

As of October 2014, John Hardy and Rick Clot prepared the following handbook for our SCG Softball Club Umpires.

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The following is the text from the above document:

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Mini-Manual for Senior Softball Umpires at AZT and SCG

PROLOGUE: This manual is primarily based upon Amateur Softball Association (ASA) and Senior Softball USA slow pitch rules, which promote safety and prevent collisions. These are shortened versions of the legal definitions or rules found in the official Rule Books. It is the intent of this mini-manual to equip recreational umpires with 90-95% of the information necessary to call a game. In the other situations, ask for help and/or let common sense prevail.

Know your local rules: Each organization/division has their own set of rules. Please know them.

PLATE/SOLO UMPIRE MECHANICS: Most of you will not be involved in a solo umpire mechanic, but when you are, you are positioned behind the plate. However, as most of these hints apply to the home plate umpire in 2-umpire situations, I'm including them here. ASA recommends you stand in the slot between the batter and the catcher (mainly to keep from getting hit by a batted ball.) In practice, at our level, we find that standing opposite the batter gives much better visibility--especially on fair/foul balls down the lines. Strikes--verbalize and raise your right hand. Balls--you do not have to do anything--it is assumed it is a ball if you don't call it a strike. (You are not required to tell the pitcher why it is a ball--that is the catcher's job.) You are not required to verbalize any situations (like 'infield fly situation') to the players. You will be well respected when you share the 'count' or number of outs.

With no-one on, any ground ball to the infield or outfield, you **must trail** the runner toward first base and get set to call the play at first. The more angle you can put towards 2nd base, the better position you will be in to make the call at first or 2nd.

With men on base, who might possibly score on a hit or sacrifice, you **must stay out of the way** of runners, defensive players, and the throws. The best place to be is in the 'safety zone' which is located to the left of the 3rd base line--close enough to call a play at home. Remember, your primary responsibility is the lead runner.

Know the pitcher's arc rule. In our case it is no lower than 6 feet at its highest, nor no higher than 12 feet at its highest. (Hint, look at the surrounding fence rails--most are 10-12 feet. 12 feet is higher than most of us realize.) If the pitch is not within 6-12, **you must verbalize** (at the top of the arc.) ASA would like you to say 'Illegal!' and raise your left arm parallel to the ground. Most of us just say 'flat' or 'too high.' An illegal pitch is a ball, but if the batter swings, the ball is in play. It is most important to be consistent. Do not be swayed by verbal criticisms.

The home plate umpire verbalizes: **FOUL BALL** and points to foul territory. If it is fair, you say nothing, but point to fair territory. On close calls, sell the call (see next section.); **CATCH** at the moment a fly ball is caught. This allows the runners to take off if they desire; **TIME OUT** is called to suspend play, when the play is over in the umpire's judgment. Check to make sure that no runners are trying to advance or that there is a possibility of an overthrow. 'Time' is usually called when the ball is returned to the infield and runners are safely returned to base.

DOUBLE-UMPIRE MECHANICS:

Pre-game: decide who calls the lines, outfield catches, tag-ups. With coaches, coin flip (if necessary), ground rules, home run rule, time limit, equalizers, tie game rule, batter's box rule for hitters and runners to home, pitching arc, one-to-one with coaches on discussions re: complaints, etc.

Home plate: Usually responsible for 3B and Home. Responsible for calling fair or foul, time out and infield fly. Primarily responsible for lead runner. Positioning--see paragraph on solo umpiring.

Base ump: Usually responsible for 1B and 2B. You may have to make a call at 3B if the home plate ump is busy watching the lead runner attempting to score. Positioning--with no one on--ASA would like you to stand to the 1st base side of the 2nd baseman. This gives you an excellent angle with minimum effort for the play at first, or, on an overthrow, you are in great shape for a call at 2nd. Many of you prefer to stand on the 1B line in foul territory, beyond the first baseman. Whatever! With a runner on first, you should move a little farther to the right. Now, you are in excellent position to call a play at 2B or a double play. (Usually, the closest play will be at first.) Stay out of the outfielder's line of vision. Some of you choose to base ump on the infield inside the base lines. That is OK (but slightly dangerous) unless you are asked by an infielder to move. Be courteous. Also, if you are hit by a batted ball and you are inside an infielder, it is a dead ball single. (If you are outside the infielder and you are hit by a batted ball, it is live.)

The best angle to call a play is 90 degrees to the throw. **The most important mechanic** is positioning (angle), not, how close you are. The second most important mechanic is to keep your eye on the ball at all times.

Selling the call!--Save your energy for the close calls. On obvious calls, simply make the out or safe sign and in a medium voice, say 'out or safe.' On a close play, you want to 'sell your call' by making the call with high octane! Make it loud and with a great flourish for either safe or out. How is anyone going to argue with you after that!

DEFINITIONS AND RULES:

Appeal: For our purposes, an appeal may be made of a close play. The manager should go to the umpire who made the call and see if the umpire wants help from the umpire, who may have had a better view or angle. The umpire who made the call has the choice, and asking the other umpire should be used only when necessary. After conferring with the other umpire, the original caller makes the call. (Umpires—never, ever show up your partner or privately say to anyone that you

would have made a different call.) On tag-up appeals, if you didn't see the play, call the runner safe (don't say "I didn't see it.")

Base line/base path: Base line is the imaginary line directly between bases. Base path is the arc/line directly between a base and the runner's position at the time a tag is being attempted. Runner cannot go more than 3 feet out of the base path or it's an out.

Batter's Box: Area of restriction for the batter. Batter must start with both feet inside (on the line is OK). Batter may not have one (or both) foot completely outside the box or touching the plate at the start of the pitch or on contact. If so, dead ball out.

Blood Rule: A player cannot play if bleeding.

Bunt or Chopped Ball: If batter bunts or strikes downward with a chopping motion of the bat and hits the ball, the batter is out.

Catch: Not a catch until securely in the hand or mitt. If a fielder, **while gaining control**, collides with another player or the ground or the fence, and the ball comes out, it is not a catch. (Runners can advance immediately after the first touch.)

Commitment line: A line perpendicular to the 3b line either 20 or 30 feet from home. If a runner crosses the line, they are committed to go to the scoring line or scoring plate. (At this point, catcher must not tag the runner, but must tag home plate before the runner gets their foot down, on or across the scoring plate or line, to record an out.) If the runner returns toward 3B after crossing the commitment line, it is an out.

Courtesy runners:—check your local rules. You cannot have a courtesy runner for a courtesy runner unless an injury forces the original courtesy runner out of the game. It's an out. If a courtesy runner gets stuck on base when it is their turn to bat, they are out on the base and come up to bat next.

Fair/Foul Ball: If the ball settles or is touched in fair territory (including the lines), it is fair. If it bounds over 1B (white portion) or 3B (which are in fair territory), regardless of where it lands after going over the base, it is fair. If it hits 1B (white portion), 2B or 3B, it is fair. Remember, it is where the ball is, not where the fielder who touches it is.

Fake tags: is defensive obstruction and runner is allowed an additional base--at the umpire's discretion.

Flip Flop—a local rule used to expedite games. Visiting team must be up by at least 10 runs going into the last inning. Home team would bat two innings in a row. If home teams catches up, the visiting team gets one more inning.

Foul tip: is a batted ball that goes straight from the bat to the catcher's mitt. It is a strike. However, in our leagues, we find it easiest to call any foul ball the catcher catches, an out.

Home run rule: see local rules.

Illegal batted ball: (See batter's box above), when batter violates the batter's box rule, or uses an illegal bat.

Infield fly: A fair fly ball, not including a line drive, which can be caught by an infielder, pitcher or catcher **with ordinary effort** when first and second or first, second and third bases are occupied with less than two outs. Umpire should attempt to call while the ball is at the highest in the arc. Failure to call the infield fly does not change the fact that the play is still an infield fly. Runners advance at their own risk.

Intentionally dropped: With any base occupied, if a fielder intentionally (in the umpire's opinion) drops or lets drop a fly ball or line drive, it is an out.

Interference/Obstruction: (Interference is on the offensive member, Obstruction is on the defensive player.) An act which impedes the offensive or defensive player from making a play or advancing the bases. Umpire uses judgment to define the play as it would have been, had there been no impeding. Contact is not necessary, nor is it necessary to throw the ball. If offensive interference is called on a runner going into a base, you not only call the runner out, but also any other runner closest to home plate. (In other words, runners on 1st and 3rd, batted ball to infield, runner on first impedes the play at second, you call the runner going home out.) An easy way to remember the difference between interference and obstruction is the word "DO" which stands for defensive obstruction. On defensive obstruction, you may award extra base(s) to the obstructed runner based on your judgment on which base would have been attained.

International tie breaker or ½ run rule. See local rules for these tie-game procedures.

Mercy rule (Run rule): See local rules.

Overthrows: On an overthrow into a dugout or other out-of-play area, the runner gets the next base plus one, even if the runner was returning to the previous base. The runner's original position is determined at the moment of the throw.

Pitcher's box: An area 50-60 feet from home plate, two feet wide. Pitcher must start by presenting ball, and take one step any direction while delivering the ball, pivot foot remaining in the box.

Protests: A formal request to review an umpire's rule interpretation. (Judgment calls cannot be protested.)

Quick pitch: A pitch made with the obvious purpose to catch the batter off balance. It is a "no pitch." ASA and Senior Softball now state that batter must be set and on balance before a pitch may be delivered.

Safety lines and bases: runner coming in from 3rd to score, must have foot down before catcher tags the plate, to be called safe.

DEBUNKING MYTHS: The batter may carry the bat to first base as long as he/she doesn't intimidate the fielder.

If a pitched ball hits the ground before reaching the home plate, it is a dead ball, ball. Even if the batter swings (or hits), it doesn't count. It's a ball.

Runners may advance on 3rd strike caught foul balls.

A windmill pitch delivery is OK if the hand with the ball only passes the hip once.

A batter-runner, safely reaching 1st base may turn left onto the infield portion and return safely to 1st base unless an attempt has been made to go to 2nd base.

Throwing a mitt at a batted ball and hitting the ball results in a triple.

A runner can be safe after being tagged or missing the bag, if, in the umpire's judgment, the runner would have made it safely had they not swerved to avoid a collision.

RULE CITATIONS: Each community and division has their unique rules, which may not necessarily comply with some of the statements herein. You are encouraged to know those rules.

Game management—In the best case, the umpires should do their tough jobs with a minimum of attention by the coaches, players and audience. Remember that this is recreational softball. If a situation starts getting out of hand, it is best for both umpires to come together immediately, advise all players except the managers to give you space. Be calm. Get both sides to the argument, confer in private with other umpire, and make the call. Thank the managers for their input. Walk away. Probably the most important sentence in the Umpire's Manual is "The umpire does not have to have the last word."

Remember—we have to live with these people!

PS--

This manual started out as a mini. It kind of grew like topsy. I hope it helps. If anyone has any suggestions or corrections, please feel free to email me at twohardys@hotmail.com.

John Hardy 2014