

Single Umpire Game Management Guidebook

Position – Movement – Focus



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For the Ohio High School Athletic Association



Working a Single Umpire “Crew”

For many reasons, more and more baseball games are being scheduled with only a single umpire assigned. When you are faced with this situation, it helps to look at the brighter side – This should be the smoothest pre-game conference you will ever have!

The most important takeaway from that “conference” should be, “If I try to view everything, I’ll end up seeing nothing!” Recognizing this fact will help you to establish priorities that allow you to attain the best position and focus for the most significant and likely calls. Fortunately, the nature of the game establishes those priorities for us.

Every play sequence begins with the pitcher possessing the ball. If his actions are legal, the subsequent events determine the priority of your calls. In the simplest terms, almost all plays require judgements in this order:

“The Pitch”

Legal or Illegal? ----- Swing or No Swing? ----- Ball or Strike?

“The Batted Ball”

Fair or Foul? ----- Catch or No Catch? ----- Live ball or Dead ball?

“Plays on the Runners”

Safe or Out? ----- Bases Properly Touched?

Your initial position, subsequent movements, and focus should reflect those priorities and give you the best chance of being correct on the most important calls. Recommended techniques and rationale for each follows.

The Pitch

One school of thought endorses the idea of a single umpire working from a position just behind the pitcher, making him centrally located to view all potential play sites. The fact is that most games have few calls in the field where proximity to the play becomes crucial, compared to 150 or more decisions made on pitches. Taking your standard plate position will give you the best possible look for 98% of your decisions that day.

Additionally, the plate position affords these other advantages:

- Plate position provides the only perspective for your highest priority batted ball decision – Fair or foul.
- All defensive and offensive players begin in your field of vision.
- Positioning behind the mound affords a view of only the pitcher, catcher, and batter, with no chance of observing the actions of fielders and runners.
- As live ball action develops, the view of all players allows anticipation of the most likely plays, enabling adjustment in focus and position to get the best look possible.
- As the lone game official, all aspects of game management are yours. At the plate, your proximity allows you to manage substitutions and communicate with the coaches professionally.
- Plate position gives you proximity for the most important live ball decisions; runners scoring and plays at the plate.

The administration of unbatted pitch situations is the same, regardless of your crew configuration. You will apply standard rules and mechanics for ball or strike, swing or no swing, pitch striking the batter, and obstruction or interference. The lone exception is - of course - going for help on a check swing. The option of going to the 3rd or 1st base coach for help is not highly recommended.

The Batted Ball

When the action of the batter puts the ball in play, following the priority of calls dictates your focus and your movement within the Working Area, shown in the diagram below. Generally, you should keep within this area while locating your best angles to view potential plays. This allows you to get a proper view of the imminent play without compromising your ability to cover subsequent action. (Situations that dictate movement outside the working area are also addressed.)

Because the entire decision-making process rests with you, it is critical that your focus and initial movement be correct. Follow the same basics that always apply to live ball coverage.

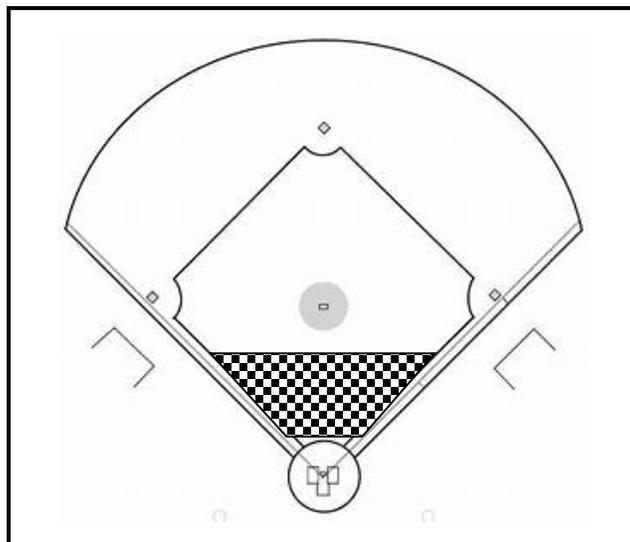
- **Locate the ball!**
 - When a ball is batted, your first reaction is controlled movement in the direction of the ball. This will set you up for your top priorities – Fair / Foul & Catch /No catch.
- **Pause!**
 - Come to a stop to view a potential call.
- **Read & react!**
 - Make your call if appropriate. (Fair or Foul? ---- Catch or No catch?)
- If the play remains active (Infield grounders / Uncaught flies / Catch, tag, & advance plays)
 - Focus on the ball as you move in the working box to view your next play.
 - Prioritize angle over distance.
 - Always come set to view the ensuing call.
 - Remain aware of potential subsequent action.

Almost all failures of a single umpire to properly cover a play result from:

- Committing too soon to a path that takes you away from the play.
- Over-hustling to close on a primary play, taking you too far from potential ensuing plays.
- Remaining in the plate area with no adjustments to viewing angle or distance.

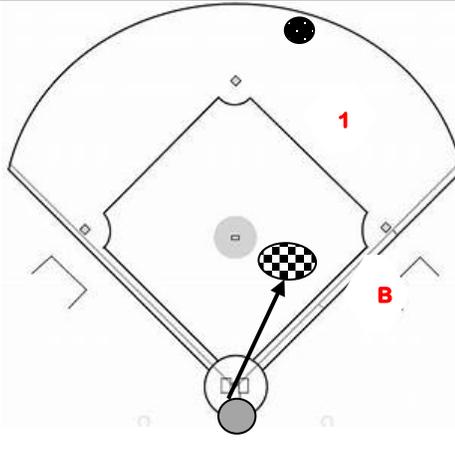
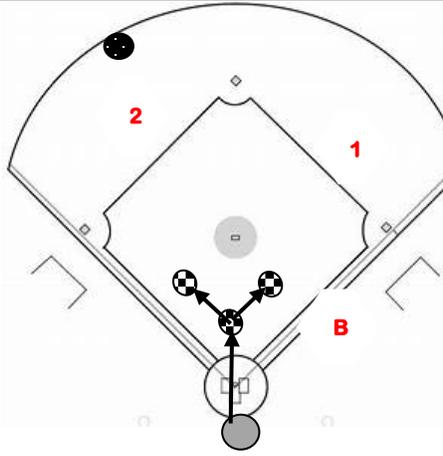
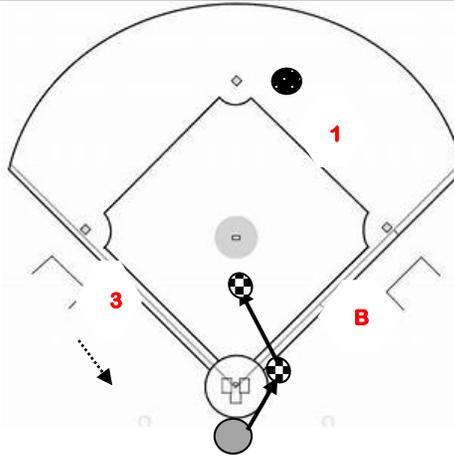
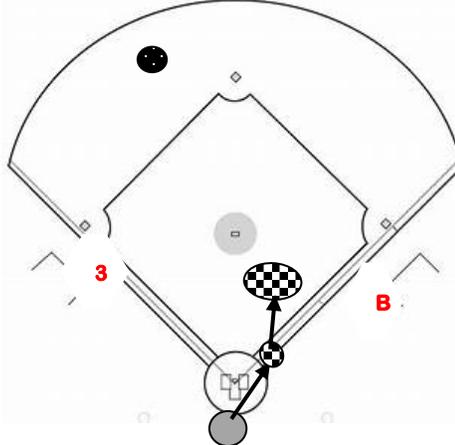
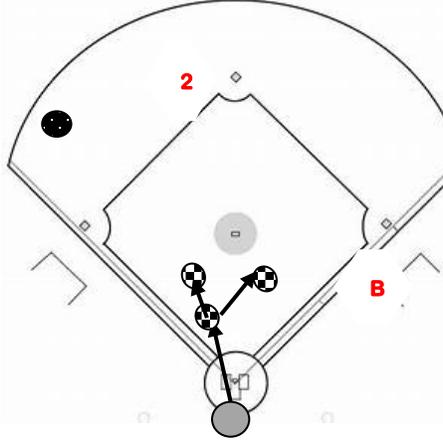
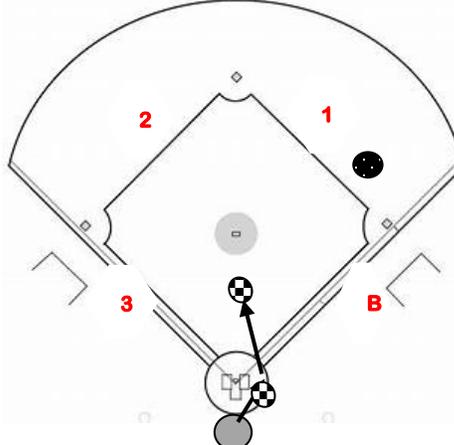
Basic Working Area

When moving out from the plate area to cover live ball action, most of your positioning should be in the shaded area in the diagram below. Your keys that dictate distance and direction of your movement are described in the following sections. Situations that take you out of the basic area are also covered.



Routine Ground ball Coverage

Key
 ● = Start Position ⚬ = Set to View ● = Ground ball Fielded ⊖ = Fly Ball Fielded
 B/1/2/3 = Runners (location at time of pitch)

| | | |
|---|--|---|
|  |  |  |
| <p><u>(A) No Runners or R on 1st</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear catcher and advance into Working Area. • Read fielder. • Set to view when he commits. | <p><u>(B) Runners on 2nd or 1st/2nd</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear catcher and advance into Working Area center. • Read fielder – If he commits to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3rd – Move left and set. • 2nd or 1st – Move right and set. | <p><u>(C) Runners on 1st /3rd or 2nd/3rd</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear catcher, moving toward Intersection of dirt circle and foul line. • Read fielder – If he commits to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Home – Set to view play. • 3rd/ 2nd/1st - Move toward the mound and set to view on release of the throw. • If relay is made, pivot to view. |
|  |  |  |
| <p><u>(D) Runners on 3rd only</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear catcher, moving toward edge of dirt circle and foul line. • Read fielder – If he commits to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Home – Set to view play. • 3rd/1st - Move toward the mound and set to view on release of the throw. | <p><u>(E) Runners on 2nd only</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear catcher and advance into left-center of Working Area. • Read fielder – If he commits to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3rd/2nd – Move left and set. • 1st – Move right and set to view. • Be aware of 2nd play on R2 | <p><u>(F) Bases Loaded</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear catcher, moving toward intersection of dirt circle and foul line. • Read fielder – If he commits to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Home – Set to view play. • 3rd/ 2nd/1st - Move toward the mound and set to view on release of the throw. • If relay is made, pivot to view. |

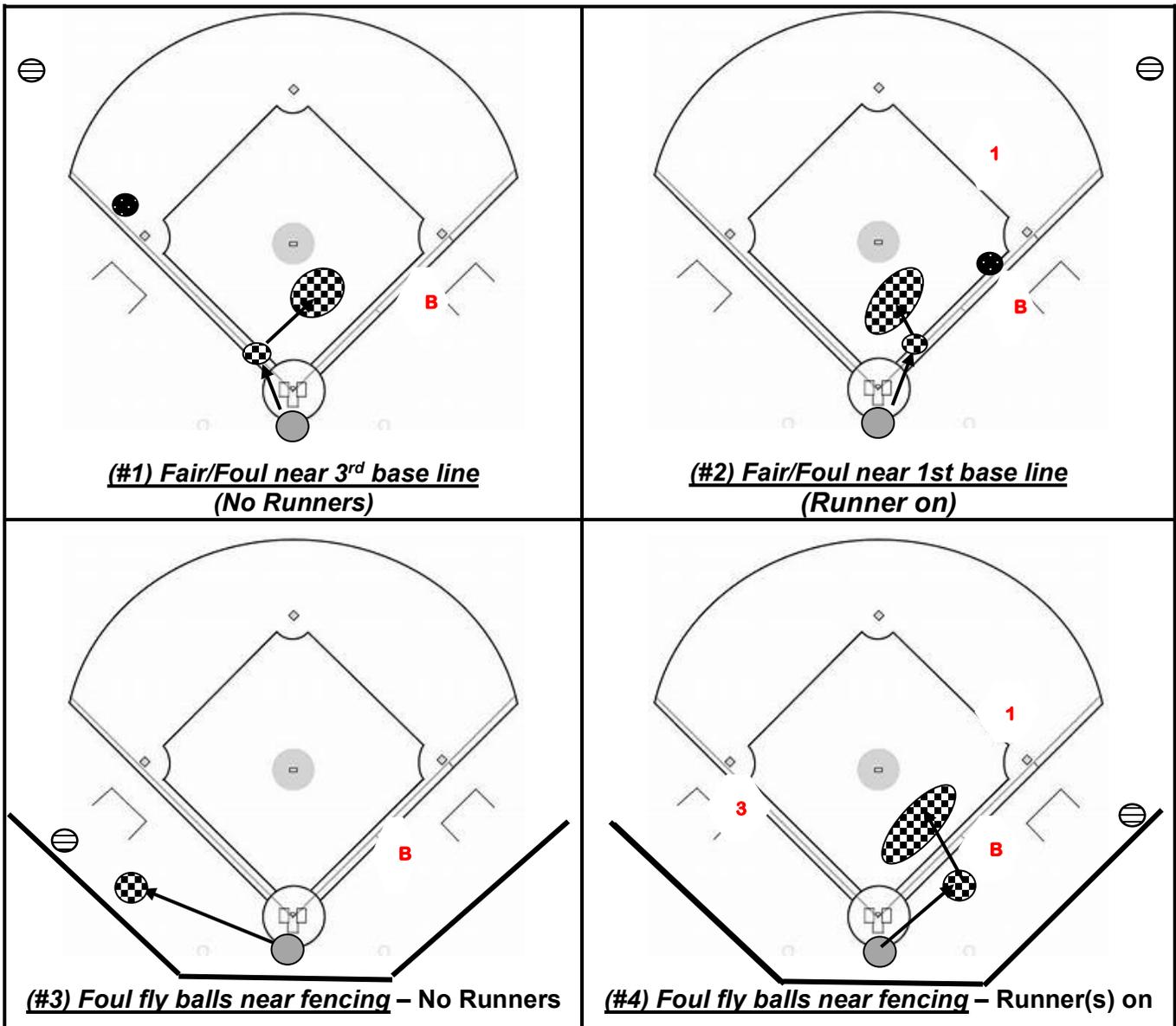
Fair / Foul

Whether a ground ball or fly ball, the fair/foul call is top priority.

- On balls near either foul line, remaining on the line is crucial. (Diagrams #1 & #2)
 - Your advance toward the play is dictated by the depth of the hit.
 - Come to a full set BEFORE the ball hits the ground or is about to be fielded.
 - Signal fair or foul, followed by catch or no catch on flies.
 - Advance into the working area to best angle to view following play(s).
 - Stop and set for all calls.
- Ground balls obviously foul require only standard signal and call.
- On Fly Balls obviously foul:
 - move to the best angle to view potential catch / no catch.
 - With no runners, you may be aggressive moving toward fencing or potential out-of-play areas if needed. (Diagram #3)
 - With runners on base, work for the best catch angle, but remain close enough to the infield to cover plays on runners who might tag and advance. (Diagram #4)

Key

- = Start Position
- ⊘ = Set to View
- = Ground ball Fielded
- ⊖ = Fly Ball Fielded
- B/1/2/3 = Runners (location at time of pitch)



Catch / No Catch

On fly balls, be sure to maintain priorities:

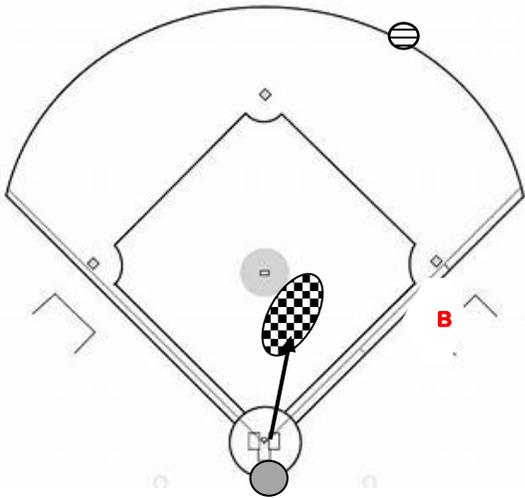
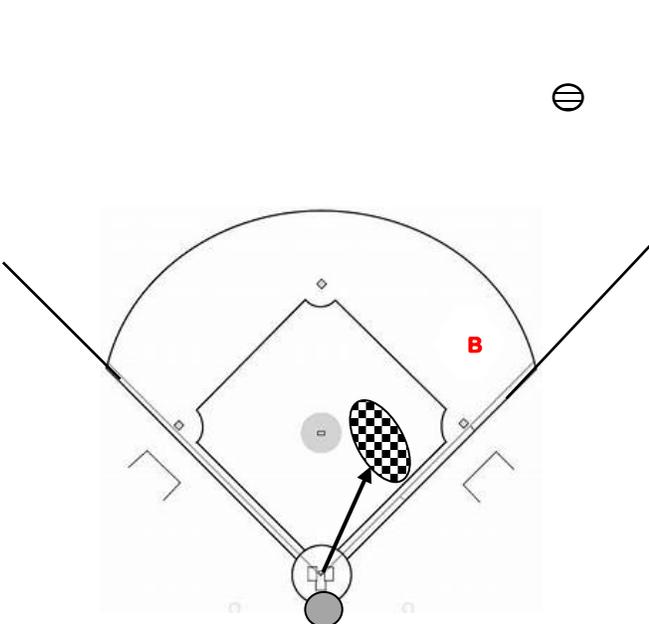
1. Fair / Foul
2. Catch / No Catch
3. Ball Live / Dead

You must attain best possible position and focus on the ball until you establish the status of ALL THREE decisions. On every fly ball play:

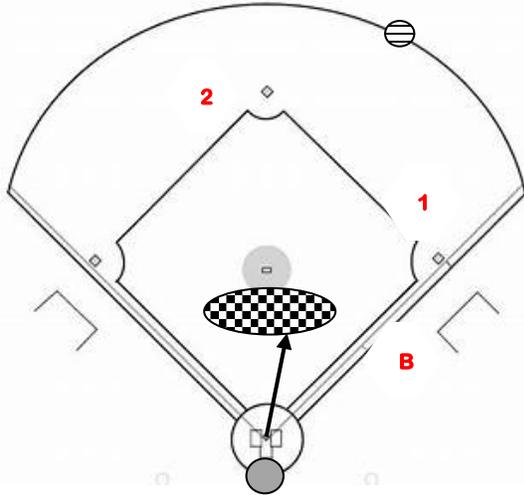
- Move to best angle to view through Fair / Foul & Catch / No Catch decisions.
- With those established beginning to move toward your next coverage.
- As you move toward working area, See the ball - GLANCE at the runners.
- Runner & Ball awareness will help you set up in the working area for most likely play.
- When the throw is made, let it take you to the set position for your play.

Key

● = Start Position ⚬ = Set to View ● = Ground ball Fielded ⊖ = Fly Ball Fielded
B/1/2/3 = Runners (location at time of pitch)

| | |
|--|---|
|  <p>(#5) Bases empty – Fly to Infield</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">Bases Empty Fly Ball to Infield</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ball near either line: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advance to position on foul line. <i>(Same positional movements as diagrams #1 & #2)</i> • Signal “Fair / Foul” on fielder contact. • <i>On catch</i>, signal “Out.” • <i>Uncaught</i> – Move into working area for possible play at 1st. • Ball obviously fair: (#5) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advance into 1st base side of working area. • <i>On catch</i>, signal “Out.” • <i>Uncaught</i> – Move to best angle for play at 1st. |
|  <p>(#6) Bases empty – Fly to Outfield</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">Bases Empty Fly Ball to Outfield</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ball near either line: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advance to position on the line. <i>(No deeper than front of mound)</i> <i>(Same positional movements as diagrams #1 & #2)</i> • Signal “Fair / Foul” on fielder contact. • <i>On catch</i>, signal “Out.” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Uncaught</i> – Read the runner. • Move into working area for best angle on most likely next play. • Ball obviously fair: (#6) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advance into working area for best angle to view catch. • <i>On catch</i>, signal “Out.” • <i>Uncaught</i> – Move for best angle on most likely next play. |

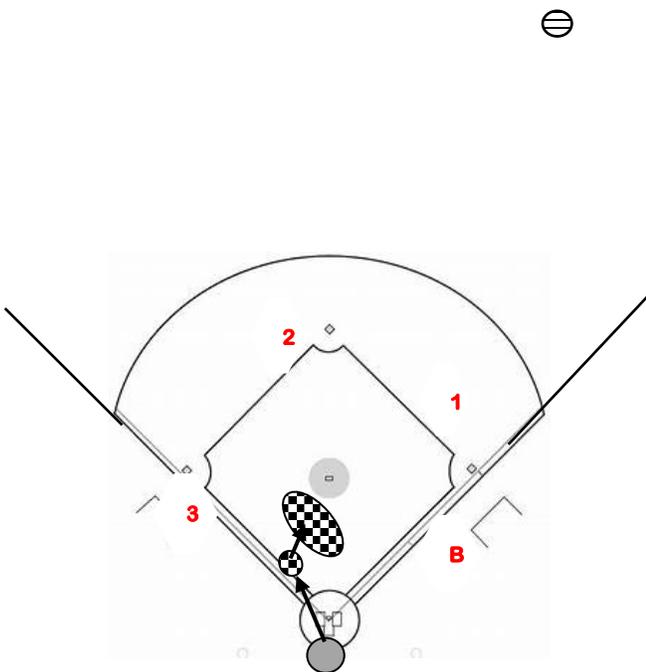
Key
 ● = Start Position ⚬ = Set to View ● = Ground ball Fielded ⊖ = Fly Ball Fielded
 B/1/2/3 = Runners (location at time of pitch)



(#7) Bases occupied – Fly to Infield

Bases Occupied Fly Ball to Infield

- Ball near either line:
 - Advance to position on foul line. (Same positional movements as diagrams #1 & #2)
 - Signal “Fair / Foul” on fielder contact.
 - On catch, signal “Out.” – locate runners.
 - Uncaught – Move into working area for best angle on most likely next play.
- Ball obviously fair: (#7)
 - Advance into working area on ball side.
 - On catch, signal “Out.” – locate lead runner.
 - Uncaught – Move into working area for best angle on most likely next play.



(#8) Bases occupied – Fly to Outfield

Bases Occupied Fly Ball to Outfield

- Ball obviously fair: (#8)
 - Move into working area for angle to view catch, (with 3rd occupied, remain near the line.)
 - When fielder contacts the ball, quickly glance to lead runner to observe tag.
 - While moving into working area:
 - Return focus to fielder to verify and signal the catch.
 - Glance to locate trail runners if possible.
 - Avoid obstructing the throwing lane to the plate.
 - Reading the fielders actions, move to for best angle to view the most likely next play.

*Though not the preferred view for plays at the plate, it is similar to your view for steals of 2nd in 2-man coverage. It also positions you to cover secondary plays at other bases.

Batter Becomes a Runner

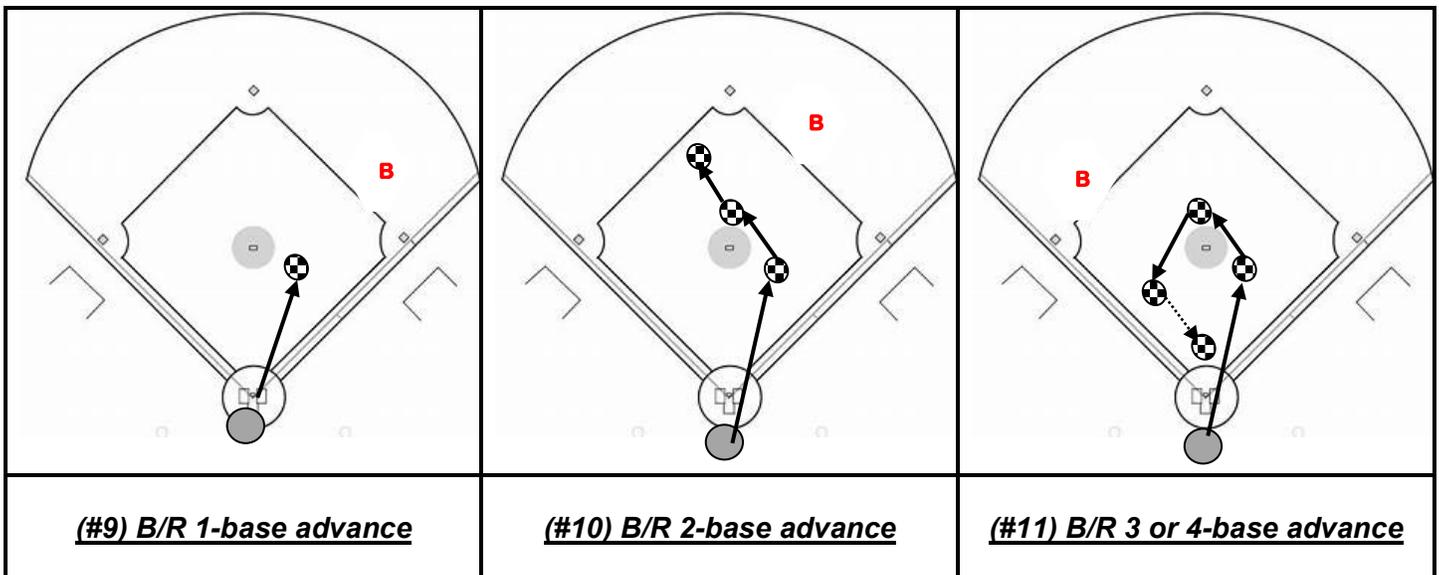
When a batted ball is a clean hit or missed fielding attempt, the batter/runner (B/R) advance and other runner actions dictate your movement in the working area.

When the B/R is the only runner:

- Your initial path should be to the right of the mound area.
- As you move, focus on the ball to assess the hit potential.
- On likely routine singles: (Diag. #9)
 - Come to set and see B/R touch and round 1st base.
 - Observe all action until no further play is certain.
 - Call "Time!" and return to plate position.
- On balls with extra-base potential:
 - Maintain movement while observing the base touch, advancing even with the mound.
 - If B/R advances, move diagonally toward the back base of the mound.
- If a play at 2nd develops, close to the play and set to view. (Diag.#10)
- If B/R commits to advancing beyond second:
 - Move diagonally from base of mound toward midpoint between mound & 3rd base line, glancing between the ball and runner.
 - If play at 3rd develops, maintain angle & distance, and set to view play. (Diag.#11) *(By locating at the half-way point, you will be able to cover a possible advance home, path to cover home shown with dotted line.)*

Covering Batter/Runner Advance (No other runners)

● = Start Position ⊕ = Pause/Set B/1/2/3 = Runners (location at time of pitch)



Batter Becomes a Runner

With bases occupied at the time of the pitch

These situations are the most challenging for single umpire coverage. Once you have determined “Fair/No Catch/Ball remains in play,” your attention shifts to runner advances and base touches. Confining your movement to the working area will allow you to position for a good angle to view the most likely potential play, without taking you too far from possible ensuing plays.

- As the play remains fluid, your priorities become:
 - Lead runner. Try to pick him up as he nears the next base.
 - Be certain that you observe runners as they advance home.
 - Base touches by trailing runners.
- Your first movement should be to the shallow working area. (*Diag. #12*)
 - Keep 1st & 3rd base in your periphery, timing your glances to those base touches.
 - Do not over-commit left or right until a fielder possesses the ball.
 - As the defense commits to a play, move to your best angle, and set. (*Ex. – Diag. #13 & #14*)
- Making the call
 - Safe / Out is your priority. Stay focused on the play through completion, then call.
 - Stay focused on the fielder with the ball. Let his actions take you to the next play.
 - Observe all action until no further play is certain.
 - Call “Time!” and return to plate position.

Covering Runner Advances (Multiple runners)

= U Start Position
 = Pause/Set
 B/1/2/3 = Runners (location at time of pitch)
 = Ball fielded
→ = Path of throw
 - - - - -→ = Path of runner(s)

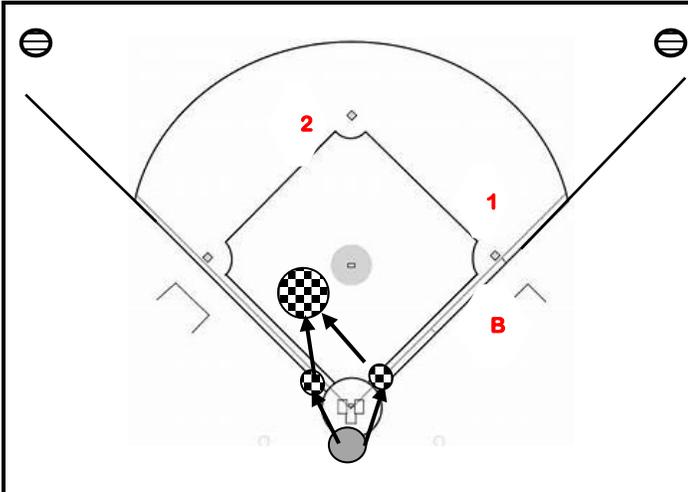
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| <p><u>(#12) Shallow Working Area</u> Base hit – Runners 1st & 2nd</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advance to working area. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pause / Read / React | <p><u>(#13) Multiple plays on Runners</u> Base hit – R1 - 1st to 3rd B/R advances to 2nd on play</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advance to working area. • Locate & set to view play at 3rd • Reset to view play at 2nd | <p><u>(#14) Bases loaded clean hit</u> Lead runner scores -R2 advances home</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advance to working area. • See lead runner touch home. • Move to open throwing lane. • View and call play on R2 • Read catcher for possible second play on R1 or BR. |

Problem Plays:

Tag & Advance – Rollers & Chops – Pickoffs & Steals

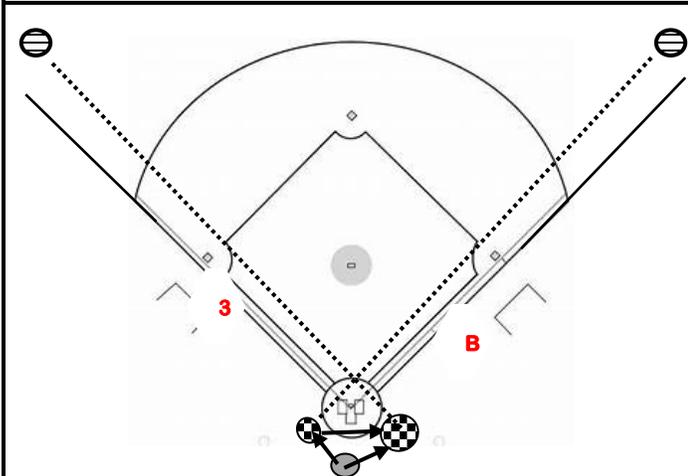
Outfield flies with tag and advance potential

As in any batted ball situation, your first impulse is to move toward the ball. With runners at 1st and/or 2nd, moving into the working area is not a problem. With a runner at 3rd, advancing into the infield can entirely remove that lead runner from your field of vision. Your positioning needs to accommodate both ball responsibility and tag and advance plays. (Diagrams #15 - #18)



(#15)
1st & 2nd Occupied – Less than 2 outs
Fly Ball near either line

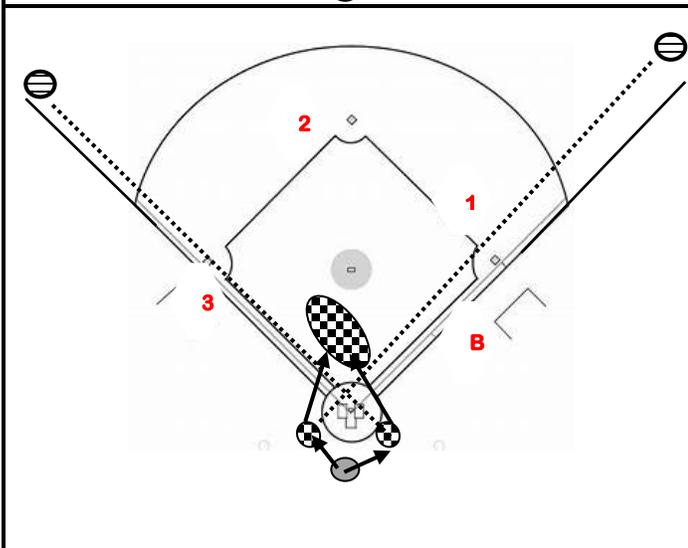
- Advance to position on the line.
(No deeper than edge of the dirt circle.)
- Signal “Fair / Foul” on fielder contact.
- Quickly glance to lead runner to see tag.
- While moving into working area, return focus to fielder to verify the catch.
- *On the move, signal catch / No catch.*
- Move into working area for best angle on most likely next play.
- Glance to locate trail runners if possible.



(#16)
3rd Base Occupied – Less than 2 outs
Fly Ball near either line:

- Retreat to position foul line extended.
(No deeper than edge of the dirt circle.)
- Signal “Fair / Foul” on fielder contact.
- Quickly glance to lead runner to see tag.
- Return focus to fielder to verify the catch.
- Signal catch / No catch, as you set up at 3rd base line extended to view play at the plate.

..... =Sightlines to catch

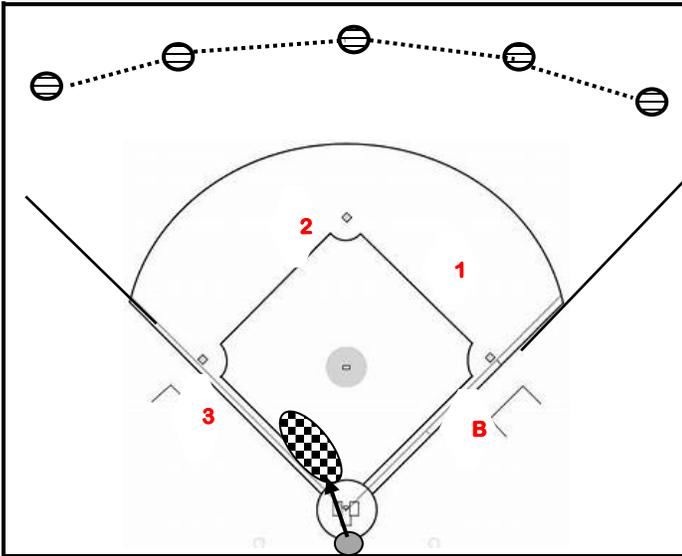


(#17)
3rd & other bases occupied – Less than 2 outs
Fly Ball near either line:

- Retreat to position foul line extended.
(No deeper than edge of the dirt circle.)
- Signal “Fair / Foul” on fielder contact.
- Quickly glance to lead runner to see tag.
- While moving into working area:
 - Return focus to fielder to verify and signal the catch.
 - Glance to locate trail runners if possible.
 - Avoid obstructing the throwing lane to the plate.
 - Reading the fielders actions, move to for best angle to view the most likely next play.

**Though not the preferred view for plays at the plate, it is similar to your view for steals of 2nd in 2-man coverage. It also positions you to cover secondary plays at other bases.*

..... =Sightlines to catch



(#18)

3rd & other bases occupied – Less than 2 outs
Fly Balls obviously fair:

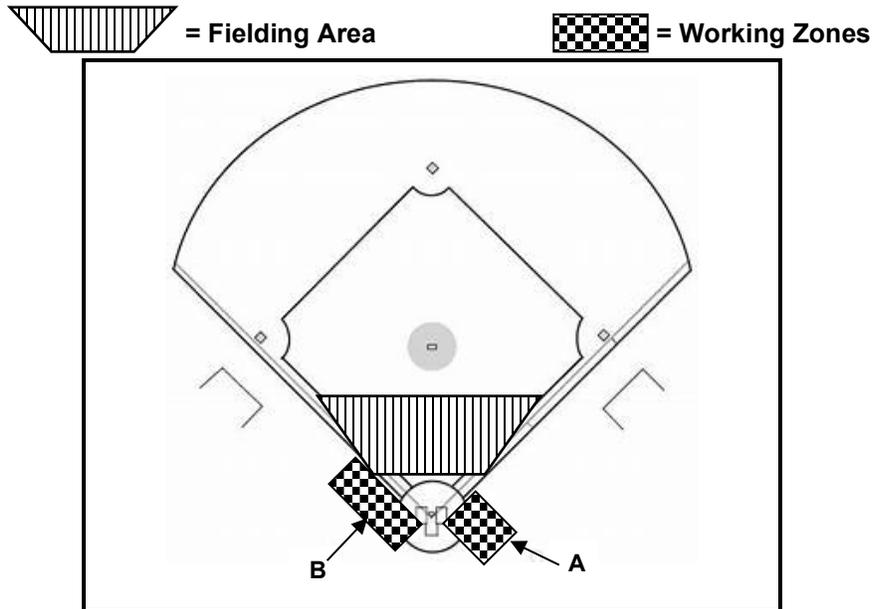
- Move into working area for angle to view catch, remaining near the 3rd base line.
- When fielder contacts the ball, quickly glance to lead runner to see tag.
- While moving into working area for best angle:
 - Return focus to fielder to verify and signal the catch.
 - Glance to locate trail runners if possible.
 - Avoid obstructing the throwing lane to the plate.
 - Reading the fielders actions, move to for best angle to view the most likely next play.

**Though not the preferred view for plays at the plate, it is similar to your view for steals of 2nd in 2-man coverage. It also positions you to cover secondary plays at other bases.*

“Hey, get out of my working area!”

Ground balls fielded between the plate and the mound

Choppers or slow rollers in front of the plate area bring fielders and throwing lanes into your preferred zone to view potential plays. Your movements must first allow for your fair/foul decision, then provide an angle to view your play *WITHOUT* obstructing throwing lanes. Your movements will generally be restricted to foul ground, making these your general working areas.



Pause / Read / React becomes critical. Movement will be dictated by direction and distance of the batted ball and best angle to view the likely play.

Zone A – After fair / foul determination, you will likely move into this zone with no runners, runner at 1st only, or bases loaded for a force play at home. Always remain in this zone with potential for runner advancing to home on a secondary play. (Diag. #19 - #23)

- If the throw goes to 2nd or 3rd, you will remain near the foul line, allowing you to move to best angle to view continued action after the initial play.
- If the throw goes to 1st, you can reset further from the foul line. The fielder covering 1st will be reaching toward the throw. The wider angle provides a line of sight that includes the glove and the bag.

Zone B – You will likely move into this zone only with runners on 1st or 1st & 2nd, potential plays at 3rd. (Diag. #24)

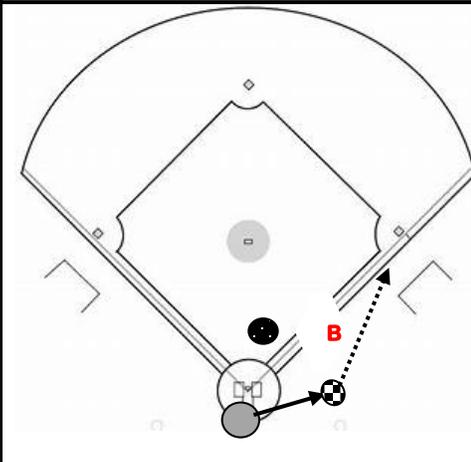
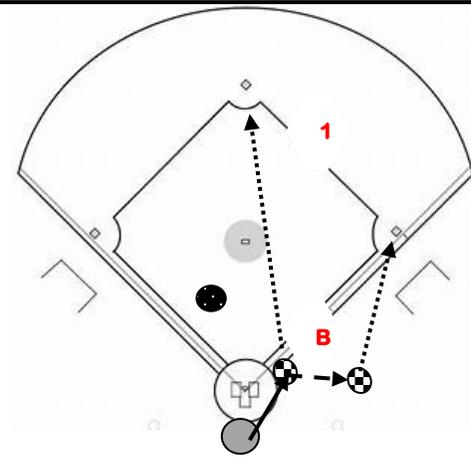
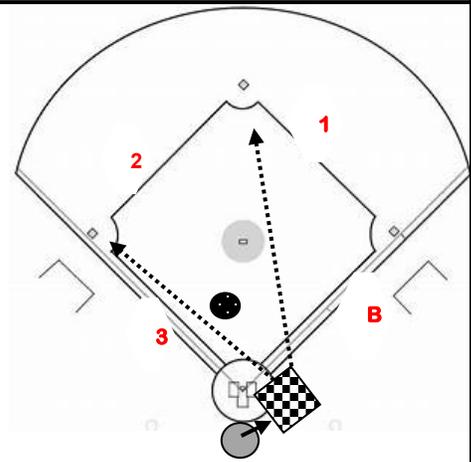
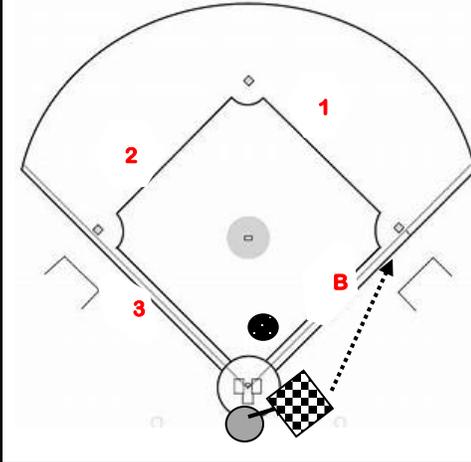
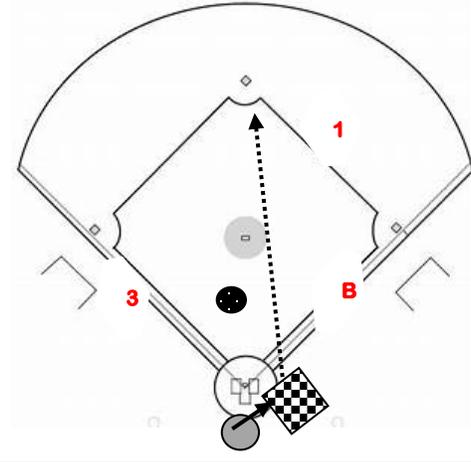
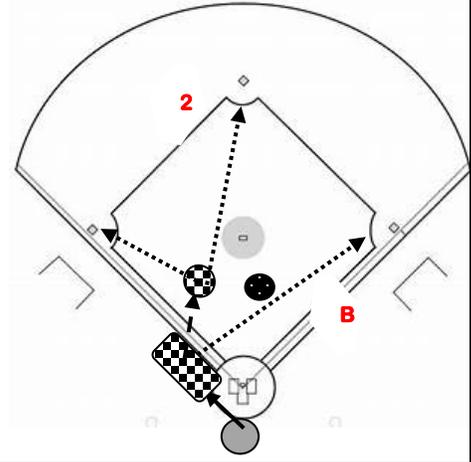
- Provides angle to view throws to all three bases.
- With runner on 2nd only and throw to 1st, allows you to step to inside to view secondary play on R2 advancing to 3rd. (Diag. #24)

Ground balls fielded between the plate and the mound

= U Start Position
 = Pause/Set
 = Working Zone
 = Ball fielded
B/1/2/3 = Runners (location at time of pitch)

.....> = Path to view
 - - - -> = Move to secondary options.

NOTE - If needed, always pause to view fair or foul before repositioning.

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| <p style="text-align: center;"><u>(#19) No Runners</u> <u>Throw to 1st</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Move to open angle for play at 1st. Set to view on release of throw. If necessary, move inside for secondary plays. | <p style="text-align: center;"><u>(#20) Runner on 1st</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Move up the line, reading fielder. Throw to 2nd, freeze to view. Throw to 1st, widen foul to view. Move toward the infield for secondary plays. | <p style="text-align: center;"><u>(#21) Bases loaded</u> <u>Throw home/3rd/2nd</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Move to 3rd base line extended. Pivot to play, set to view. Maintain position with advance home possible. |
|  |  |  |
| <p style="text-align: center;"><u>(#22) Bases loaded</u> <u>Throw to 1st</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Move to 3rd base line extended. Move away from foul line to open the angle for play at 1st Maintain position with advance home possible. | <p style="text-align: center;"><u>(#23) Runners; 3 / 1&3 / 2&3</u> <u>R3 holds - throw goes to 1st or 2nd</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Move to 3rd base line extended. Adjust distance from the line for best viewing angles for 1st or 2nd. Read R3 – Reposition to cover advance home or retreat to 3rd. | <p style="text-align: center;"><u>(#24) Runner on 2nd only.</u> <u>R2 holds – advances on throw to 1st</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Move up the line, reading fielder. Adjust position on the line to open viewing angles for 1st or 2nd. After play at 1st, move inside for secondary play on R2. |

Pickoffs & Steals

When working alone, these are undoubtedly the most difficult plays to cover. In repositioning, your goal is to establish an unobstructed viewing lane, movement to view any base varies with the situation.

On pick-off attempts at 1st or 3rd, the action is so quick that you will usually need to make the call from your slot position. At best, you may get a single step to clear the catcher or batter.

On pick-off attempts at 2nd, the pitcher obstructs your sightline to the play. Your movement is dictated by batter position. Moving out of the slot to the opposite side of the batter is your only chance at an unobstructed view.

On all steal attempts, your priorities are:

- Avoid umpire interference.
- Observe potential batter interference.
- Move to a sightline opposite the batter side.
- Establish position avoiding the pitcher impeding your view.
- Set to make the call.

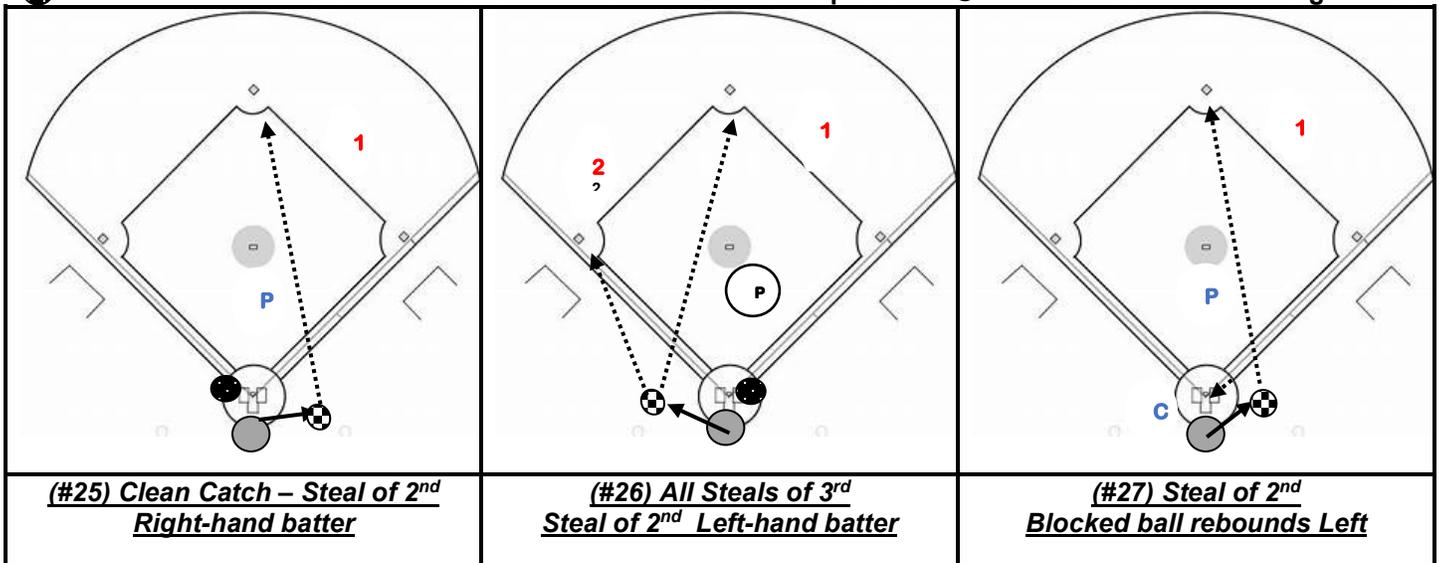
On cleanly caught pitches:

- Right-handed batter – steal of 2nd (Diag.#25)
 - Take a full step backward with your slot foot.
 - Lead with your right foot and continue moving right focusing on the catcher through release.
 - Switch focus to sightline & keep moving until you are unobstructed by the pitcher.
 - Come set as the ball arrives to view the play.
- Left-handed batter – steal of 2nd (Diag.#26)
 - Move aggressively to your left, focusing on the catcher through release.
 - Switch focus to sightline & keep moving until you are unobstructed by the pitcher.
 - Come set as the ball arrives to view the play.
- All steals of 3rd (Diag.#26)
 - Move aggressively to your left, focusing on the catcher through release.
 - Come set as the ball arrives to view the play.

On blocked pitches or short passed balls (Diag.#27)

- Read catcher's directional movement.
 - Move opposite, avoiding contact.
 - Focus on the catcher through recovery and release of throw.
 - Switch focus to sightline & keep moving until you are unobstructed by the pitcher.
 - Come set as the ball arrives to view the play.

● = batter 1/2 = runners P = Pitcher C = Catcher ● = Start position ⊕ = Pause / Set→ = Sight lines



Some closing thoughts...

Before the game begins:

- Do not accept offers for coaches, fans, or parents to “help with the bases.” Monitoring an uncertified partner’s position and coverages only gives you something else to worry about.
- Mentally review your live ball coverage plan.
It will help you to **react with instinct rather than with urgency.**
- Remind yourself, **“Angle before distance. - Hustle, but don’t over-hustle.”**
 - Moving briskly with purpose will provide the best perspectives possible.
 - With multiple runners, trying to get close to one play can take you completely out of the next one. **Be mindful of your best working areas.**

As you work your game alone, always remember:

- **Through the pitch**, your plate umpire focus and responsibilities are the same as in any crew configuration.
 - **Legal or Illegal? ----- Swing or No Swing? ----- Ball or Strike?**
- **When the ball is batted**, strictly maintain priorities.
 - **Fair or Foul? ----- Catch or No Catch? -----Live ball or Dead ball?**
- When action shifts to **plays on the runners**, focus becomes...
 - **Safe or out? ----- Bases Properly Touched?**
- As plays unfold, the ball is your highest priority.
 - **Focus on the ball, glance at the runners.**
- The fundamentals of missed base touch enforcement:
 - **Observe all touches of home** unless focused on a call at another base.
 - Unless avoiding a tag, near misses of a base create no advantage for the runner.
 - If an appeal occurs remember, **if you don’t see the miss, assume that he touched!**
- When live ball action concludes with no further plays possible, call and signal “Time!”
 - With no partner, you are unable to observe actions of fielders and runners as you return to the plate area. This allows you to hustle back to set up for the next pitch without concern.
- If dealing with a disputed call, don’t resort to stating the obvious:
“I can’t see everything. I’m out here by myself!” is better stated,
“That was the best look I could get from where I had to make the call.”

“Last call!”

After wrapping up a single umpire game, your state of mind can range from frustration to a real sense of accomplishment. The level of effort that you put into working that game is the most significant factor in forming that perception.

In any case you can always rely on this certainty to help you keep your perspective. *“It wasn’t a bad game. I might have had a couple of clinkers, but my partner didn’t miss a call!”*