

## HANDLING SITUATIONS

Year in and year out, one of the biggest complaints from coaches is that umpires are not approachable, or that they won't listen to legitimate complaints. There are a number of things umpires can do to help diffuse potentially volatile situations during a game. One of the ways to be considered a top rated umpire is to be proficient at this important aspect of umpiring. Review this material during the season.

1. Remember that even though a judgment call has been made, the coach has the right to come on the field and find out what happened. Don't inflame the situation by telling him he can't come out on a judgment call. If you think he is taking advantage of this by coming out on every close call, tell him, "If you come out one more time and I don't think it's necessary, you'll be remanded to the dugout for delaying the game."
2. The biggest reasons coaches come out are because they think you missed the play, or because they think you misinterpreted a rule. He also may believe you got the call right but, because one of his players is arguing, he's out there to support/protect him. Sometimes his team messed up a play and he's hoping you can bail him out with some kind of a call.
3. Try to follow this procedure when a coach comes out:
  - a. As long as a coach is not running to you, don't be afraid to walk in and meet him halfway. Listen, **without interruption**, to what he has to say. If he is in your face, he is trying to intimidate you. If this happens, tell him to back off or he's gone immediately. If you can position yourself so you are standing side-by-side, so much the better. Do not let a coach yell at you from the coaching box or the dugout. Call "time," walk over and say, "Coach we're not going to be yelling today. If you want to talk to me, call time and we'll talk about it."
  - b. Don't get coaches and players gang up on your partner. Get in there and keep it one on one.
  - c. Give him about 20-30 seconds to say what's on his mind. If he's yelling, you can say something like, "Coach, you don't have to yell, I'm not going anywhere and I'll listen to what you have to say." It's sometimes amusing to just stand there and let the coach carry on the entire discussion. Pretty soon, he'll wind down because you haven't helped him carry his end. When he is finished, ask him if he wants to know what you saw, or what rule you are enforcing.
  - d. Avoid confrontational responses such as: "There's no way your guy tagged him." Also guard against inflammatory comments like, "Coach, if you knew what you were doing, you wouldn't be in this mess, etc." Watch your body language. Put your hands in your back pockets. Don't fold your arms and don't point.
  - e. There are a number of things you can say that are not confrontational: 1) "Coach, tell me what you saw." 2) "Coach, tell me how you understand the obstruction (or whatever) rule as it pertains to this play." 3) "Coach, from where I had to make the call, that's what I saw."
  - f. When it comes your time to talk, again watch your body language. Don't be animated. Just discuss what you saw or ruled. If the coach interrupts you, tell him you listened to him and that if he's not going to listen to you, it's time to play ball. If he still wants to interrupt, then WALK AWAY preferably toward his dugout. Chances are, he'll follow you. This signals to your partner to get involved because you are done talking. Remember also, that on his way back to the dugout, the coach may give you a parting shot. Expect it and don't overreact. And don't follow him. This is perceived as aggressive behavior. A final note here. Learn to walk

away when you have finished explaining yourself. **Many discussions drag on for the very simple reason an umpire is not willing to walk away.**

4. **ENDING THE CONVERSATION**—One of the biggest reasons conversations drag out is that the umpire won't cut a coach off after he's made his point. Once you feel you have answered the coach's question, WALK AWAY. This tells everyone, your partner included, that the conversation is over. As long as you hang around, the coach is going to continue to plead his case.
5. **SHARPSHOOTING FROM THE DUGOUT**—The first time something is said from the dugout about balls and strikes, ignore it. The second time, keep your mask on, look over there, put your hand up in a "stop" motion and say, "I hear you." If it happens again, take your mask off, take a few steps toward the dugout and say, "I've heard enough, this is your warning for the rest of the game." Even if several innings go by before it happens again, you will have to remand the coach to the dugout, or eject him. If you aren't sure who the instigator is, try to get someone who won't hurt the team.
6. **WHERE WAS THAT PITCH**—One of the favorite questions from coaches. It is either directed at the umpire or the catcher. Allow this only once or twice, if at all. In reality, when a coach asks this question, he is arguing balls and strikes. The best way to handle this is between innings. Just remind the coach that asking the pitch location is arguing balls and strikes and that you expect him to stop doing it
7. **SHOULD YOU ADMIT YOU MISSED THE CALL**—Probably not unless you know the coach very well or it's so bad you aren't telling him anything he doesn't already know. Rather than tell a coach you missed the call, you might say, "Coach, right or wrong, that's the call and it's not going to change."; "Coach, that was a tough call and I did the best I could with it." Do not tell a coach you didn't get a good look at the call. It's your job to get a good look at the call. And also, don't ever tell a coach it's not your call. Tell him your partner had the best look at the play, etc.
8. **GOING FOR HELP**—If you did get a good look at the play, don't think you are being the good guy by going for help. Your partner may have a different look and change a good call. If a coach does get you to go for help, tell him you will ask, and if your partner had the play differently, you'll change it. But, if your partner can't help, the call stands and the discussion is over. Get the coach to agree to this before you go for help.
9. **OBVIOUSLY WRONG CALLS**—There is a saying in baseball, "Don't let your partner die with an obviously wrong call." A couple of examples: The ball is obviously foul and the base umpire calls it fair. Or, a ball obviously bounces over the fence and it's called a home run. If this happens and you know positively your partner made a wrong call, do not let either coach on the field. Go to your partner and ask him if he got a good look at the play. If he missed it that bad, he probably didn't. Tell him what you saw and let him change the call. Sometimes the game situation, such as a sweep tag with runners moving, may prevent this. Do all you can to get the call right. Remember, you are not interfering with your partner's play. You are providing him with information he may not have had when he made the call. If he doesn't want to change it, that's his choice.
10. **DON'T LET A COACH** talk with your partner then come to you WITHOUT making sure your partner is there to hear the conversation. By the same token, if a coach comes to you, then goes to your partner, GO WITH HIM. The reason, obviously, is that the coach is now obligated to stay with the same story. By not following this procedure, you will allow the

coach to say something like, “Your own partner admitted you missed the call, etc.” Avoid this by not allowing a coach to talk separately with each umpire. Also, don’t let a coach talk with you between innings after a controversial play involving your partner. Regardless of what’s being said, it gives the impression that you and the coach are now buddy-buddy. The only exception would be for the home plate umpire taking a lineup change.

11. **EJECTIONS**—Only as a last resort. If you do have to eject a coach, try to avoid being theatrical about it. Just point him to the parking lot, etc. Remember, that in a lower division game, there may be only one coach. If he’s ejected, the game is over. If you do eject a coach, let him have his final say (his money’s worth as some so quaintly put it) then walk away. At this point your partner should intervene and walk the coach back to the dugout. If your partner does the ejecting, you get involved when your partner walks away from the coach.
12. **FINALLY**—Remember, a great many ejections, and the attendant paper work, can be eliminated by the simple fact that an umpire is non-confrontational and is willing to listen to what a coach has to say. And of even more importance, in high school baseball, we do have the luxury of remanding a coach to the dugout. Use this method whenever possible. The most notable exceptions would be, 1) Intentional physical contact, 2) Threat of physical contact, “I’ll kick your #@\$ after the game,” 3) Loud vulgar language.