

Chapter 35: College Dreams

Chapter 35: College Dreams explores the story of Keith Adams, a talented young football player who faced numerous challenges while pursuing his dream to play college football. In the late 1980s, Keith's father, Roger Adams, reached out to Jim Rubiales, the football coach at Lincoln High School in Stockton, to discuss an unconventional plan. Keith, a junior at the California School for the Deaf in Fremont, expressed a desire to join the Lincoln football team, a highly respected program known for producing NFL talent. The plan involved Keith attending Lincoln High during the football season and returning to his deaf school afterward. Despite having no prior experience working with deaf athletes, Coach Rubiales agreed to make accommodations, ensuring Keith had the necessary support, including a translator to assist him during practices and games.

Keith's journey with Lincoln High's football team was groundbreaking, as the school had a rich football legacy, regularly drawing large crowds to its stadium and producing notable players. Initially, there were concerns about how Keith would integrate into an all-hearing team, but his performance exceeded expectations. As a defensive end, Keith displayed exceptional athleticism, agility, and strength, which quickly earned the respect of his teammates. His ability to read the game and his speed were highlighted as strengths, with many commenting on how his deafness seemed to enhance his skill on the field. His remarkable abilities challenged the traditional perceptions of deaf athletes, and soon, he became a standout figure on the team.

However, when it came to college recruitment, Keith faced a harsh reality. Although scouts were impressed with his talent, many hesitated when they learned of his deafness, ultimately limiting his opportunities to play at the next level. After much persistence, Keith received a scholarship offer from California Polytechnic State University, but the lack of adequate support at the school left him feeling isolated and frustrated. Communication with the translator provided by the university proved unsuccessful, and Keith found it difficult to navigate both the academic and social aspects of college life. Despite these challenges, he decided to seek guidance from his former coach, Jim Rubiales, who had been a constant source of support. After much reflection, Keith chose to transfer to Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C., where he could find a more supportive and inclusive environment for both his football and personal development.

At Gallaudet University, a world-renowned institution for deaf students, Keith found a sense of belonging and camaraderie that had been missing at his previous school. He played as a middle linebacker, where he thrived in a team that truly understood him. The connection he felt with his teammates, all of whom shared similar experiences, gave Keith the opportunity to excel both on and off the field. It was at Gallaudet where he reconnected with Carol Bella, who would later become his wife. Their wedding was a celebration of their love, accommodating both deaf and hearing guests, symbolizing the harmony Keith had found in both his personal and professional life.

As years passed, Keith transitioned into coaching, fulfilling a long-held dream of mentoring others. He coached his two sons on an all-deaf football team, imparting the lessons he had learned throughout his own athletic journey. The team, a close-knit community, allowed each member to understand one another, and their eventual championship victory was a testament to the resilience and determination Keith had cultivated throughout his life. The success of the team not only validated his personal journey but also underscored the importance of representation and support for deaf athletes in all aspects of life. Keith's story exemplifies the power of perseverance and the impact of community, as he used his experiences to pave the way for future generations of deaf athletes.