

## 35. College Dreams

In the late 1980s, Roger Adams approached Jim Rubiales, the Lincoln High School football coach in Stockton, with an unusual request regarding his deaf son, Keith. Keith, a junior at the California School for the Deaf in Fremont, wanted to play for Lincoln, a school known for its strong football program. The plan was for Keith to attend Lincoln during football season and return to the deaf school in the offseason. Rubiales had no experience with deaf athletes but was committed to accommodating Keith's needs, eventually arranging for a translator.

Lincoln High School's football legacy was significant, with a stadium that frequently filled to its 6,000 capacity and produced multiple NFL talents, such as Shante Carver and Brandin Cooks. Despite initial reservations about whether Keith would adapt to this all-hearing team's dynamics, Rubiales and his team were amazed by his performance. Keith played defensive end with exceptional skill and ferocity, earning praise for his physicality and speed. Teammates often marveled at his abilities, noting that he had a refined vision that compensated for his deafness.

As Keith excelled, he gained popularity on campus, leaving spectators buzzing about his performances and challenging their perceptions about deaf athletes. However, when it came to college recruitment, expectations fell short. While scouts recognized his talent, many backtracked upon learning about his deafness, effectively limiting his opportunities to continue playing football. Keith eventually secured a scholarship at California Polytechnic State University, where frustrations emerged due to inadequate support and unsuccessful communication with the translator provided by the school.

Feeling isolated, Keith reached out to Rubiales for guidance, ultimately deciding to leave San Luis Obispo. He transferred to Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C., where he played as a middle linebacker and experienced the camaraderie he previously lacked. There, he was reconnected with Carol Bella, whom he later married in a ceremony accommodating both deaf and hearing guests.

Years later, Keith found fulfillment coaching his two sons on an all-deaf football team, realizing a long-held dream. This team represented a community where every member understood one another, and winning a championship would serve as validation for his journey, underscoring the resilience and determination he embodied throughout his life.