

The Kid in Left Field

“You guys ready?” the coach asked while holding his trademark bucket of baseballs and two duffel bags of equipment. He slid his magnetic keycard over the locked dugout gate and kneed open the door. The team filed in to the dugout and soon all you could hear was the pinging of aluminum bats and loud conversation, none of it about baseball.

It was the halfway mark of the Little League season. The Cardinals were holding on to second place and pushing hard for a playoff spot. Being one of the younger and newer players on the team, I found my familiar spot towards the end of the bench setting out my equipment with my friend Mike.

“Hey Nick”, the coach beckoned me as he walked over, “I’m putting you in left field today. Don’t let the ball play you. Just keep it in front of you and get it in to the cutoff man quickly.” Words he has ingrained upon me more times than I would care to remember.

The game would soon begin. I found myself in the midst of a four – four tie in the middle innings. It was a long inning and my mind started to wander. I was watching the game, but at the same time, not watching it. The heat was causing an early exhaustion and I was slumped over at the waist with my hands resting on my bent knees.

I could hear noises coming from behind me. Loud mothers in the stands were trying to motivate their own kids. Children were running around screaming. I could smell slightly-overdone hotdogs cooking over by the concession stand. It really was just your typical summer Little League game.

A sudden shout interrupted my peaceful serenity. “Hey!” A voice I did not recognize, and which seemed to be much closer than the rest of the voices, boomed out at me. I just kept my head down waiting for the next batter. It came again, “Hey, number 4! Hey, you!” Being

that was my number I decided to at least glance back. I saw a boy standing on the outside part of the outfield fence. I did not recognize him.

He motioned to me to move to my right. I could barely make out what he was saying, but it seemed like he was trying to get his point across that the batter coming to the plate was going to pull the ball down the left field line. Not wanting to be harassed by this kid all game, I obliged. It didn't seem like bad advice anyway. I took six or seven steps to my right and was just a few feet from the brightly-white chalked foul line.

The clean-up hitter for the other team came up to bat; a big kid, with a reputation for even bigger hits. On the very first pitch he lined a screaming shot down the left field line. I barely had to move. I took one small step in, raised my glove, and caught what would have been a sure double if I had stayed in my original position.

The team went delirious. I even had my number chanted out from the crowd. I turned to the kid who I could see had a big grin on his face. I tipped my cap to him to say thanks for the advice.

Before I ran back in to the dugout to prepare for my next at-bat, the kid motioned to me to come closer to him. Considering the nice gift he just bestowed upon me, I felt obligated to oblige. "You see this new kid they have coming in to pitch?" he glared over to the other team's bullpen location, "he is going to throw you a first pitch curve. Guaranteed."

I thought that would be odd considering the kid warming up was throwing nothing but heat. Nevertheless, I thanked the kid and took his advice to heart. If he was right about the fly ball, maybe he would be right about this, too. I had nothing to lose.

I ran back in to the dugout with the kid's advice still circling in my head. I received congratulations on my run-saving catch as I bounded in to the dugout. I even got a 'good job' from the coach.

I started to prepare for my at-bat. I was leading off this inning. As I bent down to grab my helmet my best friend, Mike, walked up to me and asked, "What was that thing with the fence?"

I pointed to the kid at the fence and told him he gives some great advice. Mike gave a look, and then flashed me an awkward smile.

My name was announced over the P.A. system. The advice I was just given weighed heavily upon me. I could still hear the advice haunting my thoughts.

I came to the plate and dug my cleats in. I would no doubt look for a first pitch curveball, and I would be swinging. I thought to myself, "This is Little League, kids swing at just about anything anyway. Even if this advice turned out to be nonsense I would look no more a fool than any other player swinging at a bad pitch."

I picked a spot where I thought the curve would break over the plate, shifted my weight back, and then the pitch was fired in. I could see the red stitches on the baseball spinning in a way which signified the curve. I had the timing just right. The location was perfect.

My fingers tightened around the bat as I took my strongest, most level swing I could. I hit that baseball directly in the sweet spot of my bat. The ping of the bat could probably be heard towns away. I ran the bases as the baseball hummed in to the outfield and crashed in to the outfield fence right in front of the kid. I had my first stand-up double of the season.

The game dragged on and I continued to get invaluable advice from my new friend in left field. He didn't move the entire game. He just leaned up on the left field fence watching what seemed to me just another ordinary baseball game.

By the end of the game, my team had won six to four. I had three extra-base hits, two assists, and three incredible plays in the field. All of them thanks to the kid in left field.

After we recorded the last out I ran over to the fence to speak with the kid. He was wearing some type of baseball uniform. It might have been a throw-back uniform as it had a look of the uniforms you would see on players who played quite some time ago.

"Hi, I'm Nick," I said, "thanks again for all of the advice today."

The kid nodded and spoke. It was very difficult to understand him. He mumbled, "Anytime, I'm Pat McIntyre."

He let me know that he was from the same town, but did not play Little League anymore. He said he came to a lot of games, but usually stayed out of sight. The only reason he called out to me was because he used to play on the same team, same position, and even had the same number 4 as I did. I asked him when he played, as he didn't look much older than I was. He let me know he played when he was ten. I assumed he must have been twelve now.

Our talk was interrupted by my coach's boisterous voice, "Hey Nick, you a part of this team or what?!"

Pat told me he would be at the next game and we could talk then. I tried to give him a fist-pump through the fence, but he must have never seen one before because he looked at me like I had a third eye. I just ran back to the dugout.

The coach awarded me with the game ball. He quieted down the team and asked me what I did different this game to make me play so well. "I just took a little advice from my new friend Pat McIntyre," I said.

The players on the bench looked at each other surprisingly. Then after a second or two of empty stares and awkward silence they all blurted out with laughter. My coaches did not look too thrilled. They shot me a face of disgust. I had no idea what the punch line was. I took my game ball and headed to the end of the bench to pack up my gear.

"Wow, Nick, that was pretty crude," my best friend Mike said.

"What?" I asked.

"Your friend Pat McIntyre.....Patrick 'M' McIntyre. You know, Patrick M. field, the field we play on," Mike stated.

It had not crossed my mind until now, but the field we do play on is called Patrick M. Field. "Any relation?" I asked Mike.

Mike just shot me another confused look, and said, "Patrick M. Field was named after a kid named Patrick "Pat" McIntyre. You didn't do too well in history, did you? His number 4 is painted out in left field."

I was confused more than ever. Why did the kid I was just speaking to have an entire field named after him? Why was his number painted out in left field?

Most of the kids on the team had already left through the dugout gate. I supposed there was no more reason to question Mike about Pat; as it seemed to only frustrate him more and more.

I left the dugout, hopped on my bike, and rode home.

Later that night I turned on my laptop and pulled up a search engine. “Who was this Patrick McIntyre?” I thought to myself. I typed in ‘Patrick McIntyre, Little League, and the name of the town’. To my surprise there were not only local stories about Patrick, but also national articles about him. The articles were about thirty years old.

Local boy, Patrick Thomas McIntyre, 10, went missing last Monday. He was last seen leaving the community Little League field on River Road. Foul play was expected in his disappearance.

Another article mentioned,

38-year old, Stanley Cooper, was questioned today in the disappearance of young Patrick McIntyre. Stanley served as the groundskeeper at the Little League field for the past ten years. He was the last person seen with the boy.

A final article read,

Police are now searching for Stanley Cooper in the disappearance of Patrick McIntyre. While not

naming him as a suspect, police are stating he is a person of interest in the case.

The articles seem to paint Patrick McIntyre as a ten year old boy from the same town as mine. A few decades ago he played Little League. A picture in one article showed the boy playing left field for the Cardinals, wearing a number 4 jersey.

The information went on to say that after a game the boy left on his bike with some friends, but before leaving the field area the groundskeeper at the time called him over. The boys waited for their friend to finish talking to the groundskeeper, but decided to leave when it was taking too long. About an hour after the game ended Patrick's worried mother reported him missing to police.

The groundskeeper, Stanley Cooper, seemed to have a bad reputation around town. Combine that with the fact Stanley was the last person seen with the boy, the town and even the police knew who the number one suspect was in the disappearance of little Patrick McIntyre.

The police tried to get hold of Stanley Cooper, but he disappeared shortly after his first questioning. An arrest warrant was never issued for Stanley considering there was never any evidence of wrongdoing on his part. The disappearance of the McIntyre boy went unsolved.

The next evening was a night game against our division rivals, the Dodgers. The game brought an enormous crowd to the ballpark. I received a few wise cracks about Patrick McIntyre from my teammates when I arrived.

I had given a lot of thought the night before about what took place during the last game. I came up with two reasons as to what had happened. One was that I could have been seeing

things. Considering my lack of enthusiasm at being locked away in a psychiatric ward the rest of my life, I went with reason two. It had to be some kid playing a prank on me.

The time to start the game quickly approached. I looked at the line up card and saw that I was once again in left field. My coach came up to me and told me that he doesn't care how I did it yesterday, just to play that same way again today.

Our team took the field. While I jogged out to left field I scanned the outfield fence and crowd sitting in the bleachers. It was a bit hard considering it was dark out, but I could not find the boy I spoke with yesterday.

When I reached left field I started to warm up with the other outfielders throwing the ball around. All of a sudden I heard the eerie familiar voice, "Hey! Hey number 4!"

I ignored it the best I could. It seemed like my teammates did, too, as no one paid him any attention. Throughout that first inning, his voice became louder and louder as I continued to ignore the kid in left field. I could tell he was trying to give me some advice again, but I just kept on ignoring him. I did not want to be the butt of any more jokes. You could tell by the tone in his voice the silent treatment seemed to be infuriating him.

Mercifully, the top of the inning only took a few minutes and I was able to get off of the field quite quickly. I could hear the boy's voice fading out as I got closer to the dugout.

I was slotted in to the leadoff spot for tonight's game thanks in part to my performance the day before. When I came up to bat I could hear as clear as day the boy mocking me from the left field fence. It was quite loud, and quite embarrassing. The boy screamed some negative chants you may hear at a big league game, but not at a Little League game. "You suck!" and "My grandmother hits better than you!" rained down upon me from the outfield. I was kind of surprised no one in the crowd said anything to him.

I quickly went down on three pitches striking out. A loud laughter echoed through the infield. When I walked back to the dugout my coach asked me what happened. I just threw my helmet down and slammed my bat on to the rack.

The next inning I took my familiar jog back out to left field. I could see the boy leaning up on the fence. He mocked at me, “That’s the most jogging you’ll do all night if you keep swinging the bat like that, ‘cause you’ll never get on base!”

I kept jogging up to the fence where he was standing. “What the Hell is your problem?!” I demanded.

“You’re my problem,” he stated, “You can’t just ignore me. I gave you that game yesterday, and this is how you treat a friend?”

“First off, we’re not friends. And furthermore, you’re not Patrick McIntyre.” A rage filled his face. “So just sit down, and shut up!” I barked at him.

I could start to see people look in our direction from the stands. They had a concerned look on their faces. I turned my back and ran back out to my position. I had missed the warm-up throw around with the other outfielders, and the inning had just started. As soon as the first pitch was thrown I would hear what would be one of the loudest voices I have ever, and would ever hear in my lifetime. “I WILL NOT BE IGNORED!!!”

The intensity at which the phrase was shouted at me caused me to partially duck; as though the sound was like rocks being thrown at me. I could not turn back, though. The first pitch was hit on the ground to the shortstop and I stumbled forward to back him up.

After the play was made I turned back to the boy, but he was gone. Nervously, I scanned the bleachers, the concession stand, all around the field, and even on the field. My heart was

thumping, and my hands were shaking. The voice was unearthly, and continued to ring through my head, 'I will not be ignored.' The boy simply vanished.

After what felt like minutes, but was really only a few seconds, a familiar churning sound took over the infield. With a sudden burst the sprinklers all turned on simultaneously shooting cold water over the infield and outfield. My heart jumped in my throat. I had a feeling that the boy I kept seeing would jump out at me each time I turned around. The rest of my team had the time of their lives dancing around in the sprinklers.

The coaches started to call in the players. We huddled in the dugouts to avoid an early shower. Some of the coaches went in to the watering system box to try to turn off the sprinklers. Their attempts failed after a few minutes. They concluded that a pipe must have busted under the field and they needed to get someone to turn off the main valve. The rest of the game was cancelled. I was relieved since I did not have to deal with this lunatic kid anymore.

The coach walked over to the field gate and swiped his card to unlock the magnetic locks. The first swipe did not work, then a second, a third.... The gates would not unlock. "The busted pipe must have caused electrical damage." I heard one of the coaches say.

"Great! What do we have to do now to get off the field, climb the fence?!" moaned our starting pitcher.

"We have a physical key to unlock the gates, somewhere. Just be patient."

At this point, some of the parents in the stands started to walk over to the gate to find out what was going on. Our coach looked blindly through his mess of an equipment bag for a small key.

From behind us a strange sound was coming from the scoreboard. It sounded like an intense buzzing sound. With a quick flash, all of the bulbs on the scoreboard sparkled brightly in

an aimless pattern. They danced irregularly at us shining brighter than ever before; to the point that when you looked away from them you were temporarily blinded. Some of the bulbs started to pop from burning so bright. Parents ran over to the area shielding their small children from falling debris while ushering them away from the now defunct scoreboard.

As the sprinklers continued to soak the field, and the people in the stands started to vacate the bleachers, I could see people running along the outskirts of the field being hit with some thing. I saw a girl about the same age as I get hit in the head with a baseball. The pitching machines which lined the back of the park started coming on and firing baseballs all throughout the spectator area.

People at this point were in an outright panic. People were screaming, pushing, shoving; I saw one gentleman run right over a mother trying to pick up her young son. The coaches told us to stay where we were. They assured us this was all due to some electrical issues caused by the busted water pipe. I knew better. I kept watching the field for signs of Patrick.

The lights which lit the field for our night games started to pop and burn out. With each loud, distinctive pop the field grew more and more dark. The person who was manning the concession stand came running out screaming in pain. Smoke and flames flew out of the stand's window.

Everyone was in a total state of panic with people running in every direction, protecting their children, trying to escape. A few people were lying on the ground, struck in the head with flying debris, baseballs, and glass. Small children were screaming for their parents. The imminent darkness made it hard to even see the person right next to you. Most of the players at this point were huddled up by the gate. Some have started to try to climb the twenty foot fence.

As quick as things started to unravel, everything just stopped. The sprinklers went off. The scoreboard went dark. The pitching machines shut off. The field lights remained on; the ones that did not pop anyway. The field was dark, but you could still see. It was eerily quiet except for the random screams and footsteps of people still in a state of panic.

The screams started to subside as people were finally able to get their wits about them. The focus of parents was trying to escape the field with their children.

As adults and children were trying to flee a new sound could be heard. It penetrated the dark night sky. It was the sound of twisting, bending metal and it was coming from the scoreboard. Even in the darkened field, you could see the scoreboard start to sway back and forth in the wind. It became worse. The bending was to the point of total destruction and everyone feared it would soon collapse.

Without warning, what sounded like a gun being fired was heard. At the same time one of the windows in the concession stand shattered. "Someone has a gun!" could be overheard from the crowd.

The panic once again set in and people started to run. "No!" screamed the other team's coach while pointing at the scoreboard. "The bolts in the scoreboard are breaking from the stress of the rocking. Get behind something, quick!"

Everyone started to take cover. People were hiding behind anything they could find. Mothers held their children closely encapsulating them from the projectiles. A woman who was running across the field trying to reach the parking lot must have been hit near the head with a piece of metal shrapnel. She fell right by second base and a puddle of blood started to cascade down her neck and pool on top of the base. Two men quickly ran out holding large duffel bags in front of them to try to pull the woman to safety.

After a few more large pings could be heard, the bolts seemed to have stopped breaking. The scoreboard swayed back and forth much more than before. Everyone's eyes were on the big metal structure. "It's going down!" someone shouted.

With the sound of twisting metal, the scoreboard rocked one final time and started to fall forward. It crashed with a loud thud in to the corner post of the left field fence.

The post could not hold the weight of the giant scoreboard and was uprooted from the dirt; much like a tree would have been in a strong hurricane.

Once more, an ominous quiet fell over the field. No more noise, no more threat of immediate danger. Some of the parents were even able to put the fire out in the concession stand. You could hear the blaring of police vehicles and ambulances on their way to the scene.

A few of the players started to make our way over to where the post was uplifted. There were still a few people on the ground and the people who were not hurt were trying to help the injured.

The area where the post was ripped from the Earth left a huge hole in the ground. As I walked by it I could see what appeared to be a box of some type. The box was quite large and appeared to still be partially covered with dirt.

A hand grabbed my shoulder and yanked me back. I let out a horrified scream and blurted the name "Patrick!"

I looked up and saw a police officer. He asked me if I was alright. I could not even speak. I tried to lip the words yes, but my lips were trembling. With a ghost-like white stare, I nodded yes. He ushered me back and off the field in to an area where all of the parents were being reunited with their children. No one seemed to be speaking.

The police investigation concluded after a few days. Our little town became a hot bed of news media activity. We were on all of the national news channel. Everyone at the field that night was interviewed numerous times. I even found myself on the local evening news.

The authorities found the box I saw that night. When they excavated it they found the remains of Patrick McIntyre. Dental impressions had to be used to identify the remains. They also found DNA in the box which was not Patrick's. It belonged to Stanley Cooper. After a short nationwide manhunt, Stanley was arrested just a few towns over. He is currently awaiting trial on the murder of Patrick McIntyre.

In the police report, all of the strange occurrences that night were attributed to a busted water pipe under the field. That led to a power box being shorted out and causing all of the electrical problems. Just a 'freak occurrence' is how they summed it up. I knew better; but I never mentioned a thing about the kid I saw in left field.

The following year all of the gossip died down. It was April, and opening day of the new Little League season. A new field was built. The old one was turned in to a parking lot for a nearby business.

At the opening day ceremony the players were all lined around the infield. The mayor was giving his yearly speech. Right above the press box I could see the silhouette of Patrick McIntyre. It was surrounded by a bright glowing aura. I looked at the players standing around me, and I could tell no one else could see the apparition but me.

Patrick stared directly in to my eyes with a big grin. I could tell he was thanking me for finding his body and bringing his killer to justice. The apparition started to dissolve and float directly up in to the sky. He could finally rest in peace.