



## ASK THE EXPERT

# How to Argue with an Umpire

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HEAD COACH, BASEBALL TEAM

In 25 years as head baseball coach at Dartmouth Whalen has never been kicked out of a game. “I’m not sure I’m proud of that or if I should be embarrassed,” he says. His clean slate arises from the fact that Whalen takes seriously the unwritten rules of dealing with diamond authorities. “The job of the umpire is to make sure neither team gains an advantage and to let the players play,” says Whalen. “But they also have to be accountable. Which means sometimes I have to help them—and therein lies the struggle.”

## SHOW RESPECT

“It’s never about me and never premeditated. I never step out of the dugout just to stir up the crowd. Dartmouth should have the expectation that its coaches and players have class and dignity. Umpires are professionals, and they probably played the game too. This isn’t how they earn their living. They’re at a high level but have other jobs. When a Tuesday game is rained out, they’ve got to make arrangements for the makeup game on Wednesday. You must respect them, and I tell that to my players and staff.”

## DON'T TOUCH

“You cannot argue balls and strikes. If I do that I’m ejected. Keep your voice down in the dugout. No profanity. When you speak to an umpire, never start or end a sentence with the word ‘you.’ It can never be personal. If you don’t want to leave the game before it’s over you can’t bring up history, either—such as a call from last week that you’re still not happy with—or things will go south in a hurry. And don’t ever touch an umpire.”

## PROTECT PLAYERS

“I argue only when there’s a horrendous call or if I need to protect a player or assistant coach victimized by a bad call or to challenge a rule interpretation. You’ve got to know the rules, foul lines, home run calls and the complexities of the college designated-hitter rule, which is complex. I tell players no ump is going to listen to a 19-year-old mouthing off to him. But I also tell them I’m not going to argue for them after they take a strike right down the middle. Fortunately, I’ve never had a player ejected.”

## PICK YOUR MOMENTS

“Of course you have to be selective about when to argue. Is it early or late in the game? How close is the game? Is it the play-offs? Of course conference games are a little more important. Then there’s cold weather. One 28-degree day after a horrendous call in a not very close game we were losing, I spoke to the umpire. ‘This game is over. I’m begging you to throw me out.’ He wouldn’t do it. ‘If I need to be out here in the cold for nine innings, you’re staying too,’ he told me.”