

Summary of November 13, 2023 Umpire Advisory Team Meeting

On November 13, 2023, the Umpire Advisory Team (UAT) held its final meeting for 2023. UAT members in attendance were Bryan Richter, President, Joe Holonich, Secretary, Joann Brickwedde, Bill Chatterton, Jim Morton, Rick Morris, and the new UAT member Scott Snyder. John Rimmell attended as a guest representing Softball Umpires of Maryland (SUM). President Richter called the meeting to order.

Feedback from annual USSSA ECE [United States Specialty Sports Association, East Coast Events] meeting

John Rimmell provided feedback on how the UAT topics were addressed. Overall, based on the information provided by John, UAT members felt that a significant amount was accomplished, well beyond what was expected. The UAT members thanked John and John Dye for their efforts in raising the topics with USSSA ECE. Also, UAT members noted that USSSA ECE should be recognized for its responsiveness to the concerns raised. A copy of the talking points the UAT provided to SUM to use at the meeting is in the attachment.

Limited Availability of Umpires

John Rimmell reported that limited umpire availability was discussed by SUM and acknowledged as an issue by USSSA ECE. It was reported that recruitment efforts were covered including word of mouth, the SUM Facebook page and website, and the recent fliers posted on the Facebook site. USSSA ECE was provided a copy of the flyer and would be sending it to coaches and organizations registered with USSSA ECE.

Because the lack of umpires means less complexes can be used and more games per field are needed, USSSA ECE will be implementing new time limits for games. Pool play games will be 75 minutes instead of 80 while elimination games will be 80 minutes instead of 90. Only the championship game will be 90 minutes long.

Consideration was given to shortening the times more, but then additional complexes would have to be used and there were not enough umpires to cover more complexes. The new time limits matched Northern Virginia (NoVa). Using them began in Fall 2023 tournaments.

One suggestion from the UAT to help with umpire availability was to use only one person on some games. John Rimmell reported that USSSA ECE wanted to maintain two umpires on games. However, there was agreement that in the summer when the tournaments are large, a single umpire could be used for 10C/12C and 10 Recreational All Stars (RAS)/12 RAS.

One factor that heavily influences the decision on how many umpires to use is what other tournaments use. If teams are playing in other tournaments and getting two umpires, then they may look at USSSA ECE as a lesser level of play if only one umpire is used. Thus, the decision was made to remain with two umpires on all but a few types of games.

John Rimmell was asked about a rumor that he had requested USSSA ECE schedule eight games a day on fields. The reason offered was John had umpires at a site, so this was a way to cover more games without needing more umpires. John said he has never asked that there be eight game days to help with umpire availability. He reported that on large summer tournaments, USSSA ECE will schedule eight game days because of the large number of teams playing but he does not request that.

Another ancillary topic covered was the use of the new form to report ejections. John Remmell reported that USSSA ECE has been effectively using the form. USSSA ECE events have used the written input from umpires to contact the team coach or organization and report the behavior issue. Several organizations have suspended coaches because of the information USSSA ECE provided. This was a UAT/SUM recommendation in 2023 and appears to be having success.

Game Ending Procedure

A recommendation from the UAT was to shorten games as well as look at other options to end games more efficiently. It was reported that USSSA ECE agreed to shorter games and reduced game times were discussed earlier.

Implementing a drop-dead process was discussed with USSSA ECE. USSSA ECE does not want to implement any process using drop-dead time limits. Also, USSSA ECE committed to look at options to end 10C/12C and 10 RAS/12 RAS games in a timelier manner. The game ending process for 12U open and above would not change.

USSSA ECE will be working with the Maryland lead for C/RAS tournaments to see what option could be adopted. Once one was identified, it would be discussed with all state directors in USSSA, Region 1. All state directors in USSSA ECE would have to agree to the approach before it could be adopted.

USSSA East Coast Events Pays Less

The UAT developed data showing that SUM umpires working USSSA ECE games were paid less for time they worked games. USSSA ECE agreed to a new game fee of \$60 in 2024. For games that have a single umpire, the fee would be \$90 in 2024. The \$60 per game fee in 2024 will be paid in Maryland, Virginia, Pennsylvania West, and Delaware.

In addition, USSSA ECE is considering an approach used in NoVa where umpires are paid the full weekend fee even if they lose games because of weather conditions. In NoVa, umpires are given a check for the full weekend. They are told to keep any overpay resulting from games being cancelled due to weather. One advantage NoVa has is it does not return game fees, so they have the money available to pay the umpires the full weekend fee. USSSA ECE is exploring implementing a similar or modified option for Maryland tournaments.

Excessive Long Wait Times for Weather

USSSA ECE believes that excessive wait times at complexes are rare. However, USSSA ECE was in favor of providing some compensation when umpires must wait an excessive amount of time due to a weather delay. There is an action for USSSA ECE and SUM to develop a plan that would establish what criterion or criteria would be used to determine an excessive delay. If met, then USSSA ECE would agree to a half game stipend.

In addition, USSSA ECE noted that it would make sure Site Directors (SDs) understood that they, working with the Umpire in Chief (UIC), had the full authority to terminate play at a complex if weather conditions warranted. This has always been the case but appeared not to be recognized. Thus, USSSA ECE committed to make sure the SDs understood the authority they and the UICs had.

Mandatory Training for Head Coaches

USSSA ECE agreed that some form of training for coaches would be beneficial. The concept being considered was preparing short, instructional videos lasting two to three minutes on a

given rules topic. USSSA ECE would email coaches on the availability of the videos so they could view them and become more knowledgeable of the rules. SUM and USSSA ECE are working on establishing the process for doing this.

Maryland Umpires Working in Virginia

The three reasons umpires give for working in NoVa were discussed. It was agreed that the quality of fields was an issue but one where USSSA ECE had little control. North Laurel and Fairland were identified as the two worse parks for parking and field quality. It was reported that Centennial Park will be closed this year for a complete renovation that involves making all fields artificial. John Rimmell also reported that Howard County will be charging very large fees for field use starting next year.

John Rimmell informed the UAT that John Dye is investigating options for expediting pay, another reason reported for umpires working in NoVa. One option being considered was direct deposit for pay. Instead of a check being mailed, SUM would deposit the weekly payment directly in the account of the umpire who had a checking account. Because of the large number of games SUM covers and the need to use umpires from out of state, paying umpires on the weekend they work was not practical. SUM did look at using Arbiter Pay but it was found to be costs prohibitive.

As part of the discussion, out of state umpires working in Maryland was covered. John Rimmell noted that he has had to get umpires from several states including Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Florida, etc. Because these umpires travel a distance at their own expense to help SUM cover its games, John does give them more games to help compensate for their availability.

Another discussion related to umpires was the use of three umpires in championship games. The concern with three umpire mechanics was it is not used often, and umpires do not fully know that mechanic. John Rimmell informed the UAT that tournaments in Florida and New Jersey use two umpires on championship games except for 16U and 18U championships.

Part of this discussion was centered on how to do three umpire mechanics training. A suggestion was made to identify a group of individuals who could be assigned three umpire championship games. These individuals must attend a training session on three umpire mechanics.

They would then be placed in a pool of umpires that would be used for championships. If an umpire did not attend the training, they would not be placed in the pool of championship officials. The action taken was to consider how, and whether, to use three umpires on championship games, and what levels would get that such as only 16U and 18U games.

Also covered was a question of whether experienced umpires need a refresher on the rules. It was agreed that it was worth umpires attending a refresher on the rules but no real decision on whether to do it was made.

Finally, John Rimmell noted that USSSA ECE will be providing a refreshment fund to UICs starting next year. UICs can use the funds to purchase limited amounts of water, sports drinks, and snacks. It would be the equivalent of one half a game fee.

Training

A detailed discussion on the recording of the winter training sessions was held. The concept was that the videos could be used by umpires who could not attend the winter training to

prepare them to work later in the season. An example was the use of college players who might not be able to attend the winter training. These umpires might be able to work starting after the end of the school year. Having the videos available to them could provide them with the training needed to umpire.

Overall, the UAT did not see how this would work. Many individuals might not necessarily view the videos or could play the videos while doing other things. The length of the videos could pose an attention issue too. Individuals may want to watch 10 or 12 hours of training videos.

As an alternative, the UAT discussed the use of an abbreviated training for college players. It was believed that the players have a fundamental understanding of the game so the abbreviated training could focus on unique perspectives in the rules. An example was the lineup and the use of roster batting. This training could be done on two weeknights in May via Zoom or Google meets. The decision was that this option would be further explored along with the option to use videos.

Thoughts on year

It was agreed that the detailed discussion of the SUM/USSSA ECE meeting covered this agenda item.

UAT Presentation at Annual Meeting

The UAT agreed that given the success in USSSA ECE being responsive to the concerns it raised, a presentation at the annual meeting would be worth doing. It could demonstrate to SUM members that the UAT was effective in advocating for them, that SUM had presented the topics to USSSA ECE, and that USSSA ECE was responsive. The UAT will recommend to John Dye that an agenda item be added to the annual meeting for a UAT presentation.

Other topics

No additional topics for discussion were identified.

Next meeting

It was agreed that the next UAT meeting should be prior to the annual kickoff meeting on Saturday, March 2, 2024. The agreed upon date for the next UAT meeting was set as February 12, 2024. SUM members can email the UAT at uatumpires@gmail.com with any topics they would like the UAT to consider.

Adjourn

At this time the meeting was adjourned.

Attachment

Softball Umpires of Maryland Talking Points for the United States Specialty Sports Association, East Coast Events Annual Meeting

Limited Umpire Availability

Background:

- Softball Umpires of Maryland (SUM) continues to aggressively recruit new umpires, but the results are limited.
- This means the number of complexes must be limited too. Less complexes results in more games per field per day at each complex.
- More games per field means excessively long days for umpires. For example, on some weekends umpires are emailed and informed SUM was looking for umpires that were willing to work six or seven games straight, and that SUM had a complex staffed solely with Pennsylvania umpires. Often, working umpires six or seven games in a row is the only option for SUM to staff all the fields.
- Other tournaments have shorter game times; USA is 70 minutes for both pool and elimination, Northern Virginia (NoVA) has 75 minutes in pool, 80 minutes in elimination, and 90-minute only for championships. Umpires working NoVa games report that Maryland teams do not have a problem with these time limits.
- Outside of tournaments some umpires have been asked to do 2-umpire youth games paying \$60 to \$75 cash at the plate. Usually, these are 2 and 3 game days so an umpire can be in and out in less than 6 hours with more pay than spending an entire 8 to 12 hours on the tournament field.

Recommendation:

Consider one or more of the following recommendations.

1. Reduce game times to 70 minutes. This saves 10 minutes a game and reduces the day by one game slot for umpires, Umpires in Chiefs (UICs), and Site Directors (SDs).
2. Limit the number of games at a complex such that no game starts later than 4:30 pm except on rare occasions such as the state championship. This would require some proactive management of the number of teams that could enter a tournament.
3. SUM will assign a single umpire on all "C" and Recreational All Star (RAS) games.

Game Ending Procedure

Background: Under the current game ending procedure, games may go well beyond the established time limit. This causes delays in the following games as well as extends excessively long days for umpires, UICs and SDs.

Recommendations:

Consider one or more of the following recommendations.

1. Establish a drop-dead game ending procedure for elimination games.
2. Use a modified drop-dead procedure with a drop-dead period of 10 minutes after the game time limit has been achieved. For example, in an 80-minute elimination game, when the timer sounds, the umpire informs the coaches that the game will drop dead at 90 minutes. If

3. the game drops dead at 90 minutes, the score would revert to the previously completed inning.
4. Keep pool play at 80 minutes but at 70 minutes the clock sounds and the umpire would announce to both coaches that there are only 10 minutes left in the contest. At that point the umpire would limit time outs by the teams if in the umpire judgement the timeout is being requested as a tactic to stall.
5. Look at the use of the flip flop rule applied in United States Specialty Sports Association (USSSA) slow pitch. If the visiting team is leading by more than an established number of runs, say three, at the completion of the 3rd inning or more, then the home team would bat a second time and become the visiting team.

USSSA East Coast Events Pays Less

Background

- NoVA pays \$55 for a 75-minute pool and 80-minute elimination. This is approximately \$0.70 per minute for pool and elimination. A 90-minute USSSA East Coast Events (USSSA ECE) elimination game would be \$63 while a pool play game would be \$56.
- USA Softball pays \$55 for 70 minutes. Both pool play and elimination games are 70 minutes. This is \$0.80 per minute or \$64 for an 80-minute pool game and \$72 for a 90-minute elimination game.
- Some non-sanctioned tournaments pay \$70 for 75-minute games. This would be \$0.90 per minute or \$72 for an 80-minute elimination game and \$81 for a 90-minute elimination game.
- A few youth leagues are paying \$80 for 90 minutes no new inning, drop dead at 105 minutes with games ending at 3:00 pm or 5:00 pm. Paying \$80 for no new inning at 90 minutes is \$0.90 per minute or \$72 for a USSSA pool game and \$81 for a USSSA elimination game.
- SUM must compete with all these other pay rates as well as shorter games and days for the same umpires. Although youth games and non-sanctioned tournaments are a single umpire, SUM must still compete against those groups for a limited pool of expertise.
- High school and other games pay \$80 or \$85. SUM competes against these games also.

Attachment 1 contains two recent emails received by a SUM umpire that provides documentation of what is being paid to other umpires. They also show the difficulty all organizations are having assigning games. The following table summarizes the fees from different organizations.

Fee Comparison Table					
Organization	Fee	Time Limit	Rate	USSSA 80 Minute	USSSA 90 Minute
USSSA ECE	\$55			\$55	\$55
USA	\$55	70	\$0.80	\$64	\$72
NoVa	\$55	75	\$0.70	\$56	
NoVA	\$55	80	\$0.70		\$63
Nonsanction	\$70	75	\$0.90	\$72	\$81
Youth 1	\$70	75	\$0.90	\$72	\$81
Youth 2	\$80	90	\$0.90	\$72	\$81
High School, etc.	\$85	120	\$0.67	\$57	\$64

Recommendation:

A substantial raise in pay is needed to keep the quality and quantity of umpires to cover all the complexes SUM must service. A pay increase of \$65 is needed for 2024.

Excessive Long Wait Times for Weather

Background: Some days, umpires are required to wait excessively long times during weather delays. These delays can result in adding several additional hours to an already long day. Consideration needs to be given to either compensating the umpires for their wait time or allowing the UIC to unilaterally decide to end the day for the umpires if the wait is excessively long. One umpire reported he had to wait four hours for games to resume.

One factor is that SDs take a long time to make decisions on when to cancel games. Many times, the umpires and coaches are told that the SD cannot make that call, and must wait for USSSA ECE management to decide. Umpires have offered examples of sitting in their cars for over an hour in pouring rain, the fields are under water, and they are told that USSSA ECE has not yet decided.

When an umpire accepts a schedule, it prevents that umpire from working elsewhere or during that timeline even enjoying personal times. Umpires commit to work the schedule and should not be required to wait excessively long times that extend their already long days. If you were called in to a manufacturing plant to assist in unloading a delivery and it never showed the company would still pay you.

Recommendation:

1. If the wait time exceeds one game time or 80 minutes, the umpires should receive compensation of a game fee for the wait or the UIC should have the authority to allow the umpires to leave and not complete the remainder of their games.
2. Provide more autonomy to UICs and SDs to make the cancellation call at their site. Although USSSA ECE has previously said they have this authority, it seems like there is a hesitation to use it. There still appears to be an unwritten procedure that USSSA ECE headquarters must be consulted regardless of what weather and field conditions are at a particular complex.

Mandatory Training for Head Coaches

Background: Many of the problems umpires have with coaches is the coaches lack of understanding of the rules.

Recommendation: Consideration should be given to requiring all head coaches to attend a mandatory training session on the rules. Assistant coaches would be invited to attend but their attendance would not be mandatory. The session would not be as lengthy as the one given to umpires, but it would cover all the fundamentals of the rules.

This would help ensure that head coaches have a better understanding of what the rules are. Training could be given multiple times during the year, once at the start of the season in early March, once in June for RAS teams entering tournaments, and once in August when new teams are formed in preparation for the fall season.

Maryland Umpires Working in Virginia

Background: Ten to twelve Maryland umpires are consistently working in Virginia. If 12 umpires do not work in Maryland, that is one complex that cannot be covered. The reasons given for

working in Virginia are: 1) the fields are better quality and better kept, and 2) the teams are better, and you get to officiate higher quality softball. Not only do these reasons take away umpires from SUM but they also take away potential customers for USSSA ECE. One umpire was offered \$65 a game to work a weekend in Virginia.

Recommendation: 1. USSSA ECE should work with the different parks departments to find a way to improve the quality of fields. Often, the fields are in such poor condition that it is like officiating in baby powder. Virginia umpires report that they hardly clean the bases there but you can barely see the bases in Maryland parks because of the excessive amount of dirt.

2. Consider working to keep more competitive teams by eliminating "Open" tournaments. Instead, for teams that want to play more competitive softball, restrict open tournaments to only teams registered as A or B. Allowing C or RAS teams in open tournaments reduces the quality of games for teams that want to be competitive. Thus, teams head to Virginia where they can play against teams of the same caliber.

Attachment to SUM/USSSA ECE Talking Points

Recent Emails on Needing Umpires

My Fellow Umpires;

Thank you for your well wishes, very much appreciated!!!

DOUBLE-HEADER: \$70.00 cash per game

10/08, Sun, 12:00 PM, Alpha Ridge Park, Marriottsville, MD

Please let me know asap!

Joe,,, ... Dave Conroy gave me your contact info to see if you could help us out.... I am in need of a few umpires for Saturday and Sunday.. A few guys stepped out on me... We are hosting a 56 team tournament and actually having another on October 21/22 with over 60 teams but getting harder and harder to find umps.... Our games are being played in Westminster and Hampstead... I pay \$70/game cash ... If you have anyone that could help us out it would be much appreciated Thanks