

July 29, 2008

Skittles

by Ken Embley, CPPA

It is early summer, just after sunset, but dark. I am sitting on my Easton covered baseball bucket, leaning against the chain-linked backstop staring at nothing in particular. The little kids are running the bases—they always do. A cloud-like haze of dirt is in the air. My senses detect people on the move, gathering stuff; some are stretching in protest of mom's requiring nesting partners to move and help with the younger kids—they never do. Down each base line players and coaches huddle; a game ball award brought out the obligatory "Who's your daddy?" People are heading home. Then I hear the words, again, "You suck blue!" I turn my attention back to the field. A little one wearing a summer dress, not more than four years old, is heading into third. She rolls into the base, stands up and declares, without saying a word, safe! She is holding something.

"You suck blue!" Somehow, another parent feels a little better and moves on toward the parking lot. I look at the little girl. I close my eyes.

It is the bottom of the seventh inning, last at bat, bases loaded, one out, and the home team is down by one. Ping, the ball sails into right center field. The runners go. The centerfielder dives for the uncatchable ball and makes the uncatchable catch. People are going nuts. The runners are scrambling to get back to their bases. The centerfielder is in shock. The ball is in his glove. He hears his coach screaming, first base! One step by the centerfielder and the ball is out of the glove and headed toward first base. I position myself for the easy call. The visitors are going to go home with a victory unless the baseball Gods intervene. They do. The ball sails past the first baseman and takes one hop into the grandstands. Silence—the only sound is that of a runner sliding back into first base. The quiet was deafening.

I pronounce "Dead ball!" I quickly turn to see the runners now standing on second and third. "Runners," I declare with the fervor of an evangelical preacher, "without jeopardy, advance two bases." With that, the home team players, coaches and parents start jumping up and down, screaming and rushing toward the players as both legally touch home base, I declare, "That's the game!"

I turn to exit the field to find a finger in my face and the deafening screams of the visiting coach. He moved his index finger to my chest and put his face in mine. I backed away, and it did not matter. I turned to find another coach, then players and parents. I found myself alone inside a frenzy of emotion. I had no place to go. I wanted to explain my call, but there was no one to listen. The venom streaming in my direction paralyzed my thoughts and actions. I caught sight of my Easton bucket. I began to move toward my safe little spot. The anger followed. "That's a terrible call!" "There is one base on an overthrow!" "Terrible!" "We plan to protest the game you son of a...!" "You suck blue!" "You suck!" "You suck!" Everyone is yelling at the same time. The words all mesh and cover me like a heavy wet blanket. I sit on my bucket and find some relief by doing so, but the emotional rants continue. There is nothing to say, and nothing to do. I just take it and it hurts. I close my eyes.

I feel a presence and open my eyes to see the little girl, covered with dirt, and holding something—a small package of Skittles. I looked at her, then at the Skittles. She poured some into her hand, said nothing, but invited me to extend my hand. Together we worked the sticky mess and a couple hit the ground. She smiled, and so did I. I had a hand full of sticky treats.

I hear a voice in the distance, "Jenny," a pause, then again with a note of concern, "Jenny," and the little girl scurried off toward the voice. I followed her with my eyes. She turned and waved at me. I smiled and did a grandpa thing; I extended my hand and repeatedly dropped my fingers to my palm. With my mouth I muttered "bye-bye Jenny." She ran off to meet mom. My fingers stuck to my palm.

I leaned back to the fence to wonder if what I do is worth the hassle. People can be downright mean. Sure, I make mistakes but so what, we all do. I reason that I do the best I can to manage the game in accordance with the rules. I do my best to be a good example. I try to treat people with the respect they deserve. I try to do a good job and after fifteen hundred games or so, on occasion, I do hear "Good job blue!"

I pause and think beyond the game to imagine people who manage and take heat for doing their job and doing it well. I imagine people who lead and put everything on the line for a cause. Sometimes I wonder for them, is it worth the hassle?

Enough, I have to go. I have a big day ahead of me and another game tomorrow night. I lean forward, stand, and try to pick-up my Easton covered bucket. My sticky hand deters the effort. I think of Jenny and smile. I grab the bucket with



the other hand and detect Skittles on the sticky one. I pause for a moment, and then pop the slimy goop and I savor the taste.

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