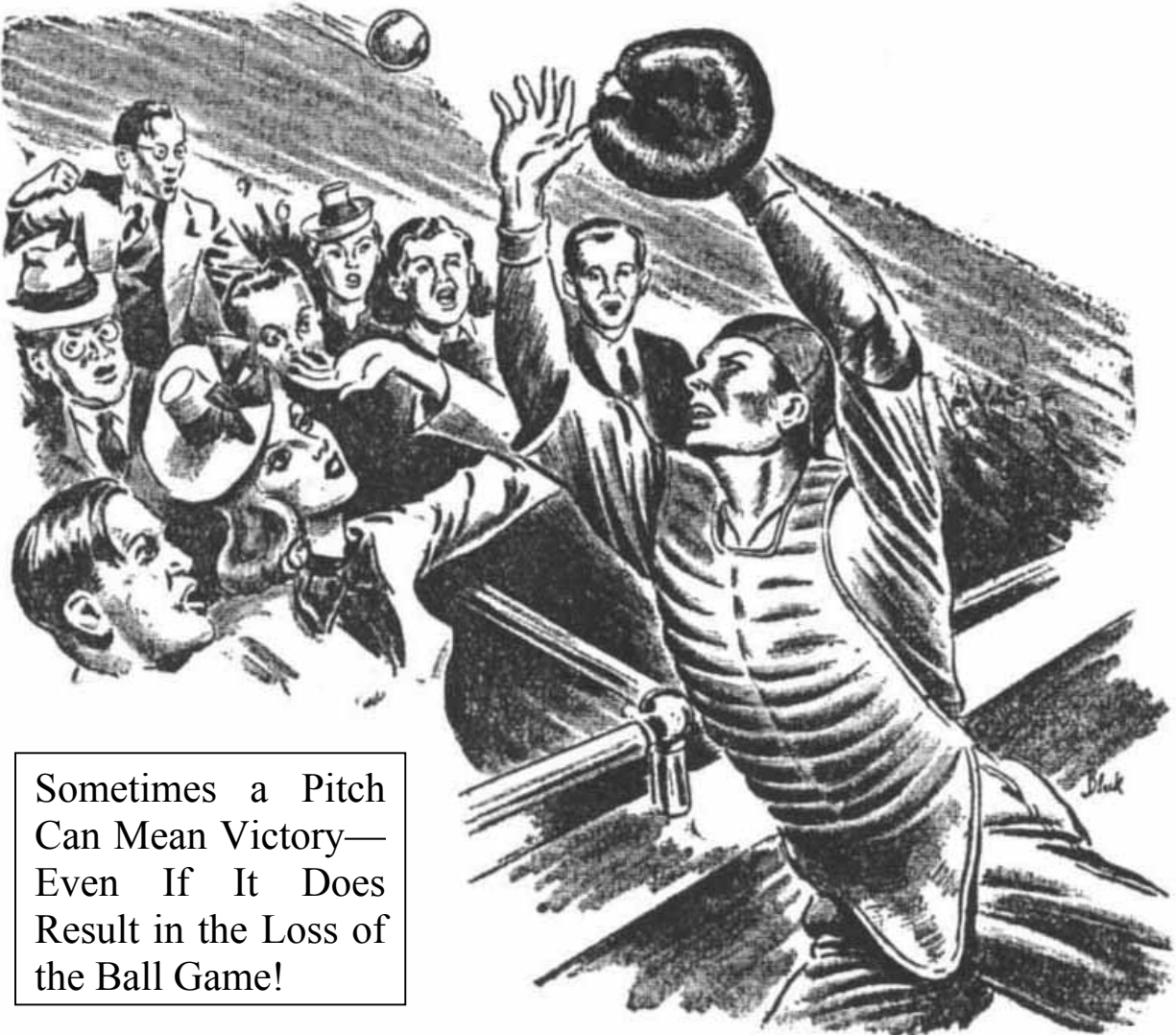


# THE LITTLE DOC

By HARRISON HENDRYX



Sometimes a Pitch  
Can Mean Victory—  
Even If It Does  
Result in the Loss of  
the Ball Game!

*Doc picked the ball off her hat*

**I** AM waiting for the little Doc now. We're goin' huntin' up on the north shore of Huron. They say the ducks is thick as flies up there. What's that? You don't know the Doc? Huh, I thought everyone knew the little Doc!

Well sir, he's a great guy an' one of the best catchers ever wore shin-guards. A genuine doc, too. A reg'lar M.D. with a diploma an' everything. Sort of a Moe Berg of medicine, ya might say. In fact, if it was not for the Doc, I would prob'ly right now be pushin' up the daisies.

It happened five years ago, but I rec'lect like it was yesterday. We was playin' the Giants in the tail end of the season. The game itself didn't make no difference, 'cause they was firm in second place an' we couldn't budge from fourth if we'd been the Yanks on a hittin' spree, which we wasn't.

It was my pers'nal record that was at the stake, as the newspapers say, on account of I have won seven an' dropped eight. If I win, it gives me a .500 percentage an' as long as I been in the leagues, I never finished below .500. Many's the time I said

I'd quit if I ever went below that figger.

It is a hot day for September an' that mornin' I remember I promised the Doc I'd go down to his clinic, where he works in the winter, an' let him check me over. He is my roommate on the road an' claims I snore like a man with ulterior distractions, or somethin'. He is a swell roommate—a good poker player an' always makin' jokes. He ain't one of these gloomy guys what sets around all day moonin' about how they was robbed of two hits over in Philly. He is just the same no matter how many hits he got over in Philly.

I figger it'll please him if I go down to his place an' let him check me over, so I hops a cab for there.

There is lots of docs down there an' nurses runnin' around in white uniforms, just like a hospital. The little Doc introduces me to most of the other docs, which I can't remember none of their names now. They all seem to know who I am, though, an' help the little Doc look through glass things an' tubes an' X-rays at me. I begun to feel like some rare specimen.

After it was all over an' we're ridin' out to the ball park, the Doc says to me, he says:

"Charley, you've been in this game for a long time, you've got plenty salted away—a farm in Georgia an' a ranch out in Montana."

"Nevada," I corrects.

"Well, Nevada then," he says. "All the better. Why don't you give up this game an' go out there for a few years? It'd do you a world of good."

"What's the matter with me," I asks, beginnin' to smell a rat.

"Everything," he says an' don't say no more.

"Name two things," I challenges.

**A**N' then without battin' a eyelash he reels off about a dozen names which sound like they was took from a book of foreign languages I seen once. Gatherin' all he said, I sums up in good English that my ticker is on the skids an' my liver is not what a good liver should be.

"Oh, them minor ailments don't bother me none," I says.

"Minor ailments!" he shouts like he was stabbed in the back. "Listen, Charley, if you pitch another season of baseball we won't be able to shoot geese together next fall, because there won't be any next fall for you, your goose will be already cooked. What you need from now on is rest, an' plenty of it."

"Baloney!" I interjects, feelin' my pulse. It is still there so I says:

"If I win this game, I'll be back in there stronger'n ever next season."

He just shook his head an' didn't say no more about it. He seen it was no use to argue with me.

Boy, it was hot! I worked up a drippin' sweat just warmin' up before the game. I wondered if I'd get awful tired in about the sixth or seventh, like I been doin' every game lately. I figgered maybe I wouldn't, 'cause my arm felt right.

The game got underway an' the innings begun to roll by. They picked up a run in the sixth on a single, a sacrifice, an' a error. I give 'em only five hits till the eighth, but we ain't exactly murderin' their portsider either. We got only six hits and no runs at all, but I feel the boys is about due for some tallies in the last o' the eighth and ninth 'cause the last inning we died with the sacks crowded. I think the whole team believes we are gonna win this one, an' me most of all.

I am pretty tired by this time, though, an' when I walk out for the eighth I am takin' it real slow. The first man is tough an' hits a fly ball into left center that makes Augie hump plenty to get under. The next guy lifts a high foul which the little Doc picks off'n a lady's hat in the boxes.

"Good old Doc," I says an' breathes some easier.

Then I get careless an' groove one for Leroy, who smacks it over first down the right field line for two bags. I walk the next batter on purpose to get at the portsider, who is easy pickin's. I figger they won't pull him for a pinch hitter on account of he is hurlin' such a good game. But I am wrong. Bill yanks him an' sends up a rookie from the Coast League by name of Joe Pinelli.

I have never pitched to this bird before, but I remember the Doc sayin' as how he'd played against him three years ago when he was in the Sunshine League. The Doc signals for a high fast one an' the big rookie slams it over third like it was a rifle bullet. It is foul by inches.

Then the Doc signals for the high, hard one again an' I figgers this Joe Pinelli was a lucky dog to even touch that last ball. I am almost too tired to care but I nods an' lets it go down the middle chest high.

There is a miserable crack, which tells me the ball has changed directions an' is headed for far places. I look around an' see Augie standin' with

his hands on his hips watchin' it bounce around on them empty seats in the upper deck.

I got through the ninth somehow. We didn't score on account of that last drive sort of took the starch out of us, an' I walks back through the runway to the dressin' room. It's cool in under the stands there an' I don't feel so bad about losin' that last game. We all got to quit some day an' maybe the little Doc's right about my liver. Anyway, I'll get lots more huntin' an' fishin' done without no double-headers to worry about.

The little Doc comes in then an' walks over to

sit beside me. He puts his arm across my shoulders.

"I'm sorry, Charley," he says.

"Hell, what for?" I says. "I can quit peaceable now an' settle down to some serious huntin'."

"Sure," he says. "Sure, that's the ticket, Charley. I hope you aren't sore about Pinelli."

"Oh, him!" I says an' laughs to prove I ain't lost my sense o' humor. "He's a fair country hitter for a rookie."

"Yes," the Doc says dreamy like, "Joe always did murder a high fast ball."

