

Anything can happen with a little imagination, and a bunch of friends. Let me tell you about the little band of brothers from a small town with a big college, and big dreams. That town, my friends, is Ann Arbor. Derrick, Samantha, Roy, Isaac, Byron, Quentin, and Jacoby were just a bunch of kids who wanted to reach that higher level of athleticism that everyone strives for growing up. None of them were really football players, but growing up in a town with the biggest college football team in history right downtown, it's hard not to love the game. So in their final year of middle school, they decided to go out with a bang. They created a flag-football team, and decided they were going to devote their lives to making it to the biggest stage of juvenile football there is. The Midwest Regional Finals. They created the Neshindrae Mastodons.

“Hey Roy, lets go over to Allmendinger and play some tackle,” Jacoby said, “I’m sure Quentin and Isaac will meet us there if we call.”

“All right, let’s head down there. I’ll call ‘em. Meet in 10.” Roy hurried down to the basement to grab his phone. Dialing Isaac, he got his shoes on, and started walking.

“Ring...Ring...Ri- Hello?”

“Hey Isaac, it’s Roy, meet us at the park in 5 all right? Me and Jacoby are heading down to play some tackle, and we need more people.”

“Aight, sounds good to me, I’ll tell him. See you there.”

At the park, they got into teams and immediately dove into it. These kids loved nothing more than playing sports in the park. It was the thing that all of their friends could just do without anything getting in the way, like a religion to them really. “Hut, Hike!” Roy snapped the ball, and immediately, Quentin was off to the races. “Q! Otterhook!” Quentin took the directions, and started to do a buttonhook, but midway through the cut, he turned and did a go route. Roy let loose. The ball soared and soared until it landed in Quentin’s arms at the goal line. “Let’s go Q! Perfect Route!” “Hey, I have an idea, why don’t we make a rec flag

football team,” Roy said in the end zone. “We could get Samantha, Derrick, and Byron. We would go H.A.M dude.”

“Not a bad idea, but we would need to really practice like crazy, and work on our plays every waking moment. I’m in if everyone else is.”

“I’m down”

“Why not? Let’s do it.”

At school the next day, Roy was so energetic to tell the rest of the guys the idea in 3rd hour, he got calls home in both 1st and 2nd hour, which he knew would result in some bad news at home. But for now, he was focused on his presentation. They all sat down in math class at their table. “Okay guys listen up. I’m just thinking out loud here, but we should make our own flag football team, and be our own coach. I promise we could take it to the Midwest Finals. They’re in Indy this year, which could be pretty sweet. What do you think? I spent all night thinking about the team name, and I definitely have the best one. The Neshindrae Mastodons. Nailed it, right?”

“Well, I have a ton of spare time, why not,” Byron said.

“Of course you do Byron, all you ever do is play video games. Oh, and I’m in too. Seems awesome, guys.” Samantha was in too. It all came down to Derrick.

“Aww, what the heck. You’d kill me if I didn’t.”

The second Roy got home, he got on the computer, and went looking for uniforms. They were only buying pants and socks, because the league provided jerseys. He found a website, that had the perfect socks, but he had forgotten to ask about colors. ‘What colors should r unis b?’ the text message read. He sent his friends the text, and then continued to look for football pants. Every couple of minutes he’d get a response saying ‘ooh, mayb gold, red, nd blue,’ or ‘how bout gold, maroon, neon yellow.’ Roy read all of them, and decided to go with gold pants, with maroon and scarlet socks, like Virginia Tech plus gold. “Okay, I’ve done it. The sweetest uniforms ever.”

“Hey mommy, can you take my friends and I to the Rec and Ed Center to sign up for football. We would appreciate it greatly,” said Derrick to his mom. Roy told Derrick that his mom should be the driver, since she was so nice, but Derrick was reluctant. Derrick’s mom agreed to drive them, and it was soon to be official.

“I think it’s great you guys are doing such a fun group activity. What a radical way to get your yah-yah’s out,”

“Mom, shut up. Nobody has said radical since you fell of your dinosaur on the way to school, and I think even those dinosaurs were too cool to use the word ‘Yah-Yah’s.’”

“Don’t bite the hand that feeds you kiddo,” Mrs. Derrick replied. All of Derrick’s friends called her that. They found it a little, super creepy, but she was such a nice lady.

When they finished their registration, they all went to Allmendinger for their first official practice. Everyone was there, except Samantha, who was probably off having a slumber party or something with her girl friends. “Okay girls, huddle up. We are like, so totally going to, like, win. Okay? It’s, like, the only possible way.” Imitating Samantha at her slumber party, or whatever she was doing. “Real talk though, practice every weekday except Friday, with Saturday fitness training, and then again with practice on Sunday.

Roy had been studying coaching on the Internet for a while before the season, and so he got off to a good start. He was running the drills smoothly, and everyone liked it at first. “Hey Roy! Good job!” Jacoby’s dad said as he walked up the hill. “Can I take over for a minute?” Dr. Connors really wanted to help out, and he knew a lot about football, but Roy had his own ideas for the team, and none of the kids wanted parental help on

this.

“Sorry Dr. Connors, but we all agreed that since we took initiative on this, we wanted to put in the work ourselves.” It was the truth, but Roy felt bad, since Jacoby’s dad wanted to do everything involving his son.

“No worries guys. I like that you guys are doing something yourselves.”

“Thanks sir.” As Mr. Connors walked away, Roy got the team back in formation. They were looking so good, they knew they had a chance to make it.

Practice had been going great for the first three weeks. Everyone knew what to do, they were in good shape, and they were having a blast. But then, during the fourth week, you could see things had changed. There were arguments breaking out every other day, and they generally weren’t playing well as a team. They started to focus on themselves too much. “Ok guys, what the hell is going on. It’s getting ridiculous. You’re pissing and moaning about every little thing. Will someone explain please?” He thought taking charge would make things better. Not the case.

“Samantha keeps overreacting to every little thing anyone does, and it’s pissing me off.” Derrick said, a little too loudly.

“Yeah, well he keeps stealing my hat, and it feels really mean.”

“THEN WHY DO YOU KEEP WEARING A HAT!!!” Derrick screamed.

“Don’t yell. It feels really mean.”

“It feels really mean, it feels really mean. You’re like a broken record.”

Samantha and Derrick both stormed off the field.

### Chapter 3

School and practice were like war zones. Everyone was awkward around the two. Roy was distraught because on one hand, there was the team, but on the other, there was their relationship. Roy went to the school counselor to see what he had to say. “Hey Mr. Waldorff, can I talk to you about something?”

“Sure my boy, anything. What’s troubling you?”

“Well sir, my friends and I are on this football team, and last week at practice, Sam and Derrick got in this huge fight, and none of us know what to do. It’s ruining our team, and we need to figure this out. It’s really important. I’m stuck between a rock and a hard place.”

“Well, I’ve always found that when there are two parties that are stuck in an argument, it works best to bring the two sides together, and have a civilized conversation.”

“That would be great, if they could be in the same room as each other, but it really is that bad.”

“It seems to me that only time will heal things. Until then, you’ll have to act like nothing has changed.”

After visiting many adults, he got the same answer. Roy needed to do this alone, so after school, he hatched a plan.

#### Chapter 4

‘Hey it’s Derrick and I can’t get to the phone right now. Please leave a message, thanks. Beep.’ “Hey Derrick, it’s Roy. I was wondering if you could hang tomorrow, and maybe catch up on some stuff. Get back to me. Thanks.” Roy left the same message for Samantha too. He needed to make things work, and fast, because their first game against Copley Falls was rapidly approaching.

At Allmendinger that Saturday, it was just Roy and Derrick, because of the storm. They had been out there for hours already, and weren’t planning on stopping anytime soon. “We need to get this play down Derrick. It’s not that hard.” Roy was drilling Derrick on what the team had been doing all week. They called the play Nomad Toss, as it was an anagram for mastodons. Right as Derrick caught the pass, a man in a suit walked into the park holding something in his hand. “Derrick, do you know who that is?”

“I have no clue. We should leave.”

“Yeah lets go.”

Just as they were leaving, the man shouted out to them. “Don’t move you guys. You’re under arrest for the murder of Jayson Rasmus. Come down to the station with me.”

## Chapter 5

At the Police Station, Roy and Derrick were freaking out. They knew they hadn’t killed Jayson Rasmus, whoever that was. They’d never even heard of him. Both Roy and Derrick’s moms came in crying that it was their fault they didn’t pay enough attention to them, but the kids reassured their parents that it wasn’t them. It was someone else. But they were just kids. Who would frame them for a murder. Then, after all the commotion subsided, a man walked into the room. “Hello folks, I’m Drake Carter, juvenile investigator. I’m here to talk to you about the recent crime your boys have been charged with. Roy. Derrick. Can you guys tell me anything?” Roy spoke up first.

“Look sir, I don’t know what this could be. Who is this guy? I’ve never even heard of him. And besides. We’ve been practicing nonstop this week, and there is no way any of us could ever... *murder* someone. It’s just not something we’re capable of. Why did they think it was us?”

“Apparently he’s a drifter, just making a pass through the town. The reason the police suspected it was you, is because the crime scene showed signs of a struggle, and there was a scrap of a shirt next to the body. After further examination, it turned out to be one of your jerseys. That is some pretty strong evidence.”

Roy thought about it for a while. He decided that they should call all their friends on the team, and look at their jerseys. Everyone had his or her jersey in pristine condition for the upcoming game. Then, Derrick remembered the last teammate. “Hey, give Sam a call. She might have something to do with it.”

“You don’t actually think she would’ve killed someone over a flag football team. Do you?” asked Roy, bewildered that a thought like that could even go through Derrick’s head.

“I don’t know,” replied Derrick. “She might have.”

“Hello?” Samantha said into the phone. “... This is the police? What happened... A murder?... Couldn’t have been them... No, I don’t have my jersey... An officer is coming. For me?” Samantha could barely squeak out those last few words. She didn’t do it. She was upset about being off the team, sure. But no way would she kill a guy. As she arrived at the station, Roy hugged her. He looked so frightened, like a rabbit. “Wh-What is happening guys? I’m really scared. A person was killed?”

“Well, yeah, and they found a piece of the Mastodon jersey on the guy. Everyone else’s jerseys are fine. Where is yours?” Derrick said, with a hint of malice.

“I was taking it to the garbage after Roy explained the circumstances, and as I opened the lid, a guy asked me if he could have it,” Samantha explained. Officer Carter proceeded to get a sketch artist to get Samantha’s description of the guy.

As all the other teammates arrived, He showed them the picture. “Hey! That’s the Copley Falls coach!” Byron exclaimed. “He came to my house the other day too!”

“Yeah, he stopped by my place.”

Everyone seemed to have been paid a visit by this guy. “So this means we’re off the hook? It’s clear we didn’t do anything now right?” Roy shouted enthusiastically. “We can’t let you leave, but I’m sure the charges will be dropped. There are still questions we need to ask you.” All the kids, and their families were relieved that this would soon be over.

## Chapter 6

On the morning of the Copley Falls game, the kids all gave a moment of silence for Jayson Rasmus. They dedicated the game to him. And Samantha even came back to

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play, wearing a torn, foul smelling jersey. “Dude, Sam, that stuff is toxic! Why didn’t you wash it?” Roy complained.

“Well, I figured we were going to go out there, and get filthy playing the game we all love.” And that’s just what they did.