

EMBRACE EVALUATIONS

By Jon Bible

April marks the start of preparation for postseason assignments, and with it comes critical evaluations for advancing in umpiring. While postseason aspirations are exciting, the ultimate goal is always to improve and become the best umpire you can be. Embracing performance evaluations, rather than fearing them, is key to this process.

Why Evaluations Matter

Evaluations serve multiple purposes:

- **Improvement.**

Constructive feedback helps you refine your skills and address weaknesses.

- **Preparation.** Knowing an evaluation is around the corner encourages proactive preparation, such as studying rules and reviewing mechanics.

- **Advancement.** Positive evaluations often determine assignments and can provide an edge in moving up the officiating ladder.

Even when evaluations seem inconsistent or subjective, there's almost always something to learn. Adopting the right mindset ensures you gain value from the process, regardless of circumstances.

Control What You Can

While some aspects of evaluations — like the evaluator's mood or background — are outside your control, there are many areas where you can take charge. Most evaluations focus on six key elements: appearance, judgment, rules and mechanics knowledge, game management, communication,

and effort. Here's how to address these areas.

Appearance

- Shed excess weight to look fit and professional.
- Ensure your uniform is clean, crisp, and properly fitted.
- Present yourself as someone who takes pride in the role.

Knowledge

- Stay current with rule books, mechanics guides and updates.
- Watch game footage to analyze positioning and decision-making.
- Discuss situations with experienced umpires to expand your understanding.

Mechanics

- Practice signals, stances and movements in front of a mirror.
- Ensure movements are brisk, controlled and purposeful — avoiding the appearance of false hustle.
- Refine timing on calls, particularly behind the plate.

Game Management

- Focus on keeping games moving efficiently.
- Manage interactions with coaches and players professionally and calmly.
- Stay engaged and observant, even during downtime.

Communication

- Use clear, confident signals and verbal cues.
- Be approachable without over-familiarity, maintaining an independent demeanor.

Effort

- Always assume an evaluator is present and give 100%.
- Hustle appropriately,

demonstrating consistent energy without overdoing it.

Preparing for Evaluations

The thought of being evaluated may raise your pulse rate — it's normal. Use these strategies to manage nerves and stay in control:

- **Thorough pregame.**

Discuss potential game scenarios and signals with your crew to feel prepared.

- **Focus on routine.** Treat the game like any other, maintaining the habits and approach that have brought you success. If you consistently give full energy and focus to every game you work, you won't need to make changes just because a game is being evaluated.

- **Stay relaxed.** Avoid overthinking the presence of an evaluator. Most evaluations are based on a body of work, not a single call or inning.

- **Post-evaluation interaction.** If the evaluator provides feedback after the game:

- **Listen receptively.** Respond with gratitude and professionalism even if the comments seem overly critical or uninformed. A simple, "Thanks, I appreciate it," can go a long way.

- **Avoid defensiveness.** Don't justify mistakes with "Yes, but ..." responses. Being open to criticism will enhance your reputation.

- **Apply feedback.** Reflect on the feedback and incorporate valuable insights into your future games.

Consistency Is Key

The best preparation for evaluations is consistency. Approach every game as though you're being evaluated. One umpire famously said, "If I'd known you were watching, I'd have hustled more." That's not a