

# One-Time Villain Humbled By Team's Respect

By Greg Waxberg

For longtime softball umpire Bill Dithrich, sportsmanship is defined with real-life examples. His newest definition stems from a state quarterfinal game last June in Wexford, Pa.

In the ninth inning, with first base open, Valley High School opted to intentionally walk Wilmington's best hitter to load the bases. But the catcher stepped outside the catcher's box, resulting in Dithrich correctly



Umpire Bill Dithrich (left) is presented a photograph of his illegal pitch call by fellow umpire and former coach Eric Felack at the Valley High School softball celebration June 28.

calling an illegal pitch (a catcher must have both feet within the catcher's box before a pitch is thrown). The illegal pitch advanced the runners, scoring the winning run for Wilmington.

Eric Felack, a fellow Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Association (PIAA) softball umpire and former coach in the Valley softball system, invited Dithrich a few weeks later to Valley's year-end banquet to honor his integrity and remind the players, coaches and parents about sportsmanship, playing by the rules and respecting sports officials. Felack said that life's lessons can be learned in victories or defeats.

"I was inspired by the situation between Jim Joyce and Detroit Tiger

pitcher Armando Galarraga," Felack says. "Joyce got the call wrong, but Galarraga forgave him, and the Tiger fans gave Joyce a standing ovation the next day for admitting his mistake. If the Detroit fans can treat a human being that way when he was wrong, how can Valley not treat Bill Dithrich the same way when he was right?"

Dithrich, who has umpired 34 years in ASA and 22 years in the PIAA, was surprised and honored by the invitation. "We could dispense with the uniforms and realize that we're all people. I was (at the game) to do a job," he says.

Along with talking about sportsmanship, Dithrich used the opportunity to explain his three options on the call: ignore the violation, issue a warning or enforce the rule. The first option was unethical because umpires are supposed to enforce the rules equally for both teams. The second option was the equivalent of coaching, which he further explained for *Referee*.

"There are times when rules permit team warnings, but in the strict sense of officiating I'm there to provide a level playing field for both teams. If you see a violation and don't call it, especially in a state playoff game, you're tipping the scales," Dithrich says.

Valley pitcher Caitlin Nealer realized, in retrospect, that no one should have criticized Dithrich. "He was doing his job and what he thought was fair to both teams. He knew what was at stake and he had no choice. We accepted the fact that he was in a tough spot," she says.

Felack says, "I made sure the team knew that one call or play does not determine the outcome of a game. After (Dithrich's) speech, the Valley faithful totally respected him."

*Greg Waxberg is a writer and magazine editor for The Pingry School, Martinsville, N.J., and a freelance writer. □*

## Minor League Umpires Help Strike Out Cancer



The Association of Minor League Umpires (AMLU)/Office and Professional Employees International Union (OPEIU) Guild 322 donated \$5,000 to Ed Randall's Bat for the Cure on Sept. 21 in New York. During the weekend of June 19-20, more than 200 minor league umpires opened their personal checkbooks and donated one cent for every pitch thrown during their games. OPEIU also pledged to match the umpires' donations.

Pictured above (from left) are AMLU/OPEIU Guild 322 member Brian Sinclair, AMLU President Shaun Francis, World Umpires Association (WUA) member Mike Everitt, Bat for the Cure Founder Ed Randall, WUA members Tim McClelland and Adrian Johnson, and OPEIU President Michael Goodwin.

SOURCE: OFFICE AND PROFESSIONAL EMPLOYEES INTERNATIONAL UNION

## NFL Officials Donate to Lawing Scholarship Fund

NFL officials recently donated \$5,000 to a scholarship fund established in memory of back judge Bob Lawing, who died on May 6 after a battle with cancer. Lawing was an NFL official from 1997-2009.

"Bob was the model of the character and integrity that we strive to represent as officials in the National Football League," said Jeff Triplette, vice president of the National Football League Referees Association (NFLRA).

The "Make the Effort Scholarship" fund is designated for young people who have been disadvantaged in life yet are willing to make the effort to get ahead, according to the NFLRA.

SOURCE: NATIONAL FOOTBALL LEAGUE REFEREES ASSOCIATION

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