

# QUEST FOR GREATNESS

## A Continuing Story by Greg Shepard

### QUICK REVIEW

#### Chapters 1-21

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 have happened in Rick's life. He comes from a one-parent family with a dad who also has problems. Rick had been faltering in school and drinking quite heavily.

However, Rick's life is now changing for the positive because of his girl friend Becky and especially Coach Drake. He is emerging as a leader, and better student. His family relationships have improved dramatically. Rick is saying "No" to drugs and alcohol while helping lead his teammates to also stay away.

The team has established a dream of winning a State Championship even though they've experienced a decade of losing. Coach Drake has the whole school psyched up. They just raised \$15,000.00 with a Lift-A-Thon and built a new weight room. However, the principal, Jim Donaldson, is out to cause Coach Drake problems.

#### Chapter 22 "A Few More"

"Dr. Kowalski, I have some reservations about Coach Drake," continued Donaldson. "As principal, I've got to keep a balance on all activities." Jim Donaldson was upset. Travis had already spent nearly all the money from the Lift-A-Thon. "I think Coach Drake has spent the money on frivolous things and on personal items. We ought to bring him in and find out exactly what's happening with those funds. We've got to put a lid on it. If what I think is correct, we should give him a stern warning and perhaps even a probationary status. You know, Sam Carter and some others aren't all that pleased about his choice of equipment. I think we've given him too much of a free reign."

"Now wait just a minute," challenged Dr. Kowalski. "I've heard a lot of tremendous things about Travis. He's made a lot of positive changes. A coach has got to be able to run his program. However, you as principal should thoroughly check out your concerns. If anything is inappropriate, you can be certain that action will be taken."

Donaldson smiled as he sensed that he'd won a point. "Thank you sir."

"Mrs. Atkinson, will you please contact Coach Drake, and ask him to meet me during his preparation period," said Donaldson in an officious tone. "And ask him to bring his Lift-A-Thon records."

Coach Drake knocked on the door. "You wanted to see me, sir?" said Travis as Donaldson opened the door.

"Yes Coach, I do. Dr. Kowalski had some concerns about how you're spending the Lift-A-Thon money. He's asked me to investigate."

"Investigate?"

Donaldson sensed that investigate was too strong a word and reiterated, "Well, you know, check into. It's just an informal administrative thing of checks and balances. Did you bring your records?"

Travis was a bit nervous. He did, however, remain under control as he said, "Yes, they're all right here."

Donaldson perused each item carefully. He examined each figure in silence. Finally, he spoke, "Coach Drake, you've spent a lot of money on shirts, socks and other things that the students could buy on their own."

Travis was irritated but tried not to show it. "Mr. Donaldson, the players earned the money. I figure they should get something back. We use those things to build unity and pride. They are rewards for achievement. My understanding was that I could spend that money as I saw fit, as long as it was for the school."

Donaldson smiled, "Well of course, but we just wanted to make sure the spending coincided with district policy."

Travis had heard enough and couldn't constrain himself. "What are you going to do next fall? Are you going to form a committee and call my football plays?"

"Now, now, Coach, no reason to react that way. What about these coaches' uniforms. Don't you think they are a little extravagant? And what about all this food for coaches' meetings?"

Coach Drake stood up and put both hands on the table. He leaned over facing Donaldson and calmly but forcefully responded, "With regard to the uniforms, I want my staff full of pride. I want us to be first class. I want us to be united and to breed enthusiasm. All my assistants are working hard and have given a lot of extra time--free. We have after-school meetings once a week to prepare ourselves. Sure we have some treats, but what's wrong with that? I'll tell you something. As a result of those meetings, we've helped our players get better grades."

"We had seventeen players who were below a 2.0 GPA and now we've got only three. What would the district pay to raise grades for that many students? What would it cost the district for all the extra hours that the coaches are putting in? If I were spending the money on myself,

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you'd have reason to be concerned--but I'm not. I'm spending it for the good of the school. Now, let me run my program and don't worry if I buy my staff a doughnut or two. And believe me, I won't do anything inappropriate with the Lift-A-Thon money."

Mr. Donaldson swiveled in his chair and stood saying, "Don't take this personal. We didn't mean to impugn your integrity. We just wanted to check your expenses. I'm satisfied that everything's OK."

They shook hands and Travis left. Donaldson immediately reached for the phone.

"Dr. Kowalski," Donaldson began, "I've had my meeting with Coach Drake. I'd say he's OK for now. The spending was borderline as far as proprieties go. I'll keep a watch on him."

As Travis was walking down the hall toward his office, Sam Carter was waiting. Sam wanted to go to lunch and talk about the football program. It had to be quick because Travis only had fifty minutes before his next class. As they headed for lunch, Mr. Carter said, "Coach, I like your style. TJ's been telling me about the physical giants on the team. Even he's gained eight pounds. We are also aware of the number of players and of the positive stance you are taking on drugs, alcohol, and grades. Everything seems to be improving. I want to express my thanks."

"Thanks, Mr. Carter. Everyone's been working hard. The staff has really been great."

Mr. Carter continued, "How is the weight equipment we purchased? Can the booster club be of more assistance? Maybe we could raise some money for some machines to "class up" our weight room."

Travis again told him the weight room equipment was super. If any additional money was going to be raised, it could go to helping the team attend a summer camp or to get team jerseys that the kids could keep. Mr. Carter acknowledged the idea and pledged his support.

"Coach Drake," Mr. Carter questioned, "How is TJ doing? He will be the starting quarterback won't he?"

"Well, Mr. Carter, TJ is working very hard to earn the starting position," responded Travis. "However, I can't say right now."

"Coach Drake, I'd like to know as soon as possible in order to make my plans. I'm in a position to really help your program, if you get my drift."

Travis' mind was racing and finally he said, "I sure do. You love your son very, very much; and you want him to rise to his potential. As he works hard, improves, and EARNs that starting position, he'll have you to thank. Not every son has such strong parental support. TJ's lucky to have you as a father. Well sir, it's time for me to go."

On their way back to school, Travis talked about everything but the starting quarterback position.

As the staff came in for their weekly meeting, Tom remarked, "What's the occasion? We're all going to gain

ten pounds with all this food."

"Well men, this is in response to the administration and to their tremendous support," said Travis, amazing even himself with his sincerity.

The meeting went well with each coach elaborating on his special area. Tom Miller reported that two of his linemen were showing all-state promise, with Buddy at a solid 240 pounds and with Dan at 6'5" and 225 pounds. He said that Buddy was much more solid and had quicker feet. Coach Littlewood noted the improvement in speed techniques and that thirty-eight players were running the forty in five flat or better. Emile was the fastest at 4.5, but everyone was pleased with Rick Steadman. He was running a 4.6, and he was up to 188 pounds. His size and speed were very encouraging. Travis informed everyone that five athletes had attained the 400-pound squat level and the 250-pound clean level. Fifty-one had squatted 300 plus, and forty-two had power cleaned 200 plus!

Coach McMasters also had good news on grades. Only two players were still below the 2.0 GPA. In fact, twenty-eight were headed for the honor roll. Coach Myers completed the improvement report by stating that vertical jumps had improved an average of 3.6 inches per man in the last month and that standing long jumps had improved 5.2 inches per man. He also reported that players had gained an average of eight pounds.

Coach Drake concluded the meeting by remarking, "Men, I couldn't be more pleased, It seems like nothing can stop us. Now that the basketball and wrestling seasons are over, we seem to have picked up a few more players. We have three new potential starters. Tyrone Johnson can jump out of the gym. He wants to try out for defensive back. Mark Russo has given me a strong indication that he would like to try out for quarterback. He certainly played heads-up ball on the court. Our 185 pounder, Pete Henderson, thinks he can help us in the line—I know he can. He finished fourth at district. Pete told me he started in junior high and only missed this year as a sophomore. Let's make these guys feel welcome and get them going."

## CHAPTER 23 TRAGEDY

Rick and Becky were studying together for an English test. It looked like a particularly hard test, and they studied until 9:30 p.m. at the Wilson house. Rick had kept up his intensity in the classroom, and he received a 3.1 GPA for the 1st term of the 2nd semester. Coach Drake had encouraged Rick to go out for baseball. It had been a couple of years since he'd played, but he was really enjoying the season. Rick was the starting center fielder, and he looked like he was going to be a powerful hitter. Fortunately, he was still allowed to lift weights, and he continued to gain strength.

Mr. Steadman sent everyone to bed at 9:00 p.m. Billy



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slept in Rick's room while Bobby and Sharon shared a second bedroom. Usually, Rick was there to help tuck them in, but they were getting old enough to do it themselves. Mr. Steadman sprawled out on the couch to watch television and to read the paper. The foreman's job was demanding, and he was very tired. He lit a cigarette and got comfortable to enjoy the rest of the evening in peace and quiet. Mr. Steadman was soon in a very deep sleep. But the cigarette continued to burn, and soon the couch and newspapers were smoldering. The smoke, in a sinister way, spread from room to room.

Rick was rounding the corner at 9:45 and he immediately saw the flames and smoke billowing from the roof. His heart pounded.

"Oh my God--Please God, don't let it be!"

He raced to the Kensington's, their neighbors, and barged through the door. Rick screamed, "Our house's on fire! Make a call! Make a call!"

He bolted back outside and ripped the front door open. Large columns of smoke and fire burst through the opening forcing Rick back into Mr. Kensington's arms.

He yelled at Rick, "There's nothing you can do! It's gone! It's gone!"

Rick broke loose and vaulted through on the floor and cried out, "Dad, Billy, Bobby, Sharon! Answer me! Please God, let them answer!"

Rick was coughing. His eyes were tearing. Rick crawled toward the bedrooms. He found a hand. It was Billy's hand. Rick grabbed it and pulled. He got a grip on both arms and dragged Billy toward the door. He was to the point of exhaustion. He was blacking out. The sirens were blasting as they arrived on the scene. Their piercing sound revived him. Flames were everywhere. Rick came crashing through what was left of the front door and collapsed with Billy in his arms. A fireman pulled them to safety.

Billy was unconscious, and Rick was coughing and could barely see.

With cries of anguish, Rick kept trying to make his way back.

"Get them!" He broke loose from the one fireman and stumbled toward the burning wreckage. Three firemen were needed to hold him down.

In a matter of minutes, the mobile home was completely gone. The ambulance sped toward the Hamilton County Hospital. Billy lay motionless. Rick was delirious as he lay beside his brother. Blackened from smoke from head to toe, Rick kept sobbing, "Make him live God! Make him live!"

News spread like wildfire through the town of Hamilton. Coach Drake was at the hospital by 11:00 p.m. He could do nothing but be there. Rick had been cleaned and given a sedative. Billy had suffered severe smoke inhalation and was listed in critical condition. Becky stayed overnight at the hospital. She didn't know what else to do.

The news about Billy was really good. The prognosis

was for a complete recovery. But what would Rick and Billy do? What would happen to them? Where would they live? How would they eat? How could he support himself and Billy? These questions weighed heavy on the mind of young Rick Steadman. However, another question loomed ominously. "Was it my fault?" Rick wondered. If I'd only been home at 9:00 to put everyone to bed. It wouldn't have happened." He searched for forgiveness or something that would relieve his sick, empty feeling of loss and guilt.

## CHAPTER 24 THE DECISION

Travis was deeply affected by the Steadman events. He just couldn't stop thinking about Rick's situation. It was late, and the kids were in bed. Travis sat in the living room thinking about Rick and Billy.

Diana came down from the bedroom. She knew all this brooding wasn't the answer. As she saw the outline of Travis in the darkened living room, she heard him crying softly. She went to the stereo in the living room and put on their love song, "You Light Up My Life."

Travis wiped away his tears and turned on the table lamp by his E-Z chair. They embraced and danced slowly to their special song. Diana whispered in Travis' ear, "I love you," and gave him a gentle hug.

"What are we gonna do? What's Rick gonna do?" sighed Travis softly.

"I've got a solution for that," whispered Diana. As she told Travis he began to beam, "You mean that honey?"

Just then the phone rang. It was TJ.

"Coach, there's something you gotta know."

"Yes TJ, what is it?"

"Well, some well-meaning parent gave Rick a fifth of whiskey. I'm worried that he'll do something stupid. He just took off, and I can't find him."

Travis told Diana what had happened, and he was off quickly to look for Rick. He drove over to the Wilson's but the lights were all out. Travis must have driven all over town, twice. He then thought to himself, "I wonder..."

Travis drove quickly to the stadium. A full moon cast its light on the playing field. Travis saw a seated figure leaning against the goal post.

He quickly and quietly made his way down to the field.

"Rick... Rick, is that you?"

*Story Continued Next Issue*

**"Quest For Greatness"**  
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