



MECHANICS MANUAL – HARTFORD CHAPTER

COMMUNICATION

Successful umpiring requires effective communication with partners, coaches and players. It is important that the messages you send are received as intended. How well or how poorly we communicate often will directly impact the outcome of that game.

With your partners

- Starts the night before with a phone call to your partner and deciding on who will work the plate or bases, where to meet at the field, what uniform will be worn.
- Have an effective pre-game conference before the game. Agree on signals and communication before, during and after the game.
- During the game use verbal and non-verbal communication. Use the approved Board signals. See separate illustrations. Signals are generally communicated non-verbally. When one umpire initiates a non-verbal signal, your partner(s) should acknowledge by mirroring the same signal. Signals require two-way communication. Signals should be communicated as the play situation changes.
- When the ball is in play, verbal communication is recommended. Verbally communicate to your partner in a clear concise manner. “Mike, you have the tag and play at third”. When mechanics breakdown, communicate verbally to your partner to let them know where you are providing coverage support. If your partner has information that would be helpful to resolve a particular call, use a non-verbal signal of patting your open hand on your chest so your partner knows to go to you. The signal should be keyed off a coach questioning your partner on a call. Wait for your partner to acknowledge your signal that you have information before getting involved.
- Good communication during a live ball reflects effective teamwork.

- Between innings avoid getting together to have a conversation. Avoid getting together after a controversial call, once the inning has been completed. This does not mean that you can't get together with your partner between innings. If you have something specific like, both teams are talking some trash to each other in the infield, let's be aware of the situation so it does not escalate."

Getting the call right – The philosophy of that is “my call and I’m not going to get help” is quickly fading away at all levels. Bottom line is to get the call correct. There are situations where umpires can seek help and communicate with each other to reach a decision. This would include discussing application of a rule e.g., base awards, if the plate umpire calls a ball on a check swing and the plate umpire asks the base umpire for help, whether a fielder pulls his foot off the base early, any swipe tag situation, if the ball may have been juggled or dropped, on a third strike where there is doubt if the catcher caught the pitch or with 1B not occupied with less than two out. Some calls cannot be changed such as routine force plays, no matter how close the play is, when a strike is called on a checked swing or on a catch or no catch of a fair fly ball with runners on base.

- After the game hold an effective post-game conference with your partner. Discuss such items as effective coverage, unusual plays, coverage situations and opportunities to improve.

With the Coaches

- Generally starts when you enter the playing field before the game. Communication should be professional and brief while you check equipment, fill out paperwork and or wait for infield practice to be completed.
- The conference with the coaches and or captains before the game should brief and conducted by the plate umpire doing the talking with the teams’ representatives. Be congenial, professional and pleasant.
- During the game communication with coaches should be limited to taking and reporting lineup changes, breaking up offensive and defensive conferences and answering a coaches legitimate questions. If you are having a problem with a particular player you should consider communicating this to the coach between innings. “Coach, your catcher is questioning balls and strikes. Can you please take care of the situation? Most coaches will appreciate the opportunity to address the issue before you have to.
- If confrontations do arise with coaches, allow coaches to communicate their concerns as long as they do so in a reasonable manner and reasonable time. Let the coach do the talking. The more you talk the more ammunition you give the coach to use against you. When communicating with coaches or players avoid shouting matches, use of profanity or provoking the confrontation. Follow the “golden rule”.

- After the game, don't wait around and seek out the coaches and players to shake their hands and have a conversation. You should not seek out or wait for accolades from coaches. Leave the baseballs by the home team's dugout and leave the field immediately with your partner.

With the Players

- In general the amount of communication between umpires and players should be less than that with coaches.
- Before the game the plate umpire may watch a few warm-up pitches. At that time the umpire can develop a rapport with the catcher. Phrases like, "what does the pitcher throw?", "how is your team doing this season?" may help break the ice. If the catcher does not seem talkative then stick to your business and avoid further conversation.
- During the game if the catcher makes a good block of a pitch in the dirt or hustles down the line, tell him nice block or great hustle. This may help later when there is a borderline pitch and his coach asks if the pitch was outside. Having a good rapport may result in the catcher telling the coach that the pitch was outside even if it was close to being a strike. Use the catcher to communicate with the pitcher. Perhaps the pitcher is close to a balk or his body language when he doesn't like a pitch call is not appreciate. Suggesting to the catcher to go to the mound to talk to his pitcher may help avoid a problem later.
- During the game, consider asking the captains for their assistance as needed. For example, if players are not staying the dead ball area during a live ball situation, you can ask the captain to speak to his teammates. Most captains will be more than happy to help if asked.
- The base umpire may engage in small talk with the first baseman or other players depending on the situation. If time is out and the base umpire is near the mound while a new pitcher is warming up or there is an injury there maybe a time to have small talk. Do not distract the players.
- Be very careful when you talk to players. You can assume whatever you say will be communicated from that player to the coach. Refrain from questioning a coach's strategy or offering coaching advice to players. Avoid use of profanity when talking to players.

Communication Reminders

- Do not engage in communication with spectators. Nothing good can result. If spectators become unruly and unsportsmanlike you should seek the assistance of the site director, if there is one, otherwise the appropriate coach should be approached and asked for their assistance to help control their spectators. If the

unruly spectators cannot be controlled then the umpire could suspend the game until those individuals leave the park.

- Non-verbal communication is noticeable. Body language and stance on the field tell others whether you care about being out there or you're umpiring only for the paycheck. Between pitches stand up straight with your hands by your sides, behind your back or on your hips. Having your hands in your pockets or folded across your chest communicates that you are not interested and displays a lack of control and command.
- Remember to communicate effectively and professionally at all times.