

## Common Confusing Baseball Issues

These are some of the most common misunderstandings of the game of baseball that sometimes arise at Sunrise Optimist games. This is not an exhaustive list, but a few I wanted to clear up, in the hopes that this issues won't be a cause for unnecessarily delaying games. It is not possible for every coach, or even every umpire, to know 100% of the little nuances of the game of baseball. But these are things EVERYONE should get to know, and never get caught making an argument based on a lack of understanding of the rules.

### **THE RUNNER TURNED LEFT INSTEAD OF RIGHT AFTER RUNNING THROUGH FIRST BASE. TAG HIM!—**

Actually, it makes **NO DIFFERENCE** whether the runner turns right or left, or if he's inside of the base path or out of it past first base. Rule 5 of the Rules of Baseball covers this in several places. A runner who has overran first base must simply return to the first base "at once." That is to say, in a timely manner and without attempting to go anywhere else. If he makes an attempt towards going to second, or starts towards the dugout, or towards his fielding position, etc., he can be tagged out. It's up to the umpire to decide if he's made an attempt to go somewhere else. But there is no hard-fast rule that says turning left is illegal. And it makes no difference whether he ran through the bag or slid through the bag. He is allowed to overrun first base with a slide.

**THE BASE PATH RULE.** Essentially, it does not matter where a runner runs MOST of the time. He establishes his own base path, within reason. HOWEVER, when there is a tag attempt being made on a runner, his base path is established when the tag attempt occurs. It forms a straight line from that tag attempt to the next base. He CANNOT run more than three (3) feet away from that base path to avoid a tag--Rule 5.09(b)(1). If he does, he is out. It's the umpire's judgment if he is more than three feet out of his base path. EXAMPLE: a catcher misses a pitched ball, and the runner advances towards home. The catcher quickly recovers the ball and runs back to the baseline to tag the runner in front of the plate. This establishes the runner's base path. The runner then runs 5 feet inside the baseline and avoids the catcher's tag. He runs back and touches the plate. The runner is OUT, as he clearly ran more than 3 feet to avoid the catcher's tag.

There is one other time a base path rule comes into play—Rule 5.09(a)(11). In the last half of the baseline between home and first, the runner must run within a path three feet to the right of the baseline, or on the line itself, or risk potentially interfering with a throw. If a throw to first is not caught, but ruled to have been catchable, the umpire MAY rule interference on the runner if he is running left of the baseline OR more than three feet to the right of it. EXAMPLE: a kid bunts and runs to first. The catcher picks it up and throws it towards first. The runner is inside of the baseline and gets hit in the back with the throw. If the umpire rules the ball may have been catchable, he may rule the runner out for interfering with the throw. NOTE: The runner is entitled to step on the base, which extends inside the running lane. So the umpire must take that into consideration, as well.

**THIRD STRIKE IS NOT CAUGHT. WHAT ARE THE RULES ON THAT?**—OK, Rule 5.05 (a)(2). If a third strike is not caught, the batter becomes a runner, and he must be tagged out or thrown out or forced out. That is, unless first base is occupied with less than two outs, in which case the runner is just out. If the third strike is dropped with two outs, it makes no difference whether first base is occupied or not. The batter becomes a runner and he must be tagged out or forced out (or another runner forced or tagged out) to record the third out of the inning.

Runners can advance at their own risk on uncaught third strikes, EVEN if it is a situation where the batter is automatically out (i.e.—first base is occupied with less than two outs). There is nothing at all in the rules that says the runners cannot advance. To put one of those runners out you must tag them—it is not a force out.

For our league, in the case of an uncaught third strike where the batter has become a runner, the batter-turned-runner will be automatically out upon reaching his dugout (entering the doorway or touching the fence/gate) if he has not otherwise been thrown out or tagged out.

It is helpful on third strike situations if the umpire clearly calls the batter out if that is the case. The umpire should call “strike three,” but should not call the batter out if he is now a runner.

In the past players have taken off running when they are out, usually prompted by the yelling of fans or coaches. Then runners on the bases take off and it’s chaos. We’re going to try to clearly call when the batter is out, and hopefully that helps. But runners taking off do so at their own risk. It’s good for the coaches to work with their parents and fans to let the coaches do the coaching and fans stick to cheering.

**FOUL TIP**—A foul tip is a ball that goes directly off the bat and straight back towards the catcher and is legally caught. If the catcher catches it (directly into his glove, or if it tips off his glove and he catches it before it hits the ground, umpire or batter), then it is merely a strike (rule 5.09) and it is a live ball. Runners may advance and do not need to tag up. If it’s a third strike, the batter is out. If it hits anything at all before the catcher’s glove (his mask, chest protector, the dirt, the batter, the umpire, etc.), then it is an ordinary foul ball, regardless of whether the catcher catches the ball or not on the rebound. The runners must return to their base. **EXAMPLE**—the ball is fouled back into the catcher’s mask and pops straight up. The catcher reaches up and catches it. The batter is NOT OUT, it cannot be a third strike, and all runners must return to their base. **ANOTHER EXAMPLE**—the ball is fouled straight back to the catcher, tips off his glove, and is caught by the catcher’s bare hand against his chest before it hits the ground. This is a legally caught foul tip, since it hit his glove first. It is a strike. If a third strike, the batter is out. All runners may advance on their own risk without tagging up.

**INFIELD FLY RULE (6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade only)**—The infield fly rule ONLY applies when at least first AND second base are occupied, AND there are less than two outs. If a fly ball (not a line drive) is ruled by the umpire to be playable with ordinary effort by an infield player, then he declares “infield fly if fair.” If the ball is caught OR lands and comes to rest in fair territory without being touched, then the batter is out. If it is ruled a foul ball, then it is just an ordinary foul, the runners cannot advance, and the batter is still up.

An Infield Fly is a live ball if fair. If caught, runners may advance after tagging up. If it hits the ground and is ruled fair, the batter is still out, BUT the runners may advance at their own risk. There is no force once the infield fly has been called—the runner must be tagged out—except in a case when a runner fails to tag up on a caught ball. In that instance, the runner may be forced out at the base on which he failed to tag up.

**THE UMPIRE’S JUDGMENT IS FINAL.** If the umpire does not call the infield fly rule (which is usually accompanied by the umpire pointing upward with one hand, although his or her voice alone is sufficient to make the call), then the infield fly rule is not in effect. ALSO....the ball need not actually fall into the

infield for the infield fly rule to be in effect. It needs only be where the umpire rules an infielder can make the play with ordinary effort.

**FAIR OR FOUL?**—To sum up fair/foul....the foul line travels in two straight lines from the back of home plate, through the outside edge of first and third base, and all the way to the foul pole at the fence. The foul line is in fair territory.

A ball cannot be ruled foul or fair until it 1. Comes to rest, or 2. Travels to or past first or third base, or 3. Touches a player, umpire, coach, fence, batter's donut in the on deck circle, etc.

Before reaching first or third base, where a ball lands (provided it doesn't touch any of the items above or similar) is inconsequential. For example, a lightly hit ball could land 5 feet inside of the foul line, but spin into foul territory and come to rest before reaching third. That is a FOUL BALL. On the flip side, a ground ball could initially be hit into foul territory, but spin into fair territory at the last second and hit the third base bag. That is a FAIR BALL.

By rule, home plate and the pitcher's rubber are BOTH in fair territory....but as they are both before the ball would travel to first or third, the ball hitting either of these does not automatically make it a fair ball. The rule book lists the specific example of a line drive hitting the pitcher's rubber and ricocheting foul before traveling to first without being touched. This is a FOUL BALL. By the same token, a ball that bounces straight up off of home plate, provided it is in fair territory when the catcher grabs it, is FAIR. If it bounces off the plate and the catcher grabs it in foul territory, it is foul.

A ball hit into the air past first or third will be judged fair or foul based upon where it either first hits the ground OR is first touched by a fielder—not based on the position of the fielder, but where the ball is when it touches that fielder. Whether on the infield or outfield, once a ball has been ruled fair or foul, it remains fair or foul, regardless of where it ends up. A ball hit over the home run fence is ruled foul or fair based on where it crosses the fence, not where it lands or rolls.

**CATCHER INTERFERENCE**—Rule 6.01(c) This most commonly happens when a batter swings and his bat hits a part of the catcher, usually his glove (although the catcher could interfere in other ways, like tripping the batter/runner or something). If catcher interference happens, the umpire lets the play continue. If the play results in the batter and all runners being safe and advancing at least one base, then the catcher's interference call is ignored. Otherwise, at the end of the play, the manager of the batter can choose to accept the play OR accept the interference penalty. The penalty for interference is putting the batter on first base, just as if he was walked or hit by a pitch.

EXAMPLE....a runner is on third with no outs in a tie game in the bottom of the last inning. The batter swings and hits the catcher's mitt, but also hits the ball and pops it out to right field. The ball is caught, and the runner on third tags and advances home to score a run and win the game. Obviously, the manager will decline the penalty and take the run to win. BUT...same scenario, if he hits the mitt and pops it out to right, and the runner on third base is thrown out trying to score, then in this scenario, the manager will likely choose to accept the interference penalty and put his batter on first, and the runner on third returns to third.

**HIT BATTER**—If a pitched ball hits a batter, it is a dead ball and he is awarded first base. This is true **even if the ball pitch hits the ground first before hitting the batter**—5.05(a)(3). Exceptions from 5.05 (b): 1. If the ball is in the strike zone when it hits the batter, it is a strike, and a dead ball, and if a third

strike, the batter is out, regardless of whether the ball is caught. Runners must return to their bases. 2. If the batter is attempting to hit the ball and the ball hits him (i.e.—he is swinging or making a bunt attempt), then the pitch is ruled a strike and it is a dead ball, and if a third strike, the batter is out.

Contrary to the old opinion, the hand is NOT a part of the bat. If a pitch hits the player's hands or fingers before hitting anything else, it is a dead ball and he is awarded first (as long as neither of the above exceptions apply).

For this league, we will make no judgment as to whether a batter is attempting to avoid being hit by a pitch. It's more likely at this age and level that a player who does not move out of the way of a pitch is frozen out of fear and not because he wants to be hit. If he is hit by a pitch, and the two exceptions above don't apply, the ball is dead and he gets first base.

**INTERFERENCE/OBSTRUCTION**—There are a lot of situations that could cause interference or obstruction. Read 6.01 of the Official Rules of Baseball. **Interference and obstruction are always judgment calls on the part of the umpire.**

Interference is when a batter or runner (or coach) interferes with a fielder's ability to make a play, or if a coach illegally assists a runner. In some instances, interference can be called even if it is not intentional, as in the case of a runner on his way to third directly from second and he collides with a short stop making a play—it is up to the runner to avoid the interference, and if he doesn't, he's out. There are situations where a runner being hit by a thrown ball may or may not be guilty of interference—intentionally getting in the way of a ball is always interference. Unintentionally getting hit may or may not be, depending on whether the runner is somewhere he has a right to be.

There also need not necessarily be contact for interference to occur. For example, if a runner stops and blocks a fielder's view of a ground ball coming towards him, that might be interference. However, if a runner is in his normal path of running between bases and does a motion to avoid being hit by the ball, or if the ball passes between his legs in his normal stride, that is probably not interference, even if it blocks the fielder's view of the ball.

Interference results in the interfering batter/runner being called out. In some instances, it could result in a second batter or runner to be called out (as in the case of interfering on a double play). The ball is dead when interference is called.

Obstruction is when a fielder interferes with a runner's ability to reach a base. The play may be stopped immediately, if the obstructed runner is being played upon, or allowed to continue if the obstructed runner is not being played upon. At the end of the play, the umpire will award the runner or runners the bases he or she judges the runner or runners would have gained if they had not been obstructed. It is possible for an out to be recorded on a play and still have obstruction.