Charles Schulz, the genius behind the *Peanuts* comic strip for half a century, once called baseball his favorite device. Schulz’s bumbling alter ego, Charlie Brown, was disrobed by line drives whizzing past the pitcher’s mound. The shortstop, Snoopy, caught ground balls in his mouth and spit them—ptui!—to a second baseman carrying a security blanket. Charlie Brown’s team lost games by scores of 40–0, 123–0, even 200–0. But we’d never think of booing.

Schulz grew up in St. Paul, Minnesota, very much like Charlie Brown, trying to play baseball but struggling mightily. In a 1995 interview with me, he spoke about how his boyhood spent playing the game forever shaped his love for it.

We never had good places to play when I was a kid in the 1930s. We would have loved to play on a real baseball diamond, with a real backstop and real bases that didn’t move around when you slid into them. But there was no Little League in St. Paul. We did it all on our own. And that’s what makes baseball so wonderful—kids can just get together and play.

I was always a pretty good player. I threw very well and could field. But I wasn’t a big kid and didn’t hit that well. So I never got a chance to play on my school teams.

When I was 15 or 16, I tried out for a real team, in what you’d now call Little League. It was sponsored by LaPlante’s Bicycle Shop, which was across the street and around the corner from my dad’s barbershop. I rode my bike over there and started throwing with the other kids. Then Mr. LaPlante said, “Go over there and hit a few.”

I fouled off the first one and then fouled off the second one. The coaches said, “Okay, bunt one.” So I did. They said okay, and that was it. That was my tryout. It was so disillusioning. But that sort of thing happens to kids all the time, in every sport. It happened
to Charlie Brown, of course, in large part because I was channeling what happened to me when I was young.

I did play on ragtag teams that we made up in the neighborhood. We’d find a bunch of kids and just play. One day, when I was about 12, we tried playing against a team of bigger kids. We had no chance. We lost one of
the games 40–0. People thought that Charlie Brown losing games by that kind of score was ridiculous, but believe me, it happens!

I loved using baseball in *Peanuts*. Baseball is the best sport for a cartoon strip, because you don’t have too much action. You could never do a basketball or hockey strip because people are moving all over the place. But in baseball, humor can come in between the action. If Charlie Brown made a turnover in a basketball game, he’d immediately have to get back on defense. But if he’s pitching and gives up a line drive that sends his shirt and socks flying, there’s a chance for reflection and humor. Baseball is perfect because little kids do play it at that age. And they aren’t very good at it. But, boy, do they suffer at it.

They say that baseball is a game of failure, but it isn’t always sad. Of course it isn’t. It’s a wonderful game. It actually brought me one of the most flattering moments of my life.

I was in the army in 1945, just after the war ended. I was stationed in a little town in Germany. We were waiting to go home. There were lots of guys from Brooklyn and New Jersey, and they decided to get up a softball game. I wanted to play so bad.

And they asked me to. I played catcher—no mask, no protection at all. I stayed very low behind the plate so I wouldn’t get hit by all the foul tips. But I loved every minute, just getting to play. I was so flattered that these big guys from New York would ask some unknown guy like me from Minnesota to be on their team.

Isn’t that funny? Something as totally meaningless as that, really, in the history of mankind and baseball, a game played in the middle of nowhere and didn’t mean a thing, meant so much to me. That’s what baseball does for us.

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CHARLES SCHULZ