

QUEST FOR GREATNESS

Continuing Story by Greg Shepard — More Next Issue

QUICK REVIEW

Chapters 1-9

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.

At this meeting, Coach Drake has challenged Rick to do 14 reps on the Box Squat with 395 pounds. The 14 reps represent 14 games and the State Championship. Each rep means a victory.

Chapter 9 14 Reps – 14 Games

Amidst shouts of, "Come on Rick," everyone hustled out of the bleachers to crowd around the squat stand. Rick seemed frozen. "What was going on here?" as he tightened his belt. He was a little scared. After doing 325, Rick felt he could do a little more. But 395? Fourteen times? Nevertheless, Rick prepared to give it his best shot. Everyone was clapping his hands faster and faster in unison. The adrenalin was flowing! Everyone was leaning toward the squat stands shouting encouragement. The noise level was increasing decibel by decibel.

Rick approached the bar. Determined, he grasped the bar as he had just been taught. Travis shouted, "Fierce! Come on! Super effort! Come on! Fierce!"

Rick took the bar off the rack. He was oblivious to its actual weight. He was undeniably psyched. He looked straight ahead. His eyes fixed on a point. He drew in a huge breath and "One!" everyone shouted.

Buddy, Jim, and Coach Travis were spotting. Buddy and Jim were going crazy.

"Two!"

"Three!"

"Four!"

"Five!"

26 Now everybody was going crazy. The reps started to

go slower. Rick was turning red as he strained underneath the ponderous weight.

"Six!"

"Seven!"

"Eight!"

On the eighth rep, Rick nearly lost it. Coach Drake shouted through all the havoc, "Come on Rick. Breathe deep. Look at that point. You can do it!" John Myers was standing on the bleachers observing the whole scene. At first he had just stood quietly in the background. Now he was joining in and clapping his hands in unison. A lot of Hamilton students who had just gotten out of their last class heard the near riot going on in the gym. Curious onlookers began to fill the gym.

Rick regained his balance and drew in a huge breath filling his chest until he thought it would burst.

"Nine!"

"Ten!"

"Eleven!"

Rick was shaking. His teammates were going berserk as they urged him to get the final reps. Coach Drake was in his ear, "Rick, we're in the play-offs, get us another one!!!"

"Twelve!"

"Thirteen!"

Rick was near the threshold of absolute exhaustion. Total fatigue had already passed, but Rick did indeed possess something special. This power of the mind is a curious thing Coach Drake often thought. Coach Miller was leaping and pounding kids on the back urging them to give more encouragement.

Rick's eyes, mind, and body prepared for one final effort. Coach Drake gave one last command, "Concentrate! Get it! Fierce!"

Rick squatted down. His hips settled back and then surged forward and up. The surge came to an abrupt halt at the halfway point. The gym was in complete chaos. More than one hundred people were now pulling for Rick. The loud vocal encouragement was working. Rick reached deep for extra strength and kept straining. The bar slowly inched upward. With one final surge it was "Fourteen!!!!"

The gym was bedlam – complete bedlam. For those kids at that moment, they actually believed that Hamilton High School had just won the State Championship. Rick, with the help of his spotters, staggered back to rack the weight. Once the bar was securely in place, Rick was besieged by a deliriously happy group of teammates. In a split second, Rick was no longer standing. He was lifted into the air. Although he was totally exhausted, Rick was giving "High Fives" like there was no tomorrow. His face sparkled as though he had just found the real Rick Steadman.

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For a moment – this moment – the world was a great place.

Chapter 10 Coach Drake's Charge

Travis mentally breathed a sigh of relief. His first meeting with the players couldn't have turned out better. It had been really fantastic. Coach Drake motioned everyone back to the bleachers. Rick, still breathing heavily, slumped exhausted but happy on the front row.

Coach Drake definitely had their attention now as he looked up into the stands. Even those students who came in after school were waiting to see what would happen next.

Coach Drake began: "Men, I couldn't be more proud. What an effort! And what's really important is that everyone played a significant role in helping Rick get those 14 reps. I was right about him, wasn't I? Rick does have something special inside!"

"Let's hear it for Rick!" Clap – Clap — Clap.

"Let's hear it for Rick!" Clap – Clap — Clap.

"Let's hear it for Rick!" Clap – Clap — Clap.

"Men, I want you to remember this day. I want you to remember our dream. I want you to remember the importance of pulling together. I want you to remember that dreams require work. A lot of it. However, I promise you that the harder you work and the more you dedicate yourselves, the more you will be rewarded."

"Men, just before I interviewed for this job, I walked down and stood in the middle of your football field. Something told me this was a special place, and I felt I was supposed to be here. You know something? Now I'm sure of it. We're going to do it. I can feel it! We are going to be state champions.

"Now make sure you see Mr. Maddox first thing tomorrow and get into weight-training. Also, if you've got a buddy who wasn't here today, tell him about the weight-lifting class. Anybody who can sign up for it. Remember the Lift-a-Thon, and get the info tomorrow. If any of you can stay for another 30-45 minutes, we can get started on our new weight room today. And the last thing, I'd like to have four of last year's starters to come to my place tonight. Who can come?"

"Buddy, TJ, Tim and Brad. Great! See you tonight about 7:30.

"For those of you who can stay, I'll meet you in about ten minutes in our new weight room. OK men, that's all."

Travis went over and shook Rick's hand. A lot of other guys did the same thing.

Buddy was the first to say something. "I can't believe what you did. All right Rick! All right!"

"Thanks," Rick responded, "'scuse me guys, but I gotta go see Becky."

Tim Adams couldn't resist, "Oowee – oowee, Steadman lifts a few weights and thinks he's a stud."

Everyone laughed, but it was the laugh of acceptance – acceptance by the other team members.

Tom Miller was the first over to see Coach Drake and blurted, "Coach, that's more enthusiasm than I've ever seen. It was amazing!" As they shook hands, Travis said, "Thanks! I know your enthusiasm and special way will play a big part in our success." Lou Tanselli and Brian McMasters also came over quite excited about the past events. "We'll get together this week and talk about roles and assignments."

Out of the corner of Travis' eye, he saw big John Myers still sitting in the bleachers. Travis walked over to John. Mr. Myers nodded and smiled. Travis climbed up to where Mr. Myers was sitting and asked, "Well, what do you think?"

"You remind me of my old high school football coach," answered Mr. Myers.

"In what way?"

"I'll tell you about it sometime Coach," replied Mr. Myers rather evasively.

"OK John, I would like to talk to you this week about coaching with us," asserted Coach Drake tentatively.

"Well, maybe. We'll just have to see," murmured John Myers softly as he gazed straight ahead.

"Thanks for coming. I'll see you later," said Travis as he made his way down the bleachers and out into the hall. Travis was slightly perplexed. Something about John Myers was profound. Travis inwardly hoped that John would open up and that they could become good friends.

"Hello Becky. Thanks for waiting," said Rick reaching for her hand. Becky, who had been in the library down the hall most of the time after school said, "I got one assignment done. How'd the meeting go? I heard a lot of yelling even from the library."

"It was great. Everybody's really fired up," stated Rick, wondering if he should tell her about his 14 reps. He decided against it.

"Becky, Coach Drake has asked for some help getting our new weight room ready. It will only take about thirty minutes, but you've been waiting so I don't know if I should stay."

Just then Coach Drake came by on his way to the lower level.

"Hi, Rick. Hey, that was a super effort. Is this your girl?" smiled Coach Drake.

"Yes Coach, I guess so. This is Becky Wilson. She's a student body officer," answered Rick.

"Hello Becky."

"Hello Coach. It's nice to have you here at Hamilton," Becky said politely.

"Have you ever lifted weights before?" asked Travis with a twinkle in his eye.

"Not really, Coach. Why do you ask?"

"Becky, we're going to have a Lift-a-Thon to raise money for our new weight room. I'd like to have all the student body officers participate, especially the cheerleaders."

"Are you serious?" laughed Becky.

"Sure am, Becky. We'll show you how. It'll be a lot of fun, and you can really help us. Can you present the idea to student government tomorrow, and I'll give you more details then."

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Now Rick was really grinning.

"OK Coach, but I can't lift very much," warned Becky.

"That doesn't matter. You'll do just fine. By the way Rick, how's your school work coming?" asked Travis as he shifted the conversation back to Rick.

Rick looked down and confessed, "It could be better Coach, a lot better. Becky was going to help me after school. That is, after I help you with the new weight room."

There was a pause. Travis looked back and forth at Becky and Rick. "Rick, you've helped a great deal already. Your school work is very important. You need to get the best grades possible. We can handle the weight room. You go study with Becky." Travis turned and headed down the hall and then walked backwards a few steps as he said, "Nice meeting you, Becky. See you tomorrow."

About thirty-five players and Tom Miller were waiting for Coach Drake at the storage room. "This is great, guys. With thirty minutes of work, we can make some big changes in our weight room. Coach Miller, would you go down and open the doors under the east side of the stadium. We'll start bringing this stuff down," directed Coach Drake.

Each kid made five trips. Travis got to associate names with faces. And sure enough, the storage room was bare in about half an hour. Travis smiled as he thought of the possibilities even though the room was still dirty and dusty.

Rick was just finishing his math assignment and ready to tackle English next. He stopped for a moment and looked at Becky who was studying for her science test. "Things are going to change," he thought. "I'm going to change. I can make it."

CHAPTER 11 That Night

"Yes sir," nodded Travis as he sat in the easy chair in his apartment's living room. He was talking on the phone and watching the evening news at the same time.

"Yes sir, that's right. We are having a fundraiser for our new weight room. It's going to be fantastic, Bob, just fantastic!" said Travis.

"Could I take some pictures tomorrow morning, Coach?" asked Bob Brentwood, the sports editor for the Hamilton Gazette.

"Sure, Bob, anytime would be fine. I also would like a favor. It sure would help us out."

"How can I help, Coach?"

Travis sat up in his chair and turned away from the television. "Mr. Brentwood, we can use all the community support we can get. We're trying to give the kids every chance to reach their potential. But we need help with paint, mirrors, sound system, photographer and things like that. We also need people to support the fundraiser when our students come knocking on their doors."

"I think we can put something in the article, Coach," agreed Brentwood.

"Thanks, Bob. Any help you can give will be greatly appreciated. See you tomorrow morning," Travis concluded as he hung up. Travis stared blankly at the tube as he thought to himself. Coach Drake knew from experience that he had to

be very careful when dealing with the press. Brentwood seemed to have his act together, but he'd never know until he saw the article in print. Travis would keep his fingers crossed, and he hoped that his initial interview with Brentwood would be written intelligently. After all, they had talked for nearly an hour about his philosophy, his past successes and the fundraiser.

The doorbell rang, interrupting his thought. The Pizza man was delivering a giant pizza with all the trimmings. It was 7:25 p.m. Just as he finished paying, Buddy, TJ, Tim and Brad showed up.

"Hi men, come on in. I know you probably already had dinner, but do you still have a little room for pizza?" asked Coach Drake as they sat around the kitchen table.

"Are you kiddin' Coach — we've always got room for pizza," blurted Buddy, licking his lips.

Coach Drake looked very serious and declared flatly, "I'm sorry Buddy. I meant the pizza for TJ, Tim and Brad. I've got a bowl of lettuce for you." There was a slight moment of silence. You could almost see the desperation in Buddy's face.

Then Travis roared with laughter.

"Just kidding, Buddy. Dig in!"

Somehow eating pizza builds trust and comradeship. The players weren't sure how to act around Coach Drake yet, but they all thought his pizza trick was pretty funny. He could sense that they were beginning to feel at ease.

Coach Drake brought out last year's yearbook and began the evening by saying, "The reason I asked you here tonight is to go through the yearbook. I want to discuss every potential player. We need to get everyone out for football that can possibly help us. I know a lot of guys didn't go out this season for one reason or another. I want to prepare a list of guys in each class and invite them to sign up for weight-training. Then if things work out, they can play football next season."

"Now, what about this guy?" asked Travis, pointing to a picture.

"No, Coach, he's a druggie."

"OK, guys, I'll put him on hold. What about this guy?" asked Travis again.

"He's on the basketball team."

"Good, I'll put him on my list," responded Coach Drake quickly. "Now, what about Fred?"

"Coach, he played in the 7th and 8th grade, but didn't come out in his Freshman and Sophomore year. He only lives one block from me," related Tim.

"Was he a good player?"

"Well, he was kind of small, but he did start as a defensive back. He's really quick, but hasn't grown a lot," explained Tim further.

"I want him," responded Travis enthusiastically. "Tim, would you ask him to sign up tomorrow?"

"You got it, Coach," said Tim, starting his list.

Coach Drake moved his attention to the next. "What can you tell me about Dan?"

Buddy raised his hand. "Dan didn't play last year. But he's really grown the last couple of years. He must be 6'5" or better."

"Buddy, can you ask him? If he is still uncertain, I'll talk to him. I'd really like him to be part of our program," Coach Drake persisted as he moved to the next picture.

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