

2024 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 continued expansion of the APTA Tour which increased the number of umpired events to 16, including Nationals. We tested a tablet based scoring system called CourtDirector with tremendous success. We again added a couple Regional Captains this season, including Baltimore and Cincinnati. The national umpiring crew continues to grow in numbers and gain experience. I will continue 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.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS/GOALS

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 2023-24 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.
Very 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 will continue 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 grows, 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 to matches and prepared with the tools they need to be successful in the chair.
Good. Umpires are arriving prepared, for the most part. This lessens 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.
- **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.
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.

Player Behavior

Aside from one instance in Philly, I feel like this past season was fairly uneventful. The players exhibited both respect and sportsmanship. The umpires were confident and professional. The Umpire Committee and all certified umpires greatly appreciate the tremendous support the APTA has given us.

Foot Faults

I feel like umpires are starting to make small strides in this area. There has been an uptick in recognizing the importance of enforcing this rule, and a slight increase in umpires calling foot faults. The umpires committee and regional captains will continue to pound 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 has 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.

Rule Clarifications

I was asked to provide opinion and feedback during the process of modifying/clarifying two rules this past season. The first involved establishing a protocol for umpires, tour directors, and tournament directors to follow in a case where there is disagreement between the players and the umpire on the score. Briefly, the solution involved reviewing the live stream feed to ensure accuracy. The second enhanced the language around injury timeouts.

CourtDirector

This past season, a large number of umpires were able to test a tablet-based scoring system called CourtDirector. It was incredibly well received for its convenience, simplicity, and accuracy. We are looking forward to this eventually replacing the current pencil and paper scoring methodology.

Going forward, I will require all umpire prospects to learn CourtDirector. I am very excited to make this system the permanent scoring methodology going forward for all umpires. Pencil and paper can be brought along for backup purposes. There will be some "old-school" holdouts, of course. The Umpire Captain on site will ensure there is someone using CourtDirector to scorekeep the match alongside those hesitant chair umpires.

Recruiting

2023-24 was a less active, but very successful recruiting year. I sent certification study materials out to 28 individuals across 10 cities. I certified 17 new umpires for a 60% certification rate. Baltimore(4), Pittsburgh(4) and Westchester(3) led the way. It is abundantly clear that the hype and excitement of tournaments in new cities continues to spark growth in the umpire ranks.

The APTA and MiPaddle were once again kind enough to create and post umpire recruiting content on social media. Two spotlights on umpiring were filmed and posted including a personal umpiring testimonial (which was both fun and sorta stressful) and a feature on an umpire informational clinic in Chicago. Both were very well received. I didn't see a noticeable increase in interest, but strongly believe we should continue to post recruiting content to social media.

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.

Regional Captains

We continue to add reliable and dedicated regional captains to the Umpire Committee. I want to acknowledge, welcome and thank Caroline Pinkin and Ron Borgatti. Caroline was a standout amongst the all-rookie crew at the inaugural and wildly successful Baltimore Open. Ron is a veteran umpire who has proven to be invaluable in the Cincinnati region.

I will again resume the regional captain role in NJ, as Greg Robertson is unable to continue given his annual winter season move to South Carolina. Thanks again to everyone for their leadership.

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: Ron Borgatti
- Baltimore: Caroline Pinkin
- Detroit: Frank Willard
- Boston: Rick Edie
- New Jersey: Mike Yachimski
- Long Island: Mike Yachimski
- Pittsburgh: Robb Lusk
- CT/Westchester, NY: Mike Yachimski

Once the 2024-25 APTA Tour schedule is finalized, I'll investigate whether it makes sense to look for and appoint captains in additional cities. 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, have 3 years tenure or serve as a regional captain 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. Additionally, it was great seeing some of the livestream 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. Could this be a topic of conversation between the Tour Directors and the local Tournament Directors during their tournament leadup conference calls?

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.

I was able to hold a couple umpire Zoom calls this season. One early season and another before Nationals. The feedback on both was positive. Topics included principles/performance, best practices, current roster depth, recruiting and rule interpretation/special situations. 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. I will continue to organize these calls throughout the season.

Budget

As mentioned above, I would like to purchase custom vests for veteran umpires and regional captains. I’m guessing 15-17 vests. I didn’t end up placing an order last season, as I overestimated the total. There are now several more umpires that have qualified after this season, so I hope the bigger order will be more cost effective. 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, 2024.

Given the increase in the number of APTA Tour events being held in new, more remote (if that is a good way to describe it) cities, I think we need to really think about buying a few more umpire chairs. Strategically placing the additional chairs would cut down on transportation costs and lessen the burden on the volunteers who haul the chairs to and from tournaments. I have heard of individual clubs/leagues purchasing chairs for their own use (ITC included), but I don’t think the APTA can assume these would be available for use. I will consult with Karen Nejedlik to come up with a good solution.

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

Submitted by Mike Yachimski
Umpires Committee Chair