

QUEST FOR GREATNESS

A Continuing Story by Greg Shepard

QUICK REVIEW

Chapters 1-20

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 have just raised \$15,000.00 and the program is in full gear.

Chapter 20 The Best Offer

Jerry Littlewood interjected, "What if they won't come to the study hall?"

Travis responded, "It's voluntary. We're trying to help, not punish. I want to make sure those kids can read and understand their assignments. Heck, if a man won't go to class, be on time, and hand in every assignment on schedule, then he won't get a good grade. Getting a 2.0 is almost always predicated on those three things. If he won't do those three things and if he refuses our help, then how can we count on him on the football field. He simply does not want to win nor be a part of our goal!" Travis could really get worked up when he started talking about self-destructive things students do to themselves.

Coach Myers took a turn. "I think a few kids still do not believe. They're testing us. If we stick together on this and truly try to help them, we won't have very many that won't get a 2.0 GPA.

Travis thanked Coach Myers and proceeded to go over the handout that illustrated the progress of the team. Coach Miller exclaimed, looking at Travis, "Coach this is amazing. You really went to a lot of effort!" Coach Drake sat looking at the figures and said, "The teachers' aides did this. They just took the figures out of each

player's record book. In my estimation, we are still weak, but we've made vast improvements."

Coach McMasters beamed, "I never thought we'd have twenty-one players benching over 200 pounds!"

Travis continued to look at the figures, "By next fall, we should have at least twelve who bench 300 plus. But the main lifts we should be concerned about are the Parallel Squat and the Power Clean. We've got to have our starters Squatting at least 400 and Cleaning 250 pounds."

Coach Littlewood spoke, "Coach Drake, I've had some of the receivers come by, and they really feel they are getting faster. They've been telling me about their form and technique. You know what we should do? We should video tape them running. Then, they could better visualize their efforts."

Travis' eyes darted up. "That's brilliant. I really like that idea. Can you get video equipment for classes?"

"Sure can coach," responded Coach Littlewood positively. He was feeling more and more like part of the staff.

"You know Jerry, I'm kind of weak at sprinting techniques. Could you organize the video taping over the analysis part. The teachers' aides can assist you."

Coach Littlewood nodded.

Coach Myers added, "We should all be very positive and make an effort to talk to players when we see them. We ought to ask them not only about their lifts and their times but also about their classes."

Everyone agreed and the meeting was over. Travis was the last one out the door.

"Coach Drake! Coach Drake! Can I talk to you for a minute?"

Startled at first, Travis looked down and saw a boy in a wheelchair. "Yes, you surely can."

Travis was fearful that maybe this was the boy who had knocked on the door over an hour ago. "Have you been waiting long?"

"Only about an hour," said the boy. "But that's Okay Coach, because I want to see if I can help, like maybe being a manager."

Travis asked, "What's your name son?"

"It's Benny, Coach," he said with a wide smile.

"Good to meet you, Benny," Travis acknowledged as his eyes quickly looked at Benny's legs and arms. Benny was nearly a quadriplegic. He had no use of his legs whatsoever and only limited use of his shoulders, arms, and fingers. "What do you think you want to do, Benny?" Travis finally asked.

"Anything Coach. I just want to help," responded Benny with his continued smile.

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"Well, I could use a good man to keep track of two important areas," mused Coach Drake. "Do you think you could be my chief in charge of towels and footballs? You could save us a lot of money if you could keep an accurate count."

Benny's eyes and face beamed as he answered, "Coach Drake, I'm your man. I can keep an accurate record, and I can hand them out and put them away."

"Boy, I'm glad that's settled. That's the best offer I've had all week," said Coach Drake. "I've been worried about that area. By the way Benny, how do you get around in that thing? And tell me what happened to you."

"Coach, you see these buttons? They control everything. I can go about any place there are not stairs. I was in a car accident when I was five years old. I can't move my legs but I'm working on better use of my hands and arms."

"Benny, I'm sure glad you came by, and now I need to ask one more thing. Valentine's day is next week. Don't let me forget that my wife, Diana, deserves my attention on that day."

"Okay Coach," Benny grinned. "I'll remind you."

"Thanks Benny. Come by tomorrow and I'll get you started. Can I give you a ride home?" Travis asked.

"No thanks Coach, I can make it just fine. See you tomorrow."

Travis watched Benny motor his wheelchair down the hall. A lump settled in Travis' throat as he was again reminded of his blessings and the strong spirit of those with special challenges.

Chapter 21 Troutman's Offer

The towels were folded and put in their slot. Some of the folds were a little off center. Benny took nearly 30 seconds to take care of one towel. Nonetheless, he had worked hard all week and got the job done.

"Coach Drake, the towels are all done," announced Benny proudly. "We have 562 towels."

"You've done well, Benny," replied Travis.

"Coach, one more thing. Tomorrow is Valentine's Day. Don't forget!"

"What would I do without you Benny?" declared Travis.

In the locker room, Rick was finishing getting dressed after his workout. Around the corner came Eddie Troutmen.

"Hey, what's happenin' my man," Troutman said, addressing Rick.

"Not much," said Rick purposely looking into his locker.

"You heard about the super party. You're goin' aren't ya, Rick?"

"Haven't really thought about it."

"Haven't thought about it! Everyone's goin' to be there man. It's at Sherman's house again. It's what's happening. Big things are goin' down. Oh, I get it. You been spendin' so much time with that broad Becky, man, you've been out of touch, man."

Rick whirled around, his eyes flashing and grabbed Troutman with both hands and slammed him against the locker. Rick's voice was quiet, yet like acid as he said, "Don't you ever talk about Becky like that again or I'll waste your face. You got that Troutman?"

"Yeah, yeah, I got it. Don't get your underwear in a tight wad man. Lemme down!" squealed Troutmen. Eddie hadn't realized it until now, but Rick had gained about 10 pounds and his grip was like a vice.

"Anyway, it's like before," spoke Troutman like nothing had happened. "It's five for the kegger. Another five if Becky drinks, and if you really want a buzz man, I'm roundin' up some good stuff. Only thing, you know, it costs like ten a hit."

Rick's grip got even tighter. "I don't want anything you got. I don't even want you in our locker room. You're like a disease that won't quit." Rick shoved him toward the exit.

Unfazed, Troutman looked at Rick as he walked backwards. "I know you man. You'll be there; and for a friend, I'll cut you some slack. The first hit you take will be on me."

A small crowd had gathered around the scene. Rick looked around. "We got to stick together guys. We're not doin' any of Troutman's shit. We can have a good time without it."

Mr. Steadman was reading the newspaper and watching the television. Rick came in and sat on the couch by his father. Mr. Steadman put the paper down and said, "How's it goin' son?"

"It's goin' great Dad. How' it with you?"

"Well son, that foreman's job is lookin' good. I'll know next week. Say. I was noticin' your jeans. Your legs look like they're gonna bust out."

Rick smiled and responded, "It's all those squats I've been doing. I think I weigh 183 now, and I've reached six foot one."

"That's great son. I think the days are gone that I can tangle with you. I'm proud of your grades. You don't know how proud. Anyway, if you need any money tonight, I got a five to spare."

"No Dad, that's Okay. Becky and I are goin' out. Do a little dancin' and then maybe go over to a party at Matt Sherman's place."

Mr. Steadman was amazed. A kid in this day-and-age turning down money on a night out. Rick said good-bye to everyone and was out the door.

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"Hello Mr. Wilson," greeted Rick as he came to pick up Becky.

"Well hello Rick. Boy, you sure are fillin' out. How's the team look for next year. You goin' to win?"

All the players had been taught by Coach Drake how to answer these kinds of questions.

"We're workin' hard, sir; and we're going to do our best," offered Rick. "Becky, you look great. You ready to go?"

Becky gave that great big smile of hers. "Sure Rick. See ya Daddy. I love you."

Rick and Becky decided to go to an early movie. Rick wanted an excuse for missing the party or at least as much of it as possible. After the movie, they walked close together. It was a cold February night so they had two reasons to be close. Kirby and Emile came driving by and honked. "Hey you two, hop in; we're going over to the party."

"No thanks guys," answered Rick. "We're going to spend the rest of the evening over at Becky's place." Rick hadn't really asked Becky, but he thought it'd be okay."

"Maybe you should go Rick," Emile persisted. "A lot of the team is there, and Troutman says he's going to have some all-time stuff that we'll never forget."

"Hey man," Rick retorted, "That Troutman's poison. He's gonna screw you up."

"We're just gonna watch, man," confessed Emile.

Rick came to an abrupt halt. "Becky, I gotta go." Becky had marveled at the way Rick had grown and progressed, but she didn't want to take a chance on any regression. "No Rick," she pleaded, "I don't want to go over there. The last time was the worst of my life."

Rick's mind flashed back to that time, which had ended with him puking his guts out. Becky had forgiven him graciously, but now he knew she carried a scar. This thought made him even more determined.

"Give us a ride," Rick stated. "Becky, please have faith in me." No one spoke all the way to Matt Sherman's house.

"Hey Rick! How's it goin' big guy?" greeted Eddie Troutman. "I knew you'd come. You got your money?"

"Sorry Troutman, we're just going to dance and have a good time without the keg."

Troutman squawked, "Hey, we gotta pay for it man. You take one sip, and it's gonna cost you five. Anyway this party's gonna start jumpin' when Bart gets here."

Rick just ignored Troutman and walked with Becky, Emile, and Kirby right by him into the house. A lot of kids were there, and the music was loud.

"Let's dance," Rick asked Becky.

As they started to dance, he saw Buddy, Jim, TJ, and Jeff. He nodded. After the dance, Eddie Troutman came running through the door with a brown bag. He stood on a chair and yelled for quiet.

"We got 'em! We got 'em!" Troutman yelled excitedly. "Line up. These little vials will give you a buzz like there's no tomorrow. They're only ten bucks for one incredible rush. What we ought to do is have a repeat of the famous contest. That will heighten everything. I've got a ten to bet on Buddy. I know he'll beat Rick Steadman this time. Let's go for it guys!" Troutman's eyes were flashing. It was obvious he was high on something.

Buddy didn't know quite what to do. He'd been cutting down on beer quite a bit this year, but the crowd began to chant.

Rick glared at Troutman and then began to smile. He came forward. Becky pulled at Rick's arm and pleaded, "Rick don't." Rick grabbed Troutman and pulled him off the chair and took his place. Rick raised his arms for quiet. Becky held her breath.

"Thanks Eddie. You've sure gone to a lot of trouble, but I've got to decline your invitation. You should know that Buddy and I are in training. I had hoped that you woulda respected our position. I don't want your vials or your keg. All I want to do is dance with Becky and have a good time with my friends. Buddy, turn on the music!"

Buddy turned on the music even louder than before. Becky rushed over and nearly tackled Rick as she threw her arms around him. Rick slung her around laughing as they began to dance amid a number of pats on the back.

Troutman didn't know what to do. He went from person to person trying to get ten. He had very few takers. Soon Bart appeared at the door, wearing his black leather outfit.

"Troutman! I want to see you right now!" ordered Bart. He grabbed Eddie by the collar and yanked him outside. "Listen you little weasel. I gave you 50 vials. You owe me three hundred. You said you could get everybody high."

Rick and Becky danced until after midnight. TJ congratulated Rick on his stand and even said that everyone should stick together. Everyone seemed to have a great time, especially Rick and Becky.

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NOVEL

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