



## Former Mayor Throws First Pitch and Chaos Ensues

by Michael Hawkins

The Hardy Falls Area Business Baseball League started their 2017 slow-pitch softball season on May 8th when the Hardy Hardware Heart Attacks met the Beecher Ballers at the Hardy Falls High School baseball diamond. Because the first game of the season featured two local businesses, Hardy Falls former mayor Barclay Ruffio was invited to throw out the first pitch.

Mr. Ruffio is an excellent politician, as the seven terms he served before being deposed will attest. He may even have been a good mayor. But as his pitching demonstrated, he is a horrible softball player.

After both teams had been introduced and the national anthem was played, the Heart Attacks took to the field, and the Ballers got ready to bat. Then, Mr. Ruffio was brought out to the pitcher's mound to throw his pitch.

"I played football in high school, not baseball," the former mayor said. "I was just trying to make it look good.

"I probably should have let him practice first," admitted Wally Dunlop, the head of the Business Baseball League. "But I figured if he'd thrown a football, he should be able to throw a softball, right? He didn't tell me he was a defensive lineman until afterward.

Mr. Ruffio's underhand pitch went completely off course, so instead of heading for catcher Austin Grant where he crouched behind the plate, the ball went wide and struck Beecher Baller lead-off batter, Tony Hayes, who was standing about twenty yards away waiting to come up to the plate. The ball hit him on the thigh with the force of a missile, and Mr. Hayes dropped to the ground, screaming.

"Thank God I was wearing a cup," Mr. Hayes said later. "But that damned thing hit me like a sledgehammer. What the heck!"

"I don't know my own strength sometimes," the former mayor admitted, shamefaced.

"The Grant kid didn't even try to catch the ball," protested Claude Beecher, owner of Beecher Auto Sales. "I mean he could have pushed Tony out the way, couldn't he?"

"I tried," Austin Grant disagreed. "But the thing was fast, and it was so far off the mark I couldn't get there in time.

“That was the worst pitch I’ve ever seen in my life,” agreed Albert Cromwell, who’d been watching from the stands.

Paramedics said that considering the size of the bruise on his thigh, Mr. Hayes should not play. Since Mr. Hayes is reportedly the best hitter on the Baller team, as well as the third baseman, this was quite a blow.

It came as no surprise to anyone that the Beecher Ballers lost to the Hardy Hardware Heart Attacks by a score of 5 to 1.

Unfortunately, there is an intense rivalry between the two businesses, and the business owners, due to Claude Beecher’s handling of a vehicle purchased by June Esperanza, Calvin Hardy’s girlfriend. As soon as the game was over, Beecher ran onto the field and started yelling that the ceremonial first pitch had been a setup and the former mayor aimed for Mr. Hayes on purpose. His opinion was that the Ballers would have won if Mr. Hayes had been able to play.

Calvin Hardy, the owner of Hardy Hardware, who had been playing first base for his team, got in Mr. Beecher’s face, yelling that his team had won fair and square and calling Mr. Beecher a few choice names.

Mr. Beecher then appeared to try to strangle Mr. Hardy, but Mr. Hardy broke the hold.

Both teams, except Mr. Hayes, rushed the field and there was much shouting and shoving. Spectators even leaped out of the grandstand to participate.

The police were called, and, with some shouting of her own, Chief Jacqueline Kline eventually managed to restore order. Mr. Beecher and Mr. Hardy were both fined for a public disturbance.

Mr. Dunlop said that he would make sure the two teams didn’t face off against each other in the future.

“Although I don’t know what we’ll do if they’re both in the playoffs,” he sighed.

Mr. Ruffio blamed his poor aim on an old war wound.

He declined to say which war.