

- 1 **FHSAA Leadership Conference**
- 2 **Opinions Expressed**
- 3 **K I S S Principle**
- 4 **Simplified and Illustrated**
- 5 **Pay attention to your appearance**

Have you heard that one before? You'd be surprised how coaches and players form an opinion of an umpire based on appearance. The first part of appearance is how you dress, both arriving at game site and in your uniform. By having your shoes shined, wearing a fitted cap with clean pants and shirt, you at least give the impression you care. One item that is a big help is having a spray bottle of water handy. It can be used to get sweat stains off your cap, dress up a dusty ball bag, etc. The second part of your appearance is how you look physically. Being considerably overweight, wearing a beard, earrings or having long hair has nothing to do with your ability to umpire. But those items have a lot to do with the perception players, coaches, fans and even your partner may have toward you as an umpire. Unfortunately, most of those thoughts are going to be negative. **Remember that**

PERCEPTION is REALITY

6 Let them play the game

One of the best things an umpire can do is let the players play the game. Umpires shouldn't be looking for technical violations and other minor circumstances to show people how much they know the rules. It seems that every time a new rule is introduced, umpires want to try it out, usually without much regard as to the spirit and intent of the rule. Use common sense when applying the rules. One of the worst raps an umpire can get is that of being a "Ronnie Rulebook Umpire." Unfortunately, it's a reputation that will stay with an umpire for a long time, if not for the rest of the umpire's career. Certainly, you should know the rules, but just as importantly, you should know how to apply them and under what circumstances. Ask yourself, "Why did the player commit a particular act?" Was it because the player wanted to get an unfair advantage, or was it because the player didn't know what he or she was doing? You must decide and rule accordingly.

REMEMBER--- Let them play the game.

7 Know how you're going to call the game

There are a number of times during a game when you must decide whether or not to make a call. A good example is when a batter hits a stand-up triple, cuts inside first base and misses the base by an inch or two. You must know in advance what you are going to do. If your philosophy is strictly by the book, you are going to uphold an appeal. If your philosophy on this type of play is more toward advantage/ disadvantage, you are likely not to call the runner out or uphold the appeal. Another good example: What are you going to do in a blowout? Are you going nose to toes on the strike zone, or remain consistent? Hopefully, for too many reasons to mention here, you will stay consistent. You must have a philosophy of how you are going to handle those types of plays and situations. Other examples: a batter/runner advancing directly toward first but maybe just a bit outside the three-foot lane, or a trap in the outfield. You need to know, based on what you see, how you intend to make those calls.

Work WITH the rulebook not BY the rulebook!!

8 Reward good play

Most good umpires make a point of rewarding good play. If a batter hits a ball to deep short, the shortstop makes a backhanded stop and guns the ball to first on a whacker, a good umpire is probably going to call the runner out. However, if the shortstop does a juggling act on a routine grounder, chances are the runner will be called safe on the same close play. The same thing applies when calling balls and strikes. It's far better to reward the pitcher by calling a borderline low pitch a strike than calling a borderline high pitch a strike.

9 Have a good pregame

There are two good reasons to have a pregame, including one you may not have considered. The obvious reason is to be sure you and your partners know how you are going to work the game. Don't think that because you have umpired many games with the same partner that it's not necessary to have a pregame. Both of you have worked with others and you still need a reminder of how you are going to umpire the game. The other reason is to get your mind on baseball. There's no telling what goes through an umpire's mind on the way to a game. The one sure way to get focused on baseball is to have a good pregame meeting.

Post-Game is probably more important than Pre-Game...

"I did great, you did great" is NOT a good postgame...

Game Reports in the Arbiter are required by ALL plate umpires for ALL games in our Association... there is a "learning point" at every game... getting umpires to SHARE with others is the hard part!!!

10 Discuss how ejections will be handled

Cover ejections in your pregame. Fortunately, ejections occur very rarely. However, when they do occur, they can get ugly fast unless the umpires have an idea of how they will be handled. First, whenever a coach comes out to discuss a play and the conversation starts to drag or get heated, the other umpire should walk to within hearing range. Listen to what's being said and don't participate unless asked by the umpire involved in the discussion or if the conversation obviously is dragging on. Secondly, it must be understood by all umpires on the crew that the discussion is over once the umpire walks away or the coach is ejected. When a coach or player is walking away turn off your hearing aid... When that happens, the other umpires should try to get the coach away, either to the bench or out of the ballpark in the event of an ejection. Be careful not to put your hands on a coach or player. Sometimes by walking toward the dugout, you can get the coach to follow you while pleading a case.

REMEMBER-- **You DO NOT have to have the
LAST WORD!!**

11 Know how to handle darkness, rain and lightning

This part of the game probably gets umpires into more trouble than any other area. Why? It's because umpires are in a "can't win" situation. However, there are some things umpires can do to lessen the pain. First, when dealing with darkness, know what time sunset is. You can get that information just about anywhere. You do not need to get into a Sunset, Dusk and Twilight discussion... all you need to know is when it is too dark to see the ball!!! That, obviously, is no problem when the sky is clear. But on cloudy days, you have a lot more credibility with a coach when you say you are calling the game because sunset occurred 10 minutes ago. Don't fib, because the first thing a coach will do after getting home is to check it. Secondly, get your partners together with both coaches before you start a new inning and tell them play will continue as long as you think it's safe. A good guideline is to watch for any player hesitating in seeing the ball. Don't make the mistake of telling everyone you'll play one more inning. There have been times when the light conditions are brighter at the end of an inning than at the beginning. Lastly, remember that few games have ever been decided by playing an extra inning. The reason should be fairly obvious. Neither team

will allow it to happen. Each team will gladly take a tie rather than a loss. So what happens? Say on the first pitch of the extra inning, the batter hits a home run. The visitors know that if the home team can't finish the inning, the score will revert. So the visitors start to swing wildly at pitches to speed up the game. This puts you right in the middle of possible acts that may cause a forfeit. In the same scenario, the home team now comes to bat. Guess what will happen? Down by a run, they are going to make sure they can't complete the inning so the score will revert. So, the home team slows down the game as much as possible and you are stuck with another possible forfeit situation. **In** another scenario, the visitors are out on about five pitches. Do you think for one moment the visiting team is going to deliver a hittable pitch to the home team? Not at all. The visitors will throw about four wide ones, the catcher will go out to talk to the pitcher, then the pitching coach will come out, then make a pitching change, etc. A change in the outcome of the game is so remote it's just not worth the aggravation for the umpire. You might also seriously consider the legal consequences of trying to be a nice guy. Who do you think a player's parents and attorneys are going to go after if someone is hit in the face with a line drive or an errant pitch?

Rain can be a little trickier. If the rain is only a drizzle, ask your partners to watch the footing of the pitcher and the infielders. In threatening conditions, you should ask the home coach if drying materials and tarps for the mound and home plate are available. If tarps are available, stop play earlier. If you wait too long, the tarps will create a greenhouse effect and cause the playing surface to hold more water. Lightning is the worst weather condition for umpires to handle. Hopefully you have lightning detectors at your schools... **DO NOT** let coaches talk you into going early...30 minutes is 30 minutes...probably due to the frightening fact that more often than not, the first bolt you see is the one that can cause life- threatening injuries to people in the immediate area. Err on the side of safety and stop a game whenever you feel there's even the slightest possibility of danger to the participants or spectators.

12 Writing incident/ejection/game reports

Remember that the FHSAA Staff may consider your incident report a legal document. Therefore, you must be extremely careful in getting the information correct. Whatever the situation, whether it's an ejection, a forfeit or other matter, stick to the facts and keep it brief. A long rambling report doesn't do anyone any good, especially the person reading it. If profanity was used, state the exact words used. Saying a coach swore at you doesn't carry a lot of weight. If you use the exact words, he might have a tough time explaining to someone why he used that type of language, you should also contact your assignor to notify them as soon as possible. If it is a serious incident, your partners should also send in a report. The only time you should use rule references is if the report involves a protested or forfeited game, then you'll want to cite the rules used to make your decision. Otherwise, FHSAA Staff don't really need to know the rule reference. But you should certainly keep it available in case asked!!!

13 Have a realistic strike zone

We all know coaches and players just want umpires to be consistent when calling balls and strikes, but umpires must be realistic in applying that principle. The lower the level of baseball, the bigger the strike zone. In high school or college baseball, umpires should be more generous on the knee pitch and on the corners than on pitches which are considered up in the zone. Regardless of the level, don't go to extremes. That applies to all levels of baseball. Don't be a voice in the wilderness. Toes to Nose, batter box to batter box is NOT a Strike Zone at any level!!! Your strike zone should be fairly consistent with the other umpires calling the same level of baseball.

14 Attend an Umpire School or Camp

There are many excellent college and professional umpire schools and week-long and weekend camps available in all parts of the country. Attend one of them every now and then. You'll be surprised at what you'll learn; chances are you'll be learning the latest techniques being taught at both the amateur or professional level. A word of caution, though. Remember that some schools teach umpire mechanics, interpretations and philosophies that generally apply to professional baseball. That is OK. Just be sure you have a good idea of what you can and cannot apply to whatever level you are' working. Also, professional schools are up to five weeks for a reason. Candidates there are given hundreds of repetitions on how to take a pivot at first base, etc. They are also allowed countless hours of time calling pitches in the batting cage. When you attend a weeklong or weekend camp, you aren't going to get that kind of training. What you will get is the correct way to do various things. It's up to you to get the extra repetitions on your own.

15 Be positive with coaches and players

Be alert for any opportunity to thank a player or coach for helping you administer the game. Whether someone is getting a bat out of the way or bringing out baseballs to you, say "please" and "thank you." As simple as that is, you'd be surprised how much game participants appreciate that little kindness. The same goes for a coach who is taking care of a problem for you. Remember, you're not trying to be their buddy, you're just showing some simple courtesy. This technique is also useful to keep a player calm. Say, for example, a batter is hit by a pitch and trots right to first base without glaring at the pitcher or practicing other theatrical items batters sometimes do. Gently praise him for keeping his poise. The same applies after a collision at a base on which a fielder takes a pretty good shot. A well-placed comment can do wonders to keep a situation from getting out of control.

At the Varsity level there is NO reason why you would ever show up to a game without KNOWING both Coaches FIRST name... not buddy buddy first names but by calling them by their first name you will establish a repoirte that hopefully goes into helping establish communication between your crew and the coaches. Lower level games a good way to remember names write them on your palm.... RH for the 1B dugout and LH for the 3B dugout!!!

16 Avoid amateurish behavior

Some umpires do things on the field that immediately peg them as inexperienced. Let's run through some of them. There is no reason to vocalize obvious plays. There is no reason to loudly proclaim "Foul ball!" when a ball is fouled directly to the backstop. The time to do something is when there is doubt as to whether the ball is fair or foul. There also isn't much reason to give an "out" signal on a routine fly or pop up. Don't let catchers or on-deck batters toss the ball to you. Ask the catcher to always hand you the ball. Tell the catcher that if an on-deck batter has the ball, he will toss it to the catcher who will then hand it to you. Don't hold your indicator up to your face and look at it like you've never seen one before. Get a file and notch the wheels (several ways) and you'll never have to look at your indicator again to start an inning. How many times have you lost the count on a hitter? Rather than having to mentally beg for a batted ball, try advancing your indicator while the ball is in the air back to the pitcher. This is whether you throw it, the catcher throws it or a fielder throws it. If it's in the air, that's your cue to advance your indicator. Do that and you will cut down on lost counts immeasurably? Use proper mechanics to signal the plays. Good, sharp mechanics give the impression you are right on top of things.

Lazy or sloppy mechanics give the impression you really don't care too much about what you are doing, or worse, give the impression you aren't too sure of your call. Put the ball in play after a dead ball, especially with runners on base. Don't leave your partner wondering if he should make an out call on a pickoff because he doesn't know if the ball is in play or not.

17 **Expect that participants will try to gain an edge**

Coaches and players have a stake in the outcome. They do care who wins. If they are not cheating then they are not trying!!! A player may fudge a bit on a trap to make you think he caught the ball. If a coach can get you to start calling low strikes because that's where his pitcher throws the ball, he may do it. The point here is, when a coach starts to get on you for something, or tries to rattle the opposing pitcher, or a player starts whining about your strike zone, consider the motive. When a participant is trying to get "the edge" the reason to get upset is not because he's doing it; the reason to get upset is if you're not buying it and he continues.

18 Take care of arguments

ALL umpires on the crew should be involved in ALL discussions... time spent "discussing" a play on the field will seem like an eternity to players, coaches and fans... #1 priority is to get the call CORRECT... but 8 minutes discussing a play is NOT acceptable!!! When a coach comes out to argue, you should have a pretty good idea of why he's out there. It will probably be for only three or four reasons: He may think you missed the play, he may think you misapplied a rule, he may be out there to prevent a player from being ejected and he may come out to show support of a player who is arguing a call. In any event, there are some things you should remember. Should a coach get in your face, your first response should be, in as a normal tone and level of voice possible, "Coach, back off right now." If he doesn't respond immediately, eject him because he's more interested in intimidating you than seeking an explanation of your call. If he is yelling at you, remind him you aren't going anywhere and you can hear him in a normal tone of voice. When a Coach comes out waving his arms like a crazy man the first thing I say is "this conversation will NOT start until you put your hands down"... if he does not, then the conversation is over before it starts... that's about as far as you should go in trying to control his behavior. If he wants to yell, let him

have his say as long as he's not in your face. It is very important to let him finish without interruption. This may be difficult to do, especially if he's totally wrong about what he's saying. Your cue to cut him off is when he starts repeating himself. Regardless, give him a little time to get it off his chest.

When he's finished, it's your turn. That is why it's important for you not to interrupt him, because he is now obligated to hear you out. If he interrupts you, remind him that you listened to him and if he isn't going to listen to you, tell him the discussion is over.

There are some very effective responses you can use that will help calm the waters. First, if he is incorrectly quoting a rule, you may say, "Coach, by rule, what you just said is wrong." Notice you are not directly challenging him. Another effective technique is to tell him, "Coach, from where I had to make the call, I didn't see the tag," or whatever. This is much less confrontational than telling him, "Coach, there is no way he tagged him." Another good response is, "Coach, tell me what you saw." You might say, "Coach, tell me your understanding of the obstruction rule as it applies to this play." (You'd better have a firm grasp of the rule before you try that one.) Get the coach thinking? Once he starts the thought process, it will normally

make him calm down. Sometimes you can tell a coach, "That was close enough to come out on, but I had a good look at it." Here, you are subtly complimenting him for coming out without inflaming the situation. It's a useful technique. One other item to remember is that a coach will often give you a parting shot as he leaves. If it's under his breath, ***it's best to ignore it***. If it is loud, deal with it accordingly. Remember that if a coach is walking away, it's best to let him go. If you eject a coach at this point, you will usually appear to be the aggressor.

19 Should you ever admit you missed a call?

Confession may be good for the soul, but not in baseball. For some reason, many coaches think it's a complete cop-out for an umpire to admit he missed a call. Why? Because there isn't much more a coach can do with that argument. But there is plenty more he can do the rest of the game, like yell at you on every close call, "Hey, blue, did you miss that one, too?"

So what can you say if you know you've kicked one? First let him have his say in a reasonable manner. Then you can do a number of things. One good response is, "Coach, right or wrong that's the call and it's not going to change." Or you can say, "Coach, if I saw it from where you did, I may have called it differently." You don't want to say, "Coach, I didn't get a good look at it." Perhaps you didn't get a good look at it, but this response will surely get a comeback such as, "You're getting paid to get a good look at it." Don't set yourself up to get buried on a coach's comeback.

20 The proper way to go for help

There is probably no bigger area for discussion among amateur umpires than the topic of going for help. One philosophy is that if you not sure, such as on a sweep tag or pulled foot at first, you should go to your partner before you make a call. "Out if he is on" or "do you have a tag". That's fine, but you'd be surprised how many umpires make a career of going for help on tough calls. You can just make the call and take the heat with the idea of that if you don't change it, you'll only make one coach mad. That being said, let's discuss a workable solution. First, you and your partners must understand that if a call is obviously missed, and someone can help, they'll get to the involved umpire before the coach. Therefore, if you make a call and your partner doesn't get to you before the coach, you can assume you either got it right or your partner can't help you. An example would be a play where the catcher obviously drops the ball on a tag and the plate umpire, not seeing it, calls the runner out and everyone on the offensive team goes nuts. That's the tipoff to the plate umpire that he may have missed something.

The first thing a base umpire should do in that situation is to prevent any coach from coming on the field is to throw up your hand to the offended Coach as you are running to your partner, Then he

should say something like, "Did you see the catcher drop the ball?" What you are doing here is not changing the call, but providing your partner with information he may not have. He may or may not change the call. Another type play is where an umpire is blocked out or is straight lined and badly misses a call. Your question here should be, "Did you get a good look at that?" If he says "No," provide him with the information. If he says "Yes," the discussion is over. Again, be careful how you handle these situations. Remember these techniques should be discussed in your pregame meeting and should apply only to *obviously missed calls*. Do not ever give "help" without being asked on a banger or any other close play!!!

21 **Watch what you say**

One area that gets umpires into trouble is their use of profanity on the field. Regardless of how it's used, profanity can cause you problems about as fast as anything you do. The biggest reason is that profanity, and the context in which it is used, is often misconstrued. You might say something that may be humorous to you, but if it's misunderstood you will have a difficult time convincing coaches, players or fans. Watch your language. You can never be blamed for saying nothing!!!

Keep in mind that whatever you say on the field will probably get back to the dugout. If it's a negative comment you can count on it. If you engage a player in a conversation on the field, it will be picked up from the dugout and someone will ask the player involved about it. That is why plate umpires should be very careful about how they handle situations involving a batter. Why? Who is a couple of feet away, well within hearing range? The other team's catcher, who is more than happy to report any interesting tidbits to his coach or teammates.

22 Realize you are in the people business

Think of how many times over the years you have had to come up with a rule interpretation on a particular play. Now think of how many times you've had to settle down an unhappy pitcher, catcher or coach. That by no means implies you should forget the rules. What it does mean is that, hopefully, when those times occurred where you've dealt with a problem, you've been able to calm the situation rather than inflame it. Whatever you do during a game, try to be approachable and be reasonable. Some very good umpires are not welcome by a lot of teams because they are perceived as being arrogant.

If you think for a moment about the most successful people in your organization, chances are they are very good at handling people and situations. That is a goal for which all umpires should strive.

23 *Have a Plan and be ready to use it!!!*

24 *Questions Comments Suggestions Complaints*