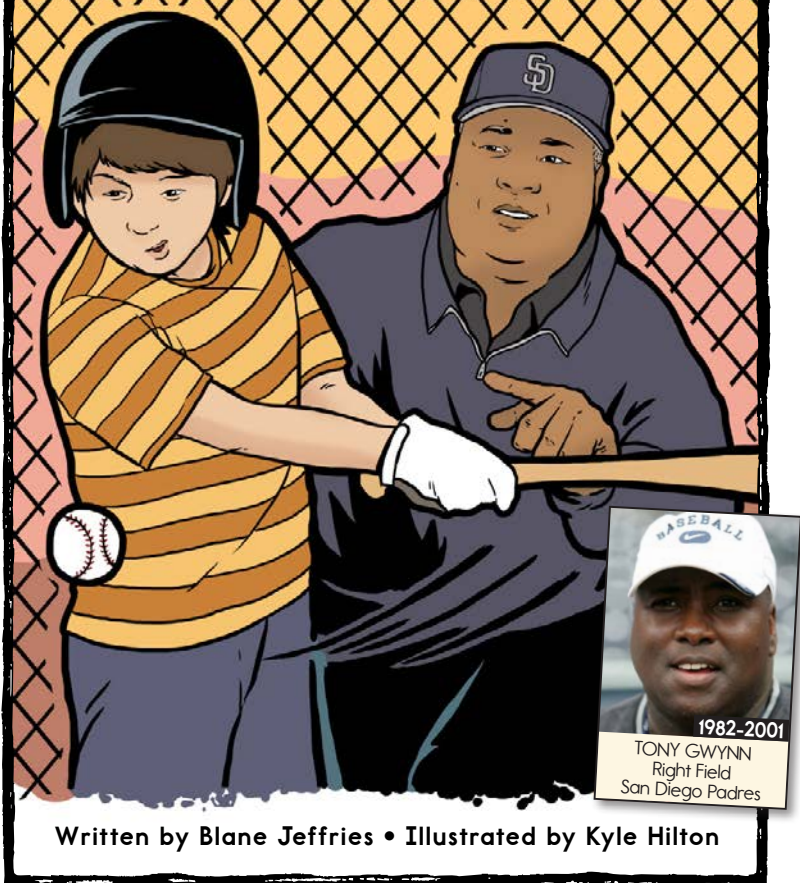


LEVELED BOOK • 0

Scotty's Spring Training



Written by Blane Jeffries • Illustrated by Kyle Hilton

www.readinga-z.com

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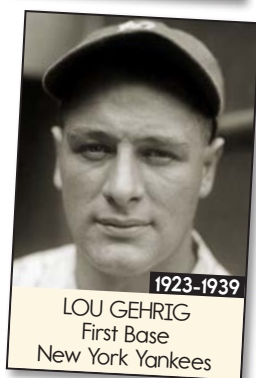
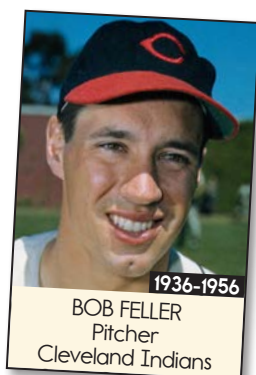
“Hey, Scotty, your spring school break is short and it’s a beautiful day here in Phoenix,” said Gramps. “Can I pry you away from that game to play some catch?”

“Umm, not yet, Gramps. I want to pitch to one more batter,” Scotty said.

He was playing his favorite computer baseball game, *All-Time All-Stars*. This game let him make up his own teams. He could have great players from history play with, and against, great players of today.

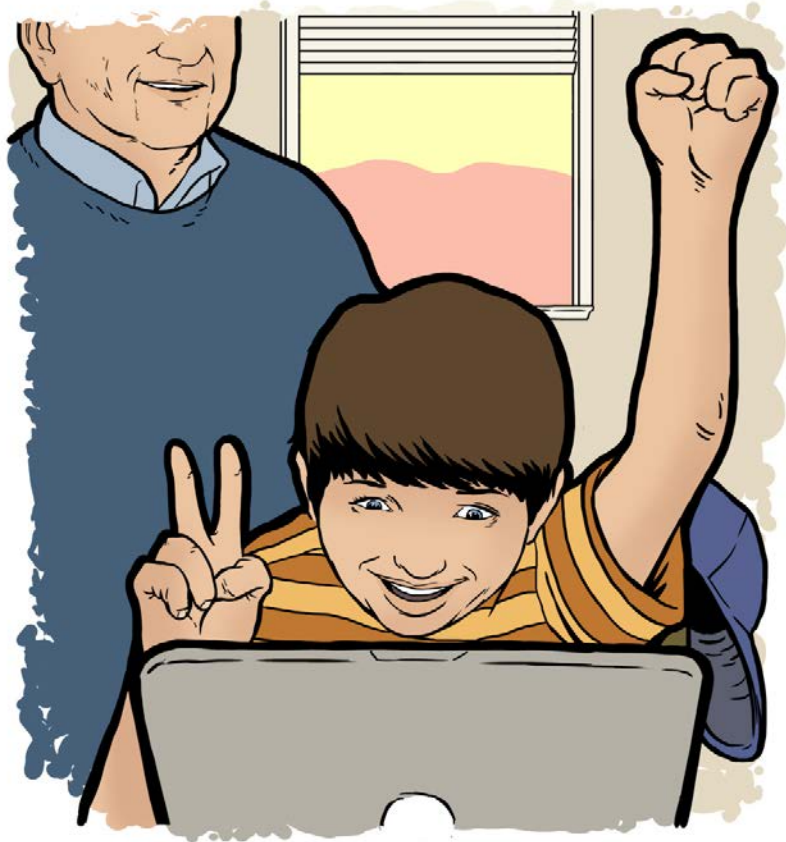


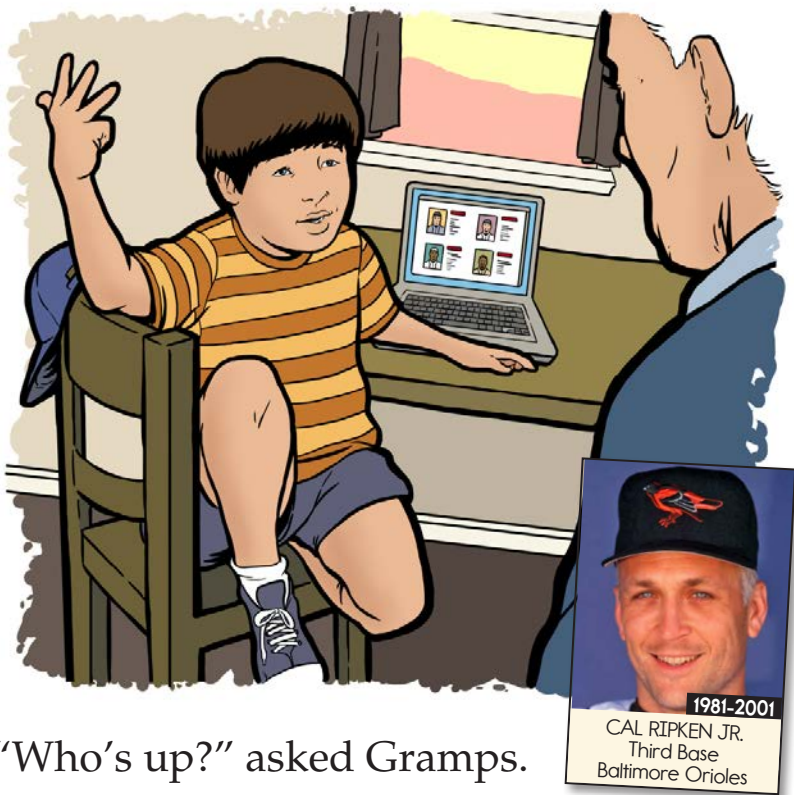
Scotty loved looking up and memorizing the players' **statistics**. Knowing what each player did best helped him to make decisions during the game. He called the pitches and controlled the batters. For Scotty, *All-Time All-Stars* was much more fun than playing *real* baseball.



Scotty wasn't very good at real baseball. In T-Ball two years ago he couldn't hit the ball off the tee. Last year, he failed to catch most of the fly balls that were hit his way. He wasn't sure if he would even try out for Little League this year.

"Here's the pitch," said Scotty. "A fastball low and away. *Strike two!*"





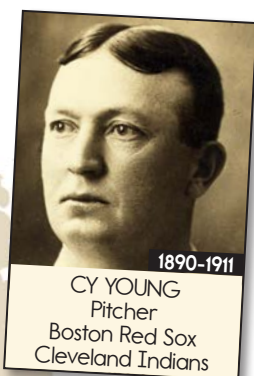
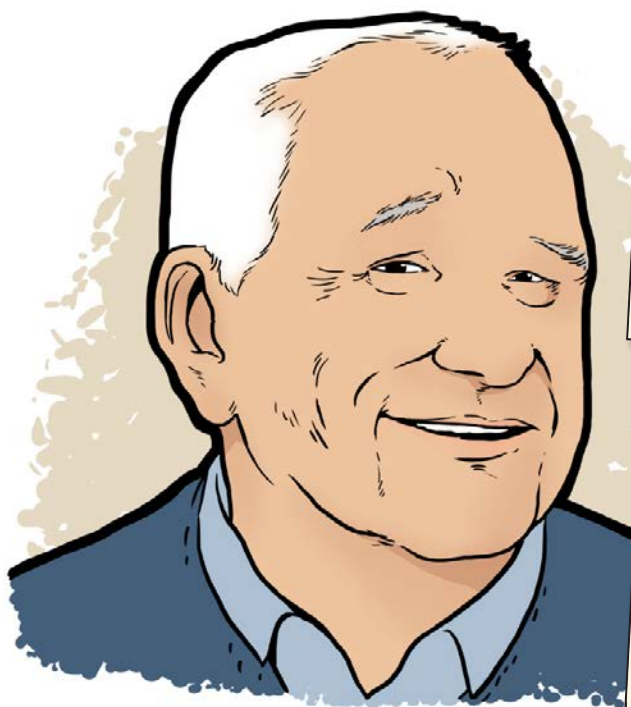
"Who's up?" asked Gramps.

"Cal Ripken Jr. He got two Most Valuable Player awards playing **shortstop** for the Baltimore Orioles in the 1980s and 1990s. But he also broke Lou 'The Iron Horse' Gehrig's sixty-year-old record of playing 2,130 games in a row. Cal played in 2,632 straight games."

"You sure know your stats," said Gramps.
"Who's up next?"

“I’m going to **pinch-hit** for my pitcher, Cy Young, with Ichiro Suzuki. Suzuki is an awesome outfielder for the Seattle Mariners. He got 200-plus hits ten years in a row. In 2004, he set the Major League Baseball record for most hits in a single season with 262.”

“That’s right,” said Gramps. “He’s really something to watch. How’d you like to see the real Ichiro Suzuki play?”



“We could drive over to the Mariners’ spring training camp,” said Gramps. “It’s not far from here. We can watch from the sidelines. We might see lots of players.”

“We could watch Suzuki training?” asked Scotty. “Come on, Gramps,” he begged. “Let’s get going!”





Dustin Ackley, second baseman for the Seattle Mariners, at spring training batting practice in Arizona.

As they drove, Gramps explained the importance of spring training camp. “Practice makes anyone a better player,” said Gramps. “Each spring, major league teams come to Arizona and Florida, where the weather is warm. They practice their skills to be ready for the new season. Teams do drills, review game plans, and play **exhibition games** against each other. I go to most of the exhibition games here,” said Gramps.

“I guess that I hadn’t thought about spring training very much,” said Scotty.



GRAPEFRUIT LEAGUE

Atlanta Braves
Baltimore Orioles
Boston Red Sox
Detroit Tigers
Florida Marlins
Houston Astros
Minnesota Twins
New York Mets
New York Yankees
Philadelphia Phillies
Pittsburgh Pirates
St. Louis Cardinals
Tampa Bay Rays
Toronto Blue Jays
Washington Nationals

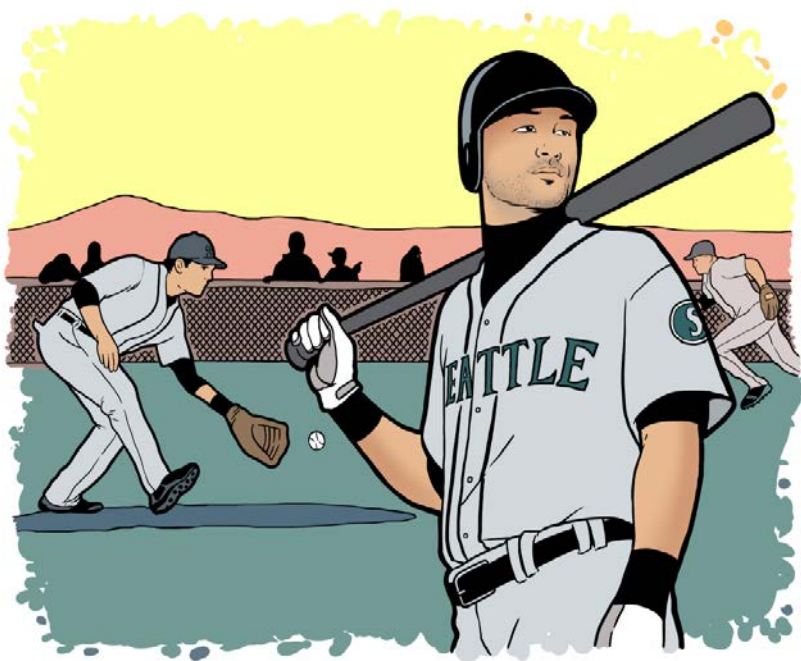
CACTUS LEAGUE

Arizona Diamondbacks
Chicago Cubs
Chicago White Sox
Cincinnati Reds
Cleveland Indians
Colorado Rockies
Kansas City Royals
Los Angeles Angels
Los Angeles Dodgers
Milwaukee Brewers
Oakland Athletics
San Diego Padres
San Francisco Giants
Seattle Mariners
Texas Rangers

“Fifteen of the Major League Baseball teams train here in Arizona, in the Cactus League,” explained Gramps. “It’s called that because, well—we have a lot of cactus here. Fifteen other teams play in Florida. That league is called the Grapefruit League because they grow a lot of grapefruit there.”

The Mariners shared the training camp with the San Diego Padres. Scotty watched as dozens of players did the same moves over and over again. They tossed balls back and forth and caught grounders. They ran the bases and chased down fly balls. They made their hard work look more like fun.

“Look, Gramps!” cried Scotty. “There’s Ichiro Suzuki, just like you said—and he’s hitting off a **batting tee**!”





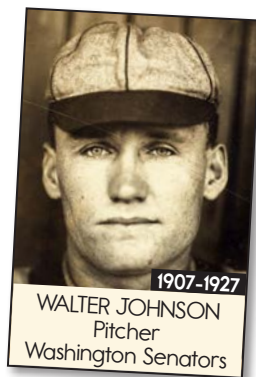
"It helps him keep his swing level," said a booming voice behind them. Scotty turned to see the Padres' Hall of Fame great Tony Gwynn watching Suzuki.

"You're Tony Gwynn!" said Scotty.

"You're on my *All-Time All-Stars* team!" Scotty said. "You got a **double** yesterday off of Walter Johnson!"

"That would have been difficult," Tony said.

"Johnson pitched from 1907 until 1927."





"I'm here as a batting coach for the Padres," Tony said. "Show me how you swing a bat."

"I'm hopeless," said Scotty.

"You're not hopeless," Tony said. "You just need to work harder on some things."

"To stay balanced, keep your back foot on the ground as you step toward the ball," he said.



Scotty still missed the tee a few times, but he made some solid hits, too.

Tony also showed Scotty how to use two hands when catching the ball. "Reach your arm high when you throw. That's it." Tony said. "Try again, and keep practicing."



On the ride home, Scotty was too tired and too happy to say much except, “Hey, Gramps, I don’t know how you arranged that, but it was cool! Will you help me practice tomorrow?”

Glossary

- batting tee** (*n.*) a flexible tube on which a baseball sits allowing a batter to practice hitting (p. 11)
- double** (*n.*) a base hit that allows a batter to reach second base without being called out (p. 12)
- exhibition games** (*n.*) a sporting event the results of which do not count as part of the regular season (p. 9)
- pinch-hit** (*v.*) to bat in the place of another player (p. 7)
- shortstop** (*n.*) an infielder in baseball who plays between second and third base (p. 6)
- statistics** (*n.*) numerical data that is collected, organized, and studied (p. 4)

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Level O Leveled Book
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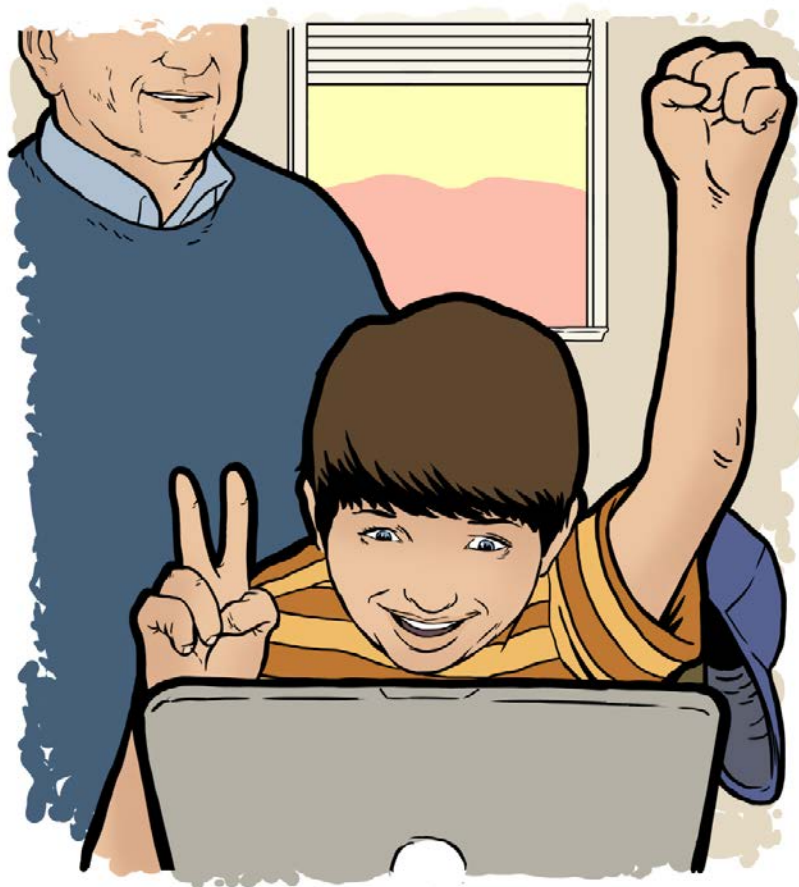
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