

By Jim Smith

Pennsylvania District 22

Many Little Leagues now pay umpires for doing games. Some even use an association to assign umpires.

Many leagues claim that they cannot find qualified volunteers to help. While others think that it is easier to pay the umpires, because it is one less thing to worry about while running a program.

When leagues compensate umpires, they do not have the responsibility of scheduling and training, and when parents or coaches complain about the umpires' performance, they either say, "That's what "The Do Good Umpires Association" provided" or someone calls the president of the association and the umpire is no longer assigned to that league's games.

The financial cost of paying umpires is usually passed on to the parents of the players in the yearly registration fee. When divided among a couple hundred parents, the cost may not seem high.

While these are valid points, many leagues do not see the ramifications of compensating men and women and even sometimes children for umpiring games.

How is it that leagues can find volunteers to coach and work in the snack stand, but cannot find volunteers to umpire? Or better yet, if we are willing to pay umpires, why are we not paying the coaches and the poor people that are toiling in the concession stand? They appear to be working harder than the umpires!

If I was a coach, and the umpires were getting paid, I would want to get paid too! I have to deal with telephone calls, practices, games, and daddy telling me that his son should start every game and bat clean-up. The umpire shows up usually ten minutes before game time, asks me what the rules are, has a "barn door" strike zone, and leaves after rushing a game through in 90 minutes, with \$50 in his pocket.

As a coach, I am consoling players who could not hit those two feet outside pitches, mom is screaming at me because her little darling Johnny did not play the whole game, and I have to rake the field. .

When it comes to training umpires, most paid associations recruit their umpires by word of mouth. Charlie has a friend who is looking to make a quick buck, part time. Charlie calls his friend, and next week Charlie's buddy is umpiring Little League games, with no training. The day after umpiring his first Little League game, Charlie's friend is umpiring a recreation league game. Five on-deck batters are swinging bats all over the place; coaches are screaming at him saying, "I cannot believe they pay you!," and every pitch is an adventure.

Although most associations, particularly the high school associations have some type of rules training, and several meetings, they do not know Little League rules and few have mechanics clinics.

Some of the dangers of compensating ANYONE for service that should be rendered by a volunteer are:

1. Worker's Compensation laws.
2. Internal Revenue Service regulations
3. State income tax laws.
4. Little or no control over paid umpires in an association.

It is a fallacy to believe that paid umpires are better than volunteers. Volunteer umpires can be recruited the same way coaches are obtained. Advertisements in local newspapers can be helpful. During player registration is an excellent time to obtain volunteer umpires. Offer to train them through the District.

Set aside some monies and send them to one of the excellent umpire schools at the Region or Little League International. Compensate them by providing umpire caps or shirts or pins. Provide umpire equipment that the umpire can borrow. Maybe after a few years, give that equipment to the dedicated volunteer.

Assign some veteran umpires with newer ones. Set up a league umpires association or encourage your umpires to join a District or State Little League umpires association.

Don't get me wrong. I like to have some extra money in my pocket. Heck, sometimes I need it. I umpire recreation, high school and men's league games. But that is a job. Most of the time, my partner cannot wait to get out of there, grab the money and run.

When I umpire Little League games, there is nothing more gratifying than volunteering, giving back to my community, and having fun with other umpires, who are in it for the same reason that you are: to have fun and help children. That is my vocation - A Volunteer Little League umpire