There's No Base Like Home

By H. C. WITWER

Ed Harmon, the Babe Ruth of baseball fiction and by his own admission the greatest hitter and pitcher in the game, sets a new laugh-per-minute record in his new adventures in "There's No Base Like Home." His experiences are related by letters to his friends. Following is the first letter. Installments will follow daily. Follow through with Ed Harmon.

CHAPTER I

First Inning

Alongside of the Hudson's river, N. Y.

Dear Joe—Well, Joe, we have got off to a start as you have prob-ly no doubt seen by the papers and win the first game of the season by trimmin' the Robins with the ridiculous ease. Even if the thing did go sixteen innin's and the score was only 1 to 0 and we got that run in the last frame by way of a wild pitch, that's the same as if we win by 749 to 0, because we win it and that's all that counts, hey, Joe? Them guys got eleven hits off of me and you can see I must of got terrible support or that never would of happened. If it wasn't for my almost unhuman control in the pinches and makin' the batter act like a armless wonder when they was a runner on the base, we would prob-ly of lost the game, because whenever they was a ball hit to the infield them birds all acted like it was against the law to touch it and it made the game more interestin' to have the bases loaded.

I was give a great reception, Joe, when I strolled out to the box in a nonchalantly way and waved my cap right and left to my 25,000 to 30,000 frantic followers and I bet if even Pres. Wilson had walked across the field right then he would of attracted no more attention than a drop of water at Niagara Falls. They was manys the loud cry for a speech and I got all set right in front of the boxes to let one forth when Mac grabs me by the arm and says this is gonna be a ball game and not a banquet and I had better go back to the bull pen and warm up so's the Robins wouldn't get no more than half a dozen hits each off of me.

"Listen!" I says. "You wanna remember this here will be the first real game I pitched for nearly two years and if them guys does luck themselves into a run or so, don't blame it on me. I always was a slow starter anyways."

"You said it!" says Mac, with a sarcastical sneer. "It used to generally be the first week in December before you got goin' at all and what good is a inshoot then?"

Joe, can you tie that? This bird would find fault with a ten thousand-dollar bill, hey?

Well, yesterday mornin' I am up in my flat, Joe, engaged in the innocent pastime of playin' with my baby whilst Jeanne looks on with a lovin' smile on her equally lovin' face and a book by the name of "The Whole English Language in One Lesson" in her hand, when they's a ring at the bell. Our imported maid from Yonkers trips lightly over a rug into the room and exclaims that they's a guy outside by the name of Mac which wishes nothin' better than to see me. I give permission for him to come in.

"Well, well," he says, lettin' forth a grin, "The happy family, hey? How is everybody this mornin'?"

"What's the use of kickin'?" I says. "What d'ye think of my child?"

"Fine!" says Mac. "What is it?"

"What d'ye mean, what is it?" I hollers. "It's a baby—what did you think it was, a giraffe?"

"I mean is it a boy or a girl," says Mac. "Save that comedy for the clubhouse."

"It's a boy," I says. "Some kid, hey?"

"I'll say he is!" says Mac, approachin' carefully like he was afraid my baby was gonna bite him or the like. "Looks just like his mother, too. Get them navy blue eyes, eh?"

"Never mind tryin' to get in solid with the wife!" I says, whilst Jeanne presents him with a dazzlin' smile. "D'ye wanna hold him a minute?"

"Well—eh—let's start with somethin' else," says Mac, backin' away. "He seems all right where he is, I'll let that part of it go for a while, hey?"

"Cherl, say bon jour to Monsieur Mac!" remarks Jeanne to my baby.

"Ump goof waugh gunko!" returns my baby, with a sarcastical grin.

"Don't mention it," says Mac. "Say—that kid's a wonder! Talks as plain as I do. How old is it by now?"

"What's the difference?" I says. "Did you wanna see me about somethin'?"

"Yeh," says Mac. "Put on your hat and coat."

"I ain't drinkin' a thing," I says. "And——"

"I want you to come out to the park with me for about a hour," he interrupts. "I have got hold of a bird which I can buy cheap from Buffalo and I gotta get him quick if at all. I wanna short flash at him at work—he's gotta be back there tonight. Of course, I won't have much time to see whether he's worth a cigar coupon or a fistful of diamonds, but if he shows me anything at all, I'm gonna take him along. He's a infielder by nationality and maybe I can put him on second next year instead of Watson."

"What are you gonna do with Watson?" I says. "I thought he was the same to the club as the franchise."

"He's slippin' fast," says Mac. "He's commencin' to field like they was lovin' cups give to the guy which made the most errors a game and he ain't hit nothin' but four fouls since he come down to the trainin' camp. They's a good livin' in one of them little cigar stores or the like—that's up to him!"

Joe, ain't that tough? As soon as a guy begins to show the first signs of wear they start greasin' up the old skids for him. Such is life in baseball, hey, Joe? Today you're a knockout, tomorrow you're a tramp! If you rap out a triple, the mob is willin' to elect you mayor—if you fan the next time up, the bleachers turns into a coupla thousand would-be murderers. Joe, wouldn't it be awfully if I begin to slip and let clubs like the Cards trim me? I often wish now that I had took up the delicatessen game or the movies or the like for a livin' and not have to caper around a lot all day for money like a idiot, hey, Joe?

Well, anyways, me and Mac climbed aboard my new auto which I now drive the same as Barney Oldfield—as good, but not as fast—and outside of one traffic cop givin' me a five-minute lecture on the subject of "Keep to the right!" and a motorcycle cop showin' unusual curiosity regardin' the reason why my motor was smokin', we got out to the park O. K. They was three or four of the gang there and also this here find of the season which was in uneyform. Joe, he was as big as Willard, with one of them fat, good-natured faces which a bartender was supposed to have, but I only seen one like that in my life and he was the guy which owned the place. Well, Joe, Mac calls him over.

"This here's Ed Harmon," he says to him. "What did you claim your name was?"

"Ike Roscovitzman," he says, grinnin' like a wolf, and shovin' out a paw as big as South Dakota. "Well, natural I'm glad I should shake hands from Harmon, which who don't heard tell of him?"

"That Rosconovitzman thing has got to go," says Mac. "It's too long! How could we ever get a trade mark like that into a box score? If you work for me we'll call you Ike Ross, and let it go at that, get me!"

"I should change my name!" says Ike. "What am I—a actor oder a ball player?"

"I don't know," says Mac. "We'll get that all settled in a minute! Let's see how you and a bat get along."

Well, Joe Smith gets on a glove and goes back of the plate and I took off my coat and vest and went out to the box. Ike Ross, nee Rosconovitzman, grabs up a bat and steps over to the plate.

"Gevhalt!" he says. "Only shoot it over and I'll murder it the ball!"

Joe, it kinda peeved me a trifle that this here busher with the trick name and the Joe Welsh dialect should cast a reflection on my world-wide reputation as a mound artist, as the young reporters says, so before I wound up I looked him over with that deadly cold gaze of mine which has quailed and flinched so many.

"I hate to send you back to the sticks, busher," I says, "but if you lay a bat on this pill I'll shine your shoes in front of the city hall at 3 o'clock tomorrow afternoon!"

"Make it half-past 2," he says, rubbin' his hands in the dirt, "and you could believe it. I'll be there! If you could make me fan, I could make it a locomotive—not that you ain't some pitchers. Maybe the first one I would miss on account from being a little cold, but oy!—what I'll do to the rest of them! This here's a big chance for me, Mister Harmon. I got it a chance I should get in the big's league. It's next to the biggest thing which it ever happened from me in my life. I should miss it, hey? Say—I'm laughin' at you!"

"What was the biggest thing that ever happened to you?" Mac asks him, grinnin' at me.

Ike rubs his chin a minute.

"Well," he says, "off the hand, it's quite a question to answer. Still, I think that the biggest thing which it ever happened from me was the day I was born!"

The gang gives Mac the laugh and I shot over a fast one whilst Ike was lookin' at him. He merely sneered at it and Mac hollers for him to take his bat off his shoulder and not act like he was carryin' a gun and if he did think he was to at least come to present arms with it. I eased over another one and Ike missed it from here to St. Paul. I put the third ball under his chin, Joe, and he swung at it so hard that he spin around like a top a coupla times and wound up sittin' on the plate.

"Oh, boy!" bawls Mac, holdin' his nose. "Who laid me on this guy? Bean him with the next one, Harmon, and I'll send him back to Buffalo on a shutter!"

"What is this—Russia?" says Ike, gettin' up and dustin' off his uneyform. "Couldn't a man get it a chance here? Suppose I should miss, now, two of them? That first one was a ball and I got one strike left, na? That makes no matter from me. Now—say they is a man on first, a man on second, a man on third a man on—well, that's enough! I'm at the bat's. One strike I got left. If I should rap it out a hit now, the least I bring in is a run, na?"

"Yeh," says Mac, "and if I had Morgan's bankroll the least I would be is a millionaire. You got the same chance of gettin' a hit on the next ball as I have of bein' elected chief of police in Bulgaria.

"Take off that uneyform and exchange it for the gate. How I ever fell for you is past me!"

"A minute!" says Ike. "The contract was I should have it a hour to show what I got. Fair is fair and right is right, na? A man's word is the same like his bond. Do with the others like you want they should do from you. Don't kick a man which he's down. Nobody's perfect. Forgive and forget. A man which——"

"Half a loaf's better than a charlotte russe," hollers Mac, dancin' around him. "A rollin' stone's liable to hit somebody. A stitch in time saves buyin' a new suit." He runs over and grabs the bat off Ike. "Shut up!" he bawls. "What d'ye mean by pullin' that stuff on me? I'll give you exactly a half hour more to show me you ever seen a ball park before you come here today; and if you ain't a riot, I'll knock you kickin' with a bat for wastin' my time. Now go to it and show me!"

Ike grins and reaches for another bat.

"Fair enough!" he says. "Oh, what I could do it in half a hour! Why, would you believe it, Mr. Mac, only the other night I win five dollars in half a hour from some friends playin' ten-cent draw poker?"

"You win five dollars in ten-cent draw, eh?" sneers Mac. "Well, you must of drawed a gun on them guys! C'mon, Harmon, let him have it."

Well, Joe, I let Ike have it; and to show they was no hard feelin's he let me have it, too! You never seen such a change come over anything in your life, not even the German army as the one that took place with this Ike guy. I felt kinda sorry for the poor hick at first, because he sure looked pitiful standin' there without a friend and the gang ridin' him to a fare-thee-well. Well, I thought, I'll ease one over so's he can make some kind of a showin' before he gets the gate; and with that, Joe, I shot him one right in the groove. Joe, he put it up against the tobacco sign in right field, and the bunch begins to ride me. I figure by this time I have done all for him that he can expect, so I feed him my world-famous slow drop next, and he lays it in the left-field bleachers. Joe, I am gettin' sore, and I give that baby everything I got in stock, from that wicked inshoot of mine to my notorious wiggler, which is as fast as a frightened bullet and twists like a epileptic snake. Joe, he eat 'em all up, fillin' the air full of baseballs; and Mac give a sarcastical grunt and asks me are we roommates. He even put a wild pitch up against the flagpole in deep center; and Smith, which was catchin' me, never laid a finger on the ball because none of them got that far. When he slammed my lightnin' outshoot so hard that it must of come down in Russia for the first bounce, I throwed off my glove and quit; and Mac tells him to go out on the lot with the rest of the gang and show him a piece of fieldin'.

Joe, that bird would never of hit me as hard as that if I had been in my baseball uneyform instead of merely standin' there in citizen's life clothes, because I am what they call a artist and cannot pitch my best unless everything is just so; and besides they was no crowd there cheerin' me on or yellin' for me to be took out of the box, one or the other, and that slowed me up too. Any guy which is what they call a artist Joe can tell you the same thing. They is a thing which is knowed among us great men as temperamental; and I was took with a sudden stroke of it or that guy would never of laid his bat within telephone distance of the ball.

Well, Joe, we all took turns rappin' out balls to him in the field; and if he was good with the old wagon tongue, he was a fiend when it come to fieldin'. He was faster on his feet than a rabbit, and as for a throwin' arm—oh, boy! Joe, he snapped one from second to me and I thought they was a motor in it from the way it sounded goin' past my ear. Before I cohld raise a glove to it it was bouncin' off the side of the dugout. Mac sent in some other guys to work out with him so's he wouldn't feel lonesome; and as far as fieldin' was concerned them guys could of started a crap game, because Ike never give them a chance. He covered more ground than the prohibition movement; and if Ty Cobb could of seen this bird work he would of gone to the nearest drug store and took a seidel of arsenic from plain jealousy. Joe, he missed a odd one now and then or he would of been unhuman; but he gave a exhibition of the game of baseball all by himself out there that would make Eddie Collins look like a busher.

"This guy's a gold mine!" Mac whispers to me. "He'll be the talk of the country in a coupla weeks and so will I for diggin' him up. Why, they won't be nothing on the front page of the papers but his pictures and the like; and they'll run what's happenin' in the rest of the world in the advertisin' section. He's got Watson's job sewed in the linin' of his vest now, and I only hope he won't ask for a cut of the Liberty loan to go to work for me. If I get to do it, though, I'll give him the clubhouse and the grandstand to get him to try out a fountain pen on the bottom of a contract."

With that he yells for Ike to come in.

"C'mere!" says Mac, when Ike come grinnin' up to the plate, "and take that simp look off your face whilst I'm talkin' to you. I must say I'm a whole lot disappointed after seein' you work. I thought you had big league stuff in you, but you got manys the year to go yet on what you've showed today. You small-time knockouts are all alike—world beaters with the high school boys and tramps when you get in the Big Show. However, I'll give you a chance, but you've got to improve 500 per cent over your present work. I counted all the balls hit to you, and out of thirty-six chances you missed two—that's terrible! The only reason you got a hit at all off Harmon was because I told him not to extend himself and take chances of hurtin' him arm. If he had really let himself out you would never of put wood on the ball, get that?"

"What else is the matter from me?" says Ike, scratchin' his head.

"I'll leave the bleachers tell you all about that the first time you work," says Mac. "How much dough do you think you ought get?"

"Well," says Ike, "that's a question. How's bosiness?"

"How's business?" hollers Mac. "Say, how long have you been playin' professional baseball, anywayo"

"Gevhalt!" says Ike. "You should live that long. I want only I should save enough money to open it a delicatessen and then I wouldn't care if I never seen a umpire even for the rest of my life." He begins waggin' his head from one side to the other. "Tsch!" he says. "Baseballs—that's a business! Strike one, strike two, he's out, he's safe, batters up, ball six, leave him in, take him out, kill the umpire, oy!"

Me and Mac is havin' trouble with a bad case of the hysterials; and finly Mac demands to know at once how much money Ike wants and be done with it.

"Well," says Ike, "so's we wouldn't waste all day with fighting and like that—how's six thousand a year?"

"That's nice money," says Mac, "and I bet Rockefeller and Morgan hit around that practically year in and year out. I'll split the difference with you and make it two thousand. C'mon down to the office and I'll sign you up before I change my mind."

"Oy," hollers Ike, speaking to the flagpole. "Two thousand a year! I'm laughing at you! A conductor from a street car gets two thousand a year and first crack at the nickels and you want I should play baseballs for that, hey? Either I get it six thousand or I go back to Buffaloes. You could take it or leave it."

"All right," says Mac, turning away. "I'll leave it. So long, stupid."

We got about three feet away, Joe, when Ike comes runnin' and grabs Mac by the arm.

"Gimme it the papers," he says. "I'll sign 'em. You could take a joke, couldn't you?"

Well, Joe, we got this here world-beater for about the same money the groundkeeper gets and I only hope he don't turn out to be a flash of the pan. Mac had a lotta fun gettin' his release from Buffalo which must of seen a rat when he went after Ike, because we had to give $7000 and two good outfielders to get this $2000-a-year champ.

Well, bonne nuit, as we used to remark in the trenches and I hope things is goin' O. K. with you. I don't work again for three days and then I pitch the first game against the Phillies. The only one of them guys which will see first base will be the bird which is playin' that position for them, hey, Joe? Outa common politeness, Jeanne sends her love.

Yours truly,

ED. HARMON.

(The Extryordinary pitcher de luxe).

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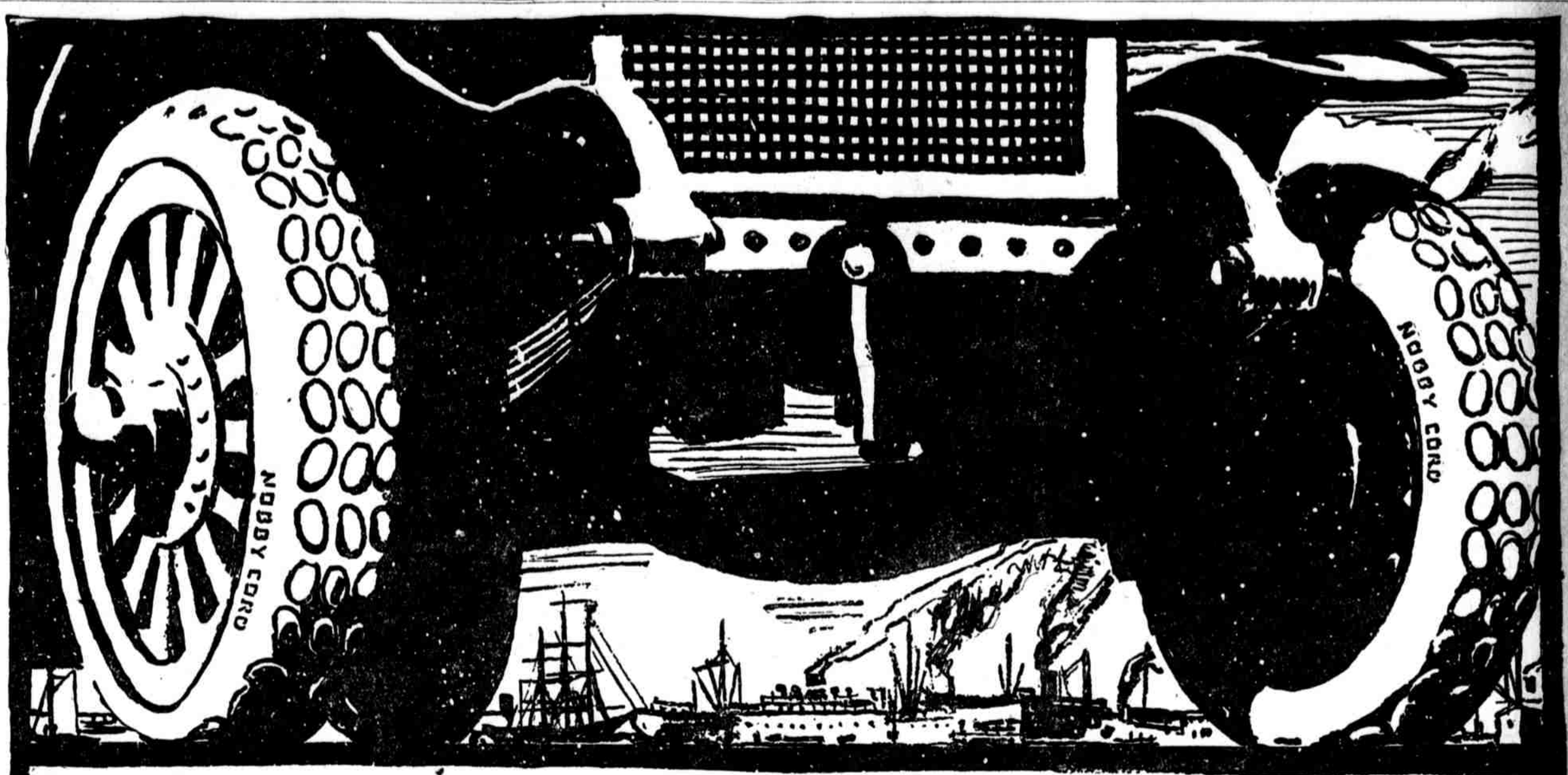
(CONTINUED TOMORROW)



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