

# QUEST FOR GREATNESS

## A Continuing Story by Greg Shepard

### QUICK REVIEW

#### Chapters 1-24

Quest For Greatness is based on true stories. Coach Travis Drake is the new football Coach at Hamilton High School. With energy, enthusiasm, charisma and hard work, positive changes have been taking place.

The other major character Rick Steadman, who is a junior at Hamilton, has just been devastated by tragedy. His father and two sisters have just died in a fire that destroyed their home. Only his little brother Billy survived.

It's such a shame because Rick, with Coach Drake's help, had improved his grades, physical skills and family relationships. He also had corrected his alcohol problem. Rick was emerging as a leader but now we don't know what will happen.

We pick up the story as Coach Drake has just found Rick alone on the football field late at night just after the tragic fire.

### Chapter 24

#### "The Decision"

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

"Go away Coach. I want to be alone."

"Rick, are you OK?" Travis questioned as he sat down beside him.

"What do you think?"

"I know how you must feel," Travis said as he looked down at the turf.

"No you don't. Nobody knows how I feel. Nobody," said Rick half sobbing.

Travis, groping for words, finally said, "You're right Rick. I don't know how you feel. I can only imagine, and what I imagine hurts very much."

"It just isn't fair. Dad just got his promotion. Bobby and Sharon never got a chance to live at all. What kind of a God would let that happen? Anyway, the whole thing is my fault. If I had come home just a little earlier."

"Rick, you can't blame yourself. It wasn't your fault. You almost lost your life trying to save your family. You're a hero for saving Billy."

Rick snorted, "Some hero. Three of my family died. I'm gonna get drunk."

"Okay Rick, that's one solution. But let me ask you a few questions first," said Travis gently.

"Do you believe that God exists?"

"Yes sir," answered Rick staring straight ahead, "But why would He let it happen?"

"I can't answer that Rick. But if He does exist, do you

believe that your Dad, Bobby and Sharon could be in His loving presence at this very moment?"

"Yes sir, I guess that's possible," responded Rick in a more positive tone.

"Well, if that's so, then their spirits must still live. Is that a possibility Rick?"

"Yes, I guess so." A quiet peaceful feeling was beginning to settle over Rick.

"Let's suppose it is true. Could you all be together again as a family?"

"You know Coach. I want to believe that we can be." Travis looked hard at Rick. "Do you think they could be aware of what is going on down here on earth?"

Rick nodded affirmatively.

"Well then, Rick, how do you want them to see you? Do you want them to see you as a man who rises to his potential? As someone who's the best he can be?"

Rick was silent for a long time. Then Rick and Travis got up. Rick gave Coach Drake a long hug.

"Thanks Coach."

"You know, Diana and I were talking tonight. We agreed that we would like you and Billy to live with us. You're almost part of our family anyway."

"You mean that Coach?"

They faced each other again. Tears were present in both Rick and Coach Drake's eyes. They walked off the field together. Travis put his hand on Rick's shoulder. The whiskey bottle was quietly slipped into a trash can. The crickets began to chirp again.

### Chapter 25

#### "The Transfer"

"Glory be!" bubbled Fred Maddox, "Wait until Coach Drake gets a load of this!"

Fred had just enrolled a transfer student. This was no ordinary transfer. He was a football player! Apparently, the new transfer had started last fall at a large high school in California. Mr. Maddox led his new find to the lower level to meet Coach Drake.

"Coach Drake, I want you to meet someone," said Fred almost out of breath. Travis saw a solidly built young man with a dark complexion.

"We got a transfer Coach! Can you make room for him?"

Travis laughed, "Slow down a minute." He shook hands with the new transfer.

"Hello, I'm Coach Drake. What's your name?"

"Lem, sir. Lem Kalani," he said very politely.

Coach Drake thanked Fred and began to find out about Lem. Travis learned that Lem was from Tonga, an

*Continued on Page 51*



## QUEST FOR GREATNESS *continued from page 26*

island in the South Pacific. His family owned a landscaping business. They migrated east from California to relocate their business in a smaller community. As Lem loosened up a little, he demonstrated a great smile and quite a sense of humor. They came to Hamilton by chance. But when they heard about the new weight room and felt the excitement about the football program Mr. Kalani said, "We will live here." A Tongan father commands a great deal of respect and his word is law; therefore, the Kalani family would live in Hamilton until Mr. Kalani changed his mind.

Lem Kalani was also impressive physically. His 6-1, 212 pound frame brought a smile to Coach Drake's lips. In addition to being big, Lem was fast. He ran a 4.8 forty. Lem had played defensive tackle, but he admitted that he'd always wanted to play linebacker. Travis promised Lem a fair shot at any position he wanted. Lem was introduced to the class and was immediately made to feel welcome. No one in his right mind would want to be unfriendly toward the big Tongan.

After school, Travis stayed in the weight room to workout by himself. In between sets, he reflected on the school year, which was almost over. His six months at Hamilton went fast, yet it seemed like a lifetime. The pieces of the "championship puzzle" were beginning to fit.

The weight room was a great success. Sixty juniors and seniors to be were signed up for football. They all had experienced tremendous improvement. He had an excited, cohesive staff. Both his staff and the players had commitment and pride. And now he had a blue-chip transfer! Coach Drake laughed at the old cliché, "It's better to be lucky than good."—and boy had he been lucky.

Travis turned his thoughts to Rick. In all his years of coaching, Travis had never seen such a drastic turn around. Rick and Billy were adjusting well to their tragedy; and in so doing, they had added a lot to the Drake family. Both Diana and Travis loved Rick and Billy very much, and that brought a warm feeling to Travis.

Travis' thoughts went from the past to the future as he thought about what he could do to help Rick and Billy. He thought about his football program and about how the players and coaches would handle the summer break. Would they stay committed during the summer? Would they continue to work on the weights?

These and other questions would be answered in their last official team meeting for the school year. Captains would be announced, and plans for the summer would be discussed. Each coach would take his turn at trying to commit his players to a summer improvement program. He could hardly wait until tomorrow to see what the meeting would accomplish.

### Chapter 26 "Summer Break"

Coach Drake had Coach Miller handle the election of

team captains. All the coaches helped count the votes. Coach Miller then addressed the players. "Your votes are counted, and your new captains are TJ Carter, Buddy Harris, and Rick Steadman."

A lot of cheers went up for the players, managers, and coaches. Then the players started chanting: "Speech, Speech, Speech!"

TJ was the first to speak, "I just want to, uh, say thanks. I'll be in touch with all you receivers and QB's. Starting tomorrow, we're going to practice on our own. I'll help anybody with his routes and with his assignments. If we practice together, we'll play great together," he concluded.

Buddy was next. "I'm like TJ, I'll help any lineman who wants help. We'll all meet at Jerry's Pizza Place and get big." Everybody laughed. "But seriously folks, thanks. I wish the season were here right now." Almost everybody felt the same as Buddy.

When Rick got up, everybody got quiet. "Thanks from me too. It means a lot to me to be elected captain. I won't let you down. We gotta stay committed during the summer. We can't let down. We need to remember that we're still a team even in the summer."

Coach Drake thanked each captain and said how proud he was of each of them. Each assistant coach spoke to the players. Coach Miller was first. "I'm really excited about next season. Our line is looking awesome but we need a lot of work." He spoke directly to Dan Porter and Pete Henderson—we're counting heavily on you guys. You'll need to work extra hard to make up for your inexperience." He knew they would accept his challenge. "The offensive line will have a special get together at my place every Monday. I want you to be so awesome that you blow people out of their shoes!"

Amidst a number of "All Rights!", Coach McMasters took his turn. "I'm really worried. We don't have a lot of size. Emile Martinez at only 5'8", 158 is a returning starter. Emile, you may not be big physically, but I know you'll give us a "big effort" and "big leadership" all the time. In fact, if the rest of you DB's will play big in the areas that really matter, I'll quit worrying about you not being big. Emile, I want you to partner up with Tyrone Johnson and teach him the ropes. All DB's will get together in the passing league; and as good as our passing attack will be, I don't think even they will be able to pass against us if we play big on defense."

That challenge sparked some friendly heated exchanges between receivers and the defensive backs. This exchange prompted Coach Littlewood to jump up. "You hear that challenge men. This summer all QB's and receivers are going to practice together at least three times per week. We're gonna be smooth. Coach McMasters you won't know whether you're comin' or goin'." The players were eating it up. They had never heard their coaches talk this way before. As Coach Littlewood sat down, he told the snappers and kickers to get at least 50 snaps or kicks in per day.

*Continued on the next page*



# QUEST FOR GREATNESS

*continued from page 51*

Coach Myers quietly ambled to the front; but then he quickly turned and bellowed, "We're not going to be like the past. We're goin' to attack every play. We're goin' to swarm around the ball, like bees on honey. We're goin' to punish people and, in general, create havoc. I don't care how big and strong a man is, but I do care about his intensity and willingness to sell out. Take Tim Adams for example. He gives every ounce of what he has, and I know he'll get the job done. Everybody has a chance to make my defense. You gotta be a little crazy and a little reckless, but most of all, you gotta be willing to give 100% when you're dog tired. I want a bunch of scrappers—especially when you're tired. Anyone can play tough when he is fresh. It takes a stud to play tough when he's tired. Close games are won when everybody is tired. I want our defense to win close games."

None of the players had ever seen Coach Myers like that. In the classroom he was always very quiet and very friendly. He always commanded the utmost respect, but now he kind of put the fear of God in each player. No one would want to quit trying and then have to face him on the sidelines.

Travis thanked everyone and proceeded to give an outline of the summer program. Players would be expected to lift weights at least twice per week. The weight room would be open five days per week, so time would not be an excuse. The passing league would start July 7. The summer camp at the University would start June 21. The one-week camp was optional, but it would only cost \$25.00 because the booster club was paying the rest and providing a school bus for transportation. And last but not least, Two-A-Days would begin August 15.

"Gentlemen," concluded Coach Drake, "A new era begins August 29 at 8:00 p.m. We will meet the challenge and whip Stevens High School—our first step toward the championship!"

The players reacted with enthusiasm and optimism. After all, this was the most players out for football in the history of Hamilton high School. Everyone remarked about the size of the players. This team would certainly be their biggest team ever. They had seven players benching over 300, ten squatting over 400 and eight Cleaning 250 or better, and they had a whole summer left!

Coach Drake excused everyone except Chad and Wes. The three of them went to Travis' office to meet in private.

Travis began, "Men, I love you guys. You have really worked hard in the weight room and on the conditioning. However, because your GPA is below 2.0, you are not eligible to play."

After a short silence, Wes spoke first, "Coach, can't you talk to our teachers or something. We're both returning starters. I'm sure if you talked to them, they'd give us a break. After all, the whole school is behind us."

Coach Drake's eyes narrowed, "Is that how you got it figured Chad?"

"Well Coach, it's only a couple of classes. What would it hurt? Who really cares anyway?"

What Travis would say in the next few moments would come as a shock to Chad and Wes and a sick feeling would come over two seventeen-year-old boys as they realized that it did matter and that someone did care.

"Yes," Travis countered. "I could talk to a couple of teachers, and yes we might even be able to fix things. But I'm not going to do it. Trying to "fix things" wouldn't be fair to you, to me, or to your teachers. We have provided you with a study hall and with extra help. Now I want you to look me in the eyes and answer me truthfully, "Did you skip any classes this term?"

Wes and Chad hung their heads and said, "Yes sir."

"When you went, did you go to class on time?"

"No sir, not all the time."

"Did you hand in every assignment on time?"

"No sir."

"We had an agreement, and you didn't keep your part. That means I can't count on you. If anyone is going to fix things it will be you—'fixing' means making up the work. If anybody is going to make arrangements to make up the work for summer school, it'll be you. If you are responsible young men, you'll meet this challenge and put your lives in order. I'll guarantee you that nobody will hold your hands or "fix things" when you get out of high school. You might as well start preparing for the real world right now. You've got three days before school's out. I suggest you get movin' if you want back on the team."

"You mean we're off the team," gulped Wes.

"Absolutely! And nobody is going to pull harder for your reinstatement than I will. That is, if you do what you need to do to make up missed assignments, to retake classes in summer school, or whatever it takes to bring your GPA to a 2.0 before Two-A-Days. But from now on, you're on your own. Good day gentlemen." And with that, Travis walked to the door and more-or-less ushered Wes and Chad out of his office and into the real world.

*Story Continued Next Issue*

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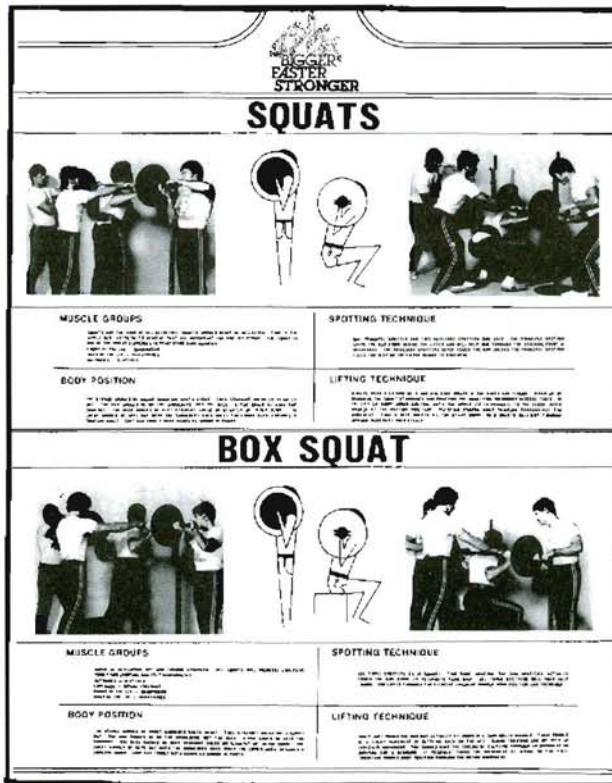




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