

## Four-Man Umpire System

### 1 GENERAL PRINCIPLES

One of the key concepts in understanding four-umpire mechanics concerns the position of the second base umpire and the coverage of fly balls/line drives to the outfield when runners are on base. An umpire goes out only when the play is going to be difficult (for example, a shoestring catch, home run, ball off the outfield wall, three fielders converging on the ball, a catch made at the wall or warning track, etc.).

Whenever runners are on first only, second only, first and second, first and third, second and third, or bases loaded the second base umpire will position himself/herself on the inside of second base (with the exceptions covered in Sections 5 and 9). With no runners on base or a runner on third base only, the second base umpire will position himself/herself behind second base. The basic idea here is that whenever a steal or double play is in order, the second base umpire is to be on the inside at second base (again, with the exceptions permissible in Sections 5 and 9).

Another important concept to remember is that whenever one umpire goes out, the crew will revert to a three-umpire system. (Refer to Three-Umpire section for basic mechanics of the three-umpire system.)

### 2 NO RUNNERS ON BASE

With no runners on base the second base umpire will position himself/herself behind second base, several feet onto the outfield grass. He/she may position himself/herself shaded toward the first base or third base side behind second base, although normally he/she will position himself/herself on the “pull” side of the hitter.

The second base umpire has responsibility for all fly balls and line drives to the outfield except those hit down the foul lines requiring a fair/foul ruling. (Note: With no runners on base, some less experienced crews may prefer to have the second base umpire cover fly balls and line drives from the left fielder straight in (or straight back) all the way to the right fielder straight in (or straight back). Using this method, the first base umpire would then be responsible for all balls to the outfield where the right fielder is moving any distance to his/her left, and the third base umpire would take all balls to the outfield where the left fielder moves any distance to his/her right. Either of the two methods described in this paragraph are acceptable. Remember that if one umpire goes out, the crew will revert back to a three-man system.

### 3 RUNNER ON FIRST BASE ONLY

With a runner on first base only, the second base umpire will position himself/herself on the inside at second base. He/she may position himself/herself on either the shortstop or first base side of the bag—whichever side he/she is more comfortable working. A general rule of thumb is for the umpire to position himself/herself on the opposite side of the pitcher’s throwing arm (i.e., on the shortstop side for left-handed pitchers and on the second base side for right-handed pitchers). However, this is not a requirement, and the umpire may position himself/herself on whichever side he/she prefers. He/she should set up with his/her feet on the edge of the infield grass a few feet down from the edge of the cutout at second base. He/she may set up with his/her

feet parallel to the grass line OR he/she may square himself/herself with home plate. Either method is acceptable.

See Section 4 regarding coverage of balls hit to the outfield in this situation.

If the first base umpire goes out with a runner on first base only with less than two out, the plate umpire will cover at first base. If the third base umpire goes out, the crew will rotate (although with two out some crews prefer not to rotate and instead let the second base umpire slide over to third). If the second base umpire goes out, the crew would revert to a three-umpire system (i.e., depending on the play, the crew would either rotate or the first base umpire would come into the middle of the infield).

#### 4 COVERING BALLS TO THE OUTFIELD WHEN SECOND BASE UMPIRE IS POSITIONED INSIDE

As mentioned in Section 1, an umpire goes out only when the play appears to be difficult. (i.e., trouble ball).

There are two other options as to coverage when the second base umpire is positioned **inside** the infield. Specifically, either one of the following methods of covering fly balls to the outfield are acceptable when the second base umpire is inside:

1. The **wing umpires** (i.e., the first and third base umpires) take **all** balls to the outfield. If a crew chooses to use this method, the third base umpire takes from the center fielder **straight in** (or straight back) all the way to the left field line. The first base umpire would then take everything from the center fielder moving any distance to his/her **left** all the way to right field line; **OR**

2. The second base umpire **goes out from the inside**. In using this alternative, the second base umpire would take everything from the left fielder moving any distance to his/her left all the way to the right fielder moving any distance to his/her right. The first and third base umpires would then take any balls from the right and left fielders **straight in** (or straight back) respectively all the way to the foul lines.

Either of the above two methods is acceptable. Each has its strong points and drawbacks, and neither one is preferred over the other.

#### 5 RUNNER ON SECOND BASE ONLY

With a runner on second base only, the second base umpire will position himself/herself on the **inside** at second base as described in Section 9.3. However, there is an “exception” to this positioning—namely, with a runner on second base only, it is also permissible for the second base umpire to position himself/herself behind the second base bag (on the direct of the infield on the third base side only).

If the second base umpire positions himself/herself on the **outside** of the bag, fly ball coverage would be the same as with no runners on base. (NOTE: With less than two out, some crews prefer to modify this coverage slightly (having the first base umpire take from the center fielder to the foul line) in order to keep the second base umpire at second for the tag-up.) If the second base umpire goes out, the first base umpire must hustle in quickly to cover any plays at second base (as well as watch the tag-up at second). The first base umpire is also responsible for all plays at first base.

If the second base umpire stays on the inside, fly ball coverage would be the same as with a runner on first base (i.e., optional whether the second base umpire or the wing umpires go out). If the second base umpire goes out, the first base umpire must hustle into the middle to take any play at second base (as well as watch the tag-up at second). The first base umpire is also responsible for all plays at first base. If the first or third base umpire goes out, the second base umpire would either slide over to cover possible plays depending on which wing umpire went out; or the crew would rotate. Which method is used here depends on which way the crew has predetermined they will cover the situation. Either method is acceptable.

## **6 RUNNER ON THIRD BASE ONLY**

With a runner on third base only, the second base umpire will position himself/herself behind second base. He/she will not position himself/herself as deeply in the outfield as with no runners on base since he/she may be required to slide over to cover plays at first or third base should one of the wing umpires go out. Fly ball and line drive coverage would be the same as with no runners on base. If the third base umpire goes out, the second base umpire would either slide over for any potential play back into third **OR** the crew would **rotate** whichever they have predetermined. The plate umpire takes the tag-up at third base if the third base umpire goes out. If the first base umpire goes out, the second base umpire would slide over to take any play at first or second.

## **7 RUNNERS ON FIRST AND SECOND**

With runners on first and second, the second base umpire would position himself/herself on the inside of second base. Either side of second is permissible, although the general rule of thumb is to position on the opposite side of the throwing hand of the pitcher. However, the umpire may position himself/herself on either side—whichever he/she is more comfortable working. Fly balls and line drives to the outfield are covered using the techniques described in Section 4 (i.e. either the second base umpire goes out from the middle **OR** the wing umpires go out—and the crew must predetermine which method they are using).

If the second base umpire goes out, the first base umpire must hustle in to the middle of the infield to take any play at second base (as well as watch the tag-up at second). The first base umpire is also responsible for all plays at first base.

If either the first or third base umpire goes out, the second base umpire must slide over to cover any plays at those bases, **OR** the crew would rotate, whichever way the crew predetermines they will use.

## **8 RUNNERS ON FIRST AND THIRD**

With runners on first and third, the second base umpire would position himself/herself on the inside of second base. Either side of second is permissible, although the general rule of thumb is to position on the opposite side of the throwing hand of the pitcher. However, the umpire may position himself/herself on either side—whichever he/she is more comfortable working.

Fly ball and line drive coverage would be the same as described in Section 9.4 (i.e., either the second base umpire goes out from the middle **OR** the wing umpires go out). If the first base umpire goes out, the second base umpire must slide over to take any plays at first or second. If the

third base umpire goes out, the second base umpire would either slide over and cover at third base **OR** the crew would rotate, whichever the crew has predetermined.

## 9 RUNNERS ON SECOND AND THIRD

With runners on second and third, the second base umpire will position himself/herself on the **inside** at second base as described in Section 3. However, there is an “exception” to this positioning—namely, with runners on second and third; it is also permissible for the second base umpire to position himself/herself behind the second base bag (on the dirt of the infield on the third base side only).

If the second base umpire positions himself/herself on the **outside** of the bag, fly ball coverage would be the same as with no runners on base. If the second base umpire goes out, the first base umpire must hustle in quickly to cover any plays at second base (as well as watch the tag-up at second). The first base umpire is also responsible for all plays at first base.

If the second base umpire stays on the **inside**, fly ball coverage would be the same as with a runner on first base (i.e., optional whether the second base umpire or the wing umpires go out). If the second base umpire goes out, the first base umpire must hustle into the middle to take any play at second (or at first); he/she would also have the tag-up at second base.

If the first or third base umpire goes out, the second base umpire would either slide over to cover possible plays depending on which wing umpire went out; **OR** the crew would **rotate**. Which method is used here depends on which way the crew has predetermined they will cover the situation. Either method is acceptable.

## 10 BASE LOADED

With bases loaded, the second base umpire would position himself/herself on the inside of second base. Either side of second is permissible, although the general rule of thumb is to position on the opposite side of the throwing hand of the pitcher. However, the umpire may position himself/herself on either side—whichever he/she is more comfortable working. Fly balls and line drives to the outfield are covered using the techniques described in Section 4 (i.e., the second base umpire goes out from the middle **OR** the wing umpires go out-the crew must predetermine which method they are using).

If the second base umpire goes out, the first base umpire must hustle in to the middle of the infield to take any play at second base (as well as watch the tag-up at second). The first base umpire is also responsible for all plays at first base.

If either the first or third base umpire goes out, the second base umpire would slide over to cover any plays at those bases, **OR** the crew would rotate-whichever method the crew predetermines they will use.