



Saul the Baseball in the Big Game

Kim LeBlanc

Afton Jane, Illustrator

FriesenPress

(40pp)

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An observant ball fulfills his dreams of baseball glory in the upbeat picture book Saul the Baseball in the Big Game.

In Kim LeBlanc's cheerful picture book *Saul the Baseball in the Big Game*, the sport is viewed from the perspective of the baseballs used to play it.

Up to 120 baseballs are used over the course of a single game of baseball. Some balls get lost, some are banged out of shape and tossed away, and a lucky few are hit out of the park to make a home run. In this story of a single game, a ball that is hoping to play is focal. Saul watches his friends and fellow baseballs Ted, Joe, Ruth, and Lynn get the chance to be thrown by the pitcher across home plate, either landing in the catcher's glove or getting hit by the batter's swing. Each ball marks another progression in the game until, in the final inning with the score tied up, Saul is fished out of the umpire's bucket, handed to the pitcher, and thrown into the game, fulfilling his dreams of baseball glory.

This happy story moves along at a light, airy pace. It's written in rhyming couplets, with no more than four couplets to a page. Each couplet speaks to a particular action or feeling, as with the pitcher warming up by passing a ball back and forth with the catcher, a list of the different types of pitches, and the feeling of a baseball as it hopes to be hit. Although the rhythms of the lines are inconsistent, the rhymes knit each line to the next well, resulting in an engaging sense of forward motion.

The complementary illustrations make use of light blues and greens alongside the classic sandy brown of the baseball diamond. Though digital, the illustrations are precise, with the characters well distinguished and endearing within them. Indeed, each baseball has a distinctive face and displays a variety of expressions, from Lynn's teeth-gritting impact with the grass to Rico's curly-haired grin after being hit for a double. These visuals are of particular importance since the characters are ill-distinguished in the prose. However, a towering figure in black appears in one illustration, standing behind the batter and holding the baseball; they are not referenced in Saul's story and only appear once, leaving unanswered questions. Also distracting are the dropped letters and missing commas in the text.

A story of sports dreams coming true, the charming picture book *Saul the Baseball in the Big Game* follows a ball game through a baseball's eyes.

WILLEM MARX (January 22, 2025)

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