

BLUES NEWS ON LINE

Contributions to mtoft@ozemail.com.au

March Edition

Vol 2 of 2003

Who's protecting our umpires By Mark Toft

A couple of years ago there was a big push for the protection of umpires/ referees in all sports, but it seemed to have run its course and there seems to be very little said, especially in softball circles.

I bring up the subject because a fellow colleague was flattened by a base runner coming into home plate after taking what seemed to be a very wide arch at third base.

The umpire was knocked down and was injured. He did not put a complaint in and of course nothing was done about it. It seems that it is now too late to report the incident and therefore deliberate or not the player has got off 'Scott free'.

It is my belief that any umpire who is touched by any player or coach should be ejected from the game immediately and let the judicial system take action.

Another colleague mentioned to me that this action could open a 'can of worms' because if an umpire touches a player they could find themselves facing the judiciary themselves. I agree in theory, but I also believe that no umpire should be touching a player or coach during a game anyway.

I have seen a number of umpires leave the game because of players and coaches taking some unusual actions and threats against umpires, only because they believe they have had a call against them.

Umpires must be protected at all costs and any incident, no matter how small must be reported immediately and the offender ejected.

What's in this edition

- **29 tips of preventive umpiring By Merle Butler**
- **Keeping out of trouble at third base by Neville Lawrance**
- **Results of last month's Power Word Grid**
- **Power Word - Find the Umpire**
- **Northern Territory Umpires Back on Track**
- **Jokes, laughs and a whole lot more**

Your Uniform – Another “Tool” of the Trade

After having spent a full weekend attending the WA Advanced Clinic with one of the greats of Softball and Softball Umpiring, Mr Alan McAuliffe (see article), many things have stuck in my mind but one in particular. Alan made a comment that has really struck home to me for a number of reasons. That was

“You never get a second chance to make a first impression”

Having recently been going through interview processes for a new job, I totally agreed with this from a professional perspective. When applied to softball umpiring, it is even truer.

As umpires, our appearance and conduct is very important. We are always “meeting” someone for the first time – weather it be a new association, team, player, coach or even a spectator – and they are interviewing/judging us. Not on who we are or our ability to call balls and strikes but on what we look like and how we carry ourselves. Chances are, if you look the part, you ARE the part.

The impression that we first make stays with us for the rest of our lives in softball. Overcoming a bad first impression requires considerable amount of work and effort.

With this in mind, I encourage you to take some time and think about what sort of first impression you make on people, when you walk out there to umpire a game. Ask yourself these basic questions:

- Are my clothes the right type and colour required?
- Are they cleaned and ironed?
- Do they fit correctly?

And most importantly

- Do I look the part?

If you are looking the part, then you are most of the way in creating the right first impression. In order to assist in helping WA umpires look the part, I have sourced a document that explains what the official softball umpire's uniform should be. It is available here (thanks to NSW Softball Umpiring Association for this document).

Whilst I am not expecting every umpire to spend many hundreds of dollars purchasing umpiring equipment, I would like to see all umpires in WA looking the part and creating the right first impression. This can be achieved at low cost. Consider it another “tool” that every umpire should have in their equipment bag. Looking the part will also make the games more enjoyable for you, as umpire and coaches will be more receptive to you as an umpire.

Make sure you ring the right number

"Hello" says a little girl's voice.

"Hi, Honey. It's Daddy", says Bob. "Is Mummy near the phone?"

"No, Daddy. She's upstairs in the bedroom with Uncle Frank."

After a brief pause, Bob says, "But you haven't got an Uncle Frank, Honey!"

"Yes I have, and he's upstairs with Mummy."

"Okay then. Here's what I want you to do. Put down the phone, run upstairs and knock on the bedroom door and shout to Mummy and Uncle Frank that daddy has just pulled up outside the house."

"Okay, Daddy."

A few minutes later the little girl came back to the phone.

"Well, I did what you said, Daddy."

"And what happened?"

"Well, Mummy jumped out of the bed with no clothes on and ran around screaming, then she tripped over the rug and fell down the stairs and she is just lying there and her neck is kind of twisted. I think she's dead."

"Oh my God..... And what about Uncle Frank?"

"He jumped out of bed with no clothes on too, he was all scared and he jumped out of the back window into the swimming pool, but he must have forgotten that last week you took out all the water to clean it, so he is in the bottom of the swimming pool and is just lying there, not moving. He looks kind of dead too."

There is a long pause, then Bob says, "Swimming pool?"

"Is this 854-7039?"

Send Contributions to mtoft@ozemail.com.au
previous editions of Blue's News On-Line are available
from the Resource Library on the Umpire's Website
nuc.softball.org.au

NT UMPIRES BACK ON TRACK

After a few weeks lay off the NT umpires are getting back together once a fortnight to have "Rules Discussion" nights and a general social get together. The first one was held at Ian & Margaret's abode with Ian organising the questions and leading the discussion (yes we could just hear above the steady rain!). David Binder arrived with nibbles and we welcomed a newcomer – Mark Bentley. Mark is an ex Riverland umpire and is very interested in resuming his umpiring interests. There is also a rumour of another "blue" in town so hopefully he will be tracked down.

During the time off the annual Blues v Men's ten pin Bowling challenged was held and once again the Blues were victorious. This is becoming a serious event on the calendar. This reminds me of the article from WA in Blues News about the umpires having a drink with the players – this happens almost every week up here – players come up to the umpires and ask questions or just generally discuss the games. Good relations between players and umpires can only benefit the game overall.

Two of our members (Derek Quong & Yvonne Newman) are off to the Men's Championships in Brisbane to observe and learn more about umpiring at a national level. Hopefully they will do some videoing and bringing back more information to the rest of us.

Arafura Games preparation is going ahead. The dates for the umpiring clinic have been set and we have umpires travelling from Alice Springs & Nhulunbuy to attend. The clinic will be held on 13, 14, 15 May with the Games beginning on 17 May. More information will come later but any umpire who happens to be in Darwin around that time is very welcome to come and join us. The design for the new T-shirt for the clinic is just about finalised and soon the order will be placed.

Lastly a big thanks you to the crew at the Under 16 Girls in Adelaide. I thoroughly enjoyed the week and learnt heaps as usual.

Marg Lee

YOUR UNIFORM Cont.....

Since taking over the State Director role, I have had the privilege to travel throughout various parts of Western Australia to a lot of Associations. I call it a privilege because I have had the opportunity to meet a large number of people who are enthusiastic about softball and softball umpiring.

On the whole, umpires on the diamond are creating a good first impression. However, there have been a few instances where the first impression was not so good. I strongly encourage each and every umpire in WA to spend some time before their next game ensuring that their appearance is correct and that they are looking the part.

Warren Duff

S	C	O	T	T	D	R	<h3>Last Month's Answers</h3> <p>Find the answers. Answers may be forward, backwards or diagonally</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> My Boy's first name Seven innings completed (score 2-1) Not Safe First name NSW Level 6 umpire (Female) Colour of Australian Olympic Medal in Atlanta and Sydney NSW umpire duo, Nicole and David's last name What Big Al calls the Derwent River ACT Umpire: Denise's partner Brother of Big Al When a field has no fencing it is regarded as City which hosted the recent Under 19 Men's Test Series Three up, three down The score is all tied up Runners can advance on this foul Don't call too early; Have good The dominant colour of South Australia's uniform Designated Runner This handy to have; A Strike Catching the ball with the bat A Buddhist sect. (popular in Japan since being introduced from China)
Y	P	G	I	U	I	E	
D	I	A	M	O	N	D	
N	F	M	I	E	N	T	
E	V	E	N	O	I	D	
Y	J	U	G	P	N	D	
N	F	S	S	E	G	B	
S	H	Z	W	N	F	U	
B	R	O	N	Z	E	N	
J	R	N	J	V	E	T	
C	R	E	E	K	L	S	

DIAMOND WAS THE POWER WORD FOR THIS PUZZLE.

- This Week's CLUES**
- Abbreviated first name of South Australia's Director of Umpiring
 - Former Level 8 Umpire from Tasmania (Last Name)
 - Victoria Duo Stacey and Leigh (Last Name)
 - Our National Umpiring Director's first name
 - Tricia Bichel's married name
 - Level 5 Queensland umpire (first name)
 - Former Queenslander, now ACT umpire (First name)
 - State Director of Umpiring Northern Territory (Last Name)
 - ISF Hall of Famer (Abbreviated first name)
 - Editor of BNOL nick name
 - Level 8 Umpire (The Traveler)
 - State Director of Umpiring Western Australia (Last name)

Find the Umpires Name

G	E	O	R	G	E	P	E	T	E	R	N
N	O	L	I	P	S	C	O	M	B	E	M
R	E	W	Y	A	A	R	B	I	S	M	C
Y	E	K	T	O	U	L	A	R	I	L	G
D	U	F	F	Y	V	O	N	N	E	A	U
N	A	N	O	R	I	E	E	L	B	P	I
A	N	N	T	A	V	V	A	T	N	O	R
O	G	R	A	M		G	S	N	A	V	E

The remaining letters are the Power word - SA Level 5 Umpire

-More Clues**
- NSW Level 7 Hill (Deceased)
 - Retired Victorian umpire Betty
 - ACT Umpire known as Dangerous ... for his driving ability
 - Abbreviated first name of NSW Level 8 Umpire
 - Victorian Umpire who's email address was lafox (first name)
 - New Level 5 Victoria Umpire (first name)
 - Director of Umpiring—Tasmania (Last name)
 - Former State Director - South Australia Level 8 Umpire (first name)

Reminder
 If you have anything which you think is newsworthy send it to The Editor - BNOL (mtoft@ozemail.com.au)

The following is an article on 'preventive umpiring', written by ISF Umpire-in-Chief Merle Butler. It was written some 12 years ago but the points he makes are still very relevant today. Although some of the points relate to Slow Pitch umpiring they have been retained, as more & more umpires are beginning to enjoy this form of the game.

Twenty-nine tips for preventive umpiring - by Merle Butler.

We've all heard the phrase, "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." If you'd like to know how that might affect your umpiring career, ask the veterans in your organisation. They'll tell you it's much easier to prevent problems than it is to solve them. I agree.

Over a period of years, tying the "ounce of prevention" advice to umpire training has resulted in the cliché "Preventive Umpiring." But the reason "catch phrases" survive long enough to become clichés is often because they offer worthwhile advice. Preventive umpiring - doing everything reasonable to make sure that nothing unusual will affect the play - is one measure of umpiring ability and experience.

Preventive umpiring is a philosophical approach that can make your job easier from the minute you step onto the field to the last out of the game. Although stressed in discussions and clinics, it is sometimes overlooked by umpires who, had they practiced it, may have been able to eliminate some problems before they began.

Here are 29 preventive umpiring tips that are easy to practice

1. Know your ball field. Know the out-of-play areas, the openings in the fence or dugouts, the holes under the fence, any tree limbs or wires that overhang the playing field, or other obstacles unusual to the field. If it is a new park and you are uncertain how to rule, consult the tournament director or umpire-in-chief for the appropriate ground rules. Once understood, carefully review those ground rules with both coaches at the pre-game meeting. Answer any questions *before* the game. That way you will not face an impromptu situation during the game.

2. Player safety is always a major concern. If you ignore player safety rules or allow games on dangerous fields, you're putting yourself in a precarious legal position. DON'T! Be certain bases are securely fastened, home plate is properly set into the ground, the pitching rubber is even with the ground and that multi-use fields have safety features covered. Because fast pitch & slow pitch base and pitching distances can vary, unused base anchors or pitching rubbers may present a hazard. Solve the problem *before* you start the game.

3. If working with new partners, review your mechanics and coverage *before* the start of the game. Agree to the coverage, especially if it is different from your usual mechanics. Be thorough: It may be the one tag-up responsibility

not covered that leads to problems. In particular, understand how you will communicate and signal when requesting help on a check swing, pulled foot, missed tag, etc.

4. Before walking onto the field, check for your indicator, brush, bat ring and (if you're the plate umpire) your ball bag, line-up holder and pencil or pen.

5. Check the bats and helmets *before* the start of the game. If you don't, check each one before each batter steps into the box. Remove the bats before you have to remove the batter or call an out. Remove a damaged (cracked) helmet before a serious injury occurs.

6. Ask coaches to have their players remove any jewellery before the start of the game.

7. Avoid being vindictive. No matter how much trouble you've had with a team, a player or a coach, the next time you work that team is a new game. Wipe the slate clean. Players and coaches are fighting to win. They'll say things on the spur of the moment, then regret or forget it an hour later. You should also forget it.

8. Review the line-up sheets with the coaches. Make sure the names are right and the numbers are correct on the sheet. Point out whether a DP (FP) or EH (SP) will be used, the importance of reporting substitutions and that you are required to record each. Don't allow a coach to tell you that the starter will re-enter when he tells you the substitute's name or number. Each substitution should be reported as it occurs.

9. If a coach reports a substitute who is ineligible to play or is entering in the wrong position in the batting order, prevent the error and make sure only legal substitutions occur.

10. At the start of each half inning or when a relief pitcher enters, tell the pitcher or catcher how many pitches have been thrown or the number remaining. Don't wait to penalise for excess warm-ups. (If the plate ump is reporting the substitutions to the official scorer, the base umpire should help with the count and notification.)

11. Tell the teams to pick up loose equipment located on the field. Do not wait until a live ball hits an object which is not part of the game, resulting in a base award or a dead ball.

12. Keep non-players out of the playing area.

13. Make sure all fence gates are closed. That includes dugout gates, maintenance access and player entry gates.

14. In fast pitch games, insure that substitute pitchers warm up outside the playing field. If that's impossible, designate an area down the foul lines and make sure each team uses three players (pitcher, catcher & a third player to protect the other two from line drives.) Have the pitcher throw away from the infield so wild warm-ups won't interfere with the game.

15. If you lose count or the number of outs, don't be embarrassed to ask your partner, particularly if a team member asks you. If you guess, and guess wrong, the result will be more embarrassing. Have you ever told a base coach there were two outs, only to have his runners "go" on a routine fly ball that became an easy double play? You get the picture.

16. In slow pitch, keep the catcher in the box so the batter has room to swing the bat. That's easier than waiting for an interference call or an injury.

17. When a batter requests "time" while the pitcher is on the rubber and has not started his pitch, authorize it, then step away from the catcher. When you walk away, the defence will not ask about a pitch that is thrown. Be emphatic with the call. And if the ball is thrown, emphatically yell "Dead Ball!"

18. In slow pitch, if two intentional walks are to be awarded, don't allow the second to occur until the first batter reaches first base.

19. In slow pitch, remember to call "Time" when each play has ended. (That's a rule often overlooked.) If you do not call time, subsequent action may cause problems, most notably in a one-umpire game when your back is turned. If you are part of a crew, when one umpire calls "Time", all others should do likewise.

20. If a fielder takes a position in a runner's path, a simple warning to back up or step forward may eliminate an obstruction call.

21. Tell a defensive player to replace an illegal glove when you first notice it, rather than waiting until a play is made with the glove.

22. After each offensive or defensive conference, inform the coach. It's a simple reminder that insures he knows a conference has been charged.

23. On time plays, when runs score or do not count, inform the scorer and both benches immediately. That reduces scorebook errors.

24. Practice good timing. How often have you had to reverse a "Safe" or "Out" call because a fielder dropped the ball or the runner slid past the bag? Those are two indicators that your timing is too fast. There's no rush. After all, "It ain't nothing 'till I call it."

25. Are you flamboyant? There's a fine line between an enthusiastic umpire and a clown. If you're close to that line, back off.

After all, criticism comes quickly enough. You don't have to encourage it. Sell a call with strength and dignity and you're an effective umpire. Become the centre of attention and you'll be the centre of controversy.

26. When opponents collide during play, try to be "on the scene" before they get up off the ground. That's not always possible, since playing action often continues. But even when you can't be standing there to prevent problems, you can be watching for tempers to flare.

27. Be aware of bench jockeying and understand the difference between good-natured jokes and outright insults. In most leagues, players know each other and often are friends. But even friendships may break down under competitive pressures.

28. If you're concerned about the way a game is going, stop play and call the coaches together. Explain their responsibilities for controlling players. Mention sportsmanship. Send a clear message that players must control their tempers. If nothing else, that break will provide a cooling-off period.

29. Talk wisely to players and coaches. A calm, gentle explanation of why you did or did not do something may eliminate the possibility of a complaint. A quiet, cautioning warning avoids embarrassing a player and usually produces quicker and more desirable results.

If you use common sense, hustle throughout the entire game, and utilise strong signals and mechanics you are more likely to stay out of trouble and at the same time gain the respect for which we all strive.

Staying out of trouble at third base cont.....

Most importantly, don't be a spectator, stay on the move adjusting and re-adjusting your position as runners advance and round third base or the ball is thrown around and fielders move about.

Keeping this in mind will provide you with the freedom of movement to setup in the best possible position to allow you to see the play that is about to happen. If you see it you then have a fair chance of being able to get the call right. Without having to guess because a fielder was in the way, or you couldn't get to the leading edge of the base, or the ball was thrown from behind you so you were unable to see it coming and therefore missed the play or even worse prevented the play because you were in the way.

KEEPING OUT OF TROUBLE AT THIRD BASE

By Neville Lawrance SDU South Australia

We all seem to have a problem staying out of harms way at third base, irrespective of whether we are local, country or national umpires. Throughout the state and right across Australia umpires are getting into trouble working third base. This is a problem that re-surfaces time and time again and is not just one or two isolated occasions that crop up as a result of something out of the ordinary happening during the course of a game. But rather it is an ongoing problem that needs to be addressed

In our basic training one of the first things we learn as new umpires is to keep all the elements in front of us. The base at which the play will be made, the ball, the runner being played and the fielder making the play must all remain in front of us if we are to have a half reasonable chance of getting any call right. This seems to be logical and works quite well.

To further assist us in this task our trainers tells us about the “inside outside theory”. The basis of which is to move into the infield when the ball is in the outfield and move to the outfield if the ball is in the infield. One could be mistaken for believing that just following these two simple rules would be enough to keep us out of trouble. While for most plays this is true provided we are only talking about force plays.

When we start looking at a tag play situations, where the runner is sliding into a base. We have another theory that we are told will help us get the best view of the play therefore providing us with the information that we need. With this extra information to help us we can then hopefully come up with the right answer. What I’m talking about is of course the “leading edge theory”.

Simply put if we setup on the leading edge of the base that the runner is attempting to reach. Using the inside outside theory and keeping all the elements runner, base, ball and fielder in front of use. We can, on a non-force or tag play see if the runner touches the base before or after the tag.

The three theories are all important if we are to be successful umpires at any level. However none will guarantee that we will stay out of trouble at third base if we don’t use them correctly. In fact the incorrect timing of their use will get us into more trouble than any of us can handle. That includes the most experienced of umpires.

So how and when do we use them, what is the secret to their correct usage? The answer is simple and very easy to follow “will there be a play”. You say this is nothing new. Yes there will be a play and we get into position ready for

the play and wait for it to happen. Surprisingly that is the problem. We find that umpires get into a position inside the diamond before they even know where and how the play will eventuate. The problem with this is that once inside the diamond it is not easy in fact it is almost impossible to get back out.

With multiple runners and the first throw going home we suddenly find that we are between the ball and a possible play at third. Not the best position to be in. Leading edge is out the door along with inside outside not to mention keeping all elements in front of use. In short we are IN TROUBLE.

So how do we stay out of trouble? Is there some sort of secret or trick that we can use or apply so we don’t get caught in the trap? How do we stay free to move about so we can use the leading edge, the inside outside theory and still keep every thing in front of us?

The first step is to work an area that I like to call the “D”. This is an area in foul territory forming a radius of about 6 or 7 feet around the third base. By working this area staying in foul territory we are free to move from the outfield to the infield side of third base as the runners advance around third base on their way home keeping every thing in front of us. When the play happens we will be free to.

Move inside the diamond with the ball coming from the outfield and the runner advancing from second. We can also move to a position outside the diamond in fair territory if the ball is coming from the infield, right field or a ball from left field that has been thrown home but cut in the infield and thrown to third for the play. If the situation demands we can even stay in foul territory adjacent to the base on the “leading edge” for a play back on a runner who has rounded and is now returning to third and it doesn’t matter where the ball is coming from.

So while in the end we use all the theories that we have been taught to help use come to a correct decision on any play at third. It is when we apply the theories that is important. Being free to move around the “D” to ensure that we can get to the very best position for any given play, no matter how much the ball is thrown around or how many runners there are. We can also do this without interfering with the base runners or getting in the way of the fielders as they setup to make a play at the base.

The “D” theory – Stay in the “D” unless you are going to have to make a call on a play that is going to happen at the base. Your own judgment and knowledge of the game will tell you if that position is going to be inside or outside the diamond, in fair or foul territory.

.....Continued Page 5