

Oregon School Activities Association

Baseball SRI Bulletin – #4

May 4, 2015

'DID HE GO?'

This bulletin will focus on one of the toughest calls in baseball-the check swing. "Did he go?"

Sometimes the appeal of a less than obvious full swing can be contentious. When can, and should, the plate umpire ask for help? What are the criteria for deciding if it is a swing? What are the proper procedures to follow in making an appeal? These are important questions that I will attempt to answer in this bulletin.

Any checked swing that is called a ball may be appealed. Under NFHS rules, an appeal is never mandatory. If you are a 100% that you got it right, you have every right not to ask for help. It is strictly at the discretion of the plate umpire to ask for help on appeal. (10-1-4a) Be very cautious about choosing not to ask for help unless the team is making a mockery of the proceedings by asking for help on obvious non-swings. Typically nothing bad can come of confirming your call with your partner(s), but plenty bad can happen if your refusal to ask is seen as confrontational by the offended team.

When a batter checks his swing, and a strike is called, there cannot be an appeal.

The umpire's decision on a checked swing should be based entirely on his judgment as to whether or not the batter struck at the pitch. We know a proper swing includes a short stride towards the pitcher as the pitch is in route and the batter shifts his weight from his back foot forward. It is at this point that the bat gets carried forward in an attempt to strike at the ball or the batter may be able drag the bat behind his body such that there is no effort to hit the baseball.

Here are two guidelines that may be helpful in determining if the batter swung: 1) Did the barrel of the bat break the plane of the front hip, or 2) Did the barrel of the bat break the plane of the front edge of the plate, provided the batter is positioned in the center of the batter's box?

If the batter turns with his arms tucked close to his body, as opposed to arms extended, it should be ruled a ball. That is merely a defensive maneuver.

Attempted bunts are treated differently. Merely holding the bat in the strike zone does not necessarily constitute a strike. You must be convinced the batter "offered" at the ball.

At the end of the day, it is strictly umpire judgment as to whether the batter struck at the pitch and it is often determined more easily by the base umpire if the plate umpire is shielded and/or was tracking the pitch so long that he was unable to fully view the batter's potential swing.

Jeopardy

Umpires as well as players must be aware the appeal on a check swing may place the batter or baserunners in jeopardy if a ball call is reversed to a strike. On any two strike count with first base unoccupied (or with two outs and first base occupied), when a check swing is not caught, the plate umpire should make an immediate appeal. In base stealing situations, with a three ball count, base runners must be alert to the possibility of being in jeopardy of being put out by the catcher's throw if a potential fourth ball is reversed to a strike call.

Base umpire guidelines

Most base umpires have limited trouble judging checked swings from the foul lines, but the B and C positions can be challenging. When in B or C, only make the call if you are 100% sure the batter offered at the pitch. Do not hesitate to go for help, however, simply because your partner is in the middle of the diamond. Allowing the appeal and ruling no swing will create significantly fewer issues than not granting the appeal request.

Appeals

Once the base umpire responds to the appeal and the original call is sustained or overturned, there can be no further appeal. Any further protest should be considered arguing balls and strikes, which is prohibited by rule. (10-1-4)

Mechanics

When an appeal of a checked swing is made, the plate umpire should point to the base umpire with his left hand. Base umpires must be alert for the request from the plate and quickly respond. There are two possible replies. “No, he didn’t (while giving the safe signal). The UIC should respond by giving the correct count. The other response is, “Yes, he did” (while signaling a strike). The plate umpire should repeat the strike call and give the count. The base umpire should always give his or her truthful opinion. “Give me what you got” is a universally accepted guideline.

Tad’s Tip....

When a coach comes out to argue: the most effective thing you can do is be quiet and listen.

See you at the yard.

Tad Cockerill
OSAA State Rules Interpreter
cockerill51@gmail.com