



SNOHOMISH LITTLE LEAGUE

SIMPLIFIED UMPIRE MANUAL



Note: The mechanics in this manual are a simplified version of the official Little League mechanics, and as such are intended for umpires working regular season games.

If you are interested in working post-season games or learning more advanced mechanics, contact the SLL Umpire in Chief at umpires@snohomishll.com



No more “Slot”

Little League International has instructed umpires to move away from the previous recommendation of setting up in “the slot” – that window of space between the batter and catcher, as set up at an angled position. The new recommendation is to position your body more straight-on to the pitcher.

Body Placement – Setting your Feet

The umpire sets up close to the catcher but not so close as to interfere. Stand so the center of your body is roughly centered on, or just outside of, the inside edge of the plate. Adjust so you are “square” to the pitcher, then spread your feet to be wider than shoulder width. Do this after the catcher is in place, the batter is in the box, and about the same time as the pitcher steps onto the pitcher’s plate.

Coming “Set” – Squat and Lean

When the pitcher begins their motion, the umpire should come set by “sitting” straight down into a squatting position (as if sitting in a chair) with a *slight* lean forward. Placing hands at the top of the knees is a good indicator of how low to sit. This “set position” is similar to how an outfielder or base coach might stand prior to a pitch. You can also protect your hands by placing them behind your knees, if comfortable. The umpire should be set before the pitcher releases the ball.

See the Entire Plate

The umpire should be able to see the entire plate. If the batter’s stance blocks the umpire’s view, adjust (typically moving higher) so a full view of the plate is achieved.

Calling Pitches

Track the pitch all the way to the catcher’s mitt every time, using only your eyes and *without moving your head*. See the pitch all the way in, pause to absorb what you saw, then make the call.

If the umpire judges that the pitch has touched any part of the zone, as defined in the rulebook, it is a **strike**. To call the strike, stand straight up without moving your feet. Raise the right arm so the elbow is parallel to the ground, move the hand back to the ear and, in a “hammer” motion, move the forearm forward while closing the fist and simultaneously verbalizing “Strike!” loud enough for the shortstop to hear. Then drop the arm to the side, take a step back, and relax until the next pitch.



For a swinging strike, utilize the same signal but omit the verbal.

If the umpire judges the pitch a **ball**, the umpire remains in their squat and verbalizes “Ball” loud enough for the pitcher to hear. The umpire should call “Ball” on every pitch (but *do not state location*) unless it is way out of the zone. After verbalizing the call, stand up, step back, and relax.

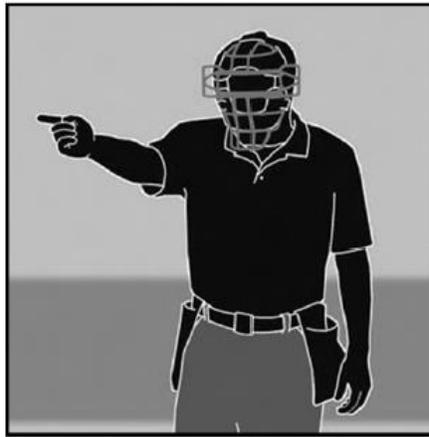
All signals should be crisp and strong. Additional signals are on the next page.

A (non-Little League) video describing the slot, basic signals, and general positioning is here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gGO580QViuU>



Do Not Pitch



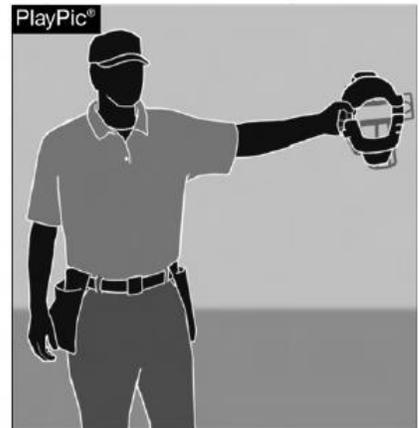
Play – Point to pitcher



Count
(Show balls with left hand)



Foul Ball, Time, Dead Ball



Fair Ball

(For fair or foul ball calls near the line, move to a credible position straddling the line before making the call.)



Infield Fly



Foul Tip

CALLING PLAYS IN THE FIELD – 1-UMPIRE SYSTEM

This section assumes the plate umpire is the only umpire working the game (a 1-umpire system).

Movement – Ball hit to Infield

When the ball is hit to the infield, and no potential play at the plate, the umpire should move to their left and come into the infield by moving through the right-handed batter's box. They should then determine where the next play is likely to be and move to get a good angle to make that call. If possible, the umpire can also move closer to that play (but a good angle is most important).

If there is a potential play at the plate (for a ground ball to the infield, this would only be when there is a runner on third base), the umpire should remain in foul territory, determine where the next play is likely to be, and move to get a good angle to make that call.

Movement – Ball hit to Outfield

When the ball is hit to the outfield, the mechanics are largely the same. If there is no potential play at the plate, the umpire should move to their left and come into the infield by moving through the righthanded batter's box. They should then determine where the next play is likely to be and move to get a good angle to make that call (it may be a catch/no catch, or a throw back into the infield). If possible, the umpire can also move closer to that play (but a good angle is most important).

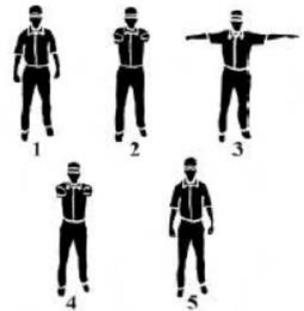
If there is a potential play at the plate (either a runner on third base tagging, or a runner on second base trying to score on a hit), the umpire should remain in foul territory, rule on a catch/no catch (if applicable), determine where the next play is likely to be, and move to get a good angle to make that call. If the runner will score without a play on them, move into the infield (while glancing back to see the runner touch home plate) to get a good angle to make the next call.

Making the Call

The umpire must stop their movement and see the play entirely to completion before making the call.

This requires the umpire to see all four elements of the play: 1. the ball; 2. the defensive player; 3. the runner; and 4. the base or tag (where the other three elements meet).

If the batter or runner is **safe**, and a play was actually made (all the elements came together at roughly the same time), the umpire should stand tall, bring their arms up and in front, sweep their arms to the side while calling "Safe!", bring their arms back to the front, and then drop their arms down. The volume of the safe call will range from zero (on an obvious play) to loud enough for everyone to hear (on a "bang-bang" play). If the elements do not come together, such as where the ball is overthrown, no safe call is required (verbal or arm signal).



If the batter or runner is **out**, the umpire must always make a call. The umpire will stand tall and perform the "hammer" signal used for a strike call, except the umpire will call "Out!" The volume will range from zero (an obvious play) to loud enough for everyone to hear (a "bang-bang" play).

Do not make the out call until you have verified that the play has been completed and the ball has not been dropped. This will avoid an "Out ... no, the ball was dropped, safe!" call.

A (non-Little League) video describing the basics of the 1-umpire system is available here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ih24EnEeT3c>

CALLING PLAYS IN THE FIELD – 2-UMPIRE SYSTEM*

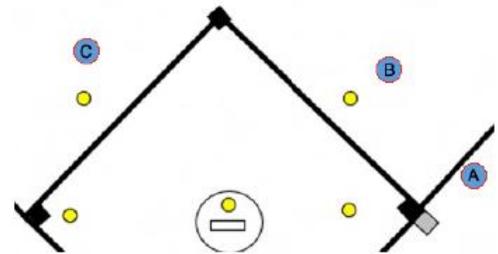
Starting Positions

The base umpire has three starting positions: A, B, and C.

“A”: Foul side of first base line, about 15 feet up the line

“B”: Halfway between first and second base, behind and to the side of the second baseman

“C”: Halfway between second and third base, behind and to the side of the shortstop



Which position to start in? The umpire should ask two questions: Are the bases empty? If yes, start in position “A.” If no, ask: Is there a runner on first base only? If yes, start in position “B.” If no, meaning there is any runner on second or third base (or both), start in position “C.” The umpire wants to be in the position that gets them ahead of the lead runner, going no further than “C.”

A common mistake is for the base umpire to move to position “A” when there is a runner on third base only. Per the rules above, the umpire should remain in “C.”

The Set Position

Prior to the pitch, the base umpire should stand relaxed. When the pitcher begins their motion, the base umpire should drop to a set position with feet shoulder-width apart, hands on knees. This is very similar to the set position a plate umpire uses.



Responsibilities – Who Calls What?

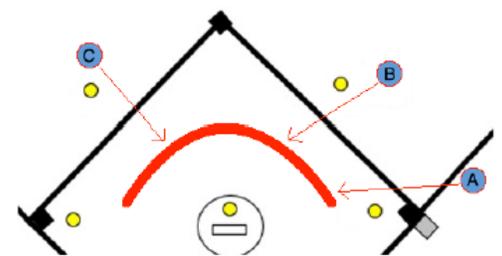
In these simplified mechanics, the base umpire has all calls at first, second, and third base. The plate umpire has all calls at home, plus all catch/no catch calls and all fair/foul calls.

Movement – Ball hit to Infield

When the ball is hit to the infield, the base umpire should remain outside (behind the first baseman, second baseman, or shortstop). The umpire should watch the ball be fielded and determine where the next play is likely to be. When the ball is thrown, move to get a good angle to make the call.

Movement – Ball hit to Outfield

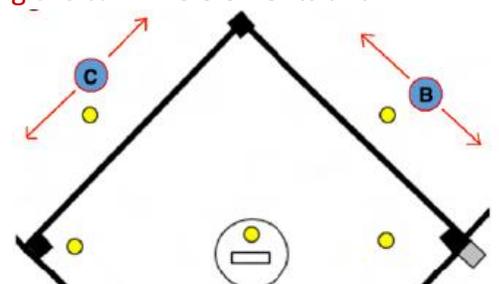
When the ball is hit to the outfield, the umpire will immediately hustle inside the diamond, toward the pitching mound or circle, and into the “working area” (the red line). The umpire will then turn so they can see the ball (“chest to ball”) and will read the runners and the defense to determine where the throw will go and which runners will be played upon. When the ball is thrown, move to get a good angle (priority) and get closer to the play (secondary).



Once the umpire has seen the entire play, the “safe” or “out” call will be made. **The umpire must stop their movement and see the play entirely to completion before making the call.** The elements and signals are described above in the 1-umpire system.

Movement – Steal or Pickoff

If a runner attempts to steal a base, or a catcher attempts to pick off a runner, the base umpire will move to obtain the best possible angle (and distance, if possible).



** Additional resources available at snohomishll.com/umpires.

GAME PROCESS AND MANAGEMENT

Good umpires understand that they are there to facilitate kids playing a game. This not only involves calling ball and strike, safe and out, but also helping the game move smoothly and quickly and being open to explaining any unusual calls or rules. Be confident, approachable, and human.

Starting the Game

SLL recommends parking separately from general spectators to avoid uncomfortable discussions after games. Reserved umpire parking is behind the East batting cages between fields 1 and 5.

Prior to the start of any Little League® game, it is the responsibility of the managers and coaches to inspect the condition of the playing equipment to be used by the players participating in the ensuing game. The manager of each team is responsible for ensuring that all equipment is legal and proper for play according to Little League rules. Beginning



with the 2025 season, it is no longer the responsibility of the umpires to inspect equipment for either team. However, the Plate Umpire will confirm with the managers of both teams at the plate conference that all equipment is proper and legal for play according to Little League rules. A more detailed description of equipment inspection is here:

<https://www.littleleague.org/university/articles/playing-equipment-inspection-baseball-softball-bats/>

After the equipment check, leave the field to get your gear on. Return 8-10 minutes before the game.

When you return to the field, ask the coaches to bring their players in (if they are still warming up).

Then ask (avoid yelling) the managers to meet you at the plate for a quick plate meeting.

At the plate meeting, after you introduce yourself, cover these topics (in this order):

1. Ask: “Do you have lineup cards for me?” (It’s good practice to always get lineup cards.) If baseball, ask: “Are ineligible pitchers marked?”;
2. Review ground rules (fence openings, etc.);
3. Confirm per-inning run limits and game time limits; and
4. Wish the coaches good luck and get game balls from home team. *Do not ask if there are rules questions – avoid a rules clinic.*

Note that some umpires choose to cover more. But above is the minimum.

Once the players are ready, step in behind the catcher, point at the pitcher, and loudly say “Play!”

Between Innings

Little League rules limit the time between innings to no more than 1 minute, beginning the moment the third out is made. Adults can now warm up pitchers, so if the catcher is getting their gear on, ask a coach to come out. If the pitcher and/or catcher are moving slowly, reduce the number of warmup pitches. (If it is a player’s first inning pitching, give them 6-8 pitches *if they are moving quickly*. For returning pitchers, give them 3-5 *if they are moving quickly*.)

Between innings, the plate umpire should stand near the foul line on the side facing the team coming to bat, 10-15 feet up the line. However, the plate umpire can stand on either side. The base umpire should stand on the outfield edge of the dirt, 10-15 feet from the foul line. The plate and base umpires should limit the number of times they talk between innings and should *never* talk immediately following an inning where a controversial play was called.



** Additional resources available at snohomishll.com/umpires.

Discussions with Managers

Every umpire will eventually have a manager come out to discuss something. When a manager does come out, the umpire should meet them part way (do not make the manager walk all the way). Be open to whatever question the manager has and listen carefully and respectfully to that question. Managers will generally ask about (a) judgment calls (e.g., out or safe) or (b) rules interpretations (e.g., obstruction).

Judgment Calls: An umpire working alone will typically not change their *judgment* call (safe or out, for example) based on a discussion with a manager. Doing so invites managers to argue about every close call. If the manager is questioning a call, the umpire can simply say something like “It was a tough call, and I did the best I could with it.” If the manager continues, just respectfully tell the manager: “Right or wrong, I am going to stay with the call. Let’s play.” If there are two umpires, the umpire should only agree to go to their partner if there is information they may have missed (like a pulled foot), not just because their partner may have a different opinion. If umpires do get together, be quick but try to get the call right.

Rules Interpretations: An umpire working alone may change their interpretation of a *rule*, but only if they realize that they are truly incorrect (and are certain of that). If there is question in the umpire’s mind about the rule, even after talking to the manager, then the umpire should stick with their understanding and interpretation. The umpire can commit to looking the rule up after the game (and should do so). But don’t trust a coach’s understanding of a rule simply because they say so. In the end, do your best to get the call right, while understanding that the kids are there to play a game and not to watch managers and umpires discuss a rule or call. In all cases, keep the game moving.

After the Game

When the game concludes, give any remaining game balls you have to the home team (or place in front of their dugout). Exit the field as soon as you can (but no need to rush). Avoid hanging out to give high-fives to the players. Head straight to your car to change out of your umpire gear and avoid discussing the game or any calls until the next day.

If anything unusual occurred during the game, this is a good time to look the rule up in your rulebook. It’s almost impossible to know every rule all the time, so learning from situations that happen in your games is the best way to become a rules expert.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Join the Little League Umpire Registry (registration is free) for a hub of umpire resources:

<https://www.littleleagueumpire.org/>

Download the Little League Rulebook App for official regulations, playing rules, and operating policies:

<https://www.littleleague.org/playing-rules/little-league-rulebook-app/>

The Snohomish Little League Umpire page contains rules and mechanics information:

<https://www.snohomishll.com/umpires>

Contact the Snohomish LL Umpire in Chief with any questions, comments, or for more information:

umpires@snohomishll.com

** Additional resources available at [snohomishll.com/umpires](https://www.snohomishll.com/umpires).