Is it true that Babe Ruth once “called” a home run?

From *The Book of Totally Useless Information* by Don Voorhees

 The home run that Babe Ruth blasted at Chicago’s Wrigley Field, in the fifth inning of the third game of the 1932 World Series, is one of the most fabled stories in sports history. It was Ruth’s last World Series homer, and it is the one that helped turn him into a baseball legend. Whether the story is entirely true, however, is doubtful.

 The Cubs had lost the first two games of the series at Yankee Stadium, and the Chicago players and fans were taunting the Babe during the first game at Wrigley Field. Ruth came to the plate in the fifth inning, with the score tied 4-4, to face Cubs’ pitcher Charlie Root. Ruth swung at, and missed, Root’s first two pitches and the crowd loved it. Root’s next two pitches were balls and the fans booed the Babe for not swinging at them. This much of the story appears to be factual. What happened next, however, is unclear. Some eyewitnesses say that Ruth pointed toward the Chicago dugout as a warning to calm down. Others claim he pointed defiantly at Root. Still others say Ruth held up one finger (not the middle one) to indicate to the fans that it only takes one swing to knock the ball out of the park. All these explanations of what happened seem ordinary and believable. However, baseball legend has it that the Babe pointed to the spot in center field where he intended to hit the next pitch. Sure enough, he sent the next pitch over the center field wall, right where he had indicated.

 A sportswriter at the game, Paul Gallico, may be responsible for starting the legend. Gallico reported that Ruth “pointed like a duelist to the spot where he expected to send his rapier home.” Gallico wouldn’t have been the first reporter to embellish upon the accomplishments of this larger-than-life American hero.

 Whether or not Babe actually predicted this home run is really academic. He remains the greatest all-around baseball player who ever lived. His sixty home runs in a 154 game season have never been topped. (In 1961, Roger Maris had fifty-nine homers after his first 154 games, but reached sixty-one after 162 games.) He led the American League in homers twelve times. His home run percentage was higher than any other player (8.5 percent), and his lifetime total (714) was only topped by Hank Aaron (755), who needed an additional 3,965 times at bat to reach that number (6.1 percent). Ruth finished with a .342 lifetime batting average.

 Ruth was also a marvelous pitcher early in his career. He once pitched 29 2/3 scoreless innings for the Boston Red Sox in the 1916 and 1918 World Series. He was the best left-handed American League pitcher, until he was moved to the outfield so that he could play and bat in every game.



Why do Wint-O-Green Life Savers spark when you bite into them?

From *The Book of Totally Useless Information* by Don Voorhees

 Next time you need a thrill on a dull evening, grab someone and some Wint-O-Green Life Savers and head for the bathroom. Turn out the light and face the mirror. Tightly clench the Life Safer between your teeth with your lips apart while biting down hard enough to crack the candy. You should see a flash of eerie blue-green light. Fascinating yes, but easily explainable.

 When sugar crystal molecules are ripped apart, opposite electric charges are created on either side of the break, causing electrons to leap across the crack in the candy. These electrons excite the nitrogen in the air, causing it to emit the blue-green flashes akin to lightning.

 What makes Wint-O-Green candy different than other hard sugar candies is the wintergreen it contains. Wintergreen contains fluorescent methyl salicylate, which absorbs ultraviolet light and converts into light that we can see. Unfortunately, while Wintergreen Life Savers’ taste is reliable, their sparking ability is not. Any background light can hamper the effect, as can humidity in the air. A similar sparking phenomenon can be produced by certain cellophane sparking tape adhesives when pulled away from a surface in the dark.

