

Starters

A play

25-page sample

By Jeffrey Wolf

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Cast:

Josh Bishop — Guard
Male, high school sophomore.

Cameron Crinkle — Forward
Male, high school junior. The tallest on the team.

Dean Wilson — Guard
Male, high school sophomore. The shortest on the team.

Monroe Harrison — Center, Team Manager
Male, high school junior.

Billy Stone — Forward
Male, high school senior.

Producer
Male, a film student. Offstage.

Cameraman
Male, a film student. Offstage.

Setting:

A high school locker room. Present.

The world premiere of *Starters* was on April 1, 2005
at the Playwright Theatre in Denver, Colorado,
a production of the Denver Repertory Theatre Company.

Director:
Michael Starks

Assistant Director:
Lynda Harris

Cast

Josh Bishop	—	Mitchell Colley
Cameron Crinkle	—	Rich Sater
Dean Wilson	—	Patrick Miranda
Monroe Harrison	—	Tim Mapoles
Billy Stone	—	Logan Kendig

Producer: Tom Jerke
Cameraman/Understudy: Aaron Quintana

(At rise, a high school locker room. There are several lockers facing the audience and a long wooden bench in front of them. One side of the stage is the entrance to the locker room. The other is the entrance to the shower/bathroom. The first thing the audience hears is the voice of the PRODUCER and CAMERAMAN from an overhead speaker, directly overhead or at the back of the audience. The PRODUCER and CAMERAMAN are never seen on stage; the audience only hears their voices.)

PRODUCER:

Check. Check. One. One. Your levels okay?

CAMERAMAN:

Yep. I just hope the lighting works.

PRODUCER:

We'll make it work. Remember – don't ever stop rolling.

CAMERAMAN:

No problem. (*A beat.*) You really think this is going to be good? I mean – they're in high school.

PRODUCER:

I don't know. We can hope.

CAMERAMAN:

When are they supposed to get here?

PRODUCER:

Soon I hope. The coach said they were coming in early for a long warm up.

(JOSH enters. JOSH is medium height and his shoulders are slumped. His hair is unkempt and his clothes look like they've been slept in. He pauses at JOHN's locker, then turns and looks at the audience.)

JOSH:

Oh. Hi.

PRODUCER:

Hi. We're part of the –

JOSH:

Yeah. I know.

(JOSH moves to his own locker and opens it.)

PRODUCER:

We don't want to be in your way— but it'd be nice if we could ask you some questions.

JOSH:

Okay.

PRODUCER:

(To Cameraman:)

Ready?

CAMERAMAN:

All set.

(A spotlight shines brightly on JOSH. Whenever the PRODUCER interviews one of the students by themselves, the spotlight comes on. It shuts off when other students enter.)

PRODUCER:

(To Josh:)

Is today hard for you?

JOSH:

That's not a very good question.

PRODUCER:

Why not?

JOSH:

The answer's pretty obvious.

(CAMERON enters and pauses when he sees JOSH. The spotlight fades out. CAMERON is very tall, the tallest on the team, however he usually hunches down so he does not seem as large as he actually is.)

CAMERON:

Hey. *(Looks at audience.)* Oh.

JOSH:

Hey.

CAMERON:

I've been – looking for you.

JOSH:

I've been here all morning.

CAMERON:

Are they the – movie people?

JOSH:

Yeah.

CAMERON:

(To audience:)

So – what do I – we – do?

PRODUCER:

Just what you normally do.

CAMERON:

Oh. Okay.

JOSH:

(Softly:)

As if today's a normal day.

CAMERON:

(To Josh:)

What?

JOSH:

Nothing.

CAMERON:

Okay. What were you doing all morning?

JOSH:

Practicing.

CAMERON:

Oh. Right.

JOSH:

It's what we – what I – always do.

CAMERON:

Right.

PRODUCER:

Sorry to interrupt – but could you just say your names?

JOSH:

(To audience:)

Josh Bishop.

CAMERON:

(To audience:)

Cameron Crinkle. How long will you guys be here?

PRODUCER:

Probably until after the game.

CAMERON:

And you're making a documentary? About us?

PRODUCER:

Basically. We're film students and this kind of started as a class project – but we got approval, and sponsorship, to do a full film.

CAMERON:

Well good for you I guess.

JOSH:

(To Cameron:)

Why were you looking for me?

CAMERON:

I just haven't seen you since the –

(A beat.)

JOSH:

Since the funerals.

CAMERON:

Yeah. *(Pause.)* Are you – okay?

JOSH:

Not really. But I'll cope.

CAMERON:

Do you want to – I mean – *(Looks at audience uncomfortably.)* I guess this must be hard for you.

JOSH:

It's hard for all of us.

CAMERON:

But you –

JOSH:

We all lost friends. There's nothing you can do about it anyway.

(JOSH moves toward the shower/bathroom exit.)

CAMERON:

Where are you going?

JOSH:

To take a shower. *(To audience:)* You guys won't tape me in the shower – will you?

PRODUCER:

No. We'll stay here.

JOSH:

Good.

CAMERON:

Josh, I'm— I'm sorry.

JOSH:

What for?

(JOSH exits to the shower/bathroom.)

CAMERON:

(To himself:)

Idiot.

PRODUCER:

Is it okay if we ask you some questions?

CAMERON:

What type of questions?

PRODUCER:

Well, we asked Josh if today was hard.

CAMERON:

What'd he say?

PRODUCER:

He said it wasn't a very good question.

CAMERON:

(Clicks his tongue.)

That's Josh.

PRODUCER:

What do you mean?

CAMERON:

Josh is smart like that. So was John.

PRODUCER:

His brother?

CAMERON:

Yeah. His brother –

PRODUCER:

You knew him well, right?

CAMERON:

Of course I knew him well. And the rest of 'em. In a small school like this, all the players— we hang out. We got pretty close.

PRODUCER:

So today *is* hard for you.

CAMERON:

Listen, I guess I don't really want to talk about it, all right?

PRODUCER:

But you were just –

CAMERON:

No! I mean – just leave it alone, all right?

(DEAN enters. DEAN is the shortest member of the team. He always wears a small gold cross on a chain around his neck.)

DEAN:

(Quietly:)

Hey Cam.

CAMERON:

Hey.

DEAN:

(To audience:)

Oh. Uh – hi. *(To Cameron:)* I forgot they were coming today.

CAMERON:

Well they're here.

DEAN:

Shower's running. Josh must be here.

CAMERON:

Thank you for stating the obvious.

DEAN:

(Indicates audience.)

Can we talk in front of them?

CAMERON:

Do we have a choice?

DEAN:

So Josh's gonna play?

CAMERON:

I'm not sure. I guess.

DEAN:

Are you?

CAMERON:

I don't know. Christ Dean, quit giving me the fucking third degree.

DEAN:

I'm not. I just wanted to know.

CAMERON:

Well I don't know. So just let it alone!

DEAN:

What's your problem with me today?

(CAMERON exits to the shower/bathroom.)

PRODUCER:

Why did you ask if they were going to play?

DEAN:

I just want to know what we're going to do. I tried calling Coach from home, but no one would answer the phone. So I came to check. I just think we need to stick together as a team on this. And if we're not going to play – we'll have to tell everyone. But if we are – I don't know. It doesn't feel right.

PRODUCER:

Can I get your name real quick?

DEAN:

Dean Wilson.

(The spotlight turns on DEAN.)

PRODUCER:

Do you think the team will play?

DEAN:

Cam and Josh are here.

PRODUCER:

What doesn't feel right about it?

DEAN:

It's hard to explain. I mean – I'm only a sophomore so I'm not as experienced as the other guys were. I don't even know if we'll win.

PRODUCER:

Is it really about winning or losing?

DEAN:

No. I don't think it ever was. We all knew each other really well. We'd travel together, eat together. You know – all one team. Now, half is missing.

PRODUCER:

When you came in – you knew it was Josh in the shower.

DEAN:

Well, I was pretty sure it was him. He and John always shower before a game. Never made sense to me. You're just gonna go get sweaty again.

(CAMERON enters from the shower/bathroom.)

CAMERON:

(To Dean:)

You going to keep crucifying me?

DEAN:

Why are you so pissy?

CAMERON:

‘Cause you come in and start whining –

DEAN:

I wasn’t whining –

CAMERON:

And I just don’t want to deal with it.

DEAN:

You don’t need to play the tough guy for the camera.

CAMERON:

What? Fuck you. That’s not what I’m doing.

DEAN:

Cam – this might not help you – but they’re in a better place now. Jesus is watching over them.

CAMERON:

Fuck that! Where the hell was He before? You don’t know that! Don’t you start spitting that God and Heaven shit!

DEAN:

Cam – they’re –

CAMERON:

If you don’t fucking shut your mouth I’m going to shut it for you.

DEAN:

You have to understand – they’re in God’s kingdom –

CAMERON:

I said shut up!

(MONROE enters. At the beginning of the play, MONROE should look impeccable. Everything about him is neat and tidy, especially his hair.)

MONROE:

What’s going on?

CAMERON:

(To Dean:)

You sonofabitch!

(CAMERON rushes for DEAN. MONROE holds him back.)

DEAN:

No! Cam! Stop!

MONROE:

What the hell? Cameron – stop it! What are you doing?

CAMERON:

You tell *him* to stop!

MONROE:

What are you talking about?

CAMERON:

He comes in here and starts spouting off his shit about God –

MONROE:

All right! Just calm down!

CAMERON:

I'm gonna –

MONROE:

No! You're not going to do anything! Cameron! Look at me. *(Glances at audience.)* We're not alone. Go cool off. Splash some water on your face or something. *(Pushes him toward shower/bathroom exit.)* Go!

(CAMERON glares at DEAN for a moment, then exits to the shower/bathroom.)

MONROE (CONT.):

What was that all about?

DEAN:

Nothing.

MONROE:

Dean, you know how that religious stuff rubs him the wrong way. That's all he hears at home.

DEAN:

I know. I guess I forgot.

MONROE:

You forgot? His stepfather preaches at your church. How could you forget?

DEAN:

Still, I've never seen him so mad.

MONROE:

(Indicates audience.)

Maybe it's them.

DEAN:

Or maybe it's just today.

*(JOSH enters from the shower/bathroom.
He is wearing a towel and looks like has just
come out of the shower.)*

JOSH:

Was someone yelling?

MONROE:

Cameron.

JOSH:

What for?

MONROE:

You know Cameron's – he's –

*(CAMERON enters from the
shower/bathroom.)*

CAMERON:

He's what?

MONROE:

I thought you went to calm down.

CAMERON:

I'm calm. Go on. Finish your sentence.

JOSH:

(Looking at audience:)

I guess I'll get dressed in the shower.

MONROE:

You don't sound calm.

(JOSH exits to shower/bathroom.)

CAMERON:

(Steely:)

So?

MONROE:

Cam, just listen to me for a sec.

CAMERON:

What do you want?

(BILLY enters. He is not dressed in his uniform, but his clothes should be casual. His eyes look puffy and red from crying.)

DEAN:

Hey Billy.

MONROE:

Why do you keep flying off the handle, man?

BILLY:

Oh. Hey.

CAMERON:

I just—

DEAN:

You don't look right.

MONROE:

You've got to stay cool. Keep it together.

BILLY:

I know.

CAMERON:

I'm trying. But—

BILLY:

(Indicates audience:)
Uh, what are they doing here?

DEAN:
They're filming us.

BILLY:
Oh. Right.

DEAN:
Where's your stuff?

BILLY:
At home.

DEAN:
Why?

BILLY:
I – just –

MONROE:
This is hard for all of us.

CAMERON:
You don't think I know
that?

MONROE:
But we have to watch
ourselves today.

CAMERON:
Fine.

MONROE:
You okay now?
(*Humorous:*) Need a hug?
Want me to make out with
you for awhile or
something?

CAMERON:
What the fuck?

MONROE:
Gotcha.

(CAMERON laughs.)

CAMERON:

Man, I feel like I haven't
laughed in years.

MONROE:

I know the feeling.

BILLY:

I'm not going to play.

CAMERON:

(Hearing BILLY:)

What?

BILLY:

That's why I left my stuff at home. I just came to tell Coach Gibbs.

CAMERON:

You're not going to play?

BILLY:

No.

CAMERON:

Why not?

BILLY:

(In a thick voice, near tears:)

I kinda wanted to tell you guys in private, but I just – can't stop thinking about it.
I keep seeing the van and – *(BILLY starts to cry.)* then –

MONROE:

(Shaken:)

Hey. It's okay. You don't have to do this here.

CAMERON:

(Uneasy:)

But you said you didn't see the crash.

BILLY:

(Crying:)

I didn't. One moment it was there – the next – it was just – gone.

MONROE:

(Almost comforting himself:)

It's okay, Billy.

BILLY:

So I just – don't want to play.

MONROE:

Calm down.

BILLY:

Dammit! I didn't want to cry in front of my friends.

(JOSH enters. He is dressed in his uniform.)

JOSH:

What's going on?

MONROE:

It's nothing.

JOSH:

Billy? Are you crying?

MONROE:

He's just upset.

CAMERON:

He's not going to play.

JOSH:

Why not?

MONROE:

Maybe we shouldn't talk about this right now.

BILLY:

I – I just can't.

JOSH:

What about you, Monroe? You going to play?

MONROE:

I – I'm not sure.

JOSH:

You Dean? Cam?

DEAN:

I thought –

CAMERON:

I don't know.

JOSH:

One “no,” and three “maybes.” Can’t really play a basketball game with that. And we sure as hell wouldn’t win.

DEAN:

So you’re gonna play?

JOSH:

That’s why I’m here. *(Pause.)* Why are you guys here?

CAMERON:

That’s a good question.

MONROE:

Listen Josh – maybe we shouldn’t – I mean, Billy says he doesn’t want to – I think we should all stick together on this.

DEAN:

So that’s it? If one of us doesn’t play – we all don’t?

MONROE:

I guess – Yeah.

DEAN:

And everyone’s with Mom on this?

(Pause.)

JOSH:

No. Not really. *(A beat.)* Billy, why don’t you want to play?

MONROE:

(Glancing at audience:)

I just don’t think we should talk about this with them here.

JOSH:

You’re being ridiculous about them. We need to discuss this.

CAMERON:

Definitely.

JOSH:

And why shouldn’t they see? Isn’t that why they’re here? *(Pause.)* So, Billy, what’s your reason?

BILLY:

I just – don’t want to play.

JOSH:

But why?

BILLY:

I just don't! Why do you want to play so bad, anyway? Of all of us I thought you'd leap at the chance to get out of it. For Christ sakes you lost your –

JOSH:

(Interrupting:)

You think I don't know? I lost my brother.

BILLY:

Don't you feel anything at all?

JOSH:

Why should I feel more than you? I lost John. We all lost friends – but we owe it to them to play. To remember them in the right way. We owe it to ourselves. It's what they'd want. I know it.

MONROE:

Come on Josh – we're not going to force Billy to play.

JOSH:

I hope not. But we are going to play. All of us.

BILLY:

No! Goddammit! Leave me the fuck alone!

JOSH:

Quit being so selfish.

MONROE:

Guys! Calm down!

BILLY:

I'm being selfish? Fuck you!

CAMERON:

(To Monroe:)

Will you just shut the fuck up for a few minutes?

MONROE:

Hey!

JOSH:

I need you to play, so I can. And we should really try and win this.

BILLY:

Winning? How can you even think about winning?

MONROE:

Everybody just be quiet! We don't have to decide right now. Especially like this. I think Josh is right – we should talk about it first.

DEAN:

We should decide fairly soon –

CAMERON:

We said we don't know right now Goddammit!

DEAN:

Cam! What's your problem?

CAMERON:

You! Can't you tell?

MONROE:

Cam – guys – we need to stop. I feel like a frickin' broken record. All right. Dean, take Billy for a walk. Cameron – you take a walk too – in the opposite direction.

CAMERON:

You can't tell me what to do, Mom.

MONROE:

I can until you grow up.

CAMERON:

Fuck this.

(CAMERON kicks a locker as he exits.)

DEAN:

Come on Billy. Let's get some water or something.

(As they exit, BILLY looks back at JOSH.)

BILLY:

I'm *not* gonna play.

JOSH:

The hell you aren't.

(BILLY and DEAN exit. JOSH goes to JOHN's locker and starts to open it.)

MONROE:

What are you doing?

JOSH:

Getting my shoes.

MONROE:

I mean – (A beat.) But that's John's locker.

JOSH:

I know. We share. (A beat.) We have the same size feet. So we bought one really good pair. So at least one of us wouldn't have sore feet. You know how crappy cheap shoes can be.

MONROE:

Yeah.

JOSH:

So we decided to share. I mean – he would play most of the time anyway, so I just wore my old ones. It was never a problem.

MONROE:

How'd you get them? I thought all the gear was in the other van.

JOSH:

It was. Some cop returned all the gear to the school last week. I was there when he came, so I went ahead and put everything away. I know that's technically your job, so I hope you don't mind.

MONROE:

You don't have to wear his shoes.

JOSH:

Yes. I do.

MONROE:

No. Even if they are better shoes, it's weird. Like a ghost's on your feet. What size are you?

JOSH:

Elevens.

MONROE:

That's my size. Mine are pretty good. You can wear mine instead of John's.

JOSH:

Then what will you wear?

MONROE:

I'll find something.

(Pause. JOSH starts to pull on the shoes.)

JOSH:

They're both of ours anyway.

MONROE:

What?

JOSH:

The shoes. They're not just John's. They're both of ours. Our game shoes. That's what he told me when I made the team this year. They're lucky too. He wore them for that game against East last year.

MONROE:

The championship?

JOSH:

Yeah. He scored 32 points. So he told me when I was ready to start, I'd wear them instead.

(JOSH stands up and winces.)

MONROE:

What's wrong?

JOSH:

There's a thing poking my foot. Huh. They've never done that before.

MONROE:

Josh, don't wear them.

JOSH:

I need to. They're lucky. This is the playoffs. And I'm starting.

(Pause.)

MONROE:

Why do you want to play so much?

JOSH:

It's just something I have to do.

MONROE:

If we didn't, Coach Gibbs would understand.

JOSH:

He asked us to be here early so we could get ready.

MONROE:

Whatever. Have you talked to him? He's practically catatonic.

JOSH:

He expects us to play.

MONROE:

He'd still respect our decision.

JOSH:

We need to warm up. To be ready. Most of us have never started before.

MONROE:

Josh – listen to me.

JOSH:

And we're it for the game. The freshmen can't sub for us. They're not even gonna dress. We have the skill. That's why we were on the team before. It's why we're starters now.

MONROE:

Josh – you're not making any sense.

JOSH:

John used to tell me he couldn't wait until I got to be a starter, because we already worked together so well.

MONROE:

Josh – I don't think Billy's going to play.

JOSH:

He'll play. It's a part of him. (*Pause.*) I'm gonna go work on these shoes. See if I can get the sharp thing out.

(JOSH exits. MONROE rubs his eyes and looks at the audience.)

MONROE:

(To audience:)

Were you taping all of that?

PRODUCER:

I think so.

CAMERAMAN:

Yeah. We were.

MONROE:

The whole – fight? *(Sarcastic:)* Wonderful.

PRODUCER:

Could we get your name please?

MONROE:

What? Oh. Monroe Harrison. I'm also the team manager.

(The spotlight comes on MONROE.)

PRODUCER:

Would you mind talking with us?

MONROE:

Uh – sure.

PRODUCER:

They called you Mom.

MONROE:

Yeah. Mommy Monroe. I don't mind it.

PRODUCER:

Why do they call you that?

MONROE:

I just usually take care of stuff. I'm the most organized.

PRODUCER:

Are you as upset as the others?

MONROE:

Of course I'm upset. Five of my friends are dead and the rest of us can't stop fighting. But I'm still trying to keep them together. It's what I do. We have to stay together, especially now.

PRODUCER:

What's it like with the others gone? Do you think you can play without them?

MONROE:

I'm not sure, it's like learning to walk again.

PRODUCER:

Tell us more about your team. Does everyone take it so seriously?

MONROE:

Being on a basketball team isn't just like another club or something. It's every day. You spend more time with these guys than your own family. It's why we play so well. We're all a part of each other out there. It's not Dean stealing the ball, passing it to Josh, who tosses it to Cam for the lay-up. It's all one thing – with different moving parts. *(A beat.)* What you saw a few minutes ago – the shouting and the fighting – it's not 'cause we don't like each other. It's totally the opposite. We're fighting because we all think we know the best way to stop hurting.

(CAMERON enters. MONROE doesn't see him.)

PRODUCER:

Do you think you'll end up playing?

MONROE:

Right now I honestly don't know. But whatever we do— it'll be as a team. It's the only way we know how to do things.

CAMERON:

If we don't kill each other first.

MONROE:

(To CAMERON:)

Feeling better?

CAMERON:

Not really.

MONROE:

You don't need to keep snapping at me. Or Dean. You know he means well.

CAMERON:

I know – it's just – I knew he'd always make varsity. He's too good not to. But he's so small. And look at me – I'm huge. And it took me three years to get off JV, and then I mostly sat on the bench.

MONROE:

Well you're starting now.

(Pause.)

CAMERON:

Yeah.

MONROE:

I'm sorry – I didn't mean –

CAMERON:

No. It's okay. I am. I'm finally starting. I just – (*A beat.*) I didn't want it to be this way.

MONROE:

None of us did.

CAMERON:

I wanted to earn it. I know those guys were always pulling for me to make it. And— and I wanted them to be there when I finally did. So they would know I really was good enough.

MONROE:

Cam – I'm sure they knew.

CAMERON:

But now I'll never be sure. (*A beat.*) Fuck! (*CAMERON punches a locker.*) It just makes me so fucking mad!

MONROE:

Jesus! Cam!

CAMERON:

I wanted them to know. Goddamn them!

MONROE:

Let me see your hand.

CAMERON:

It's okay.

MONROE:

Jesus Cam. Why the hell did you punch the locker?

CAMERON:

It's okay – really.

MONROE:

I'm going to get some ice. Don't move it. Stay here.

CAMERON:

Yes, Mom.

(MONROE exits. CAMERON looks at audience.)

CAMERON (CONT.):

(To audience:)

Shit. Now I'm alone with you.

PRODUCER:

You don't have to talk to us if you don't want to. (Pause.) Does your hand hurt?

CAMERON:

It's okay.

PRODUCER:

Just so you know, we're not doing this film to make you look bad. This sort of thing happens to a lot of people your age, and we wanted to show how brave you can be. (Pause.) Were you much closer to the other guys?

CAMERON:

The guys who died? Maybe. I knew most of them for longer. But we were all close. Especially Josh and John and I. We've been friends for a really long time. I met John in elementary school. I moved around a lot, but we kept in touch. I spent a lot of time at their house, so I wouldn't have to be at home. But we were all pretty close.

PRODUCER:

You've seemed really angry today. Do you want to talk about how you're feeling?

CAMERON:

What are you? A shrink?

PRODUCER:

No – I just – Are you angry at them? For dying?

CAMERON:

No. Not really at them. Well, maybe – I guess – a little.

PRODUCER:

How come?