



# “MADE TO WIN”

By Gian Carlo Villatoro

## **Characters:**

Jason  
Liz  
Mikey  
Nat  
Fredo  
Bryan  
Zac  
Dave  
Tina  
Frances

## **Location:**

Andrews, TX

## **Time Frame:**

Fall 2018 - Fall 2019

## **Chapters:**

- 1 - Play Ball
- 2 - City Champions
- 3 - Regional Tournament
- 4 - State Finals
- 5 - The National League
- 6 - USA Finals

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Dedicated to FRANCES TILLERY

# MADE TO WIN

## CREDITS

Original idea: Gian Carlo Villatoro

Audio Editor: Sebastian Villatoro

Writing Team:

Gian Carlo Villatoro and Tracy Villatoro

Music Team:

Gian Carlo Villatoro, Tracy Villatoro, & Fredd Rojas

Narrator: Sarah Rife

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Website: <https://www.mygiancarlo.com>

Email: [giancarlo@mygiancarlo.com](mailto:giancarlo@mygiancarlo.com)

Winning sometimes is everything. You can fly when you win. You can do many things without sleeping for hours, as long as you know that you will win! A story that started in Andrews TX.

From Odessa, TX, Gian and his team, want to share with you this unique story, one that you will listen to in a special format: it includes Gian's original music!



# PLAY BALL

## Chapter 1

There is nothing more exciting than winning. Whether it is passing a test in school, getting the highest score playing a video game with friends, watching your favorite team on TV beating the adversary, or guessing who was murdered in a crime novel. What matters is to win! Oh yeah, baby!

Winning sometimes is everything. You can fly when you win. You can do many things without sleeping for hours, as long as you know that you will win.

But that is not the way the story that I am about to tell you, started. First, I need to take you to my hometown. Andrews, TX is one small town in West Texas, where everything is about oil and gas. Nothing is really big or special there, no fabulous stores, mall, movie theaters, restaurants, nothing, not even religion or politics, because it is a small town. What we do have are close relationships with many people. You know, Andrews, TX is the kind of town that is way too old fashioned for most Americans today. We know our neighbors by name, and we greet one another every time we see each other getting in and out of our homes, or when we cross paths in the streets. Yes, there is also a lot of gossiping. But well, that is unavoidable, regardless where you live.

After I graduated high school, I went to college and got my pharmaceutical degree. I always wanted to help people get better, so I guess preparing their prescriptions makes me feel that I am doing something good for my community. I started to work for the local drugstore, where Mr. Anderson hired me a year ago when I graduated. Many of my teenager friends worked in the oilfield, both boys and girls. We continued our friendship for many years. Now in our twenties, some are married and have kids, and others are still single, like me. Others, also like me, have one special person close to our hearts. Mine is Jason. By the way, my name is Liz.

Jason and I barbecue constantly with our family and friends, and one day we decided to play games outside of Mikey's home. Mikey's parents are wealthy, and that house is huge. That day we brought some softball gear and played boys against girls, and we won. It was so fun!

Later that evening, Nat and Fredo, recently married, were showing us some videos of all of us playing, and we noticed how much fun we had. That is when all of this started. All the girls were teasing the boys that they couldn't defeat us, ever, and the next game became a real event in town. Certainly, the next weekend, we had dozens of people coming to Mikey's home to see us play. And guess what? Oh yes, you know it, we beat the boys again! Everyone was so happy, even the boys enjoyed it. The old people in town, our parents, the kids, everybody, was talking about how much fun it was.

Suddenly, Dave came up with a suggestion. He said, "What if we make a co-ed team and invite another co-ed team from another town to come play a double-match with us?" Everyone liked the idea. Dave was a chubby guy who was a tremendous batter, hitting home runs time after time, but it was so funny to see him running, carrying his beer belly, which the boys always teased him for.

Tina had friends in Kermit, and set up the match. Everyone was excited, and finally the fabulous day came true. It was a perfect Sunday afternoon. We had nearly 200 people sitting around the field, which was improvised, again, as a softball field. We won, and it was so fun.

Tina had a blog and posted some pictures, along with a nice article, on the internet about our victory. The whole town was impressed, and the comments on her blog came in like a stampede. Almost every one of the comments said, "You need to create a formal team and register in the 2018 Fall Midland/Odessa Tournament". So we did!

We named the team, "Dust Storms", which was a real target for jokes of all kinds. To begin with, our own local fans in Andrews mocked us. Imagine our family and friends, who said, "Could you possibly pick something more disgusting than "Dust Storms?" It was a full joke, but it is exactly what we wanted. Zac was the one that came up with the name. Zac is always funny, particularly when it is his turn to bat, moving his butt left to right, like a duck. Too funny!

Now, the strategies were given by Bryan. He was our playing coach. Bryan is the kind of guy who is always serious, even when he is thinking of funny stuff. Now, in reference to softball, he is a genius. He has apps on his phone that tells him everything you need to know about our performance, defending and batting. We really had a wonderful team.

# CITY CHAMPIONS

## Chapter 2

So, here we are. The Dust Storms began playing with the rest of the 15 teams in the fall season, corresponding to the last 4 months of 2018.

Nat and Fredo were in charge of carrying all the gear. Jason and I were in charge of drinks and snacks. And Dave? Well, he just need to show up. He was too slow to do anything else. Tina was in charge of the “press release” on her blog. Mikey was the sponsor paying for everything. After all, we knew his daddy had the money. Mikey also had another assignment. He, Zac, and Tina, were responsible to show up first to the field, allowing all the fans to take pictures with them because those 3 were the cute ones of the team. Through it all, Bryan was entering information on the apps and preparing our strategy for the game.

The first game was really easy. Our team was very well organized and we beat the rivals without a problem. We had everyone in Andrews so excited, and our families prepared a nice barbecue party for the team. Yay!

The second game was not that simple. Our adversaries were experienced in the league, and the score was 8-5 in their behalf, at the bottom of the last inning. We were playing locals that day, so it was our last turn at bat. Bryan reunited the team and instructed Nat, Fredo and Tina, the first 3 batters, to find the way to get to the first base and move forward, one base at a time, and they did. Still 8-5, and no outs. Dave was at bat. We knew he could do it! He hit a tremendous home run that became his first grand slam in the league. We won that day 9-8. It was a fantastic way to win. People gave us a standing ovation. Dave basically walked around the bases. It was so funny!

We realized that winning would not be easy. So we decided to practice on Friday evenings at Mikey’s. The whole town came to our practices. We even had people bringing us food. Kids and families got together just to be with us, to encourage us, and we felt their love and support.

The next game we came more prepared. Our rival was the champion of the league at the time. We knew it would be a very difficult game. Surprisingly, we had tons of our people from Andrews cheering us up for the game. That

was the first time that we realized that we were representing our town. It was not just playing for fun alone. It somehow overwhelmed us, but Nat told us that day, before the game started, "Remember, we can do it if we play with intelligence and united." Then we all held hands and yelled together, "Andrews!" Nat always knew what to say. I admired her ability to do that.

Jason and I played okay, but in truth, I think our biggest contribution was that we always brought good snacks and drinks. At least that made us feel that we were important to the team.

The game started with obvious tension among both teams. The score was 0-0, top of the last inning. We were playing as visitors. Fredo hit a double. There was one out, and Mikey was up to bat. He hit a huge fly ball, and we thought it was a home run, but it wasn't. It hit the very edge of the field, and now it was the second out. Fredo decided to run, trying to reach third base. The fielder threw the ball to third base, but missed it by a few seconds. Fredo was safe! Now it was my turn. I was so nervous. Bryan came to me and whispered, "Tap it towards the third base." I could not believe what he said, but I understood the plan. He made the sign to Fredo. The crowd was standing and screaming. Then the pitcher threw me a fast ball, and I did exactly as Bryan told me. Fredo ran towards the home plate. The third baseman was in shock, not expecting a tap towards him, and I arrived safely to first base. We won 1-0. That's when the level of enthusiasm grew like crazy!

The next Friday, and every Friday after, there was a huge party at Mikey's. Everyone came. They were taking pictures of us, filming videos, which all went viral on social media. It was absolutely incredible how the Dust Storms, a bunch a boys and girls without any experience in this sport, became so popular. Our people loved us and we loved them back.

Before Christmas, we won the tournament with an impeccable record of 15 victories, and zero defeats. We became an icon in the area. Even the newspapers published our team picture in one special edition. We had so much fun. Our fans in Andrews printed posters of our team and put them in every establishment. People came to the drugstore, just to say hello to me at the counter. Mr Anderson was so proud of me, and the extra traffic in the store was good for him.

# REGIONAL TOURNAMENT

## Chapter 3

In January 2019, we were notified that as Champions of the Fall Tournament in Midland/Odessa, we were qualified to play in the regional tournament. Wow! That was a big surprise for everyone. But no one was more excited than Mrs. Frances Smith. She was the mayor of the City of Andrews, and as a prominent member of our community, she had an enormous influence among us. Next thing we knew, Mrs. Frances had organized a gala dinner in our honor to celebrate our triumph.

“Ladies and gentleman”, she said, “we are gathered together today to celebrate the outstanding victory of our fellow Dust Storms”. Everyone laughed really loud. We even laughed at ourselves. We knew then that we were on a new task now.

The rest was pure protocol. We understood that we had a responsibility, not just in our town, Andrews, but also with the Permian Basin, and all the cities conglomerating around Midland/Odessa.

It was an honor for us. We were a little bit nervous, but at the same time, we felt capable to face the challenge.

Our city provided a bus for our team, a professional coach, who was so grateful to have Bryan as his player/assistant, and the full support of our people. We received a copy of the schedule for the Regional Tournament. We were to play against 5 teams: Houston, Dallas, Amarillo, San Antonio, and Austin. All of those teams were highly experienced at that level, except us. We were to play in this Regional Tournament, and hopefully to qualify as one of the two teams that would advance to the State Finals. The tournament would be brutal, not friendly, and the press would cover each game. Even ESPN was invited.

Our first game would be against San Antonio. They had powerful batters. Our pitcher, Jason, was under so much pressure. Thankfully, Fredo was a second pitcher, so they could alternate each game. The games were to be played in Dallas. During the whole week, we would be guests in Dallas/Fort Worth. They put us in a wonderful hotel only 10 minutes from the stadium. That was the first time that we played in a real professional

softball stadium. We felt like professionals. I remember the first time we went there for practice. Zac was making all kind of jokes about us. We all had our brand new uniforms, and we even had kids carrying our stuff. It was really fun. They made us feel like stars. Of course, with the excitement also came the nervousness, and we had problems dealing with it. Again, Nat said something profound. "Guys, no other team came to this tournament with a 15-0 record, but us. That means we can do this!" Everything changed for all of us at that point. Mikey, Zac and Tina immediately went to model for the pictures, and the press was happy with such nice looking athletes.

As expected, San Antonio scored quickly, but Dave and Bryan did their thing, too. In the last inning we were tied 3-3, and at the bottom of the inning. Fredo was at bat and hit a single. Mikey hit another single. We just needed one more hit, and it was Zac's turn. There was duck butt ready to bat, and bam! He hit a single! Fredo ran as fast as he could, but stopped at third base. It was too risky. Then, it was Tina's turn. The pitcher threw a fast ball, not knowing that Tina's favorite pitch was exactly that, and bam! She hit a single and we won 4-3. The public was screaming in the stadium. We were now on TV!

After our victory over San Antonio, we beat Austin, then Dallas, and then Amarillo. Unfortunately, Houston was doing exactly the same. They also beat San Antonio, Austin, Dallas and Amarillo. There was only one game left for us, and that was against Houston. Regardless of the result of that game, we both were already qualified for the state finals. We needed to face each other. Every sports channel was following the tournament because of the sensational development of our team, and also because it was Houston. We had people from West Texas coming every night to cheer us on at the stadium. We received a lot of support from our fans. Of course, Mrs. Frances was present in her special VIP area.

That night we lost for the first time in our career. Houston beat us 5-2. It was a horrible game to lose. I will never forget the expression on our faces. The flavor of being defeated. The strange sensation of not winning. Not smiling. Not celebrating. Even though we passed to the state finals, there was a bitter taste in our mouths that we had never experienced before. We lost that game. It felt like something died inside of us. We came back home on the bus in total silence.

# STATE FINALS

## Chapter 4

In February 2019, we received the official invitation to the state finals. TV, Radio and Social Media, were so enthusiastic about it. Slowly we started to regain confidence, and thanks to the support of our local fans coming every Friday night to Mikey's home for our practice, we felt that we could win the finals.

We practiced every night for 3 weeks. We only had public in attendance on Fridays, but the rest of the nights we practiced really hard, aiming for excellence. We listened to the right songs during our practice. During the day we listened to podcasts of encouragers. We took good care of ourselves, eating well, sleeping well, and preparing ourselves mentally and physically.

On Sunday, February 17, we were to play against Houston in their own stadium. The next Sunday, February 24, Houston would come to play against us in Andrews. Of course, Mrs. Frances already had made the arrangements with our high school to utilize the football field, transformed into a softball field.

We traveled to Houston the morning of Saturday, February 16, in our bus. The city rented another six buses, filled with our fans, including the school band and cheerleaders. We had gigantic support from our town, and everyone in West Texas. We now felt not only motivated, but responsible to represent our area with honor and professionalism.

The first real adversary to defeat was the public in the University of Houston Stadium. Located in the East Central South part of the city, this stadium, with the capacity for 1,200 people, had access from highways 45, 69, and 90. Even with the six loads of people in our buses, we still had many others driving their own vehicles. Trying to concentrate while you are listening to thousands of people cheering on Houston, was a task for titans.

We had everything we needed to play a good game. However, we never had so many people cheering on our rivals. It was overwhelming. The words, "Houston, Houston, Houston", were so loud that it was almost

impossible to think of anything else. Then we had this team looking fabulous in their amazing uniform, practicing with so much confidence in themselves, and showing off their level of knowledge on the field. The crowd was going crazy watching them hitting the ball, running, and throwing the ball so accurate and strong, that you could hear the sound of the ball being caught in the gloves. People clapped their hands, chanting, "Houston, Houston, Houston!" The spectacular views from the cameras situated all over the infield and outfield were broadcasting the magnificent images of the players doing their thing in front of their crowd. It was poetry, like a magisterial symphonic orchestra performing the most exquisite composition, and the public knew the next movement in the musical piece.

We, the Dust Storms, felt like ants. Minuscule, insignificant, and irrelevant, almost ready to give up. We could barely walk and breathe. We were lost and confused. This was the first time in our existence as a team that we felt out of our element. We were thinking, *'What in the world are we doing here? We do not belong in this!'* I thought, *'What I was thinking? I am just a pharmacist!'* All of use felt the same. The look on our faces was obvious, and the devastation was evident to everyone. The worst were the cameras taking the close-ups of our expressions filled with fear and confusion.

A few minutes after that, the team was called to the dugout. To our surprise, Mrs. Frances was there, with a big smile on her face. Holding an iPad Pro in her hand, she said, "I want everyone sitting on the floor." I thought, *'Please no more pictures, this is ridiculous,'* but we all sat down. Then she said, "I know that you cannot see totally clear here on my iPad, but I am group face-timing with our people in Andrews. I want you to know that our town is with you. Here they are. Listen to this." We were quiet. It seemed that even the crowd in Houston was silent.

The screen on the iPad showed one group at a time. In restaurants, homes, schools, the city hall...each group saying things like, "We love you guys!" "You are our heroes!" "Go Dust Storms!" "You are going to win!" Each clip showed us the faces of people that we knew personally; customers from the pharmacy, students, neighbors, relatives, and friends. Each face had a name, and each name had a story that connected with us. Each one of them believed in us; kids, elderly, and everyone smiling and believing that we would win. Everyone believed that we could do it.

Then Mrs. Frances said, “Kids, you can win. Just remember this. You love this game, and you love having fun playing softball!” In that very moment we heard the umpire yell, “Play Ball!”. We all yelled, “Yeah! Let’s play ball!” We ran to our positions to start the game.

In the third inning the score was Houston 2, Andrews 1. They scored in each of the following two innings. In the top of the ninth inning, the score was Houston 4, Andrews 1. We knew we needed to do something.

I hit a single, then Bryan hit a double and I reached third base. Mikey came to bat, and bam! He hit another double! The score was Houston 4, Andrews 3. Then, it was Dave’s turn to bat. With 2 outs and a man on second, we had a good chance. The crowd was yelling loud, “Houston, Houston, Houston!”, but we were just hoping for a good pitch to Dave. Dave stood up there smiling. Somehow he managed to smile as the pitcher threw him 2 strikes and 1 ball. Dave kept smiling until the perfect pitch came in at the right time....bam! Hasta la vista, baby! That ball flew as far as you can imagine, crossing the fence, submerging into the crowd in right field...but, it was a foul. All of the Andrews fans were disappointed, but Dave kept smiling. The next pitch was the same, although this time, Dave hit it the entire center field. It was a high fly ball and the center fielder ran, getting close to the fence. The center fielder jumped as high as he could and grabbed for the ball. People yelled. But as he was coming down, his glove hit the fence and the ball jumped out of the glove and went directly behind the fence. We yelled, “Home run, Dave! Home run!” Houston couldn’t hit a single in the bottom of the ninth inning. We had won!

The euphoria in West Texas grew to incredible levels. We would then have the chance to play in our own hometown. Our small “adapted” softball stadium could barely seat 200 people and we had thousands of requests for seats. It was crazy! The following weekend, all the hotels in our town and Odessa/Midland were packed. People from all over were coming to see the final game, without knowing if they could get a seat. The city installed gigantic screens outside of the stadium. That way everyone could be “kind-a-there” and still watch. We beat Houston 9 to 5 that Sunday. It was a fantastic triumph and everyone in our town was drunk with happiness. We all smiled for days. It felt like a happy hurricane had hit Andrews and everyone was in la-la-land. It was a miracle! We won the State Finals! The Dust Storms became the Champions of the State of Texas!

# THE NATIONAL LEAGUE

## Chapter 5

In March of 2019, we were officially notified that we'd be going to the National League. We would be playing the State Champions during the months of April through June. We became the stars of the state. Every weekend we flew to a different city, as the press and social media chased us everywhere. We were the center of attention in restaurants, stores, airports, hotels, and of course, in the stadiums.

They made us all kinds of team merchandise: cups, hats, jeans, and even a Toyota Corolla, named "Toyota Corolla, the Andrews Edition". We were having so much fun and our record of victories increased every week. We were undefeated and our fame was growing like whipped cream on top of a cup of cappuccino.

With just 2 weekends away from the National League, we flew to Seattle, Washington. No one ever would have guessed we would have such a horrible experience there. While we were in the airport there was a terrible accident. An airplane lost control and crashed in the area where we were waiting for transportation to our hotel.

Hundreds of passengers were injured. All of us went to the hospital. Naturally, the game was postponed. The most difficult part was to accept that Jason, my beautiful Jason, lost his left arm. Dave was in a coma, unresponsive. The rest of us had minor injuries and dozens of other passengers were severely injured.

The news was pretty bad for our families, but the critical part was our fans. People from all over the country were following us. Our team had become iconic America. We were a bunch of millennials who enjoyed life and played softball well enough to come the leading team in the National League.

We received thousands of emails, cards, letters and phone calls from all over the country. Social media was saturated with comments from all our fans hoping for us to get well soon, and some of them were praying for a quick recovery so we could continue on to the National League.

Jason, my sweet boyfriend, kept his enthusiasm. He never said anything sad or negative, despite losing his arm. He was the most fervent encourager to the rest of us to continue playing for the title. But honestly, we didn't feel like it. Dave was in a coma. We thought that would just be cruel to even consider the possibility of playing while he was unconscious.

Everyday we went to the hospital to see Dave, until one day, a miracle happened; he woke up. He was out of it and could barely speak, but immediately he asked about the rest. We gave him a report. He saw Jason, who was right there smiling at him. Then he said, "I want you to go and play." We did not expect that kind of response from Dave, but he was serious. He said in a very weak voice, "You guys need to finish the National League because I want to play the finals in the fall." We all laughed so hard when he said that but stopped when we realized he was serious. Then we said, "Okay Dave, we'll do."

Jason's brother, Paul, took his place. Mikey's Uncle Joe took Dave's place. The rest of us came back to practice and the next two weekends we defeated both teams. We ended the season with an impressive record: Undefeated National League Champions.

Jason drove Dave to the ceremony of our championship. Dave told Joe that night, "Joe, thank you, but I am playing the finals." He was serious about that.

# USA FINALS

## Chapter 6

The day had arrived like any other day; the final game was an event of importance, much like a graduation, wedding, or even funeral. There is a day for every competitor to face their final adversary to determine who will win.

Why are we so eager to show our crowns, medals, and rewards of our triumphs?

What is the real reason why we compete?

Do we really need to prove to everybody that we are winners, and not losers?

Is it possible that we are so insecure that we need to compete and defeat others to show our supremacy?

Undoubtedly, we love to see sports and tournaments. We are willing to miss one or two games in a tournament season, but we'd never want to miss the final game. Why is that?

Why is it so important to us to find out who is the winner or who is the champion?

What difference does it make in our lives what the result is of a competition that has nothing to do with us, our families, or our lives?

But if we are the ones competing, well that changes everything!

Why? Because if we are competing, we want to win.

The outcome of any competition in which we are involved affects us, sometimes financially, other times mentally. In any case, if we are competing, we want to win.

For me, my dear Jason, my family, my team, my hometown...this competition was extremely important because it was the moment that

would define if we were to become USA Champions or not. At that point, winning second place would have been absurd. Losing the finals was unthinkable, and we rejected that idea deeply in our hearts and in our minds. We didn't care what our bodies said. Tired? Hurting? Hungry? Sleepy? "Shut up, body! I am not asking for your opinion. Just do what I say, period!"

Any statistics, probabilities, analysis, ignorant or expert commentaries, articles in papers, magazines, radio or TV; anything and everything was absolutely irrelevant to us for one simple reason: we didn't care! We came to the finals to win.

In life, you go through tremendous challenges; you face obstacles and difficulties of all kinds: family situations, betrayals, lack of money, health problems, closed doors, indifference from some people, rejection from others, and lack of support from those you love and expect their love and support in return. You go through all that and you fight; and you fight all those battles because your life is yours, and you want to win. You are not willing to lose the final match. You can't accept losing your final game.

When you are there at the edge of the supreme test of your life, your faith in God is high, as well as your faith in yourself. You have so much strength to fight and give everything you have - even if you fall unconscious of exhaustion - for one reason: you want to win.

Only when you feel that way will you ever make it!

The desperation in life after going through innumerable challenges is to overcome that final test: to win the battle. To succeed and defeat your adversaries. Yes, it is to destroy your rival and show your supremacy; the supremacy that you've earned today to overcome the day before.

Because that is your real adversary; you must compete with yourself; you must improve yourself day after day, changing whatever you need to change. Stop doing whatever is wrong. Incorporate new things needed in your character and in your life. Add good new habits. Absorb all kinds of great skills and abilities. Do all this with the purpose of improving yourself and defeating the yesterday's version of yourself. Today you need to defeat yesterday's mistakes and weaknesses.

Our team saw that. Our team was ready to go to the field. The victory was beyond our capabilities. The real victory was inside each one of us. As a team, each member needed to see their own self as a winner. In our team, every one of us took a look at our inner self and realized that the whole process of going from one tournament to the next, working as a team, winning, and defeating our rivals, was the key to be here as champions today.

Our opponent was great but we were much better because of our desperations to win. We were hungry and were tired of waiting for the moment of the big finale where we would raise our arms together as a sign of victory and conquer.

We did it. We became conquerers - more than conquerers. There was so much inside of us, so much faith, so much hope, so much desire to win. It was impossible for any team to defeat us. No other team had what we had. We were built to win because we wanted to win.

That is why we didn't give up. Today I want you to get this: In whatever you do, don't give up. Whether it is an individual effort, career, business, or dream, do not give up. If you are part of a team, encourage your team to fight with you, and not against you. A true team member covers the back of the rest.

Like soldiers going rescue the wounded on the battlefield, we help our team members that have fallen. We don't bury our wounded soldiers because we are ashamed of their faults or mistakes or even if they caused us pain. We go where they are and we drag them to safety if necessary. That is what makes us a victorious team.

When we came back to Andrews, all the people came to greet us and yelled, "Andrews, Andrews, Andrews!" We responded, "Together, brothers and sisters. Together, helping each other, not destroying one another. Building each other up in love, compassion, and mutual forgiveness. Appreciating the qualities and skills of everyone. Lifting each other up and believing in one another for the sake of our team.

That is why we won! And that is kind of victory I want you to have!

