

JUNIOR WOMEN'S WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP - ENSCHEDE, HOLLAND 20 - 30 JUNE 2007

UMPIRE'S REPORT

Appreciation

I wish to acknowledge the outgoing National Director of Umpiring, Bill Smith, for selecting me as New Zealand's representative to the International Softball Federation's Team of Umpires to officiate at the Junior Women's World Championship. A definite privilege to be selected and an honour to represent the New Zealand Umpiring Team with distinction. Equally I recognise the great support and assistance from Softball New Zealand via Dale Edgar and the nice "touch" of welcome on my return from Holland by Cliff Bowden. Nice job guys! Lastly to the New Zealand Umpiring Programme and Team for the ongoing support and opportunities given to me to participate in a national and international programme. My sincere thanks and appreciation to all.

World Series

My journey started with a gruelling 36 hour journey including stopovers from Wellington to Amsterdam via Auckland and Hong Kong on a cold and wet Monday evening. Arriving at 11pm Tuesday evening (Holland time, some 10 hours behind New Zealand), the sight of a bed was bliss! A word to the many a travelling umpire going to events such as this, where possible and if possible, arriving a day earlier would greatly assist with unnecessary stress!

For the umpires the 11-day tournament started on the morning of Wednesday 20 June with a very quick "meet and greet" at breakfast and then a quick ride to the ball park for a 2 hour technical meeting with the ISF officials and team management. This was closely followed by a 1 hour umpire's technical meeting with the Umpire in Chief, Merl Butler (USA) and his assistant Umpire in Chief, Bob Stanton (Canada). The umpire's technical meeting was very good ensuring we as umpires and our support crew were all operating from the same rule and mechanics book. In addition the opportunity for the whole team to formally introduce ones-self properly and "meet and greet" was fitting.

The umpiring team was strongly represented by a very talented group of people from all parts of the globe. There were 21 umpires – 8 females and 13 males represented by the following nationalities - 2 Canadians (female), 2 Americans (female), 2 Australians (female), 2 Chinese (female), 2 Dutchmen (male), a Venezuelan, Argentinean, Puerto Rican, South African, Italian, Russian, German, a representative from China Taipei, Switzerland, Japan and me, the Kiwi!

Being part of an international event, it is fitting for the crew to look like an international team of umpires on the diamond. With many thanks to MIZUNO Christmas once again came along with a full kit of umpiring uniform. With my smarts and wits from my previous experience at the Worlds in 2004 I was able to quickly adapt some "seam strip" lessons and ensure my umpiring uniform fitted me perfectly.

The umpiring crew was a great team sharing knowledge willingly and working very cohesively on and off the diamond. It was a pleasure to work with and be associated with them all. Merle and Bob were a great "tag team" operating between the two diamonds providing very good and honest feedback to all members. For both of them the main areas of focus were in game control especially as a plate umpire and being in the best position to make the call. In this respect there was a strong emphasis to always be at the leading edge of a base to make an informed call.

It is customary for umpires to take gifts in the form of pins and other assortments and share with the umpiring crew. Each visiting umpire had some outstanding gift packs and presented each umpire with something from their culture and country. Our gift night took place two days into the tournament with a late evening snack and a few beverages. I would like to thank again Softball New Zealand for providing additional gifts to add to my

gift-pack for each umpire at the tournament. It was a great night! A piece of advice to the travelling umpire especially out of New Zealand, 20kgs is the maximum weight permissible however you are allowed up to 9kgs of carry on luggage. Pack well when heading away but pack even better when returning.....especially with your new gifts! 20kgs is still the maximum but some countries allow up to 12kgs of carry on luggage. Additionally, try very hard to get your luggage checked all the way to your final destination ie NZ to avoid any excess baggage charges along the way.

Now.....to the real stuff.....the main issues raised during our technical meeting on the first day were;

- Illegal Pitching
- Four umpire system
- Leading Edge
- Mechanics

Illegal Pitching

The main areas of focus for the crew were;

- To ensure pitchers taking the signal from the catcher were in contact with the pitching rubber with their hands separated
- To ensure pitchers were taking the two second pause while bringing their hands together in front of their body and bringing their body to a complete stop before starting their motion towards the batter
- To ensure both feet were in contact with the pitching rubber when moving forward to commence the pitch
- To ensure pitchers were not stepping to a second position forward off the pitching rubber
- To ensure pitchers were not leaping to a second position with their hands still together, landing and pushing again while separating their hands

Observations

Illegal Pitching

The direction and instruction from our Chief Umpires in respect to illegal pitching was to call it straight away. Give no warnings and bang it. Surprisingly compliance from the women in respect to the pre-pitch requirements was very well executed. The only area of concern highlighted by many umpires was the pause. Calling this straight away and then advising the pitcher of the error soon got the game back on track.

Four Umpire System

The four-umpire system used at the series is the one we currently use here in NZ. The only one notable change that we had to adjust to was "Grazing".

- "Grazing" at the Junior Women's was the instructed mechanic for base umpires to break between each completed half inning. Base umpires were no longer required to line up on the baselines between each half inning. This meant that each base umpire would take up a position of waiting half way between their base of operation and an extended line to the out-field fence ensuring they were not in the path of the out fielders who were warming up. The plate umpire would take up a waiting position on the baselines and alternate between each base line facing the team that would otherwise be the batting team for the new half inning. Should the plate umpire be required to perform other duties the responsibility of ensuring in-field control fell upon either the 1st or 3rd base umpire requiring them to hustle in from the outfield as quickly as possible and take up a position on the baseline within the playing diamond.
- The Umpire Line Up at Pre Game Meeting - At pre-game meetings with the respective managers of each team the plate umpire lines up behind the plate facing the outfield. The three base umpires will line up across the 1st base batter's box, home plate and third base batter's box facing the plate umpire. The 1st base umpire will stand in between the 2nd and 3rd base umpires looking directly at the plate umpire. This is so that when the meeting is over the 2nd and 1st base umpire can quickly travel up the first base line and take up their respective "Grazing" position in the outfield.
- the 2nd base umpire is responsible for brushing the pitching rubber and will do so after the third out of

each half inning. If the 2nd base umpire has gone out on a fly ball which results in the third out, the closest base umpire will dust the pitching rubber before the defensive team comes out.

- depending on the situation, but in the past, the first base umpire when coming down the track to home plate had to wait for the plate umpire to bounce into the diamond at third base before the 1st base umpire knew he had ownership of home plate. Now, the plate umpire bounces in regardless of a play or not. This sends a good signal to the 1st base umpire that he now has full responsibility for any play at home plate.

Leading Edge Calling

Whilst this subject was not explained during our technical meeting it was often brought up during feedback sessions by the Chief Umpires with each umpiring crew after each game.

The emphasis from each Chief was to ensure that any play that required an umpire to make a call at a base resulting from a pick off, a tag at the base or a play back to a base, the umpire must be in a direct line with the base whereby they are positioned to see the leading edge to where the offensive player is making their way to. Being on an angle will not always give you the four elements required to make a confident call.

Mechanics

The only mechanic I can share with my colleagues of NZ, if they're not already aware of it, relates to first base and the position the first base umpire is required to be in when making a call at first base on all batted bunt balls.

The requirement now of a first base umpire on all batted bunt balls regardless of no runners on or not is when a batted ball is bunted, the first base umpire moves quickly from his holding position in a direction towards home plate however takes up a position in the first base coaches box (moving the coach out of the way when you're coming through) and takes up a line of sight whereby the umpiring is now looking at first base on an extended line to second base. In this position the first base umpire will make a call on any play to first base resulting from a batted bunt ball and have all the elements in full sight, the leading edge of the base, the defensive and offensive player and the ball.

Venue

A superb venue with two baseball diamonds converted into softball diamonds. The two diamonds were excellent to play on and excellent under foot for the umpires. The outfield was the same.

The facilities were excellent with an internet café for players and officials to keep in touch with family back home. This service was free during the operating hours of the tournament, In addition if you were fortunate to bring your laptop, which I did, a free wireless port was provided by the host tournament organisers which was very useful when all the available PCs in the café were taken. In addition players and officials were allowed to make one 10 minute phone call back home for free. Big ups to Enschede and the Tex Town Tigers for providing a very excellent venue.

Umpire Facilities

The umpiring facilities were not at all accommodating with no break out room for the umpires to sit and relax. A room was provided at a later stage with refreshments however you had to walk almost 400 yards down the road to enjoy it! Nevertheless the team was up beat and coped as best as we could.

Accommodation

We stayed at the Hotel De Bruiden in Enschede, 5kms from the ball park. The rooms were tight with two a room. Breakfast was paid for during our stay at the hotel and it was quite lovely. There was a laundry service provided by the hotel, however this was very expensive with prices based on a per item basis. Umpires ended up doing their own washing in their bathrooms. The nearest laundry to the hotel was in Enschede some 8kms away. With no available transport for the umpires it was difficult at most times. The host committee was not very accommodating in offering any solutions.

My Game Schedule

DATE	TOURNAMENT	TEAMS	TEAMS	POSITION
20/06/2007	Opening Night Game - Not Required for the 1st Game			
21/06/2007	Junior Women's Series 2007	Venezuela	vs Japan	plate
22/06/2007	Junior Women's Series 2007	China	vs Japan	plate
23/06/2007	Junior Women's Series 2007	USA	vs Canada	1st base
	Junior Women's Series 2007	China Taipei	vs Japan	2nd base
24/06/2007	Junior Women's Series 2007	Netherlands	vs China	2nd base
25/06/2007	Junior Women's Series 2007	Puerto Rico	vs Canada	1st base
	Junior Women's Series 2007	Argentina	vs USA	3rd base
26/06/2007	Junior Women's Series 2007	Australia	vs Canada	plate
27/06/2007	Junior Women's Series 2007	China Taipei	vs China	1st base
	Junior Women's Series 2007	Russia	vs Canada	3rd base
28/06/2007	Junior Women's Series 2007	Australia	vs Japan	1st base
29/06/2007	Junior Women's Series 2007	Australia	vs Venezuela	plate
30/06/2007	Junior Women's Series 2007 - Final	Japan	vs USA	plate

**Tournament
Winners**

United States of America

Final Comment

The series was awesome and the opportunity to work with other umpiring colleagues from across the globe inspiring. Putting aside language and cultural differences, the language of softball was quite universal amongst us all. The experience gained was once again invaluable. Sharing knowledge and understanding the culture of both the umpiring fraternity and the game from the coaches and players perspective has been another valuable learning curve for me and my umpiring career. My job now is to continue sharing that knowledge and the experiences with my fellow colleagues of the NZ umpiring programme to best position them should any opportunity arise.

Much in Softball. Wiremu "Wu" Tamaki