Umpire on Brawl: 'Worst I've Ever Seen'

By JACK BOGACZYK
Sports Writer

BLACKSBURG, Va. — The force play at second base is often hailed as baseball's contribution to the art of ballet.

But when it leads to a bench-clearing brawl, Virginia Tech and West Virginia—the holed rivals over the years—became overheated Thursday at Tech Park as the Hokies won a doubleheader and stretched their winning streak to 24 games. But on this windy afternoon, winning wasn't everything.

'If I'd say it was probably the worst I've ever seen,' said umpire Yogi Roberts after the nightcap ended following a bench-emptying melee in the first inning with Tech in front, 5-0.

'I've been working as an umpire with baseball and softball for 10 years,' said Roberts, the Salem resident who was working behind home plate when the fists started flying. 'This is the first time I've ever been associated with. And I hope it's the last.'

For the two teams involved, it wasn't the first. Tech and Maryland went into a similar situation during their March 12 game at College Park, won 6-3 by the Terps. And in a Morgantown, W. Va., sports writer said today that the Mountaineers became embroiled in a bat-swinging incident with one of its state foes in a contest last year.

Thursday, WVU shortstop Jerry Mahoney, one of the principals in the fracas, returned home to Morgantown after a trip to a local hospital with a fractured jaw. Mountaineer's rightfielder Frank Pryor emerged from the battle near second base with a bloody mouth.

Umpire Julian Pulcher of Roanoke ejected Golbiers' designated hitter Tony Metts and first baseman Harold Wil- liams for their extra-curricular activities. But as far as WVU Coach Dale Ramberg was concerned, the injuries and ejections made the afternoon long enough.

Tech won the opener, 3-1, as righthander Jim Puglisi lifted his record to 6-2, and received a 9-0 forfeit win in the second game when the Mountaineers refused to return to the field following the fracas in the bottom of the first inning.

The fight actually got its initial spark in the second inning. Mahoney, covering second on a force play, was taken out by Metts on an aggressive— but certainly clean—slide.

"That was the whole thing," said Metts after the short doubleheader. "It was going into the base aggressively. That's the way I play. I don't play in any other way."

"But they (the Mountaineers) wanted to comment about it. They were making remarks about throwing at our hitters and that kind of stuff. They had the chance when I came up if they wanted to do something about it.

"After Tech's opening game win—fueled by a two-run, four-hit sixth inning—rain started to fall and it looked like the second game was in jeopardy. Unfortunately—considering the events to follow—the rain stopped and Tech began to see off on WVU rightfielder Doug Ogden.

With none out, three runs in and two men on in the first, Metts stepped to the plate and smacked an Ogden pitch to right-center. The Tech sophomore fell en route to first, but arose and turned for second. He slid at second, base umpire Pulcher calling Metts out as Mahoney made the tag.

"I slid in as the guy tagged me," said Metts. "I thought I was safe and said something about it to the ump. He (Pulcher) said, 'No, you're out.' Then this guy (Mahoney) says, 'Well, don'tcry about it.'"

"I knew then I wasn't gonna go back to the dugout. Yes, I shoved him and that got it going. But I didn't hit him. Just as I showed him, somebody came up behind me and once booted him."

"I'm sorry it happened," said Metts, a .511, 185-pounder. "I wasn't looking for ev- erything to run on the field. I could have taken care of myself. I just don't take a lot of bull from anyone."

"And I'm not gonna stop being aggressive. When you stop being aggressive, you start losing.

With the benches emptied, Roberts, Pulcher and the two coaches were powerless to stop the fracas. The field was cleared, two WVU players told Roberts that he had lost control of the game. But the Salem arbiter and Pulcher were both positioning themselves for the next pitch after Metts' hit drove in two runs and then never count.

"I saw a guy (Mahoney) make the tag," said Mountaineer Coach Dale Ramburg of the brawl. "The umpire made the call. They saw our guy come after our guy that made the tag."

"Why did the Mountaineers decide against finishing the game?"

"The reason is twofold," said Ramburg. "One is that the wag team return home with a 10-17 record. I didn't think we had a re- placement for our shortstop. And...that's enough for right now."

"I don't know what was said out there or if anything was said. I have no idea what happened. If the guy runs off the field after he's tagged out, nothing happens. But why attack the shortstop? He didn't tag him hard or in the face or anything.

"Actually, WVU did have a spare infield. Dick Angeline played second base for the Mountaineers in the opener, while John Shipley occupied his position in the night- cap. A Morgantown, W. Va., newspaper re- porter said Angeline— who was on the bench in the nightcap—played shortstop a year ago.

"It's a lousy way to end a game," said Tech Coach Bob Humphreys. "I was stand- ing out there (in the third base coaching box and looking in the dugout. Next thing, I see these two guys out there and then hear shouting. Then everyone's on the field."

"There's no sense in that kind of thing going on. What really hurts is this kind of thing gives you bad reputation. And bad reputation is easy to get, but hard to get rid of.

The Gophers are now 27-1 in the bid to gain an NCAA Tournament berth, a re-

placement which makes reputation even more important. Ironically, the first game that was Humphreys' 100th as the Tech coach. He would probably rather forget No. 10.

"The stuff started in the first game and went from there," added Humphreys. "This isn't the first time this sort of thing has happened in baseball. We certainly weren't looking for a fight. I've told our guys to go into this game it's competitive, but never start anything either. I'm not running a boxing tournament."