

Heated and Non-Routine Situations

Regarding handling throwing at batter situations umpires must obviously know and have an acute awareness *what is going on in the game*. Sometimes a knowledge or information of past history with the two teams can aid in handling these types of situations. I am a firm believer in a head's up program where a crew can be told in advance if there is bad blood or potential issues with the two teams they are assigned to umpire.

If no previous history exists then the crew must have positive game awareness and look for certain keys that we all know happen at times during our games. Teams taunting one another, home runs where the batter says or does something to the other team, a defensive player saying something to the batter, or maybe an inning where one team unnecessarily pours on the runs can also lead to a potential throwing incident.

I feel that the entire crew must be in tune with these potential non-routine situations as they arise and be prepared to deal with this **immediately**. The plate umpire is key here, but sometimes he may not have the required experience to either recognize this or just may lack the confidence to step up and deal with these incidents. The other member(s) of the crew, especially the more experienced umpire(s) must intervene if this is the case. This can be a difficult situation in itself. Sometimes umpires do not want to step on a partner's toes or embarrass the plate umpire or crew but this can be done in a professional manner when handled correctly.

Umpires need to recognize when an offensive team causes issues and this can be the same if the defense is the instigator as well. It's obvious we want to make a mental note of certain players that are guilty of an unsportsmanlike action towards the other team and then be ready for any retaliation as it arises. Sometimes we can prevent further actions with communication to teams or maybe we have to give a warning before something occurs.

When the pitcher decides to throw at a batter or retaliate for previous actions, this is also an issue we must weigh and decide how severe the pitch/action is. Obviously the location of the pitch is relevant here. Is the batter hit in the thigh; the back; or the upper shoulder; or the head? Do we warn or do we eject? These are things we talk about in camps, pre game meetings and it seems we can discuss this at length, but until you are out there on the field in this pressure filled and heated situation we really can't teach how to handle this type of situation. Sometimes umpires have to mishandle this situation a few times to learn and gain the confidence needed to be more successful in the future. Like I always say we must be 3% umpires—97% of the game usually handles itself and any umpire can be out there. But when the non-routine and heated situations arise the top umpires are not afraid to step up and work. That should be the goal of every umpire.

I think we all will agree that issuing warnings is sometimes the least we could and should do in situations where the pitcher throws at a batter. But for some reason umpires seem hesitant to do this. I don't know why and I know each situation is different but issuing a warning usually defuses the problem and the game can return to some normalcy. By issuing a warning we communicate to each team that we are serious and that we will not allow further non-game actions from either team. Sometimes a head coach is upset when we warn his team and I have found success by assuring him that I am issuing this warning so that the other team will not be allowed to retaliate against his team without a severe penalty.

As I have mentioned above, talking about these situations is great, but having them several times in an umpire's career is really the only way to improve and gain the confidence necessary. It is very difficult to create a heated situation with all the drama and energy that exists in this situation in a camp or classroom environment. Even watching and observing videos is great, but it still does not equal actually being out there on the field in the middle of the heat. *If umpires will realize that issuing warnings in the right moment (and this is also an art) their games and careers will be much more successful and fruitful.*