

Effective Communication

We all know that it is vital to the enjoyment for all, that the umpires control the game. To help manage the game environment, it is important that the umpires do this in a manner which fosters respect between players and the umpires.

Managing players, the game environment and ourselves is a skill that all umpires need to practice. The more skilled we are in all of these areas, the more enjoyable the game will be for everyone.

As umpires do we focus too much on applying the rules of the game rather than managing people?

Communication is one of the umpire's most important tools. Learning how to communicate effectively contributes to the overall success of the umpire's performance. Communication is both non-verbal (body language) and verbal.

We all need to learn how to communicate with different levels of players and also different age groups.

There are many different approaches we can take to help communicate better with players, coaches and spectators. Listed below are just some of the techniques that can be applied to help with your overall delivery.

1. Always remain calm.

Umpires should always remain calm under any circumstance. Umpires can be subject to abuse from players, coaches, and spectators. Remaining calm under duress shows a high level of composure, confidence, and maturity.

If we remain composed, our decision-making remains strong, and we do not get rushed into making a choice that may be incorrect.

2. Respect the player.

The level of respect a player may have for an umpire is ultimately forged by what the umpires "say and do" and how they "say and do it".

Umpires should never belittle a player. A player is well aware that the final decision lies with the umpire and therefore the umpire does not need to highlight this by saying things such as "I am the umpire and what I say goes."

3. Communicate decisions.

A good umpire will sell their decision strongly and confidently.

Positive communication of a decision will reflect this confidence and shows faith in the knowledge that their decision was correct.

Players are far more approving of umpires that show that they know and understand what they are doing.

4. Listen attentively.

Communication is a two-way street; umpires need to both talk and listen.

We should not just brush off a player, we should be able to acknowledge and respond (where possible and appropriate) to the person.

We need to be able to make the distinction between abuse, complaints and a simple question or clarification of a ruling.

A question asked in a claim and reasonable manner deserves a similar response.

5. Do not use sarcasm and avoid embarrassing players.

Being an umpire does not mean that you make yourself the centre of attention at a game. Umpires need to avoid grandstanding.

The use of sarcasm by umpires is both unnecessary and unprofessional, sarcasm can only serve to hurt and demean a person.

6. Having the last word

If a player asks a question, it is beneficial to both parties for the umpire to answer the question. The answer should be short and informative but delivered in a calm and respectful manner. It is not about engaging the player in an exchange about a decision that leads to the umpire feeling like they must have the final say!

It is better to allow the competition to flow than for the umpire to be the centre of attention.

7. Body language

Body language is a tool that many umpires do not use to the best of their ability. To help sell decisions the umpire needs to back it up with a strong and confident stance. Strong signalling and whistle-blowing all contribute to selling a decision. A smile and a nod to a player and good eye contact all help to exhibit confidence.

When an umpire speaks to a player, they should be mindful to maintain a suitable distance, do not intrude into their personal space. Umpires should refrain from finger pointing.