



Episode 66: Yard of Dreams
Air Date: November 17, 2021

Anthony Ammons: My name is Anthony Ammons, co-star of the Emmy-nominated documentary, *Q-Ball*. The following episode of Ear Hustle contains language and content that may not be suitable for all listeners. Discretion is advised.

[abstract industrial sounds come in as a transition – sound collage of metal clanging, an abstracted industrial electronic device powering down and voices chattering]

[ambient noise comes in from the yard at San Quentin – voices chattering as a basketball bounces continuously until it loses momentum]

Nigel Poor: So, what's the feeling on the yard about who's going to win? [voices continue chattering in the background]

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: Oh, all the money’s on T-Dub. And that's why I'm gonna go play my best, my hardest, and make them all believers ‘cause you shouldn't underestimate people. I’m gonna woop ‘em for all the nerds, everybody who’s not athletic who didn’t get to play sports ‘cause nobody picked ‘em — I’m doing this for us.

[chattering continues in the background along with the sound of a basketball being dribbled]

Nigel Poor: Can you introduce yourself?

Trevor “T-Dub” Woods: My name is Trevor Woods, AKA “T-Dub” and, I’m out here finna play this guy, New York, Ear Hustle— what is he, a commentator? A comedian? A host? New York been calling me out, and he is not on my level. And I will show him today.

[Ear Hustle theme song comes in]

Nigel Poor: Hey E!

Earlonne Woods: Hey, Nyge... you sound... a little under the weather?

Nigel Poor: Yeah, unfortunately. OK, it’s not COVID, it’s just a regular old cold. But Earlonne, there’s no way I was gonna miss this one. [laughs]

Earlonne Woods: Nah, no way. We have been waiting a *long* ass time for this one.

Nigel Poor: Truly.

Earlonne Woods: Our partner inside, Rahsaan “New York” Thomas, is going to take on Mr. All American, All Mouth, the guy that introduced me to crime...

Nigel Poor: Um, do you mean your brother Trevor?

Earlonne Woods: That’s who I mean. [Nigel laughs] He’s also a resident of San Quentin and was my cellie for a while when I was still in there.

Nigel Poor: Right. So, we’ve been waiting for this game for a long time. And we have *a/so* been waiting to do this episode for a long time.

Earlonne Woods: That’s right. [crosstalk]

Nigel Poor: [crosstalk] Oh my God.

Earlonne Woods: New York has been wanting to do an episode about sports in San Quentin since 2018!

Nigel Poor: Totally. I mean, he pitched it every season, and every season, for whatever reason, we just couldn't quite get to it.

Earlonne Woods: So today, New York's dream will finally become a reality, even if his dreams don't work out on the basketball court, Nyge.

[music fades out]

Nigel Poor: Wait, wait, wait...! Not so fast! [Earlonne laughs] I think, and I know New York thinks, he has the wind to totally sail by Trevor. And I'm going to be honest here, [Earlonne affirms] my heart is for New York. And so that's where I'm putting my money, but I am just a little worried.

Earlonne Woods: You might as well give me that money now. [Nigel laughs] My brother was all-American! Sports is what he did, Nyge. And he was good at it. And... I've seen New York's game, and he's got the elementary school game. Like...

Nigel Poor: [laughing] What? What does that mean?

Earlonne Woods: He hasn't advanced his shit since the second grade.

Nigel Poor: Oh man, you are harsh. OK, I'm going to go inside, and do a play by play with New York. I will see you for the halftime where we'll catch up on that game between your brother and New York.

Earlonne Woods: Why don't you leave your money out here though. [Nigel and Earlonne laugh] [Ear Hustle theme continues] Sounds good.

Nigel Poor: OK, I'm Nigel Poor.

Earlonne Woods: And I'm Earlonne Woods. This is Ear Hustle from PRX, Radiotopia ... dunk time! Is any of them gonna dunk, Nyge?

Nigel Poor: They're too old to dunk.

Earlonne Woods: They probably won't even get this high off the ground. [Nigel laughs]

Nigel Poor: No.

[theme song fades out]

Nigel Poor: Rahsaan “New York” Thomas.

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: What’s up Nyge?

Nigel Poor: We are finally at long last doing your sports episode.

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: Finally, Nyge. After years on the shelf, [Nigel affirms] 2021 is the year it all comes together.

Nigel Poor: Hallelujah.

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: Yes.

Nigel Poor: I know, you’ve been talking about this forever. And you also know that I’m not much of a sports person, so you’re probably gonna have to guide me through this.

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: Well, the thing is, sports is *huge* in prison, Nigel. [Nigel affirms] It’s an outlet for stress, a way to live dreams deferred, a positive way of proving yourself. And I don’t think you need to understand sports to see that it’s way bigger than a game to us.

Nigel Poor: Yeah, totally. [music comes in] And, New York, I definitely know it’s big for you. Because when I met you, you were the sports editor of the San Quentin News, right? [New York affirms] And so every time I came in here, you were all sports, sports, sports, sports. And you actually had another sport, which I’m gonna call... shit-talking. [laughs]

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: Shit talking is definitely a sport in prison.

Nigel Poor: Fair enough. And you know, I think some listeners might actually be surprised at how many sports are played inside San Quentin.

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: Yeah, I think that when you think of prison, you probably just think of guys playing basketball.

Nigel Poor: Totally.

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: But if you come to the yard on a Saturday morning, you'll see guys playing tennis, guys playing baseball, the basketball be going down. And if you look hard enough, you'll see some guys throwing horseshoes. [New York and Nigel laugh]

Nigel Poor: They got everything in here! [crosstalk] But no croquet.

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: [crosstalk] They got everything. No croquet, but don't give ‘em any ideas. [New York and Nigel laugh]

Nigel Poor: Yeah, and there are actually teams that come in from the outside too, which is really cool. I think there's something like 30 different baseball teams that come in here, right?

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: Yeah.

Nigel Poor: And there's basketball. And they are top-notch players. We're not talking about people who washed out, right?

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: No, Division 1, G League, [Nigel affirms] some retired NBA players

Nigel Poor: It's impressive.

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: It's really impressive

Nigel Poor: And there's another thing that has to do about sports that kind of sticks in my mind...

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: What's that?

Nigel Poor: [laughing] OK, our colleague Rhashiyd told me about... a certain list that somebody keeps.

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: Ah. [in acknowledgement]

Rhashiyd Zinnamon: I want to put it out there, New York has an extensive list of victims. Like, as a matter of fact, when we play this on the show, I want you to the *dun-dun*. [Law and Order opening sound effect comes in] The Special Victims Unit sound ‘cause New York has victims, right. And they are reputable ballplayers.

Nigel Poor: The list. [music comes in]

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: I happen to have it right here. [papers shuffling]

Nigel Poor: Of course you do. [laughs]

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: This piece of paper contains the name of every single guy here that I've overcome [Nigel laughs] one-on-one on that basketball court.

Nigel Poor: [laughing] Oh my God. That is obsessive. How many names are on there?

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: Uh... just, maybe, 71?

Nigel Poor: Maybe 71. [laughing]

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: Exactly.

Nigel Poor: Is this just San Quentin?

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: That is just San Quentin.

Nigel Poor: Please don't tell me you have this for other prisons you've been in.

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: I don't have them anymore, but I did have one at each prison. [Nigel laughs]

Nigel Poor: I did not know you were such a list keeper. [music fades out]

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: And there's been some list developments recently Nigel.

Nigel Poor: Oh yeah?

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: I sat down to talk to one of our friends about it.

[to New York, in San Quentin]

Nephew: Yeah, yeah— How come you got some shiny earphones and I ain't got none?

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: You got beat up ones.

Nephew: Ooh. [New York and Nephew laugh] I like how you treat your guests. Nice hospitality. But go ahead, talk to me.

Nigel Poor: That’s gotta be Nephew.

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: It is indeed our guy Nephew. And I just found out that he had a list too.

[to Nephew]

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: So, um, I’ve been in three different prisons in California.

Nephew: Ooh!

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: And in every prison because I have this awkward, nerdy basketball style...

Nephew: Yes, you shoot like a dolphin.

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: I call it the one hand shot, but...

Nephew: You lean all into it like it’s a step, a dance move.

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: It’s 70 percent accurate though.

Nephew: Ooh!

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: And so, in every prison I made this list, the people I beat one-on-one, ‘cause people don’t be surprised... [crosstalk]

Nephew: [crosstalk] That was you. That was you. I respect that.

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: And now I heard that somebody else runnin’ around doing the same thing.

Nephew: I respect that you.

[to New York]

Nigel Poor: Have you actually seen Nephew's list?

Rahsaan "New York" Thomas: I have. He doesn't have quite as many names on it yet.

Nigel Poor: Alright, so what's the point of his list? I mean, I get yours. Yours is about trying to prove that you're, um... actually a decent basketball player. [laughs]

Rahsaan "New York" Thomas: I am, I am. I got the proof.

Nigel Poor: But what about Nephew's?

Rahsaan "New York" Thomas: Well, with Nephew, he's got an agenda. See, he was trying to get drafted into the intramural league, which is this league of like six teams that play each other on the yard.

Nigel Poor: OK. So all inside dudes.

Rahsaan "New York" Thomas: All inside dudes, and nobody picked him up.

Nigel Poor: Oof. Ouch. [crosstalk].

Rahsaan "New York" Thomas: [crosstalk] Nobody.

Rahsaan "New York" Thomas: I even got picked up Nyge, and I'm like 51 years old. [Nigel laughs] So he went to talk to the commissioner, which is like this incarcerated guy named Ishmael [Nigel affirms] who runs the league, to plead his case.

[back at San Quentin]

Nephew: He said, "I'mma tell all the coaches, you know, 'Hey, look, y'all, what y'all think about this person? Any y'all want to pick him up in y'all team?'"

He come after the meeting, I said, "Who team I'm on? What's going on?!"

I'm hella juiced, I'm excited. You feel me?

He says, “Oh, guess what? I forgot. Next time.” [New York laughs] He said, “Aw man, people already picked they teams up. It’s too late.”

I walked off with my head down. You know, I’m always being told next time. I’m still waiting on next time. [New York laughs] You still waiting on next time; it will never come. ‘Cause next time will never come.

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: I know how that feel. I know how that feel.

Nephew: Right! And I walked off like, “Man, who this dude think—? I’m taller than them. I’m faster, and I’m younger, and I’m light skinned. Who this dude think he talking to?” Everybody got their teams going, I can’t get in.

[music comes in]

[as narrator]

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: So that’s when Nephew starts making his list. He went after each and every one of those guys who had made the team, challenging them to a one-on-one. And every time he beat one of ‘em, he added their names to the list.

Nephew: I’m finna start knocking these dudes down, best two outta three. I can’t join their team, I’mma knock ‘em down, and I’mma to show them what they missing. I’mma show them why you supposed to pick me.

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: How many people on your list right now?

Nephew: Right now on my list, there is... 17 people.

[to Nigel]

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: So, now Nephew has his eyes on this guy named Jay. [Nigel affirms] He has a pretty similar playing style to Nephew, so people call him “The White Neph”.

Nigel Poor: “The White Neph”. [laughs softly]

Nephew: They got some other dude up here -- they callin’ him “The White Neph”. I’m Nephew! But they want to call him The White Neph”.

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: I heard The White Neph knocked you down, bruh!

Nephew: So, that’s what I’m--- I’m finna clear the mistakes right now. The game is win by two. It’s 15-15. Got real close. It came to be 16, so you gotta win by two; everybody knows that. So we get out there. and then we’re gonna play a series, the best two out of three. But he wins that first game. And so I walked off — What did Tupac say? “Get my weight up, pay ‘em back when I’m bigger.” Right? [someone in the background interjects indistinguishably, affirming Nephew] And then, you know, he told me?

He said, “If I win the second game, there is no third game. And you go on my list.”

[New York laughs] This is what he tells me!

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: Jay started the list!

Nephew: Yeah, yeah! He says, “And you gonna be the first person on my list

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: Wow!

[music fades out]

Nigel Poor: New York, you know, I used to get picked last for teams, too.

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: Yup, me too.

Nigel Poor: And it’s weird. I mean, even though it happened a long time ago, you just don’t really forget it.

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: You certainly don’t. That type of rejection? It hurts. It makes you feel like you’re not worthy of being on the team... or even alive. So it can make you just give up on sports, or it can make you really determined to prove you belong out there. And that’s definitely what happened with this one person I met recently.

[at San Quentin, on the yard]

I’m on the field of dreams... [voices chattering in the background on the baseball field at San Quentin]

[to Nigel, narrating]

So, one evening in the summer right after chow, I took the recorder out to the baseball field which is right outside the media lab here. [music comes in]

Nigel Poor: Right, I pass by it all the time when I come in here. I mean, I'm going to say that it's a little scruffy; but it is a true baseball diamond. Like, you can see the shape, and the thing that I love about it is that somebody really takes care of it. You can tell that it's cared for. Even though it doesn't look pristine, somebody really cares about that and makes it nice. [New York affirms]

Rahsaan "New York" Thomas: You can see guys out there every morning working on it. It has the real bases. I mean, it's a real baseball diamond. [Nigel affirms] And yet in normal times, it's popping with pop flies and there's two official baseball teams in there. Well, there were anyway; right now it's just the A's. [Nigel affirms] But we still have Giants uniform. And every so often they sweep the dust off the Giants' uniforms to play some games against the A's in here. And the San Quentin A's, they are really good. They play these teams from the outside, and their last season, they were 38 and 2.

Nigel Poor: Wow.

[music fades out]

[ambient noise comes in from baseball field at San Quentin]

Rahsaan "New York" Thomas: But since that last season, the field has been quiet. All the sports were of course canceled during the pandemic. So, it is really nice to see the players back out on that field. [Nigel affirms] It feels like things might finally be gettin' back to normal, a new season about to happen.

[Coach speaking to players on the field saying, "Start out do one round, nice and easy. And then the second round you're going to do a rapid fire]

There were about 25 people on the yard, and they were getting ready for tryouts.

Nigel Poor: Can you explain how that works?

New York: So, the A's have two inside coaches, Coach Will and Coach Anthony. And they have an outside coach, but he couldn't come in because of the pandemic.

Nigel Poor: OK.

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: And so, they go out there and they practice and they practice. And then right before the first team from the community comes in, they have a tryout to see who gets to play outside. And so, the people out on the field, they're hoping to be on the team when the first team of free people come in.

Nigel Poor: That’s always exciting, right?

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: Definitely. And there was one player in particular—a new person—that I wanted to talk to.

Samantha Gordan: My name is Samantha Gordon, and I’ve been incarcerated for 25 years.

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: One of the first thing you notice about Sam are the tattoos covering her face.

Nigel Poor: Mhm.

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: She has this huge colorful butterfly across her forehead. [music comes in]

[back on San Quentin baseball field, to Samantha]

I got to ask you about these tattoos. You have tattoos across your forehead, alongside...

Samantha Gordan: I used to be wiccan. So part of my religion had to do with earth base. So, I used to consider myself like the butterfly whisper ‘cause I'd pick them up off the fence while they were sitting there hovering. And it seemed like a gift to me. So I had it blasted across my forehead ‘cause it meant something to me. [music fades out]

[as narrator]

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: Sam is transgender. And at first, she wasn’t sure how that was going to go over with the team.

Samantha Gordan: there was a couple of individuals that voiced their opinion about, well, they're not gonna play because a tranny’s on the field. Yet when they see my skill level, they toned down a little bit. ‘Cause I let them know, look, I might be trans, but when I'm on the field, I'm just one of the fellas that want to play a game of ball. If I can't

play, I'll go on to something else, but I'll still be here to cheer you guys on and support you.

[to Samantha]

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: You talked about what you're going to do if you don't make the team. But what's the first thing you're going to do if you do make the team?

Samantha Gordan: Oh, wow... that'd be a surreal moment for me. First thing I'm going to do is I'm going to relax myself and call my father and let him know I made the team that he didn't think I'd be able to make.

[to New York]

Nigel Poor: So, it's not just people out on that field that Sam's trying to prove something to.

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: No, this goes back a *long* way. [music comes in]

Samantha Gordan: I was shy, bashful, gay. Since I've been six years old, I wore women's clothes. I felt like I was a girl the whole entire time. Me being different as in gay, and I was more girly than *boy*, my mom accepted me as a girl. And she wanted girls, and I was the only girl that ever survived in her eyes... 'cause my two sisters before me passed away. So, I was what was left. Me and my father, we weren't seeing eye to eye. I did a lot of things that my dad would call a sissy's sport — the gymnastics, the floor exercises and walking on your hands and flips and stuff like that. To him that was girly exercise. Playing sports and all that stuff that, that wasn't me. [music fades out]

[as narrator]

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: In the early 2000s, Sam got sent to High Desert State Prison, near the Nevada border. That's a Level 4 prison; and Sam felt like she needed protection in there. She already had some connections from the outside— family members who had been connected white gangs inside—so when she got to prison, those gangs took her in.

Samantha Gordan: The first joint I ever went to, there it was rocking and rolling, so you had to do what you had to do. And if that meant to be a soldier, that's what you was. They made me into a soldier. They taught me. They taught me how to fight, taught me

how to make weapons, how to keister a weapon, everything. And so that's what I did. I was a keeper of knives. I was keeper of kites. I was keeper of a lot of stuff.

[music comes in]

[to New York]

Nigel Poor: That's pretty intense, New York. [New York affirms] So the gang also was not okay with Sam looking the way she did.

Rahsaan "New York" Thomas: No [softly]

Nigel Poor: She had to cut her hair and stop dressing like a woman.

Rahsaan "New York" Thomas: Yeah, and eventually, she decided she didn't want to do what it would take to be in that gang anymore.

Samantha Gordan: I listened to the sounds of my mom's voice in the back of my head telling me, *Look, what are you doing? You're nothing like that. Be true to yourself.* And so I did. I came back to being who I am. And pushed that other person away. And so off to a SNY yard I went.

[to New York]

Nigel Poor: We've talked about this a few times, New York. An SNY is a Sensitive Needs Yard. And basically, it's a section of a prison where people who have left gangs or are maybe in for what we could call sensitive crimes are housed for their own protection.

Rahsaan "New York" Thomas: And another part of being on an SNY yard — it allowed her to live as herself and pick up a new hobby. [music fades out]

Samantha Gordan: By 2001, I was in Mule Creek. And I started playing ball. Became myself; and I was a transwoman. They were the only things that kept me sane, so I played softball.

Rahsaan "New York" Thomas: Sam kept playing sports inside, like softball, volleyball. With sports in groups, and being out that gang, her points started going down. So she could go to lower-level prisons. And just last Spring, Sam got transferred to San Quentin.

Samantha Gordan: And when I got here, the girls are like, “Oh yeah, there's no playing football, there's no playing softball, not even handball. Because they will not let you. And they tell you, ‘No, we don't want your kind over here.’ Or they tell you, ‘You can't sit over here.’”

I do what I want to do. [music comes in] And if no one else wants to do it, then I guess I'll be the first. And like I said, there was like three people who said they didn't want to stay because I was coming to the field. Well, two of them stayed, one of them left. The rest of them right now help me. They push me to be better than I was the day before. And with that support, I can make it.

Nigel Poor: And there's one player in particular who's been really supportive of Sam's efforts. [music fades out]

Christopher Antonio Maximus “Max” Hickson: Oh, my long name is Christopher Antonio Maximus Hickson. I've been down 21 years going on 22.

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: Max is one of the top players on the A's, [Nigel affirms] and he uses his influence to advocate for the LGBTQ community — his community. He's also Sam's main mentor on the team. And it turns out, a little more than that, too.

Max: She had that look like she wanted to get on the field, and that's sort of where our connection arose. She has a love for the baseball fields, she was very interested. That was like something, in all my time, I've never seen before.

[to Max]

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: When did you first know this is going to be more than just me teaching Sam, how to play some baseball.

Max: Well, uh... it just sort of turned into something, you know, through our conversations. I would come to the yard, and she would be out there. And she'd wanna throw and... you know, without going too past the PG part, it was just her mind. I would say it like that. Her mind is what did it.

[music comes in]

Nigel Poor: So, this is a two-baseball player relationship...

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: Exactly, Nyge.

Nigel Poor: And I can see that becoming a problem. I mean there are only so many spots on that team!

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: We asked Max if their relationship would still be good if one of them made the team and the other one did not.

Max: From my view it would be kosher. I might want to sleep with one eye open.

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: Hold on, hold... I got a question for you, bro!

Max: Whoa. Wow.

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: I heard Sam is getting better and better and better, right? What if Sam takes your spot? Oof!

Max: You know, if she takes my spot, I'll support her.

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: Will she have to sleep with one eye open?

Max: She might, she might. [New York laughs]

[as narrator]

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: Sam said one thing *is* for sure if she gets a spot on the A's.

[to Samantha]

So you make the team. Your first call's to your dad.

Samantha Gordan: It was, “Pop, I made the team.” Yeah, I'm gonna throw it in his face. You know what I mean? [others heard laughing in the background, and someone says, “You gonna give them the *na-na-nana-na*” teasingly]

I'm going to say, “Now who's the sissy now?” [everyone laughs]

[music fades out]

[ambient noise before basketball game at San Quentin comes in – voices chattering in anticipation]

Nigel Poor: So, it's probably gonna start soon, right Tony? It's gotta start soon... I hope it's a 15-minute game. I don't wanna be here all day.

[ambient noise fades out]

[to Earlonne]

Nigel Poor: Oh my God, E, I thought this basketball game... *the* most hyped game of one-on-one in the history of San Quentin sports, was *never* going to happen. [Earlonne laughs]

Earlonne Woods: Was there a crowd there?

Nigel Poor: Oh yeah, there really was. Guys on all sides of the court, endless speculating and shit-talking. People from the media lab were bringing out video equipment to film the event. It was a spectacle!

Earlonne Woods: Yeah, I can picture that, Nyge. [Nigel affirms] I remember cats used to gather 'round to catch a game that's been hyped up all week. So, what did this crowd think? Were they calling out for my brother, T-Dub? Or was their noodles on our colleague, New York, AKA Son? [Nigel laughs]

[ambient noise right before basketball game at San Quentin comes in – voices chattering in the background while several players warm up by dribbling basketballs]

[to crowd member]

Nigel Poor: Who's gonna win?

Speaker 1: Um... I got my money on Son.

Nigel Poor: All right. Who do you have your money on?

Speaker 2: Dub.

Nigel Poor: Oh boy, OK. [laughs]

Speaker 3: I'mma ride with the underdog. I'mma ride with New York.

Speaker 4: New York. [chuckles]

Nigel Poor: All right.

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: This is Allan McIntosh, one of the best basketball players on the yard. He plays for the San Quentin Warriors. His opinion is highly valued, but he might be wrong today.

OK, who do you—

Allan McIntosh: How can you figure I might be wrong! You don't even know the opinion.

Nigel Poor: What is your opinion?

Allan McIntosh: Um... Trevor's gonna beat him bad. [laughs and other people in the background join in]

Nigel Poor: [quietly in the background] So the winner doesn't get anything but bragging rights.

Speaker 5: Yeah, bragging rights, but that's big around here. You know what I mean? Bragging rights is all we got, Nyge.

[to Earlonne]

Nigel Poor: The general consensus was: If this was a battle of pure skill, your brother had it. But if New York could wear Trevor out, he had a chance.

Earlonne Woods: Hmm. He might be conditioned because every time he calls me, he'd be like, “Yeah, I just got off the track working out, running...” [Nigel laughs]

Nigel Poor: Oh yeah, that sounds like your brother. OK, but finally, after all of the shit talking...

[back at the game in San Quentin]

Rhashiyd Zinnamon: [commentating live during the game] Shootin' to see who takes the ball out. OK, New York has the ball, he's posting— Oh, he's trying to use his body! It's not working, Dub is too strong. He can't back him down, and he's swiping at the ball...

[as narrator]

Nigel Poor: And things quickly got intense. Our colleague Rhashiyd was helping announce the game for us.

[back at San Quentin]

Rhashiyd Zinnamon: Oh, OK. It's kind of physical right now. [in the background Nigel says, "Wait a minute, that looks very aggressive"]

It is. That was very aggressive, Nigel. Thank you. [ambient noise fades out]

[to Earlonne]

Nigel Poor: There was so much aggression on that court. I had no idea!

Earlonne Woods: Well, New York is a fighter! [Nigel laughs]

Nigel Poor: That's what I'm saying! So do you want to change your bet?

Earlonne Woods: Nope. I'mma stick with my brother. I seen him play while I was inside. He got a good game. [Nigel affirms] He'll back you into the paint. [Nigel laughs]

Nigel Poor: Honestly, in the first few minutes, it was so hard to tell what to think. Like I said, there was a lot of bumping and shoving. But you know what there wasn't much of?

[ambient noise from the basketball game at San Quentin continues]

Rhashiyd Zinnamon: [commentating live] Dub with the three-pointer. No good. Lay up, no good. The jump shot, oh, Nope. In and out. He takin' him to the rack. Oh, over the backboard. [laughing]

[ambient noise fades out]

Nigel Poor: Uh... there was *not* a lot of scoring.

Earlonne Woods: [chuckling] Ah, OK [music comes in] [Nigel laughs]

Nigel Poor: In fact, our friend Greg Eskridge, who's been on a few Ear Hustle episodes in the past...

Earlonne Woods: Who's also a talented shit-talker...

Nigel Poor: Indeed. And he was on the sidelines. He felt bad for me and our producer Amy.

[ambient noise from the basketball game at San Quentin comes in]

Greg Eskridge: Nigel and Amy, I want to apologize for this right here. I'm sorry that you guys have to witness this. I'm truly sorry.

Nigel Poor: [quietly in the background] Yeah, I didn't think it would be this bad.

Greg Eskridge: Exactly. And just know that this is not a representation of African American sports. Just let you know that.

[as narrator]

Nigel Poor: We will find out what happens with the grudge match, and with Sam on the baseball field after a quick break. [music fades out]

New York, that game kind of got off to a rocky start. And I have to admit, I didn't know basketball was a contact sport. [laughs]

Rahsaan "New York" Thomas: That was all... well, first of all, if there's no harm, there's no foul. [music comes in] And keepin' T-Dub in range, that was all part of my plan, Nyge. Wear 'em down and work it out.

Nigel Poor: OK, I was definitely rooting for you, and it was clear you have heart, but... it seemed like Trevor might have more skills, I'm not sure.

Rahsaan "New York" Thomas: Yeah, that's fair. Like, I said, you know I'm not one of those natural born athletes. [Nigel affirms] I gotta work for all the wins I get.

Nigel Poor: And you know what? That's really why I'm on your team.

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: Yes!

Nigel Poor: I love the underdog

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: Thank you, Nyge. I appreciate it. But you know there are some guys at San Quentin who really know how to bring it on the court. Amazing athletes. Totally unlike me. And there’s this one guy in particular, who’s a legend.

[music fades out]

[at San Quentin]

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: All right, man, I’m gonna get to the big questions, man. How does it feel to be a two-time Super Bowl champion, and be on the cell down the tier from me?

Brandon Browner: Ah, man. It be cool throughout the day, bro. Like, it don’t hit me ‘til it’s time to lay down, and it’s quiet in that... And now, I got *really* time to myself. And when the reflection gets hard, it’s like, *fuck man, what am I doing in here? I hate this place.*

[to Nigel]

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: Nyge, this guy Brandon Browner, he was a *big* deal in the NFL.

Nigel: OK, before this interview, I had not heard of him. [music comes in] But NFL... I do know that that’s football.

Rahsaan: It is indeed football. He played on this legendary defensive squad on the Seattle Seahawks called the Legion of Boom.

Nigel Poor: Hm.

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: And these guys are known for being really aggressive on defense. No one can get past them. And Brandon Browner? He got two Super Bowl rings.

Nigel Poor: Oof!

Rhasaan: This guy is definitely the most famous incarcerated athlete I've ever met at San Quentin.

[music fades out]

[back at San Quentin, to Brandon]

Nigel Poor: Did people know who you are when you came in here? Did they know that you were...? [crosstalk]

Brandon Browner: [crosstalk] Uh... some people did.

Nigel Poor: How does that affect being incarcerated?

Brandon Browner: It's just a part of it. I don't look at it... It doesn't change who I am or anything of that nature.

Rhasaan "New York" Thomas: When I first met you, it seemed like you were angry. And then, now, you seem happy.

Brandon Browner: For sure.

Rhasaan "New York" Thomas: And so, I definitely see changes. And they didn't have groups, but I see you reading a lot of books. Like, *The Body Keeps Score*. And you stay readin' business books, like you have some kind of aspirations or something.

Brandon Browner: For sure. You know, I look at this as just part of my story.

[to New York]

Nigel Poor: What do you mean he was angry? How did you note that this was an angry person?

Rhasaan "New York" Thomas: We close, man, so we always talk. And all kinds of things would set him off. So he would tell me about what he's angry about that day. And sometimes I'm looking at him, like, *that's not anything to be angry about*.

Brandon Browner: I'm naturally just, you know, a angry person, somewhat. It's upsetting that I made the mistake I did and came here. So I was upset with myself and, you know, bitter, I'd probably say more so than anything.

Nigel Poor: Mm. I'm guessing that being aggressive is an asset when you play football.

Brandon Browner: Exactly.

Nigel Poor: And I, for the first time I heard you, what was the group Legion of Boom?

[New York affirms, "Legion of Boom" quietly in the background]

Brandon Browner: Uh-huh.

Nigel Poor: And that was a group of really aggressive players?

Brandon Browner: Yeah.

Nigel Poor: What made you aggressive on the field? Can you explain to me what that is?

Brandon Browner: Well, we play a violent game, and it's just what it was. And one of my greatest attributes was being aggressive, so it went hand-in-hand with my sport.

Nigel Poor: And did someone have to train you to be aggressive or did you just grow up?

Brandon Browner: I kind of grew up that way. I got 16 brothers and sisters... there's 17 of us, so I grew up fighting. [laughs softly] And I grew up in an apartment, low-income housing where it's a lot of kids. And I grew up competitive. It's just part of who I am. [music comes in]

[to Nigel]

Rahsaan "New York" Thomas: Yeah, that scrappiness served Brandon well when he started playing football professionally at the age of 20. He had rough it through a few winters in a Canadian football league, and then joined the Seahawks in 2011.

Nigel Poor: He won a Super Bowl ring with the Seahawks in 2014. The next year he joined *the* New England Patriots... and he won a Super Bowl there, too.

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: He signed a \$17 million dollar contract with the Patriots.

Nigel Poor: \$17 million [whispering]

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: Yeah, things were good for Brandon. [music fades out]

Brandon Browner: It probably was the funnest time of my life when I played football.

Nigel Poor: What is it like to all of a sudden be making so much money?

Brandon Browner: You go from, for me, I grew up somewhat poor, to all of a sudden having all this money, but not really having financial literacy. You make it in such a short span of time, and you think you got— you can spend as you please, but not knowing your career is really short.

Nigel Poor: What you excited to buy when all of a sudden you were making...?

Brandon Browner: Nice cars and things like that. I had a Bentley Flying Spur. I drove a Hummer, a Mercedes S550. I had an old school Chevelle, an old school Chevy Impala. I was into cars too. That was my thing. Cars.

Nigel Poor: What does it feel like to be able to do that?

Brandon Browner: Best feeling in the world.

[music comes in]

[to New York]

Nigel Poor: That is pretty much exactly how I pictured what it would be like to be a professional football player.

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: I remember he told us about this one party he went to after he won the Super Bowl [Nigel affirms] with your team, the Patriots.

Brandon Browner: Shit, I was on the stage with Rick Ross, rappin’ word for word with Rick Ross, goin’ in. Fo’ sho’. Hella shots. My family got to party with us. It was an exclusive Patriots’ family and friends. We all intermingling and shit. So it was a good

time, man. Like my closest loved ones got to meet the owners, Tom Brady. You know, one of them special moments in my life, fo' sho.

[music fades out]

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: Brandon retired from football in 2017. He was still in his 30s.

Nigel Poor: Oof, that seems young.

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: Well, Nyge, he played professional football for 12 years. [Nigel affirms] And that’s a long time and a lot of abuse for a body to take.

Nigel Poor: Yeah, I guess you’re right. But you know what? I get the sense that just ‘cause your body is done with football, doesn’t mean the rest of you is.

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: Yeah, I would say that. That aggression that he brought to the field, that was hard to let go of.

[at San Quentin, to Brandon]

Nigel Poor: So how does that work off the field? Like, how do you turn that off and deal with it? Or can you even? [crosstalk]

Brandon Browner: [crosstalk] And that's what my issue. That was my issue. I didn't know how to turn it off. And it’s something I'll probably have to work on the rest of my life to be honest with you. [Nigel affirms] Because it was an asset for me playing football, but it wasn't so much so the real world. [Nigel affirms] You know, instead of having patience and the social skills, communication skills to talk things out or even the thought process to walk away.

Nigel Poor: Are your feelings hurt easily?

Brandon Browner: [pauses] Yeah. I was going to say no, but to be honest with you, yeah. [chuckles softly]

Nigel Poor: So, you're pretty sensitive. [soft laughter in the background]

Brandon Browner: Yeah. To be honest with you.

Nigel Poor: I don't know very much about you. But I think I know I are in prison. So, can I ask you a few questions about that? And then if you don't wanna answer just say pass.

Brandon Browner: Yeah, go ahead.

Nigel Poor: So, I think you're in prison for, I guess what would be called domestic violence?

Brandon Browner: Right.

Nigel Poor: How does that happen? [music comes in] How does that aggression get turned into...? [crosstalk]

Brandon Browner: [crosstalk] Just not having the emotional, the communication skills to talk certain situations out. I could take it back; I probably would respond different. [Nigel affirms] Probably just get up and walk out of the situation because at the end of the day, it wasn't worth it.

Nigel Poor: So, do you worry about that happening again with another person?

Brandon Browner: Uh... I won't let it happen, but I do worry about making mistakes. Just being honest with you.

Nigel Poor: You're a big guy, and I would think you could be pretty... it would be pretty scary if you were a woman and someone your size is angry at them. [Brandon affirms] So, I mean, just how do you think about that, like, getting so... [crosstalk]

Brandon Browner: [crosstalk] It's horrible to think about it, you know, to scare women in that manner for sure. Because I have a daughter myself. [Nigel affirms] I wouldn't want my daughter to, you know, a guy to be that way for my daughter to experience what I made a woman that experienced.

Nigel Poor: I know. Have you talked to your daughter about it?

Brandon Browner: No, my daughter is young. She's only five.

Nigel Poor: Oh.

Brandon Browner: So, if the time comes as she gets older, you know, and we need to have that talk. I most definitely will.

[music fades out]

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: When Brandon committed his crime and got arrested, it was really big news.

Nigel Poor: I know. His rise and fall was just dramatic.

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: Yeah, it’s crazy too. But Brandon’s getting out in a few years. And I think that question of how does he live the rest of his life in a different way, that’s something he’s thinking about a lot. [Nigel affirms]

Brandon Browner: Ultimately, I want to be a better person. A good man. I want to be a husband. Those things I think will feel more gratifying, will feel better than anything I ever accomplished. That feeling in my heart that I’m a decent human being. That’s what I strive for.

Nigel Poor: How will you know when you’re a decent human being?

Brandon Browner: I think the anxiety... the shame goes away. There’s always gon’ be situations that can bring anger up out of you. When triggers don’t bother me, I look at them just as a part of life, that’s just what that is, this is life. And I handle it differently.

Nigel Poor: And how close are you to being that man you want to be, honestly?

Brandon Browner: I wouldn’t put something on it ‘cause I haven’t had... I’m not out there on the outside and had those experiences.

Nigel Poor: OK. So you think you have to get out there and you’re tested?

Brandon Browner: I don’t think I have to be out there, but the test will be different out there. We, for one, we’re in here with all men. My significant other I’ve never lived with her. We were friends when I was out there. Now, she’s my partner. We haven’t had any obstacles or any situations like that, so I think livin’ with her, that’s when the test will come, for sure.

Nigel Poor: Yeah. Yeah.

[ambient noise comes in from baseball diamond at San Quentin – birds chirping, as players catch baseballs in mits, voices chattering]

Nigel Poor: Back to the yard of dreams...

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: We are indeed.

Nigel Poor: So I gotta know, did Sam make the team?

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: Well, you know Nyge, its prison, and things never work out how you think they’re going to.

Nigel Poor: Right.

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: Not long after I talked to her on the field back in the summer, a few cases of COVID popped up. And everything shut down.

Nigel Poor: Yup. I remember that. And we couldn’t come in.

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: Nope. And neither could the outside baseball teams that were lined up to play the San Quentin A’s. So their season was cancelled... again.

Nigel Poor: Ugh, so many disappointments

[ambient noise from baseball game at San Quentin – announcer starts game announcing player at bat]

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: But...they did salvage one game.

[sound of player swinging at bat, announces says, “Ooh! Strike 1”]

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: It was an intramural game – two teams of San Quentin incarcerated people, Giants vs A’s.

[to players]

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: What's it feel when you put on this As uniform?

Samantha Gordan: It feels like something special to me because I've never put on a uniform before except a prison outfit. You know, I'm anxious at the same time. I'm also a little nervous. It's like putting on a costume for Halloween for the very first time as a

child. But as a woman, trans woman on top, just putting on a uniform makes me feel like one of them. And, that's a brand new thing for me.

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: Going out on the field now?

Samantha Gordan: Yes, I am going to go out to the field right now. I'm going to do some practice. Some throw-in or something. Hopefully they have me in a bull pen today, so I can pitch. And hopefully I do myself proud and everybody else. All right, thank you.

[announcer says something indistinguishable]

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: In the bottom of the first inning, the A's load the bases.

[someone says, “You know what to do, Sam. Stay patient. Take it slow” while announcer continues speaking. Then a few people clap.]

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: Sam comes up to bat... And on the very first pitch...!

[Sam, at bat, connects with baseball and announcer says, “That was a good hit!” followed by some clapping and shouting from a small crowd]

Nigel Poor: No way!

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: Sam hits a single and drove in two runs.

Nigel Poor: You mean RBIs? [New York and Nigel laugh]

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: Yes!

Nigel Poor: That's so cool.

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: Then, while the pitcher was distracted with the next batter...

[announcers says “Samantha takes off to second... Safe.” Crowd claps and some else says, “Good job”]

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: Samantha steals the second.

Nigel Poor: Oh, she's a professional.

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: And we caught up with her in the dugout right afterwards.

Samantha Gordan: Aw, it was great. I already know how he pitches because I've hit off him plenty of times before in practice. [loud, bass-heavy music plays in the background near field] He pitches a curve, the first one. So, since I seen the curve, I hit it, and good results came out of it. So I'm proud of that.

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: I was curious, like, whenever the A's do get to play a full season, [Nigel affirms] what Sam's chances look like of actually making the A's? [Nigel affirms] So, I went and found the A's coach, an incarcerated guy named Will.

[to Will]

So Coach Will, how does Sam do today?

Coach Will: Sam got a single with a basis loaded, which is, you know, what she's supposed to do to run. Two run RBI. So she has the ability to make this squad. I'm not saying it's sealed in stone, but she has the ability to make it.

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: The A's ended up winning that game 10 to 2!

Nigel Poor: Yup, and I got to come in a few days later, so you and I could do a... postgame analysis?

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: Yup, that's that sports talk right there.

Nigel Poor: ... a postgame analysis with Sam.

[to Samantha]

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: So I talked to Coach Will and Anthony after the game, and they said if they were picking the teams right now that you're good enough to make the team.

Samantha Gordan: And that makes me feel good. That makes me feel real good.

[as narrator]

Nigel Poor: Sam told us she was looking forward to telling her dad all about the game.

Samantha Gordan: I am. I'm proud to rub it in his face. You know what I mean? Like, [claps hands together once and someone laughs in the background] You know, like a peanut butter sandwich. Just like, *Uhh, how do you like that?* Because he never thought I could do something really manly. This is the only manly thing that he ever seen me do is be in prison, right? And in his eyes, it's probably the best thing that ever happened to try to be manly about me. But I'm just as feminine now. [music comes in] I took it upon myself to like, be a part of something. And so it started out with just volleyball. And then I played softball and softball became a love for me. And I played for 10 years. But we only played with each other. We never played outside people. When I came here, and I heard that's what they did, I was so excited to be part of something like that. It was like clarity for me. Like, how am I going to get my humanity back if I don't do the things that are exciting... that people do on the streets? If I constantly become somebody I'm not in here, I'm going to be that way when I go out. And I don't want to be that way. I want to be a human being. [music fades out]

[music comes in, a variation of the Ear Hustle theme song]

Nigel Poor: So E, [Earlonne affirms]. The A's won, [Earlonne affirms] Sam had a great game, and the coach was pretty positive about her chances to make the team. So, there's just one result we're waiting for...

Earlonne Woods: Last time we checked in about this, things were getting off to a pretty elementary start. [Nigel laughs] Did either of these jokers ever manage to sink a basket?

[ambient noise comes in from basketball game at San Quentin]

Rhashiyd Zinnamon: [commentating live] Jump shot is up. Oh! Off the backboard! Young Dub, off the backboard. Was it a two?

[voices chattering and interjecting in the background]

I was so surprised it went in. I'm just happy the ball went in.

[to Earlonne]

Nigel Poor: Finally, three minutes in, there's a basket. Your brother scored first. And then he scored again. Then again.

Earlone Woods: Alright, give me half right now, Nigel, and we can end the bet. [Nigel laughs]

Nigel Poor: Not so fast, Earlone. Because the scouting reports about your brother's lack of conditioning... they were right on the money.

[back at the game]

Rhashiyd Zinnamon: He's already winded. I see it, ladies and gentlemen. Dub has lost his legs. Oh! He can't get around New York...

Nigel Poor: New York started turning things around

Rhashiyd Zinnamon: [commentating live] Statue of Liberty. [sound of backboard being hit] Oh! And the three-pointer drops. [crowd claps and cheers] New York sinks his first three pointer.

Nigel Poor: He sunk a few more baskets and took the lead.

[crowd continues cheering and reacting to tension building in game. People shout out "New leader, new leader!"]

Nigel Poor: But Earlone, your brother had so many stalling tactics. Like, I swear to God, he kept pretending that he had to tie his shoelaces, and he was just doing it to catch his breath!

Earlone Woods: This is all tactic, Nyge. [Nigel affirms] New York is a marathoner, so he has a lot of wind.

Nigel Poor: Totally.

Earlone Woods: Sounds like my brody is just trying to catch his breath.

[back at the game]

Rhashiyd Zinnamon: [commentating live] Dub is bent over with the top of the key with the basketball, stopping the game.

Nigel Poor: Well, as much as I don't like to admit it, I think your brother's cheap stalling tactics actually worked. Soon, he was back on top.

Earlonne Woods: Here we go bro'!

Rhashiyd Zinnamon: [commentating live] Point game. This is over... oh wait! New York has life. The turnaround... I don't know if he was throwing the ball to me or Nigel. I think he wanted Nigel to shoot the layup... It didn't work. Dub can finish him now... [dribbling, followed by someone in the crowd shouting, "No he didn't!"] And then crowd reacts loudly as game ends] And won the game! Ladies and gentlemen. New York, talk to me, baby, talk to me, man. Where'd you go wrong?

Rahsaan "New York" Thomas: [catching his breath] The shot. The stamina's working, but the shot wasn't. I wasn't shooting at a high shot percent. I probably shot I shot 30-something percent. I'm a 50 to 60 percent shooter, especially with T-Dubs. Just the shot was off, man. That's all.

Rhashiyd Zinnamon: Well, I want you to know he respect your game now.

Rahsaan "New York" Thomas: He got to. He said I wouldn't score eight, he's gonna blow me out, bum this, bum that. He damn near lost that mothersucker. [music comes in] I was two shots away from winning at all.

T-Dub: Every trash can deserve a steak every now and then. So, all I'm saying is I underestimated your condition. I already knew you was going to foul all day, that's what I said no foul unless it's obvious. [New York and T-Dub continue arguing and ambient noise fades out]

Earlonne Woods: Nyge... time to pay up! [Nigel laughs]

Nigel Poor: OK, OK, you're getting your pay, don't worry. So, Earlonne, when I knew you inside, you were always down in the media lab working. And sometimes, pretty late into the evening. And I know you ran, but I don't remember if you actually played any sports?

Earlonne Woods: Nah, I didn't like too much sports, based on, you know, things can get intense when individuals get to trash talking. Sometime people have these attitudes that they have on a court — *This is a whoop de whoop shot*. And then they say something like that, we fightin'.

Nigel Poor: Yeah, I am gonna say the bravado inside is pretty intense. I get kind of tired of it, even though it is actually funny.

Earlonne Woods: Yeah, and I wasn't really with that.

Nigel Poor: You're more like the solo runner.

Earlonne Woods: Yeah! The solo runner, be in my own lane, get out my way. [Nigel laughs] So I never took sports that serious in there. But I know New York does, and that makes me feel kind of bad that he lost to Trevor.

Nigel Poor: I know. Honestly, Earlonne, I felt kinda bad too. [music comes in] But New York did get some redemption from a kind of unexpected spot. It happened recently when New York and I were once again up by the basketball court with the recorder.

[ambient noise from the yard]

This doesn't look very heavy. [people say, "Oh, OK" in the background]

Speaker 6: Well, how much you think it is?

Nigel Poor: I think it's like a hundred pounds. [people laugh in the background and say, "More like two hundred"]

Speaker 6: Nah, nah, nah. It's more like two.

Nigel Poor: OK, well, can you describe what we're talking about?

Rahsaan "New York" Thomas: It's a picnic bench!

Speaker 6: It's a jail picnic bench.

Rahsaan "New York" Thomas: It got tattoos. [laughs]

[people respond to New York's comment indistinguishably in the background, amused]

Speaker 6: It's cast iron. That's cast iron with the wood. That's why it's heavy. That's cast iron.

[ambient noise fades out]

Earlonne Woods: I know exactly the benches they're talking about. Guys are always hanging out at them, watching the games, giving haircuts, talking shit. You know, prison shit.

Nigel Poor: Yeah. And the past few months I've been going back in, Earlonne, [Earlonne affirms], I've noticed these guys using those picnic benches into a kind of makeshift weightlifting station. So they put down two crates with a blanket over it, and then the guy lies down and he's like benching the table.

[back on the yard]

Speaker 6: [narrating the scene live] So he's going to lay down, and he's going to bench press the bench. And he needs two spotters on the left side and the right side to make sure there's no accidents or any type of injury. Right now, they're grabbing both sides to lift it up. [people lifting count to three in the background as they lift the bench] So he's going to lay down and now he's bench pressing.

Nigel Poor: Oh my God. That thing is coming so close to his chest. Whoa!

Speaker 6: Yeah, he's got it though.

[to Nigel]

Earlonne Woods: And you said New York was there with you?

Nigel Poor: Yes.

Earlonne Woods: I know he's not gonna let this competitive opportunity pass him by.

Nigel Poor: No way.

[back on the yard]

Uh-oh, wait a second. New York. Oh, he's taking his jacket off. OK, he's taking his jacket off. [voices chattering in the background] Wait, wait, New York, let's get a prediction. How many are you going to do?

Rahsaan "New York" Thomas: Uh... I'm gonna go for five. [someone in the background says, "Let's just go for two, New York"]

Nigel Poor: OK, wait, he's going for five. What are you...?

Speaker 7: I think he's gonna do one and a half.

Nigel Poor: One and a half

Speaker 8: I think he got about three!

Speaker 9: I don't think he can lift it at all. [speaker and Nigel laugh]

Speaker 10: [coaching New York] Listen. When you lay down, and you take this, we are not gonna let it go until you tell us to let it go. [New York affirms] Do not release this thing until we take it off you. [New York affirms]

[voices chattering – people in the background lifting the bench say, "All together", "We got you", "You got it?"]

Speaker 11: It's gotta touch your neck! [person coaching says, "Leave him alone, leave him alone"]

Speaker 12: Two... Four...

Nigel Poor: That's intense.

Speaker 13: ...Five... Six! [crowd and Nigel sound anguished as New York continues to lift bench, followed by clapping for him]

Nigel Poor: Holy!

[voices chattering and continue to clap while someone says to New York, "You didn't work out that hard earlier today. There you go!"]

New York! Oh my God!

Rahsaan "New York" Thomas: Hold up, I'm seeing stars. [laughs]

Nigel Poor: We were wrong.

Speaker 13: Yeah, I underestimated the guy. Man, I just took it as his gray hairs and older, you know, maybe his bones couldn't handle it. [to New York] Good job, Son. Good job...

[ambient noise fades out]

Nigel Poor: E, we got some sad news recently about our friend Charlie Spencer.

Earlonne Woods: Yep. He was just in our music episode a few weeks ago, and he was battling late-stage cancer. So I kept checking in on him by the phone, but at a certain point he stopped answering.

Nigel Poor: I know. And I remember you called me on a Sunday, and you said, "Can you go check—" [crosstalk]

Earlonne Woods: [crosstalk] Check in on him.

Nigel Poor: Yeah, check in on him. And I remember where he lives, so I drove over there. And remember he was in a very tall high rise? [Earlonne affirms] So it was like a building you can't just walk into. And I rang the buzzer and luckily the manager let me in. And I told her I was looking for my friend, Charlie.

Earlonne Woods: Right.

Nigel Poor: And her face just went... white. [Earlonne affirms] And she said, "I've got some really sad news. Charlie died a week ago." And, um... [exhales] God. But, you know, of course it was hard, but the cool thing was we got to talk about Charlie. And you know what she said?

Earlonne Woods: Hmm?

Nigel Poor: This probably won't surprise you. She said everyone in the building loved Charlie. So many people would spend time with him, listening to him play his guitar and talking to him. So the good thing I left with was that he wasn't alone.

Earlonne Woods: Right. And, you know, I recorded Charlie reading the credits for that music episode. [Nigel affirms] And I had met him down by Lake Merritt in Oakland. And I kinda knew that that was the last time I was going to see this dude. [Nigel affirms] And we sat in his car, and we just talked.

[ambient noise from Earlonne speaking with Charlie in his parked car – sounds of vehicles driving by]

Earlonne Woods: I know you wanted to come see the water. What was it about the water, man?

Charlie: See, this water and I'm sitting here talking. People walking by. [Earlonne affirms] Cars going by. This is sustaining. Water is life.

Earlonne Woods: Water *is* life.

Charlie: If something's out of place in your life, we can come down here on a sunshiny day, [Earlonne affirms] sit on this little bitty bench here. You know, bust out and cool out with 7 Up or something, sit there throw a line in the water and fish or pretend to fish.

Earlonne Woods: Just cast in that line.

Charlie: Yes. And casting that line is the connection. And at that time, this is when you reconnecting. This is...

Earlonne Woods: I was just trippin' off the life that was going around here. You was talkin' 'bout the people walking by the cars going by, the dogs walking by.

Charlie: That's something. That's what it's all about. I'm not scared to die.

[ambient noise fades out]

[hopeful acoustic guitar music comes in]

Samantha Gordan: This episode of Ear Hustle was produced by Rahsaan "New York" Thomas, with Nigel Poor, Earlonne Woods, John "Yahya" Johnson, Rhashiyd Zinnamon, Bruce Wallace, and Tony Tafoya.

Speaker 14: It was sound designed and engineered by Antwan Williams, with music by Antwan, Davis Jassy, and Rhashiyd Zinnamon.

Samantha Gordan: Amy Standen edits the show. Shabnam Sigman is our digital producer, and Julie Shapiro is the executive producer for Radiotopia.

Speaker 14: Ear Hustle would like to thank Anthony Evans, Dejon Joy, Jeremiah Brown and Steve Reichart for talking to them for this episode.

Samantha Gordan: Ear Hustle would also like to thank Warden Ron Broomfield, and as you know, every episode of Ear Hustle has to be approved by this guy here.

[music fades out]

Earlonne Woods: So, Lieutenant Robinson, what is the field of dreams?

Lieutenant Sam Robinson: So, the field of dreams, is this place, this magical place inside the walls of San Quentin on our main yard where the baseball field is located. The basketball field is kinda a little bit in the background. But it's this amazing place where people come, and everything that they thought they could be, or they should be, or they were, they're able to bring it to life at the field of dreams at San Quentin.

This is Lieutenant Sam Robinson, the Public Information Officer at San Quentin State Prison. And I will say that I approve this episode.

Speaker 14: This podcast was made possible with support from the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative: working to redesign the justice system by building power and opportunity for communities impacted by incarceration.

Samantha Gordan: Ear Hustle is a proud member of Radiotopia from PRX. Radiotopia is a collection of independent, listener-supported podcasts.

Speaker 14: Some of the best podcasts around. Hear more at radiotopia.fm.

Nigel Poor: I'm Nigel Poor.

Earlonne Woods: I'm Earlonne Woods.

Nigel Poor and Earlonne Woods: [simultaneously] Thanks for listening.

[acoustic music continues]

Earlonne Woods: [on the phone, speaking to Charlie] You have a good night, man. And I'll definitely tap in to what we talkin' about.

Charlie: OK.

Earlone Woods: All right. You have a good night, bro.

Charlie: You too. One love

Earlone Woods: One.

[music fades out] [Radiotopia jingle]

END OF EPISODE.