

# HEY BLUE...

Babe Ruth League, Inc.



**Diamond Digs**

Excellence in Umpiring

November 26, 2008

## ARE YOU UP TO THE CHALLENGE?

Umpiring can provide some great personal rewards. You are in a position to be a positive role model around children and young adults.

Most umpires start at the youth level. As they improve their skills and gain confidence, they begin to work the older programs, as well as middle and high school level games. From there, they may decide to advance to small college and major colleges. The last step for a chosen few is the professional leagues.

As an umpire, you must be able to understand fairness, control disorder and promote sportsmanship.

If you decide umpiring is for you, there are a few other items to consider:

- Are you emotionally ready? Umpires are placed in stressful situations. You have to be able to take verbal criticism and stay calm when confronted by coaches, parents and players.
- Do you have the time and desire to learn? Umpiring is more than reading a rulebook. It is thoroughly understanding the intent behind every rule and being able to apply those intentions to game situations.
- Umpiring can be compared to a "calling". It is more than a paycheck. It is a way to stay connected with the game you love, meet new people, make a difference in the life of a child and much more.
- You not only have to know the rules, but also understand them and how to apply them.
- As an umpire, you will be put in a position of authority. You're in charge, but it's the players who the fans come to watch - not you.

## WHEN YOUR CHILD PLAYS...



First it's easy. Watching your children play at the youngest levels and having each parent take turns calling the bases.

Then you make the transition to umpire. Life gets complicated. There are two different opinions. According to the National Association of Sports Officials Code of Ethics, "Sports officials must be free of obligation to an interest other than the impartial and fair judging of sports competitions. Without equivocation, game decisions which are slanted by personal bias are dishonest and unacceptable. Sports officials recognize that anything which may lead to a conflict of interest, either real apparent, must be avoided."

We can certainly understand umpires being free from personal bias. But on the other hand, a lot of amateur umpires have kids that play baseball and softball. Umpires that work league games over and over again come to know the players' parents, and other family members – usually on a first name basis.

Seasons come and go. One person's policy is not the same as the next. What it comes down to is that any umpire/parent must be prepared to carry forth the highest of ethics, conduct and personal responsibility. You need to be fair and impartial and need to call strike, ball, and safe or out the same for every player and for every team.

### **FOOD FOR THOUGHT**

- Baseball and softball are simple games. Don't make it hard.
- When you walk on the field, the game is yours. You are in control. Keep things fresh and moving – it will make for a better game. Never let the fans take control of the game.
- Don't look for praise. You will know if you've done a good job or not.
- Have as big a strike zone as you can. In youth baseball, it is important that the players are encouraged to swing and hit the ball.
- Arrive at least 30 minutes prior to the game. This allows you to check the field and equipment, hold a pregame conference with your partner and mentally prepare for the game.
- Look your best and dress the part. Also, remember such items as an extra pencil, note pad, a coin to toss, sun block, stop watch, etc.
- On every play, don't be afraid to make the call. Never correct a missed call. In most instances, you will make the right call.
- Never stop learning. There are umpires who have been officiating for years and still enforce the same rules that have either changed or become non-existent. Keep up to date on the rules – read the rulebook over and over again.

### **UMPIRING IS A HEAD GAME.**

Top performers in any field have mastered the mental approach to their work. Lack of control of the mind can be a downfall for umpires. The ability to concentrate effectively is an essential skill for umpires to develop. The calls you make will fit within the framework of what you have called before. This will help you develop consistency and officiate at a high level from one game to the next.



In order to concentrate, you need to be able to keep anxiety under control and learn to deal with press. If you are distracted, refocus immediately. Use the rule, mechanics and positioning required. Employ mental practice and visualization. Take a personal pride in your job. Make an honest self-evaluation of your work and never resort to excuses. Umpires who learn to use their mind will go a long way to achieving excellence.

### **TURNING OUT UMPIRE'S UMPIRES**

Many officials, despite years of experience, still employ game knowledge, comprehension and application at a "rookie" level. What defines a rookie or an umpire's umpire is not so much a number of hours in the classroom, but rather observable points in the learning process. A

rookie approaches a problem searching for elements with which they are immediately familiar. They select and apply the rules to the situation in front of them giving a faithful and accurate judgment. Rookies rarely leave this level. The transition to an umpire's umpire occurs when an umpire begins to break down a problem into essential parts and analyzes the links between these parts. Extraneous elements are quickly discarded and relevant information is identified.

### POINTS TO REMEMBER



The umpire enforces the rules, maintains his/her dignity, compels respect and gives the fullest satisfaction to both teams and spectators. Under no circumstances shall any umpire criticize or interfere with a decision unless asked to do so by his/her fellow umpire. Should the umpires make different decisions on one play, the umpire-in-chief shall call all of the umpires into consultation with no managers or coaches. After the consultation, the umpire-in-chief shall determine which decision shall prevail based on which umpire was in the best position and which decision was most likely correct. Play shall proceed as if only the final decision has been made.

Missing pitches or plays often is a result of calling the pitch or play too quickly. Timing is recognized as a critical skill which all proficient umpires must develop. If an umpire declares a pitch a ball and the batter subsequently hits it, the umpire's call shall be disregarded and the play shall stand. This is clear evidence that the art of timing has not been identified as a skill needed by both the young umpire and the veteran umpire.

Besides not calling plays too quickly, it is important not to turn away from the pivot on a double play too soon or to call catches or tags prematurely and not to be on the run when making a safe or out signal.

Remember the pitch or play is nothing until you make the call. Make sure the play is complete before rendering a decision.

Always make sure you confer with your partner before accepting a protest.

Anytime an umpire suspects a misinterpretation of a rule by one of his partners, "Time" should be called and the interpretation and the enforcement discussed.

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### A LITTLE BIT OF HUMOR:

*What takes longer, running from first base to second or from second to third?*

*Second to third, because you have to go through a shortstop!*

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***Remember, Babe Ruth League's focus is for every player to be able to participate and have fun. We should always emphasize concern for the players and their safety, a sense of fair play, as well as teach and live by the Babe Ruth Sportsmanship Code during all levels of competition.***