

Summary of August 23, 2021 Umpire Advisory Team Meeting

The most recent meeting of the Umpire Advisory Team (UAT) was held on August 23, 2021. UAT members in attendance were Bryan Richter, President, Joe Holonich, Secretary, Damon Williams, Rick Morris, Bill Chatterton, and John Calamari.

The meeting began with a review of the actions from previous meetings. Attachment 1 is the list of meeting actions and their status. The pictures of the UAT are in process. Rick Morris agreed to complete the UAT collage for the SUM website with the current members and update it once the new member joins.

Next, the UAT discussed membership. It was noted that one UAT member had left Softball Umpires of Maryland (SUM) and moved out of state. However, the UAT was not aware of this. Therefore, the UAT discussed asking John Dye to make sure that if a UAT member leaves SUM, he informs the UAT president Bryan Richter so the UAT can know.

Second, the UAT discussed a new member to replace the member who moved out of state. There was agreement on the proposed recommendation. Bryan Richter took the action to confirm with the new member.

The next agenda item was the Lessons Learned from the spring season. The topics were identified through discussions in umpire camps during the year and provided by umpires. Following are the topics, discussions, and recommendations. Attachment 2 is a table summarizing the topics and resolution.

1. SUM Jewelry Policy

John Dye asked the UAT to look at the guidance currently on the SUM website for jewelry. The purpose of the clarification is to provide some guidance on what umpires should identify as dangerous under rule 2.5.

Two revisions were recommended by the UAT and provided to John. One was an amplification of the current policy. The other was a complete revision.

In addition to developing the revisions for the policy, the UAT also discussed several ancillary issues. One point raised was experience from the Eastern Regional Championship showed that other states do not have a policy on how to implement rule 2.5. The umpires from states like Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Colorado, Ohio, Florida, etc. do not view the wearing of earrings, necklaces, or wrist bands as being "dangerous."

Because of this, it was suggested that if SUM adopts a policy for clarifying how to implement rule 2.5 that something similar be done at the national level. Having just one organization use a clarification while the remainder of the umpires do not, leads to confusion and inconsistency. Therefore, it was suggested that John Dye recommend that national guidance be developed.

Another point raised was why rule 2.5 put the burden on the umpire to determine if jewelry was dangerous. The point raised was the umpire does not inspect bats but rather it is the coach who is responsible for ensuring bats are safe. A similar approach should be used for jewelry.

Therefore, it was recommended that a rule change be proposed to remove the word umpire and replace it with coach. This would align the jewelry rule with how other equipment is handled.

2. Length of games

A suggestion was made to shorten games to 75 minutes. This would allow more time for teams to leave and enter dugouts without impacting the start of the next game. The UAT members did not feel five minutes was that significant and did not recommend any change.

3. Teams moving between fields in back-to-back games

A concern has been raised about a team playing back-to-back games on different fields. Often, this schedule results in two fields being put behind. The reason is that the team moving to a new field may be in a game that goes beyond the time limit. Couple that with the time it takes to pack and move fields and there is the issue of putting two fields behind scheduled. The UAT recommends that the need to avoid back-to-back games on different fields be an agenda item at the annual meeting with USSSA East.

4. Quality and quantity of softballs at games

There has been an issue with the quantity and quality of extra game balls provided at tournament sites. Umpires have had to abandon balls because of large knicks or splitting seams. In addition, teams are not always willing to retrieve foul balls hit in the woods or down hills. Because of these, the number of backup balls provided do not always meet the needs of the complex. Several UAT members reported that on occasion, they have had to use balls provided by a team or even some softballs the umpire had in their vehicle. Using a ball that is not USSSA certified puts umpires at a liability risk.

To address this situation the UAT have several recommendations. First, USSSA East should ensure that coaches understand the need for their parents to retrieve foul balls. Although most teams are good about helping get balls that go out of play, not all teams do that. This leads to the umpire not having any extra balls if an inordinate amount land in adjacent woods. USSSA East should ensure coaches know at the start of the season and are reinforced in the email they receive for tournament registration that they must help retrieve out of play balls.

Second, the UAT recommends that USSSA East talk with the different counties and ask for additional netting above the standard height fences. For fields like Cedar Lane, North Laurel, or Centennial, having extra netting above the standard height fence would provide an additional barrier to keep balls in the field. For Centennial, it would also provide some much-needed protection for fans sitting around the contiguous fields.

The third recommendation is that USSSA not sell any used balls until the end of the season. It was the understanding of UAT members that USSSA sells used game balls to teams as practice balls. If this is the case, it depletes the number of good-quality, extra balls available for games. Not selling any balls until the season is done would help ensure more game balls were available.

5. College showcases

A recommendation was made to hold some college showcases. The UAT concluded this was a USSSA East marketing activity. The UAT does not have any recommendation but did agree that efforts should be made to reach more competitive teams.

6. Payment of umpires

This topic was combined with an additional topic related to the timeliness of game cancellations. The pay issue was that, in some tournaments when games are ultimately cancelled due to weather, it may take long periods of time before the games are cancelled. Umpires must stay at the site until the games are cancelled. If the cancellation is not made before the start time of a game, umpires should receive compensation for the game that was scheduled.

The UAT recommends that a policy be put in place that if an umpire waits for more than 30 minutes beyond the start time for a game to be cancelled due to weather, that the umpire receive the pay for that game. If the game has started, the umpire receives the pay but does not if they are just sitting and waiting. The wait periods can be, at times, several hours before a cancellation decision is made. Compensating the umpires for their time waiting for the cancellation is appropriate.

A complementary recommendation is to delegate more authority to the Site Director and Umpire in Chief (UIC) to make the cancellation call. The long times it takes to call games is because the Site Director must contact USSSA East before a decision can be made. Often this decision-making process is time consuming and does not have the first-hand knowledge of the facility situation.

Providing greater authority to the Site Director and UIC would allow for more timely decisions based on the situation at the field. It will also avoid decisions being made from locations that do not have first-hand knowledge with the complex.

- Other Topics

1. Equipment Exchange Page

An additional topic raised was the consideration of developing a Facebook page for equipment exchange among SUM umpires. The page would allow SUM members to post equipment for sale and SUM umpires to see what is available. Joe Holonich was assigned the action.

2. Impromptu Changes in Schedule

A second topic raised was impromptu changes made to schedules at the complex. The most frequent change is altering the plate, base, off schedule to be back-to-back, plate, plate. It was recommended that these impromptu changes not be permitted.

- Actions

1. Confirm the new UAT member. (Richter)
2. Evaluate an equipment exchange page on Facebook (Holonich)

The UAT scheduled its next meeting for October 25, 2021. This will allow the UAT to provide recommendations for topics at the annual SUM/USSSA meeting.

Attachment 1 Actions

Status of UAT Open Items				
Meeting	Open Item	Assignment	Status	Final Disposition
Aug 23, 2021	Consider a Facebook page for equipment exchange	Holonich	Open	
Aug 23, 2021	Confirm new member	Richter	Open	
Apr 19, 2021	New pictures for UAT members	Morris	Open	
Apr 19, 2021	UAT members provide individual pictures	All	Open	
Apr 19, 2021	Discuss adopt an umpire program with Dye	Richter	Closed	John Dye likes the idea but is not sure how to implement.
Nov 11, 2020	Investigate with John Dye if direct deposit is an option	Richter	Closed	John Dye had investigated this in the past. It is not cost effective.
Nov 11, 2020	Keep the UAT summary on the SUM website current and ensuring distribution of the summary	Richter	Closed	Summaries are being distributed and there is a link on the homepage

Attachment 2 Lessons Learned Topics

Lesson Learned Topics From 2021 Spring Season			
Topic	Background	Issue	UAT Disposition
SUM Jewelry Policy	SUM Policy	The policy is an attempt to have consistency. It has been suggested that it is too restrictive especially compared to other States. It has been suggested that some wording needs clarification like "covered" and "Coaches wristbands (play indicators)". Dye would like to reissue before Fall Ball but would like UAT feedback from minor tweets to major overall.	Recommended revisions were provided to John Dye. A second recommendation is to have USSSA East provide a copy of the policy when a team registers for a tournament.
Length of Games	75-minute games allowed for better team transition in and out of dugouts, so games stayed more on schedule.	Returning to 80-minute games does not allow enough time for teams to empty dugouts, occupy dugouts, and be ready for the next game.	No benefit was seen to reducing games by five minutes.
Scheduling of teams between different fields	Teams will be scheduled back-to-back on two different fields.	Having teams move from one field to another in back-to-back games impacts two fields. At times, teams that have to move to another field are in a game that takes longer to complete. This scheduling impacts two fields putting both behind schedule, the one with the elongated game and the one waiting for a team.	Recommendations were developed to avoid back-to-back games on different fields.
Quality and quantity of softball at tournaments	Many of the softballs provided for tournament use are not the best quality, foul balls hit off the field are often not retrieved by team parents, at some tournaments, umpires have had	At many tournaments the number of softballs and the quality of the balls are not what is needed to support the number of games.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ensure teams know they have to retrieve balls. 2. Discuss with counties the installation of nets at fields. 3. Do not sell softballs until the season is done.

Lesson Learned Topics From 2021 Spring Season			
Topic	Background	Issue	UAT Disposition
	to provide extra balls because there were not enough.		
College showcases	USSSA East does not have any college showcases.	Are there no showcases because of the quality of Maryland softball? What can we do to promote our tournaments to better teams?	This is a USSSA East marketing topic. UAT has no input on this.
Payment of umpires	Umpires often have to sit for longtime periods, like an hour, before they hear the games are cancelled.	Umpires sit waiting for determinations on the games. The time wait could be excessive but once the call is made umpires do not get paid for their time. Consideration should be given to paying umpires if they are required to sit and wait but then games get cancelled.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A policy should be in place to pay umpires if it takes an excessive time to cancel games due to weather. 2. Provide more autonomy to Site Directors and Umpire in Chief so decisions can be made faster.