

Yes, Even a Dead Man Can Score in Baseball. Just Ask Rich Marazzi of Ansonia.

By JEFF HOLTZ

IMAGINE the Yankees and the Red Sox in Game 7 of the American League Championship Series again this season: the game could be decided by which team paid more attention to Rich Marazzi in spring training.

Marazzi, 61, of Ansonia, a veteran baseball writer and a former umpire of high school, college and independent professional games, has created a seminar he calls "Rule Ball" to teach players and managers more about the rulebook and how use it to their advantage.

The general managers of four Major League teams — the New York Yankees, Boston Red Sox, Arizona Diamondbacks and Houston Astros — were so impressed by it, they hired him to go to spring training in Florida and Arizona earlier this month.

Marazzi, who has written five books including "The Rules and Lore of Baseball" (Stein and Day, 1989) and also is host of the radio show "Grand Stand Sports" on WICC in Bridgeport, said that he decided to act on his idea a couple of years ago when the Yankees infielder Enrique Wilson fell completely into the stands while catching a foul pop fly with a runner on first base. Marazzi said he was surprised when Joe Torre, the Yankees manager, later told him he didn't think Wilson knew when he made the play that the runner automatically got to advance one base.

"I realized there were a lot of areas where ballplayers and managers were not aware of various rules," said Marazzi, who has also served as an umpire for the Old Timers Day game at Yankee Stadium for more than a decade. "They seem to have a general awareness of the rulebook, but often times there are many layers to a rule, and that's where the problem is."

The need for the workshops really became evident, Marazzi said, after the Red Sox defeated the Oakland Athletics in a 2003 division series that featured a number of controversial plays involving the rules. In one, the Oakland shortstop Miguel Tejada believed he should have been awarded home plate by way of obstruction after colliding with Boston's Bill Mueller as he rounded third base. As a result, Tejada jogged to the plate, but was eventually tagged out when the ball got to the catcher before him.

"Tejada didn't realize the ball remains alive when there is no play being directed at the runner, and the ball is still in the outfield, which it



Rich Marazzi during one of his "Rule Ball" workshops during spring training with the Houston Astros in Kissimmee, Fla.

was when Mueller got in his way," said Marazzi. "If the runner gives up and hardly runs and is tagged out, the obstruction had no bearing on the play."

Marazzi said it was after that series that the Yankees general manager Brian Cashman hired him as a rules consultant. Cashman said he was a longtime admirer of Marazzi's column on the rules that has appeared in the magazine *Baseball Digest* for 16 years.

"Oakland lost that series because of the rules mistakes they made," Cashman said. "And my main concern was that similar game situations could happen to us."

According to Marazzi, "Rule Ball" is the product of over 30 years of research. He said he first became fascinated with baseball rules while learning about a dead man who scored a run in a college game in the late 1800's. He said the man collapsed after rounding third base and was carried across home plate by the runner behind him.

"What I learned from that is that one runner can assist another, as long as the trail runner doesn't not pass the runner or runners ahead," he said.

Marazzi said his program explains situations players are likely to see, and it teaches them what do whether they are at bat or in the field. He said the infield fly rule, as well as rules regarding interference, obstruction and what constitutes a legal catch, are most often misunderstood. When the ball is bunted into the air or hit on a line and the infield fly rule is not in effect, Marazzi's seminar trains in-

fielders and pitchers to let the ball drop. "By knowing what they're going to do before it happens, they can turn a double or even a triple play and get out of a major jam."

"Rule Ball," a 164-page manual and three compact discs that contain the same information as the book, was presented to the Red Sox, Diamondbacks and Astros during two-day seminars with the coaching staffs, said Marazzi.

Bob Melvin, manager of the Diamondbacks, said that he plans to turn Marazzi's information into on-the-field drills during the regular season. He said he was surprised by the thoroughness of the seminar.

Sometimes, even big leaguers need directions home.

"You always think you're abreast of everything concerning the rules, until you run into a guy like Rich," Melvin said. "He gave us solid interpretations. Not everything in the rulebook is concrete. We all learned things, and we enjoyed it." Melvin also said it might help him during a game. "Some of the things I picked up could determine whether or not I argue a call."

Cashman said that the Yankee coaches did not meet with Marazzi, but that the team instead had Torre put the program into his own words

in daily question-and-answer sessions with the players. The Yankees also plan to use Marazzi's system in the minor leagues, Cashman said.

"When players reach the major leagues, they know how to play the game," he said. "We are not teaching the intricacies in the minors."

According to Marazzi, another problem is that the rulebook is poorly written. "You've got to interpret it," he said. "It hasn't been revised since 1950. It's ambiguous and contradictory."

Larry S. Gibson, the lawyer and spokesman for the World Umpires Association, the union that represents Major League umpires, thinks Marazzi's seminar is a good idea. "It's always good for people affected by rules to have an understanding of them," he said. "We would advise that it focus on interference. In the discussions I have with the umpires, the most complex area of the rules deals with interference between the runner and the fielder. The disputes that arise on those plays usually do so because of a misunderstanding of the rules."

Take last year's American League Championship Series, when Alex Rodriguez of the Yankees tried to reach first base safely by slapping the ball from the glove of the Red Sox pitcher Bronson Arroyo as he tried to tag him. Marazzi said he immediately knew what the proper call was.

"I knew A-Rod was in trouble," he said. "You can't use your hands or feet to get the ball out of a player's glove. If A-Rod had lowered his shoulder and barreled over Arroyo, that would have been permitted. The umpires got it right."

Theo Epstein, the general manager of the Red Sox, said Marazzi's seminar during spring training this year gave his staff a different perspective on the rules. "We figure if it has a chance of helping us win one game, or turn around one decision throughout the course of the year, it'll be a great investment," he said. "It's just common sense. The more knowledgeable you are about the elements of the game, the more of an advantage you have."

Marazzi hopes to sell his program to all 30 Major League teams, as well as high schools and colleges. He said he also wants to produce videos to accompany it.

"The idea is to show teams they can win games with the rules if it is utilized properly," he said. "If it wins you three games in a season, that could be the difference in a pennant race."



Julie Jacobson/Associated Press

Alex Rodriguez was called out for interference after knocking the baseball from the glove of Boston's Bronson Arroyo in last season's American League playoffs. Rodriguez's attempt to knock the ball out would have been legal if he had barreled into Arroyo, shoulder first, and knocked it loose.