

THE STRIKE ZONE

Even at the youth level, umpires are seldom liked. The best they can hope for is to be respected, and earning respect takes a trained eye achieved only through practice. Calling balls and strikes is the most important job of the plate umpire. Players, managers and coaches look mostly for accuracy and consistency.

Listed below are some **STRIKE ZONE STRATEGIES** to help you as a youth umpire.



- Every pitch that leaves the pitcher's hand is a strike until it proves to you that it's not.
- Coaches want consistency more than anything else. A key ingredient to consistency is proper timing. The most common problem with umpires at all levels is calling a pitch too fast. Slow down, relax, see the pitch, hear the pop of the catcher's mitt, call the pitch. Develop a rhythm that is deliberate, it affords you more time to rerun the pitch in your brain. Call balls and strikes, it's hard to develop a rhythm if you just call strikes.
- Borderline pitches are strikes. Any part of the ball passing through the strike zone is a strike.
- Your strike zone in the 6th inning must be exactly the same as it was in the 1st inning. Umpires have a tendency to squeeze the zone late in the game because they are tired. Train yourself to finish strong.
- Your strike zone for strike three must be exactly the same as it was for strikes one and two. Attention to this one aspect of your game will identify you as an umpire who is consistent and, therefore, respected.
- Call strikes as they are defined by the rulebook, not your version of the strike zone. There are many benefits—hitters become aggressive, pitchers develop a rhythm and games move along faster.
- Don't be lopsided. No matter what, if your strike zone is from dugout to dugout, you lose respect from everyone at the game. Your authority will be undermined, and you will be subject to all kinds of criticism.
- Whatever style you use, you have to be able to clearly and consistently see the catcher catch the pitch on the outside corner. Some umpires have a tendency to squeeze the inside pitch even though we are looking right at it in the zone. Pitches at knees must be called strikes at the levels we umpire at. You cannot waiver on pitches at the top of the strike zone. If it was a strike zone for the lower half of the lineup, it must be a strike for the batter in the four hole.
- If a pitcher is consistent in an area of the strike zone, let it work in his/her favor.