

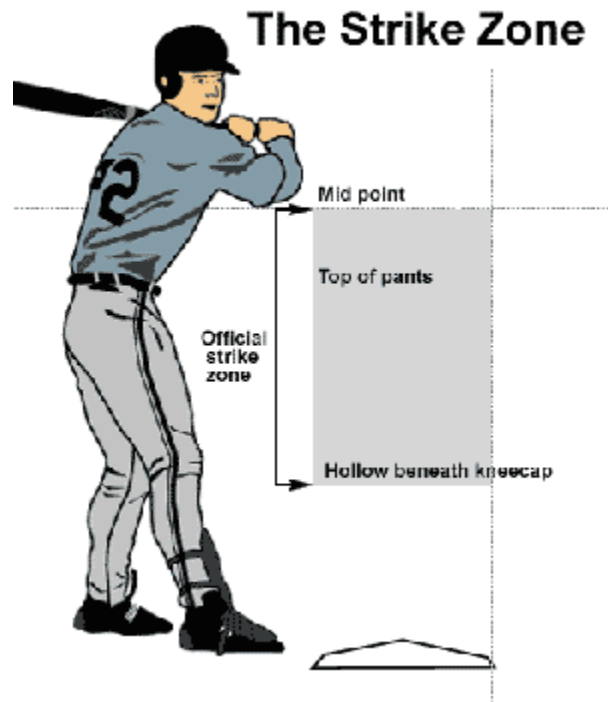
# FNYB

## Umpire Training



Compiled by:  
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Our job as umpires is to be the final authority during a baseball game. This requires us to get the call correct. Using your keys of understanding the rules, correct positioning and proper mechanics will help you be in the best frame of mind and best position to make the call and to get it right.



Some are stretched and shrunk by some umpires but the strike zone is still defined in Rule 5.00 in your FNYB rule book.

## Call Signs and Signals

**READ - PAUSE - REACT.** Remember in each of these calls timing is everything.

**Selling the call** is a matter of the game situation and each umpire will respond differently. There is nothing wrong with putting a little extra on the gesture and voice, in fact it is an important part of the game. In time each umpire develops their own personal sense of rhythm and timing, style and flair.

### Play

Along with strike and ball, this is the one call the plate umpire will make most often during a game. Pointing at the pitcher (or the plate) with the right hand and calling "play." The call is essential for the batter and catcher. The gesture is essential for the pitcher, defense and offense.. In every case in the rule book (Section 5.00) it is clear that the play signal is a verbal signal: "...the umpire shall call "Play"."

Erick Barkhuis, an umpire from the Netherlands, points out that "**this signal/call is very important for your partner(s) too!** They must know the exact moment the ball becomes alive. If they don't, they will not be able to respond correctly in situations where the pitcher makes a pickoff attempt or drops the ball while standing on the rubber. These are just a few examples." Perhaps more important than the ballplayer knowing is your partner(s) knowing the ball is alive.

## Strike

Always signaled with the right hand, each umpire develops a personalized system for signaling the strike. Some do the traditional clenched fist, some indicate the strike out to the side with an open hand.. Some umpires face forward, some turn. Some call strike then signal, others do both simultaneously. One essential element is not to turn away from the action particularly in a two man system. In a two or three man system, by not facing forward, an umpire might even miss a play at the plate while going through their actions.

## Should you say "Strike," signal a "Strike", or both?

Philip Gawthrop from Anne Arundel County, Maryland wrote to add this comment :  
 "Generally, on a swinging strike, as the plate umpire, I NEVER VERBALIZE my call but rather indicate to the players and fans with a raised right arm (in my case, with a clenched fist). The exception to the NOT VERBALIZING is on a third strike; the plate umpire again raises his right arm and says "Strike Three" firmly but does not "sell the call." If the catcher has dropped or trapped the pitch, you still go through with a firm "Strike Three" keeping eye-contact with the batter/catcher."

## Ball

Never signaled. Alright, maybe a touch of body english but no hand gestures. The general preference is that the verbal signal "ball" loud enough that both dugouts can hear it. Calling "ball" allows you to maintain the rhythm of your calls.

**Never indicate why a pitch was a ball, for example: "High, Ball One"**

## Ball Four

Ball four is the one ball count that an umpire should announce aloud. You should NEVER point to first base even with the left hand. Just say "BALL FOUR". If the umpire points to first after the pitch and the defense thinks it's strike 3 and starts to leave the field chaos abounds. Even if you use the left hand, the players may not take note of which hand it was and be confused. Professional umpires never point to first.

Why ball four? It is an important count, but even more important is that you may arrive at a point where you will have to "sell" the walk. Having adopted a vocal call you are now in a position to act with authority should you need to.

## Time

Raising both hands into the air and calling in a loud voice "TIME." All umpires on the field will immediately signal the time call. Sometimes the call must be made several times in order to shut things down. Once time is called every effort must be made by all umpires to stop the action taking place. It is preferred that umpires maintain the time signal with at least the right arm until play is prepared to resume.

## The Count

Balls are signaled using the left hand. Strikes are signaled using the right hand. A **full count** is always signaled as "three balls, two strikes" and never signaled using clenched fists. The count is relayed back to the pitcher after every pitch and a verbal report is made usually after the second or third pitch and from that point on. The count is always read aloud as "two balls, two strikes" and not "two and two" or "twenty-two" or other similar variation.

## Safe

Both left and right arms are raised together, to shoulder level, in front of the umpire and then a sweeping motion is performed out, parallel to the ground, palms down. The verbal call of "safe" may be made. To complete the call you may elect to return to the set position. To sell a safe call you might consider doing it two or three times in rapid succession. It is not always necessary to even make the sign or call. If the play is obvious do nothing.

**"Out!"**

The clenched right fist and a short hammered motion seem to be favored by most umpires. Again, personal style is acceptable as long as it does not distract you from seeing any further plays taking place. It is advisable to wait a second or two before making this call. Watch that the ball does not come loose and check that the fielder is really in possession of the ball. The call can be made with only a gesture or can be sold with a loud call of "Out!" **Signal every out.**

**Never say "Strike Three - You're Out!"**

Umpires are encouraged **not** to make this call a part of their repertoire. Why? In some leagues the third strike does not have to be caught while in others it must be caught. Often the plate umpire is in the worst situation to call the trapped ball, for example: a breaking ball in the dirt for the swinging third strike. An umpire should only call "Strike Three." If you have a situation where you know the batter now erroneously becomes a runner you can follow this by the call "The Batter Is Out!"

**Dropped Third Strike** (Not Applicable to Micro & Minor Divisions)

Where this call is made the base umpire is often in a better position to relay the possession or trapping of the ball to the plate umpire. Signaling, not calling, a small discreet "out" means the ball was caught. Pointing to the ground with your right hand can mean the ball was trapped or not caught.

**Out on the force!**

This is a simple out call but the concentration is on the base. Raise both hands together, just like you are going to call "safe". Point towards, or focus on, the base then signal the out with the right hand, the left hand usually moves up to your chest. Complete the sign by saying "...he's out" or "out at first" etc. if required.

**Out on the tag!**

Point at the runner with the left hand, signal the out with the right hand. Complete the sign by saying "out" plus "on the tag" if you want to sell it a touch. (Remember you are the umpire, not the color commentator.)

**Safe, he missed the tag!**

A "selling it" call that occurs when a runner slides under or around the tag or the tag is high. You can save some grief by indicating a loud "safe" and following it with a tapping motion where the tag was. Everyone will know you saw the tag and most will assume the runner had the bag before it.

**Fair Ball**

The right hand points into the field in fair territory. There is no call "Fair" anything ... ever made in a game. "Fair" can be mistaken for "foul" at a distance and it can confuse the runner(s), coaches, spectators, etc.

**Foul Ball**

The same signal as "Time" but the call becomes "Foul." Umpires often add a point into foul territory with one hand after giving the time signal.

**Dead Ball**

The same signal as "Time" but the call becomes "Dead Ball" or is simply left at "Time." The base umpire needs to pay specific attention to a ball hitting the batter in the batter's box. The base umpire will immediately call "Time" or "Dead Ball" if the plate umpire did not see the infraction. Never say "foul" in this situation.

### No Pitch

The same signal as "Time" but the call becomes "No Pitch." If you are the plate umpire, step away from the plate. You will use this call most often in a softball game. It is used to indicate a leading off violation in some leagues. The call is a clear "No Pitch" and the "Runner is Out!" with a point and Out signal..

### The Run Counts

Here there are two schools of thought. Often you will see an umpires point at the plate each time a run crosses the plate legally. Scorers often key on this gesture (as well as catchers!) This can be important on the "time-play" or a "third-out" situation.

Bob Bainter, a professional umpire noted, "As far as the point on the run scoring, I think it is a matter of personal preference. **Umpire Development Training wants no signal from us whether it is obvious or not.** It is not our job to let anyone know, because what if the defense wants to appeal and throws the ball away, allowing another runner to advance or even score? That is a situation could put the offensive team in a tizzy. It has happened before."

### The Run Does Not Count!

Signal and announce when the runner does not score so that the scorer and coaches maintain accurate records. The signal, done by the plate umpire, begins by forming an 'X' with the arms in front of the body then sweeping the arms out to the "time" position. The gesture is repeated and the call "The runner does not score!" is made.



### Called Strike

First point at the batter with your left hand then signal the strike with your right. It is good practice to verbalize something like "He went - strike." One very effective call is the pointed "Haaaw ... strike!"

### The "Check-Swing" or Appealed Strike

The plate umpire does not have to be asked for help, he can simply request it himself. Experienced catchers will immediately ask you to get help from the base umpire after a check swing which you called a ball although in younger leagues with the coach and three players yelling you often say to the catcher, "Do you want to ask if that was a swing or not?" . Check with your league to see where the request can come from. In some leagues the request to appeal can come from anywhere on the field, even the manager. A request should never be refused. With your left arm gesture clearly to the base umpire and ask "Did he swing?" or "Did he go?" If the answer is yes the base umpire signals - "Strike." If the answer is no - a safe sign.

### The Foul Tip

A two part signal. Extend you left arm up, in front of your body, palm down, to at least shoulder level. Brush the fingers of the right hand over the back of the left hand two or three times. The signal is completed by signaling the strike with the right hand. Because the ball is alive and runners can advance **never** say "Foul Tip." Announcing "foul" anything could stop the action.

### Infield Fly Called

All umpires point into the air with their right hand. On some crews every umpire on the field echoes the infield fly call, on others only the gesture is echoed. This should be dealt with in the pre-game conference.

### Home Run or Ground Rule Double

First, the ball is dead. Make sure any unnecessary action is killed, particularly if the ball has rebounded back into the field. The signal for a home run is circling the right arm and index finger overhead. The ground rule double is awarded by signaling "two bases" with two fingers held up usually on the left hand.

### Awarding Bases

Using the left hand point clearly at the runner and state "You second base" or "You third base", "You home" whatever the case may be. The runner is protected all the way to the base but not one inch beyond it.

### That's a Balk!

Balks must be called with reference to the action. Remember, if the pitcher completes the delivery of the ball, or throws to a base, you are in a delayed balk situation. The sequence of arriving at that signal is: point at the pitcher, arm at shoulder height, and say "That's a balk" .... now if the pitcher hesitates in his delivery call "Time" .... and award the bases "Runner, second base." etc. Pointing at the pitcher will allow sufficient time to determine a delayed balk call situation.

### The Interference Call

An immediate decision is needed: "dead ball" or "delayed dead ball." Point at the offensive player and make the call "That's Interference" followed by your decision on whether or not the ball is dead, announced with a loud gestured "Time" or (... nothing ...) meaning a delayed dead ball. If the ball remains alive avoid any signal that looks or sounds like "Time" until the appropriate moment. If the ball is dead call "Time" immediately and shut down any remaining play on the field.

### The Obstruction Call

This call is like interference except the **ball may remain alive**. In all cases the call "That's Obstruction" is made while pointing at the defensive player making the obstruction. If a play is being made on the obstructed runner the ball is dead so immediately signal "Time." This is followed by an awarding of a base or bases either after play has stopped or even while play remains ongoing. Unless a play was being made on the obstructed runner the ball remains alive.

Any gesture which resembles "Time" being called can cause problems on a diamond. This is one reason why some umpiring organizations teach to initially extend the left hand horizontally with a clenched fist. The professional baseball umpires point at the fielder with one hand only.

### Catch or No Catch

When signaled the "catch" resembles the "out" signal. No verbal indication needs to be given. The "no-catch" signal resembles the "safe" signal except the call of "*No Catch*" is clearly given. Sometimes it will be necessary to repeat this sign several times. An addition to the "No Catch" is the juggling routine which indicates the fielder did not have possession. *Juggle* when the fielder is on the base for the force out but not in full possession of the ball.

Some crews give the safe signal and then point to the ground several times saying "on the ground, on the ground" when the ball is dropped. The terms "Catch" and "No Catch" could be mixed up over the crowd noise.

**The verbal call needs only to be given on a trouble ball**, for example: a ball caught diving or below the fielder's knees. Routine fly's can be signaled or not signaled depending on crew and local practice. If a ball is on the foul lines first signal whether the ball is fair or foul, then the catch or no-catch status if desired.



**Arrive on time and be prepared.** Nothing is more aggravating than a partner that arrives two minutes before game time already dressed for the bases. In general, one should arrive a minimum of 15 minutes before game time. Whether or not your position has been assigned, you should always be prepared to work the plate. You should be on the field for ground rules and ready to go 5 minutes before the scheduled start. And, no, you can't borrow my cup.

**Always have a pre-game with your partner.** This is a great routine to establish. It is an absolute *MUST* when you are working with an unfamiliar partner. I must admit that I am sometimes lax in this area when I am working with a familiar partner, but it should always be done. It gets you on the same page and helps to get the crew focused on the coming contest. Assumes that both umpires have arrived on time (see above). If one partner has arrived late, have a brief conference between innings.

**Look sharp and dress the part.** We've all heard that you are judged before you make your first call. This is *VERY* true. Spend some of your fee and replace those pants and shirts that have been around for the last ten years. And wash your uniform *EVERY TIME* it gets dirty and keep your shoes polished. Perception is reality.

**ALWAYS put the ball back into play.** With runners on base, each occasion that time is given or a ball is fouled, the ball *MUST* be pointed back into play. This may or may not be accompanied by the verbal "PLAY" mechanic. The batter must be in the box and the pitcher on the rubber with the ball. I've had numerous pick-off attempts where, as the base umpire, I had no idea if the ball was live or not. Not a good situation. Also, a sharp pitcher will see you point the ball into play and immediately throw to first hoping to catch the runner napping. If you've made the ball live, there is no question that you have a valid play.

**Get your butt out from behind the dish.** Unless a play at the plate is imminent or a time play is possible, there is nothing for you to do staying behind home plate. This means on *EVERY PLAY*. Get down the first base line on a grounder, down towards third on a 1st to 3rd situation or follow the ball if hit into the outfield. Do you think that players and coaches don't notice that you're lazy? Nothing makes you look worse than trying to make a call at third from 5 feet in front of the plate because you didn't think the situation would allow the runner from first to advance. If the circumstances allow, get down the base line and help your partner out with half of a run-down in progress. This is one of the things that will be noticed, which leads me to....

**Always hustle.** It distinguishes you from the poor or average umpire.

**ALWAYS STAY FOCUSED on the game.** If you want to count the spectators or admire the scenery, do it between innings. Your lack of focus is noticed, and sooner or later you will get a late start or miss a play. This lapse can come up and bite you when you least expect it and in a matter of seconds.

**As the base umpire, NEVER leave the infield with runners on base while the ball is live.** Your primary responsibility is the base runners. If you go out there, you will never get back in time, and your partner can not handle multiple base runners. Never go out any farther than the edge of the infield grass.

**As the base umpire with no one on base, only leave the infield on fair/foul calls down the first base line or possible trouble balls from the right fielder towards the foul line.** Everything else is the plate umpires' responsibility. If the batter-runner continues to second, you will in no way be able to get back into position and the plate umpire may not notice that you can't cover the play, since he should be watching the ball, not you. Come into the infield, pivot and

glance over at the touch at first while following the ball. If you are leaving the infield, let your partner know by saying "I'm going" or "I'm going out". And....

**If you are the base umpire, stop making out calls on balls hit to left or center field with no one on base.** It's the plate umpires' call. And you never want an even number of umpires making a call.

**Be humble. Never try to "run" the game or coach a player.** It's not your job at any level and real players will resent it. You will also come off as an egotistical know-it-all, and no one wants to work with an egotistical know-it-all or have one working their game.

**Be aware that the strict and literal interpretation of the rule book is not always the way it is done.** This comes through experience. Remember the level of the game you are working. See above.

**Use, give and respond to signals with your partner.** *Not just in an infield fly situation.* It is very important that you and your partner are on the same page, and this is a reminder of the current game situation for the crew. No one is above this. The signals should be repeated each time the situation changes, even if just one runner replaces another on a base. Sadly, I am often giving signals to myself on the field. They are not required when there are no runners on base. Learn what a time play is, when it applies and the appropriate signal.

**NEVER turn your head away from the field when calling balls and strikes.** This may be difficult to overcome, but sooner or later you will miss something. Slick strike-three mechanics may look brilliant, but there is no reason to turn your head or turn your back toward the field.

**PLEASE stop coming in and talking to the plate umpire between every half-inning.** Get out to short right field where you belong. If you have something to discuss relevant to the game, fine, but we can shoot the breeze after the game. Circumstances permitting, I do like to talk to my partner once or twice during the game just to see what's up, but not every half-inning. Never come in after a controversial call has been made (especially to explain it) unless you need medical assistance. The reason the base umpire belongs out in short right field is the fact that only the right fielder has to come anywhere near him between innings.

**Watch EVERY touch of the bases by the runners.** This means EVERY touch of 1st and 2nd as the base umpire and EVERY touch of 3rd and home as the plate umpire. I have seen umpires asked for an appeal on a runner leaving early, and I *KNOW* they have no clue. Missed bases and runners leaving early do happen and you *MUST* see it. Never call a runner out unless you are *SURE* a base was missed or he left early.

**Don't say "Strike three-you're out", "Ball four-take your base" or point the batter-runner down to first.** "Strike three" and "Ball" will do. A dropped third strike may not be an out. The batter should know the count and generally knows the location of first base. Also, after ball four, pointing the runner to first can easily be interpreted as a called strike.

**Appeal to the base umpire on a check swing by pointing with your left hand.** Ask him "Did he go?" or "Steve, did he go?" This is another tough one to overcome. Being right-handed, it took me quite a while to break the habit, but once I did, I never went back to the right hand. Can easily be interpreted as a called strike.

**Don't indicate pitch location on called balls.** I see umpires all the time that are constantly verbalizing or gesturing the pitch location. It's not needed, unprofessional and you're asking for trouble.



**Don't call "time" until the base runners touch up.** The play is not over until the runners touch their respective bases on an award. Anything could happen.

**Don't call "time" every time a defensive player asks for it.** It's not needed, makes a long game longer and you are taking a potential advantage away from the offense. A short-stop should be able to throw the ball back to the pitcher from the infield dirt area.

**Never call "time" to get yourself back into position.** I've seen umpires that call "time" in every instance that they have to return from the third base area or other positions on the infield. Again, the game is held up for no good reason. The ball could get loose. You've got a partner out there.

**Don't hold onto the game ball at the mound and wait for the pitcher to arrive.** You're not a porter. It's not your job and it looks silly. Toss the ball to the mound and either get out to short right field or down the base line. Also, staying there will make you a target for disgruntled players as they take the field.

**Slow down your timing!!** Nothing is more embarrassing than seeing a base umpire make an out call just as the ball squirts loose, or his right arm coming up just before calling a runner safe. Also, this virtually guarantees an argument. Behind the plate, the ball should hit the catchers glove, a second or so should elapse and then you should make your call. This gives you the opportunity to really see the pitch.

**Work in the slot and keep your chin level with the top of the catchers head.** The plate umpire should see the ball all the way into the catchers glove. If you are directly behind the catcher or your head is at his head level, there is *NO WAY* you can see the ball into the glove. Most umpires that work this way can not properly observe the low pitch and hence many pitches that are far below the strike zone are called strikes. Usually indicates a poor or untrained umpire. Or both.

**Keep your head motionless.** You *must* "lock in" your head position. Attempting to accurately call balls and strikes while your head, and hence the strike zone, is moving is virtually impossible. Coaches and players *DO* notice this. You can also be exposing yourself to being hit in an unprotected area. This can also be a difficult bad habit to break but it *MUST* be corrected.

**Stop constantly looking at your ball/strike indicator.** This also looks bad, is not necessary and makes you look like your memory span is less than 15 seconds.

**NEVER make a call on the run.** Always stop moving before making *ANY* call. You must have a fixed reference point in order to properly call a play. Remember, angle is *MUCH* more important than distance. Get the proper angle, get as close as you reasonably can and *STOP!* Get set and make the right call.

**Don't wear a watch.** Keep it in your pocket if there is a valid reason for you to have one on your person at all.

**A foul ball is never a foul tip and a foul tip is never a foul ball.** A foul ball is dead, a foul tip is live. Repeat after me...a foul ball is dead, a foul tip is live....a foul ball is dead, a foul tip is live...

**Don't get talked into asking for help on your call after it has been made.** There are times when you may want to ask your partners' take on a call after the fact, but only on rare occasions....and never let it appear that one side talked you into it. You are asking for WW III from the perspective of one side or the other. If you are unsure of a tag or touch due to the limitations of the two-man system, ask *BEFORE* you make the call. If there is a need to confer with your partner, do so in private.

**Never put your hands in your pockets.** Also, don't stand there with your arms crossed. Both are examples of bad body language. Get a pair of gloves if your hands are cold and get into a set position.



**ALWAYS confer with your partner(s) before accepting a protest.** An umpire's worst nightmare is to be overturned on an appeal after the game. *ALWAYS* discuss it with your partner(s). The primary goal is to *GET THE CALL RIGHT!* Even if it means overruling yourself.

**DO NOT become best buddies with managers, coaches or players.** This has enormous potential perceptual ramifications. Be pleasant and friendly but not overly familiar. First names are fine. Going out for a cocktail after the game with the manager is not. These facts get around faster than you would believe.

**ALWAYS enter and leave the field with your partner(s).** You are a team, and should always appear that way. Also, there is strength in numbers.

**Don't hold your mask by the strap, and ALWAYS remove it with your left hand.** Walking around while your mask swings from the strap is another bad and silly-looking habit that some umpires have. Hold your mask firmly by the lower left side. You need your right hand to make calls, and switching hands is unnecessary and also doesn't look good. And practice taking off your mask without pulling your cap off with it. Make certain that your cap is not too loose or your mask is not too tight.

**Always be careful what you say. You never know who is listening.** Simply a word to the wise. Stories abound dealing with umpire stupidity in this area.

**Stay down an extra second on your ball calls.** This helps to sell the border line low pitch. Most amateur umpires pop up too quickly on a ball call and it doesn't look good.

**On an obvious foul ball back to the screen, DO NOTHING.** You will be better prepared when you have a play where the ball hits the batter and the bat at the same time.

**Set up early behind the plate, but not before the pitcher is ready to deliver.** Many amateur umpires get set too late and have trouble with the curve ball. It makes calling balls and strikes much easier.

**On check swings, don't oversell the call.** Act casual, like it was obvious. Thanks to Jack Oujo, former AAA umpire for these four additional suggestions.

**When working the dish and a foul fly is heading back toward the backstop, follow the movement of the catcher, not the flight of the ball.** I've seen

many an amateur umpire tear off his mask and watch the ball, only to have the catcher run him over in an attempt to get to the ball. Let the catcher make the first move, clear him in the opposite direction, then remove your mask and hustle back with the catcher. It's the only way to avoid contact with the catcher and to put yourself in proper position to determine if the ball has been trapped against the backstop or cleanly caught.

Thanks to David Tarracciano, Suffield, CT

**Stay off the catcher.** Give him room to do his job. Let him move first, then you move.

Thanks to Greg Swain, Murphy, NC

**Don't be a human scoreboard.** When working the plate, it's not necessary to indicate the ball/strike count before every pitch. That's overkill, fatiguing and completely unnecessary. This is especially true when working a field with a good scoreboard that is being professionally managed with balls, strikes, and outs. (Don't rely on the scoreboard, however!) Just indicate the count every so often - but not every pitch. At a minimum, I recommend calling the count when it *first* reaches 3 balls or 2 strikes, and, when the count first becomes full. Also, indicate the count if a long time has elapsed ... like when the batter has hit several foul balls or time has been called. As a courtesy to the base umpire, it is often a good idea to indicate the count after action has occurred on the bases requiring his attention, like a steal attempt. It is not uncommon for the base umpire to become preoccupied with the action and not notice whether the pitch was called a ball or strike. This will help him correctly update his indicator. As for outs, I usually don't get too involved with that other than signaling my partner. The players are responsible for knowing and keeping track of the number of outs. It's part of the game. If asked, I'll answer. On fields with no scoreboards, I might do it once in a while. If the field has a well-managed scoreboard - I almost *never* indicate the number of outs.

## Ask the Umpire (Question & Answers)

By Ralph Nelson

MLB VP Umpiring ... **Major League Rule Book Used for the Answers**

**Q.** I coach Little League baseball and we had a situation come up last Saturday: We had runners on first and second, one out. My batter hit a ground ball between first and second base. The runner from first gets hit by the ball. The kids (who were the umpires) didn't know the rule, but the other coach says it's a dead ball and the batter gets first base, the base runner is out. And being the nice guy I am, didn't want to argue, so I agreed. My argument wasn't really about the first part of the call, but I thought my base runner on second should have been able to go to third, since it was a force. What is the whole rule? Thanks.

-- M. Braverman

**A.** The umps made the right call! Baseball rules provide that a runner is out when he is struck by a batted ball (provided the ball was not touched by a fielder first). All other runners return to the base they occupied at the time of the pitch. Sorry, the runner on second returns to second base. However, the batter is awarded first base! The Official Baseball Rules are 5.09(f) and 7.08(f).

**Q.** A batter beats a close play at first and turns toward foul territory after crossing the bag and running it out. However, the throw gets misplayed and upon seeing the ball loose, the batter breaks for second. Does he have to come back and retouch first base, before continuing on to second? It seems that you can over run first base if you turn toward foul territory. If you turn toward second, you are a base runner, available to advance and be put out. This play happens a lot in unprofessional leagues, and the rule is not clear. Thank you.

-- T.M.

**A.** The answer to the first part of your question is no, the batter does not have to go back and retouch first base (provided he touched it to begin with!). He may continue on toward second base at any point after overrunning first.

Regarding the second part of your question, it really does not matter which way the player turns after overrunning first base! The key under the rule -- Rule 7.08(c) -- is that the batter-runner "returns immediately to the base." Any attempt of the batter-runner to advance to second is considered not returning immediately, thereby putting the runner in jeopardy of being tagged out. This usually happens when the runner, thinking the ball has been overthrown far enough that he can make it to second, takes a quick step or jerk toward second, thereby forfeiting his right to return to first base safely. Such a runner can be tagged out.

**Q.** I have only a vague idea what a balk is. What is the official definition. And what kind of things can a pitcher be called for a balk.

-- B. Damatan

**A.** A balk is an illegal movement by the pitcher while in contact with the rubber with runners on base which entitles all runners to advance one base. There are many types of balks, and most of these are covered in Rule 8.05. In professional baseball the most common type of balks include situations where the pitcher does not come to a complete stop in his set position, and in cases where the pitcher does not make a step directly to first base when trying to pick off a runner.

**Q.** In a game I was coaching this year a ball was hit to the first baseman. He reached down to field the ball, it hits his foot and goes inside his jersey. He goes to first and steps on the bag with the ball in the back of his shirt. The umpire makes no call. The first baseman then rolls the ball around to the front of his jersey. He then reaches down, grasps the ball in his hand while still standing on the bag. The ball remained in his shirt the entire time. The player was initially called out and after a conference between the two umpires they ruled that he did have control of the ball and called the player safe at first. Was that the correct call? I've never seen a play like that in my life before. Thanks for any help you can provide me.

-- J. Tribolet

**A.** The Rules provide for "Time" to be called when a PITCHED ball lodges in the catcher's (or umpire's) equipment or paraphernalia. However, the Rules do not address cases where a thrown or batted ball "vanishes" within a player's uniform, even though it has happened.

In the play you bring up, the runner should have been declared safe at first base since the first baseman did not have possession of the ball until after the runner touched the bag. If the fielder had been able to grasp the ball before the runner crossed the bag, he would have been out. To make a force play, the fielder must securely hold the ball in his hand or glove while touching the base.

**Q.** I was watching the Toronto/Texas game on Sat. May 20. The Texas third baseman caught a fly ball in foul territory and then stepped into the dugout. I thought that by doing this the ball is now out of play -- the same as a thrown ball -- and the baserunners advanced one base. What is the rule as no one contested the play?

-- B. Clinton

**A.** Under Major League Rule 7.04, "A fielder or catcher may reach or step into, or go into the dugout with one or both feet to make a catch, and if he holds the ball, the catch shall be allowed. Ball is in play."

**Q.** I would just like some explanation on a thing called the **infield fly rule**. I have been able to figure out the rules on my own mostly, but this one seems to confuse me a little. Could you please explain it to me. Thank you.

-- T. Vergilio

**A.** The Infield Fly Rule was instituted to protect the offense from a possibly "unfair" double play. If there were runners on first and second (or bases loaded) and less than 2 out, runners would normally hold their base on a pop-up to the infield since the ball would, in all likelihood, be caught. Without the Infield Fly Rule, an infielder could drop an easy pop-up (or let it drop untouched) and turn a double play, since the runners would then be forced. The rules makers didn't think this was fair and instituted this rule.

The Infield Fly Rule is only in effect when runners are on first and second (or bases loaded) and less than 2 out. It states that the batter is automatically out if he hits a fly ball "which can be caught by an infielder with ordinary effort." The umpires loudly announce and signal, "Infield Fly, batter is out!" so that the runners are alerted that, even if the ball is dropped, they do not have to leave their bases.

**Q.** I don't have a question to ask, I just have a comment. Someone should tell you "thanks" once in a while. You guys put up with a lot of crap and it is always your fault in the end. So "thanks" for all the great calls you make every game.

-- J.M.

**A.** Thanks for your support, JM. As the old adage goes, "Umpiring is the only profession in the world where you're supposed to begin perfect and then improve from there."