

INSPIRED BY TRUE EVENTS



SEASONS CHANGE

RUSSELL ANTHONY DEPERZIA

with Todd M. Parisi



In this hard-hitting drama, Anthony Russo coaches the Stonedale High Stallions whose star running back, Rex Sarcone, suffers a traumatic head injury. With their football careers at a crossroad, Coach Russo teams with Rex to coach the girls' basketball squad where Rex finds guidance and also falls for the team's captain, Gina Mariselli. Will Rex become another statistic of the ongoing sports tragedies linked to concussions or will his football dreams come true?

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First Edition

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*To my children,
Roman and Giavanna,
forever my home team...*

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*I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I,
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.*

Robert Frost

Chapter 1

The First Hit

Two decades ago, on a Saturday afternoon in late September, tiny helmets collided during a youth football game. Like miniature soldiers preparing for battle, the two teams set up at the line of scrimmage. The helmets worn by the ten and eleven-year-olds were scuffed and scratched. The quarterback stood behind the center, got ready to take the snap, and began calling out the signals.

“Ready, set, hut one, hut two!”

The play went off, and the ball was pitched to the halfback. Exploding around the end, he ran as hard as his little legs would carry him. He didn't see the outside linebacker until it was too late to avoid the hit. Their helmets met violently. The halfback swayed as he tried to maintain his balance, but his eyes blurred, his head rang, and he fell to one knee. Even though it was children playing on the field, the parents were as bloodthirsty as ancient Romans packed into the Colosseum.

“That's right! Way to hit, Tommy!” yelled one lady from the bleachers.

“Kill 'em! They don't belong here!” a man hollered coldly.

“Welcome to football! This ain't tennis! It's a contact sport!” screamed another man in the stands.

After a few moments, the player got back up and motioned to his coaches that he was okay. He went back to the huddle. As the game continued, he took more and more hits, but he never came out of the game. He went on to score three touchdowns and catch several key passes on the way to a victory. He broke tackles and outran defenders, making sharp cuts to elude his opponents, which he was able to do most of the time. He scampered for a fifty-yard, game winning score in the closing minutes of the game.

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Coach Russo didn't know then that seeing Johnny Sarcone's son play football on that windy autumn day in Stonedale would be the beginning of a truly amazing story. Johnny's son, Rex, was a rugged ten-year-old. Pain didn't seem to deter him, no matter how hard he was hit. He was a tough as nails kid that was a throwback to yesteryear's gridiron greats, but underneath all that toughness, Rex had a heart so big it was a wonder it fit inside his little chest.

Looking back on that first real hit Rex suffered from the much larger linebacker and seeing the way he bounced back up and kept playing after such a vicious collision showed Coach Russo how tough Rex was. He dominated, the proverbial man among boys. Coach Russo had never seen a kid take so much punishment and keep going. The coach knew Rex was special: His stride was perfect, and he was already showing signs of unusual strength at such a young age. His speed and agility were unmatched by the other kids. Rex anticipated blocks and read the defenses like a seasoned veteran in the pros.

Johnny, Rex, and Coach Russo met up in the middle of the field after the game. As Rex removed his helmet, his father approached and gave him a hug. Rex was a handsome young boy, with dark hair and soulful, brown eyes. He was tall and thin, but with a strong, athletic build. He was respectful and showed a discipline beyond his years.

"Great game, son!" said Johnny, excited and proud of his boy.

"Thanks!" Rex replied shaking his head as if to clear out the clutter in his brain.

Johnny looked concerned. "How's your head?"

"Hurts a little. Feel a little dizzy, Pop."

"We'll let's get you home and cleaned up."

"Okay, Pop. Can we get a milkshake on the way?"

"Sure thing," Johnny smiled and turned Rex's attention to the large, bald man standing next to them. "Rex, you remember my old friend Coach Russo. He wanted to come and see you play. Coach Russo is the head coach at Stonedale High, and you will be playing for him in a few years. The one that made your Pop look good back in my playing days."

Rex shook hands with Coach Russo. Coach took Rex's tiny hand and told him that if he kept playing like that, he'd be running the ball

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for Colson State like his old man. Coach Russo was in awe of the child. Rex was talented, and the coach couldn't wait to have him in a Stonedale uniform one day.

“Great game, Rex. You're a natural,” Coach said, praising the budding star.

Rex turned to his dad and said, “I'm going pro, Pop. Just wait and see.”

“Don't I know it, pal. But why don't we get you home first.”

As they stood in the middle of that youth football field, Coach Russo became inspired by the passion of this young boy. He thought about the determination in his words and didn't doubt a single one.



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