

# North Lake Little League

## Minors-Centric Umpiring

- 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

# Key Umpiring Principles

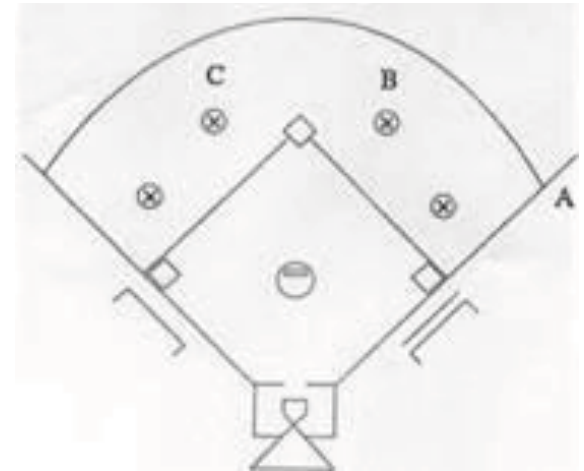
- Positioning is crucial
  - If you are in the correct position, the game almost calls itself
  - Kids, coaches, and parents all appreciate an umpire who works hard to get into position
- Angle >>>> Distance
  - You can see 60', but you can't see through a player's back. Avoid getting "Straightlined".
- 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 Little League – we want to do the best we can 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, 3<sup>rd</sup> base
- Both umpires
  - Infield Fly
  - Watch for Safety concerns
  - Calling “Time” or putting the ball in play

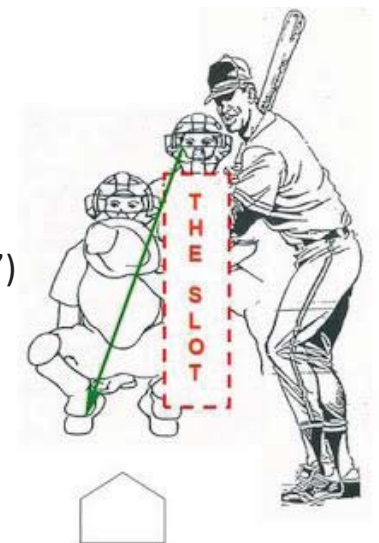
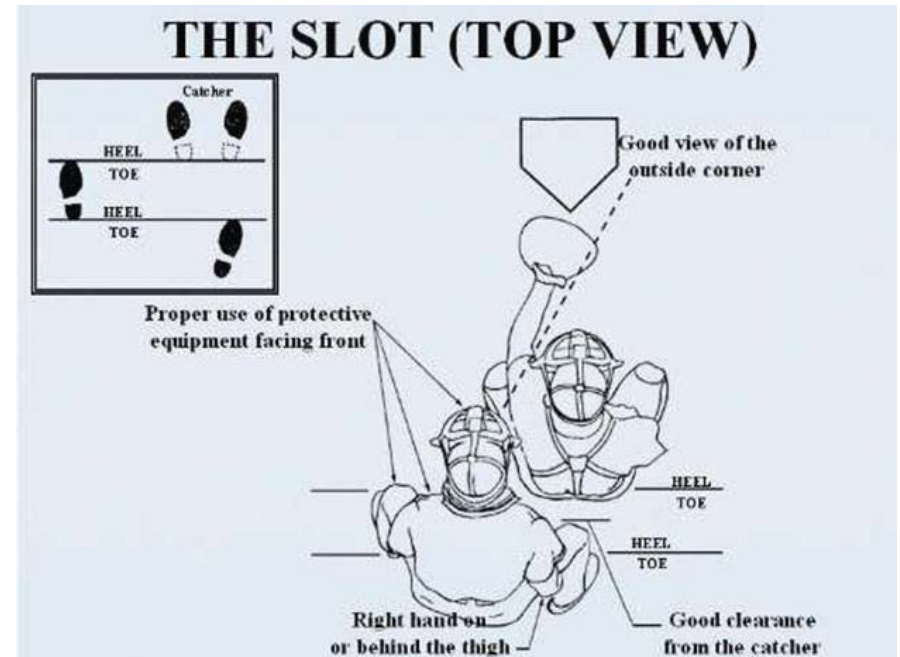
# Base Umpire Basics

- “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 1<sup>st</sup>, right foot along foul line)
  - Ball to the infield
    - step in (towards 2<sup>nd</sup>) to create a 90-degree angle from the ball to 1<sup>st</sup> base (1-3 steps)
    - Get set facing 1<sup>st</sup>, 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
  - Ball to the outfield
    - Come in and “pivot” to watch runner touch first, be ready to move on to 2<sup>nd</sup>
- Runner on first – position “B” (between 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>)
  - Ball to the infield – stay close to watch play at 2<sup>nd</sup> or 1<sup>st</sup>
    - Find a position to watch lead runner and play at 1<sup>st</sup>
    - If it looks like a potential double play:
      - pivot to watch 2<sup>nd</sup> base
      - Make the first call while taking a step towards 1st to create an angle
      - set and watch for call at 1st
  - Ball to the outfield – move inside to watch runners and outfielders
  - Be ready for steals – move in towards pitcher to create angle
- Everything else – position “C” (between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>)
  - Ball to the infield – stay back for play at 3<sup>rd</sup>, or else move towards pitcher for play elsewhere
    - Most hits, move in towards pitcher to create angle
    - If it looks like a potential double play, move towards 3rd base to create a better angle
  - Ball to the outfield - move inside to watch runners and outfielders
- Appeals on a checked swing
  - No set guideline on how far– it is your judgment if the batter “struck at” the ball
  - Your response is “Yes, he went” (with an Out signal), or “No, he did not” (with a Safe signal)
  - Do not offer until asked – this is an appeal



# 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 1<sup>st</sup> 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”)
- Appeal: Batter checks swing, you call ball and catcher wants you to verify
  - Point to base umpire with left and, ask “[Name], did he go?”
    - If “Yes, he went”, reply “then that’s a strike”, signal strike, and adjust count
    - If “No, he did not”, reply “then that’s a ball”, no signal, and count stands



# 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 1<sup>st</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> 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 1<sup>st</sup> 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 1<sup>st</sup>**
  - Ground ball: clear catcher and move 3-5 feet up 3<sup>rd</sup> base line
    - Watch for interference/obstruction, pulled foot, ball out of play
    - Be ready to cover 3<sup>rd</sup> 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 3<sup>rd</sup> for angle, and get set for a call
  - Fly ball: clear catcher and move 3-5 feet up 3<sup>rd</sup> base line
    - Create angle to see catch, come set before, make the call as needed
    - If base hit, be ready to cover 3<sup>rd</sup> base as above
    - Be ready to follow runner home (call from fair territory, between pitching mound and home; create angle to throw and runner)
- **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 3<sup>rd</sup> 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 3<sup>rd</sup> out versus runner scoring
    - Forced 3<sup>rd</sup> out, run does not score
    - Non-force, runs count if scored before 3<sup>rd</sup> 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 1<sup>st</sup> base line
    - Throw from right field (RF, 1B, some 2B): set 5-6 feet up 3<sup>rd</sup> base line, 3-4 feet in foul territory
- **Steal of home (passed ball)**
  - Get out of the way! Create a triangle of ball, plate, and you (5-10 feet from plate). Be prepared to go to either side of plate
  - Watch for batter interference – batter needs to vacate box on a play at the plate
  - Watch for runner interference – runner needs to slide or attempt to avoid (if defender has the ball)

# Key Minors rules

- Ball, strike, hit-by-pitch
- Fair, foul, foul tip
- Steals, Leaving early, & overrunning 1<sup>st</sup> base
- Interference, Obstruction, and Train Wrecks
- Bunts, Infield fly, Stealing home
- Ball out of play
- 5-run rule & Time limits
- Batting out of order



# 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 – 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 Minors. Ducking without moving arms is NOT a swing.
    - On a bunt, a "swing" is any **attempt** to hit the ball
      - Bat does NOT have to be pulled back to be "checked" (unlike softball).
        - » If the bat is held still, or dropped out of the way, that's not an attempt
- Hit-By-Pitch
  - If hit in strike zone, it's a strike!
  - If hit while swinging, it's a strike!
  - Everything else is a HBP, with base
    - Yes, even if it bounces
    - Batter is supposed to try to get out of the way, but be reasonable, this is Minors
  - Hands are NOT part of the bat (ie, can be HBP or strike)

# Fair, Foul, Foul-tip

- Short of 1<sup>st</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> 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 1<sup>st</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> 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 (steal).
  - Foul-tip that is caught for a 3<sup>rd</sup> strike is an out. (Remember, if not caught, it is just a foul ball)
- Dropped 3<sup>rd</sup> strike
  - In Minors, a dropped 3<sup>rd</sup> strike is still a strikeout. Runner may NOT attempt to run to 1<sup>st</sup>.

# Steals, Leaving Early, and 1<sup>st</sup> base

- Steals:
  - Runners can steal any base on any pitch (subject to leaving early)
    - Stealing home, delayed steal, stealing on throw to pitcher are all legal
    - Taking extra bases on an overthrow is legal
  - Be wary of Batter Interference
    - Batter must vacate batter's box for play on steal of home
      - Batter is out if 2 outs and runner stealing home; otherwise, runner is out.
    - Batter blocking catcher's throw to 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup>
      - Batter is out
        - » Jumping up, or stepping out of the box and blocking catcher is an out; wild swing that hits or interferes with catcher is an out
        - » Give some leeway for a batter "acting like a batter" in the box (ie, batter standing still for a throw to 2<sup>nd</sup> is probably not interference)
  - Be wary of Umpire interference
    - If umpire interferes with Catcher's throw, then runner is returned to prior base (unless runner was out)
  - Per Supplemental rule 4.4.9, a runner returning to 3<sup>rd</sup> base at the end of a play cannot advance on a return throw to the pitcher.
  - Per Supplemental rule 4.4.10, the ball must pass the catcher to steal home. (But can steal on an overthrow back to the pitcher)
- 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 3<sup>rd</sup> 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 the fielder's glove
    - This is an Appeal play (if appeal is made, runner is declared out)
- Overrunning or missing 1<sup>st</sup> base
  - Batter is entitled to overrun and safely return to 1<sup>st</sup> base
    - Batter can safely turn right or left, so long as returning directly to 1<sup>st</sup> base.
    - Batter is liable to be put out if an attempt to advance is made
  - Batter is considered to have touched 1<sup>st</sup> 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 1<sup>st</sup>)

# Interference, Obstruction, and Train Wrecks

## Definitions

- **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
- **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
- **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.

# 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 1<sup>st</sup> base.
    - If directly behind a fielder who misses, runner is safe
    - Applicable even when runner is standing on base (except for Infield Fly)
  - 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.
      - 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
      - Anywhere else, runner is safe
  - Runner blocks defender's path to a thrown ball
    - Intentional/unintentional as per above
    - Runner is safe on a base, and does NOT have to vacate to allow a fielder access. (But can be out if hit by the ball)
  - Batter blocks catcher making a throw on a runner
    - Batter is out and runner returns to base
  - 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)
- Defense / Umpire
  - Catcher blocks batter's ability to hit the ball (ie, glove is hit by the bat)
    - Batter is awarded 1<sup>st</sup> 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 1<sup>st</sup> base, ball is dead
    - Behind defenders – no penalty

# Obstruction

- Obstruction is any illegal act by the defense that blocks the offense's ability to run the bases.

- 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, 2<sup>nd</sup> baseman standing on the base, watching the outfielders chase a ball



**Obstruction!**

- 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 obstruction by the first baseman straddling the bag on a throw. If the runner has to slow down, it is obstruction.
  - Watch for obstruction during the "Little League dance" between 3<sup>rd</sup> base and home.
    - If the runner's path back to 3<sup>rd</sup> is blocked, runner is awarded home.
- 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 advance because of the 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

# Bunts, Infield Fly, and Stealing Home

- Bunts are LEGAL in Minors baseball
  - Be wary of Batter/Runner Interference
    - Catcher has the right to the batted ball
      - Batter blocking the catcher is Out (runners return)
      - Give some leeway for a batter “acting like a batter” in clearing the batter’s box
        - » I.e., a batter simply running up the line may be safe with minor contact
    - Catcher has the right to a clear throw
      - Batter is safe if hit in the “runner’s lane”
      - Batter is out if hit by a catchable ball while NOT in the runner’s lane
      - Catcher must make a throw for interference to be called
  - A “swing” is any **attempt** to hit the ball
    - Bat does NOT have to be pulled back to be “checked” (unlike softball).
      - If the bat is held still, or dropped out of the way, that’s not an attempt
  - A bunted ball that hits the plate and bounces up to hit a motionless bat a second time is a Foul (if accidental)
    - A second hit where the bat is moving is an Out
- Infield Fly
  - Applies with runners on 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>, or bases loaded, and less than 2 out
  - Ball must be sufficiently high (ie, a pop-up), and catchable with “ordinary effort”
    - Remember, this is Minors, so be reasonable about “ordinary”
  - Batter is declared out (“Infield Fly! Batter is out”)
  - Runners may stay put or advance at their peril (tag-ups apply if ball is caught)
  - Runners hit by an Infield Fly are safe if standing on a base (runner is out if hit by fly and not on base)
- Stealing home:
  - Stealing home is LEGAL in Minors baseball.
    - Per Supplemental rule 4.4.9 in NLLL Supplemental rules stealing home can only occur on passed balls, overthrows or plays on other runners.
  - Be wary of Batter interference
    - Batter must vacate the batter’s box to allow a play at the plate.
      - If 2 outs, batter is out; if less than 2 outs, runner is out
  - Be wary of Runner interference
    - Runner must Slide OR *attempt* to avoid a defender who has the ball
  - Be wary of Obstruction
    - Catcher or pitcher must have ball in hand and be in position before blocking the plate
    - On a throw back to 3<sup>rd</sup> base, 3<sup>rd</sup> baseman must have ball in hand and be in position before blocking 3<sup>rd</sup> base
      - Award would advance the runner to home!

# 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 2<sup>nd</sup>.
    - 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 3<sup>rd</sup>.
      - Example: Relay throw from SS on double-play attempt, ball goes into the stands, batter/runner gets 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup>, 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.
  - 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.
    - ie, 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.
  - Extra innings do not have a 5-run rule.
- Game time is limited to 2 – 3 hours
  - No new innings start after 2 hours
    - The “next” inning starts immediately after 3<sup>rd</sup> out is made.
      - So, if the 5<sup>th</sup> inning ends at 1:58 into a game, you can go 6.
    - In case of tie, extra innings are allowed, up to 3 hours
    - No new innings start after 8:15 (non-lighted field)
  - After 3 hours, the game is ended as per rules 4.11 and 4.12 (this can be tricky, so check the green book)
    - 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.