

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 has just assembled his staff of assistant coaches.

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.

At an exciting and motivational first meeting, Coach Drake has also established the dream of winning a state championship. T.J. is a potential starting quarterback and his father is president of the Boosters Club.

Chapter 13

TJ

"Pass the potatoes," TJ requested as he was all ready to devour his third helping.

Sam Carter was studying his son intently.

"You're gonna gain weight for sure now boy!" Mr. Carter exclaimed. "How much you weigh today?"

"I'm up to 158 pounds, dad."

"Hot diggity," boomed Mr. Carter rubbing his hands together. "I can see you gettin' a scholarship already."

"Now Sam," pleaded Mrs. Carter, "Don't go puttin' all that pressure on the boy."

For a second Sam Carter glared at his wife and almost said something crude, but then he turned to his son.

"Don't worry. TJ thrives on pressure. Isn't that right boy?"

"I try my best sir," TJ responded as he forked down another helping of potatoes.

Mr. Carter bellowed, "TJ, we Carters don't just try, we do. You got that boy?"

"Yes sir."

"Well anyway TJ, I want to know how the new football coach is doing?"

For the first time, TJ genuinely smiled. "Dad,

everybody's really fired up. We had a super meeting. You know Rick Steadman? Well, he squatted 395 pounds fourteen times. It was supposed to represent winning the state championship. Everybody went wild."

"That's good. I like that," pondered Mr. Carter as he lit his nightly after-dinner cigar. "How much did you lift?"

"Well, Rick did that for a demonstration. The rest of us are just working on technique. Our new weight room is going to be awesome. Coach Drake says he would have our new weight equipment before Christmas. Then we can really get after it."

"TJ, has he talked to you about any scholarship opportunities?" questioned Mr. Carter.

"Dad, gimme a break," TJ sheepishly responded. "A lot of new guys are coming out for the team. I'm going to have to work my tail off just to start. Then, we'll see. Anyway, I'm only 5'10" and 158 pounds."

"What you talkin' about boy. Hell, you were a starter last year, and you damn well better start this year. You always got two things goin' for you. First, you're a returning starter; and second I'm president of the booster club. Need I remind you of that fact?"

TJ's head lowered; and inside he was boiling, but simply said, "No sir."

Mr. Carter came around behind his only son and massaged his shoulders and neck. "You eat up boy. You're a winner. You're gonna make me proud. I know it."

TJ finished his third glass of milk and went upstairs to his room. As he lay on his bed, he had mixed feelings. TJ admired his dad and appreciated his support. However, at the same time, he wished he'd just butt out.

Chapter 14

Becky's Place

Rick raced down the sidewalk dodging imaginary tacklers. He was on his way to Becky's place for dinner and homework.

Rick knocked on the door and Mr. Wilson greeted him. "Rick, it's good to see you. Come on in."

"Thanks Mr. Wilson. Is Becky here?"

"She sure is. I'll call her. Anyway, we're ready for dinner."

At the dinner table Rick was tense at first. He felt uncomfortable around most adults. However, Mr. and Mrs. Wilson were really nice, and Rick soon loosened up.

Mr. Wilson asked, "Becky tells me that you're going out for football again and that she's going to be in a Lift-A-Thon to help raise money for a weight room."

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“Right on both counts. We’re going to make some great things happen. I can’t wait to see Becky lift those weights,” kidded Rick. Becky promptly elbowed Rick in the side. “I’m trying to get my grades up and get everything going right again. Becky’s really been helping me,” Rick said trying to justify his coming from a little trailer home to Becky’s nice home.

Both of Becky’s parents nodded thanks. Mrs. Wilson motioned for Becky to help her clear the dishes and said, “I’m sure you’ll do fine Rick, and we’re proud of you making an effort to get your grades up. We’ll get these dishes done shortly, and then you and Becky can do your homework at the kitchen table.”

“Thank you Mrs. Wilson. The dinner sure was great.”

As soon as the dishes were finished, Rick and Becky spread out their books on the table. They had a world history and English vocabulary quiz coming up.

Becky turned on the radio as she stroked Rick’s calf with her foot under the table. She asserted, “Let’s work on the vocabulary first. Spell redundant and tell me what it means.”

“R-E-D-U-N-D-U-N-T”, Rick said.

“That’s close,” encouraged Becky. “Try *ant* on the end. Now, what does it mean?”

“I’m not sure,” stammered Rick.

“It means to repeat something over and over again,” Becky reinforced. “Now, can you use it in a sentence?”

Rick thought and then mischievously grinned, “I’d like to kiss your lips redundantly.”

Becky let Rick have a kick in the shin as she said, “Get serious Rick.” Then Becky coyly smiled, “Maybe later, anyway.” Reading out of a dictionary, she said, “Redundant means being ‘repetitive to the point of being boring, wasteful, or superfluous.’”

“Well, we certainly wouldn’t want that to happen would we?” Rick chuckled.

Becky ignored him, “Spell *redundant*.”

“R-E-D-U-N-D-A-N-T”

“Okay, that’s better. Now spell *facade*.”

Rick and Becky worked on the vocabulary test nearly an hour. Rick would sing to the songs on the radio in between spelling his words. As a result Becky asked, “Rick, have you ever thought of singing in the choir?”

“Who, me? You’ve got to be kidding,” said Rick incredulously.

“No. I’m serious, Rick. You have a nice voice and can carry a tune. Anyway, we could use some more bass voices. You’ve got a study hall. You could easily make the switch.”

“Now wait a minute—hold everything,” interrupted Rick. “I can’t even read a note. I don’t know a sharp from a flat.”

“You don’t have to. You can learn to follow along. It’s not that hard. After a while, you can learn some notes. I think you should make good use of that time. Most people waste study hall anyway. It’s one more class we can be together in. Okay Rick?” Becky looked into Rick’s eyes with her beautiful, innocent blue eyes as she continued to stroke his calf.

Rick leaned forward and moaned, “Okay Becky, Okay.”

He closed his eyes and prepared for a passionate kiss.

Becky abruptly pulled back and said, “Great! I’m glad that’s settled. Now, tell me all you know about the Ottoman Empire.”

“The Ottoman what?” squirmed Rick.

“Yes, Rick, the Ottoman Empire—for our world history test. We can read about it on page 276.”

For the next hour, they studied assiduously.

Rick blurted out, “My gosh, Becky, it’s almost nine o’clock. I’ve got to go. My dad expects me to be home for my brothers’ and sisters’ bedtime.”

Rick and Becky walked arm in arm to the front door.

“Thanks Becky. This is the most prepared I’ve been for a test in high school. Thanks for dinner, and I’ll check out choir tomorrow.”

Rick turned to leave. Becky reached out and gently squeezed his arm and pulled him around. This time Becky was looking at Rick. Her eyes partially closed as she leaned forward toward Rick. Becky’s mouth opened slightly. Their lips met. A surge of electricity went through Rick. He didn’t understand what was happening, but he did know it was wonderful.

Rick dashed back up the street dodging imaginary obstacles on his way home. Halfway up the street, he let out a whoop.

Chapter 15 The Assembly

“Dr. Donaldson, you’ve got to control these things. You’re the principal.”

“Mrs. Stockman, come in please,” said Jim Donaldson in a surprised tone. “What do you mean?”

“I don’t understand why we teachers have to put up with these assembly interruptions,” asserted a frustrated Mrs. Stockman. “We’re getting all kinds of pressure because our students lack academic skills, and now we’re having a football assembly. Football season is over! Well, I don’t like it one bit.”

“Thank you for coming in Mrs. Stockman. Your opinion will be noted. I’m sure you’re not the only one who feels this way.”

Jim Donaldson studied his note pad and contemplated Travis Drake. Maybe he was coming on too strong. It probably would have been better had they hired someone else.

Mrs. Atkinson interrupted his thoughts.

“Superintendent Kowalski is here to see you.”

“Send him in, please.”

“Is the assembly all set, Jim?” inquired Kenneth Kowalski.

“Yes sir. It will be seventh period. Blaine Curtis will have the band ready, and Coach Drake is all set for sure. We’ve had some teachers complain about taking class time for a football assembly, especially after football season.”

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"Is that a fact?" snorted Mr. Kowalski. "We need some positive vibes around here. This assembly could give us a shot in the arm. For right now, I think it's a good thing."

Dr. Donaldson replied evenly, "I agree."

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"Okay class. Put everything under your desks," ordered Mrs. Stockman. "Everyone will be absolutely quiet and prepare for an oral vocabulary quiz. Many of you will probably be stumped because you haven't prepared. We will now find out."

Mrs. Stockman barked, "Rick Steadman! Spell *facade* and give the meaning."

"F-A-C-A-D-E", said Rick. "It means a false front."

Mrs. Steadman blinked, "Why, Rick, I see you studied for once. The next word is..."

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Coach Drake was dressed in the same red suit he had worn for the interview. He wanted to instill a sense of pride in the students at Hamilton High. He wanted to be known as a "Red Lion." He paced nervously behind the curtain in the auditorium. Everything was set.

"Blaine, I sure do thank you for getting your band ready."

"Hey, coach, no problem. We like to play. We got some peppy music ready, along with the fight song," Blaine Curtis replied.

It was seventh period. Students started pouring into the auditorium. Mr. Curtis had the band playing full blast. Excitement was in the air. Travis remained behind the curtain. The three front rows were sectioned off for the football team.

Buddy and TJ came in and sat right in the middle of the front row.

TJ asked, "What are all those weights doing up there? Do you know what's going on?"

"You've got me, TJ. I haven't the foggiest," shrugged Buddy.

Finally, the auditorium was full. Student body president Matt Sherman came to the podium. "Everyone please rise and repeat the Pledge of Allegiance."

"Thank you. Mr. Donaldson will now address us."

Mr. Donaldson had worn his best suit for the occasion. He came forward, "Students, faculty, and Superintendent Kowalski, we have gathered together today for a special assembly to introduce our new football coach, Travis Drake. I'm not sure what he has in store for us, but I am sure many of you have already been impressed with his enthusiasm in his short time here. Now, without further ado, let's give a great Hamilton Lion welcome to Coach Travis Drake."

At that instant, the band began playing the school fight song, the cheerleaders did a special welcome routine, and the football team rose and clapped and cheered.

Coach Drake parted the curtain at center stage and held up his right hand with his first finger extended signifying number one. Travis faced the student body grinning and acknowledging the cheers. He then made his

way to the podium.

It quickly got very quiet. Many were curious about the new coach.

"Wow! That was quite a welcome. I hope it will be the same a year from now. For right now, we're undefeated."

Travis was interrupted by some cheering.

"And we intend to stay that way!"

Again, there was some more cheering, even louder than before.

Travis was extremely pleased. He was on a roll.

"I want to thank everyone. I've been really impressed with the friendliness and cooperation of so many people. I've already fallen in love with this place. I'm ready to roll up my sleeves and work my tail off to help the students at this school reach their potential. We have all the ingredients to be number one in the state." Travis now raised his voice and thundered, "And with everyone's help, by golly, we're gonna do it!"

The band struck up eight bars of the fight song, and the cheerleaders got the student body to cheer enthusiastically.

Travis raised his hand for quiet.

"We've assembled a great staff. I'd like each coach to stand when introduced. Please hold your applause until each coach has been introduced. First, Lou Tanselli will again be the head sophomore coach, Coach McMasters will work with the defensive backs, Coach Littlewood will work with the wide receivers and will be in charge of the kicking game, and Coach Miller will be our new line coach."

There were cheers and a lot of clapping.

Again, Travis requested quiet.

"And I'm excited to announce our new defensive coordinator. John Meyers, will you please stand?"

For a moment, everyone was silent. This was unexpected. Then, there was some wild cheering, a lot of approving nods and "All rights!" by the football team. One could readily sense that John Meyers was easily the most popular teacher at the school.

Travis continued, "We've got a lot of things going for us. Besides this great staff, we are going to have the finest weight-training facility in the state. It will be available to every student and faculty member here at Hamilton. You ought to come down to the lower level to, see it. We've already ordered twenty thousand dollars worth of equipment, which will be here before Christmas. Any athlete wishing to sign up for these special weight-training classes can do so by seeing Mr. Maddox in the counseling office. I encourage anyone who wants to try out for football to see me immediately. I don't care if you've never played before. I'll work with you. We have room for a lot more players," encouraged Travis.

"Now, I need to ask for your help. We are having a lift-a-thon a week from Monday. We need your support. Anybody who wants to participate is welcome. The cheerleaders have already said they are going to lift. Will you? The money will go to buy your weight equipment."

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