

= Homer at the Bat =

" Homer at the Bat " is the seventeenth episode of The Simpsons ' third season . It originally aired on the Fox network in the United States on February 20 , 1992 . The episode follows the Springfield Nuclear Power Plant softball team , led by Homer , having a winning season and making the championship game . Mr. Burns makes a large bet that the team will win and brings in nine ringers from the " big leagues " to ensure his success . It was written by John Swartzwelder , who is a big baseball fan , and directed by Jim Reardon .

Roger Clemens , Wade Boggs , Ken Griffey , Jr . , Steve Sax , Ozzie Smith , José Canseco , Don Mattingly , Darryl Strawberry and Mike Scioscia all guest starred as themselves , playing the ringers hired by Mr. Burns . Terry Cashman sang a song over the end credits . The guest stars were recorded over several months , with differing degrees of cooperation . The episode is often named among the show 's best , and was the first to beat The Cosby Show in the ratings on its original airing . In 2014 , showrunner Al Jean selected it as one of five essential episodes in the show 's history .

= = Plot = =

It is softball season in Springfield and many of the workers at Springfield Nuclear Power Plant are reluctant to sign up for the Power Plant team due to their previous unsuccessful year . Homer reveals that he has a secret weapon , a homemade bat named " Wonder Bat " and his co @-@ workers eagerly join the team . Thanks in large part to Homer , the team goes through its season undefeated and earns the right to play in the championship game against the Shelbyville Nuclear Power Plant .

Mr. Burns makes a million dollar bet with Aristotle Amadopoulos , owner of the Shelbyville plant , that his team will win . To secure victory in the game , Mr. Burns decides to hire major league stars and assembles a team that includes Shoeless Joe Jackson , Pie Traynor , Harry Hooper , Honus Wagner , Cap Anson , Nap Lajoie , Gabby Street , Mordecai " Three Finger " Brown , and Jim Creighton (the last of whom had been dead for 130 years) . Waylon Smithers informs Mr. Burns that the players he picked have all retired and died , and so Mr. Burns changes tactics and orders Smithers to find some current superstar players . He hires nine Major League Baseball players ? Roger Clemens , Wade Boggs , Ken Griffey , Jr . , Steve Sax , Ozzie Smith , Jose Canseco , Don Mattingly , Darryl Strawberry and Mike Scioscia ? and gives them token jobs at the plant so that they can play on the team , much to the dismay of the plant workers who got the team to the championship game in the first place .

Mr Burns hires a hypnotist to train the team , and they all mouth back his words (such as ' You will beat Shelbyville ') in unison (' We will beat Shelbyville ') until the hypnotist says ' You will give 110 % ' , at which point the team mouth back , still in perfect unison , ' That 's impossible . No one can give more than 100 % . By definition , that is the most anyone can give ' .

However , before the game , eight of the nine all @-@ star players suffer unrelated misfortunes that prevent them from playing : Clemens suddenly behaves like a chicken due to the hypnotist 's incompetence , Boggs is knocked unconscious by Barney after a bizarre argument at Moe 's Tavern (over who was England 's greatest Prime Minister , Lord Palmerston or Pitt the Elder) , Griffey , Jr. takes an overdose of nerve tonic , resulting in an extreme case of gigantism , Sax is arrested and put in jail for every unsolved murder in New York City , Smith disappears in the " Springfield mystery spot " , Canseco is too busy rescuing a woman and her possessions from a fire , Mattingly is kicked off the team by Mr. Burns due to sideburns only he can see , and Scioscia is hospitalized due to radiation poisoning from the plant , having taken his token job all too seriously . Mr. Burns is forced to use his original employees , along with Strawberry , the only star who can play . He made a speech that he knows that his team hated him for what he did to them and he tells them to win . Homer remains on the bench as Strawberry plays his position .

With the score tied and bases loaded with two outs in the bottom of the ninth inning , Mr. Burns elects to field a right @-@ handed hitter against a left @-@ handed pitcher and pinch hits Homer for

Strawberry . The very first pitch hits Homer in the head , rendering him unconscious , but forcing in the winning run . The team wins the title and Homer , still unconscious , is paraded as a hero . Smithers holds the trophy . Mr. Burns thinks about it . Homer lying on the ground .

= = Production = =

" Homer at the Bat " took a long time to produce . It was written by John Swartzwelder , who is a big baseball fan , but was suggested by Sam Simon , who wanted an episode filled with real Major League Baseball players . Executive producers Al Jean and Mike Reiss doubted that they would be able to get nine players , thinking that they would be able to get three at best . However , they succeeded , and the nine players who agreed to guest star were recorded over a period of six months , whenever they were playing the Los Angeles Dodgers or California Angels . Each player recorded their part in roughly five minutes and spent the next hour writing autographs for the staff . In several cases , the writers were unable to get the player who was their first choice . Two of the players who turned down the chance to guest star were Ryne Sandberg and Carlton Fisk .

All of the players were cooperative except for Jose Canseco , who was intimidating . He disliked his original part and insisted it be rewritten , and the writers grudgingly made him as heroic as possible . He was originally slated to wake up in bed with Edna Krabappel and miss the game , but Canseco 's then @-@ wife , Esther Haddad , objected . He disliked his caricature , stating that " the animation looked nothing like [him] , " but that he found the acting was very easy . When asked in 2007 about his part by the San Jose Mercury News , he responded , " that was 100 years ago , " hung up the phone and did not answer any of the paper 's subsequent calls for an interview about his guest spot .

Ken Griffey , Jr. did not understand his line " there 's a party in my mouth and everyone 's invited " and got quite frustrated when he was recording it . He was directed by Mike Reiss , and his father Ken Griffey , Sr. was also present , trying to coach his son . Roger Clemens , who made his own chicken noises , was directed by Jeff Martin , as was Wade Boggs . Mike Reiss directed most of the other players . Mike Scioscia accepted his guest spot in " half a second , " while Ozzie Smith has stated that he would like to guest star again " so [he] can get out [of the Springfield Mystery spot] . " Don Mattingly , who was forced to shave off his " sideburns " by Mr. Burns during the episode , would later have an actual " haircut controversy " , while he was playing for the New York Yankees . The coaching staff forced him to cut his long hair , and was briefly dropped from the team line @-@ up for not doing so . Many people believed the joke in the episode to be a reference to the incident , but " Homer at the Bat " was recorded a year before it happened . Many of the guest stars , including Terry Cashman , Wade Boggs and Darryl Strawberry all admit that they are more well known because of their appearance in the episode , Cashman having " Talkin ' Softball " requested more often than " Talkin ' Baseball " .

One of the hardest pieces of editing was the hypnotist segment , which featured several of the guest stars speaking in unison . It was difficult because the parts were recorded over a period of several months and thus it was hard to sync their voices . Rich Moore was originally intended to direct the episode , but as he did not know anything about baseball he was switched with Jim Reardon , who was a baseball fan . Moore was given the episode " Lisa the Greek " instead . Many of the player designs were difficult , because the animators had a hard time designing real world people during the early years .

= = Cultural references = =

The episode makes several allusions to the film *The Natural* . Homer 's secret weapon , his self @-@ created " Wonderbat " , is akin to Roy Hobbs 's " Wonderboy " , and both bats are eventually destroyed . The scene featuring the explosion of stadium lights as Homer circles the basepaths is also taken directly from the film . The end song " Talkin ' Softball " is a parody of " Talkin ' Baseball " by Terry Cashman . Jeff Martin wrote the new version of the song , but Cashman was brought in to sing it . The scenes of the Power Plant team traveling from city to city by train , overlaid with the

pennant of the city they are going to , is a reference to the 1942 film The Pride of the Yankees . Carl batting with a piano leg is a reference to Norm Cash of the Detroit Tigers , who once tried to bat with a table leg in a game where Nolan Ryan was extremely overpowering and threw a no @-@ hitter . The episode 's title references " Casey at the Bat " .

= = Reception = =

During the previous season , Fox had put The Simpsons in a timeslot that meant it was in direct competition with The Cosby Show , which won the timeslot every time . " Homer at the Bat " had a 15 @.@ 9 rating and 23 % share to win its timeslot while The Cosby Show had a 13 @.@ 2 rating and 20 % share . This was the first time that a new Simpsons episode beat a new Cosby Show episode . Former executive producer Sam Simon and current showrunner Al Jean named it as their favorite episode . Regular cast members Harry Shearer and Julie Kavner disliked the episode because of its focus on the guest stars and its surreal tone . They were particularly annoyed by the Mattingly sideburns joke .

Warren Martyn and Adrian Wood , the authors of the book I Can 't Believe It 's a Bigger and Better Updated Unofficial Simpsons Guide , praised the episode , calling it " a great episode because the accidents that befall the pro players are so funny . " Chris Turner , the author of the book Planet Simpson , said that the episode was the indication that " the Golden Age [of the show] had arrived . " Nate Meyers gave the episode four and a half out of five , stating " the script makes great use of the baseball superstars , giving each of them a strong personality and plenty of pep (the highlight has to be Mattingly 's clash with Mr. Burns) . " Colin Jacobson disliked the episode : " when [" Homer at the Bat "] originally aired , I didn 't like it . While I 've warmed up to the show slightly over the last decade , I still think it 's generally weak , and I 'd definitely pick it as Season Three 's worst . "

Entertainment Weekly placed the episode fifteenth on their top 25 The Simpsons episodes list , noting it was " early proof that The Simpsons could juggle a squad of guest stars without giving the family short shrift . " It was placed third on AskMen.com 's " Top 10 : Simpsons Episodes " list , Rich Weir called it " one of the show 's more memorable moments " and " effective as it combines a slew of guest stars with some hilarious material for Homer . " The entire episode was placed first on ESPN.com 's list of the " Top 100 Simpsons sport moments " , released in 2004 . Greg Collins , the author of the list , gave great praise of the episode . He stated that this is the " king of all sports episodes , and perhaps the greatest Simpsons episode ever . " A friend of Collins later met guest star Mike Scioscia and told him that he thought his guest spot was the best thing Scioscia had ever done , he responded " Thanks , I think " . Eric Reinagel , Brian Moritz and John Hill of Press & Sun @-@ Bulletin named the episode the fourth best in the show 's history , and a journalist for The Toronto Star named Homer 's conversation with Darryl Strawberry as the " greatest conversation of all time , involving the word yes " .

IGN.com ranked the baseballers ' performances as the seventeenth best guest appearance in the show 's history , calling " each of these appearances was hilarious , making this a classic episode . " The Phoenix.com praised the performances of each of the guest stars , but Darryl Strawberry , whom they put in the fifth position , was the only one to make their " Top 20 guest stars " list .

= = Impact = =

The episode has been credited with helping to save several lives . During the scene in which Homer chokes on a donut , a poster explaining how the Heimlich maneuver works is on the wall behind him . In May 1992 , Chris Bencze was able to save his brother 's life by performing the Heimlich Maneuver on him , having seen it in the episode , and in December 2007 Aiden Bateman was able to save his friend Alex Hardy 's life by recalling the same .