



# BETWEEN THE LINES

## A SOFTBALL CANADA OFFICIATING PUBLICATION

Winter 2012 – ISSUE



# March 28-31, 2013 Hamilton, Ontario SOFTBALL CANADA'S BLUE CONVENTION

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

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The preparation has started, the hotel is selected, our logo is ready and our organizing committee is set. As your host, rest assured the Ontario crew will do the utmost to make the Hamilton Blue Convention a first rate officiating event.

Softball Ontario and its officials would like to extend the invitation to all Softball Canada Officials and their partners to the 2013 Blue Convention/Congrès des Bleu March 28th-30th in exciting downtown Hamilton, Ontario. As a great sports city, Hamilton embraces a wide variety of professional and semi-professional sporting activities. They have hosted world championships in hockey, curling, cycling, lacrosse and celebrated marathons. It's a city that knows how to entertain, attract, and celebrate their athletes and officials. You will not be disappointed with what the city has to offer.

Past Conventions that were held in New Brunswick, British Columbia, Quebec, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Kitchener, and Toronto have set the standard for the 2013 event and we look to provide the same strength and notoriety in Hamilton!

### What you will find at the Convention

- Renew/New acquaintances
- Seminar presentations
- Legendary Personalities
- International officials



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- Companion package
- Indicator Club Banquet
- Great accommodations
- Host Hospitality

You can count on the Hamilton Blue Convention to once again exceed your expectations as Cris and Mitch, along with the staff of Softball Ontario, will make this Blue Convention one to remember!

The umpiring fraternity in Ontario is ramping up the preparations for the convention and will be online in the next month with our interactive and informative website. There have been vast discussions and debate regarding presentations, speakers, rule interpretation forums, ISF personnel, promotional items, hospitality events, entertainment, and companion ventures. Feel free to send in your feedback and ideas via the website contact.

Blue Convention 2013 apparel and paraphernalia will be available through our site and on your Softball Exam application.

The Blue Convention Logo was created through strong input and guidance of our Ontario officials with special mention to our newly appointed ISF Official and past Blue Convention presenter, and newly appointed Blue Convention Finance Committee Chair Steve Doyle.

You can count on the Softball Ontario umpires and staff to provide all officials and their guests across the nation and abroad an outstanding 2013 Blue Convention/ Congres des Bleu. Under the leadership of Cristine Fader and Mitch Zuk, the vision of the 2013 Convention is to provide a venue that will progress and evaluate the state of officiating while encouraging the collegial atmosphere that can always be found on the blue team.

Save the date and make your preparations to attend the 2013 Blue Convention. Keep your eyes peeled for news updates on our progress and what we have in store for Blue Easter.

### **HOTEL information:**

**The Crowne Plaza – Hamilton Hotel** and Conference Centre. Online reservations will be available soon.

However, if guests would like to book through the Crowne Plaza central reservations line they can call 1-800-2CROWNE or 905-528-3451 and mention “**Umpire Blue Convention**” OR group code “**UBU**”. THIS WILL ENSURE YOU RECEIVE THE SPECIAL RATE OF \$105.

To enjoy this special rate please book prior to the March 5th, 2013 release date to guarantee the rate and a room.

**REMEMBER to register  
BEFORE January 1, 2013  
for the SPECIAL RATE.**



**REGISTRATION FORM**  
**BLUE CONVENTION 2013**  
**Thursday, March 28, 2013 – Sunday, March 31, 2013**  
**Hamilton, Ontario**

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.  
 Payable to - Softball Canada

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Gender (Check one): M  F   
 Address: \_\_\_\_\_ City: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Prov./Terr.: \_\_\_\_\_ Postal Code: \_\_\_\_\_  
 H - Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ W - Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Fax: \_\_\_\_\_ Email : \_\_\_\_\_  
 Certification Level : \_\_\_\_\_  
 Shirt Size: S  FP  L  SP  XL  XXL

**Registration:** \$135 includes participation in your selection of workshops and the Blue Convention 2013 Golf Shirt and Pin, plus a welcome package.

You can download a copy of the Pre-convention package from the Softball Canada website by January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2013. 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 \$60.00 each. The banquet will be held on Saturday, March 30, 2013. 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)

_____ <b>EARLY BIRD</b> Registration Fee (before January 1, 2013)	<u>\$135.00</u>
_____ Registration Fee (after January 1, 2013)	<u>\$155.00</u>
_____ Registration Fee and Level 4 Clinic	<u>\$250.00</u>
_____ Registration Fee and I/E Clinic	<u>\$250.00</u>
_____ Additional Golf Shirts (@\$40.00 each)	Add _____
_____ Banquet Ticket (@\$60 each)	Add _____
	Total Enclosed _____

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

Cardholder Name \_\_\_\_\_  
 Card Number \_\_\_\_\_  
 Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Expiry Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Deadline for Registration is March 1, 2013**  
**Any refunds issued after February 1, 2013 will be subject to a \$50 Administration fee.**

To Be Returned To:  
 Donna Ozarko, Softball Canada, 223 Colonnade Road, Suite 212, Ottawa, Ontario K2E 7K3  
 Tel: 613-523-3386, ext. 3101 - Fax: 613-523-5761 - [dozarko@softball.ca](mailto:dozarko@softball.ca)

# MESSAGE FROM THE NATIONAL DIRECTOR OF UMPIRES



Here we are – entering yet another Softball season. I am happy to report that, Softball Canada (with support from our Provincial Territorial partners) saw an increase in umpire registration in 2011. This is a significant accomplishment and marks three consecutive years of umpire increases to the program. It is important we all work hard to bring new umpires into our family. We know many games are not being filled across the country due to a lack of umpires and with encouragement from you we may be able to turn someone on to our fantastic hobby.

2012 brings some new changes to our Softball Canada uniform. We have concluded a new contract with our national umpire supplier Home Run Sports and will be introducing an optional uniform. Let's make it clear it is optional. This will be gray slacks and a navy blue shirt with red and white trim. We made our decision based on your input. Seventy-eight percent (78%) of respondents to our survey were in favour of the new optional uniform and while the new shirt colour was only 51% we went with that majority. Our surveys are important to us and we appreciate all who take the time to fill them out. We do look into all the issues and I am happy to say the Home Run Sports team addresses issues we bring forward.

We are working on new initiatives in order to serve the membership better. We hope to do video streaming to bring up to date information, electronic exams in the future and electronic evaluations at Canadian Championships. It is important that Softball Canada and the P/T partners continue providing education to our umpire at all levels. Equally important is that you continue to seek out this material by attending clinics and seminars to improve your game. The players practice and it is our job to be prepared.

On a final note, we have reached an agreement with Ontario to host the 2013 Blue Convention. Ontario has a team in place to make Blue Convention 2013 in Hamilton, Ontario the biggest and best yet. Lets all work together to make this convention the best Softball Umpire Convention in the world. Start planning now for Easter weekend in Hamilton.

We appreciate all the umpires in the Softball Canada family regardless of the level of ball you umpire at. Without you working in the trenches our local leagues cannot function but I want to reiterate regardless of the type of Softball you umpire, you owe it to your teams to be up to date with rules and mechanics so you can be "THE BEST YOU CAN BE"! Check out your Provincial/Territorial Websites for the clinic nearest you.

**Have a great season. Hope to see you at the ball field – Brian Van Os**

# GETTING THERE

**by Noreen Atkinson, Level V , FP, ODC member, Ontario**

Working a fast pitch game should be just that – work. No matter if you are assigned to work the plate or bases, it is a difficult job and much work is required. While working the plate can seem like much more work, I am concentrating today on the work of the base umpire.

All too often we neglect our base game. We should be constantly working to improve this part of our game. Whether you are a local umpire or one of our country's best, you must not ignore this part of your game. Umpiring a great base game will be noticed, is expected and will be rewarded.

As an umpire progresses, all too often our base work is taken for granted. It is like riding a bike, same positioning and same expectations producing the same result. You might get lucky and get all the calls right or you can make adjustments in your day to day game to ensure you are "all over that call".

First, you have to move. Moving to the call is the most important element in umpiring on the bases. For new umpires we teach – stop and make the call. This is also the mantra for our elite officials. In order to stop and make the call, one would have to be moving. You may not have much time or be able to move as far as required based on the play and the system you are using (two, three or four umpire system) but one thing is certain, the players and coaches recognize an umpire who is on the play and one who is in the vicinity of the play.

Our primary goal must be to get the angle and get on the play. How do we stay on target and get on every play? Start with a mental preparation and challenge yourself. Use pre-game preparation. Remember what has happened in the past, what adjustments you made or still need to make and talk with your partner about coverage.

We can make excuses quite easily for not making a base, the player blocked me out, the player shouldn't have thrown it to that base etc. but ultimately – you need to find a way – not an excuse. If the normal movement on the diamond is not working, you have to adjust. Get a better jump on the play or try a different angle of approach to find that small area of opportunity to get on the play and do not be afraid to use all your senses.

Listen to the game. Coaches are guiding runners, instructing their every move so anticipate and be a runner too. If you hear them instruct the runners to tag up, get in position to see the tag up and the ball. If you hear a coach yelling for extra bases, be prepared to go hard to that base as well. Often coaches will instruct a player to slide. You will need to get to the leading edge to look for obstruction, look for interference, look for the ball, look for a tag, foot, base and determine out or safe. Being "on the play" while working the bases is as important as a plate umpire having a consistent strike zone.

Before a pitch is thrown – know your path, responsibilities and range. Watch the warm up and identify the players with a "cannon for an arm". Know the level of competition, the ability of the catcher to throw and most importantly, your partner.

On the bases, you need to support your partner. Show your plate partner that you are there to help them have the game of their life. It is not just another base assignment it is an opportunity to learn, improve, lead, mediate and grow our sport by working hard and being on the play. Give yourself the best opportunity to get the call right. It is all up to you.

# Injuries are Part of the Game

by Tim Whitelaw Level V, FP, Ontario

I am sure everyone has noticed the player standing behind his or hers team bench on crutches, or the player with an arm in a sling coaching or just cheering on their team. Injuries are just a part of the game but does anyone ever give thought to the umpire sidelined with an injury? Doesn't happen very often but it does occur and when a serious enough one happens it can cut short an entire season sometimes!

Sometimes injuries can be avoided – maybe by “working the slot” better – or changing the position of the hands while behind the catcher. Watch the senior umpires in your area. Most of them have learned the ideal way of preventing getting hurt. Unfortunately though it is probably the experience of getting hit that has taught them! And experience is the best teacher they say. Proper equipment is vital in our chosen field. Shin guards, chest protector, hardened toe plate shoes and athletic supporter. Don't wait till you feel the pain of an unnecessary injury, take the time to watch and learn now! Make sure you prepare before every game by stretching and “warming” up the joints and muscles. Even if just for five minutes, this will help alleviate pain in ankles, thighs, arms etc. Remember to keep hydrated during and after the game, especially on hot humid days!

There are times when an injury cannot be avoided, even with proper warm-up and stretching before a game. Sometimes it may be a certain way you “push-off” from a standing position or a certain way you turn on the run. Such an injury happened to me in June of last year. I was working second base at the ISF qualification seminar in London, ON in a four umpire system. There was a fly ball to deep centre field. I turned, my foot got caught in a small rut and my left knee buckled! I felt the excruciating pain and instantly knew I was in trouble. The tournament was over for me!

I went to the doctor the day after the tournament but x-rays proved negative. I was booked for an MRI but if you have ever needed a MRI, you know that takes time. My season was now in Limbo! I took the opportunity to UIC/DUIC as many tournaments as I could and perform evaluations on umpires. However the pain of just watching my fellow Blue hurt almost as much as the knee! It was the first time in over 30 years of umpiring the game I love that I now became just a spectator. Hopefully the treatment and time will take care of the knee but it will always be in the back of my mind. I now realize the importance more and more of stretching and warming up but also in cooling down during and after the game. Remember, it is a long off-season, if you miss most of the regular season!

## CHRIS LEE

### ENTERS SOFTBALL BC HALL OF FAME

Chris Lee, a former Softball Canada ODC member and an ISF umpire was inducted into the Softball BC Hall of Fame at a ceremony at the Softball BC AGM in October, 2011.

After an outstanding thirty-one year career both on and off the field, Chris retired from umpiring after the 2009 season. What started as a way to make extra money ended up in a legacy that his Provincial and National Program will carry forward forever?

On field Chris umpired in five Canadian Championships including three Sr. Men. He umpired 14 Canada Cups (International Women), two SC Challenge Cups (elite Men's Club events) and represented Canada at the 1996 Men's World FP Championships in Midland, Michigan, 1999 Pan American Games in Winnipeg and the 2003 Pan American Games in San Domingo, Dominican Republic.

Off field Chris was a leader. He helped form and was the President of his local Umpire Associations Metro from 1991-1996. He served on the executive until 2001. He was a Softball BC District UIC (District 15) 1985-1991. In BC, Chris produced the Umpire Mechanics Manual,

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overheads and print materials for clinics always providing a finished product which saved the organization a lot of time and money.

Chris joined the Softball Canada ODC in 1994. During this time he contributed to educational materials working on manuals, the Softball Canada Harassment Policy, pitching videos and over head materials. His teaching back ground helped him provide updated computer technology to the Softball BC and Softball Canada programs. He was a Master Instructor at the first Instructor/ Evaluator Clinic in BC along with Don Bracey.

Chris supervised many Provincial and Western Canadian Championships. He was the UIC or DUIC of eight Canadian Championships. He retired from the ODC in 2001 having left a legacy to be proud off.



*Chris Lee and Dennis Bidin (Softball BC President)*

### **The following is a few excerpts from Chris Lee's acceptance speech**

It is truly an honour to be inducted as an Official into the Hall of Fame.

Softball has been very good to me over the years. It has allowed me to make friends from around the world.

There are many people to thank for helping me being inducted today. First of all my family. My son Michael, daughter Jennifer and their mother Janis, who all have been supportive throughout my umpiring career.

Many thanks go out to Tom Bell, Brian Van Os, Wayne Brown, Wild Bill Silves and many other selfless officials for their support over the years to help me become the best I could be.

I developed a "passion" for officiating. I soaked up information like a sponge. I read umpire manuals, went to umpire clinics in Canada and the US, watched other umpires and worked a lot of ball games. I was also given the opportunity to work top-level fast pitch games to improve my umpiring skills.

In closing I would like to thank Softball British Columbia for my induction into the Hall of Fame. My family and I will cherish this honor forever.

Thank you.

# Performance Improvement Through Self-Talk

by Joel Balberman, Level V, FP, Ontario

Sports officials work in emotionally charged environments. Those who preside at sporting events must “get up” for a game much the same way athletes do. In order to do our jobs as umpires effectively, we must maintain an optimal level of intensity throughout our games. When an umpire goes through peaks and valleys of emotional activation – performance on the field suffers. An umpire who goes through ups and downs will have a difficult time to establishing or maintaining an appropriate level of consistency in judgment while on the diamond.

How does one get to and maintain the proper level of intensity from the start to the end of a game?

Self-talk is one method that can be employed. Whether it is a mental kick in the butt when our emotional interaction with the game fails or a deliberate attempt to calm down when we get wound too tightly. Saying the right things and using the right words can make a huge difference. In effect, we use our words and our thoughts to either gear up or gear down – much like shifting gears on a bicycle. We can learn to make use of the power of the mind to enhance our performance on the field.

There is an old adage that goes something like this: “Whether you think you can or you think you can’t, you’re right.” A confident official will never allow self doubt to come on the field. Visualization and relaxation techniques employed before a game can pave the way for a successful performance by an umpire. In other words, the mental preparation starts before you even step on the diamond. If it so happens, an adjustment in your focus is needed, self-talk can be a powerful tool.

There are some basic principles which apply to the proper utilization of self-talk. They are:

- Always focus on the desired behavior or outcome. Use ACTION THOUGHTS
- Eliminate the words “don’t” and “no” in your wordings. Avoid negative phrasing and negative thoughts – sometimes referred to as NOT THOUGHTS.

As much as good thoughts and proper self-talk can have a positive effect on your performance, using the wrong words can make you worse and not better as an official. It is a simple equation: Bad Thoughts = Bad Performance. We want to be thinking in terms of what we want-to-do, not in terms of what we do-not-want-to-do. The words we use to describe our desired state should be an affirmation of the behaviors we want to exhibit on the diamond. Basically, our minds can help us reach the desired state of performance if we can use the proper words in our self talk.

Here are some examples of Not Thoughts, followed by a more effective wording using Action Thoughts:

“Don’t Blow It”

“See The Play, Then Make The Call”

“Don’t Be Nervous”

“Breathe And Relax”

“No Listening To The Fans”

“Focus On The Pitcher And The Catcher’s Glove”

“Don’t Let Your Mind Wander”

“Be Here In The Moment”

“Don’t Be Slow Calling The Pitch”

“Follow The Pitch All The Way Into The Glove”

“No Head Turning”

“Focus On The Field In Front Of You”

“Not Too Fast Calling The Out”

“Let The Play Happen. Slow It Down”

“Don’t Call It Too Soon”

“Stay Down On Every Pitch”

Self-talk can be as simple as a one-word buzz or trigger word, or it can be a phrase or short sentence. Short trigger words can be very helpful while working the plate. Try to develop your own one-word buzz word that will reinforce the behavior you want to repeat on every pitch. Single words such as Breathe, Relax, Set, Lock-In or Focus can be helpful because they describe a desired state or reinforce the action you want your body to perform. Other expressions to try are: Stay Down, See It All, Follow The Ball To The Play, Ball Out – Umpire In, Point

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Then Signal, Big Voice, etc. Adhere to the principles of using positive phrasing and action thoughts when you design your triggers and phrases.

Once an umpire gets to the desired state of mind in a game, the stage has been set for the umpire to perform well. It has always been my belief that the ability to focus intensely while umpiring has the dual advantage of not only placing the umpire entirely “in the moment” for every play, but a high level of concentration can also make it seem less stressful to the umpire. It becomes an almost relaxing experience to be out there in even the tightest of game situations. That is the power of the mind at work.

Remember that your self-talk has the sole purpose of improving your performance. Avoid criticism or looking backwards with regret. The most important pitch is the next pitch. The most important play you have to call is the next one, not the last one. Looking back at a play or a call that has already happened can cause you lose effectiveness over the balance of the game. Let it go. What’s done is done. Save the majority of your soul-searching and review of your shortcomings until after the game. There is not much you can do about something that has already happened. Find a positive in the situation and move on – for example: “You got a little too close that time” or “try to get to the leading edge of the bag”.

Like any new skill or concept, it will take time for you to master self-talk. Change can be difficult but it is worth the effort. Repetition and proper use of the technique will help to make it a habit. Remember, we are all at a different point on the road to mastering the mental aspects of umpiring. As long as we “fail upwardly”, we are getting closer to where we want to be. Take pride in your personal growth and self-improvement. Enjoy the journey.

# REVISED INSTRUCTOR AND EVALUATOR CRITERIA

Softball Canada, in conjunction with the Officials Development Committee, has revised the criteria rating system under the Instructor and Evaluator program. The criteria has been structured to more effectively define the process required to progress through the levels as well as defining the development and skills (rubrics) required to maintain and/or advance between the levels.

This information was shared with the UICs of each Province and Territory at the Softball Canada AGM in Halifax. Anyone requiring information should contact their Provincial/Territorial representative.

## IN-FIELD FLY BALL

by Len Gorgei, Level V, SP, ODC Member, Ontario

Softball is a direct descendant of baseball. It is a known fact that the earliest softball game was played in Chicago, Illinois on Thanksgiving Day, in 1887. The game was created by George Hancock and was first played indoors, at of all places, the Farragut Boat Club; the bat, being a broom handle and the ball, being a boxing glove shaped and tightened into a round mass resembling a sphere. The first contest was played between the alumni of Yale and Harvard and the score ended up 44-40. As the game grew it was known as “indoor baseball” and was played by baseball players during the winter months to keep their skills sharp for the summer months nowadays it is called winter ball. In 1895, softball was played outside for the first time and known as ‘kitten ball’. As the game evolved other names were used such as, ‘diamond ball’, ‘mush ball’, ‘lemon ball’ and ‘pumpkin ball’. The first league outside of the USA was organized in Toronto in 1897. As the game grew the ball went from being 16 inches down to 12 inches and as various leagues

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developed there was also the development of various rules and names of the game that seemed to fit specific geographic areas of North America especially in the United States.

With the formation of the ASA in 1933, standard rules were applied and the name 'softball' was used to identify the game. <sup>(1)</sup>

At the World's Fair of 1933 slo-pitch was played as a demonstration sport, but fast pitch soon became the dominant game because of its speed and similarity to baseball. The ASA formally recognized slo-pitch in 1953 and now the number of people playing slo-pitch has surpassed fast pitch in popularity.

When the first games were played, there was no such thing as gloves and players played their positions without the leather on their hand which made routine hit balls a challenge to field and get runners out.

Routine fly balls and pop-ups were not guaranteed catches since there was little assurance that the ball would be easily handled. With the growth and development of gloves, routine fly balls were easier to catch. Ball players were always looking for advantages and began to intentionally drop pop-up fly balls as a ploy to force runners who were on base but were not allowed to run because the ball was in the air. This intentional dropping of the ball lead to many double and even triple plays. In 1895, the powers to be introduced the in-field fly rule which protected the offence from the defense gaining an unfair advantage of turning a double play. This rule helped to promote talent and skills on the field and took away a state of unfair play that was becoming prevalent in the game. The infield fly rule is one of the most misunderstood rules in softball but it is a very simple idea and very straightforward to apply.

### **The in-field fly ball rule as defined in Rule 1, Section, 52 reads:**

- a. Is a fair ball (not including a line drive or bunt) (FP), (not including a line drive) (SP)
  - 1) When first and second, or first, second, and third bases are occupied.
  - 2) That can be caught by an infielder with ordinary effort.
  - 3) Before two are out.
- b. The pitcher, catcher and any outfielder that positions himself in the infield on the play shall be considered infielders for the purpose of this rule.

What does all this mean to an umpire?

1. Must have a ball that is hit in the air... (not a bunt or line drive).
2. Must be in a portion of the field in fair territory that includes areas normally covered by infielders.
3. Must have less than two out.
4. Must have runners at 1st or 2nd or 1st, 2nd or 3rd base.
5. Must be caught with ordinary effort... (judgment call).
6. Must be declared an infield fly by the PU... (called at apex of ball) (judgment call) (verbalized) (may be assisted by BU).
7. Batter is out when the umpire declares, "Infield Fly", which should be at the highest point of the fly ball and remains out whether ball is caught or falls to the ground... (must be fair).
8. Ball is live... (if fair).
9. Runners must tag up on caught fly ball.
10. Runners may advance at their own risk.

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11. Runners hit by ball on the base are not out, runner hit by ball while off the base are out.
12. Ball intentionally dropped, IFR takes precedence, runners are not forced to vacate their base so they do not have to run on the intentional dropped ball.

As one can see the infield fly is relatively easy to call.

In closing, I would like you to consider this scenario of a triple play that was reported in the April 6, 2009 issue of Newsweek. George Will had postulated an “Unassisted, Untouched” Triple Play. In this scenario, there are runners on first and second. The “Infield Fly Rule” is invoked so the batter is out. The runner on first base advances to second and continues, passing the runner on second, making him automatically out. Finally, the pop-up drops and hits the runner who was on second base after he leaves the base (if he is standing on the base during an infield fly rule call and the ball hits him he is not out, but the ball becomes dead and the play is over), making this the third out. All of this happens without a single defensive player touching the ball. <sup>(2)</sup>

This scenario is highly unlikely, but in the game of Softball anything is possible and a good umpire will always be on their toes to make the correct call. Have a great ball season and study the intricacies of the Infield Fly Rule so you know how to apply it quickly and correctly.

<sup>(1)</sup> Steve Dimitry's, Softball History. WWW.angelfire.com. 2001-09-21

<sup>(2)</sup> Potential unassisted, untouched, triple play. Infield Fly Rule, Wikipedia.org. Retrieved 2011-12-26

# MANAGING GAME CONTROL CAN MAKE OR BREAK AN UMPIRE

by Mark Gough, Level 5 (FP) and Level 4 (SP), New Brunswick

## The 5 W's (Why, Who, What, When, and Where) of Game Control

### Why we need game control?

I am finding the control of a game for an umpire is becoming a bigger issue at the senior level of ball with each senior level tournament that I attend. It was an issue when I received my Level V in 2002 in Winnipeg. I stepped up and took control of the circumstances around and kept a level head while doing so. This year past year it was ever prevalent and became major obstacles for those attempting to get to their Level V.

### Who is responsible for Game Control?

“Game Control” is the responsibility of all umpires on the diamond. Each umpire has different things that they are responsible for. I will use the pitching rule for this example and it is the base umpire's responsibility to see that pitcher's feet on the pitching slab. This is true for the most part but it is the plate umpire that looks and sees if the pitcher is within the 24” of the slab and keeps the lead foot in the chute while delivering the pitch or in slo-pitch game, he takes no more than one step in any direction. Now, how you deal with this rule and enforce it brings us back to game control because if you let it go for too long or turn a blind eye to the issue, it will come back to bite you later in the game because you just gave up some of your control.

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### **What is game control?**

“Game Control” is how you choose to apply or not to apply the rules of the game. By applying the rules whereby the game is played, we ensure the safety of all players, coaches, spectators, bat boys, game administrators and umpires, making sure that neither team is given an unfair advantage. This means applying the rules in a timely, respectful and always calm fashion. Yes, I said respectful and calmly, this is what I find makes and breaks a lot of umpires. Out there some do not know how to deal with the situation when things get very loud and “in your face”. My unwritten rule is to treat everyone involved the same way you would want to be treated. By saying this, I turn off my ears and only hear what is going on when a coach brings their question to me. I also want to hear anything that starts to get personal and deal with it or hope that one of my partners will deal with it for me especially after I have just had a controversial play / call. Umpires that choose not to deal with issues are giving up their control of the game.

### **When Does Game Control Start?**

Some feel game control starts as soon as the umpires enter the field. Wrong. It starts back in the dressing room with your pre-game. You start by discussing who is checking the bat, helmets and getting the mask on the catcher as soon as you hit the field. For as soon as you hit the field the teams are already chatting you up and seeing how approachable you are and tolerant with the rules we play by. From the checking of the bats, helmets and mask to that last out is made we have to keep control of ourselves, our partners and our surroundings at the ballpark.

### **Where do we use Game Control and how?**

Where and how you choose to deal with these situations goes a long way as well. I know that keeping the batter in the batter’s box has to be dealt with at the plate but I can get the message to both teams very easily by telling the catchers where the box begins and ends. This gets the message to the dugout a lot quicker than telling batter after batter who gets into the box. Same thing for that close play that takes place at 2nd base and the coach comes out to discuss what happened. The conversation does not have to start and end at 2nd base. When you know and see the coach coming, go and meet the coach part of the way. Stop to hear what they have to say. Once he has had his say, turn him around and explain what you saw and called while taking him back to where he came from. This puts a time limit on the conversation you are having and gets him back to where he came from and you end the conversation respectfully and run back to your position.

### **When do you take control?**

You take control from the moment you enter the ball field until the last umpire has left the playing field and is safely back in the dressing room. How and when you deal with things makes great umpires. Great umpires pick their battles and deal with those issues in a calm and respectful manner. The direct approach may be effective at times but using team leaders or coaches to get your message across goes a long way to controlling the game and building rapport with those involved in the game.

Respect is something that is earned and not given. Control is what we keep and share with our fellow umpires and the team coaches.

# SOFTBALL CANADA

## NEWEST LEVEL V

### Is Mentoring a Mission Impossible? My Journey

by Frankie Billingsley, Level V, FP, Alberta

“What is softball?” - I asked one of my friends when I saw her ball glove. I did not have any idea what softball was but, the moment I tried her glove on, I knew I wanted to play the sport. I went home and was promptly told that if I wanted to play I had to come up with the registration money myself. Once I had earned the money and registered, my grandma took me shopping and she bought me my very first ball glove – I was thirteen.

I was a catcher for most of my playing days and was always friendly with the umpires. I also played shortstop at this time and found myself asking the base umpire, “What is that signal?” “What are you doing now?” I think back on this now and I really laugh! I was playing in a tournament and one of the officials came over and we started talking. He said to me, “With your background as a catcher, you should come to the umpiring clinic!” He took my phone number and seven months later, Al Shenduk phoned me to “remind” me of the umpire clinic.

Eleven years later, sitting at home, the phone rings and I hear the voice of our National Director of Umpires, Brian Van Os. Brian shares with me that I have achieved the goal I set out to achieve so many years ago. I was successful at my Canadian Championship – I am a Level V softball umpire. That is the first time I have written that – wow!

There have been many games, tournaments and championships that stand out as turning points in my umpiring career – and I will never forget them. Rather than highlight some of those memories, it would seem more appropriate to acknowledge those that have helped me along the way. Without them, I would not have achieved my goal of becoming a Level V umpire. I hope that somehow they realize through this article that they share in my success in a very tangible way.

To my first year instructors: Floyd Torpe (inductee to the Indicator Club) and Wade Williamson (EDSUA Wall of Fame) who taught this course in an inspiring, approachable and fun way. Both of these gentlemen demonstrated such a passion for the sport; their enthusiasm was contagious. To all of my fellow EDSUA and ASUA umpires that I have had the privilege and pleasure to work with. I have learned something from each and every one of you, so thank you. To the Level V umpires in Alberta both past and present – thank you for your guidance, direction and support. To the many umpires that I have met at championships (fellow umpires and supervisors) and those I have met at Blue Conventions, thank you for sharing your knowledge, your time and a bit of your personal stories with me.

The first of these individuals was Brian Van Os who happened to see me umpire at my first Canadian Championship (Junior Women’s - 2007 in Surrey, BC). Brian approached me after one of my games and he said to me, “Cool blue Frankie - I know a Level V umpire when I see one.” Brian went on to explain how Level V umpires handle adversity and the way they respond and react to the unusual plays that can occur on the diamond. I never forgot his message and it helped me immensely in my growth as an official.

## BETWEEN the LINES

Another umpire that would fall into this category would be, Daryl Way. Daryl was the UIC at my second Canadian Championship (Senior Women's - 2009 in Kitchener, ON). After one of my games, Daryl took me aside and we talked about "presence on the diamond." I am a petite, 5'3" woman. I have always officiated in a confident manner, however there is confidence and then there is the "perception of confidence". Daryl gave me solid advice that I believe really took me and my game to an entirely new level. Since 2009, I have had numerous umpires and referees comment that I do not officiate like a 5'3" person – and what a compliment that is! Daryl was also the DUIC at my Senior Women's championship this past summer and I was thrilled to have the opportunity to demonstrate how I had progressed.

Lastly, I would like to acknowledge Terry Richter. Prior to arriving in Ile-Perrot, QC for my Senior Women's this past summer, I had coffee with a number of officials and Terry was one of them. The comment Terry made that I will never forget was simply this, "Frankie – go to your championship and umpire every game as if it is your last and enjoy it as if it is your first." Incredible...I felt and continue to feel so grateful that I enjoyed every moment of my Senior Women's Championship 2011.

We have such an exceptional group of people in this softball family and I am so proud to be one of its members. I look forward to continuing to give back to the program and taking on some new responsibilities in the future!

## Softball Canada

# UMPIRES HAVE NEW FACEBOOK PAGE!

The web is bringing the world together in ways that were just not possible even a few years ago. Communities are built through celebration and learning in new social media spaces, the most prevalent of which is Facebook.

Recognizing this shift, the Softball Canada umpire program has recently rolled out a new Facebook page where umpires from across the country can share and receive the latest information on clinics, new mechanics and other information and events that bring us together. While still in its infancy, in the future we hope to develop more interactive features like a possible section where umpires could submit questions on rules interpretations and other elements on the program.

To join the Softball Canada umpire community on Facebook, simply look for the Softball Canada Umpire Program and "Like" us. After that, you'll be on track to receive all the latest updates direct to your Facebook feed.

Please contact us if you have any questions or suggestions on how Softball Canada can utilize social media to support the umpiring community.

# OPPORTUNITY UNLIMITED

**by Randy Souliers, retired Level V, FP, Newfoundland & Labrador**

It has now been 5 years since I last umpired and I miss it every day. After 25 years of being between the lines it certainly becomes a part of you.

I remember my first clinic and the first time I stepped on a ball field there was a feeling of apprehension but that soon was replaced with a feeling of accomplishment. The skills I obtained and the discipline developed has helped me tremendously throughout my working career.

I am now the regional manager for a Fortune 500 company and those skills and ethics that I learned as an official has helped me reach the level I have obtained in my professional career.

Just think about it! Where else can you get courses and on the job training to obtain skills like judgment, objectivity, leadership, people skills, control, honesty, integrity and trust to name a few. Every one of those characteristics or skills is taught to us throughout our officiating career.

I am in sales and I remember the first time I had to teach a seminar (in people's homes) about how to be in control. At the end of the class I asked my manager and those salespeople attending if they knew where the material came from. The responses were; a few well known sales speakers who were very famous in the sales world.

When I clicked on the last screen in my PowerPoint presentation their jaws dropped when they saw Softball Canada Level 3 Umpires Manual was the source. You see up to then they thought I read too much about softball and not enough about my career.

During my career I travelled to all provinces of this country to officiate, teach clinics or attend meetings. I was fortunate enough to be selected to officiate in Christchurch, New Zealand and Eau Claire, Wisconsin for men's FP World Tournaments as well as the Pan Am Games in Winnipeg. These are experiences and opportunities that are available for everyone if you work hard and learn to be the best you can be.

You can get there if you apply yourself. First, find a mentor. Model yourself after the best officials in your association and when you are as good as them find the best in your region, then province. Take a part of each of them (what they do best) and you use those skills to mould your skills. It's not easy and it takes a long time but it is worth it when you to the top. If you approach any official who demonstrates superior skills they will help you.

Even if your goal is not an elite assignment you will learn so much from other umpires and the sport. This transferable skill set gained through officiating will assist you in your career. These things will stay with you for life, as well as the friendships you will make whether they are in your city, province, and country or around the world.

By the way, in closing I would like to give you one important tip; whatever happens on the ball field leave it there. We will all make mistakes during our officiating career just like you will in your business career and family life. It's how you handle them and grow from them that will make you a better official and a better person.

# MORE EXCITING

## **On-line Activity in 2012**

After successfully piloting a web-based delivery model for the Level IV clinic of Softball Canada's National Umpire Certification Program, the Officiating Development Committee will introduce a web-based delivery model for the Instructors, Evaluators Course.

A web-based delivery mode will allow participants to attend this course in the comfort of their own home. Do not wait any longer to upgrade your skills. Prepare to learn from some of the top instructors in the Softball Canada Umpire Program without the expense of travel or accommodation.

This is a terrific opportunity for all umpires to develop and improve upon a unique skill set. This program is designed specifically for instructing and evaluating umpires involved in the Softball Canada Umpire Program. This initial course will be offered over several weekends in September of 2012.

Stay tuned for more information regarding this course and other important information from the Officials Development Committee by following us on Face book or [www.softball.ca](http://www.softball.ca)

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