

20. Unfinished Business

On February 13, 2022, Super Bowl LVI took place at SoFi Stadium in Inglewood, California, highlighting a groundbreaking moment for deaf athletes. Amid a roaring crowd of seventy thousand, Trevin, Christian, Jory, and Enos represented not just their team, but the larger world of deaf athletes. The event symbolized a celebration of inclusion, with deaf performers also featured during halftime, showcasing the NFL's commitment to breaking stereotypes. However, despite this joyous milestone, the boys felt an unresolved yearning, especially after their recent defeat in a championship game. They cherished their historic achievement but longed more for victory than for the plaque commemorating their runner-up status.

Immediately after the game, Coach Keith Adams instilled a sense of pride in his players despite the loss. He emphasized self-esteem and rallied the team around the notion of "unfinished business," setting an optimistic tone for the upcoming season. The team faced the challenge of losing Enos, who was graduating, yet key players like Trevin, Felix, Jory, Cody, Christian, and David remained. Coach Adams even convinced Kaveh Angoorani to postpone his retirement for another championship run.

The offseason practices markedly changed from previous years. Players willingly convened in the weight room, driven by their desire to enhance their stamina and strength after a disappointing season. Galvin Drake, the strength coach, noted the transition from having to push players to work out to them coming in eager to compete against one another, fueled by the memory of their loss.

During breaks, players like Alfredo Baltazar connected with family, sharing their journey. Traveling to Mexico to meet his extended family, he communicated with them through gestures and texting, aiming to demonstrate how the deaf team could achieve success in football. As the first person in his family to play the sport, he sought validation and support from relatives. In preparation for the next season, Baltazar dedicated himself to rigorous training, transforming his physique and reaffirming his commitment to the game and his teammates, fostering a profound sense of identity through football. His newfound dedication made him more than just a player; it strengthened his familial bonds and the camaraderie with his teammates, underscoring the impact of sports in shaping lives.