

North Lake Little League

AAA-Centric Umpiring

2019

- Notes and observations from a volunteer umpire.
- This does not constitute an official Little League document.

Why are we here?

- Little League baseball is for the KIDS
 - It is NEVER about the umpires
- We are all volunteers, doing our best
 - We all make mistakes. Try to limit yours, and accept those of others (partner, coaches, parents)
 - If a mistake is fixable, try to get it “right”
- Keep it civil – there is no place for arguing or bad attitude in our league
- AAA baseball is about helping the kids to **learn**, while having **fun** playing ball.

Key Umpiring Principles

- Positioning is crucial
 - If you are in the correct position, the game almost calls itself
 - Kids, coaches, and parents all appreciate an umpire who works hard to get into position
- Angle >>>> Distance
 - You can see 60', but you can't see through a player's back. Avoid getting "Straightlined".
- Get set before the play happens
 - It's hard to see clearly when you are moving (think blurry camera)
- Take your time making the call
 - Pause, say it in your head, say it out loud
 - Rushing leads to "Safe/Out!"
- Always watch the ball!
 - Nothing happens without the ball.
 - Keep your chest square to the ball, and glance to keep track of runners
- Anticipate the play, but not the call
 - Think about what might happen, so you can be ready, but don't assume what the call will be!
- If you need to, get help from your partner
 - YOU decide what the call is, but you can ask for help with rules, what your partner saw, etc.
- This is AAA Little League – we want to do our best, and get it right for the kids

Roles and Responsibilities

- Base Umpire
 - Bases
 - Help with outfield catches and cones
 - Help with swinging strikes
- Plate Umpire
 - Balls/Strikes
 - Fair/Foul
 - Catch/No-catch
 - Plays at the plate
 - Help with interference, tag-ups, 3rd base
- Both umpires
 - Watch for Safety concerns
 - Calling “Time” or putting the ball in play

Base Umpire Basics

- “Ball’s in, you’re out; ball’s out, you’re in”
 - Balls to the infield, you will call from outside the fielders
 - Balls to the outfield, you will come inside to watch runners tag and fielders throw
- Nobody on – position “A” (the “rail” – 12 feet behind 1st, right foot along foul line)
 - Ball to the infield
 - step in (towards 2nd) to create a 90-degree angle from the ball to 1st base (1-3 steps)
 - Get set facing 1st, twist to watch the throw, then focus on the bag:
 - Watch the runner’s foot hit, watch the fielder’s foot, watch and listen for the catch
 - *This is farm – for close, really good fielding plays, reward the fielder*
 - Ball to the outfield
 - Come in and “pivot” to watch runner touch first, be ready to move on to 2nd
- Runner on first – position “B” (between 1st and 2nd)
 - Ball to the infield – stay close to watch play at 2nd or 1st
 - Find a position to watch lead runner and play at 1st
 - Ball to the outfield – move inside to watch runners and outfielders
 - Farm has lots of steals – move in towards pitcher to create angle
- Everything else – position “C” (between 2nd and 3rd)
 - Ball to the infield – stay back for play at 3rd, or else move towards pitcher for play elsewhere
 - Most hits, move in towards pitcher to create angle
 - Ball to the outfield - move inside to watch runners and outfielders
- Avoid getting too close to the base when making a call.
 - 12-15 feet away is ideal, even 60 feet is ok. 5 feet away is too tight to really see!

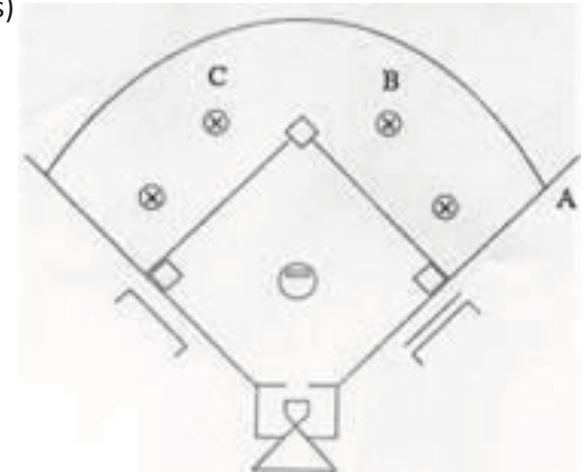


Plate Umpire Basics

- Learn “the Slot”
 - Angled stance between catcher and batter
 - Lead foot near batter, drop foot behind catcher
 - Head just above catcher’s helmet
- Stand still!
 - Watch the ball with your eyes, head doesn’t move
 - Twisting to avoid pitches means you can’t see
 - You WILL get hit - trust your gear, it really doesn’t hurt.
- See the pitch into the mitt.
 - Pause. Breathe. Make the call:
 - Ball: Stay down in your crouch, call “Ball!”
 - Strike: Stand up, raise your right fist, call “Strike”
 - Swinging strike, just signal, no need to verbalize
- Right hand is your “power” hand for calls
 - Left hand is used to hold an indicator and take off your mask
- Signaling the count
 - No need to give the count after 1st pitch
 - After that, signal every pitch (balls in left hand, strikes in right hand)
 - Verbalize either every pitch, or every other
 - use full “x balls and y strikes”, not “x-and-y”

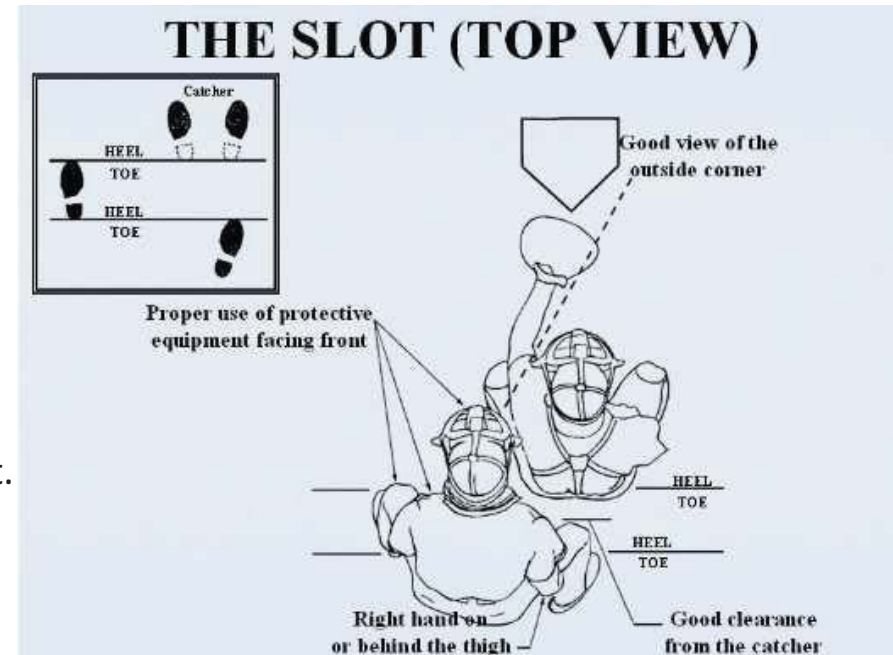


Plate Umpire – Ball in Play

Plate Umpires also need to help on plays in the field

- **Getting into the play**
 - Mask off: left thumb under chin pad, pull forward, then lift off
 - Clear the catcher: usually around to the left and then out (but can be to the right for fair/foul or steal of home and righty batter)
- **Fair/Foul**
 - Line up on 1st or 3rd base line, straddle line, get set.
 - If possible, between home and base, but otherwise on base line “extended”
- **Nobody on**
 - Ground ball: clear catcher and come up 1st base line
 - Watch for interference/obstruction, pulled foot, ball out of play
 - Fly ball: clear catcher and move towards mound
 - Create angle to see catch, come set before, make the call & return behind home
- **Runner on 1st**
 - Ground ball: clear catcher and move 3-5 feet up 3rd base line
 - Watch for interference/obstruction, pulled foot, ball out of play
 - Be ready to cover 3rd base if play blows up (base umpire has Batter/Runner)
 - If play develops: yell “I’ve got third!”, move into fair territory between pitcher and 3rd for angle, and get set for a call
 - Fly ball: clear catcher and move 3-5 feet up 3rd base line
 - Create angle to see catch, come set before, make the call as needed
 - If base hit, be ready to cover 3rd base as above, and be ready to follow runner home as below
- **Other base situations – primary responsibility is home plate and catch/no catch**
 - Clear catcher and create angle as needed, watch for catch, watch for tag ups, be ready for play at home
 - Plate umpire has responsibility for tag-up on 3rd base
- **Plays at Home – goal is to create same 90-degree angle as a base umpire**
 - Watch for catcher blocking the plate too soon (obstruction); Watch for catcher holding on to the ball (“show me the ball!”)
 - Watch for timing of 3rd out versus runner scoring – on forced 3rd out, run does not score
 - Non-force, runs count if scored before 3rd out (a runner out for not tagging up is timing, NOT force, so run can count)
 - Positioning – create angle to watch throw and runner
 - Throw from left or center of field (LF, CF, SS, 3B, P, some 2B): set 5-6 feet up 1st base line
 - Throw from right field (RF, 1B, some 2B): set 5-6 feet up 3rd base line, 3-4 feet in foul territory
 - No need to worry about steals of Home in Farm

Key AAA rules

- Ball, strike, hit-by-pitch
- Fair, foul, foul tip
- Coach pitching
- Steals and Leaving early
- Overthrows and Overrunning 1st base
- Obstruction, Interference, and Train Wrecks
- Ball out of play
- 5-run rule & Time limits
- Batting out of order

- *No bunts, no infield fly, no stealing home*

Balls, strikes, hit-by-pitch

- Strike zone is:
 - Armpits to knees
 - Don't teach them to swing at pitches above their head!
 - But, watch for the arc – Farm pitches can drop quite a bit
 - Half-a-ball inside to 2 balls outside
 - Don't call inside (safety), but give them width outside
 - Pitch is a “strike” if in the zone, or if swung at and missed
 - Use your judgment on swing versus checked
 - A swing while trying to avoid a pitch is still a swing
 - Be reasonable, this is Farm. Ducking or twisting *without* moving arms is NOT a swing.
- Hit-By-Pitch
 - If the batter is hit by a ball in the strike zone, it's a strike! (sorry, no leaning in)
 - Be reasonable, this is Farm
 - If the batter is hit while swinging, it's a strike!
 - Be reasonable, this is Farm
 - Everything else is a HBP, with base
 - Yes, even if it bounces
 - Batter is supposed to try to get out of the way
 - Remember, this is Farm – wide-eye freezing-up can be “trying” to get out of the way!
 - Hands are NOT part of the bat (ie, can be HBP or a strike)
 - Be reasonable, this is Farm

Fair, Foul, Foul-tip

- Short of 1st or 3rd base, ball is:
 - Fair if touched by a player or comes to rest in fair territory
 - Can start foul and become fair
 - “Foul” line and Home Plate are fair territory
 - Foul if touched or comes to rest in foul territory
 - Can start fair and become foul
 - Foul if hits the batter in the batter’s box
- Beyond 1st or 3rd base, ball is:
 - Fair if touched or lands in fair territory
 - Foul if touched or lands in foul territory
- Signaling
 - Foul: Plate umpire yells “Foul” and points where it went out. Ball is dead.
 - Fair: Plate umpire points fair, but does not verbalize
 - Base umpire may signal to help out, but it is the plate’s call
- Foul-tip
 - A pitch that is tipped, then goes “sharp-and-direct” to catcher’s hands, where it is caught
 - If not caught, it is just a foul ball
 - The pitch is a strike, and the ball is live (“in play”)
 - In theory, runners can advance. In practice, this means stealing 3rd only.
 - Foul-tip that is caught for a 3rd strike is an out. (Remember, if not caught, it is just a foul ball)
- Dropped 3rd strike
 - In AAA, a dropped 3rd strike is still a strikeout. Runner may NOT attempt to run to 1st.

Coach Pitching

- After 4 balls, the coach comes in to pitch
 - “Coach, that’s 4!”
 - Announce the number of strikes on the batter
 - *Runners CAN steal on ball “4” (while kid is still pitching)*
- Coach has up to 3* pitches
 - Strikes carry over from kid-pitch, so 4-2 count means 1 more strike is an out, etc.
 - Hit-by-pitch is a ball, and no base is awarded
 - If 3rd (or later) pitch, batter is out.
 - If 3rd pitch is not hit, batter is out
 - *If 3rd pitch is fouled, at-bat continues until completed
 - No stealing on coach pitches
- Fielding pitcher must set up even with or behind the coach
- Pitching coach must attempt to get out of the way in a fielding play
 - If a pitching coach interferes with a throw or fielding attempt, the batter may be called out

Steals and Leaving Early

- Steals:
 - Runners can steal 2nd base ONLY if a kid pitch gets past the catcher. (note: 90-degrees sideways is not “past”)
 - Sometimes hard for field umpire to judge, so get help from plate
 - Runners can steal 3rd base on any kid pitch that reaches home plate (includes Ball 4)
 - Runners can not advance an extra base on a catcher’s throw
 - Catchers should be encouraged to throw, since it is good, “safe” practice
 - There is no stealing of home
 - There is no stealing on throws back to the pitcher
 - There is no stealing on coach pitches
- Leaving Early
 - Runners can only leave base after the pitch reaches the batter.
 - If one runner leaves early, they are all considered to have left early
 - Runners who leave early and are put out remain out
 - Runners who leave early and are not put out are returned to their base to the extent possible
 - On a steal, return to original base
 - On an out, return to original bases. May swap who is on which base if a lead runner is forced, but no net advance.
 - On a hit, award the batter the “clean” value of the hit, return runners to bases, then advance them as per the force.
 - If bases are loaded and batter hits an infield single, runner from 3rd disappears (is not out, but does not score)
 - Runners must tag-up before advancing on a caught fly ball
 - Runner may leave as soon as the ball touches a fielder’s glove
 - This is an Appeal play (Runner is not automatically out. Runner is only declared out after defense makes an appeal.)

Overthrows and Overrunning 1st base

- Overthrows
 - Runners can NOT advance once the ball is returned to the pitcher near the mound
 - If the pitcher drops or misses the ball, but the *CLEAR* intent was to take the ball to the mound, then kill the play. (It's Farm)
 - If the ball is thrown 30 feet wide of the pitcher, though, play is still live, and runner can advance
 - Runners can NOT advance on a Catcher overthrow (steal attempt or return to pitcher)
 - Runners CAN advance on other overthrows in the field (ie, plays at 2nd base or 3rd base)
- Overrunning or missing 1st base
 - Batter is entitled to overrun and safely return to 1st base
 - Batter **can safely turn right or left**, so long as returning **directly** to 1st base.
 - Batter is liable to be put out if an attempt to advance is made
 - This is Farm, be reasonable when assessing an “attempt” versus honest confusion
 - Batter is considered to have touched 1st base once past the base
 - A missed base is an Appeal play (must have ball in hand and foot on base, or else tag runner, before runner returns to 1st)

Obstruction, Interference, and Train Wrecks

Definitions

- **Obstruction:**
 - Offense has the right to run the bases unimpeded. If blocked by the defense without the ball, this is obstruction.
 - Defense is liable for penalty
- **Interference:**
 - On a BATTED ball, the DEFENSE has priority
 - Offense is liable for penalty.
 - On a THROWN ball, position and intent come into play
 - Offense is liable for penalty.
 - Catchers, Coaches, and umpires can also interfere
 - Offense or defense can be liable for penalty
 - VERBAL interference can be called if outbursts cause a change in behavior (ie, “MISS IT!”)
 - Give a warning, but continued and egregious outbursts can be penalized against offense or defense
- **Train Wrecks:**
 - If both offense and defense are doing their job, but there is a collision, this is considered a “train wreck”.
 - Accidents happen, and there is no penalty.
- **Base Paths are defined by the runner:**
 - Once a defender has the ball, the runner must approach the base in a straight line or turn back
 - Any deviation more than 3 feet is an out.

Obstruction

- Obstruction is any illegal act by the defense that blocks the offense's ability to run the bases.
 - Far more common in Farm than other levels. Also more common than Interference
 - Watch for obstruction on steals – defender oblivious and standing in the base path.
- It is NOT obstruction if:
 - The defender has the ball and is waiting to apply a tag
 - The defender is in the act of reaching for a “catchable” thrown ball
- It IS obstruction if:
 - The defender is blocking a base without the ball
 - The defender pretends to catch the ball or make a tag right in front of the runner
 - The defender is standing on a base and the runner has to adjust speed or slow down
 - EVEN if it is unintentional!
 - ie, 2nd baseman standing on the base, watching the outfielders chase a ball
- If a play is being made on the runner (“Class A”), the ball is immediately dead and the runner is awarded one base.
 - Generally, this happens while trying to advance.
 - However, a runner that is obstructed when returning to a base is awarded the next base (even home).
 - Watch for a defender straddling a base waiting for a throw. If the runner has to slow down, it is obstruction.
- If the play is happening somewhere else (“Class B”), announce the obstruction, but play continues. After the play, call time and award bases that you think the runners “should” have earned.
 - This is a judgment call. How badly were they blocked? Did they fall down? How close was a resulting play?
 - Do not reward “crazy” runners who try to advance after an obstruction, but are thrown out by 30 feet. That’s an out.
 - Do not award a base to a runner who was blocked for a second, but was not likely to advance (ie, throw arrives soon after).
 - DO award a base if you think they would have reasonably advanced



Obstruction!

Interference

- Offensive Interference (in order of likelihood)
 - Runner hit by batted ball:
 - If not directly behind a fielder, runner is out, ball is dead, and batter goes to 1st base.
 - If directly behind a fielder who misses, runner is safe
 - Runner blocks defender's path to a batted ball
 - Runner is out, ball is dead.
 - Batter may also be out if runner was intentionally breaking up a double play
 - Runner does not slide or avoid a defender who has the ball and is waiting to make a tag.
 - Runner is out and ball is dead
 - There is no requirement to slide. Runner must slide OR *attempt* to avoid.
 - Runner hit by "catchable" thrown ball:
 - If intentionally blocking a throw, runner is out and ball is dead. (Judgment call)
 - Batter may also be out if this was breaking up a double play
 - If unintentionally hit
 - Between home and first, beyond 15 feet, but not in "runner's lane", runner is out and ball is dead. (Even if unintentional!)
 - Anywhere else, runner is safe
 - Runner blocks defender's path to a thrown ball
 - Intentional/unintentional as per hit-by-throw above
 - Batter blocks catcher making a throw on a runner
 - Batter is out and runner returns to base. (But, be reasonable, this is Farm!)
 - Coach's interference:
 - Physically assisting runner (pushing or blocking), runner is out, ball is dead
 - Coach deliberately interferes with fielders or throw, batter is out, ball is dead.
 - (If accidentally hit in coach's box, coach must vacate the area, but there is no penalty)
 - During Coach Pitch – blocking the fielder's path to a ball, or getting in the way of a throw, the batter is out.
 - This is FARM, fielder does not have to attempt a throw in order for interference to be called.
- Defense / Umpire
 - Catcher blocks batter's ability to hit the ball (ie, glove is hit by the bat)
 - Batter is awarded 1st base (or coach can opt for outcome of play if better)
 - Umpire blocks catcher's ability to throw ball (ie, on a steal)
 - Out stands if runner is out; "safe" runner is returned to prior base
 - Umpire is hit by batted ball
 - In front of a defender – batter is awarded 1st base, ball is dead
 - Behind defenders – no penalty

Ball out of play

- On a ball thrown out of play:
 - Most people assume “one base”, or “the base you were going to, plus one”, but the actual award depends on the throw:
 - On the first throw by an infielder, award is 2 bases from the time of pitch.
 - Example: SS fields a grounder and overthrows 1B into the stands, runner gets 2nd.
 - On any throw by an outfielder, or secondary throw by an infielder, award 2 bases from time of throw.
 - Example: Throw by an outfielder “behind” the runner goes into the stands, runner gets 3rd.
 - Example: Relay throw from SS on double-play attempt, ball goes into the stands, batter/runner gets 2nd or 3rd, depending where they were at time of throw (ie, before or after crossing first).
 - On a pitch that goes through the backstop, award is 1 base
 - For ragged backstops, such as Frank Love, use discretion. (ie, don’t call it!)
 - » Be reasonable, this is Farm. (ie, don’t call it!)
 - Ball is dead – call “Time!” and award bases
- On a ball that gets stuck in a fence, award is 2 bases from time of pitch
 - Be sure it is stuck, though. Loose “stuck” ball is live!
- On a batted ball that lands fair and goes out of play (through the cones, out of play to the side, etc.), award is 2 bases from time of pitch.
 - This is an automatic double (commonly-misnamed “ground rule” double)
 - Award happens even if touched by a fielder before going out.
 - Award for a ball that lands fair but then rolls foul and past the cones is a double.

5-run rule & Time limits

- In any inning, offense is limited to 5* runs.
 - In most cases, limit is 5, even if more runs score on the last play.
 - I.e., bases loaded, long single, stop counting at 5.
 - *More runs can score only on a home run or automatic double (past the cones).
 - Only forced runs will score. (ie, 2 runs on a bases-loaded double, or 4 for a home run)
- In the “final” inning, the 5-run rule is lifted.
 - Usually, this means the 6th inning.
 - Extra innings do not have a 5-run rule.
 - If you start an inning just before the time limit, you can declare that it is the final inning, and lift the 5-run rule.
 - I.e., starting the 5th inning at 1:55 into a game, you’re not going to finish in 5 minutes. This is the “final” inning.
- Game time is limited to 2 - 2:30 hours
 - No new innings start after 2 hours
 - The “next” inning starts immediately after 3rd out is made.
 - So, if the 5th inning ends at 1:58 into a game, you can go 6.
 - In case of tie, extra innings are allowed, up to 2:30
 - After 2:30, the game is ended as per rules 4.11 and 4.12 (refer to green book, it gets tricky)
 - Tie game
 - continued at next meeting (exact same game situation, pay attention to pitching rules)
 - Visitors leading
 - If Visitors tied or took the lead in the incomplete inning, score reverts to prior complete inning (tie, or home team wins)
 - If Visitors were leading before incomplete inning, visiting team wins
 - Home team leading
 - Home team wins

Batting out of order

- If discovered during an at-bat:
 - swap to the “correct” batter and continue at-bat with no penalty
- If discovered AFTER the at-bat, but BEFORE the next pitch is thrown:
 - “Proper” batter is out, and play continues with “next” batter. (ie, if 5 was skipped, then 5 is out and 6 comes to bat)
 - Any runners that advanced are returned as if play never happened
- If discovered AFTER the at-bat, and AFTER the next pitch is thrown:
 - No out!
 - The batter who batted becomes the “proper” batter, and the “next” batter is whoever normally follows them. (ie, if 5 was skipped, and 6 batted, and a pitch was thrown to anyone after that, then “7” is now the proper batter.)
 - If the “next” proper batter does not bat, then proceed as if they were the “proper” batter for the next round of figuring out what happened. (ie, in above, if 6 batted and then 8 bats, then 7 could be out. Etc.)
- **This gets tricky** – if needed, call “time” and consult the rules with a coach.