

Huff-N-Puffers Senior Softball

Umpire-In-Chief's Guide and Recommendations for 2024

The new Umpire-In-Chief in 2022 didn't make everybody happy.
(didja notice the lesson there: you can't please all of the people all of the time?)
He doesn't care. Because a few have said ~ "umps being consistent helps".

The Umpire-In-Chief-Emeritus and a ton of previous Umpires have worked hard to establish a system that seamlessly supports the operations of the League. The best news is when what-we-do hardly gets noticed. Hopefully these notes help. If not, improve them – if you have a suggestion, make it.

PHILOSOPHY

Holy crap, we have "philosophy"? Well, sorta.

We're all volunteers. We're here because *we* can't play unless somebody else volunteers to ump, so we volunteer to let *them* play. Pretty simple.

My office is committed to the idea that the easiest way to have fun is to **NOT** argue about rules. One day, there was an issue, somebody made a rule, and wrote it down. If it's written down, we follow it. We are consistent.

Tell the U-I-C how we can make this better for all of us?

RESOURCES — (FOR YOUR OWN SAKE!) USE THEM

Be a student of the game:

League Rules:

www.huff-n-puffers.com/Rules-and-Regulations.html

Underlying USASoftball Rules:

www.usasoftball.com/official-rulebook/

USASoftball Umpire Manual – the how-to guide – it's amazing how much it helps:

https://cdn1.sportngin.com/attachments/document/0144/3128/2023_Umpire_Manual.pdf

Umpire positioning is described in depth – so you don't need to 'figure it out', just 'read':

Plate Ump on page 48ff Base Ump on page 59 ff

That said: no "Rules Doc" can specify *every* possibility, so an Ump needs to *make decisions*.

When you work with an umpire whose skills you admire, feel free to ask him for pointers on your own work. It's how we grow.

Chief Instructor Michael Blades has volunteered to coach any man who asks.

Huff-N-Puffers Senior Softball

Umpire-In-Chief's Guide and Recommendations for 2024

OUR "STYLE"

We're calling games among guys we've known for maybe decades. They are friends. So of course we're going to be friendly. An occasional comment is fine.

But. Let's consider how *we* might make it easier on *them* to accept and move along with our calls that they might not like?

While we're wearing The Blue Shirt, perhaps we'll be just a *bit* reserved, a bit less jovial, a bit more professional?

(And lookin' the part – because we tuck in our shirt! And not smoke on the field.)

Not snobby. Just clearly a bit "separated" – "we're doing our job"?

So that he can just play his game?

Our job is simpler if we remember (and invite others to realize) that we do **not** MAKE rules. **Nor** INTERPRET them. But simply APPLY them.

It might help others to remember that reality if we avoid COMMENTING on the game –

– simply make the call

– not "bring it down", but simply "illegal". The pitcher will figure out what he needs to do

– not "one foul to give", but after the first foul to make the clean, concise call: "N balls, 2 strikes, 1 foul" (and everybody will be more aware if we don't make it until the ball has been returned to the pitcher's hand!)

– not call "Fair" – the Fielders will do their job hustling unless they hear us call "Foul"

– not "discuss with both managers and decide just this one time to ___" – we honor the Rules as written

MANAGING THE GAME

Umpires are in charge of their game. They cannot be removed or influenced by others, including other umpires, the U-I-C, or officers of the League.

Communicate with our partner: know who will watch which plays; Plate Ump calls Infield Fly, Catch/No, and Foul (and Base Ump does not repeat); both watch for Interference; agree that we will consult privately, and only if invited; etc.

PRE-GAME MEETING

Recommend Managers exchange Line-ups. Great Plate Umpires often write them in their own notebook or capture a pic on their phone.

Identify Runner-For-Batter, Non-Running Batter, any special circumstances.

Huff-N-Puffers Senior Softball

Umpire-In-Chief's Guide and Recommendations for 2024

Because of the Rule on "Required Innings" and "Courtesy Runners", ensure we and both Managers are clear on any players present who are *not* physically able. Advise that any changes during the game must be announced immediately.

Courtesy Runners: League recommends that Managers respect the Player's right / desire to run for himself.

D3 Non-Runner Batter must announce before *each* at bat.

Because some Managers play outfield, impractical to be the only one. They may designate an infielder to represent them as an Alternate.

Remind –

- Zero Tolerance Rule 18.3
- Excessive speed: 1 warning, 2d offense removed from mound

Remind that a Player can *ask* ~ "how many out?" etc., but only a Manager can *discuss* with an Umpire.

No time limit – we'll inform both Managers before the start of the (D1-2) 9th or (D3) 7th inning. In final regular and *all* extra innings, the five-run limit is *lifted*.

For Us

Balls: confirm are Tattoo OLT**1244**PC.

D3 second games start at 11AM, not the published 10:45.

Uniforms: during warm-ups, ensure pants colors meet 2.4's "dark blue or black". Because "will be enforced by Umpires" makes it our responsibility. (There are several loaner pairs of black shorts in the Equipment Room.)

Bat boys? Associates only allowed. Children not allowed.

CALLING THE GAME

USASoftball is clear about the recommended process.

AT THE PLATE, WE DO:

Call "Catch" or "No Catch"

Call "Foul"

(loudly enough for Runners to hear)

(but not "Fair", because all the Fielders have their back to us and they easily mis-hear, so we remain silent, arm horizontal toward the infield)

(Location of ball (not fielder) determines fair/foul)

Huff-N-Puffers Senior Softball

Umpire-In-Chief's Guide and Recommendations for 2024

Make calls at 3d

(after moving out front of the plate)

Announce the count before each pitch

(loudly enough for Infielders to hear, using that 3 balls/2 strikes/1 foul/1 screen format)

Call Illegal or Infield Fly as the ball reaches its highest point in flight

Observe Runners into 2d and 3d for possible Interference if they do not give up/slide

Observe Runners on fly ball tag-up

ON THE BASES, WE DO NOT:

Add a second voice to the Plate Ump's on his calls, above

Lose track of balls/strikes/outs/runs

AND IT GOES WITHOUT SAYING THAT:

We support our partner Ump

We might OFFER a kind suggestion, privately (but if he declines, of course we swallow it)

We NEVER criticize him openly. *EVER.*

If we have a real concern about him, we reach out to the U-I-C

PLATE MECHANICS

We do not observe USA Rule 7, Section 3. A: but instead: "Prior to the pitch, the batter must have both feet completely within the lines of the **batter's box** or touching the lines, prior to the pitch."

USA Rule 7, Section 6, F-G: "At time ball makes contact with the bat, **batter is out** if
– entire foot touching the ground is completely outside the lines of the batter's box
– any part of a foot is touching home plate."

We come out from behind the Plate on every batted ball. Take a few steps toward the mound, to be closer to any action and in better position to make a call.

If there's a potential play at 3B, move closer there.

If there's a play at the Plate, simply let the ball take us, pivot to Home, make the call.

Let's appreciate that some guys with limited mobility are still calling games.

But we have some men who CAN move, but DON'T.

Huff-N-Puffers Senior Softball

Umpire-In-Chief's Guide and Recommendations for 2024

It's disappointing when, at the end of a game, we could draw a 4-foot circle and capture ALL of a PU's footprints.

Infield Fly: If the pop-up looks to be within a few feet of foul line, call "If *Fair*, Infield Fly".

An uncaught, untouched ball rolling Foul, being a live ball, would be Foul and Dead Ball.

Div 3, Rule 35 specifies the Infield Fly is a Dead Ball as soon as declared: call "Infield Fly, Dead Ball, Batter is Out".

Screen: Ball hitting Weight Bag is same as the Screen. Pitch hitting Screen is Ball and Dead Ball.

Running Lane: in foul territory parallel to and 3' from the first base foul line ... halfway from home plate to first base. Batter-Runner must use the lane. If not, and he interferes, Out.

Runner-For-Batter

The Batter's job is to get a hit. But then what?

On a possible play at the Plate, Batter must not interfere with the play. The Batter's Box is not a safe haven. He must move so as not to interfere.

So that's one more thing for the Plate Ump to be aware of. And for the Base Ump (yes, he's 60-80' away, but still) to observe on a throw Home – in case he's asked.

A good Pre-game Checklist item – suggest to Manager to counsel his Runner-For-Batter that – on a potential play at Home – his safest spot is against the fence on the 1B side of the Plate – through the left-handed Batter's Box.

A Runner-For-Batter will start with **his body** completely on the 3rd Base side of the "V" – not leaning 4' toward 1st.

Runners in Div 3

Division III teams will be allowed as many runners as they want.

End of each half inning

Call out "Scored runs". Get concurrence from both benches. Post to scoreboard.

End of game: after confirming, erase the board.

BASE MECHANICS

Positioning: move for every call so base-runner-fielder-ball are within "90 degrees" in front of us.

Some base umpers carry a notebook, note who runs each inning, to be quickly in control if someone challenges a Courtesy Runner.

Huff-N-Puffers Senior Softball

Umpire-In-Chief's Guide and Recommendations for 2024

Tag Plays – our toughest calls

When moving into the play, know in our mind that this a *not* a *force* play. This may be painfully obvious, but if we go into this play *thinking* 'force out' we will be caught completely off guard.

We do not want to make a call on any tag play from seventy feet – twelve feet would be optimal.

DO NOT see the play on the run. DO NOT make the call on the run. Get there, get set, but be prepared to move some, if we need to get a better angle.

This is always a big play and is always a sell "out" call or a sell "safe" call.

This is where we shine – the key is being close and being forceful.

A "safe" call is always immediate – hesitation looks as if we aren't sure. On an "out" call, take our time, make sure of the tag, then sell it.

We look stronger on the out call when we are being deliberate.

Two things to remember – USA Rules state that a fielder cannot block the bag unless he HAS or almost has the ball – otherwise we have Obstruction – delayed dead ball with the runner entitled to the base. The runner must have a clear path to the base if the fielder does not have the ball.

The runner must slide or give up. If he comes in crouching/standing up and interferes in any way with the fielder's ability to catch the ball or then throw it, it is Interference – dead ball and he is out, as would be the trailing runner in a potential double play. If the runner crashes in forcefully, he is out and ejected.

Because the Base Ump will be busy watching a possible double play, the Plate Ump should be watching the first play for potential Interference by the Runner.

The Orange Bag at 1B

Belongs to the Batter-Runner. If the Fielder blocks it or has his foot on it and the B-R stomps on it, B-R is awarded 1st base.

(Unless Fielder chases a ball into foul territory – then B-R hits White and Fielder hits Orange.)

"Fielders" definition

USA defines by where he stands at pitch: Infielder = dirt, Outfielder = grass.

DISCUSSIONS

Umpires should feel free to answer *brief* questions: e.g.: 'fielder pulled his foot', 'two outs', etc. But Players may **not** approach an Umpire. We should entertain 'discussions' **only** from the **Manager** (or alternate). Make it easy on ourselves.

Huff-N-Puffers Senior Softball

Umpire-In-Chief's Guide and Recommendations for 2024

Written Warnings: if a Player offends, write him up, advise the Manager, deliver to U-I-C.

APPEALS

Not need “ball to pitcher, ball to base...” When ball becomes dead, Manager verbally appeals. Exception: If Batter-Runner misses the orange bag at 1st, that must be appealed before he returns to it – so any defensive player can do, live.

When a Manager asks us to consult our partner – our decision whether we feel we might have been blocked. If not: decline. If we do, make it private. When done, we should confirm with Safe or Out signal.

FLEXIBILITY

When an early game holds up men calling the second game, the players appreciate umps who step in to start the second game so it doesn't run any later than necessary.

When the assigned ump arrives, he should step in.

If we work a full game we weren't scheduled for – Sign as “Fill-In” (if we forget, email the U-I-C).

GAME EQUIPMENT

EQUIPMENT ROOM

Get familiar, the door faces west. We *will* need to sign in there, before or after.

PLAYING EQUIPMENT

Mesh bags should contain a marker, rag, ball/strike indicator, the Rulebook. After the game: ensure all is returned.

Home teams are responsible for obtaining/returning home plates, scoreboard, pitcher's screen, umpire mesh bag from/to the Equipment Room.

The Ball: we play with Tattoo OLT**1244**PC – check at each pre-game meeting.

We start: D1 – two new balls from Home Manager.

D2 and 3 – one new from Home, one “used, good condition” from Visiting, no nicks, no cuts.

THE PITCHING SCREEN

Placement: D1: 15-foot cord, D2-3: 16-foot cord, don't stretch it, confirm it just before pre-game meeting, then players can't touch it.

Huff-N-Puffers Senior Softball

Umpire-In-Chief's Guide and Recommendations for 2024

SCHEDULING

UPDATES

The Umpire schedule will change directions more times than a squirrel crossing a busy street. Every game, the Umpire schedule is taped on the board next to the Men's restroom. And it's always posted on the website.

PLEASE check it **every time** you play. If ever a question, call.

MISSING

If you must miss, please **text or better call** rather than not show up for a shift where teams are expecting you.

Vacations/absences: appreciate as much notice as possible. Email/paper/text (not "Hey, Peter..." in the parking lot).

THE LATE GAME

Some D3 players umpire in early D2 games. Making them late to play their own second game. Or a D2 player umpires a D3 late game. But his early 9-inning game runs long.

The Managers I've spoken with have expressed appreciation for the guys who ump, desire to have them comfortably ready to play, and are eager to have them enjoy their game. Let's work to encourage that. I propose three helps:

1. If you're an umpire observing a game, grab your blue shirt, and start that late game until the assigned ump arrives.
2. If you're calling an early game that runs long, see if there's another umpire observing who can step in to finish this game, so you can run to yours.
3. If you're to work the late game, and a player is delayed arriving:
 - A. if both Managers agree to wait, wait. Allow the ump to warm up a bit before playing!
 - B. if no agreement, wait the stipulated 10 minutes, allow the missing Player to be removed from the line-up, we start the game, when he arrives (per rule) he enters the game and bats at the bottom of the lineup.

HNP's WORKING SYSTEM

SIGN-IN SHEET

Before/after each game you work, you must confirm to me on the Sign-In Sheet. Hangs inside the Equipment Room.

Huff-N-Puffers Senior Softball

Umpire-In-Chief's Guide and Recommendations for 2024

STIPEND

\$10/game “gas reimbursement”. I think of that as “the players buying me a beer” for helping out. Or at the end of the season, you take your sweetie out for a really nice dinner?

If you work a game solo, that requires more hustle, you get both stipends allotted. Let's earn it by getting out from behind the plate to better see and make our calls.

To reduce expense and workload on the League volunteers: payment comes at end of season. (If you have special needs, ask?)

We do not make adjustments after the season – if you didn't sign (or email) you didn't get paid.

GETTING BETTER

We have a number of men new to our umpiring. Please –

MORE-EXPERIENCED UMPIRES

– shoot me a private email with your comments or evaluation of what level your partner should work, that'll help my future scheduling?

– before the game, offer any coaching they might be comfortable with?

– if you notice any issue, out of earshot of players, ask if they would be open to your observation about it?

LESS-EXPERIENCED UMPIRES

If you have questions, and especially if you would like a chat or a little “coaching”, senior umpires have offered to be available for you. Call me, we'll set it up?

Ask for what you need?

STUDY

We can't call what we don't know: See “Resources” above.

UMPIRE UNIFORM

We provide a blue “Umpire” T-shirt. If:

– you don't have one

– yours is so faded it looks white

email me your size? Then find me at the next game.

Until you get one, please bring a not-white/not-red T to work in.

Huff-N-Puffers Senior Softball

Umpire-In-Chief's Guide and Recommendations for 2024

A "HP Umpire" hat helps distinguish you on the field. If you need one, please contact me?

RULES ON WHICH TO FOCUS (TO AVOID PAST ISSUES)

RUNNER IS OUT

A Runner who reaches a base, assumes he's getting a Pinch Runner, and leaves the base before Time is called (not called by him or his manager, but by the Plate Umpire). He's off the base, live ball, with liability to be tagged out.

Or called out summarily: "USA Rule 7, Section 1, Runner is OUT, U. ...When a runner abandons a base and enters the team area or leaves live ball territory".

"CHOPPING" THE BALL

USASoftball Rules:

1. A Bunt is defined (Pg 16) as "A pitched ball that is intentionally tapped with a bat slowly within the infield."
2. A Chopped Ball is defined (Pg 17) as "when the batter strikes downward with a chopping motion of the bat."
3. The applicable rule is under "The Batter is Out", Pg 83, Subsection J: "The Batter is out when the Batter bunts or chops the ball."

Interpretation:

The positioning of the hands is immaterial to our decision to call a "chop".

True in all Divisions, but especially in D3: it's a long throw from third or short.

We should be diligent in calling out a Batter who attempts this inappropriate advantage.

COURTESY RUNNERS

cf: Rule 8.1 – Study the USASoftball definition of "Batter-Runner", which term is in our Rules. Batter becomes Batter-Runner as soon as bat strikes ball. As soon as he safely reaches his base (1,2,3) he becomes a "Runner".

Batter "A" can be replaced at the first base he successfully occupies, but **only** before the first pitch to batter "B".

(Unless subsequently injured while on base.)

D3 NON-RUNNING BATTER

Use our visual signal to indicate "Non-Running":

– Batter must announce each time he approaches the plate

Huff-N-Puffers Senior Softball

Umpire-In-Chief's Guide and Recommendations for 2024

- Plate Umpire will step in front of the plate, face the pitcher, extend both arms over his head, cross his wrists, hold a couple seconds
- Base Umpire will immediately turn to ensure outfielders do not creep in and duplicate the signal
- Outfielders should acknowledge (except for short-fielders who have already turned away and are high-tailing it to the depth of the other outfielders!)
- What is “outfield depth”? We don't paint a line. It is not [some number] feet. It is A) where the Outfielders were playing for the previous Batter; B) where the Umpire judges it to be!

PROTESTS

“...protests shall be presented in writing by both Managers” means that the guy being protested should write up his side of the story, his ‘defense’.

Both Umpires working the game must record their notes (carrying a notepad helps):

- 1) halt the game long enough to ensure you have a clear grasp of the situation,
- 2) you should write down:
 - Is the protest only about “incorrect application of a Rule”? If not, no protest.
 - Was it made before the next pitch? If not, no protest.
 - “What happened” – Who was where? Describe the situation (inning, outs, count, runners, etc)? Write a step-by-step of the complete action?
 - If you made the call, what was it? Who made it? Did you request consultation with your partner? What did the partner say? If so, did you uphold or reverse?
 - If you were the partner: What was his call? Did he request your consultation? If so, what did you say? If not, what did you see? Either way: was the call upheld or reversed?
 - What Rule is being Protested as being violated? How did you apply it? To your understanding, with what part of your call does the Manager disagree?
 - Any other observations that might be helpful to The Rules Committee?
 - File your report *within hours* of the game, while your memory is *fresh!*

COLLISIONS

Rule 8.5 Physical Contact

Is in conflict with USA. Our rule: “B. the runner ... could reasonably ... avoid the contact under the circumstances” – the “circumstances” are really “obey USA” = therefore, Rule 18.4 applies: “Defender has the right to field/catch the ball unimpeded.”

If there's a play at base, it belongs to the Fielder. If there's no play, it belongs to the Runner.

Huff-N-Puffers Senior Softball

Umpire-In-Chief's Guide and Recommendations for 2024

THANK YOU

With –

- eagerness to hear suggestions for improvement, and
- respect for how hard you work, and
- gratitude for your service to your fellow players,

Peter Toomey

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