

Windermere Little League 2019 Umpire Guide

Procedures, Tips & Expectations
to help our players have a great game.



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Windermere Little League Volunteer Umpires - Thank You!

Thank you for serving as a volunteer umpire for Windermere Little League! You are now part of a very special group of individuals who have stepped forward to serve in a difficult and sometimes thankless role—all so that our kids can have the best Little League experience possible. The quality of umpiring in our league directly affects the quality of the game experience for our young players, so we're always striving to improve our craft. I hope you will find that being a Little League volunteer umpire is a lot of fun and a terrific opportunity to make a positive difference for our kids. See you on the field!

Greg Heyn
Windermere Little League Umpire-in-Chief
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Pregame Preparation & Communication

Pre-Game: Items to Address with Your Umpire Partner

1. Fair/Foul Coverage – Who’s Got What and Where
2. Tag-ups/Touches
3. Fly Balls To The Outfield, Fly Balls To the Infield
4. Coverage Of Third Base
5. Live Ball (Restart after foul/dead balls)
6. Uncaught Third Strike (Majors/Junior/Senior Baseball and Senior Softball)
7. Batted Ball Hits Batter While In The Box
8. Half Swing (Checked Swing)
9. Umpire Positioning
10. Signals

Pre-Game: Plate Meeting with Managers

- Five minutes before gametime
- Both teams in dugouts (don’t have your plate meeting while home team is warming up)
- Not a time to visit and chit-chat
- One adult from each team—the manager of record
- Introductions, shake hands, be positive, be clear that you’ll communicate and that you’ll ask for help in dealing with situations that arise if necessary
- Note and explain any field rules or issues
- Ask if all players are properly equipped per Little League rules (get verbal affirmation)
- Remind managers to request “time” and *wait until it is granted* before leaving the dugout
- Explain that in order to maximize playing time for the kids, the goal is 60 seconds in between half-innings; instruct coaches to hustle their players on and off the field and have a player ready with a mask and catcher’s glove if necessary

Pace of Play

Do the math: in a full six-inning game, there are eleven half-inning changes. Just two minutes in between innings would equal more than 20 minutes. Just three minutes in between would result in more than half an hour of time being spent—time that the kids want to be playing ball!

60 seconds in between innings is the Little League guideline (Rule 8.03) and the goal to strive for.

Little Leaguers deserve to play full games. A good umpire will explain to both managers at the plate meeting that they seek to keep the game moving, and that it is the managers' responsibility to hustle players on and off the field.

Don't be militant or inflexible about the 60-second guideline; instead be forgiving, especially at lower levels of play and with younger kids or inexperienced managers. But remain mindful about the importance of keeping a game moving and do everything in your power to make it happen.

Practical Tips for Umpires & Managers to Improve Pace of Play

- Managers should have a player ready with a catcher's mitt and helmet in case they are needed to warm up a pitcher when the regular catcher is gearing up.
- The umpire owns sole discretion on when to limit warm-up pitches in the interest of maintaining a reasonable pace of play if he/she feels that teams are not hustling, a pitcher isn't giving full attention to warming up, something else is going on, etc.
- Coaches are allowed one offensive time out per half inning (Rule 5.10). Adhere to this rule and do not allow multiple conversations between a third-base coach and their batters.
- On a passed ball, you may choose to toss the pitcher a new baseball and get the previous one from the catcher. Same with a foul ball—it's your choice whether to throw to the pitcher or hand to the catcher.
- Have enough game balls to avoid delays. It is rare that you'll get through a game with just two or three new game balls. Ask the manager for some used but playable balls and keep them in a second ball bag, or at least have the coach ready with them when you request them. Don't be the umpire who stands helplessly at the plate, delaying the game, because of successive foul balls.

The Basic Six

Visit www.littleleague.org/university/umpires to watch 1- to 2-minute videos demonstrating the proper technique for these and other basic umpire mechanics.



Ball



Strike



Time or Foul



Safe

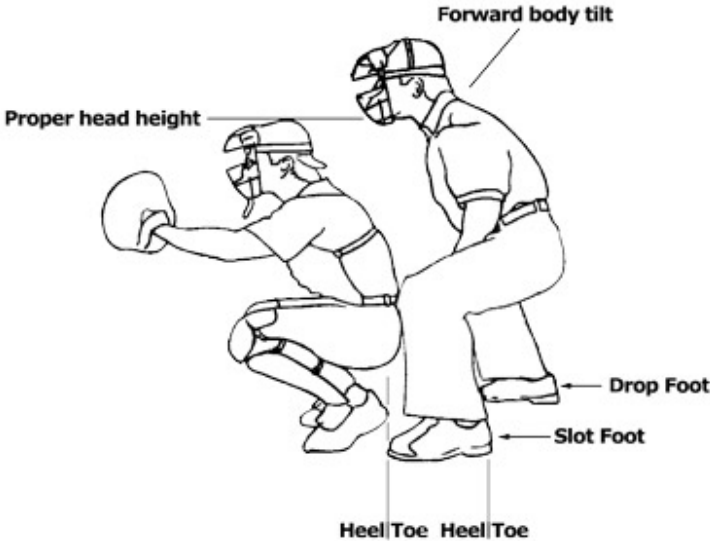
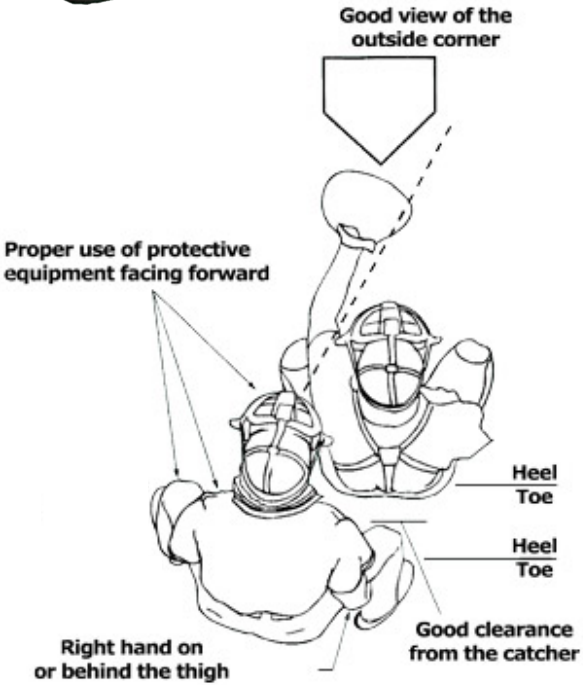
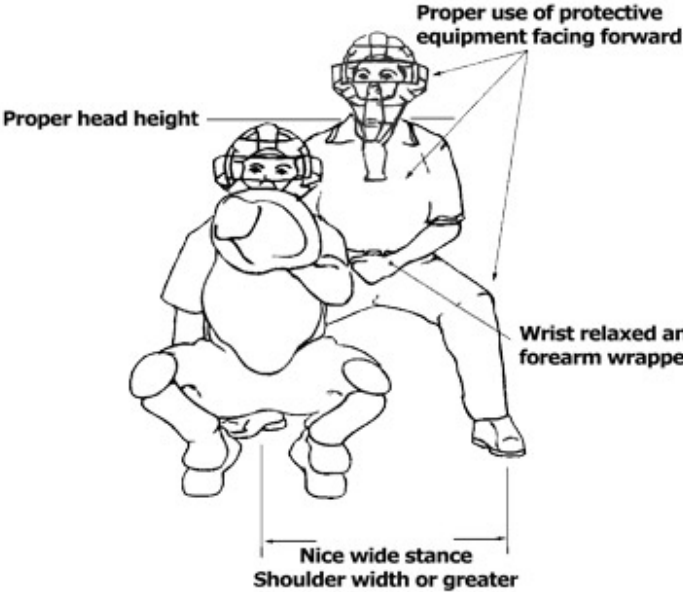


Out



Foul

The Slot Position



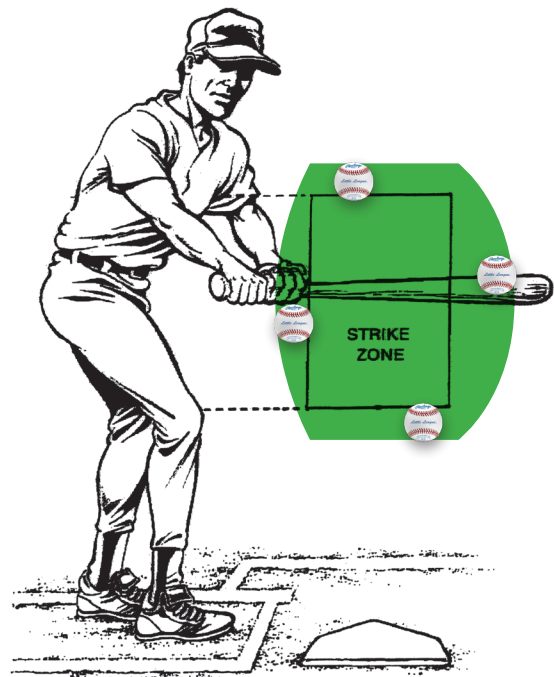
Calling Balls and Strikes

The Strike Zone

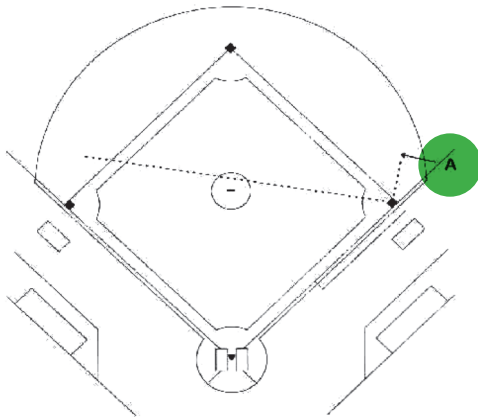
- A strike: any part of the ball passing through any part of the strike zone (*Rule 2.00*)
- The strike zone is the area between the hitter's armpits and the top of their knees, directly above the plate when the hitter is in a natural hitting position
- Strive to develop a reasonable strike zone. Be cognizant of the time of year and the level of play (perhaps in the first minors game of the year, the consideration is "can the batter hit this pitch with something resembling a normal baseball swing?")
- It's important to call strikes on borderline pitches. Hitters should come up to the plate ready to swing the bat. Always "think strikes" and make the pitch convince you that it is a ball, and those borderline pitches will take care of themselves.
- Realize your strike zone won't really be a rectangle. Rather, it will be wider in the heart of the zone where pitches are more "hittable." Your strike zone should resemble a barrel more than a rectangle (see illustration).

Steps to Calling the Pitch

1. On the rubber (a pitch is imminent)
2. Set (drop to your set position)
3. Track (pick up and follow the pitch from the pitcher's hand to the catcher's mitt. Imagine you have to catch the pitch and then catch it with your eyes.)
4. Pause (make your final read only after the catcher receives the ball)
5. Call it (announce your final read)

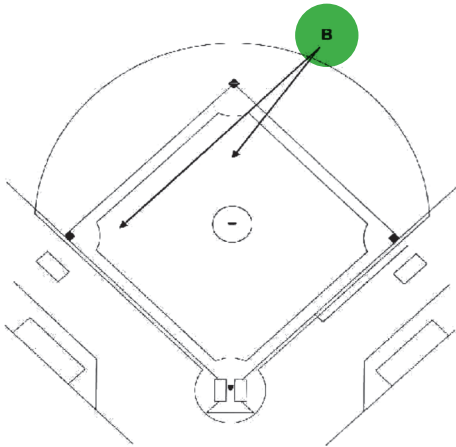


Base Umpire—Positioning and Duties



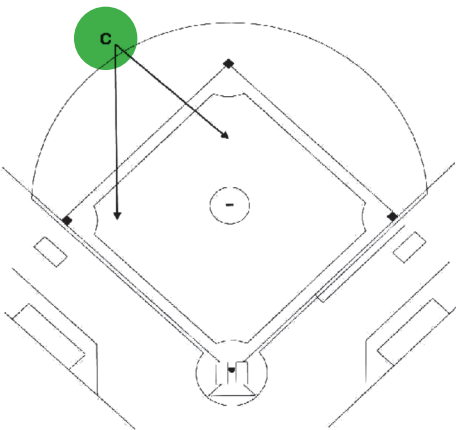
Position A: Bases Empty

When the ball is hit to the infield, the umpire should assume a position to first base and then to the fielder making the throw such that a right angle (90 degrees) is formed. Hustle out there, maintain your original distance away from the base (10–12 feet) so you will have a good view of the fielder reaching for a high throw. If the ball is hit to the third baseman, run towards him until you have your angle. Do the same toward the shortstop. When a ball is hit to the second baseman's right, move into fair territory so the angle will be as close to ninety degrees as possible. If the ball is hit to the second baseman's left or the first baseman, you will be in foul territory. Be sure to stay out of the runner's path even through it means distorting the angle slightly.



Position B: Runner on 1st Only

With a runner on 1st base only, the base umpire will position himself midway between the second baseman and the 2nd base bag approximately 30 to no more than 40 feet from the 1st base bag. The umpire's body should be square to the front edge of home plate. From this position he will be in a good starting position for help on half-swings and for checking to see if the runner leaves early. This initial positioning with a runner on 1st base only is very important, and umpires should make sure that they are not too deep towards the outfield or too far to the first base side so as to be blocked from seeing the plate by the second baseman. If the umpire is positioned as described in the previous sentence, he will be in a good starting position for the runner leaving early as well as for double plays.



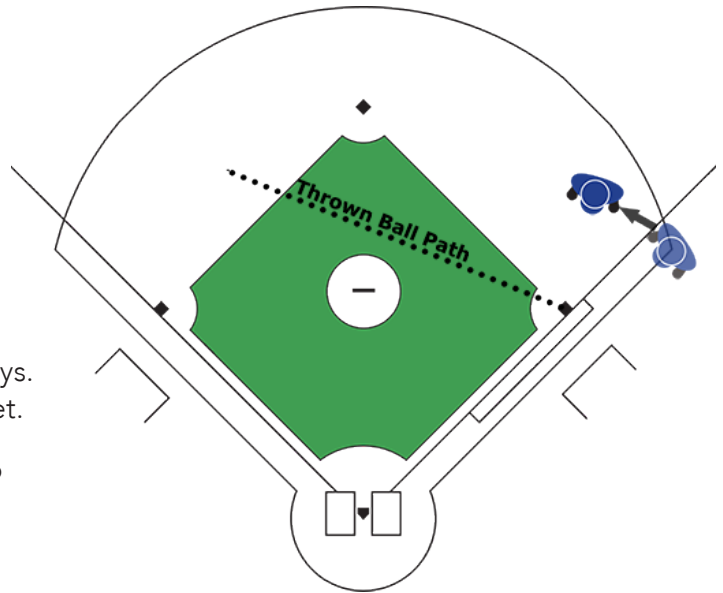
Position C: Runner on 2nd or 3rd

Position yourself two to three steps behind the shortstop and two to three steps off of the shortstop's left shoulder. Never more than 30 feet from 2nd base and never closer than 15 to 20 feet to 2nd base. From this location you will be able to easily get into position for any play on a lead runner. From this position, with any ball hit through the infield or a fly ball to the outfield, you should move into the infield grass so that you will be able to see the ball, runner, and bases. Note that with runners on base, the base umpire should make all of the calls on all of the bases (including 3rd base). The plate umpire may be called upon for assistance on a close play but it should be your call.

Base Umpire—Angle/Distance and Standing Set

Angle & Distance

- Proper positioning consists of the proper angle to the play and the proper distance from the play.
- As a rule, you should establish the proper angle to the play first then acquire the appropriate distance. In other words, **angle before distance**.
- Strive to attain a 90° angle for all force plays. Proper distance for force plays is 15-20 feet.
- For tag plays, the umpire may be closer to the play in order to see the exact point on the body where the tag is applied.



The Standing Set

- A Standing Set is assumed by squaring to the play, feet firmly planted slightly more than shoulder-width apart, knees slightly bent, body and head still.
- Your weight favors the balls of the feet, providing a more athletic stance.
- From a Standing Set position you can lean slightly one way or the other or take a quick crossover step in either direction in order to get a better angle on a non-routine play.



This is the base umpire's Set position before the pitch is delivered.



Either of these Standing Set positions are appropriate and give the umpire a clear view of the play.

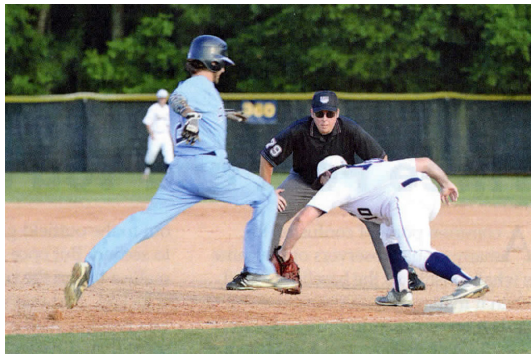
“Pause–Read–React” in Action



The umpire gets set and snaps his eyes ahead of the soon-to-arrive throw. In observing the throw, a base umpire will often get an initial read on whether the play at first may go awry. In this case, the throw is coming in low.



The fielder appears to scoop up the ball while the runner is still several steps away. Although the umpire’s position is good, the angle does not provide an immediate view of whether the ball is in the glove or on the ground.



As the first baseman closes and lifts his glove, the umpire will see whether the ball remains inside. The umpire also observes the first baseman’s foot on the bag.



The umpire watches the first baseman pull the ball from his glove, demonstrating secure possession and voluntary release.

Only then—satisfied that everything came together for the out—the umpire rises from the set position to signal and verbalize his call.



Additional Rules & Procedures “Outside” of Gameplay

- Ensure managers *request* “Time” and that *you grant it* before allowing them out of the dugout.
- A manager who wishes to discuss a call should discuss it with the umpire who made that call. The plate umpire cannot overrule a base umpire’s call – only the umpire making a call can change his/her call if he/she so chooses
- Pitchers are allowed up to eight warmup pitches between innings. Remember that the goal is 60 seconds between innings (*Rule 8.03*) and that the umpire owns sole discretion on when to limit warmup pitches in the interest of maintaining a reasonable pace of play.
- Weather: managers agree to start a game, but once a game has begun, the umpire has final authority on when to stop play. Umpires are welcome and encouraged to collaborate with managers on these types of decisions, but if there is disagreement it is the *umpire’s* final decision.
- Coaches: three allowed in dugout, no more. Must always be one adult coach in the dugout. Players may coach bases wearing batting helmets.
- No adult may warm up a pitcher during the game or before the game on the field, in the bullpen, or anywhere else (*Rule 3.09*). Players warming up pitchers must wear a catcher’s mask and helmet (*Rule 1.17*).
- Any player coming on to the field of play to retrieve a bat must be wearing a helmet.
- Courtesy runners are not permitted - Special Pinch Runners are permitted in tournaments
- Throwing the bat is NOT an out. It is the discretion of the umpire to use warnings or ejections to address the issue.
- Verbalizing the count: NOT after every pitch. Do it after “meaning” pitches, or after “events” like a foul ball or a play on the bases. Who are you verbalizing the count for? The pitcher and the batter. Courteously provide the count at the request of a manager, but not at requests from fans.
- Players may not wear any form of jewelry except for a Medical ID bracelet. All earrings, bracelets and necklaces (including pro-style titanium) must be removed. Adult coaches may wear wedding rings.
- Recognize “teachable moments” and address sportsmanship issues directly but *never* embarrass a child when doing so.
- Between innings, the plate umpire’s position is eight to ten feet up the baseline looking out at the field and the base umpire’s position is in shallow right field, watching for errant warmup throws. Casual conversation and contact between umpires during the game should be minimized. There will be times when umpires have a legitimate need to get together; keep these meetings brief.

Answers to Common Scenarios

Is a foul tip an automatic dead ball?

No. A foul tip is a **live ball**. *Rule 2.00: 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. A foul tip can only be caught by the catcher.*

Thus, it is only a foul tip if the catcher catches the ball. A ball that hits the bat and goes straight back to the backstop is a foul ball, not a foul tip.

Is the runner automatically out if he turns left after crossing first base and is tagged?

No. The direction in which the batter-runner turns in overrunning first base is completely irrelevant.

Rule 7.08(c): A batter-runner cannot be tagged out after overrunning or oversliding first base if said batter-runner returns immediately to the base.

Thus, the critical thing is not the direction in which the batter-runner turns, but what he does at, or immediately after, the turn. **This is a judgment made by the umpire.** If, in the umpire's judgment, the batter-runner makes any movement towards second base, he has forfeited his or her protection. If he comes directly back towards the base, however, he is protected until the base is touched, or until some other move towards another base is made.

Is a runner running out of the baseline automatically out?

No, a runner makes his/her own baseline; **BUT**, comes into play when a fielder has the ball and is attempting to make a tag on the runner.

Is home plate in foul or fair territory?

All of home plate is in fair territory, so if a batted ball touches or comes to rest on any part of it, it has merely struck part of fair territory.

What if the pitch bounces?

If a pitch bounces, the only thing that changes is that it can no longer become a called strike. With this single exception, the pitch is alive and in play.

- If the batter swings at the pitch and misses, it is a strike.
- If the batter hits the ball in fair territory, the batted ball is alive and in play.
- If the batter hits the ball foul, it is simply a foul.
- If the bounced pitch hits the batter, all the standard hit-by-pitch rules apply.

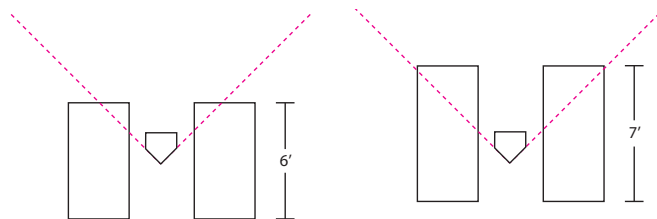
Answers to Common Scenarios (continued)

What if the batter's box and/or baselines are lined incorrectly?

Insist that the field be lined correctly before starting the game. Having the field correctly marked may alleviate issues later in the game. Helpfully remind managers of the proper way to line batter's boxes and baselines:



3rd base
Correct: a guideline string run from the back tip of home plate to the outside of first and third base.
1st base



A correctly lined BASEBALL batter's box. Note where the foul line emerges from the batter's box—NOT from the corner.

A correctly lined SOFTBALL batter's box. Note where the foul line emerges from the batter's box—CLOSE to the corner.

Are the "hands part of the bat?"

No. The hands are not part of the bat. When a player is hit on the hand by a pitch, the umpire must evaluate the situation just as he would if the pitch had hit him elsewhere:

- If the pitch was in the strike zone the ball is dead, runners return to the last legally touched base, and the batter gets a strike. If that was the third strike, the batter is out.
- If the batter was in the process of swinging, just as in the previous case, the ball is dead, runners return to the last legally touched base, and the batter gets a strike. If that was the third strike, the batter is out.
- If the pitch was not in the strike zone and the batter was not swinging at it, but the batter makes *absolutely* no attempt to get out of the way, the ball is dead, runners return, a ball is charged to the batter and he/she must continue to bat. (Unless that was ball four.)
- If none of the above conditions apply, the ball is dead, the batter is awarded first base, and runners advance if forced.

Remember—when a batter is hit anywhere by a pitch, the ball is immediately dead, whether or not a base award is made.

Does the "tie go to the runner?"

Bill Klem, a Hall of Fame umpire who worked the National League from 1905 through 1941, and then served as Chief of National League Umpires until his death in 1951, has been quoted as saying, "There's no such thing as a tie—it's either this, or it's that!" Like Bill Klem, MLL umpires should generally not recognize the existence of a tie—the runner either beat the throw, or he did not, and that's that.

Answers to Common Scenarios (continued)

Is a ball that is touched on a baseline foul or fair?

Fair. Baselines, foul lines, and foul poles are in fair territory. A ball is in fair territory if any part of it is on or over any part of the foul line. A fly ball is judged to be fair or foul according to the ball's location when it is touched by a fielder, NOT where the fielder is when he make contact with the ball.

Does a baserunner have to slide?

No. There is never any situation in Little League in which a runner is required to slide. *Rule 7.08(a)(3)—“Any runner is out when ... the runner does not slide or attempt to get around a fielder who has the ball and is waiting to make the tag;”*

There is no “must slide rule” in Little League. The rule is, “slide or attempt to get around.” The key in this situation is “fielder has the ball and is waiting to make a tag.” If the fielder (any fielder, not just the catcher) does not have the ball, and there is a collision, you can not call the runner out. However, if the umpire determines that the runner deliberately attempted to make contact or injure the fielder, the umpire could eject the runner for unsportsmanlike conduct.

What if the batter makes no attempt to avoid a pitch that hits him/her?

The ball is dead and the pitch is ruled a ball [*Rule 6.08(b)*]. Use this rule extremely sparingly: to make this call you must be **100% convinced** that the batter made no attempt whatsoever to avoid the pitch.

What if the player makes a catch but then drops the ball before throwing it?

A catch is legal only when the umpire judges that the fielder demonstrates **complete control** and **voluntary release** of the ball.

What if a base becomes dislodged during play?

A young baserunner likely won't know what to do in this scenario, so as long as in your judgment he touches/occupies either the bag itself or the spot where the bag is supposed to be, he should not be called out. *Rule 7.08(c): If a base is dislodged from its position during a play, any following runner on the same play shall be considered as touching or occupying the base if, in the umpire's judgment, that runner touches or occupies the dislodged bag or the point marked by the original location of the dislodged bag.*

How to be a Great Little League Umpire

- **Care about your appearance.** Arrive at the game site early, and when you get there, be courteous to administrators and participants. Show them that you want to be there. A neat appearance projects authority and dignity and a respect that you are taking this game seriously. Little League players deserve the best from their coaches and umpires. Keep your gear clean and in good condition and wear it correctly. Your uniform is a reflection of the pride you demonstrate in serving as a Little League umpire.
- **Have a strong pregame.** Why would you want to get on the same page with your partner? So you don't crash and burn, for one thing. The time you spend with your partner confirming positions, rules, and responsibilities is well worth it to help you manage the game successfully.
- **Control your emotions.** A mature umpire knows better than to let his emotions have free rein. No matter how good you may think it will feel to talk back to a coach or fan, it is not an option. You need to be the calming presence. Whether it's in response to remarks by a coach or if opponents get into it, umpires must be there and be ready to provide a level head (and consequences, if necessary).
- **Admit your errors.** Mistakes happen. If you never admit a mistake, you lose credibility. Often the best response to a coach who tells you, "You missed one," is to admit it, if you know the error occurred. The coach likely won't have much to say after that. It's hard to argue when you agree, after all.
- **Listen to coaches.** Tuning out worthless rants is a good thing. But for the most part, umpires should listen to what coaches say. They might offer a legitimate comment that deserves consideration, whether it's a measured criticism of a call or a suggestion to watch for a certain action. Many coaches understand the game very well, and if you tune them out completely, you might miss out on a chance to elevate your performance.
- **Consider whether to respond.** You're always listening, but you don't always have to respond. Not every challenge from a coach requires a response. In fact, if it's a statement instead of a question, it often doesn't. If you decide to respond to coaches' comments, sometimes the right response is non-verbal. Nod your head, glance in the direction of the coach, shake your head or hold up a stop sign. Those actions can often get your response across better than words and won't be as disruptive to the game.
- **Talk to players.** It's tough to work a game well and not communicate with players. Whether it's an acknowledgment of sporting behavior by the player or a firm discussion over an issue, talking to players can be a rewarding part of umpiring. But keep your teaching comments to yourself—you're not the coach and he may not be too pleased if you're acting like one.
- **Anticipate the play.** Former players turned umpires often have an advantage in anticipating a play. As long as you don't "anticipate the call" to follow, having a feel for what play is coming and adjusting your positioning accordingly will help you see the play better. As a result, you'll get it right more often.

Managing Discussions and Handling Situations

In General...

- Your role is to be a calming influence on the game and in tough situations.
- You are expected not to argue.
- Do not ignore inappropriate behavior.
- Do not overreact to inappropriate behavior

“Chirping” from the coach or dugout:

- Let the coach know you have heard him. If necessary, have a courteous one-on-one conversation with coach letting him know the behavior is unacceptable and must stop.
- If the behavior persists, advise coach they have already been warned and the behavior has to stop immediately. If it is serious, blatant, or personal: eject.

Discussions with a coach initiated by a call or action of the opposing team:

- Maintain neutral body language. Keep appropriate distance. Do not point your finger.
- Listen carefully to what is being said.
- Keep facial expressions neutral. Do not roll your eyes, grimace, smile or shake your head.
- Acknowledge what has been said. Respond appropriately. Try not to respond to statements. Answer questions directly.
- Never say or do anything that you would not accept from a coach or a player.
- Do not charge a player or coach and do not follow them if the discussion is over or he/she is walking away.
- Do not insist on the last word.
- Keep the discussion one-on-one. Your partner should calmly move close enough to see and hear what is going on, but not become part of the discussion.
- When the discussion is over, explain only the question and your ruling to opposing coach, if needed.

When a discussion is over from your point of view:

- Tell coach you have answered his question. Ask for compliance and let coach know that you want to keep him in the game.
- Describe options and then confirm options and choices.
- Eject if necessary. At this point, keep your distance and be quiet. Your partner should step up and escort the coach from the field. Let your partner manage the coach’s exit from the field.

How to Help Your Partner

The two-umpire system is a system of angles, communication, cooperation, and hustle. Every umpire can support his partner and help get calls right simply by observing the action and by being knowledgeable about roles & responsibilities. Although you generally shouldn't volunteer information, you should have it ready for your partner if he requests help on a call. Here are some ways to help *your* team—the umpires on the field—make the right call.

- **Batter is struck by batted ball.** If as a base umpire you see a batted ball strike the batter while he is still in the batter's box, call "Time" from the bases. Only make this call if you're 100% sure you saw what actually happened. But give the plate umpire a chance to make this call—this is the plate umpire's primary responsibility and the base umpire's secondary responsibility.
- **Trailing the batter-runner.** The plate umpire will trail the batter-runner about one-third of the way to first base and come to a set astride the baseline. The plate umpire's responsibilities here include watching for a runner's lane violation, runner's interference, or obstruction.
- **Tag made on a batter-runner going to first.** The rule of thumb is the plate umpire takes the first half of the distance to first and the base umpire takes the last half of the distance.
- **Pulled foot at first.** The plate umpire observes the action and remains silent, letting the base umpire make the call, unless the base umpire asks for help.
- **Swipe tag at first.** The plate umpire observes the action and remains silent, letting the base umpire make the call, unless the base umpire asks for help.
- **Double play backup at second.** The plate umpire observes the fast and furious action at second and calls interference or obstruction when he sees it.
- **Help at third on a base hit.** Whenever a runner advances two bases from first base on a hit, the plate umpire may call the base umpire off third. However, base umpires should consider all base calls their responsibility unless the plate umpire calls them off.
- **Second play in infield at third base.** By the book, the second play in the infield at third base is the plate umpire's responsibility, but he or she still must call the base umpire off third. When the runner going to third starts at second, the plate umpire will stay in foul ground and after observing the action at first, he or she will move in foul territory to the "library" near third base. The plate umpire will move to fair territory for the call at third only when both the runner and the ball are coming to third.
- **Checked swings.** Base umpires must watch for this on every pitch. Focus on whether the batter made an attempt to hit the ball. Be ready to rule on checked swings when your partner asks for your help.

Asking For Help & Reversing Calls

- As an umpire, it's *your* decision whether to honor a manager's request to ask for help on a call you've made. You're not obligated to honor a request to go for help just to appease the manager, or if you strongly believe your partner wouldn't have credible information to contribute. If you're 100% sure that you've made the right call, then that's it—courteously let the manager know that there's no need to check with your partner because the call you've made is the right one.
- When a manager requests that you seek help on a call, consider that there is a reasonable possibility that you may have missed an element of the play and that your partner may have valuable information to offer.
- If you decide to meet with your partner to seek his opinion, tell the manager you will go for help and instruct him to return to his dugout to await your decision. Inform the manager you will come to the dugout with your final decision but there will be no further discussion about the situation as there is nothing more you can do. However, do accept an official protest as applicable to the protest guidelines.
- If you seek the opinion of your partner, consider any solid information as likely to be correct since you already have some doubt or you would not have sought his assistance.
- If you reverse the call, be prepared for a possibly strong argument from the opposing manager. Exhibit some restraint; you *have* reversed your original call, after all. However, that does not give the manager license to engage in unsportsmanlike behavior.

(discuss with manager)

"Jack, I'm going to ask you to return to your dugout area, and then I will go and share what you've told me with my partner. After that we will come up with a final decision."

(discuss with partner)

"Here's what I saw, here's what the manager saw, what did you see?"

Credits

- 2018 Little League Baseball Official Regulations, Playing Rules, and Policies
- 2018 Little League Softball Official Regulations, Playing Rules, and Policies
- Make the Right Call 2018: The Casebook of Little League Baseball and Softball
- Little League Baseball and Softball Field Mechanics Manual
- Mukilteo Little League
- www.littleleague.org