

## 29. The Wicks and the Bombs

In this chapter titled "The Wicks and the Bombs," Steve Howell, the defensive coordinator for the Leadership Military Academy Wolfpack, reflects on the disappointment of his team's playoff exit while predicting that the Cubs, a team from Riverside, will advance to the championship, only to be defeated by Faith Baptist. Howell, proud of the Cubs, expresses delight in their journey through the Southern California playoffs.

As the Cubs prepare to face the elite Flintridge Prep Wolves, confidence is high despite Flintridge's distinguished history and accomplished coaching staff, including Ramses Barden, a former NFL player, and Russell White, a standout college running back. This game presents a unique experience for Flintridge, as they have not previously played the deaf Cubs, and White emphasizes the importance of treating them like any other football team, downplaying their deafness.

The Cubs enter the game buoyed by their recent victory and hours later support each other over pizza, their spirits high as they discuss their chances of winning. However, initial optimism quickly wanes as the game commences. The Cubs score first, but Flintridge swiftly answers back, revealing defensive vulnerabilities. This responsiveness leads to a back-and-forth competitive dynamic, turning the match into a tight contest.

With both teams adjusting to one another, the match unveils insights about the Cubs' unity, emphasized by their shared experience of deafness, which fosters strong communication and brotherhood. The head coach of Flintridge, Russell White, acknowledges these intangibles, seeing the Cubs' special bond as an integral part of their strength.

As the game progresses, the Cubs lead narrowly at halftime. There is growing concern among their coaches regarding defensive strategies as Flintridge successfully exploits weaknesses. After halftime, the Cubs make strategic adjustments, with Trevin throwing a remarkable pass to Gio, further increasing their lead with a significant touchdown. Ultimately, the Cubs triumph, winning the semifinals 58–28, but not without recalling the painful memories of their previous championship defeat, as Coach Adams wishes to motivate them further by displaying the haunting score of their last loss.