

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 J'wan 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.