

# BLUES NEWS ON LINE

Contributions to mtoft@ozemail.com.au

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## Andy Takes over the reigns

Australian Level 8 umpire Andrew Rindfleish has been appointed as Australia's new Umpire in Chief for the next two years. Andrew replaces Margo Koskelainen after 19 years in the top job.

The Board appointed Andrew earlier this month following nomination for positions were called for National Director and staff member formerly held by David Crowe.

David Crowe's failure to renominate made way for Victoria umpire, Leigh Evans to take a position on National Staff for the first time.

Further in this edition a memo from Margo Koskelainen, which was sent to all staff members and State Directors following the Board's decision.

Margo was kind enough to send it to Blue's News On-Line for publication.

Congratulations to Andrew and Leigh for their appointments and BNOL has been informed that the position on National Staff vacated by Andrew will be advertised by Softball Australia in the very near future.

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### ATTENTION ALL UMPIRES

We need some copy for BNOL!

If there is something happening with umpires in your Association or State let Blue's News On-Line know and we can let everyone know.

BNOL is written by umpires for umpires.

Make my job easier with continued support of Australia's Umpiring Magazine.

## Andrew's Address to the Nation



As the new National Umpire in Chief, it is not without some trepidation that I step where previously only two pairs of feet have stepped. Both previous National Umpires in Chief, Marj Dwyer and Margo Koskelainen, provided undeniably considerable service to softball umpiring in Australia.

My goal in stepping into the National UIC role is to build on an already strong umpire program in Australia, a program nurtured and developed by Margo during her time as National UIC. As we enter a new era of softball umpiring, it is certainly not my intention to "throw out the baby with the bath water", rather to consolidate and move forward in a positive way.

I am looking forward to the challenges ahead. Particularly, I am looking forward to the opportunity to support each of you in your quest to "be the best you can be". I will rely heavily on your support, particularly those of you already at National level.

Going forward, the prospect of working with each of you, as we all continue our growth and development as servants to our sport, is the most exciting driver behind my move into this role.

On the National Staff scene, we have a change in personnel. David Crowe did not seek re-election. I'd like to thank David for his contribution to management of umpiring in Australia through his years in this role. His major contribution, of late, has been the Basic Paper. David's position has been taken by Leigh Evans, from Victoria. Welcome Leigh, I look forward to your contribution at the national level.

There still exists one vacancy on the National Staff. Nominations for this position will be called by the National Office in the near future.

Two of the most influential personalities in softball umpiring in Australia, Margo Koskelainen and Alan McAuliffe, will be honoured at the Softball Australia awards night on 22 October, somewhere in Melbourne. In fact, this evening will also be recognition of Margo and Alan's contribution to our sport internationally, as they will be inducted into the ISF Hall of Fame. Whilst the venue and other details of the evening are still to be finalised, this is an opportunity for us to attend one of the most prestigious events for umpiring in this country and to support and help Margo and Alan celebrate their fantastic achievements.

**Continued on Page 3**

## Softball Australia approves Bat Ring

From time to time issues have arisen when checking softball bats for defects or when checking sizes of bats prior to games. Recent times have shown that there are variations in the size of bat rings being used.

The plastic ASF bat ring is flimsy causing it to crack and flex, allowing it to sometimes fall over badly dented bats. As a result bats may have been incorrectly taken out of games or unsafe / illegal bats left in.

At all times common sense should be used when judging a bat legal or illegal. If a bat is cracked, has a stress fracture or is badly dented or flattened then it is illegal and unsafe and should be taken out of the game. Bearing in mind the effect of high temperatures and modern bat design, if a bat is only slightly distorted, slightly egg shaped etc then perhaps it is still safe to use.

Softball Australia has introduced a new official bat ring (see figure). The bat ring is made of 3mm thick aluminum with the Softball Australia logo etched into the surface together with a "04" trademark.

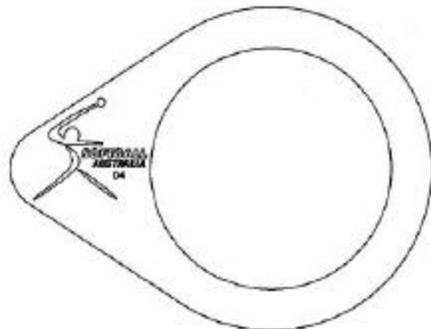
The bat rings are available from the Softball Australia office at \$10.00 each plus GST. State Umpiring bodies may wish to purchase in bulk to have stock available for their own state requirements.

The Softball Australia bat ring will be the official bat ring used at Australian National Championships from January 2005.

On behalf of the National Umpiring Committee, I would like to thank Richard Barrow and Justin Ross for their work behind the scene and design of the new bat ring.

Leigh Evans

National Umpire Staff Member



The comment embedded on this photograph is unsubstantiated. It may well be a man, who has just been too busy to finish what he had started.

## Queensland Board approves two umpiring awards

The hard work of the umpiring committee, especially Helen Strauss has realised three new awards for umpires in Queensland.

The Senior Umpire of the Year Award (Patricia Bichel Award) and the Junior Umpire of the Year Award and the Queensland District Association Umpire Development Award were recently ratified by the State Board.

It only seemed fitting that the Senior Award bear the name of one of Queensland's finest umpires and umpire administrators such as Tricia Sibraa (nee Bichel). Tricia's service to umpiring in Queensland and Australia is second to none. State Director for more than a decade and Australian Deputy Director for 10 years Tricia is one of the finest. Yes! She is a Queenslanders.

Tricia has been recognised in her home town of Toowoomba with a diamond named after her and the Toowoomba Umpire Service Award also bears the name of Tricia Bichel.

The awards will be announced on July 17 at the Queensland Awards Night.

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

Find the umpire(s) or location in the above grid from the following clues.

1. A type of bird.
2. Not blackfoot.
3. Editor of BNOL
4. Former National Director
5. Recently retired International
6. Not of this world (WA)
7. Olympic Venue
8. NT Director
9. 2 from Q
10. A couple from the West
11. Female Olympic Umpire
12. A father & son combo
13. Brothers of the rings
14. SA Director
15. Couple from ACT

**Puzzles submitted  
by John McAuliffe**

Which letter of the alphabet has not been used in above grid?

Re-arrange the letters in square 53, 71, 17, 7, 78, 50, 99, 105, 131, 46 & 25 from the grid to reveal the name of an umpiring legend.

### Andrew's Address to the Nation (From Page 1)

Please watch the normal communication channels for final details of the evening.

There is considerable movement around the country by State umpiring bodies looking into new on diamond shirts. One State, NSW, has had a polo type shirt for a number of years now and I'm aware of trials and testing of alternate shirts in three or four other States. The National Umpiring Committee has "entered the fray" and is presently developing an Action Plan with the aim of having a new National shirt available for the 2005 National Championships. I'd appreciate any comments or feedback on this initiative, from any source, via your State Directors/UICs, please.

I'm sure you are all aware that we had nine of our senior umpires attend an ISF clinic in Brisbane in January. A number of observers also sat in on the clinic. There will be a Technical Bulletin issued addressing the changes we will be introducing as a result of this clinic.

The Technical Bulletin will come out soon after we get past the hurly burly of the theory exam. In the mean time, I'd be happy to discuss any mechanics aspects States might be unsure of and can't wait for the Technical Bulletin for clarification.

Speaking of the theory exam, as we go to press on this, the last Monday in May, I'd like to wish all of you the best tonight and I hope your results are reflective of your efforts to prepare for this exam.

Andrew Rindfleish  
National UIC

### Softball Canada's Blue Convention

For those umpires wishing to know more about the Canadian Blue's Convention to be held in Calgary, Alberta between March 24-27 next year, go to the website listed below.

**Web site - <http://www.blueconvention2005.ca/>**

## **The Strike Zone** contributed by Alan McAuliffe

The strike zone is an unbelievably unique subject, and when we say unique, we mean unique to almost every umpire who calls the game. Although the strike zone is clearly defined in the rulebook it is difficult to call according to this definition.

This is not as bad as it may seem to many of you. Many coaches would absolutely run umpires off the field if they called the zone exactly as it is defined in the book. However, what tends to happen is that umpires in general begin to interpret what the zone should be in their own eyes. Our interpretation should be that the height of the zone is from the armpits (substitute sternum for armpits and a full ball below the sternum), when the batter assumes his natural batting stance, to the top of the knees (any part of the ball at the top of the knees). As for in and out (width), if the ball "touches" the black, it's a strike, if it meets the up/down requirements.

The key element to all of this is consistency. Coaches and players alike want umpires to call the zone the same for both teams from the first to the last inning. So the question is, how do we maintain consistency? Some people use the theory of a sheet hanging from a line at the top of each individual batter's zone.

Other umpires describe it as using a window frame or a cylinder over home plate through which the ball must pass. You may have another theory or method that works better for you. The point of this discussion is to do what works for you to best see the ball as it comes through the zone and be able to determine a ball or strike consistently.

The other key element of the strike zone is accuracy. An umpire that always calls the ankle pitch a strike is consistent, but not accurate. Being consistent allows a team to adjust to your zone, but being accurate makes for a much smoother game and less flack from the coaches and spectators.

By using the imaginary sheet, window frame or cylinder theory an umpire has less of a need to concentrate on movements being made by the pitcher to determine when or where the ball is going to be released. This also affords the umpire the ability to look through the zone and be more coherent to other responsibilities as the plate umpire, eg, a check swing.

Because the zone is the visual of the sheet, picture frame or cylinder, all the umpire has to do is decide if the ball touched the sheet hanging at the front of the plate or passes through the frame or cylinder. Doing this should enable an umpire to increase his reaction time to bunt attempts, check swings, balls off the batter and balls hit close to the line that have to be ruled fair or foul. This improved reaction time is much needed when calling the game at a high level.

With the incredible ability of the players of today something can happen with every pitch. It is also nice to be able to monitor more of the action from the plate, especially where only two umpires are being used.

With the three umpire mechanics and the theory of working ahead being applied, the plate umpire has much more help. However, you must still always be aware of all that is taking place and that is why it is imperative to have some sort of standard for the strike zone established before taking position behind the plate.

Still, throughout the course of the game the strike zone is singly the most important aspect and requires the plate umpire to provide consistency and accuracy from the first to the last pitch, or many other things during the course of the game could be affected.

The point is to hang out your sheet, open your window or cylinder, and present your zone in whatever method that works for you and stick with it. Deviation in your zone throughout the course of the game will only make your job that much more difficult.

In closing, whatever theory or method you use to determine whether a pitch is a strike or a ball, work hard at it so that it becomes second nature and you should improve every time out. Start working on your zone early. Call scrimmages for local teams or get behind someone taking pitches from a pitching machine. Another thing to do is find pitchers who are working through the off-season with a pitching coach and get out there and see pitches early and often.

## **Word from Northern Territory**

Margaret and Ian Lee are home in Darwin again. It doesn't take long to get back in the swing of things as Marg is already back on the diamond. (They must have a cruel Umpiring Coordinator in the North).

The Northern Territory Blue's are ecstatic that the Lee's are home and they have asked to send a big "Welcome Home" to Margaret and Ian in this edition of Blues News.

Of course it has been some time since Marg and Ian were in Darwin and from the entire Blue's Family I take this opportunity to say we hope everything is alright and you enjoy catching up with friends and family in the top end.

**Congratulation on passing your Level 2**

**JESSIE SMITH & JAY GIBSON FROM N.S.W.**

Memo Sent By Margo Koskelainen To State UICs / SDUs / National Umpire Staff on May 18, 2004

We thank Margo for sharing this memo with us all.

Subject: Thank you

On Saturday, 15 May, the Board of Softball Australia appointed Andrew Rindfleish as National UIC for the next two years. Andrew's appointment was effective at the end of that meeting and there is to be a brief hand over period.

It is appropriate at this time that I thank the State UICs/ SDUs and National Staff members, past and present, for the commitment each made to ensure that the Umpiring Program of Softball Australia was seen by the softball community as a strong group of people striving for professionalism, and, totally dedicated to the improvement of umpiring proficiency in our sport. The Umpire Program would not, could not, have succeeded without this commitment.

For me, and for umpiring in Australia, there is no doubt that the past 19 years has been an incredible and marvellous journey. I cannot be more proud of what "umpiring" accomplished during this time. However, it is essential that umpires of all levels understand how important it is to have been on this journey, even if it was for only part of the way, and how valuable they are to the Umpire Program.

To be able to say that I have been a part of it fills me with awe as I know from whence we came, and that, central to this, friendships made in times of adversity and high adventure, success and failure, will remain steadfast come what may.

On a more personal level, I have been the beneficiary of the skills of many people over these last 19 years which I acknowledge and for which I am very grateful, in particular Ken Culpitt and John Larter, but I am humbled by and greatly indebted to Alan McAuliffe and Tricia Sibraa [Bichel] for their strength, support and assistance which was available to me at all times. Their loyalty and dedication to the umpires, umpiring and the Umpiring Program is, even now, first and foremost in their considered deliberations and, quite beyond dispute, far outweighs any personal aspirations.

I also would like to record my appreciation to Vivienne Triplett for the encouragement and sustained interest in the Umpire Program which has continued long after her direct involvement ended.

There is another who continues to be at the centre of my world and therefore my work with the Umpiring Program. The usual suspect one might say, but that flippancy would mask the depth of what I hope to convey, which is to thank Karl for being with me for the entire journey.

I wish you all continued success and I look forward to seeing some of you at the park.

Margo Koskelainen.

### Stay Tuned

I was talking to one of the State's Training Officers this week and he informed me of what they were doing using the latest technology. It all sounds very interesting and I asked him to share his techniques with BNOL.

So in future editions we will have some more ideas on how to develop our junior umpires. I feel every little bit helps and I like the concept I was hearing.

So if you're a State Trainer or even a District Association Training Officer stay tuned and see what we come up with.

Tofty

Puzzle Answers (to be included in next issue or whenever?)  
1. Crowe, 2. Whitehead, 3. Toft, 4. Koskelainen, 5. Gowty, 6. Maass,  
7. Blacktown, 8. Lee, 9. Sibraa, 10. Richardson, 11. Franklin,  
12. Rindfleish, 13. McAuliffe, 14. Lawrence, 15. Culpitt  
The unused letter is 'J'  
The umpiring legend is Viv Triplett

Deadline for June's edition of Blue's News On-Line is June 15, publication date is June 22, 2004. All Umpires are encouraged to contribute articles, especially State Directors and National Staff members. If there is something happening in softball umpiring let's get into BNOL.

Send contributions to The editor, Mark Toft at [mtoft@ozemail.com.au](mailto:mtoft@ozemail.com.au)