

College Softball Two-Umpire Mechanics



*Developed for CCSUA-South umpires who work the two-umpire system
For college softball games.*

This document contains a summary of the major elements of the two-umpire system for college softball umpires. Sources: CCA Manual and the SUP web site article "Two-Umpire System."

Many of these sections are an abbreviated synopsis of the topics discussed in detail in the CCA Manual. All umpires are encouraged to obtain the CCA Manual as this document should not be considered a substitute for the CCA manual.

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Principles of the College Softball Umpire

Responsibilities and Expectations

A collegiate umpire is expected to display the utmost professionalism in all aspects of being an umpire.

- Proper attire to and from the game
- Uniform in excellent condition at all times
- In good physical shape; athletic looking; positive body language
- Excellent paperwork and follow-through on all deadlines and commitments

A collegiate umpire continually seeks self-improvement through the study of the game, the rules, the mechanics and the techniques of game management. A well-trained collegiate umpire uses established signals and mechanics, has a complete understanding of the rules – **their intent and purpose** – and the ability to interpret and enforce these rules and principles.

In addition, a collegiate umpire must:

- End any situation that threatens the safety of the student-athlete.
- Not tolerate intimidation by word or action toward a student-athlete, coach or umpire.
- Maintain a healthy atmosphere and environment for competition.
- Handle conflicts firmly but with dignity while showing respect toward those involved.

Mental Preparation and Focus

Mental preparation is essential to game preparation. Use visualization to review aspects of the game and how they should be addressed. Tough situations, taking charge, managing and resolving issues and demonstrating solid mechanics are all aspects of the game that should be included in an umpire's mental preparation.

Focus, attitude and confidence can be under control and then, inexplicably, they may be lost for a time. Boredom, lost focus, wandering minds and then...the zone or a call is blown. Dwelling on a missed call, reliving it or punishing yourself for losing focus results in getting behind on the next play.

A collegiate umpire is able to consistently maintain focus and concentration inning after inning, game after game. They are not distracted by external events or internal thoughts. These umpires work each game pitch-by-pitch, focused and in the present. Regaining focus comes down to one simple act: **Get back into the present. Right here - Right now.**

Interactions

Partners

There is no greater pleasure in umpiring than working with good partners. It is the responsibility of each member of the crew to work with his or her partners to achieve a fair, safe and equitable playing field. Umpires should establish a mutual respect between all members of the crew. An often overlooked yet very important concept is the notion of "CREWNESS" - working with and supporting your partners.

Coaches

The umpire-coach relationship should be businesslike, professional and respectful. Coaches and umpires each have a job to do, and both have a vested interest in the game. Respect the job a coach

has to do and allow him or her to do that job unhampered by needless distractions. Each coach deserves respect and consistent treatment. Conversations during the game will include pregame, lineup changes, questions concerning calls and even questions concerning possible game issues. If the conversation is pertinent to the game, politely and **briefly** answer or explain the situation or the rule and then move on.

Student-athletes

Student-athletes have their own specific job to do. An umpire rarely needs to have dealings with a student-athlete. Unless it is pertinent to the action in a game, an umpire should not initiate conversations with student-athletes nor engage in idle chit-chat. When addressing a player, whether to resolve an issue, give a warning, or facilitate a concern, plan in advance what you will say, how you will say it, what response you need and any possible action you may have to take as a result.

Fans

Fans are part of the game, but they will be biased and may be less informed in the rules. Except for spectator interference, the rules do not provide an umpire with any control over fans. An umpire must not allow them to be a distraction of any kind and must be able to turn comments, boos, or cheers from fans into simple background noise. Never respond or react to any remarks from the crowd. If a fan steps outside the bounds of acceptable behavior and/or adversely affects the game, locate the on-site administrator to handle the situation.

Uniform and Equipment

A collegiate umpire is expected (and must) have the correct uniform and wear it properly. Cleaned and polished shoes, clean and unwrinkled shirt, clean and pressed pants, clean and blocked hat, and clean and uncracked belt are the requisites of a collegiate umpire. And maintain it there at all times. If an umpire insists on wearing jewelry on the field, it must adhere to the following:

- Women only - small discreet stud earrings or small tight-to-the-ear loop earrings.
- All umpires may wear one necklace which must be, and remain at all times, tucked in the uniform shirt; wedding bands and religious or medical jewelry.

Pregame

The pregame begins with your assignment. Verify it with your assigner (by accepting it on Arbiter) and partner. When you receive the email from Arbiter about your upcoming game, forward it to your partner with specific information on what time you will arrive and exactly where you will meet with him or her. Plan to arrive on-site at least one hour before the game time, as you and your partner will identify yourselves to the home coach or on-site administrator. Have a pregame with your partner; do not deviate from standard mechanics in the pregame. You should have a detailed pregame checklist. Check the CCA manual's checklist to ensure you have all items necessary for a thorough pregame.

Postgame

At the conclusion of the game briskly walk off the field with your partner, being alert for any possible appeals or protests. Avoid mingling or moving through players and coaches; do not congratulate any team members. Do not engage in any crew congratulations or handshakes until you are off the field and away from public observation. Engage in a thorough postgame with your partner. The discussion should cover these topics in this order:

- Things that went well or we did well in the game
- Anything unusual, vague or confusing that happened
- Look up any questions concerning rules that arose during the game
- How well did we follow what we pre-gamed
- Where could we improve or do things differently

Essential Concepts

Core Philosophy

In order to umpire a game the best way possible, umpires must know where they would like to be on any given play regardless of whether they can actually achieve the position. To know that, umpires must understand the reason why one position is more desirable than another. They must also recognize that the optimum position to judge the play may not be the best choice of positioning because of potential continuing or subsequent action. Of equal importance with identifying where to be is discerning the most fitting and efficient path to getting there.

All Umpires

Appropriate angles and distances

- Force play at 1b – calling distance should be no closer than 18' from the base. Seek a 90-degree angle to the throw while maintaining a 30- to 50-degree angle for seeing the runner touch the base.
- Force play at 2b or 3b – read the play and get to the best angle and distance possible.
- Tag plays – 90 degrees from the application of the tag at 3-10' from the play.

Primary position

The initial location assumed by an umpire to rule on a play.

Secondary position

The next primary position after the initial play during continuous action. The action dictates the secondary position.

Adjust as the play changes

Method in which an umpire makes the appropriate adjustments to see the play as it is developing in order to see all necessary components.

Efficient movement

Knowing where you want to go, knowing the best route to get there, using your body to get there in the most efficient way.

Value of verbal

Using appropriate tone, volume, and inflections when verbalizing a call can sell the call, prevent questioning and enhance the confidence others have in you. Use strong verbals when communicating with your partner.

Mechanics

General Umpire Mechanics

Between Inning Positions

- Plate: facing the team that is coming to bat, 8-10 feet from the line on a perpendicular line from where the foul line meets the plate.
- Base: facing the plate no more than 15 feet off foul line about where grass starts
- Alternate base: if the team is warming up in the area of your position:
 - Try requesting that they allow some space where you need to be.
 - If this is ineffective or you feel unsafe, move into the diamond no more than 15' from 1b, off the line slightly, facing the infield.

Tag Up Responsibilities

If the base umpire chases, the plate umpire has all tag-ups. Otherwise:

- Plate: all tag-ups at third base
- Base: all tag-ups at first and second bases

Calling the infield fly

- Any umpire may make the call, but it is preferred that base umpires wait for the call to be made by the plate umpire
- Echo the call; both verbally and with a signal after the plate umpire has made the initial call.
- This allows for more consistency of judgment and rhythm throughout the game

Going for help

- If you are missing a piece of information necessary to make a call, go to your partner, unsolicited, prior to rendering any decision.
- Ask your partner what you need to know then follow with the final call and signal for the play.

Look-back rule

- Always know where the ball is, if it is in the circle and if the pitcher has it.
- At the end of playing action hold your position until the pitcher has the ball in the circle and all runners are stopped on a base.
- Keep one set of umpire eyes on the runner/ pitcher while the other umpire moves to next position.
- Once the pitcher has the ball in the circle the runners must immediately proceed or retreat.
- Know the rules regarding the unique play when a BR overruns first base and is returning to first base. (see Rule 12).

Sweeping

- Plate and pitcher's plate – **only** if the full perimeter cannot be seen or if it is completely covered.
- Bases – **only** if the base cannot be clearly seen.
- At the end of an inning do not sweep the pitcher's plate if it puts you in proximity to a coach after a controversial call.

When the game is over

- The last out does not dissolve the crew.
- Umpires must be aware of each other's whereabouts and remain alert to the actions on the field, such as possible appeals.
- One crew member will always be closer to the other; that umpire should wait on the field and close to the exit for the other umpire.

Other guidelines

- Make a full commitment to the play once you have determined where the play will be
- Work to keep the elements in front of you (ball, bag, runner and defender)
- Be stopped and balanced before making a call.
- A holding position is oval, not one specific spot.
- Hold non-sell signals long enough to demonstrate conviction of the call.
- Do not call time unless it is needed; the pitcher must have the ball in the circle and all runners must be stopped on a base before time is called or if medical attention is needed immediately.
- When responsible for a play at a base, see the runner approach-touch-round at that base.
- There is always a job to do; recognize and prepare for your next play.
- Call in your area, see in all other areas – when possible
- Between innings the plate umpire monitors the offense; base umpire monitors the defense.

Plate Umpire Mechanics

Play responsibilities

- All plays at the plate and seeing runners touch the plate
- With multiple runners, all plays on the lead runner at third base except if the first play on the batted ball is by an infielder and thrown to third base
- With multiple runners, seeing the lead runner touch third base
- All fair or foul calls except on the first base line when the base umpire chases
- All catch/no-catch on fly balls unless the base umpire chases
- All plays on all bases if the base umpire chases

Note: although the point-of-the-plate mechanic is not used for the 2-umpire system, a thinking umpire might use it in a few specific situations. In each of these situations the plate umpire must read the play (base hit, extra base hit) such that there is absolutely no chance for a play at 3b on the runner but there will be a play on that runner at the plate. Some examples:

- Runner on first base and the batter-runner hits a long double or triple
- With 2 outs and runners on 2b and 3b, or runner on 2b only and a base hit
- Inside the park home-run
- Less than 2 outs and runner on 3b is tagging on a long fly ball

Pre-pitch preparation

Before every pitch, mentally answer these questions:

- Is my partner in the correct position
- Do I have an umpire-to-umpire signal to give
- How many outs and where are the runners
- On all fly balls pick up base umpire to see if he/she chases; if chased, where do I go

- Where do I go on a hit to the outfield
- Where do I go on a hit to the infield

Watching warm-up pitches

- Watch the second, third and fourth warm-up pitches in the first inning for both teams and any new pitcher who enters the game. This will allow you to get a feel of the speed/movement of the pitch, as well as how the catcher works.
- Only watch if a totally equipped player is catching.

Plate stances

- You have a choice of plate stances; see the CCA Manual to get details for each plate stance.
- Whatever stance, work the slot – be sure you see the outside corner and the batter’s knees.
- Drop to a set before the release of the pitch; gives you a rock-solid set position; remain motionless while the pitch is delivered.
- Track the pitch and do not indicate the pitch location with head or body movement.

The Slot

The slot is the area between the catcher’s inside shoulder and the batter when the batter is in their natural stance and the catcher is in her normal crouched position behind the plate.

Calling the pitch

- Use the strike zone defined in the rulebook; consistency is not good enough; it must be accurate
- Strikes should be verbalized in the down position and signal in the up or going-up position.
- Balls should be verbalized in the down position before moving or starting up.

Check swing help

- By rule, if asked by the catcher, the plate umpire **must** ask for help
- If asked by anyone else on either offense or defense, the plate umpire **may** ask for help (11.13.5).
- Recommended: as soon as anybody on defense, including the coach, starts asking, go immediately as eventually the catcher will ask.

Other guidelines

- Do not needlessly hold the pitcher; use the “do not pitch” signal to control a situation
- Write down all conferences and warnings
- Give the count after steals, pick-off attempts, checked swing requests, time outs and some foul balls
- Present the count when the pitcher is facing home plate
- Be expedient when taking lineup changes but make sure you have recorded them accurately
- Do not inform a new pitcher the game situation (e.g. how many outs, where the runners are).
- Do not point at your partner to see if he/she is ready before starting an inning
- On “ball four” remove your mask and step out from behind the plate to first base line extended
- At the conclusion of a play walk with a purpose when returning to the plate; no need to run. Stay alert to a possible conference or lineup change.
- Do not allow arguing or questioning on judgment of balls and strikes
- Stay alert to the pace of the game; address or take action to any situation that could create an unnecessary delay or interrupt the flow of the game.

Base Umpire Mechanics

Play responsibilities

- All plays at first and second base and seeing runners touch first and second base
- The first play in the infield by an infielder at first, second or third base
- Plays on the batter-runner at third base if she runs non-stop to third on a batted ball
- Seeing the batter-runner touch third base
- All steal plays and pick-off plays
- All runners leaving before the pitch is released

General guidelines

- Try to stay outside on all balls hit unless they are hit behind you.
- Work to keep the elements in front of you - ball, bag, runner and defender
- When you must come inside on a hit, use a pivot (not buttonhook), open toward the runner
- Be aware of throwing and running lanes when moving as a result of a hit or play
- When in set position square body to the plate; turn you head as needed to see what you need to see
- It is ok to work close (one or two steps) from an infielder; if you are bothering her, she will tell you.
- It is not your job to stop runners on foul balls or tell them not to slide.
- Do not signal or echo fouls balls which the plate umpire has called
- Run to/from any position with efficiency and purpose - during a play, at the conclusion of a play and between innings.
- Move parallel with runners of responsibility
- Recognize your next play and prepare for it
- Watch both pitchers in the first inning to see if they are legal. No warnings.

Starting Positions

No runners on

- No closer than 18' down 1b line completely in foul territory, in an upright standing position and walking with the pitch; take two steps ending on the outside push foot or ready-set position.

Runner on first base only

- Between 1b and 2b, behind the second baseperson, no closer to 1b than 15' and no further from 1b than the midpoint, in a set position (same as Option 2 above)
- Starting depth may vary but try to be at tag play depth

All other runner configurations

- Between 2b and 3b, behind the shortstop, no closer than 15' to second base or third base, in a set position
- Starting depth may vary but try to be at tag play depth

Pre-pitch preparation

Before every pitch, mentally answer these questions:

- What is my chase area?
- Where are the outfielders in my area?
- How many outs?
- Where do I go on a hit to the outfield?
- Where do I go on a hit to the infield?

- What is the potential for a steal or a pickoff?

Working between pitches

This is a mechanic used by base umpires on non-batted balls. It ensures readiness and credibility in the event of an immediate pickoff attempt or delayed throw behind the runner from the catcher, a throw from the pitcher and to see obstruction on the return to the base. Come out of your set position, watch the ball and the catcher's movement, be in motion ready for a play. If a play develops the umpire simply reacts to that action by committing to a calling position on that runner.

Runner on 1b or runner on 2b

- Movement should be parallel to the baseline, or slightly diagonal depending on the starting depth, toward the primary position at 1b (runner on 1b) or 2b (runner on 2b)

Runner on 3b

- Movement should be parallel to the third/home baseline, or slightly diagonal depending on the starting depth, toward the primary position at 3b.

Runners on first and second

- Movement should be parallel to the second/third baseline or slightly diagonal depending on the starting depth, toward but not completely to, the primary position at 2b
- If the play goes to 1b, turn and try to move toward 1b

Runners on first and third

- Movement should be forward toward the second/third baseline to achieve the angle though not the distance for the runner returning to 3b.
- If the play goes to 1b, continue forward and try to get closer to 1b.

Runners on second and third

- Movement should be forward in the direction of the intersection with the imaginary line between the primary position at 2b and 3b
- It is not necessary to actually reach this imaginary intersection

Bases loaded

- Movement should be forward in the direction of the intersection with the imaginary line between the primary position at 2b and 3b
- It is not necessary to actually reach this imaginary intersection
- If the play goes to 1b, continue forward and try to get closer to 1b.

Chasing fly balls

Neither the number of outs nor runners matters in the decision to chase or not to chase.

Consider the following when deciding to chase any fly ball in your area:

- Judge if the catch will be a difficult situation for the plate umpire
- Will going out create an even greater difficulty by leaving him/her to work a one-umpire system if you have multiple runners?
- So be more judicious when deciding whether to chase

General areas of chase responsibilities

- From A position – center fielder to right field dead-ball line
- From the B or C position – right fielder to left fielder (the "V")

When chasing with runners on base, you should return to the infield as outlined below:

- Never return for the initial play (for example, you chase with a runner on first and the right fielder tries to throw out the batter-runner at first)
- Usually return for a play at second base when the plate umpire has a play at the plate.
- Let the plate umpire know where you are
- Do not return to home plate
- You do not have to return to the infield, nor should you always, but you must always be prepared to do so

Unique College Mechanics

Plate umpire

- Trail the batter-runner no more than 15'
- Do not trail with nobody on or runner at 1b only unless the play is going to 1b
- With a runner at 2b only, **if she tags and advances - PLATE umpire has the play at 3b**

Base umpire

- No inside/outside theory: depending on where ball is, may stay outside or move inside diamond 10x10 (10' inside, 10' from 1b) and pivot
- If using foul territory for play at 1b go no farther than 45° angle off the line
- You may return to the infield after chasing for specific situations; see Chasing fly balls section in the CCA Manual.

Both umpires

- With nobody on base and an extra base hit:
 - If the batter-runner runs without hesitation to 3b, the base umpire has her at 3b
 - If the batter-runner hesitates at 2b or there is a play at 2b and then she advances to 3b (e.g. overthrow), the plate umpire will take the play at 3b
 - This is considered a second play on the batter-runner. The plate umpire should be in the holding zone so he/she will react to this quicker and has only 20' to get to 3b, whereas the base umpire, who is moving to the secondary position at 2b for that play, will have to move 50' to 3b.

Signals

This is not a comprehensive list of all college softball umpire signals. This lists any signals which are unique to college softball, or have differences from other codes.

College Umpire Signals

Strike and Out

Extend the right arm straight up with an open palm facing the ear then bring the right forearm slightly forward while clenching the hand into a fist, simulating a strong hammer. The foul tip signal is optional.

Third Strike

A called third strike requires a more demonstrative signal and additional emphasis on the verbal. Two popular styles are the bow-and-arrow/chainsaw and the overhand. The feet may move during this signal, but the eyes, head and body must remain facing the plate area.

That's Ball Four

Used when the count is 3 balls and the batter obviously tries to get hit and is hit by the pitch. After signaling/calling "Dead Ball", remove your mask and raise an arm with four fingers extended in front of the body and above the eyes. Accompany the signal with a verbal "that's ball four."

Punch Out

A variation of the Sell Out, it can be used when you are too close to the play to do a full sell out. Step back with the one foot and punch forward with the same arm (right of left) as the foot used to step back.

*Safe, No Catch, No Tag, No Infraction***

This "safe" signal is used for all of the above situations. It is an important signal to use when appropriate but do not overuse it. **It should be used when the play could potentially need a call but you saw what happened and judged otherwise.** A strong verbal can also be used with this signal when appropriate, such as "no tag." Examples – batted ball almost hits runner, fielder just misses the tag on the runner, a runner and fielder were close but not interference.

On all Safe signals do not allow the extended arms to snap back in front of your body; finish the signal with a controlled release of the arms back into the body; do not just drop them.

Delayed Dead Ball

The left hand is in a fist with the fingers of the fist facing forward

Foul Balls

Do not call or signal obvious foul balls. With runners on base if the ball is near the line but not close, a signal without a verbal should be used. If the ball is close to the line give a signal and a verbal.

Fair/Foul close to foul line

Do not give status of the ball. If the ball is fair signal either out or no catch; if it is foul, signal foul.

Home Run

Extend arm high above head with index finger pointed skyward and make a circling motion with the hand and arm.

Infield Fly

Fully extend right arm above the head with the index finger pointing up. Verbalize "Infield fly, the batter is out." After verbalizing "the batter is out" signal an out.

Play Ball

With the arm extended toward the pitcher use a point or a beckoning motion with an open hand. The signal may be accompanied with "play" or "play ball"; the verbal may be used without a signal.

Run Scores or Run Does Not Score

Scores - emphatically point at the plate while saying "The run scores! Score the run!"

Does not score – raise both hands above head like foul ball signal, cross your arms back and forth (not too quickly) while saying “No run! The run does not score.”

Point

This is extremely valuable and effective when used judiciously. Use the left or right arm.

Ejection

While facing the person to be ejected, step back with one foot to open the body and allow it to turn away from the person. Bring an arm with the index finger extended up across the body and point skyward. The arm should be at a 45-degree angle to the body.

Off the Bag

This is an optional but extremely useful signal that explains why the call is being made. Sweep both arms in the same direction across the body. Give this signal first, which may be accompanied with a verbal “Off the bag”, followed by an emphatic safe signal.

Bobbled the Ball

This is an optional but extremely useful signal that explains why the call is being made. Move both arms, one after the other, in an upward/downward motion in front of the body. Give this signal first, which may be accompanied with a verbal “No control”, followed by an emphatic safe signal.

Umpire-to-Umpire Signals

Infield Fly On

Place your right hand, palm open, on the left chest. The outs should not be indicated as part of this signal. This signal is to be given before every batter when appropriate. It is initiated by the plate umpire just prior to establishing a stance behind the catcher. The base umpire should acknowledge by returning the same signal back to the plate umpire.

Infield Fly Is Off

Use the right hand in a wiping motion on the left forearm from elbow to wrist; it is acceptable to use the Two Out Indicator instead. Plate umpire initiates and base umpire acknowledges in the same manner.

Timing Play Indicator

This signal is used when a timing play scenario is in play. Two outs with a runner on 1 or 2b (other bases may be occupied.) The signal is two fingers on the left wrist. Base umpires return the signal.

Two Out Indicator

This signal is used with two outs and no baserunners on second or third base. Hold arm the arm out at waist level with two fingers; use the arm depending on the base umpire’s starting position. The base umpire should acknowledge by returning the signal with one hand.

Third Strike Is Not Caught –Base Umpire

The elbow of the right arm is held at the side of the waist with only the forearm extending out and downward from the body at a 45-degree angle; the index finger is pointing at the ground. This signal is used at all times when the batter, by rule, is entitled to run if the third strike is dropped.

Third Strike Is Caught – Plate Umpire

Give the appropriate signal/verbal for the strike and then verbally declare “The batter is out” while giving an out signal. This signal is used when the batter, by rule, is entitled to run and it is not obvious that the catcher caught the pitch or there is confusion among the immediate participants.

Third Strike Is Not Caught – Plate Umpire

Give the appropriate signal/verbal for the strike and then immediately give a safe signal and verbally announce “No catch.” This signal is used when the batter, by rule, is entitled to run and it is not obvious that the catcher did not catch the pitch or there is confusion among the immediate participants.

How Many Outs

Look to your partner and clench a fist against the thigh. It is acceptable to verbalize the request: “Partner, how many outs do you have?” If this signal is given more than once a game, it indicates the umpire is not concentrating. Do not allow play to continue if there is a discrepancy in the number of outs.

How Many Outs Response

The responding umpire should put the appropriate number of fingers against the thigh or where the fingers can be seen. If a verbal request is made, respond verbally.

What Is the Count?

Place both opened hands against the chest. It is acceptable to verbalize the request: “Partner, what count do you have?” Do not allow play to continue if there is a discrepancy in the count.

What Is the Count Response

Indicate the correct count by displaying the appropriate fingers on the chest or where the fingers can be seen. If a verbal request was made, respond verbally in addition to displaying the count.