

LIFE ON THE LINE: Football, Rage and Redemption

Brief Excerpts that Capture the Book's Essence

- From Chapter 4 – Doubts

At the end of practice Coach had solicited questions, but no one had spoken.

Franklin had a million questions. *Am I gonna be good enough? Will I get to play? Will I get hurt? How many games will we win? Will I make any new friends? Will I ever have a girlfriend? Why does Bart Wagram have it in for me? Who else will hate me at this new school?*

These weren't questions a player would ask a coach, or even a friend. They were questions kids asked themselves – in silence, when no one was around. Then the kids lived their lives and got their answers as life revealed them.

- From Chapter 8 – First Scrimmage

On the first play Bart tipped a pass, bobbled and then intercepted it, and raced twenty-eight yards for a touchdown. He ran over, through, or around six of the eleven players who tried to tackle him. That was just the beginning.

Bart shed blocks like a waxed canvas coat sheds rain. He punished blockers, throwing them aside, then flattening the runners they were protecting. Even in the moment, Bart knew what he was doing. Second team? Watch this, Coach. I'm a one-man highlight film.

- From Chapter 10 – Game Time

Bart tackled with a ferocity that was rare, even for him. On one particularly vicious lick, he sent his opponent limp and unconscious to the ground. The crowd grew hushed and even the Fighting Scot players quieted. The body lying motionless on the field tempered Franklin's adrenaline rush.

He saw the concern on the faces of the medics as they wheeled the stretcher from the ambulance. He overheard bits of their conversation. *Stabilize the neck . . . easy, easy . . . pupils dilated . . . heart rate elevated . . .* Franklin felt a lump rise in his throat and tears form in the corners of his eyes. He wanted to knock the shit out of people as bad as anyone, but this was serious. Sounded like the guy might really be in danger. Franklin didn't want to actually *kill* anyone.

Then he heard Bart. "Tough shit for the guy. If he didn't want to get hit he should have joined the damn chess club. Now let's line up and play ball. I'm getting cold and stiff out here."

Stunning. Franklin would never understand Bart.

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- From Chapter 10 – Game Time

Franklin trotted back to the line of scrimmage, a familiar metallic taste in his mouth. A quick spit confirmed it – he was bleeding. He had never felt more alive in his life. He spit into his hands and wiped the bloody spit on his pants. A little blood might intimidate his opponent.

- From Chapter 14 – Game Plan

Larry sliced into his omelet and returned to their earlier conversation. “Remember that time when Bart punched Franklin in the balls?”

“Yeah – you know that had to hurt.”

“Worst hurt I ever had. You reckon Bart did that on purpose?”

“I always figured he did. It looked like to me he slugged Franklin just because he could. That’s the reason I called off practice; I didn’t want it to get out of hand. I let it alone so they could work it out. Thought it might be good for Franklin. He seemed sort of soft when the season began. I wanted to see what he was made out of.”

- From Chapter 22 – Showdown

Bart didn’t know what else was going to happen in the Mars Hill game, but he knew this much – someone was going to pay. He had never been to Mars Hill. Didn’t even know where the place was until it popped up on the schedule. He found it on a map – some little one-horse burg way out in the sticks. He didn’t care, didn’t care about anybody or anything. He just cared that someone was going to pay. He’d see to that.

- From Chapter 27 – Rage

Bart was relentless. “You crybaby! I ought to kick your fat . . .”

He never got to finish the sentence.

“Bastard!” Franklin screamed it so loudly that it echoed through the room. He lunged at Bart. Kids scrambled out of the way. Shrieks joined Bart’s and Franklin’s curses. Desks toppled. Books flew. Franklin grabbed Bart by the neck, and the two of them landed in a mad, writhing tangle.

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- From Chapter 27 – Rage

Franklin was out of his mind. His eyes looked like something from a horror movie. If the pupils had gone bright red, Kenneth would not have been shocked. Franklin tightened his hold on Bart's neck. He smashed Bart's head once more to the floor. "Son of a bitch!" He screamed, and it was louder yet. Bart's face was going purple.

- From Chapter 27 – Rage

Franklin smashed Bart's head to the ground. "Say it, you asshole. Say I earned my place on the team! Say it or I will kill you, so help me God!"

Bart's face was getting bluer and bluer. Franklin's face was contorted. He was slamming Bart's head so hard that Kenneth could feel each blow through his feet.

Kenneth could only see the whites of Bart's eyes, the whites with a tiny bit of pupil at the top under the eyelids. Bart opened his mouth, but no words came out. Kenneth wondered what a person looks like just before he dies. He might be seeing it.