

Bleeds Bombs a Drop Kick

David R. Beatty

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While the places and events described in this novella are based upon real ones, the characters are entirely fictitious. Any similarity to real persons, living or deceased, is coincidental and not intended by the author.

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This novella is dedicated to teammates and coaches who left the field of life earlier than they should have:

Sam Jones was a graceful running back who led Bound Brook High School (BBHS) to two undefeated seasons in a row. He became sick with systemic lupus erythematosus during his sophomore year at the University of Massachusetts, departing three years later.

Bob Dugan was a fearsome tackler and blocker for BBHS, the so-called “hitter” of this story, who I was very happy to have on my team and not as an opponent. He talked me into going back out for football after a freshmen injury, but then contracted leukemia a few years after high school and left after a ten year fight for his family.

Doug DeGhetto was a demanding coach who balanced stern discipline with love of the game and genuine interest in his players. He retired from coaching to enjoy another passion, flyfishing, only to be struck down by an out-of-control motorist beside one of central New Jersey’s traffic circles.

Rick Eades was a gentle giant of a defensive tackle who led Randolph-Macon College (R-MC) to three consecutive conference championships while becoming a two time All-American. His quiet humor and artistic talent off the field belied the competitive fury he could unleash on other teams. He succumbed early in his post-athletic life.

Keith Sweeney was a quiet and intense team leader as nose guard for R-MC. His toughness and creativity despite being undersized often left him bloodied but smiling after games. After college he took his leadership abilities to the U.S. Marine Corps, losing his life in an on-duty helicopter crash.

Playlist

Chapter 1: [Kind of a Drag](#), The Buckingham (1967)

Chapter 2: [Different Drum](#), Stone Poneys (1967)

Chapter 3: [Light My Fire](#), The Doors (1967)

Chapter 4: [Happy Together](#), The Turtles (1967)

Chapter 5: [For What It's Worth/Mr. Soul](#), Buffalo Springfield (1967)

Chapter 6: [Within You Without You](#), The Beatles (1967)

Chapter 7: [Baby I Need Your Lovin'](#), Johnny Rivers (1967)

Chapter 8: [Victory March](#), John and Michael Shea (1968)

Chapter 9: [Ballad of the Green Berets](#), Barry Sadler (1966)

Chapter 10: [Somebody To Love](#), Jefferson Airplane (1967)

A note on game changing plays: One of the things shared by most winning teams, the only thing if considering repeat championship teams, is the presence of a player who leads by example usually, by infraction if necessary. The character Blaine Reed in this novella is such a leader even though he doesn't think of himself that way and disdains having been appointed team captain. The momentum changing plays described in each game, well, all except one, occurred over ten seasons of Pop Warner, high school, and college football and were enacted by multiple individuals.

Chapter 1: Unnecessary Roughness

“Hey Bleeds, did you hear that somebody saw Mickie in Charchie’s car last night?” grins Joe Fassanello leaning over the back of the green plastic seat.

“Fuck that, we’ve got our first game to play” growls Blaine Reed, the linebacker, fullback and reluctant team captain of the Bound Brook High School football team. “I’ve got to focus on beating Bernardsville and so should you, asshole, we’ll be there in twenty minutes.”

“Yeah, yeah, Bernards schmernards, let’s have some fun for our senior year” laughs the compact noseguard as he slides back down into the bench seat of the yellow Romano’s school bus heading up interstate 287 into the Watchung Mountains.

Try as he might to focus before the game, a familiar and familial fury was growing inside Blaine Reed, this time fueled by the suspicion that his girlfriend was cheating on him. Bleeds was not just a portmanteau nickname and it certainly wasn’t a nod to the Crusader team colors, red and white. It wasn’t even the red that filled his vision when about to crush a ball carrier, a secret he’d only shared with the blond daughter of borough engineer Mike Voorhees. After games during the previous season the white half of Blaine’s uniform had been stained with smears of blood from his violent impacts with teenaged boys. He was the type of player who football coaches kept a covetous eye out for in preseason contact drills. He was a hitter.

All four of the Reed siblings were prone to fast and furious responses when pushed. Blocky-looking Blaine had led the way as the oldest when the family had moved north from eastern Kentucky in 1960. A bossy Italian kid had called him Kenfucky just once before being knocked to the ground in Codrington Park and punched in the nose. When he became a leading tackler on the football team as a junior in 1966, Blaine grew to be feared throughout Bound Brook, population 10,000 packed into a square-mile central New Jersey borough.

Moon-faced Beatrice was next and saved her sharp wit and tongue to call out injustice, be it in bullying classmates or sneaky siblings. Third was dark-haired and strong-willed Beulah who had an equally strong arm for throwing rocks at invading kids. Skinny little Wiley took up the rear and tagged along whenever he could,

propelled by fast feet and the family reputation to hold his ground in the battlefields of Bound Brook's ethnic neighborhoods.

The Reed children's proclivity for decisive action was not the product of some back hollow Appalachian inbreeding. It was what they grew up seeing and hearing. Their truck-driving father withdrew even when home with severe headaches after concussive injuries during the Korean war. When berated for not helping by his homebound wife who had never learned to drive up north, his post-traumatic stress kicked in to end the harangue by hand or by curse, sometimes both. Blaine was adept at this particular art of conflict resolution and every play on the football field presented ample opportunity to apply that art.

"Ok men, let's run a halfback trap down their throats to start this game right" calls Coach Jack Righetti to the huddle of boys about to head onto the field for the first play after the opening kickoff. "Karp, you take out their noseguard and Bleeds'll cut back on the linebacker who fills the hole."

The quarterback takes the snap of the ball from the center, with the two running backs directly behind him in I formation and Karp to his right at guard. Blaine at fullback and the halfback both step to the left so the defensive linemen charge that way too. The backs abruptly cut back to the right as the quarterback ducks behind Bleeds and hands the ball to the halfback. Karp charges left and slams into the noseguard, blocking him from turning to follow the backs. The defense's left middle linebacker jumps in the opening between the big linemen and right into the reddening vision of one raging Blaine Reed.

"Eat shit and die, Charchie" is the last thing the linebacker hears before landing on his back with a crazy fullback holding onto his facemask with both hands and roaring into his face.

The speedy halfback cuts past the downed players and breaks into the clear for a seventy yard touchdown run on the first play from scrimmage. The only problem is that there's a yellow flag on the ground where Bleeds is standing over the downed linebacker.

"Facemask, unsportsmanlike conduct, and unnecessary roughness" calls out the line judge while chopping the back of one wrist with arms over his head. "Fifteen yards and loss of down."

Box Score

	1Q	2Q	3Q	4Q	Total
Crusaders (0-0-1)	0	0	0	6	6
Bernardsville (0-0-1)	0	3	3	0	6

Chapter 2: Blitz

“Come on Blaine, do it for me!” pleads the one BBHS cheerleader he did not want to hear anything from on the cinder track behind the home team bench.

“Bleeds, how can you ignore that?” asks Fas, turning to gape at the pompom-laden sophomore bouncing with encouragement for her guy.

“Time to turn this game around” he growls, hands on hips while awaiting the kickoff to start the second half with his team way behind the Brearley Bears by a score of 21-0.

Blaine had spent the week after the Bernards loss, which is what he considered a tie, blaming himself and steadfastly avoiding Mickie. He skipped the Saturday night party at Zab’s, made sure he got to school right as classes started, stayed away from the hallway where her locker was, ducked out the side door to eat lunch alone in his father’s sky blue Chevrolet Impala, and skipped last period study hall to go to LaMonte Field for practice.

“Blaine, it’s some chick calling” chided Beat who had answered the Reed phone. “Do you want to take it upstairs where it’s private?”

“Lifting weights” was all he had answered from the third floor bedroom he shared with his little brother Wiley, not taking the emotional bait on either count.

The Reed's split-level house was identical to forty-four others on the loop of Hanken Road, the newest subdivision in town. Families with young children had rushed into the inexpensive box-like houses, and now there were thirteen high school seniors in the class of 1968 from this single block.

Mickie, on the other hand, was from an early Bound Brook Dutch family and lived in a big old house in the 400s. This wealthier part of town was charitably called a number for its fire whistle code that consisted of a series of blasts from loud horns mounted on top of telephone poles around town. Four toots indicating all blocks north of Maple Avenue were followed by a pause and then two more series of toots to specify the street and block. Less charitably, those neighborhoods were referred to as Snob Hill by the newer Italian and Polish families of Bound Brook’s more modest west end. It wasn’t a coincidence that most of the football players lived there or across

the river in working class South Bound Brook while most of the cheerleaders and band kids were from the 400s.

After a short Crusader kickoff, Kenilworth has the ball on their own 45-yard line for first down and ten yards to go for another first down.

“They might try to air it out to put us away” warns Bleeds in the Crusader defensive huddle before the play. “Look for a run but be ready for the pass.”

Blaine lines up in his usual middle linebacker position behind and between Fas at noseguard and the left defensive tackle. Just before the snap of the ball he hops to the outside of the left defensive end and charges with the hike. The Kenilworth quarterback fakes a handoff up the middle, takes four quick steps back, and lunges forward to unfurl a long pass to a wide open receiver running down the right sideline. Blaine leaps as the ball flies from the quarterback’s hand, slapping it out of a spiral and down into the hands of the right defensive end who grabs it and sprints fifty-five untouched yards for a Bound Brook touchdown.

“Great play Perini” cheers Bleeds, slapping the tall defensive end on top of both shoulder pads as he leaves the field.

Box Score

	1Q	2Q	3Q	4Q	Total
David Brearley (1-1)	7	14	0	3	24
Crusaders (1-0-1)	0	0	12	14	26

Chapter 3: Veer

"Cut the shit Bleeds" calls out Fas in the Bound Brook field house before the game with undefeated crosstown rival Middlesex. "We saw you all over Little Charchie at the Park last Saturday night."

The coaches stay out of the fragrant back room where each varsity player is assigned one of the tall red lockers for stashing sweaty uniforms, pads, clothes, and cleats.

"Just talking, fuckhead" groans Blaine. "Now get your head out of your ass and into how to stop that BlueJay veer."

"Just saying, you'd better talk to Mickie or I'm gonna" counters Fas as Blaine grabs his red helmet from the top compartment and stomps into the main locker room for the pregame meeting.

After the comeback win at Kenilworth the previous week Blaine had moped around the rec room of the Reed house still not wanting to run into Mickie Voorhees or Mark Czarcinski. A college game was on the black and white TV and Wiley was playing with an electric football set on the floor.

"I'll be the defense and you get the ball" he offered, lining up the little players with a big gap in between so his little brother could make a play.

"Touchdown for the Bound Brook Crusaders" exclaimed Wiley with a big grin.

"You did it kiddo. Now I'm heading down the Park so see you in the morning."

The lights went out at 9pm at Codrington Park, a two block playground named for the only of the borough's 1683 founders to have ever lived there. Thomas Codrington had owned the entire western half of town between First Watchung Mountain to the north, the Middlebrook to the west, Vosseller Brook down the center, and the Raritan River to the south. He built the first European house in Somerset County on the only hill on the property, an old Lenape mound that would become the estate site for the town's twentieth century benefactors, the Kerns-LaMonte family.

It was also at 9pm that the town's teens descended on the darkened swing sets and merry-go-rounds.

"Hey little Charch, you in there?" called Blaine shuffling over to the Stagecoach where several juniors were enveloped in a thick cloud of smoke. "Can I talk to you for a minute?"

"Why Blaine Reed" she exclaimed, her beads swishing across a Thai peasant shirt as she stepped out of the climbing set. "To what do I owe the honor of attention from the world famous football star?"

"Cut the shit Czarcinski. What's your brother Mark up to tonight?"

"How would I know? He hogs the car most weekends."

"Has he been with Mickie Voorhees?"

"Why would you ask that Blaine, she's got your varsity sweater?"

"Look little Charch, someone saw her getting into your brother's car two weeks ago."

"I'm called Karma now" she said with a twirl to flair out the bell bottomed jeans she had made. "And I can guarantee that Mark has not been with your girlfriend if that helps your little dilemma."

"Are you sure Karma?"

"You know that it would be untrue" she smiled, quoting the song The Doors had just played on the Ed Sullivan Show and flashing him the peace sign as she glided back into the cloud.

Blaine walked home with his first smile in two weeks and wasn't quite sure why.

"They run this tricky new offense called the veer" warns Coach Righetti to the defensive players sitting on the wooden red benches lining the main locker room. "To stop it we'll triple key."

"Fas, you follow the fullback and stop him if he gets the ball up the middle" scowls the assistant coach while drawing X's and O's to represent the defensive and offensive

players on a large black chalkboard mounted on a wooden stand. "Perini, you take the quarterback coming down the line and don't let him get around you. Blaine, glue yourself to that halfback heading around end. Now get out there and do it, you pussies."

Middlesex has the ball on their thirty-five yard line after the opening kickoff and return.

"We'll ante up that triple key by taking all three down on the first play" whispers Blaine in the defensive huddle.

With the snap of the ball the BlueJay quarterback turns right and fakes a handoff to the fullback who Faz slams into and drives to the ground. The QB steps behind them and runs to the right into the long arms of Paul Perini who throws him down, but not before the ball gets pitched to the halfback heading around the end. He's reaching up for it as Blaine flies across the line and barrels in, upending the leaping back at the thirty-one yard line.

"Veer schmeer" grins Fas as the red and white players lean into the next huddle and the Middlesex quarterback looks to their sideline shaking his head from side-to-side.

Box Score

	1Q	2Q	3Q	4Q	Total
Middlesex (2-1)	0	7	8	0	15
Crusaders (2-0-1)	6	6	6	0	18

Chapter 4: Off Tackle

"Hey Bleeds, that's the first smile I've seen on that ugly mug all year" starts in Fas on the short bus ride to Manville for an important Mountain Valley Conference game with another neighboring town.

"Back with Mickie and I don't even have to kick the shit out of Charchie" Blaine concedes.

"That's two for the price of one" continues the hirsute noseguard leaning back over the bench seat. "Send Little Charch my way, would ya?"

"Call her Karma and she's not mine to give so clamp it and get ready for this game."

The night after the unexpected win over high scoring and previously undefeated Middlesex Blaine had walked the three blocks from the Reed house on Hanken Road to Codrington Park. Half the team was standing around under the lights on the basketball courts in their red wool double B jackets with cream colored leather sleeves.

"Bleeds, what's up?" greeted Paul Perini, walking over with a toss of his head to flick thick black hair out of his eyes.

"Hey Paul. Has Mickie been here?"

"She's not been over here with us, but I don't know about those hippies in the Kiddie Corral."

"Any parties tonight?"

"Nah, nobody's parents are out. Come on, let's shoot some hoops."

They kept lobbing and missing half court shots in the late September chill even after the lights went out until a police car pulled up.

"OK guys, good game today but time to go home" warned Officer Romano from the rolled down window of the blue Plymouth Fury.

Blaine cut through the playground on the way out without knowing why until he glimpsed the hunched figures in the Stagecoach.

"Is Karma in there?" he whispered into the darkness.

"It's always here" echoed back. "But she's got the Charchiemobile tonight."

"Crack" went Blaine's toothbrush and he realized he was still wound up even after a night shooting the shit with the guys. So instead of heading up to bed, he went down to the rec room and turned on the TV, pacing back and forth in front of some rerun without even seeing it. Then he turned it off and quietly opened and closed the back door. It was after eleven when he took the twenty minute bike ride down Longwood Avenue, up Vossellar, down Maple, and up Church Street to the 400s.

The big house was dark and headlights were coming up Church so he pulled his bike behind a boxwood hedge and sat on the lawn. He ducked as the car drove slowly past and turned onto the side street of the corner house. A few minutes later a light came on in Mickie's third floor window.

"Pssst" he hissed, tossing a pebble from the pathway and hitting the screened window.

"Blaine, is that you?" she whispered sliding open the window. "I'll be right down."

"Everyone's asleep" she gasped, breathing hard as she came out the front door onto the wooden porch wearing blue jeans and a form fitting sweater that outlined every curve.

"I missed you at the Park" he pleaded, pulling open the snaps on his varsity jacket.

"I had something to do" she explained, snuggling into his chest and leaning her head onto his shoulder. "But I've missed you too."

"Sorry I disappeared" he offered, reaching the jacket around her shoulders and pulling her close, her full boobs pressing into his belly.

"Oh Blaine, it's my fault" she sighed, sliding one hand down and up the front of his jeans.

"Timeout" calls Coach Righetti making a T with his hands and then waving the Bound Brook quarterback over. "They're going to look for the power sweep so cut it back off-tackle with Bleeds leading the way."

Manville is ahead 8-6 after a long grinding touchdown drive and a two point extra point on a quick pass over the middle. The Mustangs also have tough working-class players, though their eastern European fathers mostly worked in asbestos at Johns-Manville while Bound Brook's Italian and Polish men dealt in aniline dyes and plastics at American Cyanamid and Union Carbide.

The Crusaders had just countered Manville's touchdown with a drive of their own down to the Mustang 12-yard line where they stalled with less than two minutes left in the game. It's fourth down and nine yards for a first down, twelve for the probable winning touchdown. The red and white hadn't made a placekicking extra point all year, much less even tried a three-point field goal. It didn't occur to the coaches or the players to try a kick.

"Run him over, run him over, run him over" Blaine chants to himself from the ground as the halfback cuts inside the end, sprints past Blaine and the downed outside linebacker, and pops toward the corner of the goal line.

Bound Brook's speedy halfback doesn't like to get hit so he usually tries to outrun tacklers, but this time there's a cornerback tracking him toward the sideline. A quick glance tells him he'll be tackled out of bounds if he tries to make it to the corner so he just pretends to head there. When the defender's body commits to heading him off he instead cuts hard toward the goal line and barrels full steam into the surprised cornerback. The head-first impact blacks out his vision and sprawls them both over the line. Blaine is there in an instant, helping him up.

"You did it" Blaine marvels as they walk back to the huddle for the extra point try. "I had just said to myself 'run him over' and you did it!"

Box Score

	1Q	2Q	3Q	4Q	Total
Crusaders (3-0-1)	6	0	0	6	12
Manville (2-2)	0	0	0	8	8

Chapter 5: Drop Kick

"Karma, what're you doing down here" calls Blaine with hands on hips and head shaking from side to side as his petite hippy friend strides over to the sideline.

"What happened out there?" she asks, pulling a pencil and pad from an oversized cloth purse displaying a sewn on peace sign.

"Part of the game" he says while taking her arm and turning her away from the team. "Now get off the field before you get in trouble."

"Blaine, I'm a reporter for the Searchlight" she explains, glancing at the ambulance pulling up to the huddle of coaches, parents, and rescue squad personnel gathered around a downed Harrison player. "This injury is a story."

"It's a tough sport" he mumbles, turning away to join the defense on the bench, but not before catching the disappointment in her striking hazel eyes. "You want a story go talk to my little brother in the stands" he calls back.

Wiley was Bound Brook's best fan. He knew all the players on and off the field, having matched numbers from the game program to pictures in Blaine's Echo yearbook. He also knew that BBHS had never had an undefeated football team since the school was built by the LaMonte family and opened as the Washington School in 1907.

On the Friday evening before the first ever game against Harrison, a small town along the Passaic River near urban Newark, Wiley had donned his shoulder pads, red uniform, and white helmet and was enacting tomorrow's game in the Reed yard.

"Touchdown for Bound Brook" called Blaine pulling in the driveway on his bike to his little brother's big grin. "Let's kick that extra point."

"Hut one, hut two, hike" yelled Wiley snapping the ball to Blaine. He dropped it onto the ground and swung his right leg as it bounced, catching the lower part with the toe

of a white low top Converse All-Stars sneaker and booting it over the fence into the parking lot of D'Angelo's bar.

"The Crusaders win 7-6" Blaine cries as Wiley clammers over the wire fence to retrieve the ball.

"How did you kick it like that?" Wiley asked when he got back to the yard.

"The drop kick is one way to punt, kick a field goal, or get an extra point after a touchdown" Blaine answered in more words than he usually used in one sentence. "It's not used much since the ball became more pointed, but we practiced it all the time in Kentucky when I was your age."

"Let me try" exclaimed Wiley taking the ball, dropping it in front of him and whiffing as it bounced to the side.

"You have to let it hit on the lower half to get a straight bounce" advised his suddenly patient big brother.

"Yikes" cried Wiley running for the house, startled in mid-kick by a loud pop and a puff of smoke up on Union Avenue.

"Easy now" called Blaine. "It's just a car backfiring at the stop sign in front of Dairy Queen."

"It's not the blacks coming to get us?"

"Nah, those July riots in Newark and Plainfield are over now."

Karma scans the full bleachers for the Reed family under the bright golds and reds of autumn on First Watchung, spying them on the top bench at the 50-yard line.

"Wiley, can I interview you for the school newspaper?"

"Huh?" he replies as Mr. Reed shakes his head up and down from his perch standing atop the bench.

"What happened out there?" she starts with head tilted and a blue beret not quite keeping straight auburn hair from blowing across an angular face.

"We took out their star halfback in the first quarter, now it's a defensive back."

"It looks like he's hurt pretty bad. Did you see who hit him?"

"Nah, it's just a jumble of red jerseys running around."

"How will this long delay affect the game?"

"We're about to run all over them in the second half."

"Will it affect your brother Blaine?"

"He's the toughest ..." he starts but is interrupted by a siren and flashing lights as the ambulance rushes off the field.

Box Score

	1Q	2Q	3Q	4Q	Total
Harrison (3-2)	0	0	0	0	0
Crusaders (4-0-1)	6	6	14	12	38

Chapter 6: Safety

"Eee" squeaks Blaine following a forearm to the throat after the whistle blew signalling the play was over.

The Dunellen cornerback who had been charging in from the backside of the passing play just grins and jogs back to the defensive huddle at the Destroyer five yard line.

"Thirty three" mumbles Blaine stomping into the Crusader huddle.

"Alright, let's run a fake dive and pop pass over the middle" calls the Bound Brook quarterback on third down with five yards to go for a touchdown.

"Thirty three" growls Blaine leaning forward into a three point stance behind the quarterback with one hand planted on the ground.

"Blaine, I have to talk to you" whispered Karma leaning into his shoulder beside his school locker. "It'll be off the record this time."

"What's up Little Charch?" he smiled, hooking her arm and leading her to the back door to the auditorium stage.

They glanced both ways and ducked into the dark backstage when they thought nobody was looking.

"My Mom was working at the hospital last night " she gasped, both eyes moistening as he leaned down to hear. "That kid from Harrison died."

"Nah, he just broke some ribs" Blaine scowled, standing up straight and pulling back from her. "It's part of the fucking game."

"One pierced his lung and it collapsed" she sobbed, reaching up to touch his shoulders. "Both lungs filled with fluid and they couldn't save him."

"Jeez" he softened, pulling her into his chest as tears streamed down her cheeks.

With the snap of the ball Blaine bursts forward pretending to take the ball and smacks into a defensive lineman. He turns to see his quarterback leap and toss a soft pass over the linemen's heads and straight into the arms of number thirty three in the middle of the end zone.

"Thirty three" he yells, roving toward the guy with the ball who's trying to run out of the end zone and down the field.

Blaine shoves aside a would be Dunellen blocker, squares up at the goal line, and drives into number thirty three, forcing him up, back, and into the ground. He reaches for the downed player's face mask, but instead pulls back and offers a hand to help him up.

"Safety" calls the referee placing palms together in an overhead prayer. "Two points for the visitors."

Box Score

	1Q	2Q	3Q	4Q	Total
Crusaders (5-0-1)	0	2	12	6	20
Dunellen (3-3)	6	0	0	0	6

Chapter 7: Double Key

"Yo Bleeds" grins Fas as the BBHS band plays the national anthem before the Mountain Valley Conference game against Ridge High School, "I saw Mickie and Little Charch come out of the auditorium together."

"Big fucking deal" Blaine growls, irritated at the interruption to his favorite part of pregame rituals. "Let's stomp these rich kids."

"No argument here" Fas replies about the team from the wealthy suburb of Basking Ridge on the south slope of Third Watchung Mountain. "They got it coming."

"Blaine, I have to talk to you" whispered Mickie leaning into his shoulder beside his school locker.

"What is this, instant replay?" he laughed, hooking her arm and leading her to the back door to the auditorium stage.

They glanced both ways and ducked into the dark backstage when they thought no one was looking.

"I know you've been talking to Karma" she began, reaching up to touch his shoulders.

"What?" he exclaimed louder than intended, standing up straight and pulling back from her.

"It's okay Blaine" she continued, "she told me all about meeting you in the Park and talking after the Harrison game."

"It's nothing" he cried, his voice rising. "But I'm sorry if that hurt you."

"I need to apologize too" she whispered with both eyes moistening as he leaned down to hear. "It was Karma that I was riding around with that time."

"Jeez" he softened, pulling her into his chest as tears streamed down her cheeks.

He hardly heard someone else slipping in through the back hallway door.

"Yo Bleeds, you just hit two hundred yards and it's still the third quarter" exclaims Fas slapping him on the helmet in the Bound Brook huddle.

"Who gives a shit?" Blaine wheezes, leaning forward with hands on knees. "Just keep moving it down the field."

"28 sweep on two" calls the quarterback on first down from the Crusader 35-yard line. "Bleeds, you jump to halfback for this one. They're double keying you so Fas'll pull from guard and get the outside linebacker, I'll take out the cornerback."

He takes the snap and pitches the ball to Blaine who cuts inside Fas and finds an open stretch of green down the right sideline. He tries to turn on the speed but his legs won't go faster. It seems like he's running in slow motion as the Ridge safety sprints from across the field to drag him down from behind.

"Let's go Bleeds" huffs Fas running over to help him up. "Time to put them away."

"My legs" coughs Blaine trying to roll to his knees but giving up and falling onto his back. "They won't move."

Box Score

	1Q	2Q	3Q	4Q	Total
Ridge (2-5)	0	0	0	15	15
Crusaders (6-0-1)	18	18	18	0	54

Chapter 8: Twelve Men on the Field

"This section is reserved for the band" warns the director as Blaine hobbles on crutches up the four steps to the nearest section of the home stands. "But we'd be delighted to have the team captain as our musical supporter for the second half."

"Beats being an athletic supporter, I guess" Blaine winces as he plops onto the first bench he comes to.

Blaine had tried to stay away from LaMonte Field for the next to the last game of the season, but he couldn't resist tuning in on WAWZ, the Zaraphath Pillar of Fire station. He scowled with Watchung Hills' first touchdown, cursed with a late first quarter field goal, and clicked off the radio as the Warriors were driving down the field early in the second quarter.

"Karma, can you take me up to the field?" he was mortified to beg into the telephone.

"Yes if you'll tell me what's going on."

She arrived ten minutes later in the Charchiemobile, an old Pontiac station wagon with bat wings along it's long white sides.

"Hold my shoulders and fall back onto the seat" she instructed after he had made his way on crutches down the Reed driveway.

"Gee thanks" he muttered, plopping onto the bench seat and using his arms to pull in useless legs.

"Before we go anywhere tell me what's wrong" she commanded, scooting over next to him and determinedly looking up into his frowning face.

"Doc says it's just fatigue" he blurted, a single tear beading at the corner of his left eye.

"Did you get your bell rung?"

"Never, I do all the ringing out there."

"Tell me or we're staying right here!"

"I don't know, maybe six or seven times this year."

"Then maybe your legs know something that thick head of yours doesn't" she said with a small smile as she scooted back and turned the key.

"Smartass" was his only reply, but he said it with a quick glance into her dark eyes and a little smile of his own.

"Knock it off" Blaine yells as the band blasts the school fight song. "It's blocking our play calling."

The band director frowns but thrusts his out-facing hands down to stop the music. He strides over and sits by Blaine on the front bench.

"What's wrong with Victory March, young man?"

"Nothing" Blaine explains, "but when you blare it during our offensive huddle they can't hear the plays being called."

"When would you suggest we play it?"

"Start when Watchung has the ball and they get into a huddle, stop after the snap."

The Warriors start their first possession of the third quarter on their own thirty-three-yard line after a Bound Brook punt.

"DAH, DAH-DAH, DAH-DAH, DAH-DAH" toot the horns as the huddle forms and the Watchung quarterback tries to whisper a play to the ten other guys leaning in to hear.

"BUM-BUM, BUM-BUM-BUM, BUM-BUM, BUM-BUM" blast the tubas and baritones as the Warriors break the huddle and line up on the ball.

"WHEW-WHEW-WHEW-WHEW-WHEW-WHEW-WHEW" join in the winds as the quarterback calls out the cadence and two linemen jump across the line before the ball is snapped.

"False start" calls the line judge circling his fists in front of his chest, "five-yard penalty and repeat first down."

"WHEW, WHEW-WHEW, WHEW-WHEW, WHEW-WHEW" whisks in as the quarterback calls the next play.

"DAH-DAH, DAH-DAH-DAH, DAH-DAH, DAH-DAH" drums as he has to repeat the call several times so everyone in the huddle can hear.

"BUM-BUM-BUM-BUM-BUM-BUM-BUM" blares as he signals for the snap and the referee throws up a yellow flag.

"Dead ball foul, delay of game" he calls crossing arms across chest. "Five yards and still first down."

"BUM, BUM-BUM, BUM-BUM, BUM-BUM" begins again as the quarterback shouts the next play to the befuddled huddle.

"WHEW-WHEW, WHEW-WHEW-WHEW, WHEW-WHEW, WHEW-WHEW" whispers in as Fas tells the defensive huddle "He called a draw play, forget the pass and break it up."

"DAH-DAH-DAH-DAH-DAH-DAH-DAH" trumpets across the field as the quarterback takes the snap, pretends to drop back to pass, and bumps into the fullback as Fas slams into them both.

The ball pops loose and Paul Perini's there to scoop it up and race twenty-three yards for a touchdown.

"Holy shit" Blaine exclaims as the Bound Brook fans erupt with cheers. "Who knew the band was part of the team?"

On cue, the musicians, color guard and cheerleaders sing it out: "Three cheers for our red and white, they're gonna give a helluva fight, when we yell we yell like hell, hoorah for Bound Brook, hoorah for Bound Brook, hoorah for Bound Brook High."

Box Score

	1Q	2Q	3Q	4Q	Total
Watchung Hills (6-2)	10	7	0	0	17
Crusaders (7-0-1)	0	0	12	6	18

Chapter 9: Thirteenth Man

"Alright men" shouts Coach Righetti as the Crusaders bunch up to exit the Somerville locker room on a rainy Thanksgiving morning. "They're bigger, faster, and more talented than us, but we have one important thing that they don't."

This final game of the season is the oldest rivalry in central New Jersey, dating back to 1910. The winner often takes home top ranking for Somerset County, and even a losing season is considered a success with a turkey day victory. In this unexpected undefeated year Bound Brook is also looking at landing their first Group 1 state championship.

Lurking beneath this competitive match up is a racial divide that no one talks about but everyone feels. Somerville is an integrated town with a large and vibrant black community. Bound Brook is segregated with the few African American families residing in South Bound Brook across dual barriers of railroad tracks and the Raritan River.

"It's got us through this undefeated season" Righetti continues, opening the metal door to the downpour. "It's kept us in the game so far."

"Hoo-rah for Brown Brook" mutters an old black man huddled under the eave beside the door.*

The coach had decided to push their luck by having them don all white instead of the usual away game pairing of red pants and white jerseys, so uniforms are uniformly muddy for those who had played in the soggy first half.

"And it will see us through for twenty-four more minutes if you unleash it now" concludes the coach. "Now get out there and show em your heart!"

The players stomp over to Brooks Field in red rain capes with cleats clacking on the wet pavement. The coaches take up the rear in a huddle of their own until stopped by a pretty cheerleader in a clear rain cape with her arm around a little boy soaked to the bone.

"Sorry to bother you Coach" calls out Mickie Voorhees stepping in front of the group. "Little Bleeds has something to tell you."

Righetti scowls but bends down to listen as Wiley cups his hands over his mouth and whispers into the coach's ear. Then the two interlopers run off into the rain and the procession continues to the field for the start of the second half.

"Blaine, what are you doing after high school?" Karma asked while watching the pre-game bonfire blaze up behind the firehouse on the night before Thanksgiving.

"If my legs keep getting better I'll be joining the Green Berets" he answered, noticing her shiver in the cooling November dusk and pulling his varsity double B jacket around her shoulders.

"Don't believe that stupid song" she pleaded, looking up into the fire reflected in his brown eyes as she pulled the coat around her chest. "I don't want you to die in Vietnam."

"Don't worry baby, I'm not going to die."

"I'm going to Berkeley next summer" she blurted. "Why don't you come with me?"

"AH-UN, UN" boomed the fire whistle over their debate and it repeated three more times before pausing.

"It's the 400s" he told her. "Probably some false alarm at Smalley School again."

"I just gave Mickie some pot" she worried. "She was going to try it in their old barn while her parents were here."

"Let's go" he exclaimed stepping over her bicycle as the fire truck sped out the front of the white block building. "You peddle, I'll steer."

He climbed onto the seat, she stepped between his legs onto the pedals, and he pushed off and steered them on the sidewalk through the Codrington Apartments.

"There she is" Blaine cried pointing up to the back hayloft as firemen sprayed the flames through the front Dutch door.

"Up you go" he instructed, interlocking his fingers to make a stair up to the loft ladder.

Karma clambered up to find her friend frantically trying to stamp out fire all around her in the old dry hay.

"Eat shit and die" she cried, spreading and tossing Blaine's varsity jacket on the center of the blaze. "Now let's get out!"

"What that coach up to?" wonders the old black man now at the back row of the Somerville bleachers. "Consulting a doctor during a game don't mean nothing good."*

The Crusaders have the ball for fourth down at the Somerville 35-yard line with a long and muddy eight yards to go for a first down. They trail the Pioneers by two points with just two minutes left in the game.

"That one queer huddle" he exclaims as a half dozen red rain jackets enclose two guys.

"Looky there, it that bloody boy" he observes to the other older black men squinting into the rain. "He warn't suppose a play today."

"It the shotgun" he continues. "I ain't see no dropkick since them Bears in 41."

"They snap it, he drop it, he boot it, there it go, end over end, up an then down, right through them posts."

"Wait, it hit the bar, it pop up, it drop like a duck."

"He done done it?" asks another old man holding a hand above his eyes to shield the rain.

The referee waves his arms across his chest and out as the Somerville side erupts in cheers and the Bound Brook bleachers sink in stunned silence.

Box Score

	1Q	2Q	3Q	4Q	Total
Crusaders (7-1-1)	0	6	0	0	6
Somerville (6-3)	8	0	0	0	8

* Words spoken by the black fans are written in African American Vernacular English to convey the local dialect during the post-war years in central New Jersey.

Chapter 10: Postseason

"Double teamed even at Zab's party" exclaims Fas ambling over to Blaine with a long neck bottle of Budweiser. "I don't know how you do it."

"It's us that do it, asshole" chides Karma from one arm of the chair while high-fiving Mickie on the other.

"Do it to me, would ya" Fas laughs.

"Well we're driving to Harrison tomorrow, want to go?" Blaine offers.

"Forget that shit" Fas shouts over Grace Slick belting out Somebody To Love. "It happens out there."

"I need to see his grave and leave something for the family."

"What're ya gonna do, put your helmet there?"

"Good idea, maybe I should crack it first."

"No you don't honey" chimed in Mickie stripping off his varsity sweater. "Take this to keep him warm and let them know you're sorry."

"I can sew a jagged line through the double B to make it look like a broken heart" adds Karma.

"Whatever" Fas concludes. "Great year we had Bleeds, wasn't it?"

"Fuck that, I blew it and we lost."

"Aw babe, don't be so hard on yourself" Karma chimes back in. "We wouldn't have had a chance without you."

"Neither would I" adds Mickie leaning onto Blaine's shoulder.

"Now that's my kind of win" concludes Fas heading over to a group of guys by the turntable.