

Cal Hubbard. Bt J. Y. Miller

Cal Hubbard was born on 31 OCT, 1900 in Keytesville, Missouri to parents Robert P. and Sarah "Sallie" (Ford) Hubbard.[4] He grew up in modest means as the son of a small family farmer. Cal graduated from Keytesville High School, but because the school had no football team he also attended one year at Glasgow High School in nearby Glasgow, which did offer football.



The 1915 "Memories" published by Glasgow High School, lists Cal Hubbard as a member of the Freshmen class and as the left guard on the school football team. Today, the Glasgow mascot is Yellowjackets, but in 1915, it was the Glasgow Kittens.

The Freshmen history section of the Memories yearbook lists the hopes or plans of members of the class. Cal listed his hope as becoming Juanita's husband. His classmate, Juanita Cuddy, listed her's as "...presiding in Cal's home". In the photo of the class, the names are not listed, but since Cal

was 6' 4', I believe he is the 4th person from the left in the back row. I also suspect that Juanita would have stood beside him.

I do not know what ended this young romance, but Cal returned to school in Keytesville. Juanita remained her whole life in Glasgow and worked as the Chief Operator for the telephone company. She died in 1957 from a stroke and never married.

Already tall and weighing 200 pounds as a 14-year-old, Hubbard displayed natural athletic gifts. He aspired to attend the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York; however a physical discovered he had flat feet, eliminating him from eligibility. So he enrolled in Chillicothe (Missouri) Business College because of its promising football program. He lasted only one year before returning home to work on the family farm.





In 1922 Hubbard enrolled in Centenary College in Shreveport, Louisiana, after his hero Bo McMillin became the school's head football coach. He joined the football, track, wrestling, boxing, and baseball teams. (He made the baseball team only because of the college's small enrollment.) Nobody had ever seen anyone quite like him before on a football field – a player with such an awesome combination of size and speed. Able to run the 100-yard dash in 11 seconds, Hubbard was a sensation on the gridiron. In addition to his girth and quickness, the fierce intensity with which Hubbard played made a durable impression. "I liked to hit people," Cal would say, so much so that coach McMillin would bar him from participating in team scrimmages for fear of injuring his teammates.

After three successful seasons at Centenary, McMillin quit and became head coach at Geneva College in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania. And he took Cal Hubbard with him.

One day, while strolling on the campus grounds with McMillin, Hubbard saw a pretty coed walk by with an armful of books. Transfixed, he stood silent until she passed out of sight. "There goes the future Mrs. Cal Hubbard," he said to his flabbergasted coach. Catching up to the young woman, he bluntly asked her, "What's your name?" She replied "Ruth Frishkorn."

Cal's comeback: "That name's too hard to pronounce. I'm going to change it to Hubbard." Following the movie-script theme, he asked her for a date, was predictably turned down, he persisted, a college romance blossomed, and he eventually won her heart and her hand in marriage.² Ruth gave birth to Robert Cal Jr. in 1929 and to a second son, William, in 1935

When Ruth died in 1964, his friends Robert and Mildred Freeman were there to comfort him; when Robert died soon after, Cal was there to comfort Mildred. The friendship between the widow and widower flourished into romance and Cal and Mildred were married in 1966. Mildred survived Cal, who died in 1977 from cancer.

At Geneva College he set the school record in the discus throw at 142 feet, 8 inches. In 1926, he earned national attention as a virtual one-man team when Geneva's football team defeated powerful Harvard – a classic contest that remains one of the most stunning upsets in college football history. Cal's roommate Paul "Pip" Booth never forgot him: [Hubbard] moved like a cat and always smashed into the ball carrier with his face or chest. Once I saw him smash down the whole side of a defensive line by himself."

Hubbard was admired as much for his character as for his athletic ability. He helped his coach maintain discipline on the squad, making sure his teammates followed McMillin's strict rules of no smoking, no drinking and no card playing.

The contrast in Cal's Jekyll-and-Hyde personalities was striking. On the football field he was brutal, mean, and intimidating; elsewhere, he was congenial, amiable, and friendly, a gentle giant replacing a scowl with a smile. A college professor who knew him said, "Big Cal was as kind and generous a man off the field as he was an untamed savage on it."

For Hubbard 1927 was a landmark year, in which he earned his bachelor's degree, began his fabled career in the National Football League, and married his sweetheart, Ruth. When it was pointed out that it took him three colleges and seven years to obtain his degree, Cal joked that he was not exactly "what you would call a professional student." In his three years at Centenary College, he earned 32 credits.

After completing his college education, Hubbard was bombarded with offers from every NFL team. He signed with the New York Giants, teaming up with tackle Steve Owens to turn a good defensive team into a great one. By shutting out their opponents 10 times in 13 games and allowing in the entire season an absurdly low 20 points, the Giants won their first NFL championship. Hubbard kept up his ruthless, hard-nosed style of play from his college days – explaining to teammates "the fine art of using an opponent's helmet ear holes to improve your grip in preparation for smashing the opponent's head on your knee."

Not only was Hubbard a star player, he was an influential one. He revolutionized NFL defensive tactics by creating the linebacker position. Cal realized that if he stayed anchored on one side of the scrimmage line, the opposing team would just run the other way to avoid his shattering tackles. Hub was missing out on all the fun. So he began roaming the backfield and with his amazing speed was able to plug up any hole to crash into opponents. "What was really scary for quarterbacks and blockers was that on any given play, they couldn't be sure where Cal would line up," wrote football historian Murray Greenberg. "Sometimes he'd play up on the line, but just as often he'd back off the line and freelance ... and when he reached the ball carriers, it wasn't for a social visit."

In those days of leather helmets and one-platoon teams, Hubbard usually played all 60 minutes of the game, roaring into the enemy line as an end on offense and creating havoc as linebacker on defense.

Professional sports a century ago paid relatively meager salaries, requiring players to seek employment in the offseason. Although Hubbard had one of the highest salaries of any NFL player, he needed something to supplement his income. A friend suggested that he become a baseball umpire. Cal had umpired as a youth and he was known for being an expert on the rules of every sport in which he participated. He became a minor league umpire for eight seasons



1929 World Champions, Won 13, lost 0, tied 1. Left to right, back row: Cal Hubbard (T), Geneva; Hurdie McCrary (B), Georgia; Tom Nash (E), Georgia; Bernard Darling (C), Beloit; Claude Perry (T), Alabama; Red Smith (G), Notre Dame; Verne Lewellen (B), Nebraska; Roger Ashmore (T), Gonzaga; Johnny "Blood" McNally (B), St. John; Jim Bowdoin (G), Alabama; Lavvie Dilweg (E), Marquette; Jug Earp (C), Monmouth. Front row: Curly Lambeau (B), Notre Dame; Paul Minnick (G), Iowa; Bo Molenda (B), Michigan; Roy Baker (B), Southern California; Eddie Kotal (B), Lawrence; Red Dunn (B), Marquette; Dick O'Donnell (E), Minnesota; Mike Michalske (G), Penn State; Bill Kern (T), Pittsburgh; Whitey Woodin (G), Marquette; Carl Lidberg (B), Minnesota. *Lefebvre-Stiller photo.*

After a pro football career with the Giants, Green Bay, and the Pittsburgh Pirates (who later became the Steelers), Cal suddenly retired. During the last game of the 1936 season with only minutes left in the game, one of his teammates, "Red" Corine, had a leg broken in three places. When play resumed, Cal announced to the opposing team, the Boston Redskins, that "If any of you guys has a grudge against me, get it out of your system in the next minute and five seconds. This is your last shot at me. Come and get me because I'm through after this game." No one took him up on that offer. After the game, he and Ruth went to her hometown in Pennsylvania to retire on a farm.



Cal quickly moved on to baseball as a major league umpire. When asked what the greatest thrill of his umpiring career was, Hubbard found it difficult to name just one but said it might have been when he first learned he would be working in the major leagues. "Every time I walked out on the field of the American League, it was a thrill as it was a new challenge and it kept me always striving to do a perfect job," he said. Hubbard's umpiring philosophy was simple: "You really have to understand only two things and that's maintaining discipline and knowing the rule book." Cal was an expert on the rule book.'

'He also had amazing vision. He was examined at Boston's American Optical Laboratory, Hubbard was found to have 20-10 vision, the strongest they had ever recorded and keener than that of Ted Williams, who also was tested at the lab. When told of this, Cal modestly said, "But I didn't have to call many strikes on Williams. If it was a strike, he hit it."

Hubbard would be assigned to work four World Series – 1938, 1942, 1946, and 1949 – and also the 1939, 1944, and 1949 All-Star Games.

Relationships that develop between home-plate umpires and catchers are intriguing and the one between Hubbard and Yogi Berra was especially so. On June 11, 1948, Berra was ejected for the first time in his major-league career for repeatedly arguing Hubbard's pitch calls. When the popular rookie was sent to the showers, the Yankee crowd responded by showering the field with newspapers, cans, and bottles. One fan ran onto the field and threw a beer can directly at Hubbard, barely missing him. To his credit, Berra found Hubbard after the game and apologized, beginning an ongoing amusing rapport between the two. When upset about one of Hubbard's calls, Yogi would refer to the umpire's football days by saying, "I think you got hit in the head once too much." During one blistering hot game in Boston, Berra swore at Hubbard in hopes that he would be ejected and escape the suffocating heat, but the umpire didn't fall for it, saying, "Yogi, you could call me anything you want. If I'm going to suffer, you're going to suffer with me."

In another game, Berra was complaining about not getting the call when he "framed" his pitcher's nearly strike pitches. Framing is when the catcher pulls his glove into the strike zone as he catches the ball. Cal said; "Yogi, it is too difficult for you to catch and umpire. Just let me call the pitches".

Hubbard was admired by his colleagues because he made them better umpires. "Hubbard would do anything he could to help you on the field," said umpire Bill McKinley. Joe Paparella said, "He taught me more about umpiring in one year that I had ever dreamed there was to learn." Hubbard was enjoying 16 years of pro umpiring and looking forward to more when tragedy struck.

On December 10, 1951, Hubbard went quail and rabbit hunting in the prairies near his home with a group of friends. While the group was taking a break with Cal sitting in the front seat of his truck, a neighbor boy took a shot at a passing rabbit. The shot ricocheted and a small pellet, no larger than the head of a pin, entered Hubbard's left eye just above the pupil. After a local doctor superficially treated the delicate wound, Cal traveled to St. Louis, where the doctors were leery of risking further damage to his eyesight with an operation. He could still see out of the eye but his vision had been affected. Hubbard visited eye specialists in the East, including ones in Pittsburgh with experience in removing metal slivers from steelworkers' eyes, but none of the doctors would risk an operation. Cal had a trial run to see if he could still call balls and strikes with his sons playing pitcher and catcher. After a few pitches, his heart sank when he realized that he had no depth perception. The doctors had said that with proper rest his vision might recover completely, but it was not to be.

Realizing that he could no longer continue his career as an umpire, Cal sank into a deep depression and spent his time just staring off into space.

When Opening Day of the 1952 baseball season arrived, Cal wept. Shortly thereafter, a phone call triggered more tears from Hubbard but this time they were tears of joy. Cal was offered the position as assistant to Tommy Connolly, supervisor of American League umpires. Cal readily accepted, saying, "It would have broken my heart to be forced out of baseball. ... This is wonderful and thank you a million."

When Hubbard began his third sports career, this one as an executive, it was a particularly opportune time for baseball because the major leagues had just introduced the four-man umpire crew for regular-season games. Cal immediately devised new mechanics and supplied charts outlining various rotations, clearly defined duties, and the positioning the four arbiters should take on the field to cover every possible play, basically the same system that is used today.

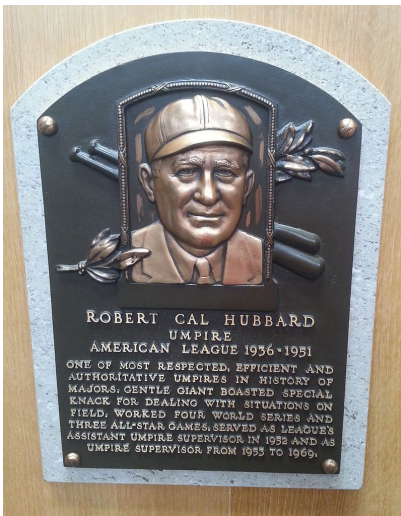
In 1954, Hubbard was promoted to his position as American League umpire supervisor. Cal was frequently on the road touring ballparks to observe and assist his umpires, as well as visiting minor-league parks to scout and support their umpires. Hubbard served as a goodwill ambassador for baseball, representing his league as a speaker at winter high-school athletic banquets in towns across America, beginning each speech by saying, "I can speak on only three subjects, football, baseball, and bird dogs."

Hub's dual positions as AL umpire supervisor and rules-committee member meant more travel from one minor-league city to another to scout another umpire, to Florida to conduct another clinic, to Oakland to approve the A's wearing white shoes, and to Chicago to investigate charges that the White Sox were using frozen baseballs. If he wasn't busy enough, in the late 1960s, he wrote a nationally syndicated feature called "Cal's Column" on baseball rule interpretations.

When the Pro Football Hall of Fame was established in 1963, Cal was among the first group enshrined, bringing back memories of his exceptional gridiron career. Fellow inductee George Halas, Chicago Bears coach, commented, “There never was a better lineman than that big umpire.”



It was probably best that Hubbard retired when he did because his big body was beginning to break down. In 1972 he collapsed in his home and recovered nicely but his decades of smoking had taken its toll. Cal had given up cigarettes in the late 1950s only to switch to inhaling cigars and then quitting smoking entirely in 1966. “I didn’t do it soon enough,” he would mutter and then chuckle and say, “If I’d known I was going to live as long as I have I’d have taken better care of myself.” On the advice of his doctors, Hubbard began spending the colder months living in Florida.



In 1976 Hubbard received the news that he had been elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame. Although suffering from emphysema, he made the trip to Cooperstown to attend the induction ceremony, the first one ever held indoors because of inclement weather. The rain didn’t dampen Cal’s spirits on his big day. Walking onto the stage using a cane and breathing heavily, he still projected a formidable figure, beaming with a broad, proud smile, as he acknowledged his family and bowed graciously.

On October 17, 1977, two weeks shy of his 77th birthday, Cal died of cancer in St. Petersburg, Florida. His body was brought home to Milan for burial.

Hubbard has been enshrined in at least eight Halls of Fame. The high-school football field in Milan and the high-school baseball field in his hometown Keytesville have been named in his honor. An impressive bronze and marble historical marker erected in Milan depicts Hubbard in a three-point stance and outlines his many achievements and honors.

Cal was proud of his sports careers and the many tributes bestowed upon him, yet he remained modest. He had devoted his life’s work to games; albeit important because they provide an escape for many from society’s ills, he recognized that sports stars are not the world’s true champions. Late in life, Hub said: “Sports heroes are glamorized because they are constantly in the lime-light, but as I look back over the years that have brought honor to me, I realize that I fall short of the dimensions of many of the nation’s unsung heroes – the Veterans of Foreign Wars. ... In their presence, I stand in awe.”