

MY YEARS of UMPIRING.

I started umpiring while I was still a player with the Hutt Softball Club. When I first started playing in 1945 in the Lower Grades they were all umpired by player umpires except for Senior Men.

The system was player umpires were always from a higher grade. In other words Senior Grade Players umpired Lower Grades, Senior Reserve Players umpired Women's Senior/Res Grades, plus Senior B. Grade Men's etc.

During these years the game was played mainly on North Park and Strand Park also at Griffins. Also the game was still being promoted, mainly by Matches being played as curtainraisers to such events as the Speedway as Twilight games.

At this time I did not umpire and it wasn't until 1952 and later that I started. My first taste of umpiring was not in the Hutt Valley but was while I was in the Air Force. Upon my return from the Services I then volunteered as a Player/Umpire on a semi permanent schedule.

The Umpire's Association at that time held meetings irregularly as there were only 4 or 5 Full Time Umpires. They were from memory, Arch Hall, Jock McCaskill, Jim Mulholland, (on a part time basis) George Vanston & a new Umpire Lloyd Bigley. There was another umpire who comes to mind, he came from Wellington, and that was Buck Laws.

Later in the 50's I umpired some Senior Men's Games but mainly Senior Women. This continued until 1959 when Myself and Vin Oswald sat the N.Z. Umpires exam. After passing this we were examined by Arch Hall & Jock McCaskill and passed as Senior Umpires in the Hutt Valley. At the same time Lloyd was examined and became a Fulltime Umpire. Both Vin & myself were still Player/Umpires

In 1962 I along with Arch Hall and Lloyd Bigley applied to take our N.Z. Practical Exam at the Men's National Tournaments which were held in Rotorua, over 2 weeks. At this time the Men's and Women's National & Interclub Tournaments were always held at the same time.

It must be remembered that all Local games were Sole Umpire staffed, so 2 man teams were seldom used other than at Nationals. At this Tournament I was coached in Base Umpiring by the recognized expert Athol Aitkens from Auckland.

Lloyd and Arch passed and were presented with their Badges while I was asked to attend the Colts Tournament in February the same year in Wellington. I was presented with my NZ Badge at this Tournament.

Of interest some of the Pitchers whom I had the chance to call at these were, Bill Massey, Ross Smith, Ted Mildenhall, Barry Cook, Gary Ward, Pete McKinley, Brian Wareham and Paul Rodgers at the Colts. Later in years I Umpired the up and comers, such as, John Dawson, Peter Roberts, Garth Tattersfield, Graham Arnold, Owen Walford and of course, Kevin Herlihy. These were just some of the Pitchers I met and became friendly with away from the Diamond. It is worth noting that all of these Pitchers had top class catchers with them from Club all the way through to Representative and NZ Levels.

In 1963 I gave up playing and became a fulltime umpire. Our Uniform in those days were, Black Shirt, Grey Slacks, White Tee Shirt, white socks and Black Softball Shoes. To complete the outfit, a Wire Mask. There were no Protectors or caps or Clickers. You kept the count on your fingers and the outs as best you could. There were no Scorers as such until 1974.

In 1966 the uniform changed to all Black. Shirt, Slacks, Tee Shirt and Socks. Needless to say in the Summer it was a pretty hot Uniform to wear

All games at that time were Sole Umpire and Umpires were not forced to stand in set positions. The rules at that time actually said; "a sole umpire shall take up a position which was suitable to call all plays". I do know that some Umpires actually stood behind the pitcher when there was a runner on first base. George Vanston

would even kneel behind a tall pitcher and call the balls & strikes by looking through his legs.

Umpires were not appointed to Women's or lower grade games as they are now, only the Senior Men's were appointed. A Base Umpire was a Player from the opposite time slot if you were lucky. As a player/Umpire you were expected to take the most Senior game at the opposite time slot, which had no Umpire appointed to it. All Umpires to games were appointed by the HVSA.

The NZ Chief Umpire up until about 1969 was Ken Morgan. In 1966 the first Men' Team attended the World Series in Mexico. On their return Umpiring began to change not least of which was the introduction of Chest Protectors, Counters and new Style Masks. No change in Uniforms.

We were lucky in some ways & unlucky as well. We lost a few umpires but gained a few more Player/Umpires. Amongst these were a few Girls who were interested. There were still no regular Umpire meetings, though we did have a couple of Clinics each season.

The one change which was made was that a Sole Umpire would make calls from behind the Catcher. This was great as it improved the Ball and Strike calls. One point to note that the stance of both Catchers and Umpires was Upright, which made for calling high strikes and not Low ones.

After 1966 we had an influx of Touring American Team, such as the Texas All Stars etc. Most of these games were played at the Hutt Rec on Grass Diamonds, and in sandshoes so that the cricket wickets were not cut up. They were also played on the Basin Reserve. To attract the public they were often played at night under lights. The lighting was nowhere up to the standard it is now. We combined with the Wellington Umpires to officiate in these games and a feature was if you were the Plate Umpire you wore white gloves so everyone could see the count. Some of these visiting teams made it a Bi Annual Tour which did help raise the standard of the play and the umpiring.

A lot of the NZ Umpires in the Hutt Valley were Players such as Bill Massey, Dave Sorenson etc. Also there was Casey Donsen, Ron Rossiter, Jim Mulholland, who had been coaching for a number of years. The Umpires Assoc. had been resurrected and Meetings and Clinics were run on a semi regular basis. We also had an influx of interested ex players and non player people. No person was forced into having to sit exams but they were encouraged to do so. Some of these dropped out after trying it for a season but those who stayed turned out to be really keen. One who comes to mind was Graham McClelland. We also had a good base of Women Umpires. Some that come to mind were, Meryl Ferguson, her sister, Jenny Scherp, Lorraine White, Sue Mills, Yvonne Collins, Diane Lambert and others who included the Riwaka sisters..

Around the start of the 1970's , the HVSA did a restructure and at the same time, approached the Umpires and reformed the HVU Assoc. The newly formed Assoc. Drew up a constitution and then held weekly clinics and monthly business meetings. It was from this time that the Umpires Assoc. made their own appointments to games which covered Senior Men's & Women's plus Maj Reserve and especially Age Grades. The Draw was given to the Chief Umpire, who made the appointments for the Umpires and then returned it to the Draw Master who then appointed Player/Umpires by naming them, to the remaining games. After a couple of years all appointments were made by the chief umpire, both fulltime and player. In the 1980's it was changed that instead of naming the player/umpires a Team was named who had to supply 2 players. There were penalties for players or teams not doing their appointments.

Over these years the HVSA gave a Grant to the Umpires to run their Assoc.. This was rescinded after the Umpires began being paid to umpire and were sponsored and had an income of their own.

During this time the Umpires from the Hutt Valley attended every National Tournament each year including Schoolchildren's. In fact the Assoc. Was often approached to find members to fill in where there lack of Umpires. One that comes to mind was the under 18 Girls Tournament in Wanganui which was staffed completely by Hutt Valley Women Umpires. In my own case I attended Secondary Schoolboys & Schoolgirls both as an Umpire and Chief Umpire , Men's Nationals, Colts, Men's Club nearly every year.

In the early part of the 1970's I also attended the Women's nationals to support our Women Umpires who were going for their NZ Badge. I also attended Colts and any Schoolchildren's Tournaments.

As is known the HVSA had bid for the Men's World Series which was held on the Hutt Rec. Unfortunately, no HV Umpires were appointed to this event. Leading up to this there were opportunities to Umpire visiting teams and meet overseas umpires.

The overseas Umpires were aghast when they found out that the umpires in NZ did not receive any payments for umpiring. And they laughed when they were told what the payments were for umpiring at National Tournaments, (5 shillings (50cents per day) for a home Umpire, and 1 pound (2dollars per day) plus second class rail fare for visiting umpires).

It wasn't for a few years before Umpires received payments. This was only after it became known that Clubs were paying players. Locally, we did not charge for age grades and it was all Umpires including full-time player umpires, who were paid.

In the late 70's, and the early 80,s the umpires became active in trying to raise their profile with Clubs, Coaches and Players. As changes to the rules came out, the umpires would attend trainings etc to discuss and show the changes to the rules to the coaches and players. They were also open to hold rules clinics at Club's convenience.

Another PR exercise was to attempt to attract persons interested in umpiring Saturday Morning Children's Games. To do this we set up clinics at which Rule Books were given out for free, plus a supper of soft drinks. This was held at a central location and at the end there was an exam held. Those passing were given a Black Tee Shirt with a HV umpires Pocket Monogram.

Also Masks and outside protectors were supplied at all grounds. Needless to say this could not be fully financed by the Umpires Assoc. so Sponsorship was sought from a number of sources, not the least was the HVSA. The following year this was held in 4 different areas but not with the same success. I must admit we did gain some umpires from the series. Among these was Daphne Turner, John & Ilona Tahere and Wayne Saunders who showed an interest, and Jim Potts, who was the HVSA President..

Around this period the Hutt Valley Umpires numbered about 28 Full Time Umpires and 10 or more Player Umpires, making this the biggest Umpires Assoc. in NZ. The Umpires Association during all this time was always represented on the Hutt Valley Assoc.

Over my time as an Umpire I served under 5 different NZ Chief Umpires. I started with Ken Morgan (who was a strict martinet).Ron McCloughlin, Jack Allen, Ray Weaver and Charlie Phillips. I was often appointed as a Deputy Chief Umpire to different National Tourneys. My philosophy at these was that the best or most competent were appointed to the top games. This did not always meet with the approval of the Hierarchy and rules were brought in to stop this. Some of this thinking is still enforced unfortunately.

In the Hutt Valley there was Jock McCaskill, Lloyd Bigley, Casey Donsen and myself. My time spanned from in the 1950's up until 1987. I had a very good time with the persons I met through umpiring not only umpires but coaches and Players. I also got to meet Administrators both Local and from other Associations along with NZ Administrators. Some of these friendships are still active but unfortunately a large number have passed on.

The HV Umpires Assoc. had a great reputation for aiding and coaching other Associations Umpires at anytime. We also assisted staffing pre season tournaments both at home and away and were always the first asked to go back the following years.

I think this will give you an insight into the early years in the HV and the rather proud record of the HVSUA.

Yours sincerely, Jack White.

P.S. My first game of softball was at Crawford Green. HV was a sub assoc. to Wellington at that time. The HV Assoc. formed in 1945-46. Also In the late 40's and early 50's, the appointment of Umpires to Nationals was rather hit and miss. If there was not enough Umpires at the Tournament, they could recruit from off the sideline. One of NZ Chief Umpires was recruited in this manner. That was Jack Allen.