

QUEST FOR GREATNESS

by Greg Shepard

QUICK REVIEW

Chapters 1-7

Quest for Greatness is based on true stories. Coach Travis Drake is in his first day as the new head football coach at Hamilton High School. He is meeting with the principal, Mr. Donaldson.

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 8 The First Day

"Hello, Mr. Donaldson. You got a minute?" asked Travis from the half-opened door.

Mr. Donaldson got up and cordially greeted Travis. He motioned his new coach to a chair.

"It's good to see you, Coach. All set for your first day? How can I help?"

Travis noted that Mr. Donaldson was again dressed impeccably and was obviously a professional. He had two nice chairs set at right angles to each other for one-on-one conversations. Mr. Donaldson had learned in graduate school that a desk between people could be intimidating. Travis appreciated his warm welcome thus far.

"Well, Mr. Donaldson," started Coach Drake, "things are just super! Mr. Carter put me up in a nice apartment close to the school, and everyone has really been nice. I know I am going to like it here. Anyway, I need to discuss several things with you." Travis looked him square in the eye.

"Shoot," said Mr. Donaldson. His legs were crossed with his fingers interlocked across his knee.

"As you know, I feel strongly about weight training. It is a great activity, and it is something our students can profit from for a lifetime. The facility I have in mind might also be used by our community. I'd like to make my weight-training and conditioning classes available to all physical education students and to athletes in all sports. This would require some scheduling and curriculum changes," explained Coach Drake. "Whom do I see about these changes?"

Mr. Donaldson had been expecting Coach Drake and was prepared.

24 "You need to see Mr. Fred Maddox. He is our counselor

in charge of curriculum changes. He has just put all schedules on our new computer system. He said he can make the changes, but he was wondering just how you were going to get students to sign up."

Travis was right. On his "Do It" list, he had put counselor for curriculum changes. "Pretty insightful," he quickly thought.

"I'm glad you asked that," smiled Travis. "The main purpose of the assembly is to excite students about weight training. It is also one of the reasons for meeting with the football players today."

Mr. Donaldson squeezed his hands a little tighter. Even though he was trying to display great control and trying to stay calm, his knuckles were turning a little whiter.

"Dr. Kowalski and I have discussed the assembly, and it is set for third period on Wednesday, Band included I might add," answered Mr. Donaldson. "But what is this about meeting with football players?"

Coach Drake responded, "It's an extremely important meeting with them today. I want them to know as soon as possible who I am. I only need about 30 minutes. It will really help our football program. Besides, they are probably anxious to know a little about their new football coach."

"Well, you're right, of course," replied Mr. Donaldson. "I'll do it just this once. I'll let the players out of their last period class 15 minutes early to meet you in the gym. That way football players who also participate in wrestling and basketball can still make their afternoon practice."

Coach Drake said, "That's great! Could you also announce that anyone who is interested should attend?"

"Well, I don't know. Maybe some will show up just to get out of class," thought Mr. Donaldson outloud.

"Maybe. I'll take care of that in the first minute, but we need to have bodies. We need a lot of them if we're going to turn the program around," reasoned Coach Drake convincingly.

"Mrs. Atkinson," called Mr. Donaldson.

"Yes, Mr. Donaldson."

"Please add this to the morning announcements: Our new football coach, Travis Drake, would like to meet in the gym with all football players and with anyone else who is interested in trying out for the team. Teachers, please excuse those students the last 15 minutes of last period. The meeting will last 30 minutes."

Then he turned back to Coach Drake. "Anything else?"

"Yes sir, there is," said Travis. "Have you decided where we can put the weight room, and when I can start ordering equipment?"

"You can use the big storage room on the lower level by the gym. It's full of old chairs and tables - it's a real mess. But it's the only room available. As far as ordering

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equipment, you'll need to do that through the superintendent's office," answered Mr. Donaldson.

"Can I get the keys today to all the football equipment?" continued Coach Drake.

"Sure thing, no problem."

"Dr. Kowalski has given his permission to hold a fundraiser. I'd like to hold it two weeks from tonight. Is that date clear?" asked a persistent Coach Drake.

"Boy, you do work fast. Let me see," said Mr. Donaldson patiently. Mr. Donaldson examined the school's activity calendar. "Where do you want to hold it?"

"The gym would be the best place," Coach Drake said.

"Usually our calendar is very full, but Mondays are the lightest. And, yes, the gym is free. I'll mark you down," said Mr. Donaldson.

"I know you're busy, Mr. Donaldson, but I have one last question. What about assistants? Who has had coaching experience? I need at least three assistants on the varsity and two more for the sophomore team," concluded Coach Drake.

"Well now, let me think," said Mr. Donaldson as he squeezed his right eyebrow together. "You've got Tom Miller, who will be teaching boys physical education with you. You and he are both enthusiastic. I think you'll hit it off just fine. Lou Tanselli is the head sophomore coach. Brian McMasters and Jerry Littlewood coached on the varsity last season. You should talk to them. The only other teacher who has had experience is John Myers, but he hasn't coached for over ten years."

Coach Drake stood up and remarked, "Mr. Donaldson, you have been a great help. You're the best principal I've ever worked with, and I thank you for being so helpful."

Coach Drake extended his hand and Mr. Donaldson shook it, then Travis was on his way. Travis hoped that he hadn't laid it on too thick at the end, but he was amazed at how cooperative Mr. Donaldson had been.

"Well, what do you think?" quizzed Mrs. Atkinson as she popped her head through the door.

"All I can say is we've got somebody who is going to make things happen fast. I just hope it's all good," answered Mr. Donaldson. "He surely doesn't waste any time."

But Principal Donaldson silently wondered, "Was this new fireball going to upset things beyond his control. Would he create more work for the counselors, more tension among the teachers, and more problems for him as principal and for his school?" He would keep a wary eye on this Travis Drake. That was for sure!

Rick Steadman slumped in his chair during first period. He had made it to school today with a minimum of hassles. His brothers and sister were doing pretty well under the circumstances. All in all, he was quite proud of them. "I'm taking care of them, and they're doing better than I am," he thought as the morning announcements began.

He tuned out the announcements and thought about Becky. What was he going to do when he saw her? What could he say? His mind raced back to the kegger. What an ass he had made of himself. He was so deep in thought, that he didn't hear the announcement about the football meeting.

"Hey, Rick! You goin' to the meeting?" asked Tim Adams, a junior letterman who sat beside Rick.

"What meeting?"

The meeting in the gym with the new coach. You can get out the last 15 minutes of last period," replied Tim.

"Aw, he won't be interested in a guy who didn't play last season," said Rick still thinking about Becky.

"Sure he will. He wants to see anybody who is interested, not just lettermen," answered Tim encouragingly.

Rick stared straight ahead and then smiled slightly at Tim and said, "Well maybe. Thanks, Tim."

Travis was about to attack another task on his "Do It" list. He was going to see Mr. Maddox about curriculum changes. As he approached his office, the door was open and a bald, middle-aged man sat at his desk reading the morning paper and drinking a cup of coffee.

Coach Drake spoke, "Mr. Maddox, I'm Travis Drake, the new football coach." Mr. Maddox jumped up with a big smile, laughing, "Glory be! Come on in. It's great to have you here. Dr. Donaldson warned me - ahem, make that told me - you'd be coming to discuss curriculum changes, but I'm still in the dark. What have you got up your sleeve, young fella?"

Travis laughed.

"Well Fred," began Coach Drake, "I want to transfer some students from a regular physical education class to a weight-training class. We're going to have a new weight room with new equipment. To change negative attitudes, we have to change self-concepts. When the kids see themselves getting bigger, faster, and stronger and when they see themselves jumping higher and farther, they will start thinking positively about themselves and their education. We can change their attitudes very quickly when we change their self concepts. I want to make this opportunity available to all students at Hamilton High. I know we have to monitor academic load and graduation requirements for those who want to enter this new class."

"Glory be! How many students will you have in your class?" said Maddox as he turned on his computer.

"Thirty-six per class."

"What do you mean per class? How many classes do you plan on having?" questioned Maddox, as his voice was getting noticeably higher.

"Why Fred, just one - one per period that is."

"Glory be! Glory be! Ain't you an optimistic cuss!" said Maddox, with his voice cracking and laughing at the same time.

"My planning hour is fourth period," reminded Coach Drake. "You've been a big help. Thanks a bunch, Fred, and it was nice meeting you."

"Glory be. Glory be," thought Maddox, as Travis walked out into the hall. He checked off another task and enjoyed that 'good feeling' again.

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Rick was still feeling bad about the kegger and thinking about Becky as he walked down the hall. He noticed her standing by her locker. He had been waiting for the right time to approach her. The trouble was, the right moment didn't seem to exist. Rick finally mustered enough courage to talk to her. Becky's back was turned when she heard the words, "I'm sorry." When she turned around, Rick was already walking away with his head down – his whole body seemed to say, "I'm a total waste."

"Rick, wait!" she hollered as she ran after him. "Thanks for saying that. You know, Rick, that was a pretty stupid thing you did, and I want you to know it hurt me to see you like that. But I also know how hard it must be for you to admit you were wrong."

"Yes I know it was dumb, and I am sorry. You don't know how sorry I am. I've hurt a lot of people lately. I don't mean to. I just don't have control of my life like I want to. I don't ever want to hurt you again."

"Apology accepted," said Becky with that beautiful smile. "But now I've got to run to class. Meet me later; I've got plans for us."

Rick leaned against the locker as Becky's figure dimmed from view down the hall. He felt relieved; but at the same time, his heart was pounding and his gut wrenched. She was some girl. He was jolted back to reality by the tardy bell and raced for class.

Travis made his way down the hall. "Where is room 15?" he mumbled to himself. "Ah, there it is."

"Bernie, how goes the battle?" said Travis as he came into the athletic director's office.

"Not bad, how bout yourself?" said Bernie, returning the greeting.

"Great Bernie, just great. Do you have next year's schedule made up yet?" asked Coach Drake.

Bernie answered, "Well, just about. The seven league games are all set. Your three non-league games are all set, except for game seven. Do you have a preference?"

"Well, yes. I want an easy game. I want a victory to build confidence. Also, I want the best possible chance to avoid injuries," reasoned Coach Drake.

"I'll see what I can do. I can't promise anything, but I do have an idea or two," responded Bernie.

"Thanks a bunch, Bernie. Keep me posted," said Coach Drake as he left quickly for his next destination. He checked off another task on his "Do It" list. And once again, he had that good feeling. He still had things to do, but the cold-cereal breakfast was wearing thin, and so lunch was mentally added to his "Do It" list.

Since Hamilton had a closed campus, most of the students were in the cafeteria. About half brought their lunches while the other half ate cafeteria food. Coach Drake made it a point to be there. He wanted to make himself known to the students and to find football players.

"Hi, men," said Coach Drake to a group of guys standing in line. "You know about the football meeting? I'm Coach Drake. If you're at all interested, I'd love to have you come. You wanna be a Stallion don't you?" Coach

Drake smiled and laughed as he shook hands and asked students their names. All in all he had a great time with the students around him.

Rick Steadman was sitting with Becky while Coach Drake was joking with the guys. He didn't know why, but he was drawn to him. There was something magnetic about him. It was the first time that Rick and Becky had been together for lunch.

Becky asked Rick, "Why don't you go to the meeting and see about getting back into sports? Coach Drake seems like an enthusiastic coach, and you were so good last year."

"I'm not sure," said Rick hesitantly.

"Aw, c'mon Rick," she said as she nudged him a little. "You know you want to. I can wait for you, and afterwards we could study together. I told you I had plans for us. Well, they include our studying together."

For the first time in a long time, Rick felt like maybe he could get back on track. Things with Becky were great. And now he had a fresh start at football with Coach Drake and at his classes with Becky.

"OK, Becky, you sweet talker, you," he said as he laughed. Then he got serious and reached under the table and gently squeezed her hand. A tear almost welled up in his eye as he whispered, "Thanks, Becky. You don't know what you've done for me – and to me."

Coach Drake made it a point to see each possible assistant coach: Tom Miller, Lou Tanselli, Brian McMasters, Jerry Littlewood, and John Myers. He wanted to introduce himself and to invite them to the afternoon football meeting. Coach Drake thought if they didn't show up, they probably didn't want to be an assistant coach at Hamilton. If they did show up, he would watch their reactions very carefully. This meeting would help him evaluate his future staff. When he met John Myers, Travis could not believe John's size. "He must weigh 300 pounds!" he guessed to himself. Travis moved quickly from each potential assistant to the next, making mental notes as he went.

Coach Drake said to himself, "Gotta hustle," as he checked another task from his list. "I'm runnin outa time." He was suddenly at the lower level by the gym. "Wow! Donaldson wasn't kidding. The new weight room is an incredible mess! But look at the size of this place," said Travis talking outloud. He quickly paced off the room as best he could as he weaved in and out of old musty chairs, long tables, packed boxes, and just plain-old junk. As near as he could figure, the room was about 40 feet by 80 feet. "That's 3200 square feet!" he exclaimed. "This is unbelievable, just unbelievable!" Coach Drake could hardly contain himself as he let out a loud whoop! "What a stroke of luck! We'll have the best dang weight room in the state," he said as he nodded his head with complete assurance.

"Mrs. Wade, is Dr. Kowalski available?" asked Coach Drake, slightly out of breath at the district office. "Is that you, Coach Drake?" Dr. Kowalski hollered from his office.

"Yes, Dr. Kowalski."

Well, come on in," he invited.

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When Fred first started powerlifting, he came under the guidance of Coach Sam Pecktol. At that time, Coach Pecktol was coaching a teenage powerlifting team at a local gym in Medford. He was also competing and assisting one of the Medford high schools with their strength program. It was to prove a fortunate alliance as Coach Pecktol would become that special friend Fred would need in his corner.

When one gets to know Sam Pecktol, one learns that as an individual, he is direct and straightforward. He remembers the day Fred came to him with news of the impending blindness. He also remembers what he said: "I simply told Fred that there was no reason he couldn't powerlift."

Since that time coach and trainee have become like uncle and nephew, close friends and workout partners. "Working out with Fred makes me work harder," Sam stated recently. "He never misses a workout, and he always goes for the win."

And speaking of wins, Fred has his share. He has won six of nine contests; four out of five since becoming legally blind. Recently, both entered and won their classes in the "Big Boy Invitational", the Oregon drug-free open championships. Coach Pecktol won the 220 lb. class with a 1700 lb. total (including a 650 squat), while Fred took the 165 lb. class. Most recently, Fred won the 181 lb. class in the Southern Oregon High School championships at North Medford High School with a 1220 lb. total. His individual lifts were: squat, 475; Bench, 295; deadlift, 450. Not Bad!

Because he takes pride in himself and wants to insure that his accomplishments are his own, Fred avoids drugs, including steroids. As Coach Pecktol says, "What good is a PR lift if you don't know whether it's you or some chemical that did it?"

Fred added, "Too many people are using that stuff without really knowing what they're doing or what can happen. It can really mess up your body." It is important to mention that Sam and his teams enter only drug-free competitions, or competitions sponsored by the high schools and other organizations or clubs that strive to maintain drug-free attitudes.

At any rate, Fred provides enough inspiration to get his teammates on a natural high. "Fred makes me appreciate being able to see, that's for sure," Coach Pecktol recently related. "But he also causes me to have less patience with others when I see them goofing off." You won't see much goofing off when Fred's there. His determination to excel and the intensity he generates seems to always bring out the best efforts of those around him. Fred has made a giant leap from one who draws inspiration to one who is an inspiration.

Fred is the son of Harold and Margo Garnett of Central Point, Oregon.

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Coach Drake was glad to find Dr. Kowalski in a good mood. He learned early that he could get much more from administrators when they were in a good mood.

"Well, how's your first day going? Are you getting

acquainted with everyone?" Dr. Kowalski asked.

"Yes, sir. Everyone's been great!"

Smiling, Dr. Kowalski said, "You must be here for something. What can I do for you?" Coach Drake laughed, "I won't always be asking for something. But you're right, I'm asking again."

Mr. Donaldson and I discussed using the storage room at the lower level of the gym for the weight room. I love it! With a little work, we can have the best weight room in the state. I'd like to get started today if I can. Where can I put all that stuff that's in our new weight room?"

"I don't know," said Dr. Kowalski, as he thought. "The only possible place I can think of right now is underneath the football stadium. We might have to rearrange some things. However, I can't put any district custodial people on that project this week, Coach."

"No problem. I'll take care of it," said Coach Drake. Travis paused a few moments and looked squarely at Dr. Kowalski. "Now, what about the weight equipment? You promised to match what we raise on the fundraiser."

"I sure did, but what about it, Coach?"

"Well, sir, I need to order the equipment now," said Coach Drake anxiously.

Dr. Kowalski's eyes narrowed as he said, "Coach, we can't do that until we have the money in hand. That is the way we do it."

Coach Drake looked at the floor, "Sir, if we don't order now, our program will be delayed. I want to start right after Christmas vacation. Look, I know I can order now and get at least 30 days to pay. We'll have the money from the fundraiser before Christmas."

"How much do you plan on ordering?" questioned Dr. Kowalski.

"About twenty-thousand dollars worth," Coach Drake answered still looking at the floor.

"Twenty thousand!" choked Dr. Kowalski. "What if your damn fundraiser doesn't work? Have you thought of that?"

"Yes sir, but I feel strongly enough about it that you can take it out of my salary if it doesn't work. I've got to have the equipment. We'll just make it work," said Coach Drake, again looking his superintendent in the eyes.

"OK, Coach, you go ahead and order your equipment, but I'm going to hold you to that salary thing. You may be crazy. Hell, I may be crazy for letting you do it! Well, what are you standing here for? You better get going if you are going to make this thing work!" Dr. Kowalski said half-threatening.

"Thank you, sir. You won't regret it." Coach Drake turned and quickly made his way out of the office. He only had twenty minutes before this meeting. On his way, he checked off still another task. He couldn't help but feel a sense of accomplishment as he quickly analyzed his "Do It" list.

Dr. Kowalski got up from his desk and looked out the window. He smiled as he saw Travis jogging back to the high school. "He's going to be all right. Reminds me of myself back in the old days," he said.

"Did you say something, Dr. Kowalski?"

"No, Mrs. Wade, must thinking outloud."