

TATUM OFFENBACHERS  
by Scott Delaney

Tatum Offenbachers loved baseball. His favorite player was Aaron Judge. Like his hero, Tatum played right field for a team called the Yankees. Unlike the slugger, Tatum was in youth league, and all season he had made contact only twice at the plate. Neither left the infield.

Today, Tatum's team was playing the Red Sox. He had barely slept because it was his turn to pitch an inning. The last time he took the mound, he gave up eight hits before the opposition mercifully scored five runs to force the end of the inning.

"At least you got it over the plate, T.O.," Coach Craig had offered.

At the start of today's game, Tatum was stationed in his usual deep right. He noticed a clover patch. Upon further inspection, each clover had four leaves.

"Wow!" Tatum plucked one for luck and put the charm in the back pocket of his uniform. He then saw something else: in the patch of green, something that looked like a G.I. Joe action figure was lying next to a tiny black kettle. The crack of the bat momentarily caught his attention.

"First out of the game, gentlemen!" exclaimed Coach Craig.

"What the?" Tatum picked up the kettle and realized it was full of gold. Maybe a thimble's full, but gold nonetheless. Excitedly, Tatum put the kettle in his back pocket, next to the clover.

Tatum then scooped up the figurine with his glove. It was decked out in green with a crimson beard and a shock of red hair. But it wasn't a toy. It was a tiny man.

"Aye! I was taking a nap!" the little fellow shouted.

"Are you real?" Tatum asked in disbelief.

“I’m as real as a leprechaun. If you put me down, I’ll collect me things and be on me way.”

“Are you a real leprechaun?”

“Me name is Rossa O’Leary.” Rossa got down on all fours and peered over Tatum’s glove. “Hey, did ye see me cooking pot?”

“Cooking pot?” Tatum’s hand dropped to his back pocket. “Oh, your kettle is safe.”

Rossa slowly turned in Tatum’s glove and stood to his full 3 ¾ -inch height.

“Aye, me kettle’s safe, eh? Are ye planning on giving it back to me then?”

Tatum got excited. He had just found himself a leprechaun.

“I’m happy to, but you owe me three wishes.”

Rossa collapsed laughing in Tatum’s glove. “I’m telling ye, that kettle’s for cooking snails and slugs.”

“Well, I can’t help you then.” Tatum set Rossa down in the patch of clover and turned back to the game. Rossa searched but quickly saw his prized possession wasn’t there. The next batter hit a lazy fly ball to left. “Two outs,” called out Coach Craig.

“Well, maybe I am a leprechaun. But there are rules,” said the tiny man.

“I’m listening,” replied Tatum.

“Rule One: Ye get precisely three wishes. Rule Two: ye get exactly what ye ask for. Rule Three: the wishes can only impact ye. Afterwards, I get me kettle. Deal?” the leprechaun asked.

“Deal,” Tatum said quickly. The promise was secured just as the third out was made.

“Ok, I’ll be back in the top of the second. Don’t go anywhere.”

“I’m staying right in me patch of clover until I get me kettle back,” said Rossa.

The Yankees took a 2-0 lead in the bottom of the first, but Tatum didn't get a chance to hit, as the batter before him hit a line drive to third base. Tatum hardly noticed, as he was thinking about Rossa the whole time. Tatum skipped back out to deep right to start the top of the second.

"Well, what's ye's first wish?"

"I wish that I get my first hit of the season next time I'm up."

"Are ye sure about that?"

"Yes, I'm sure."

The leprechaun closed his eyes, muttered a few words, then opened them.

"Ok, ye'll get your wish exactly as you asked for."

In the bottom of the second, Tatum led off with a resounding double just as Rossa had promised. As Tatum pulled into the bag, his teammates exploded in the dugout.

In the top of the third, Tatum trotted back out to the clover in right.

"I got my first hit!"

"Ye surely did," replied Rossa. "Ok, show me me kettle to make sure we got a deal."

Tatum withdrew the tiny cooking pot from his back pocket. Rossa's eyes got big. Tatum put it away.

"Ok, my second wish. I have to pitch in the fourth, so I wish that I don't give up a hit."

"Are ye sure about that?" asked the leprechaun.

"Positive."

The leprechaun closed his eyes, muttered a few words, then opened them.

"Ok, ye'll get your wish exactly as you asked for."

In the top of the fourth, Tatum took the mound with his team still leading 2-0. He took a deep breath and fired strike one over the plate. Strike two quickly followed. Strike three left the batter standing there like a pair of shoes.

“Well, I’ll be,” hooted Tatum, patting his back pocket.

But then Tatum walked the next three batters. Coach Craig came out, and Tatum calmed down enough to strike out the next hitter. Unfortunately, the elusive third out never came. The inning ended only when Tatum walked in five runs to reach the run limit. His team now trailed 5-2.

“Happens to the best of us, T.O.” said Coach Craig when Tatum came into the dugout. Tatum glared out at deep right from the end of the bench. Luckily, his team began to rally in the next inning, and Tatum was called up to bat with the bases loaded and two outs. But with his team down by three, Tatum struck out on three swings. He snatched his glove and sprinted out to right for the top of the fifth and final inning.

“What was *that* about,” shouted Tatum.

“What do you mean,” asked Rossa lying in the clover with his hands behind his head. “You didn’t give up a single hit.”

“That’s... that’s not what I meant,” stammered Tatum. “That’s not fair!”

“Not fair? Ye got exactly what ye wished – it’s just that ye got a leprechaun wish.”

Tatum’s shoulders slumped. Rossa smiled. “I’ll tell you what. You give me me kettle, and we’ll call her square.”

“No, Rule #1: I get three wishes. So, for my final wish, I wish we win this game,” Tatum said defiantly.

“Rule #3: Your wish can’t impact others,” retorted Rossa.

“Ok, then I wish that I hit a home run in my next at-bat.”

“Are ye sure?”

Tatum paused. Rule #2: he’d get exactly what he wished for. He had just hit, so his next at-bat might not be in this game. He could wish for his teammates to get a hit, but there was Rule #3.

Frustrated, Tatum threw his glove up in the air. Then, suddenly, he had it.

“I wish I never wished my three wishes.”

“Are ye sure about that?”

“Yes, I’m positive.”

The leprechaun closed his eyes, muttered a few words, then opened them.

“Ok, ye’ll get your wish exactly as you asked for.”

Tatum blinked and when he picked up his glove, Rossa and the patch of clover were gone. The crack of the bat momentarily caught his attention.

“First out of the game, gentlemen!” exclaimed Coach Craig.

Tatum reached into his back pocket. No kettle. He did, however, find his four-leaf clover.

“Well, I’ll be,” whistled Tatum. He turned back to the infield, patted his back pocket, and rooted his teammates on for the win.

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