

Dear Catcher,

Welcome To The Dance! You and I are about to get acquainted for what I hope will be the 130 quality pitches your pitcher will throw in an average game. More than that, how successful we are at working at our dance skills will determine the overall pace and tone of the game, hopefully on my part, never the outcome.

Here are a few things for you to know:

Home plate is 27 inches wide at a minimum: that is 19 inches including the black, plus the 4 inches for the ball on each side. You can set up to those extremes and should still hear the strike called.

Every pitch is a strike until I am convinced it is not. My eyes are following the ball all the way to your glove. Then and only then am I making up my mind if the pitch was not a strike. So do I "call the glove?" You bet I do!. If you are set up on the far outside of the plate, with your glove at knee height and the ball goes directly into your glove, what is the correct call? If you are set up at the same location and then have to stab well downwards, up or out to snag the ball, what is the correct call?

You can use your glove to help both of us. Let's review proper catching mechanics: You give the sign then move to your catching stance at which point I will settle in behind you. The pitcher commences her delivery, I lock into my stance. With the ball on its way to the plate you relax your hand turning the glove slightly, now you cradle the pitch into the glove leaving it just a fraction of a second. If the batter did not swing I will give you my evaluation of the pitch, strike or ball.

If you elect to drag or "frame" your glove all over the plate after receiving each pitch what are you telling me? You are clearly signaling that the pitch was outside, inside, high or low and you are trying to correct it. **At that point I really don't care where the pitch is.** You have signaled to everyone in the dugouts and the stands that the pitch was not a strike so the only proper call would be ... a ball? A little motion, sure, but that long, quick pull as if to say "maybe he didn't see that one" won't work.

If you like to play the game of showing me up, for example, leaving the ball in your glove hanging over the plate after a pitch for more than a few seconds, you might get away with it, once. If I have kicked it I know it and I'll often admit it, quietly and confidentially. Remember, I'll see more than 260 pitches today and maybe not be absolutely perfect on all of them. **Do you have anyone on your team batting .998?** Much beyond that and your catching time is about to diminish rapidly.

If you set up on the inside remember that I work the slot, that is the inside as well. You are responsible for giving me a shot at calling the pitch. Can I move? Yes I can, and usually will but occasionally you will suddenly shift into my inside slot just as the pitch is being delivered. When you do please stay tucked down low, remember I am locked into my stance and have little or no chance of adjusting. **I can't call what I don't see!** Well actually I can ... I call it a "BALL".

If you are coming up on the pitches I will tell you. At first I'll be polite and keep it between you and me. If it persists I will let your coach know quietly. If your team starts getting on my case I will let them know in not so quiet fashion. Bottom line, **stay down** and let both of us do the dance properly.

With the runner going your usual responsibility is to gun her down. Remember if you come up before the ball arrives at the plate I cannot see the pitch and must call a ball. Good catchers develop the technique of staying low, avoiding my line of site, catching the ball and coming up firing.

If you want an appeal on the checked swing ask **ME** for it and I will go up the line to the correct umpire quickly. My base umpires are instructed not to respond to you or any player pointing at them. I will also accept appeals from just about anyone on the field and also from your coach on the bench. The reason I do this is to avoid undue delay of the game while "get her to appeal that" messages are yelled across the diamond.

You will never hear me say "The Batter's Out" at any time. If you have a batter running to first base on the third strike and you caught the ball then you know the batter is out, play the other runners accordingly. If the expired player interferes with any subsequent play I will call "INTERFERENCE". If you elect to make a play on the expired batter it is at your choice and peril. As far as I am concerned you are the captain of the infield and **I am the umpire, not the color commentator.**

I may ask you to be my messenger from time to time. If I feel your pitcher is coming really close to having the illegal pitch called you will be the first to know, hopefully well before I make the call. If your pitcher is losing control I may send you out to settle her down or talk to her before I have to disqualify and eject her. Don't plunk the last gal who hit the home run, it is just too obvious.

At the start of each inning I expect you out here quickly. You have 5 warm up pitches - or - one minute: **use them or loose them.** I recognize there will be times when you were at bat or on base and will make allowances. In my judgment if you or your team are delaying the game I will hold to the time requirements and request that you "send the next one down" or even call the batter into the box immediately.

If you feel the batter is crowding the plate (and we see that all the time): **let me worry about it,** you worry about the 27 inches I will call for a strike, and know that I will call it! I can't say to a batter, "Hey batter, if you hug the plate that close and the ball hits you I will have to call the strike!" because it will be interpreted as your invitation for a free pass at the batter. Do your job, let your pitcher do her job, let me do mine.

Don't like that bat waving in your face as the batter tries to fake a bunt? Ignore it and pitch. If the bat is still in motion when the ball is on the way I may have a hard time determining which twitch was not an attempt to meet the ball with the bat "She went, strike!" If I feel the batter hindered your throw down to retire the stealing runner let me worry about interference.

Finally, remember that **I try to work slow.** When that ball hits the glove I am only then getting set to call it. By being consistent with my timing I believe I can give you the best calls. If you hear me muttering away behind you I just may be using my focus words including "Slow down," "No rush," "Eyes only," or my favorite "**On the rubber ... get set ...see it ... call it!**" Just ignore me. We all have our ways and days.

Still calling them as I see them,

The Umpire

... written July 6, 1998