

UNCAUGHT THIRD STRIKE RULE

The **UNCAUGHT THIRD STRIKE RULE** is a collection of two rules put in place for the purpose of preventing the defense from gaining the unfair advantage of earning a “cheap” double play (or triple play). The rule protects the offense. This document first states the rule and then spends some time on how it has evolved over the years.

The uncaught third strike rule comprises two rules:

- Rule¹ 6.05(b) states the general rule that **“A batter is out when (1) a third strike is legally caught by the catcher; (2) a third strike is not caught by the catcher when first base is occupied before two are out.”**
- Rule 6.09(b) states that for Majors and above: **“The batter becomes a runner when the third strike called by an umpire is not caught, providing (1) first base is unoccupied or (2) first base is occupied with two out.”**

Taken together, if a third strike is not caught by the catcher and either (a) first base is unoccupied, or (b) first base is occupied with two out, the batter becomes a runner and runners may be forced to advance. The Approved Ruling for Rule 6.05 states: **“To put the batter out, the defense must tag the batter or first base before the batter touches first base.”**

Also note that under the Approved Ruling for Rule 6.05, **“When a batter becomes a runner on a third strike that is not caught, and starts for the bench or his/her position, that batter may advance to first base at any time before entering the dugout or any other dead ball area.”** Thus the batter has not given up on first base unless and until she/he goes out of play or is properly put out by force or tag. The Note for Rule 6.09(b) reinforces this, saying **“A batter forfeits his/her opportunity to advance to first base when he/she enters the dugout or other dead ball area.”**

Here are a couple of situations:

- Runner on first base, one out and two strikes on the batter. The batter swings and misses, the catcher cannot hold onto the ball. The batter takes off for first as the runner from first takes off for second. The catcher throws to the second baseman who tags the runner. The batter-runner ends up on first. How many outs?
 - RULING: There are 3 outs. The batter was automatically out because first base was occupied with less than two outs. The runner from first was out when tagged for the third out.
 - Note that the runner is not forced to advance on this play so if the fielder merely steps on 2nd base, the runner is not out.
- Bases loaded, two outs, two strikes on the batter. The batter swings and misses at a pitch in the dirt, which gets past the catcher. The batter takes off for first, and each runner on base runs for their next base. The catcher retrieves the ball and steps on home plate before the runner arrives. The runner coming home is not tagged and steps on the plate. Runners reach third, second, and first safely. What is the call?
 - RULING: Three outs, no runs score. Because there were two outs, it does not matter that first base was occupied. With the bases loaded, when the batter became a runner all runners were forced to advance. The catcher properly tagged home plate before the runner from third arrived, so the runner from third is out.

The original rule was simply that if the final strike was not caught, the batter became a runner. Later iterations added the requirement that first base must be unoccupied. Why was the “unoccupied” requirement created?

Imagine what would happen on the following play if we did not have the second half of this rule, requiring first base to be unoccupied if less than two outs:

- The bases are loaded with no outs and a 0-2 count on the batter. The batter swings and misses as the catcher drops the pitch intentionally. Now he picks it up quickly steps on the plate and throws to third

¹ Little League Official Playing Rules

base for the force out there and the third baseman throws to second base for the force out there and thus completing a triple play.

As you can see, this would be a very "cheap" triple play. That is what catchers were doing in professional baseball prior to 1887 when this rule was first put into use. There were 4 strikes for the batter at that time. In 1888, the rule went to three strikes for an out. In 1942 it stated this rule was adopted to prevent the catcher from dropping the ball purposely to ensure a double play. In a situation where there is an uncaught third strike with first base occupied and less than two outs, the umpire should shout "The batter is out! The batter is out!" to alert everyone that the runners are not forced to run and the catcher is not obligated to tag or throw the batter-runner out at first as he is already out. However, coaches and players should also know the rule.