

# Big League Stories

By CHARLES E. VAN LOAN



## I—THE TEN THOUSAND DOLLAR ARM :

From "The Ten Thousand Dollar Arm and Other Tales of the Big League"

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WHENEVER a recruit joined the Blue Jays—that 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 his fill with reverence and some awe in his eyes. "Him" was none other than the great and only Bruno Smelzer, "Bruno of the \$10,000 arm," and our fathers cheered themselves hoarse over him in the late eighties and early nineties.

As the recruit took in each detail of face and figure he would remember that this man was pitching no-hit games away back in the dim and distant past when it was customary for the third baseman to wear a mustache, and the \$10,000 wing was a household phrase before the great pitchers of the present day were out of the kindergarten.

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.

Bruno Smelzer was a left hander. Check over the list of the great south-paws of the past and present, and you will understand why ball players hold the firm belief that every phenomenal left hander is "queer." Without wishing to nick the sensitive feelings of any gentleman who hurles them from the port side, it may be stated that there have been enough peculiar left handers to justify the belief that side-wheelers and loose screws usually go together.

If Bruno had an eccentricity it lay in the almost idolatrous worship which he bestowed upon his \$10,000 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 left hander in the business and all the right handers save one.

Charlie Grubb was 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 head first into a stone wall. Bullen did not often put his foot down, but when he did there was an end to the argument.

Dressed for public appearance, the old man would cajole some youthful catcher into accompanying him out behind 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 work 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, by which he meant that the \$10,000 arm was ready to earn his salary.

By years of practice Bruno had acquired alarming proficiency in one trick which no pitcher was likely to steal from him. It was especially designed for catching a batter off his guard. Whenever Bruno began studying the ground in front of him Sullivan, his veteran catcher, would know what was coming. The old man would stand in the box, his eyes cast down and his head bent slightly forward. Suddenly and without raising his head to look at the batter he would take his step and deliver his "fast" ball, and nine times out of ten he would split the heart of the plate before the amazed batter could recover from his surprise.

Another neat trick of the sort required Sullivan's collaboration. Ordinarily foul balls against the grand stand netting were tossed back to the catcher by players from the bench. When Bruno worked Steve Sullivan did his own retrieving. When Steve picked up the ball he would toss it back to Bruno, who would at once step into the box ready to pitch. Sullivan, returning to the plate, would pick up his mask where he had dropped it—always behind the batter and from six to ten feet away from the plate. As Steve picked up the mask he would address some remark to the batter calculated to extract a reply. If the batter turned his head to answer Sullivan would drop the mask and dive

into position, for the turn of the batter's head was Bruno's cue to slam the ball over for a strike.

Charlie Grubb, second baseman with the team for six years and playing manager for four, found his trouble at last. A recruit from the wilds of Wyoming literally elbowed the boss out of his place at second. Charlie had no wish to become a bench manager, and he hung on as long as he could, but he could not conceal the fact that he was no longer hitting in the .275 class, and, to make it worse, his legs were going



He Would Shed His Sweater and Pitch For Half an Hour.

(Posed by Eddie Plank, Athletics.)

back on him. McRae, the Wyoming recruit, was not only a sensational infielder, but he could hit like a DeLahanty, and he was a streak on the bases.

Two or three of the sporting writers started a campaign to drive Grubb to the bench and hammered away at him so viciously that the entire baseball population took up the cry, and when that happens it is the wise man who will step aside as quietly and unostentatiously as possible. Grubb was not wise.

He took to snarling at the reporters, and this was throwing gasoline on the fire. In the end the manager was forced to retreat and McRae got his chance—and made good.

Grubb began to brood over his troubles and fight with Dave Bullen. The manager went so far as to make threats against his persecutors, which crept into the sporting pages of the papers, and 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 that they had once shown a streak of yellow.

There was nothing yellow about the way the Canaries twittered 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.

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

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 out and Grubb coaching off third base. McRae and "Skeets" Tilford, the two heaviest hitters on the team, were coming up. McRae 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 the fence, and when McRae was between second and third the dustiest fan on the bleachers saw Jimmy relay to "Wingo" Jones, back of second base.

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

Grubb lost his head completely and signaled McRae to keep on to the plate, and the boy had no choice but to obey the manager. "Wingo" Jones whipped the ball home thirty feet ahead of McRae—as needless a slaughter

as was ever seen on a professional diamond.

Coming from any coacher in the world, the blunder would have been inexcusable; coming from poor Charlie Grubb, it nearly precipitated a riot, and the demonstration swelled tenfold when "Skeets" Tilford drove out the single which should have scored McRae from third. And, if that were not enough, the Canaries banged out the winning run in their half of the ninth. Grubb's error of judgment—picking the kindest name for it—had thrown away a clutch on the pennant, and Helme Pittman, who had pitched a remarkable game, came near weeping in the clubhouse.

That night 2,000 men and boys waited outside the park, and the police had to escort Grubb to the street car. A sensational evening paper, which had headed the campaign against Grubb, printed a savage attack upon him, in which it was hinted that the manager had thrown the game in order to revenge himself upon the town.

Grubb, whose nerves were in rags, read this article. It was the finishing touch.

The next morning Dave Bullen was called out of his bed to answer the telephone. He was informed that his manager was seriously ill at his hotel.

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

Bullen was at his wit's end. He had no experience in managing a club, and "Piggy" Powell, who 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 clubhouse. It was 11 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 have I got? 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—"

"Cheese! Cheese!" said Bruno. "You'll give me nothing. What do you think I am, Dave? Now, let me understand this. You put this thing right up to me, do you?"

"I do."

"I'm the boss here?"

"You are."

"Well, then," growled Smelzer, "I'll give you everything I've got. Now, you duck out of here, Dave, before the boys begin to drop in. I'll explain the situation to 'em myself. If you tried to do it you'd put 'em all up in the air."

Dave Bullen went away, and Bruno thoughtfully removed his upper garments and began twisting and stretching his arm. As he went through his exercises he shook his head and groaned slightly. Then he brought out a new jar of "dope," and the massaging began, and as Bruno stroked the relic of his former greatness he laid his plan of campaign.

Nash must go in to start the game. His speed had beaten the Canaries in the opening game of the series. It might carry him through again. Dud Belcher must be ready to step into the box at a moment's notice. In case they should hit Dud—well, he would cross that bridge when he came to it. Pittman, having worked the day before, would be out of it. No; must be Nash, with Belcher in reserve—and after that? Bruno shook his head and kneaded his arm thoughtfully.

When the Blue Jays arrived at the clubhouse they found it empty. Bruno was out behind the bleachers pitching to the groundkeeper's fifteen-year-old son. He put in an appearance, explained the situation and issued his orders.

"Nash, you'll start. And, Belcher, I want you warming up right through the game in case anything should happen. If Beau has what he had on Wednesday there won't be anything to it, but I want you to be there ready to hop in."

The Canaries sent in their pet and pride, Whitey Collier, and the Blue Jays fell upon him like a flock of chicken hawks. In the third inning they rattled out a volley of safe hits and piled up four runs. Whitey went to the bench, and Oscar Petersen replaced him in the box. The hitting stopped abruptly.

In the fifth inning the hitting started on the other side of the diamond. The Canaries were gauging Nash's speed and meeting it solidly. With the bases filled, one man in and one out, Bruno flagged the Bean and sent Belcher to the rescue. Luck helped Belcher to get the next two men at the cost of no more than an additional run. 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. "It's the speed, Bruno," he said. "These fellows are hitting speed today. Now, if we only had a man to go in there with a dink ball!"

Smelzer moved over and questioned Belcher.

"I pitched my head off to every man in that inning," complained Dud. "and if you think there wasn't anything on the ball ask Steve. They hit it just the same. Why, that 'Wingo' Jones hit

on that break ball of mine so hard that it nearly poked 'Piggy' off his feet. Good thing he held it, eh? Oh, these fellows are only lucky—that's all. They are just shutting their eyes and taking a clout at it."

"Three innings to go," thought Bruno—"three innings."

"Steve," he called, Sullivan moved over and sat down by the sitting manager. "I'm going out to warm up for a minute," said the old man. "Delay this inning all you can."

Bruno and the change catcher slipped out of the side gate as the last of the sixth began.

"Is that old fool going in?" demanded Nash, still snarling from the peeping which he had received.

"You shut up!" snarled Sullivan. "These fellows have been murdering speed today. Bruno will make suckers of 'em. See if he doesn't."

"Can you do it?" asked the catcher anxiously when Smelzer came back to the bench. "How's the arm?"

"Sore," said Bruno briefly. "I'm taking an awful chance, Steve, but if I leave Dud in there they'll just about knock him endways next inning. I guess the old girl will stand three innings all right, and the control's there. That's the main thing. We'll work that mask trick on 'em if we get a chance. I haven't tried it against this club since June."

When Umpire Burke made the announcement at the beginning of the seventh the Canaries welcomed the announcement with derisive hoots and jeers.

"Well, here's grandpa!" they shouted. "Old man, what are you going to do with that \$10,000 curio?"

Bruno set his spikes in the box and began to pitch. It was the first time for many years that he had gone into the box knowing that his arm was not "right." He was grinning cheerfully when he slipped over the first strike, but the smile soon faded from his face. The \$10,000 arm, so long coaxed and nursed and petted like a spoiled child, was sending in its sharp protest.

The nervous fans chirped up marvelously when the first hitter splashed out via third base and the second one fouled 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 presumed upon his luck to the extent of attempting to steal second base. The Hon. 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 McRae.

"Nice pegging, kid," said Smelzer as the battery trudged to the bench.

"Yes; Mac had it waiting for him when he slid," said Steve. "How's the old girl? Hurt you much?"

"She's awful fretful around the shoulder. You know, she ain't been feeling right since that twelve inning game."

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 caused 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.

Bruno at bat was more or less of a joke, and Oscar Petersen 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, their catcher, was the standard bearer of their forlorn 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!"

Corson wagged his bat up and down and took a good spike hold. Oh, what he would do to one between the belt and the stockings! Murder! Corson waited, nervously chopping circles with his bluezone, glaring at old Bruno. Bruno's face was toward the plate, and Bruno was in position to pitch, but his eyes were lowered, and his face wore an expression of deep thought.

Corson seized the opportunity to paw another hole in the ground and rub his right palm against his thigh in order to take a firmer grip on the bat. Without looking up, Bruno stepped sudden-

ly forward, and over came the ball, taking Corson entirely by surprise. "A peach!" said Umpire Burke. "Yet 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 went back to the bench, tearing up the turf with his lagging spikes, for all the word like a bad little boy dragging his feet in a dusty road.

"A-h-h-h-h!" he growled when his teammates began to bilater his tough hide with reproaches. "Who'd have thought that old stiff 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 Petersen—a big, rawboned outfielder named Merrill. Merrill was overanxious and very nervous, and Bruno kept him waiting a long time. Then he sent up such a feeble looking crippler of a ball, such a discouraged, wabbly sort of ball, that Merrill afterward swore that he saw the trademark on the horsehide turn over nine times on its way to the plate, but he fouled that dinky offering over the grand stand.

"Hah—strike!" said Burke. Merrill thumped the plate with his bat.

"Mercy!" said Steve Sullivan. "You are 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-twenty-five a month Keane 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 incoherently, 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 rough 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 out there today? Nothing but a wish and a prayer—nothing at all! Oh, you're a fine bunch!"

Rayburn, the second baseman, seeing that he was going to get nothing 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 drumsticks, raced over and toed the bag ahead of Halsey. All in vain, for Keith could not make the toes in time. Result, Halsey on first and Rayburn on third, ready to sneak home on a fumbled throw to second, a passed ball or a hit.

Jimmy McLennon, the .325 hitter and prospective big leaguer, tossed away two of the three bats which he had been swinging and advanced to the plate. He was the worst man Bruno might have been called upon to face in this crisis.

The veteran stood still for several seconds, glancing from first to third, as if watching the runners. Bruno was thinking hard. Here was a man who was almost certain to hit any sort of a ball that came over the plate. Pittman had been warming up for two innings, and Helme had at least a sound pitching arm, but he was young and had nerves. Bruno was an old man without a nerve in his body, unless those were nerves which were sending fiery pains through his left shoulder.

"No," thought Bruno; "no, it was put up to me. I'll stick, and I won't walk this bird either. The next fellow is a good hitter too."

The veteran stabbed the turf with his spikes and spat courageously. He had not pitched a curve ball thus far. It was likely that the Canaries knew it. Halsey would steal on that first ball anyway, but would Keane have the nerve to send Rayburn along to the plate on a double steal? Bruno doubted it. Keane would be more likely to place his dependence upon Jimmy McLennon's bat. Bruno signed Sullivan to hold the ball and let Halsey go down. It was gambling upon what McLennon might do, but Bruno felt reasonably certain that the batter would wait for Halsey to reach second base.

Attempting a curve with his arm in its painful condition seemed like burning up the tag end of the \$10,000 wing, but Bruno set himself and let fly, and out of the corner of his eye he saw Halsey start down on the pitch. The ball went twisting across the outside corner, and McLennon swept his bat over the plate, taking the one chance in a thousand that the movement might confuse the catcher and make him miss the ball. Steve whirled toward third base with his arm raised for the throw, but Rayburn dodged back to the bag, and the stage was set for trouble.

"Now, then, Jimmy," shouted Keane, "we've got this old man just where we want him! Lay on it, boy! Lay on it!"

The home fans became silent. The few Canary rooters present set up a valiant twittering, a very small noise in a great and apprehensive hush.

Bruno hitched at his belt. It was his sign for his "break" ball. This time, with desperation to lend the

wrist its old time snap, the ball for him, and McLennon missed. His pile driving smash tipped against the wire netting of the stand.

Mechanically Steve dropped his head and looked at the ball. Would the old fellow have nerve to try his best trick in a crisis of this sort? Two strikes and a man on in front—that's a bad situation. Sullivan threw the ball back to him as he picked it up and Bruno, with one hand, that was the Yes, the old fellow was going to do it! Steve Sullivan had some himself, but he stole a glance at the burning, crouching off third base, what might happen if there came a fumble at the end of that line behind the plate. Steve had no supply of imagination, but for a instant he had the feeling that his buckle had been turned to lock.

Bruno, standing in the box, that this was his only hope. There was one more effort in his \$10,000 arm, and all he asked was chance to make that effort and enough to sneak that ball over the plate—somehow. Sullivan came slowly back to the plate in order to give Bruno a set himself. McLennon was motionless, save for a slight wincing movement which he imperceptibly hid.

Steve squatted behind the batter, picked up his mask, half raising his face.

"You're the terrible hitter who'sing up to the big league next week, they tell me," said he, with a sneer. "You can hit some in the bushes, once you get up there. Christy Lawson and the rest of those boys take that big bat away from you, you'll be so light without it that you'll float!"

McLennon half turned his head.

"Oh, you be!"

It was all over before any one had time to yell. As McLennon had eyes off the pitcher, Steve let the mask away and leaped forward like a panther. McLennon swung back, but the mischief had been done. The last thing the demon hitter heard before the storm broke was the thud of the ball in the glove and Burke's shout.

"Batter out!"

Half an hour later Dave Bullen himself away from the wine party at the corner place. The mayor was there and many prominent men, and they were all very happy. The owner found the Blue Jays in the clubhouse stinging like flies and sitting in the shower room, where they were living over again the strains of the last inning—that is to say, but two of them.

Smelzer was sitting in his chair in front of his locker, his left arm pressed tight against his side and his right hand clasped over his left shoulder.



Bruno Knew That This Was His Only Hope.

(Posed by Eddie Plank, Athletics.) He had not removed his soggy uniform shirt. Sullivan, stripped to the waist, was sitting beside him.

Bullen walked over to Bruno's corner.

"Bruno," said he, "that was the greatest—why, what's the matter?"

The old pitcher looked up, his face twisted with pain.

"My arm," he said. "My arm."

"He threw it away in that last inning," said Sullivan. "I saw Chris Townsend do the same thing five years ago—go in with a sore arm and hit it off in one inning."

"She's gone this time, Dave," said Bruno miserably. "Just as sure as I'm sitting here I felt her go sailing clean over the plate when I threw that last ball. These young fellows may hurt their arms and come back again, but I guess I'm all done, Dave."

"Well," said the owner slowly, "I wasn't figuring on pitching you next season anyway. I'm sorry I didn't tell you before, but Grubb's contract expires this month, and I had you picked out for his job."

"Manager?" gasped Sullivan, for Bruno seemed unable to rise to the occasion. "Oh, pretty soft; pretty soft!"

"Yes," said Bullen, "and even if I hadn't had you in mind right about Bruno, I'd have given it to you on the strength of what you did for me today."

"Me?" said Bruno. "Why, Steve had as much to do with that as I did. All I had to do was lam that ball over Steve had to take a burglar's chance on stopping that strike. If you're handing things around pass something to Steve Sullivan here."

"Good idea!" said Bullen. "You're the manager now. Why don't you raise Steve's salary?"

"By grab," said Bruno, "I will!"