

Chapter Thirty-three

Monday afternoon, on the Madras High School practice field, the football team took a knee and observed a moment of time and reflection to their assistant coach. Kevin was introduced as the temporary fill in for Bull Elk. Mainly, he was the driver to make sure the seven Native American players got back to the Reservation after every practice. Kevin introduced Gus as a friend and detailed note taker. This was obvious because Gus had already listed every player's number in a column on green graft paper attached to his clipboard.

After the first practice, Kevin chauffeured the players back to the Reservation in a well used ten passenger Ford van. The brakes overheated on the long downgrade into the Deschutes river valley. The players yelled at Kevin to downshift—that's what Bull Elk always did. At the bottom of the downgrade and with the smell of overheated brakes mixing with the seven sweaty football players Kevin was thankful he'd only have to make this drive three more times. Gus yelled out to place trust in the bigger hands of the great super-hero in the sky—JC...

The van drive after football practice Tuesday went better; Kevin managed the downgrade without his knuckles turning white. Gus had passed his clipboard around to each players making sure that he had the double reverse play charted out correctly. When the smallest but most verbal boy quizzed Gus about the comic book superhero Geronimo, Gus resolutely informed him that Geronimo was not a comic book character; that Geronimo was real person who was a medicine man that was held as a prisoner of war three different times. Jake Red Cloud, Johnny Cougar, and Chief Pacqil were comic book characters. Geronimo's name meant the one who yawns...

Kevin didn't yawn but he was so used to all the superhero stories he privately rolled his eyes. The White Buffalo's would need a superhero on their team to win a game against a powerhouse Portland team. Jesuit High School recruited players like most colleges do. Their star player this year was actually twenty years old; too old to play high school football. But, his parents secretly had his birth certificate altered and then intentionally held him back in first grade. A small white lie that was about to pay off with a full ride scholarship. All part of the winning at any cost mantra that some parents will do for a genetic privileged or gifted child.

Thursday Kevin stopped at a pizza place to celebrate the last time he'd be driving the beat up smelly Ford van down the long two mile grade into Warm Springs. Gus had the seven players mesmerized with more stories. Gus told about how the "Hail Mary" plays got termed by Knute Rockne way back in 1922; when the Fighting Irish came from behind to beat Georgia Tech. The seven players kept passing around the clipboard and paper of a secret play that Gus termed the "Glory be" play. Like Geronimo, Kevin yawned—in two days he'd be done in Central Oregon.

Betting on high school football in Oregon was illegal, but if it were, the odds would have been twenty to one. Just the Bosworth name drew college scouts from all over the United States. It was the ranchers and farmers on the eastside of the Cascade Mountains against the big city fans on the west side. There was not even one line in the state playoff program that stated that Warm Springs was represented by seven players on the Madras team.

The first half of the game went like all the sports reporters had predicted. Joey Bosworth had already scored two touchdowns and sidelined three of the White Buffalo players. Kevin was just there for moral support and just wanted the blood bath to get over. He knew firsthand the ugly side of high school sports that started way back on pee-wee sports fields all over the United States. Parents were living their own aspiration of stardom through team sports that fueled the level of play way beyond being fun.

Gus was tuned out to all the jeering and cheering; he was fixated on his clipboard. He was charting the stats for the White Buffalo players but had also started a separate page on Joey Bosworth and another page for bad calls. It was oblivious that at least three quarters of the Stadium was filled with Jesuit High School fans. When Joey Bosworth blindsided the best running back on the White Buffalo team the booing from the Madras and Warm Springs fans got drowned out by cheering. The Jesuit coach gave Joey a high-five. Joey Bosworth should have been ejected but not one flag was thrown. Lilly was one of the booing fans; she drove alone to the game. It was still too painful for her parents to watch the White Buffalo's after the loss of Billy and now Bull.

Unaware, that Lilly was in the stands, what Kevin was about to do would only build on the resentment that she already held against him. While the field medics were strapping the running back to the stretcher Kevin moved right next to the head coach. "I'll give you ten thousand dollars if you let Gus Watt call three plays."

"What?" Coach Gill yelled over the cheering fans. Their victory was in sight...

"Just let Gus call three plays! The players respect him and it would mean a lot to the entire team."

"Did you say ten thousand dollars for three plays?" Coach yelled back into Kevin's face, not sure he heard right over the roaring stadium. Over the past week Coach Gill had built some respect for Kevin for stepping in. But, when he learned that Kevin was a wealthy affluent Duke College grad from LA he let his resentment be known. What really puzzled Coach Gill was the friendship and bond Kevin had with Gus. The bond Gus had built with the team in just a few days was also uncanny.

Finally the crowd did quiet when they loaded the injured Madras player into the ambulance. Coach Gill handed his clipboard to Kevin. "Three plays!" Coach Gill ran out onto the field and jumped into the back of the ambulance.

The commentator made reference to why Joey Bosworth wasn't being ejected. The Portland fans overshadowed the Stadium PA system with rants of "Play Ball." Kevin walked back over to Gus. "Three calls, Mr. Assistant Coach Gus Watt."

Gus flipped a few pages back on his clipboard and then pointed at two of the players. They knew the **Glory Be Play**. Four of the biggest and best Madras players were sidelined. At least the smaller players would be able to say they had played in a State Playoff game. Win or lose didn't matter—they were off the bench. History and Gus's charting would list Little Running Deer as a participant.

Every football connoisseur in the stands knew that a double reverse play was called when the two fresh running backs lined up on each side of the quarterback. But what they didn't expect was the smaller player to keep the ball. Joey Bosworth didn't expect it either. Running Deer was small but he was fast. The White Buffalo were on the scoreboard. "Glory be, that little kid can run," rang out from the stadium speakers.

Gus didn't even look up; he was drawing on his clipboard. The extra point play he called was only known to one other person.

The ball holder did exactly as Gus charted. The moment the football was hiked he caught it, did a one eighty and headed for the far corner of the end zone. Gus instructed the player to make sure to get the tip of the ball over the goal line. He did! But he fumbled the ball when Joey Bosworth made a late hard hit. The crowd was booing and yelling that it was a fumble. After an extra long discussion one official extended both hand over his head—the two point conversion was good.

The Jesuit coach ran out onto the field and got in the face of the officials. After about a minute of name calling and finger thumping the announcer said, "Those farm boys east of the mountains got by with a good trick play." The deep booing turned to mocking, clapping and then laughter.

Coach Gill finally returned from the locker and rushed up to Kevin. "What happened?"

"Gus faked a double reverse and then went for the two points." Kevin answered and in the same breath asked. "How's your player?"

"They're taking Hector to the hospital. That was a bad hit!" Coach Gill answered.

"I know. That player should have been ejected for the late hit." Kevin replied in a serious tone. "If the defense can hold Jesuit to four downs, there's still time."

Coach Gill looked up at the time left on the clock. "How many plays did Gus call?"

“Two! Hopefully he’ll get to call a third play. That was the agreement,” Kevin looked hard at Coach Gill; almost like a warning not to change anything now...

The kick off team was gathered around Gus; he was telling them something but not pointing at his clipboard. Coach Gill and Kevin stayed back. An onside kick to a team like Jesuit would be the wrong call.

“The big farm boys from Madras look like a herd of cows running onto the field,” blared out over the PA system. The words **herd of cows** was meant to ridicule! The crowd knew the more accurate words should have been **team of steers**.

There was no onside kick; the Madras defense played hard but Joey Bosworth broke away for twenty yards on the third down. Jesuit had another first down and they could run the clock out by taking a knee for the final set of downs. Joey Bosworth knew the college scouts were watching and wanted to put the icing on the cake. Quarterback was position he wanted to play at college—the number one position where he would be like a king.

One weakness that Gus had preached to the players was that a superhero never let pride overcome the ultimate mission. William Blackbeard was quiet and shy; not the normal traits for a defensive linebacker. But all week he listened to Gus, he learned that Joey Bosworth’s pride would not have him take a knee. When the ball was snapped Bosworth spun back and then broke for open field. Like a flying arrow William Blackbeard lowered his head and his helmet hit the target. The football popped out and rolled to the feet of a giant White Buffalo defensive tackle. The huge farm boy from Madras lumbered down the field. Three Jesuit players finally rode him to the ground but it was after he crossed the goal line.

The crowd was stunned! The State Championship game that was supposed to be a blowout was now tied up 14 to 14. Coach Gill gathered the team around the bench. They had only made seven extra point kicks all season. Coach Gill motioned for Gus to come over.

Gus took a knee in the center of all the players and flipped back through all the stats he had charted all weeks and then looked up into all the eyes that were expecting words of encouragement and said, “The odds that you make this extra point with a kick is less than ten percent. The odds that you can win in overtime against this team is even less. But if... ..”

Coach Gill stepped back away and started smacking the side of his head with his clipboard. Why he was letting Gus make the most important call of a twenty plus year coaching career was making him sick. But it was a done deal... Kevin even

realized that letting Gus call this play was a mistake. Gus was the only calm and collected person in the entire stadium. He charted out the play; said three final words and the extra point team marched onto the field. Over three quarters of the fans were yelling and jeering hoping to cause a false start. Running Deer was on one knee ready and signaled for the ball to be hiked. The Jesuit coach told his players to annihilate the ball holder—that they would win in overtime!

The ball came back at full force and for the second time Running Deer stood and then darted for the corner goal line. He was hit so hard that the wind was knocked out of him. The crowd exploded— Running Deer was five yards short of the goal line. Slowly, an unsettled hush fell over the field. Running Deer had flipped the ball back to the kicker and the kicker crossed the goal line on the opposite side of the field. The Madras player had the ball over his head and dancing. One of the officials had his hand on the flag in his rear pocket—but it was a legal play. Enough bad calls had been called already...

Coach Gill ran over to Gus and slapped him on the back. Gus stood stoic and showed little excitement. There was almost a minute of football to play and it was 16 to 14. There was plenty of time! Jesuit had the best field goal kicker in the state! The mighty White Buffalo defense with their renewed spirit kept the Jesuit Crusaders out of field goal range. The last play most everyone knew that Joey Bosworth would keep the ball; he got tackled in the backfield. Three college scouts crossed Bosworth off of their recruitment list and didn't even go down on the field to start the bribing process.

Most of the fans west of the Cascades, along with the Jesuit alumni rapidly exited with heads downcast— the eastside fans were still shell shocked. Lilly stood and watched with mixed feelings. Was this déjà vu of the game Billy and Bull Elk played in? Why was she even here? Volleyball, basketball and even soccer were games she enjoyed more...

Gus was also having mixed feelings when the players hoisted him up on their shoulders. It was only a game, every player on both teams played hard. It was the pride of just one player that affected the outcome of this game. 'Pray for us sinners' were words Gus repeated at least fifty times a day. Joey Bosworth let self pride take over his talent and athletic gift—something that impacted every player on the Jesuit team. Gus prayed for Joey.

The pride Coach Gill was feeling wasn't inward. He couldn't live with himself unless he got something off his chest. "Don't think I let Gus call those plays because of the money you offered me!" Coach Gill yelled over the roar of the fans. "You can take your money and stuff it."

Kevin didn't have time to explain his side of the story. He had another promise to keep! Finally the players put Gus down... Kevin and Gus slipped into the crowd and headed for their rental car.

The parking lot was almost empty by the time the Madras players showered and started to load up on the team bus. Lilly kept her eyes peeled for Kevin. Coach Gill noticed the orange Saxton's logging pickup truck. He walked up to the driver side. "Lilly, I'm glad to see that you made it to the game. Since Billy's climbing accident and then Bull Elk's sudden death on Thanksgiving you must be dealing with real grief. I'm sorry and I'm always praying for your family."

"Thanks Coach," Lilly said while she looked out through the bug splattered windshield. "Where is Kevin Trask?" The guy that was hauling the Warm Spring boys back and forth to practice."

"He and Gus had to catch a plane right after the game. Apparently Gus teaches Sunday school at his church. Mr. Trask promised he'd get Gus back to LA so that he wouldn't miss church tomorrow."

"Oh," Lilly responded and watched more players coming out of the stadium and loading up on the Madras school bus. "Was Gus the other coach on the sidelines that had a clipboard?"

"Yes, that was Gus Watt." Coach Gill answered. "From what I understand he works for the Trask family. Gus must be their accountant or something. Mr. Watt is great with numbers and handles the Trask money." Coach Gill pulled the corporate check for ten thousand dollars from his pocket and looked at it again. In the memo section were the words, **Madras van repairs - Dinner for football team**. On the signature line was the name **Patty Kelly-Johnson**.

"I think Gus is the head of security for Trask Inc." Lilly rebutted.

"I can't be all that sure," Coach Gill replied and shrugged his shoulders. "I resented Kevin Trask the moment I found out he was a rich college prep boy. I hardly gave him the time of day. I let him feel my resentment all week. Then at halftime, I thought he was bribing me to let Gus Watt call a few plays."

Lilly turned her eyes from out the windshield to Coach Gill. "I've been letting Kevin Trask feel my resentment for the past six months too," Lilly said in a downcast tone."

"Lilly it was nice seeing you." Coach Gill turned and looked back at the bus. "The players are going to appreciate a steak dinner over the pizza that the school had budgeted for."

"I bet they will... The White Buffalo's played hard." Lilly mustered a small smile.

"Hey, when you talk to Kevin next time tell him the school really needed the van

repairs. Let him know that we would not be having our victory steak dinner if it were not for him and Gus.”

“I will,” replied Lilly. “I still owe him a fishing trip.”

“Lilly, one last thing... Would you let Mr. Kevin Trask know that I’m not that big of an A-hole when you talk to him?” Coach Gill turned and jogged toward the yellow Madras school bus.

Kevin and Gus made their flight. Once they were in the air, Gus quit rocking from front to back. Gus didn’t care or know that he was flying in first class; all he cared about was that he would make church in the morning.

“Would you like a drink?” The flight attendant leaned over and asked.

“I think I’ll have a Johnny Walker Double Black on the rocks. We’re celebrating tonight.” Kevin answered.

I’m sorry Mr. Trask. We don’t have Johnny Walker in the galley. Would Cutty Sark be okay?” The flight attendant had been giving Kevin and Gus extra and special attention since they sat down in the extra wide, leather seats in first class. She had an autistic nephew that Gus reminded her of. “And what would you like Mr. Watt?”

“I would like an orange soda or a root beer, please.” Gus answered.

“I’m sorry we don’t have orange or root beer soda. But we do have orange juice, cranberry drink, Tomato juice, ginger ale and...”

“It was late, Gus looked out the small airplane window it was dark and too late to drink a breakfast juice. “Do you have hot coco?”

“I can do that for you Mr. Augustine Watt,” the flight attendant said and went forward to the galley.

A spark shot off inside Gus’s skull; he immediately turned toward Kevin. “How did that woman know my whole full name?”

“She read it off the flight manifest that has seat numbers and our full birth names. Haven’t you noticed that she keeps looking at a clipboard? It is like how you chart information on your clipboard about players.”

“Oh,” Gus tried to sort things out. “Does she know my birthday too?”

Now Kevin was trying to sort things out. He now wondered if the flight manifest did have birthdates on it. Birth names, gender and citizenship probably, but birthdates? “You can ask her when she comes back.”

Gus started to rock in his seat. Since they had his birth name it was important to double check that all the other information was correct. “My birthday is June sixteen!” Gus blurted out when the flight attendant returned with their drinks.

“Thank you for that information.” The flight attendant leaned in over Kevin with the

hot coco and winked at Kevin.

“My mother died on my birthday. I never was held by my mother, like baby Jesus was.” Gus said with resolute words followed by a stoic look.

“I’m so sorry to hear that...” Now, the flight attendant was on guard. She knew that her nephew with autism needed order and finality but she didn’t know where the conversation about Gus’s mother might lead.

“Gus was a big help in the State High School playoff game this afternoon.” Kevin said firmly and hopefully to change the subject. Most all the passengers in first class were now tuned in. “Gus, I was wondering what you told the players when the game was all tied up.”

“I told them to trust in God.” Gus immediately quipped.

Now Kevin was confused. “But Gus the game was tied up. They still could have lost. Wouldn’t they have lost their trust in God if your trick extra point play hadn’t worked?”

“I hope not Mr. Kevin Trask. That is why I told them to, trust in God. We need God more in difficult times than good times...”