

What is the “IT” factor?

I was instructing at an umpire clinic in the fall when a student asked some of the instructors what was the “IT” factor in an umpire. The purpose of this article is to have us reflect on what are some qualities the “IT” factor may be in the umpiring profession and can we attain the “IT” factor.

The “IT” factor may be defined as something that makes someone special. The “IT” factor is not specific to one profession such as being a politician or a celebrity but is related to all professions such as umpiring. Think about certain umpires you believe may have the “IT” factor. What are those qualities they possess which make you feel they have the “IT” factor. One of the first umpires who come to my mind is retired Major League Baseball (MLB) umpire Doug Harvey, aka “God.” Do you believe Doug Harvey had the “IT” factor? Did the fact the MLB players respected him so much that they called him “God” give that away? What about present MLB umpires, Ted Barrett or Jim Wolf? What qualities do they have made them seem so special in the umpiring profession?

I believe the “IT” factor starts with having a great presence as an umpire. A good presence in umpiring starts with how an umpire looks in their uniform. How do they carry themselves with their body language? Do they provide a presence of a cool, calm, and confident demeanor?

Second is in regard to their attitude, which may be the most important factor. An individual who has the “IT” factor in anything (life), has a certain positive, confident, I can do and a team player attitude. They are not overconfident or cocky, but confident with humility. They are liked, and most important, respected by many. They sincerely have a genuine interest in others. They are the great crew chief that commits to teaching others, genuinely care about others and their success, makes others feel good about themselves, and helps promote good umpires. For example, there was previous well-written article about being a 360-degree umpire. That 360-umpire is someone who may have the “IT” factor because they make a choice, not a commitment, to processing things in a more advance manner which will continue to breed more confidence and success. That 360-umpire can teach others, share their mistakes, and promote a better working environment on and off the field. Having a certain level of confidence allows the umpire to be calm on the field, which helps to provide a certain level of comfort for players and/or coaches. In addition, putting themselves into best possible positions to ensure that they have the best opportunity to make the right call for any situation(s).

Last, an umpire who has the “IT” factor is one of the best in their profession. Their performance is without question, second-to-none and consistent throughout because they have committed to ensuring they maximize the things they can control such as, but not limited to, focus, effort, timing, positioning, judgment, and play recognition. Retired MLB umpire, Jim Evans, once said that an umpire’s worst enemy is a surprise. The “IT” factor umpire does not get surprised because they commit to process the game, anticipates plays and situations, stays focus, and are always prepared for the unexpected.

Acquiring and committing to the “IT” factor will position any umpire for greater success and ultimately a more enjoyable umpiring experience.