



# Being an Umpire

## Making the Call

"The most important thing in calling plays on the bases is angle, not distance. If you are thirty feet away with the right angle, you will get the play; if you are ten feet away with the improper angle, you will miss it ... Sometimes you must move away from the ball to get the proper angle. That's why mechanics and position is so very important."

- Bill Kinnamon

Based on Kinnamon's examples and experience, arranged in priority, here are the ingredients needed to make a call while minimizing errors:

1. **ANGLE** is of primary importance. At all times strive to attain a 90-degree angle to the play that is happening. Always move to arrive at the best possible viewing angle.
2. **DISTANCE** is always secondary. 10 to 15 feet from every play would be perfect but often you can be too close to see the entire play. Beginning umpires often move directly towards the base where the play is about to take place. In doing so they limit both their angle and their distance, and increase the chance for error.
3. **TIMING** must be consistent in a game. Pause, Read, React. Another way is to think the entire call through internally before calling it. Working games where there is a lot of offense, particularly Minor level games, is a great opportunity to develop and refine your call time in a low(er) pressure situation.
4. **SELLING** the call is a part of umpiring that brings the crowd onto your side. The boo birds can't say you missed a tag if you signaled the tag high after you gave the safe sign. They know you are claiming the fielder did not have possession when you are juggling your hands after a safe call. That little bit of confidence and "showmanship" can go a long way towards your taking charge of the diamond.
5. But **NOT** too much. The umpire is not the color commentator, he is the arbiter who must make delicate calls to assure the teams remain equals as you interpret the rules of the game. A little style and flair are welcome but excessive displays are often frowned upon. Substance ... content ... form. The same elements that make a good essay also make a quality umpire.

Practice making calls off the field. The time to perfect your timing is not in a game situation. Visualize and respond. Move, pivot, set, make the call. Lead the imaginary runner to second base, set, make the call. Do it over and over until it feels like a part of your natural signs and signals vocabulary. Your game will only improve, and so will that of the players, coaches, and fans involved.

# Tips for Working the Plate

- Assume a comfortable position so you can see the entire strike zone
- Be accurate and consistent. Stay still, let the pitch come to you.
- Be relaxed and don't call pitches too soon. Wait until the pitch hits the catcher's glove, then take an extra second to make sure you know what you saw before you make a call.  
Remember... it's nothing until you call it.
- When you call a strike, call it loudly and confidently, especially strike three.
- Don't verbalize swinging strikes, your normal arm gesture is sufficient... everyone knows it's a strike.
- Verbalize balls, but just loud enough for the catcher and batter to hear you.
- Do not "label" the pitch: it's not a "ball, outside and low," it's just a "ball."
- Never say "strike three, you're out" or "ball four, take your base," just call the pitches.
- Keep the plate clean and always brush the plate with your back to the infield
- Move to a neutral area between innings; stay away from the plate, avoid problems, relax, remove your mask, drink some water.
- Don't meet up with your field umpire between each inning. You each have a job to do; only get together to discuss something that's relevant and necessary.
- Hustle the teams between innings; keep play moving whenever possible.
- Always call foul balls with a strong, loud voice.
- **NEVER** verbalize a fair ball, just gesture with your arm.
- The ball is **LIVE** and **FAIR** until you call it foul. Don't be too quick to call the rolling ball down the first or third base line.
- When you grant time for any reason, yell it loud and raise your arms over your head. **EVERYONE** on the field must hear your call. **DO NOT** call time until the ball is dead.
- Always know where the ball is on the field.
- **NEVER** overrule your partner, but always be ready to tell him what you saw if he asks for help. Don't be afraid to ask your partner for help (neither one of you have x-ray vision).
- If you're not sure of a ruling, don't be afraid to call time and seek out a rule book for clarification. Better to take a couple of minutes and get the call right.

# Tips for Working the Bases

- Try and stay ahead of the runners whenever possible; it is much easier to make a call when the play is coming toward you rather than away from you.
- Remember ... **ANGLE OVER DISTANCE**. Always make your first steps to create the best angle from which to make the call, then correct for distance as you can. To adequately see an entire play, you should ideally be at least 15 feet away.
- Make sure the play is finished before you make a call. **NEVER** anticipate. Few things are more embarrassing than emphatically calling "He's out!" only to see the ball rolling on the ground a split second later.
- Be sure the fielder has control of the ball. "Voluntary release" means that the ball doesn't come out of the glove or hand until the fielder makes a conscious effort to release it. Keep your eye on the ball until you're sure the fielder has position.
- Get low on all plays, and indicate your calls with a loud clear voice and clear arm signals that everyone can see.
- Never call plays on the run. It is far better to be further away from the play and call it from a stationary position.
- Echo your partner's "time" call if runners are on base.
- Always follow the ball with your body, not just your head. Stay square to the ball so you are in position to make a call.
- Be ready to assist the plate umpire on a checked swing call, foul balls that hit the batter, ball/strike count, etc. **DO NOT** offer help unless asked by the umpire who made the call. If you did not make the call and a coach approaches you asking for help, just point to the umpire who made the call and say, "You need to go talk to him."
- Don't carry on idle conversations with players, coaches, spectators, or your partner during games.
- **DO NOT** coach while you umpire.
- **DO NOT** warn a player of a call you "might" make. Example: "Son, if you leave the base early again I'm going to have to call you out." If you see a call, make a call.
- In a two-man crew, the plate umpire will call the lines, even if you are in the A position.

# Base Umpire Responsibilities

## On Every Pitch

- Watching for an illegal pitch (foot not on the rubber)
- Assisting check swing appeal (if asked by the plate umpire)
- Watching for a batted ball hitting a batter (sometimes missed by the plate umpire)
- Did the runner leave early?
- Watching for pick-off plays from the catcher
- Watching for attempted steals, particularly double steals when possible
- Is the infield fly rule in effect?

If the ball is hit, the base umpire's priorities depend on the game situation:

## No Runners on Base

- Do you have a dead ball situation (ball hits batter)?
- Assess the ball's flight and position
- You have the bases on any ball hit into the infield or outfield. The plate umpire usually has responsibility for all fly balls to the outfield. Be sure you discuss this with your partner before the game.

## Runners on Base

- Assess the ball's flight and position; you have the bases on any ball hit into the outfield or infield
- Be aware of any options the fielders have and do not commit yourself to one specific play until the fielders have committed themselves.
- You have responsibility for both ends of a double play
- Infield fly

These are only a small portion of the responsibilities and duties of field umpires. There are literally hundreds of potential situations in baseball, and thousands of variations on each situation. Even the re-positioning of a single player on the field can often drastically change an umpire's responsibilities and options. Communication with your partner is critical, as are practice and training.