

What You'll Learn Today

You'll learn a (very) condensed version of the same curriculum that is taught at Professional Umpire School. Umpire School is typically a five-week, six-day-a-week course, so we can't cover everything, but we will focus on the basics. We will be teaching MLB mechanics and rules...NHFS exceptions will be covered separately.

- Working the Plate, Positioning, Strike Zone and Mechanics
- The Two-Man System – WE WILL DEMONSTRATE AND DRILL
- Communication
- Rules Basics including, overthrows, awards, obstruction, interference, balks, appeals,
- TIMING!!!!



THANKS TO ISA, CRAIG LUTZ FROM APPLETON LITTLE LEAGUE AND FOX CITIES OFFICIALS' ASSOCIATION FOR THEIR SUPPORT. THIS CLINIC IS NOT POSSIBLE WITHOUT THEM!

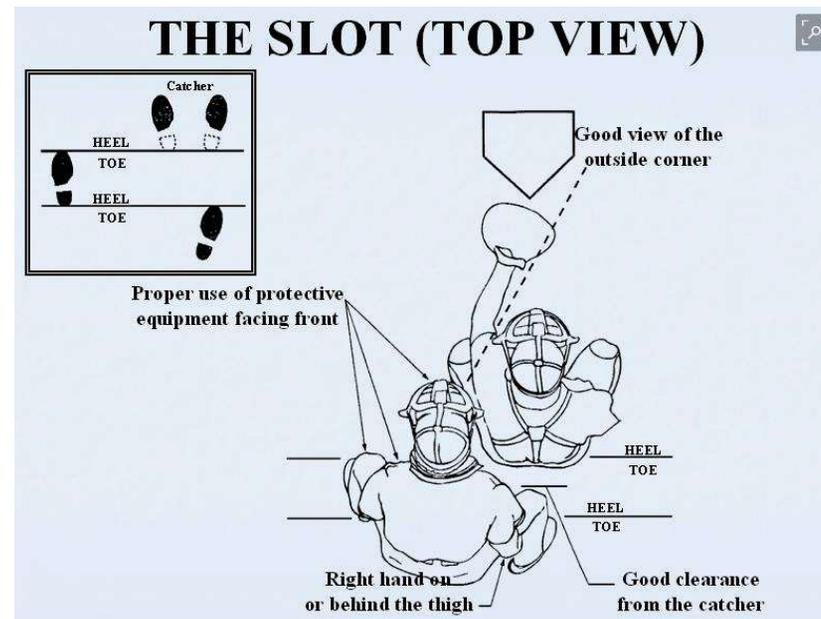
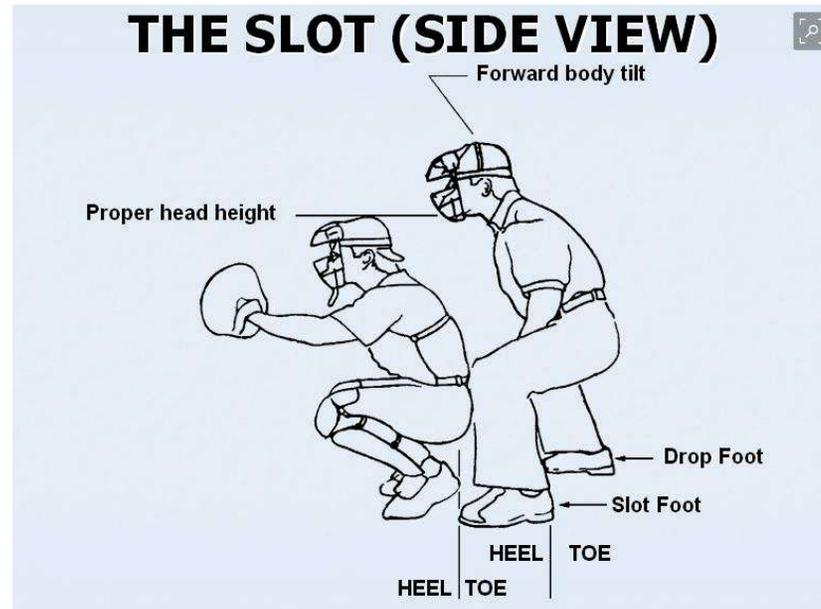
Look the Part

- Gray pants
 - Shin guards worn under your pants.
 - Buy your plate pants a size larger to accommodate the shin guards and to ensure your pants don't split.
 - Can purchase pants specifically designed to be worn with shin guards
 - Wear dark, tall socks
- Blue (Navy or Powder) umpire shirt or blue pullover
 - Available at Gerry Davis Sports, Ump Attire or Play it Again Sports
 - “Batting Practice” jackets also work well
- Chest protector is worn beneath shirt or pullover
- Solid blue, sized hat.
 - Always wear a hat (bill facing FORWARD) under your mask unless it's a hockey-style mask...then no hat
- Black umpire shoes...make sure they're clean and polished
- A (wide), black leather belt. Ball bag if you're working the plate.
 - Don't wear a ball bag on the bases
- Appropriate-sized brush. Always brush the plate with your butt facing the pitcher, not the spectators. Keep your brush in your back pocket or in your ball bag for easy access.
- Indicator (it's not a “clicker”)
- Sunglasses are fine...if it's sunny.
- Cup. I don't need to stress this, right?

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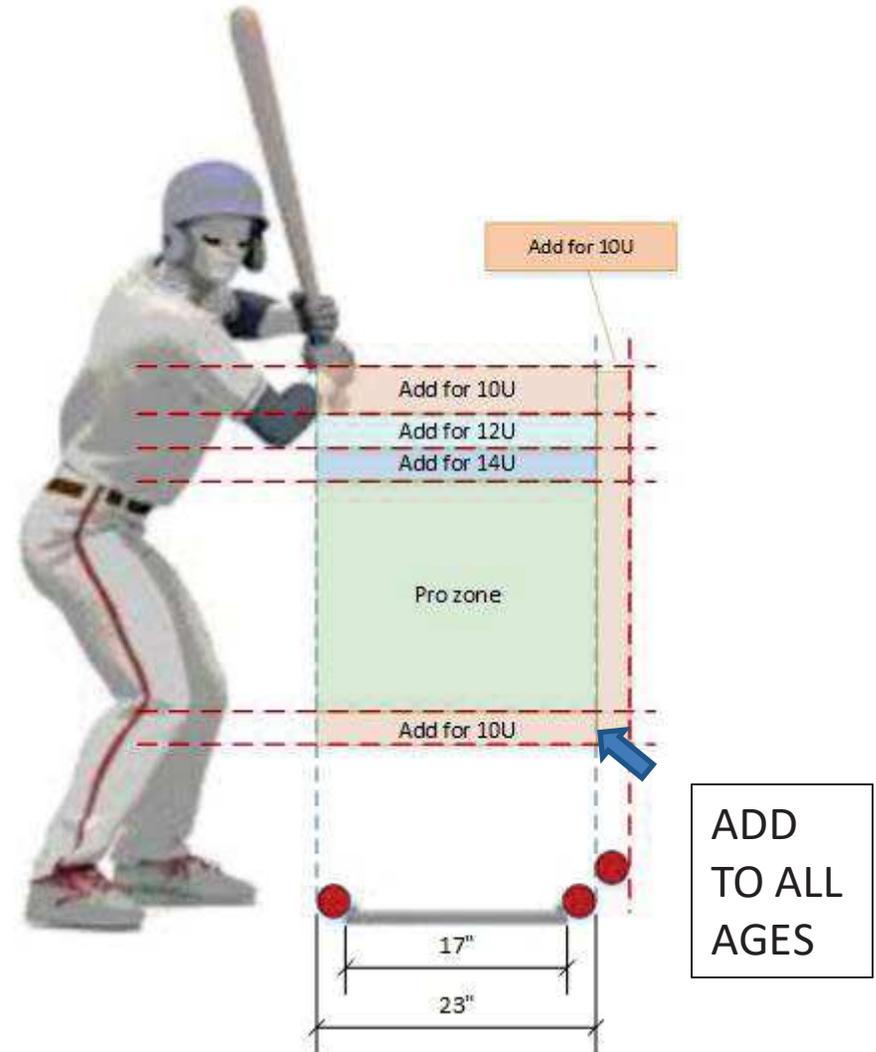
Working the Plate

- Your chin should be at the top of the strike zone
- Your head should be in “the slot” – the area between the catcher and the batter.
- From this position, you should be able to see the entire plate – including the outside corner.
- Your head positioning is the most important. How you get there is up to you:
 - Box (recommended and shown)
 - Scissors
 - Knee
- Be still. Don’t drift with the pitch. Lock into position and follow the ball with your eyes, not your head.



The Strike Zone

- Think Strikes!
- Home plate is 17" wide on every baseball field in America but we must adjust our zone to the level of play. Setting that standard early (and sticking with it) is critical.
- The pitch is a strike until it proves it's a ball.
- At higher levels, how the catcher presents the ball makes a difference on a close pitch. Let's talk about what that means.



Timing

- Timing is EVERYTHING as an umpire.
 - 95% of incorrect calls, at every level of baseball, is due to bad timing.
- Timing is simply letting the pitch happen (and plays on the bases), processing it in and your brain and THEN making your call. It sounds easy but it's not. You need to work on it and help each other.
- At first, good timing feels like an eternity. It's not!

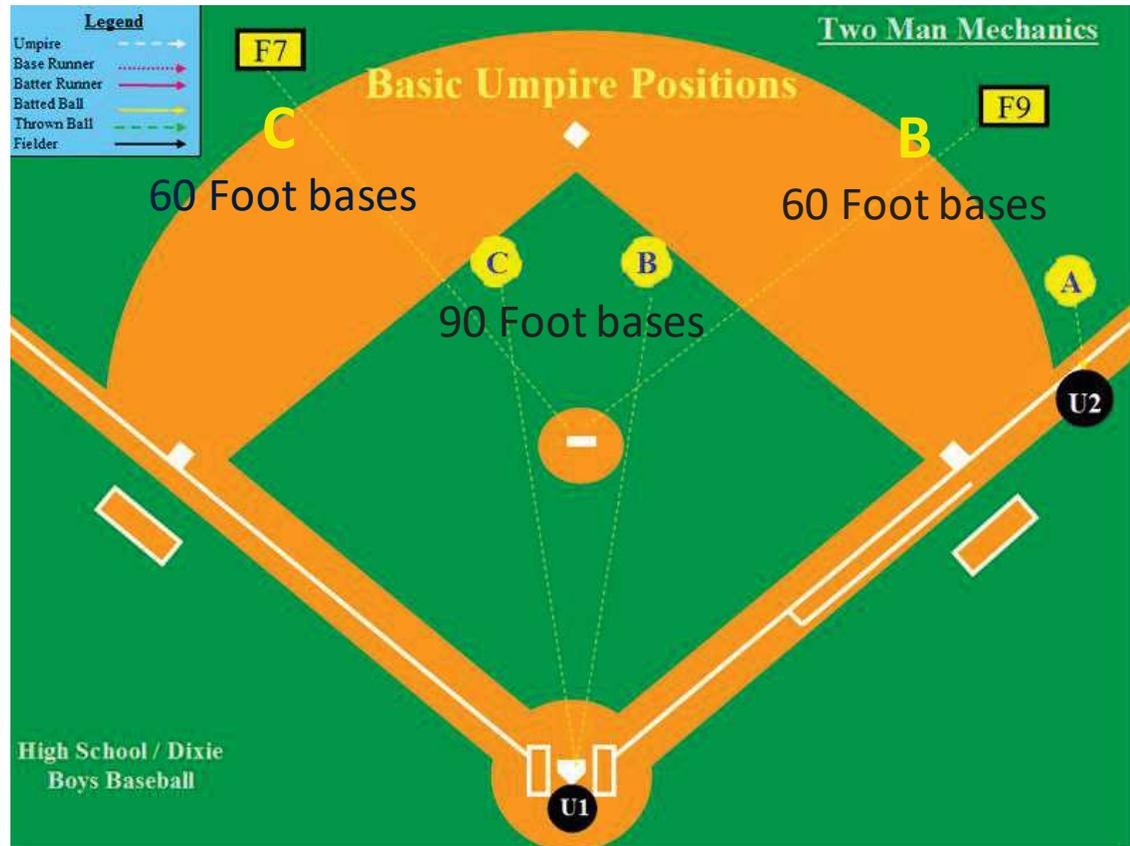
Plate Mechanics

- Keep it simple...no need to showboat
- Strike is right hand...either up into a fist (like you're pounding on a door) or a quick, snappy point out the right. Pick one and stick with it.
- Your vocal call and your signal should happen at the same time
- There is NEVER a signal for a ball. Simply say "Ball". Do not point, do not say "outside" or "inside". Just "Ball". Stay down an extra second on balls. If you pop up, you will appear unsure.
- Strikeouts. Swinging third is just a simple strike call (same as a regular strike). Called third can be a bit more energetic, but please don't show players up. A quick STRIKE THREE and an "arm pull" is fine. We will demonstrate.
- Check swings. If you think a batter offered at the pitch, point at the bat with your left hand while saying "YES" or "HE WENT" and follow that with your normal strike call.
 - If you are unsure, point to your partner and say loudly, "Joe, DID HE GO"?
 - Partner answers immediately with a "yes" and a strike signal or a "no" with a safe sign.
 - DO NOT use your partner as a crutch! This is the plate umpire's call.
 - You DO NOT appeal if you call the pitch a strike!
- Verbally give the count every three or four pitches while indicating with your fingers. Left hand is strikes, right hand is balls.
 - Never say "Full Count"...say "3 and 2"
 - DO NOT TRUST the scoreboard. Keeping the count is your responsibility!

Plate Mechanics (continued)

- Ball four is just that, say “Ball Four”. Do not point toward first base. Your partner may think it’s an appeal or people may think you are calling a strike.
- Hit batter is a dead ball. Call time (both hands over head). If it’s close, you can say “it hit him”.
- Foul Ball is a loud call of FOUL with your hands over head, followed by a point toward foul territory.
 - You **do not** need to call foul on obvious foul balls...just put a new ball in play.
- Fair Ball is simply a point toward fair territory (you can repeatedly point if it’s close).
 - NEVER say “FAIR BALL”...just point
- Time out is simply both hands overhead and yelling “Time”. You do NOT have to call time after every play. In fact, you should keep the play “live” whenever possible.
- When time is called, ALWAYS put the ball back in play by pointing at the pitcher and saying “Play”
- Do not hold your mask by the strap – always try and remove it with your LEFT hand. PRACTICE
- On pop-up foul balls around home plate, follow the movement of the catcher instead of looking up. He will take you to the ball and assure you don’t get in his way.
- When the ball is hit, you always have a place to be:
 - Ground ball with nobody on, follow the runner up the first base line
 - Ground ball with runners on, start drifting up toward third base. **If a runner goes from 1st to 3rd on a BATTED ball, the play at 3rd belongs to the PLATE umpire. We will review.**
 - Fair foul calls, you need to be straddling the appropriate foul line
 - Potential play at the plate, clear the bat and get your angle

- 2-Man System



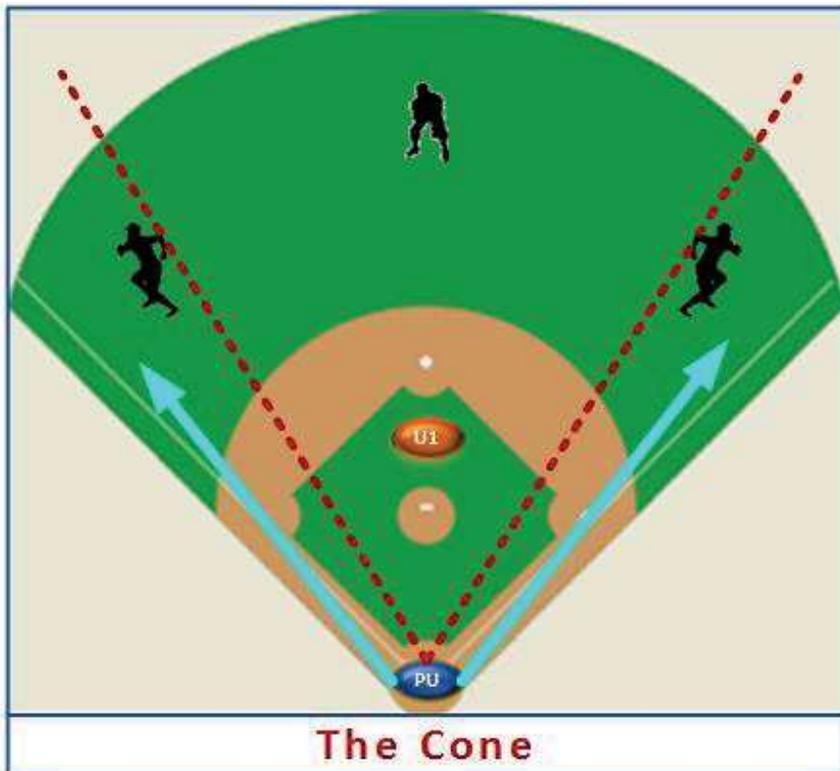
- A: Nobody on Base
- B: Runner on First
- C: All Other Cases

Note the different starting position for B and C for 60- and 90-foot bases

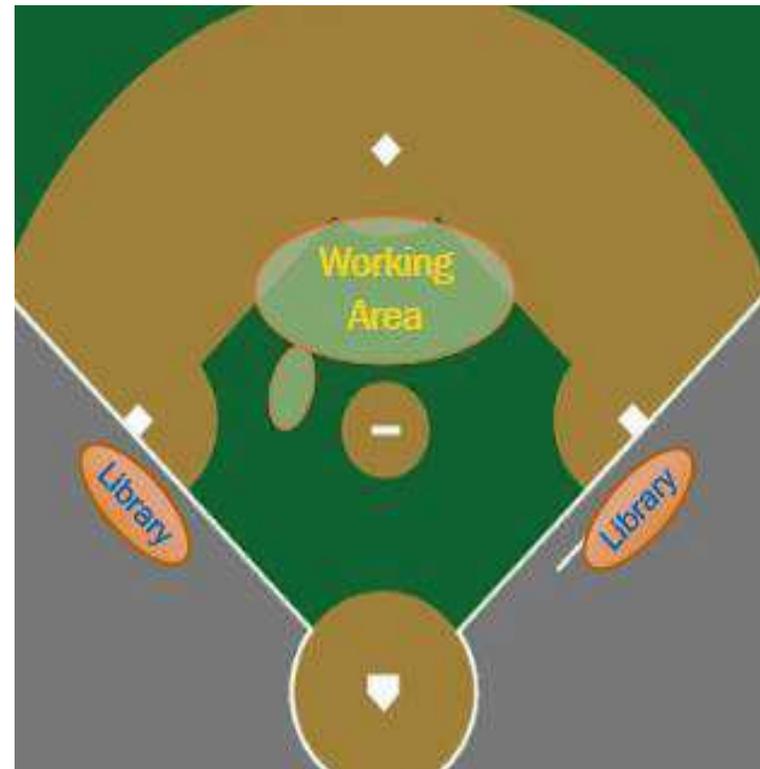
Exception: If all infielders are playing well “in”, you can move behind them.

Positioning for various scenarios. Use these as a guide but most of all use common sense. Put your self in a position where the play will likely be.

Fly Ball Responsibility with Runners on



The Working Area



Plays at First (Nobody On)

- You want to be at as close to a 90-degree angle from the throw as possible
- You want to be 15-18 feet from the base (if you're too close, the play can and will "blow up" on you).
- You want to be perfectly still...body and eyes.
- Timing! Let the play happen. Process it. Call it.
- The intensity of your call should match the closeness of the play.
 - No need to "bang out" a runner on an obvious call.
- Safe is a crisp call with your arms parallel to the ground.
- Out is just like a strike call. Never, ever, ever use your thumb.
- On safe or out calls, your voice call should coincide with your mechanic.
- There may be times (e.g., a swipe tag) where you need to ask for help. Don't hesitate to ask. This is why it's critical the plate umpire follow the play up the first base line when there are no runners on.
 - The mechanic is the same as a check swing...a point and "Joe, did he tag him?"

Plays at second and third

- Work to get the best angle for the play. It's more important to have a good angle than it is to be close to it.
- **Always keep your chest to the ball**
- Get in a good set position (e.g., hands on knees), be still and let the play happen.
- Again, timing is critical. Take your time and make sure the fielder-maintained control of the ball (on a tag play)
 - If unsure, say “show me the ball”
- Remember the play isn't over after the call. Be prepared to move for another call.
- Always RUN/JOG back to your proper position at the conclusion of the play. The game should never be held up for the umpire.

Fly balls (Nobody On)

- With nobody on, all fly balls are the responsibility of the home plate umpire....EXCEPT:
 - Fly ball to right that takes the right fielder toward the foul line
 - Trap catch to first or second basemen where the base umpire has a better (side) angle.
 - Fly ball to right field where he's coming straight in and it's a possible trap/catch.
 - SACRIFICE DISTANCE FOR AN ANGLE!
- At this level, the base umpire should "go out" rarely (almost NEVER) given the proximity of players to your starting position
- The home plate umpire will come out from behind the plate, remove his mask and run to the pitcher's mound area and be fully stopped before the catch.
 - If catch is obvious, just signal out. If it's close (e.g., close to a trap) be more vocal "THAT'S A CATCH!"
 - If not caught, he will signal (and say) "no catch" (safe signal) if it's not obvious. Once the ball is on the ground, he should return behind the plate, clear the bat and await a possible play at the plate.
- The base umpire will run (inside) and pivot and follow the runner, watching him touch every base and looking for obstruction.

Fly balls (w/runners on base)

- With runners on base, fly ball responsibility belongs to the base umpire EXCEPT on fly balls where fair/foul is a question. Those are the responsibility of the home plate umpire.
 - If the home plate umpire's call, he MUST be straddling the fair/foul line.
- Same mechanics. Out or safe mechanic with a corresponding vocal call
- Do not chase the ball to the outfield
 - You will take yourself out of position for ensuing calls.
 - Improve your angle and be stationary for the call.

Pre-Game/Line-up Exchange

- Arrive on time, start on time. “On time” is at least 15 minutes before the start of the game, dressed and ready to go. Let the Home coach know you’re there and be on the field five minutes before first pitch
- Always have a quick pre-game with your partner, especially if you haven’t worked together. Review signals and USE THEM
- Enter (and leave) the field with your partner
- Meet with the Head Coaches at home plate before EVERY game
 - Introduce yourself to each coach. Ask them to call you by name (not “Blue”) and always address them as “Coach”. Familiarity breeds civility!
 - Review your expectations of the coaches:
 - They are responsible for the behavior of their players, assistant coaches and parents.
 - Talk about the strike zone you’ll call appropriate for the level. Manage expectations.
 - Mutual Purpose and Mutual Respect
 - Go over the ground rules.
 - Talk about anything unusual, e.g., bad weather coming, etc...

Other Things to Cover

- Pre-Game
- Mutual Purpose, Mutual Respect. We are all out there for the same reason – to create a safe, fair and enjoyable experience for the players
- Pace of Play. (warm up pitches, courtesy runners, making sure catchers are ready, players hustling on and off the field)
- Overthrows
- Plays at the Plate
- Interference and Obstruction
 - Three-foot lane
- Run downs/Obstruction when the play is being made on the runner
- Balks *
- Foul Tip vs. Foul Ball
- Infield Fly Rule
- Time Plays
- Appeals on missed bases or bases left early *
- Weather/Lightning *
- Dealing with unruly fans / coaches / players
- Common Sense and Fair Play!
- You are going to make mistakes.
- Hustle and be engaged.

Communication

- Talk to your partner...be engaged
- Use signals (the scoreboard is usually wrong!) to remind each other of the situation. This should be subtle.
 - Number of outs
 - Positioning– point where you are going once the ball is hit
 - Infield Fly Rule
 - Time Play reminders.
- Keep the game moving, encourage hustle by the players and lead by example. Your enthusiasm will be contagious.
- You do not need to go talk to your partner between every inning. If you have something important to say, then go in. Otherwise, the home plate umpire should be on the foul line about halfway and the base umpire should be in shallow right field.
- You are going to make mistakes. Don't be afraid to ask your partner for help or if you're unclear on a rule. Your job is to get the play right.
- ALWAYS, ALWAYS, ALWAYS **Make a call**. Not making a call is not an option. If you have to guess, then guess and if you guess wrong, get with your partner and correct it.

Plate umpire responsibilities

1 PUT BALL IN PLAY.

2 Call pitch ball, strike, foul, fair, foul tip, hit batter, drop third strike

3 React to hit. Ground ball, move down the line behind the runner. With no one on., Call running lane violation
Obstruction, Interference

Help with tag only if asked

Help pulled foot or miss base only if asked

Fly balls move in the direction of the ball at angle.

10 to 15 feet in front of the plate.

Call infield fly, Catch no catch

You have tag up if someone is on third

Watch for obstruction and interference.

With a base runner. Ground or fly ball. Move 10 to 15 feet down the third base line., Stay in foul territory

Watch tag up on third with catch

Watch for obstruction and interference

4 Stay home watch for all timing plays. Know if runners touch home plate before the third out., Watch for force slide rule

Watch for blocking home, Adjust for play at home

5 In a pickle move down 1st or 3rd to help.

Once close to base let your partner know that you are there and you take the call into that base.

Remember home plate is your main responsibility .

* Watching runners touch third and home, can help with other bases after. Call only if asked for an appeal.

* Make a mental note where runners are at the time of a throw.

Need to know if the ball goes out of play to award proper base.

Base umpire responsibilities

1 Help with fair foul. Only when on the line.

2 Help with trouble balls. Infield fly, diving catch or no catch, line drive at the dirt.

3 React to hit Set up for ground ball 90 angle

Come into middle once ball is in the grass

Make sure you get your touches First and Second.

Obstruction and interference, Force slide rule

Once in the middle stay in the middle.

You have all calls in the infield STAY WITH THE BALL. Your partner will help call Obstruction, interference,

force side rule and base awards.

In a pickle you have all calls until the plate umpire gets into position to help.

With a base hit go to middle and get in a position to follow the runner. Very important if there is a tag.

Try to get into a slot between fielder and runner. Remember you still have all calls unless the plate umpire helps at third.

Steals and pick offs, you have them all. This can be tricky. Plate umpire can help. Take a ½ second and

look at him, if you're not sure. If his hand is on his chest, he may have info. you want.

Always keep your eyes on the ball, someone can be thrown out.

Unless there is time out. Do not turn your back to the ball.

Do not call time to quick. There could be more plays going on.

Once you call time, that's it.

Do not overuse time outs. Have a reason for someone to call time.

Once time is called nothing can

happen until the pitcher with the ball is on the plate, batter and catcher are in their box and the plate

umpire says play and points to the pitcher.