

How to Advance as a College Baseball Umpire

So many people want to know how to move up the food chain in the umpiring ranks. I have noted pointers below that have been successful for me personally, and feedback from other umpires whom I have worked with over the past few years.

1. Go to selected camps.

There are a ton of camps to go to; however you must do your research to make sure the camp is the right fit for you, and you are the right fit for the camp. You want to try and go to camps that are geographically located to where you want to work. If you are from the Midwest, you would want to go to a camp where there are going to be umpires present that work in conferences in the Midwest or the assignor of those conferences will be observing. Many times conference coordinators will take recommendations from veteran staff members. You are not going to be able to absorb everything that is taught to you at a camp, and you are going to get many different philosophies. Take a few things from that camp that you like and try to implement those things into your overall approach to umpiring.

2. Work every game like there is someone watching

Whatever level you are working, you need to give 100% effort and enthusiasm. The personal philosophy that I have is that umpiring is a privilege, and I work every game as if it is the most important game in my career. Whether it is a Division I game or a JUCO game, you never know who is watching in the stands or what coach is respected by the conference supervisor. You could be working a game where there are 10 people in the stands, but one of those 10 people might be a supervisor that came to watch your partner.

3. Listen to the Veteran Umpires

Most of the veteran umpires will not have a problem with someone asking them the path they took to get to where they are. These are guys that have been fortunate enough to get to an elite level of college baseball as umpires. The one recommendation that I have is when a veteran umpire is talking and taking the time to answer a question is “be all ears.” I remember when I was done playing college baseball, I would go to as many Division I games as I could. Sometimes, I would even go introduce myself to the crew before the game and ask to sit in on the pregame. Over time, you will begin to develop relationships with veteran umpires and you can go to them with rule questions, situation questions, etc...

4. Find a Mentor

If you have someone in your area that is an established umpire in college baseball and you like the way they work, you can try to model yourself after them. This will take a bit of work, because not only do you want to look at them as a role model on the field, but

off the field as well. Pay attention to the way they handle coaches; carry themselves with a purpose, their mechanics. Also, the way they are in the locker room, the way they come dressed to the field, how they treat game administration. I remember when I was done playing college baseball, I would go to as many Division I games as I could. Sometimes, I would even go introduce myself and ask to sit in on the pregame. Over time, you will begin to develop relationships with veteran umpires and you can go to them with rule questions, situation questions, etc...

5. Don't put the cart before the horse

This might be cliché but there is a great deal of truth to this statement. How do you expect make a jump to Division I when you are only working JUCO ball currently? How do you know when you are ready to make the next step? A great rule of thumb that I heard a few years ago is once you have worked a conference tournament or regional at the level you are currently working, you are ready to make the next step to a higher level. For example, if you are working Division II baseball and you have worked the conference tournament a couple of years in a row; obviously you are making a great impression on your assignor and the coaches in the league. I have heard stories about careers getting shattered where guys try to rush up the ladder way to quick, and get thrown in the fire to quickly, the next thing you know, their careers and dreams come to a screeching halt.

6. When you get the call be ready.

This is the only personal story that I will share with you but I think it is great example of being ready to perform. In 2005, I was an alternate in one of the conferences that I currently work in and was attending a game at my alma mater. I knew the crew chief that was working the series from a camp that I attended the previous fall and spoke with him before the game. He had asked if I received any assignments and I replied, "not yet." His response was, "it will be here sooner than you think." Later that evening I was at home watching some TV and my cell phone rang from a number that I did not recognize. It was the conference coordinator from the conference that I was an alternate in. He told me that an umpire got sick at X University and asked if I was available to work this weekend. I told him of course, I am leaving after I pack. All you can ask for is a chance. Once you get that chance, it is up to you to determine how you use it.

7. Get ready to drive

If you are offered a game in a level above what you normally work, and you are serious about moving up, take the game. However, if you have a previous assignment for that day, check with your current assignor and explain to him the situation before you commit to the game you were offered. Most of the time, assignors will understand. By asking to get removed from your current assignment to work up a level, it shows your assignor that you do care about the game that he had offered to you. Remember, you did commit to this first, so give your assignor the courtesy of asking to get removed off that game. Most of the time, these opportunities come at the last minute and you will have to travel

more than you are used to. However, this will show that you are a team player, and that you are willing to make the commitment to work at a higher level. If Division I is the level you want to get to, there are going to be some **sacrifices** that must be made.