



## Tips from a "Blue" on selling a play.

There is an edge given to a team that knows how to sell its plays to the umpire. There will be those who think/post/say "Call the plays, a player doesn't have to sell anything." If you are a coach, that type of thought process is great for message board debates on theory, but will not help your team on the field.

The #1 salesman on your team has to be a good catcher!

There are catchers that love to set up significantly outside when they want to work the outside corner. Most umpires will be in the slot between the batter and the catcher. I've had catchers so far outside, she was outside my right shoulder (normally a pitch out position for a steal). The pitches thrown were marginal outside edge pitches that probably could have gone either way; but with the catcher so far outside, she made them look horribly outside.

If the intent is to sell a marginal outside pitch, don't stick the catcher outside. Setting up outside or inside to work the corners make pitches look outside/inside. This is very poor coaching of a catcher. A catcher should work a few inches one way or the other off center and that is how you begin the process to work the corners.

Umpires will normally give a good corner, so the following is a few tips for getting that good corner:

1. A consistent pitcher. Pitchers all over the place accidentally getting one into a marginal area of the zone will not usually get the pitch unless its 3-0. Consistent pitchers working the corners with a good catcher will put em in the books all night long.
2. Good normal set up.. a few inches off center.
3. Good catching and framing.

On good framing - DON'T move your glove in/out on the catch. That is not framing and that is not how you work the edges of the zone zone. You are not fooling the umpire. A umpire watches the [ball](#) all the way to the glove, pauses, then makes a call. If you take your marginal outside corner pitch and bring it in, we see it before we make the call. What did you tell an umpire when you moved your glove in on the corner pitch?

"I thought that was outside so I moved it into the strike zone."

Is that the message you want to send? I don't think so.. so don't do it.

To work your corner hold that glove firm at the edge. Hold it there for a slight pause until you

hear the umpire begin to make the call. When the umpire makes the call, go about your [business](#) (i.e. don't keep holding it showing us up!). You hold firm on the corner and now what are you saying?

“Yes, this was a strike, look at it, I'm not even moving it. There it is blue, a great corner pitch.”

Don't misconstrue framing to be showing up an umpire. If the pitch is obviously a ball, don't frame it. Return it immediately to the pitcher. While you and I know it's a ball, people sitting to the side of us may think it's a strike and you will begin working against your umpire. The fans on the side cannot see inside/outside corner, so the path you are heading down framing an obvious ball and making the fans think it was a strike is not a good one for the umpire/catcher relationship.

"Where did it miss?" is not the best question. In fact, some times it is down right irritating, especially when I know you know. The better question is "Was that a little low blue?" With that question, phrased properly, you are working and selling yourself to your umpire. This is better for your team in the long run. Even if I know you disagree with the call, I know I'm working with a pro.

Catchers, **HOLD ON TO THE BALL!** It's embarrassing as an umpire to call a pitch that obviously wasn't even catchable. When you don't catch the ball, you take a pitch, no matter where it was, and make it look terrible! Again, umpires track all the way to the mitt. That means you gotta keep the ball in your mitt. I've actually had catchers ask me "where did that miss" on a ball they were retrieving from the back stop. "Girl, I dunno where it missed, it wasn't even catchable."

If you miss it and it hits us, you should apologize. If you miss it and lose the marginal pitch you should apologize to your pitcher "sorry that was my bad". You know you need to catch it, that is your [job](#).

I'm not giving you a pitch that was so horrible you could even catch it. You make me look dumb if I call a strike and you are off running to the back stop to get the ball. Another thing you tell the umpire if you are missing normal pitches is that you don't catch good. Umpires will not like working behind a catcher that does not catch good. The result is you are not selling yourself and your pitcher's pitches to the umpire.

Catchers you need to help your team! If an umpire isn't giving you something, it is your job to let your coach & pitcher know that. Don't keep on doing it. What good does that do? We are not going to change just because you "really, really want that pitch and have tried now for 5 innings to get it". AS the catcher, you see what the umpire sees. You will learn the quickest what the umpire gives and doesn't give. That information needs to be relayed for adjustments. It is absolutely the catchers job to advise your team where the zone is. You cannot [train](#) the umpire. You need to help your team by adjusting to the umpire.

You will often hear a coach or a parent say "Keep that pitch right there, blue has to give it to you some time." I assure you that that is not true by any stretch of the imagination. I don't have to

give it to you and I will never give it to you. So make your adjustments.

Don't block inside with poor positioning. Definitely don't adjust inside after the pitchers hands come together and the pitch has begun. That is the main complaint umpires when talking about poor catchers.. catchers who screen them from the plate. We have to work girl! Get your big dome out of our way. Umpires set when a pitchers hands come together. So if you reset after the pitcher has put their hands together, you shielded us from the plate. A pitch we cant see must be called a ball, and there is also a slight feeling of wanting to punish you for your terrible catching. You effectively stole those spots in the zone from your team. You hurt your team. That, is "your bad".

Umpires work with plenty of good catchers. Umpires know how good catchers work. So learn how to work with the umpire; understanding how the Plate Umpires go about doing their will go a long way to being a good catcher. You will help sell yourself and your pitcher's pitches to that umpire. Catching improperly will hurt your team tremendously. Fast Pitch softball is a pitchers game. You are an vital part of that.

Enough on the catcher, I'll hit on some other selling points:

Batters - so don'ts - selling in the opposite way!

Umpires love to laugh at batters who duck under pitches! We talk about you later. We enjoy ringing you up. If you duck under a pitch, you told us that that was a good high zone pitch that was a strike! You did not trick the umpire by ducking. Umpires set with their hat bill at the top of the zone. If that ball goes above that hat bill, we know it is a ball. The ducking did nothing but entice a strike, possibly even if it was high! Understand also that the strike zone is your normal batting stance (ie as you are hitting the ball). We have a good idea of your strike zone as you are taking practice swings. Ducking, crouching, or flopping around will never change a zone. So don't sell yourself into a high strike by ducking.

Batters, NEVER give the umpire the "evil eye" on a pitch. You know what you just asked for? A huge sell out called 3 strike. The biggest the umpire can drum up. You literally begged for that sell out call. Don't even think for a moment you have intimidated us. It takes a certain attitude and personality to be an umpire; I can assure you that this "umpire" personality is not frightened or taken aback by an "evil eye". You have only hurt yourself. If you do happen to decide give the evil eye on pitches, make sure you hit the ball. Don't leave it up to the umpire to decide your fate.

When there are 3 balls, don't call ball 4 on yourself and start running down the baseline on a marginal pitch. Wait for the umpire to call ball 4. As I explained above, umpires track to the ball, pause, give the call. If you have decided for the umpire that that call was a ball, can you [guess](#) what the "umpire personality" is thinking when you are running down the baseline?

"STEEEEEEERIKE, get back in here. Who the heck do you think you are?" Don't do that. You sold yourself into a strike.

Slappers, don't set "up" in the box. We will be watching to call you out for hitting the ball

outside the box. If you are up, you have clued us in that you may be out of the box when you make contact in the box. Set yourself back and go through your routine.

Get OUT OF THE WAY on plays at home. Get out of the box and get away. Don't be sly by trying to interrupt the defense. You need to be alert and gone on a play at home. Interference is a very strickly written rule, with most of the "intentional" removed from the wording. Your runner is working hard, don't interfere and cost your team a run.

A few words for the pitchers:

Control your body language in reaction to calls. Along the same lines as batter's evil eye is pitcher "eye rolls". You give us the eye roll, you are not selling yourself to the umpire. You have said to the umpire "Please call it that again to make my eyes roll, I really don't want that pitch". Talk with your catcher and find out whats going on or whatever you need to do, but don't do the eye roll. Lots of umpires have teenage daughters; we know exactly what you are saying to us.

A few last words of advice:

Fielders, Field cleanly and make good throws. On close tags show that ball. Aim your mitt right at the umpire and sell it! "Yep I got her and here is the ball". Don't flop around on the ground, fumble and dig around and make it look terrible. Don't hide the ball, we are looking for the ball. Good clean plays will sell your play. Umpires are paid by the out; we like them! So sell your out. Every umpire has also had the misfortune of selling an out and then watch the ball roll away. We are waiting to see you holding that ball to give you the call. So sell it and encourage the out!

There is no slide rule. That is because of [lawyers](#), not because of properly coached runners. Runners should slide on close plays. For example, if you steal second and its close, you stand a much better chance if you are sliding. A person walking into the bag plain looks out. Running hard and getting to the bag by slide.. you can look safe. If you make contact with the fielder and remain standing, you are out on interference. If we deem it to be malicious contact, we will call you out and eject you. Go hard into the bag and sell yourself safe! Going into a bag standing on a close play looks like an out. It is lazy running and it looks bad. Work hard and sell yourself safe.

That is a few tips from one in blue, and of course, for every rule is an exception, these are just guidelines to help you. Obviously, some umpires, coaches, and fans will disagree and that is fine. But this is some advice from this blue.

This is long enough so I'll see you on the ball field!

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