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I'm a True Rarity as I'm a Fan of the Umpires

Admittedly, this will probably be the least popular blog I've written this year because I admit openly that I am a fan of the umpires.

And very few are aligned with me.

Rabid fans enjoy booing and hollering at them while coaches and players often question their judgement and possibly their heritage or lineage.

Not me: I like them and pull for them.

Bear with me and let's take a collective moment and reflect on these non-loved arbiters.

These guys simply love the game. They most probably played baseball for as long as they could (ability-wise or physically) and remain in love with the game, just like you and me. They went to umpiring school, which isn't cheap, and is very, very competitive. They worked their way up to college ball. And for the most part, they remain in decent physical shape in order to get in position to make judgement calls.

That's what they do: they make judgement calls all game long. They call them as they see 'em. Now you the fan, the coaches and players quite often disagree, which is fine but then again, umpires, as fans of the game, probably disagree with the judgement and/or decisions that the coaches and/or players make.

"Why didn't the coach take out the pitcher earlier?" the umpire may question. "Why didn't that right fielder hit the cutoff man?" is another. "How could that third base coach wave home that runner knowing that the center fielder has an accurate arm?"

And then there's the fact that umpires never have home games. Every outing to them is away.

They have to take time off to leave their "real" jobs and often travel great distances -- alone -- to get to the park early. They have only each other and perhaps the host team's club house manager or operations guy as allies. No one in the stands, except perhaps me and possibly their wives, cares for them.

They stand and are attentive every single game, every single inning, every single out, every single pitch. When the catcher points to the first or third base umpire for an appeal on a check-swing, the ump rapidly makes the judgement call that you may or may not agree with.

That's his job: make snap and accurate decisions.

How did you do on your many (or few) snap decisions that you made at work today? Did you get them all correct? What was your percentage?

True, there are times when fellow umpires gather and overturn a call. They, like everyone else, want to get the call correct, even if it means temporary embarrassment. They clearly get more calls correct than they miss and they certainly aren't perfect. But then again, who is?

For the past 14 years, I have served as a site representative for NCAA Regionals and Super Regionals and as part of the overall responsibility, I oversee the assigned umpires that come from all over the country. For Regionals, there are six in the crew and only four for Supers. If the site is in the Southeast, we are usually assigned umpires from the Northeast or West. For the most part, the ACC and SEC umpires are assigned to the Midwest and West. And it is indeed an honor for an umpire to be assigned to a Regional, Super Regional and, of course, Omaha.

As representatives of the NCAA, the umpires and I stay at the same hotel, different from the teams, which in most cases, is located further away from the field. As a rule I always meet with them prior to the tournament's start. I have been known to have a case of beer on ice in my hotel room on the Thursday night of their arrival, and we bond. For hours. We share funny, happy and sad stories alike, find out about each other and our personal lives because, despite what others may think, umpires are human.

It is very important that the site representative and the crew chief be on the same page and work together in order to make the games operate more smoothly. We need to get along, and of my 20+ NCAA assignments, I have enjoyed several crew chiefs and umpires to the point that I still keep in touch with them by calling them when I'm stuck in Charleston traffic.

I like getting to know them away from the field.

The next time you feel like hollering at an umpire, all I ask is that you remember that the guy doesn't care who wins, isn't getting paid a lot of money, is alone with very few allies, is doing the very best he can, has to be alert for every single pitch and doesn't take a break and that, perhaps most importantly, he simply loves the game.

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