

Rules Discussions	1
Catchers' Mitts	1
The 'ol "Foot on the Plate" "appeal"	1
What constitutes a strike?	2
The Coach's Box.....	2

Rules Discussions

From time to time, we see certain trends regarding rules interpretations that need clarification. We also receive queries about specific rules. As a league, our goal is to conduct our regular season games with the same knowledge and efficiency as we can expect in a district tournament. Because that's where we want to be: winning district tournaments and advancing.

Our interpretations are, of course, open to debate, but you can be pretty sure we're not going to send something out that we don't think is 100% accurate.

Catchers' Mitts

Question: Do catchers have to wear a catcher's mitt, or will any old glove do?
 Answer: Catchers must wear a catcher's mitt.

The 'ol "Foot on the Plate" "appeal"

Since the season started, I've heard coaches on a number of occasions in bunting situations declare, "Hey, the batter stepped on the plate; he's out!" There is no rule in Little League baseball that says a batter is out for stepping on the plate. The only rule that governs the batter's proximity to the plate is Rule 6.06 (A):

*A batter is out for illegal action when:
 (A) hitting the ball with one or both feet on the ground entirely outside the batter's box;*

The myth about batters being out for stepping on the plate has evolved because the umpire often uses the plate as a guideline for whether the batter is out of the box (in situations where there is no box). If the foot is all the way on the plate, the batter is obviously out. (Actually, in our usually dusty boxes, the umpire gets a foot impression which is much easier to use as a gauge than how far the foot is on the plate.) Remember, there are only 4 inches between the outside edge (lines are considered a part of the box) of the box and the plate; a batter can easily have his or her toe on the plate and still have the heel of his or her foot in the box. I'd say in about 60% of all cases involving foot on plate, the batter has his or her foot on both the box line and the plate. Of course, this call is a lot easier to make when there are actual batters boxes on the field, but an umpire can easily enough make an accurate call without lines.

The main point here is that you should never appeal to the umpire that the foot is on the plate, because there is no such rule. At the district level, such a declaration would probably only confirm in umpires' minds what they probably already want to believe: that coaches don't know the rules as well as they do.

Ultimately, whether or not a batter is out for being out of the batter's box is a judgment call, and of course, as we all know, there is no appeal on a judgment call. It's the same as arguing whether someone was thrown out at first. You simply can't do it. Not aloud anyway.

Your best action if you suspect that the umpire is not paying attention to foot placement on bunts (This does happen, believe it or not.) is to politely say to the umpire between innings: "Gosh blue, I thought I saw a couple of their players on the edge of the box. Could you take a

closer look next inning?" Or some such get-in-the-umpires-head type of verbiage that I know, from personal experience, that none of our Majors coaches are ever at a loss for. I can guarantee you that diplomacy will get you a lot further than confrontation (especially if you're quoting the wrong rule), especially at the district level.

What constitutes a strike?

In bunt situations, I'm also hearing, "Did he offer?" or "Ump, he offered." While this is all acceptable "baseball banter," (but maybe not at the district level) the fact of the matter is that the operative word in determining a strike in this situation (and in all situations regarding balls and strikes) is "attempt." Did the batter attempt (strike at the ball) to hit the ball. Due to long tradition, batters who "break the plane" or "break their wrists" are almost always called for a strike; remember, though, balls and strikes are always judgment calls and are not technically open to appeal. On a check swing, for example, catchers are often instructed to appeal the call. This is another tradition that is completely up to the umpire's discretion as to whether or not he or she allows the appeal. The appeal must go through the plate umpire, and it's entirely up to the plate umpire to appeal to the base umpire. (No matter what you see on TV). Make it easy on the umpire; get your batters to pull their bats as fast as they can. A bat left hanging is sure to draw a strike; a bat being pulled back, if even only for a couple of inches, might get your batter off the hook.

The Coach's Box

At the majors level, I've noticed that coaches tend to "stretch" the base coaching boxes. I also recognize that I'd do the same thing in your position because a box with no boundaries is just begging to be stretched. For an umpire it's difficult to reprimand a coach for stepping out of boundaries that don't exist, just as it's difficult to call a batter out for stepping out of a batter's box that has no boundaries. In the latter case, if a batter has his or her foot more than half way on the plate, it's a pretty sure bet that he or she is out of the box. In the former case, if a coach is half way down the line between 3rd and home, it's a definitely sure bet that the coach has done more than just stretch the box. To complicate matters, the penalty for a batter hitting a ball while outside of the batter's box is clear: the batter is out. With coaches outside the coaching box, however, things are pretty gray. As umpires, we don't have many guidelines to work with in this situation. Sure, if we want to be Bad Boys, which we don't, we can always concoct some type of interference call and pump a runner out. That's not where we want to be. We can also warn a coach once (not even warn him or her if we want to be real jerks) and then eject him or her for unsportsmanlike conduct. Obviously, that's not the answer.

The only real answer is for coaches to adhere to the spirit of the law (not the letter of the law since we don't have coach's boxes) which says they have to be 6 to 10 feet off the line and no more than 8 feet down the line between the 1st or 3rd and home. Consider these points: (1) the time coaches most frequently "stretch" the box is when there is a lot of excitement going on—generally multiple base runners with one of them going in to score and the coach, quite naturally, has let the excitement of the moment take over. Let me ask you this: "Do you want umpires policing coaches at that point, or do you want them doing what they should be doing...watching the runners. In that instant, with multiple base runners, we are supposed to be checking to see if all base runners have touched the bases, we are supposed to be looking for potential obstruction calls, and we are supposed to be getting in position to make what potentially could be a game breaking call on a slide into home or another base where there might be an interference call to deal with as well. The last thing I want to do is to feel compelled to try to monitor where the coaches are at on the field because when a play with multiple base runners starts, I already know that I'm not going to be able to accurately perform all the duties I already have to deal

with. (2) when a thrown ball hits a coach in the coach's box, the ball is live unless the umpire rules that the coach INTENTIONALLY interfered with the ball. Now let's stop and consider what happens if a thrown ball hits a coach outside of the coach's box. In that case, the umpire is almost obliged to make an interference call even if the ball hitting the coach would have had no bearing on the play. The problem is that umpires don't plan for that situation because it's not supposed to happen. (But I'll guarantee you that something weird will happen if we continue to dis-respect the spirit of the coach's box.) The result is that we're probably going to botch the call whatever our best intentions are. And you know that someone is going to get agitated. That's a 100% sure bet. So, one of your goals as coaches should be to NOT create situations that set the umpires up for failure. Remember, the person who is really going to get hurt in that situation is not the coaches or umpires, it's the baserunner who's worked hard to make it around the bases only to get put out because of a coach's error.

So, remember that the only place coaches are supposed to be is in the coach's box or in the dugout area. I'm sure you'll agree that adherence to this point will create a much healthier environment for us all. On a related point, remember that you should (really, you must) ask the umpire before you vacate these areas unless he has requested a conference. Also remember that the umpire isn't obligated to recognize your request (but, of course, we all will).

It goes without saying that this is one of those "cultural" matters that won't be resolved in 2 weeks or less, so my second request is that we all honor field decorum when making requests. A coach can politely point out that another coach might be taking advantage. Then the umpire can politely point out to the coach in question that maybe a behavioral adjustment is due, if in fact it is due. It should be that simple.