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2011 SEASON
**UMPIRES
PROTECTIVE ASSOCIATION
OF CHICAGO**
www.upac.us



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August, 2011

Dear Members,

The August 19, 2011 meeting will be at 7:30 p.m. at **SKOKIE PLAYFIELD 540 HIBBARD RD. WINNETKA, ILLINOIS 60093.**

Please note that the meeting is in Winnetka.

I did attend the IHSA Officials conference again this year, a couple of interesting items that we will talk about at the meeting: online rules meetings, IHSA fees and grants.

Any problems with getting your caps please come to the meeting or call me (312-307-7431) so we can get the cap to you.

The next meeting will be September 16. At that meeting we will have nominations for 2012 officers. The October 7 meeting is dropped and at the October 21 meeting those nominated may accept or reject the nomination.

Congratulations to Mike Planthaber for 30 years as a member. Thank you for all of your great work for the UPAC.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Doug McLaughlin".

Doug McLaughlin
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THE A-HED | AUGUST 11, 2011

Baseball's Masked Men Show Their Inner Hams on Strike Three

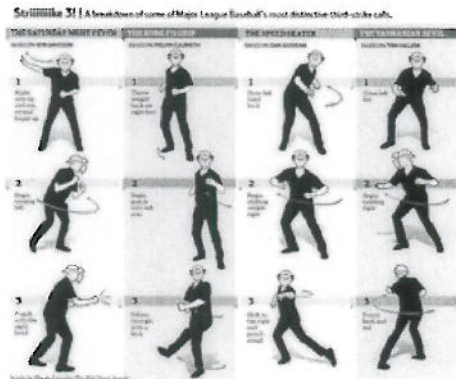
Gyrating Umpires Get Chance to Show Off When Batter Looks His Worst

By JARED DIAMOND

The manual for professional baseball umpires explains how to handle just about every on-field situation. From the backwoods of rookie ball to the grandeur of the big leagues, there is little room for creativity from these men in blue, who are largely invisible.

But a few times during each game, when the third strike whizzes past the hitter and pops the catcher's glove, the spotlight shines on the umpire standing behind home plate. For that brief moment, an ump can take center stage and, in some cases, exhibit true artistry.

An analysis of all 68 full-time Major League umpires' strike-three calls reveals 68 unique styles, running the gamut from Gary Darling's subtle fist pump to Tom Hallion's violent, Mike Tyson-esque punchout. Though nothing in the guidebook requires umpires to devise elaborate gestures, the called strike three injects a splash of color into the sport.



"It's kind of like a pitcher's signature pitch," said New York Mets pitcher R.A. Dickey. "The strike-three call has always been the one thing the umpire can make his own."

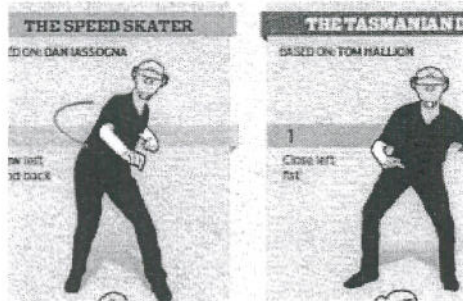
As time goes by, umpires refine their strike-three calls, adapting and tweaking their signals even after they reach the majors. Wally Bell, a big-league ump since 1993, seems to change his strike-three call from game to game, and sometimes from inning to inning. Larry Barnett, who umped in the American League for three decades, said he went through "10 or 15 different ones" before settling on "a mechanic," as they call the move, that he felt comfortable with toward the end of his career.

Among the 68 current umpires, 59 (86.8%) typically employ one of two straightforward approaches for calling strike three, punching either straight ahead toward the pitcher or out toward the side. But within that framework, each ump adds his own touches. As a result, perceptive fans can identify the umpire working the plate by his strike-three call. (Umpires usually let swinging strikeouts speak for themselves.)

Striiiiiiike 3!

How major-league umpires signal a called strike three.

For instance, Dan Iassogna (a middle-puncher) shifts his weight far into the left-hand batter's box when making his call—a move that would probably go over well on "Dancing with the Stars." Fellow middle-puncher Tim Tschida kicks his left leg into the air



on strike three like Jackie Chan in the movies, while side-puncher Brian Runge swings his right arm high over his head before punching across his body.

Even those calls look mundane compared with the remaining nine umpires' mechanics. They defy any attempt at categorization. Bob Davidson's signal resembles a disco move, as he starts his call by pointing his finger toward the sky like John Travolta did in "Saturday Night Fever." Mr. Hallion became a YouTube sensation last October, when his emphatic called strike three for the final out of the 2010 National League championship

series went viral. (Mr. Hallion makes an explosive 135-degree twist, turning his back to the right-handed batter's box on his punchout.)

"Every time I see Tom I tell him, 'I will not have you go 'Hiii-Yahhhhhh' on me tonight, that's my goal," said San Diego Padres infielder Orlando Hudson, imitating the motion as he spoke. "He's got the best strike-three call in the game."

Before any of that, prospective umps must learn the fundamentals, prompting umpiring schools to ban students from performing complex strike-three calls. Jim Evans, a former big-league ump who now runs one of the two MLB-sanctioned umpiring academies, said he teaches a "simple, robotic mechanic," resembling knocking on the door.

By the time umps reach the midlevel minor leagues, though, their supervisors and trainers take the reins off and encourage them to start developing more intricate calls. Justin Klemm, the executive director of the Professional Baseball Umpire Corp., the entity responsible for training and evaluating umps for pro baseball, said he rehearsed his motion before a mirror to see what looked right. Triple-A umpire Shaun Francis said young umps, after the games, ask their colleagues on the bases to critique their mechanics, hoping to earn a coveted promotion to the big leagues. Umpires can earn between about \$90,000 and \$300,000 a year.



"If at Triple-A you still have a rudimentary strike-three mechanic, you're not going to stand out," Mr. Francis said.

On the other hand, umpires with dramatic strike-three calls constantly tread the murky water between showmanship and ridicule. Or, as big-league umpire Jeff Nelson put it, "There's a fine line between good taste and Leslie Nielsen," a reference to the late movie actor's turn as an overly exuberant umpire in "The Naked Gun."

Players don't take too kindly to umpires showing them up and don't always need an excuse to berate the man responsible for lowering their batting averages.

"The thing about it is as a player you're emotionally invested in the game, but as an umpire you shouldn't be," Mr. Dickey said. "I can certainly see how outlandish strike-three calls could be misconstrued."

Nevertheless, Mr. Evans, the teacher, said players usually enjoy the strike-three calls, recognizing their place in the fabric of the game. Though players may not appreciate the histrionics as they trudge back to the dugout after striking out, they know it serves a purpose.

"You can't feel bad because when we make diving plays we do a little flash, when we hit a home run we do a little flash," Mr. Hudson said. "The umpires, they're in the game, too. They have to do a little something, too. That's their one moment."

Of course, that moment quickly turns sour if the players don't trust the umpire's judgment to call balls and strikes. That's why Mr. Evans has one crucial piece of advice for all young umps before acting too crazy: If you plan to use a wild strike-three mechanic, you better make sure you get the call right—at least most of the time.

"If a player thinks you missed a strike three, and you're putting on a big strike-three mechanic," he said, "then you're just a clown."