

Chapter 14: Avalon

Chapter 14: Avalon brings the Cubs to a critical semifinal match in the Southern California championship, setting the stage for an intense contest against Avalon. The Cubs, twenty-one strong, are led by their coaching staff aboard the Starship Express, a ferry making its way from Long Beach to Santa Catalina Island. Amidst the noise and excitement of the ferry ride, the players communicate through sign language, as the boisterous environment prevents them from engaging in any meaningful conversation. This journey is not just about reaching their destination; it's a moment where anticipation builds for the match that could define their season.

On the ferry, news crews from various television stations are present, adding to the pressure the Cubs already feel. The media attention, although expected, weighs heavily on the players, as repetitive interviews and the constant spotlight start to cause media fatigue. They are determined to prove themselves, not just for their supporters but also for their own sense of self-worth. Upon arrival, the Cubs face Avalon's coach, Nick Morones, a seasoned leader with a track record of success. Morones, who previously coached an undefeated middle school team, has prepared meticulously for this game. He is aware of the challenges that come with playing against a deaf team, but he also plans to capitalize on Avalon's home-field advantage, believing that the island's atmosphere and the physical nature of his players will help them outmuscle the Cubs.

Avalon is buzzing with excitement in anticipation of the game, having heard of the Cubs' remarkable abilities and strength on the field. The local community is fully invested in the game, eager to see how the Cubs will perform on their turf. The atmosphere around the small stadium is picturesque, with the iconic palm trees surrounding the field and local supporters cheering enthusiastically. Even the mothers of Avalon's players have gotten involved, creating personalized cheers for their sons,

making the game feel personal and community-oriented. The intensity builds as the game approaches, and both teams are filled with determination to succeed. The stage is set for a highly competitive match, with both sides fully aware of the stakes involved.

The game kicks off with the Cubs struggling initially against Avalon's aggressive defense, which forces them to adjust their strategy. However, as the game progresses, the Cubs find their rhythm, gradually reversing their fortunes. Avalon, on the other hand, faces a series of turnovers and mistakes that allow the Cubs to surge ahead. Yet Avalon's resilience shines through, and after halftime, they regroup, coming out with renewed energy that brings them back into the game. The back-and-forth battle is intense, with both teams showing their strength and determination. Avalon's resurgence in the second half makes for a thrilling contest, leaving fans and players on the edge of their seats. Despite the fierce competition and Avalon's attempts to mount a comeback, the Cubs emerge victorious with a 62-51 win.

After the game, a moment of respect unfolds when Avalon's players, despite their defeat, acknowledge the Cubs' performance and show great sportsmanship. Felix Gonzales, one of the standout players for the Cubs, reflects on the game with pride. He expresses how significant it was to him, not just because they won, but because it was the game he would remember most fondly from his high school years. Felix's reflection speaks to the personal triumphs and the spirit of the game. This chapter beautifully encapsulates both the fierce competition on the field and the deeper connections formed in the face of adversity. It is a moment of growth, achievement, and the realization that there is more to football than just winning—it's about respect, camaraderie, and the unspoken bonds that are formed in the heat of competition.