

The Right Call

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

Editor: Reid Duffy

July 2009

BRUCE WEBER TO SPEAK AT UMP & RULES COMMITTEE AT SABR 39 SATURDAY, AUGUST 1ST AT 11 A.M.

We have lined up New York Times reporter Bruce Weber, author of “As They See’em: A Fan’s Travels in the Land of Umpires” to speak at the Umpire & Rules Committee meeting at SABR 39, Saturday, August 1st, from 11 a.m. to noon. Following brief remarks, he will open it up to your questions on his much acclaimed book, chronicling his three year reportorial probing into the insular world of professional umpires, including his personal education in the Jim Evans Umpire School and subsequent hands-on, in-your-face umpiring experience at various levels of professional umpiring. It is a truly enlightening and insightful book, by turns funny, poignant, and surprising, in dealing with the stunning complexities and challenges of a job, where players, managers, baseball hierarchy, and fans, as the saying goes, insist on umpire perfection from the beginning, and continued improvement from then on. Prior to the meeting, Mr. Weber will be signing copies of his tome in the Vendor’s Room. (NOTE: The Convention 39 Special Edition of The Spring 2009 SABR Bulletin lists the Umpire & Rules Committee meeting as originally scheduled for 9 a.m. on Saturday, August 1st, but the meeting has been moved to 11 a.m. to noon).

Mr. Weber is prominently featured on the front page in the Week in Review section of the July 12th Sunday New York Times, titled “Umpire v. Judges”. Writing on the eve of the Senate confirmation hearings of Sonia Sotomayor to the U.S. Supreme Court, Weber analyzes the popular metaphor, as expressed by the likes of Chief Justice John Roberts and Umpire Tin Tschida, that judges are like umpires. They don’t make the rules, but apply them, with the limited role of making sure everybody plays by the rules. Weber takes issue with the metaphor and its implications with a very interesting and amusing analysis worthy of your attention.

UNCLE CHARLIE MORAN

Awhile back, we received a note from Ann Moran McCurry seeking to pinpoint when her grandfather, Charles Moran, launched his career as a major league umpire. In her research, some articles stated his career began in 1917, while other sources indicated 1918. Through the good offices of Retrosheet and the SABR Umpires logs, we were able to assure her Charlie Moran launched his umpiring career in the National League on April 16, 1918. His distinguished career as an NL umpire spanned 22 years, through the 1939 season, covering 3,184 games, all but 77 games presiding over home plate, including Carl Hubbell's no-hitter against Pittsburgh, May 8, 1929. The Doug Pappas ejection research project records that Moran felt compelled to eject 61 players and managers for obtuse behavior and failure to work and play well with others. But further freelance Googling and Yahooing reveals that Ann Moran McCurry's grandfather was a genuine Renaissance Man of the 20th Century American sporting scene. He had two snorts of java in the major leagues with the St. Louis Cardinals, starting in 1903, as a pitcher and shortstop. He pitched three games, completing two, exhibiting spasms of wildness with 19 walks, resulting in an 0-1 record, and 5.25 ERA. He also hit a lusty .429, with six singles in 14 at bats. A sore arm jettisoned his pitching career, resulting in a much traveled minor league career as a catcher. He found his way back to the Cardinals in 1908 as a back-up catcher, hitting .175 in 16 games. But the most amazing and intriguing aspect of the Charlie Moran saga is that after he wrapped up his NL umpire duties in the summer, he took on the role of head college football coach in the fall. His gridiron head coaching career began with Texas A & M, starting with an undefeated 6-0 1909 season, continuing through 1914, compiling a 38-8-4 record. A year after he launched his major league umpiring career, he took over as head football coach of Centre College in Kentucky in 1919, racking up a dazzling 42-6-1 over five seasons, including undefeated regular seasons in 1919 and 1921. The 1921 season featured an epic 6-0 upset of then powerhouse Harvard, a team that had been undefeated the previous two seasons. Behind Hall of Fame quarterback Bo McMillan, Centre's victory was deemed college football's 3rd greatest upset in history in an ESPN survey. Known by his players and the sporting press as "Uncle Charlie", Moran brought his inspirational, imaginative, and tightly disciplined style and coaching philosophy in coaching three seasons at Bucknell (19-10-2), and four seasons at Catawba College (23-10-5), for a lifetime college record of 122-33-12, with a .766 winning percentage that

ranked 20th best of all time. He even had less enthralling season as coach of the Frankford (Pennsylvania) Yellow Jackets in 1927 in the embryo stages of the NFL, sporting a record of 6-9. He briefly turned the team over to his son Tom that October so he could umpire in the 1927 World Series between the Yankees and Pirates. It was the first of his World Series assignments that also included the 1929, 1933, and 1939 Fall Classics, Born in Nashville, Tennessee on February 22, 1879, Uncle Charlie Moran retired as an umpire after the 1939 series, passing away ten years later in his longtime home of Horse Cave, Kentucky at the age of 71.

FILL THE FINAL GAPS

We still have tiny gaps in our historic MLB umpiring knowledge as it applies to our game-by-game umpires log. We still are looking to find who umped where for the following games in 1979:

Baltimore Orioles at Oakland A's April, 27, 1979
Baltimore Orioles at Oakland A's April 28, 1979
Baltimore Orioles at Oakland A's April 29, 1979
Chicago Cubs at Houston Astros May 11, 1979
Chicago Cubs at Houston Astros May 12, 1979 Game 1
Chicago Cubs at Houston Astros May 12, 1979 Game 2
Chicago Cubs at Houston Astros May 13, 1979

In both series, the umpires involved were replacements for MLB umpires on strike. The four teams involved do not have any information on who worked these games, and the box scores of the day did not list umpires.

Deeper into MLB history, we are looking for information on the identity of umpires for the following games from 1872 in the National Association and Washington:

Boston at Washington Nationals April 30, 1872
Boston at Washington Olympics May 1, 1872
Washington Olympics at Washington Nationals May 17, 1872
Middletown at Washington Nationals May 25, 1872

2009 MLB UMPIRE CREWS

Crew Chief listed first on each crew quartet

Number on left: Uniform # Number on right: years of service

CREW A

17 John Hirschbeck 25.5
35 Wally Bell 16
60 Marty Foster 10
51 Marvin Hudson 9.5

CREW B

8 Dale Scott 23
41 Jerry Meals 12
46 Ron Kulpa 10
16 Mike DiMuro 9.5

CREW C

4 Tim Tschida 23
61 Bob Davidson 20
45 Jeff Nelson 20
48 Mark Carlson 9.5

CREW D

38 Gary Cederstrom 15
7 Brian O’Nora 12
25 Fielding Culbreth 12
78 Jim Wolf 7

CREW E

3 Tim Welke 25
55 Angel Hernandez 16
77 Jim Reynolds 9.5
52 Bill Welke 9.5

CREW F

37 Gary Darling 22
29 Bill Hohn 20
1 Bruce Dreckman 9.5
50 Paul Emmel 9.5

CREW G

18 Charlie Reliford 19
27 Larry Vanover 16
34 Sam Holbrook 8.5
58 Dan Iassogna 7

CREW H

22 Joe West 31
19 Ed Rapuano 18.5
43 Paul Schreiber 11
96 Paul Nauert 8.5

CREW I

23 Rick Reed 27
8 Jeff Kellogg 16.5
47 Mark Wegner 10
95 Tim Timmons 9.5

CREW J

32 Dan DeMuth 26
44 Kerwin Danley 12
88 Doug Eddings 10
21 Hunter Wendelstedt 10

CREW K

11 Ed Montague 33
24 Jerry Layne 20
59 Tony Randazzo 9.5
68 Chris Guccione 2

CREW L

12 Gerry Davis 25
9 Brian Gorman 17
54 CB Bucknor 10
57 Mike Everitt 10

CREW M

2 Jerry Crawford 32
20 Tom Hallion 16
10 Phil Cuzzi 10
15 Ed Hickox 4

CREW N

36 Tim McClelland 26.5
65 Ted Barrett 12
53 Greg Gibson 10
49 Andy Fletcher 9.5

CREW O

13 Derryl Cousins 30
66 Jim Joyce 21
26 Bill Miller 10
71 Brian Runge

CREW P

30 Randy Marsh 27
33 Mike Winters 19
72 Alfonso Marquez 19
67 Lance Barksdale 5

CREW Q

31 Mike Reilly 32
14 Chuck Meriwether 17
56 Eric Cooper 10
63 Laz Diaz 10

Ed Montague is the dean of the umps at 33 years of service, with Mike Reilly, Jerry Crawford, Joe West and Derryl Cousin clocking in with three decades plus. Chris Guccione is in his first year as a full time MLB umpire, after extensive major league experience as a vacation relief umpire.

LET'S GO TO THE TAPE

The consensus on the instant replay system Major League Baseball installed late last summer to help umpires make accurate home run calls is that it seems to be an effective and welcome procedure, amidst some surprise at the number of times the replay system has been put into play. As of the All-Star break 2009, the replay system has been employed 35 times, seven times in 2008, and 28 times in 2009, one of them incorrectly. Under the ground rules for instant replay, put into place on August 28, 2008, after an epidemic of incorrect home run calls from umpires trying to get a bead on long flies from 200 feet away amidst the wall-behind-wall architecture and yellow line boundary accents of today's newly minted stadiums, replays can be used to determine whether the potential home was 1. fair or foul 2. cleared the fence, or 3. was interfered with by a fan. The crew chief is the sole determinant on whether or not to use the replay system. Teams cannot request or demand a replay, although clearly their freelance griping on a questionable home run call that goes against them influences a crew chief's decision to go to the tape. Once the replay is reviewed by three of the four umpires in a special replay room, no argument on the topic on the field or further appeals are allowed.

There were two reversals in 2008 and nine by the mid-season 2009:

Sept. 19, 2008- (Minnesota at Tampa Bay) Ump Gerry Davis rules Rays Carlos Pena's long fly, initially ruled in play, was interfered with by a fan, and thus changed to a home run.

Sept. 26, 2008- (Los Angeles at San Francisco)- In a quirky scoring development from this reversal, the Giants Bengie Molina was credited with a home run, two RBI's, and zero runs scored after Tim Welke reversed a call that concluded his long fly to right was in play, sending Pablo Sandoval from first to third, and Molina perched on first. MGR Bruce Bochy sent in Emmanuel Burris to run for Molina, and then, at the urging of Omar Vizquel, contended Molina's fly ball may have hit a green metal awning along the right field, which qualified by the A T & T ground rules as a home run. Upon confirming the home run, Welke further ruled that Molina could not complete his home run journey since he was taken out of the game. Thus, his pinchrunner did the honors, with Emmanuel getting credit for the run and Molina duly credited with the home run and two RBIs. Bochy

protested the game over Welke's ruling on the Molina/Emmanuel substitution, but the Giants' ultimate victory jettisoned the protest.

May 13, 2009 (St. Louis at Pittsburgh) Ump Lance Barksdale initially rules Pirates Adam LaRoche's drive clears the right field wall, only to learn upon review the ball hit a railing or screen above the 21-foot wall, keeping the ball in play. LaRoche is awarded a double, and become the first player to loses a home run to instant replay.

May 13, 2009- (Florida at Milwaukee) Ump Bruce Dreckman rules Pirates Ross Gload's drive down the right field line in Miller Park is a home run, only to have replay determine the ball was foul, leading to two replay-negated home runs in one day.

May 23, 2009- (New York Mets at Boston) 3B Ump Paul Nauert rules Met Omar Santos's drive to left landing atop the Green Monster in Fenway Park was in play. Replay determines it to be a home run, and a big one at that, turning a 2-1 deficit into a Mets 3-2 victory.

May 27, 2009- Washington at New York Mets) In a game tied at three in the 6th, Mets Danny Murphy hits a drive off a yellow advertising sign on the façade of the second deck, and initially ruled in play, resulting in Mets base runner Gary Sheffield getting gunned down at the plate. Upon further review, umps rule the ball a home run. It was the second time replay was used in the Nationals-Mets series and for the Mets, the 4th time in five days.

June 6, 2009- (Texas at Boston)- Acting crew chief Jeff Kellogg at first rules Red Soxian Mike Lowell's long fly off the facing of the first row of the left field seats in Fenway is in play. At Red Sox urging, Kellogg goes to the tape and rules it a home run.

June 9, 2009- (Seattle at Baltimore)- Orioles Melvin Mora's long drive over the outstretched attempt by Mariner LF Endy Chavez is ruled a homer, over Chavez's contention a fan touched the ball and interfered. The umps' review of the replay concurs with Chavez, with Mora called out courtesy of fan interference.

June 19, 2009 X 2- (Milwaukee at Detroit)- For the first time, we have two reversals in the same game and one inning apart. In the bottom of the third, Tigers Miguel Cabrera's drive hits the roof of the bullpen and bounds back onto the field, giving ump's the impression the ball is in play. Further review compels ump's to change the call to a home run. The next inning, Tigers Dusty Ryan's drive down the left field line ruled a home run, but downsized to a double upon further review by Crew Chief Dale Scott.

July 3, 2009- (Houston at San Francisco)- Ump's rules Astro Travis Ishikawa's drive atop the wall is in play, with Ishikawa perched on second. Giants MGR Bruce Bochy insists the ball hit a protective railing on top of wall for a home run. Replay backs up his claim and Crew Chief Randy Marsh signals for Ishikawa to continue his journey to home plate.

Replay No No- June 25, 2009- (Philadelphia at Tampa Bay)- Ump's employ instant replay to determine whether Rays Pat Burrell's drive to left center that bounced into the seats, is a clean ground rule double or was interfered with by a fan. If a ground rule double, the Rays runner on first, Carl Crawford, would be restricted to a two base advance ending at third. If fan interference is determined, the ump's could determine Crawford would have scored and give the Rays a run. Replay revealed no fan interference, resulting in a ground rule double for Burrell and Crawford limited to third base. The next day, MLB Vice President Mike Port told Crew Chief Gary Sederstrom that replays rules do not allow its use to make that determination.

The Retrosheet web site (retrosheet.org/ReplayHR.htm) has a detailed, and most up-to-date listing of replays to date, both reversals and upholdings.

UPON FURTHER REVIEW OFFICIAL SCORER DIVISION

The last two seasons has seen the emergence of the MLB Scoring Review Committee, a seemingly anonymous five-person board appointed by the Commissioner to review team appeals of official scorer decision, with the power to change a scorer's ruling. With all major league games now being duly televised and recorded on tape for review, the MLB Rules Committee expanded MLB Rules 10.01 dealing with the function and duties of the official scorer, to allow a team to appeal a scorer's decision within 24 hours of the game's completion, or within 24 hours of the scorer's final determination of the play in question. A scorer has the power to change his initial ruling within 24 hours after the game ends. The league invites the challenging team to submit video tapes or electronic media to back up their challenge. The rule then states: "The League President, after considering the evidence submitted and any other evidence he wishes to consider, may request that the official scorer change a judgment call or, if the League President concludes that the judgment of the official scorer had been clearly erroneous, may order a change in a judgment call. No judgment decision shall be changed thereafter." Although not set out in the rules, a scoring review committee was established to pass on these appeals. According to an article by Tim Brown of Yahoo! Sports in September, 2008, this committee was initially formed in 2003 to monitor the overall performance of official scorers throughout the league, assess scoring rules interpretations, and review the controversial calls and evidence of calls perceived as "flagrantly incorrect". The committee was not given the power to overturn scoring decisions until 2008. Brown cited such league executives as Frank, Robinson, Mike Port, and Joe Garagiola, Jr. as members of the committee.

In most cases, teams appeal on the basis of sparing one of their pitchers excess earned runs based on a teammate's perceived misplay of a ball that the official scorer nevertheless concluded was a hit. After quietly overruling three scoring decisions with zero fanfare in 2008, the committee came under the full glare of scoring sunlight in September, 2008, when called upon by the Milwaukee Brewers to give their then-prized pitcher, C.C. Sabathia an error for failing to cleanly pick up a dribbler off the bat of the Pirate's Adam LaRoche in the second inning of a Sunday afternoon game August 31, 2008 at Pittsburgh. Bob Webb, a 20-year veteran of the official scoring arts, called it a hit, concluding the lumbering lefthander

Sabathia would have been hard pressed to get LaRoche, who was two-thirds of the way down the line, even with a clean pick up of the spinning topper. Much to Webb's ultimate discomfort, LaRoche's bleeder turned out to be the Pirates sole hit, in the 7-0 Sabathia shutout. Amidst an indecorous rant by then-Brewer manager Ned Yost, seasoned by Sabathia's classier philosophical shrug, Webb stuck to his decision after reviewing the matter on tape. With a no-hitter hanging in the balance, the committee reviewed the DVD duly dispatched to them by the Milwaukee Brewers and concluded that Mr. Webb's judgment on the play "was not 'clearly erroneous', which is the standard set forth in Official Scoring Rule 10.01 (a)." Webb's base hit conclusion was upheld, and Sabathia settled for a one-hit shutout. By mid-season 2009, the committee reviewed and overturned three outfield misplays initially ruled hits, and deemed them errors, restoring luster to the earned run averages of three pitchers and diminishing the statistical potency of three hitters:

May 8, 2009- (LA Angels at Kansas City)- Official scorer Mel Frank rules a fly ball by Angels Howie Kendrick misplayed after a long run to the right field line by Royals RF Jose Guillen an inside-the-park home run. The Scoring Review Committee rules the play an error by Guillen, a home run and RBI subtracted from Kendrick's stat sheet, and KC Pitcher Gil Meche spared the earned run.

June 10, 2009- (Yankees at Boston)- In the second inning, Yankees RF Nick Swisher fails to corral Red Sox All-Star 2b Dustin Pedroia's slicing line drive near the Pesky Pole in right, with the ball bouncing into the stands for what is determined a ground rule double by the official scorer. Boston's George Kottaras scores on the play. Upon further review, the Committee deems an error on Swisher, scrapping the double and RBI for Pedroia, and sparing Yankee Pitcher Chien-Ming Wang the dreaded earned run.

June 19, 2009- (Cleveland at Chicago Cubs) In the second inning, Cub CF Reed Johnson fails to track down Indians Jhonny Peralta's long drive, with Peralta hustling to third for what the official scorer determines to be a triple. The Committee deems it to be a three-base error for Johnson. After Peralta reached third, Cub Pitcher Rich Harden walked Kelly Shoppach and gave up a home run to Luis Valbuena. Thus, Harden could take some comfort in the Committee decision that Peralta's run was unearned.

GREAT WORKS FROM THE VICE CHAIRMAN

Be advised and alerted that the SABR Umpire & Rules Committee's learned vice chairman, Dave Vincent, has a new diamond tome available for your edification, enlightenment, and entertainment. It is "Home Run's Most Wanted: The Top 10 Book of Monumental Dingers, Prodigious Swingers, and Everything Long-Ball". It is part of Potomac Book's series of highly entertaining and informative "Most Wanted" sports series, done up in a "Top 10" format. Dave's tome offers all manner of fascinating and unusual tidbits about baseball's most celebrated individual achievement, the men who achieved them, and the pitchers who served as facilitators, culled from the expansive research and scholarship Dave applied to his authoritative and classic, "The Home Run Encyclopedia". Dave even includes umpires into the mix, detailing home run controversies prompted by disputed umpire calls, and noting Bruce Froemming witnessed more home runs (2,194) while presiding over home plate than any other umpire, including Bill Klem (2,022, ranking 5th behind Joe Brinkman, Mike Reilly, and Derryl Cousins).

IN CASE YOU WANT TO TRY THIS AT HOME

At last year's Umpire & Rules Committee in Cleveland, Mr. Vincent showed the assembled the amazing CD-Rom: "The Virtual Umpire Camp", a computer animated and interactive presentation, detailing umpiring on-field mechanics, signals, positioning, and choreography in all situations, be you a part of a 2-man, 3-man-4-man crew. It's really quite remarkable and eye opening the complexity involved in each umpire's responsibility and effort to being in the right place at the right time in given situations once the ball is hit. The CD-Rom is put out by Immersion Media, and is available for home consumption and backyard workouts from the umpire's page or "Fan Shop" link in the MLB website for \$29.99.

UMPNEWS.COM

While stumbling and bumbling about the web, I finally came across perhaps the handiest of the umpire web sites, umpnews.com, providing extensive links to all of the relevant and pertinent umpire websites. This includes umpire news items emanating from Retrosheet, the MLB web site, the Baseball Index, the baseball leagues and associations throughout organized baseball and softball, and sites detailing baseball rules, umpiring history, rosters, training, and equipment. I came upon umpnews.com just recently (which means it has probably been around in plain sight for 30 years), and makes for a very convenient web reference tool.

UMPS ON THE TUBE

The baseball interview show on the newly minted MLB Baseball Channel, “Inside Studio 42 with Bob Costas” had an interesting session in June with former umpires Bruce Froemming, Don Denkinger, and Steve Palermo, discussing all sorts of pertinent umpiring issues and memories. Denkinger discussed at length his infamous call at first base to start the 9th inning of Game 6 of the 1985 World Series, incorrectly calling KC’s Jorge Orta safe at first, leading to the Royals’ epic comeback conquest of St. Louis and considerable grief for him and his family through the years. All three umpires agreed the intense televised scrutiny of umpire calls on endless replays on ESPN and other highlight shows has made umps less blasé on tags at bases and the so-called neighborhood play on double play pivots at second base. Froemming said there is better training in the ump schools on dealing with arguments with players and managers than in the past. And all three concluded Jackie Robinson was indeed safe in his steal of home in the 1955 World Series, upon looking at a little seen filmed angle taken from a third base vantage point. The show will probably be repeated several times, and well worth keeping an eye out for and Tivoing

U & R CLIP JOINT

If you have any umpire-related news clippings, culled from your research or casual perusal of what is left of our newspapers, or from sundry web sites, please pass them on to me for our committee library files. Please send or alert me to relevant articles to:

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JOHN PARDON

Last year's Umpire & Rules Committee in Cleveland was held on a Saturday evening and was the final research committee session of the convention. And thus ours was the final committee to be truly blessed with the presence of John Pardon, one of SABR's founding fathers, who lost his battle with cancer last October. And while it was evident John was feeling the discomfort and fatigue of the illness he so vigorously battled with quiet dignity and resolve, it did not prevent him from contributing his trademark insights, inspirations, and wit to any discussion of baseball and umpiring issues and foibles that came up that night. His love affair with baseball and the people who shared his passion for exploring the National Pastime in all its aspects and history was on full display that evening, as I am sure it was for every convention, presentation, committee meeting, and chapter session he graced and contributed the full extent of his knowledge, scholarship, intellect and humor. His presence will be missed, but his impact and fond memories will not be.