



## ***Now about that ‘common-sense’ call on Robert Fick at Wrigley Field...***

*By George Castle, CBM Historian  
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Larry Young upholds two concurrent traditions.

With both steadfastness and good humor, Young adhered to “the call-it-as-he-sees-it” style of big-league umpires. Now a resident of Roscoe, Ill., just north of Rockford, he’s part of the progression of arbiters from Chicago and surrounding areas highlighted by the posthumous Hall of Fame induction of Hank O’Dea last year.

And now Young has found there’s life after donning the blue togs and home-plate gear of umpires. He is now one of eight umpire supervisors evaluating crews in the big leagues and Triple-A. Visiting Chicago ballparks and others, he monitors all the big-league umpiring crews and five in Triple-A. Young also is responsible for watching international baseball, where he watches between 20 and 30 umpires.

But the meat of Young’s career took place between 1983 and 2007, when he was a big-league umpire. He started in the American League, then worked all games when the league umpiring crews were merged. His dues-paying began in the Midwest League in 1978, progressing through the Eastern League in 1979 and then the next three seasons in the old American Association.

“I was living in Rochelle (Ill.),” Young said of his 1978 days. “I could commute to Clinton and Davenport (both within a couple of hours’ drive in Iowa). The Midwest League is a lot (geographically) different now.”



**Larry Young calls it as he sees it in evaluating umpiring crews. Photo courtesy of Major League Baseball.**

Young is all-too-familiar with planes, trains and automobiles. Commuting 95 miles each way to Wrigley Field or U.S. Cellular Field a few days in a row is nothing. He's happy to explain trends in the evolving interpretation of rules, which includes a more calibrated toe-dip into video replay than all other pro sports.

Just as compelling are the situations and people Young has encountered in his umpiring rounds. He shared with the Chicago Baseball Museum many of those experiences.

### **The common-sense rule**

- Young's most unusual play took place on Oct. 4, 2003 in Game 4 of the National League Championship Series at Wrigley Field. The Braves' Robert Fick pinch hit in the bottom of the eighth. Grounding out, Fick ran toward Cubs first baseman Erick Karros.

"Karros went to tag him, and instead of running through the play, Fick took his hand and knocked Karros' glove away, and the ball went flying," Young said. "At first, the Braves were happy. I was working the plate, I was coming up the line to watch out for that very thing -- runner interference. (Manager) Bobby Cox came out, and I told that's not the play that the Atlanta Braves and Bobby Cox would teach.

"I told him that he intentionally knocked the ball out of the first baseman's mitt. He said, 'No way.' He went over to Glenn Hubbard, his coach at first base, and he said that's exactly what he did. Bobby said that's it for him."

Young invoked a little-used, but eternal rule.

"That was the only one I ever saw," he said. "There are some plays that aren't covered in the rule book. There is a special rule, 901c, called a 'common-sense' rule. It gives umps ability to rule on any situation not covered in the rule book. You go with this common-sense, 'fair-play' rule.

"It's used very infrequently, once or twice a year in all games. The rule book written in the 1800s, and this was one of the original rules. The problem with the rule book is such an ancient document. We try to update it yearly, but still some are things that shouldn't be in there. I'll guarantee every major-league umpire knows this rule. They have it in their pocket if they need it.



**Larry Young as a big-league umpire during his 25 seasons of service. Photo courtesy of Major League Baseball.**

“But no one on the 2003 crew had ever seen that first-base play before. Knocking ball out of a glove is not illegal if it’s a baseball play. I hesitate to use the word ‘dirty,’ but I’ll use it. It was a dirty play. That’s what I told Bobby Cox. If it’s a clean baseball play and you’re trying to dislodge the ball from the catcher, that’s in the rules.”

Cox was so enraged by Fick’s action that despite his 80 RBIs in 126 games in 2003, the player was released a month later. Fick did play for three more teams – the Rays, Padres and Nationals – through 2007.

- Young’s longest play until final conclusion. “Anytime you have a batting out of order or lineup snafu,” he said. “One day (probably in 1988) in Milwaukee, it was supposed to be ‘Young’ and ‘Yount’ on lineup card. They had two Younts. They had a Yount as a DH and Yount in the outfield. It was listed twice on the card.

“We had to try to figure it out once the game had started. I want to say (manager) Frank Robinson with Baltimore brought it to our attention. Young was out of the game, (Robin) Yount already had batted third. The second Yount we had to take out of the game, as an unannounced substitute. I don’t know if there was a right way to do it or not, but that’s the way we did it. It took quite awhile. The Milwaukee manager didn’t have much to say because it was his mistake. As long as he didn’t lose Yount, he was happy.”

- The longest game Young worked behind the plate. “It was 22 innings in the Metrodome,” he said. “Once it got to be the 13th or 14th inning, the game moved pretty rapidly. Nobody was getting on base, they were going down one-two-three.

“The key was staying hydrated, keep the water coming. The ‘Dome was dry. You had nowhere to go. That’s why I walk like I do today. I was much younger then, it didn’t seem to bother me. You had to go downstairs from locker rooms to the field there. After the game, you had to go up that same flight of stairs. That was the hardest part after a 22-inning game. I made it on my own. I was macho.”

- The hottest day Young worked the plate. “Denver (Coors Field) during a day game,” he said. “When it’s hot there at the high altitude, it’s a tough day. It was over 100 degrees and it was thin air. Whether it was wet or dry (heat), it was hot.

“The big thing was hydrate. I remember my fingers were cramping. Our (umpires) trainer now has all kinds of things to help you hydrated. I wish I had some of those things. Some of those guys have cooling vests with their chest protector. Also a cap you put on after a game to replace some of those fluids.

“I remember Kansas City on the (artificial) turf, an interleague game with the Cubs. Mark Grace was playing first base. Mark and I went over to the opposing dugout after every inning, to try to get out of the heat for 45 seconds. Now, it’s a much better park (with natural turf). I remember walking out from the ump room seeing

waves of heat on the field. Stepping on the field, your feet were burning. Sparky Anderson said one time to put a piece of lettuce under your cap to cool off. That doesn't work."

### **Sweet Lou's misdirection play for ump**

- Young's encounters with Lou Piniella, baseball's most demonstrative manager of his time. "That's easy," he said. "We had about three plays that went against Lou (in Wrigley Field). Lou didn't get thrown out, and he was not happy at the end of the game. In those days, we went through the Cubs' dugout to get to our cubbyhole. Lou was behind me, and he started arguing with Ted Barrett. I turned around and got involved in the discussion.

"We get along well and we're friends. I started when Lou was a player. We kept jawing and jawing. Our clubhouse is to the left and I went straight, forgot to take a left. He and I were still arguing and I found I was standing in the middle of the Cubs clubhouse. I looked around and I said, 'I don't belong here, I'll talk to you later.' Lou said he'll look at those plays.

"About a half hour later, there's a knock on the door and here's Lou with a bottle of red wine: 'Here's how mad I am, let's have a glass of wine.' We sat down and talked about everything other than those plays. Lou's a good man."

- Encounters with Billy Martin. "Billy was tough and he was not fair," Young said. "For some reason, I got along with Billy. I don't know why. It might have something to do with working with Rich Garcia because Billy respected Richie a lot, and he left me alone for the most part due to Richie's influence."
- Dealing with Tony La Russa on the White Sox, A's and Cardinals. "One of the best people in baseball as far as I'm concerned is Tony La Russa," Young said. "I consider him a friend. He was managing my very first game in old Comiskey Park. Tony has always been fair with me. We were talking about ejections. I never threw him out in all those years."
- Chats with the cagey Sparky Anderson. "He was good, I got along with him fine," Young said. "The thing about Sparky, he tried to intimidate young umpires. I called a ball on Reggie Jackson when he was playing with the Yankees. Sparky came out to the mound and wanted to have a few words with me. I told him, 'Sparky, I know what you're doing because I'm a young umpire. But I'm not always going to be a young umpire and I'm going to remember this.' It stuck with him and we got along really, really well."

### **Bob Boone works Young**

- The craftiest catcher with whom Young dealt. "Bob Boone could make any pitch look good because he had such soft hands," he said. "The way he caught the ball, he

could make a pitch six inches outside look like a strike. I was a young umpire, he was around awhile and he was testing me. Those first four years or so, we battled. After that, we were OK. I don't think that was obvious. He would say, 'That was a good pitch.' He wouldn't turn around. No one would know except Bob, me and the batter. A couple of times, I said 'I'll try that when you're hitting.'"

- Top gentlemen at bat. "George Brett and Wade Boggs, second," Young said. "They didn't need any help. They swung at pitches that were strikes and did not swing at pitches that were balls, and rarely did you call them out on strikes. If one of those two told me a pitch was outside, I'd have to listen to them. I might not agree with them, but I'd listen to them."
- Working historic games. "I worked first base for Kevin Millwood's (no-hitter) in Philly," he said. "There were no close plays. I look at some guys who had five or six no-hitters. I had the plate for Nolan's (Ryan's) 5,000th strikeout. No one will come close to that again with the specialty pitchers. I also worked in several hitters' 3,000-hit game."
- Jim Joyce's blown call at first on Armando Galarraga's perfect game with two out in the ninth. "Jim and I went to umpire school together," Young said. "We are friends and worked in the Midwest League together. I knew Jimmy, I didn't know how he'd handle it. He's a very, very good umpire. No one felt worse than he did. For him to handle it in that manner, I was very proud of him."



**Larry Young with managers Luis Sojo (left) of Venezuela and Tony Pena of the Dominican Republic at this year's World Baseball Classic. Photo courtesy of Major League Baseball.**

"Some say it was a black mark in baseball, but he handled it well, to his credit. Why did it happen? Our biggest (challenge) we need to get involved in is timing (calling a play). If your timing is too quick, then you'll have problems. That's what happened to Jimmy."