



BETWEEN THE LINES

A SOFTBALL CANADA OFFICIATING PUBLICATION

2009 – ISSUE HIGHLIGHTS

GREAT and Informative articles from our umpires across Canada

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Umpire of the Year – Geneviève Gaudreau

BETWEEN the LINES

A Softball Canada publication dedicated to the development of umpiring in Canada.

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BLUE CONVENTION 2010

– Regina, Saskatchewan UPDATE

by **Doug Cundall, ODC**

Pack your bags! Book your flight or gas up the grocery getter! It is rapidly approaching! Well, we do have a little lead-time to make plans. Blue Convention 2010 in Regina, Saskatchewan is a day or two away. Have you considered your plans to attend? Since the inception of the Blue Conventions, the brainchild of former National Director of Officials, Wayne Brown, Blue Conventions have been successfully held every two years. When Moose Gibson, P/T UIC of both the Canadian Military Softball and of the province of Saskatchewan, suggested extending the time frame to every 3 years, there was general acceptance of the concept.

Moose has a very active committee in Saskatchewan for the Regina event. The committee is already in full swing and has the majority of the groundwork covered, organized and in place.

More information is becoming available on their web site,

blueconvention2010.com

Softball Canada ODC member, Joyce Schroeder is liaison to the Saskatchewan committee. She is working closely with them on the details of the speakers, presentation rooms, etc.

If you have a suggested topic or speaker that you think should attend, then please contact Softball Canada, Joyce at bigredtruckwithbubbles@hotmail.com or Doug Cundall at doug.cundall@sympatico.ca. All of the Level V officials and Provincial/Territorial UICs have been invited to submit topics or speaker names.



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A message from the 2010 Blue Convention Chairperson: Stan Hilderman

I am pleased to announce that Westjet has been selected as the official airline of the 2010 Blue Convention.

Please use the booking account QC#5890 when booking flights to the Blue Convention in Regina from April 1-4th, 2010.

Attendees must submit their booking request forms via fax at 1-800-582-7072 or email conventions@westjet.com. For flight schedule information, please visit our website at www.westjet.com.

Westjet is offering a 10% discount off our best available regular fare at the time of the booking (excluding web and promotional fares). Attendees must make their travel arrangements through our Westjet Specialty Sales Team and quote the account number at the time of booking.

Discounted rates are available for travel up to 3 days prior and 3 days after your event.

For travel outside of these dates, we will offer the best available fare at the time of booking.

Fares are not applicable to group travel.

For groups of 10 or more travelling together, please contact Westjet for fare information.

Westjet serves the Canadian cities of Victoria, Comox, Vancouver, Abbotsford/Fraser Valley, Prince George, Kelowna, Calgary, Edmonton, Grande Prairie, Fort McMurray, Saskatoon, Regina, Winnipeg, Thunder Bay, London, Ottawa, Hamilton, Toronto, Moncton, Halifax, Montréal, Charlottetown, St. Johns, Saint John's, Deer Lake and Kitchener-Waterloo-Cambridge.

Visit the Softball Canada website to download the Westjet booking form for use in booking flights.

A Message from the Saskatchewan UIC - Moose Gibson (Blue Convention)

Hear ye hear ye...the wheat fields in the Land of Living Skies are starting to feel the ground quaking with the footsteps of the Blue Crew brethren making their way to Regina. That's right Blue Convention 2010 comes to the Queen City of Regina, Saskatchewan from the 1st to the 4th of April.

The Regina Inn at the corner of Victoria Street and Broad Street (okay not exactly as famous as Portage and Main) in the heart of Regina is the host hotel. The rooms are 95.00/night with parking and internet included, close to near by attractions. Hmmm...on the prairies so we naturally have a country and western bar close by. Feeling lucky... well then there's Casino Regina a short walk away.

Planning is under way for a companion package that will include many sites of Regina, such as the new RCMP museum. Then a short trip down the highway to Moose Jaw, known as the friendly city, are you ready to pass over the Belle Plaine bridge...nerve racking that first curve in the highway. In Moose Jaw, discover the tunnels of Moose Jaw dating back supposedly to Al Capone's bootlegging days. Followed by an afternoon dip in the soothing waters of the Mineral Spa...

The website is up and running lots of information is up already with more to follow.

Check it out at: blueconvention2010.com

Our hockey pool has been a success with 52 entries from across the country; on behalf of the host committee I thank you for your support.

Stay tune for more updates in the future or better yet check out the website occasionally, if any one has some interesting pictures from the past season that they would like to share, please send them to Moose. (mjumpire@sasktel.net) He'll forward them to our webmaster and we can start or collage of the Blue Crew.



REGISTRATION FORM
BLUE CONVENTION 2010
April 1-4 2010 – Regina, Saskatchewan

Please Fill Out All Sections and Include the registration fee for the workshops.
 Softball Canada accepts Certified Cheque, Money Order, Visa, Master Card or American Express.
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Name: _____ Gender (Check one): M F
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Registration: \$135 includes participation in your selection of workshops and the Blue Convention 2010 Golf Shirt and Pin, plus a welcome package. On Thursday, April 1st and on Sunday morning, April 4th, in conjunction with the Umpires of Saskatchewan and the 2010 Blue Convention, we will be running a Level IV clinic and an Instructor/Evaluator Clinic. NOTE: As a special inducement to assist people who wish to attend both, we are offering a combined fee of \$250.00 that will give you a full registration to 2010 Blue Convention and to the Level IV clinic or Instructor/Evaluator Clinic.

You can download a copy of the Pre-convention package from the Softball Canada website by January 1st, 2010. The package will contain the schedule, workshop selection form. The workshops are allocated on a first-come, first-served basis. NOTE: Workshops will be presented in English with only the materials translated into French.

You can also order a Canadian Indicator Club Banquet ticket at \$55.00 each. The banquet will be held on Saturday, April 3rd, 2010. You can also order a Closing Presentations Breakfast ticket at \$25.00 each. The breakfast will be held on Sunday, April 4th, 2010. Would you be interested in purchasing extra golf shirts at a cost of \$40.00 each?

Yes No **How Many:** 1 2 3 4 5 **Shirt Size:** S M L XL XXL

Please Include Payment for Extra Shirts with Registration Fee

(Indicate Size)

_____	Registration Fee	<u>\$135.00</u>
_____	Registration Fee and Level IV Clinic	<u>\$250.00</u>
_____	Registration Fee and I/E Clinic	<u>\$250.00</u>
_____	Additional Golf Shirts (@\$40.00 each)	Add _____
_____	Banquet Ticket (@\$55.00 each)	Add _____
_____	Breakfast Ticket (@25.00 each)	Add _____
	Total Enclosed	_____

Please check one: Certified Cheque Money Order Visa Master Card American Express RECEIPT REQUIRED

Cardholder Name _____
 Card Number _____
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Deadline for Registration is March 1, 2010
Any refunds issued after February 1, 2010 will be subject to a \$50 Administration fee.

To Be Returned To:
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*Based on availability. Valid from March 30, 2010 to April 3, 2010.

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The Regina Inn has now made available on-line hotel reservations for the 2010 Blue Convention. See the Information below on how to make your 2010 Blue Convention reservations.

The following is a link that sends guests to the website with the group block ready to go:

http://reservations.ihotelier.com/crs/g_reservation.cfm?groupID=332609&hotelID=6877

OR guests can go to the website www.reginainn.com, click reservations, then click group rates and enter in BLUE in the attendee field.

Here is an example:

<http://booking.ihotelier.com/istay/istay.jsp?groupID=332609&hotelID=6877> from this link click "Group Rates" (at the top) and enter in Blue.

SEE you in 2010 in Regina at the BLUE CONVENTION!

MESSAGE from National Director of Umpires Brian Van Os



As each of you prepare for the upcoming Softball season remember that our Softball umpiring team is like a family. Your Provincial/Territorial UIC and his/her team of educators are prepared to help you achieve "the best you can be".

I want to salute all our umpires in the umpire family who help assign games, take leadership roles in Umpire Associations, provide clinic education to our Local, Provincial/Territorial and National umpire programs, and spend countless hours at ball parks evaluating and mentoring our new and existing umpire family members. Without the efforts of those individuals our umpiring program cannot survive. Thank you for your efforts and your volunteer time.

All 2009 International Umpire selections have been made and are posted on the web page. We are working hard to find more opportunity for our SP International umpires. I can say some doors are opening up and I hope to be able to make some announcements in the next edition of Between the Lines.

The 2010 Blue Convention Committee from Saskatchewan is busy preparing for another great convention. Mark the date on your calendar. Blue Convention is truly a family member event. Make plan to attend now.

Thank you to Bob Henning, Jeff Whipple and Joyce Schroeder for this edition of Between the Lines. We are hoping to get more editions out this year. To do so these individuals need your support by providing pictures and articles of interest for future editions. This publication is yours so please try and support it by contributing.

Thank you. I Hope to see you all at a clinic or on the ball field in 2009.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brian Van Os". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Brian Van Os, Softball Canada - National Director of Umpires

NEW POLICY TO ADDRESS DISCRIMINATION AND HARASSMENT RELEASED

Softball Canada has recently completed work on a new policy to address any issues related to discrimination and harassment in the sport. The policy is in keeping with Softball Canada's values, which are:

- Fair and inclusive access
- Ethical and moral behaviour
- Athlete and participant centred
- Safe and supportive environments free from harassment and abuse
- The important role of sport in developing life skills and achieving excellence

The new policy can be found on Softball Canada's website www.softball.ca, click on "About Softball Canada" on the left banner and go to "Policies".



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BOB STANTON

NAMED ISF DIRECTOR OF UMPIRES

BRIAN VAN OS

APPOINTED AS NEW SOFTBALL CANADA NDU

(Ottawa, ON) – Following Bob Stanton’s appointment as the International Softball Federation’s (ISF) new Director of Umpires, his previous position as Softball Canada’s National Director of Umpires (NDU) was left vacant. As a result, Softball Canada went through its own nomination process and has appointed Brian Van Os as the new Softball Canada NDU.

“I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Brian Van Os on his selection as our new NDU.” stated Softball Canada President Kevin Quinn. “Brian is a very hard worker who has supported the umpire movement in Canada for many, many years. Brian wears his heart on his sleeve and has a great passion for umpire development. His great work ethic will be a real positive in his new role as NDU in Canada.”

Van Os began his umpiring career in 1971 and became a registered Softball Canada umpire in 1981. He was both a Fast Pitch and Slo Pitch official throughout his years of service. He has also been involved administratively with Softball British Columbia and Softball Canada since 1985, serving in numerous different positions. He was involved in umpiring at the international level from 1986 to 2001, including the 1988 ISF Senior Men’s World Championships and the 2001 ISF Junior Men’s World Championships. He served as Softball BC’s UIC from 1989 to 1997 and later joined Softball Canada’s Officials Development Committee (ODC) in 2002, notably working on the evolution of the rulebook and offering rule interpretations to the umpiring community.

“It is an honour to fill the position of National Director of Umpires for Softball Canada.” said Brian Van Os. “I am following some great leaders from the past who built a strong foundation for the officiating program. I look forward to leading our strong group of volunteers on the ODC and in the Provinces and Territories as we head into the future. We need to work with our Provincial and Territorial partners across the country to continue building on the strengths of the past and create new initiatives and opportunities for our membership into the future. The program needs to grow and standing still is not an option.”

Bob Stanton, a resident of Fredericton, New Brunswick, became the ISF’s Acting Director of Umpires last January following the passing of Merle Butler, the long-time head of the world governing body’s umpiring program. Stanton also served as ISF Deputy Director of Umpires since December of 2006, served as Softball Canada’s National Director of Umpires since 2005 and has been actively involved as an umpire for over 25 years.

“I would like at this time to thank Mr. Bob Stanton for his many years of service in Softball Canada both as a member of the ODC and more recently as NDU” added Kevin Quinn. “Bob is a great negotiator and this skill will be a real asset as ISF UIC. We are very proud of Bob’s performance, both in Canada and Internationally. I am sure Bob will continue to make us proud as he takes on his new role with the ISF.”

2008 BEIJING OLYMPICS IN REVIEW



Can't Believe It's Over! by Nancy Morrison

While I watched a jubilant Japanese Team celebrate their first ever softball gold medal, I paused to soak in the moment and then thought about the journey that brought me, Nancy Morrison, a resident of downtown Quispamsis, New Brunswick to the greatest stage of women's softball in the world, the 2008 Beijing Olympics. I thought, only twelve umpires in the world will have this experience, as the tape in my head seemed to be on a loop repeating over and over....."unfreaking believable!"

My earliest memories of sport were playing baseball on the side lawn and street hockey in front of our family home in West Saint John. Throughout high school, I continued my involvement in many sports including basketball, field hockey, badminton and softball.

As my competitive playing career came to an end, playing in ten Canadian Softball Championships, I realized I needed to find a way to continue to be involved at an elite level. Along the way, some umpires suggested the need for new umpires, especially female. I had already been refereeing basketball for five years, so it seemed like a natural fit.

Every official knows you have to start at the bottom and work your way up, or as they say, 'pay your dues'. This happened to me as well working many local leagues to gain some experience. To my surprise, I was getting good at umpiring and my mentors were encouraging me to apply to go to Provincial and Canadian Championships.

In 1991, I umpired my first of four Canadians and in 1997, I received my international certification, followed by many international assignments over the next eleven years. With success, comes disappointment and in October of 2003, I was told I was not selected to umpire at the 2004 Olympics in Athens. It was especially disappointing because so many of my fellow umpires, family and colleagues at work, were excitedly waiting word on my selection. As hard as that was to hear, it made the selection to the 2008 Beijing Olympics even sweeter!

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It was late October, 2007 when I received a phone call from the Philippines to tell me of my selection to Beijing. I really didn't know what to say or what to think...laugh, cry, jump up and down, who do I call first thoughts...all the emotions ran through my head at that moment, the disappointment of four years before and now the excitement of knowing I was finally realizing a dream!

I began my preparations in early January of 2008, hiring an athletic therapist to organize a fitness program and began reading up on rules and mechanics. On August 6th, after 8 months of preparation, I flew to Beijing. I knew that as soon as we landed in China, life would be good, as there were lanes dedicated just for Olympians at the airport and on the highway.

At the opening ceremonies, the officials were treated royally. We received free admission and food as well as sitting fourteen rows from the arena floor at the world renowned Bird's Nest. Security was tight as we entered, but the amazing performances made everyone forget any possible terrorist attack, the impending rain or that it was 100 degrees. Highlights of the ceremony included the 2008 Drummers that performed first, the parading in of the 204 countries and the lighting of the Olympic Torch that sent the 91,000+ spectators in to a frenzy...all memories to last a lifetime!

While this spectacle was awe inspiring, I did not lose sight of why I was there. I had been entrusted with the responsibility to be fair, honest and to make split second decisions that would determine who would win and who would lose.

On August 12th, I umpired my first Olympic game at second base. My first plate game followed the next day where I umpired the #1 ranked United States and #3 Australia. I was nervous and was hoping things would go well. It did, and each game that followed seemed to move along flawlessly. As the tournament progressed, I received another huge plate assignment, #2 Japan and #4 China who were in desperate need of a win. The game was 0-0 until the 4th inning when a 3-run homerun by Japan proved to be all they would need to win 3-0. There was a large crowd, approximately 8,000, so the stadium was loud and really rocking. My confidence was really growing by this time and I was excited to learn that I would be behind the plate for the #1 versus #2 semi-final game between eventual finalists, the United States and Japan. The winner would be moving onto the gold medal game.

It was an amazing game, 0-0 all the way to the 7th inning. I remember thinking in the 6th inning that the game would soon be over and it was probably my last plate game at the Olympics! I remember saying to myself at that moment..."you are umpiring behind the plate, the two best pitchers in the world, the two best teams in the world, at the Olympic games!" I was emotional for a moment, before I recognized the game was not over yet! In fact, no one scored in the regulation 7 innings, no runs in the 8th using the tie-breaker rule, so onto the 9th inning! In this inning, the USA outscored Japan 4-1 using a towering 3 run homerun to left field by Crystl Bustos.

After the game was over, I reached down to touch the dirt on the infield as if I was saying, "I was here," maybe for the last time. Luckily I was selected to work the Gold medal game on the left field line, with the same 2 teams that I had umpired behind the plate the day before. What an amazing place to watch a game! From my position, I could see the entire field, both team benches and all the fans. Between innings I tipped my cap to my husband, who was watching the game from the back of the right field bleachers. When he waved back it was a proud moment as I shared this most important and exciting time with him.

There were a lot of fun and memorable times at the Olympics. We would tease each other about the '72 hour rule', where the Chinese government could detain you without notifying your embassy for 72 hours. So, if any one of our umpires did anything out of the ordinary, we would just say '72 hours!' and we would all laugh!

The motto of this year's Olympic Games was 'One World, One Dream'. It is an opportunity for all people, regardless of differences, to compete as one. Additionally for me, it was a dream come true...an opportunity to umpire at the highest level possible in a world that seemed make believe, because it is so far away from small town Quispamsis.

I owe a lot of gratitude to all those who made these lasting memories possible. The many umpires who mentored me, my close friends who have supported me by raising money for my training and especially my family who missed out on spending a lot of time with me as I pursued my dream. So, thank you to all involved, too numerous to mention for sure. All I can tell you is, to never give up and believe that... "Dreams can come true...so dream BIG!"

Olympic Experience by Greg Pipher

Bottom of the 2nd inning, no score, runner on 1st and none out. Your mind races as it tries to run through all the different scenarios: What will I do if it's Obstruction? What if it's Interference? And, if it's a run-down how will we cover it? You momentarily glance up as one of the 13,000 spectators is emphatically urging his team on.

"Focus!" you say to yourself. "Calm down, it's a call you've made thousands of times... Slow it down; Hesitate; See the picture and make the call," your inner monologue helps bring you back into focus.

As the pitch is released, the runner takes off. It's a slow roller to the pitcher...

She fumbles the ball...

The shortstop screams for it...

The pitcher throws it...

In your mind, the crowd goes silent.....all you can hear is the steady thump in your chest.....while thinking: Foot – Base – Glove – Ball..... SAFE!

• • •

It is a Saturday morning, October 2007. I just received the phone call of my life.

"Hey, it's Bob Stanton calling."

"Bob, I can barely hear you. Where are you?"

"I'm in the Philippines on my cell."

"Oh, what can I do for you?"

"Well, I've got great news... You've been chosen to umpire at the Beijing Olympics."

"You're going to the Olympics!"

• • •

For weeks after I heard those words I kept trying to recall how I reacted when Bob made that statement? Was I appropriately excited, while still humble and thankful for the opportunity? I really can't remember. The phone call is one big blur. To say I was in shock is an understatement.

After getting off the phone I remember going downstairs where Les (my wife) was sitting half watching TV half reading the newspaper. All I said was: "I'm going to the Olympics!" I'd dreamt about this moment for many years, but now that it was here, I wanted to make sure I was doing it right. I wanted to make sure that this 'dream appointment' was perfect in every way and that included my reaction to the call.

I don't think I truly understood the magnitude of Bob's statement until the fourth day of competition in Beijing. That's when I realised just how 'Big' going to the Olympics was.

We were sitting in our change room: Gianluca (Italian Umpire), Rob (Dutch Umpire), Wiremu (New Zealand Umpire), and me. We had just realised that the internet hook-up that we'd been looking at for most of the week actually worked. Gianluca grabbed his laptop and immediately started surfing the web for softball message boards. The first one he came across was an American site and they were dissecting the illegal pitch calls he had just finished making in a US game. I remember thinking: "Why is this on the internet? It's only softball, it's not like it's the Major Leagues. We're just 'Regular Joes' working an elite softball tournament."

At that moment it finally hit me. It wasn't just the 13,000 spectators on hand (cheering their favourite team on to victory) that were impacted by our calls. It was the thousands of people all over the world watching on their TV (or on the net) that were analysing our every move. Sitting at home on their couch: watching replays of the "close calls" over and over again. Commentating with the game coverage and questioning, the consistency of the plate umpires' zone.



Fengtai Olympic Softball Stadium – Beijing 2008

It was at that exact moment I realised how ‘big’ this Olympic softball tournament was. For one brief moment (the twelve of us) were just like Major League Baseball professional umpires. Scrutinized, evaluated, cheered, and jeered just like those guys I’ve watched doing the Blue Jays’ games for years. For eighteen days I wasn’t a Grade 8 English teacher from Toronto, I was a world class ‘Olympic Umpire’ from Canada and the world was watching.

I had been to Beijing in 2006 for the ISF Women’s World Championships (the test event for the Fengtai Stadium and the first Olympic Qualifier). I was completely impressed with the volunteers, the stadium, and how well we were treated at that event. What was disturbing, at that time, was the deplorable conditions that some of the areas of the city were in. The pollution and the general cleanliness of the city were astonishing to us as first time visitors to China. The air seemed ‘heavy’ and the smell of sewage was very noticeable in some areas where we walked. Everything was under construction as they demolished old buildings replacing them with the frameworks for new ones. From the state of the city at that moment, we couldn’t fathom how they would be prepared to host the World in 2008 at the Olympics.

Turn the page to 2008 and one phrase describes my feelings as I was driven from the airport to our hotel... ..I was in awe! It was like a new city: pruned trees, shrubbery, and colourful flowers everywhere. Old dilapidated buildings were replaced by new modern masterpieces. Older, less attractive buildings were hidden behind concrete walls covered with beautiful murals of nature scenes. Incredible venues like: the Bird’s Nest, the Water Cube, and other amazing architectural creations lined the skyline. Half the number of cars manoeuvred through the streets as Beijing attempted to decrease exhaust emissions.

They got the result they wanted because the air was much cleaner and easier to breathe than in 2006. Beijing had accomplished something I thought was impossible. It reinvented itself: cleaner, greener, and modernized, while still keeping the best parts of its ancient culture.

BETWEEN the LINES



(L to R) Olympic TV, Traci Stoelting (USA), Lori Bish (USA), Greg Pipher (Canada), Wiremu Tamaki (NZ)

Being a part of the Opening Ceremonies was a highlight of the trip. While we did not enter into the stadium with the athletes, we sat only 10-15 rows from the floor. If I looked up to my left I saw the Olympic Torch and to my right was where the athletes entered the Bird's Nest. We all sat in amazement, snapping as many pictures as we could, not believing where we were and what we were taking part in.

The show that we watched that evening was like nothing I had ever seen before. From the 2008 drummers all in unison, to the airborne Olympic runner who ran (suspended above the audience) to his ultimate destination, the lighting of the Olympic Torch, it was emotional to say the least.

For those of you who have umpired at an international event, a Canadian Championship, a Western, a Provincial, a Qualifier, or a league final, you know the amazing feeling you get from those experiences. A feeling of camaraderie with your crew, the excitement of your first game and your first 'big' call, and finally a feeling of pride when you get that 'final' assignment proving to yourself and others that you're one of the best. Let me tell you from personal experience that feeling doesn't change just because it's the Olympics. I felt the same sense of accomplishment and pride after working the Gold Medal game of the Olympics as I had felt 22 years ago when I worked the final game at my local house league year end tournament.

Yes, the Olympics is one of the 'biggest' softball events in the world, but now that it's not on the schedule for London 2012 does that mean we have nothing to strive for as softball umpires? Should the Olympics be the 'ultimate' goal for all softball umpires? No.

You have to decide what your 'ultimate' Olympics goal will be. Maybe your Olympics is umpiring a Provincial Championship outside of your local association. Maybe your Olympics is working a Canadian Championship. Maybe your Olympics is becoming a Level V and working an international event. Maybe your Olympics is working that local year end tournament in front of all your friends and family, showing them how proud you are of your accomplishments as a softball umpire.

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Just because your name doesn't appear as one of the 48 officials that have umpired at an Olympic Games doesn't mean you're not one of the best at what you do. Work hard and practise. Get seen by the umpire leaders. Take advantage of opportunities that are given to you. Be open to all possibilities because every game is important, no one game is 'bigger' than another.

We are all Olympic umpires! You just have to decide..... What are your Olympics?

As the final "Out" was made and Japan erupted in celebration all I could think was, "Where's my crew... we need to leave the field together." As I look back on that now I wish I had stopped, looked up at the crowd, looked at the players... lived the moment. They say hindsight is 20/20 and they're right. When you're in the moment you very rarely realise that this could be 'it'. A lifetime of wanting the 'Dream' and once there, being a part of the end result, I didn't 'stop and smell the roses'. I had made working the final game 'bigger' (in my mind) than the Olympic experience itself. As I reflect on it now, I know the experience was much 'bigger' than the final game.

I have a lot of amazing memories of the 2008 Beijing Olympics and thoughts I will treasure for the rest of my life. They aren't any 'bigger' than any other tournament I have done, but they do have a special place in my heart. They are the proof that I achieved 'My Olympics'. The question I have to ask now is: What will be my next Olympics?

Feeling Tired? Get Inspired!

SURPASS EXCELLENCE!

by Mitch Zuk

As a school principal, I deal with my share of "run-ins," confrontations, disagreements, biased perceptions, innuendos, and self-serving comments. Each day contains many moments paralleling umpiring.

In 2000, prior to entering the school administrator's role, my doctor told me that I would need to develop some form of healthy living dogma in order to survive as a school administrator. This made sense. Included in his prescription was exercise and balanced eating. I entered the world of school administration at the toughest school in our school district, armed with a desire to maintain physical and mental wellness.

The exercise and eating factors were easily addressed. However, I had to find some way to cope with the daily grind of having everyone question my calls. Being a rookie administrator, there was wisdom in watching, questioning, and learning from more experienced school administrators. The more I watched the veterans, I began to observe that addressing the stress reduction factor was the key to not only being successful, but ensuring longevity and job satisfaction.

Quickly, I learned that in order for me to maintain my effectiveness, it would be essential for me to find daily occurrences that would inspire me. I had to find circumstances and scenarios that surpassed excellence. It was simple: let the stress take over and I'd be looking for another career in three years time; or determine what in my new role as a VP would inspire me to a level of surpassing excellence.

Here is a brief list of what inspires me as a school administrator

- observing a single student make a connection that previously was non-existent
- passing positive parent comments to teachers who regularly worked conscientiously with hard to reach students
- facilitating, and subsequently witnessing, teachers working together for a common goal
- recognizing and celebrating the small, daily contributions that students, teachers, parents, superintendents, and community members make that make schools great places to learn

As a level V umpire and Canadian Championship UIC

I am constantly experiencing inspiring umpire performances, that is, those aspects of umpiring that surpass excellence. It is through purposely seeking out inspiring umpires, that I have come to recognize and understand the core values that guide my pursuit of excellence in umpiring. Umpires who:

- implement supervisory suggestions
- demonstrate the courage to make gutsy, but appropriate, calls
- find innovative ways to prepare themselves to umpire

BETWEEN the LINES

...inspire me on a regular basis. You will notice that this list makes no reference to outstanding judgment calls, great voices, super-animated third-strike calls, dramatic punch-outs, major ejections, and generally what I term, celebrity umpiring. Rather, my vision of an inspiring umpire is one who:

- knows their limitations and acts accordingly to rectify areas of needed improvement
- maintains the integrity of the rules by understanding the importance of enforcing all playing rules
- finds creative ways to prepare themselves for umpiring

Let's explore inspiring umpires in more detail. As you read about the following aspects of inspiring umpires, assess yourself as to where you fit into being inspiring:

Umpires who implement suggestions

For those who have had me as an UIC, you will know that I will provide you with prescriptive feedback that is manageable and appropriate to your level of umpiring. Each time you go out on the diamond and try to implement a suggestion, you are surpassing excellence and inspiring me. There is no greater sense of personal satisfaction for me, than when an umpire decides to move towards excellence by taking feedback and applying it in a conscientious manner. Implementing new suggestions creates a zone of discomfort, growing pains, and self-doubt. However, an umpire who perseveres and works on skill improvement, comes through the process a much improved official, with a newly found sense of confidence and efficacy. Many umpires ignore suggestions and fall back on what works best for them, contributing to stagnation complacency, and eventually bewilderment. Do you:

- modify and tweak base and plate mechanics?
- refine base positioning while consistently striving towards establishing the priority angle on all calls?
- seek rule clarity and ask questions, no matter how insignificant the question might seem?
- anticipate plays and recognize on-field circumstances where obstruction and interference might develop?

If you answered yes, to the aforementioned questions, I would confidently conclude that your umpiring skills would inspire me. Invite me to one of your ball games!

Umpires who demonstrate the courage to make the gusty call

Bravo to the umpire who:

- calls obstruction on the first base fielder as the runner rounds first and throws off the runners pace because the fielder stayed close to the bag despite not having a play
- hears something strange as the batter swings and makes contact with the catcher's mitt and proceeds to call catcher obstruction loudly and clearly
- determines that a fielder did not have a chance to make an out on an initial or subsequent play, despite the ball contacting the runner prior to passing a fielder. This umpire keeps the ball alive and in play despite the shortstop and second baseman screaming for an out
- calls strike three on an 0-2 pitch that nicks the outside or inside corner
- enforces the illegal pitch against the Canadian junior men's team in front of 4000 home fans
- during a coach-umpire confrontation, demands that the coach talks respectfully or not at all
- after a fake tag, calls time and brings the coaches together to issue the warning; however, enforces the ruling one step further by insisting each coach take 30 seconds to let their players know that there is no place in the game for this kind of rule violation
- calls verbal interference with vigor and confidence

Umpires who seek out/ establish new ways of preparing for their games

- Each month I receive emails, videos, and what-if scenarios outlining various umpiring calls, mechanics, and positioning. Inspiring umpires like Dallas from Saskatchewan, Steve from Montreal, and Ryan from Rockwood engage me in regular discussion about various aspects of umpiring. Game preparation for these umpires is via scrutinizing various scenarios they come upon and seeking another person's feedback as to how can an umpire better his/her skills.

BETWEEN the LINES

- Ever watch the trains go by at a levelled railway crossing and clap your hands when you estimate them passing your front bumper? I know umpires who do. They say it helps with their timing. How about in tracking the ball by pointing at it with your finger as the fielders toss the ball around during warm-up? Try taking two tennis balls, drop them from slightly different heights, and determine which one touched the ground first? If you do not have tennis balls, use empty plastic water bottles - one in each hand and slap them against a hard surface. Vary the timing and try to determine which bottle struck the surface first.
- Want to improve your plate calls? Attend a practice of one of your favourite teams, but ask to bat! That's right, step up to the batters box, bat in hand and get set for the pitch as a batter. Ask the pitcher to pitch inside and outside but around the plate. After deciding for yourself if it is a ball or strike, (remember you are the batter standing at the plate - not behind the plate as an umpire). Then ask the pitcher what he/she thought the pitch was. This will give you the perspective of the pitcher and a whole new perspective of the plate. (This drill may have a profound affect on your plate calls).
- Ever get a sense that after making a base call you really were not certain if you had the best position? Next time you make a call, use your foot to draw an 'X' on the exact location where you made your call from. Return to your starting position and reflect on the starting location compared to the exact call location (the 'X'). More times than not, you will be surprised at how out of position you were.

As the winter approaches, take an inventory reflecting your ability to inspire others; however, at the same time, determine what inspires you when you umpire. Discover aspects of your umpiring that maintain your desire to pursue, if not surpass, excellence. Find what inspires your umpiring and you will be an inspiration to others.

See you at Blue Convention 2010 Regina!



Mitch Zuk is an ISF umpire whose day job is being the principal at Erin Public School. His greatest sense of inspiration is watching his two daughters, Pier and Silje, greet each day with a smile and sense of wonder. His wife, Alison, has gone back to school and is completing her Studio Art degree at the University of Guelph. This in itself is a major inspiration. He owes a great amount of appreciation to her for continuing to understand and support the role that umpiring plays in his life. Special thanks to mentor, friend, and inspiration to all Ontario senior umpires: Bruce Bierman.

FUTURE CANADIAN CHAMPIONSHIPS

2009

Pee Wee Girls	Guelph, ON	Aug. 12-16
Bantam Girls	Oakville, ON	Jul. 29 - Aug 2
Midget Girls	Brampton, ON	Aug. 2-9
Midget Boys	Prince Albert, SK	Aug. 2-9
Junior Women's	St. Catharines, ON	Aug. 2-9
Junior Men's	Owen Sound, ON	Aug. 2-9
Senior Women's	Open for Bids	Aug. 12-17
Senior Men's	St. Thomas, ON	Aug. 30-Sept. 6
Senior Men's and Women's SP	Lethbridge, AB	Aug. 10-15

2010

Pee Wee Girls	Open	Aug. 11-15
Bantam Girls	Open	TBD
Midget Girls	Saint John, NB	Aug. 1-8
Midget Boys	Stratford, ON	Aug. 1-8
Junior Women's	Open	Aug. 1-8
Junior Men's	Open	Aug. 1-8
Senior Women's	Open	Aug. 11-16
Senior Men's	Charlottetown, PE	Aug. 29-Sept. 5
Senior Men's and Women's SP	Surrey, BC	Aug. 9-14

IT'S GREAT TO BE BACK!

by Donald R. Mac Donald

I was appointed as Board Liaison to the ODC in February, 2008. I also served as Board Liaison in 1995 and 2000 - 2001. My first term was memorable.

Wayne Brown was starting his first term as UIC and the new Officiating Development Committee structure was taking its first steps. The original members were: Wayne Brown, Chair; Deputies were Chris Lee, Don Middleton, Don Bracey, Max Pye and the late Joe Feller. Diana (Elliot) Thibodeau was staff and I.

There were growing pains and tribulations. However today, we simply have the best Softball Officiating program in the world.

I have had the opportunity to attend two ISF World Softball Congress meetings and a few ISF World Championships. There is no doubt we are the BEST!!

Have a great summer on the field!

Note: Donald R. Mac Donald is a Softball Canada Director and the Softball Canada Board Liaison, Officiating Development Committee

Saskatoon Level IV Clinic

A HUGE SUCCESS

by **Brent Chadwick**

Saskatoon, Saskatchewan was the site for twenty members of the fraternity of softball umpires seeking that next hurdle in their quest to be the best they can be. The clinic was held from April 5-6, 2008 and included participants from Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, and British Columbia.

Instructors for the weekend included Brent Chadwick, Level V from Assiniboia, SK and Gary Skjerven, Level V from Balcarres, SK.

The clinic format afforded the umpires a unique look at a side of umpiring that is often talked about, but rarely given time in the regular certification clinics. Topics included:

- The Psychology of Umpiring
- Preventative Umpiring
- Being Successful at Canadian Championships

The discussion was enlightening to all who were in attendance and definitely sparked debate that lasted far after the clinic had stopped for a group meal on Saturday night at a local Saskatoon watering hole. Thanks to the local Saskatoon umpires for organizing the night out for the visiting contingent.

Sunday was graduation day and the results proved to be everything the instructors could have hoped for. All twenty umpires achieved excellent marks and thus achieved what we had all set out to do when we had started, to have 100% achieve the standard of Level IV Theory.

Congratulations go to all our new Level IV Theory umpires who now have the opportunity to achieve their goals of working a Canadian Championship.



Front (l to r): John Loxton, Jason Turner, Bruce Graham, Quentin Halcro, Andy Heffernan
Middle (l to r): Ray Giguere, Lorry Wilson, John Sullivan, Tim Becklake, Dallas Doell, Shawn Boomer,
Vince Yaskowich, Cal Michel

Back (l to r): Gary Skjerven (Instructor), Nathan McLeod, Trent Kulbida, Darren Greenslade, Bob Clothier,
Darryl Bergeron, Bill Scollard, Brent Chadwick (Instructor)

RETENTION

Through Education

by Mark Gough

Now that we have found new umpires, was this really the problem?

If you really look at the situation, if we were able to retain new officials we wouldn't have to recruit every year. So why are they leaving and what can we do stop them from leaving?

Attrition, no-time, and abuse are some of the reasons we will look at.

Natural attrition is one reason our umpires leave. But this usually after officiating for a good number of years and age is finally catching up with these well seasoned umpires.

So what if your judgment is going or if you can no longer keep up with the game? There is still allot you can do for the program. Your game may not be what you want it to be but who notices anyway. If you do what you were supposed to do, no-one will really notice you coming to the game and then leaving. All they remember is that someone won and lost. And who did you say umpired the game?

We will always require someone to help with off-field duties. Some of these tasks could be instructing, evaluating, assigning, and possibly treasurer of a local association. All these tasks take time and keep other officials from officiating. These officials are not the ones we want to look at for retention, but every little bit helps. And if they are determined to leave, TAKE THEIR GEAR. Seriously look to see if they are willing to part with their equipment so that someone else may start up.

The major reason umpires walk out and never return is because of other commitments. Whether it is because of their career or family, they just no longer have the time to commit to officiating. This is something that is very difficult to nullify. For if officiating is your number one career choice than, boy oh boy, are you in for a rough life. No-one that I know of has ever gotten rich from officiating sports. But by being flexible and working within our official's schedule, it is a step to forming a bond with our officials and working within their means. This also goes to forming a bond with our officiating body and giving a sense of belonging.

Abuse of officials is a quick way to ruin and scare off any new official. By proper education of new officials and a good mentorship program we can somewhat protect our new officials. By educating coaches, and players we can teach the rules and what our role is in the whole game.

This goes a great deal further than just protecting our officials. This goes back to recruitment and why we should run rules clinics for teams and their families. Through education of all those involved in the game we can start to eliminate further abuse of officials. By holding the hand of our new officials for the first year and maybe the second, it may give them a strong sense of security and make them feel safer about officiating.

Once we fix the bond between officiating and the coaches/players we are looking at a whole new game where the only reason we require new officials is because we are not paying them enough or they are too old to be an on-field. Remember, officiating is an apprenticeship.

A couple of years ago, I attended the Sports Officials Canada Conference in Ottawa and would like to share this one quote from Denis Pottage, past referee-in-chief of Hockey Canada.

Developing quality officials depends on their ability to step onto the playing surface and practice. They must be given the opportunity to participate, to make mistakes and to learn from those mistakes. Just like the players, they need a chance to develop, to mature, and to refine their skills, in essence to Apprentice.

Thus through education and comradeship we can only hope to retain new officials more than three years. If we can do this, than we will have succeeded in what we have set out to accomplish. And this will make for a better game for all those involved.

Note: Mark Gough is a Softball Canada National Deputy UIC

Getting to a **CANADIAN CHAMPIONSHIP** as a **SUPERVISOR**

by **Stephane Soucy**

When I started to umpire I did it because I felt I could do a better job than some of the umpires that were doing the games I played in. I figured instead of complaining, why not become an umpire and make a difference.

I really only wanted to officiate local ball. I had no intention or even knew about umpiring opportunities that lay outside our local association.

After about three years as an umpire I was approached about expanding my skills and abilities to next level. I was asked to apply to do a Co-ed Provincial. What an eye opener! There was another level that I knew nothing about but I really enjoyed being evaluated outside my local association.

From that moment on, I had this desire of becoming an evaluator. It took a lot of work and determination but I did achieve it this year. It started with the Co-ed Provincials and a positive evaluation. The next assignment was a couple of years later. I had to wait for my turn for the next Women's Provincials opening, but again a positive evaluation. I didn't have to wait too long for the next level because Men's Provincials happened the next year. Another umpire backed out at the last moment, giving me an opportunity I didn't pass up.

That evaluation was a bit disappointing. I was told I wasn't ready for a Canadian Championship yet. I was told I had to attend a Western Championship. I was quite upset as other umpires I thought were the same level as me got moved directly to a Women's Canadians.

I came to realize later in my career that those supervisors knew what they were talking about. That's probably why they were the supervisors. I finally achieved one of my goals to attend a Canadian and it was the 2000 Women's Championship. I got a positive evaluation. I now thank those supervisors who knew I wasn't ready earlier! If they would have pushed me through too early it might have ruined all the work I had put in by then.

The next year Sr. Men's Canadians were in my Province and they needed fillers. I volunteered but what a huge eye opener that was. The first day did not go very well. One of the supervisors pulled me aside and let me know my shortcomings. What he also did was he helped me in those areas. I swallowed my pride, I listened intently and learned. I wanted to learn and get better.

At the end of the tournament that supervisor called me into his room. I thought, "What have I done now?"

No Level V though as I didn't qualify. I was a Level IV for only one year. It took two more seasons before I finally got to return to a Sr. Men's Canadians. I did achieve my Level V at that tournament. It should be noted in all the Provincial or Canadian Championships I attended I never got the final plate assignment until the very last one, so getting that assignment is not the be all that ends all.

It took another five years before I finally got to be a supervisor at a Canadian Championship. Not without more work. I attended the Instructor/Evaluator Clinic in Quebec the year after attaining my Level V. I supervised at our Provincial Championships four out of the last five years. I was an Instructor at our local clinic every year since. I have helped several umpires prepare for their Championship (Provincial/Canadians). The work and time it took to get there was very rewarding.

What a journey it was! But all along the way it was rewarding. The friends I have made along the way makes it all worthwhile. I can say I really enjoyed it. Finally I was DUIC at the Sr. Men's Canadian Slo-Pitch Championship this past summer. That's another story in itself.

Questions for an UMPIRE

by **Nancy Morrison**

Over the last few weeks, I have been involved in a number of conversations regarding officiating.

Several people have asked me the sort of 'inquiring minds want to know' style questions. Here is my attempt at the answers..... (Disclaimer: The opinions expressed are solely those of the author and do not represent any official organization).

When a coach/player questions a call, how do you handle it?

When a player questions a call, there are many variables involved. How they approached me would be at the top of the list. If they come out screaming and yelling, my first job would be to try and calm them down. I would do that by staying calm and positioning my body in a non-confrontational position (sideways to the other person with hands down to my side but always ready to protect myself).

Secondly, I need to explain how I arrived at the call. Remember, this is not a debate and once you have explained your position it is time to move on.

How do overcome the feeling if you think you blew a call?

I never felt good about missing a call, but being human it happens to everyone, even major league umpires who umpire for a living! Over the years I have learned that dwelling on it won't help. It's probably one of the hardest things I have had to overcome as I don't really like the feeling I get when I make a mistake.

One thing that helps me overcome this, is really concentrating on the next call. I do this by repeating to myself to stay focused, slow down and see the entire play and that it's the next call that counts. It's a hard concept, so don't be discouraged if it takes some practice.

The game is over. Do you still think about the game?

The game is over and it is important to let that game go. But, it is just as important to review anything that was out of the ordinary and discuss with your partner any situations that arose in the game. If you have a weird situation that occurred, take time to talk it over to see if anything could have been done differently. It only takes a few minutes!

Do officials even up calls?

Sometimes it looks like it and I am not naive enough to think that it never happens. I think some components of 'game management' are misconstrued as an official evening up calls and are really an official's way of controlling the game at that time.

What is the best advice anyone ever gave you?

The best I ever received came from a fellow umpire who told me to always be ready to receive a pitch with 2 strikes on the batter. I seemed to be having trouble 'punching' out a batter when there was a close pitch. So now, just as the pitcher is delivering the ball, I think strike three as the ball is released. Having this thought only in my head, makes it so much easier for me to call a third strike on the batter and then if it is a ball it seems easier to change my thoughts and say "ball." Give it a try!

ROOKIE TODAY, GONE TOMORROW

by Mark Gough

This seems to be an on-going problem for most sports and not just for softball umpires. In this article we will look at the recruitment of umpires. To do this we must ask ourselves a few questions. Who, what, where, and when are the standard questions that come to mind and we will look at each one of these issues.

Who should we target? Before you answer this question, we also have to ask ourselves what are some of the qualities that we look for in an official? Here are the qualities that make an official:

1. Rule knowledge
2. Technical skills
3. Being physically fit
4. Ability to build rapport (good communication skills)
5. Feel for the game

Although these are all good qualities for a new official, think back to when you first started and how many of these qualities did you bring with you into officiating. Yes, rule knowledge and technical skills can be taught, but applying the rules and a feel for the game are things that take time to acquire or learn. And as far as being physically fit and having good people skills, these are things that cannot be taught and have to be developed with the new official.

So in answer to our question of who should we target, we should look at athletes that have played this sport or athletes that have played team sports. This should give you an official with some communication skills and if they have played the game then they have some feel for it and are somewhat fit, hopefully.

The next issue we should look at is when do we do our recruiting? Beginning, during, or at the end of the season? We will rule out the end of the season as this will do us no good as we have no games for them to umpire. Although it would probably be the time you find your most interest. During the season should also be out of the question, for by the time the rookie is ready we are into the play-offs and this would not be fair to the teams nor the rookie to introduce something or someone new at the most competitive time of the season.

The only choice and most logical choice would be to hold your recruitment camp at the beginning of the season or should maybe even take it one step further and at least one month before the season begins, but no-more than two. This would give the new official much needed time, time to let the information from the clinic sink in and study or read the rule book, time to acquire any equipment or uniforms required to start officiating, and time to come up with the money to pay for all this.

What? \$\$\$\$'s Yes, we may all agree that the biggest cost that we had in this sport was when we first started out. From the cost of the clinic, where we were told we needed a uniform and protective equipment to umpire to paying for a rule book and manual, and registering with the Provincial body so that we're insured, things do get expensive.

Giving a reduced rate or combining some of these cost also help the new official in starting out. Assisting the new official in acquiring or finding used equipment also helps. First try approaching veteran officials for old uniforms or equipment that will greatly reduce the cost. Perhaps showing where they get what they require to start out at the lowest cost would help. These things add up and anything we can do to alleviate some of these costs goes a long way to our next goal of retaining the new official.

But most of all don't make your new umpires go purchase all new gear. This is much too costly and will discourage the new umpire.

Where do we find these new officials? Try looking in your own neighbourhood. In the past someone's parent would come out to umpire the game when no-one else would do it. I feel the best place to look is in our school system. Approach your local secondary school, college or university and offer to run a rules clinic for their teams (boys and girls). Be forward with the coach / teachers and let them know that you are looking for new officials and hopefully providing some of their players with a

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part time job. By using this approach we are looking to our youths and hopefully acquiring an official with time and a feel for the game. Advertise it a month in advance in the school and the community. You might try approaching some of your minor leagues for candidates. This becomes very effective if you have an area where you have no officials and are looking to get some in that rural area. By taking this approach we alleviate some of the qualities that we listed earlier in what we are looking for.

Now that we have found our now umpires, "How do we retain them?" By having an open door policy to introductory rules and officiating clinics is a big step in the direction of educating and retaining officials. Any assistance that can be given in the early beginnings of becoming an umpire will also assist greatly in the retention of these new umpires.

Note: Mark Gough is a Softball Canada National Deputy UIC.

SAFETY FIRST!

by Doug Cundall

In the most recent edition of Referee Magazine, there is an article about a Slo-Pitch base umpire being struck by a line drive. The umpire died from the blow to the head. This is not the first death in North America of players or officials from hard hit balls. What further reminders do we need concerning the need to check for illegal and altered bats than this tragic event?

Softball Canada rules state that the ASA Banned Bat List shall be used for our bat standard. It is up to us to protect, not only ourselves, but also the players from others who will continue to flaunt the rules for the sake of one more extra base hit. Go into the ASA web site and print off the list. It can be a one-page colour bat list with pictures of the banned bats. Carry it in your ball bag. Check bats before games. Enforce the rule!

As part of this same issue is the need to check helmets and to check the core ratings and compressions of the balls being used in your games.

I recently discovered a private school, grade 12 game that wanted to use Red Dot, core 50 balls. The athletic director of the school gave them the balls because "That is what we have and we want to use them up."

Another safety issue that has been recently changed is the guideline on lightning. Softball Canada has adopted a "30/30" guide for lightning. See the flash and if you hear the thunder in less than 30 seconds, suspend the game immediately. You must then wait for 30 minutes after the last lightning flash before resuming the game.

Any other shorter time frame that you choose to use will be putting the participants in danger of a lightning strike. Lightning can strike from a distance of more than 16 kilometres, according to the National Weather office. This change in our guidelines is an increase in time and distance from the old "20/20" guide that we use to use.

We may be considered as the "mean ump" and not be popular with the coaches, players or fans when we enforce the safety rules, but we will also be doing some player or ourselves a great disservice if we do not!

SELF-TALK

by Joel Balberman

A technique that is often employed by top sports officials is self-talk. Self-talk is that little voice in our mind that can keep us on track. The experts tell us that there are optimal levels of activation and anxiety. If the level of activation falls below, or rises well above the optimal level, our performance can suffer. Self-talk can be used to either raise the level of intensity, or to tone it down and help an umpire to relax. We can apply a mental 'kick in the butt', or we can use it to sooth and calm in tense situations.

Try to develop your own 'trigger words' – expressions that work to reinforce your own desired state of performance or mechanics. These can be very brief, even one-word triggers. Expressions such as Breathe, Relax, Set, Lock-In or Focus can help. Work to make the expression a positive one, reinforcing



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the desired state rather than focusing on the things you do not want to do. Use positive phrasing and avoid the words 'don't' and 'no'. In your ongoing performance review during a game you can make use of mental reminders or expressions such as:

"Stay down."

"Follow the pitch all the way into the catcher's glove"

"Let the play happen."

"Slow it down."

"See it all, and then make the call"

"Be here now"

"You got a little too close to the play that time"

Your comments to yourself are not meant to chastise, but, rather, are designed to improve performance. If you feel you made an error, let it go. Dwelling on it will serve no useful purpose, and the problem will compound itself if you keep replying it in your mind. Promise yourself you'll think about it after the game.

You can also develop 'physical triggers' such as tapping your hand on your thigh, or closing your hand into a fist. Whatever works to get you set for the pitch, use it. Try various things until you find the triggers that work for you.

EMOTIONAL CONTROL AND COMPETITION ANXIETY

Both athletes and officials react to competition – the physical and mental results of being in a stressful situation. Performance for both athlete and official can be negatively affected by stress. Symptoms of this stress may include muscular tension, a racing heart, a cold sweat and difficulty concentrating.

Fear can sometimes arise. Fear can be a powerful distracter, significantly detracting from your performance on the diamond. Strive to understand the sources and causes of fear. Most often, fear is self-induced, coming from a real or imagined source, and not often rational.

In the larger picture, we can know fear when it arises in our struggle to achieve our personal potential. We can fear failure; conversely, we can fear success, as that means we must be able to duplicate our efforts and continue to be successful. Better perhaps to just come close, so no one expects too much of us.

Fear can be disabling, preventing entirely from reaching for that brass ring. Fear can be a self-imposed barrier; a mountain of seemingly insurmountable height. Fear is always there lurking and ready to emerge.

We need to ask ourselves some tough questions:

- Could fear be holding me back from advancing and enhancing my performance?
- Do I recognize when and if I am a victim of fear?
- What are some coping strategies I can employ when faced with fear?
- Am I motivated by fear, and the desire to overcome it, or disheartened by it?
- How do I take control of my mind and teach it not to fear?
- Which is stronger in me – the fear of failure or the desire to succeed?
- What are my personal fear management strategies?

In order to be understood, fear must be embraced and explored. Exploring fear can make us grow. Come to terms with the fear; otherwise you will not overcome it.

We stumble over pebbles, not mountains.

RELAXATION TECHNIQUES

One characteristic that many people admire in outstanding athletes is their ability to totally relax while performing. This is not to say that these athletes do not feel the pressure, but they have learned to embrace it, and use it as a springboard to even greater success. In order to perform at the highest levels, even during stressful competitions, athletes must learn to relax. The same is true of umpires.

Umpiring at a high competitive level requires a total mental, physical and emotional commitment. The great umpire rises to the occasion, and knows how to relax and enjoy the experience of the game.

Suggested Relaxation Methods for Officials

- Recall a positive officiating experience. Recall and recapture your feelings when you were officiating well.
- Keep a diary of your officiating experiences. Write and develop your experiences, looking for ways that help you to relax.
- Role play.
- Use mental imagery to help you prepare for tough matches. Picture situations that may occur and how you might handle them.
- Breathe deeply and exhale slowly, and deliberately to relax your neck and shoulder muscles. Repeat. Purge the stress from your body in this way.
- Mentally sing a small tune to relax you.
- Relax various muscle groups one after another – toes, feet, legs, hands etc.
- Use self-talk – find your own buzz or trigger words.
- Deliberately slow down and take your time when under stress.
- Have a mindset that says that you will enjoy, relax and have fun.
- Take a power nap while waiting for your next game.
- If possible, have a change of scenery. Leave the ballpark between games. Go for a walk. Go shopping. Go for a jog.

Add your own methods. Use the techniques that work for you.

PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

“What we think about, talk about and do something about, comes about.”

Larry Winget, motivational speaker.

Throughout the course of my own umpiring career, I've come to believe that we can and must become our own evaluators. Top performers in all fields engage in frank and honest self-evaluation. As umpires we are caught up in an unusual dichotomy. We are constantly being judged by players, coaches and spectators - people who are often the worst qualified to render an opinion about our performance, as their judgment is clouded by bias, and often, a lack of knowledge of the rules. These people often make their opinions about our performance known in no uncertain terms. However, as we grow in experience, we can become our own critics, if we tolerate no excuse-making, and honestly reflect on and judge our own performance after a game. An experienced plate umpire can tell you after a game how many pitches he/she might have missed, or would like to see over again.

The irony of what we do is that we do not often get noticed for being competent and capable, while perceived mistakes and shortcomings are rehashed and offered up for criticism. Get used to the fact that you are not likely to get noticed when you are doing things correctly.

Self-evaluation belongs in the after-the-game category, what the sports psychologists call the follow-up and self-evaluation phase. Hold a mirror up to yourself and have a good hard look. We can and should debrief with our partner(s). We can reflect on our efforts by keeping a journal. We can call a mentor, and discuss a game, in order to get tips that may have come in handy during the game. We should ask the difficult questions:

Did I keep calm under pressure?

Did I maintain self-control?

How well did I communicate with athletes and coaches?

Did I make the tough calls in a decisive manner?

How well did I handle challenging situations?

BETWEEN the LINES

When reviewing your performance, find the positives in your game. Write them down. Build on your successes. Write down any tips you gleaned from a partner or a mentor. Make experience your best possible teacher. Emulate the practices of your most qualified peers. What would happen if we truly believed that we could become what we think about?

Work at your game, before, during and after each contest. A love for the game and a desire to get the calls right, can carry you a long way toward the success you seek. These factors will drive you to work hard at your chosen craft. Choose to be good, not lucky. Someone once said quite wisely:

The harder I work, the luckier I get.

Finally, it must be understood that no matter how hard we strive to be perfect, we will, on occasion, make an error in judgment. That is the human element in officiating. It is a part of the game. Even the most experienced official can fall victim to an occasional mistake. No matter how hard you study the rules, work on your positioning, and hustle on the diamond, mistakes can happen. That is what they are – mistakes. No more and no less. A bad call does not make you a bad umpire. However, a bad call repeated may make you a bad umpire. Put the error aside once you have learned what you can from it, and move on.

YOUR PERSONAL PHILOSOPHY OF UMPIRING

I've always seen myself as being on a journey toward understanding the art of umpiring. Along the way, many have assisted me in gaining enlightenment and insight into this most human craft. As human beings, we have great ability to grow and adapt. Some umpires are blessed with an immense amount of natural ability, yet never make it to the top. Many umpires are more concerned with not 'screwing up', rather than being motivated by personal pride in a job well done. Set internal standards of self-evaluation that will encourage you to keep striving to achieve and improve. Engage yourself mentally in your games.

Make pride in a job well done your main motivator. Take on the challenge of mastering the mental side of the game. See it as part of a process of continual personal growth and improvement. The search for the proper mental approach to the game is your destination.

Enjoy your journey, and have a great trip!

"If you can conceive it, and your heart can believe it, you can achieve it."

Comments on my LEVEL V APPOINTMENT

by **Sonny Campbell**

An umpire who I respected when I played fastball asked me, "Sonny why don't you get into umpiring?" You are always at the park anyway and you can make a couple of bucks at it too.

Well he was right about one thing, I was always there. My wife and I ran a recreation program for the kids in the area for nearly twelve years. Our two boys grew up playing ball with their friends and my wife and I coached, taking the team on the road and always had a blast. So when this umpire (the late Danny Dorrington) mentioned umpiring it gave me another reason to be at the ballpark.

Danny took the time to recruit me even though he would let me know when I was getting close to not finishing seven innings as a player. My respect for Danny and the game grew even more when I umpired my first game. I think we all know the feeling of the first game.

Hey Sonny! "Keep at it and you will be able to do the men's games soon" said Danny. "Yeah, right!" I replied. You have to be a good ump to do those games.

The senior leagues around home offered very good ball back then. I was told that I could go to clinics and be assessed to get higher levels. Well I wanted to try it and do my best. So I went to clinics and went to assessment tournaments.

BETWEEN the LINES

I am so very glad I did. I met higher level umps there, made their friendship, and learned all about professionalism. I will carry that knowledge with me the rest of my days.

To think that I have the privilege to umpire with folks from all across Canada motivates me even more. Now that I fit in with and feel comfortable stepping onto any diamond with confidence with these people is a dream come true.

I will never forget my roots where I was brought along and trained by my peers at home. I don't regard myself any better an umpire than they are. Always remember that no one is perfect.

I took it upon myself to begin travelling away to umpire where lots of umpires are quite content to stay in their area to do their thing.

I attribute my gaining my Level V to the help from all the local umpires and my provincial body who have always encouraged me giving me opportunities to experience the full scope of the game of softball.

I am grateful for the friends I have met and look forward to the friends I am still to meet.

To anyone who is starting out or who is chasing the opportunity to do the big game, keep on going. It is the greatest reward you will ever have and you will take it with you always.

To my wife Judy and sons, Neil and John, I thank you for your understanding and for putting up with all that has unfolded in the journey to my Level V appointment.

I enjoy each and every game I do with my local association umpires. They are old stalwarts that can umpire as well as anyone. They are my buddies. It's quite a feeling and honour to be a local boy who has achieved that Level V rating.

I thank you all.

GIVING BACK to the Program

by Peter Kluszczynski

I have thought long and hard about this subject because I have been dedicated all my life to teams, players, coaches, and of course, umpires.

For someone to give back in any capacity to ones program is what I would term as doing it for your team. I know, as a player, I would help the younger players out, practice and try to be an example to them.

When I was a coach, it was my duty to be a role model and a leader to my players. I earned a lot of respect because players knew how dedicated I was to the team.

I never realized when I became an umpire that the trend would not change and if anything it is more imperative that we give back to the program.

When I was just starting out as an umpire, I had a lot of knowledge about ball but I didn't have the knowledge about umpiring. Being a rookie, I was looking for someone with experience to help and guide me to be a better umpire.

I was eager to learn and I needed someone to teach me mechanics, positioning and other little things that I should need to know to make me a better umpire.

In my early days, I asked a lot of questions from our local Level V umpire, Mitch Zuk, who was always willing to teach the rookie umpires new things. He was a big factor in my career and made me realize that giving back to the program helps everybody.

BETWEEN the LINES

As I moved up through the umpire ranks the more I realized that I needed to be on the Softball Ontario and Softball Canada Team. I became President of the Brampton Umpires' Association and then, for 5 years moved up to becoming the Deputy Provincial Umpire-in-Chief for Softball Ontario. While I was advancing in my umpiring career, I never lost touch with who I am and what I can do for others.

Bruce Bierman was a big factor in my advancement to ISC World Tournaments and Canadian Championships. I will never forget those that helped me and I look forward to being able to assist my fellow umpires in the future.

Last year in Newfoundland, I earned my Level V and when I returned I became the Fast Pitch Provincial UIC for Softball Ontario. I realize I am in a position to give back to our program and that is exactly what I am doing.

I could have received my Level V and sat back and said I had achieved my goal and I don't need to do anything. Would that be the right thing to do?

Absolutely not!!!

I challenge all umpires that have benefited through the program from Level II to Level V to give back to your program!

I had a meeting with most of our Level V's at the Instructor Training Clinic Weekend Banquet asking them to help with the program in any way that they could. They responded in a very positive way and most of them did help with our program, whether it be to instruct, evaluate or UIC a tournament.

What upsets me the most are the few that did not respond, help or assist in any way possible. For a Level V umpire not to give back to your program is insulting to all other Level V's that are dedicated in every way in working with the development of umpires throughout the country.

In speeches that I have made to the umpires of Ontario, I spoke about "SOLIDARITY" amongst the umpires. Giving back is a big part of the meaning of that word!

I ask everybody to look at your umpiring career and think about how you have benefited and what you can do to help our program?

What can you do or have you done?

- Run a tournament locally or in your Province/Territory
- Be on a local association helping the local official
- Be sure to read up on and practice current mechanics with crispness and "by the book" methods
- Volunteer to help with manuals or writing for publications - that helps all umpires across the country
- Pass on the latest rule interpretations as they come to you
- Mentor a new official
- Correct an 'old hand' in the game and bring them up to current standards
- Encourage all officials to attend clinics
- Offer solicited advice when asked
- Talk to officials about the advantages of being a member of the Provincial/Territorial body and National body
- Evaluate for the Provincial body
- Instruct at official clinics for the Provincial/Territorial and National body
- If you are a Level V official, register your desire to UIC a Canadian Championship
- If you have an area of expertise, offer to help Provincially/Territorially and Nationally with projects

The list goes on and on. Where do you fit in? What can you do to help?

Remember we are the Blue Team and we should do whatever we can for our fellow umpires.

AWARDS



2008 Home Run Sports UMPIRE OF THE YEAR

GENEVIÈVE GAUDREAU

(Photo credit: Jeff Crawford, www.jcrawford.ca)

Geneviève Gaudreau has quickly become a very prominent umpire in Quebec and in Canada over the past several years, culminating to her recent achievement of obtaining International Softball Federation (ISF) certification this past August. In 2001, she burst onto the umpiring scene as Softball Quebec's Most Improved Umpire award winner. The following year, she worked the

Canadian Bantam Girls Fast Pitch Championship and took home yet another Softball Quebec Umpire of the Year award for her representation at the National level. Beginning in 2003, she took on much more responsibility after earning her Level IV Certification, becoming a member of Softball Quebec's Umpire Development Committee, an umpire instructor and supervisor for Softball Quebec, and also worked the Canadian Midget Girls Fast Pitch Championship.

She won three more Softball Quebec Umpire Awards from 2004-2006, including two Major Umpire of the Year awards and one for being the umpire who most contributed to the development of umpires. She has served as Umpire in Chief (UIC) for the International Challenge in Montreal from 2005 to 2008, and has also done translation for Softball Canada's umpire manuals.

Geneviève has been actively involved with Softball Quebec's umpiring program, and her efforts and guidance have been truly remarkable for the development of umpires in her province. She now has four Canadian Championships under her belt, including the 2005 and 2006 Canadian Senior Women's Championships, and with her recent ISF certification, she will certainly be considered for numerous major events for years to come.

PREVIOUS

UMPIRE OF THE YEAR AWARD

RECIPIENTS

2007 - Jack Van Bynen (Ontario)

2006 - Denis Bélanger (Quebec)

2005 - Bob Constantin (Alberta)

2004 - Chris Lee (British Columbia)

2003 - Don Bracey (Ontario)

2002 - Wayne Shipley (Nova Scotia)

2001 - Serge Laflamme (Quebec)

2000 - Keith Hazel (British Columbia)

1999 - Al Shenduk (Alberta)

1998 - Bob Stanton (New Brunswick)

CONGRATULATIONS
NOTICES

Wayne Brown
Lucie Carmichael

to the ISF
Hall of Fame



BackSoftball

Join the International Softball Federation's (ISF) efforts to get women's fast pitch softball reinstated in 2009 by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) for the 2016 Summer Games.

- 🍌 Visit www.BackSoftball.com. Read the press release and ten-point blueprint so you're well versed on the matter.
- 🍌 Contact the media to have them give more attention to this issue
- 🍌 Speak out on the matter with a posting in the "Support Olympic Softball" category on the official ISF website's Message Board
- 🍌 Keep copies of this flyer circulating between now and the IOC's October 2009 vote to increase the chances of exposure
- 🍌 Contact people that you know in other countries and encourage them to get involved so that softball can show its universality and not be labeled as "just a U.S. sport"
- 🍌 Wear Back Softball merchandise to draw more attention to the campaign
- 🍌 Attend international softball events or watch them on TV or online (a calendar of such tournaments can be found in the Events section of www.internationalsoftball.com)
- 🍌 Visit Back Softball's (and the ISF's) page on Facebook and, while there, click on 'Become a Fan' (registration is free at www.facebook.com)
- 🍌 Watch videos at www.youtube.com/ISFsoftball to help demonstrate the interest in and demand for interacting with the sport
- 🍌 Make a donation to the reinstatement campaign, either via the YouTube channel or the Back Softball homepage
- 🍌 Tell others – friends, family, co-workers, neighbors – about the current situation with Olympic Softball, and get them to act on the above steps.

(NOTE: The ISF has determined that petitions are not appropriate for this campaign. Also, contact should not be made with IOC Members and the Olympic family.)



www.internationalsoftball.com