MEMBERS of Berlin’s GYA-sponsored Babe Ruth Club have an enviable reputation for their well run organization, their sportsmanship and their first-rate ball playing.

According to their coach, First Sgt. Charles F. Buss of the 7351st Supply and Maintenance Squadron, “they can beat any GI baseball team except a first-string nine.” German youngsters and US airmen who share Berlin’s Tempelhof athletic field with the Babe Ruth Club know this is no idle boast. Organized in 1946, they became USAFE all-US Zone baseball champions in 1947 and last summer they won 14 out of 17 league games against GI teams.

The rival team which has never seen how well the Babe Ruth boys steal bases is apt to be overconfident when it first goes out on the diamond against them. The young German teen-agers look small compared with an average nine, but their size is often an advantage. Their star pitcher, 15-year-old “Dedi” Widwald, has only a 90-pound heft behind his fast balls, but he has an enviable amount of control. “Mickey Mouse” Karnath was given his nickname by the airman with whom he plays frequently, but is refers to his size—Mickey is 14 years old and weighs 70 pounds—and not to his ability on the ball field.

There are several explanations for the Baba Ruth Club’s phenomenal success. The first is their coach, an ex-scoutmaster from Keokuk, Iowa, Sergeant Buss is a baseball enthusiast who enjoys developing the average young good-one-day-and-bad-the-next player into a steady, reliable teammate who usually performs at his level best, and often far better than himself. Babe Ruth’s letter of thanks is one of the club treasures, ranking equally in significance with the showing of “The Babe Ruth Story”, which Sergeant Buss arranged for the club to see when the film played at American theaters in Berlin.

Another reason for the team’s success is the enthusiasm with which the boys have taken up the game. Some of...
in small print before he dares step out on the field. Team strategy plays are run through dozens of times before Arty Stolz, the 16-year-old team captain and shortstop, says "Cut, das koennen wir jetzt!" (equivalent to "Okay, we've got it now").

Someday, if the coach should be transferred elsewhere and it might be impossible to find another American to take over his job, the club probably will be supervised by the boys' parents. With this in mind, the Babe Ruth Club asked two of the boys' fathers to serve as an advisory committee. They are Herr Stolz, father of the team's captain and owner of a small grocery store, and Herr Widewald, father of the star pitcher, and himself a GYA athletic instructor.

As a one time scoutmaster, Sergeant Buss knows that parental approval is necessary to a successful organization. To prove that the club isn't developing the boys into imitation American teen-agers, Sergeant Buss invited all parents to attend a dance the club was giving. The small band was instructed to emphasize Viennese waltzes and low fox trots. But the line between too much and too little "Americanization" of the young ball players sometimes is hard to tread. For instance, the old German custom of handshaking was seriously delaying the beginning of each practice session. It wasn't handshaking as such that the sergeant objected to. He objected because it was symptomatic of the boys' attitude toward him. He was on a pedestal of authority. His decisions couldn't be questioned and he couldn't be joked with because he was a superior, and because he wore an American uniform. The sergeant finally had to explain that all this formality just wasn't necessary.

Sergeant Buss' casual manners and even temper have done a great deal to thaw out the timidity the 16 boys originally felt in the presence of any American uniform. There was the afternoon an Air Force major was acting as umpire, but instead of calling strikes with his right hand and balls with his left, he reversed the usual procedure. Arty, the captain, could see that his team was getting confused. So he stopped the game and explained the situation with grave courtesy. He was so polite that the major couldn't take offense.

Another afternoon little "Mickey Mouse" Karnath, whom the GIs treat as a sort of mascot, was playing in a GI game and slid into first just a fraction of a second before the baseman tagged him with the ball. It happened that several parents of Babe Ruth Club members were watching from the sidelines that day, and mothers began to look anxious as pint-sized Mickey was shoved off base by the towering baseman who shouted "out, out, out!" But Mickey pushed his way back.

The first baseman's teammates rallied around Mickey and was again pushed away, but he only laughed and came back to base a second time. Even the umpire ruled that Mickey was out. One of the mothers had tears in her eyes before Sergeant Buss realized that American kidding was not appreciated by the uninitiated parents. The umpire's decision was hastily reversed and Mickey received great applause from the grandstandfull of mothers and fathers.

Mickey's only comment was that "you can always tell when they're (Continued on page 49)