

# **Life is Only a Game Baseball is Serious**

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**Cover Image: Babe Ruth, Boston Red Sox, 1916**

Love of baseball has prompted many people to do strange and unexpected things. Michael Jordan, at age 30, was the biggest star in basketball. He had just led the Chicago Bulls to their third straight NBA title when he suddenly quit the team in 1994 to play low level minor league baseball. His salary plunged from millions of dollars to about a thousand dollars a month while toiling in the outfield for Terry Francona's Birmingham Barons.

Exactly 99 years before Jordan, in 1895, young Doctor Pearl Gray took a similar flyer. He abandoned his dental practice for a shot at hardball, the game that was rapidly becoming America's favorite pastime.

The name Pearl Gray is probably not familiar to anyone living in the 2000s, but when he changed it to Zane Grey and started writing books, he became one of the most successful authors of the 1900s. It's said that he may have been the first millionaire author. If he wasn't the first, he was certainly one of the first.

When Pearl Gray was a youngster, long before the Yankees, Red Sox and Dodgers ruled baseball; the Providence Grays were the kings of the diamond. The Rhode Island team won the first World Series in 1884 beating the New York Mets (Metropolitans).

The Grays were led by 'Old Hoss' Radbourne who set a pitching record that season which will never be equaled. He won 60 games! Sixty victories! He did it by doing the work of two twirlers. For a small increase in pay, he agreed to pitch all of the team's remaining matches after the Grays other star hurler Charlie Sweeney deserted the club in July and jumped to a rival league.

Pearl Zane Gray who wrote the seminal western, Riders of the Purple Sage, and dozens of other best sellers, wanted nothing more than to play professional baseball. He spent three years in hopeless pursuit of landing a spot anywhere – even on the lowest rungs of the baseball ladder.

If you Google Zane Gray, you will probably notice that his name is usually spelled with an “E” instead of an “A”. The fact is that the family name was “Gray” with an “A”, and when Zane was born, his parents named him Pearl Gray. They later changed their last name to Grey with an “E”, but they did not change Pearl’s first name.

From the beginning he was a rowdy little brawler and hated having a girl’s name. As soon as he could, he shed himself of it and began calling himself by his middle name, Zane – which was the last name of his great grandfather who founded Zanesville, Ohio.

Always a lover of sports Zane sought a baseball scholarship to the University of Pennsylvania. The Ivy League school said they might be willing to admit him for gratis if he could prove his worth as a ballplayer.

Given a chance to show his stuff in a game against Riverton, Gray threw five scoreless innings featuring a deadly, dropping curve ball. He also doubled home the winning run in the tenth inning. He got his scholarship and degree about 10 years after the Grays won the first World Series.

By then the once mighty Providence ballclub, which won the National League Pennant in 1879 and 1884, had gone bust as a major league team and was reduced to being a Triple A minor league organization.

As a child, Zane Gray marveled at the achievements of the Grays. In 1884 not only did Radbourne win 60 games, but the National League kings also ran off a string of 20 straight wins. In August the club set another all time record – the biggest scoring party in history, a 28 to 0 whitewashing of the Philadelphia Phillies.

Also during their reign, the Grays recorded the second perfect game in history, a masterpiece by John Montgomery Ward in 1880.

Grays pitcher Charlie Sweeney struck out 19 batters in a single game early in the 1884 season before he defected. His mark of 19 punchouts stood for 102 years until Roger, the Rocket, Clemens of the Boston Red Sox fanned 20.

Zane Gray never did make the roster of the Providence Grays but it was not for lack of effort. He desperately wanted a baseball career and tried out for several minor league teams.

His first chance was in 1895 with a team his brother Reddy was playing for, the Jaxon Jaxes, a low level Class B team in Michigan.

Gray had the bad luck of trying to pitch professionally in the very first year the pitching mound was moved ten feet further back from home plate. The distance was changed from 50 feet six inches to 60 feet ten inches.

The switch was made primarily to reduce the effectiveness of baseball's top pitcher Cy Young of the Cleveland Spiders. The future hall of famer and the man who gave his name to the Cy Young award, had 34 wins in 1893 and 26 in 94. So with the ten foot increase in pitching distance, how did Cy Young do in 1895? The big six foot two, 220 pound ace won 35 games!

Young was too big and too strong to be hurt by the change. There were no radar guns in the 1890s to gage how fast the rugged right-hander threw but there was one undeniable yardstick that proved his supreme velocity – “the Beefsteak Pad”.

Jack “Peach Pie” O’Connor, the Spiders regular catcher from 1892 to 1898 told reporters that before every game, to avoid injury from Young’s heater, he put a thick, juicy slab of beefsteak in his glove as a protector pad.

“By the end of the game that broad hunk of meat was reduced to the thickness of a hair! It looked like a tiny brown paper square! There’s nobody else in baseball who throws so hard that a catcher needs that kind of padding in his glove.”

While Cy Young was not hampered by the ten foot increase, the effectiveness of many pitchers, including Zane Gray, was greatly reduced.

When Zane tried out for the Jaxes, his sharply dropping curve ball that was so effective in the Ivy League, began dropping to the ground long before it ever reached the waiting glove of the catcher.

Zane was quickly let go by the Michigan team, but his brother Reddy managed a fairly successful career and even reached the major leagues for a one game ‘cup of coffee’ with the Pittsburg Pirates.

Undaunted, Zane tried out for the Findlay Sluggers in the Interstate League. He didn't last long enough to even get his name listed in a box score.

Three years later, In 1898, Gray had his last shot at pro ball with the Newark, New Jersey Colts of the Atlantic League. His dropping curve ball could not be relied upon, so he switched to the outfield.

A good hitter in the Ivy League, Gray thought he might be able to salvage his career with his bat instead of his arm. Once again, he failed to stick with the ball club and was forced to go back to his 'day job' of performing dentistry as Doctor Zane Gray (aka Grey).

During his working hours, at every chance, Dr. Gray thumbed through copies of every newspaper he could get his hands on. He followed the New York teams, where his office was located. He also was interested in the Pittsburg Pirates, Philadelphia Phillies, Boston Red Sox and Boston Braves. But most of all, he still tracked his favorite club, Providence.

Even as a minor league ball club the Grays were electrifying Rhode Island. In 1914, with a young rookie pitcher named Babe Ruth (on loan from the parent club, the Red Sox) the Grays won the International League Championship. The Babe had a combined minor league record of record of 23 and 8. He played some games for the Baltimore club before being traded to the Red Sox and assigned to Providence. The 'Bambino' finished the season with the Red Sox and had a record of 2 and 1, giving him a total yield of 25 wins and just nine defeats in his first professional season.

He also demonstrated his prowess as a batter by slugging ten triples in about 40 games. They were huge blasts that today would be called home runs. Due to an early quirk in the rules, some hits that sailed over certain fences were called 'ground rule triples'.

Though people in Providence noticed him, Massachusetts fans were too busy watching the Boston Braves. The Red Sox finished in second place where they had been all season; but the Boston Braves, mired in last place in July, surged all the way to first and went on to win the 1914 World Series as the "Miracle Braves".

Doctor Gray didn't much like dentistry, and soon began writing stories to relieve the boredom that plagued him. His fame was as a western writer, but also wrote a number of baseball stories.

Using his brother Reddy as well as his own brief playing days for inspiration he came up with a collection of baseball yarns called, "The Redheaded Outfield and other baseball stories".

Here's the title story of the book - It's a 5,000 word short tale about the fictional Rochester Stars minor league team in a 1920 game against the real Providence Grays.

The tale begins with an introduction of the three outfielders of the Stars, all named Red: Here is the original work as published in the very early 1900s.

### **The Red Headed Outfield**

**by Zane Grey**

**There was Delaney's red-haired trio—Red Gilbat, left fielder; Reddy Clammer, right fielder, and Reddie Ray, center fielder, composing the most remarkable outfield ever developed in minor league baseball. It was Delaney's pride, as it was also his trouble.**

Red Gilbat was nutty--and his batting average was .371. Any student of baseball could weigh these two facts against each other and understand something of Delaney's trouble. It was not possible to camp on Red Gilbat's trail. The man was a jack-o'-lantern, a will-o'-the-wisp, a weird, long-legged, long-armed, red-haired phantom. When the gong rang at the ball grounds there were ten chances to one that Red would not be present. He had been discovered with small boys peeping through knotholes at the vacant left field he was supposed to inhabit during play.

Of course what Red did off the ball grounds was not so important as what he did on. And there was absolutely no telling what under the sun he might do then except once out of every three times at bat he could be counted on to knock the cover off the ball.

Reddy Clammer was a grand-stand player--the kind all managers hated--and he was hitting .305. He made circus catches, circus stops, circus throws, circus steals--but particularly circus catches. That is to say, he made easy plays appear difficult. He was always strutting, posing, talking, arguing, quarreling--when he was not engaged in making a grand-stand play. Reddy Clammer used every possible incident and artifice to bring himself into the limelight.

Reddie Ray had been the intercollegiate champion in the sprints and a famous college ball player. After a few months of professional ball he was hitting over .400 and leading the league both at bat and on the bases. It was a beautiful and a thrilling sight to see him run. He was so quick to start, so marvelously swift, so keen of judgment, that neither Delaney nor any player could ever tell the hit that he was not going to get. That was why Reddie Ray was a whole game in himself.

Delaney's Rochester Stars and the Providence Grays were tied for first place. Of the present series each team had won a game. Rivalry had always been keen, and as the teams were about to enter the long homestretch for the pennant there was battle in the New England air.

The September day was perfect. The stands were half full and the bleachers packed with a white-sleeved mass. And the field was beautifully level and green. The Grays were practicing and the Stars were on their bench.

``We're up against it," Delaney was saying. ``This new umpire, Fuller, hasn't got it in for us. Oh, no, not at all! Believe me, he's a robber. But Scott is pitchin' well. Won his last three games. He'll bother 'em. And the three Reds have broken loose. They're on the rampage. They'll burn up this place today.''

Somebody noted the absence of Gilbat.

Delaney gave a sudden start. ``Why, Gil was here," he said slowly. ``Lord!--he's about due for a nutty stunt."

Whereupon Delaney sent boys and players scurrying about to find Gilbat, and Delaney went himself to ask the Providence manager to hold back the gong for a few minutes.

Presently somebody brought Delaney a telephone message that Red Gilbat was playing ball with some boys in a lot four blocks down the street. When at length a couple of players marched up to the bench with Red in tow Delaney uttered an immense sigh of relief and then, after a close scrutiny of Red's face, he whispered, ``Lock the gates!"

Then the gong rang. The Grays trooped in. The Stars ran out, except Gilbat, who ambled like a giraffe. The hum of conversation in the grand stand quickened for a moment with the scraping of chairs, and then grew quiet. The bleachers sent up the rollicking cry of expectancy. The umpire threw out a white ball with his stentorian ``Play!" and Blake of the Grays strode to the plate.

Hitting safely, he started the game with a rush. With Dorr up, the Star infield played for a bunt. Like clockwork Dorr dumped the first ball as Blake got his flying start for second base. Morrissey tore in for the ball, got it on the run and snapped it underhand to Healy, beating the runner by an inch. The fast Blake, with a long slide, made third base. The stands stamped. The bleachers howled. White, next man up, batted a high fly to left field. This was a sun field and the hardest to play in the league. Red Gilbat was the only man who ever played it well. He judged the fly, waited under it, took a step hack, then forward, and deliberately caught the ball in his gloved hand. A throw-in to catch the runner scoring from third base would have been futile, but it was not like Red Gilbat to fail to try. He tossed the ball to O'Brien. And Blake scored amid applause.

``What do you know about that?" ejaculated Delaney, wiping his moist face. ``I never before saw our nutty Redhead pull off a play like that."

Some of the players yelled at Red, ``This is a two-handed league, you bat!''

The first five players on the list for the Grays were left-handed batters, and against a right-handed pitcher whose most effective ball for them was a high fast one over the outer corner they would naturally hit toward left field. It was no surprise to see Hanley bat a skyscraper out to left. Red had to run to get under it. He braced himself rather unusually for a fielder. He tried to catch the ball in his bare right hand and muffed it, Hanley got to second on the play while the audience roared. When they got through there was some roaring among the Rochester players. Scott and Captain Healy roared at Red, and Red roared back at them.

``It's all off. Red never did that before," cried Delaney in despair. ``He's gone clean bughouse now."

Babcock was the next man up and he likewise hit to left. It was a low, twisting ball--half fly, half liner--and a difficult one to field. Gilbat ran with great bounds, and though he might have got two hands on the ball he did not try, but this time caught it in his right, retiring the side.

The Stars trotted in, Scott and Healy and Kane, all veterans, looking like thunderclouds. Red ambled in the last and he seemed very nonchalant.

``By Gosh, I'd 'a' ketched that one I muffed if I'd had time to change hands," he said with a grin, and he exposed a handful of peanuts. He had refused to drop the peanuts to make the catch with two hands. That explained the mystery. It was funny, yet nobody laughed. There was that run chalked up against the Stars, and this game had to be won.

``Red, I--I want to take the team home in the lead," said Delaney, and it was plain that he suppressed strong feeling. ``You didn't play the game, you know."

Red appeared mightily ashamed.

``Del, I'll git that run back," he said.

Then he strode to the plate, swinging his wagon-tongue bat. For all his awkward position in the box he looked what he was--a formidable hitter. He seemed to tower over the pitcher--Red was six feet one--and he scowled and shook his bat at Wehying and called, ``Put one over--you wienerwurst!" Wehying was anything but red-headed, and he wasted so many balls on Red that it looked as if he might pass him. He would have passed him, too, if Red had not stepped over on the fourth ball and swung on it. White at second base leaped high for the stinging hit, and failed to reach it. The ball struck and bounded for the fence. When Babcock fielded it in, Red was standing on third base, and the bleachers groaned.

Whereupon Chesty Reddy Clammer proceeded to draw attention to himself, and incidentally delay the game, by assorting the bats as if the audience and the game might gladly wait years to see him make a choice.

``Git in the game!" yelled Delaney.

``Aw, take my bat, Duke of the Abrubsky!" sarcastically said Dump Kane. When the grouchy Kane offered to lend his bat matters were critical in the Star camp.

Other retorts followed, which Reddy Clammer deigned not to notice. At last he got a bat that suited him--and then, importantly, dramatically, with his cap jauntily riding his red locks, he marched to the plate.

Some wag in the bleachers yelled into the silence, ``Oh, Maggie, your lover has come!"

Not improbably Clammer was thinking first of his presence before the multitude, secondly of his batting average and thirdly of the run to be scored. In this instance he waited and feinted at balls and fouled strikes at length to work his base. When he got to first base suddenly he bolted for second, and in the surprise of the unlooked-for play he made it by a spread-eagle slide. It was a circus steal.

Delaney snorted. Then the look of profound disgust vanished in a flash of light. His huge face beamed.

Reddie Ray was striding to the plate.

There was something about Reddie Ray that pleased all the senses. His lithe form seemed instinct with life; any sudden movement was suggestive of stored lightning. His position at the plate was on the left side, and he stood perfectly motionless, with just a hint of tense waiting alertness. Dorr, Blake and Babcock, the outfielders for the Grays, trotted round to the right of their usual position. Delaney smiled derisively, as if he knew how futile it was to tell what field Reddie Ray might hit into. Wehying, the old fox, warily eyed the youngster, and threw him a high curve, close in. It grazed Reddie's shirt, but he never moved a hair. Then Wehying, after the manner of many veteran pitchers when trying out a new and menacing batter, drove a straight fast ball at Reddie's head. Reddie ducked, neither too slow nor too quick, just right to show what an eye he had, how hard it was to pitch to. The next was a strike. And on the next he appeared to step and swing in one action. There was a ringing rap, and the ball shot toward right, curving down, a vicious, headed hit. Mallory, at first base, snatched at it and found only the air. Babcock had only time to take a few sharp steps, and then he plunged down, blocked the hit and fought the twisting ball. Reddie turned first base, flitted on toward second, went headlong in the dust, and shot to the base before White got the throw-in from Babcock. Then, as White wheeled and lined the ball home to catch the scoring Clammer, Reddie Ray leaped up, got his sprinter's start and, like a rocket, was off for third. This time he dove behind the base, sliding in a half circle, and as Hanley caught Strickland's perfect throw and whirled with the ball, Reddie's hand slid to the bag.

Reddie got to his feet amid a rather breathless silence. Even the coachers were quiet. There was a moment of relaxation, then Wehying received the ball from Hanley and faced the batter.

This was Dump Kane. There was a sign of some kind, almost imperceptible, between Kane and Reddie. As Wehying half turned in his swing to pitch, Reddie Ray bounded homeward. It was not so much the boldness of his action as the amazing swiftness of it that held the audience spellbound. Like a thunderbolt Reddie came down the line, almost beating Wehying's pitch to the plate. But Kane's bat intercepted the ball, laying it down, and Reddie

scored without sliding. Dorr, by sharp work, just managed to throw Kane out.

Three runs so quick it was hard to tell how they had come. Not in the major league could there have been faster work. And the ball had been fielded perfectly and thrown perfectly.

``There you are," said Delaney, hoarsely. ``Can you beat it? If you've been wonderin' how the crippled Stars won so many games just put what you've seen in your pipe and smoke it. Red Gilbat gets on--Reddy Clammer gets on--and then Reddie Ray drives them home or chases them home."

The game went on, and though it did not exactly drag it slowed down considerably. Morrissey and Healy were retired on infield plays. And the sides changed. For the Grays, O'Brien made a scratch hit, went to second on Strickland's sacrifice, stole third and scored on Mallory's infield out. Wehying missed three strikes. In the Stars' turn the three end players on the batting list were easily disposed of. In the third inning the clever Blake, aided by a base on balls and a hit following, tied the score, and once more struck fire and brimstone from the impatient bleachers. Providence was a town that had to have its team win.

``Git at 'em, Reds!" said Delaney gruffly.

``Batter up!" called Umpire Fuller, sharply.

``Where's Red? Where's the bug? Where's the nut? Delaney, did you lock the gates? Look under the bench!" These and other remarks, not exactly elegant, attested to the mental processes of some of the Stars. Red Gilbat did not appear to be forthcoming. There was an anxious delay Capt. Healy searched for the missing player. Delaney did not say any more.

Suddenly a door under the grand stand opened and Red Gilbat appeared. He hurried for his bat and then up to the plate. And he never offered to hit one of the balls Wehying shot over. When Fuller had called the third strike Red hurried back to the door and disappeared.

``Somethin' doin'," whispered Delaney.

Lord Chesterfield Clammer paraded to the batter's box and, after gradually surveying the field, as if picking out the exact place he meant to drive the ball, he stepped to the plate. Then a roar from the bleachers surprised him.

``Well, I'll be dog-goned!" exclaimed Delaney. ``Red stole that sure as shootin'."

Red Gilbat was pushing a brand-new baby carriage toward the batter's box. There was a tittering in the grand stand; another roar from the bleachers. Clammer's face turned as red as his hair. Gilbat shoved the baby carriage upon the plate, spread wide his long arms, made a short presentation speech and an elaborate bow, then backed away.

All eyes were centered on Clammer. If he had taken it right the incident might have passed without undue hilarity. But Clammer became absolutely wild with rage. It was well known that he was unmarried. Equally well was it seen that Gilbat had executed one of his famous tricks. Ball players were inclined to be dignified about the presentation of gifts upon the field, and Clammer, the dude, the swell, the lady's man, the favorite of the baseball gods--in his own estimation-- so far lost control of himself that he threw his bat at his retreating tormentor. Red jumped high and the bat skipped along the ground toward the bench. The players sidestepped and leaped and, of course, the bat cracked one of Delaney's big shins. His eyes popped with pain, but he could not stop laughing. One by one the players lay down and rolled over and yelled. The superior Clammer was not overlaked by his co- players.

From the grand stand floated the laughter of ladies and gentlemen. And from the bleachers-- that throne of the biting, ironic, scornful fans-- pealed up a howl of delight. It lasted for a full minute. Then, as quiet ensued, some boy blew a blast of one of those infernal little instruments of pipe and rubber balloon, and over the field wailed out a shrill, high-keyed cry, an excellent imitation of a baby. Whereupon the whole audience roared, and in discomfiture Reddy Clammer went in search of his bat.

To make his chagrin all the worse he ingloriously struck out. And then he strode away under the lea of the grand-stand wall toward right field.

Reddie Ray went to bat and, with the infield playing deep and the outfield swung still farther round to the right, he bunted a little teasing ball down the third-base line. Like a flash of light he had crossed first base before Hanley got his hands on the ball. Then Kane hit into second base, forcing Reddie out.

Again the game assumed less spectacular and more ordinary play. Both Scott and Wehying held the batters safely and allowed no runs. But in the fifth inning, with the Stars at bat and two out, Red Gilbat again electrified the field. He sprang up from somewhere and walked to the plate, his long shape enfolded in a full-length linen duster. The color and style of this garment might not have been especially striking, but upon Red it had a weird and wonderful effect. Evidently Red intended to bat while arrayed in his long coat, for he stepped into the box and faced the pitcher. Capt. Healy yelled for him to take the duster off. Likewise did the Grays yell.

The bleachers shrieked their disapproval. To say the least, Red Gilbat's crazy assurance was dampening to the ardor of the most blindly confident fans. At length Umpire Fuller waved his hand, enjoining silence and calling time.

``Take it off or I'll fine you.''

From his lofty height Gilbat gazed down upon the little umpire, and it was plain what he thought.

``What do I care for money!'' replied Red.

``That costs you twenty-five,'' said Fuller.

``Cigarette change!'' yelled Red.

``Costs you fifty.''

``Bah! Go to an eye doctor," roared Red.

``Seventy-five," added Fuller, imperturbably.

``Make it a hundred!"

``It's two hundred."

``ROB-B-BER!" bawled Red.

Fuller showed willingness to overlook Red's back talk as well as costume, and he called,

``Play!"

There was a mounting sensation of prophetic certainty. Old fox Wehying appeared nervous. He wasted two balls on Red; then he put one over the plate, and then he wasted another. Three balls and one strike! That was a bad place for a pitcher, and with Red Gilbat up it was worse. Wehying swung longer and harder to get all his left behind the throw and let drive. Red lunged and cracked the ball. It went up and up and kept going up and farther out, and as the murmuring audience was slowly transfixed into late realization the ball soared to its height and dropped beyond the left-field fence. A home run!

Red Gilbat gathered up the tails of his duster, after the manner of a neat woman crossing a muddy street, and ambled down to first base and on to second, making prodigious jumps upon the bags, and round third, to come down the home- stretch wagging his red head. Then he stood on the plate, and, as if to exact revenge from the audience for the fun they made of him, he threw back his shoulders and bellowed: ``HAW! HAW! HAW!"

Not a handclap greeted him, but some mindless, exceedingly adventurous fan yelled:

``Redhead! Redhead! Redhead!"

That was the one thing calculated to rouse Red Gilbat. He seemed to flare, to bristle, and he paced for the bleachers.

Delaney looked as if he might have a stroke. ``Grab him! Soak him with a bat! Somebody grab him!"

But none of the Stars was risking so much, and Gilbat, to the howling derision of the gleeful fans, reached the bleachers. He stretched his long arms up to the fence and prepared to vault over. ``Where's the guy who called me redhead?" he yelled.

That was heaping fuel on the fire. From all over the bleachers, from everywhere, came the obnoxious word. Red heaved himself over the fence and piled into the fans.

Then followed the roar of many voices, the tramping of many feet, the pressing forward of line after line of shirt-sleeved men and boys. That bleacher stand suddenly assumed the maelstrom appearance of a surging mob round an agitated center. In a moment all the players rushed down the field, and confusion reigned.

``Oh! Oh! Oh!" moaned Delaney.

However, the game had to go on. Delaney, no doubt, felt all was over. Nevertheless there were games occasionally that seemed an unending series of unprecedented events. This one had begun admirably to break a record. And the Providence fans, like all other fans, had cultivated an appetite as the game proceeded. They were wild to put the other redheads out of the field or at least out for the inning, wild to tie the score, wild to win and wilder than all for more excitement. Clammer hit safely. But when Reddie Ray lined to the second baseman, Clammer, having taken a lead, was doubled up in the play.

Of course, the sixth inning opened with the Stars playing only eight men. There was another delay. Probably everybody except Delaney and perhaps Healy had forgotten the Stars were short a man. Fuller called time. The impatient bleachers barked for action.

Capt. White came over to Delaney and courteously offered to lend a player for the remaining innings. Then a pompous individual came out of the door leading from the press boxes--he

was a director Delaney disliked.

``Guess you'd better let Fuller call the game," he said brusquely.

``If you want to--as the score stands now in our favor," replied Delaney.

``Not on your life! It'll be ours or else we'll play it out and beat you to death."

He departed in high dudgeon.

``Tell Reddie to swing over a little toward left," was Delaney's order to Healy. Fire gleamed in the manager's eye.

Fuller called play then, with Reddy Clammer and Reddie Ray composing the Star outfield. And the Grays evidently prepared to do great execution through the wide lanes thus opened up. At that stage it would not have been like matured ball players to try to crop hits down into the infield.

White sent a long fly back of Clammer. Reddy had no time to loaf on this hit. It was all he could do to reach it and he made a splendid catch, for which the crowd roundly applauded him. That applause was wine to Reddy Clammer. He began to prance on his toes and sing out to Scott: ``Make 'em hit to me, old man! Make 'em hit to me!" Whether Scott desired that or not was scarcely possible to say; at any rate, Hanley pounded a hit through the infield. And Clammer, prancing high in the air like a check-reined horse, ran to intercept the ball. He could have received it in his hands, but that would never have served Reddy Clammer. He timed the hit to a nicety, went down with his old grand-stand play and blocked the ball with his anatomy. Delaney swore. And the bleachers, now warm toward the gallant outfielder, lustily cheered him. Babcock hit down the right-field foul line, giving Clammer a long run. Hanley was scoring and Babcock was sprinting for third base when Reddy got the ball. He had a fine arm and he made a hard and accurate throw, catching his man in a close play.

Perhaps even Delaney could not have found any fault with that play. But the aftermath spoiled

the thing. Clammer now rode the air; he soared; he was in the clouds; it was his inning and he had utterly forgotten his team mates, except inasmuch as they were performing mere little automatic movements to direct the great machinery in his direction for his sole achievement and glory.

There is fate in baseball as well as in other walks of life. O'Brien was a strapping fellow and he lifted another ball into Clammer's wide territory. The hit was of the high and far-away variety. Clammer started to run with it, not like a grim outfielder, but like one thinking of himself, his style, his opportunity, his inevitable success. Certain it was that in thinking of himself the outfielder forgot his surroundings. He ran across the foul line, head up, hair flying, unheeding the warning cry from Healy. And, reaching up to make his crowning circus play, he smashed face forward into the bleachers fence. Then, limp as a rag, he dropped. The audience sent forth a long groan of sympathy.

``That wasn't one of his stage falls," said Delaney. ``I'll bet he's dead. . . . Poor Reddy! And I want him to bust his face!"

Clammer was carried off the field into the dressing room and a physician was summoned out of the audience.

``Cap., what'd it--do to him?" asked Delaney.

``Aw, spoiled his pretty mug, that's all," replied Healy, scornfully. ``Mebee he'll listen to me now."

Delaney's change was characteristic of the man. ``Well, if it didn't kill him I'm blamed glad he got it. . . . Cap, we can trim 'em yet. Reddie Ray'll play the whole outfield. Give Reddie a chance to run! Tell the boy to cut loose. And all of you git in the game. Win or lose, I won't forget it. I've a hunch. Once in a while I can tell what's comin' off. Some queer game this! And we're goin' to win. Gilbat lost the game; Clammer throwed it away again, and now Reddie Ray's due to win it. . . . I'm all in, but I wouldn't miss the finish to save my life."

Delaney's deep presaging sense of baseball events was never put to a greater test. And the seven Stars, with the score tied, exhibited the temper and timber of a championship team in the last ditch. It was so splendid that almost instantly it caught the antagonistic bleachers.

Wherever the tired Scott found renewed strength and speed was a mystery. But he struck out the hard-hitting Providence catcher and that made the third out. The Stars could not score in their half of the inning. Likewise the seventh inning passed without a run for either side; only the infield work of the Stars was something superb. When the eighth inning ended, without a tally for either team, the excitement grew tense. There was Reddy Ray playing outfield alone, and the Grays with all their desperate endeavors had not lifted the ball out of the infield.

But in the ninth, Blake, the first man up, lined low toward right center. The hit was safe and looked good for three bases. No one looking, however, had calculated on Reddie's Ray's fleetness. He covered ground and dove for the bounding ball and knocked it down. Blake did not get beyond first base. The crowd cheered the play equally with the prospect of a run. Dorr bunted and beat the throw. White hit one of the high fast balls Scott was serving and sent it close to the left-field foul line. The running Reddie Ray made on that play held White at second base. But two runs had scored with no one out.

Hanley, the fourth left-handed hitter, came up and Scott pitched to him as he had to the others -- high fast balls over the inside corner of the plate. Reddy Ray's position was some fifty yards behind deep short, and a little toward center field. He stood sideways, facing two-thirds of that vacant outfield. In spite of Scott's skill, Hanley swung the ball far round into right field, but he hit it high, and almost before he actually hit it the great sprinter was speeding across the green.

The suspense grew almost unbearable as the ball soared in its parabolic flight and the red-haired runner streaked dark across the green. The ball seemed never to be coming down. And when it began to descend and reached a point perhaps fifty feet above the ground there appeared more distance between where it would alight and where Reddie was than anything human could cover. It dropped and dropped, and then dropped into Reddie Ray's outstretched hands. He had made the catch look easy. But the fact that White scored from

second base on the play showed what the catch really was.

There was no movement or restlessness of the audience such as usually indicated the beginning of the exodus. Scott struck Babcock out. The game still had fire. The Grays never let up a moment on their coaching. And the hoarse voices of the Stars were grimmer than ever. Reddie Ray was the only one of the seven who kept silent. And he crouched like a tiger.

The teams changed sides with the Grays three runs in the lead. Morrissey, for the Stars, opened with a clean drive to right. Then Healy slashed a ground ball to Hanley and nearly knocked him down. When old Burns, by a hard rap to short, advanced the runners a base and made a desperate, though unsuccessful, effort to reach first the Providence crowd awoke to a strange and inspiring appreciation. They began that most rare feature in baseball audiences-- a strong and trenchant call for the visiting team to win.

The play had gone fast and furious. Wehying, sweaty and disheveled, worked violently. All the Grays were on uneasy tiptoes. And the Stars were seven Indians on the warpath. Halloran fouled down the right-field line; then he fouled over the left-field fence. Wehying tried to make him too anxious, but it was in vain. Halloran was implacable. With two strikes and three balls he hit straight down to white, and was out. The ball had been so sharp that neither runner on base had a chance to advance.

Two men out, two on base, Stars wanting three runs to tie, Scott, a weak batter, at the plate! The situation was disheartening. Yet there sat Delaney, shot through and through with some vital compelling force. He saw only victory. And when the very first ball pitched to Scott hit him on the leg, giving him his base, Delaney got to his feet, unsteady and hoarse.

Bases full, Reddie Ray up, three runs to tie!

Delaney looked at Reddie. And Reddie looked at Delaney. The manager's face was pale, intent, with a little smile. The player had eyes of fire, a lean, bulging jaw and the hands he reached for his bat clutched like talons.

``Reddie, I knew it was waitin' for you," said Delaney, his voice ringing. ``Break up the game!"

After all this was only a baseball game, and perhaps from the fans' viewpoint a poor game at that. But the moment when that lithe, redhaired athlete toed the plate was a beautiful one. The long crash from the bleachers, the steady cheer from the grand stand, proved that it was not so much the game that mattered.

Wehying had shot his bolt; he was tired. Yet he made ready for a final effort. It seemed that passing Reddie Ray on balls would have been a wise play at that juncture. But no pitcher, probably, would have done it with the bases crowded and chances, of course, against the batter.

Clean and swift, Reddie leaped at the first pitched ball. Ping! For a second no one saw the hit. Then it gleamed, a terrific drive, low along the ground, like a bounding bullet, straight at Babcock in right field. It struck his hands and glanced viciously away to roll toward the fence.

Thunder broke loose from the stands. Reddie Ray was turning first base. Beyond first base he got into his wonderful stride. Some runners run with a consistent speed, the best they can make for a given distance. But this trained sprinter gathered speed as he ran. He was no short-stepping runner. His strides were long. They gave an impression of strength combined with fleetness. He had the speed of a race horse, but the trimness, the raciness, the delicate legs were not characteristic of him. Like the wind he turned second, so powerful that his turn was short. All at once there came a difference in his running. It was no longer beautiful. The grace was gone. It was now fierce, violent. His momentum was running him off his legs. He whirled around third base and came hurtling down the homestretch. His face was convulsed, his eyes were wild. His arms and legs worked in a marvelous muscular velocity. He seemed a demon--a flying streak. He overtook and ran down the laboring Scott, who had almost reached the plate.

The park seemed full of shrill, piercing strife. It swelled, reached a highest pitch, sustained that for a long moment, and then declined.

``My Gawd!'' exclaimed Delaney, as he fell back. ``Wasn't that a finish? Didn't I tell you to watch them redheads!''

The End

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So ends The Redheaded Outfield. If you are not a baseball fan you might not have understood the ending. Anybody who wishes to do so is encouraged to leave a review and is welcome to express their opinions on which team won the game and why.

You can also email me if you have a question about the finish. [Billrrrr@yahoo.com](mailto:Billrrrr@yahoo.com)

### **About the Author:**

Bill Russo is the author of *The Creature from the Bridgewater Triangle and Other Odd Tales from New England*; in which he recounts his meeting with a swamp creature called a Puckwudgie. His blog about that scary encounter led to an appearance in the award winning documentary, *The Bridgewater Triangle*. He also was also featured on national television in 'Monsters and Mysteries in America' and 'America's Bermuda Triangle'.

A number of his fictional works are centered in the Bridgewater Triangle, where he says "Fantasy and reality are crowded together into a haunted 200 square mile area of Massachusetts - where they share an uneasy truce".

Parts of this story are adapted from "Cape Cod's Figure in Black" which introduces John Deer and the Russo Brothers, as well as the little girl from Provincetown who becomes the new 'seer' of the Cape.

'Swamp Tales' and its prequel, 'Jimmy Catfish' take readers deep into Southeastern Massachusetts and neighboring Cape Cod for various adventures involving ghosts, monsters, and a strange amphibious boy who swims with, and leads, a school of shark-like, killer catfish.

In 'Ghosts of Cape Cod', Russo does not write the typical tale of people waking up and seeing spectral beings at the foot of their bed; rather, he probes into the fascinating lives of the real people who became the legendary 'haunts' of one of the most popular tourist destinations in the United States.

Many of the 'Ghosts' are well known such as the real 'Pirate of the Caribbean', Sam Bellamy. He was Captain of the *Whidah* - the richest prize ship in history. Others are lesser known but no less fascinating, like the Reverend Joseph Metcalf who owned the first of the once ubiquitous Cape Cod Flower Boats. The story of the Ghost of the 13 Churches is told in detail for the first time. It's an odd yarn of a peculiar doctor who amassed one of the biggest fortunes in Colonial Massachusetts. He gave it away to the 13 churches of Cape Cod when he died; but then returned from the grave to take it all back!

The Ghosts of Cape Cod audio book is available at all major retailers. The narration is by Scott R. Pollak of National Public Radio.

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Bill Russo, retired on Cape Cod, was educated in Boston at the Huntington School and at Gram College in Kenmore Square. He was editor of several newspapers in Massachusetts as well as a former disc jockey, news writer/presenter, and broadcaster for various outlets in New England.

His other employment included management positions in logistics and warehousing as well as a stint as an ironworker and President of Boston Local 501 of the Shopmen's Ironworkers Union.

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