

Chapter 28: “I’m Playing! I’m Playing!”

Chapter 28: “I’m Playing! I’m Playing!” focuses on the intense trials faced by the Southern California Cubs football team as they enter their crucial playoff match. The story opens by revealing the tough truth that, in some cases, the greatest challenge a team faces isn't the opponent but internal struggles, like health issues among players. Jory Valencia, the Cubs’ star wide receiver, is struck by walking pneumonia, a condition that severely impacts his ability to perform and puts his participation in the upcoming playoff game in jeopardy. Despite his strong pain tolerance and encouragement from his family, Jory is advised by medical professionals to refrain from playing to allow his body to recover. This advice directly conflicts with his desire to play in what could be his final high school football game, increasing the pressure on Jory and the entire team.

The Cubs, despite these hurdles, are ranked as the No. 1 seed heading into the playoffs and are set to face the Leadership Military Academy Wolfpack, a team known for its disciplined and aggressive style of play. The Wolfpack’s defense is led by standout linebacker J’wan Wilson, making them a formidable opponent. Their previous encounter had been a close game, which only increases the stakes for this rematch. However, the Cubs face even more challenges as key players, including Jory, are unavailable due to injuries, and others are struggling with health concerns. Even so, the Cubs remain resolute, and the coaching staff works tirelessly to formulate a strategy that allows Jory to contribute in some capacity—using him as a decoy, if necessary. The determination to rise to the occasion, despite these setbacks, showcases the Cubs’ fighting spirit and commitment to their goal of winning the championship.

As game day arrives, Jory, against medical advice, declares his determination to play, confidently stating, “I’m playing! I’m playing!” His resolve, despite being visibly ill, inspires his teammates. Jory’s participation in pregame rituals—despite his clear physical limitations—gives the Cubs an emotional boost. Although Jory doesn’t score during the game due to his weakened condition, his presence on the field and his commitment to the team become a powerful symbol of their collective willpower. The Cubs enter the game with optimism but quickly realize that the Wolfpack is a fierce opponent. As the game progresses, the Cubs initially take the lead, but the Wolfpack counters swiftly, creating a back-and-forth dynamic. This tight competition highlights the Cubs’ defensive vulnerabilities and forces them to make quick adjustments to stay ahead.

The match turns even more challenging when Christian Jimenez, a key lineman, suffers a severe injury to his leg, fracturing his fibula. Christian’s injury is a devastating blow to the team, especially considering the emotional and physical toll it takes on him. His injury, compounded by Jory’s ongoing struggle with pneumonia, leaves the team grappling with the reality of their situation. However, despite the challenges, the Cubs press forward, continuing to play with determination. Christian’s reaction to his injury is heartfelt, as he comes to terms with the fact that his football career may be coming to an end, and the emotional weight of that realization is felt throughout the team. Despite this, the Cubs refuse to give up, and they dig deep into their reserves of strength to continue pushing toward victory. The chapter concludes by highlighting the emotional and physical toll this game takes on the players, as they confront their vulnerabilities and reaffirm their commitment to the sport and each other. The victory they ultimately achieve serves not just as a testament to their skills on the field, but to their resilience and the bonds they’ve forged along the way.