

# **ADVICE FOR NEW UMPIRES**

**Darren Ward**

**6th Dan (ITF Cert No NZ-6-17)**

**ITF NEW ZEALAND**

## SYNOPSIS

For years I have thought about all the things that are not written in the rules that helps an umpire starting in their career (yes it is a career!).

For over 20 years now I have taught B and C grade umpire courses nationally in New Zealand. This thesis is a compilation of the tips and tricks that I have learnt over my journey to becoming a national and international umpire (and all the things that I do not get to teach in umpire courses). The advice is classed into the different duties for an umpire.

I hope these will help others to improve and grow as an umpire, but most importantly to have the confidence to enjoy the umpiring experience.

## PATTERNS

Starting off as a patterns umpire can be quite daunting. We all go through wondering how we can actually assessing people and how to remember all the things what we are judging competitors on.

The advice I give to new umpires is to start off with what you know about patterns, and look for the easy faults - stances, heights, movements. When you are confident picking up these, then challenge yourself to look for other faults such as returning to the starting spot with the wrong foot and Inaccurate or Incorrect Stepping.

Do not feel too bad when do not score the same as everyone else all the time – this will happen from time to time. Even as an experienced international umpire I still have different results to others at times.

If you want to be serious about becoming a good patterns umpire you will need to study the movements of all patterns, and learn where the most common faults in each pattern occurs.



## SPARRING CORNER JUDGE

Only score what you see and not what you hear, as this is a common mistake by new umpires. Too often those who are beginning out as a corner judge will score a point because they heard gloves contact each other rather than actually seeing a clean point.

Be very clear that the techniques clearly hit a valid target as too often a new umpire may score a technique that did not actually contact at all.

If you are judging using a paper based system then it is a lot harder for you to gain an understanding of how you are scoring compared to others in your ring council. To gain a better understanding of how you are scoring compared to the other judges it can be a good idea to approach the jury president during breaks to ask how you have been scoring and to give you an indication of whether you are doing a good job. The jury president will let you know how you are doing and can give you some pointers on areas to focus on.

This is a lot easier if using an electronic system such as Sportdata - you can see your live scoring compared to other umpires (and can get a gauge of how you are doing compared to other umpires).



## CENTRE UMPIRE

Your first time as centre referee can be a daunting as you concentrate on looking for warnings and fouls while not getting in the way of the competitors. It pays to start off with easier matches and then progress to more advanced ones as your skills develop. A suggestion is to start with sparring divisions comprised of younger competitors where their skill level is not too advanced. You can get a chance to umpire without too many complications with bouts like this.

Always talk to your jury president – do not be afraid to ask for feedback during rounds or at the completion of a match. A good jury president will happily give you feedback to make you a better umpire – and it is in their interests to see you performing at your best.

You can also seek feedback from other centre referees if you have them in your ring. You can informally tell each other whether one of you missed a call, or discuss a scenario or situation more in depth.

If you are in in doubt whether you have seen a foul or whether a warning is needed, it is better to stop the bout, and at a minimum issue a “nothing happened command”. Not doing anything can lead to competitors thinking they can get away with potential warnings or fouls without any consequences.

The biggest learning is to put your own ego in check - for example you are not always going to agree with the jury president about the appropriate level of contact, but you need to be able to take on the feedback and make adjustments immediately (which is not always as easy as it seems).

If you have had feedback such as this from a the jury president, always try to check back in with them to see if they were happy with the adjustments that you made and if necessary to get a better understanding of the things they are looking for from you. We all learn through experience and this is a critical part of becoming a better umpire.



## SPECIAL TECHNIQUES

You need to be consistent with your judging, especially with foot angles for the various techniques.

You need to position yourself as umpires to be able to see all the techniques being performed (with either foot), and without being in the way of the competitor. Also make sure you have plenty of room to use the flags and are familiar with their use.

Ideally all the umpires should be standing in a similar position for each competitor so that consistency is maintained across all competitors in a division. Ensure you have a good view of the equipment being used and where the competitor will start and complete their technique.



## POWER

Similar to Special Techniques being consistent with how you judge is the most important thing when judging power - you need to treat everyone the same throughout each division.

Like Special Techniques you also need to stand in a consistent position for each of the different techniques being performed by the competitor while not getting in their way.



Work together as a ring council to help each other and to learn off one another. A more experienced umpire or jury president can share their thoughts with you if you have questions about whether a technique should have been allowed or disallowed.

## JURY PRESIDENT

Remember that you are the one in charge of all that happens in the ring – you need to be able to direct and control your umpires, and if you are not feeling up to it ask to be replaced by the umpire committee. This is something I learnt personally while recovering from Covid, when I realised that I could not concentrate enough to fulfil my duties as a jury president.

While there is a great responsibility being the jury president, you need to make sure that you have time to watch the umpires under you, and be able to give them constructive feedback. This may be on scoring a technique, or just to let them know they are doing a good job. Your role should ideally be to mentor those under your guidance.

The hardest thing is trying to do everything yourself – you need to allow IT support and the other jury members to do their jobs. This will help to make your life easier and actually allow you to take more of an overview of the ring council and the competitors.





## GENERAL

- Don't be put off by noise or distractions when umpiring. Vocal crowds and coaches can be part of the job.
- Don't allow them to sway your opinion
- Breathe – relax
- Don't stress if you make a mistake or miss something – we all do it at some point
- Remember to enjoy the experience. This should be a fun experience and one that can allow you to contribute to the sport even once your own competitive days are over.

## CONCLUSION

Growing your experience and skills as an umpire should be a never ending journey. We always need to be looking at ways to improve ourselves as umpires to ensure we keep up with competitors over time and the rules as these evolve. It is key to ensure that we are doing our best to match our own knowledge and training to align with the amount of training that competitors at international levels do.

The success of not only a tournament but also the enjoyment and safety of competitors depends on the quality of the work we do as umpires. And like competitors, it is the time and training that is put in before a tournament that will make a successful umpire.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Thanks to Nick Lourantos for the use of his photos taken at the 2022 New Zealand National Championships and the 2022 Wellington Regional Tournament.