

CHAPTER 1

Practice

Ian didn't think it was possible to sweat more that afternoon. Football practice had worn him out. He was just happy it was Friday. The end of hell week. Then school started the following Thursday.

This would be Ian's first year playing as a wide receiver for Davis High School. He had been at the school since last fall but arrived too late to play.

At his old school when he was a freshman, Ian had a reputation as one of the best frosh-soph football players. Of course Coach Banks and Coach Geary, the varsity and junior varsity coaches, didn't let Ian

know they knew this. They just threw him in with the JV team. Ian could see they were impressed. Especially when he met all of their challenges. Whether it was testing his speed, endurance, or ability to pick the right moves to make, Ian never seemed phased. He never seemed rattled.

For Ian Taylor the grueling activity of the football field was a welcome change from the chaos of his life.

Practice was winding down.

As much as Ian had sweat, as much as he had run, as much energy as he'd used up, he still felt pretty good. All the other players had their mouths open. They looked exhausted. Something about this always inspired Ian. It made him try harder. He was still sweating a lot, but none of that seemed to matter. He was in a zone. Everybody was waiting for practice to be over. Ian was waiting for the next play. He didn't care that this was

just his team playing against itself in a scrimmage.

“You play how you practice,” Ian told himself.

Everybody wearily took their spots in the formation. Ian was already at his. He stood at the ready, his muscles tensing, ready to take off across the field.

“Hike,” the quarterback called. The ball was in play.

Ian moved across the field as if practice had just started. He could almost feel Coach Geary, the JV cheerleaders, and some of the people in the bleachers watching him. He moved to the area of the field where the least amount of players were. Ian quickly whipped around. The pass traveled through the air. It was as if the quarterback had been waiting for Ian to catch it.

Ian had always been a good judge of where the ball was going to land. He

saw the other players on the team moving toward him. Ian began moving again. The ball glided into his hands. It was so effortlessly done that Ian didn't really even feel it land. Before he knew it, he had run under the goal post, leaving the other players who sought to tackle him behind by many yards.

It may as well have been miles.

“Good scrimmage, Taylor. Great field instincts. Great hustle,” Coach Geary said as Ian walked with some of his teammates toward the showers. Everyone seemed to be hobbling along. Ian had a lot of spring in his step.

When he got to his locker, he checked his cell phone.

His mom had called. He'd call her later.

Jessica Barnes had texted him. “What r u doing tonight?” she asked.