

March 8, 2010

As we begin another Little League Season, we would like to reiterate our desire to use a generous strike zone. [Please note: We recognize and encourage a tighter strike zone as the divisions get higher. In other words, the strike zone for Farm should be more open than in Minors which should be more open than in Majors.]

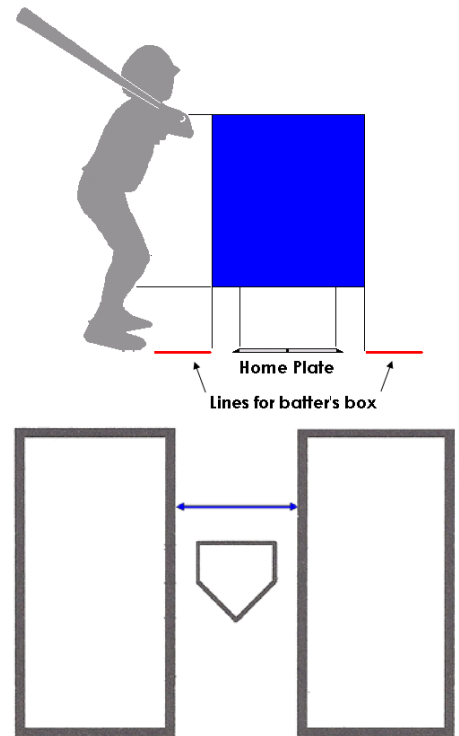
In the past, we have seen a tendency for the youth umpires from Southern, Metro and National to call a strike zone that is **too tight**. We understand that this is one of the more challenging parts of the umpire's job. Umpires receive a considerable amount of coaching to open up the strike zone. The intent of this letter is to remind managers and umpires of the reasons for using a generous strike zone, to encourage umpires to use it and to ask managers to support the umpires as they implement it.

One season, in one inning of one game, an umpire called 77 balls. In other games, we saw more than 20 walks for each team (an average of 8 per complete inning). Clearly, this pitching standard is **too high** for our young pitchers and is unfair to not only the pitchers, but all of the players on the field (for the reasons listed below).

A generous strike zone is when **any part of the ball** is thrown vertically between the numbers and mid-shin and horizontally over the plate and the area a balls-width on each side of the plate. (You can use the inside edges of the batter's box as a guide as shown in the drawing on the bottom).

As you know, Little League focuses on the development of players. A generous strike zone:

- Improves the pace of the game
- Cuts down on the number of walks
- Encourages batters to swing rather than wait out the pitcher
- Increases batter confidence and promotes batter development
- Increases the opportunity for involvement of the defensive players
- Increases defensive skills
- Cuts down on boredom in the field because balls are hit into play (due to swinging batters)
- Provides positive feedback to pitchers
- Increases pitcher confidence and decreases pitcher frustration/dejection
- Positively impacts the pitcher development (because of the pitch count rule...less pitches per inning/more innings to pitch)



As you can see, if we can get the ball in play, the game moves quicker and skills increase for **all players** (both on offense and on defense).

Umpires, please realize that not calling a strike is just as assertive as calling a strike. Don't be afraid to assert yourself with a large strike zone in Little League, as long as it's **consistent**.

From <http://www.cmumpires.org/Images/ExaminingTheStrikeZone.pdf>

"Strikes are your friends. Every pitch is a strike until it proves otherwise. If not, batters will look for walks, the game will not be fun and will last an eternity."

Managers, please realize that we are encouraging an open strike. Do not intimidate the umpires for making a call that encourages batters to swing.

Thank you for all you contribute to our leagues. Your jobs are challenging and vital to our programs and we do appreciate your hard work.

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