

Summary of August 22, 2022 Umpire Advisory Team Meeting

On August 22, 2022, the Umpire Advisory Team (UAT) held its end-of-season meeting for the spring/summer softball season. UAT members in attendance were Bryan Richter, President, Joe Holonich, Secretary, Damon Williams, Rick Morris, Bill Chatterton, and Joann Brickwedde.

- Interaction with USSSA East and UAT

The first topic discussed was the action from June 6, 2022, UAT meeting for Bryan Richter and Joe Holonich to provide information to Andy Wisk and Bill Dowell on coach and parent behavior. One action from the discussions was for Joe Holonich to assemble the information from the June 6, 2022, UAT meeting and merge it with the information discussed at this meeting. The second action was for Bryan to get the information to Andy and Bill.

One concern raised at this UAT meeting was Site Directors allowing ejected coaches to return to games before their ejection was fulfilled. Another concern was Site Directors returning the money paid for protests. The UAT felt that these actions undercut the authority of the umpires on the field and sent a message to the coaches that there were no consequences for bad behavior or lost appeals.

Second, the UAT discussed how United States Specialty Sports Association (USSSA), East should be compiling a list of coaches who have had repeated ejections or disciplinary actions against them. This list should serve as a basis to tell a coach that, although their team is welcome at USSSA, East tournaments, that coach is no longer permitted to be a coach for that team.

A point of emphasis was made of a recent event where the brother of an ex-professional football player fatally shot a coach. The shooting apparently happened during an argument between one of the coaching staff and the officiating crew. It happened in front of nine-year children. The UAT concern was if bad behavior is allowed without consequences, things could escalate.

There was a recommendation that Andy and Bill be invited to attend a future UAT meeting. The benefit would be for them to hear directly from the UAT about umpire concerns. Conversely, the UAT could also hear from them on their perspective of things.

This topic closed with a point that it appears Softball Umpires of Maryland (SUM) may be at a tipping point. The perspective was that 15 years ago, SUM was a strong group of umpires who were respected. Today it appears SUM is a collection of umpires just doing games. The question asked was whether coach and parental behavior could be the cause for the loss of umpires and the lack of recruitment.

This topic was also one of the lessons learned provided to the UAT and is included in Table 1.

- Umpire Reported Lessons Learned from Spring/Summer 2022

Next, the UAT discussed the lessons learned provided by fellow umpires following the end of the 2022 spring/summer season. The identified concerns along with additional details and recommendations from both the identifying individual and, where appropriate, the UAT are provided in Table 1.

A detailed discussion was held on scheduling of back-to-back games on different fields. The point of concern is that teams are often scheduled on a different field in back-to-back games. If the game on the first field is delayed, this then this delays the games on the other field.

The UAT was told that USSSA East said there was nothing that could be done. However, a review of the elimination games for the Sunday, July 31, 2022, at Cedar Lane Park show that a simple quality assurance check of the schedule could have helped ensure a more efficient day. It was noted that the winner of the 9:00 game on field 1 at Cedar Land then had a 10:40 game on field 4 at Cedar Lane. However, the winner of the 9:00 game on field 4 at Cedar Lane was off at 10:40.

The movement from field 1 to field 4 caused a 30-minute delay in the 10:40 game and remainder of the day. Because field 4 had one of the semifinal games, it also delayed the championship on field 3. Thus, two fields were impacted by the scheduling.

However, if the schedule was reviewed before publishing, it could be easily seen that giving the winner of field 1 the off game and having the winner of field 4 play at 10:40 would have avoided the delay. It appears that no effort is put in reviewing schedules to help ensure that the most efficient game schedule is developed.

Plus, the quick review of the July 31, 2022, game schedule rebuts the position that nothing can be done. It was evident that a single change would have avoided the 30-minute delay affecting two fields. This is demonstrated in the attachment to Table 1.

A second lesson learned discussed in detail was the use of out of state umpires and the number of games they receive. The concern expressed was that it appears out of state umpires get more games and more championship games than SUM umpires. Several UAT members felt this practice was okay. It was suggested by some UAT members that the number of games assigned and the assignment to championship games was a reward to those umpires who were willing to work for SUM and help us cover our games.

It was recognized that people may not want to travel out of state and leave their families if they receive only a few games. It was also noted that given the price of gas, out of state umpires had to receive enough games to justify the travel. Given there are not enough umpires to cover all the USSSA East games, there is a need to have out of state umpires.

The UAT next discussed the lesson learned on how SUM umpires are evaluated. The topic raised a point that some umpires may be assigned to games above their abilities. It was noted that Umpires in Chiefs do provide input on the performance of umpires after each tournament. However, there was no knowledge on whether this information is used or how it affects game assignments.

It was also noted that assigning umpires to games above their skill level may be a result of a lack of umpires to cover games. Thus, assignments had to be done based on the available umpires even though they may not be the right fit for the level of game.

The provided recommendation was to use an evaluations system like the National Collegiate Athletic Association and use experience umpires to rate their partners.

Another item discussed in detail was the professionalism demonstrated by some umpires. The UAT acknowledged that this was something that had lost attention in the past few years. It was recommended that this be emphasized at the annual meeting as it was this past year and that reminders be provided in the SUMmary and in the Morris weekly Points of Emphasis.

- Remaining Lessons Learned and UAT Actions

The remaining lessons learned were discussed and are documented in Table 1. The recommendations provided by the concerned umpire and, where appropriate, a UAT recommendation are also provided in Table 1.

The UAT action items are addressed in Table 2.

November 21, 2022, was the date for the next UAT meeting.

Table 1: 2022 Spring Season Lessons Learned

Item	Details	Recommendation
<p>Game schedules still have teams playing back-to-back games moving from field to field and delaying multiple fields.</p>	<p>There are still games being scheduled where a team moves from a field at a distance and delays two fields. Attached schedule is an example.</p>	<p>Work with USSSA East to ensure that if a team moves to another field, they will have a break to make the move. An effort should be made by USSSA East to look at the final schedules to see if changes can be made to the schedule to improve efficiency. Although the schedule may be computer generated a human review will help improve the efficiency. Note: Following the meeting it was reported that the schedules are not computer generated.</p>
<p>People from out of state get more games including championship games.</p>	<p>Umpires from out of state are often given more games and championship while SUM umpires are left with fewer games. As the weekend progresses, there are fewer umpires needed but out of state umpires get games while SUM umpires are sent home.</p>	<p>Recommendation from concerned individual was use SUM umpires for championship game.</p> <p>UAT perspective is the additional games for out of state umpires are a benefit to help compensate for their agreeing to travel and help cover our games.</p>
<p>Improve evaluation process</p>	<p>If there is an evaluation process, it does not seem to be effective. If Umpires in Chiefs are supposed to provide an evaluation at the end of each tournament, some are not seen at the fields, so it is questionable if they are conducting needed observations. Also, some umpires are officiating above their ability which can lead one to conclude the evaluation process is not working or not being used in assignments.</p>	<p>Recommendation from concerned individual was to form a committee of experience umpires to evaluate their partners each week. This is done in some NCAA sports and works very well. Some evaluation questions could include knowledge of rules, application of rules, appearance, hustle, and demeanor. Each area would get a score of 1-5 with 5 being a perfect score.</p>

		UAT understands that the Umpires in Chiefs provide input on performance. However, there is no visibility of how it is used. Plus, given the lack of available umpires, there may be times when umpires are assigned to games above their skill level.
Payment for rain delays	Umpires are paid for their time. Some schedules already require umpires to be at the field over six game slots to work four games. During weather delays umpires can sit for multiple hours until a decision is made.	Obtain a wait fee of one game fee whenever an umpire waits more than an hour in a rain delay.
Game ending procedure for Recreational All Stars	Previously the five-run limit extended to the third inning for Recreational All Stars. It has now been changed to the second inning. At times, this will result in the unlimited inning starting with just a few minutes left on the clock and taking some time to complete, going well past the scheduled game time. Given RAS games are in July, the extended times over multiple games contribute to heat issues for umpires.	Return to the five-run limit through the third inning. Alternately, set an absolute game time. If after the five-run innings are complete and there are 10 minutes or less on the clock, each team gets 15 minutes to bat in the unlimited inning. The offensive half of the inning for each team is over at 15 minutes regardless of the number of outs.
Umpire arrival time and game start time.	Some umpires arrive extremely late for games, often not being ready for game times. Also, in some situations, the plate umpire will remain in the camp and wait for the plate umpire to return. These can delay the start of games on time.	Discuss the need to be timely at the annual meeting, in SUMmary, and occasionally in the Morris weekly Points of Emphasis. Umpires should be reminded to arrive at complexes at least 45 minutes before their scheduled games.
Coaches wearing hats backwards	Some coaches wear their hats backwards. What is the policy?	Provide guidance on whether a coach wearing a hat backwards is permissible. If not, provide the reason so coaches can get an explanation.

<p>Continued abusive coaches and parents</p>	<p>Still coaches are arguing calls, including balls and strikes.</p>	<p>Have USSSA include in every tournament email that coaches need to set a standard and ensure all people associated with a team behave in a sportsmanlike manner. In addition, provide guidance to SUM umpires on how to handle situations. For example, are we responsible for addressing parent behavior? Also, have USSSA East maintain a database of ejected coaches. If coaches have multiple ejections, prohibit them from coaching a team.</p>
<p>Not enough umpires take their professionalism to heart. Is there an emphasis to implement more professionalism? Are people held accountable for their performance and appearance?</p>	<p>Umpires take the field looking unkept. Others perform antics or provide superfluous and unnecessary comments that may seem funny at first but can wear on parents, players, and coaches as the game progresses.</p>	<p>Continue the approach of covering professionalism at the annual meeting. Routinely emphasize professionalism in SUMmary and the Morris weekly Points of Emphasis. Provide guidance to UICs on whether an unprofessional umpire can be sent home.</p>



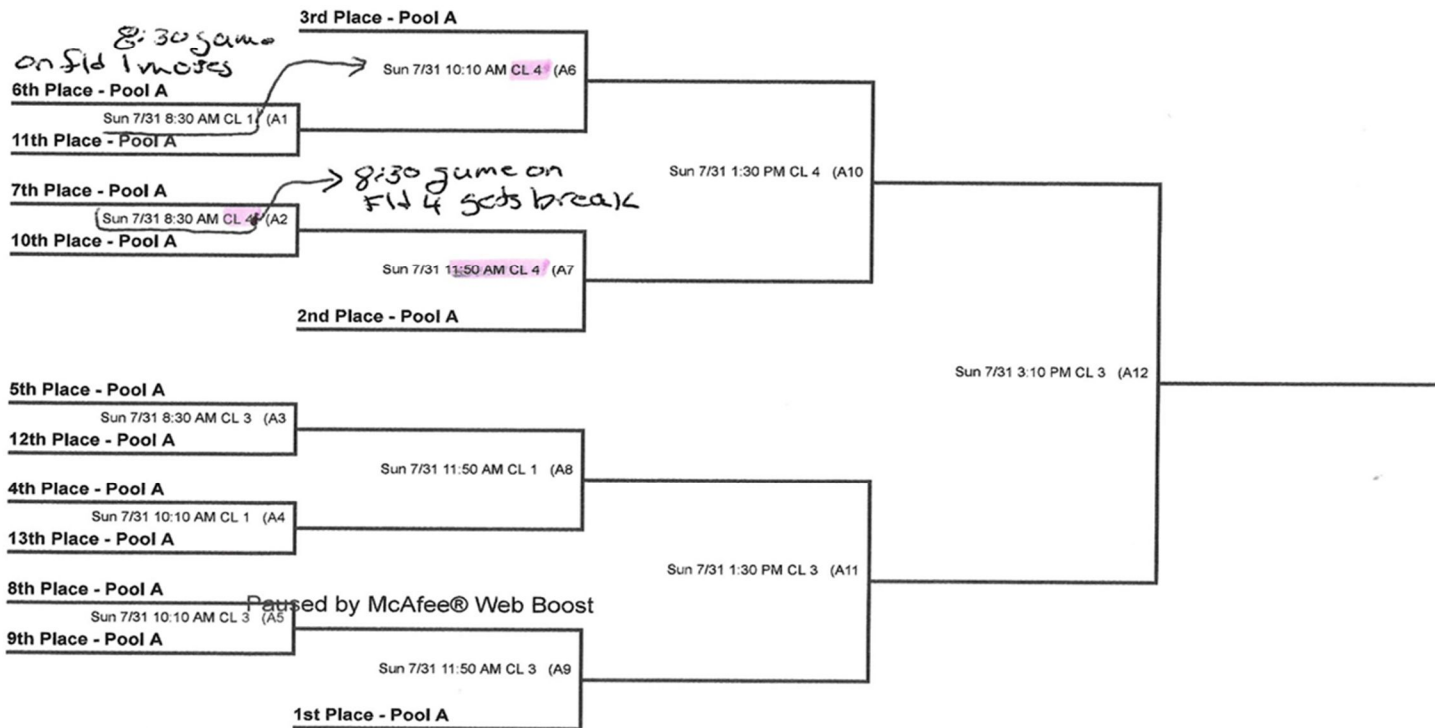
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Table 2: Status of UAT Open Items

Meeting	Open Item	Assignment	Status	Final Disposition
Aug 22, 2022	Assemble information on coach and parental behavior from Jun 3 6, 2022, UAT meeting and combine with information from the August 22, 2022, meeting to present to Andy Wisk and Bill Dowell.	Holonich	Open	
Jun 6, 2022	Obtain guidance from John Dye, working with USSSA, on how to handle loud and inappropriate music at complexes.	Ritcher	Open	
Jun 6, 2022	Work with John Dye to ensure USSSA does not return protest fees.	Ritcher	Open	
Jun 6, 2022	See if USSSA has a database of teams with unsportsmanlike conduct issues. If not, advocate that USSSA develop such a database so repeat offenders can be identified and excluded from USSSA tournaments.	Ritcher	Open	
Jun 6, 2022	Get additional detail beyond the rule book from John Dye on how to handle unruly parents and include it in a continuing learning discussion.	Morris	Open	
Jun 6, 2022	Include three umpire mechanics in a continuing learning discussion, with approval from John Dye.	Morris	Open	
Jun 6, 2022	Coordinate with John Dye on getting a website designer to improve the professionalism of the SUM website.	Ritcher	Open	
Jun 6, 2022	Publish guidance from John Dye on how to handle illegal pitches and include that in a continuing learning discussion.	Morris	Closed	It was reported that illegal pitching will not be addressed.
Jun 6, 2022	Receive approval from John Dye to implement the continuing learning discussions.	Morris	Closed	Discussions have been included in SUMmary.
Mar 7, 2022	Get help on equipment exchange page if needed	Holonich	Closed	Not needed. Page opened.
Mar 7, 2022	Talk with John Dye about mentoring Program	Morris	Closed	Mentoring in place
Mar 7, 2022	Complete list of potential mentors	Holonich	Closed	Emailed Mar 16, 2022
Mar 7, 2022	Contact UAT replacement	Holonich	Closed	Jim Morton was contacted
Aug 23, 2021	Confirm new member	Richter	Closed	Joanne Brickwedde has joined the UAT
Aug 23, 2021	Consider a Facebook page for equipment exchange	Holonich	Closed	Page developed and opened.

Table 2: Status of UAT Open Items				
Meeting	Open Item	Assignment	Status	Final Disposition
Apr 19, 2021	New pictures for UAT members	Morris	Closed	New pictures have collage has been developed
Apr 19, 2021	UAT members provide individual pictures	All	Closed	UAT members have provided pictures.
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