

The Boys of Riverside

The Boys of Riverside by L.B. Johnson is a coming-of-age novel set in a small town, following a group of young boys as they navigate the challenges of friendship, identity, and growing up. The story delves into their relationships, struggles with family expectations, and the pressures of a changing world. Through their journey, the novel explores themes of loyalty, self-discovery, and the complexities of adolescence, capturing the bittersweet moments that define youth.

Prologue

The prologue of "The Boys of Riverside" begins with an email from the California Department of Education, celebrating the first-time playoff journey of the California School for the Deaf, Riverside. This high school football team had never won a championship in its seven-decade history, prompting the email to seek support for facility upgrades. The author, serving as the San Francisco bureau chief for *The New York Times*, typically covers serious topics such as wildfires, homelessness, and mass shootings. However, the story of the Riverside Cubs unexpectedly captivated him.

Despite being seven hours away from his home, the author traveled to Riverside to meet the players just before a playoff game. He was impressed by the team's communication and skills, contrasting this experience with his previous challenging reporting endeavors. The Riverside Cubs were part of California's eight-man football division, which suited smaller schools struggling to form full eleven-player teams. This smaller scale did not diminish the athletic talent in this league, which has produced notable players such as Josh Allen and Rashaan Salaam.

The author discovered that the team represented a blend of cultures and backgrounds, with many players facing personal challenges off the field. For example, Phillip Castaneda, a talented running back, dealt with homelessness yet remained dedicated to football. The sports program had faced stigma and pressure, with opponents historically viewing them as easy targets. However, within the team, the players shared a sense of camaraderie and purpose.

The author chose to temporarily step back from his bureau chief role to follow the Cubs through their season, immersing himself in Deaf Culture and the intricacies of sign language. He recognized the significance of this story, rich in themes of belonging and aspiration, especially during a period marked by social unrest and the ongoing pandemic. The Riverside Cubs aimed to showcase that deafness was not a barrier to excellence in sports, but rather a unique advantage as they pursued their championship dreams.

Cover

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Contents

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1. Phillip

In "Phillip," the narrative unfolds in late summer 2021 as Phillip Castaneda, a newcomer to the California School for the Deaf in Riverside, navigates homelessness in the backseat of his father's Nissan Sentra. With the world emerging from the coronavirus pandemic, Phillip begins his day by dressing in the car and making his way to Target for bathroom access. The football field, visible from his car, symbolizes his aspirations; despite his small stature, Phillip aims to showcase his speed and toughness on the varsity football team.

Phillip's father, Jude Ward Castaneda, makes sacrifices to provide his son with a place to sleep, parking in an Arlington Avenue lot amid various businesses, including a Yum Yum Donuts and a cannabis dispensary. They often stay away from other vehicles, with Phillip using a gym membership for showers. Each night, after the shops close, Jude and his girlfriend occupy the front seats, allowing Phillip the back for privacy. A gifted athlete in his youth, Jude struggles with his past of addiction and incarceration but is determined to give his son a better chance, hoping Phillip wouldn't follow his footsteps.

Living in California, where around a third of the nation's homeless population resides, Phillip faces the dual challenge of homelessness and a tumultuous upbringing. He has attended six schools and found it particularly arduous to learn English, which contrasts sharply with his native American Sign Language. Born near San Francisco, Phillip was raised under challenging circumstances; his deaf mother, who suffers from rheumatoid arthritis and cannot work, relies on disability assistance.

As a teenager in Modesto, Phillip played football among hearing peers, with a friend covering his league fees. Despite his success on the field, communication barriers often left him feeling isolated. He would position himself at the end of practice drills to observe others, illustrating his determination to overcome difficulties. Football becomes his refuge, bringing him joy and hope for a future, even kindling dreams of playing in the National Football League, as noted by his sister, Priscilla Castaneda, who emphasizes football as a source of happiness for him.

2. Hell Week

On the first day of practice for the 2021 season at the California School for the Deaf in Riverside, Galvin Drake arrived with music blaring from his 2005 Toyota Camry, though he felt the rhythm more than he heard it. As the assistant varsity football coach, Galvin emphasized the importance of fitness and nutrition to the student athletes, especially after the pandemic had left many of them out of shape and overweight due to remote learning and lack of activity. The head coach, Keith Adams, also felt the toll of the pandemic, arriving

with Gatorade to prepare the team for hydration and recovery.

August heat in Riverside prompted the coaches to schedule practices for the evenings to avoid extreme temperatures. The players dubbed the first days of conditioning "Hell Week." Casual reunions among teammates showed their eagerness to return to the field, having been deprived of the camaraderie and physicality of football due to the previous season's cancellation. The initial team meeting highlighted a unique aspect of the Cubs: communication in sign language fostered deep connections, demanding constant attention, and engagement among players and coaches alike.

Focusing on practicalities like health protocols, Coach Adams informed the players about the necessity of face masks and hydration, emphasizing individual responsibility. The weight room, designed for a limited number of users, illustrated another difference from hearing schools; communication through thick glass took precedence over knocking on doors, reinforcing a central theme in Deaf Culture.

Highlighting familial ties within the team, Trevin Adams, Coach Adams's son, epitomized this spirit alongside his brother Kaden. As practice began, the team participated in drills, sprints, and conditioning. Despite Phillip Castaneda's efforts to showcase his speed, he struggled and ultimately lost his lunch on the field, an experience shared by others as the strenuous demands took their toll. Recognizing the players' readiness for conditioning varied due to the pandemic's disruptions, Coach Adams cut the practice short.

This season marked a fresh start amid significant challenges and a history of losses for the football program, which had faced enduring struggles since its inception. Coach Adams, hopeful for revitalization, understood there was much work to be done.

3. A School Among the Orange Groves

In the mid-1950s, the only state-run school for deaf students in California was in San Francisco, known as the California School for the Deaf. This institution became a vital center for Deaf Culture in the state, but for families living in Southern California, especially those near the Mexican border, getting to Berkeley was a daunting task. Post-World War II, as Los Angeles emerged as a major city, advocates successfully pushed for a second school in Southern California, culminating in the establishment of the California School for the Deaf in Riverside in 1946, under Governor Earl Warren.

Riverside, then a modest city of fifty thousand, was primarily known for its vast orange groves. The region's transformation was largely due to irrigation canals that turned the arid landscape fertile, particularly with the introduction of the sweet navel orange from Brazil in the 1870s. This fruit not only spurred local industry but also gave rise to the Sunkist brand, which propelled Riverside into recognition as the origin of California's citrus industry. By the late 19th century, its oranges were prized, winning accolades at events like the New Orleans World's Fair.

In 1948, a site for the new school was chosen amongst barley and orange trees. Advocates welcomed its distance from mental institutions, avoiding concomitant stigmas elsewhere. The land was purchased for a mere \$68,500, with hopes that this school would indeed be one of the finest in the nation. Although it wouldn't receive its first students until 1953, the anticipation for what the California School for the Deaf in Riverside would bring was palpable. The school boasted a picturesque location with views of the San Gabriel Mountains, spread out over generously landscaped grounds, a rarity among state institutions at the time.

As the years progressed, the landscape of Riverside drastically changed. The original orange orchards made way for suburban sprawl, and the population surged to 300,000 by 2022. Riverside became a significant player in the U.S. economy through its connection to freight and logistics, adapting to a car-centric culture alongside its burgeoning housing developments. Despite this transformation, echoes of its past remain, highlighted by a revitalized downtown and parks honoring its citrus heritage. Riverside historian Vincent

Moses aptly captures the nostalgia of these changes, reflecting on the region's shift from a fertile paradise to urban development.

4. A Taste of Victory

In Chapter 4 of "The Boys of Riverside," titled "A Taste of Victory," the intense preparation leading up to the Cubs' first game of the season is vividly depicted. Following a grueling Hell Week, the team finds itself ready to face off against Noli Indian, a small but formidable opponent from the Soboba Indian reservation. Dressed in scarlet uniforms, the Cubs enter the game under the guidance of senior players who have eagerly chosen their jersey numbers—Felix Gonzales in No. 1, Enos Zornoza in No. 2, Jory Valencia in No. 3, and quarterback Trevin Adams in No. 4.

Noli Indian's team, coached by Jesse Aguilar, consists mainly of inexperienced freshmen and sophomores, making expectations low as they face the Cubs. Historically, their last encounter saw Noli triumph, but this time, the game quickly turns into a showcase for the Cubs. They dominate from the outset, with Zornoza returning the opening kickoff for a touchdown, quickly followed by a fumble recovery leading to another touchdown from Trevin Adams to Enos Zornoza.

The game continues with the Cubs scoring on every possession and executing a pick-six, leading to a final score of 68-0. The sheer magnitude of this victory surprises everyone, raising questions among the players about their capability. Key players, especially Trevin and Enos, shine throughout the game, but new player Phillip Castaneda steals the spotlight when he scores a touchdown on a notable play despite some initial confusion.

Following the game, Coach Aguilar praises the discipline of the Cubs, emphasizing the importance of their teamwork to his young players. The narrative underscores the excitement and unpredictability of eight-man football, a fast-paced and dynamic style that has captivated fans since its inception in California's small schools. The chapter wraps up with reflections on the nature of the game and the dedication required to succeed in such a high-energy environment.

This thrilling chapter effectively illustrates the exhilarating beginning of the season for the Cubs, as well as the challenges and growth opportunities for the Noli Indian team against their more experienced rivals.

5. Hearing with Your Eyes

Hearing with Your Eyes

Being deaf in a predominantly hearing world presents unique challenges, but it also offers advantages that are often overlooked. For instance, ambient noise that distracts hearing individuals—like in a loud bar or a sports stadium—does not affect deaf signers. This allowed deaf scuba divers to converse effortlessly underwater and deaf football players to neutralize the crowd's noise, previously a formidable "twelfth man" on the field.

Trevin Adams, the Cubs' quarterback, viewed his deafness as an asset. With no auditory distractions from trash talk, player communication became streamlined, enabling better concentration. His experience echoed the thoughts of other deaf individuals who reject the notion of deafness equating to disability. For them, adversity enhances resilience, leading to a mentality focused on overcoming challenges rather than lamenting their circumstances.

The Cubs developed unique solutions around the football game's demands like adapting the snap count typically signaled verbally. Historical adaptations like using a bass drum were tested but later replaced by a system where the quarterback clapped his hands for rhythm, allowing players to respond visually rather than relying on sound. This required precise visual coordination, something deaf players had honed due to the reliance on visual cues in their daily lives.

Moreover, studies suggest individuals who are profoundly deaf may possess enhanced peripheral vision and biological movement perception. This heightened visual acuity created strategic advantages on the football field, allowing the Cubs to react more swiftly to plays.

Sign language further enriched the team's communication, granting them the ability to convey complex strategies unnoticed by opponents. This came in handy when the Cubs integrated a coded sign system to keep plays confidential from teams bringing interpreters. With fast-paced ASL conversations, they could execute plays quickly, eliminating the need for traditional huddles, which often slow down the game.

One memorable strategy showcased their ingenuity: during a critical play, the quarterback deceived opponents with coordinated signing that diverted attention before executing a successful touchdown pass. Coach Keith Adams emerged proud of this tactic, marking a notable success of the Cubs on the field, highlighting how they turned potential challenges into celebrated victories.

6. On a Roll

Chapter 6: On a Roll

High school football games often start with players sizing up their opponents during warm-ups. The Cubs, regarded as a small team lacking in muscle mass due to pandemic restrictions on weight training, did not exude intimidation. Despite their physical shortcomings, they compensated with fearlessness and agility, a trait recognized by opposing coaches. Felix Gonzales stood out for his impressive speed, catching kickoffs, shedding tackles, and achieving a remarkable 4.6 seconds in the forty-yard dash.

Trevin Adams, another key player, approached the game with a fearless mindset, embodying a "warrior" spirit as described by Coach Galvin Drake. His powerful running style involved barreling through defenders, a trait that even worried his mother, Carol Adams. Football consumed the Adams family's time, with practices and game analyses dominating their schedules. Though Carol often joked about being a "football widow," she remained the Cubs' most ardent supporter, proud of Trevin's on-field exploits.

Trevin's quarterback skills masked some of the Cubs' weaknesses, particularly their offensive line. He demonstrated this in a game where he evaded multiple defenders, showcasing both his elusiveness and toughness. Cody Metzner, who played various positions and possessed both brute strength and academic ambition, similarly aimed to intimidate opponents. His standout play during a game against Hesperia Christian illustrated his physical dominance, making powerful tackles that had an immediate impact.

As part of a deaf team, the Cubs faced unique challenges in a hearing world. The camaraderie among them created a "brotherhood," which strengthened their team dynamic and fueled their determination to succeed. This shared experience fostered deep connections, making communication effortless among teammates.

Felix Gonzales understood the weight of being misunderstood, having faced communication barriers on a hearing team. After transferring to CSDR and meeting Coach Adams, he reluctantly joined the football team, which ultimately led to an undefeated season. His experience on the deaf team provided an instant bond and clear communication, leading him to discover his passion for the sport. Now a role model for younger players, Felix excelled in multiple positions, proving to be a versatile athlete and a key contributor to the Cubs' success.

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.

8. The Sound of the Sun

In the chapter titled "The Sound of the Sun," the narrative begins by contrasting the glamorous imagery of California's beaches, Hollywood, and Silicon Valley with the reality of Stockton, a city significant for its location at the meeting point of the San Joaquin River and the larger world. In 1975, Linda and Roger Adams arrived in Stockton with dreams of establishing a stable life for their two young boys, Kirk and Keith. Both had roots in Inglewood, where they worked hard, but were motivated by their families' migrations from Oklahoma to pursue a better life in California.

Stockton has experienced a rich history, from the gold rush to being a hub of significant innovations. However, it has faced challenges, including poverty and segregation, underscoring the complexities behind its diversity. The couple settled into a typical Californian neighborhood, grappling with both their hopes for a future and significant personal challenges stemming from their son Keith's profound deafness, which went undiagnosed for months.

Linda's concerns about Keith's development were initially dismissed by medical professionals, but a jarring realization hit her when he showed no reaction to a loud dinner bell, leading to a diagnosis at the John Tracy Clinic which confirmed his profound deafness. Roger's reaction was fraught with anger and frustration, seeing the condition as a defect. As Linda took on the role of advocating for her son's education in Stockton, she faced a dual challenge: navigating a new city and learning about deafness.

Despite the difficult path ahead for Keith, the family was determined. Linda experimented with speech and sound awareness techniques, though these yielded minimal results. A pivotal moment arrived when her sister Mary introduced sign language to Keith, illuminating a new way of communication that sparked newfound engagement from him.

With the support of Dale Delp, a sign language teacher, the family immersed themselves in learning sign language, fostering a deeper relationship with Keith and enhancing his understanding of the world around him. This connection between mother and son highlighted the urgency of communication, with Linda transforming her approach to help her son navigate his deafness. The chapter paints a vivid picture of resilience, adaptation, and the importance of communication in familial relationships amidst adversity.

9. Frowned upon by the Gods

Chapter 9 Summary: Frowned upon by the Gods, The Boys of Riverside

In "Frowned upon by the Gods," the narrative reflects on the historical struggles and tensions between educators regarding the pedagogy of deaf students, centered primarily around sign versus oral communication. Linda Adams' realization that her son craved language becomes emblematic of two centuries of neglect faced by the deaf community in these debates, often sidelining their voices in matters that directly affect their livelihoods.

The chapter draws on scholar H-Dirksen Bauman's analogy comparing the study of deaf history to chasing fireflies in the dark—occasional insights shrouded by periods of ignorance. Evidence of sign language predates formal documentation, with sign systems blossoming independently around the world, leading to a scholarly debate on whether they preceded spoken languages. Historical accounts, including references by Socrates and observations of deaf courtiers in the Ottoman Empire, showcase the varied perceptions of deaf individuals. However, it underscores a grim reality: in many societies, deaf people were often marginalized, facing social and legal discrimination.

European cultures expressed an ingrained belief that deaf individuals were incapable of faith, which aggravated their exclusion. Yet, a shift occurred with the revolutionary work of Charles-Michel de l'Épée, who established the first public school for the deaf in Paris in the eighteenth century. His efforts in teaching sign language not only laid groundwork for deaf education across Europe but also challenged prevailing beliefs about deafness as a disability.

However, progress suffered a severe setback at the 1880 International Congress of Educators of the Deaf in Milan, which resulted in a ban on sign language in schools. Alexander Graham Bell's participation in this conference significantly influenced its outcomes, leading to detrimental consequences for deaf communities, who were further detached from their linguistic heritage. This deep-rooted stigma surrounding sign language continued, even as deaf individuals like Ken Watson navigated oppressive environments at schools that penalized their use of American Sign Language (ASL).

The narrative illustrates how attitudes toward language and communication shifted over decades, particularly through the experiences of Keith Adams. Enrolling at the California School for the Deaf allowed him to thrive in an all-deaf environment, leading to significant personal growth and social connections. Ultimately, the chapter emphasizes the ongoing struggles and triumphs of the deaf community, encapsulated by Keith's journey and the impact of socioeconomic and cultural factors on deaf education and identity.

10. The FaceTime Revolution

In the chapter titled "The FaceTime Revolution," we follow the story of Keith and Carol Adams and their son Trevin, who was born deaf on February 11, 2005. Despite their initial expectations based on genetic tests, the couple received the news from a doctor that Trevin was deaf. Carol expressed little concern, stating, "Don't worry about it," while Keith affirmed that Trevin's health was what truly mattered to them.

Trevin's upbringing contrasts sharply with that of his parents. While Keith and Carol faced significant communication barriers when they were young, relying on old methods such as TTY devices to communicate, Trevin enjoyed a vastly different experience due to technological advancements. American Sign Language became the primary mode of communication for Trevin, both at home and school. The evolution of technology around him allowed for nearly universal captioning on television and various devices, including mobile phones that facilitated instant communication through texting and FaceTime.

By the time Trevin played football at the California School for the Deaf, Riverside (CSDR), he had access to tools that bridged communication gaps, allowing him to interact seamlessly with both deaf and hearing peers. The influence of the iPhone, introduced by Steve Jobs in 2007, marking a revolution for the deaf community, making previous communication methods appear antiquated.

The chapter emphasizes generational contrasts, illustrated by Trevin's experiences against those of Ken Watson, a coach born in 1952 who faced isolation and limited communication during his youth. His summers were lonely, relying on letters to connect with friends, whereas Trevin maintains constant communication with family and friends through smart devices.

Carol expresses typical parental concerns about technology's impact, noting the risks of screen addiction but ultimately appreciating the broader access her children experience compared to her own childhood. She acknowledges both the pitfalls and the significant advantages that contemporary technology has afforded Trevin and his siblings, remarking, "The access for the kids is amazing." Overall, the chapter encapsulates the transformative impact of technology on communication within the deaf community.

11. Deafness as a Choice

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Deafness as a Choice

As summer turned to fall, the Cubs had gained confidence in their skills and their teamwork. They were winning. On the last day of September, halfway through the regular season, the Cubs played another small Christian school, Lutheran High School from La Verne, a city on the eastern edge of Los Angeles County. It was a lopsided game, and at halftime the Cubs were already ahead, 46-0. As the third quarter began, the coaches put in a player who had just joined the team. His name was Dominic Turner, and he stood a little taller than six feet and weighed around 240 pounds, a good deal of it pandemic weight. He had a well-proportioned jawline and brown hair kept in a tight, Ivy League haircut. He had transferred to CSDR a few weeks into the school year and had immediately caught the eye of Keith Adams. Adams wasted no time to make his move.

"You're kind of a big guy; you would be a good lineman," Dominic remembers Adams telling him. Dominic told Coach Adams he didn't like football much. He hadn't grown up watching it; his grandmother who raised him never had it on and his previous experience trying to play at hearing schools had been an exercise in alienation.

Keith's second son, Kaden, the backup quarterback, was also in the gym class, and he joined in the recruitment effort. Pretty soon, the entire gym class was trying to persuade Dominic to join the team. And it worked. Dominic fired off a text to his grandmother: "Pick me up at 6:00 p.m. I've joined the football team."

Dominic had attended seven different schools in his fifteen years of life, but none had quite worked out. He was a good student, generally getting As and Bs, but as a deaf boy in hearing schools he found his social life frustrating. In elementary school he was rarely invited to parties or birthdays or to friends' homes after school. He was teased because of his deafness.

"They would ask me to say stuff, and then, when I couldn't say it right, when I couldn't produce the words right, that was funny to them and they would laugh," Dominic said. He found himself watching as classmates chatted and played. "I felt so alone. No one was communicating with me at all."

The best word he found to describe how he felt in those schools was "foreigner." It was a powerful sentiment considering that he was anything but foreign to Southern California. Born in Riverside, he spent his childhood there and in Mission Viejo, a city not far from the ocean in Orange County.

In the fall of 2021, after California schools had emerged from their COVID lockdowns, Dominic had made the last-minute decision to try CSDR. It would be his second time: he had attended the school as an infant and kindergarten student. Now he was returning, abruptly, desperate to find a place where he felt more at home. He was leaving his hearing school even as his sophomore year was already under way.

In the game against Lutheran, Dominic took his place on the defensive line, crouched down, and put one hand on the turf, set for his first play. It was a pitch to Lutheran's running back, and as soon as the ball was snapped, Dominic drove the center out of the way and with the help of his fellow lineman Alfredo Baltazar tackled the runner for a loss. Not bad for his very first play in a CSDR uniform. The Cubs went on to win the game, 68-0, and their record improved to 5-0.

After years of searching, Dominic had found his place. Finally, he had this coach and this team where communication wasn't a problem. The pandemic was still raging in the fall of 2021, and the mood in California was one of frustration. But when a visitor asked Dominic how he was enjoying his football season, he did not hesitate. "Very fun," he said. "Very, very fun." He was a "foreigner" in California no more.

Dominic was born profoundly deaf. But later in life his deafness came with an asterisk. At five years old, he underwent an operation to install, under the skin behind his ear, an electronic device known as a cochlear implant. Distinct from hearing aids, which are a set of tiny microphones and speakers that amplify sounds and pipe them into the ear at higher volumes, cochlear implants communicate directly with the brain. They are basically bionic ears. They translate sounds into electrical impulses that stimulate the nerve that connects to the brain stem. The stuff of science fiction only a few decades ago, they allow most deaf people who undergo the operation to hear in varying degrees. For Dominic, whose mother tongue is ASL, which he learned as an infant, the implant gave him a facsimile of hearing and put him in an unusual position. He could switch between the hearing and the deaf worlds at will. He could wake up in the morning and decide whether to have five senses or four. It was something unimaginable to generations before him: it was up to him whether he wanted to hear or not.

Often, he chose not.

The cochlear implant, a device that would rock the deaf world, was a California invention pioneered by the son of a dentist, William House. House grew up on a ranch in Whittier, a city in Los Angeles County halfway between the coast and Riverside. He attended both dentistry and medical school and was an inveterate tinkerer who seemed to enjoy bucking the medical establishment. He performed one of his first innovations, an experimental surgery to treat the inner-ear affliction called Ménière's disease, on Alan Shepard, the navy test pilot who in 1961 became the first American in space. Ménière's can lead to debilitating vertigo, and Shepard's career had been threatened by bouts of dizziness, tinnitus, and vomiting. When other treatments failed, Shepard secretly traveled to Los Angeles to be treated by House, who at the time was a relatively obscure dentist and researcher publishing papers on his experiments. The surgery was successful, and Shepard went on to join the Apollo 14 mission that lifted off from Cape Canaveral on January 31, 1971, and rocketed to the moon. Shepard became famous for whacking a golf ball using a makeshift six iron in the thin atmosphere on the moon. From space, he spoke to House, who was a guest at Mission Control in Houston. "I'm talking to you through the ear that you operated on!" Shepard said from 230,000 miles away.

At the time of the moon mission, House, already deep into his experiments with cochlear implants, was on the receiving end of heavy criticism. Some doctors believed that sending pulses of electricity through the inner ear could cause irreparable damage. Others simply said the device would not work. One pediatric ear expert was quoted saying there was no "moral justification for an invasive electrode for children." But House persisted, and in 1984 the Food and Drug Administration approved the sale of his device. It was a crude version of what would come later. Patients reported being able to hear doorbells and car horns and muffled speech, sounds like "that of a radio not completely tuned in," House said on the day the FDA announced the approval of the implant. But even in its more primitive form, there was a sense that history was being made with this new product. "For the first time, a device can, to a degree, replace an organ of the human senses," the deputy director of the FDA, Mark Novitch, said at a news conference in Washington when House's invention was introduced. "Soon a device like this may produce an understanding of speech to many for whom even crude sound would have been considered hopeless just a few years ago."

Four decades later, implants have to some extent achieved that goal. Richard K. Gurgel, one of the leading researchers in the field of cochlear implants, estimates that around 95 percent of deaf people are candidates for implants and that the technology employed in the devices has improved by leaps and bounds. In many countries, including Sweden and France, deaf children receive cochlear implants almost as a matter of course. Implants can now be equipped with Bluetooth technology so a person can listen to a podcast or receive a phone call that is directly transmitted through the implant to the brain. Although most devices today consist of two pieces—the part that is embedded under the skin and a part that attaches, by magnet, on top of the skin—future models will be fully implanted and thus invisible to other people.

Crucially, however, cochlear devices do not produce what would generally be considered normal hearing. Ann Geers, a developmental psychologist who has been studying cochlear implants for four decades, says a user might hear sounds that are somewhat “muddy” or “underwater.” Users can have difficulties discerning between male and female voices and detecting the nuances of emotion or sarcasm. What a user hears varies enormously from person to person. One objective measurement, distinguishing notes on a piano, illustrated the variability of the implants’ success: In a 2012 study, four out of eleven children with cochlear implants were able to distinguish between a C and a C-sharp. But one child could not tell a C from an F, and two others heard no difference between a C and an E.

The effectiveness of cochlear implants also depends very much on the setting. Using them in noisy places, like a cocktail party, can be challenging. In 2020, a group of Australian researchers published a scientific review, a meta-analysis of research on the effectiveness of implants in adults. The study found that the quality of the sound that patients were able to hear varied considerably, as did their ability to understand speech. After surgery, patients on average understood 74 percent of sentences read to them in a quiet setting and 50 percent in a noisy environment.

Cochlear implants are clearly imperfect. But thousands of profoundly deaf people use them to interact with the hearing world, whether at jobs or socially. As of 2019, around 740,000 cochlear devices had been implanted worldwide, according to the FDA. In the United States, 65,000 children were fitted with the devices, with each operation typically costing in the neighborhood of \$30,000 to \$50,000.

For the deaf community worldwide, implants have been a point of debate and controversy. In the early days of their adoption many deaf people were wary of them. They feared the devices would buttress the idea that deaf people needed to be “cured” and that technology could do it. Deafness was not cancer, they argued, not something that needed treatment in the same way a deadly disease does. With sign language, members of the community were fully able to communicate with one another. The prospect of “fixing” deaf children raised questions about the future of an entire culture, of Deaf Culture. For more than a century deaf people had battled for the right to sign-language instruction. They worried what would happen to their language, and to the entire way of life that came with it, if children were urged to accept implants. What if Basque speakers or Navajo speakers were told they were better off getting a device implanted in their brain because their language was too obscure?

In the United States, enrollment in deaf schools, the heart of deaf communities across the country, was falling for a variety of reasons, and the deaf community saw implants as hastening their decline.

The technology bitterly divided families over whether parents should have their deaf children implanted, a tension captured in the 2000 documentary film *Sound and Fury*, where a deaf couple, Peter and Nita Artinian, decide against providing a cochlear device for their five-year-old daughter, Heather. At one point in the film, Peter Artinian lashes out, “Hearing people think that deafness is limiting, that we can’t succeed. I say, no way!”

Two decades later, the suspicions toward implants have by no means disappeared in the deaf community. But attitudes have softened somewhat. The availability of implants coincided with hard-fought victories for deaf activists in other areas: greater acknowledgment of ASL as a language like any other; the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990, which mandated sign-language interpreting for places like hospitals. Technologies like closed-captioned television and the iPhone bridged some of the gap between hearing and deaf communities.

In one measure of the reduced wariness toward implants, five years after *Sound and Fury* was made, Heather, the girl whose parents had vehemently rejected the device, received one, along with her mother and other deaf relatives. “I just wanted to be able to communicate with the majority of people who live in this world who are hearing,” Heather told a publication at Harvard Law School, where she graduated in 2018.

In a moving speech at Georgetown University, which Heather attended as an undergraduate, she discussed how difficult it was to learn how to speak. After receiving the implant, she had speech therapy classes every day after school, and at first her classmates did not understand her. She sometimes had to rely on sign-language interpreters. But she continued to refine her speech. "I was willing to put in the work and I saw the results," she said in the Georgetown talk. "I had a wonderful family who supported me through all this," she said. Some words like "Maryland" and "things" and "human beings" are muffled in her Georgetown speech. For people unfamiliar with her story, it might have been challenging to follow. She spoke about how her roommates asked her to repeat herself "all the time" because they didn't understand her. But Heather, like Dominic Turner, had forged this uncommon path. They didn't have to reside exclusively in the hearing world. Or in the deaf world. They just stay in the "middle," as Heather Artinian called it.

Dominic Turner's early years with the cochlear implant are testament to the hard work of learning to speak. It was a painstaking journey, and one that left him uncertain for years where he fit in. At the same time, it was a wondrous process that hearing people take for granted. Gaining hearing when he was five years old meant that he had to consciously learn the sounds that he was hearing. His grandmother Joanie Jackson, who raised him, would point out sounds throughout the day.

"Listen! That's the sound of water," she would tell Dominic. How else would he know what the trickle of liquid sounded like if it wasn't pointed out to him? "And that's a bird. Did you hear it?"

"It was constantly identifying sounds," Jackson remembered.

For years, this process would require, for Dominic, the concerted study of sound. Even as a teenager, a decade after he received his implant, he found that he needed to concentrate on speech to ascertain it.

"English is a foreign language to me," Dominic said.

Dominic Turner lives in a world that hearing people might find hard to imagine.

He tunes in to the hearing world when he wants to: At the beach, he likes hearing the sounds of waves. He wears his implants to the movies. He enjoys the roar of certain car engines. But he removes his implant and enters a world without hearing when he is around noises that he finds unpleasant. He dislikes high-pitched voices and people who laugh too loudly. He finds the sounds of traffic rushing past distracting, and in those settings he prefers to hear nothing at all.

At school and on the football field, he keeps the implant off and thrives in the world that he is most comfortable in, signing with his friends and teachers.

Dominic is convinced that when he gets married, it will be to a deaf woman.

Communicating with deaf friends is faster and "more effortless."

"I just feel that it's more fun," he said.

12. Fame

In this chapter titled "Fame," the narrative chronicles the remarkable success of the California School for the Deaf, Riverside (CSDR) Cubs football team, who continued their winning streak into October, captivating the deaf community of Southern California. Notable player Phillip Castaneda shone in a game against Desert

Chapel, scoring four touchdowns and achieving 232 yards, demonstrating his impressive skill on the field after a challenging personal journey.

Amidst this success, alumni returned to support their team, reminiscing about their own experiences and the long-overdue recognition for the school. Coaches, former players, and family members—many deaf themselves—expressed how playing for the Cubs transformed their lives, particularly highlighting changes in confidence and happiness. Jeremias Valencia, a former basketball record holder and father of standout wide receiver Jory Valencia, shared his family's legacy of overcoming adversity, including their migration from southern Arizona to Riverside for better opportunities. Jory proved to be an asset on the field, demonstrating remarkable athleticism and resilience.

As the Cubs approached a game against Desert Christian, with a record of 10-0, excitement soared. A journalist covering the story witnessed the unique vibes at CSDR, where traditional game environments were replaced by signed communication among players and spectators. Understanding the challenges faced due to their marginalized context, CSDR's victories began to gain national attention, culminating in an article about their journey that went viral.

Media requests flooded in, featuring notable outlets like NBC and ABC, while Disney considered producing a documentary. This newfound fame brought about significant opportunities, including an invitation to participate in the Super Bowl coin toss and recognition for Coach Keith Adams as coach of the year. However, the rapid rise in attention presented challenges, particularly for players like shy Trevin Adams, who struggled with the spotlight.

The narrative highlights how the Cubs' achievements have initiated discussions on deafness and inclusion, serving as an inspiration for overcoming adversity. As CSDR prepares to expand its facilities with substantial funding from the state, the team has captured national attention, symbolizing hope and resilience for the deaf community.

13. The Deaf Brain

In a remarkable surgical procedure led by Dr. Eddie Chang, a neurosurgeon in San Francisco, a profound challenge unfolded when he operated on a middle-aged man with a brain tumor located near essential language regions. This delicate maneuver involved an awake craniotomy, where the patient was secured in a vice-like apparatus to ensure immobility. After an initial cut to remove a section of the skull, the patient was awakened from anesthesia, tasked with counting or reading from a screen while electrodes stimulated various sections of his brain. Crucially, this patient was profoundly deaf, relying on sign language instead of vocalization, a scenario Dr. Chang had never encountered before.

Historically, the exploration of language in the brain began with Pierre Paul Broca, who, in 1861, uncovered insights into language processing through the autopsy of a patient, nicknamed "Tan," who could only utter that single word despite being able to comprehend everything communicated to him. Broca's examination revealed extensive damage to a specific area in the left frontal lobe, now known as Broca's area, essential for speech production. Although Wernicke later identified another crucial area for language comprehension, Broca's findings laid the groundwork for neurosurgical practices concerning stroke and brain injury patients.

During the operation, Dr. Chang discovered that stimulating Broca's area caused the patient to cease signing, indicating a complex interconnection between sign language processing and traditional speech centers. This revelation considerably expanded the understanding of language within the brain, illustrating that communication pathways encompass both spoken and gestural languages. Five years post-surgery, Dr. Chang encountered similar results when operating on a musician, further cementing the theory of a generalized communication center within the brain.

The chapter also reflects on the historical misconceptions about sign language, once branded as primitive, tied to earlier scientific narratives equating sign language with lower evolutionary status. However, in the 1960s, scholars like William Stokoe championed the linguistic complexity of sign languages, paving the way for modern recognition of American Sign Language as equivalent to spoken languages. Other studies subsequently validated that the acquisition of language—be it through sound or sign—engaged similar neural pathways, challenging preconceived dichotomies of communication and fundamentally reshaping the understanding of human language. Today, American Sign Language is rightly acknowledged as a complex and essential aspect of deaf identity and human communication.

14. Avalon

In Chapter 14, titled "Avalon," under hazy blue skies, the Cubs' coaching staff leads twenty-one players dressed in white jerseys aboard the **Starship Express**, a ferry taking them from Long Beach to Santa Catalina Island for a pivotal semifinal game in the Southern California championship. The ferry ride, filled with excitement and noise, halts any meaningful conversation, yet the players communicate enthusiastically through sign language.

Onboard with the Cubs are news crews from various television networks, adding to the pressure as they are determined to showcase their skills and prove they are a strong team, despite feeling media fatigue due to repetitive interviews. The Cubs, who had a long travel and faced challenges, were met by the Avalon's coach, Nick Morones, who has seen success with his previously undefeated middle school team. He awaits the arrival of the deaf team with a plan to utilize Avalon's home-field advantage, which he attributes to the island's unique atmosphere and the physical nature of his players.

Avalon is bustling with enthusiasm, having heard about the Cubs, who are viewed as a remarkable team. The local community prepares for a fierce competition, invigorated by the Cubs' presence on the island. As game time approaches, the setting at the small stadium, surrounded by palm trees, is picturesque, with local supporters present, including mothers creating personal cheers for their sons.

The game begins with the Cubs struggling initially against Avalon's aggressive defense, yet they soon find their rhythm and overturn their fortunes. After a series of turnovers and self-inflicted mistakes by Avalon, the Cubs surge ahead. Despite a setback in the second quarter, the Avalon's determination leads to a revitalized performance following halftime, resulting in a surprising comeback.

However, despite Avalon's resilience, the game concludes with the Cubs triumphant at 62-51. Post-game, an emotional moment unfolds as Avalon's players acknowledge their defeat and show respect for their opponents. Felix Gonzales, one of the Cubs, expresses his pride in being deaf and reflects positively on the game, declaring it his favorite of high school. The chapter illustrates both the spirit of competition and the personal triumphs experienced throughout the match.

15. Battered

In this chapter titled "Battered," the Cubs football team has reached the championship game of the California Interscholastic Federation, Southern Section—the first deaf football team to do so in California's history. Following a physically demanding game in Avalon, Trevin Adams feels the effects of his injuries as he boards the ferry to Long Beach with his family. Though filled with adrenaline from their victory, he struggles with pain and fatigue, evidenced by his difficulty walking down the gangplank.

The match in Avalon was notably rough, resulting in turf burns for many players. Trevin is among the most severely affected, shuffling through his home for three days, gingerly placing one foot in front of the other.

Felix further complicates matters with an aggravated hip injury, while teammate Jory is still battling a stomach illness. With the championship game only a week away and Thanksgiving break approaching, the team disperses, focusing on recovery and family discussions instead of football.

Coaches Keith Adams and Kaveh Angoorani decide against on-field practices during the week leading up to the game. They learn that their championship opponent, Faith Baptist, is a dominant force in eight-man football, having participated in the title match nineteen times and claiming nine victories. As Keith and Kaveh prepare a strategy by reviewing film and formulating a game plan, they acknowledge the unprecedented challenge ahead.

The coaching duo comes from diverse backgrounds—Keith being of Scotch-Irish heritage from Oklahoma and Kaveh an immigrant from Iran, who attended the oldest deaf school in Hartford. Their mutual connection lies in deafness and football, creating a strong bond. Keith had earnestly recruited Kaveh to return as defensive coordinator, but Kaveh has indicated that this will be his last season, ready to retire after a fulfilling career in deaf education. The chapter sets the stage for the culmination of their efforts, as the Cubs prepare for a historic championship game.

16. A Football? But It's Not Round

****Chapter 16: A Football? But It's Not Round****

The shrine of Imam Reza in Mashhad, Iran, attracts millions, more than those who visit Mecca. For Aghdas Kavandi, it was a sacred site to pray for her son Kaveh, who was born profoundly deaf. Aghdas initially blamed herself for Kaveh's condition due to a fall during pregnancy, a belief later contradicted by the discovery of a genetic link to deafness in the family. She fretted over Kaveh's future, fearing he would struggle to live independently or form meaningful relationships. Her pilgrimage to the Imam Reza shrine reflected the traditional Shiite practice of seeking healing.

Born in 1963 in Tehran, Kaveh was a cheerful boy, but his life altered when peers noticed he could not hear. This led to exclusion and rejection that he still recalls years later. Despite this, Kaveh's parents sent him to a deaf school, where he faced harsh discipline and learned a method of communication that combined gestures with lip-reading called cued speech. While struggling academically, Kaveh found solace and camaraderie playing soccer in the vibrant cosmopolitan atmosphere of 1960s Tehran, where he formed friendships with German boys who introduced him to impressive soccer techniques.

Kaveh excelled in soccer, using his deafness to his advantage, which allowed him a unique focus on the game. Despite his sporting success, Aghdas remained anxious about Kaveh's future and sought medical advice in Paris, where doctors confirmed his deafness was permanent. Undeterred, she pursued sending him to the American School for the Deaf in Connecticut. This plan faced familial opposition from Kaveh's father, who expressed concerns about Kaveh's safety in America.

After a family loss financially enabled Kaveh's trip, he left for the U.S. with another deaf boy. Their first experience was a humorous struggle to understand American football from a new friend, which Kaveh found odd—but later grew to admire. At the American School for the Deaf, Kaveh felt intimidated by the advanced sign language skills of his peers but discovered his love for football, quickly adapting and excelling in the sport.

Upon graduation, Kaveh moved to California, where he worked at various jobs, eventually winning a lawsuit against an employer for discrimination. Over time, he built a life marked by success, culminating in a teaching position at the California School for the Deaf in Riverside. Aghdas visited, proud of her son's achievements, validating her sacrifices as Kaveh's success brought her peace, reinforcing her faith in her prayers for his well-being.

17. Underdog Meets Top Dog

In this chapter titled "Underdog Meets Top Dog," excitement builds as the Cubs reach the championship game, causing a surge in ticket demand from the Southern California deaf community. However, the limited capacity of the CSDR home field leads administrators to relocate the championship to John W. North High School, a venue that can accommodate thousands. The Cubs face Faith Baptist, a school with a strong conservative Christian background, promising a clash of identities.

Faith Baptist was established in 1963 and aims to provide a moral education alongside general studies, requiring students to engage in Bible study and prayer. Discipline is evident in their policies, from grooming standards to strict rules about language. The school maintains an affordable tuition of under \$8,000, attracting a diverse student body, including White, Latino, and Asian students—many of whom are of Filipino descent.

Coach Rob Davidson, who has led Faith Baptist's football team since 2006, balances coaching with a high-powered career in pharmaceuticals. His dedication is reflected in the team's successful decade, with a current record of 10-2 leading into the championship. Faith Baptist boasts a large roster and impressive athleticism, highlighted by standout players like six-foot-eight tight end and six-foot-three quarterback Luke Rasmussen. Their speed adds to their advantage, particularly with A.C. Swadling, dubbed "the Missile," known for his agility and tackling ability, and star running back Parker Mills, who balances work in a Malibu restaurant with his athletic commitments.

In contrast to the Cubs, who face challenges and a losing streak, Faith Baptist practices diligently throughout Thanksgiving week, keen to capitalize on their media-savvy opponents and determined to secure a decisive victory in this underdog versus top dog matchup. The chapter encapsulates the anticipation surrounding the championship game, setting the stage for a thrilling contest between two distinct cultures and philosophies in sports.

18. Finishing with a Bang

In the championship game on November 27, 2021, Cody Metzner, the Cubs' hard-hitting player, initially doubted the crowd's turnout due to the Thanksgiving holiday. However, upon entering John W. North High School stadium, he was taken aback by the thousands of fans clad in red shirts, with ticket sales soaring to 2,362 and more at the door. Media presence was overwhelming, with reporters from top networks including ABC, NBC, and ESPN, and even representatives from Tom Brady's production company showing interest in making a film about the team.

Among the spectators was Nancy Hlibok Amann, the superintendent of CSDR, renowned in the deaf community, given her family's impactful history. As she was interviewed, she emphasized the significance of the night, hoping the game would send a strong worldwide message about the prowess of a deaf football team competing for a trophy typically claimed by hearing teams.

As the game commenced, the Cubs struggled right from their first possession. Despite an impressive twenty-yard catch by Jory Valencia, they ultimately failed to capitalize, and Faith Baptist's quarterback Luke Rasmussen swiftly scored first, putting the Cubs at a deficit. By the end of the first quarter, the Cubs found themselves trailing 28-0, after failing repeatedly to defend against Faith's aggressive offense.

In a moment of desperation, Coach Keith Adams decided on a risky fourth down play deep in their territory. Felix Gonzales made a stunning sixty-yard run for a touchdown, igniting hope for the Cubs. They continued to build momentum, with Jory catching pass after pass, bringing the score to 28-16. As the game

intensified, aggressive play led to unsportsmanlike conduct, highlighting the physical nature of the clash.

Despite facing injuries and setbacks, including Jory's foot injury and Kaden Adams' broken ankle, the Cubs managed to score once more, bringing the score to 28-22, just one touchdown away from tying the game. The precedent set by the deaf team in their fight against the odds became a central narrative of the championship night, demonstrating resilience and determination in the face of challenge.

19. No Hope Left

In the chapter titled "No Hope Left," the exhilarating football game between Faith Baptist and the Cubs is depicted, highlighting the Cubs' struggles against a formidable opponent. During the game, Parker Mills, a determined player from Faith Baptist, is vocal in his desire to run the ball, leading his team to success with a strong running game that consistently confounds the struggling Cubs' defense.

As the first half progresses, Faith Baptist capitalizes on the Cubs' weaknesses, scoring multiple touchdowns and solidly leading 50-22 at halftime. In the locker room, the mood is grim; players like Cody Metzner sense a pervasive loss of hope as injuries accumulate and the physical toll of the game becomes evident. Players are seen nursing their wounds, mentally worn down, reflecting a collective resignation to defeat.

The second half begins poorly for the Cubs, with Mills scoring an impressive twenty-five-yard touchdown, marking a significant display of strength against a once-determined defense. Christian Jimenez highlights the mental and physical exhaustion permeating his team, expressing disappointment in their inability to continue competing effectively. David Figueroa further reflects on the inadequacies faced throughout the season, attributing their performance against a stronger team to a lack of preparation.

As injuries pile up, including a concussion for Trevin Adams, the Cubs are left depleted, with Kaden Adams stepping in, only to unwittingly throw an interception that Mills converts into yet another touchdown. The Cubs fail to score again, suffering a harrowing loss with a final score of 74-22, marking a stark contrast to their previous successes.

Disheartened, the Cubs walk off the field as Felix Gonzales visibly struggles with the defeat, exemplifying the emotional toll of the game. Yet, despite the overwhelming loss, their fans remain supportive, applauding their efforts. Patrons like Patricia Davis express pride in the team's determination and hard work, underscoring a resilient sense of community amid their disappointment. The chapter effectively captures the heartache and lessons learned in the face of a crushing defeat.

20. Unfinished Business

On February 13, 2022, Super Bowl LVI took place at SoFi Stadium in Inglewood, California, highlighting a groundbreaking moment for deaf athletes. Amid a roaring crowd of seventy thousand, Trevin, Christian, Jory, and Enos represented not just their team, but the larger world of deaf athletes. The event symbolized a celebration of inclusion, with deaf performers also featured during halftime, showcasing the NFL's commitment to breaking stereotypes. However, despite this joyous milestone, the boys felt an unresolved yearning, especially after their recent defeat in a championship game. They cherished their historic achievement but longed more for victory than for the plaque commemorating their runner-up status.

Immediately after the game, Coach Keith Adams instilled a sense of pride in his players despite the loss. He emphasized self-esteem and rallied the team around the notion of "unfinished business," setting an optimistic tone for the upcoming season. The team faced the challenge of losing Enos, who was graduating, yet key

players like Trevin, Felix, Jory, Cody, Christian, and David remained. Coach Adams even convinced Kaveh Angoorani to postpone his retirement for another championship run.

The offseason practices markedly changed from previous years. Players willingly convened in the weight room, driven by their desire to enhance their stamina and strength after a disappointing season. Galvin Drake, the strength coach, noted the transition from having to push players to work out to them coming in eager to compete against one another, fueled by the memory of their loss.

During breaks, players like Alfredo Baltazar connected with family, sharing their journey. Traveling to Mexico to meet his extended family, he communicated with them through gestures and texting, aiming to demonstrate how the deaf team could achieve success in football. As the first person in his family to play the sport, he sought validation and support from relatives. In preparation for the next season, Baltazar dedicated himself to rigorous training, transforming his physique and reaffirming his commitment to the game and his teammates, fostering a profound sense of identity through football. His newfound dedication made him more than just a player; it strengthened his familial bonds and the camaraderie with his teammates, underscoring the impact of sports in shaping lives.

21. Full Sprints!

The chapter titled "Full Sprints!" from *The Boys of Riverside* introduces us to the Cubs' coaching staff meeting at the California School for the Deaf in Riverside (CSDR) on August 4, 2022. The atmosphere in Keith Adams's office is organized for effective communication among the deaf coaches, allowing for multiple conversations at once. Coaches like Kaveh Angoorani, Ken Watson, and Michael Mabashov are present, reminiscing and discussing the upcoming season and the challenges they face, including a change in the playoff format.

Despite the lack of proper architectural design for deaf communication in the athletic facility, which is described as a standard government building with institutional features, the coaches make the best of their environment. They share summer stories and express hopes for the players to be better prepared for the season than the previous year, particularly reflecting on the physical condition of the players. Ken Watson suggests weighing the players to monitor their fitness, contrasting with Keith's focus on strength and speed.

The chapter highlights the moments leading up to the first practice of the season. As the players assembled on the field, Coach Adams engaged them in asserting their identity as champions, while the preparation of the field showcased the outdated equipment still in use. The practice session begins amid the heat, and early signs of player fatigue emerge when one athlete, Cody Metzner, vomits though several coaches note fewer instances compared to the previous year, indicating improved physical readiness.

However, the chapter poignantly addresses the absence of Phillip Castaneda, a key player sidelined due to ineligibility stemming from his academic struggles and family issues. Despite Keith Adams's efforts to advocate for Phillip, the decision stands, and though Phillip briefly serves as a team manager, he ultimately leaves the team after a setback with other players. In the end, he watches from the sidelines, reflecting the ongoing challenges faced both by him and the team as they strive for a successful season.

22. Be Hungry for It! Be Angry!

In the preseason leading up to the new football season, it was evident that the team had transformed from the previous year's performance. Notably, under the guidance of strength coach Galvin Drake, the players had collectively increased their strength by forty pounds. This newfound seriousness followed their loss in the

championship, leading them to approach their training with greater maturity and focus.

California law dictated the structure of their practice, especially with strict regulations regarding full-contact sessions due to increasing concussion concerns. Limited to two full-contact practices per week, the rules specified that only appropriate equipment could be used during the conditioning period. The intention behind these laws was clear: to ensure player safety while promoting the sport's integrity.

As the team prepared for their first session wearing full pads, they elected their captains: Trevin, Jory, Felix, and Kaden. The players participated in energetic drills led by Michael Mabashov, who instilled a hungry and aggressive spirit, urging them to "be hungry for it! Be angry!" Felix Gonzales stood out during a two-on-two drill for his impressive leap to evade a tackle, inspiring excitement from his teammates who celebrated his athleticism.

Alongside this competitive atmosphere, senior player Andrei Voinea put in efforts to refine his skills as the backup center. Despite not being a starter, his physical presence at six feet, four inches made him a key asset. Voinea's background included transitioning from a hearing school with no sports teams, which fueled his determination to excel with the Cubs. Not only was he a dedicated football player, but he also excelled as a video game programmer and aspired to work for Disney.

Navigating his life as a deaf individual, Voinea faced challenges in communication, especially in school settings where interactions were often filtered through interpreters. At the California School for the Deaf, Riverside (CSDR), he found camaraderie and deeper friendships, fueling his passion for football. Despite his talent, coaches encouraged him to embrace a more aggressive disposition on the field.

As preseason wrapped up, Coach Keith Adams prepared his team for a challenging opener against Chadwick School. He emphasized the importance of studying game film and maintaining physical aggression. Strength coach Galvin Drake challenged the players to improve their eating habits, while Mabashov praised their dedication during the rigorous drills. With the preseason concluded, the team looked ahead, eager for another shot at the championship .

23. They Think We Are Nothing

Josh Goodman, a star player for Chadwick School, finds himself gripped with anxiety as the first game of the season against the California School for the Deaf, Riverside (CSDR) approaches. This game, considered a critical matchup for both teams looking to establish themselves as contenders, dominates his thoughts. Known for his skills as a running back, receiver, and kicker, Goodman's pre-game nerves are exacerbated by the anticipation of competing against a deaf school for the first time. Chadwick School's coaching staff is equally apprehensive, aware that the absence of prior season momentum and the challenge posed by CSDR could define their season.

On the cusp of the match, the Chadwick players learn that an NFL film crew will be capturing footage for a show featuring their coach. Adding to the prestige and pressure, the iconic quarterback Kurt Warner is present to observe the game. The luxurious setting of Chadwick School, marked by an affluent environment in Palos Verdes, contrasts starkly with CSDR, which has an essential but less lavish backdrop. Chadwick's rigorous and disciplined football culture, honed over decades of success, reflects a commitment to execution that has made them a formidable opponent.

Leading up to the game, Coach Jordan Ollis engages his players in discussions about deafness and the unique communication styles they will encounter on the field. He warns them about the potential unclear boundaries resulting from the fact that the deaf players may not hear the whistle. Despite their preparation, the Chadwick football squad is taken aback by the raw physicality and tenacity of the CSDR team.

As the game unfolds, the physical dynamics are evident. CSDR showcases robust teamwork and strategy, quickly establishing dominance on the field with an early score. The Chadwick team struggles, potentially due to underestimations arising from uninformed biases against their opponents. The game concludes with a decisive score of 54-16 in favor of CSDR, leaving Goodman and his teammates disheartened and realizing the tough road ahead in the season. Coach Ollis acknowledges CSDR's superiority, marking a humbling moment for the Chadwick team and instilling a newfound hunger in them for future competitions.

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 Alexandero 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.

25. Playing a Deaf Legend

In the chapter "Playing a Deaf Legend," the narrative revolves around an upcoming game between the Cubs and the Indiana School for the Deaf, led by Coach Michael Paulone. At sixty-five years old, Paulone is a veteran coach respected within the deaf community, guiding his team to a 4-0 record despite only having fifty boys in the high school. The challenge lies in the transition from eleven-man football to the faster-paced eight-man game played by Riverside.

Paulone's journey is inspirational; he was deaf from birth yet excelled as a quarterback in his youth in Philadelphia. His experience culminated in the Philadelphia City All-Star Football Game, where he faced skepticism about his abilities due to his deafness. Paulone worked around this by employing his coach from the Pennsylvania School for the Deaf to relay plays through sign language. This ingenious solution propelled him from the fourth string to becoming the starting quarterback. Notably, during the game, his team rallied

thanks to his leadership, tying the score 8-8 with Paulone earning the title of MVP, subsequently leading to a memorable encounter with NFL legend Joe Namath.

As the Cubs prepared for their encounter with Indiana, Paulone discussed his strategy, likening his team to dolphins against the perceived "shark" strength of Riverside, emphasizing physicality. Unfortunately for Paulone, the game turned out to be a blowout, with the Cubs dominating 62-18. The Cubs' impressive performance was underlined by their physical gameplay, highlighted by a memorable touchdown play.

In subsequent reflections, Paulone acknowledged the Cubs' prowess, conceding they were superior across the board. The chapter progresses to the Cubs' forthcoming match against the Florida School for the Deaf and the Blind, where expectations were set for another significant victory. Florida's coach expressed hope merely to score, resulting in an overwhelming 84-8 defeat for his team. The aftermath prompted criticism regarding sportsmanship due to the sheer scoreline, with similar historical precedents highlighting such ethical dilemmas in sports.

Ultimately, Coach Adams of the Cubs maintained that winning decisively was essential despite the backlash. The team's dominating record placed them second in California's ranking for varsity teams, affirming their relentless pursuit of victory .

26. Felix

acknowledging how a single moment had dramatically shifted his aspirations. Pre-injury, he had been on the brink of a milestone, nearing 2,000 receiving yards after a season marred by the pandemic.

As weeks passed, support from his teammates came in various forms, including heartfelt messages and videos where they vowed to continue playing for him, reinforcing their bond in the face of adversity. While the team was left to ponder how they would fare without their fastest and most versatile player, Coach Adams initiated discussions to adapt their playbook, instilling hope that success could still be achieved collectively.

Felix's injury not only impacted his football career but also served as a reminder of the fragility of dreams. The emotional aftermath resonated deeply within the team, compelling them to appreciate each moment and to honor Felix's legacy as they navigated their own futures.

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.

28. I'm Playing! I'm Playing!

In the chapter titled "I'm Playing! I'm Playing!", the narrative follows the Southern California Cubs football team's challenges as they head into the playoffs. The chapter starts with the revelation that sometimes the most significant adversary isn't the opposing team but rather health issues within the squad. Jory Valencia, the Cubs' leading wide receiver, suffers from walking pneumonia, which greatly affects his performance and jeopardizes his participation in the crucial playoff games. Despite a high pain tolerance and urging from his family, Jory is put on strict medical advice to refrain from strenuous activity—a directive that threatens his chances of playing in what could be his last high school game.

As the playoffs commence, the Cubs are the No. 1 seed and set to face the Leadership Military Academy Wolfpack, a team known for its tough and disciplined players, including star linebacker Jwan Wilson. Their previous encounter with the Wolfpack had been close, heightening the stakes for the rematch. Notably missing become pivotal players, the Cubs are determined to rise to the challenge, even as their coaches devise strategies to leverage Jory's presence on the field, albeit as a decoy if needed.

On game day, against medical advice but driven by competitive spirit, Jory joins his teammates, embodying a mantra of determination, "I'm playing! I'm playing!" His ill appearance belies his passion, and even amidst skepticism from his father, he partakes in the pregame rituals, hoping to contribute despite his illness. The game progresses, revealing the Cubs' dominating performance over the Wolfpack, though Jory struggles with his own limitations and does not score.

Tragedy strikes as Christian Jimenez, a crucial player and my body president, suffers a severe injury, fracturing his fibula. This injury adds to the team's mounting challenges as they strive to maintain their winning momentum without key players. The chapter poignantly concludes with Christian's realization of the potential end of his football career, stirring emotions among teammates and fans alike.

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.

30. An Apparition on the Practice Field

In this chapter titled "An Apparition on the Practice Field," the Cubs find themselves on the brink of a championship game against Faith Baptist, a rematch from a previous, devastating defeat. The scene is set on a bright day in Simi Valley where players from two Christian schools participate in a prayer led by a pastor, emphasizing the values of faith and sportsmanship in their competition. The chapter highlights the contrasting backgrounds of the two schools: Faith Baptist, aiming for a second consecutive championship, and Grace Brethren, starved for a title after twenty-two years.

Grace Brethren's history is explored briefly; founded in 1978 following a tragic event, the school has grown significantly since its inception. The chapter recounts the neglect that Grace Brethren's team felt after a crushing 70-22 loss to Faith Baptist, outlining players' stats and key figures, such as A.C. Swadling and Parker Mills, who have excelled on the field. The focus shifts to the Cubs' coaching staff in the lead-up to the game, where extensive preparations are underway, including analyzing Faith Baptist's plays from a meticulous game film binder.

The chapter also reveals the psychological tactics employed by the Cubs' coaching staff, who utilize imagery of last year's defeat to fuel the team's motivation. With a week of intensive practice ahead, an unexpected turn occurs when Christian Jimenez, a key player recovering from injury, resolves to join his teammates despite medical advice against it. His inner turmoil is laid bare, illustrating the struggle between desire and caution as he navigates the risks of returning to play.

Christian's determination resonates throughout the narrative, portraying his quest for redemption and the weight of responsibility he feels towards his team. He decides to procure a leg brace to help him play, emphasizing that this game is not only crucial in terms of sportsmanship but also holds personal significance as the final game of his high school career. Ultimately, the chapter captures both the competitive spirit of the teams involved and the emotional stakes for the players as they prepare for a defining moment in their lives, balancing hope with the reality of the risks they face on the field.

31. Playing with Fire

In the chapter titled "Playing with Fire," the narrative unfolds on a sunny Friday afternoon in Lake Balboa, California, as a yellow school bus transports the Riverside Cubs high school football team to their championship game at Birmingham Community Charter High School. Victory Boulevard, named for World War I soldiers, leads them to the larger venue, as Faith Baptist, their opponents, had won the right to host the championship but opted for Birmingham due to its capacity.

Birmingham High, a familiar backdrop for various media productions, boasts an illustrious list of alumni, setting an important stage for the Cubs, who have journeyed two hours from Riverside. The team received a warm send-off from their student body as they embarked on their mission, even with player Christian Jimenez nursing a fractured leg.

Upon arriving, the Cubs encounter curious Birmingham students, and they marvel at the stadium's modern facilities, a stark contrast to their own home field. Their wait before the game begins includes watching private jets take off, as affluent locals depart for holiday getaways. Tension builds as the Faith Baptist team arrives, met with intense stares from the Cubs—the visual embodiment of determination to win.

Faith Baptist is confident as they employ a strategy focusing on dominating the line of scrimmage and avoiding turnovers. In their locker room, a prayer underscores their quest for victory. Meanwhile, coach Keith Adams reminds the Cubs to play with heart and tenacity.

As the game begins, Faith Baptist's aggressive defense creates early opportunities for the Cubs, who leverage a unique offensive strategy aided by their players' deafness, allowing them to capitalize on Faith's penalties. The Cubs' driving performance makes them early leaders with a touchdown and two-point conversion. Faith responds quickly, staying within striking distance.

As the quarter proceeds, rising tensions reflect the precarious balance of championship stakes, culminating in mistakes that could cost either team dearly. With the scoreboard revealing a tight game, the question lingers: would this championship end in disappointment for the Cubs? Their resolve is tested as they navigate the frantic pace of the match, underscoring the desire for redemption amidst fierce competition.

32. The Psychology of Winning

In "The Psychology of Winning," the story of David Lavalley, a standout high school athlete from New Hampshire in the 1980s, is recounted. Lavalley, who was the only soccer player in his state to be named an all-American that year, was instrumental in his team's unbeaten championship run, scoring sixteen goals. Acknowledged in a local newspaper, his coach noted that while Lavalley lacked the highest skill level, his character and tenacity were invaluable. His qualities as a supportive teammate overshadowed technical prowess.

Success in sports is portrayed as stemming from more than just athletic skills. It involves various elements such as coaching, practice, discipline, and sometimes luck. However, the essence of effective teamwork is identified as a vital aspect of team sports, with football serving as a prime example for studying human behavior in competitive scenarios.

Lavalley later pursued a career in sports psychology, investigating the dynamics that elevate certain teams above others. His work hinged on social identity theory, which suggests that when team members feel a sense of communal identity, their performance is enhanced. The bonds forged within a team can significantly influence behavior and motivation, providing competitive advantages.

For the Cubs, their shared experience of deafness created a unique social identity. The players hailed from diverse ethnic backgrounds and socioeconomic statuses, yet they connected through their method of

communication, which transcended typical barriers. As they pursued a championship title, they relied on this "social identity" to bolster their chances of success.

Beyond athletics, the Cubs' team provided its members with camaraderie during a time often marked by isolation. The players, navigating a hearing world, had faced moments of loneliness and exclusion, making the bonds formed on the team not only impactful on the field but crucial in their personal lives.

Furthermore, a longstanding Harvard study on happiness underscored that healthy relationships significantly contribute to a fulfilling life, overshadowing the importance of wealth or success. The Cubs, regardless of the championship outcome, had formed vital friendships that promised lasting connections—a brotherhood that would endure through life's challenges .

33. The Throw

In the evening chill of fifty degrees on the field, the intensity of the game grew as Coach Davidson shed his blue Faith Baptist varsity jacket. The Cubs were midway through the first quarter and eager to make a comeback. On their third drive, they attempted a screen pass, a play that had seen success in prior games but struggled against Faith Baptist previously. This time, however, it appeared to work flawlessly. Trevin, the quarterback, let the defenders rush by before rolling right and delivering a well-timed pass to Cody, who sprinted down the sidelines. Cody gained thirty yards before being pushed out of bounds—only for a yellow flag to nullify the achievement due to a holding call on Jory. The setback was disheartening, forcing the Cubs back to their own twenty.

Hoping to regain momentum, they tried a daring play with Gio Visco, who was open for a touchdown. Trevin, unfortunately, overthrew him in a poorly executed pass, causing Gio to express his frustration. Alarmed at the sequence of negative plays—an interception, a penalty, and a missed opportunity—Trevin focused on refocusing his game.

To stabilize the team, the Cubs repeatedly handed the ball to Cody, who pushed through the Faith line, but by the time they reached the twenty-eight-yard line, Cody was visibly struggling from the impacts of the game. Facing fourth down with four yards to go, Coach Adams decided to press on with another run, calling for Trevin to keep the ball and run left. However, the Faith defenders anticipated the play and converged on Trevin, leaving him no choice but to backpedal.

Recognizing one defender had left his assignment, Trevin executed a quick mental calculation and, just before being tackled, launched what would be remembered as a "Hail Mary." Remarkably, Gio was in the right place to catch the desperate throw at the ten-yard line. He managed to scramble to the two before being tackled, bringing the Cubs to first and goal. Trevin's throw, a mix of instinct and skill, breathed life into the game, and on the next play, Cody dove into the end zone for a touchdown. After a failed two-point conversion attempt, the Cubs pulled ahead with a score of 14–12 as the first quarter neared its end.

34. Blocking and Tackling

In the chapter titled "Blocking and Tackling," the narrative revolves around a critical football game between the Cubs and Faith Baptist, underscoring the significance of defense and aggressive plays. The Cubs, facing a focused Faith offense, shifted their strategy and showcased a formidable defense as Trevin and Kaden executed strong tackles and nearly intercepted a pass under pressure. Despite Faith's minor successes, such as eking out a first down, the Cubs established dominance early.

A pivotal moment came when Faith attempted a basic running play led by Parker Mills. However, the defense, particularly the Adams brothers, effectively shut him down, signaling to Faith that their star running back would not find success on the field. After forcing Faith to punt for the first time, the Cubs capitalized on the opportunity, orchestrating a clever screen pass to Jory that gained significant yardage. The physical prowess of the Cubs became evident, especially as Gio made a standout play, utilizing skilled blocking to advance upfield.

The coaching wisdom highlighted in the chapter emphasizes that strong blocking and tackling often dictate the outcome of football games. The Cubs exemplified this by physically overpowering their opponents. The game intensified as Trevin scored a touchdown, extending their lead to 22-12 after demonstrating remarkable teamwork.

As Faith struggled offensively, their quarterback A. C. Swadling sustained an injury, compelling them to resort to limited strategies, which faltered against the Cubs' aggressive defense. Meanwhile, the Cubs maintained an audacious pace in their play-calling, opting for risky pass plays even as they held a lead, resulting in another touchdown for Jory after an impressive catch.

The chapter also touches on Christian Jimenez, a lineman recovering from a fractured leg, who showcased incredible fortitude by continuing to play despite significant pain. His determination helped the Cubs sustain their offensive momentum when Trevin scored again. Just before halftime, Trevin intercepted a pass from Swadling and ran it back for a touchdown, solidifying the Cubs' overwhelming lead at 42-12 by the break, leaving the question lingering if Faith could recover in the second half.

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.

36. "That Kid Can Play Anywhere"

The championship game at Faith Baptist ignited rival emotions, with fans segregated on opposite sides of the field. Jim Perry, president of the Southern Section of the California Interscholastic Federation, sat alone at the far end of the field, clutching the "Champions 2022" plaque, ready to present it to the victorious team. As the second half commenced, Faith Baptist emerged from halftime motivated but faced a daunting task, trailing by four touchdowns. Their coaches injected belief in their players, urging them to replicate their previous comebacks.

However, the Cubs' strategy included a seamless execution of onside kicks, even when leading. Jory Valencia's insistent kick surprised many, leading to a successful recovery by Darius Zarembka. Their celebration sparked disbelief on the Faith sidelines, diminishing their renewed hopes. Coach Jordan Ollis of Chadwick, who had lost to both teams, quietly admired the Cubs' relentless energy, even missing their star player, Felix Gonzales, who was sidelined due to injury.

The Cubs showcased their remarkable skill and preparation throughout the game, overpowering Faith Baptist with a blend of runs and passes. Trevin Adams, the Cubs' quarterback, was particularly impactful, exemplifying the iron-man football style. With each play, he demonstrated his agility, scoring multiple touchdowns and making critical interceptions, astounding spectators and coaches alike.

While Faith Baptist managed two touchdowns in the third quarter, showcasing their potential, the Cubs were relentless, completing the quarter ahead with a staggering score of Cubs 64, Faith Baptist 26. Discussion lingered among officials regarding the running clock due to the score disparity, with Coach Davidson emphasizing the educational value of both winning and losing.

Despite the impending defeat, he stood firm on allowing the players to compete fully. The fourth quarter initiated, and even with the clock running, the Cubs added to their score, culminating in their resounding victory. With mere seconds left, Faith Baptist attempted a final play, but the Cubs' dominance was unquestionable. As the scoreboard flashed the final score of Cubs 80, Faith Baptist 26, jubilation erupted among the Cubs, sealing their championship triumph .

37. "You Guys Deserved This"

In the aftermath of a celebrated victory, the mood on the field was bittersweet. A. C. Swadling, a player, repeatedly queried whether the Cubs could hear him as they passed each other during the traditional post-game handshake. This confusion arose from the presence of Gio Visco, who is profoundly deaf yet part of the winning team. Swadling's assumptions about a deaf team triumphing over Faith Baptist, a formidable eight-man football team, highlighted an underlying prejudice, demonstrating that even in victory, the Cubs faced mockery, albeit unknowingly.

On the Cubs' side, jubilation filled the air as they gathered around Jim Perry, an official from the California Interscholastic Federation. He congratulated them with a plaque while fans encircled the team. However, the cheers were delayed as the team sought translation from Julie Hurdiss, their interpreter. Perry spoke of the numerous schools wishing they could compete, slightly miscounting the number as 650 instead of the actual 560. Coach Adams received the trophy with pride, lifting it high as the fans cheered.

Despite the celebration, Felix Gonzales, observing from the sidelines on crutches, felt conflicted about the victory. He reflected on the previous year's 74-22 defeat and expressed regret over not being able to play, yet he was inspired by his teammates' performance and their ability to turn the game around.

In the euphoria of the moment, the specifics of how the Cubs transformed from defeat to victory remained elusive, almost like a hidden strength they had all tapped into. Coach Jordan Ollis of Chadwick acknowledged the Cubs' dominance without their star player, Felix, and commended their exceptional performance throughout the season.

Coach Adams, reflecting on the significance of the achievement, remembered his own journey filled with rejection due to his deafness. He celebrated how the team showcased what deaf athletes could accomplish when united, reinforcing that deafness was not a limitation but a unique strength. As the festivities continued, shared laughter danced between past regrets and future aspirations, embodying a narrative of resilience that felt almost cinematic. Adams concluded with an inspiring sentiment, advocating that deaf individuals could transcend expectations and succeed in all endeavors, a testament mirrored in their championship victory .

Photographs

The chapter titled "Photographs, The Boys of Riverside" chronicles the experiences and environment surrounding the California School for the Deaf, Riverside, particularly focusing on its football team, the Cubs. The campus, dotted with palm trees, is set against the scenic backdrop of the San Gabriel Mountains, highlighting a unique blend of nature and education for deaf students.

The narrative introduces the Cubs, a small but passionate team composed of about two dozen players who practice and play on a rutted field with faded sidelines. Before home games, the team engages in a cherished tradition of enjoying a late lunch at a local pizzeria, where their red jerseys fill the establishment with team spirit. The players' dedication is further emphasized as the field is close to a busy road, and the local community, depicted through events such as Phillip Castaneda sleeping in his father's car across the street, plays a backdrop to the team's journey.

Coaching is a central theme, with Coach Keith Adams cleverly using sign language to strategize, ensuring opponents can't intercept their plans. As they prepare for critical games, like the anticipated match against the Chadwick School, Coach Adams provides motivational talks in the comfort of the school's air-conditioned weight room, reinforcing team morale. The surrounding orange groves represent the region's historical ties to its citrus legacy, adding depth to the setting.

The chapter highlights Kaveh Angoorani, the defensive coordinator poised to help guide the team towards a championship. It describes Trevin Adams, the dynamic quarterback defined as a dual threat. It's noted the team comprises students across various grades, illustrating their unity despite limited player availability.

Technology's role is signified by the iPhone's impact on maintaining seamless communication among players. As the Cubs face their championship run in 2022, scenes of support and fervor build excitement, culminating in pivotal moments like the exhilaration of touchdowns and celebrating first downs during games. External validation is captured when the Los Angeles Chargers invite the Cubs to their stadium, signifying broader recognition for their hard work and dedication .

Acknowledgments

The chapter titled "Acknowledgments" from "The Boys of Riverside" expresses deep gratitude from the author towards various individuals and groups who supported the creation of the book. The focus is on the

experiences surrounding the author's reporting journey, primarily centered on the football community in Riverside.

The author acknowledges the contribution of players and coaches who permitted him to observe their lives closely in various settings, including sidelines and meetings. He emphasizes the behind-the-scenes support from a significant number of women, particularly deaf women, who played vital roles throughout the process. A standout figure is Teresa Maxwell, a senior administrator at the California School for the Deaf, Riverside (CSDR), who graciously offered her spare bedroom, facilitating the author's transition into a deaf household.

The author credits several individuals at CSDR, including former superintendent Nancy Hlibok Amann and athletics program head Laura Edwards, for their exceptional assistance. Erika Thompson, the school's communications head, also goes unrecognized for her patience amidst the author's numerous inquiries. The role of Melika Angoorani, the author's American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter, is highlighted as crucial to the book's success, with additional acknowledgments to interpreters who helped with interviews.

Furthermore, the author pays tribute to his wife, who provided unwavering support and encouragement despite the additional household demands resulting from his absences. He recognizes the integral role of his editor at The New York Times, Julie Bloom, and colleagues who covered for him during his time away. The author expresses immense gratitude to his literary agent, Jane Dystel, and his Knopf Doubleday editor, Jason Kaufman, for their belief in his project.

The chapter extends its appreciation to experts at Gallaudet University and others who aided the author in understanding Deaf Culture and the educational landscape. The author shares thanks to photographer Eric Melzer for capturing moments throughout the process and acknowledges the invaluable input from family members, particularly his parents, David and Isabelle. He concludes by expressing his gratitude to the broader deaf community for their unexpected kindness and support during his journey.

Illustration Credits

The provided content appears to be a chapter with illustration credits for the book "The Boys of Riverside." It includes references to the image credits of various contributors—specifically Erika Thompson, Thomas Fuller, and Eric Melzer.

Here is the shortened version of the chapter, maintaining the original names and styling:

****Illustration Credits****

In this section, we acknowledge the contributors for the illustrations in "The Boys of Riverside." We express our gratitude to Erika Thompson from CSDR for her contribution illustrated in the first image. Additionally, we thank Thomas Fuller for providing the second illustration. Furthermore, we appreciate Eric Melzer for supplying all other images used throughout the book.

These visuals play a vital role in enhancing the narrative and providing a richer context to the themes explored within the chapters. Each illustration not only complements the text but also offers readers a visual insight into the world portrayed in the book, thereby deepening their understanding and engagement with the story.

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About the Author

****About the Author****

Thomas Fuller serves as a correspondent for **The New York Times**, operating out of Northern California. His extensive reporting experience spans over forty countries, contributing not only to **The Times**, but also to the **International Herald Tribune**. Fuller's early upbringing took place in Tuckahoe, New York. He currently resides in the East Bay region of San Francisco with his wife, who is also in journalism, along with their two children. Despite the challenges faced by the team, Thomas remains a devoted supporter of the New York Jets.

Dedication

The provided text is a dedication page from the book "The Boys of Riverside." In this brief chapter, the author expresses gratitude and affection toward three individuals: Jocelyn, Harrison, and Sophie. The dedication signifies the importance of their love and patience in the author's life, particularly while the author embarks on a journey or project related to Riverside. There are no complex plot elements or character developments in this chapter; rather, it serves as a heartfelt acknowledgment of support from those close to the author. The mention of Riverside may hold personal significance, possibly relating to the themes or events that will unfold in the book.

In summary, the dedication encapsulates a moment of love and thanks, setting a warm tone for the reader as they begin the story that follows. By honoring these individuals, the author establishes a connection that might resonate throughout the narrative. This page serves less as a narrative component and more as a reflective, emotional overture to the book's deeper content.