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ATH #142

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Jahsen Wint is a 5'11", 189-pound student in the class of 2016 at Erasmus Hall High School in Brooklyn, New York. He runs a 40-yard dash in 4.6 seconds, has a measured vertical leap of 34.3 inches, and can do a 5-10-5 shuttle run in 4.3 seconds. This is the essential information about Wint found on the various college football scouting websites that comprise an industry designed to measure, study, and sell the potential effectiveness of thousands of teenagers within the greater football industry comprised of hundreds of college programs and their millions of fans. Kids as young as 14 years old are rated and ranked by their place nationally, regionally, within their respective states, and by their respective positions on a football field. In high school, Wint played linebacker and wide receiver, but he is listed on recruiting sites under the position "athlete," a way to denote that he doesn't necessarily project to a specific position for a college team, but that his physical gifts undoubtedly will make him useful somewhere. On December 12, 2015, the day Wint was offered a full scholarship by Ohio State University, one of the top football programs in the country, a composite of the leading rankings services listed Wint as the 142nd best athlete in the country.

Columbus, Ohio, is a large, midwestern college town, home to the 60,000 students who attend Ohio State University, an institution known as a "football school." On a Saturday afternoons, Ohio Stadium fills to its capacity of 104,944 (about 1/7th of the population of the city). Even this spring's intrasquad scrimmage saw an attendance of over 99,000, a national record for such spring scrimmages. And on Saturday nights, kids who seem too young to be already clad in polo shirts tucked into khaki golf shorts pack into the giant, multilevel bars that line the main street near the school, as songs long thought to be dead spill out onto the sidewalk. Further down the same street, which stretches for miles through the city, twentysomethings sip craft cocktails at quieter bars that seem to be aspiring for a certain idea of Brooklyn. When Wint was asked what he thought of Columbus while there for a long weekend to attend the football team's spring scrimmage, he said simply that he didn't want to go back to Brooklyn. When he describes the city, he grins and sputters out phrases about how the air feels different, how positive everything there is, and calls it simply a "happy place." For Wint, Columbus represents the reality of his dream.

The son of a Jamaican father and Belizean mother, Wint first started to receive attention from college scouts as a sophomore in high school. Soon after, he decided that he needed to focus his attention fully on school and football in order to develop athletically to play elite college football and academically qualify to attend top colleges. And so he left the apartment in Brownsville where he lived with his mother, stepfather, and siblings, and moved in with his aunt and her husband in a quieter neighborhood in Canarsie. After attending various camps, the expenses of which were often paid by a friend's father, Wint noticed that he was competing favorably with highly rated players in his class. He received his first scholarship offer from Stony Brook University on Long Island in New York, which was followed by other offers from similar small schools in the Northeast. Before his senior season, he received his first Division 1 scholarship offer from Temple University in Philadelphia, to whom he gave a verbal commitment. But shortly after the first game of his senior season, his head coach revealed to the other coaches that Ohio State was quietly monitoring Wint. In the middle of the season,

Ohio State's defensive coordinator came to an Erasmus Hall practice to watch Wint work out. And then just before the city championship game in early December, Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer came to watch Wint play. A couple weeks after Meyer's visit to Brooklyn, Wint went on an official visit to Ohio State, during which he received a full scholarship offer. Shortly after the New Year, he signed his official letter of intent.

Despite its status as the most watched sport in America at both the collegiate and professional levels, football's long term viability is in doubt. Mounting scientific evidence has showed strong correlation between the repeated impacts inherent in the sport and long term brain damage, in addition to the general physical toll the sport's violence inflicts on the body. The New York Times went as far as to compare the top professional league, the NFL, to the tobacco industry for the league's intentional obscuring of such evidence of brain damage. As a result, there has been an ongoing public discussion about whether parents will continue to allow their children to play the sport and whether high schools and small colleges will continue to be able to insure it. However for many kids, the sport offers a rare avenue to a broader world with perceived opportunities for academic advancement and financial security. The goal of this project is to explore the life of one such kid as he enters into a system that from afar seems designed to both build and destroy him.