



A base umpire can anticipate a force out at second base in the defense's attempt at a double play, but until the fielder catches the ball and releases it on the throw to first, the umpire should hold off on anticipating the call. Randy Sears, Puyallup, Wash.

OUTSIDE THE LINES

Off-the-Path Tips to Success While Working the Bases

By Jay Miner

To succeed in umpiring you must be a good plate umpire. Nevertheless, no matter how good a plate umpire you are, your shortcomings on the bases can quickly be exposed. Working the plate is more methodical and structured. On the bases you are in the perilous land of unexpected, lightning-fast and unusual plays.

On the bases, you will have to judge if a bullet throw or quick scoop beat a streaking runner or if a swipe tag nicked an evading runner. Crushing collisions will test your judgment and knowledge of the rules while a pulled foot and out-of-the-

baseline situations will demand your complete focus.

Just as challenging, a fielder may obstruct a runner or a runner may interfere with a fielder. Who is out? Who goes back? What bases are awarded? Are one or two runners out? Is the ball dead or live?

A good base umpire must master basic mechanics, use proper positioning and learn to read developing play situations. The base umpire must then react by moving to favorable positions to see all elements of the play and then render credible decisions. That takes hard work, determination, concentration, study, trial-and-error experiences, a feel for the game and common sense.

See in all areas of the field but call only in your own area. Be a good partner for a good umpiring team. Being a good umpiring team member means supporting your partner in difficult situations and being prepared to step up and assist without hesitation.

Good partners see in all areas of the field but call only in their own area. That means visually scanning all areas of the field but calling plays only in your own area of responsibility unless your partner requests additional information on a play in his or her area.

Never allow coaches or players to gang up on a partner. Worse, do not "throw your partner under the bus."

Get a stance. Plate umpires are taught the importance of having a good stance, but many base umpires look much like bystanders rather than the person who is about to make an important decision. The base umpire should be stopped, stationary, set, balanced and square to the play.

My recommendation for any career-oriented umpire is not to alienate your UIC. However, be aware that experienced UICs can quickly spot an umpire's phony attempt to impress them. Be well-dressed and on time, work hard, be a good crewmember and give an honest effort. It works.

Anticipate the play but never anticipate the call. A good umpire always anticipates the play but never anticipates the call. Concentrate to see the entire play and never rush to judgment before the play is over.

Sell your call. Sell your decision convincingly with a strong voice and clear physical signal that shows complete confidence and conviction. It is important to convey that you believe you made the correct call. Though some may disagree with your call or are not sure of the call, you must make them believe you are 100-percent positive your call was correct. Your demeanor often will convince doubters that you made the right call.

Plan your work and work your plan. Realize there will be many decisions to make throughout the game. From position A behind first base, it may be necessary to (1) move into fair territory for calls on the batter-runner at first base; (2) go to the outfield on fly balls and line drives from between the starting position of the center fielder to the dead-ball line in right field; (3) rim outside the diamond on safe hits going with the advancing batter-runner, or (4) move inside the diamond with a pivot on selected extra base hits when the batter-runner may attempt to advance beyond second base.

Use the "1SF" position for plays at first base. For ground balls to any infielder with no runners on base, U1 will move from position A

approximately 18 feet behind first base on the foul line to a calling position one step in fair territory. That position allows U1 to best compare the arrival of the ball and the batter-runner at first base with an incredible slow motion-like view. For a pulled foot on the home-plate side of first base, U1 needs only to look up to see directly between the fielder and the runner for a perfect view of the attempted tag without moving.

Snap-thud with 1SF. When the thrown ball is approximately 20 feet from first base, U1 will flash his or her eyes from the ball to the home-plate side of first base while maintaining peripheral vision with the ball. U1 will then listen for the snap of the ball in the fielder's glove and the thud of the runner's foot on the base. If the snap beats the thud, the runner is out.

Flash technique. Use the flash technique for pickoff plays, steal attempts, tags and catch/no-catch situations. With the flash technique, first track the ball with your eyes but then flash your eyes to the fielder's glove when the ball is approximately 20 feet from the fielder. Then let the glove take you to the tag on pickoffs, steal attempts and tag plays. For catch/no-catch situations, flash your eyes to the glove and you will see catch or trap like never before.

The flash technique allows your eyes time to adjust and your brain time to comprehend what happened. That is much better than tracking the ball all the way to the glove as everything appears to explode in front of you.

Angle beats distance every time.

Strive to get as close to plays as possible. There is a close correlation between closeness to the play and correctness of the call. Yet be aware that angle beats distance every time. View force plays and plays on the batter-runner at first base from 15 to 18 feet from the play. For a tag play, get as close as 8 to 10 feet from the play. Your author admits going even closer but I try not to step on any players. If I do, I know I might be too close to the tag.

Jay Miner is a longtime umpire and rules interpreter from Albany, N.Y. □

SIDELINE

Hamilton Rides Off

Lurline Hamilton is stepping down as the assigner for the Southeastern (SEC), Atlantic Sun and Sun Belt conferences after this season as she transitions into retirement. The longtime assigner (since 2000) from Baton Rouge, La., will continue to serve as coordinator of umpires for the Big 12 in 2018-19. Dora Martinez of San Antonio took over for Hamilton this season as coordinator of the Southland Conference and Conference USA. The SEC, Atlantic Sun and Sun Belt conferences will share one assigner beginning next season.



SUN BELT

QUICKTIP

When you are the first member of a crew to arrive at a game site, **let the on-site game administrator or home coach know that you are in the parking lot changing into your gear for the game.** That will put the coach and/or on-site administrator at ease until your partner(s) arrive. Plus, they won't be calling the conference or league coordinator to complain about late-arriving umpires.

TOOLS

Nine Rules You Thought You Knew

Looking for an easy-to-digest refresher on some of the commonly misunderstood rules of high school softball? From the editors of *Referee*, *Nine Rules You Thought You Knew* serves as a source to quickly review rules such as the DP-Flex, look-back rule, illegal pitches, double bases and more. The booklet is available at refereetrainingcenter.com for \$4.95.

