

7. Stamina

In "Stamina," the seventh chapter of "The Boys of Riverside," the narrative centers around the contrasting dynamics of high school football in California, particularly focusing on the Cubs, a team from a smaller Protestant school. The chapter sets the stage by highlighting the dominance of large Catholic schools like Mater Dei and St. John Bosco, which have impressive facilities and consistently rank among the country's top teams. In contrast, the Cubs face smaller, less competitive schools in the early part of their season, achieving significant victories that also hint at the weaknesses of their opponents.

The action intensifies during a close game against Calvary Chapel, where the Cubs struggle to maintain their rhythm. Early on, they encounter a series of setbacks: their quarterback, Trevin Adams, is swiftly sacked, leading to a chaotic series of plays that result in a rare three-and-out. Yet, the Cubs regroup and manage to lead at halftime with a score of 38-19. However, fatigue sets in during the second half, affecting their performance. Players exhibit signs of exhaustion, and mistakes begin to pile up, including dropped passes and missed tackles.

As the game unfolds, tensions rise when Calvary closes the gap in score, leading to a nail-biting finish. With only minutes left, the Cubs are ahead 66-57, but Calvary is threatening with a fourth down and inches to go. In a crucial moment, a wide receiver is tackled just short of a first down, shifting the pressure back to the Cubs. They attempt to run down the clock to secure their victory, but after a tight play, Trevin throws a pass that is almost fumbled. Jory Valencia saves the game by catching the ball just beyond the first down marker, sealing the Cubs' win.

After what was arguably their most challenging game yet, Coach Keith Adams expresses optimism about their potential playoff run. The chapter effectively conveys themes of resilience, the impact of conditioning, and the commitment to overcoming challenges, all while developing the characters and their relationships within the team framework.