

The  
**TRUE  
 STORY**  
 of  
**CASEY**  
 and the  
**MUDVILLE NINE**

## Was a school bully really the inspiration for one of baseball's greatest tales?

**E**rnest Lawrence Thayer was born in Lawrence, Massachusetts, on August 14, 1863. As a boy, he loved sports, especially baseball, but he was frail and avoided rough-and-tumble games. When he was in high school, Ernest earned many scholastic honors and became the editor of the school newspaper. In articles, he often made wisecracks about rowdy students.

One of Ernest's targets was Daniel Casey, who was a foot taller and at least 80 pounds heavier than Ernest and considered by some students to be a bully. Daniel never started a fight with Ernest, but he picked on him and teased him so much that Ernest gave up his wisecracks—but not his love of writing.

In 1886, Ernest moved to San Francisco to write a humor column and ballads (stories in rhyme) for that city's *Examiner* newspaper.

Ernest held that job for 2 years, until ill health forced him to quit. He wrote his last ballad for the *Examiner*, titled “Casey at the Bat: A Ballad of the Republic Sung in the Year 1888,” in only 2 hours. It was published on June 3, 1888, and Ernest was paid five dollars for it.

Later that summer, in New York, an actor and sports fan named William DeWolf Hopper needed an idea for a show. When he decided to stage a “baseball night,” a friend said, “I’ve just the thing for you—it’s a baseball poem, and it’s a humdinger.”

Ernest  
 Lawrence  
 Thayer

The poem was “Casey at the Bat.” DeWolf, as he was known, recited it from memory and the audience went wild. Soon, newspapers and magazines across the country reprinted it, and people everywhere were retelling the tale of Casey and the Mudville nine. Today, Casey is one of the most famous figures in baseball.

CONTINUED →

# CASEY AT THE BAT

by Ernest Lawrence Thayer

The outlook wasn't brilliant for the Mudville nine that day;  
The score stood four to two with but one inning more to play.  
And then when Cooney died at first, and Burrows did the same,  
A sickly silence fell upon the patrons of the game.

A straggling few got up to go in deep despair. The rest  
Clung to that hope which springs eternal in the human breast.  
They thought, "If only Casey could but get a whack at that—  
We'd put up even money now with Casey at the bat."

But Flynn preceded Casey, as did also Jimmy Blake,  
And the former was a lulu and the latter was a cake;  
So upon that stricken multitude grim melancholy sat,  
For there seemed but little chance of Casey's getting to the bat.

But Flynn let drive a single, to the wonderment of all,  
And Blake, the much despis-ed, tore the cover off the ball;

And when the dust had lifted and the men saw what  
had occurred,  
There was Jimmy safe at second and Flynn a-hugging  
third.

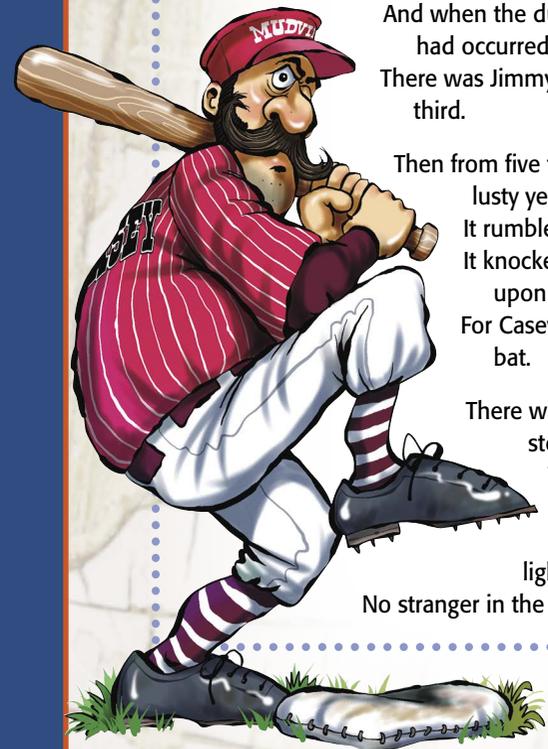
Then from five thousand throats and more there rose a  
lusty yell;  
It rumbled through the valley, it rattled in the dell;  
It knocked upon the mountain and recoiled  
upon the flat,  
For Casey, mighty Casey, was advancing to the  
bat.

There was ease in Casey's manner as he  
stepped into his place.

There was pride in Casey's bearing and  
a smile on Casey's face.

And when, responding to the cheers, he  
lightly doffed his hat,

No stranger in the crowd could doubt 'twas Casey at the bat.



Ten thousand eyes were on him as he rubbed his hands with dirt;  
Five thousand tongues applauded when he wiped them on his shirt.  
Then while the writhing pitcher ground the ball into his hip,  
Defiance gleamed in Casey's eye, a sneer curled Casey's lip.

And now the leather-covered sphere came hurtling through the air,  
And Casey stood a-watching it in haughty grandeur there.  
Close by the sturdy batsman the ball unheeded sped—  
"That ain't my style," said Casey—"Strike one," the umpire said.

From benches, black with people, there went up a muffled roar,  
Like the beating of the storm-waves on a stern and distant shore.  
"Kill him! Kill the umpire!" shouted someone on the stand;  
And it's likely they'd have killed him had not Casey raised his hand.

With a smile of Christian charity, great Casey's visage shone;  
He stilled the rising tumult; he bade the game go on;  
He signaled to the pitcher, and once more the spheroid flew;  
But Casey still ignored it, and the umpire said, "Strike two."

"Fraud!" cried the maddened thousands, and the echo answered, "Fraud!"  
But one scornful look from Casey and the audience was awed.  
They saw his face grow stern and cold, they saw his muscles strain,  
And they knew that Casey wouldn't let that ball go by again.

The sneer is gone from Casey's lip, his teeth are clenched in hate;  
He pounds with cruel violence his bat upon the plate.  
And now the pitcher holds the ball, and now he lets it go,  
And now the air is shattered by the force of Casey's blow.

Oh, somewhere in this favored land the Sun is shining bright;  
A band is playing somewhere, and somewhere hearts are light;  
And somewhere men are laughing, and somewhere children shout;  
But there is no joy in Mudville—mighty Casey has struck out.

—from *The San Francisco Examiner*, June 3, 1888



➔ Ernest used the pen name "Phin." After "Casey at the Bat" became well known, many others tried to take credit for writing the poem. It was only years later that Ernest revealed himself as the true author.