

Playing to win

Home-run hitter Samantha had been striking out in the romance department—until she met David

Everything
is possible
for you!

Every day,
someone finds the
right job or a
house that feels
like home. Every
day, someone
discovers lasting
love, real
happiness or a
new purpose in
life. Every day,
something
someone has
been hoping for
with all her heart
happens. So don't
stop believing!
Dreams still come
true. And they will
for you, too!



W^W

Samantha, pouring a cup of coffee, tried not to look up when he walked into the break room. David was the newest guy on the sales team, and with his black hair and green eyes, he was the talk of the office—among the female employees, anyway. He brushed against her on his way to the fridge.

"Sorry," he said. "These are some tight quarters."

"No problem," she said.

"Hey, you're Sam, right?" He turned so suddenly that they were practically wedged into the tight L of the break room's kitchen.

"Um, yes. Can I—"

"Sorry. You go first," he pressed against the counter to let her by, then said, "Do you have a minute?"

Surprised, Sam turned to face David. After six months working at Schmitt Advertising,

think about it."

"Sam, wait. How about this: your team takes on the Schmitt Sharks. If we win, you'll join the Sharks and help us beat Poole. If you win, you can stay in the bush leagues and I'll buy you dinner at Anthony's. Deal?"

David held out his hand, and Sam felt her chest constrict. Anthony's was the most romantic restaurant in town. She took David's hand and he gave her a firm handshake. "Way to go, Sam," he said.

Samantha told her team about the bet during an after-practice session at The Short Stop, the team's favorite bar. "It'll mean a few more practices. We play in three weeks."

"What do you mean, 'a few more practices'?" asked Tess, the pitcher.

"Well, I figure three a week?"

"Three a week? When

am I supposed to see my kids?" asked Debbie, the catcher.

"Come on, guys. Think of it as the little people taking on corporate America."

"All this so you can get a free meal?" Amy asked.

"And three extra vacation days," said a voice.

Samantha turned, startled

David held out his hand, and Sam felt her chest constrict

had she finally captured someone's interest? "Sure," she said, "what's up?"

"I hear you can knock 'em out of the park. True?"

"Sometimes," Sam admitted.

"I transferred from Schmitt's downtown branch. We've been looking to get some of you guys on the corporate softball team, and I hear you'd be a real asset."

Samantha sighed. Just what she needed—another guy-friend. "Look, David, I play for fun in a slow-pitch league. You guys at corporate are too intense for me."

"Well, yeah, we *do* play to win. Trent Schmitt's got a big rivalry going with Gary Poole at Poole and Larson. In fact, Schmitt said he'll give the team three extra vacation days if we win the championship."

"That could be interesting," Sam said. "Let me

to see David leaning against the bar.

David finished his beer and set the mug on the bar. "Sorry for the interruption, Sam. I had to check out the competition. See you on the diamond in three weeks."

"He's cute," said Tess.

Sam shrugged. "Yeah, but he's got nothing on his mind but softball."

Three weeks later, it was game day. Samantha pulled on her lucky Detroit Tigers jersey and cap and headed for the field.

It was a tough game. At the bottom of the final inning, the game was tied at five. Tess and Amy had both struck out; it was up to Samantha.

David pitched her a fastball and Sam sent it over the wall. She could tell by the look on his face that David was amazed.

Sam's team won it six to five.

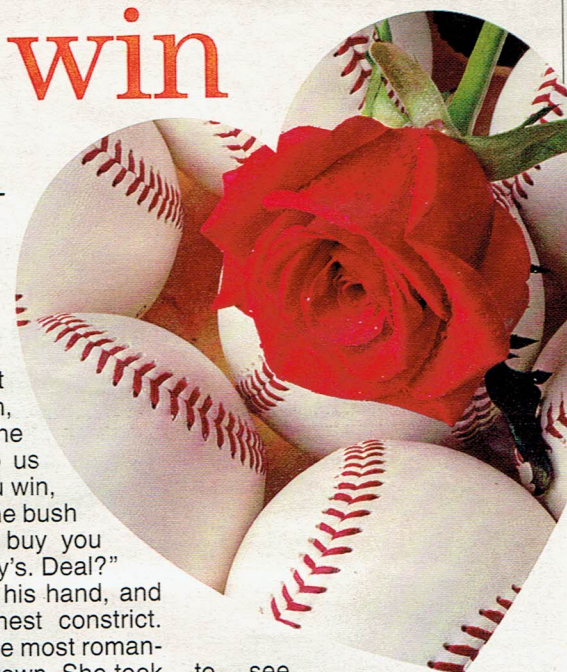
"Good game, Sam," he said after the game. "I owe you a dinner at Anthony's."

"Forget it," Samantha said. "I just play for fun." She felt her face flush. She wasn't a good liar.

"Maybe you do," David said. His green eyes looked straight into hers. "But I play for keeps, Samantha. And I promised you dinner."

Samantha smiled. It felt like her second home run of the day.

—Claire Caterer



Take a happy break!

