

## Recommendations for the Rookie Umpire

By Lawrence Dorsey

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It seems like yesterday since my rookie season. Well, truth be known it was 8 years ago. I can vividly remember many of the mistakes I made and all of the things I wish I knew now. I will never say that I have seen everything, but I have had my fair share of "situations" just like any other umpire. Since my rookie days, I have umpired from ages 9-10 all the way up to the high school ranks. I decided that during that time, I've learned a lot that I feel like others could benefit from. So here goes my attempt to provide some insight into the "art" of umpiring for those of you "rookies".

There are many standard recommendations for anyone starting out in umpiring. Suggestions like attending clinics and seminars as well as reading instruction manuals are excellent for developing into a good umpire. However, many of the things that older umpires take for granted are unwritten. I'm hoping this article will touch on a few of these items.

### If you are not willing to make mistakes, then umpiring isn't for you

Just like everything else in life, the men in blue are going to make mistakes. You see it every day in baseball from little league all the way to the majors. Before you step on the field for the first time, realize you will make mistakes and odds are someone will let you know about it. What is important to remember about mistakes is that you **must learn from them and move on**. After every game, I give myself a self-evaluation on the ride home. I remember what I did wrong, what transpired before the mistake, and how I could handle the situation better in the future.

### The clothes don't make the man, or do they???

During my first season of umpiring, I wore what was the accepted "uniform". It was a blue hat (not a true ump hat), a powder blue shirt, blue shorts and my old baseball cleats. There are days I can't believe that was me. Then one day towards the end of that rookie season, one of my supervisors approached me about working a fall developmental league. The one stipulation was that I had to get a "proper" uniform. Suffice it to say I have never looked back.

Currently, I am working in a league where almost every umpire doesn't wear a proper uniform. You wouldn't believe how little flak I get for close calls. I'm not sure there is a direct correlation between my uniform and respect, but I'd say it is a big part of it.

I know clothes aren't cheap, but spending a little on a serviceable uniform will save you a lot of grief down the road. Most umpire outfitters sell clothes that are permanent press, and wash-n-wear. Keep your uniforms clean and ironed. Keep your shoes shined. It doesn't take much to look like a real umpire, because if you look sharp, you'll feel sharp, and in turn you'll be sharp.

### Learn from your peers, good and bad

I can't tell you how fortunate I have been over the years to work with some darn good umpires. Early in my career, I was fortunate enough to work with a few guys who had college and pro experience. The things I learned from them will never be found in any book. The one aspect of umpiring that veterans can teach you the best is game management. Game management is simply the skill of keeping the game moving along, anticipating problems, and handling those problems as they arise. I have often found it helpful to ask for a critique after a game. It may sting a little if you got some work to do, but it sure will benefit you in the long run.

Well, sometimes the things you learn from others aren't things that need to be repeated. Sloppy mechanics, poor attitude, and lousy appearance are all things I have seen in my career. Don't let this get to you. All you can do is support your partner and do the best job you can with what you have. For everything I have learned to do from a fellow umpire, I can think of at least one thing I have learned not to do.

### **Keep your eyes and ears on the field**

One of the worst experiences I ever had with a fan happened earlier in my career. I gave my partner an assist (he asked) on a hit batsmen call. This one particular lady starting berating me. I looked over at her, thinking at the time she was in the dugout (turns out she was just outside of the dugout), and yelled back "Hey it didn't hit em, OK". She read me the riot act after the game and I was green enough to stand there and try to reason with her. Wow, what a bad ride home that was. Well she never did anything about it, so it all became a moot point in the end.

The important lesson I learned that day is this: If it is outside the fence or the dugouts, ignore it. You will have more trouble than you ever wanted if you start a dialogue with those outside of the fence. If you confine your observations to those actions and protests by the participants, you'll keep the game in control and keep it from dragging along.

This does not mean you will not have trouble with spectators. But, you need to learn how to handle them without direct interaction. Use your field managers, scorekeepers, and even the coaching staffs to handle people who are "crossing the line" by threatening you or being just a little too belligerent. Sometimes calling police or park rangers will be necessary; unfortunately this evolution is probably here to stay.

### **The bottom line is fun**

As long as you aren't in the major or minor league system, and this is the case for the vast majority of us, umpiring is a second job. You have to be serious about striving to be the best you can be everyday and you have to be willing to learn constantly. Also, you need to carry a professional attitude onto the field. More than anything else, you need to have fun being an umpire. For me, who wasn't a great player, but has always loved the game, umpiring is my way of staying active in the game. I enjoy working with kids and helping "young" (hey I'm not that old) umpires develop. I try to have fun every night I'm out there and I can honestly say when it's not fun anymore, I'll probably hang'em up.

I'm sure I have left a lot of things out. I am hoping this will help anyone thinking about umpiring or even someone who has just started. As you go through your career, remember the mistakes you made, the lessons you've learned, and the people you've worked with. All of these will help make you a better umpire !