

2. Hell Week

On the first day of practice for the 2021 season at the California School for the Deaf in Riverside, Galvin Drake arrived with music blaring from his 2005 Toyota Camry, though he felt the rhythm more than he heard it. As the assistant varsity football coach, Galvin emphasized the importance of fitness and nutrition to the student athletes, especially after the pandemic had left many of them out of shape and overweight due to remote learning and lack of activity. The head coach, Keith Adams, also felt the toll of the pandemic, arriving with Gatorade to prepare the team for hydration and recovery.

August heat in Riverside prompted the coaches to schedule practices for the evenings to avoid extreme temperatures. The players dubbed the first days of conditioning “Hell Week.” Casual reunions among teammates showed their eagerness to return to the field, having been deprived of the camaraderie and physicality of football due to the previous season's cancellation. The initial team meeting highlighted a unique aspect of the Cubs: communication in sign language fostered deep connections, demanding constant attention, and engagement among players and coaches alike.

Focusing on practicalities like health protocols, Coach Adams informed the players about the necessity of face masks and hydration, emphasizing individual responsibility. The weight room, designed for a limited number of users, illustrated another difference from hearing schools; communication through thick glass took precedence over knocking on doors, reinforcing a central theme in Deaf Culture.

Highlighting familial ties within the team, Trevin Adams, Coach Adams' son, epitomized this spirit alongside his brother Kaden. As practice began, the team participated in drills, sprints, and conditioning. Despite Phillip Castaneda's efforts to showcase his speed, he struggled and ultimately lost his lunch on the field, an experience shared by others as the strenuous demands took their toll. Recognizing the players' readiness for conditioning varied due to the pandemic's disruptions, Coach Adams cut the practice short.

This season marked a fresh start amid significant challenges and a history of losses for the football program, which had faced enduring struggles since its inception. Coach Adams, hopeful for revitalization, understood there was much work to be done.