

Baseball's Magic Mud: Superstition or Science?

By Thomas van Kalken

<<Mindy and the gang are at a small sports stadium>> <<We hear crowd chatter. The announcer comes on over the PA system and sets it up>>

Announcer: Good morning baseball fans and welcome to Big Gym Lil Baseball Parl ... Home of The Little Buff Bunnies. Today's game is between the undefeated Little Buff Bunnies and Mindy's Bonkerballers who haven't won a single game yet this season.

Mindy: Okay team, huddle up!

<<everyone mumbles as they huddle together>>

Dennis: Who's our pitcher gonna be today, Mindy?

Mindy: Hmm, I think it's gonna be-

Fingerling: Oh! Me! Pick Thomas Fingerling! You haven't let me pitch all season!

G-Force: That's because you're all thumbs Fingerling!

Fingerling: What?! No, I ain't

Dennis: Well, you do have more thumbs than me, Tommy.

Fingerling: Look! Just because I have four thumbs and six fingers does not mean that I don't know how to pitch!

Guy: Uhhh...

Mindy: Don't worry Thomas Fingerling, we're going to start with Gramma G-Force, and you'll be pitching later in the game.

Guy: He will?

Fingerling: I will?

G-Force: I thought we wanted to win!

Dennis: Yeah! We're never gonna break this losing streak if we let Fingerling pitch!

Mindy: Yes, we will!

Guy: Why are you so confident?

Mindy: Because Guy Raz, I have a secret advantage.

Guy: You do?

Mindy: Yuh huh. I got it. <<lifting a very heavy bucket>> Right here <<puts bucket down>> <<slaps top of tub>>

Guy: Uh...

Fingerling: Ooh, a bucket. Just what we needed.

Mindy: It's not the bucket that's going to help us win Fingerling, it's what's inside it.

Fingerling: Oh, right.

Guy: What is it, Mindy?

Mindy: All will be revealed in time Guy Raz. For now we have a baseball game to win! Hands in, everyone! <<slapping of hands coming into a huddle>> Bonkerballers on three! Ready? One, two...

Dennis: Ewe! Tommy's third thumb is touching me! Mindy! Help!

Fingerling: Quiet, ya baby!

Mindy: <<annoyed>> Dennis... one two three!

Everyone: Bonkerballers!

Dennis: Let's do it!

<<we go through a montage of the game with a baseball song like 'take me out to the ballgame' playing over the top>> <<we dip in and out of soundbites from the game with cheers from the crowd breaking up the sound bites>>

Announcer: Up to bat for The Bonkerballers, it's Thomas Fingerling!

Mindy: Fingerling! You're up to bat!

Fingerling: Lemme at em!

Guy: Woo! Go Thomas Fingerling, you got this.

<<swoosh swing and a miss>>

Umpire: Strike one!

<<swoosh swing and a miss>>

Umpire: Strike two!

<<swoosh swing and a miss>>

Umpire: Strike three, yer out!

Fingerling: Ah, fiddlesticks!

<<transition>>

Announcer: Coming up to the plate, Guy Raz!

Mindy: Guy Raz, you're up!

Guy: <<talking to self>> Okay, you got this Guy Raz, just keep your eye on the ball and...

Announcer: Here comes the pitch...

<<crack!>>

Dennis: Wow!

Announcer: And that's a home run for Guy Raz!

Mindy: Yay! Way to go Guy Razy!

<<various sounds of baseball being played>>

Umpire: Streeeerike! ... Steeerike two..... Steeeerike three! ... Safe! ... Yer out!

Announcer: And that's the end of the fourth inning ...

Announcer: End of the fifth inning ...

Announcer: The sixth inning ...

Announcer: Wow, this baseball montage is moving right along...

Dennis: I'll say!

<<crowd cheering>> <<we come out of montage mode>>

Announcer: <<over PA>> And here we are at the bottom of the ninth! The Lil Buff Bunnies are up to bat with two outs! Mindy's Bonkerballers lead by one. This is the Lil Buff Bunnies last chance to win the game.

Guy: I wish he didn't say 'spitting distance' ...

Mindy: Oh my gosh you guys. I had a good feeling about this game.

Guy: It's not over yet Mindy ... We're only up by one run and they're sending up their best batter ... She's hit three home runs this game!

Mindy: Don't stress Guy Raz, we haven't even used our secret weapon yet.

Dennis: We haven't?! What are we waiting for! Use it, use it, use it! Use the secret weapon!

Guy: Dennis is right Mindy, we can't let them get a single run this inning if we're gonna win this!

Dennis: Also, what is the secret weapon?

Mindy: Alright, Grandma G-Force, time to open this thing. Care to give me a hand?

G-Force: Uh huh <<knuckle cracking>> Heeeeeeeee-yah!

<<G-Force karate chops the bucket and the lid pops off>>

Guy: Ugh, Mindy, what's in there?

Fingerling: It looks like poop. Is it poop?

Mindy: No, it's not poop!

Fingerling: Yeah, I didn't think so.

Mindy: It's mud.

Dennis: Mud?!

Mindy: That's right.

Guy: This bucket of mud is our secret weapon?

Mindy: Yup, but it's not just any mud Guy Raz. It's magic mud.

Fingerling: Ooh, magic... <<a beat>> Magic how?

G-Force: Yeah!

Mindy: Okay, I'll tell you the story of magic mud.

Dennis: Yay!

Mindy: Ahem.

<<harps take us into storytime>> <<old timey piano music plays>>

Mindy: More than 100 years ago, major league baseball was founded in the United States.

Dennis: Major league baseball?

Mindy: Yeah, that's professional baseball, Dennis. The MLB.

Dennis: Oh, the big leagues!

Mindy: Right. In the big leagues, around 1920, there was a new rule put into place that every time a baseball got scuffed or dirtied or hit...

<<pitch>>

<<hit>>

Umpire: Foul ball!

Mindy: A clean, new, bright and shiny baseball had to be swapped in for the old one.

<<sparkle sfx>>

Fingerling: Ooh, shiny.

Mindy: But there was a problem, these clean and shiny new baseballs were a little slippery. <<squeaky clean glass sfx>> And sometimes a pitch would just slip out of a pitcher's hands.

<<pitch>>

<<whistle slip sfx>>

<<glass break>>

<<crowd gasp>>

Dennis: Yikes.

G-Force: <<cynical>> Oh my, whatever did they do?

Mindy: Well, around 1940, a third-base coach from Philadelphia, discovered a super effective trick to give the baseballs a sticky grip without scuffing or damaging or discoloring the ball.

Fingerling: What was it?

Mindy: A mysterious substance ... a slimy ... sticky ... muddy substance ... <<sloppy sfx>> a substance known as ... magic mud!

Dennis: Oooh!

Mindy: With magic mud, players could get the grip they needed.

<<pitch>>

Umpire: Strike!

Mindy: And it soon became a rule that every ball used in every major league baseball game must be rubbed with magic mud.

<<we transition back out of storytime and into reality>>

Guy: Wait a minute Mindy, you're telling me that each ball in the MLB is covered in mud.

Mindy: Well kinda, you don't cover the ball. You use a small amount of mud and rub it in kinda like lotion.

Fingerling: And just what exactly makes this mud so magic?

Dennis: Yeah! Does the mud grant wishes!?

Mindy: No.

Dennis: Oh.

Mindy: Nope, it just makes the balls extra grippy.

Dennis: Oh, well if we want to make the baseballs grippy why don't we just use something like super glue ... or maple syrup?

G-Force: I gotta stash of maple syrup here in my leotard. You want me to start pourin'?

Mindy: No! Keep that maple syrup away from those baseballs Gramma G-Force! Putting anything on a baseball that might affect its performance is against the rules and might get us disqualified!

G-Force: Fine! More for me! <<Grandma G-Force downs the vile of maple syrup>>
Mmm, that's good.

Guy: So you can't put anything on a baseball that might affect its performance? Except for this magic mud.

Mindy: Uh-huh.

Dennis: So magical.

Guy: And your plan is to coat these baseballs in this mud, make them super grippy and therefore help us pitch better?

Mindy: Bingo!

Dennis: Oooh, I wanna try it! Gimme a ball. <<snatches a ball>>

Fingerling: Take it easy, feller!

<<dennis starts slathering the ball in mud>> <<sloshy sfx>>

Dennis: There we go, magic.

Mindy: Uh, not quite. That's too much mud, Dennis.

Dennis: You know what I always say, "If it's worth doing, it's worth overdoing."

Mindy: Well, too much mud like that won't work. We're trying to take the slippery shine off the ball, Dennis.

Dennis: Ah.

Mindy: Just take a small amount of the mud and rub it into the baseball kinda hard.

Dennis: Oh, like an exfoliating facial scrub?

Mindy: Uh, yeah.

Dennis: Okay, scrub, scrub, scrub, scrub, scrub, and, there. How's that?

Mindy: That looks good! Ok, G-Force, take this ball and see if you can strike this next batter out.

G-Force: Lemme at 'em!

Dennis: Yay! Go G-Force! Strike em out!

<<G-Force walks out to the mound>>

G-Force: Don't tell me what to do, boy.

Guy: So, I guess this is where we find out if that magic mud of yours actually works, huh, Mindy?

Mindy: Yeah, but don't worry. If this batch doesn't work, I've got two others to try right there.

Guy: You have two more buckets of mud? Why?

G-Force: Hiiiyah!

Umpire: Ball!

Mindy: Well, the spot where they harvest the real magic mud for the mlb is a well kept secret ... nobody knows where it is ... all we know is that it's harvested from somewhere on the Delaware River in New Jersey.

G-Force: Hiiiyah!

Umpire: Ball!

Guy: Uh huh.

Mindy: So last week Reggie and I went out and took samples from three different spots along the riverbank ... one of them has gotta work.

Guy: If you say so!

Mindy: I say so.

G-Force: Hiiiyah!

Umpire: Ball four! Take yer base!

G-Force: Awe, hushpuppies!

Announcer: That's another walked batter for G-Force.

Dennis: Hey, Mindy! Gramma G-Force just walked a batter! The mud didn't do anything!

Mindy: Ugh, must have been a bad batch ... but don't worry, we'll try the second bucket! <<efforting>> <<bucket opens>> someone hand me another ball!

Fingerling: Here ya go. <<swoosh from ball>>

Mindy: Got it, okay, coating it in mud <<mindy coats the baseball in mud>> rubbing it in, rubbing it in, rubbing it...

Announcer: Up to bat for the Lil Buff Bunnies, number 14, Joshua Toe-Jam Johnson, who has the unusual technique of batting with his feet. <<cheers from crowd>> It may be unorthodox but this crowd is loving it!

Mindy: Okay! Dennis?

Dennis: Present!!

Mindy: You're up! Think you can get a strike out?

Dennis: Of course, I can!

Mindy: Great! Here, use this ball with mud sample number two. <<Mindy throws her the ball>>

Dennis: You can count on me, Mindy! <<running off>> C'mon ball! Let's go see if you've got the right mud on you.

Announcer: We've got a relief pitcher coming in. G-Force will sit, and now pitching for The Bonkerballers will be Dennis.

Dennis: Yay! I'm a reliever!

Guy: So Mindy, I still don't fully understand; how does covering these balls in mud make them more grippy?

Mindy: Well for the longest time we didn't know, but now thanks to a study by the University of Pennsylvania we do ...

Guy: And what did this study say?

Mindy: Well, the first thing that these researchers tried to figure out was what exactly is in this mud ...

Guy: By putting it under a microscope?

Mindy: Exactly, what they found were minerals like clay and quartz as well as sand.

Guy: Huh.

Dennis: Hiiiyah!

Umpire: Ball!

Dennis: Awe!

Mindy: The rest of it, almost 43%, was made up of water.

Fingerling: How many percents is the magic?

Mindy: The magic was the proportions of all these different ingredients together.

Fingerling: Oh.

Guy: You mean it had just the right amount of water and just the right amount of clay and sand.

Mindy: Exactaritos.

Dennis: Hiyah!

Umpire: Ball!

Dennis: Man!

Guy: Like if the mud was too watery, all those sand particles probably wouldn't stick to the ball.

Mindy: Yeah, and if it wasn't watery enough it would be too thick.

Guy: And you wouldn't be able to spread it easily over the baseballs.

Mindy: Exactly, the consistency of this mud is just right. Watery enough to spread like a facecream but sticky enough that it leaves a nice even layer of mud all over the ball.

Dennis: Hiiiyah!

Umpire: Ball!

Dennis: Awe, c'mon!

Guy: But what about this mud makes it so grippy?

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Mindy: Well, when they looked under the microscope again ... once they'd applied it to the baseballs ...they discovered something else ...

Finglering: What?

Dennis: Hiiiyah!

Umpire: Ball four! Take your base!

Dennis: Oops.

Announcer: Toejam is heading to first base! The Lil Buff Bunnies now have runners on first and second. <<crowd cheers>>

Mindy: Uh oh, pass me another ball, Fingerling. It's time to try sample number three! <<efforting>> <<bucket opens>>

Fingerling: Here ya go.

Mindy: Thank you very much. <<mindy starts covering the ball in mud>>

Guy: Wait a minute, Mindy. I don't see any other buckets of mud. Is this the last one?

Mindy: <<a little effort-rubbing the mud in>> Yeah, fingers crossed this mud sample has the right stuff.

Guy: The right stuff being the perfect combination of clay, sand and water.

Mindy: <<a little effort-rubbing the mud in>> Exactly... there... that should do it. Ok Thomas Fingerling. Take this ball and go get us a strikeout.

Fingerling: <<gasps>> Really? Me?

Guy: <<whispering>> Mindy, are you sure this is a great idea? It's the bottom of the 9th. We're only one run ahead and the bases are loaded! Fingerling hasn't got a strike out all season.

G-Force: And he has four thumbs!

Fingerling: So!?

Mindy: Don't listen to them Fingerling, you're gonna do great. Here, catch!
<<Mindy tosses him the ball>>

Fingerling: Ope! <<he drops the ball>> Whoops a daisy, let me just pick that up.

Guy: <<sigh>> Oh boy!

Mindy: Shake it off, Fingerling. We need you to have the best game of your life out there!

Fingerling: <<Fingerling runs towards the mound>> Oo-da-lolly! Here comes Fingerling!

Announcer: Mindy's sending a new relief pitcher in to replace Dennis... and it looks like ... I don't believe it ... it's Thomas Fingerling ... Thomas Fingerling is yet to get a strikeout this whole season ...

Fingerling: Get ready for my f-thumbed fastball!

Guy: So what about this mud makes it so sticky mindy? How do you know this is going to work?

Mindy: Well, when those scientists put one of those baseballs that had been covered in mud under one of their microscopes, they saw that the grains of sand that were in it had stuck to the clay which had stuck to the slippery surface of the ball ... essentially coating the whole thing in a very fine sand paper ...

Guy: Huh.

Mindy: ...under the microscope it looked like the ball was covered in lots of little barnacles.

Guy: And those tiny little barnacles give the hand more to grip onto when the pitcher is throwing the ball.

Mindy: Exactoritos! Now let's all cheer on Fingerling. He needs all the help he can get ... where'd that megaphone go, I think Dennis had it last. Dennis? <<a beat>> Dennis? Where'd Dennis go?

Guy: No time Mindy, it looks like the Buff Bunnyies' next batter is coming up to the plate now Mindy.

Mindy: Wait, who is that?

Guy: And why does he look so familiar?

<<lightning strike>>

Dennis: <<echoey>> Mwahahahaha!

Mindy: Oh, no.

Guy: It can't be.

Announcer: Up to bat, number zero zero, it's Static Man! <<cheering>>

Dennis: I am Static Man!

Mindy: Dennis?

Dennis: No! Dennis plays for The Bonkerballers! Static Man plays for the Lil Buff Bunnies and is about to win this game and be a big hero.

Mindy: Uh huh.

Guy: Well, let's hope this magic mud works, Mindy.

Mindy: Yeah, I don't know if I could stomach losing to Static Man!

Fingerling: I ain't afraid a you, electricity dude!

Announcer: Thomas Fingerling winds up... and the pitch!

Fingerling: <<efforting>> <<swoosh as the ball comes out of his hand>>

Umpire: Strike one! <<crowd cheers>>

Announcer: I don't believe it! Thomas Fingerling delivers his first on target pitch of the season!

Fingerling: Hey! I did it!

Guy: Wow!

Mindy: Way to go Fingerling! Two more of those and we're home free!

Guy: Looks like that magic mud might actually be working.

Mindy: I knew it had to be in one of those buckets!

Dennis: You can have that strike for free, Tommy! Static Man is now fully charged and ready! You'll never be able to-

Fingerling: Heeeyah! <<fast swoosh>> <<catchers mitt>>

Umpire: Strike two!

Dennis: Oh. Uhhh...

Announcer: The Bonkerballers are just one strike away from winning their first game of the season!

Mindy: This is it Guy Raz! This one's for all the bananas!

Guy: I can barely watch!

<<tension builds>> <<the crowd cheers>> <<sound washes away>> <<a beat>>

Fingerling: How's this for all thumbs!

<<atmos comes racing back in>> <<swoosh!>> <<swing and a miss>> <<a beat>>

Umpire: Strike three! Yer out!

Dennis: Noooooooooooooooooooo!

<<roar from the crowd!>>

Announcer: I don't believe it! The Bonkerballers have won! In all my three weeks of announcing rec-league baseball, I have never seen anything like this!

Mindy: Yay!

Guy: Mindy, we did it!

Mindy: I knew we would.

<<Fingerling comes running back over>>

Fingerling: I did it! And I actually only used two out of my four thumbs! I still had more thumbs!

Mindy: Fingerling! That was incredible!

Guy: I can't believe you got a strike out! Your first one ever.

Fingerling: Yeah, something about the ball just felt a little... different, you know?

Mindy: It's the mud! I knew it!

Guy: I wonder if there's anything else we could make grippy with that mud?

Mindy: Well, I don't know about making things grippy. But the researchers behind the study said that the techniques they used to understand how the baseball mud worked, could also be used to help develop more sustainable construction materials.

Guy: So this baseball mud might help us build houses in the future?

Mindy: Maybe! But that's a long way away. Right now, we need to celebrate! Come on, I think I saw a sports drink cooler over there that we can pour over Fingerling.

Fingerling: Okay, but only if it's grape flavoured. The other flavours give me a rash.

Mindy: Whatever you want Fingerling! Follow me! Walk, walk, walk, walk, walk, walk. <<fading out>>

<<Fingerling, G-Force and Guy fade out as they walk away>>

Dennis: Yay! We won! Way to go everybody! Especially Dennis! Hey, wait for me!

THE END