

SUCCESS

MAGAZINE

FOUNDED BY
ORISON SWETT MARDEN

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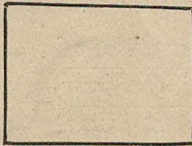
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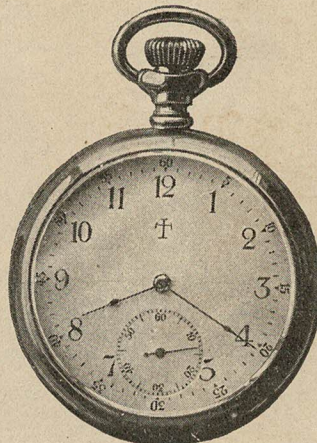
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The Rube

A BASEBALL STORY

by Zano Grey

Illustrations by DAN SAYRE GROESBECK

IT WAS the most critical time I had yet experienced in my career as a baseball manager. And there was more than the usual reason why I must pull the team out. A chance for a business deal depended upon the good-will of the stockholders of the Worcester club. On the outskirts of the town was a little cottage that I wanted to buy, and this depended upon the business deal. My whole future happiness depended upon the little girl I hoped to install in that cottage.

Coming to the Worcester Eastern League team, I had found a strong aggregation and an enthusiastic following. I really had a team with pennant possibilities. Providence was a strong rival, but I beat them three straight in the opening series, set a fast pace, and likewise set Worcester baseball mad. The Eastern League clubs were pretty evenly matched; still I continued to hold the lead until misfortune overtook me.

Gregg smashed an umpire and had to be laid off. Mullaney got spiked while sliding and was out of the game. Ashwell sprained his ankle and Hirsch broke a finger. Radbourne, my great pitcher, hurt his arm on a cold day and he could not get up his old speed. Stringer, who had batted three hundred and seventy-one and led the league the year before, struck a bad spell and could not hit a barn door handed up to him.

Then came the slump. The team suddenly let down; went to pieces; played ball that would have disgraced an amateur nine. It was a trying time. Here was a great team, strong everywhere. A little hard luck had dug up a slump—and now! Day by day the team dropped in the race. When we reached the second division the newspapers flayed us. Worcester would never stand for a second division team. Baseball admirers, reporters, fans—especially the fans—are fickle. The admirers quit, the reporters grilled us, and the fans, though they stuck to the games with that barnacle-like tenacity peculiar to them, made life miserable for all of us. I saw the pennant slowly fading, and the successful season, and the business deal, and the cottage, and Milly—

But when I thought of her I just could not see failure. Something must be done, but what? I was at the end of my wits. When Jersey City beat us that Saturday, eleven to two, shoving us down to fifth place with only a few percentage points above the Fall River team, I grew desperate, and locking my players in the dressing-room I went after them. My way of managing had always been pretty easy for players. Perhaps I had not been rough because somehow I had been lucky enough to get good work out of them without driving. This bunch, however, had to have something. They had lain down on me and needed a jar. I told them so straight and flat, and being bitter, I did not pick and choose my words.

"And fellows," I concluded, "you've got to brace. A little more of this and we can't pull out. I tell you you're a championship team. We had that pennant cinched. A few cuts and sprains and hard luck—and

you all quit! You lay down! I've been patient. I've plugged for you. Never a man have I fined or thrown down. But now I'm at the end of my string. I'm out to fine you now and I'll release the first man who shows the least yellow. I play no more substitutes. Crippled or not you guys have got to get in the game."

I waited to catch my breath and expected some such outburst as managers usually get from criticised players. But not a word! Perhaps my hot passion, my sudden change from habitual good nature, had surprised my men out of speech. As to that, I knew I would get it presently, for these players of mine were not youngsters, nor in any way lamb-like. Then I addressed some of them personally.

"Gregg, your lay-off ends to-day. You play Monday. Mullaney, you've drawn your salary for two weeks with that spiked foot. If you can't run on it—well, all right, but I put it up to your good faith. I've played the game and I know it's hard to run on a sore foot. But you *can* do it. Ashwell, your ankle is lame, I know—now, can you run?"

"Sure I can. I'm not a quitter. I'm ready to go in," replied Ashwell.

"Good! A little more of that and Worcester will strike her gait. Say, Stringer, are you ever going to get another hit? You, who batted three hundred and seventy-one last year, falling down and fanning before some of these lob pitchers! You, with the eyes of big league managers on you—are you going to keep on piffing up Texas

"Call him 'Pogie'—leaguers and fungoes?"

over," replied Stringer, soberly. "I've got some new sticks and if I don't kill these pitchers from now on I'll demand my release."

"Raddy, how about you?" I said, turning to my star twirler.

"Connelly, I've seen as fast a team in as bad a rut and yet pull out," returned Radbourne. "We're about due for the brace. When it comes—look out! As for me, well, my arm is n't right, but it's acting these warm days in a way that tells me it will be soon. It's been worked too hard. Can't you get another pitcher? I'm not knocking Herne or Cairns. They're good for their turn, but we need a new man to help out. And he must be a cracker-jack if we're to get back to the lead."

"Where on earth can I find such a pitcher?" I shouted, almost distracted. "Have n't I offered big money for some of these pitchers? It's simply impossible now to buy or trade."

"Well, that's up to you," replied Radbourne.

Up to me it certainly was, and I cudgled my brains for inspiration. After I had given up in hopelessness it came in the shape of a notice I read in one of the papers. It was a brief mention of an amateur Worcester ball team being shut out in a game with a Rickettsville nine. I had never heard of Rickettsville, but I knew several of the amateur players, and knew them to be good stickers. So, chasing a blind hope, I hunted up a couple of them and asked about the Rickettsville pitcher. What they said was a-plenty! Rickettsville played Sunday ball, which gave me an opportunity to look them over. Somehow I sensed the opportunity to be the one of my life. Rickettsville was tucked away off in the hills somewhere, close to the State line, but it did not matter to me where or how far.

It took some train riding and then a journey by coach to get to Rickettsville. The town was no different from other country towns I had seen, except that when I rode in it appeared to be deserted. The reason for this, however, became manifest when I reached the ball grounds. All the inhabitants were there. The field was laid out in a fine big meadow which made me think of Stringer and how he would like to hit a ball there and see it roll.

I mingled with the crowd of talking rustics. There was only one little "bleachers" and this was loaded to the danger-point with the feminine adherents of the teams. Most of the crowd centered alongside and back of the catcher's box. I edged in and got a position just behind the stone that served as home plate.

Hunting up a player in this way was no new thing to me. I was too wise to make myself known before I had sized up the merits of my man. So, before the players



"Call him 'Pogie'—leaguers and fungoes?"



"Boys," I said curtly, "Hurtle works to-day"

came upon the field I amused myself watching the rustic fans and listening to them. Verily a baseball fan is a queer product. There is absolutely no comprehending him. I ventured a couple of questions. The first, an innocent query to a lanky individual as to whether they played good ball up there, was an unfortunate one. I had to move a little away from that vicinity. Then the other question, relative to Rickettsville's chances of winning, brought out the amazing fact that Rickettsville could not lose. Then a roar announced the appearance of the Rickettsville team and their opponents, who wore the name of Spatsburg on their Canton flannel shirts. The uniforms of these country amateurs would have put a Philadelphia Mummer's parade to the blush, at least for bright colors. But after one amused glance I got down to the stern business of the day, and that was to discover a pitcher, and failing that, baseball talent of any kind.

Never shall I forget my first glimpse of the Rickettsville twirler. He was far over six feet tall and as lean as a fence-rail. He had a great shock of light hair, a sunburned, sharp-featured face, wide sloping shoulders, and arms enormously long. He was about as graceful and had about as much of a baseball walk as a crippled cow.

"He's a rube!" I ejaculated, in disgust and disappointment.

But when I had seen him throw one ball to his catcher I grew as keen as a fox on a scent. What speed he had! I got round closer to him and watched him with sharp, eager eyes. He was a giant. To be sure, he was lean, raw-boned as a horse, but powerful. What won me at once was his natural, easy swing. He got the ball away with scarcely any effort. I wondered what he could do when he brought the motion of his body into play.

"Bub, what might be the pitcher's name?" I asked of a boy.

"Huh, mister, his name might be Dennis, but it ain't. Huh!" replied this country youngster. Evidently my third question had thrown some implication upon this particular player.

"I reckon you be a stranger in these parts," said a pleasant old fellow. "His name's Hurtle—Whitaker Hurtle. Whit fer short. He hain't lost a gol darned game this summer. No sir-ee! Never pitched any before, nuther."

Hurtle! What a remarkably fitting name!

"He played some other position, eh?" I asked.

"Nope. Last summer our pitcher got hurt, an' Whit he come up an' sez he guessed he could throw hard enough. Then he learned to pitch curves. Say! he can curve a ball round a corner."

Rickettsville chose the field and the game began. Hurtle swung with his easy motion. The ball shot across like a white bullet. It was a strike, and so was the next, and the one succeeding. He could not throw anything but strikes, and it seemed the Spatsburg players could not make even a foul.

Outside of Hurtle's work the game meant little to me. And I was so fascinated by what I saw in him that I could hardly contain myself. After the first few innings I no longer tried to. I yelled with the Rickettsville rooters. The man was a wonder. A blind baseball manager could have seen that. He had a straight ball, shoulder high, level as a stretched string, and fast. He had a jump ball, which he evidently worked by putting on a little more steam, and it was the speediest thing I ever saw in the way of a shoot. He had a wide-sweeping out-curve, wide as the blade of a mowing scythe. And he had a drop—an unhittable drop. He did not use it often, for it made his catcher dig too hard into the dirt. But whenever he did I glowed all over. Once or twice he used an underhand motion and sent in a ball that fairly swooped up. It could not have been hit with a board. And best of all, dearest to the manager's heart, he had control. Every ball he threw went over the plate. He could not miss it. To him that plate was as big as a house.

What a find! Already I had visions of the long-looked-for brace of my team, and of the pennant, and the little cottage, and the happy light of a pair of blue eyes. What he meant to me, that country pitcher Hurtle! He shut out the Spatsburg team without a run or a hit or even a scratch. Then I went after him. I collared him and his manager, and there, surrounded by the gaping players, I bought him and signed him before any of them knew exactly what I was about. I did not haggle. I asked the manager what he wanted and produced the cash; I asked Hurtle what he wanted,

doubled his ridiculously modest demand, paid him an advance, and got his name to the contract. Then I breathed a long, deep breath; the first one for weeks. Something told me that with Hurtle's signature in my pocket I had the Eastern League pennant. Then I invited all concerned down to the Rickettsville hotel.

Nothing on this earth; not even wildfire on a dry, windy prairie, flies so swiftly as baseball gossip. In half an hour the hotel was surrounded by an excited mob. It escorted Hurtle and me to the other hotel, where

we were to take the coach. I hung to Hurtle like a leech. Twice he mumbled something about seeing somebody off, but it did not go with me until I saw there was a girl. I weakened at that, let him go, and was in mortal dread lest he would slip out of my clutches. While I was waiting, the pleasant old rustic who had been my informant at the game sidled up to me with a wise look and mysterious wink.

"Stranger, I knowed all the time what you was. You did n't fool me none," he said, and taking me by the sleeve he drew me a little way out of the crowd. "I'm a-goin' to tell you somethin' about Whit Hurtle. Whit's a queer boy. I knowed him when he worked out here to the poorhouse. You jest bet I know Whit! He had it in fer this Spatsburg team an' was some riled. Whit's so softy he can't pitch or do

nothin' 'cept when he's stirred up. But you oughter see him when he's mad! By gosh! Wal, mebbe up there among you city ball players Whit'll be kinder shy an' skeered. So I'm tellin' you—make him mad! An' sometimes it's hard to rile Whit. But there's one way thet never fails, if you dare risk it. Remember, I ain't sayin' it's safe. Call him 'Pogie!' Whit gits like a mad bull when he hears thet. You see the boys hereabouts call us old poorhouse fellers 'Pogies.' Whit worked out there an' he hates thet name. So if you can't git no other way to rile Whit, call him 'Pogie!'"

I thanked my well-meaning and voluble friend; and getting a glimpse of Hurtle in the crowd I dived for him, and presently landed him in the coach. We got a rousing cheer as we rode away.

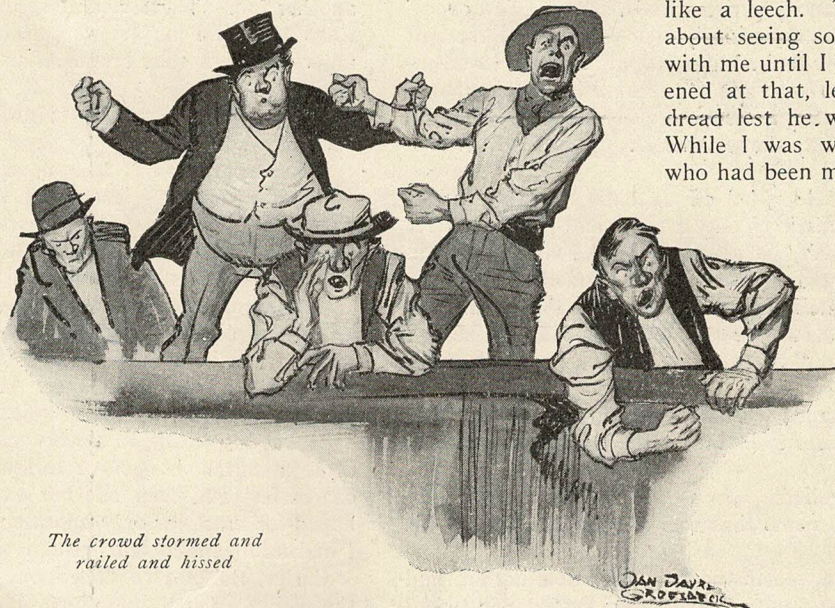
We made connections at the railroad junction and reached Worcester at midnight in time for a good sleep. I took the silent and backward pitcher to my hotel. In the morning we had breakfast together. I showed him about Worcester and then carried him off to the ball grounds.

I had ordered morning practise, and as morning practise is not conducive to the cheerfulness of ball players, I wanted to reach the dressing-room a little late. When we arrived, all the players had dressed and were out on the field. I had some difficulty in fitting Hurtle with a uniform, and when I did get him dressed he resembled a two-legged giraffe decked out in white shirt, gray trousers and maroon stockings.

Spears, my veteran first-baseman and captain of the team, was the first to see us.

"Sufferin' umpires!" yelled Spears. "Here, you micks! Look at this Con's got with him!"

What a yell burst from that sore and disgruntled bunch of ball-tossers!



My players were a grouchy set in practise anyway, and to-day they were in their meanest mood.

"Hey, beanpole!"

"Get onto the stilts!"

"Con, where did you find that?"

I cut short their chaffing with a sharp order for batting practise.

"Regular line-up, now, no monkey-biz," I went on. "Take two cracks and a bunt. Here, Hurtle," I said, drawing him toward the pitcher's box, "don't pay any attention to their talk. That's only the fun of ball-players. Go in now and practise a little. Lam a few over."

Hurtle's big freckled hands closed nervously over the ball. I thought it best not to say more to him, for he had a rather wild look. I remembered my own stage fright upon my first appearance in fast company. Besides I knew what my amiable players would say to him. I had a secret hope and belief that presently they would yell upon the other side of the fence.

McCall, my speedy little left-fielder, led off at bat. He was full of ginger, chipper as a squirrel, sarcastic as only a tried ball-player can be.

"Put 'em over, Slat, put 'em over," he called, viciously swinging his ash.

Hurtle stood stiff and awkward in the box and seemed to be rolling something in his mouth. Then he moved his arm. We all saw the ball dart down straight—that is, all of us except McCall, because if he had seen it he might have jumped out of the way. Crack! The ball hit him on the shin.

McCall shrieked. We all groaned. That crack hurt all of us. Any baseball player knows how it hurts to be hit on the shin-bone. McCall waved his bat madly.

"Rube! Rube! Rube!" he yelled.

Then and there Hurtle got the name that was to cling to him all his baseball days.

McCall went back to the plate, red in the face, mad as a hornet, and he side-stepped every time Rube pitched a ball. He never even ticked one and retired in disgust, limping and swearing. Ashwell was next. He did not show much alacrity. On Rube's first pitch down went Ashwell flat in the dust. The ball whipped the hair of his head. Rube was wild and I began to get worried. Ashwell hit a couple of measly punks, but when he essayed a bunt the gang yelled derisively at him.

"What's he got?" The old familiar cry of batters when facing a new pitcher!

Stringer went up bold and formidable. That was what made him the great hitter he was. He loved to bat; he would have faced anybody; he would have faced even a cannon. New curves were a fascination to him. And speed for him, in his own words, was "apple-pie." In this instance, surprise was in store for Stringer. Rube shot up the straight one, then the wide curve, then the drop. Stringer missed them all, struck out, fell down ignominiously. It was the first time he had fanned that season and he looked dazed. We had to haul him away.

But that was the only time Rube located the plate. He drove Henley out of the batter's box, hit Mullaney on his sore foot, scared Gregg into the middle of next week, and worst of all he sent an in-shoot square into Captain Spears's ribs. The veteran bawled once, then crumpled up like a leaf. Whereupon the team roared at Rube as if they intended to lynch him, and they roared at me. It is strange how mature ball-players hate to be hit in the morning practise. They will take a crack on the head during a game and bob up serenely and show the audience what they are made of.

I called off the practise, somewhat worried about Rube's showing, and undecided whether or not to try him in the game that day. So I went to Radbourne, who had quietly watched Rube while on the field. Raddy was an old pitcher and had seen the rise of a hundred stars. I told him about the game at Rickettsville and what I thought of Rube, and frankly asked his opinion.

"Con, you've made the find of your life," said Raddy, quietly and deliberately. "You need n't tell me. I know what he's got. He's a marvel. I don't say he'll get over his scare and find control to-day or next week. But he'll come round. He's simply a natural-born pitcher. What a grand arm! That jump ball of his and that drop—say . . ."

Con, you know I'm not a fellow to shoot off my mouth. Well, you've stumbled upon a great pitcher and the pennant's ours."

This from Radbourne was not only comforting; it was relief, hope, assurance. I avoided Spears, for it would hardly be possible for him to regard the Rube favorably, and I kept under cover until time to show up at the grounds.

Buffalo was on the ticket for that afternoon, and the Bisons were leading the race and playing in top-notch form. For some inexplicable reason Worcester hated Buffalo. The games between them had always been fiercely contested, and this sort of thing always drew big crowds. The stands were filled at three o'clock, and the bleachers could not hold another fan. There was scrap in the air. I went into the dressing-room while the players were changing suits, because there was a little unpleasantness that I wanted to spring on them before we got on the field.

"Boys," I said, curtly, "Hurtle works to-day. Cut loose, now, and back him up."

I had to grab a bat and pound on the wall to stop the uproar.

"Did you mutts hear what I said? Well, it goes . . . Not a word, now. I'm handling this team. We're in bad, I know, but it's my judgment to pitch Hurtle, rube or no rube, and it's up to you to back us. That's the baseball of it."

Grumbling and muttering, they passed out of the dressing-room. I knew ball-players. If Hurtle should happen to show good form they would turn in a flash. Rube tagged reluctantly in their rear. He looked like a man in a trance. I wanted to speak encouragingly to him but Raddy told me to keep quiet.

It was inspiring to see my team practise that afternoon. There had come a subtle change. I foresaw one of those baseball climaxes that can be felt and seen but not explained. Whether it was a hint of the hoped-for brace, or only another flash of form before the final let-down, I had no means to tell. But I was on edge.

Carter, the umpire, called out the batteries, and I sent my team into the field. When that long, lanky, awkward rustic started for the pitcher's box, I thought the bleachers would make him drop in his tracks. The fans were sore on any one those days, and a new pitcher was bound to hear from them.

"Where! Oh, where! Oh, where!"

"Connelly's found another dead one!"

"Scarecrow!"

"Look at his pants!"

"Pad his legs!"

Then the inning began, and things happened. Rube had marvelous speed, but he could not find the plate. He threw the ball the second he got it; he hit men, walked men, and fell all over himself trying to field bunts. The crowd stormed and railed and hissed. The Bisons pranced round the bases and yelled like Indians. Finally they were retired with eight runs.

Eight runs! Enough to win two games! I could not have told how it happened. I was sick and all but crushed. Still I had a blind, dogged faith in the big rustic. I believed he had not got started right. It was a trying situation. I called Spears and Raddy to my side and talked fast.

"It's all off now. Let the dinged rube take his medicine," growled Spears.

"Don't take him out," said Raddy. "He's not shown at all what's in him. The blamed hayseed is up in the air. He's crazy. He does n't know what he's doing. I tell you, Con, he may be scared to death, but he's dead in earnest."

Suddenly I recalled the advice of the pleasant old fellow at Rickettsville.

"Spears, you're the captain," I said, sharply. "Go after the rube. Wake him up. Tell him he can't pitch. Call him 'Pogie!' That's a name that stirs him up."

"Well, I'll be dinged! He looks it," replied Spears. "Here, Rube, get off the bench. Come here."

Rube lurched toward us. He seemed to be walking in his sleep. His breast was laboring and he was dripping with sweat.

"Who ever told you that you could pitch?" asked Spears, genially. He was master at baseball ridicule. I had never yet seen the youngster who could stand his badinage. He said a few things, then wound up with: "Come now, you cross between a hay-rack and a wagon-tongue, get sore and do something. Pitch if you can. Show us! Do you hear, you tow-headed Pogie!"

Rube jumped as if he had been struck.

[Continued on page 686]

To An Aeroplane

By ROBERT C. MCELRAVY

BRILLIANT, dashing, winged thing
Moving there across the sky,
What new message do you bring
Unto mankind as you fly?

Swift you cleave the vibrant air,
Now you fly and now you float;
Life itself you seem to share—
Are you bird or are you boat?

What new era do you bring
Speeding to us through the years?
Hark! your motor seems to sing
With the music of the spheres!

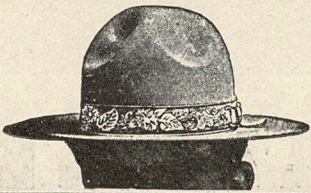
Shall mad hosts who go to war
Look to you for deadly skill?
Will you only sing and soar
So that men may maim and kill?

Rather may you skim the seas
And go whirling near and far
Fly to yonder Fleiades,
Visit Moon and Evening Star.

Waft young lovers through the air,
Ply them straight to Heaven's own door;
Ride on sunbeams bright and fair,
Chase yon cloudlets at your fore.

Go where Gods in laughter sit,
Take us where life is but kind,
Seek where elves and fairies flit—
Some new Eden for us to find.

Tiny airship, light and strong,
Lifting upward to the sky,
Life a joyous, rising song,
You shall teach our souls to fly!



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THE RUBE

[Continued from page 652]

His face flamed red and his little eyes turned black. He shoved his big fist under Captain Spears's nose.

"Mister, I'll lick you fer thet—after the game!"

"And I'll show you dog-goned well how I can pitch."

"Good!" exclaimed Raddy; and I echoed his word.

Then I went to the bench and turned my attention to the game.

Some one told me that McCall had made a couple of fouls, and after waiting for two strikes and three balls had struck out.

Ashwell had beat out a bunt in his old swift style, and Stringer was walking up to the plate on the moment.

It was interesting, even in a losing game, to see Stringer go to bat.

We all watched him, as we had been watching him for weeks, expecting him to break his slump with one of the drives that had made him famous.

Stringer stood to the left side of the plate, and I could see the bulge of his closely locked jaw.

He swung on the first pitched ball. With the solid rap we all rose to watch that hit.

The ball lined first, then soared and did not begin to drop till it was far beyond the right-field fence.

For an instant we were all still; so were the bleachers.

Stringer had broken his slump with the longest drive ever made on the grounds.

The crowd cheered as he trotted around the bases behind Ashwell. Two runs.

"Con, how'd you like that drive?" he asked me, with a bright gleam in his eyes.

"O-h-h!—a beaut!" I replied, incoherently.

The players on the bench were all as glad as I was. Henley flew out to left.

Mullaney smashed a two-bagger to right. Then Gregg hit safely, but Mullaney, in trying to score on the play, was out at the plate.

"Four hits! I tell you fellows, something's coming off," said Raddy. "Now, if only Rube—"

What a difference there was in that long rustic! He stalked into the box, unmindful of the hooting crowd and grimly faced Shultz, the first batter up for the Bisons.

This time Rube was deliberate. And where he had not swung before he now got his body and arm into full motion.

The ball came in like a glint of light. Shultz looked surprised.

The umpire called "strike."

"Wow!" yelled the Buffalo coacher. Rube sped up the side-wheeler and Shultz reached wide to meet it and failed.

The third was the lightning drop, straight over the plate.

The batter poked weakly at it. Then Carl struck out and Manning following, did likewise.

Three of the best hitters in the Eastern retired on nine strikes! That was no fluke. I knew what it meant, and I sat there hugging myself with the hum of something joyous in my ears.

Gregg had a glow on his sweaty face. "Oh, but say, boys! take a tip from me. The rube's a world-beater! Raddy knew it; he sized up that swing, and now I know it. Get wise, you its!"

When old Spears pasted a single through short-stop, the Buffalo manager took Clary out of the box and put in Vane, their best pitcher.

Bogart advanced the runner to second but was thrown out on the play.

Then Rube came up. He swung a huge bat and loomed over the Bison twirler.

Rube had the look of a hitter. He seemed to be holding himself back from walking right into the ball.

And he hit one high and far away. The fast Carl could not get under it, though he made a valiant effort.

Spears scored and Rube's long strides carried him to third. The cold crowd in the stands came to life; even the sore bleachers opened up.

McCall dumped a slow teaser down the line, a hit that would easily have scored Rube, but he ran a little way, then stopped, tried to get back, and was easily touched out.

Ashwell's hard chance gave the Bison short-stop an error, and Stringer came up with two men on bases.

Stringer hit a foul over the right-field fence and the crowd howled.

Then he hit a hard long drive straight into the centerfielder's hands.

"Con, I don't know what to think, but ding me if we ain't hittin' the ball," said Spears. Then to his players: "A little more of that and we're back in our old shape. All in a minute! At 'em now! Rube, you dinged old Pogie, pitch!"

Rube toed the rubber, wrapped his long brown fingers round the ball, stepped out as he swung and—Zing! That inning he unloosed a few more kinks in his arm and he tried some new balls upon the Bisons.

But whatever he used and wherever he put them the result was the same—they cut the plate and the Bisons were powerless.

That inning marked the change in my team. They had come back. The hoodoo had vanished.

The championship Worcester team was itself again.

The Bisons were fighting, too, but Rube had them helpless.

When they did hit a ball one of my infielders snapped it up. No chances went to the outfield.

I sat there listening to my men, and reveled in a moment that I had long prayed for.

"Now you're pitching some, Rube. Another strike! Get him a board!" called Ashwell.

"Ding 'em Rube, ding 'em!" came from Captain Spears.

"Speed? Oh—no!" yelled Bogart at third base.

"It's all off, Rube! It's all off—all off!"

So, with the wonderful pitching of an angry Rube, the Worcester team came into its own again.

I sat through it all without another word; without giving a signal.

In a way I realized the awakening of the bleachers, and heard the pound of feet and the crash, but it was the spirit of my team that thrilled me.

Next

to that the work of my new find absorbed me. I gloated over his easy, deceiving swing.

I rose out of my seat when he threw that straight fast ball, swift as a bullet, true as a plumb line.

And when those hard-hitting, sure-bunting Bisons chopped in vain at the wonderful drop, I choked back a wild yell.

For Rube meant the world to me that day.

In the eighth the score was 8 to 6. The Bisons had one scratch hit to their credit, but not a runner had gotten beyond first-base.

Again Rube held them safely, one man striking out, another fouling out, and the third going out on a little fly.

Crash! Crash! Crash! Crash! The bleachers were making up for many games in which they could not express their riotous feelings.

"It's a cinch we'll win!" yelled a fan with a voice.

Rube was the first man up in our half of the ninth and his big bat lammed the first ball safe over second base.

The crowd, hungry for victory, got to their feet and stayed upon their feet, calling, cheering for runs.

It was the moment for me to get in the game, and I leaped up, strung like a wire, and white-hot with inspiration.

I sent Spears to the coaching-box with orders to make Rube run on the first ball.

I gripped McCall with hands that made him wince.

Then I dropped back on the bench spent and panting.

It was only a game, yet it meant so much! Little McCall was dark as a thunder cloud, and his fiery eyes snapped.

He was the fastest man in the league, and could have bunted an arrow from a bow.

The foxy Bison third-baseman edged in. Mac feinted to bunt toward him then turned his bat inward and dumped a teasing curving ball down the first base line.

Rube ran as if in seven-league boots. Mac's short legs twinkled; he went like the wind; he leaped into first-base with his long slide, and beat the throw.

The stands and bleachers seemed to be tumbling down. For a moment the air was full of deafening sound.

Then came the pause, the dying away of clatter and roar, the close waiting, suspended quiet.

Spears' clear voice, as he coached Rube, in its keen note seemed inevitable of another run.

Ashwell took his stand. He was another left-hand hitter, and against a right-hand pitcher, in such circumstances as these, the most dangerous of men.

Vane knew it. Ellis, the Bison captain knew it, as showed plainly in his signal to catch Rube at second.

But Spears' warning held or frightened Rube to the bag.

Vane wasted a ball, then another. Ashwell could not be coaxed.

Wearily Vane swung; the shortstop raced out to get in line for a possible hit through the wide space to his right, and the second baseman got on his toes as both base-runners started.

Crack! The old story of the hit and run game! Ashwell's hit crossed sharply where a moment before the short-stop had been standing.

With gigantic strides Rube rounded the corner and scored. McCall flitted through second, and diving into third with a cloud of dust, got the umpire's decision.

When Stringer hurried up with Mac on third and Ash on first the whole field seemed racked in a deafening storm.

Again it subsided quickly. The hopes of the Worcester fans had been crushed too often of late for them to be fearless.

But I had no fear. I only wanted the suspense ended. I was like a man clamped in a vise.

Stringer stood motionless; Mac bent low with the sprinter's stoop; Ash watched the pitcher's arm and slowly edged off first.

Stringer waited for one strike and two balls, then he hit the next. It hugged the first base line, bounced fiercely past the bag and skipped over the grass to bump hard into the fence.

McCall romped home, and lame Ashwell beat any run he ever made to the plate.

Rolling, swelling, crashing roar of frenzied feet could not drown the high piercing sustained yell of the fans.

It was great. Three weeks of submerged bottled baseball joy exploded in one mad outburst!

The fans, too, had come into their own again.

We scored no more. But the Bisons were beaten.

Their spirit was broken. This did not make Rube let up in their last half inning.

Grim and pale he faced them. At every long step and swing he tossed his shock of light hair.

At the end he was even stronger than at the beginning. He still had the glancing, floating airy quality that baseball players call speed.

And he struck out the last three batters.

In the tumult that burst over my ears I sat staring at the dots on my score-card.

Fourteen strike-outs! one scratch hit! No base on balls since the first inning!

That told the story which my deadened senses doubted. There was a roar in my ears.

Some one was pounding me. As I struggled to get into the dressing-room the crowd mobbed me.

But I did not hear what they yelled. I had a kind of misty veil before my eyes, in which I saw that lanky Rube magnified into a glorious figure.

I saw the pennant waving, and the gleam of a white cottage through the trees, and a trim figure waiting at the gate.

Then I rolled into the dressing-room. Somehow it seemed strange to me.

Most of the players were stretched out in peculiar convulsions.

Old Spears sat with drooping head. Then a wild flaming-eyed giant swooped upon me.

With a voice of thunder he announced:

"I'm a-goin' to lick you, too!"

After that we never called him any name except Rube.

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