



Clermont County Knothole Baseball

Umpire Training Manual

CCKB Umpire Training Manual
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Introduction

Umpires are an important part of all Youth baseball games. All the players, no matter what age level take these games very seriously. You as an umpire should take them just as serious. You control the game, take charge. Your authority is assumed, act that way. Just because a manager is 40 and your 14 means nothing! You are the umpire. You are in charge. Don't be a jerk about it, just act like you are in control. Be pleasant and polite, but be firm. We want this to be a positive experience for both the players and the umpires. A good umpire must know all the rules, but learning them is difficult because the rule book is hard to understand. In game situations, you should be able to quickly look up any unusual rule that may come into play. An umpire must know how the rules should be interpreted and applied in real situations. You can't simply memorize the rule book and expect to be a good umpire. Although the umpire must know all the rules, in reality, only a few come into play in most games.

What is an umpire?

An umpire watches a baseball game and tells everybody what just happened. That's a strike, the runner is out and that's a foul ball. Remember, it's not anything until you say it is.

What is an umpire's job?

An umpire's job is to make sure the game is played properly by the rules so that neither team gets an unfair advantage, not intended in the rules. Remember it is not the umpire's job to be "fair"

"Umpiring is the only occupation where you have to be perfect the first day on the job, and then improve over the years" – Ed Runge – MLB Umpire

In order to foster a feeling of mutual respect for each other and for the game CCKB has these expectations of its umpires:

1. Be 15-20 minutes early for games
2. Be professional in appearance and manner
3. Have knowledge of the rules, and divisional guidelines
4. Be consistent during the game, a strike in the first inning, should be a strike in the last inning
5. Be aware of any and all safety issues
6. Be courteous and helpful to all players

The Basics

Your part in this, that we call Knothole Baseball...The umpire is the authority figure. If you look the part and act the part, you'll get treated the way you should be: with respect. This starts the minute you show up at the field. The basics of umpiring are very simple:

Look professional

Act professional

Look professional:

1. An umpire who takes pride in his appearance also takes pride in his game. Respect is all about perception. If you look sloppy on the field and look like you don't care, you become a target. **And you deserve it.**

Act professional:

1. Know the rules. Study the rules. Always learn: if you make a mistake, go over the rule after the game.
2. Show up on time, looking like a pro and ready to go.
3. Take charge: your authority is **assumed**, act that way. Just because the manager is 40 and you're 14 means **nothing**. You are the umpire. You are in charge. Don't be a jerk about it – just act like it's assumed you are in charge.
4. Be pleasant. Be polite. But, be firm. You are well-trained. Be confident out there.
5. Take your time on calls: **Pause-read-react**. There is nothing to be gained by rushing except trouble.
6. Your calls: **Make 'em loud and make 'em proud** – everyone has a right to know what your call is.
7. Don't hesitate. The best way to avoid confrontations is to be in the correct position to make the right call, and to "sell" close plays with confident verbal and hand signals. Don't show off though – you are not the show.
8. Don't argue. Listen to reason, but be firm. If you are sure you made the right call, say so, and move on with the game. If you are not sure, listen, use your best judgment, make the call, and move on.
9. Don't be afraid to confer with your partner if you are not sure on something.

10. If a manager asks you to check with your partner, do it, but remember, it's still your call.
11. Even professionals make mistakes: treat each call as a new one. Don't try to "even things up" if you blow a call.
12. Be a team out there: support your partner. Don't change his calls; you aren't supposed to. If you think your partner missed something, **do not** overrule him/her. If asked to, by Team Rep only, call time and go to your partner away from the players and coaches. Talk it over. Get it right. Then, whoever made the initial call, announce clearly what the call is now.
13. Smile and be nice – it goes a long way towards making things run smoothly.
14. Always watch the BALL, and you will likely not miss an important play.
15. Don't let immature comments bother you. Parents and coaches will usually say things like "that looked close" and the like, but they are not meant to undermine your authority. If a coach says, "That was a close call", you may want to reply with, "You are correct, that was close." Save your 'authority' for prevention of direct, mean spirited, or repeatedly disruptive personal attacks.
16. Read your rulebook. Rereading it will cause you to see things you missed the first time. Anything that doesn't sound right probably means you don't have the right understanding of the rule. Ask the U.C. (Umpire Coordinator(s)) for the correct understanding.
17. Never hover around a particular dugout, or mingle too closely with players and spectators, as this will cause problems. You don't want it to look like you favor one team or the other. Position yourself in front of the defensive team's dugout between half innings...this is the empty bench.
18. NEVER get into a shouting match with a spectator. Go to the offender's team manager, and politely ask him to control his parent(s).
19. Always make calls with clear, firm decisiveness, and confidence.
20. Dress appropriately, look sharp, have the right equipment. To do otherwise it undermines everything you represent.

What do I do when I don't know the rule?

You will find yourself in a situation where you can't remember the right rule. The first thing to remember is to calm down and think. It helps to think in terms of **advantage and disadvantage**. In other words, if the rule really was the way I think it is, how could the defense or the offense take unfair advantage of it, or be unfairly disadvantaged?

For example, some people think it's a hit batsman and not a strike if the pitch hits a batter in the strike zone. Think for a second: what **if** this **was** true? Imagine its bases loaded 2 outs, 0-2 count, tie score, bottom of the last inning. Why **wouldn't** a batter just lean into the strike zone and get hit? If it was a hit batsman, that's what they would do, and that's not baseball. It's not right. So, the rules makers said "A pitch that hits the batter in the strike zone is a strike, and the ball is dead". It's right there in Rule 2.00 STRIKE (f). Why is the ball dead?

Think for a second – what if the count above was 0-0 – if the ball wasn't dead, a batter could deflect a pitch away from the defense, and the runner on 3rd would score the winning run. That's not fair, it's not right, and it's not baseball, so the ball is dead.

Changing versus correcting a Call by Carl Childress

Calls can't be **changed** except in five instances.

But an umpire can always **CORRECT** a call if he does it **immediately** after the play. It looks bad, but it's better than sticking with the wrong call.

"Changing" a call implies the umpire, after a discussion with a skipper or other umpire, has altered his decision.

"Correcting" a call means he's calls "Out!" and then immediately "Safe!" when he sees the ball pop out of the glove.

For example, the umpire quickly signals a catch on a fly ball, and then the outfielder drops it. The instant the ball fell from the glove; he should have yelled "No Catch! No catch!" and signaled safe vigorously.

It's just like at first base. The ball nips the runner, and the umpire sells out. The ball pops out of F3's glove. Sheepishly, the umpire will then signal "Safe!" and make a mental note to slow down his timing.

The five instances when a call can be changed:

1. Two umpires make different calls on the same play.
2. A rule is misinterpreted.
3. A home run is changed to a double and vice versa.
4. A half swing called a ball becomes a strike.
5. The ball pops free on a tag, and another umpire sees it.

Must slide rule (7.08a3)

There is no must-slide rule in Youth baseball. Never has been, Never will be.

The runner has three options when the fielder HAS THE BALL AND IS WAITING TO MAKE THE TAG: slide, attempt to get around the fielder, or go back to the previous base. If the runner does neither 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.

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

If the ball is on its way to the base, or the ball and runner get there simultaneously, and there's contact because the runner didn't slide or attempt to get around, this is just a collision.

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:

- a. 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.)
- b. 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 interference unless the umpire judges the runner intentionally ran into him.
- c. 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.
- d. 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.

Batter's interference (Rule 6.06c)

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:

- a. The ball gets by the catcher and the catcher knocks over the batter trying to get to the ball (no penalty, live ball)
- b. 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)
- c. 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)
- d. 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.

Obstruction (Rule 2.00 and 7.06)

Obstruction is one of the most common calls in the lower classes, Pay attention! 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 is not so obvious:

- a. 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.
- b. 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.
- c. 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.
- d. Remember that there are two types of obstruction: Type A, where the defense is making a play on the obstructed runner (immediate dead ball), and

Type B where the runner is obstructed while play is going on elsewhere (play goes on)...Delayed Dead Ball Signal.

Out of the baseline (Rule 7.08a1)

The confusion with this rule is the definition of “baseline”.

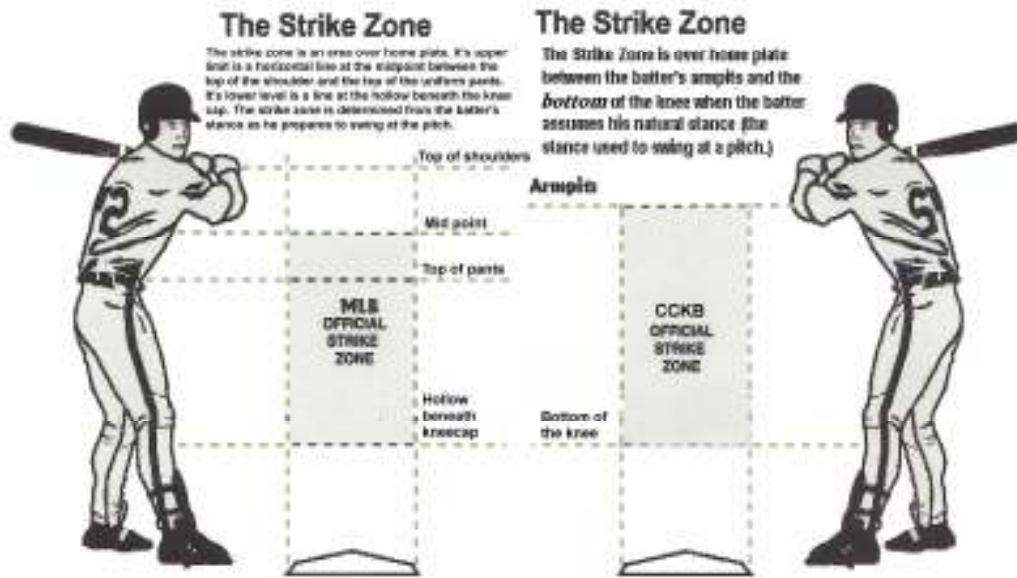
The runner establishes the baseline. It is not necessarily the direct line between the two bases.

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.

The Youth baseball Strike Zone (2.00)

“The **STRIKE ZONE** is that space over home plate which is between the batter's armpits and the bottom 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 (Left Strike Zone) is **not** the Youth baseball one. The Youth baseball strike zone is higher than the one in the Major Leagues, and **it's the Right Strike Zone**.



**If it looks like a strike call it a strike. Think Strikes. Strikes make outs.
Outs make innings. Innings make games.
We are paying you to do games, so call strikes when you can.**

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 umpire is not allowed to bring this situation to anyone’s attention either. That’s the manager’s job.

Before the game

- 1. Get to the game on time. Show up early (at least 15 minutes).** No one likes to wait.
- 2. Confer with your partner.** Get together on signs and signals. Make sure you know who has the plate. If you are supposed to have the bases, but it is 10 minutes before the game, and he isn’t here, put on the plate gear. He’s late. He gets the bases.
- 3. Make sure the managers have the field prepared on time.** The home team should line the field. Make sure there are no safety issues – walk around the field. Look for broken fences, broken glass, trash on the field, broken gates, holes in the ground, standing water, and anything else that’s unsafe and anything that could trap a ball. Make the managers fix it before you start the game. You want to impress them with your dedication? Help them do the job. You don’t have to, but sometimes they don’t get much help. Also, it’s kind of embarrassing, and it makes them feel like they owe you something.
- 4. Monitor the pre-game warm-ups as stipulated in CCKB policy.** Home team is to relinquish field to Visiting team fifteen minutes to do infield/outfield warm ups before the game. Home team can utilize field as long as desired up until then. Move things along. **Start on time.**
- 5. Plate Conference.** Introduce yourself to the managers, and learn their names. It is easier to have a discussion later if you refer to each other by name.
- 6. Go over the ground rules at the plate conference:** things like where dead ball territory is, keep gates closed, if there are holes in the fence what will happen if the ball goes in there, etc. This should be completed while the visiting team is finishing their infield practice, the Team Reps. & umpires should stand off to one side of the plate for ground rules without interfering with the infield practice.
- 7. Make sure the players are properly equipped and ready to play.** Cups, shoes, masks, other gear, bats and two game balls to the umpire.

8. Male catchers must wear a cup, no exceptions. I know, “let the kids play”; it is fun until the bell rings. Ask your catcher if he’s wearing a cup. **It is not necessary to ask them for a “cup check”** (knock-knock). If they want to perform a “cup check”, fine. If you catch one without after you’ve asked, you have every right to tell his manager. He should not be sending a catcher out there without a cup. Now, sometimes kids lie about it because they want to catch real badly. If you catch them, you’ll have to be the bad guy. **No cup, no catch, no exceptions.**

9. Make sure catcher’s masks have either a dangling or built-in throat protector. Make sure catcher’s gear fits properly. Don’t start the game until it does. Here it comes again: “Aw, ‘cmon let the kids play” which is fine until someone gets hit in the throat or breaks a collarbone. Then, it’s your fault for not noticing. So, notice.

10. Make sure equipment is in good condition and properly worn. If a helmet is cracked, throw it out of the game. Teams can borrow from each other if needed. Severely dented bats should be removed.

During the game

1. Help keep the game moving. Hustle the players into position and back to the dugout, including warming up pitchers. Make sure to ask the manager to get his catcher is ready as soon as you can if that looks like it’s an issue.

2. Stay near the plate during warm-ups, but out of the way near the backstop. If the catcher misses a warm-up pitch, hand him the other ball and go get the one at the backstop. This will speed up warm-up pitches tremendously.

3. Keep warm-up pitches to no more than 8 for a new pitcher, 5 for a returning one. On the second-last pitch (6th or 3rd) tell the catcher, “One and down”. That means, one more warm-up, and then the catcher should call out “balls in, coming down”, and then the next warm-up pitch goes to 2b.

4. “Balls in, coming down” is a privilege, not a right. If the catcher misses it or the 2b or SS doesn’t cover, tell him to toss it back to the pitcher and get his team ready.

5. Let the catcher position himself first, and then you set up. If they set up way back, ask “you sure you want to be here?” If they move, fine. If not, fine. They’ll lose strikes for their pitcher if they set up too far away, but you are not the coach. Do talk to the coach if it’s a real problem, but that’s something the coach is supposed to notice and fix, not you. Don’t let the

catcher set up where he will surely get hit. That may be closer than you think. Closer to the plate is better, so go easy on this.

6. Take care of your catchers. The catcher is your buddy – take care of him. If you see loose catcher's gear, stop the game and get it fixed. If the catcher gets whacked, stall until he can compose himself. Cleaning the plate is always a good timewaster, and it makes you look good too. After all, that catcher is the only thing between you and the pitcher whacking you in the shins all game long.

7. Keep equipment off the field. This means bats, balls, buckets, catcher's gear, etc. If you see it on the field during play, wait until the play finishes. Call time and have the equipment removed.

8. Keep the players in the dugouts when they aren't on the field. The dugouts are for players, managers, and coaches only.

9. Keep the managers in the dugouts, not in front of them. Yes, they will hate it. No, they aren't supposed to be out of the dugouts.

10. On-deck hitter. Keep the batter away from the plate while the pitcher is warming up or pitching to a batter. Some of those youth pitchers are crazy wild.

11. If you have one baseball in the bag let the managers know you need a new ball. Inspect any ball being put in the game. Make sure the balls are in good condition: no cuts or big scrapes, and not too dirty or wet. If it's wet, have the managers get a towel and keep 3 or 4 balls in circulation, drying them off when one gets too wet. If a ball hits the backstop hard, ask the catcher to see it.

12. Do not throw baseballs out to the pitcher. Give it to the catcher, and make him do it.

13. Have the balls be thrown in to the catcher, and have them handed to you. You will be surprised at how difficult it is to catch a ball with your mask on if it goes below your waist. If you have the mask off, you have it in your left hand, so righties will be tempted to catch it with the mask, since it's their glove hand. You **will** eventually drop the mask when you do this. Let the players handle thrown baseballs.

14. Make sure you and the coaches stay positive role models. Don't allow poor sportsmanship. Don't let them yell out questionable instructions, such as "Run over the catcher the next time he gets in the way!"

15. If it's too dark to finish a full inning, call the game. Don't play when it isn't safe. A half-completed inning can result in bad blood if the visitor's score gets reverted. It doesn't seem "fair".

16. Understand that umpires will make mistakes. Don't try to make up for a bad call. Let it go. Call what you see on the next one.

After the game

1. As soon as the game is over, give the baseballs back to the manager who gave them to you.
2. After teams shake hands, immediately leave the field and return to umpire shelter. There should be no conversation whatsoever between umpires and managers, coaches, players or spectators.
3. Put the equipment back clean.
4. Report any broken equipment immediately.
5. If there has been controversy or harassment before, during or after the game, please report it to your Supervisor.

INSIDE PROTECTOR

Assume a position behind the catcher looking between the catcher and the batter; you must be able to clearly see the pitcher, the entire plate and the batter's knees. To see all of those elements, it is important to move into "the slot" that area between the catcher and the batter. The farther you are into the slot, the better you will see the strike zone. Two additional factors have tremendous impact on your view of the strike zone: head height and stability. Your head should be positioned so that your eyes are at the top of the strike zone. If you have to look up to see the pitch, you know it's too high. If you work with your head lower, your view of the knee high pitch at or near the outside corner of the plate will be restricted. The head is straight ahead looking at the pitcher. Your ear closest to the catcher should be just to the outside of the catcher's shoulder. These are good starting positions. From the moment the pitcher releases a pitch until the ball arrives in the catcher's glove; your head should remain absolutely still. If your head moves at all, your view of the strike zone will be blurred and your judgment will be inconsistent.

Assume your crouch when the pitcher is about to release the ball. You'll view the pitch from between the batter and catcher. Don't go down too early, for you will put unnecessary strain on your muscles. Relaxation between pitches is very important. Many umpires wear themselves out for the late innings by staying in a set position for long a period of time. The upper body should remain in an almost upright position.

One important note, don't kneel down to view the pitch. You must remember that in a two or three man crew, the plate umpire often covers third base. Going to third from a standing position is far easier and quicker than trying to get there from your knees. (It's true that some great umpires kneel; there are usually exceptions to every rule. But, unless you're an exceptionally fast umpire, stay in a crouch, not on a knee.) When kneeling, you give the impression that you are physically tired. Whichever position you use, it is important that you do not put a hand on the catcher or position yourself against the catcher. Don't put your hands over your shin guards at the knees or put them on the catcher. This practice always looks bad to the spectators. Keeping your hands behind you during the pitch will not only aid in protection but looks far more professional.

THE PLATE UMPIRE AT WORK

When working behind the plate or on the bases, use the indicator in your left hand. A little bit of experimentation will show that it was not made for the right. Use of the indicator in the left hand frees the right for use in calling strikes. It is very difficult to change the indicator with the right hand and there is danger of throwing it away while calling pitches.

The mask is removed as often as possible when the plate umpire is not actually engaged in calling balls and strikes. The left hand is used in removing the mask; shift the indicator so the thumb is free. Grasp the mask so that the thumb is at the side of or under the jaw. Remove the mask by lifting out first, then up. By using this method, you can be sure that your cap will remain on your head. By keeping the mask in your left hand you will avoid the danger of hitting a player with it or throwing it while calling a runner out. Most people feel that the out signal looks better if made with an empty right hand.

In calling a batted ball hit down the baseline, the plate umpire should remove his mask as soon as the ball is hit. Hustle up the baseline as far as possible (30/45 foot line is recommended). Be sure to stop before it is time to make your decision. On a hard hit ball the umpire may not have time to remove his mask or get to the baseline. Do the best you can.

The plate umpire should make the decision on the batter running inside/outside the three foot line and interfering with the first baseman taking the throw. This play

occurs only on a bunt or slow roller down the first baseline; therefore, he should be in good position while the base umpire probably will not.

As the plate umpire, be sure to give the batter a chance to get set in the box before the pitcher pitches the ball. If the pitcher begins his motion while the batter is not ready and it is unintentional, call "time". If he does it on purpose, call "time" and warn him. Each such pitch after a warning will result in an illegal pitch with the bases empty and a balk with the bases occupied. A quick pitch may be called without warning, but it is good mechanics to stop play the first time because of possible physical danger.

Under normal conditions, the plate umpire will have to go to third base to cover a play anytime a runner goes from first to third on a batted ball. He should go down the line in foul territory, then cross into fair territory as close to the base as possible. If there is an overthrow, the umpire (remain in fair territory) must beat the runner to home plate so he can call the play.

The plate umpire should leave his place behind the catcher on every batted ball. He should come out in front of the plate so he can get a better view of the plays taken place on the field. If there is a possible play at home, the plate umpire will need to move into position for the best possible view of the play.

Calling balls and strikes

Try this philosophy calling balls and strikes *the pitcher gets the benefit of the doubt on the edges and knees, while the batter gets the benefit of the doubt in the top of the zone.*

However, that alone will not get you through a game successfully. Remember, with respect to in and out, all the coaches and fans can see is what the catcher does. You as a plate umpire need to recognize that and use that as one of the tools of the trade. Generally speaking, the frame of the catcher's body (i.e., knee to knee, extended up to about his face) represents what is seen as a good pitch; if a catcher receives the ball within that frame and you call a strike, from the coaches' and fans' point of view it looked like a good pitch, so you are unlikely to get much grief. On the other hand, if the catcher has to make a heroic stab at a ball and you call it a strike, then from the coaches and fans point of view it must have been a bad pitch and you are likely to get grief.

Bottom line: **your catcher is one of the tools you use as a plate umpire.** You use him before the pitch to get an idea of where the ball is supposed to go. Then the pitch comes in, you see where it crosses the plate, and you make a judgment about it. As a rule, the judgment you make when the ball crosses the plate is the call you'll make. BUT!!! You track the ball all the way to the catcher's glove, and use his position as a double-check to make sure that 1) you don't make some crazy call and 2) you use him to aid in your decision making process on a call where it was truly close and it could go either way.

That is where a good catcher can make all the difference in the world. A good catcher knows how to truly frame a pitch. By that I mean, he catches the ball and he holds it RIGHT THERE for you to get a good look at -- he gives you that extra second to make the decision. If the catcher frames a close pitch like that, they will generally get the benefit of the doubt. A lousy catcher "frames" every pitch by bringing it to waist high down the middle of the plate. That is the stupidest thing in the world to do. Everyone knows the pitch wasn't piped. This type of catcher is no help at all to either the pitcher or the umpire. If a catcher is doing this he will lose the benefit of the doubt.

It is only when you work with quality pitchers and catchers that you realize how much that glove can mean to your umpiring. The last thing to notice is the exact position of the catcher's glove in relation to the corners of the plate and the batter's knee. If that catcher is set up on the outside line, at the knee and the ball goes right into the mitt can I legitimately ball the pitch?

Too many amateur umpires give up on following the pitch long before it hits the glove. They frame their decision well before the pitch has even arrived at the plate. By watching the pitch all the way into the glove then making your call based upon the entire path of the ball you will refine your strike zone more than any other technique. Slowing down your timing means delaying the point where you make a decision on the pitch, not simply delaying the moment you say "strike" or "ball."

Don't call the glove, but don't ignore it either. It remains one of the most significant reference points the umpire can use in exercising judgment in the strike zone.

Every pitch that leaves the pitcher's hand is a strike until it's proven to you that it's not. Keep the game moving; make the batters swing the bat. This makes for a better game and it all has to do with the strike zone.

Wherever you establish your strike zone the most important job as an umpire is to call the first pitch of the game the same as the last pitch of the game. BE CONSISTENT!

Consistency comes from good timing. Slow down, relax, see the pitch, hear the pitch hit the mitt, and call it. If you have trouble slowing down try seeing the pitch, hearing the pitch hit the mitt, then read the manufacturers name on the mitt and then make the call. Develop a rhythm, call all balls and strikes. If you just call strikes it's hard to establish rhythm. Umpire's preference...

First position yourself in the slot (area between batter and catcher) so you have a full view of home plate. You have to see the catcher catch the pitch, especially on the low outside corner. Don't hide behind the catcher; you won't be able to see the plate. If you set up too low, you won't see the outside corner. The height of your head should be where your chin is above the top of the catcher's head. In order to be consistent, you must be consistent in your position, especially height. You must have the same view of the zone on every pitch, or your zone will change.

As the game begins you must decide where your zone is and keep it there. Every umpire has their own zone.

You have 3 things to help to establish the top of your zone: the batter, the catcher and you. First look at the batter to see armpit height. Every batter is different, but not that much. Check the catcher; usually catchers are pretty consistent with their stance. Where is the top of the catcher's head in relation to the batter's armpits? A lot of times it's somewhere close, which helps when the batter wants to dip down. Finally there is you, the height of your stance and eyes and how you see the zone. See the pitch; see where it passed the batter's belt or letters. Did the catcher reach up above his head or was it above his head when it crossed over the plate? If you have a higher zone you might want to set your eye level at the top of the zone. It's easy to tell if the pitch was above or below your eye level. Use whatever you can to help you consistently establish if the pitch was within the top limit of your zone. The low end of the zone gives umpires the most problems. You must position yourself to see the whole plate and the catcher's mitt, so you can see the catcher catch the ball. The way the catcher catches the pitch will help you determine whether it was a ball or strike. At upper levels the way the catcher handles the pitch is a major factor in the call. Naturally you look at the batter's knees to find the lower limit of the zone. Use the catcher's knees too: the catcher's knees are usually very close to the same height as the batter. This can help you with the outside pitch. The way the low pitch is caught will help you the most. On a fastball if he has to turn his fingers downward in order to catch the pitch, it's usually too low.

On a breaking ball, if the catcher's mitt is down next to or touching the ground, the pitch is too low. Get a good look at the low pitch, let the catcher help you. A good catcher will make marginal pitches strikes. Proper timing is crucial on these breaking balls.

The outside pitch is also difficult for some umpires. Here again let the catcher help you. Generally, if the catcher has to reach out or turn his mitt outwards in order to catch the pitch, the pitch is probably outside. This of course, depends on where the catcher sets up. The inside pitch is the easiest since it is right there in front of you. In conclusion, whether or not a pitch enters your strike zone is your call but you need the catcher to get a lot of information. Most important is to set up your strike zone and keep it the same all game. If you need to move a game along widen the zone to make it larger, never raise or lower it. Coaches can see up and down but can't tell in and out, no matter what they say. Think strikes, make your zone generous, have good timing and be consistent.

Remember, every safe call or walk awarded the batter can add at least 5 minutes to each half inning.

Proper Count Mechanics by Bob Pariseau

When giving the count, show the count with your fingers while holding the hands about forehead high and a little wider apart than your shoulders. Make sure your hands are high enough that the fingers can be seen above the heads of the batter or catcher. Face the palms of each hand towards the pitcher. It is not necessary to turn your torso to sweep the display from left to right, or to twist the hands, or any such. Just hold them up high and hold them up long enough while yelling and that will do it.

The **right** hand always shows the count of **Strikes**. The **left** hand always shows the count of **Balls**. The easy way to remember this is the right hand is also the hand you use for signaling strikes.

While showing the fingers, announce the count. Always announce balls first and then strikes-- alphabetical order if your mind thinks that way or left to right if you prefer to look at your hands while announcing the count.

Always use the words "balls" and "strikes" when announcing the count to the field or when responding to a question. Announce, "ONE BALL, TWO STRIKES!" not "ONE AND TWO", or "TWELVE", or any other such variant.

If there is a delay during an at bat, it is a good idea to remind people of the count before you make the ball live again.

Also, remember to put the ball back in play after it goes dead, such as on a foul ball or timeout using the word "play" and pointing to the pitcher. This is especially

important with runners on base, since no play can be made on them until you put the ball back in play.

You do this by saying, for example, "TWO BALLS, ONE STRIKE", point to the pitcher, "PLAY".

Use three fingers and two fingers to show a full count. Don't use closed fists. There will come a time where after some delay in the game you need to remind people that this is still a new batter and there is no count on him yet. THAT'S when you show two closed fists while announcing, "NO COUNT."

Pro umpires are trained to announce a full count as, "THREE BALLS, TWO STRIKES!", so please do it the same.

If asked for the count, then give it at the first opportunity after the current situation relaxes. Even if not asked, it is a good idea to give the current count periodically.

Umpires differ on how and when they do this. I have two different ways of announcing the count.

Starting with the second pitch, I announce the count quietly after EACH pitch as the pitcher turns to face me. I hold the fingers lower and closer together -- more like chin high and less than shoulder width apart. The purpose of this announcement is to keep ME focused and also to be a courtesy to the pitcher, the batter, and the catcher. That is, the fingers are intended for just the pitcher to see although other folks will probably also see them to advantage. While holding those fingers for the pitcher to see, I announce the count quietly -- just loudly enough for the batter and catcher to hear it clearly so that they don't have to turn and look.

The first time the count gets to 3 balls, and the first time the count gets to 2 strikes, I'll announce the count loudly as described above. The purpose of THIS loud announcement is as a courtesy to not only the pitcher, catcher, and batter, but also to the entire infield, the runners, and both benches. It is vital that the fingers be held high enough and held up long enough for people on both sides to see them, and that the count be announced loud enough that it is audible at the bases and in both benches.

After a prolonged delay with the ball dead, as the pitcher starts to approach the rubber, I'll be holding up the Stop or Time signals to him. Then I'll rapidly display the fingers with the proper count while yelling something like, "TWO BALLS, ONE STRIKE, and PLAY!" Then point the ball live as the pitcher actually takes the rubber.

On amateur fields that have scoreboards, don't leave it to the scoreboard to remind folks about the count. Scoreboards at amateur fields are notorious for having the wrong count at crucial moments. If necessary, turn to the person operating the scoreboard, show fingers and re-announce the correct count. That is, it is almost

MORE important to announce the count periodically on fields with scoreboards just to confirm to people that this one time the scoreboard actually has it right. So here's an at bat and the way I'd volunteer the count as the at bat progresses:

1) (Low and away) -- BALL ONE. - No need to say more than that or to show fingers.

2) (Called strike) -- STRIKE ONE. - Wait for pitcher to face you, show 1 finger and 1 finger at chin height to either side of face and say normally, "One ball, one strike," for the batter and catcher to hear.

3) (Swinging strike) -- silent strike signal. - Wait for pitcher to face you, show 1 finger (left hand) and 2 fingers (right hand) above head height and wider than shoulder width and yell, "ONE BALL, TWO STRIKES!", loudly enough to be audible on the bases and in the benches. Use the index finger and middle finger, in a V to indicate two strikes in the right hand.

4) (High) -- BALL TWO. - As always, wait for the pitcher to face you. Make the low display of the fingers again, this time with two fingers and two fingers, and say normally, "Two balls, two strikes" Curl the pinky, ring finger, and thumb of the left hand to hold the indicator and make the two ball signal with the index and middle finger in a V on the left hand just as you do to indicate two strikes on the right hand. Do NOT indicate two balls or two strikes using the index and pinky fingers to make "goal posts". From a distance, that looks more like a three count than a two count.

5) (Fouled off) -- Signal Time and call FOUL. - Make the low display of the fingers again, two fingers and two fingers, and say normally, "Two balls, two strikes, play."

6) (Inside) -- BALL THREE. - Make the high display of fingers, three fingers on the left hand and two on the right hand and yell, "THREE BALLS, TWO STRIKES!" Curl the thumb and index finger to hold the indicator in the left hand and use the outer three fingers to display the three ball count in that hand.

7) (Fouled off) -- Signal Time and call FOUL. - Make the low display of fingers, three fingers and two fingers, and say normally, "Three balls, two strikes... play."

8) (Called strike) -- "STRIKE!! THREE!!"

PAUSE - READ – REACT

Remember in each of these calls timing is everything. **Selling the call** is a matter of the game situation and each umpire will respond differently. There is nothing wrong with putting a little extra on the gesture and voice, if fact it is an important

part of the game. In time each umpire develops their own personal sense of rhythm and timing, style and flair.

The basics of signaling Safe or Out

A quick word on a method for starting of the "safe" and "out" signal by initially starting from a hands-on-knees set. **It is particularly important when teaching novice umpires.** The real-world sequence becomes: "pause, bust to the angle, pause to access the throw, hands-on knees-set, read, now "CALL IT", return to set." This forces an extra second that is so quickly glossed over by the new umpire. As an umpire progresses slow and proper timing is ingrained into the signal. The umpire must practice to make all calls consistent, clear and appropriate. **Consistency is the aim - Concentration the objective – Communication is the key.**

Finally, a reminder: as the field umpire all calls start from a "set" position, usually hands on-knees or standing with your hands at your side. Most important: **Never be caught moving on a call.** For the field umpire all calls should return to a set position, either standing or hands-on-knees. This brings the body into balance, allowing you to pivot smoothly to follow the developing play or to stand and move smartly to your proper field position.

Essential signs for the players and fans

My first instructor made it clear: the plate umpire's right hand signals play, strike, out, fair ball - "the ball's alive", and on the rarest of occasions "infield fly" and hopefully even rarer, an ejection. The left hand does everything else including awarding bases, controlling the pitcher and holding the indicator and the mask. Remember that simple instruction and almost everyone, coach, player and fan, will be crystal clear about your intentions.

Play

Along with strike and ball, this is the one call the plate umpire will make most often during a game. Pointing at the pitcher (or the plate) with the right hand and calling "play." The call is essential for the batter and catcher. The gesture is essential for the pitcher, defense and offense. In every case in the rule book (Section 5.00) it is clear that the play signal is a verbal signal: *"....the umpire shall call "Play"."*

Even though umpires know it is important, it is not absolutely required however. Professional umpires may, or may not give the point and play

indicator. As soon as the pitcher is "in contact" with the rubber, meaning they intend to start the pitch cycle, the ball is assumed to be alive.

Strike

Always signaled with the right hand, each umpire develops a personalized system for signaling the strike. Some do the traditional bang-the-door clenched fist; some indicate the strike out to the side with a pointed finger. Some umpires face forward and some turn. Some call strike then signal, others do both simultaneously. One essential element is not to turn away from the action particularly in a two-man system. In a two man system, by not facing forward, an umpire might even miss a play at the plate while going through their actions. Keep your eyes on the ball as you make this signal.

Ball

A Ball is never signaled. Alright, maybe a touch of body english but no hand gestures. The general preference is that the verbal signal "ball" loud enough that both dugouts can hear it. Calling "Ball One," "Ball Two," etc. allows you to maintain the rhythm of your calls. **Never indicate why a pitch was a ball, for example: "*High, Ball One*"**

Ball Four

"Ball Four" is announced clearly. You should NEVER point to first base even with the left hand. Just say "BALL FOUR". If the umpire points to first after the pitch and the defense thinks its strike 3 and starts to leave the field chaos abounds. Even if you use the left hand, the players may not take note of which hand it was and be confused. Professional umpires never point to first.

TIME!

Raising both hands into the air and calling in a loud voice, "TIME!" All umpires on the field will immediately signal the time call. Sometimes the call must be made several times in order to shut things down. Once time is called every effort must be made by all umpires to stop the action taking place. Umpires learn that there are many moments when time is out, and it has not been called. This is normal in the course of a game as the umpires change their field positions, players repair equipment, or hundreds of other reasons. It may be the simple lifting of the hands communication between

crew members, or the plate umpire holding the stop hand up. Not all "time is big-T"ime.

The Count

Balls are signaled using the left hand. Strikes are signaled using the right hand. Both hands extend to shoulder level at the same moment. A **full count** is always signaled as "three balls, two strikes" and never signaled using clenched fists. The count is relayed back to the pitcher after every pitch and a verbal report is made usually after the second or third pitch and from that point on. The count is always read aloud as "two balls, two strikes" and not "two and two" or "twenty-two" or other similar variation.

Safe

Both left and right arms are raised together, to shoulder level, in front of the umpire and then a sweeping motion is performed out, parallel to the ground, palms down. The verbal call of "safe" may be made. To complete the call you normally return to the set position. To sell a safe call you might consider doing it two or three times in rapid succession. It is not always necessary to even make the sign or call. If the play is obvious do nothing.

Out!

The clenched right fist and a short hammered motion seem to be favored by most umpires. Again, personal style is acceptable as long as it does not distract you from seeing any further plays taking place. Check that the fielder is really in possession of the ball. The signal can be made with only a gesture or can be sold with a loud call of "He's Out!" or "She's Out!" **Signal every out.**

Never say "Strike Three, You're Out!"

Umpires are encouraged **not** to make this call a part of their repertoire. Why? In some classes the third strike does not have to be caught while in others it must be caught. Often the plate umpire is in the worst situation to call the trapped ball, for example: a breaking ball in the dirt for the swinging third strike. An umpire should only call "Strike Three." If you have a situation where you know the batter now erroneously becomes a runner you can follow this by the call "The Batter Is Out!" There will be plenty of situations where this will become confusing to the players. You must know which situations the "dropped 3rd strike" comes into play. Call the batter out immediately when he/she is not entitled to become a runner.

On the tag!

Point at the runner with the left hand; signal the out with the right hand. Complete the sign by saying "On the tag, he's out!" if you want to sell it a touch. (Remember you are the umpire, not the color commentator.)

Missed the tag!

A "selling it" call that occurs when a runner slides under the tag or the tag is high. You can save some grief by indicating a loud "Safe, he missed the tag!" and following it with a tapping motion where the tag was. Everyone will know you saw the tag and most will assume the runner had the bag before it.

Fair Ball

The right hand points into the field in fair territory. **There is no call "Fair" ever made.**

Foul Ball

The same signal as "Time" but the call becomes "Foul." Umpires often add a point into foul territory with one hand after giving the time signal. Once verbalized, this call sticks. Only in the rarest of moments can it be reversed (only if NO-ONE reacts to the call of foul and EVERYONE plays the ball as if it was fair).

The base umpire needs to pay specific attention to a ball hitting the batter in the batter's box. If the batter has not moved the base umpire will immediately call "Foul." If the batter is in motion the base umpire must delay to see if the plate umpire is going to make a call. Only if the plate umpire is silent, and the base umpire is certain the batter contacted the ball outside of the batter's box would the base umpire signal "Time, that's interference, the batter is out!" otherwise the call is "Foul!"

No Pitch

The same signal as "Time" but the call becomes "No Pitch." If you are the plate umpire, step away from the plate. It can be helpful to repeat "No Pitch".

Advanced signs for the players and fans

Called Strike

First, point at the batter with the hand closest to the batter then signal the strike with your right. It is good practice to verbalize something like "He went - strike." or "Yes, he did. Strike!"

The "Check-Swing" or Appealed Strike

The plate umpire does not have to be asked for help, he can simply request it himself. Experienced catchers will immediately ask you to get help from the base umpire after a check swing which you called a ball.

A request can only come from the catcher or manger. **A request should never be refused.**

Step away from the plate, optionally removing your mask. With your left arm gesture clearly to the base umpire and ask "Did he swing?" or "Did he go?" If the answer is yes the base umpire signals - strike while saying "Yes, he went!" If the answer is no, a safe sign with, "No, he did not go!", should be given.

The plate umpire will now announce the results by giving the count. "Then that's a strike, the count is ..." or if denied, "The count is"

The Foul Tip

FOUL-TIP RULE MYTH

There is nothing foul about a foul-tip. If the ball nicks the bat and goes sharp and direct to the catcher's hand or glove and is caught, this is a foul-tip by definition. A foul-tip is a strike and the ball is alive. It is the same as a swing-and-miss. If the ball is not caught, it is a foul ball. If the nicked pitch first hits the catcher somewhere other than the hand or glove, it is not a foul tip, it is a foul ball.

This is a two-part signal. Extend you left arm up, in front of your body, palm down, to at least shoulder level. Brush the fingers of the right hand over the back of the left hand two or three times. The signal is completed by signaling the strike with the right hand. Because the ball is alive and runners can advance **never** say "Foul Tip."

Announcing "foul" anything could stop the action.

Home Run or Ground Rule Double

First, the ball is dead. Make sure any unnecessary action is killed, particularly if the ball has rebounded back into the field. The signal for a

home run is circling the right arm and index finger overhead. The ground rule double is awarded by signaling "two bases" with two fingers held up usually on the left hand.

Awarding Bases

Using the left hand point clearly at the runner and state "You, second base" or "You, third base", "You, score!" whatever the case may be. The runner is protected all the way to the base but not one inch beyond it. Always move the runner closest to home first.

The Interference Call

An immediate decision is needed: "dead ball" or "delayed dead ball." Point at the offensive player and make the call "That's Interference" followed by your decision on whether or not the ball is dead, announced with a loud gestured "Time" or (...nothing...) meaning a delayed dead ball. If the ball remains alive avoid any signal that looks or sounds like "Time" until the appropriate moment. If the ball is dead call "Time" immediately and shut down any remaining play on the field.

The Obstruction Call

This call is like interference except the **ball may remain alive**. In all cases the call "That's Obstruction." is made while pointing at the defensive player making the obstruction with a clenched fist of the **left** hand. If a play is being made on the obstructed runner the ball is dead so immediately signal "Time." This is followed by an awarding of a base or bases either after play has stopped or even while play remains ongoing. Unless a play was being made on the obstructed runner the ball remains alive.

Any gesture which resembles "Time" being called can cause problems on a diamond. This is one reason why we teach to initially extend the left hand horizontally with a clenched fist. The professional baseball umpires point at the fielder with one hand only.

Catch or No Catch

When signaled the "catch" resembles the "out" signal. No verbal indication needs to be given. The "no-catch" signal resembles the "safe" signal except the call of "*No Catch*" is clearly given, and the "no-catch" signal should be given lower; at the waist or lower. Sometimes it will be necessary to repeat this sign several times. An addition to the "No Catch" is the juggling routine

which indicates the fielder did not have possession. *Juggle* when the fielder is on the base for the force out but not in full possession of the ball.

Some crews give the safe signal and then point to the ground several times saying "on the ground, on the ground" when the ball is dropped. The terms "Catch" and "No Catch" could be mixed up over the crowd noise.

The verbal call needs only to be given on a trouble ball, for example: a ball caught diving or below the fielder's knees. Routine flies can be signaled or not signaled depending on crew and local practice. If a ball is on the foul lines first signal whether the ball is fair or foul, then the catch or no-catch status if desired.

Signs for the umpire crew

The last thing a crew needs is a whole collection of "secret" or "private" signs. Keep any signs simple. Much beyond these few universal signs and the umpire's sign list is growing too long.

What's the count and how many are out?

A quick tapping on the top of head or on the brim of the hat indicates confirmation of the count and number of outs being requested. **Response** is two-part. The count is shown made by holding the number of balls in the left hand and the number of strikes in the right hand. These are held pressed against the shirt just above the belt. It should be followed by the signal for how many are out. The number of outs is relayed by holding the appropriate number of fingers out with both hands, pointing straight out or clenched fists if no one is out.

Pre-Game conference with your crew

Everyone knows that umpires should have a good pre game conference so each will know his responsibilities. Failing to have a solid pre-game can lead to major problems.

FAIR/FOUL COVERAGE

Calling fair/foul, should always be called by the plate umpire. Since a lot of our fields in Clermont County do not have foul lines past the infield, there is nothing for the field umpire to line up the ball to judge fair/foul.

TAGUPS/TOUCHES

The base umpire has all tag-ups/retouches, on first, second, and third, however, if there are multiple runners the base umpire normally has the trail runner(s) and the plate umpire, has third or lead runner.

FLY BALLS TO OUTFIELD

A. The plate umpire takes all fly balls and/or line drives on a Youth baseball field.

B. If the base umpire goes out to rule fair/foul, catch/trap, on a trouble ball the plate umpire must be prepared to cover all the bases.

BATTED BALL HITS BATTER

The field umpire should yell, "TIME" when he sees this occur. For the ball is either foul (the ball hit the batter while in the box) or fair (the ball hit the batter when out of the box and he's out). In either case the ball is dead immediately. Signaling "TIME" allows the crew to discuss whether or not the batter was in or out of the box. If the base umpire should call the ball foul, a controversy could arise.

CHECKED SWING

If the plate umpire has asked for your opinion, then you give it to him. "Yes, he did" or "No, he didn't" along with the signal. (See Checked Swing under Timing and Proper Mechanics.)

GETTING HELP

If you get blocked out of a play or you were not in position to make the call get help from your partner. The umpire making the decision may ask another umpire

for information before making a final decision. No umpire shall criticize, seek to reverse or interfere with another umpire's decision unless asked to do so by the umpire making the original call. (See Section 9.02(c) Rule Book.)

Remember you have certain responsibilities; do not get into the habit of asking for help on each and every close play. We don't want to see NFL official huddles on the ball field.

GROUND RULES

Go over the ground rules with your partner and review any rules you do not understand.

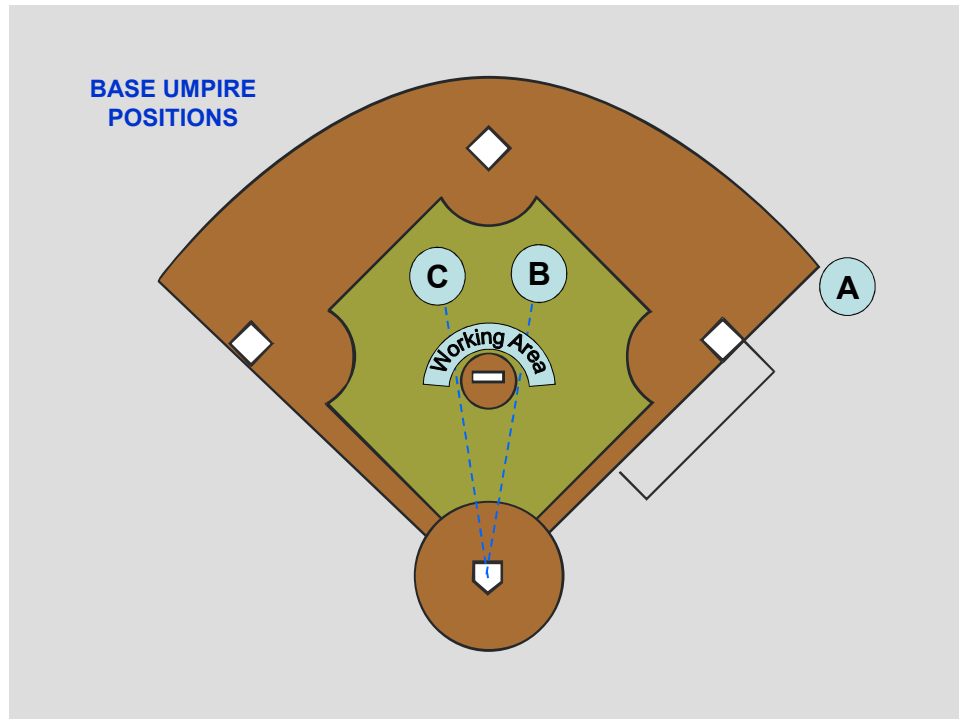
Helpful hints when working the bases

1. Always know where the ball is.
2. Field Umpires should always position themselves inside the fielders with men on base.
3. Never make a call on the move, get set and wait until the play is over before you make the call.
4. Get as close to the play as possible without interfering.
5. Hustle to be in the best position to make the call.
6. Run downs, the best coverage is by both umpires, one on each end. The call is made by the umpire with the play coming at him.

Positioning

Where to stand before the pitch in a 2-man system

Diagram 1 shows where you should be before the pitch. There are three basic positions: A, B, and C. The Field Umpire should always position themselves in front of the infielder with a runner or runners on base. The chart below shows where to be in each situation:



- A----Bases empty
- B----Runner on first base
- C----Runner on second base
- C----Runner on third base
- C----Runners on first and second base
- C----Runners on second and third base
- C----Runners on first and third base
- C----Bases loaded
- Only time at A is with no one on base
- Only time at B is with ONLY a runner on first

Quite often a play will “**Call Itself**” if you are in the proper position. It is impossible to make a call without guessing if you have the wrong angle on a play. Study and practice until you know what position to be in and how to get there. It is impossible to be in the perfect position for all plays as the play does not always develop as it is supposed to.

Three important factors to remember in positioning are **ANGLE, DISTANCE AND TIMING. ANGLE IS MORE IMPORTANT THE DISTANCE!**

To Error is human

Umpires are human. Missed pitches or errors in judgment will happen. Umpires should do their best to have as few as possible, but when you blow a call or miss a pitch do not resolve to even the score. Once called that is it, it's over and done. A missed call or pitch is just that, it's missed and gone forever.

CCKB Contacts

Game issues - Umpiring Coordinators: Scott Steiner and Gene Blom
ClermontCoKnothole@gmail.com

League President: Scott Steiner

Notes

This image shows a full page of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page, typical of notebook paper. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the page.