

Dope Factory Yarns

A Fanning Bee with Some Able Liars

By C. P. McDONALD

"**S**PEED," said Umpire Munchausen, Jr., "great speed, is what wins many hard-fought baseball battles."

"Yet," spoke up the Oldest Inhabitant, who had been a backstop in the days of the barehand game, "some players can have too great a speed. You've heard that yarn, I suppose, about Bert Cunningham? Bert was the speediest man, so the story goes, that ever wore the spangles. He was one of those fleet-footed cusses who would put down a little bunt in front of the plate and before the pitcher or catcher could capture it he would hot-foot it and perch on second or third base. That's the kind o' speed Bert had.

"But his immense speed proved his undoing, as I recollect the tale. Bert was playing his last game in the big league one day, and in his anxiety to make good he exerted himself to a far greater degree than was his usual custom, and poled what would have been only a two-bagger for the ordinary pestler, but what was a home-run for Bert with his phenomenal fleetness. In order to show the bugs how fast he was he cut loose and before the outfielder could pick up the ball and relay it, Bert had completed the circuit."

"How did that prove his undoing?" queried the Sentimental Fibber.

"Well, it so happened that in getting around the four sacks Bert had worked up such a terrific speed that he couldn't stop at the home-platter, and before he could check his gait he collided with himself on the second lap, and the concussion just naturally killed him."

"Some speed," said the Inveterate Fabricator, "believe me, some speed!"

"Well, of course," said Munchausen, Jr., "such a thing could happen—yes, it might happen. But, just the same, speed is a great factor in the sport.

"I have an instance in mind right now," he continued, touching a match to the wrong end of a cigarette. "Frisky Pete Gibler was noted for his speed and quick thinking. He played center garden in one of the big leagues for years.

"Pete was in his usual position one day, but was playing way back in the middle, for the man who was at the bat was strong on home-runs. It was the last of the ninth and the score stood 3 to 2 in favor of Pete's bunch. The visitors had a man on third with two out, and a four-bagger meant sure defeat. Pete had no intention of letting the ball come out in his pasture and get by—not Pete.

"Meantime a heavy, dark and threatening thunderstorm had come up and hovered over Pete's head. The fans were hollering at the pitcher to get a move on and the heavy swatter was pawing the ground with his hind hoof, anxiously awaiting a ball that would split the plate.

"Along came the ball he was laying for. He met it squarely and fairly on the snoot, and it floated, sailed and air-shipped out to center field like an animated bird."

"That's the domesticated species," interpolated the Lucid Falsifier.

"Yes, them's the kind like this ball was," acquiesced Munchausen, Jr., "Pete was ready for it. He didn't even hardly budge—at least, not so you could notice it with the naked lamp. He stood under it expectantly, peevishly, like a dyspeptic at a railroad lunch counter. The home rooters yelled their delight and started home. Then the unexpected happened."

A long pause, a painful pause ensued. "And right there is where Pete dropped the spheroid," vouchsafed the Careful Observer.

"Man," replied Munchausen, Jr., "your imagination hasn't even the merit of novelty. Listen: Pete stood there waiting for the globule to descend, and the storm halted long enough to butt into his preparations.

"Suddenly a flashing, blinding streak of lightning rent the clouds asunder (Is that not clever, gents?), and as though Fate were bent upon the home team's destruction, the lightning split that baseball—divided it as neatly and accurately as a school-ma'am carves an apple or as a proper hubby hands over the weekly allowance to his spouse.

"Pete saw it strike. With Pete to see was to act. One half of that mutilated pellet floated to the left, the other half to the right. Pete ran and got under the left-hand half. He smothered it in his mitt as it came down and hastily thrust it into his pocket. Then with muscles tense, his face set hard and stern, he started after the other half, which was descending with great velocity three hundred and twenty-nine feet to his right."

"Actual measurement, too," interposed the Oldest Inhabitant.

"Precisely," answered Munchausen, Jr. "The fans stood breathless, each dreading, daring not to speak. All you could see of Pete was a dim streak flashing over the sward."

Again Munchausen, Jr., paused. The silence was awful—smothering—unbearable.

"Did he get the other half?" finally asked the Cheerful One, unable longer to refrain from putting the question.

"That's the agonizing feature of the play," hoarsely whispered Munchausen, Jr. "That's where money changed hands and Pete's backers lost gold. Pete got under it all right, but just as he extended his mitt for the coveted prize, a dark shadow flashed by him. Pete stood petrified. Then with a blood-curdling, terrifying screech, an itinerant eagle swooped down and swept away with the other half of that ball in its talons."

The Cheerful One looked up slowly. "Now," he said, with a gleam of almost

human intelligence in his eye. "Now I know why some of them eagles is called 'Balled-headed!'"

"Only one thing beats speed like that," ventured the Careful Observer, "and that's the rapidity with which official returns come in at a primary election in Illinois."

"Those boys were sure enough fast," drawled the Lucid Falsifier, "no getting around that. But I don't know as they furnished any more remarkable cause for getting arrested and fined for exceeding the speed limit than Blue Streak Bill of the Old Eskimos.

"Bill took it into his head he'd like to quit the uncertain pastime and go out west and rustle cattle, or bu'st broncos, or any old Western sport that suited his artistic nature. He not only took that notion, but he went, I'm here to tell you.

"Blue Streak was the boy who got a reputation for fleet-footedness one day by playing the whole battery. Just to show the natives what he could do, Bill would pitch a fast ball and then run back behind the batter and catch it. He played a whole game that way that day and won it, too. That's the kind o' speed Bill had."

"Going some," said the Unmitigated One.

"Ain't it the truth?" replied the Lucid Falsifier.

"You betcha!" answered the Unmitigated One.

"Well," went on the Lucid Falsifier, "Blue Streak, he went out west, as I was about to narrate, and landed at a sheep ranch. He told the ranch boss he was strong and willing to work; all he wanted was a chance, that's all, and the high altitude and his speed would do the rest.

"The ranch boss put him at work rounding up sheep. Says he: 'You come with me and we'll git yuh a good hoss and you git busy.'

"I don't want no horse," said Blue Streak.

"'You certainly do talk like a tender-foot, all right,' replied the ranch boss. 'You'd have a fine time riding herd on them woolers without a bronc under yuh.'

"Why, say, Mister," drawled Blue Streak in that agonizing, tantalizing tone of his, 'let me tell you something that you maybe don't know. I can outrun any

mustang, Percheron, bronco, pony, speed merchant or wind cutter you ever tethered or let loose in a corral. No, I don't want no mount. You watch me. I'll git by with that rounding up business.'

"The ranch boss seemed to think Bill ought to be humored, so he told him to go ahead. Bill was out some hours when the boss finally got sight of him. Naturally, the first question he asked Blue Streak was how he was getting along.

" 'I ain't had much trouble,' Bill replied, grinning. 'It's a cinch to gather them sheep into the fold. The only difficulty I encountered was gitting them lambs herded. They kind of taxed my capacity.

" 'What are you giving us,' asked the ranch boss, in a quick-tempered sort of

way. 'There ain't a lamb or lambkin in that whole outfit. I ought to know.'

" 'I ought to know, too,' retorted Blue Streak, sore himself a little bit over being disputed with. 'You come on and I'll soon convince you. I got ninety-two lambs closed in down there.'

"The ranch boss accompanied him to the enclosure. He looked at Bill's 'lambs' and then grinned and looked at Bill.

" 'You derved galoot!' said he finally, 'you've surely been running like hell, all right. But them ain't lambs.' "

" 'No?' sassed back Bill, sarcastically. 'No? They ain't lambs?'

" 'Nary lamb,' said the ranch boss. 'They're jack-rabbits!' "



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