

DADDY WARBUCKS

By James Collins

When I was 14, summer vacation meant working at Yankee Stadium as a Hustler dressed in white from head to toe with a white kepi hat that made us look like we belonged in the French foreign Legion. The younger teenagers sold peanuts in a bag about the size of a fist and the cost was a quarter. You showed up early at the ballpark and worked the whole day at 11% commission, which would yield around five dollars.

A memorable day occurred when Daddy Warbucks came to the ballpark with a big blonde on his arm as eye-candy. They were an unforgettable couple primarily because of her. She looked like Marilyn Monroe, but younger. She was about 22, statuesque, with a marvelous figure and a pair of monumental breasts. She was wearing a scoop neck sundress to emphasize her assets. When she walked, everything moved. Attached to her arm was a 50-year-old bald, pudgy well-dressed bookie. At least that is what everyone thought he was from his appearance, which included a big cigar, a pair of wire-rimmed glasses, big diamond pinky rings on each hand, a yellow sports coat, and black and white dress shoes. He had the attitude but not the height. He was fully a foot shorter than the main feature who pushed her attributes forward and that is where his eyes were most of the time. When they came into the mezzanine at Yankee Stadium during the first inning, everyone turned to watch the couple. Correction, they watched the babe.

Peanuts sold for a quarter, and when you were selling peanuts, you have to move rather quickly. People on the end of the aisle were easy to handle, you gave them the peanuts they gave you a quarter and you moved on. People in the middle-of-the-aisle were a separate problem altogether. You threw the bag of peanuts to the person and they threw you a quarter. You got to be very good at throwing and catching. The age and the gender of the customer modified the activity. If the people were elderly or if they were women, you passed the peanuts down the line and the money came back down the line. The young men loved to show their athletic prowess at catching the peanuts or throwing the coins so they were in a class of their own. If somebody had a dollar bill, it had to be passed down the aisle to the Hustler, who then either threw them three quarters change or passed the coins back down the aisle. Deciding how to do this was always a bit of a diplomatic decision. The young guys were no problem. They always wanted the change thrown and they usually caught it. If they dropped one, they laughed and it was no embarrassment.

Daddy Warbucks wanted to buy two bags of peanuts. He wanted to impress the dolly at his side and he signaled to have me throw him the peanuts. I threw the first and he caught it. I threw the second and he dropped it. Then he sent out a dollar bill. I was sure he

could not catch the change so I sent the change back down the line. That is when the trouble started. He sent the change back down the line.

"Hey, you, Hustler, throw me the change."

"No problem. I'm sending it right down the line to you," I said as I resent the change back.

He refused to accept it and sent it back a second time.

"Hustler, don't mess with me, throw me the change." As he sent it back down line a third time.

I figured this guy is nothing but a problem and he wants to impress the young lady as to his athletic ability, which from my perspective was zero. I decided to throw the money very carefully, and I called ahead to alert him that the change was coming by air express.

"Okay, I'm going to throw the quarters one at a time. Here comes the first one." as I threw the quarter directly to him.

The blonde bombshell flung up her arms as everything on her shook and yelled, "Tony, here it comes."

Tony's eyes turned to watch the jiggling jumbos.

One should not take your eye off the ball. If you do, you're done. The throw was true. The quarter went directly to Tony's face, impacted his glasses and shattered them. I threw the second quarter, which hit him in the chest and left.

When I sold all my peanuts, I had to return to the main office to get a new supply. The man in charge was waiting for me.

"We had a guy in here ranting and raving about the fact you broke his glasses by throwing a quarter when he wasn't looking."

I told him the story and he had heard about Daddy Warbucks and the Marilyn Monroe look- alike who were sitting in the mezzanine. He had encountered similar complaints over the years, as this was not a new occurrence. They put Tony in touch with the insurance company and I was off the hook. I learned the correct response was to send the change in manually, turn around and leave. The customer always retrieved this change and he might be upset if you were gone, but he had no one to pick on. That's how I spent my summer.

THE END