

Fred Bowen

# THROWING HEAT



**AFRED BOWEN**  
SPORTS STORY

# Chapter

# 1

**B**et you I can.”

“Bet you can’t.”

Jack Lerner and three of his friends walked swiftly through the Galway Middle School spring fair. The sun was shining and the parking lot was crowded with kids and their families.

He led the way past the Moonbounce. Past the plant sale and the used book sale. Past the booth where high school girls were painting little kids’ faces.

“So where’s the baseball booth?” Jack asked, looking back. He was the tallest in the group of eighth-graders and his long stride kept him out in front.

“In the games section, near the basketball courts,” Danny Cruz, Jack’s best buddy, answered. “You can’t miss it.”

“You only have three chances to throw a baseball 75 miles per hour, you know,” said Jaylin Zisk. “It’s not so easy.”

Jack didn’t say anything. He kept walking, fast.

“I say Jack can throw at least that fast,” Danny said, scrambling to catch up. “No problem.”

“No way,” Annie Li said. “I pitch softball and I throw 50 miles per hour. That’s pretty fast.”

“So what?” Danny said, with a wave. “You’re not the best athlete in the school like Jack here.”

Jack smiled to himself as his friend continued to brag about him.

“He set the record in the softball throw and the rope climb last fall,” Danny pointed out to no one in particular. “He even won the Ping-Pong tournament.”

“Yeah, but 75 miles per hour? That’s almost as fast as the major league pitchers,” Jaylin said.

By now Jack was several strides ahead of his friends, but he could still hear them arguing.

“Jack struck out almost everybody in Little League with his fastball last year,” Danny insisted.

“But that was from 46 feet,” Jaylin said. “He’s got to throw from 60 feet 6 inches this year. We’re not in Little League anymore.”

Jack stopped at the edge of the games section and turned around to face his friends. “Okay, so Danny and I say I can throw 75 miles an hour,” Jack said. He pointed at Jaylin and Annie. “And you guys say I can’t.”

“Right.” Jaylin and Annie nodded.

“So what are we betting?” Jack asked with a small, confident smile. He glanced at the two long tables covered with plates of cookies, cakes, and brownies for the bake sale. His mouth was already starting to water. “How about if I throw one at 75,” he said, “and you guys have to buy me and Danny some cookies or brownies?”

“Good idea,” Danny said, licking his lips. “I’ll take cookies *and* brownies.”

“And if you *don't* throw 75,” Annie added, “you guys have to buy me and Jaylin whatever snacks we want.”

“Right.” Jack thrust out his hand. “Deal?”

Jaylin and Annie suddenly looked less sure. “Wait a minute,” Jaylin said. “You can’t get, like, a million cookies.”

“Just a bag,” Jack said. “They only cost a buck.”

Jaylin and Annie glanced at each other.

“Come on,” Jack said, getting impatient. “The money goes to the school anyway.”

“Okay, it’s a deal.” The four friends shook hands. Jack turned and headed even more quickly toward the baseball-toss section.

On the edge of the parking lot, a ten-foot-high green canvas was stretched between two metal poles. A white outline of a batter holding a bat had been painted on the canvas. To the side of the canvas, something that looked like a camera had been set up on a tripod.

“That’s the speed gun,” Danny said, pointing. “It tells you how fast the pitch is.”

“Duh,” said Annie.

A couple of grownups and one kid were already on line, waiting their turns. Jack began to windmill his left arm. "I better warm up," he said. "Hey, Danny, have you got a ball?"

Danny looked at the man taking tickets at the booth. "Can we borrow a baseball?" he asked.

"Sure." The man pulled a baseball from the bag tied to his waist and tossed it to Danny. "Don't lose it."

"Wait a minute," Annie protested. "We didn't say you could warm up." She held up three fingers. "Three throws," she said. "That was the bet."

"Are you kidding me?" Jack exclaimed. "I've gotta warm up. I don't want to hurt my arm."

"It's okay," Jaylin assured Annie. "He's pitching in our first game on Tuesday. He can warm up."

"Yeah," Jack said. "Coach Bentley would kill us if I got hurt messing around right before the season."

After a few easy tosses, Jack got in line.

A tall, lean man in front of him took a baseball and got ready to take his last turn. “He looks like a decent athlete,” Jaylin whispered to Jack. “He should be able to throw pretty hard.”

“We’ll see,” Jack replied.

The man wound up and hurled the ball at the canvas. The ball landed with a *thud!* Jack and his friends all turned to check the small box that flashed the pitch speed in large, red numbers.

67.

“Looks like the speed gun is a little slow,” Danny said. “I thought that throw might hit at least 70.”

Annie smiled. “The gun seems okay to me.”

The tall man stepped away and Jack handed over his ticket for three baseballs.

“Looks like we have a real major leaguer here...and he’s a lefty, too,” said the man in charge. “Okay, kid, let’s see your best fastball.”

Jack went into his windup. His left arm whipped by his ear and the ball smacked

against the canvas with the same explosive *thud*.

Jack looked at the box.

70.

“Whoa! Seventy miles per hour,” the man said, his head snapping back in surprise. “That’s the fastest pitch I’ve seen all day.”

“Not fast enough,” Jaylin muttered.

Jack grabbed the second ball. This time he reached back for a little something extra and let the ball rip.

*Thud!*

He quickly checked the speed box.

72.

“Wow!” the man shouted. “This kid can really bring the heat.”

“Still not 75,” Annie said.

“He’s got one more ball,” Danny reminded everyone. “Come on, Jack, give it everything you got.”

Jack tossed the final baseball up and down a couple times and took a few deep breaths. Finally, he wound up and threw with every ounce of his strength.

*Thwack!* The ball smacked the canvas like a clap of thunder.

75!

“Yes!” Jaylin shouted, throwing his fist into the air.

“I told you he could do it,” Danny said. “Take it from me, he’s gonna strike everybody out on Tuesday.”

Jack just smiled. “You know what?” he said. “I’m feeling kind of hungry. How about those cookies?”