

# The Infant Swatigy

(New York)

I love the Infant.

I'm not a crowd of one in that regard. Shea makes sure his clothes are pressed and his camel's hair coat is cleaned and his shoes shined - his street shoes and his playing shoes both. The Infant likes to be seen looking good and nobody looks better leaving the clubhouse either for the field or the town. Shea makes sure of that because the Infant's a good tipper, and the Infant doesn't carry anything smaller than twenties.

Outside the Grounds, there are always kids looking for autographs or wanting to shake hands and say they met the Babe. Cahalane makes sure they don't get too close for too long. Officially Cahalane works for the city, but he and his boys are also the Infant's private security force. If things ever get too close, Cahalane just motions over a couple of his boys and they show the billy clubs and say, "OK kids, that's enough." The kids might say, "Aw, c'mon, Babe" but they leave so they can be back tomorrow. Then Cahalane makes sure the Infant gets into the right hack with the right driver; the one who knows just where the Infant wants to go and how to get there. Cahalane loves the Infant, too.

Blackie cleans the trash in the locker. The Infant has no bigger fan than Blackie, who tells me he makes a grand or two a week out of the Infant's trash. I've seen Baby Grand open his mail so I know this to be true. He'll get two or three letters a day from companies that want him to endorse this or that, and as often as not they'll send a check along. Two, three hundred bucks, maybe five-hundred. I've seen it happen plenty. He pitches them; he can't even count the money he's got. So Blackie cleans out the trash, saves the checks and takes them to the Babe, who signs them over to him. "Have yourself a night," he'll say, and Blackie will.

The hack driver's his biggest fan. I've seen him a few times...looks like a Brooklyn guy. Cabbies and Brooklyn guys are both good talkers, except not this bird. He's got what we in the word business call discretion, which means whether it's a big Midtown joint or some dame's apartment, he can get the Babe there with the proper amount of notice. That could be anywhere from a big public fuss if it's a Midtown joint to none if it's a dame's place.

The other Yankees? You bet they love him. Why wouldn't they; he's making them rich, too. How big a deal do you think Duffy Lewis is these days without the Bazoo? Pipp, Peck and Pratt? Mays? Bob the

Gob? If they cash World Series checks this year, the Infant may as well sign them, and they all know it.

Same goes except bigger for Ruppert and Huston. They're pulling 40,000 to the Grounds each game and getting richer than either one of them ever dreamed, and that's after the feds shut down the brewery. The town is so nuts about the Yanks that McGraw's even getting' pushed off the back pages of the tabloids. They can't print newspapers fast enough, which makes Cobb and the other bigwigs down at the World happy. And which in turn makes me happy.

I wouldn't have given you a nickel for that prospect a year ago. Not that the World ain't already the biggest paper in town. Folks thought when old Pulitzer died things would fall apart on Park Row. But they didn't reckon on Frank Cobb coming in and bringing Lippmann and Anderson for the opinion page, Gavin to run sports and -- I don't mind saying it -- me and Igoe to nab the baseball fans. The problem was once the season ended Lippmann and Anderson still had plenty to do, but there wasn't much for Hype and me except the police beat. And the second problem was when the Sox went in the tank to the money boys. That meant suddenly my living didn't look as robust because you couldn't ask people to be interested in a game that isn't played on the square. And if the folks don't want to buy the papers to read my stuff because they

don't care about the games, then Gavin and Cobb's not gonna want to pay me.

Yeah, some of the games have been crooked. They can't prove it, but you can still believe your eyes. You walk around the stinking Ansonia, you see enough. You hang around the clubhouses, you hear enough talk. I come up with Chase and Herzog so I've seen it done. But whatever I've seen or think doesn't mean beans. It's what the fans see and think that counts, and by the Series last year the fans had pretty much come to the same conclusion. The smell was rotten, and they were ready to stay away. They'd still be staying away and Ruppert and Huston and the other owners wouldn't be selling tickets and Shea wouldn't be making tips and Blackie wouldn't be cashing checks and there wouldn't be crowds for Cahalane to control so he'd be working a Queens precinct and most importantly nobody'd be buying The World for the scores. As a consequence of which my boss would think I was a very small shot indeed.

Then Frazee's play went bust and Huston and Ruppert sent their beer money to the rescue and the Infant came this way and all is beautifully right with the world. It was January and it was cold and snowy but what's \$125,000 and snow against the prospect of a Bazoo wallop? For that matter, what's a bunch of gamblers and crooked players? If Ruth's playing it, the game must be square.

That's not logic but it is fever and it's the fever that's had this town ever since the season started.

Now all Frank Cobb and Gavin want is more copy so the fans can get their two cents worth and the World can stay the biggest paper in the city. I am happy to oblige. I may be a mere passenger on the Infant's joy ride - me and Shea and Blackie and Cahalane and Pratt and the rest - but it's a lot more fun than having Rothstein calling the shots. Rothstein's boys hit hard, but even he never hit them like the Infant. It is a new age in the game and I am on hand to partake and collect my small portion of the rewards.

This new age officially reaches a crescendo on Thursday, July 15 at the Grounds in the 11th spasm in front of 15,000 fans and an equal number of raindrops. The summer is getting only livelier. The first homer arrived on May 1, and by month's end The Infant has pounded 12, which happens to be the record for that span. Then to leave no doubt he hits 12 more in June so he now has the record for a month with an encore. This of course occurs to enthusiasm such that even Cahalane has never seen. Crowds of 15,000 in April have become 20,000 in May and 30,000 in June. It would be 30,000 again except there are too many people in the city still possessed of the good sense to determine that it is possible to see the Infant on a drier day.

We oughtn't even still be at the Grounds when it happens because Mays stunk and Thormahlen wasn't much better, so the Browns score 10. But inasmuch as stinking is a shared condition among St. Louis pitchers as well, 10 runs will not be enough for either team.

By the 11<sup>th</sup> inning, St. Louis has only Burwell, which is saying the minimum. He's 25, a kid out of Kansas pitching for the first time in New York so you know he's carrying a load in his drawers and lays one into Ward, who takes it right through Smith's legs into left. Hug wants Pipp to give himself up, but Burwell has his own plan, and it involves figuring out the quickest way to get out of there and go back to the hotel. So Pipp bunts and Burwell fields the ball and sits down and has a good rest while the birds are both safe. Which brings the Infant to the plate. Burke comes out and wants to talk to Burwell, like anything Burke says is going to make a difference at this point because they have two choices, they can either walk Ruth and move Ward to third with nobody out for Meusel or pitch to him. So Burke asks Burwell how he prefers to be killed and Burwell says, "I'll pitch to him." It is 3 and 2 when the pitch comes in and then it goes out and the only thing keeping it off the elevated station is a cornice on the roof of the Grounds. And everybody goes home happy. Except possibly Burwell and certainly Burke. And the Infant. The Infant gets in his cab for parts unannounced, but home is not likely to be among them.

Bayne stiffes the Yanks the next day and the Browns leave town to make way for the White Sox, which is all New Yorkers care about anyway. The talk was pretty thick about these birds last October, but it is July and seven of the eight are still here - all but Gandil - so if they did it they got away with it, which is all that counts in the city. I saw Cicotte in the lobby of the stinking Ansonia up on Broadway before the first game. I always enjoy a visit to the stinking Ansonia because none but the finest Cuban cigars are smoked there, creating a pleasant aroma throughout the lobby that covers up even the stench of Rothstein, who is the place's most influential resident. I said, "say hello to Arnold?" but Cicotte didn't think it was funny. You'd think just on those principles Comiskey'd find some different digs for his team on the whole island this year, but he hasn't. So Cicotte and Felsch share a hotel with Arnold and we all wonder whether Risberg's running any messages. Life's rich in irony, haven't you found?

There will be six games in four days and as far as the fans are concerned that means six chances to see Nibs break the record. They do not see it on Saturday although that is the only thing they do not see. The Yanks lead 6-0 off Cicotte by the end of the second and 11-2 by the sixth when Gleason lets Heath and Payne serve as undertakers for the rest of the afternoon. Just how the Babe could live through a ball game in which the Yankees got 21

base hits and not make a home run that would break the world's record is one of the comical things about the alleged game. The way the Sox were throwing one might have picked a fan at random from anywhere in the grandstand or bleachers, and he could have gone out and knocked a four-base hit, but Ruth had five chances to do it and didn't succeed, much to the disappointment of the 30,000.

The only guy madder than the fans and Gleason on Saturday was Bodie, who grabbed exactly none of those 21 hits for himself. But the next afternoon the *mano nera* was laid on the visitors, and it did not take a fingerprint expert to recognize the fine hand of the Wonderful Wop in the doing.

I saw him in the dressing room before the game and the Signor was both aroused and embarrassed by the insult done to his name the previous day. And Bodie aroused is a terrible thing. All Saturday night Ping Bodie had brooded in his lodgings, refusing nourishment, even spaghetti. The hitherto unsullied escutcheon of the Bodies hanging on the ancestral shanty on Telegraph Hill in San Francisco had been dragged in the dirt, kicked in the slats and manhandled generally.

There were two out in the first inning when Pratt got a base on balls. Ruth slapped one out to right field, a short one but they

were playing so far back for him that it went for a double and sent Pratt to third. Meusel drew a base on balls.

"Vendetta," Bodie hissed into the ears of Schalk, the Chicago catcher. "Where can you get one?" asked Schalk, who also was unversed in the language of the Pizzolas.

Thereupon Ping Bodie swung his bat, the ball arcing furiously toward left.

In such moments as these there is no ball player who is more picturesque or supremely interesting than Ping. He started furiously for first, but relaxed into a highly becoming trot when he saw the ball clear the fence and land high in the left field bleachers. He violated no speed laws, and ran in that peculiar manner which bears so striking a resemblance to the waddling of a duck.

With one out in the third inning Ruth drew a base on balls. Meusel cracked one very close to the left field foul line and the ball rolled into Harry Fabian's tarpaulin. Believing that it was foul, one of Harry's grass manicurists picked it up. There was a heated argument, the umpire finally allowing a two-bagger.

"Vendetta," muttered Ping Bodie again as he walked up to the plate. He doubled to center and Ruth scored.

Pipp started the fifth with a base on balls and was forced by Pratt. Ruth bounced a single past short. Meusel hit to center and Pratt and Ruth scored. This brought Ping Bodie again to bat, but the rage that had been boiling was now merely simmering and the Wonderful Wop hit out a mere single, scoring Meusel. That was the end of the vendetta of Ping Bodie, and it was enough. The 34,000 had to make do with the 8-4 victory and three hits by the Infant, none of them rattling any paying customers.

The rattling came on Monday. But first they waited a couple hours more through rain and gloom because although you'd have figured Wilkinson to be generous against Ruth he went the other way and extended courtesies to all others. The Yanks had six runs before they had six outs, but nothing noisesome from the Infant. Kerr opened the second game for Chicago and chose the chicken method in the first, to the objection of the 30,000 in attendance.

Granny has a ditty he recites in the press box at such moments, but the way the Infant is getting walks these days we pretty much got a rhythm going. Since he's the senior guy in name although not in experience, we still let Granny do the first line, then it sort of bounces down Typewriter Row. Usually Igoe picks it up, then Hanna, Robinson, and me to finish it off. If you haven't read it, it goes like this:

Hickory dickory dock,

Babe is the bloke who can sock;  
When they give him a chance  
He can hit one to France,  
Hickory, dickory dock.

Then we all just usually have a good laugh, and a snort if anybody's brought along their flask, which is often the case, and watch to see whether Meusel can drive him around.

Well the wee one may have walked him in the first, but he developed some backbone in the fourth while leading 1-0 with one out and Pipp at first. He went to two and two then tried a curve, and the ball went on one of its excursion trips, followed into the air by a profusion of programs and boaters. As a grand climax the Babe doffed his cap, held it an instant over his head, and smiled his happiest smile as he crossed the plate. He hit another in the ninth, but by this time errors by Shore and Truck had tossed the game away so all it counted for was a 31<sup>st</sup>, and an inconsequential one at that, merely reaching the right field stand and threatening no damage either to the roof or the elevated line.

Some of the security headed up the stands in right in the hope of finding the historic ball, but they didn't have any luck and after a while gave up. After the game, however, a timid little negro approached the Yankee clubhouse, showed a ball he purported

to be the right one and gained entrance. "Ah didn't aim to try to keep de ball, Mistah Babe, but ah jest hadter come an' give it to yo' mah own self. An' ah hoped maybe yo all might let me shake yo' han'," mumbled the dark little being in accents of the sunny Southland. Babe rewarded the little fellow with a handshake, a season pass and a bank note of larger denomination than the youngster dreamed existed.

No. 32 departed in the first game of the Tuesday double-header against Faber, the velocity and trajectory being such that it cleared the ornamentation of the roof of the grandstand by five feet, still shooting upward, and bounded over Manhattan Field. Somebody in the press box said it was picked up in Eighth Avenue, but to do that it would have had to hop a fence, and the Eighth Avenue story seemed like laying it on pretty thick. Straw hats did what straw hats do when the Bazoo clouts one, but what's a \$2 lid compared to a home run? The Yanks should have won that game, too, but Quinn fell apart in the ninth.

The second game - the sixth and last of the series - opened with more rich irony, the Babe meeting Archbishop Mannix of Melbourne, who was Col. Ruppert's guest, at home plate. The archbishop is in town on a world tour that is taking him next to Ireland, assuming the Brits allow such a thing. The archbishop and the Infant make a queer pair, for although the Babe was discovered down at the orphanage in Baltimore by a man of the cloth, and although he

attends Sunday mass to this day, that is generally understood to be the extent of his experience with religion. Afterward, the Babe and the archbishop - neither having gotten a hit off Cicotte -- discussed baseball, or the Irish question, or something. I do not take this as reliable, but according to expert lip readers in the press box this is how the Infant explained his bad game to the interested ecclesiast:

"You see, I've socked these Sox pitchers for three homers the last two games, so no man can keep busting the apple at that rate. This Sykotty's a shineballer, but that don't bother me. It's the law of averages, I guess."

After a game, even one officiated by an archbishop, you could usually find the Yanks (and probably some of the scribes) at one or two of the particular midtown speakeasies. Since Prohibition, these places have become more discreet, but it remains possible to obtain lubrication if one's face is recognizable. It took me until 7 to file, and by then the tables at Dinty Moore's were pretty well lubricated. Hannah, Thormahlen and Duffy Lewis were drinking up Hype's paycheck at one, and all of 'em said 'hi'. I'd known Duffy since his days with Speaker and Hooper up in Boston. Of the three in that outfield, Duffy's probably fallen the furthest. It sure wasn't Speaker; he was hitting .400 and if the Yanks didn't cop this year the Indians were likely to. Hooper was still hitting .300 too, in Boston. He'd won a World Series in '18

while Duffy was off fighting, and on top of all that Duffy'd come back from nearly getting gassed in France to find out Frazee didn't have a job left for him any more. So he signed on as a fill-in with the Yanks, and the best thing he had going for him now was that Hug was beginning to figure out Meusel couldn't play third or left or much of any place, and that made old Duff useful. Especially if the Yanks stayed in it.

I was gonna chew with those guys but I saw Mays back over into a corner just by himself. Mays ain't by no stretch the life of the party, but he's a savvy bird. You'd see the other guys out on the street, but Mays had his own place by the Polo Grounds. Him and his wife was due any day now and they liked to keep their own company up there, so if I didn't get him now there was no telling when the next time might be. Plus he was supposed to open against the Indians tomorrow and I figured if anybody could dope out the race it'd be him.

Most of the boys said there was a hard edge to Mays, and the writers generally agreed. I don't know where it come from, but you don't have to have your eyes open very far to see it. He was 23 and wet when the Sox brought him up in '15, just to give him a taste in the race, and it didn't take much. He won 18 games in '16, 43 more in '17 and '18, then in the '18 Series he beat the Cubs twice. That's all it took in '18 - Mays twice and the Babe twice and Boston was champs. Babe gets all the credit because he

flung them shutouts, but Mays beat them 2-1 twice, including the last game, and he only gave them 10 hits total.

Just looking at that Boston team you'd guess they'd win a bunch more. But then hell broke loose, and Mays was in the middle of it. There was the game in May when he threw a baseball at Bryan Hayes. You could look Bryan Hayes up all day in the Reach Guide and never find him because Bryan Hayes doesn't play baseball. He was a fan sitting behind the Yanks' dugout, and he committed the offense of banging on the tin roof of the dugout at Connie Mack and disturbing Mays' nap or something. For which Mays dusted off Bryan Hayes with his best fastball. Hit him in the boater, busted it up and rattled him, too. Hayes wanted to press assault charges, but Connie talked him out of it.

Then Mays got pissed at Barry for making errors and raised hell with Barrow about it. Mays made Barrow pick between his ace pitcher and his old second baseman, and soon enough Barry didn't have a job. Word was Mays didn't have friends even before then, but that didn't make it any better. They stole his glove in Detroit, then in Chicago he left the team...just up and quit in the middle of the game. "I ain't playin' for those guys no more; they can't even field," he said. Any decent team would have suspended Mays, which is what Ban Johnson wanted them to do. But Frazee saw a chance to make a buck, so he sold Mays to the Yanks instead.

Frazees never has been a man to stand on principle when there was a dollar to be made.

Ruth was next to go, and now the talk is Bush, Hoyt, Jones and Pennock may follow before the year's out. Well, Ruppert and Huston between them have the money, and they'll have even more so long as people keep violating Prohibition. I figure if they lose those arms on top of Mays and then on top of losing the Babe it may be a couple years before the Red Sox are champs again.

There were plenty of hitters who thought if Ban was going to outlaw the spitter, he ought to outlaw that submarine pitch too. Mays couldn't control it, they'd say. They always seemed pretty thin and considering Mays was usually around two and a half walks every time out it looked to me like he could put the ball pretty much where he pleased to. I think what really got them was that sometimes it looked like Mays was a little too willing to put it up and under somebody's hat. That and the hike he took on Boston. The Sox figured when Carl skipped he took their chance at another pennant with him, although considering they finished 20 games up the track last year the Red Sox weren't going to catch Chicago no matter if Mays had stayed and pitched all summer.

"Whadya think of Cox?" he says as I pull up a chair. The World likes Cox and the League both, but the truth is Cox has as much chance against Harding as the A's do of catching the pack this

year. We proceed to settle the suffrage question, which leaves only the pennant race, and to wit the Indians tomorrow. I lit one up and Mays did the same.

"Four games...where we're at we need at least three," he says. But he's got the first game doped.

"Jamieson's hot, so go with shoots away and try to get him to hit it to Peck. Chapman's tough and he don't back off. Him you got to challenge so I start him up and in and then maybe I can slip somethin' away. If not I go up and in again. Speaker's just a sumbitch. If you can get Smith to pull at one off the plate he'll hit it to Pratt all day. But if you miss he's Ruth.

"I never try to strike out Gardner, just it keep it down. Johnston's the other way; he can't handle the riser so him I pitch like Chapman, work him up in his eyes. You can get Wambsganss and O'Neill with your good stuff if you're on. Don't mess with 'em. If you ain't on, you got problems...so be on."

Now, I says, all you got to do is pitch the game you're talking. This does not perturb Mays. "I always do that," he says. Mays is 13-7 on the season so this does not qualify as bragging.

As we sit, the Yanks are one and a half in back of the Indians, and they lead the Sox by four, and I am curious which one Mays

thinks is the bigger threat to New York. To this question, however, he puzzles and chews and puzzles and chews, none of which ingests an answer.

"Chicago's got the better players," he says, "only sometimes the better players don't win, if you know what I mean."

Everybody who has been around knows what he means. "You think the gamblers won't let them win?"

"They might. Depends on whether they decide they can make more money with the Sox winnin' or losin'. But that's the thing that makes the Sox so great," he says.

I confess he has lost me.

"Don't you see? If you're a gambler, you can't play Cleveland along game-to-game, even if you had 'em in your pocket, because they ain't good enough. You might want 'em to win, but they'd go out and play their best and still get beat. Now us, we're good enough, only we ain't in the bag. Huston and Ruppert pay us pretty well, and the Babe's happy, so that kills it right there because a three year old knows you can't fix the Yanks without fixin' the Babe. Plus which I guess the gamblers want to leave the home town team alone, so we don't see 'em much. Nope, only Chicago's good enough to let the rich boys decide before the game

starts whether they want the Sox to win or lose, and then they go out and make it happen.

"That," says Mays, "takes real talent."

"Were they clean against you guys this week?" I asked.

"Yeah," he said, and since there ain't no hesitation I can tell that he is sure. "First, they left town further out than when they got here, which ain't the way you fix a race in July. You see the trick now is to just hang around...creep up within a couple, win when you need to, lose when the odds are right, don't get too far out front or too far behind."

To me Mays sounds as if he knows more about the subject than a respectable hurler ought to let on. "I been approached," he said. "Not this year. Let's just say a couple small-timers felt me out in Boston a couple years ago."

"What did you tell them?"

"I told 'em to get lost quick or I was gonna kill 'em," he says, pausing to dispatch a perfect ring of cigar smoke into the atmosphere. "Ain't seen 'em since."

Mays figured if the rich boys had their hands in the Sox, they were even more nervous this week than possibly when their minions approached him. "They're five and a half back, and yeah, you can make a few bucks fixin' a regular game, but if you want the big score you got to be workin' a contender," he says. Even so, he thinks there could be a dump this week when the Sox go to Boston and Detroit. "Odds are nobody's gonna notice, see?" he said. "Do it here and the whole world gets hinky about it."

This may be the most eloquent thing spoken by a pitcher in years because the Sox may have just fled town with only two wins, but they also nabbed the biggest bundle of greenbacks any visiting baseball team has ever corralled in New York or any other place. In the four days' play more than 125,000 persons saw them. But as Mays had said they also left town 5 and a half back of Cleveland. They were going to Boston, which if Mays was right might make for some interesting play.

The Yanks only trailed the Indians by one and a half, and with four here my guess was they'd be on top by the weekend.

Half my cigar remained. I left the stub in the ash tray in the event the booth's next occupant desired it, and graciously let Mays pick up the check.