

A close-up photograph of a brown leather football with white laces and white stripes, resting on a green grass field. In the background, a red running track with white lane markings curves through a park-like setting with trees and a fence.

SPEED DEMON

FRED BOWEN

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*For my Friday reading group at
Woodlin Elementary—*

*Aaron Boissiere
Adam Levy
Andrew St. Clair
Jacob Wexler*

CHAPTER 1

Tim Beeman stared down the Hilton Prep track. *Fifty yards*, he thought. *Fifty yards and a chance to show everyone what “the new kid” can do.*

At the starting line, Mr. Salerno, the physical education teacher, instructed the runners: “Beeman and Bland, you’re next up. Butler and Cavanaugh, get ready!”

Tim shook out his arms and legs. Even though it was still summer, the morning air held a taste of fall. He ran in place for a few seconds, lifting his legs almost to his chest.

Tim slipped his feet into the starting blocks and placed his fingers along the starting line like an Olympic sprinter. *Nice and smooth*, he reminded himself. *No need*

to rush things. You've got plenty of speed. You can show all these Hilton kids what you can do.

Tim looked down at the composite surface under his feet. *It'll be fun to run on a nice track like this.* His arms and legs tensed as he waited for the call. Two more teachers, Mr. Rivera and Mr. Carpenter, stood fifty yards down the track, holding stopwatches.

“On your mark...get set...go!”

Tim burst out of the blocks, leaving Bland in his dust. At ten yards he was moving at full speed—legs churning, arms pumping, feet barely touching the track. Tim felt the wind in his face as he ran toward the bright light of the early morning sun.

As Tim flashed by Mr. Carpenter, he heard the click of the stopwatch. Tim slowed to a stop some twenty yards past the finish line, took a deep breath, rested his hands on his hips, and turned around.

Mr. Carpenter stood next to Mr. Rivera. They were both staring at the watch. Then the two men looked at each other.

“Would you mind running that again?”
Mr. Carpenter asked Tim.

“Sure, no problem.”

“Whenever you feel ready.”

Tim walked slowly back to the starting line. *I must have run a pretty good time if they want me to run it again*, he thought. He stole a glance at the other runners waiting to race. They looked pretty impressed with “the new kid.”

“Let Beeman run it again!” Carpenter shouted to Salerno. “After he catches his breath.” Mr. Salerno waved in agreement.

Tim could hear the line of runners buzzing with talk about his run.

“Man, Bland looked like he was running in cement.”

“Beeman must have beat him by twenty yards...easy.”

“He was really flying!”

“Did they tell you your time?” asked a kid near the end of the line.

Tim shook his head. “They just told me to run it again.”

A short, chunky kid grabbed Tim by the shoulders and shoved him into the front spot in line. “Take my place,” he said. “I’m not running against you. No way. You got some serious speed. You’ll make me look like a complete loser. Even worse than Bland.”

“All right, Fullmer and Beeman,” called Mr. Carpenter. “Next up.”

The second race was just like the first. Tim was at top speed within a few strides and flashed across the finish line in a blur. *That one may be even faster*, he thought as he heard Mr. Carpenter click the stopwatch.

This time after Tim slowed down, he took a moment and looked around the Hilton Prep track and football field. The concrete stands looked like a miniature professional stadium, a lot nicer than the field at Tim’s old school. A big scoreboard proclaiming that it was “A Gift from the Viking Class of 2009” stood blank at the back of the end zone.

Tim turned around. Again the two coaches were huddled over the stopwatch.

“Hey, Beeman!” Mr. Carpenter called out. “Do you always run like this?”

Tim shrugged. “I guess. I’ve always been pretty fast.”

“Pretty fast?” Carpenter repeated. “Kid, you just set the school record for the 50-yard dash for a freshman.”

“Really?” Tim knew he was fast but...a school record?

“Yeah, really. That record has been around for something like ten years.”

Tim smiled to himself. *Maybe a record in the 50-yard dash will make some of these stuck-up Hilton kids notice me. I might even get on one of the teams.*

So far, being a ninth-grade “new kid” was no fun. Tim hardly had anyone to talk with and nobody at Hilton knew who he was. But maybe that was about to change.

After a quick shower, Tim got back into his Hilton Prep uniform—khakis and a dark blue golf shirt with the Hilton Prep insignia on the front pocket.

As he walked out of the locker room, he

glanced up at a big board that listed the Hilton Prep running records by class. A piece of masking tape had already been placed over the square for the freshman 50-yard dash. It read: Timothy Beeman 6.10.

Freshman Boys

50 Yards	Timothy Beeman	6.10
100 Yards	Justin Caldwell	10.52
200 Yards	Walter Chwals	22.29

The other kids coming out of the locker room noticed it too.

A tall boy stopped right next to Tim. “Hey, look,” he said. “A couple of days in school and this guy’s already on the big board.”

“Right,” the boy standing behind him said. “Beeman’s the man...the new champ.”

“What else can you do?” asked the tall boy. “Leap tall buildings in a single bound?”

Tim smiled. Looked like things were changing already. He wished he could tell his mother.