



**Northampton Baseball & Softball**

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# **Northampton Baseball & Softball**

## **2017 Umpires Manual**

*Youth athletics built on integrity, perseverance,  
community, character & teamwork,  
with a passion to back it up*

## INTRODUCTION:

This publication is written to assist Northampton Baseball & Softball umpires to become better umpires. The intent and hope is that this handbook will prove to be a useful tool for you, the umpire. Does this handbook contain every bit of information that you need to be successful as an umpire? Absolutely not! This handbook is only meant to augment any training you might take and game-time experience.

It is not meant to be all-inclusive. For example, the umpire must be familiar with the Little League Official Rules. This is not a recognized Little League rulebook. At no time should this publication be utilized in place of the Little League Official Rules for a game decision. Copies of the rulebook are available to all umpires.

## GENERAL EXPECTATIONS:

*Know the Rule Book.* Read, and re-read if necessary, the Little League rule book. Study the rules and become as expert as you can on them. Some umpires study the rulebook and then look for ways to put their newfound knowledge to use. They are looking for trouble - a blend of common sense and rules knowledge makes for a good umpire.

*Dress Professionally.* Have a neat appearance and wear your umpire shirt and other clothes and equipment appropriate for umpiring.

*Act Professionally.* Pay attention. Act like you want to be there. Realize that you are at the game for an official duty and that it is not a time for socializing with coaches, players, or spectators.

*Be Dependable.* Make sure you are available to umpire a game before telling the umpire coordinator that you are available. If you are asked to umpire a game and commit to do so, prioritize that commitment and follow through. If a conflict does arise, inform the umpire coordinator as soon as possible.

*Be on Time.* Umpires should be completely dressed and ready to take the field at least 10 minutes prior to the scheduled start time of the game.

*Hustle on Every Play!* It's not just players who need to hustle. Know where to move to be in the best position to call the play, and hustle to get there. You may misapply a rule or blow a judgement call, but you should never fail to hustle. To err is human, to not hustle is inexcusable.

*Be in the Proper Position.* Quite often a play will call itself if you are in proper position. It is impossible to make a call without guessing if you have the wrong angle on a play. Study and practice until you know what position you should be in and how to get there. Get as close as you can without interfering with the play. **Three important factors to remember in positioning are ANGLE, DISTANCE, AND TIMING. Angle is more important than distance!!**

*Use a Strong Voice.* A good strong voice is essential in umpiring. The voice tone, pitch, and volume help to make calls more convincing. A voice that is clear, positive, and authoritative is an asset in communicating. Talk slowly and use a slightly deeper voice when umpiring than you do in your everyday life. Make calls using clear signals and an assertive voice so that both dugouts and scorers can hear.

*Take Your Time and Get It Right.* Calling a play quickly does not sell it. Hustle to a good position, stop to view the play, wait for the play to complete itself, think about the call, and only then make the call using a good voice and signal.

*To Err is Human.* Umpires are human. Missed pitches or errors in judgment will happen. Umpires should do their best to have as few as possible, but when you boot a call or miss a pitch, do not resolve to even the score. Once called that is it - it's over and done. A missed pitch or a booted call is just that. It's missed and gone forever. Don't give them one in the future.

Work with Your Fellow Ump(s). Cooperate with your fellow umpires and help each other. In general, it's a good idea for the field ump to also keep track of outs, strikes, and balls. Don't hesitate to call "my time" and ask for assistance from your fellow umpire. Don't hesitate to ask for assistance if you are blocked out on a play. Don't hesitate to ask for assistance if you are uncertain as to a rule. The main objective is to have all decisions ultimately correct from the umpires as a team.

Be Consistent. As bad as it may seem, teams would rather have umpires who are consistently bad than those who are inconsistent. Players can adjust to umpires who call strikes on all eye-high pitches, but they cannot adjust to those who call the pitch a strike one time and a ball the next. When an umpire is inconsistent, pitchers don't know how to pitch and batters don't when to swing.

Establish a Consistent Timing and Rhythm. Credibility is important in umpiring. Everything you do with your voice, facial expressions, and body movements contributes to your credibility. If you change the timing or rhythm of your voice, or offer some change in your signal which is perceived to be different than intended or desired, your call may have been correct but it will be that much harder to sell. You must practice to develop smooth timing and rhythm in your voice and signals so they are the same on each pitch. A called third strike does, however, require a bigger call than one or two, but the timing must be the same.

Keep Your Cool. When everyone else around you is losing his or her heads, YOU MUST REMAIN CALM. As the stress increases in any situation, your poise must increase accordingly for you to be able to control the game.

Hear Only What Needs To Be Heard. When you have a close play where a runner is called out, or if you call out a batter on strikes and he says something under his breath as he walks away, ignore it unless he uses a profanity that can be heard by others or gets personal in a way that questions your integrity. The umpire who has to have the last word, or who has rabbit ears, will not be respected nor accepted. Some things are better off ignored.

Listening Skills. If you allow a manager to come out to discuss a play, allow him to have his say. Listen calmly and without interruption. He will soon talk himself out if you do not add to the conversation. This will allow you time to collect your thoughts and then explain yourself properly.

Make the Signal Match the Type of Play. Use very basic conservative signals when plays are obvious to everyone. But, when a play is close and you need to be convincing, use strong, high energy signals that are convincing and yet not embarrassing to the player involved.

The Golden Rule. No umpire should ever criticize another umpire's decision.

# Look, Act, and Talk Like an Umpire

If you look, act, and talk like you belong there; you'll have a better chance of being accepted by the managers, coaches, players, and spectators.

## TIPS:

Here are a few tips that the most skilled of umpires follow, but are easy to adopt by even a novice official:

- Obvious calls don't need to be made. For instance, when the batter swings and misses, you don't vocalize the call - simply use your strike mechanic. Everyone saw the play; vocalizing the call does nothing more than put the batter in a spotlight they'd rather not be in. If it's for strike three, an almost nonchalant strike three gesture as the batter heads back to the dugout is all that's needed.
- Don't grant every defensive player's request for time. If a defensive player wants time simply to ensure his/her return throw to the pitcher cannot result in runners advancing, you are within your rights not to grant time. The same holds true for the offense. There is no reason to grant time to the batter after each and every pitch. Make them stay in the box and keep the game moving. The rules say the pitch can't be delivered until the batter is set; anything else and you have a quick pitch. Also, remember not to call time until you're sure playing action has ceased. Too many umpires have granted time only to turn around and see a runner streaking for the next base. You'll have a hard time explaining to a manager why his/her runner's advance has been nullified because the shortstop needed time to tie his/her shoe.
- Take off your mask only when necessary. If you peel off your mask, follow the flight of every foul ball, wait for it to hit the ground, then give the catcher a new ball and put your mask back on, you'll find yourself working a lot of long games. If the ball is so obviously foul that the catcher doesn't even come out of his/her crouch, keep your mask on, give him/her a baseball/softball, and get play moving again.
- Keep the game moving. Expect players to hustle on and off the field between half-innings. Often pitchers don't need the full allotment of warmup pitches, particularly if there has been no pitching change. Don't get distracted talking with the other umpires, managers, coaches, players or spectators and lose your focus on keeping the game moving.

## THE PLATE MEETING:

Before every game, the umpires conduct a plate meeting. This meeting should start five minutes before scheduled game start time.

Call the managers of the two teams to the plate area of the field. It is up to the umpires if they will allow coaches at the plate meeting as well.

Introduce yourselves to the managers.

Go over the ground rules for the field, including any issues with the field (such as overhanging trees, holes in the fence, dead ball zones, etc). Make any rulings necessary on any disputed ground rules.

This meeting is also a good time to lay out **your** ground rules. Those rules being that you will not tolerate any behavior, verbal or otherwise, which is inappropriate or in violation of the rules, nor will you tolerate any "chirping" about judgment calls.

Make sure you have a sufficient supply of game balls.

Finish the meeting. Don't drag it out.

## **COMMUNICATION - THE LINE BETWEEN COACHING AND UMPIRING:**

Umpires can play a role in the development of players, especially in the way they handle specific situations and people in games. It will have an impact on the positive or negative participation of the player - umpires can be part of the solution.

As an umpire, there will be times when gentle guidance to a player (particularly younger players) will be appropriate. For example, if a batter is not close enough to the plate, an umpire can talk to and encourage the player to get closer. If the catcher is too close or too far back, similarly the umpire can talk to the catcher.

This guidance should be provided concisely in a low tone of voice – much quieter than the voice used to call plays. It would be counterproductive to make the player uncomfortable by bringing attention to the issues with a loud voice.

However, keep in mind that you are not the coach. Coaches may feel threatened if you are seen as giving too much “coaching” to their players, and coaches and players on the other team may feel that you are playing favorites if you give too much “coaching” to a team.

## **TAKING CONTROL OF THE GAME:**

As umpires we have a duty to keep things under control during a game. No game should ever be allowed to get out of hand due to coaches, players, or parents berating the umpires or anyone else. It is your responsibility to ensure that the game is played by the rules and that the rules are enforced. There can be no exceptions to this whatsoever. Following are some guidelines to keep in mind.

### *Control of Managers, Coaches, and Players*

No manager, player, or coach should be permitted to leave the bench (nor can the coach leave his position in the coaching box) to question an umpire’s decision on the calling of balls and strikes. If he does, you should first warn him. If he continues, he is to be ejected.

Coaches have a right to disagree with a call you might make but there are limits. They may question the call but once you tell them, “In my judgment...” that’s the end of discussion, period. If the coach continues to argue or “chirp” about your call, if you haven’t already done so in your pre-game meeting, you give them one warning and one warning only and then walk away. The next time they start to spout off, they should be ejected.

Under no circumstance is a coach to be allowed to raise their voice at an umpire in disagreement with any call. Under no circumstance can you allow a coach to curse at you, your partner, a player, or anyone else in attendance.

The Little League Rules make that very clear. Rule 4.06 states: “No manager, coach or player, shall at any time, whether from the bench or the playing field or elsewhere - 1) incite, or try to incite, by word or sign, a demonstration by spectators; 2) use language which will in any manner refer to or reflect upon opposing players, manager, coach, an umpire, or spectators.” The rule goes on to say, “The umpire may first warn the player, coach and/or manager. If continued, remove the player, coach and/or manager from the game or bench.”

This rule is very clear in its meaning, and you have a responsibility to the players, the league and your fellow umpires to enforce this rule. If a coach starts yelling at you, etc., this will only lead to some of the spectators to assume it is open season on the umpires and join in. Stop this immediately with swift and sure action. Note that the last part of Rule 4.06 says “may warn”, not “must warn”. It is up to your discretion. Give a warning when appropriate. But if the incident is sufficiently offensive, eject the offending coach or player immediately.

## Control of Spectators

Spectators do not have license to direct derogatory remarks at umpires. Understand that you need to do your best to ignore many of the comments. However, even this has its limits. When the spectators begin to get out of line or out of hand with their comments and/or actions, just what can an umpire do? Nothing in the rules allows an umpire to “eject” a spectator. However, there are certain things that can be done. The league and its representatives have a responsibility to the players to do everything within its power to provide a safe environment for the kids to play in. You, the umpire, are a representative of the league and do have an obligation to maintain order. So just what can you do?

If the situation has gotten to such a point that something has to be done, you should call “time” and ask both managers to tell their parents to cease their disorderly behavior. You should also inform them that if the conduct continues, you will have no choice but to suspend the game until order is restored. If they (managers or parents) refuse, then you should order all players to their respective benches and suspend the game. If the game resumes but the problem continues, you really have only one choice: suspend the game until a later date.

## General Game Control Responsibilities

The league is behind our umpires 100% but umpires have a responsibility as well. The rules make it very clear that the umpires are responsible for maintaining the integrity and order of the game. For those of you who are new to this or have only been at it a few years, this can be a very difficult task for you. Learning in a hostile environment is not easy. If umpires are to have any expectations whatsoever of coaches, players, and parents treating us with the respect we deserve, we must show them that we are in control of the game.

Bottom line: take control and do not tolerate any coach, player or parent to abuse you or your fellow umpire. If problems start to happen, put an end to them immediately be it by ejection or suspending the game.

If you should have to eject a coach or player, you need to report the ejection to the League umpire coordinator within 24 hours so that we may then pass it along to the League President.

## Handling Disagreements

Following are some tips for preventing and handling disagreements:

- Keep all personalities out of your work. You must be able to forgive and forget. Every game is a new game.
- Avoid sarcastic comments. Don't insist on the last word. If, after an argument, a manager is walking away, let him go!
- Never charge a manager or follow him if he is moving away. Do not point your finger or use violent gestures during an argument.
- Keep your temper. A decision or an action taken in anger is never sound.
- Watch your language! Never use language toward a player, coach, or manager which, if directed at the umpire, would result in the player, coach, or manager being disciplined.
- If the manager has a legitimate point to argue under the rules, it is your duty to listen to him. An umpire can do this with dignity and no loss of respect. Be understanding - remember, the players are engaged in a heated contest. You are impartial judges and need to maintain a calm dignity becoming the authority you have.
- Keep active and alert on the field at all times.

- Keep the game moving. A ball game is often helped by energetic and earnest work of the umpire.
- Be courteous, impartial, and firm, and so compel respect from all.
- Don't think your blue umpire's shirt grants you immunity from having to take a little criticism. It's part of umpiring. Plan on it. Successful umpires know how much to take.
- If a manager is on your back, but not enough to warrant an ejection, then just stay away from him. This is especially true between innings. Standing near an unhappy coach will only lead to further tensions.
- Keep in mind that emotions can run high near the end of games. A call late in the game may generate more of a reaction than the exact same call made in the first inning. Be aware of the extra emotional potential and act accordingly.

Ejections Reflect Poorly on All Participants

As described above, umpires have the authority to eject managers, coaches, and players. At times, ejection is absolutely the correct and necessary action to take. Ejection will certainly reflect poorly on the ejected manager, coach, or player. However, ejection will also reflect poorly on the umpire to some extent. Ejection should be the remedy of last resort. If an umpire has to eject someone, to some extent that ejection will indicate that the umpire let the game get so out of control that he had to use the last-resort action of ejection. Keep in mind that ejection is certainly an option available to you, but your priority should be keeping the game under control right from the beginning to minimize the likelihood that ejection becomes necessary.

**UMPIRE QUALIFICATIONS:**

Following are some guidelines for qualifications for umpires. These are guidelines only and may be modified by league officials as needed.

General Age and Experience Qualifications: Generally, umpires must be at least 14 years old, must be in high school or have graduated, and must have experience playing on the 90' baseball field.

Division-Specific Guidelines: General guidelines for umpire qualifications for the various baseball divisions are shown below:

Division	Plate Umpire	Field Umpire
Minors	At least one year of umpire experience	New umpires generally would start here
Majors	At least 2 years of umpire experience, including at least one year being a plate umpire	At least one year of umpire experience preferred
Intermediate	At least 2 years of umpire experience, including at least one year being a plate umpire	At least one year of umpire experience preferred
Seniors	Only most experienced umpires	Only most experienced umpires

Qualitative Factors: In addition to the quantitative factors above, qualitative factors will also be considered when considering umpire assignments. Various qualitative factors of being a good umpire are described elsewhere in this handbook.

Number of Umpires: In general, two umpires are preferred for all games. For the Seniors and Intermediate Divisions, there will always be two umpires absent extenuating circumstances. For the Majors Division, the strong preference is for two umpires, particularly for games against other towns. While two umpires are preferred for the Minors Division, at times there may be a single umpire.

## UMPIRE COMPENSATION:

For 2017, umpires will be compensated as follows for each completed game (and for each cancelled game if the scheduled umpires are not notified in advance):

Division	Plate Umpire	Field Umpire
Minors	\$35	\$20
Majors	\$35	\$25
Intermediate	\$40	\$40
Seniors	\$40	\$40

## GENERAL RESPONSIBILITIES:

1. Submit a completed umpire information sheet and a CORI National Background Check form (if required). The CORI form **must** be completed and on file for anyone directly involved with NBSL athletes.
2. Reflect the values of Northampton Baseball & Softball in all dealings with parents, athletes, fellow umpires, league officials, and spectators.
3. Refrain from the use of tobacco and alcoholic beverages at all NBSL games and other events.
4. Attend all required umpire meetings and clinics.