

QUEST FOR GREATNESS

A Continuing Story by Greg Shepard

QUICK REVIEW

Chapters 1-29

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 senior at Hamilton, has been devastated by tragedy. His father and two sisters died in a fire that destroyed their home. Only his little brother Billy survived.

Coach Drake with a lot of caring has helped Rick overcome his problems and this tragedy. Billy and Rick are now part of Coach Drake's family. Coach Drake and his staff have worked hard in the off-season and summer helping each player realize his potential physically, mentally and spiritually.

The results have been dramatic. Hamilton is now enjoying a 7-0 lead against Stevens High in their first game

Chapter 29

The First Game

Mr. Maddox punched Bernie in the shoulder, "Glory be, old buddy, we got ourselves a football team." Dr. Kowalski beamed with pride as Jim Donaldson remarked, "That was really a nice drive."

Hamilton again stopped Stevens dead on the next series. TJ again took command. Rick bolted on the first play for 65 yards and raced into the end zone. Travis' heart sank as he saw a yellow flag at midfield—it was a clip. The long run and score were nullified. Rick said, "Forget it," as they huddled up. "We can do it again." TJ quickly passed to Kirby Lewis for a twenty-yard pick up and a first down. Travis sent in another passing play, hoping to catch Stevens off-guard. The pass fell incomplete, but another 15-yard penalty for holding made it first and twenty-five. Wes yelled, "You're a real jerk ref." Travis came unglued and raced over to Wes and grabbed him by the face mask. "Don't you ever do that again. We've gone over this many times. No one, but no one, ever says anything derogatory to a ref." Wes knew better. It was an old habit. Travis' reaction kind of shocked the team, and it especially shocked Wes. They hadn't seen Coach Drake like that before. "It's Okay Wes," said Travis as he cooled down. "Just remember, it's important." Travis quickly called another play, and Rick ripped off another fifteen on a draw.

Tim came over to Wes, "I guess he really means what he says, doesn't he?"

"You got that right, man. I just screwed up. He scared the shit out of me," responded Wes.

"Don't sweat it. Let's just keep our shutout."

On third and five, Rick again got the call and promptly raced for another twelve yards. However, another holding penalty called the gain back. But no one said a word to the refs. Travis quickly conferred with Coach Miller on how to correct the problem, and another play was sent in.

The halftime score was 14-0, and the final was 27-0. Rick had rushed for 168 yards on 23 carries and had scored three touchdowns. The other score came midway through the fourth quarter on a Mark Russo pass. Travis had wanted to give Mark some experience with the first team, and he responded well. He completed only three passes, but one was a 35 yard scoring play on which Kirby caught a 20-yard post-pattern pass and scrambled for the remaining yardage.

A victory always makes a school dance a little better. Rick showered and met Becky. They had the last hour of the dance as their date. "It's surprising, but it seems our kids always have a lot of energy for dancing no matter how tired they look in class," thought Miss Johnson as she chaperoned the dance.

Becky and Rick tried to talk quietly, but it was pleasantly difficult. Everyone wanted to congratulate Rick. Becky didn't seem to mind. Everything seemed about perfect. They had won the game. Rick had played exceptionally well, and they were slow dancing. As Rick and Becky swayed to the music, he was finally feeling secure once again. "I even have wheels now," he thought, "Thanks to Coach Drake's letting me borrow his."

Diana Drake and Barbara Myers had prepared food for the special after-game party. They had invited everyone they could think of, including the administration and booster club people. Fortunately Hamilton won, so it was sure to be a celebration.

People were already mingling and having a good time by the time the coaches arrived. Many congratulatory remarks were offered and acknowledged. The first thing Travis did was to find Diana. "Honey, I've got something I want to show you," he said with a mischievous grin. Diana could read him like a book, but she played along. "Okay, what is it, Coach?" Diana said. Travis took her in a full embrace and kissed her and said, "Thanks for putting up with me." Everyone applauded.

Chapter 30

The Next Four

The next morning, the team and coaches were at work

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again. Coach Drake's in-season program consisted of two workouts per week. He wanted to see the team Saturday to check out any muscle pulls or other injury problems. At the same time, the team could stretch, lift, and do some light running. The other lifting day was Monday, which was also a light-practice day. The team came in at ten on Saturday morning, but the coaching staff had come in at eight.

Lou Tanselli had the scouting report on the next game, which was against Jefferson. After one hour, a basic game plan was established. The second hour was spent analyzing the previous game on video. After their meeting, the coaches helped the players with their in-season workout.

At eleven o'clock, everyone met in the cafeteria. The main purpose was to see the game video. Travis began by saying, "Men you played a great game. However, we can't sneak up on anybody else. We will have to be extremely well prepared. That's why we are spending the time today watching the video. We don't want the morning to be all drudgery. Besides, the only way we could get Buddy here was to promise milk and cookies to munch on while you watch yourselves crunch Stevens."

Everyone cheered.

The team had watched the game film, and they had analyzed their strengths and breakdowns. Before they left, Sam Carter, on behalf of the booster's, offered the team congratulations. However, he also came to talk to Travis in private. "Coach Drake, don't get me wrong," Mr. Carter said, "We are very pleased with the win and with the enthusiasm you've generated."

"Well thanks, Mr. Carter," responded Travis, knowing that more was to come.

"All in all, I liked your play selection," pressed Carter, "but I think you could have called more passes. You put that Russo kid in, and he threw a TD pass. How do you think that makes TJ feel?"

Travis had always wondered why fathers butted in like this. Did they butt in because they loved their sons so much that they just couldn't bear to see anything get in the way of their success, or did they butt in because they were living vicariously through their sons and refusing to let them be themselves. Even though Mr. Carter was totally out of line, Travis smiled as he asked. "Has TJ expressed being angry or upset?"

"Well no, not exactly."

"Wasn't TJ really happy with the win?" Travis further questioned.

"Well yes, but," Mr. Carter stopped talking as Travis stood up and put his arm on Mr. Carter's shoulder.

"Mr. Carter, I know you love your son. I love him too. He's a fine young man. I know you'd like him to get a scholarship and to pass for thousands of yards. TJ had a fine game, and he's going to get better. As for Russo, you know I've got to develop more than one QB. What if TJ were to get hurt? Our No. 1 team goal is to win the league and get to the playoffs. This is what generates scholarship

offers. College coaches look for winners. I want TJ to be the best QB in the state and to be a dynamic force in our system. TJ is going to lead us to a championship. You must be really proud of him."

Mr. Carter couldn't say no and said, "Yes, I am proud of him."

"Well, I hope you can tell him that. I sure appreciate you coming by and all the support you give us."

"Thank you Coach," replied Mr. Carter. He was out the door and took TJ home to watch some college games.

John Myers came in and asked, "How'd it go?"

"I'm not sure," sighed Travis. "I'll tell you one thing. We better keep on winning."

The next four weeks were fantastic for the Hamilton Lions. Bob Brentwood was now using superlatives that made even Travis blush. Brentwood was touting this Hamilton Lion team as the best in history. Travis shook his head, "We've only played five games! I wish he would cut us some slack. I don't want the kids to get the big head."

Hamilton beat a good Jefferson team 14-6 and then walloped Edison 46-0 for their second shutout. Bennington was the next victim at 30-6, and Tyler County High School, previous undefeated, fell to the Lions 13-0.

Brentwood had a field day with statistics. Five wins, no losses, three shutouts. Points scored were 131; and points given up were just 12. Rick Steadman had games of 168 yards on 23 carries and 3 TD's, 112 yards on 25 carries and one TD, 190 yards on 19 carries and 3 TD's, 132 yards on 18 carries and one TD. Rick's combined stats were 696 yards, 6.8 yards per carry, and 10 touchdowns.

TJ had passed 30 times for 16 completions, 315 yards, 3 touchdowns, and only two interceptions. Mark Russo had two touchdown passes and was becoming a good backup QB.

The defense had six interceptions, five fumble recoveries, seven sacks, and one safety. The kicking game was solid. Emile had kicked 15 out of 16 extra point attempts, and three field goals for 27, 32 and 24 yards.

The television stations, which were forty miles away, were even giving Hamilton some recognition. Bob Brentwood printed articles everyday and kept heaping praises on their new winning tradition. Brentwood also praised the players for acting like gentlemen on and off the field and for their academic successes.

Travis figured Brentwood just had to be shown. However, now Travis and Coach Myers wondered about the bubble. It was bigger than ever. Would it pop? How would the community react? How would the players react? How would they react?

Chapter 31

We're Gonna Do It!

The Hamilton Lion locker room was buzzing. The state rankings had just been broadcast over the radio. Hamilton's glossy 5-0 record was good enough to rank

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them sixth in the state. It was Hamilton's highest ranking since 1967 when they were ranked fifth. The locker room was indeed a happy scene.

"That's a decent ranking," chimed in Dave.

"We've only got one really tough game left against Templeton in two weeks," Buddy interrupted, "Yeah, I can taste it. We can make the playoffs - no sweat."

"Hey Gimp," ordered Rob, "get us some more towels."

Tim looked at Rob sharply, "Don't call him that."

Why not? We all got nicknames. He doesn't mind. Do you Gimp?"

Benny smiled, "Nah, it's OK."

"See what'd I tell you. Gimp, hurry up with those towels man."

Benny pushed the control button with his wrist in his usual, awkward manner. As he turned the corner, Benny kept smiling; but inside, he didn't feel very good. "But what the heck," he thought, "I'm part of the sixth-ranked team in the state. I'll just have to take the bitter with the sweet."

Chuck grabbed his dirty towel and snapped Skip on the rear. Skip snapped him back and chased Chuck between two rows of lockers.

Eddie Troutman was the next on the scene. "Hey guys, all right. Today number six, tomorrow number one." Eddie gave Chad a high five.

"Hey Rick. How ya doin' big guy?" Troutman asked, "Man, you're eatin' them up."

"Thanks Eddie," said Rick.

"Now Rick, don't say nothin' man until you hear me out man. OK?" urged Troutman.

"OK Eddie, but we got practice. Make it quick," Rick answered.

"We got, you know, another party Saturday night. I know you guys ain't supposed, you know - uh, to - uh - drink; so I can, you know, respect that. But we want you guys to be there. I promise that, you know, guys like Bart won't be there. I swear to God man. We'll have some pizza and stuff. We'll even have some good punch, you know, for you guys to drink. What do you say Rick?"

Rick laughed, "Troutman, maybe there's hope for you after all. Our class has been together for a long time. Hey, we all want to have a good time together. Yeah, we'll be there. But, just keep the beer away."

"Still cost you five," reminded Troutman.

"Yeah?"

"Thanks."

The captains had the responsibility of getting everyone on the practice field on time. Every player was to have his stretching completed before the coaching staff stepped on the field. Each player had the responsibility of working on specialties like deep snaps, punting, kickoffs, passing, receiving, pulling and pass rushing as they had time.

As Coach Drake and the football staff completed their

meeting, they made their way toward the practice field. Billy always tagged along with the coaches, making sure he was around if he was needed. Also, maybe he could throw the football a little. Mostly, he kept close to Travis. Billy and Travis had developed a father-son relationship.

"What's a gimp?" asked Billy innocently. Travis stopped dead in his tracks and knelt down to face Billy.

"What made you ask that, Billy?"

Billy instinctively knew something was wrong and began to stammer. "I just heard somebody use the word."

"And," Travis said in a demanding tone.

Billy looked at Travis and blurted, "Coach, some of the guys used it in the locker room. They called Benny a gimp today."

Travis frowned but replied, "Billy, gimp is short for crippled. Do you think that's what our team is about?"

"No sir," answered Billy softly.

"Tell me Billy, did you see or hear anything else? I'm not interested in names."

"Yes sir. Some of the guys were snapping towels and running around. I know that's against the rules."

"Yes it is, Billy," affirmed Travis. "Thank you very much Billy. You're a good man."

As they approached the practice field, Travis motioned for everyone to go slowly. What Travis observed did not look like the number six team. Some players were sitting on their helmets, some were lying around, and a couple of guys were even wrestling. "Everyone is screwing around," muttered Travis as his pulse rate doubled.

Travis burst forward and sprinted toward the practice field leaving his staff behind. No one knew how it was possible, but Travis managed to blow his whistle continuously as he sprinted.

Travis got the players' attention. Helmets were immediately popped on and chin-straps were buckled. There was a mad scramble by players, managers, and assistant coaches.

Travis kept blowing his whistle while his face got redder and redder. In a matter of seconds, everyone was around Travis. They all know Travis was mad. They didn't know what to expect from him. They had never seen Travis like this before. They were completely silent.

Travis roared, "This is the shittiest attitude I've ever seen. Damn it to hell anyway. Who in the hell do you think you are? Grab a knee!"

Story continued next issue

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