

24. Deaf Versus Deaf

In the chapter titled "Deaf Versus Deaf," the excitement builds as the Riverside Cubs embark on a journey to face their archrivals, the California School for the Deaf in Fremont. The setting establishes a backdrop of the long drive along Interstate 5, with a convoy of student athletes venturing into northern California, creating a vivid image of anticipation and rivalry. This game marks the beginning of three consecutive contests against deaf teams, presenting the opportunity for not only athletic competition but a chance to solidify Riverside's status as champions after being crowned national deaf football champions in the previous season.

The narrative highlights the jubilation felt by the players, who are eager for the freedom to engage in playful banter on the field, something often absent when facing hearing teams. Each player relishes the vibrancy of competing against their deaf counterparts, envisioning a game filled with camaraderie yet fierce rivalry. Personal stories surface, illustrating the emotional stakes of the match, particularly for Alexander Morales, who recalls his own family ties to the struggle between the two schools.

The competitive tension unfolds as Coach Adams reminds his players of the historic losses to Fremont, instilling a sense of urgency and determination to turn the tide in their favor. The rivalry is rooted deeply in California's culture, intertwined with a historical perspective showcasing Fremont's longstanding presence as the first school for the deaf in the state, in contrast to Riverside's relatively recent establishment.

On the day of the game, both teams prepare with innovative communication strategies stemming from their shared deafness, demonstrating the evolution of football tactics through the years. The chapter's climax builds with the start of the match, revealing the players' physical prowess as the Cubs quickly establish dominance on the field. They capitalize on every opportunity, ultimately leading to a resounding victory over Fremont, affirming Riverside's claim over "California."

As the game concludes, the Cubs celebrate with the coveted five-foot-tall trophy, a symbol of their triumph, now set to adorn their athletic facility. The narrative encapsulates not just a game but the spirit of competition, community, and the shared experience of being deaf athletes forging their identity on the field.