

## **Pitchers: Dealing With An Umpire That Has A Small Zone**

I think a lot of times as pitchers we tend to think that the strike zone should be really large, but that is not always the case. We find ourselves in games where the umpire has an extremely small strike zone. This can cause unprepared pitchers to start walking a lot of hitters or cause them to fall behind in the count. The last thing you want is to put yourself in a situation where it becomes very difficult to have a successful outing.

For this reason, I always recommend that you train for those adverse conditions. Prepare for things like an umpire with a small strike zone, playing in the rain, or pitching with a softball that has terrible seams. You must be prepared to perform in adverse situations such as these.

For an umpire that has a small strike zone, you might not be able to throw all the pitches you want if you are a rise ball or curve ball pitcher, you might be forced to throw your fastball on the corners. That is where locating the pitch is going to be really important. You should know your umpire's strike zone. Is it low in the zone? Is it high in the zone? Where does he/she like that pitch thrown in the zone where he/she will call it a strike? You throw those locations in situations when you need a strike. When you are ahead of the count—that is when you can throw other pitches and locations that the umpire might not be calling as strikes. That's when you are going to use those spots as waste pitches.

I think a lot of times we just work on our movement pitches without working on locating our fastball. We should always have a plan to be able to have something to go back to in case we are in those adverse conditions. This way, you will know where to place the ball when you need a strike.

Then you are able to practice on working both sides of the plate. Maybe throwing your fastball low in the zone and hitting the low corners. You can also waste pitches as I

mentioned earlier. Maybe you can throw a rise ball or a pitch up in the zone that he/she is not calling. Wasting pitches when you are ahead in the count may be a good idea because you can get away with just throwing a ball. Communicating with the umpire is going to be really important.

The other way that you can really take an umpire out of the game is by mixing speeds. This is because a lot of times you get hitters to swing at fat pitches. Throw your fastball pinpoint on the corner and your change up a little fat or sweet. If they swing through a pitch then it's obviously going to be a strike or a foul ball. The umpire doesn't have the choice to call it a ball or a strike.

Overall, it's easy for young pitchers to get flustered by an umpire with a small zone. But, if you are prepared for it, when it happens in a game situation you are more likely to be able to adapt and overcome. Work on small strike zones in practice. Remember to also work on hitting corners of the plate and wasting pitches. Practicing all of these things will make you more successful when you meet those adverse conditions in a game situation sometime in the future. Good Luck!