Training and evaluation of softball umpires in Missoula, Montana

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TRAINING AND EVALUATION OF SOFTBALL UMPIRES

IN MISSOULA, MONTANA

By

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This study investigated existing programs of training and evaluation of softball umpires in other states in order to offer recommendations for training and evaluation to the Missoula Umpires' Association. Forty-four questionnaires were sent to 39 individuals who were either Umpires-In-Chief of local umpire associations or who were involved in the Amateur Softball Association (A.S.A.) National Umpire Staff. The remaining questionnaires were sent to state and national associations or individual representatives who dealt with high school athletic programs.

Information received from the returned questionnaires was analyzed. This study revealed that other umpire associations faced problems in development of an effective training and evaluation program for umpires. On the basis of the results of the questionnaires, the local Umpire-In-Chief was responsible for establishing the guidelines for an effective training and evaluation program in his/her district. Programs were seasonal and included written, as well as practical training and evaluation.

Recommendations were that (1) the Umpire-In-Chief, with cooperation of the officers of the local umpires' association, be responsible for establishing training and evaluation procedures for the Missoula Umpires' Association, (2) clinics should be provided for all umpires and, (3) practical and written evaluation of umpires should be conducted in accordance with National A.S.A. standards.
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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The Amateur Softball Association of America (A.S.A.) is the largest and fastest growing amateur sports association in America. More than 40 million youngsters and adults play the game in more than 50 countries. Since 1933, the A.S.A. has developed and promoted softball on an organized basis. Softball, once a sport that was played under no less than 12 different sets of rules on a national basis, today is played under one set of basic rules, with small deviations at local levels, in more than 50 countries. Standardization and uniformity of the playing rules and A.S.A. has helped softball become more of an organized game (14).

The A.S.A. Umpire program is one division of the A.S.A. family. More than 57,000 umpires make the A.S.A. the largest sports officiating organization in the world today (14).

A full-time Supervisor of Umpires is located in the National A.S.A. office and a National Deputy Umpire-In-Chief is appointed for each of the fifteen national regions. State and Metro areas also have district or deputy Umpires-In-Chief. The responsibility of the State Umpire-In-Chief is to oversee all district Umpires-In-Chief in the organization and running of their umpires' association.
Why are umpire associations formed? There are various reasons, however, they all lead to a basic NEED. Each area finds the need to call upon a person or group of individuals to assist in the administration of the softball games. The umpire on the field administers and enforces the rules of the game, whether it be national championship rules or rules amended for local league play. Without competent umpires, the result is chaos.

Umpires may be recruited from many different backgrounds including the following:

a) Ex-ballplayers, as they know something about the game already.

b) Officials from other sports areas.

c) Individuals who like a challenge, or individuals who are able to take charge and lead.

Recruitment of softball umpires is a continual process. Umpires go on vacation, others become injured and are unable to continue working and others are not qualified to work post-season games and tournaments due to lack of experience or poor evaluations during the season.

Once an umpires' association is formed, it is important to the functioning of the organization that officers are elected and a constitution and by-laws are established. Copies of existing association by-laws are available upon request from the A.S.A. national office.
Duties of officers, as well as meeting agendas, assignments, contracts and responsibilities of members must all be established in writing. Each individual planning to pursue umpiring must know what is expected from him or her throughout the season. Responsibilities and expectations of umpires should be included in a handbook.

The city of Missoula registered 165 teams for the 1986 softball season. These teams included Men’s and Women’s Slowpitch; Men’s +31 and +45; Mens’ Fastpitch and Co-recreational Slowpitch. Adults competing in summer recreational softball totaled 2,600. All games were played on ten different diamonds with competition scheduled every night of the week, except Saturday. Weekend tournaments ran throughout the summer months.

The Missoula Umpires’ Association registered 44 umpires for the 1986 season. It was the responsibility of these individuals to umpire games in the recreational leagues during the months of May, June, July, and August.

**Background**

Training officials properly and getting them started correctly seems to be two of the major downfalls of many associations. In past years, the Missoula Association has sent new recruits to the softball diamond with a short briefing and a "good luck" pat, but without any formal training. No formal evaluations are given so that
they may continue to improve. It is critical to the success of any softball program that quality individuals interested in umpiring are recruited, trained and evaluated to enhance their learning abilities (14).

On an historical basis, the umpire training program throughout the State of Montana has produced only two umpires who have received an excellent rating from a National Softball Tournament. One of them is Jim Knight, who is the state Umpire-In-Chief, and the other is Ron Damon. Attendance at National Umpire Training Schools, which is optional, during their careers has provided dividends.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine existing programs of training and evaluation of softball umpires in other states and to offer recommendations to the Missoula Umpires' Association.

In gathering information about training and evaluation of umpire programs, this researcher felt it necessary to go outside of Missoula, Montana, as the Missoula program was ineffective in the recruitment, training and evaluation of softball umpires. Prior to 1982, the Missoula Umpires' Association was loosely structured. The Umpire-In-Chief changed yearly; there was little training given to potential umpires; leagues hired umpires independently of the Umpires'
Association and the evaluation process was non-existent.

During the Spring of 1982, the entire softball program in Missoula was placed under the direction of the City Parks and Recreation Department. At that time, an Umpire-In-Chief was appointed to direct the Umpires' Association. Initially the Umpire-In-Chief was totally responsible for all recruitment, training, scheduling and evaluation of umpires. As this was almost impossible for one person to handle, within the next two years, the Missoula Umpires' Association took on an entirely new structure. The City Parks and Recreation Department continued to appoint the Umpire-In-Chief. However, officers were selected and the previous duties and responsibilities of the Umpire-In-Chief were delegated to other members of the Association. An Executive Board was created and the following officers were initially appointed by the Umpire-In-Chief; but are now elected by the entire umpire membership: president, vice-president, secretary-treasurer, deputy umpire-in-chief, first year representative and an at-large representative. A constitution and by-laws was created, giving job descriptions for all officers, as well as rights and responsibilities of members.

The Umpire-In-Chief is responsible for scheduling of umpires, but the duties of meetings, clinics, training and
evaluations of umpires is now delegated to the board members.

Statement of the Problem

The problem of this study was a lack of effective and quality training and evaluative techniques for softball umpires in Missoula, Montana. In order to serve the 165 softball teams in Missoula, it is critical to the success of the softball program that umpires are properly trained and evaluated throughout the softball season.

Questions to be answered

Some of the questions to be answered related to umpire training are the following:

1) Who conducts the training program for umpires?
2) Is the program yearly or seasonal?
3) What is included in the training program?
4) What should be included in the training program?
5) Should umpires attend study clubs or meetings? How often?
6) How should umpires be tested?

Questions to be answered in the area of evaluation of umpires are the following:

a) Who should administer the evaluation?
b) How often should umpires be evaluated?
c) What should be acceptable standards for passing?
d) What type of evaluation should be given?

e) What type of follow-up should the evaluation procedure be given?

Rationale

For the past twelve seasons, the Missoula Umpires' Association has done little to improve and update training and evaluation techniques for their softball umpires. Only recently has any move been made in the direction of upgrading performance standards for softball umpires. Practical as well as written evaluations of umpires are now performed at least twice during the season. A Deputy-Umpire-In-Chief is elected to supervise the training program for rookie umpires. An early season umpire softball tournament is scheduled in which rookie umpires have an opportunity to work by themselves and with veterans in actual game situations. Mechanics and positioning are stressed, as well as rule interpretations. Softball programs continue to grow yearly and the Missoula Umpires' Association needs to grow with them. Based on information received from other associations, other areas are ahead of Missoula in the training and evaluation of their umpires. According to the National Umpire Office, formal training programs as well as standardized evaluation procedures are essential for a successful umpires'
Research Assumption

It is the belief of the City Parks and Recreation Softball Coordinator, Dana McGraw, and officers of the Missoula Umpires' Association that formal training and evaluation techniques will improve the quality of softball umpiring dramatically in the city of Missoula, Montana.

Importance of the Study

The information obtained from this study will be used as a basis to evaluate and make recommendations concerning present and future preparations of softball umpires in Missoula, Montana.

In addition, the information could be of value to the Montana High School Association, who has not yet developed a formal training and evaluation program for the high school girls' fast-pitch umpires.

Limitations of the Study

1. A mailed questionnaire was used to gather data.
2. Not all questionnaires were returned.
3. Not all questionnaires were completed.
Chapter 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Amateur sports can provide wholesome recreation in a high-pressure mechanized society. Good officiating can contribute to the quality of recreation and athletics. Participation in athletics should be a rewarding experience for participants. Sports' officials have the responsibility to provide such an atmosphere (4).

Good officiating is a key to the success of any program. The behavior and quality of officiating will reflect the success of the program. Because poor officiating detracts from the enjoyment of participants and spectators, it is the responsibility of amateur sports' organizations to study and conduct research in the officiating of sports and organize schools and clinics to train and evaluate officials.

The primary job of an official is to cause the game of contest to progress with as little interference as is necessary. Officiating is an art. It takes a special individual to develop a relationship that breeds friendliness and trust and not antagonism, which is essential to game control. (Bunn, 1968, p. 3).

Qualifications of Officials

According to Bunn (1968), officials must possess the following qualifications:
1. Officials must be themselves. Officials may study and review actions of good officials, but in the end, they must be their own person to gain the respect of coaches and participants.

2. Officials must be able to react quickly. In the heat of battle, players may break the rules through ignorance and accidently. Officials must be able to assess the violation and apply the correct rule in a split second.

3. Officials must have confidence in themselves and in their ability to officiate a contest.

4. Officials must be consistent in their calls and in their application of rules.

5. Officials must possess good judgment.

6. Officials must practice officiating in order to become proficient. Experience gives one an understanding of and a background for officiating that is invaluable.

7. Officials must cooperate with their fellow officials.

8. Officials must have a working knowledge of the rules and the implications of the rules.

9. Officials must be professional in all aspects. They must dress properly and must be professional in their mannerisms and actions.

10. Finally, officials must be in good physical condition.

According to Atterbom (1978), Referee Commissioner for
the New Mexico Soccer Association and Director of the Human Performance Laboratory, Department of Health, Physical Education, and Recreation, University of New Mexico.

Referees are the omnipotent directors of the game, for which they are solely responsible. They are police, prosecutors, defenders, jury, judges, and reform officers all wrapped up in one. They rule, punish, guide and educate—all in the same fleeting moment of instant chaos. They govern everyone associated with the game—players, coaches and spectators. During the game, they are governed only by the laws of the game itself. (Atterbom, 1978, p. 44).

Umpires must understand liability, insurance and their rights, as well as their duties. Ten years ago, records of the A.S.A. reveal only occasional lawsuits were filed against the A.S.A. leagues, A.S.A. umpires and A.S.A. teams. But now, according to A.S.A. Executive Director, Don Porter, "Rarely a week goes by without receiving insurance claims or suit papers involving teams, umpires and field owners affiliated with A.S.A." (Balls and Strikes, April 1987, p. 3).

Officials must have professional anticipation and forseeability. They must make split-second decisions involving rules and rule implications with the utmost of confidence.

"The important task of officiating requires an individual who combines technical knowledge with human concerns. Only individuals of wisdom and integrity make it in the lonely and thankless world of officiating." (Atterbom,
The proper handling of any athletic contest demands the three essential factors be part of the officials' make-up (13). In the order of importance, they are:

1. Judgment
2. Technique
3. Knowledge

Judgment may at first appear to be an inherent factor. The calm demeanor of the finished official when confronted with an uprising would certainly bear out this assumption. However, this is not always the case. The rookie official may likely respond negatively to a rowdy crowd or hot-tempered coach. He/she learns through experience to keep cool in adversity. No provocation, not even physical attack, should cause an official to lose sight of the fact that his/her primary responsibility is to keep the game going in an ordinary fashion. Judgment is mainly experience with a dose of cool-headed common sense.

Technique is a factor appreciated by all. The polished official is rarely in the wrong position to render a decision. Hustle is an integral part of that technique. The quality official takes pride, not only in being in proper position, but also in his/her physical mechanics of the call.

A working knowledge of the playing rules is expected of every official. Officials need to picture in their minds
various plays applicable to the rules. In visualizing them, officials should be able to interpret them properly on the field.

As the literature indicates, the official of a sports contest is a rare individual. He/she possesses qualities not matched by most.

**Indiana University Study**

In 1973, at Indiana University, 89 intramural basketball officials participated in a study to provide information relative to the factors that characterize superior, average and inferior basketball officials (5). The study did not suggest the abandonment of previously used methods of evaluation, but offered another tool for studying characteristics of officials.

**Testing Procedures**

The 89 subjects were administered the following tools of rating:

1. Cattel’s 16 PF Personality Questionnaire, Form A.
2. A written knowledge on rules and mechanics of officiating basketball.
3. A personal data form indicating their previous basketball playing and officiating experiences.

The subjects were rated on their officiating performances by intramural department supervisory personnel for the entire intramural basketball season. The ratings
served as a means of categorizing superior, average and inferior officials.

Raw scores on each of the 16 personality factors, the score on the written knowledge test, the number of years of basketball participation, and the number of years of officiating experience were statistically analyzed.

Variables were identified as contributing factors to officials being rated as superior, average and inferior. The findings of the study suggested that certain characteristics can be identified which may give insight into the possibility of predicting officiating success. With regard to personality factors, preference should be given to prospective officials who tend to be conscientious, consistent, self-assured and serious-minded. The written knowledge test may be eliminated if used strictly as a measure of officiating potential. Preference should also be given to officials who have had previous success playing and officiating. Although the Indiana University study needed to be conducted over a longer period of time, guidelines could be developed for determining the potential competencies of intramural basketball officials (5).

Training Procedures

Once individuals possessing qualities previously indicated have been found, how are they to be trained? Because poor officiating detracts from the enjoyment of spectators and players, amateur sports organizations have
studied and conducted research in officiating sports. According to Sawyer (1978), Director of intramural activities at Virginia Military Institute, officiating is a key to a successful program and it is imperative that the director of intramural activities design an intramural officials’ association under his control to develop and train officials. The purpose and objectives of the officials’ association would be the following (12):

1. Help officials, coaches, players acquire a working knowledge of the playing rules.
2. Foster the spirit of sportsmanship and fair play.
3. Promote uniformity in officiating through the use of training materials, interpretation meetings and officiating "mechanics" clinics.
4. Promote a classification system in order that officials be encouraged to continuously improve themselves.
5. Encourage and assist people interested in becoming qualified officials to enter the field. (Sawyer, 1978, p.39).

Under Sawyer’s direction (1978), each official would be required to take four examinations: 1) written on rules and mechanics (2) practical examination on court/field mechanics (3) physical examination by a medical doctor and 4) physical fitness test of running 1.5 mile in/under 12 minutes. After passing these four tests, officials would be classified for the upcoming season. During the season, officials would hold weekly meetings to discuss rules and game situations encountered (12).
A.S.A. Umpire Training

The Amateur Softball Association (A.S.A.) has outlined samples of techniques and methods of training new officials in their A.S.A. Umpire Program Information Guide (14). The following are their recommendations.

Most training for A.S.A. umpires begins with a rules interpretation meeting. Quizzes are used at weekly meetings as learning tools. Following rules meetings, umpires are familiarized to game conditions by working exhibition games. Simulated game conditions provide excellent training for the beginning official. Generally, the beginning official is assigned to work on mechanics and techniques with a veteran umpire.

Once the practice is completed and the actual season begins, the beginning umpires are classified as "probationary officials". Each probationary official is assigned an active, veteran official as his/her personal supervisor. The active official works with the "rookie", makes game observations and provides game-by-game constructive criticism. This method is generally employed for a period of two or three weeks at the beginning of the season.

The A.S.A. training program helps umpires learn to deal with verbal assaults and other forms of intimidation. The training includes types of appropriate responses, as
well as maintaining confidence in one's own decisions.

Videotaping is also popular as a learning and training tool in taping an individual's performance and then replaying the performance so that the umpires can see for themselves how they appear to others. The University of New Mexico has also used videotaping procedures in their training of flag football officials (11). In a study performed in the fall of 1976, the intramural staff produced a videotape of flag football instructional rules, interpretations and officiating techniques. The tape was twenty minutes in length and illustrated most of the situations which tended to cause problems for officials.

The tape was used to teach prospective officials proper rule interpretation. The intramural department also used the videotapes for periodic evaluations of officials. During weekly officiating meetings, the group members evaluated their peers and offered helpful suggestions for improvement.

Other training aides available for officials are found in the form of monthly publications. Referee magazine features sections devoted to umpiring techniques, quizzes and occasional feature stories. Other publications include The Sporting News, which has a weekly column entitled "Ask Hal the Referee". Various local and regional softball newspapers, such as Balls and Strikes feature columns written by umpires offering officiating tips.
Schools and clinics are a major source of training officials. Clinics are held at many levels within the A.S.A.—from the national level to the local level. Through clinics, proper interpretation of rules can be learned and passed on. One of the goals of clinics is to create uniformity and consistency of calls among umpires.

One of the newer programs of training umpires offered by the A.S.A. is the National Umpire School, held annually at five locations across the United States. These schools are held over a weekend and provide 16 hours of instruction in the classroom and on the field. Instruction is given in proper mechanics/positioning, developing timing on calls, philosophy of umpiring, plate and base mechanics, handling arguments, discussion on talking with managers during pre-game and ground rule discussions. Instruction includes audio-visual presentations, conditioning drills, and personalized evaluations (14).

A fee is charged and registration is limited to 75 students at each school. Each school employs the use of three members of the National Umpire Staff as instructors.

A.S.A. Umpire Evaluation

Continual evaluation of officials is as important as the actual training. In order to improve and learn, evaluation programs must be developed and incorporated into officials' programs (14).
Evaluations are important to the success of every umpire association. At local levels, umpires need to be evaluated in order for an assignee to know the caliber and type of softball games that an umpire is qualified to work. Each umpire should be evaluated for his/her on the field conduct, knowledge of the rules, mechanics, positioning, cooperation with partner, dress, and game control. These evaluations will determine the amount and quality of games the umpire will work, but will also serve to determine whether an umpire will be invited to post-season tournaments at higher levels (14).

Umpire Evaluators

Who evaluates a local umpire? There are several individuals used through the A.S.A. program.

1. A retired umpire who wants to remain a part of the local association.

2. Working umpires can observe each other and submit evaluation forms.

3. Officers of the local association, who are not working an assignment that day or night can observe umpires.

4. Scorekeepers can keep notes on positioning, mechanics, protests, control of the game and submit them to the umpire association.

5. Recreation department members can observe games and submit evaluations to the local association.

6. Coaches can be asked to evaluate the performance of
an umpire following their game.

**Evaluation Tools**

Evaluation sheets can be developed to evaluate "on field" performances. Evaluation categories should include appearance, hustle, knowledge of rules and application, proper positioning and mechanics, signals, cooperation with partner, and game control. These evaluations need to be performed two to three times throughout the season and recorded. By putting evaluations on paper, reference to them later is easier (14).

Another tool useful in the evaluation process is the use of the videotaping machine. Performances may be recorded and viewed objectively and the umpire may receive instantaneous feedback. Many programs working with officials have successfully used video taping machines for their training, as well as evaluation of officials (14).

Whatever the system of evaluation for new and veteran officials, a continuous program should be followed. When no evaluations are made, umpires fail to get better, bad habits only get worse and new umpires fail to begin their careers correctly (14).

The presence of an umpire is a condition that is necessary for the game of softball to be played at all. In order for the game to be played and officiated to its fullest, it is imperative that guidelines for training and evaluation of umpires be continually developed and improved.
Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

The problem was a lack of effective training and evaluative techniques for softball umpires in Missoula, Montana.

The purpose of this study was to examine other existing programs of training and evaluation of softball umpires and to offer some recommendations for improvement to the Missoula Umpires' Association.

This chapter contains an explanation of the source of the data, the development and distribution of the questionnaire and an explanation of the treatment of the data obtained.

Source of Data

In gathering information about training and evaluation of umpire programs, it was necessary to go outside Missoula, Montana, as an ineffective program was in existence. From 1975-1982, umpire enrollment had been declining; more incidents of umpires failing to show for assignments were being recorded; more complaints were being heard from managers and players on the inconsistency of calls and fewer umpires from Missoula were receiving post-season tournaments. The primary objective of the study was to use gathered program information to develop an effective
Forty-four questionnaires were sent. Thirty-nine went to individuals who were either Umpires-In-Chief (U.I.C) of local associations or who were involved in the A.S.A. National Umpire Staff. Five questionnaires were sent to state and national associations or individual representatives who had dealings with high school athletic programs.

In order to evaluate other programs, it was first necessary to identify individuals who were responsible for administering umpire programs. This was done by consulting the State Umpires-in-Chief, Mr. Jim Knight, to obtain a list of all Montana Umpires-in-Chief. A list of all umpires on the National Umpire Staff was obtained by consulting the A.S.A. Directory of Umpires listed in the 1985-86 edition of the A.S.A. Official Softball Rulebook.

Development of the Questionnaire

A questionnaire was developed following a review of related literature and questions that the researcher believed necessary to review for the institution of a quality training and evaluation program for umpires in Missoula. The two-page questionnaire dealt with questions pertaining to training programs for umpires as well as evaluation procedures for umpires.
The questionnaire was designed to be as short as possible to facilitate prompt response. The completed questionnaire has a total of 21 questions and appears in Appendix A.

**Procedure for Distribution**

The questionnaire was distributed by mail. Each questionnaire was accompanied by a letter and return self-addressed stamped envelope to facilitate fast response. The letter stated the purpose of the study and appears in Appendix B.

The questionnaire was mailed on October 25, 1985, to each of the selected Umpires-in-Chief along with those individuals responsible for high school programs. A follow-up letter was mailed one month later urging response. The follow-up letter appears in Appendix C. The initial letter and follow-up letter produced a return of 19 questionnaires or a 43% return rate. Due to the lack of response to the second letter, no further letters or calls were made.
Chapter 4

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF THE DATA

A questionnaire was mailed to 44 individuals who were Umpires-in-Chief or individuals involved with high school or national sports' programs. Returned questionnaires were received from 19 of the 44 individuals. Umpires-in-Chief responding numbered 14 with the remaining five responses coming from individuals involved in high school sports' programs. The findings from these respondents are reported in this chapter.

In all responses from Umpires-in-Chief, the individual in charge of the umpire training program was located at the local level—either the district or local Umpire-in-Chief or an appointee from the local Umpire-in-Chief. In all but five programs, the training program for umpires was a seasonal program, generally starting six to ten weeks prior to the local softball program and ending with the conclusion of the season. The remaining five respondents began programs in January and concluded them in late October.

All of the training programs involved the use of materials available from the National A.S.A. office, located in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Below is a list of those items used in the training program:
1. The A.S.A. Umpire Rule Book and Umpire Manual
2. The A.S.A. Umpire Instructional film (rental)
3. Sets of overhead transparencies for rules and signals
4. Umpire Clinic Flip Charts
5. Displays of Umpire Equipment
6. Quizzes for local meetings consisting of rules and rule interpretation questions/answers.

Along with classroom materials from the National office, Umpire Schools and Clinics were included in training programs for "on the field" training.

Thirteen of 14 Umpires-in-Chief responding indicated the use of study clubs or study meetings for their umpires. Study club meetings were held weekly for eleven associations. Monthly meetings were held by seven associations and one response indicated one yearly study club session.

All 19 Umpires-in-Chief indicated training programs had been relatively successful, with minimal problems associated with the programs. Different associations faced different problems, with attendance by umpires in the program cited as the biggest problem. Other problems encountered were lack of time and interest.

Most associations were able to solve their problems by establishing criteria within their associations. Those members not attending training program meetings or clinics
were reprimanded by assignments being reduced; receiving poor evaluations; personal counseling by veteran umpires; suspension or fines for non-compliance.

**Umpire Evaluations**

The National A.S.A. Umpire Tournament Rating Form was used by eight of the Umpires-in-Chief responding for practical evaluation of their umpires. Four of the responses indicated the use of a variation of the National form, with two responses indicating the use of a rating form of their own design. Copies of sample rating forms appear in Appendix D.

**Practical Evaluations**

The practical evaluations (on the field evaluations) were done by the local Umpire-In-Chief in 13 of the 14 associations. Positioning, mechanics and proper rule interpretations of calls were evaluated. In most instances, the local Umpire-in-Chief was responsible for the administration of the evaluation with the assistance of qualified veteran umpires who the local Umpire-in-Chief appointed. In only one case were evaluations of umpires performed by softball coaches.

As to the number of times a season in which umpires were evaluated on the field, varying responses were given. One or two times a season received seven responses.
Evaluations being done three times a season numbered four responses. Weekly evaluations were cited by only one association. Two associations performed evaluations on umpires only when umpires requested the evaluations.

Practical evaluations (on the field evaluations) were performed by all 14 Umpires-in-Chief responding. Practical evaluations included the following categories: appearance, proper positioning for calls, rule interpretations, mechanics, signals, cooperation with partner and game control. Forms appearing in Appendix D served as instruments for evaluations. No minimal standards were established for practical evaluations. All respondents indicated the use of the practical evaluation as a learning tool for umpires. Those umpires not scoring well on the practical evaluation were most often given personal counseling and one to one training by qualified veteran umpires. Those failing to improve were placed on probation or were limited in receiving assignments. Further negative evaluations resulted in dismissal of the umpire.

Written Evaluations

Acceptable standards for passing the written evaluation ranged from 70% on a closed-book test to 100% on an open-book test. Those failing to score minimal standards on the written rules test were most often allowed to re-take the examination. Failure to pass after a re-take resulted in not being assigned softball games until
the test was passed.

In all but one instance umpires were not allowed to see their written and practical evaluations. In all but one, evaluations were kept on file with the Umpire-in-Chief.

Evaluation Problems

The problem encountered by all Umpires-in-Chief was administration of the practical evaluations. Finding time to evaluate all umpires in an association was the biggest problem faced. Other problems cited were personality conflicts between umpire and evaluator and some umpires' unwillingness to accept constructive criticism.
Chapter 5

SUMMARY, RESULTS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study was conducted to offer recommendations or solutions to the ineffective training and evaluation of softball umpires in Missoula, Montana. The replies of 14 Umpires-in-Chief representing 14 cities across the U.S. were analyzed in this study.

Also responding to the questionnaire was the A.S.A. National office, the National Federation of High Schools, the Montana High School Association, the National Association for Girls and Womens' Sports and the Montana Officials' Association. The responses from these organizations included very little information that could be used at the local level of umpire training and evaluation.

The study revealed that other umpire associations have been faced with problems in developing an effective training and evaluation program for umpires.

Results of the Study

On the basis of the results of this study, the following statements can be made:

1. The local Umpire-In-Chief is responsible for establishing the guidelines for an effective training and evaluation program for umpires in their district.
2. Study club meetings are an important ingredient in the training program for umpires. Agendas for study club meetings should include signals, mechanics, positioning, and reviewing game situations and rule applications. Having quizzes on rules and interpretations are appropriate. When giving quizzes, rules and rule sections should be given which require the umpire to look up the answer as well as the reference.

3. Training programs for umpires are predominately seasonal programs.

4. Attendance by umpires seems to be the major obstacle in the umpire training program.

5. The National A.S.A. practical evaluation rating form is the most widely used instrument for rating and evaluating umpires at this present time.

6. The local Umpire-In-Chief is responsible for administration of the written and practical evaluations for umpires.

7. The minimal standard for passing the written test is 70%. The examination given was the National A.S.A. Examination.

8. Practical evaluations (on the field) are used as a learning tool as opposed to a grading tool.

9. Umpire written evaluations are shown to the umpires and are kept on file in the office of the Umpire-In-Chief, in all but one case.
10. Umpire evaluations dealing with on the field performance are shown and discussed with the umpire and a copy is kept on file in the office of the Umpire-In-Chief.

11. Finding time to administer the practical evaluations is the major obstacle for umpire associations.

Recommendations

This study was conducted to assess existing umpire training and evaluation procedures in order to offer recommendations for improvement in those procedures in Missoula, Montana. Due to lack of response to the umpire questionnaire, the researcher believes a more detailed account of existing programs of evaluation and training of softball umpires could be learned through further surveys and personal visitations and observations of existing quality programs that incorporate training and evaluation of umpires over an extended period of time. The questionnaires served as a much needed starting point from which to assess training and evaluation programs for softball umpires. From the results of the questionnaires, the following recommendations for the Missoula Umpires' Association are offered.

It is the responsibility of the local Umpire-In-Chief, with the cooperation of the officers of the local umpire association, to establish training programs for beginning
umpires. It is also the responsibility of the local Umpire-in-Chief to establish evaluation procedures to be used for all umpires.

The training program for umpires should include rule knowledge and the practical application of rules on the field, along with mechanics and positioning. The training program should also include the following items:

1. The Umpire-In-Chief or representative of the local association should be encouraged to attend a National Umpire School. Expenses for the school would be paid by the association. By attending the school the umpire could bring back information to share with the entire association.

2. The Umpire-in-Chief should attend the Regional Umpires' clinic in order to receive rule changes and interpretations. If the Umpire-in-Chief is unable to attend, an appointee should attend.

3. All umpires should attend the State Umpires' Clinic in Helena, Montana. At the State clinic, umpires will receive rule changes and interpretations for the upcoming season. Rules 1-12 from the A.S.A. Rulebook will be discussed in detail. Umpire mechanics and positioning will be discussed. The clinic will conclude with open questions referring to rules or mechanics. The clinic will be conducted by the State Umpire-In-Chief.

4. Local umpire clinic attendance should be mandatory
for all those desiring to umpire during the up-coming season. Clinic content will be similar to the State and Regional Clinics. Local clinics would deal more with local league rules and specific on-the-field mechanics.

5. Local clinics should be conducted by the Umpire-in-Chief and the umpire association officers. Local clinics should include the use of any and all training tools available from the A.S.A. National office.

6. Each umpire in the association should be videotaped at least once per season.

7. Umpire training (on the field practice) should begin prior to the actual game. Mock games and practice games should be used as a time when veteran umpires could assist rookies in mechanics and positioning.

8. Umpires should be trained in the handling of coaches and players by seasoned veterans. Proper responses as well as "keeping one's cool" should be a part of the training program.

The following are recommendations regarding umpire evaluation procedures:

1. Guidelines and acceptable standards for passing the written test need to be established. A closed book test is recommended in a two hour time block. A closed book test, as opposed to an open book test, will require each umpire to study and learn the rules and their application. Umpires need to be able to make instantaneous decisions
based on a sound knowledge of the rules. All umpires should be required to take the written examination together. Scores from the examination should be kept on file and used as an assignment criterion. An 80% should be required as a passing grade. Those questions that are missed by umpires should be looked up and corrected citing rules and rule sections as references.

2. An evaluation committee should be appointed by the Umpire-in-Chief to conduct the practical evaluations. Members of the evaluation committee should include the members of the Executive Board of the Umpire Association. Practical evaluations should also be a criterion for assignments.

3. Rating scales need to be established by the evaluation committee for the practical evaluation. The criteria for a satisfactory, as well as an unsatisfactory evaluation, need to be stipulated. Even though the A.S.A. Rating Form is the most widely used form of evaluation for on-the-field performance, it does not define standards for performance. Categories are not defined. What might be a satisfactory rating to one evaluator, may not be satisfactory to another. It is this researcher's opinion that the A.S.A. Rating Form should be improved considerably.

4. Practical evaluations should be conducted at least three times a season in order for them to be beneficial to
the umpire. Umpires need to see their evaluations and discuss them with the evaluation committee.

5. Softball coaches should work with the evaluation committee on evaluating umpires. Evaluation cards may be given to coaches prior to the officiating of a game. Coaches should try to be objective when evaluating and should not base evaluations on whether or not they win or lose the game. Evaluation categories should include appearance, pre-game conference, rule knowledge and interpretations, hustle, game control, mechanics and signals. Coaches would turn in evaluation cards to the Umpire-In-Chief following their game.

Evaluations by coaches should not be an assignment criterion, but rather a learning tool.

6. Criteria for firing an umpire need to be established and followed. The following are suggestions for firing an umpire.

   a. Failure to conform to proper dress code.
   b. Missing scheduled assignments more than twice.
   c. Soliciting or accepting softball games not assigned by the association, without prior notification and approval of the association.
   d. Failure to pass the written examination with a 80% after the third attempt.
   e. Failure to pass a practical evaluation performed two to three times a season by members of the evaluation committee.
f. Non-compliance with guidelines and responsibilities in the Missoula Umpires' Association Constitution.

7. Umpires must familiarize themselves with the Sports' Officials Legal Guide. Plaintiff's attorneys have alleged that since umpires are in charge of the entire softball game, they are responsible for any and all injuries that occur, however remote their involvement. Umpire Associations must provide comprehensive insurance for their registered umpires.

Finally, it is recommended that additional study be conducted to further improve and update training and evaluation practices of umpires in the softball program.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

UMPIRE QUESTIONNAIRE

Please answer the questions as completely as you can. Any additional input will be extremely helpful.

Training Program for Softball Umpires

1. Who conducts the training program?

2. Is the program seasonal or yearly?

3. What is included in the training program?
   a. Do officials attend study clubs?
   b. How often do they meet?
   c. Are there tests included in the program?

4. Why did you choose this particular training program?

5. Has the program been successful?

6. What problems have you encountered? How did you solve them?
APPENDIX A

Evaluation Program For Softball Umpires

1. Why have you adopted this evaluation form? (Please include a copy of your evaluation form, if available.)

2. Who administers the evaluation? What are the evaluator's qualifications?

3. How often are the evaluations given?

4. What standards are acceptable for officials to receive a passing grade? What steps are taken if the official doesn't pass the evaluations?

5. What is the follow-up to the evaluated official?

   a. Do they see their evaluations?

   b. Are they kept on file?

6. Have the evaluations been successful?

7. What problems have you encountered with the evaluation?

Please make any other comments that you feel would be helpful. Thank you again for your cooperation.
Missoula Umpires' Association  
435 North Avenue West  
Missoula, Mt. 59801  

October 25, 1985

Dear Sirs:

My name is Vicki Brown and I presently hold the position of Umpire-In-Chief of the Missoula Umpires' Association. I am in my third year at this position and am currently working on a study for our Association in the areas of training and evaluation of officials; specifically, our summer softball umpires.

We have not been particularly satisfied with our training program and our evaluation system of umpires, particularly beginning umpires. I am seeking information from others on what has been successful for them. If you do not have a program specifically for softball umpires, I would be most interested in obtaining information about other sports' officiating programs.

I am enclosing a questionnaire which I would ask your assistance in filling out. I realize this may be time-consuming for you, but I hope that you can assist me in upgrading the quality of umpiring in Missoula.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am enclosing a self-addressed stamped envelope for your convenience.

Sincerely,

Vicki Brown  
Umpire-In-Chief

VB: 1p  
Enc.
Dear sirs:

On or about October 25, 1985, you should have received a letter from me regarding the training and evaluation of softball umpires in your area. Included in the letter was a questionnaire, which I asked your help in completing. I am working on this study with the hopes of improving our standards in Missoula for training and evaluating our softball umpires.

I would hope that you could take some time in completing the questionnaire and return it to me at your earliest convenience.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am enclosing a self-addressed stamped envelope for your convenience.

Sincerely,

Vicki Brown, U.I.C.
Missoula Umpires
Missoula, Mt.
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**Appearance Rating**

1 2 3 4 5
APPENDIX D

PLATE MECHANICS:

Proper 'SET' Position .......... 1 2 3 4 5

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Comments:

Timing-Rhythm:
Proper Hesitation ............... 1 2 3 4 5
Proper Emphasis ................. 1 2 3 4 5

Signals:

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Clarity .......................... 1 2 3 4 5
Decisiveness ...................... 1 2 3 4 5

Comments:

AWAY from PLATE:

Base Awards ( ) Proper Rotation ( )
Trailing BR - First Base ( ) Inside-Outside Theory ( )
Fly Ball Coverage ( ) 'Tag' Plays ( )
'Tag' Situations ( ) 'Force' Plays ( )
Run Downs ( ) Proper Angle ( )

Comments:

---

APPENDIX D
APPENDIX D

BASE MECHANICS:

SIGNALS:

OUT .............................. 1 2 3 4 5
SAFE .............................. 1 2 3 4 5
Fair .............................. 1 2 3 4 5
Foul ................................ 1 2 3 4 5
DEAD BALL ......................... 1 2 3 4 5
Delayed Dead Ball ............... 1 2 3 4 5
CLARITY ......................... 1 2 3 4 5
SELF CONTROL .................. 1 2 3 4 5
DECISIONS ....................... 1 2 3 4 5
PROPER TIMING .................. 1 2 3 4 5
PROPER EMPHASIS ............... 1 2 3 4 5

COMMENTS: ____________________________________________

POSITIONING:

Without Base Runners ........... 1 2 3 4 5
Pitcher-Delivery
Plate Area and Alertness.
With Base Runners ............... 1 2 3 4 5
Pitcher-Delivery
Baserunner
Plate Area and Alertness

PROPER ROTATION ............... 1 2 3 4 5
Proper use of
INSIDE-OUTSIDE THEORY ........ 1 2 3 4 5
Proper Position ................. 1 2 3 4 5
Angle
Depth Perception
Peripheral Vision
Fly Ball Responsibilities
Including 'TAG-UPS' ............. 1 2 3 4 5
PROPER 'BUTTONHOOK' .......... 1 2 3 4 5

Comments: ____________________________________________
# A.S.A. NATIONAL TOURNAMENT
## UMPIRE RATING

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<th>Arrival On Time</th>
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<th>AT</th>
<th>Buses</th>
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### NOTL Criteria
- Categorizes the performance of the umpire in each category (U = Unsatisfactory, S = Satisfactory, G = Good, E = Excellent). If situations do not occur to rate a category, do not mark.

- **1.** TIMELINESS OF APPEARANCE (at proper time)
  - U
  - S
  - G
  - E

- **2.** APPEARANCE (demeanor, neatness, physical condition)
  - U
  - S
  - G
  - E

- **3.** HABITS OF ATTENTION (inattention to field, etc.)
  - U
  - S
  - G
  - E

- **4.** HABITS OF CLARIFICATION (pacing, voice, etc.)
  - U
  - S
  - G
  - E

- **5.** ATTITUDES(when blocked out, responses to feedback, etc.)
  - U
  - S
  - G
  - E

- **6.** COMPORTMENT (properly unobtrusive, professional conduct)
  - U
  - S
  - G
  - E

- **7.** HABITS OF STORYTELLING (discipline, manner, etc.)
  - U
  - S
  - G
  - E

- **8.** ATTITUDES (on the field, cooperation with others)
  - U
  - S
  - G
  - E

- **9.** COOPERATION WITH UIC (throughout the tournament)
  - U
  - S
  - G
  - E

- **10.** ATTITUDES (on the field, cooperation with other officials)
  - U
  - S
  - G
  - E

### UMPIRE TECHNIQUES AND SKILLS

A. **Drill Calls**

B. **Corrected during tournament**

C. **Needs to work on these**

D. **Needs to correct**

### RATING
- **Excellent**
- **Good**
- **Satisfactory**
- **Unsatisfactory**

### RECOMMENDATION
- **At Large**
- **Return**
- **Would Accept Back**
- **Do not return**

### RATLD BY TOURNAMENT UMPIRE-IN-CHIEF