



2018 USSSA Official Umpire's Manual



Introduction

The 2018 manual is the collaboration of many people to help bring the highest standards of the United States Specialty Sports Association to its Fast Pitch program. The manual is an important part of getting all officials working to the highest standard for the Association, the athletes and the officials. While this is an important reference, it is also important that the USSSA official grows outside of this manual by attending the local meetings, the state level training and, finally, attending the Elite Umpire Academies to give themselves the best chance of becoming the official that they can be. Questions on this progression can be handled by going through your local association, your state umpire in chief or your regional umpire in chief.

National Coordinator of Fastpitch Officials- Victor Canales, Indiana

National Rules Interpreter-Don Briscoe, Georgia

National Rules Emeritus- John Dye, Maryland

Region 1- New England states, New York, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, New Jersey

Regional Umpire council- John Wright, Pennsylvania

Regional rules interpreter- Diane Reuter, New Jersey

Region 2- Illinois, Michigan, Indiana, Ohio, Kentucky, West Virginia

Regional Umpire council- Mike Terwilliger, Michigan

Regional rules interpreter- Jen Gallo, Kentucky

Region 3- Wisconsin, Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, Iowa, Nebraska, Missouri, Kansas

Regional Umpire council- Tony Coates, Kansas

Regional rules interpreter- Tim Thorne, Iowa

Region 4- Colorado, Montana, Wyoming, Idaho, Washington, Oregon, Northern California

Regional Umpire council- Larry Neth, Colorado

Regional rules interpreter- Billy Knoppi, Washington

Region 5- Southern California, Nevada, Arizona, Utah

Regional Umpire council- Russ Olson, Arizona

Regional rules interpreter- Jody Watts, California

Region 6- New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas, Arkansas

Regional Umpire council- Ron Mayfield, Oklahoma

Regional rules interpreter- Phillip Wheeler, Texas

Region 7- Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Tennessee

Regional Umpire Council-

Regional rules interpreter- Terry Cagle, Alabama

Region 8- Georgia, South Carolina, Florida

Regional Umpire council- Esther Holloway, Georgia

Regional rules interpreter- Jeff Becker, Florida



First Pitch, USSSA National Coordinator of Fastpitch Officials

Victor Canales

Welcome to the 2018 season! I am excited to help guide our association as we step into the next 50 years of USSSA. As the Fast Pitch program for USSSA has grown, the missing element has been a program to help develop the officials to the standard of being the best officials possible. We are now putting in place the system and the structure to help each and every official reach their potential as well as give the athlete that plays USSSA the best possible game every time out.

Every athlete that plays in USSSA deserves the very best we can offer. Whether it is the first game of a 10u “c” division tournament or the championship game of the 18u World Fast Pitch Championship in Kansas City. As we strive to make every game an experience, I want our officials to reach for the highest level of game that we can offer. Each athlete gives 100% when they take the field, and they deserve no less from us, as officials. With that in mind, we will address the mechanics used in our game and set the tone by standardizing across the nation on this manual. That is our job and responsibility to the athletes, our Association, and further, to ourselves.

This is, for most of our umpires, an avocation. I, for one, appreciate the effort that you all put forth to help these athletes aspire to their dreams of playing softball at the next level, no matter what level it is. I understand that the struggle to keep our uniforms up to date, our equipment in good order, be on time and balance out all of this with our personal lives is a sacrifice that we make because we love the game. While we strive to improve and work at our craft, I never want you to lose sight of the fact that the greatest players in the world, were at one time little girl's with big dreams. I hope that you take the time to smile and enjoy our part in the ascension of the next Cat Osterman, Lauren Chamberlain, and Jordan Taylor. This is their game, and we get to play a big part in it!

Thank you to all of the officials, administration, and the people who have helped put me in a position to help you. Thank you so much to my wife, Stephanie, and my children, Drexel and Carson for allowing me to continue to enjoy working with all of you. Call them fair, call them well, and remember, we are, as Michael Mazur would have said, #alwayscrew!

Yours in Softball,

Victor Canales

Points of emphasis

Plate Position- One of the things that I have noticed about the best umpires I have worked with is that their plate mechanic's are crisp and clean. While there is some variation from umpire to umpire, a few things stay consistent in the plate mechanics.

1. Be in the slot- An umpire is in the best position to see the pitch when BOTH EYES are facing the pitcher. Being in the slot means having your head slightly above the catcher's head, nearer to the shoulder closest to the batter. About half of your body is exposed to the inside part of the plate. Your distance from the catcher should be about 8-10 inches from her. A slight turn towards the pitcher allows both eyes to be focused on the pitch. Do not turn sideways to look through the zone! This should enable you to see through the zone and see the outside corner of the plate. Head height is important here. I personally want your head height consistent. The "Gerry Davis", heel toe, box and even the scissors stance are all approved stances for USSSA. In my mind, any of these stances are okay as long as you maintain the same head height. This should make your zone consistent. I then ask that you check your lower part of the strike zone. If you are missing the lower part of the zone, then you may need to get your head height lower. This will be brought to you in evaluations during the season.
2. Movement- While most of us are doing 6-8 games a day on the weekend, I ask you to remember that the athletes still expect their game to be called to the utmost of our ability. This means that when the ball is hit, we must get out from behind the plate and know our responsibilities! We must move when we may need to offer assistance for our partner on things like swipe tags, pulled foot, interference, ball out of play, etc. Almost every play could use a second set of eyes, because the time that something goes sideways, and we haven't moved, we, as a crew, are in trouble.
3. Strong strike- I have watched different umpire's call strike's from all over the country. There will always be a slight variance from umpire to umpire, and I appreciate that. However, we all need to strive to call a "strong strike". When a pitch is in the strike zone, there should be no question that it is a strike. See the pitch, hear it hit the catcher's glove, call the strike from the down position, then raise up with your arm in front of you, elbow at shoulder height and a strong fist to signal strike. Notice, I don't want to see you raise up with an open hand and "squeeze and release" a strike. That is not strong. Flex your muscle and be strong!
4. Resetting from position- One thing the great umpire's have in common is measured movement when resetting behind the plate. Don't "wander". You should come out of your stance and move as little as possible. I personally take a 2 step movement out of my stance, then step back in with 2 steps. We have to be cognizant that almost every game is being broadcast now and the more motion that we put in behind the plate, the quicker attention is drawn to us as an official. We want to be as close to being invisible as possible. Lot's of movement draws attention.

Base position- USSSA mechanics are going to strive to teach people to the highest standard. Gone are the days of the players being non athletes. The players at the highest levels are swift of foot and strong of arm. Trying to use the "inside-outside" theory is no longer feasible. The athlete's continue to get faster and faster as well as being consistently the same age year after year. While every year, we as official's, get a year older and a step slower. We must advance our thinking and understand that a 90 degree angle from the play goes both directions. We must enable ourselves to use our steps efficiently. To that end, here is what we want in your base work.

1. Stay outside the diamond unless it's prudent to be inside! If the athlete drives the ball to left field, we will not have a play at first. If you come and turn inside, You are losing sight of a key part of any softball play. THE BALL! We have to know where the ball is to see it get back into the circle and know that our look back rules are now in effect. If we stay outside the diamond while watching the batter-runner touch first, we will be able to see the ball go into the circle. We must continue to watch for obstruction and also see if the ball is overthrown. The possibility exists that we may have a "broken play" heading to second. We will go deeper into mechanics in this manual, but as a rule, we will try to stay out of the diamond.
2. Know where we are moving and why. Many officials have been moving for no real reason and lose sight of their responsibilities. We will very specifically lay out what you are to be looking for in this manual. There are some times, specifically in the "B" position, where the best position to be in is right where you start from! We want you to be active and able to move, however, if there is no reason to move and all the elements that you are responsible for are in front of you, then we can choose to hold our position and move when necessary.
3. The importance of the chase. Many times in 2 man we do not chase fly balls. In "B" and "C" it is often difficult to want to leave the plate umpire as we may have multiple runners. These chases, if needed, must be taken. However, we need to be more judicious in these positions. In "A" however, there is no reason not to chase the fly ball down the line and get a good look at it. If it drops foul, we reset the batter-runner. If it's caught, especially by a diving athlete, we have just shown the coaches and the fans that we understand the game and are putting ourselves in good positions to make the calls necessary. If it drops fair, our plate umpire, who is coming out from behind the plate can take a much shorter route to see the batter-runner hit all the bases and any subsequent throws to make a play on the hitter. We again show that we are a well oiled machine and are working hard for the teams. This doesn't go unappreciated!
4. Illegal pitches must be called. This manual, nor the rules book, says anything about warnings for illegal pitches. While at a younger age we need to be logical while calling illegal pitches, at age 14u and above, however, illegal pitches should be called when they occur. You will catch less static from a coach if you call the first illegal pitch as "ball one" of the game and explain what you are seeing then not calling it all game and suddenly pulling it out in the 7th inning to send home the winning run.

Umpire Demeanor- We are the face of the association as umpires. We are the first line of customer service in the industry of amateur sports for USSSA. As such, we need to understand that our interaction with our customer base is important from the minute that we arrive at the ball park until the tournament has ended. Here are some general guidelines for our official's to follow.

1. Arrive early to you game site. There is no excuse for arriving 10 minutes prior to game time. All of our official's should know at least 3 day's ahead of time when the first game is scheduled to go off. If you have any problem's, you need to contact your umpire in chief 30 minute's prior to game time to allow them to adjust the schedule. Life happens. But, we have all sorts of ways to communicate in this day and age. If you communicate, we can cover. If you do not, you are telling people that they are low priority. If you're on time, you're late!
2. Proper uniform. The default uniform for USSSA fast pitch is the Red shirt with black insert's made by Boombah. Heather gray pants, black ball bags and black USSSA hat with red stitching. We also want a flat black belt. Do not use patent leather! The preferred undershirt is black. The secondary shirts are black with the red insert and

white with red inserts all available at Boombah. The jacket is Black with the red and white inserts. We are now 3 years into our working with Boombah. Make the investment and wear the proper uniform.

3. Tobacco products are prohibited anywhere near the field. If you must have tobacco, it is to be far away from the field. Under no circumstances are tobacco products to be used anywhere within sight of the field. Parent's, players and coaches do not need to see that.
4. Interaction with fans should be brief and can be friendly. We aren't robots. However, try to avoid long, drawn out conversations as the perception of some fans, no matter how wrong they are, is that we care who wins. We all know that we don't. However, we can't afford for that perception to exist. Get off the field together as a crew, head towards your official's area as designated by your umpire in chief and get out of your uniform. If you are going into area's where the fans will see you, you change out of your uniform. Period.
5. When you are still at the tournament city and going out to eat at night, remember that fans will still see you as a representative of USSSA. During tournament weekends, you need to hold yourself to a responsible amount of alcohol and be cognizant of who is around you. We don't require you not to talk to fans outside of the game area, but realize that most of these people, while being friendly, are not your friends. The minute you make a call that goes against their team, they will bring anything they can say against you to the forefront. If it hasn't happened yet, be aware that it will if you stay in the game long.

Social Media Guidelines- In 2018, social media is everywhere. This is a new and changing area to officiating that is constantly under scrutiny. The internet can be a powerful tool for good and bad. As many people have found, your social media posts very rarely go away. USSSA will even be using social media to promote our official's and recruit more. While we can't, nor want, to limit your use of social media, we would like to provide you the following guidelines.

1. When posting anything about a tournament that you are officiating, remember that those posts may be shown to people with a vested interest in the tournament. Do not cheer on any particular team or player.
2. If you are a USSSA official and not working the particular tournament that you are at, **DO NOT CRITICIZE THE OFFICIALS WORKING THE TOURNAMENT!** Under no circumstances is this okay. When you do that you are making yourselves the worst kind of fan. This will not be tolerated and depending on the severity of the comments may lead to a suspension.
3. Remember that you are constantly being judged by people and are a representative of USSSA once you wear the red shirt. You do have freedom of speech and can say whatever it is you feel like. However, officiating is a privilege, not a right. Be smart about what you are putting on social media.

Game Administration

Before the Tournament

Week of tournament

- Communicate with the umpire in chief as to day and time of first game. You should be provided with the location that the umpire's will be changing from or facilities that will be available.
- Know your hotel and roommate, if applicable.
- Check your equipment, make sure pants and shirts are ready to go and all protective equipment is packed and ready. Good time to shine your shoes before the first day.

First day of tournament

- Be at field 45 minutes prior to first game.
- Check in with umpire in chief upon arrival
- Confirm partners and have a pregame meeting with each other
- Check with umpire in chief about water and snacks available. Expect nothing and be grateful if given things.
- Confirm time limits, ground rules, run rules and any special tournament rules.

Before the Game

Pregame Topics with partners

- Mechanic's and tag ups
- Point's of emphasis relative to the game
- Run rules and tie breaker procedure
- Getting together and when to get together
- Confrontations with player's, coaches and fans
- How to exit the field

Plate Meeting with coaches

- Plate meeting will NOT start until all player's are in their respective dugouts. NO WARMING UP WHILE MEETING IS GOING ON!
- Introduction
- Check line ups. Last names, numbers and positions. This is crucial!
- Ground rules
- Time limits
- Assign each team a side of the coin. No reason to do a double flip
- When the plate meeting ends, the clock starts
- Anything you say outside of what you need to say, may be used by the coaching staff later. Be short and sweet!

Equipment Checks

- In tournament's where the bat check is in place, check the bat's together as a team
- We are looking for the USSSA thumbprint or mark, anything else is turned in to the umpire in chief.

- Show the coach a “good” thumbprint on the bat, then show them where the bat doesn't have it. Allow him to look to see if you missed it. Then, turn it into the umpire in chief.
- Helmet's should have no cracks readily visible or tape holding them together. Those helmet's are illegal and put YOU at risk if someone is injured wearing them.

During the Game

Game Management

Game management is a phrase that helps all of us in keeping the game in control. It not only refers to calling the game, but the handling of coaches, fan's and player's to facilitate the game in a fair and unbiased way. There are a few topics here that we need to cover.

Pace of Game

No one like's to watch games that drag. Least of all umpires. We need to do our part to keep the games moving. Action in the game allows everyone to stay involved from player's to fan's to umpire's. Study and understand how to keep the game moving. If a ball is out of play, get the new ball in motion quickly so that we can return to action. Move teams in and out of the dugout cheerfully, and understand the time between inning's especially when a time limit is involved. Move briskly from position to position as the base umpire. As the plate umpire, use a timing mechanism to give coach's an equal, yet quick time to visit with their defense and keep the game moving. A good rule of thumb is the time it takes to walk out to the rubber, the plate umpire to sweep off the plate, write down the defensive conference, and then we should be heading out to break up the conference. Keep the game moving!

Line up Card Management

You must write down changes! This is a requirement. However, you need to have a system that enables you to do this quickly and efficiently. There is no substitute for looking professional when making the changes that a coach is asking for and being ready to play when the athletes are. Line up card holder's are used at the very top level of softball by all plate umpires. You owe it to yourselves and to the game to get one and learn how to use it correctly.

Post Game

Exiting the field

90 Percent of the time, we will be leaving through the winning teams dugout as a crew. Occasionally, the winning team and the crew had a difference of opinion and we want to avoid the situation. Regardless of the situation, we always exit the field as a crew. If spectators want to offer their thanks for a game well done, do not stop walking. Nod, say thank you and keep moving. Nothing can be gained from taking the time to talk to a fan while in uniform.

Post game topics of discussion

If there were any rules questions, wait until you get back to the official's area and make sure that is discussed out of ear shot of the fans. If a rule was misapplied, make sure the umpire in chief knows that you had an error in a rules interpretation. Because going forward, the coach will be playing by the rule that you misapplied. While there is nothing you can do about the misapplication, the umpire in chief will need to communicate with the coaching staff about what was misapplied. The worst thing possible is for you to get the same coach later in the tournament and apply the rule correctly the next time you see them. Talk to your partner about any mechanic's that were misapplied or things that we

feel, as a crew, we can do better. If you made mistakes, this is where you can discuss them and then LEAVE THEM THERE. Grow for your mistake but do not let one mistake become two by overthinking.

Managing the Game

Preventative umpiring

Preventative umpiring is a term that has come to mean many things, to many people. We are now going to define this term going forward as preventing a rules violation by a coach that we can control. For instance, we can take the changes for entering a player into the lineup, but also inform the coach that they now have lost their courtesy runner. “Coach, is that what you want to do, knowing you have no courtesy runner?” If the answer is yes, we are not here to coach them from that point on. We won't allow a courtesy runner in that game going forward and when he calls it out, we will remind him they have lost the runner. What we won't do is tell the coach, “your pitcher is close to being illegal.” That is not preventative, that is coaching. We can help control line up changes that are brought to our attention. We can keep coaches from taking too many conference's, from putting in substitutes that they have already used, etc. But, a player is either legal, or illegal. She has either left the base early, or she has not. We cannot warn people of violations. That is coaching. If we have option plays, such as illegal pitches that are hit, we need to make sure the coach has all the options in front of them to make the correct decisions based on their situation. This also means handling the individual personalities involved in the game itself and recognizing when we need to address situations.

Unsportsmanlike Warnings

Warning have been instituted for the benefit of the coach. Sometimes, a coach will bypass the line and we may not get a chance to issue a warning. However, when a warning is given, it should be recorded with inning and situation on the score card. There is no separate warning for each coach. When a team has been warned for unsportsmanlike conduct, further discussion of any play during the game needs to be professional. Anything else will be cause for a restriction to the dugout.

Writing down the warnings themselves and good record keeping will be very important to the umpire as back up for when the coach inevitably heads to the umpire in chief. A warning is also the first step in the discipline of team personnel and must be followed up on when appropriate. If the problem persists, we must be prepared to act with a restriction to the dugout at the minimum and an ejection if necessary. All of these situation must be documented and turned in on the appropriate form for follow up.

If we use good preventative umpiring, and good judgment, we should be able to avoid most situations. Coaches are allowed to ask questions and should not be warned about asking questions. We can't have coaches, however, discussing the questions from across the field. If the coach approaches the official in a calm manner and asks questions, we should be able to address the situation. If a coach persists, than we may need to issue a warning. Remember, the final call still belongs to us. It's okay to disagree, but the game needs to continue on from there.

Restrictions to the dugout

This is the second stage of the discipline for personnel. When a team member is restricted to the dugout, they are REQUIRED to stay in the dugout. The only exception is a coach being called on the field to tend to an injured player. Other than that, a coach may not be allowed to set foot upon the field.

When a team member is restricted to the dugout, the non calling official must step in and direct

the team member to the dugout. The official should remind the personnel that the next step is an ejection and remind them of the constraint's that they must now operate under. You can listen to the coach as you walk them to the dugout, but keep moving. Don't allow them to stop. If they do, they are subject to being ejected. This is a good time to use preventative umpiring and remind them of that. That restriction is in force for the rest of the game and is valid for all official's. If there is another outburst, we have no choice but to go to the third stage of discipline.

Ejections

So, we have kept our cool. We have warned the coach. We have restricted the coach. They continue to object and draw attention away from the game. At this point, with all of our documentation, the coach has chosen to eject themselves. While no one enjoys doing this part of the job, sometimes it is necessary. Once again, the non calling official play's a huge part in this. When you have ejected a team member, you must walk away from the offender. There is nothing left to be gained there and they are no longer part of the game. Document, in detail, anything said on your score card, so that you may include the exact words in your report.

As the non calling official, your job is to make sure that the guilty party leaves expeditiously. They must get out of sight and out of sound. If your umpire in chief walks them away or the tournament director is escorting them away, then you have handled your responsibility. Resume play as quickly as possible and place the emphasis back on the field where it belongs. If the coach refuses to leave, remind them that the next step is a forfeit. Do not put a time on it, keep calm and try to get the coach to leave. If you have a further situation that cannot be brought back under control, then you, as a crew, have given the coach's 4 chances to correct the unsportsmanlike behavior. It is time to leave the field as a crew. This should almost never happen, but in the event it does, you now have followed all protocol laid in front of you and the team has lost control, not you as a crew.

Protest

Protest of rules applied are allowed and should be welcomed. If a team is protesting a rule, we should be able to put our ego aside and make sure that we have the interpretation correct. A protest of a judgment call is not allowed. When a coach asks for a protest of a judgment call, we need to tactfully remind the coach that those type's of protest are not allowed. If they have a question on a rule interpretation, we should ensure that we are explaining the rule correctly. If that doesn't clarify and the coach would like to protest a misapplication of the rules, we have protocol for that.

- Receive the protest fee, if applicable for the tournament
- Stop the game clock
- Gather all information pertinent to the play
- Bring the umpire in chief in on the discussion
- Make sure that all pertinent information is given
- Refer to the rules book, if necessary
- Administer the correct ruling
- Start the clock and resume play, as quickly as possible

Reports

Submitting reports

A report must be submitted through the national website whenever a team member is ejected. This includes a player, a score keeper or a coach. Fans will be handled by your tournament director and Umpire in chief. The reports are to be turned in within 24 hours of the ejections themselves. The form is located on the national website.

Who receives the report?

The report is automatically forwarded to the following people

- The National Coordinator
- Your Regional Umpire in chief
- Your State Umpire in chief
- Your state director

Again, you do not need to forward these on as the report, when submitted, automatically sends these out to the respective people mentioned.

Writing good reports

It's important to write the report in great detail. This is your back up when the state director gets to hear from the ejected person. If you write down, in detail, what led up to the ejection, showing the steps that got from point a to point b, your state director now has the information necessary to discipline team personnel, if necessary. When you give exact words and actions this protects you, as an official, from getting things turned around on you. We, as officials, can also review if the same person is getting ejected from tournament's all over and have a discussion with the director who is sanctioning this team. **BE SPECIFIC IN YOUR REPORTS!**

Mechanics

Mechanics are very important to our association. When you take the field with your fellow official, you should all be on the same page with what we expect from a national perspective. You will be judged for advancement based upon your ability and your adherence to the manual and the use of the mechanics incorporated herein. We will cover specific situations with diagrams in this manual. We want you to know that there are no exact spots on the field that handles every call, but we expect you to use this manual as a guide to getting in the best possible position for the call and seeing the elements that we feel are necessary for the call. This is a living and breathing guide. Work this manual, try the mechanics incorporated herein. Then, if you have a better way, feel free to send that suggestion along and we can continue to improve the calling of softball for USSSA going forward!

All Umpires

We communicate through body language, signals and our mechanics. Every move that we make on the field is sending a message as to what we are seeing and our responsibilities. Learn to use the mechanics and body language to tell the story of what we are calling and what we are seeing to help facilitate the game.

Positioning

- There are 4 elements to every play. The ball, the base, the runner and the fielder. See them all!
- Arrive ahead of the action and get set, if possible.
- Starting distance down the first base line is 25 feet away from first base. Stay DEEP!
- Be patient on ground balls; See the fielder catch the ball before you decide to move.
- A 90 degree angle, most of the time, is not as far a move as you think. When we have multiple runners, a 90 degree angle isn't always possible. By using teamwork, we can cover it all
- Be no closer than 15 feet on a tag play to see all the element's and close the distance to make the

call

- Generally, with no runners on, the base umpire is responsible for seeing the batter/runner approach, touch and round the base. You have zero responsibility for the ball in the outfield unless you chase. Show the coaches you are watching with your body language.
- When we have multiple runners, as a general rule, seeing runners touch third and the plate is the home plate umpires responsibility. The runner's touching 1st and second base is the base umpire responsibility. The trail runner almost always belongs to the base umpire
- **COMMUNICATE!** When we have multiple runners, as the plate umpire, your job is to tell the base umpire if you are coming up to third or have chosen to stay with a possible play at home. This enables the base umpire the opportunity to cover a play at third if the snap throw goes there.

Force Play

A force play is the most routine out, but the one that is missed most often. Be patient, and make sure you know where the ball is being thrown. Move when you see the fielder has secured the ball, then let the throw take your eyes to the bag. When your eyes move to the bag, if the runner isn't there, you have an out. Using this method will help you get the banger right.

Tag Play

The calling of the tag play involves 4 elements and timing! We are giving you general guidelines and understand that you may need to adjust and close in as the play develops. Timing is important here. Allow the runner and the defender to make the initial play. Hold your call and insure that the runner has touched the bag, the fielder has the ball and process the information. Nearly every tag play where the runner is called out is almost, by definition, a banger. **SELL THAT CALL!** With proper timing and insuring the elements are in front of you, this call should be exciting and hard to argue.

Dropped third strike

This is sometimes a difficult play for the home plate umpire to get correct. The assumption is, if in doubt, the ball was caught. As a plate umpire, you must attempt to see the ball and be sure. You still have a strike, so, first thing first, make the appropriate signal. If the ball is caught, glance at your partner(s) and see if they are pointing at the ground. If they are, and we are in the dropped third situation, the ball has hit the ground. Give the "safe" signal and move where it's appropriate to make the call or help on a throw down the line. Then officiate the play from there. Again, if you have doubt, and your base umpire is not pointing down, the ball has been caught. We must be 100% to have a dropped third strike.

Infield Fly Rule

The plate umpire is responsible for calling this play. If the plate umpire does not make it and it's an obvious infield fly call, the base umpire can make the call. However, the primary responsibility belongs to the plate umpire.

When the plate umpire is sure that we have an infield fly play possible, they should bring their right hand to their chest, with a flat palm to their chest. No need to show outs. The base umpire should echo this signal to verify the play is on. If the play is not on, or we no longer have the situation, the plate umpire or base umpire should take their right hand down their left arm in a wiping motion, to "wipe off" the play.

Look Back Rule

Many times in the mechanic manual you will see the reference to the play concluding. When does the play conclude? The correct answer is when the pitcher has the ball in the circle and all runners on back on the base they are going to. Be patient on this. If the batter-runner is still coming back from over running first, do not move and insure she returns to the bag. **THE PLAY IS NOT CONCLUDED UNTIL SHE IS!** When everyone is there and we still have runners on, we can only have 1 umpire in motion at a time. So, the base umpire(s) move to their next position first. Hustle! The plate umpire is to hold his spot and insure that the pitcher remains in the circle with the ball or that we don't have runner's leaving their bases in an attempt to move to the next base. Shifting their weight is not a violation. When the base umpire makes eye contact with the plate and is in their position, they take over the observation and the plate umpire can briskly walk back to their position behind the plate. Take this time to observe the benches and see if a coach is requesting time out.

A look back rule violation is a rare play, but it does happen. The best way to ensure that we get this play right is to remember we need to see the runner's return to their base. If the runner stops, look from the runner to the pitcher to insure she is in the circle with the ball. Then, look at the runner again, if she is still standing, check the pitcher one more time. When you take your eyes back to the runner, if she hasn't moved, we now have a "Dead ball, look back rule violation!" Be loud and proud, we can only get one out on this play, point to the player you are calling out while calling it. You have given her 3-5 seconds to get back. We shouldn't have an argument on this one, if done correctly.

Home run

When the ball goes over the fence, and there is no chase, the person responsible for this call is the plate umpire. The correct signal is twirling the finger over head to signal the home run. Once the ball is over, we pick up our base touching responsibilities based on the situation. However, the difference here is that the plate umpire will step in to fair territory to observe the touch at third and home plate. As the player's come to the plate, anyone not running needs to be told to stay in foul territory so you can see the touch. Preventative officiating here! "Number 11, please stay in foul." This can be done quietly and avoids the issuing of warnings. The base umpire is responsible for taking the trail runner all the way over to third . When you see her touch third, you can cut across the diamond, looking towards the plate while going across to help on a missed plate and head back to your next starting position. As a reminder, the batter is allowed to come back and touch the plate as long as she hasn't left the plate area. This is a judgment call. If she's in the mouth of the dugout, the defense can get the appeal and get an out. Do not throw a ball to the pitcher until you are sure the last runner has had the opportunity to touch home. You giving them a ball is a signal they can ask for an appeal, so be very patient with it.

Going for Help

We do not need to go for help on every call! When a coach asks for an umpire to go for help, most of the time, they just don't agree with our call. We do not need to dismiss the coach for this. But, we can help educate the coach as the appropriate way to get help. When a coach says, "I think your partner had a better angle." Our response should be to find out what the question really is. "Coach, I have all the elements in front of me and the timing is a judgment call. Did the defender bobble the ball? Do we have a pulled foot? Did the runner not touch the bag?" These are things that not only can we get help for, **WE SHOULD!** Don't have such a big ego that someone who is in a different spot can't help us. We want to get the call right. However, we don't need to appease the coach when they don't like our judgment. "I think she beat the throw." is not a reason to get together. That being said, be professional when a coach asks that question. No reason to get high and mighty. They are allowed to

ask questions, but it's our job to keep the game moving. "Coach, I had the play, I had all the elements, we have to move on and play ball." If this is said in a calm and even tone, this is almost always met with a coach retreating to their position.

Plate Umpire Mechanics

Plate umpires need to work in priority. First priority is know the situation (infield fly, timing play, etc.) Pitcher, pitch, batter, and finally, action.

Situation

It's important for the plate umpire to communicate the situation when appropriate. We have gone over the infield fly signal, if we have two outs, we need to communicate that as well. With no runners on or a runner on first only, show the 2 fingers at waist level to your base umpire. They should echo that back to you, as long as there are 2 outs. With a runner on second or third, we now have a timing play possibility that is likely. The plate umpire should place two fingers from the right hand across where a watch would be on the left wrist at about chest level to signify we have a possible timing play. The base umpire should echo this back as well.

Giving the count

The count is a relay of information from the official to athlete. We want to make sure that we give the count at appropriate times and be consistent with our count information. The count should be given when the pitcher has turned to face the plate, preferably before she steps on to the rubber. Watch the pitcher, all of them have rhythms. Match her rhythm to give the count when she is ready for the information. Balls are given with the left hand and strikes with the right. The count should be given verbally as well.

Priorities

Pitcher

The pitcher needs to have the ball, in the circle and on the rubber, with the offense and umpires in their positions before we begin our 25 second count. Once the pitcher has assumed that position, unless there is an outstanding reason to grant time, the count should begin and continue. If the pitcher removes herself from the rubber and the batter stays in the box, the count continues. If the batter steps out, call time remind the batter that you have a count going and that you did not grant time. Remember, this is a live ball sport. When the pitcher gets on the rubber, we should have a pitch within 25 seconds.

Pitch

As the pitcher begins her delivery, we must be cognizant of a double touch. That is our responsibility at the plate for illegal pitches. Assuming that doesn't happen, we need to call the pitch a ball or strike. See the ball into the zone, hear the ball hit the glove, process the information and make the call. We are paid to call "ball" and "strike" if the pitch comes in, we should have a call. If a batter swings, a simple strike mechanic, without announcing, should be used.

Batter

Our next priority is the batter. As the pitch comes in, we need to focus on the pitch and see if the batter is moving. If they move into a pitch, it is a dead ball. It may be a dead ball strike, but it is dead. Again, process the information. If you saw the batter move into a pitch, keep them at the plate. If they swung, it is a dead ball strike. If the pitch hit them, we have a dead ball and we award bases.

These are all things that we have to process.

Action

We move on to our next priority, which is a throw on a steal or pick off, a ball in play, or a passed ball. Any of these things require further action as a plate umpire. We are still observing the play, looking for interference by a batter, or obstruction by a catcher. We must also judge a ball to be fair or foul by getting on the line and making the call. A ball going back to the fence is also our responsibility and possible plays at the plate based on that as well.

After the Ball is hit

Ball in Play

- Once the ball is put in play, the plate umpire must first rule on interference, or obstruction at the plate. To do that, remember to pull off your mask and pause for a second. Take in the information while watching the ball. Interference at the plate is an immediate dead ball WHEN WE CALL IT! We can't make a dead ball live, so I would rather that you be a little slow with an interference call than to call it and have to eat it if you had it incorrect.
- Next is a fair or foul ball. A ball is fair until we call it foul. Again, process the visual information. Be deliberate! If you are wrong, and you have it fair, you may be able to get help from your partner to turn it foul. If you are wrong and call it foul, we have no recourse. When you call the ball foul, it is both hands, stretched above the head, with your mask off, and a loud "FOUL BALL!" on anything close. If it is, however, fouled off against the backstop, or out of play, there is no need to call that foul. Use our signal and voice to confirm calls when it is close.
- Now, as the play moves on, we either trail the batter-runner with no one on up the first base line about no more than 15 feet and plant ourselves. We don't want to be moving when we are looking down the line. Now, what are we looking for? The base umpire will have the initial play at first. We are there to have eyes on swipe tags, a pulled foot, possible running lane violations, coaches interference and a ball being thrown out of play. Stay with the play until the play is complete.
- If there are multiple runners, we still need to be in motion. A runner on first only, leads us to the holding zone in front of the pitcher's circle. More runners leads us to the holding zone down the third base line. Very rarely do we get to set behind home plate and do nothing. Be prepared to move!
- DO NOT TOUCH TEAM EQUIPMENT! If you move the bat, and another player gets hurt involving the bat, you may be found liable! It seems safer, but it is not. Do not touch any equipment.

Base Umpire Mechanics

Before The Pitch

You must stay involved in the game and now how to help on the field. Before every pitch you need to be asking yourselves these things:

- Where are the outfielders positioned?
- Where are my runners?

- How many outs? Do we have a timing play?
- Is there an umpire signal I need to echo?
- Do I have tag up responsibilities?
- Do I have possible plays on the bases? (Hit ball, steal, pick off?)
- Do I have a potential interference/obstruction/no call on the bases?
- What is the game situation? Possible Squeeze? Walk off scenario? Double-play?

By going through all of this before the pitch, there is less chance of an error on our part. It also keeps you focused on the game and in the game.

Walking the Line at First

Many people have taken this mechanic and turned it into a daily stroll. While I appreciate people being active, we want to limit the amount of movement necessary to reach our starting point for the play. We want you to take no more than 2 steps to end on your outside foot as the pitcher releases the pitch. We also want you to end no closer than 90 feet from home plate, completely in foul territory. This enables you to react to a hit ball, after you see the play take shape. No reason to move until the ball is caught by an infielder, or through the infield. Practice patience! If the ball is not down the right field line and through the infield, you can lead the runner to second. If the ball is in the air, down the right field line, we want that ball chased more often than not.

The Set Position (B, and C)

When you move to the “B” and “C” position, we no longer will be standing up. The Base umpire will be down with both hands either on your thighs or above the knees, with your body squared up to home plate. We want you a step behind and a step to either side of where the middle infielder starts. This will feel close to many of you. However, remember that the middle infielder will move up a step or two as the pitch is released. This should keep you shallow enough to be credible when making calls on the infield and far enough away to move when the infielder retreats to make a call.

Teamwork Among Umpires

- Watch for checked swings and dead ball situations that you can help on
- Never, as a base umpire, signal foul ball
- You may call a “dead ball” on a batter, but any determination of foul should be the plate umpires.
- Never stop runners on dead ball situations
- Always know the location of the ball
- Work to keep the elements in front of you when possible
- Be aware of throwing lanes and running lanes once the ball is hit and stay out of the way!
- Be parallel to runners you are responsible for when possible
- Make sure the action is complete, including the pitcher with the ball in the circle, before moving to your next position. One umpire moves at a time!