



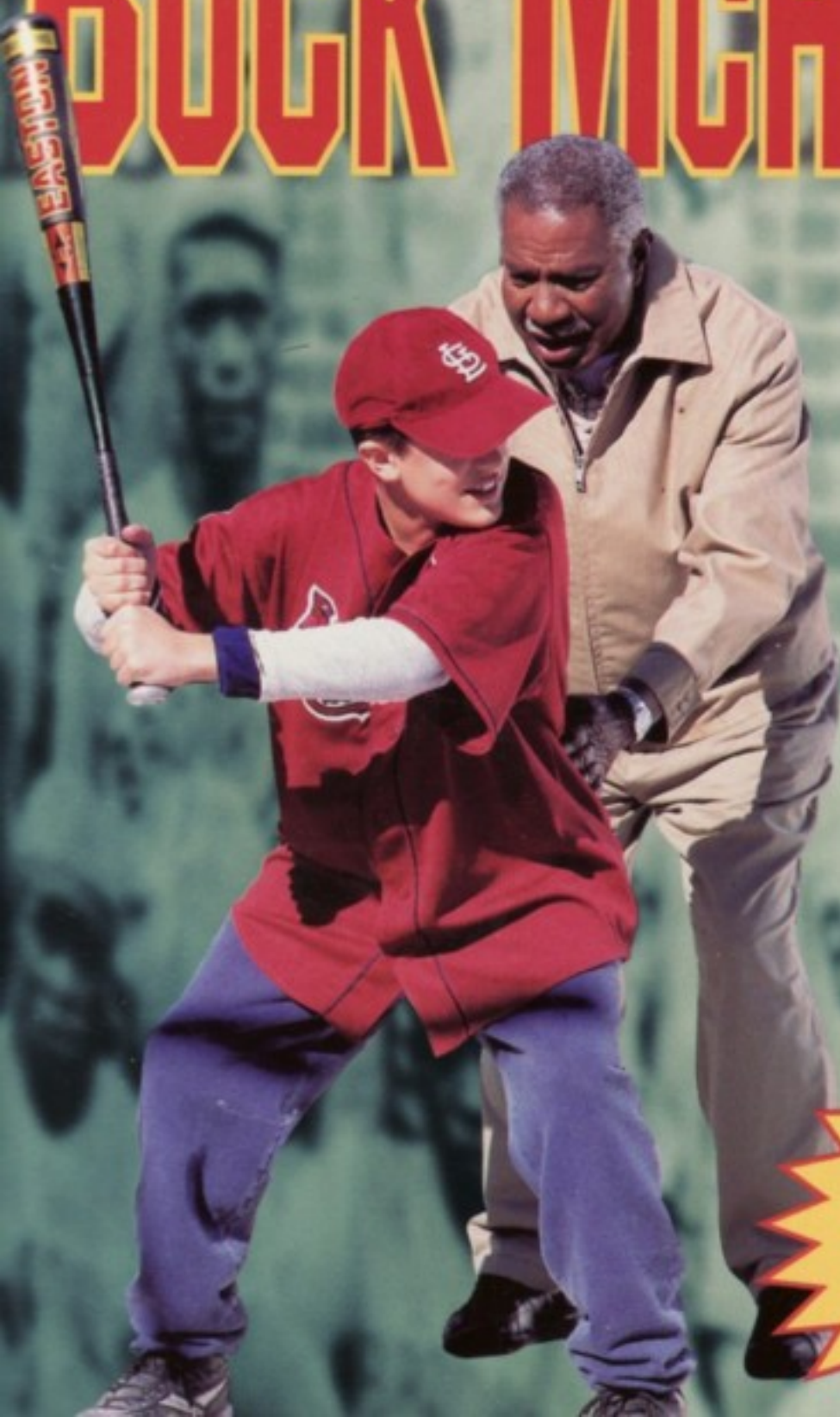
H A R P E R • T R O P H Y

A L F R E D S L O T E

*finding*

# BUCK MCHENRY

They looked for a legend  
. . . and found a man.



NOW A

**SHOWTIME**

ORIGINAL PICTURES FOR ALL AGES  
STARRING OSSIE DAVIS AND RUBY DEE

# 1

Dad says it's wrong to make up scenarios for real life. (As though I did it on purpose.) He says real life has a way of telling you off.

He's talking about Mr. Henry, of course.

Mr. Henry is the custodian where I used to go to school. My name is Jason Ross. I'm eleven years old and I live in Arborville, Michigan.

There's no reason you should have heard of me. But there was, I thought, every reason you should have heard of Mr. Henry. Not under that name, of course. But under his real name—Buck McHenry.

I'm jumping the gun now. Dad says that if I insist on telling this story, "which doesn't do you a lot of credit, Jason," he adds, I ought at least to start at the beginning.

The beginning was when I got kicked off the Baer Machine baseball team. And that happened during our last intrasquad practice game of the



spring. I was the batter and I'd just hit a hard ground ball down the third-base line.

"Run, Jason, run!" the guys on my side yelled. (We'd divided the team in half for this practice game.)

I ran hard. If I beat out the ball for a hit, Greg Conklin would score from third and we'd tie them and go into extra innings. I knew I could beat it out too, because as I took off for first, I watched Art Silver, our third baseman, back up on my ball. Ahead of me I saw Tim Corrigan, our first baseman, stretching to receive Art's throw. It would be close but I could make it, I thought. I lunged for the bag and hit it with my right toe just before, I thought, the ball arrived.

"Out," Mr. Borker called. He's our coach and was umping from behind the pitcher.

"Out?" I couldn't believe it.

"Yes, out, Jason. When you should've been safe. For Pete's sake, when you run that slowly to first, are you thinking about something?"

"Jason's thinking about baseball cards, Coach," Pete Diaz, our center fielder, said running by us to the bench.

"Jason's always thinking about baseball cards," Greg Conklin laughed.

Kevin Kovich chimed in, "Jason was thinkin'



that soon as practice was over he was goin' down to The Grandstand and buy more cards."

"Okay, guys," I said, getting down on the bench with them. "Take it easy, huh?"

I try not to let their taunting get to me. Some athletes collect cards; others don't. I'm one who does. Baseball cards are an important part of my life.

Mr. Borker shook his head. "Ballplayers don't think about baseball cards while they're playing, Jason."

I wanted to tell him that I wasn't thinking about baseball cards. I wasn't thinking about anything except beating Art's throw to first. But I had the sense to keep my mouth shut. You never get anywhere arguing with a coach. In any sport. Coaches are always right. Even when they're wrong.

"Daydream while you're playing ball, Jason," Mr. Borker went on, "and you'll never win a game for your team."

That stopped me. Not the daydream part but the way he said, win a game for *your* team, as if my team wasn't Baer Machine. As if Baer Machine wasn't *our* team. I guess I should have sensed then what was coming. But I didn't.

"All right, everyone down on the bench and let's have some quiet," Mr. Borker said, even



## *Cut from the team*

**T**he coach says that Jason thinks more about baseball-card collecting than baseball playing. Now Jason will have to play on the Little League's not-yet-formed expansion team—the reject team—which doesn't even have a coach.

But Jason's got a plan to turn his luck around. He's found a sponsor and a couple of good key players. Now all he needs is a great coach. That's where school custodian Mack Henry comes in. Mr. Henry is perfect for the job: he knows a lot about baseball—and he knows exactly what a kid should do to improve his game. Jason's also noticed an interesting coincidence: back when black players were excluded from the majors, a guy named Buck McHenry was one of the greatest pitchers of the Negro Leagues. Mack Henry. . . Buck McHenry. Is it possible? Could Mr. Henry be the legendary baseball player?

“Slote skillfully blends comedy, suspense, and baseball in a highly entertaining tale.”

—*Publishers Weekly*