Column/Robert E. Malchman
A fat kid hangs up his spikes

I think it was somewhere around the seventh inning of MIT's 0-0 draw with Bowdoin two Saturdays ago when I made my decision. It was a cold, drizzly afternoon. The winds whipping across Briggs Field had disturbed the blizzard coming three days hence. My hands were freezing, my nose was running, and I had the flu. I am, you see, the manager of the varsity baseball team.

In another incarnation, I was a pitcher. I was not a good pitcher. My out pitch was the slow curve. My only pitch was the slow curve. My manager, thevarsity coach and I were all totally screwed up by the manager's timing.

I was coming back from breaking my ankle the spring before. I had been shagging flies, you see, and someone hit a screaming liner to my right. As I got to it, the ball sidled on me, and hit my trailing left ankle. The coach said it was the only thing he'd never seen me outrun.

Where I got here in the fall, I was a little out of shape. This is what Briggs from DuPont, for example, had me in the dry heaves. I ran into a kind of Catch-22. I needed to pitch a lot, but in order to pitch at all, Coach O'Brien wanted me to be in shape.

So I became the manager, which meant that I kept the scorebook (unless the other manager was there), practiced standing in the outfield doing nothing, and took abuse from the players. It wasn't a bad job per se. What got to me was the watching.

The best thing about baseball — any sport, I suppose — is being on a team, counting on your teammates, and your teammates counting on you. It's a bad rap from me to his home for a drink, volunteer to put me up for the money, and insist that I sleep with his wife.

The worst thing about any sport is being on the periphery of a team, being there, but not belonging, not being enough. It hurts to stand around and watch. MIT only loses by scores of 15-2. That eleven-run difference between here and high school is too much to make up.

So I'm hanging up my spikes at the end of the year. Coach O'Brien's been great to me. He's given me every chance, but it's time for the fat kid with the slow curve to call it a career.

Though, my new knuckleball might come around over the summer.