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### Short Assignment #3 – “The Called Shot”

He was already bigger than the game, but five pitches into his fifth inning at bat, Babe Ruth would become larger than anyone thought a baseball player could be.

The wind was blowing out at Wrigley Field on October 1, 1932 and Charlie Root was warmed up. He had not been able to keep the hulking lineup of the New York Yankees in check all game. Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig had already taken him out of the park once each. Fortunately, George Pipgras had also been rocky for the Yankees, and the score was tied at 4 when the home team took the field in the fifth.

The sun was still out, but the cool weather of autumn settled into the stands at Wrigley. The bench jockeys were calling to Ruth as he stood in the on deck circle, swinging at imaginary fastballs with two bats. Riding opposing players was not uncommon, and the already loud jeers from the crowd joined together to create an atmosphere so unpleasant that one might think Ruth had wronged each one of them personally. But Ruth just waved towards the fans and continued fanning the bats leisurely.

Ruth looked down at his two bats and swung again, peeking back up in time to see shortstop Billy Jurges scoop the ball and fired it to Charlie Grimm at first base. Joe Sewell's groundout drowned into a sea of cheers that turned to both jeering Ruth and cheering Root. Ruth started in towards the batters box, swinging one final time and tossing the extra bat towards the Yankee dugout.

Barbs continued to pour in from the stands and the opposing dugout; some said it was a bit much for someone to take with even Ruth's gruff demeanor. But rather than sit and take it, he was mouthing back. Ruth was hurling insults back at the fans and opposing bench jockeys as quick as they were doling out their own epithets. The crowd roaring and the Yankee bench quietly willing their giant onward, Root looked in for the sign and Ruth spit on his hands. They were now ready for their own personal battle.

A fastball that clipped the outside corner high drew a strike call from Roy Van Graflan. Ruth turned to the fans who were now cheering and Root motioned to his bench that two strikes remained. Both thought they had the upper hand. Root missed with two consecutive balls and found himself pitching behind in the count. With their man down, the crowd was quickly hushing in hopes it would help Root refocus. Root toed the rubber and focused his eyes in on the catchers digits. He pulled back into his stretch and delivered from the wind up; strike two.

The fans again roared and the bench started to heckle Ruth harder than before. Some of the Cubs bench exited the dugout to make sure he could hear their words of discouragement over the roars of the 49,986 rowdy and faithful fanatics. Ruth pulled his right leg out of the box and the entire crowd focused in on him. He slung the bat over his left shoulder and raised his right hand. There was confusion over the gesture but Ruth put the bat back into both hands and readied himself for the next pitch.

As Root nodded for the curveball, he began to wind up and deliver. The crack of the bat echoed throughout the park. The ivy on the outfield walls seemed to whip

around from the wind off the bat, and the blowing wind carried the ball past the fielders' mitts, over the fence. The ball landed where Ruth was seemingly pointing.

Rather than watch the shot fly out, Ruth rounded first base and gestured toward the crowd behind home plate by waving his arm downward as if to say "sit down". The Cubs bench returned to their dugout, heads hung low. The second home run of the day for Ruth gave the Yankees the lead, and as he received congratulatory words from his teammates, Gehrig ended Root's day one pitch later with his second home run of the day. The Cubs could not recover, and lost 7-5. But hardly does anyone recall the final score or the first home run from that day in October. They remember the finger point, the ball flying, and the called shot.