

Chapter 25: Playing a Deaf Legend

Chapter 25: Playing a Deaf Legend centers on the Cubs' football team as they prepare for a challenging game against the Indiana School for the Deaf, led by Coach Michael Paulone. At the age of sixty-five, Paulone has built a respected legacy within the deaf community as a coach, having already led his team to an undefeated 4-0 record with only fifty players on the roster. Despite the pride of having such a record, Paulone faces a significant challenge: his team's transition from traditional eleven-man football to the faster-paced, more demanding eight-man game used by Riverside. This format, unique to the Cubs, presents a challenge that Paulone must prepare for, forcing him to rethink how his team will adapt to an entirely new style of play.

Paulone's story is not just one of coaching but of personal perseverance against adversity. Born deaf, he faced early skepticism about his potential in sports, especially when he took up the role of quarterback. Despite the doubts of others, Paulone's tenacity allowed him to excel, and his determination to succeed in the face of barriers became evident. His use of sign language to communicate plays with his coach from the Pennsylvania School for the Deaf is a perfect example of his innovative approach to overcoming obstacles. This innovation helped Paulone rise from a backup quarterback to the starting position, earning him MVP honors during the Philadelphia City All-Star Football Game. His leadership and unwavering determination not only made him a hero to his teammates but also introduced him to NFL legend Joe Namath, cementing his status as a pioneer for deaf athletes.

The Cubs, as they prepare for the matchup against Indiana, face a tough but exciting challenge, given that their opponents are led by a veteran coach with a deep understanding of the game. Paulone, despite feeling the pressure of facing the highly skilled Riverside squad, attempts to rally his team by emphasizing the importance of their physical strength and unity. However, the Cubs' overwhelming talent proved too

much for Indiana. The final score of 62-18 reflected not only the Cubs' superiority in terms of athleticism but also the preparation and dedication that had led them to this point. The Cubs' performance on the field, particularly during a key touchdown play, served as a reminder that their combination of skill and teamwork was unmatched. Coach Paulone, in his post-game reflection, was the first to admit that his team was no match for the Cubs, acknowledging their overall superiority in every aspect of the game.

Following their victory against Indiana, the Cubs were set to face Florida's School for the Deaf and the Blind in the next matchup. Florida's coach, fully aware of the Cubs' dominant performance, expressed his hope to at least score a point during the game. However, the Cubs continued their impressive run with another dominating victory, securing a lopsided 84-8 win. While this victory further showcased the Cubs' excellence, it also sparked controversy over the ethics of such a one-sided game. Critics questioned the sportsmanship involved, particularly given the margin of victory. Despite the negative attention, Coach Adams maintained his stance that a decisive victory was necessary for the Cubs, as it helped build momentum for the team. The Cubs, with their consistent wins and second-place ranking in California for varsity teams, proved their dominance in the state. Through every win, the Cubs' perseverance and commitment to each other and their goal was clearly visible, not only as athletes but as a unit. The chapter encapsulated their remarkable journey, which not only pushed their athletic abilities but also their emotional growth and sense of unity.