

GAME ON

Game day for a baseball umpire

By Daniel Geneau



The day begins like any other regular weekend morning, except today is game day. I have my first cup of coffee, and then go outside to my deck to check on the weather. Giving the horizon a good scan in each direction, my personal prediction is made as to how the day will be in regards to rainfall, I am thinking like “Ernie Banks” used to say “Let’s Play Two!”

Since it is a double header today, the first game is scheduled for a noon start and the second game should be around 3 pm. With the prediction, there should be no rain before 6 pm; all is good to get the games in for the day.

I make sure to get a good breakfast. “No Wheaties” for this umpire, a good hearty breakfast of bacon and eggs, toast and coffee. I then go downstairs to start the different stretching exercises I need to make sure I can call both games today without getting tired. There is lots of running and bending being an umpire and believe it or not, you need to be in good shape. Knee bends, back stretching and hamstrings, quad muscles are all worked on, making sure not to forget the arms, shoulders and chest. These can all be continually repeated right up until the car is packed and it’s time to go.

At last, the final check. I make sure that all necessary equipment has been properly

packed in the umpire bag. This final check will be done at least three times. The game shirts, game pants, spare T-shirt, shin guards, chest protector, face mask, shoes, both regular black sneakers and steel toed shoes for doing behind the plate and most importantly, the protective cup are all accounted for.

The final little things to be checked include having a towel ready in case the field is wet and the game balls need to be dried, have at least one umpire counter in the bag, a small brush for cleaning home plate, a water bottle filled with ice water and plenty of wet naps for doing a further cleaning of the shoes. I carry an extra pen and paper for making notes during the game, a small watch and some sunscreen, no need to get sunburn and besides it helps protect your skin from a hot sun.

I then take a shower and also shave on game day, I feel this is important to be a professional and although this is not a requirement of all umpires, it is my way of making sure I am in the proper mindset for the tasks ahead. I can never be sure of what kind of mood the coaches, players and fans will be in, but being a father of 3 girls you can be sure I have plenty of practice in arguments and patience. The only exception is I don’t say “You’re outta here!” to my daughters, just the manager or players who give me a rough time.

Just before loading the car with my gear, and a final coffee, I do a little more work in front of the mirror on the signals that will be used for the game. Outs, safes, strikes and balls, are all signals that will be used in every game and need to be presented clearly and affirmatively. Sometimes as an umpire, you really have to sell your call. “Practice makes Perfect”! It is time to go to the ball park.

After unloading all my gear into the umpire club house, a brief stroll is made near each team’s dugout to have a quick conversation with coaches, fans and players. Just saying some hello’s and asking how everyone is. Talking about the weather is always a great way to start everything, especially when there is rain in the forecast. That is when I will bring up my predictions made much earlier in the morning on the deck with my first cup of coffee.

With my partner and I having our gear on and ready to take the field, we make our way onto the diamond, calling for coaches and captains to home plate for last minute questions and comments. We go over the general ground rules and things such as, time limits and any mercy rules that may come into effect later in the game.

Everyone is then waiting for those two famous words that signify everything is set to go.

PLAY BALL!

A break of anywhere from 30 to 45 minutes is generally taken between first and the second game. The umpire’s will be trading places on the field for that second game and any information they can pass on to each other is talked about. Then they are ready to go. Waiting for the next....

PLAY BALL!

Now, with both games over, congratulations are passed on to both teams for good games. The umpires offer congratulations to each other and hit the club house to pack up the gear. Today was a good day, no arguments and good calls on close plays that both teams did not complain. We head home knowing we did our job and stayed out of the spotlight. The game is about the Players and their teams.

I will sleep well knowing I had fun and played a small part in what I think is the best game in the world-“Baseball!” LH