

David Vincent, Scorekeeper for the Washington Nationals

Interviewer: John McMurray

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Centerville, Virginia

John McMurray (JM): This is John McMurray sitting with David Vincent, the official scorer for the Washington Nationals on May 2, 2016 at his home in Centerville, Virginia and David has been involved with scoring professional baseball for twenty-nine years and twelve years with the Nationals. I wondered David, if you could explain how you got from there to here, so to speak.

David Vincent (DV): When I was growing up, I played little league like all my friends and I wasn't very good but the best thing that came out of little league for me was I learned, for the first time I learned, how to keep score on a piece of paper. A woman who was the wife of the guy who was in charge of the little league, I sat with her a couple of days and she was keeping score for games. I started watching and she was telling me what she was doing so I was 8-9 years old and I learned my first system of scoring. Of course, my system has probably changed forty-five times since then but you know, that's where it started.

When I was in high school, I didn't play but I was a stringer for the local newspaper and then after, both basketball and baseball, and after games I would go from dinnertime or right after dinnertime, I would go to the newspaper office, and I would talk to one of the sports writers and report facts of the game. They write the story but I'd give them something so they could put a box score together in the story. And I used to get paid, this was the mid to late 60s, and I was being paid two dollars a game as a stringer for this local town newspaper which was my first money in baseball. Two dollars a game. I make a couple of dollars more than that now.

When I got to grad school and I moved to Johnson City, Tennessee there was a local team there in the Appalachian League named the Johnson City Cardinals and we used to go to games. I got to know a couple of the staff people. And at that time in 1980, in the early 1980s (80 or 81), there was one guy in the press box, the local sportswriter who was the official scorer and he also did public address and he flipped switches throughout the scoreboard, and one night I was asked by somebody because at the time I was a college band director. Part of my duties during football season, especially, was doing a lot of public address stuff for the band. They asked me if I would be the PA guy for them at the ballpark and I said, "Sure." I started working upstairs with this guy named Jimmy Smith and I started talking to him about plays. He'd make a call and I'd ask him about it because I was interested. I went and got a rule book and I started reading the rulebook and we would talk and I could have more intelligent conversations with this guy because I actually had a rulebook so I knew what was going on a little bit more. Before I left Johnson City, I worked there as an official scorer.

I moved out of there and I lived in a couple other places for a while. There was no baseball anywhere close to where I was. We came to this area in 1988 and I lived in Woodbridge, two miles from the ballpark where the minor league team that's now known as the Potomac Nationals play. They've gone through a few names in the time I've been here. After I was there a couple of years of going to games, I

met Jerry Gregory, a grand old SABR guy, who introduced me to the official scorer one night before a game and told Jerry that I had worked as an official scorer in the past. So he and I talked scoring and the scorer and I talked, and I filled in for him at a few games that summer of 1992, the first summer I worked over there. And then every year got to be more and more and more games I was working.

I've passed a thousand games in that ballpark now which is, I would bet if I could figure out anybody in any capacity working over there in Woodbridge, and I would bet no one has come close to that. About 800 would be the closest to that someone would have worked in the press box or even anything else in that ballpark. So I've been working over there a long time. I've been through a lot of parent clubs, like the Yankees and White Sox, Cardinals, Reds, and the Nationals and since 05 have been over, which is a good situation for them. I've been through a lot of managers, and I've met a lot of people over there. Scouts and managers and whatever. You find some managers are better to work with than others. Some coaches I don't want to talk to. It depends on their attitudes. Over there, as long as a manager is an adult about the conversation and is intelligent and not just wanting to be upset with me, I'll talk to them. We'll talk about a play and I'll consider his request. I kind of just fell into that job. Eventually after I was there a few years the guy retired and I took over full time. A lot of it is being in the right place at the right time but you have to have the knowledge too.

Then in the Winter of 04/05, one of those, it was announced the Expos were moving to Washington, the announcement was finally made and then rumors for a while. I wrote to the PR guy for the Expos, who I knew, and expressed a desire to be a scorer in DC and he asked me for a resume, a scorer's resume. I sent him a one-page resume and I was hired by... it's kind of tricky. In the big leagues, and actually in any level, the league hires the scorers, and the scorers work for the league, whether it be the Carolina League over in the Woodbridge or Major League Baseball in DC, but they want local people to try to find candidates and the final decision is made in the league office. I got a call from the Commissioner's Office from one of the vice presidents for Major League Baseball saying that I was going to be hired and that I was going to be the primary guy and I was supposed to work opening day and any of the other sorta big nights. And so Opening Night 2005, the home opener at RFK, Liván Hernández threw the first pitch against the Diamondbacks. The first announcement I'm supposed to make is the time of the first pitch and so I made some announcement at the point of the first pitch in Washington DC in however many years it'd been at that point it'd been, 32 years or whatever it was, came at 7:07 or whatever the time was. That was pretty cool to be there for that and be the scorer for that first game at RFK and I worked the last game at RFK. I worked the first game at Nats Park which is another pretty exciting with the Ryan Zimmerman walk off homer. I got to work as the official scorer for both of Steven Strasburg's debut for his first and his second arm. A lot of other interesting nights. Jordan Zimmerman's no hitter was mine, so first no hitter with the Nationals. Starting as an eight-year old learning how to keep score and working in high school and I got away from it in college and got away from it for a while because after we left Johnson City cause I wasn't in a place where there was anything. I got here and I got lucky enough to have a minor league time and to work for them for a long while. I had a big league team dropped in my lap in 2005 so that's how I got that job.

JM: To be clear, you did not do every Nationals game?

DV: Correct

JM: There are multiple scorers...

DV: Correct

JM: ...three of them who handle each actual season and there are some benefit to having multiple people doing it, isn't it?

DV: Right. Major League Baseball does not want the same person working every night. Bad feelings can arise if there's a call a team doesn't agree with and that can fester and grow. I like the idea. For this summer, in 2016, I'll be working about thirty games in Washington, split with the other two guys. It's an interesting job but I like to have a life too some days and it's funny too because when I'm not at the ballpark, I don't watch the games because I see enough baseball during the summer that I'm not going to sit in front of the TV and watch the game. I might see parts of games on the tv, especially if my wife has the game on. It's kind of funny for her because she doesn't go to the park very often but she'll have the game on here, if I'm working, and she'll know what's going on. If I'm working the minor league stadium where there's no TV, she'll go monitor it every once and a while on the website to see what's going on. The other night, I was working, we got well into the game before anyone scored a run and she sent me a text in the middle of the game and said "Somebody needs to score a run for you." I'm out there half the night with an extra inning ball game or something. I have fun and I enjoy the job. I'm pretty good at the job but I also want to get away every once and awhile.

JM: You mention separating yourself from the game when you're away from the stadium. Is that because it's intellectually exhausting in some way because you got to be concentrating so hard when you're doing the game or is it in some cases interpreting very difficult situations on the spot?

DV: I think some nights it's both. Some nights are easy but I have to watch every pitch and I can't be distracted. I can't be watching other things going on. When the pitcher starts his motion, I have to be aware of what's going because you never know what's going to happen. Especially if there's runners on base. If you have a runner on first and I have to keep track of that runner when the pitcher starts his motion towards the plate. I need to know did he start running or is he still standing there, just taking a bit of an extra leap, to say if the ball gets away from the catcher and if he advances is it a stolen base or a wild pitch or something. I have to know that by did he start with the pitch. So, yes. There's lots of situations like that. A ball hit into right field corner, there's a runner rounding third I need to be able to see if he kept running or stopped and started up again and watch the play in right field at the same time. I have one eyeball going one way another eyeball going the other way.

JM: Is that too much for one person? Should there be two people?

DV: No there's not. I've developed habits that I know things that I need to do at particular times and I don't have to watch the ball the whole time down the right field line. I only have to watch it when the fielders about to play it so I can peek at the runner and I can peek at the right field and I can peek back at the runner and I can see what's going on and watching both plays. The problems come in where, at Nats Park, I can't see the right field corner, there's a piece of it I can't see. If I think it might have been a miss play I have to wait and see if I happen to get a replay on television.

JM: What happens if you legitimately do miss something? Can you go to video tape? Do you go to the video tape?

DV: In Washington, we have a big flat screen monitor next to us with a TiVo machine and I have run it back and I can see the play. We get the feed straight from the truck and even coming straight from the

truck, there's about a four second delay from when the play starts to when something is on my screen for the first time. I can see a pitch and then I can turn left and look at the screen and see the pitch again, the first time it's on the TV. Then they might show the replay so I can see it three times without any effort at all, usually. And I do look. Pitches in the dirt with base runners is a problem. I need to be sure that it actually hit the ground or didn't hit the ground or where was it when the catcher was trying to catch it to determine a wild pitch or passed ball. In the minor leagues that's probably the hardest call because I don't have tv. I'm blocked by the umpire and catcher. I have to go strictly on what I hear. Every once and awhile a coach may want to talk about that and say we'll talk about what they saw from the side which they have a better view of that than I do and I'll go with them most of the time if they say "No that didn't hit the dirt." I'm kind of stuck there without any tv.

JM: 90% percent of calls, it has been written, most people can interpret...

DV: ....Yeah

JM: ...It's that hard 10% that you are really responsible for. With the help of replay are you pretty confident after the fact that you've gotten most of that difficult 10% correct?

DV: Most of the time. Every once awhile there is a play that I can be talked out of, especially in the minor leagues where I don't have the replay but it's not that often. Like I said if a coach wants to talk to me and if he's going to be an adult about it and he's going to have an intelligent conversation, I'll talk to him. If he's going to act like a big baby, we're done. I don't even listen to him. And I don't go by myself. I will not talk to a manager in the minor leagues without a team representative or the PR guy there with me to have the conversation. It's coverage for me. There's been some bad situations in the past and I'm just not going to get myself into that again.

JM: It takes years of experience to get where you are...

DV: Yes

JM: ...You were saying how you have able to let a ball down the line go for a little bit while you watch other part of the field but a younger scorer might not be able to do it. It takes time...

DV: Yes, it does.

JM: ...How long do you reasonably have to do this before you are ready to be a Major League official scorer

DV: That's tough to say. Everybody grows at a different rate. It doesn't matter if it's algebra or intellectually grows. If it's whatever the topic is, and some people will never get there. Some people could work for fifteen years in the minors and still be bad and not really should not work in the big leagues. Not to say that they shouldn't be working in the minor leagues. I've seen some scoring in the minor leagues that I thought was horrendous too but that's beside the point. You have to know the rulebook, the whole section on scoring and a lot of other sections that are referred to in the scoring section, you have to know how to interpret all that and you have to have a certain amount of experience to have seen some unusual stuff and know how to handle things and know how to handle yourself with people who are gonna come and question you. It's funny now in the minors, I don't really get any grief from anybody anymore. I think it's to a certain extent it's because these coaches find out before they ever talk to me that I'm a big-league scorer. There's a whole different mindset on their side, I think, and I

like it. I don't want to get into any of these issues or arguments and people yelling and screaming or coming after me physically as one manager did one time which we can get into later. At this point in the 12<sup>th</sup> year in with the Nationals, someone told me last summer in passing "You've probably worked more Nationals games than any other scorer." And I thought at the time "I haven't thought about that but you're probably right probably." Now I have factual information to prove that that I'm way ahead of who's in second place. That's kind of an interesting thing too that I've been around enough and I've seen enough that most nights that I have seen everything that happens on the field in the past. Every once and awhile I see something that I think "Whoa I haven't seen that before."

JM: What is it then about it that keeps you attracted to being an official scorer after all this time?

DV: I get to sit in one of the best seats in the ballpark. I get paid to sit in that chair and to earn my money I get to told to watch the ball game. While I watch the ballgame I make decisions that affect history because if something's a hit or an error that affects two players' stats, probably more than that. Statistics are more and more driving the sport for contracts and for post season awards and hall of fame voting and all kinds of other things and all these fantasy players that are out there doing things. It matters. As much as I like to say one call is not going to change your season that's not the way the players look at it. One call can make a big difference in their head. And that's unfortunate because I think it's gone a little bit too far in that direction. Luckily they can't talk to me. They can't call upstairs. They can't have me come downstairs. They can't do any of that anymore because there's other procedures in place now. I kind of like the idea that some of the things I do have an effect on what's going on.

JM: In terms of the qualities necessary to be an effective official scorer, it isn't something where a fan of the team needs to do it, you need someone unbiased...

DV: Right. Right.

JM: ...As someone who has followed baseball for a long time, how can you maintain a certain unbiased approach in your scoring?

DV: This may sound like I'm lying but I'm not. I don't pay attention to who is at plate or who is in the field. I don't watch uniforms. I don't read game notes. So I don't know that player x has a fifteen-game hitting streak going on because that could influence me. I don't want to know that stuff. The tv screen I have next to me is muted. Every screen in the press box is muted by rule. I'm not allowed to listen to audio. In my letter of appointment every year it's written where we can't listen to the broadcast. I don't want to listen to it anyway. I don't need them telling me anything. If it's a Bryce Harper or Albert Pujol as a visiting player or whoever okay fine or somebody I might not even know his name when he comes to the plate or my scoresheet. It's not supposed to matter. It doesn't matter to me. I didn't grow up in this area. I grew up in a different area. I root for a different team in the big leagues and I've worked games with that team as a visitor and it didn't matter. Just make the call. Afterwards, I may think about it later, but I don't think about it at the time.

JM: You had written an article in 2005 where you listed out the qualities that were essential for any official scorer. It's safe to say the first quality is comprehensive knowledge of the rulebook. You can't go looking everything up anytime something happens. Can you talk a little about your own knowledge of rulebook and how you developed it?

DV: I bought a rulebook way back because I was kind of interested in it. I'm geeky enough that I found that fascinating. As I was reading it and I was trying to work back and forth how one rules refers to another rule and trying to find all the ins and outs of it. At this point, after all these years, every spring I still read the rulebook before every year before I start my season because it's a refresher and every year there's a rule I look at and I'm like I would have forgotten about that. You do need to know the rules and in the minor leagues especially I find a lot of opportunity, educational opportunities, where I can talk to the PR people or sometimes even a manager and explain a rule to them. The home manager I got this year and he's been there a couple years now and last summer he asked if he could talk to me the next afternoon and he said "bring your rulebook and I want to talk to you about a rule." He didn't want to talk about one of my calls, but he wanted to talk about the scoring rules I used to make a call that night. He wanted to go through the whole thing and it was an educational situation for him. And I love that stuff. To help him understand better so he becomes a better manager and he can approach a scorer in a better way. That's really good. It's knowing the rules but knowing how to interpret the rules as well.

JM: You have five rules you listed which the first is knowing the rules and then applying the rules. Then having the integrity to make the calls regardless of consequence and if someone is upset to know they are upset at the call and not at you personally...

DV: Right, it's the uniform, not me

JM: ... And then to the fifth rule was to be aware of the entire field during the play, which you mentioned before...

DV: That's the hard part sometimes because it's a big field. But you develop habits where you know and the guy, in Nationals Park, the guy who runs the balls and strikes on the scoreboard. He's been there since the very beginning in 05 at RFK. We've become friendly over the years and lots of nights before games we'll sit together and talk while we eat. Everytime he'll introduce me to somebody new working in that area. Nationals have a lot of people who run the audio and video and all the stuff on the scoreboards and all this. We'll be sitting at a table and there will be six of us and he'll introduce me to somebody that is new or I'm new, and each time he introduces me he says "He told me something the very first week the very first year I've carried with me ever since" and it's the fact that I told him that I noticed there was a stolen base and the pitch didn't go the scoreboard right, the ball or strike, because everyone's reaction is to watch the play on the second base and he completely missed the results of the pitch. You watch until the umpire gives you some indication of whether it's a ball or strike then you can look at second base. You still have plenty of time to get your eyes there before the play is over. He uses that and he tells everybody that. And I love it. There's a second-generation instruction going on with that one thing at least. If you learn how to do it, you learn where you have to concentrate and when you can go look at other things. That's not as hard as it seems.

JM: When you are up in the booth you have a rule book with you...

DV: Yeah

JM: ...Is there anything else you bring along that is helpful as an accessory?

DV: I have my own scoresheet that I put together for myself that has just what I want on it and nothing extra. Multiple pens and whatever. But that's really all I need. In the big leagues, I bring my computer with me. I have a scoring program that I use. A lot of the big-league scorers don't use a computer. I like

it because I track plays and put plays in as they happen. I'm supposed to announce pitching lines. When a pitcher comes out of a game, I'm supposed to announce the innings pitch and hits and runs allowed and walks and strikeouts and anything else beyond that. By putting the plays in the computer, every play in the computer as it happens, the program on the screen shows me the pitching line as it runs so I can just look at the computer and I can announce the pitching line. I don't have to look at my scoresheet and count five walks. I can just look because the computer does the counting for me. It's the 21<sup>st</sup> century, why should I do it myself?

JM: Give me a couple of misconceptions people might have about the role of the official scorer?

DV: The first one, the biggest one, is that I work for the team. And I don't. I work for the league.

JM: ...Partially that's because you are referred to as the Washington Nationals official scorer or something like that.

DV: Which is not really correct. I'm the official scorer assigned to Nationals Park. Which is subtle but it's different. We are assigned to a ballpark or ballparks. In Chicago most of those guys work both parks occasionally. That's the biggest misconception.

The second is that I'm talking to players or players might be talking to me. I've never met most of the Nationals. A couple of those players I've met just by chance somewhere but

JM: You are down on the field occasionally

DV: Not very often. Without a uni number on I wouldn't know some of those faces. Obviously, I would know Ryan Zimmerman if he walked to me. I would know Harper if he walked up to me. I would know some of the pitchers if they walked up to me. But some of them, Jeyson Werth just from the hair, but if some of them walked up to me and there brother could walk up and I wouldn't know the difference. It's much more that case in the Minor Leagues. Because those guys come through and they might be there one year or one year and a half and they're gone. It's not like the big leagues where Ryan Zimmerman made his debut in September 05 and is still there. He's been there almost as long as I have. The biggest misconception really is that I work for the team and I don't.

JM: You mentioned before how people can develop an intuition perhaps for how to become a good official scorer. What qualities does someone need if they want to get into being an official scorer presumably at the minor league level?

DV: Beyond the rulebook and that sort of thing, attention to detail, the ability to concentrate and not be distracted because if you go to a ballpark and you sit in the stands and you see all these people most of them aren't paying attention to the game. They are out there to party and have a good time and the ballgame is in some cases secondary. That's not the case here. The ballgame is it. All the distractions that go on you have to put out of your mind. I like to joke about the Peanuts cartoons were the adults are all sounds like that Wawawaw stuff everything else except the game that's all that is to me. It's just that. The trombone that's the adults in the Peanuts.

JM: It's like you are alone in some strange way.

DV: Yes. I need a cone of silence. I'm in the main press box with the writers in both ballparks. There are some ballparks where the scorers are in a separate room with perhaps the PA guy or perhaps nobody...

JM: That seems in some ways that would be better

DV: In some ways it's better. In some ways it's not. Between innings is my break time. I get up a lot of innings and I can move around a little bit and I have some space to move. I know most, especially the guys who sit down near where I am, I know them enough that we can talk about stuff and they ask questions and I'll bring something up I see going on and sometimes I see them scribbling notes to themselves to put it in their story. I wouldn't want to be in a room by myself because it's too stifling.

JM: You are well known for your home run work. Cataloging basically every homerun that's ever been hit...

DV: Right

JM: ...What's the overlap between your work in cataloging homeruns and your work as an official scorer? What connects them besides just baseball?

DV: The homerun research is almost kinda secondary now because I've been spending much more time on umpire research and stuff related to that, ejections, replays and some other stuff like that. The four umpires on the field and the official scorer are the five representatives from Major League Baseball who are there to officiate the game and as such I like to joke with the Minor League guys and say that it's us against the rest of the world out there and they laugh about that but it's true. I'm spending more time on this other research and I'm still keeping up with homerun stuff but the connection really is that it's baseball. But for the other stuff it's more that there was no umpire research going on and there was nobody doing any kind of database for the umpires. The stuff I've been able to put together is on the RetroSheet website now and not only do we have players and managers but I've helped put together a big coaches database and now the umpires are out there and the umpires love it. They love that they can go see the numbers related to their career, how many games they've worked in the big leagues, you know and a list of their ejections out on their page. It's fascinating to them that I would take that time but I've developed a lot of friendships with the umpires because of that and some other things and it's fun for me too because I've made some friends there people who hardly anyone knows. Umpires are never more than a black shirt on a field with a hat on. You don't know who it is. Or blue, everyone calls them blue. And it's the same for us. Anonymity is kind of nice.

JM: The job has a certain thanklessness to it...

DV: Yeah. Every night I have the ability to make somebody mad.

JM: But does the grief, when it ever occurs, if someone's particularly mad with a call you make, does that roll off your back?

DV: Moreso than it used to. I think to a certain it's also partly I get less grief now than I used to.

JM: By being more established?

DV: Maybe? I'm better at the job than I was twenty years ago

JM: And you have more safeguards. If you're doing this in '85 you don't have multiple replays.

DV: I'm better at the job so less things might come up that somebody wants to comment on. Especially with the home manager in the minor leagues, in the major leagues I don't talk to them, in the minor

leagues the minor league president, he wants all of us in the Carolina League, if a manager wants to talk to us to listen to them as long as they're adult about it. And I'm fine with that. So I make a point with the home manager every time the manager changes to go down and introduce myself. Just say hello and say if you need to talk, you talk to the PR guy and he has my phone number and we can talk. Whether it be on the phone or in person it doesn't matter. It's a little bit of up front let them see my face doesn't hurt. It's been good the last few years. Next time I'll be down there at the Minor League park, it'll probably all fall apart in the next series. Other than the weather it's been pretty good so far.

JM: Often when there's a controversial play, like a play at second base involving new sliding rules or something like that, ESPN will pull out all sorts of examples of how it's been interpreted in the past. To what degree do you rely on precedent and do you say "I remember this play in this particular game I better go look at that and see if that's the same as if what I just saw?"

DV: No two plays are exactly alike. There are similarities. You can show similarities between plays but there's always something to make a play different. With that said though we are working at the Major League level the scorers are working on consistency. We have meetings every Winter. We have people like Joe Torre and others at the level come talk to us and we are working on a consistency of interpretation of rules to avoid having a scorer in Minneapolis take a play and rule it completely different than a scorer in Washington. We don't want that. We want to be able to have some consistency and we want to be able to say "Well this is what we were instructed to do. This is how this rule gets interpreted." I had a play ten days ago in the Minor Leagues, a pop up, there was nobody on base, a pop up ended up in front of the plate and it's not the catcher's ball. In that territory, the first baseman and the third baseman one of them is supposed to catch that ball. The poor catcher is standing behind the plate looking up and he's backing up, backing up, because the ball tends to come towards the field as it comes down and he kept backing up and he didn't get out there far enough and he kinda lunged and the ball fell to the ground untouched about two feet on the grass outside the dirt circle at home plate. So about eighteen feet from home plate. The first baseman is just standing there. It was his ball. It was on that side. He should have called the catcher off but he just stood there and watched. The third baseman didn't do anything either. So that's a mental error. That's not a physical error. The rulebook says mental errors are not to be judged as an error. Thus that ball that landed eighteen feet from home plate, the batter reached second on the play was a double. And everybody looked at me in the press box funny. We can't do anything about it. We were told if you get two or three players there and they all back off, and they're all 'you're taking it', it's a hit. So I had an eighteen-foot double that night in the Minor Leagues which is one of the weirdest things I've ever seen.

JM: Are there particular rules that you still feel to this day are especially ambiguous and are in need of reform?

DV: Yeah, that's a good one too. We've been talking about that. That's why we are putting together a manual to go in with the rule book just for us. And we're talking about some of the rules that are a little squishy or the rules that aren't used very often or don't come up very often and sort of solidifying them. I would say at this point there's a lot less of that. There are rules I don't like. That double that fell in should have been an error on somebody but there's nothing I can do about it. We're getting more and more to the point that the big holes have been closed by us having meetings and taking care of it. And it's not just the scorers. Elias Sports Bureau in New York is the official statistician of Major League Baseball and if we ever have a question we call Elias during the game, after the game, whenever, we can

call and talk to somebody at Elias. They have some knowledgeable people there. And we can talk through a play. They'll watch the play and call me back. And we'll talk through it. I had one of those last year that we talked after a game and I changed the call that I made during a game based on the discussion I had with one of the League guys at Elias. That's important back up for us that we have somebody we can talk to because I'm not going to talk to anybody in the press box. The writers might not have seen the play. You can't talk to a team guy, you know? That's our lifeline.

JM: But your fidelity is to the text?

DV: Yes

JM: Okay. So you have to be a textualist in some sense?

DV: Yes. Until it gets to the point where there is a giant hole in the rule. There's a sentence in the scoring rules it says the official scorer, I forget the exact wording, but the effect is the official scorer has the authority to rule on anything not specifically covered in these rules

JM: So if you had said you know that's ridiculous to have an eighteen foot double...

DV: ...But it's covered. That's covered by what we've been instructed to do by the rule that says mental errors are not errors. There's couple of exceptions, we've all seen outfielders catch the third out and throw the ball in the stands. Well, if they do that with runners on base after two outs, runners get to advance automatically and that is an error. That's specifically noted in the rulebook that that starts out as a mental error that it is a physical error and to judge it as an error on that player

JM: So you do have to divine intent a little bit...

DV: Yes

JM: Similar to what you mentioned with the first baseman, where you said "That guy should have had it..."

DV: Yes

JM: ...And that's quite subjective and could very

DV: Yep. Yep. I think that's part of the problem with the ball falls in behind second base, with the centerfielder and the shortstop and the second baseman all watching each other instead of the ball. Part o the problem is whose ball was that? In some cases, it's almost just like pick a player if you want but that eighteen-foot double was obviously the first baseman just because of where it landed. It wasn't center. It was just off to the right. But my hands were tied.

JM: What I've been hearing you say, you're not concerned with the intent of the rule was...

DV: Well yeah...

JM: ...but what the rule says literally?

DV: No, I think both. You have the text but there is a certain amount of interpretation sometimes. Some rules are real straight forward. A batted ball that falls in the outfield untouched is a hit. There's no

question about that. But there's some other rules that based on experience you make a decision based on what you saw and the play.

JM: Do you feel that an interpretations are changing with time? In other words, would it have been reasonable effort to go and get a ball or something like that is something where it might have required more effort in a particular period than another period for an error or have they keep it consistent relatively?

DV: Since I've been working, I wouldn't say things like that have changed. Rules have changed and in some cases... A few years ago, the unearned run had what turned out to be determined a typographical error in it. It said not when it shouldn't have said not in one particular part of it. A batter reaching base on a catcher's interference and that whole rule that part of that rule did a complete 180 in the middle of the season one year. We were instructed that's the way the rule's supposed to be and that's how we are going to do it. That was a huge change for me. That doesn't come up that often but that was something I had to plug into the old computer upstairs and say if that comes up you have to remember that. I think the way I've interpreted somethings has changed slightly because of the work we are doing as a group. Nobody is going to find themselves the same as what we end up with all the time. Everybody's going to have one thing that we've talked about, an interpretation, where they are going to have to toe the line. There's been some where I've made some slight adjustments based on what we've talked about on how I interpret a rule. That's good though.

JM: What are the hard ones? I imagine whether something is an earned run or not?

DV: Most people have the most trouble with the earned run business. And that can be difficult. Most of it's not that hard. For me, it's when you have multiple pitching changes and multiple errors and you have start assigning the runs to the right pitchers and now which ones get to be unearned and which one's are earned and there's also the team unearned where the pitcher is dinged for the run but the team's not so there's three categories there

JM: Going through an inning playing it as the error didn't happen but the issue is going to be in terms of taking extra bases and things like that. But other than that it should be pretty straight forward?

DV: Well you give the pitcher benefit of the doubt, according to the rule. There's that part of it. There's the first baseman fumbled that grounder and that batter reached well he's out. So there's an out. If there's a runner on first, we know he would have gone to second anyway. So you do have to go through with that. Sometimes I find myself doing that during the inning. What do I have now, cause there's already been an error? Where am I right now in my head, where are the runners and how many outs are there. So I'm sort of starting to do that even before the innings over. That can be helpful so at the end of the inning I can say two runs, no earned runs and I'm ready to go and I don't have to take a minute to do it. Earned runs can be tricky.

JM: You ever wish you had someone sitting next to you and you could bounce an interpretations off of them or do you feel better being solo?

DV: I have twenty-four hours to make the change so I will do my best to make the judgement at the moment and if I'm still not totally comfortable with it the next morning I'll go back and go through it again. And if I'm still not comfortable with it, I'll call Elias and say "Would you look at this inning. See what you can come up with, see if it's different than what I did inning last night." And you know, they're

fine with that. That's their job. I do have someone I can rely on. It doesn't have to be at the moment. Because I do have twenty fours from the end of the game to change a decision so that's good too.

JM: You mentioned all of the important games you've gone to; Strasburg's first game or something..

DV: Yeah

JM: But to some degree you can't get caught up in any of that stuff, no matter what's going on so it's kind of nice to think about after the fact but you can't say "Wow, we are in the middle of a perfect game or something."

DV: I walked in on the Strasburg debut night, thinking this is huge, and the press box was overflowing. They had so many writers. ESPN had about six people there. It was on MLB Network. Sports Illustrated had people there. Newspapers from all over the country sent somebody. It was like it was the All-Star Game or World Series something that night in terms of the media coverage. It was ridiculous how many people were there and I have two seats assigned to me, so I that I have plenty of space. That night I had somebody sitting in one of my seats. It happened to be Jason Stark from ESPN. I specifically told the people who were figuring out seating would you put the ESPN guys next to me. They said, "Yeah if that's what you want." I said "I'd rather than than almost anybody else." So Jason's with me and I don't remember who else. Tim Kurkjian was there and some other guys were there. They're all really busy. I knew they would be busy, and they wouldn't be bothering me that's why I wanted them there. Plus, I'm friends with those guys. There is pressure on a night like that. There is pressure in a no hitter. But I don't worry about a no hitter until you've been through the lineup at least twice. I don't worry about it in the fourth inning, the fifth inning, or sixth inning. Give me the seven or eighth inning and then maybe I'll be thinking about it. The Jordan Zimmerman one I didn't think he was going to throw a no hitter, so I wasn't worrying about it at all. We got to the 9<sup>th</sup> inning and I thought "Whoa wait a minute here. We've still got this thing going on." And Christian Yelich, the Marlins outfielder, hit that ball with two outs in the ninth, hit that line drive to left center and I thought "There you go. It's all over now." And Steven Souza made the Superman catch. And I just sat there...

JM: So you play some attention to who is who?

DV: Well after the fact I went back. I went back and looked. I knew it was Sousa at the time because people were talking about it. I went back to find out who was the batter, and it was Yelich. A lefty hitter. At the time, I wouldn't have been able to tell you who it was batting. The funny thing is that Souza had been put in the game late in the game as a defensive replacement and then he goes and makes that catch. Zimmerman, Ryan Zimmerman, had been playing left field. He wouldn't have made that catch.

JM: Yeah, sure wouldn't have...

DV: I think Worth was out or something. Injured. I don't know what it was. Anybody else that they might have had out there, there was no chance. Souza only made that catch because he wasn't going to let that ball fall. Then he got traded that next winter. Thank you very much go away.

JM: How hard is it to interpret the infield fly rule?

DV: It's easy. Not my decision. That's the umpire's decision. They put their hand up and say "Infield fly. The batter's out." And at that point it becomes easy for me, and I just have to see if anybody tries to

advance. If the ball falls in, uncaught, then it starts being a little bit of a headache for me because people are probably going to run but on a normal infield fly easy.

JM: And then the whatever advances anyway...

DV: And that's not my decision to make. That's another thing; In the scoring rules it says the scorer can't make any decisions that are in conflict with an umpire's decision. Last night, yesterday's game, there was a timing play which is a third out was made on the bases on a tag play and the runner was scoring at the same time. And the decision was by the homeplate umpire that the run was scored just before the third out was made so the run counts. That was actually challenged, and they used replay and they upheld the call. That was one of those things where I can't say "No, no I'm not putting that run down." The umpire said the run counts, the run counts. Not up to me. That home plate umpire in that game, I know pretty well and next time I see him I'll joke with him a little bit about it.

JM: I wanted to transition to some of the specific things that you've observed over your time. You had mentioned about people getting upset after a particular call. What's the most upset anyone has been with a call you have made and what happened?

DV: In the minor leagues, I had in June 2001 there was a night where the visiting team wasn't a very good team. There was an umpire's call that was changed during the game on the field that went against the visiting team. They blew a big lead and lost the game. There was some groundball on the infield and I don't know if I called it a hit or an error. I don't care. It doesn't matter. It wasn't that big of deal. I called it whatever I thought it was. After the game the phone in the press box rings and it's a couple seats down from me. Somebody picked it up and listened for a second and reached out and said "It's for you." I said "Hello" and what I heard wasn't "Hi, this is so and so" what I heard was and the exact quote is "You have to change that fucking call." And I stopped for a second and said, "Excuse me. Who is this?" I knew perfectly well who it was, it was the visiting manager. He just went off and he just kept going off. After about four sentences or five sentences I said, "I'm sorry but I don't have to listen to this with you." I handed the phone back and the guy hung the phone up. And just after the phone's hung up, I see the manager coming up through the stands. Still in uniform. There's still people out there, exiting, and He's running up through the stands to the press box. He's coming after me because I hung up on him. We got the press box doors closed so he couldn't get in and we started closing windows. And he was outside the door pounding and kicking on the door, yelling screaming and swearing at me. And he came around the front, and he's pounding on the windows. And I know that if that door was open, he would have come in and he probably would have decked me because he was really upset that I hung up on him because he thought I screwed his team. Not that anything went else wrong but he was going to take it out all on me. I mean that's the worst I've ever seen. It took them awhile. The coach's finally sauntered up and took him away. It turned out the Minor League director for that team was there in the ballpark that night but I had to call the League president and turn him in. There's no way I can... If something like that happens I have to turn that in. And I don't know what happened. If he was suspended or fined, I don't care. The League president backed me up. Next time that team was in town, the President was in the ballpark and that meant a lot to me. John Hopkins he's always been really good to me in the Carolina League. We have a really good working relationship and I told him the next year, we sat down, and he brought that whole situation up and he said that "I want you to know that I don't hold you responsible at all for any of that." I said, "Well, I appreciate that." And I looked at him and laughed and I said, "I don't either." But I told him "You came and it did mean a lot to me." League presidents are supposed to back up the

scorers in those situations. I've had players in the press box and they're not allowed in the press box during the games. And this is all in the minors. Most of these weird things mostly happen in the minors. In the big leagues, there are some PR guys who get uppity about stuff but now with the new appeal process they mostly just keep quiet and stay away from us which fine with me. Having a manager come after me physically that's just way out of line. There's no reason for that. For strange things, a lot of this in the minors, I've seen some strange things at Nats Park. I've had games halted because the lights go out. Obviously rain but we've had fog-outs. I've had sprinklers come on in games. I've seen lightning delays. One night some years ago a player got hit with a fastball, a batter got hit by a false ball in the head and he went down and was unconscious and they eventually after quite a delay they carted him and put him on a helicopter and took him to the trauma center. The helicopter is outside the ballpark on the third base side. That's where it landed. We sat there for a long while waiting while they took care of him, which is the right thing to do, so soon as they get him off the field and the gate's closed, the plate umpire says, "Let's go. Throw a couple of pitches and let's get started." Lefty batter steps in the batter's box. First pitch, foul ball off to third base side. I see a fireman running in, on the field, arms waving. And we stop the game again because that foul ball almost hit the helicopter before it took off. So we had a helicopter delay that night. They had to take off and get out of the area, then we resumed the game again. That's probably the weirdest delay I've ever seen but five-man infIELDS and all these shifts going on now. That makes my job harder because I have to know when they start moving around one way or another, and I'm starting to see it a lot with right-handed batters too, okay which player is which player. First baseman is easy with the glove. And sometimes in the minors I just have to know which guy has his socks up and which guy doesn't because I can't see numbers. I have to pay attention to see the move. I'll generally know which batters they are probably going to move on and I'll watch them move but that does make life harder.

JM: Has there been an error call that has been particularly difficult because whether somebody's bobbling something in the outfield, that's very much open to interpretation and I imagine errors are one of the more contentious things you have to deal with?

DV: Hitting errors are things the most people get upset about...

JM: ...Support your conclusion, maybe challenged it...

DV: Everybody wants every call to go their way. A hitter wants everything to be a hit. A pitching coach wants everything to be an error for his pitcher. There's been times. I had a coach come after me one night arguing. But every other night he wanted to argue a call. He went off about how this one call could be the big difference between this guy making it to the big leagues and not making it to the big leagues and I told him, "That's not my job. That's your job. So why don't you go do your job. Let me go do my job and stop bugging me" and I walked away. And I never heard from him again, which was good. They get wrapped up in it cause it's their livelihood. And they think I'm messing with their livelihood. And I'm not. I'm just trying to go right down the middle and make a call based on what I see and based on my experience of looking at things. I suppose if I was a player I might think the same way, especially if I'm twenty-one years old and trying to make it to the big leagues. The big leaguers too there's a lot of that going on where they're turning calls in and I'm thinking, "Really? You're going to turn that one in after all these other things that went on?"

JM: Tell me about the incident a few years ago when you appeared on television somewhat unexpectedly.

DV: Yeah. That was at RFK. That was probably 2006. The Mets TV guys were upset with a call apparently and they were going off about things and I don't know if they mentioned me by name or what they did but the director decided to tell one of his camera guys to find me and put my face on the TV so I was on the Mets broadcast that night during the game while they were saying what a horrible official scorer I was or whatever they said I did. I never did listen to it. I got two emails from two friends in up in the New York area that night who were watching the game and were quite surprised to see my face on the screen that night. I went to the Nationals PR guy the next afternoon and told him and he went to the Mets guy, and the Mets guy is a pretty nice guy, and he came to me before the game in the press box and stuck out his hand and said, "On behalf of the NY Mets, I apologize for what happened." And I said, "I understand that you have no control over what they do. I appreciate the sentiment but I understand. It's just not right." And he said, "No, it's not right." At least it wasn't the home TV then all my friends would see it.

JM: What's the most unexpected thing that has ever happened to you?

DV: Wow. In terms of a play, there's a few. Back in 07, there was a groundball, the Nationals were on the field, there was a groundball to third base. Ryan Zimmerman is there waiting to field the ball. I'm watching the ball go towards him, waiting for the play. And all of a sudden the ball disappeared. In that brief instant right after I no longer saw the baseball, I saw the left side of his jersey bulge out. So the ball came up, went in his shirt and get caught in there. My brain is processing this as it's going on. And I look down and see the plate umpire come out from behind home plate. He held up his hand and called time. He puts Zimmerman on first. I guess there might have been runners on. Every runner was given a base, every runner that was on base. At that point there's nothing in the rules to cover that for me. There is for the umpires. Ball gets lodged in the player's uniform, that's a dead ball but there's nothing that says anything. I went back to that "I get to rule on this." And that's a hit. It can't be an error on Zimmerman. His error was that he didn't have his shirt closed properly but that's not an error. So that was one of the strangest things. At the end of the season a guy I happened to know was writing an article for Baseball Digest about a series of scoring decisions that stuck out in his mind during the season. That was one of the ones he wrote about, that particular play. One of the editors from Baseball Digest wrote to me and said "You know about this article?" I said "No," so they sent me a copy of the issue and I still got that. It's one of those funny plays more than anything else.

In 09, we were in Nat's Park by then. The Astro's were in town and at that time they were still in the National League. Their only trip into town was the last game of the series. We were in extra innings, bottom of the eleventh inning and we went into a rain delay for well over an hour. We were just sitting there because it was the last time they were going to play in Nationals Park that season. Eventually they knew they weren't going to be able to play and so the game got suspended. The game was in May and it was resumed in July when the Nationals went to Houston. It was the bottom of the 11<sup>th</sup> and the Nationals wore whatever uniforms they were. They probably wore their road uniforms because they were on the road and they finished the game. I think there were two batters to finish the game down there. Joel Hanrahan had been pitching for the Nationals when we were suspended. At the end of June he was traded to the Pirates but he was still the pitcher of record. The Nationals scored a run in the bottom of the eleventh on a throwing error. Hanrahan got the win although he was in Philadelphia and not in Houston because he was in Philadelphia that night with the Pirates. He got the win for the game that he had pitched a little bit in May. I was still the scorer of record but MLB wasn't going to put me on an airplane and send me to Houston so I sat in my living room with my computer and my scoresheet and

everything else and watched the end of the game. One of the Houston scorers was sitting in the chair in Houston. We talked on the phone. I sent him, I scanned my sheets and everything and sent them to him, so he had all that. We talked just before the game was going to restart. He timed that segment of the game. He knew the running time at that point. He timed the last seven minutes and added it together and announced the time of the game. We agreed on, was obvious who the winning pitcher was and that so most of it was easy but we had to do postgame paperwork and turn it in. So I sat here at home that night and did the postgame paperwork and sent it in to New York and it took ten or fifteen minutes out of his life which he didn't get paid for, but he was going to be working the other game that night. Sometimes that sort of thing happens but that was a very strange situation because I watched the end of that game on television and I wasn't actually at the game when it ended. So you know, things like that happen.

JM: (1:01:45) Can you do as good of job as an official scorer watching on television? You're shaking your head "No."

DV: No, because your eyeballs on the play are always better, you can see the whole field and look at what you need to look at. Not what the TV is forcing you to look at.

JM: You can also get a certain variables whether it's wind or things that might affect the player.

DV: Right. Right, and the Houston guy, the last play was a throwing error, and he made the call on the error. That wasn't my call. We agreed he would have to make whatever calls were necessary. It was an obvious call. It wasn't a problem. It wasn't like I was going to call that a hit or anything. So we had no issues with that. It might have been interesting if it had been a 50/50 call. We would have had to talk about it, but we didn't have that issue. So, no watching on television there's no way you could do the job....

JM: In an article you had written on scoring a few years ago, you had put a few scenarios out of potential plays, and I had wanted to ask you about a couple of them...

DV: Okay.

JM: ...because it involves a certain amount of interpretation. If the batter hits the ball down the right field line and runs to second base and then takes a few steps past the bag and the right fielder throws the ball to the shortstop, who's at the bag, then the shortstop tags out the batter/runner before he can return safely to the base, what's your call?

DV: He ran past the bag, not slid past the bag. When you run past the bag, you are considered to have attained that base. Second base, in this case. So, by robbing the base too far and not getting back, that's a double and then he's thrown out in that scenario 9 to 6. Let's change it up slightly. On a stolen base, guy tries to steal second, he gets in ahead of the tag, touches the base, he goes right by the bag and then gets tagged out past the bag. When you slide past the bag, you never had the bag which is different than running by so that's a caught stealing. If he, the batter, had slid past second and was tagged out, it would have been a single. Running past second, it's a double. That's one of those rules that you have to know. It doesn't come up that often but it's in the scoring rules and it's one of those rules you have to know, and you can't go and make the wrong call or have to go look at the rulebook for five minutes.

JM: Suppose it's the last game of the season and the home team needs to win to catch a playoff spot. The score is tied in the bottom of the ninth, with a runner on second base. The batter hits a ball over the right field fence and the runner from second scores. The batter rounds first and is mobbed by his teammates, they celebrate and eventually they leave the field without allowing the batter to complete the circuit of bases. What's your call?

DV: This has happened in the big leagues in postseason. It happened to the Mets in 2000 in either the World Series or the LCS and it would have been a grand slam. He got to first base, he didn't get to second base, even though he hit the ball out of the ballpark, that's a single and an RBI because you have to actually run the bases for it to count.

JM: Runner on third base and nobody out. The catcher calls for an intentional walk for the batter. The second intentional ball sails very wide and high past the catcher and the runner on third scores. Now the catcher resumes his usual position by the plate and the upset pitcher throws two balls unintentionally outside of the strike zone. What's your call?

DV: It's not an intentional walk. The last ball is the only one that matters. You can throw three... You could start out not throwing intentional balls and throw three of them like that and the last one being intentional makes it intentional walk. In this scenario it's not an intentional walk it's just a regular walk.

JM: Last one: With the bases loaded, the batter is awarded first on catcher's interference and a run scores. What's your call?

DV: Say that again

JM: The bases are loaded...

DV: Right

JM: The batter is awarded first on catcher's interference...

DV: Right

JM: A run scores. What's your call?

DV: Well, catcher's interference is no time at bat for the batter and an E2. This is a tricky one. This is one of those things, this a rule that's interpretation has changed recently. Bases loaded, it doesn't matter how many outs there are, the batter is going to get an RBI on that, and the run will be earned depending on what happens after that. It depends on the totality of the inning but at that particular moment that run is earned but it's not a time at bat and it's an E2.

JM: Okay. So, what has changed?

DV: Well, the change is it used to be that a run scored by a batter who gets on by a catcher's interference was automatically unearned. That's not the case anymore. It's now an earned run because we don't know how his plate appearance would have ended. I had to struggle with that one. I didn't like that change when they made that change. I had to struggle with it but there it is. I have to toe the official party line.

JM: You mentioned a lot of the sort of odd things that have happened. What has been the hardest inning for you to score?

DV: Whoa, you know, if two or three pitching changes and multiple errors and lots of runs. That gets a little tricky in terms of the earned run stuff. I had a play once way back in the minors. It was first and third. Runner from first took off with the pitch on an attempted steal. The throw goes through. The runner on third takes off on the throw towards second base, takes off from the plate. The short stop cut in front of the bag, throws home. Catcher catches the ball, the runner slides in. The ball flies out of the catcher's glove. The runner's safe. The ball flies away a little bit. Catcher goes running after it. The runner who started at first on the throw home, kept running to third base. He sees the ball's gotten away, he runs through third, runs home. The catcher tracks the ball down, throws it to home plate where the pitcher is standing with his glove up and the ball goes right by the pitcher because he's an idiot or something, I don't know, and he doesn't catch the ball. Luckily for him, the third baseman was right behind him, caught the ball, tagged the runner out. So now we have a guy from first who comes all the way around and doesn't score but he's not caught stealing because he tried to advance on the ball that got away from the catcher. But you have the guy from third base who tried to steal, he's safe only because the catcher lost the ball. He was tagged out; the ball went flying. The umpire says safe. That runner who scored was caught stealing. So, the caught stealing was the runner who scored, the no-caught stealing was the runner who was out. That's really backwards.

JM: Luckily, you have twenty-four hours!

DV: It took me a awhile but I finally got through all that. Oh, you were talking about weird situations, I had a night one night years ago in the minors that before the game they wouldn't give me a starting lineup and I kept saying, "I need a lineup. It's five minutes before the game, what's going on here?" So, five minutes before game time, a trade was announced that involved the two teams, the big league teams, that were there representing in the minors. And one of the players on the visiting team was part of the trade. He went from the visiting dugout to the home dugout and played the game. He showed up on the bus with his teammates from the hotel, took batting practice with his visiting teammates, went over to the other side, put on a uniform, and led off for the home team that night. It's one of those silly situations that you can only run into in the Minor Leagues. Or in Bull Durham, probably.

There's another rule too; the detached equipment rule. About three or four years ago, I had a play where the ball was in the dirt where the catcher didn't catch it. He stood up and as he stood up, he took his mask off with his right hand and he's looking around for the ball and the dugout's yelling at him. There's a runner on third. Dugout's yelling at him. The ball is right between his feet. So, he took a step back, he leaned over, and he scooped the ball up with his mask. Which is against the rules. It's called the detached equipment rule and every runner on a pitched ball, with detached equipment, every runner is allowed one base. Well as soon as he picked it up, out loud I said to myself, "You can't do that." I see the plate umpire sitting there and he kinda cocked his head and is probably thinking the same thing, "You can't do that. "He stopped the play. He pointed at the runner on third and pointed towards home and said, "You score." I've never seen a detached equipment play in all the years so I finally had one of those that I could check off. Yeah, I've had one of those.

I want to get back to something you asked about tough things. Obstruction calls, the infield shifts are tough, obstruction can also be a tough play for a scorer. I had a play in the big leagues where the runner on second, there's a ball hit to the outfield. Runner on second takes off. He's coming towards third. He's going to run third and the third baseman got in his way and slowed him up. He kept running and he was eventually tagged out at the plate, but the third base umpire saw the collision and that's obstruction

cause the fielder is supposed to get out of the way of the runner. So instead of being out at the plate he was safe because of the obstruction. Obstruction is by a definition an error on the player who obstructed the runner so that would have been an "E5" except if, and it says this in the rules, except if in the scorer's opinion the obstruction didn't affect the play. Without the obstruction, the way I ruled it was, without the obstruction, he's rounding third and scoring in plenty of time. Because he was only out by two steps and he would have scored without that obstruction. So I didn't charge the error. It was a hit and RBI for the batter, in that case. That's an interpretation based on what I can see. If I thought he was going to be out anyway the error would have counted and it wouldn't have been an RBI. That can be tough because you don't see obstruction that often. There's a great deal of interpretation that has to be made there.

JM: There's a great deal of desire on the part of television commentators for you to get a call out as fast as you possibly can when taking a little bit of time and thinking, "hey, is this obstruction?" would be nice.

DV: Yes they're in a big hurry and you can see that if you watch any games now and you see these umpire replays and commentators are acting foolish and saying things about "Stop listening to the elevator music and make the decision already" or "Maybe the guy in New York is in the bathroom" and all these ridiculous comments that I hear them make.

JM: Another one is sometimes they'll say, "Well that would have been scored a hit if they weren't on the road" or "They wouldn't score an error at home," or something like that which I can't imagine would ever be a thing.

DV: In the big leagues, if that's happening in the big leagues now, then that person needs to be fired. If you're giving something to one of your players. The rulebook is clear in terms of runs and earned runs to give the benefit of the doubt to the pitcher, in terms of bases advanced without errors. If on a batted ball, if it's not played cleanly the rule says to give benefit to the batter on the play. If it comes down to the fact that you really can't make a decision, which I find hard to believe, but if you really can't make a decision, you're supposed to flop one way or the other based on that give the benefit of the doubt but there's always going to be things that you can look at and hang on to and say "This and this and this" it's a hit or an error or whatever.

JM: It seems like fidelity to the rulebook is the domain of the official scorer and not many others. You always here things like "Tie goes to the runner" or something...

DV: Which is not in the rule book

JM: ...Which is not in the rule book

DV: Yeah. Yeah

JM: And these sort of things become the colloquial way of it.

DV: Yeah, I think that "tie goes to the runner" business is a little league thing, kids playing out on the sandlot or the street or something. I remember hearing that growing up. But, it's not true. The runner has to beat the ball to the bag to be safe. He has to beat the ball there. If you don't get there ahead of the ball, because it's a tie, you're out. You have to get there first. There is no tie, you're either out or

you're safe. That's almost always retired players sitting in the television booth that say that and the other guy is sitting there probably rolling his eyes, worried about it.

One other thing talking about Nationals Park and games that I've worked. I've had the pleasure of seeing a lot of well known people throw out ceremonial pitches, including two different United States presidents. And I've joked about that I've seen a righty and lefty throwing ceremonial pitches as presidents and I'm not talking politics, I'm talking throwing hand. I'll say that to people and I'll say, "Of course, the throwing hand hand, at least in certain amounts, matches the politics of the individual president in each case." So we're going to have an election soon and next year maybe I'll see another president throw out a ceremonial pitch. That would be fun. I remember in 05, opening day, first Nationals game, George Bush came out. The next game, the second night, the Vice President was there, Cheney and I started thinking, "Will we get the Secretary of State the third night and we'll go right down the order of succession." It didn't work that way. We get a lot of generals and admirals. A lot of military. It's not usually some sergeant or ensign or somebody. It's usually big deals. That's kind of interesting to see. It's fun to see all the military in the park and how well they are treated in the park. They do a really tough job. Much tougher than I'm doing, you know. Lives don't depend on what I'm doing. It's the same with the police and the fire department and all them. They have those guys out all the time, even if it's just color guards or things and I love seeing that. That's a benefit to being there in addition to being able to watch the game.

JM: Going back a little, you mentioned about, you know, to a degree you're recording history...

DV: Yes

JM: ...Not to a degree you are recording history...

DV: To 100% degree

JM: That is a weighty responsibility, in a way.

DV: Yes and I don't take it lightly and I really don't joke about it on the job. I don't joke about calls or any of that. I'm very serious about that but it is. It is a responsibility that we all do take seriously.

JM: We know people in SABR who go back and try and get RBI records from a hundred years ago precise. We saw Ty Cobb's batting average change after however many years. It can be hard for people who are not in the baseball community to understand how important it is to have that just so. Because it isn't just what happened last night. It's in perpetuity.

DV: Right. If somebody does have a hitting streak going on and they're 0-3 and at their last time up they hit a ground ball that's fumbled, that's an important call there but it's also an important call if it's the first guy in the game, regardless of what his batting average is. It's the same call. It shouldn't matter if the guy's got a hitting streak or not. But after the fact, it does matter.

JM: Yes. But not to you...

DV: Not to me in the moment of making the call. Maybe a week after that somebody might say something to me about it or the no-hitter or whatever.

JM: But to do it the other way would be to invite bias if you were to give someone a hit call because of his hitting streak, would be out of bounds in every respect.

DV: I want to be able to walk away from this job and not have anybody say "He was a homer. He made calls based on the uniform." And, nobody can do that. Ten or fifteen years ago in the minor leagues, I'd hear home managers or coaches say to me "We are getting screwed on the road by scorers and now we are getting screwed at home." My response to that the first time I heard that was, "Wait a minute. Let me make sure I know what you're saying. You had a call on the road that you think was made based on uniform and went against you. So you're saying that guy didn't do his job correctly and so you want me to make up for him by not doing my job correctly and give you a call." "No no no no no I'm not saying that at all." "Then okay, we're done here. Bye." And that was part of becoming a better scorer, for me was I hear certain lines all the time from people and I need an answer to shut them up. If it's a line that has no basis being in the discussion. I'll hear pitching coaches say "Well, that caused an unearned run." No. It's a hit or an error. I don't want to talk about runs. We are talking about a ground ball that was a hit or an error, whether it turned into a run later is immaterial to whether that was playable or not. And so they shut up at that point because that's their whole argument that was a run that I want to be unearned. Well, sorry that's not why we're talking. And then when we get done with that, I'll say "Take that lesson away with you and remember it. Don't talk to a scorer about runs, talk about they shouldn't have made that play." "Okay, okay. Thanks, thanks."

JM: Give me some broad lessons you've taken away from your own career, things that you know now that you didn't know when you started

DV: Well, one of them is if somebody's upset, they're upset at the call, upset at the uniform, so to speak, they're not upset with me. I'm just the person in the way at that particular moment and I have to not take it personally. I am serious enough about the job that I take every call seriously and I want to get it right. I believe I get calls right and if someone objects, if someone's upset, it still doesn't to a certain extent upset me but nowhere near the extent that it used to. I have other things going on in my life so I don't have to worry about that particular call on that particular night, last June or whenever it was. I'll walk out of the park every night and be confident that I did my job right because if it was a call I think I didn't get right I'll fix it before I leave the ballpark. I'm not walking out of there leaving something hanging.

JM: The goal is it to always be correct...

DV: Right and correct based on the rules and the interpretation of the rules. That's the big thing. That's the number one lesson I would tell anybody wanting to do this job is try to divorce yourself from the emotion of someone yelling at you. We're all human and it's not easy. It's the same thing the Umpires go through except they go through it a whole lot more than I do. Strike zone every night. That's one. If anybody wanted one lesson, that's the lesson. Maybe the second lesson is don't get distracted. Make sure you're paying attention.

JM: Our time is running short, is there anything I haven't asked that you would like to be sure to include?

DV: Wow. I made a lot of notes before knowing we were going to talk. I think we've gone through most everything. It's a fun job. It can be a lot of fun. There's a lot of opportunity to help people understand things and that's part of the fun for me but just being in pro ball and getting paid as a league official, that's a blast, for me. It's so much fun and having the respect of people around me, doing the job, is very nice. It's something good that makes me smile that I can walk away from a ballgame most nights and

think "That was a good night." Every once and awhile it's not one of those nights. But most nights, most of the time.

JM: I'd like to thank David Vincent for taking time to speak with me for this Society of American Baseball Research oral history interview and for taking about ninety minutes of your time.

DV: I appreciate you coming out to talk to me. Thanks John!