

Little League Umpire Clinic

Tips

Uniform

Looking like an ump helps a lot! Wear your Dunbar umpire's shirt and cap with dark gray or blue pants, black shoes and socks.

Equipment

DON'T ump behind the plate without a mask with a dangling type throat protector, a chest protector, leggings and a cup. You should also have a clicker and a brush. You hold the clicker in your left hand. Keep the brush in your back pocket.

Positioning

Outs and safes: Don't try to get too close to the play. Stay back and get an angle. See the whole play not just a little bit of it.

Balls and strikes: Set up on the catcher's inside shoulder, the shoulder closest to the batter. Have your eyes at the top of the strike zone. Learn not to flinch when the pitch comes in. This takes practice. Stay steady and keep your face right toward the pitch. Your face is protected by the mask. The side of your head is not. Don't turn your head to the side.

Timing

Don't call the play too fast. Take your time. You don't want to call: "He's out!" and then see the ball lying on the ground. **Watch the whole pitch and wait a beat after it's in the catcher's mitt before you call it. It's not: catch "strike". It's: catch ... "strike".**

Voice

Call "strike" loud enough to be heard in the infield. Call "ball" loud enough for the batter and the catcher to hear it. If the out or safe is obvious just signal it, don't say anything or say something softly. **If the play is close, make the call loud and emphatic.** You call "foul" out loud. Do not call "fair" out loud. You just point toward fair territory.

What to do before the game

1. Explain to the base ump that you want him to throw his flag when there's a lead off.
2. Tell the base ump where he should be. He should try to stay ahead of the lead runner.

Nobody on: in foul territory behind 1st base.

Man on 1st only: between 1st and 2nd.

Man on 2nd or men on 1st and 2nd: between 2nd and 3rd.

Man on 3rd (with or without other runners): foul behind third base. This is **not officially correct** but it's how I do it. The accepted position is between 2nd and 3rd.

3. Discuss with the base ump what calls he will make and what calls you will make.

I always tell the base ump I will call all fair/foul and he will call all plays at the bases. Some plate ump's say they will call 3rd. I prefer to leave all the bases to the base ump.

4. Go over the ground rules with the coaches. Home run line. Ground rule double. Stealing second. No on-deck batters. Remind them that runners may not crash fielders. They must slide.

What to do between innings

Don't just flake off between innings. Keep the game moving!

Give the team going into the field a brief moment to take the field, if they don't hustle out, walk up toward their dug out and say: "Come on Red (or Blue or Green or whatever their uniform is) hustle in the field, please." Players and coaches will like it if you keep the game moving. Don't be crazy or impolite, but do try to keep the game moving.

After the first inning, allow six warm-up pitches (unless the inning was a really long one or its ice cold or there's a new pitcher). I tell the catcher I'll let him have 6 warm-up pitches and ask him please, after the fourth warm-up pitch to call "field balls". If the catcher doesn't call "field balls", I do. After I call "field balls" or "balls in" (loud enough to be heard all over the field), I give them two more warm-ups and then I start the inning

Players and coaches like an ump who is in control. Not somebody who pushes them around, but somebody who gives the game a shape, like the fence does. Playing with a weak ump is like playing with a fence that has holes in it.

Baseball Rules

Fair/Foul

A batted ball can do three things.

It can stop without being touched or be touched before it reaches any of the bases.

Fair, if it stops or is touched fair

Foul, if it stops or is touched foul

It can hit the ground or be touched for the first time on or beyond any of the bases.

Fair, if it hits the ground or is touched fair

Foul, if it hits the ground or is touched foul

It can hit the ground in the infield (in front of 1st or 3rd) and then bounce or roll into the outfield (on or past 1st or 3rd).

Fair if it is fair when it passes 1st or 3rd

Foul if it is foul when it passes 1st or 3rd

Fair if it is inside or over the bag

Foul if it is outside the bag

The “foul line” should really be called the “fair line”. The bags and foul lines are in fair territory. A ball that hits a bag is fair.

The plate is in fair territory, but it's treated like the ground, not like a base. A ball that hits the plate is neither fair nor foul. A ball that stops on the plate is fair.

Hit by Pitch

A batter who is hit by a pitch gets 1st, unless

he was swinging at the ball

the ball was in the strike zone

he did not make an effort to get out of the way (this is your judgement)

Bounced Pitch

A pitch that bounces before the plate cannot be a called strike. The batter can hit it but if he swings and misses, it is a strike.

Swing/No swing

The question you should ask yourself is not “How far did he go?” but “Did he try to hit the ball?” If he did, it’s a swing. If he didn’t, it’s not. On a bunt, the batter does not have to pull the bat back, he can hold it steady and take the pitch, but if the batter moves the bat even a little towards the ball, that’s a swing. If you call a strike on a check swing, make the strike signal, point at the batter with your left hand and say “Yes, he went.”

Foul ball/foul tip

The plate umpire has to know the difference between these because ***a caught foul ball is out*** and ***a caught foul tip is not out, except on a third strike.***

A ***foul ball*** is any foul which is not a foul tip. If it is caught on a fly by any fielder, even the catcher, the batter is out. The ball is live and runners can tag up.

A ***foul tip*** is a ball which goes “sharp and direct” into the catcher's mitt or hand and is caught in the hand or mitt. A foul tip on a third strike is out, on any other strike it is not out. On a foul tip, the ball is alive and runners can run. If the catcher drops the foul tip or traps it against his body it becomes a foul ball. The ball is dead. The play is over, runners must return.

Catcher Interference

If the batter swings and the bat hits the catcher’s glove that is catcher interference. This doesn’t stop the play. If the batter hits the ball, you wait to see what happens.

1. If the batter hits the ball and no outs are made on the play, you just let the play stand. (You don’t take away a home run.)
2. If the batter misses the ball, you call time and give the batter 1st base (any forced runners advance 1 base, all other runners return to their bases).
3. If the batter hits the ball and either does not reach 1st safely or a runner is forced out, you call time, ignore the out, give the batter 1st base (any forced runners advance 1 base, all other runners return to their bases).

If 3 happens, the team at bat can choose to take the play. For instance, if there are none out and the batter is out at first but a run scores from 3rd.

Catch/No catch

If the fielder juggles the ball and then drops it, there is no catch. But what if the fielder catches the ball on the run, falls down and then drops it? The way to tell whether it's a catch or not is whether the fielder *did something with the ball*. If he did it's a catch. If he takes it out of his glove and then drops it, that's a catch, because he did something with the ball. He took it out of his glove. If he drops the ball, even after he's run three or four steps, it's no catch.

Tags

The tag has to be made **with the hand holding the ball**. You can't have the ball in one hand and tag the runner with your other hand. You must have possession of the ball to make a tag or to complete a force out. The test for this is like the test for catch/no catch. If the fielder is juggling the ball, there is no tag and no force out. If the ball is in the dirt, for instance on a close slide at the plate, you say to the fielder: "Show me the ball." If the fielder can turn his glove up and show you the ball, then it's an out. If he can't, the runner is safe.

Overrunning bases

The batter can overrun 1st base and he is not out if he is tagged while off the base, unless he has made a move to go to 2nd. You may have been told that the batter has to turn toward the foul side when he has overrun 1st. This is not true. The batter can turn to the fair side and he still can't be tagged out, *unless he has made a move toward 2nd*. If he makes even a little move, he can be tagged and if he makes a move and then decides not to go for it, he can still be tagged. Once he makes a move he is live like any other runner.

Running out of the basepath

A runner does not have to stay in the basepath; he can run where he wants, but a runner is out if he leaves the basepath *to avoid a tag*. The basepath does not run straight between the bases. It runs from wherever the runner is straight to the next base. The runner can avoid the tag by ducking out of the way, but he cannot move more than an arm's length out of the basepath to avoid a tag.

When can a run score on a 3rd out?

No run can score if the third out is a force out. A force out is an out on the batter at 1st, or an out on any runner who is forced to leave his base by reason of the batter reaching 1st. **If the third out is not a force out, the run scores, if it crosses the plate before the out is made.** Two outs men on 2nd and third. Batter hits the ball. Runner from third comes home; runner on 2nd is in a rundown between 2nd and 3rd. The run scores if the runner from 3rd crosses the plate before the runner from 2nd is tagged out. You have to be very alert on this play.

Interference/Obstruction

Runners hit by balls

If a **batted** ball hits a runner (including the batter) in fair territory, the play is over. You call time. The runner who was hit by the ball is out. The batter gets first base (unless he's the one who was hit) and all other runners return to the base they had when the pitch was made, unless they are forced. It doesn't matter whether the runner is on or off the base when he is hit. He is still out.

The only times a runner can be hit with a batted ball in fair territory and not be out is

- when he is in the batter's box (ball hits him in the foot)
- when he is running behind an infielder and the infielder misses the ball
- when he is hit by an Infield Fly while in contact with a base.

A ball which has touched or been touched by a fielder is no longer a batted ball. It is a **thrown** ball. If a thrown ball hits a runner, the play is live and continues, unless the runner **deliberately** gets in the path of the ball. A runner who deliberately gets in the path of a thrown ball is out and the play is dead. The batter gets 1st; all runners return to the bases they had at the pitch, unless forced.

Runners and fielders colliding on batted balls

A runner must avoid a fielder who is making a play or moving to make a play on a batted ball. It doesn't matter whether the fielder is in the basepath or not. If a runner touches or bumps into a fielder who is making a play or moving to make a play on a batted ball, the runner is out. This is called **interference**. The play is over. You call time. The batter gets first base. All other runners return to the base they had when the pitch was made, unless they are forced.

A runner can run in front of an infielder who is making a play on a ball, but if you think the runner interfered with the fielder you can call him out even though he didn't touch the fielder. (This would be a *very* unusual call.)

If a fielder is not making a play on a batted ball or moving to make a play on a batted ball, he must avoid making contact with runners. If he touches, bumps or gets in the way of a runner, this is called **obstruction**. If a fielder obstructs a runner, two things can happen:

- If a play is being made on the runner who is obstructed, you call time, the play is over and the runner gets the next base. It doesn't matter whether he was going toward it or back to the last base when he was obstructed. (Hot box)

If play is not being made on the runner who is obstructed, the play continues and you wait to see what happens. If the runner who was obstructed is out on a close play and you think he was out because of the obstruction, you call him safe and give him the base. If he is way out and you think he would have been out even without the obstruction, he's out. If a runner is obstructed and stops or goes back, you don't call it. (Rounding first)

Runners and fielders colliding on thrown balls

This usually happens when the runner is coming to the base, often at the plate. The rule is easy to state but hard to apply. A fielder with the ball can block the runner's path to the base. A fielder without the ball cannot block the runner's path to the base. If he does, that's obstruction. The hard call is when the ball is coming to the fielder. Often it is the catcher and he has to stand in the runner's way to catch the ball. If he's just about to get the ball, and tag the runner, he can be in the runner's way. It is your judgement whether the fielder was there too soon or not.

In little league, a runner must slide or avoid a fielder when the fielder (usually the catcher) has the ball. He cannot run into the catcher. You should be alert to this play. If the runner runs into the catcher and the catcher drops the ball, the runner is out. If you think the runner was trying to hurt the catcher or didn't care whether he hurt the catcher or not, you should throw him out of the game.

Out of play

Foul territory is not out of play. The ball is only out of play when it goes ***past the line of the backstop***. Sometimes these are close. If the ball goes towards out of play, you should move to the backstop and see whether the ball has gone out or not.

Batted balls -- Out of Play

A fly ball can be caught even if it is out of play, but the fielder's feet have to be in play when he catches the ball. Think of it like a fence. You can reach over the line into the stands and catch a fly, but you can't run up into the stands to catch a fly.

Thrown balls -- Out of Play (Overthrows)

If a thrown ball goes out of play (overthrow at 1st or 3rd). You call time. The play is over. You give the batter and every runner ***two bases from the base they had when the pitch was made***. Batter goes to 2nd. Runner at 1st goes to 3rd. Runners on 2nd or 3rd score.

This is a safe rule and you can use it, but technically it is not quite complete. If the overthrow is made by an outfielder or comes on the second play by an infielder (one infielder throws to another and then the second one throws it out of play, or an infielder

steps on 2nd and overthrows 1st) then the batter and the runners get two bases from where they were at the time the throw was made.

Lead Offs

In little league, a runner may not leave the base until the pitch reaches the batter. Runners are not out for leading off. If a runner leads off and the pitch is not hit, no runner can advance. It doesn't matter whether the catcher misses the ball or the runner steals safely. You send all the runners back. If a runner who led off is thrown out, he is out and all other runners go back.

If a runner leads off and the pitch is hit, you wait till the end of the play to figure out what to do. At the end of the play, you look at where the batter has gotten to and send *all* runners back (even those who did not lead off) unless they were forced to advance by the batter. Men on 1st and 3rd. Man on 1st leads off. Batter hits a single. Runner on 3rd back to 3rd. Runner on 1st goes to 2nd.

A final word of encouragement

The more you ump, the better you will get at it, but you will never be perfect. Every ump makes mistakes. We all try not to, but we all do.

If you make a mistake, try not to get down on yourself. Don't let one mistake create others. Don't make up for a mistake by making another "mistake" in favour of the other team. Just try to put the mistake behind you and go on from there.

If you run into a situation where you're not sure what to do, try not to look flustered. Stay calm and make a call. Then, stick with it. If it's wrong, it's wrong. The coaches probably don't know any more than you do and the fans for sure will know way less.

If you run up against a question about the rules or a situation that you find interesting or difficult, call me and we'll talk about it. I like talking about umpiring so don't feel like you'll be bothering me. My name is **Steve Wexler** and my number is **228-8953**.