

The Championship

It's the bottom of the fifth of the town tourney championship baseball game. The game is tied five to five with two outs and Flinn has one strike on him. His team cannot let the Cougars beat them. Flinn steps into the batter's box. It's late in the evening and the field lights are on, shining over the dirt field. Flinn can hear his mother cheering as loud as she can, but it almost feels silent as the second pitch comes flying towards him. "Ball," says the Umpire. "Whew," Flinn thinks to himself while turning to his head coach. Flinn watches him give the steal sign to Alex, one of his good buddies, who is ready at first base. "Hey, you got this Flinn," says a voice from his dugout, probably his best friend Adrian. He always encourages Flinn to work hard and do his best. Flinn steps back into the box, ready for any pitch the opposing pitcher throws at him. The pitcher winds up... reaches back... and drives the baseball right at the catcher. "Striiike," yells the Umpire as Alex steals second base safely. "Come on now, you got this," shouts someone encouragingly from his dugout as Flinn holds back a scowl. This is the final game of the season and he definitely wouldn't want to be ejected, for this Umpire in particular was not someone to make faces at. Flinn turns to his head coach who tells him, "That's alright, Flinn. Stay loose and drive the ball." Flinn takes a deep breath and steps back into the box, ready to hit the next pitch. "You got this, right over the shortstop's head, come on," Flinn thinks to himself. The pitcher winds up yet again... reaches back.. and fires the ball right down the pipe. This is his chance, he can do it, he can get his team in the lead. His heart is pumping fast, the whole world seems to slow, he can't hear his mother or anyone in the bleachers, he is hyper-focused and this is his moment. He swings. "Striiike three, you're out," the Umpire. "What!?" he thinks furiously as he backs away from home plate, "How did I miss that? It was perfect!" Flinn slowly walks back to the dugout with his head down as the other team cheers and runs back to their dugout. In his dugout, Flinn discovers that during his plate appearance, his coach crossed off "2B", which meant "Second Base," and wrote "Bench." Now he begins to tear up. He sits on the bench and watches his team play defense, feeling angry and sad at the same time.

Now it is the bottom of the sixth, and the other team is winning five to six. Who can help the team in winning the town-tourney? "I sure can't," Flinn thinks to

himself. "I couldn't even hit a ball that was right down the middle." He watches his teammate Walter strike out to a 12-6 curveball. "Oh no," Flinn thinks, "There's two outs and I'm up again, I can't do this. Never in a million years." Adrian notices how discouraged Flinn looks and sits down with him. "Hey Flinn, are you okay?" "No," Flinn says. "I couldn't hit a ball that was in the perfect spot, how can I ever do this? It's the bottom of the sixth with two outs, it's all up to me!" He says that a little loudly and his whole team looks at him and begins to encourage him. "It's alright, Flinn. You got this!" Flinn hears another teammate say, "Don't be discouraged, you'll do great." "You know, they're right, I can do this!" Flinn thinks to himself. With that, he grabs his bat, throws on his helmet, and steps onto the field. "Oops," he thinks to himself, "I stayed in the dugout for longer than I thought." The Umpire looks irritated and the opposing team looks impatient. "It's alright, though. I can do this!" So, he steps one foot into the batter's box and looks at his head coach who gives the steal sign to Jack, his good friend who is on second. With a deep breath, Flinn puts his other foot in the batter's box. This is it. The last chance at beating the Cougars. There is a new pitcher this time, and Flinn doesn't know what pitches he throws, but he doesn't have time to dwell on that as the first ball comes flying towards him low and outside. "Ball," the Umpire says softly as Jack reaches third safely. "Alright, the first pitch is looking sort of good for me," he thinks as Adrian hollers, "Good eye, Flinn! Look for a good one now." Flinn steps out of the box and peers down at his coach standing by the dugout. "Let's go Flinn, remember your mechanics now, you got this!" With that, Flinn steps back into the batter's box, ready for the next one. The opposing pitcher comes set... pulls back... and drives the ball high and inside. "Ball," the Umpire says again. "Whew, that's close!" Flinn thinks as a rush of compliments swarm him from the dugout. "Good eye!" "At-a-boy, Flinn!" they call. Flinn turns to his coach. "Here we go, Flinn. Drive it now, you got this!" Flinn turns back to the pitcher who seems to be a little more stressed now that he has thrown two baseballs just outside the zone. For the third time, the pitcher stands up straight, pullsback, and throws a curve ball high and outside to low and inside. Flinn swings. "Striiike," the Umpire calls, followed by his teammates hollering, "That's alright, Flinn, you'll get the next one, you got this!" Flinn spins to face his coach, but the coach is talking to Jack on third base, so Flinn just tells himself, "I got this, it's a two and one count, I just need to find the right pitch," and for the fourth time he aligns his feet with the plate, poised to crush the ball. Yet again, the pitcher stands tall... pulls back... and throws a fastball chest-high and outside. Flinn swings. This time there is resistance against his bat, but it disappears

quickly. "Wait," Flinn thinks. "That would mean I..." His thought is interrupted by a heavy amount of cheering and his coach yelling, "Run! Run! Run!" So he runs! He runs as fast as he can and discovers the amazing fact that he'd smacked the baseball between the first baseman and the second baseman, then between the center fielder and right fielder, all the way to the fence! Yet he can't pay attention to that now, his first base coach is giving the sign to run to second as Jack scores at home plate. So Flinn rounds first and runs like he's never done before, but the throw is heading right for the shortstop who is covering second. It's going to be really close! "Wait," Flinn thinks. "Why does this kid look worried? Probably because of how far I hit it." But he has to focus on running, he needs to be safe at second! He gasps when he realizes it might be an overthrow! This might be huge for him! It isn't long until he discovers he is right! The second baseman overthrew the baseball in his panic. "Go three! Go three!" he hears his coach roaring. This is his big chance, he can do it, he can get there in time. So Flinn sprints as fast as his little legs can carry him. He is just about to start sliding when the catcher scoops up the ball and begins to throw. It's going to be very close! Flinn gets closer as the ball flies even closer, the tension begins to rise. Suddenly, the third baseman moves! Instead of being in a ready, squatting position, the third baseman jumps up, long enough for Flinn to slide in safely at third! Then, instead of hearing loud cheering from the dugout and the bleachers, all he hears is, "Run! Run! Get up and run!" No, it couldn't possibly be, but it was. It was an overthrow, right down the foul line! Flinn is too astonished to yell, but he is excited enough to run, to get ahead of the Cougars, to win. So he sprints as fast as he can. He will never be able to remember how long it took him to cross home plate, but he will always remember the excitement. As Flinn slides across home plate, it feels like the greatest moment of his whole life. He is instantly smothered with many arms pulling him up, and the loud sound of his cheering teammates all around him. Flinn's done it. He's won his team the championship game.