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**"Give It A Chance, Blue!"**  
**- Or -**  
**"The Thud Principle"**

By Dave Harris

I was in about my third year of amateur umpiring and had made the move up to some leagues with older players. Having "paid my dues" doing the young kids, I was now umpiring for some players who were beginning to play the game the way it was intended.

I had enjoyed a couple of pretty good rookie seasons, and was feeling pretty confident in my own abilities. "Hell," I thought to myself, "this job is fun and I can do this!" It was a gorgeous spring day, the sun was shining, there was a nice gentle breeze, fluffy clouds, and I was feeling good. Then, about the second inning I hear it from the dugout:

**"Give it a chance, Blue!"**

This comment had come from the manager of the defensive team just after I called a ball. The pitch was obviously high I thought, and the comment didn't bother me greatly. I know managers are always "working the ump" to get all they can, and that's just part of the game. What did bother me a bit was that I heard it several more times after I called a pitch, and I began to wonder just what was going on.

**"What is this guy's problem?"** I'm thinking. I was having a good game and was all over every pitch and play. I just couldn't figure out what he was talking about with his "give it a chance" routine, and it began to gnaw at me a little. I also noticed I was getting some grimaces from the pitcher from time to time, and this entire thing continued for about four innings! It was nothing serious, and not on every pitch, but it was there and it had me baffled.

Then between frames in about the fifth inning I'm standing along side the plate area, mask under my arm, still thinking I'm in complete control of this game and I'm doing a good job. Then this manager heads out to coach third base and says to me as he walks by...

***"C'mon, Blue, you gotta give that curve ball a chance! Some of those have the zone and you're killin' a pretty good pitcher out there."***

That's it. Nothing loud, nothing angry, but just a quiet comment as he walks by, and it really got me thinking about my performance. I'm thinking, "Could I have missed that many? Maybe I'm not seeing the ball as well as I thought."

This bothered me a lot, and I was determined to bear down and watch myself for the rest of the game. I was not going to let this guy upset my confidence and certainly not going to change my zone to suit him, but I was going to really concentrate and make sure.

The top of the fifth went pretty uneventfully. The pitcher for the other team was throwing mostly fastballs, and when he did try the #2 or most anything off speed it was usually well out of the zone. But I was really bearing down! **I was concentrating so hard it almost hurt!**

And when the bottom of the inning started I really got down to business. I was going to show this manager I knew my job! There was not a pitch that was going to get by me, and I was really into the game. The pitcher threw a couple of pitches and I made the appropriate calls with no beef from the dugout. I was all over them! Then the kid uncorks a curve ball. I don't mean a "curve ball" but "The Big Yellow Hammer"! This thing starts out way up there (as his others had), and I watch it all the way, concentrating on the pitch and blocking out everything else.

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About the last 10 feet this thing begins to break. I'll be damned if it didn't drop right into the zone about belt high, splitting the plate in half!

You remember the old E.F. Hutton commercials? Well, I imagine that's what it looked like in the stands and dugouts after that pitch. I was concentrating so hard on the pitch I forgot to make a call! Finally I said, "Strike!" and made the signal. From the dugout I hear, "**There you go, Blue!**"

Well, I learned my lesson that day about timing. I discovered that no matter how well intentioned my efforts if I didn't employ the proper timing techniques in making my calls everything went south in a hurry! I learned that I had to take my time and let every play conclude before I made a call, and let every pitch complete its path before calling it.

I gave this game a lot of thought afterward and I decided I must have been giving up on those curve balls, as some hitters do, and actually deciding it was a ball before it even got there! I have since noted this is a common problem for many rookie umpires, and it has become my personal "cause" to inform them how to time calls on the field.

I stress to all our umpires both in school and on the field the proper timing of umpiring. I have since become pretty good at timing my calls properly, and never, ever hurry them to impress anyone with my speed of making the calls.

My first concern is getting it RIGHT, and as a result I have become a much better umpire. I have also since developed my own little routine for making all calls, both behind the plate and on the bases, which I refer to as "**The Thud Principle**".

**The Thud Principle**

The "thud" is the sound of the ball hitting the glove or mitt. That sound begins my sequence of calls and actions, and nothing happens before that sound! Oh, I am watching everything and I'm sure mental processes are going on, but outwardly there is no sign of anything from me.

Behind the plate I wait for the "thud" as I watch each pitch. Once I've heard that sound and a call must be made I decide on the proper call. I then hesitate for just a second as I say the call in my mind. Then and only then do I voice the call aloud and make a signal if called for.

On the bases the principle is much the same. As a play develops, force or tag, I get the proper position and watch the play carefully. When I hear the "thud" I decide the "out-safe" call, say it to myself, then voice it and make the proper hand signal. This allows me to be sure and allows me to let all playing action complete before making a call. There is nothing more horrible than to call a runner out quickly, then see the ball rolling along the infield!

And while this brief hesitation may be taken by some to be uncertainty it's not that at all. It is merely an umpire doing the best job he can and being absolutely certain of each and every call. Once the managers and players in my area began to realize my "style" they accepted it and I get no heat about it.

I urge all umpires, especially the rookies, to give it a try, or if not truly use my "Thud Principle" at least try to slow down those calls and be sure of what you saw. I am living proof that doing so can only make you a better umpire and probably save you a lot of heat from the dugouts. I am now an avid subscriber to the old Bill Klem saying, "**Fellas, it ain't nothin' till I call it!**"