

4 UMPIRE MECHANICS - THE BASICS



Fast Pitch and Slo-Pitch

Four umpire Mechanics provides an umpire at every base. An umpire chases most fly balls and the remaining umpires revert to three umpire mechanics. This system creates movement for all umpires and requires every umpire to be fully aware of his/her responsibilities and requires all umpires to be on the same page.

Definitions

1. **Holding Zone** – The holding zone is a position taken by the plate umpire 30 feet up the third base line and 12-15 feet off the line in foul territory.
2. **Filling** -Term used when an umpire moves to a position to fill for an umpire who is chasing a fly ball.
3. **Backfill**-Term used when the base umpire goes counter clockwise to fill for the chasing umpire or when he returns to his former position after filling for a chasing umpire.
4. **Third base line extended** – Umpire position at second base with no runners on base, any time a runner is at first base, or any time a runner is at third base only. Position is 18-21 feet on the first base side of second base and on a line extended to third base.
5. **First base extended** – Umpire position at second base whenever there is a runner at second base and no runner at first base. Position is 18-21 feet on the shortstop side of second base on a line extended through the base to first base.
6. **Pre start** – Position of umpires prior to every pitch. Base umpires are 18-21 feet down third base line and first base line. The second base umpire is 18-21 feet on the third base line extended or the first base line extended. See #3 and #4 for situations when each extension is used.

Basic Rules for Four (4) Umpire Coverage

1. Once an umpire has gone to the outfield, the remaining umpires revert to three umpire mechanics.
2. One of the three remaining umpires must fill for the umpire who has chased the fly ball.
3. Know before the pitch where you fill when an umpire chases.
4. Once an umpire turns his back on the infield and goes out to the outfield he remains out until the play is complete.
5. Rotation of umpires is almost always clockwise.
6. Always know your fly ball and tag up responsibilities before the pitch.
7. Plate umpire has no fly ball responsibilities if an umpire goes out.
8. Plate umpire does not call fair/foul, catch or no catch if an umpire goes out.

Fly Ball Coverage

1. U2 covers all fly balls from the left fielder to the right fielder.
2. U1 takes all balls from the right fielder to the out of play line/ fence.
3. U3 takes all balls from the left fielder to the out of play line/fence.
4. Base umpires key off U2 on balls hit at their respective fielder. Give way to U2 on hit balls you are not sure of.

The following are general responsibilities for each umpire on fly ball coverage. These situations are not all-inclusive, but will be a quick check list to help you understand the required rotations on fly ball coverage. When you have an infield hit or a clean hit with no rotation all umpires move to the best position to make the call or, if you are not responsible for the call you should

move to the best position for a secondary call should the play continue to your base. Complete coverage for every specific play follows the guidelines.

Plate Umpire (PU)

- 1) **Use of the Holding Zone** - PU is required to cover 3rd base whenever U3 covers second or chases a fly ball. This creates a lot of pressure on the plate umpire particularly when you have several runners on base. Using the holding zone puts the PU in a good position to move into the diamond for calls at 3rd base or return to home plate for a call. Whenever possible commit to third base so U1 can commit to home plate. The following guidelines give you a look at using the holding zone to your advantage.
 - a) **R1 with fly ball that U2 or U3 chases.** Go to the holding zone and immediately fill at third base. Move down the line in foul territory but end up 10-12 feet from third base in fair territory. Stay at third base because U1 covers home plate.
 - b) **R2 with fly ball that U2 or U3 chases and the ball is caught:** Holding zone not necessary on this play. Commit and fill at third base. No tag responsibility.
 - i) **Ball not caught.** Be prepared to backfill to home plate for call. Decide if there is going to be a play on R3 at home. If R3 will score easily watch him/her touch home and fill to third base.
 - c) **Bases loaded or runners at second and third with fly ball that U2 or U3 chases:**
 - i) Move to holding zone.
 - ii) On a clean hit watch runner from third touch home and commit to third base.
 - iii) On a caught fly ball PU is responsible for tag up at third. Remain in holding zone and be prepared to make a call at home plate or third base but if no chance for a play back fill to home plate. Once you commit to home plate allow U3 to carry back runner(s) into third base.
- 2) **U1 goes out.**
 - (a) **No runners on base or R1:** Follow the batter runner to first and be responsible for the first play at first base on the batter runner. Fill to home plate by moving to home plate in foul territory and setup for call at plate. This is the only time the PU backfills at first base.

U1 (First Base Umpire)

- 1) **Filling:** The first base umpire can operate in foul territory on all hit balls outside the diamond.
 - a) Working outside and moving down the line allows U1 to key off the PU to determine where he/she needs to be.
 - b) U1 cannot over react and is responsible for the batter runner touching first base.
 - c) As you move down the line stay in a first base holding position approximately 10-12 feet in front of first base and close to the first base line. If required you can step into fair territory on a throw back to first base.
 - d) Key on the PU and the ball to see if you continue home for a call at the plate. Stay in foul territory when moving to home plate.
 - e) Pick up the ball and get to either the third base extended plate position or the first base plate extension.
 - f) Always strive to reach home plate even if you have no call.
- 2) **Back filling:** The only time U1 will back fill is situations with runners at second base and third base or base loaded. The following criteria determines if you backfill at second base:
 - PU stays at or moves back to home plate.
 - U3 or U2 carries a runner into third base because the PU stayed home

- R1 or the batter runner is still alive at first or second base.
- a) After the BR moves to first base, the first base umpire should be 10-12 feet ahead of first base.
- b) Once you determine the PU has stayed home, move parallel across the diamond checking to your left. If there is no umpire at second you are responsible for a runner leaving first base going into second base or a runner returning to first base.

U2 (Second base Umpire)

- 1) U2 chases most fly balls because of the wide coverage (from the left fielder to the right fielder).
- 2) **Filling Responsibilities**
 - a) **No runners and U1 chases a fly ball:**
PU takes initial call at first base but once the PU releases the runner to return home U2 must pick up the batter runner and backfill to second base.
 - b) **R1 and U1 chases a fly ball:**
Move to the middle of the diamond. Be responsible for R1 and the batter runner into second base and back into first base when the plate umpire returns to home plate.
 - c) **Runners at first and second bases or bases loaded and U1 chases a fly ball:** Be responsible for tag up at first and second bases. Must take R1 and the batter runner into second base and all calls back into first base.
- 3) **Backfilling responsibilities**
 - a) **No runners and U3 chases a fly ball:**
Just look after 2nd base and first base if PU goes to third base after trailing runner to first.
 - b) **R1 or several runners and U3 chases a fly ball:**
The plate umpire has the lead runner past second base. If the plate umpire stays home U2 must backfill for calls at third base for runners after the lead runner.
With several runners it is important you check to your left to see if the plate umpire has committed to third base. He may be in the holding zone and may call you off if you are moving to third base with a runner. Calling you off indicates he is prepared to take the call if necessary.

U3 (Third Base Umpire)

- 1) **Filling:** U3 must be very active in this system. When U2 chases U3 always fills at second base even with runners at second base and third base. You cannot hesitate and must commit to second even with runners from second base coming at you.
- 2) **Backfilling:**
 - a) When U2 chases a fly ball, U3 goes to second base but U3 may backfill at third base when we have several runners and the PU commits to home plate.
 - b) The PU has the lead runner from third base or second base with no runner at third base and U3 takes any subsequent runner into third base.

We now know and understand that the plate umpire is responsible for the lead runner in these situations, but U3 must be able to cover 3rd base when something goes wrong. All this requires is that U3 glances to the left to ensure that PU has the call at 3rd base. If no one is there, then U3 must back-fill and make the call on the play.

Communication is an important aspect in the ISF 4 Umpire system. Umpires need to make their partners aware they are filling or backfilling. If each umpire knows his/her responsibilities before every pitch, the 4 Umpire Mechanics will bring some energy into your officiating.