



If 2 balls in play at once seems weird, then 3 must be a crowd

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Home-run distances and fastball speeds, like noses, tend to grow over the years and decades.

Now, the Chicago Baseball Museum has discovered the number of baseballs involved in perhaps the wackiest play in the city's diamond history might have increased from two to three.

The 55th anniversary of the two-balls-in-play during a June 30, 1959 Cubs-Cardinals game at Wrigley Field is upon us. And we're in receipt of an account by Hammond, Ind. native Bob Anderson, the Cubs pitcher who triggered the craziness, that possibly a third ball was involved in the Keystone Kops caper.

"It's the only way my name is the record books," he said.

Anderson, hale and hearty – "78 is just a number," he says of his age – is asked about the strange sequence every few years from his longtime home in Tulsa. The Cliff Notes' version of the play is that on a full-count offering to Stan Musial with one out in the fourth inning, Anderson's pitch zipped back to the screen. Almost everyone thought it was a foul ball, but it wasn't. Time was not called.

Musial trotted to first, then was encouraged by his bench to continue to second since play had not stopped. Anderson, believing time was called, asked for a new ball. Plate umpire Vic Delmore, who apparently had a brain cramp in losing track of the 3-1 pitch and the situation, dug out a new ball and tossed it to Anderson. Meanwhile, Cubs third baseman Al Dark kept his head in the game, tracking the ball as it was apparently touched by a batboy and Wrigley Field PA announcer Pat Pieper behind the plate.

As Musial steamed for second, Anderson instinctively threw his new ball in that direction, but it sailed over second baseman Tony Taylor's head into center field. At almost



Bob Anderson as a promising young Cub.

the same moment, Dark retrieved what was claimed as the original ball, noticed Musial near second and fired a one-hopper to shortstop Ernie Banks.

The confused Musial had gotten up and strayed off second. Banks tagged him out and a rhubarb ensued. The Cardinals protested the game, but the action became a moot point when St. Louis won 4-1.

Published accounts of the game said both batboy Bob Schoenfeldt, a freshman at Foreman High School, and Pieper touched the original ball before Dark picked it up. Pieper denied he touched it. Cardinals manager Solly Hemus claimed Pieper held the ball, then dropped it “like a hot potato” when the Cubs began yelling.

Now after a half-century-plus, Anderson reveals another version, in which a possible third ball entered the chaos after the pitched ball caromed off Delmore’s shoulder, leaving the umpire in pain and distracted.

Did Pieper reach into the bag for Ball No. 3?

“It went to the backstop, and that’s when Pat picked it up,” he said. “Dark saw what was taking place. I didn’t know the batboy touched it. If that was the case, the ball should have been declared dead and Musial should have stayed at first base.

“The ball got there pretty fast and he (Pieper) just picked it up and threw it in the (dead-ball) bag. Al came over and said ‘Don’t say anything, Pat...Give me a ball.’ It may not have been the same ball.”

So you’re saying a replacement, third ball might have been inadvertently given to Dark?

“Oh, yeah,” Anderson said. “They’re wide-enough bags so if you reach in there, you grab one of about three dozen balls. He may have grabbed the right one, he may have grabbed a different one. All he did was give a ball to Dark. I talked to Al afterward. He told me he talked to Pat and asked for a ball.”

The game was designed for one ball at a time. But two? And now the possibility of three total in one play? Obviously, the follies occurred in the appropriate place.



Did PA announcer Pat Pieper reach into the dead-ball bag and give Al Dark a third baseball involved in the caper?

“It can only happen at Wrigley Field,” said Anderson.

From his seat on the bench, then-rookie Cubs outfielder George Altman notched another memory for his long career.

“You hang out in baseball long enough, you see weird things. It’s one of those oddities you see,” said the gentlemanly Altman, now 81 and a St. Louis-area resident. Altman would be linked with Anderson two years later in another uncommon manner as Cubs teammates.

Anderson won’t soon forget the sight of a befuddled Musial, in 1959 one of the most admired athletes in any sport.

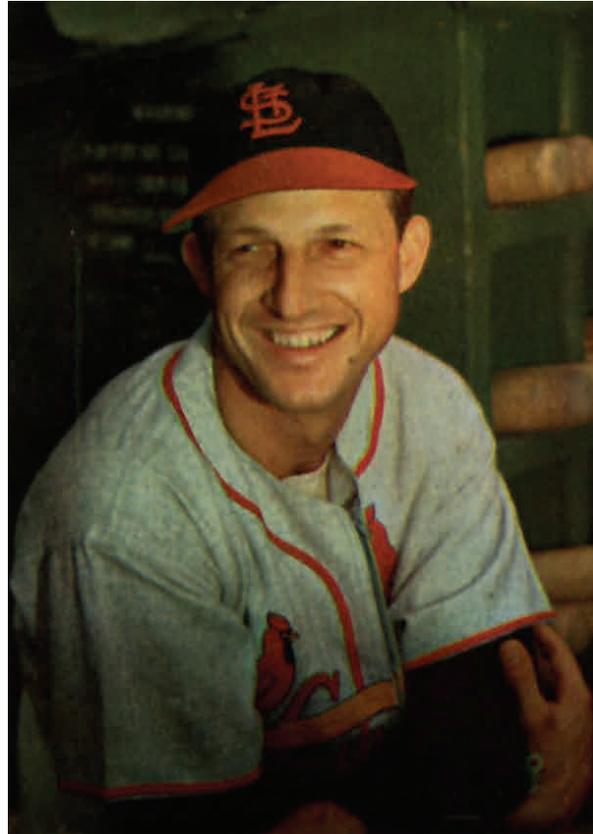
“To me, the funniest thing was watching Musial, a very (smart) baseball guy, wandering around there and(asking) what the hell is going on here?,” he said. “The guy who saw everything and knew time hadn’t been called was Dark. He knew he needed to get to that ball. Pat didn’t volunteer everything afterward, and everyone assumed that ball was still in play.”

Delmore’s absent-mindedness cost him. After the 1959 season, the umpire’s contract was not renewed by National League president Warren Giles. But some dalliance with Baseball Babylon also may have been a factor. Early in 1960, Delmore married Giles’ umpire scheduler. His story was the only tragic end of the goofball sequence. He died of an apparent heart attack at 42 on June 10, 1960.

Oral history is the only record of the crazy afternoon. WGN-TV began videotaping highlights of Cubs and Sox games using the then-new technology in 1959. A video of a 1959 Cardinals-Dodgers game at the Los Angeles Coliseum has been mounted on YouTube. But the two-balls incident apparently was taped over so the tape spool could be used for other programming. No newsreel or other footage exists. The image would be priceless leading off any baseball follies video segment.

Not summoned back for any Cubs events

Amazingly, given his role in the strange play and stature as part of a quartet of promising Chicago pitchers of the era, Anderson has never been invited back by the Cubs for team events such as the Cubs Convention. He did not hear from the team for the Wrigley Field 100th anniversary celebration, which included a 1950s theme for the June 20-28 homestand. Three-time All-Star Altman also never was summoned back to Chi-



For one of the few times in his life, Stan Musial appeared befuddled on the field.

cago – where he had lived until the 1990s – for the Convention. Fortunately, someone in the marketing department put two plus two together and snared Altman, the Cubs' first regular African-American outfielder, more than a month ago to sing in the seventh inning on June 28.

In an era of BaseballReference.com tracking every detail of a player's career and beyond, along with complete season rosters and box scores, locating former players should not be hard. The Cubs briefly toyed with an alumni association around 1990, even holding an inaugural party in a Chicago suburb, then dropped the idea while less-popular teams have active alumni groups.

“All you have to do is look up the name in the book,” Anderson said. “With everything computerized, it should be at somebody's fingertips. I went back and looked back to remind myself of the year (1961) I hurt my arm. I forgot I had pitched against, and beaten (Sandy) Koufax a little while before I hurt my arm.”

While claiming he is not upset about not being invited back to Cubs events, Anderson offered up a constructive plan to bring the former players back into the fold.

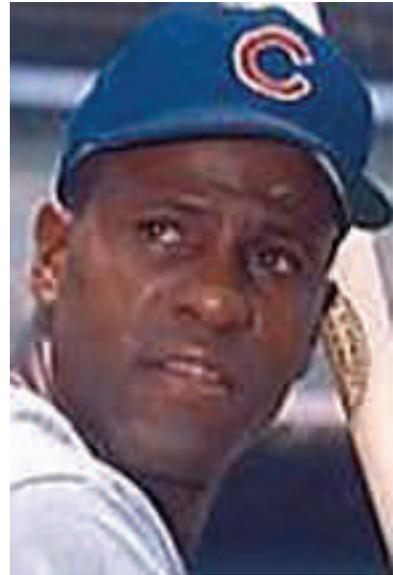
“You can invite your regular group (Hall of Famers and 1969 and 1984 players) and then invite others from a particular year,” he said. “That way your expenses aren't going to be that huge. You kind of bounce around a little bit.” Anderson reasoned like a class reunion, not all the players from one year will show up. But it's worth the effort, he added.

Altman said he was “excited” about his invitation to sign after not being at Wrigley Field “for years and years.” Still, he said he was “surprised” he had not been summoned back, given his status in Cubs history. Altman and Anderson were in the same ignored period of team history that also featured Dick Ellsworth, last Cubs lefty to win at least 20 games (22 with a 2.11 ERA in 1963). Ellsworth, now part-owner of the Fresno Grizzlies, the Triple-A Giants affiliate, is another alumnus who has not returned to Wrigley Field in any role other than a fan.

“At least one year I thought I should have been invited,” Altman said. Indeed, old friend Billy Williams said last off-season “we've got to get George to the Convention.”

“There's that trivia thing out there,” Altman said. “Which team had four (future) Hall of Famers in the lineup, but had another guy lead the team in batting?”

The trivia answer was the 1962 Cubs that featured eventual Cooperstown enshrinees Williams, Ernie Banks, Ron Santo and Lou Brock. Altman paced the lineup with a .318 average and made the second All-Star Game in Wrigley Field. The previous season,



All-Star George Altman, who helped Bob Anderson beat Sandy Koufax in 1961, finally got invited back to Wrigley Field this year at age 81.

with Williams, Banks and Santo as regulars, Altman led the Cubs with 27 homers, 96 RBIs and a .303 average while slugging a homer in Candlestick Park in one of the two All-Star Games in which he played.”

Anderson, Altman e-mails feature Cubs IDs

Both Anderson and Altman still identify as Cubs. Each has a team identifying phrase in his e-mail address.

“I loved the organization,” said Anderson, who sometimes took the South Shore electric train from Hammond into the Loop, where he transferred to the subway for the remaining five miles to his workplace at Clark and Addison.

“I enjoyed the people who were there,” he said. And I enjoyed the players. Periodically I look them up to see if they’re still around.”

The hard-throwing Anderson was part of a quartet of talented right-handers whom broadcaster Jack Brickhouse thought would form the rotation nucleus of a contender. Anderson, Dick Drott, Moe Drabowsky and Glen Hobbie were all around the same age, with each making their Cubs debuts in 1956 and 1957.

But all suffered elbow, shoulder and back injuries early in their Chicago tenures. Only Drabowsky recovered to enjoy a career into his 30s that included some relief heroics for the Orioles in the 1966 World Series and a stint on the 1972 White Sox.

“They all should have been great,” said Altman. “Definitely so, especially with Hobbie, who had a good sinking fastball. Anderson threw hard and Drott had a good curveball.”

Anderson still recalls how he hurt his shoulder. He had been a starter much of the 1961 season, and beat Koufax 4-2 in Los Angeles on Aug. 4, thanks to two homers by Altman, a rarity for a lefty hitter off the incomparable Dodgers’ southpaw. Then, filling in



Glen Hobbie (left), with whom Bob Anderson re-connected a few years back, formed a promising-yet-unfulfilled Cubs pitching quarter with Anderson, Dick Drott (center) and Moe Drabowsky (right).

as the Cubs' closer, he faced Roberto Clemente as the last hitter at Forbes Field on Aug. 28. He thought he had The Great One struck out on a pitch, yet it was called a ball. On the next pitch, Clemente grounded out, but Anderson felt a "tug" in his right shoulder. The undiagnosed condition got worse and his record sagged over the next year-plus. At age 28 after the 1963 season, he was out of baseball.

Rotator-cuff injury diagnosed 3 decades later

About three decades after the original injury, Anderson went to see a doctor after injuring his left shoulder playing golf. He mentioned the old pitching injury. The doctor pushed on Anderson's right shoulder, driving him to the floor. The diagnosis: he had torn his rotator cuff back in '61. Anderson rues how the Cubs' College of Coaches literally would work some of their pitchers, like himself, until their arms fell off. He had several instances, including the time he was hurt, where he would throw two-plus or three innings in a game several days in a row. Anderson worked three straight days over a four-game series going into his fateful encounter with Clemente.

In addition to injuries, Anderson had to mentally survive the ignominy of losing. His final year with the Cubs in '62 featured the team record for losses – 103 – that still stands.

"We were all disappointed, obviously," Anderson said. "You couldn't wait to get it done and go to school. It was the end of a bad year. You wondered what was going to happen next year. Not a good year all around due to my arm trouble.

"You thought, were you going to be there, or be traded? That bad a year, you're anxious for it to end. You don't really talk about it, but you knew everyone was thinking the same thing by their actions. Everyone was disappointed in the management. There was some of the guys they liked, some of them they couldn't stand playing for (an apparent reference to '62 head coach Charlie Metro, a true martinet of a leader)."

Anderson went on with his life. He moved from Chicago to Kansas City in 1966, then to Tulsa in 1973. He had a long career with Inland Steel. More recently, he divides time between morning golf and part-time work in the plastics industry.

Anderson is the last one still alive of his grouping with Drott, Drabowsky and Hobbie. Drott died young due to cancer at 49 in 1985 after a career as a Chicago Park District baseball instructor. Drabowsky served as Cubs pitching coach under manager Tom Trebelhorn in 1994. He died at 70 in 2006.

Hobbie was still going strong living not far from St. Louis in downstate Illinois. Anderson, who had not talked with him since 1962, re-connected with Hobbie, a year younger than him, a few years back.

"He and I were very much alike – the way we threw, our determination, our morality," Anderson said of Hobbie. "We started communicating. We stopped to see him in the St. Louis area. We maintained contact every two weeks to let the other one know each was still surviving.

“Close to Christmas in 2012, I didn’t hear from him. He called me a month and a half later to say he had part of a lung removed from cancer. The cancer came back in the summer. By August he was dead. It hit me hard.

“Glen got me in touch with (former outfielder) Bob Will. He had cancer, too, and passed away two weeks after I talked to him. You’re almost afraid to contact people at this point of time because something’s going to happen.”

Like World War II veterans, Anderson’s cohort of Cubs is being whittled down quickly due to age. Calling them home while there’s still time sounds like a priority for a front office that has done some good things this year to honor Cubs history – but can do a lot more. Such actions would result in some great storytelling, such as how two baseballs might really come out as three.



Bob and Sherry Anderson today. Hammond, Ind. native Anderson has lived in Tulsa since 1973 (Photo courtesy of Bob Anderson).