

ORIGINAL SCREENPLAY BY CARL D. LORD



UNIFIED



CHAMPIONS COME IN ALL SHAPES AND SIZES



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

TITLE: *UNIFIED*

LENGTH: **FEATURE**

GENRE: **FAMILY/DRAMA**

BUDGET: **LOW**

LOGLINE

A dysfunctional high school track team struggles to realize their potential until a small group of special needs students teaches their egotist counterparts what real competition is.



BACKSTORY

As a high school & college track coach, I was so inspired the first time I witnessed the Unified students compete at one of our meets that I knew a movie had to be made! Unified Sports, which was pioneered by the Special Olympics, features those with special needs who team up with a partner athlete without intellectual or physical disabilities. UNIFIED is a low-budget feature drama that offers a sometimes prejudicial glimpse into those who, if given the chance, compete with as much, if not more, determination than their able-bodied counterparts.

KEY CHARACTERS



Mike Sinclair (40)

Demanding, Sinclair's coaching success is overshadowed by personal and health-related issues that could determine his coaching future.



Peggy Wells (34)

Doubting her worth as a coach, Peggy wonders if her efforts are making a difference in her special needs students lives.



Fantasia Dupree (17)

Fantasia is the defending state sprint champion and egotist who has set a goal to deride and embarrass those on her school's Unified team.

KEY CHARACTERS



Simone Simmons (17)

Pretentious and self-centered, Simone is Fantasia's best friend and partner in crime when taunting the Unified athletes.



Trevor Rusk (16)

Mentally impaired, Trevor captivates Clermont's able-bodied track team members with his hilarious antics and inspiring athletic performances.



Gretchen Paul (17)

Born with Down syndrome, Gretchen is the outspoken Unified team leader whose goal is to run fast and keep Trevor in line.

SYNOPSIS

Act 1

As Clermont High School prepares to defend their 2023 state championship in track and field, sprint phenom FANTASIA DUPREE, and her like-minded, egotistical teammate SIMONE SIMMONS, begin to deride and make fun of Clermont's beloved *UNIFIED* (special needs) track team members. Embarrassed by their counterparts lack of athletic ability and physical limitations, Fantasia and Simone's actions are observed and reprimanded by the track team's head coach, MIKE SINCLAIR.

Discouraged by her inability to quell her Unified team's dysfunctional, sporadic, and aloof behavior, first-year coach, PEGGY WELLS, catches the attention of Coach Sinclair, who lends a compassionate but practical ear, offering additional coaching tips.

After an innocent lunchroom mishap that involved an accusatory Fantasia, Simone, and one of the Unified team members, Principal LAURA BAINES, suggests that both Fantasia and Simone should join up with the Unified members as *Best Buddies* and mentors. Wary of the Principal Baines assignment, Coach Sinclair and Coach Wells take a wait-and-see approach, but not before all hell breaks loose when Fantasia and Simone learn of their perceived sentence of doom.

SYNOPSIS (CONT.)

Act 2

After a coffee shop meetup, Coach Sinclair shares with Coach Wells that he is scheduled for surgery at season's end to remove a concerning tumor. After sharing more about their individual pasts, an emotional connection begins to develop between both coaches.

Chided by their able-bodied teammates, Fantasia and Simone are now on full display during practice and at track meets, pretending to be willing participants and partners with the Unified athletes. Seeking retribution, Fantasia and Simone's families file a lawsuit against the local school board for discrimination, resulting in Coach Sinclair's voluntary move to step away from the track program.

Now led by Assistant Coach BRAD MAYS, and Coach Wells, Clermont's chance to repeat as state champions is questionable. Determined not to allow Fantasia and Simone to break apart the team, Coach Mays devises a plan to have Fantasia and Simone become partners with two of the special needs runners, GRETCHEN, and TREVOR, during the Unified races at each track meet. Unhappy, Fantasia devises a plan, which includes Simone, to sabotage Gretchen and Trevor's chance to win their races. Recognizing their attempts, Coach Mays threatens to remove both of them from the team.

SYNOPSIS (CONT.)

Hoping that Coach Sinclair will change his mind and return to the team, Coach Wells learns that his tumor is spreading and that emergency surgery with a low chance of survival is needed. While facing an uncertain outcome, Coach Sinclair makes Coach Wells promise that she will go out with him if he survives. Embracing his request, she wholeheartedly agrees.

Act 3

Simone, required to help escort the special needs students on a class field trip, now begins to see how loving, caring, and comical they are. As they become friends, Fantasia recognizes Simone's change in attitude, which places their long-term friendship in jeopardy. Now isolating herself from both the team and Simone, Fantasia's running future is also at stake after she injures her leg during a regular-season meet.

With her ear pods pulsating, Fantasia crosses the street after school. Suddenly, a car with faulty brakes speeds towards her. Gretchen, standing nearby, immediately recognizes the danger and throws her body at Fantasia, pushing her out of the way. Chaos erupts as students and faculty surround Gretchen, now lying motionless in the street. Fantasia, visibly shaken, sits on a nearby curb and cries. A touching hospital scene then follows, showing a repentant Fantasia asking Gretchen for forgiveness. Accepted, a new friendship begins to blossom.

SYNOPSIS (CONT.)

At the Track and Field State Championships, Fantasia, back to full running strength, is once again the favorite to defend her titles in the 100-meter and 200-meter races. After winning her first race, Fantasia learns that Simone, Gretchen's partner in the Unified events, injures her foot in the long jump. Heartbroken, Gretchen's hope of finally winning a state title quickly disappears until she learns that Fantasia has volunteered to give up her chance to defend her 200-meter title and race with Gretchen. Asked why she would do that by Coach Mays, she replied, "Gretchen saved my life." In a climactic ending to their race, Gretchen manages to edge out the other team's Unified athletes and become a first-time state champion.

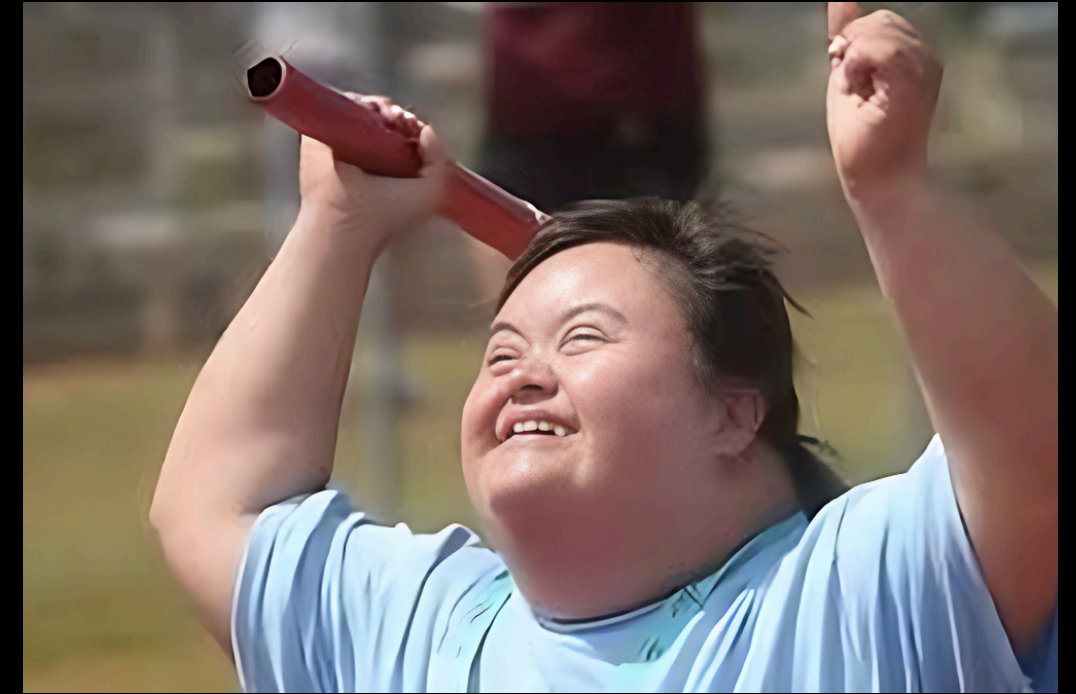
One year later, our final scene shows Coach Sinclair and his new wife, Coach Wells, with a baby bump at Clermont's track practice. Fantasia and Simone, home on college break, surprise everyone, including Gretchen, Trevor, and the rest of their Unified teammates. After addressing each athlete about the importance of being a great teammate not only in school but in life, Coach Sinclair directs Clermont's men's and women's teams to surround the Unified team. He then leads them with a momentous cheer, ending with a deafening shout, "UNIFIED!"

THE END

SIMILAR FILMS



VISUAL REFERENCE





WRITER'S BIO

Carl Lord's early love of literature began as a child after reading his first Hardy Boys mystery. Those early years of journaling and writing creative short stories have evolved into *Carl's* work appearing in national magazines, regional commercials, and local publications. Having completed multiple award-winning inspirational feature-length scripts, *Carl* has also written a fictional novel and a personal memoir.

With a background in college athletics, *Carl* is also an assistant track and cross-country coach at both the high school and college levels.

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