

BECOMING A 360 DEGREE UMPIRE

by Joe Burleson

Throughout our umpiring careers I am sure many of you have been asked what it takes to achieve and attain the highest levels as a baseball official and exactly how do you get to the top? I know that we will agree that there are many ideas and types of advice and guidance we all have shared along the way to help our fellow brothers in their pursuits to also reach this ambition. It is definitely a great feeling of accomplishment to be deemed worthy and trusted enough to receive these kinds of assignments in our unique line of business. Although this is highly important to me, I also truly feel that it is imperative to continue to maintain this status as a successful umpire. Each new season I strive to keep setting goals for myself and make an honest effort to never allow my umpiring to 'level out' or go into cruise mode and simply just coast along or become stagnant.

As I prepare myself for this upcoming baseball season my aspiration and objective is to work hard to be a 360 degree umpire. What exactly does this mean? What is a 360 degree umpire? My idea of a 360 degree umpire is someone who does not limit himself. He maintains an open mind and is willing to try new techniques and methods to help improve, develop and advance his umpiring skills and abilities. We must avoid being or becoming 'spot' umpires or simply always finding ourselves in the same place as we set up for our plays and situations on the field. Too many times I see our umpires move to get into position to take their plays and they tend to fall into the same old habits as they settle for what I call the 'default position'. I know it sometimes just feels natural/normal to always go to the cutout for a tag play on the bases or to simply run down the baseline when going to the outfield.

A 360 degree umpire does not allow himself to fall into this rut and is constantly maintaining a fresh outlook as he works hard to attain the very best positioning with optimum angles and distances required for each different play that arises. He is not fearful to adventure out and explore new possibilities—working outside the box of what many consider the average standard or norm. This includes, but is not limited to, achieving the very best angles to the open side of the fielder when going to the outfield, working in foul territory or outside the base, when

possible, for both tag and force plays, getting to the open side for force outs at second base instead of just always going to the cutout. A 360 degree umpire consistently works hard to reacting in a more positive manner in keeping the base, the ball and the runner in front of him when feasible to help improve his location and positioning to be more successful.

I truthfully believe and have observed that the very best umpires constantly display high levels of intensity and instincts—they consistently work hard and are always focused throughout the entire game. Both of these elements are required for success—you cannot possess just one. I know that some umpires seem to be born with better instincts and appear to react in a quicker and more positive manner than others. I also know that each of us can work harder to train ourselves to help improve these instincts and reactions to develop positive and solid habits in our umpiring. Everyone of us can advance our game/situation awareness and focus with better pre-pitch knowledge, by utilizing updated umpiring technology and keeping our minds open and not limiting ourselves to just meeting standards.

As many of you have heard me say, there are three types of umpires. Umpires that **MAKE** things happen. Umpires that **WATCH** things happen. Umpires that **WONDER** what happened. A 360 degree umpire **MAKES** things happen!