

ECWLL Volunteer & Youth Umpires 2009 Training Manual

Umpires are a vital part of the Little League experience. ECWLL will continue to offer our very successful Youth Umpire program to train responsible teens in the art of umpiring.

El Cajon Western Little League will provide an opportunity for adults and the youth of our community to be involved as Volunteer or Youth Umpires. The goal of the ECWLL Program is to build a core group of well-trained adult Volunteer and 11 to 17 year old Youth Umpires.

The benefits of an Umpire Development Program are many:

- Makes the program better by increasing the number of games covered by trained umpires
- Provides better coverage of games at a lower cost
- The Youth Umpire Program keeps older kids involved in baseball
- Youth umpires tend to stay involved later on as adults
- Fosters a sense of community – the ump isn't an outsider, it's your neighbor, or that nice kid down the street, or **you**. Umpiring is time-consuming; not only games, but also to complete the vital study and training needed to become a minimally competent umpire. It is a lot to expect of an adult volunteer to buy equipment and spend time learning to be an umpire and then spend the time doing it, all for nothing.

Thus ECWLL will provide all volunteer umpires with t- shirts and hats as uniforms for all ECWLL umpires, and also provide all protective equipment need by plate umpires to run a games as needed. Volunteer and Youth umpires will be **compensated 1 hot dog and 1 drink or the equivalent to \$2:50 at the snack bar at the end of the game, Along with water during the course for the game.**

All Youth and Volunteer Umpires will be fully supported by ECWLL to ensure their involvement is a positive experience. Whether there is the need for rules discussion or interpretation, feedback and evaluation, reviewing game situations, or dealing with coaches and parents, umpires are supported in several ways:

- The Umpire-in-Chief and Umpire Coordinator, who report directly to the ECWLL Board of Directors
- The full support of the ECWLL Board of Directors In order to foster a feeling of mutual respect for each other and for the game ECWLL has these expectations of umpires:
 - Prompt for games
 - Professional in appearance and manner
 - Knowledgeable about the rules
 - Consistent in game administration
 - Flexible relative to player level (e.g. 9-10 year olds)
 - Courteous and helpful to players
 - Aware of safety issues

Introduction

I'm sure as a new umpire you have many questions. Let's start with the most fundamental question of all:

What is an umpire?

- ⌘ An umpire watches a baseball game and tells everybody what just happened.
- That's a strike, that's a ball, that runner is safe, that runner is out.
- It ain't nothin' until you say it is.

On to the next question:

What is an umpire's job?

- ⌘ An umpire's job is to make sure the game is played properly by the rules so that neither team gains an advantage not intended by the rules.
- ⌘ It is not the umpire's job to be "fair".
- 4.01 (d) as soon as the home team's batting order is handed to the umpire-in-chief, the umpires are in charge of the playing field
- 9.01(b) Each umpire has authority to order a player, coach, manager or league officer to do or refrain from doing anything that affects the administering of these rules and to enforce the prescribed penalties.
- ⌘ Only you know what the weather's like today:
- 3.10 (b) The umpire-in-chief shall be the sole judge as to whether and when play shall be suspended during a game because of unsuitable weather conditions or the unfit condition of the playing field; as to whether and when play shall be resumed after such suspension; and as to whether and when a game shall be terminated after such suspension.
- ⌘ Just like in *The Matrix*, you get to suspend time and kill things:
- Rule 3.12 -- When the umpire suspends play, "Time" shall be called. At the umpire's call of "Play" the suspension is lifted and play resumes. Between the call of "Time" and the call of "Play" the ball is dead.

The Basics

Your part in this play we call Little League Baseball is *The Authority Figure*. If you look the part and act the part, you'll get treated the way you should be: with respect. This starts the minute you show up at the field.

The basics of umpiring are very simple:

- ⌘ Look professional
- ⌘ Act professional

Look Professional

An umpire who takes pride in his appearance also takes pride in his game. Respect is all about perception. If you look sloppy on the field and look like you don't care, you become a target. And you deserve it.

Wear your uniform with pride. You have earned it. This means:

- ⌘ Uniform shirt – clean and neat
- ⌘ Uniform hat - never worn backwards
- ⌘ Black pants – clean and pressed – no shorts, windpants, sweats, etc.
- ⌘ Shinguards under your pants
- ⌘ Black shoes – clean and shined if you can
- ⌘ Black belt with ball bag, keep plate brush in the ball bag, never on the ground

Act Professional

- ⌘ Know the rules. Study the rules. Always learn: if you make a mistake, go over the rule after the game.
- ⌘ Show up on time, looking like a pro and ready to go.
- ⌘ Take charge: your authority is assumed, act that way. Just because the manager is 40 and you're 14 means nothing. You are the umpire. You are in charge. Don't be a jerk about it – just act like it's assumed you are.
- ⌘ Be pleasant. Be polite. But, be firm. You are well-trained. You know the rules. Be confident out there.
- ⌘ Take your time on calls: Pause-read-react. There is nothing to be gained by rushing except trouble.
- ⌘ Your calls: Make 'em loud and make 'em proud – everyone has a right to know what your call is.
- ⌘ Don't hesitate. The best way to avoid confrontations is to be in the correct position to make the right call, and to "sell" close plays with confident verbal and hand signals. Don't show off though – you are not the show.
- ⌘ Don't argue. Listen to reason, but be firm. If you are sure you made the right call, say so, and move on with the game. If you are not sure, listen, use your best judgment, make the call, and move on.
- ⌘ Don't be afraid to confer with your partner if you are not sure on something.
- ⌘ If a manager asks you to check with your partner, do it, but remember it's still your call.
- ⌘ Be a team out there: support your partner. Don't change his calls; you aren't supposed to. If you think your partner missed something, when the play is over, call time and go to your partner first away from the players and coaches. Talk it over. Get it right. Then, whoever made the initial call announces what the call is now.
- ⌘ If a manager insists they want to protest, let them. Note it in the book, and move on.
- ⌘ Even professionals make mistakes: treat each call as a new one. Don't ever try and “even things up” if you blow a call. Fix it if you can (more on this later), and move on.
- ⌘ Smile and be nice – it goes a long way towards making things run smoothly.

Top 10 Advice List For New Blues

by Mario Fiermonte

1. Always watch the BALL, and you will likely not miss an important play.
2. Never SEARCH for rules violations, as they will usually become obvious, and don't attempt to call an obscure violation unless you completely understand the rule.
3. Don't let inane comments bother you. Parents, and coaches will usually say things like "that looked close" and the like, but they are not meant to undermine your authority. Save your 'authority' for prevention of direct, mean spirited, or repeatedly disruptive personal attacks.
4. Read your rulebook regularly. Rereading it will cause you to see things you missed the first time. Anything that doesn't sound right probably means you don't have the right understanding of the rule. Ask someone with experience. Refer to #2 above.
5. Never hover around a particular dugout, or mingle too closely with players and spectators, as this will cause problems. You don't want it to look like you favor one team or the other.
6. ALWAYS back up your partner, and NEVER make him look like a fool. If you really disagree with a rules call (not a judgment call), take him aside if time permits, and let him know what you think. Let HIM decide if he wants to make your (comments/advice/observation) public knowledge and reverse his call.
7. Let coaches know how you feel about certain types of behavior before the game begins but don't be an jerk. Treat them with courtesy, and they will hopefully make at least a feeble attempt to treat you the same way.
8. NEVER get into a shouting match with a spectator. Go to the offender's team manager, and politely ask him to control his parent(s) or HE'S gone. You have NO AUTHORITY over spectators.
9. Always make calls with clear, firm decisiveness, and confidence.
10. Dress appropriately, look sharp, have the right equipment. To do otherwise undermines everything you represent.

Advice for Working Little League Solo

by Alex Pufhal, Maine Little League District 6 Umpire, Western Maine Baseball Umpires Association

In pre-game I tell the managers that I'm the only umpire, I'm going to do everything I can to get the call right and am going to do the best to get in position. My judgment is still my judgment.

Make an effort, sell your calls and you'll be fine. Don't wave your arms around like a fish on a close call that you may have missed, be emphatic, be strong. If you're wrong on a non-obvious call and gave it a strong effort you'll be better off than showing you missed the call by making a timid call or signal.

Coach, if you get a couple of borderline 7.13s (leaving early) calls and you know the other manager put the bug in my ear that he thinks your runners might be leaving early but I'm not close enough to tell for sure, then, coach, tell your runners to stay on the bag. They usually do and that's that.

I've had a couple of situations on check swings. Not having anyone to go to I've had offensive managers say that yes their batter went around. Works for me.

Be intense, work hard and do the best you can.

Rules

Umpires need to know the rules. You can know all the rules and still not be a good umpire, but you can't be a good umpire if you don't know the rules.

We will be covering the rules in some detail in class. Don't worry if you don't remember them all right away.

Professional umpires spend years studying the rules and they still make mistakes. Do your best out there, and use your common sense and judgment.

What Do I Do When I Don't Know the Rule ?

You will find yourself in a situation where you can't remember the right rule. The first thing to remember is to calm down and think.

It helps to think in terms of advantage and disadvantage. In other words, if the rule really was the way I think it is, how could the defense or the offense take unfair advantage of it, or be unfairly disadvantaged ?

For example, some people think it's a hit batsman and not a strike if the pitch hits a batter in the strike zone. Think for a second: what if this was true ? Imagine its bases loaded, 2 outs, 0-2 count, tie score, bottom of the last inning.

Why wouldn't a batter just lean into the strike zone and get hit ? If it was a hit batsman, that's what they would do, and that's not baseball. It's not right. So, the rules makers said "A pitch that hits the batter in the strike zone is a strike, and the ball is dead". It's right there in Rule 2.00 STRIKE (f). Why is the ball dead ? Think for a second – what if the count above was 0-0 – if the ball wasn't dead, a batter could deflect a pitch away from the defense, and the runner on 3rd would score the winning run. That's not fair, it's not right, and it's not baseball, so the ball is dead.

Rulebook Dos and Don'ts

Don't bring your rulebook on the field, even in your back pocket or ball bag.

Do make sure there is a rulebook at the field. If you have a small cooler or bag with keys or cash, keep it in there.

Don't let the coach come out of the dugout waving a rulebook. He's effectively saying to the crowd "See, he doesn't know the rules. I'll show HIM !" Do say "Coach, please put that away. If we need to consult it, I'll ask you for it. Don't ever do that again." Chances are you know the rule better than him anyways.

If during a discussion on a play you do need the book, don't hesitate to ask the coach for it. They're supposed to have one. If they don't, then do take the time to go get yours, or go to the hut or shed to get one and get it right.

If after you've warned him not to the coach comes waving the rulebook again, do eject him. You've already warned him, and he's just showing you up. Don't tolerate that; you don't have to.

Do read your rulebook from cover to cover at least 3 or 4 times every year.

Don't just toss it in a bag or on a shelf and never look at it. There are lots of rules and it's easy to confused sometimes, or to forget one. All good umpires, even ones who have umpired for years read their rulebooks.

Changing versus Correcting a Call

by Carl Childress

Calls can't be changed except in five instances.

But an umpire can always CORRECT a call if he does it immediately after the play. It looks bad, but it's better

than sticking with the wrong call.

"Changing" a call implies the umpire, after a discussion with a skipper or other umpire, has altered his decision.

"Correcting" a call means he's calls "Out!" and then immediately "Safe!" when he sees the ball pop out of the glove.

For example, the umpire quickly signals a catch on a fly ball, and then the outfielder drops it. The instant the ball

fell from the glove, he should have yelled "No Catch! No catch!" and signaled safe vigorously.

It's just like at first base. The ball nips the runner, and the umpire sells out. The ball pops out of F3's glove.

Sheepishly, the umpire will then signal "Safe!" and make a mental note to slow down his timing.

The five instances when a call can be changed:

1. two umpires make different calls on the same play;
2. a rule is misinterpreted;
3. a home run is changed to a double and vice versa
4. a half swing called a ball becomes a strike; and
5. the ball pops free on a tag, and another umpire sees it.

50 Rule Myths of Little League Baseball

Each myth is followed by the rules that apply - either to disprove it or show there's nothing in the rule to support it.

1. The hands are considered part of the bat. - 1.10, 6.05(f), 6.08(b)
2. The batter-runner must turn to his right after overrunning first base. - 7.08(c) & (j)
3. If the batter breaks his wrist when swinging, it's a strike. - 2.00 - Strike
4. If a batted ball hits the plate first, it's a foul ball. - 2.00 - Fair Ball & Foul Ball
5. The batter cannot be called out for interference if he is in the batter's box. - 6.06(c)
6. On a foul tip, the umpire must announce "Foul," and the ball is dead. - 2.00 - Foul Tip
7. The batter may not switch batter's boxes after two strikes. - 6.06(b)
8. The batter who batted out of order is the person declared out. - 6.07(b)
9. The batter may not overrun first base when he gets a base-on-balls. - 7.08(c)
10. A runner is always out if a batter ball hit him. - 7.08(f)
11. If the batter keeps his bat in the strike zone while bunting, it's an automatic strike. - 2.00 - Bunt & Strike
12. The batter is out if a bunted ball hits the ground, bounces back up and hits the bat again. - 6.05(g)
13. The batter is out if his foot touches the plate when he hits the ball. - 6.06(a)
14. The batter-runner is always out if he runs outside the running lane after a bunted ball. - 6.05(j)
15. A runner is out if he high-fives a coach or other players after he hits a homerun over the fence. - 7.09(i)

16. Tie goes to the runner. - 6.05(i), 7.08(e)
 17. The runner gets the base he's going to, plus one base on a ball thrown out-of-play. - 7.05(g)
 18. In an Infield Fly situation, the umpire must call it anytime the ball is popped up in the infield. - 2.00 Infield Fly
 19. Runners may never run the bases in reverse order. - 7.02
 20. The runner must always slide when the play is close. - 7.08(a)(3)
 21. The runner is always safe when hit by a batted ball while touching a base. - 7.08(f)
 22. A runner must physically make contact with a fielder making a play to be called out for interference. - 7.09
 23. It is a force out and no runs can score when a runner is called out for not tagging up on a fly ball. - 7.10(a)
 24. An appeal on a runner who missed a base cannot be a force out. - 7.10(b)
 25. A runner is out if he runs out of the baseline to avoid a fielder who is fielding a batted ball. - 7.08(a)(1)
 26. Runners may not advance when an infield fly is called. - 2.00 – Infield Fly
 27. An umpire interferes if he gets in the way when the catcher goes after a wild pitch/passed ball. - 2.00 Interference, 5.09(b)
 28. A pitch that bounces to the plate cannot be hit. - 2.00 - Ball & Strike
 29. The batter does not get first base if hit by a pitch after it bounces. - 2.00 - Ball
 30. If a fielder holds a fly ball for 2 seconds, it's a catch. - 2.00 - Catch
 31. You must tag the base with your foot on a force out or appeal. - 6.05(i)
 32. The ball is immediately dead on an illegal pitch. - 7.08(c)
 33. If a player's feet are in fair territory when the ball is touched, it is always a fair ball. - 2.00 - Fair Ball & Foul Ball
 34. The ball must always be returned to the pitcher before an appeal can be made. - 2.00 - Appeal
 35. A batter is automatically out if he throws the bat. - 6.05
 36. A fielder must make physical contact with a base runner for obstruction to occur. - 2.00 - Obstruction, 7.06
 37. The pitcher cannot take signs from his manager or coach. - 8.01, 8.02
 38. If a fielder catches a fly ball and then falls over the fence, it is a homerun. - 2.00 - Catch, 6.09(h), 7.05 (a)
 39. The ball is dead anytime that an umpire is hit by the ball. - 5.09(f)
 40. The manager must appeal a bad call to the plate umpire. - 9.02(b)
 41. The manager can visit his pitcher once every inning. - 8.06(a)
 42. The pitcher cannot wear a white T-shirt under his uniform. - 1.11(a)(3)
 43. A fielder cannot fake a catch to decoy a runner into slowing down. - 2.00 Interference & Obstruction
 44. A runner is out if he collides with the fielder who is attempting to catch a throw from the outfield. - 7.08(b)
 45. If a runner leaves a base early, he cannot score. - 7.13
 46. If a runner misses home plate, he can always go back and touch it for the run to count. - 7.10(b)
- Approved Ruling 2
47. A starter must play six consecutive outs and bat once before a sub can replace him. - 3.03
 48. Players on the bench may yell to distract a fielder from catching a pop fly. - 2.00 - Interference
 49. A fielder can't trick a runner into returning to a previous base by telling him a pitch was fouled off. - 2.00 - Interference & Obstruction
 50. The official scorekeeper must inform the umpire when a team is batting out of order. - 6.07 Note

The Most Misunderstood Rules in Little League Baseball

Some of the material below is original, and some was adapted from text prepared by Manny Aponte, Central Springfield, VA LL

The Little League Strike Zone (2.00)

“The STRIKE ZONE is that space over home plate which is between the batter’s armpits and the top of the knees when the batter assumes a natural stance. The umpire shall determine the strike zone according to the batter’s usual stance when that batter swings at a pitch.”

The strike zone on TV or at a big league game (Left Strike Zone) is not the Little League one. The Little League strike zone is higher than the one in the Major Leagues, and it’s the Right Strike Zone.

Remember: The offense interferes, the defense obstructs.

Interference - Rule 2.00 and 7.09

The umpire must judge that someone on the offense "interferes with, obstructs, impedes, hinders or confuses" a defensive player who is trying to make a play on the ball. Some interference calls are easy, such as a runner being struck by a batted ball, or a runner colliding with a fielder trying to field a batted ball. The troublesome ones are when the umpire must judge the intent of the runner, such as:

- a. A runner makes contact with a thrown ball. The umpire must be convinced that the runner intentionally interfered with the throw (raised arms, timed it so ball hits him, etc.)
- b. A runner makes contact with or gets in the way of a fielder trying to field a thrown ball. INTENT is required here. If a runner just runs into a fielder while that fielder is waiting for a throw, it’s not interference unless the umpire judges the runner intentionally ran into him.
- c. A runner doesn’t contact a fielder fielding a batted ball, but causes him to miss it by some other action. Contact is not needed for interference. So if a runner: yells at a fielder as he runs behind him; waves his arms at the fielder; runs at the fielder and stops at the last second, stops in front of the fielder and jumps over the ball, etc., AND the umpire judges that this act caused the fielder to miss the batted ball, it’s interference.
- d. A base coach or someone from the bench gets in the way or yells "DROP IT". The rule says any member of the team at bat, not just the batter or runner, can cause interference.

Batter's Interference – Rule 6.06(c)

There are things a batter does (or fails to do) that are interference, and other things he does (or fails to do) that do not. Confused? First off, the batter's box is NOT a safety zone for the batter. If he's in the box, he's usually OK in these situations:

- a. The ball gets by the catcher and the catcher knocks over the batter trying to get to the ball (no penalty, live ball)

- b. The catcher throws the ball back to the pitcher or to a base to retire a base stealer, and the ball hits the batter or his bat (no penalty, live ball UNLESS the batter PURPOSELY moves into the catcher or the path of the ball)
- c. The batter swings so hard that he hits the catcher's glove on the follow-through, knocking the ball away from the catcher (dead ball, runners return)
- d. However, if the batter had time to get out of the box but stays in and gets in the way, then he's guilty of interference. This usually happens in lower levels when the ball gets by the catcher, a runner tries to score, and the batter stays in the box and affects the play at the plate. If the batter gets in the way of a play while OUT OF THE BOX, he will almost certainly be guilty of interference, even if it's unintentional.

Obstruction – Rule 2.00 and 7.06

Like interference, this is a tough call when there is no contact. If a runner has to slow down or stop because of a fielder's action OTHER THAN fielding a batted ball, you have obstruction. Examples of obstruction that are not so obvious:

- a. A fielder boots the initial play, and then gets in the runner's way as he goes after the ball. No interference here on the runner because the fielder booted the ball. The fielder is only “protected” on the initial play, not a subsequent play after his error.
- b. A batter-runner has to slow down on his way to first because the first baseman is standing on the base. This happens a lot in the lower divisions.
- c. A fielder stands in the baseline or puts his leg down and blocks the base or plate well before he has the ball. A fielder cannot block the base while he is waiting for the throw to come in.
- d. Remember that there are two types of obstruction: Type A, where the defense is making a play on the obstructed runner (immediate dead ball), and Type B where the runner is obstructed while play is going on elsewhere (play goes on).

Must-slide rule (7.08a3):

There is no must-slide rule in Little League. Never has been. Never will be.

The runner has three options when the fielder HAS THE BALL AND IS WAITING TO MAKE THE TAG: slide, attempt to get around the fielder, or go back to the previous base. If the runner does neither and goes in standing up, he's out. But if he attempts to get around and successfully avoids the tag without going out of the baseline, he's safe.

Remember, the fielder must have the ball and be waiting to make the tag.

If the ball is on its way to the base, or the ball and runner get there simultaneously, and there's contact because the runner didn't slide or attempt to get around, this is just a collision.

Out of the baseline (7.08a1):

The confusion with this rule is the definition of “baseline”.

The runner establishes the baseline. It is not necessarily the direct line between the two bases.

For example, if the runner takes a wide turn at first into the grass behind the second baseman's normal position, and the throw comes back to first, the baseline goes from the runner to first base.

If the first baseman tries to tag him, he cannot deviate more than three feet to either side of this line. The other source of confusion with this rule is the fact that the runner is not out for being out of the baseline unless he's avoiding a tag. If he's running around a fielder who is trying to field a batted ball, there is no violation.

Base awards on a bad throw (7.05g)

There's a myth that the runners get "one plus one" on a throw that goes out of play. Not in LL. The runners always get two bases from the last base legally touched depending on who makes the throw and when the throw is made.

a. If the throw is the first play by an infielder, the runners get two bases from the time of the pitch.

b. If the throw is a subsequent play by an infielder, or any throw by an outfielder, the runners get two bases from the time of the throw (the moment the ball leaves the fielder's hand) (not the time the ball goes out of play).

c. If the throw comes after all runners, including the batter, have reached their next bases, the runners get two bases from the time of the throw.

d. The umpire must make some judgment calls here. He must first judge whether the throw is the first play by an infielder. For example, if the shortstop steps on second and then throws to first to complete a double play, his throw is a subsequent play, the first play being the out at second. The other judgment the umpire must make is determining where the runners were at the time the throw left the fielder's hand. A runner could be a step away from second when a throw is made, and halfway to third when the throw finally goes out of play. Here, the base award would be two bases from first base, the last base legally touched before the throw.

Infield Fly (2.00)

Most everyone understands when the infield fly is in effect (runners at first and second or bases loaded with less than two outs). The trouble comes when the umpire must judge one thing: is the fly ball one that an infielder may catch with ordinary effort?

"*Ordinary effort*" is judged differently at the different levels; ordinary effort for AAA Majors shortstop may not be ordinary effort to an AA Minors shortstop, and just about any popup on the infield of an A Minors game is beyond ordinary!

An umpire may judge that a ball hit to short left field warrants an Infield Fly call, whereas a ball hit behind second base (shortstop and second baseman must run hard to get to it) does not. Also, if an outfielder catches the ball but the umpire judges an infielder could have made the catch with ordinary effort, an Infield Fly call is valid. It is entirely up to the umpire to judge "ordinary effort".

If the umpires fail to call Infield Fly when it was obvious they should have, and the defense fails to catch the ball and subsequently turns a cheap double play the umpires shall retroactively enforce the infield fly rule and place the runners back.

The ball is live during an infield fly. Once the ball is touched or hits the ground the runners may advance at their own risk.

Appeals (7.10)

An APPEAL is an act of a fielder in claiming violation of the rules by the offensive team. Appeals must be made to the umpire that made the call being appealed.

Appeals must be made while the ball is in play (Alive).

You don't have to wait until the ball is dead to appeal. Example: Batter doubles but missed first base. You don't have to get the ball back to the pitcher and throw to 1b; you may simply throw to 1b and make an appeal.

When the ball does become dead, you must put it in play before appealing. It becomes in play when the pitcher has the ball and is on the rubber and the umpire says "play".

When the ball is alive an appeal may be made by the defense in any of the following ways:

- 1) By touching the runner whom they believe committed a base running infraction;
- 2) By touching the base they believe was missed while the runner was advancing;
- 3) By touching the original base that a runner left before a fly ball was caught.

An appeal should be clearly intended as an appeal, either by a verbal request by the player or an act that unmistakably indicates to the umpire that it is an appeal. In all cases, the defense must make a verbal appeal to the umpire or complete an act that is unmistakably an appeal.

Appeals must be made before the next pitch or play. If the defense makes an appeal after "time" has been called, the umpire should say something like "Put the ball in play and appeal again." Since no runner may advance or be put out while the ball is dead, this is not a play and the defense has not lost their right to appeal.

The appeal itself is not a play. A fake throw to hold a runner is not a play. It is a play when a balk is committed during an appeal. Plays that occur during "continuous action" after an infraction do not cancel the defense's right to appeal.

What is a play? This definition comes from the MLBUM:

A play or attempted play is interpreted as a legitimate effort by a defensive player who has possession of the ball to actually retire a runner. This may include an actual attempt to tag a runner, a fielder running toward a base with the ball in an attempt to force or tag a runner, or actually throwing to another defensive player in an attempt to retire a runner. (The fact that the runner is not out is not relevant.) A fake or a feint to throw shall not be deemed a play or an attempted play.

The defense loses their right to appeal when any of the following actions occur:

- When the throw made in an appeal attempt goes into dead ball territory. Then, no more appeals may be made at any base. This is the "err" in Rule 7.10 on an appeal and is interpreted to be the same as a play.
- A pitch is made to the batter.
- A balk is committed before or as part of an appeal attempt.
- A play is made that is not part of continuous action. Continuous action example: Runner on 1b misses 2b as he goes to 3b on a hit. The defense makes a play on him at 3b and he's safe. The play was part of continuous action after the hit, therefore, yes; the defense may appeal the infraction at 2b.
- Successive appeals may not be made on the same runner at the same base. You can appeal the same runner at another base. Example: Batter triples and misses 2b. Defense appeals at 1b, denied. They can appeal the miss at 2b.

Leaving the base early (7.13)

This rule is unique to LL, and may cause umpires a lot of headaches. The bottom line: if any base runner leaves a base before the pitch reaches a batter, all runners are guilty, and depending on the subsequent action, all runners must return to any unoccupied bases. The Rule Book has a number of examples that are pretty straightforward. Some that are less well-understood:

1. If the batter is subsequently thrown out on a play, ALL RUNNERS return. For example, a batter hits a double with the bases loaded, but gets gunned down trying to stretch it into a triple. Since his out left all the bases open, no runs score and all runners must return. If his out was the third out of the inning, no runs score and the inning is over ! Expect the offensive manager to be very peeved by this.
2. The runners can only advance to the bases they would have achieved based on the umpire's judgment of the base value of the hit, regardless of any subsequent errors. For example, a batter hits a sharp grounder to the centerfielder with the bases loaded, and the ball goes under the centerfielder's legs all the way to the fence. After the play is over, the umpire may judge the value of the hit was a single. If so, he would put the batter on first, and put the other runners on second and third (only one run scores).
3. If with the bases loaded the ball doesn't leave the infield, no runs score. This is explained in Example 15 in the Rule Book. What is not explained is if the ball is hit in the infield and then goes through because of an error on the fielder. Here the umpire should rule that the value of the hit is only one base, so everyone only gets one base and one run scores.
4. The POOF play: if the bases are loaded and ball doesn't leave the infield and the batter reaches safely, no runs can score. The runner from 3b simply disappears - POOF ! He doesn't score, and he doesn't remain on base. If the manager asks how to put this in the scorebook, say "Write POOF in his space."
5. If a runner leaves early, he cannot correct his mistake by returning to touch the base. For example, a runner on second leaves early, then sees the ball is flied to right. He tags up and tries for third, and ends up scoring on a wild throw. He must return to second because he left early, regardless of the fact he subsequently tagged it. There is no "fixing" a 7.13 violation.

Batting Out of Order (6.07)

This one is ALWAYS fun to try and straighten out. To simplify the rule, you must understand one basic premise: the PROPER batter (the one who should have batted) is the one who is called out. Here's more to try to clear this up:

- The ONLY time the proper batter is called out is when the defense appeals after the improper batter completes his time at-bat (getting on base or making an out).
- If the defense appeals while the improper batter is batting, the proper batter simply replaces the improper batter, and the proper batter assumes the count.
- Any base running advances or put outs while the improper batter is up are upheld.
- Any base running advances or put outs when the improper batter puts the ball in play are nullified (so if an improper batter hits into a double play, the defense may not want to say anything !)

- If the defense fails to appeal an improper batter before the next pitch or play, the improper batter is now “legalized”, and next up is the person following the legalized batter in the order.
- The scorekeeper is NOT ALLOWED to bring this situation to the umpire’s attention. It is the manager’s responsibility to catch a batting out of order situation and to inform the umpire.
- The umpire is not allowed to bring this situation to anyone’s attention either. That’s the manager’s job.

Let’s Go To Work

OK, so now it’s time for your first game. How’s this whole thing work ? How does a game unfold ? What do I do

first ? What do I expect the managers and players to do ? What do I do after the game ?

BEFORE THE GAME

1. Get to the game on time. Show up early (at least 15 minutes). No one likes to wait.
2. Confer with your partner. Get together on signs and signals. Make sure you know who has the plate. If you are supposed to have the bases, but it is 10 minutes before the game, and he isn’t here, put on the plate gear. He’s late. He gets the bases.
3. Make sure the managers have the field prepared on time. The home team should line the field. Make sure there are no safety issues – walk around the field. Look for broken fences, broken glass, trash on the field, broken gates, holes in the ground, standing water, and anything else that’s unsafe and anything that could trap a ball. Make the managers fix it before you start the game. You want to impress them with your dedication ? Help them do the job. You don’t have to, but sometimes they don’t get much help. Also, it’s kind of embarrassing, and it makes them feel like they owe you something.
4. Monitor the pre-game warm-ups as stipulated in NABCLL policy. Each team is allotted ten minutes to do infield/outfield warm ups before the game. And then we still need five minutes for the plate conference. So, have your plate conference at 5:25 for a 5:30 game. Move things along. Start on time.
5. Clear the field of players, and then have the plate conference. Introduce yourself to the managers, and learn their names, and get the game balls. It is easier to have a discussion later if you refer to each other by name. The home plate umpire stands behind the plate, and the base umpire out in front. The managers are on either side. The managers are supposed to give you their lineups, home team first, so ask for them, and now you are in charge. If they don’t have them, you are in charge once you asked.
6. Go over the ground rules at the plate conference: things like where dead ball territory is, keep gates closed, if there are holes in the fence what will happen if the ball goes in there, etc. Be brief.
7. Make sure the players are properly equipped and ready to play. Cups, shoes, masks, other gear, and two game balls to the umpire. Ask this question at the plate conference: “Are all your players legally equipped ?” That covers everything: male catchers without cups, cracked helmets, dented bats, etc.

8. Male catchers must wear a cup, no exceptions. I know, “let the kids play”; it’s fun until the bell rings. Ask your catcher if he’s wearing a cup. It is not necessary to ask them for a “cup check” (knock-knock). If they want to perform a “cup check”, fine. If you catch one without after you’ve asked, you have every right to give his manager the third degree. He deserves it, the knucklehead, sending a catcher out there without a cup. Now, sometimes kids lie about it because they want to catch real bad. If you catch them, you’ll have to be the bad guy. No cup, no catch, no exceptions.
9. Make sure catcher’s masks have dangling throat protectors. There are extras at the field. If you give one to a manager, get it back after the game. If you forget, please report it so it can be replaced immediately. Make sure catcher’s gear fits properly. Don’t start the game until it does. Here it comes again: “Aw, ‘cmon, let the kids play” which is fine until someone gets hit in the throat or breaks a collarbone. Then, it’s your fault for not noticing. So, notice.
10. Make sure equipment is in good condition and properly worn. If a helmet is cracked, throw it out of the game. Teams can borrow from each other if needed. Severely cracked or dented bats must be removed.
11. Make sure you have someone to serve as an official scorekeeper and pitch counter early. In case of dispute the home team book is the official scorebook, so make sure someone is keeping score and counting pitches.

DURING THE GAME

1. Help keep the game moving. Hustle the players into position and back to the dugout, including warming up pitchers. Make sure to ask the manager to get his catcher is ready as soon as you can if that looks like it’s an issue.
2. Stay near the plate during warm-ups, but out of the way near the backstop. If the catcher misses a warmup pitch, hand him the other ball and go get the one at the backstop. This will speed up warmup pitches tremendously.
3. Keep warmup pitches to no more than 8 for a new pitcher, 5 for a returning one. On the second-last pitch (6th or 3rd) tell the catcher, “One and down”. That means, one more warmup, then the catcher should call out “balls in, coming down”, and then the next warmup pitch goes to 2b.
4. “Balls in, coming down” is a privilege, not a right. If the catcher misses it or the 2b or SS doesn’t cover, tell him to toss it back to the pitcher and get his team ready.
5. Let the catcher position himself first, and then you set up. If they set up way back, ask “you sure you want to be here ?” If they move, fine. If not, fine. They’ll lose strikes for their pitcher if they set up too far away, but you are not the coach. Do talk to the coach if it’s a real problem, but that something the coach is supposed to notice and fix, not you. Don’t let the catcher set up where he will surely get hit. That may be closer than you think. Closer to the plate is better, so go easy on this.
6. Take care of your catchers. The catcher is your buddy – take care of him. If you see loose catcher’s gear, stop the game and get it fixed. If the catcher gets whacked, stall until he can compose himself. Cleaning the plate is always a good timewaster, and it makes you look good too. After all, that catcher is the only thing between you and the pitcher whacking you in the shins all game long.

7. Keep equipment off the field. This means bats, balls, buckets, catcher's gear, etc. If you see it on the field during play, wait until the play finishes. Call time and have the equipment removed to the dugout.
8. Keep the players in the dugouts when they aren't on the field. The dugouts are for players, managers, and coaches only. No bat-boys, little kids, etc. in the dugouts.
9. Keep the managers in the dugouts. Yes, they will hate it. No, they aren't supposed to be out of the dugouts.
10. There is NO on-deck hitter in Little League at any time. The first batter of the inning can come out to take practice swings at the start of the inning under your supervision, but that's it. Keep the batter away from the plate while the pitcher is warming up. Some of those youth pitchers are crazy wild.
11. There is NO batting donut allowed in Little League. If you see one, ask the manager to put it away and tell him you don't want to see it again. If you see it again, ask one more time, and remind him you've already told him to put that thing away. Third time, toss him. He's asking for it.
12. Make sure managers inform the umpire-in-chief AND the opposing manager of substitutions. This is less of an issue with continual batting orders and free defensive substitutions.
13. If you have one baseball in the bag, let the managers know you need a new ball. Inspect any ball being put in the game. If you don't you'll end up with a T-Ball in a Majors game. Make sure the balls are in good condition: no cuts or big scrapes, and not too dirty or wet. If it's wet, have the managers get a towel and keep 3 or 4 balls in circulation, drying them off when one gets too wet. If a ball hits the backstop hard, ask the catcher to see it.
14. Do not throw baseballs out to the pitcher. Give it to the catcher, and make him do it.
15. Have the balls be thrown in to the catcher, and have them handed to you. You will be surprised at how difficult it is to catch a ball with your mask on if it goes below your waist. If you have the mask off, you have it in your left hand, so righties will be tempted to catch it with the mask, since it's their glove hand. You will eventually drop the mask when you do this. Let the players handle thrown baseballs.
16. Make sure you and the coaches stay positive role models. Don't allow poor sportsmanship. Don't let them yell out questionable instructions, such as "Run over the catcher the next time he gets in the way!". A manager or coach who says something like that is asking to be ejected.
17. If it's too dark to finish a full inning, call the game. Don't play when it isn't safe. A half-completed inning can result in bad blood if the visitor's score gets reverted. It doesn't seem "fair" (Rule 4.11).
18. Understand that umpires will make mistakes. Don't try to make up for a bad call. Let it go. Call what you see on the next one

AFTER THE GAME

1. As soon as the game is over, give the baseballs back to the manager who gave them to you. If you forget, turn them in at the hut at Carl Thomas, or put them in the shed at Sharpners or Aplin.

2. Encourage the managers to get the teams and equipment out of the dugouts quickly. This is especially critical if another game follows yours. The longer they take, the later the next game gets started.
3. Then, get away from the field. Don't hang out – especially if there has been controversy.
4. Put the equipment back clean. We will have cleaning supplies at the fields. Wipe down any sweat, and give things a little spritz of Febreze. This will make the experience much more pleasant for the next umpire using the equipment, and it will make the equipment look better and last longer.
5. Report any broken equipment immediately. We need to know ASAP. Borrow a cell phone if you need to, but please report it.
6. If there has been an ejection, a protest or other controversy during the game, you'll need to report it. It will eventually have to be in writing, but report it by phone first. We'll help you with the rest of it. An ejection doesn't mean you did something wrong; THEY did.
7. When you get home, or on the drive home, think about the game and where you might improve. You may be surprised at how well you did. Remember, it's what you learn after you think you know it all that really counts. If you stop learning, you'll stop being a good umpire.
8. Some umpires keep a journal. Right after the game they write down what went right and what went wrong so they can look at it later to find answers to a rule they might not have been 100% sure of, or a play where they got caught out of position, or a situation that blew up on them. Later they can look at their notes to help them study the rules.

The Ten Unwritten Rules of Calling Balls and Strikes

by Jim Porter

While reading some of the following you may find yourself strongly disagreeing with this author. It would be worth your while to consider my ideas. These guidelines have given me game after game of grief-less balls and strikes and a reputation of plate work excellence in my area.

The Ten Unwritten Rules

1. If the catcher's glove is turned down, it's too low. If the catcher's glove is turned up then it might be a strike.

To find the lower part of the zone use the catcher to aid you in determining those borderline knees pitches. This does not work every time but it will help you in the majority of cases. If the catcher must turn his glove down (webbing in the dirt) then it will look low to everyone - - if it's borderline call it a ball.

But if the catcher can catch the ball with his glove pointed up (webbing to the sky) then your borderline knees pitch quite easily became a strike. That's right - the same pitch in the same place can conceivably be a ball or a strike depending on how the catcher catches it. There are more examples of this.

2. If the catcher's glove touches dirt, it's too low.

Even if the catcher keeps his glove up but after catching the pitch his glove touches the dirt the illusion will be that the pitch was too low. Catchers must learn to catch and hold the glove for a momentary frame. Good coaches know this too.

If the mitt hits the dirt call it a ball.

3. If the catcher's armpit gets air the pitch is too far off the plate.

When a catcher catches a pitch on the glove side his upper arm must not extend away from his body. His armpit must not get air. He must not reach out. If he does the pitch is too far off the plate (either inside or outside).

If his armpit gets air call it a ball.

4. If the catcher's elbow crosses the center of his body the pitch is too far off the plate.

When a catcher catches a pitch on his throwing-hand side, if his glove-side elbow crosses the center of his body causing him to turn his shoulders, then the pitch is too far off the plate (either inside or outside).

If his elbow crosses the center call it a ball.

5. If the catcher drops or misses the ball then any borderline pitch should be called a ball.

When a catcher muffs the catch of a pitch it is awfully tough to call a borderline pitch a strike. It is another illusion. Everyone thinks that the catcher missed it because it was a ball. Good coaches expect you to call this pitch a ball. Good coaches expect their catchers to squeeze it.

If the catcher muffs the catch on a borderline pitch call it a ball.

6. If the catcher catches it at his head-height or above it's too high.

The catcher's head should always be used to help you find the top of the zone. If he catches it at his head or below then it may very well be a strike - - his head or above and we're looking at a ball. Anytime a catcher must reach even slightly above his head everyone believes this to be too high despite what the rule book says.

This guideline obviously relies on the catcher's size. Use your best judgment.

7. If the batter reacts like it's a ball then it very well may be a ball.

Sometimes a borderline pitch can be decided by how the batter reacts to the pitch. If the borderline pitch looks a little inside and the batter reacts as though it is inside then you should call this a ball. If the batter ducks his head just a little that high borderline pitch might very well be too high. If the batter steps across the plate without swinging then that outside corner pitch might have been outside and a ball. This is not to say that we should allow the batter to make our calls. These are just guidelines to help you. There are times when a batter is fooled by a pitch - - that does not apply here.

8. Call the glove on a curve. This is an advanced theory for levels of ball where the curves are breaking like curves. Some umpires believe a curve can enter the strike zone and then curve down into the dirt. I'm not going to argue about that. What I will say is that even if you believe the ball entered the strike zone you should not call this pitch in the dirt a strike. These same umpires believe a curve ball which smacks right into the center of the mitt was too high when it crossed the strike zone. Once again I will not argue physics. Just call this pitch a strike - reward that pitcher for hitting the mitt, freezing the batter and awing the crowd. Everyone wants you to! Call that glove on a curve and stop calling your theories on ball velocity and air speed physics.

9. Pitches which are always a strike with a count of 3-0 may not be a strike when the count is 0-2 This controversial idea has sparked debate amongst the greatest umpiring minds. Some say that you should call the same zone all the time and others say it always seems to get a little wider on 3-0 and tighter on 0-2. No one can doubt the human sense of fairness. No one wants to see a kid get punched out on a borderline strike after seeing only three pitches just as much as no one wants to see a kid take his base on a borderline pitch after only seeing four pitches..

10. If the catcher moves his mitt it's always a ball. Some catchers think they're fooling us umpires. They don't think we see them move their gloves over the plate on those borderline pitches. If the catcher moves his glove it **MUST** have been a ball. Otherwise why would he have moved his glove? There's no fooling us! That's a ball.

If it looks like a strike call it a strike. Think Strikes. Strikes make outs. Outs make innings. Innings make games. We are paying you to do games, so call strikes when you can.

BE CONSISTENT! Consistency comes from good timing. Slow down, relax, see the pitch, hear the pitch hit the mitt, call it. If you have trouble slowing down try seeing the pitch, hearing the pitch hit the mitt, then read the manufacturer's name on the back of the mitt and then make the call. Develop a rhythm to use calling all pitches, balls and strikes. If you just call strikes it's hard to establish rhythm.

First position yourself in the slot (area between batter and catcher) so you have a full view of home plate. You have to see the catcher catch the pitch, especially on the low outside corner.

Don't hide behind the catcher, you won't be able to see the plate. If you set up too low, you won't see the outside corner. The height of your head should be where your chin is above the top of the catcher's head. In order to be consistent, you must be consistent in your position, especially height. You must have the same view of the zone on every pitch, or your zone will change.

As the game begins you must decide where your zone is and keep it there. Every umpire has their own zone.

You have 3 things to help to establish the top of your zone: the batter, the catcher and you. First look at the batter to see armpit height. Every batter is different, but not that much.

Check the catcher, usually catchers are pretty consistent with their stance. Where is the top of the catcher's head in relation to the batter's armpits? A lot of times it's somewhere close, which helps when the batter wants to dip down. Finally there's you, the height of your stance and eyes and how you see the zone. See the pitch, see where it passed the batter's belt or letters.

If you have a higher zone you might want to set your eye level at the top of the zone. It's easy to tell if the pitch was above or below your eye level. Use whatever you can to help you consistently establish if the pitch was within the top limit of your zone.

The low end of the zone gives umpires the most problems. You must position yourself to see the whole plate and the catcher's mitt, so you can see the catcher catch the ball. The way the catcher catches the pitch will help you determine whether it was a ball or strike.

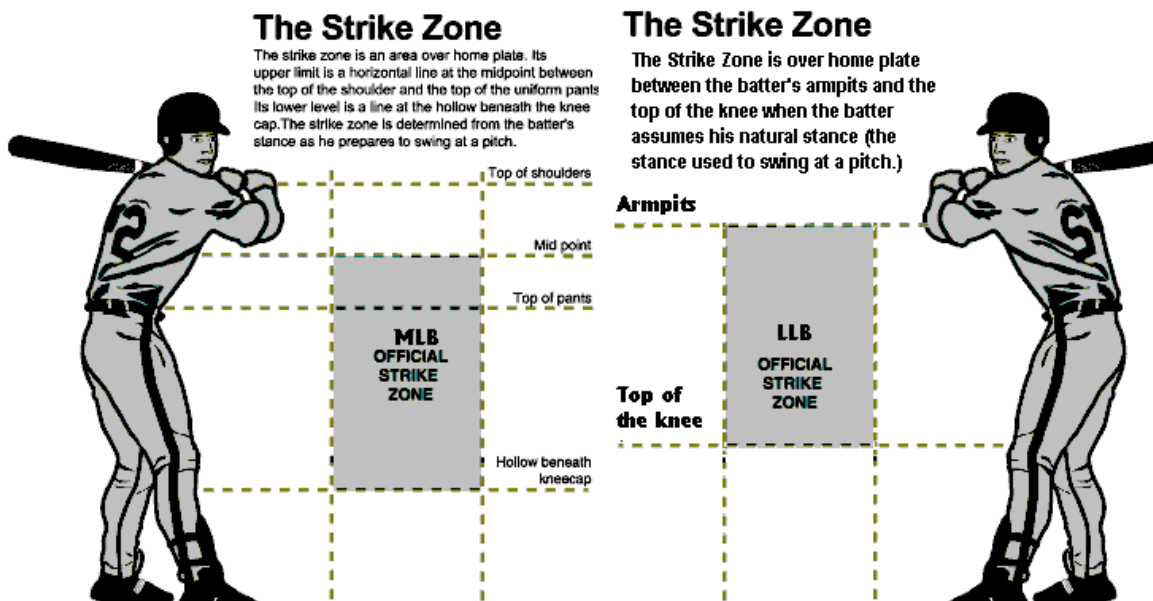
In conclusion, whether or not a pitch enters your strike zone is your call but you need the catcher to get a lot of information. Most important is to set up your strike zone and keep it the same all game. If you need to move a game along widen the zone to make it larger, never raise or lower it. Coaches can see up and down but can't tell in and out, no matter what they say. Think strikes, make your zone generous, have good timing and be consistent.

Remember, every safe call or walk awarded the batter can add at least 5 minutes to each half inning.

The Little League Strike Zone (2.00)

“The STRIKE ZONE is that space over home plate which is between the batter’s armpits and the top of the knees when the batter assumes a natural stance. The umpire shall determine the strike zone according to the batter’s usual stance when that batter swings at a pitch.”

The strike zone on TV or at a big league game (Left Strike Zone) is not the Little League one. The Little League strike zone is higher than the one in the Major Leagues, and it’s the Right Strike Zone.



Proper Count Mechanics

by Bob Pariseau

On amateur fields that have scoreboards, don't leave it to the scoreboard to remind folks about the count.

Scoreboards at amateur fields are notorious for having the wrong count at crucial moments. If necessary, turn to the person operating the scoreboard, show fingers and re-announce the correct count. That is, it is almost MORE important to announce the count periodically on fields with scoreboards just to confirm to people that this one time the scoreboard actually has it right.

So here's an at bat and the way I'd volunteer the count as the at bat progresses:

- 1) (low and away) -- BALL ONE. - No need to say more than that or to show fingers.
- 2) (called strike) -- STRIKE ONE. - Wait for pitcher to face you, show 1 finger and 1 finger at chin height to either side of face and say normally, "One ball, one strike," for the batter and catcher to hear.
- 3) (swinging strike) -- silent strike signal. - Wait for pitcher to face you, show 1 finger (left hand) and 2 fingers (right hand) above head height and wider than shoulder width and yell, "ONE BALL, TWO STRIKES!", loudly enough to be audible on the bases and in the benches. Use the index finger and middle finger, in a V to indicate two strikes in the right hand.
- 4) (high) -- BALL TWO. - As always, wait for the pitcher to face you. Make the low display of the fingers again, this time with two fingers and two fingers, and say normally, "Two balls, two strikes" Curl the pinky, ring finger, and thumb of the left hand to hold the indicator and make the two ball signal with the index and middle finger in a V on the left hand just as you do to indicate two strikes on the right hand. Do NOT indicate two balls or two strikes using the index and pinky fingers to make "goal posts". From a distance, that looks more like a three count than a two count.
- 5) (fouled off) -- Signal Time and call FOUL. - Make the low display of the fingers again, two fingers and two fingers, and say normally, "Two balls, two strikes, play."
- 6) (inside) -- BALL THREE. - Make the high display of fingers, three fingers on the left hand and two on the right hand and yell, "THREE BALLS, TWO STRIKES!". Curl the thumb and index finger to hold the indicator in the left hand and use the outer three fingers to display the three ball count in that hand.
- 7) (fouled off) -- Signal Time and call FOUL. - Make the low display of fingers, three fingers and two fingers, and say normally, "Three balls, two strikes, play."
- 8) (called strike) -- "STRIKE!! THREE!!"

Safe

Both left and right arms are raised together, to shoulder level, in front of the umpire and then a sweeping motion is performed out, parallel to the ground, palms down. The verbal call of "safe" may be made. To complete the call you normally return to the set position. To sell a safe call you might consider doing it two or three times in rapid succession. It is not always necessary to even make the sign or call. If the play is obvious do nothing.

"Out!"

The clenched right fist and a short hammered motion seem to be favored by most umpires. Again, personal style is acceptable as long as it does not distract you from seeing any further plays taking place. Check that the fielder is really in possession of the ball. The signal can be made with only a gesture or can be sold with a loud call of "He's Out!" or "She's Out!"

Signal every out.

Why "He's Out!" ??? Players are running by, not focused on the umpire, on a noisy diamond. If the player hears one sound he is "safe" ... if he hears two "he's out!" If the players hear nothing, the call is usually so obvious that everyone knows the result.

Never say "Strike Three - You're Out!"

Umpires are encouraged not to make this call a part of their repertoire. Why? In some leagues the third strike does not have to be caught while in others it must be caught. Often the plate umpire is in the worst situation to call the trapped ball, for example: a breaking ball in the dirt for the swinging third strike. An umpire should only call "Strike Three." If you have a situation where you know the batter now erroneously becomes a runner you can follow this by the call "The Batter Is Out!"

Missed the tag!

A "selling it" call that occurs when a runner slides under the tag or the tag is high. You can save some grief by indicating a loud "Safe, he missed the tag!" and following it with a tapping motion where the tag was. Everyone will know you saw the tag and most will assume the runner had the bag before it.

Fair Ball

The right hand points into the field in fair territory. There is no call "Fair" anything ever made.

Foul Ball

The same signal as "Time" but the call becomes "Foul." Umpires often add a point into foul territory with one hand after giving the time signal. Once verbalized, this call sticks. Only in the rarest of moments can it be reversed (only if NO-ONE reacts to the call of foul and EVERYONE plays the ball as if it was fair).

The base umpire needs to pay specific attention to a ball hitting the batter in the batter's box. If the batter has not moved the base umpire will immediately call "Foul." If the batter is in motion the base umpire must delay to see if the plate umpire is going to make a call. Only if the plate umpire is silent, and the base umpire is certain the batter contacted the ball outside of the batter's box would the base umpire signal "Time, that's interference, the batter is out!" otherwise the call is "Foul!"

No Pitch

The same signal as "Time" but the call becomes "No Pitch." If you are the plate umpire, step away from the plate. It can be helpful to repeat "No Pitch".

The Run Counts

Here there are two schools of thought. Often you will see an umpire point at the plate each time a run crosses the plate legally. Scorers often key on this gesture (as well as catchers!)

This is important on the "time-play" or a "third-out" situation. It can also be important on a force play.

The Run Does Not Count!

Signal and announce when the runner does not score so that the scorer and coaches maintain accurate records.

The signal, done by the plate umpire, begins by forming an 'X' with the arms in front of the body then sweeping the arms out to the "time" position. The gesture is repeated and the call "The runner does not score!" is made.

Advanced Signs for the Players and Fans

Called Strike

First point at the batter with the hand closest to the batter then signal the strike with your right. It is good practice to verbalize something like "He went - strike." or "Yes, he did. Strike!"

The "Check-Swing" or Appealed Strike

The plate umpire does not have to be asked for help, he can simply request it himself. Experienced catchers will immediately ask you to get help from the base umpire after a check swing which you called a ball. In professional baseball the catcher and the manager can request the appeal on the swing.

A request should never be refused.

Step away from the plate, optionally removing your mask. With your left arm gesture clearly to the base umpire and ask "Did he swing?" or "Did he go?" If the answer is yes the base umpire signals - strike while saying "Yes, he went!" If the answer is no - a safe sign with "No, he did not go!"

The plate umpire will now announce the results by giving the count. "Then that's a strike, the count is ..." or if denied, "The count is"

The Foul Tip

A two-part signal. Extend your left arm up, in front of your body, palm down, to at least shoulder level. Brush the fingers of the right hand over the back of the left hand two or three times. The signal is completed by signaling the strike with the right hand. Because the ball is alive and runners can advance never say "Foul Tip." Announcing "foul" anything could stop the action.

Infield Fly Called

All umpires point into the air with their right hand. On some crews every umpire on the field echoes the infield fly call, on others only the gesture is echoed. This should be dealt with in the pregame conference.

The plate umpire will usually announce the verbal portions of the signal, echoed by the other umpires.

Home Run or Ground Rule Double

First, the ball is dead. Make sure any unnecessary action is killed, particularly if the ball has rebounded back into the field. The signal for a home run is circling the right arm and index finger overhead. The ground rule double is awarded by signaling "two bases" with two fingers held up usually on the left hand.

Awarding Bases

Using the left hand point clearly at the runner and state "You, second base" or "You, third base", "You, score!" whatever the case may be. The runner is protected all the way to the base but not one inch beyond it. Always move the runner closest to home first.

That's a Balk!

Balks must be called with reference to the action. Remember, if the pitcher completes the delivery of the ball, or throws to a base, you are in a delayed balk situation. The sequence of arriving at that signal is: point at the pitcher, arm at shoulder height, and say "That's a balk" Now if the pitcher hesitates in his delivery call "Time ... that's a balk" and award the ball call on the pitch count.

The Interference Call

An immediate decision is needed: "dead ball" or "delayed dead ball." Point at the offensive player and make the call "That's Interference" followed by your decision on whether or not the ball is dead, announced with a loud gestured "Time" or (...nothing...) meaning a delayed dead ball. If the ball remains alive avoid any signal that looks or sounds like "Time" until the appropriate moment. If the ball is dead call "Time" immediately and shut down any remaining play on the field.

The Obstruction Call

This call is like interference except the ball may remain alive. In all cases the call "That's Obstruction." Is made while pointing at the defensive player making the obstruction with a clenched fist of the left hand. If a play is being made on the obstructed runner the ball is dead so immediately signal "Time." This is followed by an awarding of a base or bases either after play has stopped or even while play remains ongoing. Unless a play was being made on the obstructed runner the ball remains alive. Any gesture which resembles "Time" being called can cause problems on a diamond. This is one reason why we teach to initially extend the left hand horizontally with a clenched fist. The professional baseball umpires point at the fielder with one hand only.

Catch or No Catch

When signaled the "catch" resembles the "out" signal. No verbal indication needs to be given. The "no-catch" signal resembles the "safe" signal except the call of "No Catch" is clearly given, and the "no-catch" signal should be given lower; at the waist or lower. Sometimes it will be necessary to repeat this sign several times. An addition to the "No Catch" is the juggling routine which indicates the fielder did not have possession. Juggle when the fielder is on the base for the force out but not in full possession of the ball. Some crews give the safe signal and then point to the ground several times saying "on the ground, on the ground" when the ball is dropped. The terms "Catch" and "No Catch" could be mixed up over the crowd noise. The verbal call needs only to be given on a trouble ball, for example: a ball caught diving or below the fielder's knees. Routine flies can be signaled or not signaled depending on crew and local practice. If a ball is on the foul lines first signal whether the ball is fair or foul, then the catch or no-catch status if desired.

Signs for the Umpire Crew

The last thing a crew needs is a whole collection of "secret" or "private" signs. Keep any signs simple. Much beyond these few universal signs and the umpire's sign list is growing too long.

What's the count and how many are out?

A quick tapping on the top of head or on the brim of the hat indicates confirmation of the count and number of outs being requested. Response is two-part. The count is shown made by holding the number of balls in the left hand and the number of strikes in the right hand. These are held pressed against the shirt just above the belt. It should be followed by the signal for how many are out.

The number of outs is relayed by holding the appropriate number of fingers out with both hands, pointing straight out, or clenched fists if no one is out.

Possible Infield Fly Situation

Crews signal each other to indicate that the infield fly could be called by first relaying the number of outs as above, and then touching their right index finger to the brim of their hats to signal the infield fly.

When the infield fly is off, indicate the outs, touch the brim of your hat with right index finger, and then make a cutting motion across the throat. What is important is play does not resume until all umpires are aware of the situation.

“C’mon, Blue, That’s a Horrible Call” - Handling Disputes

How to Argue With a Coach

Carl Childress (NCAA Div 1 Supervisor of Umpires) posted an essay on handling conflict with coaches on the eteamz umpire discussion board. He was responding to a post in a different forum advocating the use of classical Conflict Resolution techniques when arguing with coaches. Below is a version of Carl's post edited slightly to make it stand on its own here.

Assertive Discipline

In a high school setting the teacher would:

- ⌘ enforce rules consistently, fairly, and without prejudice or "memory" of past behavior for different offenses
- ⌘ talk one-on-one
- ⌘ accept the student's feelings
- ⌘ employ the "broken record" method to terminate an inciting situation
- ⌘ use an escalating, stair-step method of control, with clear, understandable consequences

My recommended method of handling coaches during a judgment "discussion" follows these AD steps exactly.

In a baseball setting, the umpire should:

- ⌘ Be fair, not make calls because of some incident that happened in an earlier game.
- ⌘ Not permit other coaches or players to be present during our discussion.

I prefer my partner to listen, but I want him 15-20 feet from the scene. I need a witness but not help.

- ⌘ Keep his mouth shut.

The coach has come to rant and rave, and you and he are "alone." Don't defend your call.

Listen to the coach. Accept everything he says. One should be relaxed, hands on hips or behind the back, not folded aggressively across one's chest. Wait until the coach runs down.

- ⌘ Ask the question: Do you want to know what I saw ?

You may have to repeat that a couple of times. Stay on track: You want the coach to listen to what you saw.

Don't go off on a tangent by replying to ANYTHING he said during his initial outburst.

Don't defend your call. You're a broken record, spinning over and over: I will not defend my call. I will not defend my call. I will not defend my call. That record is playing through a speaker you alone can hear. You may need to say those exact words: "Skip, I won't defend the call. I told you what I saw. Let's play ball." (See the next section below.)

∞ Use an escalating method of control.

First, control by demeanor: listen to the coach, don't argue, ask if he really wants an answer.

Second, control by example: Explain quietly what you saw, tell him we're ready to play.

Third, control by leaving the scene of the dispute: Walk away from the spot of the conflict, even if it's just a few steps. Turn your back on the coach, just as the matador does the bull. That is the key moment in this "dialogue." Everyone, participants and fans alike, can see that you are done with the argument. If anything else happens, it cannot be your fault!

Fourth, control by force, with clear, pre-defined consequences for additional bad behavior: If the bull charges, in a FED game restrict him to the dugout at once unless he threatens, curses you (not the call) where others can hear, or physically abuses you. In an OBR game you have no choice: He's toast, but no one can say you precipitated the "final solution."

In summary: DON'T DEFEND YOUR CALL.

In the final analysis my experience with coaches of all ages and levels shows that the less said, the better. That's the heart of my recommendation. It is also the most difficult for an umpire to follow, especially when he knows he nailed that call dead to the ground.

Arguments: Umpires Helping Umpires

How do umpires "signal for assistance" when handling an unruly player, coach or manager?

Brent McLaren offered the following advice:

First, anytime a discussion ensues on the field the other umpire(s) will move towards the discussion area but keep an eye on the dugouts. In four-umpire rotation we actually assign an umpire to shut down any sniping that might be coming that way.

We absolutely want to stop a two-on-one situation or any chance that the players will get involved.

The umpire in the discussion listens; we call it "Doug Harvey's 20 second rule" since we learned it from a NASO tape. Listen to the whole problem, and then answer the specific questions the coach is asking. This usually sends everyone back to the dugout. They may not be happy but their questions were answered.

When things get hot, any time the umpire in the discussion taps/pumps his hands on his hips the other umpire is "coming in." This discussion is now over.

What does "coming in" mean? It means the intervening umpire will literally get in between the umpire in the conversation and the coach. The original umpire will now back away since, in fact, will no longer participate in the discussion in any form. He will move a considerable distance away to avoid a shouting situation. He will not react to the coach anymore.

The intervening umpire has only one objective, to get the coach back to the dugout and get the game underway. He will say things such as "Hey, whoa coach, I'm not the guy who made the call, that discussion is over so lets get back to playing baseball." or "Let's get back to the game coach."

The intervening umpire knows absolutely nothing about the call. If the coach is ejected then why would he now be ejected? It would have nothing to do with the call but would only deal with his failure/refusal to permit the game to get underway ... his unsportsmanlike conduct.

.How to Handle a Protest

Jim Mantle shared the following suggested protest scenario on rec.sport.officiating. There are some following comments by Brent McLaren.

Coach: I am protesting

Blue: Get your Manager in here

Manager: What....?

Blue: Your coach wants to protest the decision

Don't let players or coaches lodge a protest - only Managers get to do that

Manager: Yeah - we want to do that

Blue: OK, Hang on.

get your partner in there - you want a witness to hear this

Blue2: Yeah, what's up?

Blue: We have a protest. Manager, state your protest

Manager complains about the call. Blue writes it down

Blue: Thank you, guys - we'll be having a conference alone now.

Managers leave. Umpires get out the rulebook, clarify the facts, reference the rules, make a decision, including change your decision if required. Jointly. Get it right. Include actions your partner might have seen that you didn't. Call in BOTH Managers - and ONLY the Managers.

Blue: Gentlemen, here are the facts:

Relate the facts of the play

Blue: Based on this play, we ruled XXX. Mr. Manager here protested, so we have reviewed the rules in question.

Rule 11.72.2(f)1(a)2 applies here, and so the correct ruling is XXX (or YYY or whatever).

Gentlemen, that is our ruling, based on the rulebook.

At younger levels, you could continue here. But at senior or more competitive levels, you might shut up right here, and let the Manager take it to the next step - don't invite him.

Blue: Do either of you wish to pursue this further?

Be willing to share your rulebook. You want it to stop right here.

If either or both Managers says "Yes, I am not happy" then you FINALLY have a for-real protest - up to now, you've been diverting and trying to avoid.

Blue: State your protest.

Write it down. Write down the situation at the time (inning, outs, count, who was on which base, who was at bat, who was pitching). Enforce your ruling you developed after examining the rules earlier. Write down your ruling. Make sure what you write down agrees with reality. Inform the other team, and the scorer. Get the game underway.

In a tournament situation (as opposed to league play), protests are usually resolved on the spot. Go through all the above steps EXCEPT "get the game underway" - take the protest to the committee at that point.

The key is to not involve the rulebook or your partners until the Manager says he wants to protest. Then, involve everything and everyone, and get the call right.

Often, when you do the review and get the call right - the OTHER manager will protest. It's his right. And you now have the call correct, so it's no big deal.

Here are Brent McLaren's additional comments:

Assuming you cannot resolve the protest on the field, and this in regular season, NOT TOURNAMENT, play:

⌘ Stop the game, get out a notepad, make notes of exactly what you saw, ruled and why. Do it at that time ... not after the game, not later when you might be inclined to change your opinion.

⌘ Note the game situation down in total detail ... runners, count, pitchers.

⌘ Make a notation on the scores sheets to indicate the exact moment of the protest. After this the protest is totally in the hands of others ... so restart the game and let it ride. (As you know, in Tournament play everything comes to a standstill here.)

⌘ After the game obtain copies of the score sheet for your report.

⌘ Do nothing, submit nothing until you are asked to. The coach may not file a formal protest.

⌘ After the game, call the UIC and let him know that a protest "may" occur.

The coach has the right to protest, and those magic words should not be taken poorly by the umpire. Even the best umpires have protests lodged against them. Don't take it personally.

Ejection Mechanics

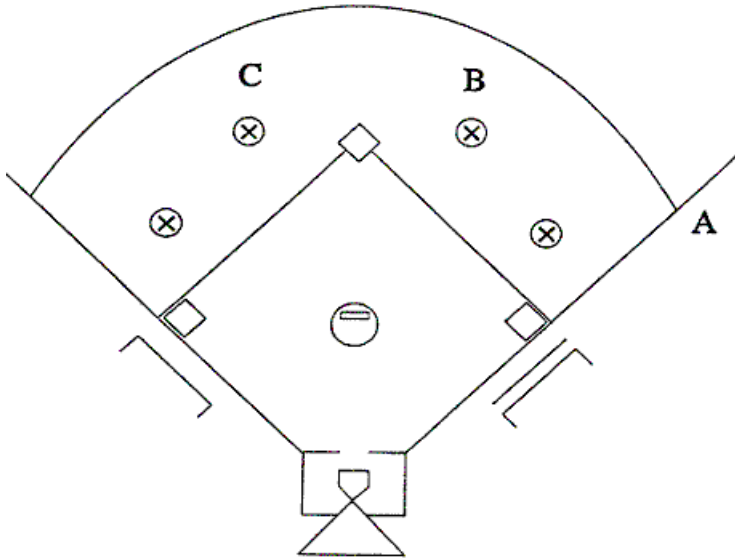
The umpire is the only one with a Magic Ejection Pistol. It's on your right hip, and it makes managers disappear.

We use a simple 1-2-3 system – remember "Use an escalating method of control" ? This is it.

1. Right hand up, "unsnap the holster": "That's enough coach, time to get back to playing baseball"
2. Left (and right) hand up: "Coach, no more. I've had enough." You are holding him back now with both hands. He should understand "No more" means "No more" by now. No more.
3. Any more, the right hand goes down, comes back up with the Magic Ejection Pistol & poof! He's GONE! "That's, it, sir. You are ejected."
4. An ejected manager should pick one of the coaches to be the manager now.
5. Don't let another coach come into the dugout from the stands. That's part of the penalty for an ejection.
6. Managers and coaches now have to leave the game site when ejected.

Positioning and Mechanics

Where to stand before the pitch in a 2-man system:



A BASES EMPTY

B RUNNER ON FIRST BASE

C RUNNER ON SECOND BASE

C RUNNER ON THIRD BASE

C RUNNERS ON FIRST AND SECOND BASE

C RUNNERS ON SECOND AND THIRD BASE

C RUNNERS ON FIRST AND THIRD BASE

C BASES FULL

When in doubt, with runners on, it's C.