

From Chapter 4. Animal Farm:

The Joys of a Summer Shower

Pitchers Kettle, Bob Milo and Marco Mainini, and infielder Gordie Figard did their best to take my mind off my pitching that summer. At one point, our team was dragging from playing heaped up doubleheaders; our pitching staff was wearing thin. Usually baseball was fun, but at times the schedule could become a relentless enemy. We needed a rainout, and there was no hope in the forecast. However, late one night Bowman Field's sprinklers "spontaneously" erupted and showered for hours. Unfortunately, the cursed ground crew was up to the challenge. The following evening we had to play anyway.

That summer, rain was more a toy than a meteorological event. Once, when a game was interrupted by a sudden downpour, Milo yelled, "Hey, I've got some scuba equipment in the trunk of my car." Kettle howled, "Hey, bring it in and bring it on." Milo and Kettle put on wetsuits, tanks, flippers - the works. They emerged from the dugout to the amusement of the fans amassed under the grandstand roof. The pair flap-flopped around the bases like sea lions on holiday, sliding into each base, including first. Infield water sprayed in great graceful arcs, and mud coated the rambunctious pitchers puddlewonderfully. Although Lucchesi thought it was hilarious, he felt duty-bound to reprimand them with a straight face. The umpires, being umpires, saw no humor there at all.

They also saw no humor in Ted Sloan's antics. Sloan was our short and stocky backup catcher. He spent most of his time warming up pitchers in the bullpen - a tedious, thankless task. He was chomping at the bit for some real action. Now, whenever our catcher had batted last in a half-inning, and needed time to get his shin guards on, it was Ted's duty to run in from the bullpen to warm up our pitcher. Ted developed the practice of running in as hard as he could and sliding into home plate. The crowd loved it, giving him a standing ovation each time. In fact, they anticipated this unique display of enthusiasm and stood to chant in unison, "TED-DY, TED-DY ", during his sparkling sprint.

One night we continued to play even though a steady drizzle had been falling since the start of the game. Finally, around the sixth inning, the rain turned serious, and the home plate umpire suspended play. Ted took this as his special cue. Even though we warned him this was going to be a fine for sure, he broke into a frenetic sprint. The fans saw him coming and realized immediately what Ted was up to. They were on their feet, going wild – "TED-DY, TED-DY, TED-DY". Ted, looking like a crazed rutting rhino, huffing and puffing, headed right for the huge and slushy puddle that lay just at the heels of the unsuspecting plate umpire. His back turned to the dashing bullpen catcher, the ump was gazing up in puzzlement at the inexplicably enthusiastic crowd. It was a perfect slide. And, yes, Ted got fined plenty.

