

# THE INVISIBLE UMPIRE

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There is an old myth, from a bygone era but persistent even to this day, that to be a good umpire you have to be invisible.

In truth, the only time umpires are forced into shedding their cloak of invisibility is when they blow their whistle. And, the only time an umpire blows his or her whistle is when a player or coach has broken a rule. So, unless you're officiating a hockey game in which there will be no fouls, it is impossible for an umpire with eyes, ears and rules knowledge to remain invisible while officiating a hockey game. If you're an umpire who believes you're supposed to be invisible, your only real option is to leave your whistle at home.

What are the two leading mistakes that umpires make during the course of a contest that, essentially, make them invisible? They don't penalize coaches for:

1. Encroaching on the officiating space next to the side line
2. Making negative public statements about the officiating

It's hard to blame umpires who don't card coaches in our "anti-umpire" culture but, good umpires card coaches who behave badly.

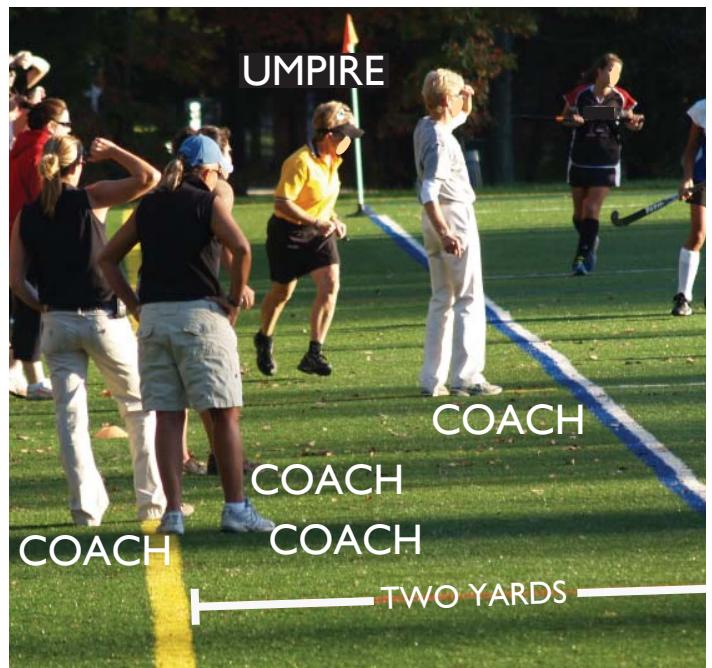
**Here is a photo of coaches encroaching into the officiating space of an "invisible" umpire.**

The photo on the right was taken 10 to 15 minutes after the umpire (in yellow) cupped her hands around her mouth and loudly pleaded with the coaches to *please* get behind the yellow line. This was said loud enough that the umpire's request was heard in the bleachers more than 60 yards away on the far side line.

After politely warning the coaches, did the coaches change their behavior? No. What should the umpire do, ask again – and again, and again?

No. The umpire should card the coaches. The coaches are behaving as if the umpire is invisible.

Even when the umpire nearly collided with one of the coaches, she didn't card the coach.



**Coaches prefer umpires who ignore negative public comments made about the officiating.**

When umpires let a coach's negative comments "roll off their back" they are ignoring the coach's disrespectful behavior and pretending that everyone within an earshot didn't hear the comments. When the umpire doesn't card the coach, everyone sees an umpire who isn't doing his or her job. The umpire not only appears to be invisible, they appear incapable of carrying out their core responsibilities of enforcing the rules. Worse, they teach the coach that disrespectful behavior is okay.

**Why don't umpires card coaches for this kind of disruptive misconduct?** Umpires who card coaches get removed from games, don't get put on a coach's preference list for possible tournament appointments, and are sometimes described with negative attributes by umpires who want to remain popular with coaches and seem more interested in personal advancement than the spirit of the game.