

44 Years Behind the Plate

Putnam County Sentinel – June 24, 1981

Time did not really catch up with Charlie Bennett, who with the completion of the high school state baseball championships two weeks ago called his last game after 44 years of umpiring baseball, nearly all of it in Northwest Ohio.

Bennett was one of the best liked and respected baseball umpires in the state and decided this year to be his last behind the plate. "My family requested I quit," he said. "I have a son and daughter and my wife wanted me around home more."

"A lot of umpires get forced out because their legs start to give out and what not, but I have been pretty lucky. I never had any serious injury or anything."

It all started in 1938, when Bennett was living in Pittsburgh that he got the bug to call balls and strikes from a friend, Jim McPherson. Even when Bennett was in the Army he umpired and Putnam County got lucky when he moved back to his home town of Leipsic in 1946 to stay for good.

There was not much money involved in officiating but the love of baseball kept Bennett one of the best. And he umpired when there were not as many umpires around as today.

"We usually picked someone up in the stands to do the bases," he said. "That meant for doubleheaders you would have to call both games behind the plate. That would be tough to do for me now."

Bennett retired in high fashion after calling the Class AA and AAA baseball finals. It was the fifth time in the last eight years and twelfth time in all that Charlie had been selected on the umpiring staff for the state tournament.

There is still no hiding the fact Bennett already misses donning his mask and other protective gear. "I love the game of baseball," stated Bennett, "and the association with the ball players and other umpires."

Though the state knows well of Bennett's long years of success, he still decided to let Putnam County

gets his full services the last five years of his career, not leaving the area, except for the state tournament.

The near half-century of work also let the Leipsic native see a vast amount of baseball talent over that span, especially the last 14 years when the state took over the umpire association.

"When the state took over, the quality of umpires and baseball players improved immensely. The good players have always been around, but now there are much better coaches and pitching machines what have you."

Bennett stated umpires have improved with umpire schools that the "rookie" umpires must attend. "When I started there wasn't a school to go to. You just went out there and started to call balls and strikes. It was learning the hard way."

No one knows how many games Bennett has called, but he figures around 3,000 since he began when most of Putnam County's current population was not even born yet. And many of those games were when the towns in the area had men's teams.

"Glandorf, Kalida, Deshler...they all had teams," the quiet, good natured Bennett stated. "Now, a lot of people are playing softball."

True modesty keeps Bennett from telling of awards received during his career, and not all in baseball. As the Secretary-Treasurer of the Putnam County Bowling Associations he was, in 1977, named to its Hall of Fame. He received from the county Little League Association in 1974 an appreciation plaque for his years of service. He also received the game ball from both state finals games signed by the umpiring crews and the state high school commissioner.

So, what are the plans of a man who had busy summers working America's pastime? "We're going to take a vacation." And it need not be added that Bennett also states, "I am also going to watch a few ball games."