

Enhancing Your Game

An important point of emphasis is plate work. We all have been asked the classic question, "Which do you enjoy working more, the plate or bases?" For me personally, it is the plate because of the engagement, challenge and focus that comes with this responsibility. You make your name when working the plate and no one has made it to the show or major D1 by being a stellar base umpire.

How do we turn ourselves into good plate umpires? By developing good and repetitive work habits. Habits that will bring consistent looks and mechanics when a game runs long, or pressure situations present themselves.

First, have a good base and make sure you get into the slot, so you can see the entire plate. Develop a locking position with your stance whether it be the bar, hands on knee, scissors or crouching with hands behind knees. This locking position will set your head height at a correct, stable and constant position to get the pitch right. This position will become what you can count on for each pitch, one at a time. Next, develop the timing of the "drop" into your locked position right before the pitcher delivers his pitch.

Second, elements that separate the great umpires from the rest of the pack, are "tracking" and "timing." Are you tracking the ball from the pitcher's hand to the catcher's mitt? After tracking the pitch, does your timing allow you to replay the pitch and validate the decision you are about to render? Once ready to reveal your decision, use good tone and crisp mechanics. These are some of the core elements that big league and major D1 umpires have in common and got them where they are.

Third, staying focused for a whole game can be tough. Find ways to help you maintain focus from start to finish. For example: In a nine-inning game, separate the game into three, three-inning games and try to better yourself in each game. Constantly remind yourself when you're in a tough situation or feeling tired to slow your timing down, and call strikes like you did in the top of the 1st. Find what works for you to help yourself keep mentally focused for an entire game or extra innings.

Finally, as the plate umpire you are the leader, so signal your crewmates to be on the same page for rotations, situations and changes. Know the ground crew so when weather presents, you are prepared. Manage situations as a diffuser, not as an instigator and whatever the case may be, being strong in the responsibilities defined above will enhance your game. Bringing calm to the storm when coaches and players get emotional is not only required but is the norm in today's game. Work on these things and veteran officials, coordinators and evaluators will take notice.

Sincerely,

Mo Hodges