

# Magazine Feature Section

## THE YOUNG "PUNK" a BASEBALL PLAYER



TY COBB



TRIS SPEAKER



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### Young America Finds His Level When He Is Properly Handled in Big Company.

By J. B. SHERIDAN.

**T**HIS is the season of the year when boys in box-toed shoes and coats that are padded heavily about the shoulders, carry suit cases out of the "bushes" into the cities and start on careers that they think will land them fame, fortune and the display pictures in the newspapers, like Ty Cobb, Tris Speaker, Grover Cleveland Alexander and Walter Johnson. The baseball-playing animal is abroad in the land. April 1, the day of All Fools, is also the day of all baseball players. And, taken by and large, there are few fellows who are more foolish than the "young punk" who starts out to have his first season in professional ball.

"The young punk!"

You know what a "young punk" is? Of course.

You probably have one or two in your house. Almost every American family has one or two, or a succession of "young punks" about the house. The "young punk" is a boy between 16 and 21 years old, awkward, callow, hoarse-voiced, inconceivably untidy, more inconceivably rude and most inconceivably conceited.

When father hears that his "young punk" can play a good game of baseball he begins to take an interest in him. He goes to see him play. Regardless of whether he is or is not a good ballplayer, father thinks that he is a coming Cobb.

"Say," father says to mother, "if that no-account kid can play a good game of baseball he may make more money than any of us ever made."

"I always knew you never understood the boy," says mother. "I always told you he would be a credit to all of us some day."

"Mam," says father, "say, mam, he told me yesterday that he wanted a new pair of baseball shoes. Slip him the price, will you?"

"Give it to him yourself," says mother. "I have little enough to run the house. I have not had a new pair of shoes myself in two years, and I have worn the same coat for three winters."

"Never mind that," says father, "this fellow may make a lot of money soon. Give him the price of a pair of baseball shoes."

"How much will they cost?"

"Oh, two and a half, I guess," replies the father. "That is what they cost when I was a kid."

"Did you ever have a pair of baseball shoes?" inquires mother.

"I did not," says father. "My old man would have killed me if I asked for a pair. But times have changed. Living is faster, higher, better. Slip him the \$2.50."

**Mother Obeys Orders.**

Mother sighs but obeys.

"Willie, dear," she says to the "young punk," "I think you should have a pair of baseball shoes. Here is \$2.50 to buy them."

"Say-a-ay, what do you think I am," cries Willie. "Two and a half for a pair of baseball shoes? I'd better play in my old slippers."

"Why, what is the matter with \$2.50 for a pair of baseball shoes? Your father said that was what they cost when he was a boy."

"Ah, what does that old sink know about up-to-date people?" asks the young hopeful.

"He's back in the old 1904 period. Why, he wore 60-cent shirts and 25-cent neckties. He bawled me the other day about my \$1.50 silk shirt, said he wore 50-cent shirts in his time. I told him that I would be telling my kids, when they were wearing \$15 shirts, that I wore 45 shirts when I was a boy. Time moves. Pop is a messback."

"Why, is not \$2.50 enough," mother inquires, pathetically.

"I should say not," growled "the punk."

"What, then, does a pair of baseball shoes cost?"

"Seven fifty for any sort of a decent pair and \$9.50 if a guy wants to be in the swim," came the answer.

Mother is shocked. But she sighs and goes deep into the stocking in the bureau drawer and takes out \$5 that she had been painfully saving for a new frock.

"Go in the swim, Willie," she says.

"All right," growls "the punk," thrusting the money into his pocket. "Now gimme carfare and lunch money, so that I may go downtown and buy the shoes."

He buys a \$5 pair of shoes and keeps the \$2.50 for spending money. He lunches on pies and buys huge quantities of cigarettes. That night he plays pool for hours and buys not a few "long beers."

Being well fed, sleeping all he wants to sleep, the "young punk" becomes quite a lusty youth. It must be admitted that he plays a fair game of ball on the lots. By and by some one asks him to join a uniformed team. A business house furnishes the "suits."

Father loosens up. He feels that he may have a young Cobb in the house. He tells mother to feed the animal well, to let him

sleep. He counsels heavily with the boy about baseball. Every American father knows all about baseball. He has read about the grand things that the great players have done for their parents, the palaces and farms bought with the savings of their first year in baseball, etc. He has great hopes from the "young punk." He tells him how to hit and how to field, and what a great player his father was before him. He feeds him and clothes him and spends money upon him.

**Gets First Baseball Job.**

After keeping him a year or two, the "young punk" is offered \$125 a month to play baseball. That is probably more than his father has been getting a month. Father overlooks the fact that while he draws salary twelve months in the year, the "young punk" will draw salary but for four and one-half months in the year. If he does think of it, his mind glides off to the \$16,000 salary of Cobb, the \$12,000 of Alexander and the \$18,000 of Speaker.

Then comes a ticket for the "young punk" and a letter ordering him to report for training. Next day the papers bear a line to the effect that the "young punk" is some punkina. He has been offered a job playing professional ball. Good judges who have seen him play say that he is a coming Cobb. Father almost bursts with pride. Mother is proud, too, but very quiet. Her eyes are moist. She dreams

to see the "young punk" leave home for the first time.

Of all persons in the world, the small boy is the most difficult to deceive. His young brothers still call him "the big stiff."

By and by he hurries in and eats rapidly. It is but 5:30 and his train, the first he ever has traveled on, leaves at 9:30. He is afraid he will be late. He must wait, she says, to see his father. Father comes in about 6. Son says he will be back in a few minutes and rushes out. He must say good-by to the girl. He is so proud of himself that he has not much time for her that night. Secretly he is thinking that she was all right for a "young punk," but the great ballplayer he already is will do better. However, he is not adverse to giving her a treat. He poses about in his new suit, shows her his tan shoes with box toes, and "beats it" for home.

Father has made a hurried dinner and is putting on his Sunday clothes. The little brother has had his face washed and a tie put on. He is to carry the "valise." Very shortly father says, "Well, I guess we'd better be going; we may be delayed on the cars. They prepare to leave. Mother makes a brave face of it, but the tears will trickle down cheeks that are beginning to show signs of wear and tear.

It is an awkward moment for the "young punk." He says a rough good-by to the sisters who have helped support him while he has been "studying to be a ballplayer." The girls can scarce contain their joy. Once he wore Marie's silk stockings to play ball in, and, naturally, ruined them. She was a generous, affectionate girl, but she never can quite forgive that. He owes Lizzie \$3, and Lizzie dearly desires a new hat. Sisters are not sorry to see him go.

Kid brother is already on the sidewalk with the "valise." He has invited a playmate to go along and help carry the bag. Father moves down the back steps. "The punk" comes out of the dining room into the kitchen.

He finds his mother there alone. She drops her apron. She has been wiping away a tear and holds out her arms to her son.

"All right, mom," he replies, shame-facedly. "All right, pop, let's go!"

At the training camp is a rough, uncouth and undisciplined lot. Those from the larger cities are "fresh." They curse the jay town in which they play and deride the "yaps" who pay them their salaries. Some stand or sit about their boarding houses and insult the girls who pass. Some run accounts with the local merchants and deem it "smart" not to pay for anything they can get charged. One or two of them "get in bad" with some of the more foolish young women of the town. They loaf on the corners and spit tobacco all over the sidewalks. They give baseball and themselves a bad reputation. They are a sad lot of "young punks."

**Not All Are Rude.**

Not all of them, however, are rude, wild and silly. A reasonable majority, perhaps more than half, are bred to do better. Among the latter is our "young punk." Once away from the supporting father and the adoring mother, thrown upon his own resources, he is electrified into energy and into reliability. Not for nothing did his mother deny herself food, rest, clothes and raiment. Not for nothing has his father labored long and hard.

His parents had given him power of arm, strength of back and keenness of vision. He had not hit more than two balls in batting practice when the veteran who managed the club said to a friend:

"That big stiff looks like he'd do."

"He sure takes a healthy poke at it," says the friend, approvingly.

He took several more "healthy pokes" at it that summer. He learned a lot of baseball and he learned a lot of life and of manners, too. Of course, he had to be beaten up a couple of times by rustic strong boys, a girl or two had to set him in his place; he was fortunate enough to room with a veteran player who gave him plenty of good advice. The umpires helped him by taking away some of his salary. The opposing pitchers gave him much assistance by striking him out many times when a hit meant a game won. His manager did much for him by keeping an iron heel on his strong neck. A couple of hotel keepers helped him by "bawling him out for fair" when he got fresh in the dining room. But the boy was bred right, to go right, and probably would have gone right under any conditions.

But he was fortunate in the things that happened to him. At his best, or at his worst, he did not forget his mother's instructions to remember his religion. He might miss his daily prayers, now and then, but he never forgot to go to church on Sundays.

**Discipline Brings Out Manhood.**

The rigor of baseball discipline did much to bring out the manhood that was in him. Old Tim Maloney, a hero of thirty minor league campaigns, grimly insisted that his players should not only be in the hotel or boarding house at 11 p. m., but that they should also be in bed. Then it was practice for three hours every morning and play and practice for five hours every afternoon. Sun and air make manhood. It is difficult to live in the open and remain "punkin'."

Facing powerful pitchers every day, keying yourself up to hit a baseball that shoots like a bullet fired from a gun, judging fly balls in the air and facing hostile and hissing crowds, tightens the nerves and the sinews. Obedience to discipline, cutting out cigarettes, controlling the appetite, makes for manhood.

So it was that at the end of five months the "young punk" had become a sunburnt, hardened, clean-faced young man. The skin on his face was like tanned silk, the knuckles on his strong hands showed white against the brown outcure about them. The mushy lines of the mouth had become firm and set.

He sent \$50 to his mother every month and lived on the balance, \$45. After his league season closed he was a member of the club on a barn-storming trip that yielded him \$100. When he returned home on October 1 he was 15 pounds heavier than he had been when he left, yet so well was the flesh distributed that he seemed to be 20 pounds lighter. All the mush and fat, the "punk," had gone out of his face. His step that had been slow and louncing was quick and springy. His mother was waiting on the front porch to greet him. He leaped up the steps and took her, unshamed, in his arms.

He had not much time for the mother that evening. He had to see the boys and the girl. Mother was abed when he came home. Next morning, after breakfast, he kissed her and put a roll of bills in her hand.

"I'll save it, with the rest you sent, for you, son," she said.

"You'll save nothing," cried the "young punk." "If you don't go downtown and spend every cent of that money on clothes for yourself, not for things for the house, I'll never speak to you again. Ever since I can remember we all have had clothes but you. Now, you are going to dress up like a duchess. Don't worry about spending the money. There is plenty more where that came from."

Yes, who have passed the 30s, and who have grown old and worldly and wise and godly, maybe, and grave, would give a good deal to be once more a "young punk."