

Little League Baseball Rule Myths / Clarifications

1. [A batted ball that hits the plate is a foul ball.](#)

Reality:

For the purposes of a fair/foul determination, home plate is no different from the ground. As it happens, all of home plate is in **fair** territory, so if a batted ball touches it, it has merely struck part of fair territory.

A ball that touches the ground before passing either first or third base is not yet a fair or foul ball. It is merely a ball **over** fair or foul territory. This may seem like just a bit of semantics, but the distinction is very real. The ball does not become fair or foul until it either "settles" (stops rolling) or touches something other than the ground - a player, a fence, etc. At **that** time, the ball is then rendered fair or foul based on its position at the time it settles or is touched. How the ball got there (the path it followed before being touched) has nothing to do with the fair/foul determination.

2. [A base runner cannot be guilty of interference on a ground ball if he or she doesn't touch the fielder.](#)

Reality:

Interference does not require contact. The definition of interference reads:

2.00 INTERFERENCE (a) Offensive interference is an act by a member of the team at bat which interferes with, obstructs, impedes, hinders or confuses any fielder attempting to make a play.

Two examples of things that should probably be ruled as interference, even though there is no contact:

1. *The ball is grounded towards the second baseman. R1 stops in front of the fielder until the ball is almost there, then ducks out of the way.*

Here, the runner took up a position that could prevent the fielder from seeing the batted ball as it approached him. Although simply crossing the fielder's line of sight is not generally cause for an interference call, stopping like this is designed to hinder the fielder, and should be penalized.

2. *The ball is grounded towards the second baseman. R1 runs behind him, but just as R1 passed behind him, R1 shouts, "Look out!" The fielder is visibly startled, and misses the ball.*

Here again, the actions of the fielder are clearly designed to confuse or hinder the fielder, even though there is no actual contact.

The two examples above illustrate cases in which the runner clearly interfered with the fielder deliberately. Intent is not always required in order for interference to be called, particularly when the fielder is attempting to field a batted ball. Neither, however, is actual contact.

3. [If a pitch hits a player's hands it's considered a foul ball, since hands are considered part of the bat.](#)

Reality:

The hands are **not** part of the bat. They are part of the arm.

Let's repeat that again. All together now...

The hands are not part of the bat.
The hands are not part of the bat.
The hands are not part of the bat.

Don't believe it? Try this. Hold a bat in your hand at arm's length. Now open your hand. Did the bat hit the ground? Good, gravity works. Where is your hand? I'll bet it's not on the ground. So your hand is not part of the bat.

When a player is hit on the hand by a pitch, the umpire must evaluate the situation just as he would if the pitch had hit him elsewhere:

1. If the pitch was in the strike zone the ball is dead, runners return to the last legally touched base, and the batter gets a strike. If that was the third strike, the batter is out.
2. If the batter was in the process of swinging, just as in the previous case, the ball is dead, runners return to the last legally touched base, and the batter gets a strike. If that was the third strike, the batter is out.
3. If the pitch was not in the strike zone and the batter was not swinging at it, but the batter makes no attempt to get out of the way, the ball is dead, runners return, a ball is charged to the batter and he/she must continue to bat. (Unless that was ball four.)
4. If none of the above conditions apply, the ball is dead, the batter is awarded first base, and runners advance only if forced.

Remember - when a batter is hit **anywhere** by a pitch, the ball is immediately dead, whether or not a base award is made.

4. [The runner must always slide when the play is close.](#)

Reality:

This is probably the single most misunderstood and misapplied rule in Little League. There are any number of variations of the "must slide" myth. "The runner must always slide at home." "The runner must slide if the defense is making a play on him." "The runner must slide once he's been put out during a double play attempt."

None of them are true.

There is **never** any situation in which a runner is **required** to slide. The relevant rule is:

7.08(a)(3) -- Any runner is out when ... the runner does not slide or attempt to get around a fielder who has the ball and is waiting to make the tag;

First, notice that the runner has two options -- he or she may slide, or he or she may attempt to get around the fielder. The choice is up to the runner. Second, notice that the rule says that, if the runner does not elect to slide, that he or she must **attempt to get around** the fielder. It does not say that the runner **must not contact** the fielder. Consider a common play:

The catcher is standing just off the line as the runner approaches. The catcher fields the ball, and starts to step across the line to tag the runner. The runner swerves to his right, trying to avoid the catcher, but the catcher continues his motion toward the runner, and the two collide.

The fact that contact occurred does not mean that the runner is automatically out. In this situation, by swerving, the runner satisfied the rule -- he or she **attempted** to get around the fielder. Of course, if the runner goes more than three feet to either side attempting to avoid a tag, then he or she can be called out under Rule 7.08(a)(1), but that is another matter entirely.

Finally, read the last half of the rule again. For this paragraph to even apply, the fielder must **have the ball and be waiting to make the tag**. Thus, for example, if the runner arrives just as the ball is hitting the catcher's glove, this rule probably doesn't apply either. Only once the catcher is in position to make the tag does the runner acquire the obligation to slide **or** attempt to avoid. In fact, if contact occurs **before** the fielder has the ball, then the fielder is probably guilty of obstruction.

Little League has made this abundantly clear in *Make The Right Call*, a Little League publication with commentary on how the rules should be applied. In there, it says:

There is no "must slide rule." The rule is, "slide or attempt to get around." The key in this situation is "fielder has the ball and is waiting to make a tag." If the fielder (any fielder, not just the catcher) does not have the ball, and there is a collision, you CANNOT call the runner out. However, if the umpire determines that the runner deliberately attempted to injure the fielder, the umpire could eject the runner for unsportsmanlike conduct.

The first part bears emphasizing. Repeat after me:

There is no "must slide" rule.
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There is no "must slide" rule.

5. [In order to be called out on a caught foul ball, the batted ball must go higher than the batter's head.](#)

Reality:

To start off with, there is no such thing as a "caught foul ball." In order for a ball to be foul, it has to strike the ground, the fence or some other object. If that happens, the ball can't be legally caught. Thus, what we're really talking about here is a "ball caught over foul territory."

We all know, of course, that the batter is out if a fielder catches a popup or line drive while the ball is over foul territory. The popup is routine, and that diving catch by the first or third baseman is a play we admire. So what we're **really**, really talking about here is the situation in which it is the catcher who gathers in the ball, not one of the infielders.

Is the catcher somehow special from a rule point of view? Yes. There are two very specific situations in which a batted ball caught in the air by the catcher does not result in an out:

- a. The ball goes sharply and directly from the bat to the catcher's hand or glove and then is caught legally. In this case, the batter has hit a foul tip. A foul tip is a live ball, and a strike. If the batter had two strikes before hitting the foul tip, then he or she is out, since this makes three strikes. Otherwise, however, it is just a strike. This is covered in the definition of a Foul Tip in section 2.00.
- b. The ball goes sharply and directly from the bat and first touches some part of the catcher or his equipment other than the glove or the hand (like his mask or chest protector) and is then caught. This is a "rebound," and is considered a foul ball. (2.00 FOUL TIP mentions that a rebound is not a foul tip. The fact that it is considered a foul ball is a bit of baseball tradition that you won't, actually find written in the rulebook, however.)

That's it, however. If there's any "loop" in the ball as it leaves the bat, it isn't "sharp," so neither of these provisions apply. If it doesn't come straight back to the catcher, but the catcher manages to dive to one side and glove it, it wasn't "direct," so again, neither of these provisions apply. As a result, we fall back to the more general case of "caught before it touches the ground," and the batter is out.

6. [If a fielder holds a fly ball for two seconds it's a legal catch, even if he/she drops it thereafter.](#)

Reality:

Let's look at the definition of a catch in section 2.00:

A CATCH is the act of a fielder in getting secure possession in the hand or glove of a ball in flight and firmly holding it before it touches the ground providing such fielder does not use cap, protector, pocket or any other part of the uniform in getting possession ... In establishing the validity of the catch, the fielder shall hold the ball long enough to prove complete control of the ball and that release of the ball is voluntary and intentional.

You will see that no specific time limit is stipulated. The critical elements here are "secure possession" and "complete control" which are entirely and 100% a judgment call on the part of the umpire.

On one hand, fielder may be considered to have secure possession even though he holds onto the ball for far less than two seconds - consider the outfielder who catches a fly ball and immediately whips the ball back into the infield. The ball was probably in the fielder's glove or hand for much less than two seconds. On the other hand, a fielder could snow-cone a ball on a dead run, stagger for several more steps, fall and have the ball squirt free and not have it considered a catch, even though more than two seconds elapsed between the time the ball went into the glove and when it came out.

"Voluntary release" is one of the key measures that an umpire will use to judge whether or not the player is considered to have control of the ball. In the first case mentioned above, the outfielder deliberately removed the ball from his glove and threw it back to the infield. In the second case, however, the fielder did not intend for the ball to drop out of his glove. Thus, the "voluntary release" in the first case demonstrated "secure possession" and "control," while the "involuntary release" in the second case demonstrated a lack of control

Of course, despite the phrase "and that release of the ball is voluntary and intentional," voluntary release is not the only criteria an umpire will use. Suppose Johnny's in right field, and catches a fly ball for the final out in the Little League World Series. He runs back to the infield and jumps into the arms of another player. As he does so, the ball slips from his glove and lands on the ground. Does the fact that he did not intend to drop the ball mean that this wasn't a catch? Of course not. In carrying the ball back to the infield, he clearly demonstrated control, voluntary release or not. Thus, while voluntary release is **one of** the criteria an umpire will use to judge a legal catch, it's not the only one.

7. [A runner who runs more the three feet away from a direct line between bases is out of the baseline and should be called out.](#)

Reality:

Rachel hits a screamer into the gap. It's clearly going to be extra bases, maybe even a triple. Does Rachel run directly down the first base line, make a perfect right-angle turn at first and then run towards second? Of course not. Part way down toward first, she veers out into foul territory and "rounds" first. Both between home and first, and between first and second, she is almost certainly more than three feet away from a direct line between the bases.

The key to understanding "out of the baseline" is twofold:

- a. Under normal circumstances, the runner makes his or her own baseline.
- b. The rule about staying within three feet of the baseline only applies when a fielder is trying to make a tag.

Until a play is being made on a runner, he or she can take any path to, or between, bases that he or she wants. If the batter wants to go from first to second via center field, that's just fine. Maybe not wise, but definitely legal. When this changes, however, is when a fielder gets the ball in a position to potentially make a tag on the runner. **Then**, and only then, does the "direct line to the base" come into play. Even so, the "line" is a direct line between where the runner currently is and the base, not the direct line between the bases.

Not only does a runner have the right to run outside a direct line between the bases, at times the runner is obligated to. If a fielder is attempting to catch a batted ball, and is standing in the baseline, the runner is required to avoid him or her. Here, too, the runner is **not** out for veering off his path - he or she is doing exactly the correct thing.

8. [On a double play ball, it's mandatory for the runner going into second to slide or get out of the way.](#)

Reality:

7.09(f) It is interference by a batter or runner when... any batter or runner who has just been put out hinders or impedes any following play being made on a runner. Such runner shall be declared out for the interference of a teammate

Play: John is on first. The batter hits the ball to the shortstop, who flips it to second, retiring John. The throw from second to first strikes John as he (a) continues to advance toward second, (b) stops dead in his tracks, (c) throws up his hands as he approaches the second baseman, or (d) veers out of the baseline towards the side of the base from which the second baseman is throwing.

In (a) and (b), no interference has occurred. A runner has the "right of way" with respect to a throw, and, as long as he or she does not **deliberately** interfere, a throw that strikes a runner is alive and in play.

It might appear from a literal reading 7.09(f) that John should be called out. By baseball custom and interpretation, however, a runner who has been put out, and continues to advance, is not judged to be interfering merely because he or she continues to advance, nor is it interference if he or she stops in his or her tracks. The runner must commit some other action that indicates a deliberate intent to interfere before the "spirit" of the rules has been violated. The logic behind this interpretation is that the runner may not, in fact, yet know whether he or she is out, nor can he or she "dematerialize" in order to avoid a subsequent throw. Indeed, the professional rulebook contains a specific casebook statement to this effect:

Comment: If the batter or a runner continues to advance after he has been put out, he shall not by that act alone be considered as confusing, hindering or impeding the fielders.

Although Little League has never incorporated the Casebook comments from the Major League rulebook into its own rulebook, the vast majority of these interpretations do apply to Little League baseball and softball.

In (c), the runner committed a deliberate act to try to distract or interfere with the second baseman. Thus, in this case, interference should be called. The ball is immediately dead, and the batter-runner should be called out for his teammate's interference.

In (d), the umpire must judge whether John left the baseline in order to deliberately stay between the second baseman and first (interference) or whether he was trying to get out of the way of the play (not interference). This is a judgment call.

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10. [In order for a runner to be called out for interference, it must be intentional.](#)

Reality:

There are a number of situations in which intent is not a factor in calling interference on a runner. These include:

- a. The runner hinders a fielder attempting to field a batted ball.
[7.09(a), 7.09(l)]
- b. The bat hits the ball a second time in fair territory.
[7.09(b)]
- c. The batter-runner interferes with a fielder receiving a throw at first by running out of the three-foot "running lane."
[7.09(k)]
- d. A fair ball touches the runner in fair territory before the ball touches or has passed a fielder.
[7.09(m)]

In general, with certain exceptions, the runner has the right of way on a thrown ball, and thus should not be called out for interference if the throw strikes him or her unless the act was intentional. A runner struck by a **batted ball**, however can easily be called out for interference, even if unintentional, because the **fielder** has the right of way to a batted ball.

11. [The home plate umpire can over-rule another umpire if he/she has more experience or a better look at the play.](#)

Reality:

The rulebook explicitly states:

9.02(c) ... No umpire shall criticize, seek to reverse or interfere with another umpire's decision unless asked to do so by the umpire making it.

If the base umpire makes a call, the home plate umpire has no authority to overrule it. Similarly, if the plate umpire makes a call, the base umpire has no authority to overrule it. Rule 9.02(c) also includes the following

If a decision is appealed, the umpire making the decision may ask another umpire for information before making a final decision.

Thus, an umpire may only become involved in a call if his or her partner chooses to ask. Managers have no right to go to another umpire and ask him or her to change a call or attempt to influence the call. The only thing a manager can do is to go to the umpire who made the call and request that he or she check with his or her partner.

The use of the word "appeal" in 9.02(c) deals specifically with the issue of whether or not a call is in conflict with the rules, not whether a judgment call was correct or incorrect.

9.02(b) If there is reasonable doubt that any umpire's decision may be in conflict with the rules; the manager may appeal the decision and ask that a correct ruling be made. Such appeal shall be made only to the umpire who made the protested decision.

Even if the manager does believe that the call was incorrect under the rules, you can see that it is still necessary to go to the umpire who made the call, and let him or her decide whether to ask his/her partner for more information.

12. [A pitch that bounces as it comes in cannot be hit.](#)

Reality:

If a pitch bounces, the only thing that changes is that it can no longer become a called strike. With this single exception, the pitch is alive and in play.

- If the batter swings at the pitch and misses, it is a strike.
- If the batter hits the ball in fair territory, the batted ball is alive and in play.
- If the batter hits the ball foul, it is simply a foul.
- If the bounced pitch hits the batter, all the standard hit-by-pitch rules apply.

13. [The batter is not out for interference with the catcher if he/she stays in the batter's box.](#)

Reality:

Whether or not the batter may be called out for interference depends on the nature of the play. A few examples:

- a. If the catcher is making a throw to attempt to put a runner out, the batter is "protected" while in the batter's box, provided that he or she makes no deliberate attempt to interfere. Thus, for example, if a catcher's snap throw attempting to pick off a runner on first strikes a left-handed batter in the batter's box, interference is only called if the batter deliberately interfered with the throw. The batter cannot be expected to "dematerialize."
- b. If a runner is attempting to score, the batter is required to vacate the area, if necessary, to avoid interfering with the defense. If the batter remains in the box, and his or her presence interferes with the play, interference should be called, even if the batter did not commit any deliberate action. An exception to this would be a squeeze play - the batter is allowed to stay in the box because he has the right to try to hit the pitch. In this case, however, the batter must still avoid doing anything to deliberately interfere with the defense's play on the runner once the pitch is past him or her.
- c. If the batter's follow-through strikes the catcher and interferes with his or her attempt to throw out a runner who is stealing, interference can be called, even if the batter did not leave the box. The batter is responsible for his or her follow-through.

A general "rule of thumb" is that the box protects a batter who is struck by a thrown ball, except when a play at home is under way. The batter must not, however, interfere with a play at the plate, physically contact the catcher outside the batter's box, or deliberately interfere with any play.

If the batter **leaves** the batter's box, he or she is completely responsible for any interference that might happen.

With R2 on second, the pitch is wild, going all the way to the backstop and then rebounding up the third base line. The catcher retrieves the ball and throws toward third, attempting to retire R2. When the pitch passed the catcher, the batter backed out of the box toward the third base fence. The catcher's throw strikes the batter.

In this situation, 6.06(c) applies:

6.06(c) A batter is out for illegal action when ... interfering with the catcher's fielding or throwing by stepping out of the batter's box or making any other movement that hinders the catcher's play at home base.
EXCEPTION: Batter is not out if any runner attempting to advance is put out, or if runner trying to score is called out for batter's interference.

Thus, the batter can be called out for interference, and R2 returned to second.

14. [Contact must occur for interference or obstruction to be called.](#)

Reality:

The definition of offensive interference in 2.00 INTERFERENCE reads:

Offensive interference is an act by a member of the team at bat which interferes with, obstructs, impedes, hinders or confuses any fielder attempting to make a play.

Note that the word "contact" does not appear in the definition, while the word "confuse," while does not require contact, does. In fact, there are at least two actions that do not necessarily involve contact that are specifically cited as interference in the rulebook:

7.09 It is interference by a batter or runner when...

(e) any member or members of the offensive team stand or gather around any base to which a runner is advancing, to confuse, hinder or add to the difficulty of the fielders. Such runner shall be declared out for the interference of teammate or teammates

(j) with a runner on third base, the base coach leaves the box and acts in any manner to draw a throw by a fielder

A runner could also easily interfere with a fielder by standing in front of him to block his view of a batted ball, or by shouting at the fielder as he passes behind him. Each of these actions also can be considered interference.

The definition of obstruction reads

OBSTRUCTION is the act of a fielder who, while not in possession of the ball, impedes the progress of any runner. A fake tag is considered obstruction. (NOTE: Obstruction shall be called on a defensive player who blocks off a base, base line or home plate from a base runner while not in possession of the ball.)

A runner can easily be impeded without requiring contact - the simple act of "taking a detour" around an obstructing player will certainly cause a runner to take longer to get to his destination. Thus, even if contact does not occur, this can constitute obstruction.

15. [If the batter does not pull the bat out of the strike zone while in the bunting position, it's an automatic strike.](#)

Reality:

As with the "breaking the wrists" myth, the position of the bat during a bunt attempt has nothing to do with whether the pitch is a strike or not. It is solely a question whether, in the umpire's judgment, the batter made an attempt to hit the ball.

When a player squares to bunt, he is simply adopting a different batting stance. This stance may or may not involve the bat being in the zone. If the batter makes no attempt to move the bat towards the ball, he

or she has not attempted to hit it. Thus, in this situation, if the pitch is outside the strike zone, it must be called a ball.

Granted, it is better practice for a batter who does not want to bunt a pitch to move his bat away from the ball and out of the strike zone, since this is much more likely to convince the umpire that he/she was not "offering" at the pitch. A batter who does not do this, however, and who made no motion toward the ball, has not met the criteria for a called strike.

16. [The batter does not get first base if hit by a pitch after it bounces.](#)

Reality:

When a pitch bounces, the **only** thing that changes is that it can no longer be a called strike. The pitch is still alive and in play. The batter may swing at it, and if it hits the batter, all the standard rules about whether or not the batter is awarded first apply.

17. [If a player's feet are in fair territory when the ball is touched, it is a fair ball.](#)

Reality:

The position of a player's feet have nothing to do with whether a ball is fair or foul. The "condition" of the ball is based solely on where the ball is with respect to the foul line. The rule book emphasizes this by including the following phrases:

Under 2.00 FAIR BALL:

A fair fly shall be adjudged according to the relative position of the ball and the foul line, including the foul pole, and not as to whether the fielder is on fair or foul territory at the time such fielder touches the ball.

Under 2.00 FOUL BALL:

A foul fly shall be judged according to the relative position of the ball and the foul line, including the foul pole, and not as to whether the fielder is on foul or fair territory at the time that fielder touches the ball.

18. [A pitcher may not wear sunglasses.](#)

Reality:

Pitchers are permitted to wear non-mirrored sunglasses while pitching. If it becomes a distraction because when the pitcher throws they fall off and it continues happening then the umpire has the right to ask them to take them off. Also, while on the field the sunglasses cannot be removed and placed on top of the hat. They must be worn until the inning is over or removed completely from the field of play.