

# **2020 NYSSO UMPIRE MANUAL**



## **INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of the NYSSO Umpire Manual is to foster uniformity and consistency in umpiring throughout New York State. While a limited degree of flexibility is permissible if the situation warrants, umpires must adhere to the spirit of the NYSSO procedures and mechanics. In addition, any deviation from the NYSSO procedures and mechanics must be a direct result of a specific playing situation, rather than be predetermined by an umpire. Moreover, individual umpires and chapters do not have the authority to endorse procedures or mechanics contrary to those contained within this manual. The contents of this manual will also serve as the basis for evaluating umpires at the New York State Public High School Softball Tournament, as well as serve as the basis for NYSSO test questions. Please direct any questions, comments, or concerns to the NYSSO Umpire Manual staff.

**Directed by James Berkery**  
**Authored by Brad White, Esq.**  
**Edited by Jay Miner**

Special thanks to PONY Softball, Jay Miner Enterprises, Inc., and *Referee Magazine* for their contributions.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## GAME PROCEDURES

- PRE-GAME CONFERENCE WITH PARTNER
- COACHES' PRE-GAME MEETING (GROUND RULES)
- PRIOR TO THE FIRST PITCH
- AFTER THE GAME

## GAME MANAGEMENT

- GENERAL
- COACHES
- APPEALS
- GOING FOR HELP
- JEWELRY
- UMPIRE AUTHORITY

## GENERAL GUIDELINES

- PAUSE - READ - REACT
- STOP - SET - FOCUS - HOLD . . . CALL
- OPEN UP & FACE THE BALL
- CALLING DISTANCES
- GET YOUR OWN CALLS RIGHT
- SILENCE SELLS CALLS
- "I'M HERE . . . ALMOST"
- FLASH TECHNIQUE
- LEAVE THE PHANTOMS IN THE BAG
- BAT REMOVAL
- WHERE'D THE BALL GO?

## PLATE MECHANICS

- PLATE STANCE
  - INITIAL SET UP
  - DROPPING TO THE DOWN-SET POSITION
  - THE SLOT
- TIMING & TRACKING THE PITCH
  - ON THE RUBBER - GET SET - TRACK - READ - HOLD - CALL - STEP BACK
- CALLING BALLS & STRIKES
  - BALLS
  - STRIKES
  - DROPPED / UNCAUGHT THIRD STRIKE
- GIVING THE COUNT
- CALLING POSITIONS FOR PLAYS AT THE PLATE

## BASE UMPIRE STARTING POSITIONS

- GENERAL
- STARTING POSITIONS
  - "A" POSITION - NO RUNNERS ON BASE
    - WALKING THE LINE
    - DROP-SET POSITION
    - ADDITIONAL GUIDELINES
  - "B" POSITION - R1 ON 1<sup>ST</sup> BASE ONLY
  - "C" POSITION - R2 ON 2<sup>ND</sup> BASE
  - MODIFIED "C" POSITION

## PLATE & BASE UMPIRE MECHANICS - BALL PUT IN PLAY

- "A" POSITION – ROUTINE HIT IN THE INFIELD
- "A" POSITION – IMAGINARY BOX
- "A" POSITION – THE RIM
- "A" POSITION – THE BUTTONHOOK
- "A" POSITION – HIT TO RIGHT FIELD WITH POSSIBLE PLAY AT 1<sup>ST</sup> BASE
- "A" POSITION – FLY BALL TO RIGHT FIELD
- "B" POSITION – ALL MOVEMENTS
- "C" POSITION – ALL MOVEMENTS
- MODIFIED "C" POSITION

#### **PLATE & BASE UMPIRE ADDITIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES**

- WORKING BETWEEN PITCHES
- ADDITIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES FOR BASE UMPIRE
- TAG-UP RESPONSIBILITIES
- THE RUNDOWN
- ILLEGAL PITCHES
- FAIR/FOUL BALL COVERAGE
- FLY BALL COVERAGE
  - NO RUNNERS ON BASE
  - RUNNER(S) ON BASE
- WHEEL PLAY MECHANICS & CIRCLE/LOOK-BACK RULE RESPONSIBILITIES
- CHECKED SWINGS
- AFTER PLAYS END
  - BASE UMPIRE
  - PLATE UMPIRE
  - UMPIRE-TO-UMPIRE SIGNALS
- INFIELD FLY
- BETWEEN INNING MECHANICS
- RUNNER LEAVING EARLY
- HIT BATTER
- THREE FOOT LANE VIOLATION
- PREVENTATIVE UMPIRING
- OBSTRUCTION

#### **THREE UMPIRE MECHANICS**

- BACKGROUND
- GENERAL GUIDELINES
  - ROTATION
  - FLY BALL COVERAGE
  - TAG-UP RESPONSIBILITIES
  - COMMUNICATION
  - CHECKED SWINGS
- STARTING POSITIONS
  - NO RUNNERS ON BASE
  - RUNNER ON 1<sup>ST</sup> BASE ONLY
  - GB2 MODERN MECHANICS
  - RUNNER ON 2<sup>ND</sup> BASE (ANYTIME) OR RUNNERS ON 1<sup>ST</sup> & 3<sup>RD</sup> BASE
  - RUNNER ON 3<sup>RD</sup> BASE ONLY
- BALL PUT IN PLAY – NO UMPIRE GOES OUT
  - NO RUNNERS ON BASE
  - RUNNER ON 1<sup>ST</sup> BASE ONLY
  - GB2 MODERN MECHANICS
  - RUNNER ON 2<sup>ND</sup> BASE (ANYTIME) OR RUNNERS ON 1<sup>ST</sup> & 3<sup>RD</sup> BASE
  - RUNNER ON 3<sup>RD</sup> BASE ONLY
  - OVER-THE-FENCE HOMERUN (NO RUNNERS OR R1 ONLY)

# **GAME PROCEDURES**

## **PRE-GAME CONFERENCE WITH PARTNER**

All umpires must arrive to the park at least 30 minutes prior to game time. If you have a UIC, make sure you check in with him or her. If your partner has not arrived within 20 minutes of game time, begin preparing to work the plate.

One of the most overlooked mechanics is the umpire crew pre-game conference. Umpire must always strive to arrive on time to conduct a thorough pre-game. Even when there isn't much time, umpires can have a pre-game while they walk to the field and while the walk the actual field. Teams will not be upset that they get an additional few minutes of practice while the umpires prepare accordingly.

How many times does that "less experienced" umpire try to have a pre-game only to have his "experienced" partner say, "I know the book says this, but this is the way I am going to do it?" The plate umpire or crew chief is in charge. He should lead the pre-game conference. Is it a dictatorship? No, but he will make final decisions if there is not an agreement among the crew. Umpire per this manual. Do not pre-game deviations. However, you may discuss areas where deviations may be necessary so that the umpire crew is alert when that situation may arise.

Few things look worse than an umpire crew that does not work together. Umpiring per the manual and having a thorough pre-game conference can help avoid a play not getting covered, two umpires calling the same play and worse, opposite double calls.

### **Umpires should cover the following items in their pre-game conference:**

- Fly ball responsibilities
- Run downs
- Checked swings
- Foul balls on the line with a base umpire on the line
- Signals
- Grounds rules
- Rules
- Help (e.g., pulled foot, swiped tag, etc.)
- What to do if the base ump goes out on fly or trapped balls
- Dead ball situations
- Illegal pitches

## **COACHES' PRE-GAME MEETING (GROUNDS RULES)**

- Ten minutes before game time, the umpire crew shall walk onto the field together. ***Present a united front.*** Umpires will walk the inside perimeter of the field to check the ground conditions, fences, dead ball areas, pitcher's plate, bases, lines and dugout areas. Also, be aware of any other sports activities that are being held in close proximity to the softball field.
- Equipment Check
  - Both umpires enter each team's dugout *together* - One can check bats, the other helmets. Don't split up and go into the dugouts individually.
  - Bats with dents or signs of excessive wear are not legal.
  - Check the bats to see if there is bare metal on the handle.
  - Confirm bats have the proper certification and aren't on the banned bat list.
  - Make sure the helmets and face guards have a NOCSAE label and the helmets are not cracked. Masks must be properly affixed.
- Five minutes prior to start time make sure any players still warming up return to the dugout. Do not allow pitchers/catcher to warm up on the field after this point.
  - Ask for the coach, captains (no more than two) and line-up cards.
    - While an assistant coach may attend the conference, it is preferred that the head coach be present. If a team has co-head coaches, it must pick one coach as head coach and the spokesperson for the game.
  - Be friendly but business-like.
  - The plate umpire introduces himself and his partner(s).
  - Make sure the players' first and last names, along with their uniform numbers and defensive positions are listed on the line-up cards. Confirm DP/Flex. Have substitutes and their numbers listed at the bottom. Have coaches verify the line-up, which becomes official when you take it back.
    - Notify the teams that all substitutions, DP/Flex changes and courtesy runners must be reported to the plate umpire. The plate umpire is responsible for reporting changes to the opposition.
    - Do not accept an improper line-up card.
  - Establish dead ball boundaries around the field, including gaps or holes in fences and any obstacles on the field (e.g. holes or overhanging branches).
    - ***Do not*** instruct players to raise their hands if the ball "goes out of play." Any ball that bounces over, through or under a fence is dead; any ball that crosses the dead ball line on the ground is dead. Players should continue to play as directed by their coaches, not the umpires.
    - Establish an official scorer - That will usually be the home team's scorer, but consider the competency of the scorer – child v. adult.
  - Confirm with the coaches that all equipment is legal and safe and that all players are legally and properly equipped, which encompasses the jewelry rule (See "Jewelry Rule Procedure).
  - You *may* ask your partner if she has anything (relevant) to add.
  - Ask the coaches if they have any questions concerning the grounds rules only. ***Do not*** hold a clinic. Questions asked by coaches are best answered by the rule book, not the umpire.
  - If a coin flip is necessary to determine home team, designate one team "heads" and the other team "tails."
    - Don't ask who traveled farther to establish who calls it - Designate & Flip!
  - If there's a time limit, it begins when the coaches' meeting ends.

- Notify the official score that the clock is running and that you will keep the official time on the field. Do not hand timing devices on the fence.
- If the coaches' pre-game meeting takes more than two minutes, the umpires aren't doing it correctly. Keep it moving and do not hold a clinic.

### **PRIOR TO THE FIRST PITCH**

- Start the clock (timed games) when the coaches' pre-game meeting ends.
- Make sure there is no equipment left on the field.
  - Coaches are not permitted to have any portion of a bucket on the field.
- Secure enough game balls to keep the game moving. It is highly recommended that you wear two ball bags so that you don't delay the game waiting for a ball.
  - Any potential game ball must be sufficiently rubbed up to remove any sheen or slickness from the ball. Never put a brand new ball into play.
- The plate umpire should set up in proper position and watch warm up pitches. Set up for right-handed and left-handed batters. Don't forget to put your mask on. Set up for warm-ups 2, 3 and 4. Notify the catcher that you are set up behind her. Repeat this in the bottom of the 1<sup>st</sup> inning and for substitute pitchers.
  - Do not call the actual pitches.
  - Get a feeling for the backstop – Will a passed ball die at the backstop or ricochet all the way back to the plate?
- Base umpire should ensure that spectators haven't crossed the dead ball line.
- Make sure there is only one on-deck batter. Only one is permitted to swing, even starting an inning. This is a major liability issue.

### **AFTER THE GAME**

- Have an exit plan.
  - Leave through the less hostile side whenever possible (usually the winning team).
  - If there was any controversy in the game, leave immediately.
    - Do not go out of your way to grab the game balls, take your towel from the fence, pick up your water bottle, etc.
    - Get off of the field and worry about those items after the teams have left the area.
  - Though a protest must be lodged before the umpires leave the field, the umpires aren't permitted to race off of the field to avoid a protest.
- Always leave with your partner(s).
  - ***Present a united front.***
- Do not comment to the media.
- Do not field questions about the game, especially from spectators.
  - The players are represented by their coaches, not spectators.
- Do not comment on any plays/calls.
- Do not try to sugar-coat any game controversy.
  - You aren't going to convince people that your call was correct if they didn't agree with it when you made it.

# GAME MANAGEMENT

## GENERAL

- Control and management of the game are the umpires' responsibility once they step onto the field.
- Umpires are responsible for ensuring that a game runs as smoothly as possible.
- Keep the teams hustling on and off the field and prevent unnecessary delays.
  - **Avoid game interrupters.**
- Do not allow teams to perform unsportsmanlike cheers.
- Do not allow anyone in the dugout to scream at the umpires.
  - The first time that happens, stop the game and speak with the head coach.
  - Inform the head coach that the behavior will not be allowed and it is her responsibility to halt it.
  - If the inappropriate behavior continues, eject the offender.
- Nip problems in the bud before they escalate and spread.

## COACHES

- A coach must be present at the pre-game conference. It is preferred that the head coach be present. If a team states that it has "co-head coaches," the team must pick one coach as the spokesperson for the game.
- The head coach is the only person who will be allowed to take part in any discussion that involves the game, with few exceptions.
- It is the head coach's responsibility to control the people that are in attendance in her team's favor, including players, assistant coaches, scorekeepers, etc.
- Generally speaking, only the head coach has the right to carry on discussions with an umpire.
  - Assistant coaches do not have the right to come on the field to argue a call. If the assistant coach is *already on the field* as a base coach, she still does not have the right to *argue* a call.
  - However, keep in mind that the assistant coach may be the one in position to see a particular element of a play.
    - For example, the assistant coach who is coaching 1<sup>st</sup> base is in a better position to see a pulled foot at 1<sup>st</sup> base.
    - Provided the assistant coach is respectful and reasonable, umpires should not unreasonably refuse to speak with her.
    - However, once a conversation with the assistant coach starts to become prolonged or heated, the umpire must end the conversation. It is then up to the umpire whether he'll speak with the head coach.
    - If at any time an assistant coach comes at you or argues with you about a call or play, that coach should be directed back to the dugout. If the coach doesn't comply, eject the coach.
- Umpires are not to discuss the play/call with one or more coach at the same time.
  - The "off" umpire is responsible for keeping other coaches, players, etc. away..
  - The "off" umpire should not participate in the conversation either.
  - The "off" umpire is responsible for ensuring that any ejected person leaves the game without further disruption of the game.



- Do not antagonize a coach by pulling your watch out and threatening to forfeit the game if the coach isn't out of sight and sound within one minute.
- Instead, manage the game by exercise good judgment and common sense.
- At no time should an umpire discuss a call that was not his call. This is so *even if* the "off" umpire agrees with the call.
  - Though you may think you are helping, you may be providing inconsistent information.
- The head coach has the right to go to an umpire and ask about a call, provided he does so respectfully and reasonably.
  - It is best for the umpire to meet the coach somewhere near the foul line. Preventing the coach from walking/running out onto the field has several advantages, such as:
    - It helps prevent the coach from getting even more heated.
    - Walking over toward the coach shows the coach that you are willing to speak with her.
    - It allows the umpire additional time to review the play and prepare for the discussion.
    - It is easier for the umpire to return to his position without being followed by the coach.
  - If the call is a judgment call (e.g., safe or out), remind the coach that such calls are not subject to discussion.
  - If the coach asks you to get help from your partner because she thinks there was a pulled foot or perhaps the player dropped the ball, then you can go to your partner. Do you have to? No, but sometimes by doing so, you can keep things from escalating into something bigger.
    - However, do not make a habit of doing that. Coaches are not interested in getting the call correct; they are interested in getting the call in their favor. Otherwise coaches would argue calls that are missed in their favor. Coaches have their job to do, umpires have their job to do.
  - If the question is about a rule interpretation, go to your partner for confirmation.
    - If the coach still disagrees, consult the rule book. If she still isn't satisfied, then she has the right to protest.
    - Umpires do not have the right to deny a protest. The UIC or protest committee must be used to resolve the issue.
  - Remember to listen to what the coach is asking you and answer only what she asked.
    - Allow the coach to state her case and listen to what she says. Often, the coach may describe something that supports your call.
    - Do not volunteer anything that does not answer her question.

## **APPEALS**

- An appeal play is a play on which an umpire may not make a decision until requested by a manager, coach or player.
  - The *only* plays that can be appealed are batting out of order, a runner attempting to advance to 2<sup>nd</sup> base after making a turn at 1<sup>st</sup> base, a runner missing a base and a runner failing to tag-up on a caught fly ball.
- Appeals can be made during either a live or dead ball, depending on the appeal.
- Watch runners carefully and be prepared for the appeal.
- If the appeal is made to you and you are not responsible for the call, relay the appeal to the appropriate umpire.

- For example, if the defensive coach appeals to the plate umpire that the runner on 1<sup>st</sup> base did not tag-up, say, "(Base umpire), they are appealing that the runner at 1<sup>st</sup> did not tag-up."
- The base umpire would then make the call.
- Do not allow the coach or player(s) to turn an appeal into a guessing game.
- If the appeal involves a timing play or batting out of order, go to your partner and between the two of you go over the entire play step by step to ensure that you get the appeal correct.
- Do not confuse an "appeal" with "going for help." Coaches frequently will "appeal" an umpire's call. That is not the proper terminology.
  - With that said, do not get into an argument with a coach over terminology. It is the subject matter of the coach's comment that matters, rather than the terminology she uses or how she phrases her request.
  - A checked swing is not an appeal play.
  - A coach questioning a runner leaving prior to the release of the pitch is not an appeal play.

### **GOING FOR HELP**

- Even if you use proper mechanics and employs the Pause – Read – React and Stop – Set – Focus – Hold . . . Call techniques, there may be times when you need to ask your partner for help before making a call.
- If you are missing a piece of information, ask your partner for help prior to making the call whenever possible. For example, if you are in the "C" position and cannot determine whether the 1<sup>st</sup> baseman kept her foot on the base, ask your plate umpire, "Was her foot on?" Ask the question so that an affirmative "yes" response will result in an out call.
- Umpires must discuss this mechanic during their pre-game meeting.
  - The umpire crew can decide whether they prefer to have the plate umpire make the actual call or simply provide the information to the base umpire to make the ultimate call.
- These mechanics are preferred to an umpire making a call with significant doubt, the coach coming out to argue, the umpires conferring and then possibly changing a call.
  - That could be detrimental to the game, particularly in the case of the reversal of a third out when there were other runners advancing on the play.
- Whenever possible, *get the call right at once.*
- Note, these mechanics are not designed so that the base umpire can delegate responsibility to the plate umpire. The base umpire must know whether the ruling will be "out" or "safe" and is only asking for the final piece of information to make that call.

### **JEWELRY RULE PROCEDURE**

- Umpires are not fashion police officers.
- However, umpires are required to enforce the jewelry rule in accordance with the NYSPHSAA policy.
- If an umpire suspects that a player is covering up jewelry (e.g., placing tape over earrings), the following procedure must be followed:
  - In the presence of the head coach, ask the player if she covered up jewelry.
  - If the player states that she does have jewelry on, she must remove it before she is eligible to play.
  - If the player states that she does not have jewelry on, accept her statement as truthful.

- If you later discover that the player was wearing jewelry, the player and head coach will be subject to penalties for unsportsmanlike conduct.
- Knowingly violating a safety rule and deliberately attempting to cover it up is unsportsmanlike. It poses a risk to both that player and others.

### **UMPIRE AUTHORITY**

- Umpires are responsible for conducting a game in accordance with the official rules and maintaining discipline and order on the playing field during the game.
- Each umpire is a representative of NYSSO and NYSPHSAA and is authorized and required to enforce all rules and regulations.
- Each umpire has authority to order a player, coach or team member or associate to do or refrain from doing anything that affects the administering of the rules and enforcing the prescribed penalties.
- Each umpire has authority to rule on any point not specifically covered in the rules. Each umpire will use common sense, good judgment and thoughtful reasoning based on the spirit of fair play when making rulings.
- Any umpire's rulings on such special circumstance situations in a game are not necessarily binding for a future game of similar circumstances.

## **GENERAL GUIDELINES**

### **PAUSE – READ – REACT**

- When the ball is put in play, umpires must refrain from immediately sprinting to a position before using the pause-read-react technique.
- **Pause**
  - Once the ball is hit or thrown, briefly “pause” to give yourself an opportunity to observe playing action and the trajectory of the ball.
- **Read**
  - During the pause, “read” the play in order to determine which movement would put you in the most favorable position for a developing play.
- **React**
  - After reading the play, react by physically moving as the play dictates.

### **STOP – SET – FOCUS – HOLD . . . CALL**

- Whenever you are going to make a judgment call, whether it is a safe/out call, fair/foul call or a catch/no catch, you must use the stop-set-focus-hold-call technique after employing the pause-read-react technique. Having your eyes still and focused is even more important than obtaining to optimum angle. Proper distance is important. But remember, angle beats distance and being stopped and set beats angle.
- **Stop**
  - Once the ball and runner are coming to a base, the umpire must “stop”. Even if you have not obtained the ideal angle or distance, the benefit of stopping will far outweigh the negative effect of your eyes bouncing and not taking a clear picture of the play.
- **Set**
  - Once you get into position and a play is going to occur, drop to a “set” calling position. That must occur before the ball arrives at the glove.
- **Focus**
  - Once set, you need to focus on the primary area of the play. In doing so, you will be able to see all of the necessary elements of the play.
  - Focusing on the primary area allows the umpire to quickly ask himself a number of questions, such as:
    - When did the ball arrive?
    - Was the defensive player’s foot on the bag?
      - If she did pull her foot, did she return it in time for the play?
    - Did the defensive player bobble the ball?
    - Did the defensive player tag the runner on a non-force play?
- **Hold**
  - Holding momentarily will allow you to benefit from focusing.
  - When it comes to umpiring, few things look worse than when you have to overturn your call because you didn’t hold before making the call.

- Avoid the situation where the ball beats the runner and you immediately call the runner out, only to have the player drop the ball.
  - Avoid ever having to say, “No wait, she dropped the ball! She’s safe. The runner’s safe.”
- As a timing mechanism for plays at 1<sup>st</sup> base, you should wait for the batter-runner to pass you before making the call. On other plays, you should wait until you see all of the elements and a change in the elements won’t result in a change in your call.

### • Call

- Make the call using the appropriate signals and voice.

### OPEN UP & FACE THE BALL

- On hits to the outfield, many umpires “race” into the infield. Rather than using the pause-read-react technique, they immediately drop their head and start running forward.
- Most often, the best thing to do after pausing is ***open up and face the ball*** so that you can read the play. ***You can’t read the play if you cannot see the ball.***
- Umpires must consider the dimensions of a softball field as compared to a baseball field and determine whether the philosophy behind a baseball mechanic is equally as applicable in softball.
  - For example, the “Inside-Outside Theory” that states when the ball is in the outfield, the umpire should be in the infield is not typically the best theory for softball. Because outfielders are much closer in softball than baseball, most umpires cannot come inside the diamond, turn and face the ball before the ball is fielded. Then, once the ball is fielded and thrown back into the infield, the umpire is stuck in the infield with the ball being thrown around. Now the ball and the umpire are both in the infield when an *actual play may occur*. For the same reasons that base umpires do not start inside the diamond at the time of the pitch, this is not the ideal position.
- Likewise, consider how many runners on 1<sup>st</sup> base tag-up on a fly ball to right field. Rather than racing inside the diamond, likely not being able to turn and see the ball in time for the tag-up anyway, pivot open, take a step or two back if necessary to get a wider angle and watch the play. Umpire realistically based on the game of softball and the *actual likelihood of a particular play*. ***Unless there is a compelling reason to come inside the diamond on an immediate play, stay outside the diamond and let the ball take you to the play.***

### CALLING DISTANCES

- The optimal calling distance on force plays is 15 – 18 feet from the base.
  - Make sure you are at an angle that allows you to see the entire play, including a pulled foot and the runner’s foot hitting the base.
- The optimal calling distance on tag plays is 6 – 8 feet from play.
  - Usually, the best calling angle for *online throws* is 90 degrees from the path of the runner.
  - Umpires must adjust accordingly when a runner slides wide of a base or when a defender has to reach to swipe a tag.
  - The philosophy on covering off-line throws at home plate applies to all the bases. Umpires must be positioned at the *time of the play* to see through the play and not be blocked by runners or fielders. See “Calling Positions for Plays at the Plate.”

### GET YOUR OWN CALLS RIGHT

- While it is important for umpires to “help” their partners when necessary, umpires must get their own calls right first. Work in terms of priorities.

- **See in all areas – call in your own.**
  - Avoid calling in your partner's area. If your partner did not make a call, ask yourself why he did not make it. If you can justify the "no call," then do not make the call yourself.
- If a call must be made and your partner did not make it in his area after ample opportunity, then make the call.
  - For example, if the plate umpire doesn't see a batted ball contact a batter resulting in a dead ball, the base umpire should hesitate momentarily and then call, "Dead Ball!" Do not call foul ball, as it will still be the plate umpire's responsibility to determine where the contact occurred.

### **SILENCE SELLS CALLS**

- Umpires talk about "selling the call" all the time. But when umpires sell calls that are not close, they lose credibility.
  - For example, if the plate umpire bellows, "FOUL BALL" on every ball lined off the back stop, why would anyone have any more confidence in his call when the ball is lined 70 feet down the 3<sup>rd</sup> base just an inch off the line?
  - **Use your voice, don't abuse it.**
- Generally speaking, when a fielder's possession of the ball is necessary for an out, if the ball is not in her proximate vicinity, there is no signal or verbal call.
  - For example, the 3<sup>rd</sup> baseman's overthrow to 1<sup>st</sup> base that ends up against the fence should not be signaled or called. Instead, the umpire should pause, read and react to a secondary play.
- NO BALL – NO CALL!

### **"I'M HERE . . . ALMOST"**

- Never tell your partner that you're somewhere until you *actually get there*.
- For instance, in a rundown, don't say, "I'm here" until you are actually in the position to make the call.
  - What happens if the plate umpire says, "I'm here" or "I've got 1<sup>st</sup>" when he just left the plate and then gets tangled up with the catcher? Now, rather than the base umpire continuing to move with the runner, he stayed near 2<sup>nd</sup>. Who's going to make the call when R1 slides back into 1<sup>st</sup> base?

### **FLASH TECHNIQUE**

- The flash technique gives an umpire a great view of catch-no catch, pickoffs, attempted steals, tags and checked swings. Flash your eyes from the flight of the ball to the fielder's glove when the ball is 25 feet from the fielder. Focus on the fielder's glove while keeping the ball in your peripheral. That will give your eyes time to adjust and your mind time to digest the play.
- By focusing on the fielder's glove, you will have a precise view of whether the batted ball was caught in flight or "trapped."
- On a pickoff, attempted steal or on any other tag play, concentrate on the glove and let the glove take you to the exact point of the tag on the runner.
- As the base umpire on checked swings, flash your eyes to the barrel of the bat when the ball is 25 feet from the bat.
  - Be prepared and alert for the plate umpire to ask you for help on checked swings.

### **LEAVE THE PHANTOMS IN THE BAG**

- Inherent in umpiring is the need to make calls that at least 50% of the people are may not like.

- However, whenever umpires are going to interpose themselves into the game on a non-routine call (based on rule violations rather than the defense making a play), the umpires must be 100% sure that they are correct in their call.
- Examples of these plays are: 1) Illegal pitches; 2) Leaving a base too soon; 3) Interference; 4) Obstruction; 5) Illegally batted ball.
- By no means should you avoid making a call you are 100% sure is correct solely to avoid "hearing it" for the rest of the game.
  - With that said, if you, as the plate umpire, decide to call a batter out for illegally hitting the ball while outside of the batter's box, being 100% sure of your call is the only thing that will allow you to keep your concentration for the remainder of the game.
- ***Avoid calling phantom violations!***

### **BAT REMOVAL**

- After hitting a ball, a batter may drop her bat into a position near home plate that might subsequently interfere with a play at the plate. When possible, umpires may safely, carefully and cautiously remove a bat without interfering with play.
- Three criteria should be used in deciding whether to clear the bat:
  - Is it *necessary*? If there is a possibility of a play at the plate, you must determine....
  - Is the bat *available*? If the bat is close enough and you can get it, you must then determine....
  - Is it *possible*? Is it possible to get the bat, move it and get back into proper position for the ensuing play at the plate?
  - If the answer to all three questions is "Yes," then clear the bat.
- The proper technique for clearing the bat will allow you to keep an eye on your responsibilities and move the bat safely away from the home plate area.
- When grabbing the bat, keep your head up and watch the runner round 3<sup>rd</sup> base. There is always the possibility of a missed base, obstruction, or a coach's assist.
- Grab the bat firmly with your hand, point the handle or barrel toward foul territory and slide the bat along the ground. The bat should not leave the ground.
- Slide the bat far enough so that it cannot be in the way, including if players adjust. Sliding the bat rather than picking it up and throwing it also minimizes risk of injury to an on-deck hitter who may be coaching the approaching runner.

### **WHERE'D THE BALL GO?**

- Amazingly, a tremendous number of umpires do not keep their eyes on the ball. These umpires move at the wrong time, turn at the wrong time and worry about runners that are not their responsibility. The result? The umpire neglects his own responsibility.
- There is *only one* judgment call in all of softball that does not require knowledge of the ball's location – A runner missing a base.
- Even if you haven't achieved the ideal position, it's better to stop and watch the ball then to get to a position and not know what happened behind you.
- Watch the Ball – Glance at the Runners – See Your Partner(s)
- ***KNOW WHERE THE BALL IS!***

## PLATE MECHANICS

### PLATE STANCE

We talk about working the slot, but what is it and how do we work it? The slot is the space between the catcher and batter that the plate umpire uses to set up to call balls and strikes. You must master the box stance first. The Gerry Davis is a type of box stance. Once mastered, you may use the scissor or one-knee stance.

#### • **Initial Set Up**

- The heel-toe stance refers to your left heel and right toe being placed on the same imaginary line. The heel of the foot closest to the batter and the toe of the foot behind the catcher should be on this imaginary line. (See “Slot – Top View”).
- Your feet must to be at least shoulder width apart, but should be as far apart as you can put them while maintaining your balance and your ability to pivot out of the way if necessary. (See “Slot – Front View”)
- Your inside ear must to be lined up with the inside corner of the plate. That allows you to see the outside pitch. Another way to set this up would be to have your belt buckle even with the inside line of the batters box. (See “Slot – Top View”).
- Set up as close to the catcher without interfering. (See “Slot – Top View”).
  - The *maximum* distance between your inside knee and the catcher’s back shall be 12 inches.
    - If you set up deeper, you won’t be able to see the entire plate nor the ground around the plate.
    - Too many umpires stand too far back and are blocked out from seeing the corners of the plate and a possible dropped 3<sup>rd</sup> strike.
  - You may have to turn your inside foot and point it toward the 2<sup>nd</sup> baseman (for a right-handed batter) or the shortstop (for a left-handed batter) out to allow your knee to be as close as possible and parallel to the catchers back.
- *NOTE:* For left-handed batters, do the exact mirror image.

#### • **Dropping to the Down-Set Position**

- To go to the set position, bend at the knees until your eyes are at the top of the strike zone. Always keep your chin above the catcher’s helmet.
- Drop to the position when the pitcher separates her hands or earlier. However, don’t drop too early if doing so will result in unnecessary fatigue.
- When working the “Box Stance”, avoid bending too much at the waist. When umpires bend at the waist, their head-height tends to fluctuate, leading to an inconsistent strike zone. They also tend to flinch on pitches. Additionally, too much bending at the waist may cause back pain.



- However, a slight tilt forward is recommended to relieve pressure on your back and so you can get closer to catcher without interfering.
- With the exception of never placing your hand on the catcher, there are no strict requirements as to where to place your hands at the time of the pitch. Instead, find a position that is comfortable and in no manner compromises your ability to call pitches.
  - Note, however, that umpires who place their hands behind their back tend to slouch, bend too far forward at the waist, vary the head height improperly and flinch.
- Once you have called a ball or strike, stand when the catcher throws the ball back to the pitcher and take a step backward. By doing that you are giving yourself a second to relax. When the pitcher steps back on the pitching rubber you repeat the process of setting up for the pitch.

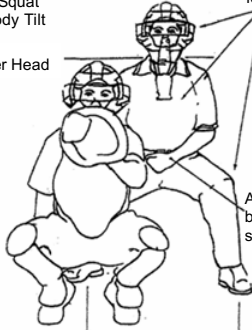
# THE SLOT

## FRONT VIEW

Proper Head Position is Controlled By:

1. Width of Stance
2. Amount of Squat
3. Forward Body Tilt

Proper Head



Feet at least  
shoulder-width apart  
- wider preferred

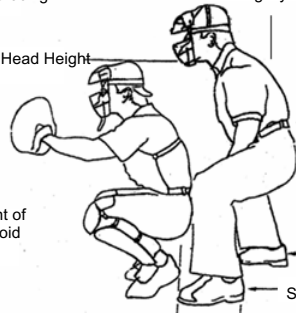
Proper use of  
equipment facing  
forward

Proper Head Height

Arm in front of  
body to avoid  
slouching

## SIDE

Body tilted  
slightly forward

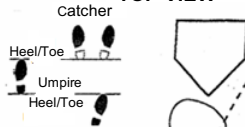


Back  
Foot

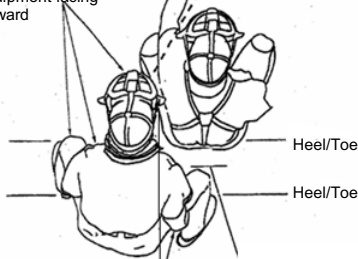
Slot Foot

Heel/Toe Heel/Toe

## TOP VIEW



Proper use of  
equipment facing  
forward



Heel/Toe

Heel/Toe

Umpire's inside ear lined  
up with the inside corner of  
home plate

Umpire's knee no  
farther from catcher's  
back than 1 foot

## TIMING & TRACKING THE PITCH

Proper timing is important on all plays/calls. Before making any call, the umpire must stop, set, focus and hold, then make the proper call/no call. This allows the umpire to digest what has happened and make the correct call.

Timing is as important when calling balls and strikes as it is safes and outs. The following is a step-by-step break down of the technique umpires should use for timing and tracking pitches.

- **On the Rubber**

- Once the pitcher steps on the pitcher's plate, get into position behind the catcher, remaining upright.
- You should be highly alert and anticipate immediate playing action.

- **Get Set**

- Drop to the set position no later than when the pitcher begins her pitching motion.
- Your head should not be moving as the pitch is delivered.
- Your particular plate stance/set up will dictate exactly when you need to drop into position.
- Dropping to the set position too early may cause you to hold the position much longer than necessary, causing more fatigue.
- Each pitcher is different and it is up to you to get in sync with the pitcher so that you and the pitcher are moving as one.

- **Track**

- Tracking a pitch begins by focusing on the pitching hand. Proper tracking requires you to "pick up" the ball out of the pitcher's hand at the earliest possible moment. Track the ball with your eyes
- You must track the ball until it is hit or it hits the catcher's mitt.
  - Continue watching the ball to rule on any additional plays.

- **Read**

- Once the pitcher releases the ball, make a general determination as to what the pitch looks like. Reading the pitch allows you to focus on specific elements important to that individual pitch.

- **Hold**

- Once the ball reaches the catcher's mitt, hold your call just briefly before announcing "ball" or "strike."
- Your credibility/judgment might be questioned if you call the pitch too quickly or wait too long to call it. Therefore, do not call the pitch before it reaches the catcher or after the catcher throws it back to the pitcher. The hesitation after each pitch must be consistent because calling the pitches with the same rhythm is extremely important when it comes to an umpire's credibility.

- **Call**

- Make the "ball" or "strike" call.

- **Step Back**

- The last part in the umpire's timing is to step back after calling the pitch, which will give you a moment to relax, observe the field of play and prepare for the next pitch.
- Move with the pitcher to your set position as she steps on the rubber to start the next pitch. Then repeat the process.

## **CALLING BALLS & STRIKES**

- **Balls**

- In the set position, say "ball" loud enough for the batter and catcher to hear.

- Avoid motioning with your hands or leaning with your body to indicate where the pitch missed the strike zone.
- Turning your head *slightly* to indicate that a close pitch was “just” inside or outside is permitted. However, that should not become a habit.
- On ball four, simply say “ball” or “ball four.”
- Do not say, “take your base.”
- Do not point toward 1<sup>st</sup> base.

## • **Strikes**

- There are two aspects to calling strikes: The verbal call and the visual signal.
  - Make the verbal call in the down-set position or as you come up by saying “strike.”
  - Give the visual signal by bringing your left arm across your belt, close to the body, while raising your right arm higher than your head, slightly in front of your body, with your arm in a locked hammer position.
  - If you chose to point with your right index finger when calling a strike, you must keep your held straight and focused on the ball.
    - When working the box stance, it is preferred that your feet remain in the set position when making the visual signal. This looks more athletic, is not distracting and looks crisper.

### • Swinging Strikes

- If the batter swings and misses the pitch, simply give the visual signal.
- Do not verbalize “strike.”

### • Called Strikes

- If the pitch is a called strike, verbalize “strike” from the down position or as you come up.
- Then rise to the upright position and give the visual signal.

### • Called Third Strike

- A verbal call for the third strike is necessary.
- The signal for the called third strike *must differ* from the ordinary “hammer.”
- Umpires may use some creativity in designing their strike three signal.
- The umpire’s head must remain focused on the home plate area while giving the signal.
- Umpires must keep in mind that while they must “sell” the call, they must not oversell it and risk embarrassing the players.

### • Swinging Third Strike

- Use a toned-down third strike signal with no verbal. *Do not use a routine “hammer” for any third strike*, regardless of whether it is called, swinging, caught or uncaught.

## • **Dropped Third Strike (a/k/a Uncaught Third Strike)**

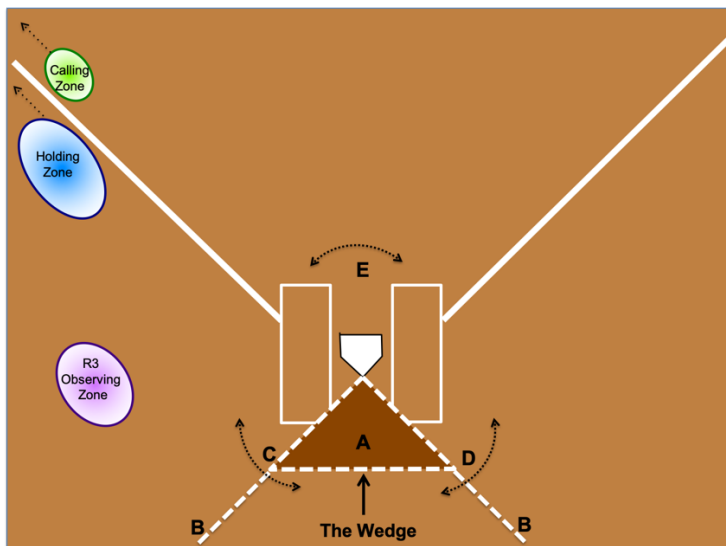
- To avoid the situation in which the coach yells, “Hey, you called the batter out,” you are required to use a signal that doesn’t closely resemble an out or routine strike call. For example, a toned-down bow & arrow strike signal shouldn’t be confused with an out signal.
- When the Dropped Third Strike Is Not In Effect
  - Signal strike (as described above)
  - You may verbalize, “The batter is out” but only if you are certain that the batter is not permitted to run.
- When The Dropped Third Strike Is In Effect
  - Signal strike (as described above)

- If you clearly see that the catcher did not catch the pitch, follow the strike signal by signaling “safe” with no verbalization. The safe signal may be accompanied by a “No Catch” verbal call on closer calls that may need emphasis.
- If the catcher makes a clean catch, the base umpire shows a closed fist waist high with his right arm slight extended from the hip.
- If the catcher does not make a clean catch, the base umpire points to the ground with his index finger with his right arm.
  - The arm should be extended slightly from the body so that the plate umpire can clearly see the signal.
  - The base umpire must move into a calling position for a possible play at 1<sup>st</sup> base.
- NOTE: This base umpire mechanic is used for the rare situation when the plate umpire is unable to determine whether the pitched ball was caught or uncaught.
  - It is the plate umpire’s responsibility to see all action at the plate and rule accordingly.
  - A plate umpire who has trouble making such determinations must adjust his plate stance.

### **GIVING THE COUNT**

- Balls are shown with the left hand.
- Strikes are shown with the right hand.
- Many clinicians *prefer* the umpire use the “x balls, y strike” method.
  - For example, “2 balls, 1 strike.”
    - Alternatively, umpires may say “2 and 1.”
  - For a full count say, “3 balls, 2 strikes.”
    - Alternatively, umpires may say “3 and 2” or “full count.”
    - Do not, however, use closed fists to show the count.
- When showing the count, your hands should be above your shoulders and at least shoulder width apart.
- Fingers are held up in order (*i.e.*, no long-horns).
- Give the count when asked or when there are either 3 balls or 2 strikes.
  - You can also give it when there is an abnormally lengthy delay.
- Wait until the catcher returns the ball to the pitcher and the pitcher faces you before giving the count.
  - Giving it sooner could be distracting and people tend not to hear it.
- Base umpires don’t mirror the count.
- It is highly recommended that the plate umpire provide the base umpire(s) with the count after an attempted steal or pick-off play.
- It is highly recommended that the base umpires be prepared to flash the count to the plate umpire after a runner has attempted to score on a passed ball or wild pitch.
- When a new pitcher enters the game, do not provide her with a full “game situation.”
  - Just give the count before play resumes.

### **CALLING POSITIONS FOR PLAYS AT THE PLATE**



Too many calls are missed at home plate because of poor positioning. Umpires move up the 3<sup>rd</sup> base line into "No Man's Land" and don't return to "The Wedge" in time to adjust for the play. The play/throw will dictate which of calling position you should use. Move to the "Holding Zone" when you might be responsible for either a play at 3<sup>rd</sup> base or home and adjust accordingly.

#### **POSITION "A" – "The Wedge"**

- This is the umpire's original position at the time of the pitch.
- As a *general* rule, if the ball is put in play and the plate umpire remains in Position "A," the umpire is in the wrong position!
- But this is also the position that you should use when you know that there will be a play at the plate. Then adjust your positioning depending on the throw.

#### **POSITION "B"**

- This is for force plays at the plate.
- The position is about 15 ft from home, along the 1<sup>st</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> base line extended.

#### **POSITION "C"**

- This is for non-force plays when the throw home is on-line.
- The position is about 8 ft from home, along the 1<sup>st</sup> base line extended.
- Adjust as necessary to see through the play.

#### **POSITION "D"**

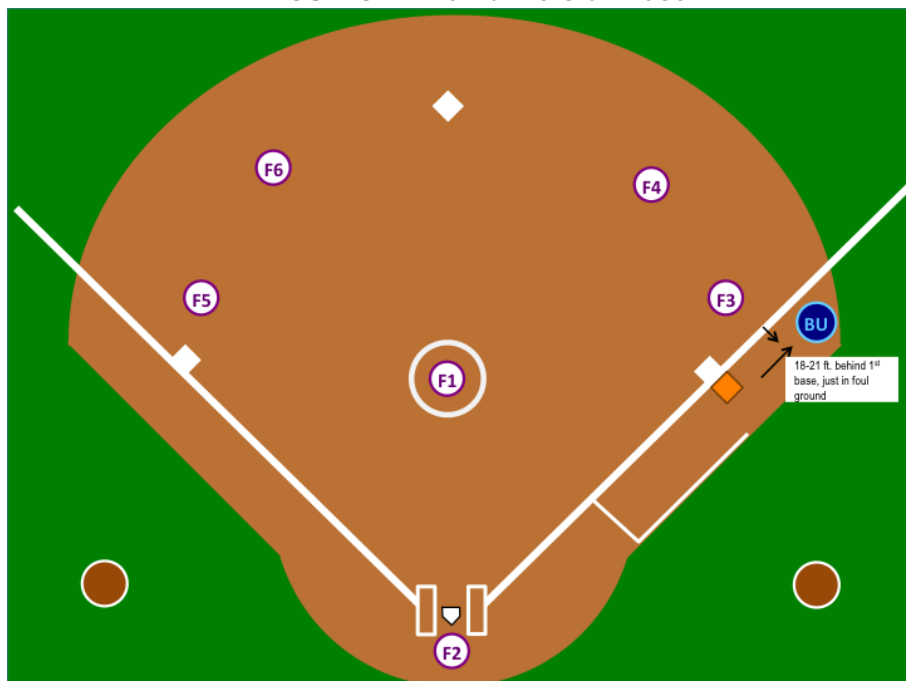
- This is for non-force plays when the throw is off-line *and*
  - Is up the 3<sup>rd</sup> base line;
  - Is up the 1<sup>st</sup> base line; or
  - When the fielder catches the ball in fair territory and must reach back to attempt to tag the runner.
- Adjust as necessary to see through the play.
- Remain alert to avoid a runner who remains upright and runs through the plate. The position is about 8 ft from home plate along the 3<sup>rd</sup> base line extended.
- That position allows the umpire to clearly see the catcher attempt to make a swipe tag, determine if it is made, and determine if it is made before the runner reaches the plate.
- That position also allows you to determine if the catcher has the ball in her glove when the tag is applied. Rotate around and adjust as necessary.

#### **POSITION "E"**

- This is for when the plate umpire enters fair ground for a call at 3<sup>rd</sup> base and then must retreat because the runner attempts to score.
- The position is approximately 8 ft from home plate, in a direct line between home and 2<sup>nd</sup> base.
- Adjust as necessary to see through the play.

### **BASE UMPIRE STARTING POSITIONS**

## “A” POSITION – No Runners on Base



### Walking the Line

- If you walk the line, start 21 ft. behind 1<sup>st</sup> base.
- When the pitcher goes into her motion, take two small steps toward home plate.
  - Step first with your right as the pitcher is about to release the ball.
  - Then step with your left foot, which should hit the ground just before the ball arrives at home plate.
- Return to your original starting position.

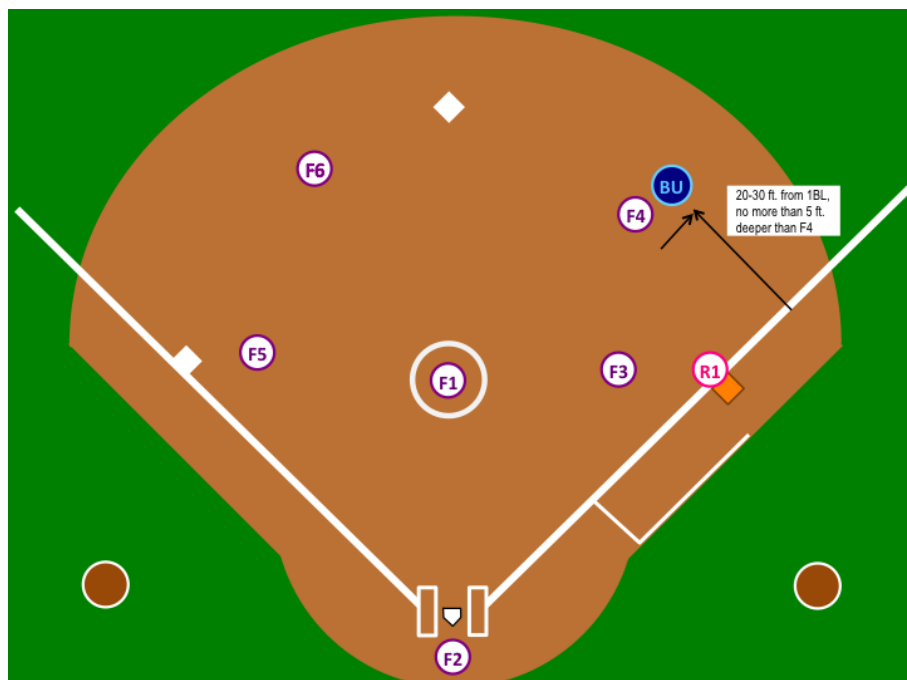
### Drop-Set Position

- If you use a drop-set position, start 18 ft. behind 1<sup>st</sup> base.
- When the pitcher steps onto the pitcher's plate, move to the drop-set position.

### Additional Guidelines

- After the coaches' pre-game conference, jog down to 1<sup>st</sup> base and measure your starting position. The length of an average step is 3 feet. Take 7 steps if you walk the line or 6 steps if you use a down-set. Use your foot to draw a line in foul territory so that you always start at the same position.
- Choose *either* walking the down or the down-set. Avoid using varying hybrid methods. Use the same method for the entire game and be mindful of your body language.

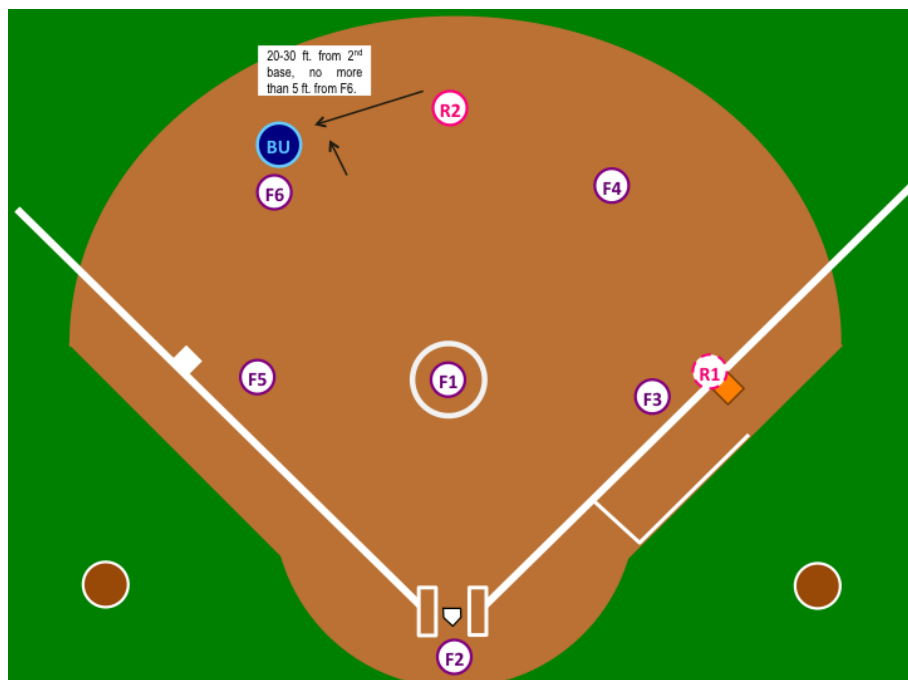
## “B” POSITION – R1 on 1<sup>st</sup> Base Only



- Start 20 – 30 ft. from the 1<sup>st</sup> base line and no deeper than 2 steps behind F4.
  - If you are much more than your body height behind F4, move in!
  - BU should not be closer to 2<sup>nd</sup> base than 1<sup>st</sup> base at the time of the pitch.
- When the pitcher steps onto the pitcher's plate, you should be in the drop-set position.

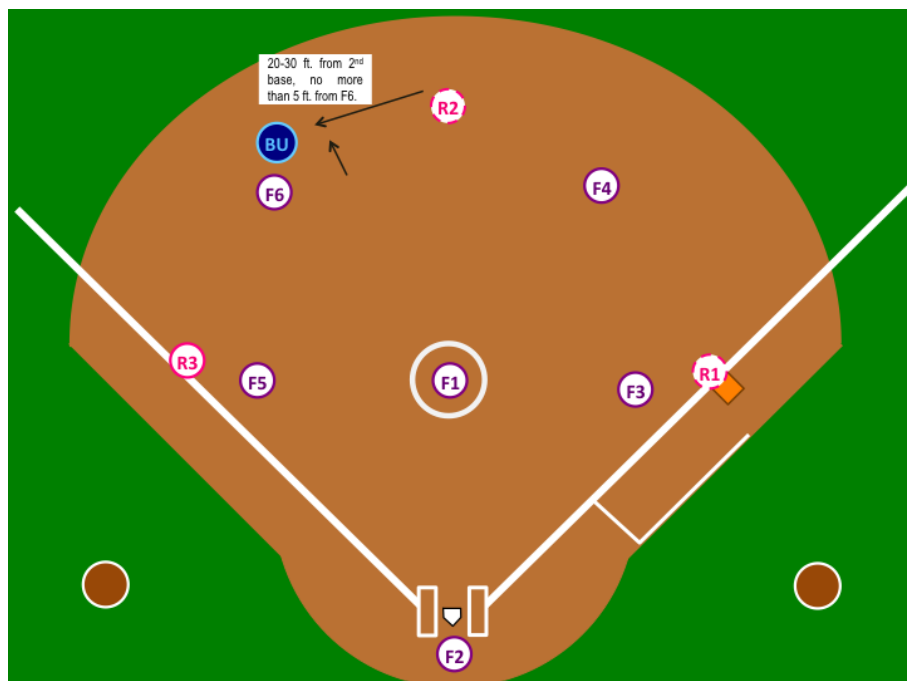
**“C” POSITION – R2 on 2<sup>nd</sup> Base**





- Start 20 – 30 ft. from 2<sup>nd</sup> base and no deeper than 2 steps behind F6.
  - If you are much more than your body height behind F6, move in!
  - BU should not be closer to 3<sup>rd</sup> base than 2<sup>nd</sup> base at the time of the pitch.
- When the pitcher steps onto the pitcher's plate, you should be in the drop-set position.

**“C” POSITION – R3 on 3<sup>rd</sup> Base**

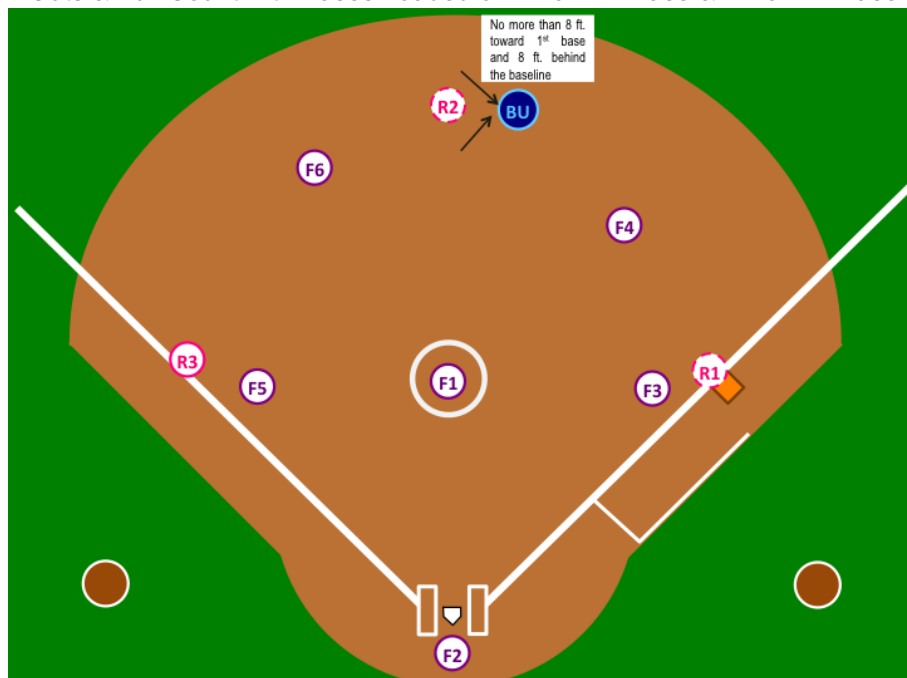


See next diagram for alternative position

- Start 20 – 30 ft. from 2<sup>nd</sup> base and no deeper than 2 steps behind F6.
  - If you are much more than your body height behind F6, move in!
  - BU should not be closer to 3<sup>rd</sup> base than 2<sup>nd</sup> base at the time of the pitch.
- When the pitcher steps onto the pitcher's plate, you should be in the drop-set position.
- Runner on 3<sup>rd</sup> Base Only or Runners on 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Base
  - Note the commentary following the next diagram to determine which position is ideal in these situations. Umpires must be able to recognize which play has priority and adjust according.

## MODIFIED "C" POSITION

R3 on 3<sup>rd</sup> Base Only  
 R3 on 3<sup>rd</sup> & R1 on 1<sup>st</sup> Base  
 2 Outs & Full Count with Bases Loaded or R2 on 2<sup>nd</sup> Base & R1 on 1<sup>st</sup> Base

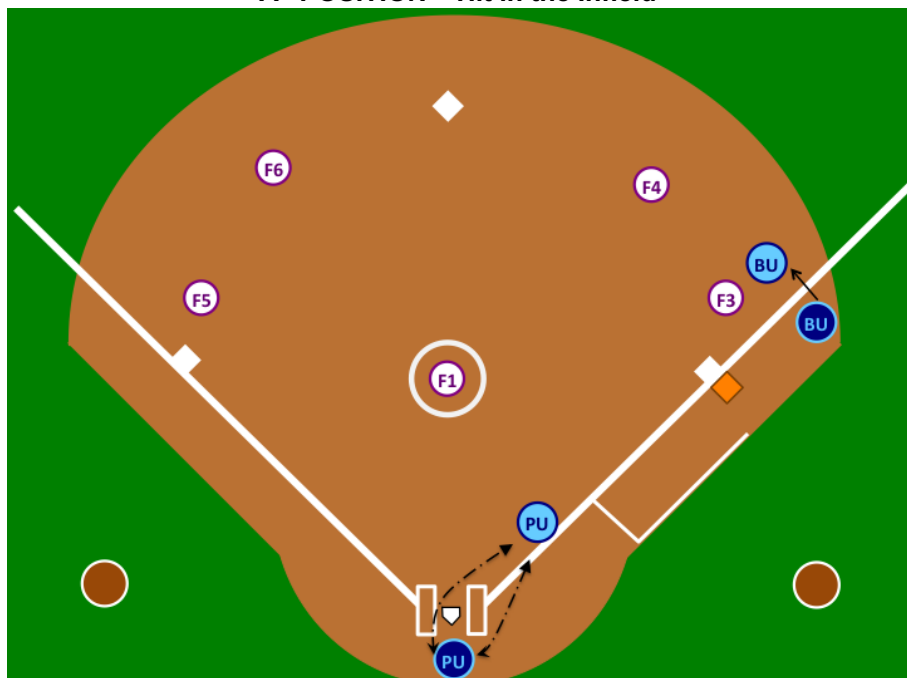


See previous diagram for alternative position

- This is an optional position for the base umpire to use:
  - 1 - Anytime there is a sole runner on 3<sup>rd</sup> base or runners on 1<sup>st</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> base.
  - 2 - When there are 2 outs with a full count and either bases loaded or runners on 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> base.
- Rationale: The rationale for taking this position is that with runners running on the pitch, the likelihood of the play going to 1<sup>st</sup> base is substantially greater than both 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> bases combined.
  - By moving from behind shortstop to between 2<sup>nd</sup> base and the 2<sup>nd</sup> baseman, the base umpire will be positioned on the side of the field of the play.
  - Likewise, with just a runner on 3<sup>rd</sup> base, the position behind the 2<sup>nd</sup> baseman guarantees that you will more often be positioned on the same side of the diamond as the play.
  - *Note:* In determining which position to use, you must be able to “read the situation” in order to determine the likelihood of a pickoff attempt on the runner at 3<sup>rd</sup> base. How important is R3 at that time?
  - If you elect to use the modern mechanic with a runner on 3<sup>rd</sup> base only, it is important that you move toward 3<sup>rd</sup> base after *each pitch* if the ball is not put in play. That will allow you to be significantly closer to 3<sup>rd</sup> base in case there is a “surprise” pickoff attempt.
- Neither the “C” nor the “Modified C” is a default position. Umpires must use common sense, good judgment and thoughtful reasoning when deciding which position to use in any given situation.

## **PLATE & BASE UMPIRE MECHANICS – BALL PUT IN PLAY**

## **“A” POSITION – Hit in the Infield**



### **PLATE UMPIRE**

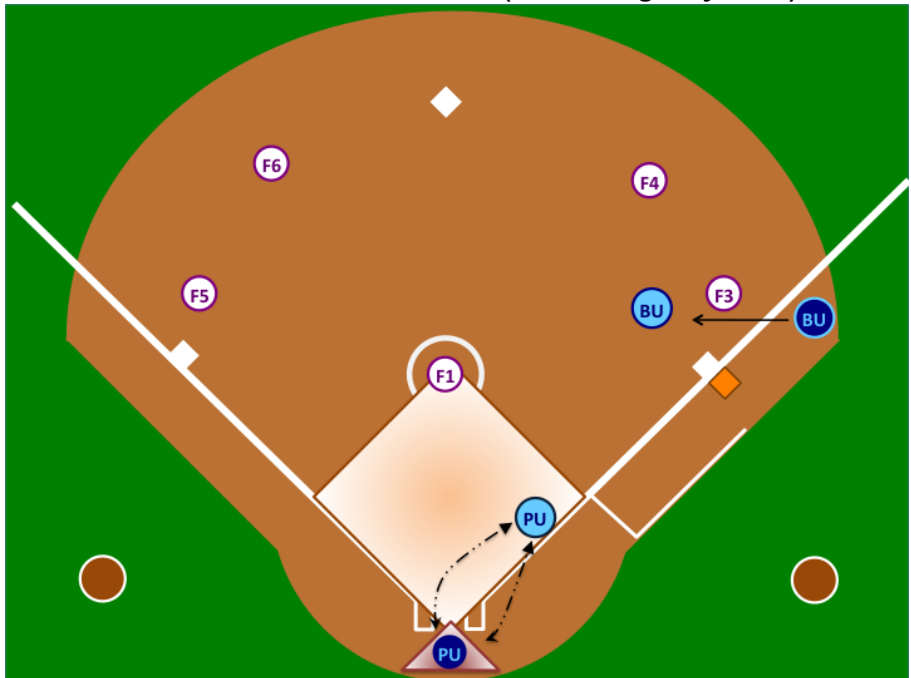
- Exit the plate in the most expeditious manner without interfering.
- Trail the batter for the first 15 feet up 1<sup>st</sup> base line.
- Stop and watch for a pulled foot or swipe tag.
- Watch for three-foot lane violation.

### **BASE UMPIRE**

- Pause – Read – React
- On a routine hit to an infielder, take 1 full step into fair ground (“1SF”).
- The calling distance for a “force play” at 1<sup>st</sup> base is approximately 15 -18 feet from 1<sup>st</sup> base.
- Watch the infielder field and throw the ball to 1<sup>st</sup> base, allowing the ball to turn your head toward the base.
- BU must be set before the ball arrives. BU’s body must be square to 1<sup>st</sup> base.
- If there is an overthrow, be prepared to take the runner to 2<sup>nd</sup> base by running parallel and outside the 1<sup>st</sup> - 2<sup>nd</sup> base line.
  - Do not cross the path of the runner by going inside on the way to 2<sup>nd</sup> base.
  - No ball = No call!
- If there is an overthrow at 2<sup>nd</sup> base, come inside the diamond and take the runner to 3<sup>rd</sup> base. The play on BR at 3<sup>rd</sup> base is still the base umpire’s call.
  - Nevertheless, the plate umpire must be alert and available to help if directed to do so by the base umpire if the base umpire is trapped.

## **“A” POSITION – Bunt or Soft Hit in Front of Home Plate**

## “Diamond within the Diamond” (a/k/a “Imaginary Box”)



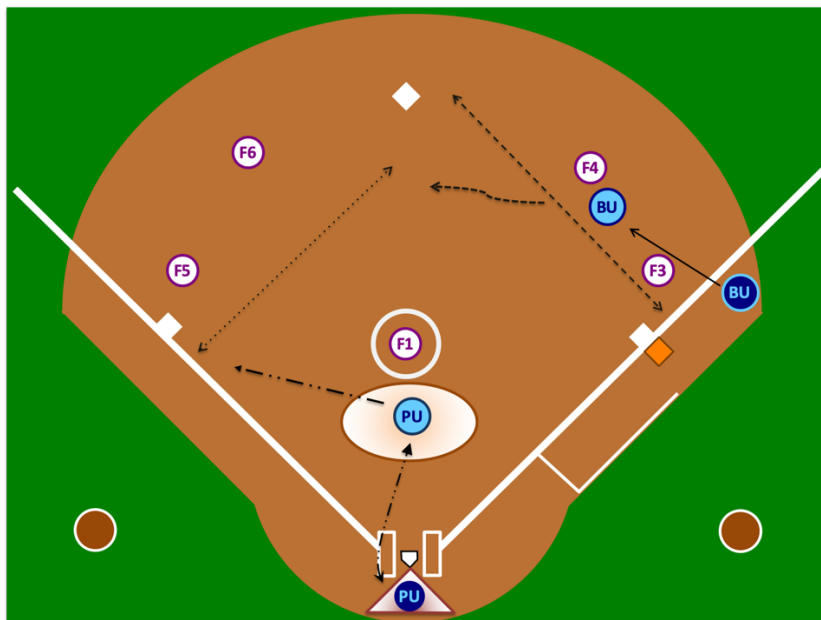
### PLATE UMPIRE

- Exit the plate in the most expeditious manner without interfering.
- Trail the batter for the first 15 feet up 1<sup>st</sup> base line.
- Stop and watch for a pulled foot or swipe tag.
- Watch for three-foot lane violation.

### BASE UMPIRE

- This position is used when the ball is hit in the shaded area (*approximately 30 feet up each baseline and 30 feet toward the pitcher's plate*).
- It most often occurs on bunts and soft hits.
- Pause – Read – React
- When the ball is fielded in the shaded area, move 15 feet from 1<sup>st</sup> base on a direct line on the 1<sup>st</sup> - 2<sup>nd</sup> base line.
- There are multiple benefits to using this position when the ball is hit in the shaded area.
  - First, the defender covering 1<sup>st</sup> base is more likely to have her foot on the edge of 1<sup>st</sup> base closest to home, so the umpire will be able to see a pulled foot.
  - Second, there are more wild throws from this area, so the umpire will be able to quickly move inside the diamond if the runner goes to 2<sup>nd</sup> base.
  - Third, if there is an overthrow, the umpire will not be in the line of the throw.

**“A” POSITION – Hit to Center or Left Field or to Right Field Where it is Clear Batter-Runner Will Not Advance to 2<sup>nd</sup> Base - “The Rim”**



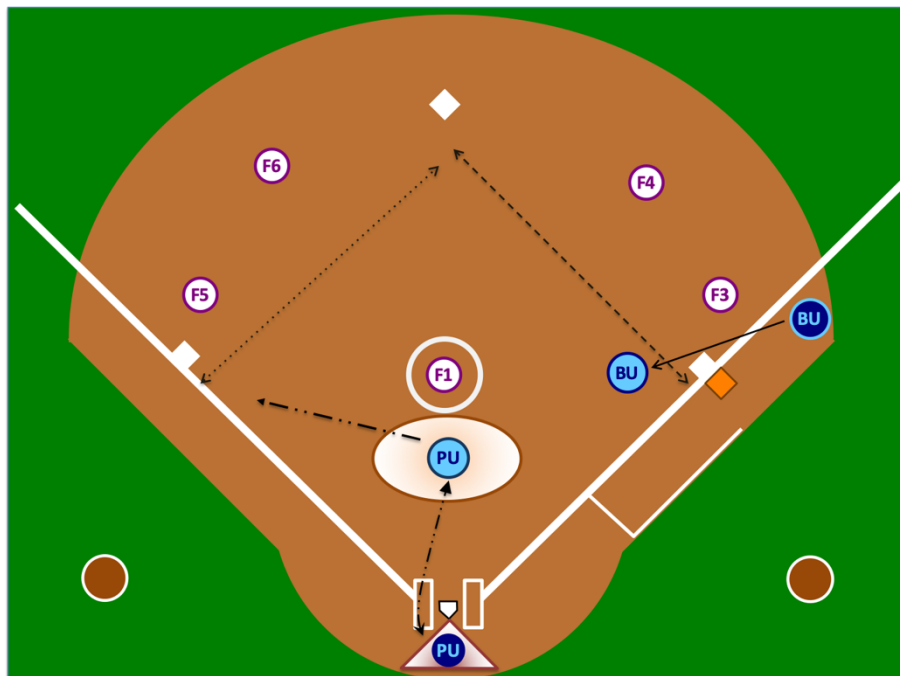
### **PLATE UMPIRE**

- Exit the plate in the most expeditious manner without interfering.
- Move to an area in front of the pitcher's circle and observe all play.
  - Move so you have an angle on the ball rather than directly at the ball.
- If it is clear that the batter-runner will attempt to advance to 3<sup>rd</sup> base, move back to "The Wedge" and adjust for any play at the plate.
- If BR stops at 2<sup>nd</sup> base and the ball is thrown away causing her to advance to 3<sup>rd</sup> base, then take the play at 3<sup>rd</sup> base in this scenario *only*.

### **BASE MECHANICS**

- The "Rim" is the counterpart to the "Buttonhook" and is a modern, more advanced and appropriate mechanic.
- They are used when the ball is hit to left field or center field area or on easily handled balls to right field if it is clear after reading the play that the batter-runner will not attempt to advance to 2<sup>nd</sup> base.
- Simply by turning your head slightly and flashing your eyes, you will be able to see all of the elements (i.e., the batter-runner, bases, fielders and ball).
- Pause – Read – React
- When the ball is hit, move 15 – 20 ft. into fair ground. Read the runner's motion.
- If the ball is returned to the infield and the runner returns to 1<sup>st</sup> base, move back toward 1<sup>st</sup> base with the runner, while keeping an eye on the ball.
- If the runner goes to 2<sup>nd</sup> base, run parallel with the base line.
  - If the throw goes to 2<sup>nd</sup> base, *stay outside* the diamond and make the call.
- If you believe that the runner may go to 3<sup>rd</sup> base, allow the runner to pass you and cut immediately behind her inside the diamond.
  - Do not continue to run stride for strike with the runner outside the diamond as you will soon find yourself trailing the play and in poor position for a call.
- If the runner goes to 3<sup>rd</sup> base, run parallel with the base line.

**"A" POSITION – Single to Right Field and Batter-Runner May Advance  
"The Buttonhook"**



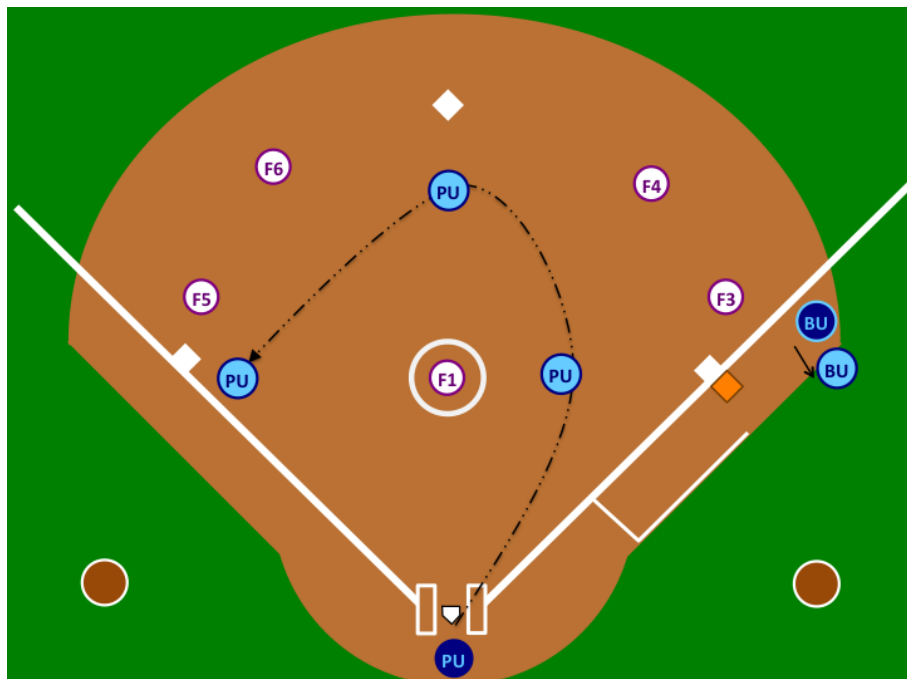
### PLATE UMPIRE

- Exit the plate in the most expeditious manner without interfering.
- Move to an area in front of the pitcher's circle and observe all play.
  - Move so you have an angle on the ball rather than directly at the ball.
- If it is clear that the batter-runner will attempt to advance to 3<sup>rd</sup> base, move back to "The Wedge" and adjust for any play at the plate.
- If BR stops at 2<sup>nd</sup> base and the ball is thrown away causing her to advance to 3<sup>rd</sup> base, then take the play at 3<sup>rd</sup> base in this scenario *only*.

### BASE UMPIRE

- The "Buttonhook" is the counterpart to the "Rim" technique.
- The buttonhook will only be used on a potential gapper to right-center or right field.
- Run to a point 8 ft. from the 1<sup>st</sup> base line & 8 ft. from the 1<sup>st</sup> - 2<sup>nd</sup> base line.
- To buttonhook, turn counter-clockwise.
  - The buttonhook must be tight and you should not have to back pedal in order to do it.
  - The buttonhook *must* be completed *before* BR hits 1<sup>st</sup> base.
- Watch for the runner to hit 1<sup>st</sup> base and for obstruction.
- Watch for the ball being thrown into the infield.
- Move with the runner!
  - BU should move in a smooth manner along with BR.
  - If she rounds 1<sup>st</sup> base, move with her, but do not just run to 2<sup>nd</sup> base.
    - Instead, make sure she is actually going to 2<sup>nd</sup> base first.
  - Any throw-back to 1<sup>st</sup> base is your responsibility.
  - If the runner returns to 1<sup>st</sup> base, move back with her.

**"A" POSITION – Hit to Right Field with Possible Play at 1<sup>st</sup> Base**



## PLATE UMPIRE

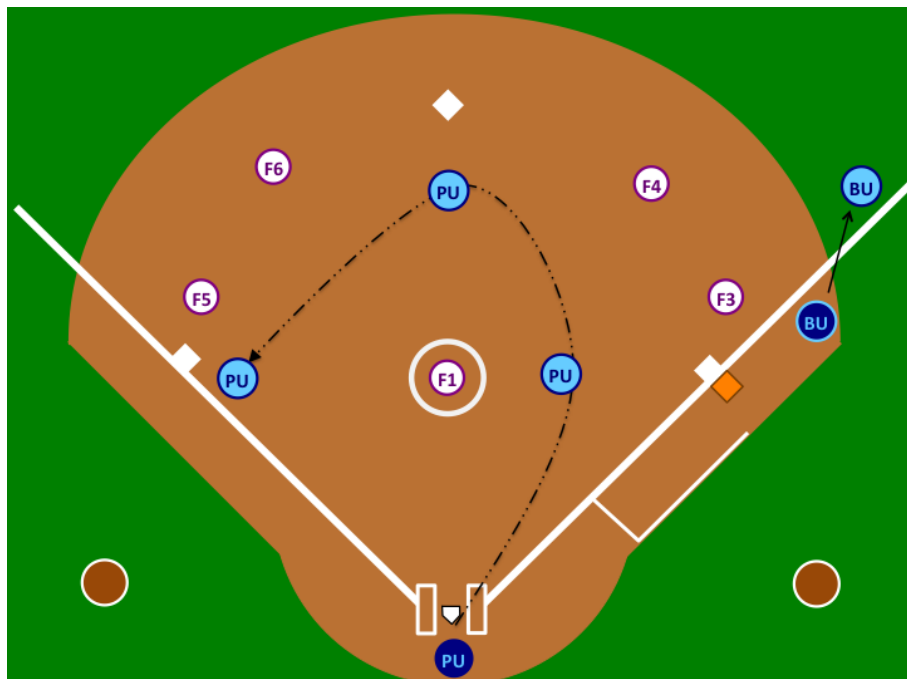
- Exit the plate in the most expeditious manner without interfering.
- See your base umpire step into foul ground for the play.
- Move to a location between the pitcher's circle and 1<sup>st</sup> base.
- If BU gets "trapped" in foul territory, PU is responsible for any play made on the batter-runner going to 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and home.

## BASE UMPIRE

- Most importantly, BU must avoid being hit by the batted ball or a thrown ball. Additionally, BU must avoid distracting the fielders. To determine the best position for the call at 1<sup>st</sup> base, BU must consider the position of the fielders, how hard and close to the line the ball is hit and BU's physical capabilities.
- BU should take 2 steps into foul ground, approximately 15 feet from 1<sup>st</sup> base.
  - Getting into this proper foul ground position has several benefits.
    - BU will avoid interfering with the play or getting hit by the throw.
    - BU will be able to see if F4 pulls her foot.
    - BU will be far enough from BR's path to avoid a collision between BU & BR.
    - BU will be stopped, set and focused for the call rather than sprinting and pivoting when the play develops at 1<sup>st</sup> base.
- BU must read the throw coming from F9.
  - If the ball gets by F9, BU is responsible for judging if the ball enters dead ball territory.
- BU is still responsible for a throwback to 1<sup>st</sup> base and for any look-back rule violations occurring between 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> base.

### **“A” POSITION – Fly Ball to Right Field**





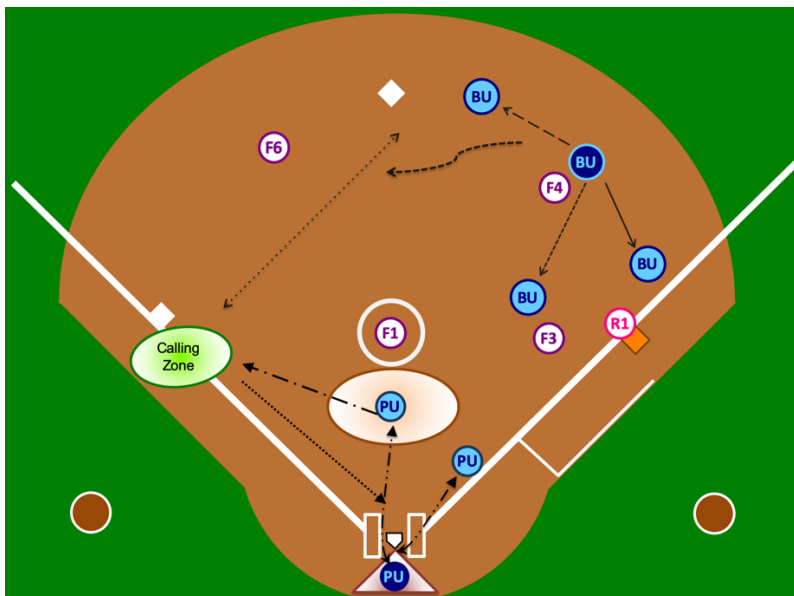
### **PLATE UMPIRE**

- Exit the plate in the most expeditious manner without interfering.
- See that your base umpire has gone out on the ball and not merely taken a step or two to get a better view of the play in the outfield.
- Move to a location between the pitcher's circle and 1<sup>st</sup> base.
- If BU does go out, PU is responsible for any play made on the batter-runner going to 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and home.

### **BASE UMPIRE**

- Particularly with no runners on base, BU must recognize the potential for a difficult catch/no catch call and go out on the ball.
- Pause – Read – React
- Announce to PU, "I'm going" or "I'm going out, you have the batter."
- Run parallel to the flight of the ball.
  - Do not run directly at the ball as this will diminish the quality of your angle to the play and may also distract the right fielder.
- When the ball is approximately 25 feet from the right fielder, stop and get set.
- Use the "Flash Technique."
- If a call needs to be made, hold your call and then make it.
  - Make the call facing the play. Do not turn back toward the infield to make the call.
- If you went out in error and no play needs to be officiated, withhold your call.

### **"B" POSITION – All Movements**



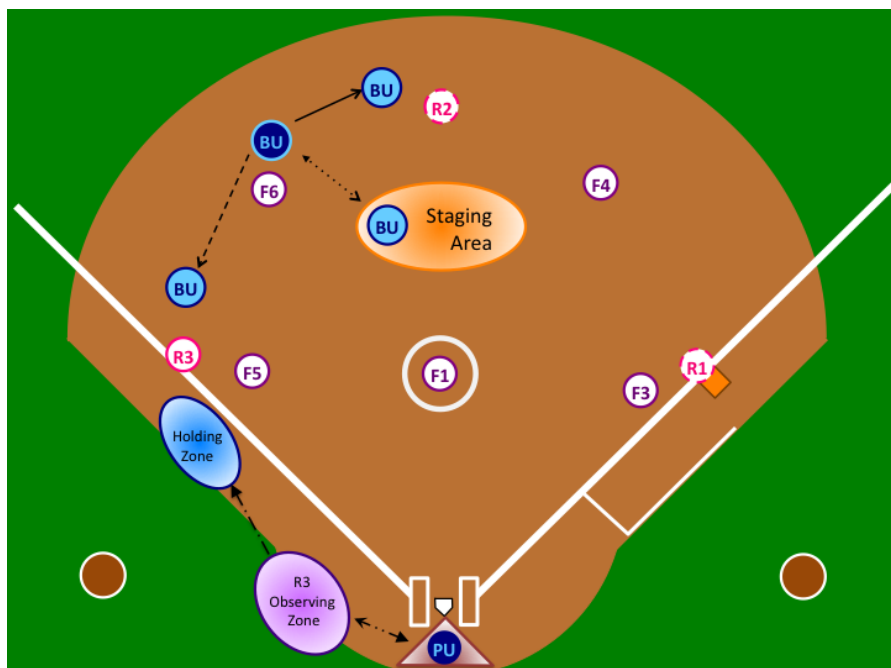
### **PLATE UMPIRE**

- Exit the plate in the most expeditious manner without interfering.
- **Infield Hit**
  - Trail the batter for the first 15 feet up 1<sup>st</sup> base line.
- **Outfield Hit**
  - Move to an area in front of the pitcher's circle and observe all play.
    - Move so you have an angle on the ball rather than directly at the ball.
- If it is obvious that R1 will attempt to score on a hit to the outfield, move back to "The Wedge" and adjust for the play at the plate.
- After trailing the batter-runner, move to the Calling Zone at 3<sup>rd</sup> base.
- If after moving to the Calling Zone R1 attempts to score, move back to home plate in fair territory. Do not try to cut into foul territory.
- Watch for obstruction as R1 rounds 2<sup>nd</sup> base and advances toward 3<sup>rd</sup> base.
- Be prepared to help out BU if asked for help on a pulled foot or swipe tag.

### **BASE UMPIRE**

- **Infield Hit or Play to 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> Base**
  - Pause – Read – React
  - Let the throw dictate your movement toward 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> base.
  - Double Play Attempt – "Drift Technique"
    - Take a few steps toward 2<sup>nd</sup> base.
    - As the ball arrives at 2<sup>nd</sup> base, start drifting toward 1<sup>st</sup> base.
    - While drifting toward 1<sup>st</sup> base, signal the play at 2<sup>nd</sup> base.
    - Get set for the call at 1<sup>st</sup> base.
- **Ball Hit to Outfield**
  - Stay outside the diamond unless there is a compelling reason to come inside (e.g., a potential gapper to right-center or right field).
  - If you stayed outside and believe that the BR may go to 3<sup>rd</sup> base, allow her to pass you and cut immediately behind her inside the diamond.
  - Do not take R1 to 3<sup>rd</sup> base.

### **"C" POSITION – All Movements**



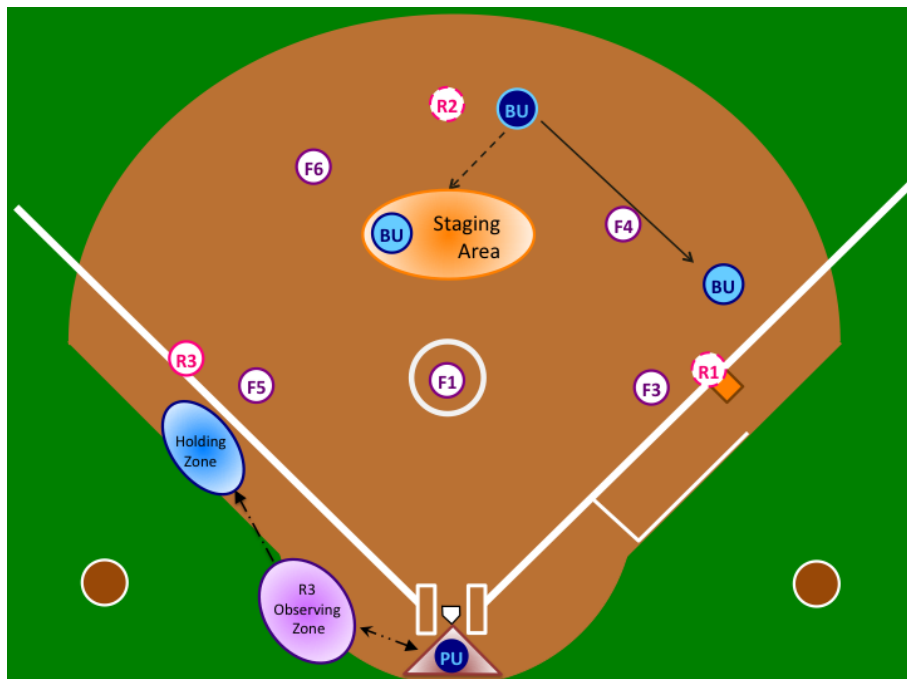
## **PLATE UMPIRE**

- Initial Play at Home: Stay in “The Wedge” and adjust to the throw.
- If the throw goes to 1<sup>st</sup> base, be prepared to move to the “Holding Zone” for a possible play at 3<sup>rd</sup> base. Then retreat back home if necessary.
- If R3 clearly will attempt to score once the defender throws the ball to 1<sup>st</sup> to retire BR, move back from the “R3 Observing Zone” to “The Wedge.” If you misjudge R3’s movement and she does not come home, move to the “Holding Zone.”
- If R3 is tagging up, move to the “R3 Observing Zone” in order to get a proper angle for the catch and tag-up.
  - Once the defender touches the ball, *move back* to “The Wedge” and adjust according to the throw.

## **BASE UMPIRE**

- **Ball Hit in Infield**
  - If the first play is to 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> base, take a few steps toward the base.
    - Close in on the play but do not get straight-lined.
  - If the first play is to 1<sup>st</sup> base, move into the infield, avoiding any other runners. Wait for the actual release of the ball before committing in.
    - Just before the ball arrives at 1<sup>st</sup> base, stop and set.
    - On more obvious plays, simply make the call.
  - On closer plays, after verbalizing the call, take 2 or 3 steps toward 1<sup>st</sup> base while giving the visual signal.
    - This gives the impression that you were closer to the play.
    - Do not run or hop halfway to 1<sup>st</sup> base, as this will make it obvious that you were not originally in that position at the time you saw the play.
- **Ball Hit to Outfield**
  - Stay outside the diamond unless there is a compelling reason to come inside. Then, adjust as the play dictates.

## **MODIFIED “C” POSITION**



## **PLATE UMPIRE**

- Initial Play at Home: Stay in “The Wedge” and adjust to the throw.
- If the throw goes to 1<sup>st</sup> base, be prepared to move to the “Holding Zone” for a possible play at 3<sup>rd</sup> base. Then retreat back home if necessary.
- If R3 clearly will attempt to score once the defender throws the ball to 1<sup>st</sup> to retire BR, move back from the “R3 Observing Zone” to “The Wedge.” If you misjudge R3’s movement and she does not come home, move to the “Holding Zone.”
- If R3 is tagging up, move to the “R3 Observing Zone” in order to get a proper angle for the catch and tag-up.
  - Once the defender touches the ball, *move back* to “The Wedge” and adjust according to the throw.

## **BASE UMPIRE**

- **Ball Hit in Infield**
  - If the first play is to 1<sup>st</sup> base, move toward 1<sup>st</sup> base for the call.
  - If the first play is to 2<sup>nd</sup> base, take a step or two backward to get a fuller view.
  - If the first play is to 3<sup>rd</sup> base, move toward 3<sup>rd</sup> base.
- **Ball Hit to Outfield**
  - Stay outside the diamond unless there is a compelling reason to come inside. Then, adjust as the play dictates.

# **PLATE & BASE UMPIRE**

# **ADDITIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES**

## **WORKING BETWEEN PITCHES**

- With one or more runners on base in the two-umpire system, the base umpire's time-of-pitch position does not provide an acceptable calling position on a pick-off attempt. Therefore, the umpire "works between pitches" by moving in the direction of a calling position when:
  - a non-batted pitched ball is caught by or blocked by the catcher and
  - the runner(s) is not stealing or advancing toward the next base.
- With a runner(s) on base, use a drop-set position, allowing you to be set when ruling on the runner leaving/not leaving prior to the release of the pitch. You should be set once the pitcher takes her position on the pitcher's plate.
- Even if the pitch is not batted and the runner is not stealing, there is still a potential play. Working between pitches moves you toward a calling position that forms a 90 degree angle between the path of the runner and the tag. Use of that mechanic prevents you from being caught "flat footed." Working between pitches is as simple as taking two steps toward the desired calling position.
- If the ball is returned directly to the pitcher and the runner returns to her base, there is no need to actually reach the calling position; it is important to be *moving* toward that calling position in case a pick-off attempt does develop. If there is no play, the umpire simply returns to the proper starting position.

The chart below provides the initial direction of movement for the base umpire to effectively work between pitches in the two-umpire system.

Base Runner On	Starting Position	Base Umpire Movement
1 <sup>st</sup> Base	"B" Position	Parallel to base line in the direction of 1 <sup>st</sup> base foul line
2 <sup>nd</sup> Base	"C" Position	Parallel to base line in the direction of 2 <sup>nd</sup> base/right-centerfield
3 <sup>rd</sup> Base	"C" Position	Perpendicular to the base line toward pitcher's circle. If there's a pick off, pivot shoulders to form the 90° angle
3 <sup>rd</sup> Base	"Modified C" Position	Straight forward toward 3 <sup>rd</sup> base
Multiple Runners	Various	Move forward and adjust when a throw is made

## **ADDITIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES FOR BASE UMPIRES**

- First throw by an infielder to any base.
- The base umpire only makes four calls at third on a ball put in play:
  - All force plays.
  - If the first throw is by an infielder to 3<sup>rd</sup> base.
  - Batter-runner going to 3<sup>rd</sup> base (for a triple).
  - If the plate umpire is caught with a play at home.
    - Make sure that your partner is not in a calling position. Remember that you still have all calls at 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> base and that you will only make the extra call at 3<sup>rd</sup> if your partner gets caught at home. The plate umpire should say, "I've got 3<sup>rd</sup>!" If you, as the base umpire, don't hear the plate umpire say this, be prepared to make the call at 3<sup>rd</sup>.
- Any and all trail runners, unless called off by the plate umpire.
- Checked swings.
- All runners leaving base early.
  - Exception: Either umpire can call a runner at 2<sup>nd</sup> base out for leaving early.

- All illegal pitches pertaining to the pitcher's feet (except for stepping outside the 24 inch pitcher's plate).
- All steals at all bases.
  - However, with just a runner on 1<sup>st</sup> base, if the runner steals 2<sup>nd</sup> base and continues to 3<sup>rd</sup> base due to an *overthrow* to the outfield, the call at 3<sup>rd</sup> base is the plate umpire's responsibility.
    - If the runner continues to 3<sup>rd</sup> base because the ball is bobbled around the backstop, the base umpire is expected to continue with the runner, remaining outside the diamond.
    - The plate umpire typically cannot be expected to clear the plate area and move to 3<sup>rd</sup> base in this case. That may also result in the plate umpire being in the line of the throw to 3<sup>rd</sup> base.
- All pick-off attempts at all bases.

## **THE RUNDOWN**

*A rundown is the acts of multiple defensive players at two bases making more than 1 throw in an attempt to retire the same runner. Getting the call right requires the "off" umpire to notice the potential for a rundown immediately.*

- **Generally**
  - The key to any rundown is hustle and communication.
  - Get in position as quickly as possible.
  - The "helping umpire" should say "I've got (base) once he gets there."
- **Positioning**
  - Each umpire should be no farther than 15 feet from the base for which he is responsible.
  - Each umpire should be no closer to the base line than 6 feet.
  - The umpires should be on the opposite side of the base line.
    - However, in the 3-umpire system, if the 3<sup>rd</sup> base umpire is inside the diamond, then both the 3<sup>rd</sup> base umpire and the plate umpire will be on the inside of the diamond.
  - Each umpire should hold his position and avoid running back and forth with the runner.
- **Calling**
  - Ordinarily, the umpire responsible for making the call is the umpire to whom the runner is running. However, if a runner is tagged in the back, the trail umpire is responsible for the call.
  - When the umpire sees a tag, the umpire points toward the tag with left arm and say, "tag," then continue with the appropriate call.
  - Each umpire should be watchful for both obstruction and interference.

## **ILLEGAL PITCHES**

- **Mechanic**
  - The umpire calling an illegal pitch shall extend her left arm shoulder high with a closed fist and say "illegal" loud enough for the closest player to hear.
- **Plate Umpire**
  - Call illegal pitches that pertain to the hands.
  - Call illegal pitch for stepping outside the 24-inch width of the pitcher's plate.
  - Call illegal pitches for foreign substance.
- **Base Umpire**
  - Call illegal pitches for foot violations.
  - Call illegal pitches for foreign substance.

## **FAIR/FOUL BALL COVERAGE**

- There is a close correlation between proximity to the play and correctness of the call. For this reason, the plate and base umpires share fair/foul responsibility in certain situations.
- In the 2-ump system, the plate umpire has all fair/foul calls down the 3<sup>rd</sup> base line.
- With a runner(s) on base, the plate umpire has all fair/foul calls down the 1<sup>st</sup> base line.
- With no runners on base, the base umpire has fair/foul calls starting at the front edge (home plate side) of 1<sup>st</sup> base. That is, any batted ball, whether rolling, bounding or in flight is the base umpire's responsibility once it *reaches* 1<sup>st</sup> base.
  - Exception: If the base umpire needs to move off the line to avoid interfering with a *fly* ball near his position, the plate umpire has fair/foul calls. In addition to avoiding interfering with the players, the players often have their back to the base umpire, which makes determining fair/foul difficult.
- With no runners on base, it is important for the 1<sup>st</sup> base umpire to "go out" on fly balls down the 1<sup>st</sup> base line.
  - With no runners on base, when there is a potential catch/no catch down the 1<sup>st</sup> base line, the base umpire should take a few steps toward the outfield, then drop to the set position.
    - If the ball *hits* the ground in *fair territory*, signal "safe" and verbalize "no catch."
    - If the ball *hits* the ground in *foul territory*, signal and verbalize "foul."
    - If the ball *contacts* any part of a *player* (including her glove) before it hits the ground, the umpire must immediately point whether the ball was fair or foul.
      - If the ball is caught, the umpire signals and verbalizes "out."
      - If the ball is not caught and is foul, the base umpire must signal and verbalize "foul."
      - If the ball is not caught and is fair, the base umpire must signal "safe" and verbalize "no catch."
  - Pointing fair or foul when the ball contacts the player before touching the ground is important. It allows the umpire an additional second or two before making the call. Most importantly, it forces the umpire to determine fair/foul *before* the ball is dropped. Amazingly, when everything happens so quickly, umpires frequently forget whether the ball was fair or foul when the fielder first touched it.
  - When pointing, extend the appropriate arm fully, pointing with only your index finger. If you feel it is necessary, you may re-pump the signal once. Do not do a rapid-fire pump. One or two quick, crisp pumps look best and notifies everyone.
- The 3<sup>rd</sup> base umpire in a 3-umpire system should use these same techniques. Far too often the 3<sup>rd</sup> base umpire takes off for 2<sup>nd</sup> base, abandoning highly important play in her area. The priority ought to be getting the initial call correct. The 1<sup>st</sup> base umpire can take batter-runner to 2<sup>nd</sup> base should the ball fall in fair down the line.
- The plate umpire should take her mask off before determining fair/foul. However, if taking your mask off would interfere with your ability to determine fair/foul or catch/no catch, you may leave your mask on. With that said, do not get in the habit of always leaving it on, which is the exception to the rule, and not the norm.

## **FLY BALL COVERAGE**

### **• General Guidelines**

- Do not call or signal routine catches.
  - For example, do not bellow “OOOOUUUTTT” and pump your fist in the air on a routine catch.
- Try to be in a stopped “set position” and not moving when watching a play, including catch/no catch.
- With no runners on base, the plate umpire may inform her partner, “That’s a Catch” or “Batter’s Out” on routine fly balls in the plate umpire’s zone if the base umpire is making a buttonhook and may not have seen the catch.
  - *Note:* The base umpire should still quickly look up to find the ball as it reaches the defensive player.

### **• Calling Area**

- The following two diagrams illustrate the calling areas for both plate and base umpires both with no runners on base and with runners on base.
- The base umpire is responsible for the shaded area on *all* fly balls, not just when the base umpire “goes out” on a fly ball.
  - That is because there is a close correlation between proximity to the play and correctness of the call. The base umpire also has a much better angle to the path of the ball.
  - Because the base umpire may be responsible for both catch/no catch and runner(s) tag-up(s), the base umpire must establish a position that provides the best angle to watch both the catch and the runners.
    - Remember, the base umpire needs to watch the catch anyway to determine whether the runner left early.
- Base umpires must avoid the temptation to buttonhook on all fly balls. While a buttonhooking umpire may obtain a good view of the runner leaving her base, the umpire most often does not turn in time to watch the catch/no catch.
  - Consequently, the umpire neglects catch/no catch responsibility. Additionally, if the umpire doesn’t see the initial touch of the fly ball by the defender, he will not be able to determine whether the runner actually left early.

## **TAG-UP RESPONSIBILITIES**

### **• Plate Umpire**

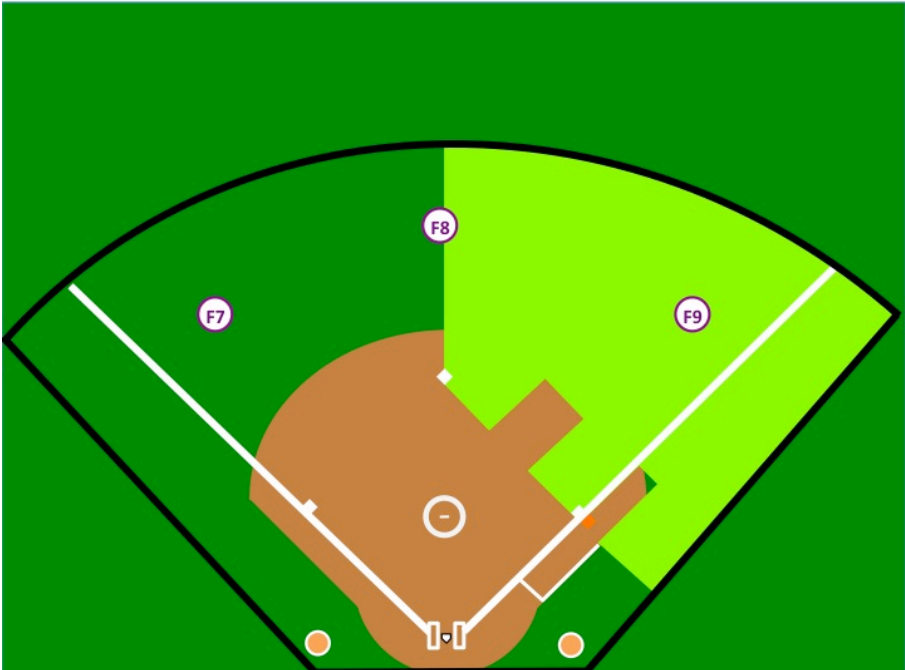
- Responsible for the lead runner.
  - In order to have a lead runner, there must be a trail runner (i.e., multiple runners on base).
  - Responsible for R2 on 2<sup>nd</sup> base with R1 on 1<sup>st</sup> and R2 on 2<sup>nd</sup> base.
- Responsible for R3 on 3<sup>rd</sup> base.
  - If PU is pinned at the plate observing catch/no catch and fair/foul down the right field line, PU may direct BU to watch R3’s tag.

### **• Base Umpire**

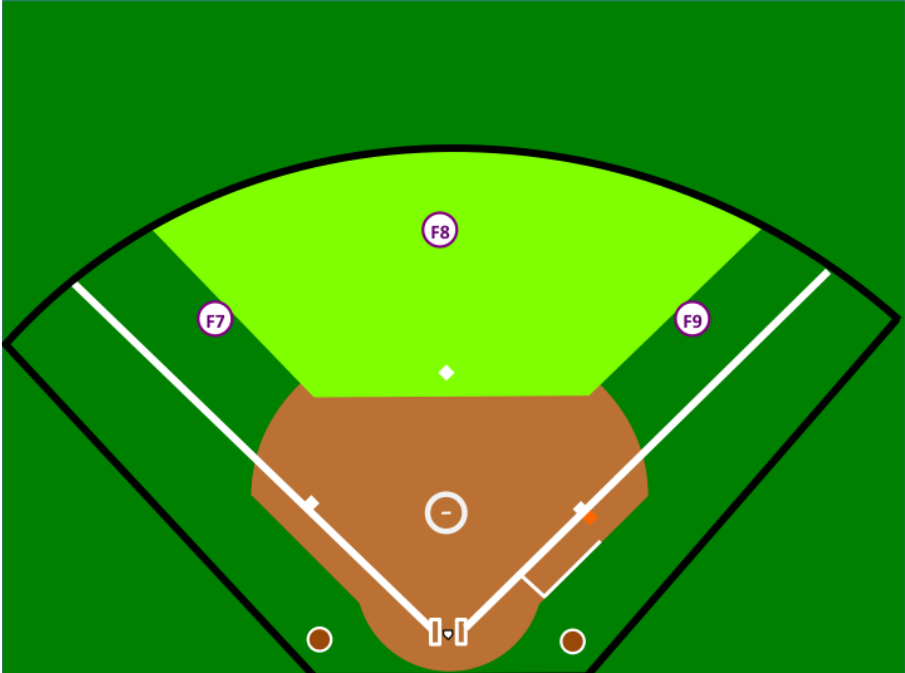
- Responsible for R1 as the sole runner on 1<sup>st</sup> base.
- Responsible for R2 as the sole runner on 2<sup>nd</sup> base.
  - *Note:* The play on R2 going into 3<sup>rd</sup> base is PU’s call unless PU directs BU to take R2 into 3<sup>rd</sup> base solely because PU is pinned at the plate observing catch/no catch and fair/foul down the right field line.
- Responsible for all trail runners.



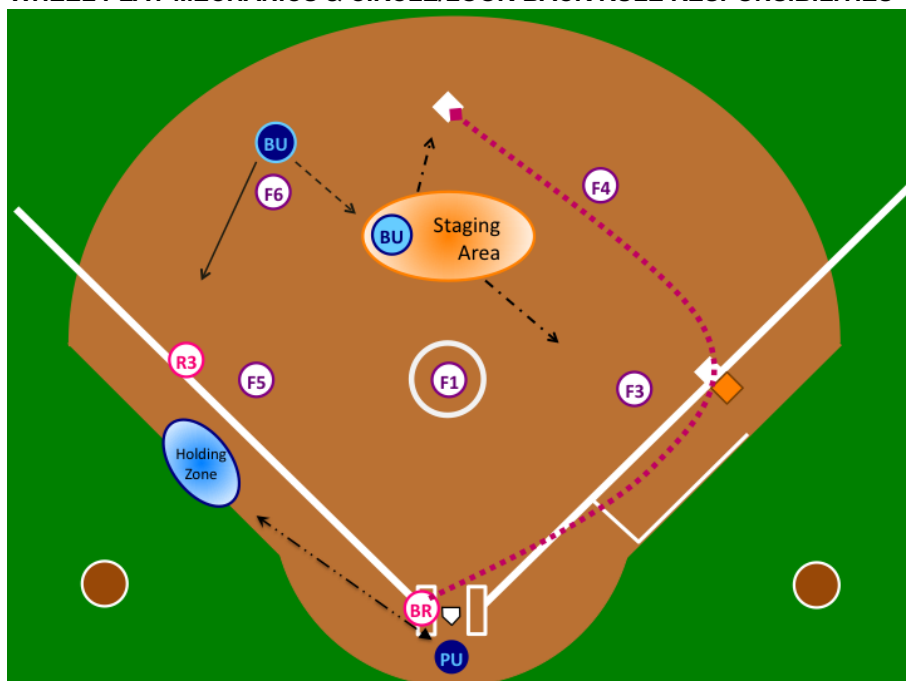
**FLY BALL COVERAGE (CATCH/NO CATCH) WITH NO RUNNERS**



**FLY BALL COVERAGE (CATCH/NO CATCH) WITH ANY RUNNER**



## WHEEL PLAY MECHANICS & CIRCLE/LOOK-BACK RULE RESPONSIBILITIES



The "Wheel Play" is in effect when there is a runner on 3<sup>rd</sup> base at the time of the pitch with the base umpire in the "Traditional C Position" and the batter walks.

- Proper positioning during this play is extremely important because the potential calls involve a runner in scoring position and the enforcement of rules without the defense executing an actual play.
  - Therefore, for the umpire's call to have any credibility, the umpire must be in the proper position.
- **Base Umpire Responsibilities**
  - BU is responsible for an initial pickoff attempt if F2 immediately throws down to 3<sup>rd</sup> base.
  - If F2 does not attempt such a pickoff, BU must move into the "Staging Area".
  - Maintain a good position within the "Staging Area", keeping the ball and the runner within your line of sight.
  - BU has all calls on plays made on BR.
    - Adjust toward 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> base if a play develops, staying out of the line of the throw.
  - BU has all circle rule (look-back rule) violations committed by BR.
- **Plate Umpire Responsibilities**
  - PU must immediately move into the "Holding Zone".
    - The closer R3 is to 3<sup>rd</sup> base, the farther up the "Holding Zone" PU must move.
  - Watch BR hit 1<sup>st</sup> base.
  - PU has all circle rule (look-back rule) violations committed by R3.
  - PU has all calls on plays made on R3.
- **Note**
  - If the base umpire elects to use "Modern Mechanics" and starts on the right side of the infield at the time of the pitch, the base umpire must stay outside the diamond. The responsibilities, however, remain the same.

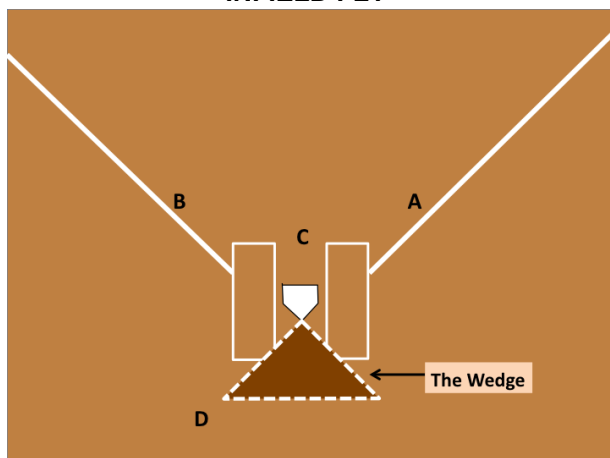
## **CHECKED SWING**

- The two-umpire system does not always allow the base umpire to be in the position to help on checked swings. However, the plate umpire must go for help when asked. The base umpire should employ the “flash technique” to get checked swings correct. Plate umpires must never say, “My partner can’t see from where he is” or “She can’t tell from that angle.” By mechanic, the plate umpire must go for help on checked swings unless the requests are repeatedly baseless and become abusive.
- **Plate Umpire**  
When going for help, take a step back from the catcher, point to your partner with your left hand and ask, “Did she go?” or “Did she swing?”
  - On dropped 3<sup>rd</sup> strike situations where you aren’t sure if the batter checked her swing, go for help immediately. Do not wait for the defense to ask, as this puts both teams in jeopardy. Checked swings are not appeal plays.
- **Base Umpire**
  - Swing
    - If asked, “Did she go?” reply “yes” and give a strike signal.
  - No Swing
    - If asked, “Did she go?” reply “no” and give a safe signal.

## **AFTER ALL PLAYS END**

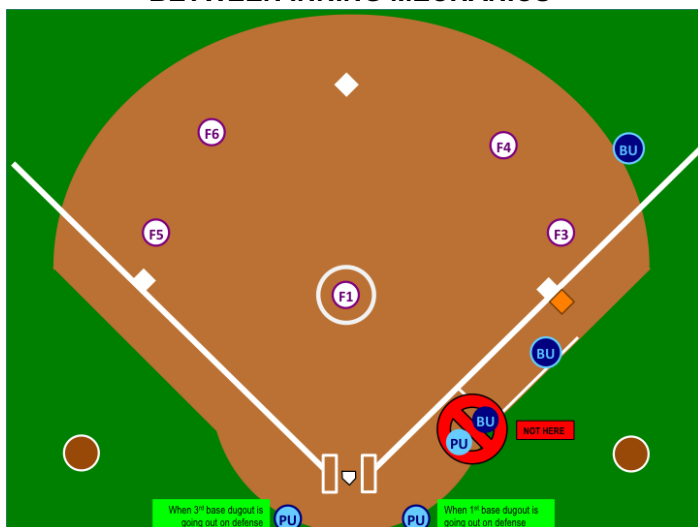
- Both umpires should never have their backs turned to a live ball simultaneously.
- **Base Umpire**
  - Wait for the defense to return the ball to the pitcher in the circle.
  - Make eye contact with your plate umpire to make sure he/she is assuming responsibility for any additional plays or rule violations.
  - Hustle back into position.
    - Once the base umpire is back in position, all circle violations are the base umpire’s responsibility.
  - The plate umpire should never have to “hold the pitcher up” because the base umpire did not get back into position quickly enough.
  - Do not point to your plate umpire when you get back into position, as this is highly over-officious. Simply turn around and face home plate.
- **Plate Umpire**
  - Wait for the defense to return the ball to the pitcher in the circle.
  - Make eye contact with your base umpire so she knows to move into position.
  - Wait for the base umpire to get back into position.
    - Until the base umpire is back in position, all circle violations are the plate umpire’s responsibility.
  - Hustle back behind the plate, remembering to put your mask on before setting up behind the catcher.
- **Umpire-to-Umpire Signals**
  - When umpire-to-umpire signals are used, the plate umpire shall initiate the signals just after putting the mask on and prior to stepping behind home plate.
  - The base umpire shall acknowledge the signal by demonstrating the same signal back to his partner.
  - Examples of umpire-to-umpire signals include putting the infield fly on, taking the infield fly off and the two out timing play.
  - The plate umpire should not step in behind the catcher if the base umpire(s) is not in the correct starting position.

## INFIELD FLY



- When there is a possible infield fly, both umpires must “put it on.”
- Wait until both umpires are back in position before putting the infield fly on.
  - The plate umpire will initiate putting the signal on, followed by the base umpire mirroring the signal back.
  - Any time there is a change in situation (e.g., new batter), the umpires must signal again.
  - The umpire signals by placing his right hand over his heart. Then, signal how many outs there are by indicating zero outs with a closed fist or extending the index finger for one out.
- When there is no longer a possible infield fly, “take it off” by moving your right hand down from your left forearm to your left hand.
- Both umpires may call an infield fly.
- Say “Infield Fly – Batter’s out.”
  - If the fly ball is near the foul line, say, “Infield Fly – Batter’s out if fair.”
- As the verbal call is made make an out signal.
- Make the call loud enough for everyone to hear you.
- If the ball is not caught, the umpire closest to the ball when it lands must say, “Batter is still out – that’s still an infield fly.”
- Note: If the batted ball lands uncaught and the umpires failed to declare an infield fly, the umpires shall not declare an infield fly.
  - Rationale: To call an infield fly so late would lead to further confusion. Additionally, it would award the defense when they failed to execute an out.
- **Plate Movements for Infield Fly**
  - When calling an infield fly, don’t just stand behind the plate. Provided there isn’t a runner on 3<sup>rd</sup> base, get out from behind home plate and make it known that you are calling an infield fly.
  - If the infield fly is on or near the 1<sup>st</sup> base line and no runner is on 3<sup>rd</sup> base, move up the 1<sup>st</sup> base line 10 - 15 feet (Position A).
  - If the infield fly is on or near the 3<sup>rd</sup> base line, come up 10 to 15 feet up the 3<sup>rd</sup> base line (Position B).
  - If the infield fly is more than 10 feet off either line and there is no runner on 3<sup>rd</sup> base, move 10-15 feet in front of home plate to make the call (Position C).
  - On an infield fly with bases loaded, move to clearly see the play.

## BETWEEN INNING MECHANICS



- **Plate Umpire**
  - Stand on the 1<sup>st</sup> base line extended approximately 10 feet from home plate when the team in the 3<sup>rd</sup> base dugout is entering on defense.
  - Stand on the 3<sup>rd</sup> base line extended approximately 10 feet from home plate when the team in the 1<sup>st</sup> base dugout is entering on defense.
  - Those positions will allow the umpire to observe the defense warming up, while staying out of the area the on-deck batter uses to warm up.
- **Base Umpire**
  - Clean pitching plate *only when needed* after 3<sup>rd</sup> out of inning.
  - Clean bases only if you cannot see them.
  - Do NOT run around the field needlessly brushing off visible bases or the pitcher's plate. Rather, move to the proper position and keep an eye on what is going on.
  - Move to edge of the grass in right field, 10 to 15 feet from the foul line.
    - If players are warming up in this area, find another "safe" spot nearby, but not next to the fence.

### **RUNNER LEAVING EARLY**

- The base umpire will call loudly and clearly "NO PITCH" and signal dead ball while stepping toward the infield.
- Point at the runner who left early with your left hand and say "Left early."
- Then drop your left hand and signal and verbalize "Out."

### **HIT BATTER**

- When a batter is hit by a pitched ball, the plate umpire makes a strong verbal "DEAD BALL" The plate umpires will immediately move out in front of the plate in between the batter-runner and pitcher and continue to walk the batter-runner a few steps toward first base.
- When the plate umpire fails to call a batter hit-by-pitch or by a batted ball, the base umpire will hesitate momentarily and then call "Dead Ball."
  - However, if the base umpire is not positive that the ball hit the batter, he should not make the call.

### **THREE FOOT LANE VIOLATION**

- Plate umpire will call loudly and clearly, "Dead Ball" and signal dead ball while stepping toward the point of interference. Point at the batter with your left hand, then signal and verbalize, "Out!"

### **PREVENTATIVE UMPIRING**

- When a situation occurs and it appears that there could be a rule violation but there was not in fact a violation, it is an accepted and recommended mechanic to signal safe. That lets everyone know that the umpire saw the situation but there was no violation.
  - **Examples:**
    - The batted ball did not hit a runner;
    - A runner did not contact a defensive player attempting to field a ball;
    - The bat did not contact the ball a second time over fair ground;
    - The ball did not contact unauthorized equipment on the field; and
    - The ball did not get stuck in the fence.

### **OBSTRUCTION**

- Whenever obstruction occurs, it must be called. The severity of the obstruction does not dictate whether the umpires will call the obstruction. Obstruction is obstruction and must be properly called like any other call.
  - Proper Mechanic
    - Verbalize "That's obstruction" while pointing to the infraction with your right arm.
    - Then, signal obstruction by extending your left arm perpendicular to your body with a closed fist.
    - The verbal call should be loud enough for those around you to hear and the visual signal should be held long enough for others to see.
      - Do NOT run around the field with your arm out. Drop your arm and attend to your other responsibilities.
    - If the obstruction runner is declared out between the two bases where the obstruction occurred or prior to reaching the base to which she is protected, the following mechanics are used:
      - Declare "dead ball" or "time."
      - Re-announce "that was obstruction" while pointing to where the obstruction occurred.
      - Award the proper base(s).
      - Do NOT call the obstructed runner out, then kill the play, then award bases. This is not the proper technique, causes confusion and looks terrible.



## **THREE UMPIRE MECHANICS**

### **BACKGROUND**

- The NYSSO Three-Umpire System is an advanced system of softball umpiring designed to cover the entire field with proper officiating balance, shared umpire responsibilities and optional mechanics to best cover any possible play.
- With a 50% addition to the two-umpire system, all umpires must constantly maintain eye contact with fellow officials prior to the pitch and during playing action. Officials must be aware of their areas of responsibility but also must be careful not to make calls in another umpire's area. Caution must be taken so there are no double calls or, worse, opposite double calls by different umpires. Double calls and opposite double calls occur most often on fair/foul decisions, catch/no catch situations, on plays at 3<sup>rd</sup> base and plays at second when 1BU improperly takes BR to 2<sup>nd</sup> base.

### **GENERAL GUIDELINES**

- 1BU refers to the umpire assigned to work 1<sup>st</sup> base; 3BU refers to the umpire assigned to work 3<sup>rd</sup> base.
- **Rotation**
  - When in a rotation mode, the rotation (movement) is clockwise except for certain advanced mechanics or when a crew member errs.
  - Umpires are in a rotation mode only when there is:
    - No runner on base;
    - A sole runner on 1<sup>st</sup> base; or
    - A sole runner on 3<sup>rd</sup> base.
  - Umpires are in the "stay mode" whenever there:
    - Is a runner on 2<sup>nd</sup> base; or
    - Are multiple runners on base.
  - With each new batter or change of baserunner positions, each umpire should signal to each other whether they are in a "rotation mode" or a "stay mode."
  - Always know where the ball is and where your crew members are.

- **Fly Ball Coverage**

- Routine fly balls are not called or signaled under NYSSO mechanics.
- It is not necessary for one of the base umpires to go out on every fly ball. A base umpire should only go out when the play might require umpire judgment, such as in the following situations:
  - Difficult catch/no catch situations, balls deflected from one fielder to another, dropped balls, trouble balls near a fence or dead-ball line or any other trouble play
  - These plays should be verbalized, "That's a Catch" with an out signal or "No Catch" with a safe signal.
- Base umpires must factor in the direction the fielder is running and the open face of the glove more so than strict imaginary field markings.
- When an umpire goes out on a fly ball, the remaining base umpire and plate umpire revert to two-umpire mechanics.
  - When an umpire goes out, the plate umpire will state, "Two-Umpire System," "Two-Man," etc.
    - This technique, for example, will prevent 1BU from rotating home when 3BU has gone out.
- When a base umpire actually goes out, that umpire will almost always stay out. There must be loud and clear communication if there is a deviation.

- **Tag-Up Responsibilities**

- **Either Base Umpire Goes Out**
  - Revert back to the 2-umpire system with the same responsibilities.
- **No Umpire Goes Out**
  - **Plate Umpire**
    - No responsibility for tag-ups
  - **1BU**
    - Responsible for all trail runners.
    - Responsible for single runner on 2<sup>nd</sup> base and single runner on 1<sup>st</sup> base.
  - **3BU**
    - Responsible for the lead runner.
    - Responsible for R3 on 3<sup>rd</sup> base.

- **Three Umpire**

- When a base umpire goes out, the plate umpire and base umpire assume the same responsibilities as those in the two-umpire system.

- **Communication**

- The 3-umpire system requires even more communication than the 2-umpire system.
  - For example, 3BU should say "I've got 2<sup>nd</sup>" so that 1BU knows he does not have to take BR to 2<sup>nd</sup> base and he can rotate home.
    - However, do not state, for example, "I've got home" until you are actually at home plate.
- Umpires also need to recognize what the other umpires are doing.
- Base umpires must not neglect their primary responsibility in order to "get to the next base."
  - Example 1: 3BU stays on the line to determine fair/foul, he may be unable to get to 2<sup>nd</sup> base.
  - Example 2: 3BU had to stay at 3<sup>rd</sup> base due to a possible play on R3, 1BU must recognize this and assume additional responsibility for BR.



3BU is not going to run away from 3<sup>rd</sup> base to cover an empty base when he has a runner right in front of him. In this case, 1BU must take BR to 2<sup>nd</sup> base.

- However, since 3BU did not actually go out on the ball, 3BU will be able to make calls at 3<sup>rd</sup> base. 3BU can prevent the plate umpire from coming up the line by holding his hand up to the plate umpire.
- Example 3: With R1 on 1<sup>st</sup> base, B2 lays down a bunt. PU has to remain at the plate to determine fair/foul and help on a possible tag. 3BU must stay ahead of R1 and be prepared to take her to 3<sup>rd</sup> base.
- Base umpires are still square to home plate, regardless of whether there are runners on base.
- **Checked Swings**
  - The plate umpires should ask 3BU for help on left-handed batters and 1BU on right-handed batters.
  - Exception: When 3BU is off the 3<sup>rd</sup> base line and R1 attempts to steal 2<sup>nd</sup> base, the plate umpire should ask 1BU for help. Pay attention!

## **GB2 MECHANICS**

### **• Three-Umpire Overload**

- With “traditional” mechanics, 3BU is positioned on the left field foul line behind 3<sup>rd</sup> base whenever there is at least a runner on 2<sup>nd</sup> base or 3<sup>rd</sup> base. That means that on a ground ball double play possibility 1BU, who’s positioned behind the second baseman, has an overload of responsibilities. 1BU must call the play at 2<sup>nd</sup> base, look for interference and then call the play at 1<sup>st</sup> base where there could be a pulled foot or swipe tag. This play is also likely to be very close.

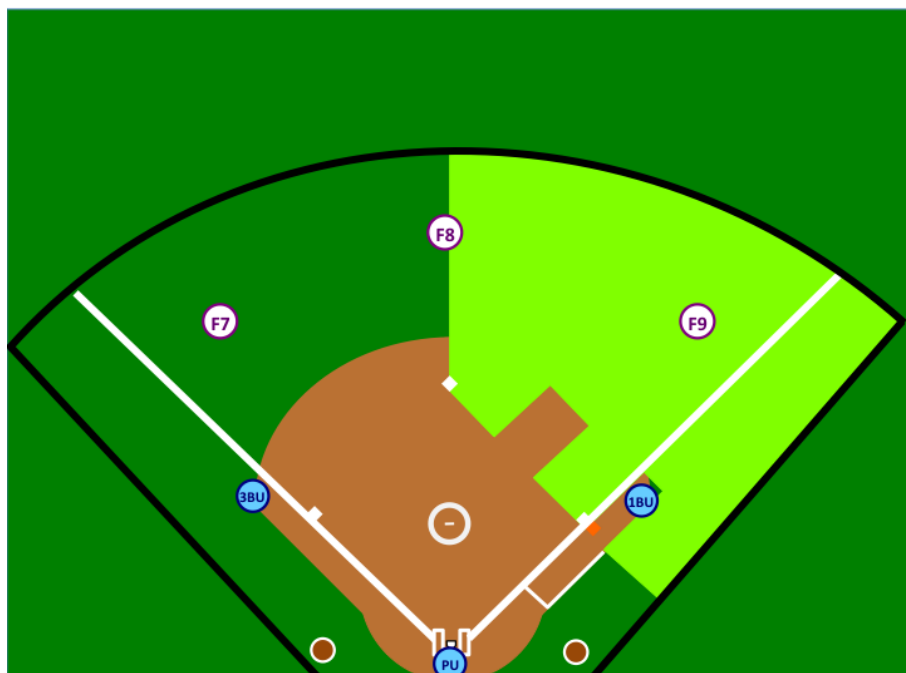
### **• Three-Umpire Update**

- With “modern” mechanics, the “GB2” method is used when there is a possibility of a ground ball double play with a runner on 1<sup>st</sup> base plus another base with fewer than 2 outs. 3BU sets up behind the shortstop and between the shortstop and 2<sup>nd</sup> base in the C Position. From that position, 3BU calls the play at 2<sup>nd</sup> base and stays with the play looking for possible runner interference. 1BU, working from the A Position, moves into fair territory (1SF) and takes the back end of the double play.

### **• Exceptions**

- The following are exceptions to the GB2 mechanics. Therefore, the umpire crew must be able to reasonably justify deviating from GB2.
- With runners on 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> base and no outs, in an obvious bunting situation, traditional mechanics *should* be used. That is because there is a significantly higher probability of a play at 1<sup>st</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> base than at 2<sup>nd</sup> base. The umpires should communicate with each other with an inconspicuous bunting signal.
- When there is *overwhelming* evidence that the runner on 2<sup>nd</sup> base will attempt to steal 3<sup>rd</sup> base, the crew may use traditional mechanics.
- With runners on 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>, traditional mechanics *may* be used when the likelihood of a steal is greater than a ground ball double play possibility.
- Late in a close game, the crew *may* use traditional mechanics when there is the possibility of a time play with two outs.
- **Hint** – If you “put the infield fly on” with your partners, there is a 95% likelihood that you should be using GB2.

## NO RUNNERS ON BASE



- **STARTING POSITION**

- **PU:** Behind F2
- **1BU:** 18-21 ft. behind 1<sup>st</sup> base
- **3BU:** 18-21 ft. behind 3<sup>rd</sup> base

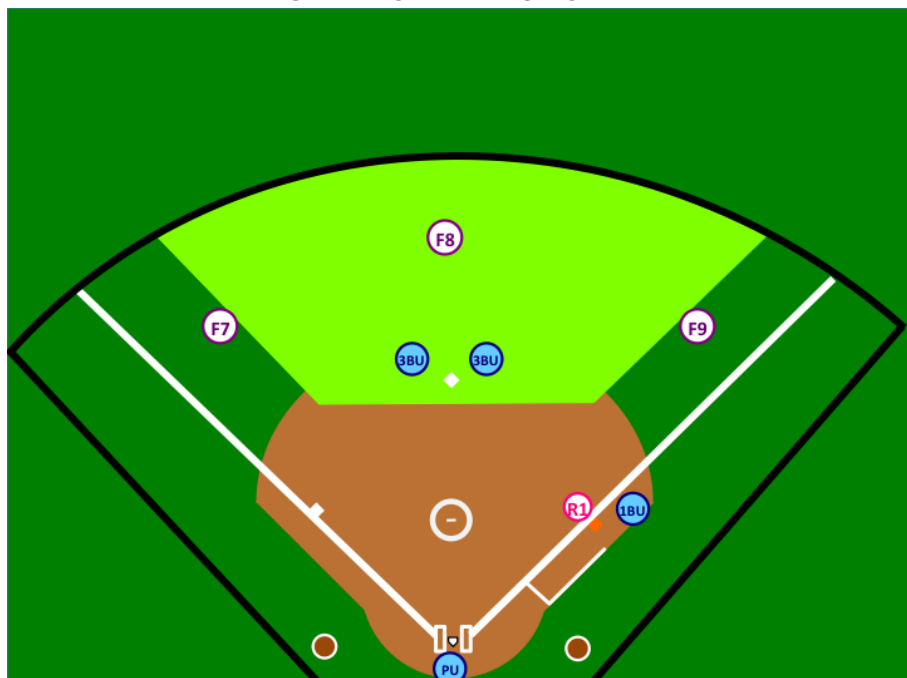
- **FAIR/FOUL COVERAGE**

- **PU:** Home Plate Up To 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> base
- **1BU:** 1<sup>st</sup> Base to the Foul Pole
- **3BU:** 3<sup>rd</sup> Base to the Foul Pole

- **FLY BALL COVERAGE**

- **PU:** No responsibility
- **1BU:** From center field to the right field fence
- **3BU:** From center field to the left field fence
- *Note:* When in doubt, 3BU is responsible for the fly ball hit toward center field. 1BU must key off of 3BU.

## RUNNER ON 1<sup>ST</sup> BASE ONLY



### • STARTING POSITION

- **PU:** Behind F2
- **1BU:** 6 - 8 ft. behind 1<sup>st</sup> base in foul ground square to the plate
- **3BU**
  - **Option 1:** 6 - 8 ft. behind 2<sup>nd</sup> base square to the plate and on a direct line from 2<sup>nd</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> base.
  - **Option 2:** 6 - 8 ft. behind 2<sup>nd</sup> base square to the plate and on a direct line from 1<sup>st</sup> to 2<sup>nd</sup> base.

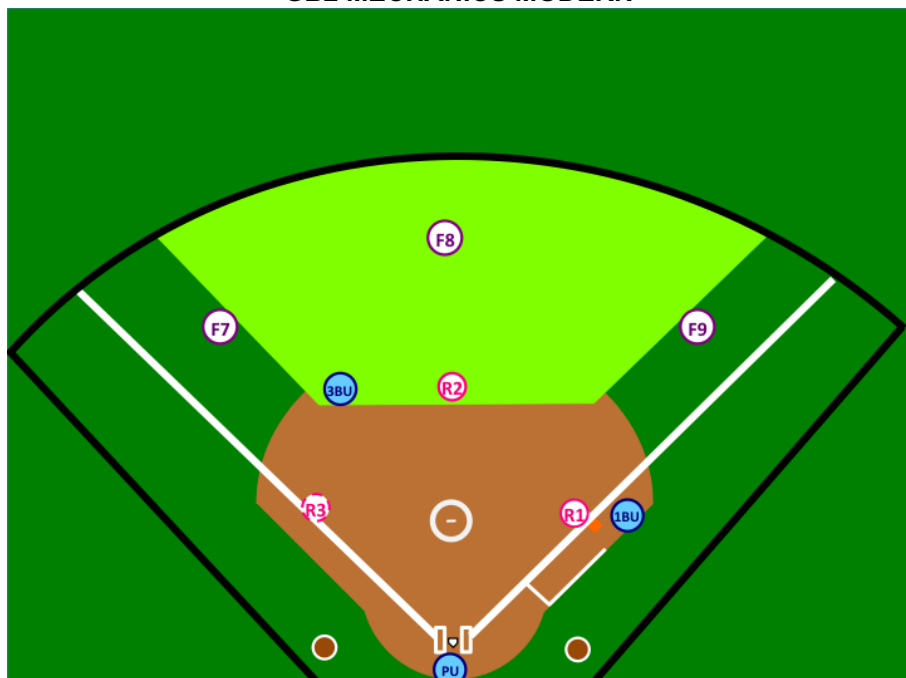
### • FAIR/FOUL COVERAGE

- **PU:** Home Plate Up To 1<sup>st</sup> Base & Entire 3<sup>rd</sup> Base Line
- **1BU:** 1<sup>st</sup> Base to Foul Pole
- **3BU:** No responsibility

### • FLY BALL COVERAGE

- **PU:** Direct Hit to the Left Fielder to the Left Field Fence
- **1BU:** Direct Hit to the Right Fielder to the Right Field Fence
- **3BU:** Between the Right Fielder and Left Fielder (either starting position)
- *Note:* When in doubt, 3BU is responsible for the fly ball. 1BU must key off of 3BU on fly balls to right field.

# RUNNERS ON 1<sup>ST</sup> & 2<sup>ND</sup> BASE, OR 1<sup>ST</sup> & 3<sup>RD</sup> BASE, OR BASES LOADED –GB2 MECHANICS MODERN



## • STARTING POSITION

- **PU:** Behind F2
- **1BU:** 6-8 ft. behind 1<sup>st</sup> base
- **3BU:** 20-30 ft. from 2<sup>nd</sup> base and no deeper than 2 steps behind F6.

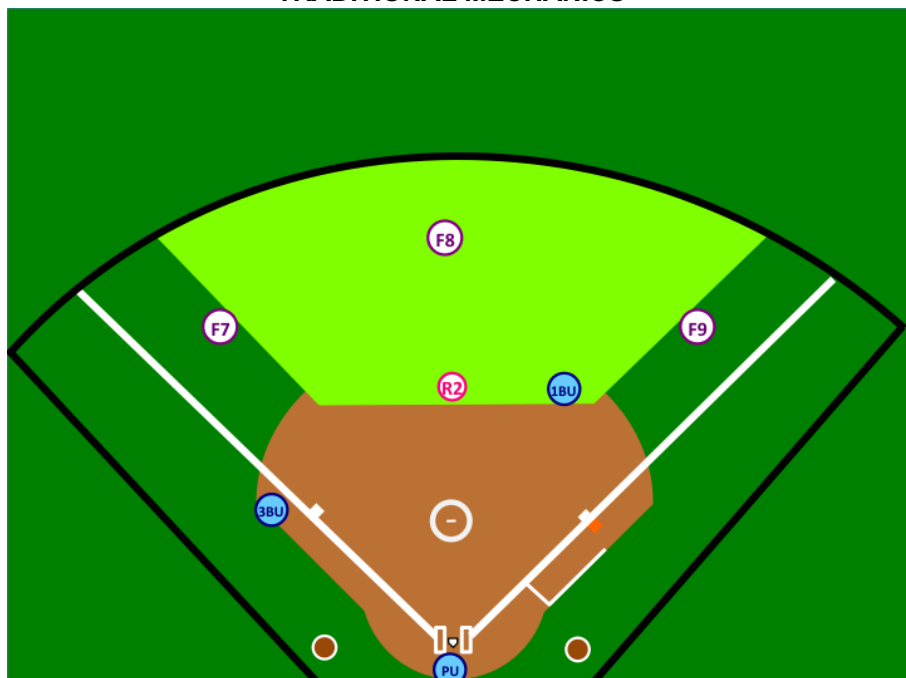
## • FAIR/FOUL COVERAGE

- **PU:** Home Plate Up To 1<sup>st</sup> Base & Entire 3<sup>rd</sup> Base Line
- **1BU:** 1<sup>st</sup> Base to Foul Pole
- **3BU:** No Responsibility

## • FLY BALL COVERAGE

- **PU:** Direct Hit to the Left Fielder to the Left Field Fence
- **1BU:** Direct Hit to the Right Fielder to the Right Field Fence
- **3BU:** Between the Right Fielder and Left Fielder
- *Note:* When in doubt, 3BU is responsible for the fly ball. 1BU must key off of 3BU on fly balls to right field.

**RUNNER ON 2<sup>ND</sup> BASE (ANYTIME) OR RUNNERS ON 1<sup>ST</sup> & 3<sup>RD</sup> BASE –  
TRADITIONAL MECHANICS**



• **STARTING POSITION**

- **PU:** Behind F2
- **1BU:** Approximately  $\frac{1}{2}$  way between 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> base and no deeper than 2 steps behind F4
- **3BU:** 6 - 8 ft. behind 3<sup>rd</sup> base in foul ground

• **FAIR/FOUL COVERAGE**

- **PU:** Entire 1<sup>st</sup> Base Line & Home Plate Up To 3<sup>rd</sup> Base
- **1BU:** No Responsibility
- **3BU:** 3<sup>rd</sup> Base to Foul Pole

• **FLY BALL COVERAGE**

- **PU:** Direct Hit to the Right Fielder to the Right Field Fence
- **1BU:** Between the Right Fielder and Left Fielder
- **3BU:** Direct hit to the Left Fielder to the Left Field Fence

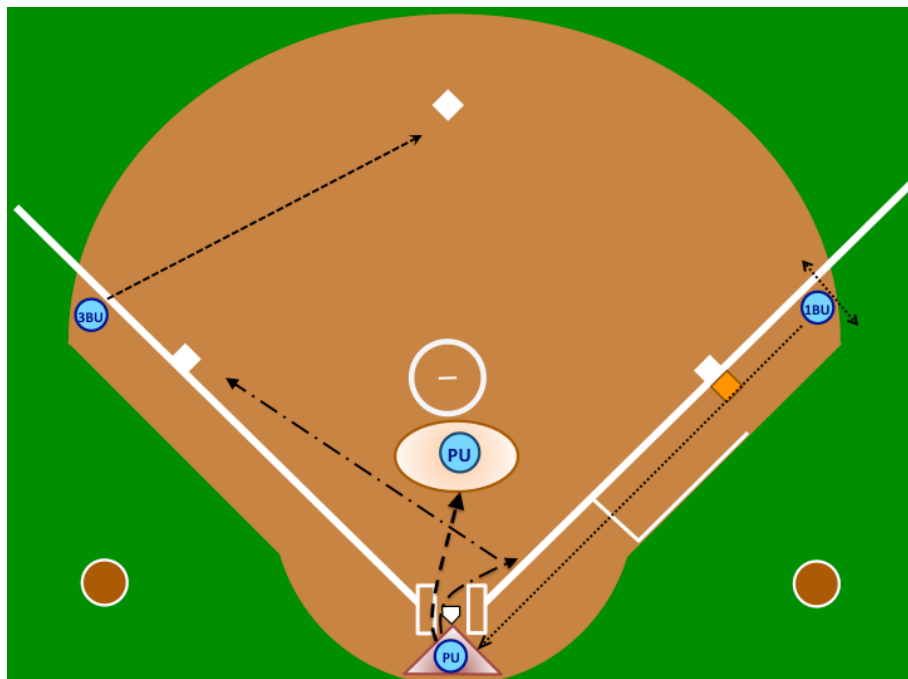
- **PU:** Behind F2
- **1BU:** 18-21 ft. behind 1<sup>st</sup> base
- **3BU:** 6 - 8 ft. behind 3<sup>rd</sup> base in foul ground

- **PU:** Home Plate Up To 1<sup>st</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> Base
- **1BU:** 1<sup>st</sup> Base to Foul Pole
- **3BU:** 3<sup>rd</sup> Base to Foul Pole

- **PU:** No Responsibility
- **1BU:** From Center Field to Right Field Fence
- **3BU:** From Center Field to Left Field Fence
- *Note:* When in doubt, 3BU is responsible for the fly ball. 1BU must key off of 3BU on fly balls to center field.

## **BALL PUT IN PLAY – NO UMPIRE GOES OUT**

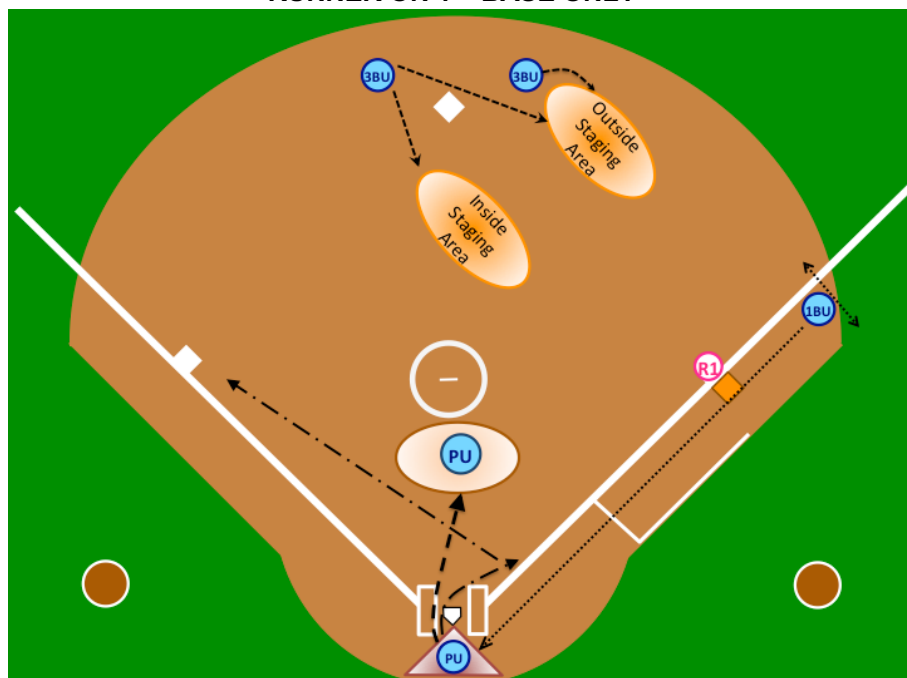
### **NO RUNNERS ON BASE**



### **\* ROTATION MODE**

- **PU**
  - **Infield Hit**
    - Trail BR 15 ft. up the 1<sup>st</sup> base line.
    - Then move directly to 3<sup>rd</sup> base for a possible play there.
      - Stop approximately 8 ft. from 3<sup>rd</sup> base.
  - **Outfield Hit**
    - Move to an area in front of the pitcher's circle and observe all play.
    - Then move directly to 3<sup>rd</sup> base for a possible play there.
      - Stop approximately 8 ft. from 3<sup>rd</sup> base.
- **1BU**
  - Use 1SF (1 step fair).
    - Option: If the ball is hit to right field, 1BU may elect to step into foul ground. Do not buttonhook.
  - Wait for BR to hit 2<sup>nd</sup> base, then move home to the "Wedge."
  - Do not move home until there is no possible play on BR at 1<sup>st</sup> base.
- **3BU**
  - Move directly to 2<sup>nd</sup> base inside the base line, 8 ft. from 2<sup>nd</sup> base.

## RUNNER ON 1<sup>ST</sup> BASE ONLY

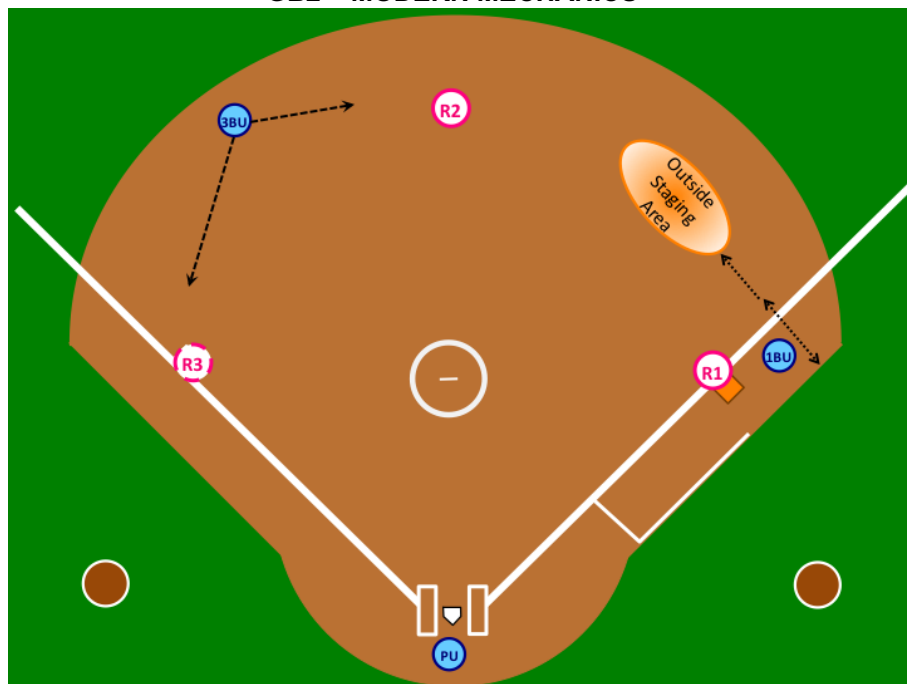


### \* **ROTATION MODE**

- **PU**
  - **Infield Hit**
    - Trail BR 15 ft. up the 1<sup>st</sup> base line.
    - Then move directly to 3<sup>rd</sup> base for a possible play there.
      - Stop approximately 8 ft. from 3<sup>rd</sup> base.
  - **Outfield Hit**
    - Move to an area in front of the pitcher's circle and observe all play.
    - Then move directly to 3<sup>rd</sup> base for a possible play there.
      - Stop approximately 8 ft. from 3<sup>rd</sup> base.
- **1BU**
  - Use 1SF (1 step fair).
    - Option: If the ball is hit to right field, 1BU may elect to step into foul ground.
  - Make sure there is no immediate play on BR.
  - Then move to home plate.
- **3BU**
  - Move to the appropriate staging area.
  - Once 1BU moves home, 3BU is responsible for all plays at 1<sup>st</sup> base as well as 2<sup>nd</sup> base.



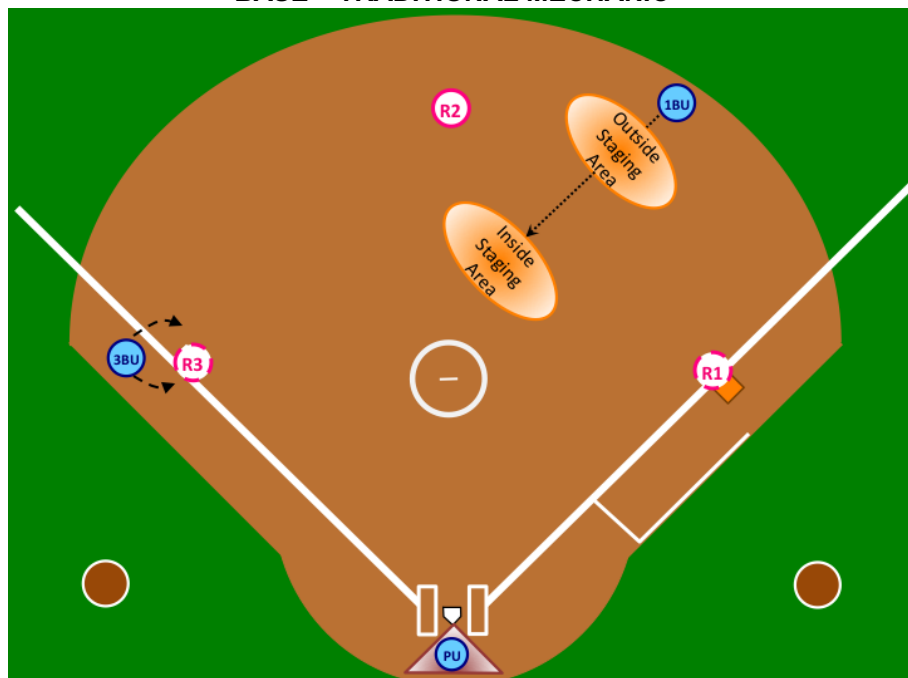
## GB2 – MODERN MECHANICS



### **\*STAY MODE**

- **PU**
  - Responsible for all calls at home plate.
  - **R1 Only:**
    - Trail BR 15 feet up the 1<sup>st</sup> base line.
    - Then return to “The Wedge”.
  - **All Other Runner Situation**
    - Remain in “The Wedge”.
- **1BU**
  - Responsible for all calls at 1<sup>st</sup> base.
  - Use 1SF.
  - **Outfield Hit**
    - If a return throw from the outfield goes to 3<sup>rd</sup> base causing 3BU to commit to 3<sup>rd</sup> base, move to the “Outside Staging Area” and be prepared to make the call at 2<sup>nd</sup> base on any subsequent play.
- **3BU**
  - Responsible for all initial calls at 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> base.
  - Open up and face the ball.
  - Remain outside the diamond unless there is a compelling reason to come inside.
  - Adjust as necessary for any play at 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> base.

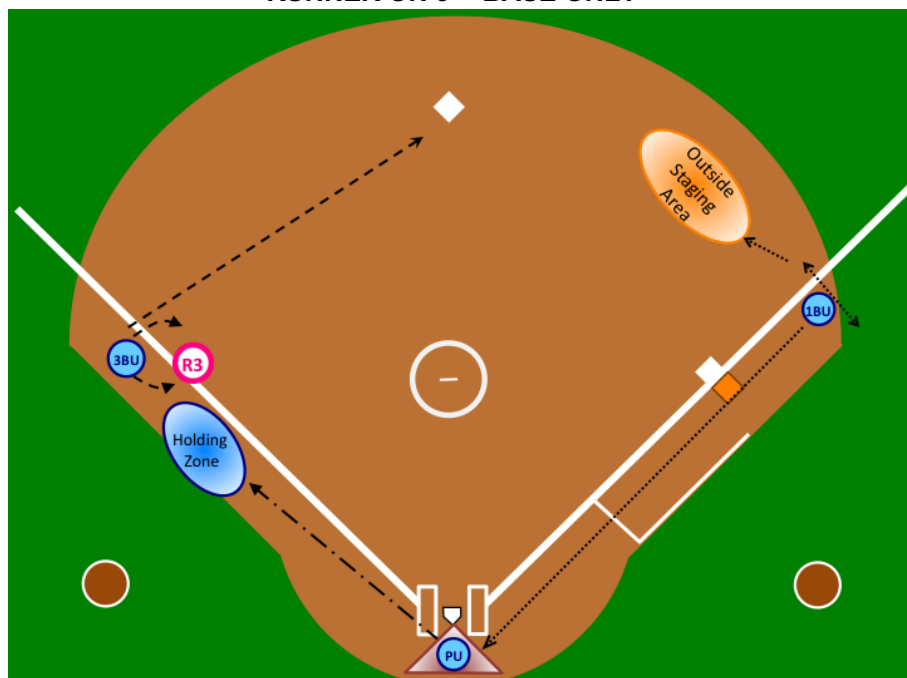
**RUNNER ON 2<sup>ND</sup> BASE (ANYTIME) OR RUNNERS ON 1<sup>ST</sup> BASE & 3<sup>RD</sup> BASE – TRADITIONAL MECHANIC**



**\*STAY MODE**

- **PU**
  - Responsible for all calls at home plate.
  - Remain in “The Wedge” and adjust for a play at the plate.
  - Do not trail the batter-runner.
- **1BU**
  - Responsible for all calls at 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> base.
  - Open up and face the ball.
  - Remain in the “Outside Staging Area” unless there is a compelling reason to move into the “Inside Staging Area”.
    - You may need to move into the “Inside Staging Area” on a batted ball to Right Field if you are responsible for both R1 and R2 tag-up or if there is a possible throw to 2<sup>nd</sup> base.
    - Otherwise, remain in the “Outside Staging Area” and let the ball take you to the play.
- **3BU**
  - Responsible for all calls at 3<sup>rd</sup> base.
  - Open up and face the ball.
  - Adjust as necessary to be in position for any play at 3<sup>rd</sup> base.
  - Do not buttonhook into fair territory.

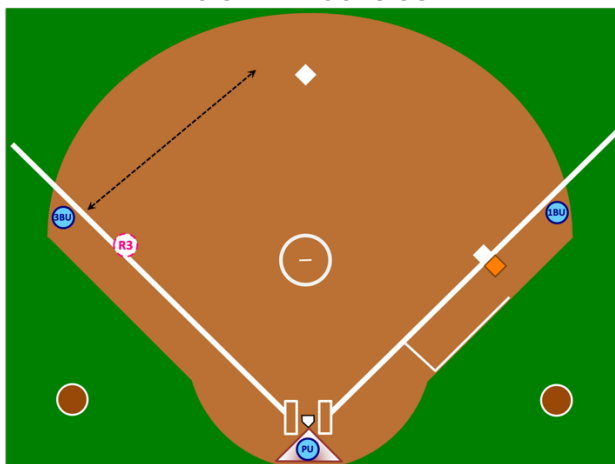
## RUNNER ON 3<sup>RD</sup> BASE ONLY



### \* ROTATION MODE

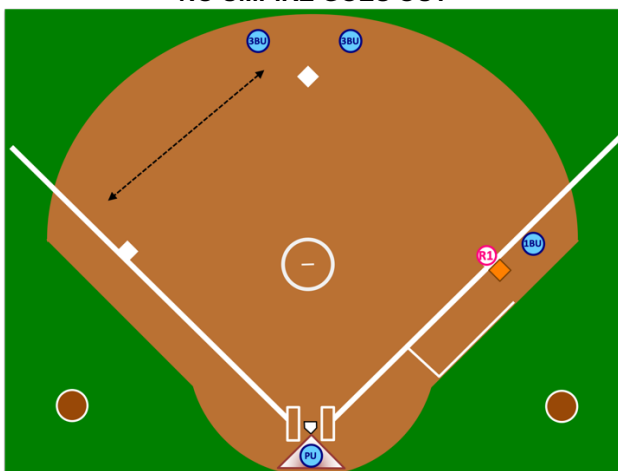
- **PU**
  - Stay in “The Wedge” and watch R3 hit home.
  - Then move to the “Holding Zone” for a possible play on BR trying for a triple.
    - Do not rotate to 3<sup>rd</sup> base until R3 is either declared out or has scored.
- **1BU**
  - Use 1SF.
  - Wait for BR to hit 2<sup>nd</sup> base, then move home to “The Wedge”.
  - Do not move home until there is no possible play on BR at 1<sup>st</sup> base.
  - Recognize that 3BU may be occupied at 3<sup>rd</sup> base because of R3 responsibilities and be prepared to rim with BR as necessary
    - If that is the case, move to the “Outside Staging Area” and be prepared to make any call on BR at 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> base until 3BU can relieve you.
  - Wait for BR to hit 2<sup>nd</sup> base, then move home to “The Wedge”.
    - Once 3BU relieves you, move directly to “The Wedge”.
      - It is not necessary to move into foul ground when running home. Rather, take a direct path from your last position.
- **3BU**
  - Adjust as necessary to be in position for any play on R3.
  - Make sure R3 is going home and not coming back to 3<sup>rd</sup> base.
    - Do not abandon R3 responsibility until there cannot be a play on her.
  - Then move to 2<sup>nd</sup> base for a possible call on BR attempting a double.
    - Announce to 1BU that you are now at 2<sup>nd</sup> base so that he can be relieved.

**NO RUNNERS ON BASE OR R3 ONLY– OVER-THE-FENCE HOMERUN  
NO UMPIRE GOES OUT**



- **PU**
  - Observe the batted ball.
  - Watch BR touch home plate.
- **1BU**
  - Watch BR touch 1<sup>st</sup> base.
- **3BU**
  - Watch BR touch 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> base.

**R1 ON 1<sup>st</sup> BASE – OVER-THE-FENCE HOMERUN  
NO UMPIRE GOES OUT**



- **PU**
  - Observe the batted ball.
  - Watch BR touch home plate.
- **1BU**
  - Watch BR touch 1<sup>st</sup> base.
- **3BU**
  - Watch BR touch 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> base.