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The Privilege of Being an Umpire

By Joel Balberman

Have you ever thought about how fortunate we are as umpires? If you take time to reflect on this, you'll see that we have a privilege bestowed upon us. We get are enriched in many ways from our participation in the ball games we work.

No regular fan or follower of the game can relate to the action on the field the way we can. Our role as umpires has taught us a deeper understanding of the fine points of the game; its nuances; its subtleties. Indeed, it is the depth of our understanding of the game that allows us to enjoy any game we view as a spectator, to think one or two plays ahead, and to know the possibilities in every game situation.

Who better to understand the essence of the game - the confrontation between pitcher and hitter - than the umpire? We have the best seat in the house for this showdown, which happens with every at-bat. Both pitcher and batter place their confidence in us. Which one will succeed this time? Our judgments go a long way toward deciding this question.

How many times have you been on the field, and admiringly watched an athlete make a play and think to yourself, "Great play!" As umpires, we are privileged to be able to watch amazing feats of athletic ability first-hand, and marvel at them.

Where else can you find the type of bond that exists among umpires? All umpires share a special kinship that comes from our common avocation. Indeed, the spirit of brotherhood and friendship I speak of is similar to that which is found among teammates in sport. That's because our ties that bind are built on common experiences, and facing the same hardships and challenges. Think of those you are closest to in life. Other than family, I'll be surprised if a fellow umpire is not at least in your top 10.

As umpires, our involvement with the game can extend far beyond the time afforded to players. Eventually, skills wane, and players no longer play, either by their choice or out of necessity. An umpire's career can go on for many years past the playing days of the average player. This allows us to continue our love affair with the game.

Have I convinced you yet that being an umpire is a privilege? How much better off would we all be, if we held the thought that we are privileged to be there in our hearts every time we walked out onto a diamond to work a game? How much differently would we relate to others if we really believed that working as an umpire is special, a gift, a blessing?

Let us all enjoy the privilege of umpiring. This is my wish for all.