

UMPIRE BASICS

THE 6 BASICS OF BASEBALL ARE FAIR/FOUL, BALL/STRIKE, SAVE/OUT. AS ELEMENTARY AS THOSE ARE, WE NEED TO BE AWARE OF PROBLEMS AND PITFALLS THAT ARISE WITH THEM.

FAIR/FOUL

WHEN THE BASE UMPIRE IS BEHIND 1ST BASE IN THE "A" WITH NON-ON, THE DIVIDING LINE FOR FAIR/FOUL CALLS IS THE FRONT EDGE OF THE 1ST BASE BAG. ANY BALL THAT STOPS **BEFORE** REACHING THE BASE BELONGS TO THE PLATE UMPIRE. ONCE IT **REACHES AND PASSES** THE BASE, IT BELONGS TO THE BASE UMPIRE. WITH THE PROPER DIVISION OF 'DUTIES, BALLS HIT DOWN THE 1ST BASE LINE WITH NO RUNNERS ON BASE WILL BE CALLED FAIR/FOUL BY THE BASE UMPIRE. ANYTIME THERE ARE RUNNERS ON BASE, THE PLATE UMPIRE HAS THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR FOUL LINES.

THERE ARE TWO EXCEPTIONS WHEN IT IS USUALLY BEST FOR THE PLATE UMPIRE TO MAKE THE CALL:

1. *HARD HIT BALLS DIRECTLY AT THE BASE UMPIRE - HIS JOB IS USUALLY TO AVOID THE BALL AND HE MAY NOT BE IN A POSITION TO MAKE A PROPER CALL-THE PLATE UMPIRE MUST HESITATE TO SEE IF THE BASE MAN ACTUALLY SAW THE BALL AND WILL MAKE THE CALL.*
2. *BALLS POPPED UP IN THE VICINITY OF THE 1ST BASE UMPIRE. AGAIN, HIS HAVING TO VACATE THE AREA MAKES IT REASONABLE FOR THE PLATE UMPIRE TO MAKE THE CALL.*

BALLS/STRIKES

TWO THINGS HERE THAT YOU **MUST** REMEMBER! - GET THE PITCH RIGHT AND KEEP TRACK OF THE COUNT. TO SOME EXTENT, THE IMPORTANCE OF A PITCH IS DEPENDENT UPON THE SCORE, THE INNING AND HOW MANY RUNNERS ARE ON BASE. IT DOESN'T PAY TO OVER ANALYZE THE ISSUE, BUT WE NEED TO RECOGNIZE THAT THE IMPACT OF MISSING **JUST ONE PITCH** WILL HAVE VARYING RESULTS, DEPENDING ON THE COUNT. MOST UMPIRES FEEL THAT THE MOST IMPORTANT PITCH IS THE 3-2. IT'S OBVIOUS YOUR CALL WILL MAKE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN AN OUT OR ANOTHER RUNNER ON BASE (**AS WELL AS A POSSIBLE RUN IF THE BASES ARE LOADED**). IT CAN ALSO BE ARGUED THAT A 2-0 PITCH IS IMPORTANT. THE BATTERS APPROACH TO THE FOURTH PITCH WITH A 3-0 COUNT WILL VARY GREATLY FROM A 2-1 COUNT. ALL UMPIRES MISS PITCHES. THEY SAY THAT A MAJOR LEAGUE UMPIRE MIGHT MISS 4-6 PITCHES PER GAME. EVEN THE BEST AMATEUR UMPIRES CAN EXPECT TO MISS MORE THAN THAT. MISSING THE 1ST PITCH GIVES THE BATTER OR THE PITCHER MORE TIME TO RECOVER. THAT DOESN'T MEAN THAT YOU CAN AFFORD TO CONCENTRATE LESS. **CONCENTRATION IS STILL THE KEY!!!**

THE BIGGEST PITFALL OF BALLS AND STRIKES IS THE 3-0 PITCH. SOME ADVOCATE EXPANDING YOUR STRIKE ZONE FOR THAT PITCH. THIS CAN LEAD TO PROBLEMS AS YOU GO ALONG. AS WE KNOW, MOST GOOD UMPIRES HAVE AN EXPANDED STRIKE ZONE TO BEGIN WITH. THE PHILOSOPHY BEHIND THE LIBERAL STRIKE ZONE ON THE 3-0 PITCH IS TO AVOID "**CHEAP**" BASE RUNNERS.

KEEPING TRACK

O.K. NOW THAT YOU'VE CALLED THE PITCHES CORRECTLY, HOW DO YOU KEEP GOOD TRACK OF THE COUNT. THERE IS A LITTLE THING CALLED AN INDICATOR. SOME UMPIRES ADVOCATE NOT TO USE AN INDICATOR. THEY SAY THAT THIS HELPS KEEP YOU IN THE GAME THROUGH CONCENTRATION. OTHERS SAY **NO**, USE THE INDICATOR. 99% OF ALL MAJOR LEAGUE UMPIRES WILL USE IT! ALL IT TAKES IS ONE TIME TO COMPLETELY LOSE THE COUNT BECAUSE OF A "**BRAIN - LAPSE**" (USUALLY

AFTER A PICK-OFF ATTEMPT, A STEAL, A QUESTION FROM A PLAYER, MOVING OUT OF THE WAY FOR A PASSED BALL or A SCREAMING COACH). THE SCOREBOARD MAY BAIL YOU OUT, AS MIGHT THE SCORE KEEPER (IF THEY ARE KEEPING THE COUNT). YOUR PARTNER MIGHT ALSO HELP YOU OUT. BOTTOM LINE: ***DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT IT.***

SAFE/OUT

HERE ARE SEVERAL WAYS TO REGISTER AN OUT. MOST OUTS ARE EITHER CATCHES OF FLY BALLS OR PLAYS AT 1ST BASE. ON THE OTHER BASES THE OUT MAY BE EITHER A FORCE OR A TAG PLAY. IT'S IMPORTANT FOR YOU TO RECOGNIZE WHAT YOU HAVE SO YOU CAN **(1) ANTICIPATE THE PLAY, (NOT THE CALL!)**. **(2) GET INTO THE PROPER POSITION** - IDEALLY YOU SHOULD BE CLOSER TO THE BASE, AND AT THE PROPER ANGLE, FOR A TAG PLAY -, **AND KNOW WHAT TO LOOK FOR.** YOU ALSO NEED TO PAY EXTRA ATTENTION TO A SLIDE PLAY. SOUNDS SIMPLE ENOUGH. DON'T LET THE "**ROUTINE**" BECOME SO ROUTINE THAT YOU FORGET THE BASICS.

A WORD OF ADVICE, KEEP IN MIND WHAT THE THREE MOST IMPORTANT WORDS IN BASEBALL UMPIRING ARE:

CONCENTRATION POSITION TIMING

REMEMBER THEM, PRACTICE THEM, AND YOU'LL HAVE FAR FEWER PROBLEMS.