

The Right Call

Newsletter of the Umpires & Rules Committee Society for American Baseball Research

COMMITTEE CO-CHAIRS FOR A NEW MILLENIUM

Veteran SABRites Steve Johnson and Clifford Schold have agreed to co-chair the SABR Umpire and Rules Committee. As they have indicated in e-mails to SABR members, Steve will handle matters dealing with umpires, while Cliff will focus on topics dealing with rules. Committee Archivist Reid Duffy (reidduffy@yahoo.com) will continue to crank out the newsletter.

Steve Johnson can be reached at sjiiioboh@aol.com

Cliff Schold's e-mail address is schold@sprynet.com

SABR 33 UMPIRE & RULES COMMITTEE MEETING

The annual meeting of the Umpire & Rules Committee at SABR 33 in Denver will be on Thursday, July 10th at 10a.m. at the downtown Denver Marriott Hotel. Check with the SABR registration desk for the meeting's room designation, or any changes. We will be discussing on-going research projects, your thoughts and suggestions on future umpire and rules research projects, any thoughts you might have on the infamous Questec electronic strike zone to evaluate plate umpire performances in MLB's pursuit of a uniform strike zone we can all embrace as a nation, and ponder whether pitchers like Curt Schilling are justified in making adjustments to Questec cameras with a baseball bat, as long as the bat isn't corked.

ARBITER EVANS TO GIVE SABR 33 KEYNOTE ADDRESS

The Umpire and Rules Committee is delighted to note that the distinguished former major league umpire Jim Evans will be the keynote speaker at the SABR 33 Awards Luncheon on Saturday, July 12th. Evans umpired in the major leagues for 28 years, 18 as a crew chief, with four World Series, eight League Championship series, and three All-Star games on his gaudy resume. Of special interest to the U&R Committee is Evans' reputation as the leading authority on the rules of baseball and their origins and development, his scholarship showcased as author of *Official Baseball Rules Annotated* and *Professional Baseball Rules Index*. Evans also operates one of the major umpiring schools, the Academy for Professional Umpiring.

DURWOOD MERRILL

One of the umpiring arts' most colorful practitioners, Durwood Merrill, died January 11th at the age of 64. Merrill worked 23 years as an American League umpire, retiring in 1999. His husky physique and rough-hewed Texas visage gave him a certain "umpire from Central Casting" look, but he possessed a lively sense of humor that served him well in spirited discussions with managers and players filing dissenting opinions with his calls. Much of this was showcased in his entertaining and frequently revealing 1998 memoir, *You 're Out and You re Ugly, Too* (St. Martin's Press). In his Texas community, Merrill was known for his extensive charity work, well documented in Jerry Holtzman's tribute in the umpire section of the MLB website.

LEONARD KOPPETT-ANALYTICAL BASEBALL SCHOLAR

Perhaps no sports writer served as great an inspiration to the spirit and mission of SABR than Leonard Koppett, who passed away on June 23M at age 79. Through his sports journalism with the New York Times and other papers, and several books, Koppett brought an insightful analytical approach to his prime areas of coverage, baseball and basketball, pouring over statistics to extract more meaningful insights and arrive at the games' greater truths. His 1967 book, later revised and updated, *The Thinking Man's Guide to Baseball*, no doubt served as a primer for many budding SABRites in pursuing their passion and fascination for baseball scholarship. He graced past SABR convention panels with his observations, insights, and courtly charm, and was scheduled to do so at SABR 33 in a Saturday panel on the future of baseball. We will sorely miss the wisdom he was prepared to pass on to us in that forum, but take comfort in knowing he left so much for us to ponder and savor.

MEN IN BLUE LIT

Joining the ranks of great American Umpire Wordsmiths is Ken Kaiser, with his breezy, bittersweet baseball memoir, *Planet of the Umps*. You may recall the beefy Kaiser putting on a raucously amusing show, subbing for his crew chief Joe Brinkman, a few SABR conventions back. You'll also recall Kaiser, a diabetic, was one of the ultimate losers in the umpire union's disastrous resignation ploy, and did not receive a call back of any kind. Basically, his book is the usual round robin of funny battlefield anecdotes, with the likes of Earl Weaver and Billy Martin prominently featured, as well as Kaiser's past occupations as a professional wrestler and barroom bouncer. His account of the final umpire labor strife that rendered him unemployable is revealing, with the bitterness and self pity toned down but unapologetic, as he declares: "I think a lot of people will describe what I have to say as sour grapes. That's not really accurate. It's probably more like a sour vineyard." Those sentiments are basically confined to the final chapter, with much of the rest reflecting a genuine love of a game he umpired for 36 years with considerable flair. In a related matter, two of Kaiser's fellow umpire banishees, Bob Davidson and Tom Hallion, are back umpiring in Class A, hoping to claw their way back to the majors, where they toiled for much greater pay and perks for many years.

2003 MLB UMPIRE CREW CHIEFS & CREWS

In case you missed it, here are the 2003 Umpiring Crew Chiefs and Crews:

1. Bruce Froemming (Mike Winters, Doug Eddings, Ron Kulpa)
2. Gerry Davis (Ed Rapuano, Mark Carlson, Paul Nauert)
3. Rick Reed (Tim Tschida, Jeff Nelson, Alfonso Marquez)
4. Tim McClelland (Ted Barrett, C.B. Bucknor, Tony Randazzo)
5. Jerry Crawford (Laity Poncino, Brian O' Nora, PhiCuzzi)
6. Mike Reilly (Bill Hohn, Eric Cooper, Tim Timmons)
7. Randy Marsh (Angel Hernandez, Paul Schrieber, Sam Holbrook)
8. Joe West (Jeff Kellogg, Bill Miller, Paul Emmel)
9. Tim Welke (Chuck Meriwether, Gary Cederstrom, Mark Wegner)
10. John Hirschbeck (Wally Bell, Kerwin Danley, Bill Welke)
11. Ed Montague (Brian Gorman, Brian Runge, Bruce Dreckman)
12. Larry Young (Charlie Reliford, Mike Everitt, Hunter Wendelstedt)
13. Dana DeMuth (Jerry Layne, Greg Gibson, Marvin Hudson)
14. Joe Brinkman (Derryl Cousins, Mike DiMuro, Andy Fletcher)
15. Dale Scott (Jim Joyce, Lararo Diaz, Jim Reynolds)
16. Mark Hirschbeck (Terry Craft, Fieldin Culbreth, Marty Foster)
17. Steve Rippley (Gary Darling, Larry Vanover, Jerry Meals)

FROM THE MLB UMPIRE INFORMATION GUIDE

- Bruce Froemming is the oldest active umpire both in terms of age (63, 9/28/39) and in terms of service (32 years, starting in 1971). Joe Brinkman is at the 30 year mark; Ed Montague-27 years; Jerry Crawford and Mike Reilly- 26 years; Joe West-25 years; Derryl Cousins-24 years; Randy Marsh and Rick Reed-21 years; Tim McClelland-20 years.

- The youngest active major league umpire is Alfonso Marquez at 29, born April 12, 1974 in Zacatecas, Mexico.

- Triple A Reserve "vacation relief" umps for 2003- Lance Barksdale, Rob Drake, Mike Fichter, Chris Guccione, Matt Hollowell, Dan Iassogna, Jim Wolf.

- 21-year veteran Rick Reed was the plate umpire for Kevin Costner' s baseball flick, "For the Love of the Game."

- Despite widespread speculation to the contrary, Tony Randazzo is not, nor ever has been, a Las Vegas lounge singer.

HALF-BLIND UMP LIT

And in the fall, from McFarland, we can look forward to Mike Shannon' s *Everything Happens in Chillicothe*, an account of one-eyed Frontier League umpire Max McCleary, who responded to complaints from one manager about his eyesight, by taking out his glass eye and handing it to him. Shannon is the founder and editor of the baseball literary magazine, *Spitball*, which sponsors the Casey Awards for best baseball book each year. He has also written several popular baseball books, revolving around baseball anecdotes as spun by the players.

FROM THE ARCHIVES: A COUPLE OF PROMISING PROSPECTS

From Skip McAfee comes this intriguing clip from the May 27, 1905 edition of *Sporting Life*:

"NEW UMPIRES: We have seen two of the new umpires here...Bausewine and Klem. The former worked with Emslie in the Chicago games mid alone in the contests with Cincinnati. No umpire in recent years has covered ground any better than he and has made an excellent impression... He is not one of those individuals who tries to impress you as knowing it all, He runs the game well and deserves the heartiest cooperation of the players. Klein made his first appearance in the St. Louis games. He met with some severe criticism in New York, but there was no room for fault-finding. He has a good voice and he runs the game in most creditable fashion. If the players would let the umpires alone and let up in distracting his attention, and thus impairing his work, the game would move better and be flu more enjoyable. For nothing is more disgusting than this forever baiting the umpire. Both Bausewine and Klem are certainly valuable adjuncts to the staff of President Pulliam and a decided improvement over the men he had last season."

For the record, George Bausewine' s rookie season as a National League umpire in 1905 was his last. Hill Klem stayed a little bit longer...until 1941, retiring as a Hall of Fame legend and umpiring' s most enduring icon.

FROM THE WEB: WWW.HECKLEDEPOT.COM/UMPIRES.SIHTML

From the above website, one can research great heckling from the Western World, as it applies to players and umpires. From the unsurprisingly massive umpire' s file comes these inspired suggestions from the umpire evaluators in the stands:

I Hey Ump: "How about some Windex for that glass eye?"

"I thought horses only slept standing up."

"I was confused the first time I saw a game, too."

"Kick your dog. He' s lying to you."

"I' ve seen better blue in a toilet bowl."

"A HIT?! HE CALLED THAT A HIT!?"

Dave Vincent, SABR' s premier chronicler of the home run (co-editor with Bob McConnell of *The Home Run Encyclopedia*) and its go-to guy for scoring rules interpretations, has offered his services to the committee and this newsletter on matters confronting and dealing with official scorers, who rank right behind managers and umpires as baseball' s most second-guessed practitioners. Dave is the official scorer of the Potomac Cannons in the Carolina League, and is willing to take on any questions on baseball scoring and rules interpretations you might have, and we' ll include them in the newsletter. If you wish to contact him directly, his e-mail is GrandSlams@aol.com.

UMP ROSTER RESEARCH

The committee' s on-going research on umpire rosters and game-by-game assignments continues apace, most notably the efforts of John Schwartz in Rochester, New York. Over the past few seasons, he has compiled umpire roster summary sheets, covering:

1881 National League

1882 National League

1887 National League and American Association

1909 National and American League

1942 American League

1952 National and American League

John Schwartz has provided summary sheets for virtually every season from 1882 to 1924.

From Joey Beretta comes the 1969 National and American League game-by-game umpire assignments, culled from the Sporting News.

One of the prized contributions donated to the Umpire & Rules Committee archives, as dispatched by Flank Utley of Concord, North Carolina of a diary composed by former minor league umpire Denver Howard, chronicling his first year-and-half as an umpire, from umpire school to toiling in the Kitty League, Mississippi-Ohio Valley League, and the Northern League in the mid-50' s. He has some interesting insights and delightful stories we hope we can share in the next newsletter, with opportunities to make it more widely available. Mr. Howard, who lives in Fort Wayne, TN, titles his diary, "Twenty-Twenty Was Not Enough"

FINAL THOUGHTS

Hope to see you in Denver.