

## Runner Leaving Early

### LEAVING EARLY BEFORE THE PITCH REFERENCE

When a pitcher is in contact with the pitcher's plate AND in possession of the ball AND the catcher is in the catcher's box READY TO RECEIVE delivery of the ball, base runners shall not leave their bases until the ball has been delivered and has REACHED THE BATTER.

Confusion on this rule arises in regard to what exactly do they mean by "REACHED THE BATTER" and "READY TO RECEIVE" and just when does a runner have to return and what is the proper penalty when a runner leaves early and then the pitch is hit.

Ready to receive means the catcher must have his equipment on (including his helmet) and be in the catcher's box facing the pitcher. He does NOT have to be squatting. The batter does not have to be in the batter's box. Because the batter may not be in the box, the catcher is not required to squat.

Reached the batter means literally that. If the batter is standing in the front of the box the pitch reaches him at a different time than when he is standing in the back of the box. It is NOT when the pitch crosses the plate, which is the most common misinterpretation.

Frequently in Little League, a batter who is a fast runner will run all the way to second after receiving a base-on-balls. This occurs mostly when a runner is on third. Managers think they can stop this by having the catcher immediately return the ball to the pitcher and have the pitcher step on the rubber before the runner arrives at first. SORRY! The official ruling from headquarters is: you may not stop a runner who is ALREADY ADVANCING and continuing to advance prior to the pitcher and catcher being in position. If a runner stops or is already stopped when the pitcher steps on the rubber, that runner must return. He is liable to be put out while off base, but if he advances after being stopped while the pitcher was on the rubber, he shall be sent back. The umpire must use good judgment. The defense should not be granted time out while a runner is advancing. All play must be stopped before the umpire grants time out.

### LEAVING EARLY WHEN A HIT OCCURS REFERENCE

The rule book takes a full page attempting to explain what to do in all possible situations when any runner leaves early before a hit. I will try to simplify it. It's not easy though. There is one loophole in the rule that allows the offense to go unpenalized. If a runner or runners are forced to advance and have left early and the batter gets a "clean" hit. No penalty is imposed. A "clean" hit means it was a single, double or triple in the umpire's judgment. If it was a hit and an error or an advance on the throw, the batter will be sent back to the base that was the scored value of the "clean hit" and all runners must go back to the bases they originally held or the one nearest the batter after the batter has been placed at the value of the "clean" hit. Any time a base becomes available after a hit, runners will be sent back.

Here are some basic keys that help simplify the rule:

**If one runner is guilty they are all guilty.**

You move the batter-runner back to where you judge the value of the clean hit. Any advance made by him, beyond his "clean" hit, is nullified.

Place all runners back on their **original** bases whenever possible. Put them as close as possible to the batter-runner after placing the batter-runner at the base judged to be the clean hit.

If any bases become empty due to any runner or the batter-runner being put out, return the runners to those bases.

EXAMPLE: Bases loaded, no outs. Batter hits a "clean" double, and tries for third thinking the throw is going home. The throw is cut-off and they get him out at third. Before the hit a runner left early. Guess what? The batter is out and ALL runners return. Because his out left bases empty, you put all runners back to their original bases. The offense just loves that call! In that same play, if the out on the batter had been the third out, no runs would count due to the fact that they could have been put back if it had not been the third out. The really love that call!!!

When a runner leaves early he remains guilty even if he returns before or after a hit.

EXAMPLE: A runner on 2nd leaves early, then a fly ball is hit to right field. The runner retouches after the catch and heads for 3rd. The throw gets past F5 and the runner scores. RULING: You put the runner back on second. They love that call too!

There is NEVER an out called for violating rule 7.13. That's just the way it is written. Your play where the guy beats the force at second is one of a few instances where they get away with leaving early. There is no penalty. However, it is not advisable for a coach to do this because it can hurt him other ways.

For instance:

R1 leaves early and a single is hit to right. The right fielder misses the ball thru his legs. R1 continues on to score and the batter goes to third. Well, since R1 left early and the "clean" hit was a single, you put the batter back on first and R1 on second.

They just lost a run because they violated the rule in hopes of beating a possible force at second. Is it worth trying to beat the force at the risk of losing a run?

**Scott The Ump.**