**BUCKBALL SEASON**

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Prologue

(*Opening shot: fade in to a long shot of Applejack standing under one of Sweet Apple Acres’ many trees during the day. A bullseye target has been set up several yards in front of her. Zoom in slowly as she runs a critical eye over the trunk and boughs, then cut to a close-up. With a determined smile and narrowed green eyes, she focuses on one particular apple, a gleam of light playing off its deep red skin. She spits on a front hoof, holds it up to test the wind, and lets her rear ones slam into the bark. The chosen fruit vibrates for a moment and falls free, leaving a red-tinted afterimage behind itself as the action shifts to slow motion. Applejack pivots 180 degrees and leaps to hit the apple with a hind-leg kick; just before she can connect, though, Rainbow Dash arrives on the scene and normal motion resumes.*)

**Rainbow:** Hey, Applejack!

(*The kick misses, but Applejack’s momentum turns her into a whirling blur of blond and orange-tan before gravity dumps her flat on her back. Both the apple and her trusty hat fall free.*)

**Rainbow:** Whatcha doin’?

(*A second apple drops out of the tree, bonking Applejack squarely in the head and eliciting a grunt of pain before the hat settles down over her face. She pushes it back to expose a very sour expression.*)

**Applejack:** Well, I *was* practicin’ my distance buckin’.

**Rainbow:** Uh, distance bucking? (*Applejack stands up.*) What for?

**Applejack:** (*dusting herself off*) Because Cousin Braeburn and the rest of the Apple family in Appleloosa seem to think that their team can beat Ponyville at buckball.

(*She expresses her opinion of this claim by bucking the tree again to bring down another apple and lashing out with one hind leg to propel it toward the target. Dead center hit.*)

**Rainbow:** (*incensed*) What?!? Hah! That’s ridiculous! (*hovering*) Nopony beats Ponyville. I mean, I could beat the whole town of Appleloosa at buckball with one wing tied behind my back!

(*Applejack bucks once more, dropping another apple which she kicks skyward; the blue speedster responds by going airborne and striking it down as if spiking a volleyball. As soon as it gets within range of Applejack’s hind legs, she brings one up for a kick that sends the piece of produce through the center of the target, which topples over for good measure. Rainbow descends to the ground.*)

**Applejack:** So I can count on you to join the Ponyville buckball team?

**Rainbow:** Oh, yeah! I am *so* there! I’ve just got one question.

**Applejack:** Hmm?

**Rainbow:** (*suddenly puzzled*) Uh…what’s buckball?

(*The earth pony’s smile turns into an irritated groan and eye roll at her opposite number’s total ignorance of the sport. Fade to black.*)

OPENING THEME

Act One

(*Opening shot: fade in to Applejack, Fluttershy, and Pinkie Pie walking along a path through the orchards as Rainbow keeps pace above their heads. She has regained her original enthusiasm.*)

**Rainbow:** So basically, buckball is the coolest game ever. (*All stop.*) Offense, defense, teamwork, nonstop action! (*She drops into a head-down hover between Fluttershy and Pinkie.*) It’s got it all!

**Fluttershy:** Wow, Rainbow Dash. You sure seem to know a lot about this game. (*Rainbow zips away*) I’ve never even heard of… (*puzzled, to Pinkie*) …buckball.

**Rainbow:** Yeah, I’m kind of an expert.

**Applejack:** (*sarcastically*) Heh. An expert who hadn’t heard of the game either until I told you. (*Rainbow lands facing the others.*)

**Rainbow:** Well, it’s a new game. I probably know more than most ponies, so that makes me an expert.

**Pinkie:** I don’t know anything about it at all, but it sounds like there’s a ball and bucking— (*rising to hind legs*) —so I’m betting it’s super-duper fun! (*She settles down.*)

**Applejack:** (*pacing*) The point is, my cousin Braeburn somehow convinced a pegasus *and* a unicorn to come play with him on the Appleloosa team. And he can’t stop braggin’ about how his team is gonna beat ours. (*Cut to Fluttershy and Pinkie.*)

**Fluttershy:** But, um…we don’t have a team. (*Rainbow pops up in between them.*)

**Rainbow:** Well, between Applejack and me, we’ve got two-thirds of a team. All we need is a unicorn. That’s where you two come in.

**Pinkie:** (*whispering, to Fluttershy*) Uh…they know we’re not unicorns, right?

**Rainbow:** Uh, obviously.

(*One nimble, wing-assisted bound takes her back to stand alongside Applejack.*)

**Rainbow:** (*to Pinkie*) You’re gonna be on my team, and Fluttershy is gonna be on Applejack’s team.

**Applejack:** We’ll play against each other, along with whatever unicorns want to try out, until we find the best one.

**Pinkie:** Ohhhh! Phew! That’s a relief, because I left my unicorn costume at home.

(*The two athletic mares trade a hopelessly confused glance upon hearing this. Clock wipe to a large open field set up as follows. Four concentric circles, a small inner pair and a large outer pair. Two empty apple baskets on poles mounted diametrically opposite one another on the inner circle of the large pair. A diameter drawn perpendicular to the imaginary line connecting the bases of the poles, bisecting both this same circle and the two innermost ones. Applejack and Fluttershy have donned sleeveless green jerseys, Pinkie and Rainbow red ones, all trimmed with white at hem and collar. In addition, Pinkie sports a red/white sweatband across her forehead and has used matching scrunchies to gather her mane into two huge puffs that stick out from the sides of her head. Granny Smith is a short distance back, wearing a referee’s black/white striped shirt and a black cap, and Big Macintosh is off to one side with a cartload of red balls similar to those often used in dodgeball. He wears a dark gray cap turned backwards and a matching jacket over an off-white turtleneck. At midfield, Fluttershy stands facing a seated Pinkie across the line as Rainbow hovers behind the latter.*)

(*Applejack stands facing a group of ponies whose backs are turned to the camera; they stand at the edge of the outermost circle among a scatter of empty baskets. Zoom in slowly as she starts to pace, then cut to a close-up of her and this group—all unicorns, wearing jerseys in either red or green.*)

**Applejack:** I know a lot of you are here because I told you what an amazin’ game buckball is. (*Stop.*) And even though it’s already an Apple family favorite, most of you probably don’t know anything about it. So I thought we’d give you a quick demonstration.

(*Close-up of Macintosh; now a bit of decoration can be seen on the jacket—a lightning bolt overlaid on a red apple. He grabs a ball in his mouth and flips it to Granny, who catches it on a front hoof, and Applejack and Pinkie move to opposite sides of the midfield line.*)

**Applejack:** The two earth ponies are on offense. They meet in the middle of the field for the buck-off.

(*On the end of this, she turns to aim her hindquarters at the line.*)

**Applejack:** (*kicking up with a hind leg*) They both try to be the first one to kick it.

(*Granny throws the ball straight down, hard enough so that it rebounds several feet, and the orange-tan legs boot it sharply so that it arcs toward the basket on Pinkie’s half of the field. Just as it is about to drop neatly in, though, a sky-blue wing lashes into view to bat it away; it ends up being bounced on Rainbow’s pinions.*)

**Rainbow:** And the pegasus is on defense. (*Slow pan across the unicorns; she continues o.s.*) She tries to keep the ball from going in the goal— (*Back to her.*) —and passes it back to the earth pony on her team. (*Catch on a front hoof.*) Just give it a little kick, Pinkie.

(*The rubber sphere is tossed easily toward the mare in question, who is facing it but flips/twists to get a rear hoof onto it. By the time she lands on all fours, Applejack is staring intently at its trajectory; cut to her side’s basket, where a very scared Fluttershy is playing defense. She covers her head with a whimper as the ball clatters in.*)

**Pinkie:** Ohhhh! I get it! (*Fluttershy touches down between her and Applejack.*)

**Applejack:** And all the unicorns have to do is float these here baskets around the outside of the field— (*pacing; they are levitated up*) —and catch as many balls as possible for their team.

(*Stopping at midfield, she addresses Fluttershy and Pinkie.*)

**Applejack:** You two get the idea?

**Pinkie:** (*bounding up*) Absolutely!

**Fluttershy:** Oh, I don’t know. That ball moves pretty fast. (*Rainbow flies over to the unicorns.*)

**Rainbow:** All right. Now let’s see which of you has what it takes.

(*She returns to the field, followed by two candidates; in close-up, one of the pole-mounted baskets is pulled down and a magic-controlled one replaces it. Zoom out to frame the stallion keeping it aloft as Fluttershy gets into position to guard it and Rainbow hovers just behind them both.*)

**Stallion:** Um…what do I do? (*Rainbow lands next to him.*)

**Rainbow:** When the ball comes towards you, catch it.

(*Giving him an encouraging smile, she zooms to her position on the other end of the field, whose pole has also been removed; a mare has this basket in her aura. Cut to a close-up of Granny, blowing a blast on a whistle around her neck, and zoom out. She holds up a fresh ball for the buck-off between Applejack and Pinkie, both turned to face away from midfield.*)

**Applejack:** Okay, just try your best, Pinkie. I *have* been doin’ this a lot longer than you.

(*Almost as soon as the ball hits the ground and bounces up, the party pony launches herself into a sideways flip and nails a kick that leaves Applejack staring in mute shock.*)

**Applejack:** (*stunned*) Nice kick.

(*It hurtles straight and true toward a shuddering Fluttershy, who drops into a midair somersault fast enough to turn her into a yellow/pink swirl—with the red of the ball caught up in it. She comes out of it right side up, smiling joyfully and slinging the ball back the way it came with her tail.*)

**Fluttershy:** Whee! (*Giggle.*)

**Applejack:** Great save, Fluttershy!

(*Not missing a beat or turning around, she hoists a hind leg to boot the projectile over Pinkie’s head. The mare holding the basket on this end gasps in fright; she and it hit the deck as Rainbow flies in to intercept.*)

**Rainbow:** (*punching ball away*) Coming your way, Pinkie! (*Pan quickly to her and Applejack on the next line.*)

**Pinkie:** Somersault…kick!

(*She suits the action to the words by doing a backflip and scoring a rear-hoof hit. As the ball bears down on her team’s goal, the stallion keeping it up cries out in fear and flips it so that the shot bounces off the closed bottom end. The force of impact drives the container onto his head, knocking him flat; at midfield, Rainbow lands next to Applejack and Pinkie.*)

**Pinkie:** (*catching/bouncing ball on hind legs*) Hey! This game is easy!

(*As she kicks it away and somersaults after it, here comes Fluttershy in a lazy backwards hover, fooling with two more on her tail.*)

**Fluttershy:** Oh! (*Giggle.*) It actually is kind of fun.

(*Neither Applejack nor Rainbow has any immediate response to these unexpected displays of sporting prowess. Here comes the stallion with the basket still on his head, stumbling about and emitting muffled cries.*)

**Applejack:** Where did Pinkie Pie learn to buck like *that?*

**Rainbow:** And Fluttershy’s spinning tail catch is pretty amazing.

**Applejack:** Um…okay. (*to the remaining unicorns*) Well, let’s see what the rest of you can do.

(*Another stallion and mare trade uneasy looks and float their basket sup to get in the game. Dissolve to Applejack and a hopping Pinkie at midfield, ready for Granny to initiate a new buck-off.*)

**Applejack:** (*as Granny bounces the ball*) Now don’t expect to be able to beat me twice in a row.

(*And just as before, the pink bundle of energy backflips into a kick even before Applejack can get a hoof off the ground. The ball sails toward Fluttershy, now much more at ease.*)

**Fluttershy:** Well, hello there, Mr. Ball. (*Catch on tail; spin in midair, hurl it back.*) Whee!

(*Down below, Applejack flips her hindquarters up to kick it over the head of Pinkie, who has taken to bouncing in place on her haunches. Rainbow darts in to deflect it, setting Pinkie up for a forward flip kick. A diagonally divided split screen frames close-ups of Applejack and Rainbow, both sweating freely and staring in disbelief; from here, cut to Fluttershy and the mare holding the basket she is defending. A couple of butterflies flit past, not seeming to be in any hurry.*)

**Fluttershy:** (*ushering them along*) Hurry along, butterflies, before that ball comes and hits you.

(*The unicorn’s nerves get the better of her, and she drops to her haunches and covers her head with a cry of fear. Her basket thuds to the ground, a streak of red marking the ball’s passage.*)

**Applejack:** (*from o.s.*) Nope! (*Cut to frame the entire group; the mare stands up.*) Um…okay! Let’s see what the rest of you can do.

(*Macintosh and Granny have left the field by this point. Clock wipe to a stallion on the green side, floating up a basket and having serious second thoughts about trying out. The impact of ball against foreleg sends him to the turf on his face, and his basket drops onto his rump.*)

**Rainbow:** (*from o.s.*) Nope!

(*Another such wipe frames a stallion on the red side, who skids to a stop but fails to keep his basket within easy reach. A ball dribbles slowly past him across the grass.*)

**Applejack:** (*from o.s.*) Definitely not.

(*Another wipe to the green side: now a mare is in the hot spot, spinning a basket rapidly overhead. Too rapidly for her own good, in fact, as it induces a bout of motion sickness; cheeks go green and she claps a hoof to her mouth in order to avoid vomiting all over the field. The basket falls away as a ball bounces past.*)

**Rainbow:** (*from o.s., emphatically*) No.

(*Another: over on the red side, a mare is more focused on touching up her lipstick with the help of a hand mirror than she is on the game. A ball comes down just behind her, completely missing her basket.*)

**Applejack:** (*from o.s.*) Not a chance.

(*A fifth clock wipe brings her and Rainbow into view, sitting on their haunches at midfield and watching balls sail and bounce across from either side.*)

**Rainbow:** No.

**Applejack:** Nope.

**Rainbow:** Aaaaand…no.

(*Dissolve to them in the same positions, but noticeably worn out from fatigue and disappointment. The balls have now stopped flying.*)

**Rainbow:** Uh, this didn’t go how I thought it would.

(*On the end of this line, zoom out to show all the unicorns sprawled out with their baskets around the field perimeter. Fluttershy and Pinkie are the only two ponies still in the game, the pink pony’s laughter and squeals drifting across as they pass a ball back and forth.*)

**Applejack:** It sure didn’t.

(*Here comes Fluttershy, holding one in her tail. She is followed by Pinkie, who is doing cartwheels to keep three of her own aloft.*)

**Fluttershy:** (*as both move o.s.*) This game is a whole lot more fun than I thought it would be! (*Cut to the pair; now they bounce/juggle in place.*)

**Pinkie:** It’s exactly as much fun as I thought it would be— (*kicking hers away*) —a whole bunch!

(*Pan slightly away from them in that direction to bring Snails into view, topping a small rise with two buckets slung on a pole across his shoulders.*)

***Next two lines sung a cappella, loosely based on the tune of “Alouette”***

***Leisurely 4 (A flat major)***

**Snails:** Carryin’ my water, my water, my water

Carryin’ my water on my shoulder pole

**Pinkie:** (*panicked*) SNAILS!! LOOK OUUUUT!! (*He glances up.*)

**Snails:** Hmm?

(*As the trio of scarlet projectiles homes in on him, he levitates the whole assembly away and whirls it in midair, positioning it perfectly so that all three plop into the buckets. The load goes right back on his shoulders, and he placidly crosses the field to the very great surprise of both Applejack and Rainbow. Fluttershy and Pinkie gather behind them, grinning at the display of agile magic. All the rejected unicorns have cleared out.*)

**Applejack:** Amazing!

**Snails:** You should be more careful with these. (*He floats the buckets/pole away and sets them down.*) You could lose them.

(*The balls are telekinetically lifted away and returned to Applejack’s grip. It takes only a moment for her and Rainbow to tune in on the same wavelength, marked by the big grin that steals across the orange-tan face.*)

**Rainbow:** Hey, Snails? Can you float one of those baskets over here? (*He spots a dropped goal basket near him.*)

**Snails:** Hmm? Sure. (*It rises.*) What do you want me to do with it?

**Applejack:** (*tossing all three balls up*) Catch! (*She bucks them at him; he does so effortlessly.*)

**Snails:** Anything else?

(*The demonstration leaves these two observers’ minds blown all over again, but they quickly recover with a pair of calculating little smiles.*)

**Fluttershy:** Wow, Snails. You’re a natural at buckball.

**Pinkie:** It’s a good thing, too. We were running outta unicorns.

**Fluttershy:** Do you think you’ll be ready to play with Applejack and Rainbow Dash against the Appleloosa team? (*Snails has now set the basket down.*)

**Snails:** I guess I’ll find out. Plus, after I deliver this water, I don’t really have anything else to do. (*Rainbow flies over to him.*)

**Rainbow:** Well, Snails— (*touching his shoulders*) —with you on the team, Ponyville is one step closer to crushing Appleloosa! (*Applejack crosses to them.*)

**Applejack:** Heh. And after today, it’s pretty clear who the other two players should be.

(*All three train their gazes across the field; cut to Fluttershy and Pinkie on the receiving end.*)

**Fluttershy:** What do you mean? I thought you and Dash were gonna play.

**Pinkie:** Yeah! If you’re not crushing Appleloosa, who is?

(*Rainbow drops to her haunches with a knowing laugh.*)

**Rainbow:** Uh, you two. (*Fold forelegs.*) Obviously.

(*Cut to the two unlikely players, zooming in slowly on their dumbfounded expressions, and fade to black.*)

Act Two

(*Opening shot: fade in to the same zoom in on Fluttershy and Pinkie. They finally get enough neurons working to trade an utterly confounded look.*)

**Fluttershy:** Um, you want *us* to play buckball against Appleloosa instead of *you?*

**Rainbow:** (*as she and Applejack nod*) Mmm-hmm. (*Fluttershy crosses to them; Pinkie hops over.*)

**Pinkie:** That’s un-credible!

(*A round of uncomprehending stares from Applejack/Rainbow/Snails; Pinkie drops to her haunches.*)

**Pinkie:** Unbelievable and incredible? (*Impatient scoff.*) Come on!

**Applejack:** I can’t explain it, but you two are really good at this game. And if it means beatin’ Appleloosa, I’ll give either one of you my spot on the team quicker than Granny Smith can core an apple. (*Rainbow nods under the end of this.*)

**Rainbow:** Me too! (*She shoots up several yards.*) I’d normally be so pumped all of Ponyville was counting on me to win, I-I’d run right over the competition. But you still flew rings around me.

**Fluttershy:** Oh. I’m sorry. I was just having fun.

**Applejack:** Well, you can have all the fun you want, as long as it’s while you’re beatin’ the hide off of Braeburn’s team. (*Pinkie sidles up next to Fluttershy.*)

**Pinkie:** (*singsong*) I do like fun!

**Fluttershy:** Honestly, the game was a little scary at first— (*smiling*) —but once I got the hang of it, I had a pretty good time.

**Pinkie:** (*backflipping, dancing on hind legs*) Let’s get this party started!

**Applejack:** All right. But if we really want to beat Appleloosa— (*suddenly all business*) —we’re gonna have to get serious.

**Fluttershy:** Serious? (*Pinkie stops dancing.*)

**Pinkie:** (*skeptically*) Serious, how?

(*Dissolve to the four mares at the outer edge of the field, facing away from it across the grass. Applejack gestures ahead of herself as Fluttershy and Pinkie stare in disbelief. The pole-mounted basket on this side has been set up again, and Applejack and Rainbow have both shed their jerseys.*)

**Applejack:** With serious practice!

(*As she speaks, the camera zooms out to frame an obstacle course laid out on this trace. Hurdles, slide, a zigzag pattern of hoops laid on the ground as an agility exercise, and so forth.*)

**Fluttershy:** (*shivering*) Um…wow. This looks pretty intense. (*Rainbow lands between her and Pinkie, throwing a foreleg around each set of shoulders.*)

**Rainbow:** Well, duh! You two are gonna be representing all of Ponyville, and more importantly, us.

(*She releases her grip and points to herself on this last word. Zoom out slightly as Applejack crosses to them.*)

**Applejack:** That’s why, before we leave for Appleloosa tomorrow, you two are gonna practice just as hard as we would.

**Rainbow:** So let’s hop to it! (*She launches herself into a hover.*) Snails already has a head start on you!

(*A hoof pointed off to one side sends the camera into a quick pan across the field. Stop on the gangly colt, who has two baskets held in his aura and is idly flicking them up and down to send balls arcing between them for a little midair juggling. Fluttershy and Pinkie trade fearful glances—“what have we gotten ourselves into?”*)

(*Wipe to the obstacle course and zoom in slowly on Fluttershy and Rainbow, at the start of the zigzag hoop run. The blue pegasus hovers, tossing a ball.*)

**Rainbow:** Okay. (*Close-up of them.*) If you want to win, you totally gotta get this drill down.

**Fluttershy:** (*shivering*) I-I-I do?

(*The pegasus-turned-coach wastes no time in hopping through the hoops, working the ball back and forth and prompting a wide-eyed gasp from her counterpart. A serpentine carry through a row of poles draws another gasp, and Rainbow’s nimble leaps up a set of ascending platforms—while catching and bouncing the ball off each one—elicits a third. The camera then shifts to a head-on view of Rainbow and zooms out as she flies through holes cut in a series of vertically mounted planks, doing a tight roll and carrying a ball. Thee badly flustered Fluttershy gasps in sheer fright, chewing a front hoof, as Rainbow emerges from the board run to zoom down a curved tube and pop out at ground level, still flying like sixty. She skids to a stop before Fluttershy and pulls up into a hover.*)

**Rainbow:** It’s all about ball control.

(*She drives the point home by tossing the one she carries to Fluttershy, who bobbles and nearly drops it.*)

**Fluttershy:** (*stammering*) Whoa!

**Rainbow:** Ready? (*Tiny nod.*) Go!

(*The self-confessed weak flyer flaps toward the hoop run and begins to pick through it at a speed far lower than Rainbow’s, fumbling the ball back and forth.*)

**Rainbow:** Come on! Faster! You don’t want Ponyville to lose because you can’t get into high gear, do you?

**Fluttershy:** (*shuddering, stumbling*) Whoa!

(*She pitches face-first to the turf, the ball squirting out of her grip. Pan quickly to Snails, who has donned a red jersey and is sitting tranquilly atop an upended basket at the edge of the buckball field. Eyes closed, forelegs raised and hind legs crossed as if meditating, he has five other baskets floating around him in a circle. Popping one eye open, he shifts a container out of position just long enough to catch the errant ball. Fluttershy stands up, pulling a hoop partway off her head and risking a fearful look at Rainbow; the red-violet eyes and disapproving set of the blue face say all that needs to be said. Cut to Applejack, walking up.*)

**Applejack:** All right. (*holding up a ball*) Bein’ able to buck a ball into a goal from any direction is the most important thing in the game.

(*As she speaks, the camera cuts to a longer shot; she is addressing Pinkie on the field, and Macintosh’s cart of balls stands between them. She ends her sentence by setting hers on the ground. Pinkie nods casually.*)

**Pinkie:** Eh, if you say so.

(*The workhorse flips it into the air and easily bucks it into the basket on top of its pole. Back to a close-up of her, smiling her satisfaction, then zoom out to show that Pinkie has cleared out. Green eyes pop at the sudden disappearance, but she has merely gone to the midfield line and is standing on a ball with all four hooves balanced on it. Tiptoeing motions roll it along the lines, accompanied by little squeals and noises of glee; after a few seconds, she flips into a one-hoof headstand and kicks it smack into the goal. Applejack gapes at the feat, then smiles fiercely and smacks a hoof into the cart’s tailgate. A panel falls open, allowing one ball to fall free so she can buck it to Pinkie; the fun-loving mare just swings her rump around to knock it away.*)

**Pinkie:** Whee! (*Here comes the next one, she propels it back with her head.*) Woo-hoo!

(*A third one is kicked up as she balances on her tail; cut to a close-up of the goal and zoom out as all three shots find their mark. Applejack keeps firing balls toward the o.s. Pinkie on the next line, and they come back on target.*)

**Applejack:** Keep it up! Just one miss’ll ruin the Apple family’s buckball reputation forever!

(*Cut to the ace rookie on the end of this line, which leaves her considerably rattled even as she keeps returning balls.*)

**Pinkie:** Whoa! What?

(*One of them sweeps her tail out from under her, leaving her as a whirling pink/magenta blur in midair for a moment. She thuds down on her flank, a ball bouncing high off her head only to be snagged in a basket that shoots up under Snails’s control. He brings it down to join the other four in their slow orbit around his seated form, never once breaking his semi-trance.*)

**Pinkie:** Whoops.

(*She offers Applejack a sheepish grin and is met with a scowl. Pan quickly to the pole course, where Fluttershy is straining to run the serpentine but not making very good time under Rainbow’s critical eye. She has removed the hoop from her head.*)

**Rainbow:** Come on, push! Push! PUSH!

(*Whereupon Fluttershy runs flat into one pole, losing the ball she carries and knocking herself silly. Pan quickly back to Applejack and Pinkie, the former rolling balls to the latter so she can flip and buck them up.*)

**Applejack:** Come on now! Every shot is for Sweet Apple Acres! And me! And Dash! AND ALL OF PONYVILLE!

**Pinkie:** (*slipping on a ball*) Whoooaaa!

(*Down she goes, the pink chin meeting the green grass in a most abrupt and unwelcome fashion.*)

**Pinkie:** Ow. (*Pan quickly to Rainbow.*)

**Rainbow:** Faster!

(*Cut to a hovering Fluttershy, who loses control of the ball balanced on her hind leg.*)

**Fluttershy:** Whoa! (*Pan quickly back to Applejack.*)

**Applejack:** Come on now!

(*Cut to Pinkie, standing at midfield; she misses a kick but launches herself into a blur of somersaulting motion.*)

**Pinkie:** Wh-wh-whoooaaa! (*Slam down spreadeagle on her back. Pan quickly to Rainbow.*)

**Rainbow:** Come on!

(*Cut to Fluttershy, huddled in a large spring-mounted bowl at the top of a slide; she gets out a terrified little squeal and begins to hyperventilate. Pan quickly to Applejack.*)

**Applejack:** Keep it up!

(*Pinkie tries to keep her balance on a ball, two hooves at a time.*)

**Pinkie:** Whoooaaa! (*Pan quickly to Rainbow.*)

**Rainbow:** Come on!

(*Now Fluttershy threads the needle through the planks as she did, holding the ball and executing the tight roll, but thuds her way down through the final tube. She tumbles out in a heap, losing the ball so that it rolls to a stop on the field in close-up. Zoom out quickly as she and Pinkie both lunge for it but only manage to bonk their heads together. Neither Applejack nor Rainbow is even remotely impressed. Once the two novices get their wits about themselves, Pinkie is first to dive for the ball with a gasp, but it shoots out of her grip and comes down on Fluttershy’s head.*)

**Applejack:** What in the apple happened to those two?

**Rainbow:** I don’t know! They mopped the field with us before.

(*Cut to midfield. Pinkie bounds nimbly to intercept the incoming ball, but miscalculates her grab and comes down without it on top of Fluttershy.*)

**Applejack:** (*from o.s.*) All right! That’s it for today, y’all!

**Fluttershy, Pinkie:** Phew!

(*Cut to Applejack and Rainbow and zoom out as the other two mares and Snails cross to them. The colt has put away his baskets.*)

**Pinkie:** I thought practice was supposed to make us better.

**Fluttershy:** Maybe we just need a little rest.

**Rainbow:** (*sourly*) Or a whole lot of it.

**Applejack:** Just be sure to get your heads in the game before tomorrow. All of Ponyville is countin’ on a win.

(*Exeunt these last two, followed by Snails; the fear and nervous tension in the other mares’ minds comes through in their mutual grimace. Dissolve to a stretch of a path through the orchards as they walk into view, having shed their practice gear; Pinkie has untied her mane as well.*)

**Fluttershy:** I really don’t want to let Applejack and Rainbow Dash down— (*Both stop.*) —or anypony else, but…after that practice, I’m not feeling very confident.

**Pinkie:** (*smiling*) Maybe we weren’t *that* bad. (*Fluttershy moans; the smile fades.*) I guess I was hoping you saw something I didn’t.

**Fluttershy:** I know our friends want us to win, but…how can the whole town be counting on us if most ponies have never even heard of buckball?

**Pinkie:** I know! How can we disappoint a pony who doesn’t even know we have a team? (*Both smile.*)

**Fluttershy:** Or that we’re gonna play Appleloosa!

**Pinkie:** Pfft! Yeah. I don’t think we need to worry. (*as they start walking again*) I’d be surprised if anypony in this town cares about this game at all.

(*Clock wipe to a group of ponies decked out in face paint and assorted apparel items in which shades of blue and white dominate. Two hovering pegasi, one of whom is Derpy Hooves, unfurl a banner that depicts the faces of Fluttershy, Pinkie, and Snails, and the camera zooms out to show the whole bunch waiting on the platform of the Ponyville train station. A train idles behind them.*)

**Crowd:** Go Ponyville! Go Ponyville! (*Confetti/streamers rain down.*) Win! Win! Win!

(*A heavy burst tumbles over the screen to the sound of their cheers; behind it; the view wipes to the unlikely all-star trio at one end of the platform. Fluttershy and Pinkie gape at the unexpected display of fervor, their minds totally shorted out for the moment, while Snails just adopts a mildly puzzled frown. He is the only one of the three still wearing his jersey.*)

**Snails:** Whoa. (*smiling, pacing*) The whole town really seems to care about this game a lot.

(*His teammates can manage no response beyond a pair of horrified, breathy gasps and a sidewise glance at each other, as if searching desperately for any scrap of hope or comfort. Fade to black.*)

Act Three

(*Opening shot: fade in to a close-up of the upper end of the train locomotive’s smokestack. It emits a burst in time with the crowd’s cheering, and the camera tilts down to frame them just before the train begins to roll. A flabbergasted Fluttershy and Pinkie have boarded and are staring mutely out at them from one window; cut to inside this car as Fluttershy hastily pulls down the shade. Seated facing each other, they exchange unnerved looks as the camera zooms out to frame Applejack and Rainbow approaching them.*)

**Rainbow:** Heh. We kinda went around town and talked up the team a little.

**Applejack:** Yep. We wanted to make sure you two knew that all of Ponyville was behind you.

(*This update thoroughly fails to settle their audience’s minds, but Pinkie forces herself to smile.*)

**Pinkie:** Greeeeat.

**Applejack:** I hear the whole town’s already plannin’ a parade for when you get back after whuppin’ Appleloosa. (*Pinkie shivers.*) That should feel pretty good.

**Fluttershy:** It should? (*Rainbow flies over to her.*)

**Rainbow:** Totally! Just spend the whole ride to Appleloosa thinking about everypony cheering for the victorious Ponyville buckball team. (*Gasp.*) I bet Princess Celestia even comes to congratulate you. (*nudging Fluttershy*) If that doesn’t get you in the zone, I don’t know what will!

(*She and Applejack take their leave, so thoroughly satisfied with the quality of their pep talk that they fail to notice that it has only strung the other pair’s nerves even tighter.*)

**Fluttershy:** I don’t know what zone Rainbow Dash is talking about, but I’m pretty sure I don’t want to be in it. Do you?

(*The pink pony can muster no words in reply, only letting her eyes flick toward Fluttershy for the briefest moment. From here, dissolve to Applejack and Rainbow on another pair of facing seats; the earth pony looks out the window, while the pegasus lounges against the wall for a nap. She snaps upright at the approach of Fluttershy and Pinkie.*)

**Rainbow:** Hey! You two are supposed to be in the zone!

**Pinkie:** (*whimpering/sniffling fearfully*) You see…thing is…thinking about everypony…thinking about us… (*Yelp.*) …there’s just no way to—

**Fluttershy:** (*with sudden, growing fury*) There’s no way that we can get in the zone, because the zone sounds like a *horrible place*, since we are *terrible* at buckball, and we are going to *lose* and let everypony down, *AND WE DON’T WANT TO PLAY ANYMORE!!*

(*On the end of this line, cut to Applejack and Rainbow, who can only goggle at this display of rancor from deep left field. However, it is Pinkie who responds first, turning tail and galloping away with an anguished wail. Fluttershy races after her, leaving the two to face each other in the uneasy silence—until Snails pops up between them, that is. He has shed his jersey.*)

**Snails:** I’m still okay with playing, in case you were worried.

(*Which they are, very much so. Dissolve to Applejack and Rainbow pacing uneasily down the length of a full car.*)

**Rainbow:** I don’t get it. They’re naturals. Why wouldn’t they want to play anymore?

**Applejack:** Maybe us tellin’ them how much everypony was countin’ on them messed them up somehow.

**Rainbow:** (*smiling*) What? (*Both stop; she turns to face Applejack.*) That’s crazy talk. (*Close-up; she hovers.*) Having ponies depend on you is exactly what you need to focus and—

(*Cut to Applejack on the next line, now sitting on her haunches in the aisle.*)

**Applejack:** —get serious and play hard and—

**Rainbow:** —get ready to totally smash the competition and—

(*Both snap out of their building fervor as a sudden realization catches hold.*)

**Rainbow:** And…none of that sounds like Pinkie or Fluttershy, does it?

**Applejack:** (*sighing*) Guess not. We got so wrapped up in what’s important to us, we went and ruined what was fun about the game for them.

**Rainbow:** (*groaning loudly*) What do we do now?

(*Hooves go to chins in deep thought. Dissolve to a close-up of the door at one end of a car; it is shut, but swings open after a string of knocks rings out from the other side. The faces of Applejack and Rainbow are exposed around the sides of the frame; zoom out as they enter—this is the luggage car.*)

**Rainbow:** Pinkie? Fluttershy?

**Applejack:** We know you’re in here! (*Their perspective, panning slowly from one side to the other.*) We’ve looked in every other car on the train!

(*The sound of the next voice brings the camera back to center. The next three lines are muffled somewhat.*)

**Voice of Fluttershy:** Maybe you need to look again!

**Voice of Pinkie:** Yeah, because…we’re totally not in here! (*Back to Applejack and Rainbow, trading smiles and moving farther in.*)

**Voice of Fluttershy:** And we’re definitely not in here if you’re gonna try and make us play against Appleloosa!

(*Cut to the two fugitives, huddled together behind a stack of suitcases as Applejack and Rainbow reach them.*)

**Pinkie:** Or anypony else! (*Applejack clears her throat; they look up.*)

**Fluttershy:** Oh… (*They pull apart.*) …we’re sorry to let you down. But it’s better to do it now than during the game against Appleloosa. (*Pinkie nods sadly under this last.*)

**Rainbow:** You don’t have to play against Appleloosa.

**Fluttershy:** (*puzzled*) We don’t?

**Applejack:** Nope. We’re gonna take your place, so you don’t have to worry about that at all. (*Cut to Fluttershy and Pinkie, Applejack in the fore; all smile.*)

**Pinkie:** (*sighing with relief*) Why didn’t you say so?

**Rainbow:** (*from o.s.*) Buuuut… (*Cut to her and Applejack.*) …we can’t take on Braeburn and his team without any practice, so we need you to play just one more time.

**Applejack:** Against us.

(*The smiles on the yellow and pink faces turn to pensive little frowns. Dissolve to a long shot of a buckball field drawn on a patch of arid desert land and zoom in slowly. All four mares and Snails stand at midfield, and a pole-mounted basket lies on the ground off to one side. Applejack, Rainbow, and Snails have donned sleeveless blue jerseys, and Applejack has a ball under one hoof. Zoom in slowly.*)

**Applejack:** Now I know we mixed up the teams before, but since Dash and I really need the practice, we’ll play against the two of you.

(*Rainbow flies over to set the pole upright, and Snails floats a spare basket along as he ambles to the other side of the field.*)

**Fluttershy:** Oh, I don’t know how much practice you’ll get against us. We’ve been playing just awful.

**Rainbow:** Don’t worry about it. Applejack and I just need a little workout.

**Applejack:** Yep. You two just do your best.

**Pinkie:** (*brightly*) I can do that!

(*As Fluttershy flies into position to defend Snails’s goal, Applejack flips the ball high for a buck-off. The camera shifts briefly to point straight up at it, the view blacking out for an instant as it falls to fill the screen. Snap immediately to Applejack and Pinkie, the latter jittering badly in place and moaning out her trepidation as her eyes fix themselves overhead. The farmer pivots away from her and bucks the ball hard toward Fluttershy, who shivers and moans in midair before dodging to let the shot thunk into the levitated basket. Snails calmly brings the container down and sends the ball back to land between the two offensive players. Pinkie gasps and flinches away as it takes one short bounce to stop, but Applejack just clears her throat and gives it a leisurely kick. This time, Fluttershy goes into the same high-speed somersault she pulled off during the Act One tryouts and flings the ball back from her tail. Once she realizes her success, she lets off a giggly little sigh.*)

**Pinkie:** (*smiling*) Ooh!

(*Up go the hind legs for a buck that deprives Applejack of a chance at another offensive shot. The ball sails over Rainbow’s outstretched forelegs and drops into the pole basket for a goal; both she and Applejack gape at the resurgence of the amateurs’ skills.*)

**Fluttershy:** (*teasingly*) Looks like you two really *do* need practice.

(*A smile passes between them; cut to a ball rising in slow motion and tilt down to follow its descent as normal speed resumes. Pink hind legs re-launch it into a high arc, but this time Rainbow dives across just in time to catch it and throw to a beaming Applejack. The apple expert’s buck sends it up and across the field, where Fluttershy casually puts herself in position to snag it with her tail and flick it away. Pinkie skids up to midfield and bounces her rump up to send the ball over Applejack’s head; Rainbow makes another last-second catch and tosses it back. Once again Applejack takes a shot, but now Fluttershy is so perfectly placed for a tail catch that she does not have to shift even an inch. She does a 180-degree spin and hurls it back, sending it down so neatly that Pinkie has only to buck where she stands in order to get her shot off. Rainbow makes a jumping catch and pitches the ball down at the peak of her trajectory so Applejack can kick it up to Fluttershy. The yellow pegasus plies her tail to intercept, then whirls it like a helicopter rotor to build up speed for a lightning-fast return. As Applejack stares in total disbelief, Pinkie takes to the air in an upside-down leap and one-legged kick, which Rainbow blocks with only inches to spare. Applejack’s buck sends Fluttershy into an easygoing climb and tail block/return, which ricochets off the top of Pinkie’s head; Rainbow dives madly for it but fails to stop the shot before it scores.*)

(*The camera stays on the pole basket, cutting to frame it from different angles and distances as five more shots find their mark, accompanied by laughs and whoops from the o.s. Pinkie. From here, cut to Snails, half-slumped over the basket he has set down and snoring heartily as he naps, then pan back to midfield, where Fluttershy and Pinkie are laughing and passing the ball back and forth. It ends up balanced on the end of Pinkie’s forelock, now standing upright under its own power, as a thoroughly tired, scuffed, and disheveled Applejack and Rainbow cross slowly to them.*)

**Fluttershy:** If you need more practice, we can keep going.

**Pinkie:** Yeah! (*bouncing ball on forelock*) I can do this all day.

**Rainbow:** (*trying to catch her breath*) No thanks. Playing against you two is just as humiliating now as it was when we weren’t trying to show you how awesome you are.

**Pinkie:** (*letting ball and forelock drop*) Wait. What?

(*Pan to follow the ball’s rolling course over to the snoozing Snails, who wakes up just in time to levitate his basket.*)

**Snails:** Finally!

(*The vessel is flipped upside down and plunked over the ball.*)

**Applejack:** (*to Fluttershy/Pinkie*) You musta noticed how you aren’t bad anymore.

(*Blue-green and blue eyes contract to stunned points, then widen again as Pinkie smiles.*)

**Pinkie:** Oh, yeah! (*Fluttershy follows suit.*) Weird.

**Fluttershy:** But, um, why were we so terrible before?

**Rainbow:** I guess some ponies thrive on pressure and some ponies don’t. And even though we weren’t playing, we were treating you like us, which totally stressed you out.

(*Back to Fluttershy and Pinkie on the end of this.*)

**Applejack:** And that just sucked the fun right out of the game for you.

**Rainbow:** And having fun is what makes you really, really, *really* good!

**Fluttershy:** But…being good doesn’t matter if we’re too afraid of letting ponies down.

**Pinkie:** Yeah! What about all those ponies back in Ponyville counting on us to win?

**Applejack:** I’m sure folks want you to win, but not if worrying about it makes you miserable. Winning’s never worth that.

**Fluttershy:** But…how do we keep from worrying about it?

(*On the start of the next line, pan to Snails sitting by his overturned basket.*)

**Snails:** You could do what I do and not think about it. (*Pause.*) Seriously. I don’t think about anything…ever!

**Pinkie:** Hmm. (*smiling*) Works for me!

(*She stomps on the ball resting before her to send it up. Dissolve to a close-up of one rising to the top of its flight and falling again, then cut to a long shot of the area—a different buckball field, this one encircled by a perimeter wall with a horseshoe-shaped gate at the far side. Immediately beyond the wall are sections of packed bleacher seats and loudspeakers mounted on poles; the frontier skyline of Appleloosa is visible in the distance. The teams are on the field and suited up—Fluttershy, Pinkie, and Snails in blue for Ponyville; Applejack’s cousin Braeburn, a fierce-looking unicorn mare, and a heavily bulked-up pegasus mare in red for Appleloosa. Both unicorns have their baskets in the air.*)

(*Pinkie is first to strike on the buck-off, doing a partial backflip to get a rear hoof onto the ball. It sails past the Appleloosa defender and into Snails’s basket, drawing cheers from the crowd. On the start of the next line, spoken by the voice of an announcer stallion through the loudspeakers, cut to a scoreboard set up behind one section. Apple-marked placards show the score as 5-4, but a pegasus flips one over on the lower side to even the count.*)

**Announcer:** And with another bouncing goal from Pinkie Pie, the score is tied!

(*The blue-clad trio gathers, Pinkie panting slightly, and Applejack and Rainbow are quick to join them. The latter two are now cleaned up after their rigorous practice session.*)

**Rainbow:** You guys are amazing!

**Pinkie:** (*gasping for breath*) Braeburn is really good! (*Close-up of her and Fluttershy.*)

**Fluttershy:** So is that pegasus. Oh, I don’t know if we can win. (*Zoom out to frame Snails a few steps back.*)

**Snails:** You know what I would do? (*Pinkie sidles up with a sly smile…*)

**Pinkie:** Not think about it? (*…and zips away.*)

**Snails:** Not think a—

(*He cuts himself off sharply upon realizing that he has lost his audience. After a very long pause, his bewildered expression shifts into his usual dopey smile.*)

**Snails:** Oh! Yeah. That.

**Applejack:** (*to Fluttershy/Pinkie*) Huh. And as long as you’re havin’ fun, it doesn’t matter if you win or not.

(*This pep talk proves much more effective than the one she and Rainbow gave on the train in Act Two, and the two playing mares return to the field with a smile at the sound of a referee’s whistle. Cut to a close-up of this individual—an earth pony stallion—holding up the ball and zoom out to show Applejack and Braeburn facing off. He puts on his best game face, but she flips over with a giggle to stand on her head, bringing him around to an involuntary smile.*)

**Pinkie:** I think it’s more fun this way!

(*The ball is thrown up; Braeburn does an about-face in preparation to buck it, but his opposite number snaps her hind legs forward and gets herself upright almost in the same motion. It hurtles up and over his head.*)

**Announcer:** And Pinkie wins the buck-off!

(*The Appleloosa defender hurls herself up to swat the ball away.*)

**Announcer:** (*as Braeburn skids over to Pinkie*) But her shot’s rejected! Back to Braeburn—

(*This time he is first to the ball, sending it toward Fluttershy. During the next line, she catches it with her tail and flicks it back.*)

**Announcer:** —whose kick’s stopped by another Fluttershy save! (*Braeburn stares as Pinkie lifts her rump to bounce it high.*) Next point wins.

(*It gets briefly stuck amid the overdeveloped muscles on the pegasus mare’s chest, and one vigorous flex sends it back. Braeburn bucks it downfield on the next line.*)

**Announcer:** Lots of tense back-and-forth here.

(*But Fluttershy’s cheerful grin never wavers as she goes into her aerial somersault, catching the ball and returning it at ludicrous speed.*)

**Announcer:** Fluttershy unleashes her patented spin move… (*Braeburn gallops across the turf.*) …but Braeburn’s there to…

(*He skids to an abrupt halt as Pinkie tumbles past, bucking the ball skyward the instant it lands on her rear hooves.*)

**Announcer:** …no! It’s Pinkie with a somersault kick!

(*Which zings just past the defender’s reaching hoof to slam into the basket under Snails’s control. And the crowd goes wild.*)

**Announcer:** What a move!

(*The scorekeeper puts up the sixth point on the same side as before.*)

**Announcer:** And that’s the game! Ponyville wins!

(*The spectators break into a chant of “Ponyville! Ponyville!” as Fluttershy and Pinkie embrace joyfully and their coaches and Snails join in. They fall quiet for the next line, Pinkie hugging Snails and Rainbow delivering a happy little noogie to Fluttershy’s mane.*)

**Applejack:** Huh. Looks like you three made quite an impression.

(*Zoom out slightly as the home team crosses to them.*)

**Braeburn:** Well, cousin, I have to admit— (*Here comes Applejack…*) your Ponyville team played a pretty good game. (*…followed by a smug, hovering Rainbow.*)

**Rainbow:** Hah! Good game? We bucked the hooves right offa you!

**Braeburn:** (*removing his hat*) Yep, you sure as shootin’ did. I’m gonna have to get real serious about a strategy for our rematch. (*Close-up of Fluttershy and Pinkie.*)

**Fluttershy:** Oh, I wouldn’t get *too* serious.

**Pinkie:** Yeah! Everypony knows the secret to good buckball is just having fun.

(*On the end of this, zoom out to frame the whole Ponyville quintet gathering together. They break into a round of laughter, causing a perplexed Braeburn to glance toward his teammates, but he just gets two shrugs to indicate their equal degree of befuddlement. Cut to the winners, zooming out slowly, and fade to black.*)