UMPIRE 103

The Rules of Baseball

Part Three of a three-part introduction to umpiring Little League baseball

INTRODUCTION TO LITTLE LEAGUE UMPIRING

Umpire 103, **The Rules of Baseball,** is Part Three of a three-part introduction to the rules of baseball for new Little League umpires.

➤ **101** – **Working the Plate**

➤ **102** – **Small-Diamond Mechanics (2 man)**

➤ **103** – **The Rules of Baseball**

UMPIRE 103 COVERS THE FOLLOWING:

1. Managing the Game (again)
2. Live ball / Dead ball
3. Fair / Foul
4. Batter basics
5. Runner basics
6. Pitcher basics
7. Interference / Obstruction
8. Key definitions
9. AAA/Coast specifics

These eight areas represent about **98%** of what Little League umpire normally rules on in a typical game. That said, the rules of baseball cover far more ground than we'll cover in this course. ***There is no substitute for studying the rules!***

Conducting the Game

- **Plate umpire is the UIC**. You own the game!
  - But you cannot overrule your partner's calls
- **Pre-game conference with your partner**
  - Go over your rotations and assignments, especially fair/foul calls and coverage of 3rd base
  - Go over ground rules (especially dead ball areas)
- **Plate meeting with team managers**
  - Confirm that both teams have 9 players; get lineups.
  - Confirm that players are properly equipped
  - Confirm time limits, run limits, and mercy rules, if any
  - Cover ground rules and take questions
- **Your appearance and demeanor are important**
  - You *look* like an umpire
  - Your voice says you're in charge: strong and commanding
  - Develop a loud and crisp voice for calling strikes, fouls, dead balls, out/safe, and other calls
  - Communicate with coaches is an even, but firm tone

SAFETY DURING THE GAME

- **Players do not handle bats in the dugout.** The batter coming up should grab his or her bat when it is time to exit the dugout.

- **Players should remain in the dugout except when they are playing.** Also, make sure players aren't standing in the dugout opening where they could be hit by a foul ball or errant throw,

- **In general, there is no on-deck hitter allowed.** At the beginning of an inning, the first batter of the inning may come out of the dugout with a bat and warm up well away from the plate and any player or coach. But at no other times, not even during a pitching change, can a batter be outside the dugout.

- **All batters and runners wear batting helmets.** Also, any players who are coaching bases must wear a helmet.

- **The catcher must have a "dangler"** (a throat guard, or Yeager as it is called) attached to his mask, even for hockey-style masks.

- **During warm-ups before the game, the player standing next to the coach who is hitting grounders and flies must have on a catcher's helmet and mask.**

- **Between innings, any player can warm-up the pitcher, but that player must have on the catcher's helmet and mask.** Shin guards and chest protection is not required for warming up a catcher.
  - At Majors and Coast levels, adults may not warm-up a pitcher during the game. In AAA, it is OK for an adult to warm-up a pitcher at any time.

ENDING THE GAME

- **All divisions play 5 ½ or 6 inning games**
  - If the home team is ahead after 5 ½ innings, the game is over
- **All divisions use the "Mercy Rule"** – if the Visiting team is ahead by 10 after 4 or 5 complete innings, or if the Home team is ahead by 10 after 3 ½ or 4 ½ innings, the game is over.
- **If it is too dark or raining too hard for you to see balls and strikes, or if the field is too muddy to play on, you declare the game suspended** – you don't have to worry about who wins or loses or continuations
  - You can delay the game and try to wait out a rain shower
  - But, rain or snow alone is not a reason to call a game here in the PNW – player safety is
- **Time Limits – *only* on weekends, and *not even for all games then!***
  - No matter what parents say (!), there are **NO** time limits on weekday evening games, even when it is cold and wet and windy
  - On a weekend game that has a following game, no new innings after 2 hours, and no pitch after 2:20, unless the game is a Coast or Majors game that is tied after 6 innings, then the limits are 2:30 and 2:50 respectively

KEYS TO EFFECTIVE GAME MANAGEMENT

- **Keep the game moving**
  - Get defense changeover quickly
  - Use ready catcher (player with mask, or courtesy catcher)
  - Pitcher gets 8 warm-up pitches initially, then 5
  - Try to keep changeover to one minute
- **If coaches have question on a call**
  - Coach asks for time, then approaches ump who made call
  - Call for help IF you think more info can help get call right
  - Discuss with other umps AWAY from coaches
- Distinguish between **judgment calls (not arguable)** and questioning the **application of rule (appealable)**
- **Don't allow "chirping" on judgment calls**
  - If chirping from the bench, approach the coach and stop it *immediately*.
  - If from a coach, warn him to stop. If continues, then …!
  - If from the stands, ask the coach to help.

LIVE BALL / DEAD BALL

- **The game starts** when the PU puts the ball in play by calling "**Play**". From then forward, *the ball is always in one of two states: live or dead*. The umpires control this.

- **When the ball is live**, all legal actions of the game may occur *until* the umpire calls "**Time**", "**Foul**", or "**Dead ball**". All three render the ball dead.

- **When the ball is dead**, no runner may advance, no run can score, nor any action of the game take place *until* the umpire puts the ball back in play with the call "**Play**".

- **There are two outcomes of a dead ball:**
  - **Runners (and/or batter) return** – that is, the play resets
  - <u>OR</u>, **Runners (and/or batter) advance**

DEAD BALL – OUTCOME 1

- **Foul ball, not caught** – **5.09(e)**. 90% of your dead ball/runner return situations are foul balls.

- **Illegally batted ball** – **5.09(d)**. Batter hits the ball with one foot entirely outside the batter's box.

- **Offensive Interference** – for example:
  - Batted ball hits base runner
  - Base coach intentionally interferes with thrown or batted ball, or physically assists a base runner
  - Runner makes contact with fielder making play on the ball

- **Batter hit by pitch in strike zone**, or while swinging – **6.08(b)(1)**. In both cases, the pitch is a strike; if strike 3 the batter is out. The batter is **not** awarded first base.

- **There are many more instances** where the play resets.

DEAD BALL – OUTCOME 2

RUNNERS (&/OR BATTER) ADVANCE

- **There are many situations** when the ump calls "dead ball" and awards bases to the batter and/or runners. Examples:
  - **Batter hit by pitch** (not in strike zone) – **5.09(e)**. Batter is awarded 1st base; base runners advance *if forced*.
  - **Ball overthrown out of play** on throw from F6 to F3 – **7.05(g)**. Batter and runners awarded two bases *from time of pitch*.
- Depending on the infraction or circumstances, the awards can be **one** base, **two** bases or, in some cases, **three** bases.
- Base awards are determined by the position of runners **either** at time of pitch (**TOP**), **or** at the time of fielder's throw (**TOT**), depending on circumstances.

DEAD BALL (3)

○ **Delayed dead ball**
Some infractions call for a **delayed dead ball**. In these situations, allow "continuous action" to conclude, then call "Time" and deal with the infraction. Example:

- Catcher's interference – **6.08(c)**

○ **Putting the ball back in play**

- Every time the ball is taken out of play by an umpire calling "Time", "Foul", or "Dead ball", **the ball must then be put back in play**. This is very important.

- When the **pitcher has the ball** on the mound, the **catcher is in the catcher's box**, and the **batter is ready** to take his position in the batter's box, point to the pitcher and call loudly, "**Play**".

- The "Play" call signals players and umpires that the ball is back in play, the game is on, and legal actions can take place.

FAIR / FOUL

The most common dead ball case is the **foul ball**. Perhaps 90% of all dead-balls result from foul balls. Looked at another way, a good deal of an umpire's time is spent judging batted balls fair or foul.

- **Fair territory** (**2.0**): "…that part of the playing field within, and including the first base and third base lines, from home base to the bottom of the playing field fence and perpendicularly upwards. *Home plate, first base and third base and all foul lines are in fair territory.*"

- **Foul territory** (**2.0**): "… that part of the playing field **outside** the first and third base lines extended to the fence and perpendicularly upwards."

- **Foul ball** (**2.0**): "… a batted ball that settles on foul territory between home and first base, or between home and third base, or that bounds past first or third base on or over foul territory, or that first falls on foul territory beyond first or third base, or that while on or over foul territory, touches the person of an umpire or player, or any object foreign to the natural ground. (Note): A foul fly shall be judged according to the relative position of the ball and the foul line, including the foul pole, and **not** as to whether the fielder is on foul or fair territory at the time that fielder touches the ball."

Judging a Foul Ball

- **Judge the position of the ball**, *not the fielder*, relative to the foul line:

- **There are three fair/foul scenarios**:
    1. **Infield ball** not reaching 1st base or 3rd base is judged by …
        - Where the ball is **first touched** (bounder, line drive, or fly), or
        - Where the ball **settles** (bunt, dribbler)
        - The ball can wander in and out of fair territory until **settles** or is **touched**
    2. **Bounding ball over 1st base or 3rd base** is **fair**
        - Crosses plane of the base, or touches the base
        - Breaks the glass ….
    3. **Fly ball beyond 1st base or 3rd base** that drops *uncaught* in foul territory is **foul**.

- **Note**: **a fly ball that is caught in foul territory is a *live ball.***

- **Note**: A ball that first touches "foreign" object in foul territory (like a backstop, fence, etc.) is always **foul**

Fair Ball Scenarios
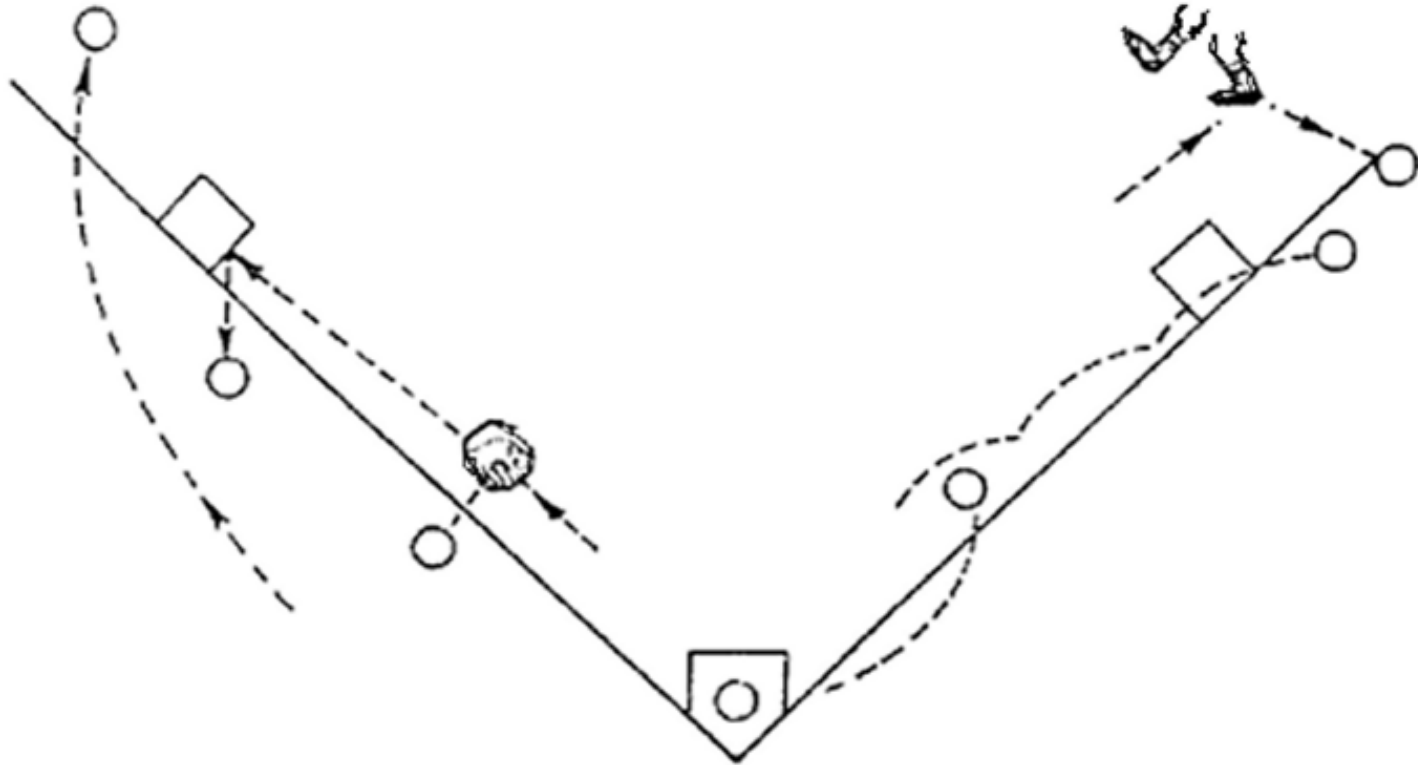
Foul Ball Scenarios
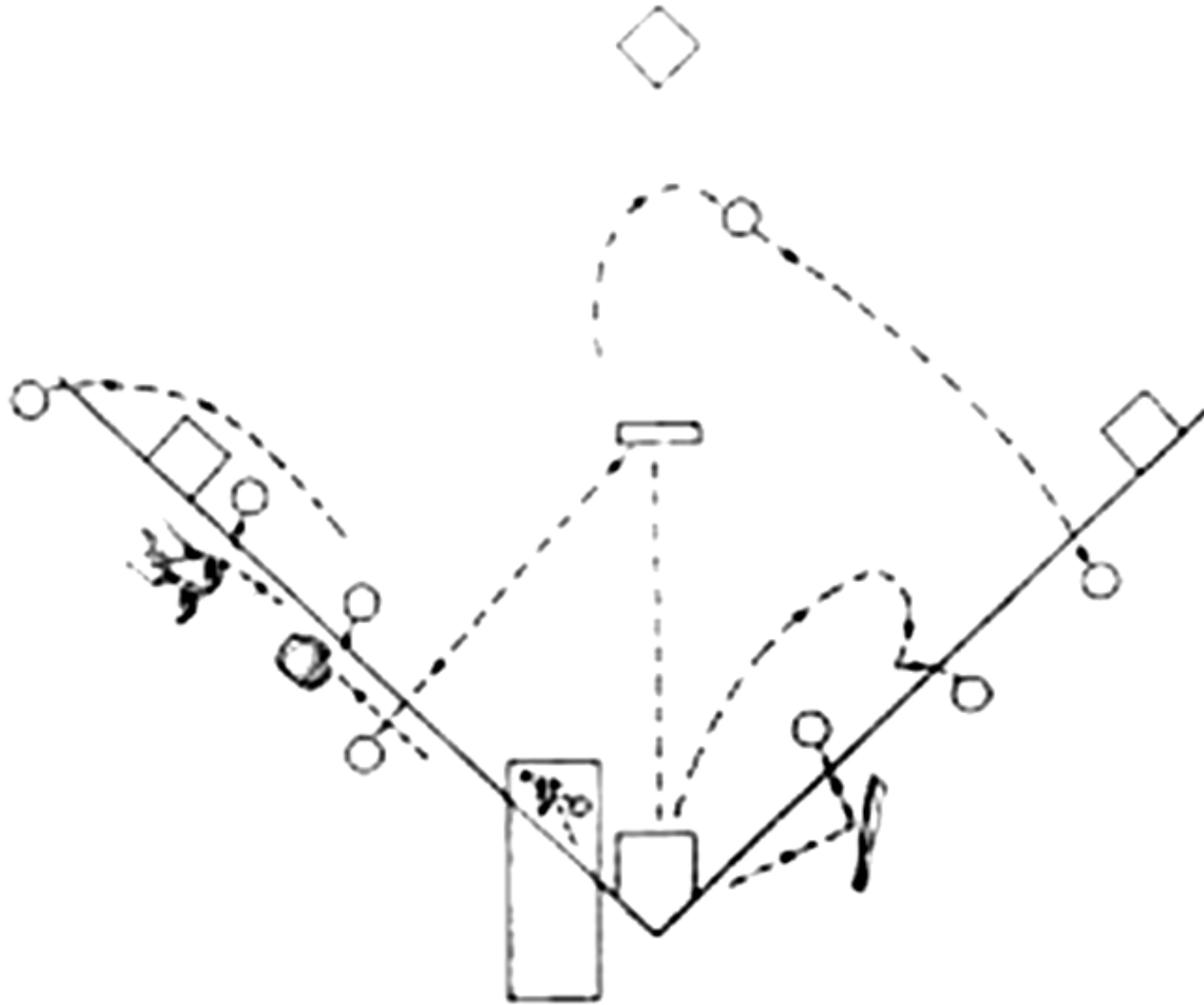
FAIR OR FOUL?

**(1)**   **(2)**   **(3)**

BATTER BASICS

- **Legal position of the batter at delivery** - **6.03**: Feet must be within batter's box (the lines of the box are "within" the box)
- **Batter hit by pitch** – **6.08(b)** (**dead ball**):
  - **Not in strike zone**: **Award first base**; runners advance if forced (see AAA coach exception).
  - **While swinging**: **Strike**; if third strike, batter out. (Hands not part of the bat.)
  - **Batter in strike zone**: **Strike**; if third strike, batter out.
  - **Batter *not* in strike zone, but makes no attempt to avoid**: **Ball – use rarely, and never at AAA**.

- **NOTE: Throwing the bat is NOT an out**
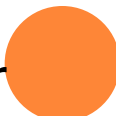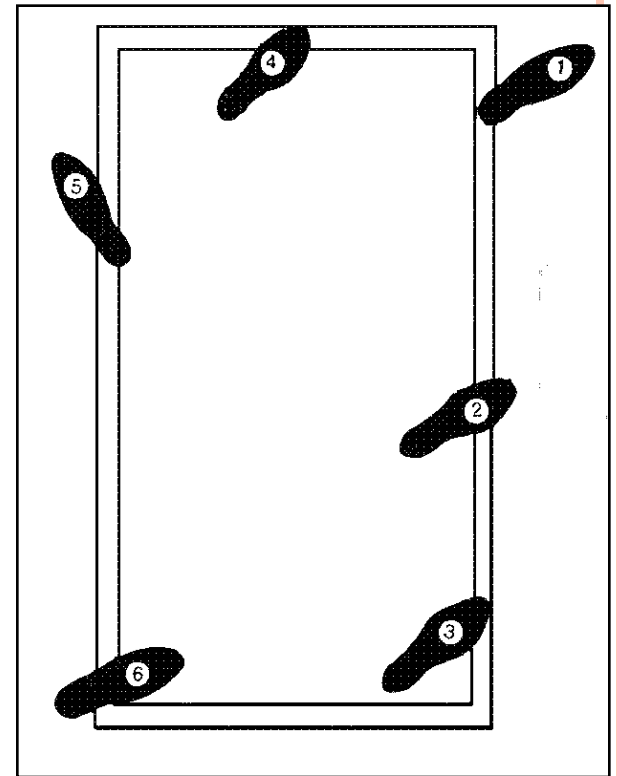
- **Batter hit by *batted* ball**:
  - **While still in batter's box**: **Foul ball** (dead ball) (w/i two steps)
    - Only really an issue on a bunt
  - **Outside of batter's box: Out** (interference–dead ball) **6.05(f)**:

BATTER BASICS (2) – BATTING OUT OF ORDER

When a player bats out of order, the "**proper batter**" (the one who failed to bat in his proper place) is the one called out and the at-bat of the "**improper batter**" is nullified – **6.07**.

- **Note**: **This is an appeal play** for the defensive coach. The umpire or scorekeeper (or fan) should not call attention to a player batting out of order.

- **If discovered while the improper batter is still at bat**, simply replace with the proper batter who assumes the count.

- **If discovered following the first pitch to the batter *following*** the improper batter, the improper batter's at-bat becomes legitimate and the batting order picks up at that point

- **If discovered before the first pitch to the next batter**, the proper batter is called out, the improper batter's at-bat is nullified, and the batting order picks up with the batter following the proper batter.

Runner Basics

- **The batter-runner (BR) heading to 1st base**:
  - **If runner is outside the running lane** in last half of distance to 1st base, **and interferes with a throw** to first from the vicinity of home plate, as with a bunt, BR is out – **6.05(j)**
  - **BR can overrun 1st base to either side**. BUT, any move toward 2nd base invalidates protection – **7.08(c)**
  - **Overrunning 1st base**, the BR is assumed to have touched the base.

- **On base path**, if the BR runs more than 3 feet off path **to avoid a tag**, the BR is out – **7.08 (a)(1)**
  - **"Base path" is defined as** line of natural progress. It is, technically, the line between the runner at a given time and the base toward which he is running.

- **Two runners on a base – 7.03**
  - **The base belongs to leading runner**; the trailing runner must retreat
  - **However, this is not an automatic out**; the defense must tag the trailing runner before reaches his legal base.

Runner Basics (2): Outs

The base runner is out in the following situations:

- The **runner does not slide or attempt to avoid** a fielder *who has the ball and is waiting to make tag* - **7.08(a)(3)**
  - THERE IS NO "MUST SLIDE" RULE!!! Note the requirements – fielder must have ball and must be waiting to make tag, and even then runner can attempt to go around.
- **Intentionally interferes with a thrown ball** or intentionally or unintentionally hinders a fielder attempting to play on a batted ball – **7.08(b)**
- Is **touched by a batted ball** in fair territory before the ball is touched or passes through an infielder – **7.08(f)**
- **Slides head-first** into a base while advancing - **7.08(a)(4)**
- Base runner **passes a preceding runner** – **7.08(h)**
- **Tagged by a live ball** while off the base – **7.08(c)**
- **Fails to reach a base to which the runner is forced** before he or the base is tagged – **7.08(e)**

RUNNER BASICS (3): APPEALS

Some infractions are not automatic outs

Rather, the defense must call out the infraction and tag the offending runner or relevant base.

- Runner misses touching a base (including first base) – **7.10(b), (c)**
- Runner misses home plate and makes no effort to return – **7.10(d)**
- Runner fails to return to 1st base immediately after overrunning – **7.10(c)**
- Runner fails to tag up on a caught fair or foul fly ball – **7.10(a)**
- A player fails to bat in his proper position in the batting order – **6.07**

Appeal Basics

- The ball must be alive and in play
- The defense must call out and specify the infraction while tagging the appropriate base or player
- Appeals must be made before the next play or pitch (not counting "continuous action" that includes the appealable infraction)
- You can appeal only once. If you err on the appeal, you lose the right

RUNNER BASICS (4): BASE AWARDS

In many situations umpires make base awards (see rules **7.04** and **7.05**). Examples of base awards:

- **one** (e.g., batter hit by pitch)
- **two** (ball thrown out of play)
- **three** (fielder uses cap, for example, to field a ball)
- **four** (ball hit over the fence in fair territory)

- **The most common situation** is a ball thrown out of play (into dead-ball territory) on a throwing or fielding error

- **Concepts**:
  - **Time of Pitch (TOP)** – last legally held base
  - **Time of Throw (TOT)** – position on base path

BASE-AWARDS ON OVERTHROWS

- **Overthrows that go out of play** are ALWAYS two bases. *However…*

- **Depending on circumstances**, two-base award on overthrows *out of play* are judged from **TOP** or **TOT**.

  - **First play in the infield** (F6 overthrows F3 and ball goes into dugout): **Two bases from TOP**.
  - **Second play in the infield** (F4 completing double-play to F3 throws it into the dugout): **Two bases from TOT**.
  - **Throw from outfield** (F9 throws wild over fence and into the parking lot): **Two bases from TOT**.

LEAVING EARLY (7.13)

Base runners may not leave their base until a pitched ball reaches the batter.

- **If a play is made on the runner**, let the play continue. If the runner is put out, forget the infraction; if the runner is safe, call TIME and enforce penalty.

- **If the batter gets a hit**, let the play continue until action stops, then call TIME and enforce penalty.

- **If a clean hit forces the runner** to the taken base, he cannot be returned.

- **Infraction for one base runner applies to all**. Everyone returns, except where forces prevent it.

INTERFERENCE

Any action by an offensive player that "obstructs, impedes, hinders or confuses any fielder attempting to make a play."

- **Runner is hit by batted ball**: Runner out; dead ball.

- **Runner collides (even slightly) with a fielder** making play on batted ball: Runner out; dead ball.
  - **Base runners must avoid** any fielder attempting to field a batted ball.

- **Runner intentionally impedes a player's attempt to throw the ball** to make a play: Runner out, *and possibly* the other runner is also out; dead ball

- **Runner intentionally slaps away tag:** runner out; dead ball.

- **Batter intentionally or through willful neglect interferes with play at the plate: runner out; dead ball** – unless third out, then batter is out
  - But batter is not required to have eyes in the back of his head, just to back away from plate as runner comes in

OBSTRUCTION

"… a **fielder** who, *while not in possession of the ball and not in the act of fielding the ball*, impedes the progress of any runner" – **2.0**, **7.06**

- **Type "A" Obstruction** - **7.06(a)**: When a **play is being made on obstructed runner**: dead ball; award base as appropriate
- **Type "B" Obstruction** - **7.06(b)**: **When a play is not being made on obstructed runner**: *delayed* dead ball; award base as appropriate
- **Base Award**: Award the base runner the base which, *in the umpire's judgment*, the runner would have attained had the obstruction not occurred.
- **If obstructed while returning to a base** (as on pick-off play), **always award the next base**.

OBSTRUCTION - 2

- **Calling Type B Obstruction** (delayed dead ball)
  - **Point to offending fielder** and hold extended fist and call "that's obstruction"; when play concludes, enforce as needed
- **Calling Type A Obstruction**
  - **Call TIME immediately** and enforce the infraction
- **The two most common points of obstruction**:
  - **Extra-base hit** and **F3 is watching the ball in the base path** when BR bumps into him rounding 1B.
  - **Home plate** – F2 is blocking the plate *without the ball*. **The base line belongs to the runner** and the catcher should be there only when fielding a ball or with the ball already in his/her possession

PITCHER BASICS

- **There are no balks in Little League**, but we call illegal pitches at the Majors level. (In Coast and AAA divisions, we issue warning so the kids learn about pitching rules, but we don't call infractions.)

- **Learn this: 8.05**. This is the extensive rule that lists all of the ways in which a pitch is illegal. However, in Little League we go pretty lightly with **8.05**.

- Note that **most illegal pitch types apply only when there is a runner on base**
  - **Quick pitching and pitching from off the mound are always "illegal pitches"**

- **Regulations specify pitch-count restrictions** (by age) and required days of rest between games, but these regulations are not enforced by the umpire.

PITCHER BASICS - 2

- **A coach or manager can visit the pitcher on the mound** with the following restrictions:
  - Visit the same pitcher only **twice per inning**; third time is the hook
  - Visit the same pitcher only **three times in a game**; the fourth is the hook

- **Manager can substitute a pitcher at any time** – even during an at-bat (the new pitcher assumes the count)
  - **New pitcher gets 8 warm-up pitches** (unless entering due to an injury; in that case he gets as many as they need)
  - **A pitcher who is relieved** can remain in the game at another defensive position, **except not as a catcher**.

- **A pitcher has an official "appearance"** upon delivering one pitch (not warm-up pitches)

DEFINITIONS OF KEY TERMS

Baseball rules are all built on the definition of terms in <u>Rule 2.0</u>. We'll look closely at a few of these.

- Catch
- Tag
- Inning
- Infield Fly (Infield fly rule)

CATCH

CATCH is the act of a fielder getting **secure possession in the hand or glove** of a ball in flight and firmly holding it before it touches the ground …

- To be a catch, the fielder shall hold the ball long enough to prove **complete control** of the ball and that ***release of the ball is voluntary and intentional***.

- **KEYS** to judging a catch**: Secure possession** and **voluntary release.**

- **NOT a catch** if fielder (simultaneous with the catch) **collides** with player, wall, or fence, or **falls** down, and as a result of the collision or fall **drops** the ball.

- If the fielder drops the ball while making a throw ***following*** the catch, the ball shall be adjudged to have been caught (i.e., "drop on the transfer").

- In a tag-up situation, runners may leave their bases the instant the first fielder touches the ball.

TAG

TAG is the action of a fielder in touching a base with the body **while holding the ball securely and firmly <u>in the hand or glove</u>**; or touching a runner with the ball or with the hand or glove **holding the ball securely and firmly <u>in the hand or glove</u>**

- **The KEY** is the phrase "**securely in hand or glove**"

- **NOT a tag** if ball is trapped against body

- **NOT a tag** if touched with glove while ball in hand

INNING

… that portion of a game within which the teams alternate on offense and defense and in which there are three putouts for each team.

- Each team's time at bat is a **half-inning**.

- An inning **starts the moment the third out is made in the preceding inning**.

- **Coast and AAA Only**: There is a five-run limit per half-inning except for the last inning; a team's **half-inning concludes when a team has three outs or five runs**, whichever comes first. There is no run limit in the last inning.

INFIELD FLY

… a **fair fly ball** (not including a line drive nor an attempted bunt) **which can be caught by an infielder _with ordinary effort_**, when first and second, or first, second and third bases are occupied, before two are out.

- **The Conditions**
  - **No outs or one out**
  - **Runners R1, R2 OR, bases loaded**
  - **Infield pop-up (not blooper, and never a bunt)**
- Both umpires **point and call**: "Infield fly, batter out"
- **IFR is NOT enforced at the AAA level**.
- **If you forget to call the IF**, you can apply the rule after the fact.

SPECIAL AAA RULES

- **Pitching - AAA uses a combination of kid pitch and coach pitch**
  - **There are no walks.**
  - **If a kid pitcher hits a batter, then batter is awarded first.**
  - After 4 balls from the kid pitcher, a coach shall be allowed to pitch a maximum of 6 pitches, at which time the batter will be declared out if the ball is not put in play, regardless of whether the last pitch is a ball or strike, unless the last pitch is an uncaught foul ball, in which case an additional pitch or pitches will be allowed until the last pitch is not an uncaught foul ball. There are no hit batsmen with coach pitchers.

- **Batting/Running**
  - **No bunting**
  - **No stealing**
  - **After a batted ball to the outfield is returned to the infield** (within an approximate 50 foot arc of the pitching mound) and controlled by an infielder, **runners may advance only to the base they are approaching**. However, if a play is made on the runner, the play remains alive. If in your judgment at the time the ball is controlled a runner is less than half way to the next base, return the runner to the previous base.

QUESTIONS