**Open Space**

By Gwen Reisenberg 8:28 AM Wed 08 Jun, 2011

It is time umpires were celebrated by fans, says reader Gwen Reisenberg

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OK, SO I know it's not AFL umpires appreciation week or anything but.....

As an undiscovered sports analyst and avid fan of the game itself, I am appalled by the views of the masses regarding the umpires. Umpires are the most underrated commodity in the AFL.

I have witnessed many a conversation between supporters of a team staring in the face of defeat or simply not playing well; on most occasions the umpires were completely responsible for the loss or poor performance.

The 22 players selected to play that day could not have done any more as the umpires obviously "had it in for them".

As a whole I think the umpires do a remarkable job.  In a game with ever increasing rule changes and one of the fastest paced sports in the world, the umpires have to be just as quick if not quicker than the players themselves.

I am constantly amazed at the ability of the umpires to see things almost quicker than the human eye.

Watching a game on TV recently, I saw many incidents where I was left thinking "how in the world did they see that?" when I saw absolutely nothing until the slow motion replay pointed it out to me.

The ability and fitness of the men in yellow (or red or green) to get to every contest is unbelievable and I have no doubt that they train just as hard as the players themselves.

The football supporters are an unforgiving bunch. I find it strange that fans will boo an incorrect umpiring decision but will not boo a player who makes a poor decision under pressure because this would be 'unsportsmanlike'.

I am full of admiration for the umpires at the highest level. They have done their time just like any other player on the field and no doubt have the same injury concerns, training and recovery sessions as any AFL player.

The difference being that they do it without the fanfare and special treatment that comes with a high profile.

Umpires are a nameless, faceless bunch that get no favours from the football community. They are not celebrated for milestone achievements nor are they recognised for the time and effort they put into each and every game they adjudicate.

Without them the game doesn't go on, it's as simple as that.

AFL players are put on pedestals for taking a good mark or kicking a 'miracle' goal.  The men in yellow are never cheered openly for making a correct decision as this is considered 'their job'.

I for one am tired of the 'maggot' label and feel the football community as a whole need to move on from this old-school behaviour in the same way that we are moving forward in areas such as racial or sexual vilification.

This sort of behaviour no longer has a place in today's society and football 'ferals' are no exception.

To all those football followers out there who are so quick to judge the AFL's invaluable assets - I'd invite them to walk a mile (or run 20km) in an umpire's shoes and see if they can do a better job. I highly doubt it.
 *Gwen Reisenberg is a Geelong supporter and self-titled 'armchair sports journalist'.*

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