

Umpire Game Rituals & Responsibilities Updated 03/06/20

How do umpires prepare for games? What do they need to do? Hopefully this will guide you on your way to being a successful umpire.

General Baseball Umpire lingo

- PU – plate umpire
- BU -- base umpire in a 2 man crew
- LL – umpire on the left line
- RL – umpire on the right line
- BR – batter/runner. This is the batter who has just put the ball in play
- R1 – runner starting on 1st base at beginning of play
- R2 – runner starting on 2nd base at beginning of play
- R3 – runner starting on 3rd base at beginning of play
- CBO – continuous batting order

General Responsibilities

These are the generally agreed upon responsibilities for the plate and base umpire. Some of these are open to discussion when you pre-game with your partner.

- Both PU and BU
 - PU and BU are responsible for safety. Offensive players must have a helmet on when in the field of play. No “on deck” batters – only one player has a bat at a time.
 - PU and BU are responsible for infield fly calls. Mirror the call of your partner. PU also has “infield fly if fair”.
 - PU or BU accompany the coach/manager on injury visits. These will not be charged as a pitcher visit unless game strategy is discussed. Keep the other players away.
 - PU or BU can call “Time!” to suspend play.
 - PU and BU are responsible for interference and obstruction calls. Know the difference and how to apply it.
 - BU and PU are responsible for managing the managers/coaches. One adult must always be in the dugout (if players are present). Only 1 Manager and 2 coaches.
- PU responsibilities
 - PU can put the ball in play. Only the PU can do this.
 - PU has all ball/strike calls.
 - PU has all fair/foul calls.
 - PU has all catch/no catch calls. That’s balls to the infield and outfield.
 - PU has all touches at 3B.
 - PU has tagup of R3 on fly balls. Get yourself into a position to make call on the fly ball & see R3 tagging up.
 - PU is responsible for the touch and all plays at home.

- PU can help BU with pulled foot and swipe tags on plays at first. The call on the play is the responsibility of BU but PU can help if queried. See signals later in this document.
 - PU is responsible for runner's lane violations.
 - PU is responsible for overthrows (or any ball going into dead ball area).
 - PU is responsible for any pitch or thrown ball becoming lodged in the backstop, catcher's or umpires gear, or fence.
 - PU is responsible for tracking all pitcher & catcher changes.
 - PU is responsible for counting visits to defensive players (usually the pitcher, but any visit to any player, except for injury visits, is a visit to the pitcher).
 - PU is responsible for tracking balls, strikes, and outs. Use the indicator -- don't rely on the scoreboard.
 - PU, managers, and scorekeepers are responsible for pitcher maximum pitch count thresholds. Ask the score keeper to notify you when a pitcher is within 10 pitches of his/her limit.
- BU responsibilities
 - BU responsible for plays, touches, and tagups at 1st and 2nd. Responsible for plays at third unless in a 1st to 3rd rotation.
 - BU is responsible for players leaving the base on a pitch before it reaches the batter.
 - BU can assist PU on check swings (usually only done from A on right handed batters on a 2 man crew). Wait until the PU asks for help. Do not respond to coach or catcher queries. Signal safe (no swing) or strike (a swing).

24 hours before the game

PU is responsible for contacting his/her partner to discuss:

- Where & what time to meet (minimum ½ hour before game)
- What to wear. Umpires are a team, and it is important you look like a team. Coordinate jerseys & hats (if you have options). The fallback is the Navy blue Little League Umpire jersey, and lacking that, the navy blue Almaden umpire t-shirt. There are Navy Little League umpire jerseys and hats in the scorers booth at the AAA and Majors field for you to use for the game. After the game, place the dirty shirt in the shirt basket to be washed. Keep the hat.

½ hour before the game

Meet at your agreed meeting spot. Take some time to discuss responsibilities and signals. We have general notions about responsibilities, but experience and physical fitness can have a role in modifying those responsibilities. The responsibilities here assume a 2 man crew. There are books written about 3, 4, and 6 man crews, so I won't go into that here.

Work on improving one aspect of your game every game. Discuss this with your partner so you can gather his/her feedback at the end of the game.

Things you need to discuss:

- Responsibilities
 - In general, PU has all fair/foul calls. Experienced umpires can modify that allowing BU to take fair/foul calls for baseballs between 1st base and BU in the A position. Make sure you agree on who has the call.
 - In general, PU has all catch/no catch calls. That's balls to the infield and outfield. Experienced umpires can pregame BU going out on trouble balls when in the A position. If that happens, PU has all touches and plays at all the bases. Make sure you agree on who has the call.
 - PU can help BU with pulled foot and swipe tags. The call on the play is the responsibility of the BU, but PU can help if queried. See signals below.
 - 1st to 3rd. Discuss the 1st to 3rd responsibilities, signals, and vocal responses. If you're not comfortable doing 1st to 3rd rotations, don't. Just make sure you both understand who's responsible for plays at 3rd.

- Signals (suggested, but discuss any variances)
 - Infield fly. Generally tipping the cap with fingers indicating the number of out (0 or 1).
 - Wipe off infield fly. Using right hand to wipe down the left arm from shoulder to hand.
 - 1st to 3rd. PU points towards third, BU (in B or C) points towards 1st using fingers to indicate number of outs.
 - I'm staying home. Point to the plate indicating the number of outs.
 - I've lost the count. PU double-taps the top of his/her head. BU discreetly flashes the count (left hand balls, right hand strikes). If BU doesn't have the count, consult the official scorekeeper.
 - I have some information for you. When a manager has been granted time to talk to your partner about a play, and you have information that may help your partner uphold or overturn his/her decision (pulled foot, swipe tag), hold your hand over your belt buckle. Your partner can dismiss the manager and you can conference alone. An umpire overturns his/her own call. Never overrule an umpire.
 - Open/Closed hand. Useful for BU to indicate to PU that an uncaught 3rd strike has happened. Open hand – ball not caught. Closed hand – ball caught. Also useful to BU on a pulled foot situation at 1B; Open hand – 1st baseman pulled his foot, Closed hand – 1st baseman on the bag.

Equipment inspection

After you've discussed responsibilities and signals, it's time to inspect equipment. You should always inspect equipment as a team (one checking bats, one checking helmets & catcher gear) together. The same umpire should check the same equipment on both teams.

Equipment found in violation or poor condition must be removed from field of play. Find the kid's parents and let them take care of it. Under no circumstances should the equipment be returned to the dugout.

What to check for:

- Bats



- Non-wood bats must have a USA bat logo (Majors and below).
- Check for roundness (no dents), splits, cracks, the end cap (if any) is secure
- Any tape or rubber hand grip is secure
- NO PINE TAR. Travel players may have pine tar on their bats. Little League has expressly prohibits any pine tar.
- Wood bats – hold by the barrel and tap the handle on the ground, listening for vibrations.
- Helmets
 - NOCSAE (National Operating Committee on Standards for Athletic Equipment) stamp on the helmet.
 - No stickers (unless approved by the manufacturer in writing), paint, pine tar, or writing on the helmet, for 2 reasons: 1) stickers could hide cracks, and 2) glue and sharpies contain solvents that can weaken the plastic. The helmet manufacturer would void the warranty – don't let a kid play with it.
 - Look for stress lines on the plastic. Gently pull the ear flaps away from the center of the helmet, looking for stress cracks at the brim where it meets the ear flaps.
 - Foam on the inside must be in good shape and covering the ear flap.
 - No modifications to the helmet, in the form of screws or drill holes.
 - C-flaps – must be from the same manufacturer of the helmet.
- Catcher's gear
 - All the helmet rules apply to catcher's helmets
 - Helmet has a dangler, and a ball cannot fit between the dangler and the helmet chin.
 - All screws holding wirecage to mask are in place and tightened. These have a tendency to come loose during the season.
 - The team should have at least 2 catcher's helmets. Inspect them all.
 - The straps and fasteners are secure.
 - Check shin guards and check protectors for straps and hooks.

Before the game

Umpires have responsibilities during warmups and before the plate meeting

- Collect 4 new baseballs from the score booth (AAA & Majors). For Juniors, collect 2 baseballs from each team.
- Check for safety violations during warmups.
 - Any player with or near a swinging bat MUST be wearing a batting helmet
 - A catcher during infield warmups must be wearing a catcher's helmet if the manager/coach is hitting baseballs with a bat
 - Managers/coaches CANNOT warm up pitchers on field or in the bullpen

Plate meeting

No fewer than 5 minutes before game time, the PU should hold a plate meeting. The plate meeting involves the umpires and one manager or coach from each team (in post season they often bring a team captain as well). The PU stands at the point of plate, BU directly opposite in fair territory between the batter's boxes.

Make sure the home team remains in the dugout during the plate meeting. BU should direct the players back into the dugout if they don't comply.

The managers must bring their lineups in duplicate to the plate meeting. PU introduces himself and his partner(s) to the manager/coaches. Shake hands. Bump fists instead during flu season.

The mnemonic to help remember the steps involved in the plate meeting is **LEGS** – Lineups, equipment, ground rules, and safety/sportsmanship.

- Lineups
 - Take the lineup and all copies from the HOME team manager or coach. This action transfers control of the field to the PU.
 - Make sure the lineups (if multiple copies are provided) are identical.
 - Make sure all players are listed with name and number on the lineup. Make sure there are no duplicate numbers.
 - Make sure the pitcher and catcher are designated on the lineups. Those are the only two positions you'll track.
 - Ask the manager of any ineligible pitchers. Mark ineligible pitchers on all copies of the lineup.
 - Note any players on the lineup not currently present at the game (late arrivals). They should not be in the batting order but can be listed somewhere on the lineup sheet. Players arriving late (for CBO) will be appended to the end of the lineup when they arrive. Players not present at the start of game do NOT have to meet any minimum play rules (or play at all).

- Repeat for the visiting team lineup.
- Equipment
 - Ask each manager, and do not proceed until you get a clear “YES” answer, “Are your players properly equipped to play their position and does your equipment meet Little League standards?”
- Ground Rules
 - Ask the home team manager to take you around the field, noting any ground rules.
 - Remind the managers that baseballs that become lodged in holes, bounce under, over, or lodged in fences should be handled by players throwing up their hands. The umpires can then assess any base awards.
- Safety/Sportsmanship
 - Tell the managers to have the players hustle on and off the field.
 - Remind them we expect sportsmanship and good behavior.
 - Wish them luck, shake hands or bump fists, and send them back to the dugouts.

The plate meeting should take no more than a couple minutes.

Give the pitcher a minute to warm up, clean the plate, and get the game going. “PLAY!”

Between Innings

You need to do something in the void between half innings. Being in the right place can move the game along and make you look professional.

- BU
 - Get a drink of water if you need to, but don’t loiter near the fences or chat with the fans, managers, or coaches. Be friendly, not friends.
 - Move to a position in mid right center field and wait for the ball to be thrown down before jogging back to your A position.
 - Assist with pitch count if the PU is taking changes from the manager. A good partner will signal number of pitches remaining with fingers to the PU when the PU looks to him/her after taking the changes. See the PU section for recommendations on number of warm up pitches between innings.
- PU
 - Get a drink of water if you need to, but don’t loiter near the fences or chat with the fans, managers, or coaches.
 - Check the ball return for baseballs. Inspect the baseballs for wear and tear.
 - You should line up on the first or third base line, 10 – 15 feet up the line, on the side of the team on defense. This brings you closer to the dugout that will likely be having changes between half innings, and keeps you away from swinging bats.
 - A new pitcher is allowed no more than 8 preparatory pitches. Returning pitchers can get by with 5 pitches unless you’re experiencing very low temperatures. The

rule book allows for 1 minute between end of previous half inning and start of the next. If the pitching battery takes too much time to get into place, you may subtract pitches. Keep the game moving.

- Warn the pitcher and catcher when 2 more preparatory pitches are left. “Pitcher, 2 more” with two fingers raised.
- Observe unannounced changes in pitcher or catcher. A new pitcher becomes pitcher of record, whether announced or not, when he/she delivers a preparatory pitch to the catcher from the pitcher’s plate.
- Observe the pitch count and verify with the score keeper when a pitcher’s count is near a threshold.
- Keep the batter warming up on his side of the diamond. Do not let them cross a pitcher warming up until after the catcher throws down.
- Make sure only 1 batter has a bat.
- Clean the plate after the catcher throws down.
- Make sure the base coaches are at their designated positions before allowing a pitch. Base coaches are required.

Avoid conferencing between half-innings unless absolutely necessary. Be very careful to avoid conferencing in the half-inning after a controversial call; best to put some distance between the two. Reasons for conferencing between innings might include safety or coverage issues, which can impact the game. “Bob, I notice you’re busting inside on balls hit to the infield. Can I hold your wallet for you?”

Ending the game

There are still things to do when the game has ended.

- Ineligible player and pitcher protests are possible until the umpires have left the field. While most teams want to high-five the umpires, keep in mind we need to exit as promptly as possible to finalize the game.
- Umpires DO NOT need to sign the scorebook. Don’t know where this myth comes from, but it’s widespread. Are you really signing off on the accuracy of the book?
- Distribute and return the baseballs to the teams. Rolling baseballs to the dugouts is usually sufficient.
- If possible, exit nearest the winning team’s dugout. You’re less likely to encounter conflict on this side.

Post Game

No game goes perfectly for the umpires. There is something we can all do to improve. After every game, plan on spending time with your partner a discuss what happened during the game. Elicit feedback for improvements.

- Move to a location away from the crowd. If food is available, grab your paycheck first (hotdog, coke) and find a place to sit, eat, and discuss the game.
- PU should start the conversation. How did my strike zone look? Was I consistent?
- PU can offer mistakes made by him/herself during the game and how to improve on them.
- BU can do the same.
- Offer constructive criticism. "You could be louder on calling foul". "I missed a rotation with runners on 1st and 3rd in the 2nd inning. I'll get that next time".

We're all volunteers here. We all want to improve and give the players the best we can. Follow these simple steps every game and you'll be a better umpire. Thanks for volunteering.