, gets out of a truck that says "COAL TAR BABIES" on the side. He tries to wipe tar off his hands with a rag. Joins the boys.

The boys AD LIB: "Hey, Andy, Buddy," etc.

They swat dust and sugar off themselves and each other, then pull off their shirts and put on tattered, faded jerseys.

ANDY
Godamighty, Buddy. You ever wash
that thing?

BUDDY
Not so long as we're winnin'. It's
just gettin' good.

Butch puts his jersey on inside out. Bill puts his on backwards. They laugh at each other.

CRIP
Dang sugar sticks to everything!

Crip combs his hair, primps in the truck's side mirror.

ANDY
Be glad it's not roofing tar. Hey,
I heard there's a scout coming.

RONNIE
You're kiddin'! When?

LYN
Championship game.

Pink minces steps with his pinky fingers out.

PINK
Prob'ly sign one of the Bayou Braves.

CAL
And unto them that hath, it shall be
given. Them that has, gets.

ANDY
Be a lifetime ticket outta here. No
more tar, no more sugar.

Butch and Bill straighten out their jerseys.

LYN
Hah! Whaddaya think we'll be doin'
when we graduate?

RONNIE

That'd be so great. Play major league ball.

Ronnie sees ERASTE BERNARD, 30's, dissolute, drinking from a flask.

RONNIE (CONT'D)

And not have a worthless coach.

Ronnie holds up a dilapidated bat.

RONNIE (CONT'D)

I say, ready?

The boys reach in to grip the bat, their hands aligned up the shaft.

THE BOYS

Ready!

Ronnie collars Eraste and drags him along.

They run into the stadium.

EXT. STADIUM -- DAY

Ronnie enters, looks at the field, the crowd. He's all smiles. He carries a worn-out baseball glove.

The ANNOUNCER's voice comes over the loudspeaker.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

Gooood afternoon, ladies and gentlemen, welcome to Pep Dupuis Field here in Cecilia for an American Legion contest between the Nina Redbirds...

The boys wave.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.) (CONT'D)

...and Breaux Bridge's Bayou Braves.

A WAR WHOOP from the bleachers.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.) (CONT'D)

On the field, Redbirds. Second base, LeRoy Huval.

Buddy waves to his dad in the bleachers. Vernon waves back.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Center field and left field, Wilbur and William Magee.

Butch and Bill make faces at each other and laugh.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.) (CONT'D)
First base, Lyn Angell.

Lyn glowers at the crowd.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Third base, Calvary King.

Cal, hands folded, is praying.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Right field, Andrew Jackson Guidry.
At short, Cristophe Cormier.

Crip waves to CHERIE LANDRY, 16 going on sexpot, who hangs on the fence, her boobs jiggling.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Catching, Pinkney Bellew.

THE BOYS
Pink-ney! Pink-ney!

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
Pitching, Ronnie Le Blanc.

Ronnie stands with Pink at home plate. He talks like a radio announcer--

RONNIE
One of the finest pitchers in
baseball!

He makes a breathy sound like crowds cheering.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
Redbirds coach, Eraste Bernard.

Eraste puts the cap back on his flask and wipes his mouth.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.) (CONT'D)
And now for the Braves...

The opposing team, the Braves, line up in front of their dugout in spotless new uniforms and throwing attitude.

RONNIE
Look at 'em. Dressed all pretty and
lined up like girls at a dance.

Ronnie takes the ball from Pink and walks to the hill.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
Batting eighth, Aypee Dupuis. Ninth,
Wade Lee Gilbert. Coach, Denis
Gilbert.

EXT. STADIUM -- LATER

The scoreboard shows nothing, then goose eggs for two innings.

The sun beats down. People wipe sweat with handkerchiefs.

Ronnie strikes out easily half the batters. Between pitches he struts on the hill, ignoring AD LIB nasty comments "I've seen better junk in a junkyard," etc. from the Braves' dugout.

When a ball is hit foul, the fans in the stands retrieve it and give it back to put into play.

VERNON

Your boy's quite a pitcher.

GUY

Better'n I ever was.

Fans on one side cheer when one of the Braves hits a fly ball. They boo when Bill Magee catches it.

Elderly PEP DUPUIS sits down next to BO BRASSEUX, 30's.

PEP

Bo Brasseur! You playing hooky from the bank?

BO

I do what I please, Pep.

PEP

My Gawd, it's hot.

BO

Hot as dog shit in a skillet. Your grandson's lookin' good.

At bat, AYPEE DUPUIS takes some practice swings.

PEP

Aypee looks good ever' day.

Pink signals. Ronnie nods and windmills on the mound.

Aypee checks his swing, but the umpire, EDDY BARIL, calls strike one.

In the stands, Bo watches while Pep mops his head.

BO

Yep, he's lookin' real good.

PEP

Right. Y'know, Bo, now that Earl Long's called Bob Delcambre up to the state house, we need a new mayor.

BO
You got Junior Sain.

PEP
Job'll suit you when Junior's term
is over.

On the mound, Ronnie throws again, and Aypee swings. Strike two.

Back in the seats, Bo studies the field.

BO
Mayor?

PEP
On one condition. There's a scout
comin'. You make sure that scout
signs Aypee to the major leagues.
I'll make sure you get to be mayor.

At home plate, Aypee swings hard and misses. Strike three.

More boos.

As they trade sides, more AD LIB trash talk from the Braves:
"White trash," "Get them jerseys from the rag bag?" Etc.

The Redbirds bat next and Andy Guidry wallops a line drive
to center. The Braves misjudge it and Andy singles.

The Braves' pitcher gets halfway through his windup and halts.
Ronnie shouts at his coach.

RONNIE
He balked! Tell 'em! That was a
balk!

Eraste blinks at him.

RONNIE (CONT'D)
You don't even know what a balk is,
do you?!

Scoreboard shows Redbirds ahead 3-0 at the end of the third.

Signals on: Ronnie and Pink make solid eye contact time and
again. They're in perfect synch.

On a Braves' pop foul, Ronnie covers first base while Lyn
catches the ball.

More boos from the stands. Now the crowd is getting into
the attacks on the Redbirds.

Bo rises.

BO

Tell Junior not to get too comfy.

He makes his way to the Redbirds' dugout. He passes HOLMAN "SCOOT" GROSHON, 30's, black, powerful, on the way.

BO (CONT'D)

Outta my way, nigger.

Scoot stares at Bo for a long time, then steps aside. Bo passes and Scoot climbs to the "Colored" section.

Behind the Redbirds' dugout, Bo calls Eraste to the sideline. He holds out a \$50 bill.

BO (CONT'D)

You need to get yourself another job.

Eraste salivates at the money, almost takes it, but hesitates.

ERASTE

I'm coachin' so's I c'n pay off the Legion Hall. Y'know. For a drink or two.

Bo pulls out another \$50.

BO

Pay 'em off, and do your drinkin' at Dotty's from now on. Get lost.

ERASTE

Right now?

Bo nods. Eraste takes the money, heads for the parking lot.

Scoreboard shows Redbirds 4-0 in the middle of the fifth.

The Redbirds come in for their turn at bat.

RONNIE

Think I can do what Don Larsen did?

BUDDY

You don't talk about it! Jinx it for the rest of us!

PINK

You do it and I'll buy you a pack of rubbers.

RONNIE

And I'll show you what to do with 'em. Where's Coach?

PINK
 Takin' a piss, I guess.

On the other sideline, Bo talks to the Braves' coach, DENIS GILBERT, 30's.

BO
 If I get that scout to sign Aypee,
 Pep's gonna make me mayor.

DENIS
 Then we better stop these Redbirds
 or the scout won't look twice at
 Aypee.

BO
 It's already handled.

One of the Braves, Bo's son T-BO BRASSEUX, looks at his dad.

T-BO
 Papa! I could be that good...if
 Coach would let me play.

BO
 T-Bo, it's time to tell the officials
 the Redbirds are missing their coach.

T-BO
 But I don't--

BO
 Maybe I'll ask Denis here to give
 you some playing time.

T-Bo takes off from the dugout toward the officials' box.

In the bleachers, a man in a straw fedora, JACK DOYLE, draws stares as he climbs to the Colored section and stands next to Scoot. They acknowledge each other but nothing more.

On the field, Ronnie flexes his arm, grimaces, pitches. There's a Brave on first.

A Braves batter hits a line drive straight back to Ronnie, who catches it, then throws to first to get the runner out.

Ronnie takes the ball from Lyn.

LYN
 Coach ain't come back.

RONNIE
 We don't need him.

Ronnie massages his arm and winces again.

Up in the Colored section, Jack Doyle looks at Scoot Groshon.

JACK

That boy's got talent. You could help him with that arm.

SCOOT

He has bigger problems than his arm.

INT. OFFICIALS' BOX -- DAY

T-Bo is talking to CHARLIE SAVOY, 50's.

The Announcer has his hand over the microphone.

EXT. STADIUM -- DAY

One of the Braves hits a sacrifice single, scoring a runner from second.

Scoreboard reads 4-2.

Charlie Savoy comes on the field toward home plate. Eddy Baril waves at Ronnie to hold up.

Charlie and Eddy confer. Eddy throws his cap on the ground, then follows Charlie to the pitcher's mound.

Eddy says something to Ronnie.

RONNIE

What!

Pink bolts for the mound.

CHARLIE

I'm sorry, son. You have to forfeit the game. Those are the rules.

PINK

Whose rules? Rules about what?

The Redbirds gather from the field onto the mound.

EDDY

American Legion ball says you gotta show up, have enough men, enough equipment, and a coach.

RONNIE

We have a coach, he's just - oh, wait. You don't want the Redbirds to win!

ANDY

Don't, Ronnie.

RONNIE

You stopped it 'cause of that! Whose
idea was it? Huh?

CHARLIE

That's not it at all.

In the stands, the crowd boos.

T-Bo starts to jeer, but then hangs back.

T-BO

White...trash...filthy...bums...

Down on the field, Ronnie turns on the bleachers.

RONNIE

Shut up, y'all! Shut up! Just shut
up!

LYN

It ain't fair!

RONNIE

What are we supposed to do now?

EDDY

Right now you have to forfeit the
game.

In the Colored section, Jack Doyle nods at Scoot Groshon.

JACK

Never amount to anything with an
attitude like that.

Scoot says nothing. Jack starts down the steps.

Guy frowns at the field and turns to another spectator.

GUY

What's goin' on?

The spectator shrugs. Bo approaches.

BO

Redbirds forfeit. Your boys are
playing without a coach.

GUY

Ain't their fault he's no-count.

BO

Whyn't you get those boys a coach
with some of your wife's money?
'Stead of letting it sit in my bank.

GUY
 You'd strangle your own people with
 a rosary, wouldn't you?

EXT. STADIUM PARKING LOT -- DAY

Pep and Aypee, Bo and T-Bo and Denis watch as Ronnie gets in
 the pickup and the team jumps in the back.

Bo in particular makes note of the truck as it drives off.

BO
 In a Houma Sugar truck, too.

INT. TRUCK -- DAY

Guy argues with Ronnie.

GUY
 You woulda lost that game anyway!

RONNIE
 Did you even notice I was winning
 before the game was called? Geez!

A song comes on the radio. Ronnie punches another button.

RONNIE (CONT'D)
 I don't wanna listen to that!

GUY
 'S good music. Not what Father Lusk
 says makes young people fornicate.

Guy punches the button back.

RONNIE
 Find some fornicating music. How
 'bout "Hound Dog"? See if I touch
 myself.

GUY
 Ron. I think it's time I tell you...

RONNIE
 Oh, here it comes.

GUY
 When I was your age...

RONNIE
 I don't wanna hear it right now!
 Anyways, Pink told me everything.

GUY
 Pink told you? How'd he know?

RONNIE
Maybe his Mama told him.

GUY
You know all about it, then?

RONNIE
You coulda mentioned it a few years ago. It's a little late now. Just drop me at the Legion Post.

INT. AMERICAN LEGION -- DAY

Ronnie enters, pauses a moment at a trophy case.

There's a big trophy. And old photos: parades of Legion baseball teams surrounded by pretty girls.

And in a corner, a photo of soldiers with their arms around each other. He lingers on it a moment until he hears--

Charlie and Eraste are talking.

CHARLIE
Well, Eraste, I'm sorry to see you go.

Eraste turns to leave. Ronnie sees him.

RONNIE
What the hell! Where'd you go?

ERASTE
I quit.

RONNIE
In the middle of a game?!

CHARLIE
Now, son--

ERASTE
You're losers! Ever' last one o' you. I ain't coachin' a bunch o' losers!

He brushes past Ronnie and exits.

RONNIE
You're the reason we lost!

Ronnie rounds on Charlie.

RONNIE (CONT'D)
Some coach you gave us!

CHARLIE

I thought you'd be by. Well, come on in.

INT. CHARLIE'S OFFICE -- DAY

More like a closet with a desk and file cabinet.

Charlie switches on a fan.

RONNIE

So what now? What about me? And the team?

CHARLIE

I'd be more inclined to help you if you'd'a kept your temper today.

RONNIE

Kept my temper?! That no good--

CHARLIE

I know why you did it. Don't do it again. Fact is, that Braves coach, Gilbert, is on the warpath. Filled out a official form to disqualify you. Alls it needs is a signature.

He holds out a sheet of paper.

RONNIE

Gilbert's just a poor loser!

CHARLIE

Denis Gilbert was a fine man before... See, that's how it works. Favors for favors. I made Eraste your coach 'cause he owed me a favor.

Ronnie pounds the desk.

RONNIE

So that's it? You're just cutting us loose?

The fan WHIRS. A clock TICKS.

CHARLIE

Well, now, here's a thing. This disqualification will have to wait, if you find a coach.

RONNIE

How'd I do that?

CHARLIE

There is one man...might be what you need.

RONNIE

All right. Who?

CHARLIE

Holman Groshon.

RONNIE

But he's...he's a...he's...colored.

CHARLIE

Pitched in the nigra league, he did. Won the New Orleans regional division game.

RONNIE

But I play for your post! You're supposed to help me, not--

CHARLIE

There goes your temper again! Come here.

Charlie exits the office. Ron follows.

INT. AMERICAN LEGION -- DAY

In the hallway, Charlie stops at the trophy case.

CHARLIE

You see that? 1937 team. Three of 'em Milwaukee Braves now.

RONNIE

Yeah, 'cause the Legion helped 'em out!

CHARLIE

You're good. You could be in the majors, like them. All's keeping you from that is your pride.

RONNIE

I can't go begging to a, a n--. I can't!

CHARLIE

A winning team would bring honor back to Nina. You know where Groshon lives?

Ronnie storms out, past the photo of the soldiers.

EXT. LE BLANC HOUSE -- EVENING

An unfinished frame house with a screen porch on the side.

Guy is in the yard. Ronnie walks past him. YELLING and SCREAMING come from inside the house.

INT. LE BLANC HOUSE -- EVENING

More unfinished projects: the framing is exposed on one wall, a stack of doors in a corner, no woodwork.

BABETTE LE BLANC, 30's, grabs the face of eight-year-old ISABELLA.

BABETTE

A movie star? Hah! No studio would let you in like that!

Isabella's face is a mess of lipstick, eyebrow pencil and tears.

ISABELLA

Brenda Brasseur called me ugly and I said I was gonna be a movie star!

Babette tries to wipe the makeup off.

BABETTE

Monique Comeaux's asked twice about her Congo Red lipstick. Now I have to re-order it.

Isabella sticks out her tongue and runs away. Babette swats at her and misses.

BABETTE (CONT'D)

Stay out of my Avon, Isabella!

Ronnie enters.

BABETTE (CONT'D)

She'll be the death of me before I get her to Hollywood. She's headstrong and I don't know where she gets it.

Babette moves to the kitchen.

BABETTE (CONT'D)

You do okay? You won today?

RONNIE

No. We were ahead four-two in the seventh so they stopped the game.

INT. KITCHEN -- EVENING

Unfinished as well. Cabinets without doors, the fridge in the way.

BABETTE

'They' who? Why'd they stop it?

Ronnie enters after Babette.

RONNIE

Nobody's saying. Daddy was about as much comfort as a priest with fleas.

BABETTE

Ronnie!

RONNIE

For all the consolation I got? 'Give it up.' 'You won't win.' Geez, Mama.

Babette leans on the sink and looks out the window.

She sees Guy, in the yard, stubbing out a cigarette.

RONNIE (CONT'D)

How can you...still like each other?

BABETTE

He was so full of promise. I used to want to crawl inside him, to see the future through his eyes. Dropped all my own plans to be a movie star.

They watch Guy use a penny to check the tread on a beater Oldsmobile.

RONNIE

Do you feel like that...any more?

Babette ties on an apron.

BABETTE

I felt lucky he married me when I was pregnant with you.

RONNIE

You always said it was the right thing.

BABETTE

Now I just want so much to get ahead.

They watch Guy work under the hood of the Olds.

BABETTE (CONT'D)

When he came home from the war, he was up for promotion at the mill. I thought we'd get a new car, new house.

They watch Guy slam the hood of the car.

BABETTE (CONT'D)

House I wanted, the pretty white one where the Arcenauxs live now? We couldn't afford it. So he started to build this one.

Babette wipes off the counter.

BABETTE (CONT'D)

And then...that stopped, too.

RONNIE

What happened, Mama?

BABETTE

The promotion fell through.

Sound of FOOTSTEPS on the screen porch.

RONNIE

Why?

BABETTE

Alonzo Castille got the job.

Guy enters.

INT. LE BLANC HOUSE -- NIGHT

The family sits down to the supper table. Isabella is scrubbed clean.

GUY

Get used to it. Forfeiting is what Le Blancs do best.

RONNIE

What I do best is win. When I'm on the mound, I can do anything.

He begins passing a bowl of mashed potatoes.

GUY

Oh, you're good at baseball. Game's always come easy to you.

RONNIE

Baseball's important in this town. Winning would bring back honor to Nina.

GUY

Out in the real world, things don't
come so easy.

Ronnie passes a bowl of green beans.

RONNIE

That's your motto, isn't it? 'Don't
expect anything and you won't be
disappointed?'

GUY

Sure be easier on you.

RONNIE

Come July, Redbirds'll be on top.

GUY

Showing up in rags and playing with
beat-up bats so everybody sees how
poor we are. Babette: tea.

Babette passes the tea pitcher to Ronnie, who gives it to
Guy.

BABETTE

Guy? This is his last summer. If
he wants to dream--

GUY

Like our dreams? Your handprints in
cement or me as a country gentleman?

BABETTE

Don't start that again.

She picks up a carving knife and begins to cut the legs off
a scrawny chicken.

GUY

You wanna know my dream, kids? That
your mama here turns loose of the
twenty four hundred dollars she got
when her daddy died.

BABETTE

Guy. Dammit.

GUY

We could pay off the loan on this
house! Put us on Easy street!

RONNIE

Mama?

BABETTE

And you could buy another boat like
the one, sank after three days?

Guy stands.

GUY

I could finish the house--

Babette stands, still holding the knife, and they face off.

BABETTE

Don't cost a dime to put a door on
our bedroom, but no! You go out all
night--

RONNIE

We could get a good coach--

BABETTE

No! I have plans for that money.
I'm gonna buy me a business.

GUY

Like hell you are!

BABETTE

An investment in the future!

GUY

This whole family's gone crazy! You
wanna play baseball, you wanna be a
movie star and now your Mama fancies
herself a bidness woman!

BABETTE

Well? If you can't get us ahead,
then I will!

ISABELLA

Could you please stop arguing!

Guy storms out of the house.

INT. LE BLANC SCREEN PORCH -- NIGHT

Isabella lies on a cot. Ron sits on a box next to her.

RONNIE

You shoulda seen me today, Izzy. I
had a no-hitter going 'til the
seventh.

ISABELLA

I don't know what that means.

RONNIE

It was good. A dream game.

ISABELLA

Sometimes I dream I'm in Hollywood
and I'm pretty.

She cries. Ronnie wipes her tears.

RONNIE

My dream is, there's a man coming
called a scout. If I can play for
him, he can get me with a big-league
team.

ISABELLA

What'll I do if you leave?

She rises. Ronnie does, too.

RONNIE

You just said you wanna be a movie
star.

ISABELLA

It's just a wish. I'll never be a
star.

RONNIE

You been listenin' to Daddy.

Ronnie picks her up and sits down on the cot, with her in
his lap.

ISABELLA

I don't like it when everything's
sad all the time.

RONNIE

Yeah. Feels like everything's falling
apart.

ISABELLA

I'm scared something's gonna happen.

RONNIE

I'm scared nothing will.

Ronnie gives her a hug.

RONNIE (CONT'D)

Now go inside and let me have my
bed.

Ronnie kisses her on top of her head. Izzy gets up and goes
into the house.

Ronnie lies on the cot. Sounds of LOCUSTS and CRICKETS.
Then, from the front room, RADIO SHOWS.

Ronnie stares at the darkness.

EXT. VACANT FIELD -- DAY

Some of the boys stand around tossing a baseball.

LYN

Hey, Pink, that pup of yours gonna
be a good huntin' dog?

PINK

Yeah, I got him fetching rawhide
bones now.

CRIP

Why bother practice if we can't play?

RONNIE

Crip, could your dad coach us?

CRIP

My step-dad's always travelin'. My
real dad, who knows where he is?

RONNIE

Butch? Bill? How 'bout your dad?

BILL

He'd be great.

BUTCH

As soon as he gets out.

CAL

Ronnie, would your dad do it?

RONNIE

Naw. He's got us losin' before we
suit up.

CRIP

All fathers are dumb.

CAL

Ack! Honor thy father--

BUDDY

Hey! I get along with my Pa!

LYN

At least he don't beat the tar outta
you. No offense, Guidry.

ANDY

My dad says the smell of tar is the smell of money. Then he treats me like the help.

PINK

At least you have fathers.

LYN

Wisht I didn't.

CRIP

Let's go. My stepdad's got the Playboy with Jayne Mansfield on the cover.

The boys AD LIB "Woo hoo," "All right," "Who's the centerfold?" etc.

BILL

Might as well.

BUTCH

We can't play.

All of the boys trail off except Ronnie and Pink.

PINK

You comin'?

RONNIE

I need to find us a coach.

PINK

And give up havin' fun?

He slugs Ronnie on the arm. Ronnie glares at him.

RONNIE

Watch the arm.

PINK

We don't need a coach. We don't need to play!

RONNIE

That scout's coming.

PINK

Who cares? He ain't lookin' at me.

RONNIE

It's a break.

PINK

Well, I'm gonna enjoy my summer.

RONNIE

I just want a break...

He shakes his head, and watches Pink walk off.

EXT. SCOOT GROSHON'S HOUSE -- DAY

A converted feed store on a sun-baked road. A separate lean-to shack with a stove pipe.

Two black men, FRANKLIN and MARCEL, sit on the front porch.

Ronnie drives by in the Oldsmobile. Then he drives by going the other way. Then he drives up a third time, pulls up onto the dirt outside the house, parks, gets out.

RONNIE

Morning.

Ronnie mounts the stoop.

Franklin sharpens a stalk of cane with a machete. Marcel cleans a shotgun. The men do not acknowledge Ronnie.

Scot Groshon comes to the screen door, startles Ronnie.

RONNIE (CONT'D)

Hello! I'm Ronnie Le Blanc, I pitch for the Nina Redbirds baseball team.

Scot does not open the door.

RONNIE (CONT'D)

Sir, I'd like to show you how you can be part of history--

SCOOT

I'm already part of history.

Scot walks away from the door.

The two men laugh at Ronnie.

FRANKLIN

Take off, boy. Scot's busy.

MARCEL

He ain't comin' out.

Ronnie hesitates, then calls through the screen door.

RONNIE

Mr. Groshon! Actually, sir, I need your help. Hello?

Marcel loads his gun, closes it and chambers a round.