

'Blues' Take Their Game to the Diamonds

When the weather starts warming up and attention starts turning to baseball, there is a small group at Defense Distribution Depot San Joaquin, CA (DDJC) that has already done plenty to prepare for the season. Meetings to go over new rules and points of emphasis start as early as January. The folks in the stands and on the field call them 'Blue'— after the color of their uniform. After work eight softball or baseball officials hurry off to ball fields all over central California.

Anthony Santa Cruz, a blocker and bracer in the box shop, has been officiating for 31 years. He started with softball and then went to Little League. "Little League is much faster paced," said Santa Cruz. He started while serving in the Air Force when there was a shortage of officials and it stuck with him. He now only does little league as a volunteer.

"After doing city league, it got to be too much of a job," recalls Santa Cruz. His most gratifying moment comes when the youngsters thank him after the game. "That makes it all worth while," he admits.

Investigator Tom Eddy has worked the diamond for the last 24 years. He doesn't do much baseball anymore. Serving as the State Umpire Chief for the National Softball Association since 1995 keeps him busy nearly year round. "After the season ends around Thanksgiving, I attend the winter meetings and conventions," said Eddy. "That is followed by clinics and getting officials registered, certified and scheduled, so there is really no down time for softball."

Whether it is a high school softball game, city league or NSA, he is calling softball games at least five days a week. He gets his biggest chuckle when parents and coaches who obviously don't know the rules try to help him.

Eddy helped write the NSA rulebook and is always glad to promote the rules. He recalled a recent situation where the coaches weren't familiar with the rule changes. "I had a big box of rulebooks in my car so I gave all the coaches a new rulebook," said Eddy. "I like seeing the kids progress, get scholarships, come back, and coach the younger kids," said Eddy.

Forklift operator Dave Corral has done everything from T-ball to Division 1 softball with teams like Cal, Stanford, and UOP for the past 17 years. He started on a bet watching a group of umpires play a local all star team. "I did the bases that day and started officiating the following year," recalls Corral. His earnings were used to put his daughter through Chico State College in preparation for her Certified Public Accountant license.

One of his most memorable events came four years ago when he was doing the National Championships in Montgomery, AL. "It was hot and humid and 95 teams from all over were there and Hurricane George was coming," recalled Corral. "The call was made that we had to work around the clock to get the games in before the hurricane arrived. After working eight games in a row, the scheduler asked if I was up to doing a Softball World Series game. I said yes. Standing along side was a World Series official who agreed with my answer. For me that was a great compliment."

Corral has also helped Bulk Division supervisor Robert Vidabel and forklift operator Raoul Rosal get started in officiating. Rosal has been officiating softball for 12 years, from city leagues to junior college level. "You got to be able to hustle," he points out. "You have to be able to come out from behind the plate, track the runners and be aware of where the ball is."

Recalling one of his first junior college games brings a laugh from Rosal. "I ejected the coach for the Merced team," he said. "And in junior college ball you get paid by the home team after the game, so I dreaded approaching him afterwards. But, it wasn't as bad as I thought it would be. He didn't take it personally."

Rosal also officiates basketball and volleyball, each uses unique signals when calls are made. "One time I threw up a basketball mechanic (signal), when I was working a softball game and everyone was looking at me like what was that?"

Vidabel started officiating after playing on as many as 3 teams at the same time. In eight years of officiating he has moved up the ranks to do Division 1 college national championships around the country. This year he was inducted into the American



Umps DDJC 'Blues' front row from left, Anthony Santa Cruz, Dave Corral, Robert Martinez, and Raoul Rosal. Standing from left are David Hernandez, Tom Eddy, Charlie Pikas and Robert Vidabel.