



# BETWEEN THE LINES

A SOFTBALL CANADA OFFICIATING PUBLICATION

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## COUTURE to Hall of Fame



*Bob Stanton, ISF UIC, Wilfred Couture, Gabe Babineau*

### **BETWEEN the LINES**

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

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A lot of time and effort goes into running a provincial umpire program and leadership is a critical component of any success. For New Brunswick's Wilfred Couture his years of time, effort and leadership were recently recognized with his induction into the Softball New Brunswick Hall of Fame.

On the field, Wilfred represented New Brunswick at several regional and national events gaining his Level V status after his performance at the 1996 Senior Men's Canadian Championships. Wilfred went on to a successful international career culminating with his representing Canada at the 1998 Women's World Championships in Japan.



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In addition to his on field accomplishments, Wilfred was even more recognized for leading and advancing his local and provincial programs as a regional UIC and later as Provincial UIC for six years. During that time he worked tirelessly to ensure every umpire was supported and was able to meet with success.

“Wilfred worked tirelessly to build on the strengths to improve our provincial program.” notes former provincial UIC and now ISF Director of Umpires Bob Stanton. “His enthusiasm to see others succeed speaks volumes to his character and has ensured our provincial program continues to thrive even after his departure. It’s a very strong legacy.”

## MESSAGE FROM THE NATIONAL DIRECTOR OF UMPIRES



It seems we just started the season and yet our Canadian Championships are complete. Most parts of the country have experienced a bad spring and some terrible weather in the summer. It probably means assignors have been scrambling to reschedule games which always puts a strain on the umpire resources. Try and help your local assignor out by doing extra if you can.

For those who went to a Canadian Championship, we hope you enjoyed the experience and remembered to be professional on and off the diamond. Always respect the host committee and most of all work as a team. Umpiring is all about team work and working together to achieve the best results. It is important you set goals for yourself but do not put your goals ahead of the entire team. The only goal the ODC and Softball Canada is interested in is a tournament that is umpired in a fair and equitable nature. Our only

concerns are that no participant receives an unfair advantage and no participant’s safety is jeopardized. Our umpire supervisory crew have vast experience on and off the field so listen and learn. It is my hope that every umpire has a positive experience at this year’s Canadian Championships

On another note, we ask for your feedback when you attend Canadian Championships. I want to assure you that the feedback we receive is confidential. All sealed envelopes are sent to Softball Canada then forwarded to me and I compile the feed back to produce the umpire supervisor evaluations. We want our supervisors to learn just like the umpires so never be afraid to put down the issues that bother you at a Canadian Championship. If more than two umpires have the same issue in an evaluation I make a point to let the UIC/DUIC know what an issue is.

I spent a week at the Canadian Open in Surrey, BC. The tournament has used over 50 umpires in the Futures and Show Case events and 12 ISF officials in the International event. I am pleased to see so many new young umpires working in the Show Case and Futures events. Teams and fans have commented about their professionalism and hustle. The experienced umpires in the Futures and Show Case tournament have helped the younger crew members by providing support. The ISF crew has provided support and words of encouragement for this next generation of umpires in BC. It is encouraging to see that the program is working and that the new generation is getting turned on to softball officiating. These new umpires need support and role models and it was a delight to see that our veteran umpires and our ISF elite are providing support and demonstrating a positive standard for the new generation to follow.

If you have attended or are attending a Provincial/Territorial or a Canadian Championship do the best job you can. Do not worry about making a mistake. Mistakes provide the experience it takes to become the “BEST YOU CAN BE” Have fun and enjoy the experience.

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**Brian Van Os**

### From Local Games to a Canadian Championship

# AM I READY?

By Sal Gara, Level V, Gatineau, QC



*Sal Gara at the 2010 Sr. Men's CC where he achieved his LV rating*

Several excellent articles have been written on what to expect at a Canadian Championship as well as how to prepare for one. I thought it might be interesting to also provide some perspective on how you might determine if you're actually ready to apply for one. And I'm not referring to whether you meet the posted requirements with respect to levels etc. But rather, how to recognise within yourself that you're ready to take that next step, the step from umpiring local league play and the occasional provincial or elimination tournament to umpiring at a Canadian Championship (CC).

I think back to when I first began thinking of umpiring a CC. It was 1998 and I was a third year umpire, a relative rookie then. The Midget Boys CC was in our area being hosted by Stittsville, and one of our local officials had been selected as one of the crew. What a great opportunity to observe how 'real' umpires did it! And I certainly wasn't disappointed. I took in as many games as I could and I still recall the intensity and excitement of every game, both on the field and in the stands. What a rush! And the umpire crews – so professional and polished! I was totally focused on the umpires in each game - their positioning, their movement, their mechanics, their body language. All of it textbook, just as I had been told and shown in the Level 1, Level 2, and Level 3 clinics which I had recently taken. That tournament did it for me, I knew that I wanted to umpire a CC.

So regardless what triggers you to set that same goal, you then need to determine how to work towards it. Well it's clear that adhering to what is laid out in the umpire clinic program is a key element. And like any other sport or activity, it then requires practice, practice and more practice of all the elements learned. So back you go to your local games, many of which may lack intensity or excitement. But that is where it all begins. Your self-discipline needs to kick in and you must give your best at all times. Whether its mite or adult ball, take the opportunity to implement what you've learned. And if you're fortunate enough to have some well respected mentors who've 'been there', heed what they recommend and work hard to implement their suggestions. Focus on your mechanics, moving to the best position for calls, tracking the ball, making crisp clear calls, and developing your game management skills. This will not only help you hone your skills but it will earn you that much needed respect that's required on the diamond.

As you continue to work hard towards your goal, you become confident of your mechanics, your positioning, your judgement, your rule knowledge and you keep yourself in top physical shape. So what's left? Are there some intangibles that will help you recognise if you're ready? Well, I would suggest the following:

- You're confident on the diamond and take pride in your role as an umpire. You actually enjoy being out there.

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- The 'bigger' the game – the better. You're able to channel stress into positive energy.
- The majority of your games go smoothly and when they don't you're able to regain control quickly. Better still, you've developed a sense of when to take action before something develops.
- You rarely have ejections but do not hesitate when they're required.
- You rarely hear grumbling about your strike zone.
- When you 'blow' one, you're able to refocus and put it behind you.
- Your peers enjoy working with you.
- You're beginning to sense respect from coaches and players.
- You enjoy helping newer officials develop their skills.

If the above paints a pretty accurate picture of you, then I'd say you're ready. And I wouldn't be surprised if next time you do a major tournament; your UIC takes you aside and says 'you really should consider applying for a Canadian'. A fine compliment for sure and one you should act upon.

# ISF Fast Pitch and Slo-Pitch CERTIFICATION CLINIC 2011 – London, Ontario



*Brian Van Os (National Director of Officials, Softball Canada and North American ISF Deputy) and Bob Stanton (ISF Director of Officials) lead participants through their paces in the on-field drills. Also helping out with the clinic was Jack Van Bynen (Provincial UIC, Slo Pitch for Softball Ontario).*



The clinic was held in London Ontario by the ISF and hosted by Softball Canada and Softball Ontario. It consisted of two days in class sessions and on diamond drills. All participants had passed an on-line ISF exam before attending the clinic. The in-class sessions were then followed up with evaluation games in 3 umpire SP crews or 4 umpire FP crews in real game situations. All of the participating officials were able to work and be evaluated at all of the umpire positions.

Officials from across Canada and the USA were in attendance. The classroom sessions were a combination of lecture, discussion and scenario presentations.

Note taking, rule referencing, drawing on experiences and use of common sense applied to scenarios all were part of the experience of obtaining International Certification status.



*George Findley and Peter Kluszczynski from Ontario pay close attention to the points being made.*

# Thoughts from a Participant AT THE ISF SCHOOL

**By Sue Sawyer, Southern California ASA**

"The camp was first rate. It combined excellent classroom work with on field work. Fantastic adjustments were made on the fly to allow the attendees to gain maximum benefit and opportunity from all aspects of the camp.

Technology was incorporated into the classroom side of the camp and the umpires were able to take full advantage of the website in preparation for the camp. The files were available from the website and then put into PDF format and students were able to download them onto iPads, computers, and smart phones for access during the classroom session and study sessions with our fellow umpires during the camp.

The new format of allowing the umpires to take the ISF qualifying test online BEFORE attending the camp allowed all participants to be more fully engaged in the activities both in the class and on the field. The students were totally focused on learning and implementing the ISF techniques into their game.

The camaraderie was second to none. The hospitality of the Canadian umpires towards the American umpires was first class. Making new friends and forging new bonds in this fraternity of umpiring while being given the opportunity to earn the International Softball Federation Certification was a tremendous experience."



*Left to Right - Al Strang BC, Laura Head, Southern California, Casey Waite, Idaho, Sue Sawyer Southern California*

# BY THE RULES

## Inside the Obstruction Rule

By Brian Van Os, Softball Canada National Director of Umpires

To become a good umpire you must be able to distinguish obstruction and Interference. In this article we look at obstruction. To understand obstruction you need to know what the Rule Book says about it. Rule 1-62 SP and FP defines obstruction. It is broken down into three areas:

1. A fielder not in possession of the ball or not in the act of fielding a batted ball who impedes the progress of a runner or batter runner who is legally running the bases.
2. A fielder in possession of the ball who pushes a runner from a base or who is not making a play on a player and impedes his progress.
3. Defensive players preventing a batter from striking or hitting a pitched ball.

So what do all those words mean? **Let us look at #1 in detail.**

This statement has two different areas you have to understand, the fielder without the ball and the fielder not in the act of fielding a ball. The rule eliminated the term “about to receive the ball” in 2005 so if a fielder does not have the ball he cannot block a runner from the base **on a thrown ball**. This is important. This portion of the rule is about a player who is trying to put the runner out on a ball not batted. If he does not have the ball in his possession he cannot block the runner’s base path or the base the runner is trying to achieve. In the past coaches taught players to block the runner, receive the ball and then tag the runner. This is illegal and if he contacts the runner or forces the runner from his path by definition it is obstruction. The player must receive the ball before he can block the path of the runner and then tag the runner. Block, ball, tag is Obstruction. Ball, Block, tag is legal. First lesson, on a ball thrown to a fielder every time the defensive player contacts the runner attempting to go to the base without the ball it is obstruction. “Call it” always-no exceptions. It becomes a delayed dead ball. Call “obstruction” loud enough for players in the vicinity to hear but not too loud to create confusion and cause the runner to stop. The play continues until the runner is put out or all play has stopped. This type of obstruction is common at home plate and pick off plays at any base. Let’s look a little further into this play. Most times the fielder is waiting for the ball. He cannot contact the runner at all if he does not have the ball. What happens if the throw is off the mark and pulls a catcher or fielder up the line or pulls the first baseman to the line? The defensive player has a right to play the ball but on a thrown ball if they contact the runner it is obstruction. You have to penalize the errant throw by giving the delayed dead ball signal.

**The second part of #1** talks about a fielder not in the act of fielding a **batted ball**. Key point here is a fielder can be in the way of the runner if he is fielding a batted ball. He **does not have to have the ball** but only attempting to play the ball. Remember the fielder can play the batted ball anywhere on the field. The fielder is “BOSS” – think about the great plays you have seen—the fielder should be given protection from the runner to make that great play. Once you decide a fielder is not trying to play a batted ball he must not impede the runner from running the bases. The rule does not require contact to have “Obstruction” in this scenario. What should you look for? Look for the infielder who is looking to the outfield for the ball but gets in the running path of the runner. This generally happens at first base and short stop. If the runner is distracted,

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hesitates, or is forced on a different path give the delayed dead ball signal, call “obstruction” and continue the play till its conclusion or the runner is called out. Give other runners the next base if they are a least half way to the next base. If they are not half way return them to the base they just left.

Questions always arise when infielders are accused of decoying a runner. That is they create contact before playing the ball. Be careful here. The fielder can go anywhere to play the batted ball as long as he has a chance to make a play. As earlier stated, give the fielder a lot of latitude not the runner. Situations like backing up and contacting a runner may not be obstruction if the ball is in front of the fielder and hit hard. It is an acceptable move for a fielder to take a step or two back on hard hits. If the fielder contacts the runner do not call “obstruction”. In this case the runner is obligated to get out of the way. He may have to stop, go around or in front of the fielder but the fielder is “BOSS” in this situation.

What about the fielder who dives to make a play but the ball gets by him? If he is prone on the field and the ball is past him he must get out of the way of the runner. If the runner is forced to go around the prone fielder or makes contact it is obstruction. That is not to say a fielder only has one chance to make a play. If he knocks the ball down and can make another play he still has rights. If he could not make a play he must get out of the way and if he impedes the runner it is obstruction.

**#2 in our Obstruction** rule is what I describe as the Canadian Rule. ISF has added this portion of Obstruction to their rules. The first part of the rule talks about a player without the ball not impeding the runner while #2 is concerned with a player who has the ball and impedes the progress of a runner. Once a player achieves a base the fielder cannot push the runner from the base to obtain an out. This generally happens on pick offs with the fielder turning into the runner with the ball and applying a pushing tag. Simply call obstruction and “time” right away. The rule also talks about a fielder who is not making a play and impedes the progress of a runner. This rule came from a play at Canada Cup. The fielder had the ball in her procession but was prone on the ground. She could not reach the runner with her glove so used her leg to trip the runner and apply the tag. This now is obstruction. The thing to look for is can the fielder reach the runner with the ball. The fielder can change positions to reach the runner but she cannot knock the runner down with their feet/leg/ or free arm to achieve the tag.

Runners cannot be called out between the bases they are obstructed unless they commit a different violation. For example if an obstructed runner later causes interference the obstruction is nullified. If the obstructed runner is appealed out for missing a base or failing to tag up the obstruction is nullified.

**#3 is self explanatory** and talks about a defensive player preventing a batter from striking or hitting the ball. The most common occurrence is catcher’s obstruction. If the pitch is on the way and has not reached the plate or gone past the plate we protect the batter. Any distraction or contact by the defensive player during this period of time is Obstruction. Prior to the release of the pitch the umpire can use preventative umpiring and stop the action if the catcher’s glove is contacted by the batter. Call “time” in this situation and let the batter reset. Questions arise, what happens if the batter backs up and then makes contact with the catcher? As long as the batter remains in the box the contact even if initiated by the batter is the catcher’s problem. Give the delayed dead ball signal and call “Obstruction” loud enough for the batter to hear.

The penalties in this situation vary. The ball remains alive and the advantage is given to the offensive team.

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- If the batter hits the ball and the batter and all runner's advance a least one base the obstruction is ignored.
- If the batter hits the ball and all runners or the batter fail to advance a base the coach is given an option, take the result of the play or the penalty.
- The penalty results in the batter being awarded first base and other runners only advancing if forced by the batter becoming a runner.

### In summary some key things to remember:

1. Thrown ball - no ball, no blocking the base or base path. Any contact without the ball is obstruction.
2. On a hit ball the fielder can play the ball anywhere and deserves protection if they have a legitimate play on the ball. Remember do not penalize the fielder even if the attempt to play the ball is unorthodox.
3. You can cause Obstruction even when you have the ball.
4. If the ball has not reached the plate or gone past the plate we protect the batter who is in the batter's box.
5. Even if the runner is not held up if you see an infraction signal delayed dead ball.

**It is important you see and recognize obstruction and it is more important you enforce it.**

# Looking to the Future WITH A LONG-TERM PLAN

During the past several years many national sports organizations, including Softball Canada, have embarked upon the development and implementation of Long-Term Athlete Development (LTAD) Models that will serve as roadmaps to the development of athletes within the many sports. Softball Canada's player development model is now developed and is currently in the implementation phases.

As sports organizations find success with long-term athlete development planning, a few have begin to look at parallel development of long-term officials development models. Softball Canada has joined baseball and ringette in this point position as the Officiating Development Committee and the Board of Directors have struck a Long-Term Officials Development (LTOD) Committee who, over the next year or two, will develop a map for the future development of Softball Canada's umpiring program. Working within the principles of the Softball Canada Long-Term Player Development model and the Softball Canada National Officiating Certification Program, the committee will also develop a framework for the development of an individualized progression program for all Softball Canada umpires from the novice to the elite official.

The committee has eight members representing various backgrounds within the sport, including ODC member Jeff Whipple (Chair), Softball Canada staff member Donna Ozarko, ISF Director of Umpires Bob Stanton, Softball Manitoba Executive Director Don Klym, Softball Alberta President Paul Wagner and umpires Frankie Billingsley (Alberta), Scott Williston (Ontario) and Scott Stirling (British Columbia).



# RULES STUDY MADE **Easy with UmpSchool**

For many umpires, the highlight of the summer is that BIG event. Whether it is a local league tournament or a Canadian Championship, the secret to success is being prepared!

There are many pieces to the preparation puzzle. Fitness, equipment, psychology can all ruin a perfectly good event for an umpire but rules knowledge has proven to be the downfall of more than one umpire. Now, Softball Canada and Rulebox Software have partnered to bring the Canadian umpiring community a new tool for learning rules – UmpSchool!

Now that clinics have been taken, tests have been written and we are into the season, maintaining a strong rules knowledge is important as you work towards this summer's BIG event for you. Softball Canada's UmpSchool is a subscription based service that allows umpires unlimited rules practice allowing short quizzes on specific rules or a broader range of questions to help maintain your understandings of the rules. For one small annual fee you receive an unlimited amount of review opportunities. That's right – unlimited!

You can subscribe now online! Visit the Softball Canada UmpSchool site at

<http://bit.ly/qFfV2v> and sign up for success.

## U14 JAMBOREE **Vaughan, Ontario**

Kaila Holtz, Softball Canada Executive Member and Supervisor for the U14 (Pee Wee Jamboree) welcomes players, coaches, fans and umpires to the event in Vaughan, Ontario. All who attended were high in praise for the concept of an open event. Teams from across the country attended and showed the strength and health of the sport.





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