



## ALL THE SMALL THINGS

Seven 'Little' Ways to Turn Good to Great

By Brad Tittrington

When it comes time to decide who gets to work the state playoffs, the NCAA postseason or the championship plate in a big tournament, it generally comes down to a lot of little things that separate the umpires who are chosen from those who watch at home. The umpires often picked to work those prime assignments tend to do all the little things — that aren't really so little — right. So what things can you do to take your game to the next level and make sure assigners pick you instead of someone else?

### 1. Be Professional Off the Field

A lot of how you are perceived as an umpire starts well before the game or tournament ever begins. You are going to be judged on how you handle business off the field. This includes keeping your calendar up to date, communicating quickly with assigners when offered new assignments, taking care of testing requirements, registering in a timely fashion, etc. It also includes how you communicate with partners, administrators and assigners. Be courteous and professional in all your communication. Whether it is via email, phone or text, make sure

you use professional language and take the time to spell check. Being sloppy in communication shows a lack of care. Assigners are looking for umpires who take care of business off the field as well as on the field. Start off on the right foot.

### 2. Wear the Right Uniform

This sounds simple enough, yet there are plenty of umpires who choose to buck the rules and wear something other than the approved uniform when working games. Remember, you are judged from the moment you arrive on site, and often even before. Make sure you have the





A lot of factors go into getting the opportunity to work a state championship or other high-level assignment. It often comes down to umpires who take care of the little things that separate them from those who don't get the call." Kevin Haun, Portage, Mich.

right color (and right shade) of pants for the code you are working, the right color shirt or jacket, the correct color undershirt and the right hat. Most importantly, make sure each of these garments is cleaned. A dirty or wrinkled uniform makes you stick out like a sore thumb and can tarnish any hopes of getting a plum assignment. Take the time to take care of your uniform, clean and press your pants and shirts, shine your shoes, buy new hats and wear clothes that fit you. All of these add up and take very little time. Invest in your

uniforms and it will pay off for you in the future. If you haven't bought a new shirt or pair of pants since the Reagan administration, don't complain to your assigner about why you haven't advanced.

### 3. Use Appropriate and Prescribed Mechanics

If you are looking to impress those who make the decisions on how far you advance, use the proper mechanics for the code you are working. If you are working a high school game or a USA Softball tournament, using college mechanics will not only not impress your evaluators; it will hurt your chances of advancing. Same holds true if you are working an NCAA game or USSSA event and you use high school/USA Softball mechanics. Use the prescribed mechanics in the manual for the level you are working. Remember, someone is always watching you. An assigner is not going to place you in prime time assignments if you are unable to use the proper mechanics. Using the wrong mechanics can also cause confusion with partners, players, coaches and fans.

While studying the rulebook is a first crucial step in showing competency, perfecting the mechanics in the manual will quickly help elevate your game. Take the time to study the manual, practice in front of a mirror so you can see what your signals look like, then break down film of your work to see where you can improve. Use the proper mechanics to show assigners they can trust you to be in the right place and use the right signals when it counts the most.

### 4. Get a Mentor

One thing a lot of umpires struggle with is taking constructive criticism. It is hard to have others tell you things you are doing wrong. However, no one was born with perfect umpiring abilities. You have to start at the bottom and work hard to improve. And one of the best ways to do that is to find someone you trust who will give you honest feedback. This can be difficult, but

## QUICKTIP

**Leave bats alone.** If you toss or kick a bat, you are now liable if it hits a player. Also, if you are handing a bat to a coach or player, there is the potential for another interaction where something may be said that you could have avoided by simply moving to your between-innings position.

## BY THE NUMBERS



The percentage of 8,694 softball umpires who said sportsmanship is getting worse according to the 2023 NASO National Officiating Survey powered by Referee.com.

## TOOLS

### UMPLIFE Shoe Bag Set

Looking for a way to protect your shoes in your equipment bag? Look no further than the UMLIFE Shoe Bag Set, which features two bags, one for your plate shoes and one for your base shoes. These bags will protect your shoes from getting scuffed inside your equipment bag and will also keep them separated from the rest of your equipment. The two bags are made from 100 percent Neoprene and feature a front pocket to store all your shoe accessories as well. The pair of bags sell for \$49.99 at [ump-attire.com](http://ump-attire.com).





## TEST YOURSELF

Each of the following includes a situation and possible answer(s). Decide which are correct for USA, NFHS, NCAA or USSSA rules and which might vary. **Solutions: p. 81.**

1. With R3 on third base, R2 on second base and one out, B4 hits a slow ground ball to short. F6 comes in to field the ball and R2 bumps F6 on the way to third base, causing F6 to miss the ball. At the time of the bump, R3 had not reached home and B4 had not reached first base.

a. The ball is immediately dead, R2 is ruled out on the interference, B4 is awarded first base and R3 is returned to third base.

b. The ball is immediately dead, R2 is ruled out on the interference, B4 is awarded first base and R3 is awarded home.

c. The ball is immediately dead, R2 is ruled out on the interference, B4 is ruled out and R3 is returned to third base.

d. Legal play, the ball remains live and all runners advance at their own risk.

e. It is a delayed dead ball. The umpires must wait until play concludes, determine outs (if any) and where runners will be placed depending on their judgment of where runners would have ended up had there been no contact.

2. With R3 on third base, R1 on first base and two outs, B5 hits a ground ball that is misplayed by F4, allowing the ball to roll into short right field. R3 scores and R1 advances to third base, but misses second base. After F4 recovers the ball, she runs across the diamond and tags R1, who is standing on third.

a. Legal appeal. R1 is ruled out for missing second base and R3's run is negated.

b. Improper appeal. The defense must return the ball to the pitcher and have the pitcher take a position on the pitcher's plate, call time and then request a dead-ball appeal.

c. Improper appeal. Only the head coach may appeal the missed base.

d. Legal appeal, R1 is ruled out for missing second base, but R3's run still counts because this is a timing play.

3. Line drives and attempted bunts (no matter how high they go) can never be declared as infield flies.

- a. True.
- b. False.

seek out someone at a level you wish to attain and pick that person's brain. It is necessary to find someone you trust who you know is looking out for your best interest. Once you have a mentor, listen to what they tell you and strive to improve on your weaknesses. And try to emulate the things that mentor does. People will take notice of the company you keep. We are guilty by association, both the good and the bad. Umpires talk and if you have the right mentor, that person will get the ear of those who can help your career.

### 5. Hustle

During a game, you can never take off a play. You must always stay focused. When you decide to relax, that is when the game can come up and bite you. Always prepare for the next situation. And when you are on the field, always move with a purpose. There are times you are on the field for long stretches, especially in summer tournaments. It can be hot and humid and it can get exhausting. However, there are always college coaches, other umpires, assigners, etc., walking around during these tournaments. It is important you stay hydrated, have the proper nutrition and prepare your body so you can give 100 percent at all times during these long days. You often only get one shot to impress someone. Don't let fatigue ruin your chances to show your abilities. Always hustle to your next spot. Laziness will give the impression you don't care and can cost you dearly.

### 6. Write Down and Share Goals

Many high-level umpires keep a journal in their bags. Prior to each season, they will write down their goals for the season and things they want to work on. They keep this journal with them at all times as a reminder of where they want to go. They also share their goals with their mentors and their assigners. Don't assume your assigner knows what you are aiming for during the season. If you tell them what your goals are, good assigners will work with you to help you achieve those goals. The main thing is to set goals you can

achieve, otherwise you will simply be setting yourself up for failure. Don't be afraid to shift your goals throughout the season. Celebrate when you achieve a goal and work with your mentor and assigner to set your next milestone.

### 7. Get Noticed in a Positive Way

While it is often said your work will speak for itself, this is not always the case. Do all the small things correctly so assigners can't use those things against you. This doesn't mean to be a self-promoter. Constantly telling your partners or assigners how great you are and how much you deserve a prime assignment will hurt you. Instead, treat each game like it's the most important game and do the things listed above. Your hard work and attitude will get you noticed by the right people. It may not happen overnight, but take advantage of any opportunities you get. Be willing to take an extra game when your assigner is stuck or be flexible when that assigner asks you to be flexible. Assigners remember when you take care of them. They also remember when you don't.

The same is true when you go to camps. Your work on the field will get you noticed. Telling everyone on staff how great you are will not. Be professional off the field, listen to evaluators and work hard and hustle while you are on the field. When you go to camps, evaluators and coordinators want to know you can be coachable. Listen to feedback, incorporate changes recommended to you the next time you take the field and be an active participant.

These seven things you can start working on today and don't take a ton of time or effort. While knowing the rules, having a great strike zone and sound judgment are all huge, it is often the small things that separate the great umpires from the rest. Work on these small things and you should see your game take off to new levels and help you get noticed the right way.

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