

Rule 2.0: Definition of a Bunt

Up until this year, a batter could hold the bat in the bunting position out over the plate without penalty as long as the pitch did not cross the strike zone, strike the bat, or the batter did not “make an offer” at the pitch. Under the new rule, putting Little League Softball in line with Federation and NCAA rules, a batter must withdraw the bat from the “ready to bunt” position before the ball gets to the batter or the very fact of holding the bat out will be considered an offer.

Be careful! A drag bunt is treated more like a standard swing, necessitating an actual motion of the bat at the pitch to be considered an offer. What the rule is talking about is a batter set in the box, holding the bat over the plate for the ball to be “met with the bat and tapped slowly.”

Rule 6.09 (b) Dropped Third Strike

The batter becomes a runner when –

(b) Major/Junior/Senior/Big League: the third strike called by the umpire is not caught, providing (1) first base is unoccupied or (2) first base is occupied with two out. NOTE: A batter forfeits the opportunity to advance to first base when he/she enters the dugout or any other dead ball area.

Now the Majors Division of softball gets to enjoy this cool rule. Seems easy enough to understand but hold on a second. Let’s go over a few situations and see if you have a handle on this one.

Situation #1:

No runners on base, two strikes on batter. Batter takes called strike three and the ball pops out of the catcher’s mitt. She immediately picks it up and tags the batter. The batter is now out. If the batter had run towards first base the catcher would have to throw the ball to the bag to complete the strikeout. *All baserunning rules apply to this situation, so umpires should watch for running lane violations here!*

If the batter had simply walked back to her dugout, the umpire should wait until she steps into the dugout area and declare her out at that point.

Situation #2:

Same as above except the batter has swung and missed the third strike, which skips on the ground into the catcher’s mitt. This is also a dropped third strike. The umpire should point at the mitt and say: “Strike Three, no catch”, under new rules mechanics developed from Major League Baseball.

Situation #3:

Same as above two examples except first base is occupied and less than two outs. Any dropped third strike is an out, batter may not advance by rule. Umpire should make Strike Three mechanic and declare; “The batter is out.” If the batter attempts to advance the umpire can repeat “The batter is out!”, but any subsequent actions by the defense are their own choice. If they choose to make a play on the batter who has been declared out it is not, by rule, considered interference on her part. They must ignore her attempt to advance, especially after the plate umpire has declared her out.

Situation #4:

Two outs, bases loaded, two strikes on batter. She swings and misses at a ball in the dirt. The ball rolls to the backstop, where the catcher retrieves it. She runs to home plate, touching it before the runner from third gets there. The runner is out. Why? A dropped third strike with two outs can set up a force play just like a ball put into play on a hit. So with bases loaded all the catcher needs to do is touch home plate with the ball in her possession.

Umpire notes on dropped third strikes:

It is very important here for the field umpire to be aware of a potential Dropped Third Strike situation. You may be called upon to help your partner out on pitches swung at and missed in the dirt, as the plate umpire may not see or hear it. Get in the habit of signaling to the plate umpire that the ball has been caught (right fist clenched) or dropped (right index finger pointing to the ground) on any potential third strike, no matter how obvious. Your partner will thank you for it!

If a player is improperly advancing, do not attempt to stop her in any other way than the plate umpire's declaration. Make that declaration loud enough to be heard and say it no more than a couple of times. There is no call at first even if they throw down to get her, as she is already out. If she continues past first base and draws a throw, she may then be subject to an interference call.

Rule 7.08 (a)(5) When Runners Can Leave a Base

Any runner is out when –

(a) (5) Major Division: the runner fails to keep contact with the base to which that runner is entitled until the ball has been released by the pitcher on the delivery. (NOTE: A local league may adopt a rule that requires the runner to keep in contact with the base to which that runner is entitled until the ball has been batted or reaches the batter, or be called out.)

(b) Minor League/Tee Ball: the runner fails to keep in contact with the base to which that runner is entitled until the ball has been batted or reaches the batter.

For anybody who has umpired at the Juniors level or above, this one is easy. However, if your umpires have not they need to be aware of how girls use a “runner's start” to be off with the pitch. The runner's foot will typically be behind the base from the direction of travel (ie, in foul territory at first base), and will be crossing over as the pitch is being released. The foot on the bag may lift up a split second before the ball actually leaves the pitcher's hand, *but that is not considered leaving early!*

Look to the spirit of the law and not the letter on this one. If the foot on the base follows the lead foot and strikes the ground before the pitch is released, point to the runner, call: “Time! Runner left early. Runner is out!” All other runners must return to their previously occupied bases, the batter resumes her at-bat with the previous count and no other action can take place. This means any hit by the batter is nullified.

Rule 8.01 (f) Pitching

“The pitcher shall hold the ball in *one or both hands* in front of the body for no less than one and not more than ten seconds before starting the delivery.”

Many coaches still believe that the pitcher must bring her hands together before starting her pitching motion. This part of the rule makes it clear that she need not do that in Little League Softball. What she can *not* do is hold her hands at her side and pitch directly from that position. “Hold the ball...no less than one and not more than ten seconds...” can mean as little as a brief pause. So the pitcher can start with the ball in her hand at her side, bring it up in front of her and then pitch without even touching the glove.