Umpire 101

Working the Plate

Part One of a three-part introduction to umpiring Little League baseball

Introduction to Little League Umpiring

Umpire 101, Working the Plate, is Part One of a three-part introduction for Little League umpires.

- **101 – Working the Plate**
- **102 – Small-Diamond Mechanics (2 man)**
- **103 – The Rules of Baseball**

Umpire 101 covers the following:

1. **Qualities of a Good Umpire**
2. **What does the Plate Umpire do?**
3. **Managing the Game**
4. **Umpire Signs & Signals**
5. **Getting into the Slot: Setting Up**
6. **The Strike Zone**
7. **What's a Strike?**
8. **Foul Tip is not a Foul Ball**
9. **What's a Ball?**
10. **What's a Foul?**
11. **Where do I go at the crack of the bat?**

Qualities of a good umpire

- Shows up, and shows up on time
- Looks like an umpire – kids REALLY respect that
- Pays attention to the game at all times – head must be in the game, eyes (almost always) on the ball
- Has good timing; is not too hasty to decide on a call – pause… read the play… then react
- Is decisive once the decision is made, and is proud to let everyone know the call – don't be shy
- Works and communicates well with partner
- Knows where to be and hustles to get there
- Knows the rules

What Does the Plate Umpire Do?

- You manage the start, finish and pace of the game
- You call balls and strikes
- You make all Fair/Foul calls
- You make all Catch/No-Catch calls
  - Get out from behind the plate to get a good look
- You make all safe/out calls at home
- You make running lane violation calls
- You cover 3rd base in certain situations
- You help your partner if he needs it – watch all plays and give help IF ASKED
- You don't make calls that belong to your partner

Managing the Game

- **Plate umpire is the UIC**. You own the game!
- **You control signs & signals** with your partner
- **You control pace** and movement of the game
  - Inning changeovers
  - Keeping batters moving
- **Your style is important**
  - Use a loud, crisp voice for calling balls and strikes and other calls – don't be shy
  - Communicate with coaches in an even, but firm tone
- **Your appearance and presentation** are keys:
  - You must ***look*** like an umpire
  - Your voice says you're in charge
  - Don't be indecisive; if you must, talk it over with partner

The Umpire Pre-Game Meeting

- **Fifteen minutes to game time, the umpires meet.** *This is extremely important*
  - **Go over the division of responsibility**
    - Discuss Fair/foul coverage
    - Discuss Catch/no catch coverage
    - Discuss coverage on the 1st-to-3rd
    - Discuss covering the tag-up at third
    - Discuss handling overthrows out of play
  - **Go over the ground rules**
  - **Go over your umpire signals**
  - **Discuss handling of problem calls and getting help**

Pre-Game Meeting with Managers

Five minutes before the game time, umpires call the team managers to home plate for the pre-game meeting (2 minutes)

- **No players should be on the field at this time**
- Introduce yourself and your partner
- Ask coaches to confirm that all **players are properly equipped, and that all equipment is regulation**
- Go over **ground rules**; especially important is establishing out-of-play at Lewis Creek and other parks
- Clarify special **local rules, like time limits**
- **Tell coaches to ask for time before coming out**
- Ask for questions

Safety during the game

- **Players do not handle bats in the dugout.** The batter coming up should grab his or her bat when it is time to exit the dugout.
- **Players should remain in the dugout except when they are playing.** Also, make sure players aren't standing in the dugout opening where they could be hit by a foul ball or errant throw,
- **In general, there is no on-deck hitter allowed.** At the beginning of an inning, the first batter of the inning may come out of the dugout with a bat and warm up well away from the plate and any player or coach. But at no other times, not even during a pitching change, can a batter be outside the dugout.
- **All batters and runners wear batting helmets.** Also, any players who are coaching bases must wear a helmet.
- **The catcher must have a "dangler"** (a throat guard, or Yeager as it is called) attached to his mask, even for hockey-style masks.
- **During warm-ups before the game, the player standing next to the coach who is hitting grounders and flies must have on a catcher's helmet and mask.**
- **Between innings, any player can warm-up the pitcher, but that player must have on the catcher's helmet and mask.** Shin guards and chest protection is not required for warming up a catcher.
  - At Majors and Coast levels, adults may not warm-up a pitcher during the game. In AAA, it is OK for an adult to warm-up a pitcher at any time.

Ending the game

- **All divisions play 5 ½ or 6 inning games**
  - If the home team is ahead after 5 ½ innings, the game is over
- **All divisions use the "Mercy Rule"** – if the Visiting team is ahead by 10 after 4 or 5 complete innings, or if the Home team is ahead by 10 after 3 ½ or 4 ½ innings, the game is over.
- **If it is too dark or raining too hard for you to see balls and strikes, or if the field is too muddy to play on, you declare the game suspended** – you don't have to worry about who wins or loses or continuations
  - You can delay the game and try to wait out a rain shower
  - But, rain or snow alone is not a reason to call a game here in the PNW – player safety is
- **Time Limits – *only* on weekends, and *not even for all games then!***
  - No matter what parents say (!), there are **NO** time limits on weekday evening games, even when it is cold and wet and windy
  - On a weekend game that has a following game, no new innings after 2 hours, and no pitch after 2:20, unless the game is a Coast or Majors game that is tied after 6 innings, then the limits are 2:30 and 2:50 respectively

Before anything can Happen – "PLAY"

Standing behind the crouching catcher

Stand straight up, right hand up

Point at the pitcher and say "PLAY"

This signal is used to start a game, to start every inning, and to start play again after a dead ball or time has been called

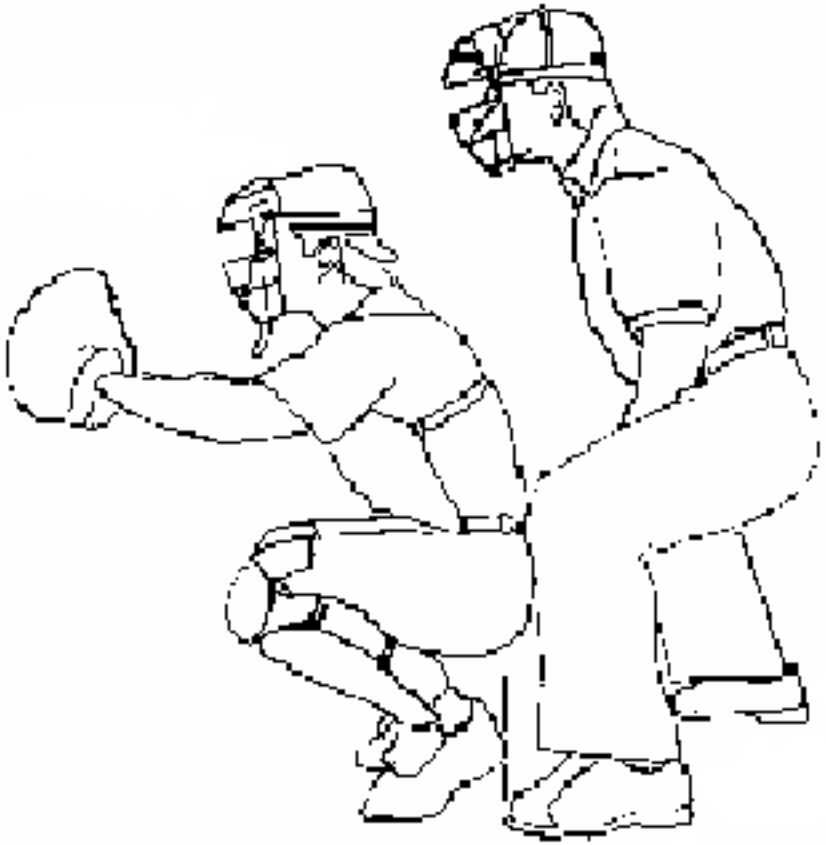
Umpire to Umpire Signals

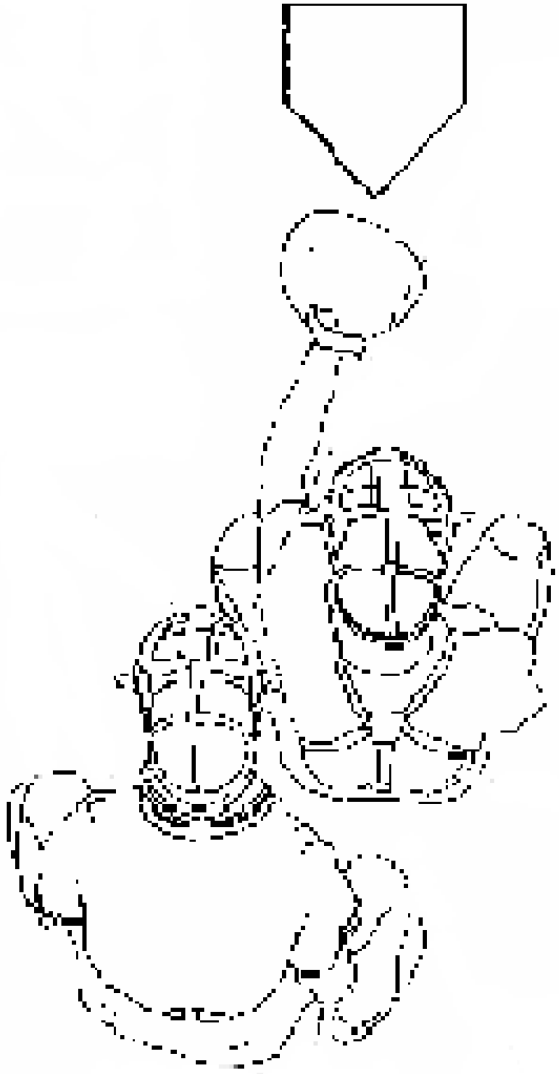
Communicating with you partner is critically important; learn and use the following guidelines:

- **PU gives the signals**; Base Umpire flashes back
- **Make eye contact with your partner** at every new batter, and whenever the situation changes (e.g., after a steal)
- ***Learn and use the following signals !!!***
  - Number of outs, if any – hands out to the side, fingers indicate number of outs
  - Infield Fly situation, if applicable – hand to hat bill
  - PU is staying home – Pat on the chest
  - PU has 3B on the 1st-to-3rd – Tap on chest and point to 3B
  - Check swing – left hand point to partner "DID HE GO"?
  - Lost count – twirl fingers

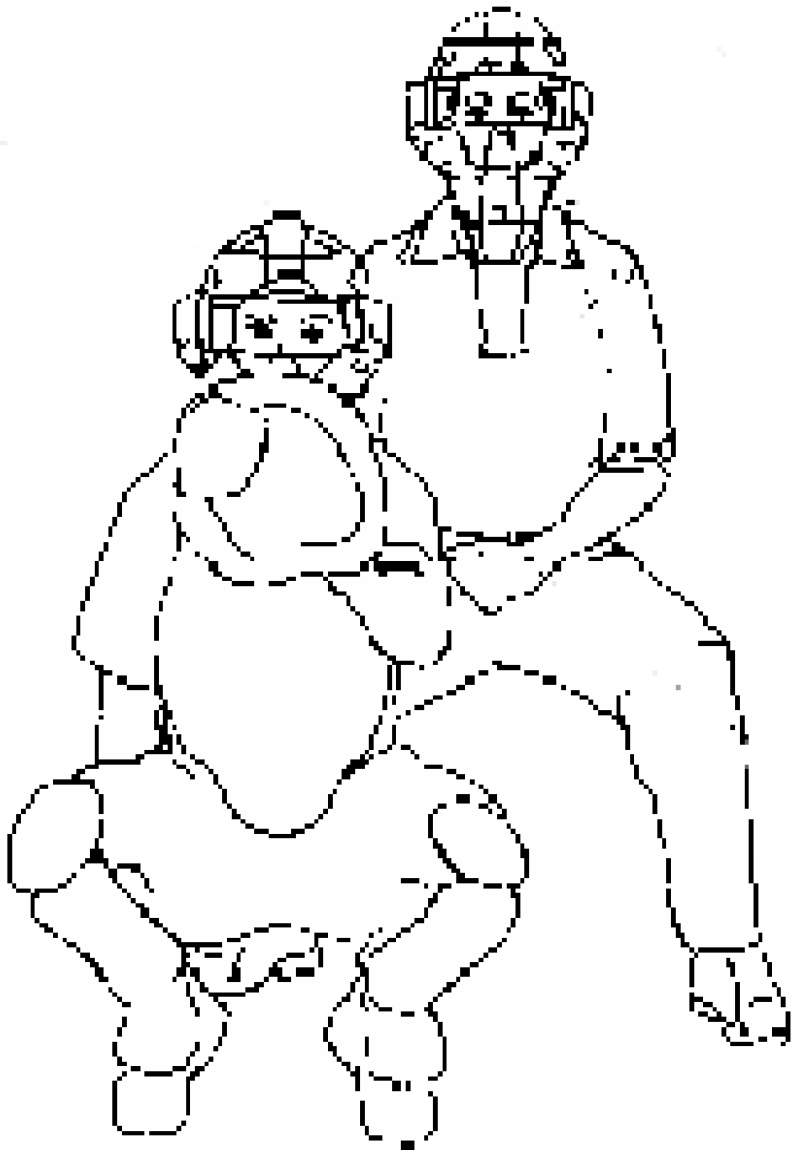
Getting into the SLOT: Setting Up

- Work the plate using the **SLOT position**. **Umpire's nose**:
  - **Inside edge of strike zone**
  - **Over catcher's head**
- **Remember, the strike zone changes** with the player, so **visualize the zone**.
- **Legs apart** for stable platform
- Slightly **forward at waist**
- **Keep your head still**
- **Track the ball with eyes**
- **Uniform pause, then call**
- **Timing, timing, timing**

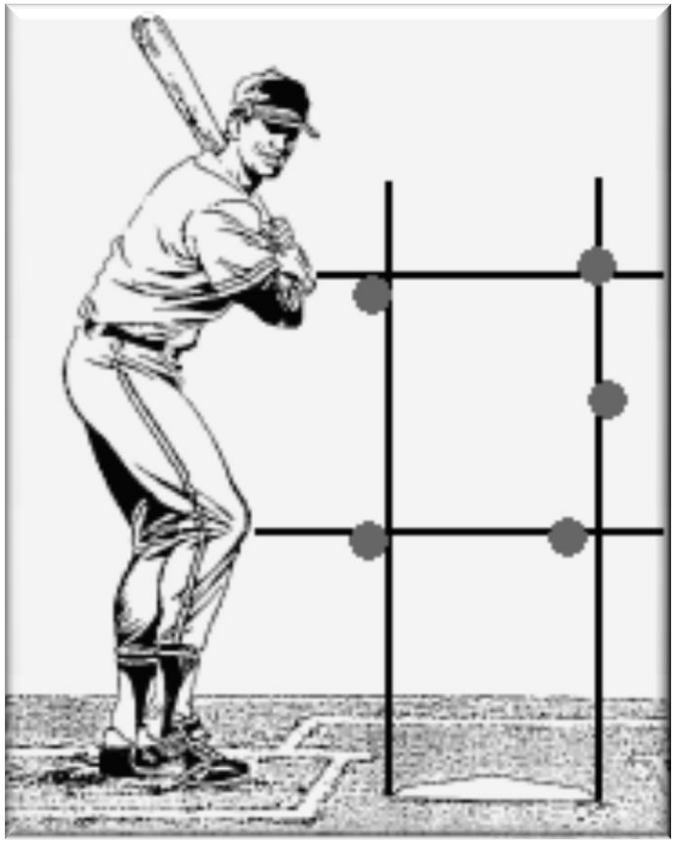




- **Use reference points to frame the strike zone**:
  - **Visualize the top of the zone – often the batters hands are at the top of the zone**
  - **If the catcher is in nice and tight, look at his knees relative to the batter**
    - **But, at AAA and Coast, this usually doesn't work**
  - **See the ball hit the catcher's mitt** when the ball arrives – but it isn't where he catches it that counts!
- **Be sure you can see the entire plate** so you can see the low and away pitch



The Strike Zone



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.

KEY POINTS:

1. **Over the plate** – any of the ball touches any part of strike zone
2. Top is at the **batter's armpits**
3. Bottom is at the **batter's knees**
4. Based on the batter's **natural stance when swinging**

What's A Strike

A STRIKE is a legal pitch which meets any of these conditions – 2.0

1. **Struck at by the batter and is missed** (swinging strike)
2. Not struck at, if **any part of the ball** passes through **any part of the strike zone** (called strike)
3. **Fouled by the batter** when there are fewer than two strikes
4. **Bunted foul** (batter is out and ball is dead if batter bunts foul on third strike)
5. Touches the batter **as the batter swings** at it (dead ball) – NO MATTER WHERE; HEAD, HANDS, etc.
6. Touches the batter in flight **in the strike zone**
7. Becomes a **foul tip** (ball is live and in play)

The Strike Call

You decide it is a strike

Stand straight up, right hand out

Clinch fist, raise arm and say “STRIKE”

A Foul Tip is not a Foul Ball

A FOUL TIP is a batted ball that goes ***sharp and direct from the bat to the catchers hands and is legally caught***.

It is not a foul tip unless caught and any foul tip that is caught is a strike, and the ball is in play. It is not a catch if it is a rebound, unless the ball has first touched the catcher's glove or hand – **2.0**.

1. **Sharp and direct** from bat to catcher's mitt
2. **Must be caught**
3. **Always a strike**; if strike 3, batter is out.
4. **Always a live ball**
5. **Not a foul tip if a rebound**, unless first touching the catcher's hand or glove.

The Foul Tip Call

You decide it is a foul tip

Stand up and put your right hand on your left forearm

Slide your right hand up and out

Clinch fist, raise arm and say “STRIKE”

What's a Ball

A BALL is a pitch which does not enter the strike zone in flight and is not struck at by the batter

- If a pitch **touches the batter in flight and is not in the strike zone**, the batter shall be awarded first base
- If the **batter swings at such a pitch and misses**, it is a STRIKE
- If the pitch **touches the ground and bounces through the strike zone** it is a BALL
- If the pitch **touches the ground and bounces and then touches the batter**, the batter shall be awarded first base

The Ball Call

You decide it is a ball

You stay down and say “BALL”

What's a Foul Ball

- **There are three fair/foul scenarios**:
  1. **Infield ball** not reaching 1st base or 3rd base is judged by …
     - Where the ball is **first touched** (bounder, line drive, or fly), or
     - Where the ball **settles** (bunt, dribbler)
     - The ball can wander in and out of fair territory until **settles** or is **touched**
  2. **Bounding ball over 1st base or 3rd base** is **fair**
     - Crosses plane of the base, or touches the base
     - Breaks the glass ….
  3. **Fly ball beyond 1st base or 3rd base** that drops ***uncaught*** in foul territory is **foul**.
- **Note**: **a fly ball that is caught in foul territory is a *live ball.***
- **Note**: A ball that first touches "foreign" object in foul territory (like a backstop, fence, etc.) is always **foul**
- **Judge the position of the ball**, *not the fielder*, relative to the foul line

The Foul Call and the Fair Non-Call

Say (loudly) “FOUL” (also used for “TIME”)

NEVER CALL“FAIR” OUT LOUD. Just point into fair territory.

Where do I Go on Crack of the Bat?

- **Know your rotations!** Every new batter pause and review the situation and anticipate action
  - We'll cover this in Umpire 102 and on the field
- **Get out from behind the plate. In two-man system, the Plate Umpire is always in motion.**
  - **Trail batter-runner** 1/3 of the way to 1B if no R3
  - Set up for your **catch/no-catch** call, or
  - Set up for your **fair/foul** call, or
  - **Cover 3B with R1 or R1/R3**
  - **Then, double-back to home** plate and set up for plays coming home

Avoiding the Catcher

- **On a pop up near or behind the plate,** take your eyes off the ball and watch the catcher
  - **Removing your mask while doing so**
- If he goes right, swing your right leg back (called "opening the gate") and let him by
- If he goes left, swing your left leg back
- **He'll take you to the ball**

Qualities of a good umpire

- Shows up, and shows up on time
- Looks like an umpire – kids REALLY respect that
- Pays attention to the game at all times – head must be in the game, eyes (almost always) on the ball
- Has good timing; is not too hasty to decide on a call – pause… read the play… then react
- Is decisive once the decision is made, and is proud to let everyone know the call – don't be shy
- Works and communicates well with partner
- Knows where to be and hustles to get there
- Knows the rules

Questions

– and yes, we are going to practice this stuff!

Umpire 102

Field Mechanics for a Two-Man Crew on a 60’ Diamond

Part Two of a three-part introduction to umpiring Little League baseball

Introduction to Little League Umpiring

Umpire 102, Field Mechanics for a Two-Man Crew, is Part Two of a three-part introduction to the rules of baseball for Little League umpires.

- **101 – Working the Plate**
- **102 – Small-Diamond Mechanics (2 man)**
- **103 – The Rules of Baseball**

Umpire 102 covers the following:

1. **Abbreviations and Nomenclature**
2. **The Basic Assignments for U1 and U2**
3. **The Start Positions for U2**
4. **Getting into Position**
5. **Making Calls**
6. **The Base-Runner Scenarios**
7. **Appeals**
8. **Meetings: Plate Meeting & Umpire's Meeting**
9. **Umpire Signals**
10. **Handling Problems & Getting Help**

Abbreviations & Nomenclature

- Umpires
  - Home Plate Umpire = **U1**
  - Base Umpire = **U2**
- Bases = **1B**, **2B**, **3B**, **Home**
- Base Runners
  - Runner on 1B = **R1**
  - Runner on 2B = **R2**
  - Runner on 3B = **R3**
  - Batter-runner = **BR**
- Field Position:

F1 = Pitcher
F2 = Catcher
F3 = 1st Baseman
F4 = 2nd Baseman
F5 = 3rd Baseman
F6 = Shortstop
F7 = Left Fielder
F8 = Center Fielder
F9 = Right Fielder

Basic Assignments & Responsibilities for U1

- **Plate Umpire (U1)**
  - The plate umpire is the crew chief and manages the game; he convenes the **plate meeting** and **umpire meeting** and he handles **signals** with the base umpire.
  - The plate umpire calls balls and strikes and makes all safe/out calls at home plate.
  - The plate umpire has ***all catch/no-catch calls*** on all fly balls, both in the outfield and the infield. This releases the base umpire to watch base runners.
  - The plate umpire has ***all fair/foul calls***, both in the infield and outfield.
  - The plate umpire must come out from behind the plate when the ball is hit and get the best possible position to call fair/foul or fly ball outs.

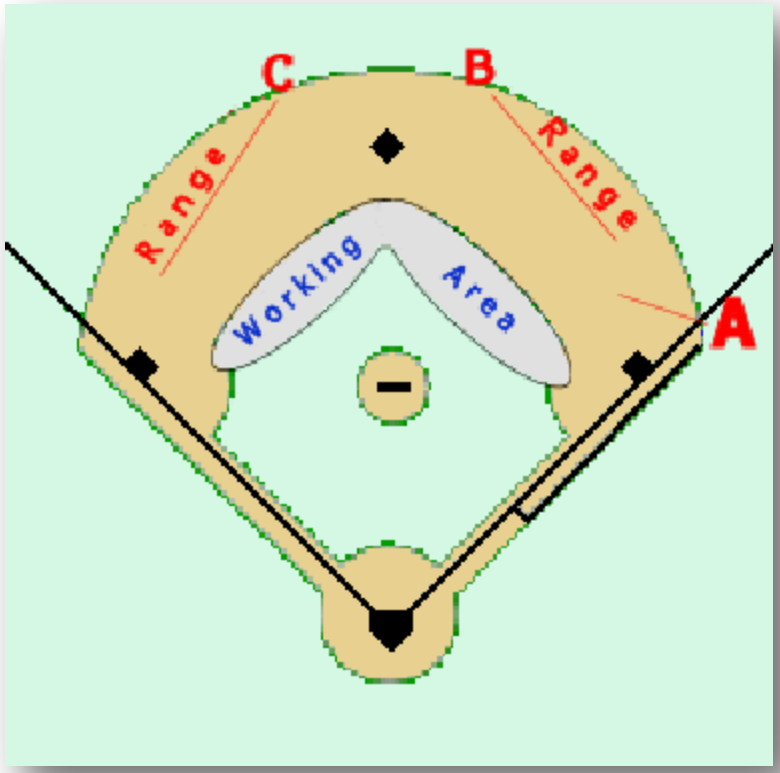
Basic Assignments & Responsibilities for U2

Base Umpire (U2)

- You have the safe/out call on all base runners at all bases except home (with one exception that we'll talk about later).
- You have the base-touch and tag-up on all runners at all bases except home. You also handle all appeal calls at all bases except home.
- You watch for runners leaving early at all bases.
- ***You own all base runners at all times from first base through third base*** (again, with one exception).
- On hits to the outfield, you must come ***inside*** the diamond; on hits to the infield, you must stay ***outside*** the diamond. This is ***the Golden Rule***.

Start Positions for Base Umpire: A, B, C

The start positions for the Base Umpire are simple:



- **No runners on base, Position A**
- **With R1 only, Position B**
- ***In all other situations*, Position C**

The Golden Rule for Base Umpire:
Inside Out / Outside In

- On hits to the **INFIELD**, you remain **OUTSIDE** the diamond and slide in your working range.

- On hits to the **OUTFIELD**, you come **INSIDE** the diamond to the working area, pivot and pick up your base runners.

REMEMBER: Inside-Out, Outside-In

The Silver Rule for Base Umpire: *Angle over Distance*

- **Get in the right position** to make the call
  - Ideally, about 10 feet away from the play and at a 90 degree angle to the throw and/or tag
- But there is only one of you out there; you can't be everywhere at once
  - You will have to make calls at first base when you are in C position – about 75 feet away!
- **Get the right angle on the play** – that is more important than getting close
  - The right angle is where your view isn't obstructed by any other players, and where you can see the tag
  - Try not to get "straight-lined" by runners

Tag or No Tag?

- Determining a **tag or no-tag is a matter of doing these things:**
  - Moving into position to take the play (called "**Bust-to-your-Angle") and standing still**. You will follow the throw with your head, not body. Don't get too close.
  - Finding the throw from the fielder
  - Adjusting to the throw in case it is offline, called "lean-and-a-look"
  - Going to hands-on-knees set (unless doing a lean-and-a-look) to observe the tag. **DON'T MAKE A CALL WHILE ON THE MOVE.**
  - Seeing the tag by using the eyes properly – head still, watch the whole play before you decide
  - Assuring the requirement of "firm and secure possession" has been met – again watch the whole play
  - Finally, **signal the play as using a proper signaling mechanic and a firm voice**

Making the Out or Safe Call

- **The umpire's eyes must be** focused on the critical aspects of the tag (force play or not) as it develops.
- **If the tag is on a base the umpire's eyes will focus on the bag and the feet of the fielder and runner as he** arrives. The arrival of the ball will be clearly seen in the peripheral vision.
  - So don't be too close; you won't see the ball
- **If the tag is on the runner's body then the umpire's eyes will focus on the glove of the fielder.** The glove will direct your eyes to the runner.
- Now the umpire can complete the first part of the call process … **YES a tag took place, or NO a tag did** not take place.
  - If the call is **NO then the umpire will signal "SAFE".**
  - If the call is **YES the umpire must then bring his eyes to the glove and determine if the possession of the** ball is "firm and secure." Only when he sees this will he signal "**OUT"**

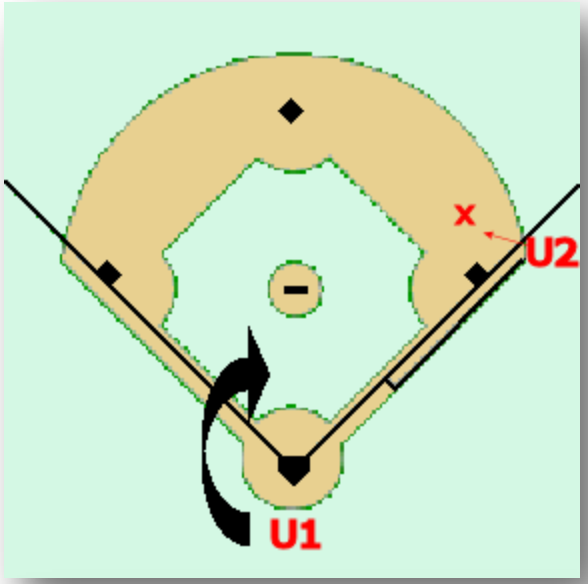
Eight Base Runner Scenarios

- Now we look at each of the eight base-runner scenarios, one-by-one:
  1. No runners on base
  2. Runner on first (**R1**)
  3. Runner on second (**R2**)
  4. Runner on third (**R3**)
  5. Runners on first and second (**R1**, **R2**)
  6. Runners on first and third (**R1**, **R3**)
  7. Runners on second and third (**R2**, **R3**)
  8. Bases loaded (**R1**, **R2**, **R3**)

No Runners on Base

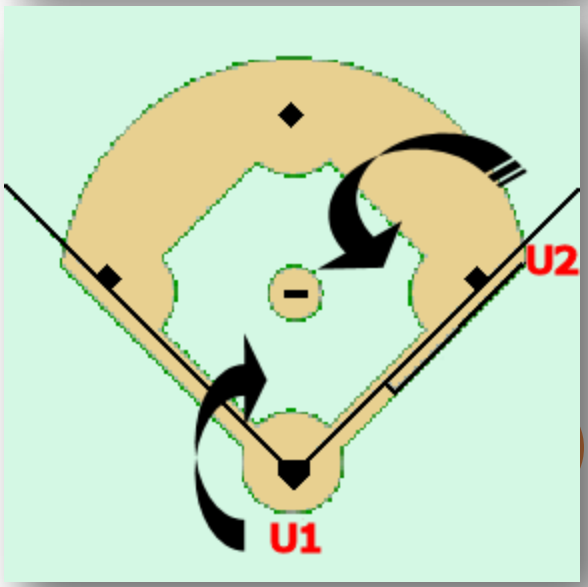
Ball to the Infield

- **U2** starts in **A**. On hit, break to sweet spot for play at 1B
- On overthrows at 1B, watch for ball out of play
- If BR continues beyond 1B, break inside and stay with the BR
- Be sure to ***see all base touches*** –



Ball to the Outfield

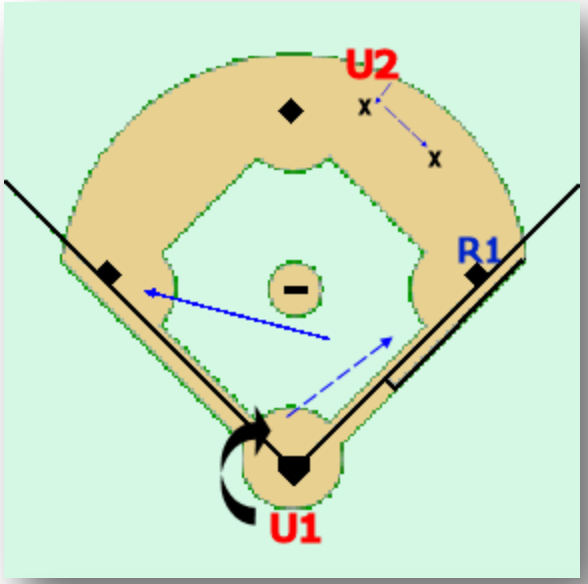
- Break inside and pivot in the working area; pick up the ball but watch 1B for base touch
- You have ALL bases except home; stay with the BR if he advances beyond 1B.
- Your primary responsibility is BR, but from the corner of your eye ***always know where the ball is*** – this lets you *read the play* as it develops
- Take BR all the way to 3B, then release



Runner R1 (1st /3rd)

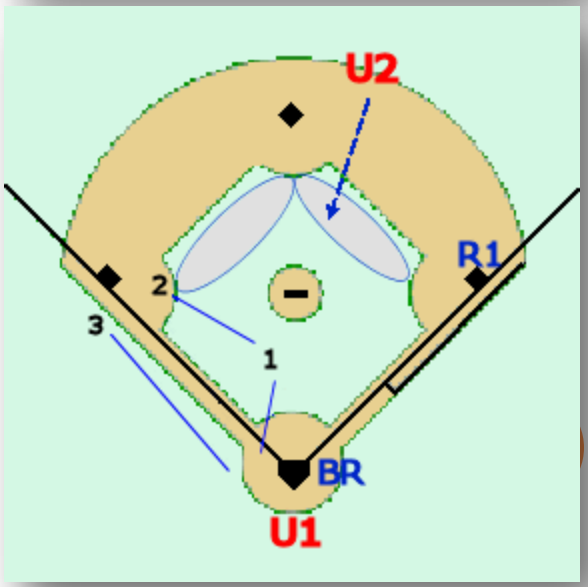
Ball to the Infield

- **U2** starts in **B**. On hit, slide in your range to sweet spot; the play could be at 1B or 2B, so read the play and be in position
- Be alert to the double play
- Be sure to see all base touches
- Watch for obstruction of the BR rounding 1B



Ball to the Outfield

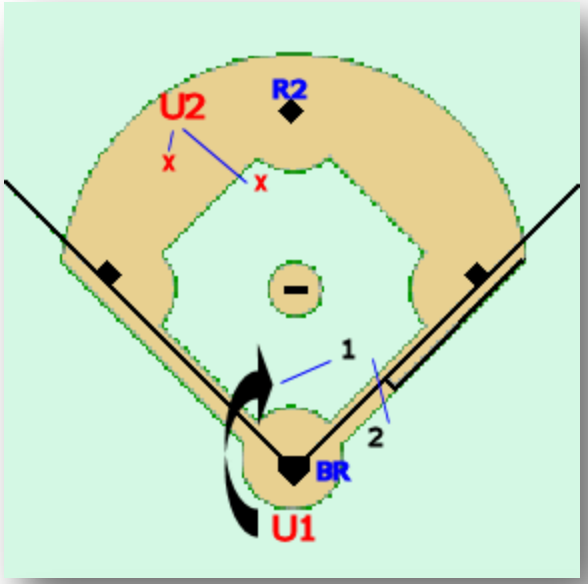
- Break inside to the working area, pivot
- Pick up the ball and stay read the play as the ball returns to the infield. **Follow the ball to the play**. ***Read and react***.
- If the ball is caught, look ***immediately*** at R1 to see tag-up if the runner advances.
- If R1 advances to 3B, **U1** covers 3B and Home (**U2** stays with BR).



Runner R2

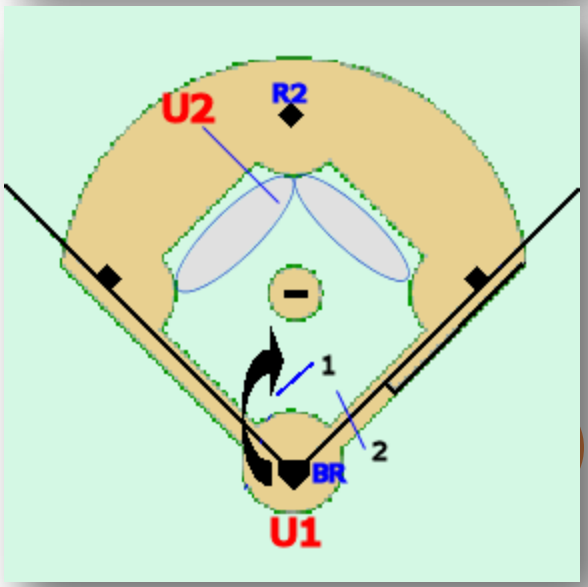
Ball to the Infield

- **U2** starts in **C**. Read and react, follow ball to play
- If at 1B, take a few steps in and set for call
- If play is on R2 (either advancing, or returning to 2B), pick up ball and set for play. Watch for obstruction.
- If a caught line drive, *look immediately at R2* for the pick-off play – **OR**, for tag-up if R2 advances



Ball to the Outfield

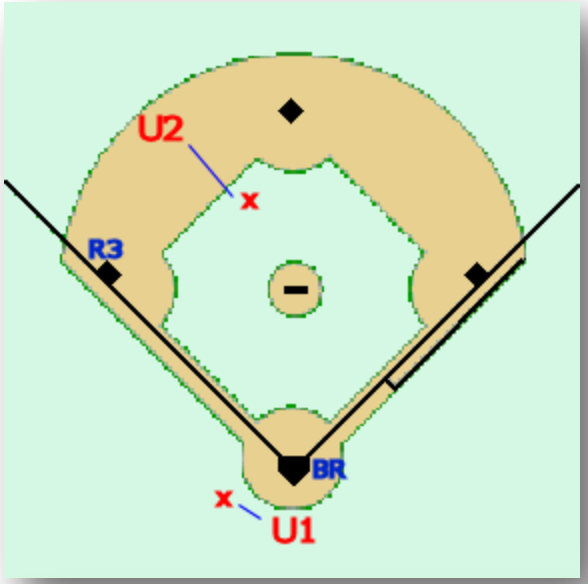
- Break inside, pivot, and pick up the ball
- If caught, look at R2 to ensure he tags up before advancing
- If not caught fly, ***read and react***. Slide in your working area and stay with the ball as it returns to the infield.
- After R2 passes 3B, release R2 to U1 and pick up the BR



Runner R3

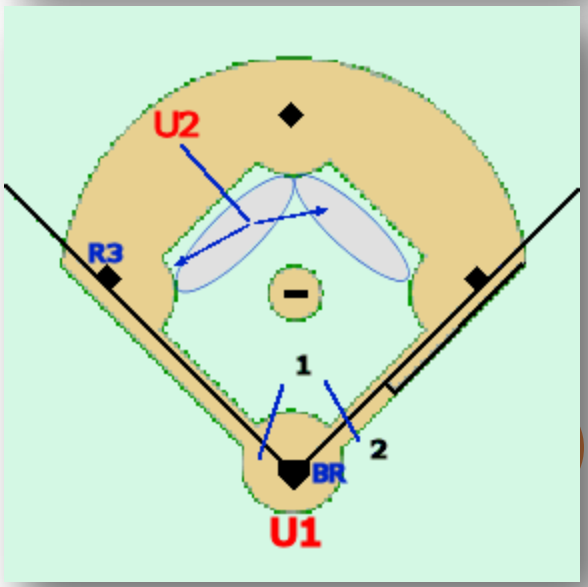
Ball to the Infield

- **U2** starts in **C**. Take steps toward 1B and set for call, AND, sneak a look at R3 to see if he is going
- Follow ball to the play. If caught line drive, look *immediately* at R3 for tag up or pick off.
- If BR breaks for 2B trying to draw the throw, allowing R3 to steal home, stay with the ball and know where your runners are. Stay with BR and let U1 handle R3.



Ball to the Outfield

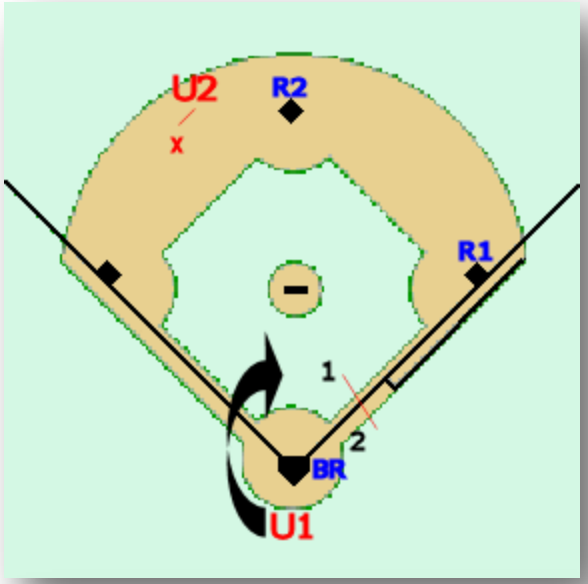
- Break inside, pick up the ball; keep the ball in the corner of your eye, but focus on the runners
- ***See all base touches*** and watch for obstruction
- On caught fly ball, look *immediately* at R3 to see the tag up
- If not caught, release R3 and focus on the BR. You have the BR all the way to 3B



Runners R1, R2

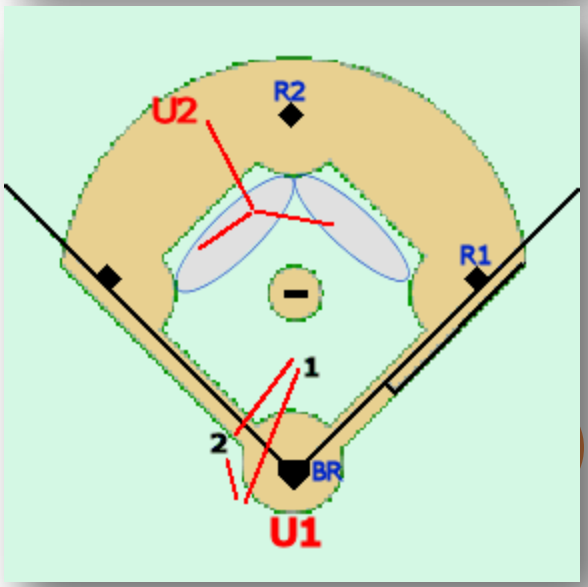
Ball to the Infield

- **U2** starts in **C**. You have forces at all bases, so read and react – and follow the ball to the play.
- Be alert for double play
- On a caught line drive, look *immediately* at runners for tag-up and pick-off plays
- Remember that with fewer than two outs, R1, R2 is an ***infield fly situation***. If pop-up to infield, point and call "Infield fly … batter out."



Ball to the Outfield

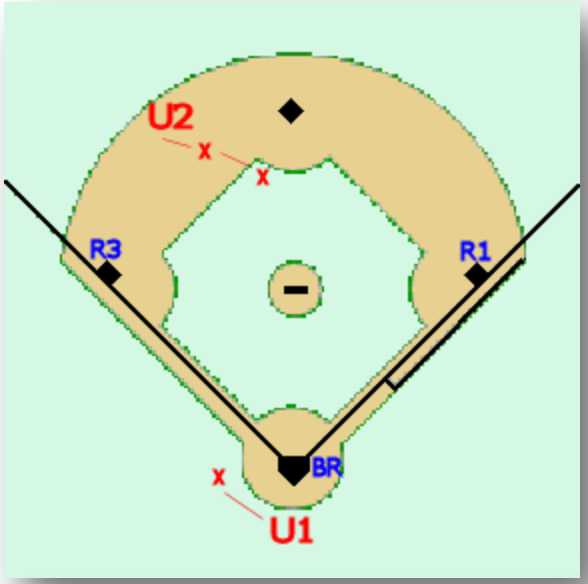
- Break inside, pivot, and pick up the ball so you can see runners and still know where the ball is
- If caught fly ball, look *immediately* to see that runners tag up before advancing
- If not caught, track the ball – read and react. ***You have all runners at all bases***.



Runners R1, R3

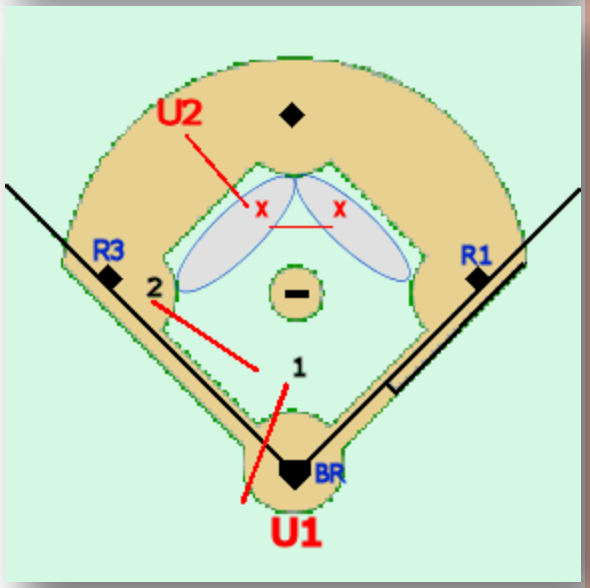
Ball to the Infield

- **U2** starts in **C**. Be flexible. Take a couple of steps and get set for the play at 1B. However, the play could just as easily go to 2B (on R1)
- Stay with the ball, then read and react and follow the ball from the first to the next play
- If it's a caught line drive, immediately look at both runners to see a tag up or pick-off play. If you have agreed with your partner that U1 has the tag-up at 3B, then focus on R1



Ball to the Outfield

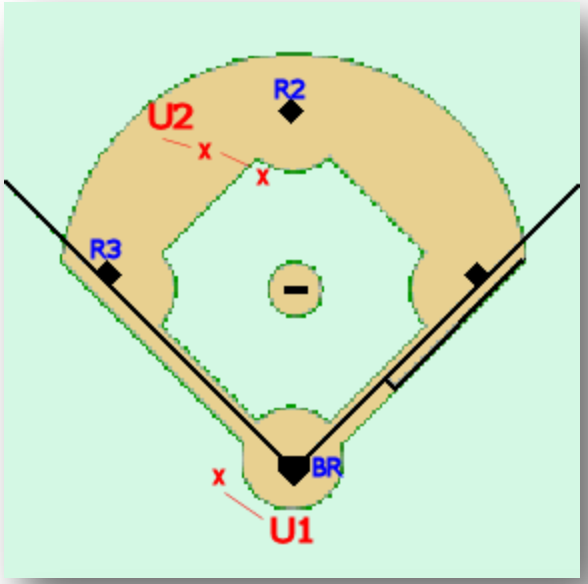
- Break inside, pivot, pick up the ball; read and react.
- If a caught fly ball, look immediately at R1 to ensure he tags up before trying to advance to 2B. U1 has the tag-up on R3.
- If the ball to the outfield is not a caught fly ball, forget about R3. Pick up the ball, watch all runners (R1 and BR) touch bases, then read and react to the ball coming back to the infield



Runners R2, R3

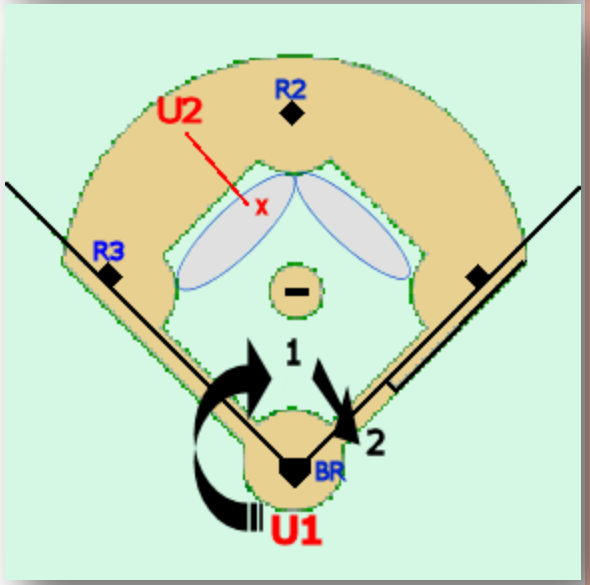
Ball to the Infield

- **U2** starts in **C**. No force, so your first move should be toward 1B. However, watch for snap throws on R2 and R3 if they have moved off their bases.
- If play does go to 1B, expect R2 and R3 to advance, so follow the ball to the next play.
- If a caught line drive, look at R2 to see a tag up. With R2/R3, you have the tag up on R2 while U1 has the tag up on R3.



Ball to the Outfield

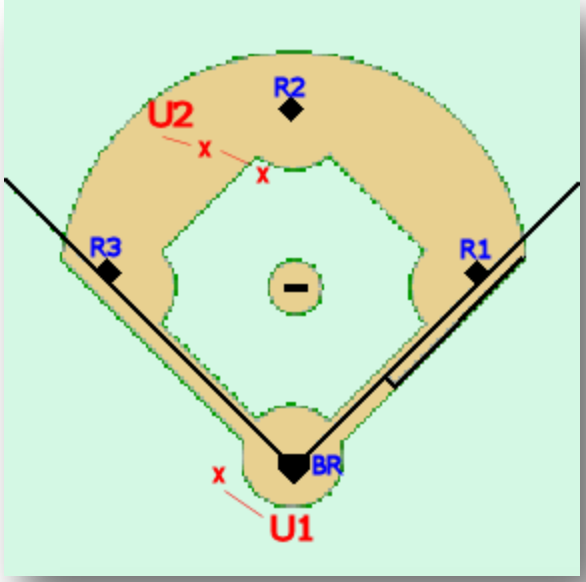
- Break inside and pivot. Pick up the ball and read the play as you follow the ball back to the infield
- If ball is caught, look at R2 for the tag-up. U1 has the tag-up at 3B.
- If ball is not caught, release R3 to U1 and concentrate on R2 and BR. Be sure to see all base touches.



Runners R1, R2, R3 - Infield Hit

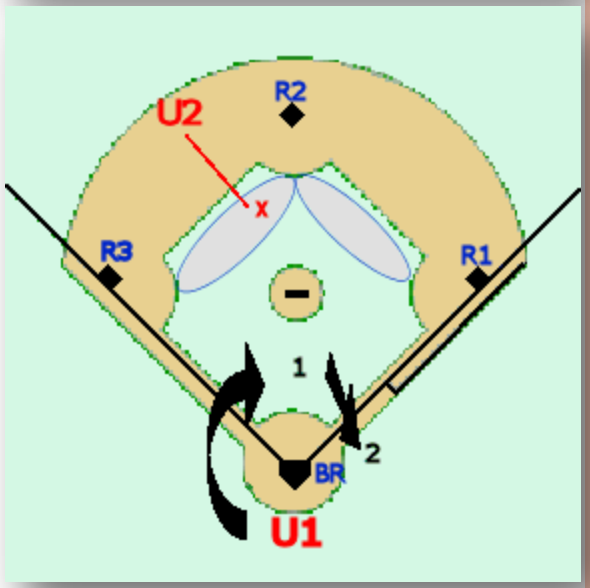
Ball to the Infield

- **U2** starts in **C**. Pick up the ball immediately and follow it to the play. We have forces at all bases, so the ball could go anywhere
- Be alert for double play. Stay with the ball and stay out of the way
- If a caught line drive, look immediately for the snap throw on R1 or R2
- If ball is mishandled and gets through the infield, come inside and pivot



Ball to the Outfield

- Break inside and pivot. Pick up the ball and move to a spot to you see R1 and R2 for tag-ups if the fly ball is caught.
- If no catch, pick up the ball coming back to the infield. ***Stay with the ball***, *and stay out of the way*.
- See all base-touches. This is ***very*** important. With bases loaded, everyone is forced.



Appeals

- An **appeal** is when a fielder claims a violation of the rules by the offensive team. There are some violations that an umpire ignores unless a defensive player appeals. These are the most common:
  - Failing to tag up when required
  - Failing to touch a base; failing to touch home plate
  - Batting out of order (Manager's appeal)
- ***Appeals must be made while the ball is in play (live ball)***.
- Fielder must either **tag the offending runner** with the ball, or **touch the base** where the violation occurred with ball in hand
- The appeal must be obvious; no "accidental appeals". This is especially important at 1B, where runner is *presumed* to have touched the base.
- Defense loses the right to appeal after a pitch, any play, or once the defense leaves the field of play.

The Umpire Pre-Game Meeting

- Twenty minutes to game time, the umpires meet. This is extremely important
  - Go over the division of responsibility to ensure you're both on the same page. Cover fair/foul and catch/no-catch. Discuss U1 coverage of 3B on the 1st-to-3rd, and situations where U1 has the tag-up on R3.
  - Discuss handling overthrows out of play at 1B and 3B
  - Go over the ground rules
  - Go over your umpire signals and prompt to remember eye contact and signals on every new batter.
  - Discuss handling of problem calls and getting help

The Pre-Game Meeting with Managers

- Five minutes before the game time, umpires proceed to home plate and call the team managers to home plate for the pre-game meeting (2 minutes)
  - Ask coaches to confirm that all players are properly equipped, and that all equipment is regulation
  - Go over ground rules; especially important is establishing out-of-play.
  - Clarify special league or local rules.
  - Ask for questions.

Umpire Signs & Signals

- Communicating with you partner is critically important; learn and use the following guidelines:
  - U1 gives the signals; U2 flashes back
  - Make eye contact with your partner at every new batter, and whenever the situation changes (e.g., a steal)
  - ***Learn and use the following signals***:
    - Number of outs, if any
    - Infield Fly situation, if applicable
    - U1 is staying home
    - U1 has the tag-up on R3
    - U1 has 3B on the 1st-to-3rd (runners R1, or R1/R3)
    - I need help / I have information for you

Problem Calls & Getting help

- Our main goal is to get the call right. If you make a mistake, don't worry. If you can correct it, do so. If you can't, then learn from it and move on.
- If for any reason you are less than 100% sure about a call you've made, get help. This is up to you.
- If you see something that your partner might have missed, offer help. This is up to him.
- **Do NOT** let managers or coaches argue judgment calls; **do NOT** allow managers to charge the field
- However, managers can legitimately question and appeal an error in the application of a rule.
- Do NOT allow arguing, rudeness, or unsportsmanlike conduct. You have the authority to eject players or coaches. Use that power sparingly, but use it if you must.

A teaser for next clinic – Rule Myths Part I

- The hands are considered part of the bat.
- The batter-runner must turn to his right after over-running first base.
- If the batter breaks his wrists when swinging, it's a strike.
- If a batted ball hits the plate first it's a foul ball.
- The ball is dead on a foul-tip.
- The batter who batted out of order is the person declared out.
- The batter may not overrun first base when he gets a base-on-balls.
- If the batter does not pull the bat out of the strike zone while in the bunting position, it's an automatic strike.
- The batter-runner is always out if he runs outside the running lane after a bunted ball.
- A runner is out if he slaps hands or high-fives other players, after a homerun is hit over the fence.
- Tie goes to the runner.
- The runner gets the base he's going to, plus one on a ball thrown out-of-play.
- Anytime a coach touches a runner, the runner is out.
- The runner must always slide when the play is close.
- The runner is always safe when hit by a batted ball while touching a base.
- A runner may not steal on a foul-tip.

A teaser for next clinic – Rule Myths Part II

- It is a force out when a runner is called out for not tagging up on a fly ball.
- An appeal on a runner who missed a base cannot be a force out.
- A runner is out if he runs out of the baseline to avoid a fielder who is fielding a batted ball.
- Runners may not advance when an infield fly is called.
- No run can score when a runner is called out for the third out for not tagging up.
- A pitch that bounces to the plate cannot be hit.
- The batter does not get first base if hit by a pitch after it bounces.
- If a fielder holds a fly ball for 2 seconds it's a catch.
- You must tag the base with your foot on a force out or appeal.
- If a player's feet are in fair territory when the ball is touched, it is a fair ball.
- The ball must always be returned to the pitcher before an appeal can be made.
- With no runners on base, it is a ball if the pitcher starts his windup and then stops.
- If a fielder catches a fly ball and then falls over the fence it is a homerun.
- The ball is dead anytime an umpire is hit by the ball.
- The home plate umpire can overrule the other umps at anytime.

QUESTIONS

Umpire 103

The Rules of Baseball

Part Three of a three-part introduction to umpiring Little League baseball

Introduction to Little League Umpiring

Umpire 103, The Rules of Baseball, is Part Three of a three-part introduction to the rules of baseball for new Little League umpires.

- **101 – Working the Plate**
- **102 – Small-Diamond Mechanics (2 man)**
- **103 – The Rules of Baseball**

Umpire 103 covers the following:

1. Managing the Game (again)
2. Live ball / Dead ball
3. Fair / Foul
4. Batter basics
5. Runner basics
6. Pitcher basics
7. Interference / Obstruction
8. Key definitions
9. AAA/Coast specifics

These eight areas represent about **98%** of what Little League umpire normally rules on in a typical game. That said, the rules of baseball cover far more ground than we'll cover in this course. ***There is no substitute for studying the rules!***

Conducting the Game

- **Plate umpire is the UIC**. You own the game!
  - But you cannot overrule your partner's calls
- **Pre-game conference with your partner**
  - Go over your rotations and assignments, especially fair/foul calls and coverage of 3rd base
  - Go over ground rules (especially dead ball areas)
- **Plate meeting with team managers**
  - Confirm that both teams have 9 players; get lineups.
  - Confirm that players are properly equipped
  - Confirm time limits, run limits, and mercy rules, if any
  - Cover ground rules and take questions
- **Your appearance and demeanor are important**
  - You ***look*** like an umpire
  - Your voice says you're in charge: strong and commanding
  - Develop a loud and crisp voice for calling strikes, fouls, dead balls, out/safe, and other calls
  - Communicate with coaches is an even, but firm tone

Safety during the game

- **Players do not handle bats in the dugout.** The batter coming up should grab his or her bat when it is time to exit the dugout.
- **Players should remain in the dugout except when they are playing.** Also, make sure players aren't standing in the dugout opening where they could be hit by a foul ball or errant throw,
- **In general, there is no on-deck hitter allowed.** At the beginning of an inning, the first batter of the inning may come out of the dugout with a bat and warm up well away from the plate and any player or coach. But at no other times, not even during a pitching change, can a batter be outside the dugout.
- **All batters and runners wear batting helmets.** Also, any players who are coaching bases must wear a helmet.
- **The catcher must have a "dangler"** (a throat guard, or Yeager as it is called) attached to his mask, even for hockey-style masks.
- **During warm-ups before the game, the player standing next to the coach who is hitting grounders and flies must have on a catcher's helmet and mask.**
- **Between innings, any player can warm-up the pitcher, but that player must have on the catcher's helmet and mask.** Shin guards and chest protection is not required for warming up a catcher.
  - At Majors and Coast levels, adults may not warm-up a pitcher during the game. In AAA, it is OK for an adult to warm-up a pitcher at any time.

Ending the game

- **All divisions play 5 ½ or 6 inning games**
  - If the home team is ahead after 5 ½ innings, the game is over
- **All divisions use the "Mercy Rule"** – if the Visiting team is ahead by 10 after 4 or 5 complete innings, or if the Home team is ahead by 10 after 3 ½ or 4 ½ innings, the game is over.
- **If it is too dark or raining too hard for you to see balls and strikes, or if the field is too muddy to play on, you declare the game suspended** – you don't have to worry about who wins or loses or continuations
  - You can delay the game and try to wait out a rain shower
  - But, rain or snow alone is not a reason to call a game here in the PNW – player safety is
- **Time Limits – *only* on weekends, and *not even for all games then!***
  - No matter what parents say (!), there are **NO** time limits on weekday evening games, even when it is cold and wet and windy
  - On a weekend game that has a following game, no new innings after 2 hours, and no pitch after 2:20, unless the game is a Coast or Majors game that is tied after 6 innings, then the limits are 2:30 and 2:50 respectively

Keys to Effective Game Management

- **Keep the game moving**
  - Get defense changeover quickly
  - Use ready catcher (player with mask, or courtesy catcher)
  - Pitcher gets 8 warm-up pitches initially, then 5
  - Try to keep changeover to one minute
- **If coaches have question on a call**
  - Coach asks for time, then approaches ump who made call
  - Call for help IF you think more info can help get call right
  - Discuss with other umps AWAY from coaches
- Distinguish between **judgment calls (not arguable)** and questioning the **application of rule (appealable)**
- **Don't allow "chirping" on judgment calls**
  - If chirping from the bench, approach the coach and stop it *immediately*.
  - If from a coach, warn him to stop. If continues, then …!
  - If from the stands, ask the coach to help.

Live Ball / Dead Ball

- **The game starts** when the PU puts the ball in play by calling "**Play**". From then forward, ***the ball is always in one of two states: live or dead***. The umpires control this.
- **When the ball is live**, all legal actions of the game may occur ***until*** the umpire calls "**Time**", "**Foul**", or "**Dead ball**". All three render the ball dead.
- **When the ball is dead**, no runner may advance, no run can score, nor any action of the game take place ***until*** the umpire puts the ball back in play with the call "**Play**".
- **There are two outcomes of a dead ball:**
  - **Runners (and/or batter) return** – that is, the play resets
  - OR, **Runners (and/or batter) advance**

Dead Ball – Outcome 1

Runners (&/or batter) Return – The Play Resets

- **Foul ball, not caught** – **5.09(e)**. 90% of your dead ball/runner return situations are foul balls.
- **Illegally batted ball** – **5.09(d)**. Batter hits the ball with one foot entirely outside the batter's box.
- **Offensive Interference** – for example:
  - Batted ball hits base runner
  - Base coach intentionally interferes with thrown or batted ball, or physically assists a base runner
  - Runner makes contact with fielder making play on the ball
- **Batter hit by pitch in strike zone**, or while swinging – **6.08(b)(1)**. In both cases, the pitch is a strike; if strike 3 the batter is out. The batter is **not** awarded first base.
- **There are many more instances** where the play resets.

Dead Ball – Outcome 2

Runners (&/or batter) Advance

- **There are many situations** when the ump calls "dead ball" and awards bases to the batter and/or runners. Examples:
  - **Batter hit by pitch** (not in strike zone) – **5.09(e)**. Batter is awarded 1st base; base runners advance *if forced*.
  - **Ball overthrown out of play** on throw from F6 to F3 – **7.05(g)**. Batter and runners awarded two bases ***from time of pitch***.
- Depending on the infraction or circumstances, the awards can be **one** base, **two** bases or, in some cases, **three** bases.
- Base awards are determined by the position of runners **either** at time of pitch (**TOP**), **or** at the time of fielder's throw (**TOT**), depending on circumstances.

Dead Ball (3)

Other Dead Ball Issues

- **Delayed dead ball**
  Some infractions call for a **delayed dead ball**. In these situations, allow "continuous action" to conclude, then call "Time" and deal with the infraction. Example:
  - Catcher's interference – **6.08(c)**
- **Putting the ball back in play**
  - Every time the ball is taken out of play by an umpire calling "Time", "Foul", or "Dead ball", **the ball must then be put back in play**. This is very important.
  - When the **pitcher has the ball** on the mound, the **catcher is in the catcher's box**, and the **batter is ready** to take his position in the batter's box, point to the pitcher and call loudly, "**Play**".
  - The "Play" call signals players and umpires that the ball is back in play, the game is on, and legal actions can take place.

Fair / Foul

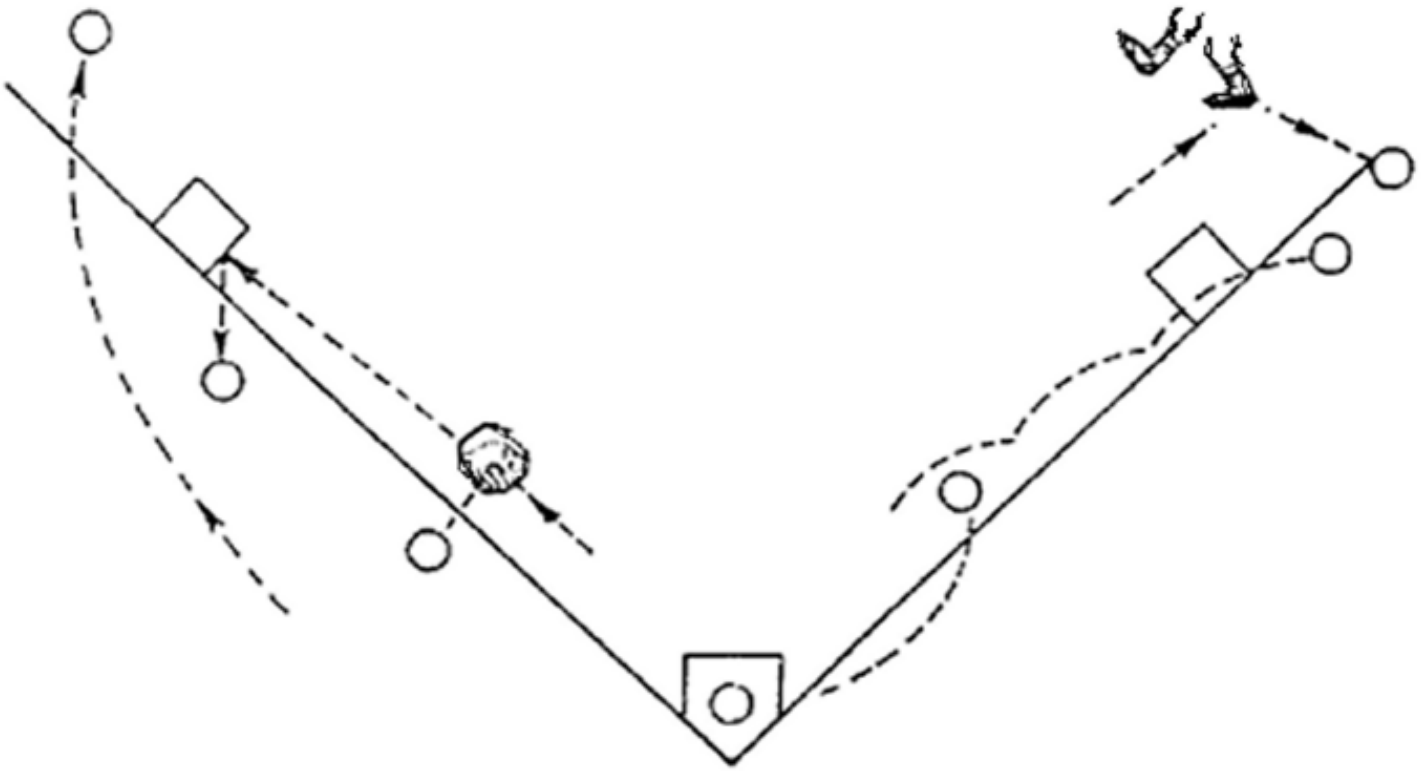
The most common dead ball case is the **foul ball**. Perhaps 90% of all dead-balls result from foul balls. Looked at another way, a good deal of an umpire's time is spent judging batted balls fair or foul.

- **Fair territory** (**2.0**): "…that part of the playing field within, and including the first base and third base lines, from home base to the bottom of the playing field fence and perpendicularly upwards. *Home plate, first base and third base and all foul lines are in fair territory*."
- **Foul territory** (**2.0**): "… that part of the playing field **outside** the first and third base lines extended to the fence and perpendicularly upwards."
- **Foul ball** (**2.0**): "… a batted ball that settles on foul territory between home and first base, or between home and third base, or that bounds past first or third base on or over foul territory, or that first falls on foul territory beyond first or third base, or that while on or over foul territory, touches the person of an umpire or player, or any object foreign to the natural ground. (Note): A foul fly shall be judged according to the relative position of the ball and the foul line, including the foul pole, and **not** as to whether the fielder is on foul or fair territory at the time that fielder touches the ball."

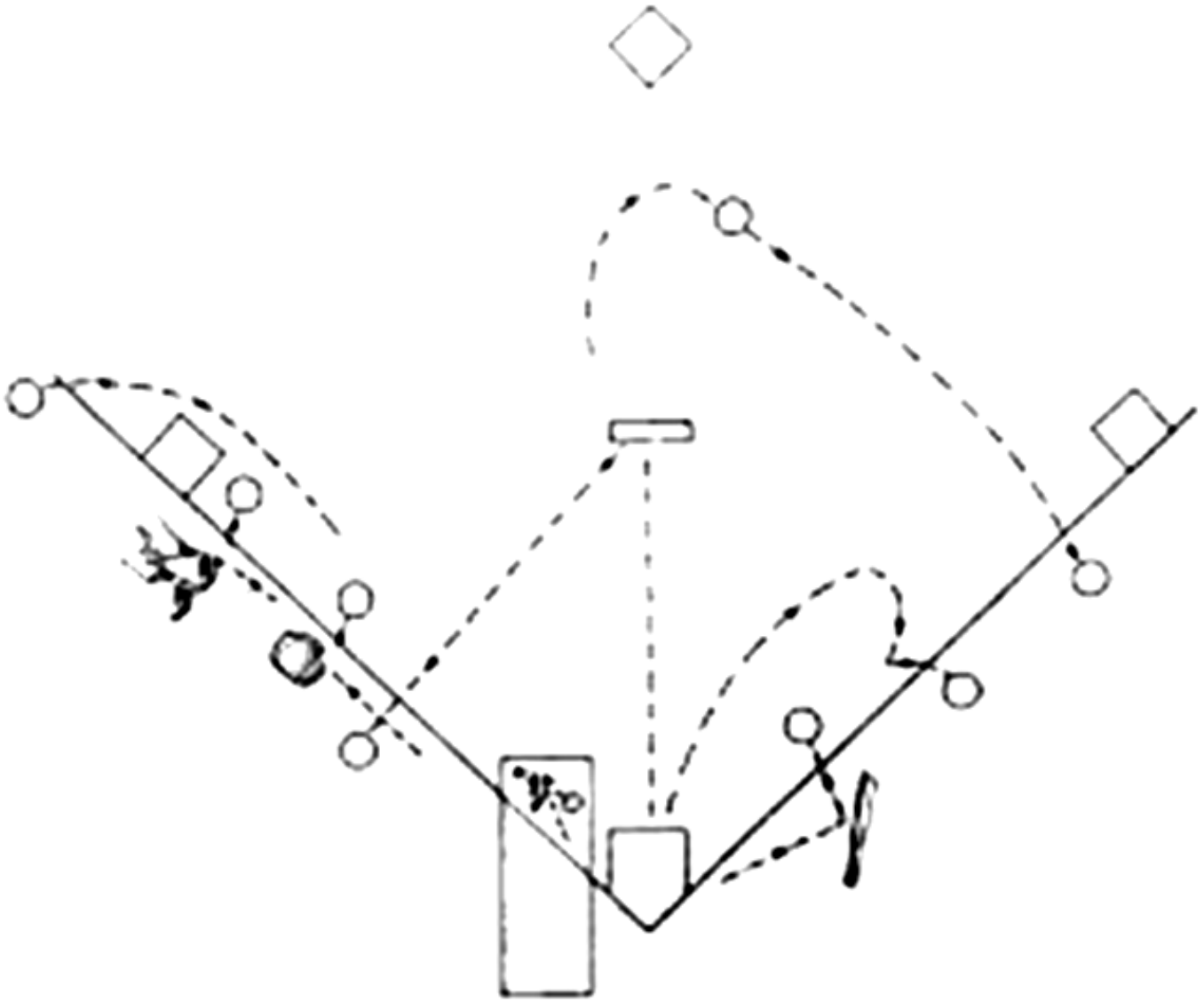
Judging a Foul Ball

- **Judge the position of the ball**, *not the fielder*, relative to the foul line:
- **There are three fair/foul scenarios**:
  1. **Infield ball** not reaching 1st base or 3rd base is judged by …
     - Where the ball is **first touched** (bounder, line drive, or fly), or
     - Where the ball **settles** (bunt, dribbler)
     - The ball can wander in and out of fair territory until **settles** or is **touched**
  2. **Bounding ball over 1st base or 3rd base** is **fair**
     - Crosses plane of the base, or touches the base
     - Breaks the glass ….
  3. **Fly ball beyond 1st base or 3rd base** that drops ***uncaught*** in foul territory is **foul**.
- **Note**: **a fly ball that is caught in foul territory is a *live ball.***
- **Note**: A ball that first touches "foreign" object in foul territory (like a backstop, fence, etc.) is always **foul**

Fair Ball Scenarios

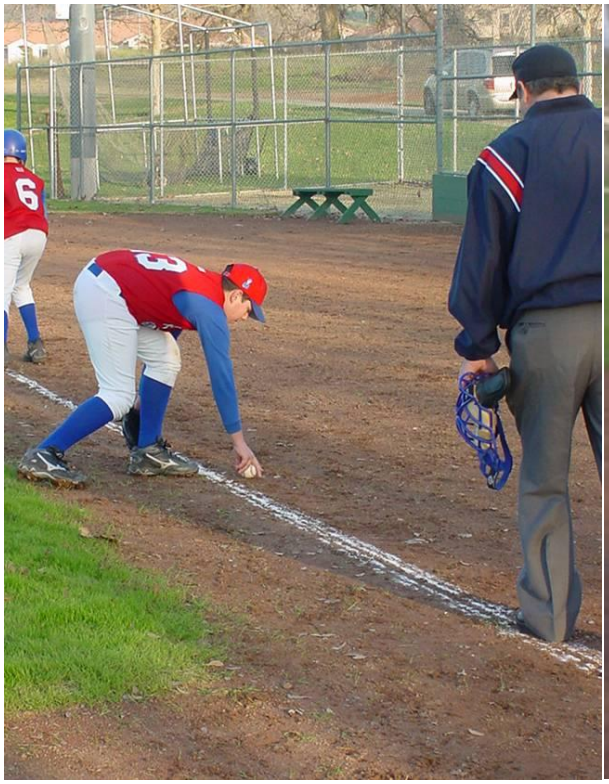


Foul Ball Scenarios



Fair or Foul?

(1)

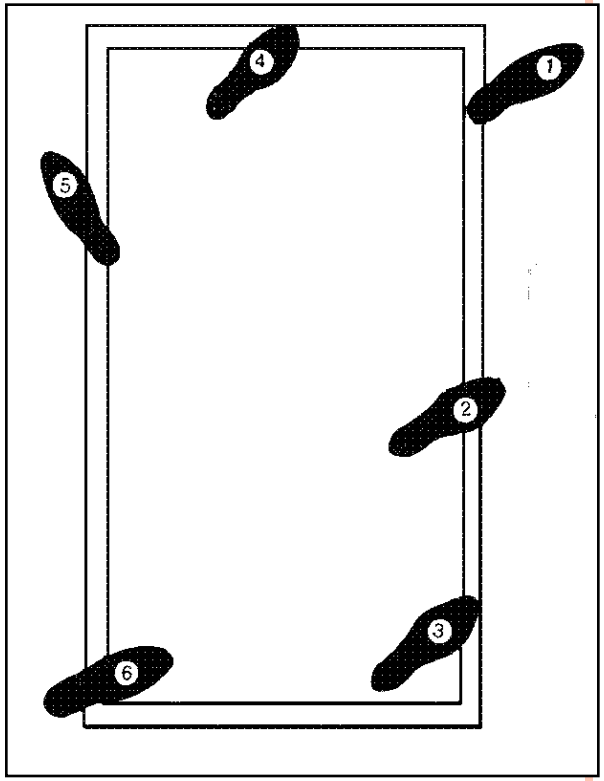


(2)

(3)

Batter Basics

- **Legal position of the batter at delivery** - **6.03**: Feet must be within batter's box (the lines of the box are "within" the box)
- **Batter hit by pitch – 6.08(b) (dead ball)**:
  - **Not in strike zone**: **Award first base**; runners advance if forced (see AAA coach exception).
  - **While swinging**: **Strike**; if third strike, batter out. (Hands not part of the bat.)
  - **Batter in strike zone**: **Strike**; if third strike, batter out.
  - **Batter *not* in strike zone, but makes no attempt to avoid**: **Ball – use rarely, and never at AAA**.
- **NOTE: Throwing the bat is NOT an out**



- **Batter hit by *batted* ball**:
  - **While still in batter's box**: **Foul ball** (dead ball) (w/i two steps)
    - Only really an issue on a bunt
  - **Outside of batter's box: Out** (interference–dead ball) **6.05(f)**:

Batter Basics (2) – Batting out of Order

When a player bats out of order, the "**proper batter**" (the one who failed to bat in his proper place) is the one called out and the at-bat of the "**improper batter**" is nullified – **6.07**.

- **Note**: **This is an appeal play** for the defensive coach. The umpire or scorekeeper (or fan) should not call attention to a player batting out of order.
- **If discovered while the improper batter is still at bat**, simply replace with the proper batter who assumes the count.
- **If discovered following the first pitch to the batter *following*** the improper batter, the improper batter's at-bat becomes legitimate and the batting order picks up at that point
- **If discovered before the first pitch to the next batter**, the proper batter is called out, the improper batter's at-bat is nullified, and the batting order picks up with the batter following the proper batter.

Runner Basics

- **The batter-runner (BR) heading to 1st base**:
  - **If runner is outside the running lane** in last half of distance to 1st base, ***and interferes with a throw*** to first from the vicinity of home plate, as with a bunt, BR is out – **6.05(j)**
  - **BR can overrun 1st base to either side**. BUT, any move toward 2nd base invalidates protection – **7.08(c)**
  - **Overrunning 1st base**, the BR is assumed to have touched the base.
- **On base path**, if the BR runs more than 3 feet off path ***to avoid a tag***, the BR is out – **7.08 (a)(1)**
  - **"Base path" is defined as** line of natural progress. It is, technically, the line between the runner at a given time and the base toward which he is running.
- **Two runners on a base – 7.03**
  - **The base belongs to leading runner**; the trailing runner must retreat
  - **However, this is not an automatic out**; the defense must tag the trailing runner before reaches his legal base.

Runner Basics (2): Outs

The base runner is out in the following situations:

- The **runner does not slide or attempt to avoid** a fielder *who has the ball and is waiting to make tag* - **7.08(a)(3)**
  - **THERE IS NO "MUST SLIDE" RULE!!! Note the requirements – fielder must have ball and must be waiting to make tag, and even then runner can attempt to go around.**
- **Intentionally interferes with a thrown ball** or intentionally or unintentionally hinders a fielder attempting to play on a batted ball – **7.08(b)**
- Is **touched by a batted ball** in fair territory before the ball is touched or passes through an infielder – **7.08(f)**
- **Slides head-first** into a base while advancing - **7.08(a)(4)**
- Base runner **passes a preceding runner** – **7.08(h)**
- **Tagged by a live ball** while off the base – **7.08(c)**
- **Fails to reach a base to which the runner is forced** before he or the base is tagged – **7.08(e)**

Runner Basics (3): Appeals

Some infractions are not automatic outs

Rather, the defense must call out the infraction and tag the offending runner or relevant base.

- Runner misses touching a base (including first base) – **7.10(b), (c)**
- Runner misses home plate and makes no effort to return – **7.10(d)**
- Runner fails to return to 1st base immediately after overrunning – **7.10(c)**
- Runner fails to tag up on a caught fair or foul fly ball – **7.10(a)**
- A player fails to bat in his proper position in the batting order – **6.07**

Appeal Basics

- The ball must be alive and in play
- The defense must call out and specify the infraction while tagging the appropriate base or player
- Appeals must be made before the next play or pitch (not counting "continuous action" that includes the appealable infraction)
- You can appeal only once. If you err on the appeal, you lose the right

Runner Basics (4): Base Awards

In many situations umpires make base awards (see rules **7.04** and **7.05**). Examples of base awards:

- **one** (e.g., batter hit by pitch)
- **two** (ball thrown out of play)
- **three** (fielder uses cap, for example, to field a ball)
- **four** (ball hit over the fence in fair territory)

- **The most common situation** is a ball thrown out of play (into dead-ball territory) on a throwing or fielding error

- **Concepts**:
  - **Time of Pitch (TOP)** – last legally held base
  - **Time of Throw (TOT)** – position on base path

Base-Awards on Overthrows

- **Overthrows that go out of play** are ALWAYS two bases. ***However…***
- **Depending on circumstances**, two-base award on overthrows *out of play* are judged from **TOP** or **TOT**.
  - **First play in the infield** (F6 overthrows F3 and ball goes into dugout): **Two bases from TOP**.
  - **Second play in the infield** (F4 completing double-play to F3 throws it into the dugout): **Two bases from TOT**.
  - **Throw from outfield** (F9 throws wild over fence and into the parking lot): **Two bases from TOT**.

Leaving early (7.13)

Base runners may not leave their base until a pitched ball reaches the batter.

- **If a play is made on the runner**, let the play continue. If the runner is put out, forget the infraction; if the runner is safe, call TIME and enforce penalty.
- **If the batter gets a hit**, let the play continue until action stops, then call TIME and enforce penalty.
- **If a clean hit forces the runner** to the taken base, he cannot be returned.
- **Infraction for one base runner applies to all**. Everyone returns, except where forces prevent it.

Interference

Any action by an offensive player that "obstructs, impedes, hinders or confuses any fielder attempting to make a play."

- **Runner is hit by batted ball**: Runner out; dead ball.
- **Runner collides (even slightly) with a fielder** making play on batted ball: Runner out; dead ball.
  - **Base runners must avoid** any fielder attempting to field a batted ball.
- **Runner intentionally impedes a player's attempt to throw the ball** to make a play: Runner out, *and possibly* the other runner is also out; dead ball
- **Runner intentionally slaps away tag:** runner out; dead ball.
- **Batter intentionally or through willful neglect interferes with play at the plate: runner out; dead ball** – unless third out, then batter is out
  - But batter is not required to have eyes in the back of his head, just to back away from plate as runner comes in

Obstruction

"… a **fielder** who, ***while not in possession of the ball and not in the act of fielding the ball,*** impedes the progress of any runner" – **2.0**, **7.06**

- **Type "A" Obstruction** - **7.06(a)**: When a **play is being made on obstructed runner**: dead ball; award base as appropriate
- **Type "B" Obstruction** - **7.06(b)**: **When a play is not being made on obstructed runner**: *delayed* dead ball; award base as appropriate
- **Base Award**: Award the base runner the base which, ***in the umpire's judgment***, the runner would have attained had the obstruction not occurred.
- **If obstructed while returning to a base** (as on pick-off play), **always award the next base**.

OBSTRUCTION - 2

- **Calling Type B Obstruction** (delayed dead ball)
  - **Point to offending fielder** and hold extended fist and call "that's obstruction"; when play concludes, enforce as needed
- **Calling Type A Obstruction**
  - **Call TIME immediately** and enforce the infraction
- **The two most common points of obstruction**:
  - **Extra-base hit** and **F3 is watching the ball in the base path** when BR bumps into him rounding 1B.
  - **Home plate** – F2 is blocking the plate ***without the ball***. **The base line belongs to the runner** and the catcher should be there only when fielding a ball or with the ball already in his/her possession

Pitcher Basics

- **There are no balks in Little League**, but we call illegal pitches at the Majors level. (In Coast and AAA divisions, we issue warning so the kids learn about pitching rules, but we don't call infractions.)
- **Learn this: 8.05**. This is the extensive rule that lists all of the ways in which a pitch is illegal. However, in Little League we go pretty lightly with **8.05**.
- Note that **most illegal pitch types apply only when there is a runner on base**
  - **Quick pitching and pitching from off the mound are always "illegal pitches"**
- **Regulations specify pitch-count restrictions** (by age) and required days of rest between games, but these regulations are not enforced by the umpire.

Pitcher Basics - 2

- **A coach or manager can visit the pitcher on the mound** with the following restrictions:
  - Visit the same pitcher only **twice per inning**; third time is the hook
  - Visit the same pitcher only **three times in a game**; the fourth is the hook
- **Manager can substitute a pitcher at any time** – even during an at-bat (the new pitcher assumes the count)
  - **New pitcher gets 8 warm-up pitches** (unless entering due to an injury; in that case he gets as many as they need)
  - **A pitcher who is relieved** can remain in the game at another defensive position, ***except not as a catcher***.
- **A pitcher has an official "appearance"** upon delivering one pitch (not warm-up pitches)

Definitions of Key Terms

Baseball rules are all built on the definition of terms in Rule 2.0. We'll look closely at a few of these.

- **Catch**
- **Tag**
- **Inning**
- **Infield Fly (Infield fly rule)**

CATCH

CATCH is the act of a fielder getting **secure possession** **in the hand or glove** of a ball in flight and firmly holding it before it touches the ground **…**

- To be a catch, the fielder shall hold the ball long enough to prove **complete control** of the ball and that ***release of the ball is voluntary and intentional***.
- **KEYS** to judging a catch**: Secure possession** and **voluntary release.**
- **NOT a catch** if fielder (simultaneous with the catch) **collides** with player, wall, or fence, or **falls** down, and as a result of the collision or fall **drops** the ball.
- If the fielder drops the ball while making a throw ***following*** the catch, the ball shall be adjudged to have been caught (i.e., "drop on the transfer").
- In a tag-up situation, runners may leave their bases the instant the first fielder touches the ball.

TAG

TAG is the action of a fielder in touching a base with the body **while holding the ball securely and firmly in the hand or glove**; or touching a runner with the ball or with the hand or glove **holding the ball securely and firmly in the hand or glove**

- **The KEY** is the phrase "**securely in hand or glove**"
- **NOT a tag** if ball is trapped against body
- **NOT a tag** if touched with glove while ball in hand

INNING

… that portion of a game within which the teams alternate on offense and defense and in which there are three putouts for each team.

- Each team's time at bat is a **half-inning**.
- An inning **starts the moment the third out is made in the preceding inning**.
- **Coast and AAA Only**: There is a five-run limit per half-inning except for the last inning; a team's **half-inning concludes when a team has three outs or five runs**, whichever comes first. There is no run limit in the last inning.

INFIELD FLY

… a **fair fly ball** (not including a line drive nor an attempted bunt) **which can be caught by an infielder *with ordinary effort***, when first and second, or first, second and third bases are occupied, before two are out.

- **The Conditions**
  - **No outs or one out**
  - **Runners R1, R2 OR, bases loaded**
  - **Infield pop-up (not blooper, and never a bunt)**
- Both umpires **point and call**: "Infield fly, batter out"
- **IFR is NOT enforced at the AAA level**.
- **If you forget to call the IF**, you can apply the rule after the fact.

SPECIAL AAA RULES

- **Pitching - AAA uses a combination of kid pitch and coach pitch**
  - **There are no walks.**
  - **If a kid pitcher hits a batter, then batter is awarded first.**
  - After 4 balls from the kid pitcher, a coach shall be allowed to pitch a maximum of 6 pitches, at which time the batter will be declared out if the ball is not put in play, regardless of whether the last pitch is a ball or strike, unless the last pitch is an uncaught foul ball, in which case an additional pitch or pitches will be allowed until the last pitch is not an uncaught foul ball. There are no hit batsmen with coach pitchers.
- **Batting/Running**
  - **No bunting**
  - **No stealing**
  - **After a batted ball to the outfield is returned to the infield** (within an approximate 50 foot arc of the pitching mound) and controlled by an infielder, **runners may advance only to the base they are approaching**. However, if a play is made on the runner, the play remains alive. If in your judgment at the time the ball is controlled a runner is less than half way to the next base, return the runner to the previous base.

QUESTIONS