

OREGON
ASA SOFTBALL UMPIRE
ASSOCIATION



Mentoring Program 2008

What is the Function of the Mentoring Program?

The Mentoring Program is a process for new officials to gain experience and individual attention to help them in their maturation as an umpire.

When new people first begin the process of becoming an umpire, they are overwhelmed with what needs to be done, how to do it, why to do it and who to consult for the answers associated with the process. As they learn just enough to become dangerous to themselves, they are forgotten and thrown to the wolves. Frustrations sets in and many leave. The retention rate for our profession has been reported to be less than 50% new members each year. They need a friend – a mentor.

This program provides these beginning umpires the opportunity to work with seasoned officials, who then pass on some tips on mechanics, positioning and rule interpretation. With this happening, our newer and 1 and 2 year officials become more confident and better umpires. If umpire beginners and those with 1-2 years of experience are given a mentor, a person to whom they can go for answers, many may stay in the program. The potential for keeping new umpires increase and become viable, long-term members increase dramatically. They also will pass on this information to other officials who haven't had the opportunity to work with the senior umpires.

Once new people have come through the door, a thorough orientation should take place. A veteran umpire is assigned the responsibility for nurturing that individual. The operative word here is nurturing. The program aims to use experienced umpires to nurture and mentor new and inexperienced umpires as they learn the fundamental skills of umpiring.

Philosophy of Training New Umpires

We use the ASA training program. Please only use the ASA Rule Book as your guide for Mechanics Training. This is not the place for "Advanced Mechanics". Don't confuse a new umpire with how much you know. The veteran official must put the new umpire and their development as the top priority. The Mentor needs to be empathic to their needs, be good listeners and be clear and concise in your teaching and teach them to be clear and concise when they are questioned on the field whether by a trainer, player or coach. A good mentor is a good teacher. A mentor instructs and encourages.

When new umpire walks on the field to umpire their first game nothing in their lives has prepared them for this moment. Please be supportive, constructive and positive when you see things they are doing incorrectly. Carry a small notepad and list areas for you to discuss at a later time. It is important to let the new official learn by letting them make their own mistakes so they can grow from it. Be a good example.

As a Mentor set a time in which you can get together with the new umpire. Sit down and establish goals and expectations, teach them how to self evaluate after each game. Read the rulebook together, let them select the sections to review. Talk about the game, attend a game together and walk around and examine simple game situations, have the new umpire ask 20 questions.

The Basics:

Uniform:

Take time to establish the expectation of the umpire's uniform, explain the first impressions begin with umpires uniform, that the uniform is clean; the shoes are shined before the first game and cleaned between games. We do expect them to have protective equipment. Have the new umpire develop a checklist of protective equipment and clothing and for them to review each time before going on the field. Remind them to double check to see they are wearing their equipment properly. For example, ball bags on the right hand side; shin guards have the hooks on the outside. Show them how to remove their masks properly, have them practice at home in front of a mirror.

Hustle:

Establish early the need to get to their primary calling position and then be prepared to move to the next play. Have your umpire review those calling positions with you.

Tempo/Timing:

This is huge, even for some veteran umpires, especially during start of the season. Stress "One thousand-One" theory. All new umpires call everything to quick. On the plate stress hear the ball hit the catcher's glove, count "1001" then make your call, no need to count on an obvious ball in the dirt or way out of the zone. On the bases again "1001" after the ball hits the glove, explain the fielder may drop the ball or miss a tag or pull their foot, even completely miss the base. Have them come to a complete stop, so there eyes are not moving up and down, tell them this will allow them to see through the play. Now tell them "It's nothing until I make the call."

Signals:

We communicate with sign language more than we do verbally so it's important to emphasize the correct signals and when they are applied. As a mentor you both can practice all the signals in the rulebook. Remind your new umpire to practice the safe and out call in the mirror at home, it builds self-confidence.

Teaching use of signals ties strongly with the teaching of timing and tempo, so please emphasize the connection between timing and signals in the context of effective communication with players, coaches, partners and fans.

Coverage responsibilities

Keep it simple and by the book. This is the place to stress, "Let the ball take you to every play". This is the place to teach priorities.

1. **Plate:** Is the catcher in the catcher's box, batter in the box, fielders in fair territory, pitcher on the rubber for the signal? Did I see the ball off the hip, track with my nose, is the pitch in or out of the zone (no low pitches), did I read the batters hands, did I read the bat head, did the hitter swing or check, did the ball hit the batter, did the ball go off the bat to the catcher's glove, ground or body?

2. **Bases:** Was the Pitcher in circle with possession of the ball, on rubber for signal, did they make a legal delivery, did the catcher receive the pitch cleanly, Was the runner in contact with the base until ball disappeared behind the pitchers hip, did the batter in the box make clean contact with the ball and not get hit by pitch, did the batter interfere with catcher's throw?

The runner has priority on the base path unless a fielder is making a play on a batted ball, fielder must have possession to block a base.

This is the time to teach coverage responsibilities on the field as well as calling positions. It's also the place to teach starting positions for calls on the bases, exiting the plate, coverage responsibilities i.e. fair-foul, out-safe, catch-no catch, obstruction, interference and blocked ball.

BUILD A STRONG MECHANICS FOUNDATION:

Plate: ASA Rule Book page 178/193.

- Wide comfortable stance, heel and toe stance, not more than your hand to elbow length behind the catcher; chin no lower than the top of the catcher's helmet, eyes at the top of the zone and good pelvic alignment (GPA).

Top priorities: Go set when the pitcher's hands come together at the start of the pitch and be locked when the ball leaves the pitchers hand. Use your legs, not your back for support. See the ball come out of the pitcher's hand and track with your nose to the glove. Verbalize every pitch. Give the count on all pitches except the first one, (this is too much, but they lose the count when they're new and it's important to have them hear themselves give the count so they will remember it).

Help them with their voice in a positive way. Teach the Plates responsibility to manage the game and communication is the key.

It's not normal for new umpires to draw attention to themselves and it's not something they are naturally comfortable with. *In all other communication situations teach them to speak when they are spoken to and to economize on verbiage.* We don't want to teach bad habits of starting conversations with players and coaches during games. It drives coaches nuts and will always come back to haunt the umpire.

Show them how to clear on a passed ball without getting tangled up with the catcher or batter.

CONSISTENTLY TEACH: Lock early, track with your nose, "NO LOW PITCHES & DON'T CALL TO QUICK" from the plate. The ball will always take the umpire to the play so please reinforce that concept too.

HUSTLE!!!

BASES: ASA Rule Book page 193.

Whenever possible have a veteran trainer working along side the Base Umpire to help with position and build strong habits.

- Start 18-21 feet (five to six steps) down the line and a step in foul territory, Shoulders Square to home plate and be set or in ready position prior to release with no one on base. Teach them to be stationary when the pitch is released.

Top priorities:

It's important to explain why we teach the angles, calling positions & styles (normal & sell out calls) and the concept of moving to the next play. Many were taught the theory of "Man/Ball" as kids by our coaches. If this term is not familiar to you what "Man/Ball" refers to each player is responsible to know where the ball is at all times and where the player they are responsible to guard is at all times. What we are teaching is similar. If you find that framing what you're teaching on mechanics in this context helps you more effectively communicate they I encourage you to do so.

For me, the easiest explanation for teaching the ASA base mechanics is that it puts me in a position to "see through" the play. I hustle to get to my calling position early, the ball takes me to where the play occurs (tracking), the position I've been taught places me where I can make a slight adjustment and see the fielder, the base if necessary, the runner and most importantly the ball (4 objects). At that point applying good timing and the correct signal is the key to successfully communicating what I saw happen to my partner, the players and coaches and even the fans.

It's been my experience that newer umpires are more comfortable on the bases after a game or two. Across the country we haven't been teaching that there is just as much work on the bases as the plate so the new umpire relaxes on the bases. We have the opportunity to start the new umpires off on the right foot and show them all the elements that make working the bases just as important as working the plate. Study the Mechanics section of the ASA manual and point out the partnership, roles and responsibilities that exist between an umpire team.

If you explain base umpiring in that context using the information available in the ASA rulebook/manual, we will have success developing our 1st and 2nd year umpires.

Consistently teach:

Study ASA umpire mechanics. Work every pitch. See everything and call in your area. Concentrate and anticipate where the next play will be, but don't anticipate the call. Base umpires must learn to call two plays; the force play and the tag play. Remember the first priority of the base umpire is: To see the batter runner touch first base. This needs to be taught in the context of knowing where the ball is at all times. Finally, there is no dead ball in Fast Pitch Softball unless an umpire signals a dead ball, so keep working.