

The right call

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Starting An Umpire Association

In my area, umpiring for summer ball had been really disorganized for years. There was no association; nothing was really organized. Each team had an umpire scheduling umps for their games. Those who scheduled games were finding it increasingly difficult to find partners because it seemed everyone always had a game somewhere else.

Last fall, my best friend and I decided to get everyone in town organized under one umbrella, and the Clarksville (Tenn.) Area Baseball Umpires Association was born. We've had a great summer but it has not been without its speed bumps.

Here are a few of the things we learned this year:

1) It's never too early to get started. Start contacting umpires and schedule makers now. Let the umpires know how many games you anticipate being able to give them next year, and what the pay for each age group will be. Let the schedule makers know how many umpires you anticipate having and how much money you will require.

2) Make sure to get everything in writing. Demand that the schedule makers sign off on the schedules they give you. We had a coach give us his schedule over the phone, and then he added a game later. He never told us about the added game, so game time came and there were no umpires. He blamed us. Also, include a stipulation that umpires will be paid 1/2 game fee for games that are cancelled without notification. This has been a verbal understanding in our area for years, and normally helps en-

courage coaches to call umpires if a game is cancelled. We had a new team this year that cancelled three games and would not pay the umps anything. Umps were not notified in any of the three situations.

3) Have one primary point of contact for coaches and a secondary POC. Our primary POC was difficult to reach at times because he umpires a lot of games. Next year we will have a secondary contact. This will help in the event of changes in game time, location, or anything else that may come up.



4) Make sure you have the best umpires available. It's a great feeling when an out-of-town coach tells you that your guys are the best he's seen, and asks you if you will schedule his games. Local coaches like to know that

they are getting the best available, as well.

5) Make sure you get paid what you are worth. For years, we were underpaid because we had no organization. We tell the coaches, "If you want high school-caliber umps, then you have to pay high school rates." We back that up by requiring that, as a minimum, all of our umps are high school certified. Many of us, like myself, work college games, as well. This is a strong bargaining chip.

6) Make sure your umps know what is expected of them. Uniform styles, scheduling policies, ranking system, amount of travel, et al. If the umps know what is expected, you will have a better idea of who is on board and who is not.

These are but a few things I can suggest. There are myriad other details that you will learn along the way. **By Chris Winn**

Message from the Executive Director

For the first time, the ABUA has instituted an ambitious membership survey to define the strengths of the ABUA and the challenges that are ahead in order to build the association into the biggest and best baseball umpire association we can.

We want to know what you think. We want to know how you rate your membership experience. We want to know why you renewed or joined for the first time in 2002. Was it the liability insurance program? The loss-of-game-fee benefits? On-line educational resources? Camp and clinic discounts? Or the equipment and uniform discounts through Honig's Whistle Stop?

We also want to know what we are not doing. What can we do better to help you become a better umpire? Do you like receiv-

ing the newsletter on line instead of in the mail? How do you rate the content? Have you had to file an insurance claim with Special Markets Insurance Consultants? If so, was your experience positive? How about dealing with Honig's. Did you have a positive experience when ordering equipment?

We also want to know if you would be more apt to attend the annual ABUA Hall of Fame dinner and ceremony if we moved it to Omaha in June during the final weekend of the College World Series. How many of you would want to attend the dinner and ceremony, attend a few of the best-of-three CWS finals games and maybe play a round of golf? Sounds like a great weekend to me.

With a membership close to 1,100 members, the ABUA is just beginning to scratch

the population surface of amateur baseball umpires in the U.S. While it is a tall task to identify who and where the amateur baseball umpires are, we should continually try to identify new prospective members, especially the large groups of youth-league and high school umpires. That is the area where I see the most growth and the most growth potential in the future. The results of this survey will help us plan in order to achieve our goals.

Thanks for taking the time to give us your thoughts!

Ted Breidenthal

ABUA Executive Director

ABUA Hall of Fame

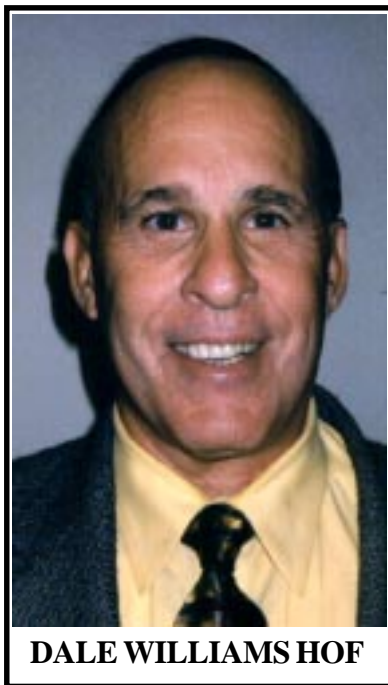
Dale Being Dale, A True Hall of Famer

Imagine what it's like to get that first letter from the NCAA telling you that your schedule has been approved by the NCAA Division I Baseball Committee and that your selection has been confirmed to work a regional competition in the NCAA Division I Baseball Championship. Then imagine what it's like when you get the phone call from your crew chief with the particulars of the event. It was all pretty heady stuff for a rookie going into his first regional. Topping it all off was who was calling. Your first crew chief for your first regional, in Tennessee, is Dale Williams. That happened to me in 1994. I went from hyperventilation to complete blackout, but Dale got me through it.

This was to be the biggest assignment of my career, and it ended with Arizona State defeating Tennessee, earning Arizona State coach Jim Brock his final trip to Omaha. Characteristically, Dale Williams deferred his championship plate assignment to another umpire to give him the experience of working what was truly "The Big One." Understandably, after 21 regional assignments and eight College World Series assignments, Williams had seen plenty of big ones over the years. Redirecting the championship limelight to another umpire was just Dale being Dale. I was stationed at second base for that game, and, ironically, Dale was on the bench.

He was there for my first, and only, plate job, the typical rookie assignment. At the conclusion of that game Williams announced there would be an emergency meeting of all the tournament staff in the dressing room. It didn't sound good and Dale was uncharacteristically somber.

His mood changed almost immediately when the six of us assembled.



DALE WILLIAMS HOF

Not only had I passed the test, but Dale was reworking the assignments so I could work a second plate just like the rest of the crew. What I didn't realize was that Dale had given up his plate assignment for me. This vote of confidence got me through my first regional and has remained with me throughout my career. It didn't seem like a big deal to Dale. It was Dale being Dale. But it was a huge deal to me. A nod of approval from your first regional crew chief is huge. A nod of approval from Dale Williams is epic.

I haven't talked to Dale a lot since that regional in 1994, but I have seen him quite often. In his 23 years in the NFL, he has garnered 21 consecutive post-season assignments and is the dean of the NFL headlinesmen. When I called him for this interview, it was like we had just worked together. But instead of me asking the questions, Dale took over the interview, more interested in how my career was going; where I had been, what I had been doing. Again it was Dale being Dale, gracious and deferring, more interested in me and reluctant to talk about himself. It was hard to swing the conversation to Dale Williams and get his story told. Suffice it to say, Dale has done everything there is to do in amateur baseball. He served as a NCAA regional evaluator for two terms. He is the Big West Conference coordinator of umpires. His full-time job for 12 years was assigning all game officials for the Los Angeles Unified School District for 16 sports and 49 high schools. He has been responsible for the careers of numerous West Coast officials.

The right call

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Jim Garman	Director
David Rogers	Director
Randy Christal	Director
Dave Yeast	Director

Executive Director

Ted Breidenthal
ted@umpire.org

Executive Editor

John Kleis
jekleis@hotmail.com

Senior Contributing Editor

Dan Weikle

Contributing Editors

Chris Winn
Mark Hratko
Scott Watkins
Dick Runchey

These organizations, through various personnel, also offer on-going assistance to

The right call:

NCAA
NFHS
ABUA
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Copy Editor

Melany Kleis

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**Professional
Umpires for
Amateur Baseball**

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Membership is Grand ... Again

For the second straight year, more than 1,000 umpires in the U.S. and abroad joined the ABUA, making it the largest association of amateur baseball umpires in the country. As of July 30, a total of 1,093 individual umpires and 20 local umpire associations were members of the association.

This is the second time in the association's five-year history that membership has topped the

1,000 mark. Last year, the ABUA had 1,079 individual members and 17 local associations.

"While surpassing the 1,000-member mark for the second straight year is quite an accomplishment, we have our sights set on building an association with thousands of amateur youth league, high school and college baseball umpires around the country," said Ted Breidenthal, ABUA executive director. "To accomplish this goal, we need every board member, officer, lo-

cal association leader and individual member to spread the word about ABUA and the benefits of membership to other umpires in their area."

Members are encouraged to promote ABUA membership at board and local association meetings. Any member who needs ABUA marketing materials for a presentation should contact Ted Breidenthal, ABUA executive director, at ted@umpire.org.

ABUA Seeks Board Nominations

The ABUA currently is accepting nominations for two new Board members. The term for both Board members will begin January 1, 2003, and expire December 31, 2005. The Nominating Committee, which consists of former ABUA presidents Dick Runchey and Ken Eldridge, will submit a list of finalists to the Board by the end of September. The finalists then will be voted on by the membership beginning in October. If you are interested in nominating a member for the Board, please contact Dick at rrunch6050@aol.com and copy Ken at keneldridge@hotmail.com.

ABUA Seeking Hall of Fame Nominations

The ABUA currently is accepting Hall of Fame nominations from the membership. All nominees shall be considered on the merits of contributions to and achievements in umpiring at the youth

league, high school or college levels. All nominees must have significant and long-term contributions to umpiring at any of the three levels, and be worthy of national recognition. All nominees must exemplify the highest standards

of ethical conduct, moral character and sportsmanship supporting amateur baseball. Please send nominations to Ted Breidenthal, ABUA executive director, by September 15, 2002.



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Umpire Tips

From the ABUA Website...www.umpire.org

The ABUA web site, www.umpire.org, offers members the opportunity to discuss various umpire topics. Below are some interesting excerpts from the site. Take time to go to the site and share your experiences with other umpires.

Umpiring in Hell

Someday I may write a book about umpiring. If so, it will include a chapter called "Umpiring in Hell." Yesterday will be there. It was 107 degrees, 3 p.m. game. I actually blocked this day initially, then took it as a fill-in. I was right the first time.

Little League Junior All-Stars, winners bracket (2nd game). Should be some pretty good ball. Top of first, three errors, two runs walked in. After two innings, it's 9-2. It's also been over an hour. Now I know what a turkey feels like three hours before Thanksgiving dinner. But, we're going to get a 10-run game and sit in the shade before the 6 p.m. game (I said I was stupid, yes 3 p.m. and 6 p.m. on a July afternoon in Sacramento). It was not to be. By the end of five, it's 11-11, and over three hours. Guess the 6 p.m. game won't start on time. A partner and I figure out the good scenario — a leadoff home run in the bottom of the sixth followed by six outs. Yeah, right! They got the one run in the bottom of the sixth; now it's

12-11. And the visitors got seven in the top of the seventh, and the home team got three in the bottom of the seventh, leaving the bases full. It was a 18-14 final score, just short of four hours. But here's the good part: 19 errors, not to mention more wild pitches and passed balls than you could count, many scoring (giving away) runs. Just short of four hours. I do believe that this was the worst-played game of baseball, for its level, that I have ever seen. The nine and 10-year-old's played a much better game the night before. We umpires suggested that both teams should lose, and never play again.

Oh yeah, game two, also winners bracket. The 6 p.m. game that started at 7:30 (same crew). 12 runs in the top of the first (four errors, first three batters walk, steal second and third, score on errors). With one out in the third, it's 22-0. The scorekeeper quit counting errors (at 6) in the top of the second. Fortunately, only one team in this game stunk. To their credit, they maintained a good attitude all the way through. The final score was, 24-0, a no-hitter (two walks). Partner adopted a "strike-if-it-doesn't-bounce" zone on the winners, who quit running after two innings. At least we were done in just over an hour and a half.

There are some really good days in umpiring, and then there are days like yesterday.

Art Hager

Trick Plays

I've seen a few in my years of baseball as a player, but as a coach I was always afraid to try any of them. Now that I'm an umpire and have a good

75 games under my belt this year, I've seen a few more.

This one from a game last week: R3, R1. While the pitcher has the ball on the mound and is taking signs, R1 sprints to take his lead — in SHORT RIGHT FIELD. He's off the dirt and on the grass behind the second baseman. He comes to a stop and then when the pitcher tries to make a play on him, there is no one within 25 feet of him. While F1 waits for a fielder to get within range who can make a tag, R3 bides his time. As soon as F1 throws, R3 breaks for home. In the time that it takes the throw to go from F1 to F3 or F4 out in short right field, and back to the plate, R3 scores standing up and R1 takes second base.

The defensive coach was fit to be tied. It was all perfectly legal, however, as R1 established his own baseline in short right-centerfield. He didn't move from that position, hence was never out of the baseline.

After the game the offensive coach explained that if the defense doesn't make a play on him, he just jogs over to second base as the pitcher makes his pitch. You either move R1 up, or score R3. The thing about it is the element of surprise and the fielders not knowing what to do about it. It was a thing of beauty.

Jeff

VISIT OUR WEB SITE
www.umpire.org

Association Profile

In each edition of the right call, an umpire association will be profiled to learn what associations are doing to promote professional amateur umpires. This edition's profile is the Copperstate Umpire Association (CSUA) of Phoenix.

The Copperstate Umpires Association (CSUA) was formed in 1994 with 24 members. While CSUA was incorporated in August 2000, current membership exceeds 150 umpires. CSUA provides umpires for high school freshman baseball and all levels of youth and adult baseball throughout the state of Arizona. CSUA, in conjunction with the Arizona Umpiring Academy, provides umpires a second-to-none comprehensive training program no matter the level of experience. The quality training produces quality umpires with a high competency level.

Competence increases confidence, and for umpires to be successful they must possess those two characteristics. Training encourages fraternal and educational



attributes to all baseball umpires.

The CSUA has created financial incentives for all umpires, which promotes new membership, clinic attendance and new contracts that provide added assignments to umpires. CSUA is projected to assign nearly 4,000 games in 2002 and 6,000 in 2003. CSUA, in conjunction with the Arizona Collegiate Umpire's provides oppor-

tunities for umpires to aspire to the college level. The 2002 season had five umpires who worked the high school playoffs, 10 umpires who worked a Junior College regional, two umpires who worked an NCAA regional, one umpire who worked a super regional, one umpire who worked the JUCO World Series and one umpire who worked the NCAA College World Series in Omaha.

We are very proud of the umpires' accomplishments and together with the Arizona Umpiring Academy (Steve Mattingly as the owner and chief instructor) we will continue to make a difference with umpiring in Arizona. Thanks to the ABUA for its direction and assistance in further developing amateur baseball umpiring in Arizona.

Mark Hratko

CEO & President, CSUA Inc.

ABUA & USA Baseball Heat Up With Summer Assignments

ABUA umpires all across the country have been busy working USA Baseball competition. Below is a list of ABUA umpires and the USA Baseball events they have or will work during 2002. The ABUA congratulates all umpires for a job well done:

Junior Olympic Championships, Tucson, AZ June 22-29. Sixty-three umpires worked the championships.

USA Baseball National Team

The following USA National Team assignments were announced: June 24-25 in Tucson, AZ. ABUA umpires: Steve Mattingly, Phoenix; Mark Hratko, Glendale, AZ; and Jason Rogers, Phoenix. The National Team then traveled east to play a five-game series with Japan. June 28 in Aberdeen, MD ABUA umpires: Chris Leach, Wilmington, DE; Bob Gustin, Alexandria, VA; and Darrin Sealey, Spring

field, VA. June 29 in Bridgeport, CT ABUA umpires: Jim Rondeau, South



Dennis, MA; Steve Ricciarini, Pittsfield, MA; and Dan Salce, Bristol, CT. June 30 in Long Island, NY ABUA umpires: Bob Parker, New Fairfield, CT; John Basso, Woodbridge, CT; and John Christos, Danbury, CT. July 3 & 4 in Lakewood and Trenton, NJ ABUA umpires: John Kleis, Lovettsville, VA; Harry Greer, Philadelphia; Tony Gisondi, Middletown, NJ; John Tub-

ertini, Vineland, NJ; and Mark Savedoff, Metuchen, NJ.

International Assignments

Congratulations to four very deserving ABUA umpires who have been chosen by the International Baseball Federation (IBAF) and USA Baseball to work international baseball competitions.

Warren Bumpus, Liverpool, NY, was selected to work the IBAF AAA World Championship August 1-11 in Sherbrooke, Quebec.

John Kleis, Lovettsville, VA, will work the IBAF World University Baseball Championship in Messina, Italy, August 2-11.

Doug Brown, Lake Worth, FL, has been chosen to work the COPABE Continental Qualifier August 23-September 1 in Barquisimeto, Venezuela.

Randy Bruns, Waverly, IA, was selected to work the American Cup (COPABE) September 27-October 6 in Monterrey, Mexico.

Pregame Discussion

"Out of the Blue"...An Umpire's First NCAA Game

There are three good things...I can say about calling the dish in my first NCAA baseball game. Nothing I did affected the outcome of the game, I stayed with it all nine innings, and finally, I was able to leave walking upright. Beyond that? Disaster.

It was my fault. Stupidly believing I was ready, I asked the local assignor to use me. I expected to call bases until I understood the rhythm and style of play, and figured I would begin with small NAIA schools in non-conference games. I thought at that level, the games would practically call themselves, and at the worst, the occasional mumble and grumble about this or that close or missed call. Wrong.

Three days later, I was given a game between two nationally ranked teams, and told to "strap." The coaches were all over me from the first inning, using language that in high school would get you tossed in a heartbeat. When

I asked my partner - a veteran of the NCAA - where the boundary lines were, "There will be some cussing at this level, you just have to ignore it unless it's personal."

Bud, it was ALL personal. From thinly-veiled threats to out-and-out screaming and - ah - 'performance evaluations' ("You're AWFUL!" "Don't f***ing let that happen AGAIN!" "You will NEVER step foot on this ball field AGAIN!") etc. The truth is, they had a point - I had no business being there, and after three innings, I knew it.

In my brief career as an umpire, I was used to calling pitches that lacked the speed I saw that day, and the catchers I normally stood behind were good, but not like what I was seeing here. These guys knew how to frame a pitch. Unaccustomed to the speed and consistency, I was forever behind and racing with my mind's eye to catch up. Not good. My partner told me later that the majority of the pitches the coaches were whining about I had called correctly, from his perspective. Small consolation.

With two outs, bottom of the ninth, the

game mercifully drawing to an end. I had bounced no one. I didn't belong there, not yet - I had no idea what the boundaries were. So I just took every verbal shot, kept moving. Then the benches cleared, and I heard, "This is happening because YOU couldn't control this game!" from the home coach as he raced to try and end the fracas. Maybe.

I did need more training, more experience. I shouldn't have been there. But in retrospect, I can't help wondering if such coaches aren't the type who would blame a woman they impregnated for failing to take birth control. If that game is indicative of NCAA ball, it's time to rethink that whole 'sportsmanship' clause in the rule book.

Conversely, the ball players were gentlemen, all. They deserved a better umpire. They'll get one, too. Because eventually, I will be back on that ball field. Count on it.

By Scott Watkins

Hall of Fame Continued From Page 2

As an administrator and evaluator, he was years ahead of his time. Long before it was in vogue, Williams developed the prototype evaluation system much like other college conferences have in place today. The system is not without the usual complications. "No matter what kind you have, it seems like someone gets upset," Williams observes. So the key, he says, is to walk the tightrope between umpire staff and the coaches for whom he works. What Williams has found over the years contradicts conventional thought. "The coaches are probably as fair evaluators as there can be." How does Williams get these biased evaluators to check their egos at the door when filling out the paperwork? "I stress that it is important for these umpires in getting assignments the following year." When a negative evaluation is received on an umpire with a good track record, Williams doesn't stand pat. "I'll call the coach on the telephone and ask what happened. I get an idea where they're coming from and then remind them that a call that went against them, or that they didn't agree with, shouldn't be the basis of a bad rating." Williams knows how to handle the coaches, something he has had to do working California baseball.

Handling coaches is something Williams believes separates the good umpires from the great umpires. "The main thing is being able to handle situations and the additional pressure of working universities with class programs fighting for national exposure," says Williams. It's knowing what to do and what not to do in tense situations that can make or break a career. Williams recounts the time when he had to deal with an unruly dugout during a championship game. After a stern warning from the plate umpire, Williams, who was working first, had to resort to stronger measures which ended in an ejection. Williams' thought process on his actions is interesting. "If I eject anybody in that dugout, that might make a difference in the game," Williams recalls. "I spotted the team manager, who was also yelling." The result was exactly what Williams was going after. "The whole dugout shut up. They didn't know who I got." The television people described it another way. "They said the manager was like a sacrificial lamb," laughs Williams.

Williams has made a career out of having all the right moves, from his notable career in the NFL, to his celebrated NCAA baseball accomplishments. From his first College World Series assignment in 1978 to his last in 1995, and two Super Bowl assignments in between, Williams has been a consistent performer. But don't ask him to talk about it, he'll be too busy finding out about you. It's just Dale being Dale.

ABUA Clinic Update

ABUA Sponsors Mile High Advanced Umpire Clinic

The 10th Annual Mile High Advanced Umpire Clinic in Denver, CO was the most successful clinic there to date. Over 30 umpires attended the four-day clinic featuring D-I supervisors Bob Jones (Big XII) and Joe Bureson (Mountain West). The instructional staff also included CWS umpire Bill Davis, as well as regional umpires Dale Luker, Dan Perugini, and Bill Speck. Perugini pulled double-duty at the clinic by representing the Western Baseball League. This independent professional league is looking to expand into the Rocky Mountain West and Perugini, who also acts as the league's umpire supervisor, scouted several prospects. Rounding out the instructional staff were Keith Bailey and Ray Belfiore, both D-I regional umpires and Jim Paronto a fixture at the Junior College World Series. Don Rolfe, a D-II regional umpire served as the clinic director.

Needless to say, the main calling card attracting umpires to the camp was the quality of the instructional staff. John Damsma attended the clinic to brush up on his skills after taking a short hiatus from his main calling. "I saw this as an opportunity to draw on the experience of very experienced people. It would take years to gain this type of experience in the school of hard knocks," said Damsma, who besides calling balls and strikes is also the vice-president of the Denver Men's Senior Baseball League. He oversees the league's umpires. Damsma was particularly impressed with the emphasis on mechanics taught at the clinic. "Timing and watching the ball to the glove has allowed me time to focus more on just one thing and I feel more confident. It also has increased my mental toughness."

Damsma's attitude reflects the overall goal of the clinic. Rather than just preparing experienced umpires for a step up the ladder, the Mile High Clinic was

geared toward preparing the new umpire to be more successful. Kim Duley, whose job it is to prevent heated situations as the owner of A-1 Firestopping, is taking a lot less heat on the field these days as a result of the clinic. "I don't get as many 'snippy'



comments from coaches. My timing has improved and I like the way I look as an umpire." Duley commented that his wife has even seen the difference in his on-field persona and ability.

Jim Van Houten, a 22-year Department of Defense personnel manager finds that his clinic training made him a lot less defensive on the field. "I get less flak on my calls. Players and coaches perceive me differently. I'm a lot more confident in making my calls than before."

Rolfe, in his second year as clinic director, fine-tuned this year's clinic to make it more enjoyable for those who attended. The clinic featured live baseball played in conjunction with two major high school tournaments, as well as morning cage work on two days. "Our goal is to make everybody better. Videotaping in the cage and during live-game situations, along with written evaluations all coordinated well with the instruction.

Working in the cages with high-level instructors helped some umpires improve dramatically." Rolfe, a retired Colorado State Patrolman and Vietnam veteran who served with the Marine Force Recon knows the value of training. "To move up, an umpire has to learn the right way, to get the proper training. This training shouldn't just be for guys to get to the higher level, it should be geared for the new guys as well."

Looking for a common thread to tie the Mile High Clinic umpires together regardless of experience was the feeling of increased confidence that all attendees commented on. Clearly, when you have a chance to learn from the best and then put that into action almost immediately; it's easy to see the results. Kim Duley is already talking about a return trip. "I got a lot out of it and I'd do it again tomorrow if I could." Damsma noticed a new ability to relax. "If something goes wrong like a close call and then a rhabarb, before this training I would be a little more uneasy. Now I'm a little more relaxed and sure of what I do." For Van Houten, clinic training has led to an all-new look. "I have a new sense of confidence and a more professional appearance." His camp training paid off handsomely; Van Houten was selected to be the crew chief for the Southwest Region of Major League Baseball's RBI (Return Baseball to the Inner Cities) Tournament and worked the Junior Division Championship game at Coors Field.

So why go to a training camp like the ABUA sponsored Mile High Advanced Umpire Clinic? The answer is simple. With increased training comes enhanced ability making the game better for everyone; players, coaches, spectators; but most importantly; the individual umpire. Van Houten sums it all up. "It's become much more fun for me to be an umpire."

By Dan Weikle

**Interested in Sponsoring a Clinic for the ABUA?
Or maybe you'd like to attend a clinic?
Contact Ted Breidenthal: ted@umpire.org
Telephone: 816-474-8677**

