

# Homerun

Story By: Andrew Frinkle

Jaden loved to play baseball. He was good at it. He'd played ever since he was very young, and now at age 10, he was working on being the MVP for his team. Part of it was his good fielding at 3<sup>rd</sup> base, but his batting was great, too.

He stood next to home plate and tightened his batting gloves. Then he adjusted his helmet and settled into his batting stance. With the bat waiving above his head, he eyed the pitcher on the mound, waiting for the delivery with practiced calmness.

The pitcher was slow about pitching, taking his time to make Jaden nervous. He eventually nodded when he liked the catcher's signal, and then wound up. The ball came whizzing in, but Jaden didn't swing. He could tell it was going low and outside.

The slap of the ball in the catcher's mitt was followed quickly by the umpire's call, "Ball 1!" Jaden smiled to himself. He was up in the count. He settled into his stance once more and waited. He expected a good pitch this time.

The second pitch came; it was low but a decent pitch. Jaden took a poke at it, and knocked it foul off down the left field line. He sighed and wished he'd hit it a bit straighter, because it might have been a homerun. The count was 1 and 1.

The next pitch was meant to have Jaden go fishing for it, so the pitcher would be up in the count, but Jaden wouldn't bite. He knew it was going to be an ugly pitch even before the pitcher wound up. The count was 2 balls and 1 strike.

The fourth pitch was going to be another bad one, but not too bad. It would be close to a strike, so the umpire might make a bad call, but it wouldn't be too nice. It would likely be inside and high, Jaden figured, since those are harder to get around on and get a homerun. He took that pitch, too. The count was 3 balls and 1 strike, in his favor.

Now it got tricky. The pitcher could throw a crummy pitch, hoping that Jaden would swing at something he expected to be a good pitch, or he could throw a fast one at one of the corners of the strike zone. Which would it be?

Jaden gritted his teeth and stared up the mound at the pitcher. Something in the pitcher's eyes said fastball. Jaden tensed and waited for it. As it came, his heart seemed to slow, his breathing caught, and he swung his bat.

There was a loud crack and then the white ball with red threads rocketed toward center field. Jaden flicked his bat aside and took off at full speed, but it wasn't necessary. The cheer of the crowd already told him where his ball was going: it was a homerun.

Jaden laughed as the crowd started chanting, "MVP! MVP! MVP!" This was going to be his best season ever!



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Use the information in the story to answer the questions below.

1. What sport is Jaden playing?
  - A. baseball
  - B. ice hockey
  - C. basketball
  - D. soccer
  
2. How does Jaden feel when he starts batting?
  - A. nervous
  - B. anxious
  - C. excited
  - D. calm
  
3. How would you BEST describe Jaden's batting strategy?
  - A. He tries to figure out what the next pitch will be.
  - B. He swings at everything.
  - C. He doesn't try, because he wants the game to get over.
  - D. He is scared of the ball.
  
4. How does Jaden react after the last pitch?
  - A. He watches to see where it goes.
  - B. He starts off slowly toward 1<sup>st</sup> base.
  - C. He throws down his bat in frustration.
  - D. He takes off running immediately.
  
5. What happens to the last pitch?
  - A. Jaden strikes out.
  - B. Jaden swings and misses.
  - C. Jaden gets a homerun.
  - D. Jaden gets a walk.

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