

Situation:

In the top of the 4th inning with the score tied 4-4, there was a runner on 2nd base with 2 outs & and an 0-2 count on the batter.

Prior to the next pitch, the runner on 2nd base yells "Curve ball!"

The pitch is wild, eludes the catcher, and the runner on 2nd base advances to 3rd base safely. The base umpire calls "Time!"

Is this unsportsmanlike conduct under Little League rules?

Is there a penalty?

Answer:

It was clear that what R2 did was steal the sign & relaying the pitch selection (not too subtly) to the batter. Although many may consider the stealing of signs to be unsportsmanlike in Little League, it is not against the rules unless a local league has specifically adopted the Note under Rule 9.01(d)

Rule 9.01(d) NOTE:

*The local league has the option to adopt this rule application. The stealing and relaying of signs to alert the batter of pitch selection and/or location is unsportsmanlike behavior. If, in the judgment of the umpire, this behavior is occurring, the team manager and those responsible including any player(s) and/or coach(es) shall be warned after the first offense. Those responsible including any player(s), coach(es), and/or manager shall be ejected from the game for a team's subsequent offense.*

Absent a local league adopting this option, sign stealing is considered part of the game. The only option then available to the defensive team is to make their signs more difficult to steal. How do you know if a local league has adopted the rule outlawing the stealing of signs? You need to have reviewed the local league rules for each league at which you are umpiring. Do not rely on the managers; invariably, managers don't know what the local league rules options their league has adopted (or opted out of). Furthermore, Managers cannot, by mutual agreement, decide at the plate meeting what local league rule options they are going to employ for that particular game.

This particular league's rules state that they have adopted the rule prohibiting the stealing of signs. If a local league has adopted the rule & you become aware that a team is stealing signs & relaying them to their hitters, the penalty is a warning to offender/s & manager for the first offense (I would advise warning the manager & allowing the manager to talk to the violators).

For a subsequent offense the offender/s are ejected. I would also eject the manager at that time (even if the manager is not the perpetrator) because the manager is ultimately responsible for the actions/conduct of their team (per the rulebook Definitions - Manager).

This is the sort of thing that is good to report to the local league president, per Rule 9.05(a) Rule 9.05 (a)

*The umpire shall report to the league president within 24 hours after the end of a game all violations of rules and other incidents worthy of comment, including the disqualification of any manager, coach, or player, and the reasons therefore.*

Things that should be reported include (but are not limited to) ejections, protests, serious injuries including possible concussions, unsafe field conditions, unruly spectator behavior, tobacco use, & unsportsmanlike conduct that didn't lead to an ejection.

Don't see it as tattling; rather you are keeping the Local League Board of Directors informed about what's happening on their fields.