



**Items of interest to baseball umpires, coaches, players, and fans, from the [UmpireBible](#)**

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## Umpire News & Notes / 03 March 2020

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### 2020 Rule Changes in Official Rules (OBR)

**Major league baseball has posted rule changes for the 2020 season.** The most significant of this year's rule changes is another of those "speed up" rules -- this one mandating that pitchers must face a minimum of three batters before being removed from the game (except for injury or ejection). Make of it what you will. I expect we'll see the occasional pitcher taking a dive. But that's just me.

**Other changes include** shortening the period available for managers to challenge a call (shortened from 30 to 20 seconds), and several administrative items related to roster size, player assignment, and the injured player list.

**Read** the official [MLB statement HERE](#). For more insight, read [ESPN coverage HERE](#).

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### Little League Rulebook Available as Phone App

**Little League has a phone app** that you can download (\$1.99) that gives you a comprehensive set of Little League playing rules -- baseball, softball, and Challenger division, all in one app. This one-time download also allows for automatic updates for future seasons.

[Read about and download the app HERE](#).

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### New Pickoff Rule in Minor League Class A and Lower

**More rule changes this year in the minor league "laboratory"** for MLB. This one involves a new requirement that left-handed pitcher must step off before making a pickoff attempt at first base. Set to be implemented in Class A and below, the new rule will "eliminate the Andy Pettitte-style pickoff move." This rule was in place in the Atlantic League for the last half of last season and the result was an increase in stolen base attempts, from 1.03 to 1.69 per game. That seems to be the objective: faster games, more action. But be careful what you wish for.

**Read more** in the current Baseball America: [New Pickoff Rule Coming to Minors](#).

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## MLB Taking Steps to Address Cheating

The recent **Houston Astros sign-stealing fiasco** has MLB scrambling to clean up its image. Sports Illustrated senior baseball writer [Tom Verducci](#) covers the bases (so to speak) in a wide ranging article entitled [Inside MLB's Plan to Crack Down on Cheating](#).

Now, you may (or maybe not) be sick of hearing about this, but if interested, there's more interesting coverage. From ESPN: [MLB players weigh in on sign stealing](#). The *Washington Post* has a piece by Barry Svrluga and Dave Sheinin asserting that [Astros' cheating was an open secret across MLB](#). An then there's this: [Little Leagues across the country are dropping the Astros nickname](#). And there's plenty more ... just Google it.

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## Automated Strike Zone Fails

We reported some months ago how MLB was testing automated strike-calling systems in certain of the minor leagues. One such test was conducted in the Arizona Fall League, in which every game played in Salt River Fields used the automated system. It wasn't a hit. Not only hitters, but pitchers and managers complained. Everyone hated it. The main source of complaint, of course, were about edge pitches -- for example, a 12/6 breaking ball that clips the very front-bottom edge of the zone, then dives into the dirt around the plate. No umpire will ever call this pitch a strike ... but the automated systems do. Same story with the same pitch coming in chest high, then diving and catching the back-top of the zone at the last instant. Again, jaw-dropping strikes.

Josh Norris in *Baseball America* pens an interesting article about the system's failures, [Automated Strike Zone Wiffs at Arizona Fall League](#). The upshot: Maybe human error isn't such a bad thing after all.

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## Rule of the Day: Umpire Interference

Although it takes all of six rules to capture umpire interference, the truth is umpire interference is pretty straightforward. There are just three relevant scenarios. Read about umpire interference, end-to-end in our article, aptly named [Umpire Interference](#).

For the intrepid, here are the six rules reference:

- [Definitions \[interference \(c\)\]](#): Definition of umpire interference
  - [5.06\(c\)\(2\)](#): Plate umpire interferes with catcher's throw
  - [5.06\(c\)\(6\)](#): Fair batted ball touches umpire in fair territory
  - [5.05\(b\)\(4\)](#): Fair batted ball touches umpire before passing a fielder
  - [5.05\(a\)\(4\)](#): Fair batted ball touches umpire after passing a fielder
  - [6.01\(f\)](#): Umpire accidentally touched by thrown ball
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