

## **Three-Umpire System Tips (Florida HS)**

*Last Updated: 1 July 2022*

The three-umpire system is probably the most fun to work, once you are familiar with it and have a chance to work it enough to be comfortable.

There are four basic rules to remember:

1. Rotations are ALWAYS clockwise. (PU to 3B, U3 to 1B/2B, U1 to home)
2. If you start counter-rotated (U1 in B), there will be NO rotations.
3. We cover (in our zone) every fly ball that has potential to touch leather. If U1 or U3 goes out, the other two revert to two-umpire mechanics.
4. If U1 or U3 turns their back to the plate, they have gone out — and have fair/foul, catch/no catch responsibility.

These tips are divided into three sections, one for each umpire. PU = Plate Umpires; U1 = First Base Umpire; U3 = Third Base Umpire.

### **Plate Umpire (PU)**

PU actually has the job that is most familiar. It isn't that different from the duties and mechanics of the two-umpire system. Calling balls and strikes is the same as it is for every game. Heel-toe positioning, good pelvic alignment (belt buckle aimed at the front outside corner), in the slot, and head height are identical to the mechanics for the two-umpire system.

*Rotations:* Whenever U1 starts on the line you have a potential for rotation. If neither base umpire goes out, PU has the lead runner at 3B. Rotations happen most often with a single runner on 1B. Be ready for rotations on sacrifice bunts or throws to 1B from the infield. PU trails and observes the play at 1B, but is ready to really hustle to calling position at 3B. When PU moves to 3B, he pushes U3 to 1B/2B, and pulls U1 to home. Strong verbals help in the push-pull.

*Stay Home:* If U1 starts counter-rotated, there will be no rotations. If neither base umpire goes out, PU has no responsibility at 3B. Resist the temptation to move down the line to the holding zone you use in the two-ump system. Hold behind the point of the plate and read the play.

*Check Swing:* Clear your mask and go to the appropriate base umpire (U1 for right-handed batters, U3 for left-handers).

*No Runners, U1 Goes Out:* When there are NO RUNNERS and U1 goes out, PU will move to calling position at 1B (as U3 moves to the “rabbit target” at 2B). PU has all calls at 1B and home. U3 has all calls at 2B and 3B. This is NOT a trail, it’s a full-out hustle to calling position at 1B.

### **First Base Umpire (U1)**

*Starting Positions:* ALWAYS start with your shoulders square to the plate and your belt buckle aimed at the point of the plate. Turn your head toward the pitcher and runner(s) to check for illegal pitches and leaving early.

- No runners or single runner at 3B: 18-21’ behind the base, in foul territory, walk the line.
- Single runner on 1B: 12’ behind the base, 12”-18” off the line, and in a set position. (U3 is 12’ behind the base line as well. You should be able to glance over and be even with each other.)
- Runner on 2B, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>, or bases loaded: Shade the runner on 2B (be on F4’s right shoulder). If F4 is pushing you too far toward 2B, move to her left shoulder. Go to a set position when PU goes set.
- Runners on 1B and 3B: Shade the runner on 1B (be on F4’s left shoulder). Go to a set position when PU goes set.

*Rotations:* Whenever U1 starts on the line, you have the potential for a rotation. When the lead runner reaches 2B, U1 should be in foul territory. Parallel the lead runner as she runs toward 3B. By the time she reaches 3B, you should be near the plate. Always finish your rotation at the point of the plate. U1 pushes PU to 3B and pulls U3 to 1B/2B. Strong verbals help in the push-pull. *Be aware that even a simple sacrifice bunt play can require a rotation. After the play at 1B, any following throw to make a play on R1 can result in an overthrow. In that case, U1 has the play at the plate and PU has the play at 3B.*

*Buttonhooks:* If U3 doesn’t go out, you have help ahead. If you buttonhook inside, hit your target close to the 1B line. (10-12’ from the 1B line and 10-12’ inside the baseline.)

*Steals:* When the runner on 1B breaks for 2B, move up to 1B in foul ground and observe the play. Be prepared to rotate if there is an overthrow.

*Single Runner on 1B—Plays at First:* Starting only 12’ behind the base, you need to gain some distance from the base to get to the desired 18’. Move toward the outfield as you move into fair territory.

*Two Out Plays at 1B:* If you are counter-rotated with two outs and the grounder goes to the F1 or F5, the throw will almost certainly go to 1B. Move **HARD** and parallel to the baseline toward 1B to close the distance for this key call.

*Outfield Coverage:* Know your coverage area. U1 has the “right of first refusal” on a ball between your area and U3’s area. U3 will read U1 and adjust. Give a verbal (“TWO MAN”) and/or visual signal to your partners when you go out. Move parallel to the flight of the ball, NOT at the play. Stop and be set to see fair/foul, catch/no catch. The easiest “ding” for an evaluator is to see your feet still moving after the ball hits the ground or is caught. Make your signal facing the play. Turn back toward the infield and observe the rest of the play.

*Left Shoulder ... Let It Go:* If U1 starts counter-rotated, PU has fly ball coverage from F9 to the out-of-play boundary down the right field line. Resist the temptation to go out on a fly ball that is over your left shoulder. Come inside and buttonhook, pick up your runner(s) and the ball. Think, “Left Shoulder ... Let It Go!”

*Working outside the diamond:* See the FHSAA Softball Mechanics document for suggested ways to properly use foul ground and for times you can choose to work outside the diamond.

*Work Between Pitches:* When you are responsible for a runner or runners, the pitch is not hit, and there is no immediate throw from F2, you should “work between pitches.” If a defender moves to cover the base, you take a couple of steps toward your calling position. Keeps you alert and loose.

### **Third Base Umpire (U3)**

*Starting Positions:* ALWAYS start with your shoulders square to the plate and your belt buckle aimed at the point of the plate. Turn your head toward the pitcher and runner(s) to check for illegal pitches and leaving early.

- No runners: 18-21’ behind the base, in foul territory, walk the line.
- Single runner on 1B: On a line from the inside edge of 3B through the inside edge of 2B and 12’ behind the base line, and in a set position. (U1 is 12’ behind the base line as well. You should be able to glance over and be even with each other. U1 should have a 12’ reference point marked somewhere, so position yourself off U1.)
- Runner on 2B or 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>: 12’ behind the base in foul territory, and in a set position.

- Anytime there is a runner on 3B: 12' behind the base, 4'-5' off the line in foul territory, and in a set position. (This helps protect you from being blocked by the runner, who is taught to stay in foul territory as she leads off from 3B.)

*Rotations:* Whenever U1 starts on the line, you have the potential for a rotation. On a hit to the outfield, if neither base umpire goes out, U3 hustles to calling position at 2B. When the lead runner rounds 2B, you have all subsequent calls at 1B or 2B. U3 pushes U1 to home and pulls PU to 3B. Strong verbals help in the push-pull.

*Steals:* Steal attempts are simple for U3 in the three-umpire system. The starting position of 12' behind the base at 2B means you only have to take a step up to the 90° angle and a perfect 10-12' distance. Move to keep all four elements in view. At 3B, just step into fair territory and up to 10'. Don't over-hustle on steal attempts.

*Force Plays at 2B:* With a single runner on 1B, you are only a couple of steps away from ideal calling position for force plays at 2B. If the throw is coming from inside the base lines, move back and to your **left** to 18'. If the throw is coming from outside the base lines, move back and to your **right** to 18'. These directional steps get you closer to a 90° angle to the throw.

*Backside 90:* When you start rotated and the throw goes to 1B (SAC bunt, for example), move around the outfield side as R1 rounds 2B. That puts you in position for a possible tag play on a runner diving back to 2B.

*Outfield Coverage:* Know your coverage area. U1 has the “right of first refusal” on a ball between your area and U1’s area. U3 will read U1 and adjust. Give a verbal (“TWO MAN”) and a visual signal to your partners when you go out. Move parallel to the flight of the ball, NOT at the play. Stop and be set to see fair/foul, catch/no catch. The easiest “ding” for an evaluator is to see your feet still moving after the ball hits the ground or is caught. Make your signal facing the play. Turn back toward the infield and observe the rest of the play.

*No Runners, U1 Goes Out:* When there are NO RUNNERS and U1 goes out, PU will move to calling position at 1B. U3 will move to the “rabbit target” at 2B. PU has all calls at 1B and home. U3 has all calls at 2B and 3B.

*Using Foul Ground:* See the FHSAA Softball Mechanics document for ways to properly use foul ground to get to the best holding/calling positions.

*Work Between Pitches:* When you are responsible for a runner or runners, the pitch is not hit, and there is no immediate throw from F2, you should “work between pitches.” If a defender moves to cover the base, you take a couple of steps toward your calling position. Keeps you alert and loose.