

QUEST FOR GREATNESS

A Continuing Story by Greg Shepard

QUICK REVIEW

Chapters 1-14

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

The other 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 submit to peer pressure 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.

They have established a dream of winning a state championship. Coach Drake has psyched the whole school up and the kids are signing up.

Chapter 16 The Response

Travis couldn't help but laugh as he said, "How we doing? How many do we have signed up?"

Maddox studied his scribbling on a piece of yellow paper. "You got 23 in your first period and 19 in your second."

"How about the other classes?"

"Well sir," pondered the somewhat beleaguered counselor, "You have about four per class at this point. But after that assembly of yours, I know a lot more than that will want your classes. Let me ask you a question. How 'bout females?"

"What do you mean Fred?" said Travis knowing full well what he meant.

"You don't want them lifting do you?"

"Why not?" responded Travis rhetorically, "I've already talked with the coaches of our ladies teams. They think lifting will be great for them. I'd like to steer them into classes after second period. Also, sign up any students interested in being aides. I'll let you get back to the students. Thanks a bunch Fred, Good Luck!"

Fred Maddox was speechless for a moment, which was amazingly uncommon. As he motioned for the next student to come in, he could be heard muttering, "Glory be, females liftin' weights. What's this world coming to." The other students in the hall all laughed. Almost everyone liked his eccentric manner, and Mr. Maddox almost reveled in his character. In spite of his crusty

way, he was always there for the students and seemed to be uniquely understanding in critical situations.

The day was very interesting and inspiring for Coach Drake. A steady stream of students came to see what was going on in the new weight room. Some asked questions about getting involved, either as an athlete or with general body-building pursuits. Some came to offer their talents. Some came just out of curiosity. But no matter why they came, Coach Drake kept adding students to his classes.

All this activity in the new weight room was happening around the painter. Not only had paint been donated, but a painter as well. The walls were being painted a bright white with a 12-inch-wide red stripe. The red stripe was four feet from the floor and went around the perimeter of the weight room. Not much lifting was done, but Coach Drake did manage to teach the Hamilton-Lion flexibility program. Everyone was assigned to do it every day before or after class. As the kids were stretching, Coach Drake meditated about how nice it was of the community to donate the paint and the painter.

Rick Steadman had Coach Miller for second period, so switching to Coach Drake's class would be easy. Coach Miller excused Rick to see Mr. Maddox about a schedule change. As Rick ambled down the hall, he thought about his promise to Becky to sign up for choir.

"Well glory be if it isn't Rick Studman. That was quite a lift young fella. I'm glad it wasn't me up there. I'd have left my family jewels right there on the platform," exclaimed Mr. Maddox. Rick couldn't help but grin. Mr. Maddox changed the direction of the conversation as he asked, "How's your daddy doin' Rick?"

"He's doin' better. He may be gettin' the foreman's job pretty soon."

Most of the time, Fred Maddox would not look directly at you; but when he did, he got your attention. Mr. Maddox knew of Rick's situation. He seemed to know most every student's situation. He turned and faced Rick. His eyes were now compassionately gentle as he stated, "Rick, I've known your daddy for a long time. He's a good man, but I know things are tough right now; so anytime you need to talk, my door's always open." Changing the direction of the conversation again, Mr. Maddox said, "Now, you want to get in Coach Drake's Weight Training class, right?" as he turned and sat down at his computer.

"Yes sir. It should be easy. I've got Coach Miller second period."

Mr. Maddox punched a few numbers into his

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computer.

"Presto," he exclaimed, "First time I got it right so quickly. You're in Rick. Here's your slip."

Rick took his admission slip and asked, kind of under his breath, "Mr. Maddox, how tough would it be to switch from study hall to chorus?"

"What are you talkin' about? Choir? You want to sing?"

"Becky has been talking about it, and I actually want to do it because of her."

Again Fred Maddox turned and faced Rick. "You mean Becky Wilson. She's quite a girl Rick, but what about your school work? I've been really concerned about your grades. Don't you need the time to study?"

Rick answered assertively, "Things are lookin' up in the grade department Mr. Maddox. Me and Becky—er—I mean Becky and I have been studying together. Becky said I could make a lot better use of my time in choir. I don't think I can sing very well, but she says I'd be Okay."

"Glory be, why don't you come over here and just punch this into the computer. It sounds like you have everything all figured out," laughed Mr. Maddox as he punched in some more numbers.

"Here you go. You're all set for chorus. Now before you go, tell me how math is going."

Rick looked down shyly and stammered slightly, "Mr. Baker told me he wished I could do math as well as I lifted on stage."

Mr. Maddox stared at his computer and asked bluntly, "Well, why don't you?"

Rick thought for quite a while and finally responded, "You know, because I am studying with Becky and because of some good things that have happened with Coach Drake, I bet I CAN get a good grade in math."

Mr. Maddox had a warm feeling inside as he stared at his computer. But he still retorted, "Well boy don't just stand there. Go get 'em. I got work to do."

With that Rick bolted out the door and down the hall as he said, "Thanks Mr. Maddox—thanks a lot."

Coach Drake put his planning period and lunch hour to good use. He roamed the halls and conversed with as many students as possible.

His "Hi men" became a familiar greeting. Coach Drake made it a point to pick up trash as he talked to each group. He didn't say anything about the trash as he was picking it up. He only beamed as he said, "I love this school already; you students are the greatest." As he talked to students in the cafeteria, he did basically the same thing. Coach Drake saw one student leave his tray on the table. He walked over immediately and picked up the tray. Many eyes focused on what was going to happen next. The kid who left the tray on the table defiantly braced himself for a confrontation.

Travis smiled as he said to the boy, "Relax, this tray

is no problem. I'm just glad to be in this fine school, and I'd be glad to have you in my weight training class."

Most of the time Travis acted normal, but not today; he was having a lot of fun playing "mind games" with the students.

The boy just stood there. He didn't know what to say. Travis' statement had completely disarmed him. As Travis finished taking care of the tray, he returned.

"What's your name," asked Travis smiling.

"Bob," said the boy stiffly.

"Well Bob," said Travis softly, "I'm glad to meet you. 'Don't sweat it. I'm for you not against you. You're Okay.'" Travis shook Bob's hand and left.

Just outside the hall, three girls were giggling as they eyed Coach Drake. Travis laughed as he came up to the, "What are you girls up to anyway?"

"We've got a question Coach Drake."

"Well first, tell me your names."

"I'm Ann, I'm Susan and I'm Barbara," they responded.

"Well Ann, Susan and Barbara what is your question?" Coach Drake said with a friendly twinkle.

"Well Coach Drake," asked Susan sheepishly, "Can girls sign up for your Weight-Training Classes?"

"Why sure. You can get some great benefit from lifting. But I must warn you that it's a tough class. I expect hard work and no foolishness. If you go out for any of the Red Lion's Lady teams, the class will improve your athletic abilities just like it will improve the boys'."

Coach Drake then made his way outside. He began picking up cans and talking to a few students who braved the brisk, but bright December day.

Coach Drake liked the small town atmosphere. Most kids at Hamilton were fairly conservative; but like every school, it had a few on the fruit-loop fringe, he thought. He saw a group of six kids around one corner of the building. They had the weird hairdos and the black-leather look. Coach Drake knew this was their way of making a statement and showing off their individuality. However, he couldn't help laughing to himself as he walked closer. The four boys were all wearing earrings and black, spiked leather bracelets.

They were surprised to see Coach Drake, and they tried to hide their cigarettes. All but one that is, and Coach Drake had recognized him from the yearbook. The boy didn't flinch as he continued to smoke.

"Your name's Bart isn't it?" said Travis politely.

"So," Bart curtly responded.

"My name's Coach Drake, and I recognized you from your picture in the yearbook."

"So," he again curtly responded.

"Well Bart," Travis continued, "I had some of the varsity starters over at my place the other night. They said that you were a pretty good athlete."

"So," again came the reply.

Travis almost lost control, but then reminded himself that he had no idea what this kid had gone

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through. And besides, everyone can change for the better.

"So here's the deal," smiled Travis unblinkingly. "I'm inviting you to join my Weight Training class, and if things work out, I'll invite you to be on our football team. If you'll work hard and dedicate yourself, I'll work my butt off for you. I'll do everything I can to give you the opportunity of being successful in every phase of your life and of reaching your potential. I don't care about your past. You have an opportunity right now for a fresh start." As Travis was talking, he was picking up pop cans around the boys.

"I'll think about it man," Bart said with a steely hardness. Travis knew that the boy had to stay in character in front of his friends. However, he hoped that Bart would really think about his offer.

Travis turned and put the cans he had picked up in the trash can, and said, "Okay Bart, I'll see you. Take care." As Travis made his way back into the school, one of the girls turned to Bart and snickered, "Man, that guy is weird man, totally weird."

"So," Bart muttered as he finished his cigarette.

What a week thought Travis. he was glad it was Friday. Travis plopped down in his Toyota and began the three-hour trip back to his family. "I can't wait to see Diana and the kids," he said aloud. He turned to a country music station and began to think about the week.

He now had fifty-five kids in the first two periods. He had an average of twelve kids in the other classes. Plus, another twenty-one who had to wait until semester break to work weight training into their class schedule were coming after school. He had six teacher aides, two managers, a photographer, and Hamilton's best art student who had offered to paint a ferocious red lion on the weight-room wall. All in all, Travis Drake was extremely pleased at such an overwhelming response to his assembly.

"Hi Daddy!" squealed Shauna as Travis came through the front door.

"Hello pumpkin. Boy did I miss you." Travis picked up his little Shauna and held her close as he whirled her around. Matt and Andrea got their hugs; and finally, Travis was alone with Diana.

Chapter 17 The Lift-A-Thon

Becky and Rick knocked on Mr. Dixon's door.

"Hello Mr. Dixon, I'm Becky Wilson and this is Rick Steadman. We're in the Hamilton High Lift-A-Thon to raise money for our new weight room. I'm going to lift as much as I can, and so is Rick. We would like to have you as a sponsor. Can we count on you to help us?"

This was a canned speech that everybody was using. Mr. Dixon smiled pleasantly and asked, "How does it work?"

Rick took his turn. "Well sir, it's simple. We lie on a bench and take a weight down to our chest and then push it up. We'd like you to pledge money for each pound that we lift. I can do around 200 pounds; and Becky, we hope, can do about 50 pounds."

"That is if I don't kill myself first," chimed in Becky. Mr. Dixon laughed out loud, "Well kids, our budget is pretty tight; but Becky, I suppose I could pledge a quarter for you and a nickel for you Rick. Is that Okay?"

"It sure is Mr. Dixon and thanks a lot. By the way, you and your family can come watch. It's next Monday night at 6:30 in the gym. We've got hot dogs, drinks, and balloons for the kids. It should be loads of fun," added Becky.

And so it went. Some gave more and some less. Ninety people had agreed to participate in the Lift-A-Thon. Sixty-five boys, mostly athletes; fifteen girls, cheerleaders and student body officers and ten adults.

Coach Drake had arranged special contests between the Presidents of Hamilton's two local banks and between Hamilton's Police Chief and Fire Chief.

"How much you got Becky?" asked Rick.

"I got you beat," taunted Becky.

"Oh yeah, well we'll see who's the strongest Monday night," challenged Rick teasingly as he took Becky into his arms for a very long good-night kiss.

Becky had \$5.50 per pound in pledges, counting 75 cents from her parents and grandparents. Rick had \$1.15 per pound pledged.

Needless to say, Coach Drake was sweating blood for a while. But when the pledges began to come in, he began to breathe a little easier. Fortunately, he didn't have to worry about the hot dogs and drinks, Mr. Carter was in charge of them. He got everything donated. The orange drinks were from McDonald's and the hot dogs were donated by two local supermarkets. Mr. Carter decided to charge a quarter for the hot dogs and to give the drinks away. Mr. Carter and Coach Drake wanted as many people there as possible and for them to have fun. To help promote community involvement, Coach Drake would speak at a special booster club meeting held in conjunction with the Lift-A-Thon. He would be officially introduced to the community at this meeting.

But Travis' biggest worry was the pledges. His neck was on the line. Coach Miller, Tanselli, McMasters, Littlewood and Myers were busy tallying the pledges from their groups. As soon as they were finished, they gave the totals to Coach Drake.

"Woo," whooped Travis as he stared at the totals. "If everybody lifts and if everyone collects what they're supposed to, we'll have over ten thousand dollars!"

Three benches were set up in the gym. Coach Drake had made certain the floor was protected. Phil Singleton, the basketball coach, was a little worried that someone would drop a weight on his newly finished floor. Two of the benches and weights had been borrowed from athletes; but all in all, the set up looked good.

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