


# Jack and the Bean Ball



by Samuel G. Camp

**L**ISSEN. I'm gonna ask you one o' them hypocritical questions. Suppose, some time, you went to a ball game. Getting right down to brass tacks, suppose the Long Branch Cubans was playin' the Royal Giants—you might say the Claros *versus* the Colorado Maduros. Get me? An' suppose, just about the time the hostilities is due to begin, one, two, three guys appear from nowhere in particular, the first one carryin' a rock about the size of a bushel basket, the second guy carryin' a sledge, an' the third a couple of empty pop-bottle cases.

An' suppose them three birds walks into the diamond an' dumps down them various articles just outside the pitcher's box—an' beats it.

Say, what's gonna happen? What's the idea? Well, think it over. The possibilities is immense!

"Say!" says the fella I'm with, "let's get outa here! It looks like they's gonna be trouble!"

Well, I dunno but what he's right, but—"Aw, let's take a chance." I says. "Let's see it through—I'm interested!"

So we seen it through, an'—it reminded me o' Jack Adams an' the bean ball.

This guy wasn't no conscript: he was a volunteer. Way down yonder in the trainin' camp, he shows up on the ball lot one day an' tells the Old Man that after lookin' over all the teams in both leagues he guesses us Destroyers has the one best chance o' landin' that old world's seriousness

dough, an' so he has decided to join out with us, an' with him on the team they won't be nothin' to it.

"Fine!" says the Old Man. "Great! This'll be the first year I was ever sure o' gettin' into the big series, not to say nothin' o' coppin' it—before the mayor had throwed out the ball for the season's openin' game! Here we got the series on ice an' we haven't even went north yet! Fine business! That's gonna save me a lot o' worry! But, say! Would you be insulted if I was to ask you to show me what you got before we sign a contract?"

A certain number o' these nuts is due to show up every year durin' the spring practise, an' the quickest way o' gettin' rid of 'em is to give 'em what they ask for—which is a try-out.

"Nothin' like that," says Jack. "I'm always willin' to show goods; an' besides, when you see what I got I'll be able to get a better contract."

"H-m-m-m," says the Old Man. "In that case, maybe I had ought to show you the dotted line right now an' save the club money. But—just what do you do?"

"Me?" says Jack. "I'm a hitter. I don't claim to be no great shakes as a fielder, though I haven't never had no trouble getting by in the outfield. But me, I'm a natural-born hitter! Cobb, Speaker, Baker, none o' them guys has a thing on me! I bust 'em on the nose all over the lot an' out of it! Honest, I ain't lyin'! It's a gift! Spitters, mudders, smokers,

fadeaways, emery balls—*bam!* See ‘em drift! I eat ‘em up! Honest! It comes natural. Southpaws, righthanders, it makes no difference to me! I can hit any kind of ball pitched anyhow! Honest I can! It’s a gift! I—”

“Lay off!” says the Old Man. “Hittin’ ain’t your only gift. Come hither! If you can hit just one little old third o’ what you claim you’re the guy I been lookin’ for since fourteen years ago last March. Let’s go take a look at them goods.”

Well, this was when we was ‘most ready to go north, along toward the last of the spring practise, an’ so the pitchers had got to where they wasn’t afraid to put somethin’ on the ball—them as had anythin’. An’ so the Old Man steers Jack over to where Speed Williams was warmin’ up and tells Speed to turn his wolf loose onto Jackie.

“Whiff this bird a couple o’ times,” the Old Man says to Speed, “after which we get right back to business. Trainin’ trips is no place for levity.”

“Take your choice,” the Old Man says to Jack, pointin’ to a pile o’ bats.

“Bats don’t make no difference to me,” says Jack, pickin’ up the first one he come to. “I’d as lief have one bat as another. Any guy that has to have a certain kind of bat ain’t a natural-born hitter. I just grab any old stick, an’ walk right out to the rubber, an’ give that old pill a ride, Watch me!”

“Let’s go!” says the Old Man.

Now I always had a sort o’ idea what a natural-born hitter would look like—or what he wouldn’t—an’, whilst this bug was pulling his stuff to the Old Man, I says to myself: “Well, if you’re a natural-born batter then I’m a natural-born millionaire—and you can search me!” Because, as a type, as they say in the movies—well, in the movies, this bird wouldn’t never of played nothin’ but regular highbrow parts; say famous authors, or maybe one o’ them poet things, or artists an’ them kind o’ people. Oh, as for build, he was well enough set up, but— Say! When it comes to expressin’ that old, now, intellectuality thing by means o’ the human face, William Gillette as *Sherlock Holmes*, or Woodrow Wilson as President of the United States, or—now—Harold Bell Wright, as advertised—none o’ them had a thing on Jackie!

Him a natural-born hitter? He looked more like a thirty-third degree college prof. Yes, sir, you can take it from me, this guy Adams was there all seventeen ways with the noble brow stuff an’ the

classic features.

An’ now listen! I don’t claim to be no seventh son of a seventh son nor nothin’ like that, an’ so it couldn’t o’ been nothin’ more than just a plain, common, ordinary hunch, but right then an’ there I says to myself:

“Gee! Ain’t it gonna be a shame if some day one o’ them old bean balls you hear about, an’ which is liable to come along most any time, collides with that regular, delicately shaped head to which all them classical features an’ things is attached! A shame? It’ll be a total wreck!”

No, sir; you could see at a glance that Jack’s head-piece wasn’t calculated to stand no such wear an’ tear as that. Most any regular roughnecked, low-browed ball tosser, such as I, can take the count from one o’ them bean balls an’ live to kill the man that throwed it. But if I was a pitcher, I wouldn’t take no chance on manslaughter with Jackie.

But let’s go, as the Old Man said.

Speed Williams unhooks his fast one, an’—*wham!* This guy Adams rode it clear out o’ the lot!

“Huh!” says the Old Man. “Hey, you,” he yells at Speed, “put somethin’ on that ball! We can’t waste all day monkeyin’ with this here busher! Strike ‘im out! Strike ‘im out!”

Well, barrin’ the usual exceptions, they ain’t no tougher bird in the big leagues to bat against than Speed Williams—an’, barrin’ no exceptions a-tall, Speed has the meanest spitter that ever give a man floatin’ kidney swingin’ at it. An’—

Jack busts that spitter clean out o’ commission. He could o’ made three home runs off that hit an’ come in standin’ up!

“H-m-m-m,” says the Old Man, beginnin’ to look kind o’ serious an’—scared. I guess maybe he thought he was seein’ things. Well, I don’t know as I blame him. It would make most anybody rub their eye.

“That’s enough for you!” says the Old Man to Speed. “Here, Dempsey,” he says to another first-string pitcher, “you give the poet lariat, or the professor, or whatever he is, a whirl! Show up this natural-born hitter an’ show him up quick—get me? Come on, now—the old jazz! Slip it to him!”

“That’s right!” sings Jack. “Bring ‘em on! Bring ‘em all on! The more the merrier, no fear an, no favor!”

An’ believe me, if he showed anythin’ to them pitchers—an’ he did!—it wasn’t favor. That bird

simply rapped everythin' to all corners o' the lot an' out of it! He loops an' whizzes 'em all over the place—an' every one right on the nose! If you hadn't knowed what was goin' on, you might o' thought it was the drumfire on the western front—the sound o' them balls explodin' up against Jack's bat. On the level. I never before seen no such exhibition o' the fine art o' pastin' that old pill! Never!

An' so—well, if I was to try an' describe that bird, I guess I'd say—now—that he was what you might call a natural-born hitter!

No, sir, I wouldn't say that this guy had oversubscribed himself by a single share: he was all he said he was. An'—well, leave it to the Old Man. When we hiked north, Jack Adams, the natural-born hitter, was with us—as a regular.

The rock, the sledge, an' the pop-bottle cases? I'm workin' back to 'em right now.

They was better fielders than Jack, an' guys which was faster on the bases, Cobb, for instance; but if one man can make a team, an' one man can do that little thing, Jack Adams made us Destroyers. The Old Man put Jack in the clean-up position, and I'll tell the world Jackie cleaned up! Doubles, triples, an' four-baggers trickled off that bird's bat like water offen a duck's back.

He was sure a terror to pitchers, for one thing, because he was always crowdin' the plate. You take a guy which crowds the plate, an' about the only way you can get him to stand back is to shoot a good fast one right on a line with the place you seen him last an' about head high; if he's still there—well, you win your point, or that plate-crowder goes clean out o' the game an' maybe to the hospital.

That's the old bean ball!

But Jack—well, somehow he was so sort o' delicate appearin' 'round about where a bean ball lands if you don't happen to duck it—an' sometimes you don't—that most o' them pitchers didn't dast to take a chance on beanin' him. Nobody goes to the chair from choice.

Oh, of course, sometimes a pitcher would go crazy an' shoot one at Jack—an' Jackie always ducked 'em. Then him an' the pitcher would chatter at each other till both of 'em got sore. An' then, sometimes Jackie would—an' sometimes he wouldn't—wade right into the diamond an' take after that pitcher with his bat. After which, of course, Jackie spent the rest o' that perfect day on

the bench.

Jack was sure some pitcher-baiter an' umpire-baiter. On the average, I should say he was throwed out of about every third game, sometimes sooner and sometimes later. But we should worry. By—it must o' been along, about the last of August, that bird had batted up the Destroyers into the lead by a good nine games. Us for the Big Series, and the winner's end at that!

An' then—

I guess I must o' noticed it as soon as anybody: Jack wasn't crowdin' the plate no more. An' his hittin' fell off a little.

Well, with a lead like that, we didn't think nothin' much about it till it seemed like the symptoms—whatever they was symptoms of—begin to get a little more pronounced. Jack was standin' just a little too far back from the plate for the best results in bustin' the well-known pesky pill. An' his hittin' fell off *quite* a little.

The Old Man didn't say nothin' for a game or two—sometimes these natural-born hitters an' things is best left alone to work out their own troubles but finally it gets so the Old Man see where they was somethin' had to be did, or said, an' trust the Old Man to say it!

The next time Jack is due at the plate—"Listen here!" says the Old Man, "I been noticin' where you're standin' too far back from the plate. From where you're standin' a man couldn't hit the ball with two bats on end. Whazza matter with you? You gettin' ball-shy, or yeller, or lazy or what? Now, see here! You go out there and deliver! Stand right up to that old plate like you used an' gimme that hit! Get me? Gimme that hit!"

Well, Jack didn't say nothin'—which was an awful bad sign—an' on the level as he walked out to the plate, I could' swear his knees was shakin'! It didn't seem as if no such could be possible, but—

Well, Pete Horton was pitchin' for the Pawnee that day, an' where Pete got the hunch you can search me, but the first ball Pete sends up to Jack is one o' them regular old bush-league roundhouse outcurves. That ball was so slow that the reporters was wirin' bulletins to their papers statin' the exact location o' the sphere at the present moment o' time—"The ball is now six foot from the pitcher an' is expected to cross the plate about 6:30"—somethin' like that.

It woulddn't o' fooled a schoolboy.

Sometimes—generally—they slow out starts in your direction, but you can see ‘em bendin’ away from you all the way up to the plate. An’ I guess this one must o’ looked to Jack like as if it was comin’ at him..

Because, anyways, Jack had edged up to the plate like the Old Man told him, but when that ball leaves Pete’s hand, about half an’ hour before it got to the catcher Jack drops flat an’ rolls away from the play a good forty foot—no tumble-weed had nothin’ on him! Right now he holds the rollin’ record in both leagues, both for speed an’ distance.

Well, of course, the stands went crazy an’ everybody else—but none o’ them had anythin’ on the Old Man! Rave? I wouldn’t repeat it.

The Old Man had took three guesses when he sent Jack up to the plate that time, an’ he win with the first one: somehow or other Jack Adams had developed the worst case o’ ball-shyness ever known to science!

Of course, gettin’ into the World’s Series don’t mean nothin’ to a ball club or a ballplayer—not a thing! A fat part in a Broadway success don’t mean nothin’ to an actor, an’ the championship don’t mean nothin’ to a fighter, certainly not! An’ so it didn’t mean nothin’ to us Destroyers when that nine game lead of ours fade away till you wouldn’t notice it, an’ it’s up to us to win our last game with the Pawnees if we’re gonna grab the old flag an’ get into the big seriousness.

Anyways, that’s what happened.

The Old Man started Jack in a couple o’ games, after the time Jack fell—an’ rolled—for that sand-lot outcurve o’ Pete Horton’s; but nothin’ doin’. Jack pulls away from the plate at every pitch an’ he can’t hit a lick. No mistake, Jackie is plumb scared to death o’ that ball, an’ he ain’t takin’ no chances. The pitchers made a monkey of him; all the sport pages carries half a column advertisin’ the fact that Jack Adams, the Destroyers’ celebrated natural-born hitter, has blew up with a report that made the Black Tom disaster sound like somebody crackin’ one o’ Harry Stevens’s peanuts, an’—the Old Man yanks Jack for keeps.

That is, y’ understand, till we can find out what’s his trouble an’ maybe get him goin’ again.

Well, the Old Man has Jack up on the mat an’ throws the third degree into him like if he had said just one half o’ the same things to me I would o’ killed him where he stood an’ went to the chair with

a song; but the Old Man didn’t get no satisfaction. Jack didn’t do nothin’ but stall an’ beat ‘round the bush, an’ so finally the Old Man knowed just as much about what was Jack’s trouble as he did in the first place.

Of course, they was somethin’; a man doesn’t go into one o’ them slumps without they’s a cause for it.

But anyways, so then the Old Man gives up tryin’ to find out what was the cause, an’ starts in tryin’ to cure the result, as you might say.

Believe me, the Old Man’s methods was what you might call radical!

Nobody—not even Mister J. J. McGraw—has anythin’ on the Old Man when it comes to the sort o’ English, plain an’ fancy, straight an’ reverse, which peels the hide right often you; an’ he feeds this to Jack in liberal doses before, after, an’ durin’ each meal an’ just before retirin’. The rest o’ the time he has Jack backed up against a fence—so he can’t pull away-bein’ pitched to by every pitcher in the string an’ anybody that’ll volunteer.

But it didn’t do no good. No, sir; Jack is afraid that every ball pitched to him is gonna bean him; an’ when the Old Man tries him out away from that fence—well, if anythin’, he backs away more than ever.

Well, I dunno; it didn’t look to me like Jack was fitted by nature to stop no bean balls, like I was tellin’ you, an’ so— At that, maybe if we could find out just what it was that brung on this attack o’ ball shyness—just what started Jack worryin’—

But, as I was sayin’, it comes down to where that last game with the Pawnees would make or break us, an’ Jack still out o’ the game.

The night before that game, early in the evenin’—I guess the Old Man had been ridin’ him again—Jack comes to my room lookin’ for sympathy. Somebody must o’ gave him the wrong address. After he went out I seen a little bundle o’ letters layin’ on the bed. It was hot an’ Jack had throwed down his coat there. So-Well, on the quiet, I had been pullin’ a little *Phineas Jenks* stuff on the strange case o’ Jack Adams ever since the Old Man tells me to pick up any little tiling I can an’—it looks like I’m justified.

Ten minutes later I enters the Old Man’s room like a half-back goin’ through a hole in the line. It seems like the Old Man is harnessin’ himself all up to go to a show or somethin’—tryin’, I guess, to

forget how to-morrow, as sure as shootin', we're gonna drop that last game to the Pawnees an' kiss our chance at the Big Series good-by.

"Can the frivolities, boss," I says, "here's business!"

"What's broke?" asts the Old Man.

"I got the goods on the natural-born flivver," I says.

"Exhibit A," I says, "one letter from 'Your Lovin' Ameliar' to 'My Own Dearest Jack'—ouch!—containin' amongst other things which I blush to repeat a solemn warnin' to dearest Jack not to let none o' them brutal baseball pitchers get him in the head with no baseball, because just think what would happen, an' she encloses two clippin's from the papers showin' where only this last week two fatal accidents went to the hospital on account o' bein' hit on the head with them baseballs; an' if you love me, Jack, be careful an' don't take no chances o' lettin' anybody hit you with no baseball, because she hears they is throwed with terrific speed, an'—so on.

"Exhibit B," I says. "Another letter containin' among the outpourin's of Ameliar's fond an' lovin' heart another solemn warnin' not to go an' let no pitcher bean him, an' two more clippin's.

"Exhibit C," I says. "Similar.

"Exhibit D," I says. "The same, except this time they's three clippin's instead of two. Must be about this time them brutal pitchers was wagin' a campaign o' ruthlessness.

"Exhibit E," I says—

"Gimme them letters!" says the Old Man.

Listen. The finest cure in the world, for some complaints, is ridicule!

An' the Old Man sure had somethin' to work on!

Anyways, when we went up against them Pawnees, next day, for the fatal game, the Old Man takes a chance. Jack is back in the line-up—in the old clean-up position.

If he's game again, it's a cinch we win; if not—good-night!

Us Destroyers was shakin' dice *some* when Jack walks out to the plate. Right then they was two gone an' a man on second.

It's Pete Horton pitchin', again, but this time Pete don't try no roundhouse outs at Jack—nothing like that! This game is for blood, an' no funny

business; an', thinks Pete, if this guy Adams has dreamed that he's gonna make a comeback, here's where I wake him up an' scare him to death into the bargain—with just one pitch!

Jack had crowded up to the plate like old times. An' Pete unhooks with the old beaner—an' everythin' he's got—straight at that fragile-lookin' dome o' Jack's!

As I was sayin', you can take it from me it had the crowd guessin' some when these three guys dumps down that big rock, the sledge, an' them pop-bottle cases outside the pitcher's box an' beats it.

Goin' back, y' understand, to the begin in' o' that game between the Long Branch Cubans an' them Royal Giants.

Then a couple o' fellas wades into the diamond an' one o' them begins ballyhooon' a line o' stuff about how "Iron-Head" Barry, which is the other one an' which now makes his bow to the audience—about how Iron-Head Barry, the guy with the cast-iron bean, or somethin', will now oblige by lettin' any gentleman in the crowd bust that rock, using the sledge, of course, whilst the rock is balanced on, an' supported solely by—an' absolutely no trickery nor subterfuge as you can see for yourself—the head of Iron-Head Barry!

An so then Iron-Head Barry sits down an' waits for somebody to come along an' kindly bust that boulder over his bean. Finally a big beef which played with the Cubans—an' if he was a Cuban then I'm a Chinaman—a big beef comes to the front an' picks up the sledge. Iron-Head, perched on them pop-bottle cases piled one on top o' the other, balances that hundred pound rock on his head, keepin' it from tippin' with the tips of his fingers.

The big beef with the sledge gets into position, takes a wind-up an' *bam!*

"O-o-o-fl!" says Iron-Head.

Him an' the rock is both intact though that blow would o' killed an elephant.

"Come again!" says Iron-Head, fixin' the rock so's it rests a little more comfortably on his bald spot. "Put the jazz into it! Don't mind me!"

An' so then the big beef spits on his hands, an'—*zowie!*

"Woof!" says Iron-Head, an' rises smilin' from among the fragments—that rock had split into a thousand pieces! An' absolutely no trickery—I seen

it. After which the ballyhoo artist passes the hat. Get me?

That beaner Pete Horton unhooks at Jack—well, it beans him! An' bounds clean up into the press stand like it was shot there out of a gun! An' Jack—that ball didn't have no more effect on him than as if he had been struck by an idea—fact! He never even blinks! All he does is look surprised, then sore, an' then—wade into the diamond swingin' a long black bat an' looking for Horton! Pete hadn't hurt him—no, sir! Iron-Head Barry had nothin' on Jack Adams! But he was insulted, see?

Well, Pete applies to the ump for protection, an' gets it; an' Jack—well, under the circumstances, instead o' gettin' the bench, Jack gets his base on a dead ball.

An' they wasn't never a deader ball!

Yeh—we win the game with the Pawnees; an' how Jack Adams's battin' busted up the world seriousness is history.

An' I guess that's pretty near the finish—except a couple o' morals—I ain't no piker—an' a letter.

As the feller says: most of us spends our life worryin' about things that never happen—or can't. An' as the feller didn't say: bone, like gold, is where you find it.

As for the letter, it's one I sent to Mrs. Ameliar Jack Adams, about a month after we win the Big Series, along with a little trick automatic—a sort o' weddin' present.

“Dear madam,” I says, “the enclosed is strictly for home defense; but if you ever feel like usin' it on Jack, why, go right ahead, an' no jury wouldn't never convict you—an' *shoot low!*”