

CONCUSSIONS

By Steve Boutang

This article first appeared in Volume 5, Issue 2 Fall 2013, of the “Hey Blue! Newsletter” of the BCBUA. Even though this article is written for baseball umpires, it still has relevance for the softball community.



This article is reprinted with the permission of the author. Steve Boutang is the Provincial Supervisor for the BCBUA. He is an accomplished baseball umpire who has worked many international tournaments. To quote Steve: “ Well I'm no doctor Dave. I was simply expressing thoughts. I did research on concussions. And I have a few friends in MLB and International Baseball who provided some info.”

Concussions are increasing at an alarming rate around baseball. Players are being concussed more often, and guess what? So are umpires. Truth.

Several of our own BCBUA umpires have been concussed this year and last, being hit in the head area by pitches primarily. This can happen at any level of baseball, although mostly these specific injuries are as a result of higher levels of baseball where the balls are travelling at greater velocity.

It has nothing to do with poor equipment or protection, or umpires bailing out at the last second. Yes, there are better masks out there than others, but concussions still happen with these products.

Mainly, it happens because of the whiplash effect (among other things) whereby a foul ball goes screaming past the catcher and directly onto the face and head area of the umpire, snapping the head backwards.

I'm not a doctor, but I can tell you that concussions are growing because the symptoms and signs were often ignored in the past, and now people are getting checked and diagnosed more frequently. And the effects are dramatic the more it happens. And the symptoms take longer to dissipate the more times you get your melon rattled.

If you do some research on umpire positioning you will discover that the best position to avoid getting hit is the “slot position”. That's the position where the middle of your body is positioned basically on the inside corner of the plate. The best way to accomplish this is by working in the “Box Stance – Heel/Toe” with your head and back slightly leaning forward. The more you hide behind the catcher, the more likely you are to get hit ironically enough.... And if you get too low and hide behind the catcher completely, then you can't see the pitches.

If you work in a position where your head is slightly above the catcher, on the inside portion of the plate, slightly exposed, it is almost physically impossible to get hit in the head under normal foul ball circumstances.

Thus, reducing your chance of getting that dreaded concussion.

Some people like the “Gerry Davis” style stance. Yes, you see the pitches better because you are basically more upright, looking almost overtop of the catcher’s head. But you are too ex-posed to foul balls in this position. You’ll get hit on the arms and head much more, and it’s dangerous.

MLB is asking their umpires to get away from this stance. And so am I.

Try hard this winter to develop a good, solid box stance-heel toe stance. And in spring, when the season begins anew, start working this style and stay safe!

And before you get your bell rung, go to the doctor. There are base line tests out there that will measure your brain functions when you are healthy. Go get one done. That way, when you have a concussion, the doctors have a place to start their measurements and can tell you how bad your injury is.

When you do have that bad experience when you get hit, for pete sakes go to the doctor and get checked. And TAKE TIME OFF of baseball! That includes the bases. I’m not joking here! Coming back too soon exacerbates this condition.

Finally, think of the rest of your life. Baseball is a hobby. Yes we take it seriously. But it’s a game. Your family, your health, and the rest of your life are way more important to look after.

Editors note: The representations in this article are to be considered opinions of the author and are not to be construed as any specific medical advice.