



14 Unwritten Rules of Umpiring

1. When You “Think” You Saw Something, YOU DIDN’T

There are times you say to yourself “That looked like a balk, but I didn’t see the whole thing.”

Missing a call is never a positive thing. But most assigners, coordinators and observers will tell you failing to call something that did happen is more acceptable than calling something you aren’t absolutely positive happened. Gut feeling is a valuable tool. Many times, your instincts will guide you in the right direction. But your eyes trump all. See what you call and call only what you see. Period.

2. Keep The Game MOVING

There are few umpires who want to be on the field for a really long game. However, there are some games that are just going to be longer than others.

What is not acceptable is for umpires to be the cause of a game going long. Do everything possible to make a dead ball live again as soon as possible.

That doesn’t mean neglecting important duties or rushing teams. It does mean being efficient with recording substitutions, enforcing the batter’s box rule, hustling to your position, and getting the next pitch thrown.

3. Provide COURTESY To Players When It’s Needed

While an umpire should strive to keep the game moving, there are times when you need to it slow down. A catcher works extremely hard during a game and that hard work generally keeps you from getting hit. So, when you see him get hit and in pain (but not enough to bring out the athletic trainer), take some extra time — dust off a clean plate or walk the ball out to the pitcher.

Buy that catcher a few minutes and, in turn, he will probably appreciate it and work even harder for you the rest of the game.

The same thing can sometimes apply to when tensions get high. Take a moment to put the ball in play and use that time to give a friendly reminder as opposed to a premature penalty. When you feel the situation has had a moment to calm down, get the game moving.

4. Give A LONGER LEASH To Those in Charge

Maybe more important is the flip side of this rule: Those who aren’t in charge don’t get a long leash. Yes, you should listen to head coaches and managers who give their thoughts to you about a call or situation — as long as they don’t cross the line. Communication, including listening to grievances, is part of game management.

But assistant coaches, players and other bench personnel should not be given the same privilege. Unsportsmanlike talk and actions by those individuals need to be addressed right away. If warranted, you can give head coaches a chance to take care of other game participants.

Use preventive umpiring whenever you can and tolerate a bit more from head coaches. Work with them until their behavior becomes a distraction.

5. Give The BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT To Those Who Have Earned Respect

There will be times — probably in every game — when you get questioned on a decision you made. How you respond should be determined in part by how you are asked.

Think about the ranting, raving head coach. Anything that doesn’t go exactly how he wants the blame is pointed toward you or your crewmates. You are to blame for his team’s woes.



Greater Dallas Baseball Umpire Association

In a tight moment, a coach questions a call. The coach who doesn't go ballistic on every call deserves a more thorough response than the lunatic. It is as simple as that.

Because it is so out of character for that calmer coach to question a call, maybe he saw something that didn't make sense or was a violation by rule. Taking the time to acknowledge the concern is time well-spent. The ranter may have seen the same thing, but doesn't deserve the benefit of the doubt since he has been on your case about everything.

6. Look the COACH In the Eye

Police will tell you that suspects who lower or turn their heads when providing alibis are withholding information. It is difficult to obfuscate when you are looking someone right in the eye.

Whether you are introducing yourself to the coach before the game or answering his question during the game, communication should be done face to face and straight on. Even if you are delivering bad news, you will have more credibility and gain more respect by looking the coach in the eye.

7. When In Doubt, Do What Is Expected

An umpire takes on the task of applying mainly descriptive rules to fluid situations, but there are times in games when that umpire may not be immediately certain what action to take after observing a play or an incident. Rulebooks will spell out the intent and guiding principles of the rules and the better umpires figure out how to apply them equitably, in context. But there are times when an umpire faces doubt at the moment he is expected to make a call. When that happens, it's best to do what is expected.

Does it appear that a player sustained a possible concussion even though he does not have a loss of consciousness after a play? If there is any doubt, it is best to take that player out of the game to get checked. Should an umpire call a borderline pitch a ball or strike? It is expected that the umpire follow through by calling that pitch a strike.

In any event, do not try to run away from the play or shrug your shoulders. You'll lose credibility fast.

Umpires will never be 100 percent sure of what they see 100 percent of the time. In those gray-area moments when a call is necessary, do what is expected and make the call with a clear conscience.

8. Answer QUESTIONS, Not Statements

"That's a bad call." "That was interference."

What do all those comments have in common? They are statements that coaches say/yell/shout, etc.

Coaches say a lot to umpires during a game. And much of what they have to say, whether it is a valid point or not, does not need a response. Statements don't need an answer from umpires. Often the only time you need to respond to a statement is when you are delivering a warning for one that crosses the line.

What deserves a respectful response when time permits is a legitimate question. Umpires can save themselves a lot of headaches and heartburn by answering only what is asked.

9. Don't Answer the Question You Don't Have INFORMATION About

You don't need to answer every question, though. That most often relates to a coach asking a question about a play called by a crewmember. If you don't know what happened, don't guess.

Sometimes a coach or player may ask you about a rule or situation that you are not sure about. If you don't have the knowledge or information you need, don't guess at the answer. You'll lose all credibility if you answer the question wrong. Instead, seek assistance from your partner. Then vow to study the rules more, so you can answer that question if it comes up in the future.



10. Get The Game Going After A MISTAKE Or EJECTION

Sure, ejections and mistakes are a big deal. But it is the responsibility of umpires to make sure they don't become a huge deal and negatively impact a game.

When your game has a situation, such as an ejection or a rule controversy, the best thing you can do is to get the next pitch thrown. Once game action resumes, players, coaches and fans will typically worry about that action and forget about the situation that caused the problem in the first place.

While participants will be forced to move on when action resumes, umpires should keep the mistake/ejection in the back of their mind. Don't dwell on what happened but keep in mind that it could lead to future issues. Managing the game by making sure your presence is felt even more after ejections, for example, is a good way to prevent future problems.

11. Be 100% Sure If Making the UNEXPECTED CALL

It's never a good idea to enforce an arcane rule just to let everyone know that you know the book. But if it needs to be called, sell it and be prepared to back it up with confidence. The more unusual the situation, the more sure you must be.

12. Don't Insert Yourself or Disrupt GAME RHYTHM If It's Not Necessary

If you somehow don't feel "in the game" because little if anything to rule on has occurred, don't go looking for something. Back off. At some point the game will need you and when it does, be ready.

13. Let The PLAYERS Help You Make the Call

Generally, players are not award-winning actors. And as you drop down from the professional level, to college, to high school and below, the acting skills are dramatically worse.

One of the toughest calls to get right in baseball is the high-and-tight pitch that may have hit the bat or the hand first. Read the batter's reaction: If the batter immediately screams, "Ouch!" and drops the bat, there's a pretty good chance it hit his hand. But if the batter doesn't react as the ball rolls into fair territory, in all likelihood, it's a fair ball. Read the reaction of the player and use that to provide you the additional information to make a correct call.

14. When A Game Is Obviously Over, CONCENTRATION Needs to Be Stronger

There are games that are decided early on. It's at that time when teams will start going through the motions and that makes it easy for umpires to do the same.

That's the time to increase your focus. Don't allow yourself to be distracted. A blowout situation offers umpires the perfect time to work on certain mechanics or habits.

Above all, don't physically quit on the game. Continue to hustle. Do anything necessary to keep your focus and not let up.