

The Championship Ballgame

Grayson Thorpe eyed the pitcher as he prepared to throw the ball. The game was on the line. His Butte des Mort (pronounced Bu - da - more) Lion's team had two outs in the last inning and they were one run behind. Each time at bat, Grayson had hit the ball hard but right at a fielder.

The pitcher threw the ball. The umpire called, "Strike one."

Grayson looked to first base where his best friend, Alex, stood near the bag. Grayson knew that Alex would need a running start to have a chance to score so he motioned for Alex to take a bigger lead, but Alex didn't notice.

The pitcher threw the ball fast, and Grayson swung and missed. He wanted to hit the ball hard because he knew it would take a long drive to get Alex home.

The pitcher looked confident. One more pitch and he'd win the game. Grayson wiggled his feet, looked toward Coach Meyer in the dugout, and then eyed the pitcher.

The ball flew toward him, and Grayson started to swing, but he held back.

"Ball one," the umpire called.

Grayson backed away from the plate and looked toward Alex at first. He didn't think his friend had enough lead off the base.

But Alex didn't look in his direction. He stared toward second base, ready to run at the sound of the bat hitting the ball.

Grayson swung the bat twice, hitched up his pants, and stepped back into the batter's box. The pitcher raised the ball to his chest. Grayson leaned back, waiting for the pitch.

He expected a fast ball—knew the pitcher would try to throw it past him. He set his feet and waited. The ball came down the middle of the plate. Grayson swung hard and made solid contact.

As he rounded first base he could see the outfielder chasing the ball toward the fence. He looked toward second base and saw Alex step on the bag, but Grayson was catching up fast.

By the time Alex touched third base, Grayson was running at his heels, and they ran toward home plate together. But Grayson had to slow to not run over his friend. He looked back and saw the shortstop with the ball, ready to throw it to the catcher who stood on home plate.

Grayson hollered, "Run, Alex. Run fast."

They'd win the game if they both scored. And they were ten feet from home plate when, out of the corner of his eye, Grayson saw the ball flying at the catcher. He reached forward to his friend who was running his fastest, but as Alex stepped toward home plate, he stumbled and fell face-first into the base path, two feet short of the plate.

Grayson tripped over Alex and flew into the dirt. The catcher

grabbed the ball and tagged them both.

The umpire shouted, "You're out!"

Alex sat on the base path, eyeing his twisted foot, tears streaking his dirt covered face.

At first Grayson wanted to scream at Alex. But when he looked at his heartbroken friend, he felt miserable. Even with his twisted foot, Alex tried his hardest and did his best.

Their baseball season was over until next summer.

February days in Wisconsin were cold, so Alex and Grayson often played in his cousins' heated garage. Wyatt, Grayson's older cousin, pushed his scooter around in circles, and Grayson and Alex ran behind, waiting their turn. But Alex tripped as he tried to keep up. Grayson wished that Alex could run and play like his other friends. It made him sad to see Alex stumble across the garage floor. He hoped the doctors could find a way to fix his best friend's twisted foot.

When it was Alex's turn to ride the scooter, he had trouble getting started. His turned-in right foot slipped off the scooter.

"Put your left foot up," Wyatt said. "Try pushing with your right."

But when Alex tried it that way, the back wheels ran over his toes. He dropped to the floor and rubbed his foot. "I'll just watch."

Alex sat on the hard cement steps and smiled toward his friends. Grayson knew that Alex sat and watched lots of times, and he

wished that he could help somehow. Grayson thought he'd cry if

he had to sit and watch his friends play, but Alex always had a smile on his face.

And because he didn't know how he could help, Grayson took Alex's turn on the scooter.

More than anything, Grayson wanted a heated garage like his cousins' garage. All winter, Wyatt and his sister, Aubrey, played in it. They hit wiffle balls. They rode Wyatt's tractor. They pushed the scooter in circles. They tossed Frisbees. And Wyatt helped his father wash their car in that garage. But best of all, they could do these things all winter when, outside, the snow piled high and the cold air froze their fingers.