

How to Brush Off Home Plate

Christ the Redeemer Church
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John 15:9-17
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Love one another. It was a simple rule from Jesus. He said to his followers, "I call you friends, not servants. Now just love one another." It was that simple.

I decided to become an umpire this year in the San Marcos city softball leagues. I ump primarily on Wednesday evenings in the Mixed League, the co-ed league.

Lots of fun and surprises in this my first year of umpiring.

Pam questioned my sanity and wanted to know why I would want to do something in life that I knew I would get yelled at by other people.

After a few games, I told her that only half the people yell at you on your close calls. The other half is very happy. Every close judgment call makes one team happy and one team angry. That is just the way umpiring goes.

After umpiring my first co-ed softball game at the beginning of this season, which happened to be me umpiring our own CTRC co-ed team, I came home and Pam asked me how much I got yelled at. I told her that players in the co-ed league don't yell much at the umpire. I told her the only two people that yelled during the game were Coach Harris and his wife Judith. He plays shortstop on our church team and she plays second base on our same team. They screamed at each other during the game. They are both good players.

Pam said, "Oh, they are just flirting with each other." That is true. Coach Harris and Judy would yell at each other loudly for missing a ball or a play and then they would go into the dugout and hug and make up with each other. Good marriage. Know how to argue and know how to make up quickly.

I called Coach Harris "out" on a play in which he slid into third base. My first close call to make as an umpire. I probably missed the call. He probably was safe. After the game, in a reasoned voice, Coach Harris said to me as his pastor and nose to nose, "If you ever call me out on a play like that when I am safe, I will throw your behind over that fence." Great to have that much spirit in the church and on our team!

I loved it. It is great being an umpire.

In the co-ed league most of the talk between players is the act of apologizing. Girls apologize to each other for missing the ball. On Tuesday nights and Thursday nights the guys will yell and curse at each other for missing the ball. But the Wednesday night girls will apologize to each other and to me for things.

One batter last week apologized to me for not swinging at the ball when I called her “out” on a strike three called. She told me she would try to do better next time. One time a female catcher caught a pop-up behind the plate and I called the batter out and the catcher apologized to the batter for having caught the ball. They hugged at the plate and told each other that everything was okay between them. I had to break up the hugging between the girls so that the game could go on.

Last week a girl walked up to the plate. This was the first time in life she had ever played the game. I watched her coach show her which end of the bat to hold...the skinny end. She walked up to bat and stood ON the plate. I called time-out while the catcher from the opposing team showed her patiently where to stand and which direction to face. I was dumbfounded. We had to show the girl the most simple things in baseball...how to hold a bat, how to not stand on the plate, who to face, etc. She turned to me and told me that she had never played softball before. I could tell.

Last week the director of the umpiring crews asked me to umpire in the Thursday night men’s league championship game. I agreed. Those boys are a little different. I was umpiring the bases and before the game started the first baseball asked me if there were any hard feelings between us. I said “No.” He asked if I remembered him yelling at me the week before in a game. I said, “Now that you bring it up, I do recall you yelling at me.” “So, no hard feelings?” He wanted to make sure that I was not going to retaliate against him and make calls against him and his team.

I said, “No hard feelings. Had I been playing, I would have yelled at me on that call also. Yelling at the ump is part of the game. It is therapy. I like the umpires and I yell at them during the game with a smile. It is all baseball. Yelling at the ump is part of the game. Good umps know that. Yell all you want. It won’t change my mind but it will make you feel better.”

I am surprised at how much fun it is to become friends with the other umpires. They have taken me in under their wings and they give me umpiring tips. Where to stand. How to cover for each other. How to make calls. What words to use and when.

I had to spend money to buy the right color pants, shoes, belt, and ASA shirt and hat. American Softball Association. I also have spent money on buying the other umpires soft drinks in between games. They have appreciated that and now offer to reciprocate and buy me a drink. That is nice. I love it all. Sitting around discussing calls and games.

Two best pieces of advice that umps have given me are 1) Know the rules. Most rules are simple in the book but an umpire has to know the rules.

2) How to brush off Home Plate. The head of the umpiring crew and the other umps had been telling me that I needed to get a brush to clean off home plate. Such brushes are hard to find. Finally last week I went to Wal-Mart and purchased the smallest dust brush I

could find. This blue one here. Yes, it is larger than the small umpire's brush. But I had to have one. And this one came attached to a dust pan. Cute, isn't it?

So I took the blue brush and this blue dust pan to home plate with me last week. The head of the umpiring crew said to me, "Nice brush. Dump the pan. The guys will never let you live it down." So I hid this cute little dust pan.

I was so excited about brushing off home plate prior to the game since I was the umpire behind the plate. I bent over and brushed off very meticulously the entire off Home Plate and felt so proud of my job. Home Plate was spic and span clean (that is an old saying). I even dusted off the black trim around the plate. Perfect.

The more seasoned umpire came to me from first base and said, "Can I give you some advice about brushing off Home Plate?" I said, "Sure." He said, "Never show your bottom to the crowd. Always show your bottom to the pitcher." I had bent over backwards and showed my umpire bottom to the crowd. Bad. Wrong. There is umpire tradition that I need to learn.

56-years-old and I never knew that. I am learning more and more umpire etiquette every day. Umpires are careful about who they show their bottoms to in life. Never show your bottom to the fans. Important advice. Simple advice.

Last week one umpire called me over prior to his game on another diamond and he said, "Pastor, will you and your church pray for me. I have to have heart surgery and I have no health insurance. Please pray for me this Sunday." I told him we would. Lord, hear our prayer. It is all ministry, this loving people rule.

Jesus said to love one another and that then we will get whatever we ask for in life. Strange promise. But I am beginning to slowly understand that the more we love others then the more our prayer requests are for others and for their needs.

It is okay to argue with God about things. I have found that the better umpires are not threatened when players argue with them. It is all part of the game to argue with the ump. A good ump knows that a player who loves the game will argue a call. The Scriptures are filled with pages of His people arguing with His ways and questioning life. Marriage and church can withstand questions and arguments. It is a sign of engagement and caring to argue and question at times.

I keep dusting off Home here at church so you know where Home is located. To remind you of the goal you have to get Home.

Jesus said, "Love one another." Great advice from a wise Umpire in Life. Watch out to whom you show your behind in life this week. It matters. Go love. Amen.

