

2008 ISC WORLD TOURNAMENT

Umpires report - by Mark McFarlane.

Appreciation

Firstly, my thanks must go to Softball New Zealand, for allowing this to happen. Thanks also to Wayne Saunders being instrumental in this happening along with the International Softball Congress (ISC), for this fantastic opportunity to represent New Zealand, at this prestigious event in Kimberly, Wisconsin.

Arrival

My partner, Nicola Ogier (also an International Umpire) and I arrived at Minneapolis Airport, to look for a Gentlemen that was tall, and looked like an Umpire, wearing an ISC cap aka Les Novak. Les picked us up and took us back to his home in New Hope Minneapolis, where we met his gracious wife Vickie. We stayed our entire time with Les and Vickie, and they showed us the sights of Minnesota and the bordering towns. He was a fantastic host, and even had the joy of being invited to his cabin by one of the many hundred lakes in the Minnesota - Wisconsin area. (of course we had to work for our food, and keep), however the results were well worth our investment of time and energy.

Nicky was the gardening gang and Les and I were the forestry gang. All and all we had a great time here, and appreciated the opportunity to chill out before the tournament began. Whilst we were at the cabin, we were privileged to be able look around Les's world renowned museum. Over the number of years of officiating, Les has collected memorabilia from softball, and baseball, and his many excursions around the globe. These even included many familiar faces from New Zealand from Les's excursions down south. It is simply unbelievable and we spent more than a few hours perusing here.

Pre tournaments.

Our stay in America was for the duration of approximately 6 weeks and Les had earmarked three tournaments, to make sure I was at my peak for the main event, the ISC Worlds. The first tournament we attended was the annual St Paul classic in Minnesota. Lindsay Edwards also attended this tournament on his exchange four years earlier. Suffice to say, many players remembered him and were now becoming more adept at recognizing the kiwi accent.

This tournament gave me a chance to brush-off the cobwebs from our winter and get me tuned-up for the main event. It also provided first-hand experience of how the game is played and also to watch the local umpires in action. In particular, to get to practice and observe the ISC base mechanics in action.

Umpires and their expectations of me.

Nicola was also invited to officiate at this tournament. Most of the teams here were ISC II strength, with a few stronger players playing, there was even a taste of home (Sam Bishop (WN) was playing for Herda & Sons), so at least one team could actually understand me. There were some very good games, and also it gave me a chance to witness first- hand the ISC pitching regulations.

I would also like to thank the UIC for this tournament Ken Vierling, on being able to join the Umpiring crew, many of them we will umpire with for most of our stay here. I was appointed 1st base on the final.

The following weekend we attended the Farm Tavern Invitational tournament in Madison, Wisconsin. This tournament also doubled as the NAFA Open Tournament. The format was two sections, round robin and four team playoff. This is a NAFA run tournament. It consisted of very high ranking teams that were entered for the ISC WT, and there were a number of New Zealanders playing here for their host teams as a build-up for the WT.

The UIC for this one was Carley Parrish who was from Canada. I am very pleased I did some work on my fitness before I left, as there were a lot of games in very hot conditions.

The final was between Patsy's from New York, and the Southern Californian Bombers (aka So Cal Bombers) Marty Grant's team. This was a one sided affair to the power batting of the NZ players.

I was appointed 1st base on the final.

Our third and final build up was a tournament in a small country area, close to Les Novak's lakeside cabin, where we stayed whilst here. This tournament provided us with the insight to the one diamond American ball field in the middle of the cornfields. To any of you who may have seen the movie "Field of Dreams" featuring Kevin Costner, this was like something right out of the movies.

Just organise a softball tournament and they come..

Once again it was made up of mainly ISC II teams, and many of the players were now becoming very used to seeing us on the diamonds, albeit in different teams.

The local team sets the tournament going, marks the diamond, runs the food and beverage shop and has turns playing. Then it is the responsibility of another area the following weekend, and so on. This is the only way the game survives in some of these areas. This was a very interesting tournament, had a lot of fun, and required good game control. (For those of you who may have umpired at a particular ball park in Auckland and thought the back nets were close, you want to try umpiring when you are sitting with your back hard up against the wire netting and the spectators chirping right in your ear... because this field was just exactly that!

Once again I was at 1st base on Final, Nicola however had the honour of calling this final.

Had a few more days R and R and then off to the big event, via a five and a half hour drive across Wisconsin.

ISC World Tournament

We were housed in a very comfortable hotel in Kimberley, the home of the ISC Hall of Fame, (and coincidentally the birthplace of Houdini).

The Chief Umpire was Bruce Bierman and his Deputy Les Novak.

Umpires selected were-- Rich Silva, Ron Adkins, Jay Hart, Serge La Flamme, Jay McGivern, Randy McLamb (ASA invitee), Billie Norton, Charlie Johnson, Peter Kluszynski, Rick Havercroft and me (NZ ISC exchange umpire).

Bob Henning, John Irvine and Gary Schmitt were supposed to attend but through ill health and logistics this wasn't to be.

The Umpiring experience within this crew was immense, (Peter Kluszynski and Rick Havercroft have had 21 years ISC Worlds experience between them) and it was heard from Serge La Flamme, (he represented Canada at the Olympics' in Australia) "it is with great pleasure to be invited to officiate with all the legends..", a sentiment I wholly agreed with.

Our changing facilities were quite cramped, but comfortable. We had adequate water and ice available.

The Tournament was played over nine days, using three-man ISC mechanics, with a five-man used on the final. This ensured most umpires had three umpiring assignments most days.

Umpiring assignments were given out for the first five days. And from there every two days. Double elimination games, on two diamonds with 32 teams, meant for long days (and for some even earlier mornings).

One of the nights we started our game at 1am and there was another behind me.

Two of those guys on the last game, were on the first games in the morning, so fitness mentally & physically was a pre-requisite. There was no room for those ill-prepared.

I was appointed to 1st base on the final between two Canadian teams (a first for the ISC WT) Kitchener River Shark Twins and Aspen. Patrick Shannon catching for the eventual winning team Kitchener.



The Final Crew: Rick Havercroft RF, Mark McFarlane 1B, Serge La Flamme P, Randy McLamb 3B, Peter Kluszynski LF

Pitching

The ISC Pitching rule allows the non pivot foot, not having to be in contact with the bar. The majority of the front foot must be ON the BAR, (Not in front nor alongside, and the front Pivot may not move prior to the separation of the hands (so no rocking, stepping nor sideways slide nor twist is permitted).

There were only a few instances where the Umpires had to speak to the pitcher concerned, and then generally the team took over. If we had any illegal pitcher, it was just a ball, no advancement of the runners, and if a runner stole on an illegal pitch and was subsequently thrown out, - they were out.

The benefits to the application of this rule were certainly immense, in the two main areas that create the most frustration for players and umpires. Firstly the umpires were more consistent with the calling of the illegal pitch, regardless of where a runner was on the diamond, and secondly the players didn't get agro with the umpires, they dealt with their pitcher and only involved the umpire to seek clarification of the infraction. I personally thought this made for better attention to players and spectators needs this allowed the umpires to focus on the bigger plays, and to be more alert for the big call.

I also feel that in general, the players, coaches and spectators see this as possibly the best compromise to allow the game to flow, and believe in the culture of the game over here.

I mentioned that the standard of the umpires on my trip over here, on the games we umpired under the ISC banner, were very good, where the emphasis is really on game control, the selling of calls, safe or out, and really emphatic.

There was a large amount of spectators that watched the tournament every day, and they were very conversant with the rules of the game, and knew a lot about the culture of the game. The weather for the 9 days was hot, and the uniform we wore, at certain times of the day reflected that. In the mornings we wore the White top and after 6pm we wore the Navy top.

Also the grey pants we wore, were more user friendly, especially when we had the late games, and washing was out of the question at 4am in the morning.

Assignments

From	To	Tournament	Plate	Base	Feature Game	
18/07/08	20/07/08	West St Paul ISC	3	3	Final Vallad v Herda & Son	1 st Base
26/07/08	28/07/08	2008 NAFA Open World Series	3	3	Final Patsy's v So Cal Bombers	1 st Base
01/08/08	03/08/08	2008 Wanderoos Fastpitch	4	5	Final Rice Lake v Saw Dust	1 ST Base
10/08/08	16/08/08	2008 ISC World Tournament	7	13	Final Kitchener River shark Twins v Aspen	1 st Base

Observations

Apart from the pitching rule, my observations were

1. Only one base used at first base.
In all of the games I officiated here, not once did we have problem with players cleating opposing players.
It's as though they have utmost respect for each other, on this aspect.
2. Yellow Optic balls
As I was to hear, (from one player),The're for girls. So the men use the white balls. The only difficulty I saw with the white ball was the tracking of it, early in the morning games.
3. No Umpires worried about the wiping out of the batter's box, and the rule associated with this.
4. No equipment checks. Maybe this has something with the Insurance claims associated with it.
5. There were a large number of smart players that forced the obstruction rule to the limit, at the top end of the game over here.

In closing, I am truly Honoured to have had the chance to travel to the ISC Worlds THIS WAS MORE THAN UMPIRING, it was an experience.

The games at this Tournament are of the most competitive I have experienced. My thanks to Bruce Bierman for allowing to me to be part of a very professional thinking crew. And a special thanks and appreciation to Les Novak and his Wife Vicky. He not only was an exceptional host, but truly believed, like me, in the game. And taught me an exceptional amount about the culture of Umpiring whilst I was living with him.

Mark McFarlane
SNZ Umpire.



Sunset Park at night So Cal Bombers v Townline 10pm game.