

Chapter Seven

The second semester begins on the first Monday in February, and immediately there are some surprises. The biggest surprise is that Mr. Ortega has decided to let Tiny Garcia, Jesus Christo Reyes, and One-eyed Joey Galvan back into Del Cielo High. On the same day, he also enrolls Annette Garcia and Anita Ceja. Both girls are well known athletes, and they played for the Patterson High Softball team last year. Annette is a pitcher and Anita plays catcher. Nobody knows how they ended up at Del Cielo High but I have known them both since Patterson Elementary.

It is hard for me to believe that Mr. Ortega has admitted Tiny, Joe, and Jesus because they have been known to spend every available opportunity recruiting new gang members. I've been around Mr. Ortega long enough to know that he is going to try and save everybody. My feeling is that most of the First Street Boyz can't be saved because all they think about is making easy money.

This semester, I have to retake a semester of biology because last year I flunked the second semester. The class is taught by Mr. Horseman, and it meets in his classroom after lunch. In our CORE classes, we are already preparing for the state tests. This is because our state test scores have been bad as long as anyone can remember, and the state is threatening to take over the school. Personally, I have no idea why the state would want Del Cielo High.

This semester, our math study group is meeting on Tuesdays and Thursdays. This is so that Mr. Phish can attend. Wendell says that the class has become so difficult that even he needs help. Once more algebra is scheduled for 3rd period, just before P.E. class.

According to Mrs. Purdy, this is only the second time that Del Cielo High has been invited to the Rosehaven Softball Tournament. She tells us that the invitation came only after our third place finish at their volleyball tournament. Mr. Phish says that it is an honor because it is the largest alternative education co-ed softball tournament in the state, and they never

invite schools as small as ours.

On the first day of softball, Mr. Phish has us all start by taking batting practice. I'm a little rusty at the plate, and very few of my hits manage to reach the outfield. On the other hand, Dalton proceeds to hit the heck out of the ball. Tiny, Mambo, Joey, and Jesus Reyes spend their time at bat trying to hit the ball out of the park. Then, just as soon as we are done with batting practice, Mr. Phish has us play a short intermural game. Our first tournament is next month at Los Banos. I played in it last year, and it features a half a dozen small farming community continuation schools.

The week before the Los Banos Softball Tournament I am surprised when a letter arrives from Katrina Cortez. There are butterflies in my stomach when I open it. Of course, I can't understand a word that she has written, so the next morning I get to school early so that I can have Mr. Phish translate for me. None of it is good news. Her father is working in Zamora and for now they are staying there. She has no idea when they will be returning to Patterson. The letter leaves me with an empty feeling. I am disappointed, and heartbroken.

Mr. Phish says that the Los Banos Softball Tournament has been around for a long time and the best we have ever done is fourth place. Then, when it is only three days before the tournament, Mr. Ortega surprises us all by making Mambo the team captain. He tells the P.E. Class that he wants Mambo to channel his leadership skills into something constructive. Needless to say, we are all stunned by his decision.

The day before the tournament, we are in the middle of our lunch period, when Mambo knocks on Mr. Ortega's office door, and then enters. Then after the two of them have a brief discussion, Mambo emerges from Mr. Ortega's office. He slowly strolls across the main room, and then proceeds to tack his team roster on the bulletin board. The moment he finishes, we all crowd around to see who is on the team. At first, I can hardly believe what I am seeing. Mambo has given every position to the First Street Boyz. It's an all First Street Boyz team except for Anita and Annette, and he can't eliminate them because continuation softball tournaments require that 3 girls play on the field at all times. Chili Rodriguez is also on the list. She has just given birth to their third child, and according to Mambo, is ready to play.

I am about ready to explode, and when I confront Mambo about leaving us off the list he just laughs in my face, and when he's done laughing he calls me a series of four letter words. It is all pretty disgusting, so I decide to do something about it, and I walk over to Mr. Phish's classroom to complain.

The second I enter his classroom I tell him, "Mr. Phish I thought that you wanted to win. If I had known that this was the way it was going to be, I would have taken another class. I can't believe that you're letting Mambo get away with this!"

Mr. Phish is totally unprepared for an answer, and instead he just sits there with his mouth wide open, and doesn't reply.

Finally after a long pause, he answers, "I'm not involved in the decision. Mr. Ortega is the boss and I have to do what he says because I'm not a tenured teacher. He wants to show those kids that there is something in life other than gangs. Mr. Ortega thinks that he can turn Mambo around and make him a productive citizen."

All I can do is shake my head in disgust at what I'm hearing.

It's at this time that I peer straight in Mr. Phish's face, and remark, "I've known Mambo Rosas for a long time. He and the rest of the First Street Boyz are nothing but trouble."

The day of the tournament, my dad drops me off at school early so he can get to a job in Modesto. Mambo and the softball team are already gathering in front of the school for the ride to Los Banos, which is 45 minutes south of Patterson on the I-5 Freeway. Those of us who have been left off of the team watch from a distance as they board the school districts brand new mini-bus. We have been screwed, and there is nothing we can do about it.

Mr. Phish's substitute shows up 5 minutes late. He tells us to do the work in the book, and stay quiet. The entire time I am in class I keep saying to myself that if Mr. Ortega wants to put a trophy in the trophy case, then Mr. Ortega needs to play his best players.

The next morning when I arrive at school there is a Los Banos Police car parked in front of the school. Then when we enter the school, Mrs. Purdy

instructs us to go wait in front of our respective class rooms. At this time there are two uniformed policemen standing in Mr. Ortega's office, and from the looks of things they are pretty fired up. It doesn't take long before I figure out that something bad has happened. None of the First Street Boyz are in school, and Mr. Phish is nowhere to be found. Just a short time later, once more the same male substitute arrives and opens up our classroom. Without hesitating, I sit down and my hand goes up.

The sub asks, "How can I help you?"

I inquire, as politely as I can, "Did something happen in Los Banos?"

The substitute responds, "I have no idea. They called me early this morning, and told me that they would need me for a second day."

It's at this time that everyone in the room turns in the direction of Anita and Annette. They are the only ones in attendance who had gone to the tournament yesterday. Minutes pass like hours, but the second the bell sounds announcing the end of the first class we all rush outside to get the story from the girls.

Anita and Annette are clear that they don't like being put in this position. At first they refuse to answer, but eventually they realize that we're not about to let up until they tell us what had happened. Only a minute later, Anita does all of the talking.

She says, "Things went bad right from the very start. Mr. Phish exploded in anger because all of the Boyz walked off the bus wearing red socks and red tennis shoes. He told them that there were rules against displaying gang colors, and that they were going to get them kicked out of the tournament. He ordered them to get back on mini-bus to change back into their white socks. There was nothing that he could do about the red tennis shoes. This made Mambo angry. The Los Banos Softball Park is pretty small with only has 4 diamonds. Pretty soon, we found out that all of the other teams were Sureños. Almost immediately, both sides started throwing down gang signs, and all of the other teams wanted to fight us."

Anita is so excited that she is almost hyperventilating. She pauses for a moment. Then, she needs another minute to gather her thoughts before she can continue.

Finally, she takes a big gulp of air and finds the strength to continue, “It was horrible. We couldn’t get anyone out. Jesus, Joey, Mambo, and Tiny were awful. Tiny hit the ball into deep center field, but he ran so slow that they threw him out at first base. They kept trying to hit home runs, but instead of home runs they hit popups. We got beaten badly 3 games in a row. Then, after lunch it was our turn to play the home team, Los Banos.”

“When Los Banos got up to bat, we couldn’t get anyone out. They had two guys in scoring positions, when this big guy named Chuey came up to bat. Chuey drove one out of the park. He hit the ball so far that it landed on the roof of a house across the street. The second it cleared the fence, Mambo became as angry as I have ever seen him. I thought he was going to explode. Then when Chuey rounded first base, Mambo stuck out his foot and tripped him. The big guy went down hard, and the moment he did, the entire Los Banos dugout emptied. They wanted to kill Mambo.”

“Mambo ran as fast as he could into our dugout. There he grabbed bat for self-defense and boy did they come after him. You could see the blood in their eyes. Mr. Phish and the Los Banos coach tried to get him to put the bat down before he hurt somebody, but Mambo was scared. He just kept swinging, and somehow he nailed the Los Banos coach in the forehead. He hit him pretty good.”

“Mr. Phish had no choice, but to call 911. The police arrested Mambo and placed him in handcuffs. According to Mr. Phish, Mambo is now 18 years of age, so for the first time he went to jail.”

“Soon after, Mr. Phish got all of the First Street Boyz on the mini-bus, they all began flashing gang signs out the bus windows. The Sureños responded by hurling rocks at us. There was broken glass everywhere, and the bus is a wreck. It was a real mess.”

During the second period, Mr. Ortega came into our class to talk to us.

I can tell that he is really upset, “I’m sure that you all heard about what happened in Los Banos yesterday. I just received a hand delivered copy of the police report, and it says that Mr. Phish did everything he could to stop what happened. I’ve never been more embarrassed. I suspended both Jesus Reyes and Joey Galvan for 5 days for fighting. Mambo is facing

expulsion. I have decided to cancel the Rosehaven Softball Tournament.”

I can't believe what he is saying, and what about Mr. Phish's job? For sure, he will lose it now. Immediately, I raise my hand, so that Mr. Ortega will call on me.

He says, “Tyrell.”

I insist, “Mr. Ortega, I don't think that it's fair for you to punish us for what those guys did. We didn't have anything to do with it, and I don't think that we should be punished for their bad behavior. Besides, Mrs. Purdy told my mom that Mr. Phish is in danger of losing his job. Mr. Phish is the best teacher I've ever had, and this isn't his fault. I want to play in the Rosehaven Tournament for Mr. Phish.”

At first, Mr. Ortega is a little startled, and it takes a long time before we have an opportunity to hear his reply. In fact, he is silent for so long that I am just about certain that he has given up on the idea of a Del Cielo High sports program.

Finally, he lets off a big groan and then asks, “How many of you want to play on the Del Cielo High softball team, at the Rosehaven Tournament?”

In a second, every hand in the room is raised. Even the soon-to-be mothers are raising their hands.

Mr. Ortega looks over the classroom and says, “I don't know what to say. I can't afford to have another episode like this because it could cost me my job. They destroyed a brand new mini-bus, and it's going to cost a fortune to get it repaired. All of the bad publicity has been a nightmare for me. My telephone hasn't stopped ringing. Even worse, I'm going to have to explain what happened in front of Dr. Davis and the school board. I have no idea how they're going to react.”

“Mr. Ortega, I promise you that nothing will happen,” I reply.

Finally, after what seems like eternity, he responds, “Alright, I give in. I'm going to give you guys one more chance, and there better not be any more problems. Tyrell, I'm holding you personally responsible, and I'm putting everyone on notice. If you're failing a class, in a gang, or not behaving in

the classroom, then you're not going to the Rosehaven Tournament.”

“Thank you, Mr. Ortega, you won't regret it,” I tell him grinning ear to ear.

Then before I even have a chance to celebrate, he says, “Don't get too excited, Mr. Walker. I'm putting everyone here on notice, if there are any problems between now and then, I'm going to cancel.”

The next day Mr. Phish came back to work, and I am totally ecstatic because we have the first algebra test of the semester tomorrow. Right now, I can't afford to lose him. He's my life line, if I lose him now, I'll never pass algebra. We spent the entire algebra class reviewing for the next test. Then just when class ends, Wendell invites me over to his house to study. The entire time that we are walking over to his house the only thing on his mind is the tournament. We studied until Wendell's parents call, and tell him that their restaurant is packed and they need him to bus tables. It doesn't matter because I'm prepared.

The next day, the moment we finish taking the math test, we head straight out to the softball diamond for an inter-mural game. No sooner have we taken the field when Joey's Chevy low rider appears. Joey's front windows are rolled down. Inside the car I can see Joey, Jesus, and Tiny, and they are all wearing red bandannas. We all watch nervously as they continue to cruise past the softball field until Mr. Phish decides to call 911. The second he puts the phone to his ear, Joey starts waving an Uzi machine gun out the car window. Immediately, we all ran for our lives, but there is no place to hide.

Sergeant Sanchez arrives in what seems like an eternity. He quickly orders the First Street Boyz to get out with their hands up in the air. Then, none of us can believe it when Sergeant Sanchez reaches into Joey's car and pulls out an Uzi machine gun. Then when he pulls the trigger, a steady stream of water came squirting out of the nozzle.

Only a second later, Sergeant Sanchez announces, “It's OK, everybody. You can get off of the ground. It's only a squirt gun that looks like a machine gun.”

Jesus and Joey really think that it is funny, and they are laughing hysterically. Unfortunately for them, the police didn't like it at all. They

arrest them all for making a terrorist threat. We are sure that Mr. Ortega will cancel the tournament, but when we get back to school he doesn't say a thing about it.

At lunch time, Mr. Ortega taped a list of those who would be permitted to participate to his office door. Out of all of the people in our P.E. Class, I am one of the few to make the team along with Wendell, Chico, Anita, Annette and Dalton. The rest of the students on the eligible list are in the migrant program, and they have never played softball. Not a single Latin King or First Street Boy is on the list.

The next day, Mr. Phish decides to bring all of his migrant students to the softball diamond for P.E. Class. I am not surprised because he is desperate for talent. Maybe, out of the 8 students in this class, one or two will play well enough to help the team, but none of them own mitts.

At this time, Anita and Annette prove to be a huge asset because they both are native Spanish speakers, and excellent hitters. From behind home plate Anita patiently instructs the migrant students on how to swing the bat. It is fun to see their excitement, but mostly they just hit foul tips. The next day, Mr. Phish really amazes me. He shows up with new gloves for the ESL students. He tells us that the gloves have been donated by Clint Boreman, which doesn't surprise me.

By the end of the week we are told that Mambo has been sentenced to the time that he has served, and he is already out on the streets. Just as soon as he finds out, Mr. Phish starts looking out the window of the classroom like he's expecting a drive-by. Just watching him makes the class nervous. The moment we enter the main room for lunch, Mrs. Purdy waves for me to come over to her desk.

"Veech Martinez called me from Zamora last night. He's on his way back to Patterson," Mrs. Purdy exclaims, "I told him that he can stay with me until he graduates next year."

I can't think of anything that I would rather hear, "That is just fantastic. We sure need another infielder."

Mr. Purdy takes a stapler out of her drawer before continuing, "I have something else. Mr. Ortega thinks that he found him a job at one of the

local warehouses.”

I am really excited. I didn't think that I would ever see Veech again. At this time, it is obvious to all of us which of Mr. Phish's recruits can play. It's already clear that Simon and Chico are the two guys who have the most potential, but we still need one more girl. Anita and Annette are as good as they come, but we needed one more. Mr. Ortega has ruled Chili is a gang member, thus ineligible, but it doesn't matter because we all know that she won't play without Mambo. The rest of the girls are pregnant.

Annette can slow pitch as well as anyone. Simon and Chico will play right and left field and Dalton can play center. Under the rules of the tournament, every single player on your team must have a turn in the batting rotation. So, in our situation we will be better off if we show up with the roster minimum of 10 players. We will lose for sure if we show up with a group of people who have no hope of getting a hit or catching a ball.

The next week, both Veech Martinez and Eddie Cruz returned to Del Cielo. Except for a boot heal mark that is still visible on his forehead, Eddie's wounds have all but vanished. The day after Eddie returns, he tells Mr. Ortega that he is through with gangs. Most of us didn't believe him, but whatever he said to Mr. Ortega worked because he made Eddie eligible for the softball team.

Less than a week before the Rosehaven Softball Tournament I get the biggest surprise ever, when Katrina Cortez walks through the front door of Del Cielo High. At first I don't believe what I am seeing. She seems taller, and even prettier than the last time I saw her. It has been a long time, almost 3 months. Everything about her seems different. She seems so mature, and she is sure happy to see me.

We held each other in a long embrace, as I asked her about her family, “How are your mother and father?”

She replies, “They are fine. Do you have a new girlfriend, Tyrell?”

“Your English has really improved,” I answered.

I don't think that I have ever been so happy to see someone in my life. I had given up hope of ever seeing Katrina again, and her timing couldn't

have been better. Just seeing Katrina makes me realize how much I have been missing her. At the same time she's the extra girl that we need desperately need to satisfy the Rosehaven entry requirements.

The day of the tournament all of the members of the softball team are told to arrive at school early for the ride to Turlock. On the way to school, I have my dad swing by Katrina's house to pick her up. Once again her family is living in the Walnut Acres Farm Camp, and when we arrive to pick her up she is patiently waiting outside. Then when we pull up in front of the school, I am not surprised to see the oldest bus that the school district owned parked in front of the school. I doubt that they will ever let Del Cielo High students use the new mini-bus again. Before we get on the bus, Mrs. Purdy hands each of us our uniforms, a sack lunch and a bottle of water. The uniforms have numbers on the back, and a picture of a bulldog on the front.

Soon after Mr. Phish finishes loading the softball equipment, he opens the bus side door and we all get on board. The tournament is in the Turlock softball complex which is adjacent to Rosehaven Alternative High. There is hardly a peep out of any of us as we round the Patterson circle and then quickly exit Patterson's city limits. Soon after we cross over the San Joaquin River, I start to feel overwhelmed. We are short on talent, but we are very high on hope. Before long, the sign on the side of the road says, "Welcome to Turlock." Then just as the sun's rays perch we pull into the softball complex.

The second Mr. Phish turns off the engine, he says, "This is why we have been training. It's up to you guys. You can win it, if you want to win it. Let's get out there."

The moment he stops speaking we all respond with the bulldog bark. It's at this time that we get out of our seats and follow Mr. Phish off of the bus. He wants us to warm up on the diamond farthest away from the entrance. Then as we warm up, Mr. Phish walks over to the signup desk to get our schedule. At the same time, buses filled with softball players are pulling into the parking lot one after another. Before long, Mr. Phish returns with a copy of the schedule and rules.

Then as he stands stoically on the pitcher's mound, he tells us, "Gather around everybody."

Abruptly, the entire team rushes in to hear what he has to say.

When he has everyone present, Mr. Phish gives us his final instructions, "There are going to be 12 schools here today. The teams are divided into two divisions of 6 teams apiece. The winner of each division plays for the championship. The second place teams play for third and fourth place. Only the top 3 teams get trophies. These are 6 inning games, and if the game ends in a tie then it's a tie on the books. No bunting is permitted. The ball has to be hit passed the pitcher's mound to be a hit. Everybody hits. We play Stockton first on Diamond 1. They have some really big guys."

No sooner does Mr. Phish finish talking when there is an announcement over the public address system. The announcement says that we all need to report to our assigned diamonds immediately. Hastily, Mr. Phish grabs the equipment bag, and as fast as we can, we all head to Diamond 1. The tournament hasn't even begun and we are already late.

The second we arrive on Diamond 1, the umpire points us toward the dugout along the first base line, and then starts shouting, "You guys need to hurry up. The games all have to start on time."

Veech hurries as fast as he can to home plate for the flip of the coin. Stockton calls tails and wins. They choose for us to hit first. It's at this time that Mr. Phish posts the lineup and batting order in the dugout. I am starting at first base and Wendell is our leadoff batter. Their pitcher is a tall, freckled faced, red headed girl. She arches the first pitch high over Wendell's head, and it drops across the plate. The umpire yells, "Strike!"

Wendell is unfazed. Once more, the girl delivers the same pitch, but this time he drives it over the head of the second baseman and it falls in for a single. The second it drops in, we leap to our feet cheering. Veech has been anxiously waiting for his turn in the on deck circle. He hit the first pitch, a hard grounder that shoots under the glove of their second baseman and keeps rolling into right field. Mr. Phish doesn't hesitate to wave Wendell all the way home, and Veech advances to 3rd base. Now with Veech in scoring position, it is Anita's turn at the plate. Anita swings at the first pitch and misses. The very next pitch she smacks a single into short right field, knocking Veech home. Our turn at bat ends with the score 2-0.

Annette's slow pitch arch is one of the best that I have ever seen. Over and over she gets them to pop up or ground out. By mixing up her pitches she manages to hold them scoreless until the fourth inning. In the fourth inning, their center fielder, with 2 outs and a runner on, hits a home run, tying the score at 2-2. Then with the game still tied in the top of the 6th inning, we are in desperate need of a run, but Veech and Wendell both ground out, and we are quickly running out of options. Now it is all up to Dalton. Dalton's first pitch is way outside. However, the second pitch is right over the plate. Dalton rears back and drives this one into the right field corner, and then proceeds to fly around the bases as fast as I have ever seen him run. At the same time, the right fielder picks up the ball, and turns to throw the ball toward home. Then with the throw bearing down on Dalton like a rocket, he dives head first for home plate, arriving under the catcher's tag. We are ahead 3-2.

Mr. Phish shouts at the top of his lungs, "This is it. Hold them, Del Cielo!"

Annette proceeds to not give them a single pitch over home plate. The result is they swing at bad pitches and pop up. It's three up and three down, and we have won our first game.

The next team on our schedule is Clovis Alternative School from the Fresno area. This time we win the toss, but the Clovis team jumps on the scoreboard with a run following a series of singles. This game, Mr. Phish has Annette as our leadoff hitter. She punches one that falls in for a single. Wendell then hits a pop up into center field and the rover and the right fielder collide going for the ball. In the confusion that follows, Mr. Phish waves Annette home, and we are tied at 1-1.

Neither team scores a run during the next 4 innings. Both teams put up amazing defense, and getting a hit is almost impossible. Finally, in the bottom of the 6th with the game still tied and one out, Veech and Anita hit back to back singles, and it is my turn to bat. The outfielders all back up to the fence expecting me to smack the ball, but we only need is a single to win. The next pitch is right over the plate, and I punch it down the 3rd base line, in fair territory, and Veech scores for the win.

Our third game is against the biggest school in the tournament, Elliot High of Modesto. They have also won both games. Their coach plays golf with

Mr. Ortega on Saturdays, and they have a big bet going. He told him that they are going to kick our rears. He also told Mr. Ortega that they have the best infield in the tournament.

We won the toss, so again we let them bat first. The score was tied at 2-2 until the 4th inning when Anita knocked in two runs with a double. Then, in the bottom of the 5th inning, they score two runs on a ball that rolls between Chico's legs and continues until it hits the fence. The score is now tied 4-4. At the start of the 6th inning, the tournament officials came over to talk to Mr. Phish.

He turned to tell us what had been said, "I just got word that if we win here, we make it into the final 4. We're now in uncharted territory, no team from Del Cielo High has ever gone this far in a big tournament. We have to hold them."

We end the inning with Wendell and Veech turning the best double play ever. Now, it is our final turn at bat. Eddie is up first, and he hit the third pitch to the shortstop, and he bobbles the ball, allowing Eddie to arrive safely at 1st base. Next, Wendell punches a single over the second baseman's head, and Eddie races all the way home. We won 5-4.

The moment the game ends, one of the tournament officials comes over to tell us that we are playing the home team Rosehaven Alternative High School. They are the only other undefeated team. Over the years, Rosehaven has developed a reputation for having great athletic teams, and they are well disciplined. We have 30 minutes to eat our sack lunches and go the bathroom before the game starts on Diamond 1. However, none of us is very interested in eating or drinking, we want to play.

We are totally surprised by what happens next. Suddenly, all of the classroom doors open at the same time and hundreds of students empty out of their classrooms and surround the diamond. They immediately try to intimidate us by shouting crude comments and blowing noise makers. It's at this time that we all learn first-hand about the home field advantage.

Then when Rosehaven's pitcher warms up we can't believe what we are seeing. The narrow chested pitcher throws the highest arched pitch that any of us have ever seen. Mr. Phish has Anita lead off, and the second she steps up to the plate she receives a chorus of heckling from the students.

She swings wildly at the first pitch and misses the ball entirely. This causes the crowd to go crazy, and the awful things that they are saying overwhelm her.

Finally, Mr. Phish calls, "Time out."

He then walks up to Anita and places his arm around her.

He tells her, "Don't let these people get the best of you. This is just between you and the pitcher. Keep your eye on the ball, and take a big cut. You can do it Anita. Start us out with a hit."

The next pitch is a big fat one right over the plate, and Anita hits the ball into shallow right field, where it is caught for the first out. Veech and Wendell follow her, and they ground out, making it three up and three down.

Rosehaven's leadoff batter smacks the first pitch down the 3rd base line. Eddie backhands the ball on the third bounce, and his resulting throw is wide, forcing me to pull my foot off of the base. Then when the umpire yells, "safe," I cringe.

Their next batter is their left handed first baseman. He hits a hard line drive and it roars past Katrina in right field. The ball just keeps going until it reaches the right field fence. Katrina races after it, and a few feet from the fence, she threw it as far as she can, but it is hopeless. Both runners score on what turns into an inside the park home run. The Rosehaven students are going crazy with excitement. At the same time, Mr. Phish can tell that we are quickly falling apart.

He ran out onto the infield shouting, "Time out, ump."

At the same time he waves for all of the infielders to meet at the pitcher's mound for a conference.

He says, "Everybody, calm down right now. These guys are nothing special. We can beat them, just like we've beat everyone else. Don't let this crowd get to you, that's what they want. They want you to fall apart. Let's calm down, and get them out."

Standing in the batter's box is their shortstop. He lines a hard grounder straight into Wendell's glove. Wendell pivots, and throws a sizzler to me at first base for the first out, beating the runner by a mile. The second the umpire yells, "Out," we all start to calm down, but our joy is short lived when we realize that the biggest guy in the tournament is up next.

Their coach yells, "Hit it out of here, Moose."

Moose rears back in the batter's box and then launches the first pitch into deep left center. Immediately, Simon takes off running towards after the ball as fast as he can, and just when it is about to clear the fence for a home run, he leaps as high as he can and brings the ball down for the second out. Their girl rover follows Moose up next. She pops up for the third out.

When we return to the dugout, Mr. Phish says, "The left fielder is playing real deep. Punch one in, Tyrell."

From the batter's box I can tell he is right. I am going to have to hit to the left side of the field if I want to get on. The first pitch is inside, and a perfect pitch for what I want to do. I punch the first pitch over the third baseman's head, and slowly begin running to first base, thinking that the ball is foul.

Then suddenly the umpire yells, "Fair ball."

The ball rolls into the far corner, and as fast as I can move I round second base before sliding into third base for a triple. Chico is next up, and so far today he hasn't gotten a hit. This time at bat he swings at the first pitch, knocking a grounder that rolls untouched between the first and second baseman, knocking me in. Then, Eddie hits in Chico with a double, and the score is tied 2-2.

During the next three innings both teams play flawless defense, as we are once more locked in a dead tie. In the top of the 6th inning, the tournament officials once more enter the dugout to talk to Mr. Phish. They are there to make it clear that we will continue playing until there is a winner.

Katrina is the first batter up in the top of the 6th inning. She swings at the first 3 pitches, and never gets near the ball. She strikes out. The Rosehaven students can smell blood, and they jump on the moment,

heckling louder and louder. Annette is up next. She pops the ball straight up and the pitcher catches it for the second out, and we are in big trouble.

Anita hit a grounder to the third baseman, and he makes a terrible throw allowing her to arrive safely at second base. There is one on, with two outs, and it is Veech's turn at bat. Veech rears back, and the ball came right over the center of the plate. He swings and the ball sails over the head of the short stop and then proceeds to clear the left field fence. Veech pumps his right fist into the air, rounding the bases grinning ear to ear. Wendell is next up and he grounds out for the third out and we are ahead 4-2.

Then as we take the field for what we hope will be the last time, Mr. Phish pulls Annette aside and tells her to pitch to them outside. Their shortstop leads off with a single, and Annette walks the very next batter. Now, we are in big trouble because Moose is next up. No outs, bottom of the sixth, 2 on, and their best hitter at the plate. None of us are surprised when Moose takes a vicious cut at the very first pitch, and the ball sails into right field towards Katrina. I can barely watch when I realize that she has lost the ball in the sun. Then just when everything looks hopeless Katrina sticks her glove into the air and catches the ball, but both of the runners advance.

Now, there are two runners in scoring position. Their next batter swings and the ball rolls straight into Wendell's glove. Wendell reaches out to tag the runner, and then threw the ball to me on first base in time for the double play. The game is over, and we have gone undefeated.

We all lined up to shake hands with the Rosehaven team, before following Mr. Phish to where they are presenting us our trophies. Our trophies are gold, and they depict a batter. The one that Del Cielo High received stood almost 4 feet tall. Just as soon as we loaded up our equipment, we all got on board for the ride back to Patterson. The moment we are settled on board, Mr. Phish announces that he has talked to Mr. Ortega on the phone.

He says, "I just talked to Mr. Ortega. He's buying pizza for the entire team. We're going to meet him at Wilbur Garcia's."

We couldn't be more excited as we all yell our approval. Then when we are about half way home, I call my buddy Sal Marquez to tell him about our win. He didn't think that we had a chance of winning. Sal is really excited.

He keeps telling me on the phone, "I don't believe it. You mean that you guys beat those big schools."

I laugh, and then reply, "We sure did. We're on our way to Wilbur Garcia's for pizza. Mr. Ortega says he's buying. Why don't you join us for the celebration?"

Sal replies, "Sure, I'll stop by. Can I bring Chad Campbell?"

"I don't see why not," I utter, "We should be at Wilbur's in about 20 minutes."

Just a short time later, we pull in front of Wilbur Garcia's, and Mr. Phish gets out the bus with the school's trophy. The trophy looked even bigger when he places it on a table in the middle of the restaurant for everyone to admire. Mr. Phish ordered 3 Canadian bacon and pineapple pizzas, and some pitchers of soft drinks. His smile is enormous, and it stretches from ear to ear.

Then as he poured us each a soft drink, he says, "I couldn't be more proud of you guys. I didn't think that we had a chance."

I asked, "Does this mean that you'll get to keep your job, Mr. Phish?"

He just stands there staring me in the face, and then finally he answers, "I was ready to quit after what happened in Los Banos. I didn't think that I ever wanted to coach again."

The moment Mr. Phish finishes pouring the soft drinks, he enters the rest room to relieve himself. Suddenly, Mambo, Jesus, Joey, and Tiny pull up in front of Wilbur's in Joey's Chevy low rider. We all watched through the window as the four of them jumped out of the car and then burst through the front door of Wilbur's.

Mambo asks the girl who had just taken our order, "Where's Catfish?"

Afraid for her life, she nods towards the bathroom. Mambo walks straight over to the bathroom door and shoves a chair under the door knob so that Mr. Phish can't get out. I am sure that they are packing guns.

Mambo then turns and once more glares at the trophy.

He then says, "That trophy is ours, you guys stole it from us, and we're going to take it home."

I have heard enough.

I immediately rise up out of my chair and as directly as I can I told him, "We're here to celebrate, and you guys aren't invited. How about leaving us all alone, Mambo?"

Mambo snarls, "You better watch it, Tyrell, or you're going to be the first one to pay."

The moment he finishes speaking, Sal appears in the restaurant doorway. Sal has heard everything that Mambo has said, and he is really angry.

He rips into Mambo, "Everybody in town is sick of you. Why don't you do what Tyrell told you to do, and leave everybody alone?"

Suddenly, Tiny Garcia wants to get involved.

He says, "Sal, if you know what's good for you, you'll show Mambo more respect. Nobody talks to Mambo like that!"

Knowing that he has all of the cards with Tiny backing him up, Mambo once again snarls, "Now what are you guys going to do about it. I'm taking the trophy home."

Chad Campbell has arrived with Sal, but so far he has been sitting back just listening. Until now, he has been reluctant to get involved.

Finally, he looks straight at Tiny and shouts, "Tiny, if you know what's good for you, you'll stay out of this. This fight is between Tyrell and Mambo."

It is at this moment that my entire team rises out of their seats.

Without hesitating I tell him, "Your problems just got bigger, Mambo."

Mambo came out swinging, and his first punch hit me square in the nose.

It hit me so hard that I tumble backwards and fall into the ice machine almost crashing onto the floor.

Then as I struggle to regain my composure, Chad comes over and put his arm around me, and yells, "Go get him, carpet cleaner. This is what you've been waiting for."

My brain is rattled, but I respond with a flurry of punches that force Mambo to retreat out the front door of Wilbur's, and onto the street. There, in the middle of the downtown, we hook it up, exchanging punch after punch as the crowd gets bigger and bigger. Before long Mambo gains the upper hand by using a series of counter punches, and I stumble to the asphalt on my knees. Then just when I think that I'm going down for good, I hear Katrina's voice.

She screams, "Get up, Tyrell. Get up."

I can see the tears welling in her eyes, and just when it looks completely hopeless, I somehow find the strength to get back on my feet. Only this time, I go after him with everything I have, flattening Mambo with a combination of punches. Suddenly, he goes down on his face and doesn't move.

Then with Mambo struggling for consciousness, I tell the rest of the First Street Boyz, "If you know what's good for you, you'll get this sack of garbage out of here."

Joey, Tiny, and Jesus carry the semi-conscious Mambo to the car, and drive away as fast as they can go. At the same time, Wendell lets Mr. Phish out of the bathroom, and he calls 911. The Patterson Police Station is only a block away, and Sergeant Sanchez finds their car almost immediately. He pulls the First Street Boyz over, and inside the trunk of Joey Galvan's car he finds a large quantity of methamphetamine, and a large cache of guns that had been stolen during a residential burglary.

The next day, the newspaper came to school and takes our picture. The very next issue, a story about the team appears on page 3. On the front page in big headlines is a picture of Mambo and the story about the drug bust. The article tells how the police broke up Patterson's most notorious gang, the First Street Boyz. It says that the leaders of the gang are all

facing serious prison time.

Just a few weeks later, we are all excited when we learn that Mr. Phish is going to be the new varsity football coach at Patterson High. I guess that miracles do occur because I end the school year with a "B" in algebra class. I didn't miss a class all year, as a result, Dr. Davis the school superintendent, lets me back into Patterson High. At the same time, he admits Wendell, Veech, Dalton, Katrina, and Eddie. Now, they all want to go to college. Eddie says he's done with gangs and stealing cars. I certainly hope so, because we're getting our Chevy Malibu fixed, and he knows where we live.

Tyrell Walker Chapter Seven Questions

Answer using complete sentences

1. Should Tiny, Jesus, and Joey have been allowed back in school?
2. Why does Tyrell think that the First Street Boyz can't be saved?
3. Why does Mr. Ortega make Mambo team captain?
4. What started the riot that occurred at the Los Banos Tournament?
5. Should the Roselawn Softball Tournament have been cancelled after what had happened at Los Banos?
6. Why did Rosehaven High let all of their students out of class?
7. Why does Mr. Phish decide to call time out in the 1st inning against Rosehaven High?
8. How did Mr. Phish answer Tyrell when he asked if the win was enough for him to keep his job?
9. Do you believe that Tyrell should have let mambo take the trophy and avoid the fight?
10. If you ever face great adversity like Tyrell, will you quit or will you do everything in your power to overcome it?