

Richard Cecil

BATTING AVERAGE

Terrible at sports, I knew that no one
counted on me to bat in a run
or throw a touchdown pass or score a goal.
No, I'd freeze while my opponent stole
the ball out of my unathletic hands.
Whenever I played, I prayed for empty stands.
So why did I try out for every team?
Not to impress a girl, for, even in dreams,
I booted easy grounders, dropped fly balls,
missed tackles, fumbled, blundered into walls.
"Hey, Elise! Watch me swing and miss!"
was not my way of trying to earn a kiss.
So what did I think, stepping to the plate
like doomed Hector, going to meet his fate
against Achilles, his bound-to-win opponent:
God help me? Or This time it might be different? . . .

as once it was for me, when, by mistake,
I swung just as a curve began to break,
and it dipped down and somehow found my bat.
I ran to first so fast I lost my hat
and stood there breathless in a glory haze—
a hit! But next pitch as I stepped off base,
the pitcher threw to first and picked me off.
You're out! the umpire cried. Once more, I'd goofed.
I trotted from the field with my head down,
knowing this was not the time to clown,
and when I reached the bench I kicked the dirt
and cursed as if this failure really hurt.

But inwardly I was relieved to flee
my fluke success before coach labeled me
a savvy curveball hitter and moved me up
a notch or two in our weak starting lineup,
raising expectations I'd prevail
once or twice at bat, instead of fail
every time, however hard I tried.
Once you've grown used to being unsuccessful,



screwing up becomes a lot less stressful
than playing well, which raises futile hope
that you are not a loser, not a dope,
not the one whose enemy will slobber
on your corpse after he has clobbered
you at a sport, or in single combat.
It's best to strike out every time at bat.

