

# The Problem of Official Scoring

## A Criticism of the Present Unbusinesslike Methods of Taking the Official Records With a Few Suggestions For Their Betterment

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The problem of the official scorer is one of the unsolved questions in baseball. While it is perhaps a minor consideration alongside of some of the really great interests of the diamond it is nevertheless of sufficient consequence to merit far more attention than has been given it in the past. The methods of official scoring as at present conducted in the big leagues are unbusinesslike to say the least, and hardly in keeping with the advanced state of efficiency in other departments of the game. They need a pretty thorough revision, and it is to be sincerely hoped that the officials of organized baseball who have such affairs in charge will inaugurate a few much-needed changes.

**A** BALL player's record is his stock in trade. More than any other profession he depends for his job upon the good opinion of some big league manager backed up by the good opinion of the public. This good opinion which is so important to him is supposedly built upon his individual work, good, bad or indifferent. But as a matter of fact, his ability is determined almost wholly by his batting, fielding, and base-running efforts as compiled in the official records, and these records far more than is for the good of the game are at the mercy of an unbusiness-like system of official scoring.

Behind all the brilliant or indifferent work of the player upon the diamond, above and beyond all the written press notices which are given him, is a force working unseen, silent, but always powerful, which is often more than sufficient to change a fairly good into an indifferent average or vice versa. Behind the wire screen which protects the sport writers' bench from the danger of hard batted fouls is an individual whose judgment is no better probably than that of any sport writer there assembled, but whose single word outweighs the combined judgment of sport authorities, audience, umpires, or the players themselves. And oftentimes this individual who

wields so powerful an influence on passing events is unknown to the players themselves whose scratch hits he converts into errors or whose errors are termed allowable scratch hits at his own peculiar whim.

The official scorer has for years been a bone of contention in baseball circles. The system, or rather lack of system, by which he is hired and under which he works has been constantly criticised and seldom or never defended. It is one of those things which are esteemed bad by common knowledge and common consent, but which are, nevertheless, under rated and left without remedy solely through failure to adequately grasp their importance.

There is nothing unimportant in the work of the official scorer. Upon his work, to a greater or less degree, rests the reputation of every baseball player and his work can, without stretching a point, change a star into a near star or a discard into a possibility.

At present, the official scorer is practically always a newspaper man hired for a very small salary by the local club. It is his duty to be on hand at every game on the home grounds to keep score according to his own lights and forward his daily records to the Secretary of the League. There is absolutely no way

of supervising or verifying his work. He is the absolute judge as to what shall count as a base hit and what shall go for an error. His term of service is limited by the club for which he works and in some cities that there may be no partiality the baseball editor of every one of the great dailies serves as official scorer in turn throughout the season.

Oftentimes the official scorer is unknown to the player and to the public. He is very seldom well-known. In some cities at least the official scorer changes so frequently that it is hard even for those in a position to know to keep track of just who is the arbiter of the records.

There is something eminently unfair in this system. The official scorer, as we have seen, is practically always a newspaper man and always hired by the local club.

Now on several accounts he is under obligation to that club. First, as a newspaper man it is big business to be loyal to the home team and to support its affairs wherever possible. Without any intention of being biased or prejudiced his sub-conscious attitude is one which inevitably leans toward the players of the home club. It is practically impossible for the official scorer to escape this tendency, however fairminded and just he may be.

Second, in addition to being a newspaper man whose prejudices are all in favor of the home club, the official scorer is also a paid employee of that club. It would not be human nature to suppose that he is wholly superior to this double influence which is always present, always slightly warping his judgment in favor of the home player as against the opposing player.

Again the official scorer is in a far different position to that of an umpire at a ball game or a referee at a boxing match. Both these officials give their decisions in the open where everyone can see them. If their decisions are false, it is very sure there will be all kinds of criticism from the audience. But the official scorer works under no such handicap. Public opinion is not a force which he is compelled to recognize. The opinions of the majority affect him not at all. His decisions are given in secret and are carried

out in secret, and for the most part are absolutely unknown to the public. So there is not in his case the strong force of common justice resting upon popular judgment which largely controls the conduct of an umpire or referee working strictly for the public and giving his decisions to the public. The decisions of the official scorer even though they do come to light, which is not likely, will be seen only after the events they decide have been largely forgotten and when the effect of popular approval or disapproval will have almost completely died out.

Furthermore the official scorer as he is human has the natural prejudices of any other person. As he is a newspaper man, he knows personally a number of players, is favorably impressed with some of them, and unfavorably with others. It is not to be expected that he is fully superior to that natural impulse which leads him to favor a player with whom he is friendly as against one for whom he has an honest dislike. That this is done very frequently cannot be proved, but is so probable as to be accepted for fact.

In addition there are numerous occasions when the temptation to change the actual facts of the case are stronger than at other times. For instance in the celebrated battle between Lajoie and Ty Cobb for the batting supremacy of the world, it is currently reported and commonly believed that practically anything by which Cobb reached first save a base on balls went as a hit at Detroit, while the same circumstances favored Lajoie at Cleveland. Furthermore, that Cobb had difficulty in making a safe hit at Cleveland in the opinion of the official scorer while Lajoie suffered under the same handicap at Detroit. Though these rumors were very likely exaggerated, the fact that they could very well have existed so far as the system is concerned is a criticism of that system.

Even where the official scorer is not involved in any possible prejudice, his opinion, is, nevertheless, merely the opinion of one man. There is no effort made to select an official scorer according to his ability. In fact there is no effort made to find out whether or not he has any ability though it requires as much judgement to be a fair and intelli-

gent scorer as it does to be an umpire. It is taken for granted that the official scorer is competent to fill his position. This does not follow at all. There is no brainier player in the world than John Evers. There is no one who has a more thorough understanding of baseball rules or a clearer grasp of their application. Obviously Evers ought to be a good scorer if any one is, and yet Evers last season, when he was sitting in the grand stand often times, though he closely followed the game, told me he couldn't keep score.

"I seem unable to follow the game well enough for that," said Evers. "I think it takes a special knack to keep the score. At least I know that I am no good at the job." In Evers' opinion as well as in the opinion of any person who gives the matter any unbiased consideration whatever, it does require real knack and real talent to keep score, and do it well.

And yet the official records of the two major leagues are wholly in the hands of a group of men many of whom are doubtless fully competent, but whose merits depend not at all upon their proved ability while others are constantly being added to the official ranks without any inquiry whatever into their capacity to fill the position.

The records of any big corporation are scrupulously kept, worked out in the exactest detail and filed away for future reference, but the records of baseball which are certainly of almost national importance are taken in only the most slipshod unbusinesslike manner by a corps of men who not only lack any uniform control but come and go wholly at the caprice of a local club owner.

Much of the work of the official scorer could be done by the rankest amateur, but in every game there are a number of close plays where it is only a matter of judgment what shall be considered as a safe hit and what shall be counted an error. Then, too, there are complicated plays where a number of players have their hands on the ball and where it takes a quick eye and a keen observer to give every man his share of the assists. Judgment also enters into the crediting of stolen bases. In fact into everything except the calling of balls and strikes and the scoring of runs. Al-

though the majority of plays admit of no difference of opinion there are always a number which are close and it is here that the official scorer is omnipotent.

I sat in the press box at the Polo Grounds one day when one of the Cub players hit a long fly which Murray misjudged. The ball went to the fence and the runner completed the circuit. I sat directly behind the official scorer and watched the play closely and could see nothing to do in fairness save to call the hit a home run. Practically everyone of the New York scribes to say nothing of the Chicago writers also called it a home run until the official scorer announced it in his opinion as a single plus an error on the part of Murray. I have no doubt that this was a perfectly honest opinion on the official scorer's part, but he saw the play one way while various other newspaper men as competent as himself to judge the play, all united in seeing it the other way. Yet, the official scorer's opinion is the only important one and his opinion outweighs the majority vote or even a combined vote against him.

There is no doubt that official scoring offers a serious problem. This problem is well recognized by the great majority of the players, many of whom have not scrupled to lay some of their troubles to its charge.

Joe Jackson said "I think the system of official scoring is all wrong. Last year when I was pressing Cobb pretty hard for the batting leadership, I know it was a serious job for me to get a safe hit at Detroit. I imagine that Cobb may had much the same difficulty at Cleveland, but I know that I lost not a few hits that unprejudiced persons thought I was clearly entitled to, and it doesn't take the loss of many hits to make a serious difference in a man's batting average." With official scorers not responsible to anybody and influenced by a good deal of prejudice, it is often impossible for the average player to get exactly what is due him. In fact, in a large number of talks with leading players I have never yet heard a single opinion expressed in favor of the present system, while opposition varied all the way from mild criticism to a wholesale denunciation of the entire scheme.

John Evers, who is certainly not ultra-

radical along this line and who is uniformly friendly toward the official scorers of his home city did not scruple to say: "It is perfectly true that the present scheme of official scoring is hardly logical. The records are left entirely to a set of newspaper men, many of whom do not continue in office long enough to grow accustomed to their work and none of whom are responsible to anyone. I won't say that my records have suffered any by what I consider the errors of the scorers, though I can't say I always agreed with those gentlemen. But there are a good many players who have had trouble, and whether or not their trouble was genuine or imaginary, the scheme certainly isn't business like."

Ty Cobb also criticised the system with the remark that "There is always a good deal of trouble over the official records. I don't suppose any player ever fully agreed with the number of hits and errors chalked up to his account. But allowing that this trouble is largely exaggerated, it does seem that a better scheme than the present might be put into operation for keeping the records."

These are merely a handful taken at random from the expressed opinions of many big league stars, all of whom united in criticizing the present scheme.

There is more than the passing whim of a player or his dissatisfaction with a fancied grievance behind this agitation. The system is wrong, radically wrong, and while wondering that it has so long continued, we cannot but heartily urge its revision. The main difficulty in the present system is that the official scorer is a club official and not a league official. He is a club official in every sense of the word. He is a resident of the town where the club is situated, is a newspaper man who by preference is inclined to favor the home player. He is, furthermore, a paid official of the club. The club hires him, fires him, and controls his labor.

As a matter of fact, although he is in fact a club official and that wholly, he is by right or ought to be a league official. He should be no more concerned in the record of any individual player than is the umpire in the record of an individual club. In fact, it would be just as logical to leave the appointment of both umpires to the club where they officiate.

There is nothing local in keeping batting and fielding records. There is nothing unimportant about such records. The reputation of every big league player and his acknowledged ability is gauged by his official averages. Such averages are league property not single club property and such decisions should be made by league officials.

The official scorer should be as independent of the influence of any club as are the umpires. The official scorer should be solely dependent upon the central office. He should be hired and supervised by the president or the secretary of the league.

Furthermore, a corps of official scorers should be chosen on their ability not in the present helter skelter way, and once chosen and proved efficient, they should at least be as permanent as the umpire staff. One rather poor official scorer is better than three or four good ones who serve too short a term to become familiar with their duties. There is no possible way of getting uniform results from such shiftless methods. Furthermore, the official scorer thus appointed would gain much by an honest desire to get at the bottom of a close play and could learn much by conferring with the other newspaper men in the press box where he was stationed, and, if necessary, by consulting some of the players.

At present there is no such effort made, and in fact one of the official scorers with a national reputation told me personally that he took no more pains in scoring officially than he would ordinarily, and that if he was wrong on a decision once in a while that was no more than what could be expected.

An added evil of the present course is the fact that there is no uniform system in the methods of official scoring. On some diamonds where a player reaches first base under certain circumstances, it is called a fielder's choice. On other diamonds it goes for a safe hit. Where the records are in the hands of a body of men who are answerable to none save the club for whom they work and are changed constantly, it is not reasonable to suppose that there will be any uniform system.

The only reason why the present system continues to exist is the fact that it is already established, has long been in use.

and the inertia of the league officials prevents the installation of a better system although the defects of the present scheme are well understood. The only difference between having a corps of official scorers appointed by the league and under the league authority would be that such scorers would be paid by the league instead of, as at present, by the individual club. Why that should work a hardship upon anyone does not appear. The money in each case would be derived from the profits of organized baseball, and whether the sum expended should be from the earnings of the various clubs and paid by the league, or whether it should be handled wholly by the clubs themselves need make no difference in the actual expenditure. It would not be necessary to have the official scorers travel with the clubs as do the umpires, although that would be the ideal condition. It would be sufficient to have the scorer appointed by the president of the league and under his direct supervision.

The umpire once he has made his decision usually stands by it, though he knows he is wrong. This he usually considers necessary in order to uphold the dignity of his official position. The umpire is obliged to give snap judgment before his mind can be swayed at all by the conflicting opinions of those about him. This is all a recognized part of his difficult duties, but the official scorer does not have to give such snap judgment. In a really important play where he is in doubt and almost any observer is frequently in doubt on some plays he might, without any damage to his authority, at least consult the opinions of those about him or perhaps of the players involved. In other words, it should be his duty to make the necessary effort to get at the facts in the case without merely chalking down his own impressions at the time any given event transpired. It should be the aim of the official scorer, in other words, to give a just, unbiased and consequently accurate opinion on every detail which comes up for his decision. This at present is only approximated and can never be more than approximated under existing conditions.

The aim of this article is not to criticize the existing staff of official scorers, who so far as the facts appear are doing

at least reasonably good work. It might be found perfectly prudent to keep the entire present staff, and at least most of the official scorers now in office are in every way competent to fill their positions. But although every official scorer at present employed might consistently be retained on the best all around staff which could be selected, there should be a radical revolution in the system by which he is appointed and supervised. It should be plainly understood that such officials work for the league and not for the club. There should be a strengthening of central authority vested in the hands of the chief executives of the league and a uniform business-like method of taking and preserving records.

As it is not generally known how official records are kept, the following remarks by Mr. John Heydler, Secretary of the National League, will prove of interest. Mr. Heydler says: "According to the baseball rules every official scorer forwards his report of the game to the secretary of the league generally immediately after the contest. The records must reach the office not later than five days after a game, otherwise there is a penalty of \$2 for such an offence. The records are all sent in on printed sheets prescribed by the rules.

"The Secretary has no right to alter the report in any way so far as base hits or errors are concerned. The only instance where anything is left to his judgment is the decision in certain cases of crediting a pitcher with a win or loss of a game. A pitcher who goes into a contest near the close of the game with the score a tie and wins is given credit for the victory; if he loses, he is given credit for the loss. But there are certain exceptions to this rule which are not commonly understood. Any pitcher who goes into a game is assumed to go in there with an even chance to win, if the score is a tie. Consequently, the bases are assumed to be vacant. If there are men on bases when he enters the box and some of these men score through hits which are made off his delivery or through errors, such loss is not counted against him. It is counted against the previous pitcher who allowed the men to get on base. This is only fair, for it is unjust to suppose that a pitcher can enter

a contest cold with men on bases who are not there through any fault of his own and prevent them from scoring. He is accountable only for those men who reach the bases while he is pitching. This is the invariable rule. The official scorer practically always states in the record of the game which he forwards to the secretary what pitcher in his opinion should be given credit for the victory. He also ordinarily states his reasons. The Secretary invariably gives due weight to his reasons, but he is not bound by them. It rests upon his own judgment how pitchers shall be credited for victories or

losses. But the secretary has no authority to further alter the reports submitted to him in any other way. He merely compiles the records which are sent him and in the fall sends out the final averages."

Such is the present status of official scoring. The faults in the system which are so obvious have not prevented the system from being a fairly efficient one to date. But baseball is a game where constant progress is demanded in every department and the day for a thorough reorganization of the outgrown methods of official scoring is at hand.

