The Boys of Riverside

The Boys of Riverside: A Deaf Football Team and a Quest for Glory by **Thomas Fuller** In this inspiring work of narrative nonfiction, **New York Times** journalist **Thomas Fuller** chronicles the remarkable rise of the football team at the **California School for the Deaf in Riverside (CSDR)** — a group of young athletes who defied odds, stereotypes, and a decades-long losing streak to chase championship glory.

For 51 seasons, CSDR's team had never experienced a winning season. But under the leadership of **Coach Keith Adams**, a Deaf former athlete, and with the help of a tight-knit community, the team transformed into an unstoppable force. In 2021 and 2022, they shocked the football world by going undefeated and earning a place in the state playoffs.

Fuller follows the players' personal journeys — many of whom had struggled on hearing teams — as they found pride, unity, and power in their Deaf identity. The book also highlights how American Sign Language became a strategic advantage on the field, allowing for seamless, silent communication in the heat of competition.

More than just a sports story, *The Boys of Riverside* is a moving testament to perseverance, belonging, and the power of community. It celebrates how a group of young men redefined what it means to win — not only for themselves, but for the entire Deaf community.

Prologue

Prologue begins with an email from the California Department of Education, marking a pivotal moment for the California School for the Deaf in Riverside. The email

celebrated the football team’s unprecedented playoff appearance, a milestone in a seven-decade history where they had never before reached a championship. The communication from the department highlighted the team’s growing recognition, but it also underscored the need for facility upgrades, a request motivated by the team's newfound prominence. The author, who serves as the San Francisco bureau chief for *The New York Times*, typically covers complex and heavy topics such as wildfires, mass shootings, and homelessness. However, the story of the Riverside Cubs football team unexpectedly captured his attention, sparking his curiosity about how a school for the deaf, often overlooked in the sports world, could have such an inspiring and compelling story to tell.

The author, despite being seven hours away from his home, felt compelled to travel to Riverside and personally meet the players just before their critical playoff game. Upon arriving, he was immediately impressed by the team’s exceptional communication skills, which allowed them to function seamlessly despite being a deaf team. He contrasted this experience with his previous reporting endeavors, which had focused on challenging and often heartbreaking stories. The Cubs, competing in California’s eight-man football division, were a part of a smaller league designed for schools unable to field full eleven-player teams. This division, however, did not detract from the talent on display, as players like Josh Allen and Rashaan Salaam had come out of it, showing that smaller divisions could produce top-tier athletes. The author realized that the Cubs' journey was about more than just football; it was about proving that smaller schools and unique teams could achieve greatness when given the opportunity.

As the author spent more time with the team, he learned that the Cubs were not only skilled athletes but also individuals who came from diverse backgrounds, each with their own personal struggles. Many players had overcome significant challenges in their lives, and one of the most remarkable was Phillip Castaneda, a talented running back who had experienced homelessness but remained dedicated to the sport. Phillip’s story of perseverance was just one example of the strength and determination shared

by the entire team. For years, the Cubs had been seen as an easy target by their competitors, who viewed them as underdogs due to their small size and the stigma surrounding their deafness. However, within the team itself, there was a sense of brotherhood and shared purpose that united them. This unity became the foundation of their success, as they worked together to prove the world wrong and show that deafness was not a limitation in sports, but rather an asset that shaped their approach to the game.

Recognizing the profound significance of the Cubs' journey, the author chose to step away temporarily from his demanding role as bureau chief to follow the team through the rest of their season. This allowed him to immerse himself deeply in the team's world and learn firsthand about the intricacies of Deaf Culture, including the role of sign language in their daily lives. During a time of social unrest and global uncertainty due to the ongoing pandemic, the Cubs' story became a symbol of hope and resilience, transcending the sports world. It highlighted how, despite facing significant challenges, they were determined to succeed and to show the world that their deafness was not a barrier, but a unique strength. Their dreams of a championship were not just about football—it was about demonstrating to the world that anyone, regardless of their circumstances, could achieve greatness with dedication, unity, and the willingness to push through adversity. The Cubs' remarkable story resonated far beyond the football field, offering a message of perseverance, self-belief, and the power of community.

Chapter 1: Phillip

Chapter 1: Phillip begins by offering an intimate glimpse into the life of Phillip Castaneda, a young man navigating homelessness in the backseat of his father's Nissan Sentra in the late summer of 2021. At a time when the world was slowly emerging from the shadows of the coronavirus pandemic, Phillip's daily routine revolved around making the best of his difficult circumstances. Each day began with him dressing in the car and then heading to a nearby Target for bathroom access, marking a stark contrast to the typical morning routines of his peers. The football field visible from his car offered him a glimmer of hope and a symbol of his aspirations. Though small in stature, Phillip was determined to showcase his speed and toughness, and he set his sights on joining the varsity football team, hoping to prove himself on the field despite the odds stacked against him.

Phillip's father, Jude Ward Castaneda, made significant sacrifices to provide his son with a semblance of stability. Parking his car in a lot on Arlington Avenue, surrounded by local businesses like Yum Yum Donuts and a cannabis dispensary, Jude and his son found a quiet spot to sleep at night. They stayed away from other vehicles and used a gym membership for access to showers, a small luxury in the face of their hardship. After the shops closed each night, Jude and his girlfriend would occupy the front seats, leaving Phillip the back for privacy. Jude, once a promising athlete in his youth, now battled the weight of a troubled past filled with addiction and incarceration. Despite his struggles, Jude's determination to give Phillip a better chance in life never wavered. His hope was that Phillip wouldn't fall into the same traps that had ensnared him and instead would find a way to rise above the difficulties they both faced.

Living in California, where nearly a third of the nation's homeless population resides, presented Phillip with unique challenges. His experience of homelessness was further complicated by his turbulent upbringing, including attending six different schools and

facing significant challenges in learning English, which was vastly different from his native American Sign Language (ASL). Born near San Francisco, Phillip grew up in a household where his mother, who was deaf and suffered from rheumatoid arthritis, could not work and relied on disability assistance for their survival. Despite these obstacles, Phillip demonstrated remarkable resilience, adapting to his circumstances while trying to build a better future for himself. The difficulties he faced on a daily basis only seemed to fuel his determination, reinforcing his belief that he could overcome his situation with persistence and hard work.

Phillip’s teenage years in Modesto, California, were marked by his involvement in football, where he played alongside hearing peers. During this time, a friend helped him cover the cost of league fees, allowing Phillip to pursue his passion for the sport. While his talent on the field was undeniable, he often found himself struggling with communication barriers that left him isolated from his teammates. At practice, Phillip would position himself at the end of drills, using the time to observe his peers and improve his skills through sheer determination. Football became more than just a game for him; it became a lifeline—a way for him to escape the frustrations of his everyday life. His dreams of one day playing in the National Football League (NFL) were not just lofty ambitions; they became a source of motivation, providing him with hope and direction even during the toughest times.

Phillip’s sister, Priscilla Castaneda, often spoke about the joy football brought him, noting that the sport was a constant source of happiness in his life. Despite the many challenges Phillip faced—both in terms of his homelessness and his struggles with communication—football provided him with a sense of purpose and belonging. His commitment to the sport went beyond just playing; it was about finding a way to navigate the complexities of his life and turn his circumstances into an opportunity for success. The drive to succeed in football became a reflection of his broader desire to overcome the hardships he encountered daily. Football, for Phillip, was not just a means of athletic achievement—it was a path to a brighter future, one where his struggles could be outweighed by his triumphs. Through his journey, he demonstrated the power of resilience and the importance of pursuing dreams, no matter how

unattainable they may seem at first.

Chapter 2: Hell Week

Chapter 2: Hell Week begins with a unique scene on the first day of practice for the 2021 football season at the California School for the Deaf in Riverside. Galvin Drake, the assistant varsity football coach, arrived with music blasting from his 2005 Toyota Camry, though his experience of the rhythm was more felt than heard. This moment exemplified the challenges faced by the team as they began their preparation, particularly after the pandemic had left many athletes out of shape due to remote learning and limited physical activity. Emphasizing the importance of fitness and nutrition, Coach Drake focused on bringing the players back into top physical condition, with the added challenge of overcoming the pandemic's toll on their health. Meanwhile, the head coach, Keith Adams, arrived prepared with Gatorade, aiming to keep the team hydrated and promote recovery after the grueling practices.

Riverside's summer heat presented its own challenge, prompting the coaching staff to schedule practices during the cooler evening hours to avoid the extreme temperatures of the day. The players referred to these first days of intense conditioning as "Hell Week," as they adjusted to the physical demands and reconnected with their teammates. The eagerness to return to the field after a season lost to cancellation was evident in the casual reunions and the excitement of getting back to the physicality of the game. The team’s dynamic was uniquely shaped by the use of sign language for communication, which played a significant role in fostering deep connections among teammates. This required constant engagement from both players and coaches, creating a bond built on shared understanding, patience, and clear communication, reinforcing the strength of their team spirit.

Coach Adams emphasized the importance of practical health protocols during their first meeting, informing the players about the necessity of wearing face masks and maintaining hydration. The team also faced unique challenges related to their training

environment, such as the weight room, which could only accommodate a limited number of users at a time. Unlike in hearing schools, communication in these spaces was conducted through thick glass, highlighting the distinct ways the Cubs managed their interactions and reinforcing Deaf culture’s focus on visual communication. This approach also reinforced a central theme of the team’s season: responsibility and mutual support, as everyone had to stay aware of each other's needs and progress. The nuances of Deaf culture and communication shaped the team’s dynamics, giving them a unique advantage in fostering understanding and cooperation, even during physically demanding practices.

As the season began, familial ties were a significant part of the Cubs’ team culture. Trevin Adams, Coach Adams’ son, exemplified this sense of family spirit alongside his brother Kaden, both contributing to the team’s close-knit atmosphere. The practice sessions kicked off with rigorous drills, sprints, and conditioning exercises that tested the players' stamina and perseverance. Despite his determination, new player Phillip Castaneda struggled with the physical demands of the session, even losing his lunch on the field—an experience that was not unique to him. The intense nature of the workouts affected many players, as the long break due to the pandemic had left their bodies unaccustomed to the intensity of regular practices. Recognizing that each player's readiness varied, Coach Adams made the decision to shorten the practice to avoid further strain on the athletes, demonstrating his focus on their well-being and ensuring they could build up their fitness over time.

This season marked a fresh start for the Cubs, who had faced a history of struggles and losses since the football program’s inception. Coach Adams, however, remained hopeful and motivated for revitalization, fully aware that there was much work to be done to rebuild and strengthen the team. The challenges they faced, from adjusting to the physical demands of the game to overcoming the lingering effects of the pandemic, highlighted the resilience and determination of both the players and coaching staff. As they faced their toughest opponents yet, the Cubs’ journey was just beginning, and the team’s bond, built on a foundation of trust and communication, would be crucial in overcoming the hurdles ahead. With hard work, perseverance, and

unity, Coach Adams believed the Cubs could rewrite their history and move toward success in the upcoming season.

Chapter 3: A School Among the Orange Groves

Chapter 3: A School Among the Orange Groves takes us back to the mid-1950s, when California’s only state-run school for deaf students was located in San Francisco, known as the California School for the Deaf. This institution became a vital center for Deaf Culture in the state, offering a space for both education and community. However, for families residing in Southern California, especially those living near the Mexican border, the long trip to Berkeley posed a significant challenge, particularly given the limited transportation options. Following the post-World War II boom, as Los Angeles grew into a major city, advocates pushed for the establishment of a second school in the Southern part of the state. This led to the creation of the California School for the Deaf in Riverside in 1946, under Governor Earl Warren, which aimed to provide greater accessibility for students in Southern California. This move was a game-changer for many families who had long struggled with the geographical and logistical obstacles of sending their children to the northern part of the state.

In 1946, Riverside was a modest city of about 50,000 people, mainly recognized for its extensive orange groves. These groves had become a symbol of the area, flourishing due to irrigation systems that transformed the arid land into fertile soil. This agricultural boom was largely fueled by the introduction of the navel orange from Brazil in the 1870s, a sweet and prized variety that revolutionized the citrus industry. The city’s transformation into a citrus powerhouse helped establish Riverside as the epicenter of California's orange industry. As the region’s oranges became widely acclaimed, with awards won at prestigious events such as the New Orleans World’s Fair, Riverside gained national recognition. This agricultural success laid the groundwork for the city’s future growth, which would go on to include significant industrial and economic development, contributing to its expansion into a thriving urban area over the coming decades.

In 1948, Riverside was chosen as the site for the new school, located amid barley fields and orange groves. This location was selected intentionally to distance the school from the stigma associated with mental institutions, ensuring that the new facility would offer an empowering and positive environment for its students. The land was purchased for a modest price of $68,500, which would later prove to be an incredible investment. Although the school did not open its doors to students until 1953, the anticipation for the school's establishment was palpable throughout the region. The California School for the Deaf in Riverside was strategically located with views of the San Gabriel Mountains, providing a peaceful, inspiring backdrop for students and staff. The school's expansive, well-maintained grounds were rare among state institutions at the time, offering an ideal space for education and personal growth for its students.

As the years passed, Riverside underwent significant changes. The once-thriving orange orchards began to make way for suburban development, and the city's population grew exponentially, reaching 300,000 by 2022. Riverside's strategic location in Southern California, with its close proximity to freight and logistics hubs, helped to solidify its role as a key player in the U.S. economy. The city adapted to a more car-centric culture, with housing developments sprawling across the area, which changed its landscape significantly. Despite the transformation into a bustling urban center, Riverside still retained ties to its agricultural heritage. Revitalized downtown areas and public parks dedicated to its citrus legacy served as reminders of the city's agricultural roots. Local historian Vincent Moses captures the sentiment surrounding these changes, reflecting on how Riverside evolved from a peaceful agricultural community to a thriving urban landscape. His observations highlight the complexity of such a transformation, emphasizing both the growth and the preservation of Riverside's unique history as the city adapted to the pressures of modern development.

As Riverside continues to grow and evolve, its shift from a small farming town to an industrial powerhouse serves as a model of adaptability. The city's legacy, marked by its agricultural foundations, remains an important part of its identity even as it embraces its role as a logistics hub in the modern era. Through all of these changes,

Riverside’s transformation illustrates how cities can maintain a connection to their past while adapting to new challenges and opportunities. The creation of the California School for the Deaf in Riverside stands as a testament to the city’s ability to evolve while maintaining a focus on the needs of its residents, particularly those in the deaf community.

Chapter 4: A Taste of Victory

Chapter 4: A Taste of Victory takes readers through the highly anticipated opening game of the Cubs' football season, capturing the intensity of their preparation. After surviving a grueling Hell Week, the team is eager to test their skills on the field against Noli Indian, a smaller yet tough opponent from the Soboba Indian reservation. Dressed in their scarlet uniforms, the Cubs are filled with anticipation as they prepare to face off against a team that has been historically challenging. The senior players, Felix Gonzales in No. 1, Enos Zornoza in No. 2, Jory Valencia in No. 3, and quarterback Trevin Adams in No. 4, have each chosen their jersey numbers with pride, ready to guide the team through this critical match. Their focus and energy demonstrate how prepared they are to start their season with a resounding win.

The Noli Indian team, coached by Jesse Aguilar, consists mostly of freshmen and sophomores, and their inexperience becomes a clear disadvantage as the game begins. With little to no expectations placed on them, Noli Indian faces an uphill battle against the Cubs, who are more seasoned and physically prepared. Despite this, the Cubs face their own challenges, and the game begins with a fast-paced intensity that reveals the true test of both teams’ willpower. However, the Cubs quickly take charge, dominating the early part of the game. Zornoza wastes no time, returning the opening kickoff for a touchdown, which energizes the Cubs and sends a strong message to their opponents. The momentum shifts decisively as Trevin Adams recovers a fumble and immediately leads his team to another touchdown, throwing a perfect pass to Enos Zornoza.

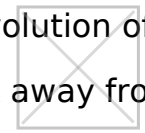
As the game progresses, the Cubs continue to assert their dominance, maintaining control throughout each possession. Their offensive unit remains unstoppable, with the team scoring on every possession and demonstrating superior teamwork and precision. In addition to their consistent scoring, the Cubs execute a pick-six, a

highlight that further cements their lead and showcases their defensive prowess. By the end of the game, the scoreboard reads 68-0 in favor of the Cubs, a stunning result that raises eyebrows throughout the football community. While the sheer margin of victory is impressive, it also sparks a sense of curiosity among the players about their own capabilities. The Cubs had not only won—they had crushed their opponents, leading some to question whether they were truly ready for the tougher games ahead. Key players like Trevin and Enos show their ability to dominate, but it is Phillip Castaneda, a new addition to the team, who steals the show. Despite some initial confusion, Castaneda scores a touchdown, making an impact that adds to the excitement and momentum of the game, proving his worth as an essential part of the team.

After the game, Coach Aguilar, though disappointed by the outcome, praises the Cubs for their discipline and emphasizes the importance of teamwork in such a comprehensive victory. His recognition of the Cubs’ exceptional performance serves as a lesson for his own young players, illustrating how collaboration and commitment to a common goal can lead to success. Coach Aguilar also uses this opportunity to encourage his team to learn from the Cubs' disciplined approach to the game, which focused on precision, communication, and strategic play. The chapter emphasizes the high energy and rapid pace of eight-man football, a style of play that is unique to California’s small schools. This fast-moving and dynamic format not only demands physical endurance from players but also sharpens their mental acuity, requiring them to think quickly and react swiftly to constantly changing situations on the field. Eight-man football has become beloved for its intensity, and this game highlights why fans of all ages are drawn to its exhilarating nature.

While the Cubs experience an unforgettable beginning to their season, the Noli Indian team gains valuable lessons from their loss. The inexperience of the Noli players may have been a significant disadvantage during the game, but they now have an opportunity to reflect on the importance of preparation, teamwork, and resilience. This match, though difficult, serves as a stepping stone for Noli Indian’s future growth, as they take away insights that will help them improve in the coming games. For the

Cubs, this victory serves as an indicator of their potential, showing that they have the power to dominate when everything falls into place. However, the win also raises questions about how they will perform against tougher competition, particularly as their journey progresses. As the season unfolds, the Cubs will undoubtedly face challenges that test their resilience and ability to maintain their high performance under pressure. This chapter not only showcases the Cubs' impressive start but also highlights the evolution of the Noli Indian team as they continue their development. Both teams walk away from this game with lessons learned, and for the Cubs, this victory marks just the beginning of their quest for a successful season.



Chapter 5: Hearing with Your Eyes

Chapter 5: Hearing with Your Eyes highlights the unique challenges and hidden advantages faced by deaf individuals in a predominantly hearing world. While many may focus on the limitations of deafness, this chapter underscores how these very challenges can be transformed into strengths. For example, deaf individuals are not distracted by the ambient noise that often overwhelms hearing people in places like crowded bars or stadiums. This ability to filter out surrounding noise proved particularly advantageous for deaf scuba divers, who can easily communicate underwater, and deaf football players, who were able to neutralize the crowd's noise—traditionally considered a powerful "twelfth man" in sports. In these contexts, what many would view as a hindrance became an asset, allowing for clearer communication and better focus.

Trevin Adams, the Cubs' quarterback, exemplified this perspective by viewing his deafness as a strategic advantage. Without the distractions of verbal trash talk or the constant chatter from opposing players, Trevin could focus solely on the game, enhancing his concentration and decision-making. This focus was echoed by many other deaf individuals who reject the traditional narrative that deafness is a disability. Instead, they embrace it as a condition that fosters resilience and perseverance. In this light, their experiences of adversity not only shape their mental fortitude but also empower them to approach challenges with a mindset geared towards overcoming obstacles, rather than succumbing to them.

The Cubs developed inventive solutions to overcome the demands of the football game, particularly when it came to communication. In a traditional football setting, the snap count is usually called out verbally, but this posed a challenge for the deaf players. Initially, a bass drum was used to provide rhythm for the snap count, but this method was later replaced with a more effective system. The quarterback would

simply clap his hands to signal the rhythm, allowing players to respond visually rather than relying on auditory cues. This adaptation, which depended on precise visual coordination, was something that the deaf players had already honed in their daily lives, where visual cues were the primary means of communication.

Studies have shown that individuals who are profoundly deaf may develop heightened peripheral vision and a more acute sense of biological movement perception. These advantages proved beneficial on the football field, where the Cubs could react more quickly to the movements of opposing players. Their heightened visual acuity allowed them to read plays and anticipate movements in ways that gave them an edge over their hearing counterparts. The ability to perceive and interpret movements more rapidly helped the Cubs adjust their strategy on the fly, making them formidable opponents on the field.

The Cubs’ use of sign language further enhanced their communication and strategy execution, providing them with a tactical advantage that was virtually undetectable to their opponents. The team employed a coded sign system to keep their plays confidential, a method that thwarted efforts from teams bringing interpreters to gain insight into their tactics. Fast-paced ASL conversations allowed the Cubs to make quick, efficient decisions without the need for traditional huddles, which often slowed down the game. This made their offense more dynamic and harder to predict, as the opposing teams could not decipher their strategy in real time.

One memorable moment highlighted the Cubs' ingenuity when they used their sign language system to deceive their opponents during a critical play. The quarterback, with the help of coordinated signing, distracted the opposing team’s defense, creating an opening for a successful touchdown pass. This clever use of their unique communication method not only showcased the Cubs' tactical creativity but also reinforced the importance of their deafness as an asset. Coach Keith Adams was especially proud of this play, seeing it as a perfect example of how the Cubs had turned potential challenges into celebrated victories. The Cubs’ success on the field demonstrated that their ability to communicate and adapt to their circumstances was

a key factor in their ability to thrive in competitive sports.

Chapter 6: On a Roll

Chapter 6: On a Roll begins with the scene of high school football teams sizing up their opponents during warm-ups. The Cubs, considered a small team, lacked the imposing physique of many of their competitors, especially due to pandemic-related restrictions on weight training. Despite their physical shortcomings, they compensated with incredible fearlessness and agility, qualities that did not go unnoticed by opposing coaches. Felix Gonzales, one of the standout players, gained attention for his exceptional speed. Known for catching kickoffs, shedding tackles, and posting an impressive 4.6-second 40-yard dash time, he proved that sheer speed and determination could make up for a lack of muscle.

Trevin Adams, another crucial player, approached every game with a fearless mindset. His "warrior" mentality, as described by Coach Galvin Drake, was evident in the way he barreled through defenders with power and persistence. His aggressive running style became a point of pride for his team, though it worried his mother, Carol Adams, who fretted over her son's safety. Football dominated the Adams family's lives, from practices to game analyses, and even Carol joked about being a "football widow" due to the sport's all-consuming nature. Despite the sacrifices, Carol was the Cubs' most loyal supporter, watching with pride as her son showcased his athleticism on the field.

Trevin's skills as a quarterback helped mask some of the Cubs' weaknesses, particularly their offensive line. During one memorable game, he demonstrated both elusiveness and toughness by evading multiple defenders, proving his ability to lead under pressure. Cody Metzner, known for his strength and academic ambition, also played a pivotal role, intimidating opponents with his brute power. In a game against Hesperia Christian, Cody's physical dominance was clear, making powerful tackles that immediately shifted the momentum in the Cubs' favor. These key players exemplified the heart and resilience of the team, showing that even without size, their collective

strength and drive made them formidable opponents.

As a team composed of deaf athletes, the Cubs faced unique challenges in a world where most people relied on hearing. The bond between the players created an unspoken camaraderie, turning the team into a tight-knit "brotherhood." This shared experience made communication effortless and allowed the Cubs to function as a well-oiled machine, no matter the circumstances. Their ability to communicate beyond words gave them a significant advantage in the fast-paced world of high school football, where teamwork and synchronization are crucial for success.

Felix Gonzales, in particular, understood the challenges of communication. Having previously faced barriers while playing on a hearing team, he knew firsthand how isolating it could feel. When he transferred to CSDR, he initially hesitated to join the football team but ultimately found a sense of belonging. The instant communication bond formed with Coach Adams and his teammates made the decision to stay easy, leading to an undefeated season for the Cubs. Felix, who had initially been unsure of his place, grew into a versatile player who excelled in various positions. His leadership and adaptability made him a key contributor to the team, and he quickly became a role model for younger players, showing them the power of resilience, communication, and passion for the sport.

This chapter illustrates how the Cubs' success wasn’t just about raw athleticism but also about the deep, unbreakable bonds formed through shared experiences. Each player, from Felix to Trevin to Cody, brought something unique to the team. Their commitment, combined with their ability to work together despite challenges, propelled the Cubs to victories that many would have deemed impossible at first glance. Their journey is a powerful reminder that teamwork, heart, and determination can lead to success, no matter the obstacles standing in the way. Through their struggles and triumphs, the Cubs proved that being "on a roll" is not just about winning games—it's about overcoming adversity and doing it together.

Chapter 7: Stamina

Chapter 7: Stamina focuses on the contrasting dynamics between high school football teams in California, with a particular emphasis on the Cubs, a smaller Protestant school team. This chapter sets the stage by introducing the dominance of large Catholic schools like Mater Dei and St. John Bosco, known for their state-of-the-art facilities and consistently ranking among the top football teams in the nation. These schools are powerhouses in the world of high school football, and their success often casts a shadow over smaller teams like the Cubs. In contrast, the Cubs face off against smaller and less competitive teams early in their season, where they enjoy impressive victories. However, these wins also serve as a reminder of the upcoming challenges they will face when their stamina and skills are tested against the more formidable opponents in later rounds.

The intensity rises in a challenging game against Calvary Chapel, where the Cubs struggle to maintain their early rhythm. Despite a promising start, their quarterback, Trevin Adams, is swiftly sacked, throwing off their offensive flow and resulting in a rare three-and-out. The setbacks compound when the Cubs face difficult plays and find themselves scrambling to regain control. However, they manage to regroup and pull together, taking a 38-19 lead by halftime, reflecting their ability to bounce back from adversity. But as the second half unfolds, fatigue begins to set in, and the game’s pace starts to take its toll on the players. The Cubs, visibly exhausted, begin making uncharacteristic mistakes, including dropped passes and missed tackles. These errors highlight the critical importance of stamina—both physical and mental—as fatigue sets in and threatens to derail their chances of securing a win.

As the game enters its final stretch, the Cubs’ lead begins to shrink as Calvary Chapel makes a strong comeback. The once comfortable lead of 38-19 dwindles as the game heads into a nail-biting conclusion. With just minutes left on the clock, the Cubs cling

to a slim 66-57 lead, but Calvary Chapel threatens to take the game with a fourth down and inches to go. The pressure mounts as every play becomes more critical, and the atmosphere grows tense. In a pivotal moment, a wide receiver for Calvary is tackled just short of the first down marker, shifting the momentum back to the Cubs. This play keeps their hopes of victory alive, but the pressure remains. The Cubs attempt to run down the clock and secure their win, but a tense moment arises when Trevin throws a pass that almost results in a fumble. The game is ultimately saved when Jory Valencia, with a calm and composed demeanor, catches the ball just beyond the first down marker, sealing the Cubs' victory. This dramatic play underscores the unpredictable nature of football and highlights the critical importance of mental fortitude in high-pressure situations.

After the dust settles, Coach Keith Adams reflects on the game, acknowledging the challenges and mistakes but emphasizing the lessons learned. He expresses cautious optimism about the Cubs’ potential playoff run, knowing that the team has shown resilience in the face of adversity. The chapter not only showcases the physical demands of high school football but also highlights the emotional and psychological challenges players face. The game against Calvary Chapel serves as a reminder that stamina, both in terms of endurance and mental focus, is crucial for success. This chapter conveys the significant role of conditioning, teamwork, and resilience in overcoming setbacks. As the Cubs move forward in their journey, they carry with them the lessons learned from this intense game, knowing that each challenge prepares them for the battles ahead. The team's ability to stay focused, even when faced with exhaustion and pressure, marks a turning point in their season, solidifying their identity as a team determined to succeed.

Chapter 8: The Sound of the Sun

Chapter 8: The Sound of the Sun opens by contrasting the glitzy image of California—its beaches, Hollywood glamour, and booming tech hubs—with the more grounded reality of Stockton. Situated at the confluence of the San Joaquin River and various larger trade routes, Stockton represents a crossroads of both history and opportunity. In 1975, Linda and Roger Adams arrived in this city with hopes of providing a better life for their two young boys, Kirk and Keith. Having roots in Inglewood, where they worked tirelessly, the couple was driven by the stories of their families’ migrations from Oklahoma in search of prosperity and stability.

Stockton’s rich past, marked by the gold rush and significant developments in agriculture, has shaped its diverse character. However, it has also struggled with challenges such as poverty and segregation, reflecting the complexities beneath its colorful mosaic of cultures. The Adams family, despite their hopes for a brighter future, faced the added weight of navigating personal challenges, notably their son Keith’s profound deafness, which remained undiagnosed for months. Settling into their new Californian life was difficult as they balanced adjusting to the city’s dynamics with the overwhelming concern for Keith’s development, which seemed to stall.

Linda's growing concerns about her son’s development were initially dismissed by medical professionals, but everything changed when she noticed Keith’s lack of response to a loud dinner bell. It was a moment of clarity that led to a visit to the John Tracy Clinic, where Keith was finally diagnosed with profound deafness. Roger, feeling angry and helpless, struggled with accepting the diagnosis, viewing it as a flaw that would impede Keith’s future. Meanwhile, Linda, driven by her love for her son, stepped up as his primary advocate. Faced with the daunting task of navigating a new city and learning about deafness, she embarked on a journey to ensure that Keith’s needs were met, despite the emotional turmoil and uncertainty surrounding her son’s condition.

Although the road ahead seemed filled with obstacles, Linda and Roger remained determined to give their son a fighting chance. Linda began experimenting with various speech and sound awareness techniques, though the results were often frustratingly minimal. The breakthrough came when Linda’s sister, Mary, introduced sign language to Keith, sparking an entirely new way of communication. This shift allowed Keith to engage in a way he hadn’t before, offering him a new perspective on the world and fostering hope for his future.

With the support of Dale Delp, a sign language teacher, Linda and Roger threw themselves into learning sign language. This new skill not only helped Keith communicate more effectively but also deepened the emotional bond between mother and son. Linda's approach to motherhood shifted dramatically as she worked to connect with Keith on his terms. The family's journey underscores the importance of communication, not just in overcoming barriers, but in fostering deeper connections within families. Through the perseverance of Linda and Roger, and their willingness to embrace new learning methods, they found a way to bridge the gap between Keith’s deafness and the world around him, ultimately illustrating the power of adaptability in the face of adversity.

This chapter highlights the resilience and dedication required to help a loved one navigate a profound challenge. Linda’s commitment to finding the right way to communicate with Keith proved transformative, both for her son’s development and for their family dynamic. It also shows how embracing new methods and learning from others can unlock potential in ways previously thought impossible. The power of communication—whether through speech, sign language, or other forms—was the key to fostering a deeper understanding of the world for Keith, allowing him to thrive despite the challenges of his condition. In this story, communication becomes not just a tool for education, but a lifeline for emotional and social connection.

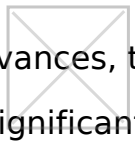
Chapter 9: Frowned upon by the Gods

Chapter 9: Frowned Upon by the Gods explores the long-standing challenges and debates within the education system regarding the most effective way to communicate with deaf students. Central to this debate is the longstanding conflict between sign language and oral communication, with educators historically divided over which method best serves the needs of deaf learners. Linda Adams' realization that her son Keith craved language serves as a poignant reminder of the two centuries of neglect that the deaf community faced. For much of history, deaf voices were ignored in educational decisions, and their methods of communication were sidelined, affecting their social and educational lives. This tension highlights the difficulty that deaf individuals faced in asserting their own identities and advocating for their rights in a society that often overlooked them.

Drawing from the work of scholar H-Dirksen Bauman, the chapter presents deaf history as akin to chasing fireflies in the dark—glimpses of understanding punctuated by long periods of ignorance. Although sign languages developed independently in various cultures, they were often unrecorded, which led to debates about whether they predated spoken languages. Ancient references, such as those by Socrates and the observations of deaf individuals in the Ottoman Empire, show the different ways societies viewed deafness. However, in many cases, deaf individuals were marginalized, facing exclusion and discrimination not only socially but legally. The chapter paints a picture of a society that, for much of history, struggled to accept and include deaf people as equals.

Throughout history, European societies exhibited a deep-seated belief that deaf individuals were incapable of faith or intellectual engagement. This belief led to their further exclusion from mainstream social and religious activities. However, the tide began to turn in the eighteenth century with the groundbreaking work of Charles-

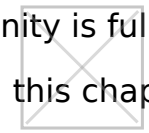
Michel de l’Epée, who established the first public school for the deaf in Paris. His work in teaching sign language and advocating for deaf education significantly changed the perception of deafness in European culture. De l’Epée’s contributions laid the foundation for the development of deaf education systems across Europe, marking a shift from seeing deafness as a deficiency to recognizing the potential of deaf individuals when given the proper tools for communication.



Despite these advances, the 1880 International Congress of Educators of the Deaf in Milan marked a significant setback for the deaf community. The congress resulted in a ban on the use of sign language in schools, a decision heavily influenced by the participation of Alexander Graham Bell, who argued against the use of sign language. This decision had a lasting impact, as it further distanced deaf communities from their linguistic heritage and reinforced the stigma surrounding sign language. The ban on sign language in schools led to generations of deaf children being taught to communicate solely through oral methods, often with little success. Even in environments where American Sign Language (ASL) was prevalent, individuals like Ken Watson faced oppression, with schools penalizing the use of ASL and discouraging students from using their natural language.

The narrative shifts to the personal experiences of Keith Adams, who benefited from the inclusive, all-deaf environment at the California School for the Deaf. In this supportive setting, Keith was able to thrive, developing strong social connections and experiencing significant personal growth. Unlike his earlier experiences, where communication barriers impeded his development, Keith was able to fully participate in the learning process, fostering a sense of identity and pride in his deafness. This highlights the importance of an educational environment that recognizes the needs of deaf individuals and supports their use of sign language. The chapter ultimately underscores the ongoing struggles and triumphs of the deaf community, from early marginalization to the eventual embrace of their unique culture and language, embodied in Keith’s journey and the broader impact on deaf education and identity.

This chapter emphasizes how far the deaf community has come, yet how much work remains to be done in ensuring that deaf individuals are fully integrated into society. The battle between sign language and oral methods of communication has shaped the education and lives of many, but the growth of a generation like Keith’s shows the potential for positive change. With continued advocacy and support for the use of sign language, the future holds promise for a more inclusive and equitable society where the deaf community is fully recognized and valued. Through historical reflections and personal stories, this chapter offers a powerful reminder of the importance of language in shaping identity and fostering inclusion.



Chapter 10: The FaceTime Revolution

Chapter 10: The FaceTime Revolution unfolds the compelling story of Keith and Carol Adams and their son Trevin, born deaf on February 11, 2005. While genetic tests had initially given the family some hope that Trevin might not have any hearing impairments, the confirmation of his deafness by the doctor came as a surprise. Carol, ever optimistic, reassured Keith by saying, "Don’t worry about it," emphasizing that their son's health was the most important thing to them. Their response set the tone for the journey ahead, one in which Trevin's deafness would become just one aspect of his vibrant life.

As Trevin grew, his experience differed greatly from that of his parents. While Keith and Carol had relied on outdated communication methods such as TTY devices, which were often cumbersome and slow, Trevin was raised in a world where technological advancements created new opportunities. He primarily communicated using American Sign Language (ASL), which he learned both at home and in school. With the evolution of technology, the world Trevin navigated allowed for near-universal captioning on television, making information more accessible, and mobile devices such as smartphones made texting and video calls via FaceTime an integral part of his daily communication. This revolution in communication technology ensured that Trevin’s ability to connect with others, whether deaf or hearing, was only a tap away.

By the time Trevin enrolled at the California School for the Deaf, Riverside (CSDR), his world had become seamlessly connected, and the communication barriers that once hindered the deaf community seemed almost nonexistent. The introduction of the iPhone by Steve Jobs in 2007 marked a turning point for the deaf community, revolutionizing communication in ways that previous tools like TTY devices could not. FaceTime, in particular, played a pivotal role, allowing Trevin and others in the deaf community to engage in face-to-face conversations, breaking down the isolation that

had once been a part of their reality. For Trevin, these technological advancements not only facilitated smoother communication with his peers but also fostered stronger relationships, helping him integrate into the broader social fabric more easily than his parents had ever imagined possible.

The generational differences between Trevin’s upbringing and that of older deaf individuals are starkly illustrated in the chapter. Ken Watson, a coach born in 1952, represents an earlier era of the deaf experience, one defined by isolation and limited access to communication. Watson's summers were filled with loneliness as he relied on letters to stay in touch with his friends, a far cry from Trevin’s constant connectivity through his smartphone and FaceTime. The contrast is jarring—where Watson had to wait days or weeks to hear from friends, Trevin communicates instantly with both his deaf and hearing peers, reflecting a seismic shift in how deaf individuals interact with the world around them.

Carol, like many parents, expresses concern about the impact of technology on her children's lives. She recognizes the potential risks of screen addiction, a common concern among parents today, but she also acknowledges the incredible advantages modern technology offers. The access that her children, especially Trevin, now have to educational resources, communication tools, and social connections far exceeds what she had access to in her youth. Carol’s statement, “The access for the kids is amazing,” underscores the profound shift that has occurred in how technology can bridge gaps and create new opportunities for the deaf community. As she observes, while technology comes with challenges, the benefits it provides are immeasurable, enabling her children to have richer and more connected lives than ever before.

This chapter encapsulates the transformational impact technology has had on the lives of deaf individuals, particularly in terms of communication. The advent of tools like FaceTime has made what once seemed impossible—instant, real-time communication—readily available. The evolution of mobile devices and digital platforms has allowed the deaf community to break free from isolation, providing them with a sense of belonging in a way that was unimaginable just a few decades ago. This

technological revolution not only improves the lives of those within the deaf community but also enhances their ability to integrate into broader society, creating a more inclusive world. Through these advancements, the line between the deaf and hearing communities is gradually being erased, making the world more connected and accessible for everyone.

Chapter 11: Deafness as a Choice

Chapter 11 "Deafness as a Choice", As summer turned to fall, the Cubs had gained confidence in their skills and their teamwork. They were winning. On the last day of September, halfway through the regular season, the Cubs played another small Christian school, Lutheran High School from La Verne, a city on the eastern edge of Los Angeles County. It was a lopsided game, and at halftime the Cubs were already ahead, 46–0. As the third quarter began, the coaches put in a player who had just joined the team. His name was Dominic Turner, and he stood a little taller than six feet and weighed around 240 pounds, a good deal of it pandemic weight. He had a well-proportioned jawline and brown hair kept in a tight, Ivy League haircut. He had transferred to CSDR a few weeks into the school year and had immediately caught the eye of Keith Adams. Adams wasted no time to make his move.

“You’re kind of a big guy; you would be a good lineman,” Dominic remembers Adams telling him. Dominic told Coach Adams he didn’t like football much. He hadn’t grown up watching it—his grandmother who raised him never had it on—and his previous experience trying to play at hearing schools had been an exercise in alienation.

Keith’s second son, Kaden, the backup quarterback, was also in the gym class, and he joined in the recruitment effort. Pretty soon, the entire gym class was trying to persuade Dominic to join the team. And it worked. Dominic fired off a text to his grandmother: “Pick me up at 6:00 p.m. I’ve joined the football team.”

Dominic had attended seven different schools in his fifteen years of life, but none had quite worked out. He was a good student, generally getting As and Bs, but as a deaf boy in hearing schools he found his social life frustrating. In elementary school he was rarely invited to parties or birthdays or to friends’ homes after school. He was teased because of his deafness.

“They would ask me to say stuff, and then, when I couldn’t say it right, when I couldn’t produce the words right, that was funny to them and they would laugh,” Dominic said. He found himself watching as classmates chatted and played. “I felt so alone. No one was communicating with me at all.”

The best word he found to describe how he felt in those schools was “foreigner.” It was a powerful sentiment considering that he was anything but foreign to Southern California. Born in Riverside, he spent his childhood there and in Mission Viejo, a city not far from the ocean in Orange County.

In the fall of 2021, after California schools had emerged from their COVID lockdowns, Dominic had made the last-minute decision to try CSDR. It would be his second time: he had attended the school as an infant and kindergarten student. Now he was returning, abruptly, desperate to find a place where he felt more at home. He was leaving his hearing school even as his sophomore year was already under way.

In the game against Lutheran, Dominic took his place on the defensive line, crouched down, and put one hand on the turf, set for his first play. It was a pitch to Lutheran’s running back, and as soon as the ball was snapped, Dominic drove the center out of the way and with the help of his fellow lineman Alfredo Baltazar tackled the runner for a loss. Not bad for his very first play in a CSDR uniform. The Cubs went on to win the game, 68–0, and their record improved to 5-0.

After years of searching, Dominic had found his place. Finally, he had this coach and this team where communication wasn’t a problem. The pandemic was still raging in the fall of 2021, and the mood in California was one of frustration. But when a visitor asked Dominic how he was enjoying his football season, he did not hesitate. “Very fun,” he said. “Very, very fun.” He was a “foreigner” in California no more.

Dominic was born profoundly deaf. But later in life his deafness came with an asterisk. At five years old, he underwent an operation to install, under the skin behind his ear, an electronic device known as a cochlear implant. Distinct from hearing aids, which are a set of tiny microphones and speakers that amplify sounds and pipe them into the ear

at higher volumes, cochlear implants communicate directly with the brain. They are basically bionic ears. They translate sounds into electrical impulses that stimulate the nerve that connects to the brain stem. The stuff of science fiction only a few decades ago, they allow most deaf people who undergo the operation to hear in varying degrees. For Dominic, whose mother tongue is ASL, which he learned as an infant, the implant gave him a facsimile of hearing and put him in an unusual position. He could switch between the hearing and the deaf worlds at will. He could wake up in the morning and decide whether to have five senses or four. It was something unimaginable to generations before him: it was up to him whether he wanted to hear—or not.

Often, he chose not.

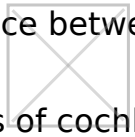
The cochlear implant, a device that would rock the deaf world, was a California invention pioneered by the son of a dentist, William House. House grew up on a ranch in Whittier, a city in Los Angeles County halfway between the coast and Riverside. He attended both dentistry and medical school and was an inveterate tinkerer who seemed to enjoy bucking the medical establishment. He performed one of his first innovations, an experimental surgery to treat the inner-ear affliction called Ménière's disease, on Alan Shepard, the navy test pilot who in 1961 became the first American in space. Ménière's can lead to debilitating vertigo, and Shepard's career had been threatened by bouts of dizziness, tinnitus, and vomiting. When other treatments failed, Shepard secretly traveled to Los Angeles to be treated by House, who at the time was a relatively obscure dentist and researcher publishing papers on his experiments. The surgery was successful, and Shepard went on to join the Apollo 14 mission that lifted off from Cape Canaveral on January 31, 1971, and rocketed to the moon. Shepard became famous for whacking a golf ball using a makeshift six iron in the thin atmosphere on the moon. From space, he spoke to House, who was a guest at Mission Control in Houston. "I'm talking to you through the ear that you operated on!" Shepard said from 230,000 miles away.

At the time of the moon mission, House, already deep into his experiments with cochlear implants, was on the receiving end of heavy criticism. Some doctors believed that sending pulses of electricity through the inner ear could cause irreparable damage. Others simply said the device would not work. One pediatric ear expert was quoted saying there was no “moral justification for an invasive electrode for children.” But House persisted, and in 1984 the Food and Drug Administration approved the sale of his device. It was a crude version of what would come later. Patients reported being able to hear doorbells and car horns and muffled speech, sounds like “that of a radio not completely tuned in,” House said on the day the FDA announced the approval of the implant. But even in its more primitive form, there was a sense that history was being made with this new product. “For the first time, a device can, to a degree, replace an organ of the human senses,” the deputy director of the FDA, Mark Novitch, said at a news conference in Washington when House’s invention was introduced. “Soon a device like this may produce an understanding of speech to many for whom even crude sound would have been considered hopeless just a few years ago.”

Four decades later, implants have to some extent achieved that goal. Richard K. Gurgel, one of the leading researchers in the field of cochlear implants, estimates that around 95 percent of deaf people are candidates for implants and that the technology employed in the devices has improved by leaps and bounds. In many countries, including Sweden and France, deaf children receive cochlear implants almost as a matter of course. Implants can now be equipped with Bluetooth technology so a person can listen to a podcast or receive a phone call that is directly transmitted through the implant to the brain. Although most devices today consist of two pieces—the part that is embedded under the skin and a part that attaches, by magnet, on top of the skin—future models will be fully implanted and thus invisible to other people.

Crucially, however, cochlear devices do not produce what would generally be considered normal hearing. Ann Geers, a developmental psychologist who has been studying cochlear implants for four decades, says a user might hear sounds that are

somewhat “muddy” or “underwater.” Users can have difficulties discerning between male and female voices and detecting the nuances of emotion or sarcasm. What a user hears varies enormously from person to person. One objective measurement, distinguishing notes on a piano, illustrated the variability of the implants’ success: In a 2012 study, four out of eleven children with cochlear implants were able to distinguish between a C and a C-sharp. But one child could not tell a C from an F, and two others heard no difference between a C and an E.



The effectiveness of cochlear implants also depends very much on the setting. Using them in noisy places, like a cocktail party, can be challenging. In 2020, a group of Australian researchers published a scientific review, a meta-analysis of research on the effectiveness of implants in adults. The study found that the quality of the sound that patients were able to hear varied considerably, as did their ability to understand speech. After surgery, patients on average understood 74 percent of sentences read to them in a quiet setting and 50 percent in a noisy environment.

Cochlear implants are clearly imperfect. But thousands of profoundly deaf people use them to interact with the hearing world, whether at jobs or socially. As of 2019, around 740,000 cochlear devices had been implanted worldwide, according to the FDA. In the United States, 65,000 children were fitted with the devices, with each operation typically costing in the neighborhood of $30,000 to $50,000.

For the deaf community worldwide, implants have been a point of debate and controversy. In the early days of their adoption many deaf people were wary of them. They feared the devices would buttress the idea that deaf people needed to be “cured” and that technology could do it. Deafness was not cancer, they argued, not something that needed treatment in the same way a deadly disease does. With sign language, members of the community were fully able to communicate with one another. The prospect of “fixing” deaf children raised questions about the future of an entire culture, of Deaf Culture. For more than a century deaf people had battled for the right to sign-language instruction. They worried what would happen to their language, and to the entire way of life that came with it, if children were urged to accept

implants. What if Basque speakers or Navajo speakers were told they were better off getting a device implanted in their brain because their language was too obscure?

In the United States, enrollment in deaf schools, the heart of deaf communities across the country, was falling for a variety of reasons, and the deaf community saw implants as hastening their decline.

The technology bitterly divided families over whether parents should have their deaf children implanted, a tension captured in the 2000 documentary film *Sound and Fury,* where a deaf couple, Peter and Nita Artinian, decide against providing a cochlear device for their five-year-old daughter, Heather. At one point in the film, Peter Artinian lashes out, “Hearing people think that deafness is limiting, that we can’t succeed. I say, no way!”

Two decades later, the suspicions toward implants have by no means disappeared in the deaf community. But attitudes have softened somewhat. The availability of implants coincided with hard-fought victories for deaf activists in other areas: greater acknowledgment of ASL as a language like any other; the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990, which mandated sign-language interpreting for places like hospitals. Technologies like closed-captioned television and the iPhone bridged some of the gap between hearing and deaf communities.

In one measure of the reduced wariness toward implants, five years after *Sound and Fury* was made, Heather, the girl whose parents had vehemently rejected the device, received one, along with her mother and other deaf relatives. “I just wanted to be able to communicate with the majority of people who live in this world who are hearing,” Heather told a publication at Harvard Law School, where she graduated in 2018.

In a moving speech at Georgetown University, which Heather attended as an undergraduate, she discussed how difficult it was to learn how to speak. After receiving the implant, she had speech therapy classes every day after school, and at first her classmates did not understand her. She sometimes had to rely on sign-language interpreters. But she continued to refine her speech. “I was willing to put in

the work and I saw the results," she said in the Georgetown talk. "I had a wonderful family who supported me through all this," she said. Some words like "Maryland" and "things" and "human beings" are muffled in her Georgetown speech. For people unfamiliar with her story, it might have been challenging to follow. She spoke about how her roommates asked her to repeat herself "all the time" because they didn't understand her. But Heather, like Dominic Turner, had forged this uncommon path. They didn't have to reside exclusively in the hearing world. Or in the deaf world. They just stay in the "middle," as Heather Artinian called it.

Dominic Turner's early years with the cochlear implant are testament to the hard work of learning to speak. It was a painstaking journey, and one that left him uncertain for years where he fit in. At the same time, it was a wondrous process that hearing people take for granted. Gaining hearing when he was five years old meant that he had to consciously learn the sounds that he was hearing. His grandmother Joanie Jackson, who raised him, would point out sounds throughout the day.

"Listen! That's the sound of water," she would tell Dominic. How else would he know what the trickle of liquid sounded like if it wasn't pointed out to him? "And that's a bird. Did you hear it?"

"It was constantly identifying sounds," Jackson remembered.

For years, this process would require, for Dominic, the concerted study of sound. Even as a teenager, a decade after he received his implant, he found that he needed to concentrate on speech to ascertain it.

"English is a foreign language to me," Dominic said.

Dominic Turner lives in a world that hearing people might find hard to imagine.

He tunes in to the hearing world when he wants to: At the beach, he likes hearing the sounds of waves. He wears his implants to the movies. He enjoys the roar of certain car engines. But he removes his implant and enters a world without hearing when he is around noises that he finds unpleasant. He dislikes high-pitched voices and people

who laugh too loudly. He finds the sounds of traffic rushing past distracting, and in those settings he prefers to hear nothing at all.

At school and on the football field, he keeps the implant off and thrives in the world that he is most comfortable in, signing with his friends and teachers.

Dominic is convinced that when he gets married, it will be to a deaf woman.

Communicating with deaf friends is faster and “more effortless.”

“I just feel that it’s more fun,” he said.

Chapter 12: Fame

Chapter 12: Fame tells the inspiring journey of the California School for the Deaf, Riverside (CSDR) Cubs football team, whose extraordinary season brought them recognition beyond the deaf community. Their winning streak, which extended well into October, was not just a series of victories but a momentous achievement for deaf athletes everywhere. The Cubs' success was a symbol of resilience, proving that communication barriers did not limit their potential. Their unwavering determination resonated deeply with the deaf community of Southern California, inspiring many who had long sought recognition in mainstream sports. The team’s remarkable performance turned them into local heroes, attracting alumni and supporters eager to witness history unfold.

One of the most outstanding moments of the season was when Phillip Castaneda, a key player for the Cubs, delivered an extraordinary performance against Desert Chapel. His impressive display of athleticism resulted in four touchdowns and 232 rushing yards, a feat that reflected not just his skill but also his perseverance in overcoming personal hardships. The field became his proving ground, where years of dedication and relentless effort culminated in one unforgettable game. Castaneda’s journey was not just about football; it was about proving that adversity could be conquered with persistence. His story resonated with many who understood the struggles of being underestimated due to communication barriers.

As the Cubs' success grew, former players and alumni returned to the school, rekindling memories of their own time on the field. For many, watching the Cubs dominate their opponents was a moment of validation, proving that deaf athletes could thrive in competitive sports. Coaches, past players, and families—many of whom were deaf themselves—shared how being part of the team had transformed their self-confidence and sense of belonging. Among them was Jeremias Valencia, a former

basketball record-holder and father of Jory Valencia, one of the team’s standout wide receivers. The Valencia family had relocated from southern Arizona to Riverside in pursuit of better opportunities, a decision that ultimately shaped Jory’s athletic journey. His presence on the field was a testament to his family’s resilience, demonstrating that overcoming obstacles led to greater achievements.

As the Cubs approached their highly anticipated game against Desert Christian, excitement reached a fever pitch. With an impressive 10-0 record, the team had positioned itself as a powerhouse, garnering admiration from the deaf community and beyond. A journalist covering their journey was struck by the unique energy surrounding the team, particularly the way communication took place in complete silence. Unlike traditional high school football games, where cheers and play calls echo through the stadium, CSDR’s environment was different. Players relied on hand signals, visual cues, and seamless teamwork, proving that language barriers were no obstacle to strategic excellence. This distinctive approach to the game captured widespread attention, leaving spectators in awe of the team’s synchronized play.

As word of the Cubs' success spread, national media outlets took notice, propelling them into the spotlight. News agencies, including NBC and ABC, featured segments on their journey, highlighting how their story was breaking stereotypes about deaf athletes. The overwhelming support led to unexpected opportunities, including an invitation to participate in the prestigious Super Bowl coin toss. The recognition extended beyond the players, with their dedicated coach, Keith Adams, being named coach of the year. These milestones were more than accolades; they represented the shift in societal perception of what deaf athletes could accomplish when given the right platform. Their achievements became a beacon of hope for others who aspired to break down barriers in sports and beyond.

However, with fame came new challenges, especially for some players unaccustomed to the public eye. Trevin Adams, a naturally reserved athlete, found the sudden attention overwhelming. The media exposure required the players to adjust to a newfound level of visibility, an aspect they had never experienced before. While the

recognition was a dream come true for many, it also meant stepping outside their comfort zones. The journey of the Cubs was no longer just about winning games—it was about advocating for inclusivity and proving that deaf athletes deserved a place in the sports world. Their triumphs on the field had ignited a national conversation about accessibility, representation, and breaking preconceived notions.

The Cubs' legacy extended far beyond their historic season, as their story began influencing change within the larger sports community. Their rise to fame emphasized the need for better opportunities for deaf athletes, sparking discussions about inclusivity in professional leagues. Schools, organizations, and sports programs across the country began exploring ways to accommodate athletes with disabilities, recognizing that talent should never be overlooked due to communication differences. The state of California took notice, providing funding for CSDR to expand its facilities and enhance athletic programs, ensuring that future generations would have even greater opportunities to succeed. The impact of the Cubs' journey was far-reaching, cementing their place as pioneers in advocating for equality in athletics.

Their story serves as a testament to the power of perseverance, proving that barriers can be broken when determination and passion are at the core. What began as a remarkable football season had evolved into a cultural movement, challenging the way society viewed deaf athletes. The Cubs had not only rewritten their own narrative but also inspired countless individuals to believe that limitations exist only where they are allowed to. Their success was not just measured in wins but in the lives they touched and the change they sparked. The legacy of the CSDR Cubs will continue to resonate for years to come, serving as a powerful reminder that true greatness is achieved when individuals refuse to be defined by their challenges.

Chapter 13: The Deaf Brain

Chapter 13: The Deaf Brain takes us into the cutting-edge world of neurosurgery, offering a fascinating glimpse into how the brain processes different forms of communication. In a landmark surgery led by Dr. Eddie Chang, a neurosurgeon from San Francisco, a profoundly deaf middle-aged man was treated for a brain tumor near essential language regions. The patient, unlike previous individuals Dr. Chang had worked with, communicated through American Sign Language (ASL), not speech. The operation, an awake craniotomy, involved stimulating various areas of the patient's brain while he performed tasks such as reading and counting. This marked a significant moment in neurosurgery, as Dr. Chang had never before encountered a deaf patient using sign language in this context.

The study of language processing in the brain has a long history, dating back to the pioneering work of Pierre Paul Broca in the 19th century. Broca, in 1861, discovered the link between a specific area of the left frontal lobe—now known as Broca's area—and speech production. This discovery followed the autopsy of a patient who could only say the word "Tan," despite understanding everything spoken to him. While Broca's focus was primarily on speech, Carl Wernicke later identified a corresponding region for language comprehension, further advancing the understanding of language centers in the brain. These findings laid the foundation for modern neurosurgical practices, especially in treating patients suffering from strokes, brain injuries, or language disorders.

In Dr. Chang's groundbreaking surgery, it was discovered that stimulating Broca's area caused the deaf patient to stop signing, revealing that sign language is processed in the same brain region as spoken language. This was a revolutionary discovery, as it challenged the existing belief that spoken and signed languages were governed by distinct neural pathways. The results suggested that the brain treats all forms of

language—whether spoken or signed—through the same cognitive and neural processes, reinforcing the idea of a universal language center in the brain. Dr. Chang's work not only provided clarity on how different languages are processed but also emphasized the adaptability of the brain in accommodating diverse methods of communication.

The chapter also explores the historical stigma surrounding sign language, which was once considered primitive and inferior to spoken languages. Early scientific and societal views often dismissed sign language as a rudimentary form of communication, with critics equating it to simple gestures rather than a sophisticated language system. However, the work of linguists like William Stokoe in the 1960s shifted this perception. Stokoe's research demonstrated that American Sign Language had its own complex grammar, syntax, and structure, leading to the eventual recognition of ASL as a fully developed language. This breakthrough was crucial for the deaf community, validating their language and culture on a global scale.

As modern research progresses, it has been confirmed that acquiring a language—whether spoken or signed—activates similar regions of the brain, challenging the previous assumption that only spoken language involved complex neural engagement. Both ASL and spoken languages engage the same cognitive structures, indicating that the brain treats all language forms as equal. These discoveries not only reshape the way language is perceived but also have profound implications for how individuals with disabilities are treated in the fields of education, medicine, and society. Dr. Chang's work is just one example of how neuroscience continues to shed light on the intricate ways in which humans communicate, proving that language is a deeply ingrained, versatile skill, adaptable to various forms and expressions.

Today, American Sign Language is not only an integral part of deaf culture but also an important subject of scientific research. Dr. Chang's groundbreaking findings have significantly contributed to the understanding of how the brain processes different languages, laying the foundation for future breakthroughs in both neurology and

linguistics. As researchers continue to explore the complexities of the human brain, these discoveries highlight the importance of inclusivity and the recognition of all languages, spoken or signed, as valuable forms of communication. Through this research, society can move closer to understanding the deep connection between language and the brain, ensuring a future where all forms of communication are respected and valued.

Chapter 14: Avalon

Chapter 14: Avalon brings the Cubs to a critical semifinal match in the Southern California championship, setting the stage for an intense contest against Avalon. The Cubs, twenty-one strong, are led by their coaching staff aboard the Starship Express, a ferry making its way from Long Beach to Santa Catalina Island. Amidst the noise and excitement of the ferry ride, the players communicate through sign language, as the boisterous environment prevents them from engaging in any meaningful conversation. This journey is not just about reaching their destination; it’s a moment where anticipation builds for the match that could define their season.

On the ferry, news crews from various television stations are present, adding to the pressure the Cubs already feel. The media attention, although expected, weighs heavily on the players, as repetitive interviews and the constant spotlight start to cause media fatigue. They are determined to prove themselves, not just for their supporters but also for their own sense of self-worth. Upon arrival, the Cubs face Avalon’s coach, Nick Morones, a seasoned leader with a track record of success. Morones, who previously coached an undefeated middle school team, has prepared meticulously for this game. He is aware of the challenges that come with playing against a deaf team, but he also plans to capitalize on Avalon’s home-field advantage, believing that the island’s atmosphere and the physical nature of his players will help them outmuscle the Cubs.

Avalon is buzzing with excitement in anticipation of the game, having heard of the Cubs’ remarkable abilities and strength on the field. The local community is fully invested in the game, eager to see how the Cubs will perform on their turf. The atmosphere around the small stadium is picturesque, with the iconic palm trees surrounding the field and local supporters cheering enthusiastically. Even the mothers of Avalon’s players have gotten involved, creating personalized cheers for their sons,

making the game feel personal and community-oriented. The intensity builds as the game approaches, and both teams are filled with determination to succeed. The stage is set for a highly competitive match, with both sides fully aware of the stakes involved.

The game kicks off with the Cubs struggling initially against Avalon’s aggressive defense, which forces them to adjust their strategy. However, as the game progresses, the Cubs find their rhythm, gradually reversing their fortunes. Avalon, on the other hand, faces a series of turnovers and mistakes that allow the Cubs to surge ahead. Yet Avalon’s resilience shines through, and after halftime, they regroup, coming out with renewed energy that brings them back into the game. The back-and-forth battle is intense, with both teams showing their strength and determination. Avalon’s resurgence in the second half makes for a thrilling contest, leaving fans and players on the edge of their seats. Despite the fierce competition and Avalon’s attempts to mount a comeback, the Cubs emerge victorious with a 62-51 win.

After the game, a moment of respect unfolds when Avalon’s players, despite their defeat, acknowledge the Cubs' performance and show great sportsmanship. Felix Gonzales, one of the standout players for the Cubs, reflects on the game with pride. He expresses how significant it was to him, not just because they won, but because it was the game he would remember most fondly from his high school years. Felix’s reflection speaks to the personal triumphs and the spirit of the game. This chapter beautifully encapsulates both the fierce competition on the field and the deeper connections formed in the face of adversity. It is a moment of growth, achievement, and the realization that there is more to football than just winning—it’s about respect, camaraderie, and the unspoken bonds that are formed in the heat of competition.

Chapter 15: Battered

Chapter 15: Battered portrays the physical and emotional strain experienced by the Cubs football team as they approach the pinnacle of their season—the championship game of the California Interscholastic Federation, Southern Section. Their journey has already made history as the first deaf football team in California to reach this level. The Cubs had just endured a tough, hard-hitting game against Avalon, which left many of their players bruised and battered. For Trevin Adams, a key player on the team, the aftermath of this physically demanding match was particularly severe. Despite the rush of adrenaline following their victory, Trevin's struggle with pain and exhaustion became evident as he boarded the ferry to Long Beach with his family. Every step he took on the gangplank felt like a challenge, with his movements slow and careful, showing the toll the game had taken on him physically.

The Avalon game had been an intense battle, and the Cubs had been on the receiving end of some brutal tackles. Many players left the field covered in turf burns, which served as painful reminders of the violence that occurred during the game. Trevin, in particular, had suffered the worst, with his body still aching and slow to recover in the days that followed. He moved cautiously around his home, struggling to find any relief from the pain. Felix Gonzalez's struggles were equally significant, as an aggravated hip injury slowed his movements, making it difficult for him to stay on top of his game. Meanwhile, Jory Valencia was still fighting through a lingering stomach illness, making it harder for him to contribute as he had in earlier games. With only a week left before the highly anticipated championship game, the players were urged to rest and recover, leaving the intensity of football practices behind. The Thanksgiving break provided a perfect opportunity for the team to regroup, heal, and regain their strength before their next monumental test.

Instead of pushing the team to practice, Coaches Keith Adams and Kaveh Angoorani decided to give the players a much-needed break. They knew that with injuries and fatigue taking their toll, focusing on rest would be more beneficial than forcing further physical exertion. During the break, the coaches turned their attention to their upcoming opponent, Faith Baptist. This team, a powerhouse in eight-man football, had dominated the sport for years, with an impressive record of nineteen championship appearances and nine title wins. Faith Baptist's long-standing success presented an enormous challenge, and Keith and Kaveh understood that in order to compete, they needed to rely on more than just physical strength. They immersed themselves in studying game footage, analyzing Faith Baptist's tactics, and crafting a game plan that would allow the Cubs to overcome the odds and claim victory.

The chapter also sheds light on the deep and meaningful partnership between Coaches Keith and Kaveh. Keith, with his Scotch-Irish background from Oklahoma, and Kaveh, an Iranian immigrant who had attended the oldest deaf school in Hartford, forged a strong bond over their shared commitment to both the sport and their players. Despite their different backgrounds, the two coaches found common ground in their passion for coaching and developing young athletes. Kaveh had always been dedicated to the Cubs, but he had decided that this season would be his last. His decision to retire after this season was not taken lightly, but he knew it was time to step away after years of hard work and commitment. However, before retiring, he was determined to see the Cubs through to their best season yet. With the championship on the horizon, both coaches remained focused on preparing their team for the ultimate challenge, knowing that the upcoming game would mark not just the culmination of the season, but a defining moment for the Cubs' legacy.

Chapter 16: A Football? But It’s Not Round

Chapter 16: A Football? But It’s Not Round begins by highlighting the pilgrimage of Aghdas Kavandi, a mother from Iran, to the shrine of Imam Reza in Mashhad, a revered site for millions. Aghdas’s journey was driven by her deep concern for her son, Kaveh, who was born profoundly deaf. Initially, she believed that his condition was a result of her fall during pregnancy, but this belief was later corrected when a genetic connection to deafness in the family was discovered. Despite this newfound understanding, Aghdas’s fears for her son’s future persisted, worrying that he would struggle to live independently or build meaningful relationships. Her pilgrimage to the Imam Reza shrine was an expression of her hopes for healing, consistent with the traditional Shiite practice of seeking divine intervention for personal challenges.

Kaveh, born in 1963 in Tehran, was a cheerful child, but his life was altered when his inability to hear became noticeable to his peers, leading to isolation and rejection. The memories of this rejection stayed with him well into adulthood. However, his parents enrolled him in a school for the deaf, where he faced strict discipline but also learned a combination of gestures and lip-reading known as cued speech. Despite struggling academically, Kaveh found comfort and camaraderie playing soccer in 1960s Tehran’s cosmopolitan environment. He formed friendships with German expatriates, who taught him advanced soccer techniques, offering him a sense of belonging and purpose in a world that often felt isolating.

Kaveh’s talent in soccer allowed him to use his deafness to his advantage, as it provided him with an extraordinary ability to focus on the game. Despite his success on the field, his mother’s anxiety about his future persisted, and she sought medical advice in Paris, where doctors confirmed that his deafness was permanent. This confirmation did not deter Aghdas, however, as she continued to pursue educational opportunities for Kaveh. Eventually, she decided to send him to the American School

for the Deaf in Connecticut, though this plan was met with resistance from Kaveh's father, who expressed concerns over his son's safety and well-being in the United States. A financial setback for the family eventually made Kaveh's trip possible, and he left for the U.S. with another deaf boy, both facing a new world and new challenges.

Upon arriving in Connecticut, Kaveh's initial experience was a humorous and confusing encounter with American football, a sport that seemed strange and unfamiliar to him. However, despite his initial doubts, Kaveh grew to admire the game. At the American School for the Deaf, he was initially intimidated by the advanced sign language skills of his peers but soon discovered a passion for football. His natural athleticism and drive allowed him to adapt quickly and excel in the sport, eventually becoming a standout player. Kaveh's journey reflects not only his personal growth but also his ability to overcome challenges and transform them into opportunities, both on and off the field.

After graduating, Kaveh moved to California, where he worked a variety of jobs and eventually won a lawsuit against an employer who had discriminated against him. Over time, he built a successful life, culminating in a teaching position at the California School for the Deaf in Riverside. Aghdas, filled with pride, visited her son and saw firsthand the fruits of her sacrifices. Kaveh's achievements brought her peace, reinforcing her faith in her prayers and providing her with the reassurance that her son's future, once uncertain, was now filled with success and purpose. Through his accomplishments, Kaveh not only validated the hopes and dreams of his mother but also forged a path that would inspire countless others in the deaf community.

Chapter 17: Underdog Meets Top Dog

Chapter 17: Underdog Meets Top Dog captures the anticipation and excitement that the Cubs experience as they approach their championship game, marking a historic moment in the Southern California deaf community. The intense demand for tickets reflects the growing anticipation for this game, but the limited seating at the California School for the Deaf Riverside (CSDR) forces the event to be moved to a larger venue, John W. North High School. This stadium, with its expansive capacity, accommodates the eager crowd, ensuring the game can be witnessed by thousands. The decision to change venues is a pivotal one, allowing the game to be played in front of a larger audience, amplifying the importance of this contest as the Cubs prepare to face a formidable opponent in Faith Baptist. The game represents more than just athleticism; it’s a symbolic clash of ideologies and cultures that promises to bring out the best in both teams.

Faith Baptist School, a fixture in conservative Christian education since its founding in 1963, boasts a strict moral and academic curriculum that includes mandatory Bible study and prayer. This discipline is instilled across the student body, dictating everything from the appearance of students to the language they use in their daily interactions. Despite these rigorous standards, Faith Baptist remains accessible to a diverse range of students, thanks in part to its low tuition, which remains under $8,000. The school’s commitment to providing an affordable education attracts a variety of students, including those from White, Latino, and Asian backgrounds, particularly among the Filipino community. Led by Coach Rob Davidson, who has guided the team since 2006, Faith Baptist’s football team has a storied history, including a current record of 10-2 heading into the championship. The team boasts impressive physical prowess, highlighted by players like six-foot-eight tight end Luke Rasmussen and six-foot-three quarterback Luke Rasmussen, both of whom play a

crucial role in Faith Baptist’s dominating presence on the field. Alongside these standout players are A.C. Swadling, known for his agility and tackling ability, and Parker Mills, a running back with unmatched dedication, balancing his football commitments with work at a Malibu restaurant.

On the other hand, the Cubs head into the championship with the underdog status, coming off a difficult season marked by a string of losses. Despite their challenging season, they are fueled by an unwavering determination and the desire to prove themselves on the grand stage. While Faith Baptist practices relentlessly, honing their strategies and preparing for a decisive victory, the Cubs find strength in their unity and resolve. Despite being outmatched in terms of preparation and experience, the Cubs are driven by their collective will to overcome adversity, with the hope that their teamwork and resilience can counterbalance the superior preparation of their opponents. The anticipation for the game grows as both teams prepare to put their contrasting philosophies to the test on the field. This championship game, with its layers of cultural clash, ideological differences, and individual player motivations, will be more than just a competition of athleticism; it’s a test of heart, grit, and determination. For the Cubs, it represents the culmination of their season’s struggles and triumphs, a chance to rise above the expectations and show that they can overcome the top dog in the competition. The emotional stakes are high for both teams as they prepare for an unforgettable showdown that promises to be full of surprises and moments of brilliance. The narrative builds tension by illustrating not just the physical challenges but also the mental and emotional fortitude required for both teams to emerge victorious, making the game a true spectacle that transcends the boundaries of the sport itself.

Chapter 18: Finishing with a Bang

Chapter 18: Finishing with a Bang begins with Cody Metzner, a hard-hitting player for the Cubs, expressing doubts about the size of the crowd at the championship game on November 27, 2021, because of the Thanksgiving holiday. His concerns quickly dissipated as he entered John W. North High School stadium and saw thousands of fans dressed in red shirts, filling the stands. Ticket sales had reached 2,362, and many more fans arrived at the door, eager to witness the game. Media presence was overwhelming, with reporters from top networks like ABC, NBC, and ESPN in attendance. Even representatives from Tom Brady's production company were present, showing interest in creating a film about the team's remarkable journey. This overwhelming support made the atmosphere electric, setting the stage for an unforgettable night.

Among the attendees was Nancy Hlibok Amann, the superintendent of CSDR, whose presence highlighted the significance of the event. She was well-known in the deaf community, with her family's impactful history. During her interview, she spoke passionately about the game, emphasizing that the night held much more than a championship title. She hoped that the game would send a powerful message to the world about the capabilities of a deaf football team, competing for a trophy usually claimed by hearing teams. Her words underscored the importance of the Cubs' journey, which was more than just a fight for victory but also a fight to break barriers and showcase their athleticism and resilience on a global stage.

The game began with the Cubs facing immediate challenges. On their first possession, they failed to capitalize despite a spectacular twenty-yard catch by Jory Valencia. Faith Baptist's quarterback, Luke Rasmussen, took advantage of the Cubs' defensive struggles and quickly put his team ahead with a touchdown. By the end of the first quarter, the Cubs were trailing 28-0, as Faith Baptist's aggressive offense continued to

overpower them. The Cubs struggled to defend against Faith’s high-powered offense, and the tension mounted as the deficit grew larger. Despite the early setback, the Cubs knew they had to dig deep and find a way to get back into the game.

In a moment of desperation, Coach Keith Adams made a bold decision to go for a risky fourth down play deep in the Cubs' territory. Felix Gonzales, known for his agility and power, took advantage of the opportunity, making a stunning sixty-yard run for a touchdown. This play sparked hope for the Cubs, as it was the first sign of their ability to fight back against the odds. They continued to build momentum with Jory Valencia catching pass after pass, bringing the score to 28-16. The game became more intense as both teams showed signs of aggressive play, which eventually led to penalties for unsportsmanlike conduct. The physicality of the game only heightened the stakes, making each play feel like a battle.

As the game wore on, the Cubs faced significant injuries, with Jory suffering a foot injury and Kaden Adams sustaining a broken ankle. Despite these setbacks, the team refused to give up, continuing to fight through the pain and adversity. They managed to score once more, bringing the score to 28-22, just one touchdown away from tying the game. The Cubs’ resilience in the face of such adversity became a central theme of the championship night. It wasn’t just about the physical battle on the field—it was also about mental toughness, determination, and proving to the world that a deaf team could compete at the highest level. Their incredible journey, filled with challenges and triumphs, captured the hearts of everyone watching and became a testament to the power of perseverance and teamwork.

Chapter 19: “No Hope Left”

Chapter 19: “No Hope Left” captures a critical and emotionally charged moment in the Cubs' football season, where they face off against one of their toughest opponents, Faith Baptist. The energy is palpable as the Cubs prepare for a high-stakes game, and nerves run high, especially for players like Parker Mills, who leads Faith Baptist with his unrelenting physicality and aggressive running style. Mills' impressive skills on the field immediately set the tone, overwhelming the Cubs' defense and making it clear that this would be no ordinary game. Despite their prior preparations, the Cubs struggle to keep up with the intensity and speed displayed by Mills, as well as his ability to break tackles and make big gains on every play. With each successive run, Mills advances the ball and continues to exploit gaps in the Cubs' defense, forcing them into a position where they must react quickly, but with little success. The Faith Baptist offense, led by Mills, relentlessly pushes the Cubs back, keeping them on the defensive and making it impossible to gain any real momentum or control of the game.

By halftime, the score reveals the extent of the Cubs' struggles, with Faith Baptist leading by a commanding 50–22. Inside the locker room, the Cubs are faced with a tough reality, with the weight of the scoreline and the emotional exhaustion taking its toll on the players. Many are nursing injuries, and the mental strain of falling behind so significantly weighs heavily on the team. Cody Metzner, one of the team’s key players, feels a deep sense of defeat, realizing that they are no longer playing with the same level of hope and confidence they had earlier in the season. The locker room atmosphere is filled with resignation as players question their abilities, but beneath the disappointment, there is a faint glimmer of resolve. The Cubs’ resilience begins to show through as they realize the importance of holding on to their pride, despite the overwhelming odds stacked against them. The support from their loyal fans becomes an essential factor, as their encouragement continues to remind the team of their

strength and capability, offering a sense of comfort and motivation that they desperately need at this crucial moment.

The second half begins, and with the Cubs already trailing, their situation becomes even more dire. Mills adds another touchdown with a 25-yard run, pushing the Faith Baptist lead further out of reach. On top of this, Trevin Adams, the Cubs' quarterback, suffers a concussion, leaving the team without one of their most pivotal players. With Trevin out of the game, the pressure mounts on the remaining players, particularly Kaden Adams, who steps in to fill the gap. Unfortunately, the game takes another turn for the worse when Kaden throws a costly interception that is immediately converted into another Faith Baptist touchdown, pushing the Cubs’ chances of a comeback further out of reach. The physical toll and mounting errors prove to be too much, and by the time the final whistle blows, the Cubs are defeated with a score of 74–22. Despite the heavy loss, their fans continue to cheer them on, a testament to the unwavering support from the community. As Felix Gonzales, visibly frustrated and disheartened, walks off the field, he is reminded of the importance of community and camaraderie. Though the defeat is painful, the Cubs’ bond with their fans and each other remains intact. This defeat serves as a reminder of the harsh realities of competition but also highlights the true meaning of teamwork and perseverance. Through this loss, the Cubs have the opportunity to grow stronger and learn from their shortcomings, finding ways to better themselves for future challenges. Ultimately, the chapter portrays not only the pain of defeat but also the strength that arises from it, showing that resilience comes from how you handle adversity and continue to move forward even when the odds seem insurmountable.

Chapter 20: Unfinished Business

Chapter 20: Unfinished Business, takes us into the world of the Cubs as they reflect on the pivotal moment when Super Bowl LVI took place on February 13, 2022, at SoFi Stadium in Inglewood, California. This remarkable event wasn’t just significant for the sport, but also for deaf athletes, as players like Trevin, Christian, Jory, and Enos found themselves not only representing their team but the broader deaf athletic community. With 70,000 spectators in attendance, the stage was set for a powerful celebration of inclusion, marked by the appearance of deaf performers during the halftime show. The NFL’s commitment to breaking stereotypes was on full display, but even amidst this monumental achievement, the Cubs felt a yearning for more. Though they took pride in their history-making moment, they couldn’t help but feel the sting of their recent championship defeat, craving the taste of victory rather than the consolation of second place.

Despite the disappointment, Coach Keith Adams knew how to transform the sting of loss into a motivational tool for the Cubs. He reminded the team that their journey was far from over and that they had "unfinished business" to settle in the next season. With Enos graduating, the team had to come to terms with a change in their roster, but key players like Trevin, Felix, Jory, Cody, Christian, and David remained committed to the goal of redemption. Coach Adams successfully persuaded Kaveh Angoorani to extend his playing career for one more season, offering a sense of continuity and experience. The Cubs understood that their success in the upcoming season would be defined not just by their talent, but by the mental resilience they were developing in the face of adversity. It was clear that their determination to win was stronger than ever, and they were eager to put their hard work into action.

The offseason proved to be a critical period for the Cubs, as the dynamics of their training evolved. No longer were they simply going through the motions—they actively

sought to improve and become stronger as a unit. The weight room, once a place that required pushing from their strength coach Galvin Drake, became a hub of activity where players arrived with the intention to outdo each other. The sense of urgency that had been missing the previous year was now palpable, as the players channeled their frustration and disappointment from the previous season into a commitment to improve. Coach Drake observed the transformation, noting that the Cubs were now driven by a desire to hold each other accountable, pushing their limits to ensure that their next season would not be another missed opportunity. This renewed dedication laid the foundation for their physical and mental growth, setting the stage for a season in which they would aim to prove their worth on the field.

During this period of intense preparation, players like Alfredo Baltazar took the time to connect with their heritage and share the Cubs' journey with their families. A trip to Mexico allowed Alfredo to meet with extended relatives and communicate his accomplishments as part of a deaf football team. This wasn't just about playing football—it was about showing his family that deaf athletes could excel in the sport. As the first person in his family to play football, Alfredo sought their approval, and his desire to prove himself became a driving force in his preparation for the season. His dedication to the sport was reflected in the physical transformation he underwent during the offseason, as he dedicated himself to the strength and conditioning necessary for success. More than just a player, Alfredo became a symbol of determination and inspiration for his family and his team, reinforcing the idea that sports could offer not just personal growth but the opportunity to bridge gaps and foster deeper connections. His journey exemplified the power of sports to shape not only athletic careers but also the relationships that supported those endeavors.

Chapter 21: “Full Sprints!”

Chapter 21: “Full Sprints!” provides an in-depth look into the rigorous preparation and emotional challenges faced by the Riverside Cubs as they gear up for another football season at the California School for the Deaf, Riverside (CSDR). On August 4, 2022, the coaching staff, led by Coach Keith Adams, convenes in his office for an important strategy meeting. The office is arranged to facilitate smooth communication among the deaf coaches, allowing multiple conversations to take place at once without confusion. Among those present are notable figures such as Kaveh Angoorani, Ken Watson, and Michael Mabashov, each contributing their perspectives and strategies for the upcoming season. The meeting is filled with discussions about refining their training programs, addressing weaknesses from the previous year, and preparing the players to be in peak condition before the first game. One of the key topics discussed is a change in the playoff format, which could significantly impact the team’s road to the championship. The coaches acknowledge the challenges ahead but share a collective determination to build on last season’s successes.

Despite their enthusiasm, the meeting also highlights the difficulties the team faces due to the outdated and inadequate athletic facilities at CSDR. Unlike other elite high school football programs with cutting-edge technology and resources, the Cubs must make do with what they have. The government-issue building where they train lacks specialized design features that would make communication easier for a deaf coaching staff and team. However, rather than allowing these obstacles to discourage them, the coaches exhibit resilience and adaptability, ensuring that the players receive top-tier training regardless of their environment. Ken Watson suggests implementing weigh-ins to monitor the physical development of players, while Coach Adams remains steadfast in his belief that speed and strength are the keys to victory. The staff agrees that players must be held accountable for their conditioning, emphasizing the importance

of hard work and discipline in their training regimen. Their ultimate goal is to ensure that this year’s squad enters the season stronger and better prepared than ever before.

As the players gather on the practice field for their first session, the energy is electric, yet the pressure is undeniable. Coach Adams rallies the team with an impassioned speech, reinforcing their identity as champions and reminding them of the level of commitment required to achieve their goals. The field, while far from ideal, is transformed into a proving ground where the players must push themselves to their limits. Early signs of fatigue emerge as the grueling drills take their toll, with some struggling to keep pace. Cody Metzner, overcome by the physical exertion, is seen vomiting on the field—an image that serves as a testament to the intensity of their training. However, the coaching staff quickly notes an improvement from the previous season, with fewer players showing signs of exhaustion, a promising indication of their enhanced fitness levels. The Cubs are proving that they have taken preseason conditioning seriously, but their work is far from over.

A somber note is struck by the absence of Phillip Castaneda, a player who had been sidelined due to academic ineligibility and personal struggles. His story reflects the harsh reality that many student-athletes face—balancing the demands of both school and sports. Coach Adams had made every effort to advocate for Phillip, hoping for a resolution that would allow him to return to the team. However, despite these efforts, the final decision stood, preventing Phillip from playing. For a brief period, he takes on the role of team manager, attempting to stay connected to the sport and his teammates. But the emotional toll proves too great, and he ultimately steps away from the team entirely. As the Cubs continue their journey, his absence serves as a reminder of the challenges that extend beyond the field. Yet, for those who remain, the season represents an opportunity to rise above adversity, to push forward with relentless determination, and to prove that they have what it takes to claim victory. With their first game just around the corner, the Cubs are more motivated than ever, knowing that every sprint, every drill, and every moment of practice is bringing them closer to their ultimate goal.

Chapter 22: “Be Hungry for It! Be Angry!”

Chapter 22: “Be Hungry for It! Be Angry!” focuses on the transformation of a football team during the preseason, highlighting their growth and determination to improve after a disappointing championship loss. Under the leadership of strength coach Galvin Drake, the players showed significant physical progress, with a collective strength increase of forty pounds. This transformation reflects their renewed focus and maturity, as they dedicated themselves to becoming a stronger and more competitive team. Their approach to training, marked by a sharper sense of discipline, demonstrated their commitment to correcting past mistakes and preparing for the season ahead with a heightened sense of urgency.

California’s new laws on player safety had an impact on the team’s practice structure, limiting full-contact sessions to just two per week. This regulation was part of a broader effort to address growing concerns about concussions and protect athletes during practices. As a result, the team was required to use proper equipment to maintain safety standards while still fostering the integrity of the sport. Despite these limitations, the players remained focused on their goal of becoming stronger and more resilient, ready to face any challenges that came their way during the season.

As the team geared up for their first full-contact practice session, they elected their captains—Trevin, Jory, Felix, and Kaden—who would lead the team both on and off the field. Their leadership would be critical in maintaining team morale and motivation throughout the season. Michael Mabashov, known for his energetic coaching style, pushed the players to perform with intensity, encouraging them to embrace a competitive spirit. His mantra, “Be hungry for it! Be angry!” resonated deeply with the team, inspiring them to approach every drill and practice with a sense of urgency. Felix Gonzales, in particular, stood out during a two-on-two drill, impressing teammates with his agility and athleticism, which sparked excitement and anticipation

for the season.

Meanwhile, Andrei Voinea, a senior player, worked hard to refine his skills as a backup center. Despite not being a starter, Voinea’s physicality and height (six feet, four inches) made him a valuable asset to the team. Voinea’s journey to the football field had not been without obstacles. Coming from a hearing school with no sports teams, he was determined to excel with the Cubs, and his transition to a deaf school allowed him to bond with his teammates more deeply. Voinea’s dual talents extended beyond sports; he was also an aspiring video game programmer with dreams of working for Disney. His passion for both football and technology drove him to push himself harder every day.

The challenges Voinea faced as a deaf individual were not limited to the football field. Communicating in a school setting often required him to rely on interpreters, making some interactions more difficult than they would have been for hearing students. However, at the California School for the Deaf, Riverside (CSDR), Voinea found a sense of belonging and camaraderie with his teammates, which fueled his love for the sport. Despite his natural talent, his coaches encouraged him to develop a more aggressive mindset on the field, pushing him to become an even stronger presence during games.

As the preseason came to an end, Coach Keith Adams and his team turned their attention to the upcoming season opener against Chadwick School. Coach Adams emphasized the importance of studying game film to gain a tactical advantage, as well as maintaining physical aggression throughout the game. Strength coach Galvin Drake also took the opportunity to challenge the players to adopt healthier eating habits to fuel their bodies for the demanding season ahead. With the rigorous training complete, the team was ready to face the challenges of the new season, confident in their preparation and motivated by their pursuit of a championship.

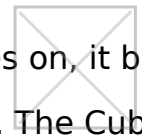
Chapter 23: “They Think We Are Nothing”

Chapter 23: “They Think We Are Nothing” follows Josh Goodman, a star football player from Chadwick School, as he faces overwhelming anxiety before an important game against the California School for the Deaf, Riverside (CSDR). Goodman, a well-rounded athlete excelling in multiple positions such as running back, receiver, and kicker, becomes increasingly anxious about playing against a deaf school for the first time. His nerves grow as this game is not just another contest, but a defining match that could determine his team’s future performance. Alongside Goodman, Chadwick’s coaching staff, led by Coach Jordan Ollis, is equally apprehensive, understanding the high stakes involved. After a less-than-ideal season start, this game could set the tone for the rest of the season and either propel the team to new heights or spell disaster.

The intensity of the game is further increased when the players find out that an NFL film crew will be documenting the match, with a focus on Coach Ollis’s strategies. To top off the pressure, NFL legend Kurt Warner will be present to observe the game, adding an extra layer of significance to an already important event. Chadwick School’s prestigious location in Palos Verdes, known for its wealth and historical significance, creates a stark contrast to CSDR, which, while no less important, operates in a more modest setting. Despite their differences, both schools have a rich tradition in football. Chadwick has consistently been a dominant force, known for its disciplined and successful program, while CSDR’s football program remains relatively under the radar. Despite this, CSDR’s focus on determination and grit quickly proves that the Cubs may have underestimated their opponent.

In the days leading up to the game, Coach Ollis prepares his team by discussing the unique challenges they will face when playing against a deaf team. He talks about how the communication styles will differ, especially since the deaf players may not hear the whistle, signaling breaks in the game. This forewarning, however, does little to prepare

Chadwick for the raw power and intensity that CSDR brings to the field. The Cubs, who entered the game with confidence, quickly find themselves stunned by CSDR’s ability to execute flawless team plays. CSDR’s seamless teamwork and relentless physicality dominate the game from the outset, making it clear that Chadwick's initial assumptions about the game were misguided. The Cubs' attempts to recover are thwarted by their own overconfidence, and they struggle to find their rhythm.



As the game goes on, it becomes increasingly clear that CSDR is not just a team but a formidable force. The Cubs, despite their reputation and well-known discipline, are no match for the collective strength and unwavering focus of the CSDR players. The Cubs, underestimating their opponents due to preconceived biases, find themselves outclassed on both a physical and mental level. By the end of the game, CSDR has delivered a dominant performance, securing a 54–16 victory. The loss is a tough blow for the Chadwick players, particularly Goodman, who is left to reflect on the defeat. It’s not just a loss in terms of score, but a realization that CSDR had earned their victory by pushing themselves beyond what Chadwick expected. Coach Ollis, ever the professional, acknowledges CSDR's superior play and uses the loss as a teachable moment. This defeat serves as a humbling experience, one that propels Chadwick forward with a renewed sense of determination. It marks a pivotal moment in their season, reminding them that true success is achieved through respect for all opponents, mental toughness, and an ability to adjust when faced with unforeseen challenges. The chapter reinforces how preconceived biases and a lack of adaptability can lead to failure, and how humility in defeat can drive future success.

Chapter 24: Deaf Versus Deaf

Chapter 24: Deaf Versus Deaf highlights the Riverside Cubs' journey to confront their historic rivals, the California School for the Deaf in Fremont. As the players travel along Interstate 5 toward Northern California, the anticipation and excitement build within the team. This game marks the beginning of three consecutive matchups against other deaf schools, making it a pivotal moment for the Cubs. Having been crowned national deaf football champions in the previous season, Riverside is determined to defend their title and continue their legacy. This match isn't just about competition, it represents their chance to solidify their dominance and assert themselves in the deaf football community. The team feels the weight of their previous success and is eager to prove they are worthy of their position as the best.

The atmosphere among the Cubs is electric as they prepare for the game, eager to showcase their skills against their deaf counterparts. For these athletes, the excitement goes beyond the game itself; it’s about the shared experience of playing against another team of deaf athletes. This bond adds an extra layer of meaning to the contest. The players find camaraderie in the unique communication strategies that come with being deaf, offering them an advantage on the field that hearing teams cannot replicate. The emotional stakes are high for players like Alexandero Morales, who shares his family's deep connection to the rivalry between Riverside and Fremont. It’s not just about football for him; it’s about continuing a legacy of competition that’s been years in the making, adding further depth to the significance of the match.

The rivalry between the two schools runs deep within California’s culture, with Fremont holding a prestigious place as the first school for the deaf in the state. Riverside, though a newer institution, has quickly established itself as a formidable competitor, but their journey has been filled with hurdles. Coach Adams drives home the importance of overcoming their past failures, including their previous losses to

Fremont, as they prepare for the upcoming battle. His words motivate the players, who now understand that this game is more than just another win—it’s about breaking the cycle of past disappointments and proving their worth. They must rise above their history and capitalize on the moment. Knowing they have a chance to make their mark, they step onto the field with a sense of determination and unity that reflects their growth as a team.

The Cubs employ advanced strategies for communication on the field, which is critical to overcoming Fremont’s skilled and aggressive play. With shared communication methods perfected over years of practice, the Cubs excel at using their advantages to disrupt Fremont’s plans. The game becomes a display of their grit and tactical brilliance, with each player stepping up to make key plays that lead to a dominant performance. Their ability to capitalize on every opportunity is apparent as they quickly establish control of the game, never allowing Fremont to settle into a rhythm. The final score, a resounding victory for Riverside, solidifies their place as the top team in California’s deaf football circuit. This victory is not just about a championship; it’s a testament to the power of unity, teamwork, and the relentless pursuit of excellence. As the Cubs lift the championship trophy, their hard work, sacrifice, and shared identity as deaf athletes are recognized. This victory represents a culmination of their journey, and the trophy becomes a symbol of their resilience and their place in deaf sports history. The chapter celebrates the spirit of competition, teamwork, and the bond that unites athletes from all walks of life in the pursuit of greatness.

Chapter 25: Playing a Deaf Legend

Chapter 25: Playing a Deaf Legend centers on the Cubs' football team as they prepare for a challenging game against the Indiana School for the Deaf, led by Coach Michael Paulone. At the age of sixty-five, Paulone has built a respected legacy within the deaf community as a coach, having already led his team to an undefeated 4-0 record with only fifty players on the roster. Despite the pride of having such a record, Paulone faces a significant challenge: his team's transition from traditional eleven-man football to the faster-paced, more demanding eight-man game used by Riverside. This format, unique to the Cubs, presents a challenge that Paulone must prepare for, forcing him to rethink how his team will adapt to an entirely new style of play.

Paulone's story is not just one of coaching but of personal perseverance against adversity. Born deaf, he faced early skepticism about his potential in sports, especially when he took up the role of quarterback. Despite the doubts of others, Paulone's tenacity allowed him to excel, and his determination to succeed in the face of barriers became evident. His use of sign language to communicate plays with his coach from the Pennsylvania School for the Deaf is a perfect example of his innovative approach to overcoming obstacles. This innovation helped Paulone rise from a backup quarterback to the starting position, earning him MVP honors during the Philadelphia City All-Star Football Game. His leadership and unwavering determination not only made him a hero to his teammates but also introduced him to NFL legend Joe Namath, cementing his status as a pioneer for deaf athletes.

The Cubs, as they prepare for the matchup against Indiana, face a tough but exciting challenge, given that their opponents are led by a veteran coach with a deep understanding of the game. Paulone, despite feeling the pressure of facing the highly skilled Riverside squad, attempts to rally his team by emphasizing the importance of their physical strength and unity. However, the Cubs' overwhelming talent proved too

much for Indiana. The final score of 62-18 reflected not only the Cubs’ superiority in terms of athleticism but also the preparation and dedication that had led them to this point. The Cubs’ performance on the field, particularly during a key touchdown play, served as a reminder that their combination of skill and teamwork was unmatched. Coach Paulone, in his post-game reflection, was the first to admit that his team was no match for the Cubs, acknowledging their overall superiority in every aspect of the game.

Following their victory against Indiana, the Cubs were set to face Florida's School for the Deaf and the Blind in the next matchup. Florida’s coach, fully aware of the Cubs' dominant performance, expressed his hope to at least score a point during the game. However, the Cubs continued their impressive run with another dominating victory, securing a lopsided 84-8 win. While this victory further showcased the Cubs’ excellence, it also sparked controversy over the ethics of such a one-sided game. Critics questioned the sportsmanship involved, particularly given the margin of victory. Despite the negative attention, Coach Adams maintained his stance that a decisive victory was necessary for the Cubs, as it helped build momentum for the team. The Cubs, with their consistent wins and second-place ranking in California for varsity teams, proved their dominance in the state. Through every win, the Cubs’ perseverance and commitment to each other and their goal was clearly visible, not only as athletes but as a unit. The chapter encapsulated their remarkable journey, which not only pushed their athletic abilities but also their emotional growth and sense of unity.

Chapter 26: Felix

Chapter 26: Felix dives deeper into the emotional and physical aftermath of a devastating injury that altered the course of a promising football career. Felix had been nearing a remarkable achievement of 2,000 receiving yards, a feat that would've made him one of the top players of his generation. His season had already been impacted by the unpredictability of the pandemic, but Felix, despite all the setbacks, had continued to shine. His unique combination of speed, agility, and unmatched football IQ had made him an indispensable asset to the team. The entire season had been focused on reaching this personal milestone, and with every catch and run, he was getting closer to solidifying his place in the sport. However, the injury came as a sudden, crushing blow, turning his dreams into a distant memory. In a matter of seconds, his once bright future on the field became uncertain. The injury didn't just take away his ability to play but cast a shadow of doubt on whether Felix would ever return to the field the same way again. It was not just the physical pain he was dealing with, but the emotional weight of losing his opportunity to accomplish a goal he had worked so tirelessly to achieve.

As Felix tried to come to terms with the new reality of his life without football, his teammates rallied around him with an outpouring of support that served to remind him he wasn't alone. The team, recognizing the significance of his absence, went to great lengths to keep his spirits up, sending him endless messages of encouragement and sharing their determination to succeed in his honor. They knew how much his success meant to the entire group, and they vowed to push forward for him, keeping his spirit alive on the field. Some even went as far as to create heartfelt video messages, each one expressing their commitment to play in his stead, vowing to give everything for Felix and his legacy. These moments of solidarity were not just about wishing him well—they were a commitment to overcoming the adversity caused by his injury and

continuing to strive for success as a team. Despite the uncertainty surrounding Felix's recovery, the Cubs weren't going to let his absence define their season. Coach Adams took a pivotal role in this transition, helping guide the team with a clear focus on adjusting the game plan. Through conversations with his coaching staff, he understood that despite losing one of their most talented players, their collective drive could still propel them to greatness.

The injury also brought with it a broader realization: the fragility of dreams and aspirations in a sport so demanding. Felix's injury wasn't just a setback; it was a lesson for everyone involved in the sport. It became evident that success in football, or in any sport for that matter, is not just about individual accomplishments or personal milestones but about a collective effort. Felix's story, in its essence, was a reflection of what it truly meant to be a part of a team. His injury acted as a catalyst for a deeper understanding of what it means to support each other, to push through challenges, and to never give up—even when faced with the harshest of circumstances. The Cubs, with Felix in their hearts, realized that it wasn't just about being on the field together; it was about the bonds they had forged, the relationships they'd built, and the shared commitment to achieving something greater than any individual goal. Despite being sidelined, Felix continued to be a guiding force for his teammates, whether through his messages, his presence at practice, or simply being there for them. His resilience became a model of perseverance, and his story inspired his teammates to push through their own obstacles. The Cubs didn't just play for themselves anymore—they played for each other and for Felix.

Chapter 27: The Speech

Chapter 27: The Speech presents a compelling story of resilience and team spirit as the Cubs football team navigates through a critical moment in their season. After Felix’s injury, the team faces a daunting challenge, but they find unexpected motivation in their top ranking as the best team among California’s eight-man teams, according to CalPreps. This significant achievement ensures their place in the playoffs and instills a sense of pride and determination within the team. With the impending game against United Christian Academy, the team is focused and prepared, buoyed by the recognition of their success so far. As their next game approaches, the NFL reaches out to Coach Adams, expressing dissatisfaction with a prior pregame speech and requesting a fresh recording. This opportunity for a new speech excites the team, and the coaches work together to craft a message that will inspire and uplift the players in the wake of Felix’s injury.

The first version of Coach Adams' speech had already been centered around inspiring pride and unity within the team, but the revised speech, made by the NFL, takes a more dramatic approach. Emphasizing the Cubs’ heart, resilience, and undying competitive spirit, the new speech resonates deeply with the players, especially the younger members of the team who have always looked up to Felix as a role model. The revised speech not only highlights their strength as athletes but also underscores their unity, motivating them to push forward in their quest for victory despite the adversity they face. When Coach Adams delivers this speech through an interpreter in the locker room, the energy in the room surges, as the Cubs feel a renewed sense of purpose and determination to win, knowing the weight of their shared responsibility. The atmosphere is charged with excitement, and the Cubs head out to the field, ready to take on their next challenge with renewed vigor.

As the game begins, Gio and Luca Visco are tasked with stepping up in Felix's absence, taking on pivotal roles in the team. Gio, a talented but previously overlooked player, sees this as his chance to prove his worth on the field. Luca, one of the few African American players on the team, is motivated by the responsibility of leading his team forward. Both players rise to the occasion, making remarkable contributions that change the course of the game. Gio's incredible kickoff return for a touchdown showcases his athleticism and determination to make an impact, while Luca's stellar defensive performance, including crucial interceptions, helps anchor the Cubs' defense. Their performances highlight the team's depth and showcase the collective strength that has been built through their unity, creating a powerful message of perseverance and the will to succeed despite the challenges faced.

By halftime, the Cubs hold a commanding lead over United Christian Academy. Coach Adams, mindful of Felix's injury and the importance of avoiding further setbacks, decides to rest some of the starters in the second half. Despite the game being well under control, the NFL requests another take of the motivational speech, adding a surreal and entertaining twist to the already charged atmosphere. As the second half begins, the bench players are given their opportunity to shine, and several key moments arise, further showcasing the talent and determination within the team. These contributions from the bench players solidify the Cubs' dominance, and the game serves as a testament to their resilience, teamwork, and unwavering commitment to each other. As the final whistle blows, the Cubs' victory is not just about the score, but about the strength of character they've displayed throughout the game. This chapter encapsulates the essence of their journey: perseverance, teamwork, and the indomitable spirit that propels them forward toward their ultimate goal.

Chapter 28: “I’m Playing! I’m Playing!”

Chapter 28: “I’m Playing! I’m Playing!” focuses on the intense trials faced by the Southern California Cubs football team as they enter their crucial playoff match. The story opens by revealing the tough truth that, in some cases, the greatest challenge a team faces isn't the opponent but internal struggles, like health issues among players. Jory Valencia, the Cubs’ star wide receiver, is struck by walking pneumonia, a condition that severely impacts his ability to perform and puts his participation in the upcoming playoff game in jeopardy. Despite his strong pain tolerance and encouragement from his family, Jory is advised by medical professionals to refrain from playing to allow his body to recover. This advice directly conflicts with his desire to play in what could be his final high school football game, increasing the pressure on Jory and the entire team.

The Cubs, despite these hurdles, are ranked as the No. 1 seed heading into the playoffs and are set to face the Leadership Military Academy Wolfpack, a team known for its disciplined and aggressive style of play. The Wolfpack’s defense is led by standout linebacker J’wan Wilson, making them a formidable opponent. Their previous encounter had been a close game, which only increases the stakes for this rematch. However, the Cubs face even more challenges as key players, including Jory, are unavailable due to injuries, and others are struggling with health concerns. Even so, the Cubs remain resolute, and the coaching staff works tirelessly to formulate a strategy that allows Jory to contribute in some capacity—using him as a decoy, if necessary. The determination to rise to the occasion, despite these setbacks, showcases the Cubs’ fighting spirit and commitment to their goal of winning the championship.

As game day arrives, Jory, against medical advice, declares his determination to play, confidently stating, “I’m playing! I’m playing!” His resolve, despite being visibly ill,

inspires his teammates. Jory’s participation in pregame rituals—despite his clear physical limitations—gives the Cubs an emotional boost. Although Jory doesn’t score during the game due to his weakened condition, his presence on the field and his commitment to the team become a powerful symbol of their collective willpower. The Cubs enter the game with optimism but quickly realize that the Wolfpack is a fierce opponent. As the game progresses, the Cubs initially take the lead, but the Wolfpack counters swiftly, creating a back-and-forth dynamic. This tight competition highlights the Cubs’ defensive vulnerabilities and forces them to make quick adjustments to stay ahead.

The match turns even more challenging when Christian Jimenez, a key lineman, suffers a severe injury to his leg, fracturing his fibula. Christian’s injury is a devastating blow to the team, especially considering the emotional and physical toll it takes on him. His injury, compounded by Jory’s ongoing struggle with pneumonia, leaves the team grappling with the reality of their situation. However, despite the challenges, the Cubs press forward, continuing to play with determination. Christian’s reaction to his injury is heartfelt, as he comes to terms with the fact that his football career may be coming to an end, and the emotional weight of that realization is felt throughout the team. Despite this, the Cubs refuse to give up, and they dig deep into their reserves of strength to continue pushing toward victory. The chapter concludes by highlighting the emotional and physical toll this game takes on the players, as they confront their vulnerabilities and reaffirm their commitment to the sport and each other. The victory they ultimately achieve serves not just as a testament to their skills on the field, but to their resilience and the bonds they’ve forged along the way.

Chapter 29: The Wicks and the Bombs

Chapter 29: The Wicks and the Bombs follows the Cubs as they navigate through a critical stage of their playoff journey, emphasizing their resilience and determination. The chapter starts with Steve Howell, the defensive coordinator for the Leadership Military Academy Wolfpack, reflecting on his team's early exit from the playoffs and his thoughts on the Cubs' potential. Howell, while disappointed by his team's loss, is confident that the Cubs will make it to the championship game. However, he predicts that despite their drive and grit, the Cubs will eventually lose to Faith Baptist, the team he believes will be their strongest challenge. His reflection on the Cubs' playoff run highlights the admiration he has for their growth throughout the season, and his respectful acknowledgment of their journey adds a layer of emotional depth to the story.

The Cubs are next pitted against the renowned Flintridge Prep Wolves, a team with a rich football history and a roster of exceptional talent, including Ramses Barden, a former NFL player, and Russell White, a standout college running back. Flintridge's coaching staff, led by White, maintains a calm yet confident approach, treating the Cubs no differently from any other team they have faced. White's emphasis on ignoring the Cubs' deafness and focusing solely on their abilities underscores the competitive nature of the game. However, the Cubs' unity and strong communication, shaped by their shared experience of deafness, become their secret weapon. The team's ability to communicate silently and effectively with one another provides them with an edge that even Flintridge, despite their physical advantages, will struggle to overcome. This underlying dynamic between the teams sets the stage for an intense, high-stakes matchup.

As the game begins, the Cubs start strong, scoring first and quickly building momentum. Their early success gives them a temporary sense of confidence, but the

Flintridge Wolves respond almost immediately, striking back with a series of offensive plays that expose weaknesses in the Cubs' defense. The score becomes tight as both teams go back and forth, with each side adjusting their strategies in response to the other's moves. The Cubs' coaches begin to grow concerned as they realize that their defensive line is not as solid as they initially thought. As Flintridge exploits these vulnerabilities, the Cubs find themselves struggling to maintain their lead. Yet, through it all, the Cubs demonstrate their unwavering spirit, drawing strength from their sense of unity and their shared experience as a team of deaf players. They know that their bond is what sets them apart from other teams and motivates them to push through adversity.

Despite the mounting pressure, the Cubs manage to hold on to a narrow lead at halftime. Their defense continues to face challenges as Flintridge adapts to their tactics and gains ground. The Cubs' coaching staff takes this time to reassess their approach, realizing that adjustments need to be made quickly to keep their lead intact. The second half begins with renewed energy as Trevin, the Cubs' quarterback, makes a remarkable pass to Gio, who catches the ball and scores a crucial touchdown, expanding their lead. This pivotal moment lifts the Cubs' spirits, and the team begins to regain control of the game. With their offensive momentum back in full force, they capitalize on the opportunity to extend their lead further. By the time the game concludes, the Cubs have secured a decisive 58–28 victory, an impressive win that propels them to the championship. However, Coach Adams, ever mindful of the team's past losses, shows the players the painful score of their previous championship defeat. This reminder serves as a powerful motivator, urging the Cubs to stay focused on their ultimate goal: redemption and the chance to prove their true potential on the biggest stage.

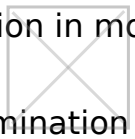
Chapter 30: An Apparition on the Practice Field

In Chapter 30: An Apparition on the Practice Field, the stage is set for an emotionally charged rematch between the Cubs and Faith Baptist, where the stakes are higher than ever before. This game comes after a devastating defeat the year before, and the Cubs are determined to make their comeback. A key element of the lead-up to the championship is a prayer led by a pastor, underscoring the shared values of faith and sportsmanship between the two teams, setting a tone of respect and competition. The sunny Friday afternoon in Simi Valley brings an air of anticipation, and as the teams prepare, the contrasting backgrounds of the two schools come into sharp focus. Faith Baptist, with its seasoned roster aiming for a second consecutive championship, faces a hungry Grace Brethren, who have been without a title for over two decades. This gap in success fuels a fierce determination for victory on the Cubs' side, as they long for redemption and a chance to prove themselves on the biggest stage.

Grace Brethren's history, though rooted in a tragic past, has been one of growth and resilience since its founding in 1978. The team's previous loss to Faith Baptist, a humiliating 70-22 defeat, left the Cubs emotionally scarred, but it also ignited a renewed desire for success. Players like A.C. Swadling and Parker Mills, who had demonstrated their skill on the field, now stand as symbols of the talent that could lead them to victory. The team, though emotionally bruised from last year's defeat, has been galvanized by this sense of injustice and has prepared meticulously for this rematch. The Cubs' coaching staff, fully aware of the need for a strategic advantage, analyzes the game film with a fine-tooth comb, studying Faith Baptist's plays, looking for weaknesses to exploit, and aiming to outmaneuver their rivals with precision.

The chapter shifts focus to the psychological preparation for the game, which plays a significant role in the Cubs' strategy. The Cubs' coaching staff, led by Coach Keith Adams, incorporates imagery from last year's painful loss, using it as fuel to inspire

their players to rise above and redeem themselves. The intense emotional stakes of the game are further amplified by Christian Jimenez, a key player who has been nursing a leg injury. Despite the medical advice against playing, Jimenez's decision to suit up for the final game of his high school career shows his commitment to his team and his personal desire for redemption. His struggle between playing and protecting his health reflects the internal conflict faced by many athletes who must balance passion and caution in moments of intense pressure.



Christian’s determination to play is symbolic of the larger theme of resilience and redemption that runs throughout the chapter. His choice to return to the field with the added support of a leg brace demonstrates his belief in the significance of this game and the culmination of his high school football journey. This moment is not only pivotal for the team but also represents the personal stakes for each player involved. The emotional resonance of Christian’s decision reverberates throughout the team, as they prepare to face an opponent they’ve long wanted to defeat. The urgency of the moment is felt by all players, who understand that this game isn’t just about winning, but about proving to themselves and each other that they are capable of greatness. As the chapter continues, the tension heightens, with each player fighting not only for a championship but for their place in history and the legacy they wish to leave behind.

The buildup to this defining game showcases the passion and dedication that define the Cubs as a team, and each player’s individual journey reflects the spirit of the game. The Cubs have a chance to not only change the course of their season but to overcome the past and achieve something they’ve worked tirelessly for. As they take the field, the narrative encapsulates not just a football game, but the personal and emotional significance behind every play, tackle, and touchdown. The chapter beautifully weaves together themes of competition, resilience, and redemption, providing a deeper understanding of what it means to fight for a dream, no matter the obstacles in the way. The upcoming championship is more than just a game – it is the realization of years of hard work, determination, and unwavering belief in each other.

Chapter 31: Playing with Fire

Chapter 31: Playing with Fire immerses readers in a high-stakes football championship game, set against the backdrop of Lake Balboa, California, on a bright, crisp Friday afternoon. The Riverside Cubs, a team fueled by determination, board their yellow school bus for a crucial game at Birmingham Community Charter High School. Traveling down Victory Boulevard, a road named to honor World War I soldiers, the team journeys toward a stadium that represents not just a location, but a significant moment in their pursuit of victory. Faith Baptist, their formidable opponents, had originally earned the right to host the game but opted to hold it at Birmingham due to its larger capacity, creating a charged atmosphere. The Cubs' two-hour journey from Riverside only heightened their anticipation and resolve, knowing they were about to face their toughest challenge yet. The energy was palpable, and despite the odds, the team remained focused, ready to battle on an unfamiliar field.

As the team arrived at Birmingham High School, they found themselves struck by the stark contrast between their modest home field and the grandiose facilities at this new location. Birmingham High, a school renowned for producing notable alumni and frequently featured in media productions, presented an imposing stage for the Cubs. The stadium was vast, and the sight of private jets taking off in the distance added to the sense of awe and pressure. These jets, transporting affluent locals to their weekend getaways, symbolized a world of wealth and privilege that stood in sharp contrast to the Cubs' working-class background. However, instead of allowing this divide to demoralize them, the Cubs used the grandeur of the setting to fuel their determination. The stark differences between their humble beginnings and the affluent world around them only strengthened their resolve to prove themselves on the field, giving them a sense of unity and purpose.

Faith Baptist entered the game with a strategy centered around dominating the line of scrimmage and minimizing mistakes. In their locker room, the team gathered in prayer, emphasizing the importance of unity and their shared commitment to victory. Meanwhile, Coach Keith Adams addressed his players, reminding them to keep their hearts in the game and play with the tenacity they had shown throughout the season. As the game commenced, Faith Baptist's aggressive defense quickly challenged the Cubs' offense. However, the Cubs, fueled by a tactical approach that played to their strengths, began capitalizing on Faith's penalties, showing adaptability and resilience. Trevin, the quarterback, displayed his leadership and vision, executing plays that caught Faith off guard, leading to an early touchdown and a successful two-point conversion. Despite their lead, the Cubs faced an unrelenting response from Faith, who remained determined and aggressive, keeping the game in a constant state of flux.

As the first quarter unfolded, both teams understood the weight of the moment. The intensity on the field mirrored the tension in the stands, where fans on both sides anxiously watched every play unfold. Each team knew that mistakes could cost them dearly, and every opportunity needed to be seized. The Cubs, however, remained resolute, despite the mounting pressure and the risk of making errors. They knew that every play, every decision would impact their chance at redemption, and the desire for victory remained at the forefront of their minds. The Cubs were more than just a team—they were a symbol of perseverance, resilience, and the collective will to overcome the odds. The back-and-forth nature of the game kept the fans on the edge of their seats, and with each moment, the tension continued to grow, leading to a thrilling conclusion that would ultimately define the fate of the championship.

Chapter 32: The Psychology of Winning

Chapter 32: The Psychology of Winning delves into the impactful life of David Lavallee, a standout high school athlete from New Hampshire in the 1980s, who made a lasting impression in the world of sports. Lavallee, notably the only soccer player in his state to be honored as an All-American that year, played a key role in his team’s impressive unbeaten championship season. His incredible performance, which saw him scoring sixteen goals, was celebrated in local media. Despite not being the most technically gifted player, Lavallee’s coach highlighted his determination, grit, and leadership qualities, emphasizing that his real value lay in his ability to inspire and support his teammates. His example serves to demonstrate that success in sports isn't solely dependent on athletic prowess but on the mental toughness, perseverance, and leadership that a player brings to their team.

Success in competitive sports, as illustrated in Lavallee’s story, goes far beyond an athlete’s physical skills. The road to triumph in any team sport is a complex process influenced by various elements such as discipline, focused practice, effective coaching, and, occasionally, a bit of luck. However, the essential factor that leads to success is the cohesion and unity within the team. In fact, football, one of the most popular and high-stakes team sports, offers a powerful case study in how the dynamics between players and their shared goals can drive success more than individual accomplishments. The mental and emotional bond between teammates can have a profound effect on their performance, often influencing how they execute plays, react to adversity, and maintain their focus.

David Lavallee's transition into sports psychology was driven by his deep interest in understanding what makes certain teams excel while others fall short. He became especially fascinated by the theory of social identity, which explores the concept that teams with a strong sense of communal identity often outperform those without. This

theory postulates that when athletes feel connected to each other and are invested in the success of the group as a whole, their performance improves significantly. This collective spirit, based on shared experiences, mutual respect, and common objectives, can be the differentiator between winning and losing, providing an invaluable advantage to teams facing high levels of competition.

For the Cubs, their shared experience of deafness created a unique and unifying social identity that significantly enhanced their teamwork and overall performance. Despite their varied ethnic backgrounds and socioeconomic statuses, the players found common ground through their shared method of communication, which gave them an edge over many other teams. Their communication method transcended traditional barriers, reinforcing their bond and creating a sense of solidarity that bolstered their confidence and determination as they pursued their championship dreams. This shared identity, built on common ground and mutual understanding, played a key role in their ability to work together seamlessly, allowing them to perform at their best under pressure.

The Cubs’ team dynamic provided far more than just athletic success—it was also an essential source of emotional support for players who often felt isolated in a predominantly hearing world. Their shared experiences of navigating a society that wasn't designed to accommodate them created an unbreakable bond, one that made their connection more meaningful than just their victories on the field. The relationships built through their time together on the team were vital not only for their success in the game but also for their personal growth, offering the players a sense of belonging and understanding that many had previously lacked. This sense of camaraderie was fundamental to their well-being and helped them endure the challenges they faced as deaf individuals in a world that often overlooked them.

Furthermore, scientific studies, including the landmark Harvard study on happiness, have shown that the most significant contributors to a fulfilling life are the strong, supportive relationships we form with others. This research aligns with the Cubs' experience, where the deep bonds formed within their team played a crucial role in

their overall happiness and satisfaction, far outweighing the significance of winning championships. Regardless of their athletic achievements, the friendships and trust they developed on and off the field would last a lifetime, forming a brotherhood that would continue to support them through life's challenges. This sense of connection and emotional support would remain their most valuable asset, ensuring they would face future obstacles with greater strength and resilience.

Chapter 33: The Throw

Chapter 33: The Throw highlights a crucial turning point during a tense football game that pushed the Cubs to their limits, demanding resilience and quick thinking. It was a chilly evening, with the temperature hovering around fifty degrees, as Coach Davidson removed his blue Faith Baptist varsity jacket, preparing for what would become an intense battle on the field. The Cubs were midway through the first quarter and, despite facing a tough start, were determined to make a comeback. Their third drive of the game saw them attempt a screen pass, a play that had been successful in previous games but had faltered earlier against Faith Baptist. This time, however, the pass worked beautifully. Trevin, the quarterback, allowed the defenders to rush by before rolling to his right and delivering a perfectly timed throw to Cody. Cody sprinted down the sidelines, gaining thirty yards before being shoved out of bounds. But just as the Cubs' spirits began to rise, a yellow flag was thrown, signaling a holding penalty on Jory, nullifying the gain. The setback forced the Cubs back to their own twenty-yard line, dampening the team's momentum.

Undeterred by the penalty, the Cubs pushed forward, aiming to regain momentum with a bold attempt. They turned to Gio Visco, who was open and in position for a touchdown. Unfortunately, Trevin overthrew the ball, and Gio's frustration was palpable as the missed opportunity added more tension to the situation. With the sequence of negative events piling up—an interception, a penalty, and now a missed opportunity—Trevin focused on staying calm and refocusing his mind for the next play. As he worked to stabilize his game, he continued to rely on his teammates for support. The Cubs, determined to advance, turned to Cody once again, giving him the ball for another attempt to break through Faith's defense. As Cody carried the ball forward, his efforts were met with fierce resistance, but he kept pushing, despite showing signs of exhaustion. Reaching the twenty-eight-yard line, Cody, visibly struggling, continued to

give his all. Facing a critical fourth down, Coach Adams called for Trevin to take control and run the ball himself. However, Faith’s defenders anticipated the play, forcing Trevin to retreat.

In a split second of decision-making, Trevin noticed a defender leave his post, and instinctively, he launched a Hail Mary pass with incredible accuracy despite the mounting pressure. The pass seemed almost impossible, but miraculously, Gio, ever the reliable receiver, was perfectly positioned to catch the ball at the ten-yard line. With the ball in his hands, Gio quickly sprinted toward the end zone, but his run was halted just two yards short as he was tackled by the defense. The Cubs now found themselves with a first-and-goal situation, a chance to regain the lead. Trevin’s quick thinking and on-the-fly decision-making had breathed new life into the game, rekindling the Cubs' hope for a successful drive. As the team huddled and prepared for the next play, they were filled with determination. On the very next play, Cody, despite his fatigue, dove into the end zone for a touchdown, bringing the Cubs one step closer to victory. The crowd erupted in excitement as the Cubs surged ahead with a score of 14–12. Although the two-point conversion attempt was unsuccessful, the Cubs had achieved a much-needed lead, and the energy on the field shifted dramatically. With only moments left in the first quarter, the Cubs had found their rhythm again, showing their ability to rise above adversity and stay focused under pressure. Trevin’s critical throw and Cody’s determination had sparked a pivotal change in the game’s momentum. The Cubs’ journey to victory had only just begun, but this moment would be remembered as a testament to their resilience and unwavering commitment to the game.

Chapter 34: Blocking and Tackling

Chapter 34: Blocking and Tackling shifts the focus to an intense football game between the Cubs and Faith Baptist, highlighting the significance of strong defensive plays and strategic offensive efforts. From the start of the game, the Cubs knew they were up against a tough opponent, but they immediately adapted by solidifying their defense and asserting control over the match. Trevin and Kaden stood out with their fierce tackling and nearly intercepted a pass despite the pressure from Faith's offensive line. Even though Faith managed a few minor victories, like a first down, the Cubs quickly demonstrated their dominance with a defensive strategy that set the tone early in the game. Their solid defense was a key factor, and their ability to handle Faith's attempts with such efficiency created a noticeable shift in momentum.

One of the game's defining moments came when Faith tried to execute a basic running play with their star rusher, Parker Mills, carrying the ball. However, the Cubs' defense, led by the Adams brothers, was more than ready and shut down Faith’s attempt to move the ball forward. Mills, who had been anticipated as the game changer, was stopped cold by the aggressive Cubs’ defense. This major defensive stand sent a clear message to Faith that their star player wouldn't find much success on the field. The Cubs made the most of their newfound momentum when they forced Faith to punt for the first time, providing the Cubs with the chance to strike. With determination, the Cubs orchestrated a brilliant play, using a well-timed screen pass to Jory that resulted in an impressive gain in yardage, pushing them even further into their opponent’s territory.

This chapter underscores the idea that the fundamentals of football, such as blocking and tackling, can be more influential than any flashy plays or complex strategies. The Cubs demonstrated this, overpowering their opponents through sheer physicality and determination. With every hit and tackle, they asserted their dominance, proving that

in football, sometimes brute strength and teamwork triumph over finesse. Trevin, for his part, capitalized on this solid defense and turned it into offensive success by scoring a touchdown, putting the Cubs ahead by a score of 22-12. Meanwhile, Faith struggled to maintain their footing, as their quarterback, A. C. Swadling, was injured during the game. This injury left Faith with limited options for recovery, and their offensive strategy faltered as a result. The Cubs, now confident in their lead, opted to take risks, trying for daring passes and plays even as they held the upper hand. This paid off when Jory made a stunning catch that resulted in another touchdown, further increasing their advantage.

In addition to the team’s strength and skill, individual perseverance played a crucial role in the Cubs' performance. Christian Jimenez, a lineman who had been suffering from a fractured leg, refused to let his injury affect his performance. Despite the excruciating pain, Jimenez continued to play a vital role in keeping the Cubs’ offensive line strong. His resolve was a clear reflection of the team's overall mindset and determination. Trevin’s role in driving the team forward didn’t stop after the touchdown; he followed through with another interception, running it back for a touchdown just before halftime. This crucial interception and subsequent score put the Cubs firmly in control with a commanding 42-12 lead, leaving Faith with little hope for a comeback in the second half. The Cubs’ aggressive defense, coupled with their precise offensive plays, ensured that Faith was not going to recover from such a devastating blow. This game was shaping up to be a defining moment for the Cubs, showcasing not only their skill but their indomitable spirit.

Chapter 35: College Dreams

Chapter 35: College Dreams explores the story of Keith Adams, a talented young football player who faced numerous challenges while pursuing his dream to play college football. In the late 1980s, Keith's father, Roger Adams, reached out to Jim Rubiales, the football coach at Lincoln High School in Stockton, to discuss an unconventional plan. Keith, a junior at the California School for the Deaf in Fremont, expressed a desire to join the Lincoln football team, a highly respected program known for producing NFL talent. The plan involved Keith attending Lincoln High during the football season and returning to his deaf school afterward. Despite having no prior experience working with deaf athletes, Coach Rubiales agreed to make accommodations, ensuring Keith had the necessary support, including a translator to assist him during practices and games.

Keith's journey with Lincoln High's football team was groundbreaking, as the school had a rich football legacy, regularly drawing large crowds to its stadium and producing notable players. Initially, there were concerns about how Keith would integrate into an all-hearing team, but his performance exceeded expectations. As a defensive end, Keith displayed exceptional athleticism, agility, and strength, which quickly earned the respect of his teammates. His ability to read the game and his speed were highlighted as strengths, with many commenting on how his deafness seemed to enhance his skill on the field. His remarkable abilities challenged the traditional perceptions of deaf athletes, and soon, he became a standout figure on the team.

However, when it came to college recruitment, Keith faced a harsh reality. Although scouts were impressed with his talent, many hesitated when they learned of his deafness, ultimately limiting his opportunities to play at the next level. After much persistence, Keith received a scholarship offer from California Polytechnic State University, but the lack of adequate support at the school left him feeling isolated and

frustrated. Communication with the translator provided by the university proved unsuccessful, and Keith found it difficult to navigate both the academic and social aspects of college life. Despite these challenges, he decided to seek guidance from his former coach, Jim Rubiales, who had been a constant source of support. After much reflection, Keith chose to transfer to Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C., where he could find a more supportive and inclusive environment for both his football and personal development.

At Gallaudet University, a world-renowned institution for deaf students, Keith found a sense of belonging and camaraderie that had been missing at his previous school. He played as a middle linebacker, where he thrived in a team that truly understood him. The connection he felt with his teammates, all of whom shared similar experiences, gave Keith the opportunity to excel both on and off the field. It was at Gallaudet where he reconnected with Carol Bella, who would later become his wife. Their wedding was a celebration of their love, accommodating both deaf and hearing guests, symbolizing the harmony Keith had found in both his personal and professional life.

As years passed, Keith transitioned into coaching, fulfilling a long-held dream of mentoring others. He coached his two sons on an all-deaf football team, imparting the lessons he had learned throughout his own athletic journey. The team, a close-knit community, allowed each member to understand one another, and their eventual championship victory was a testament to the resilience and determination Keith had cultivated throughout his life. The success of the team not only validated his personal journey but also underscored the importance of representation and support for deaf athletes in all aspects of life. Keith's story exemplifies the power of perseverance and the impact of community, as he used his experiences to pave the way for future generations of deaf athletes.

36. “That Kid Can Play Anywhere”

The championship game at Faith Baptist ignited rival emotions, with fans segregated on opposite sides of the field. Jim Perry, president of the Southern Section of the California Interscholastic Federation, sat alone at the far end of the field, clutching the “Champions 2022” plaque, ready to present it to the victorious team. As the second half commenced, Faith Baptist emerged from halftime motivated but faced a daunting task, trailing by four touchdowns. Their coaches injected belief in their players, urging them to replicate their previous comebacks.

However, the Cubs' strategy included a seamless execution of onside kicks, even when leading. Jory Valencia's insistent kick surprised many, leading to a successful recovery by Darius Zarembka. Their celebration sparked disbelief on the Faith sidelines, diminishing their renewed hopes. Coach Jordan Ollis of Chadwick, who had lost to both teams, quietly admired the Cubs' relentless energy, even missing their star player, Felix Gonzales, who was sidelined due to injury.

The Cubs showcased their remarkable skill and preparation throughout the game, overpowering Faith Baptist with a blend of runs and passes. Trevin Adams, the Cubs’ quarterback, was particularly impactful, exemplifying the iron-man football style. With each play, he demonstrated his agility, scoring multiple touchdowns and making critical interceptions, astounding spectators and coaches alike.

While Faith Baptist managed two touchdowns in the third quarter, showcasing their potential, the Cubs were relentless, completing the quarter ahead with a staggering score of Cubs 64, Faith Baptist 26. Discussion lingered among officials regarding the running clock due to the score disparity, with Coach Davidson emphasizing the educational value of both winning and losing.

Despite the impending defeat, he stood firm on allowing the players to compete fully. The fourth quarter initiated, and even with the clock running, the Cubs added to their score, culminating in their resounding victory. With mere seconds left, Faith Baptist attempted a final play, but the Cubs’ dominance was unquestionable. As the scoreboard flashed the final score of Cubs 80, Faith Baptist 26, jubilation erupted among the Cubs, sealing their championship triumph .

37. “You Guys Deserved This”

In the aftermath of a celebrated victory, the mood on the field was bittersweet. A. C. Swadling, a player, repeatedly queried whether the Cubs could hear him as they passed each other during the traditional post-game handshake. This confusion arose from the presence of Gio Visco, who is profoundly deaf yet part of the winning team. Swadling's assumptions about a deaf team triumphing over Faith Baptist, a formidable eight-man football team, highlighted an underlying prejudice, demonstrating that even in victory, the Cubs faced mockery, albeit unknowingly.

On the Cubs' side, jubilation filled the air as they gathered around Jim Perry, an official from the California Interscholastic Federation. He congratulated them with a plaque while fans encircled the team. However, the cheers were delayed as the team sought translation from Julie Hurdiss, their interpreter. Perry spoke of the numerous schools wishing they could compete, slightly miscounting the number as 650 instead of the actual 560. Coach Adams received the trophy with pride, lifting it high as the fans cheered.

Despite the celebration, Felix Gonzales, observing from the sidelines on crutches, felt conflicted about the victory. He reflected on the previous year’s 74–22 defeat and expressed regret over not being able to play, yet he was inspired by his teammates' performance and their ability to turn the game around.

In the euphoria of the moment, the specifics of how the Cubs transformed from defeat to victory remained elusive, almost like a hidden strength they had all tapped into. Coach Jordan Ollis of Chadwick acknowledged the Cubs' dominance without their star player, Felix, and commended their exceptional performance throughout the season.

Coach Adams, reflecting on the significance of the achievement, remembered his own journey filled with rejection due to his deafness. He celebrated how the team

showcased what deaf athletes could accomplish when united, reinforcing that deafness was not a limitation but a unique strength. As the festivities continued, shared laughter danced between past regrets and future aspirations, embodying a narrative of resilience that felt almost cinematic. Adams concluded with an inspiring sentiment, advocating that deaf individuals could transcend expectations and succeed in all endeavors, a testament mirrored in their championship victory .