

Just to wear the ASA Blue is a symbol of pride!

It means you are one of nearly 50,000 and are a part of one of the largest sports officiating organizations in the world. And, as you read on, you'll see it means much more than just a uniform.

It means, as a new official, you will observe other umpires, be involved in training and discussions, read the Rule Books and the Umpire Manual, and are eager to show your enthusiasm and confidence on the field.

It means, as a veteran, you are grateful for the season to be in full-swing, particularly after a winter off-season. You have refreshed legs to carry you through the summer, have the leadership to help others, and once again to be able to hear and enjoy the greeting, "It's good to see you."

Each person is unique, with different physical and mental capabilities. We have different needs, capacities, and goals. Some umpires want recognition, while others prefer not to be noticed. Most people have a genuine desire to be wanted, accepted and liked. (As a sports official, if you weren't wanted, there would be no games for you to umpire.)

In this day of sports and changing times, it takes a SPECIAL PERSON to be an umpire, and, because you are reading this, you are that special person. It means you have enthusiasm, common sense, a good sense of humor, and you know how to communicate with managers, coaches, players, and fellow umpires. It means you have the capacity not to criticize, but to be criticized. It means you are dedicated, committed, and flexible.

To be a good umpire it means you have to be fair, but firm, just like a good parent.

Coaches and players often test umpires, particularly new umpires or officials they haven't seen before. They are skillful in just how far they can go, and you must be firm in your response. This leads to approachability and the way you communicate with the managers, coaches, players, and your partner. It means you are supportive to your partner, and tolerant with the coaches and players.

When your partner is involved in an argument, don't let coaches and players gang up on him/her. Let the manager and your partner discuss the situation one-on-one. Be supportive and move all others away from the discussion. This means you have the ability to be a good partner, and you will gain the respect of all umpires in your association.

You, too, may be involved in a discussion with a manager or coach as well. This is part of the game. Again, you must be aware of your actions, your body language and your replies. Don't challenge a manager, coach or player by pointing a finger or jabbing someone in the chest. Avoid crossing your arms, placing hands on your hips, rolling your eyes or looking up in the air. When you are in control, it means showing confidence, and this is the result of your training, your knowledge of the rules, and your positioning and the angle obtained to make the call.

It means you have the courage to believe in your decisions. It means you have the concentration to remain alert during the entire game. It means you have the motivation to perform well and to strive for improvement. It means you have the fitness to match the demands and the requirements of the game. And it means you have the ability to be humble, as even the best and most respected umpires sometimes get a call wrong.

Being an ASA umpire also means you have insurance coverage, should something go wrong beyond your control. Whether you are injured on the field, or while driving to or from the game; whether a player is injured as a result of his/her play on the field; or

should a player or coach become upset over an ejection and threaten or attack an umpire. Having this coverage means umpires add to their confidence in the decisions and actions made on the field.

Being an ASA umpire means different things to different people, but the underlying fact is, it allows you to go as high as your ability allows you to go, or you want to achieve. This all starts from the initial training, the guidance of your leaders, your own confidence and attitude on the field, and what you want to put into the game. If it means a post season berth to championship play is your goal, and this is achieved, you can be proud of this accomplishment. If it means obtaining international certification and being selected to umpire in the Olympics was your goal, and it was achieved, you can feel proud. The ASA is the only organization in the U.S. where you can be selected to umpire in World Championships, the Pan-Am Games or the Olympics.

Ode to Softball Umpires (anonymous)

Of all the thankless jobs on earth, whenever duty calls;
The worst is his who must decide between the strikes and balls.
Who always has to say at once if it is foul or fair;
When some determined player hits the softball in the air?
The man whose eyes must rove the field and cover every base;
And figure if the defense or the runner won the race.
He is the softball umpire who must be prepared to talk;
When there is an argument about a run or walk.
But whether crowds stand up and cheer, or politely boo and shout;
He is the one the softball world can never be without.

Umpires just want to walk away from a well-officiated game without comment, fuss or fanfare from anyone. As we all know, that means a job well done. Thanks for being an ASA umpire or, if you are new to the ASA, welcome aboard. I wish you a long and rewarding career.