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Who can ever say why unexpected events actually happen? Maybe it's motivation. Maybe it's belief in one's self. Maybe, like Morris insisted, it's the dream. Whatever the reason, the Reagan County Owls won the district championship in the spring of 1999.

Then they held their coach to his promise.

On 19 June 1999, Jim Morris and his three kids went to Howard Payne University in Brownwood, Texas. (Lorrie couldn't get out of her job on such short notice. She had to administer entrance exams to would-be students at Angelo State University.)

The Tampa Bay Devil Rays were holding an open tryout that day. Around seventy hopeful young men were eager to actualize their potential in front of the Tampa Bay scouts. Jim Morris, former pro pitcher, felt foolish as he surveyed the scene. Most of these guys were half his age.

Doug Gassaway, a Devil Ray scout, wondered aloud what Morris was doing there. When he heard about the pact, he agreed to let Morris pitch. He'd have to go last.

Jim's dad and stepmother were in the stands, watching him and supervising his kids. Gassaway just wanted to go home.

It was hot outside - around 104 degrees. Of the 70-some guys trying out for a big-league team, not a single one showed any promise. Then Jimmy Morris stepped on the mound.

His first warm-up pitch was 94 miles per hour. Gassaway thought his radar gun was broken.

The high school science teacher threw a blistering second pitch: 96 mph. Gassaway was sure some kind of electrical interference had caused false radar readings.

Morris fired his third pitch at 95 mph. The next twelve came in at 98. This 35-year-old teacher, with greying temples, shocked the lifer baseball scouts. No one had ever seen anything like it.

To be sure about things, Gassaway made Jimmy throw fifty pitches. Everyone else had thrown thirty. On the mound, Morris watched the scouts shake their radar guns and compare their findings.

As he walked away, relieved he hadn't embarrassed himself, another pitching hopeful ran after him:

You were throwing ninety-eight. Faster sometimes.

Morris didn't believe him. People like Nolan Ryan threw that fast. But as Morris walked away, a shocked Gassaway yelled:

Wait. I'm gonna call this in, and they're gonna think I'm crazy—a thirty-five-year-old throwing that hard. (The Rookie, page 240.)

The Morris family answering machine had a dozen messages on it when Jimmy and his kids returned home from their trip to Brownwood.

Sometimes dreams really do come true.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/ANOTHER-CHANCE-Rookie-The>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/ANOTHER-CHANCE-Rookie-The>

Media Stream



The Reagon County Owls

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Brownwood Texas

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Nolan Ryan

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