

You know that I usually write these news letters for our umpires, but since I agree with most of what the author below has to say and I'm a lazy bastard sometimes; enjoy what a top official has to say. Besides it's good for you to see that we aren't just blowing smoke up your butt when we talk about the importance of the interrelated skills that form the base of good Game Management. Merle was the Director of Umpires for the International Softball Federation for many years and helped pick umpires from all over the world to umpire events like the Olympics. He passed away in 2008, but he certainly knew his stuff.

UMPIRES MUST HAVE GAME MANAGEMENT SKILLS

By Merle Butler

Game Management Skills are a very important part of any umpire who is trying to reach the top. Players, coaches, and evaluators alike watch each umpire and observe his/her game management skills. This is how respect is gained from the players and coaches, and how evaluator's rate umpires so the umpire can reach the next level.

"Game Management" covers the umpire's attitude, field presence, professionalism, communications, credibility, game awareness, fitness, team officiating, and common sense. Many will overlap, and all are tied together. First let's discuss

Attitude: This is an umpire's disposition, his/her communication with players, coaches, and partners; the approach used, his/her outlook for each situation, the mannerism followed, and their demeanor. **An umpire's attitude – good or bad – affects all people around him/her** and it affects their ability to perform their primary task – to umpire the game they've been assigned to.

If you're the individual who places all others below you, and feels that you're the only one who knows what's going on, then you'll soon find that you have very little support around you. Even to the extent that people will be waiting for you to "fall on your face" This type of "cockiness" is generally detested and often challenged.

How do you change your attitude? By becoming more tolerant or understanding of others and to respect the role of others in the game. An umpire's field presence starts with his/her dress and appearance when they first walk on the field and the mannerisms used while checking equipment and in addressing the pre-game managers meeting. His/her positions between innings, and the positions taken prior to a pitch and for every call. The hustle when moving to make a call, the signals used (both verbally and visually), and above all the communications used with players, coaches, and partners. **Be precise!** **Don't labor a point or make excuses.** State what you've seen, and if it involves a rule, explain it precisely. A quick, concise, and courteous response will soon gain the coach's confidence.

When involved in confrontations, the mannerism used in listening and responding to questions should be positive, rather than a negative reaction. The umpire should watch his/her attitude and any body language used. The umpire should be prompt and accurate on calls when partners request help. Team officiating requires good communication when 2-4 umpires are assigned to a game, for umpire rotation and full infield coverage, when one umpire goes out on a fly ball. Also, don't overrule a partner(s) unless they've misapplied a rule and then only if the partner requests help.

Athletic Appearance: Is an important aspect of the umpire. If you look like an athlete, it helps gain respect. If you're small, you must make up for this with your mannerisms. If

you're overweight, you must make up for this with hustle. If you're timid, you must make up for this with confidence and courage in making calls.

When speaking of **professionalism** you must look and act like an umpire. How you walk onto the field at the beginning of the game, the signals you give, and once again, your attitude and mannerisms during confrontations. Be on time to all games, and honor all contracts. Each addresses professionalism.

Game awareness: Is the ability to both **think like a ballplayer and be a student of the game**, through game situations. Knowing where a ballplayer will throw the ball following a ground ball or fly ball catch, and knowing that what happens in the first or second inning will change when a close game reaches the sixth or seventh inning. Knowing that when outfielders (or infielders) are playing shallow they are probably trying to cut off a run at the plate, or if infielders are playing deep, they are probably setting up for a possible double play. This helps in positioning yourself before the pitch, what to expect in advance of the ball being put into play (before a pitch is thrown), what the players should and will be doing, and where to move to make the call. Many situations could be available and you should be prepared and ready for each.

Credibility: Is what every umpire strives for. Umpires should have purposeful movement and should exhibit strength. Reflect an assurance that the umpire knows exactly what he/she is doing in the game. Umpires are tested by coaches – particularly new officials. **Umpires need to gain RESPECT!** And this is from continuous hard work and time preparing oneself for the job.

Remember we cannot be perfect, but we can strive for excellence and **when you have achieved excellence you will reach the goals you have set for yourself.**

Merle Butler is the ISF's Umpire-In-Chief and a member of the ISF Hall of Fame. (This article appeared in the May-Aug. 2004 edition of World Softball magazine, Volume 32, Number 2)