



"Hey, you like beer?"

By Lee Godden

When I first telephoned NCAA basketball referee and major league baseball scout Larry "Moose" Stubing at his Villa Park, Calif., home to arrange the time and place for an interview, he wasted no time before offering a suggestion. "Hey, you like beer?" he asked in a thick Bronx accent.

"Um, sure," I responded cautiously.

"Good. Me too. There's a bar down the street from my house. We'll meet there. Toss back a few cold ones and we'll talk."

Even today, at age 60, Moose looks more like a football linebacker than a basketball ref. Standing 6'4" with a barrel chest, shiny bald head and piercing blue eyes, Moose could rule by intimidation if he wanted to. Instead, he utilizes his tough Bronx accent and his wry humor as key elements in his game management style. Amazingly, Moose has called a mere 11 technical fouls in his 30-year career.

Like any good ref, Moose has a knack for clear, concise communication. Bobby Dibler, Moose's basketball assignor for the Western Athletic Conference (WAC), said, "Moose has excellent communication skills. If he makes a bad call, he says, 'I missed it.' It's as simple as that. That kind of attitude creates a real trust with the players and coaches."

A referee who's confident enough to crack jokes with players and coaches during games, Moose often employs off-the-cuff humor to handle on-the-court situations. "In this one game," said Moose, "the two teams went the first eight minutes without a

score. Zero to zero! Everyone was getting frustrated — the crowd, the coaches, the players. You could see it. I called timeout and said, 'Gimme dat ball! Something must be wrong with it.' I got a new ball on the court, and you know what happened? It relaxed everyone; it made 'em laugh and the game got back on track again."

Moose sums up his philosophy this way. "If my crew's not having fun out there, then they're not doing a good job."

Several years ago Phil Causus, sports editor for the *Albuquerque Tribune*, followed Moose for several days, watching him referee in university arenas from Denver to San Diego. Recently Causus wrote, "Moose is the WAC. He has an uncommon style of refereeing and it's certainly not the current modular style. The home team never intimidates Moose. He's one of the few referees who can survive, intact, the noise and the coaches of The Pit at the University of New Mexico."

Moose explains his reputation matter-of-factly. "You've got to know when to smile and when to frown. If

Moose Stubing with bar manager Lynda Woodstra at his favorite hangout, National Sports Grill in Anaheim, right across the street from Edison International Field, where the Angels play.

BOB MESSINA

you don't smile at the right times, players will think that you've got it in for them, that you don't like them. And that can cause unnecessary problems.

"Next, there's knowing how to say the right thing to the coaches. If you can't say the right thing, you're better off saying nothing. If you're working a game with me, assuming you're a junior official, I don't want you saying anything, *anything*, to the coaches. You screw up and I'll hear from the coaches. 'Moose! Moose!' they'll say. 'What's up with that kid?' 'Don't worry about it, I'll tell them. I'll take care of it.'"

Moose says that young referees will make mistakes during a game. "The toughest thing for a less-experienced referee to learn is how to take a blown call and to immediately bring the focus back to the game in progress, back to the what the rest of the crew is doing. But what happens is they keep reliving their mistake, repeating to themselves, 'Don't miss any more three-second violations.' If I see that happening I'll rotate positions with them — outside of the normal rotation — so that they have a chance to collect themselves."

Cooling down hot players is another of Moose's game-management abilities. "I see two opponents about to get out of control. I call a timeout and say to the teams, 'Both of youse [sic], go to your bench.' I'll do whatever it takes. I've called TV timeouts when there was no TV timeout scheduled. Then I'll say to one of the coaches, 'If you don't do something about number 35, I will. I suggest you substitute him right now.' Then I'll walk over and tell the other coach the same thing about his player. Simple as that; problem solved."

Moose enjoys playing the role of mentor to younger referees. "Look," he said, "between you and me, I'm not in this for the money. And there's only a few of us left like that. I've cut back a lot. I'm down to 40 games a year now. I do it now because I love to go to the different towns, I love to see the people and I love to work with the kids (younger referees).

"When I walk on that floor, the coaches know me, the players know me and they all know how that game is going to be called. They can have confidence in me. Refereeing is not physical, it's mental."

When the college basketball season ends, the professional baseball season is just beginning. That timing works perfectly for Moose because he also happens to be the top talent scout for the Anaheim Angels. Moose says that's one of the reasons you haven't often seen him at the NCAA tournament. In the



"Refereeing is not physical," says Moose, "it's mental."

'70s, he says, he was able to work the first round a few times but these days the tournament overlaps completely with Moose's spring training duties. After the baseball season, basketball starts again. Suffice it to say Moose doesn't get a lot of time off work.

Baseball dominated Moose's younger years. He swung the bat for a half-dozen different professional baseball clubs, all of them in the minors except for a late-career cup of coffee with the then-California Angels. When his playing days ended, Moose began coaching for the Angels. He even spent a brief time as the team's manager.

When asked if he feels a certain kinship with baseball umpires because of his basketball refereeing, Moose deadpans, "Kinship with an ump? No way! Next question."

Born and raised in The Bronx, New York, Moose's size seemed perfect for football, but his heart belonged to the New York Giants baseball team. A talented left-handed first baseman, Moose helped his alma mater, Evander Childs High School, reach the All-City finals in 1955. Pittsburgh scout Lou Zaklan paid attention to the big blond kid and signed Moose to the Pirates organization immediately

following high school graduation. Legend has it that the "Moose" nickname came about after a baseball announcer exclaimed, "Look at that big moose mow down that poor catcher!" describing young Larry Stubing sliding into home plate.

In 1965, after several years of up-and-down minor league play and with his young wife, Cookie, expecting their first child, Moose decided to supplement his meager minor league baseball player's income by refereeing high school basketball games.

A year later, just when Moose was starting to believe he'd never get to

play in the majors, he received a call from the Angels. They wanted him as a big league player and coach. Moose, then 29, didn't hesitate. Angels coach Rocky Bridges told Moose the assignment was to assist the team in developing young talent while also stepping in as an occasional pinch-hitter.

Things didn't go well for Moose as a major leaguer.



ANAHEIM ANGELS



LARRY STUBING P.81.11 CALIFORNIA ANGELS

As a manager for the then-California Angels, Moose went 0-8; as a player, he batted a perfect .000.

ANAHEIM ANGELS

Working for Angels manager Bill Rigney, Moose went 0 for 5 as a pinch-hitter in his first season.

Luckily, the Angels saw something else in Moose — valuable coaching talent. At the end of his first, luckless season with the Angels, he was sent to El Paso, Texas, to coach the Angels farm team.

There, Moose became friends with Don Haskins, head basketball coach at the University of Texas-El Paso. With the coach's encouragement, Moose improved his basketball officiating skills and, armed with a letter of recommendation from Haskins, applied to the WAC in 1971. Moose was soon refereeing 60 games a year in the WAC, while continuing to work for the Angels as a coach.

In 1988, after the firing of Angels manager Cookie Rojas, Moose was named interim manager. It was a mercifully short interim. After Moose's Angels went 0-8, he hung up his manager's uniform forever and took a full-time scouting position with the team.

Moose laughs at his dismal batting and managing percentages with the Angels. "Hey, folks around Anaheim know me as the only Angel to bat perfect zeros!"

Dibler, the WAC's basketball assignor, has worked hundreds of basketball games as a referee alongside Moose. "Moose and I were working two different games the same evening in Salt Lake City," said Dibler, "one at Brigham Young University and the other at Utah State. Later that night I saw Moose at our hotel bar. 'How was your game?' I asked him. 'Piece of cake,' Moose said. He was sipping a beer at the time.

"The next day on the plane I read in the newspaper that Moose's game was a wild one. A fight had broken out and several players were ejected. You see," explains Dibler, "Moose works hard for those 40 minutes because he loves the game, no matter how good or bad the actual game is."

Moose has his pet peeves oncourt and the biggest is inconsistency. "Not enough younger officials are willing to pay their dues, so to speak, to get the experience it takes to work college and higher level games," he said. "But those relatively inexperienced officials are working at high levels and that, in turn, adversely affects referee consistency.

"If you can't go into noisy, distracting arenas — places like The Pit — and completely block out all distractions then you're going to have an inconsistent performance as an official. It's that simple."

Moose says he'll hang up his whistle in the next year or two but he wants to continue working in baseball until he's 70.



In a 30-year officiating career, Moose says he has called only 11 technical fouls.

Moose strongly believes in postgame reviews with his fellow referees, but not in the lockerroom. "I'll let them take a shower, cool down. Then we'll all go out to a nice, quiet bar, with no one around who was at the game. We'll have a drink, have a few laughs, then I'll let them know how they can improve. You see, I can referee a game and see a game at the same time. It took me a long time to learn how to do that. My job is to train the crew so that they can take my place when I retire."

Having raised the "R" word, Moose felt compelled to explain his retirement plans in more detail. "Yeah," he said, "I figure another year or two." When reminded that he had said that same "year or two" thing to a reporter seven years ago, Moose merely shrugged and smiled. "Keep in mind, that's retirement from basketball officiating, not from scouting for the Angels," he added. "I want to be with the Angels organization until I'm 70. That's another 10 years."

And after that? "Play lots of golf," he laughed.

An officiating career as long as Moose's is bound to produce some funny stories. One of his best involves a delayed flight into Salt Lake City, where Moose was scheduled to referee a game. "The crowd was there. The players were there, all waiting. And I was up above, circling in the plane until the weather cleared. Finally the plane started to land. I knew I was going to be late as it was, so to shave some time off I sneaked into the plane bathroom and changed into my referee uniform. It wasn't a pretty sight."

He received a standing ovation from the restless crowd when he finally entered the arena that night. "The game started 15 minutes late," Moose said, "but when I called the first foul on Utah, I heard some guy in the stands yell out, 'Now I wish that damn plane would have crashed!'"

With our beer glasses dry, I thanked Moose for the interview and asked him if he had a message for other referees. His reply was in typical Moose fashion: "Work as many games as you can and work games that will help you improve. Don't do it for the money; do it for the experience. And finally, make it fun."

(Lee Godden, a USSF State Referee, lives in Long Beach, Calif.)

