

# Chapter 2: Hell Week

Chapter 2: Hell Week begins with a unique scene on the first day of practice for the 2021 football season at the California School for the Deaf in Riverside. Galvin Drake, the assistant varsity football coach, arrived with music blasting from his 2005 Toyota Camry, though his experience of the rhythm was more felt than heard. This moment exemplified the challenges faced by the team as they began their preparation, particularly after the pandemic had left many athletes out of shape due to remote learning and limited physical activity. Emphasizing the importance of fitness and nutrition, Coach Drake focused on bringing the players back into top physical condition, with the added challenge of overcoming the pandemic's toll on their health. Meanwhile, the head coach, Keith Adams, arrived prepared with Gatorade, aiming to keep the team hydrated and promote recovery after the grueling practices.

Riverside's summer heat presented its own challenge, prompting the coaching staff to schedule practices during the cooler evening hours to avoid the extreme temperatures of the day. The players referred to these first days of intense conditioning as "Hell Week," as they adjusted to the physical demands and reconnected with their teammates. The eagerness to return to the field after a season lost to cancellation was evident in the casual reunions and the excitement of getting back to the physicality of the game. The team's dynamic was uniquely shaped by the use of sign language for communication, which played a significant role in fostering deep connections among teammates. This required constant engagement from both players and coaches, creating a bond built on shared understanding, patience, and clear communication, reinforcing the strength of their team spirit.

Coach Adams emphasized the importance of practical health protocols during their first meeting, informing the players about the necessity of wearing face masks and maintaining hydration. The team also faced unique challenges related to their training environment, such as the weight room, which could only accommodate a limited number of users at a time. Unlike in hearing schools, communication in these spaces was conducted through thick glass, highlighting the distinct ways the Cubs managed their interactions and reinforcing Deaf culture's focus on visual communication. This approach also reinforced a central theme of the team's season: responsibility and mutual support, as everyone had to stay aware of each other's needs and progress. The nuances of Deaf culture and communication shaped the team's dynamics, giving them a unique advantage in fostering understanding and cooperation, even during physically demanding practices.

As the season began, familial ties were a significant part of the Cubs' team culture. Trevin Adams, Coach Adams' son, exemplified this sense of family spirit alongside his brother Kaden, both contributing to the team's close-knit atmosphere. The practice sessions kicked off with rigorous drills, sprints, and conditioning exercises that tested the players' stamina and perseverance. Despite his determination, new player Phillip Castaneda struggled with the physical demands of the session, even losing his lunch on the field—an experience that was not unique to him. The intense nature of the workouts affected many players, as the long break due to the pandemic had left their bodies unaccustomed to the intensity of regular practices. Recognizing that each player's readiness varied, Coach Adams made the decision to shorten the practice to avoid further strain on the athletes, demonstrating his focus on their well-being and ensuring they could build up their fitness over time.

This season marked a fresh start for the Cubs, who had faced a history of struggles and losses since the football program's inception. Coach Adams, however, remained hopeful and motivated for revitalization, fully aware that there was much work to be done to rebuild and strengthen the team. The challenges they faced, from adjusting to the physical demands of the game to overcoming the lingering effects of the pandemic, highlighted the resilience and determination of both the players and coaching staff. As they faced their toughest opponents yet, the Cubs' journey was just beginning, and the team's bond, built on a foundation of trust and communication, would be crucial in overcoming the hurdles ahead. With hard work,

perseverance, and unity, Coach Adams believed the Cubs could rewrite their history and move toward success in the upcoming season.