

In my pre-masturbatory youth, I was obsessed with sports. My heroes were all sports figures: boxer “Smokin’” Joe Frazier, pitcher Sandy Koufax, and quarterback Johnny Unitas. A highlight of my early years was receiving an autographed photo of slugger Hank Aaron in the mail. I remember sitting in the back of my parents’ car on a cross-country vacation, ignoring the scenery as I read a book about Babe Ruth.



THIS GUY WAS BETTER THAN ME AT SPORTS...



...SO WAS THIS GUY...



...AND THIS GUY.

WHEN I WAS A KID...

I BLEW AT SPORTS!

Some of my favorite teams back then were the fish-out-of-water, old-school-looking, waxed-mustache Oakland A’s of the early seventies and the “Purple People Eater” Minnesota Vikings of the late 60s. When Minnesota was due to play a crucial game against the Dallas Cowboys, I wrote a poem predicting victory for Minnesota. Even though I wrote it nearly forty years ago, I still remember the last four lines:

*Your black running back will turn white with fright
With [Alan] Page coming at him—oh man, what a sight
Minnesota will win, final score will be
Eight million, seven hundred sixty thousand to three.*

Minnesota lost, and I was heartbroken.

I filled my oversized head (even in Little League, I had to wear the coach’s cap because the ones made for kids wouldn’t fit me) with every tidbit, statistic, and smidgen of sports trivia that I could cram inside it. I could rattle off every heavyweight boxing champion in history and tell you who held every major baseball record. If you told me how many hits and at-bats a player had, I could figure out his batting average in my head. The Lord bestowed upon me a mathematically precise mind.

Unfortunately, he also gave me an exceptionally clumsy body. In sports that required more aggression than coordination, I wasn’t so bad. I was a decent defensive football player who loved smashing people onto the ground, and I was a feared street-hockey predator always prone to fighting. But I absolutely sucked donkey cock at any sport requiring the slightest degree of hand-eye coordination. My older brother was a Little League MVP and routinely took home diving medals, but I was such an athletic loser, it was humiliating.

In four years of junior-league basketball, I scored an impressive grand total of ONE basket. I remember how the crowd erupted in cheers when the ball swished into the hoop. They were as utterly surprised as I was. But when I tried to dribble, I resembled a Mongoloid with polio. I was always the last kid to be picked for street hoops.

In three or four years of Little League baseball, I compiled a staggering record of ONE hit. For a kid who could rattle off virtually every statistic in baseball history, I was pathetically under-equipped at actually *playing* the game I loved so much. When they tried me as an outfielder, I’d drop every ball that was hit my way. When I was positioned at infield, balls would routinely hop right through my legs.

Exasperated, my coach finally made me a pitcher. In the first few innings of the only game I ever pitched, I was either walking batters or they were hitting everything I threw at them. Embarrassed beyond repair in the middle of one inning, I placed the ball on the mound, walked off the field, and walked home, where I crawled into my bedroom and into my head for the next few years. I never played team sports again.

My best friend and next-door neighbor, who was good at sports, joined a team called the Normals. I joined the Weirdos, and it’s been that way ever since.

I seem to have improved as an adult. I can even shoot a decent free-throw now. Maybe my pre-pube athletic awkwardness was due to a nervous condition, because I was quite the spazz as a kid.