

Ramblings of an Umpire

By Robert D. Emslie

National League Umpire

Illustration from Photograph

UMPIRING is more difficult today than ever before. Under any circumstance it is a most trying task, and few can fill the bill satisfactorily. That it is possible for a man to hold his position longer now than was formerly the case is due to the fact that the umpire is more firmly entrenched in his position. No longer can a club owner get an umpire fired for the asking. It used to be the common thing for players to run to the head of the club and lay the defeat to poor umpiring, whereupon forthwith a telegram would be sent to the head of the league asking for the removal of the official. Often the umpire would be transferred to some other point. Now it is all different. There has not been a change in the personnel of the corps of either major league this season. The men are assigned on a schedule and this schedule is not changed. The club owners know that it is of no use to protest an umpire or ask for a change in his assignment—consequently matters proceed with less

friction than formerly. Of course it is inevitable that players will protest when a decision is given that seems to them erroneous. Umpires make mistakes the same as other people and it is only natural that there should be a protest if the player gets the small end of a decision. The rules say that no player shall leave his position to protest a decision of the umpire. It is well nigh impossible to enforce this rule. At times almost the whole team will crowd around the umpire at some critical point of the game. They forget rules and everything else.

What incenses an umpire most is when a protest is registered at some trivial point where none deserves. There is absolutely no reason for a player to turn on an umpire when the latter happens to miss a ball and call it a strike. Often

a player offers at a widely pitched ball but he is not subjected to the sharp criticism of the umpire when the latter makes a slip. The umpire is doing his level best all the time and ought to re-



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ceive the support of the player—not his censure. Umpire and player ought to work together all the time. Of course an umpire must have lots of patience and plenty of judgment. To throw players indiscriminately out of the game even when they deserve such treatment, would be demoralizing and spoil a contest. A player will say much in the heat of a moment that he will be sorry for afterward.

I think that umpiring is more difficult today for the reason that there is so much base-running. The players are running all the time these days. I suppose the reason for this is that there is so much of what is known as the hit and run game when players are running on signal. The man runs whether the ball is hit or not and the umpire is kept busy in watching the man at the bat and the man on the bases. Then there is the prevalence of the bunting game. Nowadays more than ever the first baseman runs in when a bunt is expected and the second baseman is supposed to cover first base. Here the pitcher, too, should be ready to cover first in case of need for there is no telling what play may come up. Often the catcher will run forward in case of a bunt and, if he has time, will throw to second base to head off the runner there.

What bothers an umpire most, to my way of thinking, is the effort to decide correctly when a runner attempts to steal third base. If the umpire is not at the proper angle to see the play he will have considerable difficulty to decide it properly. When the umpire is working behind the rubber he cannot get into the desired position to see the play and is therefore liable to lose it.

The question naturally arises what can be done to lighten the labors of the umpire, to cause less friction, to please players and the public? The answer is easy. It is the double umpire system. I am for it first, last and all the time. Anything that minimizes the labors of the umpire is a blessing. Two umpires are a deal better than one for the simple reason that two men can see more than one. There are very few plays that can get away from two umpires. There is more confidence in the umpires when there are two men working. There will

be very little or no kicking for the players know that the umpire is on the play and can see just how it is made. Where the miscalling of a strike or an erroneous decision will affect an important game one can easily realize how important it is that two umpires should be employed in a game. This system should have been in vogue long ago. It was once tried, years ago, but was never permanently installed. The expense would be as nothing compared with the benefits that would accrue.

Few people realize the dangers that confront an umpire in the discharge of his duties. Thoughtless people seem to find it extremely amusing when he is solidly struck by the horsehide and fairly leaps from the pain. I have received so many blows on my anatomy that it would take a mathematician to count them up. Suffice it to say that I have walked or hobbled on the field to umpire a game when my body was covered with bruises. It is a case of work, however, as long as one can stand on his feet.

It was purely a matter of accident how I came to follow umpiring as a means of livelihood. I was once a pitcher in St. Thomas, Ontario, when our club made a trip through the states. It was expected the trip would last a week, but it was extended to seven or eight weeks. I had one shirt and one pair of socks to start out with on that trip. At Camden, N. J., I must have played well, for I attracted the attention of the people who ran the ball club there—it is across the river from Philadelphia—so I was launched upon a professional career. I played in Camden in 1882 and part of 1883. In 1883 the club disbanded and "Billy" Barnie, one of the great figures in the game of days gone by as a catcher and a manager, came after me to pitch for the Baltimore club. A poor arm caused me to give up the game.

One day in the season of 1887, after my return from Savannah, I happened to be in Toronto to see a game between that city and Hamilton in the old International League, when the umpire, "Wes" Curry, chanced to take ill. Stroud, the manager of Hamilton, and Charley Cushman of the Toronto club, selected me to officiate. I was asked to continue and received an appointment from Charley

White, the president of the league, who is now well-known all over the country as one of the leading lights of the A. G. Spalding & Bros. house. I umpired in that league for three seasons—1887, 1888 and 1889, and would have remained another season, but Mr. White kindly released me to allow me to accept an offer to umpire in the American Association under the presidency of Zack Phelps, for whom the present president of the National League was then secretary.

We little dreamt—Mr. Pulliam and myself—that one day he would be at the head of one of the most prominent baseball organizations of the world, and that I would be umpiring for him. Mr. Pulliam was regarded in that day as a very bright hustling young man and

was extremely popular. I worked in the Western League the following season. The Milwaukee club went over to the American Association that year and I received word to go to Cincinnati and umpire, and so ever since I joined the National League forces in 1891, I have worked for that body, under but two presidents—N. E. Young and Harry C. Pulliam. "Uncle Nick," as Mr. Young was called, left no stone unturned to do everything in his power to make matters pleasant for the umpires; he was deservedly popular. Mr. Pulliam has proved a worthy successor and has done wonders to bring back the prestige of the National League to its old standing. The National League is playing to old-time crowds and its future is assured.

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