

Frank Woods – The Umpire.

Legendary baseball umpire dies, aged 59

The Advertiser – By Barry O'Brien

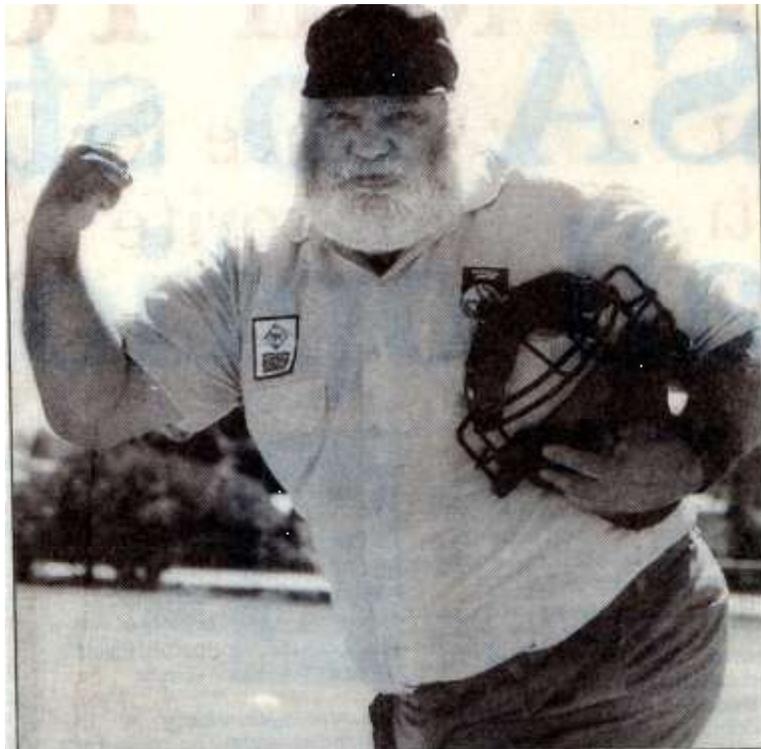
Woods cut a striking figure at home plate

Calling the tune... Frank Woods added colour and entertainment to SA Baseball

One of the most colourful and controversial characters in the South Australian baseball, umpire Frank Woods, has died, aged 59. Woods died after suffering a severe heart attack. He had been ill with asthma and respiratory problems for some time.

He had recently announced his retirement from A Grade baseball but intended to concentrate on his beloved juniors and masters games.

His umpiring career, which began in 1958, included Claxton Shield, International fixtures and under age carnivals.



Woods was known for keeping a running commentary on the game from behind the plate.

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Some of his calls included:

“That’s an easy out, baby.”

“I got a 1-1 call; baby [one strike, one ball]”.

“I got the Archbishop call, baby [two – two]”.

“I got two in the bin, baby [two batters out]”.

“That’s not a Texas Leaguer [a common term for a ball that lands over the infield, that’s an Alabama slammer, baby [over the outfield]”.

In a recent interview,

Frank said: “I call everyone ‘baby’ – it’s just a baseball expression.

“But one very irate juniors coach once challenged me and said: “You’re not calling my kids babies’. “I soon sorted him out.

The words just come out – anything I think of – and the players seem to like it.”

Frank started playing with East Torrens in 1948 and was an A Grade catcher until he was forced to retire after crushing his elbow in an industrial accident.

“I love umpiring. Wherever there’s a baseball game I’ll find it.” he had said.

“I’ve created records umpiring. Reckon I would have done more than anyone else in Australia – thousands of games all over, as well as those in the top grades.”

Although known as a gentleman, who would rather turn his back on an incident than

make a report. Frank threw many players out of games for various misdemeanors over the years.

One incident stuck.

“I was chiefting a game many years ago and noticed my third base umpire had made a couple of glaring mistakes,” he claimed.

“Halfway through I was tipped off that he was having financial difficulties and had a substantial bet on the game. I gave him his marching orders, quick smart.

“I reckon it’s the only time an umpire has been evicted from a game.”

At his funeral, Frank was described as the most colourful caller in Australia.

He probably was the only umpire who, in his heyday, drew a crowd just to watch him perform.

1966, 16th April.

W. FRANK WOODS, BASEBALL UMPIRE

AN APPRECIATION

Eulogy: 16 April 1996, By W.R. (Bill) Barker, a player

I am honored to have been asked to salute and farewell Frank Woods of Australian Baseball.

My contact with Frank has been entirely in the area of baseball. But this sport formed a major part of his life. I hope that in sharing my experiences of his involvement in this great game, I will help conjure up some of the fond memories which all here even remotely associated with the game will undoubtedly have of him.

My stint as a player and that of Frank Woods as a top level umpire have coincided extensively over the last 30 years: in the SA Baseball League from the 1960s, in the SA Winter Baseball League from its inception around 1970, in intervarsity championships, both official and unofficial, in the 1960s and 1970s, and in Central Australian and Australasian Masters Games in the 1990s. Frank also umpired in Australian Baseball Federation championships and international series and continued to recent times in intervarsity. He officiated on three occasions in the premier Australian interstate competition, the now superseded Claxton Shield, when held in Adelaide; we are as yet uncertain if he was invited to participate interstate in this event.

Frank Woods' first A-Grade game as chief umpire came about in 1966 under unusual circumstances at the Woodville ground. Fellow umpire that day Alan Waldron takes the blame. Alan relinquished his chief umpire's duties behind the catcher when a foul ball rebounded from a metal crossbar on the backstop. Alan swears the crowd cheered as he was stretchered off the ground. And so young Frank was initiated as chief umpire unusually positioned behind the pitcher. If Alan's account is correct, this was the first time, but certainly not the last, that crowds warmly welcomed Frank's

participation as umpire.

Frank put his heart and soul into the game. He rarely turned down the opportunity to umpire a game or in a series. He was up there with the best. He was fair in his umpiring. I never saw him lose his cool. A baseball game is full of line-ball decisions; it licenses debate between player and umpire. But in that debate he was not influenced by opinions, genuine or contrived. I can still picture determination in his beady eyes at sticking to his decision. No player would hold it against him after the game when on the odd occasion he was the only one in the arena who really agreed with his call.

On the ground ... Well on one occasion at Thebarton Oval it must be recorded that a player so frustrated with Frank's decision snatched the sacred cap and stamped on it.

"Break it up, chappies I" was his response to a player dispute.

He called things as he saw it off the field, too. So much so that he did on occasions fall out with the establishment. He was an individualist. He did things his way. How appropriate his and his father's christian names were: Frank and Ernest. They fitted his character. But he was a private man. He generally kept hard-felt opinions to himself, and the little I did hear was I believe through a mutual respect and friendship. You rarely heard about his love of the Labor Party or the beloved Westies, generally on that rare occasion that he had to turn down an invitation to umpire. The most he spoke of his home life was when it looked like the Council was going to deprive him of his chooks.

Umpires are remembered by players in various ways. Each puts his own stamp on the game. Frank Woods will be remembered by the Australian baseball fraternity as one of the most colorful men in blue to grace the diamond at the top level. I have experienced no-one like him. I suspect he was unique. As Alan Waldron said of him: "All umpires take on the role because they enjoy baseball. But I never saw an umpire so outwardly show his love for the game as Frank Woods."

His trademark was a unique set of pronouncements on various game situations. "How many outs, Frank?". **"I've got two in the bin!"** was his invariable reply. (Frank would rather us chuckle at Phil Alexander's way of agreeing with this on another occasion.) **"I've got a full house, baabeey!"** was his full count on the batter. His call of **"Seeef"** was as drawn out, as his "Out" was abrupt and final. And **"Nice hit, baabeey!"** from him as chief umpire was icing on the cake for a base hit.

These embellishments were an integral part of his enjoyment of the game, and it added to our enjoyment as players. It helped us to relax, to reduce the tension between two lines of battle. Fellow umpire Bert Haynes recalls his call of **"Streeek"** that accompanied a swing of the bat which saw the ball soaring over the homerun fence.

Frank felt it was his duty to be part of the entertainment of the game. The team from Guam in the 1993 Australasian Masters Games in Perth thought he was magic. It was full of ex-professional American baseball players. Before chiefing the gold medal game he said with that glint in his eye: "I'm going to entertain 'em tonight, Billy." and entertain the crowd and players alike he did. But his style did not detract from the game. Some umpires do, by their actions, take over a game. Frank added to it. The game is there to be enjoyed. The crowds in Alice Springs for Masters Games baseball were swollen by those who wanted to experience his colourful calling. To indicate his renown among Alice Springs residents and the 5000 Games participants, he was one of a panel of three invited onto local radio. One of the other two was basketball great Al Green; I need Frank to remind me of the other, for they broadcast it while we were playing a game.

Robyn and I remember how thrilled he was at being asked to chief a media game at Norwood Oval in recent years as part of the SABL's bid to pull in the crowds. Bert Haynes said of Frank: "He took baseball to the people more than any umpire I know."

It was only a fortnight ago that he said he wanted to chief our home games in winter baseball, despite his declining health. He was looking forward to what he felt would be his fourth and last trip accompanying our Redbacks team to Alice Springs. I think he may have got his greatest kicks out of being invited to umpire in such interstate

series over the years through the many friendships he made. He could get carried away with his enthusiasm on these trips. So carried away was he with performing his on-field repartee for the fare welling crowd at the airport after one underage series in Hobart, that he is today noted as being the only umpire ever to miss his plane home. This is a doubtful honour.

Our friendship grew out of the Intervarsity series well over 20 years ago. Yet friendships did not influence his umpiring. I remember him refusing to take heed of rain and the glare of headlights in a final of the Winter League in the early 1970s, even of Alg Serelis lighting a match to see.

It only made him the more determined to give the opposition the full seven digs to catch up. I suspect the photo of a victorious and muddied University team with Frank dragged into its midst is still in that strange bag of tricks he took with him umpiring or amongst his memorabilia of the game.

And so Baseball farewells the legendary Frank Woods, one of its great characters. He came to bat as a catcher for East Torrens, but through injury in the 1950s spent most of his stint at the plate behind it. That Great Umpire has finally struck out Frank Woods the steadfast showman, but Frank Woods, true to his calling, went down at the end still swinging. We salute the way he enriched our joy of the game. We will long gain pleasure from our memories of him.

20/04/2015 Post Note. Sadly I had arranged to go over Franks place to record his sayings but something came up, a fortnight later he was gone.

Can you remember other Frankisms or stories? – Gordon Penhall

On the third strike “That’s a strike, your out of here baabeeey.”