

THREE UMPIRE MECHANICS – THE BASICS



Fast Pitch and Slo-Pitch

The Softball Canada Umpire's Program is adopting the International Softball Federation Three Umpire Mechanics System. The ISF system is the same for FP and SP. The major difference is the ISF system covers most fly balls to the out field. In our SP game it will continue to be an option to chase fly balls but it is suggested umpires make an effort to chase fly balls, when there appears to be a difficult catch, when the ball is hit near a fence, when two players converge on the ball or when it is hit down a line. This system provides complete coverage on most everything that can occur in a FP or SP Softball game.

Definitions

1. Pre start (Standard)

Pre start is the standard position of umpires with no runners on base or a runner at third base only.

2. Third base extended (Rotated)

This is a position at second base 18-21 feet from second base on a line extending to third base. This is the position U3 takes with a runner at first base only.

3. Counter rotated¹

Counter rotated is the basic position prior to any pitch when the third base umpire is stationed down the line at third base and the first base umpire is in a position behind the second baseman. Situations include any situation with more than one runner on or a Runner at 2nd base only.

4. Holding Zone

Holding Zone is a position halfway down the third base line from home plate and approximately 10-12 feet from the line in foul territory.

Basic Rules for Three (3) Umpire Coverage

1. Rotation of umpires is almost always clockwise.
2. Once an umpire turns his back on the infield and goes out to the outfield he remains out until the play is complete.
3. Once an umpire has gone to the outfield, the remaining umpires revert to two umpire mechanics.
4. Once the umpires start the basic position from a counter rotated position there shall be no rotation.

Umpire Responsibilities

Each Umpire needs to know what responsibilities he/she has prior to the ball being hit. Every pitch he/she must know the following:

1. What is my fly ball responsibility?
2. Where do I go if the other base umpire chases a fly ball?
3. Where do I go on balls hit to the infield?
4. Where do I go on clean base hits or balls hit to the outfield that nobody chases?
5. What are my tag-up responsibilities?
6. What are my lead-off responsibilities?
7. Do I have a check swing responsibility?

Pre start

1. The base umpires are stationed outside the base lines at first and third base, 18-21 feet behind first base and third base.
2. The plate umpire is responsible for fair/foul balls in all situations unless the base umpire turns his/her back to the infield and chases a fly ball hit to the out field. Once the base umpire chases a fly ball he/she is responsible for Fair/foul balls.
3. The field is divided down the middle for fly ball coverage. U1 takes all fly balls from center field to the right field out of play line/fence and U3 takes all fly balls from center field to the left field out of play line/fence.
4. U1 keys off U3 for center field fly balls.

The following gives some basic responsibilities for each umpire. The list is not all inclusive but understanding these situations should help you with responsibilities for each position in three umpire mechanics.

U1 (First base umpire)

1. Pre start

- a. On balls hit inside the diamond move to fair territory to approximately a 22 degree angle to 1st base to make calls at your base. (Maintain the 18-21 foot distance)

¹ Term used in ASA and NCAA Umpire manuals

- b. With no runners on base and a bunted ball or a ball swung at and hit and slowly rolling in the infield close to the plate or base line, move to a position between the coach's box and even with the leading edge of first base (90 degrees) in foul territory to make the call. Maintain at least 15 feet from the base.
 - c. Go out instantly on fly balls when the fielder: moves toward your line, the ball is hit over your head, the ball is hit close to your line or in foul territory.
- 2. Pre start**
- a. If U3 goes out, rotate inside the diamond to cover second base. (two umpire mechanics)
 - b. Cut inside the diamond approximately 12 feet from first base and run parallel with the batter runner to second base.
 - c. Be in position to slide back to first base if the batter runner returns to first base.
 - d. With no runners on base take the batter runner all the way into third base.
 - e. If a runner is at third base only take the batter runner into second base.
- 3. Counter rotated**
- a. Fly ball coverage expands. Take all fly balls from the left fielder to the right fielder.
- 4. Counter rotated**
- a. Revert to 2 umpire mechanics when U3 goes out on a fly ball.
 - b. Cover R1 and the BR into 2nd base.

U3 (Third Base Umpire)

- 1. Pre Start (Standard Position)**
- a. On balls hit inside the diamond move toward second base to get position inside the diamond and position for a call at second base on the runner coming from first base.
 - b. If U1 goes out on a fly ball move across the diamond to a position 10-12 feet from second base to pick up the batter runner when he/she releases from first base.
 - c. R3 only- and U1 goes out, move across the diamond through the pitcher's circle to pick up the batter runner.
- 2. Pre Start**
- a. Go out instantly on fly balls when the fielder moves toward your line, the ball is hit over your head, the ball is hit close to your line or in foul territory.
 - b. Generally cover any ball hit to the center fielder. U1 will key off U3.
- 3. Counter rotated**
- a. Fly ball coverage shrinks. Cover all fly balls from the left fielder to the out of play line/fence.
- 4. Counter rotated**
- a. If U1 chases revert to two umpire mechanics. Responsible for R1, BR and R2 back into 2nd base.
 - b. After the lead runner responsible for runners into third base.
- 5. Third base extended**
- a. Fly ball coverage expands. Take all fly balls from the left fielder to the right fielder.
 - b. If U1 chases responsible for R1 and BR into 2nd base and BR into third base

PU (Plate Umpire)

- 1. Pre start (Standard position)**
- a. Has responsibility for fair/foul call on balls hit inside the diamond and when no umpire turns his back on the play.
 - b. The PU has no fly ball responsibilities when a base umpire goes out.
- 2. Pre start**
- a. No runners on base-If U1 goes out must take the BR to first base and the throw back into first base.
 - b. Runner at third base only-must take the tag if U1 goes out.
 - c. No runners on -If U3 goes out use holding zone but your responsibility is home plate calls. Help U1 with third base if required.
 - d. Runner at third -If U3 goes out responsible for the R3 at third base or home plate including the tag up of R3.
- 3. Third base Extended or Counter rotated**
- a. Covers fair/foul down line where no umpire is stationed.
 - b. Covers fly balls from the fielder to the out of play line on the side of the field no umpire is stationed.
- 4. Third base extended or counter rotated**
- a. Responsible for first calls into third base and lead runner into home plate.
 - b. Multi runners and U3 chases PU has lead runner tag up.
 - c. Use the holding zone and decide where the call will be necessary.
 - i. 3rd base call is made inside the diamond.

- ii. Home plate calls are made outside the diamond unless the ball gets away while stationed at third base and you must return to the plate for a call.

Inside or outside the Diamond?

Generally an umpire should come inside the diamond when the ball is outside and stay outside when the ball is inside. There are situations when it is advantageous for an umpire to stay on the outside even with the ball in the outfield. The following guidelines offer some insight to staying outside the diamond with the ball outside.

1. When an umpire chases the other base umpire must come inside the diamond.
2. Third base extended
 - a. U1 can stay outside if U3 does not chase a fly ball.
 - b. U1 should move down the line staying between the coaching box and the base.
 - i. Watch the runner touch first and then move 10-12 feet further in the front of the base near the line
 - ii. This position allows U1 to step into fair territory to make a call on a runner back into first or allows U1 to get to home plate for a potential call.
3. Counter rotated
 - a. Balls hit to right field and U1 does not chase U3 can stay outside the diamond.
 - i. If a play comes to third base move into fair territory 10-12 feet on the outfield side of third base.
 - ii. Maintain the leading edge of the base with a 90 degree angle with the path of the runner.
 - b. Any ball hit to the outfield with runners at second base and first base U3 can move up to the base in foul territory.
 - i. Access the chance of a play on the first runner.
 - ii. If no play then stay outside watching the runner touches the base, pick up the ball and move to a position for a call on the remaining runners.
 1. Balls from left field move inside for the call
 2. Balls from center field or right field you can stay outside.
 3. Throw goes to home plate remain outside for a potential secondary call.

Credits to go at front of L4 Manual
ASA Umpire Manual
NCAA Umpire Manual
ISF instruction material
Simplified 4 Umpire System