

SNZ would like to acknowledge and thank Merle Butler for allowing this article to be reprinted. The subject of game ejection is one most umpire would like to avoid where ever possible; unfortunately it is part of our game. Merle's words of advice will give you a wider understanding of this subject and guidance how to best handle yourself in these situations.

◆ WHEN AND HOW TO USE THE POWER OF EJECTION

Some umpires seek ways to eject players or coaches. Others wonder why and when to use ejection as a means of game control. Still others never resort to ejection because they are afraid of losing friends, or worse, lack "guts." Each of those situations is packed with potential problems.

You should never "look" for ejections, but when one comes your way you have to be ready to pull the trigger, then resume the game with a minimum of fuss and bother. Relative success can be measured by your ability to recognise a developing ejection and avoid the hazard.

You are entrusted with a great responsibility every time you step onto the field. When you don the blue uniform, you become **JUDGE, JURY and EXECUTIONER**. Other than an official protest, there is no appeal of your decision. That means you must learn to judiciously exercise your absolute authority by tempering it with reason, sound judgement and common sense.

A condescending "I am God" attitude has no place in umpiring; you should "walk softly and carry a big stick" in combination with having the "wisdom of Solomon." (That is quite a trio of clichés!) Here is some straight language to help you accomplish all that.

Earn the respect you need by looking sharp, working hard and setting a positive example for players and umpires alike. Execute your umpiring duties by believing your decisions will be accepted and without overreacting when they are questioned. Also, deal calmly with appropriate questions; deal sternly with unsportsmanlike cracks and eliminate players and coaches who deserve to exit the contest.

PREVENTING EJECTIONS

Using preventative techniques, I encourage you to:

1. Avoid direct confrontations
2. Use a third party to ease a bad situation,
3. Never challenge a coach, and
4. Take charge when an ejection is necessary.

Let us examine each of those four points.

To avoid confrontations, you might use any of a variety of tactics, which allow you to talk unobtrusively with a player. For example"

- ◆ Dust off a perfectly clean plate when discussing an uneasy situation with a catcher or batter.
- ◆ Wipe off the pitcher's plate when warning the pitcher about an illegal action.
- ◆ Kick dirt off a base if you need to talk briefly to with a runner or infielder.

You can say the same things to a player when you are nose-to-nose, but saying them less conspicuously and more calmly avoids the spectacle of an all-out argument even if those on the benches realise you are having a chat.

Using a third party keeps you out of conversations you don't want and makes it look as if teammates are encouraging each other. The pitchers mad because he thinks you are squeezing the strike zone. Have the catcher do the talking, especially if he knows those pitches are not strikes. Someone on the bench is a little too willing to offer an opinion about a close play on the bases? Between innings, a word to a wise coach can quickly end the comments. Variations on the theme are obvious. In each situation, it is better for someone else to quiet a complainer than it is to have an umpire and an angry player square off.

You should never challenge a coach or a player. That means no screaming, no finger pointing, no touching, no conduct that baits him into an ejection. It is sage advice: It takes two to argue. If you refuse to argue, the

raving maniac appears even more foolish. If ejection becomes necessary, everyone in the park will understand why.

"Taking charge," means that when an ejection is necessary, do it and move on. If you eject too quickly, it looks as if you have a "chip" on your shoulder. If you are too slow, you may have lost control. However, when ejections occur at the "right" time, it is a sign of a good umpire who is in charge. Remaining calm and staying in charge makes a difficult situation tolerable.

AUTOMATIC EJECTIONS

Some ejections are time-honoured and automatic. The coach wants to go, so he does something he knows will result in ejection. ***NEVER miss an "automatic."*** Here are a few of them:

- ◆ After a called third strike, a batter throws a bat so high or so far that it sets a new altitude or distance record.
- ◆ In disgust after a runner is ruled safe on a close play, a fielder tosses his glove in your direction.
- ◆ Anyone who intentionally kicks dirt on or at you.
- ◆ Anyone who in anger kicks dirt on the home plate.
- ◆ That "cute" five-fingered gesture that starts with a player's thumb against the end of his nose as a way to express his opinion about your ability.
- ◆ After an adverse decision, anyone from either team who drops to his knees "in pain."
- ◆ The "ultimate automatic": The choke sign (holding five fingers around the neck in a choking motion).

Of course, there are other automatic ejections, including virtually any physical contact (intentional or not) with you. In addition, each umpire has his own list of "automatic" words and phrases that lead to an ejection.

There will be times when a manager or coach has a legitimate point to discuss or question about the rules. So long as the "discussion" is focused on rule interpretation and does not unduly delay the game, it is your obligation to listen. That can be accomplished with your respect intact. Remember, you are there to be an impartial judge. A calm dignity must be utilised with the authority and responsibility you hold.

Do your best to keep the discussion conversational, not loud. Focus attention on what is being said and let the coach have his ***entire*** say before you respond. By doing that, he may realise that his "argument" is illogical. If things "heat up," turn your body slightly so you are no longer face-to-face with the coach. However, never turn away before you are "finished" listening.

When you have let him finish, answer his question or explain the rule ***once***. If you need to consult your partner first, move away from the players and coaches and do it. Either way, you have listened to the coach and answered him. That should end the discussion. Make sure he understands that he has had his opportunity for input and that anything else he says will move him rapidly toward unsportsmanlike conduct.

Arch Lusterberg's book ***Winning at Confrontations*** lists eight strategies to use in the battle to communicate. Translated to your work as an umpire you should:

1. ***Enlighten***, don't debate;
2. ***Explain***, don't argue;
3. ***Converse***, don't make a speech;
4. ***Talk***, don't react critically;
5. ***Speak calmly***, don't shout back;
6. ***Be positive***, don't be negative;
7. ***Be friendly***, don't be arrogant; and
8. ***Be confident***, don't be meek.

Those strategies and concepts, along with the other suggestions offered in this column, will help you in your next "confrontation."