

# With A Runner On First

## A Two Umpire Base Primer

**Examine** where you, the base umpire, spend the majority of your time. By far you are standing on the first base line, in foul territory, 10-15 feet back of the base. From here the options seem limited: you are either going out to watch the catch of the ball, occasionally signaling fair or foul, or you are preparing to move to fair territory. Once in fair territory your training and instinct either sets up the 90-degree angle as you follow the ball to the play at first or you are about to pivot and lead the runner anticipating a play at second base. The motions of the base umpire remain the same whether you are on a 60 or 90-foot diamond, playing baseball or softball.

**When** a runner gets to first things change. More important, the different diamond sizes and issues arising from the speed of the game place different coverage demands on the plate and base umpire. An umpire who works baseball on a 300' diamond will be quite used to chasing fly balls into the outfield. This can cause considerable problems when you work on a 200' fast pitch softball diamond where the plate umpire makes all rulings on fair/foul, catch/no-catch.

**There** are fortunately common elements that can be taught and with minor adjustments to the placement of the umpire a foundation for effective coverage can be established. It is important for umpires to learn with an eye to the future. The majority of umpires have been called upon at the last minute to fill in on a game that is beyond their current instruction level. Suddenly the umpire is faced with a larger diamond, new positions, pitch-outs, pick-offs or a multitude of potential danger areas. It is incumbent on the umpire to learn field positioning in a manner that allows knowledge to be applied easily to these new situations. That is the premise from which this article has grown.

**First, where is Position 'B' anyway?** When it comes to positioning umpiring systems usually discuss umpire placements as Plate and positions A, B, C and D.

- **Position A** is in foul territory, usually 10-15 feet up the first base line
- Similarly **Position D** is on the third base line. (You will never use this position in a two-umpire system.) It is important to note that these positions are 10-15 feet **relative to the baseman's position and not the base.** □ **Tip:** How far in foul territory? If the umpire pivots 180 degrees to face the outfield their belt buckle should come over the foul line. □ **Tip:** How deep should the umpire stand? On the 60 foot diamond the umpire will have to come in closer, say 8-12 feet away. On the 90-foot diamond you can move back slightly, 10-15 feet. **Always take your position according to the baseman.** □ **Please note:** "At position A take a position 10-15 feet behind the FIRST BASEMAN. You take your position relative to F3, NOT the base. Regardless of wherever F3 is. If he's playing super deep for a lefty slugger at the rim of the outfield grass, you're still going to be 10-15 feet behind him. The reason is you want to keep F3 in your peripheral vision, and not get in his way if he suddenly breaks back to his left. Like on a pop-up and you're both looking up. You don't want him to run into you blind-sided. Keeping 10-15 behind him, allows you time to see his movements and react accordingly. Hence, on a routine infield ground ball, as F3 races to the bag to take a throw, you just follow him in, crossing to your 90-degree angle position. Similarly, this technique allows you to be 10-12 feet back when F3 is holding a runner on." □
- **Position B** is easy to locate if you visualize an imaginary line from home plate running along the first base edge of the pitching mound. On the 90-foot diamond you will stand on the infield halfway between the rubber and second base along this imaginary line. On the sixty foot diamond continue this line into the outfield and take a position about 12 feet behind the baseline between first and second base. (Usually the edge of the outfield grass) You would also occupy this position with runners on 1st and 3rd, or the bases loaded. Most crews also prefer this position anytime two are out and there are runners on base. On the 60' diamond this position is always one of compromise. Often you will be

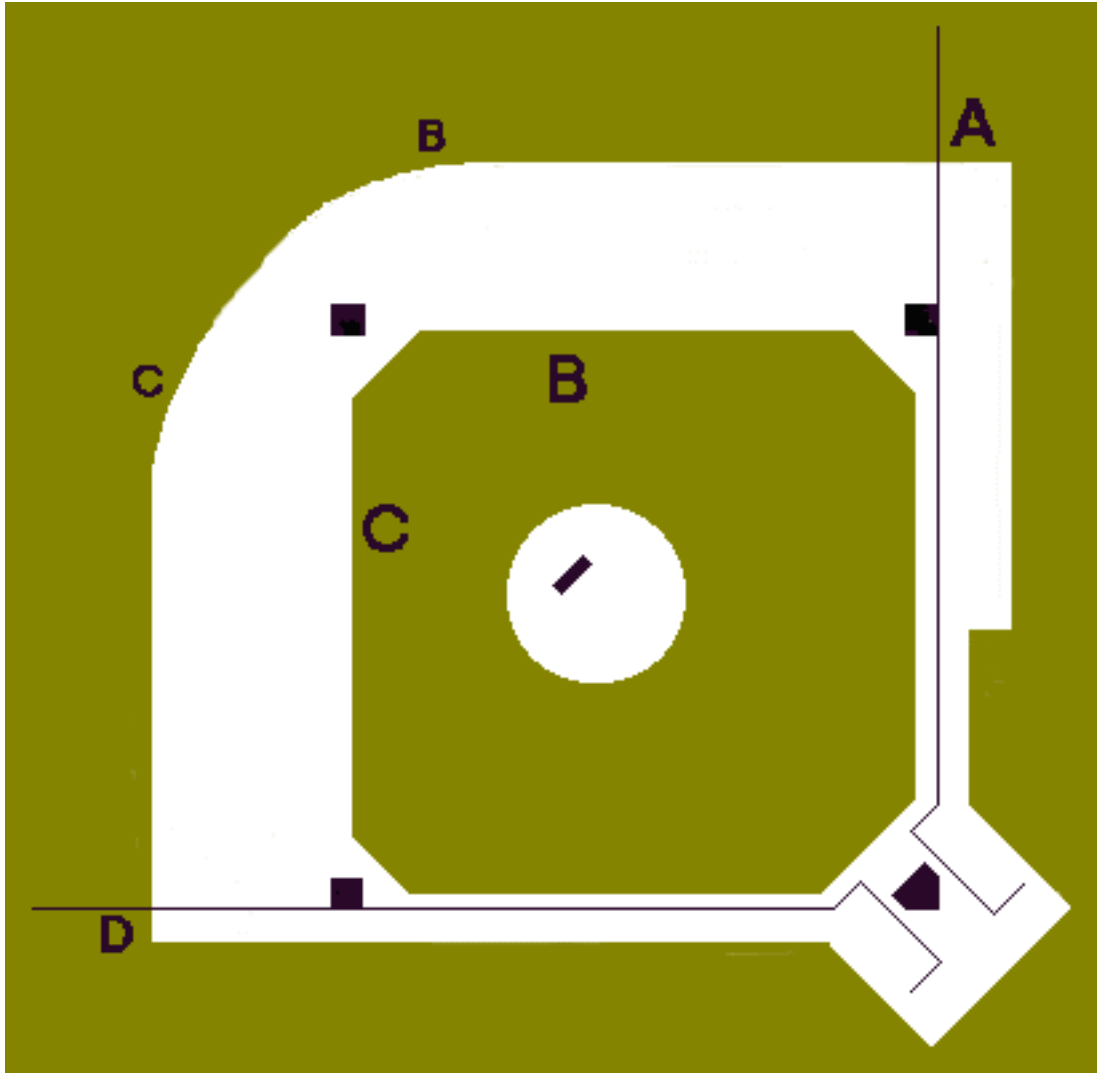
unable to gain an angle on a play simply due to the fielder's position, the charging runner and the thrown ball. Steal attempts can put you in the worse of possible situations: the ball, the base and the sliding runner all obstructed from view and no time to really adjust your positioning. On the 60' diamond you must be prepared to move aggressively and often to move slightly away from the play in order to gain the most critical component in accurate calls, an angle. □

- **Position C**, which you would occupy with runners on first and second before two are out, is in the exact position as B but uses an imaginary line drawn on the third base side of the mound. **Tip**: if the diamond you are working on is not clearly marked then teach the umpire to visualize the regulation circle around the rubber. □ **Tip**: in position B and C you will stand so that your shoulders are parallel to the front edge of the plate. □
- **Deep B** (75-90' only) means moving backwards up the imaginary line a few feet as you anticipate a stolen base attempt.
- **Deep B** (60' only) means moving inwards, towards the baseline, on the imaginary line a few feet as you anticipate a stolen base attempt.

**Shaded B** means favoring first base just a step or two as you anticipate the pickoff or bunt attempt. Experienced umpires can make this work. If you are new to the positioning game then avoid making minor corrections.

**Tip**: there is no hard and fast rule on perfect placement. Anticipation and experience will dictate how the official fine-tunes their positioning.

We hope this list helps the coaching, umpiring, and our BVPB Family improve their knowledge of the game. Original author unknown and revised by Wade Lavery for BVPB use.



# "The Basics"

A quick note on the mechanics: Many years ago it was popular for the plate umpire to handle all fair/foul and catch/no catch calls. This remains the general rule in softball however baseball umpires have adopted a split set of responsibilities owing to the increased field size, decreased size of the ball and proportional speed increase of the hit baseball. Deciding whether a 2 1/2 inch diameter baseball moving at over 90 miles per hour hit one side of a line or the other 290 feet away is not an easy task.

Many umpires who will work baseball on the smaller 60-foot diamond are instructed in the traditional softball coverage. This will work fine until they move up to a larger diamond and simply due to distance and speed the coverage will break down. Worse still, when the time comes to move to three and four umpire mechanics the ingrained small diamond coverage patterns can become an impediment to effective coverage.

Can you work a softball game using modern baseball coverage systems? Yes. Can you work a full diamond baseball game using softball mechanics? Certainly, but not without opening the potential for significant and costly error.

**Ideally** the umpire will be conversant with both systems. The baseball coverage is more complicated initially but stepping back to softball mechanics is relatively easy. Stepping up from softball to baseball mechanics will not be done without a period of detailed study.

**A tip.** Relating to "position B or C on a regulation field. You're sometimes come set directly in the way of F4 or F6. If one of them calls, "Hey Blue, can you move over?" Fight the urge to turn around and look where he is, or ask him, "Which way?" That's exactly the time the pitcher will balk, or attempt a pick-off at 1B and you'll miss it. Or the batter will launch a bee-bee right off your coconut! If a fielder asks you to move, unless he specifically tells you which way he would like you to shift, just quickly slide over two steps without response or averting your eyes from where you're looking. I usually go "away from" second base when I'm asked to shift. (Moving to the right at position C, to the left when at B.)"

## Five important concepts:

- Always **"open the gate."** This means letting the ball direct you to the play. You are opening the gate when you keep your shoulders 90 degrees to an imaginary line drawn to the ball. The tangential move will minimize the mistakes you will make if you set up anticipating a play at a base only to have the ball go in another direction, or a wild throw.
- Always be on the **look out for the double play.** Any bunt, infield hit or even charged outfield hit can become a double play ball. If you minimize your foot motion and concentrate on gaining an angle on each play you will get a higher percentage of correct calls. Never make a call while you are in motion but get ready to bounce to the next play and call quickly.
- You plate umpire will handle all fair/foul calls and will provide assistance on bobbled balls, swipe tags or pulled foot errors at first base. **If you need help request it before you make the call.**
- At no time will you rotate to cover home plate. Unlike working from Position A (after going out to cover a fly-ball in right field) you will **never take this responsibility** from the plate umpire.
- Above all: **read the play** and **communicate**

## Remember ☐ Pause - Read - React ☐ and ☐ Communicate!

With a runner on first ...		
Situation	Baseball (75-90' diamond)	Softball (60' diamond)
<b>Starting Position</b>	Infield Position B	Outfield Position B
<b>Fair / Foul</b>	No responsibilities. The plate umpire handles this.	
<b>Batted Ball Hits Batter</b>	Shared responsibility. Call "Time" to kill the play.	

<b>Pick-off</b>	Step forward with the right foot. Pivot with the left. Open the gate and follow the ball to the glove and player. Set and call. If the play breaks down you have the runner all the way to third base.	
<b>Steal</b>	If anticipated then move to Deep B. Read the runner and catcher. Open the gate with the catcher's throw and step towards the play, set and call. Do not rush your call. Be certain the fielder is in possession of the ball before giving an "out" call.	
<b>Bunt</b>	If expected shade to 1st. You have all calls at 1st and 2nd and last half of the 45' lane. Don't commit to a base, you will get fooled! If play breaks down the Umpire in Charge will cover 3rd and home. Follow the BR to third if needed and communicate you are doing so.	Move aggressively to the infield. You have all calls at 1st and 2nd and last half of the 30' lane. If play breaks down the Umpire in Charge will cover 3rd and home
<b>Infield Hit</b>	Keep your chest to the ball (open the gate) and maintain angle as you step, pivot and make the call. Bounce out and be prepared for the double play.	Read the play and step to get an angle at 2nd, step forward and pivot following the play to 1st and call. Adjust quickly for the double play.
<b>Infield Pop-up</b>	You have responsibility for the tag up and <b>only if</b> you can see directly into the fielder's glove will you share the "catch/no-catch" with the Umpire in Charge. Anticipate any following plays and move on the infield accordingly.	
<b>Outfield Hit</b>	You will have plays that develop at 1st and 2nd. If the fielder throws behind the runner you will have to move aggressively to gain the best angle on the ensuing play. Follow the BR to third if required communicating, "I'll take third if he goes."	Move aggressively into the infield approximately halfway between 1st and 2nd base. Follow the play and step towards the base the fielder is throwing to. The plate umpire has any plays that develop at third or home.
<b>Outfield Fly In The "V" Between F7 &amp; F9</b>	This is your call. Umpire in Charge will handle the tag up. Take one or two steps <b>backwards</b> towards the mound, maybe a few towards the first baseline, in order to gain an angle. <b>Never go to the outfield!</b> If there is a catch you have any plays on R1. Be ready for the tag up and steal of second base. On a "no-catch" you will have plays at 1st and 2nd. Move aggressively back to Position B while following the play.	You have the tag up and subsequent plays at 1st or 2nd base. Move quickly to the infield to gain an angle on R1 and the catch. Follow the play to second if it happens.
<b>Outfield Fly On Either Baseline</b>	You have the tag up. Move towards the first baseline to gain an angle on R1 and the catch. . If a catch occurs lead the runner to second or third if	You have the tag up. Move aggressively to the infield towards the first baseline to gain an angle on R1 and the catch. . If a catch occurs lead

	required. If no-catch you are responsible for plays at 1st and 2nd and will follow the BR to 3rd if required.	the runner to second or third if required. If no-catch you are responsible for plays at 1st and 2nd.
<b>Outfield Fly "No Catch"</b>	You have responsibility for all plays at 1st and 2nd base and will follow the BR to third if required (allowing Umpire in Charge to return to home plate.)	