

QUEST FOR GREATNESS

A Continuing Novel by Greg Shepard

QUICK REVIEW

Chapters 1-31

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. The Town, School, and team are going crazy over the unbelievable turn around. They are ranked sixth in state but they are getting the big heads. They humiliated Benny their crippled manager and were screwing around big time.

Coach Drake came unglued on the practice field and is now engaged in a team attitude adjustment.

Chapter 31

We're Gonna Do It!

Everyone knelt down on one knee immediately. They had never heard Coach Drake swear before. He definitely had their attention.

"I don't think I've ever been as disappointed as I am today. You get a state ranking, and you think you're God's gift to football. I'm going to lay it out for you."

"You keep this attitude, and you're gonna get your little fannies whipped. I'm talking about calling Benny a 'Gimp'. Hey, we're supposed to be family. We're supposed to care about one another. We build people up; we don't tear them down. Benny's donating his time just to be associated with you. When I think of what he's gone through. And the kid still smiles - All the time! When I heard what you guys called him, it ripped my guts out. I'm telling you what we're gonna do. We're gonna apologize and we're going to dedicate the Harrisburg game to Benny. It's the class thing to do."

"I'm going to tell you for the last time. You don't snap towels, and you don't run around the locker room. The floors are wet and slick. We don't want a stupid injury."

"Where were you captains today? I came out here, and you were all screwing around. You weren't preparing. Have you men ever heard of the word 'upset'? Your performance was classic. Now, we're going to watch everyone and re-evaluate every position



Despite obstacle after obstacle Rick Steadman was developing into an Upper Limit person and player.

according to how you practice. We will find out who wants to keep our winning streak going."

"As far as my swearing, I'm sorry. I'll take four laps after practice."

Travis blew his whistle.

Everyone scrambled to get ready for what was to be a great practice. Everyone hustled and sprinted from drill to drill. The spirit was the best ever. Coach Drake congratulated the team on their positive response, especially after going through the hardest practice of the year.

"Men, you did yourselves proud. If every practice was like this one, we'd win every game for sure. Now, go in and shower down."

The team gave a cheer and headed toward the locker room. Travis turned and jogged toward the track to begin his four laps.

Wes looked back and saw Coach Drake. Without saying a word, Wes put his helmet back on his sweaty head. He sprinted to catch up with Travis as he remembered the times that Coach had run laps with him.

"How's the family doin' Coach?"

Travis was startled but then smiled, "Just fine Wes, just fine."

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Rick and Buddy saw Wes and they looked at each other. Silently, they too, began to jog the four laps some distance behind Wes and Coach Drake.

One by one, each player soon joined the procession. Then each coach followed suit. Travis surveyed the entire track and saw sixty-some guys who were dog tired running laps voluntarily. Tears started streaming down his face. He was overcome by emotion.

"Wes buddy," choked Travis.

"Yes Coach?" said Wes.

"We're gonna do it. We're going all the way."

Chapter 32 After Practice

The locker room was quiet. The players came in one by one aware of their coach's deep feelings. Every player came up to Benny and called him by name. Each thanked him as he received his carefully folded towel. Rick, TJ, and Buddy informed Benny that the team wanted to dedicate the Harrisburg game to him; and that the game ball, signed by the players and the coaches, would be presented to Benny after the game.

Benny's ever-present smile beamed even brighter. Rick thought he even noticed a difference in Benny's arm movement. It left a warm feeling with everyone. Coach Drake was right. It was a class way to handle the situation.

It was even quiet in the coaches' office. Travis had regained his composure, but he was still feeling profound emotions. "John, Tom, and Brian, you don't know how much seeing the kids on the track meant to me. Then, when I saw you guys," Travis's voice trailed off. He couldn't look up. The tears were ready again.

Jerry piped, "It was worth it, Travis, just to see big John do four laps; it made my day."

Everyone got a good laugh, even John.

Lem hustled home. He was required to help his father every spare minute. The Kalani landscaping business was a family enterprise. At dinner, Mr. Kalani sat in his Tongan attire at the head of the table.

Lem's father did not speak many words; but when he did, everyone listened carefully.

"Lem, I like you to play football."

"Thank you father," Lem replied.

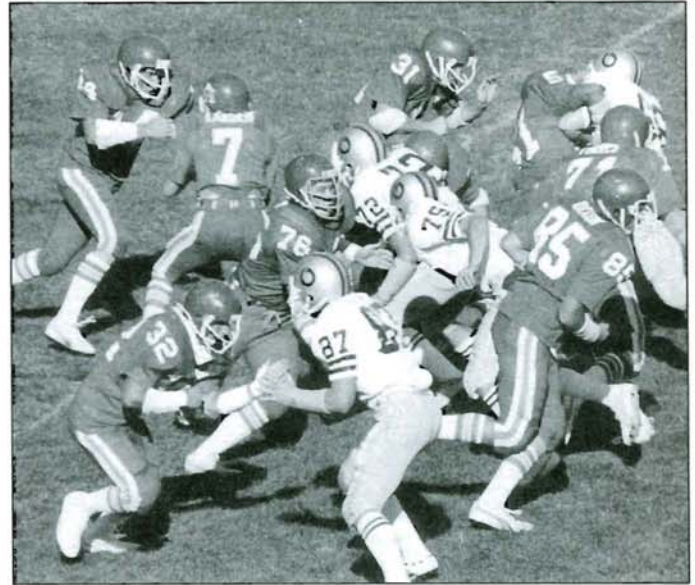
"It is good for business. It is also good for you to help me," continued Mr. Kalani.

"Yes father."

"Are you doing OK in school? You must do well," asserted Mr. Kalani looking at his son.

"Coach Drake and Mr. Maddox have helped me get the classes I needed to graduate. Coach Drake thinks I can get a college-football scholarship," answered Lem testing his father.

"That is good. You are a good son."



Hamilton methodically beat Harrisburg High and Steadman had another 100 yard plus game.

Wes was listening to music when his mother came home. She slapped a couple of TV dinners in the oven and plopped down in a chair next to Wes. Mrs. Jackson was exhausted.

"Wes....Wes."

She shouted louder, "Wes! Take those things out of your ears."

Wes complied and said, "Sorry."

"Dinner will be ready in forty minutes. You got your homework done? I don't want to bug you, but Coach Myers asked me to help you when I could," coaxed Wes' mother.

"No problem, I'll get right at it," answered Wes. Mrs. Jackson was surprised, but she had noticed a more mature attitude the last few weeks.

"Wes honey," she sighed, "I know it's tough sometimes with just the two of us. I wish I could do more."

Wes got up to get his homework. He turned and came to his mother. He kissed her gently on the forehead.

"Mom, you're doin' great. You're doin' the best job you can possibly do, and I appreciate that."

Mr. Harris and Buddy were watching Monday-night football together. Mr. Harris was also studying the sports page, which contained the state rankings.

"Things are shapin' up really good, Buddy," declared Mr. Harris. "Harrisburg's not that good. They've only won two games. I can't wait for the Templeton game. I figure the whole town will travel in a giant caravan. We'll see who's number one then huh Buddy?"

"Daddy, we gotta beat Harrisburg first. We can't overlook 'em. We're gettin' psyched for 'em right now."

"That's right Buddy. Good to hear you talk like that; but if you guys can beat Templeton, you'll be ranked

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Hamilton High vaulted to their highest ranking ever!

higher than my team was back in the early 60's," reminisced Mr. Harris as he finished his second beer.

"Did ya see that clip," yelled Mr. Harris. "What a cheap shot!"

TJ's family was seated at the formal dinner table. Mr. Carter usually monopolized the conversation, mostly on business matters and sometimes on football.

"You know boy," Mr. Carter said eating another piece of bread, "The thing that sticks in my craw?" Not waiting for an answer, he continued. "It's the way that Coach Drake plays favorites. He's lettin' that Steadman boy of his run all the plays. Your stats aren't anything like they oughta be."

"Dad, Coach Drake's offense is run-oriented; but if a pass is there, we'll take it. You can't argue with Rick's stats or the team's stats. We're doin the right thing. Football's a team game. We'll do whatever it takes to win."

Unruffled at this uncharacteristic rebuttal by his son, Mr. Carter offered, "TJ, do you have the option to change the plays Coach Drake sends in?"

"Sure, if the defense does something unusual or stacks things up where we're goin', I can use our audible system. But we haven't used it yet."

"Want some more potatoes?" asked Mrs. Carter.

"Yes, thanks mom."

Mr. Carter posed this idea: "TJ, why don't you audible yourself some passing plays. You could build your stats, and you'd probably win by bigger scores anyway."

TJ braced himself and once again asserted, "I can't believe you said that. It would be like betraying the team for personal gains. I couldn't do it. I won't do it. That's not the class way to do things. Please dad, help me by accepting my play and my role as a team member. Winning the championship would be a lot easier if you gave us your full support and 100% loyalty."

After a brief moment of uneasy quiet, Mr. Carter shrugged, "It was just a thought. I guess it was kind of a dumb thought. You're developing into quite a leader. That should count for something. TJ?"

"Yes sir."

"I am very proud of you. My son's the quarterback of the number six team in the state!"

TJ gulped down his third glass of milk and simply said, "Thanks dad; we'll get even higher than that."

"You want to watch the game Rick?" asked Travis. "No thanks, Coach, Becky and I have a paper due Wednesday. We'll just stay here."

"How 'bout you Billy?" asked Travis again.

"I don't know. Rick's supposed to help me with my math," Billy said as he sat at the same table with Rick and Becky.

Travis gave Rick a little wink "I think Rick's got enough to do. Anyway I need some company. I'll help you with your math at half time."

"You gotta deal," grinned Billy widely.

Travis spent most of the game helping his kids with their homework. He also broke up two squabbles, played three games, wiped away a set of tears, and gave everybody hugs.

"Such is the life of the state's greatest football coach," teased Diana lovingly.

Story Continued Next Issue

"QUEST FOR GREATNESS"

NOVEL

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