

THE EDUCATED PILL

By Bob Olsen

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The games stood two to one in our favor, but with both of our regular twirlers on the sick list, our chances of snaring the other two looked pretty slim. In the next game, I tried out one vet. and two unseasoned college graduates, and the Sox walloped the three of them all over the pasture. The score of that mill was twenty-seven to four, with us on the short end, of course. The fifth of the series was about the same, only more so. This gave them the lead, and meant that we'd have to win two games running to spear the championship.

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I was just going to tell the rest of the boys that there wasn't no use of practicing any more, when a little dried up runt of a guy comes up to me and asks me if I'm the manager.

"I plead guilty," says I.

"My name is Gottlieb Schnitzelkuchen," says he.

"What?"

"I say my name is Schnitzelkuchen."

"Please say that again, and say it slow."

"Schni_tzel_kuchen,—ess_tzay_ha—"

"That's enough. Never mind spelling it. I got you in the first place, but I kind of like to hear you talk. What do you want?"

"I want a job. Would you like to hire a good pitcher?"

"Would I like—say, can the burlesque. Just now, I'm not in the mood for kidding."

"But I tell you I can pitch a ball which nobody can hit."

"You can?" says I, turning so as I can get a better look at him. He was—but I guess I'd better salt down the descriptive stuff until we get him all dolled out in his uniform and ready to make his daybutte—as they say of the society squabs.

Course I thought he was balmy, and I was going to tell the bat boy to direct him to the nearest nut factory, when he yanks a ball out of his pocket and says, "Watch."

Would you believe it? He puts so much stuff on that pill that it went clean around in a circle, like one of those sticks that you've seen the circus guys throw, and come right back into his hands again.

"Make believe that glove is home plate," he says. "Now watch once more." This time he started a slow one. It went straight for the glove until it was two feet from it; then it stopped, and after hanging in the air for a while, backed up. Again he caught it before it touched the ground.

"Now bring out your best batters. I

will show you.”

And he sure did make us all feel as if we'd just arrived from Saint Louis. He struck out five of our star hitters, not allowing a single hit, or even a pass to first base. Talk about control! I signed him on the spot. After we had both put our John Hancocks on the papers, I asks, “Say, how in Sam Hill do you put so much English on the ball?”

“I will tell you. It is the ball. I invented it myself.

I've been working on it four years. I call it the aeroplane base ball.”

As he spoke, he had the ball in his hand, twisting on it until it came apart in two halves. One of the pieces was just a hollow shell of steel with small holes in it; the other part was the funniest looking contraption you ever see in your life. It was built like a dinkey toy aeroplane, with a propeller and dinguses for making it go up and down and to the right or left. The whole rig was so small that it fitted inside a hollow sphere just the size of a league base ball.

He told me it was run by a spring motor, which he wound up by twisting it just before he delivered the ball. The steering gear and motor were controlled by small buttons, which he pressed through the cover.

“But, say,” I protests. “That ain't just square, you know.”

“Why not?” he retorts. “There ain't nothing in the rules against it. You're the home team now, and you have to provide the ball. This one comes up to the rules. It is nine and one quarter inches 'round the middle, and weighs just a little over five ounces.”

“But it ain't on the level according to the spirit of the game.”

“How about Mitchell getting hit on the arm? Did that happen on the level, according to the spirit of the game?”

THIS argument helped to decide me; and then, too, I wanted to win that pennant.

On account of the boys, you understand. I still had my doubts, though, and so I asked for another slant at that aeroplane ball. It sure was a dead ringer for a real pill, and the parts fit so close that you'd never notice the crack.

“What are you going to do when we go to bat?” I asked.

“I'll just substitute a regular ball. I used to do sleight-of-hand tricks, you know.”

Course the home fans knew we didn't have a ghost of a show; but quite a few of them turned out just to see us get licked, and we had a fair sized crowd. You ought to of heard the howl that went up when the umpire introduced our battery, “Schnitzelkuchen and Bing.” No wonder they yelled at what sounded like the head line of a comic supplement.

Snitz sure did look funny, too, in his hand-me-down uniform, which was four sizes too big for him. He was a wiry little cuss, with skinny bow legs like the shanks of a wishbone. His age was forty-six, and he looked it, and then some. Over his long pointed nose was a pair of goggles, which he said he had to wear or he couldn't see nothing. But the worst of all was his whiskers. We tried to get him to roach them, but it was no go. And, believe me, it was some hedge. Stuck out on all sides like the Katzenjammer's Captain friend, only much longer. Honest, if he'd a worn a stocking cap he'd a been a dead ringer for one of those goblins you see in the fairy stories.

Course the crowd gayed the life out of him, but their jeers changed to cheers when he commenced to pitch. He sure had that vest-pocket, hide hound flying machine of his trained. The first ball he threw was a snaky, wobbly curve that'd give you the jimjams to look at. The guy at the bat was so buffaloed he forgot to offer at it, and the ump called a strike. Then Snitz gave him his slow come back. By the time the slugger had swung at it, it was on its way back to its pa. Next he

pressed the buttons for full speed on the motor and hard_a_lee on the helm; and hurled a beautiful wide outshoot. Thinking he was going to get hit, the batter jumped back; but the ball cut a corner off the plate, and sailed around right into the first baseman's mitt without being touched by the catcher or anything else.

You'd ought to of heard that crowd yell. They were seeing some real twirling, and, believe me, they knew it. They was so anxious to see him do some more stunts that, after he had fanned three men without having a single ball called on him, they could hardly wait for him to get back into the box again. They even hissed one of our men because he got to first base, and cheered the ones that struck out. Among these, of course was Snitz, who thus added to his popularity.

Encouraged by the crowd, he began to pull off some throws even more sensational than before. One of these was a straight ball that traveled in jerks, first fast, then slow; another would start like a rainbow lob that looked as if it was going ten feet over the catcher's head, but just before it got to the plate it would take a sudden dip, and come across waist high. But the best one of all was the loop the loop drop. This left his paw with an underhanded rise, made a complete somersault in the air about halfway home, and finally ended up with a neat little bow over the home plate. The batter just stood and gawked at it.

The innings that they was at bat was all the same story. Three sweating guys would step up to the dish, one after the other, and then retire to the tune of "One! Two! Three strikes, you're out, at the old ball game." Talk about a pitcher's battle! This was a slaughter, a regular one-man massacre.

All we needed to win was one run, and we tried all the tricks we knew to get that run. Course, Snitz was the weak link in our batting order. He couldn't hit a push ball with a

Canadian snowshoe; but with Dugan striking out Gilbert and some of our other leading men, that didn't make much difference. At that, Snitz brought in a run.

Funny how that happened. Seeing that Snitz had him beat, Dugan, the Silk Sox flinger, went back to his old tricks of trying to wing our pitcher. But Snitz was wise to him, and instead of trying to hit the ball, he spent all his time dodging. Honest, it was worth the price of admission, just to see him dodge. He'd either jump ten feet from the plate or else flop flat on the ground, and Dugan only succeeded in handing him a complimentary ticket for lower berth number one.

He could run, too. You'd ought to of seen those bull clog legs of his carry him to second when Dobbs knocked a pretty little infield bunt. Right then I put in Sullivan, who I'd saved out as a pinch hitter, and the second ball over sailed over right field fence. These two tallies and one more was all we got, but it won us the game, score three to nothing.

TALK about hero worship! Schnitzelkuchen was the man of the hour. A mob of fans invaded the field after the game and carried him to the club house on their shoulders. That night all the papers issued special baseball extras, as usual, but the front pages was all full of Schnitzelkuchen. Everything else—politics, murder trials, railroad wrecks, war news was pushed into the society columns.

This of course was some ad for the last game. All the fans that had seen Snitz wanted to come again, and those that missed the other game was just batty to see him perform. People stood in line all night outside the grounds, and at two P.M. there was such a mob outside that we had to close the gates for fear someone would get crushed.

When it comes to an ovation, Napoleon Bonapart never had nothing on Snitz and the cheers he got that afternoon.

And, as before, he gave them the goods. He wanted me to take all our men off the field and fight it out alone, with the bat boy to shack the balls behind the plate. I knew he'd get away with it, too, but I wouldn't stand for it. I don't believe in rubbing it in. All the same, I did let on to the boys that if they got lonesome on account of having nothing to do, I wouldn't kick if they amused themselves.

They took the hint all right, and believe me, what with Snitz's freak pitching and the antics of the others, it was some circus. The left fielder started it off by turning a back flip and walking around on his hands. The two other pasture tenders got together in right field and commenced a comedy boxing match. Bedard sat down on first and began to play a solitaire game of mumblepeg, while Chase was on his knees hunting four leaf clovers around third base. Grey and Castle, the other two infielders lived up to their names by going through the latest steps of the black bottom.

All this horse play made a hit with the fans, but the Silk Sox bench looked like a colored funeral combined with a meeting of the I.W.W.

I ought to of explained that we had it framed up so that on the third strike of the last man up, the catcher or the first baseman would toss the ball back to Snitz, so he could change it for the regular ball.

In the third inning, Frenchy Bedard forgot this, and nearly crabbed the act. Snitz didn't wake up until Dugan had the phony pill in his mit. Then he came running to me with his eyes popping out, and told me what happened.

"If it gets hit it may break the machinery," he stammers.

"That's all right," says I. "I'll just pass the word around for the boys not to offer at it; and let's pray that Dugan don't press any of the buttons." I might of spared my worries about that, though, for of course he didn't

know how to wind the thing up. And, would you believe it, Dugan pitched a whole inning with that counterfeit pill, and never got wise!

After the bawling out I give Bedard, I figured he wouldn't be likely to pull off another scissor bill play like that.

At the end of the sixth, we was two runs to the good, and it looked like easy money for us. But in the last of the seventh, Jones, the Silk Sox shortstop started something by making a lucky hit. Here is how it happened: When he come to the plate, he just stood fanning his bat up and down as fast as he could, and just by luck the third one over hit the willow stick. It sent a nice little rolling grounder straight for Snitz's feet; but he muffed it, and before the second baseman could get his paws on the ball, Jones was on first.

Our balloon ascension was the next thing on the program, and we sure did go up in the air some. I never could figure out whether the jar of the hit knocked some of the gears loose, or whether Snitz got excited and pressed all the buttons at once; but anyway, he just couldn't make that ball behave after that.

He tried to hold Jones down to first; and the ball he threw started all right, but took a sudden rise and aviated a yard over Bedard's head—finally coming to rest at the foot of the fence in front of the first base bleachers. Of course Jones got to second on that, and a wild pitch advanced him to third. The next ball hit the grandstand netting ten feet to the left of the plate, and Jones came home. Two more men got their bases on balls, and Bing was nearly crazy, running around like a bird dog in his frenzied attempts to get within range of Snitz's wild lobs and curves.

THEN Schnitzelkuchen pulled off his big thriller. It started as a high rise, that looked as if it was going over the grand stand, but it gave a sudden dive and headed back, hitting the umpire an awful crack on the knob,

just where it hitches onto his neck. In the excitement, the two men on bases came in. Course I protested, and darned if the other ump didn't call the runs. He even showed me the place in the rule book:

“Rule 54. Sec. 7. If a thrown or pitched ball strike the person or clothing of an umpire, the ball shall be considered in play, and the baserunner, or runners, shall be entitled to all the bases they can make.”

When the umpire that got beaned came to, he wanted to know who threw the pop bottle; and when we told him how it happened, we had to hold him to keep him from going out on the field and cleaning up Schnitzelkuchen.

But Snitz was having trouble enough as it was. He'd let another man get to first, and again made a bum attempt to keep him from stealing. This time the ball broke loose as if it was going to show off all its paces at once. It circled and zigzagged around the diamond like a bucking bronco, and then started a skidding, dip of death flight for the left field fence. Snitz tore after it, but he might as well of tried to catch a sparrow. When he seen it go out of sight, he climbed right up on the bleachers, trampling on knees and shoulders until he got to the top of the fence, and then he disappeared.

When they picked him up, he could walk all right, but he was as nutty as a hickory tree. He fought to get back on the field and it took four cops to put him into the ambulance and hold him down until they got to the bug hospital.

That was the end of his pitching career. He wound up by making the longest and the wildest throw on record. You remember reading about the big wreck on the C. Q. D. that happened at the time of the World's Series? That was supposed to of been due to a soused engineer, but I happen to know that Schnitzelkuchen's educated pill

caused that accident.

You noticed that the Washington Avenue grounds are right next to the C. Q. D. tracks—in fact the left field fence is the railroad boundary line. Well, just as the aeroplane spheroid went sailing out of the grounds, an express train came by. The engineer and the fireman were rubbering out of the cab window, trying to get a squint at the game as they tore past, and that educated pill took an ornery streak, and just naturally beaned the two of them. The engine run at a sixty-five mile clip with nobody at the throttle for an hour and a half; and then it hit a curve and rolled over into the ditch. The ball had traveled a hundred miles without stopping. Some peg, what I mean.

Maybe you wonder how I come to know all this. I'll put you wise. The day after the wreck, I went down there and give it the once over. I found Schnitzelkuchen's trick ball in a heap of coal next to the junk that'd been the tender.

BUT I suppose you're more interested in hearing how that game come out. Let me see, where was I at? Oh, yes, we was in the field, end of the seventh, nobody out, and our matinee idol on his way to the brain garage.

When the inventor of the aeroplane ball began to aviate, Jimmy Mitchell, who had been sitting on the bench with his arm in a sling, begged me to put him in. At last I told him to get Walker and start warming up. Talk about guts! That kid went in with his teeth gritted, and pitched the finest four innings of his life. You could hear him groan every time he let go of the ball, but he stuck it out. We held them down to two hits, and gave only one base on balls. They didn't make any runs while he was in the box. We tied the score in the ninth, and Jimmy himself brought in the winning run in the last of the tenth.

I was going to let a substitute bat for him, but he wouldn't stand for it. He was

afraid we'd have to play another inning, and if I took him out he wouldn't be able to finish it. He got to first by beating out a pretty bunt along the base line, and was knocked home by Johnson's two-bagger. The lameness in his arm hadn't hurt his sprinting power none.

That night the papers had a new hero, and it was Jimmy Mitchell's mug that graced the front pages of the extras.

After that morning when he tried to practice, Jimmy's arm had got worse, and the doctors warned him that if he pitched with it in that shape he'd never throw another swift ball. But Jimmy fooled them. He started to learn all over, and in two seasons was one of the best southpaws on big time. As Jonah said to the whale, "You can't keep a good man down."

Schnitzelkuchen come out all right, too. He was in a straightjacket that night when I called on him, and crazy as a woodtick. As soon as he seen me, though, he began to quiet down. "Tell me, did we lose?" he gasps.

"No, we won," and I tells him all about it. And, say, I never realized what a loyal scout he was, until I seen the way he carried on about us winning the pennant. It wasn't on

account of his part in it, neither.

In a month he was all right, and the doctors turned him loose. Of course the management stood for his hospital charges, and we all chipped in and made him up a purse of a thousand.

He said he was going to use this money in perfecting his aeroplane ball, and inventing other baseball junk. He had an idea he could rig up a small wireless station in his left pants pocket, so he could control the pill, and even change the signals after it had left his hand. He said he got this notion from a bird named Hammond that runs a torpedo boat that way. Another of Snitz's inventions is called the electric bat.

Drop around again some time and I'll tell you all about it.

And say, Mr. Magazine Writer, when your story comes out, send me a copy of it, will you? And I forgot to tell you, if you have to mention names, just mix them up, so as not to give anybody a hunch, you understand. Course, most folks have forgotten about it by now, but I wouldn't want to have anyone get wise to the fact that there was anything phony about the way we won that pennant.