

SO, YOU WANT TO ADVANCE

If you're the type of umpire who likes to have control of your game, here are some great ideas that may assist you in achieving that control.

When you get to the collegiate level, be it Divisions I, II, III, NJCAA, or NAIA, you are expected to be proficient in the basics: balls and strikes, safes and outs and the catch-no catch plays. Everyone goes to camps to get that one magic mechanic or piece of advice that will propel them to the next level or into the post season. Well, it's right in front of you, the BASICS. Are you set for every play that you must rule on? Are you seeing the voluntary transfer before you verbalize your call? Are you taking the proper angle to get to the open side of the glove? Do you use the proper footwork to get yourself into the proper position to see the critical elements of the play?

How about not allowing oneself to get defensive when your call is challenged by a coach. Chill out and relax, your primary goal is to get the call right. Coaches want umpires that have good game control. How do you like to be treated in your personal life? Don't try to bluff your way out of it.

Keep your strike zone consistent throughout. Sure, we will miss a pitch occasionally, but don't allow that to disturb you or break your concentration on "the next pitch" or the pitches that keep on coming. What I am really referring to is "do not change an at-bat."

When the count is 2-0, 3-0, 3-1, don't go "get" that fastball, that is on the opposite batter's box line for a strike, to "keep the game moving." Sure, the catcher "squared-up" the pitch and never moved his glove but it was six-inches off the plate. Or the pitch that was just at the knees when it crossed the dirt-grass line in front of the plate. The catcher turns it over and we get too quick and call it a strike. Are we using our eyes properly to track the pitch all the way to the glove and see it into the glove?

In both instances, our calls have changed an at-bat. It will make a difference in the pitch sequence to that hitter. It certainly messes up the "consistency" theory that so many coaches, observers, evaluators talk about. Don't allow yourself to reward a pitcher on a pitch he did not earn.

What about one's physical fitness or the perception that one is overweight and cannot move. A perception that one will not be able to get to that proper angle to make the correct call. Take charge of your physical health, not only for the benefit of your umpiring future but for the benefit of your family.

When a mentor or crewmate is trying to offer suggestions that are meant to help make us a better umpire, "listen!" Don't offer excuses, "listen!" The best advice that I have heard given is to "open one's ears" and "shut one's mouth." Coordinators do contact respected umpires that you have worked with for their input. Not just the names you put on your resume. We want both the positive and negative responses that you may have given when advice is offered.

I encourage those who truly want to advance, to make themselves better, make rules knowledge a year-round process. In your pre-games, emphasize a particular rule or portion of a "sticky" rule situation so as to get the mind engaged before you go on the field and to get the crew all on the same page. In the off-season, on a regular basis, break down a particular rule so as to be better able to fully understand all of the nuances associated with a particular rule.

We have all heard, "failure to prepare is preparing to fail." Don't be one of those. Have a great year in 2017.