

## 25 Quick Tips for Amateur Umpires Youth League Style

- 1. Clear the Catcher.** On a pitch that gets by the catcher, you must clear the catcher and keep your eye on the ball. A common mistake made by amateur umpires is to remain in one spot and focus on the runners stealing bases. *Nothing can happen without the ball!* You must turn, back off from the plate and watch the ball. You must watch for the possibility of the ball going out of play, or the chance of a lodged ball. Either would require you to call time, declare the ball dead and award one base to all runners. (*Rule 7.05 h & i*) Watching the passed ball allows you to keep out of the catcher's way, if he chooses to throw the ball to somebody to make a play on a runner. Let the ball lead you to the play. Finally, youth league batter's often have the bad habit of backing out of the box on a wild pitch, when they shouldn't. You have to watch the catcher's attempt to throw out a runner to rule on any possible interference by the batter.
- 2. Don't say "Ball four, take your base!"** Saying this helps the offense. It is actually a form of coaching! As an umpire, you would never shout to a runner to "slide!" or "get back!" When it is a ball four, don't point to first base, either. Most of the players know where it is. Your pointing arm could be confused as a strike gesture. Just say "ball," like you would on any other pitch. It is the responsibility of the batter to know the count. Plus, you should verbalize the count often, especially when you've got either 2 strikes or 3 balls, or when asked.
- 3. Never say "Strike three, you're out!"** In a youth league, just saying "strike three," is humiliating enough for the batter. Everyone knows he's out. Nevertheless, it's a bad habit. In teenage leagues and over, when the ball is not caught by the catcher, it might be strike three, but the batter may not be out until the catcher tags the batter or throws to first base. If you say "he's out," prematurely, you might kill a viable play.
- 4. Always call "play!" to make the ball live.** After any dead ball situation, (i.e. foul, requested time-out, ball out of play, etc.) Always verbally *command* and *physically* signal the pitcher to "play!" This is especially critical when runners are on base. But, as a good (and professional) technique you should always do it. It shows that **you** are in control of the game. And it prevents any misunderstanding when the defense attempts a play on a runner with a dead ball.
- 5. Insist that the ball be made live properly.** Whenever the ball is dead, to make the ball live, the ball must be given to the pitcher, and the catcher and batter must be ready. As soon as the pitcher contacts (toes) the rubber, call "play!" This is the only legal way the ball can be made live.

6. **Hold up the anxious pitcher.** Don't let a pitcher go into any pitching motion when the ball is dead. He must wait until you call "play!" Even if you're just about to say "play," if the pitcher begins his motion, throw up your arms, holler "Hold it!" Carefully slip sideways out from behind the catcher. Don't holler "time" here because time is already out. Explain to the pitcher that he must watch YOU and wait for the signal and command to "play!" before he can pitch. If he throws, it's a no-pitch.
7. **Dress the part.** All of the players come out in their game uniforms. So should you. You don't have to spend a lot of money to do this. In fact you probably have what you need right now. Wear neat trousers, a solid colored shirt or jacket (preferably blue) and a dark colored cap. Choose items with no (or very small) logos on them, but never wear items with sports teams, tobacco or liquor emblems. Walk onto the field looking like the game is important enough to *you* to dress properly for it. You don't want to appear like you just stopped off to umpire the game while on your way to the beach.
8. **Look out for your partner.** As a plate umpire, never call "play" until you are sure your field umpire is ready. Especially at the beginning of an inning, your partner may have run to get a sweater from his bag behind the backstop, or he might be answering nature's call in the port-a-jon. It is very embarrassing to have the lead-off batter of an inning ground-out to first base and nobody is there to make the call!
9. **Don't look sideways on a strike call.** Many umpires like to make a grand strike gesture that sometimes involves turning their heads sideways to the right. By doing this, they're taking their eyes off the field and the baseball. It's a bad habit. If you do this, sooner or later you'll miss a play. Keep the grand gestures if you must, but keep your eyesight trained on the field.
10. **Your palm means "time."** When a plate umpire holds up his hand(s) in the "stop" gesture. It means "time." The ball is dead, any play or pitch is nullified. If you hold up your hand, you must then signal the pitcher and command him to "play." Don't say "pitch," "OK," "Go!" etc., just say "play!"
11. **Keep the game moving between innings.** The pitcher is allowed 8 warm-up throws within one minute. (*Rule 8.03*) Some local leagues allow fewer warm-ups. Be reasonable, but firm. Don't let a team waste your time. Cut short the warm-ups and order the batter to step into the box, if the defensive is not hustling into their positions and nobody comes out right away to warm-up the pitcher while the catcher suits up.
12. **Don't "shut down."** Shutting down, is the blunder of taking your attention away from a play too soon. This is a common mistake made by amateur umpires after a safe call, and usually at first base. Example: The runner beats out a play on him at first. He is called safe. Immediately after making the call, the field umpire, turns away and heads for his "B" position, or buries his head in his "clicker" to reset it. There are many things a runner

can do, especially at first base, that can get him tagged out *after* he gets there safely. When you call him safe, stay right there and watch! Keep your eyes on the ball and the runner. He might fake at going to second base, or the defense might be attempting the hidden ball trick. When the ball is finally returned to the pitcher, only then should you head for your "B" position, but still keeping your eyes on the ball!

- 13. Don't give time to fielders.** Under normal game circumstances, fielders might ask you for time before throwing the ball back to the pitcher. Granting that fielder's request for time deprives the offense from benefiting from a possible wild throw. Don't give them time. Aside from a player's injury, lost contact lens, or some other special case, only give time to pitchers who have the ball, or to the catcher when the pitcher has the ball.
- 14. Don't be too quick to give time to runners.** Runners love to ask for time after sliding into a base. Since you're such a nice guy, you'll be inclined to grant it on the spot. However, (aside from injuries, or other special cases) develop the reflex to say "No, wait." Quickly survey *all* the bases for any other possible movement or plays on other runners. If there are any other runners still moving on the bases, don't give time until all play has come to a natural end. If you call time while runners are moving, you've got to send them back! Even when you explain to the offensive manager that HIS runner asked for the time, he'll tell you "So! You didn't have to give it to him!" He is right.
- 15. Don't give time to a coach while a batter-runner is advancing to first base on a base-on-balls.** Often an impatient coach wants to talk to his pitcher after the sixth consecutive walk. He'll stride out and bark "time" to you and expect that he can have it. Tell him to "Wait. Coach!" The ball is live! Allow the batter-runner to get to first and then wait for him and any other runners to show you that they're not attempting any further base advancement before you give him time.
- 16. Don't let the fielders distract you.** When at position "B" or "C" on a regulation field (90' baselines). You might sometimes set yourself directly in the way of the shortstop or second baseman. If one of them calls, "Hey Blue, can you move over?" Fight the urge to turn around and look where he is, or ask him, "Which way?" That's exactly the time the pitcher will balk, or attempt a pick-off at first base and you'll miss it. Or the batter will launch a bee-bee right off your coconut! If a fielder asks you to move, just quickly slide over two steps to one side without response or averting your eyes from where you're looking. Similarly, if you're asked for the pitch count, just put out your fingers so that it can be seen from behind you.
- 17. Tell your Chief it's OK to play.** Whenever a field umpire grants a time-out, he must communicate to his umpire-in-chief when the game can resume. As soon as the need for the time-out is over, the field umpire should hustle

to his proper position (A, B, or C), and gesture (a point or salute) to his partner behind the plate that he can call "play" as soon as he is ready.

18. **Don't look at your "clicker."** Looking at your ball/strike indicator, especially while resetting it, is a perfect time to get burned by a sudden pick-off attempt, or a quick-pitch, that you'll miss. Don't be distracted by the clicker, only *glance* at it. Reset it while *not looking* at it, then glance again to make sure it's 0-0. When you must look at it when the ball is live, don't look down at it, *hold it up at your eye level*. Glance over at it while you're still watching the field.
19. **A foul tip is never a foul ball.** A foul tip is always caught by the catcher and it is live and it always a strike! Runners may steal on a foul tip. If the tipped ball is not caught by the catcher, it is a foul ball and it is a dead ball. All runners must return to their bases on a foul ball. An umpire should never declare "Foul tip!" when it happens because the very mention of the word *foul* will cause runners to stop running and confuse everybody. On a foul tip, make the tip gesture and just say "Strike!"
20. **Appeals:** The ball *must be live* to make an appeal. Therefore, runners can steal and advance during an appeal. Only fielders, not coaches, may ask for and make the appeal. If a fielder asks for time, and you grant it, then he makes an appeal, do not rule on it! Say "I will rule on the appeal when the ball is properly made live." If the defense appeals an infraction by a runner *still on base*, they may also choose to tag the runner, instead of the base. A runner cannot be tagged once he has entered the dugout. Calling for, and receiving "time" *does not* nullify a team's opportunity to make the appeal when the ball becomes live.
21. **A pitcher standing on the rubber with the ball does not stop an advancing runner!** In youth league, runners who have stopped at a base may not leave the base once the pitcher has the ball on the rubber, AND the catcher is behind the plate ready to catch. The catcher must have his mask on, but he does not have to squat. Runners who continuously advance may always legally continue. Standing on the rubber with the ball, and a catcher being ready, does not stop an advancing runner! Runners can always be tagged out with a live ball, if off base. This rule, 7.13 (LLB) only applies to runners who have decided to stop at a base, or in-between bases. A runner is *never* called out for leaving a base before the pitch reaches the batter. He is usually sent back. Know this rule, re-read it often.
22. **Ignore spectators.** Try not to react to spectator's shouts or questions. Don't give the count or the number of outs when a fan hollers at you for it. Allowing the spectators to communicate with you is a source of distraction that could cause you to miss a play. If fans are shouting discourteous comments about you or anyone else on the field, send a coach of the appropriate team to handle the problem.

- 23. Don't accept a replacement baseball while the game ball is live.** At youth league games, often fans, coaches or players chase down a foul ball that has gone out of play. They're anxious to get it back to you and you're anxious to get it back. Don't allow yourself to be distracted by the helpful person returning the ball. If you hear, "Hey Blue, here's that foul ball." Don't turn to accept it or even acknowledge the person until the game ball is dead. Politely remind the helper to wait for a time-out next time .
- 24. When you're not sure, sell the call!** From time to time, you'll see a tag or a force play, where it was so close that you have no idea if it's safe or out. If it was that close, then nobody else will be sure either. Make a decision, then this is the time to make your most emphatic call and animated mechanic. If *you* seem absolutely sure of your call, then everyone watching will be *sold* on it too.
- 25. Read the rule book often.** Then, Re-read the rule book often. Look for opportunities to work with and discuss rules and game situations with more experienced umpires.