

North Lake Little League

Sluggers – 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 (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
- Sluggers is about helping kids **learn** while having **fun** playing the game of baseball.

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!
 - YOU decide what the call is, but you can ask for help with rules, what your partner saw, etc.
- This is Sluggers Little League – we want to do our best, and get it right for the kids

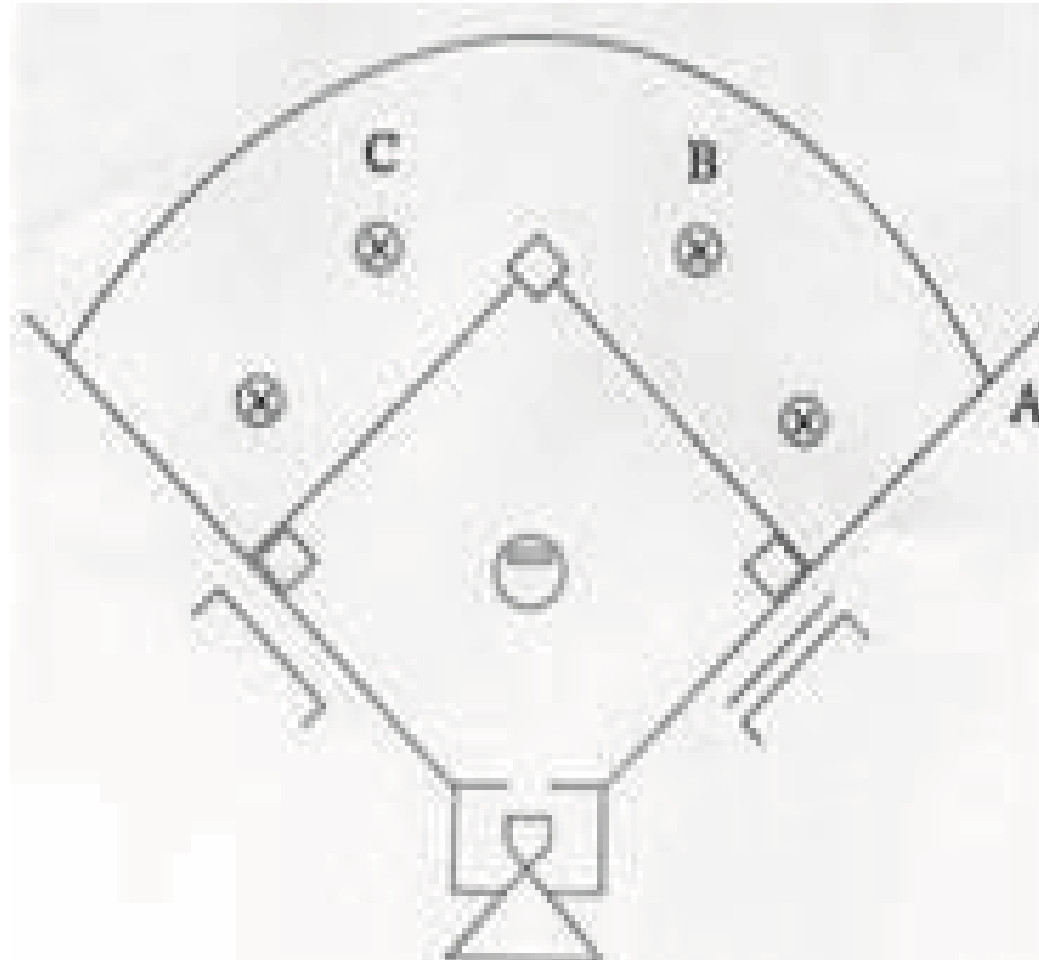
Role and Responsibilities

- Base Umpire Only in Sluggers Division - Watch for Safety concerns
 - All Safe/Out Calls on all Bases
 - Catch/No-catch at all positions
 - Ground rule doubles/homerun calls at cones (150')
 - Swinging strike count - 3 swinging strikes and batter is out (no called strikes/balls)
 - Pitch Count – 6 pitches maximum unless foul ball(s) occur.
 - Interference, obstructions, tag-ups
 - 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 sluggers– 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
- 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!

Position Details Below:



Key Sluggers rules

- No Balls, called strikes or hit by pitch
- Fair, foul, foul tip
- Coach pitching only
- 6 pitches max unless foul ball on last pitch(s)
- 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*

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 including the 15’arc area in front of home plate
 - 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: Base umpire yells “Foul” and points where it went out. Ball is dead.
 - Fair: Base umpire points fair, but does not verbalize
- 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)

Coach Pitching

- After 6 pitched balls, the batter is out unless last pitch(s) are foul balls
 - Keep swinging strike count and announce it, no non-swinging called strikes.
 - 3 swinging strikes and the batter is out
 - Hit-by-pitch is a ball, no base is awarded
 - If 6th (or later) pitch, batter is out.
 - If 6th pitch is not hit, batter is out
 - *If 6th pitch is fouled, at-bat continues until completed
- 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
 - Coach pitchers shall be considered part of the field, the ball remains live after incidental contact (umpire judgement), if contact is purposeful in the umpires judgement the batter/runner shall be deemed out and all runners return to bases occupied prior to occurrence.

Leaving Early

- 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 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 infield unless runners were already advancing on throw from the outfield.
- Runners CAN advance on other overthrows in the field (ie, plays at any base) until pitcher near the mound has possession of the ball.

- 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 Sluggers, 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.
 - This will be common at Slugger levels. Also more common than Interference
 - 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

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 Sluggers, 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 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 Sluggers. (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.
- 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.
 - 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.
- Ie, 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 No New Innings after 1:20 or 6 Innings, whichever occurs first.
- The “next” inning starts immediately after 3rd out is made.
 - So, if the 5th inning ends at 1:28 into a game, the game is over
- If game is tied after no new inning time limit or 6 innings the game ends in a tie.