

Summary of June 6, 2022 Umpire Advisory Team Meeting

The Umpire Advisory Team (UAT) held a mid-season, check-in meeting on June 6, 2022. Members in attendance included Bryan Ritcher, President, Joe Holonich, Secretary, Joann Brickwedde, Damon Williams, Rick Morris, and Jim Morton. At the meeting, the UAT covered several topics that have arisen during the first half of the 2022 spring season. The following topics were discussed.

- Introduction of New Member

President Bryan Ritcher opened the meeting by introducing Jim Morton. Jim is replacing John Calamari who left the UAT because of his participation on the Softball Umpires of Maryland (SUM) executive committee.

- Recognition of D Day and SUM Service Members

Next, the UAT recognized the Americans who participated in D Day on June 6, 1944. Also, the UAT recognized those SUM members who have been in the military and extended thanks for their service to our country.

- Concerns in Umpire Email

Next, the UAT reviewed several concerns raised by a SUM umpire. The topics include loud music and inappropriate language in music; time between innings; calling illegal pitches; protests and money return; and coach language and abuse of umpires.

- A. Loud and Inappropriate Music

With respect to the use of speakers and inappropriate language in music, UAT members noted that it is a hit or miss situation. Some weekends there is nothing while on other weekends teams are asked to turn down the music so the pregame conference can be heard. It was agreed that there is no rule addressing noise. However, some members of the UAT did say they ask teams to limit when they play music. The example given to teams is, even at professional games, music is stopped once the pitcher steps on the pitching rubber, so music is fine until the pitcher is on the pitching plate.

As an action, the UAT agreed that it would seek guidance from John Dye on how to handle loud music at fields.

The second part of the discussion on this topic dealt with some older teams playing music with inappropriate language. It was agreed that the United States Specialty Spots Association (USSSA) Tournament Director should remind teams that there are a variety of ages at the different complexes. Inappropriate music can be heard by 10U and 12U teams. Therefore, teams should ensure that any music played is appropriate for any age given the music may be heard on other fields.

B. Time Between Innings

This topic dealt with the time teams take between innings. The rule book states that a team gets five pitches or one minute, whichever comes first. Further, the topic raised why umpires only give teams three pitches instead of the five allowed.

It was noted by one UAT member that teams do not appear to have an issue with the three pitches between innings. The pitchers and catchers take three and throw down to second base without being prompted to do so. Another UAT member noted that his view was the three pitches accommodates the time teams take to get on the field after they complete the at bat. Three pitches usually are enough and seem to be the right fit for teams to get on the field and throw warmup pitches within one minute.

It was noted that John Dye has provided some guidance on this. John has stated the rule book provides for five pitches in one minute. Additional time could be added for the throw down to second base. Thus, John thought it could be as much as 1 minute, 30 seconds between innings.

Rick Morris noted that he was working on a procedure, pending approval by John Dye, to provide continuous training on various topics. Time between innings would be covered in the first one. It is expected to be issued in the next week following this UAT meeting if John Dye agrees to do it.

C. Calling Illegal Pitches

Next, the UAT addressed the topic of calling illegal pitches. The UAT members noted that everybody may see slight differences in the proclivities of a pitcher. Plus, at the Eastern Regional Championships last year, umpires were told not to call illegal pitches.

One UAT member said his procedure is to send the catcher out to the pitcher after warmups to tell the pitcher what to fix so she was legal. Then if the pitcher continues to pitch illegally, he can tell the coach he gave the pitcher a chance to fix it after warmups. His experience is the illegal pitch last a couple of batters.

The most common type of illegal pitches are when a pitcher steps on the pitching plate with her hands together or when she does not pause to take or simulate taking a signal.

Again, the UAT felt guidance from John Dye on how to handle illegal pitches would be useful.

D. Protest and Returning Money

At one game this spring, the coach protested the call. The team paid the \$100 and was informed the call was correct. After collecting the \$100 protest fee, the Site Director returned the money to the team. The reason for the return was that the call could not be protested. It was uncertain if the Site Director unilaterally decided to return the money or if USSSA directed to return it.

UAT members worried that if teams protest and then the protest fee is returned, it could set a bad example. By not honoring the protest process, the UAT felt umpire authority was being undercut. It was noted you get the behavior you reward and by returning protest fees, you would encourage coaches to protest more frequently. This could lead to more trivial protests that will needlessly delay games.

It was agreed that an action from the meeting was for John Dye to discuss the need to keep protest fees with USSSA management.

E. Abusive Language

There was consistent agreement among all the UAT members that abusive language and behavior from coaches and parents is becoming a problem. The view was umpires are at a tipping point. In the past few weeks, several umpires have quit because of treatment by coaches.

A recent example was excessive inappropriate language a coach used during a game. The coach was ejected but continued to be abusive toward the umpire. The coach returned to the confines of the field for the next game even though the ejection was for that game also. The umpire told the coach he had to leave the field completely.

The UAT members offered that some teams may have to be excluded from USSSA tournaments if poor coach and parent behavior continued. It was agreed that not all umpires handle these situations well. The UAT members all concurred that the situation needs to be addressed before it gets out of hand.

It was noted that the Umpire in Chief (UIC) will document this behavior in their weekly reports. However, the UAT members were not sure if any action was taken by USSSA because of these reports. The UAT recommended that USSSA have a database of teams and if a team or organization were identified as repeat offenders, they be banned from USSSA tournaments.

Also, UAT members agreed that umpires need to know the procedure for ejecting a parent. Although the USSSA rule book has a provision for ejecting parents, the UAT noted that there was no defined procedure on how exactly to eject a problem parent. The UAT would seek guidance from John Dye on how to handle unruly parents.

In the end it was agreed that the umpires felt they needed more support when dealing with unruly coaches and parents. The UAT felt that there was support for umpires but there needs to be more visible support shown when coaches or parents exhibit abusive behavior.

- Assigned Games

Three issues were identified in this area. One was that some umpires got to work two days in an early season tournament while others got no games. It was reported that this issue had been addressed and was no longer a worry. In addition, John Rimmell explained that in one instance, additional games were added on a Sunday after some complexes were rained out on Saturday. John provided umpires with the opportunity to tell him if they wanted to work additional games and those who responded were assigned. This is why some umpires were able to work on both days while others, who did not respond or responded late, had no games.

The second issue was some umpires expressed concern that they seem to always get first game base assignments. Having the first game base results in the umpire being at the field for more time slots. It was stated that John Rimmell did address this by noting that he usually gives out of state umpires first plate games so they can leave the field earlier given their travel. The UAT recommended that if the umpire had this concern they should talk with John Rimmell.

A third concern was umpire teams agreeing to work back-to-back plate assignments. It was noted that UICs have the ultimate decision on allowing this and that for the most part it should not be allowed. Usually umpires from other states advocate this position because it is a common practice there.

- Three Umpire Mechanics

It was reported that there are many umpires, some new and some senior, experienced umpires, who do not know three umpire mechanics. The need to understand three umpire mechanics is essential having knowledgeable crews available to officiate championship games. Rick Morris will cover the topic in a continuing education discussion should the concept get approval.

- Continuing Instruction for Umpires

Rick Morris provided more details on this. He reported that Rick has asked John Dye about doing something related to continuing learning. The concept was to attach a continuing learning discussion to the weekly SUMmary report John Dye issues. In addition, the UICs would cover that topic at each complex the next weekend.

Rick noted that if umpires had any topics to recommend for continuing learning the topics could be submitted to him.

- Thoughts on the Season So Far

Given the extensive discussions, there were no other major topics identified. It was noted, however, that demonstratable support of umpires was needed at all levels up to and including USSSA management.

The UAT believed training this year went very well and that several of the new umpires were phenomenal in their performance to date.

Finally, it was recommended that John Dye consider hiring a website designer to redo the SUM website to make it more professional looking.

- Review of Action Items

Joe Holonich reported that the only open item was the development of an equipment exchange Facebook page. He reported that due to the high school season, he just completed investigating whether such a page could be embedded in the SUM Facebook page. It appeared that was not possible. Based on discussions with John Dye, John agreed that Joe could open a new, private Facebook page for SUM equipment exchange. It would be open to all SUM members, but they would need to request access.

- Actions From the Meeting

1. Obtain guidance from John Dye, working with USSSA, on how to handle loud and inappropriate music at complexes. (Ritcher)
2. Publish guidance from John Dye on how to handle illegal pitches and include that in a continuing learning discussion. (Morris)
3. Work with John Dye to ensure USSSA does not return protest fees. (Ritcher)
4. 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)
5. 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)
6. Include three umpire mechanics in a continuing learning discussion, with approval from John Dye. (Morris)
7. Receive approval from John Dye to implement the continuing learning discussions. (Morris)
8. Coordinate with John Dye on getting a website designer to improve the professionalism of the SUM website. (Ritcher)

The Action Item table has been updated and is attached.

Attachment Meeting 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	
Mar 7, 2022	Get help on equipment exchange page if needed	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	Publish guidance from John Dye on how to handle illegal pitches and include that in a continuing learning discussion.	Morris	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	Receive approval from John Dye to implement the continuing learning discussions.	Morris	Open	
Jun 6, 2022	Coordinate with John Dye on getting a website designer to improve the professionalism of the SUM website.	Ritcher	Open	
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

Status of UAT Open Items				
Meeting	Open Item	Assignment	Status	Final Disposition
Aug 23, 2021	Confirm new member	Richter	Closed	Joanne Brickwedde has joined the UAT
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