

How you play the game

by

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20 March 2008

INT. ROADSIDE PHONE BOOTH - NIGHT

The rain drowns a small town's Main Street. GEORGE ROSSEAU, late 30's with a depreciating muscular build, yells into the phone's receiver.

GEORGE

I dunno. There's a chance of a call up ... well things ain't been too great either, Michelle ... you know it ain't like that ... well, what about what's-his-name? Blane ... whatever. He's this great father until you need some money.

Three twenty-something guys, led by CHUCK, shield their heads with their jackets as they pass by. Chuck raps on the booth.

CHUCK

C'mon old man. Don't think we forgot about the round you owe.

George waves them on. He sighs out.

GEORGE

Well at least put her on the phone ... dammit Melissa! The least you could do --

He's countered with an abrupt dial tone. He starts to slam the receiver, then gently hangs it up and slumps against the telephone box.

Chuck eagerly returns and knocks again on the booth. George doesn't notice.

CHUCK

Rosseau. Rosseau!

INT. DUGOUT - NIGHT

BAIRD

Rosseau!

BAIRD, salty ol' coach of the DIGGSVILLE DOGS, tosses a towel to get the attention of bench-riding George.

BAIRD

I don't believe it either but I need ya. Get on deck.

George gets up, bones creaking, and comes over.

GEORGE

Hey Skipper. The big club really looking for a call-up?

BAIRD

Wouldn't worry about it if I were you.

George grabs his helmet and bat, and proceeds to

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD - ON DECK CIRCLE - NIGHT

and takes some mighty big practice swings.

BAIRD

Calm it down George. You're reading that thing. Not swinging it.

George's face protests. Baird slowly runs signs across his body. George huffs.

The crowd erupts as George's teammate strikes out.

The AM Radio team of BUCK and CHIPPER feed in.

BUCK (V.O.)

That's number thirteen tonight for Cruz and this kid is unstoppable.

BAIRD

There's one out. Just get Chuck over.

CHIPPER (V.O.)

The club knows they got something special in America Cruz. Word is he'll be going to the big show for September call-ups.

BUCK (V.O.)

Doubt we'll ever see him back here again. Speaking of people we never thought we'd see again, Dogs manager Sherill Baird is sending utility infielder George Rosseau to the plate.

George makes his way to

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD - HOME PLATE

and digs his cleats in.

CHIPPER (V.O.)

Buck, behave.

BUCK (V.O.)

All I'm saying is I can't believe
Rosseau's still kicking around
here.

CHIPPER (V.O.)

Maybe the club's looking to bring
him up too with All-Star second
baseman Ed Lopez's status in doubt.

Chuck, leading off second base, gets the signs and nods to
George.

BUCK (V.O.)

Not a chance. If Lopez has in fact
torn his hammy, that man on second,
Chuck Tralber, would be the go-to
guy. I mean Rosseau's hitting what?

CHIPPER (V.O.)

A buck ninety-five.

BUCK (V.O.)

Jeez. That'll barely buy you a
coffee, no less a ticket to the
show.

AMERICA CRUZ, early 20's but with the look of the hardest
vet, checks the runner and delivers. George's hands slide up
the bat to bunt.

He angles the bat towards the first base line. The pitch, a
sweeping curve, falls under the bat as George runs out of
the batter's box. Seeing he missed, he stops; embarrassed.

CHIPPER (V.O.)

And Rosseau misses with the drag
bunt!

BUCK (V.O.)

Oh, that's just sad.

The crowd razzes George as he re-enters the box. The CATCHER
shakes his head laughing.

BUCK (V.O.)
Cruz is good but not that good.
Chipper, what's Baird thinking
putting this guy out there?

CHIPPER (V.O.)
He's got no choice. His bench is
depleted.

BUCK (V.O.)
Still. Down by one in the ninth
with the tying run in position?

CHIPPER (V.O.)
I guess he figures the Dogs are out
of contention and with the season
over tonight, this very well could
be George Rosseau's last at-bat.

George looks at Baird who flashes a new sign. George nods.

BUCK (V.O.)
We can hope.

Cruz delivers the next pitch: a cut fastball that freezes
George at the plate for strike two.

BUCK (V.O.)
A cutter for strike two. I can't
blame him for keeping the bat on
his shoulder.

CHIPPER (V.O.)
Well, Buck.

BUCK (V.O.)
That was like a Da Vinci. You don't
swing at the Mona Lisa.

George steps out of the box and re-adjusts his gloves.

GEORGE
C'mon George. One more time.

He steps back in. He twists his spikes into the dirt.

America stares at nothing but the catcher's mitt. His arm
cannons the ball.

It cycles over and over itself on an invisible line. George
begins to swing. The ball starts to cut inside.

George tries to check his swing but can't. The ball hits the
bat's handle, shattering it.

The ball bumbles forward among shards of lumber. George races towards first. The catcher runs for ball but bumbles gripping it.

BUCK (V.O.)

This should be it -- no! He boots the ball. Rosseau makes it aboard.

George runs right through first before realizing he's safe. Heaving, he brushes off the FIRST BASE COACH.

GEORGE

I'm alright. I'm good.

George looks to Chuck, now on third, who points and smiles.

CHIPPER (V.O.)

Looks like the Dogs still have some fight in them.

BUCK (V.O.)

Did you see that bat explode?

America eyes George on the mound. George, with a modest lead, still breathes heavily.

GEORGE

Alright, George. We're on. Let's do something. Let's --

America throws to first. George slides back just ahead of the tag.

CHIPPER (V.O.)

That was a close one.

BUCK (V.O.)

A twenty-one year old with a pick off move like that? This kid is gonna be great.

George leads off again, further. America winds and delivers.

The batter hits a pop fly. The winds pick up. Flags and pennants salute out to centerfield.

BUCK (V.O.)

Woah. This could be trouble.

The CENTERFIELDER gives chase. George runs halfway to second, halting to see if it's caught.

BUCK (V.O.)
 A long fly with all of the wind
 behind it ... and ...

The centerfielder dives but can't reach. He and the ball hit the wall.

BUCK (V.O.)
 He can't come up with it.

George throws it in gear. The LEFTFIELDER runs to the ball.

CHIPPER (V.O.)
 Trabler will score from third and
 we're tied.

George rounds second and heads for third. The leftfielder relays to the SHORTSTOP.

George stops at third as the shortstop throws home. The ball sails over the catcher's head to the backstop.

BUCK (V.O.)
 He threw it away!

The catcher runs for the ball and America covers the plate. Fists clenched, George breaks down the line.

BUCK (V.O.)
 Here comes Rosseau. Cruz covering
 the plate.

The catcher grabs the ball and throws to America who turns to find a barreling George.

He railroads the pitcher. As he falls, America's arm twists against the ground in an ungodly way.

The ball rolls out of the pitcher's mitt as George slaps the plate.

The roaring crowd dies as George jumps up screaming in celebration. He grabs a white-faced Chuck.

GEORGE
 What? What's up man?

Chuck covers his mouth. George turns to find America lying, arm broken at the elbow. Crying. He looks nothing like a vet now. Now he looks like a kid in the worst pain imaginable.

BUCK (V.O.)
Just horrible. They'll do all they
can but ...

EXT. BALLPARK - PARKING LOT - NIGHT

A somber George chucks his bag in the storage section of a charter bus.

BUCK (V.O.)
I can't recall anyone who's come
back from such an injury. Just
thinking about it.

CHIPPER (V.O.)
I know what you're saying. In
better news, Ed Lopez's hamstring
should be fine and he should be
back by the end of the week.

George walks to the bus door and stops. He stares at the stadium all lit.

BUCK (V.O.)
With most of the Dogs to be called
up selected, that ends another
season for the rest.

The ballpark lights shut off. George loads the bus.

INT. BUS - NIGHT

The charter rolls on. The landscape indistinguishable.

BUCK (V.O.)
You know it always goes by so fast.

George rolls a ball in his hand.

BUCK (V.O.)
It seems like there's always
another game until "boom," it's
over.

George puts the ball to his forehead and silently cries.

BUCK (V.O.)
And only then do you realize what
you did. When you've had your last
homerun. Your last strikeout.

From his pocket, George takes a photo of a little girl.

BUCK (V.O.)
And all you can do is hope you've
played a good game.

EXT. BUS - NIGHT

The charter speeds off, lights dwindling to nothing.

FADE OUT