

president's message

Safety is the first concern

On May 23, Bill Butler, head groundskeeper for the Lakewood (NJ) BlueClaws, was ejected from his field during the team's Class A South Atlantic League game with the Kannapolis (NC) Intimidators. A tarp dispute led to the ejection. The Friday night game was the fourth of a homestand that took place during nine consecutive days of rain.

There's been considerable media attention to this event and Butler confirms that a search by the National Baseball Hall of Fame revealed no record of a groundskeeper ever previously being ejected in the major or minor leagues.

Butler said, "We had played the three previous games in the rain and had needed to have the field covered during the day, too. Before the fourth game started, the umpires were praising me and the crew for getting in the three previous games. And they asked me to let them know when conditions reached that point that we'd need to shut it down.

"We had pretty steady rain the first three innings. During the fourth inning, the rain really started coming down hard. The coaches were concerned about player safety and agreed the game should be shut down. I relayed that information to the umpires, but they opted to keep it going."

Butler is an STMA member, is working his 13th season in the minor leagues, and has earned Groundskeeper of the Year (now Sports Turf Manager of the Year) honors three times, in three different leagues.

He says, "I've never had a problem with the umpire and crew. I have a lot of respect for them and work with them. But I have to be concerned about the safety of the players and the safety of my crew. No matter how well a field is designed, it reaches a point where it can't take any more. We'd put down all the drying agents that we could, but conditions were getting nasty."

Play was still underway in the sixth inning. Butler says, "By then, I felt it was no longer safe for the players out there. Two batters in a row had been hit because the pitchers couldn't grip the ball. I felt conditions were reaching the point where it would be dangerous for our crew to pull the tarp."

Butler stayed in his customary position for rain events, at the top of the dugout so he could be in eye contact with the umpires. He had a radar printout that confirmed what he told the umpires: there was no window for play without rain.

He says, "I did start barking at them from the dugout, and I shouldn't have done that. Finally, I went out to them with the radar printout. That's when the discussion occurred that led to the ejection. I didn't want to be tossed out and I wasn't trying to show up the umpires. I wasn't worried about the field. We could easily fix it the next day. I was concerned about safety."

Following Butler's ejection, play was stopped and the crew pulled the tarp. Butler says he would much rather be recognized for his work on the field than for his ejection. But, whatever it takes, safety is his number one concern. Which leads me to the closing point of my message: It's more than a job.



BOB CAMPBELL, CSFM

Bob

bcampbell@UTK.edu

Whatever your game,



have a ball on our turf.

From the savage thrashing of rugby, to the deep divots of a weekend golfer, one of our 36 varieties will be the right turfgrass for your application.

Call us today
888-NEW-GRASS
639 4727

Turfgrass America

"Making a positive impact on your environment."

Circle 123 on card or www.oners.ims.ca/2081-123