

Parents,

Welcome to baseball 2022.

I am one of the two head umpires in Prospect Park and there are a couple of very important things you need to know.

First, in the world of umpiring there is one principle that stands above all others. From the first day of training it is emphasized and is repeated over and over. The games must be played SAFELY. The field conditions must be free of hazards, the equipment must be in good order and the rules must be followed.

On the Prospect Park fields we have a crowding problem every year and that problem will be exacerbated this year because fields 2 and 3 are being renovated. We need everyone to be aware of games that are going on and we need everyone to keep out of those playing areas. That means that you and your group are going to have to walk the long way around to get to your fields and to get back home again. Doing this out of courtesy is a fine reason but, there is another very important reason.

In baseball, if a player is properly coached and a fly ball is hit in her or his general direction, the player should calculate where that ball is likely to land and should run as hard as possible toward that spot. They should keep their eyes on the ball. They should not look where they are going because the field belongs to them. No one should be in their way except, perhaps, a teammate.

If any spectator is on their field and there is a crash, we have a disaster.

A baseball field does not end at the foul lines. A baseball field ends at the out-of-play-line. In Prospect Park the out-of-play-line is the line determined by the back fence of the dugouts extended to infinity. Everyone, except players in the game, needs to stay on the out-of-play side of that line. If there is a crash in out-of-play territory, we have an unfortunate accident. If there is a crash in playable territory, we have negligence and negligence leads to real trouble. Stay off the players' fields. The day belongs only to them and their coaches.

I'll be around almost all the time on weekends chasing away soccer players and Ultimate Frisbee teams. We have permits for the fields and while I am willing to share my toys, I won't let your children be put into a dangerous situation.

I thank you for your help.

Secondly, for parents who are new to this:

This is recreational baseball and softball. The first question you should ask your child after a game is, "Did you have a good time?" If the answer is, "Yes," then things are working well. If the answer is, "No," then there is some issue that needs to be addressed and it is possible that I can help.

I have 30 years experience in youth baseball and have seen all the good and all the bad. Success and failure are both part of the path to learning to play this very difficult game. It takes a thousand days to make a baseball player. I have coached 3 men who make their living as professional athletes and through them I have met many other professional athletes and yet, I have never met a "natural."

Baseball is a game in which everything needs to be taught. It is also a game of habits. Developing those habits takes time and repetition – and it's great when that time and repetition is fun.

If you want to help your child along, play catch with your kid. You don't have to be good at baseball to play catch with a 6, 7, or 8 year old. Roll up a pair of socks and play in your living room. Toss whiffle balls and let him or her whack them with a plastic bat. They don't travel far. They are easy to pick up. Play with your kid. It'll make a world of difference to you both.

Finally, if you have a problem with an umpire or think a rule has been misapplied, come find me and let me know the issue. (I'm a tall 66 year-old guy in an umpire uniform and am the only one who fits that description). If you have the rule wrong, I'll explain what the rule book says. If the umpire has it wrong, I'll straighten it out with him or her. The rules of baseball are very complicated and are not intuitive. They are the result of 170 years of evolution and evolution is messy. What you think is so, may not be.

Enjoy yourself and please, stay out of the players' way.

All of this exists so that our children can try to learn to do something by themselves that is both fun and very difficult. That process will have lows and highs. Hearts will break but, for the resilient, there is the opportunity to feel the highest highs imaginable.

Let's play and enjoy... safely.

John Ottavino
Matt Kemp
PPBA Head Umpires