

Umpires Committee Report 2018-19 Season

Transition from Monte to Marshall

The 2018-2019 season marked a transition of leadership of the umpires committee from Mike Montalbano to Marshall Chapin as Monte shifts his focus to leadership of the players committee. Many thanks to Monte for his years of service and support of the umpires committee.

Umpiring Principals

The umpires committee has codified some guiding principles intended to continually increase the quality of umpiring in platform tennis. They are...

- **Professional:** umpires should act with a level of professionalism no different than those umpiring an ATP event or an MLB game. Yes, we are volunteers, but there's no reason we volunteers can't or shouldn't be as professional as possible.
- **Knowledgeable:** umpires should know the rules. They should know the most common issues which arise in umpired matches, and they should be prepared to handle them effectively.
- **Consistent:** we're trying to create some consistency across all our umpires. How they introduce the players, what they say when they call scores – consistency makes it easier for the players and crowd to follow, and it feels more professional to all involved.
- **Reliable and Prepared:** tournament directors and live stream crews have enough to worry about at big events. Umpires should be reliably on time to matches and prepared with the tools they need to be successful in the chair.
- **Loud:** one of the most common complaints is the crowd can't hear the umpires. That should be easy to fix and it will remain a focus for improvement.

Umpire Training and Certification

The process for training and certifying new APTA umpires has evolved this past season, becoming more rigorous and intentional with the goal of ensuring every umpire is set up for success and ready to live up to the umpiring principals and standards.

- **Training:** when a new candidate comes forward for certification, he/she is sent a fairly long and detailed email with guidelines, step-by-step instructions for matches, guidance on how to practice using archived matches, links to the rule book, and attachments of the supporting documents they'll need to umpire (scoresheet, pre-match prep document,

etc.). When they have reviewed and absorbed the material, they reach out again asking to take the certification exam. [note: I'm happy to share these emails and documents with anyone interested]

- **Certification Exam:** the exam has been augmented with a few new questions related to common issues which come up in matches. If the candidate gets any questions wrong, I email him/her back with detailed explanations to be sure the correct answer is understood and absorbed. The back and forth of these emails is often where the deepest learning happens. I now have a stable of deeper explained answers for every question.
- **Pre-Tournament Conference Calls:** before Nationals this past year I conducted a pre-tournament conference call with all the umpires to go over any last-minute logistics and to be sure each umpire (especially the new ones) was comfortable and set up for success. They had some good questions and it was clear that the exercise was beneficial for most of them. We may do more of these in the upcoming season.

Regional Captains

This is by far my top priority for the 2019-2020 season and all future seasons. I can't make every major tournament, and I can't dedicate the time leading up to every tournament to do all the required prep work for success. The Boston Open has become a pretty good model for success, and at the last one I asked Monte if he has someone like me in every major tournament region – he said no.

My goal for next season is to find, train, and support a regional captain for every Grand Prix city. I did this for Nationals this year in Pittsburgh and it worked out pretty well – Scott Kahler said that Robb Lusk had done a good job at the last Steel City Open and was planning to be point at Nationals. I spent a bunch of time with Robb via phone and email providing guidance and getting him the materials he'd need to make the event a success. He recruited and scheduled the umpires, sending new candidates to me for certification along the way. I ended up doing a bit more of the work this first time, but my hope and belief is that Robb is now completely prepared to run the next tournament in Pittsburgh completely on his own.

We'll start with Chicago Charities, I'll need help determining a great candidate for the role (it sounds as if Rob LeBuhn may be the guy), then I'll get to work towards the end of the summer getting he/she up the curve and ready. I'll do that for each Grand Prix, and hopefully by the end of next season we'll have a strong crew of regional umpire captains to rely on moving forward.

Some Issues for Consideration

- **Chair logistics** – I understand we have 4 chairs in the Midwest and 4 chairs on the east coast, but I have little understanding of who manages the

movement of those chairs between tournaments. I'm very happy to NOT own this, I just wanted to flag it ahead of time.

- **Chair quality** – Rob Coster has expressed some interest in helping to improve/update the chairs and ensure they are up to par. Some don't have seatbelts, we really should get that resolved.
- **Foot faults** – I think our training is improving this, but more work needs to be done. I encourage umpires to watch during warm-ups and quietly let players know if they've been foot faulting before the match starts, that has a huge impact. And if a player does foot fault, it needs to be called immediately and without warning. That said, I understand a foot fault was called deep in a 3rd set tiebreaker for the foot pronating maybe a half an inch onto the line. I've spoken with umpires about this – we want foot faults to be called without any hesitation or remorse, but we also want to be smart about how and when we do it.
- **Umpire feedback** – I'd love to get feedback from the live stream crew after every match on the quality of the umpire. I don't think we need a formal grading sheet, but a quick email after the tournament with some brief comments would be helpful. I've heard of lets being called in umpired matches, that should never happen, that's a sign that the umpire didn't know the rules or was somehow unprepared (the only reason for a let in an umpired match is some non-play related issues like a 2nd ball coming into the court or a court door opening). In cases where real problems come up, someone always finds me to discuss the issue which is great, but I'd love a simple rundown of each umpire after a tournament so the regional umpire captain gets the feedback and can use it to coach the umpires and to ensure only the top umpires are in the chairs for the later rounds.

Special Thanks

Again, big thanks to **Monte** for his past leadership of the umpires.

And a huge thanks to **Shannon Vinson** for her incredible leadership and tireless effort at the major tournaments. Shannon has been a fierce supporter and advocate for umpires, and she's a big part of the reason I chose to put so much time and effort into umpiring personally and into elevating the umpiring position for the APTA.

Any questions or concerns, please reach out to Marshall Chapin
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