

UMPIRE 102

Working the Plate and Bases

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

INTRODUCTION TO LITTLE LEAGUE UMPIRING

Umpire 102, Working the Plate and Bases, is Part Two of a three-part introduction for Little League umpires.

- **102 – The Rules of Baseball**
- **102 – Small-Diamond Mechanics (2 man)**
- **103 – Field Training**

UMPIRE 102 COVERS THE FOLLOWING:

1. **Qualities of a Good Umpire**
2. **What does the Plate Umpire (U1 or PU) do?**
 1. Managing the Game
 2. Umpire Signs & Signals
 3. Getting into the Slot: Setting Up
 4. Strikes, Balls, and Fouls
 5. Where do I go at the crack of the bat?
3. **What does the Base Umpire (BU or U2) do?**
 1. The Basic Assignments for U1 and U2
 2. The Start Positions for U2
 3. Getting into Position
 4. Making Calls
 5. The Base-Runner Scenarios
 6. Appeals

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 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

- **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 handling overthrows out of play
 - **Go over the ground rules**
 - **Go over your umpire signals**
 - **Discuss handling of problem calls and getting help**
 - **Discuss who is the UIC and what is he/she going to call**

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**) – PU runs this meeting
- **No players should be on the field at this time**
 - Introduce yourself and your partner and find out who is the GC if neither of you are adults
 - 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**

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, the GC (or adult ump) declares 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 – player safety is
- **Time Limits – AAA has new weekday time limit!**
 - Coast/Majors: No matter what parents say (!), there are NO time limits on weekday evening games, even when it is cold and wet and windy
 - AAA: on weekday games, 1:30 no new inning, 1:45 no pitch – YAY!!!!!!
 - 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

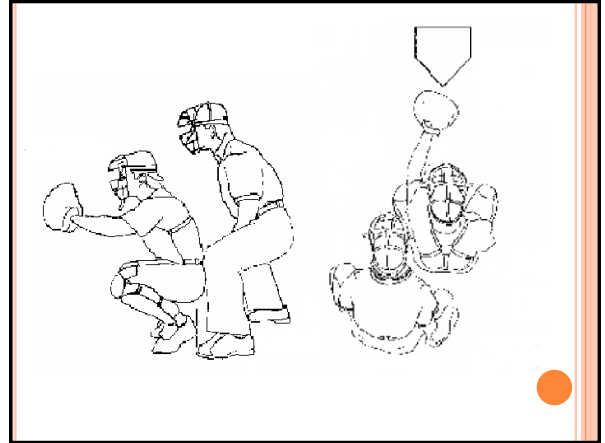
UMPIRE TO UMPIRE SIGNALS

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
 - Check swing – left hand point to partner "DID HE GO"?
 - Lost count – twirl fingers

GETTING INTO THE SLOT: SETTING UP

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

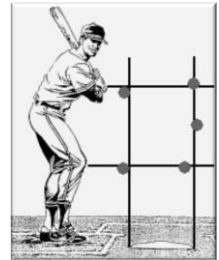


- o **Use reference points to frame the strike zone:**
 - **Visualize the top of the zone** – often the batters hands are at the top of the zone
 - **If the catcher is in nice and tight, look at his knees relative to the batter**
 - o **But, at AAA and Coast, this usually doesn't work**
 - **See the ball hit the catcher's mitt** when the ball arrives – but it isn't where he catches it that counts!
- o **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 catcher's 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** (bouncer, 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 what is going on!** Every new batter pause and review the situation and anticipate action
- **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

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**

ABBREVIATIONS & NOMENCLATURE

- Umpires
 - Home Plate Umpire = **U1 or PU**
 - Base Umpire = **U2**
 - **Base Umpire = U3 (if there are two)**
- Bases = **1B, 2B, 3B, Home**
- Base Runners
 - Runner on 1B = **R1**
 - Runner on 2B = **R2**
 - Runner on 3B = **R3**
 - Batter-runner = **BR**
- Field Position:

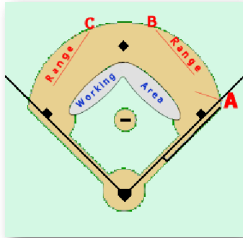
F1 = Pitcher	F6 = Shortstop
F2 = Catcher	F7 = Left Fielder
F3 = 1 st Baseman	F8 = Center Fielder
F4 = 2 nd Baseman	F9 = Right Fielder
F5 = 3 rd Baseman	

WHAT DOES THE BASE UMPIRE DO?

- Assuming there is no 3rd base umpire:
 - You have the safe/out call on all base runners at all bases except home.
 - 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.**
- **If there is a 3rd base umpire, you own 1st and 2nd base.**
- 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 a single Base Umpire are simple:



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

If there is a 3rd base umpire, use Position A for no runners on base, Position B for all other situations!

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"**

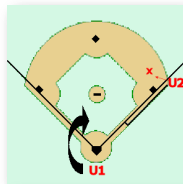
BASE RUNNER SCENARIOS

- Now we look at several base-runner scenarios, one-by-one, each with one or two field umpires:
 1. No runners on base – 1 base umpire in **A**
 2. Runner on first – 1 base umpire in **B**
 3. All other situations – 1 base umpire in **C**
 4. No runners on base – 2 base umpires in **A** and **D**
 5. All other situations – 2 base umpires in **B** and **D**

NO RUNNERS ON BASE – 1 BASE UMPIRE

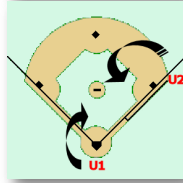
Ball to the Infield

- **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

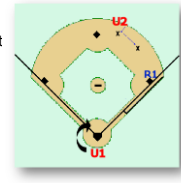
- Break inside and pivot in the working area; pick up the ball but watch 1B for base touch
- You have ALL bases except home; stay with the BR if he advances beyond 1B.
- Your primary responsibility is BR, but from the corner of your eye **always know where the ball is** – this lets you **read the play**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



ONE RUNNER AT FIRST - 1 BASE UMPIRE

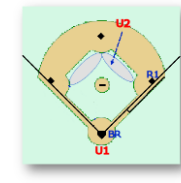
Ball to the Infield

- **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

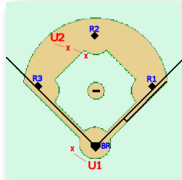
- Break inside to the working area, pivot
- Pick up the ball and stay read the play as the ball returns to the infield. **Follow the ball to the play. Read and react.**
- If the ball is caught, look **immediately** at R1 to see tag-up if the runner advances.
- Move to working area and follow runners as they advance. Watch ball to the play.



ALL OTHER SITUATIONS - 1 BASE UMPIRE

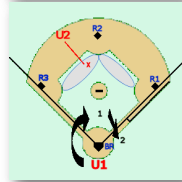
Ball to the Infield

- o **U2** starts in **C**. Pick up the ball immediately and follow it to the play.
- o Be alert for double play if possible. Stay with the ball and stay out of the way
- o If a caught line drive, look immediately for the snap throw on any runner
- o If ball is mishandled and gets through the infield, come inside and pivot



Ball to the Outfield

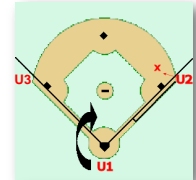
- o Break inside and pivot. Pick up the ball and move to a spot to see tag-ups if the fly ball is caught.
- o If no catch, pick up the ball coming back to the infield. **Stay with the ball, and stay out of the way.**
- o See all base-touches. This is **very** important.



NO RUNNERS ON BASE – 2 BASE UMPIRES

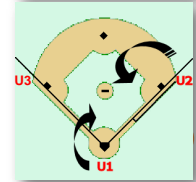
Ball to the Infield

- o **U2** starts in **A**. On hit, break to sweet spot for play at 1B
- o On overthrows at 1B, watch for ball out of play
- o If BR continues beyond 1B, break inside and stay with the BR to 2B
- o Be sure to **see all base touches**



Ball to the Outfield

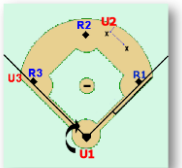
- o Break inside and pivot in the working area; pick up the ball but watch 1B for base touch
- o You have all calls at 1B and 2B
- o Your primary responsibility is BR, but from the corner of your eye **always know where the ball is** – this lets you *read the play* as it develops
- o Take BR to 2B, then release



ALL OTHER SITUATIONS - 2 BASE UMPIRES

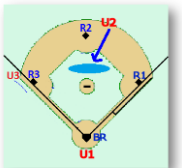
Ball to the Infield

- o **U2** starts in **B**. Pick up the ball immediately and follow it to the play. You have 1B and 2B.
- o Be alert for double play if possible. Stay with the ball and stay out of the way
- o If a caught line drive, look immediately for the snap throw on any runner at 1B or 2B
- o If ball is mishandled and gets through the infield, come inside and pivot (see below)



Ball to the Outfield

- o Break inside and pivot. Go to the area between the mound and 2B. Watch 1B and 2B.
- o Pick up the ball and move to a spot to see tag-ups if the fly ball is caught.
- o If no catch, pick up the ball coming back to the infield. **Stay with the ball, and stay out of the way.**
- o See all base-touches. This is **very** important.



APPEALS

- o 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)
- o **Appeals must be made while the ball is in play (live ball).**
- o Fielder must either **tag the offending runner** with the ball, or **touch the base** where the violation occurred with ball in hand
- o The appeal must be obvious; no "accidental appeals". This is especially important at 1B, where runner is *presumed* to have touched the base.
- o Defense loses the right to appeal after a pitch, any play, or once the defense leaves the field of play.

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.

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!