PLATE MECHANICS

Set Position

Position yourself behind the catcher and slightly inside the inside corner of home plate so that your eyes are up slightly inside the inside corner and at the top of the strike zone. This position will be referred to as working the "**slot.**" It allows the catcher free movement up and down without obstruction the umpire's view and enables you to see all of home plate and the batter's strike zone.

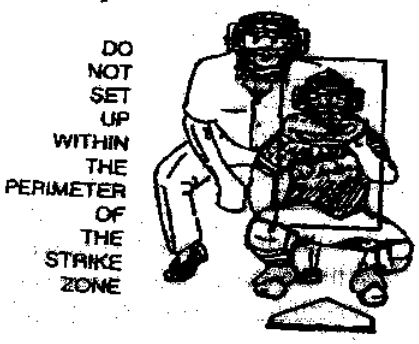
Your feet should be placed approximately shoulder width apart with your inside foot slightly forward. This is referred to as a "toe to heel" stance. It is important that you remain in balance and comfortable.

Prior to assuming the set position, the umpire should assume a ready position by properly placing the feet while waiting in a relaxed fully upright stance. The proper time to drop to the 'set' position is immediately after the pitcher has separated his hands and started the pitch, but prior to the release of the ball. The umpire should never be moving to the set position while the ball is in flight toward the plate. It is important to know one can set too early, as well as too late. The set position requires additional energy that should not be wasted. You may need that extra strength in later innings.

To assume the set position, bend the knees while keeping your back as straight as possible. Shoulders should be square with the pitch. You eyes should be lined up at the top of the strike zone; the umpire has given himself the best possible look at the pitch. Always be able to see the plate and the batter's feet and hands.

In the set position, the eyes are usually at the batter's armpits in a definite crouched position looking from slightly outside the strike zone through the entire strike zone.

In calling balls and strikes, it is generally most accepted to bring the pitch down or up into the strike zone, and widen it out, making sure to give a good corner. The bench and spectators can see whether the pitch is too high or too low, however, they can not tell whether it passed over the plate.



Points of Emphasis for Plate umpires:

1. **Inside protector offers certain advantages.**
   - The inside protector is worn under the shirt, sweater or jacket. It gives more freedom of movement on the field and frees both hands.
   - Allows the umpire to work in the "slot" to see inside and outside corner.

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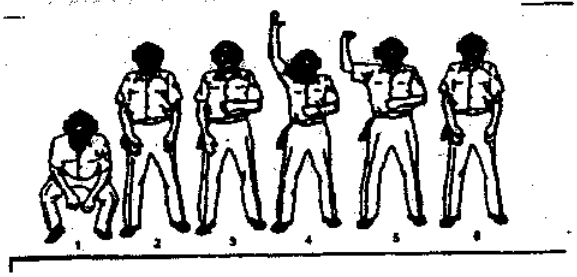
2. **Positioning of the hands is critical**
   - First concern is protection
   - Tuck right elbow into the inside of leg when right-hand batter, vise versa.
   - Make sure hands are loose and allow give. Don't put them on knees.
   - Your hands should not touch the catcher.
3. **Establish a good line of sight.**
   - Squat position, should be over the catcher's left shoulder and to the side when the batter is right-handed.
   - The squat style seems to make outside pitches the hardest to call.
   - If umpire is getting hit to often by foul balls, it usually attributed to working too high or too far behind the catcher. Work "slot"
4. **Visualize the strike zone.**
   - Know how; rule book defines strike zone.
   - You have the best advantage point, visualize dotted line rectangle over the plate.
5. **Remove mask with left hand.**
   - If you take it off with the right, you might throw it at someone.
6. **Call out both strikes and balls.**
   - Say ball, for infielders can hear you. So say something on every pitch.
   - Vary your voice for each situation for a strike
   - When she swings, do motion, everyone knows she swung.
   - Looking, make yell strike, called third strike be your loudest.
7. **Develop your basic strike motion.**



8. **Develop a style that works.**
   - Watch other umpires to see if they have different technique then you. Try there tech. And if you like it, use it.
   - On third strike most umpires have different body language, then first two.
9. **Follow the action.**
   - As plate umpire, your duties don't stop when ball is hit.
   - On a ground ball hit to the infield, leave the plate area left of the catcher and trail the batter-runner toward first base.
   - If the plate umpire has moved into proper position, he will be where he can see what is happening and be of assistance to his partner if help is requested.
10. **Help the base umpire.**
   - Moving to the infield is part of your job. Many people call it hustling. It becomes easier the more you do it.

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- Partner goes out for a trapped ball, you got bases. If he doesn't you have the catch and you need to get out from behind the plate.

11. Use good judgment.
- Exercise your best judgment and be consistent.

12. Your reputation precedes you.
- Remember that umpiring begins when you enter the park. From that point on, someone is certain to be watching you.
- The only person that has to be satisfied with you, is yourself.
- Players aren't the only ones who have to hustle, umpires have a lot to do with setting the tone and pace of a game.

13. Call'em, don't explain 'em.
- Don't explain every pitch, if the catcher starts asking you a lot tell her that.
- Agree with catcher if she says "was that low"

14. Infield-fly signals need to be communicated.
- Have a signal to communicate with partner, hand on chest for example.
- Home plate umpire usually calls it first but both umpires are responsible.
- Raise fist over head, and say "Infield fly, batter's out, if fair."

15. Give the catcher room.
- Do not watch ball on a pass ball, watch catcher's shoulders. Get out of way. It's tricky!

16. Keep the plate clean.
- Face backstop when cleaning plate.
- If batter or catcher asks for it to be done, do it!
- Don't let catcher clean it, not professional.

17. React immediately to a batted ball that hits the batter.
- Kill the play quickly by throwing your arms up and calling "Foul!"

18. Indicate foul tips.
- **DO NOT** verbalize foul tip. Use sign only. Must be caught. If not foul ball.

19. Stay on top of the slow roller.
- Get out from behind the plate without getting to close to interfere. Take off mask and make call if close to line.

20. Avoid ambiguous fair-foul calls.
- Yell 'foul' on foul balls.
- **Do Not** say anything on fair balls, point.

21. Don't disagree openly.
- Don't disagree on the field about a call that your partner made.
- Go over troublesome rules before the game that you might have.

22. The err is human.
- Umpires are human, we make mistakes, **GET OVER IT!** but make sure it doesn't happen again.

23. Your reputation needs consistency.
- A good reputation isn't easy to earn. Need to do many games to establish it. To do this, establish a strike zone that is used everyday.

24. Between-inning mechanics.
- Alternate base lines, and be on base line team coming off.

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- Base umpire shall stand on edge of outfield.
- Stand ten feet from foul line.
- Avoid conversation with partner, especially after close play.
- Keep players hustling on and off field.
- Keep track of warm up pitches.
- Clean plate before first batter.

25. Ball rotation.

- The pitcher has choice of ball in the beginning of each half inning. Except for the pitcher who is pitching at the bottom of the first, must use unused ball.
- The pitcher must request other ball before throwing a warm up pitch.

26. Trap plays

- Should move to the play to have an advantageous angle to best determine whether the ball is trapped or caught.

HELPFUL HINTS FOR PLATE UMPIRES

1. Hustle
2. Obtain the batting order from both managers at the pre-game, review it making sure there are no errors. Discuss ground rules, so that they are in agreement.
3. Plate umpire always handles the pre-game conference and all introductions. of other umps.
4. Keep plate clean, moon pitcher when cleaning it.
5. Take time to brush the plate when warning batter or catcher of something.
6. Say ball only, don't say "ball four, take your base". And don't point to first.
7. Say strike, not "strike three, you're out."
8. On a swing and miss, don't yell strike, only signal.
9. Really emphasize a check swing, especially on the third strike.
10. A big third strike call is important but don't intimidate or embarrass the batter.
11. Do not verbally describe a pitch, or use a hand signal. Use only a slight body motion toward the location of the pitch.

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Technique on the Bases

Like the plate umpire, the base umpire must bear down on every pitch and be ready for any play. Watch for illegal pitches. Should a foul fly be hit in territory not adjacent to the plate, cover the fielder as closely as the base situation permits. Be alert for check-swings or hit batsman. Be ready to cover the catcher's attempts to pick runners off bases, Between plays, in fact, between pitches, the base umpire must remain alert for any of these possibilities. The umpire must always keep in mind that umpiring-at the plate or on the bases-demands complete concentration, undivided attention and full energies until the final out.

Be on the play at all times, work your angles on the bases. Do not leave yourself open on a play above all do not let the coach call them for you. On a close play, sell the call; but on a wide open play, a routine signal is all that is necessary.

Be on your toes at all times. Call your plays from a set position and be emphatic. Follow the ball at all times. Know where the ball is and who had it last. If a ball is hit to the outfield and there appears to be trouble, go out on it. If the ball is driven out of the park, to the best of your judgement be sure you know where and when the ball leaves the park.

Decisions on Bases

The base umpire indicates decisions by simultaneously vocal and manual expression. Umpires signal SAFE when a runner has beaten a play. They punctuate a vigorous SAFE signal with a verbal SAFE call. In calling a runner out, the motion of the arm is combined with the word OUT.

As it is with the calling of balls and strikes, the volume of voice and force of gesture employed should fit the importance and closeness of the play. The base umpire's decisions may be classified as close or easy. A close decision deserves all the vocal force and power of gesture at hand. In the language of the trade, the umpire should let it out on a close play. An easy decision is given by hand for plays so obvious the plays call themselves. The signal is merely an acknowledgment or announcement of the safe or out.

Attempted steals, attempted base stretching on hits, close force plays, most rundowns, almost all tag plays are close plays and the ruling should be rendered accordingly. Should an umpire, after appeal, rule a runner out, the overhead out call is in order, which is a hard SELL.

For fairly close force-plays, wide open tag plays, and run-downs, the easy decision call, with medium emphasis as to voice and gesture Is called for. Keep full power in reserve for the really close ones.

The "out-safe" or "safe-out" calls are a result of poor timing. If you give it that slight hesitation and allow the mental image or "instant replay" to take place(in your head), you will never have another 'out-safe' call in your career. HOLD IT-SELL IT! (You can't have good judgement without good timing. They go hand-in-hand.)

Should the batter of a ground ball be thrown out at first base by five feet or the leading runner be forced out by a wide margin on potential double-plays, only a routine out is necessary.

An obvious easy decision that could be routine must be handled as a close sell call.

Decisions on Bases

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(CONT.)
(i.e., a fielder failing to touch a base for a force out, failing to tag a runner sliding into a base, miss swipe tag.)

On attempts to pick runners off base, a routine signal may also be given unless play is close, then Sell you call. *Signal a call, if an attempt is made. Even though it wasn't closes.*

Any time the base umpire's back is turned on the plate umpire on a deep fly ball or a possible trapped ball, the base umpire has all responsibility for 'fair and foul' and 'out and safe' decisions on the ball. A base umpire that goes out, must stay in the outfield and never drift back to the infield for a play on the bases. This could cause two umpires to make a decision on the same play. Even if both decisions are the same, IT looks BAD.

The proper angle will have the ball, the base, the defensive player, and the runner in view. When watching the tag on the slide, make sure the base is in view. In watching force outs, keep your eye on the base and watch for the ball to hit the glove or let the ball take you in to the play. Note: Make sure you know from where the ball is being thrown. Never take your eyes off the thrower until the ball is released and let the ball take you into the play.

Hustle is an integral part of good base umpiring technique. In essence, it is the alert application of the principles of good umpiring. Aimless running about is not hustle-at least, not productive hustle. The polished base umpire quickly finds the position for the best possible angle of the play, yet the umpire's whereabouts is overlooked by spectators until the decision is rendered.

Base Calls

There are two basic calls an umpire MUST master if he is going to establish himself as a top notch umpire: **1) The force play, and 2) the tag play.**

For the purpose of discussion, we will discuss the force play at first base as the principles involved apply to ALL force plays.

The Force Play

Again, the play at first base. As the fielder is getting into position to field the ground ball the base umpire should be moving into one of the recommended positions described earlier. As the fielder fields the ball, the umpire should stop (minimum of 18 feet from first base.) As the releases the throw, then and only then does the umpire turn into the base. (Let the ball take you into the play...a play cannot be made without the ball.) At this time, the umpire should concentrate on the BASE, where a) the runner touches it, b) the first baseman is on it when the ball is caught, and c) the ball is not juggled by the fielder.

An important consideration for the umpire at this point is if proper positioning has been maintained (minimum of 18 feet from the base), while concentrating on the base, watch the runner coming down the line and at the same time actually see the ball being caught by the first baseman. A position too close to the base restricts the angle, closes the range of vision, and may cause the umpire to get caught in the action.

Another element in making your decision is sound. While concentrating on the 'base' and allowing peripheral vision to aid us in seeing the play develop, the sound of the ball hitting the glove helps determine which arrived first, the ball or the player's foot hitting the base. Never take your eye off the ball or depend entirely on the sound of the ball hitting the glove for crowd noise could distract you or drown out the sound of the ball hitting the glove.

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The Force Play(Cont.)

If proper mechanics are followed as described, the only consideration left to insure proper timing is a slight hesitation to allow a clear and mental picture to develop, insuring the proper call.

Remember, we are talking about a hesitation here, not a delay. At one time it was thought that any delay in an umpire making a decision was a weakness, it even showed indecisiveness on the part of the umpire. This not true at all, in fact, it shows that you are in control of yourself and it is the manner in which you handle yourself that is more convincing.

Consideration must be given toward being consistent in the time it takes to announce your calls. If you are quick on every call and then have an exaggerated hesitation on one particular call it will appear to the players and fans that you are undecided and guessing. Slow your timing down and don't make a call until the play is completed but be consistent with your timing.

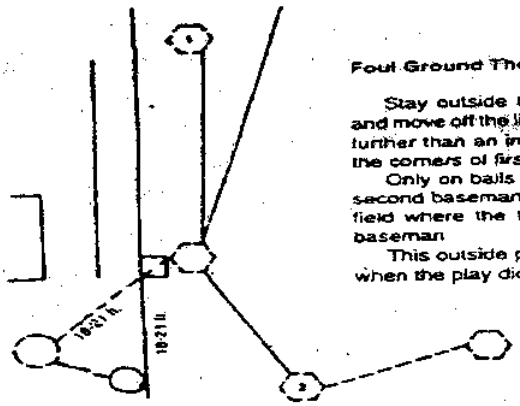
Once the umpire has observed the play come to it's completion, has made his hesitation and knows the outcome of the play, it is time to make the decision that will be made known by the out or safe signal.

It is important that we understand the basic elements and how they relate to each other. For example, we discussed the basic position, proper distance and how it relates to peripheral vision in setting up your timing. If you wind up in a position where you are smothering a force play (in too close) and you are concentrating on the bag, you may have to physically look up to see if you the ball is caught and then look back down to see if the first baseman comes down on the base, if there was an errant throw. While this is happening the runner may have already passed the base while you were looking up at the catch. If proper distance is maintained, peripheral vision will allow you to see the entire play, making your job considerably easier.

There are two basic positions for calling force plays at first base:

1. **Fair Ground Theory**- On all ground balls hit into the infield, the base umpire should move inside the diamond, observing the ground ball to a position which would be an imaginary line drawn through the corners of first base and at the same distance as you were positioned at the start of the pitch. This position allows maximum use of peripheral vision, a basic to good timing and sound judgement. That allows the umpire the ability to move to the foul line for a possible tag play.

2. **Foul Ground Theory**- Should be used as an exception when you can't get to fair territory. Only on balls hit to the first baseman, the second baseman's extreme left, or to a short right field, where the throw is coming to the first baseman from near the foul line, the umpire should stay outside the diamond in foul territory and move through first base. As the outside position is very vulnerable, it is preferred whenever possible, that the umpire move inside the diamond unless forced to stay outside by the throw to the first basemen or another fielder coming from near the first base foul line.



Foul Ground Theory

Stay outside the diamond in foul territory and move off the line to make the call. Move no further than an imaginary line drawn through the corners of first base.

Only on balls hit to the first baseman, the second baseman's extreme left or to the outfield where the throw is coming to the first baseman.

This outside position should be used only when the play dictates.

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The Force Play(Cont.)

Move inside the diamond, observing the defensive player fielding the ground ball, to a position not to exceed an imaginary line drawn through the corner of first base and at the same distance as you were positioned at the start of the pitch. Stop as the fielder fields the ball and let the throw turn you into the play.

On a double play, take one step parallel towards second base (step with the right foot and push off with the right foot) then quickly run parallel down the line to first base. Don't take your head and eyes off the ball and let the flight of the ball turn your head and body into the play at first base.

The four basic elements an umpire should keep in front of him and unobstructed as much as possible are:

1. The ball.
2. The defensive player making the play
3. The batter-runner or runner
4. The base, the area where all four elements meet.

From this foul ground position it is often difficult to determine whether the first baseman juggled the ball, or pulled a foot. Other problems created by this position are:

a) all to often the umpire winds up in a position too close to the play which in turn affects his peripheral vision, timing and eventually, judgement.

b) a coach legally in the coach's box must be instructed and sometimes assisted in vacating portion of the box if you need room

c) a possible overthrow might hit you if you are in the direct line of a throw that goes uncaught.

d) puts the umpire behind the runner who may advance to second base.

Most of these difficulties can be overcome by not crowding the play. Maintain your distance from the base if possible from freedom of movement and peripheral vision.

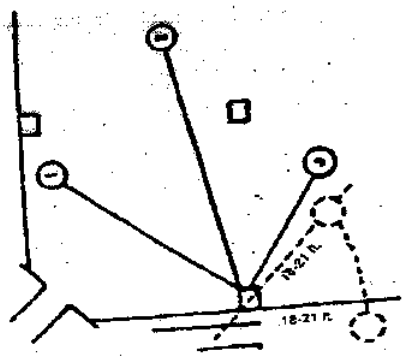
Also remember if there is an errant throw it is your responsibility to quickly get inside the diamond to take the runner into second base.

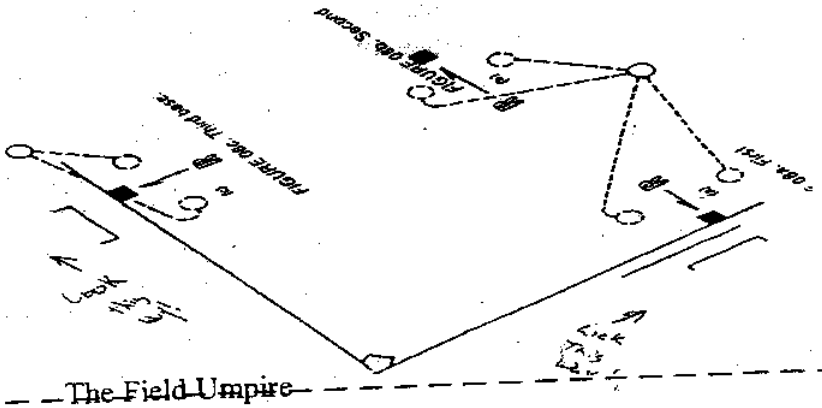
Tag plays

Many of the elements discussed on force plays also apply to tag plays, such as position, angle and peripheral vision especially as the play develops. However, the major difference is in the fact that on tag plays we want to complete the call with your nose right on the tag.

As the play develops, stay back, keep ALL the elements in front of you, the ball, the defense, the runner and the base, as well as the area where they all come together.

Now as the runner and the ball near the tag area, move in. Get about 10 to 12 feet and let





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Tag Plays (Cont.)

the play carry you into the tag. Normally the best angle on plays is 90 degrees from the path of the runner just short of the base at the point of contact.

When we speak of unobstructed angle we mean never position yourself so that the defensive player or runner is between you and the actual tag. The angle may move as the tag and slide are made. The umpire must also move to keep an un obstructed view.

Once you have allowed the play to develop, move in on the play, concentrate on whether the tag was made prior to the runner reaching the base or the runner beat the tag on the base. If the runner is in before the tag, the play is over, providing he doesn't slide past the base. Hesitate slightly then make your call, SAFE.

On the other hand, the out call is more critical. Nothing can be any more embarrassing than to have the tag beat the runner on a close play, have the umpire comes up with a good strong OUT, only to have the ball roll out from the pile.

If the tag is made prior to the runner reaching the base, hesitate, make certain the fielder has the ball, point at the ball with the left hand, and sell the call OUT.

On the same play where a good hard slide causes a collision and you cannot find the ball after the tag, continue looking for the ball and ask in a good crisp voice to, "show me the ball." Be sure to be pointing at the defensive player with your left hand while you are moving around the play trying to find the ball. When you see the ball, make the call with a good signal, and don't look away when making the call. Remember, **you must find the Ball**

DO NOT PLANT yourself like a batter digging in at the plate, move in and around the play if necessary to see the tag and move to find the ball.

Pulled Foot

Quite often the play itself will dictate your actions as to 'selling the call', for example, the pulled foot at first base. It might be obvious that the ball arrived in plenty of time to retire the runner, however, the first baseman pulled his foot off the bag before the catch. In this case you should think in terms of priorities. You do NOT want anyone to think that the runner was called safe because she beat the throw. Thinking in terms of priorities, your first move should be toward the play, POINTING WITH YOUR LEFT HAND at the base indicating that the fielder did in fact pull the foot followed with a vigorous vocal and demonstrative 'NNNooo! You pulled your foot' and followed with the proper 'safe' signal-selling it. If you give the 'safe' signal and nonchalantly point at the base, it will appear as though you 'blew' the call and are looking for an excuse.

Swipe Tag

Similarly with the play where an errant throw goes up the line toward home plate and the first baseman makes an excellent catch and 'swipe tags' the runner prior to reaching first base.

Think in terms of priorities, how was the out made.

Never guess an out. This is similar to never guessing a strike. If the runner beat the ball, never go for help. If you do request help, make the request before making the call and let the home plate umpire make the call. If you do request help, the ball beat the runner and now it must be determined if the foot was off the base or the tag made and you were blocked out and could not see the tag.

Move up and forward the foul line in the direction of the play, point with the left hand, let everyone know the runner was tagged, "Yes or Tag" Now follow through with a SELL out.

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Inside-Outside Theory

The inside-outside theory is simple, if the ball is hit inside the diamond, meaning at point anything on the dirt infield, stay OUTSIDE the diamond. If the ball is hit in any way outside the diamond, on the grass, move INSIDE the bases.

The purpose is equally as simple, ALL four elements are in front of you: the BALL, the RUNNER, the DEFENSIVE PLAYER(S), and the BASE where they all come together.

Button- Hook

The key to the inside-outside theory is movement and the key to movement regarding the inside-outside theory is the button-hook. The button-hook is a term used for the method of moving from outside the diamond to the inside. As you move toward the inside of the diamond, you should be concentrating on the runner(s) you are responsible for, making sure you do NOT interfere with anyone, checking for the tag on the base, obstruction or interference while glancing to pick up the ball in the outfield.

As you are moving inside the diamond, you should be: Watching the runner, glancing to pick up the ball, watching the runner, glancing to pick up the ball.

Once inside the diamond 10 to 12 feet, pivot (or button-hook) into the play, make sure the runner touches the base, check for obstruction and proceed with play.

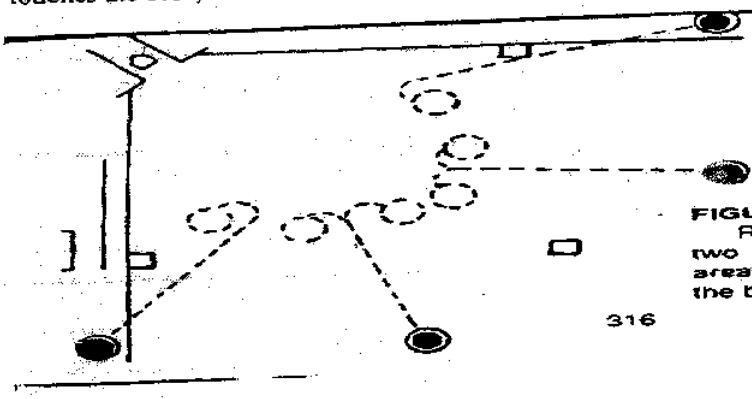

FIGURE 09. Button-hook. Regardless if slow or fast pitch or two or three man system, these are areas you would move to when using the basic inside/outside theory.

Three-Foot Line

A violation of the three foot line is an example of an **interference** call and calls for the umpire to take charge. The umpire should step into the play throwing arms high above the head shouting DEAD BALL. Step forward the point of **interference**, point at the spot of **interference** with the left hand and SELL out. At the time the runners MUST be instructed to return to the last base legally touched at the time of the **interference.**

Running Out of the Base Line

Running out of the base line to avoid a tag is also a violation but does NOT result in a dead ball. The umpire should point with the left hand indicating that the runner did, in fact, violate the rules by running out of the base line and SELL out! Other runners may continue to advance at there own risk and the umpire should react accordingly.

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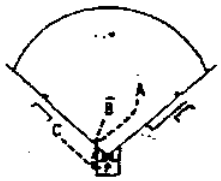
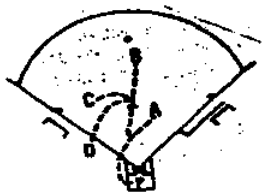
ONE PERSON MECHANICS

Ground Ball Situations



	Position:	Situation:
A.	Ground Ball	No runners on
B.	Ground Ball	Runner on first base or runners on first and second base
C.	Ground Ball hit to infield	Bases loaded

Fly Ball Situations



A. No runners- fly ball to infield or outfield and not near the foul line.

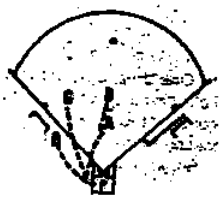
B. Runners on first base.

C. Runners on first and second or second only, move to a possible call at third or to foul territory ahead of the lead runner or a possible play at home if necessary after the catch.

D. Runner on second and third or first and third.

Note: On all fly ball situations where the ball is near the foul line, the umpire must stay on the foul line to determine whether the ball is fair or foul- then move into the infield to pick up runners and plays.

No Runner on Base Situation



A. No runners- single.
B. No runners- double
C. No runners- triple.
D. No runners- home run.

Note: On all base hit situations, umpire must watch runner tag bases and be aware of position of the ball.

BETWEEN INNING MECHANICS

Assume a position approximately 15 feet from home plate, near the line in foul territory and facing the infield. Alternate foul lines according to the following policy:

–Take a position on foul line that is on the side of the field that the defense is coming off. (Everyone is Different)

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