

# TAKE ME OUT TO THE Ball Game

Two letter carriers  
spend their free time  
as sports officials

**"Strike Three and you're out!"**  
Two carriers utter those words on a regular basis in their capacity as baseball umpires.

Santa Rosa, CA Branch 183 member **Chad Lamb**, who's delivered mail for 25 years and is currently a steward, branch trustee and Formal A rep, has served as a Little League umpire for the past four years in the Napa area of Northern California. As Napa Little League's current umpire in chief, besides officiating at his own scheduled games, some of his duties include making sure umpires are scheduled, ensuring that there is enough equipment for the games, interpreting any rule questions that come up during games, and training new umpires.

Four hundred miles to the south, Tri-Valley, CA Branch 2902 member **Glen Lopez**, a 33-year carrier who also works as lead facilitator at his local Carrier Academy training new carriers, is not

only a high school and adult recreation league baseball and softball umpire, but also a basketball referee for the youth, high school and adult levels in Southern California. He's refereed for basketball in an unofficial capacity for more than three decades, and he has been certified for it for the past 10 years. He's been officially certified for baseball and softball umpiring for eight and five years, respectively.

Each began his hobby because of a simple love of sports.

Lopez played basketball as a guard from age 8 through high school. "I've been around it my whole life," he said, "so I got into refereeing."

His son began playing baseball in elementary school. Lopez wanted to get involved, so he soon started as an umpire, and his participation has escalated from there. His son was fine with it, and Lopez never officiated his games, saying it would be a "conflict of interest."

Lamb also got involved with baseball umpiring because his son played in the league. "It looked like they were short-handed," he said. "I asked about it, and they said, 'We can have you umpire next week.'"

His son, who was around 10 years old when he started playing baseball, enjoyed the fact that his dad would umpire—although never for his games. "When he got old enough, he became an umpire as well," Lamb added.

Lamb has been a lifelong fan of the sport. During his childhood, he says not many games were shown on TV, and most were broadcast only locally to clubs' home cities. He got his baseball

Umpire Chad Lamb (l) referees a game.







fix while growing up mainly by going to minor league baseball games. He then played baseball in a rec league during his seven years in the Air Force. “I played catcher, and admittedly I wasn’t that great, and neither was the team I played on,” he said. “It was fun, though. It was just a local, tiny league that just stayed on base.” (No pun intended.)

Umpiring, he says, is “my way of giving back to sports.”

Being in charge of a game means you can get a variety of reactions from players and parents.

“You never know how people will take things,” Lopez said, but “with experience, you learn to block out the crowd. You’re taught, once you verify a score, you walk out of the building.”

Lamb agreed. “You’ve got to have a thick skin,” he said. “I had one young man—a 9-year-old—I called him out on strikes, and he said, ‘That’s what you think.’

“He, his coach and I had a discussion.”

Despite that interaction, “We don’t see a lot of confrontation,” Lamb said. “You don’t see coaches come screaming out of the dugout. Parents aren’t screaming at you when you leave the field.”

And do they ever ponder later whether a call they made was right or wrong?

“I never question a call, but I evaluate my performance,” Lopez said. “It’s an ongoing self-examination.”

Lamb agreed, saying that umpiring is always a work in progress. “You always try to improve on the game you just called,” he said. “I do not ponder the actual call, because unlike in [Major League Baseball], there’s no calling

New York to get a replay challenge. I just try to work harder about getting into the best position possible, to see the whole picture, to get the call right.”

Both say that working with youngsters is a big plus of the job.

“I enjoy working with the kids,” Lopez said. Lamb says he likes the fact that “I get to see some of the kids mature as ball players throughout the season. It’s fun to watch them develop,” adding that some go from not being able to hit a pitch to getting it out to the outfield.

Serving as a sports official is time-consuming but well worth it, both carriers say, and they are able to work around their postal schedules.

Lopez says that how often he serves as an official varies by sport and division. For the high school leagues, he usually does it three to four times a week, and for the adult leagues, two times a week for each sport. Games can take place both on weekdays and weekends.

He added that assignments are partly based on the official’s experience, partly on the official’s own choices.

Lamb says he serves as an umpire three to four games a week during the busy spring Little League season, which typically begins in late March or early April. In October, there also is “fall ball,” which is “less stress, but gets the kids out there on the field,” Lamb said.

For Little League, “you set your own schedule,” he added. “It’s pretty flexible.”

And every once in a while, both carriers say, they may take some annual leave to officiate a special event, such



as during a championship week or district all-star games.

Those events garner more attention, and sometimes bring more pressure.

“Those games, you have more family attending, more friends, and just baseball fans in general,” Lamb said. “You definitely hear more from the stands.”

“I enjoy it more because I can focus on the game. I get to be a part of some great baseball and see some of the area’s best players in action,” he continued, and added, “The most enjoyable game was when [it] went to extra innings, and this player hit a home run off the scoreboard to win it for his team. It happened to be his first home run he ever hit, and it was a big fly.”

Lopez says big games can bring more attention, but he doesn’t let it faze him. “I treat every game the same. Every one is important, regardless of level of play,” adding that for the players, “this is the game of their life.”

The year 2020 was, of course, an unusual one, due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The season was



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“pretty much canceled” with a year to a year and a half off, Lopez said. “This year, we weren’t sure if there would be a season.” Sadly, the adult leagues were halted, though fortunately in 2021, the students were able to have a condensed two-month season both for

baseball and for basketball, as well as a six-week season for softball.

Last year was the same for Lamb’s league. “We got in a whole week before we had to shut down,” he said. “This year, we started a good month late. It’s still up in the air whether we’ll have district all-stars,” although he’s holding out hope.

When it comes to baseball, position matters.

For Napa Little League, Lamb says that being at home plate can be fun. “It depends on who’s pitching,” he said with a laugh. “You’re kind of getting beat up out there. You’re dealing with 10-, 11- and 12-year olds. You can get some bruises on your thighs.”

Umpiring at a base is less stressful, he said, because the calls are fewer and often less contested, though “you can get some real close-up plays at first [base],” Lamb says.

However, he adds, “No matter what call you made, half the people will love it and half will hate it.”

Lopez explains that for umpiring high school and adult baseball and softball in California, most of the games are a one-person show—just at home plate. “You can always put in your request” for a base position, he said, though it might not get assigned.

For basketball games, it’s always a two-

person assignment. There’s a referee, who is the primary official and is in control of calling the game, tossing the ball and verifying the result. Then there’s an umpire, who is secondary and is in charge of starting and stopping the game clock. Lopez almost always serves as the referee because of his extensive experience.

Both carriers keep up to date on the rules of the sports they officiate.

Lopez takes classes each year to be certified as a referee and umpire for the California Interscholastic Federation, which governs high school sports, and for the Southern California Municipal Athletic Federation for the adult leagues. He also must take annual qualification exams and pass multiple evaluations “to decide what levels you’re authorized to do.” For basketball officiating, he’s a member of the California Basketball Officials Association.

The carrier says there generally are only “minute” changes to the rules each year, though in their training, they also will look at and discuss various problems from the past season, which can be helpful.

Lamb agreed, noting that Little League International, which is the ruling body of Little League, updates some of the rules every few years. “You have to refresh yourself a little bit,” he said.

Luckily, though, Lamb says, as an umpire, you can “always bring your rule book on the field. You can look it up if a question arises.”

Both carriers love officiating and hope to continue for as long as possible.

“It’s fun if you’ve played and followed the game as long as I have,” Lopez said.

Lamb concurred. “I can get outside and enjoy a sport,” he said of umpiring. “This is my way to be a part of a game.” **PR**



Glen Lopez

Below: Glen Lopez makes a call as a basketball referee.

