

Summary of August 28, 2023 Umpire Advisory Team Meeting

On August 28, 2023, the Umpire Advisory Team (UAT) held its end-of-season meeting for the 2023 Spring/Summer season. UAT members in attendance were Bryan Richter, President, Joe Holonich, Secretary, Damon Williams, Rick Morris, Bill Chatterton, and Joann Brickwedde.

- Review of Spring Summer Season

There was some discussion about the language in songs played by 18U teams that could be inappropriate for 10U teams on nearby fields to hear. No recommendation or action was identified.

- Game Fees

Last year the UAT reported on the pay differences between United States Specialty Sports Association (USSSA) East Coast Event (ECE) and other tournaments. A non-sanctioned tournament pays umpires \$70 a game cash. Some recreational leagues pay \$80 a game and have shorter days with the day ending at 3:00 pm after three games for \$240. A USSSA day could be 10 to 11 hours or longer with less pay, just \$220 for 4 games. Others youth leagues pay \$70 for a 75-minute game.

Although these games have only one umpire, Softball Umpires of Maryland (SUM) is competing for them from a limited pool of individuals. At times, umpires may choose the higher paying, shorter days. The UAT recommends SUM advocate for a \$10 per game pay raise for umpires to \$65 per game.

The \$65 fee is based on the fee paid and time limits in other USSSA tournaments. For example, Northern Virginia also pays \$55 per game. As discussed later, the Northern Virginia time limit is 80 minutes for an elimination game. Dividing \$55 by 80 minutes you get a per minute rate of approximately \$0.70. Using that rate for a USSSA ECE 90-minute elimination game, the fee should be at a minimum \$63. The pay increase to \$65 is in line with the game rate paid by other organizations when the difference in game times is considered.

- Topics Provided by Umpires

Ball Availability

A concern was raised by an Umpires in Chief (UIC) about the limited number of balls available at a complex. Besides the limited amount of game balls, parents do not always retrieve foul balls so games may at times be delayed due to a lack of balls.

It was noted that this phenomenon appears to be Site Director (SD) dependent. Some SDs tell umpires to make sure balls are retrieved because of limited supply. Other SDs do not, and look for balls on their own. The UAT noted that ball retrieval is not an umpire's responsibility.

The UAT recommends USSSA ECE make sure SDs understand umpires are not responsible for ensuring game balls are retrieved. Consistency is needed across all complexes so SDs understand the SD needs to make sure game balls are retrieved, either by them or by parents.

Game Time Limits

SUM umpires work for different organizations and identified that other organizations have shorter game times. With the increase of teams playing USSSA ECE and the reduced number of umpires, fewer complexes can be used. This means more games get added to fields for complexes where umpires are assigned. That extends the day for umpires, UICs, and SDs.

Examples of game times provided by umpires were the USA tournaments held in Hagerstown. They have 70-minute games. Reducing games by ten minutes would reduce the umpire day by an hour for a field that has six games, and a full game slot for fields with seven games. Similarly, Northern Virginia has a 75-minute time limit for pool play, 80-minute games for elimination games, and 90 minutes for only championship games.

It was recommended that USSSA ECE consider reducing the game times to be more aligned with what other tournaments do. In addition, it was noted to the UAT that the USA tournaments in Hagerstown start games at 8:00 am. The reporting umpire suggested that USSSA ECE also consider this.

Another way discussed for making days more efficient was changing the game ending procedure. The UAT discussed the possibility of having a drop-dead, game-ending procedure for pool play games. Two options discussed were a drop dead at 80 minutes or the game ending at 80 minutes if the home team was winning and at bat but with an absolute drop dead at 90 minutes. This would help start the next game closer to on time. If the 70-minute game time was adopted, drop dead would either be at 70 minutes or 80 minutes absolute.

Ultimately, the UAT believes that if USSSA ECE is going to continue to add teams, some consideration for shortening game times needs to be made. Under the current situation, USSSA ECE just keeps adding teams which means more games. With limited umpires, SUM can only support so many complexes. Thus, more teams and games mean more games on a field and longer days at fewer complexes. Plus, as noted earlier, the pay for a USSSA ECE game is the same pay received in Northern Virginia for shorter games, and less than many youth leagues.

Some consideration needs to be given to adjusting game times so umpires are not working excessively long days. The UAT recommends that pool play games be shortened to 70 minutes and elimination games be 80 minutes.

Use of Back-to-Back Games (plate, plate)

Northern Virginia and USA Hagerstown use back-to-back assignments, e.g., plate and plate. It was suggested that this assignment approach be considered for USSSA ECE games. This would eliminate the need for multiple uniform changes and would increase the efficiency of starting games by having both umpires on the field. It would also help ensure umpires get their full break time.

Discussions on this topic centered on two considerations. One was the umpire working two back-to-back plate games in the afternoon heat in late June and July. The other concern was a team who had issues with an umpire's strike zone would have a second game with the same plate umpire. This could result in some acrimony in the second games. Based on these concerns, the UAT did not think moving to this scheduling approach, back-to-back plates, should be done.

Game Declines

Game declines are not only an issue for the assigner but also impact umpires. When blocks are not set and then assigned games are declined, the assigner must scramble to cover the games. In addition, the number of games umpires must officiate in a day may increase because there are no available umpires to cover the declined games. The UAT is a strong supporter of umpires setting their blocks and not declining games if they have not blocked.

Although the UAT has no authority to require umpires to set their blocks, if they are not blocked, then they should not decline assignments. The UAT encourages umpires to understand the impact declining games has not only on the assigner but also their fellow umpires, the UIC and SD. Please be considerate of how your actions impact a large swath of people.

Use of Slow-pitch Umpires

Because of a shortage of umpires, Blast at the Beach had to use slow-pitch umpires. A concern was raised that the slow-pitch umpires did not know fast-pitch rules or mechanics plus wore shorts on the bases. No slow-pitch umpire was assigned the plate. The concern was slow-pitch umpires made officiating the game more difficult and did not make a professional appearance.

The UAT recognized that the shortage of SUM umpires is so severe slow-pitch umpires had to be used. This highlights the importance of all SUM umpires taking an opportunity to recruit every chance they get. If SUM umpires know of any person interested, they should get their email and forward that email to John Rimmell. Do not tell the interested person to email us. Often, they forget or do not, so get their email. If we have their email, SUM will be in touch with the person well before January training.

If slow-pitch umpires need to be used in the future, the UAT recommends a short training session before the tournament. This session can be an electronic session or in person. It would familiarize the slow-pitch umpires with the fast-pitch rules and mechanics.

Consideration of Other Umpires

Several concerns were raised about umpires not starting games in an efficient manner. Examples offered were waiting until the plate umpire returned to camp, or when assigned multiple back-to-back games, taking breaks, changing positions every game, and eating lunch. These delay the start of games and impact umpires who have games tied to a field where umpires are not working in an efficient manner. It also extends the day for the UIC and SD.

The UAT advocates that SUM umpires be ready for games in a timely manner. Arrive at the field well in advance of game time so you can start the day early if the coaches agree. Be at the field 10-15 minutes before the end of the current game. This will ensure that you and the current base umpire start the next game as quickly as possible. Finally, if you are assigned a full day of back-to-back games, recognize that taking breaks, changing every game, or eating lunch could delay other fields. Be considerate and keep games moving to help your fellow umpires, the UIC and the SD.

- Open Item Status

The attachment contains the UAT Action Items List. The status is provided in the table. The last three open action items were considered closed by the UAT.

- **Remmell Response to Various Items**

In the June meeting, the UAT discussed several topics related to scheduling and umpire conduct. In response to those discussions, John Remmel provided some additional information.

UIC Asking Umpires to Get Scores

John Remmel indicated he was the Bachman UIC who asks umpires to report scores. He noted that the SD was new, and he was looking to help the SD. He said this was a unique request.

Although this was a unique situation for John, several UAT members noted that they were asked by other UICs at different tournaments to obtain scores. Because of that, the UAT recommends that SUM decide on whether umpires need to report scores. UAT members felt that reporting scores is not the responsibility of the umpires. The UAT feels that USSSA ECE needs to make sure SDs understand they need to retrieve the scores from the different fields.

If SUM adopts a policy that umpires should report scores, then this will be done across all tournaments and not just for certain SDs. Under the current procedure, it is not the umpire's job to report scores but still they are being asked to do so by some SDs. There is inconsistency across complexes. SUM should either establish a policy that umpires report scores, or make USSSA ECE ensure SDs obtain the scores independent of SUM umpires.

Two-Break Requests

John noted that a request to not schedule an umpire on two-break days is not honored. The UAT agrees with this approach and has no other input.

Umpire Leaving the Field

John Remmel reported that the umpire leaving the field was disciplined. The UAT felt that SUM needed to develop a policy that outlined what disciplinary actions would be taken for different offenses by umpires. It was agreed among the UAT members that a strong, written disciplinary policy was needed to address behavior issues.

Three Umpires for Championship

John suggested that championship games use only two umpires not three. The UAT believes keeping three umpires for championship should continue. However, the UAT recommends that SUM develop a way to train umpires on three-umpire mechanics. This includes both a formal training session and continuing training through Rick Morris' training updates.

- **Other Topics**

New Training Coordinator

Rick Morris announced he is retiring as the Training Coordinator. Joe Holonich will replace him.

A UAT member announced his resignation from the UAT and provided a recommendation on a replacement. The UAT agreed with the recommendation and Bryan Ritcher will be contacting the replacement. All UAT members acknowledged the resigning UAT member had been a strong contributor to the UAT and will be missed.

- **Next UAT Meeting**

It was agreed that the next UAT meeting would be November 13, 2023. SUM members email the UAT at uatumpires@gmail.com with any topics they would like the UAT to consider.

Attachment: Status of UAT Action Items				
Meeting	Open Item	Assignment	Status	Final Disposition
Jun 12, 2023	Contact USSSA East Coast Events digital staff to discuss umpire video	Morris	Close	No feedback from SUM to pursue this was given so the UAT considers this closed.
Jun 6, 2022	Include three umpire mechanics in a continuing learning discussion, with approval from John Dye.	Morris	Closed	This was discussed with SUM but no feedback to pursue it was given so the UAT considers this closed.
Jun 6, 2022	Coordinate with John Dye on getting a website designer to improve the professionalism of the SUM website.	Ritcher	Closed	No action from SUM has been taken. The UAT views this as a decision not to pursue an update.
Jun 6, 2022	Obtain guidance from John Dye, working with USSSA, on how to handle loud and inappropriate music at complexes.	Ritcher	Closed	Umpires should take the initiative and stop any music that has inappropriate language in it.
Jun 6, 2022	Work with John Dye to ensure USSSA does not return protest fees.	Ritcher	Closed	John Dye has communicated this to Andy Wisk
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	Closed	USSSA East Coast Events is developing a database
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	Closed	The new database will provide an effective tool for addressing parents who are repeat problems
Jun 6, 2022	Publish guidance from John Dye on how to handle illegal pitches and include that in a continuing learning discussion.	Morris	Closed	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.
Apr 19, 2021	New pictures for UAT members	Morris	Closed	New pictures have collage has been developed

Attachment: Status of UAT Action Items				
Meeting	Open Item	Assignment	Status	Final Disposition
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