

QUEST FOR GREATNESS

by Greg Shepard

QUICK REVIEW

Chapters 1 - 12

Quest for Greatness is based on true stories. Coach Travis Drake is the new football coach at Hamilton High School. He is meeting with potential new assistants.

He has established the dream of winning a state championship at an exciting motivational first meeting.

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.

However, Rick now has had two good things appear in his life. First is his girlfriend Becky and second is Coach Drake. In the first meeting, Rick did way more than he thought he could do and help establish the dream by doing 395 pounds on the box squat for 14 reps!

Chapter 12 The Assistants

As Travis came back into the new weight room, he was quite surprised. Jerry Littlewood was waiting for him.

"Coach Drake," said Jerry in a soft voice, "I'm Jerry Littlewood."

"Hello Jerry. How are you doing?" "OK."

They both were silent for a few moments. Travis knew this was a difficult situation. Jerry had also applied for the head coaching position, but the administration had told him flatly they were going outside. Travis figured it would be better if Jerry spoke first, so he just waited. Travis, trying to appear friendly, looked at Jerry. Jerry looked noticeably uncomfortable.

Finally Jerry spoke. "Coach Drake. I want to apologize. I should have come to the meeting yesterday, and I should have come down earlier. I was hoping we could talk."

"Sure thing Jerry," nodded Travis smiling. "Let's sit down."

Travis settled back in his chair, holding his drink and again propping his feet up on the table.

"Look Jerry, I think I know what you've been going through. You wanted the head job, and then you were bitter when the administration denied you a shot at it."

"Yes sir, that's part of it. I thought I was ready. I was going to show 'em though by getting out altogether. But I love football. I don't want to move; I can't afford it anyway. So here I am. Is it too late for me to be an assistant?"

"Heck no," laughed Travis affably. "Don't ever let administrators get you down. You read the latest nationwide survey on administrators, didn't you?"

"No coach," replied Jerry, still looking down, "What'd it say?"

"It proved conclusively that over 70% of them have brain damage," Travis retorted.

Jerry looked up and started to laugh. Then Travis broke out laughing too as he tipped his drink toward Jerry. Jerry started howling with laughter as he now felt completely at ease.

They must have talked for an hour. Even though Jerry had been the defensive coordinator in the past, Travis felt a change in that assignment would be best for all concerned. He had explained to Jerry that experiencing new areas in coaching would prepare him to be a head coach. Jerry agreed to coach the receivers, to perfect the kicking game, and to prepare the scout teams. Travis knew his biggest job with Jerry would be to constantly encourage him and to make him feel his contributions were vital and greatly appreciated.

Travis was very relieved after speaking with Jerry Littlewood. A major obstacle had certainly been overcome. But now he had to hurry. Travis had only 45 minutes to get ready and to pick up John Myers for dinner.

"Hello Coach Drake, I'm Barbara Myers. Welcome to Hamilton. Come in and sit down."

"Well thank you Mrs. Myers," replied Travis marveling at her elegance and poise. It was certainly unexpected to say the least. Travis smiled and almost laughed out loud as he sat in the living room thinking about big John Myers. John was a mammoth and burly sort of man. His large shoulders and six foot one inch frame carried his 300 pounds with surprising strength and ease. John was forty-seven years old and completely bald. The back of his head carried a deep groove with a gristly roll of flesh which protruded just where his neck met the bottom part of his head. But, perhaps his most distinguishing feature was the unusual amount of body hair, not only on his chest but also on his shoulders and back. At first glance, John Myers was scary; but then he had this gentle way and a soft voice with a very slight speech impediment. "Yes sir," thought Travis, "Old John had done all right with a lady as classy as Barbara."

"Hello Travis," said John as he entered into the living room. "I'd like you to meet my son Eric."

"Hello sir."

"How are you doing Eric? Are you going to college?"

"No sir. I graduated from college last June. I've just signed a contract with a computer firm in California."

Travis was even more amazed. Eric wasn't anything like John physically. he was a little shorter with a medium build and quite nice looking.

"Well that's wonderful Eric. Do you have any more family John." "Just one more, Travis. Jim is a junior at-

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the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs."

"What a family you and Barbara have," Travis blurted out. Barbara chimed in, "Thanks Coach. We have really been blessed. When you get your family moved in, we'll have to have you over for dinner, John tells me you have three children."

"Thank you Mrs. Myers. I know Diana and the kids would really like that."

"Please call me Barbara. Well are you two about ready?"

John nodded. "Yes honey. I won't be gone too long."

On the way to the restaurant, Travis told John about the progress that was being made with the weight room, the program, the fund-raiser, and the new equipment. Travis also told John to watch for the newspaper story about his new program.

Then Travis inquired, "How is Bob Brentwood? He came by today and took a lot of pictures and got a lot of information."

"Don't worry, Travis," assured John. "Brentwood's a little strange sometimes, but he does a good job. He's been with the paper for years."

As they drove to Fernwood's, supposedly the best steak house in the county, Travis asked, "Where did you play football John?"

"At Michigan State."

"Hey that's great! Were you a starter?"

"Yes Travis I was fortunate to have started for three years."

Travis was truly amazed. Here was a teacher at Hamilton who had started for three years at Michigan State, but who was not in coaching. However, the evening was still young. Even more amazing things would be revealed before this night was over.

Both men joked and talked until it seemed like they had been friends for many years.

"John," asked Coach Drake, "I was wondering why you hadn't coached at Hamilton for the last ten years?"

"Well sir, maybe I should have. I just got tired of coaches being negative and telling the kids they were no good. That behavior really strikes a sensitive chord with me."

"Go on," Travis urged.

Big John Myers drew in a big breath and sighed heavily as he toyed with a small portion of food on his plate.

"When I was a ninth grader, I was big and almost fully mature. I stood 6' 0" and weighed 225 pounds. Being hirsute at that age also made me stand out. However, mentally and emotionally, I was probably younger than my age. Anyway, I was playing junior high ball when this little player came up and hit me under the chin with his helmet. For some reason, I had my tongue out and nearly bit it off. It was just hanging there by the skin. The student trainer came out with that white ankle tape. He actually stood there trying to tape my tongue back together."

"He what!" interrupted Travis. "You mean he tried to tape it!"

John Myers kind of nodded sheepishly.

It hit Travis funny and he started to laugh. Travis tried his best to stifle his laughter, but it was no use. he was gone. Travis was laughing out of control. Then John started to laugh. Tears began to form in Travis' eyes. Slowly Travis regained enough composure to return to

the conversation.

"Then what happened?" Travis asked in disbelief.

"Well, Travis, fortunately, the head coach was there. He took one look and removed the tape. He took me to this old doctor who really did an excellent job. He used well over two hundred stitches to repair my tongue. Naturally, it was quite swollen and turned black."

Travis began chuckling again but sensed that John was leading up to something serious, so he stopped.

"My English teacher left not too long after that to have a baby. The new teacher was young and in her first year. Anyway, she asked the students to stand up and introduce themselves. I was petrified because my tongue was so swollen I couldn't even mumble very good. I didn't know what to do. When it came my turn I stood up and tried my best to say my name. It was really garbled. Then she shouted at me, "Sit down you big dummy. You can't even say your own name!"

How quickly moods can change. The tears which welled up because of laughter were now of a different kind. After a long silence, John merely shrugged, "Obviously she made a mistake. I've long since forgiven her. But I never again spoke in high school after that incident. My high school football coach seemed like he was my only friend. If not for him, I would have been behind bars. That's for sure. Michigan State was an exceptional institution. They recognized my problem and got me into speech therapy. As my speech improved, I slowly started to come out of my shell. After two years of pro ball, I began teaching and coaching. I guess I wanted to give back a little of the good things given to me."

John Myers scooted his chair forward; and as he supported his weight on the table with his elbows, he studied Travis for a reaction. John continued, "My first five years as a coach at Hamilton were really good. We had some winning seasons and had a lot of fun. I felt we helped a lot of kids. I never really wanted to be a head coach; and so some new coaches came in with negative attitudes, and things changed. I couldn't be part of a program that downgraded kids, so I channeled my energies into my classroom work and my family."

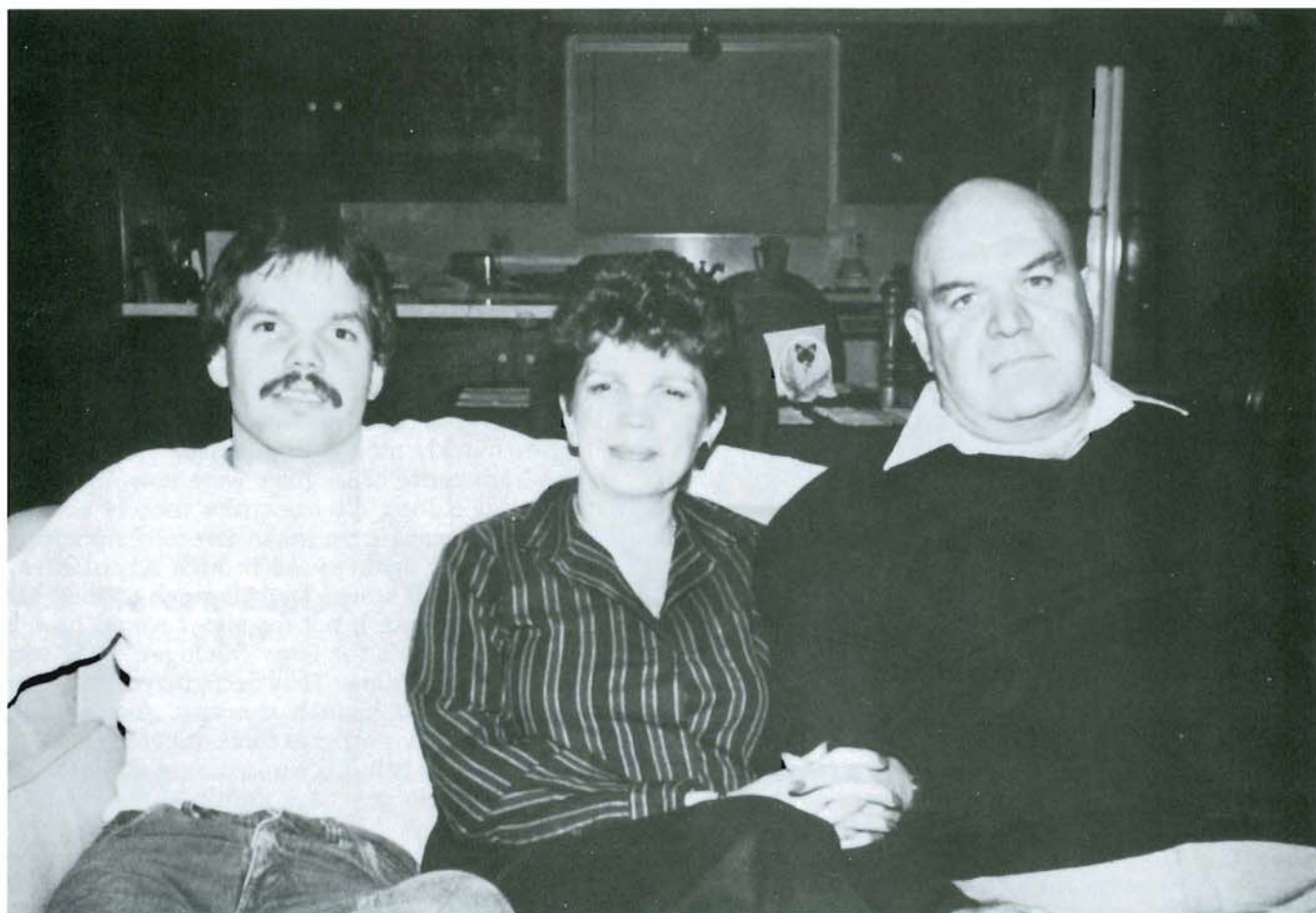
Travis Drake looked at John very intently and said, "John I would like very much for you to join our staff and to be our defensive coordinator. We can turn things around together. What do you say?"

John laughed a little, "I figured you were going to ask me to coach. I've already talked the possibility over with Barbara. She's given me her blessing. She knows I'm happiest when I'm helping young men reach their potential. I'm all fired up, although I didn't expect you'd ask me to be the defensive coordinator."

Travis interjected, "I know you've been out of coaching for ten years, but things haven't changed that much. And the changes aren't anything you can't handle. Defenses still have to get after people, have to hit 'em hard, and have to swarm all over the ball. You know as well as I do that great defense is mostly attitude."

The two men shook hands warmly, and Hamilton's new varsity football staff was complete. Travis took John home and then returned to his apartment. He quickly reviewed his "Do It" list with a feeling of accomplishment. He was very tired. Travis fell asleep exhausted on his bed. It was only 9:30.

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The real Coach Myers, his Wife and one of his Two Sons.

Meet Jim Myers. His true story is portrayed in the character John Myers in *Quest For Greatness*. The real Coach Myers was a football coach in inner city Detroit. He was also the head wrestling coach. Coach Myers had me come to Detroit for a BFS clinic. He is just like the character in my novel. On the way back from the airport, Jim revealed his junior high experience with the tongue incident and his Michigan State days. His school Madison Heights High School went 10-0 after the clinic. Anyway, Jim put me up for the night at his home and we got to talking.

He said, "I go to New York on Saturdays. Can you guess what to do?" I looked at him, thought for a minute and replied, "I haven't the foggiest." His son went to the closet and pulled out a poster. IT WAS GEORGE "THE ANIMAL" STEELE!! Coach Myers was a professional wrestler!

Jim told me that because of his tongue he always ate green Clorets to keep his tongue pliable. So when he first wrestled and he ate the turnbuckle the camera did a close up of his tongue. The switchboard lit up. "What's wrong with the man's tongue?" When he was interviewed, "Jim would only grunt, growl and make faces. He didn't want the school board, administrators, players or anybody to know he was a pro wrestler. Jim felt it might jeopardize his job or cause some problems.

Anyway, the wrestling federation decided to play it up and claim that George was half animal and was born in a zoo not knowing who or what his parents were.

The football season before last ended Coach Myers' career at Madison Heights. His sons were on their own so he and his wife decided to go on the wrestling tour full time. They are having a ball. Coach Myers is making a lot of money playing his role as George "The Animal" Steele but just remember this is a football coach at heart.

If George comes to your town, take your players and go back stage after the match. Ask if George could come out as Coach Myers and talk to your athletes. Tell him Coach Shepard sent you.

More Next Issue!

Quest For Greatness is made up of true characters and stories just like Coach Myers. It's your story! Get the novel today. Share it with your players over the summer.