

Between Innings

You are still the umpire between innings. **The time between half-innings is a suspension of play, but not a suspension of your responsibilities.** This is not a time to pick a comfy corner behind the backstop, sit in the grass and pull out a lollipop. Especially if you are working alone, you cannot divert your attention from the field. First, it just looks plain sloppy and unprofessional to be sprawled out on the ground relaxing. Walking into the spectator area to chat with some buddies is just as bad. In youth league play, the families usually sit on the side of their team's dugout. What will the moms of the away team think when they see you exchanging hugs and handshakes with some folks over on the home teams' side? You never want to give the impression that you might favor one side.

You should never leave the field of play until the game is over. If it's a particularly hot afternoon and you could use 30 seconds of shade and a sip of water, if there is no neutral place for you to put your things, go into the dugout of the team that is going on defense. There are less people in the dugout. When you enter either dugout, you're always going to be persona non-grata. Act like a guest. If you must sit, take a seat at a far end and don't talk to anyone. Keep your attention out on the field. It's best, though, to avoid the dugouts.

Between half innings, while the teams are exchanging defensive positions, walk up the foul line of the side now becoming the defense, unless there was an issue that half inning, then you would stray away from controversy. If the players aren't hustling, motion to them and make some remarks to expedite them like, "Let's go guys, it's gonna get dark soon!" or "Come on guys, the curfew is only 20 minutes away!" Make sure the catcher is getting help suiting up, if he's not already on the field. If coaches are wasting time assigning defensive positions at this time, stand close enough to let them see you don't like that. Let them finish the assignments. Then quietly tell them this should have been done during their time at bat. Don't let coaches hold up the game this way. – **NJSFU RECOMMENDATION: Observe how the team operates early in the game, this could be discussed and avoided later in the game if taken care of in the beginning of the game.**

One thing you particularly want to observe is the pitching mound. During the inning change, occasionally another fielder, say "Jimmy," the team's left fielder, is jogging past the mound and he will see the ball laying there where the other team's catcher tossed it when the last half inning ended. Jimmy has been wanting to pitch but the coach hasn't let him try yet. So just for fun, Jimmy picks up the ball, steps on the rubber and tells "Charlie," the catcher to catch one pitch for him. Charlie's got nothing to do since, "Elvis," the real pitcher, still hasn't come out onto the field. So Charlie squats behind home plate. – **NJSFU RECOMMENDATION: This should be addressed as soon as conversation begins between LF and Catcher. Coaches are usually good at giving pitching substitutions in HS ball. If you do not receive notification, ask the catcher if this is a new pitcher. Stop it before it happens. PREVENTATIVE UMPIRING IS THE BEST UMPIRING.**

If you miss this because of other substitutions or conversation with a coach, the base umpire should have observed this happening. The coach of the other team trots out and says "Ump, did you see that other boy throw a practice pitch? Doesn't that make him the pitcher?" If you saw it, then you have no choice but to enforce the rule. If you did not see it, "Coach, I was taking a substitution, talking with the other coach, and did not observe it. I will check with my partner." If your partner did see it, then you have no choice but to enforce the rule. You could deny noticing the "Jimmy pitch," but that would do more harm to your reputation as a competent and fair umpire.

Remember your responsibility to keep the game moving. If you're lucky enough to be working with a partner umpire, don't use each break between innings as an opportunity to swap horror stories, quiz each other on rules, or catch up on old times. The base umpire should watch the next defensive team's dugout and try to hustle them along and count warm up pitches in the event his partner is recording substitutions or conversing with coaches. Meanwhile, the plate man should be watching the field to count the pitcher's warm-up pitches and take substitutions. Warn the catcher and pitcher when he has two remaining warm-ups. It is NOT your responsibility to call "BALLS IN".

Although, umpire-partners will feel mutual camaraderie, you have to resist the urge to turn the breaks between innings into a social time, this includes talking with spectators. I've been on the field with base umpires in HS State Tournament games and youth level games become so engrossed in a continual between-inning chat that they didn't notice the game was ready to start as he was still on the fence talking to the spectators. Startled and embarrassed, he sees that everybody at the field is looking at him, waiting to resume the game. This kind of behavior sends a message to the players and coaches that your own issues are more important than their game.

Generally, umpires should keep away from each other between innings. If you need a quick rule clarification, or a review of a communication signal, that's OK. But keep your discussions brief, to the point, and related only to the game you're currently working. Remember, you're still an umpire between innings.

1. The time between innings is not a suspension of your responsibilities
2. You don't want to look sloppy and unprofessionally during that space of time
3. You want to be alert on whatever happens out there: substitutions, not enough players on the field, players who take ages to get ready for the next inning, etc.
4. You'll have to count warmup-pitches
5. You don't want to miss the moment when players are ready to resume play