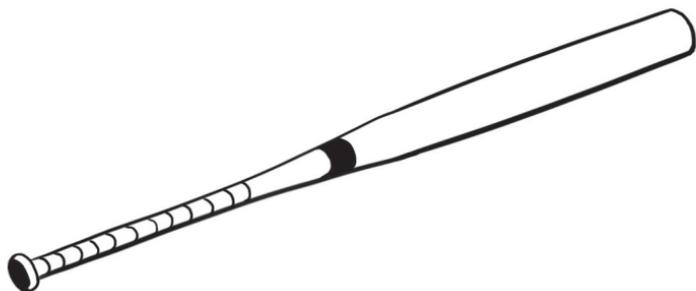


• CHAPTER 1 •
Tough Breaks



The pitcher looked worried. Little Rhino was sort of nervous, too, but he was ready. Butterflies were part of baseball! He blew out his breath and stepped into the batter's box.

Rhino felt sweat trickling down his neck. The air was warm and still. *This pitcher knows I can hit*, he thought. *It's me against him.*

The game was tied. Rhino's teammate Cooper had reached second base, and he would score if Rhino got another hit. With two outs, the game was riding on Rhino.

“Bring him home!” came a shout from the Mustangs’ dugout.

“Strike him out!” came a call from the other side of the field.

Rhino watched the first pitch go by. It was way outside. He stepped back and wiped some dirt from the knee of his baseball pants. That was from sliding into third a couple of innings ago with a triple.

This pitch, he thought. This is the one!

The pitcher threw a fastball. It was low but straight down the middle. Rhino pulled back his bat and swung hard. The ball hit the catcher’s mitt.

He felt a pop, but it wasn’t his bat hitting the ball. A sharp pain surged through Rhino’s right ankle. He fell to the dirt and winced.

“Yow!” Rhino yelled. The umpire called time out and Coach Ray ran from the dugout.

Rhino tried to get up, but his coach told him to stay still. He gently grabbed Rhino’s right ankle. “Here?” he asked.

