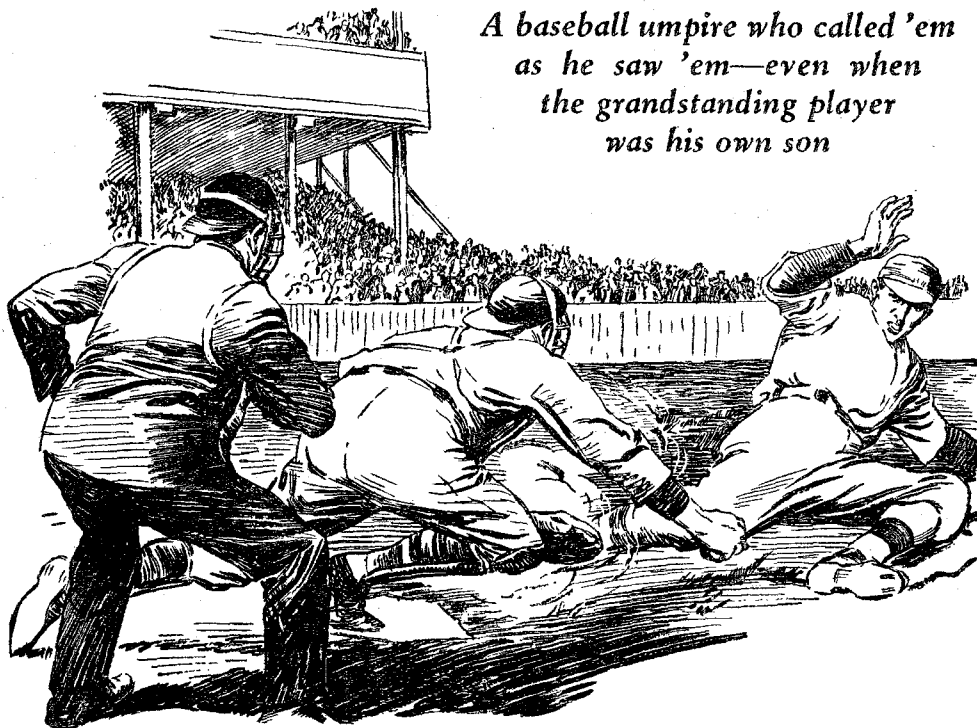


The Grandstander

By VIC WHITMAN

*A baseball umpire who called 'em
as he saw 'em—even when
the grandstanding player
was his own son*



"Out!" bellowed the umpire

WITH the crack of the bat against the ball, Terry Noonan left second base and started for third. Instinctively, John Noonan, who was working the game alone, knew that the boy was going to try to make the plate; knew it because he knew his own son so well. He wanted to shout to Terry to play safe and hold up at third; that Decato was in the stands, watching. But he didn't. He couldn't. Instead, he crouched to one side of the plate, waiting to call the play.

Going a mile a minute, Terry shot over third and headed for home. That was like him—always doing the sensational, playing to the grandstand.

Straining now with the flying runner, Noonan glued his eyes to the ball which the Bears' left fielder had taken on the hop and whipped in. He waited. He couldn't call encouragement, he couldn't leap and wave his arms wildly as half the players on the Black Pirates' bench were doing, but he could and did root mentally:

"Come on, kid, come on! Faster! Now! *Now!* HIT THE DIRT!"

Straight and true, the ball took its infield bounce and shot into the catcher's hands just as Terry Noonan left his feet in his long, fade-away slide. The catcher hurled himself upon Terry, and the elder Noonan dived into the cloud of dust, arose and jerked his

thumb over his right shoulder in a peremptory motion.

"Out!" he bellowed.

Terry got up slowly, beating the dust out of his pants, his blue eyes hard upon his father.

"That's right," he said bitterly, "ride me! G'wan an' ride me all you can!"

As always, the crowd took its cue from the player. A long-drawn "*Booooo!*" rolled from the stands while father and son faced each other, the one stolid and ruggedly honest of face, heavy-limbed and square, the other built like a racehorse, with mobile features and a grin that could be instantaneously friendly.

A moment they stood thus, eyeing each other. Then John Noonan turned away. There was nothing he could say, nothing much he wanted to say. At best there is nothing easy about an umpire's existence, even in the minor leagues, and it seemed that the Fates that govern baseball had particularly conspired against John Noonan. Since the age of ten, his ambition had been to make the major leagues as second baseman. Well on the way, at twenty-six, he had broken his arm in three places in an automobile accident, and his career as a ball player was over.

Three years later, he became an umpire; and once again hope flickered and grew that he might go to the majors as an arbitrator at least. That would have been something. But because he was reticent and taciturn, because he did not make friends easily, his chance never came—even though he was generally recognized as a four-square umpire. Others came along, developed and went up—Jimmy Regan, Art LaCase, Fred Hanrahan and the rest. They went up, he knew, because they were showmen all; because they

could dramatize every decision; because they were colorful and interesting to watch. But he—well, there was just nothing colorful about him. He could only plod along, calling 'em as he saw them.

These things John Noonan had taken calmly, hiding his disappointment. But it was a bit too much when Terry came up into the Coast League from the sandlotters, and promptly started in heckling him. He knew, of course, why the boy did it. It was because Terry was a natural-born grandstander—it was because he was something of a showman, like Regan, LaCase and Hanrahan. He and his father were as different as day is from night. Terry wanted the stands to be with him in everything; consequently he made every play accordingly.

An umpire, on the other hand was the natural enemy of a baseball fan. What more natural than that a ball player who wanted to play to the fans should ride the ump? It had been all right with John Noonan when Terry started kicking on decisions; that was all in the game. But when the boy actually began to believe that his kicks were justified; when by his very protests he had hypnotized himself into thinking that his father was giving him a raw deal, every time he called a play; when his lips curled in scorn as he looked at John Noonan—that was a bit too much.

"The kid needs to be taken down," muttered Noonan. "He needs to find out that he'll go a lot farther by shootin' off his mouth less."

THE dust cleared away, and Lefty Flynn, first baseman for the Pirates, stepped into the batter's box, grinning at Noonan.

"Get your goggles on, John," he said. "This guy works the corners."

"Yeh?" retorted Noonan. "I'll watch the corners if you'll remember you can't hit 'em with that club on your shoulder."

That sort of kidding was all right. There was no malice in it. Even now, Lefty was chuckling over Noonan's thrust.

His last time up, in the fourth inning, he had let three fast ones go by him without moving a muscle. That sort of kidding went with the game. But when a man's son . . .

"Batter up!"

Out on the mound Tommy Fitzpatrick, ace pitcher for the Bears, took his wind-up and sent the ball hurtling in, low and on the inside.

"Strrrrike one!"

Going good to-day, Tommy was. He had everything—a sweet hook, a deceptive change of pace, and a fast one with a hop on it. He'd certainly been pitching great ball against the league-leading Pirates, as witness the score in the sixth inning—tied at 2-2. That was pitching the sort of ball that causes an umpire to keep on his toes. As Lefty had said, Tommy was working the corners; and the man behind the catcher can make or break such delivery. Noonan wondered if Tommy could keep it up for the nine innings—with the game tightening more and more every minute.

In came the ball again, swooping like a white swallow, low and outside. It was too far out, but Lefty took a cut at it.

"Might's well," he grumbled in self-justification. "You'd called it on me, anyway."

"You'd better go take ping-pong lessons, Flynn!" John Noonan shot back at him.

5A—I

A good scout, Lefty. Noonan wished that Terry was more like him.

TOMMY was winding up again. Noonan set himself for the hook. Even more quickly than the batter, an umpire gets to know what the pitcher is going to throw. A nod of the pitcher's head, a twitch of the elbow, a movement of his foot—these things sometimes foretell the pitch. In Tommy's case it was a slow clenching of his gloved hand, just at the climax of his wind-up.

The ball came in, broke sharply. Lefty stepped into it and smacked it out to short. Coming in fast, Danny Logan of the Bears scooped it up and whipped it underhand to first. A smart player, Danny. On his toes every minute. Almost as smart as Terry, and lacking only in Terry's showmanship.

Automatically, as Noonan trailed down to first, following the play, his arm went up and back.

Lefty turned aside and picked his mitt out of the coacher's box. "You look tired, John," he commented. "Everything okay?"

"Sure, fine," said Noonan.

"Decato's up in the stands."

"Yeh, I know."

"Lookin' over Terry, is he?"

"Maybe. I dunno."

The teams were changing sides. Noonan's eyes went to Terry, trotting out to his position at short. He wondered if Decato was watching the boy, too. Somewhere in the packed stands the scout was sitting. Noonan knew him as he knew most of the big league scouts. Twenty years of umpiring had given him acquaintance with them; and many times they had come to him casually, asking his opinion of this player or that. Decato had done it himself, before now. To-day, when

Noonan met him just outside the park, he had said nothing about ball players. That meant, confirming rumors that Noonan had heard, that he was down to look over a shortstop—Terry. Boston needed a shortstop badly, to plug the only hole in its infield. Noonan knew that as well as he knew that Decato would never ask a father about his son's playing ability.

"It *would* be my day to work," reflected John Noonan, "with Decato watchin' an' with every play on the kid close."

But that was the way it had been all afternoon—close. Once or twice, by stretching his rugged honesty a bit, Noonan might have given Terry the decision. But he hadn't done it.

The first batter for the Bears stepped to the plate. Jed Thompson, slow-ball artist for the Pirates, wound up. He tossed in a floater, and the batter hit it, driving a sizzling grass-cutter to Terry's right. Like a flash the boy was over, dug the ball out of the dirt, and threw to first. Bullet-like, the ball traveled over to Lefty Flynn, dead on a line. Again the play was close, but the hawk eye of John Noonan had seen the runner's foot touch the bag simultaneously with the smack of the ball in Lefty's mitt, and his hands went down, spread wide.

Lefty stepped from the bag, tossing the ball up and down. "What's the matter, John?" he asked. "Don't you want to give the kid any kind of a break?"

"Play your bag," growled Noonan. "I'll call 'em as I see 'em."

IT was one of those games that have the spectators constantly on their feet, roaring. The man on first stole second, with Terry Noonan covering the bag. Safe!

Terry glared; walked away shaking his head.

The next batter walked. Two on for the Bears, and none away. It looked like a break in the ball game. Then Jendron came up for the Bears. Thompson studied him a moment, and bore down. Two strikes, and Jendron socked one at Terry. Terry scooped it, flashed it to Harrington at second. All in one motion, Harrington took it, kicked the bag and lined it to Flynn.

Both Noonan's arms went back over his shoulders. He wanted to grin broadly. It was keen, heads-up baseball—as fast a double play as he'd seen that season. His eyes twinkled as he looked at his son. It was the nearest thing to a smile that an umpire could permit himself.

"That's the way to go, kid," he applauded inwardly. "Now you're playin' ball!"

But there was no answering twinkle in Terry's eyes, nor did his young face relax its stony hardness as he met his father's glance.

"It's a wonder you didn't muff that one, too," he said.

Noonan cringed a little from that. The boy, he reflected, took after his mother more than he did his father. She had been gifted, versatile, brilliant. In her way, she had that same flair for playing to the grandstand. Terry was like her—impulsive, voluble. He was the spring that bubbles over constantly, while his father was the still, slow-moving stream with depth and body. Never had the two thoroughly understood each other; no more had John Noonan understood his wife. Perhaps, he mused, it was his own fault that he and Terry hadn't been closer; perhaps he should have invited the boy's confidences more than he had. Yet how could he? While Terry had been

growing up, his father had been away most of the time, covering the circuit.

More than anything he had ever wanted in his life, Noonan wanted Terry to make good in this game, chiefly to impress Decato with the fact that the boy could hold his own in faster company. Boston would be a good town to break into. Boston was a red-hot baseball town and a good one so far as treatment of its players was concerned. Boston was slowly but surely making its comeback in the world of baseball; it badly needed a shortstop.

Meditatively, John Noonan watched Thompson throw in another slow curve; saw the batter pop up a fly ball to Lefty Flynn, who faded back and took it easily. Yeh, he certainly hoped the kid could land with Boston.

"Maybe he'll bust one," he thought hopefully. "That'll help with Decato."

But the kid didn't come up, that inning. Helpless before the pitching of Tommy Fitzpatrick the first three Pirate batters went out, two by the strikeout route and the third on a pop-up to third. Pitching great ball, Tommy was — marvelous ball. But maybe he'd break.

THE eighth inning, with the Bears at bat! Thompson's fast one hit the first batter on the thigh. Rubbing his hip, pretending that he was half killed, as ball players will, the man limped down to first. Then, on the next pitched ball he stole second.

Danny Logan came to the plate. A sweet hitter, Danny, and likely to break up a ball game at any time. Decato was probably watching Danny. He would like that confident step into the pitch; that powerful swing. He would compare it with Terry's hit-getting chop.

The ball came sailing in. It was close, but Danny liked 'em close. He swung with the ball, pulling it far around to right field. With the smack of wood against horsehide, Noonan was crouched in line with the right field flag. This, too, would be close. Everything about this damned game was close!

For a moment he thought it was going to strike foul. Then he saw it strike fair, barely by an inch or two. It was so close that it might have been called either way. But the head of John Noonan, who called 'em as he saw them, came up. "Fair ball!" he yelled.

Amid a rising storm of protest from the bleachers, the man on second raced around third and came home standing up. Danny, going like a racehorse, went over second and headed for third. He had to dig to make it, but make it he did. His beautiful hook slide carried him away from third-baseman Potts and into the bag, as Potts took the relayed ball and made a wild, diving stab at the runner. Another cloud of dust, with John Noonan diving into it to be on top of the play.

"Safe!" he roared, both hands spread wide, palms downward.

The storm of protest became a hurricane as the home fans gave tongue to their rage.

"What the hell ails that guy's eyes!" — "Oh, you robber! You dirty crook!" — "Sock him, Potts! Kill him!" — "BOOOOOOO!"

And Terry—Terry was encouraging it. He was throwing his glove upon the ground as if further effort were futile. Placing his arms akimbo, jutting out from his hips, he glared at his father. That was the thing that hurt—to have Terry grandstand to the fans at the expense of his father.

"The man is safe!" repeated John Noonan steadily. "Play ball!"

THE ninth inning; the score 3-2 in favor of the Bears; and the Pirates at bat. This would be the inning with the tensity merely the fuse that awaited the spark. Thompson up—a slow roller to second. One away! Potts up—a clean, nifty single between first and second. Hard running took Potts to second base, against all mathematical probability.

Gleason, hard-hitting left-fielder up. A high fly to center that the fielder took almost without moving out of his tracks. Two away, with the stands beginning to move toward the exits. Fernald up—a walk! Maybe Tommy Fitzpatrick was cracking under the strain; maybe he was going to break. Jennings up—another walk! The bases filled, and jubilation entering the soul of John Noonan; jubilation that he fought to repress as unfair!

Terry Noonan on call—a determined, grim-jawed Terry, hurrying to the plate swinging three bats! Just before he reached the box he stopped, tossed two of the bats to the boy, knocked the dirt out of his spikes and stepped to the plate. Two away, the bases loaded, and Terry Noonan up! Noonan had known it would be like that.

In the stands the crowd had now turned from the exits and was roaring, howling, for a hit. Over and over the noise rolled from them in a great chant: "Get that hit! Get that hit! Get that hit!"

Fitzpatrick's infield was talking with him now, the whole Bears' infield pleading with him to steady down, while over in the bullpen Ed Thorpe was hastily warming up.

Fitzpatrick nodded, grinning, and

the infield retired. A cool guy, Tommy. Maybe he'd stave off the break after all.

A windup, and a ball that whizzed over the inside corner! Terry cut at it viciously with that chop of his, missed.

"Strrrrrrike one!"

That was not what Noonan wanted to say. He wanted to say: "Take your time, kid, take your time! He's in a tougher spot than you are.—Let him come to you!"

A hook that broke sharply too far out!

"Ball one!"

A rising roar from the stands. Another fast one over the inside corner that Terry let go past.

"Strrrrrrike two!"—"And hit 'em when they're in there, kid!" he thought.

"Aw, for cripes sake watch 'em!" snarled Terry.

Two hooks in a row, both wide.

"Ball thureee!"—And to himself, "That's the old eye, kid! That's the old eye!"

The stands were in pandemonium. Three and two, and the bases loaded! A walk would tie up the game; a hit would win it. Hands tightly clenched, John Noonan crouched behind the plate. Once he ran his tongue over lips that were dry. God, he'd be glad when this was over!

He realized that he was shaking like a leaf. He fought for control of himself, gluing his eyes to the ball in Tommy's hands.

Then he saw the pitcher's gloved hand shutting and opening in a slow, clenching motion. A hook! It would be a hook! "Get set, kid, for a hook! Get set, get set!" But the kid didn't know, and John Noonan couldn't tell him.

That wind-up—it seemed minutes

long! Wasn't Tommy ever going to throw the damned ball? Wasn't he ever—?

THE ball came in waist high, headed for the exact middle of the plate. Terry stepped into it, started to swing. Then he saw it break, and held his bat a foot from his shoulder. It broke sharply, and the keen eye of Umpire Noonan saw it cut the outside corner just as Terry, grinning joyously, threw down his bat and started for first.

In that split-second, temptation came to John Noonan. It would be easy to call that a ball. Nobody could kick on the decision. The ball had barely cut the corner. Perhaps, too, he had seen it wrong. After all, a guy can't always call 'em right; he's got to miss one once in awhile. Perhaps it really had been outside. Perhaps . . .

But one does not break the habit of years so easily, and for years, John Noonan had been calling 'em as he saw them.

His shoulders straightened, and his thumb jerked toward the Pirates' bench. "Batter's out!" he roared.

Terry whirled, his face white and unbelieving. "WHAT!"

"Batter's out!" repeated Noonan, steadily eyeing his son.

A thunderous, booing roar from the stands!

Terry approached his father, his face set in the lines of a snarl. "That's too much!" he screamed. "Damn it, that's too much!"

John Noonan set himself. The kid was wild, berserk. This would be the showdown. It might even come to blows, he realized with a sick feeling.

But as he set himself, he saw out of the corner of his eye a pop bottle come spinning through the air. It had been

aimed at him, but Terry was walking right in line of it.

John Noonan acted wholly upon impulse. He lunged forward, his hands striking Terry on the chest, tumbling the boy head over heels out of the way. The bottle descended squarely upon Noonan's unprotected head, and ball players of both teams rushed to the umpire's aid as he fell, smiling and crumpled to the ground. . . .

HE opened his eyes in the hospital, the odor of ether and clean linen in his nostrils. A white-clad nurse bent over him as he tried to struggle to one elbow.

"Everything's all right, Mr. Noonan," she soothed. "Now, just lie quietly."

"It was a strike!" fumed Noonan still struggling. "So help me, it cut the corner!"

"Of course it was. Now quiet—quiet."

Under her voice he relaxed. Presently his head cleared and he saw Terry sitting by the bedside, still in uniform, his face white and worried.

"It was over the corner, kid," said Noonan.

Terry swallowed hard. "Sure, I—I know," he said. "I knew it would be, the minute it started to break. I just couldn't get my bat off my shoulder, that's all."

STRENGTH came back to John Noonan quickly. Another man came into the room, upon a nod from the nurse. Noonan blinked. It was Big Jim Caldwell, president of the National League.

Big Jim smiled down. He masked his sympathy in a bit of kidding. That was the way of ball players; and it was Big Jim's way. "Sort of used your

head on that last play, didn't you, John?" he said.

John Noonan smiled wanly.

"Sort of," he replied.

Big Jim nodded. "It's a good thing you're tough, or they'd have had to do more than take five stitches," he said. Becoming serious he continued, "John, I saw that last strike. I was sitting right behind the plate to-day. You could easily have let the boy go down to first on it, but you didn't.—I saw other plays, too—close ones."

A moment he paused, looking into the square, wondering face of Noonan.

"There's going to be room in the National League for another umpire next season, John," he went on at last. "We won't go into details now, but when you get stronger there's a contract waiting for you."

"Gee, that's swell!" said Terry Noonan. His young, tanned face broke into a smile.

"But you, kid," said Noonan. "Did you—did Decato—?"

Still smiling, Terry shook his head.

"He took Danny Logan," he said.

"He said I needed another year of seasonin'. He talked to me plenty straight, too; told me as soon as I got over playin' to the grandstand all the time I'd be a better ball player.—Oh, he told me right where I got off, all right. But I had it comin' to me. And say, it didn't do me a bit o' harm, neither."

Noonan's voice was husky. "No, that's right, kid," he said. "You did have it comin' to you.—But just the same, I kind of wish you'd gone up."

"I got plenty o' time," said Terry, cheerfully. "I'll make it all right." Almost shyly he put his hand on his father's, only to draw it quickly away again. "But I guess the best play now is for you to go up first an' show me the way!"

John Noonan turned his head quickly away. For years he'd been calling 'em as he saw them, but for some reason at the moment he couldn't see.

THE END

Crazy Courage

WHEN the Foreign Legion of France was fighting Druse tribes in Syria they ran up against a new kind of courage. At Moussifrey three thousand Druse horsemen charged a barbed-wire fortification. Hundreds died. Horses went down. Still they came, till the entanglement was full of dead bodies. Over this bridge of corpses charged the fanatic tribesmen, naked, holding their bullets in rags grasped in their teeth. Machine guns mowed them down as they cleared the barbs.

Twenty charged a tank, grasping the caterpillar tread bare-handed to stop it. Even when ten had been shot and five crushed by the tank, the remaining five kept on. Again twenty charged a machine gun nest . . . One reached the gunner and sliced his hand with a knife before he went down. Three hundred hid till they were in the midst of 12,000 advancing Frenchmen, then staged a wild attack. A cannon was quickly swung about and fired directly at them.

Such willingness to die has been explained by the Druse belief that he will return to earth in a splendid new body after fifteen years in paradise, a sort of harem.

J. W. Holden.