

DO UMPIRES NEED TO FOLLOW A MENTAL PROCESS/CHECK LIST WHEN MAKING A DECISION?

Would a judge allow a guilty verdict against a defendant without knowing the proper law(s) and having all appropriate evidence reviewed? Of course not, it's in the best interest of a judge to have a high level of competence and follow the correct processes and procedures prior to making a decision to ensure the accurate decision is made. Although umpiring baseball isn't the same responsibility as a courtroom judge, it is relative to how and why umpires make a decision. So I ask, should an umpire make a decision whether a player is safe or out, call a strike or ball, interpret and enforce a rule, etc., without knowing what information to look for and then knowing how to process that information so the correct call is made?

We all know or should know that a call is a mental process that an umpire performs to determine what judgment will be communicated (safe, out, ball, strike, time, play, fair, foul and interpreting and enforcing rules, etc.). An umpire should never make a decision (call) without collecting all the information needed to ensure the final decision communicated is an accurate decision. Once all applicable information pertaining to the play/situation is collected by the umpire, the umpire then processes that information and then internally makes the decision (call). Afterward, the umpire will perform the appropriate mechanic(s), signal(s), and/or voice to communicate the call.

Although I could list a variety of different protocol/check list examples (rules, handling situations, judgment plays, tag plays, etc.) an umpire should follow, here is one example of a mental process (check list) a base umpire should implement on a force play at first base when the batter runner is out:

- Identify the origin of the throw
- Identify the quality of the throw
- Identify the appropriate angle for the play at first base. This will depend on the following:
 - Origin of the throw
 - Quality of the throw
 - Position and/or movement of the first baseman receiving the baseball in relation to the point of contact of the base with the fielder's foot
- Identify which sound happened first
 - Sound of the baseball hitting the glove of the fielder
 - Sound of the batter runner's foot stepping on the base
- Identify that the first baseman maintained contact with first base
- Identify that the first baseman maintained control of his body while maintaining secure possession of the baseball and a voluntary release of the baseball
- Determine the decision based off the information collected
- Communicate by performing the appropriate mechanic/signal

Although the above seems cumbersome and overwhelming, this approach is manageable and needed. The best part about this process is the level of accuracy the umpire has when committing with fidelity to follow this mental process. It is the epitome of good timing and we all know what good timing is in umpiring. Good timing equals good judgment and good judgment equals teams win or lose on their own performance and not due to an umpire's inability to manage the game at a high level of competence and following processes and procedures prior to making a decision. Yes, umpires should always follow a mental process/check list when they have to make a decision. It's the right call; it's the only call.

Click on the link to [view a video](#) of a different example of mental process (check list) of a first base umpire on a tag play of the batter-runner at first base.