

QUEST FOR GREATNESS

by Greg Shepard

QUICK REVIEW

Chapters 1 -6

Quest for Greatness is based on true stories. Coach Travis Drake prepares for his interview for a new head football coaching position at Hamilton High School. He contemplates interview strategies and reflects on his past coaching experiences. Coach Drake also ponders the effect a possible new move could have on his wife and children. He has just been offered the head football coaching job.

The other major character is Rick Steadman who is a junior at Hamilton. It is November and he wishes he had gone out for football. A lot of negative things are happening in Rick's life. He comes from a one parent family with a dad who also has problems. Rick is faltering in school and is beginning to submit to peer pressures with drinking problems. He lacks direction and is beginning to not care anymore.

Chapter 6 The Decision

"Dr. Kowalski, thanks! This is great news! Diana and I have already talked it over. We very much want to come as soon as possible, but I do have some questions," said Travis carefully.

"How can I help?" inquired Superintendent Kowalski.

Travis wanted to know about his three conditions that he had stated in the interview.

"What about a weight room?"

"I have a place in mind," said Dr. Kowalski.

"What about the money for the equipment?"

"I'll come up with half. Is that OK, Coach?"

"Then I can have a fundraiser?" asked Travis.

"I'm sure we can arrange that," agreed Dr. Kowalski.

"Now, how about the weight-training classes," asked Travis.

"Mr. Donaldson said he could arrange some curriculum changes next semester," promised Dr. Kowalski, "but just how will you spark an interest in these new classes?"

Travis knew the time to ask for things was in the beginning, so he let it "all hang out."

"We need to have a school assembly. We'll get everybody really fired up! It'll be like a new beginning. We will just forget all the negatives. It will be an opportunity for you to introduce me as your new coach," said Travis, hoping he did a good job convincing the superintendent.

"Is an assembly really necessary?" Dr. Kowalski could just see Mary Putnam's face and hear her saying in disbelief, "You're taking school time for an assembly to introduce a football coach."

"Yes sir, it is," said Travis assertively. "It will be very

special to the students and worthwhile to them educationally. I promise you."

"At least I can tell Mrs. Putnam that," thought Dr. Kowalski.

"OK, you got it, coach. Anything else?"

"Yes sir. Have the band there."

"Anything else?" said Dr. Kowalski, getting a little tired of the game.

"No sir. Just encourage everyone to be there, even the teachers. I will be there right after Thanksgiving and thank you, sir. I'm sure you know that I will give Hamilton total dedication."

That night Travis Drake's mind was a blur. He couldn't sleep. His mind was going crazy with all the possibilities his new job presented. He was on fire with enthusiasm! He was going to be a "Red Lion."

Chapter 7 Party

Rick Steadman was getting ready to party and to have a good time. A kegger! His head was buzzing with excitement. Becky would be there. He checked that out Friday. The way she smiled was pretty hot!

Saturday night in Hamilton. There wasn't a lot to do, so the Kegger was big time. Matt Sherman's parents were away for the weekend, so Eddie Troutman had organized this get together. A lot of people were supposed to be there.

"Rick, what the hell you doin' in there!" bellowed his father.

Rick had been in the bathroom for about an hour. Showering, shaving, blow-drying his hair and looking for zits. He felt proud of the fact that now he had to shave every three days. "I'm gettin' ready. I'm almost ready," he answered.

"Where you think you goin' boy," slurred Mr. Steadman who had started drinking at 5:00.

"Just out," said Rick trying to be mellow as he walked out of the bathroom.

"The hell you are boy. You're flunkin'! You're stayin' home. You are grounded."

Rick had never really defied his father before. His father worked hard, and Rick knew things hadn't been all that easy without mom. Still, life could be a bummer sometimes, especially when his father started drinking. Rick was already two inches taller and 10 pounds heavier than his old man. He decided it was time to push the issue.

"I turned in my assignments and went to class this week. My homework's all done. I'm goin'!" said Rick with a rebellious tone.

You could tell that Mr. Steadman was seeing red. It didn't take much to set him off.

"Why, you little bastard! Who do you think you're talkin' to, boy!"

Mr. Steadman charged.

Rick dodged him easily, shoving him aside. He didn't push his dad that hard, but Mr. Steadman slammed into the wall with his back and slumped to the floor. Billy, Bobby, and Sharon scampered to hide in their bedrooms. Rick turned and walked out the door.

"You worthless bum," screamed an enraged Mr. Steadman. "You'll get yours. You just wait. Damn you anyway!"

Rick didn't like to do things that way, but he was free – at least for the night. The brisk air felt good against his face. Rick had scraped together every penny he could find to give Eddie Troutman five bucks. He was looking forward to this, for it had been one tough week. Because he lived in a poor section, Rick had turned down rides to the party. He didn't want friends to know where he lived. Besides it was only a little over a mile to Matt Sherman's house, and he could walk it in less than 20 minutes.

"Hey Rick! How's it going big guy?" greeted Eddie Troutman, as Rick came to the Sherman's front door.

"OK, how 'bout you?", greeted Rick in return.

"Our keg's in the kitchen. Help yourself," encouraged Eddie.

"Thanks," said Rick.

As Rick strolled through the front door, his eyes darted around the room. He spotted Becky over in the corner. She was talking with some other girls. Rick decided to look cool, so he went to the kitchen to get a drink.

Buddy, Jim, Jeff and TJ were crowded around the keg.

"Hey guys," nodded Rick. TJ responded, "Hey, what's happenin'." The others greeted Rick warmly.

"Want a glass?" asked Buddy.

Rick grinned and said, "Gimme a double."

"All right," they all answered.

Rick chugged it down quickly and bent down to pour himself another. It was time for Becky now, and Rick, with drink in hand, went back to find her.

"Hi, Becky," said Rick shyly.

"Hi Rick. It's good to see you. How ya doin'?" said Becky smiling.

"Fine. How 'bout you?" said Rick looking down at his shoes.

Becky liked that bit of shyness in Rick. She was a good student and was in almost every activity the school offered. She was also the Junior Class Secretary. Becky was well liked by everyone and seemed to be well adjusted.

"Can I get you a beer?" asked Rick politely.

"No thanks Rick, I've got a coke," Becky answered.

Rick looked a little embarrassed but said, "Do you want to go sit down?"

"Sure Rick."

They found a place on the sofa in the Sherman's family room. Things were getting crowded and the music was getting louder. Things were really rolling as he talked with Becky. "Scuse me for a minute. I'll be right back," said Rick.

Rick hustled to the kitchen and chugged down two more beers and came back to Becky with another. His head

was buzzing, and he felt good, really good.

However, Becky noticed that Rick was getting a little high. She did not really like it.

"C'mon Becky," said Rick as he pulled on her arm. He led her into an adjoining bedroom. She hesitated, then went with Rick. They sat quietly on the bed. Rick put his arm around Becky.

"Right now, Becky, you're about the only good thing in my life."

Becky was startled at that statement, and Rick couldn't believe he had said something like that.

Becky smiled slightly and said, "What do you mean?"

"This whole year has been a bummer. School's goin' bad, and my father's always on my case. It seems like no matter how hard I try with my family, it isn't enough. I screwed up, too, by not going out for football."

"Yeah, I wondered about that, Rick. You were really good last year," said Becky affectionately as she placed her hand on his hand. "You know, Rick, what about if we studied together? I could help you, that is, if you want."

"That'd be great!" responded Rick with a grin.

He leaned forward. Their eyes met. Their lips were drawn to each other.

"Hey Steadman!" The door flew open just before their lips touched.

"We got a contest!"

Everyone cheered!

Reluctantly, Becky and Rick came into the family room. Buddy was challenging anyone who dared to go against him to a chugging contest.

Troutman was there. This would really liven things up.

"Hey Steadman. Why don't you go against Buddy?" challenged Troutman.

Rick looked at Becky and Becky looked down. For the first time in months, Rick didn't really want to drink.

"Go for it Rick!" yelled another.

Then a group of guys pulled Rick from Becky to the center of the room.

"Go! Go! Go! Go!" Everybody was chanting.

Ten glasses were set out for Buddy and ten for Rick.

The rules were set by Troutman.

"It's really simple! First one to chug all ten is the winner!" screamed Troutman to the wild mob.

"Go!"

The contest was on. Buddy was big. He weighed about 220 pounds and was overweight. Rick didn't like to get beaten at anything. He took the challenge. After 10 minutes, it was tied five to five. From then on the pace slowed considerably, but Rick hung in there. After 20 minutes Buddy was on his ninth glass while Rick was only halfway through his eighth. Rick glared at Buddy. The competitive drive was still alive. The crowd roared and began to chant.

"Rick! Rick! Rick! Rick!"

Rick decided right then that he had to win.

He chugged and chugged. Five minutes later, Rick finished his 10th. Buddy still had a quarter of a glass left. The crowd of students cheered. Rick didn't feel so hot. He was wondering why he hadn't stayed with Becky. Things were just starting to fall together. She was so sweet. She was everything good he had ever wanted. He looked for

Continued from Page 41

her in the crowded room. Rick could tell that she was going to leave. She was backing away with several of her friends. Becky wanted to get away before things got out of hand. She had seen Keggers get wild before, and she didn't like it.

Rick staggered toward Becky and said in a garbled voice, "Where ya goin', Becky?"

Just as he said those words, he fell down and couldn't get up. Everything was spinning. He tried to crawl to Becky. She turned and began to walk towards the door. As Rick crawled towards her, the full impact of the fast drinking hit him hard. Becky had never seen anybody puke like that before! Seeing Rick like that was more than she could take. She ran out the door as she burst into tears. Rick hadn't noticed. He lay unconscious on the floor with his face in the puke.

The next morning Rick lay in bed. What a night, but somehow he had made it home and cleaned himself up. It must have been noon when he came to! "Oh God," he thought. "My head! My stomach! My pride! I was crawling on the floor to Becky. Becky, what about Becky. She is the only person I wanted to impress; but instead, I made an ass out of myself," lamented Rick. "She'll never speak to me again." He became more depressed than ever. "Maybe I should just drop out," he thought as he drifted back to sleep.

Chapter 8 The First Day

After a long Thanksgiving weekend, Coach Drake had driven to Hamilton late Sunday night. Sam Carter, Booster Club President, had made arrangements for Travis to stay in an apartment. This was the Booster Club's way of saying "Welcome." Mr. Carter had told Travis that he was welcome to stay as long as he wanted – free of charge – until he found a home to his liking in Hamilton.

Travis smiled to himself. "It's amazing what people will do when you're undefeated." However, he was really grateful as it would give him a chance to get settled with a minimum of hassles. He could really go to work with an all-out intensity. Travis felt bad about being away from his family, but he would see them on the weekends. Besides, it was only about four weeks until Christmas; and they surely would find a home by then. The kids could start fresh in the Hamilton School District in January. "It'll be OK; yes sir, it'll be OK," he said as he contemplated his first day.

Coach Drake sat down to a bowl of cereal and some juice. It was one hour before school started, but he was already dressed. Travis had bought some red coaches pants, and he already owned a white coaches shirt and white coaches shoes. He had his pencil and paper and was ready to assemble his "Do It" list.

The "Do It" list was an essential part of Coach Drake's efficiency. He would list the important tasks for the day, and then he would place a check mark by each item when it was completed. Checking off an important task made him feel good. It gave him a feeling of accomplishment. "So much to do, and so little time to do it," he thought to

himself. He finished his list and then reviewed his handiwork.

DO IT LIST – NOVEMBER 28

- 1) Meet with all football players for 30 minutes.
- 2) See the counselor about curriculum changes.
- 3) See Mr. Donaldson about:
 - a. curriculum changes
 - b. the assembly
 - c. the weight room
 - d. the weight equipment
 - e. assistants
 - f. meeting with football players
 - g. football equipment
 - h. the Lift-A-Thon
- 4) See Bernie Alderwood about the schedule.
- 5) See Dr. Kowalski about his half of the weight room money.
- 6) Invite potential assistants to football meeting.

Then he wrote in big capital letters the following words below his "Do It" list:

BE POSITIVE – BE A GREAT EXAMPLE!!!

He took one final look at last year's annual that Sam Carter had given him. Travis had tried to memorize as many names as possible, especially the secretaries. He knew that they were the key. The apartment was only a half a block from school, so he decided to walk. He took a deep breath and began his first walk to Hamilton High School.

Travis was a little early, but some students and a few teachers were already working on what were apparently early activities. "That was good," he thought. Two boys were talking by the front steps to the main entrance. As Travis approached briskly, he nodded and said, "Hi, men!" Travis had a firm, authoritative voice, so it did get their attention, especially with that unusual greeting. Travis had always said "Hi, men" to groups of boys. He laughed to himself when he thought of what he said after he learned their names.

One of the boys he addressed said, "Who's that? He's a big guy! Look at those arms." Travis did not think of himself as big, but maybe he was to high school kids. Travis was just under six feet tall, but he was stocky and muscular. He had lifted very heavy weights for years and weighed over 200 pounds, and he did have big arms.

Travis opened the door and headed for the main office. Coach Drake's eyes scanned the office. Mrs. Atkinson was busy at her desk. He recognized her immediately from the yearbook.

"Hello, Mrs. Atkinson," Travis greeted her with a smile.

Mrs. Atkinson looked up abruptly at the distinct, new voice and returned his smile.

"Well, hello. You must be our new football coach. Welcome to Hamilton, Coach Drake! How did you know my name?"

One thing Travis had learned over the years was that secretaries and custodians are critical. They could really help you if they liked you. Or they could make life difficult if you were on their bad side.

MORE IN NEXT ISSUE!