

Part Three of Three: Fundamentals of Umpiring:

The third fundamental of umpiring is mastering the rules. There are fewer things an umpire can do that look better than, “Nailing,” a tough rule situation. When a tough play happens and a rule is applied correctly an umpire gains instant credibility, this is taken to another level if it can be explained to a coach using rule terminology.

Please notice fundamental number three is MASTERING the rules... Not, knowing, understanding, having read, I heard at a clinic once, So and So said, or even I remember on a test once... According to Webster the definition of *mastering is: **a person who has total control, or has become extremely skilled at doing something.*** I believe there are three pieces to mastering the rules. First, have a clear understanding of what you have just seen. Second, know cold the Rule, the Definition, and the Penalty verbatim from the rulebook. And third, clearly be able to demonstrate and explain the rule with, “Rule Book Terminology.”

The first step to “Nailing” a rule is, knowing exactly what you have just seen. As umpires we do not watch plays as the average fan or broadcaster might, we watch every play with a purpose. We are responsible for watching plays with the pre-knowledge that a particular rule needs to be fulfilled in order for it to be legal. A question I ask myself all the time while working is, “Why were you watching that?” It tells me what I was thinking as a play developed, or if I was looking at what I was responsible for watching on a given play. As a play develops certain rules or scenarios need to run through your mind. An example of this could be, less than two outs runner on first ball hit to the shortstop and they are going attempt a double play. As you are moving into position you should be thinking that you will be responsible for force play slide rule, and then watching to make sure the runner fulfills all of his requirements under the rule. There are many more examples but the focus here should be... were you looking at the right thing and can you clearly explain to someone exactly what you have just seen? Knowing exactly what to be looking for and being crystal clear about you have just seen is the first step in mastering the rules.

Step two; know cold the Rule, the Definition, and the Penalty verbatim from the rulebook. At the level we work it is not good enough to have a working understanding of the rules. We need to know them cold! Once you have a clear understanding of what you have just seen the next question is, does it fit the rule and definition of what you are about to enforce? If it does, are you dead sure of the penalty? If you have answered yes to both then the last piece gets far easier. A little tip here for practice... Ask, and play the, “what if game.” When a routine play happens ask yourself, “What if that ball was thrown into the dugout? Or, what if that guy had interfered when the ball barely missed him? Or, what if the coach had not told you of that substitute?” Every play is an opportunity to learn.

Now for the, “Easy” part! Once you have clearly seen, what you have watched with a

purpose, and know with out a doubt a rule has been violated and a penalty needs to be enforced, step three is all down hill. Just demonstrate a great mechanic and explain the rule using, "Rule Book Terminology." It really is that simple. I have seen umpires complicate this by using their own verbiage or even worse, being unsure and using a poor mechanic. Most of the time umpires, "Freeze" when they are not sure of either step one or step two. By mastering the first two steps, the last step will make you look like a million bucks! Whether in a huddle or a discussion with a coach, take your time. Explain clearly what you have seen, then verbatim explain the rule and its application. He may not agree, but when he looks it up later that night and it says exactly what you told him you will have gained his respect and trust. In the end, you and your crew will gain instant credibility that will carry for many games, even seasons to come.

By working pitch in and pitch out, game in and game out, season in and season out on these fundamentals; you will build a foundation that will grow into a career you will be proud of forever.