

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:

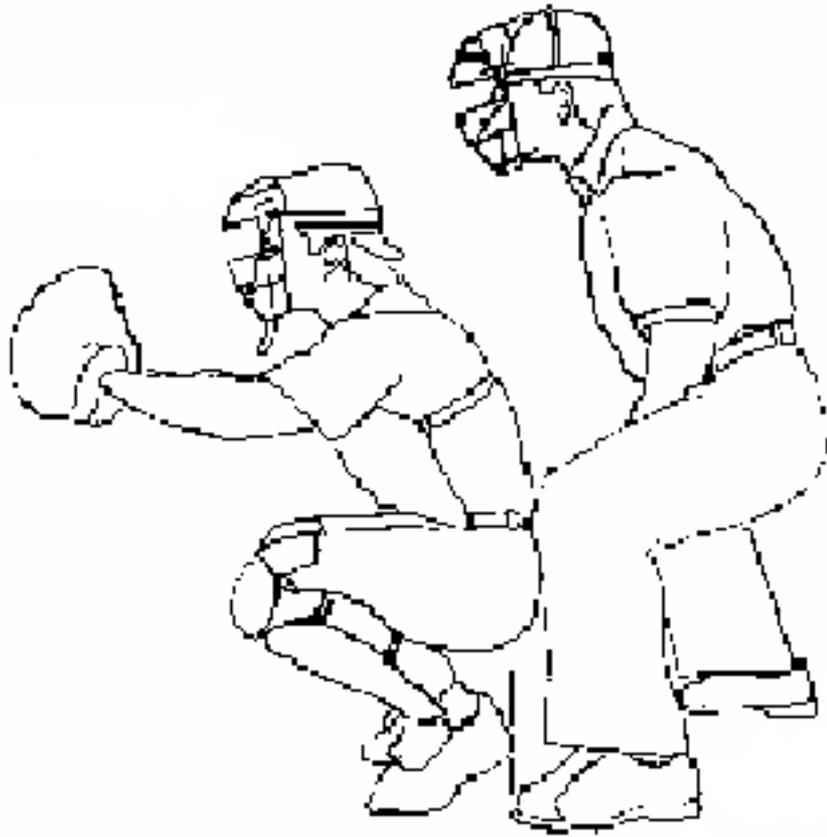
- **PU gives the signals;** Base Umpire flashes back
- **Make eye contact with your partner** at every new batter, and whenever the situation changes (e.g., after a steal)
- ***Learn and use the following signals !!!***
 - Number of outs, if any – hands out to the side, fingers indicate number of outs
 - 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



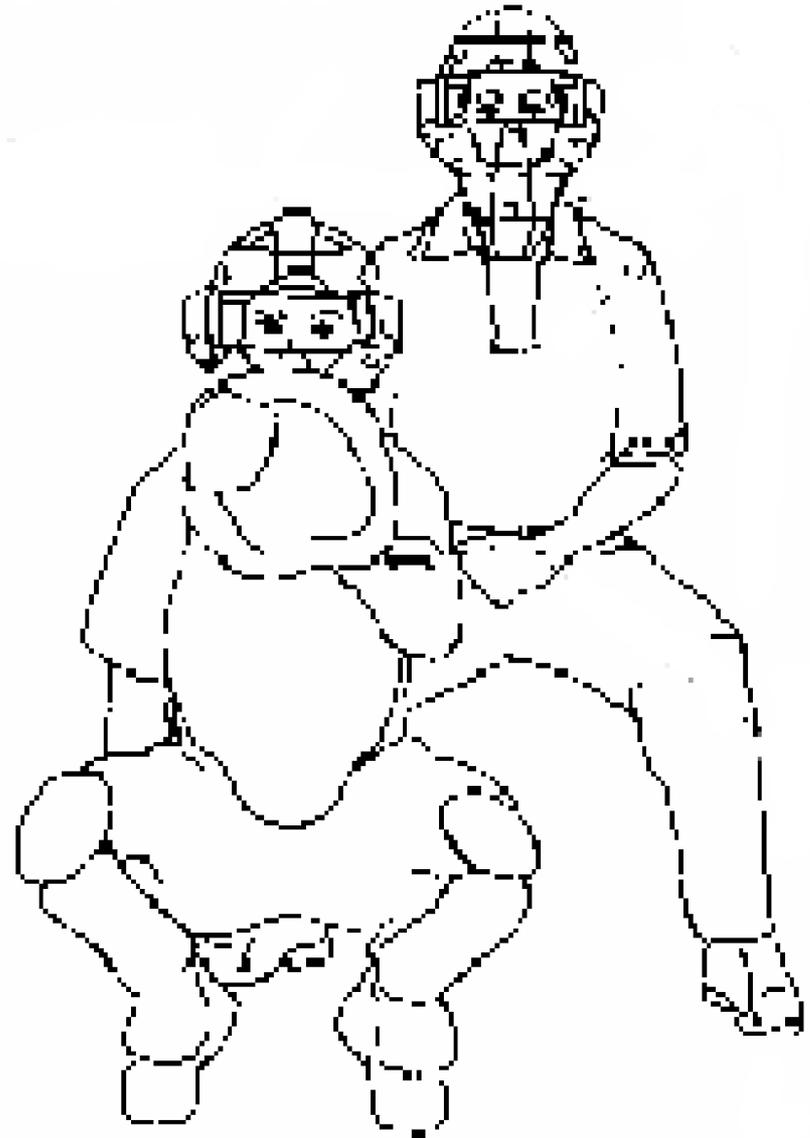
GETTING INTO THE SLOT: SETTING UP

- 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**



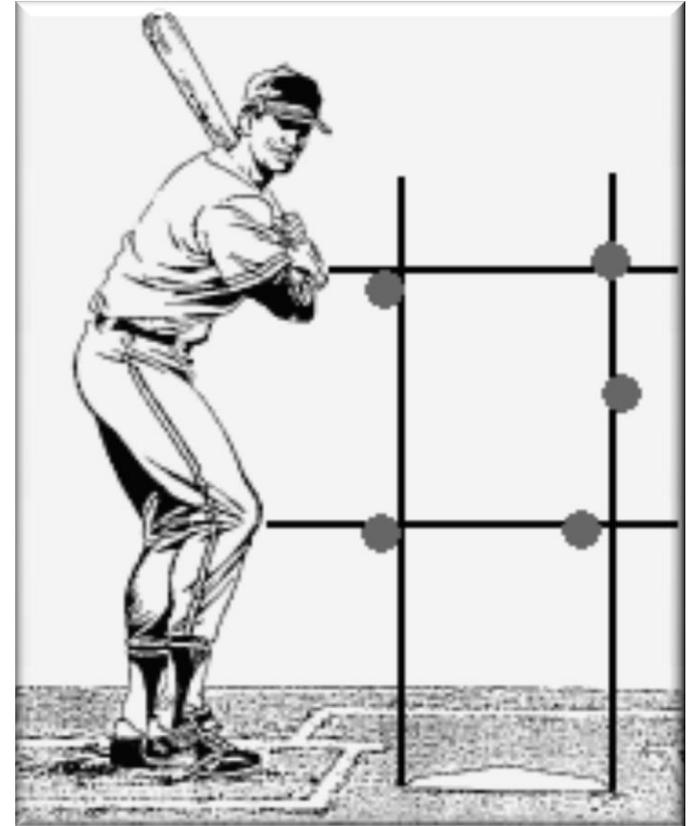


- **Use reference points to frame the strike zone:**
 - **Visualize the top of the zone** – often the batters hands are at the top of the zone
 - **If the catcher is in nice and tight, look at his knees relative to the batter**
 - **But, at AAA and Coast, this usually doesn't work**
 - **See the ball 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)
- 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)
- Touches the batter **as the batter swings** at it (dead ball) – NO MATTER WHERE; HEAD, HANDS, etc.
- Touches the batter in flight **in the strike zone**
- 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** (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 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**



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QUESTIONS

– AND YES, WE ARE GOING TO
PRACTICE THIS STUFF!

