

Check It Out! Podcast Transcript
Episode #63
“Podcast creator will change your mind about umpires”
Sno-Isle Libraries, Sept. 25, 2020



Ken Harvey:	00:00	In today's podcast, I have a chat with a talented friend of mine from Mukilteo, Washington. In my book, he's a genius, and he's producing a fascinating podcast for the officials behind America's favorite round ball sport: that's baseball, and those are umpires. Up next, a conversation with the Umpire Inspire podcaster, Jason Becker.
Ken Harvey:	00:32	Welcome to season three, episode 63 of Check it Out!, the Sno-Isle Libraries podcast for lifelong learners with inquiring minds.
Speaker 2:	00:40	The views and opinions expressed on this podcast may not necessarily reflect the official position of Sno-Isle Libraries.
Ken Harvey:	00:48	Hey, thanks for joining us here at Check It Out! podcast. My name is Ken Harvey. I am your podcast host for this episode, and I remember the first time I got the opportunity to swing a stick at a ball. The ball was being tossed at me... I think it was a ball and not a rock... but anyway, it was being tossed to me and you know what? I swung and I didn't knock it out of the park, I actually missed it. And if you don't get it right on your first time, in your first try, what you do is you try it again, and so after a few more tries, I did hit it. But between the first swing and the first hit, there were a few balls that simply got past me. Now, either they were too fast for me, or they were out of reach, or I simply let them go past without swinging at them.
Ken Harvey:	01:41	And you know what? That's part of the game of baseball. Sometimes you swing, sometimes you don't, and sometimes you wish you had, because if it's baseball, there's likely a person behind you who may be calling it a strike, because even though you didn't swing at it, it was in the zone. So, the person behind you is the ump or the umpire; that's the official who gets to make the judgment call on the play. And the ump starts and ends the game, enforces the rules, makes the calls and hands out discipline.

(Continued)

- Ken Harvey: 02:15 Now, the typical game, fans and players often disagree with what the umpire says and what the umpire does, which can make it a lonely job even when there are two of them on the field. But according to our guest, it's something they love, and it's not always something they get paid to do. Sometimes they're volunteering to do it, but they do it because of the love of the game, and they're inspired to do it.
- Ken Harvey: 02:41 So that's where our guest today comes in. His Umpire Inspire podcast is all about the stories, the journeys and the heart of umpiring baseball. In each of his podcast episodes, he invites his listeners to come in and hear an extraordinary conversation with an enthusiastic umpire who may be from anywhere on the planet, because you know what? Baseball isn't just American, it's global, and these umpires consider their jobs to be a lot more than just calling balls and strikes. So, I want to welcome to the Check It Out! Podcast, fellow podcaster of the Umpire Inspire podcast, Jason Becker. Jason, thank you for joining me.
- Jason Becker: 03:26 Ken, thank you. It's such a pleasure. I've really been looking forward to this.
- Ken Harvey: 03:30 Well, you and I go back a number of years. We used to work together at a place in the Snohomish County, Washington. We've kept in touch over the years, and you let me know a few months ago that you were taking a hard look at starting up your own podcast. And you told me that it had to do with this love that you had, this love affair that you have with baseball, and it's not just about baseball, but it was about the personalities behind the plate who were actually making the game go by the rules, and also very interested. So, tell us a little bit about why this passion that you have that has led you to start up a podcast?
- Jason Becker: 04:35 Well, ask my wife, ask my kids, any of my friends, and all of my family, baseball is my passion and has been for practically my entire life. I've played since I was a kid, like a lot of people. Coached my boy all the way through Little League, and my girls for a couple years while they were playing, and at a point seven or eight years ago, grabbed a mask and an indicator for the first time to try my hand at umpiring. It was a need that I felt I could do some good with in our local Little League here in Mukilteo, and it turned out to be a really great fit.
- Jason Becker: 05:11 I love the game. I love being on a field, Ken. Being out on a baseball field makes more sense to me than being just about anywhere else, so I've really enjoyed umpiring. I've come to really take it seriously and enjoy doing so. I umpire Little League

baseball and softball here in Washington, and I also umpire high school baseball now here in Snohomish County.

Jason Becker: 05:39 I had this idea bouncing around in my head for a couple years now, that I started to come to understand that umpires are a pretty special group of people. You mentioned it a little bit in your opening. There's a lot of folks out there for whom umpiring means an awful lot, and they put a lot of their heart and their time into it, and it's often not paid, as you mentioned; Little League is an all-volunteer organization, for instance. I found that umpires were generally just a really great group of people to hang around with, because of their giving spirit, their commitment to public service... how umpiring is a public service for many of the friends that I have in the umpiring community.

Jason Becker: 06:27 Being a podcast fan myself, listening to a lot of great podcasts, being inspired and encouraged by so many great shows out there, these two worlds sort of started to come together in my head, and that's where the very first idea for the Umpire Inspire podcast was born, and then it bounced around in my head for almost two years, Ken. Then, at a certain point late last year, decided, you know what? Now's the time. We're going to take a swing at this, as you mentioned early on. We're going to take a swing. Hopefully, I'll connect. Maybe I'll miss, but it's going to be an interesting journey, and it has definitely been such a joy and such a privilege, as I have completed this first go-around, and I'm just on the doorstep of getting my own season two underway, so it's been great.

Ken Harvey: 07:18 Well, Jason, you have a number of episodes out. People are listening. You've had an opportunity to already have some conversations with some remarkable guests already.

Jason Becker: 07:34 Yes.

Ken Harvey: 07:34 I'd like to just go back and just kind of help the audience fill in maybe a few blanks to better understand kind of your own story and your journey towards this. Do you recall how old you were when you first started playing baseball yourself?

Jason Becker: 07:57 Oh, Ken, I was five. All-American sport, All-American kid; been playing baseball all my life, literally all my life, Ken. Played Little League when I was a kid; played in high school down in Puyallup, Washington, where I grew up, and I actually still play today on a 45 and over men's adult... beg pardon, not men's, adult baseball team. There's a couple adult baseball organizations here in the Puget Sound area. The one I play in is called the Puget Sound Senior Baseball League.

Jason Becker: 08:34 Under normal circumstances, we have upwards of 1,000 players in 13 divisions. This year is a little different, with the pandemic that's been going on; obviously, everything is different right now. But it's the biggest league in the Puget Sound, and I still play. I've played for 13, 14 years now; made some of my very best friends, and we have a lot of fun playing there.

Jason Becker: 08:59 So, I'm telling you, you know Maureen, Ken. There's no escape for her. There are cleats and gloves and some jerseys all over our house, from about January to October, but that's kind of how we like it.

Ken Harvey: 09:19 Well, as a youngster playing baseball, do you recall a time, or maybe even how young you were... young or old you were... when you noticed the umpire for the first time?

Jason Becker: 09:40 I don't think anybody has asked me that question before, Ken. I'm not sure I do remember, if I'm being honest. As a kid, you're out there, you're doing what you do with your buddies, and you're playing the game and you're having fun. I can't recall a time where I do remember the umpire, but it does put a point on what the best volunteer umpires, or paid umpires... one of their best characteristics is they're doing it for the game.

Jason Becker: 10:17 A lot of times, we say to ourselves, our service is to the game itself. We don't care who wins or who loses. We are what we call the third team on the field. In every baseball and softball game, there are three teams: there's the home team, there's the away team, and there's the third team, the umpires, who, just like the players, are out there giving their best effort and trying to make every call correct. They want to do their best job, just like the players do. And maybe it makes a point that I don't remember my umpires when I was a kid, but it doesn't change the fact that they were out there giving their time away from their families, away from their work lives, so that I could play ball. Without an umpire, it's just a scrimmage.

Jason Becker: 11:13 I guess I have to publicly say thank you, all you umpires who umpired for me down in Puyallup, Washington when I was growing up. I didn't notice you then, but I'm glad you were around for me.

Ken Harvey: 11:23 Well, I think one of the reasons why I asked the question is I remember, as a youngster, kind of walking out onto a ball field, and really, as you mentioned, kind of understanding immediately that this was not just a scrimmage. It was not just a practice session, because there was someone standing behind the catcher.

Jason Becker: 11:50 Right.

Ken Harvey: 11:51 That person, as a youngster, for me, seemed larger than life, and wasn't someone that I knew; didn't recognize, didn't know, and in some ways, maybe I was in awe and fear of this person because I knew that, other than what I might do to either make myself a hero or embarrassed, this person was going to essentially be kind of judging my performance in terms of how well I swung at and missed or chose not to swing, and in some ways, there were two individuals who really had my fate in their hands: one was me and the other one was this person standing behind me.

Ken Harvey: 12:44 I think that probably any of us who have stood on the field and gone to the home plate and swung, at some point in our lifetime, whatever age, we start to recognize that this person has a significant amount of power, but also a significant amount of knowledge about the game, and maybe even more than my coach does.

Ken Harvey: 13:18 So, do you recall, and I'm just kind of asking this because I'm going to want to transition into some of your conversations with umpires and all, but I think in some ways, one of the reasons why I'm so fascinated by your podcast is that you... you really help to bring out the humanity and the service that these individuals bring to what they do and to the sport, and I'm just wondering, at what point did you start to really recognize that about these umpires? Was it once you became on, started trying that out yourself, or did you realize that earlier?

Jason Becker: 14:12 I didn't realize it earlier. I believe it did come after I started serving as an umpire myself and getting more deeply involved in what it takes, and motivations behind why we do what we do.

Jason Becker: 14:29 Ken, it means so much to me that you just described my show as focusing on the stories and the humanity and the service aspect of umpires. That's exactly what I hope people will listen to my podcast and come away with. My show is not about rules or field mechanics or instruction. There are a thousand great websites and podcasts and sources that do a much better job with things like that than I do, but as you mentioned at the top of the show, my show is about the stories and the journeys and the heart of why we do what we do.

Jason Becker: 15:18 One thing that every umpire has in common, from the most inexperienced youth umpire to a 30-year Major League Baseball umpire, is we all love to hear each other's stories. That's a fact. That is embedded in umpires' DNA. There is nothing an umpire

loves more than to just get together with his or her partner after a game, share their experiences and their wins and their losses, and what they've learned; swap stories; tell tall tales; that is something that is common with every umpire at every level, all around the world.

- Ken Harvey: 16:02 So, Jason, let me just jump in.
- Jason Becker: 16:04 Sure.
- Ken Harvey: 16:05 Give us an example of what an umpire story shared with another umpire sounds like.
- Jason Becker: 16:13 Well, think of war stories on a baseball field. Every umpire will come at these conversations differently. A fun thing about being an umpire is you just never know what's going to happen during that game. One of my favorite guests during this season one was a gentleman named Dale Scott, who is from the Pacific Northwest. He was a major league umpire for 30-plus years until his retirement in 2017. It was such a privilege to get to speak with him; so great, in fact, that I had to turn it into a two-part episode. There was so much good stuff there.
- Jason Becker: 17:04 But he did point out... if you went to your job every day not having any idea of what was going to happen that day, it might make you get up out of bed in the morning a little differently. It could light a little bit of a fire. That's what it's like every game for a baseball or a softball umpire. Some things are going to be consistent, but just about every game you see something and have to rule on something that you may never have seen before.
- Jason Becker: 17:34 So, a lot of the stories that we tell are about that kind of thing, Ken, and then also just where we've been. It's fun to hear guys talk about great games they've been a part of, or great performances that they've seen. Boy, it's just all over the map.
- Ken Harvey: 17:54 So one of the things that I'm really struck by, Jason, is that as you're talking with umpires, you're chatting with individuals both at the amateur level and at the professional level, correct?
- Jason Becker: 18:12 That's right.
- Ken Harvey: 18:13 So tell us a little bit about what you understand and what you appreciate in terms of the journey that umpires may travel, especially for those who have ended up becoming professionals and paid for their work.

Jason Becker: 18:33 One thing that's really interesting, Ken, is that a lot of the stories start exactly the same, okay? You're right, I've had the opportunity to speak with everyone from teenage youth umpires here in Snohomish County, all the way up to Major League Baseball umpires, and oftentimes, they have very similar stories. In fact, I was just re-listening the other day to one of my episodes, a conversation I had with a major league umpire... really, an umpire hero of mine named Tripp Gibson, who is one of many major league umpires that live here in the Puget Sound area.

Jason Becker: 19:17 He was telling us about his first game, how he went out there; sure enough, they threw him back there with the gear on; coach gets a little fired up, and in his very first game ever as an umpire, he has to toss the coach. It was on a ball/strike thing, whatever it was, but he has to eject the coach in his very first game. So the older gentleman that brought him-

Ken Harvey: 19:46 All baptism by fire?

Jason Becker: 19:48 Exactly! Exactly! The way Tripp described it, he says, "Yeah, so the gentleman, Pat, who brought me out, he met me after the game and gave me my check for 25 bucks and said, 'Well, good try, kid.'" Tripp said, "Good try? That was awesome! I'm coming back tomorrow!"

Jason Becker: 20:10 So, the stories that the big league guys have, they're probably not all that different from the guys' stories who were here in Mukilteo or in Everett, or in Lake Stevens, or Darrington... anywhere working youth games. It's a lot of fun to listen to.

Ken Harvey: 20:32 With umpires, it's interesting to me that... people might not appreciate that umpires come in all shapes and sizes, and that there might be any type of athleticism involved in umpiring.

Jason Becker: 20:59 Right.

Ken Harvey: 21:00 Can you tell us a little bit about kind of your own experience, but the experience of others in terms of how grueling is it to actually umpire a game?

Jason Becker: 21:15 Grueling is an interesting word to describe it. It can be, depending on the situation. I was fortunate enough to be able to travel to Tucson, Arizona last year. I was lucky to be selected to work a regional Little League tournament there, and myself and the other Pacific Northwest umpires who were chosen to

work that tournament, that was an adjustment for us, working in 100-plus degree heat in Tucson in July.

Ken Harvey: 21:45 Just a little warmer than here.

Jason Becker: 21:48 A little warmer, and I have to be honest, Ken, there was some struggles with a couple of us, and we had to battle that, and it was part of how we had to wisely prepare a little differently, so that can be grueling.

Jason Becker: 22:05 Games behind the plate that are long can be grueling physically, but I think more than that, Ken, it's a mental game. Umpiring is very much mental. When you're the umpire behind the plate calling balls and strikes, you have a lot of responsibilities, as does the base umpire or umpires that you're working with; but as the plate umpire, you cannot take one pitch off, do you know what I mean? You cannot let that concentration lapse even for one pitch, because guess what? That's when everything is going to go bananas, and you're going to lose your concentration for one moment just at the wrong time.

Jason Becker: 22:51 So, for me, personally, it's less of a physically taxing activity than it is a mentally taxing activity. If you're doing it correctly, you really can be pretty fatigued at the end of the game.

Ken Harvey: 23:08 Well, Jason, let me just jump in. That's really interesting to hear, because I think that for those of us who follow baseball at the amateur or college or professional... Little League up to professional levels... there's often a great deal of excitement, fascination, and appreciation for pitchers who seem to be heading towards a no-hitter, recognizing how challenging that is and the level of consistent output that's required to achieve that. But what you just described in some ways kind of paints for me a deeper appreciation for what umpires go through, because in some ways, as you said, every call is crucial, every pitch is crucial, and the attention can't waver... and so, that almost sounds like a no-hitter every game for an umpire!

Jason Becker: 24:13 That's a really interesting way to describe it, and I think you're right. I would love for listeners of this show to maybe start thinking about umpires in a little different way. The home team and the away team, they get to go in the dugout and relax every half inning, don't they?

Ken Harvey: 24:38 That's right.

Jason Becker: 24:41 But the umpires stay out there every pitch, every inning, every game, and for the major league guys, six to eight months in a row.

Ken Harvey: 24:52 That just occurred to me with what you previously had just said, and I was like, "Oh my gosh, I don't recall seeing the umpires take a break."

Jason Becker: 25:01 That's right.

Ken Harvey: 25:02 That's got to be really tough.

Jason Becker: 25:04 That's right.

Ken Harvey: 25:05 Especially when the weather conditions aren't prime for something like that.

Jason Becker: 25:12 And if you go back to that no-hitter thought, Ken, when a pitcher in the big leagues, or at any level, really, is working on a no-hitter or a perfect game, the tension rises, right? You can feel it. The pressure is on, and umpires definitely feel that, too. The guys that I've spoken with, they've had big game opportunities like that; boy, they are just dialed in in a way that they've never been dialed in before. They do not want to miss a call. They do not want to miss a pitch. They sharpen their focus like a laser, even more so than normal, when you get down to a moment like that. That could be a hair-raising time for an umpire, just like a player.

Ken Harvey: 25:58 Well, I think that... I really appreciate you saying that. I think this is a great opportunity for us to just take a short little break. We're going to come back in about a minute or so. We're going to pick up this conversation with Jason Becker, who is the podcaster putting out the Umpire Inspire podcast, and we're going to spend a little bit more time after we come back, so back in a minute.

Speaker 4: 26:29 Want to get the latest business news and solid financial advice from the experts for free? You can with your Sno-Isle Libraries account. Library customers can download the latest news and advice from publications like Entrepreneur, Kiplinger's, Fast Company, and Inc. You'll find feature stories around the business of technology, leadership, innovation, the stock market, retirement planning, and achieving financial success... all of that with a library card, just waiting for you online at Sno-Isle Libraries.

- Ken Harvey: 27:00 Enjoying this episode of the Check It Out! podcast? Head over to the iTunes store, Google Play music store, or most other podcast stores to subscribe, rate the podcast, or leave a review. Your rating and review will make it easier for others to find the Check It Out! podcast wherever it's available.
- Ken Harvey: 27:30 Hi, everyone. Thanks for returning from the break. My name is Ken Harvey. I'm the host for this episode of Check It Out! podcast, and have the distinct pleasure of having a conversation with Jason Becker, who is the podcaster responsible for the Umpire Inspire podcast. And so, if you haven't listened to that podcast yet, I invite you to go to wherever you can find podcasts listen: the Apple Podcast site, Google Podcasts, wherever you can go online and just type in Umpire Inspire, or in any of the podcast search engines, put in that name and his podcast will come right up. I want to invite you to subscribe and listen, because it is definitely worth it, especially if you love the game of baseball and you really want to better understand the passion and the professionalism that is happening behind the plate and out on the field to make sure that the games go the way that they're supposed to.
- Ken Harvey: 28:47 Hey, Jason, I wanted to ask you a question about the role of umpires, and one of the things that I took a look at as I was researching for this episode and conversation was that umpires are kind of in place to make sure that when two teams are playing, and that players and coaches and fans are all there for, in some ways, the benefit of the game, and to make sure that it's played in a sportsman-like way, so that the focus is on playing, and the focus isn't necessarily on any bad blood that might be in place between teams or between personalities, or even personalities just not on the field, but in the stands.
- Ken Harvey: 29:45 So I was really fascinated by that, and can you tell us a little bit about what you've seen or even experienced, or what you've heard from some of your guests, in terms of where umpires discover that they not only have to essentially police the game, they have to police the personalities?
- Jason Becker: 30:10 Yes, and the term that we use in the umpiring world for that is game management. It's the third leg of the stool, so to speak. Every umpire must be strong on rules, must be strong on field mechanics... that is, moving around the field, where to be, your roles and responsibilities when you're out on field... and then game management, and Ken, game management is the single most challenging part for any umpire. It's interpersonal communication, right, and so that's challenging for us in any conversation.

- Jason Becker: 30:51 When you get to a baseball or softball game where both teams want to win, their striving tensions sometimes are rising... it is an art form and it is very, very difficult, and I think it's probably a lifelong task to learn how to be good at that. The umpires who are good at that are just superheroes to me. They have a superpower, a way of defusing situations and explaining rules or regulations in a way that helps the conversation simmer down a little bit so we can all get back to playing. Game management is really tough, really tough indeed.
- Ken Harvey: 31:41 So that personality issue, I certainly have seen it as a challenge in baseball and other sports, as well, but my hat's off to you and all others who step forward to take that kind of thing on, so I think that's really wonderful.
- Ken Harvey: 32:05 When you've talked with some of your guests, have they talked to you at all about really what kept them within the sport, what kept them in that role, because I can well imagine that there must be some games that things just do not go well, and maybe that third leg of the stool just starts to really kind of get out of control, and I just wonder if umpires sometimes go home feeling battered and bruised, as well? And then what makes them want to come back and do that again?
- Jason Becker: 32:48 Yes, and that's the key question, I think, for every umpire to answer for him or herself. Battered and bruised... I do feel battered and bruised, sometimes, Ken, physically and mentally, no doubt about that.
- Jason Becker: 33:01 It's the love of the game. It's the love of the game for a lot, if not most umpires that you will speak with. We love the game. We feel that it is a worthwhile pursuit for young people. We feel a duty. We feel a calling to enable the game to happen. As I said, without an umpire, it's just a scrimmage, and it's a high calling to decide to serve in that way, in my opinion... to raise your hand and say, "Yes, I will do this thing that nobody else seems to want to do. I'll do it so you can play and have fun and learn."
- Jason Becker: 33:50 So, the best umpires, and the kind of umpires that I like to visit with on the Umpire Inspire podcast, they have a little different view on that, Ken. They know that they are not only enabling the game to be played, but if they do their job right, they are enhancing the game. They are enhancing the game, and a game with a well-skilled umpire will go better. The quality of the game experience, especially for young players... Little League and high school players... the quality of the game experience is directly affected by the quality of the umpiring, there is no question,

and I think anybody who just thinks about it for a couple of seconds will understand that to be true.

- Jason Becker: 34:41 One thing that umpires like to hang their hat on is, if they can get through a game and nobody notices that they were even there, they had a pretty good game, right?
- Ken Harvey: 34:54 Yeah.
- Jason Becker: 34:54 Because it's not our job to get in the way. It's not our game. We are there to serve. We're there to go to work and enable and enhance that game that we're working at, and if we get that done, it's been a pretty good day at the office.
- Ken Harvey: 35:11 Yeah, so before we get to our final set of questions, I just want to remind the audience we're talking with Jason Becker, who is the podcaster responsible for the Umpire Inspire podcast. If you've got questions or comments that you would like to make to Jason, he's going to have an opportunity to tell you how you can get in touch with him. We'll also have that information available in the show notes. That's available on our website and with the listing for the podcast.
- Ken Harvey: 35:43 Jason, I... oh, and I should say before I forget... if you, as an audience member, are interested in umpiring and [crosstalk 00:35:53] umpires, we've got plenty of materials at Sno-Isle Libraries that you can browse through our collection online, and then reserve those materials, and they are available for you, and will be made available to you contact-free... so, available in a brown paper bag when you come and pick it up at the main door of the library.
- Jason Becker: 36:21 Ken, may I jump in for just one second?
- Ken Harvey: 36:23 Absolutely.
- Jason Becker: 36:25 Since we're talking about library materials, I have a book recommendation for anybody who is interested in umpiring. The single best book on umpiring that I have ever read, and that I recommend to anyone who will listen, is a book that I checked out at the Sno-Isle Library here in Mukilteo. It's called As They See 'Em. It's by an author named Bruce Weber, who was a journalist with the New York Times for many, many years. He stepped in to the world of umpires for a few years to profile what goes on there, who these men and women are, why they're doing what they doing, and it's really outstanding.

Jason Becker: 37:12 So, As They See 'Em is the book, and I really recommend that.

Ken Harvey: 37:14 As They See 'Em.

Jason Becker: 37:15 Yep.

Ken Harvey: 37:18 I'm really glad that you mentioned that book and author, Bruce Weber. That actually leads me to a question I wanted to ask you, which is... as I was looking at my research, it reminded me that unlike referees in American football, an umpire's judgment call is typically final. Is it always final? I know sometimes it's in theory, anyway, final for the person who doesn't agree with it, but-

Jason Becker: 37:54 That's a really good question. No, it's not, Ken. There are rules to be followed, and our job is to ensure that the game is followed according to the rules. Okay, that's a given. We all understand that. But I think anybody who has watched a baseball or softball game... from time to time, a call will be made or a ruling will be made, and you'll see the umpires call time and get together to discuss something, either on their own or at the request of a manager who is asking them to double check.

Ken Harvey: 38:34 Jason, can I just jump in for a second, because I have seen that happen, and I've seen umpires huddle, and I've always wondered, what in the world are they actually saying in that little huddle?

Jason Becker: 38:48 I can give you a little inside information on that, Ken. The umpires... what do we want? We want to get the call right, and we have processes in place to get the call right, to give ourselves the best chance to get it right. Let me give you one example.

Jason Becker: 39:05 So, in youth baseball or in high school baseball in the lower minor leagues, you will typically work two men. You'll have two umpires on the field: one working behind the plate and one out on the bases, and each of those umpires has a lot of different responsibilities based on what happens; where the runners are, sometimes how many outs there are, where the ball is hit, what's going on. There's a lot going on out there, and we can help one another, okay? Umpires, just like players, are communicating with one another on the field all the time.

Jason Becker: 39:44 I encourage listeners of this show to watch an umpire crew next time they go out to T-Mobile Park, or next time they're

watching their son or daughter's game. Umpires are communicating with one another, verbally, with hand signals, and a lot of other things.

Jason Becker: 40:03 So, back to that example. So, Ken, let's say we have no runners on base, and there is a ball hit on the ground to the shortstop, okay? The play is going to be made at first base. The shortstop is going to try to throw to the first baseman to get that runner out, okay? Pretty basic play. The base umpire who is stationed behind first base in that moment is responsible to make that call, okay? It is the base umpire's responsibility to get him or herself to the proper angle and to the proper distance to get the best possible view to make that call correctly, out or safe at first base.

Jason Becker: 40:48 But the plate umpire, even though it's not his job to make the call, he still has very, very important responsibilities. You will see a plate umpire take his mask off, and it's called trailing the runner. We will trail the runner up the first base line to make sure that the runner stays within the running lane, and we will make sure we will have an eye on the first baseman's foot, to make sure that the first baseman's foot doesn't come off the bag before the catch is made.

Jason Becker: 41:20 So, that's one example of where a manager may ask for help. A manager may come out to the base umpire and say, "Hey, I think the first baseman's foot was off the bag right there, and I think your partner might have had a better angle at that. Can you check with him?" So long as the manager asks that very politely and respectfully, the base umpire will say, "Yes, Coach, I'll be happy to do that. We will discuss what happened and we will make a final ruling." So the base umpire goes to the plate umpire, the base umpire says, "Hey, Coach, I had the first baseman's foot on the bag. Coach thinks otherwise. What did you see?" The base umpire is just trying to get additional information in order to make a correct call.

Jason Becker: 42:16 Well, the plate umpire says, "Yeah, I had a great angle at that, and I had the first baseman's foot definitely off the bag." Base umpire says, "Okay, I was blocked a little bit. We're going to go with that"; then, they may correct the call on the field. So, that's the sort of thing that happens a lot, and there are a thousand different permutations of that on a field, Ken, where an umpire may get together with his partner and discuss what you saw, or maybe a rules question, but it truly is all in an effort just to get the call right.

- Ken Harvey: 42:53 Well, I think it's just really remarkable the passion, the desire and commitment to provide kind of that level of accuracy and correct observation and ruling that goes into this incredible service that umpires provide us. I'm really struck, too, by how many young people are touched through Little Leagues, and then as you move through middle school and high school and college, up to the big leagues, through the minor leagues and up to the big leagues, how many people's lives are touched by the service that umpires bring. I think that your podcast is just an incredible opportunity to learn more about this community of human beings who care about this game and are doing their best to make the game enjoyable, fair and a wonderful experience for everyone who participates in it.
- Jason Becker: 44:29 I totally agree, Ken, and you mentioned earlier that umpires come in all shapes and sizes. I've reminded right now of one of my favorite episodes of my podcast. I interviewed two good friends of mine, two fellow umpires here in Everett, Washington, named Garrett and Gary... both umpires in Everett Little League. Garrett is 16 years old. Gary is 76 years old.
- Ken Harvey: 45:02 Wow. What an age range.
- Jason Becker: 45:05 That's right, and I'm smack dab in the middle, and we've all worked games together and had a great time, and we're brothers. We're umpire brothers, and that's part of the joy of being in the umpire community. It's a brotherhood and a sisterhood, a very supportive place to be, and we just have such a good time. So, the perspective that Garrett and Gary have about umpiring couldn't be further apart, and yet they still retain the same love of the game, the same dedication to service, and it was a lot of fun to visit with those guys.
- Ken Harvey: 45:49 Well, you actually said something, and I probably think we're going to be ending on this and maybe one or two more questions... you mentioned that significant age range just now, and so that it seems like there's significant age diversity within the umpiring community. You also used two words, brotherhood and sisterhood; does that mean that there are female umpires out there?
- Jason Becker: 46:19 Absolutely, in both baseball and softball. Ken, anybody can be a great umpire. You need to be willing to work hard. You need to have an attitude of service. It's not always necessary, in fact, to have an extensive career playing the game. I know a lot of really successful and well-regarded umpires who didn't really grow up playing the game like I did. In fact, sometimes it can be a little bit of a stumbling block for umpires. I often hear, "I grew up

playing the game. I figure I can umpire. It couldn't be too hard, right? I know the game." Well, guess again, pal. You get into the rules of the game and the intricacies, and the if-this, then-that's of being an umpire... it's a lot more challenging than you think.

- Jason Becker: 47:19 But yeah, to answer your question, Ken, there are some outstanding, outstanding female umpires. Last year, for example... well, it's foolish to even point out one or two over anybody else, but I'm just thinking of a couple friends of mine. One is named Kelly Dean. She was chosen to work the plate for the International Championship game for the Little League World Series last year. That's a feather in an umpire's cap, no matter who you are. I've spoken with a couple female umpires, outstanding female umpires, who are working their way up the minor league baseball system right now. There hasn't been a female major league umpire yet, but that's going to change, and sooner than probably people think. There are some outstanding umpires coming up through the system right now, and we're going to see that happen in just a few years, I'm 100 percent certain.
- Jason Becker: 48:17 Beyond all that, Ken, there's great umpires here in Snohomish County, even the dads and moms who, as I said earlier, just raised their hand during that pre-season Little League meeting and said, "Yes, I'll do that job because it needs to be done. I'm going to give my best effort. I'm not always going to be right, but I'm going to serve in that way so that the boys and girls can have this great experience."
- Ken Harvey: 48:44 Well, I really want to just say to all of you in the audience who may have umpired before, been one of those individuals who raised your hand... or if you know someone, or if you've been to a game, and you didn't know the person but you saw someone out there who was umpiring for your child or friends of your family... I hope that you can join me in being appreciative and letting them know how much we appreciate that service.
- Ken Harvey: 49:21 Hey, Jason, last question: if someone is interested in getting in contact with you, how would you like them to do that?
- Jason Becker: 49:33 I would love to hear from anybody who is interested in umpiring or serving as an umpire. I think email is a good way to do that, Ken. My email address is jason@umpireinspire.com, and of course, that's the website where you can find the podcast and some other efforts, www.umpireinspire.com.
- Jason Becker: 49:55 Yeah, so I think email would be a great way to do that. People might be interested to check out the Umpire Inspire Facebook

page and connect there, as well. The Facebook page and other social media channels that I have set up is really where the heart of this new umpire community is quite clearly on display. That's been a very rewarding outcome of this whole little project, so... once again, jason@umpireinspire.com. I love talking umpiring. I'm sure that's clear by now, and if somebody is interested, then I can help them get connected with a way to serve in their own community.

- Ken Harvey: 50:36 Well, we've been talking with Jason Becker. Jason is the... I described him as the genius who came up with the Umpire Inspire podcast; a Mukilteo resident, Sno-Isle Libraries customer, and a good friend.
- Ken Harvey: 50:53 I want to encourage all of you in our audience to check out his podcast, and also, if you're interested in learning more about not just the umpire community that he will really introduce you to through his podcast, if you want to learn more about umpiring, come to the Sno-Isle Library's website. We've got some titles and some things that, hopefully... that I know that you would enjoy and benefit from.
- Ken Harvey: 51:26 Jason, thank you so much for being part of this conversation, and I look forward to enjoying a lot more podcast episodes.
- Jason Becker: 51:38 Likewise, Ken. It's been a pleasure. Thank you very much.
- Ken Harvey: 51:40 All right. Take care.
- Speaker 5: 51:42 Cuddle up with your pre-schooler, reading fun books like Goodnight Moon, or Chicka Chicka Boom Boom. You'll find 100 enjoyable picture book titles which were hand-selected by Sno-Isle librarians, guaranteed to create delightful and meaningful afternoon and bedtime experiences, all while helping your children learn to read. Find the Countdown to Kindergarten list and many more online at Sno-Isle Libraries.
- Speaker 6: 52:10 Self-Help Shelf, coming up next.
- Sarri Gilman: 52:21 This is Sarri Gilman with the Self-Help Shelf for Sno-Isle Libraries. The book I have for you today is Eight Dates, by Dr. John Gottman and Dr. Julie Schwartz Gottman. Oh yes, they're married, and they once ran the famous Love Lab where they researched couples and communication. Together, they now have the Gottman Institute in Seattle, where they share years of research on how to make marriage work and what predicts divorce.

- Sarri Gilman: 52:54 During COVID-19, not too many couples were having romantic dates, and your closeness and intimacy may feel like it was just lost in the pandemic, or maybe it was lost even before that. If you're married or dating, *Eight Dates* is for you. The book gives you a guide on things to think about before each date, and you literally make a plan to go on eight dates together, and each date, you're given a different topic with a whole different set of questions to ask each other. You practice listening and learning about each other, and even if you've been together for decades, I think you're going to get a lot out of this book, especially if you feel like your relationship needs attention and you wish you were closer.
- Sarri Gilman: 53:43 Since we're in a pandemic, you're going to need to bring a little bit of creativity to your dates with your partner. Maybe it's a beach picnic or a date at home; it really doesn't matter where you are, because each date is a full discussion on a topic picked by the Gottmans, with a guide to support you.
- Sarri Gilman: 54:05 I do recommend that you each read a copy of the book so that you have some of the background material to think about before your date, or you could even read out loud to each other to prepare for your date.
- Sarri Gilman: 54:19 One of my favorite lines from the book is this one: "The goal of conflict is not to win or convince the other person that you're right. In creating compromise, we have to understand each other's core needs on the issues we are discussing, as well as each other's areas of flexibility. The goal is not to become identical; the goal is to understand each other."
- Sarri Gilman: 54:47 This book is also going to help you get a better understanding of each other's core needs. By going on the eight dates, you will have a much deeper understanding of each other, and you're going to get tips that you can practice for each date, and my hope is that you just continue going on these deeper dive discussion dates in the future.
- Sarri Gilman: 55:12 *Eight Dates*, by Doctors John and Julie Gottman, is available digitally from the Sno-Isle Libraries. Take good care of you, and remember, some books are almost as good as therapy.
- Speaker 8: 55:26 Thank you for listening to the Check It Out! podcast. For free resources and materials connected to today's guest and topic, head over to the library's website and search for the word podcast. The library's website is sno-isle.org/podcast.