



Demystifying Batting Out Of Turn

A Common Sense Approach to the Rules

“Mr. Umpire, we have a problem with the batting order.” To most new umpires, there are few words that result in more fear, uncertainty and doubt than these. In this article, we hope to provide enough of a logical foundation that umpires, managers, coaches, players and fans will be able to understand Batting Out Of Turn, and how the related rules work and should be applied.

Rule 6.07, which governs Batting Out Of Turn (or “Batting Out Of Order”), is one of those rules which seems to be unusually hard to understand. Part of the reason for this is that, like many of the rules in the rulebook, the rule is written in language more associated with lawyers than with laymen. In addition, there are elements of this rule which are not completely written down, and which require some reliance on standard interpretation. Finally, the result of the correct application of the rule sometimes leads to results that are counter-intuitive. In this article, we will attempt to make sense of the rule, both through (hopefully) clearer language, as well as providing some rationales for the construction of the rule itself¹.

First, let us acknowledge two fundamental facts: First, all those involved in the game are human, and thus honest mistakes will sometimes happen. Second, all those involved in the game are human (again), and thus there will be situations in which there will be temptation to, well, ignore the rules in order to gain an advantage. OK, to cheat, in order to win.

Thus, consider the following two scenarios:

Scenario 1: Brian² has been batting in the second position in the batting order all year, right behind Adam. Late in the season, however, the manager decides to try Brian in the fourth slot, since he’s been doing a pretty good job of hitting for power. All is well until late in the game, when Brian, out of force of habit, grabs his bat and steps up to the plate right after Adam. Everyone is so used to the Adam-Brian pairing, that neither the manager, the coaches, nor even Brian’s teammates notice this right away.

Scenario 2: It’s late in the game, in a critical situation. The potential winning run is on third base, with the league championship on the line. Unfortunately, there are two outs, and the number nine hitter is up. He’s been weak all season, but is having a particularly poor day today, having struck out every time he came to the plate.

¹ It should be emphasized that the rationales presented herein are entirely those of the author. Although they appear to make sense, there is no concrete guarantee that what is written here was, in fact, the reasoning followed by the rulesmakers.

² This article is mostly written with male names and the use of “he,” “him,” and “his.” This isn’t intended to offend the ladies among us – it just gets cumbersome to use “he/she” and “him/her” all the time. The author loves working girl’s softball, and is fully supportive of the female gender in every aspect of baseball and softball.

The batter in the first slot, however, has been ripping the ball. Yielding to temptation, and hoping his opponents are not paying attention, the manager deliberately skips over the number nine hitter, sending the number one hitter to the plate in hopes of getting that crucial base hit.

It seems fairly reasonable that the second scenario should be dealt with more harshly than the first one, since there we are dealing with a deliberate attempt to cheat, as opposed to a simple human error. Of course, it is also possible that we might have trouble telling the two cases apart. If a manager or coach told Brian that it was his turn to bat, was it because they had a momentary “brain cramp,” or was it because they were taking a calculated risk to try to “get away with it” in order to win? Certainly, we can presume that a manager or coach who was willing to cheat by sending up the wrong batter would also be willing to lie about it if questioned, so there needs to be some set of black-and-white procedures we can follow that don’t require the umpire who is forced to rule on the situation to read the minds of those involved.

First, let us consider what an appropriate penalty might be if there was deliberate cheating involved. In all likelihood, the reason that a team might skip over a batter is that they’re afraid that the batter will make an out – more specifically, will make an out without advancing the runners, such as by striking out. We all know that there are times that a team will trade an out for an advance – this is the whole reason for the sacrifice bunt. Thus, it is really the combination of the out and no advances that is what the team is likely trying to avoid. Given that, it seems, at least to the author, that the punishment should fit the crime, and that awarding an out and not letting any baserunners advance is thus a very reasonable penalty to impose.

Thus, we arrive at our first general principle:

Principle #1: If the offense is to be penalized for batting out of turn, the penalty shall be what they were presumably trying to avoid – an out without advancing any runners.

This principle has certain implications. In particular, it means that if the offense does bat out of order, and is caught at it, and the actions of the incorrect batter do serve to advance any runners, not only must we award the out to the defense as part of the penalty, we must also “undo” the advances made as part of play. Thus:

Principle #2: The actions of the incorrect batter must not be allowed to give the offense an advantage. Thus, if the incorrect batter advances runners, whether by a walk, a base hit, a sacrifice or whatever, those runners should be required to go back to their original bases.

Making this assumption, then, who should we call out? Well, it might be tempting to call out the player who actually stepped to the plate, on the theory that calling out a better hitter might be more of a penalty than calling out a weaker player. Doing that, however, has at least two problems:

1. It disrupts the smooth flow through the batting order that the scorekeeper probably likes in his (or her) bookkeeping. The rules and practice of baseball is that we proceed through the batting order in, well, order. This is central to the whole theory of the batting order and so basic we rarely think about it. If the number 6 batter makes the last out of the inning, who leads off the next inning? The number 7 batter, of course. Why? Because that’s the next slot in the batting order. Thus, it makes intuitive sense that if the number 9

position was supposed to be up next, that we deal with that position before moving back to the top of the order.

2. If we don't dispose of the batters in order, it's possible that a team could deliberately bat out of order, be caught, and still benefit from it. Suppose that the last three batters in the order have been having a bad night, so the manager puts the #1 batter up after the #6 batter, and is caught. If we call the #1 batter out, who should we put in the box next? If we move on to the #2 batter, the offense has still achieved its goal of skipping the 7, 8 and 9 slots, at the cost of an out. If we jump back to the #7 batter, then the scorekeeper is fuming over how to record the out-of-order out in the book.

As a result, it makes at least some kind of sense that, if the #9 batter was skipped in order to avoid an out, that we simply call the #9 batter out (which is what the defense was trying to avoid) and continue on from there as if nothing had happened.

This leads to our third general principle:

Principle #3: If we're going to call someone out, it's the person who should have batted, in order to keep things in their proper place, and prevent the offense from trading an out for a change in the position in the batting order.

One could argue against this position by pointing out that the batter who actually batted out of turn has violated the rules. The batter who failed to take his proper place in the order has as well, however, and the "cheating" portion of the rules makes the assumption that everybody on the offending team knows what is going on. Thus, given the choice of two players, each equally guilty, to call out, why not stick with the "make the punishment fit the crime exactly" and make the scorekeeper happy at the same time?

So, we've decided what the penalty is. Next, we have to ask ourselves at what point we're going to actually invoke this penalty. We could, of course, adopt the harshest possible outlook and stipulate that, as soon as the incorrect batter even puts a toe into the batter's box, the penalty be enforced. Such an approach would assume that all cases of batting out of turn were deliberate attempts to cheat. At least to the author, that seems a little harsh, since it doesn't allow any provisions for human error. Presumably the Lords Of Baseball Ruleology felt the same way, since they did not structure the rules this way.

Let us ask ourselves, then, at what point does having the wrong batter in the box really affect the game? Certainly, if the wrong batter steps into the box and then is removed for the correct batter before any pitches are thrown, the presence of the wrong batter in the box can hardly be said to have affected the game. On the other hand, if the ball is hit into play, we can presume that the fact that it was hit by the wrong batter is likely to have an affect on the game – a ball hit by Barry Bonds is likely to do much more for the team than one hit by Joe Schlabotnick,³ right? So now we have two extremes – standing in the batter's box alone is probably not harmful to the game as a whole, but hitting the ball almost certainly is. There is, of course, still a good bit of middle ground uncovered. Should we set the line at the first actual pitch? Or wait until the ball is put into play?

³ For those of you thinking about looking up Joe Schlabotnick in the Baseball Encyclopedia, don't bother. Joe was the favorite player of Charlie Brown of *Peanuts* fame, and was about as skilled at the game as was Charlie Brown.

For whatever reason, the Lords Of Baseball Ruleology decided to set the dividing line later rather than sooner. Put in other terms, apparently the feeling was that even taking a few pitches, without putting the ball into play, did not affect the game enough that it warranted applying the “call him out” penalty. You may argue, of course, that a batter with a small strike zone might end up with a different count after a few pitches than a batter with a big strike zone. While this argument has at least some validity, we may speculate that, since these rules were originally designed for adult baseball, it was presumed that the strike zones did not differ that much from player to player, and that the pitchers were skilled enough to put the ball in the strike zone if they wanted to, or at least were used to adjusting to differing strike zones.

As a result, we arrive at our fourth general principle:

Principle #4: The mere presence of the wrong batter in the batter’s box is not seriously disruptive to the game. Thus, we can treat this as an “honest mistake” up to, and until, the batter does something (like hit the ball) which would affect the flow of the game.

Extending this logic, we can come up with two additional conclusions. First, if the presence of the wrong batter in the box doesn’t really affect the pitcher and catcher as they go about their duties of pitching and catching, then it is reasonable to assume that a wild pitch or a passed ball are really mistakes on the part of the pitcher and catcher, and aren’t really “caused” by the presence of the wrong batter. Similarly, a stolen base has very little to do with what batter is in the box – this is more a function of the pitcher’s delivery, the catcher’s arm and the speed and craftiness of the runner. Thus, if we’re in “honest mistake” mode, we can let any of that which happens while the wrong batter is in the box stand, on the theory that it could have happened anyway. Second, if we’re going to allow for honest mistakes, we should allow them to be corrected. Thus, up to and until the wrong batter affects the outcome of the game, the offense should be allowed to correct its mistake.

By now, we’ve built up enough information to understand the first of the rules paragraphs that govern batting out of order:

6.07(a) A batter shall be called out, on appeal, when failing to bat in his/her proper turn, and another batter completes a time at bat in place of the proper batter. (1) The proper batter may take a position in the batter’s box at any time before the improper batter becomes a runner or is put out, and any balls and strikes shall be counted in the proper batter’s time at bat.

Here, we have the following items, all in accord with our principles:

1. The penalty for batting out of order is an out.
2. The penalty will be enforced when the incorrect batter “completes” a time at bat.
3. Prior to that point, the correct batter may replace the incorrect batter.
4. If the correct batter replaces the incorrect batter, any balls and strikes that have already been called are assumed by the correct batter.

We’ll come back to the “on appeal” part in a little bit. As far as the ball-and-strike count being assumed, this seems only fair, doesn’t it? After all, you wouldn’t want the offense to be able to deliberately put the wrong batter in, have him take a couple of hacks and miss, and then be able

to say “oops, made a mistake,” swap batters and get the strikes erased, would you? The defense earned any strikes legally, and so should be allowed to keep them. If they’re going to keep the strikes, however, they have to keep the balls as well.

Now, let’s look at the second rule paragraph that governs batting out of turn:

6.07 (b) When an improper batter becomes a runner or is put out, and the defensive team appeals to the umpire before the first pitch to the next batter of either team, or before any play or attempted play, the umpire shall (1) declare the proper batter out; and (2) nullify any advance or score made because of a ball batted by the improper batter or because of the improper batter’s advance to first base on a hit, an error, a base on balls, a hit batter or otherwise.

NOTE: If a runner advances, while the improper batter is at bat, on a stolen base, illegal pitch, balk, wild pitch or passed ball, such advance is legal.

Here again, we have developed enough in the way of principles to understand most of this rule as well:

1. The most common way that the incorrect batter “becomes a runner” is by hitting the ball. Thus, at this point, the defensive team can get the penalty enforced.
2. If we’re going to call someone out, it will be the person who was supposed to be batting (“the proper batter.”)
3. If we enforce the penalty, we also have to “undo” any runners advancing as a result of the actions of the incorrect batter.
4. Advances that aren’t really a function of the presence of the incorrect (“improper”) batter in the box are allowed to stand, even if we end up undoing other advances that are reasonably the result of the incorrect batter.

So, again, we’re in pretty good shape. Now let’s deal with that pesky “on appeal” language.

Let us presume that the defense is on the ball and monitoring the offense’s batting order. If so, then they will immediately recognize when the incorrect batter is in the box. There are two things they can do:

1. They can bring this to the umpire’s attention right away. Now, if this happens, the defense is going to assume, or want the umpire to assume, that the offense was cheating, and therefore they will want the out. We’ve already decided, however, that if this was an honest mistake, it’s reasonable for the offense to correct it before things go too wrong. You can imagine the comedy that might result if the defense was allowed the out if they got to the umpire before the offense – we’d have two managers each rushing out of their dugouts, each bent on reaching the umpire first. Now, umpires really hate having someone rush out of the dugout at them, and the thought of two managers doing this simultaneously just makes them cringe, not to mention having to figure out which side shouted “wrong batter!” first. Besides, at exactly what point should we allow the “race to the plate guy” to start? On your mark, get set... Thus, for the sake of sanity, if the offense is in a position to fix it themselves, we let them fix it even if it’s the defense who mentions it. This is presumably why 6.07(a) simply says *the proper batter may take a*

position in the batter's box at any time before... rather than appending "if the offense points it out first."

2. Alternately, the defense can wait and bide its time, hoping that the offense does not correct the situation before the end of the at bat. If they do this, and if the offense doesn't correct matters, then the defense is guaranteed an out, which obviously makes them happy, and rewards them for their diligence at monitoring the other team.

So, let us assume that the defense does, in fact, decide to sit back and wait for the end of the at bat. Then, lo and behold, the batter does hit the ball – right into a double play. Now, once the batter has hit the ball, we've decided that they were deliberately cheating, or, at least, we're going to treat it that way. Given that it was the offense that cheated; shouldn't the defense be able to reap the benefits of the play if they want? Seems reasonable, doesn't it? Suddenly, it's turned around to where the offense might want to bring the problem to the umpire, since that would "unwind" the last play, giving them one out instead of two. Thus:

Principle #5: Once the batter has completed the at-bat, the offense cannot correct the problem – only the defense is allowed to appeal the situation beyond that point.

Now, let's suppose that the defense lets things go, because it likes the outcome of the play, and then we somehow continue the game. Later in the inning, however, the offense suddenly gets hot, and racks up a few runs. As a result, the defense approaches the umpire and says "The offense batted out of order six batters ago. We want to go all the way back to that point in the inning, take the penalty, and restart from there." That seems just a little too much of an advantage conveyed on the defense, doesn't it? If they were happy with the outcome of the play at the time, then they really ought to have to stick with that decision. Besides, now the scorekeeper would have to erase half a page worth of carefully drawn diagrams and meticulously calculated statistics.

This is a good rationale for when the defense has to apply for the penalty – right after the incorrect batter did his thing. It's reasonable to allow them to let things go to the point that they can enforce a penalty, but not reasonable to allow them to postpone their decision past that point. As a result:

1. The defense is forced to take action in order to get the penalty – they must approach the umpire, inform the umpire that they have detected the batting out of order situation, and that they want the penalty applied.
2. The defense is forced to take action immediately. How immediately is immediately? Well, if the defense begins to pitch to the next batter, it's pretty reasonable to assume that they were happy with the outcome of the previous batter (or simply aren't paying attention). As a result, the defense must appeal the situation before the next pitch.
3. What if the pitcher gets up on the mound and, before pitching to the next batter, he tries to pick off the runner on first? Well, just as with pitching to the next batter, this pretty much indicates that the defense is ready, willing and able to continue the game past its current point. Thus, if the defense either pitches or makes a play (or even attempts a play) then they are assumed to be happy with the way things stand, and have given up any recourse that they have with regard to the batting out of order.

This is the reason for the requirement to appeal "*before the first pitch to the next batter of either team, or before any play or attempted play.*" The "either team" provision covers the case where

the out-of-order batter makes the third out of the half-inning. If the defense leaves the field and waits so long that they can put a batter in the box and have him take a pitch, they've also presumably accepted what went before.

So let's assume that the defense decides not to appeal. At this point, we need to figure out how to pick the game up and continue from here. Presumably the defense is accepting both the outcome of the play and where this leaves us in the batting order, so just to clean things up, we have another rule paragraph:

6.07(c) When an improper batter becomes a runner or is put out, and a pitch is made to the next batter of either team before an appeal is made, the improper batter thereby becomes the proper batter, and the results of such time at bat become legal.

That's fairly straightforward – by going ahead with the game, the defense is giving up any right to object to the incorrect batter, so we'll just go ahead as if that at bat was perfectly legal. Now we just have to figure out who should step into the box next. Even if the defense does appeal and gets the out on the incorrect batter, we still should have some written rule that governs where we pick up from there. That would cut down on inconsistent rulings by different umpires.

Remember, in the case where the defense appealed and got the out, we want the penalty to simulate the case of a strikeout and no advance. Thus, as we discussed earlier, in applying the penalty we effectively “strike out” the correct batter by calling him out and not allowing any advances. It makes perfect sense that the next batter in sequence should be whoever is next in the batting order right after the player we've just rung up. On the other hand, if the defense has not appealed, and if the originally-incorrect batter gets legalized, who should be next? Well, since the general rule of baseball is “the person who bats now is the one who follows whoever went just before,” we can simply apply that same rule now, and pick up with whoever is next in the order after the now-legalized batter. Granted, the scorekeeper isn't happy about the gap in the book, but he or she will learn to live with it. Thus:

6.07(d) (1) When the proper batter is called out for failing to bat in turn, the next batter shall be the batter whose name follows that of the proper batter thus called out;
(2) When an improper batter becomes a proper batter because no appeal is made before the next pitch, the next batter shall be the batter whose name follows that of such legalized improper batter. The instant an improper batter's actions are legalized, the batting order picks up with the name following that of the legalized improper batter.

Thus, we now have it all covered in black and white and, hopefully, it all makes some kind of sense.

Aside from the examples in the rulebook, the astute among you, of course, will have noticed an additional note:

NOTE: *The umpire and scorekeeper shall not direct the attention of any person to the presence in the batter's box of an improper batter. This rule is designed to require constant vigilance by the players and managers of both teams.*

What's up with this? Isn't the umpire supposed to enforce the rules, including the batting order? Well, yes and no. First, most umpires the author knows have enough to do without having to worry about monitoring the batting order. Doing so would require them to be checking the lineup card after each and every batter. One can therefore speculate that the umpires weighed in on this a little, and had this little duty explicitly removed from their list. In addition, remember that we're allowing the defense to wait until the at bat is over when they can get a penalty, and we're also allowing them to take whichever they prefer – the results of the play itself or the penalty. If the umpire tried to step in earlier than the end of the play, the defense might be robbed of the opportunity of an out. Even if the umpire waited until after the play was over and asked the defense what they wanted, this would mean that the umpire was, at least in some manner, helping the defense – they might not have noticed without being prompted. Thus, if the defense wants the out, they have to prove that they were keeping track by speaking up explicitly.

What about the scorekeeper? Although some of the same philosophies apply to the scorekeeper as to the umpire, there is an even more powerful argument for silencing the scorekeeper – he or she is far less likely than the umpire to be impartial. Even in professional baseball, the home team provides the scorekeeper. Thus, if the scorekeeper were allowed to comment on what was going on, one may presume that it would be impossible to guarantee that such whisperings would benefit the visitors as much as the home team. As a result, the rulesmakers decided to gag the scorekeeper entirely.

Finally, let's clean up some loose ends:

Question: I can follow the argument about allowing the defense to get the penalty (an out) if the batter hits the ball. What about if the batter walks or strikes out?

Answer: Even if the batter doesn't put the ball in play, there can be some benefit to the offense of skipping backward or ahead in the order, since it affects who will bat next. Given that, it still makes sense to allow the defense to appeal the batting out of order. Since there's no way to know ahead of time which pitch will end the incorrect batter's turn at bat (think of a long series of foul balls, for example), the simplest thing to do is to put the "break point" between "offense can fix it" and "defense can get the penalty" at any event at which the at bat is completed, be it a hit, walk, strike out, ground out, hit-by-pitch, sacrifice, ground-out, etc. etc.

Question: If the incorrect batter strikes out or hits into a double play, what happens if the defense then appeals the batting out of order? Can they get more than one out?

Answer: The easiest way to think about it is to go back to our "penalty principle," which was the equivalent of having the correct batter strike out without advancing runners. If the defense appeals the batting out of order, what they are implicitly saying to the umpire is "we would rather take the penalty than the result of the play." This implies that they lose both of the outs in the double play – we completely unwind the entire result of the batted ball, and give them the out on the proper (correct) batter. If they wanted the double play, all they had to do was to keep their mouth shut. Similarly, they lose the strikeout on the incorrect batter in order to gain the out on the correct one.

Question: But the rulebook doesn't say anything about "undoing" outs.

Answer: Admittedly, the wording rulebook is not 100% clear on this point – it only talks about nullifying any scores or advances, not any outs made on the play. Regrettably, there are many places where the written words in the rulebook are incomplete, and this is one of them. The long-standing interpretation, however, is that the entire play associated with the batted ball (or, looked at another way, the pitch that ends the at bat) is wiped out.

Question: Why not give the defense both?

Answer: Presumably, if they're going to get the benefit of unwinding the play and taking the penalty when the play benefits the offense, it doesn't make a great deal of sense to change their options when it turns out that the play benefits them. This is consistent with several other rules in the rulebook. "Pick the play or the penalty, Mr. Manager. You can't have both."

Question: The batting order is supposed to be Adam, Brian, Charlie, but Brian bats out of order in Adam's place and reaches base. Who's supposed to bat now?

Answer: Well, we're kind of in limbo right at this instant, since Brian's at bat is not yet legal. If the defense throws a pitch to anybody, however, that legalizes Brian, which means now it's definitely Charlie who's supposed to be batting.

Question: Well if Brian and Adam somehow got themselves inverted and Adam now comes to the plate, does this mean Adam is now out of order?

Answer: Yes. As said above, as soon as the defense pitches to Adam, Brian's at bat is legalized, and the now-correct batter is currently Charlie. So, yes, Adam is now also out of order.

Question: Wow, this could get really tangled up, couldn't it?

Answer: Yes, to some extent it could. Fortunately, because of the "legalize the previous batter" rule, an umpire doesn't have to reconstruct the entire inning in order to figure out what to do.

Question: So let's suppose that Adam also walks and Charlie comes up, and they pitch to him.

Answer: That legalizes Adam.

Question: But that means that Brian is supposed to be the one in the box, since he follows Adam in the order, and he's on base. What happens if the offense or defense appeals it now?

Answer: Again, you won't find this written in the book, but if a situation arises in which the correct batter is currently on base, you simply skip over him in the batting order. Thus, in this case, you'd skip Brian, and Charlie is now the correct batter. You don't pull a player who's legally on base off to put him in the box, and Brian's presence on the base became legal as soon as the first pitch was thrown to Adam.

Question: So, in this case, once they've pitched to Charlie it has all fixed itself?

Answer: Yes. This happens more often than you would think if the defense isn't monitoring things. Specifically, if two adjacent players get inverted, as soon as a pitch is thrown to a batter behind both of them, it will have sorted itself out.

Question: Let's go back to the beginning. Adam is supposed to be up, and Brian bats for him and gets a hit. The defense properly appeals it. What happens?

Answer: First, Brian is removed from base, and any other runners that advanced on his base hit are put back to their original bases. This means you take them out of the dugout if they scored on the play, and take the runs off the board. Second, you call Adam out. Remember that Adam was the correct batter, and we want to knock them off in order. Besides, if it was Adam the offense was afraid was going to strike out, that's exact penalty (effectively) we're going to enforce. Then you put the next batter in the order in the box, which turns out to be Brian.

Question: You mean that Brian gets as second at-bat?

Answer: Well, it kind of looks that way. Remember, however, that we effectively wiped out Brian's at bat by pulling him off the bases and resetting all the runners, so he hasn't really gotten two at bats. The scorebook will back this up – the scorekeeper erased Brian's first trip to the plate, filled in the missing slot with Adam's out for missing his time at bat, and we're now back to Brian in his proper place in the order. The appearance of giving him another shot, however, is probably the thing that most confuses managers, coaches and fans about this rule when it's enforced. Since we "unwound" the first time, however, the now-cancelled at bat didn't really benefit the offense in any way.

Question: So if the scorekeeper isn't allowed to say anything what is he or she supposed to do if players bat out of order?

Answer: Record exactly what happened, in what order. It may, at least temporarily, create gaps in the scorebook, but it's the scorekeeper's job, after all, to record exactly what happened. In addition, if the defense appeals and the scorekeeper can accurately and confidently answer the umpire's questions as to exactly what transpired, the umpire's going to be extremely grateful as he or she tries to sort this out.

Question: And, if I'm an umpire, how do I go about fixing things if the inning has gotten crazy?

Answer: Glad you asked.

Fixing a Batting Out Of Order Situation

The fact that pitching to a batter legalizes the previous batter greatly simplifies the job of the umpire, since he or she never has to worry about more than two offensive players. In order to correct the situation, you need two things – the batting lineup, which you should have gotten at the plate meeting and thus should be carrying in your pocket, and access to the scorekeeper to figure out what's happened (very) recently.

Here's how you go about it:

First, we need to figure out who should have batted, or should be batting. In order to figure out who the correct batter is at any time, all you have to do is consider two players:

1. Who was the last player to whom the defense pitched? This is either the batter currently in the box, if we're part-way through his at bat, or else the last player to complete an at bat, depending on exactly when the appeal is made.

2. Who batted immediately before the player you found in #1? Not who was supposed to bat – who actually batted? Hopefully, your friendly and diligent scorekeeper will be able to tell you this. Of course, in some cases it's easy – he's standing down there on first base.
3. Find the player you identified in step #2 in your lineup, then move down one slot. That is who should be batting now (if there's a count on the current batter) or who was supposed to have just batted (if the last batter had just completed an at bat, but the defense hadn't pitched further.)

The procedure above works no matter when in the inning the out-of-order situation occurred, or how tangled things got as time went along. The reason for this is that, by pitching to the player you found in step #1, the immediately previous player (the one you found in Step #2) is automatically legal, regardless of what happened before. Since the player in Step #2 was the last legal batter, the next player in the batting order after him is the current correct (“proper”) batter. If it turns out that this was, indeed, the player from step #1, then you don't have a batting out of order situation, at least not any more – the situation may have “healed itself.”

Once you have figured out that there is, indeed, a batting out of order situation, and you've figured who's supposed to be batting (or have batted):

1. Is it the offense or defense that is appealing? If it's the defense, go to #2.
 - a. Is the offense trying to correct the batter who is currently in the box? If so, allow them to make the switch. If the incorrect batter being pulled out has a ball-strike count, the correct batter inherits that.
 - b. If the offense is trying to correct someone other than the batter who's currently in the box, they can't. Tell them they can't fix it at this point, and send them back to the dugout. If they're lucky (and have been quiet about it) maybe the defense hasn't picked up on what's going on. If they've been loud about it, however, expect an immediate visit from the defensive manager.
2. Is the defense appealing that the batter currently in the box is not the correct batter? If so, allow the offense to make the switch to the correct batter. As above, if the incorrect batter being pulled out has a ball-strike count, the correct batter inherits that. When the defense wants an out, tell them they appealed the situation at the wrong time to get the out. And don't hold feel you need to hold a rules clinic to teach them the “correct” strategy right then and there – it's not your fault that they haven't read the rules (or this article).
3. Is the defense appealing the batter who just completed his or her at bat? If so, and if that batter was, indeed, incorrect:
 - a. Completely unwind the result of the last pitch to the incorrect batter, undoing any outs, advances or scores and removing the incorrect batter from base, if required. If the defense suddenly doesn't like the fact that they're going to lose a double play, it's too late for them to decide not to appeal the play – they've already done so and now have to live with the result.
 - b. Call the correct batter out.
 - c. Get the correct next batter in the box.

- d. If the correct next batter happens to be the player you just removed from the bases, be prepared to tell the manager that you are, indeed, in full possession of your senses and properly enforcing the rule. Again, no need for a rules clinic – just inform the manager that this is the way the rule works and then watch them shake their head as they go back to the dugout.

4. Is the defense appealing an earlier batter? If so, tell them that it's too late to appeal that.

Not quite as bad as you thought it might be, was it?

So, it took us most of twelve pages, but by now hopefully you've got a firm handle on Rule 6.07 and all (or at least most) of its nuances. This way, the next time someone approaches you saying "Mr. Umpire, we've got a problem with the batting order" you'll be able to step forward with confidence, as opposed to looking like a deer in the headlights.

Happy umpiring!

Sincerely,

Kevin Hunter
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