

The right call

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Hall of Fame	Page 2
Pet Peeves	Page 3
Angel at Shortstop	Page 4
NCAA Update	Page 5
USA Baseball Update	Pages 6 & 7

ABUA Individual Membership Benefits for 2003

The ABUA board has finalized the membership benefits for 2003. The annual individual membership dues are \$40. Umpires who join the ABUA will enjoy membership through December 31, 2003. The benefits of individual membership include:

-A comprehensive \$2 million liability plan that covers court judgments and awards; legal fees and court costs; lawsuits for bodily injury, property damage and personal injury.

-A \$100,000 accident medical plan that covers accidental injuries.

-A loss-of-game-fee benefit that will pay up to \$50 per game lost if an umpire is injured while officiating (maximum payable is \$2,000 for up to 26 weeks).

-Cross-over insurance for any ABUA umpire who is injured while working amateur softball, either fastpitch or slowpitch.

-MEMBERS-ONLY access to quarterly newsletters, rules exams and web-based educational resources.

- A 10% equipment and uniform discount through Honig's Whistle Stop (800/468-3284).

-A 20% discount for selected ABUA camps and clinics.

- Limited opportunities for game assignments through affiliated organizations, including USA Baseball.

To inquire about ABUA individual memberships, please contact Ted Breidenthal, ABUA executive director, at ted@umpire.org or 816/474-

Local Association Membership Benefit Update for 2003

The ABUA is offering a unique and comprehensive Local Association membership benefit program for 2003. The local association membership fee is \$300. Your 2003 membership will be good through December 31, 2003. The benefits of Local Association membership include:

-A 2003 ABUA teaching curriculum notebook.

-Membership in NASO's Local Officials' Administration Network (LOAN).

-Option to purchase general liability coverage for local officials' associations directors and officers through NASO.

-Three scholarships to selected ABUA camps or clinics in 2003.

-MEMBERS-ONLY access to quarterly newsletters, rules exams and web-based educational resources.

-Rules and mechanics updates for high school and college umpires.

To inquire about ABUA Local Association memberships, please contact Ted Breidenthal, ABUA executive director, at ted@umpire.org or 816/474-8677. Feel free to browse our web site to learn more about the ABUA at www.umpire.org.

VISIT OUR WEB SITE
www.umpire.org

8677. The 2003 membership applications and renewals can be submitted on-line with our ABUA secure membership application form. Please go to our web site, www.umpire.org, for more information about the ABUA.

Hall of Famer's Health Improving

The ABUA spoke with Hall of Famer Bullet Alexander recently to get an update on his health. Bullet was slowed this past July when he underwent major heart surgery. "It's been slow going, but I feel really good. My wife is ready to kick me out of the house and let me watch some games, so she must think I'm getting better," he said jokingly. It's good to see Bullet's humor is still with us. Bullet wanted the ABUA to send out a special thanks to all of those who sent cards and flowers during his illness. The ABUA wishes Bullet the very best as he continues his road to recovery. We hope to see you at the park soon!

ABUA Hall of Fame

Sweet Lou-He's A Score-KEEPER

There's a runner on second when the batter hits a screamer down the third base line. The umpire points the ball fair. The left fielder makes a clean pickup, but thinking the ball was foul, flips it into the stands. The batter-runner is standing on second when the untimely miscue was made. What's the call?

Umpires and sports fans across America probably remember this play from the College World Series. The umpires correctly ruled that the ball was dead and scored the runner from second due to the errant throw. But what was the official ruling on the play? Only the official scorer knows for sure. This incident was just one of many witnessed by Lou Spry who, for 22 years, has been the official scorer at the College World Series in Omaha, Nebraska.

Spry began his career as an official scorer in 1953 in Tacoma, Washington. A self-described "baseball nut" as a high school student, Spry entered a contest sponsored by his high school's baseball coach and literally won his first scoring job. "I entered a 20-question test and got them all correct," said Spry. The next day, the coach called his youthful scorekeeper, but the message was more urgent than congratulatory. "He said, 'You're it. Get your stuff-we've got a game,' " he remembered.

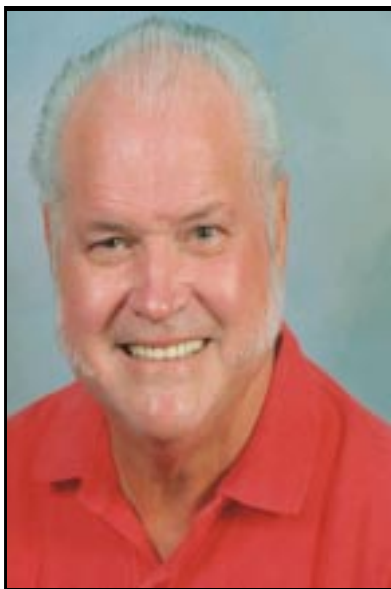
Spry's celebration was short-lived when a female member of his sophomore class approached him soon after with news that the guys on the high school baseball team were more in favor of a female scorekeeper. It seems the scorekeeper was always

a girl and this particular one had her eyes on the job. According to Spry, she made an interesting offer. "She said, 'I'd do anything if you'd let me do that.' I was 15 at the time and my question was this: Does she really mean anything?" So, the teenage Lou Spry turned to the baseball coach for advice. His words remain with Lou to this day. "Spry, are you going to let her talk you out of something that you've worked so hard for?"

And with that Lou began a long career as an official baseball scorer taking him from Tacoma's Amateur Baseball League, to the NAIA, to West Texas, and finally to the Kansas City Royals in the American League. "All I want is a chance," said Spry to the league in Tacoma. "If I'm no good, then run me off." And that attitude has served him well in his baseball pursuits, even though his father had second thoughts about his son's ambition. "My dad always wanted me to get a real job," laughs Spry.

From 1966, until he retired in 1999, Spry's "real" job was with the NCAA where he did just about everything. During his 32-year tenure, Spry served as publications editor, director of research, assisted in the championship events department, and for eight years, he was the NCAA chief financial officer and associate executive director. He currently serves as an NCAA competition manager at regional baseball tournaments, which he has held for

Continued on page 6



LOU SPRY
ABUA Hall of Fame

The right call

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

The right call:

NCAA
NFHS
ABUA
USA Baseball

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**Professional
Umpires for
Amateur Baseball**

Pet Peeves...Words of Wisdom...Or Both

When I first started in college baseball, many of the “established” umpires seemed to have these extremely “cordial” relationships with not only coaches, but with trainers, equipment managers, players, players’ parents and, seemingly everyone around the stadium.

I knew of umpires who regularly met coaches after games for beverages at the local pub, who readily accepted “gifts” from equipment managers, who made it a point to have breakfast on game day with the parents of their favorite players, who knew the student-athletes almost as close friends, and who considered none of this the least bit inappropriate.

It seemed that only after these various baseball constituencies had accepted you socially were you accepted as an umpire. Many up-and-coming umpires

spent as much time and effort working on these relationships as they did studying rules and polishing mechanics. I am ashamed to say that in some isolated cases years ago I probably

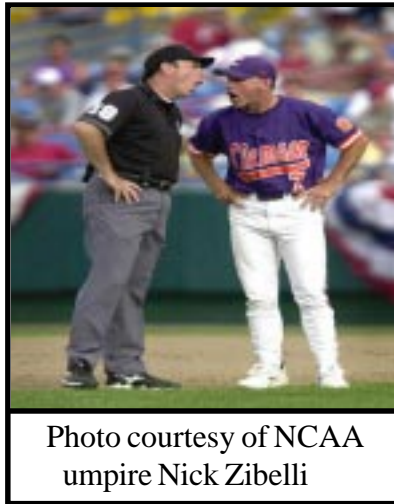


Photo courtesy of NCAA umpire Nick Zibelli

was guilty of some of these behaviors—right or wrong, it just seemed to be the way to advance one’s career.

Looking back I wish someone would have set me straight sooner.

Fortunately for me, the true professional veterans in my area tutored me away from that style before I became immersed. They stressed a more serious and businesslike approach to officiating. Before long I realized what all those constituencies really wanted was good umpiring and, when it really came down to it, being “accepted” was not nearly as critical as being “respected.”

Today, as a supervisor of six conferences, this issue has become my pet peeve. I still see umpires spending too much time “politicking” on and off the field. I implore umpires—whether they’re a rookie or an established veteran—to approach their officiating in a serious, businesslike manner. Since none of us will ever be liked sincerely by all of those constituencies anyway, let us at least be respected for the way we do our job. *By Rich Fetchiet*

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 your nominations to Ted Breidenthal, ABUA executive director, by March 1, 2003.



ABUA uniforms available exclusively at
Honig's 1-800-468-3284

Umpire Feedback

I Met An Angel At Shortstop

My name is not important. Nor is the name of the young player that I am writing about. I am a high school and college sports official, and I fill in the time between seasons working youth sports as well. It just so happened that on a typical day of umpiring, I had a not so typical experience. I met an Angel who plays shortstop, or more precisely, I met a young man whom I will just call Michael who happens to play shortstop. You see, I call him that because the Archangel Michael played a major role in Christian belief, and this young man played a major role in mine.

Michael is a normal young man with a tremendous zest for life and a desire to play ball with his friends in the age-old American tradition. Michael plays on a minor league team with his buddies, and plays an unbelievable shortstop. His brand of shortstop isn't special although he has tremendous range and an outstanding throwing arm. He is a special shortstop because of the way he puts his heart into the game. You see, I neglected to tell you that Michael is a very unique young man. He has only short appendages for arms and legs. And he will never play in the Major Leagues or for any

university. He will never even be able to play in high school. But today, for me, he was a star. He fielded every ball he could reach. He hit when it was his turn. He ran the bases, and took his turn coaching first base. And, he had a great time doing it. His friends took no notice of his differences, nor did his opponents. For that hour and a half, he was just another baseball player.



I don't have a clue what his life is like outside baseball. Nor do I know anything else about this young man. But I do know one thing. In this day of highly paid specialist players, college playing prima donnas, and high school players with horrendous attitudes about the sportsmanship aspect of the game, it did my heart good to see someone who just LOVED being on the field. I laughed until I cried when he pulled his buddies socks down between innings, and teased his coach because he couldn't pitch to his "little" strike zone. And I felt those same tears

come back when I realized how little I had done for the game in view of the "gifts" I had been given. I felt totally belittled having to complain about the level of ball played at some of these games, and the poor pay we get when umpiring. Suddenly, none of that really seemed to matter.

When I got home that night, I hugged my wife and daughter, got ready for bed, and did something I hadn't done in years. I actually went to my knees when I said my prayers rather than just running through them like usual. Suddenly, those thank you's mean a lot more. I have not turned down an assignment based on the level of the game or the price since, and I think it will be a long time before I ever will again.

This letter may not be much. But, if one person who reads it, becomes a little less callous in their attitude toward the game and the kids who play it, or one parent or coach tries a little harder to teach sportsmanship or the love of the game rather than winning at all costs, then it will have been worth the time it took to write it. Thank you "Michael" or whatever your real name is. You may never know how much you touched my life, but you did. May God bless you and yours forever. *By Richard F. Tate*

Tucson Hosts USA Junior National Tournament

Tucson, AZ was the host for the recent USA Baseball Junior National Labor Day Tournament. Ten teams from

across the U.S. competed in the event. Eighteen umpires were selected for the tournament. Umpire Assignor Terry Mann stated most of

the umpires assigned were ABUA members. He indicated feedback was very positive. Congrats to all umpires selected.

College World Series Expands To Crew of Eight



The NCAA Division I Baseball Committee has approved the expansion of the umpire crew for its Men's College World Series. After considerable discussion and input from NCAA Division I postseason umpires, the committee increased the number of umpires assigned from six to eight beginning with the 2003 championship.

The College World Series, to be played June 13-23 in Omaha, NE, has been expanded from 15 to possibly 17 games for the 2003 championship. The additional games are a result of the expansion from a one-game playoff to a best-of-three series for the national title.

"The change in format was an issue the committee has discussed for a few years so it would have an impact on our assignments" said Dave Yeast, NCAA national coordinator of umpires. "The committee was sensitive to the tournament length and number of games an umpire

worked in a day. The CWS was the only championship where its officials were asked to work more than one game in a day. With the intensity of the competition and physical demands that are placed on our umpires, the committee is excited about removing some of the difficulties that past CWS umpires have had to overcome."

The new structure will generate two additional spots on the crew each year and eliminate the need for any umpire to work two games in the same day. The NCAA will form two crews that will each work one game a day during the first portion of the tournament where two games are played each day. During the championship portion of the tournament (best-of-three finals for the national championship), the NCAA will use six umpires on the field for each game.

The committee developed five options for the possible expansion of the crew and then surveyed former CWS umpires to solicit their advice and input. While the survey did not provide

a clear mandate on one proposal, it did point out the need for some change to the crew structure. The two major issues identified by the respondents were the time an umpire spends away from his career and family during the tournament, and the doubleheaders during the first six days of the CWS. While the approved new structure does not eliminate the overall length issue, it was felt that the doubleheader issue was more important and that the committee could reevaluate the crew structure if in the future, the duration of the tournament became an obstacle for umpires accepting the assignment.

Notification of the CWS assignment will continue to be approximately four weeks before the championship and still will be contingent upon satisfactory performance at the regional and super regional tournaments.

Said Yeast, "While there were other viable options, I feel this is the best solution for now and I appreciate the committee's continued concern for the well being of our officials. I am always excited about getting more umpires involved in the championship and this is a great change for college baseball umpires."

World Junior Championships - A Rich Experience for ABUA Umpire



This past August, the ABUA and USA Baseball selected me to umpire and represent the U. S. at the World Junior Baseball Championships outside of Montreal. When I arrived, the organizing committee was waiting with my name on a placard. Eric Campbell from USA Baseball was there as well, double-checking to see that I was met at the airport and had transportation. At the airport, I met up with four Canadian umpires, and we eventually were driven to Sherbrooke, about two hours away.

There were 21 umpires at the championship, representing the 12 countries in the competition. Each of the countries had one representative, while the host country, Canada, had 10 umpires. All the IBAF officials for the games attended the pretournament umpire meeting. These representatives were from Cuba, Italy, Sweden, Canada and probably a few more I missed. Communicating with all the umpires was a bit tricky. The Italian representative and Brazilian umpires translated into Spanish and Italian. This left only the Chinese Taipei and Korean umpires without any real translation. I believe that almost everyone else had a fairly good understanding of what was communicated.

The opening day game was at 1 p.m. The bus showed up for the umpires at 12:20 p.m., with nearly a 30-minute commute to the stadium. Thankfully, the umpires already had left for the game in a local van. Transportation was an issue early on and continued throughout. Luckily, several Canadian umpires had vans to help in a pinch. I worked over half of the Canadian team's games. Since no umpire was allowed to work any game in which his country's team played, all Canadian games eliminated 10 umpires. It also meant that the umpires in those games were truly an international crew. Opening night I worked the plate in the Canadian game with the Panama, Cuban and Korean umpires. Our pregame at the hotel consisted of about 20 pages of diagrams and very broken Spanish on my part. During the game we had several coverages, and they were all covered well. Early in the game it was obvious my fellow umpires and I were all on the same page!

The games were a conglomeration of 10-run-rule games and others decided by walk-off home runs. Some of the games were quiet and uninspired, while others were intense and hotly contested. All the games with the better teams were good games to work. The teams came to play! The fans were fun to watch and hear. Korea and the Chinese Taipei teams came ready to cheer! They brought flags to wave and shirts to wear, all with their country emblems. The fans were spurred on by a head cheerleader who started the cheer and then waved a large flag while running back and forth in front of his fans. The Panama and Venezuela fans had a party! They brought bongos and other percussion instruments and chanted and sang to cheer for their team. One umpire remarked that the fans might not know the score, but what a party they threw! I was impressed by the national pride shown before the games, during the anthems and exchanging of gifts among players and coaches. After that it was "play ball."

Fabrizio Chirici, an Italian umpire who attended the ABUA Training Camp for Elite Italian Umpires in Florida last March, asked if I knew Dave Yeast. He spoke highly of the ABUA camp and remarked how much the Italian umpires improved after the camp. With only one exception, the umpires all came to the tournament to work and learn from their compatriots. The bond of umpires transcends nationalities. All the umpires traded stories and worked hard to perform smoothly with their on-field partners. Mechanics from nation to nation are very similar, with some minor differences. Meeting and working with the foreign umpires was a very rich experience. The excitement of teams playing for their countries was inspiring. I thank all those who were responsible for my assignment!

By Warren Bumpus

Hall of Fame (continued from page 2)

the last 10 years. In his role as tournament manager, Spry has supervised and taken care of umpires for years. But through all the career changes, Spry has kept his baseball scorebook and the umpire's best friend, his rule book, close at hand. Spry will be the first to admit that the job of a scorekeeper and that of an umpire are very similar, especially when there's controversy. Lou recalls a CWS play where a pitcher was working on a no-hitter, only to have a close relay from the first baseman to the pitcher covering the base explode into a whacker at the bag. Although, the batter-runner was ruled safe on the play, it was Spry's ruling that carried the most impact. If the runner beat the throw, it was a hit; no-hitter ruined. If Spry ruled an error, the runner would still be safe, along with the pitcher's no-no. Spry ruled the play a hit and controversy ensued. Only the pitcher's own admission, in a postgame news conference, got Spry off the hook. "The pitcher thought it was a hit as well," recalled the vindicated Spry. And of Spry's personal philosophy of scoring? It sounds like an umpire talking. "You score the play as you see it," he explains. "The dignity of the position is not worth more than being right." As far as being right is concerned, how would you score that play involving the left fielder and the fan? Check your answer with the official scorer on the play. "Credit the batter with a two-base hit and an RBI. The left fielder is charged with a throwing error."

By Dan Weikle

USA Baseball Update

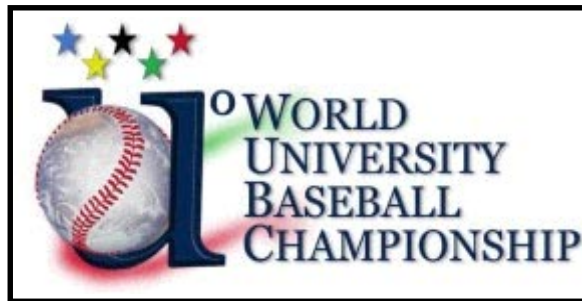
ABUA Umpire Selected for First-Ever World University Championships

Overlooking the Mediterranean Sea on the island of Sicily with beautiful weather and picturesque mountains on a baseball field that mirrors many NCAA Division I fields is not the norm when it comes to umpiring. However, during the period of August 2-13, 2002, Messina, Italy, on the island of Sicily, was host to the first ever World University Baseball Championships.

Sponsored by the International Baseball Federation (IBAF), the country of Italy, the city of Messina and numerous local businesses, the event featured teams and current college players from around the world. International powers like Cuba, the United States, Japan and Chinese-Taipei were in attendance. Also, very competitive teams from Italy, Korea, China and Canada made their mark in the tournament. Rounding out the field were newcomers on the international scene, Czech Republic and France, who provided a special flavor of sportsmanship to the tournament.

Eighteen umpires or arbiters, as they are referred to internationally, were selected from the participating countries. One umpire was selected from each country with the exception of Canada because their representative had to cancel at the last moment. Selected as the U.S. umpiring representative was NCAA umpire John Kleis from Lovettsville, VA. Kleis stated, "It was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to umpire with quality people from all over the world. The friendships we developed and the camaraderie we shared made for an incredible experience. I want to thank the ABUA and USA Baseball for the chance to represent the U.S. in this first-time event."

Italy provided an additional nine umpires to round out the crew. Italy was a tremendous host for the event. From the time umpires and teams arrived, they were showered with red carpet treatment, gifts and all the pomp and circumstances normally associated with an Olympic event. The umpires stayed in a five-star hotel in downtown Messina.



Very tasteful Italian full course meals with all the trimmings were a daily ritual. It was not uncommon to see the hosting Italian arbiters toasting a glass of wine during mealtimes in honor of an umpire's performance or just to celebrate the camaraderie the men in blue felt for each other. Although the umpires spoke different languages, there were no communication gaps when it came to umpiring or having fun. In fact, the umpires developed a special bond with each other sharing gifts, umpire stories and personal stories of their families back home. Although the on-field experiences were priceless, the off time in the hotel and site-seeing together are what many will remember most. The umpires spent time together on the beautiful beaches of Sicily, took motorcycle rides and toured the towns, visited Mount Etna (Sicily volcano), and viewed the churches and many Italian/Greek ruins. Everyone took lots of pictures to take back home with them to remember the event.

Other highlights of the tournament were the Opening and Closing Ceremonies, which left attendees awestruck. The Ceremonies featured parades, bands, teams and umpires carrying flags, the lighting of the Games torch, balloons, white doves flying and even the Italian Expert Paratrooping Team. Crowds for the tournament were mixed, but when Italy played or when the medal rounds began, attendance reached several thousand. There were many games that gave you the feeling you were at an NCAA regional or U.S. championship.

Watching arbiters from around the world display their talents and mechanics was a thrill for all the umpires. Their game preparation and dedication to the profession seemed standard, regardless of what country they were from. Some of the umpires were even given nicknames. One in particular was "Baby Blue," Alexandre Makouchetchev, a 20-year old arbiter from France who seemed to always liven-up the room wherever he was. As the nickname refers, he was relatively new to the international umpiring scene, but his passion and determination for the game were aspects all of the umpires admired.

Team USA played very well during the tournament. They came away with the silver medal, losing out to Cuba in the finals, 6-0. They faced a stellar pitching performance by the Cuban hurler who handcuffed the Americans to just seven hits. The Cubans gave the U.S. their only losses in the tournament. Japan took the bronze by defeating Chinese-Taipei, 5-0. Next year's World University Championship will be hosted by Chinese-Taipei.

By Melany Kleis