

How to Handle an Umpire's Questionable Call as a Manager or Coach



Intentionally or not, managers and coaches who argue with umpires – or otherwise share their disagreement with calls – send messages to players and fans that can degrade the Little League experience for everyone involved. Even without “arguing balls and strikes” a coach’s groan or over-exuberant “did-he-go?” can divert fan focus from the players, distract the players themselves, and incite a crowd into its own misbehavior toward the umpires.

As managers and coaches, remind yourself before each game that all the adults are there to provide the players a fun, positive experience. It may even help to say that out loud at the pre-game ground-rules meeting: “Thanks for coming out to umpire today. I try to keep this all about the players, and I don’t want to argue calls, but if I have a question, how can I approach you?” Then, be sure to respect whatever guidelines the umpires share.

It also is important to teach your players to show respect. And if there are questionable calls, turn them into teachable moments. If a player is called out on strikes, returns to the dugout complaining the pitch was outside, tend to the player not the umpire. Ask the player what he/she learned, because the teachable moment is both technical and emotional.

For example: From the technical side, the coach can explain to the player that with two strikes, you have to protect the plate and work to get a good pitch to hit. On the emotional side, he/she can encourage the player to shake it off, learn from the experience, and remember during their next at-bat that the umpire is calling the outside pitch.

If you still want to discuss the call with the umpire, wait until between innings, request permission to approach the umpire, and calmly, quietly and privately explain your point of view. This sets a much better example for your players and fans and keeps everyone focused on what matters most -- the players.

You can learn more about managers and coaches working with umpires in [this video of former Major League Baseball player and manager Jerry Manuel](#).

Story submitted to Little League University by David Jacobson, Positive Coaching Alliance