

12 ROUNDS

A young Black man is shown in a dynamic, low-crouched pose, reminiscent of a boxer's stance. His face and upper body are covered in vibrant, multi-colored paint splatters in shades of blue, green, yellow, and red. He is wearing a black tank top with a white trim around the neckline. The background is a solid, bright yellow. The overall aesthetic is energetic and artistic.

To stay on the team, Rashawn may *cut* more than weight.

CUT

EVAN JACOBS

CHAPTER 1

DRAINED

A voice boomed over the loudspeaker. “Rashawn Walker wins for Adams High School!”

The ref held up Rashawn’s hand. Rashawn smiled at his teammates. Then he shook his opponent’s hand.

“Good match,” Rashawn said. His opponent nodded.

Rashawn had won on points. It wasn’t easy. He barely had any energy.

I’m so hungry! he thought.

Rashawn was a senior. He’d been on the wrestling team since he was a freshman. During

his junior year, keeping his weight down to 152 pounds had been hard. Last summer, Rashawn had worked on his diet. He'd stayed at 152. But maintaining that was a struggle.

Going up a weight class wasn't an option. The team started Rashawn's senior season with wrestlers in every weight class. Rashawn had to make 152 pounds. It was either that or lose his spot on the team.

Rashawn's body ached after his match. Every muscle felt tight as he walked off the mat.

"Bro!" Troy Mesa shook Rashawn's hand. They were best friends. The two had met as freshmen on the wrestling team. "How does it feel to win another trophy?"

Rashawn lied. "Great."

He put his hand on Troy's shoulder. That helped Rashawn walk.

I just need to sit down, Rashawn thought.

His plan was to drink water. He hoped that would make the cramps go away.

Coach Dale smiled. “I’m proud of you, Rashawn!”

Rashawn leaned on the coach too. He couldn’t wait to sit down. “Is there any water?”

“Yes,” Troy said. “I’ll get you one.”

“Thanks.”

Rashawn fell into a chair. His body really hurt. The teen’s thoughts started to spin.

Next Friday is my final high school meet. I have to win.

Aside from weight problems, Rashawn’s senior year had been great so far. He’d even been recruited to wrestle next year. That was for Adams Community College. It was an okay school.

Rashawn wanted to go to a university. But his grades weren’t good enough. School never came easy for him. Other students often had to explain things. His parents helped too.

Wrestling was different. It was something Rashawn did well right away.

CHAPTER 2

TOO MUCH

Rashawn and Troy walked away from the bus. It dropped them in the Adams High School parking lot. Silas Cruz walked with them.

“We’re eating, right?” Silas asked. He was the team captain.

The team had pizza parties after meets. Rashawn had loved them until this year. Now they made cutting weight hard.

Rashawn frowned. “You guys go. I’m tired.”

I just want to go home and rest, he thought.

Silas shook his head. “Bro! It’s our last season. We’re seniors. Come with us. Enjoy this.”

Rashawn looked at his friends.

I can't wrestle if I don't make weight. I'm not missing my last match. It's next week.

"Fine," Rashawn said. "You guys can drive. I'll walk."

"Whatever," Silas said. He went to his car. "Just show up."

Rashawn nodded. *Nobody else has weight problems. Why me?*

"I'll walk with you," Troy said.

Troy spent more time with Rashawn than Silas did. He saw how little Rashawn was eating. As a wrestler, Troy sort of knew what Rashawn was going through. But Troy didn't struggle with his weight.

The teens started walking. Rashawn eyed the track behind the school. It was outside the wrestling room. After practice, Rashawn liked to run there. That started his freshman year to help with his stamina. Now he did it to lose weight. He was spending more and more time at the track.

“That’s crazy,” Troy said as they walked down the street.

“What?” Rashawn asked.

“This is our last season.”

Rashawn nodded. “Yeah. I can’t believe high school is almost over.”

It was early April. The boys had a couple months of school left. Overall, Rashawn liked high school. Winning another trophy would be the perfect ending.

“You’re going to win your last match,” Troy said. “Stop worrying about your weight.”

“I’m barely making 152 now.”

“You did it this week.” Troy smiled. “Just one more week to go. You’ve got this. I know it.”



Tap Pizza was packed. The wrestling team had tables in the back. One of them was covered with pizzas.

“Eat up, guys.” Silas sat down. His plate was full of slices. “We won’t be eating like this again until after next Friday.”

Most of the team had heaps of pizza on their plates. Rashawn had one slice on his. He didn't plan to eat it. Instead, he sipped a cup of water.

Don't drink too much, he told himself. Water adds weight too. I need to leave. There's too much food here.

The guys talked about next week's matches.

"Rashawn's taking on Bobby Gomez," Silas said. "He's that guy from Campbell Hill High. Bobby pins everyone."

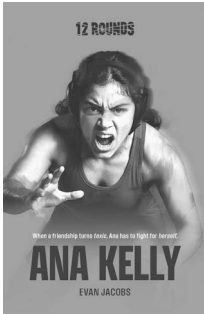
"My boy's going to beat him," Troy said. "He would've earlier this season. Too bad Bobby got sick."

"Rashawn! Eat!" Silas said loudly. "You won today. Celebrate! You earned it."

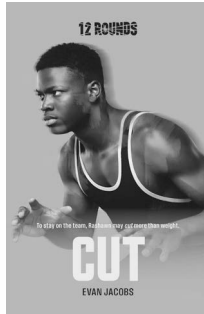
Sighing, Rashawn looked at his plate. Then he took a big bite of pizza. He couldn't help himself. The others cheered him on.

Suddenly, Rashawn couldn't stop eating. He ate six slices before leaving.

12 ROUNDS



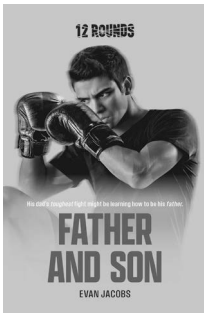
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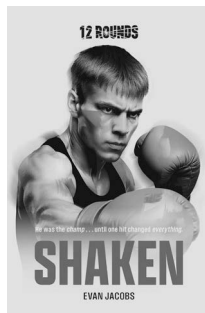
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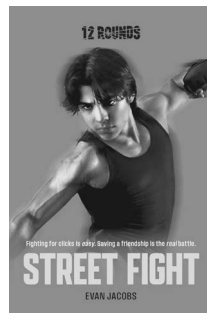
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CUT

Senior Rashawn Walker has been on the high school wrestling team since he was a freshman. But making weight is a problem this year. He'd like to go up a weight class, but that isn't possible. Will he put himself at risk to stay on the team?