



May Plays and Clarifications

Mechanic Issues:

Mechanics: The Importance of Communication when Rotating

Our mechanics topic this month deals with umpire communications on the field. A successful umpire must use the art of communication when rotating into position, especially in the Three Umpire System. Webster's Dictionary defines communication as "the exchange of ideas, messages or information". This can be accomplished both verbally and physically. Communicating when rotating is a must regardless of your level of experience or how well you think you know your partner or partners.

We sometimes refer to communication in the Three Umpire System as a "push-pull system" when we, as umpires, are required to rotate. For example: The 1B umpire must pull the 3B umpire over to cover 1B and 2B when they are required to rotate home. Likewise, you must also push the Plate Umpire up to 3B so that you can complete your rotation. As the 3B umpire, you must push the 1B umpire home so the crew has a complete rotation. The same is true for the Plate Umpire. This "push-pull system" cannot work successfully without communication. Nowhere is communication more important than when you are working with umpires that may or may not speak English. [Here is a link with an example of verbal and physical communication.](#) Keep your eye on the 3B umpire as they rotate to 2B and remind the 1B umpire, both verbally and physically, to rotate home.

Even when not in the Three Umpire System, it is imperative that umpires communicate verbally during rotations. Regardless of the umpire's skill level or the level of play, verbal communication between umpires is essential for our umpire systems to work properly. Umpire communication has become a lost art, and we need to re-train all of our umpires to communicate at all times while on the field. Verbal communication when an umpire goes out on a fly ball or when all umpires rotate inside the diamond and no one has gone out becomes critical with multiple runners on base.

A form of communication for an umpire is to visually confirm that our communication was received and understood by our partners. We must visually glance and make sure our partner or partners have rotated into position and that all bases are covered. A visual confirmation allows us to react and cover a base in the case our partner has not rotated. Again, nowhere is this more important than in international softball. We are familiar with the differences in Federation, College and ASA/USA Softball, so therefore we must also expect differences in international play. [Watch the video clip and note how the plate umpire rotates to 3B and glances to make sure there is an umpire at home plate to cover a possible play.](#) In this case it is an over the fence home run. However, the plate umpire still visually verifies that home plate is covered. Remember, good habits make for good umpiring.

Going out on Fly Balls:

A commonly asked question, especially in the Three Umpire System, is when we should go to the outfield to cover a fly ball or line drive. ASA/USA Softball teaches that anytime the ball has a chance of being caught, an umpire should go out to cover that fly ball. A key aspect of making a good decision whether to go out or buttonhook inside is pre-pitch planning. Performing a good pre-pitch read of where the outfielders are positioned, along with knowledge of how fast they are, will prepare you to have a better reaction when the ball is hit. For example, if you see that the outfielders are playing very deep and a line drive is hit just over the infielders head, there is little chance this ball will be caught and most likely you would be best served to buttonhook inside than to go out to the outfield. On the other hand, if the fielders are playing shallow and have a lot of speed, this same line drive would be a ball that the umpire should go out to the outfield as a diving catch is highly likely and going out to cover that play would provide the crew with the best overall coverage of the situation. The above discussion is most relevant to the Three Umpire System where one umpire going to the outfield causes the crew to revert to the Two Umpire System. Reverting to the Two Umpire System still allows adequate coverage of possible plays, even with multiple runners; however, there are situations in a Two Umpire System that the Base Umpire should consider going to the outfield. Since the Plate Umpire is forced into a One Umpire System when this happens, these situations should be limited to hits that could be very difficult for the Plate Umpire to rule on. Simply stated, going out on a fly ball in the Three Umpire System should be more the rule, and doing so in a Two Umpire System more an exception.

In the Two or Three Umpire System, once the umpire decides to go to the outfield and cover a fly ball or line drive, this umpire must remember a few very important items. First, once they turn their back to the infield they are responsible for fair/foul and catch/no catch. With this in mind if the ball is hit near the foul line the umpire must stay near the foul line in order to have the best position to determine the balls status. If the ball is not near the foul line, the umpire's movement should be parallel to the flight of the ball. This movement allows the umpire to have the best view of the ball entering the fielder's glove, which is especially important to ensure a correct call is made on a "shoestring" or diving catch. Second, as we move parallel to the flight of the ball, we also want to get as far out as possible to allow us to be as close to the play as possible. A key point of umpiring should not be forgotten, STOP, see the play, and then make the call. These situations are no different than a routine play at first base; the umpire should move to get the best angle and distance possible but should be stopped and stationary when the play takes place. Lastly, when the umpire stops to see the play they should be square to the play and remain so while making the call. [Watch the umpire in the following clip.](#) The umpire does a good job of moving parallel to the flight of the ball and being square to the catch when seeing the play and making the call. If the umpire would have stopped just a little bit sooner it would have been a perfect example of going out on a fly ball.

Another frequently asked question is: Do we give a safe signal on a fly ball that is dropped by a fielder? The simple answer to this question is yes, a safe signal should be given when needed. Unlike the out signal that must always be given when a fly ball is caught, a safe signal is only needed on a dropped fly ball. Much like the theory of "no ball, no call" on a play in the infield, if the ball is obviously not caught in the outfield there is no need to give a signal.

Where should the Plate Umpire or the 1B Umpire be when rotated home on an over-the-fence home run:

In ASA/USA Softball, our mechanic for plays at the plate is for the umpire to be in foul ground and in line with the deepest corner of the right handed batter's box (approximately 10-12 feet from home plate). This is the primary position for the umpire to be in for a possible play at the plate, and then they should move as needed to get an unobstructed view of the play. This mechanic does not change on an over-the-fence home run. This positioning is first discussed in the ASA/USA Umpire Manual on page 36 in Chapter 4, Plate Mechanics and is detailed again in several places when discussing the One, Two and Three Umpire Systems. Utilizing this position allows the umpire to keep all elements and actions on the diamond in front of them, greatly reducing the chance of missing any activity that would be blocked if the umpire were to position themselves in fair territory with their back to the field. As mentioned above, this primary positioning is the same for the Plate Umpire and the 1B Umpire that has rotated home in a Three Umpire System. As mentioned, it is consistent with the positioning of the Plate Umpire if an umpire was to go out on the fly ball and the crew reverts to a Two Umpire System. In the Two Umpire System, the Plate Umpire should move to the holding zone in foul territory, observe lead runners touching third base and home plate from there and move back to the desired position at home plate to watch the last runner touch home.

Plays and Rulings:

PLAY: R1 on 2B with no outs, B2 hits a ground ball toward F6. F6 is moving to make a play on the ball as R1 jumps over the ground ball causing F6 to lose sight of the ball and not field it cleanly. The umpire does not signal interference because in their judgment R1 did not hinder, impede or confuse F6 from making a play. The umpire does not call interference. Is this a correct call?

RULING: The umpire is correct in their ruling. If in the umpire's judgment the runner did not impede, hinder or confuse the defensive player from attempting to execute a play there is no interference.

Rule 1 Definitions: Interference.

PLAY: In the bottom of the 2nd inning and two outs B3, the pitcher, gets a hit. The team enters a player as a courtesy runner for the B3/the pitcher. B4 grounds out to end of the inning. The home team now wants to enter that player as a substitute before a pitch is thrown in the top of the next inning. The umpire does not allow this and quotes **Rule 8 Section 10D:** A player may not be a substitute for any player in the half inning that they participated as a courtesy runner. The umpire stated that since a pitch has not been thrown, the last half inning is not over.

RULING: Incorrect. The meaning of the same half inning is that while your team is at bat (Top or Bottom of the inning) and you enter a player as a courtesy runner, that player cannot now be entered as a substitute during that ½ inning at bat. Example: Bottom of the 2nd B3 (Ryan), the pitcher, get a base hit and they insert (Zhul) as a courtesy Runner for Ryan. Later in that half inning, bottom of the 2nd, they want to enter Zuhl to bat for Smith. This by Rule 8, Section 10D is not legal. Since Zhul was used as a courtesy runner in the bottom of the second they cannot now substitute for another player in the bottom of the 2nd or as the rule states in the same half inning. Also by **Rule 1 Definition INNING:** That portion of a game within which the teams alternate on offense and defense and in which there are three outs for each team. A new inning begins immediately after the final out of the previous inning.