

= Joe West (umpire) =

Joseph Henry West (born October 31 , 1952) , nicknamed " Cowboy Joe " or " Country Joe , " is an American professional baseball umpire in Major League Baseball (MLB) . Born in Asheville , North Carolina , he grew up in Greenville and played football at East Carolina University (ECU) and Elon College . West entered the National League as an umpire in 1976 ; he joined the NL staff full @-@ time in 1978 . West has worn uniform number 22 throughout his career . As a young umpire , West worked Nolan Ryan 's fifth career no @-@ hitter , was on the field for Willie McCovey 's 500th home run and was involved in a 1983 pushing incident with manager Joe Torre .

A few years later , West was the home plate umpire during the 1988 playoff game in which pitcher Jay Howell was ejected for having pine tar on his glove . In 1990 , he threw pitcher Dennis Cook to the ground while attempting to break up a fight . West resigned during the 1999 Major League Umpires Association mass resignation , but was rehired in 2002 . Since then , he has umpired throughout MLB . In a 2004 playoff game between the Boston Red Sox and New York Yankees , West 's crew made a controversial decision that necessitated police presence to calm the crowd . He served as crew chief for the 2005 World Series .

In 2010 , West attracted media attention after he publicly complained about the slow pace of a game between the Red Sox and Yankees . He also worked the game that year in which Albert Pujols hit his 400th career home run . West has worked several no @-@ hitters , including a 2012 perfect game by Félix Hernández . As of 2015 , West has the longest tenure of any MLB umpire . West has appeared in five World Series , two All @-@ Star Games , nine League Championship Series (LCS) , seven League Division Series (LDS) and two Wild Card Games .

West is president of the World Umpires Association (WUA) . As the organization 's president , West helped negotiate the largest umpiring contract in baseball history . He works with a sporting goods company to design and patent umpiring equipment endorsed by MLB . West is also a singer and songwriter , and has released two country music albums . He had a small acting role in the comedy film The Naked Gun : From the Files of Police Squad ! and a cameo appearance in the television crime drama The Oldest Rookie . He plays golf on the Celebrity Players Tour .

= = Early life = =

West was born in Asheville , North Carolina in 1952 . He grew up in Greenville , North Carolina , where he played youth baseball and football . He graduated from Rose High School in Greenville . West played safety on the freshman football team at East Carolina University (ECU) in 1970 and he was a quarterback for Elon College (now Elon University) from 1971 to 1973 . He intended to play his college football career at ECU , but head coach Mike McGee resigned after his freshman year , prompting West 's transfer .

While in college , West hoped to play both baseball and football . However , spring practice for football interfered with West 's ability to be on the baseball team as well . He concentrated on football and umpired high school baseball games on the side . In his three seasons at Elon , West was the starting quarterback and the team won three conference championships . He was named Most Valuable Player (MVP) on the 1973 team that lost the Division I National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics title game to Abilene Christian ; the Abilene Christian team was led by future professional football players Clint Longley and Wilbert Montgomery . West left Elon holding three passing records that were not broken for 20 years , and was inducted into the Elon Sports Hall of Fame in 1986 , in the same class as former North Carolina State women 's basketball coach Kay Yow .

= = Umpiring career = =

= = = Early career = = =

While umpiring locally as a college student , West met Carolina League umpire supervisor Malcolm Sykes , who recommended that West attend an umpire training school . West went to umpire school and graduated at the top of his class . He worked in several minor @-@ league circuits (the Western Carolinas League , Puerto Rican League , Florida Instructional League , Southern League and American Association) before he was promoted to the major leagues . West made his first National League (NL) appearance in 1976 and joined the full @-@ time NL staff in 1978 .

In his first season as a full @-@ time MLB umpire , West umpired the game in which Willie McCovey hit his 500th career home run . In the same year , he was at first base when Pete Rose tied the NL record for most consecutive games with a hit , and he was the home plate umpire when Rose broke it the following day . In 1981 , West worked first base for Nolan Ryan ? s fifth career no @-@ hitter . On October 13 , 1981 , West was 28 when he became the youngest NL umpire to call an LCS . In 1983 , West was suspended for three days and fined US \$ 500 after a shoving incident with Atlanta Braves manager Joe Torre . The manager became angry at the end of a game and followed West into the walkway outside the umpires dressing room . West then shoved Torre . On appeal , NL President Chub Feeney reduced West 's fine to \$ 300 . Torre also received a fine stemming from the incident .

= = = Middle career = = =

West made his second NLCS appearance in 1986 . He umpired his first All @-@ Star Game in 1987 . On September 28 , 1988 , West was on the field when Orel Hershiser set the MLB record for consecutive scoreless innings pitched . West returned to the NLCS in 1988 and was the plate umpire when Dodgers pitcher Jay Howell was ejected for having pine tar on his glove .

During a 1990 on @-@ field brawl , West attempted to break up the fight by throwing Phillies pitcher Dennis Cook to the ground . The matter ultimately was handled among West , NL President Bill White , then @-@ Commissioner Fay Vincent and the umpires union . West said White supported his actions in the brawl , but White quickly issued a statement saying he had prohibited West from making further physical contact with players . White was reported to have nearly resigned due to lack of support from Vincent , but the NL president remained in his post after receiving support from league owners . West met more controversy the next year when Chicago Cubs outfielder Andre Dawson bumped him after a called third strike during a game at Wrigley Field . After Dawson was ejected from the game , he walked back to the dugout and tossed 14 bats onto the field . Chicago fans threw debris onto the field , causing a delay in the game . Dawson received a one @-@ game suspension and a \$ 1 @, @ 000 fine . On his check to the league , Dawson wrote " donation for the blind . "

In 1992 , West made his first World Series appearance when the Atlanta Braves faced the Toronto Blue Jays . West was behind the plate in the first World Series game played in Canada and ejected Braves manager Bobby Cox for throwing a helmet onto the field . In 1993 , he appeared in the NLCS . He worked another no @-@ hitter on April 8 , 1994 , when Kent Mercker shut down the Los Angeles Dodgers . The 1995 NLDS was West ? s first League Division Series . The following year West worked in the NLCS . He returned to the World Series in 1997 , when the Cleveland Indians faced the Florida Marlins .

In 1999 , West was among 22 MLB umpires who engaged in mass resignations during a labor dispute . The strategy backfired when MLB simply accepted the resignations instead of entering into further negotiations with the umpiring union . The union filed charges against MLB with the National Labor Relations Board , saying the mass resignation was " a concerted action protected by law . " After arbitration and appeals , MLB settled with the union . A few umpires received severance pay and were allowed to retire under the settlement , but West and several other umpires were rehired by MLB in 2002 .

= = = Since rehire = = =

In the same year he returned to the field , West worked in the ALDS . He also umpired in the 2003

and 2004 ALCS . In game six of the latter series , West 's crew ruled Yankees batter Alex Rodriguez out for interference after Rodriguez appeared to swat the ball out of the glove of opposing pitcher Bronson Arroyo on his way to first base . Fans threw debris on the field , Red Sox manager Terry Francona pulled his team off the field , and NYPD officers in riot gear took to the field to calm the crowd . West said fans actually applauded the umpires for the correct call when they came onto the field the following day . West 's first All -@-@ Star Game and World Series appearances after his rehire came in 2005 ; that year he umpired in his second ALDS and his third World Series , serving as World Series crew chief .

West was the home plate umpire when rookie pitcher Clay Buchholz threw a no @-@ hitter against the Baltimore Orioles on September 1 , 2007 , at Fenway Park ; West called a curveball strike three for the final out . He worked his 4,000th career game on July 30 , 2009 , at Miller Park in Milwaukee , Wisconsin ; he ejected Washington Nationals manager Jim Riggleman from the contest . That same year he appeared in the American League Division Series and the World Series . He was also elected president of the World Umpires Association (WUA) . West and the union 's governing board negotiated the largest umpiring contract in the history of MLB . The contract runs from 2010 through the 2014 season . West designed the chest protector sold commercially as the West Vest , now marketed by Wilson Sporting Goods . He holds patents on the West Vest in the US , Australia , Canada and Japan . He also designed Wilson 's high @-@ end umpiring gear , the only umpiring equipment endorsed by MLB .

In 2010 , West sparked controversy by criticizing the slow pace of the recently completed series between the New York Yankees and Boston Red Sox , which he called " pathetic and embarrassing . " Red Sox manager Terry Francona referred to the remarks as " troubling " , while Yankees closer Mariano Rivera remarked , " If he has places to go , let him do something else " . Columnist Wallace Matthews defended West , saying the umpire was simply expressing what people had been thinking for a long time . West was not fined by MLB for his comments , but was " admonished firmly , " according to press reports . On August 26 , 2010 , West was the plate umpire for Albert Pujols ' 400th career home run .

On September 14 , 2014 , West ejected Jonathan Papelbon , resulting in a confrontation where West grabbed Papelbon 's jersey . West later falsely claimed Papelbon had initiated first contact . Videos replay showed West was not correct , Papelbon had not touched him . MLB subsequently suspended Papelbon for seven games for his lewd act and West for one game for initiating contact with Papelbon , marking the first umpire suspension since Fieldin Culbreth 's May 2013 suspension for misapplication of baseball rules and the first on @-@ field misconduct suspension of an umpire since Bob Davidson 's May 2012 suspension for situation handling violations related to his ejection of Phillies Manager Charlie Manuel .

West umpired in his second NLDS (and fifth LDS) in 2011 . The next year West was the first base umpire for Félix Hernández 's August 15 perfect game against the Tampa Bay Rays . He umpired another NLDS that year , then appeared in his fifth World Series . His career has spanned the tenure of baseball commissioners Bowie Kuhn , Peter Ueberroth , Bart Giamatti , Fay Vincent , Bud Selig and Rob Manfred . As of the 2014 season , West was MLB 's most senior umpire . Umpire Bruce Froemming , who was previously the most senior umpire , spent 37 seasons in MLB , but he announced his retirement in 2007 .

= = = Reception = = =

West has been mentioned in several polls of MLB players . In 2006 , the spring after he was crew chief in the World Series , a Sports Illustrated survey asked 470 MLB players to identify the best and worst umpires . West was identified as the best MLB umpire by 2 percent of those players , ranking him ninth on that list . With respect to the worst umpire , 6 percent of players in the survey selected West . Only three umpires were named more frequently as worst umpire in the survey . A 2007 review of umpire strike zones by The Hardball Times determined that West was the most consistent umpire in the major leagues .

In a 2010 poll of 100 players , West ranked as the second @-@ worst umpire in the league . In a

2011 players poll , West was named the best MLB umpire by 5 percent of players polled , placing him fifth . However , he was named the worst umpire in the same poll by 41 percent of players polled .

= = Outside of baseball = =

West is known outside of umpiring as a singer ? songwriter . His involvement in country music and his demeanor on the field have earned him the nickname " Cowboy Joe . " West has described his music as " two chords and the truth It 's simple . It tells a story . " In 2009 , West said of his music pursuits , " I was lucky . You know , the dues you have to pay to get here as an umpire are long and tedious , but the music business , because I was already in the major leagues , kind of opened a lot of doors I normally wouldn 't have been able to open . "

West has appeared at the Grand Ole Opry . He has performed with Mickey Gilley , Johnny Lee and Merle Haggard . West served as a pallbearer for Boxcar Willie .

West released his first album , Blue Cowboy , in 1987 . Blue Cowboy is an album of three original songs and five covers . Chuck Yarborough of the Cleveland Plain Dealer said , " Listening to the first excerpt of his " Blue Cowboy " made me balk ? you 'll pardon the expression ? at listening to the second . But I did . And the third . And so on . And now ? Well , if I 'm Nashville , I run West outta the game . The Hook . The Heave @-@ Ho . The Thumb . " In a September 2012 review , music blog Long After Dark said , " Blue Cowboy easily ranks with Ron Artest and Carl Lewis as one of the worst albums that a sports figure has cut ... ever . I can say that I managed to make it through the record , although it was not easy . "

He released Diamond Dreams in 2008 . The album was a collaboration with Kent Goodson , pianist for country star George Jones . It tells baseball stories inspired by West 's umpiring career . Goodson later said , " As I look back on how this CD came together , I realize that I am a musician and Joe is an umpire . But his love for music and my love for baseball bonded us in this project . " Sports blogger Voodoo Brown described West as " in creepmode from the gate . " Sportswriter Doug Miller said that the album was " a fun , humorous and often touching collection of spoken @-@ word gems in which the listener gets a perfect sampling of the true personality of Cowboy Joe West . "

West has made one film appearance , playing a third base umpire in the 1988 comedy film The Naked Gun : From the Files of Police Squad ! He also made a cameo appearance on the television crime drama The Oldest Rookie , An avid golfer , West appears on the Celebrity Players Tour .