

Blue's News On-Line

Official Australian Softball Umpire's Magazine

Contributions to mtoft@ozemail.com.au MayEdition 5/2006

National Umpiring Program Website: umpring.softball.org.au

The National UIC's Call with Andrew Rindfleish

This month I was asked by Darrell Shephard, NSW UIC, if I'd present an introduction to a seminar the NSE Umpires Association were conducting for the NSW local Association UICs.

This seminar was conducted during the recent NSW Under 16 State Championships and focused on the roles and responsibilities of the local UICs as well as presenting some tools and resources applicable to these roles.

In writing this short introduction, the very valuable contribution played by local UICs as well as the huge responsibility falling on their shoulders really hit home with me.

Elsewhere in this edition of BNOL I have captured the essence of this presentation and in doing so, present it as a testament to this huge contribution and would like to thank all UICs responsible for management of umpiring matters and developing our umpires at the grass roots level.

To all those National level umpires who have completed the survey on the 2006 Nationals, I say thank you. These provide some very useful feedback as we prepare for the 2007 round of National Championships.

Speaking of which, the applications have been distributed to all State UICs and the application form is now posted to our web site.

A couple of small problems have recently come to light with the current electronic Activity Log. If you are having problems, please download the current version from the web site.

It was only updated in the last week. I'd like to acknowledge the work done by Matt Gowty in preparing and maintaining this document for us.

The Board of Softball Australia have re-appointed Leigh Evans, Sue Itzstein and Mark Toft to National Staff member positions for a two year term. Congratulations to all three.

To all those sitting the exam on Monday 29 May, careful reading, clear thought patterns and good luck with your pencil strokes.

Another large crew for NSW T-Ball State Championships



T-Ball (Under 10) Championship by Ron Houison

The weekend of the April 29-30 saw the first T-Ball Championship run in NSW for a number of years. In recent memory this competition has been a "Tournament" with, supposedly, no winners. The coaches and players know the difference between winning and losing, and so it was decided to again run the competition as a Championship.

Forty-nine umpires attended the weekend in what overall was good weather for softball. The venue was Penrith City Softball Association, west of Sydney at the foot of the Blue Mountains.

Since this is a junior championship we tend to find a number of the umpires on the crew have not been calling games for very long - this championship was no exception, with Level 1's making up 35 of the 46 umpires on the diamonds. A number of the blues had recently been accredited at Level 1 and were having their first look at umpiring at a state championship.

The new blues were welcomed into the crew by the more experienced people, and by lunch time on Saturday they were comfortable enough to be stirring with the best of them!

One of my highlights of the weekend was seeing the pride on the faces of 2 newly-accredited umpires as they walked out to a game for the first time in a uniform blue shirt.

The crew ran 4-umpire systems all weekend. No, not THAT 4-umpire system... To speed up the game all changes were managed by the 4th umpire who sat behind the net. This allowed the maximum possible play to be achieved in the 1-hour timed games.

Continued Page 4.....

The Contribution of the Affiliate UICs by Andrew Rindfleish (National UIC)

The management of the Australian Softball Umpire Program really is a collaborative effort. I, as the national UIC, am responsible for the program nationally. The eight State UIC's have responsibility for the delivery of our program at the State level. And, the local Association or Affiliate UICs have the enormous responsibility for delivery of the program at the local affiliate level.

The National Umpire Program, like any other people-based organisation, really is a pyramid. Our pyramid has eight levels. There are a small number of umpires who get the opportunity to umpire at a world championship or the Olympics. These few are supported at each level of the pyramid by ever increasing numbers of umpires as we move in a downward direction through the pyramid. There are literally hundreds of level one's and unqualified park umpires across Australia. Hundreds of umpires within the local associations.

The Association UICs have a huge responsibility. I like to think that these responsibilities fall into two main two areas. I'm sure there are many others, as well. The first main responsibility is as an integral part of the management of our sport within your local association. Secondly, from the National Umpire Program perspective, the local UIC manages our program at the grassroots level. It is at this grassroots level where our umpires are recruited and where 50% of all umpire accreditations and re-accreditations take place.

Recruiting of umpires almost 100% occurs within the local association. Getting new umpires is half the battle; retaining them is the other half of the battle. Here, again, the local UICs are terribly important to the National program. If, whilst the new and aspiring umpires are under the care of the Local UIC, they develop a passion for officiating and a hunger to improve and develop, we have a much improved chance of retaining them within our sport.

And, we need to train and develop our umpires if we want to retain them. At the National level we are moving our training and assessment processes to a competency based platform. I know most State Associations offer Basic and Intermediate Clinics on a regular basis. However in our business, there is nothing that can replace good, effective on-the-job training. This is, again, where the role of the Association UIC, is so important

For our beginning and Level 1 umpires, the local UICs play an enormous part. Once they have a person interested in umpiring, it is their job to care for, to nurture, to protect and to develop this person so that he or she becomes a valuable contributor to our program.

As an Association UIC of some 25 years myself, at Sutherland Shire, I understand the enormity of the job of an Affiliate UIC. On behalf of softballers across Australia, and particularly umpires at all levels, I'd like to thank each and every Affiliate UIC for the valuable week-in and week-out contribution made within the grass roots of our sport.

The Blues are buzzing in Blue Town

It has certainly been an exciting month for New South Wales Softball. We have had a series of big events and also have some exciting things to come. Over the Easter long weekend we had four days of amazing ladies and men's softball. Blacktown Olympic Park played host to Grand Prix 3 with National and International Players and Umpires coming together for this competition.

In the Men's Fastpitch Invitational – Dolphins, once again made a familiar appearance in the Grand Final defeating United in a game full of spirit and bench clearing determination.

The Final Crew was -
Bruce McCahon, Andrew Rindfleish, Scott Rindfleish, Nicola Ogier

Grand Prix 3 had its fair share of highs and lows, some nail biting plays and some fabulous hitting. The NSWIS Blues won the third leg of the Softball Australia Grand Prix Series with a 2-1 victory over QAS Heatwave.

After recording a 6-0 win record in the preliminary rounds, the defending series champions continued their winning form into the championship game.

The team was also declared winners of the series on overall points after 3 rounds of competition.

Pre-assessment for Higher Levels underway **Queensland**

In preparation for the various State Championships to be conducted at the end of the year, nomination forms have been distributed for application to the positions of UIC, Examiner and Trainee Examiner. A mailout of the nomination forms was conducted during May. Applications close for these positions on June 9 2006. Copies of the nomination forms are also available on the website www.umpiring.qld.softball.org.au.

Nomination forms to attend the various State Titles is also on the Queensland Umpiring Website. If you wish to attend a tournament download the nomination form from the website, complete by the due date and forward to Ron Yardley.

Additionally, Level 3 to 4 pre-assessment is being conducted during the month of June. The assessment is being conducted at both Caboolture and Redlands. Please contact Darren Sibraa if you wish to present for pre-assessment.

David Casey

What Should You Do When You Make A Poor Call?

(Extracted from an article in Referee Magazine – September 1993)

The basic premise for all officials is to make correct judgement calls. Simple enough, right? Of course not; if it were that simple there wouldn't be a shortage of officials or an abundance of know-it-alls, otherwise known as "fans".

Most officials have heard from their trainers and observers: "Slow down ~ see the play ~ then call it". But what happens when you see the play and make the wrong call? You're faced with a critical thought process and an internal battle. Is it more important to get it right or is sticking to your guns more paramount?

There are two common ways to look at a play that you *know* you've called wrong. The first is to stay with your original call, no matter what the circumstances, because changing your call is likely to decrease your credibility. The officials who apply that philosophy believe that if you change your call, the teams and fans will expect changes on every close play.

The level of the sport also plays a key role. It is generally understood that senior softball umpires are reluctant to change calls unless there are compelling reasons to do so, such as input from crewmates.

A very senior umpire, considered to be one of the best in the game, has stated that an umpire should never say he's sorry for a call because that tends to lead to chaos. He said that when an umpire apologises to a coach or player, the umpire immediately loses credibility.

Still, there are cases in which world class umpires "overrule" their partners. Most of those cases involve scoring plays, eg, a home run shot was originally ruled a foul ball when it was clear to at least one other umpire that it was a fair ball. Those cases are rare.

Should the same approach be taken by officials who work the lower level weekend games? A quote taken from a newspaper article in 1992 stated: "Kids make mistakes and a good official will admit he makes mistakes also. You just try to minimise them and hope they don't make the difference in the game."

One of the most common complaints from players and coaches at the lower level games is that officials refuse to admit mistakes. Those officials who do admit their mistakes usually follow this thought process: *How can you expect a coach or a player to believe you when you say you were right unless you are also willing to admit when you are wrong?* They believe that approach works as long as you're not apologising too often.

Partners' mistakes. It's awkward to know just what to do when your partner makes a mistake. In softball, a classic example is the checked swing. There are two common schools of thought: If the plate umpire said the batter didn't swing,

the base umpire automatically supports his partner's call; or, the base umpire will "overrule" if he felt the batter swung.

Some crews add a third consideration related to timing: If there is a disagreement between catcher and umpire after a checked swing and a "delay" before the plate umpire eventually asks for help, back your partner even if you saw the batter "go too far." Those crews sense that game control would be in jeopardy if calls were changed after disagreements or lengthy delays.

An example of the dilemma posed by trying "to get it right" was highlighted in an article titled "Kid Ump". A veteran adult umpire (Bill Jones) changed calls made by 14-year-old umpire, Tommy Brown, who was umpiring an under-12 game. Those changes contributed to a series of on-field problems that dogged Brown for some time.

Well after the article was published, Jones insisted that one of the plays in question "was not even close. The first baseman pulled his foot off the bag (and Tommy called the runner out)." Brown was out of position, noted Jones, who said, "I had a better look at the play than Tommy."

No matter who or what was correct, the play and ensuing chaos illustrate the problems of "getting it right." In that case, Jones was chastised by many of his colleagues, but should he have been praised for "getting it right"?

Jones's methods were questionable, but it appears as if his intentions were pure. Said Jones, "I know that there is no appeal on a judgement call, but I also have to get it right. I wanted the kids to enjoy and be able to play their game."

The debate continues and the jury is still out! What would you do in this circumstance?

Congratulations George

At Softball Victoria's AGM on May 20 2006, George James was awarded Life Membership of Softball Victoria. Softball Victoria recognised 17 consecutive years administrative service on Softball Victoria's Umpiring Committee. Congratulations George on a mammoth effort!

Letters to the Editor

Canada's Blue Convention

Hi Mark, Denis Bélanger from Quebec City, Canada. If you want to have information about this convention just have a look on Softball Canada website, under officiating and then Blue Convention. You can also have a look at the convention's website. If you need more information, just e-mail me. Thank you, Denis.

....From page 1

NSW tried a new concept at this championship - with play starting and stopping on a siren. The Blue Crew and the teams worked well together, and when the siren sounded, signalling the start of a game, every diamond had a fielding team ready to play and a batter ready to hit the ball. 6-inning games were not uncommon, and we even had a couple of 7-inning games over the weekend.

On Sunday afternoon it was Macarthur and Georges River playing off for the Boy's Championship, with Manly Warringah and Cumberland Nepean facing off for the Girl's Championship. Congratulations to Macarthur and Manly Warringah, the winners of hard-fought campaigns.



Congratulations to the Blues on the finals:

Boy's Final:
Sharyn Girdler (P),
James English (1st),
Ronnie Sheather (3rd)
and Michael Gill
(Changes)

Girl's Final:
Kerry Benson (P),
Sara Brain (1st),
Matthew McGrath(3rd)
and
Rebecca Palmer (Changes)



Most of the crew were available for a photo at the end of the championship, however some had to leave early - just in case there's some of you out there who might count the number of heads in the photo!!! Thank you to all of the umpires who contributed their time on the weekend, also my thanks to Amanda Houison and Leanne Gearside, my very capable deputy UICs.

Lastly, this weekend all will travel to Tamworth (north-west NSW) for the U16 State Championships. We hope a great weekend is had by one and all, players, umpires, UIC and staff alike. The best of luck to the umpire candidates vying for their next Level this weekend, we hope all are successful and an amazing amount of fun is had by all.

At this weekend away, NSW SUA will have their first Umpire-In-Chief Conference. All UIC's from their respective Associations will convene with the NSW SUA to help, discuss, plan, implement and generally discuss the UIC position within their home venue. A great weekend is planned. Good luck to all.

Future Umpires Program a success in Frankston

On March 4-5, the Victorian Under 14's State Championships were held in Frankston. This tournament is used as an opportunity for training and development for Level 1 and Level 2 umpires. Over the tournament all umpires receive feedback and mentoring from senior umpires.

Each association is also required to nominate a future umpire. This year nine new umpires (affectionately nick-named the 'Fuppies' by UIC Jason Carter) participated in the Future Umpires Program.

The program promotes umpiring to people wishing to get involved with umpiring and is aimed at those people who have not yet achieved a level 1 and have not been to a state championship.

Future umpires are taught the fundamentals of base umpiring and learn through observation, theory and practical sessions. They then get to umpire one game on the Saturday afternoon and another on the Sunday.

Comments from the Future Umpires

"I most enjoyed the throw-outs"

"I learnt to umpire properly"

"I enjoyed the weekend"

"I learnt new things and fixed other things"

"It taught me heaps"

A big thank you to Alex Turnbull and Vanessa Flemming-Baillie for assisting to run the program and to Jason Carter (UIC), Lindsay Whitehead, Di Waller, Rhonda Scammell and Kev Broomhall for all their support both before and during the tournament.

Stacey Evans
FUPT



Classic finishes on a high note by Richard Barrow

The 05-06 Ausport Classic competition ended this weekend with Finals Day at Melbourne Ballpark Altona. This season's competition saw some new innovations that certainly added to the excitement for players and spectators, with the Ausport Challenge skills tests in the middle of the day.

With three Sunday rounds before Xmas, the Ausport Classic provided great opportunities for umpires to work more games of a high standard, and certainly benefited candidates at all levels, as well as being good preparation prior to Nationals.

Finals Day started in the morning with the Men's Preliminary Final between Metrans and Sunshine. Phil Waller officiated behind the plate, with the two Kev's at the bases. Sunshine ended with a comfortable victory.

Later in the morning the Plate Final of the Women's competition took place between Glen Eira and Knox. The plate umpire was Richard Barrow, with Ryan Thorneycroft and Roy Arscott officiating calls at the bases (the Triple R crew?). Glen Eira were victorious with a tight one-run victory.

The final of the Ausport Challenge skills test was exciting. Players had competed over the three earlier rounds in categories of: Target Throw (throwing from home to a designated area in the outfield), Base Chase (timed base-running from home around the bases), and Home Run Derby (batters facing ten pitches from the machine). Of particular note was the five towering home runs hit by Luke Lee Tet. We need to see some umpires enter these skills challenges next season.

In the afternoon, the Men's Final was played between Comets and Sunshine. This game was tight and exciting all the way, with Sunshine victorious by one run. Plate umpire George James was joined by Kevin Broomhall, Phil Waller and Jason Carter at the bases. Stan Tolmie handled the radar gun and top speed pitches were recorded at 130 kph.

Rounding out the afternoon was the Women's Cup Final contested by Falcons and Syndal. Plate duties were performed by Diane Waller with Jason Carter and Kevin Offer at the bases. Syndal won by 1 run in a thrilling final.

A big "Thank You" to all umpires for their work during each game of the Ausport Classic this year. Whether you did just one game or a dozen, your efforts are appreciated and we hope you derived value from it as well. Congratulations to those appointed to finals, and let's all continue to support this competition next season.

