

# **International Friendship Series July 2-8 2016**

**Blacktown International Sports Park**

Dennis Ormsby

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## **Introduction**

To begin, I would like to acknowledge those that were involved in my appointment to this year's International Friendship Series. This was an experience that I will remember and I encourage anyone with aspirations of furthering their career to submit their application of interest and make the absolute most of the opportunity. There are things to be learned and experiences to be had, both on and off the diamond.

Blacktown International Sportspark is a complex unlike anything I have ever seen and umpiring games under lights is something special.

## **Day 1**

After spending the night in Christchurch, I checked in for my 6.15am flight, excited at the prospect of umpiring my first international tournament.

While getting up at 3am to be at the airport by 4.15am doesn't usually offer any appeal; that was easily overshadowed by the anticipation of embarking on my first overseas adventure. Everything went smoothly until I got to Sydney. At this point, I need to make a note to self: make sure I clean the grass off my umpire shoes - customs in Australia tend to frown on having to clean the grass off them and treat them for you!

So, I arrived in Sydney not knowing what to expect as far as being picked up etc. Fortunately, Dale Kaimoana, who I met at the last Southern Cross series in Christchurch, was already in Sydney and had seen my Facebook posts about leaving Christchurch and called me to say he will collect both Rob Sadgrove and I from the airport on Rob's arrival. Rob was due to arrive 2 hours after me, so I looked around the airport and had breakfast while I waited.

Rob arrived and Dale was waiting for us, so we loaded our gear and set off.

As we were so early, Dale, the incredibly kind gentleman that he is, took us around Sydney and showed us the sights. We felt like real tourists with our phones out taking so many photos!

We got to the apartments at around 5.30pm after getting groceries and spent the evening relaxing.

## Day 2

Dale arrived to pick us up at 8.30am to pick us up for the warm games that were organized - I was assigned the NZ Emerging Sox Boys versus Australia game on Plate.

Georgia Kiel, a local NSW Country umpire, was assigned as base umpire on my game. She's a level 2 and 16 years old. The game went well with a few quirky expectations from the Australian boys. That said, the NSW style seemed very regimental to me. It is not a criticism, they hustled to position, they were 'determined' on their safe and out calls, even on obvious out calls, they made them as if they were close ones and seemed almost robotic in their movements (a comment that was echoed by a couple of the other umpires from different regions). For *every* strike call, regardless of whether the batter swung the bat or not, the plate umpire would almost stand to attention, bringing both feet together and call 'Strike!'

After the games, it was time for bat checks. This was difficult for both Rob and I as this was also something they do differently. They were probably a little less rigid with their acceptance and denials, allowing a few more in than we would have at home. All of the umpires got involved in this, with people taking bats off each other to check for themselves – there seemed to be little structure in the way they did things. Two bats that I threw out were re-entered by one of the senior umpires and they both broke during the week

With everything done for the day, we headed back to our accommodation again to meet the rest of the crew. With such a large team, of various levels, I knew it was going to be a great week!

## Day 3 - Opening Day

I was again assigned the NZ Emerging Sox for the 2 games I was appointed for the day. Fortunately, I was also assigned with the same crew for both games, so it gave me a chance to work out how they do things here.

For anyone interested in coming to this tournament to umpire, my strongest recommendation would be to get a couple of games in before heading this way. I took some time to get my rhythm, which would have been easier had I managed to see some ball first.

My first game was on base 1 in a 3-man team, which I found out later is done differently. BU1 leads the 'anti-clockwise rotation'. This is when; after a play that requires a full rotation, once play is completed, I call 'time' at home plate, then the PU calls time at 3rd, and they all wait for me to move back into A position and I need to verbally release the next umpire before they move. In NZ, I'm used to just moving.

Also, as we are all being assessed here and provided feedback after every game, I was asked in mine about moving down the line from first to home. I did it when required, as was pointed out by my assessor, but was questioned why I didn't do it more often (this is not for a rotation, it was for plays at B1). I was a little confused, as he pointed out, I did it when required and didn't do it when I didn't need to.

I was also told that we have a much more 'laid back' style of umpiring, which lends itself to my earlier observation. They felt it was really good to see that we didn't over-sell the obvious plays, which their crews tended to do.

My second game was on plate, which went really smoothly. My assessor told me I had a good, consistent strike zone but felt I was trying to accommodate their way of umpiring, so suggested that I revert back to my way as they wanted to see more of 'me'.

#### **Day 4 – Rain Affected Day**

The games were affected because of rain so we had a later start and didn't finish the day until 10.30pm (the last round was at 8.30pm). As I was given more freedom to umpire, I felt more relaxed. My games went really well and had no issues at all. I used the day to work on game management, getting to know the coaches and catchers names and working a little more closely with the scorers. I should mention that this was the first tournament where I was told that we, as Plate Umpires, are in charge of taking time for the games. Our Australian counterparts all carry a watch in their pouches. I informed the scorers that this was not something that we are used to over here and asked if they could do that for me instead, which they were more than happy to do.

I was debriefed by my assessor and was given really positive feedback. I did get a call the wrong way around (I had batter interference on a play at home and I called the runner out first, then called the batter out), which was pointed out to me. I was fortunate that I had worked with my assessor in N.Z. at the Southern Cross Tournament in Christchurch this year, so he knew our style and could assess me on that. He felt I was more relaxed and as he knew my aspirations of going higher in the sport, he was able to offer some 'polishing' advice to my games.

#### **Day 5**

This was an eventful day! We had time to get a bit of time to relax before we started. We got to the grounds at 9am and waited for to find out what time we would start.

I was assigned my first game of the day as Plate Umpire and was excited to see that Rob Sadgrove was one of the base umpires on the game – the two kiwi boys were going to get a chance to umpire over there together! As it turns out, the umpire assigned to first base was an ex-kiwi too!

The game itself was great and we certainly had a crowd of fellow umpires watching. They spoke to me afterwards and were impressed at how relaxed we were, how nothing seemed to faze us and our game management.

My last game of the day I was assigned B3 at 8.30pm. This game was interesting!!!

Half way through the game, the Plate Umpire (Angela Post from Tasmania) called time, complaining of breathing problems and her heart was racing. She came directly to me with the issue and I calmed her down enough, to the point where she felt she could carry on. This did not last long, as she had to call time again and tell me it was 'back again'.

I called the assessor over, who had returned from instructing another umpire to put his gear on and we removed Angela from the game. I know that B1 umpire normally goes to Plate at this point, but this was not done.

Once the new umpire arrived, I informed him of who the current batter was, who was on base and where and who was on deck. I spoke to the coaches, informing them of an umpire change and then spoke to the Plate Umpire and scorer together to confirm everything.

I was congratulated after the game for 'taking charge' and was told my actions were what would be expected of their more 'senior' umpires.

Angela did not return to the game and was sent to hospital. She was back at the apartments the next morning after tests, feeling better, but not ready to resume umpire duties until much later.

### **Day 6 – Rain Affected**

Another rain affected day meant we did not start until 2.30pm. This was good as I had gotten an insect bite sometime between Monday Evening and Tuesday morning. My knee had swollen and was oozing fluid, which was not good. I had to go to the medical centre that morning, so was glad for a delayed start.

My games went well again and there was not really enough in them to write about. I did, however, throw out 2 bats that day because of damage (I threw these bats out at the start of the week at bat check, but were told they were ok by the TCU, who entered them back in).

My last game was a good game to Plate. It was close 6-all at the bottom of the innings with 2 out. Western Civil (an Australian team) beat Southern Pride (NZ) by 1 run.

I suspended play for 10 minutes due to rain, but was able to start it again. The grounds were mud and both teams wanted a result.

This would turn out to be the last game of the Series as rain caused the cancellation of the last day's games.

### **Day 7 – Rain Cancellation**

We got word at 7.15am that all games were cancelled for the day. This was disappointing as Rob and I had been working really hard and hoped to be assigned a final. Obviously, we felt our hopes were dashed.

Richard Dodds, the TCU caught up with us later in the morning and said it was unfortunate as they had assigned both finals to us. They debated whether to put us both on one diamond together, or to give us a final each and he said they couldn't do us justice by *not* giving us a final each.

So, that brought about an end to our official umpiring and we headed back to the grounds to get our gear.

From that point, the other umpires went their own separate ways and Rob and I returned to our apartments to relax.

It was strange, as we had been left with no travel and no information on how to get anywhere, so Rob and I spent time on the internet figuring out the best way to get to the airport for our return trips home.

### **Summary/Conclusion**

Things are done very differently in Australia. The way we look after each other when we travel to another association is vastly different to them. Over there, we supplied our own food and our own transport back to the airport. We were lucky to have transport from the airport, as Dale (the umpire that was here for the Southern Cross Tournament) saw our posts on Facebook about leaving home) was able to meet us.

The umpires there mostly stayed in the rooms they were assigned to and didn't mingle much at night.

The umpiring style is different, as mentioned, and as a whole you must be prepared to make subtle changes to accommodate their style.

Also, Rob and I took all feedback we were given and made the most of it. Our counterparts felt the only feedback they personally received was all negative (Rob and I agreed that there is no point in being told the good stuff as we are hopefully already doing that right).

From the positive perspective, our counterparts, chiefs and assessors were always eager to chat to us, as well as pick our brains. We made some good friends there and have been invited back again. We have been welcomed to all areas of Australia now and they are keen to get us back.

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Softball N.Z. Umpire Level 4