

WBSC Europe Baseball Umpiring Committee

2023 Report

w. included 2024 projections
5th December 2023

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Season 2023

Introduction

Season 2023 marked a biggest change in European baseball umpiring (hereinafter as “umpiring”) in its history. Still in its provisional phase, the Baseball Umpiring Committee (hereinafter as “committee”) has sought the stabilisation of umpiring community, streamlining the nomination process, creating new umpire manuals, implementing evaluations under the leadership and observation of newly appointed supervisors, standardisation of uniforms, as well as creating a brand-new certification and educational programme.

1. Nomination Process and the Umpiring Community

Nomination Process and Umpire Data

The most significant change in the operation of umpiring programme was the adoption of the strict policy regarding the provision of umpires by national federations; whereby the national federations were mandated to provide an equal number of umpires to the number of participating teams from that respective national federation, at the disposal of the committee.

In order to streamline the nomination process on the committee’s end and stabilising the umpiring community, the committee took the following steps.

- At the end of 2022 and beginning of 2023, the committee streamlined data-gathering process directly with the umpiring committee. National Federations were asked to provide provisional rosters, which were set to be locked from 2024.
- Based on said rosters, umpires were addressed directly and asked to provide availability.
- Based upon availability, the committee nominated umpires to events based on their own decision, as opposed to previous years where umpires were always sent with their team.
- The nominations were finished by 15th March 2023.

The result of the newly established data gathering process is as follows:

Total number of umpires on rosters in 2023	174
Total number of federations that provided rosters 2023	30
Number of responsive umpires in 2023	156

The result of the nomination process in 2023 is as follows:

Total number of nominations	105
Number of umpires used	91
Umpires with 1 tournament	80
Umpires with 2 tournaments	2
Umpire with 3 tournaments	1

Issuing fines

Despite strict umpire provision mandate policy, only two fines were issued – fine to the federation of Malta and the federation of Great Britain. It is important to point out that in both cases, the committee had made all attempts to reach a more feasible and less grave solution. In case of Malta, there was no cooperation provided and no communication requitted. In the case of Great Britain, fine was issued as a result of Great Britain's failure to fulfil an agreement with the committee, whereby the committee had provided a replacement umpire and Great Britain entrusted with coordinating that umpire's travel arrangements, including its costs. In conclusion, Great Britain failed to communicate with the umpire and then disputed the cost of travel and was issued a fine as a last resort.

On a positive side, however, thanks to the relief of the nomination process on the side of the committee, the committee succeeded in nominating two umpires out of the ordinary. It had been one of the committee's outlooks to start reaching out to communities with less opportunities, and given to the new nomination process, the umpiring committee was able to, and successful in, nominating two umpires from countries without participation in 2023 – an umpire from Denmark and an umpire from Greece.

2. Supervisors and evaluations

Supervisors

The most prolific and successful change was the implementation of supervisors, and the separation of duties between the Technical Commissioners and Supervisors tournaments.

Total number of selected supervisors for 2023	21
Total number of supervisors used	14
Supervisors with 1 tournament	8
Supervisors with 2 tournaments	6

Supervisors for 2023 were hand-selected by the committee. Every newly appointed supervisor was required to undergo virtual training and pass a test. Supervisors' main duties were to stabilise the in-tournament umpire operations and to provide feedback to the umpires in the best way possible. Before the tournament, supervisors conducted a virtual meeting with umpires at all tournaments, which provided an extra safeguard that umpires will report.

Evaluations

Each supervisor provided after-game feedback with performance evaluation. Majority of supervisors followed-up with a written evaluation after each game. At the end of the

tournament, an overall master evaluation was prepared by all supervisors – this evaluation shall serve as a comprehensive outlook of individual umpire's stage of development. Committee is very pleased with the overall impact these evaluations made – they served as a checkpoint for umpires and brought a level of objectivity in comparing umpires' performance. Master evaluations contained supervisors' recommendation for further assignments of evaluated umpires. These recommendations, as well as the information provided in the evaluations, will serve as general advice to the committee in the preparation of umpire assignments in 2024.

Coming into 2024, evaluation will require some form of revision to ensure more standardised feedback. Furthermore, after-game evaluations were extremely time-consuming for supervisors, especially those that served as the only supervisor at a tournament.

As far as the overall result of all evaluations, the committee concluded that the most insufficient areas of observations were umpires' starting positions, reading fly balls and the three-umpire system in general; the latter was, however, expected due to the introduction of brand-new, unified, mechanics at the beginning of season 2023. These areas will be the prime focuses in 2024 Championship season and will be the topic of instruction at the Advanced Clinic in February 2024. The biggest impediment in nominating was the uncertainty of some events, alongside with tournaments finishing on Sunday. The recommendation of the committee is to push the decisive date on tournaments to a date earlier in the offseason to help better planning. Furthermore, given to the amateur profile of our competitions, it is difficult for the umpires to take extensive time off their employments. Finishing tournaments on Sundays mean extra time off work for travelling on Mondays. The committee recommends that tournaments' end date on Saturday is considered to be a norm for all events.

3. Uniforms

Thanks to the centralisation of ordering uniforms and engaging our strategic partner, Honig's Europe, the committee managed to fit out uniforms to all umpires working in 2023. The help of Honig's Europe in providing a supply chain for our uniforms must be highlighted. Despite a very late notice and added extra uniforms ordered by individual umpires, there were only slight delays at two tournaments. The extent of the provision of uniforms from WBSC Europe is as follows:

- Each umpire reporting to a tournament obtained two hats and one black uniform shirt including logos ("uniform ration").
- If an umpire reported to a more than one tournament, they received their uniform ration at their first tournament. No umpire received more than one ration, regardless of tournament worked.

The prescribed minimum by the committee to be worn at WBSC Europe Baseball events was a WBSC Europe provided hat and shirt. No shirts and hats other than those provided (especially with other insignia) were allowed. Umpires had the option of buying a blue uniform shirt with WBSC Europe insignia as well as the option of purchasing jackets with WBSC Europe logos. The committee is very pleased to report that the majority of umpires deployed in 2023 have taken advantage of the offer and ordered extra uniform pieces – helping to display a brand new, unified product on the field. Thanks to WBSC Europe, 2023

was the first year that all umpires at all WBSC Europe (or formerly CE) events were identically attired.

4. Certification and Education

Monthly Virtual Meetings

Aside from the deployment of tournament supervisors, education of WBSC Europe umpires was the second bedrock of outlined progress of the committee. The education started at the beginning of the year, conducting monthly virtual meetings in January, February, March, April, and May, pausing briefly for the championship season (and supplemented by pre-tournament virtual meetings), and resumed with virtual meetings in September, November, and December. These virtual meetings served as a tool for providing the umpires with clinics on various topics, updates regarding day-to-day operation, as well as team-cohesion activity. All virtual meetings were recorded and are available on-demand to all WBSC Europe certified umpires.

Manuals

The committee has reworked WBSC international umpire manuals for the two and three umpire system and provided it for the general use in WBSC Europe Baseball. No other mechanics but those in line with the manual are longer acceptable. Furthermore, the committee succeeded in opening cooperation with the MLB in the form of Mr Larry Young, who has provided the committee with the access to the MLB Umpire Manual and the MLB Four Umpire system. Both of these materials were given to the umpires and were followed throughout the season.

A positive externality of the implementation of manuals was the reception of many National Federations, e.g., that of Belgium, Czech Republic, Italy, who have decided to strictly follow the newly established WBSC Europe Baseball standards from now forward – thereby helping create unity across borders and improving the overall quality across the board in the future.

Certification and Basic Clinic in Toulouse – November 2023

The committee planned and executed a prime Certification Clinic – a first one in many years, and a very first one on this scale. This clinic combined two clinics in one; basic clinic for already certified WBSC Europe umpires, and a Certification Clinic, for candidates aspiring to become WBSC Europe Certified. Pursuant to regulations introduced by the committee at the beginning of 2023, any national federation interested in adding an umpire to their WBSC Europe Baseball roster will have such umpire certified by the committee. Evidently, this opportunity was taken very seriously by many national federations, as the certification clinic registered 44 applicants. The basic clinic, however, attracted 10 umpires on WBSC Europe rosters – with many umpires seemingly giving preference to already announced advanced clinic to be taking place in February. Two participants to the Certification Clinic did not attend due to last minute illness (National Federation members of Italy, Germany).

The committee is pleased to share its satisfaction with the organising committee, led by Mr Boris Rothermund from the French National Federation. Their unwavering support of our clinic, tireless work, and the eagerness to meet any demand from our side ensures our

willingness to extend our cooperation in 2024 and beyond. As a result of the aforesaid, the committee does not plan to change venues for its Advanced and Certification Courses in 2024.

The participants' national federation affiliation was as follows:

Certification Clinic:

Austria: 1	Italy: 14
Belgium: 1	Netherlands: 2
Bulgaria: 3	Slovakia: 4
Czech Republic: 2	Slovenia: 2
France: 2	Spain: 6
Great Britain: 1	Sweden: 1
Hungary: 1	Switzerland: 1
Ireland: 2	

Basic Clinic:

Belgium: 1	Croatia: 1
Bulgaria: 1	Germany: 1
Georgia: 1	Spain: 2
Great Britain: 1	Sweden: 2

Lead Instructors: Zdenek Zidek (Field), Marek Vicar (Cages)
 Instructors: Marco Screti, Serge Makouchetchev, Marco Taurelli, Christian Posny

The certification clinic featured instruction comparable to professional umpire schools. The instruction was mostly on-field, beginning on 16th November in the evening hours and continuing from 8 AM on Friday and Saturday, finishing both days in the late evening hours. The main topics of instruction were the two-umpire system, alongside with general umpiring mechanics. The participants of the Certification clinic were presented with a new certification system, aligned with the WBSC Europe Baseball Umpire evaluation, evaluating candidates in eight areas:

1. Professionalism off the Field
2. Communication
3. Relationship with others
4. Administrative Duties
5. Coachability
6. Overall Plate Work
7. Overall Base Work
8. Rules' knowledge.

All candidates were asked to show progress throughout the course. To be able to pass, the candidates had to score at least "Marginal" in all categories, i.e., no "insufficient" grades in any of the above mentioned. Furthermore, the candidates were mandated to pass a Rules' Test with a grade 85% or higher (i.e., answer at least 43 of 50 questions correctly). Seven of the candidates did not meet the certification standards; the most frequent deficiency was

the combination in deficiency in Communication (the participants were not able to communicate in English), alongside with one other category in all cases.

The rules test was conducted online after the conclusion of the clinic from the comfort of the homes of the candidates, the candidates had an unlimited amount time (as long as the test was passed within deadline) and were allowed to use rulebook. A total of 24 candidates have passed the test and were granted WBSC Certification right away.

Fifteen of the candidates failed the test. The instructors decided to grant the possibility of a second attempt to the candidates who would have passed the other certification criteria. The total number of candidates who had the chance of retaking the test was 9. All but one candidate have successfully taken the opportunity and retaken the test.

As a result, the committee has certified 32 candidates from the following national federations:

Austria: 1	Ireland: 1
Belgium: 1	Italy: 10
Bulgaria: 3	Netherlands: 2
Czech Republic: 2	Slovakia: 3
France: 2	Slovenia: 2
Great Britain: 1	Spain: 3
Hungary: 1	Switzerland: 1

The unsuccessful candidates' National Federation Affiliation was as follows:

Ireland: 1	Spain: 3
Italy: 2	Sweden: 1
Slovakia: 1	

Two candidates from Spain did not meet the criteria in all but one evaluation category - communication. These candidates were flagged as very viable potential prospects and were granted a conditional certification and invited to the WBSC Europe Baseball Advanced Course, which, when able to show sufficient progress in their communication skills in February will give them permanent certification.

Finally, after accounting all expenses for the clinic, the committee has succeeded in gaining a small surplus of 583,96 €:

52 participants + 6 instructors		
Item	Income	Expense
Accommodation Instructors		
Food + Accommodation from Participants	7 546,00 €	9 105,50 €
Participation Fee	5 300,00 €	
Transportation Instructors		2 306,54 €
Instructors' Fee		850,00 €
	12 846,00 €	12 262,04 €

5. Committee's Operation in 2023

The operation of the committee was marked by two main maxims – the fact that it was a “year zero” for many of its operations, caused by the unknown nature of the community and the numerousness of goals set out. In this environment, however, the committee has succeeded in many breakthroughs despite some setbacks. The operation, however, was slightly impeded by the chairman's busyness in his personal occupation. Mr Screti has regretfully announced his resignation at the end of 2023 season but expressed full support and trust in the committee's programme and operations. Mr Screti will remain in the role of an advisor, instructor, and supervisor with WBSC Europe Baseball.

Season 2024 – outlook

1. Nomination Process and the Umpiring Community

The committee will continue with its procedures laid out in 2022. The rosters are now closed, and the National Federations have only the option of restricting them for 2024. If the National Federations want to make addenda, they need to send their candidates for certification in 2024.

The nomination process schedule is as follows:

CALL FOR ROSTERS	•1st December– 15th December 2023
AVAILABILITY FORMS	•16th December 2023 – 15th January 2024
ASSIGNMENTS	•16th January – 29th February 2024
UMPIRE CONFIRMATION	•1st March – 15th March 2024
EFFECTIVE DATE	•1st April 2024

The committee concludes that all calls for forms have been sent out on the 1st December. The committee will, however, in contract to the previous season, extend their effective date due to complications with tournament planning in 2023, as a result of which some umpires were forced to change flights. The committee seeks to avoid this situation in any way possible.

Subject to a change from the National Federations, the committee projects to operate with the following number of umpires:

		Increase from 2023 in #	Increase in %
Total number of umpires on rosters in 2024	207	32	20%
Total number of federations that provided rosters 2023	31	1	3%

In light of the already established umpiring community and its progression into the future, the committee proposes that a licencing system be introduced, whereby the umpires' licence is limited to a total of three years. The umpire has the opportunity to renew his/her licence by attending one of WBSC Europe Baseball Umpire Clinics and passing a test every year. At the moment the umpire attends one of said clinics, the licence automatically renews for another three years. The committee proposes this

change coming into force from 2026, while the automatic extension apply to all current WBSC Europe Baseball Clinics from 2023. For the avoidance of doubt – all licences of all umpires from the 2023 list shall expire at the end of 2025 season, unless they take part in any clinic organised by the committee – in which case, their licence is extended by three years, counting from the year following the year in which the clinic takes place (i.e., Advanced Clinic 2024 – licence extended until the end of 2027).

2. Supervisors and evaluations

The committee will revise their roster of supervisors and will consider certifying new prospective supervisors if necessary. The supervisors will again be required to undergo virtual training and pass a test to be eligible for 2024.

The goal of the committee is to profound the supervisors' knowledge. Furthermore, given to the overwhelming success of their operation, the committee will strive to expand the supervisors' numbers at tournaments.

The evaluation will need to be revised to ensure more standardised feedback. Due to the excessive time-demandingness of the after-game evaluations for supervisors, the committee will consider its further use.

The committee also opened cooperation with WBSC International. The committee would like to have its supervisors act in the role of Umpire Directors in WBSC world events.

3. Uniforms

The committee would like to continue with the uniform-provision policy set out in 2023. All umpires who did not receive uniform ration in 2023 (two hats and one black uniform shirt) would receive same upon their report to the tournament. The committee will continue to recommend the usage of standardised jackets, but they will not be mandatory in 2024.

4. Certification and Education

Monthly Virtual Meetings

Monthly Virtual Meetings resumed with the first Wednesday of December and will continue on every first Wednesday of every month until the beginning of the championship season. The topics of those meetings will vary; however, the umpires were mandated to pass a rules test. The overall result of the test has discovered an insufficient rules' knowledge in a significant portion of our umpires, therefore, the main focus of virtual meetings in 2024 shall be to the rules of baseball.

Manuals

The committee will continue to fine-tune its manuals. The committee will also continue ensuring that these manuals are correctly interpreted and used at all WBSC Europe Baseball Events. Lastly, the committee is prepared to render any and all cooperation to National Federations should they decide to follow the WBSC Europe Manuals in incorporating them.

Certification Clinic

The committee is planning on organising another certification clinic in 2024 in similar dates and location, i.e., from the 14th – 17th November in Toulouse, France. The commission's outlook is to organise the clinic every year in the same general time.

Advanced Clinic

The committee has set out plans to organise Advanced Clinic for current WBSC Europe Umpires. The Baseball Advanced Umpiring Clinic is designed for the WBSC Europe Baseball Umpires seeking to elevate their skills and learn from distinguished faculty including WBSC Europe Umpire Supervisors and esteemed professionals such as Mr. Larry Young (MLB Umpire Supervisor), Mr. Dan Merzel (MLB Call-up), Mr. Macon Hammond (MiLB AA), and Mr. Z Zidek (MiLB AA).

The clinic promises a comprehensive learning experience, blending classroom sessions with a predominant focus on practical, on-field training -with a special accent to game management and the three-umpire system. The clinic will provide an excellent opportunity to improve WBSC Europe Baseball Umpiring, improve team-cohesion as well as provide opportunities for the umpires to showcase their qualities to the WBSC. The committee has negotiated with the WBSC that the top candidates will have the opportunity to be granted the WBSC certification as the result of their performance at the clinic.

The committee is pleased to announce that a total of 83 candidates have applied and will be attending this clinic. This number of attendees has been unmatched in the past – this clinic will be the biggest umpiring clinic in WBSC, as well as ESF and IBAF's history.

The committee will require that all of its supervisors be present at the Advanced Clinic to ensure their development and standardisation of their instruction.

5. Committee's Operation in 2024

The committee recommends that Zdenek Zidek be promoted to the chairman's position and Mr Dirk Biehl to be appointed in lieu of the vacancy created by Mr Screti's resignation.

Budget 2023

Baseball Umpiring Committee - 2023 Final Statement

Item	Income/Expense	Sum	
WBSC Europe Budget Allocation to Umpiring Committee	Income	20 000,00 €	*
Uniforms	Expense	-7 000,00 €	*
Supervisors 'Travel	Expense	-5 500,00 €	*
Umpires' Travel	Expense	-3 150,00 €	*
Fee Malta (Umpire no-show)	Income	500,00 €	*
Clinics	Expense	-750,00 €	*
Line-ups	Expense	-600,00 €	*
Certification + Basic Clinic Final Statement	Income	600,00 €	*
2023 Final Statement		4 100,00 €	

* All amounts rounded up

Clinics - Virtual Clinic Expense -750,00 €*

Per the budget proposal of the committee, approved by the board for 2023, the committee will provide a remuneration for the creation and operation of the Virtual Clinics (9 renditions) to the lecturer, Zdenek Zidek.

Income 2023

The Income of 2023 was as follows:

Fee Malta (Umpire no-show) Income 500,00 €*

The committee had made all attempts to reach a more feasible and less grave solution. In case of Malta, there was no cooperation provided and no communication requitted.

Certification + Basic Clinic Final Statement Income 600,00 €*

Thanks to the participation of an elevated number of clinicians, the committee managed to earn 600 € from the participation fees, after accounting all expenses.

2023 Final Statement
+4 100,00 €

On behalf of the WBSC Europe Baseball Umpiring Committee
Zdenek Zidek