

2020 WBSC U18 World Cup – Umpire Report

Tournament: WBSC U18 World Cup

Location: Palmerston North, New Zealand

NZ Umpires: Andrew McManus, Mark Porteous & Rikki Thompson

Appreciation

We would like to begin by thanking North Harbour Softball & Canterbury Softball for their ongoing support in our development throughout the years. We would also like to acknowledge and thank the NUS for giving us the opportunity to participate in this tournament as well as the wider NZ umpire whanau for their encouragement, support and guidance that they have provided all 3 of us over the years and have continued to do so.

Pre-Tournament Communication

When the emails came out to let us know that we were selected to attend the 2020 U-18 World Cup Rikki & myself were excited for our first opportunity at a WBSC World Cup & for Mark it was a pre-cursor to a much more significant appointment we would learn about later on.

As the three of us got the chance to meet the crew via email's it was clear that this was going to be a very experienced crew compared to the normal crew selections for a Junior Grade tournament. Rikki & I were the only two "Rookies" where everyone else had either Senior Men's or Senior Women's WBSC experience. We would come to learn later, that the majority of this crew were to be the crew also appointed to the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games.

Introductions between the crew were made via email and we were then split into teams of four, to undertake a case play which we had to discuss, make a ruling and outline all umpire's movements and responsibilities. The play we were all given was one that had a lot of "grey" areas which really brought back the importance of pre-game crew meetings. Specifically, around knowing how crew-mates planned to react in certain scenarios so that everyone is aware of everyone's tendency's.

Throughout the leadup, Bob Stanton (UIC) & Wu (AUIC) shared articles and learning material around a variety of topics, but a key theme was around being mentally prepared/ pre-game preparation.

To assist all of us in keeping in touch and getting to build chemistry before actually meeting each other, Mark created a "Whatsapp" group for the tournament, and most of the crew had joined it. This was a much easier way for communications in a non-formal format between each other as well as to and from the chiefs. This was also the communication platform during the tournament that was used to communicate (except for appointment allocations).

Travel & Pre-Tournament On Site

When the time came to head to Palmerston North for the tournament, Rikki took a flight from CHC whilst Mark and myself elected to drive down from Auckland in order to have an extra vehicle available during the tournament. The travel time heading down there was broken up nicely with everyone on the crew sharing photos of their state of travel either it be flight or road based.

Upon arrival in Palmerston North, we checked into our temporary hotel where we would stay one night before transferring to the tournament hotel the remainder of the tournament. Rikki arrived on an earlier flight, whereas Mark & I arrived later in the afternoon, meeting Rikki and the rest of the crew in the lobby of the hotel. It was great to finally get to meet everyone in person.

We had the chance to pick up our uniforms for the tournament before heading out to a local venue for a dinner and a few quiet. Then it was time to turn it in for the night, as the following day was full of pre-tournament activities.

The final day before the tournament was filled with meetings discussing key focus points, local ground rules (i.e. backstop netting on Diamond 1) as well as how we wanted to address certain situations so that we have a consistent approach as a crew throughout the entirety of the tournament. Then it was onto bat checks, getting our gear sorted at the grounds, a formal welcome at the city square and finally the pre-tournament dinner function.

Tournament

The tournament itself was contested over 8 days, at the same venue but operating 2 diamonds. This allowed the crew to keep together for the most part, with just a differencing on time of appointments, dictating when you would arrive or leave the park. Due to the fact New Zealand were allocated the nightcap game throughout the round robin, this meant Rikki, Porty & I were able to avoid the late shift each evening.

Every game was allocated 4 field umpires and 1 clock operator, which for our part would mean either a day of 2 base appointments or 1 plate and 1 clock appointment. Having the constancy of 4 umpire crews every game, meant that as the tournament progressed we began to become more familiar with each other's tendencies and started to operate smoother as rotations and game situations arose. This fact alone outlined why the Olympic crew was here as gaining chemistry as a crew is invaluable.

The WBSC technical officials were great at assisting us with navigating our way through the pre-match festivities, keeping track of time for us to keep in line with Sky TV broadcast timings. This helped us keep to a focused pre-game routine and by the second day everyone had it down to an art.

The matches themselves were interesting to call, as in addition to the pressure of a WBSC World Cup event, the age of these players meant they had speed but would make unexpected errors or plays frequently which meant everyone had to stay on their toes.

As the tournament progressed a highlight for myself was the ability to work some Super Round matches on base, with one being a game paired with Porty who was calling the shots behind the dish! It was a special moment getting to work with a friend I get to call games most weekends with in such a high stakes game. In addition, the appointment of myself as Clock Operator for the bronze medal match was a great privilege considering the calibre of

the crew here. The same goes for Porty's final day appointment as 1st base umpire for the gold medal game.

The tournament finished off with Japan taking Gold, Aussie's Silver & Czech Republic Bronze.

Following the completion of the tournament, the crew had its final evening together. We all went out to a local restaurant where we were able to socialise together and get presented with match balls containing everyone's signatures as a memento. On top of this, it was decided the 2 rookies of the crew (Rikki & I) had to undergo some "hazing" in the form of some poetry reading and song singing respectively.

The Following day everyone started to depart, with Rikki taking a flight back to CHC & Porty and I driving back up north to AKL.

Post tournament reflections

The drive back along with the following days and weeks provided myself with time to reflect on the tournament and the overall experience. The introduction to the World Cup scene though a U18 tournament was a great one as the pressure was there along with all the subtle pre-game changes to a "normal" game of softball. However the age of the players made managing the game much easier. It provided a great stepping stone to future WBSC World Cups for Rikki & me at the U23 and Open grades.

The biggest takeaway I took from this tournament was the importance of secondary movements or "micro" adjustments when getting ourselves in positions to make a call on a play. The 4 elements need to be there for us and over the years in New Zealand we have adopted the "Four Essential Elements Theory" (FEET), and this tournament just cemented that this is the right thing to do and in line with Worlds best practice.



Gold Medal Crew (Porty 1st Base)



Bronze Medal Crew (Andy CO)



Andy – Czech Republic v Canada



Andy – Japan v Mexico



Rikki – South Africa v Singapore



Getting a smile out of Rikki on the field



Porty – Japan v Denmark



Andy & Porty – Super Round Game



The NZ Crew



Andy – Australia v Guatemala



Rikki Plated up



Pre Game Fist Bump



2020 U18 Men's World Cup
Palmerston North, New Zealand
 22nd February - 1st March 2020

WBCS



Back Row: Andrew McManus (NZL), Thomas Lohnert (GER), Christina Drumm (USA), Rikki Thompson (NZL), Jose Chaparro (PUR), Yu-Sing Lin (TPE), Mariana Prins (NED)
 Front Row: Genevieve Gaudreau (CAN), Ayaka Sasajima (JPN), Miki Yabe (JPN), Frances Billingsley (CAN), Mitsunori Kusamoto (JPN), William Lopez (PUR), Kyira Cox (AUS), Mark Porteous (NZL)