Three & Four Umpire Mechanics Reference Guide

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This guide is to supplement and provide explanation of the NFHS mechanics book.

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Three & Four Umpire Mechanics Overview

• The “base” system for NFHS/PIAA is the two-umpire system – mastering the basics is necessary.

• The three and four umpire system builds on each other – three umpires is “two plus one”; four umpires is “three plus one”

• The three and four umpire system is a combination of positioning, Always Knowing Your Responsibility, AND reading the play and your partners
Three & Four Umpire Mechanics Basics

• All umpire aspects that pertains to the two umpire system applies to the three and four umpire systems.

• Mastery of the two umpire system is required. For review:

• Calling distances/calling position
  – 18’ on a force play (angle to see all elements)
  – 10’-12’ on a tag play (90° from runner)
Three & Four Umpire Mechanics Basics

- Inside/outside theory (base umpires) – when the ball is hit outside, you go inside

- Signals – umpire to umpire are the same

- Do not echo a foul balls calls from another umpire
Three & Four Umpire Mechanics
Definitions and Notations

Umpire labels by starting position with no runners on:
PU (plate umpire), U1, U2, U3
U2 is only in the four umpire system

Fielders are labeled by position (F1 to F9)

Baserunners are labeled from where they start (i.e.
runner on 1st only; runner on 2nd )
Three & Four Umpire Mechanics
Definitions and Notations

DBT – Dead Ball Territory, either RDBT (right field) or LDBT (left field)

3BLX-3rd baseline extended; 1BLX 1st baseline extended - both areas in foul territory around the plate
Three & Four Umpire Mechanics
Notes about the guide

This guide is to help explain the three and four umpire systems for PIAA play. As stated, this guide is a supplement of the NFHS mechanics guide, not a substitute.

The numbers in the upper left corner indicate the number of umpires.

The 4 umpire section builds on the 3 umpire section, therefore read the 3 umpire section first.
Three Umpire Mechanics
Three Umpire Mechanics
New Concepts

With the addition of the third umpire, there are new concepts:

- New starting positions
- New movements (rotation)
- New fly ball coverages (chasing)
- New vantage points (different perspectives)
Three Umpire Mechanics
New Concepts – Starting Positions

• There are three starting positions:
  • **Standard** – no runners on OR runner on third only
  • **Rotated** – with a runner on first only
  • **Counter-rotated** – all others cases (1\textsuperscript{st} and 2\textsuperscript{nd}; 1\textsuperscript{st} and 3\textsuperscript{rd}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} and 3\textsuperscript{rd}; bases loaded)
• Starting positions are NOT calling positions. You will move from a starting position to a calling position on each play.
Three Umpire Mechanics
New Concepts – Starting Positions

**Standard – U1**

- U1 will be positioned 18’ to 21’ on the first base foul line.
- This is the same position the base umpire takes in a two umpire system with no runners on.
- Use the same position for no runners and a runner on third only.
- “Walking the line” is standard for no runners; optional if there a single runner at third.
Three Umpire Mechanics
New Concepts – Starting Positions

**Standard – U3**

- U3 will be positioned 18’ to 21’ on the third base foul line.
- “Walk the line” but end on your **right foot** (U1 will end on the left).
- With a single runner on third, U3 will be at 12’ and in a set position.
- Be as close to the line as possible and still have a view of the plate. Be square to the plate.
Standard

18’ - 21’

18’ - 21’
Standard - Runner On Third

12’ – square to plate – off the line far enough to see

18’ to 21’ - May walk the line or use set position
Three Umpire Mechanics
New Concepts – Starting Positions

Rotated

• U1: 12’ from first, SQUARE to the plate, using a set position.

• U3: 12’ from second base, on the extended line connecting third and second, in a set position. Also square to the plate.

• Do not be too far from second - on a steal attempt, little or no movement should be required.
12’ right foot should be in line with edge of 2B

12’ – on the line, **square** to plate
Three Umpire Mechanics
New Concepts – Starting Positions

Counter-Rotated

2nd only, 2nd and 3rd, 1st and 2nd, 1st and 3rd, or bases loaded

- U1: Using F4 as a guide, shade the fielder’s shoulder of the “lead” runner - Right shoulder with a runner on second; left shoulder if no runner on second (runner on first only). Square to the plate.

- U3: 12’ from third base, in a set position (same position as standard with runner on third). Square to the plate.
Counter-Rotated

12' on line – square to plate

Shade to the side of the lead runner (right shoulder)
Counter-Rotated

12’ on line – square to plate

Shade to the side of the lead runner (left shoulder)
Three Umpire Mechanics
New Concepts - Rotations

• In the three umpire system, umpires will move in different ways than in the two umpire system. This specialized movement is called “Rotation”.

• All movement should be quick, efficient and AGGRESSIVE. Commit to the calling position.

• Umpires will only rotate from the standard and rotated starting positions; never from the counter-rotated position.

• The rotation is clockwise in order to be “ahead” of the runners.

• Communication is key – alert your partners when rotations happen.
Three Umpire Mechanics
New Concepts - Rotations

• Umpires’ movements should be predictable, in that you should know the responsibilities and locations of your partners.

• However, an umpire should never assume the play is covered. “Look Ahead” of the runner.

• Alert your partner when you rotate in front of them.
Three Umpire Mechanics
New Concepts - Rotations

From Standard Starting Position

- **U1** – Button-hook into the infield - tight to 1st. “Tight” means you should button-hook into the calling position. Watch the batter/runner touch first, then move to home when she advances past 2nd, taking a calling position outside of the diamond, along the far corner of right handed batter’s box.

- **U3** – Move to the calling position at second base, prepare to pick up runner when she comes into second.

- **PU** – Move to a inside calling position at third. Commit to this position.
Standard rotation

Calling position

Tight button-hook (calling position)

Release when BR passes second base

Take position at far corner of RHBB (calling position)
Three Umpire Mechanics
New Concepts - Rotations

From Rotated Starting Position

• Base hit that no one chased OR fly ball into PU’s area*.

• U1 – When the base runner advances past second base, rotate to calling position at home (button-hooking via foul territory is optional, as there is a runner starting on first).

• U3 – You will have the base runner into second. When she moves to third base, pick up batter-runner from first base.

• PU – Inside calling position at third.

• *explained in next section
Rotated Starting Position

- Take runner into second, then pick up BR at first and second
- Tight button-hook when runner passes second, move home
- Take position at far corner of RHBB (calling position)
- Commit to calling position at third
Three Umpire Mechanics
New Concepts - Rotations

On Home Runs

• Yes, you rotate on home runs when the ball is in PU’s coverage area from the rotated starting position only.

• U1 – When runner advances past second base, rotate home. You will see BR touch first base. Take a position in FOUL TERRITORY (corner of right handed batter’s box), making sure the offensive team members are behind you.

• U3 – You will have the runner and BR into second base.

• PU – All runners at third base taking inside position.
Three Umpire Mechanics
New Concepts - Rotations

From Counter-Rotated Starting Position

• Base hit that no one chased OR fly ball into PU’s area.

NO ROTATION

• U1 – button-hook, make calls at first and second.
• U3 – button-hook (via foul ground if possible), make calls at third.
• PU – Stay at plate
Button-hook, avoid the runner(s), calls at third

Button-hook, calls at first or second

Calling position, do not wander toward third
New Concepts - Chasing

• Chasing fly balls by the base umpires is a must in the three umpire system. This is new to most umpires, as the two umpire system does not avail itself to chasing fly balls. Umpires must know **HOW** and **WHEN** to chase.

• **HOW** – you want to chase parallel to the flight of the ball if the flight is toward center field.

• **WHEN** – if there is a question of fair/foul, you want to **straddle** the foul line.
Three Umpire Mechanics
New Concepts - Chasing

• HOW – the parallel path will provide you with an angle on the catch. You do not want to “straight line” with the ball and glove.

• For all chases, you want to **STOP** prior to the ball being caught – you do not want to see the catch as you are moving. You may re-adjust or reposition as needed if the fielder is diving, etc. to make a decision.

• Sometimes you will only take 3 or 4 steps on a chase.
Three Umpire Mechanics
New Concepts - Chasing

- **WHEN** – any time a fly ball (including a line drive) is hit into the outfield. If you can turn and the ball isn’t on the ground, the ball deserves a chase. If you can take two steps before it is on the ground, you should chase.

- Chase if the ball is in your “fly ball coverage area” or “chase zone”. This includes all fly balls: “can of corn”, a hit in the gap, obvious home runs and sinking line drives. Many times, you have to make a quick decision.

- Know your coverage areas/chase zone pre-pitch!
Three Umpire Mechanics
New Concepts - Chasing

Chase Zones/Coverage Areas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Standard</th>
<th>Rotated</th>
<th>Counter-Rotated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>U1</td>
<td>F8 to RDBT</td>
<td>F9 to RDBT</td>
<td>F7 to F9 (The &quot;V&quot;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U3</td>
<td>F8 to LDBT</td>
<td>F7 to F9 (The &quot;V&quot;)</td>
<td>F7 to LDBT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PU</td>
<td>Infield</td>
<td>Infield and F7 to LDBT</td>
<td>Infield and F9 to RDBT</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*PU has foul ball coverage up to the front of U1/U3, includes foul ball around the infield. U1/U3 will only call foul or fair IF they chase. PU responsible for all bounding balls over 1\textsuperscript{st} / 3\textsuperscript{rd} base.
Chase Zones – Standard

F8 to LDBT

F8 to RDBT, primary right of refusal*

None (infield)
Chase Zone: Rotated

F7 to F9

F9 to RDBT

F7 to LDBT
Chase Zone: Counter-Rotated

- F7 to F9
- F7 to LDBT
- F9 to RDBT
Three Umpire Mechanics
New Concepts - Chasing

• What is “first right of refusal”?  
• When a ball is hit to the division line between the base umpire coverage areas, U1 has the primary option to chase. If U1 does not chase, and the ball can be caught, U3 needs to chase. U3 needs to read U1.

• Read the fielders – chasing decisions should be where the ball ENDS, not the actual fielder. Example: standard position – F8 moves to her right to catch a ball – U3 should chase.

• When an umpire chases, he should communicate to his partners: “CHASE!” or “GOING!”. PU should communicate with remaining umpire: “2 MAN”.
Three Umpire Mechanics
New Concepts - Chasing

• When a base umpire chases, use standard two umpire mechanics. Always. Forever.

• PU should communicate when an umpire has chased. PU needs to take charge. Don’t watch the flight of the ball: PU needs to read U1, U3 AND the ball (it could be in your coverage area).

• With two umpires left in the infield, revert to the two umpire system. The base umpire who does not chase has the same responsibilities as the base umpire in the two umpire system. Tag-ups, bases, runners, etc.
Three Umpire Mechanics

New Concepts – New Views

New vantage points

• The three umpire system gives you different perspectives pre-pitch than the two umpire system.

• Illegal Pitches – there are umpires now on both sides of the field (standard). Sometimes a leap is easier to see on one side or the other. Call what you see (it is a cop out to say: “well, U1 doesn’t see the leap”)
Three Umpire Mechanics
New Concepts – New Views

Leaving prior to the release of the pitch

• U1 will now have two different views. With a runner on first, U1 is now looking to the right, (two umpire system looks to the left). Likewise, with a runner on second, U1 is looking to the right, not the left. Be aware of this difference.

• U1 takes all runners at first and second, unless there are runners on 1\textsuperscript{st} and 2\textsuperscript{nd} or bases loaded, then U3 will take the runner at first (in addition to all runners at third).
Three Umpire Mechanics
New Concepts – New Views

Pick off plays and steals

• U1 – in standard, a slight movement is only necessary for pick off. If counter-rotated, you have to read the catcher, especially if you have runners on first and second.

• U3 – with a runner on third, read the play and adjust as needed, usually toward home. On a steal of third, one step into the field is sufficient.

• In all cases – read the play then react.
Three Umpire Mechanics
New Concepts – New Views

New vantage points

Tag-ups with no chase (fly ball in PU’s coverage area):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Rotated</th>
<th>Counter-Rotated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>U1</td>
<td>Runner on first</td>
<td>Trail runner (first and second if bases loaded)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U3</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>Lead runner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PU</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: with a chase, you use standard two umpire tag responsibilities.
Three Umpire Mechanics
New Concepts – New Views

New responsibilities

• Calling interference on a runner (batted ball) or obstruction on fielder is the responsibility of the umpire toward which the runner is advancing.

• For example, a runner from second to third would belong to U3.

• However, any umpire may call interference.

• Cleaning the pitcher’s plate: 1) base umpire who didn’t make the third out; 2) base umpire “in the infield” (not on the line)
Three Umpire Mechanics
Helpful Hints - PU

• Be the leader of the crew. You have the vision to see all rotations and chases.
• Be more mindful of your partners. You need to know the location of the ball and your partners. If you are focused on the ball, you can’t see your partners.
• Rotate AGGRESSIVELY to third when necessary, commit to the calling position. Don’t wander to third if you are supposed to stay home.
Three Umpire Mechanics
Helpful Hints – PU (Continued)

• You have fair/foul calls on bounding balls. The base umpires will only call fair/foul when they chase (meaning they turn their backs).
• Do not echo a foul ball call made by either base umpire that has chased – just as they will not echo you on a foul ball call.
• Communicate when someone chases. Communicate when you rotate to third.
• COMMUNICATE!
Three Umpire Mechanics
Helpful Hints – U1

• When a runner has advanced beyond second, you are needed at home. Take the calling position PU would take (back corner of right handed batter’s box). In a rotated starting position, you can pass the BR while you are in foul territory (avoiding the runner and the base coach).

• Notify PU that you are at home. Communicate.

• Counter-rotated position, you have first and second.
Three Umpire Mechanics
Helpful Hints – U3

• Move to a calling position at second when U1 does not chase from standard starting position.

• If U1 chases from the standard starting positon, you MUST cover first base, including a throw from F9. Take a path through the circle.

• If U1 chases from rotated starting position, you MUST get into the infield NOW! Cover the appropriate tag-ups. If the ball isn’t caught, you have 1st base, 2nd base and BR to 3rd base.
Three Umpire Mechanics

Final Thoughts

• The three umpire system provides excellent coverage of most plays, but requires the umpires to know the system. A breakdown is magnified by having the extra umpire.

• As a base umpire, pre-pitch planning is essential. Know your fly ball coverage areas and your responsibilities on each play.

• Communication is the key.
FOUR Umpire Mechanics
Four Umpire Mechanics
Overview

• Used in all PIAA inter-district games
• As with the three umpire system, the four umpires are a crew – and each play an important role.
• Don’t overcomplicate the system! Build on the three umpire system (you need to know the three umpire system before advancing to the four umpire system)
Four Umpire Mechanics
Overview

• As the three umpire system is “two umpire system plus one”, the four umpire system is “three umpire system plus one”.

• The basics from two umpire and three umpire still apply.
Four Umpire Mechanics
New Concepts

There are two new concepts from the three umpire system:

• New starting position

• New movements
Four Umpire Mechanics

Starting Position

• There is only one starting position, but starting depth will vary (depending if there are runners). Square to the plate every pitch.

• **U1** – 18’ to 21’ on first base line. 12’ if there is a runner on first.

• **U2** – 18’ to 21’ on line extended from third base to second base (similar to U3 rotated position in three umpire system – but don’t be in the grass). 12’ if runner on first or second.

• **U3** - 18’ to 21’ on third base line. 12’ if there is a runner on second or third.
No Runners On

18' to 21' – right foot should be in line with edge of 2B
Runner on First

12’ right foot should be in line with edge of 2B

12’ – on the line, square to plate

18’-21’
Runner on Second

- 12’ on line – square to plate
- 12’ right foot should be in line with edge of 2B
- 18’-21’
Runner On Third

12’ – square to plate – off the line far enough to see

18’ to 21’ – right foot should be in line with edge of 2B

18’-21’
Four Umpire Mechanics Movement

- When the ball is in play, each umpire will move, either to a calling position or to chase a fly ball.
- *This is unique to the four umpire system, but is also very simple.*
- Any movement should quick, efficient and AGGRESSIVE. More aggressive than in the three umpire system.
- Still moving clockwise, as you “fill” for a vacating umpire (this movement is, at times, very quick)
Four Umpire Mechanics
Movement – No Chase

• When a ball is not chased, all umpires will basically “hold” their base.

• With no runners on, a ball in the infield will require U1 to move to a calling position. U2 is already in a calling position; U3 can take one step into the infield. PU will trail the BR.

• **U2 and U3 – Don’t feel as if you have to move**

• With runners on base, umpires will make the appropriate call at their respective base.

• A base hit will require U1, U2 and U3 to button-hook.
Four Umpire Mechanics
Movement – Chasing

- Fly ball coverage areas:
- PU – All fly balls in the infield. U1 and U3 can assist with foul balls not beyond their base. AND all bounding balls over 1st and 3rd

- U1 – F9 to RDBT
- U2 – F7 to F9 (the “V”)
- U3 – F7 to LDBT

- This is for every batter, regardless if runners are on base.
Fly Ball Coverage

- F7 to F9, primary right of refusal
- F7 to DBT
- F9 to DBT
Four Umpire Mechanics
Movement with Chasing

- The new aspect of the four umpire system is that you rotate whenever an umpire chases. In the three umpire, you rotate when no umpire chases. Per NFHS manual “when an umpire chases, revert to 3-umpire system”
- Movement should be quick, efficient and AGGRESSIVE.
- If the base “in front of” you (clockwise) is open, you belong there.
- Communicate – PU take charge, use voice to move umpires.
- Movement is NOT dependent of starting position of runners.
Four Umpire Mechanics
Movements with Chasing

When U1 Chases

• U2 – come inside and pick up first base. You will then be responsible for first and second base.
• U3 – Stay at third, inside calling position. Foul territory movement is preferred. Watch for runners.
• PU – Stay at the plate. Don’t drift to third.
• This is akin to the counter-rotated rotation from the three umpire system.
U1 Chases

- Responsible for third, foul ground button-hook to keep play in front.
- Responsible for first and second.
- Take calling position at far corner of RHBB.
Four Umpire Mechanics
Movements with Chasing

When U2 Chases

- U1 – You have BR at first base; when lead runner advances past second, rotate home
- U3 – Quick dash to second base (avoid runner), you will have second base and first base when U1 vacates
- PU – You are primary at third base, move to inside calling position
- Similar to rotated starting position in three umpire system.
Four Umpire Mechanics
Movements with Chasing

When U2 Chases

Note:
• If runners start on second or third, U1 might have to rotate home quickly.
• U3 needs to fill in at second base (and at first base when U1 vacates), and PU needs to move to third base.
• PU does NOT need to wait at the plate for a touch of home, you can see that while moving to third base.
U2 Chases

“Beat Feet” to second, and may have to cover first when U1 vacates

Cover third, avoiding runners (take best path)

Responsible for first and home

Take calling position at far corner of RHBB
Four Umpire Mechanics
Movements with Chasing

When U3 Chases

- **U1** – You have BR at first base; when lead runner advances past second base, rotate home (foul territory movement is optional).
- **U2** – Come inside and pick up first base when U1 vacates. You will then be responsible for first base and second base.
- **PU** – You are primary at third base, move to inside calling position.
- **Akin** to the rotated position of the three umpire system.
U3 Chases

- Cover third, avoiding runners (take best path)
- Take calling position at far corner of RHBB
- Responsible for first and home
- Responsible for second and first when U1 vacates
Four Umpire Mechanics
Tag-ups

• As a basic rule, you cover the runner closest to where you are going.
• Example: runner on third base, fly ball to F7, chased by U3. PU rotates to third base and takes the tag of the runner.
• The only time an umpire would have more than one runner is: runners on 1st and 2nd with U1 chasing – U2 would have both
Four Umpire Mechanics
Difficult and Unusual Plays

• **Home run**: if U2 or U3 chase, you will rotate. U1 will see the touch at home. Remember to be in foul territory (not fair territory).

• **Sac fly**: if U2 or U3 chases - Optimally, PU needs to commit to third and U1 needs to rotate home for the play. However, this coverage is difficult and may not be possible. COMMUNICATE. PU needs to be prepared to cover the tag and runner into home.
Four Umpire Mechanics
Helpful Hints - PU

• You are the leader of the crew. You have the vision to see all rotations, never turning your back on the ball.

• You have all bounding balls for fair/foul calls.

• You must rotate AGGRESSIVELY to third when U3 vacates. Most rotation breakdowns occur when third base is left open. Don’t linger at the plate, even with a runner coming home.

• Take an “inside” calling position at third, watch for throws from F7 to the plate.

• You might make more calls at third than at the plate.
Four Umpire Mechanics
Helpful Hints – U1

• When a runner has advanced beyond second, you are needed at home. You can pass the BR while you are in foul territory.

• If runners start on second or third, you need to go home when U2 or U3 chases.

• When you get to the plate, take a 1BLX calling position as the PU would, back corner of the right handed batter’s box.

• You do not have bounding balls over 1st base.
Four Umpire Mechanics
Helpful Hints – U2

• You will chase more than the other base umpires.
• Sometimes your chase is just steps.
• When U1 chases, you have both first and second. This includes attempts by F9 at 1st base.
• With a BR is retired at first base, “round” 2nd base if there is a runner. Be aware of the next play.
Four Umpire Mechanics Helpful Hints – U3

- When U2 vacates by chasing (if U1 chases, U2 isn’t vacating), you must get to second NOW. Read U2 on every play.
- Move to a calling position at second.
- There will be times when you also have to cover first base, so your path may be more through the circle than to second.
- You do not have bounding balls over 3<sup>rd</sup> base.
Four Umpire Mechanics
Final Thoughts

• Work the system and be prepared to move. When you need to be somewhere, get there NOW!

• Don’t over complicate the system, if the umpire “in front” of you vacates, fill the spot.

• U2 is the only umpire with a possible two base responsibly.

• Communicate your rotations.