

How to Get Along With an Umpire

A “tongue-in-cheek” guide to on-field relationships.

Dear Mr. Manager:

Tonight is your team’s first game. You are about to spend the next two hours or so working with an umpire, whether or you like it or not. Since I’m sure you want to be a proper credit to the occupation of both Little League Manager and Modern Sports Parent, I thought I’d take the liberty of providing you with a quick summary of conventional manager-umpire relationships:

Before the game:

1. Don’t bother to prepare. Although the umpire needs to inspect your team’s equipment before the game, don’t have it lined up and ready. Umpires love digging through all your equipment bags looking for helmets and bats. If he does notice that your son’s favorite helmet has a three inch crack in it and asks you to remove it, remember to look incredulous and tell him that no other umpire has ever tossed it. Remember that he only discards dented bats and cracked helmets in order to annoy you, not because of any mythical “safety issues,” and so you need to help him keep the proper sense of perspective about such things.
2. Don’t worry about getting the game started on time. The Constitution of the United States guarantees you as much infield practice as you want before every game. If you don’t get your practice started until two minutes before game time, the umpire doesn’t mind, even if he does have another game after this one. After all, if your players don’t get infield practice, they may forget that they are supposed to catch a ground ball, or where first base is.
3. Don’t bother to introduce yourself at the plate meeting, and don’t pay attention when the umpire introduces himself. All umpires would rather you addressed them impersonally as “Blue” or “Ump,” preferably at the top of your lungs from half a county away. Addressing them by name breeds familiarity and smells of respect, which obviously can’t be tolerated.

During the game:

1. Your view of balls, strikes, safes and outs is obviously better than the umpire’s. The fact that you’re 60 feet from home plate, and he’s less than 6, gives you perspective, while the wire fencing through which you’re frequently looking helps focus and clarify the scene. Throwing up your hands and calling out “You’ve got to be kidding” on every pitch that obviously just caught the outside corner of the plate, but was called a ball, or on each tag play where the glove missed the runner by at least an eighth of an inch will help the umpire train his vision to nearly the perfection of your own.
2. Although there are nine defensive players on the field, bases are loaded, and the batter hit a fly ball deep down the right field line on which your right fielder had to make a diving, rolling catch, this is absolutely no excuse for the umpire not being able to see that the runner tagging up at third base left at least a quarter of a second too soon. Berating the umpire loudly about missing this will help him to focus on his priorities. It’s especially important to call attention to this when your team is winning 23-1 in the second inning.

3. Although it is human for a manager to send a runner only to have him thrown out, keep a pitcher in an inning too long, or make an ill-timed substitution, there is absolutely no excuse for an umpire to ever miss a call. Umpires are expected to be perfect during preseason games, and then to improve as the season goes along.
4. Remember to have your fans begin yelling at the umpire starting no later than the second pitch of the game. Umpires thrive in a loud environment, and look forward to the fans' critique of their games. If your team's parents provide the louder, more consistent critique of his calls throughout the early innings, this will cause the umpire to like your team better, and he will make sure the close calls go your way later in the game.
5. When a call doesn't go your way and you want to discuss it with the umpire, make sure to charge out of the dugout, waving your arms and yelling at the top of your voice. The umpire will be impressed by your hustle, and your desire to start the conversation from the instant that you leave the dugout, and thus will be more likely to pay attention to your arguments regarding what actually happened on the play. If you remember to come out waving your rulebook as if he's never seen one, this will earn you extra points. Finally, you'll do best if both you and your coaches simultaneously run over to the discussion, since this will allow the umpire to get all your points of view at once, rather than having to pay close attention to only one individual.
6. If the manager from your opponent's team comes out to discuss something with the umpire, make sure you hustle over and correct his erroneous position. Although calls that go against you need to be challenged, calls that go in your favor are obviously correct, and you can help the game move along by joining in with the umpire in correcting the other coach or manager.

After the game:

1. Take your time clearing the dugout. The field is yours until you choose to leave it. Although the umpire may be working another game after yours, he doesn't really have any place else to go this evening, so it doesn't matter how long it takes to get the next game started.
2. Don't forget to remind your players and parents that it was the umpire blowing that close call at the plate in the third inning that caused you to lose 16-15. The 5 home runs and 7 hit batters your pitchers gave up, the four runners who were thrown out trying to steal and the 9 errors your fielders made had nothing to do with it. After all, you only sent 43 players to the plate during the six innings – with that few chances, you can't afford to lose a single run due to the umpire's incompetence.

Finally, and most importantly, remember that whether he's a parent out of the stands, or a veteran with years of playoff experience behind him, he can't possibly know as much about the game as you, and you should not pass up any opportunity to remind him of this. Umpiring is easy, since all you have to do is stand there and watch what happens, and everybody knows what the rules of the game are. If you abuse him enough, he won't come back, and you'll be able to handle both ends yourself. After all, your team would be much better off with you umpiring the game in addition to managing, right?

Sincerely,

Your friendly neighborhood umpire