

The Biggest "Bugs" In Baseball

*The Greatest Mental Freaks in the National Game Are Found
Among the Players*

By R. W. Lardner

Hughey Jennings and Arlie Latham are funny for a purpose. It's part of their job. This is the first of three stories about ball players who are funny because they can't help it. The general public, which sees them only on the field, would never suspect the truth. The athletes with whom these sketches deal make the long hours of idleness on the road bearable by their unique comedy. They may be divided into three classes of "bugs"—those whose aim is their own entertainment, those who devote their talents consciously to the amusement of their fellows, and those, every bit as amusing, who have no idea that they are affording entertainment to anyone. In these stories we will deal with the most typical of each class, beginning with three members of the Chicago Cub team, who, while working for their own amusement, make life easier for their mates.

ASK the average fan if he considers baseball players sane, and he will probably answer: "Why, yes, of course. Why shouldn't they be?" Ask the average ball player if he can swear to his own sanity, and he'll probably admit that he can't. Ask the average baseball writer what he thinks about this deep and weighty question and he'll reply, without an instant's hesitation: "They're crazier than we are"—and that means a lot.

You can sit in the grandstand or the bleachers day after day and year after year and you'll never know the truth. You'll see Arlie Latham cutting up on the coaching line, Hugh Jennings going through his strange antics and emitting peculiar sounds and you may wonder inwardly if their unceasing flow of comedy is forced or natural. You may even doubt the sanity of one of these two. But it never occurs to you that the ball players these two men are encouraging are anything but staid, sober citizens, with minds bent solely on winning or on the next pay check.

If you ever have money enough and time enough, take a trip around the circuit with a ball club and you'll find out "the worst." You'll discover before you have traveled from one town to another in the company of the athletes that the majority of them are "bugs" of a unique and pronounced type, "bugs" whose conversation and actions are far more amusing than the comedy of Messrs. Jennings and Latham, with all due respect to those two worthy gentlemen. The chances are you will enjoy these ball players more in a Pullman car than you would merely watching them on the field of play. And the strangest part of it is that the ones who conduct themselves in the most dignified manner on the field are the ones who show most symptoms of "mental derangement" in their railroad and hotel existence.

At the close of each major league season, four or five heroes of the diamond prepare for seasons on the stage, but very few of them go into comedy. "Doc" White, the Chicago American League Club's great left-hander, earns

good theatrical money with his very pleasant baritone voice, the word "earns" being used advisedly. Charley Dooin, manager of the Phillies, also possesses a voice that means money to him in the off-season. Joe Tinker, the Cub shortstop, gets the coin with a sketch usually built around baseball incidents. Jimmy Callahan tells Irish stories admirably and deserves the laughs he gets. Herman Schaefer is being paid for his humorous stunts before the footlights this year, but he and "Cal" are exceptions. For the most part, the baseball comedians are afraid to try their real talents on the stage. If Mr. Schaefer, for example, could be as amusing in a theatre as he is in a hotel, Bert Williams, Eddie Foy, Richard Carle and Willie Collier would have to look to their laurels.

There are baseball players just as funny as the best of stage comedians. But their entertaining powers are known only to those who enjoy their company from day to day through the season. They are shy among "strangers."

When a major league ball club is on the road, its members have lots of time to kill. The indoor national pastime, poker, passes many a dull hour away, but there are some who do not care to risk their earnings and their good-nature around the board. You'll seldom find a real "bug" a regular in the poker game. These abstainers from card playing must find some other way of amusing themselves during the long forenoons and evenings in hotels, or during long days on the train. They must look to themselves for entertainment, and, take it from one who knows them, they get it.

These "bugs," the ones who depend on their senses of humor for their own amusement, are among the most interesting studies in baseball. It is no insult to them to call them "crazy." They admit it and glory in it. You can find them on every team and you'll usually find them flocking together.

The Chicago Cubs were beaten out last season in the race for the National League championship, and were trim-

med by the White Sox for the Chicago title. But they still remained "bug" champions and are likely to remain so until about half of them are traded or sold. In this outfit are three typical ones of the class that makes life bearable by being "a little off." Two of them are outfielders and the other is a pitcher. Their names are Sheckard, Hofman and Richie. Hofman and Sheckard are of German descent and Richie claims to be part Persian, part Welsh, part Indian and part Wild Man from Borneo.

In the season of 1910, there was talk of a trade of Frank Schulte for John Titus. Schulte heard it and remarked:

"They'd better pull it off quick if they want me to keep sane. It's no cinch to play in that Cub outfield and stay in your right mind."

And the all-around champion of the National League is something of a "bug" himself, and was one before he ever met Sheckard and Hofman.

But let us get down to proof. The writer happened to be journeying with the Cubs one night from Pittsburg to Philadelphia. The players were tired out, as they usually were after a Pittsburg battle, and most of them made for their berths as soon as they entered the sleeper. Be it known that Mr. Sheckard's home town is Columbia, Pa., which is off the main line. Before retiring, he informed Mr. Hofman that the train would pass within eighteen miles of Columbia about two in the morning.

"You know," he continued, "I've got a big tobacco warehouse there. You're interested in everything that belongs to me and I realize it would be a big treat for you if you could see my building."

"You bet I am interested in you, Jim," returned Arthur, who knew that the "tobacco warehouse" was a child of Mr. Sheckard's imagination.

"Well," said Sheck, "if you'll stay up till two o'clock I'll point it out to you."

"Never mind that," Artie replied, and started in search of his berth.

When two o'clock arrived, everyone in the car except Mr. Sheckard was



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sleeping peacefully. The Cub left fielder crawled out of his bunk and sought the section occupied by Hofman and his baggage.

"Artie," he yelled, and shook the Hofman shoulders until the Hofman eyes were wide open. "You missed it. We passed the nearest point to Columbia about three minutes ago. Right back that way"—and he pointed through the closed window shade—"about twenty miles. If you'd been awake, and if it had been daylight, and no trees in the way, you might have seen it."

Now Mr. Hofman didn't care much about being awakened from a sound sleep to hear that he might have seen a mythical tobacco warehouse under certain impossible conditions, but he confined his anger to the utterance of three words, and returned to the land of dreams.

In the morning, James denied the charge of noisiness brought against him by the entire car, said he had never left his berth and threatened to kill the porter unless he was exonerated. No one wanted to see the innocent porter murdered, so the case was nolle prossed.

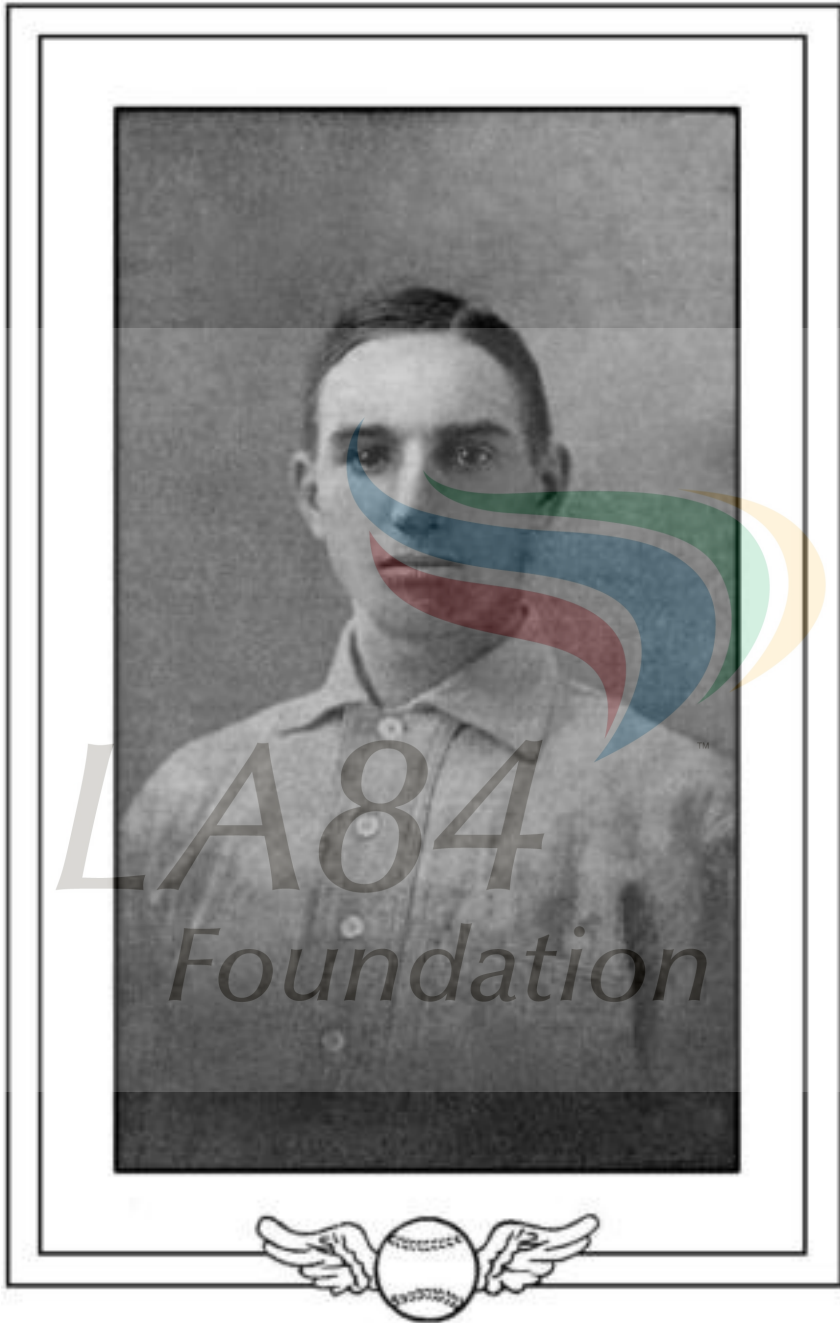
The three Chicago "bugs" are best when you catch them in competition with each other. They relate adventures that make Baron Munchausen look like a "busher." It seems that Sheckard is over ten thousand years old and that Richie and Hofman are only a few hundred years younger. All three of them played ball in Old Testament times. In those days Sheckard's name was Sheckardy, with accent on the second syllable; Hofman's was Hofmanski, and Richie's was Richsva. The great game of baseball was started by Moses and the first organized ball was played in the Ark League, of which Noah was president. Sheckardy, Hofmanski and Richsva all played in this circuit, the three being members of Ham's team, which was pushed hard for the championship by the club of which Shem was manager.

On the tenth of August in the year 6,000 B. C., it began to rain, and it rained for forty days. The season ended before the first of October. Anyhow, there were forty postponed games to be played on the last day and these were all between the Hams and Shems, which, incidentally, were the only two clubs in the league. But let Hofmanski tell it himself:

"Manager Ham came up to us in the lobby of the Ark Hotel the night before the season ended. He said: 'Boys, they say the ground is going to be all right tomorrow. Of course, it's pretty well flooded, but there's only a mile of water in left field, which is the worst part. You know we need twenty-one of these forty games to clinch the pennant. We must win those games by strategy. Here's my scheme. While the Shems are all good swimmers, some of them are a little shy on endurance. The same is true of us. Well, to remedy this fault, I want you fellows to spend the entire night in your bath-tubs. Keep your heads under water all night and when morning comes, you'll be so used to it that you can stand anything and make the Shems look sick. And, in the games tomorrow, use your brains, especially you three, Hofmanski, Sheckardy and Richsva, three of the best thinkers I have ever managed. Mr. Richsva, I shall expect you to pitch the twenty-one games we win. King Colevitch will work in the others!

"Then he bade us good-night and retired. Well, most of the boys started the water running in the tubs, but we three had another plan. I am too modest to tell you who originated it. We went over to the editorial rooms of the Assyrian Appeal and asked for the two baseball writers, Hughski and Fullertonovitch and Carlo Van Loanek. They accompanied us to a cafe and there we sat all night, listening to their stories. By breakfast time, we were so full of hot air that there wasn't a chance for any of us to sink in any depth of water.

"The first game started at eight o'clock. I won't give you all the de-



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tails of it, or of the succeeding thirty-eight battles. Suffice it to say that when the thirty-ninth contest was at an end, we had won twenty and lost nineteen. The rival managers, Ham and Shem, had both been drowned. So had all the players on both sides except the Shem catcher, pitcher and left fielder, and Sheckard, Richsva and myself. We got together and passed a rule that, in this final struggle, all balls must be hit to left field. Otherwise, they didn't count. This was a concession on our part, for the Shems had one outfielder and a battery, while we had two outfielders and a pitcher. But, yielding to the persuasion of my two pals, and for the good of the game, I decided to put on the mask and life-preserver and go behind the bat.

"I will admit that poor old Shem had gathered a pretty good ball club. The three best men in it were left. They were a lucky trio and they held us even for 136 innings. It was getting dark when the 137th started and we knew we must win then or never. You know a tie meant the pennant for us, as the league rules prevented the playing off of a game after that date, and we were one game to the good. But we wanted to win this battle and make ourselves more solid with the animals in the stands.

"They went to bat first in the final round and the score was one thousand to one thousand. Callahano was the first man up. Richsva gave him the whale ball and he hit it out of Sheckardy's reach in left for three bases. You can bet that put us on the anxious seat. One run mean a lot. But Richsva's brains came to our rescue. At a sign from him, we floated out to the centre of the diamond and listened to his plan. He had it figured that if we could get the next two out without allowing Callahano to score, the side would have to be declared out because it would be Callahano's turn to bat and he would still be on base. This sounded feasible and we decided to try it. It was up to Richsva to strike out the next two batters, for it was almost

certain the fleet Callahano would score from third on a fly to left, for Sheckardy was having trouble with his throws on account of the soaked condition of his sleeve. The next man up was Billy Sullivan. I knew he was death on the whale ball, so I signed Richsva to pitch him two trouts and an eel. He did and Billy was a dead one. Ed Walshero was the next victim. He bit on three codfish balls. Callahano was still on third and we walked to the bench. The Shems raised a howl, but Umpire Japheth decided in our favor.

"It was up to us to score one run. We held another consultation and fixed up a scheme that worked well enough to give us the victory. Richsva was up first and I was next. Both of us struck out purposely. Thus, if Sheckardy got to third base, there would be two of us ready to bat again and bring him in. With Sheckardy up, we got out on the third base coaching line and started to blow as hard as we could. We blew up such a squall that the waves dashed over Callahano's head and made it impossible for him to see anything. Sheckardy slammed one to left and would have made a home run if the ball had not struck Callahano on the back of the head, thus making known its whereabouts. Sheckardy was held at third and Richsva went to bat. Before we knew it, Walshero had two strikes on him. It was time for something desperate. Sheckardy was equal to the occasion. Hardly giving me a chance to guess what he was about, he started floating on his back toward the plate. 'Help me, Artie' he cried. And help him I did. Always something of a ventriloquist, I imitated Callahano's voice, made my words sound as if they came from left field, and shouted: 'Let it go, Ed, it's only a stick, it's only a stick!' Walshero was completely fooled. He held the ball until Sheckardy had floated across the plate with the run that meant so much to us.

"The elephants went wild and carried us off the field in their trunks.

"Yes, sir. That was one of the most exciting pennant races I ever was mixed up in."

When Mr Hofman has finished this tale, the others both remark that they remember the occasion well, and then Richie starts in:

"I quit using that eel ball in 19 A D. We were playing in the Nile Valley League and would have lost the pennant but for Sheckardy's head work. The last game decided it and we were one run to the good in the eight hundredth inning. With one of our opponents, Bushello, on third base and two out, Ty Cobbono hit my eel eight miles across the desert. We started off the grounds in tears, but Joe Tinkerini told us to wait a minute. We looked around and saw Sheckardy speeding after the ball on a camel, which he had concealed under the left field bleachers. He had to hump some, but he caught it and wound up the game. Henry M. Stanley was exploring in that vicinity and vouched for the catch."

"Do you know," says Sheckard, "that I owe a great deal of my success to that year I played in Norway? Why, the sun field doesn't bother me a bit. I just pretend I'm in Norway, where the sun doesn't shine in the afternoon. And when we play extra inning games now and it gets dark enough to bother most outfielders, I again make believe I'm up there and that it's late in the evening, and I can see just as plain as I want to."

Conversation isn't the whole thing with these three "bugs." They are also songbirds. Mr. Hofman is tenor, Mr. Richie "lead" and Mr. Sheckard baritone. They can sing the regular barber-shop songs as tonsorially as any trio. But it's much more edifying to hear them in the songs they make up as they go along.

The melody of "Chicken Reel" was a favorite with all three of them, but it had no words and so to sing it they had to manufacture some. Their "lyric" was very simple, running as follows: "Everybody's talking 'bout your folks, 'bout your folks; yes, everybody's talking 'bout our folks, 'bout your folks."

Only the first two strains of the music were used. It was the rule to start it slow and keep increasing both speed and volume. If the three were walking when they began the song they were running when they finished it, for it was also a rule that the body must keep time to the song. They left the Copley Square Hotel in Boston one day last summer with "Chicken Reel" as pacemaker, and were running so fast when they reached Massachusetts avenue that street cars, delivery wagons and pedestrians suspended operations to watch the race.

The Cubs played an exhibition game in Hattiesburg, Ky., last spring. Only a few of the regulars were used and Richie was acting manager. The fans of that town wanted to see Mordecai Brown pitch and made their want known loudly and constantly. Manager Richie was doing the pitching and "Brownie" was having a rest, for he had worked on the previous afternoon. But the crowd was so insistent that Richie finally asked Brown to pitch the last inning. Mordecai was willing and the throng—of 2000 odd—cheered wildly when the three-fingered wonder took his place on the mound in the ninth.

Before Brown had raised his arm to pitch, Richie strode up to the plate and called in his two "side-kicks," Hofman and Sheckard, from their positions in the field. Each of the trio picked up a hat and used it as a banjo. Then, while Brownie pitched, they sang, to an air of their own: "Brownie's going to fan this man, yes, Brownie's going to fan this man"—and the concert continued through the half-round, while Mr. Brown retired the side on strikes. It wasn't much of a trick at that. The poor young batters were afraid of Brown's reputation and they were also awed by the unearthly noise around them. They swung feebly at everything pitched and didn't even make a foul.

Manager Chance enjoys his trio of "bugs" as much as they enjoy themselves. He tries not to laugh at them openly, for that would be inimical to discipline, but there are times when he makes it very patent that he is amused.