



*Beau sauntered toward the plate swinging three bats.*

# I'M A BUM

by CLIFF CAMPBELL

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To the knifing jeers of the fans, Beau Hatfield learns what it meant to buck sheer hell  
—to win!

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HE WAS through. The papers said he was an “in and outer”—a duck who didn’t have any more sense of responsibility than a young colt. And he wasn’t so young anymore—a year past thirty. Beau Hatfield, lean, brown, unshaven, watching this third game of the big series—and watching from the bench of the Redbirds.

“You’re a bum, Hatfield,” Marty McLean told him flatly, “and there’s not a team in either league wants anything to do with you. We’re takin’ you on and I ought to get my nut examined for doing so.” Marty managed the Redbirds.

Beau grinned. It was true but what did it matter? He was a mountain boy up in the big city. Ten years back he came up from the semi-pro team down around Simmsville, Kentucky—and you couldn’t even find it on the map.

“I’ll take ‘em all,” Beau said then. They’d taken him. He was a hard drinker; a hard man to get in condition. He had lots of stuff, control and sweeping hooks. They were murdering that fast one now and the hook was only a wrinkle.

“Get out there,” Marty McLean rasped, “get out in the pen.”

Beau was surprised. He’d stayed on the bench those first two games of the series which the

Redbirds and the Mustangs had split.

“Get warmed up,” McLean snarled, “and if you’re sober enough we might stick you in.”

Beau’s dark face reddened and his mouth opened to speak. He got up and lounged out of the dugout; he slouched along the fence toward the bullpen out in right field.

A fan leaned over the railing. He was fat and florid. “I can smell liquor,” he yelled. “He ain’t sobered up yet.”

Beau slashed savagely at him with his glove.

“Get out in the pen—bum; earn your keep, Hatfield.”

They jeered some more; they showered paper on him as he passed the bleacher section; a seat cushion sailed past his head. Grimly, Beau strode on—unhurried, face expressionless.

There was the sharp crack of the bat and the fans forgot him. Barney “Slugger” McCoy had landed on one of Glenn Fisher’s southpaw slants and it was riding. Beau watched the white ball level out against the sky; Sock Haley, Redbird center fielder, scrambled back up against the center field fence and then watched the ball disappear. These McCoy’s could hit. Moon McCoy, Barney’s twin, came up next and Moon hit a harder ball if

anything.

Beau took his place alongside relief pitcher Bill Quail and a moment later Marty McLean signaled Quail from the bench. Fisher was through; the hard hitting Mustangs were touching him and touching him too hard. It was the sixth and the Mustangs leading 4 to 1—a homerun apiece by the McCoy sluggers, Barney and Moon.

Beau turned to the bullpen catcher, Chug Hartman. Chug squatted wearily. “Okay, Moonshine,” he called, “let’s go.”

Beau threw easily. The arm was stiff; he hadn’t pitched in nearly two weeks—and his last start with the fourth-place Beavers he’d been pelted with base hits. That night he was drunk; in the morning the Beavers showed him the gate and in the evening Marty McLean picked him up. Nobody else was interested.

He hoped if the Mustangs belted Bill Quail they would take their time about it. Evidently, McLean intended to put him in next. There was no one else in the pen.

He watched Quail throw his first pitch and Moon McCoy leaned on it with his two hundred and ten pounds. The ball rammed up against the left field fence and Moon pulled up on second. Two pitchers from the Redbird bench got up and started for the bullpen. Beau Hatfield grinned. McLean intended to use them all.

Bill Quail walked the Mustang third baseman, Peewee Adams, and then Bert White, right fielder, doubled to left; another single and Quail was through.

McLean, face black as thunder, stood up again and looked hard toward the bullpen. Beau stared back at him steadily, McLean waved and sat down.

“Go on in, Moonshine,” Chug Hartman jeered, “go on in and take your medicine.” He wasn’t popular with the Redbirds; he had a bad name—he never gave his best.

Beau turned and walked across the field. They were jeering again; they were throwing paper. He moved slowly like a farmer going across a field. They never hurried back in the mountains near Simmsville. He thought about it occasionally even though he hadn’t been back in seven or eight years.

Pop Hatfield was there and Mom—and he wondered about little Emmy who considered herself his sweetheart—a gangling girl of twelve with freckles and pigtails. Someday he’d go back and see them.

**B**IG Bo Jerome, Redbird catcher, waited for him on the mound. The corners of Jerome’s mouth were turned down. “Just throw ‘em in, Moonshine,” he grinned, “and then duck!”

Beau picked up the ball and shuffled some dirt together around the rubber. He could do that; he could just throw and forget about the whole matter. After the series McLean would send him packing so it didn’t matter. He could probably sign up with some minor league club; he still had enough for those stumble bums; then back to the semi-pro outfits where he’d started from. After that—

Hal Martin, batting for the Mustangs and Hal hit from the left side. Beau rubbed the ball mechanically and stared around the infield. There was no noise; he was an outcast—a bum with no sense of responsibility; he never gave his best.

Jack Newlands glared from first base and pounded his glove; Billy Hammersmith, golden-haired Billy, kicked at some imaginary pebbles and didn’t even look at him; Harry Ashworth stared at the Mustang batter; Art Lang, surly and dark, watched him silently from third base.

“Talk it up,” Beau whispered, “everybody talk it up. A cheer for the bum—on his way out!”

One down and a runner on first base; Mustangs leading now by 7 to 1. Beau took the stretch, watched the runner on first and whipped the ball to the plate.

“Ball,” called the umpire. It was out wide. Beau hitched his shoulder. He felt like throwing today; he wanted to show up this great Redbird team—his own teammates; he’d like to show them he still had something left.

Hal Martin slashed at the next pitch and lined it over second for a clean bingle. . . . They jeered some more from the stands. It was becoming a massacre. Beau’s face darkened.

Ed Bloom, Mustang pitcher, stepped into the rectangle. Beau fanned him on a sharp breaking hook—and they jeered some more. Bloom was a notoriously weak sticker.

Dave Proctor, Mustang second sacker, moved up. Dave always a dependable man in a pinch. Beau watched him narrowly. He’d pitched against the Mustang; before; he’d been in both leagues—and neither league wanted him. Proctor didn’t like ‘em around the handle.

Beau whipped it in close and Proctor let it go by.

“Strike,” bawled the umpire.

Another close ball and Dave slashed it back into the screen. Two and nothing. He could waste a few. Still no talk from the Redbird infield. Beau grinned. The suckers seemed to forget that this was the big series—and a lot of extra dough for the winner.

Dave Proctor went down a moment later on another close ball down around the knees. Beau plodded in toward the dugout; he'd fanned two men in the pinch. There was a splattering of applause from the stands—from the good sports who didn't know him very well. The dyed-in-the-wool boys shut up like a lot of clams. He was still a bum.

Ed Bloom eased up and the Redbirds got a run, but that was all. Beau went out for the seventh. He knew the lineup; there were some bad men coming up. Davis, and the McCoy twins. He'd like to get past them even if it didn't matter.

He worked carefully on Bud Davis and the Mustang shortstop rolled to third. It was one down when Barney McCoy moved up—big, red-faced McCoy, hitting up around .360. Beau stared at him coldly. He'd faced the McCoy brothers and they'd hit him; they hit anybody—but now he'd like to get them out—just this once.

"Put it in, Moonshine," Barney jeered, "and then stagger out of the way."

Beau looked past him at the big glove on Bo Jerome's right hand. Barney liked them fast—straight in on a line. Beau led him hooks, slow tantalizing hooks, and Barney broke his back. Three times he fouled off balls and then lifted a consumptive fly out to second baseman Hammersmith.

Young Billy forgot himself. "Nice goin' kid—keep—" He looked around and flushed. The Redbird infielders glared at him and Beau Hatfield rubbed the ball into his leg.

He got past Moon McCoy, too. Big moon-faced McCoy, Mustang catcher, leading the league in home runs. Moon slashed a few hard fouls and then rolled to Jack Newlands. It was three down; no hits, no runs, no errors.

Marty McLean regarded him queerly when he sat down at the other end of the bench. Beau Hatfield had always an assortment of stuff and today it was working.

**T**HE Redbirds went to work on Ed Bloom. Ashworth doubled on the first pitch; Art Lang singled him home; Moe Goldberg got a life on an infield hit. They passed Bo Jerome purposely

bringing up Beau. Beau kept his seat as Marty McLean sent pinch hitter Harrigan in to bat.

"Guess you can go home now," Jack Newlands said. "See if you can keep sober—"

"Can it," Beau snarled. He'd never liked the big Redbird first baseman.

The Mustangs took the game by an 11 to 6 score. They'd hit freely the two men who followed Beau. Back at the hotel he found a letter for him. It was strange because he seldom got mail. It was a big, brown envelope, addressed in pencil with a scrawling hand. Beau grinned. It was Pop—Pop Hatfield. Someday he'd like to go back home.

"We're comin' down, Beau," the letter read. "We want to see you play in the big series. Mom is comin' down and Emmy. You'll be glad to see Emmy. She's growed up—teachin' school in Simmsville."

Beau sank down in a lobby chair and finished the rest of the letter. He felt in need of a drink. They couldn't come down here; they didn't know anything about him; they thought he was still Beau Hatfield, ace pitcher of the Simmsville Arrows—a clean-cut kid who'd made good in the big-time.

He thought of Mom and Pop sitting up there in the stands and listening as they jeered him—as they threw seat cushions, paper and bottles at him. He'd send a telegram; he'd tell 'em to stay home. The last paragraph of the letter stated that they were taking the train on the night of the seventh—that Emmy was handling everything. This was the eighth—they were due in today. It was too late!

He'd do something; he'd keep them away from the game; he'd stay out of uniform himself; he wouldn't let them see the papers. Back in Simmsville they didn't know anything about him. Pop Hatfield may have read the local paper occasionally; the Hatfields lived out of town—back in the mountains—nothing ever got back there. They still thought he was Beau Hatfield—the boy who'd made good!

"Taxi." Beau climbed aboard and rode down to the station. The hotel clerk informed him the train was due in any minute. He got there ahead of time. He'd send them to a small hotel where nobody would know them; where they couldn't find out anything about him.

Pop Hatfield climbed down the steps first. Beau breathed a little faster. Pop was older; his hair wasn't black anymore—it was gray; he'd seemed to have grown smaller. His clothes were shabby but

his shoes had a new shine on them—a little gray-haired man with a mahogany face and a lot of wrinkles.

Beau shook hands gravely. Mom was a bit stouter. Emmy had fixed her up in a new town dress. Emmy—Beau stared. She wasn't twelve any more. She must be—must be over twenty. Still tall, slender—no more freckles except a few on the nose—blue eyes. Beau stammered his greeting.

"We come down to see you pitch," Pop Hatfield chattered. "We come down to see you beat these Mustangs."

Beau tried to grin. "We'll take 'em, Pop," he managed to say. "We'll take 'em like Grant took Richmond."

"Hey!"

"Like Lee took 'em at Bull Run."

Emmy smiled—twinkling blue eyes. Beau walked beside her as they went out of the station. She was tall, grave and spoke very well.

"You teach school in Simmsville?" Beau asked. "It—it must be a job." He'd gone to school in Simmsville.

Emmy nodded. "I like teaching little boys," she said quietly.

Beau nodded.

"Some boys," Emmy continued blandly, "never seem to grow up."

Beau took a deep breath. He had to do something; he had to keep them away from the game.

"We're goin' to the game tomorrow," Pop Hatfield called back. "You goin' to pitch, Beau?"

"I want to hear them cheer for you, Beau," Mom Hatfield was saying, "like they used to down in Simmsville."

Beau helped them into the cab. It had just occurred to him. Tomorrow was the fourth game. Maybe McLean wouldn't use him again. McLean would never start him with pitchers like Harris, Franklyn and Fisher ready to go. He was a bum—an in-and-outer. He breathed easier. If he stayed in the dugout—hid in a corner somewhere he might get by.

That night he took them all to the movies and sat beside Emmy Grayson. He didn't know whether to call her Emmy or Miss Grayson. He got home early, for McLean was strict; he thought of stopping in for a drink—but he didn't.

THE Redbirds with Mike Harris on the mound took the Mustangs by a 5 to 3 score. It was tied up—two and two. Big Barney McCoy got another home run but Moon's bat was shackled.

Beau cowered in the dugout most of the afternoon.

"You ought to get out there and get some of that barroom pallor from your cheeks," Jack Newlands sneered. "The sun'll do you good."

Beau's lips tightened. He wasn't taking much more from the Redbird first baseman. "Another crack," he warned, "and you'll find yourself lookin' up at the sun—from the ground."

Newlands stood up and dropped his glove. Marty McLean pushed through the door from the dressing room and Newlands sat down again. Once before Marty had slapped a hundred dollar fine on him for fighting.

Again the Redbirds, behind the Sterling pitching of Lefty Franklyn, set the Mustangs down and went into the lead. Franklyn hurled five-hit ball—three of the hits by the battering McCoy twins—and won going away 4 to 0.

"When you goin' to pitch, Beau?" Pop Hatfield was becoming impatient.

"Maybe the last game," Beau told him, "maybe they're savin' me for the big game."

He was aware of Emmy Grayson watching him silently. "Maybe," he continued lamely, "maybe I'll be in there for the big one, Pop."

The Mustangs evened it up the next day with a smashing 12 to 3 win. It was Fisher again who'd been blasted from the mound.

In the sixth Marty McLean told Beau to get out in the pen. Beau shook his head. He was pale.

"I don't feel good, Marty," he said. "I wouldn't do much today."

Jack Newlands roared. Marty McLean studied him. Beau did look sick. He couldn't go out there; he couldn't walk down the field and have them jeer him—not with Pop and Mom and Emmy up in the stands. They shouldn't have come—they should have stayed down in Simmsville thinking that he was Beau Hatfield—the boy who made good up in the big-time.

"Had a couple of snifters last night," Jack Newlands roared in the dressing room after the game, "so he feels sick and can't pitch. The bum is pickled—he's so full of alcohol he'd burn if you put a match to him!"

Beau got up slowly. "You're a cheap four-

flusher, Newlands," he said loudly and distinctly. The Redbirds stopped dressing and watched open-mouthed.

The first baseman swung hard with a right which caught Beau on the side of the face. He staggered backward and then came in like a wild man. The rush carried both men back over a wooden bench. They went down in a heap and Beau smashed into a corner of an iron locker. There was a sharp, searing pain in the side—it ran like fire up and down his back; he gasped from the pain.

Marty McLean was speaking. "This," he said calmly, "will cost each man one hundred bucks on the line."

Beau dressed slowly. He rubbed the side but it didn't do much good; something had happened in there—but it didn't matter. After tomorrow he was a free agent—responsible to no one—and he had ideas. He'd be getting a cut of the series—win or lose. It wouldn't be very much. He had ideas. He'd finish out this final game on the bench because he told Marty he'd play him square and Marty had given him a break when nobody else would.

"You pitchin' tomorrow, Beau?" Pop Hatfield wanted to know. "When you goin' in, Beau?"

Tomorrow he'd go and see a doctor about that side. It was red and swollen; he'd get that fixed and then Marty and the rest of them—

Marty started Mike Harris on the mound—redheaded, lean Mike who'd stopped the Mustangs a few days ago. It was three and three and the big game—a dark, misty day and a capacity crowd. Beau shivered on the bench. October rain.

Mike looked good but Marty McLean was worried. The redhead needed a longer rest; he was no work horse but he was game. For three innings the Mustangs lunged at his slants. He got by the McCoy twins—got Barney on a long fly to center and Moon on a roller to the box. Still McLean was worried.

It was the fifth and no score. Big Ed Bloom on the mound for the Mustangs; Bloom the Wild Horse ace. Going into the sixth and the Mustangs got a man on. Harris was losing his fast one; the hook broke too slow. He walked Swanson, Mustang first baseman.

**M**ARTY McLEAN stood up and waved to the bullpen pitchers. There were two of them out there. Lefty Franklyn who'd pitched two days ago and the relief hurler Bagby. McLean looked down

the bench. "Hatfield—get out there in the pen."

Beau stared at him. He'd gotten by without any show. This was going to spoil it.

"Maybe—" he began. Marty regarded him coldly. He knew Marty's mind; Marty was playing a long shot; Marty knew that Franklyn wasn't rested and that Bagby was just another pitcher. He remembered that Beau had stopped the Mustangs in that third game—although only for two innings. Marty had played him square and Marty wanted a return. This was it.

"Okay, Marty," he mumbled, "okay."

Buttoning his jacket tightly around him he slipped out the dugout and trotted along the fence head down. They didn't recognize him. Two men aboard for the Mustangs and one down. It was tense and they watched the game. It was drizzling—a steady, gray, misty rain.

He threw a few warm-up pitches to Chug Hartman and that right side began to burn again. He'd have to get loosened up fast. Maybe Harris would go this inning. He began to bear down. It was nauseating. Pitching wrenched that side and it flared danger signals up and down his body. He'd get that looked at tonight after the game.

The sharp crack of the bat and Beau turned. Martin, Mustang outfielder had smashed a line shot over second. It looked good; the crowd yelled and then Ashworth scooted across the ground, stabbed at the white ball, stepped on second and whipped it to first. Triple play, but they only needed two. Mike Harris grinned and walked to the dugout.

Beau threw some more balls to Chug Hartman and then he sat down. Mike Harris got through the seventh but it was dumb luck. Again the Wild Horses had men on the sacks but Sock Haley climbed the center field wall and pulled down Moon McCoy's bid for a homer.

The end of the seventh and the Redbirds pushed a run around the bags—one, lone, precious run. Ashworth singled; Art Lang helped him along with a sacrifice bunt and Jerome eventually drove home the Redbird shortstop with a screaming double.

"We got one," Marty McLean growled. "Let's hope it's enough." Marty's face had lightened up and his eyes were hard. This was the big series—lots of dough riding on the winner.

Adams leading off for the Mustangs—start of the eighth. The Mustangs—wild, desperate, bidding for the big title, slashing at everything. Adams doubled to right field. Beau saw it coming; saw it

bounce on the wet grass and carom off the wall; watched a wild-eyed Moe Goldberg scramble after the hit.

Marty McLean called time. There was a conference in the pitcher's box. Marty's cap was off and his gray hair was tinged with moisture. He waved to the pen and Franklyn started out. Marty waved him back and Bagby looked at Beau Hatfield.

"He wants you," Beau lied. "Go on in."

They sent Bagby back. Beau swallowed and started across the field. He wasn't afraid to pitch; he wasn't afraid of anything—except those jeers with Pop and Mom and Emmy sitting up there in the stands.

He walked through the mist, head erect and slapping at his glove. He was a bum—an in-and-outer—but he was going to pitch ball now. They stood around and watched as he warmed up. And then that arm. Worse than before—like fire.

"Okay," Marty McLean said, "okay Beau—keep throwin'." And then Marty grinned.

Beau look off his glove and rubbed the ball with his hands. Then for the first time he noticed it. No noise—no jeers—no catcalls—nothing—not even a seat cushion or a piece of paper—just quiet. They watched him. Beau tried to grin—tried to laugh it off but it didn't work.

**T**HEN he got it. They were giving him another chance. He was a bum—but they were backing him. This was a Redbird crowd; they wanted a Redbird win and they were backing him—willing to ride with him. He wondered where Pop and Mom and Emmy were sitting.

Bert White, Mustang right fielder, was in the square waving his hat. Bert was a right-handed baiter, solid, powerful with wrists like a gorilla.

Beau took the stretch, watched Adams dancing off second and hooked the ball on the outside corner.

"Strike," called the umpire.

He played it in the same place and White slashed at it. The ball rolled down along the first-base line. Beau sprinted to cover the bag. Jack Newlands made the toss and it was one way. Adams went down to third.

He couldn't take any chances now. Any kind of a hit might tie up the ball game and if it went extra innings he was through. That bad side wouldn't hold out.

He threw the first pitch to Swanson and his face went gray with pain. Swanson went around twice on the swing but the ball plunked into Bo Jerome's mitt. It was a beautiful hook—the kind of ball you wrenched your body on.

Another pitch and Swanson lifted high to Arlie Lang on third; it was two away. You couldn't waste many pitches. Things were beginning to swim a little.

"Get it in there, Beau—give it to 'em boy—" Billy Hammersmith wasn't afraid to yell now. And the rest of them were following the lead.

"All behind you, Beau—keep chuckin'," from Artie Lang. Even Jack Newlands grinned and shook his fist at him. Beau didn't see them or hear anything. His mouth was a thin, blue line; the pain had gone up to his eyes.

Martin, Mustang left fielder, lifted a pop to Jack Newlands. It was three down and no score. The Redbird fans rose as a man and showered paper—but they were cheering now; they were cheering Beau Hatfield—the bum who was making good.

Beau plodded in toward the bench and sagged down.

"You look good out there," Marty McLean told him. "One more to go, kid."

Somebody grounded out and then an usher climbed over the railing and went down the dugout steps.

"Outside," Coach Evans yelled. The usher had a message for Beau Hatfield.

Beau read the note. It was written in a scrawling hand—written in pencil on a blank page of the souvenir programs. It said, "Go get 'em, Beau; a Hatfield could always lick two McCoys. Signed, Pop."

Beau grinned. He hadn't thought of it that way. The old Hatfield and McCoy feud down in the mountains. It was silly. He knew the McCoy twins came from up around Boston. Trust Pop Hatfield to remember the famous mountain feud. Pop's dad, his own grandfather, had his hat shot off and had taken potshots at the McCoys. Maybe he'd face the terrible McCoys next inning.

The Redbirds took the field again. Start of the ninth—score 1 to 0 for the Redbirds. Beau took two warm-up pitches and signaled that he was ready.

They put a pinch hitter in for Ed Bloom. Beau regarded him calmly. He threw and the pain flared back. The Mustang slapped the ball through short for a bingle. Ashworth dove at it but the pill slid

by.

There was a murmur from the stands. Still a gray mist. Beau shivered. Start of the Mustang lineup and he could see the McCoy's watching him from the dugout—the big, bruising McCoy's. A Hatfield could always lick two McCoy's.

He fooled Proctor on another hook with the count 2 and 1, and the Mustang went back to the dugout dragging his bat. One away, man on first. Davis, Mustang shortstop at the plate.

Davis singled over second but they held Proctor to the bag. Runners on first and second, one away and the McCoy's coming up there. The crowd stood up and the roar increased—like thunder. Barney “Slugger” McCoy in the slot—hitting from the right side and with a bat like a wagon tongue.

A steady chatter from the Redbird infield, Beau listened and it was music. It'd been a long time since anybody talked it up for him. He was a bum. They were pleading up in the stands. A Hatfield could always lick—

**H**OOKS, hooks and more hooks; hooks that wrenched that flaming side. Things were getting blurred up at the plate. He was dizzy with the pain. Three and two—and Slugger McCoy walked.

Bo Jerome slipped off the mask and came out to confab. “Keep it low,” Jerome growled. “Keep it down in the dirt and we'll get this sucker for two.”

Big Moon McCoy in the rectangle. There was no smile on the moon-face now. Dough—greenbacks, cold cash rode on the next play. It was the big series.

Beau hooked and hooked some more—down low, around the knees. McCoy fouled off two of them. Bases loaded, one away. Keep it down low and play for two.

The last one; Beau Hatfield gathered his waning strength. It was another hook, breaking beautifully across the plate—Moon McCoy's big bat swished and the ball shot past Beau's feet. He knew Ashworth was after it and would get it. They were playing for him today.

Little Harry's gloved hand stuck out and the ball bounced in; a flip to Hammersmith and the kid second baseman stepped on the bag and whipped it to Jack Newlands. They had big Moon flatfooted. Double play. Beau stuck his glove in the back pocket and weaved toward the dugout. He'd get that side fixed up now. Somebody caught him as he staggered down the dugout steps.

“It's a cracked rib,” Doc Walker said, “and it's in bad shape.” They had Beau on the table. There had been a lot of noise a few moments ago; now the Redbirds were gathered silently around the injured pitcher.

“We got a nice, fat contract for you next year, Beau,” Marty McLean looked down at him.

“I'm a bum,” Beau grinned. He paused. “But I got ideas.”

Marty waited.

“It's like this,” Beau told him, “I come up from the mountains and now I'm goin' back to the mountains. Back with Pop and Mom and Emmy Grayson. I belong down near Simmsville. I can open a store or somethin'—I can pitch for the Arrows. I'll like it down there.”

They were on the train and moving south.

“There's somethin' I want to tell you, Emmy,” Beau said. “It's about me. I'm a bum—”

Emmy smiled. “I can read, Beau.” The blue eyes were soft. “I've been reading the papers for years.” She paused. “You're all right now, Beau.”

Beau Hatfield nodded. He was all right; he was going home.