

## 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.