

# Ump-Up for Dummies

By Allen Miller

## General Information:

- Wear single-color blue, red, or light blue shirts if possible. Multiple colored shirts can be a distraction to the players.
- A baseball cap should be worn during day games to help with the glare. It is optional for night games, but may be useful to signal calls such as runners leaving early.
- Do not wear jewelry or watches which might reflect sunlight, as this can be a hindrance to the players.
- Sunglasses should be the non-reflective type.
- Drink plenty of water.
- Have fun and smile!

## Position 'A' – No Runners on Base:

- Take a position down the right field line in foul territory, approximately 10 to 15 feet behind the first baseman.
- On a ground ball to the infield, run into the infield dirt to the right of first base and set yourself to make a call on the runner at first base.
- On a ball to the outfield, run into the infield grass towards the pitcher's mound, watch for the runner to touch first base and then set yourself to make a call on the runner at second or first base as needed. Note: The home plate umpire is responsible for all calls in the outfield, including catch or no catch.
- The home plate umpire is responsible for all foul ball calls on the third base line and for the first base line up to first base. The field umpire is responsible for foul ball calls past first base. Note: Foul balls should be signaled and called. Fair balls should be signaled only; do not call out "Fair Ball".

## Position 'B' – Runner on First Base:

- Take a position in the infield dirt, just in front of the outfield grass boundary, to the right of the second baseman.
- Watch runner on first to ensure that he does not leave the base until the ball has crossed the plate.
- On a steal attempt, move as close as possible towards second base in order to make a call on the runner. The runner must be tagged to be out.
- On a ground ball to the infield, set yourself to make a call on the runner at first or second base as needed.
- On a ball hit to the outfield, move into the infield grass, watch the runners touch the bases (priority on the lead runner), and set yourself to make a call on the runner at any base. Make sure that you do not impede the runner advancing from first base.
- Once obtaining a position in the infield grass, you should, in general, follow the lead runner up to third base. You must, however, be prepared to make a call at any infield base.
- On a fly ball, either fair or foul, that is caught in-flight, ensure that runner does not leave the base to advance until the ball is caught. The runner may leave the base, but must return to the base prior to advancing on any ball caught in-flight. If the runner advances illegally, the defensive team need only tag the base from which the runner advanced to record the out; it is not necessary to tag the runner.
- The home plate umpire will call foul balls at both base lines while the field umpire is in Position 'B'.

### **Position 'C' – Any Combination with Runners on Second and/or Third Base:**

- Take a position in the infield dirt, just in front of the outfield grass boundary, between the shortstop and the third baseman.
- Watch runners (priority to lead runner) to ensure that they do not leave the base before the ball has crossed the plate.
- On a steal or pick-off attempt, move as close as possible to the base at which the play is being made in order to make the call. The runner must be tagged to be out.
- On a ground ball to the infield, set yourself to make a call on the runner at any infield base. Be aware of which runners are forced to advance.
- On a ball hit to the outfield, move into the infield grass, watch the runners touch the bases (priority on the lead runner), and set yourself to make a call on the runner at any base. Make sure that you do not impede any runner advancing to a base.
- On a fly ball, either fair or foul, that is caught in-flight, ensure that runner does not leave the base to advance until the ball is caught. The runner may leave the base, but must return to the base prior to advancing on any ball caught in-flight. If the runner advances illegally, the defensive team need only tag the base from which the runner advanced to record the out; it is not necessary to tag the runner.
- The home plate umpire will call foul balls at both base lines while the field umpire is in Position 'C'.

### **Important Rules:**

- **Obstruction:** The act of a fielder, not in possession of the ball, who impedes a runner. Fielders cannot block off a base or base line without possessing the ball. Note: The act of catching a thrown ball is no longer considered to be 'in possession'. This is a recent rule change.
- **Interference:** The act of a runner who hinders a fielder's attempt to make a play on a batted ball, or who intentionally interferes with a thrown ball.

Note: When the field umpire observes an incidence of obstruction, interference, or of a base runner attempting to steal before the ball has crossed the plate, the field umpire should toss his cap at the area of the infraction, but shall allow the play to continue to its completion. At the completion of the play, you should call time and confer in private with the home plate umpire, telling him what you saw, and assisting him in determining if any resulting penalties should be applied. The field umpire should never stop the play and call out 'Obstruction', etc.

- A runner to a base is out whenever they run more than 3 feet away from a direct baseline if doing so with the intent of avoiding a tag. Note: The runner may run outside of the baseline to avoid a fielder making a play on a batted ball.
- A batter is out when, in running the last half of the distance to first base, the runner runs inside of (to the left of) the first base foul line or more than 3 feet to the right of the foul line in an attempt to avoid a tag or, if in so doing, interferes with the fielder taking the throw at first base. Note: the batter may run outside of this area to avoid a fielder attempting to field a batted ball.
- If a following runner is put out on a force play, the force is removed from leading forced runners, who must now be tagged to record an out. Example: With a runner on first base, the batter hits a ground ball to the first baseman who steps on first base. The runner who was on first is no longer forced and must be tagged at second base to record the out.

- A runner coming in to a base that is covered by a fielder in possession of the ball must slide or otherwise attempt to avoid a tag. No head-first slides are allowed, unless a runner is returning to a previously occupied base (pick-off attempt or run-down, for example). Note: If the fielder does not have possession of the ball, the runner need not make any attempt to avoid contact with the fielder.
- A runner who is hit by a fair batted ball, before it touches an infielder or before it passes an infielder other than the catcher or pitcher, is out. Note: If a fair ball touches a runner after passing an infielder other than the catcher or pitcher, the runner shall not be declared out. In making this judgment, the umpire must be convinced that no other infielder had a chance to make a play on the ball.
- The umpire is considered part of the field, and any ball hitting an umpire is considered live and in-play. Exception: If a batted ball touches an umpire before it has passed an infielder other than the pitcher, the ball is dead.
- A ball accidentally touching a base coach is alive and in-play, unless said coach interferes with the ball.
- Infield Fly Rule: Invoked when, with less than two outs and runners on first and second or runners on first, second, and third, a fair fly ball (line drives excluded) is adjudged to be able to be caught by an infielder with ordinary effort. Note: The home plate umpire shall make this call. The field umpire should echo the call immediately.
- If a runner fails to tag a base while passing it, the field umpire should mentally note the infraction, but should not call it out or signal the infraction by throwing their hat. The runner is out on appeal only, when the defensive team tags the base which the runner missed prior to the next pitch.
- When a following runner passes a leading runner, the following runner (the passer) shall be declared out.
- When two runners are on a base at the same time, legal possession of the base belongs to the leading runner; the following runner shall be declared out when tagged.
- When returning to a previous base, the runner must re-touch all of the passed bases in reverse order, unless he is returning during a dead ball. Example: A runner on first base leaves the base and touches and passes second base on a fly ball caught in-flight. That runner must re-touch second base on his way back to first base.
- If asked to assist on a check-swing, the rule indicates that it is a swing if, in the judgment of the umpire, the batter offered at the pitch. This is a judgment call. There is no such rule concerning the position of the bat or the breaking of the wrists when determining if the batter swung.
- Judgment calls may not be appealed. However, a manager or coach may ask the ruling umpire to get a second opinion, so long as this is done in a respectful manner. The ruling umpire is not obligated to obtain a second opinion if he does not feel it to be necessary. If a second opinion is granted, the ruling umpire should confer privately with the other umpire with no players, managers, or coaches present. He should ask the other umpire 'What did you see'. The ruling umpire may, based upon this input, either change his ruling or not. An umpire should never provide unsolicited advice or opinions without first being asked by the ruling umpire.
- An appeal is a formal claim of a rules violation by the offensive team, and applies only to specific plays such as missed bases and other rules violations.

**Tips:**

- When setting yourself to make a call, your body and, in particular, your head should be still so that your eyes can properly focus.
- When making calls on a tag play, you should try to be as close to the tag as possible. When making calls on a force play, you should be far enough away so that your field of vision can pick up the runner's foot at the base and the incoming ball. Think 'Close to a tag / Far from a force'.
- When making a call on a close, bang-bang play, use all of your senses including listening for the incoming ball to be caught.
- As a rule, the closer the play the louder you should make the call.
- If it's your call to make, then make the call. Always make the best call that you can make. The manager can always ask for a second opinion on the play, at which time you may confer with the other umpire.
- The home plate umpire is responsible for all calls in the outfield. If a batter hits a deep fly ball, do not watch it as it soars overhead; rather your responsibility is to ensure that the runners touch the bases and do not leave early if the ball is caught in-flight.
- Always confer privately with the other umpire.

**Non-Verbal Umpire Communication:**

- While a call is being disputed with a manager, the other umpire may signal that he thought it was the proper call by holding one fist in front of his stomach and topping it with the other hand. If the other umpire puts his hands behind his back, you are probably on your own.
- If the home plate umpire loses track of the ball/strike count, he may look to you and roll his two index fingers. You should then discreetly (perhaps by holding fingers down in front of your thighs) help him out. Don't shout out the count from across the field of play.
- If an infield fly situation is possible, the home plate umpire may hold one fist to his chest while holding the other hand down to the side, indicating how many outs have been recorded. You should mimic this signal back to him.