

## *What it takes to be an NCAA Tournament Crew Chief*

By Jeff Henrichs

There are many characteristics that a Crew Chief must have to be a strong leader. Without a doubt - **communication** is the most important, period. This communication begins as soon as you find out who your crew is going to be – **be the first call them, and the first to congratulate them!** Let them know that you are there to make the games go smoothly and to **support** their umpiring in any area you can. Ask how you can help with their **travel** - if there are any concerns or problems, and then inform the crew of your travel plans and if there are some difficulties with their travel - you will be there to support them through this anxious time.

*Most of us all want to know what game we will be working the plate.* Communicate that information in the initial phone call to put your crew mates mind at ease. Ask them some open ended questions on how their season has gone - if they've had any of the teams involved and ask how their health is and, finally - **if there is anything you can do for them.** If it's their first regional, *walk* them through the process, **congratulate them again** and let them know what a special experience it will be!

You will have to understand how to communicate with Don Umland, Scott Taylor and George M. Drouches. There might be problems that arise with crew travel, umpires getting hurt or hydration problems with the heat. We might have an ejection or a protest. Make sure no matter what happens in these events, they are the **first ones** to know! As a Chief, feel at ease to talk with them and be able to give them the events on what happened, listen to what they have to say and offer what you have to help them/NCAA **understand the situation.** Remember, they are the ones who have their trust in you - so you will be able to have a candid conversation with them. Not only Don, Scott, George, but with the NCAA Representative(s) Baseball Committee members who are there with you. They are there to help make the tournament go smoothly and at times - *will ask for your advice.* Take your time to think about the answer and use the tools that you've put in your tool box over the years. Don't be afraid to talk with your Assistant Chief and **involve your crew.** They love to be a part of things.

The management of the game is what will make or break you, period. **Know** the names of the Head Coaches so that at the home plate meeting - when you shake hands - use their first name. They **know** our names, so it is crucial to know theirs. **Know** the ground rules that have been provided. **Know** if you have weather problems possibly coming throughout the game is important as well. Finally, you were chosen because of the qualities of your management style. Don't change what got you to being a post season crew chief. Be who you are, and stick to your management style!

What is 'it' that makes a Crew Chief shine during the critical times of a ballgame? As the late, great Hall of Fame MLB umpire Doug Harvey used to say, "take 20 seconds to listen to what they have to say before you give an answer!" How true! Take your time to listen, take your time to answer and use the tools that have carried you to this position as a chief to pull you through. If the situation is an ejection or a bench clearing brawl, stay calm! After it's all said and done and things have calmed down, use your crew for what they observed and gather all the information. If someone is excited on the crew, calm them down! Ask your assistant chief what they have, and if he's not on the field, ask the most experienced umpire last what they have. Gather all your information and then tell the crew what you're going to rule so that in case something is wrong you can fix it now and look good as opposed to after the fact and you look sloppy. If there are ejections/suspensions take the time at that point to write it down on the line up card, and if it's not you behind the plate stay with and help the umpire that is. You'll need all this information immediately after the game. Once you get into the locker room, gather your crew and the alternate umpires. Go over once again what happened and ask the alternate umpires what they witnessed. Clear the locker room of any clubhouse or school helpers. Make the call to the NCAA and explain what happened, if there were ejections and if you had to hand out suspensions.

Your crew will follow your leadership from the very beginning of your communication with them. If you bring great energy, passion and enthusiasm from the first time you talk to your partners to the last pitch of the postseason your crew will follow you! Help, guidance and understanding of some travel issues will calm the nerves of some of your crew. Having your crew feel that you are there for them makes the tournament go that much easier! Remember your crew mates are there because their Supervisor and NCAA Regional Advisors put them there. Give them positive feedback, and IF there is something major you need to talk to them about, pull them aside and do it one on one!

**Being a Crew Chief in the Post Season is a huge honor!** Be a good strong leader that works hard and leads by example. Pump your guys up and let them know how much you value them. There is no greater feeling then to hear an umpire say, "I would love to be on his crew!" YOU are the one they entire crew looks up to, - so have a great Tournament and do what got you to being chosen as Chief!