

WORKING THE BASES

A former college umpire and high school baseball coach was asked a question about umpiring, now that he was a coach.

"On your game today, you will have one umpire who is very good and the other who is below average. You get to pick who works the plate and who works the bases. Where do you put the umpires?"

He responded without hesitation, and if you think he put the better umpire behind the plate, you would be totally wrong.

"I want the weaker umpire behind the plate, because he will miss pitches, but probably not that many more in critical times than the veteran," he said. "On the other hand, I only get 21 or 27 outs on offense, and if he misses one on the bases, then it becomes a big deal."

That anecdote illustrates the importance of working the bases. While you won't have as many decisions as the plate umpire, your decisions take on a much greater magnitude.

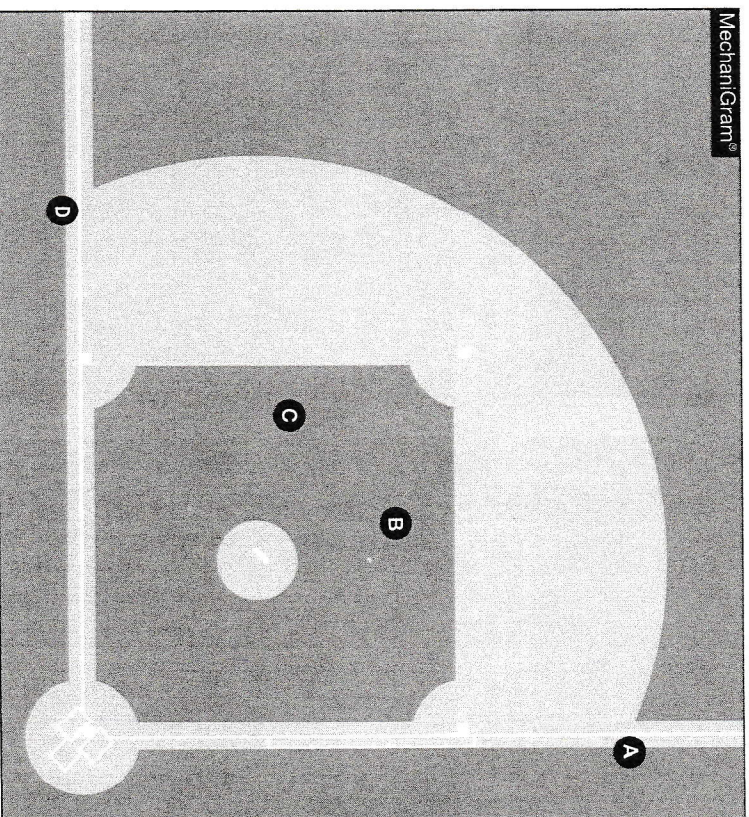
Therefore, it is imperative that you put as much or even more effort into working the bases as you do the plate. Working the bases consists of starting in the right position, knowing where to go when the ball is put into play, knowing what plays you are responsible for and calling the out-of-the-ordinary plays like a fielder forcing you into foul territory or a pulled foot/swipe tag.

Basic Positioning

The base umpire will work from one of four basic positions in the two-

and three-umpire systems. Where exactly you start depends on runner configuration and that is covered in detail in the later chapters of the book. For now, we are just describing the positions and showing them in the MechanGrams.

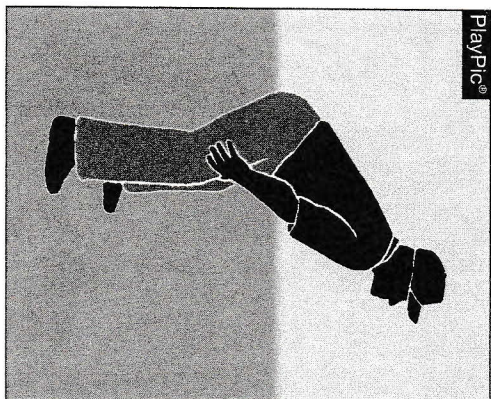
The "A" position. The "A" position is in foul territory, about 10-to-15 feet behind the first baseman, but generally no closer than 15 feet behind first base. That position allows you to get into the infield to make a play and take a runner beyond first base without interfering with the fielder. Remember, on a fly ball in that area or foul territory, the first baseman will be tracking the ball, not watching you. It is your responsibility to watch the fielder and get out of his way.



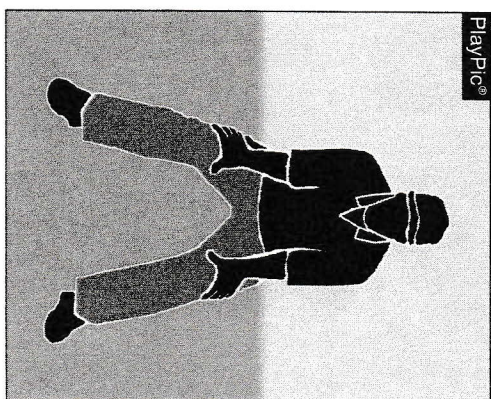
Depending on the runner configuration and number of umpires, each base umpire should start each play in one of the four basic positions shown.

The “B” and “C” positions.
 The “B” and “C” positions are mirror images of each other in the middle of the infield. The umpire should stand halfway between the mound and second base. The “B” position is on the first-base side of the mound, and the “C” position is on the third-base side.

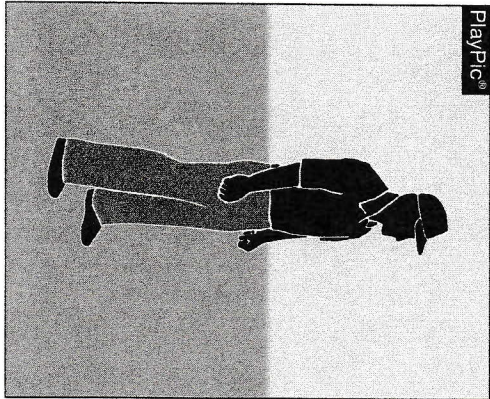
In three-person mechanics, there will be situations where the umpire in the middle of the field should work in the “deep B” or “deep C” positions. Instead of being halfway between the mound and second base, the umpire is at the edge of the infield grass. The “D” position



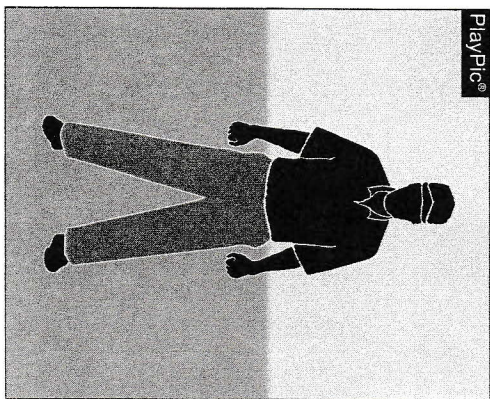
PlayPic® Hands-on-knees set profile view



PlayPic® Hands-on-knees set front view



Standing set profile view



Standing set front view

is in foul territory about 10- to -12 feet behind the third baseman, but generally no closer than 1 1/2 feet behind third base. It is only used in the three-umpire system. The same principles of clearing the fielder apply as in the “A” position.

Stances. In all positions on the bases, umpires can work in the standing set with your feet comfortably apart at shoulder width. However, once the pitcher engages the pitching plate, base umpires should go to a more ready position by going hands-on-knees set.

A hands-on-knees set is where you flex at the knees and “sit down” into your stance, leaning forward slightly, bending at the waist. In a good hands-on-knees set, you should be able to look forward comfortably; if you bend too far, you will have to strain your neck muscles to avoid looking down at the ground.

Play Responsibility
 The back section of this book will take you through the specific responsibilities that each umpire is responsible for once the ball is batted into play. But the method for handling some plays is consistent throughout a game and are best described here.

Balks. With a runner on base, the base umpire must be aware of the pitcher trying to gain an illegal advantage. That is why it is important for the base umpire to be in the hands-on-knees set when the pitcher engages the pitching plate. All attention should be on the pitcher.

Although the plate and base umpire share responsibility on balks, the base umpire should concentrate on the pitcher coming to a complete stop and right-handed pitchers breaking their front knees before the jump turn. While it’s common for people to think the base umpire should call the left-handed pitcher’s step to first, that call belongs to the plate umpire.

When a balk is called the proper mechanic is to call time and then point at the pitcher and say, “That’s a balk.” Once a balk is called, it is OK to

explain to the coach or pitcher what he did if he asks, but do not demonstrate.

Steal of second. An umpire in the “B” position (two umpires) or “C” position (three umpires) will have responsibility for the steal of second.

By starting out in the proper position, you can typically see the runner break for second out of the corner of your eye. Once he is committed to second, take one step backward and open up to the base. Keep your eyes on the ball at the plate because you need to also judge the half swing or be aware where the ball goes if the batter hits it.

Once the catcher throws, let the ball pass you and then turn and be square to the play at second base. You can remain in a standing-set position, although going to a hands-on-knees set is also permissible.

Just as the plate umpire does with plays at the plate, it is important to see the fielder apply the tag and the runner touch the base. If the runner has beaten the tag, it doesn’t matter whether or not the fielder has the ball and the runner should be called safe.

If there is a tag before the runner arrives, make sure the fielder retains control of the ball before calling the out. It is OK to ask the fielder to show you the ball before making the out call. Do not ask the fielder to see if the ball if you’re already sure the runner is safe. That conveys lack of confidence in your decision. You should only ask to see the ball if the tag was properly applied but you cannot see it in the fielder’s glove.

If the ball is on the ground, many umpires indicate that by pointing and saying, “He doesn’t have it! Safer!” Keep in mind that the runner cannot overslide at second base, so if he does, he could have beaten the initial tag, but can still be called out for his infraction if tagged.

Steal or third. An umpire starting in the “C” position in the two-umpire system or the “C” or “D” position in the three-umpire system will have responsibility for the steal play at third.

From the “B” or “C” position, you cannot see the runner break from second, so it is important to sneak a quick glance over your right shoulder once the pitcher has committed to pitch. You have time to glance and return your focus to the plate for the half-swing or to see the ball put into play.

If the ball is not put into play, the steal of third is different because the umpire doesn’t have to worry about the throw hitting him. While that is better, it is tougher, because the umpire also cannot get as close to the play. Move toward the plate and get as good of a look as you can to rule on the play.

From the “D” position, the umpire needs only to take a couple of steps toward the play and get a clear look at the play.

Plays at first base from the “A” position. With no runners on base, a ground ball anywhere in the infield (and sometimes even to the right fielder) will result in a play at first base. Here are the keys for those plays.

Ideally, umpires should strive to get a 90-degree angle when taking plays at first base. However, many umpires are overrunning angles and getting too far into fair territory. That is taking them away from being able to see a pulled foot or potential swipe tag.

On many throws to first base that come from within the infield, it is not necessary for the first-base umpire to take more than one or two steps into fair territory in order to have the proper angle.

Get set. Once the first-base umpire has gotten into proper position, it is imperative that he be set before the play occurs. Moving while trying to judge a play greatly reduces the chance of getting that play correct.

It is not required that the umpire have his hands on his knees and be waiting for the play. However, he should be stopped (body completely still) and be focused on the base as the throw is released, unless it is a poor throw.

Poor throws. When a first-base umpire moves in from the foul line and sets up for the play, he should have his head on the ball and his body squared up to the potential play at first base. Once the fielder releases the ball, the umpire needs to determine whether a quality throw is being made to first base.

A quality throw is one that the fielder receiving the ball will stretch directly towards the thrower to receive the ball. A ball that is not a quality throw will take the first baseman off the bag and require the umpire to adjust. Too often, umpires are getting set with their 90-degree angle and then not adjusting when there is a bad throw.

In cases of a poor throw, a “read” step is needed. That step is necessary when the throw takes the fielder’s mitt toward the foul line and enables the umpire to see the first baseman’s foot in relationship to the bag and to observe a potential swipe tag. Many umpires were observed during last season getting set for the initial throw, but then not reacting to a poor throw.

Plays involving ‘pressure’. Umpires should be taking as many plays at first base in fair territory as possible. When the first baseman fields a ground ball and throws to the pitcher covering the bag, the umpire should still strive to remain in fair territory. Getting one or two steps in fair territory will enable the umpire to see the fielder step on the bag and to allow the batter-runner to run straight through the base without colliding with the umpire.

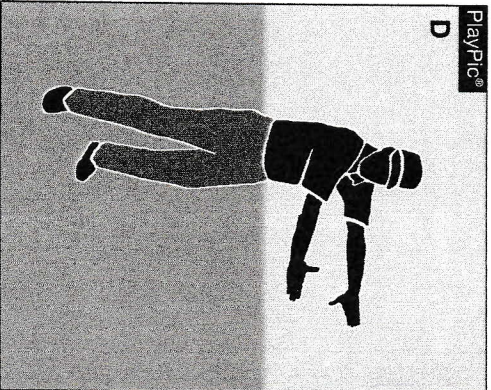
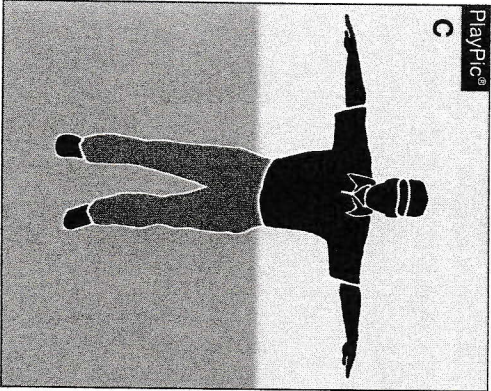
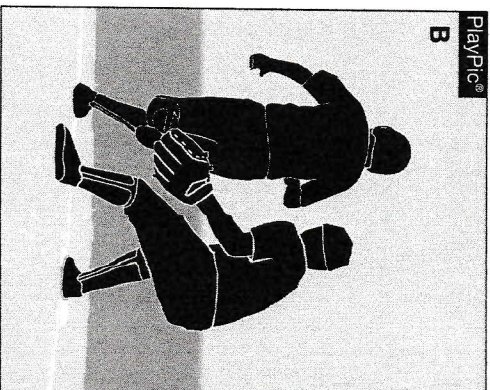
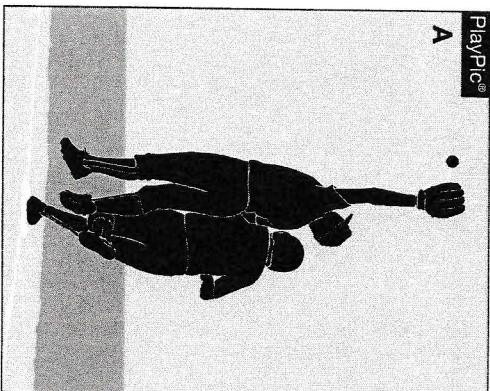
Pitchers are taught to touch the inside half of the bag, and an umpire in foul territory might not be able to see if the pitcher hits the inside corner or misses it entirely as he is making that play.

There are times when an umpire may need to go into foul territory to take a play at first base. A couple of instances are when a second baseman fields the ball going hard to his left or a first baseman fielding the ball deeply off the first base. In both of these instances

an umpire would have to go into foul territory to see the throw while staying out of the throwing lane as to not get hit by a thrown ball.

needed. From that position, the umpire will still be out of the way of the batter-runner running through the base and will also have a look at the fielder’s foot touching the inside of the base. Going too far into foul territory will take away the look at the inside edge of the bag

When an umpire does need to go into foul territory, just taking one or two steps into foul territory is all that is



When the first baseman had to leap for the throw (PlayPic A), the runner was able to reach the bag before the first baseman touched the bag (PlayPic B). The umpire calls the runner safe (PlayPic C) and then signal with a sweep of the arms (PlayPic D) to confirm the fielder was off the base.

and the umpire will not be able to tell whether the base was touched or not. Additionally, being too far foul will force the base umpire to look through the batter-runner's legs, making it difficult to tell when the bag was touched or when the fielder received the ball.

A pulled foot. When a high throw beats a runner to a base but forces the fielder off the base, umpires can indicate

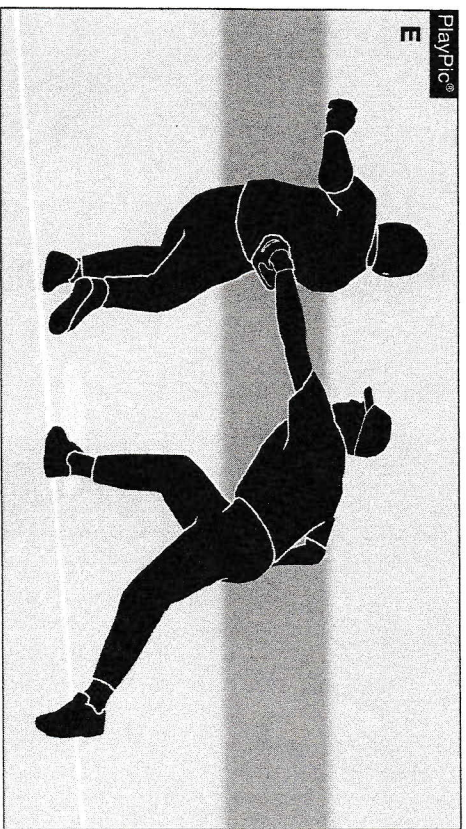
why the runner is safe by adding a signal to the safe signal. In the illustration on the previous page, the first baseman had to leap for the throw (PlayPic A on pg. 29) and the runner reached the bag safely before the first baseman touched the bag (PlayPic B on pg. 29). The umpire calls the runner safe (PlayPic C on pg. 29) and then a signal — a sweep of the arms (PlayPic D on pg. 29) — to

confirm that the runner is safe because the fielder was off the base.

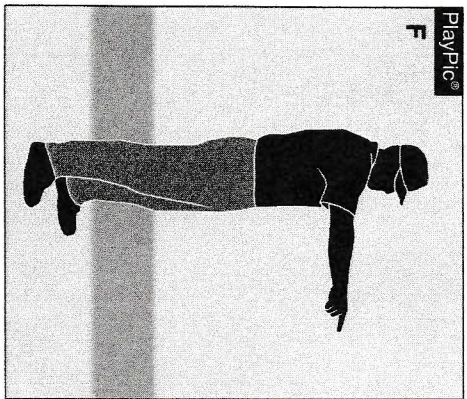
A swipe tag. Many times, the defense gets an out even when a throw pulls the first baseman off the bag. That's because an adroit and thinking first baseman will tag the batter-runner rather than step on the bag.

In PlayPic E, the throw has taken the first baseman just to the plate-side of first

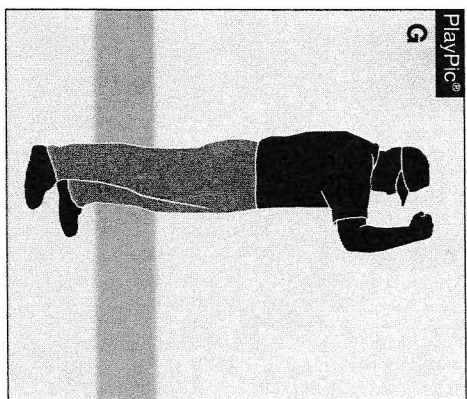
base and has tagged the batter-runner. If the umpire simply declares the runner out, an argument may ensue because the fielder did not touch the base with his foot. The umpire can prevent an argument and lend credibility to his call by pointing to the play (PlayPic F on pg. 30) and verbalizing, "On the tag," followed by the out signal and verbal declaration (PlayPic G on pg 30).



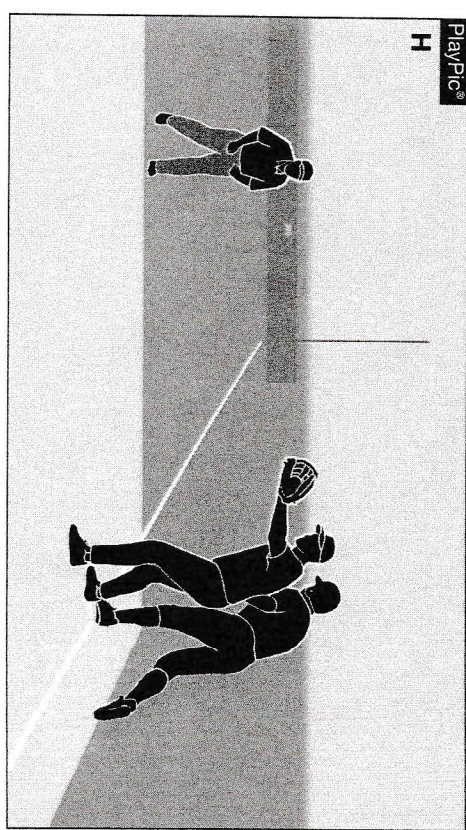
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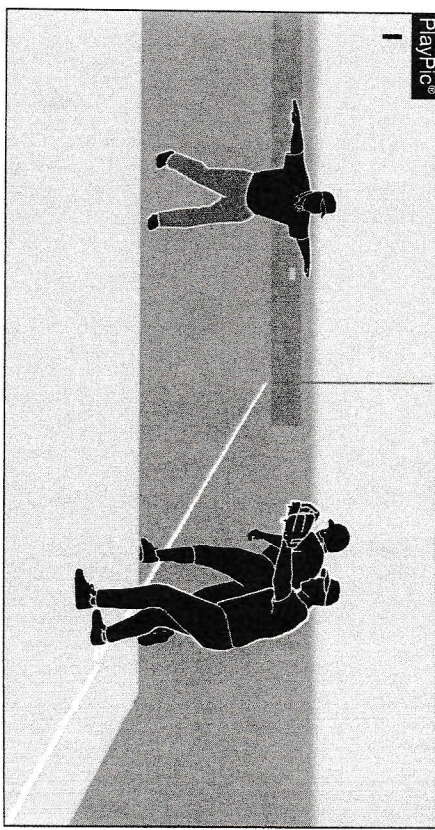
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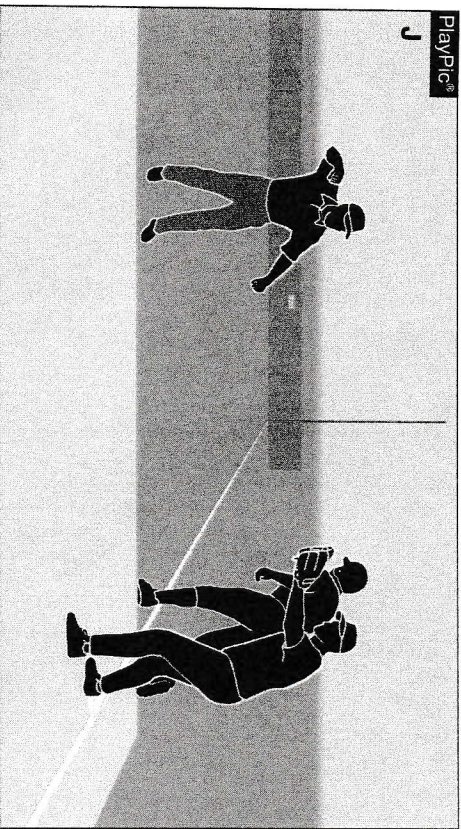
When the first baseman comes off the bag, he will usually attempt to tag the runner out (PlayPic E). When he is successful, the base umpire needs to point that he saw the tag (PlayPic F) and then call the runner out (PlayPic G).

The closer the play, the more an umpire has to "sell" the call. When the ball and runner arrive at first almost simultaneously (PlayPic H), the umpire has to judge the play. If he judges the runner was safe, he can sell the call by stepping toward the play and aggressively signaling (PlayPic I).

'Selling' the Call

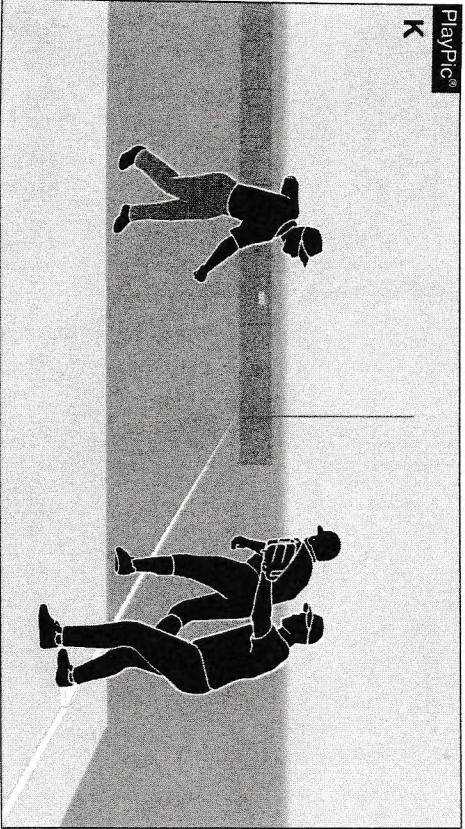
A routine out deserves a routine call. But many plays on the bases are a lot closer than a routine play. In those instances, base umpires can use their voice and body language to lend credibility to close calls. The technique is called "selling" the call.

On the previous page, the runner and the ball have arrived at first base at

**PlayPic®**
J

nearly the same time (PlayPic H on pg. 31). Because it's an extremely close play, the umpire must display confidence in his decision with a decisive call.

If the runner is judged safe (PlayPic I on pg. 31), the umpire steps toward the base, thrusts out his arms and says, "Safe!" In a loud, confident voice. An out call on a whacker is equally demonstrative, and is a two-step

**PlayPic®**
K

If it is a close play that the umpire judges to be an out, the umpire should use an overhand motion by preparing to throw a punch (PlayPic J) and following through by stepping toward the bag and shouting, "Out!" (PlayPic K).

process. Again, step toward the base, bring the arm back as if preparing to throw a punch (PlayPic J) and follow through while shouting, "Out!" as shown in PlayPic K.

Remember that the sell technique should be saved for close plays. Using it all of the time is like shouting all of the time; after a while, people can't tell when you're really shouting and when you're speaking in your normal tone.

Philosophy of Positioning

At any moment during a game, each base umpire assumes the position on the field that will give him or her the best opportunity to rule correctly on the next play; as each play develops, each umpire adjusts his or her position to observe the ongoing action.

Two-umpire mechanics is a system of angles, distances, shared responsibilities and anticipation; the most important is anticipation. When you can reasonably predict what is most likely to happen next, you can establish your angle, cut the distance and meet your responsibilities; you can also move to the proper position before the play begins and adjust as it develops.

Of course, you could wind up in the proper position merely by following the action, the ball, or both. You could get to the right spot purely by accident, just because you have to be someplace. And in most situations you'd be lucky enough to see the play no matter where you are on the field — most plays don't really need an umpire. But when there is a decision to be made, it will be more accurate and will be accepted more readily if you are in a position to really see what happens.

If you've umpired for any amount of time, you've been told to "get in position" to make the call. That's good advice, even when it comes from angry players, coaches and fans who have no idea what that position is. It's the same advice this book offers, except here you'll get useful suggestions and the reasoning behind them. The

suggestions will focus on helping you get into position in time to wait for the play to develop, because an umpire who can stand still and watch the action has a better opportunity to rule accurately on that action.

While "get in position" is good advice, it is incomplete. As you strive to be in the proper position to see a play, you must concentrate on seeing the entire play. Never look away from one play, hurrying to move to the next action, before you are certain the first play is over. Remember the sage advice offered by virtually every umpire training staff: "It ain't nothin' until I call it!"

Along with judgment, rules knowledge, concentration and courage, positioning is an important umpiring asset. When you are in a place on the field that offers an advantageous view of the action, your decision will be more confident, more often correct and more readily accepted by players, coaches and spectators.

It's important to understand the advantages of each position and its associated movement. When you understand why one position is better than another, you'll find yourself in great position throughout each game.

Proper Positioning

"Angle is primary; distance is secondary; closer is better, up to a point."

While no sentence can summarize everything you need to know about positioning, that one comes close. When you understand how angle, distance and proximity work together, you understand how your on-field position affects your opportunity to rule correctly on a given play. Let's consider each element.

Angle. Your line of sight must provide you with an opportunity to view an important, instantaneous activity (on a tag play) or combination of two activities (on a force play). To get the right line of sight, you have to establish the correct angle.

For decades, veteran umpires have preached to rookie umpires: Get the

90-degree angle. That's a wonderful starting point, if you understand what 90-degrees you are trying to get.

For example, on a tag play you would like to be looking at the space between the fielder's hand or glove (holding the ball) and the runner's body. Assume for a moment that the fielder has the ball and is waiting with his glove extended to tag the runner. As the runner slides, his movement establishes his line of action. Your standard "90-degree angle" would place your line of sight perpendicular to the runner's slide — a good starting point. You may have to adjust your angle to see over, under or around the fielder's body or the runner's body.

Distance. In theory, once you establish the proper angle, you have a reasonable opportunity to accurately view the action, regardless of the distance between your position and the play. The theory holds as long as you do not have to adjust your angle.

In reality, the final moments of virtually every play require some amount of adjustment. The greater your distance from the play, the more difficult it will be to make that adjustment, but if you have not first established the proper angle your ability to adjust is inconsequential.

Proximity. How close you want to be to a developing play depends on several variables, including the type of play, your mobility, your peripheral vision. Begin by moving to a position eight to 10 feet from a tag play, 15 to 18 feet from a force play. As you gain experience, adjust those distances to fit your own ability.

WORKING AS A TEAM

Whether it is two or three umpires working a game, you are a team on the field, and it is imperative that you work together to cover all of the plays that come up in a game.

Nothing looks worse when there is a runner sliding into third with a dramatic tag being made and no umpire is around to make the call. By communicating before and during the game, those problems can be avoided.

Specific rotations and initial play assignments make up the heart of this book, but the general communication tools listed here will get you started.

Before the First Pitch

A plate umpire will judge more than 150 pitches during a game and a base umpire will probably have more than a handful of close plays in the field, either fair/foul or catch/no catch calls.

But neither umpire has a reasonable chance of being successful during the game if the crew hasn't taken care of business before the ball is made live and the first pitch is thrown.

Here are things that every umpire needs to take care of in advance of every game.

Assignment calendar. When an assigner opens up the calendar for the season, it is imperative that umpires block out dates they are not available. Wedding anniversaries and birthdays are the same every year, so if you know you aren't going to be available on those days, block them out immediately.

Once your calendar is ready, accept the assignment as soon as its handed out. Barring unforeseen issues with work or family, you should be able to accept any assignment that comes your way if you have kept your calendar up to date.

A game should never get turned back unless you have permission from your assigner to take another game or one of those rare work/family issues occurs.

Confirm with home team, partner. About a week before the game, the umpires should communicate and confirm the site and time of the assignment. If there is a designated crew chief, the crew chief needs to be the one to reach out to the crew.

The crew chief should also make contact with the host school to confirm the game details as well. It doesn't look good for the crew to have a game on it's schedule for 7 p.m. and the athletic director and teams have it as a 4 p.m. game on their schedules.

Part of confirming with the home team is being aware of potential weather issues. Teams are likely to switch the date, time and even location of a game if weather is going to threaten the game's original starting time. And coaches will

often communicate with each other and assume that umpires will be available at their beck and call. By communicating with the coach in advance, you become a part of the equation.

Pack your bag. You should take all of your equipment and uniforms to every game. Just because you are assigned the bases doesn't give you an excuse to not have things when the original plate umpire doesn't show up or thought he was working the bases and didn't bring anything either.

Before going into the bag, make sure everything you are going to take is in good condition. Pants should be wrinkle-free and clean, which means getting them in the wash or to the dry cleaners more than once per season.

Don't forget that ball bags and shoes also need attention. It doesn't matter how clean the rest of your clothes look, if you come out with unpolished shoes and dirty bags, you won't look impressive. It's a good idea to throw the ball bags into the wash several times a season.

Getting there. If you've been to a field or stadium before, then you likely know where to park and where your locker room is (if you are fortunate to have one). If not, then that's something that hopefully you confirmed with the home team in your phone call.

Make certain you leave yourself plenty of time. A game gets off to a bad start if you are rushed because you got caught in typical rush-hour traffic. Sometimes, you have to leave before the rush hour hits in order to get there on time.

In the locker room. The locker room, if you get one, should be the place where you not only get physically ready, but also mentally ready.

The physical is what everyone thinks of — getting dressed, rubbing up game balls and leaving at the right time to be on the field when required.

The mental side is often overlooked. First, the game deserves your full attention, so when the entire crew

has arrived, the cell phones should be turned off and put away. There are obvious exceptions, such as family situations, but gabbling with the umpires at another game site is not necessary.

When you start your pregame discussion, make sure it fits the crew that you are with for that game. Three veteran umpires who have worked together before probably don't need a complete discussion of all rotations. However, if it's one veteran and one new person on a varsity game, going through the whole pregame not only ensures coverage, but it will likely put the newer umpire at ease. The newer umpire will hear things he's heard before, and will grow more comfortable.

The list on Page 42 gives you a complete rundown of the topics that should be covered during a pregame discussion.

No locker room. At a lot of high school fields, there is no locker room. Instead you are forced to dress and hold your pregame discussion by your cars.

In those cases, it is strongly recommended that you park as far away from the fans and teams as possible. Also, you should come to the game with your undergarments already on. There is nothing good that can come from getting naked in the parking lot of a high school.

You will sometimes have to ask people to leave you alone when you are in the parking lot area. It is important that you treat that area as you would your locker room. It is your area and that time before a game is when you are getting both physically and mentally ready for the game.

Going to the field. Make certain you arrive at the field in time to take care of all necessary pregame responsibilities before the plate meeting.

Use the time when you walk on to the field to give it an inspection. Take note of wind conditions or potential safety hazards.

Since the ground rules meeting will likely take five minutes, you need

to arrive on the field 10 minutes before the start time in order to get the game started on time.

Get to the plate meeting and allow the plate umpire to do most of the talking for the crew. The only time a base umpire should be involved is during introductions, clarifying any ground rules that aren't clear and filling in anything that gets omitted. The plate meeting is when all special rules for that day are decided. If a ground rule or game-ending rule isn't declared and agreed upon at that meeting, then it can't be used that day.

After the meeting. One last thing to know before the meeting breaks up is if the National Anthem will be performed or played. If so, it looks better for the umpires to be together during that time.

Once the pregame activities are concluded, the base umpire or umpires should hustle to the outfield. However, they should not run to their positions at the same time the defense is taking the field. Let the defensive players clear the area before leaving the plate.

The plate umpire should use this time to watch pitches and establish a good rapport with the catcher. Observe if the pitcher has a normal delivery and how the catcher receives the ball. That also gets the mind right for the pitches that count.

Another thing to watch for is to see if the pitcher is throwing from the set position, and if he is, ensure he is coming to a complete and discernable stop. If he's not, now's the time to tell the catcher, "Make sure if he gets a runner on base that he stops."

As the pitcher throws his final warmup pitch and the catcher throws to second base, brush off the plate. Take a deep breath and put the ball in play.

To everyone else, it may appear that the work has just begun.

But you know better.

Before Each Play

Just as a coach gives signals to his hitter and runners before a play, umpires

have a set of signals they should use. Before each new batter, confirm the number of outs with your partner. Also confirm if the plate umpire is going to rotate to third base when the ball is put into play or stay at home. Lastly, you need to know if the infield fly is in effect. The plate umpire should initiate the signals and have them echoed back to him by the base umpire(s). By getting on the same page before the play, you dramatically increase the chances that every play will be covered.

During the Play

If umpires were robots and nothing out of the ordinary ever happened, this step would be unnecessary. After all, you communicated before the play, so why do you need to keep talking?

Unfortunately, umpires are human and sometimes forget to rotate when they just said they would, or rotate when they shouldn't. And sometimes, the way a ball is hit dictates a change in the normal coverage.

So if the plate umpire is supposed to rotate to third, he should still call out, "I've got third if he (the runner) comes." That lets the base umpire know that he no longer has to be concerned about that play. The reason for the communication is the plate umpire could have fallen down or just forgotten to rotate.

If the base umpire doesn't hear the plate umpire take the call, it still belongs to the base umpire. The base umpire cannot release the play until he knows the plate umpire has it covered.

Between Innings

There is plenty of time for umpires to talk before and after games. They should not need to get together between innings.

However, there are times when you do need to relay information to your partner. In those cases, the communication should be quick and umpires should return to their normal positions between innings. That is not the time to discuss where you are going

for dinner or the funny joke that you heard at the office.

End of the Game

When the game is over, the crew should leave the field together. Sometimes the final play is controversial, so it is important that the umpires leave together and that one umpire isn't left on the field with the angry mob of players and coaches.

Your goal, however, should be to get off the field as quickly as possible. Once you are off the field and back in the locker room or at your cars, you can talk about anything that needs discussing.

A wrapup following each game can be more important than the pregame meeting. While plays and rulings are fresh in all of the umpires' minds, it is the perfect time to review situations that occurred during the game.

The most experienced umpire on a crew should initiate the discussion and be the one to admit mistakes first. That will open the discussion for lesser experienced umpires to feel less threatened for admitting their mistakes. Umpires should never start the discussion by asking, "Did you see anything?" and being satisfied with no response. Successful umpires are aware of plays and/or situations in every game that could have been better handled.

Here are several topics that should be covered in each postgame review:

- Judgment plays
- Strike zone interpretation
- Proper positioning for plays
- Crew mechanics

Get the Call Right

Obviously, the goal of an umpire is to get every play correct. Realistically, that will never happen. Umpires are human and will make mistakes. Fortunately, in some cases, there is a mechanism in place in the rules for "getting a call right" when it has been potentially missed.

However, there are some pitfalls with that philosophy as well. Here are some general guidelines.

- By rule, there are some calls that

can be changed and some that cannot. It is imperative to know the ones that can be reviewed by the umpire team.

- There are some calls that don't need to wait for an appeal or conference. For example when a batted ball hits a batter in the batter's box, a caught/uncaught third strike and if a foul tip is caught or dropped or trapped.

- As a general rule, a decision that involves judgment is not reversible. Plays that involve misapplication of rules or that the calling umpire might not have seen fully are the calls covered by the guidelines for changing a call. Some of those calls are:

- A checked swing that is called a ball;
 - A question on whether a foot was pulled by the fielder at a base;
 - Whether a swipe tag was made;
 - A dropped ball after a tag;
 - If the ball was juggled on a force play at first;
 - Whether a home run was fair or foul;
 - Whether a hit was a home run or a ground-rule double;
 - The catch of a foul fly;
 - The catch of a fair fly with no runners on base; and
 - The declaration of a balk when the pitcher's foot was not on the pitcher's plate.
- Some calls just can't be changed. Those include:
- Calls on close force plays;
 - Tags on non-force situations;
 - A checked swing when a strike is first called; and
 - The catch or no catch of a fair fly with runners on base.

Making the call. Umpires should always make their initial call. It is better to make the call and then discuss and make a change. The alternative is to not make a call and then go for help, only to find no help available. At that point, your credibility is totally blown.

Once you have made the call, if you realize that you may not have gotten the best look and a partner might be

able to help, do so immediately. Read the reaction of the runners, fielders and coaches. Don't wait for the discussion with the coach. Instead, call time and seek help immediately.

However, if you are 100 percent confident of your call, there is no need to ask for assistance simply because the coach did not like your decision.

The most common play for help.

The swipe tag/pulled foot is the most common play in which help is requested. Let's take a ground ball to the infield and go through the procedure that should be followed.

With no runners on, the plate umpire should move toward the 45-foot line in order to assist with the potential pulled foot/swipe tag scenario at first base.

As discussed, the base umpire shall make the call. If the offensive coach believes you when you called the out, he won't argue and no discussion will ensue.

If the reaction or argument convinces you that you need help, then seek it. If the request appears wide open, it's OK to ask from across the diamond (Justin, did he pull his foot? Or Kim do you have a tag?)

The plate umpire shall make no call, but instead, shall answer the base umpire's question. Immediately after that answer, the base umpire shall uphold or reverse his call.

If the base umpire asks for help and the plate umpire answers in a way that would change the call, the base umpire has NO choice but to change the call.

If there is potential problem in the quick answer, the plate umpire and base umpire should get together (away from the coaches and players) and have a quick discussion. Example: If the plate umpire saw a tag, but believes it was late, he can't truthfully answer the "Do you have a tag?" question without causing further problems.

With runners on base, the base umpire will be in the middle and the plate umpire will have other responsibilities (force-play-slide rule, play at home), therefore, the base

umpire cannot ask for help on that play. If the plate umpire “sees” the play at first, he likely wasn’t looking where he was supposed to be looking.

Rundowns

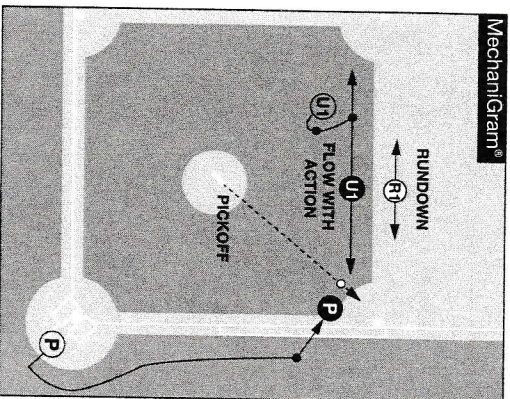
While rundowns can be exciting plays for fans to watch, they are among the toughest to umpire. Those are the rare plays when the umpire will likely be on the move and making the call all at the same time.

How many rundowns you’ll see in a season depends on the style of baseball played by the teams you umpire. Teams with aggressive baserunning tendencies — those that attempt a lot of stolen bases or hit-and-runs — will often find themselves in more rundowns. Regardless of individual style, however, you are likely to have a few rundowns each year.

Because of the nature of the play — a runner trapped between two bases — a three-umpire crew will find rundowns relatively easy to cover. The crew will be able to station one umpire at each base and watch the rundown unfold.

In a two-umpire crew, however, few situations provide better opportunities for umpire teamwork than a rundown. The two keys are distance and timing. The lead umpire (the one originally responsible for the runner) must establish his position at a comfortable distance to the basepath so he can flow laterally between the bases to observe the activity. The other umpire must understand how and when to step into the coverage.

In the MechanGram, U1 is the lead umpire as R1 attempts to get back on a pickoff throw. U1 must read the play and move aggressively toward either first or second if he senses a play developing there. But if he reads a rundown, U1 should square his shoulders to the runner and move laterally, approximating the runner’s progress. U1 will not try to keep up with the runner; instead, he will shadow the runner’s movements and let R1



On a rundown between first and second base, U1 will stay with the runner until P can get to the first-base cutoff and assist. P should only move in to the cutoff while the runner is going away from first base.

lead him laterally along the basepath. By remaining 10 or more feet from the basepath and flowing with the play, U1 will have a reasonable angle for a tag at either base.

The plate umpire must recognize the rundown and move toward one end of the action — logically, the first-base side. Move aggressively to the play but stop and hold about 20 feet from first base in foul ground. That prevents a collision with players participating in the rundown and precludes a double call. From the holding spot, wait for the play to move away from you, then advance to the edge of the first-base cutoff and communicate verbally with your partner, “I’ve got this end.”

Upon hearing the communication, U1 should acknowledge his partner, then conserve his own movement by flowing toward the second-base cutoff, moving a bit closer to the basepath and focusing his attention

on the runner’s action from a more stationary position.

Once the umpires establish shared responsibility, the plate umpire should rule on tag attempts if the runner dives back to first, while U1 is responsible for activity between the bases. U1 also rules on a tag attempt if the runner dives into second.

Other points to remember regarding rundowns in a two-umpire crew:

- The plate umpire will never leave the plate to assist the field umpire on a play when another runner may attempt to score.
- If P decides to assist U1, P will retain all responsibility for resulting plays at the plate.
- Umpires must communicate and keep the field in proper officiating balance.
- P must not be so eager to help that he “runs” U1 off the play.

U1 must be aware of other runners. For instance, if R2 is trapped between second and third, R1 may anticipate R2 being safe at third or tagged out and attempt to advance to second. Only U1 can make that call. Regardless of the number of umpires:

- During a rundown, a runner is out for leaving the baseline if he runs more than three feet away from a direct line between bases to avoid being tagged. If a runner deviates one step, he is likely still in the baseline. But if he takes two steps, he should be considered out of the baseline.
- If a rundown results in two players on the same base, the trail runner is out if both are tagged.

Don’t forget about obstruction and interference. Either is a possibility in the action leading up to, during and immediately after a rundown.

- If you’re unsure if the runner was tagged, observe the players’ body language. Their actions will often help you make the call.
- The responsibility of calling the tag varies. If a runner is tagged in the

chest, for instance, the umpire whom the runner is facing has the call. If the runner is diving into a base, the trail umpire makes the call.

Time Plays

In baseball, a time play is not formally defined in any of the codes, but is generally understood to occur when the runner crosses the plate at approximately the same time as the third out is made at another base. The sequence of events determines whether the run scores.

For example, with a runner on second and two outs, the batter singles is out at second trying to stretch the base hit. If R2 crosses the plate, before the batter’s out, then the run scores. If not, then no run scores.

On a time play, each umpire has a set job to do.

For the base umpire, it’s nothing out of the ordinary. In fact, it is critical that the base umpire do everything correctly and normally. If, in the play example above, B1 was safe at second, then there is no time play to be called.

The base umpire needs to not rush his call — the plate umpire can see when the tag was applied and that’s the important time, not when the base umpire calls the out.

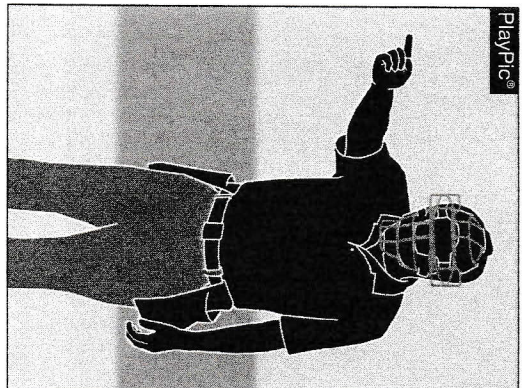
For the plate umpire, recognition that a time play is possible is key. In the play above, seeing the batter stretch the single into a potential double is the most significant clue. The plate umpire should be directly behind the plate, in line with the potential play on the bases. See if the tag is made before or after the runner who is attempting to score crosses the plate. Don’t make any signal until the base umpire calls the runner at second out. If that runner is safe, then you don’t have to judge the time play.

When the base umpire does make the out call, only then should you indicate emphatically whether to score the run or wave it off.

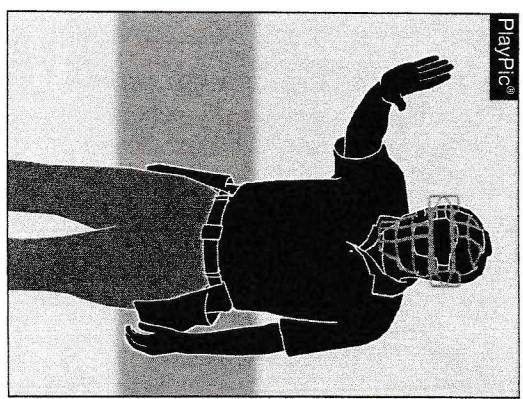
PREGAME CONFERENCE OUTLINE

1. **Notify home coach/game administrator that the crew has arrived**
2. **Confirm start time**
3. **Discussion points**
 - a. Rule changes
 - b. Points of emphasis
4. **Pregame conference**
 - a. Positioning
 - b. Ground rules by home coach
 - c. P does all talking unless otherwise directed
 - d. National Anthem position
 - e. Run to positions
5. **Half swing responsibilities and mechanics**
6. **Swipe tag and pulled foot mechanics**
7. **Fair/foul responsibilities**
8. **Outfield coverage**
9. **Non-verbal signals**
 - a. Infield fly
 - b. Standard rotation
 - c. Reverse rotation
 - d. Umpire going out
10. **Review play situations**
11. **Appeals: base touches and tag ups**
12. **Handling dugouts**
 - a. Coaches/players outside
 - b. Buckets
13. **Arguments**
 - a. One on one
 - b. When to step in and when to leave them alone
 - c. After an ejection, the umpire should turn and walk away
14. **Closing**
 - a. Rule or mechanics questions
 - b. Hustle at all times
 - c. Communicate
 - d. Good eye contact
 - e. Good timing
 - f. Get plays right
 - g. Have fun and enjoy what you are doing

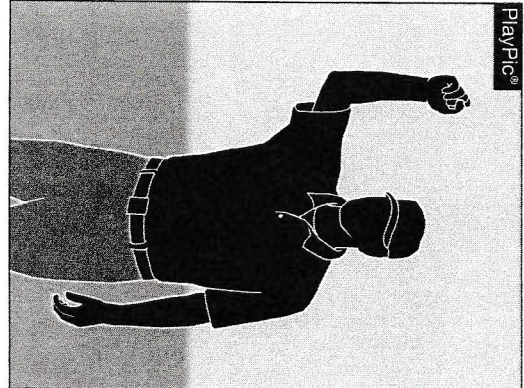
SIGNAL CHART



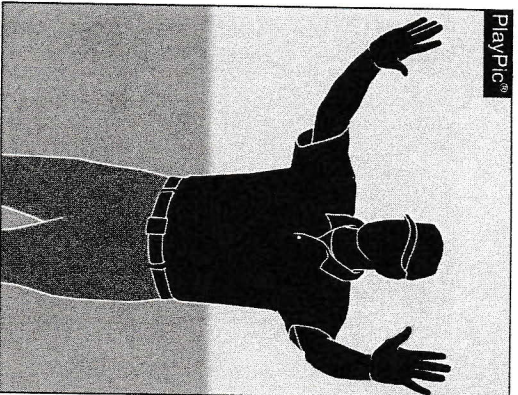
Play or Play Ball. Point with the right hand directly at the pitcher. Call forcefully, "Play ball!"



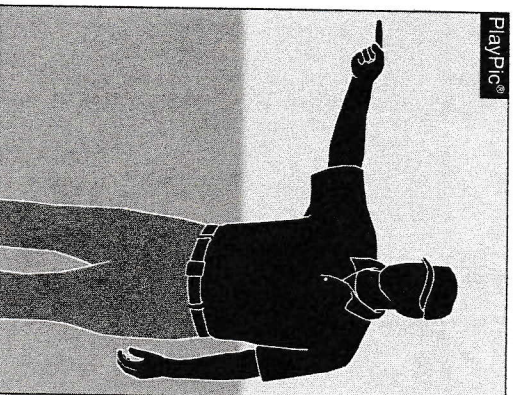
Do Not Pitch. Hold the right arm straight out with palm outward and fingers up. That signifies that the ball is dead and the pitcher should not pitch.



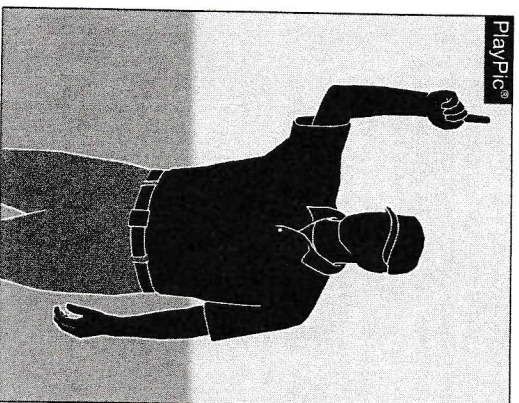
Out. Begin in a set position. Stand with your shoulders square to the play, keeping your head still. Bring your right arm up, arm extended and parallel to the ground. Bend the elbow 90-degrees; close your fingers into a fist, thumb tucked along the front of the curled fingers and facing you. Motion your right forearm forward and then back, as if pounding a nail. Declare loudly, "He's out!" as you knock on a door. Return to a set position.



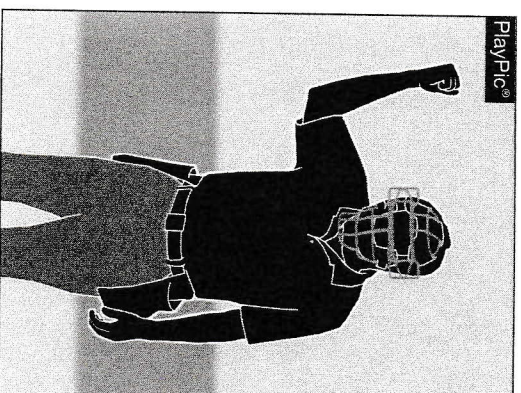
Foul Ball, Time Out, Dead Ball. Extend both arms in front of your body, slightly higher than your shoulders and wider than shoulder width. Extend your hands out, fingers together and pointed up, palms forward as if trying to stop something with your hands. Declare, "Time!" In any dead-ball situation, the ball must be put back into play.



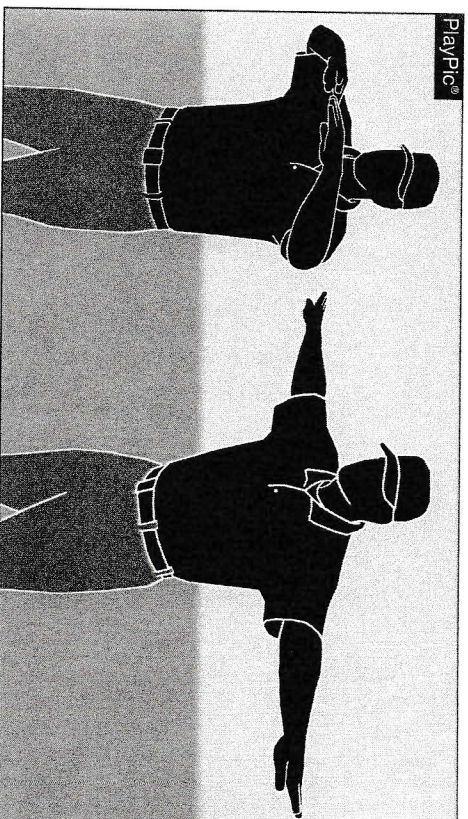
Fair Ball. Move as close to the ball as safety and the play will allow, then straddle the foul line. Come to a standing-set position before the play happens. Point to fair territory with the hand and arm on that side of your body.



Infield Fly. Begin in a set position; when the ball is hit, pause, read and react; step up, turn and face the fielder(s) and the play. When the ball is descending and you are convinced the batted ball is an infield fly, point straight up with your right hand and declare, "Infield fly!" If the batted ball is near foul territory, the verbal call is, "Infield fly, if fair!" If the batted ball is fair but uncaught, signal an out and declare, "He's out! He's out! The batter is still out!" If the batted ball becomes an uncaught foul ball, signal and declare a foul ball.

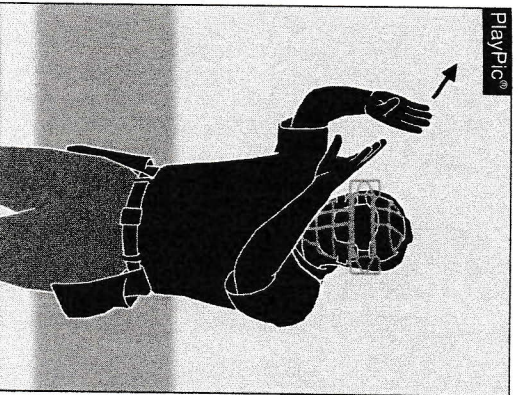


Strike. As P stand up from your stance and step back away from the catcher. Continue watching the ball, normally in the catcher's possession; bring your right arm up, arm extended and parallel to the ground. Bend the elbow 90-degrees; close your fingers into a fist, thumb tucked along the front of the curled fingers and facing you. Motion your right forearm forward and then back, as if pounding a nail. Declare loudly, "Strike!" as you knock on a door. Then, relax as you prepare for the next pitch. Verbalize a strike so that your voice can be heard in the outfield. When U1 responds to P's question about a checked swing, the strike signal is used to indicate that a batter did swing. On a swinging strike, you do not verbalize the call.

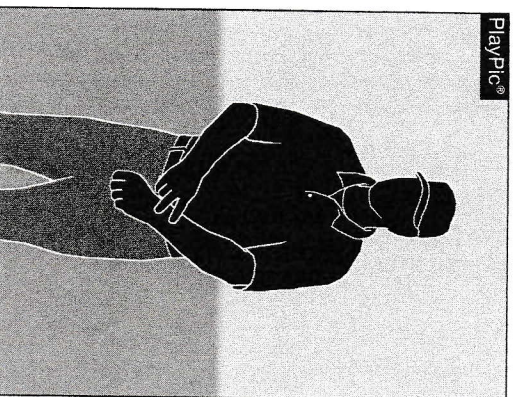


Safe, Uncaught Third Strike, "Did Not Go." Begin in a set position. Stand with your shoulders square to the play, keeping your head still. Bring both hands together, shoulder high. Extend both arms straight out parallel to the ground in front of your chest, shoulder high. The fingers of each hand are straight and together, thumbs along forefingers. Sweep both arms out, separating toward the sides of your body even with your shoulders until

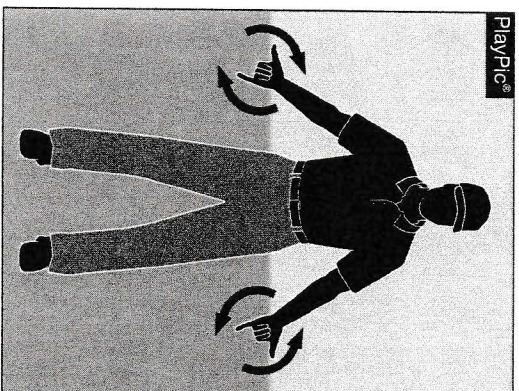
the arms are fully extended along the lines of your shoulders. Call, "Safe!" (not "He's safe!") as you sweep your arms. Return your arms, still parallel to the ground, in front of your chest. Drop your arms to your sides and resume a set position. When U1 responds to P's question about a checked swing, the safe signal is used to indicate that a batter did not swing. The same signal indicates a catcher did not catch a third strike.



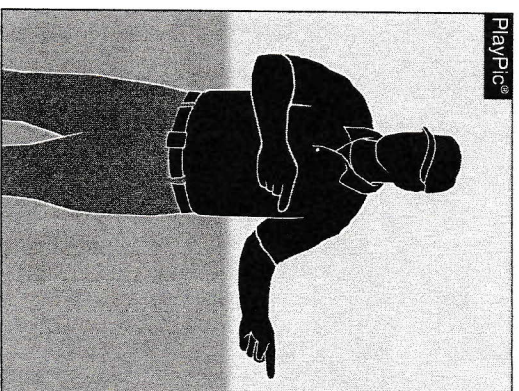
Foul Tip. Scrape the fingers of one hand across the other hand to indicate a batted went directly to the catcher's hands and was legally caught by a fielder then signal a swinging strike.



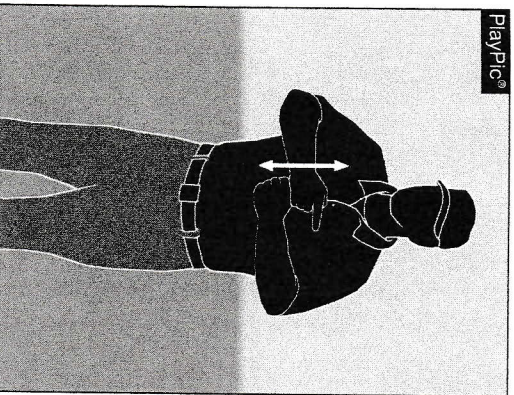
Time Play. Tap one wrist with two fingers on the opposite hand.



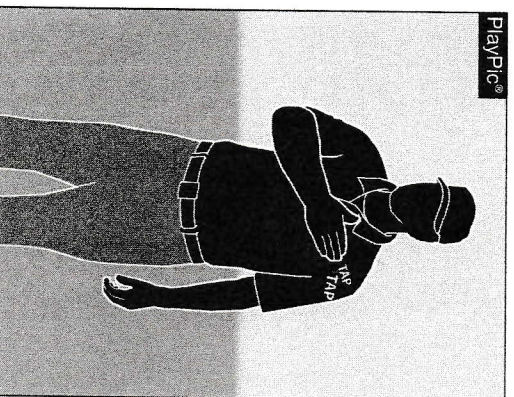
Rotation. Official NFHS signal. Thumbs and pinkie finger extended. Arms down by side. Rotate hands to indicate movement.



Rotation (alternate signal). Commonly used to indicate to partner(s) the direction of rotation if coverage calls for it. The umpire points with one or both hands in the direction of the base to which he or she will be moving.



Double-Tag Rotation. Bump both fists on top of each other with the index finger of the right hand extended, signalling that the PU will rotate to third on a double-tag situation.



Information Available. Umpires can indicate they have relevant information for a partner by tapping two times over their left chest (heart).

CREW OF TWO

CREW OF TWO CHAPTER 1 BASIC PRINCIPLES

1. Angle is primary, distance is secondary. This mechanics manual points out areas, not specific spots, for umpires to take plays. With only two umpires, you're not going to be able to get as close as you'd like on some plays. Work to get the best angle to make the call.

2. The plate umpire (P) will move. Helping on a pulled foot at first base ... helping on slides at second base ... covering plays at third base ... P is responsible for much more than balls and strikes.

3. Studying two-umpire mechanics will help you understand three-umpire mechanics. The two-umpire system is the basis for many coverages with multiple umpires.

Basic Outfield Coverage
A. Do not go out automatically on all fly balls in your coverage area.

B. Pause, read and react. Then go hard and get a good angle. Be stopped when the play occurs.

C. Four conditions that should guide an umpire on when to go to the outfield:

1. The outfielder turns and begins to run toward the outfield fence (possible home run).
2. Multiple players converging on a fly ball.
3. A catch being made below the waist.
4. Outfielder moving toward the foul line and possible fair/foul decision.

D. If in doubt, go out on fly balls in your coverage area.

1. If you are going out, go out hard.
2. Leave no doubt in your partner's mind about whether or not you are going out.

3. Signal your partner by raising your arm if you are going out.

4. If you are not going out, hold your arm out to your partner with your palm facing him and continue with your responsibilities.

5. Once you go out, do not return until the play is complete.

a. Exception: With no runners on base and U1 goes out, U1 would return to the plate for any play on the batter-runner there after ruling no catch and when no more trouble exists (ball can't get under a fence).

NO RUNNERS ON BASE

6. U1 positioned within the infield never crosses the base path to observe catch/no catch.

Balk Concentration

There are some balks that are more obvious from some positions.

A. P should concentrate on:

1. Left-handed pitchers stepping toward the plate when attempting a pickoff at first base.
2. Pitchers coming to a complete stop.
3. Right-handed pitchers stepping to the plate on the third to first move.
4. Right-handed pitchers gaining ground on the jump turn.
5. Right-handed pitchers closing their front shoulder before the jump turn.
6. Right-handed pitchers opening their front shoulder toward first base after coming set.

B. U1 should concentrate on:

1. Pitchers coming to a complete stop.
2. Right-handed pitchers breaking their front knee before the jump turn.
3. Right-handed pitchers gaining ground on the jump turn.

Overthrows

Overthrow responsibility belongs to the plate umpire with one exception.

If the base umpire (with no runners on) goes to the outfield and then rotates to home, overthrow responsibility will then belong to the base umpire at the plate on all overthrows, except the plate umpire (rotated to third) will have the overthrow at third base that goes toward the outfield.

CREW OF TWO CHAPTER 2 NO RUNNERS ON

FAIR/FOUL COVERAGE

INITIAL POSITIONS AND OUTFIELD COVERAGE

INFIELD CATCH COVERAGE

ROUTINE GROUND BALL

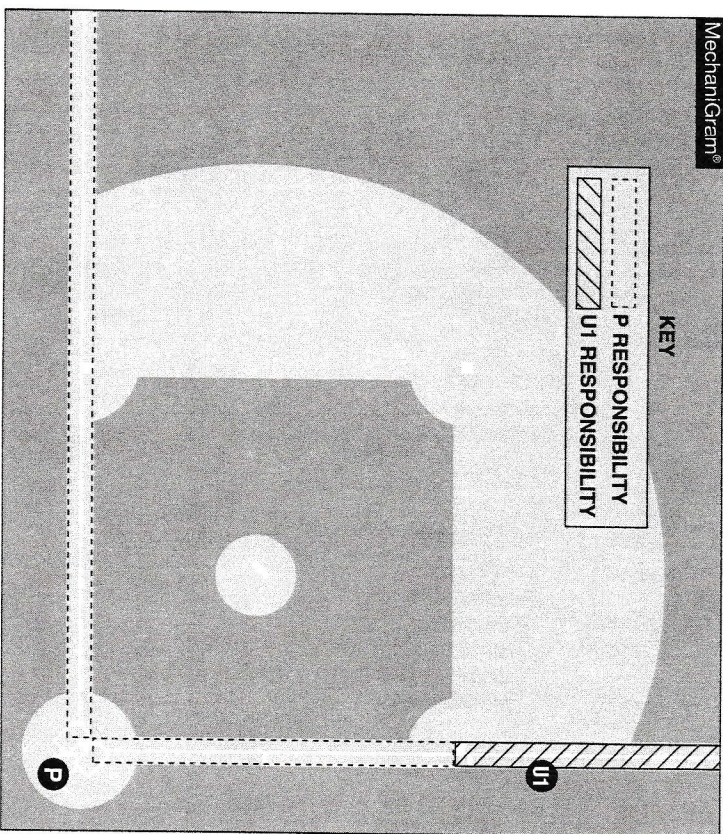
GROUND BALL WITH PRESSURE

PLAYS WITHIN THE INFIELD: OVERTHROW

CLEAN HIT TO THE OUTFIELD

CLEAN HIT TO THE OUTFIELD: EXTRA BASES

FAIR/FOUL COVERAGE



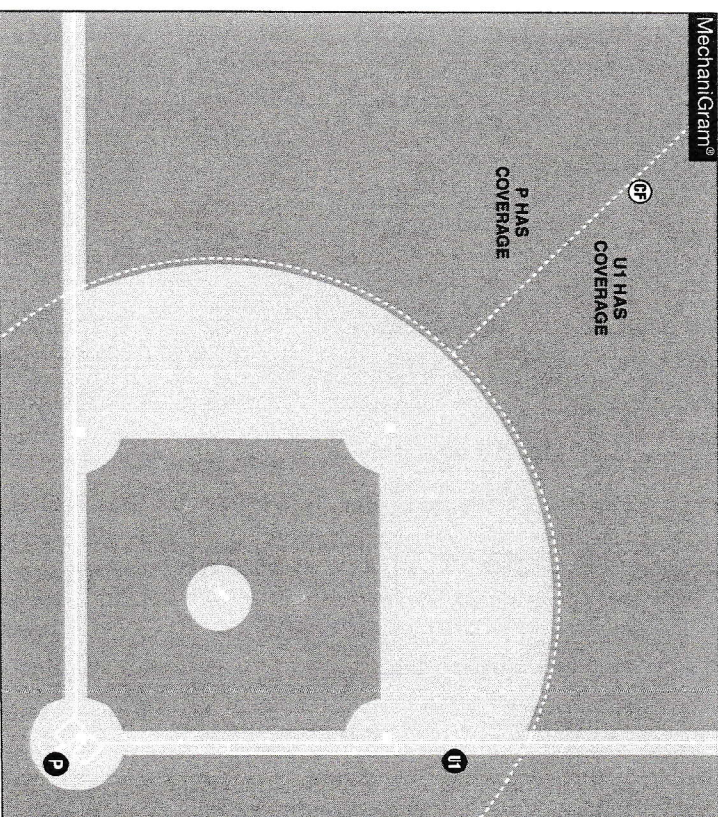
Action on the field: No action.

Umpire responsibilities:

P: Has responsibility for balls up to first base and all balls along the third-base line.

U1: Has responsibility for balls that hit first base and/or beyond.

INITIAL POSITIONS AND OUTFIELD COVERAGE



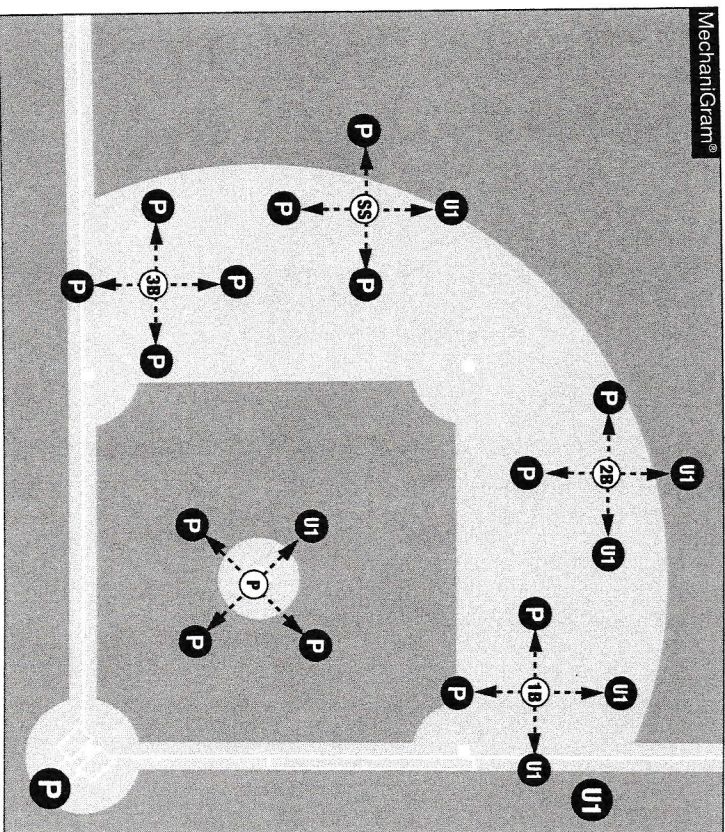
Action on the field: No action.

Umpire responsibilities:

P: Has center fielder moving toward the left-field foul line.

U1: Is in the "A" position. U1 dictates outfield coverage and has the center fielder straight in and straight back and any ball to the right fielder. U1 only makes the calls on fly balls in that area when he goes out on a fly ball. If U1 comes in, pivots and takes the runner, then P will make the call on the fly ball.

INFIELD CATCH COVERAGE



Action on the field: No action.

Umpire responsibilities:

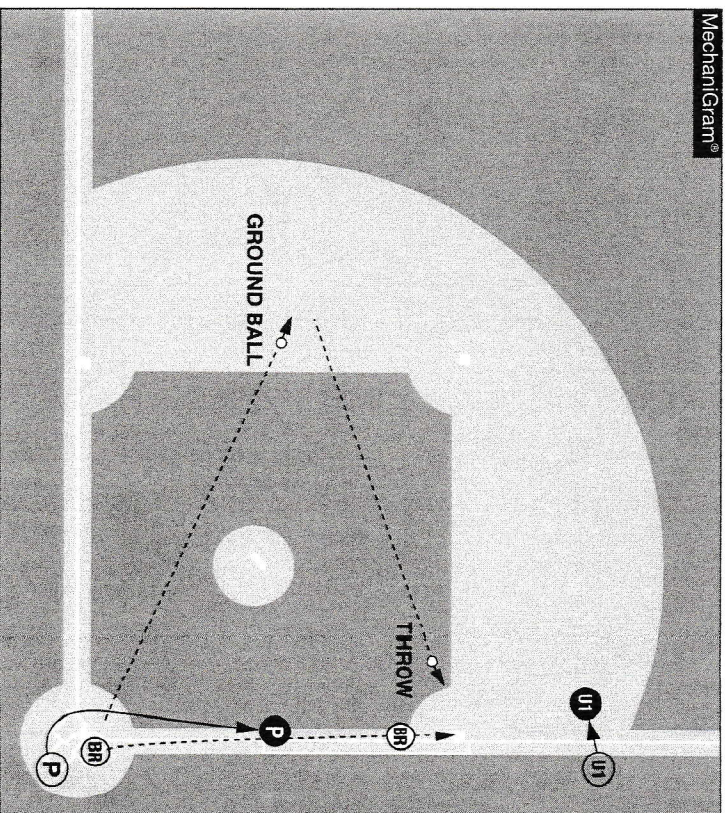
P has catches:

1. By the pitcher moving in, left or right.
2. By the first baseman moving in or right.
3. By the third baseman in all directions.
4. By the shortstop moving in, out or toward third base.
5. By the second baseman moving in or toward second base.

U1 has catches:

1. By the first baseman moving left or out.
2. By the second baseman moving out or toward first base.
3. By the shortstop moving toward second base.
4. By the pitcher moving back.

ROUTINE GROUND BALL



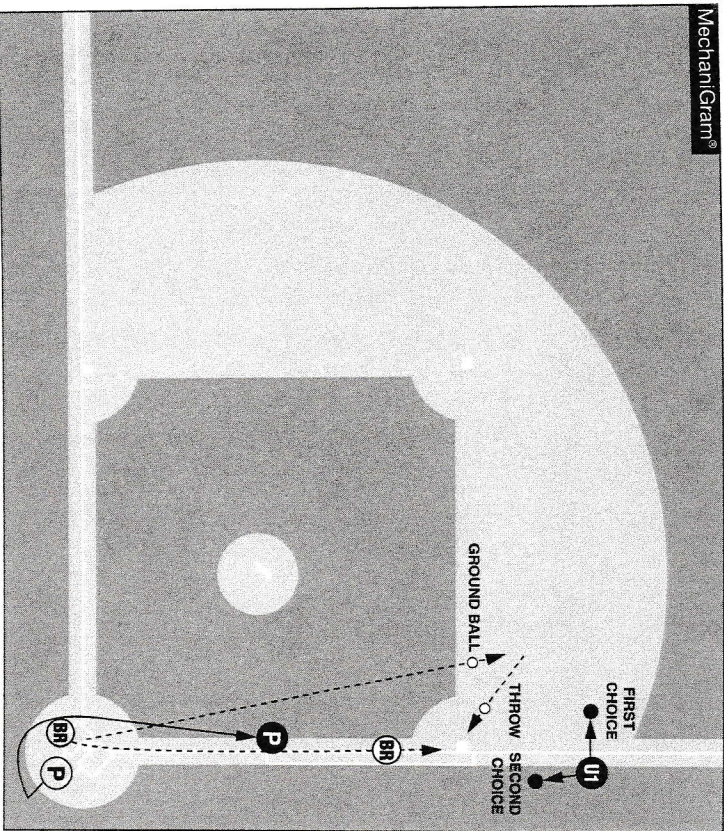
Action on the field: Ground ball to shortstop, throw to first base.

Umpire responsibilities:

P: Moves toward first base to assist U1 on swipe tag or pulled foot by the first baseman. Will also watch for potential running-lane interference.

U1: Moves into the best position to rule on plays at first base.

GROUND BALL WITH PRESSURE



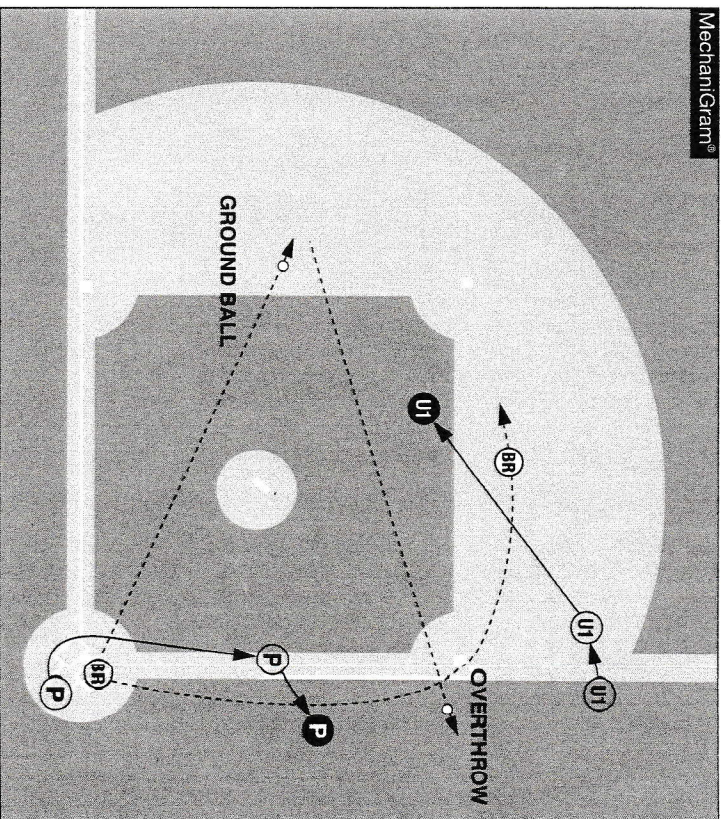
Action on the field: A ground ball is hit that either takes the second baseman to his left or the first baseman has to make a play with the pitcher covering first. That situation is referred to as "pressure" since the umpire is getting the ball and one or more fielders is headed directly at him or her.

Umpire responsibilities:

P: Moves toward first base to assist U1 on swipe tag or pulled foot by the first baseman or pitcher (if he is covering first base).

U1: Ideally, U1 will be able to move one or two steps fair and remain out of the way of the play. Especially when the pitcher covers first base, he will often touch the inside of the bag with his foot, so the U1 needs to be in fair territory to see that. If being in fair territory puts him in the way, then U1 can move one step foul. Be wary of the batter-runner bearing down and not looking where he is running.

PLAYS WITHIN THE INFIELD: OVERTHROW



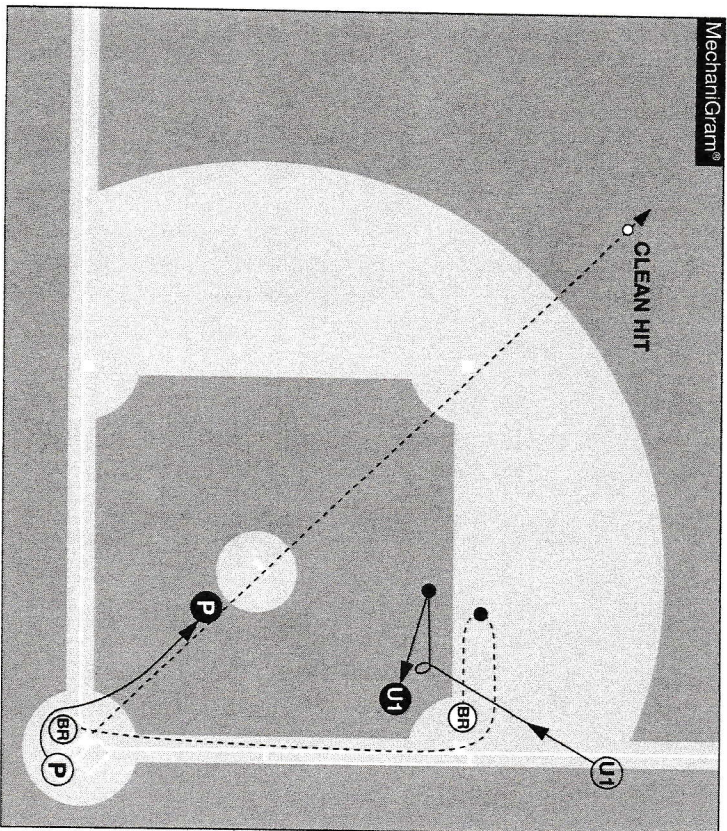
Action on the field: Ground ball to shortstop, overthrow to first base.

Umpire responsibilities:

P: Observes the ball and rules if it enters dead-ball territory, moving into foul territory as necessary.

U1: Enters the infield and has all plays on the bases. The goal should be to move into the infield ahead of the runner. However, if the runner makes a quick turn, U1 might have to let the runner pass and move in behind him.

CLEAN HIT TO THE OUTFIELD



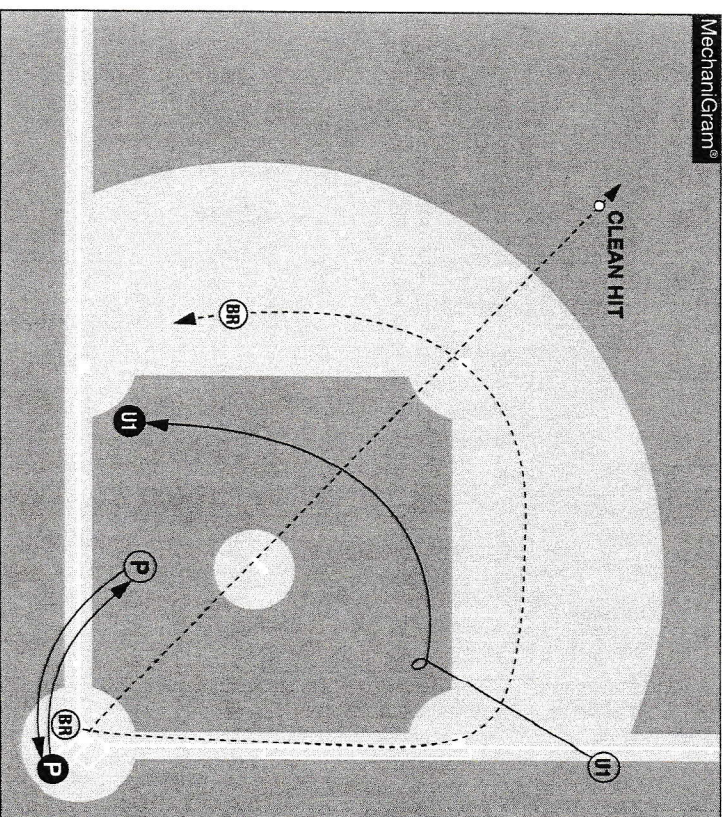
Action on the field: A clean hit to the outfield.

Umpire responsibilities:

P: Moves out of the dirt circle and observes the play.

U1: Enters the infield with a pivot and prepares for all plays on the batter-runner at first base, second base and third base.

EXTRA-BASE HIT TO THE OUTFIELD



Action on the field: A clean hit to the outfield results in the batter advancing beyond first base.

Umpire responsibilities:

P: Moves out of the dirt circle and observes the play. P returns home for any potential play at the plate.

U1: Enters the infield with a pivot and prepares for all plays on the batter-runner at first base, second base and third base.

Note: NFHS mechanics have P taking the play at third and U1 crossing the mound for a play at home. Because that leaves second base uncovered should the batter-runner retreat, Referee recommends following the above procedure.