

Biscuits & Gravy

A Strange Week

Over the years, it has become necessary, from time to time, to consider our Softball teams and the leagues we are a part of, not in terms of hitting, fielding and running and winning or losing, but rather more in terms of how we present ourselves than how we play.

We are a good group of teams comprised of good people. Tim and I have spent a lot of time and effort finding good people who can play ball and we're learning how to win together. I'd rather play with the teams of McCoy Softball than any other teams anywhere and I know Tim feels the same way.

We play the game honestly and fairly and we don't take cheap shots and try to hurt opposing players. When we make errors or make outs we pick each other up and don't yell at each other like players on some other teams who never seem to stay around for long. Most of the time we even like the other team and we always respect them on the field.

That same respect extends to the umpires, scorekeepers, league directors and program directors, too. We don't always like every single one of them or agree with them on every issue, but we do respect them. Now, I'm the guy who deals with most of these groups, but one group is constantly working with us every time we take the field. They are, of course, the umpires.

As a group we do respect the umpires. Individuals may vary as to the amount of respect we give our arbiters, but overall we do. We have to if we plan to keep playing ball and have fun doing it. Not all people respect traffic cops and judges, at least not all the time, especially when we've had speeding tickets, but we have to respect them. Umpires, cops and judges are serving the same basic function. They are making decisions that need to be made to keep things going.

Umpires all make mistakes with their decisions, but they are very rare and we just have to grin and bear it when we disagree with them. Indirectly, we pay them to make these decisions and we could not play ball without them. The point of this whole thing is to say that we've been running a little ragged with regards to our conduct lately and we have to bring it back in line.

Now, 99.9% of the time we act properly and 99.9% of the time the umpires make the right calls (I may be fudging the numbers here.) and things go along smoothly. Even when things go afoul; a bad call, a good call we disagree with, a louder than intended blue word that leapt into being before any thought processes were engaged. We've all been there. We've all been burning mad at an umpire or a play or whatever on the field.

In those rare occurrences when our internal temperatures run into the red and we're about to lash out, we need to think about the team. We need to think about all of our teams. Our teams are well respected, because we conduct ourselves like good people. The **Dirty Dozen**, **The Cowboys**, the **Jets**, the **Mixed Nuts** and now **Motörhead** are respected at the parks where we play and by the players on the other teams. Your team is respected among the officials and the other teams and by association YOU are respected.

You may never have noticed it, but it's there. We are respected and we do get the benefit of the doubt. This did not happen overnight nor was it easy. It has taken a while to weed out all the players who've played with us who had continually caused us to lose that respect.

Last Fall when we turned our two Coed teams into Men's teams, we found a lot of new players and this Fall when we expanded again to include the **Mixed Nuts** and **Motörhead** we had to find a lot more people. It has been fun and exciting to have all the new players on our teams, watching them develop into solid teammates as our teams get better and better and I hope I play a thousand games with them over the next years!

In all this expansion, though, we need to keep a close eye on the things that live at the core of our teams. We need to continue to respect the other teams and the officials, so that we in turn are respected.

All this explanation is coming from a bad week or so at Bethesda Park. One Friday we had a player ejected late in the game for swearing loudly when he was tagged out at third base. The next Monday we had a play at the plate where a player was called out and came up yelling at the umpire and was promptly ejected. Thursday that same week we had another guy launched for language.

The Friday guy didn't know better. He'd only played with us for a handful of games and didn't know how serious Bethesda Park was about swearing, especially loudly and when the umpires seem to be focusing on that. Tim and I should have done a better job explaining everything. The Monday guy came up yelling at the umpire, not something we really like to see, but, again, Tim and I should have been more careful to explain things beforehand. The Thursday guy was warned in the beginning of an inning when he swore on a bad hop in the field. He was warned, since it really wasn't that loud. A couple of plays later he muttered a "damn" on a bad hop and was ejected. English is the guy's second language he honestly didn't know that "damn" was a swear word. I was surprised that an umpire would eject a guy for that, but that's the rule and we were guilty.

I would actually have to dig around in the old score sheets to find out when the last time was we had a player ejected. *We just don't get ejected!* Tim and I trimmed that element right off of our teams long ago.

The solution, of course, is simple as well as tried and true...

A Simple Solution



When our teams arrived at Bethesda, Briscoe and Lucky Shoals Parks, refugees from the Softball Country Club, and later played at Keswick Park and everywhere else around the state, Tim and I already had a well established protocol for keeping our teams respectable and not looking like some Rusty Carter rag-tag redneck tournament team. If a player got ejected when we played at the SCC, we just wrote him off and found another one who looked just like him.

Back then, we only had to worry about getting new players if they continually ran late or no showed us or couldn't quit hollering at the umpires or other teams. Or sometimes their own players! The first guy we had to axe was a guy who yelled at his own teammates. When we landed in the city and county leagues, suddenly language was a big issue. We'd already weeded out the real redneck element, but now all of a sudden we had to think about what we said during ball games for crying out loud!

When we started playing at the new places I warned everybody about the new code of conduct and told them all to say "Biscuits & Gravy" whenever a blue word wanted to spring into the air. You newer guys may laugh, but it worked and it still works! Just ask any of those grizzled ol' veterans like **Norman Mapp** or **Russell Ray** or **Robbie Crider**.

If you get tagged out at third some Friday holler, "Biscuits & Gravy", instead of swearing and if you bobble one in the field some Thursday, grumble, "Biscuits & Gravy", and I promise you no umpire in the world will launch you for it. Of course, if you jump up after getting tagged out and holler, "Biscuits & Gravy" right in an umpire's face while going nose to nose with him, yeah, you'll probably get run.

The point is this: Have fun and don't get thrown out of a game. When a player gets launched, he becomes an automatic out when his spot in the order comes up and you end up hurting the whole team. Then the county suspends you for the next game, too, and we have to find a sub. Then Tim and I have to go find another guy who looks just like you and break him in.

None of this is even remotely an issue for most of our guys most of the time and we're not a foul mouthed, umpire bashing bunch, but every now and then Tim and I have to underscore how important it is to play nice and represent the **Dirty Dozen**, **The Cowboys**, the **Jets**, the **Mixed Nuts**, **Motörhead** and whatever else we might become in the next thousand games. Good players from the past have passed us a legacy of respect and we need to continue to build on it.