

THE LITTLE LEAGUE UMPIRE

The contribution of time and the devotion of the Little League umpire often go unrewarded, if not unnoticed. But, as a representative of the program, which serves youth worldwide and has earned respect for integrity and discipline, the umpire fills a unique role. Likened to a police officer, the umpire must command respect and enforce the rules of the game. He or she must also have knowledge of children and make every effort to be a good ambassador for Little League.

Umpires' decisions are frequently questioned, a time-honored tradition among baseball fans. Umpires can and do make mistakes, and should be the first to admit it, should a misinterpretation of a rule occur. There are times when the inexperienced umpire may be tempted to "even up" a bad decision on the next call. This is poor policy; avoid it.

An umpire should be conveniently "deaf" at times, and should see and hear only what is necessary while on the field of play. Every umpire should review his or her attitude regularly and determine if it's in the best interest of the kids and the game. The following attributes are most important for carrying out the duties and responsibilities of umpiring:

UNDERSTANDING – This is vital, as far as youngsters are concerned. The umpire must study and know the rules, while also studying the Little Leaguers whose reactions don't always coincide with the adult's.

MENTAL ATTITUDE – In baseball, it's characteristic for players to question the umpire's decisions at times. Instead of taking a youngster to task for something said, try to let him see your willingness to answer a legitimate question, and solve the problem constructively.

COOPERATION – Take the time, on or off the field, to share your love of the game with the players, whether it's answering a question or just being friendly. You'll gain their confidence and goodwill, and encourage a positive attitude in them.

CONDUCT – The Little League umpire should lean towards being accommodating on the field. Managers shouldn't set a bad example by rushing onto the field and causing a disturbance. But if this occurs, the umpire should be the one to set the example by remaining calm and exercising good judgment.

APPEARANCE – Attire is important; making a good first impression when you step on the field goes a long way toward setting the tone for the game to come. You don't have to have the very best uniform, but whatever you wear should be clean and neat. Shoes should be shined, and the umpire's cap should always be worn. The officially issued shirt, along with trousers that are light gray (preferred) or navy blue or black are accepted attire.

NEW UMPIRES In Little League, there are always many umpires who lack substantial experience. When a veteran umpire is working with a new umpire, every effort should be made to assist the new official however possible, both for a better game and to encourage good habits.

HELPFUL HINTS

1. Every game is a new game. Don't worry if you have had a bad game; review it, and try to analyze your mistakes for future correction.
2. Patience is not only a virtue, it's an essential. The Umpire controls the environment of the game. If you lose your temper, you lose control.
3. Umpires function as a team. They should not be critical of one another on or off the field, and should support each other as necessary.
4. Umpires should keep themselves physically fit.
5. Calls should be made firmly, professionally and without due hesitation. Umpires who are exhibitionists detract from the game and from their own stature.
6. Umpires may be asked to explain a decision, but they should not allow themselves to become involved in an argument about it.
7. Plate umpires should make sure the next batter is ready as soon as the pitcher has finished warming up. Delays can ruin a good ball game. It's up to the umpire to keep players hustling and the game moving.
8. Umpires should always be alert to field conditions that may call for a special ground rule. See to it that managers, coaches, and players are in their proper places during the game, and that equipment not in use is removed from the field.
9. When a decision must be made about calling a game due to weather conditions, darkness, or other factors, all umpires involved should confer before a decision is reached. However, it is the prerogative of the umpire-in*chief to make this decision on his or her own.
10. Keep your eye on the ball at all times. This is deceptively simple, so concentrate on doing it.
11. Your partner is the only friend you can count on out on the field. Work to keep it that way. Always let your partner know where you are on the field. Learn to communicate with each other in a voice loud enough to be heard.
12. Remember, the game is largely what you make it. You are an important part of the game but you are not more important than the game.

CONTROLLING THE GAME

1. When calling balls and strikes, allow the catcher plenty of room, but get close without interfering. Under Rule 5.09(b), you could cause interference.
2. Watch the pitch into the catcher's mitt, and then wait a full second before making the call. Never anticipate where the pitch will be.

CONTROLLING THE GAME, continued

3. Call the pitches what they are. Some catchers will try to "assist" you by calling out "ball" or "strike. Politely remind him that you are the umpire and you will make the calls.
4. When a catcher "pulls" a pitch into the strike zone or "frames" it for you after he makes the catch, warn him to stop it. When catchers do this, they are acknowledging that the pitch wasn't a strike and are attempting to influence your call and/or agitate the fans.
5. Wait until a batted ball settles before calling it fair or foul unless it touches a person or object. Remember that batted balls can strike in foul territory and still become fair balls.
6. Time should not be called before a play is completed. Catchers often ask for time following a base on balls. Don't grant time until the batter-runner has reached first base and all other runners have advanced as forced.
7. If necessary, call time once a play is completed. Remember that prompt action avoids many an argument.
8. If time is called too soon, a play that might occur can be quashed before it can happen. Be aware of this possibility, and don't call time (or foul) too soon.
9. Calling time too often will slow down the game. Don't call time unless you're convinced the situation calls for it.
10. **WATCH THE BALL.** Don't move away from a play too soon. The adage about keeping your eye on the ball at all times can avoid embarrassment, especially if the ball is dropped.
11. If the ball is alive, never touch it. Be alert, and allow the players to handle the ball and so decide the outcome of the play and the game.
12. When a judgment decision is made, no explanation is necessary. Explain a decision only when a rule interpretation is in question.
13. On an appeal play, offer no decision unless an appeal is made properly. Be prepared for the next play. **THIS IS IMPORTANT.** Appeals are intended to keep the defense on the alert; don't assist them by making a decision before they make a proper appeal.
14. You may get hit or cause other problems if you stand in fair territory to make calls at the plate. Almost every play at home can be called from a position in foul territory. Make every effort to avoid interference.
15. Get into the proper position quickly when the ball has been batted or thrown. Be alert and move fast. Hustle makes a good impression, *and* it helps you call a better game.

CONTROLLING THE GAME, continued

16. Don't make decisions on the run. Stop, and then call the play. Your vision will be jumpy if you're on the move.
17. Be sure that bases are secure and positioned properly. An out-of-place base can make for a very difficult situation.
18. When getting into position as a field umpire, be sure not to obstruct the view of a fielder. Always check with those behind you before you get set.
19. Get close to every play (but not less than about 15 feet) without getting in the way. Always try to be looking into the play, and avoid being blocked out visually.
20. When calling a play, give up distance to get a good angle.

PLATE UMPIRE GUIDELINES

1. The strike zone is from the armpits to the top of the knees when the batter assumes his natural stance.
2. Stand square to the pitcher. Use the stride stance, with one foot slightly in front of the other (heel to toe).
3. With a right-handed batter at the plate, put your left foot between the batter and the catcher's left shoulder; reverse for a left-handed batter. Have your chin about the height of the top of the catcher's head, and be close to him without making contact. Be sure your position gives you a view of the entire plate.
4. As the pitcher looks in for his sign, stand erect or with your hands on your knees. Always watch for a possible balk. As the pitcher starts his windup, assume the crouch position.
5. Keep your head still and follow the pitch with your eyes from the time it leaves the pitcher's hand until it's caught. Keep your hands down and your elbows in tight. Make the call a full second *after* the ball is in the catcher's mitt.
6. When the ball is hit, move out in front of the plate to watch the play develop (unless you have a runner at third).
7. Face the backstop, with your back to the pitcher, when you clean the plate.
8. When there's a play at the plate, remove your mask with your left hand and move to the third base side to position yourself for the call. Wait for the play to happen; never anticipate it. Continue to watch the play after it has "happened," especially to see if the catcher has dropped the ball. Once you're sure it's over, make the call. The closer the play, the more emphatic your call should be.

PLATE UMPIRE GUIDELINES, continued

9. If the catcher crowds the inside corner, raise your head a little higher to see both the pitcher and the plate, or adjust to the outside corner. Be sure your new stance allows you a view of the entire plate and the flight of the ball all the way from the pitcher's hand to the catcher's mitt.
10. If the catcher positions himself to one side, set up in your normal position to maintain a good view of the plate and the pitched ball.
11. If the catcher maintains a high crouch stance, move your head higher to get the needed view; don't duck below the catcher's shoulder level.
12. To call a strike, stand erect, bring the right fist forward above your head and call "Strike." Don't make a verbal call when the batter swings and misses; the signal is sufficient. Be more emphatic when calling a batter out on a called third strike.
13. To call a ball, remain in the crouch position and call "Ball" with no hand signal. No explanation of where the pitch was is necessary.
14. Indicate a fair batted ball by pointing (perhaps repeatedly for emphasis) to fair territory, but *never* verbalize the call.
15. If the batter is still in the batters box and is hit by a foul ball, call "Foul!" and raise both hands.
16. On a foul tip, give the foul tip signal, then the strike signal. Do not call "Foul" or "Foul tip." Remember that a foul tip must be caught directly by the catcher; it is not a foul tip if caught on the rebound, or if dropped.
17. When a batter receives ball four, just call "Ball four;" don't point to first.
18. The following situations are fair batted balls:
 - The ball settles on fair territory between home and first or third.
 - The ball is on or over fair territory, including any part of first or third base, when bounding toward the outfield.
 - The ball first falls on fair territory beyond first or third before rolling foul.
 - While on or over fair territory, the ball touches an umpire or any player.
 - While over fair territory, the ball passes out of the playing field beyond the outfield fence.
 - The ball touches any base.
19. A protest shall not be considered if based solely on a decision involving the umpire's judgment. The following are judgment calls:
 - A batted ball is fair or foul.
 - A base runner is safe or out.
 - A pitched ball is a strike or a ball.
 - A pitch is legal or illegal.

PLATE UMPIRE GUIDELINES, continued

- A base runner leaves the base too soon on a caught fly ball.
- A base runner leaves the base before the pitched ball reaches the batter (Little League Major level and below only).
- A base runner did or did not touch a base.
- A fly ball is or is not legally caught.
- A hit is or is not an infield fly.
- Whether or not there is interference or obstruction.
- Whether or not a field is fit to play.
- Whether there is sufficient light to continue play.

JURISDICTION – WHO CALLS IT?

The following situations are based on two-umpire mechanics.

1. With no runners, the plate umpire takes all fair/ foul calls, except those down the right field foul line beyond first base. The field umpire has calls down the line beyond the first base bag; the field umpire also must go out on any fly ball or line drive that forces the right fielder to move toward the right field foul line.
EXCEPTION: On a popup in the area of first base, the field umpire comes inside and pivots; this gives the fair/foul and catch/no-catch calls to the plate umpire.
2. With runners on base, the plate umpire has all fair/foul calls.
3. With runners on base, the field umpire should only call a foul ball that is fouled off the batter in the batters box.
4. With no runners, the plate umpire takes all catch/no-catch calls on balls hit to the third baseman and shortstop, plus the second baseman if he is moving to his right. The plate umpire also takes all calls in front of the mound, plus the outfield, unless the field umpire goes out.
5. With no runners, the field umpire takes the catch/no-catch calls on balls hit to the first baseman, plus the second baseman if he is moving straight ahead or to his left. EXCEPTION: with a popup near first base, the field umpire comes in and pivots, relinquishing catch/no-catch responsibility to the plate umpire. The field umpire has catch/no-catch calls when going out on a fly ball (which should only be on plays from the center fielder to the right field foul line), and he or she MUST go out on balls that might involve fair/foul calls down the line.
6. With runners on base, the plate umpire takes all catch/no-catch calls on balls fielded by the third baseman if he is moving toward the foul line. The plate umpire also takes catch/no-catch calls in front of the mound, and on balls fielded by the right or left fielders if they're moving toward the line.
7. With runners on base, the field umpire takes all catch/no-catch calls on balls fielded by the first or third basemen if they move away from the lines, or if the ball is hit directly at them. The field umpire also takes those calls on the second

JURISDICTION, continued

- baseman and shortstop, as well as on fly balls hit directly to or between the outfielders.
8. When working on the Senior field (90 foot diamond), with runners on base, the field umpire should never cross the infield line when making a catch/no-catch call on an outfielder; stay inside the diamond.
 9. During ground rule situations, the plate umpire has primary responsibility for any batted ball that goes out of play, unless the field umpire goes out, in which case it belongs to the field umpire. On any thrown ball that goes out of play, the umpire closer to play will generally call "Time," but the other may make the call if he or she has a clear view of the play.
 10. In an infield fly situation, the umpires will have signaled each other that it exists. Either may call the infield fly (remember: after the ball reaches the top of its arc) once the decision has been made. If the ball is near one of the foul lines, the plate umpire should initiate the call by saying, "Infield fly, if fair!" The field umpire will then echo the call. If the ball is behind the pitcher, the field umpire initiates the call, especially if a fielder has to run any distance for the ball. The field umpire will be in the best position to determine if the ball can be caught with ordinary effort.
 11. There are two situations when the plate umpire takes the play at third; it is crucial in both that the field umpire know where the plate umpire is.
 - (a) With a runner at first only, the plate umpire is responsible for any play on that runner going to third. When it becomes apparent that there will be such a play, the plate umpire will quickly move into position, yelling, "I've got third, I've got third!"
 - (b) With a runner at second only, or with runners on first and second with fewer than two out, the plate umpire is responsible for a play on the runner coming to third if he tries to advance on a fly ball. When the runner tags up at second, the plate umpire moves quickly into position, calling out to the field umpire, "I've got third if he comes!" The field umpire should acknowledge that the message was heard.
 12. If there's a checked swing, the plate umpire should make the decision when the pitch is called. If a strike is called, there is NO appeal. If the call is that the batter did not swing, and the catcher (NOT the coach!) requests that you check with your partner, then point with your *left* hand to the field umpire and ask, "Did he go?" Your partner should respond immediately with either the safe signal and "No, he didn't go!" or the out/strike signal and "Yes, he went!"
 13. If you're working a Senior (90foot) diamond and there are two strikes on the batter, and there's any doubt about a checked swing, the plate umpire should go to the field umpire for help immediately. The batter is entitled to know his status right away, in the event the catcher drops the ball.

JURISDICTION, continued

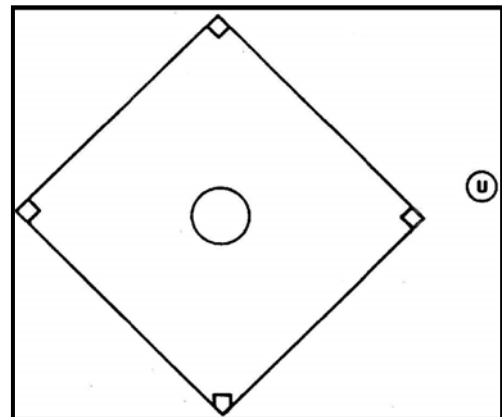
14. If the batter fouls the ball off himself, the catcher, or anything else and the plate umpire doesn't see it, the field umpire should immediately call "Foul" (more than once, if necessary) to stop play.
15. In the case of a swipe tag on the batter-runner because the first baseman is pulled off the bag by a bad throw, the field umpire should make the call if possible. If he or she is unsure of the play, and knows that the plate umpire is on the first base line, *and* knows that if there *was* a tag it was made before the runner reached the base, then the field umpire doesn't make the call. Instead, he or she points to the plate umpire and asks "Was there a tag?" The plate umpire responds with either a safe signal and "No, he missed him!" or an out signal and "Yes, he tagged him!"
16. On a play where the hitter's batted ball is fielded along the first base line and the fielder tries to tag the batter-runner, the call is made by the plate umpire if the tag is attempted between home and the point where the running lane begins (half way up the line). If the batter-runner is beyond that point, the field umpire has the call.

FIELD UMPIRE GUIDELINES

Common field situations and the recommended positions for the field umpire:

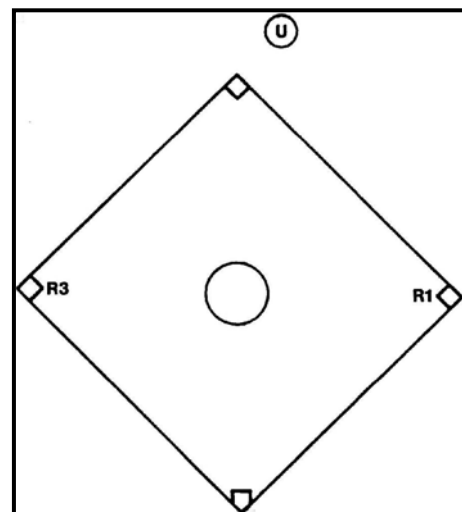
(1) NO RUNNERS ON BASE

Take a position about 10 to 15 feet behind the first baseman, with both feet in foul territory. If the first baseman is playing deep, 10 feet is enough; if he's playing even with the bag, 15 feet is better. Allow the first baseman to move to the ball without running into you, and react accordingly.



(2) RUNNER AT FIRST BASE, OR RUNNERS AT FIRST AND THIRD BASE (Little League)

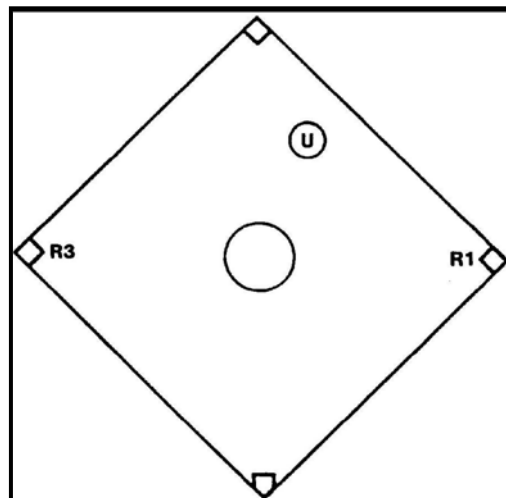
Take a position about ten feet behind second base on the first base side of the diamond, in line with second and third. You should be one to three steps into the outfield grass, depending on the depth of the infield area.



FIELD UMPIRE GUIDELINES, continued

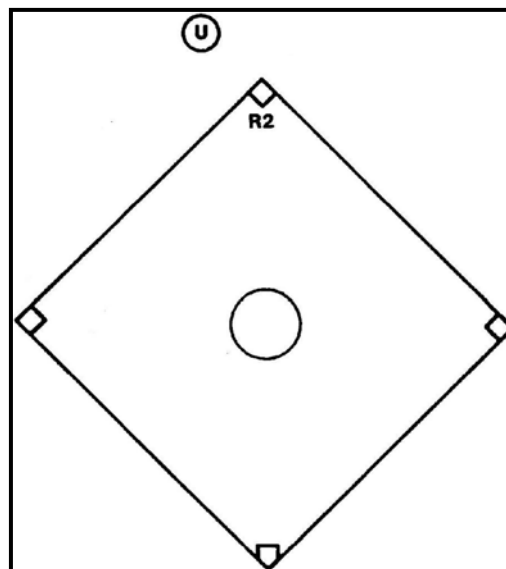
(3) RUNNER AT FIRST BASE, OR RUNNERS AT FIRST AND THIRD (Seniors)

Position yourself in the infield on an imaginary line running from the first base side of home plate to the edge of the dirt circle (or bottom) of the first base side of the mound, approximately half way between the mound and second base. You should be square to home plate and down in the set position (both hands on your knees).



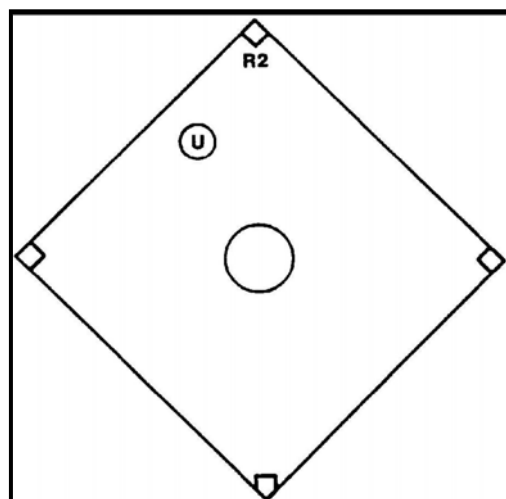
(4) RUNNER AT SECOND BASE, OR RUNNERS AT SECOND AND THIRD, OR BASES LOADED (Little League)

Assume a position about ten feet behind second base on the third base side of the infield, in line with first and second bases. You should be one to three steps into the outfield grass, depending on the depth of the infield area.



(5) RUNNER AT SECOND BASE, OR RUNNERS AT SECOND AND THIRD, OR BASES LOADED (Seniors)

Take a position in the infield on an imaginary line running from the third base side of home plate to the edge of the dirt circle (or bottom) on the third base side of the mound, about half way between the mound and second base. You should be square to home plate and down in the set position (hands on both knees).

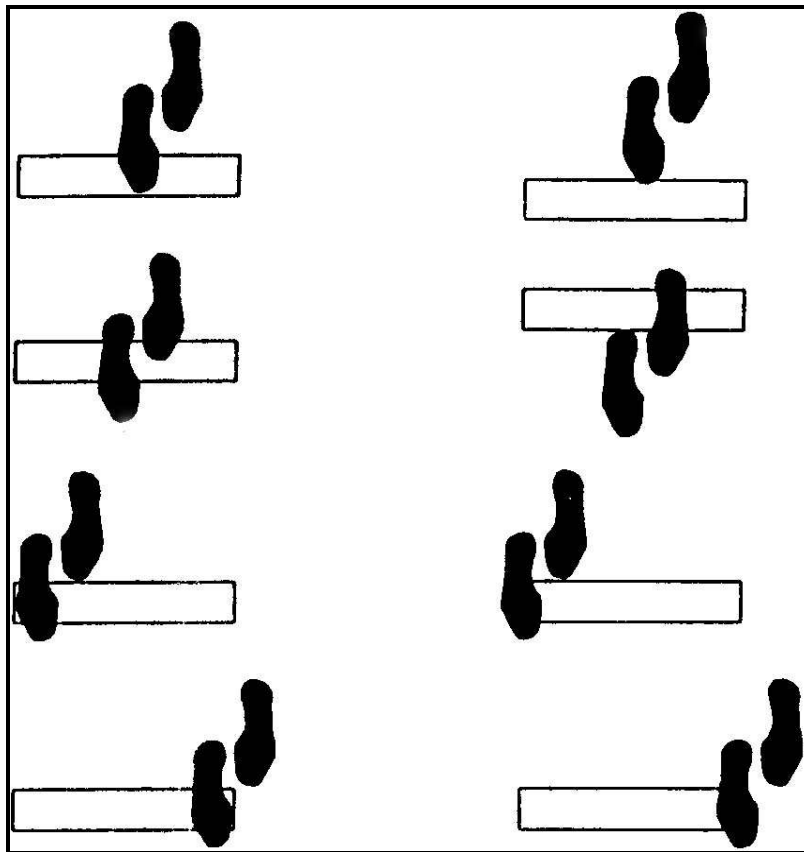


POSITION OF THE PITCHER

WINDUP POSITION

CORRECT

INCORRECT



SET POSITION

CORRECT

INCORRECT

