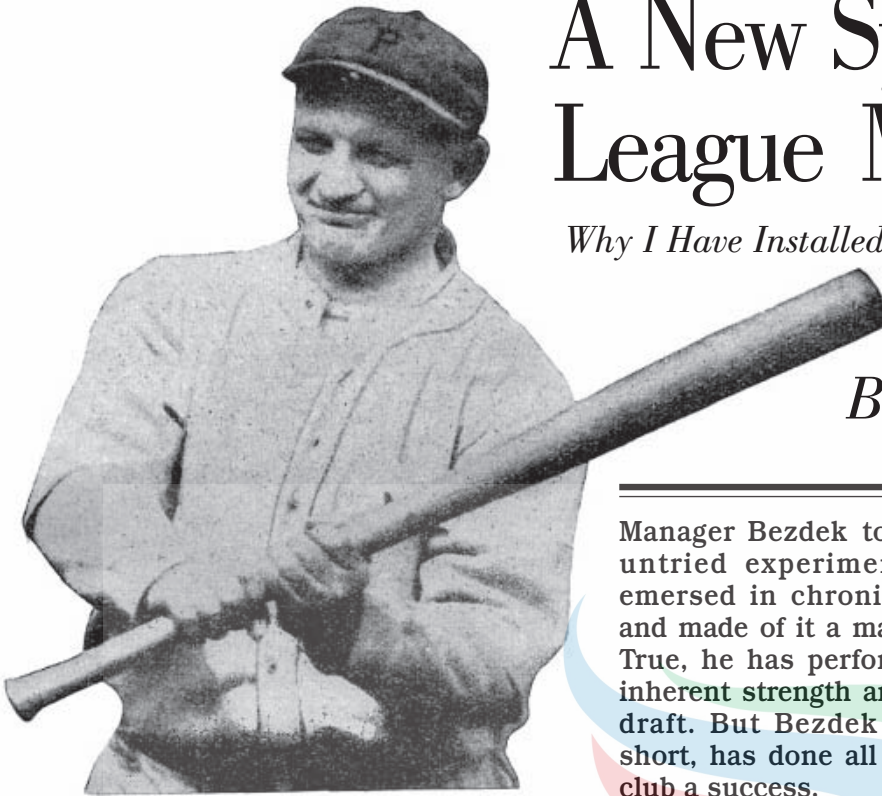


A New System of Big League Management

Why I Have Installed What I Believe to Be Common Sense Methods in Directing the Pirate Club

By HUGO BEZDEK



Hugo Bezdek taking a little batting practice

Manager Bezdek took the helm at Pittsburgh as an untried experiment. He found a dispirited club emersed in chronic defeat. He has taken that club and made of it a machine of hustling, efficient energy. True, he has performed no miracles. The club lacks inherent strength and has been sadly shattered by the draft. But Bezdek has made it a fighting club, in short, has done all that one man can do to make the club a success.

LAST fall Barney Dreyfus approached me with a direct question which I couldn't answer. The question was not more than ten words long—a typical telegram length, but I found it a poser. He merely said to me, in a matter-of-fact way, "Would you like to manage the club in 1918?"

There was a time when I would have jumped at the chance had a major league owner propounded such a query. I would have welcomed it as the realization of a long-standing ambition. But experience comes to us sometimes, in big chunks, and we learn rapidly the things which we supposed it would take years to master. At least that has been my experience in my brief career as a major league manager. And so I hesitated to give a definite acceptance to his pointed query.

Instead of jumping at the chance as I would have done once upon a time, I said to him, "Mr. Dreyfus, I really don't know. Sometimes I think that the game isn't worth the candle. It is a hard row to have to manage a big league ball club, and life is pretty short. I don't shy at obstacles in the path. In fact I rather welcome them. Difficulties are put before us to start our blood to circulating. And the act of overcoming them is what gives the zest to life. But there is such a thing as getting more than your share, and I am beginning to wonder if the manager isn't one of these unfortunate people."

So, instead of an immediate agreement we talked the situation over for I should say about two hours. Then I definitely

bound myself to accept the helm and try the difficult task of piloting the Pirates into smoother seas than they had recently sailed, and even dared to picture to myself on the far-off horizon the trim, snug harbor of Pennantville. Managing a major league club is a pure business transaction—so I have heard. And I proved it, in my own case, by forgetting absolutely all mention of anything remotely suggesting salary. Yes, in all our two hours' talk I covered every angle of the business, except salary, which shows how much of a business transaction it really was. In fact, it wasn't a business transaction at all. It was purely a matter of professional pride with me. And the next day when I journeyed down to the office and ventured the remark that we hadn't mentioned salary we fixed up that little item in a very few minutes.

Why did I accept the job? I suppose a number of reasons entered into the situation. I like baseball, I have grown attached to the life in many respects. I would no doubt find it hard to give it up now. But the main reason, the reason which far outweighed all the rest, was the little matter of professional pride. I had been identified with a number of radically different business enterprises and I had made a success of every one of them. My experience as a major league manager, however, had been too brief and I had been obliged to face too discouraging circumstances to be sure, even in my own mind, that I had made a success. To drop out now seemed to me to be shirking a

task, of quitting a work that had only been begun, an act which would leave a bad taste in my mouth forever after. So I took the job and here I am.

It would be far too early for me to lay claim to any measure of that success which I speak of. And yet I believe those who know will admit that under my leadership the Pirates have developed, from a disorganized, discouraged group of athletes, into a well-knit combination which is willing and able to give a battle to any club in the circuit. We may be defeated, in fact we are defeated altogether too frequently to satisfy me, but there is such a thing as a large measure of success even in defeat. There is a great difference between the defeat which comes from being hopelessly outclassed and thoroughly discouraged, and the defeat which comes from being finally bested by superior forces only after a game and spirited struggle. The Pirates, at least, suffer defeat of that better type, when they are downed on the diamond. And the club that beats them knows that it has been in a battle, and knows that the victory has been fully earned.

A baseball team is a curious thing. In many respects it is a miniature army. And much of its success is due to the same tactics which win out on the field of battle.

Take a company of untrained recruits for example. Every man in that company may be a natural athlete, six feet tall, rugged, physically strong. Take another company composed originally of hollow-chested clerks, but thoroughly trained in a

MANAGERIAL MAXIMS OF HUGO BEZDEK

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Making a well-oiled machine of his club is, to my mind, the supreme task of the manager.

His job, for the most part, consists in trying to match, with 60 per cent. material, what some other manager can do with 70 per cent. material.

Frequently a team is composed of well-known stars but they don't win. The manager hasn't been able to make a machine of them.

A manager will frequently take a team composed of mediocre players and do surprisingly well with them. He has succeeded in making a team of them.

When I first began to handle clubs I followed pretty much the same system which the German army employs. I thought out my campaign and drove my men to follow that campaign regardless.

Later I adopted a system not unlike that which the French army uses with so much success.

My system is merely the common-sense one of treating a player like a human being.

Managing a ball club does not consist in springing unique plays on the opposition.

There are few if any plays which can be tried which haven't been tried before.

The chief task of managing is to get the players imbued with the proper spirit, to see them playing together intelligently and loyally.

In the colleges the public uses a good deal of discretion in its attitude toward the football coach.

But in professional baseball the only thing which seems to count is games won.

When we have lost a tight game I feel so cut up about it that I can't eat for a couple of hours after coming back to the hotel.

military sense, welded together in a unit by the iron discipline of war. Not a man in that company, perhaps, would be a match in a fist fight with the weakest member of the recruit division. And yet the company of trained soldiers would undoubtedly wallop the life out of the company of untrained recruits in an actual conflict on the field. Individually the recruits would be far more than a match for the veterans. Collectively they would be no match at all. They wouldn't have a chance.

Now the system of training and discipline applies nearly as much to baseball as it does to the field of battle. It isn't known by the same name—it is called team-work. But it is the same in actual fact. And because of that system, that discipline, that team work, the task of comparing the relative class of two clubs will always be a difficult one. For the team with scarce a star in the line-up may through its superior team-work defeat a team much stronger in individual merit but lacking in that all-essential quality.

Making a well-oiled machine of his club is, to my mind, the supreme task of the manager. Of course he wants to have his team constructed of naturally strong materials. He wants great pitchers and star catchers and .300 hitters. But it is never easy to get such materials and it is frequently impossible to get them. The manager must take such materials as he has and from these elements construct the finished club.

The success which the manager gains along this line determines his ability as a

manager. Anybody could take a club with Tris Speaker and Ty Cobb and Joe Jackson in the outfield, and Maranville and Jake Daubert, and so on down the line, with Alexander pitching in form, and win a majority of games from any club on earth. There the sheer weight of individual talent would tell, for the players themselves would have sufficient intelligence and mastery of the game to improvise, for themselves, such team-play as they felt necessary, on the spur of the moment.

But the manager has no such easy task. His job for the most part, consists in trying to match with 60 per cent. material what some other manager can do with 70 per cent. material.

You see examples of this in every pennant race. Frequently a team is composed of well-known stars. They are great fielders and .300 hitters. But they don't win. And the public wonders why. The answer is simple enough. The manager hasn't been able to make a machine of them. They are not all pulling together. They are like the company of undisciplined recruits. And as a result they play considerably under their proper class.

On the other hand a manager will frequently take a team composed of rather mediocre players and do surprisingly well with them. He does this because he has got them to working together; in other words has succeeded in making a team of them. In consequence they play away above their normal form, to the confusion of the experts who dope the pennant race. Now, from the moment I took charge of

the Pirate team, it was obvious to me that with the material at hand, my only hope of success lay in moulding a machine which would make up in collective ability what it might lack in individual talent. We had two or three players of unusual ability and a number of hard-working youngsters who were bound to develop. But the team, all will concede, was deficient in a number of important respects. My problem was somewhat like the one which confronted me as coach at Oregon University last autumn. We were obliged to face California University in a most important game, when the latter's football club was confidently claiming the championship of the Pacific coast. California has some eight thousand students; Oregon has one thousand. California inherited several good men from the preceding season. My club was completely disrupted by graduation and from other causes. I had to comb out all possible talent from the juniors and seniors. And the best I could do was to place a makeshift team on the gridiron weighing an average of 159 pounds. Along came California, exultant from an easy victory over Washington, with a powerful team averaging 186 pounds. And what happened?

We met that team and when the smoke had cleared away we had defeated them by the impressive score of 21—0. It was one of the greatest triumphs of my life. And how was it done? From a variety of reasons, but primarily from instilling the proper spirit into the boys and from a rigorous team play, which made the whole club act like one man.

When I took my present job as major league manager I was looked upon as an unknown busher. The fact that I had had considerable experience as a football coach did not seem to cut any ice. But the two jobs are by no means dissimilar. The proper handling of men, which brings results in one case, is pretty certain to do no less in the other.

When I first began to handle clubs I followed pretty much the same system which the German army employs. I thought out my campaign and drove my men to follow that campaign regardless. Later I reconsidered and adopted a system not unlike that which the French army uses with so much success, a system which has made the French army superior to the German. In the French army the humble sergeant knows as well as the general the importance of capturing a certain hill or retaining a certain trench. He acts not altogether on blind obedience but with the added stimulus of knowing the importance of the task which confronts him. And for that reason he fights all the more tenaciously when the time comes.

No doubt I have sometimes seemed like a dub to my men through employing this system. I have said to them, "Now what would you do in such and such a case." Occasionally a player has looked at me with an odd light in his eye, as much as to say, "Well, you must be dumb if you don't know that." But he answered me, and the process has set him to thinking. The result of this system has led my men to think for themselves, to see just how important they are in the machine which we hope will score a big success for Pittsburgh, and to work more intelligently to that end. After all, my system is merely the common sense one of treating a player like a human being. A horse will draw a heavy load because he is compelled to do so, but if he had human intelligence to see the importance of his work he would go about it with far more spirit and enthusiasm.

Managing a ball club does not consist in springing unique plays on the opposition. There are few if any plays which can be tried that haven't been tried before. Almost every nook and cranny of baseball has been thoroughly explored and explored repeatedly. Perhaps one manager understands inside baseball, so-called, better than another. But I believe there isn't anywhere near as much difference between them as would commonly be supposed.

But the chief task of managing, to my mind, is to get the players imbued with the proper spirit, to see them playing together intelligently and loyally. The manager who has succeeded to this extent has won half the battle.

And it's a hard job at best. In the colleges the public uses a good deal of discretion in its attitude toward the football coach. If he has lost a valuable man through injury or other cause, that fact is remembered and taken into consideration in the big game of the season. But in professional baseball the only thing which seems to count is games won. The results, however they are obtained, are the only things to be considered. My plans have been broken into considerably already. Hamilton, a smart pitcher who was beginning a great year for us, left for military service after winning six straight games. Of course we are all glad to see him do his bit, but the fact remains that the manager can't win games with the pitcher who is wearing khaki. I cannot replace Hamilton. No doubt I will experience other setbacks before the season closes. It seems to be part of the game.

When we have lost a tight game I feel so cut up about it that I can't eat for a couple of hours after coming back to the hotel. You would think that grown men would be able to avoid that kind of attitude. As for superstition, I have nothing to say, but to laugh when I admit that if I go to the park a certain route one day and we win, I continue that route until we lose. Indefensible, idiotic, all that and



Hugo Bezdek in action

more. But we all do it, and I am no exception. For my professional reputation is at stake. I want to make good in this job beyond any shadow of a doubt.