

Things Umpires Can Do To Keep the Game Moving

Umpires can have a very positive effect in keeping a game moving. Below are some things umpires can do to prevent a game from dragging on.

Get the game started on time. The umpires should not be the reason a game starts late!!

1. Use the “Summon Batter Procedure.” See the box below.
2. Have a ball ready for the pitcher when a ball is hit out of play or in foul territory.
3. At the pregame meeting, request that the coaches have their on deck hitters retrieve foul balls to the backstop. Then have the on deck batter roll the ball to the home dugout, not take the ball with him back to the visitor dugout or on deck circle. Don’t slow the game down by having the catcher retrieve foul balls. (On some fields this is not possible due to the proximity of the backstop.) In this case, get a new ball to the pitcher while the catcher retrieves the ball.
4. Don’t wait until you are out of baseballs to request more. When you are down to one baseball in your ball bag, ask for more baseballs. Waiting for someone to find a game ball is one of the primary reasons games drag on. If you have an adequate supply or have the use of ball boys or ball girls, ask for more baseballs when you have two left.
5. At the end of a half inning, be sure someone is out warming up the pitcher in the event the catcher is not ready to go.
6. Don’t allow outfielders to chase foul balls that do not go onto the playing field.
7. Don’t delay the game to report lineup changes to the other team. If the ball has been thrown down and everyone is ready to go, get defensive changes to the other team after the half inning, or when possible. When lineup changes are made, use numbers rather than names to inform teams of changes.
8. Don’t allow batters to constantly leave the batter’s box. This is another big reason games drag on. If the pitch is not swung at and is caught by the catcher, there isn’t much reason for the batter to leave the box. A slow sweeping motion with your hand toward the batter’s box will let the batter and everyone else know you want the batters to stay in the box. Use good judgment. (Rule 7-3-1)
9. Fielders often congregate during pitching changes. The base umpire(s) should count pitches and when there are two remaining, encourage the players to get back to their positions and, if necessary, the runners to their bases. The base umpire should also count pitches if the plate umpire is reporting changes.
10. Don’t let mound conferences drag on. Let the coach have a few moments with his defensive player(s) then walk out and ask the coach if he is going to make a change. If not, break up the meeting and get the game going.

11. Don't call time when the batter puts his hand up to get set in the box. Tell the batter "I've got it," Only signal and call time if it appears the pitcher might start his delivery before the batter is ready.
12. Don't necessarily grant "time" just because a player requests it. Often, infielders will ask for "time" just to make sure they are covered in the event of a bad throw to the pitcher. When a player asks for time and you are not sure why, ask him, "Why do you want time?" Then, act accordingly.
13. Offensive team huddles in front of the dugout between innings are OK. Discourage the practice for the defensive team prior to taking the field as it will surely lengthen the time between half innings.

By constantly being alert for the above situations, umpires can often cut several minutes off the playing time of games.

Summon Batter Procedure

In an effort to help speed up games, the instructional chairmen voted, at the June 2006 meeting, to institute the "Summon Batter Procedure" which is used in the major leagues and is now being used by college baseball.

The procedure works like this: Between innings, the plate umpire will station himself 10-12 feet behind home plate and approximately halfway between the plate and the **offensive** dugout. The plate umpire is responsible for counting the pitches. When the pitcher has two pitches left, the plate umpire, will move to the foul line and inform the pitcher verbally and with his index and middle finger that the pitcher has two pitches remaining. Before the last pitch, the umpire will signal one more pitch to the pitcher and then face the on deck hitter and inform him of "one more pitch." Be sure the batter proceeds all the way to the plate. Some batters start toward the plate then stop to take more warm up swings. Do not allow this!

Should the catcher need to put on his equipment, use the summon batter procedure to allow him at least two warm up pitches once he assumes his position.

If the umpire is attending other duties, he should tell the catcher to throw the ball down on the fifth pitch if the pitcher is already in the game, and on the eighth pitch if a new pitcher is in the game.

The "Summon Batter Procedure" has worked very well at both the professional and college level and hopefully, our membership will be consistent in its use in an effort to keep the pace of the game at an acceptable level.