

FEATURES

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The St. John Standard,

NEW BRUNSWICK, CANADA.

ST. JOHN, N. B., SATURDAY MORNING, JUNE 14, 1919.

FEATURES

Society—Fiction
Children's Corner

The Ten-Thousand-Dollar Arm

By CHARLES E.
VAN LOAN

Here is the first of a short series of wholesome, thrilling, out-of-door stories, written by the master of sporting stories, Charles E. Van Loan. They are worth reading for the stories themselves even if it were not for the breath of fresh air and the pulse-stirring excitement that they carry.

Whenever a recruit joined the Blue Jays—the famous minor-league club which sends so many youngsters to the big league and takes veterans in exchange—the first thing that the recruit was likely to ask was, "Which is him?"

Nobody pretended to misunderstand that question. The players would point out a tall, thin man, with a wrinkled forehead and hair turning gray at the temples, and the recruit would look at him with reverence and wonder. "That's him," they would say. "That's the great and only Bruno Smelzer—'Bruno' of the Ten-Thousand-Dollar Arm!" and our fathers cheered themselves hoarse over him.

To do the recruits justice, it was not the sight of one of the former great ones of the diamond which moved them so strongly, but the thought that old Bruno was still pitching winning ball—"still getting away with it," as they said.

If Bruno had an eccentricity, it lay in the almost idolatrous worship which he bestowed upon his ten-thousand-dollar arm. If that be an eccentricity, then a red fox is eccentric. It was nothing but the extravagant care which Bruno lavished upon his aged wing which made it possible for him to outlast every other left-hander in the business—and all the right-handers save one.

From the day when a major-league manager paid an unheard-of price for Bruno and his left arm, Smelzer had been a sensation.

Bruno Signs With Blue Jays.

Bruno lasted several seasons as a big leaguer; and then slipped quietly away to the minors—the training school for comers and the graveyard of the has-beens.

He signed with the Blue Jays because of the warm climate of their home town. The old-time baseball player likes warm weather—the warmer the better. That heat loosens his aged joints, supplies the little extra energy which he needs to keep his rheumatic legs so that he is able to prance and cavort about the diamond like a recruit.

For the first few seasons the old-timer found that his arm was still equal to the task of mixing curves and speed for nine innings; but as time went on he depended more and more upon his head, coaxing his ten-thousand-dollar arm with every artifice at his command. Perhaps no man ever made a more exhaustive study of the art of cutting down the number of pitched balls to the minimum and lasting nine innings with the least possible expenditure of energy. Bruno was a past master of every annoying trick by which a pitcher "sneaks over a strike ball" upon a dangerous hitter; and he lay awake at night planning new strategies, always with an eye to saving his arm as much work as possible.

The curve ball, of course, was hard on his arm; so, as time went on he pitched very few of them—and then simply to prove to the batter that he still had a "bender." When Bruno stopped to spit, the catcher knew that the curve was coming—and it broke Smelzer's heart to throw one.

Charlie Grubb, the manager and team captain for the Blue Jays, who held his job in spite of the fact that he was always at war with the owner, Dave Bullen, Charlie did not have any particular love for Bruno, and would have been glad to rid himself of the veteran; but the only time he mentioned this to Bullen, he ran headfirst into a stone wall. Bullen did not often put his fist down; but when he did there was an end to the argument.

Smelzer's Position Assured.

"Now you listen to me," said the owner. "You let that old boy alone; understand. He won six hundred and sixty-seven per cent. of his games last year, and that makes him a good pitcher—as good as we've got. And even if he couldn't pitch a lick on earth, he's worth his salary for what he can teach these new kids breaking in. He's got more baseball savvy than you or any other manager in this league, and there's just one thing you can't do and get away with—start a row with Bruno. You lay off him, Grubb. And another thing—any time he comes to you and says he's ready to pitch, you send him in. He's the best judge of when he's ready, and I won't have you ordering him out there when he doesn't feel like working. That goes, and don't you forget it!"

Grubb was furious. He complained that Bruno would upset the regular routine of the pitchers who worked in turn; but, by special dispensation, Bruno became a law unto himself.

Bruno figured that he should pitch thirty times a season, and he prepared himself for each contest as carefully as a debutante prepares for her coming-out party. This preparation, which never varied, was quite a ceremonious affair.

When the early birds—and every team has two or three baseball "bugs" who show up at the club house at noon—found all the doors and windows closed, and were seated upon a bench by a withering blast which would have



Photograph of Charles E. Van Loan Characteristically Autographed.

Gone credit to a Turkish bathhouse; they knew that Bruno was "reading up for a game." He was sure to be sitting by the stove, stripped to the waist and soaking in the terrific heat like a salamander.

The other players complained of the heat in the club house—and well they might, for the weather was usually hot enough to suit any one—but Bruno never paid the slightest attention. One o'clock was the hour set for "limbering up." He would rise and put his left arm through a gentle course of calisthenics, bending the elbow and stretching the muscles for half an hour. Then he would come out to the diamond for the precious "dope" with which Bruno would appear his left arm from wrist to shoulder, not forgetting the back muscles.

Scientific massage treatment was next on the program. The pitching motion, pinching, kneading, and slapping of the ten-thousand-dollar arm would continue for some time. By long practice, Smelzer had learned how to get every muscle which had anything to do with the working of his most valuable member.

The Blue Jays of seven years ago will never forget what happened when Major Bones, newly appointed as official rubber, joined the club. Major Bones was a young negro who had worked in a Turkish bathhouse long enough to get the idea that what he did not know about massage treatment was not worth bothering to learn. He was also ambitious to please and it shocked him to see one of the players rubbing his own arm. The major leaped to the conclusion that Bruno was doing his own work because the former rubber had been incompetent.

"Jus' you lemme have that ol' arm, sub," said the major, by way of introduction. "I'll show you uhov I ust' rub Misteh Kid McCoy!"

What Happened to Bones.

Smelzer granted in surprise, and went on kneading and pinching his biceps. Major Bones pressed his suit warmly. When he arrived at the direct statement that no more ball play or could rub his own arm and do the job properly, Bruno, who was a peace-loving soul, and loved quiet so well that he would do battle for it, picked up a chair and knocked Major Bones head over heels through a locker door.

Then he calmly resumed the rubbing when he had left off.

After massage, Smelzer would get into a heavy woolen undershirt, his uniform shirt, and, last of all, a great white sweater. Bruno had three sweaters for different sorts of weather. The first one was as thick as a board, and the others were thicker.

Dressed for public appearance, the old man would catch some youthful catcher into accompanying him out to the bleachers, where not a breath of air was stirring. Here he would shed his sweater and pitch for half an hour. If the arm "felt all right," he

would pitch for forty-five minutes, after which he would put on his sweater again and watch the game from the sunny end of the bench.

On the second day, the entire process would be repeated; and on the third, if all went well, he would come out from behind the bleachers with a broad grin on his face.

"She's there today, boys!" he would say. Smelzer, who had been learning the ten-thousand-dollar-arm was ready to earn his salary.

Then, of course, Grubb had no alternative. Smelzer would pitch and Sullivan would catch. A strong friendship existed between Smelzer and Sullivan. Both were veterans, and Sullivan had taken pains to learn Smelzer's peculiarities. With "Steve" Sullivan behind the bat, Bruno's little strategies reached their highest power, and the manager was seriously ill at his hotel.

The overwrought nerves had given way under the strain of months of criticism, abuse and innuendo, and the doctor in charge of the case promptly killed any hope that the manager might be able to appear that afternoon at the park.

"A nervous breakdown, Mr. Bullen," said the physician. "I have had this man under my care for weeks. The unfortunate occurrence of yesterday undoubtedly hastened matters."

Bullen was at his wit's end. He had no experience in managing a club, and he was a nervous wreck. He had been acting as team captain, was really no more than the mouthpiece through which Grubb had issued orders from the bench. In despair, the owner went to the club house. It was eleven o'clock in the morning, yet there was the aged Bruno pottering around in his capacious locker.

"You're the man I've been looking for," said Bullen.

"How so?" demanded Bruno, pausing with his hands full of stockings.

"I want you to handle the team today," said Bullen. "Grubb is down and out—nervous collapse."

Bruno whistled. "Hard luck!" he said. "Poor old Charlie! And—I'm to be the goat. Is that it?"

"You are not," snapped the owner. "Who else is to go? Who can I put in there to pull us out of this hole? The boys know you and they respect your judgment. I'll give you all the authority you need. Go in there today and run the team, and if you win this game, I'll give you—"

"I do."

"In the boss here?"

"You are."

"Well, then," growled Smelzer, "I'll give you everything I've got. Now you, the boss here, before the boys begin to drop in. I'll explain the situation."

In the end, the manager was forced to retreat, and McEneaney got his chance—and made good.

To make the situation worse for Grubb, the Blue Jays struck a phenomenal winning streak, which carried them through the first division and to the top for the first time in four years. As Grubb had been at considerable pains to make enemies out of the newspaper men, the sporting writers at once pointed out that but for Grubb's obstinacy and bull-headedness the team might have been in front much sooner.

The left-field bleachers—why is it that all the insurgent fans sit behind third base?—began attacking Grubb every time he appeared on the coaching lines, and they made his life a misery to him.

This was the situation when the Blue Jays came winging home for the four games which were to close the season. As luck had it, the four games were with the club which was crowding Grubb's men hard for the pennant—the Canaries, so called because it was believed they had once shown a streak of yellow.

There was nothing yellow about the way the Canaries twiddled when they rolled into town, needing three games to win the flag. They modestly announced that they would win all four, and the local fans howled.

Old Bruno had been percolating his ten-thousand-dollar arm for a week, and was far from satisfied with his condition. He had pitched a hard game on the road—twelve innings—and he felt it from elbow to shoulder and back again. Though he massaged himself industriously and worked out each day, he congratulated himself upon the fact that "Himie" Pittman, "Beau" Nash, and "Dud" Belcher, all reliable pitchers, were going well.

Nash led off for the Blue Jays, and the Beau won his game on cannon-ball speed. Dud Belcher went in for the second game, and sustained a defeat in eleven innings.

Grubb's Fatal Mistake.

On the third day poor Charlie Grubb offered his overladen back to the last straw. The score was a tie at three apiece when the Blue Jays began to hit in the eighth inning—began to hit with one bat and Grubb's coaching off third base. McEneaney and "Skeets" Tifford, the two heaviest hitters on the team, were coming up. McEneaney slammed a fast ball into center field, and was off around the bases like a deer. Jimmy McLennon, the Canary center fielder, played the ball off to the fence, and when McEneaney was between second and third, the dulcet tones of the bleachers saw Jimmy rally to "Wingo" Jones.

"Hold him!" howled "Piggy" Powell, who was coaching behind first base.

Grubb lost his head completely, and signaled McEneaney to keep on to the plate and the boy had no choice but to obey the manager. Wingo Jones whipped the ball home to first, and McEneaney, at the cost of no more than an additional run, scored. Score: Blue Jays, 4; Canaries, 2.

In the sixth, the Canaries continued to hit, and drove in their third run on three singles. Brilliant fielding cut them off just short of a tied score. Steve Sullivan, who was catching, came back to the bench dripping wet.



As McLennon Took His Eyes Off the Pitcher, Steve Leaped Forward.

When he slipped over the first strike, but the ball was fished from between the ten-thousand-dollar arm, so long coddled and nursed and petted like a spoiled child, was sending it its sharp protest. Bruno set his jaw with a time lock and thanked whatever gods he knew that the "old control was still there."

What happened to McLennon.

The nervous fans chirked up marvelously when the first hitter splashed out via third base, and the second one foiled to Sullivan. The third batter, and this was the demon Jimmy McLennon, whose hitting was taking him to the big league next season—lined a single into center and prearranged upon his luck to the extent of attempting to steal second base. The Honorable Stephen Sullivan came up on his toes with a perfect throw, and the chesty outfielder perished in a cloud of dust and a whirl of arms and legs—Sullivan to McEneaney.

The Blue Jays succeeded in getting two men on the bases in their half of the seventh, but Billy Keith, the first baseman, sent a line drive fairly at the shortstop's head. Instinct came, that young man to throw up his hands to save his face—and the ball stuck, was passed on for a double play, and the side was out.

"Take that horseshoe out of your pocket!" vociferated the faithful retainers on the bleachers. "You ought to be arrested!"

Bruno wriggled through the eighth inning somehow. He was holding the Canaries, but his arm was tottering the cost for him as well as a cash register might have done the job. Every ball cost him an effort, and the pain in the shoulder was becoming unbearable. The redoubtable Wingo Jones doubled after two men were out, but the next man poked a weak infield fly, and Bruno trudged back to the bench with the blessings of the multitude thundering after him.

"I'll be all winter getting the old girl back into shape again," he moaned to Sullivan, as he slipped into his thick white sweater and selected his bat. Bruno at the bat was more or less of a joke, and Oscar Peterson refused to waste time with the old man. He curved three strikes over for Smelzer, and Bruno limped back to the bench. Not for anything would he have taken a hard swing at a ball. Two more Blue Jays were plucked in quick order, and Sullivan helped to peel off the pitcher's sweater.

"Well, Steve," said Bruno, "it looks as if this one-run lead will have to do us!"

"One run is a whole lot when you ain't got it," said Steve philosophically. Judging by the "crabbing" on the visitors' bench, the Canaries thought so, too.

Corson Thought Them High.

Corson, their catcher, was the stand-out hero of their fortunes. Hope "Rube" Corson was a dangerous batter if he could get a ball anywhere between his waist and his knees. A high ball he could do nothing with.

With exasperating precision, Bruno lobbed over two strikes, each one fully as high as the law allowed. Corson thought they were too high, and barked at the umpire. Then he waited, swearing savagely under his breath.

Why, Clarence, said Sullivan, in a high falsetto, "Shame on you! I believe you're angry!"

"Right." He was grinning cheerfully

over came the ball, taking Corson entirely by surprise.

"A peach!" said Umpire Burke. "Yes out!"

The Blue Jays on the bench howled with delight, the infield sent up a scattering volley of yells, and the fans hopped up and down. Corson sat back to the bench, tearing up the turf with his lagging spikes, for all the world like a little boy dragging his feet in a dusty road.

"Ah-h-h!" he growled, when his team-mates began to blister his tough hide with reproaches; "who'd have thought that old fellow would have the nerve to pull that bush-league trick in a tight game like this?"

The pitcher was next on the list, and Harry Keane, manager of the Canaries, sent in a substitute for Peterson—a big, raw-boned outfielder named Merrill. Merrill was over-anxious and very nervous, and Bruno kept him waiting a long time. Then he sent up such a discouraged, wabbly sort of a ball, that Merrill afterward swore that he saw the trade-mark on the horseshoe turn over nine times on its way to the plate. This gave him plenty of time to think what he was going to do to that trade-mark, which was Bruno's idea, a "floater" being the most effective ball in the world against a nervous batter. About the time that Merrill really made up his mind to tear the trade-mark loose, he fouled that dinky offering over the grand stand.

"High—strike!" said Burke.

Merrill thumped the plate with his bat.

Merrill Lost His Goat.

"Mercy!" said Steve Sullivan. "You're angry, too, aren't you, Eddie? I'll bet you won't hit the next one at all. If you could hit hard enough to earn your one-hundred-dollar a month, Bruno wouldn't have been playing you on the bench all season!"

Now, it was a sprained ankle that sent Merrill to the bench, and Sullivan knew it. The big outfielder spluttered, apologetically—and over came the ball. Merrill collected himself for another giant swing—and flew out back of second base.

By this time the fans were in a terrific commotion, and there was considerable excitement on the visitors' bench. Keane was running up and down in front of his players and flaying them with the roughest side of his tongue.

"Here's an old man, a thousand years dead and buried, and you're going to let him win this pennant from you? Are you? What's he got there today? Nothing but a wish and a prayer! Nothing at all! Oh, you're a fine bunch!"

Rayburn, the second baseman, got so angry that he was going to get something but, strikes, chopped at the first one and dropped a Texas leaguer over on the third-base line and halfway between two fielders. He could not have placed it better had he used a messenger boy, and the throw to second did not come near catching him. Two bases on a Texas leaguer!

"Sap!" Halsey, the right fielder, also smashed at the first ball, and drove a vicious liner toward first base. Billy Keith knocked it down and chased after it, and Bruno, his aged legs working like drunks, raced over and took the bag ahead of Halsey, all in vain, for Keith could not make the loss in time. Result: Halsey on first and Rayburn on third, ready to sneeze.

(Continued on next page.)

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