



# BETWEEN THE LINES

## A SOFTBALL CANADA OFFICIATING PUBLICATION

SUMMER 2010 – ISSUE

## BLUE FOR YOU!

### Saskatchewan Welcomes Country at Blue Convention

For softball umpires from across the country, Easter weekend in 2010 was not spent filling their stomachs with chocolate eggs and bunnies, but instead they had a good feed of Moose in Saskatchewan.

For the seventh time since the inception of Blue Convention, members of Softball Canada's umpiring family gathered for a spring get-together featuring a celebration of the accomplishments of the members of the program and engaged in many learning activities over three days.

Moose Gibson - who doubles as the Softball Saskatchewan provincial umpire-in-chief and the Canadian Forces Chief Official – and his host committee welcomed over 200 umpires from coast to coast to coast as well as a number of international guests from the USA, Korea and New Zealand.

"The organizing committee did just an amazing job as hosts for the event", noted National Director of Umpires Brian Van Os. "It's never easy to bring everything together but their attention to detail made sure that things ran smoothly for the workshop leaders and the participants."

The highlight of the event was the Indicator Club banquet where thirty individuals were recognized into the prestigious group for their achievements and contributions to the umpiring program at the local and provincial levels. As the guest speaker, Regina Mayor Pat Fiocco, an Olympic boxing official, delivered a strong and entertaining message about the need to stick to your values as an official and protect the integrity of the sport.

Over the two days, delegates were able to take in sessions from some of the best officials and instructors in Canada and the world, with the NCAA's Kathy Strahm and Kevin Ryan from the ASA joining a leading group of Softball Canada's best who shared their knowledge gained from years of experience both on and off the diamond.

Blue Convention also featured popular Level IV and Instructor/Evaluator Clinics that bookcased the convention, starting Thursday and finishing on Sunday.

Van Os was appreciative of the efforts of the host committee to contribute to the national program. "Saskatchewan has certainly added another rung to the tremendous history of this event. We look forward to seeing this event continue to grow and prosper as an integral component of our national officiating program."

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

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# INDICATOR CLUB INDUCTEES

ALBERTA - John Gheran, Brian Gouthreau, Hilary Lewis; BRITISH COLUMBIA – Arne Austring, Craig Holyhead, Rick Leche, Michael Track; SASKATCHEWAN – Adolph Fischer, David Hill, Darren Smith, Brian Waldbauer; MANITOBA – Devin Beaudry, Frank Fargey, Peter George; ONTARIO – Steve Bedard, Gary Chenier, Bruce Ellis, Terry Gavas, Dave Hale, John Snook; QUEBEC – Christian Brown, Beniot Marcotte, Francis Néron; NEW BRUNSWICK – Carl Collins, Gordie Craft, Sharon Loder; NOVA SCOTIA – Nickolas Bonnar, William Lou Dixon, Patrick White; PEI – Frank Hughes



## **Message from The Director of Umpires**

We are well into the Softball year and many are in the middle of playoffs. I want to take this time to thank the many umpires who go out every night and every weekend to umpire Softball. Sometimes it appears you are not appreciated but Softball Canada and the Provincial/Territorial partners appreciate the time and commitment you make to umpire. Umpiring is an integral part of any successful Softball Program. Keep up the good work.

It is also time to thank Association executives, assignors and educators who work in the background keeping our umpires abreast of changes in rules, mechanics and getting them to the park on time. Umpiring needs structure and the successful umpires have a team behind the scene making sure all the little things are in place. We appreciate all the support you give to your umpires and

the support you give your Provincial/Territorial Associations. It is the everyday umpires that make up the bulk of our registration and without you we cannot be successful.

Canadian Championships have come and gone and we have filled the Umpire Rosters with a record number of umpires from across the country. Thanks to all the Provinces who sent umpires and to those Provinces who filled vacant opportunities. 115 umpires umpired in our Canadian Championships in 2010. For the first time we have an exchange with ASA in SP where three ASA umpires umpired in our Canadian Championships. Two in the men's and one in the women's. We have SP umpires attending an ASA Men's Championship in Columbus, Ohio.

I also want to thank our Level V umpires who gave up time to supervise in the Canadian Championships. Many of you have achieved success on the field internationally and are passing along your knowledge to the umpires in the field. Without your passion and commitment we cannot be as successful as we have been internationally. Each of you is important in the Softball Canada program. For those Level V umpires doing or have done an International events thank you for doing the best you can and upholding the strong Canadian effort and standard.

In closing we are embarking down a new path. I am in the process of putting a team together to look at a Long Term Official Development Plan similar to the Long Term Player Development Plan recently presented to the Province/Territories. The team will be chaired by Donna Ozarko and will have only one ODC member as well as representatives from outside the umpiring circles. It is our intent to look at the future needs of our Sport and make sure umpiring across the country can meet those needs.

Be professional and do the best you can on every pitch. The game belongs to the players. Our role is to create an environment where neither team gains an advantage. If you keep that thought you will always be successful.

**Thanks again for you participation. Brian Van Os – National Director of Umpires**

# NEW BETWEEN THE LINES EDITORIAL TEAM

## **ANNOUNCED**

The Officiating Development Committee is pleased to announce that Rick Lifford of New Brunswick and Darren Gerior of Nova Scotia have been appointed to the Between The Lines editorial team.

Together with ODC liaison Jeff Whipple, they will be responsible for gathering stories to share from and with our umpiring family from coast to coast.

“We see real value in Between the Lines as an important part of the fabric of our national program.” notes Whipple, “Rick and Darren bring with them an extensive network of friends and colleagues from many events that they can leverage to bring content to share.”

If you have a story or a story idea to share please feel free to contact Rick at [ricklifford@hotmail.com](mailto:ricklifford@hotmail.com) or Darren at [cecoach@ns.sympatico.ca](mailto:cecoach@ns.sympatico.ca).

# ON-LINE LEARNING

## **Softball Canada Welcomes UmpSchool Program**

As the world gets digital and connected, Softball Canada’s umpires can now leverage a new tool for learning. At Blue Convention 2010 in Regina, National Director of Umpires Brian Van Os announced a new web-based learning initiative for umpires across the country.

Softball Canada’s UmpSchool is a subscription-based on-line rules review and test preparation centre, developed in conjunction with Rulebox Software. For a subscription price of just \$8 USD annually, UmpSchool allows umpires to review rules and take practice exams built on a database of almost a thousand questions built from actual past Softball Canada exams and refresher tests.

Softball Canada UmpSchool can be used from any computer with an internet connection, so there is no download or installation required, giving you instant access all the time

Umpires can purchase a subscription to Softball Canada UmpSchool through the Softball Canada website ([www.softball.ca](http://www.softball.ca)), providing unlimited access for the entire year. With each new season, umpires can renew their subscription for the same low price, providing continued access to dozens of new questions and all the latest rule changes and revisions.

Subscriptions can also be easily purchased in bulk for zones or provinces that want subscriptions for their entire group or certification classes.

“We believe that virtual training initiatives will play a larger role in our program in the future”, notes Van Os. “We are excited to have this tool to offer and the initial uptake by officials has been encouraging. We particularly welcome the input of umpires with suggestions to make this tool better.”

Upon signing into UmpSchool, umpires can select from amongst a number of different rules and select questions, receiving immediate feedback and rule references to help build new knowledge. The tool is meant as a casual learning tool throughout the season or as a more intense application prior to the national exam or in preparation for a national tournament assignment.

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“This is a powerful learning tool” notes Van Os “and we really want to build on it. We look forward to partnering with the provinces and territories on this and see technology as playing a significant role in our national training programs in the future.”

To subscribe to UmpSchool look for the button on the front page of Softball Canada’s website at [www.softball.ca](http://www.softball.ca).

## LEARNING FROM THE BEST Olympic Umpires Lead Youth Clinic at BC2010

For a couple dozen teenage umpires from across Saskatchewan, Blue Convention 2010 was a special opportunity to learn about umpiring the sport of softball. And learn they did, not just about mechanics and rules, but about just what it means to be an umpire and how to set goals and reach them to the highest levels.

Led by International Softball Federation Director of Umpiring Bob Stanton and Canadian Olympic umpires Nancy Morrison of New Brunswick and Greg Pipher of Ontario they were put through their paces on cases, positioning and making the calls, but it was the stories that caught the attention of the young umpires.

Thirteen year-old Troy Poole of Moosomin, Saskatchewan recalls his favourite story from the day-long clinic. “I liked the story she (Morrison) told us about the coin she found in the dirt at the Olympics.” he explained. “It was just so cool to be able to hear about that stuff.”

Morrison, herself an educator, understands that it is through stories that we connect with kids and engage them in the learning process.

“To have this youth clinic as part of Blue Convention is an amazing learning experience for these young umpires”, she notes. “They get to rub shoulders with adult umpires but still have their own space where they can learn on their own terms.”

Each of the youth umpires were given some souvenirs from their day with the Olympians and will certainly take away valuable knowledge they can apply as they practice their skills on diamonds all across Saskatchewan this summer.



*Participants and instructors at the youth umpires clinic celebrate the completion of their day at the youth umpires clinic at Blue Convention 2010.*



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*Youth umpires, Troy Poole of Moosomin, SK and Kelsey Rapp of Kipling, SK, practice some of their new mechanics under the watchful eyes of Canadian Olympic umpires, Nancy Morrison and Greg Pipher, at the youth clinic held in conjunction with Blue Convention 2010 in Regina in April.*

## IS IT LIVE OR IS IT MEMOREX? AUGUST 2009, Canada Games, Summerside, PE

by **Sandra Allan, Level IV, NB**

As an official with Softball Canada, the 2009 softball season is one I will always remember – gold medal plate game at the Junior Women’s Canadian Championship and the plate at the Canada Games to be televised live by TSN. My first assignment at the Canada Games was Game #1, BC v. NS which ended 1-0 with BC victorious. When the game ended I thought this was the game of my life. However, on Tuesday, John MacEwen (DUIC) took me aside and told me my assignment for Thursday was the TSN game with two other females, Carla Mckenzie (NS) and Arianne Longtin (PQ). This was to be the only televised game with three females officials working a game, a coo for Softball Canada and their umpires program.

Game day preparation started early. By 2 am, my uniform was washed and pressed, my plate shoes had a shine they had never seen before, shin guards were washed, and my goalie style mask was cleaned and shining (the least I could do is look good, even if I didn’t get any sleep). Once at the park, my nerves were calmed thanks to my fellow crew mates’ jovial mannerisms.

In mental preparation, I realized I need to be comfortable on the diamond and I needed to present a CALM demeanour – two personality traits I sorely lack. Guess there is no time like the present to work on both. I noticed in my first plate game that the crushed rock was

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very uneven so I asked Game Control to have the grounds crew remove all crushed rock from behind the catchers box – I wanted a smooth surface. Comfortability problem solved. Prior to the game, I met with a member of the TSN crew and he explained the procedures for commercial breaks and the cues he would be giving me. I realized my normal game management skills were going to be thrown out the window. Normally I hustle and have the players hustling and ready to play. Now I had to slow myself down and try to slow the girls down – this was an important game for both teams (winner would be seeded #1 for playoffs) and the adrenaline was flowing. The girls were eager to start, but TSN was still at commercial - bad start, had to WAIT. Once I had received the signal from TSN crew member, PLAY BALL.

After the first inning and becoming accustomed to waiting for TSN, the game progressed as any other game – balls and strikes, safes and outs, with a couple of glitches thrown in (typical game !!! LOL). Bottom of the 2nd inning, I lost the count – DUH, only two pitches had been thrown (nerves, I guess). I'll NEVER look at the scoreboard again !!! The next inning, Arianne Longtin, BU at first, called time and spoke to the pitcher about keeping in contact with the pitchers slab. Several pitches later she called an illegal pitch. Here comes the coach – after explaining why an illegal pitch was called, the coach returned to the dugout and the game continued.

Post game – lots of laughs (mostly at ourselves) and we agreed this was a highlight of our umpiring careers. For me, a country girl from a small town in Carleton County, it was my Olympics. I had a lot of help to get to this point: Softball Canada, fellow NB umpires, the support of NB umpires who attended the Canada Games as fans of the game, and the support of family.

*Sandra Allan is a Level IV umpire from Fredericton, New Brunswick. In 2010 she was one of 16 umpires assigned to the Canadian Midget Girls Fastpitch Championships in Saint John.*

## FROM EAST TO WEST

**by Amy Richter, Level IV, AB**

I grew up in New Brunswick and started playing softball when I was around 12 and umpiring at 14. I did both for a while and when I was too old to be a midget girl I just stayed with umpiring. At that age umpiring was more about building confidence and a new skill, and since my softball playing skills weren't really improving, I started to feel even more comfortable being the umpire.

Once I began umpiring as a young woman I realized umpiring was about more than just personal development - I had acquired this whole new circle of friends and mentors. I felt like a part of a group that I could identify with, the blue crew. I would find myself saying "I'm an umpire" rather than "I umpire".

Life happens and mine took some twists and turns that landed me in Alberta at age 24 on my own, other than my boyfriend at the time (who I moved for and later married). I got a job and met a few people and then summer came around and I thought, hey, I bet I could umpire here too. I can't remember how I got in touch with the local association but it wasn't long before I was at a clinic and out on the diamond.

Now, as you can imagine, the regional differences in Canada are quite vast and they do extend into softball, apparently. I remember speaking with one blue who had just come back from the States umpiring and said "You wouldn't believe it; down there you actually get paid on the diamond, in cash, before the game." To which I replied, "Heh? How do you guys get paid? That's the way they do it in New Brunswick." Difference number one: It is much easier to save your money if you get it all at once at the end of the year.

The second major difference came as a big surprise. I came back to Alberta at the end of June after having a visit home in New Brunswick. When I called the assigner to say I was back and ready to work some games she told me they were already in playoffs and there were no games left. I was really confused. How could the season be over in June when there were two more months of summer left? I can remember playing in the girls' league final tournament on

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Labour Day weekend. And I know the men's league playoffs would run into September sometimes due to rain outs in August. But that was in New Brunswick.

It was on a really cold, windy, yucky day, that no one in their right mind should have been playing ball on, that I discovered difference number three. Back home I wouldn't dream of getting on the diamond without my hair pulled back, my collar straight and my shoes and pants clean. This cold, awful day I saw one umpire in rubber boots and another in a yellow slicker. And it didn't matter, it was flipping cold and wet and if they wanted umpires out there they would have to take us as warm and dry as we could get. It was no fun at all that day but looking back now I can't help but laugh.

Despite the little differences between provinces there is one similarity that makes it all worth it. The camaraderie. It doesn't matter where you are or who you are, as a Canadian Softball Umpire and really around the world, you are a part of something. And it isn't the money, or the workout, or the sweet tan lines that keep umpires working into their seventies, it's the relationships that we build with one another. And it is the relationships that I have built across the country that make me want to stay involved, even as I start a family, because being in this network of intriguing people continues to enrich my life and keep me grounded.

*New Brunswick's Amy Chedore is now Alberta's Amy Richter. She is a Level IV umpire and lives in Red Deer.*

## UMPY YOU STINK!

by Doug Cundall, ODC

That is hardly an original insult for someone who has officiated for 50 years and Arnie Ziegler has umpired for 50 years. Starting in 1960, he stepped out onto the diamond in Barrie, Ontario and into the softball wars of the Barrie and District Intermediate Fast Pitch League.

Over the years, umpiring with Barrie Minor Baseball and the South Simcoe Baseball Association took up about 8 years and overlapped with his blooming Fast Pitch umpire career. Arnie's concentration was mainly on Fast Pitch.

When asked why he started umpiring, his honest response was, "Because I wasn't a very good player!"

For those readers who are familiar with the softball scene in Barrie the diamonds in Queen's Park, Shear Park, Lampman Lane, Agriculture Park (the old race track), Rotary Park on 26/27 highways, Eastview and Georgian Diamonds all ring familiar. He even ventured onto the odd school diamond. It was in this first 26 years of his umpiring career as a fast pitch umpire that Arnie discovered Slo-Pitch. For the past 30 years, Arnie has mainly stuck to Slo-Pitch with the past 24 exclusively. Outside of Barrie, the communities of Hillsdale, Bradford, Stroud, Orillia, Base Borden, Elmvalle and Oro all saw Arnie out on the ball field. As did the Sky Dome in the 24 hour SP tournament. The veteran umpire was well respected by the veteran players and coaches and quickly earned the respect of the new players.

During those many years as an umpire, Arnie found time to take on a few other duties in the ball world. He coached women's Slo-Pitch teams in the Barrie Ladies League for several years. What a treat those games were to officiate, with a veteran umpire standing in the 3rd base coach's box scrutinizing your every call. But, being the gentleman that he is, he had the ability to question with calm decorum and to suggest in such a way that as the umpire you walked away knowing that you had just "blown a call" but still had your dignity intact. Arnie also took on the position of third base coach for the first two seasons of the Barrie Bay Cats Intercounty Baseball team.

When questioned about his umpiring career, Arnie relates, as one of the humorous moments on the diamond, the night in a fast pitch game when he had the dubious duty of throwing out the coach, and two players from the same team. All were from the same family – namely father and two sons. Later that same night, the wife/mother phoned him at home and gave him a verbal going over with language that "would have made a sailor blush".

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When asked about his most memorable moment on the diamond, Arnie replied quietly with, “the night that I got to umpire with my son for the first time”.

Somehow, Arnie also found the time to take on administrative duties in the local Barrie Slo-Pitch Umpires’ Association. Over the years, Arnie stepped up and was an association Director, and President and Past President many times.

Frustration set in for Arnie on occasion as he progressed through his long career but it was “always rewarding”. Why did he do it? “Because I love the game!” Has he retired? No, not yet! Ask that question next spring when carding times comes around and I bet that Arnie will be on the phone to me asking, “What if the runner ...?”

*Doug Cundall is a Level IV umpire from Ontario and a long-standing member of Softball Canada’s Officiating Development Committee.*



*Arnie Ziegler shows off some of his memories of his umpiring career.*

## HAVING AN IMPACT

**by Frankie Billingsley, Level IV, AB**

The scene is Kars, Ontario, in 2005. I was getting ready to play in the gold medal game at the Senior Women’s Canadian Championship. Teams were warming up, coaches were chatting and the stands were buzzing. All of a sudden a hush fell over everyone. I turned to see the gold medal crew walking toward the diamond and I will never forget that moment. There were four female officials who were making their way to the diamond and they were: Genevieve Gaudreau, Tonya Ribalkin, Joyce Schroeder and Daryl Way. I wondered if the four umpires had any idea how much conversation they had created amongst the fans, the coaches and the players.

I have had the privilege of playing in many championships where officials have earned the coveted Level V designation. When I think about women in umpiring now, I realize how



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important it is for us, as female officials, to have a presence so that female athletes can see what the possibilities can be for them in the future of this sport.

I felt so lucky to have an opportunity similar to the one in Kars a few years later, in 2008. There were a number of provincial championships happening on the same weekend in Alberta. I knew Edmonton would be asked for fill-ins and I really wanted to attend our men's provincial tournament in Calgary. Instead, I was asked to officiate at the Junior Women's provincial in Strathmore. I was disappointed but, in hindsight it was the best thing I ever did as I had no idea how rewarding this experience would turn out to be. I was assigned to work the plate for the opening game of the Junior Women's Provincial 2008. I remember seeing the schedule and commenting that there were three female officials on the game. Up to that point, I had never had the opportunity to work with two other females. Amy, Crystal and I walked out to the diamond and we did not realize that as we approached the diamond everyone stopped what they were doing. Fans ceased to carry on their conversations, players and coaches stopped warming up. My partners and I continued our pre-game duties as we normally would - completely oblivious to all that had just transpired. Finally, time for the plate conference, I awaited the arrival of my partners who were escorting the coaches and players from their respective benches. As everyone gathered and I introduced my crew, one of the young ladies put up her hand and I smiled and nodded and she said, "I have never, ever seen three women umpires before – this is so cool!" It was in that moment that I realized why I was there and how important it was, and is, for young women to see women in officiating.

As part of my work on the Women in Umpiring Committee I am writing this article to incite conversation, debate, discussion and to introduce our committee to you. I feel honoured and privileged to be on this committee with such a great group of people and they are:

Bonnie Gostola (AB—liaison to the ODC), Tonya Ribalkin (BC—Chair of the committee), Kelly Hunter (BC), Claire Austring (BC), Hilary Lewis (AB), Genevieve Gaudreau (QC), Lesley Pipher (ON), Kelly-jo Murphy (ON), Daryl Way (ON), Kim Dudzic (ON), Lori Smith (ON), and Sandra Allan (NB).

I look forward to hearing from each and every one of you!

*Frankie Billingsley is a Level IV umpire from Alberta and a member of Softball Canada's Women In Umpiring Task Force.*

# BORDER BATTLE MEMORIES FROM 2009

## **Stephane Soucy, Level V, SP, AB**

It all started with an application last winter to umpire at an international event. Although the Border Battle was not one of the events on the application I had read about it and was hoping I would have a chance to be selected. In early March I received a phone call from Murray Harvey (past ODC). He asked if I would be interested in attending this new international event, the Border Battle in Oklahoma City. Interested? It would be an honour I thought. In accepting this event, I took it upon myself to make sure I was well prepared and in shape. After assuring that I was well prepared, it was on to Oklahoma, USA.

The event was three days long. There were some exhibition games involving both the US and Canada against local teams ending with the televised game between the two nations on the last day.

I flew in on the Wednesday with the games starting the next day. I had been aware of the heat in that area at that time of year, but was not quite prepared for 110° F upon landing. As we landed, I was greeted by the Host Committee and a few players on the Canadian team. I also met my roommate John, from Washington state and the UIC Bernie Profato, of Ohio. The event was on its way.

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As soon as we made it to the hotel you could tell this was going to be a first class event. We were treated as VIPs the whole time there. The first day was meet and greet time. I met the American umpires I was to work with. There was Paul from Ohio, my roommate John from Washington, Mike from Michigan, Daryl from Texas. We all went out to dinner that night with the crew from the Women's USA World Cup. It was a nice evening all around and a great way to start the weekend.

The next day the games were to start. We had three games scheduled that evening. Another surprise that I was aware of made an unexpected visit. A tornado was spotted near the stadium as we were making our way there. It did not touch down but it did make a mess of the stadium. We were delayed for a while but we did manage to get two of the games in that night. Thanks to a great job by the ground crew.

The first game started and I was on the sidelines watching. I was happy to as this way I could watch for any differences in mechanics or positioning between ASA and SC. Well that didn't last long. One of the crew members went down with an injury and I was called into action. Great! No time to get nervous. I was placed at first base and the very first play was a banger at my bag – what a way to start. All went well and the next game was my plate. USA vs All Star Plumbing (the top team in Oklahoma). I really enjoyed the game. It went very smoothly. There was one monster shot from Brian Wegman. The game ended with the USA taking the victory.

The next day went well also. This was the day we tried the five umpire system for the first time. This has three umpires rotating in the infield and one each down the lines in the outfield. What a great system. We managed to get three more games in that night.

On Saturday it was the game. The Border Battle in the main stadium with it being televised in Canada and the US.

The game went very quickly with Canada taking an early lead. Unfortunately the US had one great inning to take a late lead. They would not relinquish the lead to the end. Canada did our country proud. They battled until the end but most of all they represented the country class and pride. Great job, guys.

This event was very well organized by the Host Committee. They did outstanding work for a great event. It was an honour to be selected for this event. I would like to thank Softball Canada, the ODC, the Hosts, my new American umpire friends, Kevin, Chris and Craig of the ASA and Bernie, UIC, for this great experience to remember.

*Stephane Soucy is a Level V Slo-Pitch umpire from Alberta.*

## HOW TO PACK FOR THE ROAD

by **Bonnie Gostola, ODC**

So you're going to a softball tournament requiring you to get your gear bag and your day to day clothing on an airplane. The problem is the airline will only allow you to pack two bags each of which cannot exceed 22 Kg (50 lbs). How many of us have faced this dilemma; what to pack and what to leave behind. After this past summer of flying to three different locals to umpire ball, I think I have come up with a solution of sorts. First, you should know that I am the typical woman, and tend to pack way more for the trip than I will actually need. It's in my nature. So, the first piece of advice I have to offer; defy nature. If you have access to laundry facilities, learn how to do laundry at 1:00 o'clock in the morning. You really need to know how to do this because it will save you some headache in the packing stage.

Okay, so we've established a basic premise. You must pack to survive a lengthy tournament but doing laundry can help limit the amount of clothing that needs to be packed. Now, let's get into the actual packing part. First, if you're a Fastpitch umpire, you will have the must have gear. You have to pack the mask, shin guards, cup, steel toed shoes, and chest pad. There is just no getting around that part. You also must have two indicators, a ball bag, a plate hat, a base hat, a shirt and a pair of pants. Socks and undershirts would probably be a good idea, as well. The rule book and the casebook probably should be included. Now to the dilemma of the packing.

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Except in extraordinary circumstances, you may only do as many as three games per day. Most Canadian Championships will only assign one plate game per day and two base games. I hope you can see where I'm going on this one. One pair of plate pants, a shirt for over the chest pad should be all you need. Two pair of base pants and two shirts – especially for those of you who can sweat through a shirt even at -5° C. Socks and undershirts for those same three games would suffice. Each of you should have undergarments and over garments for the possibility of inclement weather. Top the whole of the umpire dress with the jacket, toque, and mitts and you are ready to umpire at a typical Canadian Softball tournament in the middle of July. Just kidding! Anyway, I think you are starting to get the idea. Then there are the dreaded gifts for the fellow umpires. All you have to remember here is for everything you take you will be returning with more.

That brings us to your day to day luggage. At most of these tournaments there are articles of clothing for sale. If you are anything like me, you will be purchasing some mementos of the tournament. Factor that information into your initial packing. Cut back on how many t-shirts you will need by the amount of clothing you may be receiving or purchasing at the event. Do you really need a change of clothes for every day of the tournament? Remember – do your laundry! A couple pair of slacks, shorts, maybe a sweater for the cold days This will free up some space in your luggage. Finally, I have gotten into the habit of not taking a carry-on bag for the trip. I have started packing a lightweight duffel or the like to bring extra stuff home.

It is becoming harder and harder to get anything on an airplane that does not cost money. Exceeding the 22 kg limit can prove to be a costly addition and a put a damper on the trip. Trust me; keeping the luggage under the limit can be done. It just takes a little more planning. Start with the essentials, proceed to the things that will get you through the day and finally; pack knowing that you can do laundry (at 1:00 am). I hope this will help each of you save a little money; to purchase the items and return home with the memories of your experience.

*Bonnie Gostola is a Level V umpire from Alberta and a member of Softball Canada's Officiating Development Committee. She recently returned from Venezuela where she officiated at the ISF Women's World Championships.*

# PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

by Joel Balberman, Level V, ON

*"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. The top performers in every field of human endeavour 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

## BETWEEN the LINES

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?

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 on 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. Be driven by a desire to do the job well with a high level of accuracy and competency rather than by a fear of failure. The fear of failure is a negative motivator. Choose to have positive activators and thoughts instead. Work hard at your chosen craft mentally and physically. 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.

Finally, I will leave you with some of Larry Winget's guiding principles for success, happiness and prosperity that you can make a part of your own self-evaluation:

- Take Responsibility
- Believe
- Be Positive
- Expect The Best
- Learn
- Focus
- Ask

*Joel Balberman is a Level V umpire from Ontario*



# **BET YOUR LIFE CALLS**

## **For Use If and When In Doubt**

by **Bob Henning, Level V, BC UIC**

There are so many gray areas when it comes to making critical decisions on the diamond that umpires need to base their decisions on more concrete evidence. Have you ever had to guess one of your calls and make a decision based on conjecture? Yes, conjecture, otherwise known as a guess based on skimpy evidence. It is not a pleasant situation to find yourself in when deciding important calls that require your immediate response.

I like to think of these types of calls as 'Bet Your Life' calls. Are you 100% positive that what you think happened actually took place? Often times umpires are not 'positive' of just what took place yet are obliged by the rules to render a decision.

One important way to stay out of trouble is to utilize a series of responses when you are in doubt of exactly what happened or what you think happened. Nothing upsets the participants, spectators and our own partners more than when umpires miss these types of calls.

A perfect example is calling a leadoff. This is a critical call because the result is the runner is being called-out. If you are 60%, 70% or 80% certain the runner led off, then they didn't. Are you 90% sure? Not good enough! If you are not positive you have a violation, then the runner did not leadoff.

You guessed it, you had better be 100% certain or willing to 'Bet Your Life' you are correct. Now you should make the call, "Dead ball, no pitch. The runner is OUT for leadoff."

Some other situations would be batters leaving the batter's box and contacting the ball, double-batted balls, and batters hit by the pitch or a ball off a batter's bat and hitting their foot. It might be the runners touching bases or being tagged, runners tagging and leaving early or runners causing interference. It could be an infielder pulling their foot early to attempt to get another out somewhere on the diamond.

There are other calls where the same mind set should prevail. All pitches are strikes until you decide they are balls. All balls are fair until you decide they are foul.

Nothing upsets the players, coaches, spectators and your partners more than calling something that didn't happen. If you are not 100% sure a pitch is illegal, then it must be legal. If you are not sure, ignore calling it. Never guess a batter or runner out. Make sure you are 100% correct before rendering them out.

Below are some pointers that can assist your decision-making process. Using these guidelines will assist you in making critical calls and help maintain your reputation as an intelligent and fair official.

When in doubt, the pitch is a strike.

When in doubt, it was not a leadoff.

When in doubt, the runner touched the base.

When in doubt, the runner did not leave the base too soon.

When in doubt, the ball was not caught.

When in doubt, the fielder did not pull his foot.

When in doubt, it was not an illegal pitch.

When in doubt, it is a fair ball.

When in doubt, the runner was not tagged.

When in doubt, the batter was not out of the batter's box.

When in doubt, the pitch did not hit the batter.

When in doubt, ask for help!

*Bob Henning is a Level V Umpire and the Umpire in Chief for Softball British Columbia.*

# IMAGE ISN'T EVERYTHING but It Is a Good Start

by Frank Omoe, Level V, AB

A year ago I travelled to an educational conference with a colleague. I knew that he coached major men's soccer and he was also the coach of his junior high school boy's soccer team. I asked him how the junior high season had gone. His answer surprised me. "Frank," he said, "we had a great season right up until the semi-finals. I never complain about bad calls but as soon as I saw the referee for that semi, I knew the game was going to be a bad one."

My curiosity piqued, I inquired if he had a previous poor experience with that official. My friend replied that he had never seen the referee before. Now really intrigued, I asked him how he knew that the game was going to be a bad one. His response was very revealing. He said, "This guy arrived about ten minutes before the game was scheduled to start wearing a baseball cap on backwards and a referee outfit that must have been put in the hot cycle of the dryer. I've never seen anything so wrinkled! After the coaches' and captains' meeting he lay down in the middle of the field and put the baseball cap over his face until the game started! I don't know if he was sleeping or what. After seeing that, I didn't expect it to get better once the game started."

I asked if the referee had done a particularly poor job of refereeing. "I don't know if he did or not," my friend answered with a rueful shake of his head. "My expectations were pretty low and I guess he met those expectations."

Over the years, I must have read dozens of articles about the importance of an umpire's pre-game dress and conduct. But to hear it expressed that way, from an experienced coach of a different sport and whose opinion I really valued made it even more meaningful. As the saying goes, "You only get one chance to make a good first impression."

*Frank Omoe is a Level V umpire from Alberta. Last year he umpired at the ISF Men's World Championships in Saskatoon.*



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