

May 15, 2012

A Message From the SLL President . . . They Are All Our Kids!

With our season in full swing and the players, coaches and parents settling into the routine of our playing season, we are all enjoying a level of baseball and softball that is improving game by game. With improvement comes better played games, closer games and more exciting games. And with more excitement comes more competition and, particularly in our upper divisions where standings are kept and All Stars are chosen, admittedly we all can get our emotions up a bit.

We believe these games mean a lot – and they do – but usually more so to the adults than our players who are just as interested in the after game snack shack fare as they are about winning the game. Being competitive rubs off, it becomes infectious, it is fun and it absolutely has a place in Little League.

But we have to all remember why we are here – Little League is *for the kids, right?* And the kids consist of two groups – our players who we all come out to watch and cheer - and our youth umpires, all 100 strong of them. These youngsters choose to become umpires because it provides them yet another opportunity to remain connected to Little League and an experience that meant so much to them as players. It is this latter group of our kids that I want to talk about in this letter to our SLL community.

Admit it – how many of us come out to watch our youth umpires? To cheer *them* on? I can tell you how many – their parents, our Umpire-in-Chief and some volunteers who help with this huge youth umpire program. And, like our players, other youth umpires watch each other's games if they finish early. This is a decidedly smaller and much quieter fan zone than that enjoyed by our players. But that is the life of an umpire – they get no love. Theirs is a solitary journey where, in their world, some say the mark of a great umpire is one who is unnoticed in a game. Being unnoticed doesn't even qualify for a team soda.

At this point in our season I am asking all of us, players, coaches and parents, to ask ourselves: “*How are we treating our umpires?*” **Are we mindful of the fact that our youth umpires are our kids?** Trust me, we don't bus them in from the school for wayward umpiring youths – they really are our kids. Are we mindful that our youth umpires are trying their best and are “calling them as they see them?” Good call or even the occasional bad call they are only trying to make the right call? Are we telling them they did a good job after their games?

Or are we, too often, being critical of their performances and holding them to the same standards we would hold adult umpires to? Do we feel it is ok to shout our negative opinions of their performance because, after all, they are umpires and it goes with the territory? Do we not say anything to another manager, coach or parent in the stands who is deriding a youth umpire? Well, it's not ok for us to do this to our children or to allow this to happen to our children. It is not ok to do this to our neighbors' children or allow this to happen to our neighbors' children. Just as we would not allow our coaches or fans to deride or criticize a youth player's error (yes, errors occur in Little League, about as frequently as a missed strike call) we should all strive to ensure that our youth umpires are treated with the same respect, admiration and maturity that we treat our youth players with. Let's remember that all our SLL kids try hard.

Tom Benneche, 2012 SLL President