

Teach

As a college-level umpire, you have undoubtedly worked hard to learn the rules, draw from the experience of others to refine your mechanics and ability to handle tough situations, and navigate the culture of college baseball. You've demonstrated your skills to one or more coordinators and established relationships within the sport you love. Now, whether you are still building your career or winding down a successful one, there is one thing that all umpires should embrace during their time in our game and beyond: teaching!

One of the strongest recommendations I can make to any umpire at any level is to teach. It makes you better, and it makes our sport better. Be sincere, be encouraging, be patient and nurturing, and, above all, be honest. Teach through your words, your actions, and your experiences.

The reality is that we're always teaching whether we realize it or not. There's always an audience - someone taking something away from whatever we're consciously or subconsciously demonstrating. That's precisely why we must acknowledge our responsibility to do it right. Teaching is a great way to build our own confidence by reinforcing our knowledge and skills. Everyone around us benefits in some way; it's a universally positive endeavor. The umpiring profession benefits, and, more broadly, the sport of baseball benefits too. Now and then, demonstrations of strong character will even benefit those well beyond baseball and into other areas of society.

Teaching umpires can come in many forms. The most obvious format is organized forums - classes, camps, or schools. That is not for everyone. However, we can all teach by simply understanding that we are constantly around students of baseball and umpiring, and we must behave accordingly. What we do in a certain situation could very well influence the future actions of an observing umpire.

Even if we don't consider teaching to be a strength or part of our skillset, we are all capable of open communication. Remember, teaching is only happening when all parties show an openness to learn - including the teacher. We should ask partners for honest feedback on specific aspects of our performance and be open to receiving that feedback. Then, we should ask them if they are open to the exchange of feedback in both directions. Once we establish two-way constructive feedback, everyone is less defensive and more receptive as we share information and elaborate on anything that will be beneficial. We should never leave valuable lessons on the table!

If you consistently work at the Division I level, you will have a profound impact on someone trying to break into that level. If you are working at the Division II or III levels, teach and mentor the less experienced umpires that may be looking to move up. Your umpiring legacy will take on a new dimension when you are actively teaching. There's an indescribable level of satisfaction when you see the results of showing someone and explaining with clarity how it's done.

Like any interaction, teaching has its caveats. Though well-intended, we can easily come across as arrogant or condescending. We can exaggerate stories that we think are making good examples. We can easily lose perspective and tell someone to change a behavior that they've been programmed to follow for years and then expect them to change it in an instant. Sloppy teaching and mixed-messaging can be more destructive than we will know. Our message must be sincere, focused, and unmistakable.

As umpires, we have many responsibilities. I thank you for what you do day in and day out. Remember that the responsibility to pass on what we know is as important as our ability to call out and safe. Effective teaching is the lifeblood of any profession. The future of our great game depends on it!