

2023 APTA BOARD MEETING UMPIRES COMMITTEE

MISSION STATEMENT

To create a standard for umpires, particularly for Grand Prix Series, National Championships, and Live Streaming matches. To dedicate resources to make sure umpires are qualified, tested, and vetted for the sport, and to encourage members to volunteer for this vital role in the sport's professionalism.

Major Themes

The season was highlighted by the expansion of the APTA Tour which again increased the number of umpired events to 14 across 7 states. We added several Regional Captains this season, including Cleveland and Indianapolis. We dipped our toe into recruiting using social media with good success. The national umpiring crew continues to grow in numbers and gain experience. I hope to increase communication and collaboration across all regions as the demand for live streamed/umpired matches increases. I will address these themes in the report below.

Umpiring Principles, And Annual Review Of Performance

The umpiring principles are intended to continually increase the quality of umpiring at APTA events and can be used as a qualitative measure of performance. The principles are listed here, with 2022-23 scoring below in italics.

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 volunteers can't or shouldn't be as professional as possible. *Good. The more rigorous certification process, prep emails, and match day conversations continue to stress best practices/expectations and therefore lead to umpires taking their role as a professional more seriously. When faced with confrontational players, the umpires have behaved exceptionally well despite uncomfortable circumstances.*

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. *Very good. More rigorous certification is producing more knowledgeable umpires. I'd like to increase dialogue amongst all umpires nationally. Sharing specific match day experiences/occurrences/rulings across the entire umpire community will continue to increase our knowledge base and provide consistency. We strive to instill confidence in every umpire to make calls with conviction and stand by them.*

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. *Improving, but needs work. – As the ranks of certified umpires grow, we need to continue to focus on the umpire's match-calling responsibilities. In order to present a polished, professional product on the live-stream, the verbiage and cadence used in intros, score calling, overrules, etc., should be the same for all umpires across all regions, i.e. - no "ad in" score calling, it should be "advantage Hanisch/Zubori" or very similar.*

Reliable and Prepared: Tournament directors and live stream crews have enough to worry about at big events. Umpires should be reliably on time for matches and prepared with the tools they need to be successful in the chair. *Good. We may have taken a small step back this year. Umpires must come prepared, thereby lowering the burden on tournament directors. We will stress the importance of the Umpire Captain's role in both pre-match scheduling and tournament day expectations and responsibilities.*

Volume: 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. *Needs Improvement. This needs to be more of a focus for not only the crowd in attendance but for the live stream coordinators as well. Currently, live stream scoring relies on umpire calls to update the on-screen scoreboard. Volume is essential to accuracy.*

Player Behavior

While 99% of umpired matches are generally uneventful, there seemed to be an increase in the number of instances of unsportsmanlike behavior by players this past season. I was made aware of a couple of situations at Nationals where players were extremely aggressive/offensive in questioning umpire calls. This is unacceptable. Umpires offer up their time because they love the game and the tournament experience. We understand the stakes are higher now with the APTA Tour offering prize money, but umpires should never be subjected to personal attack.

The Umpire Committee and all certified umpires greatly appreciate the tremendous support the APTA has given us. The APTA was quick to respond to the above instances and we are grateful that they have our backs. We are hopeful that increased player accountability will decrease what are already rare instances.

Foot Faults

This continues to be a major point of contention. The umpires committee and regional captains have pounded the table on the need for umpires to call foot faults. Every year we make small steps toward improvement in consistency but still need work. The ingrained culture to ignore foot faults in league/social play seems to carry over to the minds of some umpires when in the chair.

Pre-match efforts to approach the players and inform/remind them of the foot fault rule and the obligation to call foot faults have made a difference. It is vital that these pre-match conversations continue. Calling foot faults early in the match sets precedence. The players do adjust and are less temperamental early when the match hasn't had time to become hotly contested.

Recruiting

2022-23 was a fairly successful recruiting year. I sent certification study materials out to 55 individuals across 10 cities. I certified 18 new umpires for a 32% certification rate. New Jersey (4), Philadelphia(4) and Indianapolis(5) led the way.

The APTA and MiPaddle were kind enough to create and post a simple recruiting message on social media to great success. I received 13 new inquiries in the week following the post which turned into 2 new certified umpires. I would love to expand this practice. I suggest at least a couple of social media

posts over the course of the season. Additionally, I would love to create a more elaborate recruiting “commercial” using during match footage and live umpire testimonials.

The expansion of the APTA Tour this season continues to stress the importance of active recruiting in all regions. Finding new umpires that check all the boxes (organized, attentive, confident, loud, happy to climb the ladder, etc.) is difficult. We need to be constantly recruiting new umpires in order to continue to present a polished/professional product. Additionally, having our regional captains establish relationships and lines of communication with the leadership of the local leagues is extremely important in recruiting. Lastly, finding new female umpires continues to be a challenge but a priority.

Regional Captains

We continue to add reliable and dedicated regional captains to the Umpire Committee. I want to acknowledge, welcome, and thank Greg Robertson, Dave Nejedlik, and Jeff Meunier. Greg took over the New Jersey region, captained the Short Hills GP, and has already had some recruiting success. Dave will captain Cleveland. He was able to help make the Cleveland Masters a success on extremely short notice with no roster of certified umpires. Jeff will captain Indianapolis. Similarly, Jeff did a great job quickly recruiting and organizing the umpires for the Indy Open in February. Thanks again to all three for their leadership.

Additionally, I’d like to recognize and thank Rob LeBuhn who once again proved himself a tremendous help across the entire Midwest region. He kindly traveled to several tournaments to provide experienced leadership to the umpire crews. Rob also successfully led the umpires at Nationals this year in Chicago.

I’ll continue to look for candidates to lead the Long Island, CT and Westchester regions.

Chicago: Rob LeBuhn

Philly: Derek Yost

Cleveland: Dave Nejedlik

Indianapolis: Jeff Meunier

Cincinnati: NONE

Detroit: Frank Willard

Boston: Marshall Chapin

New Jersey: Greg Robertson

Long Island: Mike Yachimski

Pittsburgh: Robb Lusk

CT/Westchester, NY: Mike Yachimski

Once the 2023-24 APTA Tour schedule is finalized, I'd like to discuss whether it makes sense to look for and appoint captains in additional cities (Baltimore, Louisville). I'll lean on Jackie Cameron, Karen Nejedlik, and other APTA Tournament staff to provide contacts in those areas.

Umpire Recognition/Exposure

We will continue the tradition of gifting official APTA umpire vests to the new regional captains and veteran umpires this season. It's a simple way of acknowledging their commitment and dedication to umpiring. The recipients are very grateful and wear them proudly. Not only do the vests serve as a "thanks" from the APTA, but they increase the visibility and add to the professionalism of each tournament. Additionally, it turns out they are a good recruiting tool. I had several conversations with folks interested in umpiring. As a reminder, those who have umpired 10 matches or have 3 years of tenure or regional captains qualify.

We are always looking for small ways to improve the exposure/recognition of the tournament umpires. I was happy to notice and experience the efforts of the live stream coordinators and commentators to introduce and include pictures of the umpire pre-match. I would still like for them to include hometown and club just to make it that much more personal. Additionally, it was great seeing some of the live stream providers show live cutaways of the umpires up in the chair between points. It gives great perspective, and everyone loves a "close-up".

I think it would be a good idea for tournament directors to consider offering tournament favors to the umpires. Not all umpires take payment for their matches and this would be an easy way to say thanks.

Communication/Collaboration

Given the expansion of the APTA Tour and the increased need for more umpires across an increased number of cities, I believe it is necessary to enhance the level of communication amongst all regional captains and certified umpires. My plan is to have 3 Zoom calls next season, 1 pre-season, 1 mid-season and 1 before Nationals. Topics will include principles/performance, best practices, current roster depth, recruiting, rule interpretation/special situations and whatever else comes up. The increase in communication and collaboration will provide consistency across all regions and increase the knowledge and professionalism of all umpires and therefore upgrade the APTA Tour's product and experience.

Budget

As mentioned above, I would like to purchase custom vests for veteran umpires and regional captains. I'm guessing 10-12 vests. The last order was placed in December 2021 for 12 vests totaling \$800 or \$67 per vest including shipping (I think). I hope to order in September 2023.

Several tournaments had difficulty finding local umpires last season (Nationals included). It has come to my attention that The Tour will be expanding again in 2023-24, thus the need for umpires to travel will most likely be greater than in the past. Having experienced umpires at all tournaments is important. Knowing that part or most of an umpire's expenses would be covered if they choose to travel to a tournament would be a good recruiting tool. This veteran leadership would be especially important in

those “smaller market” host cities where there is an inexperienced umpire roster. While my goal is to ramp up recruiting, it may be wise to increase the allocation of funds for umpire travel expenses.

I hope to conduct a formal accounting of all umpire chairs. We would determine location, condition, and method of transport. I think funds should be allocated to the repair and purchase of new chairs. These chairs would be strategically placed based on the 2023-24 tournament schedule. I think this would save money long-term, eliminating 3rd party transportation costs.

I look forward to continuing to work with everyone at the APTA next season. Any questions or concerns, please reach out to mkyachimski@gmail.com.

Submitted by Mike Yachimski