

## Understanding and Having a Feel for the Game

As you go through your umpire career, you will cross paths with different personality types and umpiring styles. Many umpires know the Rule Book *like the back of their hands*. They can quote the chapter, sections and paragraph but may have a hard time judging interference, obstruction, batting out-of-order and other infractions. There are those who balance the rule book with common sense or what I call "Game Sense."

Developing an UMPIRES' understanding of how college baseball is played-while acquiring a feel for the game is an important recipe for success. We, as collegiate umpires, must be able to anticipate changes in a game's pace and intensity. Good umpires will read these changes and have a feel for when they must assert themselves into the game versus the need to fade into the background-letting the game come to them. You may be a young umpire just getting started in college baseball. You may be transitioning to the college game from the professional ranks or be a veteran to the college game. Developing the skills and maintaining those skills is sometimes a very difficult skill to acquire and attain!

Umpiring college baseball is an apprenticeship. Once you learn how the college game is played, you can become as a very successful collegiate umpire. It is important to mention that honest discussion with both supervisors and your fellow umpires can help you gain an understanding of this very important quality. There is no doubt most umpires who possess a good understanding of how college baseball is played can work their way up the ladder very quickly in spite of weaknesses in other area of their umpiring abilities.

When teaching clinics I am often asked by campers, *Who would you rather umpire with?* An umpire who knows the rules inside and out but does not know how or when to apply them on the field or one who has limited knowledge of the rules but has a great understanding and feel of how the college game is played? My personal response is "give me the umpire who has limited knowledge of the rules but understands how college baseball is played!" The reason I say this is we all know the CCA Manual gives us guidelines on how and when to come together and get the call correct. On the flip side of this scenario the CCA Manual does not teach us how to handle all situations-- when having to deploy instinct and judgment. Either you have the people skills to effectively communicate with coaches, players or administrators **and** the common sense of balancing the rule book, or you don't!

If you fall in the **DON'T** category, it is my belief your longevity as a successful collegiate umpire is limited as for your ultimate ambition to make it to the top of our profession, the College World Series, is short lived. I am not down-playing the importance of knowing the applications of the rules as set forth by the NCAA rule book. It is a vital piece to our success as umpires.

But to support my opinion on “understanding the game”, many coaches and umpires I have worked with during my career have all expressed one very important belief. “HAVING A FEEL FOR THE GAME” is by far the most important trait in an umpires’ toolbox!

With this said, do not be the umpire who uses the term, “HAVING A FEEL FOR THE GAME”, as an excuse for NOT enforcing the rules of the game. This is seen by simply ignoring infraction after infraction with the rationale YOU are displaying some form of game management. If this is YOU, you have missed the point I am trying to express. Let the game come to you, see and absorb what is happening. Take the extra second to process the information and decide the impact on the play and the game. Be the umpire who understands and has a feel for the game on when to NOT be afraid to make the game deciding call or no-call!

In closing I challenge each of you to continue spreading your knowledge and experience to young and seasoned umpires, so that we all can pave the way for those who follow in our footsteps. Have a great year!

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