

# Rookie

by Jerry B. Jenkins

1 The kids were lined up at home plate<sup>1</sup> and asked to stand in the batter's box, one at a time, with a bat. They were to swing and drop the bat and run all the way around the bases, touching each one. They were timed from the plate to the plate.

2 Most of the kids swung, set the bat down, then ran. They ran in a huge circle, touching each base and ranging almost into right field on their way to second and into left on their way to third. Several slid into home. Most slowed and jumped on the plate with both feet.

3 When Elgin's turn came, he stepped quickly into the box. He stood in left-handed to give himself an edge toward first.

4 "When you're ready," said one of the two men with a stopwatch. "You a lefty or are you just tryin for an advantage?"

5 "Switch-hitter,<sup>2</sup> sir."

6 "Sure you are. Which hand you throw with?"

7 "Right."

8 "Bat rightly for this."

9 Elgin's face burned. He moved to the third base side of the plate, stepped and swung hard. He was moving before he dropped the bat, and within three strides was at top speed. The other hopefuls stared and punched each other. "Whoa, look at that kid!"

10 Elgin was hardly two feet out of the base paths all the way around, digging, charging, flying around the infield in what seemed the shortest distance possible. Everyone watched in silence as he got ahead of himself on the way to the plate and almost stumbled, then righted himself and sped across the plate.

11 "Man!"

12 "Wow!"

13 Elgin smiled self-consciously and stole a peek at his mother in the bleachers. She raised a fist and smiled.

14 The timers looked at their watches and then at each other. They showed each other the times they had clocked. "Can't be right," one said.

15 "The watch doesn't lie. He looked pretty quick."

16 "He didn't look this quick. I don't think a fourteen-year-old has run this time. I think maybe I was late punching in at the start."

17 "Me too? We were both off?"

18 "Could've been. He got out of the box fast."

19 The time recorder approached with a clipboard. "Time?"

20 "We're not sure."

21 "What do you mean?"

22 Both displayed their watch faces.

23 "You want me to write that down? Or should I just note that both clockers think they're funny? C'mon, what's the time? I expected him to have the fastest time, but faster even than the big kids, and by more than a second? Are we sure this kid's only eleven?"

24 "He's ten."

25 "Sure he is."

26 "Woodell!"

27 "Sir?"

28 "When you catch your breath, get back in line. We need to be sure of your time."

Elgin looked at his mother with a shrug, as if to say, "When I catch my breath?" He was hardly panting.

29 Twenty minutes later, when Elgin was up again, it seemed word had spread across all the diamonds. Kids and coaches from all three tryout areas watched the big ten-year-old who ran like no kid they had ever seen. Elgin was aware of all the attention, and if anything, it made him faster.

<sup>1</sup> **home plate:** the main base in baseball where the runner starts and the points are scored

<sup>2</sup> **switch-hitter:** a player who can bat right-handed or left-handed