



FAQ: Umpires in North Natomas

The very culture of Little League Baseball is centered on the concept of community volunteers providing a safe, educational and fun environment for kids to learn the game of baseball. Umpires should be no different. Historically, Natomas Little League (NNLL) has struggled to reach sufficient numbers of umpires. This phenomenon is common for every league regardless of size, resources, or community demographics. This is even true whether a league chooses to pay its umpires or people volunteer their time to umpire.

NNLL has grown to almost 1,000 kids in 10 years, which suggests a need of about 60 umpires to properly officiate baseball (Minors AAA and higher) and Softball (11U and higher). This document is designed to answer many of the common questions about umpiring in North Natomas.

Q: What does it pay?

Umm... nothing. NNLL is proud to be the only 100% volunteer umpire crew in the area. *Each of our umpires volunteers for YOUR community.* They are proud of that fact.

Q. What are the advantages/disadvantages of a volunteer umpire crew?

The **primary reason** to develop and maintain a volunteer crew is a better program providing better game results. A volunteer crew cares more than an outside crew because it is THEIR league. They take ownership and pride in the league and it typically leads to stronger commitment to the League and training.

Of course there are other advantages.

Obviously, volunteers reduce costs. The payment of umpires in NNLL would result in a 20-25% increase in fees. If you think about it, the men and women who volunteer their time **DIRECTLY** reduce your fees. **You might even want to thank them for saving you money!**

Leagues that use volunteer umpire often have much higher levels of sportsmanship, primarily because volunteers are not willing to put up with as much attitude problems and animosity. Why should they? It is for this reason that NNLL adopted a tough Code of Conduct and stresses to participants and spectators that negative behavior and actions will **NOT** be tolerated.

Despite the lack of pay, NNLL has more District-trained, and Section-level quality umpires than any league in our District. Little League Baseball recognizes the better trained **VOLUNTEER** umpires through post season tournament assignments including Regional and World Series consideration. In the past few years, NNLL umpires have represented the Natomas community in Arizona (Western Region), Montana (Western), Delaware (International World Series), and San Bernardino (Majors Western Regional 12 Year-Old Finals).

Post-season assignments are problematic for umpires in a league that pays its umpires. Better for NNLL - Western Region Headquarters knows NNLL is all-volunteer!

There are basically three disadvantages. One, leagues that rely on volunteers must continually recruit and train people to umpire. Two, because people are reticent to give it a try, there are likely more games with no umpires. Three, volunteer umpires can widely vary from umpire to umpire in terms of rules knowledge, consistency, and expectations.

Q. What are the advantages/disadvantages of a paid umpire crew?

Typically leagues that pay umpires for their services have less administrative headaches. There are likely to be umpires for all games. Paid umpires usually come with their own equipment and have more experience with different situations. As a result, there is greater chance umpires can handle more complicated rules situations.

Disadvantages include a significantly higher cost. Providing umpires for NNLL would result in a new expense - one of the highest behind uniforms and fields. Obviously fees would need to be increased significantly.



Payment of umpires does not guarantee better umpiring. There is greater demand for umpires than umpires available. As a result, NNLL would compete with other Little Leagues as well as travel ball, high school, college, and amateur leagues throughout Northern California. This results in the least qualified and experienced umpires available to Little Leagues (especially at levels below Juniors divisions).

Further, paid umpires often are less familiar with Little League-specific rules and more familiar with other rules sets (i.e., high school, college, etc). As a result, they are less likely to call Little League rules involving safety and sportsmanship. Further, they are often unaware of local league rules.

Q: I paid good money for umpires, right?

No. NNLL is an all-volunteer league. When registration fees were established, there were ZERO DOLLARS budgeted for payment of umpires. Typically, less than \$2 per player is spent on equipment and uniform purchases for league umpires.

Again, should the league convert from volunteer to paid, umpires will represent a 20-25% increase in NNLL expenses, and require a corresponding increase in fees.

Q: How much does it cost?

Basically - nothing. The League provides training, equipment, umpire shirts and hats. The only costs for you are grey pants and black shoes (especially at the Majors and higher levels). Even then, work with the Umpire in Chief (UIC). The League will figure out a solution if cost is a problem. Also, the UIC knows a lot of ways to cut costs. Cost should never stop you from volunteering as an umpire in NNLL.

Q: How do you become certified?

In Little League, there is no certification. In an all-volunteer league (like NNLL) all we ask is to give back, get involved, be fair and do your best. You do need some basic training and the easiest way to obtain it is to attend the District 6 Umpire Clinic. After that, you will slowly improve and the easier it becomes.

If you choose to continue on and receive payment, you will be required to join the local officials association, purchase your own gear, and attend training and clinics.

Becoming an umpire is easy. Becoming a great umpire? Well... That is up to you.

Q: I cannot make any of the Clinics. What do I do?

Contact the Umpire in Chief (umpires@nnll.org). Clinics are the single best way to get comfortable on the field. But, inability to attend an umpire clinic should NEVER prevent you from getting involved. We will work with anyone who helps out.

We can provide limited one-on-one training. We can slowly prepare you to do games. Maybe we can jump on a Minors AAA game together and you can learn as you go. In short order, you will feel comfortable and confident. Next year, go to the clinic and you will notice a big improvement.

Q: What about dealing with unruly parents or coaches?

NOTE: Umpire Abuse in Little League is unacceptable!

NNLL attempts to proactively prevent problems from occurring. Dealing with unruly fans is a community responsibility and NNLL is committed to ensure a safe and fun environment for our kids. This includes good sportsmanship, and decorum expected from all adults on and off the field.

As an umpire, you receive 100% support from the League.

Consistent with the goals of Little League and the Volunteer/Parent pledge, NNLL adopted a much stronger code of conduct for 2014. The coaches and managers are fully aware of the League's policy. All abusive behavior (coaches, parents, spectators) will be reported to the on-site League official, forwarded to the UIC, addressed by the Board, and escalated to Sacramento Police Department if necessary.

**Q. What is the time commitment?**

You are a volunteer... you decide. Actually, umpiring is one of the LEAST time-consuming roles you can fill in Little League (about 2 hours a game). The typical umpire does about 2-3 games a month. If you can only help on Saturdays, Wednesdays, or the third week of April - GREAT!

Average is about 6-12 games a season. Of course, some umpires do ONE game, some FIFTY!

But, it is always your choice.

Q: I get home from work around 6:30, can I still help out?

With up to 15 games on a Saturday, which means 30 umpires needed nearly every Saturday, we REALLY need support on Saturday. Come help out for a couple hours!

Q: Are there umpires for my kid's T-Ball (or Minors) game?

Typical leagues in our region provide umpires (or equivalent) for all games played Minors AA (or 8U) and above). Currently, it is unlikely we will have umpires for levels below Minors AAA. But remember, if we don't have umpires today for AAA, Majors or Juniors AND you don't volunteer, there will be none when your kids make it to the big show.

BOTTOM LINE: The more involvement today, the better trained we all become, the better the experience for all the kids. Thus, getting involved now means a better experience for your kids later.

Q: I am helping out my kid's team by coaching! What can I do?

GREAT! Thanks for getting involved. Volunteerism is crucial to the success of NNLL. Make sure to talk to every player's parent on your team and encourage them become an Umpire. Let them know, if volunteers do not step up, they will umpire anyway.

In 2015, NNLL adopted a Team Umpire role required of each team Minors AA and higher. You MUST actively identify your Team Umpire and are highly encouraged to identify 2-3 persons for training.

BTW - If you are in the lower instructional levels - there is a good chance you will be out there umpiring anyway; you might want to consider going to the clinic.

Q. It looks dangerous behind "the plate". Is it?

In all clinics, umpires are instructed on the best methods to position and move themselves to minimize potential for injury. Everything an umpire does is purposeful. It is true - once in a while you get hit. But that is why you wear protection.

Q. What if I can't physically do "the plate"?

We have a constant need for people willing to "go behind the dish" and control the game from behind the plate. But, you should only do what you feel comfortable doing. We need "field" umpires. Come out and help fill that need!

It is a REALLY important role. It cannot be over-stated: there is a tremendous difference between umpiring a game alone and doing so with a partner. So, both the plate and field umpire are important.

Q. What if I don't know the rules?

You do have to agree to work at learning as much as possible. Baseball rules are strange and steeped in history. It takes years to KNOW the rules. But, if you do the best you can, that is all the League can ask of you. You will learn more every game. If enough people are interested, there will be rules clinics.

If you have any other questions, contact the Umpire in Chief (Umpires@nnll.org)