

QUEST FOR GREATNESS

A Continuing Story by Greg Shepard

QUICK REVIEW

Chapters 1-17

Quest For Greatness is based on true stories. Coach Travis Drake is the new football coach at Hamilton High School.

The major character is Rick Steadman, who is a Junior at Hamilton. 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 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.

They have established a dream of winning a state championship. Coach Drake has psyched the whole school up and the kids are signing up. They are also raising money for a new weight room with a Lift-A-Thon.

Chapter 17 The Lift-A-Thon

Bernie Aldewood was in charge of roping off the lifting areas.

Bob Brentwood was taking pictures all over the place. True to his word, he has given the Lift-A-Thon some good press. It must have helped because a lot of people showed up. They started coming about six. Mr. Carter kept the hot dogs cooking while Mr. Donaldson was careful not to get mustard on his suit as he greeted the many parents and boosters with his best smile.

At seven o'clock, Sam Carter took the microphone and addressed the crowd. "Ladies, Gentlemen, distinguished guests, and people of Hamilton High, it is my pleasure to welcome you tonight."

Mr. Maddox leaned over and nudged Bernie Alderwood, "Sounds important doesn't he." Bernie didn't even blink.

"As your booster club president, I want to thank you for the tremendous support you are showing tonight. It is my privilege to introduce to you our new football coach. He has been a winner in the past, and the way this fireball is going now, we're going to have a winner here!"

A thundeous burst of applause broke out along with some whistles and cheers.

"Let's give our biggest Hamilton welcome to Coach Travis Drake."

Travis was excited as he stepped to the microphone. Sam Carter's exuberance had really ignited the crowd. As he cleared his throat, everyone became quiet and waited for Travis' first words.

"I am overwhelmed and very, very glad to be here at Hamilton. Your presence here tonight is a great stepping stone in our pathway to victory. I can already taste it!"

Again the crowd responded enthusiastically. After introducing the new football staff, Travis went on, "Your kids are great. We should be very, very proud of them. They have worked hard for our fundraiser. The money will go to build and equip a new weight training facility. Your generosity tonight will enable us to have the best weight room in the state!"

The crowd cheered once more.

"The weight-training facility will be available for all athletes in all sports, including the women's sports. However, having a great weight room does not guarantee victories. It does offer us the opportunity to reach, after a lot of hard work, our potential. I pledge to you that our staff will dedicate ourselves totally to giving your kids this priceless opportunity. We want you to be proud of them; but most of all, we want them to be proud of themselves. Now let the Lift-A-Thon begin!"

A few parents and most of the players stood instantly to applaud, and soon everyone was giving Travis a standing ovation.

The gym was a blur of activity as the spotters, loaders, and judges expertly guided the participants through their lifts.

Rick spotted Becky and nine other girls on the light-weight bench.

"Get mean," taunted Rick encouragingly to Becky. All the girls were giggling, and the parents were laughing it up.

Fred nudged Bernie again, "What if one of them farts? You know they're not suppose to do that." Finally Bernie laughed.

"Push it! Push it!" Rick shouted. Becky came through with 60 pounds. "Not bad Becky," Rick applauded. He then added, "We may just have to sign you up on the team."

"Go ahead and laugh," Becky grinned, "but \$5.50 times 60 is \$330.00! You will need to lift almost 300 pounds to beat me." Becky turned swaying her hips and walked to the tabulation table. Rick was speechless. He just stood there with his mouth open.

Over at the big-boys bench, Rick's teammates were psyching up. He quickly joined them as they were

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starting to lift. with the crowd's enthusiasm seeming to help, everybody was getting a new max.

"Push it! Push it!" Screamed Becky when Rick's turn came. Rick did get a new max of 265 pounds, but he seemed disappointed. However, Becky was not. She beamed, "Rick that was great."

"I swear," vowed Rick, "I'll get over 300 before the next season." "Patience," Becky said as she took him by the arm and escorted him to the tabulation table. "You can to it, but it takes time."

The last event was the contest between the two bankers and the contest between the police chief and the fire chief.

Sam Carter did a marvelous job as he got the bankers to agree that the one who lost would donate an extra thousand dollars. The way the "chiefs" were going at it, one might think that they had agreed to give an extra thousand.

"Look at our fire chief go," gasped Mr. Maddox, "He's as old as I am. I can't watch. He's goin' to lose 'em for sure Bernie."

Bernie just shook his head.

Sam Carter's voice boomed over the loud speaker. "We got a total folks! We got a total! Tonight, the participants lifted their hearts out for a good cause. Coach Drake," Sam screamed, "You got \$14,672.00!"

Everyone stood and cheered and cheered and cheered. Travis felt a tremendous rush of excitement, but it was not as great as the feeling of relief at knowing that it was over--he had pulled it off. His neck was off the line.

Chapter 18 The Reaction

"You wanted to see me, Dr. Kowalski?" asked Coach Drake.

"Yes I do, Coach. Come in. First, I want to say 'Congratulations.' That Lift-A-Thon was quite an event. You've certainly won that battle. I also wanted you to know that I heard a lot of fine comments by parents. I'd say you're off to a fine start. Now give me an update on your weight room plans."

"Well sir," began Travis, "First, thanks for those comments. It's nice to get positive feedback. As for the weight room, the equipment has been ordered. I shouldn't have to cancel any items. I totaled the monies last night, and we have a little over nineteen thousand to turn in right now. The kids are still collecting the rest; and, hopefully, they'll bring in another five thousand."

"Nineteen thousand!" said an excited superintendent.

"Well sir, I was counting your ten thousand," answered Travis with a little apprehension.

"Oh yeah, I forgot about that," grinned Dr. Kowalski.

"When the bills come in, I'll take care of my ten. You understand that we must keep money in our account as long as possible for the interest. Now what are you going to do with the excess money?" questioned Dr. Kowalski as his eyebrows narrowed slightly.

"I want to use it for motivational things like medals, charts, awards, and shirts. And we'll need to keep some to replace equipment as needed."

Dr. Kowalski thought for a minute and cautioned, "That sounds fine; but with all this money involved, I want you to strictly follow district policy. Make sure you have a purchase order for everything you get and keep very accurate records. You'll be reporting directly to Mr. Donaldson because your funds will be run through the high school. Thanks for coming in; now go get 'em."

As Travis nodded and headed toward school, Superintendent Kowalski thought about his conversation with Donaldson yesterday afternoon. Kowalski shook his head slightly as he recalled that Donaldson was excited about raising the money, but he was more concerned about mismanagement of funds if they weren't handled properly.

At lunch, John Myers and Travis sat together in the faculty area. "How's the family doin' Travis? When you movin' them here?"

Travis smiled, "John, it could be this weekend. We've got a house picked out over on Elm Street. I think we'll probably have to rent our old house while we're trying to sell it. One thing for sure, I can't afford to make double house payments. Anyway, I want you and Barbara over for dinner first thing."

"Hey buddy, we're goin' to have you over. Diana will be exhausted from moving," interrupted John with a nod. "Anyway, what I wanna know is when can I start workin' out in our new weight room."

"Anytime, partner, anytime," came the answer. A bond of friendship, which would later prove to be an essential ingredient for future success, was developing.

That night, Sam Carter was on the phone with another booster. "Yeah, I was in rare form wasn't I," said Mr. Carter agreeing. "You know with all that money, maybe we could get some machines. I'm still not convinced about free weights. Hell, doesn't everyone use machines? Maybe our coach was just going to get free weights because they're cheap. Maybe we should get more involved and go to Donaldson. After all, we want the best for our kids."

TJ was standing in the hallway out of sight, but still he overheard. A tight knot formed in his stomach.

Rick and Becky were making the rounds to collect their Lift-A-Thon money.

"Hello again Mr. Dixon. I suppose you heard about the success of the Lift-A-Thon?"

Mr. Dixon smiled, "I sure did. How could I miss it? It was front-page news. Don't tell me, Rick, you lifted a ton and I owe you a mint."

"No sir," laughed Rick, "I benched 265, and Becky

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blasted up 60 pounds."

After collecting the money, Rick walked Becky home. As they kissed by the front door, Rick began to squirm uncomfortably.

"What is it Rick?" asked Becky a little concerned.

Rick got in his now-familiar embarrassed posture as he looked down and began to stammer.

"B-Becky"

"Yes Rick"

Rick managed to summon up his courage but still stuttered, "Becky, I've got something for you; but I'm afraid you'll think it's stupid."

"Rick, I would never think of you as stupid. What is it?"

Rick reached in his jeans and pulled out a ring and murmured, "Here, it's to say, like we're goin' steady or something."

"Oh Rick, It's sweet."

Then Rick blurted, "You know how much I love you!"

"No Rick, I don't. I mean I didn't."

This time it was Becky who was stammering. They held each other very close as Rick whispered, "Well, I do. I love you very much."

Becky looked up, "And, I love you too Rick."

As Rick walked home, he was on cloud nine. "Wow!" he yelled.

"I beg your pardon," said Coach Drake.

Rick whirled around. He had been in such a daze, he hadn't heard Coach Drake drive up beside him.

"You need a ride?" asked Travis.

After a moment's hesitation, Rick answered, "Naw Coach, that's OK."

"Oh come on—get in," Travis insisted. "I want to talk to you anyway."

Rick hustled around to the passenger's side and hopped in.

"You in love Rick?" Travis asked rather nonchalantly.

It was dark, but you could almost see an intense blush build up in Rick's face. Rick's mind was racing for something to say, but he just couldn't think of anything.

Travis laughed, "It's okay Rick. It happens to the best of us. Say, is your dad home?"

Grateful that the subject had been changed, Rick turned and said, "Why yes Coach, I think so."

Travis nodded, "I'd like to meet him. I'm trying to meet every player's family."

Again, Rick's mind was racing. "Please don't let him be in a bad way," thought Rick. Trying to change the subject he said, "Coach I got all my Lift-A-Thon money collected, and so did Becky."

"That's great Rick. You guys really did a terrific job. We should have our equipment in a couple of weeks."

They pulled up in the gravel driveway; and as they entered the mobile home, Rick yelled, "Dad, Billy, Bobby, Sharon! Coach Drake is here!"

Rick breathed a mental sigh of relief as Mr. Steadman got up from his couch and shook Travis' hand politely. The kids came running from their bedrooms. After the introductions, Travis spoke warmly to Mr. Steadman. "Rick has made giant strides in a very short time. He is one of our strongest athletes and has demonstrated fine leadership capabilities. Rick is proving to be one of the most responsible students in the school. We are really counting on Rick to lead us to a championship next season."

All this time Mr. Steadman was beaming like a Christmas tree as Rick kept looking at the floor. Billy proudly smiled at his big brother.

"You know," continued Travis, "Rick and I were talking the other day. He must be real proud of you. He told me that you are a very hard worker. He also told me that you really wanted him to do well and to have a better life than you have."

Mr. Steadman didn't know what to say, but now he was the one staring intently at the floor.

Travis then turned to Rick and said, "Rick you're real fortunate to have such a great family. You do your best by them. You hear?"

"Yes sir," mumbled Rick.

"Well, I've got to be going. Mr. Steadman it's been a pleasure. Rick, you take care."

And with that, Travis Drake was back in his car. He had been in their home only a few minutes, but he hoped Mr. Steadman knew that he was sincere.

Mr. Steadman gently asked, "Would you kids mind going to bed now. I'd like to talk to Rick for a minute."

Mr. Steadman took Rick by the shoulders at arms' length and looked into his eyes. "Son, I'm really proud of you," he said with his voice soft and with his eyes brimming with emotion. "When I think of all the things you could have told the Coach about me," his voice trailed off. "Rick, I promise you that I'm going to be a better father," he finally whispered.

"I love you Dad," Rick responded emotionally.

"And I love you, son." Then, Mr. Steadman hugged Rick for the first time since the death of Rick's mother.

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