

# HEY BLUE...

Babe Ruth League, Inc.



**Diamond Digs**

.....  
**Excellence in Umpiring**

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## **UMPIRING PRIORITIES**

The #1 rule of umpiring is “watch the ball”. Other axioms to help an umpire are:

- Keep the ball, the base, the runner and the fielder in front of you.
- Try to get a 90° angle from the tag on a tag play and from the flight of the ball on a force play.
- Move parallel with the runners.
- Stop. Set. See It.
- There is always a job to do.
- Adjust.
- Work in priorities – first this, then that.

There is no argument that an umpire must make one call before making another. An umpire is expected to give their full attention to each play. If he/she circumvents on a call in order to be better prepared for the next call, then both calls only get half the concentration and neither call can be made with certainty. The truth is that many things in need of the umpire’s judgment can and do happen simultaneously. You need to think and prioritize.

For example, if the umpire is needed to rule on a play involving the ball, then it is possible to miss some infraction off the ball. This is a good sense of priorities. However, when the ball is away, if the umpire has acknowledged the need for priority work, there is no reason to not see what is the umpire’s job to see. A runner on first is going to get the quicker jump to second than the batter in the box is to first. After watching the batted ball and determining that it is a hit, it is quite easy to see the runner touching second and then glance over and see the batter runner touch first. As a plate umpire, we know that runners must pass third before coming home so we watch in that order. But what if the umpire must move out to get a good look on a fly ball that the fielder dives for and the umpire rules that the ball is trapped and meanwhile a runner has scored? No the umpire did not see him touch the plate, but would it matter if, in exchange for seeing him touch the plate, the umpire did not know whether the ball was caught or trapped?

These are only a very few situations out of the many that exist to show the necessity for umpires to think and work in priorities. These are things umpires learn from experience (often painful). If an umpire does not learn to think and prioritize, it is unlikely he/she will survive in umpiring at all. Be a thinking umpire. Know your priorities. Respect the very difficult job you do.



## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

**What is proper timing?** Timing is the proper use of the eyes. Call the pitch as fast as you can...after you see it. Umpires talk about those who call pitches before they have even reached the glove (like the called strike three that goes for a home run!). We watch batters get half way to first before the umpire calls a strike, or watch both catcher and batter turn and look at the umpire waiting for an announcement of his decision. We see the scoreboard being reset after the "ball" becomes a "strike". On the rubber...get set...see it...call it!

**The Automatic Call.** Why do some umpires automatically call "strike" on a pitch made at a count of three balls and no strikes? Why do some umpires call "ball" on a pitch made at a count of no balls and two strikes? Does the pitcher suddenly get worse or better? Don't do it! Don't do it! Call the pitch exactly where it was placed, exactly as you would in every situation without regard to the count or game situation.

**Don't Make It Hard!** Every pitch is a strike until it convinces you it's a ball! Baseball and softball are simple games - don't make them hard!

**The Game is Yours!** When you walk on to the field that game is yours. You are in control. Keep things moving! If you let things drag on, there will be more errors and more arguments for no reason. Keep things fresh and moving and the play of the game will be much sharper.

**Don't Look for Praise!** Some umpires crave to be recognized as being an excellent official. Once you start looking for praise, you will need it and it will own you. Don't look for praise. You know in your head if you've done a good job or not.

**Arrive Early!** Get to the park at least 30 minutes prior to the game. This allows you to walk the field, check equipment, have a thorough pre-game conference with your partner, and mentally prepare for the game.

**Just Walk Away!** Umpires usually never discuss their routine calls. The more an umpire talks, the more he feels he has to justify and explain his call. It takes years of study and practice to make a good umpire. It takes excellent judgment to make a quality official. It can take only one second to make that same official look like he doesn't know what is going on. Make a call and walk away from it! Don't turn that second into minutes, hours and a career.



## DID YOU KNOW...

...There is no such reference in any official rulebook that addresses that a left-handed pitcher has some imaginary 45-degree mound line that establishes some kind of "no balk zone" with reference to where and how he or she steps when throwing over

to 1<sup>st</sup> base during a pick-off attempt. Official Baseball Rule 8.05(c) states “...it is a balk when the pitcher, while touching his plate, fails to step directly toward the base before throwing to that base.” That’s the official rule in its entirety.

**Common Mistakes:** *Three* things to consider – *First*, assuming that there really is a 45-degree angle rule. *Second*, assuming that left-handed pitchers should be treated differently than right-handers when it comes to applying 8.05(c). *Third*, failure to interpret and enforce 8.05(c) exactly as written.

**Solution:** Interpret and enforce Rule 8.05(c) exactly as written, with special emphasis on the “directly toward the base...”

...*The batter* has until he goes into the dugout (or any other dead ball area) to run to 1<sup>st</sup> base when the 3<sup>rd</sup> strike is dropped by the catcher. (Assuming that 1<sup>st</sup> is not occupied with less than two outs. Batter may acquire 1<sup>st</sup> if it is occupied when there are 2 outs). Official Baseball Rule 6.09(b) states, “*The batter becomes a runner when (b) The third strike called by the umpire is not caught, providing (1) first base is unoccupied, or (2) first base is occupied with two out.*” **Casebook Interpretation:** “*When a batter becomes a runner on a third strike not caught by the catcher and starts for the dugout, or his position, and then realizes his situation and attempts then to reach first base, he is not out unless he or first base is tagged before he reaches first base. If, however, he actually reaches the dugout or dugout steps, he may not then attempt to go to first base and shall be out.*”

**Common Mistakes:** Too many umpires are under the impression that if a batter has given up any obvious attempt to acquire 1<sup>st</sup> base on a dropped 3<sup>rd</sup> strike that he has in fact given up his right to do so. When the umpire has made this determination that the player is out, there is usually no attempt made on the batter’s part to run to 1<sup>st</sup> base. And if the batter decides to run to 1<sup>st</sup> base despite the umpire’s call and acquires it safely, only to be removed from the base by the umpire, the offensive manager would have a valid protest if he decides to file one.

**Solution:** Know the rule. Pass it on to other umpires. Don’t declare an out until the batter goes into the dugout or into any other dead ball area.

...*That because* a batter simply squares around to bunt a pitched ball and subsequently leaves the bat in that position does not automatically result as an attempted swing. Per Official Baseball Rule 2.00, A STRIKE is a legal pitch when so called by the umpire, which – “(a) is struck at by the batter and is missed.”

**Shouldn’t Make Any Mistakes or Need a Solution! *Pretty direct and to the point!***

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### **All Time Top Umpire Heckles:**

1. I thought only horses slept standing up!
2. Flip over the plate and read the directions!
3. I’ve gotten better calls from my ex-wife!
4. Wake up you’re missing a good game!
5. I’m gonna break your cane and shoot your dog!
6. You couldn’t call a cab!
7. You need to go to confession after that call!
8. Leave the gift giving to Santa!
9. Which one of you is the designated driver?
10. If you just want to watch the game, buy a ticket!