



## Author Kurtis Scaletta answers questions about his new novel **MUDVILLE**

**Did you always want to write a book for young readers, and what made you decide to write about baseball?**

When I was a kid and decided I wanted to be a writer, it was because I was reading books like *Charlotte's Web* and *Alan Mendelsohn, the Boy from Mars*, I felt like the greatest thing anyone could do was write a book like one of those—a book that will make kids laugh out loud at the beginning and reduce them to a puddle of quivering goo at the end and turn them into lifelong readers along the way. So I've definitely been wanting to do this for most of my life. I also love baseball, I love the way baseball is talked about - there's so much richness in the slang and the vocabulary around the game. That makes it fun to write about.



**In the novel, the town of Moundville has been experiencing rain for 22 years. How did the idea behind that come about, and has there ever been an actual case of it raining consecutively like that somewhere?**

The idea of a very long rain delay occurred to me while trying to watch a Twins-Rangers game on TV that was in a rain delay (as you might guess, it was in Texas, since the rain doesn't really stop them from playing at the Metrodome). I wondered what would happen if it just kept on raining. I'm a big fan of tall tales, and I think they go naturally with baseball stories. I did try to find out what the longest rainfall on record really is, but wasn't able to dig it up. So if anyone reading this is a historical meteorologist, please tell me. I just hope it is years and years and not just a few days. That would be boring.

**When Roy, the main character in the novel, arrives home after baseball camp, he is introduced to his new roommate, a foster care child that his father has taken in. Were you interested in exploring the foster care system, and what role does Sturgis play in the novel?**

I decided to make Sturgis's sudden appearance another tall tale aspect of the story, because I didn't want to walk readers through the processes of the foster care system. I'm sure that process is interesting, but it's not what the book is about. To me the important thing is the relationship Sturgis and Roy have as brothers and as teammates.

Besides, there is a secret revealed late in the book... but I've said too much, haven't I?

**How would you describe Roy's relationship with both his father and mother? Do you feel that his introduction to Sturgis changes him as a person?**

When I was writing the story I thought of Sturgis as the main character and Roy as the affable narrator, the "Watson" who just tells the story. Now that it's done, I think maybe Roy is the main character. He changes a lot, because of Sturgis, because of his leadership of the Moundville team, and because of how the events in the novel affect his dad's business.

**If you had to compare yourself to one of the characters in *Mudville*, whom would you be the most similar to?**

I'm probably the most like Steve's dad, Mr. Robinson, because he's interested in history and opinionated about music, because he loves a good shaggy dog story, and because he knows that a hotdog shouldn't have ketchup on it. I think I'd get along really well with Mr. Robinson. Actually my wife's maiden name is Robinson, so you could say I *am* Mr. Robinson.

**Where did you come up with the idea behind the feud between Sinister Bend and Moundville?**

There was a bit of a town rivalry between Grand Forks, North Dakota and East Grand Forks, Minnesota, which I remembered from growing up, so I was recalling that and intensifying it. Sports stories usually need a good rivalry, but I wanted to avoid the cliché of the ragtag bunch of misfits playing the spoiled rich kids from across town, so I made the rivals an even harder-luck team. Their town has been washed off the face of the earth, but they're also a much better team with a long history of winning. The floods are inspired by my old home town, too, which suffered from severe floods in 1997.

**It seems like the adults in Moundville have given up on baseball. Why is it left to Roy to create the new baseball team?**

I only ever played sandlot ball and I wanted this book to have that kind of baseball - the kind that is managed and run by kids, instead of by their parents and coaches. I don't know what goes on in Little League. To me a pick up game between kids is a lot more familiar.

**Your bio says you have lived in various places before settling in Minnesota. What made you decide to live in the Midwest?**

I'm really a Midwesterner. I lived in strange and faraway places when I was growing up, but I've lived in North Dakota and Minnesota and Kansas for most of my adult life. I liked visiting Minneapolis when I was a student at the University of North Dakota and it was high on my list for places to settle down.

**Are you excited for this year's baseball season?**

I'll certainly be at the Metrodome on opening day this year like I am every year, but I'll be even more excited next year when the Twins open their new open-air ballpark.

**Do you have another book or project that you are working on right now?**

My next novel is now going through the editorial process with Knopf. The title is *Mamba Point*, and it takes place in Monrovia, Liberia. I lived there myself as a kid, so a lot of the story is about my experience of moving there and trying to fit in and failing abysmally. The hero of the book befriends a black mamba, though -- one of the deadliest snakes in the world - that part is definitely *not* based on personal experience.