



HEY BLUE



The Heart of Umpiring at the Amateur Level

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THE PSYCHOLOGY OF UMPIRING

While a great deal of becoming a successful umpire and a good umpire is related directly to knowledge of rules, positioning, mechanics, and timing, too many umps do not understand the proper psychology they should use on the field.

Psychology is the frame of mind, the attitude, the demeanor one assumes on the field, as well as how one deals with managers, coaches and players on a one-on-one basis, as well as how one interacts with the teams and fans as groups.

Maintaining Control

One of the toughest things to do for most people is to hold their temper when others are angry. But this is exactly what an umpire must do. Teams, players, and especially fans, are biased. They are caught up in the game and the plays, but the umpire must remain detached and impartial at all times. You will never make a sound judgment or ruling while angry!

The umpire must control the game without appearing bossy. He must take charge in certain sticky situations without anyone realizing he's doing it. He must allow play to move freely while maintaining control of every aspect of the game. He may sometimes have to take over to the point of ejecting someone, but even that should never be done in anger.

Making the Call

So how about calls "**within the framework of the game**"? Well, this refers to such calls as the "phantom" touch of second base on a double play attempt. If you watched closely you may find that as much as 50-60% of those touches of the bag, if the touch is made at all, come a second or two before the middle man catches the ball, yet the out call is made. This is making a call within the framework of how the game is played today.

So why is this out call made? There are probably many reasons, but there are two primary reasons. First, by allowing the middle man in the double play attempt to do this he is less likely to get ripped in half by the runner sliding into second, thus preventing potentially serious injury. And second, such a call simply makes the game go smoother and faster, and it has become such an accepted part of the game that no one complains as long as the middle man is in the vicinity.

This out call simply has to be made, but be careful. Make certain that the middle man was near the bag, and made some obvious attempt to touch it. If you begin to get too lax when making this

call it can quickly become a joke, and you will quickly get some serious heat from the manager of the offensive team.

Another example of this approach to calling the game is the "bang-bang" play at first. How many times have you heard the old saying, "a tie goes to the runner"? **That alleged "tie" means that runner is out!** But while this call on the surface seems to be in this category there is actually scientific support for making the out call. If it appeared to you that the runner's foot touched the bag at the very same instant you heard the ball hit the glove, and since sound waves (what you heard) travel much slower than light waves (what you saw), the ball obviously hit the glove before the foot hit the bag. Thus, the runner is out!

"When in doubt, call him Out!" ... Well maybe...

Likewise, the tag play is a "when in doubt, call him out" play. If the ball beats the runner to the bag and the defensive player makes the catch and is not lazy in putting down the tag, call the runner out! Of course this is a general rule, but if the runner does something spectacular to avoid the tag and is successful, then by all means give him credit and call him safe.

These are but a few examples of how your approach to the game, personally, mentally, and game-wise can help you umpire a better game.

ASKING FOR HELP AND CHANGING CALLS

Too many times we see umpires make a call on a close play and the coach comes running out insisting that the umpires get help from their partner. Trying to be a nice guy, or perhaps being a little intimidated, they go to your partner for help.

Mistake!

First off, if you make a call, you are telling everyone that you saw the play, you've processed the information from the play and you've made your decision. If you weren't sure about something on the play and you don't have all the information you need to make your decision, you ask for help before you make your decision. Remember it's still your call, you're only asking for help to get more information in order to make a decision. Don't throw your responsibilities on your partner.

If you ask for help just because the coach wants you to, you will be asked to go for help on every close play, by both coaches, all game long. If you constantly ask for help, you might as well leave the field, because your partner doesn't need you if he has to do your job too. Don't let the coach push you around, tell him or her that "I saw the play, I don't need any help, this is my call and the call stands" Whether your decision was right or wrong, stick with it. If you change one call, the coaches will want you to change every call that they don't like. Also, when you change a call you have to deal with the other coach who now also has an argument with you.

Remember, you can change your own call in certain situations, but you must do it immediately. For example, if you make an out call, and your timing was too quick after the call you see the ball loose on the ground - change your own call immediately, get the play right. This

is never going to look good, but you'll get the call right. Never, never make a call, think about for a while and then change it, you will lose all your credibility.

Plays that you might need to ask for help, in order to get more information:

Swipe Tags

If in doubt - ask first - before you make any call. If you make a call - any call - DON'T ASK!

On **swipe calls** you ask "did he tag him?" Your partner should answer "yes he did" or "no he didn't" and then you make your call.

If you ask for help and can't get it - the runner is SAFE!! You will only be asking if you didn't see, or if you weren't sure of the tag. You can't penalize the runner for something you didn't see.

Pulled Foot

On a **pulled foot** you ask "did he pull his foot?"

If you ask for help and can't get it - the runner is OUT!! You will only be asking if the ball beats the runner to the bag. You have to assume the fielder's foot is on the bag until you know for sure that it wasn't

Batter hit by batted ball

Hit batter in the box (by batted ball)- immediate help should be given by partner by calling "DEAD BALL" or "FOUL BALL" depending on the way the league handles the call.

Plate Umpire - never ask for help in this situation. Base umpire should be yelling immediately if he saw THE batter get hit with a batted ball.

Coaches love to come out and want you to get help on this - DON'T! Tell the coach "if my partner saw anything, he would have said something immediately."

Batter hit by pitched ball

Don't ask for help concerning THE batter being hit by a pitch. As the plate umpire, you are 18" from batter; your partner is 90' away.

Four considerations for giving or asking for help

1. Never offer help unless it is asked for.
2. Only ask for help when you absolutely, positively need it.
3. If you kick the call - DON'T get your partner involved to try to fix it.
4. Live and Die with your call

Four calls that can be legally and properly changed

1. Calling a ball on a half-swing (check swing). On appeal or if you're not sure of the call yourself - ask for help - change if necessary. Don't be afraid to ask for help, good idea to do so, takes pressure off catcher from coach.

NEVER ask for help on a called strike (You point at batter & say "Yes he went")

Strikes, outs and foul balls are forever and cannot be reversed. You never ask for help for them once they are called. If you are going to ask step out from behind the catcher, yell to your partner loud and clear "Did he go?" ... no pre-planned responses from partner - Get the call right!!

Note: check swings have nothing to do with the wrists, only concerns are with the barrel of the bat

2. Improper rules application. Example: if partner awards wrong amount of bases - step in, confer with partner and change the call
3. On tag plays only - with a loose ball situation - your partner sees the ball on the ground while you're calling "OUT" (result of poor timing) - move into the area quickly and straighten out the call.
4. Two umpires making simultaneous opposite calls. One call has to be changed immediately

A good pregame conference, good communication and signals can eliminate almost all of these problem areas.

A LITTLE BIT OF HUMOR:



How Come you Never Sweep at home!!