

Skits

Baseball Reminiscences

By Tim Hurst

IT is remarkable how many people in the grand stand can see plays better than the umpire. Once while umpiring a game in a certain American League city, I called a ball foul. The players did not even register a kick, but the bleachers raised a roar, and from the bleachers one of the reporters took his cue and the next morning the paper pointed out what a difference it would have made had I seen the play the way many of the spectators saw it. Wouldn't it be lovely if the umpire always saw it with the vision of the prejudiced partisan spectator? Then it would be tough luck indeed if the home club ever was beaten.

Now doesn't it stand to reason that the umpire standing directly on the home-plate can see whether a ball is fair or foul better than people many feet farther away? Many imagine that the frantic howlings behind an umpire have an effect upon him, but they do not budge him in the least; he continues to give the decisions just as he sees them. If some of the people who constantly criticize the umpire had their own way the term of office would be exceedingly short. Happily the umpires have in President Johnson a man who backs them to the letter and turns a deaf ear to the mouthings of people incompetent to judge the work of his officials.

Then the players. You would think they would have sense enough to appreciate that the umpire is their friend, that he is in the game to give them a square deal. While some recognize this, others are antagonistic at the least pretext. There is but one thing to do with them—fight them on their own ground. The umpire must show that he is the boss in all things. I realize that um-

pires will make mistakes just the same as other people, but that gives the players no right, however, to get nasty. I am always open to reason and will listen to a protest properly couched, but when it comes to abuse that is another question.

Some odd incidents happen in the career of an umpire. Often strange people get in the game and act in a strange way. For instance, the never-to-be-forgotten "Andy" Freedman lorded the whole thing when he reigned on the Polo grounds, being so autocratic that he barred reporters and umpires from the ground. He had a fist-fight with one reporter who did not report the game to his satisfaction, and was in a constant turmoil with representatives of the press. Well, he had Tom Lynch on the prescribed list—one of the best umpires who ever lived—Emslie incurred his displeasure, and I also was a marked man. It so happened that I was assigned to umpire a game on the Polo grounds. "Andy" was always at hand near the grand stand entrance to see that none but those agreeable to him entered the portals. Of course he spied me, but he had no idea that I was to umpire, thinking that I had a day off. "Now Mr. Hurst," said he, "we have had some trouble with you on these grounds. Friends of yours are enemies of mine."

"Is that your reason for objecting to me?"

"Yes."

"Too" bad," said I. "If you'll tell me one friend you have in New York, I'll cultivate him. I think you are the best-hated man in New York."

The Baltimores were to play that day and it was about time to get ready to

umpire, so I said, "I guess I'll quit you."

"What," said he, "are you going to umpire today?"

"Sure thing."

"If there is anything that is coming our way I want it," said he.

"Well," I answered, "if I see anything coming your way I think I'll side-track it."

"Pat" Tebeau, celebrated manager of the Clevelands, was a hard man on umpires. He was a strenuous worker, and fought to the point of obstreperousness. Charley Zimmer was his catcher, and there wasn't an easier man in the business to umpire for than "Count" Zimmer. An umpire never had the least trouble with him; it was always smooth sailing. You can imagine my astonishment when, one day, he started up a harangue at some decision and became very aggressive. I supposed he would come to a stop, but instead he kept on and on. Then I had my inning, going back at him for all that I was worth and told him a few things, concluding by threatening to put him out of the game if he did not cut it out. Well, he weakened and let up. I never tumbled for a moment that Zimmer had been put by Tebeau and the bunch to go at me. It was all a joke. You can imagine what a time the players had while the altercation lasted.

Tom McCarthy, of the famous St. Louis Browns, and afterwards with the Bostons, is one of the players that one could never forget. He was full of tricks, and the most resourceful outfielder that ever played the game. He had no end of nerve, and was never afraid to take a chance. He could make some of the alleged players of today open their eyes in wonder if they saw such a fielder who backed up every base, and it was nothing unusual for him to go behind the catcher when there was need. Throw? Well, I guess yes. He was very strong, quick and accurate and always had the situation gauged to a nicety. Think of an outfielder making two double plays in one game—off the same runner. I can testify to that, for I umpired the game in which it was

done. Those who were so partisan that they could not appreciate that kind of a play, yelled, "Dirty ball," and this in Baltimore!

The first time I met "Mike" Kelly was in Cleveland during my first year out. We were staying at the same hotel, although I did not introduce myself to him; our first words to each other were on the ball field. Clarkson was pitching and it came down to a very critical situation in a very close game. It was three balls and one strike, with a good batsman up. The catcher did not come behind the bat until the second strike in those days. "Kel" started to step behind the bat and, giving the tip to Clarkson, said to me, "Watch yourself, young fellow." I wondered what in the world was going to happen. His point was gained, for the attention of the batsman was distracted, and Clarkson sneaked a good one over that made it three balls and two strikes and completely changing the situation, so that the batsman was in the hole. It was a bit of brain work pure and simple, and was in keeping with the man. He was always looking out for openings and not only knew how to take advantage of them but how to create them.

Kelly was a great man in every sense of the word. He was not a bit of trouble to an umpire.

I think Kelly was the best baserunner that ever lived, taking into consideration the handicaps under which he labored. He was a big man and had bad legs. He was not a fast runner but no one had the knack of getting away quickly better than he, and no one ever took more ground on the pitcher. His marvelous ability in sliding enabled him to get back to his base safely every time. Then in sliding to a base he always made the fielder go the bad way to touch him and the result was that many a time Kelley would make his base when the shortstop or second baseman, as the case was, had the ball in waiting for him, yet failed to touch him. It was a treat to be in a game in which Kelly played, for it was sure to be full of life. He was very magnetic and infused enthus-

iasm and dash into his team. Nothing disgusted him more than a senseless, foolish play. Where shall we see his like again?

If I ever felt badly in making a decision it was one day on Cleveland while "Pat" Tebeau was managing the club. Baltimore was playing there and "Pat" was being badly fooled on that slow curve of "Bill" Hofler. "Fatty" Childs was on second. "Pat" conceived a bright idea. He took a run out of the batting box before the ball broke and met it squarely and fairly and sent it up against the fence for two bases, sending Childs in with what appeared to be the winning run. There was but one out at the time and with Tebeau on second

things looked good for more scoring. Catcher Wilbert Robison of the Baltimores, "Robbie" as he was generally known, immediately called my attention to the fact that Tebeau had batted out of the batsman's box position contrary to the rules. I had no other option than to declare Tebeau out for stepping out of the box, and to put Childs back to second. That made two out and the next man popped a little fly. The game went on for eleven or twelve innings, I forget which, until Baltimore won. "Pat" admitted that he was out of the box when he hit the ball, but said that he could not understand why it was that an umpire should call him out for a thing like that.



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