

Chapter 21: “Full Sprints!”

Chapter 21: “Full Sprints!” provides an in-depth look into the rigorous preparation and emotional challenges faced by the Riverside Cubs as they gear up for another football season at the California School for the Deaf, Riverside (CSDR). On August 4, 2022, the coaching staff, led by Coach Keith Adams, convenes in his office for an important strategy meeting. The office is arranged to facilitate smooth communication among the deaf coaches, allowing multiple conversations to take place at once without confusion. Among those present are notable figures such as Kaveh Angoorani, Ken Watson, and Michael Mabashov, each contributing their perspectives and strategies for the upcoming season. The meeting is filled with discussions about refining their training programs, addressing weaknesses from the previous year, and preparing the players to be in peak condition before the first game. One of the key topics discussed is a change in the playoff format, which could significantly impact the team’s road to the championship. The coaches acknowledge the challenges ahead but share a collective determination to build on last season’s successes.

Despite their enthusiasm, the meeting also highlights the difficulties the team faces due to the outdated and inadequate athletic facilities at CSDR. Unlike other elite high school football programs with cutting-edge technology and resources, the Cubs must make do with what they have. The government-issue building where they train lacks specialized design features that would make communication easier for a deaf coaching staff and team. However, rather than allowing these obstacles to discourage them, the coaches exhibit resilience and adaptability, ensuring that the players receive top-tier training regardless of their environment. Ken Watson suggests implementing weigh-ins to monitor the physical development of players, while Coach Adams remains steadfast in his belief that speed and strength are the keys to victory. The staff agrees that players must be held accountable for their conditioning, emphasizing the importance of hard work and discipline in their training regimen. Their ultimate goal is to ensure that this year’s squad enters the season stronger and better prepared than ever before.

As the players gather on the practice field for their first session, the energy is electric, yet the pressure is undeniable. Coach Adams rallies the team with an impassioned speech, reinforcing their identity as champions and reminding them of the level of commitment required to achieve their goals. The field, while far from ideal, is transformed into a proving ground where the players must push themselves to their limits. Early signs of fatigue emerge as the grueling drills take their toll, with some struggling to keep pace. Cody Metzner, overcome by the physical exertion, is seen vomiting on the field—an image that serves as a testament to the intensity of their training. However, the coaching staff quickly notes an improvement from the previous season, with fewer players showing signs of exhaustion, a promising indication of their enhanced fitness levels. The Cubs are proving that they have taken preseason conditioning seriously, but their work is far from over.

A somber note is struck by the absence of Phillip Castaneda, a player who had been sidelined due to academic ineligibility and personal struggles. His story reflects the harsh reality that many student-athletes face—balancing the demands of both school and sports. Coach Adams had made every effort to advocate for Phillip, hoping for a resolution that would allow him to return to the team. However, despite these efforts, the final decision stood, preventing Phillip from playing. For a brief period, he takes on the role of team manager, attempting to stay connected to the sport and his teammates. But the emotional toll proves too great, and he ultimately steps away from the team entirely. As the Cubs continue their journey, his absence serves as a reminder of the challenges that extend beyond the field. Yet, for those who remain, the season represents an opportunity to rise above adversity, to push forward with relentless determination, and to prove that they have what it takes to claim victory. With their first game just around the corner, the Cubs are more motivated than ever, knowing that every sprint, every drill, and every moment of practice is bringing them closer to their ultimate goal.