

## 27. The Speech

In the chapter titled "The Speech," the Cubs' football team, reeling from Felix's injury, finds motivation in their first-place ranking among California's eight-man teams, as calculated by the computer algorithm of CalPreps. This historic ranking not only boosts their morale but also ensures their spot in the playoffs. As they approach their next game against United Christian Academy, the NFL reaches out to Coach Adams for another pregame speech recording after dissatisfaction with a prior attempt. Coaches and players eagerly prepare for the new speech designed to inspire and elevate team spirit, emphasizing their toughness and determination, especially in light of Felix's absence.

The original speech by Adams includes direct appeals to the team's pride and desire to win. The NFL, however, remakes the speech, adding more flair and dramatic cadence, focusing on their heart and competitive spirit. The revised speech strikes a chord among the players, especially the younger members, who look up to Felix as a role model. As the team enters the locker room, excitement is high, and Coach Adams is filmed delivering the speech through an interpreter, marking the moment with the players' enthusiastic reactions.

Replacing Felix falls to cousins Gio and Luca Visco, both athletes with strong backgrounds. Gio, a gifted but underappreciated player, is looking to prove his skills on the field, while Luca faces pressure to step up as one of the team's few African American players. Initial nerves soon dissipate during the game, where both players highlight their strengths. Gio makes a remarkable kickoff return for a touchdown, showcasing his athleticism and determination. Meanwhile, Luca intercepts passes, contributing significantly to the Cubs' defense, which ultimately records six interceptions during the game.

The Cubs dominate the game against the Eagles, leading impressively at halftime. Coach Adams opts to hold some starters back, mindful of Felix's injury. When the NFL asks for another take of the speech, the atmosphere becomes surreal yet entertaining as players prepare for the second half of the game. Despite the game being well in hand, the second half offers opportunity for bench players to shine, leading to standout moments that crystalize their memories of the match. Overall, the chapter illustrates resilience, teamwork, and the indomitable spirit of the Cubs in the face of adversity.