

QUEST FOR GREATNESS

Continuing Story by Greg Shepard — More Next Issue

QUICK REVIEW

Chapters 1-8

Quest for Greatness is based on true stories. Travis Drake has just been hired as the new head football coach at Hamilton High School. Hamilton has had a history of losing seasons but the challenge was exciting for Coach Drake. He is preparing for his first meeting with his players. Coach Drake contemplates on how to deal with losing attitudes and poor self-concepts.

The other major character is Rick Steadman who is a junior at Hamilton. It is late November and he wishes he had gone out for football this past season. 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 heavy drinking parties. He lacks direction and is beginning to not care anymore. However, the one good thing in Rick's life is his girlfriend, Becky. She's encouraged him to attend Coach Drake's first meeting.

CHAPTER 9 – The Meeting

"Mrs Atkinson, I'm runnin' late," said Coach Drake slightly out of breath as he came into the main office. "Can I run off some copies of my football questionnaire? I only need about a hundred."

Mrs. Atkinson got up from her desk and motioned for Travis to follow her and said, "Come with me coach. I'll show you our copy machine. It's right around the corner. Just sign your name and note how many copies you run on this form. Also, put down your department, which is physical education."

"Thanks, Mrs. Atkinson. By the way, where can I get some pencils?"

"I'll see if I can't round some up," she said.

FOOTBALL QUESTIONNAIRE

NAME: HEIGHT: WEIGHT: PHONE:

YEAR IN SCHOOL: ADDRESS: PLAYING EXPERIENCE:

OFFENSE POSITION: DEFENSE POSITION:

SPECIALTIES: OTHER SPORTS YOU PLAY:

MYSPEED IS	Very Good	Above Average
(Circle One)	Average	Below Average

MYSTRENGTH IS	Very Good	Above Average
(Circle One)	Average	Below Average

I SEE MYSELF AS A	Varsity Starter	Substitute
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OUR TEAM SHOULD WIN	All our Games	6 Games	3 Games
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IS IT POSSIBLE FOR HAMILTON TO WIN THE STATE CHAMPIONSHIP NEXT SEASON?

YES	NO
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BEGIN A NEW ERA!	LET'S GO FOR IT!
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Coach Drake wondered about the response of the

players as the copier did its job. He was very interested to see how they would circle some of the questions. He guessed the younger players would be more positive than the veterans.

"I could only find twenty-five, Coach," said Mrs. Atkinson coming back with the pencils.

"That'll do just fine. I sure do appreciate it," said Coach Drake.

As Travis came into the gym, several players were already waiting.

"Hi, men. What are your names?"

"Kirby," "Brad," "Emile."

"Would you men go in the exercise room and bring out the squat rack, one olympic bar with collars, six 45-pound plates, and two 35-pound plates. I also need that black box sitting just on the inside of the door and the portable chalkboard," Coach Drake asked almost like an order.

Coach Drake handed them the questionnaire and a pencil as the prospects came into the gym. It seemed unduly quiet. Coach Drake thought perhaps they were really wondering what was going to happen and how they should answer the questions. It was already twelve minutes into the meeting time.

Rick Steadman sat quietly in the corner of the gym. He thought he was 6'1" and weighed 165 pounds. "I probably weigh 170 with my clothes on," thought Rick as he put down the higher number. "Let's see. I have Sophomore experience; I'd like to play running back; I don't know on defense; I return punts and kick-offs; I play baseball," answered Rick on paper. Now the next questions were difficult. As a Sophomore, he had been the fastest on the team; but was his speed very good? He didn't want to put down very good and then be timed by the new coach in a slow time. That would look bad. As to the strength question, Rick didn't have a clue. After mulling things over in his mind, Rick put "very good speed" and "average strength."

As for seeing himself as a starter, he knew he probably could have been a starter last season – he circled "varsity starter." The next question was answered optimistically by Rick – He circled "6 games." It had been quite a number of years since Hamilton had a winning season. Maybe this next year they could win six and have a winning year.

The last question was really something. Rick had never heard of State Championship talk before at Hamilton. Possible? Sure, he guessed it was possible – like one chance in a million. Nevertheless, Rick circled "Yes." He looked up and saw most of the others had completed their questionnaires. Rick got up and handed Coach Drake his questionnaire. For a second their eyes met as Travis nodded to Rick and said, "Thanks."

Travis had all the questionnaires from the fifty-five potential football players. He was pleased to see all the assistant coaches. Jerry Littlewood was the only one not there.

Continued on Page 59

Travis was pleasantly surprised to see big John Myers. He had really hoped that John would be interested at least enough to come to the meeting.

"Men," he stated in a firm coach's voice, "I want everybody in the first five rows." Coach Drake had learned from experience to get players close together in order to get their utmost attention. He stood about five feet in front of them with his hands on his hips and looked them square in the eyes. The gym was absolutely quiet.

"Men. What do you want to accomplish next season?" Coach Drake asked, not wavering. There was silence. "Men, I've been coaching football for fifteen years, and I suspect I'll be coaching for many years to come. But next year is your year. And for you seniors, next year will be your last. What do you want to accomplish next season?" continued Coach Drake trying to probe deep within each person.

Jeff timidly raised a hand and said, "You mean like how many games do we want to win?"

"Well Coach," Jeff offered, "We haven't done much in the past, so I guess we'd all like to have a winning season. Yeh Coach," he began to smile, "We'd all like to go out with a winning record."

Travis wrote "Winning Record" on the chalk board followed by a "6-4" in parenthesis.

Then Emile spoke up. "I don't know about the other guys, but I'm sick of losing. I'd like to be Conference Champs or maybe even . . ." Emile hesitated in midsentence as if embarrassed to continue. "State Champs," Travis interjected after the seemingly long pause.

"Yes, Coach, State Champs," repeated Emile with his voice louder.

Travis wrote "Conference Champs" underneath "Winning Record (6-4)" and below that "State Champs."

"Men, we should be united on what we want. What happens the rest of the year will depend on the decision that you make today. I have one plan of action for a winning record, another for a Conference Championship, and yet another for a State Championship. I'd like all of next year's Seniors to come down and talk it over for a couple of minutes," requested Coach Drake.

Seventeen guys came down and assembled in a circle. Everyone was talking at once.

Coach Drake addressed the players in the bleachers. "Whatever these Seniors decide, will you support them?" The "yes sir" sounded like it had been rehearsed. Travis' grin was spontaneous.

"Have you decided yet?" Coach Drake asked the Seniors.

Buddy stepped forward. "We want to win the State Championship." His statement was greeted with a lot of hollering, a lot of "all rights" and a lot of "high fives" as the Seniors-to-be returned to their seats.

"Men, I'm proud of you. That's the one I picked too. We have taken a big step. Now we have a dream, but dreams don't come true without work. And now the work must begin – a lot of hard work, a lot of dedication, and a lot of commitment. That is if you're really serious. Are you?" Again the boys shouted "yea!" "Yes sir!" and other forms of affirmation. "Then what are some things we need

to do or be to be State Champions?" countered Travis.

Kirby raised his hand and said, "Strength. We need to be stronger. We got pushed all over the field this year." Coach Drake smiled as he wrote "Stronger" on the chalkboard and said, "And indeed you shall get stronger."

Then hands started going up all over, and Coach Drake wrote their suggestions as "key words" on the board:

"Stronger!" "Diet!" "Speed – Faster!"

"Agility!" "Gain weight – get bigger!" "Confidence!" "Flexibility!"

Coach Drake remarked, "Good job. However, one very important thing is missing – perhaps the most important of all. What is it? The pause seemed forever. Travis was content to wait. It had to be their idea.

Finally, TJ raised his hand. "How 'bout practice Coach."

"That's it!" Travis shouted enthusiastically. "What's your name?"

"TJ sir – TJ Carter."

"Well, that's great TJ. Let's all hear it for TJ and practice," said Coach Drake.

Everyone started clapping.

Coach Drake stopped them and asked, "How many think teamwork's important?" Everyone raised his hand. From now on, we're going to start a Hamilton Lion tradition by clapping three times in unison," continued Coach Drake with his eyes flashing, "Like this." Clap – clap – clap.

"Let's try it. Let's all hear it for TJ." In unison, sixty people clapped their hands three times. The sound and the spirit were great.

Travis stood before them once again and began, "Men, I'm excited to be here. We have got a lot of great things going for us. We have a beautiful town, a nice school, an incredible football field, and a lot of people who believe in us and want to help. If you're serious about winning the State Championship, I'll work my butt off for you guys. I'll give 100% dedication and total commitment. My house will be your house, and my refrigerator will be your refrigerator." Then Travis paused and looked at Buddy's stomach. Buddy weighed a good 220 pounds. "With the possible exception of this man here," smiled Travis as he put his hand on Buddy's shoulder.

Everybody laughed. The humor seemed to be just the right amount and did not distract from what Travis wanted to happen.

Travis continued, "Men, we've got a wimpy weight room, but we need the best. We can have the best weight room in the state. You know the big storage area at the lower level? It's going to take a lot of work, but that's going to be our new weight room. By the time we're through with it, it will be the best weight room in the state. Dr. Kowalski, our Superintendent, has already committed ten thousand dollars for this project. We need to raise another ten thousand. We can do it over the next few months by selling 10,000 candy bars, or we can raise ten thousand dollars in one night with a lift-a-thon. How many want to sell candy bars for the rest of your lives? Not a hand went up. How many want a lift-a-thon?"

"Now where's Steadman? Where's Rick Steadman?" barked Coach Drake. Rick was startled. He looked up with amazement; but before he could even wonder what was

happening, Coach Drake shouted, "Come on down Rick; come on down!"

Coach Drake grinned, and other guys started laughing as the tension was broken. Rick made his way down to the gym floor and stood kind of half smiling in front of Coach Drake.

Travis put a hand up in the air, and everyone instinctively knew that meant to be quiet. Travis stepped closer to Rick and faced the group with his right hand on Rick's upper right shoulder just at the base of the neck.

"I've been told, Rick, that you were a darn good back as a Sophomore," stated Coach Drake. Rick began blushing just a bit as he looked down at his feet. Travis continued, "I'm really glad you came to the meeting Rick." Rick's eyes darted up to look at Coach Drake.

"Now, I was wondering if you could help me demonstrate the box squat. You're here because I'm counting on you to be a leader," said Coach Drake, looking intently at Rick.

"I've never squatted before Coach," apologized Rick.

Coach Drake smiled and said, "That's all right; I'm going to teach you. Get in an athletic stance – like you're going to rebound a basketball or like a linebacker." Coach Drake faced Rick and got in an athletic stance.

"Like this!" said Coach Drake with a loud voice so that everyone could hear. "Get your butt back, lock the lower back in tight, spread your chest, bend down, look straight ahead, and get your hands in front. Don't touch your knees! That's a sign of weakness!"

As Travis gave these instructions, he molded Rick into the correct position.

"There, that's good. Now, come over to the squat rack. We have 235 pounds on the bar. That's what we warm up with from now on at Hamilton. Just get under the bar like this and place the bar on your shoulders, not on your neck. Take the weight off the rack, look at a point straight ahead, and take a deep breath as you squat down. Make sure you keep in a good athletic position as you sit down lightly on the box. Then drive upward explosively on your toes as you let the air out."

All the time Coach Drake was giving these instructions, he was demonstrating. Coach Drake did the weight easily five times. As he racked the bar, Travis turned to Rick and said, "Now it's your turn. Get a belt."

Rick reached for a brown leather belt, which was four inches wide. He cinched it up tight, just as Coach Drake had done. Everyone was buzzing with anticipation and watched Rick prepare for a new experience. Coach Drake talked Rick through every step, and Rick did exactly as he was told. Coach Drake stood behind Rick and placed two hands on the bar. Coach Drake said so all could hear, "This is how you spot a lifter."

Rick settled down a bit on the box and exploded upward. Rick was amazed at how light it felt. It was easy! Five reps went like a piece of cake!

"Let's hear it for Rick."

Everyone clapped three times in unison.

It had been a long, long time since Rick had something as good as this happen. "It feels good, real good," thought

Rick as he wondered what was next.

"Let's put another 45 pounds on each end of the bar," urged Coach Drake. "That'll make 325 pounds for Rick's last warm up." Everyone buzzed as if in unison, "Warm up – 325 pounds for a warm up? You gotta be kidding!"

However, Rick was already cinching up his belt. He was ready to go. The 235 pounds had been light once he had learned the technique. He was sure he could do it.

"OK, Buddy and Jim. I want each of you to grab the bar lightly at each end like this. If he gets pinned, we'll all help him up together. When he finishes five reps, you'll help Rick back to the rack. Be sure not to lift unless he gets pinned. Just guide him gently," instructed Coach Drake.

Rick grabbed the bar for his second set. This time with more confidence and more aggressiveness.

325 pounds was noticeably harder, but Rick felt like he still had some power to spare. Apparently, so did Coach Drake as he ordered Buddy and Jim to put on two more 35-pound plates.

"We've got 395 pounds on the bar," shouted Coach Drake to everyone as he motioned for Rick to come over. Coach Drake put up his hand, which by now everyone knew meant quiet.

Coach Drake had one eye on Rick and one eye on the bleachers while he spoke.

"Rick, how many games do we play next year?" asked Coach Drake intently.

"I think we play ten," said Rick uneasily. A brief silence followed.

"How about the play-offs?" Coach Drake questioned.

"Oh yeh," responded Rick like he'd just been hit with a revelation.

"Well Rick, we have four play-off games in the State Championship. Ten season games plus four play-off games make a total of fourteen games. I want you to plan on 14, I want you to think about 14, and I want you to dream about 14. Right now, Rick Steadman is going to demonstrate exactly what fourteen means," stated Coach Drake, his voice booming.

Travis wasn't sure about this. A lot depended on Rick and on how he would physically and mentally respond. From the way Rick did 325, Travis felt it looked like he had a shot at it. After what Coach Miller had said about Rick, Travis felt it was important for the team and for Rick that things start off with a bang. Travis had quickly looked at Rick earlier in the meeting and had decided that Steadman had a fairly sturdy frame. Travis was mentally keeping his fingers crossed.

"Here's what we're going to do men," ordered Coach Drake. "Rick is going to squat this thing fourteen times." He pointed to the bar with 395 pounds. "Each rep that he does will represent one of our games next year. If he can only do one, that means only one victory next season. But I picked Rick to do this because I feel that he has a special spirit about him. I feel that in the face of great odds, Rick Steadman will not quit – he will go until he drops. But he needs help. I want everyone to come down here in front of the squat rack. We are all going to start clapping in unison until he completes the fourteen reps. As he begins to come up on the first rep, I want everyone to yell one, and count each rep until we get him to fourteen."