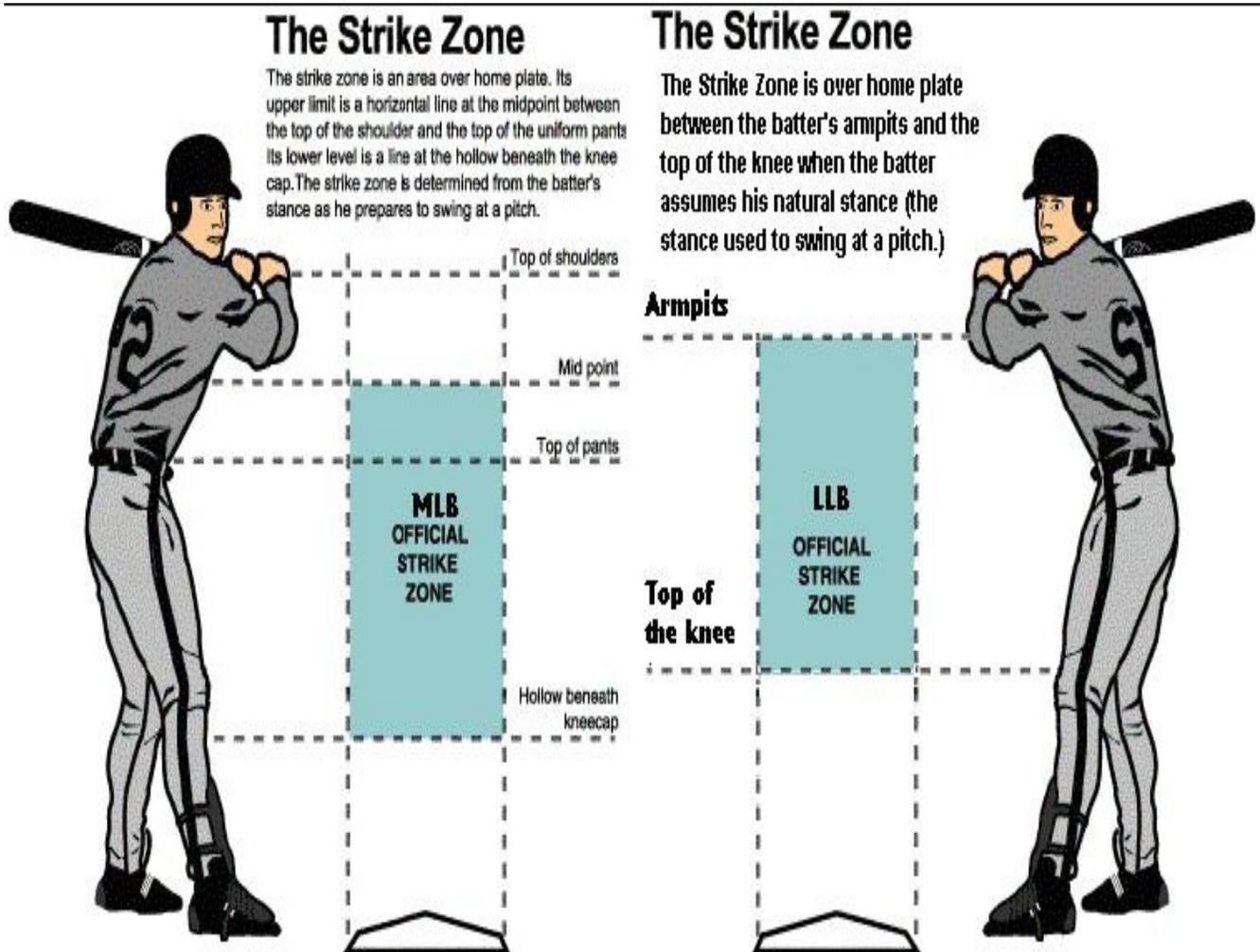


# The Most Misunderstood Rules in Little League Baseball

## The Little League Strike Zone (2.00)

“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.**”

The strike zone on TV or at a big league game (the Left Strike Zone) is **not** the Little League one. Notice the Little League strike zone on the right is higher than the one in the Major Leagues, and **it’s the Right Strike Zone.**



## **Out of the baseline (7.08a1):**

The confusion with this rule is the definition of “baseline”. It is not the direct line between two bases. The runner establishes the baseline: it is a direct line between the runner and the base to which he is advancing or returning.

Depending on the circumstances, his/her baseline may change as the play develops. For example, if the runner takes a wide turn at first into the grass behind the second baseman's normal position, and the throw comes back to first, the baseline goes from the runner to first base. If the first baseman tries to tag him, he cannot deviate more than three feet to either side of this line. The other source of confusion with this rule is the fact that the runner is not out for being out of the baseline unless he's avoiding a tag. If he's running around a fielder who is trying to field a batted ball, there is no violation.

## **Interference and Obstruction**

**Remember:** the offense **interferes**, the defense **obstructs**.

### **Interference - Rule 2.00 and 7.09**

The umpire must judge that someone on the offense "interferes with, obstructs, impedes, hinders or confuses" a defensive player who is trying to make a play on the ball. Some interference calls are easy, such as a runner being struck by a batted ball, or a runner colliding with a fielder trying to field a batted ball. The troublesome ones are when the umpire must judge the intent of the runner, such as:

1. A runner makes contact with a thrown ball. The umpire must be convinced that the runner **intentionally** interfered with the throw (raised arms, timed it so ball hits him, etc.)
2. A runner makes contact with or gets in the way of a fielder trying to field a thrown ball. **INTENT** is required here. If a runner just runs into a fielder while that fielder is waiting for a throw, it's not be interference unless the umpire judges the runner intentionally ran into him.
3. A runner doesn't contact a fielder fielding a batted ball, but causes him to miss it by some other action.

**Contact is not needed for interference.** So if a runner: yells at a fielder as he

runs behind him; waves his arms at the fielder; runs at the fielder and stops at the last second, stops in front of the fielder and jumps over the ball, etc., AND the umpire judges that this act caused the fielder to miss the batted ball, it's interference.

4. A base coach or someone from the bench gets in the way or yells "DROP IT". The rule says any member of the team at bat, not just the batter or runner, can cause interference.

## **Obstruction – Rule 2.00 and 7.06**

Like interference, this is a tough call when there is no contact. If a runner has to slow down or stop because of a fielder's action OTHER THAN fielding a batted ball, you have obstruction. Examples of obstruction that are not so obvious:

1. A fielder boots the initial play, and then gets in the runner's way as he goes after the ball. No interference here on the runner because the fielder booted the ball. The fielder is only “protected” on the initial play, not a subsequent play after his error.
2. A batter-runner has to slow down on his way to first because the first baseman is standing on the base. This happens a lot in the lower divisions.
3. A fielder stands in the baseline or puts his leg down and blocks the base or plate well before he has the ball. A fielder cannot block the base while he is waiting for the throw to come in.

Remember that there are two types of obstruction: Type A, where the defense is making a play on the obstructed runner (immediate dead ball, obstructed runner gets at least one base), and Type B where the runner is obstructed while play is going on elsewhere (play goes on, base awards made after play ceases).

## **Batter's Interference – Rule 6.06(c)**

There are things a batter does (or fails to do) that are interference, and other things he does (or fails to do) that do not. Confused ? First off, the batter's box is NOT a safety zone for the batter. If he's in the box, he's usually OK in these situations:

1. The ball gets by the catcher and the catcher knocks over the batter trying to get to the ball (no penalty, live ball)
2. The catcher throws the ball back to the pitcher or to a base to retire a base stealer, and the ball hits the batter or his bat (no penalty, live ball UNLESS the batter PURPOSELY moves into the catcher or the path of the ball)

3. The batter swings so hard that he hits the catcher's glove on the follow-through, knocking the ball away from the catcher (dead ball, runners return)

4. However, if the batter had time to get out of the box but stays in and gets in the way, then he's guilty of interference. This usually happens in lower levels when the ball gets by the catcher, a runner tries to score, and the batter stays in the box and affects the play at the plate. If the batter gets in the way of a play while OUT OF THE BOX, he will almost certainly be guilty of interference, even if it's unintentional.

### **Must-slide rule (7.08a3):**

**There is no must-slide rule in Little League. Never has been. Never will be.** Here's the rule: **7.08 -- Any runner is out when (3) the runner does not slide or attempt to get around a fielder who has the ball and is waiting to make the tag;**

**“The Right Call” Casebook -- Comment:** There is **no** must slide rule. The rule is slide or attempt to get around. The key in this situation is “fielder has the ball and is waiting to make the tag.”

#### **INSTRUCTOR COMMENTS:**

Hurdling or going over the defensive player that has the ball and is waiting to make a tag is a legal maneuver.

Rule 7.08(a) (3) does not prevent or make hurdling illegal.

**Rule 7.08(a-3)** is easily the most misunderstood rule in the book. It is easily broken down as follows:

(1) The fielder must have the ball in his/her possession; AND

(2) The fielder must be WAITING to make the tag;

If BOTH of those two criteria are satisfied, then the runner must EITHER:

(1) Slide; OR

(2) ATTEMPT to get around the fielder.

Notice the rule says, “attempt to get around”, not “avoid”. Contact may occur with no penalty assessed. There is no “Must Slide” rule and no league may create one. No league may modify this rule.

**Remember, the fielder must have the ball and be waiting to make the tag.**

The runner has three options when the fielder HAS THE BALL AND IS

WAITING TO MAKE THE TAG: 1) slide, 2) attempt to get around

the fielder, or 3) go back to the previous base. If the runner does none of those and goes in standing up, he's out.

But if he attempts to get around and successfully avoids the tag without going out of the baseline, he's safe. If the runner **attempts** to avoid, but still makes

contact, the runner is **not** automatically out. What constitutes an attempt is entirely up to the judgment of the umpire.

### **Base awards on a bad throw (7.05g)**

There's a myth that the runners get "one plus one" on a throw that goes out of play. Not in LL. The runners always get two bases from the last base legally touched depending on who makes the throw and when the throw is made.

1. If the throw is the first play by an *infielder*, the runners get two bases from the time of the pitch.
2. If the throw is a *subsequent play* by an infielder, or any throw by an outfielder, the runners get two bases from the time of the throw (the moment the ball leaves the fielder's hand) (*not* the time the ball goes out of play).
3. If the throw comes after all runners, including the batter, have reached their next bases, the runners get two bases from the time of the throw.
4. The umpire must make some judgment calls here. He must first judge whether the throw is the first play by an infielder. For example, if the shortstop steps on second and then throws to first to complete a double play, his throw is a subsequent play, the first play being the out at second. The other judgment the umpire must make is determining where the runners were at the time the throw left the fielder's hand. A runner could be a step away from second when a throw is made, and halfway to third when the throw finally goes out of play. Here, the base award would be two bases from first base, the last base legally touched before the throw.

### **Infield Fly (2.00)**

Most everyone understands when the infield fly is in effect (runners at first and second or bases loaded with less than two outs).

The trouble comes when the umpire must judge one thing: is the fly ball one that an infielder may catch with **ordinary effort** ?

"Ordinary effort" is judged differently at the different levels; ordinary effort for Majors shortstop may not be ordinary effort to an AA Minors shortstop, and just about any popup on the infield of an A Minors game is beyond ordinary ! An umpire may judge that a ball hit to short left field warrants an Infield Fly call, whereas a ball hit behind second base (shortstop and second baseman must run hard to get to it) does not. Also, if an outfielder catches the ball but the umpire judges an infielder could have made the catch with ordinary effort, an Infield Fly call is valid. It is entirely up to the umpire to judge "ordinary effort".

If the umpires fail to call Infield Fly when it was obvious they should have, and the defense fails to catch the ball and subsequently turns a cheap double play the umpires shall **retroactively** enforce the infield fly rule and place the runners back.

The ball is **live** during an infield fly. Once the ball is touched or hits the ground the runners may advance **at their own risk**.

## **Batting Out of Order (6.07)**

This one is ALWAYS fun to try and straighten out. To simplify the rule, you must understand one basic premise: the PROPER batter (the one who should have batted) is the one who is called out. Here's more to try to clear this up:

- The ONLY time the proper batter is called out is when the defense appeals after the improper batter completes his time at-bat (getting on base or making an out).
- If the defense appeals while the improper batter is batting, the proper batter simply replaces the improper batter, and the proper batter assumes the count.
- Any base running advances or put outs while the improper batter is up are upheld.
- Any base running advances or put outs when the improper batter puts the ball in play are nullified (so if an improper batter hits into a double play, the defense may not want to say anything !)
- If the defense fails to appeal an improper batter before the next pitch or play, the improper batter is now “legalized”, and next up is the person following the **legalized batter** in the order.
- The scorekeeper is NOT ALLOWED to bring this situation to the umpire’s attention. It is the manager's responsibility to catch a batting out of order situation and to inform the umpire. The umpire is not allowed to bring this situation to anyone’s attention either. That’s the manager’s job.

## **Leaving the base early (7.13)**

This rule is unique to LL, and may cause umpires a lot of headaches. The bottom line: if **any** base runner leaves a base before the pitch reaches a batter, **all runners** are guilty, and depending on the subsequent action, runners must return to any unoccupied bases. The Rule Book has a number of examples that are pretty straightforward. Some that are less understood:

1. If the batter is subsequently thrown out on a play, ALL RUNNERS return. For example, a batter hits a double with the bases loaded, but gets gunned down trying to stretch it into a triple. Since his out left all the bases open, no

runs score and all runners must return. If his out was the third out of the inning, no runs score and the inning is over ! Expect the offensive manager to be very peeved by this.

2. The runners can only advance to the bases they would have achieved based on the **umpire's** judgment of the base value of the hit, regardless of any subsequent errors. For example, a batter hits a sharp grounder to the centerfielder with the bases loaded, and the ball goes under the centerfielder's legs all the way to the fence. After the play is over, the umpire may judge the value of the hit was a single. If so, he would put the batter on first, and put the other runners on second and third (only one run scores).

3. If with the bases loaded the ball doesn't leave the infield, no runs score. This is explained in Example 15 in the Rule Book. What is not explained is if the ball is hit in the infield and then goes through because of an error on the fielder. Here the umpire should rule that the value of the hit is only one base, so everyone only gets one base and one run scores. If a runner leaves early, he cannot correct his mistake by returning to touch the base. For example, a runner on second leaves early, then sees the ball is flied to right. He tags up and tries for third, and ends up scoring on a wild throw. He must return to second because he left early, regardless of the fact he subsequently tagged it. There is no "fixing" a 7.13 violation.

## **Appeals (7.10)**

Managers and coaches often have trouble with appeals and how to do them properly. An **APPEAL** is an act of a fielder in claiming violation of the rules by the offensive team. Rule 7.10 covers appeals.

**Appeals must be made to the umpire that made the call being appealed.**

**Appeals must be made while the ball is in play (Alive).**

You **don't** have to wait until the ball is dead to appeal. Example: Batter doubles but missed first base. You **don't** have to get the ball back to the pitcher and throw to 1b: you may simply throw to 1b and make an appeal.

When the ball does become dead, you must put it in play **before** appealing. It becomes in play when the pitcher has the ball and is on the rubber and the umpire says "play". **When the ball is alive** an appeal may be made by the defense in any of the following ways:

- 1) By touching the runner whom they believe committed a base running infraction;
- 2) By touching the base they believe was missed while the runner was advancing;
- 3) By touching the **original** base that a runner left before a fly ball was caught.

An appeal should be **clearly** intended as an appeal, either by a verbal request by the player or an act that **unmistakably** indicates to the umpire that it is an appeal. In all cases, the defense must make a verbal appeal to the umpire **or** complete an act that is unmistakably an appeal.

Accidentally touching a base that was missed is not an appeal. For example: Batter doubles to right but misses 1b. Right fielder throws to 1b, who steps on the bag and says A) nothing or B) "batter missed first".

A) Is **not** an appeal. B) **Is** an appeal.

A throw to a base to catch a runner who had not retouched is unmistakably an appeal. Example: Runner on 3b, fly ball to left, runner leaves before the catch. A throw to 3b **is** an appeal. No verbal appeal is necessary here.

Appeals **must** be made before the next pitch or play. If the defense makes an appeal after "time" has been called, the umpire **should** say something like "put the ball in play and appeal again." Since no runner may advance or be put out while the ball is dead, this is not a play and the defense has **not** lost their right to appeal after the ball is put in play.

The appeal itself is **not** a play. A fake throw to hold a runner is not a play. It is a play when a balk is committed during an appeal. Plays that occur during "continuous action" after an infraction do not cancel the defense's right to appeal.

**The defense loses their right to appeal when any of the following actions occur:**

- When the throw made in an appeal attempt goes into dead ball territory. When this occurs no more appeals may be made at any base. This is the "err" in Rule 7.10 on an appeal and is interpreted to be the same as a play.
- A pitch is made to the batter.
- A balk is committed before or as part of an appeal attempt.
- A play is made that is **not** part of continuous action.

**Continuous action example:**

Runner on first misses second as he advances to third on a hit. The defense makes a play on him at third and he is safe. The play was part of continuous action after the hit, therefore, **yes**; the defense **may** appeal the infraction at second.

- Successive appeals may not be made on a runner at the same base. You can appeal the same runner at another base. Example: Batter triples and misses 1b and 2b. Defense appeals at 1b, the umpire rules the runner safe there. The defense **can** appeal the miss at 2b.