



A PITCHER'S GOT TO THROW

By C. HALL THOMPSON

HERE I am, minding my own business, happy as a bug in a rug with my beer and salami-on-pumpernickel at Kindy's, when in waltzes Charley Budd. Not that I got anything against Charley, you understand. Far from it, he's my best friend. Only, here of late, Charley is what you would call a guy with a one-track mind. Every ride you take on the Budd Special you end up getting an ear-beating about a new kid named Lou Farrell, a kid with a million-dollar left arm, and a nice, honest grin.

Now, the first time, you don't mind

hearing about this Farrell guy, and how damned good he is, and how he's got Bob Feller and Lefty Grove up an alley, pitching pennies. But, like I say, when you see Charley maybe ten times a day, not counting meals at the clubhouse, it gets kind of like a broken record.

I scrooched down in my metal-backed chair and got ready to shut off the listening apparatus, soon as I got wind that Budd was shifting off-course to his favorite subject. He came across the low, cool taproom; it was shadowy and nice compared to the steam-heat of the sun outside. Charley's large bony head was

sweating a little, so that those bald spots by the temples were kind of shiny. The big guy was getting old.

He sat down and called for a beer. The fat boy behind the bar brought a dribbling schooner, and grinned at Budd. Charley wasn't grinning back; he was glum. In fact, he was in a hell of a mood, and I knew why.

"Where you been?" I said.

"Down the park."

"You work out today?" He nodded and guzzled beer. "How's the arm. Feel any kinks. . . ?"

"It'll do," Charley said.

"You gotta be in damn good shape. There's some heavy hitters on this Washington set-up. And you know the pen. . ."

"Yeah, I know. The pennant depends on taking them."

"Well, don't sound so down-in-the-mouth about it," I told him. "Ain't every hurler gets himself a spot like you got. The club only half a game off the pace, you on the mound. Fritzie's got a lot of faith in you. . ."

FRITZ MOSEBY. That's the little fat guy that manages our club; maybe you seen him in the papers lately. He was in a few of them old-time pictures with Charley and a few of the others.

"More than he's got in Farrell," Charley said. I blinked at him, and began to close the ear-shutters. Here it came again.

"Have another beer, Charley," I sighed. I waved to the fat guy, making a V with my fingers. He brought two more.

"I tell you this Farrell kid's good, Joe," Budd said to me. "He's got everything I had in the old days . . . and a hell of a lot more. . ."

"Sure. Don't we know what he's got?"

"You ought to . . . Fritz ought to. You

seen him play . . . you seen him hurl that game against Pittsburgh. Damn near a no-hitter that was . . . I couldna held 'em any better. . ."

"I know," I admitted. "Sure, Farrell's good. . ."

"Then, why don't Fritz give him this set-up against Washington. He could do it. He'd make them look like ten-pins in a bowling alley with that curve. . ."

"He ain't had enough time. He's still rough on the edges."

"Rough, hell. He's smooth. . . I know, I trained him. I been behind the plate at practice. . ."

"Look, Charley," I cut in. "What're you tootm' your horn for Lou Farrell, for? This is your game. You crazy?"

"No. . . . Not crazy. . . . I'm a little tired maybe." Budd ran a hand over his face and grinned sheepishly. He looked at his left hand and arm. "There ain't a hell of a lot left in that old pin," he said. "I keep trying to tell people. . ."

"Nuts!"

"No, I ain't kiddin', Joe. It's the old baseball story. Guys come up fast and they do all right but you got just so many ball games in you. Then you go down. Maybe I want to make sure I leave my place to the right guy . . . a guy that can do the same as me . . . and maybe better. . ."

"And you think Farrell's the guy?"

"I know he is. I don't think, Joe. I know. . ."

I shook my head.

"Maybe," I said. "But, he ain't ripe yet. . ."

"You been listenin' to Fritz too much." He scowled at his beer. "Look, Joe. You been around. A scout knows when he see good material. You gonna sit there and tell me Lou ain't good material?"

"We been over that before," I argued.

"I tell you, he ain't ready. Besides, why pick on me? It's up to Fritz. He's the

boss." Charley just looked at me for a while then he shrugged impatiently.

"What's the use?" He muttered.

All the same, later, when we went back to the park, he was still batting the subject around. I gave up listening and arguing. I just said "Yes" and "No" at the proper intervals, and the ones that couldn't be answered that way I kept quiet about. I didn't like going out of the oasis of Kindy's into the broiling mid-day sun with the rest of the mad dogs and Englishmen, but I'd told Fritz I would be around to give the club the once over, and to view a couple of hopefuls he had lined up for next season.

We went in through the rear gate and Pop Dingler gave Charley a wink and said something about taking Washington with both hands tied behind him. We walked through the clubhouse, and up the ramp, into the dugout. Fritz Moseby was squatting on one of the benches, chewing a cigarette. He was sweating like hell.

"Where you been hidin'?" he growled at me.

"Down to Kindy's. You got the new stars of tomorrow on hand. . . ."

"They've worked out already. You can see them the next time." Fritz warmed to his subject. "Ya know, Joe, one of these babies is a beaut. A natural shortstop if I ever seen one. . . ."

"There y'are," Charley Budd complained to nobody in particular. "You look at that kid and tell me he ain't top hole. . . ." The tone of his voice was I-dare-you. His marble eyes were squinted against the sun green of the diamond, watching the long, limber bag of bones on the mound.

A scout gets to see a lot of ball players and I had to admit it; this Farrell bohunk was it. He had a hell of a lot more on the ball than spit, and you liked to see him out there in the box. He had style; he was a

showman. Charley was right. This boy would have been a double for him in his biggest days, quite a few years back.

"Like I was sayin'," Moseby cuts in, ignoring Budd. "This shortstop, Joe. We got to use him next season. A little bit of sand-paperin' on those rough corners and he'll be. . . ."

"All right," Budd said. "Don't listen to me. Ignore me.

"Whatsa matter with him?" Moseby asked, innocent like.

I shrugged. This wasn't my party.

"As if you didn't know," Charley plunked down on the bench and began to take the makings out of his pocket. He rolled a smoke with long sunburned fingers.

"Charley thinks you oughta give Farrell a shot of the big meat tomorrow."

Moseby eyed me, then Budd, then me again.

"He's screwy," he said finally.

"The kid's good," Charley repeated stolidly.

"All right," Moseby said. "So, who's arguing. . . ? But, he's not good enough to risk a pennant on. . . . You are. . . . At least I think you are. . . ."

CHARLEY set fire to his cigarette.

"You feelin' all right?" Fritz asked suddenly. "You sick or something?"

Budd told him. "Look, Fritz why don't you listen to me, once and a while. Farrell can take this thing tomorrow, one-two-three, and you'll have a newspaper headliner on your hand. . . . Me, I'm not so sure about. . . ."

"I'm takin' the risk on you," Moseby replied tight-lipped. "You just take care of your hay-fever, that's all. . . ."

"How is the hay-fever?" I said.

"Pretty good," Charley said. "Ain't bothered me much this year. . . ." There for a while, last season, his sneezing had

had us worried, but a few injections had cleared it up. "But, look, about Lou. . . ."

"Hell!" Moseby exploded. "Will you shut up. . . . I know what I'm doing. . . . I know. . . ." He calmed down. His eyes narrowed. He put a finger against Budd's thick chest and emphasized each word he spoke with a little jab. "Look. . . . I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll leave it up to Farrell. What he says goes. . . ." He didn't wait for Charley's answer. He called out the kid's name.

The lanky guy on the mound looked in our direction, then threw his glove in the box. He came over slow and sure, like some cowboy in a western. He grinned at me with that wide open face of his. He slapped Charley on the shoulder, and I saw this funny, proud light come into Budd's eyes.

"What you want, Mister Moseby?" Farrell said.

"Got a proposition for you kid," Moseby said. "Charley, here, wants you should take his place tomorrow. . . ."

The kid's eyes and mouth widened simultaneously.

"Take his place? You mean pitch? Against Washington. . . .?" He turned to Budd. "Whatsa matter Charley you sick. . . .?"

"No. . . . 'Course not. . . ."

"He wants you should have the chance to show what you got." Moseby's eyes narrowed more. "He's goin' to give up the honor of winnin' the pennant to give it to you. . . ."

"Now, wait a minute." Farrell grinned and shook his head, the same slow way he walked. "I can't do that, Charley. You got a right to that, yourself. . . . Hell, no. . . . I couldn't do that on ya. . . ."

I saw Charley glare at Fritz and I knew he was wise to how the fat little guy had twisted things to suit himself. He didn't say anything. Moseby shrugged, some

good-nature coming back into his crafty little face.

"You see how it is, Charley. . . . The kid wants you to do it yourself. . . ." He winked at me, but I didn't wink back. "You see how it is. . . ."

"Hell, no," Farrell wagged his head. "I couldn't do a thing like that. . . . Don't you worry, Charley. I'll get my chance. . . . I'll. . . ."

"Sure, kid," Charley said softly. "Sure, you will."

That was all. He didn't look at Moseby again. He just mumbled something about taking a shower, and he walked away. I watched him go down the few steps and along the ramp. All of a sudden I couldn't help being reminded of another lefty—fifteen years ago. Then the shadows beyond the bright scalpel of the sun swallowed him.

I DIDN'T get a look-see at Charley Budd the rest of the day. He wasn't around for supper, and once or twice during the night somebody asked for him. I could see Moseby was a little worried about the whole mess, but after all you wouldn't blame him. A guy whips a team into shape, he's got a pennant practically in his mitts, and then something like this comes up. He only does the thing that seems safest.

Only the guys that mix in the sports-pages are pretty funny guys. You tell them they're sentimental and they'll paste you all over the floor. But, just the same they are. Maybe, they're like army men, that way. A group of guys are together for a long time, and they get to know each other inside out. Like I say, try and tell them they're soft. You couldn't make them believe it, no matter what you did; but you know it inside you, when you're there along with them, the way I was. You hear them singing old songs like Mother

Machree and On The Banks of the Wabash, and you see a guy sitting in one of the club easy chairs with a book in front of his face. If you took the book away, his eyes would be shining, and he'd swear like hell at you for finding him out.

There was this pride between Charley Budd and the kid. It had been Budd who'd been pushing Fritz on the kid from the beginning when Lou had come up from a bush team in God-knows-where. Charley had talked himself blue in the face until he wore Moseby thin. He'd spent a hell of a lot of time setting the kid up, showing him every trick there was to know. You'd think it was father-and-son stuff, some people said. Budd was never married, and maybe this was his way of filling in the empty space, others reasoned.

Anyway, I knew this had hit him pretty hard. I guess, all along, he'd thought he could convince Moseby in the end. God knows he tried hard enough. Only Fritzie knew what he wanted. He had seen Charley pour strikes over the dish for years and he knew he could depend on the veteran. He wasn't taking any chances on a dream boy, no matter how many complexes were involved.

Charley didn't come in until after two in the morning. Moseby had waited up a while, then finally gone to his room. I sat in the hotel bar. Charley came in and ordered a drink. I went up and sat beside him.

"Moseby's worried about you," I said. "Thought you walked out. . . ."

"Forget it," Charley said. "It's all right." He drank his glass empty and slapped my knee. "Everything's going to be all right. . . ."

I went up to bed mulling that one over, but I couldn't make head or tail of it, so I slept on it. My mind wasn't any clearer when I woke. I wasn't looking forward to the day. The newspapers had been laying

heavy odds in our favor and they were all putting their steaks on Charley Budd. Only, they didn't know what was going on inside him, or maybe the best of the bets would've gone the other way.

Moseby and him avoided each other. They didn't fight or anything. I guess both of them knew it would make the rest of the guys shaky to see the king-pins squabbling. All the same, there was a tenseness in the air that you couldn't forget about. I ate my breakfast down at Kindy's, and missed the ham and eggs at the club, so you know how much I wanted to get away from that dreary atmosphere.

YOU KNOW too, if you read Grantland Rice and Lanse McCurley and the others, how things turned out that day. I wish we could've read those headlines beforehand; it would have saved a lot of sweating blood. I went out to the park, not knowing what to expect. The locker room was dead as hell. There was a smell of sweat and flesh. Nobody did much talking and those who did kept it strictly underground. I don't know what Farrell made of it all; he didn't say anything. I guess he knew what was going on, and he thought if he opened his mouth he'd only make things worse.

Fritz gave them a pep-talk before we went out, but it fell flat on its face. The guys kept looking Charley's way and expecting an outburst. There wasn't any. I almost wished there had been. It would have been better than the waiting. They marched out as though the square of dappled sunlight that led onto the field was the little green door in Sing Sing. Moseby looked at me and shook his head.

The sun was blistering; there was a haze of heat rising from the ground, and Pop Dingler's new-lined lines were cool and precise-looking. There was plenty big noise when the club came out. Washington

was already out, and had been working for some time. They looked damn good. I was feeling glum and wishing I was back in Kindy's and the damn thing was over. I sat down beside Fritz and said:

"You think he'll blow?"

"How do I know?" Moseby grunted.

I didn't say any more; at best Fritzie was a rotten conversationalist, and he was in no mood for idle chit-chat now. I watched Charley select his glove and go out there on the diamond. There was a pretty good reception. The tall gray stands were jammed with white shirts and gay dresses that yelled, "Yea, Budd. . . . Go get 'em, Charley." He didn't seem to notice them any. In the mound he eased up a bit. One of the first ones went wild and I saw Fritz tense. I told him it was only practice. Then, the ump hollered: "Play ball!"

WATCHING them first innings was like listening to the Inner Sanctum; you never knew what was coming next. None of us knew how Charley was going to act. I saw Lou Farrell sitting on the edge of the bench with a worried expression on his long horse-face. But, Charley held them. Those first two rounds were honeys. He was like a main spring, winding and letting go. The Washington boys couldn't even see the ball. Moseby began to relax and some of the guys in the dugout even got to cheering. We didn't score either, but that could come later.

It wasn't until the third that Budd started to slow down. One heavy hitter got a double out of him, and he had to walk another. Fritz looked at me and scowled. I looked at Farrell. He was twisting his glove in great bony fists. When Charley came in to the dugout between innings, Moseby went over to him.

"You all right?"

CHARLEY looked up. "I'm okay," he said evenly.

"What the hell happened out there?"

"They didn't score," Budd said. "Don't let it worry you. I'm all right. . . ."

And he blew his top in the fourth. The mob went haywire. A single, a double into the corner, and then a sweet bunt that Charley muffed. There was a run in. Moseby chewed a cigarette and said: "What the hell. . . ." You could almost see Budd sweating out there. This was no fake; this was no put-up job. He was really trying to get 'em past the plate, and he couldn't. I don't know even yet how he managed to retire the side. He moped back heavily and we met him out by the bat-rack.

"Listen, bohunk, if you blow this. . . ." That was as far as Moseby got. Charley was holding his arm gently and there was real pain in his face. It was swollen up like a toy balloon. We just stared.

"What happened?" I gasped.

"Must've thrown my arm out," Charley told me.

"Better get to a doctor," Fritz ordered. All his anger was gone. He was the manager, now, the leader of his flock. And one of them was hurt.

"I'll be all right," Budd interrupted. "I'll stay and see the game. . . ." He walked back to the dugout. I went with him. I saw Moseby hesitate, then go over to Lou Farrell and talk in a quiet voice. Lou came over and said he was sorry as hell.

"Nuts," Charley snapped, gruffly. "Just you remember what I taught you, son. . . . That's all you gotta do. . . ." He looked from Farrell to Moseby to me, and grinned. Nobody said anything. The next inning they made the announcement over the field mike and the crowd moaned. Farrell went in.

They didn't moan when Lou Farrell came out; they was too busy throwing

pop-bottles and hats in the air. They was too busy yelling their heads off. I don't need to tell you what happened that day. All you got to do is look it up in the books. All the sports-pages ran banner heads. ROOKIE HURLER TAKES PENNANT, one of them said. Most of them ran along the same line. Farrell held them to one fluke hit for the last five innings. I thought the guys in the dugout would go crazy. The final score was 4 to 1, and we marched off with the championship in our hip pockets and Lou Farrell on our shoulders. Even Moseby was so happy he wrung Budd's bad hand, forgetting about the arm. There were tears in Charley's big, calm eyes. And, then, they say there are no more sentimentalists.

But most of that was in the papers. What you don't know about is what happened that night at Kindy's. Nobody knows about that, yet, and maybe I can make things clear if I'm the first one to tell the whole story from the beginning to end. I hope I can make it simple enough; I hope I can make people understand about Charley Budd.

WE WERE at Kindy's raising the roof: we had a sea-food supper and drinks all around and all kinds of toasts. Me and Charley and Farrell was at the piano with Ike Harris playing. This Farrell kid is a nice tenor and we made a pretty fair trio. We sang the old ones because they was good for harmony. You know, I Care Not For The Stars That Shine, and The Bells Are Ringing For Me and My Gal. . . . The oldies. Everybody was feeling fine. I went over to the bar to get another drink between songs, and I saw Fritz come in through the swinging glass doors. He motioned that he wanted to see me. I called to Budd and Lou that I'd be right back, and followed him into a back room. He flopped on a chair. There was a

look on his face that wiped the smile from mine.

"Whatsa matter?" I said.

"I was just up to see the Commission," Moseby said. "They called me. . . ."

"The Commission?" I said.

"They're thinking of dropping Charley. They're threatening to blackball him, send him back to the minors. . . ."

"I don't get it. . . ."

"Yon know what that damn fool did?" Moseby's voice was gentle even when he swore; you could see it hurt him. "You know what he did, Joe. He went out to three different doctors. He got three injections. . . . one for hay-fever . . . two for anti-tetanus. . . . He told 'em he'd cut his foot, and was afraid of infection. . . . He took the needles in the left arm. . . ."

"You mean . . . that's what caused the swelling. . . . That. . . ."

"You got it. . . ."

"But why do they want to break him?"

"There might be scandal; they might say he tried to blow the game so Washington could cop the pennant. . . . They might say he was paid off. . . ."

"Yeah," I reasoned. "But, you know why he did it. . . . You know he did it to give Farrell a break. . . ."

"Sure and hell I know it," Moseby rumbled. "But, who's going to believe a crazy story like that . . . ? It's no good, Joe."

"But, if they send him back, it may ruin him. He may never be able to come up again. . . ."

For a long while Moseby just looked at me and I saw his eyes glistening. We didn't say any more. We both knew I was right, but there was nothing to do about it. I shifted my feet. I was closest to Charley.

"You want I should tell him?" I murmured.

"Somebody has to. It won't be so hard to take from you, Joe. . . ."

“Yeah. . . . Sure. . . .” I turned and opened the door a little. I still had the beer in my hand, but the froth was all gone. I set it on the table at Fritz’s elbow and went out and closed the door.

I DON’T know what I did then. I remembered a lot of crazy things, and I saw a guy stepping down from a pedestal to give his place to another kid. I saw him breaking himself because he had faith in a lanky goon with an honest smile. I went over and stood by the piano with Farrell and Charley. Soon as they saw me, they wanted to sing again. Ike played a lead-in, and I tried the melody. “Gee, But I’d Give The World to See That Old Gang of Mine, I Know I Never Can Forget That Old Quartet That Sang Sweet Adeline. . . Good-bye Forever, Old Sweethearts and Pals. . . .” I don’t know how I ever got through it. Every word stuck in my gullet.

After that, I mumbled some excuse and got away. I guess I should’ve told Charley right then, but he looked so damned happy and proud with his arm around Lou’s shoulders. I went away and I got to another place where the lights were dim and the liquor was raw. I had some idea I ought to get stinko and forget the whole thing. But, I knew I couldn’t. I’d keep remembering, and, in the end, I’d go back and tell Charley Budd how it was for him. But I kept worrying about his face when I say the words, and I felt lousy.

Even a man’s best friend, a guy who knows him, knows the worst about him and still likes him, isn’t much good at a time like this. I get rehearsing to myself.

So what if I go over and say, “Charley, I understand, anyway. You’ve squared up for all those shenanigans in the old days. Plenty guys act crazy when they’re on the young side and it doesn’t matter now that a lot of people didn’t understand, including your own sister. Sure it’s tough,

Charley, to get told off to stay away from your own nephew who begins to act like a Christy Mathewson right outta the crib.

“But you came back, Charley. The name was Budd now—but the arm was the same—that’s what counts—and the heart! And of course that kid nephew of yours, he just naturally found his way to a baseball diamond.”

The speech curdled even before I got finished thinking it through. Still, I was elected. . . .

I MOISTENED my lips as I walked over towards the piano. Would it help any to mention I’d seen his sister sitting back of third, looking mighty pleased about young Farrell’s showing? I didn’t know and there was moisture in my eyes as I laid a hand on Charley’s arm.

He turned, looked at me and grinned. I thought, you’re old, all right, Charley. Too old to take something like this. And I’m the guy to stick the knife in. I pulled him outside where we were alone. And I told him everything. Spilling it out quick so the pain would be sharp, short.

Then there was nothing but the singing coming out soft and sad from Kindy’s. I thought why doesn’t the old lug say *something*, curse or take a swing at me—why *doesn’t* he?

But Charley just stood there, still grinning. Then he said, abrupt like, “Don’t worry, Joe, the Commission won’t be heavin’ me.”

I must’ve jumped like an airedale pup at that but I still had my doubts.

Charley went on, drawling, taking his time the way he does. “You thought I was kiddin’ you a while back about my arm, Joe. I was leveling. I’ve known the old wing was shot for quite a while. I couldn’t pitch a decent nine innings if my life depended on it. One, two, maybe three innings and then. . . .” Charley drew his

finger across his throat.

“How could I tell Fritz, though. Besides we were driving for a pennant. Wouldn't help the rest of the boys to find out the old workhorse had pulled up lame. No, Joe this was the only way. Otherwise Moseby wouldn'tve left me in thinking I'd settle down. We'd have been sunk.

“And I knew Farrell could do it,” he added almost as an afterthought.

I almost jumped on Charley in eagerness. “That arm business, will it hold up? You got a doctor who'll go to bat for you before the Commission?”

Charley laughed at me. “Take it easy, Joe. Yeah, this is straight. Hell, I got three docs—count 'em—who know I'll have to do my pitching righty from now on.”

We went back into Kindy's arm and arm and the sun was shining again all inside my brain. Why there was plenty of spots a guy like Charley could fit in the big time—scout, coach, manager, lots of places.

And I knew there were going to be some reunions for the old guy. And not with any minor leagues!