

U M P I R E



T R A I N I N G

negoa.org

2022 NEGEOA Training

Committing to become a NEGEOA High School umpire can be an easy or hard task. The hard part...First, you need to know the rules. NFHS (National Federation of High School Sports) distributes rule books and case books to study. Once you pay your NEGEOA dues (\$60.00/\$20.00 for first year) you will receive both books. Study them. Just because you played baseball or watch MLB, don't assume you know the rules. There are a lot and you need to know them. The Case Book is filled with scenarios to learn from and give you ammo to ask questions. During the course of the NEGEOA meetings (starting the first Monday in January 2023), we will be studying the rules and in-time, there will be an exam that you must receive 80% or higher to be considered for varsity baseball. If you have never umpired before, chances are you will just be assigned junior varsity level baseball until you get knowledgeable and, confident and we have confidence in you. This is not to say that you won't receive varsity assignments. NEGEOA wants to be confident in your ability before we assign a varsity game to you. Most likely, you will be paired up with a veteran umpire who will help you.

The easy part, lean on veteran umpires. NEGEOA has several playoff caliber umpires as well as college umpires who are more than happy to help you. Find one or two veterans, exchange phone numbers and call them from time-to-time to talk about something that happened in one of your games. NEGEOA provides you a lot of information to study from. Go to our website (negoa.org) to explore. There you will find rules, mechanics, venues, vendors, camp information, etc. Go to our Facebook page (umpire@negoa.org) to view: Tips, You Make the Call, Rule Myths, etc.

One more thing, the high school baseball season is roughly 12 to 14 weeks long. It is amazing how quickly the season goes. Although short, you will learn a lot about umpiring and in-turn, we will help you find employment with other umpire associations who work with: recreation baseball, travel baseball and, summer college baseball.

In high school baseball, the two-man rotation is standard however, as you become a better umpire, you will learn the three-man rotation, and the four-man rotation respectively. The three-man and the four-man are used mostly in playoff and championship series.

Did I mention "know the rules"?

NEGEOA has published every rule and every situation on every level of baseball that you can imagine. It's up to you to access the rules section of our website NEGEOA (negoa.org under Rules & Information). Never hesitate to ask a question. The dumbest question is the one that is never asked. The veterans and the staff of NEGEOA are here to help you and to encourage you with your umpiring career. It's up to you on the commitment you make to either advance or stay the same, we see them all.

Once you become an independent contractor and pay your annual dues (\$60/\$20 for new umpires), you will be given a NFHS rulebook and casebook. We highly advise you to read the rulebook cover to cover as well as the casebook. NEGEOA will hold several meetings starting the first Monday of the year. In these meetings we will discuss rules, situations, and assignments that you will be given through Reftown. You will need to register with Reftown and Dragonfly. Again, please never hesitate to ask any questions. During our meetings, one of the board members will give a demonstration how do use both Reftown and Dragonfly.

How to Dress

How to dress as an umpire it's extremely important. GHSA and NEGEOA, requires that the plate and field umpires dress the same, this is why it is important to contact your partner a minimum of 48 hours prior to an assignment. We require umpires wear charcoal gray umpire pants, either a navy blue or light blue jerseys with the GHSA logo on the jersey. Not very often will you find an umpire who will wear or even owns the light blue shirt so, it is not a requirement for you to purchase the light blue jersey. Both umpires must wear a high gloss belt preferably a minimum of 2 inches wide. Both umpires must wear black socks and a navy blue under shirt.

It is also a requirement that both umpires wear a navy-blue hat with the GHSA logo on the hat. The plate umpire does not have to wear a hat if he uses a hockey style mask however, if he uses a regular mask, he must wear the navy-blue hat with the GHSA logo.

Please visit the NEGEOA website to download the PDF on "How an Umpire Must Dress".

The plate umpire will wear under his uniform a chest protector, shin guards, a protective cup, and protective plate shoes with steel toes. The plate umpire will also use navy blue ball bags (preferably two) that will loop through his belt and in that bag will be a plate brush and an indicator. The plate umpire will also have a line-up book and a red pen in his pocket of his jersey to keep the line-up cards and to make notable changes throughout the course of the game.

The field umpire will wear same uniform as indicated above with base shoes. Both the field umpire and the plate umpire must be diligent in keeping their shoes polished, pants pressed, hats and, jerseys clean. Again, please refer to the NEGEOA website for this information.

If the weather happens to be cold, the umpire may wear a heavy jacket or a lighter jacket. Those jackets should be navy blue with red stripes on each shoulder. The GHSA logo is not a requirement for the jackets. You may also wear black gloves. You may also wear a face protection for warmth.

It gets very cold in the springtime in Georgia. It is advised that you bring other jackets or under protection to help keep you warm during the course of a game. You will find the more experienced umpires have fleece to wear under their jackets as well as leg warmers under their pants. There are also vests, socks and gloves that you could purchase that are battery powered for heat.

Please visit the NEGEOA website for vendors that we recommend to purchase your uniforms and equipment. Please be aware there are only a handful of vendors that offer hats and jerseys with the GHSA logo embroidered.

Communication

One of the most important jobs of an umpire, both field and plate, is communication. The better you are at communication, the better umpire you will become.

Communication on a ball field comes in many forms, verbal, hand gestures, face gestures, positioning to name a few.

Remember, most of the coaches and most of the players don't know who you are. They may have never seen you before on the ball field and they will immediately judge you if you do not know how to communicate. If you come across as hardheaded, there just to collect a paycheck, or not knowing the rules or where to be positioned at the time of a play, you will be given a hard time by the coaches, the players and especially the fans.

Today's umpires are experiencing attitudes toward officials that are less than professional. Fans today think they know the rules and in most cases that is not true so, the more educated you are with the rules, the better you are at your mechanics and how well you communicate will set you apart from other umpires and it will be appreciated by the coaches, the players and the fans.

Keep this in mind as well, we live in a society where everyone carries a camera with them. You will make a call that may not go the direction a respective team and you will hear from the crowd "I got that on camera and you got that wrong!" Expect that to happen. How will you handle that is up to you.

Advice...check your ego at your automobile. After you put on the uniform, you are now representing NEGEOA. How you conduct yourself on and off the ball field wearing that uniform can and will determine your future as an umpire with NEGEOA.

Many umpires get themselves into trouble because they think they know the rules and cannot communicate citing them. Never assume you know a rule if you do not. Nothing more embarrassing to an umpire and an umpire association when an umpire makes a ruling on a play and the exact rule is different than what the umpire gave. It will take you several seasons to be polished in knowing the rules that NFHS requires on a high school baseball field.

DO NOT become best buddies with managers, coaches or players. This has enormous potential perceptual ramifications. Be pleasant and friendly but not overly familiar. First names are fine. Going out for a cocktail after the game with the manager or coach is not. These facts get around faster than you would believe.

ALWAYS enter and leave the field with your partner(s). You are a team and should always appear that way. Also, there is strength in numbers.

Prior to Your Assignment

Once you have received and accepted an assignment first: NEVER turn it back. Sometime life gets in the way and we understand that however, it is important you commit and stay committed. Second, contact your partner at a minimum of 48 hours prior to that assignment (call, text or email). This will give you an opportunity to decide who does the plate and who does the bases, decide what jersey you will wear (navy or light blue), what kind of vehicle you drive and where to park. Text, call or email.

Arrive on time and be 100% prepared. Nothing is more aggravating than a partner that arrives two minutes before game time dressed for the bases (don't be surprised if a veteran umpire makes you change clothes to do the plate). In general, one should arrive a minimum of 30 minutes before game time, preferably 45 minutes. Whether or not your position has been assigned, you should always be prepared to work the plate. You should be on the field for ground rules and ready to go at least 10 minutes before the scheduled start. Also, if you have never been to a particular venue, get there and walk the field to look for obstacles or places where the ball could get potentially get out.

Always have a pre-game with your partner in the parking lot (again, why it's important to get there early). This is an essential routine to establish. It is an absolute must when you are working with an unfamiliar partner. It gets you on the same page and helps to get the crew focused on the game ahead. Assuming that both umpires have arrived on time, if one partner has arrived late, have a brief conference between innings but, NEVER be late. Try to NEVER meet between innings.

Look sharp and dress the part. We've all heard that you are judged before you make your first call. This is VERY true. Spend some of your pay and replace those pants and shirts that have been around for the last ten years. And wash your uniform EVERY TIME it gets dirty and keep your shoes polished. Perception is reality. Remember, someone is always watching and must likely, have a video camera.

Always hustle repeat...always hustle. It distinguishes you from the poor, average or good umpire.

ALWAYS STAY FOCUSED on the game. If you want to count the spectators or admire the scenery, do it between innings. Your lack of focus is noticed, and sooner or later you will get a late start or miss a play. This lapse can come up and bite you when you least expect it and in a matter of seconds. We are all human except, when you're on a ball field (at least that's what the coaches and fans think). Don't give the opportunity to be critiqued in a negative light.

As the base umpire, NEVER leave the infield with runners on base while the ball is live. Your primary responsibility in the two-man system is the base runners. If you go out there, you will never get back in time, and your partner cannot handle multiple base runners. Never go out any farther than the edge of the infield grass.

Be humble. Never try to "run" the game or coach a player. It's not your job at any level and real players will resent it. You will also come off as an egotistical know-it-all, and no one wants to work with an egotistical know-it-all or have one working their game.

NEVER wear a watch, NEVER carry a phone on the field, NEVER carry a rule book on the field.

After The Game

Don't linger after the game. Walk off with your partner and leave as soon as the game is completed. Do not hang around for handshakes or chit-chat. You are there to work the game, not to socialize. When your assignment is over, leave. If possible, park next to each other and make sure you are in an area away from spectators, team buses, etc.

Always be careful what you say. You never know who is listening. Simply a word to the wise. Stories abound dealing with umpire stupidity in this area.

Mechanics

The mechanics of umpiring a baseball game and how well you do them is paramount. Every mechanic you do is scrutinized by the coaches, the players, and the parents or fans. NEGOA stresses that you learn and practice each mechanic and know what each mechanic is used for. We encourage you to take what you learn and practice in front of a mirror, in front of others or capture a video of yourself and critique what you have accomplished or what you need to work on. Again, never hesitate to ask a question. Videos of mechanics, as well as other events, are on the NEGOA website under the "Rules and Information" section.

Safe Mechanic

The safe mechanic is performed by first, getting set. Make sure you are in the right position where the players, both fielder and batter/runner see you. Once you are set, bring both arms up to chest level thumbs touching the chest, then extending both arms horizontal to the ground hands are flat. You will look like you are "flying". Once the players see your mechanic for the safe call then, bring both hands back in toward the chest and then lower your arms to your side. Most, but not all umpires will verbally say "safe". You can do so however be convincing.

The safe call is the same for both the plate umpire and the field umpire.

Out Mechanic

The "out" mechanic can be performed in a couple ways. The field umpire, should be set where both players can see him. Once the field umpire determines whether the batter/runner is either safe or out, it is time to give the mechanic. The safe mechanic was explained in the previous paragraph so, the out would obviously be the next call. The out mechanic can be as simple as extending your right arm out, appear that the umpire is flexing his right arm and his fist is closed at that time in a clench. It is the field umpire's option to verbally say "out" or not.

A different way to indicate and out is much more dramatic than the previous. Again, the field umpire must be in a set position, take one step forward with his left leg, throw his right arm across his body with fist clenched. At that time, the field umpire can verbally say "out". Again, dramatics can be very useful for this mechanic. It is often called "banging the runner out".

The plate umpire has that same mechanic for the "out". His positioning is paramount where the catcher and the runner are at the time of the play. We will illustrate where the plate umpire must be positioned for a respective call.

If a ball is batted and the ball is carried to the outfield and caught by a fielder, (left, center, or right fielder), the plate umpire will proceed around the catcher, remove his face mask with his left hand, and move toward the flight of the ball to view if it was caught. Once the ball is caught, the plate umpire will give the "out" mechanic and verbally say "that's a catch". The field umpire has no responsibility to verbally indicate if the ball has been caught in the outfield.

The mechanics that you will be learning today or reading about from the material on our website is based on a two-man rotation. That means there will be a plate umpire and a field umpire and you will do plenty of both.

During an inning as you are aware, each team are allowed three outs. The plate umpire may verbally say how many outs there are during an inning however, that is not paramount. Often-times you will find a veteran umpire will only give how many outs there are when asked. Usually, they won't say anything until asked. It is up to the team who is that bat or who is in the field to stay up with how many outs there are. It is not really the responsibility of either the plate or the field umpire.

Play

Putting the ball back in "play". As an umpire "play" is probably the most important words you will use during a game. The word "play" is used to start the game. Without that word "play", nothing can happen. The word "play" will be used by the plate umpire only because, he will put the ball back in play after every time the ball becomes "dead". For example: foul ball, hit batter, a balk, a home run, interference, obstruction, a ground rule double, time out by a coach or a player, catcher's obstruction. There are many more instances of when a ball becomes "dead" and you will become aware of these things during the course of each game that you call. Make it a habit to putting the ball back in "play".

The mechanic for putting the ball back in "play" is simple. After it is determined that the ball is indeed dead, the home plate umpire will put the ball back into "play". That is done by the home plate umpire acknowledging the pitcher is engaged with the pitching rubber, the batter is in the batter's box and the catcher is in his set position. Once these three things have occurred, the home plate umpire will point toward the field, toward the pitcher with his index finger on his right hand and verbally say "play". Some umpires say it loudly, some do not. We encourage you to say "play" loud enough so your partner can hear "play" as well as the players in the outfield also, the coaches appreciate it.

Putting the ball back in "play" may affect a pick-off attempt where, as the base umpire, had no idea if the ball was live or dead. Not a good situation. Also, a sharp pitcher will see you point the ball into play and immediately throw to first hoping to catch the runner napping. If you've made the ball live, there is no question that you have a valid play.

The Count

When you are the plate umpire, your job is determined what is a ball and what is the strike (study the rule book to see what the strike-zone looks like). After you make that determination, you must record your decision on an indicator. The indicator will be in your left hand it will have a dial that you must turn to indicate the ball or the strike, this way, you will not lose the count. During the "at bat", you will hold up your fingers to give the count. With your left hand you will display the ball count, with your right hand you will display the strikes. For example: one ball and two strikes will be shown by holding up one finger probably your index finger on your left hand to show one ball, and two fingers on your right hand to indicate two strikes. From time-to-time you must verbally say what the count is loud enough for your partner to hear it as well as the outfielders. How often you give the count verbally is up to you however, more often could be an advantage for you. A good field umpire will keep the count in his head in case the plate umpire forgets (can happen).

Fair/Foul

During an at bat, the batter potentially may hit the ball in foul territory or in fair territory. The determination of a fair or foul ball is most likely the responsibility of the plate umpire. The determination of a fair foul ball can be difficult at times. The fair/foul determination for the plate umpire will most likely be down the third base line. It is important that the plate umpire remove his mask using his left hand and then proceed down the third base fair/foul line to determine where the ball will indeed land, in fair or foul territory. If the ball is indeed a foul ball, the ball becomes "dead" immediately, the plate umpire will hold both hands in the air, mask in the left hand, to indicate the dead ball and then point with a mask in his hand, left of the fair foul line and should verbal indicate by saying "foul" loudly enough for all to hear. If the ball is indeed in fair territory but close to the fair foul line, the plate umpire will point with his right hand and his index finger toward fair territory and not say one word.

If the ball bounds past over first base, the fair/foul ball becomes the field umpire responsibility if he is in position "A". If the field umpire is in position "B" or "C," the fair/foul ball is now the responsibility of the plate umpire. If the ball is hit down right field line, it will be up to the field umpire to determine whether or not they need to go down first base fair/foul line to watch where the ball may land either in fair or foul territory. If the ball lands in foul territory, the field umpire will immediately extend both arms and hands in the air two indicate the ball is indeed "dead". The field umpire will immediately point with his right hand extending his right index finger toward foul territory indicating the ball is indeed foul. If the ball lands in fair territory, the field umpire will immediately point with his left hand with extending his index finger toward the fair territory. Either way no verbal instructions are needed.

Time Mechanic

During a baseball game, someone will request "time". That may happen quite often during the game. Most often "time" will be asked by the batter who is in the batter's box. It is up to the plate umpire to grant time or not. The coach may request time to visit a pitcher, make a change or to consult with an umpire, either plate or field. Requesting "time" can be done by anyone on the ball field including umpires. Make sure time has been called after any play has stopped.

The mechanic for "time", is by extending both arms up in the air with palms facing forward. The umpire must then verbally say "time". The umpire's partner must echo the word "time" immediately. Make this a habit and say the word "time" loudly. The plate umpire must then put the ball back in "play" because once "time" has been granted the ball is then dead.

Infield Fly Mechanic

The infield fly mechanic is by the plate umpire extending his right hand into the air and pointing with his index finger into the air (base umpire will mimic) and verbally indicating, "infield fly rule is in effect if the ball remains in fair territory". Most umpires will only say "infield fly rule is in effect". Keep it simple. If you notice in the first line was said, "if the ball remains in fair territory". Keep in mind, the ball must remain in fair territory for the infield fly rule to be in effect. If the ball is caught in foul territory, it's an out and only an out. The runners must tag up on the base that they are occupying before proceeding to the next bag.

The infield fly rule applies when there is a runner on first and second or first second and third with less than two outs. If the ball is hit by the batter within the confines of the infield where the umpires determined that the ball can be caught without any extra ordinary effort by any of the fielders, the batter is then called out. Keep in mind if the ball is not caught, the batter is still out however, the runners may advance on their own accord.

Timing Play Mechanic

The timing play mechanic is used when there are runners on any base with two outs. The plate umpire will signal to the field umpire extending his index finger and his middle finger on his right hand which will look like the plate umpire is showing the field umpire the number two. That shows there are indeed two outs. He will then take those two fingers and place them over the top of his left wrist where his watch would be then tapping it.

The reason it's called a "timing play", is because, there could be potentially a runner scoring before the third out has occurred. That run would score prior to the out being called.

Foul Ball Mechanic

If the batter fouls a baseball, the plate umpire must indicate that it is a dead ball and that is simply by holding both hands up where all can see them. He can verbally say "foul" and should do so loudly if he needs to "sell" his determination of the ball being "fair or foul". In most cases, it will be painfully obvious to everyone at the ballpark that it is indeed a foul ball so, nothing should be said however both arms should be up then the ball should be put back into "play".

Foul Tip Mechanic

The foul tip is much different than a foul ball. A foul tip is when the batter strikes the ball and the catcher catches the ball before the ball hits the ground.

The foul tip mechanic is where the plate umpire will proceed to come out from behind the catcher extend his left arm with his left hand flat add a 30° angle and swiping his right hand on top of his left hand up in the air. A foul tip is a live ball.

The foul tip is a strike and can end the batters at bat as a third strike. The plate umpire can indicate that it was indeed a catch by the catcher and the batter is out. For example, "that is a catch, the batter is out".

Ground Rule Double Mechanic

The ground rule double is when the ball is batted to the outfield (any direction but has to be fair) hits the ground and proceeds over the outfield fence.

The ground rule double mechanic is as simple by extending your right arm and your right hand in the air with two fingers pointing up.

Most likely, the ground rule double will be observed by the field umpire but never rule out that the plate umpire can see it as well. Sometimes that type of a play is hard to see and determine if the ball did indeed proceed over the fence. The field umpire may glance over his shoulder to see what the plate umpire may have seen. Remember, you are a team. It is just the two of you on the field and you must help each other when the time of help is needed.

Home Run Mechanic

A home run, as you are aware, is when a ball is hit in the air and proceed over the outfield fence. This can be in any area of the outfield however the ball must be determined that is indeed fair.

The home run mechanic can be given by either the field umpire or the plate umpire. The mechanic is pretty-simple by extending your right arm and right hand in the air. You can extend up four fingers to indicate the home run or you can circle your index finger indicating the home run. Either one will work just fine.

Positioning

The field umpire has three positions on the ballfield where he may determine and watch the events of a play. If no one is on base, the field umpire will be down first base line, past first base, facing home plate. This position is known as position "A".

Once the batter/runner reaches first base, the field umpire will proceed to position "B". Position "B" is between first base, and second base, and if one observes, will position himself just left of the picture circle between the picture circle and back towards second base. Make sure you do not block the view of a fielder or a runner (most likely at second base).

If the batter/runner hits the baseball and there is a potential play at first base, the field umpire will move from position "A", and pivot 45° and approximately 8 feet from the first base to watch if the batter/runner touches first base or if a play made and by the first baseman who fielded the ball to make an out. Other things to look for, watch to see if the first baseman is indeed in contact with first base prior to the batter/runner touching the base so you can determine whether it is an out or safe. You may also observe, if the first baseman's foot is in contact with a base. Some of these plays can potentially be extremely close and it will be up to the field umpire to make that determination in a quick and timely manner. In some instance the field umpire may need help so, it will be up to the plate umpire to remove his mask with his left hand and proceed down first baseline to watch the play at first just in case the field umpire will need help in determining what has happened.

If there are other runners on base at the time of this play, the plate umpire will remain at home and most likely will be headed down third base line in case of a play third base.

Before the batter/runner reaches first base, the field umpire will hustle from position "A", toward position "B" all the while watching the batter/runner touch first base if the runner is headed toward second base.

If the batter/runner reaches second base, the field umpire will then proceed to position "C". Position "C" is between second base and third base, just right all the pitcher's circle, and between the pitcher's circle and second base.

If the next batter/runner gets to first base and moves the runner at second base to third base, the field umpire will proceed back to position "B". That happens only if there are runners on first and third base.

Between innings, the plate umpire will remove his mask with his left hand place the mask under his left armpit and proceed about 15 feet down the fair/foul line. It is best for the plate umpire to occupy the fair/file line opposite of the team that is coming to bed. The field umpire will proceed and position himself in right field approximately halfway between first base and second base, 5 to 10 feet into the grass.

Timing

While learning to become an umpire, you will find that one of the most important aspects of umpiring is “timing”. Timing is when you determine what will happen during and after a play or what the outcome of the play could be.

During a baseball game, the umpires, both plate and field, will witness several plays. Some of these may be routine, some may be a little more interesting. The timing of your decision can either make you a hero or zero. What I mean is there are so many things that could happen on every play. For example: a batter/runner hits a ball toward the third baseman, the third baseman fields the ball and throws the ball toward first base. This looks like it could be a routine play, the first baseman catches the ball and the field umpire immediately call the runner out however, the first baseman drops the ball. The umpire has already made his call however, it was much too quickly.

You will hear many times during the course of learning to be an umpire these three things “ pause, read, and react”

These are probably the most fundamental elements of successful umpiring. Good timing is essential. From the set position, observe the ball, pause to read the situation, see the developing action and react in the appropriate manner. The few extra moments can be the difference between proper reaction and running off in the wrong direction. Take advantage of that extra second before calling a strike. Wait and see if that throw pops out of the glove. You’ll be a better umpire, have fewer problems and will avoid some of those embarrassing situations, such as making an out call and then seeing the ball rolling away on the ground. Umpiring baseball is a game of “what ifs”. Stay ahead of the “what ifs” and you will be a great umpire.

Covering Third

If there is a runner on first base with less than two outs, the plate umpire will signal to the field umpire by pointing with his right arm and his right-hand index finger toward third base. That mechanic communicates with the field umpire that the plate umpire will cover third base if the runner advances towards third. This will take the pressure off of the field umpire to get to third base to watch either a tag or the force.

If that happens, the plate umpire will verbally communicate to the field umpire “I will cover third if he comes”.

Dropped Third Strike

A “dropped third strike” may happen several times during a game. A “dropped third strike” occurs when there are two strikes on a batter, a pitch is thrown through the strike zone, received or caught by the catcher and then dropped. The ball could be in the strike zone, which would be a strike, or the batter may swing at the ball, the ball could bounce in front of home plate and intern the batter swings at the pitch. Verbally say or indicate “strike”, then give the safe mechanic. No other words should be said.

The mechanic for a “dropped third strike” is performed by the plate umpire only and is as follows. Once the plate umpire determines that it is indeed a “dropped third strike”, he will stand and give the safe call to indicate it is a “dropped third strike”. The field umpire may help in this decision by holding a fist with his right hand clenched to the right side of his body indicating that it was a “dropped third strike”. The batter/runner may then hustle down first baseline and the catcher must attempt to throw the batter/runner out. Field umpire, make sure you get in the right position.

Other Important Things to Know...

The Plate Umpire - get your butt out from behind the dish. Unless a play at the plate is imminent or a time play is possible, there is nothing for you to do by staying behind home plate. This means on EVERY PLAY. Get down the first base line on a grounder, down towards third on a 1st to 3rd situation or follow the ball if hit into the outfield. Do you think that players and coaches don’t notice that you’re lazy? Nothing makes you look worse than trying to make a call at third from 5 feet in front of the plate because you didn’t think the situation would allow the runner from first to advance. If the circumstances allow, get down the base line and help your partner out with half of a run-down in progress.

NEVER turn your head away from the field when calling balls and strikes. Always point your strikes toward first base. This may be difficult to overcome, but sooner or later you will miss something. Slick strike-three mechanics may look brilliant, but there is no reason to turn your head or turn your back toward the field.

When getting ready to call a series of balls and strikes, it is best for the plate umpire to get in a set position. That’s a position entails squatting placing both hands on each knee where the arms are locked and your head is just left of the catchers helmet if a right-handed batter and right of the catcher if it’s a left-handed batter. Slow down on making your strike calls or balls. The strike call should be, what do you determine if it is indeed a “strike”, stand up out of your set position point toward first base and verbally say “strike”. You can be as loud as

you want and as dramatic as you want. A different way to call a strike is to stand up, hold your right arm up with your right fist clenched and move your right arm like you have a hammer in your hand and you would strike something like you would with a hammer. Again, you can say strike. Make sure you slow down on your decision before making one.

Don't say "strike three you're out", or "ball four-take your base" or point the batter-runner down to first. "strike three" and "ball" will do. A dropped third strike may not be an out. The batter should know the count and generally knows the location of first base. Also, after ball four, pointing the runner to first can easily be interpreted as a called strike, don't do it!

There are several ways to call a "ball". If it is obvious to everyone on the ballpark that the pitch is definitely a "ball", say nothing. If the pitch is in the vicinity of the strike zone, you should verbally say "ball" and let everyone know it is a "ball". There are many umpires who will even say where they think the location of that ball is. For example: "ball...outside". This is not necessary however, it is done.

Appeal to the base umpire on a check swing by pointing with your left hand. Ask him "Did he go?" or "Steve, did he go?" This is another tough one to overcome. Being right-handed, it took me quite a while to break the habit, but once I did, I never went back to the right hand. Can easily be interpreted as a called strike. If you are calling a "strike" on a check swing, point to the batter's head with your left hand and verbally say, "yes he did".

Work in the slot and keep your chin level with the top of the catcher's head. The plate umpire should see the ball all the way into the catcher's glove. If you are directly behind the catcher or your head is at his head level, there is NO WAY you can see the ball into the glove. Most umpires that work this way cannot properly observe the low pitch and hence many pitches that are far below the strike zone are called strikes. Usually indicates a poor or untrained umpire. Or both.

Keep your head motionless. You must "lock in" your head position. Attempting to accurately call balls and strikes while your head, and hence the strike zone, is moving is virtually impossible. Coaches and players DO notice this. You can also be exposing yourself to being hit in an unprotected area. This can also be a difficult bad habit to break but it must be corrected.

Stop constantly looking at your ball/strike indicator. This also looks bad, is not necessary and makes you look like your memory span is less than 15 seconds.

Don't hold your mask by the strap, and ALWAYS remove it with your left hand. Walking around while your mask swings from the strap is another bad and silly-looking habit that some umpires have. Hold your mask firmly by the lower left side. You need your right hand to make calls, and switching hands is unnecessary and doesn't look good. And practice taking off your mask without pulling your cap off with it. Make certain that your cap is not to lose or your mask is not too tight.

NEVER make a call or a decision on the run. Always stop moving before making ANY call. You must have a fixed reference point in order to properly call a play. Remember, angle is MUCH more important than distance. Get the proper angle, get as close as you reasonably can and STOP! Get set and make the right call.

A foul ball is never a foul-tip and a foul tip is never a foul ball. A foul ball is dead, a foul tip is live. Repeat after me...a foul ball is dead, a foul-tip is live, a foul ball is dead, a foul-tip is live...

Don't get talked into asking for help on your call after it has been made. There are times when you may want to ask your partners' take on a call after the fact, but only on rare occasions....and never let it appear that one side talked you into it. You are asking for WW III from the perspective of one side or the other. If you are unsure of a tag or touch due to the limitations of the two-man system, ask BEFORE you make the call. If there is a need to confer with your partner, do so in private.

Never put your hands in your pockets. Also, don't stand there with your arms crossed. Both are examples of bad body language. Get a pair of gloves if your hands are cold and get into a set position. And don't sit down or lean against the backstop or fence.

The primary goal is to GET THE CALL RIGHT! Even if it means overruling yourself.

The Base Umpire - As the base umpire with no one on base, only leave the infield on fair/foul calls down the first base line or possible trouble balls from the right fielder towards the foul line. Everything else is the plate umpires' responsibility. If the batter-runner continues to second, you will in no way be able to get back into position and the plate umpire may not notice that you can't cover the play, since he should be watching the ball, not you. Come into the infield, pivot and glance over at the touch at first while following the ball. You MUST watch the batter/runner touch first base. "What if" he misses the bag and heads to second and it's appealed and you didn't see it? Egg on your face! "What if" a batter hits a home-run and you did not see him touch second and that gets appealed? If you are leaving the infield, let your partner know by saying "I'm going" or "I'm going out", yell that so he hears you.

Stop making out calls on balls hit to left or center field with no one on base. It's the plate umpires' call. And you never want an even number of umpires making a call.

Use, give and respond to signals with your partner. Not just in an infield fly situation. It is very important that you and your partner are on the same page, and this is a reminder of the current game situation for the crew. No one is above this. The signals should be repeated each time the situation changes, even if just one runner replaces another on a base. They are not required when there are no runners on base. Learn what a time play is, when it applies and the appropriate signal. Also, keep the count in your head, this will help you in staying sharp throughout the game and could help your plate umpire partner in case he happens to forget the count...could happen (what if).

Do not come in and talk to the plate umpire between every half-inning. Get out to short right field where you belong. If you have something to discuss relevant to the game, fine, but we can shoot the breeze after the game. Never come in after a controversial call has been made (especially, to explain it) unless you need medical assistance. The reason the base umpire belongs out in short right field is the fact that only the right fielder will come anywhere near him between innings.

Watch EVERY touch of the bases by the runners. This means EVERY touch of 1st and 2nd as the base umpire and EVERY touch of 3rd and home as the plate umpire if, at all possible. Umpires asked for an appeal on a runner leaving early, and they have no clue. Missed bases and runners leaving early do happen and you must see it. Never call a runner out unless you are SURE a base was missed or he left early. Never call anything you have not seen.

Don't tell the defense "Ball's in" while the pitcher is warming up. Tell the pitcher he has one or two more warm-ups left or tell the catcher to get it down to second. None of this is your responsibility.

Don't call "time" until the base runners touch up. The play is not over until the runners touch their respective bases on an award. Anything could happen. Don't call "time" every time a defensive player asks for it. It's not needed, makes a long game longer and you are taking a potential advantage away from the offense. A short-stop should be able to throw the ball back to the pitcher from the infield dirt area. Never call "time" to get yourself back into position. I've seen umpires that call "time" in every instance that they have to return from the third base area or other positions on the infield. Again, the game is held up for no good reason. The ball could get loose. You've got a partner.

Don't hold onto the game ball at the mound and wait for the pitcher to arrive. It's not your job and it looks silly. Toss the ball to the mound and either get out to short right field or down the base line. Also, staying there will make you a target for disgruntled players as they take the field.

Don't wear a watch or carry a phone. Keep it in your pocket if there is no valid reason for you to have one on your person at all.

How to Climb the Ladder

Climbing the ladder of your umpire career is up to you. Do you want work varsity games? Do you want to call playoffs? Do you want to advance to college baseball? Pro ball perhaps? How well will you study and learn the rules? How will you learn to handle situations? How good and convincing are your mechanics? Finally, will you accept every assignment you are given and ask for more? Keep in mind, the high school season is roughly 12 weeks long. You will find it amazing how quickly the season goes especially if you work a lot. Always hustle, always hustle, you never know who is watching you. From time to time an NEGOA board member may visit a game that you were calling to critique you or a GHSA official make critique you to determine if you are playoff quality umpire. Always ask questions. When you first start umpiring your head will be spinning with everything that has been thrown at you it's up to you how will you respond to what we are teaching you. You will not receive this quality of umpire instructions anywhere...Good luck!