

# Dear GEMSA coaches;

## Re: Yellow Card Pilot GEMSA (2024)

The following information and protocol is endorsed by both official Umpire Associations providing officiating services to GEMSA. Up until now we have witnessed several incidents where mere lip service has been paid to the league's Code of Conduct. The Umpire Associations have grown tired of ongoing abuse resulting in our newer umpires refusing to continue to provide this necessary and valuable service to the league. Our registration numbers are diminishing rapidly and swiftly. Certain action is required to impress upon everyone that we are profoundly serious in meeting abuse head on.

### Background

Alberta, as a whole, has issues with recruiting and retaining officials. It is important to protect, encourage and respect ALL of our officials. A bulk of our umpires are between the ages of 13 and 18 years. They are learning the rules of the game and responsibilities to run a game efficiently. Disrespectful comments or behaviour from spectators, coaches and/or players often lead these young umpires to quit after their first season. We are bringing in the yellow card as a trial basis to start on the path to zero tolerance.

### Pay ≠ Perfection

These umpires are being paid to officiate a game impartially to the best of their ability. Just as you cannot expect perfection from a player on every play, you should not expect perfection of an umpire learning to officiate. As an example, do you hear spectators or coaches yelling at the shortstop for letting a softly hit ground ball go through their legs? Does a fielder get chastised for dropping what otherwise should be an easy catch? These questions are hopefully rhetorical and you should realize the answers to both are a resounding NO.

All umpires receive training in basic game rules, and proper mechanics to give them the confidence to make the best possible call. But you simply cannot expect perfection. No umpire, especially new umpires, can know all the rules for all possible scenarios. They will learn through experience, and we need that learning experience to be positive! Even if an umpire is “wrong” on a rule, we encourage them to make a call, stick with it - then look it up later. This is the epitome of learning through experience.

### Balls and Strikes

Why do umpires take so much grief with respect to balls and strikes? Because people expect perfection. See previous section! Each spectator/player/coach that questions a ball or a strike decision, is heard/seen by the umpire. While perhaps each one only makes 1 or 2 comments for

the entire game, multiply that by dozens of spectators watching the same game, and that effectively amounts to dozens and dozens of negative comments in one game - i.e. verbal abuse. Do you think this is fair to our officials?

## Implied inclusion to ALL plate conferences

The graphic below sets out a narrative that is **deemed to have been read** to the coaches by the plate umpire prior to every game. This *deeming* provision is necessary, given the different levels of confidence of our newer umpires. As outlined in the GEMSA handbook, simply by participating in a GEMSA game, agreement (i.e. “Yes” answers are also implied). Please ensure that all of your players, staff, parents and other fans are aware of what it says, as well as the Code of Conduct set out in materials provided to you from GEMSA.

### Plate Conference

- 1. Check line-up cards from coaches and make them official*
- 2. Introduce yourself and your partner(s) to coaches*
- 3. Provide the coaches with the opportunity to introduce themselves*
- 4. Go over any game or park specific rules*
- 5. “If you need clarification on a call, please ask for time, and when granted, respectfully go to the umpire that made the call. If we need to discuss the play, then we will and the final decision will rest with the umpire responsible for the call.*
- 6. ”Just like the players, (I/we) will try (my/our) best, but do not expect perfection. If there are any concerns about the game, please contact the UIC”**
- 7. “Coaches, are you and all your players, coaches, parents and spectators ready to conduct themselves respectfully, fairly and within the GEMSA codes of conducts as written in the GEMSA handbook?**
- 8. “Are you fully aware of the contents and sanctions as described in the 2024 yellow card pilot program as posted on the GEMSA website?**



## Yellow Card Incidents

Since the 2024 coaches meeting, the definition and examples of a yellow card has been modified significantly. While it was presented as a mechanism to allow an umpire time to think and/or collect their thoughts under a pressure situation, it has now morphed into an all-encompassing “warning” mechanism for negative comments and/or behaviour. However, this does not preclude that issuing a yellow card could still simply mean “give me more time”. The specifics of each incident will dictate if any further response is required by GEMSA.

Yellow card warning triggers, may include (but are not limited to):

- Cursing
- Speaking louder than is usual or within acceptable limits,
- Trying to communicate to the umpire from the bench / a coach’s box
- Use of hands or body signals to show up the umpire
- Any negative comments, signals, or body language regarding the strike zone (note - this includes spectators)
- Encroachment - advancing beyond usual or acceptable limits
- Overreacting to a call or ruling
- Harassment
- Derogatory or negative comments about the umpire or their ability, from spectators, coaches and/or players
- Undue pressure to change a call or ruling / Ignoring a call or ruling
- Failure to demonstrate good sportsmanship, sport leadership and ethical conduct to all participants
- Failure to treat all participants fairly and reasonably
- Not ensuring adherence to the rules of softball and the spirit of those rules

## Implied inclusion to ALL Yellow Card events for conduct

If a Yellow Card is produced as a result of a conduct issue on the part of a coach, a member of the coaching staff or other team support, a player, a parent or other fan, the following narrative below is **deemed to have been read** to the coaches by the umpire who produced the Yellow Card. The rationale for this *deeming* provision is as set out for the plate conference.

For conduct of Coach(es) or Player(s):

**“You or your team’s behaviour is unacceptable, and you have not honoured your promise to abide by the agreed upon GEMSA codes of conduct. Continued poor behaviour will result in you or your player being ejected from the game”**

For conduct of Parent(s) or Spectator(s):

**“Coach, your parent/spectator behaviour is unacceptable, and you have not honoured your promise to abide by the agreed upon GEMSA codes of conduct. Continued poor behaviour will result in you being ejected from the game and/or the parent/spectator being removed from the playing area prior to the game continuing.”**

## What happens if a yellow card is presented?

An immediate “Dead ball” is implied, and play is suspended.

Immediately give the umpire their space and respect their need to gather their thoughts and composure. If the card is presented simply to allow the umpire time to gather their thoughts to make a ruling, then no further action is required. Prior to resuming play, the scorekeeper(s) shall note that a yellow card was presented “to allow time”. This shall be communicated by the umpire to both scorekeepers. No report will be necessary for yellow cards presented “to allow time” for the umpire to think and become composed.

However, if the card is presented as a “warning” due to comments or behaviour, then the scorekeepers shall record the inning, outs, current batter and count on the batter. They must clearly state on the scoresheet “Yellow card: warning” along with description of the recipient of the card (i.e. Coaches name, Player name/number, spectators for a specific team). Details then will need to be reported using the supplied forms on the GEMSA website.

**Note:** It is the responsibility of **both** head coaches to control the behaviour of their respective spectators. If a yellow card is presented regarding spectator behaviour or comments, then it is the head coach that will subsequently take full responsibility and consequences for the actions of their fans.

A yellow card warning means that the individual(s) are now subject to ejection upon presentation of a second yellow card. Hence, a first yellow card should be taken very seriously by ALL spectators and participants. E.g. Any yellow card presented to a coach can easily result in an ejection for that coach if their fans get unruly enough to trigger a second yellow card.

If after one (1) ejection, if there are any more incidents that require a 3rd yellow card, then the umpire will declare a forfeit in favour of the team not at fault, and will immediately leave the diamond.

### Warning:

A record will be kept for each yellow card infraction given as a “warning”. GEMSA will track the individuals who have been carded throughout the season and from season to season, to determine if a pattern exists. Yellow card “warning” infractions will be treated seriously, and subsequent incidents may be subject to disciplinary action.

### Ejection:

The individual ejected will be suspended for not less than 1 game. The individual will be subject to review by a GEMSA delegated committee to assess specific circumstances, and may be subject to further disciplinary action.

**This is a game  
These are kids  
Coaches are volunteers  
Umpires are Human  
EVERYONE DESERVES RESPECT**

Yours truly,



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Brent Tyson  
President - EBCUA

and



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Gerald Tomko  
President - BRUA