

# Baboons and Monkeyshines

(Chicago)

I had known Cruisenberry back from my first time in Philly. You would see him when the Sox came to town or you came to Chicago. He was a regular guy. I never thought he had any reason to cross anybody. So when he told me the rumors about last year were true and Gleason knew it, I began to think. It wasn't exactly like the Kid denied it when I asked him; he just blew up and gave me the heave.

It's a queer feeling when you're getting along in your career and you don't know whether your team's on the square. If this was my last chance, I didn't want a punk gambler buying it off...or a big-timer for that matter. Since I was only playing some, I had plenty of chances to watch what was going on. But I wasn't sure what to watch for. How do you tell whether somebody's crooked? Felsch misses a fly - did he dodge it or did the sun get him? Jackson throws it to the wrong base. I did that myself my last week in Philly, and I knew I wasn't crooked. I'd seen it happen a hundred times a season since I had been in the big leagues without giving any thought to whether the guy who threw it was on the take. Now a throw goes wild and I can't get it out of my mind.

And what about Cicotte or Williams? They say they're funny, and maybe they are. Here's what I know. Nothing. I have been on this team three weeks, and between Cicotte and Williams they're 5-4. Maybe they ought to be 10-0. If you want to say that, go ahead. I'd seen them pitch tough and then it's gone and then it's back again. For six innings last week I thought Williams was going to no-hit the Red Sox and then that quick they knocked him around and Kid had to get Kerr to turn the game again. Then again I saw Naylor lose it against the Senators last month in Philly, too. Of course if you say Naylor isn't Lefty Williams, you're right.

It's all baffling.

But there's nothing baffling about the team's mood. It's hardly fair to the word to call it a team. Most clubs are tight. That's what happens in a race; the clubhouse, the hotel, the trains, the dining room, they all make you that way. You can't help it; it's 20 guys with the same interests, namely baseball, women and cards. You see these same faces all day, and if that isn't enough by itself you're playing the same game and trying to win. I saw the inside of my first big league clubhouse in 1908 and I've seen one every year since and I've never seen one different. The veterans always have a poker game going, and the chatter is about dames and other guy stuff.

Except in Chicago. Here the train could be carrying corpses for all the racket there is, and if two or three guys get together they're talking low, if you know what I mean. And if you happen by even that's likely to stop, so you might get a respectful 'hi,' which is really a polite way of saying 'move along.' If there are card games, they're private; the same three or four guys, no spectators or visitors welcome.

You're on your own getting to the hotel. At least nobody's welcome in Cicotte's cab or Weaver's or Schalk's, especially nobody from the other side of the club. You could shoot a shotgun through the lobby and never injure the Sox' chances because Risberg doesn't want to be out where he might run into Collins and vice versa.

Of all of them, the one I knew best was Collins. We had come up with Mr. Mack about the same time, he was only a couple years older than me, and we won with Philly in 1911, 1913 and 1914. But you couldn't talk to him. He was a college boy, he'd already made good money in baseball and he didn't have any use for most of us. Jackson I knew from when we were bushers together with Philly in 1908 and 1909, but he didn't stick long and then when he got sent to Cleveland he became a star. That's been a decade ago. He doesn't give any sign of remembering me and there isn't much reason why he should.

The rest I won't say I knew well, but when guys are in the league long enough word gets around on them, and the dope's usually pretty good. Most of the guys on Collins' side were the hangers-on. The exceptions were Faber, Kerr and Schalk. Nothing much to be said about Faber, a good guy trying to make an honest buck. There might not have been an issue about the Series last year except that Faber got a sore arm, so he couldn't pitch. He wasn't fixable, and if the gamblers couldn't fix the pitchers they couldn't fix the team. But with Faber out, Cicotte and Williams carried the pitching load, and that gave the sure money boys an opening.

Kerr was a hot-head. He'd been a hot-head rookie in 1919 and now he was just a hot-headed bantam. You looked at him and figured it went back to his size. If he's over 5-6 and 150, it isn't by much and his uniform just sort of drapes around him so my suspicion is the runt got kicked around a lot and has been dishing it out to survive ever since. I've seen little roosters before - Evers was one. And sometimes those guys do OK. But mostly they take a swipe at their Skip or do something else to get shown the door. If Kerr keeps winning like he has so far maybe he'll be the exception.

If Kerr wasn't a pitcher he could have been a catcher. Schalk's a jerk just the same way. He'd rather ride you than anything. I've only seen him and Kerr work a couple times together so far, but they are a pair of dart-throwers. The word is Schalk almost had a

stroke in the Series last year getting crossed up by Cicotte and Williams.

The other group is a strange mix. Felsch and Jackson are jugheads. If the team is fixed and they're part of it, it's because somebody came along and offered easy money and they went along. Actually fixing a game takes brains they don't have. Weaver's another funny one. He's easy going and doesn't like Comiskey. But he's always playing hard and I don't see him taking a dive. So his angle I don't get.

McMullin? He's a stooge. You can't fix the game from his position, which is usually on the other end of the bench from Gleason. But he knows folks and he's good company, so his friends on the team keep him around.

That leaves Cicotte, Williams and Risberg. They're the ones you have to watch. Cicotte's the hungriest. He's 36, he's been around a long time, he isn't going to pitch much more, he isn't making much money, he hates Comiskey because of it, and it's no secret he just moved the family up to a big new spread in Michigan, so he needs cash. Beyond that he's a pitcher, and a pitcher can nearly fix a game by himself. Williams is younger, and based on this season and last he has a better future. But he's nearly as hungry and just as mad. Plus they both like Risberg and were best friends with Gandil before he quit. If Risberg's hinky it's

because he wants to get rich quick and knows shortstops who can't hit and can't field don't usually make a lot unless they have the acquaintance of some high rollers and can deliver on command.

At first I blew off the talk as sour chatter. We were home at the end of July against the A's and we only copped three out of five, but if it's the "crooks'" fault they had a funny way of doing it. Cicotte three-hit them in one of the games, and Williams beat Rommel 4-2 in the other. It was Leibold who threw away the third game with that baserunning boner.

The Yanks followed Philly in for four. You could tell coming in to the park it was going to be a dangerous scene, and it had nothing to do with gamblers. That's what the Babe does. The fans everywhere are nuts about the big oaf. The cops ordered the gates opened three hours early so they'd have some way to try to control the crowd. Didn't work. They filled up the place by noon and were five to six deep on the promenades and on the field. When they couldn't get in, some of them scaled one of the walls and here they came climbing over 10 feet of brick and falling down onto the field. All that just to see Ruth. Word was they were lined up outside the Yanks' hotel this morning. We weren't supposed to start playing until 3 but the cops said to get it going at 2:45 because if we didn't there might be a riot outside.

He's something to see, I have to give them that. On the benches the guys call him the Big Baboon. That's partly because of how far he hits and ball, partly because of how he farts and belches and generally carries on like an ape and partly because of how he looks. If you haven't seen a picture, he's big and kind of dark and there are rumors that maybe his blood isn't entirely white. Mostly we just do it to get under his skin. The way he hits you got to have something going against him.

I had the best seat to watch him, right there on the bench. Cicotte whiffed him in the second, then there was that funny play in the fourth when Jackson went back into the crowd on the field and didn't come out with the ball, and Connolly still called Ruth out. On the bench Joe bragged to Hap how he pulled a fast one, but Connolly's an old Mick so when he makes up his mind even Huggins isn't changing it. Funny business? Well, Eddie shut them out on five hits, Jackson got three himself, and he made a catch in the fifth that was as good as the stunt he pulled on Ruth in the fourth and it was legitimate. Felsch too.

It wasn't much different on Monday, although some of the work crowd wasn't there so we only drew 25,000. Well, the Babe drew 25,000. Imagine 25,000 on a wash day. He gave them what they wanted, I'll say that. Lefty passed him in the first and third, but he got one too close in the fourth and the Babe whacked it into the bleachers in right. Somehow it doesn't sit right when

you have 25,000 in your park and the other guy hits it out and they're all up and cheering. But I guess I understand they aren't really pulling against us. They just want a show. Kid let me take a cut at Picus Quinn for Wilkinson with one out in the ninth, but I didn't do anything and neither did the rest of our guys, as 7-0 would suggest.

But that was all the Yanks got out of the four games. Faber beat them 3-1 on five hits on Tuesday. There were 23,000 more there and they let Red have it good and proper because he walked Ruth three times, but we was trying to win the game. I have no beef with Red. The first time Peckinpaugh was on second with two out, so he'd have been stupid to pitch to him. There was nobody on in the fifth or seventh, but it was still close and one swing could have turned the game. I suppose the fate of nations has hung on slimmer threads, but even though Red got a roasting from the fans he did the right thing.

They sent Mays out against Red and we lit him up early. That was OK with us. I don't know anybody in the league who likes the sorry SOB. I left Boston before he took that hike last summer in Chicago; the Red Sox had shipped me to Philly two weeks before that. But I sure heard about it, and anyway I'd been around him plenty. He's a dumb Southern hick; that's what he is. There are basically two kinds of ballplayers in the majors: Southern boys like Mays and big city guys like me, and a lot of the Southern

boys are still fighting the Civil War and they won't let go. Mays, he's got a chip on his shoulder the size of Lookout Mountain and he'd just as soon fight you as anything. The same goes on the field. If Mays is pitching, you better stay loose because he'll come upside you. I've seen him do it.

But from where I stand he's mostly a coward, so I wasn't surprised when he walked off the mound in Chicago last year in the middle of taking a whipping and then blamed his teammates. Johnson should have suspended him. And I don't care if he fines me for saying so, but he darned sure shouldn't have let the Red Sox trade him to New York instead. Johnson said he'd block it, but then the courts jumped in and old Ban lost his backbone.

I'll say this for Mays. That submarine pitch of his may be a freak, but it's tough. Every other pitcher I've ever seen, the ball comes at you from up above. Then you get in against Mays and there's nothing up there. Instead the pitch is down by his knees and ankles. Then it rises when it's supposed to dip and dips when it's supposed to rise and I'll be damned if I can figure it out. I think he's tougher on righties, but maybe that's why we got to him. Leibold's a lefty and Mays couldn't find the plate with him and he walked. Then he took off and stole one on Ruel. Mays got Collins, but Weaver, whose also batting lefty, chops one over to short that Peckinpaugh can't play and that's a hit. That brought up Jackson - another lefty - and the general just tarred one out

toward Ruth in right and the ball rattled past him and into the coop and by the time the Babe could figure it out we were up 2-0.

I wish we'd have scored 50 off the big bastard.

We got 25,000 more in the house for Wednesday, which brought it to 123,000 for the four games, and the word is it's the biggest turnout for any four games ever played anywhere except at the Polo Grounds. I had to hand it to Kerr for sand because he pitched to Ruth and got him four times. The fact that we scored four in the first maybe made it easier for Kerr because there were no tight spots. Mogridge started for New York, but he didn't have it. Then Huggins went to Collins, who wasn't any better. When it got to 10-3, the Kid figured he had it wrapped up enough that he sent me out to center for Hap, who's been aching.

Coming out of the Yankee series, we looked well-positioned for a move. "Jake," the guys say. The Yanks were going to Cleveland in a week, while we had Boston, Washington and Detroit coming in. So I blew off Cruisenberry. After the way we looked against Barrow, though, I'm not so sure. That wasn't big league ball Jackson and the Swede were playing. Eddie and Lefty looked good mostly, but they blew up at the key moments. Then again, I didn't help much, either. We won two of the four, but we should have won them all.

Other than the one inning in the opener they hardly touched Eddie. But he let them have four hits in the third, and that turned out to be three runs, which was enough with Jones working for them. About Shoeless, well, I wouldn't say this to his face, and perhaps it was an accident. But if the fix was in he fixed it properly, and nobody could say for sure that he did. Jones was sailing along in the sixth - we'd get some hits but he'd get out of the spots somehow - when the general tagged into one and sent it out past Menosky to the wall in left-center. That should have been three bases easily. But Joe wasn't looking where he was going rounding first - or maybe he was - and he ran plumb into McInnis. Joe beefed with Hildebrand about interference, but Hildebrand said it was as much Joe's fault as Stuffy's so he didn't give him more than he got, which was second.

I was next up and I got hold of one out to right. It would have scored Joe from third, but since he wasn't on third we didn't get the run.

Lefty came out the next day and was even better than Eddie, at least until the seventh. He'd given the Sox no base runners through six and we led 2-0, and you haven't seen a finer mix of shoots and fastballs. But Vitt tagged him for one that got between me and Leibold for two bases to start the seventh, and from there Lefty's balloon went up. They got two off him in the seventh and another in the eighth, so the run we got in the

seventh only kept the game tied into the tenth. Kerr had replaced Lefty by this time, and darned if that little SOB didn't decide to win it himself with a hit that sent Shano home. I didn't help much myself - nothing in four cuts.

This, however, was not the case on Saturday with poor Faber working. We were up 1-0 in the second when McInnis pasted one past me for three. He wouldn't have scored except that Risberg heaved one over Shano's head at first on an easy play to end the inning. We got that one back in the third, but Schang decided he was Ruth in the sixth, then Boston went ahead in the eighth. A base on balls, a couple of wild pitches by Faber and a boot by Risberg gave Harper insurance in the ninth. Again I didn't contribute, so even though you could have laid two runs right on Swede I personally am in no position to do so. Hap came back on Sunday and took Pennock out in the fourth, and that is all Kerr needed, so we won 2-0.

We looked fishy there, but not so with Washington. We knocked them off four straight, and the only close one goes to us 4-3 in 10 when Buck and Joe got the big hits. Detroit came in for three over the weekend. After we split the first two you saw what happened today. You can't bat a guy around much more than we batted around Dutch Leonard. I'd say 10 runs and 18 hits was a pretty fair licking. This time it's the Swede doing a Ruth

impression. Jackson tripled, Hap hit two doubles and with Eddie pitching it is hard to see Cleveland holding us off.

The talk on the walk between the rooming house and ballpark is not about whether the games are square, but about whether we will win again. The talk is about Faber's spitter and Cicotte's knuckler. If you pass a pickup game, one of the kids is always swinging Black Betsy - that's what the General calls his bat -- or getting into a fight over who gets to be Eddie Collins. On the corners you can see guys looking for action, and from what I pick up the action is with the White Sox, and I take that as a good sign. These guys, at least, haven't been told the fix is in.

We were in the parlor the other night having a quiet time, smoking, reading and being at ease when the fellow who got the rush from his wife piped up. "You guys are going back East next week," he said.

"Philly first, then Washington and then into New York," I nodded.

"We finish up in Boston. Home the first part of September."

"Well, Philly ain't no good and Washington neither without Johnson." The latter is a reference to the great Walter Johnson, who went out with a sore arm the first part of July.

"I don't miss him," I said. "Never hit his truck worth two cents."

"Over to New York then?"

"New York for three and the Boston for four. It's our last trip there. They all got one more in here next month, and as close as things are the games with New York might be the show."

"I take it you don't think Cleveland can hang on, then, Mr. Strunk?"

"Well, they never have as long as I've been in the league. That's all I know."

I never heard the guys talk baseball before, so the questions have me curious. "Are you a fan?" I said.

"Only an occasional one," he said. "I went to several games during the war...not much since then."

That surprised me because almost nobody went to the games during the war. A lot of the players were in the Army, and a lot of the rest were working the factories and shipyards. So were the spectators. Against the war, folks thought ball-playing was frivolous, so even the people who could show up didn't.

Attendance fell off so much they took a month off the season in 1918.

"I saw you play once, Mr. Strunk."

"When?"

"The Series."

I sure remembered the Series. Barrow thought Tilly Walker was losing it after Tilly hit .250 in 1917, so he brought me in and shipped Tilly over to the A's a few days later. Damndest way things work: Tilly came back and hit nearly .300 for Mr. Mack, and I hit .257 for Barrow...but we won and Tilly's team finished last. So we played the Cubs in the Series. Beat them in six games. No thanks to me: I was four for 23.

"It was the first game," the guy said. "Ruth vs. Hippo Vaughn. You don't forget matchups like that. You were in center for the Sox."

I certainly recalled the first game. Shean led off the fourth by getting a walk. In a scoreless game between the best pitcher in the National League and the best pitcher in the American, my job was simple: move him over. I bunted and popped it straight up to Vaughn. He hardly had to move. We might still be playing except

Whitehead came up after me and ran one off Hollocher's glove, then McInnis socked a clean hit that scored him. So we end up winning 1-0.

"What got you interested in baseball?" I asked.

"Business," he says. "At the time I was traveling the circuit, selling flags, music and patriotic stuff. Lots of demand for it during the war. Especially at fairs and at the ballparks.

I remembered that part, too. Before some of the games, we'd be issued wooden rifles and they'd have us form ranks and march around the field, just like soldiers. Ban Johnson's orders. He thought it made us look more soldierly.

"You the one who supplied those American flag patches we wore?" I asked the guy.

"Those and the rifles and the music for the Star Spangled Banner, too."

The Banner...Ban decided the right thing to do given the war and all was to play it before each of the games. So we'd all take the field and there'd be a band - maybe from one of the high schools - and just before the first pitch they'd play: "Oh say can you see, by the dawn's early light. What so proudly we hailed, by the

twilight's last gleaming..." I'd heard it 200 times. You're standing there, trying to focus on the first batter, and all you can hear is "Oh say can you see..."

"I made good money selling the sheet music to that song, Mr. Strunk," the guy said. "Broke my heart when they quit playing it after the war ended."

"Not mine," I told him. "You'd get out there, you were all warmed up and ready, then they'd go through the darned music and all you could do was stand there stiff. At least with the marching you could get loose."

"All I know is I had a lot better living when I could sell those patches and that sheet music. Since they cut out the Star Spangled Banner, well...I guess all you need to say is I'm living here."

"So you soured on baseball because they stopped playing the Anthem because the war ended?"

"I still go once in a great while," he said. "For the sport of it. You know, to put a dollar or two down."

"Just a dollar?"

"Just a dollar."

"How do you do?"

"Like everybody...I win some and I lose some," he said. "The wife said I was too big a sport. Maybe that's part of the reason why I'm here and not home, I suppose."

It wasn't any of my business, and I don't know why I wanted to know...but I did. "You take a hit on the Series last year?"

"Fifty, yeah. I could afford it. Well I thought I could...then I needed a new place to stay and that fifty would have come in handy. " He shook his head and shut up, but only for a few seconds. Then...

"Can't see how the Reds could have done that to Williams and Cicotte, Mr. Strunk. You been around a while. You got any theories."

"Maybe when I see Williams and Cicotte tomorrow I'll ask them."

"It doesn't matter," the fellow says. "But I don't want any upsets on your road trip. I got a dollar down with a friend on the games in New York and Boston. I'd probably bet the Philly and

Washington series, too," he says. "But you know how hard it is to get anybody to take them two."

"Just a dollar?" I said.

"A dollar a game yeah. Is that OK with you?"

"You do what you want, Mister," I says. "But if I was you I wouldn't go overboard."

The man from the university at this point emerges from the depths of the Tribune. "You have the better talent, Mr. Strunk, do you not?" he asks.

"Yeah," I said, "we have the better talent."

"Then it should be a simple matter," the genius responds. "In any competition, assuming equal and consistent effort," talent is the most likely determinant influencing the outcome. His wager should be a cinch."

"Assuming effort," I nod. "Only the league does not pay off on assumptions. Sometimes those chuckleheads are throwing curveballs out there, you know." He may not have caught on that I was not necessarily talking about only the pitchers.

Having said that, I confess that I believe the fellow has things pretty well doped and will probably collect. We board the train for Philly after the last game of the series here with the best team...as I see it anyway. The Indians are ripe for a fall. They took a pounding in that series with the Yanks, and now they have to go to New York starting Monday. They've lost five of their last six, all of them at home, and the only game they won was a kid nobody ever heard of. With us beating Washington and Detroit, we're basically tied for first now and the issue as I see it isn't whether we can catch Cleveland but whether we can hold off the Yanks. The Kid has told me I will be playing more and I am ready. With the White Sox, of course, all of this will not be the subject of in-depth conversation in the lounge car of the train. So I pack a book as well, and plenty of paper to write letters home to Ethel.

There are only two things that worry me.

The first is the way the way the Baboon is hitting.

The second is assuming what the genius calls "equal and consistent effort." This principle may be true in college, but it does not necessarily apply to the White Sox. And neither the league nor, I am told, the gamblers pay off on assumptions.