

## 2020 Season Specific Safety Protocols

The following procedures are in place for 2020 as a result of Covid-19. The full list of procedures for the league should also be reviewed.

- The plate umpire shall call the game from behind the pitcher's mound.
  - Umpire should be at least 6 feet behind the mound and in a position to the left or right of the mound to achieve the best angle to call balls and strikes.
  - One recommendation is to position to the left of the mound with no runner on 2<sup>nd</sup> base and the right of the mound when a runner is on 2<sup>nd</sup> base in order to have a better view of a potential play at 3<sup>rd</sup>.
  - Typical protective equipment is not required. However, umpires need to be extremely alert on hit balls to ensure their safety.
  - 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> base coaches should call fair or foul. However, umpires should also be assessing in the event that a coach does not call it. It is recommended that umpires speak to base coaches to confirm process at each game.
- Umpires shall wear a face mask. If the face mask needs to be removed temporarily, social distancing must be observed.
- The umpire will not handle game balls. The defensive team will handle balls, including putting additional balls in play when a foul ball/home run leaves the field.
- Umpires should make an attempt to provide their own counter. League counters will be available in the equipment room (not the bathroom) and must be sanitized after use before returning.

## 2020 Rule Change Highlights

A number of rules have been changes for 2020. The full local rules should be referenced, however a brief summary of changes from 2019 is included here:

- Manager and 4 coaches are now allowed in the dugout. It was previously a manager and 3 coaches.
- A time limit has been imposed on weekend games that take place at 9:00, 12:00 or 3:00. Evening games do not have a restriction other than darkness. No full inning may start later than 2 hours after the first pitch (not the scheduled start time).
- Majors have the option to use the continuous batting order, which must be announced to opposing team in advance (both teams to do not have to use the same method)

## Intermediate Division Specific Rules

Several rules are introduced for the new Intermediate division to add additional safety, to address Covid-19 concerns, etc. These rules are changes to Little League Rules for Intermediate and it is assumed that umpires are familiar with the base rules.

- Once a pitcher is removed for the pitcher's position, he/she may not re-enter as a pitcher (Little League normally allows one re-entry)
- Metal cleats are not permitted. This should be looked for as some other leagues that 13 year olds participate in may allow it.
- Head first sliding is not permitted, except when returning to a base (consistent with Majors)

- 13 year old players are limited to 85 pitches (Little League allows 95)
- See below for modified leads, stealing, pickoff attempts, and illegal pitches

## Intermediate Modified Rules for Leads, Stealing Bases and Pick Off Attempts

### Rules

- Runners on 1st and 3rd base may leave the base, but leads are limited to a maximum distance marked by chalk line on the field. Runners may not go beyond the maximum distance/marked line until the pitcher releases the ball. As a result, the pitcher may not hold the runner and may not attempt a pick-off of a runner on 1st or 3rd base.
- The runner on 2nd base is not held to a maximum lead distance and a pick-off attempt can be made by the pitcher. A runner on 2nd base has the option to outright steal 3rd base at any time, but only if 3rd base is not occupied.
- If the pitcher makes a throw to 3rd base in attempt to throw out a runner stealing 3rd base from 2nd base, a runner on 1st base may attempt to steal 2nd base.
- If a pitcher attempts to pick-off a runner on 2nd base, runners on 1st and 3rd base may attempt to steal at their own risk.
- If an illegal pitch/balk is made by the pitcher with no runner on 2nd base, this shall be considered a "ball", consistent with lower division play.
- If a runner occupies 2nd base (regardless of any other base occupied), the penalty shall be as stated in rule 8.05, with each runner advancing one base without penalty of being put out unless the batter reaches on a hit, walk, hit batter, or otherwise and all other runners advance at least one base.

### More Information

- The pitcher should be given two warnings on an illegal pitch before penalizing. The umpire should always explain to the pitcher what they did in order to provide additional training.
- In summary of the rules, when there is no runner on 2<sup>nd</sup> base, the pitcher only has the option of pitching to the batter. Any illegal pitch that would normally result in a balk will be counted as a ball against the count.
- When there is a runner on second base, the pitcher only has the option of pitching the ball to the batter, or attempting a play on the runner at 2<sup>nd</sup> (pick-off or catch stealing 3<sup>rd</sup>). Any illegal pitch with a runner on 2<sup>nd</sup> results in a balk. Once the pitcher makes an attempt on the runner, any runners on 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> are free to advance.

## Illegal Pitches and Balks

Little League Rule 8.05 covers illegal pitches and the penalties. To assist umpires that are new to calling balks, the following information may be helpful. Remember that an illegal pitch results in “balk” only when a runner occupies 2<sup>nd</sup> base. Otherwise it is “ball”.

- A. the pitcher, while touching the plate, makes any motion naturally associated with the pitch and fails to make such delivery;

*This would typically be that the pitcher starts his motion to make a pitch and then stops. This may confuse the runner into thinking the pitch will occur and cause him to attempt a steal. Younger players may sometimes do this accidentally if they were not fully ready or became distracted.*

- B. the pitcher, while touching the plate, feints a throw to first base and fails to complete the throw;

*The pitcher may not fake a throw to first base. They may to other bases if they are occupied. This should NOT be an issue for our league since they are not allowed to attempt a pick-off at first base. However, they may forget if they are used to playing with leads. **See the 3:30 minute mark of video #1 below.***

- C. the pitcher, while touching the plate, fails to step directly toward a base before throwing to that base;

*The pitcher must step in the direction of the base they are throwing to. For example, the pitcher can step towards home or halfway between home and first and then throw to first. The foot must be in the direction of first base. This should NOT be an issue for our league since they are not allowed to attempt a pick-off at first base or third base and the throw to second will typically be a spin move. Important: Also check for the pitcher’s knee/leg breaking the plane, which would not be considered stepping directly toward the base. **See the 7:30 mark in video #1 below.***

- D. the pitcher, while touching the plate, throws, or feints a throw to an unoccupied base, except for the purpose of making a play;

*The pitcher cannot throw or fake a throw to an unoccupied base. The only time this should come into play for us is if there is on 1<sup>st</sup> and/or 3<sup>rd</sup>, there is no runner on 2<sup>nd</sup> and the pitcher throws or fakes a throw to second.*

- E. the pitcher makes a quick pitch; Umpires will judge a quick pitch as one delivered before the batter is reasonably set in the batter’s box;

*If there are no runners on the base, this is just a ball.*

- F. the pitcher delivers the ball to the batter while not facing the batter;

*Fairly self-explanatory and likely will not occur.*

- G. the pitcher makes any motion naturally associated with the pitch while not touching the pitcher's plate;

*This results in a ball when there are no runners on base. Most likely this would be the pitcher faking a pitch while not being engaged with the rubber.*

- H. the pitcher unnecessarily delays the game;

*This should generally not be an issue for our league unless something deliberate is being done. I would suggest directing the manager before penalizing the pitcher unless the situation continues.*

- I. the pitcher, without having the ball, stands on or astride the pitcher's plate or while off the plate feints a pitch;

*This also should generally not occur unless the players are trying to be sneaky and fake having the ball.*

- J. the pitcher, while touching the plate, accidentally or intentionally drops the ball;

*Once the pitcher is engaged, if they drop the ball, it is a balk. This happens more frequently and should be monitored. **See the 6:20 mark in video #1 below.***

- K. the pitcher, while giving an intentional base on balls, pitches when the catcher is not in the catcher's box;

*Our league should not be actually throwing the 4 pitches. The announcement can be made and the runner takes his base.*

- L. The pitcher, after coming to a legal position, removes one hand from the ball other than in an actual pitch, or in throwing to a base;

*Basically, once set, the pitcher may not remove their hand from the ball unless they are throwing, or they legally step off the rubber. This may happen frequently as a pitcher adjusts, wipes sweat, etc. The umpire can provide a teaching moment for the pitcher around this regarding how to become set before throwing, and how to correctly step off the rubber. **See the 1:30 minute mark in video #1 regarding how to properly disengage the rubber with the non-glove side foot.***

M. The pitcher delivers the pitch from the set position without coming to a stop.

*The pitcher must come set and have a pause. This will occur, but is expected that this will be a primary focus in practice for pitchers. See the beginning of video #1 below through roughly the 4 minute mark. Also see the 5:40 mark for the double set.*

#### Notes on balk

- The likely major violations will be issues with being set and properly disengaging if they need to restart.
- Penalty: The ball is dead and all runners advance one base.
- If the pitch is thrown and the batter reaches on a hit, error, walk, hit batter, etc., the balk is void if ALL runners advance as a result. If the pitch is thrown, it is not a ball or strike unless it was ball 4, and all runners advance as a result.
- A pitch delivered resulting in a balk DOES count against the pitch count.
- Straddling the rubber without the ball IS interpreted as a balk under rule I.
- There is a portion of video #1 below at the end that shows the mechanics of calling the balk.

#### Video Resources

The following resources are helpful in seeing correct pitcher mechanics and how these rules might be violated.

1. Overview of Little League Balk Rules: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tFYoSqmEizE>
2. Other Balk Rules (intended for older players, but applicable)  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DYu6y0ji9\\_U](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DYu6y0ji9_U)
3. Pickoff moves to 2<sup>nd</sup> base, may be helpful to see how the pitchers will hopefully do it:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5-9zBGMMg3M&t=163s>