

NATIONAL UIC'S CALL Andrew Rindfleish



In this edition of Blue's News On-Line I'd like to talk about two aspects of softball umpiring in a general sense. The first is that of "service", particularly to pay tribute to the hundreds of umpires we have in Australia who do just that – they provide a service to our great game.

There are many and varied reasons we each of us became involved in umpiring, and there are different reasons why we stay involved. Irrespective of these reasons, we all have to have recognize the notion that we are providing a service to our sport – a service that allows the athlete, coaches, administrators and fans the opportunity to participate at whatever level of competition they choose.

Unfortunately there is not enough recognition of this service - not by the other participants and not by the softball umpire infrastructure.

There will always be some amongst us who are fortunate enough to be appointed to finals, who umpire Tests matches, who get to travel away with international teams or who are appointed to World Championships or to the Olympics.

I say fortunate, because, whilst these umpires have worked hard at their trade, such appointments are made by others and are the result of a complex set of criteria. Irrespective, we have to recognize and pay tribute to these appointments. After all they are the pinnacle of our trade and we all celebrate them.

The real heroes of softball umpiring, though, are those of us who front up game after game, week after week, season after season and quietly go about our job, serving the game we love. We all need to find ways of celebrating this service, for without it we have no trade to belong to.

League administrators and associations have a part to play, so do umpire administrators. To each and every one of you in such a role I urge you to be creative and find ways of celebrating this service. Number of years umpiring; number of career games; number of games in a season; number of weekends umpired – these are all measures that might help define service.

Perpetual and special awards can be presented. The National Umpire program has a series of Service Awards, which I urge all State Directors to review and participate in.

To all those softball umpires out there, in the trenches, week after week – I salute you.

The second point I'd like to cover is the importance of observing other umpires at work. As we all go about our trade, doing what we obviously love to do, we owe it to ourselves to "be the best we can be". If for no other reason, it gives us a feeling of being more comfortable in our own skin, of doing a

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NATIONAL UIC's CALL *Continued*

good job and intensifies the enjoyment of umpiring. One easy way to enhance one's own umpiring is to watch other umpires do their job.

Players, coaches and fans certainly watch the umpires do their job. We should watch umpires for the mechanics they use, their movement, hustle, timing, position and angles on calls and the way they handle interesting game situations.

We all need to self appraise our own performance, a very difficult and learned skill. Appraisal of others is a much easier thing to do, and is something all umpires should do and can easily do. Now I'm NOT promoting that we all go around "writing up" other umpires.

We need to do this in private – this is for our own individual benefit. Watch what others do, be critical and make (a mental) note of what's done well, what could have been done better; ask (yourself) why would he/she have done that; do I do that?; can I do that that?; make sure I don't do that; that's not the correct position for that play; that position/rotation/timing was perfect.

Use your peers' performances to provide opportunities for you to enhance your own experiences and take the opportunity to enhance and develop your umpire appraisal skills. Use the performance of the top umpires in your State or league to see the correct execution of our umpiring trade. Whilst the top umpires might not always be text book in the execution of all mechanics, and they will sometimes get it wrong, they will provide the best examples of how it should be done.

I urge all of us to become students of the game and specifically students of umpiring. Being a student leads to learning and learning leads to improved performance.



World Men's Qualifier Umpiring Crew – New Zealand 2008

Back L to R: Wiremu Tamaki (NZ), Lindsay Edwards (NZ), Damien McCauley (AUS), Leigh Evans (AUS), Scott Rindfleish (AUS)

Front L to R: Wayne Saunders UIC (NZ), Darren Sibraa (AUS), Bill Smith DUIC (NZ), Lance Type (NZ), Mark McFarlane

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AUST. CAPITAL TERRITORY

www.suaact.softball.org.au

Sad passing of Mike Sandford (extract from ACT Web site)

(6 May 2008)



Today we mourn the loss of a great stalwart of softball umpiring here in the ACT.

Mike Sandford, friend, gentleman, mentor, SUA ACT Life Member and all round nice bloke passed away earlier today surrounded by his family.

On behalf of the SUA ACT Board, current and past members we would like to pass on to his family our condolences and heart felt wishes.

This is a very sad time for all however, we are better for having had the pleasure of knowing Mike and sharing in his love of softball.

Gone but not forgotten, cheers old friend.



We are proud of our umpire development program: Pictured above are the members of the Softball Umpiring Association from the Australian Capital Territory. The picture was taken following the annual presentation day at the Hawker Reserve.

Although the SUA ACT program thrives with new members and a good mentoring program in place the program also has to address the retention issue. Being a small State association it is a great deal easier to work with senior umpires on a regular basis.

The SUA ACT is confident of developing more umpires during the 2008/2009 season.

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ACT Umpires Finish a Great Year

What a fantastic year for the Softball Umpires Association of the ACT (SUAACT).

'The 2007/08 Game Plan' = Attracting and retaining umpires and developing a greater sense of an Association.

One of the problems identified in the past that hindered retention of Umpires was the abuse we coped from people who thought they could see the strikes better from the sideline!!!. What to do????.

In 2007/08 armed with a keen new Executive, we trialled a ZERO Tolerance Policy and it was the talk of the town. This new policy was fully backed by Softball ACT and saw a HUGE reduction in the level of abusive behaviour from players/officials and helped to attract new umpires to the Association. But how else to attract and retain members??. Train them!! - seems like a simple concept, but for SUAACT it was new!! – We introduced a Mentoring program – which meant that every umpire had a Mentor. The Mentors would do games with them, observe their games, give them ongoing feedback based on a set of training standards = great success.

Our website had developed cobwebs, so our trusty webmasters Mat Camp and Luke Strain set about to bring it out of the dark ages, and it looks fantastic with bells, whistles and flashing signs!!!!– a website for our members to be proud of – check it out.....www.suaact.softball.org.au

Not content with all of this, the Executive ordered SUAACT specific off diamond shirts, worn proudly by our members. We also organised several social events throughout the season where we all got together over a barbie, had a snag, a drink and took the rinse out of Brett!!.. But wait there's more – we introduced a number of new awards, namely the Dan McKay Rookie Umpire of the Year (named after the great man), won in its inaugural year by Rebekah Pearson. Then we had the Umpires Umpire award– voted on by members of the Association, and members obviously appreciated all his hard work as it was won by Brett Atkinson. We gave out Service medals for the first time, recognising years of service to SUAACT - Dan being the big winner, receiving his 40 year medal and we presented Diana Kropp with a Life Membership for 17 years of fantastic service to umpiring in the ACT.

The award that is not new to SUAACT is the prestigious “ACT UMPIRE OF THE YEAR”, and this year this went to one of our young umpires, newly crowned with his Level 3, Tim Windsor. Tim did a great job as UIC at his Junior Affiliate Association, training up many young kids to be junior blues, as well as mentoring/umpiring for SUAACT and doing all this with the pressure of being examined for his level 3 – well done Tim.

At the end of the season our numbers had grown with 12 new umpires, a new Level 5 – Mark Gallagher, a new level 3, several new level 2's and numerous new level 1's and an Association that was together, buzzing, supportive and respected.– for next season we already have a long list of people wanting to come on board the good ship SUAACT, we will be extending our mentoring/training program, offering our mentors formal training in mentoring and with more social events planned SUAACT is looking towards a very bright future....WATCH THIS SPACE.....

Sarah Houston
President

National Umpiring Program

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NEW SOUTH WALES

www.nswumpires.softball.org.au

International Challenge by Scott Rindfleish

Softball NSW played host for the 2008 International Challenge between Australia, Canada, China and Japan from March 12-16.

Being an Olympic year, selectors are finalising team line ups in preparation for the Beijing games later in 2008.

The NTC International was the lead up series with Canada leading the way in preliminary rounds, but was beaten by Japan in the Final 1-0. The International Challenge showcases these well drilled sides once again and was the first opportunity to see the Aussie Spirit line-up perform together, since the squad was announced.

Canada secured victory in the 2008 International Challenge by defeating Japan 2 runs to 1 in an eight innings tie-breaker.

With a score line of nil all at the end of seven innings, Canada's aggressive batting and base running saw them put two runs on the board in the tie-breaker, with Japan managing only one in reply. Canada proved that they are definite medal contenders for the 2008 Olympics with the most wins recorded over the course of the five day Tournament.

Australian players had their final opportunity to impress selectors, as the Australian Olympic team will be announced in early April.

Milestones: Australia's Natalie Ward, Natalie Titcume and Belinda Wright reaching career milestones. Ward played her 400th game for Australia; Wright played her 200th game and Titcume playing over 300 games for Australia.

Highlights: Stacey Porter - three out of the park homers. Fastest pitcher in the world - Ueno (Japan) pitching a 120kph pitch with an average fastpitch speed of approx 115kph. A three hour forty minute eleven innings marathon between Canada and Australia with the Spirit coming up with the 11-10 win.

CREW

Debbie Grove
Darrell Shephard
Damien McCauley
Neville Lawrence
Andrew Rindfleish
Scott Rindfleish
Diane Waller

GRAND FINAL CREW

Debbie Grove, Diane Waller, Darrell Shephard, Scott Rindfleish

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NEW SOUTH WALES

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NSW Under 14 State Championships

Well, it was somewhat delayed, but we finally journeyed to Lismore for the NSW Under 14 State Championships. The weeks leading up to the weekend of 26-27 April saw rain again hit the far north of NSW, however the weather dried up sufficiently for the championship to be run.

The championship itself was much smaller than in previous years, with six female teams making the trip. A lot of people were unable to make the trip on the rescheduled weekend due to a number of reasons – unfortunately this meant no male championship was contested. It also meant a smaller crew was needed. Congratulations to our successful Level 2 candidates, pictured left, Garry Grimes (Penrith City) and Craig Myers (Orange).



Lismore was very glad to have us all in their town – so much so that they even organised an air show for “our” entertainment at the airport that was only a kilometre or 2 away from the grounds.

Ah, Saturday night... Let me see – Softball championship and we’re in a country town. What else to do but find a restaurant for a number of the crew to quietly kick back, relax and shoot the breeze. Luckily we had a few locals on hand to help us find a place – however the “quietly” part of the plan didn’t eventuate.



Good food, good drink and good company led to a very good time – which saw the manager come over and ask us to please keep it down. Ok, we can all imagine that happening. However, it was the normally quiet and unassuming Howard Watt who copped the earful from the disapproving lady in question! Some more on Howie, later...

Sunday dawned foggy, but soon cleared to a clear and bright day. The competition was close fought, and no games more so than the grand final contested between Sutherland and North Shore. The score was tied at 3-3 at the end of 7, and it was an 8th inning tie-break that saw Sutherland score 2 runs in the top and defended well to keep North Shore scoreless in the bottom. Congratulations to Sutherland, and also to our Finals crew, Howard Watt (plate), Vicki Lansley (1st Base) and Jess Rooke (3rd Base) pictured above.

Finally, back to Howie, to whom the quote of the weekend was made. After the game Howie was speaking to an official, complimenting the way the winning pitcher had kept in the game and toughed out some difficult situations.

The official was very complimentary about Howard’s game as well, congratulating Howard (Level 6 umpire) on his success as a Level 2 Candidate at the championship. Howard, the readers would also like to congratulate you on a job well done!

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Tee-Ball State Championships by Amanda Houison

A fine weekend – albeit a cool start! - Greeted all the umpires as they arrived at Penrith City for this year's Tee-Ball State Championships.

It was excellent to see some familiar faces, tee-ball “veterans,” one might say; as well as some new Level 1's attending their first State Championship. From the word “play ball,” the crew mixed well and many new friendships were formed.

The “4th umpire” was not used this year so the plate umpires took responsibility for the cards and changes, which caused no problems. It also gave umpires a chance to watch the games and support their fellow umpires.

Both Vicki and I were impressed with how well the umpires' uniform was worn, the crews' willingness to listen to suggestions for improving their skills on-diamond and the camaraderie shown over the two days.



Congratulations to our finals umpires, pictured left: Linda Bray, Shontell Smith and Kristina Travers on the Girls' Final, which saw Cumberland Nepean victorious over Manly Warringah; and Sharyn Girdler, Matthew Guillaumier and Garry Grimes on the Boys' Final, where Georges River defeated Macarthur.

To Penrith City, thank you for hosting a great championship; to all umpires, thank you for giving up your time on the weekend to make an enjoyable experience for all the players out on the diamond – we look forward to seeing you at future championships!

Under 14 Junior International Challenge

A crew of 14 Umpires were kept very busy on the weekend of March 29-30 at Blacktown Olympic Park where Under 14's teams from local NSW affiliates and ACT competed in a friendly series against teams from Japan.

This event was seen as a fun event for the teams and the umpires. It was a unique opportunity for junior umpires to officiate in an event with teams from interstate and overseas. I'm sure they all had a great experience working with the Japanese Teams and their interpreters.

Congratulations to all the New South Wales and ACT umpires who officiated the 44 games over the weekend.



NEW SOUTH WALES

www.nswumpires.softball.org.au

NSW Umpires Intermediate Clinic by Scott Rindfleish

As part of the NSW Umpire Development Program, the recent Intermediate Clinic was a great success! The Intermediate Clinic is targeted at Level 2 and 3 umpires with hope of gaining higher accreditation. Special thanks must be extended to Penrith City for hosting the clinic in connection with the T-ball State Championships.

The ten participating umpires were certainly put through their paces with a variety of challenging exercises with key focus on the 3-2 rotation system and game management as well and effective delivery of feedback, UIC responsibilities, rules sessions and four T-ball games umpired with radios worn for immediate feedback from off diamond assessors.

The game management role plays proved a challenge yet have been claimed to be a highlight and most beneficial. (I promise I will not actually behave that way when I am coaching, however it was fun to re-enact the 'bad' behaviour of our elite athletes at their worst).

Thanks to Sue Itzstein and Ron Houison for facilitating with me over the weekend, and good luck to all the attending umpires.

Itzy Retires by Mark Toft

It may seem easy for Itzy to be acknowledged by her peers in New South Wales, but I saw something in 1998 that has made this lady one of the most respected umpires in this country for many years to come....in my eyes anyway.

There we were on Thursday night on a boat cruising down the Derwent River in Hobart. Itzy and I had umpired all week under assessment for our Level 5, along with Yvonne Kahler.

Itzy snuggled up to me and said something that I will always remember.

"How did you think you went? I don't know if I did enough to pass, but if I haven't I am putting all my eggs into your basket and hope you get through."

That statement meant so much to me as I was at my first nationals under assessment (for Itzy it was her second). Her unselfish nature to think of someone else before herself has stayed with me for many years.

Her success as an umpire to go to receive her ISF accreditation and selection to the Junior Women's World Championships in Holland was no fluke. She has been and always will be a role model for the National Umpiring Program, especially for young junior women.

Sue Itzstein you are a very special lady and I know that the National Umpiring Program will survive with you continuing working for the benefit of umpires throughout Australia. Great career Itzy, you should be proud, I know I am very proud of you.

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QUEENSLAND

www.umpires.qld.softball.org.au



SOUTHERN CROSS CHALLENGE – BRISBANE 2008

Queensland umpire Bill Buckley in action on third base at the inaugural Southern Cross Challenge at the Redlands Softball Association grounds recently.

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QUEENSLAND

www.umpires.qld.softball.org.au

Southern Cross Challenge

Drawing together teams from across the globe, the Southern Cross Challenge is an initiative of Softball Queensland and Canterbury (NZ) and promised to be an exciting, action packed tournament for teams and spectators alike.

The event was hosted by Softball Queensland and Canterbury Softball Association in alternate years, beginning in 2008 in Queensland. The Southern Cross Challenge incorporates both female and male competitions.

The opportunities for Queensland umpires to officiate at a first class competition was invaluable with as many as 30 umpires taking advantage of working 3-umpire and 4-umpires systems.



With teams from Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea filtered with National and State players ensured the standard of play was of a high standard.

State Director, Darren Sibraa also nominated the Southern Cross Challenge as a lead up tournament for Level 3 umpires to pre-assess for their Level 4 accreditation later in the year.

Final allocations

Men's Final – David Casey, Mark Toft, Yvonne Kahler, and Helen Strauss.

Women's Final – Ian Frame, Ron Trow, Matt Blake, and Ron Yardley.

The Southern Cross challenge was a huge success in regards to the development of umpiring and umpires from Queensland will be given the opportunity to cross the Tasman next year for the reciprocal tournament.

One of the highlights of the Southern Cross Challenge was the Anzac Day service which was conducted on the main diamond with guest speakers from Australia and New Zealand, for some this was a very moving service.

Pictured above: New Zealand umpire Charlie Gaze on the plate at the Southern Cross Challenge in Brisbane recently.

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VICTORIA

www.vuc.softball.org.au

Victorian Under 19 Men's and Women's State Championships.

This year it was Dandenong Association's turn to host the Championships over the week end of 16 & 17 February. This turned out to be a very hot week end and with many games to be covered, the umpires did a splendid job.

Many senior Victorian umpires were on hand at these Championships in various roles.

The management crew for this tournament were.

George James TCU, Leigh Evans DTCU, Richard Barrow TEO

There were two successful candidates at this tournament

Steve Lloyd (Waverley) who was presented with his level two accreditation.

James Loveridge (Sunshine) who was presented with his level three accreditation.

Congratulations also to Jason Carter who was assessed for his examiner accreditation during this tournament.



B Grade Men's Grand Final Crew: Pictured L to R: Alex Turnbull (3rd Base), Trevor Murphy (Plate) and Stan Tolmie (1st Base). Congratulations on your appointments.

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VICTORIA

www.vuc.softball.org.au



CONGRATULATIONS

James Loveridge (Left) and Steve Lloyd took the next step in the umpiring program at these championships.

James from the Sunshine Association received his Level 3 accreditation.

Steve from the Waverley Association was a successful candidate for his Level 2 accreditation.



A Grade Women's Grand Final Crew

Pictured L to R (Back) Jason Carter (1st base), Kevin Offer (2nd base)

L to R (Front) Stacey Evans (3rd base) and Phil Waller (Plate).

Congratulations to all umpires on their appointments in the Championship game.



A Grade Men's Final Crew

Pictured L to R: Leigh Evans (3rd base), Richard Barrow (Plate), Diane Waller (1st base) and Kevin Broomhill (2nd base).

Congratulations to all umpires on their appointments in the Championship game.

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NATIONAL EXAMINATION

2008 Umpires Examination Procedure Changes by Leigh Evans

Following the 2007 State Directors meeting changes have been made to simplify the exam process and the exam administration procedure.

The exam Question and Answer sheets have also been changed slightly.

1. The question sheets have a provision to allow candidates to put their True/Yes and False/No answers directly onto the question sheet. They can then transfer their answer onto the answer sheet when they are all finished. This is to help prevent incorrect circles being filled out on the answer sheets. When the candidates change the answers, cross some out, tick other circles etc. It makes it very confusing to mark. Would all candidates select one circle to fill in only?
2. This year we are trialling character scanning software to mark the exams to speed up the analysing process and save valuable time. Accurate markings on the answer sheets are therefore required. Black pen or HB pencil is best read by the scanner.
3. Please do not cross, put dashes or tick circles for correct answers where possible.
4. Please do not to make markings or make comments on the answer sheets
5. Please do not fold the answer sheets; this makes it difficult to feed through the scanner.
6. You will notice there is a provision for you to insert your name, state and current level. In the past we have never asked for the candidate's name. However as these are purely true/yes false/no questions it is not an issue having the identity on the paper, in fact it will help with the data analysis process. If you do not want your identity known leave it blank. You will also notice a specific number printed at the top of each answer sheet, this number will be used by the scanner, and it needs to be recorded on your scrutineer's key.
State candidate numbers may still be used if required.
7. There have been changes made to the return process. This year I will not ask scrutineers to send the papers to me and the EXAM KEY to the Softball Australia office.
The registering and postal of exam papers has been an issue, so is the postal time from some areas, there has also been a concern over lost mail.
Note: Only Level 4-8 exams go to National Rules Committee, all other exams are marked by the state.

The answer sheets will be photo copied and the original sent back, this will prevent the issue of exams being lost, as they will still have a copy.
8. The master exam key is electronic; I would appreciate it if the state scrutineer's could fill it out electronically, including email addresses. This makes it easier to use this data to update the analysis data bases and the data can be sent to the registration officers of each state and the national registrar for our Australian Sports commission requirements. The email address can also be given to the Web master for information and Blues news on line. Please fill out exam keys in block letters, including email addresses.

Note: In future we hope you will be able to scan or fax the answer sheets back

Thank you for your assistance. If you have any questions please call me on 0419 304 100 or email leighevans@westnet.com.au



NEW OFFICIAL BAT RING

New and Improved Softball Bat Measuring Ring 2008.

Background.

From time to time issues have arisen when checking bats for defects or checking sizes of softball bats prior to a game.

Recent times have shown that there are variances in the size of bat rings being used. Due to these reasons bats may be taken out of the game incorrectly or unsafe/illegal bats left in.

The maximum legal size of a bat barrel is 57mm. A tolerance of 0.8mm is allowed for expansion of the bat; therefore the external diameter of the bat ring is 57.8mm max.

At all times common sense and a consideration of the expense of bats in general should be taken into account when judging a bat legal or illegal, safe or unsafe. If the bat is cracked, stress cracked or badly flattened/dented then it is illegal and unsafe, and should be taken out of the game. Bearing in mind temperatures and design, if it is only slightly distorted, slightly egg shaped etc. then perhaps it is safe and not giving advantage to the batter.

A new Stainless Steel Softball Australia official bat ring has been designed and manufactured. (See picture) the Softball Australia logo has been carbon etched into the surface and a trademark "08" for authenticity has been added. The previous aluminium bat ring "04" is still approved for use in Australia.

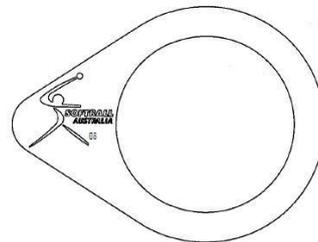
They are available from the ASF office at **\$18.00 including GST.**

These Australian approved bat rings should be the only ones used for all championships and for the Australian Nationals.

Thank you to Stuart Tyler from Victoria for the work with design and manufacture co-ordination.

Regards

Leigh Evans.





NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIPS

2009 National Events Allocations

Softball Australia is pleased to announce the following allocations of national events.

Gilley's Shield:

14 – 16 November:	Gilley's Shield, Round 1	Brisbane, Qld
12 – 14 December:	Gilley's Shield, Round 2	Hawker, ACT
16 – 18 January:	Gilley's Shield, Round 3	Waverley, Vic
17 – 21 February:	Gilley's Shield, Round 4/Finals	Blacktown, NSW

6 applications were received to host a round of the 2008/09 Gilley's Shield (formerly the National League).

National Championships:

17 – 21 February:	Open Men's Championship	Blacktown, NSW
• 2 applications received		
4 – 10 January:	U19 Men's Championship	Hawker, ACT
• 2 applications received		
4 – 10 January:	U19 Women's Championship	Altona, Vic
• 5 applications received		
11 – 17 January:	U16 Boys Championship	Launceston, Tas
• 4 applications received		
11 – 17 January:	U16 Girls Championship	Mirrabooka, WA
• 6 applications received		

Applications due for appointments

The Under 23 Championships Men & Women are under consideration and will be advised at a later date.

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