

Understanding the Uncaught Third Strike Rule

The rule is for majors only (our National League) in the 12 and under divisions. It is in effect for the over 12 leagues. A batter, under certain conditions, can attempt to achieve first base if the third strike is not caught.

Part by part:

It's commonly called a dropped third strike. This is a misnomer. It's really an uncaught third strike and you need to grasp that.

Uncaught means: The pitch was not secured in flight OR was dropped after the catcher appeared at first to secure it OR the catcher flat out didn't secure it or even touch it.

In flight means: The pitch has not touched anything, including the ground. If it bounces and the catcher secures it cleanly, it was NOT caught for purposes of this rule.

See 2.00 "Ball" If the pitch touches the ground and bounces through the strike zone it is a "ball." If such a pitch touches the batter, he/she shall be awarded first base. If the batter swings at such a pitch after two strikes, the ball cannot be caught, for the purposes of Rule 6.05 (c) and 6.09 (b).

The batter can only attempt to go to first base if: 1) there are two outs even if there is a runner at first base OR 2) there are less than two outs and first base was unoccupied at the time of the pitch AND 3) the runner has not yet entered the dugout. The runner may go straight to the base from their current position. *(Note: in pro ball the runner may not begin his attempt to go to first base once he leaves the dirt circle around the plate.)*

The base is considered occupied if there is a runner at (not necessarily on, at) first base at the time of the pitch. The runner is at first base until he touches second base. So, in a game with lead-offs and stealing, he is still considered to be at first even though he could well be on his way to second base.

The time of the pitch is the moment that the pitchers motion commits him to pitch. It is NOT when the pitcher releases the ball.

AND - when the conditions permit the batter to advance, he must be put out in the same manner as if he had hit the ball into play. And if you fail to get him out, he's now safe and a runner.

AND THEREFORE, any other runners that would be forced on a batted ball are forced on this play and can be put out as on any other force play. The extreme is a bases loaded, two out, uncaught third strike. Because the runner from third is forced, all the catcher has to do then is secure the ball and step on home plate before the runner from third gets there and voila, he's out - inning over.