

BILLTOWN

Written by
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EXT. MANHATTAN STREET - DAY

A U-Haul truck sits at the curb outside the Washington Square Village Apartments.

JOE O'MALLEY, 40, exits the front door of the building, carrying boxes to the truck. He squeezes the last boxes in and pulls cargo latch shut.

INT. APARTMENT - DAY

Inside the now empty living room, GUS, 12, sits looking out the window.

Joe enters, looking around to be sure everything has been packed.

JOE

All right, c'mon, the truck's ready.

Gus points out the window.

GUS

You see that rooftop track right there? You know who runs out there?

JOE

Yeah, I do, every morning.

GUS

College girls. Hundreds, maybe thousands of college girls. Running. In circles. All day. I'd watch them run out of sight, just long enough to miss them, then, you know what happens?

JOE

Do you do this a lot?

Gus is not listening.

GUS

They come back. They come back to me, and I see them again.

He keeps staring out the window.

GUS (cont'd)

When it's hot, they have water bottles.

Gus closes his eyes and mimes squirting water all over his face and body.

Joe puts his hands on Gus's shoulders and guides him toward the door.

EXT. CITY STREETS - DAY

The truck maneuvers through Manhattan traffic slowly.

GUS (O.S.)
How long until we get our own
place?

JOE (O.S.)
I don't know. What's the rush? I
figure we stay with Aunt Cathy for
as long as we need to.

INT./EXT. CAB OF THE TRUCK - DAY

Joe drives while Gus rides shotgun, looking out the window at the city he is leaving.

JOE
This is going to be great!

GUS
Says the guy who is *not* sharing a
bedroom with his farty cousin.

JOE
Please! He...

Joe searches. Gus turns to him, keeping him honest.

JOE (cont'd)
Might...not...do that...anymore.

GUS
We saw him a month ago. He had to
go check his underwear in the
bathroom.

JOE
Okay, maybe he doesn't do it while
he sleeps. Give the kid a chance.

EXT. GEORGE WASHINGTON BRIDGE - DAY

The truck crosses the Hudson River, leaving the city behind, rolling into new territory.

JOE (O.S.)

I want this to be a new beginning.
For you. For me. It's not about
forgetting the past, but it's about
being open to the present. To the
future. It's --

He is really gathering up momentum here.

INT./EXT. CAB OF THE TRUCK - DAY

Joe points out the window.

JOE

It's about all the possibilities
out there. It's about --

He briefly looks over at Gus.

Gus is staring out the window of the truck, wearing large headphones.

Joe looks frustrated, taps Gus on the shoulder. Gus takes off the headphones.

GUS

What?

Joe looks back to the road.

JOE

Nothing.

Gus smiles.

GUS

Oh, was it one of your speeches?

JOE

Forget it.

GUS

Was it about possibilities?

JOE

Yes.

GUS

Did you get to the part about
seizing? I love the part about
seizing!

JOE

Go back to your music.

EXT. PENNSYLVANIA COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

The truck rolls west along I-80 through the hills of central Pennsylvania.

EXT. WILLIAMSPORT CITY LIMIT - DAY

The truck drives past the sign "WELCOME TO THE CITY OF WILLIAMSPORT."

From the road, LAMADE STADIUM is visible.

JOE (O.S.)

Just tell me you'll give it a shot.

GUS (O.S.)

It's not like I have a choice,
right?

EXT. MARINO HOUSE - DAY

The truck parks in the driveway of an old colonial house on a quiet street. Tire swing, basketball hoop over the garage, kid's bike on the lawn.

CATHY MARINO, late 30s, emerges from the house in her hospital scrubs to meet the truck.

She is followed by APRIL, 8, who sprints ahead of her.

Gus and Joe climb down slowly from the cab of the truck.

APRIL

Uncle Joe!

She runs to him, and he swoops her up.

JOE

April! The one person who's always
happy to see me.

GUS

Give it time.

CATHY

Not too bad a trip, I hope.

JOE

No, not at all. Couple hours.
Very uneventful.

GUS

That's a great word for it.

CATHY

The things you had shipped are
already in the house. Bobby and
Jake tried to get as much in as
they could.

JOE

Thanks. We have most of the boxes
here.

CATHY

I wish I could help, but I have to
take her to dance class then run to
my shift at the hospital.

JOE

Don't worry about it. We got it.

The RATTLING OF BOTTLES is heard from the neighboring yard.
Gus and Joe turn toward the noise.

MR. HOWELL, mid-80s, slowly ambles toward his trash cans at
the curb.

CATHY

(calling to him)

Mr. Howell! This is my brother-in-
law Joe and his son Gus. They'll
be staying here while --

MR. HOWELL

(yelling)

The one with the dead wife?

CATHY

(to Joe)

I'm sorry.

JOE

No, that's okay. That's how most
people know me.

(to Mr. Howell)

Hello, sir! How are you?

Mr. Howell, a garbage can in each hand, shrugs as he drags the cans back to his garage.

JOE (cont'd)
I'm looking forward to meeting
everybody, and --

Mr. Howell disappears into his open garage.

JOE (cont'd)
(to Gus and Cathy)
Probably couldn't hear me.

MR. HOWELL (O.S.)
Yes, I can!

GUS
I like him.

Cathy musters a smile.

CATHY
Anyway. So glad you're here. Stop
by the restaurant. Bobby is
expecting you.

JOE
Great. I'm starving. As soon as
we get these boxes in.

INT. MARINO HOUSE - DAY

Gus and Joe carry boxes into the front hallway of the modest house.

INT. BOYS' BEDROOM - DAY

Gus carries boxes into a darkened bedroom and flips on the lights.

In the near corner, a clean, neatly-made bed against a blank wall, meant for him.

In the far corner, an unmade bed with magazines, articles of clothing, and various personal effects splattered all over it. This is Jake's bed.

The rest of the room is populated by soiled clothes, discarded wrappers, and other garbage, ending at a loose border around the clean bed, as though this is the only territory ceded to the new arrival.

EXT. BOBBY'S BILLTOWN PIZZERIA - DAY

The best attempt any other place can make at a New York-style pizzeria. The no-frills sign out in front makes it seem like the place has been with the neighborhood a long time.

INT. BOBBY'S BILLTOWN PIZZERIA - DAY

Joe and Gus enter past patrons eating pizza at booths. The place is crowded and loud.

From behind the counter, BOBBY, mid-40s, big, loud, comfortable with both of these qualities, calls to them.

BOBBY

Joe! Joe! Back here!

Joe waves and starts toward him. Gus follows reluctantly.

Bobby maneuvers past TWO COUNTER WORKERS who barely adjust for his presence as they prepare pies and serve customers.

Joe offers his hand.

JOE

Place looks busy!

BOBBY

Yeah, yeah, kids just got out of the last day of school, lots of foot traffic today. What is this? C'mere!

Bobby presses past the handshake and hugs Joe, hard.

This amuses Gus.

BOBBY (cont'd)

What is this? You, too. C'mere.

Bobby hugs Gus, too. Not so amusing.

BOBBY (cont'd)

(to his counter workers)
Get me two for these guys!

INT. PIZZA COUNTER - DAY

Joe and Gus sit at stools along a counter, slices and sodas in front of them.

Joe attacks his slice. Gus looks skeptically at his.

JOE

I don't know what your problem is.
This is good.

GUS

You only came to New York as an
adult. I was born there. Pizza is
like my birthright. And this. Is.
Offensive.

JOE

All right, fine. Give me yours
then.

Gus bats his hand away.

GUS

No, no. I'm eating it. Who knows
if I'll get anything better around
here?

Bobby approaches them.

BOBBY

Hey, listen, Jake has his last
baseball game of the season in a
few minutes. I'm headed over there
now. You should come.

JOE

Yeah, that sounds great.

BOBBY

And, the pizzeria sponsors the
team, so afterwards, we're going to
come back here again with all the
kids to celebrate. Gus, you can
get to know some of the guys your
age in town.

JOE

Oh, that's perfect.
(to Gus)
And more pizza. Huh, Gus?

Joe elbows Gus gently.

GUS

Well, this night can't miss. Let's
go, I guess.

Bobby stands perfectly still.

BOBBY

Wait, wait. Finish your slice first.

Joe and Bobby look at Gus.

GUS

What?

JOE

I'm already done. C'mon. Eat up.

Gus takes it in. He really is serious.

Gus slowly but completely jams the rest of the slice in his mouth.

GUS

(garbled)

Okay, let's go.

Bobby leads the way out. Joe puts his arm around his son.

JOE

See, this is the kind of fun we'll be having. All the time!

EXT. LITTLE LEAGUE FIELD - DAY

Two teams of twelve year-olds, one in red t-shirts over baseball pants, the other in blue.

The field has seen better days, but the foul lines are freshly chalked, and the pitcher's mound has been cared for.

The metal bleachers on either side of the field are spotted with parents, siblings, and other reluctant family members. A lot of cellphones are providing stimulation.

In foul territory, slightly removed from his teammates, JAKE MARINO, 12, swings a several aluminum bats around in a windmill, loosening up his arms. He is noticeably bigger and bulkier than most of his contemporaries.

Bobby, Joe, and Gus stand along the chainlink fence of the backstop behind homeplate.

JOE

God, Jake is really getting big, huh?

Bobby nods with pride.

BOBBY

Yeah, he's put in a lot of work in the cage this year. Working a lot off the tee. We've shortened up his swing a little. Little quicker to the ball.

Jake steps into the batter's box as the OPPOSING CATCHER settles into a squat.

A NERVOUS LOOKING PITCHER delivers the first pitch. Jake doesn't move the bat from his shoulder.

A KINDLY LOOKING UMPIRE behind home plate raises a hand.

UMPIRE

Strike one!

Bobby calls out, almost instinctively, to his son.

BOBBY

That's it, baby! Get a look! Get a look!

The volume of the sudden outburst startles Gus slightly.

BOBBY (cont'd)

(to Joe and Gus)

We're really hoping it all pays off in the tournament games. He's just hitting stride right about now.

The second pitch comes in high and outside. Ball one.

BOBBY (cont'd)

You still playing, Gus?

Gus is about to answer when his father cuts in.

JOE

Oh, great season. Great season, this year, he --

Gus puts up his hand.

GUS

(to Bobby)

Don't mind him. He doesn't like when he has to talk baseball with the other dads. He tends to run out of things to say in a couple sentences.

Joe looks frustrated, but also relieved.

JOE
Hey! I'm at the games!

GUS
Yeah, grading papers.

JOE
I was... I pay attention.

They are brought out of the conversation by the action on field.

The next pitch comes down the middle, and Jake swings.

The metallic PLINK of contact brings everyone to attention.

A high, arcing drive pulled down the left field line. No doubt about the distance: it is well over the wall. Batter, catcher, umpire, and pitcher all lean, as if body language will affect the flight of the ball.

As it sails over the fence, the ball shoots just left of the pole.

The Umpire throws up both hands.

UMPIRE
Foul ball!

A disappointed Jake returns to the batter's box.

Suddenly a serious smile crosses Gus's face: now there is no place he would rather be.

BOBBY
Atta boy, Jake! Atta boy! Stay on it! Stay on it!

GUS
What do you think that was? Three hundred feet? Three twenty?

BOBBY
I don't know. Could be. He keeps wanting me to measure some of his batting practice bombs. Who's got the time for that?

GUS
That could have been out of some major league parks!

Bobby shrugs it off.

BOBBY

Eh! Just a loud strike, right?
Just a loud strike.

The next pitch comes in high. Jake can't lay off. He swings through strike three.

Bobby cringes. He knows what is coming next.

BOBBY (cont'd)

Oh boy. That's what I was afraid
of.

Jake growls audibly. He storms off to the bench.

His teammates all instinctively avoid him. He rushes straight past them to a line of bats along the fence, grabs one, and heads off by himself.

Somewhat removed from the team, he pounds the ground with the bat repeatedly, muttering to himself.

Despite the tremendous violence and volume of the act, coaches, parents, and players all seem to pretend nothing is happening.

JOE

Is he...? Will he be all right?

Bobby is mildly embarrassed, which is saying something.

BOBBY

He's got some anger issues. We
find it best to let him work
through them this way.

Jake is still really letting that bat have it.

BOBBY (cont'd)

You'd be surprised. Now he only
goes for a minute or two. Used to
be, if he struck out like that, he
might not make it back out to the
field for the next half-inning.

Joe tries for a silver lining.

JOE

Well, that's good. Progress,
right?

Gus cranes his head to better see the meltdown.

GUS
He's going to destroy all the bats
like that.

BOBBY
No, the team keeps that one bat
there just for him. No one could
ever hit with the thing. It's just
all dents and nicks now.

Gus is totally absorb by this display of rage.

GUS
Smart. Probably saves a lot of
money that way.

INT. BOBBY'S BILLTOWN PIZZERIA - NIGHT

Hours later, the team spills into the pizzeria. School is
done. The season is done. Everyone is hungry.

Bobby enters behind the team, along with Gus and Joe.

BOBBY
(to everyone)
All right! Grab some tables! I'll
get some pies out quick. Let's
have some fun, okay?

The kids seem energetic. Joe leans into Gus.

JOE
Listen, it's been a long day. If
you're tired, we could probably
head back to the house and --

GUS
No, no, I'm good. I'm good.

Joe is pleasantly surprised.

JOE
Really? Okay, great.

Gus gestures.

GUS
I'm gonna --

JOE
Yeah, go! Go!

Gus heads off in the direction of the kids.

Joe walks behind the counter with Bobby. The two men watch Gus from a distance.

BOBBY
(to Joe)
How's he doing?

JOE
I wish I really knew. He's always been quiet, but now... I can't tell if he's just keeping to himself or if he's trying to freeze me out for some reason.

Gus approaches Jake and his teammates.

BOBBY (O.S.)
I don't know. Seems like he at least talks to you some. You can't get a complete sentence out of Jake. It's the age.

JOE (O.S.)
When's that age end?

INT. TABLE AT PIZZERIA - NIGHT

Jake acknowledges Gus approaching him.

GUS
Hey man, good game.

JAKE
Thanks. You guys get all your stuff here now.

GUS
Yeah, got the last of it in just before.

Jake closes his eyes for a moment.

JAKE
So this is it, huh? This is really happening.

Gus looks nervous.

GUS
Um. Yeah, I guess.

JAKE

You better not touch any of my stuff, you understand?

Gus straightens up. His cousin is a little too big for him not to take it seriously.

GUS

Listen, I --

JAKE

I'm just screwing with you.

Jake hands him a soda. Gus relaxes a moment, takes a drink.

JAKE (cont'd)

Seriously, though. Hands off.

Gus chokes a little.

JAKE (cont'd)

And if the door is ever closed...Knock first.

Gus thinks a moment and nods.

GUS

Same.

Jake looks at him.

JAKE

(nodding)

Well, it won't be for too long, right?

Gus shrugs.

INT. KITCHEN PREP AREA - NIGHT

Bobby works making pizzas while Joe stands by him.

JOE

So what are you guys doing for the summer then?

BOBBY

You're looking at it. Summer's my busiest time. Did I tell you I'm looking at a food truck?

Joe looks impressed.

JOE
No, you didn't. That's awesome.

BOBBY
Yeah, we get a lot of business at the community pool, and then there's block parties, that whole thing. So, I figured, if we can go to the business.

JOE
(nodding along)
Makes a lot of sense. What do you do with the kids?

BOBBY
April does this dance camp. Keeps her pretty busy. Then in the afternoons she hangs out here with me until Cathy finishes her shift. Jake's got tryouts for the all-star team this weekend. That goes well, who knows how long that will keep him occupied.

JOE
What do you mean, all-star team?

BOBBY
The travel team that competes for the Little League World Series. The first district game is in two weeks.

JOE
You guys have the championship here every year, right?

Bobby nods along.

BOBBY
Yeah, I take them to at least one game during the big tournament. I tell you, that's my best couple weeks all year. Teams come through here. I make my year during that stretch.

JOE
Hey, is there any way?

Joe doesn't quite know how to ask.

BOBBY

What?

Joe looks out from the kitchen.

INT. TABLE AT PIZZERIA - CONTINUOUS

Gus is talking to Jake and his friends at the table, seemingly comfortable for the first time.

JOE (O.S.)

Is there any way Gus could try out?

BOBBY (O.S.)

For the team?

JOE (O.S.)

Ah, you know what? Forget it. I'm sorry I even asked.

BOBBY (O.S.)

No, no, that's a great idea. I mean, what the hell else is he going to do all summer?

INT. KITCHEN PREP AREA - CONTINUOUS

Joe turns back to Bobby.

JOE

Well, I don't start teaching until the fall. He could just hang out with me.

Bobby chuckles and slaps Joe on the back.

BOBBY

Exactly!

INT. BOYS' BEDROOM - NIGHT

Hours later in the darkened bedroom, both boys are in their beds.

Jake is turned away from Gus, on his side.

Gus stares up at the strange new ceiling.

GUS

(whispering)
You awake?

Jake responds without moving.

JAKE

Uh huh.

GUS

Sorry. It's just. It's so quiet.

JAKE

All the better for sleeping.

GUS

Right, it's just, in our building, we lived beneath this professor from the Portuguese department. I think he used to be a DJ or something, and he cranked this weird music all hours.

JAKE

That sounds awful.

GUS

You'd be surprised how quickly you get used to it.

JAKE

If you want noise, you could open the window. The crickets could lull you to sleep.

GUS

Maybe. Can I open the window?

JAKE

Hell no. It's ninety degrees outside.

GUS

Right. Sorry.

Gus turns to his side.

Jake opens his eyes, rolls onto his back.

JAKE

Hey.

Gus cringes. He knows what is coming.

JAKE (cont'd)

I'm sorry about your Mom.

GUS
(autopilot response)
Thank you.

This has killed any conversation that may have been building.

JAKE
(to break the silence)
So you gonna come to tryouts
tomorrow?

GUS
I guess.

Jake flops over in bed.

JAKE
So, what's it like now? Just you
and your Dad?

Gus stares up at the ceiling again.

GUS
Honestly. It's like we're both
waiting for her to walk through the
door again.

JAKE
What do you mean?

GUS
She was the one who kept things
moving. Who made decisions.
Sometimes, we just. Stop talking.
And there's nothing left to say
about it. I think we both expect
her to come into the room and
change the subject.

JAKE
Wow. Sorry.

Gus keeps staring.

GUS
Thanks.

INT. GUEST BEDROOM - NIGHT

Joe lies alone in bed, also staring at the ceiling. He turns to his side and shuts his eyes.

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD - DAY

Dozens of players are scattered across the field. In foul territory, two lines play catch.

An ADULT COACH hits grounders to players in the infield, who cleanly scoop and throw to first base.

Another COACH works privately with a hitter, doing soft toss hits into a net.

Gus, in baseball pants, t-shirt, and Yankees cap looks a little scared amongst the new faces.

Jake waves to him from the line of players throwing back and forth.

JAKE

Over here!

Gus jogs in his direction.

JAKE (cont'd)

You pitch, right?

GUS

Yeah.

JAKE

Good, good. They're looking at pitchers over there.

Jake points to a small group in deep center starting to form.

Gus goes off to the group.

EXT. OUTFIELD GRASS - CONTINUOUS

A GROUP OF KIDS forms a semicircle around COACH HAYES, mid-40s, scruffy face, scruffier voice, as he instructs the kids.

HAYES

All right, we'll loosen up here. Long toss back and forth for a few minutes. Then we'll get each of you in there pitching to the position players. We're looking at *them*, and we're looking at *you*. Each of you will get about ten pitches to each batter, three batters per pitcher. Understand?

The kids nod in agreement.

HAYES (cont'd)
 (nodding)
 All right. Pair up for long toss.
 Hundred feet apart. Go!

The kids scatter.

EXT. FIELD - LATER

Gus is on the mound waiting for a batter in the box. The catcher, TOMMY, 12 red-headed with freckles, jogs out to the mound and takes off his mask.

TOMMY
 Hey man, what do you throw?

GUS
 Let's go one for fastball. Two for
 curve. Three, change up.

TOMMY
 All right.

GUS
 What can you tell me about these
 guys I'm facing?

Tommy turns and looks back to the batter's box. MICHAEL digs in.

TOMMY
 First guy is nothing to worry
 about. Slap hitter. No power.
 Bust him inside.

He turns to the on-deck circle where, JAVIER loosens up.

TOMMY (cont'd)
 Second guy is good. Great eye.
 Won't chase anything. Definitely
 have to mix speeds.

Behind Javier, Jake grabs a bat.

TOMMY (cont'd)
 Third guy is the big stick. Huge
 power. And he's a jerk.

GUS
 That's actually my cousin.

Tommy turns to Gus.

TOMMY

Oh. So you knew that already.

GUS

What's your name?

TOMMY

Tommy.

GUS

I'm Gus. Thanks.

TOMMY

All right, let's get em.

MONTAGE OF SHOTS

Gus delivers pitches to first batter.

Called strike.

Weak ground ball to second. The fielder handles it easily.

Swing and miss.

Another swing and a miss.

Pop-up to third.

Foul ball.

Swing and a miss.

EXT. BENCH AREA - CONTINUOUS

Coach Hayes makes notes on a clipboard.

HAYES

Very nice. Let's get Javier in there.

EXT. FIELD - CONTINUOUS

Javier digs into the batter's box.

Gus shakes off the signal. Tommy puts down another. Another shake off. Last try. Gus shakes no again.

Tommy, frustrated, gets up, jogs out to the mound.

Javier looks confused.

TOMMY
(hushed at the mound)
You have three pitches, right?

GUS
(into his mitt)
Yeah.

TOMMY
So how can you shake off all three?

GUS
I'm trying to make him confused.

TOMMY
Oh.

Tommy turns back to the batter's box.

TOMMY (cont'd)
Well, I think it's working.

GUS
Good.

Tommy starts back.

GUS (cont'd)
Hold on.

Tommy spins back.

GUS (cont'd)
I'm also thinking, should I brush
this guy back?

Tommy thinks a moment.

TOMMY
Little piece of advice? People
really like Javier. You brush him
back, you make some enemies. Save
it for your cousin.

GUS
Really?

TOMMY
Yeah. He's the toughest kid here.
You challenge him, people will take
notice.

GUS
Thanks.

Tommy turns back to home plate.

GUS (cont'd)
Hey, you're a pretty smart guy,
huh?

Tommy shrugs.

TOMMY
Eh. I just really don't like your
cousin.

HAYES (O.S.)
Can we get moving here, ladies?

Tommy gets back behind home plate.

EXT. BLEACHERS - CONTINUOUS

Joe sits in the stands, visibly nervous for Gus.

He notices Bobby and some other fathers at a distance talking with one another. Bobby turns and looks at Joe, then back to the fathers. The group approaches Joe.

BOBBY
Joe, come down here and meet some
of the other guys.

Joe climbs down the bleachers.

BOBBY (cont'd)
Fellas, this is my brother-in-law
Joe. He and his son are staying
with us until they find a place of
their own in town.

The well-intentioned FATHER #1 smiles.

FATHER #1
What brings you to Williamsport,
Joe?

JOE
I'll be teaching at the university
in the fall.

FATHER #1
Lycoming?

JOE
Yeah.

FATHER #1
That's fantastic. What subject?

Joe is about to respond when the much more direct FATHER #2
breaks in.

FATHER #2
Can we just cut to the chase?
Bobby, please?

BOBBY
Listen, Joe. We all had sort of
a...proposition for you.

FATHER #1
We don't want to force anything on
you.

Joe would start backing up, but he's against metal bleachers.

JOE
You guys remember the scene in To
Kill a Mockingbird when the lynch
mob confronts Atticus outside the
jail?

Father #1 laughs.

FATHER #2
What?

BOBBY
Listen, Joe. We all coached the
kids during the spring. Different
teams throughout the league. Some
of us were head coaches. Others
filled in where we could. And that
was great.

JOE
Okay.

FATHER #2
But how much time can a guy keep
giving up after three months?

The pack of FATHERS all nod along.

FATHER #3
I have no vacation days left.

FATHER #4
I got other kids.

FATHER #5

My boss is on my case as it is.

BOBBY

Basically, we need someone to put as head coach of the all-star team. Someone who could be there for every practice and game. Someone who isn't working.

JOE

I work. I'm a professor.

Bobby moves to put his hand on Joe's shoulder.

BOBBY

Look, there's no need to be defensive about your job. I'm sure it's great.

FATHER #1

It's just. We need someone who can take the kind of time. With the boys. While the rest of us get back to normal.

JOE

But what about Gus? What if he doesn't make the team?

BOBBY

Well, that's the beauty of it. If you're coaching, he's locked in.

Joe thinks about this for a moment.

BOBBY (cont'd)

Look, he's holding his own out there. They're going to want two lefties who can pitch. He might as well be one of them.

Joe is starting to smile.

BOBBY (cont'd)

And it's like you said. What else is the kid going to do all summer by himself?

Joe sees Gus on the mound, talking to Tommy between hitters.

JOE

All right. I'll do it. You're right. It will be good. For Gus, I mean.

FATHER #2

Oh, you're not doing it for him.

FATHER #3

You're doing it for us.

FATHER #4

The overworked, overtired fathers of suburbia.

EXT. FIELD - CONTINUOUS

Javier steps out of the batter's box, and in steps Jake.

Tommy and Gus conference at the mound.

TOMMY

All right. Give him a fastball. See what he can do with it. Then, second pitch, whatever happens, bust him in. Give him something to think about.

Gus nods half-heartedly.

TOMMY (cont'd)

Hey, what's the matter? It was your idea, right?

GUS

Yeah, but --

TOMMY

What?

GUS

Right now, I -- I share a bedroom with him.

Tommy can't control himself. He laughs right in Gus's face.

TOMMY

Good luck there, buddy!

Tommy jogs back to the plate.

Gus stares in, delivers his first pitch to Jake.

Jake smacks a towering blast to left-centerfield. It climbs and climbs. The outfielder does not even make a move for it, and it clears the fence with ease.

Several players chuckle, others clap.

Tommy tosses out a new baseball to Gus.

Second pitch -- just under the armpits as Jake dives back.

A moment of complete silence on the field.

Jake squares up to Gus from beside home plate.

JAKE

Hey, what the hell are you doing?

Jake starts to take a step out to the mound, but Tommy comes between them.

TOMMY

All right, big fella. All right.
I called for it. Don't worry.

Gus is barely able to match Jake's stare, but he manages. Tommy again jogs out to him.

TOMMY (cont'd)

(to Gus)

All right. I think you made your point. Now just give him soft stuff off the plate, and there's no way he won't go for it.

GUS

Yeah?

TOMMY

Are you kidding? He wants to hit the next pitch harder than anything ever before. Use that!

Tommy gets back behind the plate.

Next pitch: change-up outside. Jake is way out in front and misses.

EXT. BACKSTOP - CONTINUOUS

Javier, Michael, and a group of players stand around drinking from paper cups.

JAVIER
Who's this new kid?

MICHAEL
I don't know, but I like him.

EXT. BLEACHERS - CONTINUOUS

Joe watches the strangely tense scene from his seat. What has he got himself into?

INT. MARINO HOUSE KITCHEN - DAY

Gus and Joe sit at the kitchen table while Cathy and April put away groceries in the refrigerator.

JOE
So I'm going to have to get to know these kids, I guess. And I'll probably need to make a practice schedule and...

Joe looks a little horrified.

GUS
It's now dawning on you that you have no business coaching a baseball team, isn't it?

The sound of the SCREEN DOOR SLAMMING attracts their attention as Jake enters the house.

He enters the kitchen and immediately locks eyes with Gus.

CATHY
(to Jake)
Hey, honey. You want something to drink?

Jake does not take his eyes off Gus.

JAKE
No thanks.

He spins on his heels and exits.

Joe and Cathy both turn to Gus.

JOE
Well, good luck with that.

GUS

I think you should talk to him. As the coach.

JOE

Hey, I can protect you as a coach, but not as a roommate. That guy knows where you sleep.

Gus lets this sink in.

INT. BOYS' BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Jake enters the room, sits at his desk, and flips open a laptop computer.

Gus enters a few steps behind him.

GUS

Hey, Jake, listen --

Jake spins quickly in the chair toward him.

GUS (cont'd)

I wanted to say I'm sorry. For before.

Jake stands, smiles, maybe devilishly.

GUS (cont'd)

I was -- Well, I was trying to get some attention, and I'm sorry that I did that.

Jake inches closer to Gus.

GUS (cont'd)

I didn't mean to hurt you or anything, and I hope you can forgive me.

JAKE

You're lefty, right.

GUS

Yeah.

WHAM! Jake slugs Gus in the right arm. Hard.

Gus clutches his right arm with his left and shrinks to the wall.

Jake walks past him, out of the room.

GUS (cont'd)
(calling to him)
Why my right arm?

JAKE (O.S.)
Because we have a game tomorrow,
and that's going to hurt for a few
days.

INT. BOBBY'S BILLTOWN PIZZERIA - NIGHT

Bobby sets down two pies and sits at the table with the whole family.

Cathy serves April a slice before taking one for herself.

Joe is seated next to Bobby with Gus and Jake on the other side.

Gus rubs his sore right arm while looking suspiciously at his cousin.

BOBBY
So, the very first Little League World Series was played in 1947. The championship game was played between a team from Williamsport and a team from Lock Haven, a few towns over. So, each year, our All-Star team plays the All-Star team from Lock Haven as a local charity event for the medical center.

JOE
And the game doesn't count?

BOBBY
Not for the district championships, but it's huge for bragging rights. And it's the first chance you have to figure out what kind of team you have.

JOE
And what kind of team do *they* have?

BOBBY
They've won the district title the last seven years in a row, and, four of those years, they've won the state.

JOE (cont'd)
 All right, yeah. Sure. And hey,
 maybe we sneak out of there with a
 win.

Bobby immediately snaps this up.

BOBBY
 Just hearing that, there, in your
 voice. You are not ready. They
 will *dismantle* our kids. There
 will be *weeping* --

GUS
 I'm going to the bathroom.

Cathy shoots a disappointed look at Bobby.

BOBBY
 Hey, don't kill the messenger,
 right?

INT. MARINO HOUSE KITCHEN - NIGHT

Joe shuffles, bleary-eyed, through the darkened house in the
 middle of the night to the refrigerator.

As he turns, he sees Gus sitting at the kitchen table, and he
 is startled.

JOE
 Oh my God!

GUS
 Sorry.

JOE
 Do you often sit alone in the dark?

GUS
 I didn't want to wake anyone.
 Can't sleep either?

Joe pours himself a glass of milk.

JOE
 I get this heartburn now in the
 middle of the night. Don't get
 older.

GUS
 It's too quiet for me here.

Joe nods.

JOE
It's definitely different.

Joe sits at the table with him.

GUS
Can I ask you something?

JOE
Sure.

GUS
Why'd you agree to coach the team?

JOE
They asked me.

GUS
You never coached my teams before.

JOE
Did you want me to?

Gus looks away.

GUS
I don't know.

JOE
Do you not want me to coach the team?

GUS
Are you doing it so I'll have a spot?

JOE
What do you mean?

GUS
Would I be on this team if you weren't the coach?

JOE
I'm coaching because I want us to do something. Together. I want to spend this time with you.

GUS
That's not answering my question.

JOE
 What about my question? Do you
 want me to coach?

A beat.

GUS
 Why don't you just say it?

JOE
 Say what?

GUS
 I don't know. It just always feels
 like there's something there, but
 you're not saying it.

Joe gets up from the table.

JOE
 I'm going back to bed. Get some
 sleep. You're pitching tomorrow.

Joe exits.

GUS
 (calling to him)
 By the way, he *does* fart in his
 sleep.

The door closes down the hall.

GUS (cont'd)
 It's terrible!

EXT. LOCK HAVEN FIELD - DAY

The team, all neatly aligned down the third-base line, stands in their new uniforms, caps clasped over their hearts, as a recording of the STAR-SPANGLED BANNER plays. They nervously eye their opponents.

Along the first-base side, the LOCK HAVEN ALL-STARS stand at attention for the anthem. They are bigger, tougher-looking. At least a few of these kids are shaving already.

The song ends, and Joe starts clapping.

JOE
 All right, let's get out there and
 put a zero up on the board. Set
 'em down: one, two, three.

GUS
Dad, we're the away team. We hit first.

JOE
Right! Sorry! Well, then let's take the field with a lead. Put some runs up early!

GUS
Good recovery.

The team ambles to the dugout.

The Lock Haven team takes the field to cheers from the home crowd.

A MENACING-LOOKING PITCHER begins to warm up for Lock Haven. His first pitch POPS the catcher's mitt in a way that makes Williamsport all take notice.

Second pitch: POP!

GUS (cont'd)
What do you think he's throwing?

JAVIER
Mid-sixties, at least. Maybe seventy.

The other kids start to watch, increasingly discouraged.

JOE
All right, no sweat.

GUS
You know, from the shortened distance of a little league mound, seventy miles an hour is like over a hundred from a major league pitcher.

The faces of the Williamsport kids: there will be no Christmas this year.

JOE
I don't know about that.

JAKE
No, I saw that, too. ESPN did a whole Sports Science segment on it.

More warmup pitches: POP! POP! POP!

Joe is thinking on his feet to rally the troops.

JOE

You know what, though? This kid has great command of the strike zone. You can really dig in and find the pitch. He's grooving them right down the middle.

On cue, the pitcher uncorks one, the catcher springs to his feet to no avail: it catches the UMPIRE standing by in the shin.

UMPIRE

OW!!!

The kid doesn't even say sorry.

Joe turns to an ANOTHER DAD standing by the dugout.

JOE

Well, I tried, right?

MONTAGE OF SHOTS.

The first three Williamsport batters step into the box against this monster.

Swinging strikes. Called strikes.

EXT. BLEACHERS - DAY

Aunt Cathy and Bobby sit with April between them. April buries her head in her mother's shoulder.

EXT. DUGOUT - CONTINUOUS

A dejected Williamsport team takes their mitts and heads out to the field for the bottom of the first inning.

Gus jogs out to the mound.

EXT. PITCHER'S MOUND - CONTINUOUS

Tommy is waiting for Gus at the mound, his catcher's mask in hand.

TOMMY

You been to the new multiplex by the medical center?

Gus is confused.

GUS

No.

TOMMY

I didn't think so. They have those brand new reclining seats, and the nachos are really good. You want to check it out with me tomorrow after practice?

GUS

Uh. Sure.

TOMMY

Cool.

He puts on his mask and turns toward home plate.

GUS

Wait --

Tommy turns back.

GUS (cont'd)

That's what you wanted to say.

TOMMY

Yeah. I basically wanted to think about something else for a minute. I get nervous easily.

Gus smiles. Tommy returns to the backstop.

EXT. DUGOUT - DAY

Bobby approaches the chain link fence separating the fans from the team and speaks to Joe through it.

BOBBY

How's he feeling?

JOE

Good. I mean, no pressure, right? No one's expecting anything from us.

BOBBY

Who you got warming up if he tanks?

JOE

What?

BOBBY

Who's going to take the mound if
Gus chokes?

JOE

Shouldn't we give him a chance
first before we start planning
contingencies?

Bobby can barely resist patting him on the head.

BOBBY

Right, okay. You have your style.
We'll try it your way for right
now.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

Gus delivers first pitch to Lock Haven LEADOFF HITTER: low
and outside, ball one.

Second pitch comes in, and the batter singles cleanly to
centerfield.

The Lock Haven crowd cheers. The ball comes back into the
infield, and Gus snatches the toss from Javier at shortstop.

He stands behind the mound on the infield grass, takes a deep
breath, then steps onto the rubber.

The SECOND HITTER steps in. First pitch --

A soft grounder back to Gus. He picks it cleanly, wheels,
throws to Javier at second base, on to first, double play!

The Williamsport fans cheer loudly.

Gus gets the return toss from first. Another deep breath.
Maybe this won't be so bad.

Back onto the rubber. The THIRD HITTER digs in. First
pitch.

CRACK.

A long, deep drive, way over the head of the left fielder.
Going, going, gone.

The umpire hands Tommy a new ball, which he walks out to the
mound as the batter trots around the bases.

GUS
(as he takes the ball)
So tell me more about these nachos.

TOMMY
They have a little toppings bar:
pickled jalapeños, onions...it's
nice.

GUS
Sounds good.

EXT. SCOREBOARD - LATER

The board shows Lock Haven up, 4-0, hitting in the bottom of the fifth inning with one out.

EXT. FIELD - CONTINUOUS

Runners stand on first and second base, while Gus digs in to deal with the batter.

First pitch: Crack!

A fly ball drifts foul down the right field line.

Second pitch: low and outside. Ball one.

Third pitch: Crack!

A stinging line drive through the infield. Gus cringes.

Javier dives at shortstop and spears the ball out of the air.

The runner, straying too far from the bag, races him back, but Javier touches the base before he can reach.

Just like that, Gus is out of trouble.

The Williamsport crowd goes crazy.

Gus stands in disbelief. Javier smiles as he jogs up to him. They slap mitts and trot to the bench together.

EXT. DUGOUT - CONTINUOUS

Joe tries rallying the troops for a comeback.

JOE

All right, this is it! One last shot. Let's put some runs up on the board.

Tommy starts taking off his catcher's equipment and grabs a bat. Joe stands beside him, encouraging.

JOE (cont'd)

Look, Tommy, we need baserunners, right? One at a time.

Tommy nods along.

JOE (cont'd)

Anything you can do, okay?

Tommy looks out to the field.

EXT. MOUND - CONTINUOUS

The same pitcher is still throwing smoke out there.

TOMMY (O.S.)

I haven't been able to catch up to this guy all night.

JOE (O.S.)

Hey, Tommy, look at me.

EXT. DUGOUT - CONTINUOUS

Joe is getting serious here.

JOE

You get on base...however you can.

Tommy nods.

JOE (cont'd)

Now's the time to be creative, you get what I mean?

A lightbulb.

TOMMY

I got it.

Joe is surprised.

JOE

Yeah?

Tommy winks.

TOMMY

Well, it's worth a shot, I guess.

Joe claps him on the back and moves to the dugout fence next to Gus as Tommy steps to the plate.

GUS

What's he going to do?

JOE

I have no idea.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

Tommy taps the plate and digs in. The Lock Haven pitcher wastes no time in dealing the first pitch.

Suddenly, Tommy squares around to bunt and drops one down the third base line. The third baseman, pitcher, and catcher are all caught by surprise, and Tommy reaches first safely.

The first signs of life from the Williamsport bench.

EXT. BLEACHERS - CONTINUOUS

Bobby looks on in disbelief.

BOBBY

What the hell was that?

EXT. DUGOUT - CONTINUOUS

Joe calls to the on-deck circle.

JOE

Javier!

Javier comes back to the fence.

JOE

Square to bunt, right away.

Javier looks confused.

JOE

Show them it's coming. Let them think about it.

He nods, jogs to the plate.

EXT. FIELD - CONTINUOUS

Tommy stares bug-eyed from the first base bag, still in disbelief that he reached base.

As soon as the pitcher toes the rubber, Javier shows bunt.

First pitch: over his head, to the backstop. Tommy takes off for second base on the wild pitch.

The catcher scrambles for the ball and fires down to second base.

The throw is in the dirt, the second baseman can't pick it cleanly.

UMPIRE

Safe!

Javier looks back to the dugout.

EXT. DUGOUT - CONTINUOUS

Joe is furiously nodding his head.

JOE

Again! Again!

EXT. FIELD - CONTINUOUS

Javier steps back into the box and shows bunt. The second pitch comes.

PLINK!

Javier drops a bunt right in front of the plate.

Tommy takes off for third.

The catcher lunges forward, grabs the ball and fires to third.

The throw comes in wide to the third baseman, down the left-field line in foul territory. Tommy rounds third and heads for home.

The left fielder reaches the ball, fires it in to the catcher.

Too late. Tommy slides into home, pops up.

Javier, now rounding first, takes off for second base.

The catcher whips a throw down to second, not in time.

UMPIRE

Safe!

Williamsport comes alive.

The LOCK HAVEN COACH springs out of the dugout

LOCK HAVEN COACH

Time!

The umpire spreads his hands above his head.

The coach walks slowly out to the mound and talks to his pitcher.

EXT. DUGOUT - CONTINUOUS

The Williamsport kids are going crazy, slapping Tommy on his helmeted head as he comes back into the dugout.

Joe gets their attention.

JOE

Hey, hey! That's one, right?
Let's keep the line moving. Make
him work. We can do this, right?
Let's go.

Gus puts on his helmet and steps up to the plate.

EXT. FIELD - CONTINUOUS

Gus digs in, mind racing.

The Lock Haven pitcher looks off to his own dugout.

His coach looks back and nods.

The first pitch is right at Gus's hip. He tries to pivot out of the way, but can't move in time.

EXT. DUGOUT - CONTINUOUS

The entire Williamsport team leaps to their feet and starts yelling.

EXT. BLEACHERS - CONTINUOUS

Williamsport fans start to boo. Bobby hops up instantly.

BOBBY

What the hell? Get this kid out of here!

EXT. FIELD - CONTINUOUS

Joe runs out to Gus from the dugout.

JOE

You okay?

Gus nods his head furiously.

JOE (cont'd)

Really?

Keeps nodding.

GUS

(mouthing)

No.

Joe puts an arm around him, starts walking him down the first base line.

About half way, Gus breaks off on his own, walks it off.

The Williamsport fans clap for him.

JOE

Hey, look, you're a hero.

Gus chuckles.

GUS

Funny. I keep us in the game the whole way, but I'm a hero for getting plugged.

JOE

You can't always choose you're greatest moments, I guess.

Joe jogs back to the dugout.

Crossing him, coming to the plate, is Jake.

And he has that look in his eye. That look just before he grabbed the bat and pummeled the cement with it. That look that says, "Get away."

Behind him, the LOCK HAVEN CATCHER snorts.

CATCHER
That oughta stop your little
bunting nonsense.

Jake stares straight out to the mound.

JAKE
Oh, don't worry. I'm not bunting.

The pitcher stands atop the rubber. He sets, delivers.

Jake doesn't blink as the ball passes him.

UMPIRE
Strike one!

Jake remains in the batter's box, staring straight ahead at the pitcher.

Back on the rubber, the pitcher stares in, sets, delivers.

Jake doesn't move a muscle.

UMPIRE (cont'd)
Strike two!

Javier claps and shouts to Jake from second.

Gus winces and flexes his leg at first as he shouts encouragement.

Here comes the pitch.

Jake uncoils and connects: BOOM!

The ball flies out to deep center. All eyes watch it. Javier inches toward third as he follows the flight of the ball. Gus wanders toward second, his eyes locked on the ball.

Jake follows it on his way to first.

The centerfielder turns and runs to the fence.

The ball, fielder, and fence all converge. He leaps.

His glove a full foot over the wall, he snatches it out of the air.

Jake winces.

The fielder turns and fires the ball back into the infield.

Javier pivots and races back for second base. The throw beats him by a step.

Gus spins to get back to first, but he falls in the baseline.

The relay throw to first reaches the fielder as Gus looks up from the ground.

The most bizarre triple play you could imagine.

EXT. DUGOUT - CONTINUOUS

Joe clasps his hands to his head. Around him, the team is dejected.

EXT. BLEACHERS - CONTINUOUS

The Williamsport parents and fans collapse.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

The teams line up to shake hands. These are some of the most insincere "Good game" exchanges possible: the bad blood is palpable.

EXT. DUGOUT - CONTINUOUS

Joe stands alone, waiting for the team to come back to the dugout. Bobby approaches on the other side of the fence.

BOBBY

What are you gonna say to them?

Joe shrugs his shoulders.

BOBBY (cont'd)

Just, be careful. Remember, you gotta see them all at practice tomorrow.

Bobby walks away.

The team assembles back in the dugout. They all look to Joe to speak.

For a few moments, all is silent.

JOE

I want you all to realize, no one was giving us a chance in this game. And we just came within inches of tying it up. If you didn't think winning was possible before, you should be thinking it now.

Some of the faces are perking up. Joe starts to feel inspired.

JOE (cont'd)

Because it's not about what happened today. It's about our present. Our future as a team. It's about our possibilities. About *seizing* those possibilities.

Gus rolls his eyes. Joe notices.

JOE (cont'd)

You know what, we've got a long road ahead. I'll see you guys tomorrow. But you should be proud of the game we played today.

The team starts to disperse. Jake looks sullen as he packs up his bag. Gus approaches him

GUS

Hey man, sorry. I really thought you had it.

Jake does not seem to acknowledge him. Gus keeps moving.

A beat.

JAKE

You pitched a good game.

Gus looks back.

GUS

Thanks.

EXT. PRACTICE FIELD - DAY

The boys are loosening up at practice. Bobby is hitting ground balls to infielders.

Joe is in the outfield grass, clipboard in hand. Gus is at his elbow, looking at the notes he is making.

JOE

So what do you do with the six spot? Michael? Then Carl as seven?

Gus nods along.

JOE (cont'd)

And who fills in at short when Javier pitches?

Tommy, in full catcher's equipment, warms up Javier on the sidelines.

TOMMY

That's it. Fire it in here.

Javier winds, kicks, delivers. The mitt pops nicely.

TOMMY (cont'd)

All right! Yeah! Give me the deuce this time.

Javier closes his eyes. Here goes nothing.

The pitch bounces well short of Tommy.

TOMMY (cont'd)

All right! No sweat, no sweat. You're just yanking it early. Just relax, let it rip. Let's do it again.

The next one is over his head.

MONTAGE OF CURVEBALLS.

In the dirt.

Wide right.

Another bouncer.

Straight over Tommy's head.

Finally Tommy jogs out to him.

TOMMY (cont'd)

All right. Let's figure this out. You can bring the heat, but we need a second pitch. Something to keep them honest. Any ideas?

Javier nods reluctantly.

JAVIER
Um. I got something.

TOMMY
Okay.

A beat.

TOMMY (cont'd)
You want to tell me what it is.

JAVIER
Um, I like...can't really talk
about it. I just -- Can I throw
it?

Tommy's face is pure amusement.

TOMMY
Color me curious.

He snaps back down the mask.

TOMMY (cont'd)
By all means. On with the show.

Tommy returns to his crouch. Javier winds, kicks, delivers.

It looks like another fastball, but the ball seems to slip, almost accidentally from his hand and travels a high, slow arc, twenty feet above the ground, until it drops gently into Tommy's waiting mitt, dead centered in the strike zone.

Tommy springs to his feet and rips the mask from his face. It's like he's seen the face of God while looking in the mirror.

TOMMY (cont'd)
Do that again!

Javier winds, kicks, delivers. Another perfect lob for a strike.

Third time. His arm hurls forward with all his might, but still this gentle rainbow trajectory.

EXT. OUTFIELD GRASS - CONTINUOUS

Gus and Joe are still at the clipboard. Tommy, mask in hand, runs over.

TOMMY
C'mere. You gotta see this.

EXT. PITCHER'S MOUND - CONTINUOUS

Javier is on the mound. Tommy has assembled the whole team, along with Bobby, for this display.

Joe and Gus stand by the first base bag.

JOE

All right, what am I looking at?

Tommy gets behind the plate.

TOMMY

All right, Javy. Give em a few fastballs.

Javier delivers a fastball down the middle.

He takes the return toss from Tommy and delivers another fastball to the same spot.

JOE

Okay, good stuff, Javier. But, uh...what's up?

Tommy stands up.

TOMMY

All right. Now hit em with it.

Javier winds, kicks, and delivers the eephus pitch.

It drops into Tommy's waiting mitt for a strike.

Half the team starts to laugh. The other stares wide-eyed and silent.

Jake steps forward and grabs a bat.

JAKE

All right. Let me get at this trash.

Cheers, hoots, hollers, clapping from the team.

Jake digs in.

First pitch from Javier, out of the strike zone, high.

Second pitch, down the middle, Jake swings, foul tip to the backstop behind him.

Third pitch, here it comes. Jake tries to follow the high lob and swings harder than he ever has before.

Too anxious. Way out in front, misses completely, and the ball drops into Tommy's mitt.

The team goes ballistic.

JAKE (cont'd)
 (turning red)
 Go ahead! Throw that garbage
 again.

Javier silently winds up, kicks, and delivers.

Fastball down the middle of the plate. Freezes Jake. Strike three.

JAKE (cont'd)
 That's not fair!

These kids are loving it. The screaming, the name calling, the David and Goliath of it all.

EXT. SIDELINES - CONTINUOUS

Bobby leans toward Joe, whispering.

BOBBY
 Can you really do that?

JOE
 I think you just saw that he can.

Gus smiles.

GUS
 I think we got ourselves a second
 pitcher.

Joe nods.

JOE
 (to the team)
 All right! Everyone circle up!

The children gather around the first base bag in front of Joe.

JOE (cont'd)
 First game is the day after
 tomorrow. The good news is, we're
 home. We're not having practice
 tomorrow.

The team starts to disperse.

JOE (cont'd)

But! We are having a team meeting.
Address is on the week's schedule.
Grab one as you go.

Gus takes the papers from the clipboard, starts passing them around. After a moment, he pauses, goes back to his father.

GUS

Dad, the address for the meeting is wrong.

JOE

No, it's not.

GUS

But that's not Aunt Cathy's address.

JOE

I know.

Gus looks confused.

JOE (cont'd)

The meeting isn't at Aunt Cathy's.

He winks at Gus and walks away.

GUS

(calling to him)
Is this like a clever thing? Are you doing clever now?

EXT. MARINO HOUSE - DAY

Cars pull up to the curb by the house, and boys start to spill out of the cars. Parents pull away.

Joe emerges from the house. The boys start to walk toward him.

Joe stops them.

JOE

No, fellas. Meeting isn't here.

Joe crosses the lawn to Mr. Howell's property.

JOE (cont'd)

Meeting's here!

The boys look at one another, confused.

More kids start to gather. Gus and Jake come out of the house and cross over to Mr. Howell's lawn.

JOE (cont'd)
We got everybody? Good, let's start.

The boys are looking at him. He'd better start making sense. Soon.

JOE (cont'd)
This town has done something that very few other towns have done. It has won the Little League World Series. The first one.

Jake smirks.

JAKE
Yeah, who the hell remembers that?

From the shadows of his garage, a gravelly voice calls out.

MR. HOWELL (O.S.)
I do!

Nice effect. Mr. Howell steps into the sunlight.

Joe smiles.

JOE
Boys, the second baseman for the 1947 Williamsport Little League World Series Champions.

One kid starts to clap. The others look at him. He stops immediately.

MR. HOWELL
And I tell you something, the championship game was the most exciting thing any of us ever saw as kids. We played at an old field down by the river. Still there. And twenty-five hundred people came to see us.

Okay, the kids are into it now.

MR. HOWELL (cont'd)
There were teams from around Pennsylvania, but it was our home. And we won it.

Mr. Howell looks at the children assembled before him.

MR. HOWELL (cont'd)

You boys may not know it, but this town used to really be something. All those fine homes down on Fourth Street. The lumber yards. When my grandparents lived here, this town was the best thing for miles. That started to change. The wars, the depression, but we didn't mind. This was our home, and we loved it. And when we won that game, we won it for this town. And when they played the championship each year after that, we thought, we're sharing this town with the rest of the world. Even if it's only for a week or so. We're bringing the whole world into Williamsport.

He winks at them.

MR. HOWELL (cont'd)

But we're the lucky ones, because they have to leave, and we get to stay. It's important to know your home. To find your home in this world.

Gus watches Mr. Howell intently.

MR. HOWELL (cont'd)

When you look down at the uniform you wear tomorrow, and you see the name, I want you to think of the kids that wore that name before you. I want you to think of what baseball has meant to this place.

The boys are now looking at each other.

MR. HOWELL (cont'd)

I want you to beat the snot out of those entitled little jerks from Nisbet.

The boys are confused. This has taken a turn.

MR. HOWELL (cont'd)

With their condescending attitudes, and there --

Joe steps in front of him.

JOE
 Okay, Mr. Howell, thank you. Thank
 you very much.

MR. HOWELL
 Just beat them, boys! Beat them
 with everything you've got.

JOE
 (now almost shouting)
 Thank you!

EXT. FIELD - DAY

The Williamsport team is assembled at the field before the
 game.

Nervousness is palpable everywhere.

Javier warms up with Tommy behind the dugout.

Jake wraps gripping tape around the handle of his bat.

Gus unwraps a piece of gum and jams it into his mouth. He
 repeats the process with three more pieces.

The visiting team warms up as Williamsport players watch.

Joe watches the anxiety around him: he should say something.

JOE
 All right, bring it in.

EXT. DUGOUT - CONTINUOUS

Joe addresses the team.

JOE
 Today, let's try an experiment.
 Let's forget about how close we
 came with Lock Haven, and let's
 realize that right now, everyone's
 record is zero and zero. There's
 no top dog. There's no underdog.
 Today, we're just playing a game,
 okay? And games are fun. Let's
 have some fun.

MONTAGE OF SHOTS

Williamsport batters swing and connect with pitches.

Javier delivers a pitch.

Tommy tracks a foul ball, catcher's mask in hand, and reaches over a fence railing for an impressive one-handed catch.

EXT. SCOREBOARD - DAY

The final score shows Williamsport winning 7-2.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

The two teams line up opposite each other and shake hands.

Joe stands smiling proudly at the boys from the foul line.

INT. BOBBY'S BILLTOWN PIZZERIA - DAY

The team explodes into the pizzeria to celebrate the victory.

Bobby is waiting in front of them with his arms in the air.

BOBBY

Boys! Boys! I have something for
you. April, if you would please?

He turns. No one is there. He looks back at the boys who are waiting patiently.

BOBBY (cont'd)

April? APRIL!

April sticks her face out of the back kitchen door.

BOBBY (cont'd)

What are you doing? Bring it out,
bring it out!

Through the kitchen door, April drags a huge poster board. Across the top is written THE ROAD TO WILLIAMSPORT.

JAVIER

I don't get it. We're in
Williamsport. We live here.

Bobby explains good-naturedly.

BOBBY

Yeah, but I mean Williamsport, like
the tournament. The World Series.

JAKE

Then why didn't you say "The Road
to the World Series."

TOMMY

Yeah, or like "The Path to Glory!"

The kids like that.

GUS

Oh, that's good.

BOBBY

(interrupting)

It's already printed! Okay? It's
the Path to Williamsport.

Joe feels bad.

JOE

It's a great sign, Bobby.

BOBBY

Don't patronize me.

(trying to shake it off)

Anyway, today was the first step.

He walks over to the board and finds the game labeled
"WILLIAMSPORT VS. NISBET." He writes a large "W" over the
game.

BOBBY (cont'd)

It's a long road, but it begins
today!

The kids cheer and clap.

BOBBY (cont'd)

Great game, boys! Now let's eat.

MONTAGE OF SEVERAL GAMES

Javier cleanly fields a ball at shortstop and fires to first
for the out.

Jake crushes a hard line drive over the pitcher's head and
dashes to first.

Split screen: Javier's right-handed pitching delivery
mirrored by Gus's left-handed delivery.

Bobby writes more "W"s on his big board.

Kids in the dugout cheer for the team.

INT./EXT. SCHOOL BUS - DAY

Bobby drives a large yellow school bus. The boys sit in the back, joking around together while Joe and several moms and dads sit toward the front.

Joe leans forward to speak to Bobby.

JOE

I think...I mean, I think he's doing okay, right?

Bobby looks in the rearview mirror to see Gus laughing with several of his teammates.

BOBBY

(smiling)

You kidding me? He's having the time of his life. Do you remember being his age? What would you have thought of spending the summer playing ball with your friends?

Joe nods, smiles to himself, sits back in his seat and closes his eyes for a moment.

Two fathers from the seat behind him break his moment of relaxation.

FATHER #1

Joe?

He opens his eyes and wheels around to them.

FATHER #1 (cont'd)

First of all, great game today.

JOE

Thanks. The boys are really starting to build some momentum.

FATHER #2

Yeah. Five in a row. Impressive.

FATHER #1

So, listen, has Bobby spoken to you?

JOE

About what?

Joe looks to Bobby. Bobby appears uncomfortable.

FATHER #2
We appreciate what you've done.

FATHER #1
And it's been great, but...

Joe furrows his brow.

JOE
But what?

FATHER #1
Well, it seems like the boys are
showing some real potential.

Joe nods along.

FATHER #2
And a few of us feel...

They are trying to let the silence say something for them.

JOE
What? What is it that you feel?

FATHER #1
Maybe it would be in the best
interest of the boys to get someone
in to take it from here.

FATHER #2
Someone with a little more youth
coaching experience. Someone who
knows the teams in the area more.

JOE
Are you kidding?

FATHER #1
Look, you've done a great job.

JOE
You guys came to *me*. You wanted *me*
to take this on, because you didn't
want it.

FATHER #2
And we appreciate that.

JOE
And now you want to take it back,
just when it's working.

FATHER #1

Look, you have to have other things
you'd want to --

JOE

No! No! That's just it! I have
no other things. Right now, it is
me and my *son*. That is it. I
moved here with nothing. This is
everything right now, and you
cannot take it.

FATHER #1

We just want to give the kids the
best shot is all.

FATHER #2

We think they could really go far
with the right coach.

Joe cannot believe this.

JOE

Then maybe you should have found
that guy before your little mob
cornered me.

The two fathers look at each other. This guy just isn't
being reasonable.

JOE (cont'd)

No. This is nonsense. No way.

FATHER #1

Look, Joe, we've...

JOE

What?

FATHER #2

We've already hired someone. He'll
be at practice in the morning.

Joe turns away in disbelief. He is thinking. He spins back
to them.

JOE

But I'm the coach. I'm on record
as the coach. My name is...is on
the roster with the league.

The two men barely contain laughter.

FATHER #2

Joe, this is little league. I think that paper is written in pencil.

EXT. PARKING LOT - DAY

Everyone disembarks from the bus. Kids and adults scatter to their own cars in the parking lot.

Bobby catches up to Joe.

BOBBY

Hey, Joe. Joe!

Joe wheels around.

JOE

You're in on this.

BOBBY

Look, they came to me about it. They already had the guy.

JOE

And what? You don't stick up for me?

BOBBY

We just want to give the boys the best chance.

JOE

You didn't want this, so you dump it on me. Now it looks good, you want it back?

BOBBY

It's not like that. Look, Joe, it's not about you, all right?

Joe looks skeptical.

BOBBY (cont'd)

The kids win, people get excited. They find some guy who promises results, they buy into the nonsense. I'm as guilty of that as anyone. This is a blessing for you. You need the stress of coaching baseball?

Joe chuckles.

BOBBY (cont'd)
Look, you guys have practice
tomorrow?

Joe nods.

BOBBY (cont'd)
Meet with this guy tomorrow. See
what he's about. Trust me. This
is going to be a huge relief for
you.

INT. MARINO HOUSE - NIGHT

Joe sits alone at the kitchen table. The house is dark and
quiet.

Cathy, looking half-asleep and wearing pajamas, approaches.

CATHY
Can't sleep?

JOE
No. Sorry, did I wake you?

Cathy shakes her head.

CATHY
You want something to eat?

JOE
No, I'm fine, thanks.

She watches him for a moment.

CATHY
Bobby told me.

Joe nods.

CATHY (cont'd)
I'm sorry.

JOE
You know, I, I guess I sort of get
it. I mean, I'm an academic. Not
a coach. And the boys deserve the
best shot at winning they can get,
right?

CATHY
I guess that's their thinking.

Joe chuckles.

JOE

I guess, the strange thing, the thing I didn't realize was, I've really started to get caught up in this now. Watching these kids play. Watching them win. Watching them have all this fun.

Cathy smiles as he lights up about it.

JOE (cont'd)

I don't want it to stop.

CATHY

Maybe it doesn't have to.

Joe nods. A beat.

JOE

I haven't really thanked you for taking us in.

CATHY

Of course. I'm so glad you guys are here.

JOE

He's a good kid.

CATHY

(nodding)
He is.

JOE

Better probably than I deserve.

CATHY

I think all parents feel that way.

They sit quietly a moment.

CATHY (cont'd)

You should get to bed, Coach!
You've got practice in the morning.

She heads back to her bedroom. Joe sits in the chair.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

The boys loosen up as practice begins. Behind the backstop, COACH TAYLOR, 30s, a drill sergeant in baseball pants takes everything in with a knowing smile.

Gus and Tommy are working through warmup tosses in the outfield grass.

GUS

Who's this new guy?

TOMMY

Some instructional league guy. Supposedly does all these youth baseball clinics in the area, the whole deal.

GUS

So what's he doing with us?

TOMMY

He's our new coach, I guess.

Gus hears this but isn't sure he understands.

Suddenly a WHISTLE BLOWS and players start to gather by third base.

COACH TAYLOR

Good morning, boys! I'm glad to be joining you. I'm Coach Taylor, and I'm here because you are one of only two undefeated teams remaining in the district. And tomorrow, in the district semifinals, you're playing the other one: Lock Haven.

He pauses for effect.

COACH TAYLOR (cont'd)

Now, I understand you've played them, and you came up short.

Joe steps forward.

JOE

I wouldn't say we --

Coach Taylor silences him with a quickly raised hand.

COACH TAYLOR

But that was then.

Another pause for effect. Joe eyes him. There is just something so punchable about this guy's face.

COACH TAYLOR (cont'd)

I am here as the difference maker.
I'm here to push you over the top.
So today, I want to see what we
have, see what we'll do. And by
the time we leave here, we *will* be
prepared to win this game tomorrow.

A beat.

COACH TAYLOR (cont'd)

Does that sound good to everybody?

A few scattered responses.

COACH TAYLOR (cont'd)

I can't hear you boys!

Somehow this always seems to work with kids.

WHOLE TEAM

Yes.

Tommy seems confused.

TOMMY

Yes, sir.

COACH TAYLOR

The sir is completely unnecessary,
but I appreciate the sentiment.
Now let's go let's go let's go.

The boys scatter and start drill work.

Joe approaches him.

JOE

Hey, Coach, I'm Joe O'Malley. Nice
to meet you.

COACH TAYLOR

Seems like you've got a good group
here, Mr. O'Malley.

JOE

Yeah, they've got spirit.

COACH TAYLOR

Looks like a fair amount of talent,
too.

(MORE)

COACH TAYLOR (cont'd)
I have some work to do, but I think there is some impact to be made here.

JOE
Well, I look forward to working with you.

COACH TAYLOR
Look, it's just easier if I tell you right now: you can't be in the dugout during the games with me.

Joe has no response.

COACH TAYLOR (cont'd)
You want to hang around during practices, hit them some grounders, that's great. I appreciate the extra set of hands. But games are a different story. I can't have the distraction.

JOE
I'm not trying to be a distraction. I'm their coach.

COACH TAYLOR
It's like this, Joe. A team is a family. Right?

Taylor steps toward him.

COACH TAYLOR (cont'd)
And the coach is Dad. Now, if Dad comes in and lays down the law, we can't have the kids running to Mommy and looking for sympathy, can we?

Joe smiles.

JOE
I like how you made me the Mommy so quickly.

Taylor smiles back.

COACH TAYLOR
It's just an analogy, Joe.

JOE
Well, then, let me save you the trouble.

Joe walks away. He brushes past Gus as he is leaving the field.

GUS
Dad, where are you going?

JOE
I'll pick you and Jake up later.

Gus looks confused.

EXT. LOCK HAVEN FIELD - DAY

The Williamsport team stands by their dugout, watching as the Lock Haven infielders take practice and the pitcher warms up.

EXT. BLEACHERS - DAY

Joe and Bobby sit a few rows up, nervously awaiting the first pitch.

BOBBY
Well, it's good to have some company up here.

JOE
Yeah, maybe it won't be as nerve-racking from the stands, at least.

Bobby pops two antacids.

BOBBY
(full mouth)
Oh, trust me, it's a nightmare.

He offers the roll to Joe. Joe takes two.

EXT. FIELD - CONTINUOUS

Javier digs into the batter's box to start the game.

The pitcher winds, kicks, delivers: ball one, high and outside.

Javier steps out of the batter's box and looks down to Coach Taylor.

Taylor flashes a series of complicated looking signs: tugging his cap, touching his nose, etc.

Javier squints back in confusion.

EXT. BLEACHERS - CONTINUOUS

The group of fathers from before sit just within earshot of Bobby and Joe.

FATHER #1

See, this is what you get with an experienced coach. A thinking man's game. Teach the kids the finer points.

EXT. FIELD - CONTINUOUS

Javier steps back in. Second pitch: he connects for a single to left-centerfield.

The crowd cheers as he makes the turn at first, follows the throw into the infield, and retreats to the bag.

Tommy digs in. He takes the first pitch down the middle for a strike as Javier takes off for second base.

The Lock Haven catcher whips a throw down to second, but Javier slides in safely ahead of the tag.

Second pitch: Tommy squares to bunt and drops one down the third baseline. Javier advances to third base while the third baseman fields the ball and throws Tommy out at first base.

Tommy jogs back to the dugout, high-fiving his teammates upon his return.

Jake steps up to bat. He swings at the first pitch and sends a high fly ball to centerfield. Javier waits to tag up.

The centerfielder makes the catch: Javier takes off for home. The throw from center is cut off by the second baseman. Javier slides safely into home without an attempt at the plate. Williamsport leads 1-0.

EXT. BLEACHERS - CONTINUOUS

The group of fathers turns momentarily to glance at Joe and Bobby as they clap.

JOE

(to Bobby)

Kinda hard to remember we're on the same side, isn't it?

EXT. SCOREBOARD - LATER

Williamsport holds on to a 5-4 lead with Lock Haven batting in the bottom of the fifth inning.

EXT. FIELD - CONTINUOUS

Gus is sweating bullets on the mound.

Runners stand on first and second.

Javier holds up his index finger and pinky in the familiar bull horns sign.

JAVIER

All right boys, two outs! We got two. Play it to the easiest base. Let's get em, Gus. Here we go.

Gus delivers the pitch and misses his target well wide. Tommy spears it with his glove.

UMPIRE

Ball four! Take your base.

EXT. BLEACHERS - CONTINUOUS

Bobby and Joe clap in support.

JOE

(yelling)

That's all right, buddy. Shake it off. Shake it off. Get this next guy here. Bear down.

(to Bobby)

God, he's wiped out there.

EXT. DUGOUT - CONTINUOUS

Coach Taylor emerges from the dugout.

COACH TAYLOR

Time, ump!

The umpire calls time.

Taylor walks slowly out to the mound. Tommy comes out to meet Gus and the coach there.

COACH TAYLOR (cont'd)
(to Gus)
All right, listen. Here's where
some coaches would pull you.

Gus nods along. He looks ready to hand him the ball.

COACH TAYLOR (cont'd)
But I'm not going to do that.

Gus and Tommy look at each other confused.

COACH TAYLOR (cont'd)
Listen, whatever happens in this
game, we're right back here again
in a few days. You win, you need
to beat these guys again to
eliminate them. You lose it here,
same thing. Either way, someone's
going to win twice. Someone's
going to lose twice.

This news is sinking in with Gus.

COACH TAYLOR (cont'd)
So, what I'm telling you here, son,
is...this right here is your game.
Win or lose.

EXT. BLEACHERS - CONTINUOUS

Coach Taylor starts to walk away.

BOBBY
Wait. So he's leaving him in?

The row of fathers looks slightly perturbed. This wasn't
exactly what they thought either.

JOE
Maybe he's just got to get Javier
warmed up?

Javier stands flat-footed at shortstop, not moving.

Bobby shrugs at Joe.

EXT. FIELD - CONTINUOUS

Gus labors on the mound. First pitch: ball one.

This looks like it is getting harder and harder.

Second pitch: in the dirt, Tommy blocks. Ball two.

Third pitch: high, ball three.

Fourth pitch: not even close.

The batter trots down to first, all other runners advance, with the tying run crossing the plate.

EXT. SCOREBOARD - CONTINUOUS

The board now reflects a 5-5 tie score.

EXT. BLEACHERS - CONTINUOUS

The tension with the fathers is palpable. Everyone is waiting for someone else to make a move.

EXT. FIELD - CONTINUOUS

Gus makes his first pitch to the next batter, which he lines to the gap for a stand up double. Three more runs score.

EXT. SCOREBOARD - CONTINUOUS

Lock Haven leads 8-5.

EXT. BLEACHERS - CONTINUOUS

Bobby cannot sit any longer.

BOBBY

All right, c'mon coach. Let's give em a break, huh?

EXT. DUGOUT - CONTINUOUS

Coach Taylor turns quickly to the bleachers.

COACH TAYLOR

If I needed your help, I'd have you right here with me.

EXT. BLEACHERS - CONTINUOUS

One of Bobby's more admirable qualities is his complete refusal to back down.

BOBBY

Well, it looks like you could have
used me a couple hitters ago.

The parents make audible noises of agreement.

Coach Taylor rushes out to the bleachers angrily.

COACH TAYLOR

You can get the hell out of here
then, my friend.

Bobby springs to his feet.

BOBBY

No, I'm doing just fine here, thank
you.

Fathers all around pop up between the men.

EXT. FIELD - CONTINUOUS

The boys on the field become aware of the situation.

The umpire rushes off the field.

EXT. BLEACHERS - CONTINUOUS

The umpire arrives at the scene.

UMPIRE

Gentlemen. Let's move the game
along, shall we.

Neither man backs away.

UMPIRE (cont'd)

(to Taylor)

Coach, to the bench, please.

(to Bobby)

Sir, you can sit down.

Bobby sits without taking his eyes off Taylor.

Taylor continues to stare at Bobby, then suddenly throws his
arms up.

COACH TAYLOR

(to the fathers in the
bleachers)

Screw it! I don't need this. You
came to me!

(MORE)

COACH TAYLOR (cont'd)
 I'm not putting up with this.
 Figure it out yourselves, boys.

As he leaves the field, Taylor points out to the mound.

COACH TAYLOR (cont'd)
 (to Gus)
 You finish this, you hear me? Win
 or lose, you finish the game.

Taylor storms off dramatically.

EXT. FIELD - CONTINUOUS

Gus and the rest of the Williamsport team look mortified.

UMPIRE
 All right boys, let's play ball,
 shall we?

EXT. BLEACHERS - CONTINUOUS

The fathers all look down in silence.

JOE
 (loudly)
 Definitely the type of guy I want
 my kid around, that's for sure.

INT. MARINO HOUSE KITCHEN - NIGHT

The family eats dinner together: Cathy, April, Bobby, Jake, Gus, and Joe.

Gus looks dejected, pushing food around his plate. Joe watches him carefully.

BOBBY
 Well, that's a tough one to take.

JAKE
 I'll say.

Cathy elbows him.

JAKE (cont'd)
 What?

She gestures to Gus.

JAKE (cont'd)
I lost, too, you know?

BOBBY
You took it like men, though.

GUS
What does that mean?

Bobby thinks a moment.

BOBBY
I don't know. Just felt like something my dad would have said to me. Would your dad have said that, Joe?

JOE
I don't know. My dad usually just said stuff like, "you're blocking the TV!"

Gus laughs a little. Joe puts his hand on the back of his neck.

JOE (cont'd)
Ah, there we go! Signs of life.

April notices something out the window.

APRIL
Mom, there's men on our lawn.

Bobby puts down his fork. Joe stands slowly.

JOE
That'll be my lynch mob.

BOBBY
You want me to go?

JOE
No, no. I'm sure they're not...armed or anything. I'll be right back.

EXT. MARINO HOUSE - NIGHT

Joe exits the front door to find five fathers by the walkway.

JOE

Okay, let's get this over with. Which one of you holds me down, and who gets the first shot. And just realize my kid is watching through the window, so don't hold back or anything.

FATHER #1

Look, Joe, we wanted to say we were sorry.

FATHER #2

We really thought we were doing something good. For the boys.

Joe considers for a moment.

JOE

Well, I appreciate the apology.

A beat.

FATHER #1

We would all be grateful if you would...take over again.

Joe thinks a moment.

JOE

Okay, but, this is definitely going to hurt you at my contract negotiation in the off-season.

A few of the fathers laugh. Father #2 doesn't seem to get it.

Joe spins and heads back to the house.

INT. MARINO HOUSE KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Everyone is silent as Joe enters.

He sits and starts to eat again as though nothing has happened.

BOBBY

Well? What'd they say?

Joe cracks a smile.

JOE
They wanted to know if Javier was
ready to go in the rematch.

Gus points at his father.

GUS
(to the rest of the
family)
You see this? This is the face he
makes when he thinks he's being
funny.

EXT. WILLIAMSPORT FIELD - DAY

The team looks nervous as they assemble before the game. Tommy puts on his catcher's equipment, and the fielders are ready to jog out to their positions when Joe enters the dugout.

At first, it is silent as he enters. Then, one by one, the boys start to clap for him. Gus joins in, smiling.

Joe is genuinely touched.

JOE
Thanks, guys. I tried watching
from up there, but the game is much
more interesting down here with
you.

They smile.

JOE (cont'd)
Well, we have our backs to the wall
now. But another way to look at
that, is that we have nothing to
lose. And if you have nothing to
lose, then I certainly have nothing
to lose. So I'm going to give my
long speech.

Gus shifts uncomfortably.

JOE (cont'd)
And you're going to hear it,
because... Well, you don't have
any other choice, I guess.

He clears his throat. Gus looks nervous.

JOE (cont'd)

What some people see as a problem, others see as an opportunity. And when opportunity presents itself, we must *seize* that opportunity. And that's what we're going to do right here. Sometimes, things happen to you in life. Things you don't want. Things you can't understand. But when that happens, it's more important than ever before that you take control of the chances standing before you. That you find your own way. That you work and scrap and push to get to where you want to be. That's winning. Winning isn't the score at the end of the contest. Winning is the decision to play the game. Not to sit along the sidelines and see what happens to you, but to get in there and take matters into your own hands. Seize it, boys. Seize it.

Quiet for a moment. It seems like someone needs to say something.

TOMMY

You heard em, boys! Let's go!

With roars and cheers, the team bursts out of the dugout onto the field. Gus hangs back a minute.

GUS

Not bad.

Joe smiles.

JOE

Was it? I had another version about man's great achievements, and

--

Gus pats him on the back.

GUS

No, I think that was just enough.

Gus trots out to first base with his mitt.

EXT. FIELD - CONTINUOUS

Javier peers into Tommy's signal from the mound.

MONTAGE OF SHOTS

Javier pitches to batters swinging and missing. Some take strikes looking.

The scorekeeper puts up a "0" on the scoreboard.

Williamsport hitters struggle against the flame-throwing pitcher from Lock Haven.

Another "0" on the board.

Williamsport fielders scoop grounders, take throws, make outs.

More "0"s on the board.

EXT. SCOREBOARD - DAY

The 0-0 score continues into the bottom of the sixth inning.

EXT. DUGOUT - CONTINUOUS

Javier sits on the bench, a towel wrapped around his pitching arm. He looks spent.

Joe claps to bring the boys to attention.

JOE

All right, look. We need to win this, and we need to do it here. Gus and Javier are both at their innings limit, and unless we want to roll the dice on who gets to pitch in extra innings, we need to squeeze one across. Now!

The boys nod along.

JOE (cont'd)

Okay, look. Station to station. Nothing crazy. Let's make something happen. Get a baserunner. Move him over. Look for a chance to steal. Be aggressive on the base paths. Good things will happen, right?

The boys nod along.

JOE (cont'd)
All right, let's do it.

EXT. FIELD - CONTINUOUS

Jake digs into the batter's box. He might have heard every word Joe just said, but he wants to end this with one swing.

First pitch: he's taking all the way. Strike one down the middle.

Second pitch: a little low. Ball one.

Third pitch: he swings. CRACK!

A high, towering fly. By God, this might be it.

Jake takes off down the first baseline.

The centerfielder retreats. He tracks the ball. He gets to the fence. He leaps. The ball bounces off the top of the wall and comes back into play.

Jake races around first base to second.

The centerfielder gets back in pursuit of the ball.

Jake touches second, rounds for third.

The centerfielder barehands the ball off the grass and fires to third.

Jake slides.

UMPIRE
Safe!

Williamsport erupts in applause.

EXT. LOCK HAVEN DUGOUT - CONTINUOUS

The Lock Haven coach calls time and walks slowly to the mound.

Without hesitation, he takes the ball from the pitcher, and the crowd applauds him as he jogs off.

The right fielder comes in to pitch.

EXT. WILLIAMSPORT DUGOUT - CONTINUOUS

The new pitcher takes his warmup tosses.

The ball hits the leather of the catcher's mitt like a sledge hammer to a concrete block.

JOE
Where the hell have they been
hiding this kid?

Michael in the on-deck circle gulps.

EXT. FIELD - CONTINUOUS

Michael digs in. The pitcher works quickly.

First pitch: by him in an instant for strike one.

Second pitch: this isn't even fair. Strike two.

Third pitch: Michael is back in the dugout before the ump can call him out on strikes.

JIMMY, the left fielder blinks slowly as he moves from the on-deck circle, like the next convict headed to the electric chair.

Joe pops out of the dugout.

JOE
Jimmy!

Jimmy turns back to him.

JOE (cont'd)
Swing away.

Jimmy looks confused.

JOE (cont'd)
You think you can hit this kid?

Jimmy looks scared and shakes his head "no."

JOE (cont'd)
Then at least look heroic, am I
right?

Jimmy smiles.

He approaches the plate and digs in.

First pitch: Jimmy spins himself around with an epic swing. The ball explodes in the catcher's mitt for strike one.

Second pitch: If possible, an even bigger swing and miss.

Third pitch: This time, Jimmy's eyes are even closed as he's swinging. Strike three.

Jake looks on anxiously from third base. An idea is brewing.

CARL, the third baseman steps to the plate for Williamsport, steps into the batter's box.

First pitch: strike one down the middle. The catcher tosses the ball back to the pitcher. The pitcher turns his back to the plate for a moment, adjusts his cap. Gets back on the rubber.

Second pitch: strike two. Jake waits. The catcher tosses the ball back. The pitcher nonchalantly snatches at it, then turns his back to the plate.

Jake takes off for home.

Suddenly the team on the field, the Lock Haven dugout, and the crowd start screaming. The pitcher panics, wheels toward third. The third baseman is nowhere near the bag.

The pitcher spins toward home.

Jake is racing headlong for the plate.

The pitcher whips the ball in.

The catcher reaches up for the high throw.

Jake dives in head first. He touches the plate with his outstretched hand before the catcher can get the tag down.

UMPIRE

Safe!

Williamsport goes ballistic and rushes the field.

The Lock Haven coach storms out to argue with the umpire.

Jake's teammates mob him at home plate.

EXT. BLEACHERS - CONTINUOUS

Parents spring to their feet and applaud.

EXT. FIELD - CONTINUOUS

Joe joins the team on the field and hugs Jake.

JOE

All right, fellas. What do you say
we do it again, same way tomorrow?

The boys cheer.

INT. BOYS' BEDROOM - NIGHT

Gus lies awake staring at the ceiling. He glimpses over at
Jake's bed.

GUS

You awake?

JAKE

Sort of.

GUS

That was a pretty clutch move.

JAKE

Yeah, you like that?

GUS

How'd you know when to go?

Jake speaks without moving a muscle.

JAKE

I didn't really. I just figured, I
had to do something. Better to be
thrown out at home than be left
standing on third, right?

Gus nods.

GUS

Seizing the opportunity.

JAKE

What?

GUS

Nothing.

A beat.

GUS (cont'd)

Great job today.

JAKE
Thanks. Don't screw it up
tomorrow.

Gus chuckles.

GUS
Thanks.

A beat.

JAKE
I'm serious.

EXT. LOCK HAVEN FIELD - DAY

Gus warms up along the sidelines with Tommy. He takes his last toss then heads to the dugout.

EXT. DUGOUT - CONTINUOUS

Gus enters the dugout with supreme confidence. He holds up his index finger.

GUS
One, guys! Just get me one today.

Javier and Tommy chuckle to themselves.

TOMMY
I love your confidence.

GUS
I'm serious. One's all we're going
to need today. I got this.

MONTAGE OF SHOTS

Gus delivering pitch after pitch.

Batters strike out swinging.

Batters strike out looking.

Williamsport fielders handle routine ground balls and throw runners out at first.

At the plate hitting, Tommy connects for a single.

Javier slaps a double to the opposite field.

EXT. SCOREBOARD - DAY

Williamsport heads to the bottom of the sixth inning, leading 2-0.

Gus works with confidence.

A batter steps into the box. Gus delivers the pitch.

The batter connects and sends a weak pop up behind second base. Javier drifts under it and makes the catch. He puts his index finger up.

JAVIER

All right boys, one down. Let's go.

Gus gets back on the rubber and quickly deals to the next hitter. Strike one.

Next pitch: strike two.

Third pitch: batter swings through a changeup. Strike three.

The Williamsport cheering section goes wild.

Tommy comes out to the mound.

TOMMY

Hey man.

Gus looks confused.

GUS

Hey.

TOMMY

How you feeling?

GUS

Pretty good.

TOMMY

Cool. Cool.

A beat.

GUS

What...What are you doing?

Tommy shushes him.

TOMMY

Just. Just look at me like I'm saying something important.

EXT. LOCK HAVEN DUGOUT - CONTINUOUS

The Lock Haven coach and players look confused by what is happening.

EXT. FIELD - CONTINUOUS

Tommy's eyes dart around, smiling.

TOMMY

Sometimes, before something great is about to happen, I just like to take a picture of it in my head.

Gus smiles.

GUS

Hey, do me a favor?

TOMMY

Sure.

GUS

Get the hell back over there so I can finish this.

Tommy pulls his mask back down.

TOMMY

Cool, cool. Right.

The crowd applauds as play resumes.

First pitch: the batter swings and sends a weak grounder down to third.

Carl scoops it barehanded and fires to first in time. Game over.

Williamsport teammates and parents storm the field.

INT. BOBBY'S BILLTOWN PIZZERIA - NIGHT

Bobby writes a huge red "W" over the bracket "DISTRICT CHAMPIONSHIP."

MONTAGE OF SHOTS

The team rides a school bus on I-80.

Shots of Gus and Javier pitching.

Jake crushes a fastball.

Tommy throws out a runner trying to steal second base.

Bobby's hand writes a "W" over "PENNSYLVANIA CHAMPS."

The team jokes around on the bus.

Joe high-fives Michael returning to the bench after scoring a run.

Bobby's hand writes a "W" over "NORTHEAST REGIONAL CHAMPS."

CUT TO:

ESPN SPORTSCENTER INTRO TITLES AND MUSIC

The SPORTS ANCHOR in slick business suit stares into the camera and delivers his lines.

SPORTS ANCHOR

It is that time of summer where the baseball fans of the world turn their eye to Williamsport, Pennsylvania. But for the first time since that inaugural tournament of 1947, the home team *will be playing* for the title of best team in the U.S., and possibly, the best in the world.

INT. BOBBY'S BILLTOWN PIZZERIA - DAY

The place is packed. The team sits together at a few tables in one corner.

Joe stands back by the counter with Bobby.

JOE

Wow, you weren't kidding. This place is mobbed.

BOBBY

You haven't seen the best part.

Bobby waves for him to follow.

EXT. ALLEY BEHIND THE PIZZERIA - CONTINUOUS

Bobby steps outside to reveal the Bobby's Billtown Pizza Wagon, a monstrous food truck, white with red and gold lettering.

Joe laughs.

JOE
You're kidding me!

BOBBY
This baby will be at all the games,
all day and all night. It'll pay
for itself before the week is out.

JOE
Well, congratulations!

BOBBY
Congrats to you! How're the boys?

Joe shrugs.

JOE
Nervous. Excited. I mean, they're
going to play on TV!

Bobby laughs.

JOE
I need something to...to calm them
down, I guess.

Bobby thinks for a minute.

BOBBY
Get em out here.

JOE
What?

BOBBY
No, seriously. Get the boys
together. I'll get the bus. I
have an idea.

JOE
Bobby --

BOBBY
Trust me.

EXT. STADIUM - NIGHT

Bobby parks the team's bus outside Lamade Stadium.

The all climb out of the bus, and Bobby leads them through a dark tunnel out onto the pitch black field.

BOBBY
(calling out)
All right, hit it!

Suddenly, the stands of flood lights illuminate the whole field. The boys are standing in the middle of the largest baseball stadium in the country outside of Major League Baseball.

JOE
How'd you get us on here at night?

Bobby laughs.

BOBBY
I've lived in this town my whole life, Joe. I know a few people.
(to the boys)
Gentlemen, this is it. Here's where you'll be playing the day after tomorrow. I know it seems big. But when you're out here on the field, look up in the stands. Because everyone you know is going to be there cheering you on. Your friends, your neighbors, your teachers, everybody. This stadium is the best home field advantage you could possibly get. It's better than two runs already being up on the board.

GUS
Though that would be nice.

The team chuckles.

BOBBY
I want you to realize that this is the most exciting thing to happen to us here in years. And people are going to tell this story for a long time to come.

Bobby's speech continues as we

CUT TO:

ESPN TITLECARD: U.S. SEMIFINALS: WILLIAMSPORT, PA VS.
HUNTINGTON BEACH, CA

The boys jog out to take the field to a roaring crowd.

BOBBY (O.S.)
Everyone has come here to this
place, but it's yours. This was
your place first.

Javier takes the mound to start the game.

BOBBY (O.S.) (cont'd)
Everyone else is trying to prove
that they belong here.

The television cameras show parts of the crowd. Mr. Howell
sits in attendance watching the game.

BOBBY (O.S.) (cont'd)
But you *do* belong here. This is
your home. Don't forget that.

The crowd noise begins to swell.

EXT. PRESSBOX - DAY

TWO ESPN COMMENTATORS sit in front of microphones providing
play by play and color commentary on the game.

COMMENTATOR #1
The city of Williamsport, host to
these Little League World Series
for seventy years, is now knocking
on the door to the championship
itself, and, by God, is this town
excited.

COMMENTATOR #2
They certainly are, and with good
reason. This team has done it in a
variety of ways: some lights out
pitching, timely hitting, and a lot
of creativity.

EXT. FIELD - CONTINUOUS

Javier starts to work to the first batter.

COMMENTATOR #1 (O.S.)
 Javier Morales, the Williamsport
 right hander has been so consistent
 for this team.

COMMENTATOR #2 (O.S.)
 Williamsport's other major arm, Gus
 O'Malley, the left-hander, playing
 first base today. You're likely to
 see him on the mound if
 Williamsport advances to the
 American Finals.

Javier throws a fastball down the middle, taken by the hitter
 for strike one.

COMMENTATOR #1
 Javier has an interesting approach.
 He'll throw his fastball a lot.
 Change locations. Work inside and
 out.

Second pitch. Swinging strike. 0-2 count.

COMMENTATOR #2
 And I wonder if we'll see it here.

Javier winds, delivers.

The hitter is completely flat-footed as Javier's lob pitch
 arcs in for a perfect strike.

COMMENTATOR #1
 There it is! The eephus pitch.
 Almost impossible to teach. You
 rarely see it, and that one is a
 beauty for strike three.

COMMENTATOR #2
 These California boys: they're
 playing ball twelve months a year,
 but I guarantee you, they are not
 seeing that pitch. Rarer than the
 knuckleball.

EXT. SCOREBOARD - DAY

The scorekeeper hangs a "0" for the top of the first.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

Javier steps up to the plate in the first inning.

COMMENTATOR #1

Williamsport coming to bat in the first, and the pitcher, Javier Morales will lead off here.

Javier swings at the first pitch and drives it to right-centerfield for a single.

COMMENTATOR #2

Things starting off well for Williamsport as Tommy Kennedy, the catcher steps in.

Tommy shows bunt. Pulls it back to take the first pitch high for ball one.

COMMENTATOR #1

He was showing bunt there. Let's see what he makes of this second offering from Huntington Beach's big righty, John Sanderson.

The pitch comes in, and Tommy slaps a single to left field.

COMMENTATOR #2

Williamsport is set up with two men on, no one out, and here comes their big stick, Jake Marino. Jake leads the team in runs batted in.

First pitch, Jake smacks a towering blast to center.

COMMENTATOR #1

The centerfielder going back, back, at the wall.

The ball flies over the wall onto the grassy hill. Swarms of fans chase after the ball.

COMMENTATOR #1 (cont'd)

That ball is gone, and just like that, Williamsport shoots out to an early lead, three to nothing.

EXT. SCOREBOARD - DAY

The scorekeeper puts a "3" in the bottom of the first inning.

MONTAGE OF SHOTS

Javier delivers pitches.

Gus receives a throw at first and records an out.

Michael smacks a single to right field.

Carl makes a clean pick on a hard grounder down to third and fires to first base.

EXT. SCOREBOARD - DAY

The scoreboard shows Williamsport leading 6-2 in the top of the sixth.

EXT. FIELD - CONTINUOUS

Javier steps back onto the mound with the ball in his mitt.

Gus at first base puts up the bull horns.

GUS
(yelling)
All right, boys. Two out. Let's
get it. Come on, Javy, baby.
Let's get it.

Javier breathes deeply, winds, delivers.

The batter takes strike one.

The crowd is like a cork about to pop off a bottle of champagne.

Javier delivers again. The batter swings, connects. High pop up to first base.

GUS (cont'd)
(calling)
I got it! I got it!

Gus positions himself under the ball, squeezes it in his mitt.

The crowd explodes.

COMMENTATOR #1 (O.S.)
Ladies and gentlemen, Cinderella
will dance once more at this ball,
as Williamsport, Pennsylvania
survives and advances to the United
States Finals, where they will meet
Pensacola, Florida.

INT. BOBBY'S BILLTOWN PIZZERIA - DAY

The celebration is in full swing. The boys can't contain themselves. Frankly, neither can the adults.

Tables full of team members and parents laugh and shout to one another.

JAKE

Two wins! Two more wins, and we've got it!

Bobby moves about the restaurant depositing pies on tables, refilling pitchers of soda.

Two official looking men enter the pizzeria unnoticed by the revelers. They approach Joe at the table.

OFFICIAL #1

Mr. O'Malley?

JOE

Yeah, how can I help you?

OFFICIAL #1

You're the coach of the Williamsport team, yes?

JOE

Yes, that's right.

OFFICIAL #2

Is there some place we can talk?

INT. PIZZERIA KITCHEN - DAY

The two officials stand there with Bobby and Joe.

BOBBY

Wait, what are you saying?

OFFICIAL #1

It's fairly simple. And to be clear, no one has proven any wrongdoing as of now.

JOE

So what are you saying?

OFFICIAL #2

An allegation has been made that you have an illegal player.

JOE

Who?

OFFICIAL #1

Gus O'Malley.

JOE

That's my son.

OFFICIAL #2

Yes, Mr. O'Malley, that's one reason why we find this so strange. However, there is no record of you actually *living* in Williamsport.

BOBBY

What do you mean? They both live with us. At our house.

OFFICIAL #1

That's just it. That's the problem. If you had a mortgage, a rent receipt, a tax bill, even a library card, you could prove residence. Your boy doesn't even go to school in Williamsport.

JOE

We moved after he finished the school year in the city.

OFFICIAL #2

I understand, Mr. O'Malley, but this creates a difficulty for us. How can we prove that you're actually a resident of the town and not just some ringer that was brought in to boost this team?

Joe puts his head in his hands.

JOE

This is unbelievable.

BOBBY

So what happens?

OFFICIAL #1

We have to investigate.

JOE

What about the team? What about the next game?

OFFICIAL #1
The game goes on as scheduled.

OFFICIAL #2
But --

JOE
But what?

OFFICIAL #1
But the player in question is
suspended pending further
investigation.

JOE
You mean Gus can't play?

OFFICIAL #1
I'm afraid not.

BOBBY
But, he's supposed to pitch that
game. It's his turn to pitch.

JOE
All summer, we've been playing
games, this comes up now.

OFFICIAL #1
We investigate when someone brings
us the case.

BOBBY
And it just so happens that you're
investigating before he pitches and
not after, huh?

OFFICIAL #2
Look, we're not trying to be the
bad guys here. We have to protect
the integrity of the game. For the
kids.

The two men start to leave.

OFFICIAL #1
We'll be in touch. Soon. Good
luck, Mr. O'Malley. I mean that.

JOE
(to Bobby)
How the hell do I tell him?

INT. MARINO HOUSE KITCHEN - NIGHT

Bobby, Jake, Joe, and Gus sit around the table.

GUS
Wait, they think what?

JOE
They think you might be ineligible
to play because you don't live
here.

GUS
But I do live here.

JOE
Yes, of course, but we can't prove
that you live here.

GUS
Well, what do they want?

JOE
Honestly, I don't know. I don't
know how you prove a negative.

JAKE
This is garbage!

BOBBY
Yes. Yes it is.

GUS
We've won all these games. We've
come all this way.

JOE
Hey, we still play. It's just --

GUS
I can't.

Joe nods.

JOE
I'm sorry.

JAKE
Who the hell is going to pitch?

Joe thinks.

JOE
I'm certainly open to ideas.

EXT. PRACTICE FIELD - DAY

The team sits on the bench, listening to Joe.

JOE

So, we're going to have to attack
this as a team.

The kids look around at each other in disbelief.

JOE (cont'd)

First, we need to score. There is
no such thing as too much offense.
Grind out your at-bats. Be
aggressive on the bases. Squeeze
everything you can out of them.
Then, in terms of pitching, we'll
go by committee. Jake will take
the first two innings, three if
it's going well. Michael, we'll
need you for four and five. Tommy -

-

Tommy looks up, scared.

JOE (cont'd)

You're going to close it out.

TOMMY

Who's going to catch?

Joe is caught.

JOE

Oh yeah, I didn't think of that.

Jake raises his hand.

JAKE

I will.

JOE

Okay, good. Thanks, Jake.

Jake nods.

JOE (cont'd)

The most important thing is to
throw strikes. We field the ball
very well. Use that. No one needs
to be a hero up there trying to
strike everyone out. Don't think
of it as pitching a whole game.

(MORE)

JOE (cont'd)

Think of it as getting one out at a time. All right?

EXT. PRESSBOX - DAY

The ESPN commentators begin their broadcast.

COMMENTATOR #1

Welcome, everyone, to the Championship game for the American teams, where Williamsport, Pennsylvania will meet Pensacola, Florida. The winner here today will take on a very talented team from San Pedro de Macoris in the Dominican Republic.

COMMENTATOR #2

The story here today, Williamsport, having to go without their number one starter, Gus O'Malley. Though we're not clear on why he is unavailable, their other starting pitcher Javier Morales has reached his weekly innings limit, so it will be bullpen by committee for Williamsport.

COMMENTATOR #1

Well, that's not how any coach draws it up, but this is a gritty team, and I am sure we're in for some interesting baseball here today.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

Williamsport bats in the top of the first. Javier steps to the plate.

COMMENTATOR #1 (O.S.)

Javier Morales, not pitching today, back to his usual position in the field at shortstop.

Javier takes the first pitch for a ball.

COMMENTATOR #2 (O.S.)

And Williamsport really needs to put up some numbers early to compensate for their unusual pitching dilemmas here.

Second pitch: Javier rips a line drive, just fair, over third base.

He turns at first, decides to go for second.

The left fielder plays the hop well, makes a strong throw, but Javier is in ahead of the tag.

COMMENTATOR #1 (O.S.)

This boy is a terrific all-around player, and he has once again set up Williamsport with a leadoff double this time.

Tommy is about to step up to the plate, but Joe calls him back.

JOE

Tommy! Listen. Slow down up there. Step in. Step out. Ask for time. Adjust your helmet. Really make this kid wait.

Tommy nods quickly, then turns to march to the plate, hesitates a moment, turns back to Joe.

TOMMY

Why?

Joe smiles.

JOE

Listen to that crowd. There are 40,000 people here. This kid has TV cameras on every pitch he makes. He doesn't want to start losing this game right away.

Tommy stares back blankly.

JOE (cont'd)

You're just giving him time to realize that.

Tommy smiles.

JOE (cont'd)

You don't have a care in the world. None of this bothers you. It bothers *him*.

Tommy turns to go back to the plate, hesitates again, spins back to Joe once more.

TOMMY

You know that's not true, right?
I'm incredibly nervous.

Joe smiles, taps Tommy on the side of his helmet.

JOE

Get in there.

Tommy finally makes it to the batter's box.

The pitcher looks in at him. The kid is practically shaking.

Tommy puts up his hand.

TOMMY

Time, ump!

The umpire stands out of his crouch and spreads his hands.

Tommy steps out and adjusts his helmet.

The pitcher steps off the rubber.

Tommy steps back in.

The pitcher watches him. This is agony.

Finally a pitch: bounced in the dirt. It gets away from the catcher.

Javier takes off for third and makes it safely without a throw to the base.

The Williamsport fans cheer.

The pitcher turns bright red.

Next pitch, Tommy singles to rightfield. Javier comes in to score.

EXT. DUGOUT - CONTINUOUS

Gus leaps to his feet and cheers on his team.

EXT. SCOREBOARD - CONTINUOUS

The scorekeeper puts a "1" in the top of the first.

COMMENTATOR #1 (O.S.)

And once again, Williamsport grabs
an important early lead.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

Now Jake takes the mound. He might look a little uncomfortable with it, but he is an imposing presence, and he fires the ball in with all that he has.

He works through his warmup tosses.

In the on-deck circle, the Florida leadoff hitter watches carefully.

After a few tosses, Tommy jogs out to him.

TOMMY

Listen, wait until you know their watching, then fire one over my head.

JAKE

Why?

TOMMY

Because I want them to think you're dangerous.

Jake smiles.

TOMMY (cont'd)

Way over my head. Like, you have no control over the ball.

Jake nods.

Tommy returns to a crouch. The next warmup pitch sends the umpire diving for cover.

The Florida leadoff hitter shivers.

Tommy walks the ball out to the mound.

TOMMY (cont'd)

That was perfect.

JAKE

(a little shaky)

I actually wasn't trying that time.

A beat.

TOMMY

Oh. Well. Good anyways.

EXT. SCOREBOARD - DAY

Williamsport leads after three and a half innings, 4-1.

EXT. FIELD - CONTINUOUS

Williamsport takes the field for the bottom of the fourth, and Michael jogs out to the mound, very nervous looking.

MONTAGE OF SHOTS

Michael delivers pitches.

A batter takes a strike.

A batter singles sharply to leftfield.

A batter pops up to Tommy behind the plate.

A batter drives a double to the gap.

EXT. SCOREBOARD - DAY

The scorekeeper hangs a number, and Williamsport now leads 4-3, heading to the bottom of the sixth.

EXT. FIELD - CONTINUOUS

Williamsport takes the field with Tommy warming up on the mound.

Jake crouches behind the plate as catcher.

Tommy completes his warmup tosses, and Jake jogs out to him.

JAKE

All right, let's bring it home.
You've got the bottom of the order
here. Seven, eight, nine, so let's
get them. They turn the lineup
over again, we're in trouble,
right?

Tommy nods.

Jake jogs back, resumes his crouch.

Tommy fires to the first batter.

The batter swings and sends a two-hopper to Javier. Javier fields it, throws to first. One out.

Tommy breathes a sigh of relief.

Next hitter. Tommy delivers. Called strike one.

Second pitch: line drive, but right at Michael playing first. Two out.

The Williamsport crowd is going crazy.

Tommy stares in. First pitch. Outside, ball one.

Second pitch: high, ball two.

Third pitch: low, ball three.

Fourth pitch: outside again, ball four.

The batter jogs down to first.

Tommy puts his face in his glove.

Florida's leadoff hitter steps in.

Tommy deals the first pitch: strike one.

Second pitch: the batter lines it to the gap. The runner on first advances to third, and the batter slides into second.

Tommy takes a deep breath.

COMMENTATOR #1 (O.S.)

Williamsport clings to a one-run lead. Pensacola has two on, two out, the bottom of the sixth. It does not get any more tense than this. And here is Mark Simons, one of their most consistent hitters.

Tommy sets, kicks, delivers. Called strike one.

A small sigh of relief.

Second pitch: CRACK! A high, deep fly down the left field line. Everyone cringes.

It keeps soaring, but it also keeps curving. As it soars over the fence, it squeaks just to the left of the foul pole.

The umpire spreads his hands.

UMPIRE

Foul ball!

Tommy cannot take his eyes off the foul pole, even after the ball has landed. He looks destroyed.

EXT. DUGOUT - CONTINUOUS

Joe steps out of the dugout.

JOE
Time, ump!

The umpire calls timeout.

Joe and Jake jog out to the mound.

JOE (cont'd)
(to Tommy)
All right, you've got him exactly
where you want him.

Tommy looks shocked.

TOMMY
I do?

JOE
Yeah, oh and two. Get him to
chase. Go out of the zone.

Tommy looks as though he isn't hearing a word of this.

A light bulb goes off in Jake's head.

JAKE
Wait a minute, I got this.

Tommy seems to snap out of it.

JAKE (cont'd)
Just get the ball over the plate,
all right?

Tommy nods.

JOE
What are you going to do?

Jake smiles.

JAKE
Just trust me.

The three disperse. Joe heads back to the dugout, Jake to home plate. Tommy breathes deeply.

COMMENTATOR #1

After the brief conference on the mound, Tommy Kennedy will try to put away the hitter and seal the American Championship for Williamsport.

Tommy opens and closes his eyes.

Just before he starts his windup, Jake lets out a high-pitched, three-second FART.

Tommy winds, kicks, delivers.

Just as the ball is coming out of his hand, the gas reaches the Pensacola hitter's nose. Without realizing it, he blinks.

The ball smacks into Jake's mitt. The bat has never left the hitter's shoulder.

UMPIRE

Strike three!

In the truest sense of the word, the batter does not know what hit him.

Jake leaps to his feet and runs to the mound. The team swarms in the center of the field.

COMMENTATOR #1 (O.S.)

You just can't do it any better than this, folks. In dramatic fashion, the little town that could, Williamsport, Pennsylvania has won the American Championship and will play for the Little League World Series on Sunday afternoon. It wasn't always pretty, and it certainly wasn't easy, but the hometown team has put this place front and center for the world to see.

INT.. BOBBY'S BILLTOWN PIZZERIA - NIGHT

The celebration is just as loud and just as boisterous, but Gus sits somewhat removed.

Joe tries to comfort him when he notices the two officials enter again. He and Gus both go to them.

EXT. BOBBY'S BILLTOWN PIZZERIA - CONTINUOUS

The four step outside.

OFFICIAL #1

Well, formally, we should speak to the coach, but I guess there's no harm here.

OFFICIAL #2

Gus, I'm happy to say you are cleared to play in the final game.

Gus is overjoyed, hugs his father.

JOE

How did you --? I mean, I'm certainly not complaining, but what did you even investigate?

The first official produces a paper from the inside pocket of his blazer.

OFFICIAL #1

You used to reside at 1 Washington Square Village, Apt. 8C?

JOE

Yeah, that's right?

OFFICIAL #1

Well, that address currently houses a Professor of Medieval and Renaissance Studies named Leonard Wolfring. We found that your lease terminated and his began *before* tournament play, so your timeline of events checks out.

JOE

Oh my God! Thank you!

OFFICIAL #2

Don't thank us! Thank the high demand for Manhattan living space. If that apartment was still empty, you'd be riding the bench again.

Father and son hug again.

The officials walk away.

OFFICIAL #1

And good luck on Sunday.

INT. BOBBY'S BILLTOWN PIZZERIA - NIGHT

The pizzeria has cleared out now, and only the team remains with Joe and Bobby.

JOE

I want to tell you boys something.

All eyes are on Joe.

JOE

I've only been in this town a couple months, but since I came, magical things have been happening. I want you to look around at each other.

The boys look left and right.

JOE

Now, whether you like it or not, you will remember each other for the rest of your lives. Just as you are right now. Time won't matter. And that's the most unique thing about baseball. The absence of time. In every other sport, there's a clock. If you run out of time, you're done. No other way around it. But in baseball, no matter how much you're up or down, there's always time for something magical to happen. Even if you think you've seen it all. Even if you think you're done and there's nothing good left for you. Baseball is the most optimistic game there is.

Joe continues to talk to the boys as we

CUT TO:

ESPN TITLECARD: LITTLE LEAGUE WORLD SERIES CHAMPIONSHIP GAME,
LIVE FROM WILLIAMSPORT, PA

The television cameras show the crowd on their feet as the national anthem plays.

JOE (O.S.)

And you can think you know everything about this game.

(MORE)

JOE (O.S.) (cont'd)
 You could spend your whole life
 learning it, but it still surprises
 you.

Mr. Howell steps out to the mound for the ceremonial first pitch.

JOE (O.S.) (cont'd)
 Just like the people in your life
 can still surprise you. I can
 honestly say, you've all surprised
 me.

Gus takes the mound for the first inning.

JOE (O.S.) (cont'd)
 And I can also honestly say that
 I've never been prouder to be a
 part of anything else in my life.

The crowd noise is deafening as the television announcers start their broadcast.

COMMENTATOR #1 (O.S.)
 The feeling is absolutely electric
 here as Williamsport takes the
 field. This team from San Pedro de
 Macoris is incredibly talented.
 They swept through the
 international bracket, but the
 story that everyone has been
 talking about here this week is, of
 course, the hometown team.
 Williamsport, Pennsylvania, a town
 of thirty thousand people. You
 could fit all the townspeople in
 this stadium and *still* sell ten
 thousand tickets. But it's a small
 city with a big heart, and we have
 watched these young men win some
 very difficult games against some
 very good opponents.

COMMENTATOR #2
 And today, their ace takes the
 mound. The lefty, Gus O'Malley,
 the son of coach Joe O'Malley.
 Williamsport has got to wonder, do
 they have one more trick up their
 sleeves? Can they make history
 here on their home turf?

Gus deals to the first batter, strike one. The crowd goes wild.

Second pitch: a high pitch the batter chases for strike two.

Third pitch: the batter gets out in front of a changeup and swings through it, strike three.

COMMENTATOR #1

And listen to that crowd. They love it, and Gus O'Malley looks as cool as a cucumber out there. The kid must be loving this.

The ball whips around the infielders and finds its way back to Gus. He snatches at it with a smile.

GUS

(to the infielders)
Just gonna need one again today, boys.

EXT. SCOREBOARD - DAY

The "0"s on the scoreboard indicate three and a half innings with no runs.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

Williamsport bats in the bottom half of the fourth.

Javier steps into the box.

The pitcher looks in, winds, kicks, delivers.

The pitch sails inside and grazes Javier's wrist. He drops the bat and winces in pain.

The umpire throws up his hands and points to first base.

Javier starts walking down to first, clutching his hand.

Joe races out of the dugout.

JOE

Wow, that's already blowing up like a balloon.

He waves to the bench where IAN pulls on a helmet and goes to first base to run for Javier.

COMMENTATOR #1

And a good news/bad news situation developing here for Williamsport.
(MORE)

COMMENTATOR #1 (cont'd)

A baserunner to lead off here in the bottom of the fourth, but they may have just lost Javier Morales, their shortstop and, if it comes to it, their relief pitcher in a tight situation.

The crowd applauds Javier as he goes to the bench.

Tommy digs in.

First pitch, he squares to bunt and drops one down the first base line.

Ian moves to second base as Tommy is put out at first.

Jake steps in.

First pitch: ball one.

Second pitch: called strike.

Third pitch: ball two.

Jake steps out of the batter's box, takes a deep breath. Steps back in.

Next pitch: he smacks a line drive into right-center.

Ian turns around third base. The rightfielder comes up throwing.

Ian slides in. Play at the plate.

UMPIRE

Safe!

The crowd cheers.

COMMENTATOR #1

And now Williamsport strikes first, one to nothing.

Jake stands on second base clapping.

EXT. DUGOUT - CONTINUOUS

Joe claps along. He leans over to Gus.

JOE

How you feeling?

No hesitation.

GUS

Great.

JOE

You feel like you can get six outs?

GUS

I'm *seizing*.

Joe shoots him a look.

GUS

What? I listen.

JOE

I just can't tell if you're serious
or your mocking me.

GUS

Can't it be both?

Joe shakes his head.

EXT. SCOREBOARD - DAY

Last inning. Williamsport clings to the 1-0 lead.

Gus is on the mound.

COMMENTATOR #1

Gus O'Malley and his Williamsport
teammates are three outs away from
baseball history, but they will
have to do it with the heart of the
Dominican order due up in the top
of the sixth.

Gus stares in and gets the sign. He delivers. High for ball
one.

Second pitch: called strike.

Third pitch: a hard grounder back to Gus at the mound. He
knocks it down, picks it up, fires to first. One out.

The crowd cheers.

COMMENTATOR #2

This is where it gets harder if
you're Gus O'Malley. Closing out a
game, especially a tight one, can
feel like a nightmare.

(MORE)

COMMENTATOR #2 (cont'd)
 Any little mistake can become
 magnified. It takes concentration
 and patience.

Gus delivers to the next hitter. A soft liner over Gus's
 head. It reaches the centerfield grass for a single.

COMMENTATOR #1
 And now signs of life from the
 Dominican Republic. The first
 baserunner they've had since the
 second inning, and that has got get
 them fired up.

Gus gets the ball back and toes the rubber. He delivers the
 first pitch: high, ball one.

Second pitch, fouled back to the screen for strike one.

Third pitch: outside, ball two.

Fourth pitch: in the dirt, Tommy blocks it.

Gus takes a breath. Fifth pitch: just outside, ball four.

COMMENTATOR #2
 And now the nightmare of closing
 out the game becomes a reality.
 Two on, one out. A runner now in
 scoring position, so a single to
 the outfield will tie the game.

EXT. DUGOUT - CONTINUOUS

Joe calls for time from the dugout.

EXT. FIELD - CONTINUOUS

Joe walks out to the mound slowly. Tommy goes to join him,
 but Joe puts up a hand.

He and Gus stand alone on the mound.

GUS
 What are you doing?

Joe pauses a moment.

JOE
 You know we're on TV right now?

Gus laughs.

GUS

Are you trying to make me nervous
or what?

JOE

No, I'm just saying. I've had to
wait my whole life to get on TV.
You're twelve, you get to do it.

EXT. STADIUM SEATS - CONTINUOUS

Bobby sits with Cathy and April.

CATHY

What do you think he's saying to
him?

Bobby shrugs.

EXT. FIELD - CONTINUOUS

From a distance, the conference on the mound looks to be all
business.

COMMENTATOR #1 (O.S.)

At this point, Coach O'Malley is
probably going over their scouting
report, reminding him of how he
wants to approach the hitter, just
calming him down, giving him a
breather.

Joe now appears more animated.

JOE

No, admit it. Admit it right now,
you like your uncle's pizza.

Gus laughs.

GUS

I know what you're trying to do.

JOE

Yeah? Is it working?

GUS

A little.

JOE

It's just... You know, I want you to know, I just can't believe we're here. So whatever happens, I'm glad we got to do this together.

The umpire comes out to break up the conference.

UMPIRE

All right guys, let's move it along.

JOE

(to the umpire)
Okay.

He goes to walk away.

GUS

Hey Dad.

Joe turns back.

GUS (cont'd)

I really did like the speech.

Joe smiles.

Tommy stands up behind the plate with his index finger up.

TOMMY

(yelling)
All right boys, we got one! We got one! Let's go!

Gus stares in.

COMMENTATOR #1

If you're Williamsport, you want to be very careful with this hitter. A small mistake is a tie game. A big mistake is a two-run deficit.

Gus's first pitch: called strike one.

The crowd loves it.

The runners clap and yell encouragement to their teammate.

Gus sets and delivers: ball one, outside.

COMMENTATOR #2

You could cut the tension with a knife. I don't know how these young men can stand it.

Gus delivers the pitch.

The batter swings.

The ball is chopped between first base and second base.

Instinctively, Gus moves over to cover first base.

The first baseman charges the ball, spears it and throws to second. One out. Michael relays to first base.

The ball, the runner, and Gus all converge on first base at the same time. Gus catches the ball and touches the bag.

UMPIRE

Out!

Absolute pandemonium. The crowd erupts. Fans storm the field.

The team carries Gus off the field on their shoulders.

EXT. DUGOUT - CONTINUOUS

Joe, in tears, hugs his bench players.

COMMENTATOR #1 (O.S.)

For the first time in seventy years, the hosts of the Little League World Series are keeping the trophy here in Williamsport! In one of the gutsiest pitching performances in series history, Gus O'Malley has shut out the team from the Dominican Republic, as Williamsport wins, one to nothing!

EXT. MAIN STREET, WILLIAMSPORT - DAY

A huge parade down Main Street, with townspeople lining both sides of the road.

Bobby drives his pizza wagon slowly down the route as the boys wave from the service window.

Joe rides shotgun in the front of the truck.

BOBBY
So, what's next for us, Joe?

JOE
The president wants us to come to
the White House.

Bobby shoots him a look.

BOBBY
Are you serious?

Joe nods.

BOBBY
Can I bring the truck?

Joe laughs.

EXT. MARINO HOUSE - NIGHT

Gus sits with Jake on the hood of the car in the driveway,
watching fireworks in the distance.

Joe comes out from the front door.

JOE
Hey, I want you to come with me to
the school tomorrow.

GUS
Okay, why?

JOE
They've got a real estate agent
that can show us a few houses.

GUS
Oh, really?

JOE
Yeah. That okay?

Gus doesn't take his eyes off the fireworks.

GUS
I mean, sure, it's just. There's
no rush, right?

Joe smiles.

JOE
No, I guess not.

GUS
Okay, cool.

Joe heads back to the house.

JOE
I'm going to go to bed.

GUS
All right, g'night, Dad.

JOE
Goodnight.

The fireworks explode over the night sky.

FADE TO BLACK.