



## **Umpire Bill DeCosta accepted no back talk on field**

TAMPA — Every game Bill DeCosta called was serious business, a controlled war on behalf of the truth. Mr. DeCosta presided over organized sports for 30 years, from youth baseball to the pros in spring training, becoming one of the most visible umpires in Hillsborough County. He was known for his keen eye, something other umps call "plate visibility," and his quick thumb.

He threw out players. He threw out coaches. Once, Mr. DeCosta effectively ejected the fans, halting a game between Jesuit High School and its archrival, Tampa Catholic, after Jesuit fans got unruly.

His certitude offended some. He was expelled from the West Coast Umpires Association, an organization he headed for 20 years, for what board members called dictatorial leadership. Mr. DeCosta continued to umpire softball games for several more years before he retired, devoting himself to handyman work.

"The West Coast Umpires Association and Bill were pretty much synonymous," said Ben Hugel, a former association president. Mr. DeCosta also served as an official in softball, basketball and football games, and for years was the official timekeeper for the Tampa Bay Buccaneers.

But baseball produced some of his most memorable moments. "He'd get in this position where one arm went this way and one arm went that way," said Bonita DeCosta, his daughter. "He'd kind of walk backward and say, 'Yeeerrrrroouutta heeeere!'"

Mr. DeCosta and Clement Brooks, who is black, worked games together for 15 years. People began calling the duo "Salt and Pepper." They looked out for each other. "Once, a man in the stands wanted to get me when the game was over," recalled Brooks, 76. "The guy started toward me and Bill grabbed him. He said, 'Look, you go your way and we'll go our way.' That's the kind of guy Bill was. He had your back."

Mr. DeCosta was born in Newport, R.I., close enough to Boston to make him a lifelong Red Sox fan. A high school quarterback, he won a football scholarship to Boston College, but turned it down to help his parents.

His Air Force career took him to Thailand and Vietnam. He served as a quality control inspector of fighter jets.

His expulsion from the West Coast Umpires Association in 1995 was a tough period.

"It probably wasn't managed very well on either side," said Hugel, the association's president at the time.

A few months ago, doctors found a cancer in his tongue that had spread. On Father's Day, the end near, his family members took Mr. DeCosta home from Tampa General Hospital. They set him on the recliner, where he uttered five last words.

"Are the Red Sox on?"

Mr. DeCosta died June 22, at home. He was 75.

**William Francis DeCosta**

**Born:** May 21, 1935.

**Died:** June 22, 2010.

**Survivors:** Wife Diane Lawton; sons William, Brian and Robert DeCosta; daughters Bethany Davis and Bonita DeCosta; brothers Edmond and Joseph DeCosta; sister Gilda DeCosta; stepchildren Corrie and William Goodwin, and D. Brent Prizer;

four grandchildren; and three great-grandc