



Iowa Intercollegiate Athletic Conference



Iowa Conference Softball Umpire News

Newsletter # 4

Dear IIAC Umpires & Coaches:

May 3, 2001

Wow, another season has flown by in fast and furious fashion. The weather has been tough, but we battled through it and by the time we get to the end of it all, it just starts to get nice. Oh well, I hoped you have enjoyed your season and I want to thank you for your efforts in conducting yourselves and the games in a very professional manner! This is our final communication of the season and if you work with someone over the next two days that doesn't have email, please print them out a copy of this and share it during your travels or your pre-game conversations. I am a little behind this week and will mail to those who need it mailed, but wanted to make sure we all have had a chance to read this before Friday's and Saturday's games. I have asked some of the top softball umpire supervisors in the nation to see if they would contribute to our newsletter and discuss topics that I know you find very informative. Hopefully there is something you have been able to take with you and add to your game from this and our other newsletters through this season. Jeff Hansen, who is the Coordinator of Umpires for the Big XII Conference and National Coordinator of Umpire Improvement Program for the NCAA and Kathy Strahm who is the Supervisor for the BigTen Softball Umpire Program have both written some excellent commentary this week, so sit back and enjoy the read.

Going for HELP?

One of the goals for the NCAA Softball Umpire Improvement Program is to implement umpire mechanics and positioning standards in the two and three umpire systems so that umpires throughout the country can work the game with the same basic concepts. While this is an important and necessary aspect of any national training program, even more can be done to implement a strong and consistent philosophy regarding game administration.

One area of game administration that, in my view, needs improvement throughout the country is the almost universal notion that an umpire must, and much worse, WILL go for help any time a coach questions a call or requests an umpire to get a second opinion on a play where that umpire is responsible for the call. This situation happens far too often and simply needs to stop. Let's say you are the primary umpire responsible for a force call at first base. The runner and ball arrive at the same time making the play very close. You make an emphatic call and walk to your next starting position only to have the coach (who didn't get the call) request time and walks out to talk to you. It is obvious the coach wants you to change the call- not because you are wrong, but because the call went against her/his team. Are you one to cave in to the coach's demands? Are you one to abandon your only responsibility on that play? Are you willing to appease a coach just so you don't look bad? Are you one to let your partner take the bullet? Are you one who does not have enough pride or confidence in your professional ability and training to believe you got it right? Too often, the answer is yes to one or many of these questions in this situation. If you are the umpire involved in this play and you have all the information you need to make the call, the proper response for the coach's demand is to hold your ground, take the heat, confidently explain your decision and play ball. You will be a more respected and effective umpire for it.

Have a great season!

Jeff Hansen

National Coordinator

Softball Umpire Improvement Program

"Little things make the BIG Difference"

When it comes to picking out the crème of the umpire crop, I allow for big differences in style, presence, and personality. I look less to a list of objective criteria when I evaluate umpires, and more to an umpire's presence on the field and apparent feel for the game. I start out thinking that just about everybody can call balls and strikes, but not everybody would make it in the "big leagues." With me, umpires tend to eliminate themselves from getting top assignments by picking up "demerits." There are several points that will cause me to strike an umpire, or at a minimum, cause me pause in moving that umpire up in the ranks. I give mental demerits whenever I see the following:

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- An umpire with too casual an attitude on the field
- An umpire who is carrying on a conversation with the catcher...or the 1st baseman...or the assistant coach...or a spectator....
- An umpire who doesn't adhere to the fundamentals of officiating, i.e. in the slot (can he SEE the pitch?), timing, solid signals and mechanics
- An umpire who looks like a slob
- An umpire who would rather explain and talk than to let the coach vent and move on
- An umpire who decides there will be no play, so there's no need to get into position over there
- An umpire who fails to support his partner
- An umpire who looks lazy because of a lack of hustle or sloppy signals
- An umpire with rabbit ears
- An umpire who lets the teams control the game flow
- An umpire who has to go for help on every checked swing
- An umpire who doesn't have the guts to make the tough, unpopular call
- An umpire who is more concerned about getting the next, more prestigious assignment than working the best game possible here and now
- An umpire who shows up unprepared, i.e. weak rule knowledge, and tries to fake it
- An umpire who is constantly apologizing for missing the call
- An umpire who seems to think that he is who everyone came to see perform

Kathy Strahm
Big Ten Umpire Supervisor

Regarding Illegal Bats

Please keep in mind that a bat must be stamped by the manufacturer with the words "Official Softball" to be considered a legal bat. In addition, any bat that has been repainted from its original manufactured state is considered an altered bat.

As you know, many teams have contractual agreements with bat manufacturers. It has come to our attention that some teams may try to play with unidentified, repainted or unmarked bats from a manufacturer other than one with which they are contractually obligated. Any bat of this type is not likely to comply with the rules of the game. Be advised to have your game officials thoroughly check bats before every game to make sure legal equipment is being used in all contests.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. Please give me a call at 402-658-9426 should you need further information or clarification. Jeff Hansen, NCAA National Umpire Coordinator

Rule Interpretations from Dee Abrahamson, NCAA Softball Rules Interpreter

Question:

I think it is well explained what is not construed as a charged conference, but I think many of us have some questions with what IS a charged conference. For example, if the coach does something that really does not delay the game, but they still enter fair territory, cross the "fair" line and deliver a message, is that still NOT a conference just because they have not requested time or delayed the game? Here are a few questions that have come up from plays this spring.

Play 1) Offensive coach goes down to pick up the batter's bat after she has batted and either gives it to the next batter or gives it to the on deck batter and in so doing tells the next batter what he wants her to do. Is that a conference? He did not delay the game, but did deliver the message and was out of the coaching box.

Play 2) Second base pops off after a hard slide (safety base) and needs to be cleaned up and reset. The defensive coach races out to the pitcher's circle and meets with the pitcher. She doesn't delay action, but delivered the message to her pitcher and crossed the foul line. Charged Conference?

Continued...

Is a charged conference only strictly in instances where the game is delayed or time is requested? I know we discussed the short discussion after an injury that coaches sometimes have with their teams and that was ok as long as it was very brief and we as umpires get out and break it up quick or ask them if they want a conference. Can you help with these?

Answers from Dee:

The two situations you detail would not be considered conferences. In the first case, delivering a message while retrieving a bat, it is not a conference unless it delays the game. If the coach offers advice while moving the bat it is similar to talking from the coach's box while a bat handler picks up the bat. In the second case, while there is field or equipment repair, both coaches can use the opportunity to discuss strategy with their teams.

In both cases, if the conferences extend beyond the actions, the coaches should be asked if they would like to continue in which case, a conference will be charged. If they break it up, you have nothing but if they want to use their conference, they may do so.

Thank you

Thanks again for the hustle, dedication, and hard work you have all put in this spring. Hope to see you on the field somewhere this summer and always remember "It is always a big game, but it is still just a game". Enjoy and take care!

Tom Topping
Coordinator of Softball Umpires, Iowa Conference