

Gwyneth Walker

# Sportsongs

a new look at athletic accomplishment!

*for Narrator and Piano*

1. Analysis of Baseball
2. Holding the Towel
3. Summary By the Pawns
4. The Football Fumbler

# Sportsongs

a new look at athletic accomplishment!

*duration: 10'40"*

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*Sportsongs* are dramatizations (narratives with music) on the topic of athletics. The poems, by May Swenson and Virginia Hamilton Adair, explore the intricacies of sport in a knowledgeable, quizzical and sometimes confused (!) manner. This poetic approach to sports is infused with fanciful imagination!

In the opening scene, "Analysis of Baseball" (poem by May Swenson), the narrator explains to the audience the function of baseball equipment – ball, bat and mitt. Non-athletic associations arise frequently. "Bat waits for ball to mate...ball flirts...don't keep the date." The narrator attempts to catch a fly ball hit beyond reach. "Mitt has to quit in disgrace." The elements and details of baseball seem to overwhelm the narrator. Yet, there is a joyful conclusion that "It's done on a diamond, and for fun. It's about home, and its about run."

The narrator, probably not an adventurous swimmer, stands on the beach, "Holding the Towel" while searching the waves for a friend. The only clue to locating the friend is an orange bathing cap, which the narrator often confuses with a buoy. Many "round heads" are seen "dipping, rising, tipping." Alas, they are only floats. Narrator gives up on the search and leaves the beach (doing a mock breast stroke).

The game of chess is now described – from the viewpoint of the smallest chess piece – in "Summary by the Pawns" (poem by Virginia Hamilton Adair). With the stage transformed into an imaginary chess board, the pawn (Narrator) takes short steps, moving from spot to spot. "First the black square, then a white..." The steps are rigid. Yet the pawn observes the more varied movements of the larger pieces. "While around us with free gaits move the taller potentates." The pawn can occasionally dislodge another piece ("remove a man"). Yet, without warning, the pawn is knocked from the board. "Off, off, off, we go!"

"The Football Fumbler" is based on May Swenson's charming poem, "Watching the Jets Lose to Buffalo at Shea." The poet, not a knowledgeable football fan, has attended a game with the New York Jets at their home field, Shea Stadium. Ms. Swenson immediately forms a "nurturing bond" with the football, which she refers to as a "leather baby." She hugs the ball as she runs down the field, "to deliver the baby to a cradle of grass at the goalposts." Oh, but it is knocked away. She fumbles!!! Chastising herself, she laments, "Oh, what a blooper and a fumbler you are..." She pretends to cuddle her "leather baby" at the goal posts. Imagination triumphs over reality as she raises the football aloft in triumph, accompanied by the Notre Dame Cheer Song!

With this focus on sports, a narrator with athletic experience might deliver a suitable and comfortable presentation. However, a narrator entirely unfamiliar with sports might present a highly entertaining rendition. This would truly be "a new look athletic accomplishment!"

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Dr. Gwyneth Walker (b. 1947) is a graduate of Brown University and the Hartt School of Music. She holds B.A., M.M. and D.M.A. Degrees in Music Composition. A former faculty member of the Oberlin College Conservatory, she resigned from academic employment in 1982 in order to pursue a career as a full-time composer. She now lives on a dairy farm in Braintree, Vermont.

Gwyneth Walker is a proud resident of Vermont. She is the recipient of the Year 2000 "Lifetime Achievement Award" from the Vermont Arts Council as well as the 2008 "Athenaeum Award for Achievement in the Arts and Humanities" from the St. Johnsbury (VT) Athenaeum.

Walker's catalog includes over 200 commissioned works for orchestra, chamber ensembles, chorus and solo voice. The music of Gwyneth Walker is published by E. C. Schirmer of Boston (choral and vocal music) and Lauren Keiser Music (orchestral and instrumental music).

Further information concerning Gwyneth Walker and her works is available at [www.gwynethwalker.com](http://www.gwynethwalker.com)

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# Sportsongs

a new look at athletic accomplishment!  
for Narrator and Piano

## Analysis of Baseball

May Swenson (1913 - 1989)

Gwyneth Walker

During the piano introduction, the NARRATOR comes onstage, wearing a baseball cap and carrying a ball, bat and mitt. These items are (lovingly) placed on stage in front of the NARRATOR, for the audience to view.\*

Lively ♩ = 180 (♩. = 60)

The first system of the musical score is for the piano introduction. It consists of two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The time signature is 3/4. The tempo is marked 'Lively' with a note equal to 180 beats per minute, and a half note equal to 60. The dynamics are marked 'f joyfully'. The bass line features a steady eighth-note accompaniment. The treble line has a melodic line with a dotted quarter note followed by an eighth note, and a half note. The instruction 'with slight pedal' is written below the bass staff.

The second system of the musical score continues the piano introduction. It consists of two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The time signature is 3/4. The bass line continues with eighth notes. The treble line features a melodic line with a dotted quarter note followed by an eighth note, and a half note. The key signature changes to one sharp (F#).

The third system of the musical score continues the piano introduction. It consists of two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The time signature is 3/4. The bass line continues with eighth notes. The treble line features a melodic line with a dotted quarter note followed by an eighth note, and a half note. The key signature changes to one sharp (F#). The instruction 'rit.' is written above the treble staff, and 'p' is written below the bass staff.

\*The performance of "Analysis of Baseball" might be especially entertaining if the Narrator is not very familiar with baseball!

NARRATOR points to props, to explain baseball to the audience.

It's about the ball,  
the bat, and the mitt.      Pounds fist into palm,  
as if preparing to play.      Ball hits the bat,  
or it hits mitt.      Bat doesn't hit ball,  
bat meets it.      Takes a nice, slow  
practice swing

↓      ↓      ↓

×      ×

**A**

Ball bounces off bat, flies air,  
or thuds ground (dud)      (aside) ↓      Narrator moves in time to the music,  
or it fits mitt.      ×      ×      ×      perhaps "rounding the basses"  
(running around the bases on stage).

**B** *a tempo* (♩ = 60)

*rit.*

*p*

*8vb*

Bat waits for ball to mate.      Ball hates to take ball's bait.      Ball flirts, bat's late don't keep the date.

**C**      (*very short tremolo*)      (*slightly longer tremolo*)

*p flirtatiously*

*8va*      *8va*

Ball goes in (thwack) to mitt, and goes out (thwack) back to mitt.

(quick, high, ascending clusters)

Musical notation for the first system, showing a treble and bass clef. The treble staff contains three eighth notes ascending in pitch. The bass staff is mostly empty. The system ends with a repeat sign and a 3/4 time signature.

NARRATOR continues activity from B

**D** *a tempo* (♩ = 60)

Musical notation for the second system, featuring a piano (*f*) dynamic and a 3/4 time signature. The treble staff contains a series of chords and moving lines, while the bass staff has a steady accompaniment.

Ball fits mitt, but not all of the time.

*poco rit.* **E** *p*

Musical notation for the third system, including a *poco rit.* marking, a dynamic change to piano (*p*), and a 'Leo.' marking. The system ends with a repeat sign and a piano (*p*) dynamic.

Sometimes ball gets hit (pow) when bat meets it,

and sails to a place where mitt has to quit in disgrace.

Musical notation for the fourth system, featuring a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic and a repeat sign. The treble staff contains a few notes, and the bass staff has a simple accompaniment.

NARRATOR attempts to catch ball, which is hit over the head, beyond reach. Narrator is disappointed.

(a series of short, high gliss. ad lib.)

[tap piano ledge, upper end] (as background excitement)

*p* *f*

That's about the bases loaded, about 40,000 fans **exploded**.\*

NARRATOR picks up all three props, perhaps struggling to hold all at once!

NARRATOR displays each item as mentioned.

*Quickly*  
It's about the **ball**, the **bat**, the **mitt**, the bases and the fans.

(continue tapping)

**F**

*Not as quickly*  
It's done on a diamond, and for fun.

*Slowly, happily*  
It's about home, and it's about run.

*stop tapping*

NARRATOR prepares — — — — —

**G** *Slower* *accel.*

*p*

ped.

\*Pianist may pump left fist a few times as a cheer!

and then runs around the bases one last time...

*a tempo* (♩ = 60)

The first system of musical notation consists of two staves. The upper staff begins with a treble clef and a forte (*f*) dynamic marking. It contains five measures of music, including quarter notes, eighth notes, and a half note with a slur. The lower staff begins with a bass clef and contains five measures of music, including quarter notes and eighth notes.

The second system of musical notation consists of two staves. The upper staff begins with a treble clef and contains five measures of music, including quarter notes, eighth notes, and a half note with a slur. The lower staff begins with a bass clef and contains five measures of music, including quarter notes and eighth notes. A key signature change to one sharp (F#) is indicated at the end of the system.

The third system of musical notation consists of two staves. The upper staff begins with a treble clef and contains five measures of music, including quarter notes, eighth notes, and a half note with a slur. The lower staff begins with a bass clef and contains five measures of music, including quarter notes and eighth notes. A key signature change to one sharp (F#) is indicated at the beginning of the system. The word "Leo." is written below the lower staff, with a horizontal line extending from it under the first three measures. The word "playfully" is written above the lower staff in the fourth measure.

...and exits the stage.

[ball in mitt displayed from off stage.]

The fourth system of musical notation consists of two staves. The upper staff begins with a treble clef and contains five measures of music, including quarter notes, eighth notes, and a half note with a slur. The lower staff begins with a bass clef and contains five measures of music, including quarter notes and eighth notes. A key signature change to one sharp (F#) is indicated at the beginning of the system. The word "molto rit." is written above the upper staff in the third measure. The word "p" is written below the lower staff in the fourth measure. A dashed line labeled "8va" spans the first three measures of the upper staff. A vertical arrow points down from the text "[ball in mitt displayed from off stage.]" to a note in the upper staff in the fourth measure.

*short pause*  
3'00"

## Holding the Towel

May Swenson (1913 - 1989)

Before the music starts, NARRATOR comes on stage carrying an orange bathing cap. The cap is (lovingly) placed at the front of the stage for the audience to see. NARRATOR is holding a large beach towel.

NARRATOR scans the horizon looking for a friend who has gone swimming in the ocean.

### Flowing (♩. = 66)

(as waves)

Musical score for 'Flowing' in G major, 6/8 time. The piece is marked *mf* and includes a *ped.* (pedal) marking with a *simile* instruction. The score consists of two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The melody is primarily in the bass clef, with a more active line in the treble clef. The piece is divided into four measures.

[reading and music approximately synchronized]

You swam out through the boats your head an orange buoy sun - daubed

### A (as a quiet background)

Musical score for section A in G major, 6/8 time. The piece is marked *p* (piano). The score consists of two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The melody is primarily in the bass clef, with a more active line in the treble clef. The piece is divided into four measures.

bobbing. My squint lost you to nibbling waves.

*rit.*

Musical score for section B in G major, 6/8 time. The piece is marked *rit.* (ritardando). The score consists of two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The melody is primarily in the bass clef, with a more active line in the treble clef. The piece is divided into four measures.

I looked for a mast to tilt  
to glint with your splash  
but couldn't see past the huddled boats.

### C *a tempo* (♩. = 66)

(as waves bobbing in the distance)

Musical score for section C in G major, 6/8 time. The piece is marked *p* (piano) and *lightly*. The score consists of two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The melody is primarily in the bass clef, with a more active line in the treble clef. The piece is divided into four measures.



I found round heads sun - red dipping rising tipping. [pause] They were tethered floats. [pause]

[high black-note cluster]

When you dove from the stovepipe buoy  
in the far furrow of the channel  
I was still scanning the nearby nowhere - going boats.

**D** **E** *a tempo* (♩. = 66)  
(as waves)

NARRATOR approximates a breaststroke and "swims" around the stage.  
dipping rising tipping... dipping rising tipping...

NARRATOR exits the stage, stopping to pick up the orange cap en route.  
dipping rising tipping... dipping rising tipping. *rit.* *slow tremolo (as waves)*

*Red.* *Red.* *short pause*

## Summary By the Pawns

Virginia Hamilton Adair (1913-2004)

[tap piano ledge with both hands beginning  
as far apart as can be comfortably reached,  
then towards the middle.]

**With energy** ♩ = 126  
*strict tempo, as a chess piece*

NARRATOR steps on to stage, taking one step per measure, as a chess pawn moving.

Spoken in rhythm while standing very upright, as a chess pawn.

First the black square, then a white, Moved by some - thing out of sight,

**A** [high white-note cluster]

We are start - ed with a bound, Knights and cas - tles all a - round,

[cluster]

Kings and queens and bish - ops ho - ly! Af - ter that we go more

**B** *rit.*

slow - ly,

*(rit.)* *a tempo*

Moved by some - thing out of sight.

The first system of music features a vocal line with four groups of triplets of eighth notes, followed by a quarter rest and a dotted quarter note. The piano accompaniment begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic, showing a treble clef with a whole note chord and a bass clef with a whole note chord. The second measure of the piano part contains a triplet of eighth notes in the treble and a dotted quarter note in the bass. The third measure continues with a triplet of eighth notes in the treble and a dotted quarter note in the bass.

a more relaxed pose while describing the other chess pieces

While a - round us with free gaits Move the tall - er

**C**

*playfully, more freely*

*with slight pedal*

The second system of music features a vocal line with two groups of quarter notes, followed by a quarter rest and two groups of triplets of eighth notes. The piano accompaniment starts with a C-clef on the treble line and a bass clef on the bass line. The treble part consists of a series of eighth-note triplets, while the bass part has a steady eighth-note accompaniment. The instruction *playfully, more freely* is written below the treble staff, and *with slight pedal* is written below the bass staff.

now upright

po - ten - tates. \_ Still we pawns\_ look straight a - head.

*mf*

*p* *mf*

The third system of music features a vocal line with a triplet of eighth notes, followed by a quarter rest and a series of quarter notes. The piano accompaniment begins with a triplet of eighth notes in the treble and a quarter note in the bass. The second measure of the piano part has a *mf* dynamic. The third measure has a piano (*p*) dynamic, and the fourth measure has a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic. The piano part concludes with a series of eighth notes in the treble and a dotted quarter note in the bass.

**D** flowing gestures describing  
the "taller potentates" moving in "free gaits"

*with slight pedal*

Still we pawns\_

*no pedal*

look straight a - head.

*p* *mf*

NARRATOR moves from one square to another on an (imaginary) chess board.  
(diagonal moves might be included)

**E** Swing rhythm (♩ =  $\overset{\sim}{\underset{\sim}{\text{♩}}}$ )  
(same tempo)

*mf*

*with slight pedal*

Musical score for the first system, featuring piano accompaniment with chords and triplets in both staves.

[spoken freely (not in rhythm) approximately synchronized with music]

Still we pawns look straight ahead. To encourage us it is said that

Musical score for the second system, including a vocal line starting with a boxed 'F' and piano accompaniment with a 'p' dynamic marking.

pawns who reach the utmost square are as good as monarchs

Musical score for the third system, including a vocal line and piano accompaniment with a 'mf' dynamic marking and triplets.

there.

Meanwhile pawns, if need be, can  
By slanted ways remove a man.

Musical score for the fourth system, including a vocal line starting with a boxed 'G' and piano accompaniment with triplets.

But frequently,  
before we know  
What has got us

Off we

*long white-note gliss.*

8vb

go! | | | But

**H** *a tempo* (♩ = 126)

*spoken quickly, in terror!* (many) off we

frequently, before we know What has got us, off, off, off...

**I** [very high, short, quick glissando] *gliss.*

*p*

go!

**J** *a tempo*  
[tapping as before]

*mf*

First a black, then a white, Moved by some-thing

*p*

*short pause*

NARRATOR "flies" off stage (exits abruptly)  
as if being yanked off a chessboard.

(whispered)

out of sight,

*rit.*

[high, clusters] *black*

*white*

*short pause*

2'40"



# The Football Fumbler

“Watching The Jets Lose to Buffalo at Shea”

May Swenson (1913 - 1989)

Suggested props: football helmet, football (can be fake, foam football), pseudo goalposts placed on stage.

*With bravura*

Musical score for the first system, featuring a grand staff with treble and bass clefs. The music is in 4/4 time and begins with a forte (*f*) dynamic. A long, sweeping slur covers the entire melody. The piece concludes with a double bar line and a 4/4 time signature. A *ped.* (pedal) marking is present at the beginning of the bass line.

(“scurrying” motive)

**A** Lively ♩ = 144

Musical score for the second system, featuring a grand staff in 4/4 time. The tempo is marked as Lively with a quarter note equal to 144 (♩ = 144). The music starts with a forte (*f*) dynamic in the bass line and a piano (*p*) dynamic in the treble line. A slur covers the treble line melody, which transitions from *p* to *f*. A *ped.* marking is located at the end of the system.

Musical score for the third system, featuring a grand staff in 4/4 time. The treble line continues the “scurrying” motive with a slur, marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic that transitions to forte (*f*). The bass line provides harmonic support. A *ped.* marking is located at the end of the system.

with pedal

rit. ,  
a tempo, vigorously

*p sub.*

*f* *p*

NARRATOR runs on stage, wearing a football helmet, carrying a football

spoken lovingly, while holding a football

The feel of that leather baby solid against your sternum, you hug its skull and bottom between huge huddled shoulders.

**B**

*p* throughout

fade out

stop

*f* *p* *f* *p*

It's wrapped in your arms and wedged under the hard muzzle of your stuck-out faceguard.

Your thighs pumping, you run  
to deliver the baby to a cradle of  
grass at the goal posts. But it's **bumped**

*a tempo, a running pattern*

(repeat these 2 measures ad lib.)

*f* *p*

stop abruptly

from your arms,  
and you're mounted  
as if your back were leather.

Your legs cut away,  
you fold,  
you tumble like  
a tree trunk.

[high, random, white-note dyads]

[lower, random, white-note dyads]

*f*

NARRATOR takes off helmet  
and examines it with curiosity.

Your brain's for  
the ground to split  
like a leather egg,  
but it doesn't.

Your helmet  
takes the  
concussion.

**Slower**  
(“wobbly” motive)

*p*

Reo. Reo. Reo. Reo.

NARRATOR looks up, following the flight of an imaginary kickoff.

Sent aloft by a leather toe, a rugged leather baby dropped from the sky and

(as a football in flight)

*p gracefully*

*8<sup>va</sup>----- loco*

(repeat these 4 measures)

slammed into the sling of your arms.

(last time)

*rit. loco*

*8<sup>va</sup>----- loco*

rapturously  
Oh, the feel of that leather bundle.  
Oh, what a blooper and fumbler  
you are, that you couldn't nest it,

that you lost and  
couldn't nurse it,

(“cuddling” motive)

*p slow, rocking style*

long enough to lay it  
in a cradle of grass at the goalposts.

NARRATOR tenderly places the ball on the ground,  
then kneels or leans over by the football.

(quiet, tender tremolo)

*p*

*pp*

**E** *a tempo, lively*

*p* as if a distance

lovingly strokes football

*ped.*

*cresc.*

*ped.*

*f*

raises football to the right

*8va*

*with pedal*

back down

raises football to the left

*8va* *15ma*

back down

Stands up...

and raises the football aloft, triumphantly!

*rit.*

*8va*

*ff*

*ped.* *8vb*