

# Reached The Top, Emmett Ashford 'Calls' It A Career

LOS ANGELES (AP)—Baseball, regally attired in a plush Hollywood setting on the final night of its winter meetings, will be somewhat poorer next spring without Emmett Ashford calling 'em as he sees 'em.

The bouncy, 56-year-old umpire, first black man ever to call balls and strikes in the major leagues, bowed out after five turbulent seasons.

His retirement announcement came several hours before Cincinnati Reds' Johnny Bench, St. Louis Cardinals' Bob Gibson and San Francisco's Giants' Willie Mays received top honors at baseball's

inaugural national awards banquet in a swank Beverly Hills hotel.

Bench, the major league slugging king last season, was named player of the year. Gibson, a 23-game winner, captured 1970 pitching laurels. Mays, the Giants' 39-year-old superstar, was selected as the player who best typifies the game on and off the field.

Other award winners included third baseman Brooks Robinson of world champion Baltimore Orioles, named defensive player of the year, Pittsburgh Pirates' Danny Murtagh, named manager of the year, and Orioles' front

office chief Harry Dalton, executive of the year.

Ashford, who reached the normal retirement age of 55 for American League umpires a year ago, announced he was stepping out "with a great deal of reluctance" after 20 years on the job—the first 15 of them in the minors.

Joe Cronin, American League president, who brought Ashford up from the Pacific Coast League in 1966, and who invited him back last years, denied that pressure had been put on the ebullient showman to retire. Commissioner Bowie Kuhn hinted that he would offer Ashford a job in his office.

Ashford, who worked the World Series for the first time this year, insisted he merely wanted to "depart on top."

"Trying to top . . . the thrilling events of the 1970 World Series would be superfluous and anti-climactic," he said.

"He wasn't pushed out," Cronin said. "He certainly has been a credit to baseball and contributed greatly to it."

"You can't give him (Cronin) enough credit," he said. "In every league I worked in, the president has been on the spot and I've had to get him off—by working."

Ashford did his job with a flourish, and his antics behind the plate and on the bases delighted the fans.

"I've toned down on that stuff the last two years," he said. "I think I was taking a little away from the players."

He said he was disappointed at first that there were no other black umpires in the majors.

"Now I'm very happy, because we have about half a dozen black umpires on the way up."

Ashford will receive a pension of only \$1,600 per year for his five-year stint in the big leagues. He intends to stay active, he hopes within baseball.

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