

Santa Monica Girls Fastpitch (SMGFP)

Junior Umpire Program

Blue-Print, Roadmap, and Program Report



Timothy Kohut, UIC, SMGFP

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Background:

Santa Monica Girls Fastpitch (SMGFP) is a recreation league that has been affiliated with ASA since 2006. Prior to 2006, SMGFP was affiliated with Bobby Sox. Umpires working with Bobby Sox were often affiliated with the league as family members or coaches, and there were a small number of junior umpires - players in the upper divisions - who also umpired. Although the umpiring may have started as a volunteer program, umpires have been paid since at least 2003.

In 2007, SGMFP joined ASA hoping to play in more competitive all-star environments. To start, the league continued to field locally trained umpires, most of whom were not ASA registered or trained. There was also a small contingent of junior umpires, high school aged, who had previously played softball in SMGFP, all of whom had graduated from the Bobby Sox program.

In late 2008, Tim Kohut became Umpire In Chief for SMGFP, assuming the role with board approval to develop a locally based umpire program comprised, as much as possible, by junior umpires. A small number of locally based umpires - ASA trained - work to supplement the program, mentor the junior umpires, and fill gaps when junior umpires are not available.

Program Goals:

1. Teach young adults (12 years and older) the rules and mechanics required to umpire local recreation league games.
2. Provide economic opportunity for teenaged SMGFP players, or teenaged affiliated family members.
3. Provide ongoing training and support to both new and experienced umpires to learn the skills they need to effectively officiate, manage difficult game situations, and to grow in confidence both on and off the field.
4. Nurture and maintain the roster of active junior umpires by engaging both participants and parents in a way that allows them to learn more about umpiring, gain a deeper appreciation of the job, and to ensure they stay with the program.

SMGFP Junior Umpire Program - In Concept

In training umpires, ASA has pointed out - through its mechanics and rules clinics - that skills learned on the field carry over into life (L.P. Montgomery pointed this out at a So Cal ASA Rules clinic c.2008). With this in mind, the junior umpire program for SMGFP was conceived with the belief that placing young adults as game officials will enable them to grow in confidence while providing them with life skills they can use off of the softball field.

Because the quality of umpiring in SMGFP had been less than mediocre, opportunity existed to train an umpiring crew that was local, based around players or siblings of players, that was well trained, and that would be better than the umpires that had been previously provided.

Training of the junior umpires was identified as both a priority and an imperative, and ASA's Mechanics and Rules clinics were singled out, without hesitation, as the appropriate medium for this training. Incentives to attend ASA clinics and to certify were identified and implemented in the first year of the program. These incentives included:

- ASA Registration - Umpires who attend both the ASA Rules Clinic and the ASA Mechanics clinic, then umpire a minimum of two games for SMGFP have their registration fee paid for by SGMFP. In recent years registration fees (\$50) and Rules Clinic fees (\$15) have remained unchanged for junior umpires, and the mechanics clinic fee is waived for umpires younger than 17 years old. Logistically - junior umpires present a check written out to SMGFP for \$65, SMGFP in turn writes a single check to So-Cal ASA for all its junior umpires. The check is returned when the junior umpire has met the program requirements.
- ASA Registration and attendance to either a Mechanics Clinic or a Rules clinic is a mandatory requirement each year for junior umpires hoping to be scheduled in Santa Monica. Attendance at a clinic in prior years is not sufficient to secure a continuing right to umpire in Santa Monica.
- ASA Certification (passing the ASA umpire exam) also qualifies junior umpires for a \$5/game increase in umpire fee, up to full umpire game rate.
- Scheduling of junior umpires is prioritized by years of experience and 1). ASA Certification; 2). Attendance at both ASA Rules and Mechanics clinics; 3) Attendance at either an ASA Mechanics clinic or an ASA Rules clinic.

Following attendance at the ASA clinics, all junior umpires are obligated to attend a SMGFP Mechanics and Rules review meeting. ASA mechanics and SMGFP local rules are reviewed during the course of this two hour on-the-field meeting.

Board Support:

Since 2008, the SMGFP board has promoted the development of the junior umpire program, providing both policy and financial support for the program formally recognizing the incentive programs identified for the program. Aside from providing support and incentive for ASA registration and training, the board also supports the program providing:

1. Sufficient umpire scheduling budget to allow all games to use the two-umpire system
2. Plate equipment for at least two fields
3. Rule modifications that protect junior umpires and ensure that the game conduct of coaches remains respectful and appropriate
4. Financial support to pay junior umpires with three or more years of experience, who ASA Certify, to serve in the role of Mentor Umpire, where they assist in coaching of newer umpires.

Board support for the junior umpire program is renewed on an annual basis.

Requirements for Participation:

While the umpiring program recognizes that fast pitch softball is a girls' sport, and while the UIC recruits with a focus on those playing in SMGFP, a decision was made by the SMGPF board when the program was established with an emphasis on recruiting girls (especially players or former players), but to allow boys to participate in the program. Boys with a family connection to an active player are encouraged to join the program.

The SMGFP junior umpire program is open to players entering their second year of 12U, players who formerly played in SMGFP (two years at any level) and siblings of active players. Umpires who will turn 13 in the year they will begin umpiring are eligible, and umpires remain eligible to participate in the program until they turn 18 years old (at which point they become adult umpires, per ASA).

Pay Scale:

Game rates start at \$20/game for first year umpires, and increase \$5/game for every completed year of umpiring, capping at a maximum game rate of \$40/game. Additionally, umpires who ASA certify (attend both Mechanics and Rules clinics, then take the ASA Certification) earn an additional \$5/game extra, but the maximum game rate cannot exceed \$40.

Scheduling:

Depending on age, first year umpires generally begin with 8U, working as field umpires until they achieve a basic level of understanding and confidence, while demonstrating basic competence as game officials. First year umpires are paired with an experienced plate umpire who can assist in coaching the new umpires, make more difficult calls on the field, and ensure that the coach and fan conduct is appropriate and respectful. First year umpires who demonstrate competence and confidence are assigned to work plate at 8U, as early as the middle of their first year of umpiring.

Second and third year umpires are assigned to work bases at 10U, and also plate at 8U. Older umpires who demonstrate competence and a deeper understanding of more complex rules may also be assigned to work plate at 10U. As plate umpires at 10U, plate umpires are expected to exert game control, to assist field umpires in difficult situations, and ensure that coach and fan conduct is appropriate and sportsmanlike.

Third and fourth year umpires (and some of the older second year umpires) are assigned to work plate and bases at 12U. These umpires are generally expected to ASA Certify, and are encouraged to seek opportunities, with the support of SMGFP's UIC, to seek opportunities to umpire SoCal ASA tournaments (Districts and State Championships).

Mentoring:

Experienced junior umpires with at least three years of experience, who ASA Certify, and who have exerted leadership within the SMGFP junior umpire program are asked to serve as Mentor umpires to first and second year umpires. Mentor umpires may assist with local clinics, but

serve primarily as game coaches, assisting with pre-game and post game discussions, and serving to help umpires make adjustments during the game (if the game situation allows). Mentor umpires are paid \$20/game, and are recognized as elite members of the SMGFP umpire unit.

Program Supervision - the Role of the UIC:

The Umpire In Chief, charged by the SMGFP Policy and Procedures to identify, recruit, and train umpires, is responsible for the welfare and success of the junior umpire program. At the same time, the UIC is responsible for identifying areas for improvement, and is ultimately responsible to parents, coaches, and the SMGFP Board of Directors for the quality of the umpiring. The UIC is also responsible for:

- Pre-season communications and coordination of ASA Clinic attendance
- Pre-season clinic to review ASA Mechanics and local rules
- Enforcement of the dress code policy (ensuring that new umpires understand what they are expected to wear, where to purchase the uniform, and how the uniform plays an important role in demonstrating the seriousness and professionalism of the umpire).
- Communicating with junior umpires and their parents to schedule games
- Ensuring that all umpires are aware of their game assignments.
- Scheduling of mentor umpires
- Providing oversight and quality control on game day, or in the absence of the UIC, ensuring that a field UIC is available (this is an adult who is also ASA certified and has experience or affiliation with SMGFP).

The UIC position, which includes junior umpire development, scheduling, and program oversight, is a voluntary position - there is no pay offered to the UIC for any of these services, and none has been requested or expected. The success of the program, and the growth of the Umpires involved, and the contribution back to the softball and umpiring community is the motivating factor to the program.

Communication with Umpires and Parents of Umpires:

All umpires are under the age of 18, discretion and transparency of communication is critical. Junior umpires are allowed to participate in the program provided they have consent of a parent or guardian. The parents or guardians become point for all communication with junior umpires, except those who have been in the program for three or more years, at which point the junior umpire becomes point for communication with parents copied on all communication with the junior umpires. Junior umpires are not engaged in one-on-one communications. For the program to succeed, parents of participating umpires, and the SMGFP board must feel secure that this is a safe and well supervised environment. The UIC communicates with junior umpires to:

1. Recruit new umpires and ensure that returning umpires are aware of the upcoming season, and all required ASA clinics.

2. Coordinate travel and participation at ASA clinics, and encourage and coordinate ASA Certification (taking the ASA exam)
3. Survey availability to umpire week to week. (This is sometimes a challenge when junior umpires also play in the league - junior umpires often have conflicts that need to be identified by the UIC). This survey is typically done with "Google Forms".
4. Schedule umpires for the coming week and confirm that umpires will be able to work. Scheduling is generally confirmed using "Evite".
5. Follow up with umpires to discuss performance, reinforce positive aspects, and identify areas where additional training is needed.

The roster of active junior umpires in Santa Monica generally numbers from twenty to thirty, with four adult umpires with current or previous affiliation with SMGFP. There are also umpires who have either graduated (moved off to college), who we consider to be ongoing affiliates of the program (we strive to keep them in the loop). Communicating to this large number by phone or email is cumbersome and time consuming. To ease communication, and to create a sense of community, information is conveyed to the junior umpires through a Facebook Group, "Samo Umpires". Prospective junior umpires and their parents are asked to join the Facebook group, where they join active umpires and their parents, members of the SMGFP board, and supporters of the SMGFP junior umpire program in conversations about umpiring, softball, scheduling, and the work we are doing together on the Santa Monica fields.

Measuring the Success of the Program:

The relative success of the junior umpiring program can be measured by four key indicators:

1. number of active junior umpires
2. number of junior umpires returning to the program
3. earnings of junior umpires (as a percentage of total game fees)
4. number of junior umpires selected to work championship play
5. number of graduating umpires who transition to ASA (introduced 2016)

Indicator 1 - Number of Active Junior Umpires: The number of junior umpires active in the program grew during each of the first five years, then declined slightly (coinciding to a decline in registered players in the league). As the numbers of active junior umpires increased, the percentage of game fees paid to junior umpires has also increased steadily. This is due by and large to the programs ability to train and continually train junior umpires. Junior umpires who stick with the program gain enough experience by their fourth year to work the highest division games in Santa Monica (until recently this was 14U, in 2014 this was a combined 12/14U division).

Indicator 2 - Number of junior umpires returning to the program: Holding onto umpires once recruited and trained is a challenge for any program. In the first years of the program, retention rates were low (see table below), but the program was able to survive by recruiting

new first year umpires. In recent years, more experienced umpires have stayed with the program. As the number of experienced junior umpires increases, the need for experienced adult umpires decreases. For 2015, the goal is to staff junior umpires for 100% of all games - using adult umpires to fill in only when junior umpires are unavailable. This will contribute to the success of indicator three (measured in game fees delivered to junior umpires).

Indicator 3 - Earnings of junior umpires: In the first years of the program, there were not enough trained junior umpires to displace adult and veteran umpires. In the first year of the program, SMGFP used LA Coastline to schedule umpires using a 1-umpire approach. The UIC then scheduled a junior umpire whenever possible, and when not possible, scheduled a local SMGFP adult umpire. After 2009, SMGFP assumed the role of scheduling umpires, allowing the number of games assigned to junior umpires to increase. In recent years, upwards of 75% of game fees were paid to junior umpires. The goal for 2015 and the years ahead is to schedule games using junior umpires for 100% of the available slots, which should result in 100% of fees being paid to junior umpires. Promoting the economic opportunities offered to junior umpires should allow the program to continue to thrive, provided the league is able to continue to recruit and retain girls interested in playing fast pitch softball.

Table 1: Key Indicators of the SMGFP Junior Umpire Program from 2009 - 2016

Year	Total Umpires (start of Season)	Junior Umpires Returning from the Previous Year	% of Junior Umpires Returning	1st Yr - Junior Umpires	Umpires graduated from H.S (previous year)	Decided not to return from previous year	Earned by Junior Umpires (Spring Season)	% of Games fees earned by junior umpires
2009	13	3		10	0	9	\$2,233	25.3%
2010	15	4	31%	11	0	7	\$2,555	26.5%
2011	16	8	54%	10	1	4	\$4,985	45.7%
2012	23	11	69%	11	0	5	\$6,670	58.25%
2013	26	18	78%	8	1	6	\$8,050	76.78%
2014	22	13	50%	9	3	7	\$7,665	77.54%
2015	22	14	64%	8	0	8	\$9,655	86.09%
2016	22	13	59%	9	2	7	\$8,330	98.08%
2017	25	17	68%	10	3	11	\$6735	79.33%
2018	26	17	65%	9	1	7	\$7335	76.17%
2019	27	19	70	8	1	12		

Indicator 4 - Umpires Chosen for Championship play: While the accomplishments of the junior umpire have been recognized locally in Santa Monica, both UIC and SMGFP board take great pride in the quality of the initial ASA training, the ongoing training provided by experienced and certified ASA umpires during the course of the season, and the fact that many of the junior umpires are motivated to certify ASA. For the program to be recognized outside of the borders of Santa Monica, to contribute to the health of the program, and to provide motivation for continuing umpires it is important that Certified junior umpires who have demonstrated advanced standing in Santa Monica (typically those who have umpired three or more years) be invited to umpire in championship play at some level. In recent years, a number of Santa Monica umpires have been invited to umpire in Championship play. We hope to see this number increase in the coming years.

Table 2: ASA Certified Junior Umpires 2009 - 2015 - Roster of Championship Play

Year	Total Umpires (start of Season)	Certified ASA Junior Umpires with 3+ years of Experience	Junior umpires invited to Districts	Junior Umpires invited to work State Championship	Junior Umpires invited to work National Championships	Championship Umpires
2009	13	0	0	0	0	
2010	15	0	0	0	0	
2011	16	0	0	0	0	
2012	23	2	1	0	0	Eligible Umpires - Molly Curren, Alena Kaye (Molly Curren worked B-Districts)
2013	26	4	3	0	0	Matthew Hepler, Alena Kaye, and Molly Curren all worked Districts
2014	22	4	1	1	0	Matthew Hepler, (Alena Kaye and Molly Curren were graduates who worked - Molly at Districts and State, Alena at Districts)
2015	22	1	1	1	1	Matthew Hepler (Eligible Umpires: Robert Gutierrez, Emma Miller, Matthew Hepler, Kyla Walker, LunaKohut)
2016	22	5	2	2	0	Matthew H, (Eligible Umpires: Matthew Hepler, Makensey Druckman, Kyla Walker,

						Jordan Doctor, Emma Caruth)
2017	25	2	1	1	0	
2018	26	7	4	1	0	(Eligible umpires Kyla, Sammy, Elizabeth, Kendall, Sydney, Molly, Milan)
2019						(Eligible umpires: Sammy, Elizabeth, Kendall, Sydney, Molly, Milan)

Indicator 5 - Umpires Who Transition to Full ASA Umpires: Umpiring for our junior umpires should not end when they graduate from high school and leave the program. The goal is for junior umpires to graduate from the program with a desire to continue to umpire at higher levels. This “transition” phase requires support from the broader ASA community, who will need to recognize the future potential of SMGFP graduates. This metric will be slower to measure. The following table tracks the number of umpires, by year, who continue to umpire beyond their involvement with SMGFP.

Table 3: SMGFP graduates who transition into full ASA umpires

Year	1st Year Umpires	Umpires who graduated from the program the previous year	Umpires who transitioned to ASA umpiring
2009	10	0	0
2010	11	0	0
2011	10	1	0
2012	11	0	0
2013	8	1	0
2014	9	3	0
2015	8	0	0
2016	9	2	0
2017	10	3	0
2018	9	1	0
2019	8	1	0

Areas for Improvement and Growth:

SMGFP takes pride in the program, and those who work with the junior umpires feel they assist in providing training both through ASA and through weekly involvement, mentoring, and

coaching, that allows many of these umpires to grow to a skill level on par with many adult umpires. Training and certifying with ASA has not necessarily led to assignments in Championship play. This is likely due to the fact that SMGFP umpires rarely work outside of Santa Monica. Even so, allowing experienced SMGFP umpires to participate in Districts and State Championships would help ensure umpires to stay with the program, while simultaneously motivating other umpires to follow.

Those junior umpires who are able to branch out from Santa Monica should be recognized and supported in other circles (see success indicator 4). This is definitely starting to happen as SoCal ASA recognizes the quality and skills that SMGFP junior umpires bring to the fields. Exploring growth for the SMGFP umpires is important for the long term health of the program. For those most motivated, charting a course to National Umpire Schools and National Championships would be a shot in the arm to the program.

Umpires who graduate from high school move on and become full adult umpires. It is the goal of SMGFP to keep these graduates of its program engaged in umpiring, but this is not possible without the broader support of SoCal ASA. SMGFP umpires who move away from Santa Monica, while staying in California, often hope to stay involved in umpiring, but find it more difficult finding a support network similar to the one they had in Santa Monica. Support from SoCal ASA, and possibly ASA elsewhere in the country (when umpires leave the state to attend college) would be ideal.

Finally, the question must be asked, if girls fastpitch softball remains healthy, why don't more programs exist like the one in Santa Monica? It is the hope of those who helped lay the foundation for the junior umpire program for SMGFP, and the SMGFP Board of Directors, that others might follow the roadmap charted in Santa Monica. With this hope, this blue print for umpiring in Santa Monica has been written and made available for wider circulation.

2015 - Samo Umpires - Year In Photos



Image 1: Samo Umpire Matthew Hepler, behind the plate. Matthew worked the 10U ASA National in July/August 2015 and was one of three umpires assigned to the Championship Game.



Image 2: Jordan and Matthew at a Pre-Game meeting (March 2015)



Image 3: Luna, set position 10U bases (April, 2015)



Image 4: Mentor umpire Emma talking to her base partner Luna in between innings (April, 2015)



Image 5: In between innings offer a great opportunity to adjust mechanics. Here, talking about squaring to the base to make the call (April, 2015)



Image 6: Katrina arriving at leading edge on the steel (April, 2015)



Image 7: Lauryn, explaining the illegal pitch at 8U (April, 2015)



Image 8: LA Southbay UIC James Walker, spending the day umpiring with some of the rising stars in the Samo Program (March, 2015)



Image 9: Veteran Mentor Umpire Bill Hepler talking to Lauryn at 8U plate (February, 2016). Bill is armed with his favorite teaching tool - a great camera and a keen eye.



Image 10: Emma, arriving at leading edge on the steel (February, 2016)



Image 11: ASA UIC staff and Division 1 Umpires Jess Black and Smokey Edds instruct Samo Umpire Maya on proper head height as Samo Umpire Molly looks on (December, 2015).



Image 12: UIC and Division 1 Umpire Sue Sawyer doing the double play dance with Samo Umpires Sydney and Milan (December, 2015).



Image 13 - So Cal ASA UIC Sue Sawyer talking about field mechanics and positioning to the Samo Umpires (December, 2015)



Image 14: So Cal ASA Central District UIC Fred Mayrhofer talks about plate movement to Samo Umpires Makensy and Jordan.



Image 15 - Samo Umpires with So Cal ASA UICs Sue Sawyer and Jess Black (December, 2015)



Image 16: Samo Veteran Umpires Sydney and Kendall talking between innings



Image 16 - Samo Umpires, 2016 Class (with a few umpires missing) along with Veteran Mentor Umpires.



Image 17 - Samo Umpires, 2017



Image 18 - Samo Umpires 2018