

CAREERS

WHY I... am a cricket umpire

GP Rodger Charlton talks to **Kathy Oxtoby** about the excitement and unpredictability of being a qualified cricket umpire

Rodger Charlton is known as the “Spin Doctor” by members of his local village cricket team in recognition of his skills as a leg spin bowler on the pitch. Even when he’s not playing the game or chairing his local cricket club, he keeps his eyes fixed firmly on the ball as a qualified cricket umpire.

Umpiring has given him time out of clinical practice and a chance to do something completely different and recharge his batteries. “When you’re on the field of play,

MAKING THE CHANGE

- Invest in cricket umpire clothing—short white jacket, black trousers, and an approved floppy hat for sun protection
- You’ll need sun cream and you’ll be standing for long periods of time so will need a decent pair of trainers that will also protect you from the ball
- General information about the Association of Cricket Officials, for umpires and scorers, is at www.ecb.co.uk/play/officials/ecb-aco
- Umpire training courses can be found at www.ecb.co.uk/play/officials/courses/umpiring. Searching under each county lets you know what is happening in each locality
- The laws of cricket from Marylebone Cricket Club are at www.lords.org/mcc/the-laws-of-cricket
- Once you are a member of the Association of Cricket Officials there is a multiple choice quiz to test your knowledge. Being a member also provides you with a lot of information, courses, insurance, and Disclosure and Barring Service checks



the only thing you can—and should—think about is the game in front of you. Every other anxiety or worry is forgotten,” he says.

“Some might say cricket is boring and a very slow game. But there is never a boring moment—it’s exciting and unpredictable,” says Charlton, a GP and professor of undergraduate primary care education at Leicester Medical School. “As an umpire you’re constantly having to make sure you know exactly what’s happening, and you need to make the correct decisions to move the game on as quickly as possible. It’s an intense experience.”

Umpiring also gets you out of your comfort zone, Charlton says, as an opportunity to gain a new skill, “and makes you realise there’s more to life than medicine.” He adds, “It’s great for your wellbeing, for being outdoors, and for making sure you stay physically fit. You need to be able to move out of the way of a cricket ball. For my own safety, I never take my eyes off it.”

Growing up in Belfast, Charlton’s experience of cricket was confined to watching test matches on television, as there were no opportunities to learn to play at his school. Then in 1999, while working as a GP at Hampton Surgery in Solihull, he joined Berkswell village cricket team, where his son was a member—having never played a match.

After some professional coaching, “I discovered I could hold my own as a leg spin bowler,” he says. He became obsessed with cricket, playing every Sunday and at every other opportunity. Then in 2016 during what he describes as “the misery season”—the winter, when there is no cricket—he went on an umpiring course. Having qualified as an umpire, Charlton has officiated at league matches of every format and travelled all over Warwickshire, as well as further afield.

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To be a successful umpire it is vital to know the laws of cricket, which are considerable, Charlton says, as well as the regulations for each individual match and competition.

Impartiality is vital and decisions made shouldn’t linger post-match. “An umpire colleague once said to me, ‘Never ruminate over a decision you’ve made but move on to the next ball that’s being delivered—and don’t take any decisions home with you, wondering whether or not you’ve got it wrong or right,’” he says.

Umpires also need to be able to manage confrontation, Charlton says. “Sometimes players forget their social skills and the scapegoat is often the person needing to make the decision—the umpire. The professionalism of players is sometimes lacking, and it’s up to you to lead by

example.” When umpiring Charlton draws on his skills as a clinician, where he has learnt to be calm in challenging situations, and to communicate with people from all walks of life.

He doesn’t advertise his medical expertise, however. “I feel it’s important that people do not know you’re a doctor, and that you only act in an emergency situation—which has been necessary on occasion, such as reducing the dislocation on a wicket keeper’s finger,” Charlton says.

There are times when being an umpire can be challenging “so you have to really love the game,” he says. “But if you enjoy cricket, and want to get involved, you’ll have a front seat and the best view on the pitch.”

Kathy Oxtoby, London

Cite this as: *BMJ* 2024;384:q399