

DROPPED THIRD STRIKE SIGNAL AND MECHANIC

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Whenever the batter has two strikes, there are fewer than two outs and first base is not occupied, or when there are two outs AND the batter swings and misses the pitch AND the catcher does not catch the pitch – Base umpires should give the Dropped Third Strike signal.

If a base umpire judges
the catcher caught the ball, use this signal:



If a base umpire judges
the catcher did not catch the ball, use this signal:



The reason for using these signals is:

- Often the plate umpire is unsure whether the catcher catch the pitch
- All umpires are aware whether they may have a potential play.

These are not secret signals. They are umpire to umpire signals. They do not need to be seen by anyone other than umpire partners but it does not matter if others do see them - kind of like who cares if they see us give an infield fly signal.

Because they only need to be seen by umpires, they are down and in close to the body instead of big, up and away from the body like signals that everyone needs to see.

When the batter has two strikes, base umpires should make a mental note whether she is entitled to run if the third strike is dropped. Doing so precludes the umpire from having to figure it out once it happens.

If the batter is entitled (by rule) to run and the third strike is dropped, base umpires should give the third-strike-is-not-caught signal. If the batter is entitled to run and the third strike is not dropped, base umpires should give the third-strike-is-caught signal. It does not matter how obvious the catch or drop is, a signal should always be given. This ensures consistency in displaying the signal and a plate umpire knows there will always be help if needed. The signal itself alerts all umpires to the potential for a play.

If the batter is not entitled (by rule) to run and the third strike is either caught or dropped, base umpires should not display any signal. However, a good technique for honing your judgment, is to still judge whether or not the third strike was caught even though the batter is not entitled to run and you are not going to give any signal.

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Do not be concerned that the signaling of the third strike by the plate umpire will be confused with calling the batter out. A plate umpire always signals a strike after the pitch was a strike. The rule, not umpire judgment, makes the batter either out or not out after the pitch is called a strike.

For example:

- Umpires do not signal the batter safe after strike one. The rule says she is still at bat.
- The rule says that the batter is out any time a third strike is caught.
- The rule says the batter is not out when the third strike is not caught and there are two outs or no one is on first base.
- The rule says if a batter is entitled to run and she instead enters the dugout, she is out.

Umpires do not need to signal these outs. There is no umpire judgment involved. The batters are out by rule.

But not everyone understands these rules as well as umpires do and sometimes batters run, or are instructed to run, any time a third strike is dropped or even when a third strike is caught. Sometimes catchers play on running batters when the batters are already out. In those circumstances, because it is an umpire's job to manage the game, the umpire should declare the ruling.

The umpire should signal an out and say: "The batter is out" if the batter runs when she is not entitled to, or she runs when she is entitled to but the umpire judged the third strike was caught, or when there is any confusion or a play is attempted.

If the batter is entitled to run, the umpire judges the third strike not caught, and a play is made, umpires simply umpire the play.

If catching of the third strike is questionable and the catcher holds up the ball in her glove as if to show she caught it, the umpire should respond with either: "Batter is out." or "No catch." depending on how the umpire judged the play or the information the umpire got from the base umpire.

SUMMARY

Whenever the batter has two strikes and would be eligible, by rule, to run if she swung at and missed the third strike and the catcher did not catch the ball, base umpires should signal to the plate umpire whether, in their judgment, the catcher caught or did not catch the ball.