

How to Work with Umpires To Make Your Games More Fun

Presented to the Coaches
Of the
WSYBL

Intro:

Everyone in this room has had a bad call or a rule screw up. It is inevitable. There is no instant replay in Youth Sports. Umpires are human. We all make mistakes. Not every call is going to go your way. Competition can bring out the best in people, but it can also bring out the worst. Both teams are competing to win the game, which means naturally they are impartial and see things from an emotional side. Any given play can be seen from several different perspectives by virtue of the angle on **or** off the field and what team you are on. Remember there are three teams out there.

When it comes to parents, they see things entirely different. They are sitting in the stands rooting for their son or daughter who maybe isn't getting enough playing time and can't do anything wrong and of course umpires can't do anything right. Every fan has an opinion about officials, because it is easier to officiate from the stands than on the field.

JOKE

Did you hear the one about the coach that was talking to his 8 yr. son about sportsmanship and how it's all about the team?

Coach says, "Johnny do you know what good sportsmanship is?"

Johnny nods and says, "Yes, I do coach".

"Johnny, Do you understand that what really matters is that we play together as a team?"

Johnny nods and says, "Yes, I do coach."

Do you understand then that if the umpire calls a third strike on you or that you make out at first base, that you can't curse or attack the umpire?

Johnny nods his head and says "Yes, coach I do."

Good, now will you go over there and explain that to your mother."

BY THE WAY I HEARD FROM THAT MOM LAST YEAR, SHE SENT ME A 2 PAGE EMAIL THAT WAS THE WORST I'VE EVER SEEN. SHE WAS BRUTAL. Those umpires didn't make one right call.

Whether you want to believe it or not, umpire's come to the game with a neutral perspective. They are there because they "Love" the game too and want to give something back to the sport. We enjoy being with the kids. An umpire's goal is to officiate the game without bias and to make sure that both teams follow the rules, play the game fairly with good sportsmanship, so that a winner can be determined. Not everyone is going to agree. We know that. Do you know it is much harder to umpire youth baseball than it is Varsity or College? There are so many goofy things that happen in youth baseball. Weird plays, strange rules, and throws flying all over the place. It's Helter Skelter out there sometimes. It's because the skill levels are lower. The higher the skill level the easier it is to umpire.

When the time does come that a coach needs to question a call or a rule, there are ways to do that, where the umpire will respect you and give you the best chance of him making a ruling in your favor.

This is my philosophy and why I do not have very many problems on the field. This is the same philosophy I am trying to instill in umpires in the WUA.

- It isn't about how well you know the rules
- It isn't that you have great mechanics or are in the right position
- **IT'S HOW YOU HANDLE PEOPLE**

THE SAME THING IS TRUE ABOUT COACHES HANDLING UMPIRES.

Here are some tips on How to Work with Umpires to get them to see your point of view.

- 1) **Remember screaming and yelling at someone isn't going to get anyone on your side.** Yelling or screaming won't get the umpire to change the call. It will only make him defensive and now he has to deal with your behavior, not the game. How many people enjoy being yelled at? Are you likely to want to help someone when they yell at you?
- 2) **What you really want is for the umpire to reconsider your alternative viewpoint or to ask his partner for help.**

SO IT'S, IT'S HOW YOU HANDLE PEOPLE

Tips:

- Control your anger, ask for "time" and slowly walk out to talk to the umpire. This will give you time to calm down and to formulate your questions.
- Your body language and demeanor make all the difference in the world. You are not Billy Martin or Earl Weaver and this not the Major Leagues, **it's "YOUTH BASEBALL"**
- Creating a big scene to fire up your team or the crowd diverts the attention from the actual call to you and causes the umpire to react to your negative behavior, not the call.
- Speak slowly and with respect.
- Ask questions that require the umpire to reconsider your perspective. Like "What did you see on that play?" and then let him tell you. Then you can dispute his version from your angle.

Or

"Is that the kind of play you can get help on? Maybe the other umpire knows something about this play that will help you?"

- **Don't question the umpires integrity, fairness or impartiality.** That is like saying you are a cheater. Comments like, "That's a make up call" or "They just want to get home early", just stir the pot and question the umpire's integrity. This can be grounds for an ejection, especially if you say it loud enough for everyone to hear.

REMEMBER: IT'S HOW YOU HANDLE PEOPLE

- 3) **There is a difference between questioning a judgment call and a rule interpretation**
Don't expect an umpire to change his judgment call, that's where you should ask if he can go to his partner for help, like a pulled foot at first or a check swing. Umpires are taught to go their partner before they make the call. When you ask the question, he is probably thinking I should have gone to my partner before I made the call, now what do I do. It's too late. I got to eat it. If he does go to his partner and the partner doesn't over rule the call, you still got him to get help. You accomplished part of your mission.

However, a rule interpretation can be changed especially when the other umpire has other information on the rule. Once the umpire agrees to go to his partner, leave them alone and let them work it out, then they should explain the ruling to both coaches.

- 4) **Pick your spots.**
Complaining the whole game about the little things isn't going to help you when you need the "big" call later in the game. Opening the game by questioning balls and strikes just put the umpire in a defensive mode for the rest of the game. He is thinking, "What is this guy griping about, I haven't even had enough time to establish my strike zone."
- 5) **Don't start your comments with the word "YOU or YOU'RE"**, because the next thing you will be hearing is **"YOUR GONE"**. Don't make it personal. Refer to the call as being terrible, not the person.

REMEMBER: IT'S HOW YOU HANDLE PEOPLE

6) Control your bench, meaning players, assistant coaches and parents.

An umpire will gain great respect for you if you take care of your business in the dugout and handle problems before the umpire has to handle them. The head coach is really the only person on the team that should be addressing an umpire. Don't ever let players talk back to an umpire and keep your assistants under control. If an umpire is having problems with a parent in the stands, they should ask for your help first to defuse the situation. Take care of it, before it gets ugly.

REMEMBER: IT'S HOW YOU HANDLE PEOPLE AND THIS GROUP OF PEOPLE ARE YOUR RESPONSIBILITY

7) QUESTIONING BALLS AND STRIKES IS USUALLY A "NO, NO", but there are ways to get your point across without the umpire saying back to you. "Coach we're not going to argue about Balls and Strikes tonight." You may get away with actually asking "where was that pitch" once or twice a game, but never more than that. **And it's how you ask the question.**

Tips:

Talk thru your catcher, by giving him instructions, the umpire knows AND UNDERSTANDS that you are really talking to him.

Like: "Johnny, you gotta give that guy a better look at that pitch." Or

"Johnny make sure you give a good target where we want those pitches".

Never ask Johnny "was that a strike" or "where was that one" because some catchers don't know the game well enough to give the right answer. They're likely to say the wrong thing and now they just lost their rapport with the umpire that he's been working so hard to get. If you have a good catcher who builds a nice rapport with the umpire and can stick pitches, more strikes will be called and the game will flow alot smoother. Coaches should want more strikes. It gets the kids to swing the bat. I try to tell my umpires, make the strike zone as big as you can without being ridiculous.

8) ARE THERE BAD UMPIRES? OF COURSE THERE ARE.

There are umpires with bad people skills. I understand that. I am trying to change that.

If you have an umpire who is not handling the game in a respectful manner to you or the kids or has trouble with any rules, mechanics or game management skills, I want to know about it.

I go out and watch umpires in this league about two times a week when I am not umpiring. I evaluate and talk with them about how to improve their game. I will eliminate umpires who do not uphold the standards of the WUA and don't belong in this league.

CALL OR EMAIL DAN

9) EJECTION:

If by chance you do go over the top and get tossed, leave the field peacefully and don't try to get in the last parting shot. Profanity and calling the umpire names will not be tolerated. This is a bad example for your kids. Remember kids look up to their coaches and when a coach exhibits bad behavior to officials, kids think they can do that too. Causing a big scene at the end just gets you another game suspension.

10) WE NEED UMPIRES, as the saying goes "WE NEED A FEW GOOD MEN."

There is such a shortage of umpires in southeastern Wisconsin. **The WUA is the only umpire training organization that is recognized by the WIAA for certification in this area.**

I am looking for x-coaches or kids who have come thru the WSYBL or x-High School ball players. The WUA is beginning our 2009 training program this Wed. January 28th thru April 8. Located here at Heritage Christian High School and the fee is \$75. Please contact me if you know someone who is interested.

People with good people skills make good umpires.

REMEMBER IT'S HOW YOU HANDLE PEOPLE