

BASEBALL UNDER GLASS

Montero outburst yields to Santo's '69 rips of Young in ranking of Cubs' impact

*By George Castle, CBM Historian
Posted Thursday, June 29, 2017*

Miguel Montero could not hold his tongue about his batterymate Jake Arrieta, so he paid the price for a serious violation of baseball etiquette with his walking papers from the Cubs.

A player never calls out a teammate publicly even if his head explodes. They may fight in the runway or the clubhouse – as Carlos Zambrano has done – but never does a player jump another verbally in the heat of the moment.

Giving Montero the gate was not all that stressful. Cubs boss Theo Epstein could point to Montero's 0-for-31 record in throwing out baserunners. That's not all on his pitchers, for sure. The Cubs do not need a platoon catcher with Willson Contreras flirting with stardom and prospect Victor Caratini deemed ready at Iowa. See our [Chicago Baseball Museum story on Caratini](#) when he arrived in a trade from the Braves in 2014.

Montero's faux pas still is not the worst calling-out in Cubs history. Through all of Zambrano's histrionics, which also included gestures to his fielders after errors, the grand prize for way off-kilter criticism goes to Hall of Famer Ron Santo.

We old-timers won't forget it, and here's a lesson for Millennial Cubs fans that even the franchise's all-time heroes sometimes have feet of clay. On July 8, 1969, Santo ripped center fielder Don Young for misplaying two ninth-inning fly balls in Shea Stadium in front of more than 55,000 fans. The botched catches turned into three Mets runs and pinned a 4-3 loss on fellow Hall of Famer Fergie Jenkins, who had taken a one-hitter – Ed Kranepool's fifth-inning homer – into the ninth.



A young Ron Santo (left) with Cubs broadcaster Vince Lloyd (center) and Ernie Banks. Santo was at the center of Cubs controversies in 1960 and 1969.

The bespectacled and eccentric Young was kind of an “accidental” center fielder in ‘69. An original Cubs product whose first big-league game was leading off in Sandy Koufax’s Sept. 9, 1965 perfect game, the good-field, little-hit Young had spun out of the organization, only to come back. He started only because incumbent center fielder Adolfo Phillips was injured coming out of spring training, then totally fell out of favor with manager Leo Durocher, prompting a trade to the expansion Montreal Expos. The Cubs’ favored outfield prospect, Oscar Gamble, wasn’t deemed ready yet in mid-season.

Young struck out twice in four at-bats against Mets starter Jerry Koosman. But, batting eighth (where Phillips typically hit) in Durocher’s lineup, his job was to just catch the ball in center. Young failed to hang onto two drives in the gap, one against the wall, in the fateful ninth.

In the somber clubhouse afterward, team captain Santo ripped into Young for supposedly taking his batting failures onto the field in the ninth. Young was so distraught he fled the clubhouse as fast as he could. Relayed back to Chicago, Santo’s comments set off a firestorm of criticism. Santo was forced to hold an impromptu press conference in his hotel room the next day to clear the air and apologize to Young. That night, the shaken Cubs came within two outs of Tom Seaver throwing a perfect game against them. Only a ninth-inning single by Jimmy Qualls, replacing Young and one of the nine center fielders the ‘69 Cubs employed, saved further embarrassment.

Young was never the same, moving in and out of the lineup the rest of the season as Durocher tried a platoon of players, including a still-not-ready 19-year-old Gamble, in center. He never played another major-league game after 1969, a season in which he made just \$12,500 and tried to live just on his meal money. He disappeared into Cubs infamy, re-appearing only at a 1992 McCormick Place team reunion. Young had hung around Denver, working in construction on the city’s new airport.

Boos start going Santo’s way

Santo’s life changed for the worse. In 1969 his stature made him the unquestioned “big cheese” Cub, a nickname that stuck in part for running his “Pro’s Pizza” brand sold at the ballpark. His salary had passed that of Mr. Cub Ernie Banks, and was perceived as a favorite of owner Phil Wrigley. But after what became known as the “Don Young Incident,” Santo began hearing a smattering of boos when he’d fail at Wrigley Field. By the time the Cubs held a special day for him in Wrigley Field late in 1971, he had fought with Durocher over being dropped to seventh in the lineup and the scheduling of the Santo day.

General manager John Holland even mulled a Santo-for-Cesar Tovar trade with the Minnesota Twins at the 1971 winter meetings that netted the Cubs outfielders Rick Monday and Jose Cardenal, and a baseball-shaking deal landing Dick Allen for the White Sox.



Don Young’s center-field misplays prompted a horribly-wrong reaction from Ron Santo.

Holland firmly wanted Santo out amid the post-1973 housecleaning, but he became the first player to invoke the “Santo Clause.” A 10-year player having five consecutive years with his present team could block a trade, one of the steady gain of contractual rights players union godfather Marvin Miller had won in that era. Holland pivoted and traded Santo to the White Sox, so he could stay in Chicago. Santo accepted, but endured at 34 one final miserable big-league season on the South Side.

Absence made the heart grow fonder for Cubs fans. Santo regained their love when he was hired as radio color announcer in 1990 for a 21-season run. He became what could be called “Grandpa Cub,” his outright cheerleading in the booth combined with his fight against the ravages of Type 1 diabetes endearing him as never before to the masses. The “Don Young Incident” was brought up only sporadically. Still, Santo could caution any loose-lipped players about the long-term consequences of public dissent against teammates.



In spite of his sorry Cubs ending, Miguel Montero went where Ron Santo could not go — getting clutch hits in a World Series title drive.

Interestingly, Santo was also involved in the negative consequences of a minor-league demotion, given the well-publicized head-clearing mandated trip to Iowa for mega-slumping Kyle Schwarber. Santo’s situation was different. He had one year in pro baseball at Double-A San Antonio at 19 in 1959, but seemed a wunderkind ready for the Cubs’ third baseman job coming out of camp in 1960. Santo expected to come north with the parent club.

One day, however, Holland and recycled manager Charlie Grimm called him in for a chat. They informed Santo he’d start out in Triple-A Houston. Santo was furious, but had to obey the brass’ orders. The consequences of a gaping hole at third — a position formerly filled by the aging Alvin Dark — prompted Holland to trade lefty pitching prospect Ron Perranoski, Santo’s San Antonio roommate, to the Dodgers for veteran Don Zimmer.

Decades later, Santo called the transaction “an unnecessary deal.” Holland brought him up in June, and he held down third base for the next 13 ½ seasons. Meanwhile, Perranoski emerged as baseball’s best left-handed reliever for most of the 1960s at the back end of the Koufax-Don Drysdale-led Dodgers’ staff.

The Cubs being able to use a home-grown Perranoski was one of the game’s understatements. The incompetent Holland oversaw two 103-loss seasons in 1962 and 1966 without a threat to his job security from a too-loyal Wrigley. With the exception of the 1963 team’s startlingly good numbers, the pitching staffs were abominations annually until Durocher’s arrival. By modern standards, giving away your top lefty pitching prospect for a journeyman infielder was rank ineptitude.

The Perranoski deal wasn’t an outlier. Holland continued the process of the pitching-poor Cubs bolstering the mound-rich Dodgers, also trading two more home-grown products in lefty reliever Jim Brewer and righty starter Burt Hooton to Los Angeles. Like Perranoski, both enjoyed much better days and more stable coaching at Dodger Stadium.

Life with the Cubs is unfair. Montero ended his 2 1/2 Chicago seasons on a downer, but not before amassing key clutch hits during the team's 2016 World Series run. Santo would have given anything just for one at-bat in a Cubs postseason. Unfortunately, he still outranked Montero in both ill-considered post-game remarks and the negatives of a minor-league demotion.

That's just another storyline in the craziest game ever invented and a team with the most unusual history in pro sports.