

Volunteer Umpire Tips and Suggestions

- Read the rule book often. Talk to others about rules and game situations.
- Know the LPPLL Local Rules for the division you are working, including any special rules about game length, run limits and mercy rules.
- Arrive on time and be prepared. No later than 15 minutes before game time. Look sharp and dress the part. (Perception is reality.) Stretch out before the game.
- Drink water. Studies show acuity and judgment are compromised if dehydrated.
- Be polite and respectful. Never lose your temper on the field. Players and coaches will follow the lead. Keep your words to a minimum when in an argument. Listen to what the coach has to say and respond with precise and accurate answers. Control the game as necessary.
- Walk the field and make sure there are no hazards or issues to deal with at a plate meeting. Do not allow unsafe or illegal equipment to be used by the players. As soon as you see lightening, or if you find the field is too slippery in the rain, or it's getting too dark, or if the field is otherwise somehow unsafe, *kill the game!*
- Have a plate meeting with both Managers 5 minutes before the start of the game. Discuss the strike zone for the level of players. Do not take a lineup card in lower divisions. The Managers can work out the out of order batters. Remind Managers that they are the only adults allowed to discuss (or argue) calls with the umpire. Do not get into the habit of addressing all of the coaches.
- Pay special attention to key safety rules such as: No jewelry such as earrings, necklaces or bracelets, other than medical alert jewelry); catchers must wear throat protector/neck plate on helmet and it *must* dangle; all male catchers must wear protective cup; no on-deck batters; coaches under 18 must wear batting helmet while on the field; catchers warming up pitcher must wear the helmet with face guard and throat protector; and no adults catching for a pitcher that is warming up.
- Umpires should ask Managers at the plate meeting, “Are all of your players equipped properly to play the game and their respective positions.” This will cover illegal bats, missing cups, missing hats, etc. There is no time to go through a detailed checklist at the plate meeting. This responsibility is primarily on the Managers.
- Toss the ball to the mound. Don't hold onto the game ball at the mound and wait for the pitcher to arrive. It's not your job.
- Tell the pitcher he has one or two more warm-ups left or tell the catcher to get it down to second. Don't tell the defense “Ball's in” while the pitcher is warming up.
- Work in the slot and keep your chin level with the top of the catcher's head. The umpire should see the ball all the way into the catcher's glove. If you are directly behind the catcher or your head is at his head level, there is NO WAY you can see the ball into the glove.

- Develop a style for calling strikes and outs. Be loud, be aggressive. Develop a style for calling balls and safe. On calling balls for younger players it is best to say something so the pitcher, batter, and catcher know the count.

- Call balls and strikes honestly (but look for strikes in lower divisions) The objective is to get you to, "think strikes." Strikes lead to outs, and outs lead to innings, and innings get the game over with sooner. If the pitch is a bit inside or outside, and the catcher makes it look good, and it pops into the mitt just like a strike ought to sound, *ring it up!*

- Don't try to "even up" a bad call. Occasionally you're going to accidentally make a bad call, and you'll know it. Most times you cannot change the call because further play has already been made based on your bad call. Most reasonable coaches expect that the umpires will miss one occasionally, but nobody expects or wants to see an umpire to do it willfully.

- Always hustle. It distinguishes you from the poor or average umpire. Your movements transmit the essence of your umpiring style. Once you step onto the field, think about everything you do and say, because you're always being watched and judged. Utilize precise mechanics and meaningful gestures. Get your butt out from behind the plate. Unless a play at the plate is imminent or a time play is possible, there is nothing for you to do staying behind home plate. This means on EVERY PLAY.

- ALWAYS STAY FOCUSED on the game and slow down your timing! For every play, PAUSE - READ - REACT. These are the most fundamental elements of successful umpiring. From the set position, observe the ball, pause to read the situation, see the developing action and react in the appropriate manner. Behind the plate, the ball should hit the catcher's glove, a second or so should elapse and then you should make your call. This gives you the opportunity to really see the pitch.

- When you're not sure, sell the call! If you see a tag or a force play where it was so close that you are not 100% sure if the runner is safe or out, then nobody else will be sure either. Make a decision, and make an emphatic call and animated mechanic. If you seem absolutely sure of your call, people watching may be *sold* on it and it may save you an argument.

- Keep the game moving between innings. The pitcher is allowed 8 warm-up throws within one minute. (*Rule 8.03*) Be reasonable, but firm. Don't let a team waste your time. Some teams that are winning will use this to burn the clock if it is close to a time deadline.

- Don't give new pitchers information when they enter the game. This is coaching. During warm up pitches look at a couple of pitches to get familiar with his motion and delivery.

- Don't let an anxious pitcher go into any pitching motion when the ball is dead. He must wait until you put the ball back in play. Explain to the pitcher that he must watch YOU and wait for the signal and command to play before he can pitch. If he does pitch, it does not count.

- Your palm means "time." When a plate umpire holds up his hand(s) in the "stop" gesture, it means "time." The ball is dead, and any play or pitch is nullified. If you hold up your hand, you must then put the ball back in play.

- ALWAYS put the ball back in play when there are runners on base. After any dead ball situation, (i.e. foul, requested time-out, ball out of play, etc.) verbally *command* and *physically* signal the pitcher to play. The batter must be in the box, catcher ready, and the pitcher on the rubber with the ball (some teams may try hidden ball tricks, but they cannot unless the ball is in play). As soon as all of these are ready, put the ball back into play.

- Don't "shut down" after a play by taking your attention away. For example: The runner beats out a play at first and is safe. Don't immediately turn away and go to your next position as you can miss something that happens after the play. There are many things a runner can do that can get him tagged out *after* he gets there safely. Stay right there for a second or two and watch! When you do head away keep your eyes on the ball and the runner. He might fake at going to second base, or the defense might be attempting the hidden ball trick.

- NEVER turn your head away from the field when calling balls and strikes. You may miss something as you perform your slick strike-three mechanics. Also looking at your ball/strike indicator, especially while resetting it, is a perfect time to get burned by a sudden pick-off attempt, or a quick-pitch, that you'll miss. If you must look at it when the ball is live, don't look down at it, *hold it up at your eye level*. Glance at it while still watching the field.

- Watch EVERY touch of the bases by the runners, if at all possible. Missed bases and runners leaving early do happen and you must see it. Never call a runner out unless you are SURE a base was missed or he left early.

- Don't say "Ball four, take your base!" Saying this helps the offense. It is actually a form of coaching! Also do not point the batter-runner down to first as the batter should know the count and location of first base. Also, after ball four, pointing the runner to first can easily be interpreted as a called strike. Just say, "Ball," or, "Ball four."

- Don't get into a habit of saying "Strike three-you're out", "Strike three" will do.

- For young players you can indicate pitch location on called balls. For older players it is not needed.

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

- On a pitch that gets by the catcher, clear the catcher and keep your eye on the ball. Do not focus on the runners stealing bases. *Nothing can happen without the ball!* You must watch for the ball going out of play, or the chance of a lodged ball. Youth league batters have the bad habit of backing out of the box on a wild pitch when they shouldn't. Watch the catcher's attempt to throw out a runner to rule on interference by the batter.

- A *foul tip* is never a *foul ball*. A foul tip is always caught by the catcher and it is live! Runners may advance on a foul tip. If the tipped ball is not caught by the catcher, it is a foul ball and it is a dead ball. Never declare, "Foul tip!" because the very mention of the word *foul* will cause runners to stop running. On a foul tip, make the tip mechanic and do not say anything.

- Don't call "time" every time a defensive player asks for it. It's not needed, makes a long game longer and you are taking a potential advantage away from the offense. Granting that fielder's request for time deprives the offense from benefitting from a possible wild throw. Don't give them time.

- Don't be too quick to give time to runners after they slide into a base. First quickly survey *all* the bases for any other possible movement or plays on other runners. If there are any other runners still moving on the bases, don't give time until all play has come to a natural end. If you call time while runners are moving, you've got to send them back!

- Never verbally call a fair ball. When you rule on a batted ball as fair or foul, only holler if you have a foul ball. Calling, "Foul!" kills the play and the runners will know to stop advancing. When a hit is fair, simply point.

- Appeals: The ball *must be live* to make an appeal (unless it happens at the end of an inning.) Therefore, runners can steal and advance during an appeal. Only fielders, not coaches, may ask for and make the appeal. If a fielder asks for time, and you grant it, then he makes an appeal, do not rule on it! Say something like, "I will rule on the appeal when the ball is properly made live." If the defense appeals an infraction by a runner *still on base*, they may also choose to tag the runner, instead of the base. Calling for, and receiving "time" *does not* nullify a team's opportunity to make the appeal when the ball becomes live.

- When the game is over, disappear. Some opportunities to appeal a play, or protest a game, end when the umpire leaves the field. If you have a partner, leave together.