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My Friend Babe Ruth

By Arthur Robinson



a peculiarly intimate friendship with Babe Ruth. I have traveled with him as a New York newspaperman, lived with him, in and out of the baseball season, and helped him write his newspaper articles. We have developed, totally apart from business relations, a friendship

OR some years I have enjoyed

which has thrown us together in a sort of Boswell-Johnson capacity. We have been trainmates and playmates on trips around the big circuit, in the baseball hinterland, and in the obscurity of private life. To the alternately idolatrous and jeering millions who have watched this modern Beowulf at bat, driving out his great smashes, it may have appeared

player, schooled to deafness on the field. The skin of my friend Babe Ruth is not thick. I have seen hundreds of men, women, and hero-worshiping boys get under it. Like me, they discovered that Ruth, in the raw, is as likable as a human being as he is interesting and fascinating as a ball player and psychological study.

For ten years I have done widely

diversified newspaper work in New

York, meeting all kinds of characters

that he was just a thick-skinned ball

in and out of sport, on and off Broad-

way, around and about the country, but never have I met one who has sustained my interest from day to day and year to year as has Babe Ruth. He has very few secrets from me. And knowing all his faults I am genuinely helpless in my affection for him. In short, I like him and often apologize for him; at other times, it is impossible even to apologize. He is a human being apart from all others of the species. He

is more than unique; he is really a phenomenon. And I like him. What manner of man is that Gargantuan sporting character that only two or three people really know? Wherein do his private life and private mannerisms, habits, and customs

differ from the public impression?

scrutiny?

Mrs. Ruth calls him George, and it is of George Ruth, mainly, that I writethe Ruth that neither the public, nor the newspapermen, nor ever his fellow players know. He has a gruff manner about him. He

deals profusely in horse-play. He is

something of a physical clown-a good-

How does he look and act and sum up

under the X-ray of close and constant

natured personification of Brute Force. OldMagazineArticles.com



tender, too. I have seen him in a boxing match with Mrs. Ruth in the room of a Boston hotel at which only one other person and myself were spectators—a match in which he allowed himself to be decisively outpointed and slightly wounded. I have also seen him wrestled to the floor by his blondhaired three-year-old daughter, Dorothy. I myself have tapped him on the

head with a golf club without any

serious aftermath.

But just as he is a success even when he fails on the baseball field—that is, a

sensation and a source of dramatic interest even when he strikes out—so is he equally interesting in Pullman trains and in hotels on the road.

Often he travels with a little portable phonograph and gives concerts in the baggage-rooms of some wayside rail-

At such times he will sing bass in a quartet and do quite well indeed with his favorite song, "My Darling Lou," and not so well with others. He has a special fondness for the ukulele and likes to dance. He plays bridge, stud poker, and draw poker the way he hits a baseball—wildly, freely, forcefully; and more often than not he loses.

And How He Does Eat!

HE EATS as very few men can. He eats often—probably on an average of ten times a day. Railroad engines

manages to survive the amount and sort of food he eats.

He is a little temperamental. He has a deep, abiding suspicion that he always suffers from stomach trouble. Before almost every game he complains to the club trainer about this and then devours huge quantities of bicarbonate of soda. I don't believe there is another human being alive in all the world who

consume an enormous amount of fuel.

So does he, and it is a wonder that he

has actually eaten so much sod and chewed so much tobacco as Ruth.

He reads very little but is amazingly well informed on baseball statistics.

Of all the big-league players I know, I don't think there is a one who has a keener analysis of the records statistics. And I know of no player who is so fundamentally well-liked by

his team-mates or is so genuinely considerate of them.

He does not wear underwear, winter or summer. One of his favorite decsions is bull-frog hunting at night with lights attached to the front sites of the rifles. He is immaculately groomed and always has his barbering done in his hotel room. He is manicured frequently and pays high for everything. A Texas barber once charged him \$1.80 for a shave and a few wet towels.

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And, as you might expect, he's Hendrik Van Loon superstitious. author of "The Story of Mankind" "The Story of the Bible," gave him a silver dollar two years ago-the day he dedicated the Yankee Stadium by hitting a home run—and for a long time the Babe carried the coin with him.

He does more autographing of su-

venirs than probably the ten most pertinent movie stars combined. Hewrites an enormous number of letters to his fans all over the country, and no "c rity" ever received such queer requests -from get-rich-quick promoters, than charitable organizations, from strangers who want to share in the richest attribute to him, and from clubs, schools and churches—asking him to assist in various functions, or possibly make a little speech. Incidentally, the Bal an astonishingly good after-dinner talker. He has perfect poise and presence and a free flow of talk.

Consider his superstitions. The sight of a yellow or white butterfly on the field of play will either terrify him in forebodings of ill luck or exalt him with a plane of ineffable anticipation of assured good fortune on the diamond.

On the road, a few years ago, he

pitched to the Yankees in batting practice following the loss of a few important games, and that day the Yankees, then engaged in the thick of a pennant fight, won. The next day and every day thereafter until the Yankees lost again he pitched to the players in batting practice because he was convinced it was lucky. When they lost he tried warming up the pitcher before the game-for luck

-and found that successful. He kept on warming up the pitchers until the Yanks again lost, and then he tried hitting fungoes to the outfield. When all other expedients failed he went out on the coaching lines. These are his special superstitions; but with Miller Huggins,

shares another. If team wins he returns to the hotel and goes through the same door he used on his way out. If it loses tries another door. And in common with most ball players he believes that a load of empty barrels, seen on the way to the ball park, is a sign of certain victory. He rarely answers letters but sometimes the thoughts of his correspondents stick out in his mind. Fans tell him he

Yankee manager, he

curve ball. swing for a "I guess," he says, "that most of the baseball scientists sit in the bleachers." He is solicited by vaudeville agents, who

offer attractive tours

on little time and b'g;

has a wrong stance or a

right stance or a bad

by committees of fraternal organizations who want him to appear on the coast business man. didn't.

in exhibition games. To these requests Ruth turns the cold ear of a He'd be foolish if he An athlete's financially productive life is short. But there are innumerable requests to which the Babe does not turn a cold. businesslike ear. They come in

shoal. Daily, when the team is at

home, Christy Walsh, who syndicates

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his newspaper articles, carries to the Yankee Stadium loads of balls and bats—all for the bold and legible signature of the recognized Sultan of Swat. Out in Los Angeles there is a high-school league. It means something in the lives of the winning team if each member receives as a trophy of victory a bat signed by Babe Ruth.

In Indiana the Knights of Columbus, of which the Babe is a member, are building a school for delinquent boys. Baseballs signed by the Home Run King can be sold to advan-

tage for the home. In Nebraska the Elks, and in Oklahoma the Masons, have similar charities, and balls and bats similarly signed have added market value. Or a ladies' organization desires him to attend a bazaar in some town where he is scheduled to play, and will he make a talk and sign souvenir programs? He will and does, gladly. By mid-July, this year, Ruth had signed eleven hundred bats and about jammed with thousands of boys and grown-ups eager and ready to scramble for the balls. Baseball leagues for boys bearing

his name are organized by newspapers. Some youngsters in a hospital would like to see and meet the Babe in the flesh; newspapers arrange that, and the Babe is happy to oblige. And what is the significance of all this? It's this: Babe Ruth to-day is a

milestone in the progress of American life-yea, even a vital economic and social force and factor. The Yankee Stadium cost several millions and is appropriately called, "The House That Ruth Built." He has drawn more people to baseball than any player in the history of the game. Everywhere larger ball parks have been built simply because of the interest he has attracted to the game. And baseball salaries have gone up because of him. No sporting figure has ever received the publicity he has. He is before the public, as a player, one hundred and fifty-four days a year. But there

follows, told here for the first time, involves the most dramatic moment I have ever shared with the Babe. It was somewhere in Texas, on the special train in which the Yankees were making their spring training trip north from New Orleans, playing exhibition games en route.

are some stories concerning him that

have never been told. The one which

My friend the Babe was suffering from an attack of "The Misery" which was critically and alarmingly acute. "The Misery" is peculiarly a baseball disease. It is a compound of all the ailments known to the ball player. It includes a long and concerous batting slump and

general debility. In short, it is a Terrible Thing. Physically the Babe was in better shape than he had ever been. He had spent the winter on his farm at Sudbury, Mass., chopping wood, building hen-houses, hunting and plowing through miles snow-covered roads. He had gone back to nature and to wide open spaces to reform and to forget and live down his colossal failure in

world series against the

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for training at New Orleans weighing only 200 pounds—a weight which presumably attuned his tremendous hulk to

the celebrated "pink of condition."

The newspaper correspondents with the Yankees said he would have his greatest year. Then The Misery attacked him, feeding at first upon the memory of his failure in the world series and then gnawing at his inability of the moment to hit a baseball with anything approximating his former violence and consistency. Day after day the Babe went with-

out making a hit; a week passed and he made no homers. Another week of pitiful effort. The kingthe Home Run King-was tottering on his throne. He brooded almost insanely. Hug-

gins diagnosed his condition and case over and over again, and finally arrived at a decision in his drawingroom on the special train in which were touring the South and Southwest. The Babe, Huggins, and myself were

the only ones in the room. "Babe," said Huggins, "I want to

tell you something. I think you ought to know. I have been in baseball for more than twenty years. I have seen ball players come and go. No man lasts forever. This slump you have been having is no ordinary thing. I have been trying to figure out just what is the matter with you. Apparently you swing the bat the way you used to. Apparently nothing is the matter with your eyes. Physically you're in great shape. But for a month you have looked worse than the bushiest bushleaguer in the outfit. "The symptoms are all familiar. There are times when dying men should

say it but I think it is best that I should. Babe, you're slipping! You've seen your best days. Babe, you're just about through. Make up your mind to ityou're just about through!" A strange, fugitive look came into the Babe's eyes. He did not gasp but his huge body stiffened almost imper-

ceptibly at the shock. He glanced

be told the truth. Babe, I don't like to

incisively at Huggins. Then, almost

crazy!"

savagely he growled, "Hug, you're But the manner in which he spoke indicated he believed that Huggins might be right. For several minutes he sat there silently, staring out of the win-

not lit and chewing tobacco. Huggins said (Continued on page 28) nothing. I said nothing. The situation was funereally oppressive. Babe Ruth-the Home Run King-the greatest and most picturesque figure baseball had ever known-was dying and had been told so! The

dow into the dark shadows of night,

alternately puffing on a cigar that was

was ailing and had "The Misery," but the public did not know just how seriously indisposed he was. Even the baseball writers themselves didn't know.

public, through the news bulletins is-

sued daily by observing and expert

baseball writers, knew that the Babe

The next day the Babe struck out a few times. He acted like a man who had been told he was dying. But he also acted as a man who said over and over again, "I won't die-I won't die-I won't die; I'm not slipping-I'm not through." And toward the end of the game, in overwhelming ultimate des-peration, he reached out with the big bat for a ball that was wide and high of the plate-virtually a wild pitchand made one of the longest home runs I have ever seen him hit. He caught the ball two or three inches from the

end of his bat, swung the full force of his great shoulders and back behind

and beyond the roof of the distant bleachers—accomplishing a feat which had never even been approximated before. That home run was oxygen to the

dying Home Run King.

In 1921 the Babe made his record of fifty-nine home runs. Every baseball fan in the country followed the sensational composition of his record from day to day. Newspapers in tiny, obscure towns carried telegraphic, ball-byball descriptions of his turns at bat, at Millions and millions great expense. of words were written about him. had as much secrecy as the goldfish Irvin S. Cobb tells about. He was becoming a Great American Idol, followed everywhere by crowds, worshiped by boys and besieged by all kinds of promoters and schemers.

ONE day Huggins went to him and said, "Babe, you've got this country goofy. You're drawing the biggest crowds that ever went to baseball games. You have been doing some things you shouldn't do-things that other players do not do. So long as you keep on doing well I don't mind. But that isn't the point. I'm thinking now of you. You're fat. You have been keeping bad hours. All this success may spoil you, turn your head and ruin your career when it's just starting. Let's get organized right, Babe. out the fast living. Go to bed early. Be careful of what you eat and drink. Take off twenty-five pounds and you'll get more base hits; your eye will be clearer; you'll get more home runs. You'll do better every way. What do you say?"

to get a home run, to say nothing of a measly little ordinary base hit. But again he went to bed early, and once more he had the same experience. He did this twice again, with the same result, and finally he exploded. For a greater love of home runs and base hits hath no baseball player; and the Babe could

not tolerate an abstinence from them.

Ping Bodie, his room-mate, came to

That night the Babe went to bed at

nine o'clock. The next day he failed

me in Detroit and said, "Come on. We're going out. The Babe is in an uproar. The panic is on." So out we went. Then we came back and played cards all night. Virtue alone was not a satisfying reward. The Babe simply could not sleep. In between he ate probably fourteen sirloin and hamburger steak sandwiches, with some odds and ends thrown

that he did not get more than two hours' sleep. But what happened? What happened illustrates precisely the utter freakishness of the man. Where for four days he had gone to bed early and gone hitless and homerunless he now went to the ball park visibly affected by the change of habit and drove out two home runs in one game-one of them over the scoreboard in deepest center field; something

in. And I know it to be absolute fact

that had never been done before!

THAT fall he defied Judge Landis and was suspended for the first six weeks of the 1922 season. But in the intervening months and until the end of the year he earned about \$250,000—and spent most of it. He went to the race tracks and gambled high, betting as much as \$26,-

000 on a single race. In Cuba, following a disastrous experience with book-makers, he found himself about. "broke" and in an awkward situa-He owed \$65,000 to the racetrack hawks and vultures. He had transportation for himself and Mrs. Ruth back to the States but he had that obligation of \$65,000 to take care of. and what little money he had left was tied up in investments which Mrs. Ruth had made for him.

Finally he was compelled to take Mrs. Ruth into his confidence. "We'll have to cancel our passage," he said, "until

I can dig up that sixty-five grand."

But they did nothing of the kind. Mrs. Ruth calls the Babe "Hon". "Hon," she said, "here's a check for

\$65,000. Go out and pay your debts."

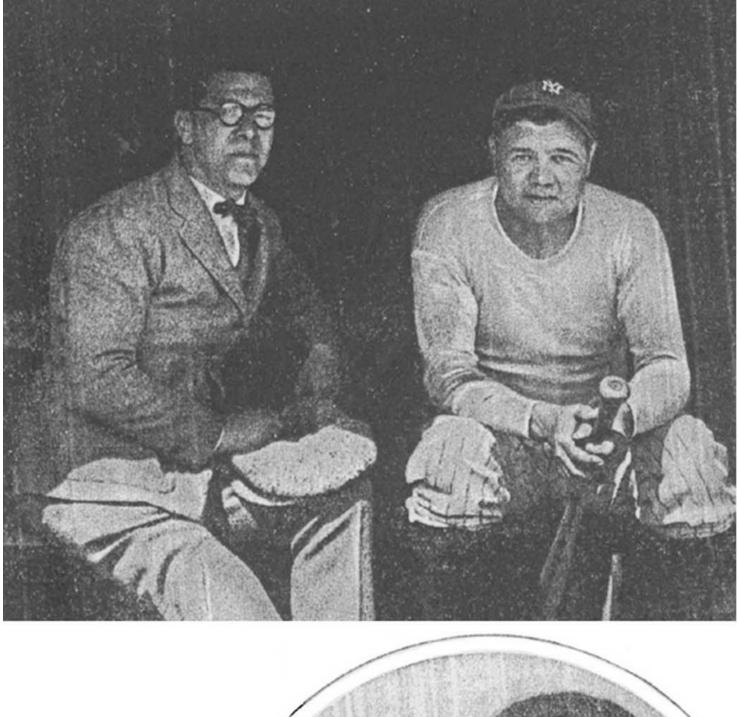
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And the Babe did, after an almost miraculous recovery from the shock of discovering his wife had somehow managed to save \$65,000 from the wild wreckage of his first year's great successes. And since then Babe Ruth has learned many things-and failed to learn a few others.

It was necessary, following this, to protect him from himself and the attacks of the army of confidence men and women which constantly intrigued against him. So detectives employed by the Yankee owners and by the powers that be in baseball began to watch him and those who insinuated themselves upon him. But that—as they say—is another

story, spun of the fabric of an oldfashioned dime novel and equally as

thrilling in its melodramatic developments.







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