

WBSC Men's World Cup – Group C – Oklahoma City, USA

Sept 17th – 21st 2024

Report – Andrew McManus



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Acknowledgements

I would first like to acknowledge Softball New Zealand (SNZ), the National Umpire Staff (NUS) and the World Baseball Softball Confederation (WBSC) for the opportunity to attend and officiate at this event.

In addition, an acknowledgement to those who have and continue to help support and drive for continuous improvement, both as peers and mentors.

Lastly, I would like to thank the local members in North Harbour who helped out with pre-season games and taking up roles during this tournament locally which allowed me to attend and focus solely on the event.

Pre-Tournament Preparation

I was made aware of my selection for this tournament via WBSC in January which was 8 months prior to the start of the tournament. This was done via email and allowed for more than enough time to complete the required administrative ends of medicals, insurances, clothing etc....

As the tournament was to be held in the USA, this would mean that the tournament fell right at the tail end of the New Zealand Softball offseason. This made finding/organising pre-season games locally very important to ensure the “rust” is off before the tournament. I was fortunate enough to have local premier men’s teams playing regulation pre-season games, and our local umpiring staff came out to ensure these games were being done with 4 four-umpire systems.

The crew was announced to me only a month and a half prior to the tournament and we had a total of 2 Zoom calls organised. Since I was the only umpire from NZ these meetings were held at midnight and 3am respectively. The items covered off in these Zoom meetings were:

- Overall expectations on conduct and behaviour
- Travel admin (flights, ground transportation, hotel etc...)
- Local venue rules
- Crew expectations and focuses for the tournament

The travel for the tournament consisted of a 15hr flight (Auckland to Houston) on Air New Zealand, a 2hr flight (Houston to Oklahoma) on United Airlines, and a 30min ride via ground transport to the hotel.

Once in Oklahoma I was able to meet up with the rest of the crew, and spent a full day covering off at the venue the following:

- Meeting the Technical Commissioners (TC’s) and discussing how we will work together
- Learnings from the past 2 group stage events
- Ground Rules – Tarp & Blind Corners (Venue specific)
- Proposed WBSC mechanic changes

Tournament

The tournament was contested with a single field used over 5 days of play. 6 teams competed in this group stage and were attempting to punch one of two tickets available at this group stage event. These teams were:

USA, Japan, Guatemala, Colombia, Netherlands & South Africa.

There were 4 timeslots per day (3hrs each) and as umpires we did 2 games a day. The crew for this event comprised of:

Andrew McManus (New Zealand), **Bubba Ewald** (USA), **Casey Waite** (USA), **Frankie Billingsley** (Canada), **Jon Hand** (USA), **Juan Gonzalez** (Colombia), **Trevor Topping** (Canada), **William Lopez** (Porto Rico)

Florian Lautenschlager (Germany) – Assistant Umpire Director

Chris Drumm (USA) – Umpire Director



*Back Row – Andy M, Casey W, Trevor T, William L, Chris D
Front Row – Florian L, Bubba E, Jon H, Frankie B, Juan G*

Our hotel was located approximately a 20min drive from the park. The hotel provided us with breakfast, while lunch and dinner was provided at the park. Florian and I quickly found ourselves “real” coffee from a local shop a short walk from the hotel which was a necessary for us “particular” coffee drinkers. We were shuttled to and from the park by the local organising committee (LOC) which normally consisted of an 8am pick up from the hotel and getting back around 8 or 9pm.

The facility in Oklahoma City is second to none. Being the home of the NCAA World Series and LA28 Olympic Games, it was a privilege to umpire on the field. The field played true, was maintained between each game and we had no issues at all as it related to the facility. In addition to that, I was advised before getting there that there was an umpire store that I needed to check out. This was located at what is called “the fieldhouse” which also hosted the ASA Hall of Fame museum.

The days at the tournament were very warm, and hydration was provided in abundance as well as the locals showing me the ways of pickle juice for recovery from the amount of sweat you lose in the course of the games.

On the final day I was assigned to 1st base on the 3v4 elimination game (Columbia v Guatemala) and 2nd base for the final (USA v Japan). As is often the case, the 3v4 game was an exciting close game with the South Americans being very emotional and requiring active game control management from all members of the crew. The final however was quickly fizzed out when the USA took a 10-0 lead after the 1st inning and finished the game with a run ahead rule.

The tournament itself ran without much issue, with no protests and no major on field disputes which showed the level of professionalism of the teams and as well as the quality of the officials we had in our small crew.

Learnings & Takeaways

The use of the 20 second clock was very beneficial to keep games moving along at a good pace in the heat. Management of this clock was key, and the crew was promoted not to pause the clock for general requests as players have learnt to do this to control and slow the pace of the game. This required the whole crew to commit to this approach and it resulted in all but 1 game in the tournament finishing within a 2hr window.

Communication between the crew during the game was also a focal point that we practiced during these games. While I feel within New Zealand we are already good about this, it was great to see at an international level umpires are being encouraged to discuss with each other when required between innings and share information they may be receiving (ie. Views on zones, pitching regulations, game situations etc...)

During the tournament, we discussed WBSC proposed mechanic changes and agreed to trial and provide feedback on them. This included starting positions on second base and utilizing more dynamic movements for plays to ensure we maintain in the “window” to observe all four elements. This was particularly beneficial in plays where a swipe tag is attempted due to the movement of the play and the fact that “window” is always moving. It is important to note that the current WBSC mechanics remain unchanged at the moment for our domestic and developing umpires.

Overall, this was an invaluable experience and one I won't forget. It was a great experience, and I have taken back some new “tools” and experiences back with me to New Zealand.

Photos

