



# LIGHTS, LAUGHTER & FAITH

*DANNY GANS HAS A  
SOLID CAREER HIT*

BY SCOTT ROARK

BASEBALL FIELDS ARE INTRIGUING PLACES. Dreams are born there. Dreams die there. Sometimes they are starting points for where you need to go. Just ask **Danny Gans**, who studied physical education at Cal Poly.

It's hard to miss Gans' name and image when driving through the neon collage of the Las Vegas Strip. It jumps from billboards and signs, especially the one in front of the Mirage Casino, where he plays nightly shows in a 1,265-seat theater that bears his name.

Gans is considered the No. 1 entertainer in one of the world's most dynamic cities, playing to thousands of people in a show that includes music, comedy, acting and impressions.

He has been named Las Vegas Entertainer of the Year for 11 straight years. Critics rave about his show. Loyal fans snap up the \$100 tickets whenever they are in town.

It's a good thing, but not exactly what Gans originally had in mind.

The Southern California native was quickly hitting his way toward a career as a professional baseball player, leading the minor leagues in home runs before a devastating injury killed his dream.

Gans had just been drafted by the Chicago White Sox when he fielded a routine ground ball and the runner's cleats ended up completely severing his Achilles tendon. "It was like taking a hatchet to it," said Gans, grimacing.

Months in a walking cast and rehabilitation followed. It was a dark time to say the least.

"I moved back in with my parents in San Diego," Gans said. "My career in baseball was over. I didn't know what I was going to do."

One night Gans, in his walking cast, and a few friends went to the Comedy Store in San Diego, watching comics and not being very impressed. "My buddies were nudging me during this comic's act, saying 'you're better than this guy,'" Gans recalled. The comic caught wind of the conversation and dared Gans to come up to the mic. As the old cliché goes, the rest was history.

"I got up there and started doing my voices," Gans said. "It

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Danny Gans



(L) Danny Gans playing for Cal Poly Baseball, circa 1978

went over big.”

Gans, whose father was a stand-up comedian and mother was a big-band singer, always had a gift for impersonations. “In high school, it was ‘Danny do the voices’ – it was a party trick,” said Gans. “I never thought it would be any more than a way to entertain my fellow teammates in the locker room. That was it.”

In the San Diego audience that night was the daughter of Mitzi Shore, the owner of the Comedy Store in Los Angeles. Before long, still in his walking cast, Gans was doing his voices at comedy clubs in Los Angeles. He refers to the performances as a diversion at the time and was not taking them seriously.

One thing lead to another. Gans ended up in Reno, working at a club for \$400 a week. It was 1979.

“My faith really kept me going – God had a plan for me,” said Gans. “Julie’s support was also vital,” Gans met Julie, his wife of 27 years, while at Cal Poly prior to the injury. Both were active in an organization called “Campus Crusade for Christ.” Gans played baseball and lived on campus at Jespersen Hall during that time.

Gans came to Cal Poly on a full athletic scholarship, after seeing what he thought was the ideal baseball field. “I visited Cal Poly with my father on an invitation from the baseball program,” he said. “I saw this field on campus and thought what a great, small field! I could really improve my home-run

stats with this place.”

Little did he know that field was only the on-campus practice field. The game field was at nearby Sinsheimer Park, a much larger field that had a constant breeze blowing toward home plate. Gans didn’t realize this until after he signed on with Cal Poly. “It’s actually funny now,” he said.

Gans credits the post-Cal Poly injury for making him stronger for the cutthroat world of show business. His act has constantly been at the top of the Las Vegas entertainment scene, playing the Mirage for the last eight years. In November he will relocate to a new casino, Encore.

As anyone who has seen his show knows, Gans is a live wire on stage. He calls Sammy Davis Jr. his greatest inspiration because of the versatility of Davis’ live shows, which included singing, dancing and impressions.

Gans builds on that formula. One minute he is giving a dead-on impersonation of Stevie Wonder, the next, it’s Garth Brooks, complete with the 10-gallon hat. Al Pacino in “Scent of a Woman” and Tom Hanks in “Forrest Gump” are only a couple of his many characters. Another highlight is Gans impersonating George Burns while rapping MC Hammer’s “U Can’t Touch This.” It’s not surprising audiences keep coming back.

It’s been quite a journey for Gans, who will always remember his experience at Cal Poly. “It’s a beautiful place, a beautiful part of the country,” he said. “Ironically, if it wasn’t for that small baseball field at Cal Poly, I would never have met my wife, Julie. She is the one who supported me and kept me going after my injury. I am where I need to be.” □