

Oregon School Activities Association

Baseball SRI Bulletin – #1

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PAINFUL PLATE MEETING

The 2015 baseball season is here and the first bulletin of the year will focus on the plate meeting. How many times has your, or your partner's, plate meeting been almost painful and/or difficult to understand? Plate meetings should be neither. They should be relatively brief, cordial, and productive for all involved.

The purpose of the plate meeting is to exchange line-ups and establish ground rules. Simple, right? It should be, and will be, if you follow some basic principles.

- Keep it short. No one is at the park to watch four guys stand around home plate and shoot the bull.
- Recognize how some preparation for this little chat can make it painless. Get a sense early in the year for how you are going to approach your plate conferences during the season. If there are idiosyncrasies with that day's coaches and/or ball field, think about how you will handle them before you get to the plate meeting.
- Do it virtually the same way every time. This may sound boring, but it will lend itself to fewer misunderstandings and more efficiency.
- Listen to a veteran umpire and learn from him or her. You will recognize quickly that those of us who have been through hundreds, or even thousands, of these conferences tend to say very little and let the head coach(s) do most of the talking. Yet everything still gets covered.

It is customary that the home team lineup be taken first. When reviewing the lineup card I count the nine fielding positions and look for the DH. I will announce to the coach, "You have Welter DH'ing for Garrett in the four spot". I repeat the process for the visiting coach. Last, and *always*, I ask both coaches "**Are all your players properly and legally equipped?**" After getting a verbal confirmation, I ask "**Will both teams display good sportsmanship today?**" After receiving a verbal confirmation to that question, we are ready to play ball. I think it can be appropriate to stress sportsmanship, especially if it is a rivalry game, an important game in terms of league standings, or any other contest where you sense emotions may run hot. Think of using phrases like: "**Sportsmanship starts with the head coaches.**" or "**Please come to me directly and professionally with any concern.**"

The usual procedure is to have the head coach explain the ground rules. Some coaches are better at this than others, and a savvy umpire can prompt a coach with a simple "Coach Weber, starting here at the backstop, can you take us around?"

There is a specific procedure that should be used when going through the ground rules. Start with the backstop. Most backstops have no breaks and are played as live should a thrown ball hit the screen. Be alert to any gaps or nets in the backstop. Working clockwise, cover the third base dugout. Things to consider are the top step of the dugout, any chalked dead ball lines, and the facing or padding of the dugouts. Address any concerns relative to the entrance/exit to the dugout, with a focus on player safety. Continue moving down the left field line, which may include a bullpen or tarp. If the bullpens are located within the confines of the playing field, determine if they are considered live ball territory. Discuss how a ball should be played if it enters the bullpen. Discuss tarp rules.

Move along the outfield fence and observe any scoreboards, flag poles, irregularities, etc. Continue your way down the right field line, which should be similar to the opposite side of the field. Finish the ground rules by explaining how the first base dugout will be played. The first base dugout should be similar to the third base dugout, but is unlikely to be exactly the same. If the game is a double header, confirm start times for the next game, and how much time there will be between games.

Painless, right? With a little practice and preparation, the plate meeting can be covered in just a few minutes, with confidence that you have covered it all.

Tad's Tip....

You still have time to do some squats before first pitch! First pitch is just days away. Be ready. See you at the Yard.

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