

SO YOU WANT TO BE AN UMPIRE?

Thank you in your interest in becoming a softball umpire. It is a very rewarding experience regardless of your age or experience - it is also a great way to earn money. You will see the game you play from a different perspective, and this will help you as a player. Our goal is to supply well-trained, mature, and committed umpires – as such there will be a Softball Quebec certification course that will be required.

There is also a certain minimal level of commitment that we are demanding. The umpire is expected to enforce the rules. This means that the umpire must manage the game with minimal confusion or controversy. The umpire should not be part of the game but simply call the game. The home plate umpire has the most responsibility. His/her responsibility is calling strikes/balls, calling plays at the plate, observing all other plays at bases and managing throughout the game. The base umpire is responsible for plays at the 3 bases and supporting the home plate umpire – for example: the number of strikes and balls.

This is the best description of what an umpire should be:

"The duties of a skilled softball ump go beyond the rule book itself. The International Softball Federation says good umpers possess superior "game management skills." These include such attributes as a positive attitude, field presence, professionalism, fitness, credibility and common sense. Umpers must be able to shrug off harsh criticism from coaches, players and fans. As the softball umpire manual of the National Federal of High School Associations states, "To remain calm in the face of adversity is an essential part of an umpire's makeup."¹

It is worthwhile breaking down this statement.

Positive Attitude: You are the only person at the game that is being paid, you must act like you want to be there. Look interested, look engaged, look confident. Have a welcoming look on your face. THE PHONE STAYS IN THE POCKET! Remember, you are in charge.

Field Presence: You have been taught where to stand, where to go when different things happen – force yourself to follow these instructions – it will become second nature. Make the calls loud, clear and with authority – take a few extra seconds if you need it, then make your call.

Professionalism: Look the part, act the part. You are expected to wear the acceptable and proper umpire attire – it is not a fashion show. Have the proper equipment/tools. Between innings, you stand facing the field along the first base or third base side. Please do not socialize with friends between innings.

Fitness: Hustle to where you need to be to make the call. Once the call is made, hustle back to where you need to be before the next pitch. Don't stand there with your arms crossed but be ready to move so that you can make the call.

Credibility: This comes by knowing and understanding the rules and following the above points. In my experience, if the above 4 points are followed then credibility is well established. If you establish that credibility, most coaches will appreciate your effort and become an ally instead of an adversary.

¹ www.sportsrec.com

Common Sense: You are not expected to be perfect! You are expected to try! Umpiring takes time to get used to, there are many moving parts, and many rules. You are permitted to ask the other umpire for help. Asking for help is because YOU feel that you need it and not because a coach has asked it.

Criticism: This is a tough one because no one likes to be yelled at or criticized. The truth is that as a softball umpire you are usually only ever 50% right – there is always someone who disagrees. Coaches and players will yell, jump, kick, gesture, gyrate, grunt, mutter words, etc. – let them do it. People have the right to disagree – think about it: have you agreed with every call an umpire made on you? There is no rule that states that a coach must remain quiet – the key is RESPECT. As stated before, an umpire’s responsibility is the game – not the stands. What happens there is not your responsibility.

The purpose of this note is not to scare young umpires away but to guide them towards the “right” way. By instructing and teaching young umpires, we hope that we give them a better chance to succeed and make the experience a pleasant one. I’ll see you on the field.

PLAY BALL!

Tony De Felice

Umpire in Chief