

# Umpires Work Hard To Call Clean Games

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By Kendrick E. Johnson, Beaumont Enterprise

Photos by: Guiseppe Barranco, Photo Editor

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## Come on, blue!"

It's a phrase that is yelled at baseball umpires from Little League all the way to the Major Leagues. Harold Hearn of Orange has heard it a time or two in 35 years of umpiring baseball games in Southeast Texas.

At 76, Hearn has called more than 5,000 games. He has learned how to block it out.

"A lot of fans are blinded by the fact their kid is playing, and they simply want everything to break their way," Hearn said. "In my experience over the years, a kid could be out clear as day and his or her parents are still going to be complaining because that is their son or daughter you just called out."

After his own son advanced past the Little League stage, the retired Chevron chemist got into officiating in the late 1960s because of the lack of umpires in the area. Forty years later, there is still a shortage of umpires in the area, especially given the year-round nature of the game.

"We are looking for umpires who want to be a part of the game and enjoy baseball," Hearn said. "Do not come to the fields just looking for a quick job, because you will be in store for a rude awakening ... we take calling games seriously."

For the past 11 years, Hearn has overseen the staffing of umpires at the Ford Park baseball diamonds. Thanks to Hearn's commitment, many umpires come to Ford Park each weekend, with experiences from the high school and college levels all the way down to calling youth league games.

For Kevin Bauhaus, a 13-year veteran umpire of Jennings, Louisiana, calling Select, Pony and Little League games is a learning tool to get better for more advanced levels.

"Even though I umpire college games, you can never learn or see too much in this profession," Bruchhaus said. "We advance by our performance on the field. And when you call tournaments like this where every game is video-recorded, you can't help but to get better."

Hearn and Bruchhaus point to lack of knowledge of the rules among fans and their belief in common baseball phrases as gospel, when in reality they are often misconceptions.

Name a common saying associated with the game, and Hearn has heard it over the years, such as "tie goes to the runner" or "99 balls."

As a result, Hearn often has to dispel these misconceptions because the rules of baseball do not support them.

"People would not heckle umpires as much if they knew by rule, a batter always has to try to get out of the way of the ball and the runner has to beat out the throw to be safe on any force play," Hearn said. "As a professional you have to follow the letter of the rules and simply tune fans out. Because the kids expect and deserve a good umpire who is going to be fair, have a consistent strike zone and call it the right way every single time."

Unbeknownst to the general public, most umpires are volunteers who call games for free, or the standard rate of \$35 per game.

No matter how much they are getting paid, most umpires have a passion for the game.

[David Smith](#) of Vidor is one of those.

Smith has 20 years of umpiring experience and has seen everything on the diamond: unassisted triple plays, a 10-year-old Little Leaguer going behind the back to start a double play and even a couple of fights between parents in the stands.

No matter how exciting or crazy the action gets, there is nothing else Smith would want to do in his spare time.

"I do this for the love of the game and to get better each time I call a game," Smith said. "We need more umpires who are here because they have a true passion for the game and are dedicated to having a positive impact on our youth's lives in a positive way."

While Smith calls games because of his love for baseball, five-year veteran umpire [Mike Fogo](#) got into calling games for a completely different reason.

Fogo, a teacher and basketball coach at Hardin-Jefferson, became an umpire to give himself a different perspective of things in the dynamic of coach versus official.



Paul Starkie calls a game during the Nationals baseball tournament at Ford Park on Monday.



Forrest Zoch calls a game during the Nationals baseball tournament at Ford Park on Monday.



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