

Chapter 1

Kickoff



Martin Jones stood at the five-yard line waiting for the kickoff. He could feel the electricity in the air. The stadium was packed with 60,000 people—all screaming wildly—but Martin didn't hear a thing. His eyes were focused on the flight of the ball. His ears were filled with the sounds of his own breath and the perpetual thumping of his racing heart. The smell of fresh-cut grass reminded him of the hundreds of games, practices, and kickoffs that brought him to this very moment. He had played thousands of hours of football throughout his life and yet he had never experienced a moment quite like this. It was the moment of all moments. It was his first pre-season game and as an undrafted rookie trying to make it in the NFL, this was his one shot to get noticed.

Veterans didn't have to get noticed. First-round draft picks with big signing bonuses didn't have to stand out. But undrafted nobodies had to do something special during the pre-season to catch the eye of the coaches, scouts, and key decision makers who would decide their fate. Every

play, every moment, every movement mattered. This was his one shot to do something special, to make a statement that he had what it took to compete with the best football players in the world. A great play meant he would be on the team for at least another week. A mistake would surely mean the end of his dream. An average play . . . well, that wasn't an option for Martin. Playing it safe was never his style, and he wasn't about to start now. He was going to go for broke or fail trying. He owed it to his high school and college coaches. He owed it to his family. He owed it to himself.

And as Martin caught the kickoff, he made the most of his opportunity. He ran slowly to the left looking for an opening as 11 opposing tacklers raced toward him. When his blockers met the defense with fierce collisions, he cut to the right and saw the opening he was waiting for. It wasn't a big opening, but it was big enough for him to sprint through it into the open field. A player dove at his feet, but Martin was one step ahead. One person to beat and he was in the clear. The kicker, the last line of defense, ran straight toward him, but Martin made such a quick fake that the kicker fell to the ground and Martin ran past him.

All that was left between him and the end zone were two players that chased him from behind. One dove and just missed his leg while the other closed in on him. Martin pumped his arms and legs as fast as he could and ran toward the end zone like a man shot from a cannon.

Seconds later he was celebrating a touchdown with his teammates in the end zone. He not only caught the eye of his coaches and thousands of fans, he electrified the crowd with his speed and athletic ability. Everyone but Martin was stunned.

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