

SBMSA Youth Umpire Program 2023

The opportunity. We are delighted by your interest in being a youth umpire for SBMSA Junior Baseball. For over 25 years, being an SBMSA umpire has proven to be a great opportunity for youth in the Spring Branch area, because it allows you to earn good money while you are outside, on a baseball field, officiating a game that you no doubt love, and for a league you may fondly remember from your own Junior Baseball playing days. It certainly beats working at a fast-food joint, which is the route so many high school kids across the country take to earn some extra spending money. But there is more to being an SBMSA umpire than the paycheck. There is also the opportunity to take on responsibility outside the classroom; to improve time management skills by balancing schoolwork, a social calendar and a three-month job commitment; and to gain experience interacting with adults, both as an employee and as a decision-making game official. We know that many former SBMSA youth umpires have drawn on these themes in their college applications. Just last year some of our umpires got into the University of Texas, Texas A&M and the University of Virginia (to name but a few) after submitting applications that included an essay on life-lessons learned and experience gained through umpiring in our program. Also worth noting is that we have had a recent string of valedictorian umpires who have been accepted to the Business Honors program at the University of Texas.

Pay scale. The table below shows the pay rates for SBMSA youth umpires for the 2023 season. As you can see, your pay scale depends on what grade you started umpiring for SBMSA and what grade you are in now. If you are in middle school and it is your first year umpiring, you earn \$15 per game. If you are in high school and it is your first year umpiring, you earn \$20 per game. Each year returning umpires get a \$5 per game bump in pay until they reach \$35. After that, pay increases by \$2 per year. Clearly, it pays to start early as an umpire and stick with it: the high school senior who has been umpiring since 7th grade makes \$37 per game. Pay rates are independent of what type of game you are umpiring. So your pay is the same whether you umpire a Rookie league coach-pitch game involving 6-year olds or a Pee Wee league kid-pitch game involving 10-year olds. If you umpire a game solo, you get paid 1.5x your normal rate subject to a cap of \$40. So an umpire whose normal rate is \$20 would earn \$30 for a solo game, whereas an umpire whose normal rate is \$30 would earn \$40 (not \$45) for a solo game.

Per Game Pay Progression for Umpire Whose First Year Was In ...						
	Middle School		High School			
Grade	7th Grade	8th	9th Grade	10th	11th	12th
7th	\$ 15					
8th	20	\$ 15				
9th	25	20	\$ 20			
10th	30	25	25	\$ 20		
11th	35	30	30	25	\$ 20	
12th	\$ 37	\$ 35	\$ 35	\$ 30	\$ 25	\$ 20

Please note that the above rates apply for an entire calendar year based on an umpire's grade in March of that year. So, for example, if you were an 8th grader in March 2023 umpiring for the first time in

spring 2023, you would earn \$15 for your spring *and* summer 2023 games. You must work at least four games in the calendar year to move up to the next pay grade in the following year.

Umpire expectations. Our aim in the SBMSA umpire program is twofold: (i) deliver a positive job experience for our young umpires, and (ii) deliver a quality umpire product each game to the coaches, players, and parents in our league. The recipe for being a successful SBMSA umpire really comes down to understanding what the league expects of our young umpires and deciding upfront that you can commit to meeting these expectations over a three-month spring baseball season. This is the responsibility piece of the equation: umpiring is a fun job and a great way to earn some money, but it is a job nonetheless and with the job and paycheck come responsibility.

So what does the league expect of our young umpires? First, we are looking for our umpires to have a strong commitment to showing up at the games that they have confirmed they will umpire. When an umpire no-shows for his scheduled game, the league is left with just one umpire for the game and that is not the quality two-umpire product that has been promised to coaches, players and parents. We understand that kids sometimes get sick or something important school-wise comes up last minute, but these unforeseen situations should be the exception, not the rule. But they do happen. And whenever an umpire does have to cancel on short notice, we expect him to advise the Umpire Coordinator as soon as possible and diligently look to find a replacement umpire for the game. By the way, these actions should come naturally to the SBMSA umpire who understands how important it is for the league to deliver on its commitment to put two umpires on the field every game.

Second, we are looking for our umpires to show up on time for games, being properly equipped, dressed and ready to go. As an example, if you are umpiring a 5:45 pm weekday Midget game at Pine Shadows, you will want to arrive at the field no later than 5:30 pm. Assuming your typical travel time to Pine Shadows at that time of day is 20 minutes, that would mean you would need reliable transportation from your house at 5:10 pm.

Third, we would expect our umpires to be focused on the game and in hustle-mode during their games. Being engaged in the game and, if you are the field umpire, hustling around the field to be in a good position for all your calls are some of the hallmarks of good umpires—and we would hope that our umpires would aspire to do a first-rate job whenever they are out there. Sort of at the opposite end of our expectation would be the disinterested, stand-in-place umpire who is constantly distracted by his iPhone.

Fourth, we would expect our umpires to know the rules of the league whose game they are umpiring. We recognize that it was always unrealistic to expect that our umpires would read our 80-page rulebook in its entirety. So that is why we created a short document that summarizes the key rules for the Rookie and Midget leagues, which are the two leagues whose rules differ the most from regular baseball. Thus if you are an umpire scheduled to work a Midget game and you do not already know the special rules of the Midget league, we would expect that you would spend the 10 to 15 minutes needed to read this summary rules document. This document can be found at sbmsa.org/baseball-home/ under the Baseball Rules & Resources section.

Fifth, we would like for our umpires to be communicative and responsive to the Umpire Coordinator when bi-weekly umpire game schedules are being put together. Specifically, during those set days when notice of the schedule is being sent out, umpires need to be checking their email or text messages. They then need to respond to that notice by going to our online scheduling system and confirming or declining their assigned games. And if an umpire ever discovers that he will not be able to make a scheduled game, he needs to let the Umpire Coordinator or Crew Chief know as soon as possible so that the league can maximize its chances of finding a replacement umpire. Good, responsive communication via email and/or text messaging will be an important ingredient to a successful season for umpires and the league alike.

In a nutshell, in return for the opportunity to earn good money doing a fun sports-related job, we expect our umpires to be reliable, engaged, knowledgeable and communicative. If you feel like you can commit to all these fine things over a three-month baseball season, please read on to learn more about the SBMSA youth umpire program. (The appendix at the end of this document is a summary one-pager of the keys to success in SBMSA umpiring.)

The spring season. The umpiring season really kicks off with the pre-season Midget tournament that occurs before Spring Break. With SBISD's spring break ending on Sunday, March 19, 2023, regular-season games are scheduled to commence on Monday, March 20, 2023. The regular season will roll right into the playoffs, which will end with championship games in mid to late May.

There is also an opportunity during July to umpire some SBMSA summer league games. In early June we will go out to our spring-season umpires to see who might have an interest in umpiring some summer games.

Umpire pool and umpire scheduling. Last spring we had ~150 kids in the umpire pool, and we expect our pool will number to increase this 2023 spring season. Umpires in the pool are either (i) "regular" umpires who are regularly scheduled to umpire games, or (ii) "reserve" umpires who are not regularly scheduled but who get opportunities to umpire games in other ways. Last year our umpire pool consisted of around 130 regular umpires. Regular umpires are the more experienced, generally older umpires while reserve umpires are the new, generally younger umpires. Last year our reserve contingent included many of our 7th grade umpires. Some of our older umpires essentially self-select to be reserve umpires, and this is perfectly OK because we aim to be flexible and accommodative to folks' schedules. High school baseball and lacrosse players in our umpire pool most often self-select in this way, becoming reserve umpires who can opportunistically sign up for games as their baseball or lacrosse schedules permit.

Here's how umpire scheduling works (using last year's numbers). A two-week block of games is scheduled seven or so days ahead of time using our 120 regular umpires. Regular umpires are given at least three days to accept or decline these games. Games that are declined are immediately made available to the entire umpire pool, including to reserve umpires. When the three-day deadline passes, any games that have not been accepted are also made available to the entire umpire pool. In a typical

two-week scheduling period, 15 or more games will become available to reserve umpires in this way. Although a big source of games, this is not the only opportunity for reserve umpires to find games. A second opportunity arises over the course of the two-week scheduling period as umpires realize that—due to a school conflict, illness or whatever—they can no longer work a game that they had previously accepted. Umpires are allowed to “turn-back” such previously accepted games so that they can be reassigned to other umpires, including reserve umpires, who are looking for more games. In a typical two-week scheduling period, 20 or more games will become available to reserve umpires in this way. As you can see, new young umpires need not despair if they are not part of the original schedule. Because of the rich after-market that develops in previously assigned games, an opportunistic reserve umpire could—if he wanted to—find himself two or three games to work each week.

Horizon Web Ref and email communication. Horizon Web Ref (www.horizonwebref.com) is the online scheduling system that we use to schedule our youth umpires. Every umpire will be set up with an account in Horizon Web Ref (HWR), and it is through this online system that you will get notice of the games you have been assigned, accept or decline your assigned games, see your schedule of upcoming games and umpire partners, “turn back” games that you originally accepted but now cannot work, and view your payroll info. It is important for you to know that HWR’s main forms of communication are texts and email, so you will need to make sure that you are checking your texts and/or emails regularly. One great feature of the HWR system is that you can download the HWR mobile app on your smartphone which will enable you to have complete access to your account when you are on the go.

Four leagues. There are four different leagues in SBMSA Junior Baseball that use youth umpires, and there are some format and rule differences between the leagues. If it is your first year umpiring and you are in middle school, we are most likely to schedule you for Rookie or Midget league games. The Rookie League is a coach-pitch league for kindergartners (ages 5 and 6) while the Midget League is a coach-pitch league for first- and second-graders (ages 7 and 8). While there is a great deal of similarities between these two coach-pitch leagues, there are a couple of key rule differences that umpires need to know.

If you are a first-year umpire in high school or a returning umpire in either middle or high school, we would like to have the flexibility to schedule you for games in any of the four leagues: Rookie, Midget, Pee Wee NL or Pee Wee AL. Third- and fourth-graders in Pee Wee NL play a brand of closed-base, kid-pitch-plus-coach-relief-pitch baseball while third- and fourth-graders in Pee Wee AL play a brand of open-base, 100% kid-pitch baseball that closely resembles real baseball. Having started their umpiring careers with Rookie and Midget League games, young returning umpires are sometimes hesitant to step up to Pee Wee games. But there really should be no hesitancy: with a trained adult umpire behind the plate in both Pee Wee NL and AL games, Pee Wee games are actually easier to umpire than Midget games. Umpires with two or more years of experience under their belts should be confident umpiring games in any of our leagues.

Umpire training. New umpires will be required to attend an umpire training session before they step onto the field and umpire their first game. SBMSA will be offering a group training session that is scheduled for Saturday, March 4, 2023 from 8:00 am to 9:30 am at Pine Shadows Elementary (Midget). SBMSA has developed a youth umpire training document that supplements this on-field, in-person training. This document, entitled *SBMSA Umpire Training Course 2023*, can be found in the Baseball section of the SBMSA website, under Baseball Resources.

Umpires will be required to read this document in advance of their on-field training session as this document pretty much serves as an outline for what will be covered in that training. There is another document in the same section of the website that is also a valuable resource for youth umpires. This previously mentioned document, entitled *Summary Rules for Midget and Rookie League Umpires*, extracts from the SBMSA Baseball rulebook the key rules that umpires need to know for Rookie and Midget league games. For umpires who do have the time and initiative to read the full SBMSA Baseball rulebook, that too can be found in the same section of the website.

In the spirit of continuous improvement, umpires may receive some informal training or guidance during the season. For instance, if, during a game, the Umpire Coordinator notices an area where an SBMSA youth umpire could improve, he may quietly mention it to such umpire between innings or after the game. The Crew Chief or veteran umpires might also offer up helpful suggestions from time to time, especially to new umpires early in the season. We would hope that all of our young umpires would be open to constructive suggestions to improving their performance on the field.

Junior and Senior Crew Chiefs. I am happy to report that SBMSA umpire veterans Nathan Flato, Jacob Katterhenry, and Luke Muschalik have agreed to serve as Youth Umpire Crew Chiefs this season. Nathan is a senior at Second Baptist High School who has been umpiring since seventh grade and was a Co Crew Chief last year.

Jacob is a junior at Stratford High School and Luke is a junior at Memorial High School, who have each umpired since seventh grade year. As Co Crew Chiefs, these young men will basically operate as the Umpire Coordinator's right-hand men, assisting in such areas as umpire training, scheduling, and managing a location (usually Pine Shadows) on game day. Umpires should feel free to contact either of the Crew Chiefs or the Umpire Coordinator for any issues or questions that might arise during the season. Nathan, Jacob, and Luke are very interested in working with, and being a resource for, their middle-school and high-school peers in the SBMSA umpire program.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at the email address shown below.

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Appendix

Keys to Success in SBMSA Umpiring

1. Show up for your game

- Only in rare cases should you have to miss a game that you yourself confirmed

2. Show up on time

- Punctuality is a virtue in life: plan to show up 15 minutes before game start time

3. Focus on game you are umpiring

- Give your undivided attention to the game, doing the best job you can as you hustle around the field to be in good position for your calls

4. Know the rules

- Take advantage of the available resources so that you know the key rules of the Rookie, Midget or Pee Wee league before you step onto the field and umpire a game in that league

5. Be communicative and responsive in umpire scheduling process

- Respond promptly to the Umpire Coordinator and learn how to use the online scheduling system as both are essential to successfully scheduling 85 umpires for 120 games each week

6. Find a replacement ump if you have to cancel at short notice

- Understanding your responsibility here should come naturally to the umpire who appreciates how important it is for SBMSA to put 2 umpires on the field for every game