

Umpiring in 2020

In a quickly evolving on-field culture in our sport, “umpiring smart” is more complex than ever. This is true from professional baseball to college baseball. Each level must deal with the evolution in its own way.

Technology now influences how the game gets played. When play is affected, umpires, naturally, need to adjust. With the unbelievable level of technology in Major League Baseball, comes data on certain aspects of the umpires’ performances. Although adjustments must be made to gain accuracy and precision, no umpire’s on-field decision should be influenced by the presence of replay!

As a college umpire, it is important that you pay attention to professional baseball’s evolution. *Our* game now uses technology as a tool to correct some calls, albeit not close to the extent in MLB, and you should consider that replay and high-definition TV exist whether they are used to change your call or not. You are accountable in a high-profile world to make decisions with accuracy.

Defining a “correct call” today is different than in earlier decades when umpires learned to call “out or safe” based on perception. That is to say that if the tag is down before the runner gets to the bag, he’s out – period. Don’t be “too fine” because no one in the stadium (including the umpire) knows whether the actual tag was perfect or not. Today, everyone in and outside of the stadium has access to that information. You must now see and gather all the same information that television gathers or you may in-fact be the only one in the stadium *not* aware of what the proper call should be. No matter how hard you try to “sell” your call, no one is buying it without checking a replay.

To work in the changing culture in 2020 takes constant work. It doesn’t matter how long you’ve done it- as the game evolves, your approach must evolve. To optimize your ability to see the all elements of the play it takes some unprecedented skill and reprogramming. It takes new thought, new habits and a different way to apply your instincts.

Being among the best will require that you quickly get to the best “staging” spot- enabling any necessary angle adjustment, properly using your eyes to gather all the information, and clearly rendering a decision that will line up with what the rest of the world will see in high-definition and slow motion.

Consider that you will generally get more calls right than wrong even if you’re out of position because you may still have a good look “by accident” depending on how the play develops. Many of your plays will not have any unusual issues and no one will notice or even analyze your position. In other words, you may just be lucky.

Although I wish you luck in the coming season, I wish you more the inspiration needed to not depend on it. Have a great 2020!