

Summary of February 23, 2023 Umpire Advisory Team Meeting

On February 20, 2023, the Umpire Advisory Team (UAT) held its first meeting of 2023. UAT members in attendance were Bryan Richter, President, Joe Holonich, Secretary, Damon Williams, Rick Morris, Bill Chatterton, Joann Brickwedde, and Jim Morton.

- Report on Meeting with Andy Wisk on Umpire Abuse

Rick Morris and Joe Holonich reported that John Dye was working with Andy Wisk and USSSA East Coast Events on developing a database to track coaches, teams, and fans who repeatedly are ejected or who cause inappropriate situations during games. Because the development of the database was a recommendation from the UAT for having a mechanism to track repeat occurrences, the UAT agreed there was no longer a need to meet with Andy Wisk and the USSSA East Coast Events staff.

- USSSA East Coast Events Response to Lessons Learned

Rick Morris presented the USSSA East Coast Events response to several UAT recommendations.

A. Increased game fee

USSSA East Coast Events did not provide for any pay increase in game fees for 2023. Andy Wisk noted that determining the game fees was done a year in advance. The UAT believed it was worth John Dye asking USSSA East Coast Events if the current topic of game fees raised now was sufficient for raising fees a year in advance for consideration next year.

B. More efficient game endings

The UAT provided several recommendations, originally suggested by umpires, on ways to end games that would help make game time management more efficient. Suggestions included using the flip-flop rule currently applied in USSSA slow pitch tournaments, drop dead at the game clock on Saturdays, as well as having a drop-dead time for recreational all-star and "C" level teams to bat once game time has gone over an hour of play. Rick reported that Andy Wisk was considering the recommendations.

C. Heat Index

Heat index became an issue during the Howard County Summer Sizzler tournament in July 2022. Because of high humidity and temperatures, at least one complex shortened game times by 15 minutes on Sunday. The reduction in time was not cleared with USSSA East Coast Events. However, the weather conditions that day did raise the question about what is the right heat index policy that should be used.

The UAT developed a comparison of the heat indices for several different organizations in Maryland as well as the heat index for the Occupational Health and Safety Administration, which is nationwide. This was presented to USSSA East Coast Events.

Andy Wisk noted that the decision on any heat situation during the Howard County Summer Sizzler would be made by Howard County who was running the tournament. He further noted that the Howard County and USSSA East Coast Event heat indices were the same. However, Andy committed to look at the evaluation presented by the UAT to see if a change in the heat index policy was appropriate.

D. Back-to-Back Games

The UAT provided an example of at least one tournament where teams scheduled in back-to-back games at different fields significantly impacted the schedule of games on three fields. Rick Morris stated that Andy Wisk said that situation was unique and a mistake. It was agreed that Joe Holonich would serve as a collection point for the 2023 seasons where umpires could provide documentation of complexes where back-to-back games had impacted the schedule at their complex. If there were a significant number of such scheduling “mistakes,” Joe would provide it to John Dye for him to present at the 2023 end-of-season meeting with USSSA East Coast Events.

E. Paid If Waiting for Weather Conditions

It was reported that Andy Wisk would not agree to paying umpires for time waiting. The UAT recommendation was, if a weather delay lasted more than one hour, umpires at that complex would receive one game fee of wait pay. The answer was a hard no.

F. Game Fee Increase if Gas Is Above a Certain Price

A recommendation was made that the game fee be increased by \$1.00 or \$2.00 if the price of gasoline went above a certain amount. USSSA East Coast Events did not agree to implement this recommendation.

- Negative Cheering: Is there a need for a USSSA East Policy?

Background: Some umpires do not like the ball, ball, ball cheer and view it as negative cheering. Other umpires are not bothered by it. The question is, is it the responsibility of umpires to decide if negative cheering can be done or should USSSA East Coast Events take a position and issue directions to coaches.

It was agreed there is no consistent policy on negative cheering. Some umpires and Umpires in Chiefs (UICs) do not like it and stop it on their field or at their complex. However, the UAT questioned if umpires wanted to inject themselves into policing cheering. The UAT consensus was if the cheering creates an issue, then umpire should stop it but should not be responsible for policing cheering just because it is not seen as positive.

Umpires should not have to address fan cheering. If it gets to the point where parents from one team are yelling at parents from another team, the umpires on the field should get the UIC or Site Director involved. However, if issues with cheering start with the teams on the field, then the umpires can and should address it under good sportsmanship.

Ultimately, it was agreed that umpires do not need to be the cheering police and mandate what cheers a team can do. If problems do arise, like on the field, because of cheering, the UAT felt the new process of tracking problem coaches, teams, and fans would help identify any repetitive problems. Therefore, it was agreed, umpires do not need to manage what cheers are done, either on the field or in the stands, unless they lead to acrimony on the field.

- UAT Presentation at Annual Meeting

The UAT reviewed the draft presentation for the annual meeting. It was agreed that Bryan Ritcher, as UAT president, would make the presentation. The UAT felt providing some information to the membership on what the UAT did during 2023 could help members better understand the role of the UAT.

Joe Holonich was charged with sending the presentation to John Dye and asking John to schedule Bryan early due to his afternoon games. Joe was also tasked with establishing an email for the UAT. This would allow umpires to provide input to the UAT anytime during the year. The new email address is UATumpires@gmail.com.

- **Expanded Presentation on Professionalism at Annual SUM Meeting**

The UAT agreed that the topics on professionalism raised by umpires during the 2022 season should be included in the annual meeting presentation on professionalism. The following topics were provided to John Dye prior to the UAT meeting and he indicated he would provide them to Reggie Grant. Reggie was last year's Umpire of the Year and will be making the professionalism presentation this year.

- a. Arrival time before games
- b. Be at field before the end of the previous game to keep games moving
- c. Work to be efficient between games to avoid cutting too much in partner's break
- d. Appearance including pressed pants and unkept appearance on the field
- e. Superfluous and unnecessary comments
- f. Duties during game; cleaning pitching plate and bases
- g. Avoid talking with each other during game

- **Review of Action Items**

The UAT reviewed its action item list. The following items were closed. The basis for the closure is reported in the attached table.

1. Obtain guidance from John Dye, working with USSSA, on how to handle loud and inappropriate music at complexes.
2. 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.
3. Get additional details beyond the rule book from John Dye on how to handle unruly parents and include it in a continuing learning discussion.
4. Work with John Dye to ensure USSSA does not return protest fees.

- **Next UAT Meeting**

It was agreed that the next UAT meeting would be June 12, 2023. Members can email the UAT with any topics they would like it to consider.

Status of UAT Action Items				
Meeting	Open Item	Assignment	Status	Final Disposition
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	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
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.

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