



HEY BLUE



The Heart of Umpiring at the Amateur Level

June 2012

PREPARING FOR THE TOURNAMENT SEASON

As you prepare for the tournament season, examine your personal philosophy about umpiring. Enjoy your time on the diamond. A basic knowledge is required to umpire baseball and softball, but a true knowledge of umpiring lies in a complete understanding of the rules, correct positioning and proper mechanics. You are responsible for the conduct of the game and for maintaining discipline and order. Be on time for games. Hustle. Dress properly. You will instantly command the respect you deserve.

OFFICIAL PLAYING RULES

As a reminder, all Babe Ruth Baseball and Softball games must be played in accordance with the Official Baseball Rules and the Official Babe Ruth Softball rules, respectively. The only exceptions for baseball and softball are those listed in the 2011 Babe Ruth Baseball/Softball Rules and Regulations. **IMPORTANT:** Be certain to use the Official Baseball Rules and the Official Babe Ruth Softball Rules and not those of the National Federation of High School Athletic associations, or any other group, as there are major differences between the sets of rules.

UMPIRE PROFESSIONALISM



When we talk about professionalism, we talk about a confidence and knowledge that should be carried by all umpires. This confidence isn't arrogance; it is a confidence in knowing that when you walk onto that field, you are there to do a job as defined by your rulebook and to enforce your rules as defined by common sense and the interpretation of those rules. As an umpire, you have one of the least forgiving, least understood, and most underappreciated jobs in the world. You must be prepared before you walk onto that field for anything to happen, and expect that anything to happen on every pitch.

An understanding of the rules is the easiest cornerstone of umpiring to grasp. Read the rulebook and read it again and again.

Correct positioning is in the simplest terms, angle and distance. Understand that having a proper angle is more important than being five feet from the play. Most umpires use two-man mechanics and it isn't always possible to be standing directly behind the bag to make every call. Know where you need to be, get a good angle, see the play, and make the call.

Proper mechanics allow you as an umpire to correctly communicate with your partner, and to allow yourself as an umpire to be in the best possible position to see the play. Proper two-man mechanics get you in correct position, and lets the rest fall into place.

The confidence portion of professionalism is the part of umpiring that you won't find in the rulebook. This confidence allows you to deal with situations that do not normally occur, and to best handle outlying factors during a game. The following **tips** will make a great difference in your ability to umpire effectively:

- **Get the Call Right!** If you have to sell the call, then you probably didn't get the call right. It is better to stop and discuss the situation with your partner and get the rulebook out if necessary to ultimately get the call right. Your job as an umpire is to be the final authority during a game, and that requires you to get the call correct at all costs. Use your keys of understanding the rules, correct positioning and proper mechanics to put you in the best frame of mind and the best position to make the call and get it right.
- **Competitiveness.** Accept the fact that every player is putting forth their best effort; therefore, you should too. Being lazy will let the game slip away from you. As an umpire, you have to be willing to call the first pitch of the game the same way you call the last pitch of the game. If you don't, you are going to be in trouble. Realize that every pitch means something to someone in the field.
- **Every Blue Shirt Doesn't Come With a License for Respect.** Just because you wear an umpire uniform doesn't mean you deserve respect. You don't deserve anything until you earn it. If you walk onto the field with the attitude that no matter what you call you are always right, then you do deserve something. You deserve to have the manager stapled to your back, riding you the entire game. Earn your respect with confidence, your knowledge of the rules, correct positioning and proper mechanics.
- **Don't be the Judge, Jury and Executioner.** Your job is to umpire the game, not to pass judgment on individuals. Some players may not be the most outstanding of individuals, but don't let that distract you from what your job is. Accept the players for who they are - baseball players, and do your job - umpire the game. Control the game as necessary, and never pass judgment on the players.
- **Most Importantly, Leave the Game on the Field.** Once the last strike is called, leave the game on the field. Use the situations that happened during the game to make you a better umpire. Read your rulebook or ask another umpire - but that is as far as it should go. Don't let a situation that occurred during the game relive itself over and over again. Decide how the situation could have been handled, learn from it, and let it go.

A PITCH IS A PITCH!

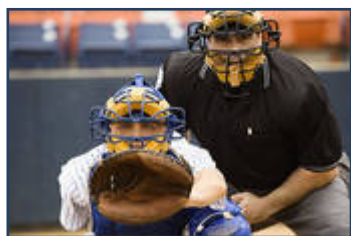
Some umpires automatically call "Strike" on a pitch made at a count of three balls and no strikes. Some umpires automatically call "Ball" on a pitch made at a count of no balls and two strikes. Does the pitcher suddenly get better or worse? The plate wider or narrower? The batter taller or shorter?

Don't Do It! As a plate umpire, this is one way to have your integrity questioned by the coaches, players and fans. At that moment, your actions are clear to everyone. Call the pitch exactly where it was placed, exactly as you would in every situation, without regard to the count or game situation.

Worry About Every Pitch! Umpires who play this game are easy to spot. They are already on their way up as the pitch approaches the plate. You can hear the indicator click as the pitcher comes set; you hear them call the pitch simultaneously, even slightly before, the ball hits the glove.

Worry about getting the call right every time. The number one requirement for a plate umpire is a consistent strike zone from the first pitch to the last.

SELF-EVALUATION:



Before you accept the assignment for your first tournament game, ask yourself the following questions as a form of self-evaluation:

- Have I improved as an umpire?
 - Have I corrected my faults?
 - Do I take pride in my appearance?
 - Do I avoid acting like a big boss on the field?
- Do I regularly review the rulebook?
 - Do I arrive for games early?
 - Do I keep my temper under control?
 - Is it possible that I could have been wrong?
 - Did I attend the necessary clinics?
 - Do I cooperate with my fellow umpires?
 - Do I stay alert on the diamond?
 - Am I firm in my decisions?
 - Do I keep the game moving by hustling myself and the participants?
 - Am I considerate and courteous?
 - Does dignity govern my voice and manner on the field?

HANDLING COACHES AND EJECTIONS:



There are many different views on how to handle coaches. Working hard at umpiring, giving 110% and being the best you can be will make handling coaches a snap. A good umpire will evaluate each situation and flow with it a little bit; listen to what the coach has to say; answer his questions while being a good listener; and being polite. Follow these simple tips:

- Always speak to the coach away from team members.
 - Let the coach have his say. Listen to what the coach has to say – don't cut him short unless he is repeating himself, is taking up too much time or becomes abusive.
- Always give an instruction and walk away. Don't give him time to answer.
 - Don't let the coach come right up to you.
 - Let the coaches get upset, NOT YOU.
 - Never let the coach get your partner involved. If you want help from your partner, you ask him. It's your call so you should handle it. Involving your partner could make you both look bad.

WHEN MOTHER NATURE CALLS



Knowing when a game needs to be called for weather is an important step in enforcing safety. Everyone from the ballplayers to the spectators wants the game to be played. At the same time, they do not want to be dodging lightning and covering up with umbrellas. Like most tools of the trade, the art of arbitrating weather comes best with experience. Whenever lightning can be seen and/or thunder can be heard, the risk is already present. It is recommended that all individuals leave the game site and seek a safe location

when the lightning to thunder count is a minimum of 30 seconds. Using this formula (divide the number of seconds by 5) means that lightning is approximately six miles away.

As weather authorities agree, game personnel and participants should wait a minimum of 30 minutes after the last flash of lightning is witnessed or thunder is heard before returning to the playing area. Don't start something you can't finish. If the game cannot begin because of weather, don't even try. It's better to replay a game a couple of days later than risk getting the game started and only playing an inning or two. An umpire should be comfortable in postponing any game where the field has been covered in rain for more than a few hours or when a potentially dangerous storm is in the area. During a light shower, it's left up to the umpire's decision whether to halt a game or keep it going. In most cases, if the rain is misty or comes under sunny skies, chances are it may blow over.

One eye on the plate, one eye on the field and *one eye on the sky*. If the clouds are excessively dark, you will want to keep one eye on the sky. If it's only dark and not raining, try to get as much of the game in as you possibly can. If the skies stay clear of rain for even 30 minutes, you can finish a game or at least make it an official game, which is a goal an umpire should always strive for. Safety is always your first priority and erring on the side of caution is never an error.