UMPIRING: PAYING IT FORWARD

by Tyrone Hill (Umpire-in-Chief)

They were there. They had to be. I remember the feelings, the joy and the happiness. I remember some of the moments, but I don't remember their names or faces. But I know they were there. "They" are the umpires of my youth. The men who made themselves available so that I and thousands of young boys like myself could enjoy our days in the sun and chase dreams playing baseball.

Could we have played without those umpires? Probably…and we did sometimes in the parks and streets of our neighborhoods. But it was not the same as having an umpire there. Umpires yelling "play ball" and calling balls and strikes and outs made it "real baseball".

With umpires you were not just playing the game; you were on the stage of the game. In Little League, Pony League and even into High School it was the umpires that gave the game the feeling of being "big league", of being …on stage. And with that came the adrenalin, the surge in awareness and challenge that made baseball the absolute joy of a rush for me. You see the game did not start at the time of the first pitch for me. Not even at the time when I was supposed to be at the field for pre-game warm-ups. The game began the night before when I listened to the weather report to see if any rain was in the forecast for game time. If game day was cloudy I would go through the school day constantly looking toward the heavens begging the Baseball Gods to intervene so that I could play on that stage…the stage that the umpires made possible for us.

As an umpire today, I recognize that many of the boys and girls who play the great game of baseball probably won't remember what part I am contributing to their lives. And really, that's fine. In fact one could argue that is exactly as it should be. For if an umpire is performing his

role as he is trained, he should not be the focus of the activities. He should be but a part of the many things that combine to provide the participants with the best possible experience. When I accomplish that, I make that bond with the umpires from my youth that I can't remember today. The umpires who gave to me yesterday, so that I can pay it forward by giving it to the youth today!