

# RUNDOWN LOWDOWN



At the pro level, most rundowns last a throw or two before the out is recorded and the play ends. At the high school and college levels, one throw can become two, three, five or 10! And the out isn't a sure thing. Be aware of the following things in a rundown:

**1** Once in position — as college umpires Bill Speck, Modesto, Calif. (left), and Kendall Snyder, Azalea, Ore., are — there is no need to move. They have the play boxed in. Note: In the two-umpire system or with multiple runners, it is more difficult to box in the rundown. An umpire coming into the play should only do so when play is moving away from him.

**2** Watch the runner for interference or for leaving the baseline. Each time the runner heads in a new direction, he re-establishes his baseline. Once established, the runner can move three feet (approximately a step and a reach) in any direction away from that baseline to avoid a tag. Ensure the runner doesn't stick out an arm or a hip in order to deflect a throw. That's interference and the runner must be called out.

**3** Watch the ball and the tag. Number 8 has the ball and the runner is stopping and reversing toward second base. When there is a tag, make sure it's with the ball (or the glove, with the ball inside) and that control is maintained. The call should be made by the umpire who has the play coming to him.

**4** Watch the fielders for obstruction. As in this photo, fielders will come from everywhere to participate in the pickle. A fielder without the ball cannot impede the runner. Fielders are taught to peel away after releasing the ball, but the runner may try to initiate contact. Watch the runner and Red number 26. Contact is possible and whoever initiates it is guilty. The proper terms are that the defense commits obstruction and the offense is guilty of interference.



# In a 'Pickle'

When a runner gets caught in a rundown, there is the potential for a lot to happen fast. In the two-umpire system, the base umpire needs to keep on his or her toes — literally — to follow the action, as Kurt Kruse of Bellevue, Wash., does on this play.

The base umpire can move laterally with the play to maintain an angle to see any potential tag.

The base umpire should avoid overworking the play. The focus should be on maintaining an optimal view versus keeping pace with the runner.

Key things to watch for (other than the tag): obstruction by a fielder, interference (such as a runner intentionally knocking the ball out of the fielder's glove or hand) and the runner leaving the baseline (remember, the baseline can shift as the ball is thrown between fielders).

In a two-umpire system, if the plate umpire has no other responsibilities, he or she can hustle down the line to assist. Ideally, the plate umpire should move into the mix when the runner is moving toward second, communicating to his or her partner, "I've got this end."

The plate umpire should only announce that he or she is helping when actually in a position to help, not when first moving from the initial position.

When both umpires are in position to take both ends of the rundown, when a tag is applied, the call should be made by the umpire where the runner was headed at the time.

Rundowns often result in the ball being thrown around a lot, creating a greater potential for a ball being thrown out of play. Be prepared — especially if there are other runners — to make base awards from time of throw.

# That Run Down Feeling



Rundowns are usually the result of a runner being too aggressive. Depending on the level of play, players may go into panic mode. Umpires can't afford to fall into the same trap. Here are some things to remember in rundown situations.

- Consider the possibility of obstruction. Because fielders rotate in and out of the rundown as throws are made and the runner is chased down, it is pretty easy for one of the fielders who has just made a throw to fail to get out of the way quickly enough to avoid the runner changing direction.
- Interference can occur. Acts such as attempting to knock the ball out of the glove of a fielder in possession of the ball or using a body part to intentionally interfere with the flight of a throw from one fielder to another are the most common examples.
- While trying to avoid being tagged out, the runner may not run more than three feet left or right of a direct line between the base and his location at the time a play is made on him. The basepath may change due to multiple throws and changes of direction.
- Get in position to see a swipe tag. Moving laterally with the play will allow you to maintain an angle that may be necessary to see the tag properly. It is possible that despite great effort to maintain a good angle, you may not be able to see the tag placed clearly on the runner. In those situations, the reaction of the runner and/or whether the fielder's outstretched glove hand appeared to meet some resistance as it swiped at the runner will help you make the call.
- Depending on the size of the crew and runner configurations, the plate umpire may be able to hustle from behind the plate to get in position to help his partner on the opposite end of a rundown. The responsibility of calling the tag varies. If a runner is tagged in the chest, for instance, the umpire whom the runner is facing has the call. If the runner is diving into a base, the trail umpire makes the call.
- Know how to react if two baserunners wind up on the same base. The defense likely doesn't know the rule and will tag both runners. The lead runner is entitled to the base, unless it is a force-play situation. Consequently, he is not in jeopardy, while the trail runner is out.