



NATIONAL FEDERATION
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Alex Phelps of Mar Vista, Calif., records a change to his lineup card. Phelps will need to understand a new option for designated hitters for the 2021 season. A designated hitter can now be declared as a starting defensive player. In addition, several new strategies can be used by coaches to maximize player participation.

DH and Fielder?

Designated Hitter Options Expanded

Due to the widespread cancellations of baseball seasons, the NFHS opted to keep the 2020 rules in place for the 2021 season. While the NFHS Baseball Rules Committee met virtually in June, no changes to the 2021 high school baseball rules were made.

One rule change the committee approved during its annual meeting in 2020, however, will still require some attention by high school umpires who did not have an opportunity to enforce it last spring. Additionally, it is important to consider the most recent interpretations published by the NFHS.

Designated Hitter (3-1-4b)

The change to rule 3-1-4 provides an extra scenario in which a designated hitter may be used. The starting designated hitter may now also be a starting defensive player as listed in the starting lineup presented to the opposing team and the umpire during the pregame plate meeting.

Teams that utilize this option will have one player in the lineup listed with two positions: one of the nine defensive positions and designated hitter. This may include any of the nine defensive positions on the field and is not confined to just the pitcher.

SEE "NEW DH" P. 2

2021 PRESEASON GUIDE BASSEMBATT

► New DH CONT. FROM P.1

Teams using this scenario would begin the game with a lineup featuring nine starters — nine defensive players, one of whom is also the designated hitter.

This differs from the traditional use of the designated hitter at the NFHS level. In that scenario, which remains an option, the designated hitter is listed as a 10th starter who hits for any one of the nine starting defensive players.

Teams also still have the option of not using a designated hitter and batting a straight lineup of nine players.

Some additional understanding is necessary with the new DH implementation with substitutions. The role of the defensive player in this dual role may be substituted for by any legal substitute. Once that occurs, the original player/designated hitter may re-enter as a defensive player one time.

However, the role of the designated hitter is terminated for the remainder of the game when a substitute or former substitute for the defensive role subsequently participates in an offensive role, or the starting defensive player/designated hitter is substituted for either as a hitter or runner. This is a major difference with the traditional designated hitter scenario, in which a substitute may replace the designated hitter as a hitter or runner, and the designated hitter may re-enter the lineup one time and maintain his designated hitter status.

The two available designated hitter options are also a point of emphasis for the 2020 season.

Play 1: Team A lists Daniels as the starting designated hitter and the starting first baseman in the No. 4 position in the lineup. Ruling 1: This is legal, as a player can now be listed on the starting lineup as one of the nine defensive positions and a designated hitter.

Play 2: Team A lists Daniels as the starting designated hitter and the starting first baseman in the No. 4 position in the lineup. In the fourth inning, Jackson substitutes as the first baseman. In the fifth inning, Daniels comes to bat in the No. 4 position. In the sixth inning, Daniels re-enters defensively as the first baseman. Ruling 2: This is legal, as the role of the defensive player has been ►

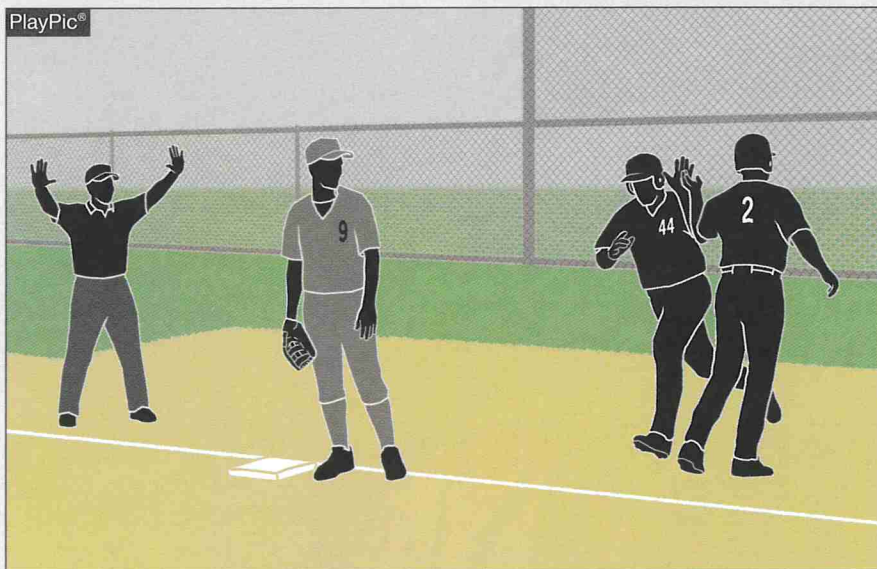
CR With a Player/DH?

The player/DH option, added for NFHS play in 2020, gives high school coaches another option for player participation.

The player/DH might prove a useful option for a pitcher who hits the pitch-count limit and a coach wants to keep him in the game as a hitter.

But what happens when a player/DH, who is currently in the game as both the pitcher and the DH, gets on base — can the player/DH have a courtesy runner (if this speed-up rule is adopted in the state) as shown in the PlayPic?

No. The player/DH rule does not allow for a courtesy runner.



Elliot Hopkins, NFHS baseball rules editor, explained that the player/DH occupies two roles. When he's in the field, he's playing a defensive position. When he's at bat or on the bases, he occupies an offensive position as the DH. So when he's acting offensively, he's in the DH role and thus not eligible for a courtesy runner.

So whether the player/DH is a catcher or a pitcher in the defensive role, he may not have a courtesy runner when he's in the DH role.

With a player/DH, a team starts with nine players, one of whom starts in both a defensive role and the DH role. There may be substitutions in the defensive role without terminating the DH role. A player/DH who had a substitute in the defensive role may return to that defensive role once (that counts as a starter's re-entry) and continue as the player/DH; a subsequent substitute shifts the player/DH into the DH role only.

Any substitution into the offensive role terminates the DH role for the remainder of the game. If the player/DH had not used his re-entry, he could still return to that spot in the batting order, but as a regular substitute and not as the player/DH.

Teams may also still opt to use a "traditional" DH, where they have 10 starters, one occupying the DH spot, batting for a player in a defensive spot. Both the DH spot and the spot occupied by the player for whom the DH is batting may have substitutes. With a "traditional" DH, the DH is terminated when the defensive player for whom the DH is batting (or any substitutes) pinch-hits or pinch-runs, or when the DH or any previous DH assumes a defensive position.

The "traditional" DH is not permitted to have a courtesy runner since he never occupied a defensive role, although he is eligible for a pinch-hitter or pinch-runner as a straight substitute. Unlike the player/DH, an offensive substitution does not automatically end the "traditional" DH. □

▶ substituted by a legal substitute, while the designated hitter role remains intact. The original defensive player/designated hitter is also allowed one re-entry on defense.

Play 3: Team A lists Daniels as the starting designated hitter and the starting first baseman in the No. 4 position in the lineup. In the fourth inning, Jackson substitutes as the first baseman. In the fifth inning, Jackson comes to bat in the No. 4 position. **Ruling 3:** This is legal, and the role of the designated hitter is terminated for the remainder of the game. However, Daniels, who still has re-entry rights, may re-enter at any defensive position and may replace Jackson as the No. 4 hitter in the lineup.

Play 4: Team A lists Daniels as the starting designated hitter and the starting first baseman in the No. 4 position in the lineup. In the top of the

fifth inning, Daniels hits a single, and Jackson substitutes for him as a pinch-runner. In the bottom of the fifth inning, Daniels continues to play first base on defense. In the sixth inning, Daniels comes to bat again in the No. 4 position. **Ruling 4:** This is legal. Once Jackson entered as an offensive substitute for Daniels, the role of the designated hitter is terminated. However, Daniels still has re-entry rights, may re-enter at any defensive position and may replace Jackson as the No. 4 hitter in the lineup.

Play 5: Team A lists Daniels as the starting designated hitter in the No. 4 position in the lineup, and Jackson as the starting first baseman with Daniels hitting for Jackson. **Ruling 5:** This is legal, as the designated hitter may still be a 10th starter hitting for any one of the nine starting defensive players.

Play 6: Team A lists Daniels as the starting designated hitter in the No.

4 position in the lineup, and Jackson as the starting first baseman with Daniels hitting for Jackson. In the fifth inning, Jackson comes to bat in the No. 4 position. **Ruling 6:** This is legal. Jackson is allowed to pinch-hit, and the role of the designated hitter is terminated for the remainder of the game.

Play 7: Team A lists Daniels as the starting designated hitter in the No. 4 position in the lineup, and Jackson as the starting first baseman with Daniels hitting for Jackson. In the fifth inning, Daniels replaces Jackson as the first baseman. **Ruling 7:** This is legal. Daniels is allowed to play a defensive position, and the role of the designated hitter is terminated for the remainder of the game. However, Jackson still has re-entry rights as a starter, may either pinch-hit or pinch-run for Daniels and may also re-enter on defense. □

NFHS POE Breakdown

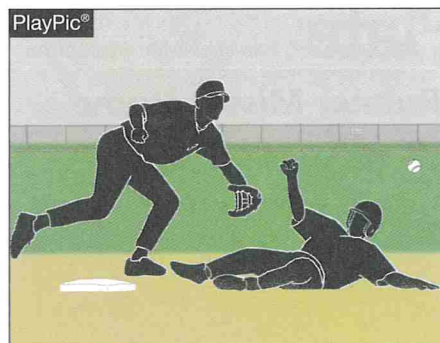
Game-ending procedures.

The manner in which games are ended, including suspended games, is up to state association adoption. If a state association has adopted such procedures, such as ending a game after five innings if one team has a 10-run lead, only those game-ending procedures may be used. If a state association has not adopted such procedures, a game may be ended, shortened or terminated by mutual agreement of the opposing coaches and the umpire-in-chief.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Total
VISITOR	3	2	4	1	4			14
HOME	1	0	0	0	0			1

Force-play slide rule

Runners are never required to slide, but if a runner elects to slide, it must be legal. A legal slide can either be feet first or head first. If a runner slides feet first, at least one leg and buttock shall be on the ground. Runners may not pop-up into a fielder, have a leg raised higher than the fielder's knee, slide away from a base in the direction of a fielder, or slide through

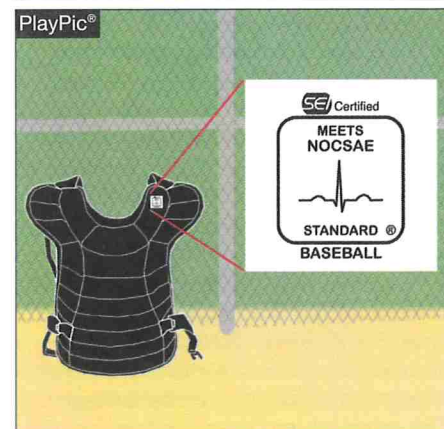
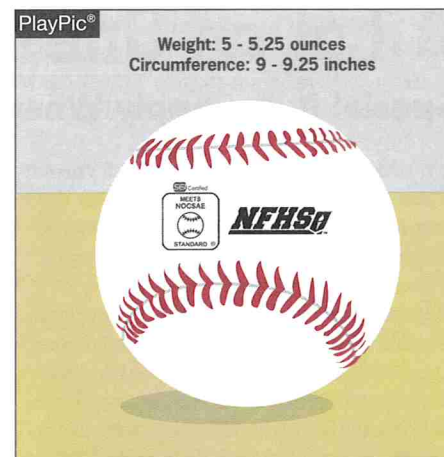


or beyond the base, except at home plate. A runner may slide or run in a direction away from the fielder to avoid making contact or altering the play of the fielder. The runner is out when he illegally slides and affects the play, and on a force play, the runner is also guilty of interference.

Compliance of player's equipment

The ball and the catcher's body/ chest protector shall meet the current NOCSAE standards for baseball effective Jan. 1, 2020. Helmets must meet the provisions of rule 1-5-1, including that all facemasks/guard attached after manufacture are approved by the manufacturer and meet NOCSAE

▶ SEE "POE" P. 4

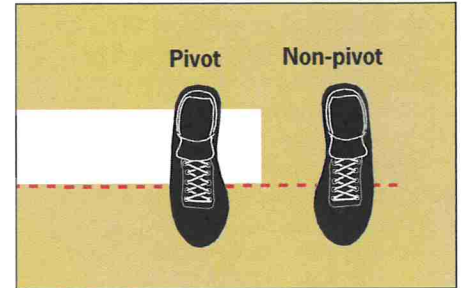
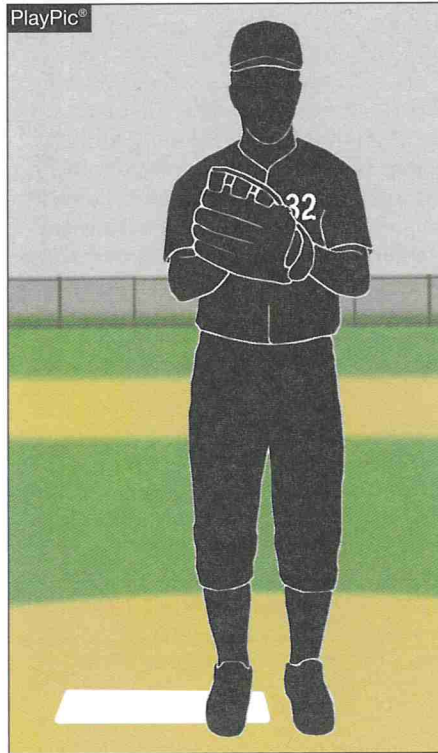


▶ POE CONT. FROM P.3

standards at the time of manufacture. Bats shall be unaltered from the manufacturer's original design and production and must meet the provisions of rule 1-3-2.

Proper pitching positions

The windup and set are the two legal pitching positions. For the windup, the pitcher's non-pivot foot shall be in any position on or behind a line extending through the front edge of the pitcher's plate. For the set position, a pitcher shall stand with his entire non-pivot foot in front of a line extending through the front edge of the pitcher's plate and with his entire pivot foot in contact with or directly in front of and parallel to the pitcher's plate. Pitchers are no longer required to have their entire pivot foot in contact with the pitcher's plate. The so-called hybrid stance remains illegal as it does not meet the requirements of either the windup or set positions. Also,



while in the set position, pitchers may dangle their arm in front, but may not rock their arm from side to side. Any such movement of the arm is considered the start of the pitching motion and the ball must be delivered to the plate. Therefore, that motion results in a balk.

Enforcement of NFHS jewelry rule

Jewelry, including necklaces, bracelets and earrings, shall not be worn except for religious or medical medals. A religious medal must be taped and worn under the uniform. A medical alert must be taped and may be visible. □

A Lot on One's Plate

Special Rules Apply When a Runner Misses Home

In order to legally score a run, a runner must touch the plate, the same as the requirement to touch any other base. However, because the runner's journey is seemingly over when he reaches home, there are special rules that apply. It's OK for teammates to tell the runner to go back and touch the plate but they cannot assist him in returning, such as shoving him toward the plate or by grabbing him to stop his departure. There have been cases where spectators have pointed out the infraction to the defense and prompted an appeal; there is no rule prohibiting that.

There are two general scenarios in which runners may miss the plate. They are evading a tag and celebrations.

Evading a tag

A runner who misses the plate after overrunning or oversliding it may return to touch it (NFHS 8-2 Nt.). If the runner immediately makes an effort to touch the plate, he is out only when he is tagged. If he starts toward the dugout or his ▶



Omar Astorga, Canoga Park, Calif., observes a close play at the plate. If the runner misses the plate and a following runner touches the plate, the runner who missed the plate can no longer correct the mistake. But the defense will still need to appeal to get an out.

► position, he is out when he is tagged, or the plate is tagged and appealed. Such a runner cannot return once he enters the dugout (NFHS Sit. 8.2.2M).

Play 1: With a runner on second, B1 singles. R2 attempts to score and there is a close play at the plate. F2 misses the tag as R2 misses the plate. F2 jumps up quickly, steps on home plate and yells, "I'm appealing!" as he fires to second to prevent B1's advance. As F2 appealed, R2 was (a) scrambling back to the plate, or (b) heading for the dugout. Ruling 1: In (a), R2 is not out and the run counts. F2 would have had to tag him. In (b), it is an appeal play and R2 is out since he left the plate area heading for his dugout.

Also, a runner who misses the plate cannot return once a following runner has scored. The third out does not preclude a return as an appeal can be made any time before the defensive team leaves the field. That means before the pitcher and all infielders have crossed the foul lines and before the catcher has left his position on the way to the bench. The run counts unless a proper appeal is made. Either the plate or the runner can be tagged on the appeal (NFHS 8-2 Pen., 8-2-3).

Play 2: With two out, R2 scores from second on B1's single, but fails to touch the plate. B1 becomes the third out when he tries to go to second. Right after the

out, R2 returns and touches the plate. Ruling 2: Legal. The run scores and the missed base cannot be appealed after R2 touches it.

When a runner slides past the plate without touching it and without being tagged, the umpire should not signal. In Game 4 of the 2009 World Series, Ryan Howard of the Phillies advanced from second on a Pedro Feliz single in the bottom of the fourth. He slid into Yankees catcher Jorge Posada and never touched the plate. The Yankees apparently did not recognize the miss and after a brief pause plate umpire Mike Everitt gave a weak safe signal.

Celebrations

The second general scenario in which a runner might miss the plate is some form of celebration and is most likely after a home run, especially a walk-off homer. In a prep game, the overjoyed teammates left a path to the plate for the hometown hero, but he chose to do a belly flop over the plate and into the scrum. The announcer pointed out the error when he saw the plate umpire was standing fast.

When a walk-off home run is hit, pandemonium reigns and the umpire's task of ensuring all runners touch the plate becomes more difficult. Restrictions

on celebrations are usually waived. The umpire must watch the batter-runner until he is reasonably certain the plate has been touched. In non-walk-off scenarios, the umpire must enforce the applicable rule, if for no other reason than to prevent a recurrence. Here is a case from a 2019 prep game where an impulsive umpire decided to fabricate a rule.

In the fifth inning, a visiting team home run hitter was called out because he got high-fived by a teammate before touching the plate. Remarkably no one was ejected over the bizarre call. Perhaps the fact the score was 18-2 in favor of the visitors influenced their coach to avoid a confrontation. The umpire's rationale was he had to call the out to avoid setting a precedent for players obscuring the umpire's view of the batter-runner touching the plate. Under NFHS rules, no violation occurred, but the umpire could certainly warn players to not overcrowd the plate. NFHS rule 3-3-1a prohibits non-participating players from leaving the dugout while the ball is live, but in this case the ball was obviously dead.

Another celebration scenario is when the batter-runner rips off his helmet before scoring. That is not a violation but is worthy of a team warning if the ball is live (NFHS 1-5-1 Pen.). □

Loose Equipment

With runners on second and third, a ground ball is hit to the second basemen. During an attempted play at the plate on R1, the thrown ball evades the catcher and rolls into a batting helmet that had been left on the ground in the on-deck circle (as shown in the MechaniGram). The ball caroms out of reach of the catcher. R2, sensing an opportunity, breaks for home and arrives safely as a result of how the ball deflected off the helmet. The umpire calls time and puts R2 back at third and the batter-runner remains at first. Correct call?

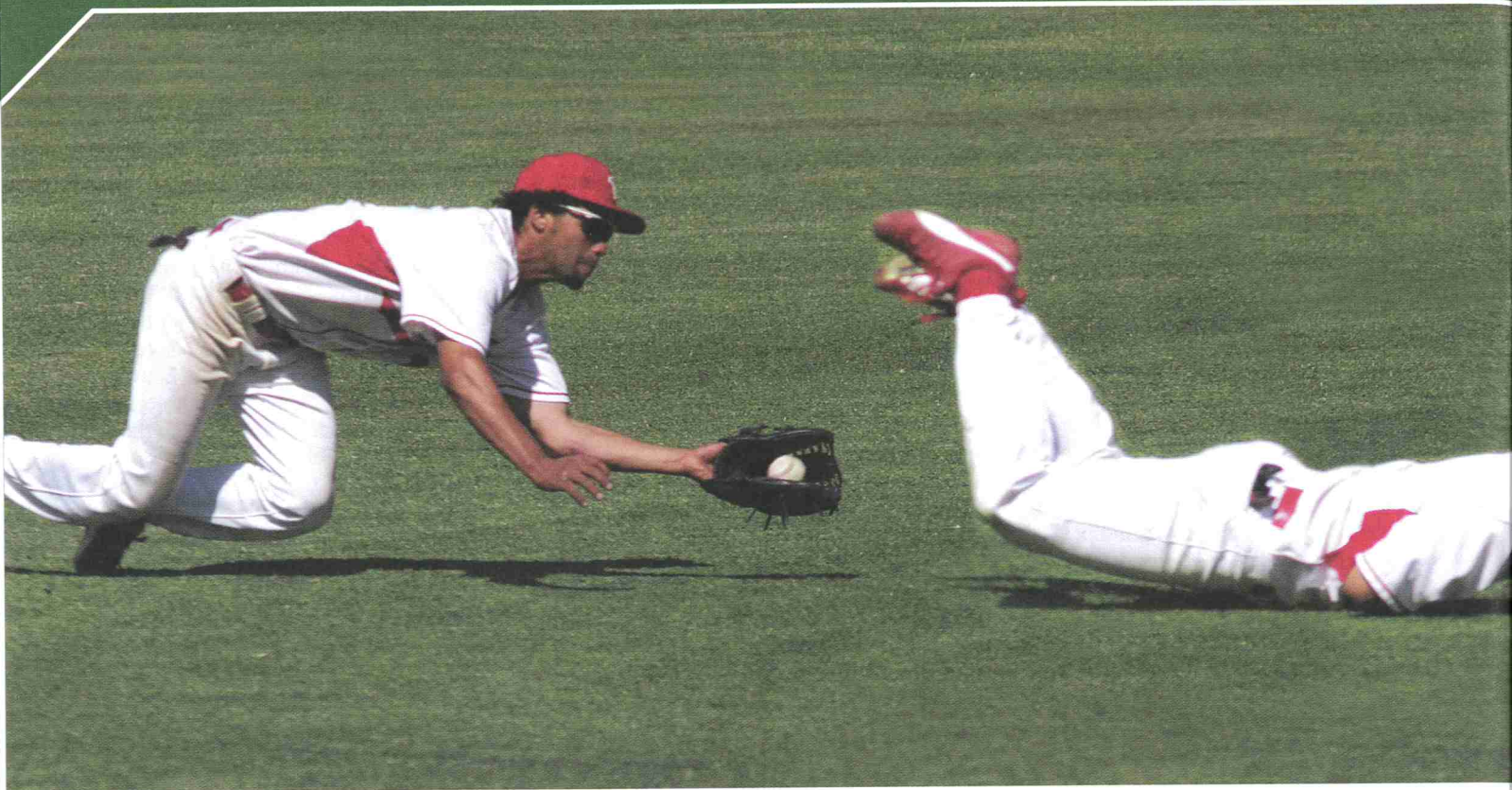
Yes, NFHS rules prohibit loose equipment (such as gloves, bats, helmets or catcher's gear) on or near the field and there is a penalty if loose equipment interferes with play (NFHS 1-3-7).



If loose equipment interferes with play, the umpire may call an out or outs, award bases or return runners, based on his or her judgment and the circumstances concerning the play. Two

caseplays (Sit. 1.3.7 A and B) further illuminate the application of the rule. If loose equipment by the defensive team prevents a ball from entering dead-ball territory, the umpire can rule that the ball would have entered dead-ball territory and award bases accordingly. If loose equipment by the offensive team, such as a batting helmet left near a dugout entrance, causes a defensive player to stumble while making an attempt on a fly foul ball, the umpire may award an out(s), award base(s) or return a runner(s) because of the offensive team's loose equipment on the field.

Ultimately, it behooves umpires to avoid these sticky situations by keeping an eye out for gloves, catcher's gear, bats or other equipment left outside dugouts or in on-deck circles. □



Players Sometimes Drop Clues That Help on Tough Calls

Reading players' body language proved a helpful tool when a ruling could go either way. If you are patient and observant, the players can make decisions for you in a number of situations.

Rundown remedy

There was a play with runners on first and third, the base umpire had to take a rundown between first and second alone. The adroit runner did an admirable job of staying alive as the first baseman and second baseman ran and threw back and forth trying to record the out while keeping an eye on the runner at third.

After what seemed an eternity, the trapped runner contorted his body to avoid a swipe tag. Out or not? What to do? The base umpire simply could not tell if leather had brushed cloth. The fielders acted as if they weren't certain either.

Fortunately, the runner stopped in his tracks, slumped his shoulders and

took on the hangdog body language of a vanquished foe. He gave up the chase and trotted toward his dugout. With a mixture of relief and joy, the base umpire gave the confident out signal of an umpire who appeared as if he'd known it all along.

Third-strike surrender

There were a few times a 2-2 or full-count pitch may or may not have nipped the corner. Most umpires will tell you to find a way to call any strike you can. That's easier said than done if the pitcher has something less than pinpoint control and hasn't been hitting that corner consistently.

The saving grace in these situations is good timing. It's nice when the batter calls himself out and grumbles at himself, not you, on a non-swinging third strike.

Of course there are two parallels to the surrender that aren't as helpful: the catcher who tries to goad you into

a called third strike by coming out of his crouch and heading for the dugout or firing the ball to third to start the "around the horn," and the batter who tries to convince you he's walked when he drops his bat and heads for first base on a perceived ball four. If those don't go the way the players want them to, you can expect some squawking.

Foul by a foot

Never turn down help from the players on fair/foul rulings. That included the one in which the batter smashed the ball down in the batter's box and it dribbled forward into fair territory. If the catcher doesn't try to field it and the batter doesn't sprint toward first, rule foul ball. If both go into action, that's good enough and go with fair. Of course if only one reacted, it was time to be an umpire again.

Speaking of fair and foul, one local field has a grove of trees beyond the ►



On a potential diving catch with the possibility of a trap, reading the fielder's actions in the wake of the play — such as coming up firing to second base with no runners on base — can provide valuable information.

- ▶ outfield fence that provides a beautiful backdrop. When they're in bloom, that is. Early in the season, they're a dull brown that is roughly the same color as a game-used baseball. So when a deep fly ball is hit down the line and the umpire has to rule home run or foul ball, good luck.

What about a cloudy afternoon. The batter belts a drive to left and as it gets closer to the fence, the visual of the ball gets lost in the trees. Suddenly, the left fielder lets out a mild expletive and throws his glove against the fence. That could only mean one thing. Reprieved! Point fair and twirl your index finger overhead. Everyone will know you had it all the way.

The no-trap trap

A looping fly ball to the outfield can present a challenge to a base umpire but there is one clue that you can sometimes use. Say the fielder charges in and attempts a shoestring

catch. You have no idea if it's a catch or trap. But the fielder scrambles to his feet and immediately throws to second base.

That can tell you he was conceding it was a trap. Unless the outfielder was just showing off his arm, there's no need for him to come up firing in that way (unless, of course there were other runners on base. The theory described only works if the bases were empty when the ball was hit).

It isn't foolproof, of course. Some fielders make the throw in that manner by force of habit. And you can't base the ruling solely on the reaction of the fielder who holds his glove aloft with the ball in it.

Failure at first base

Poker players know about "tells," clues that tip them off as to the strength of other players' hands. A first baseman has a tell on a bad throw and it used to help me.

If the first baseman had to leave the bag for a nanosecond to dig out a low throw and the batter-runner was several steps short of the bag, if the fielder didn't seem to panic, call the out. But if he rushed to go back and jab the bag with his foot or tried a swipe tag on the batter-runner, he told me he knew he missed it and he needed to secure the out.

Tag, you're not out

On a tag play, if a fielder applied a tag a second (or third) time, one might interpret that as him knowing he missed the tag the first time. If the runner was on the base, it was an easy safe call.

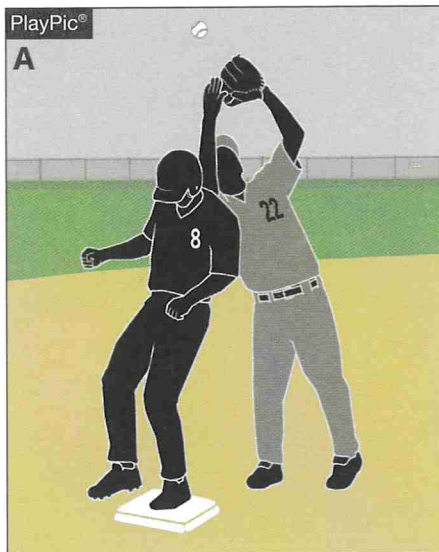
Many fielders will show you the ball in their glove after a tag. That doesn't automatically mean it's an out, but at least one part of the puzzle has been solved for you. Just remember that if you ask to see the ball and the fielder shows it to you, you've got to have an out. You don't ask for the ball and then rule safe. □

Way Off Base

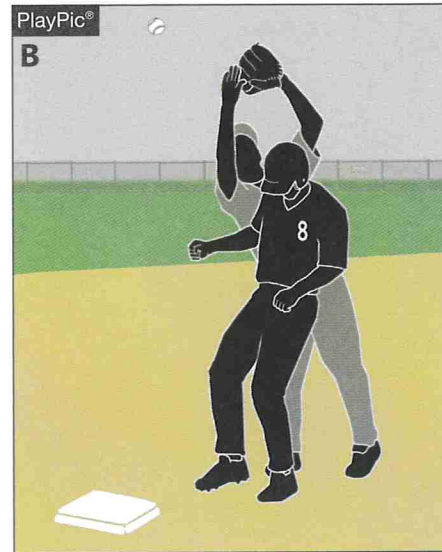
A runner will get called for interference when hit by a fair batted ball before it has passed an infielder other than the pitcher (note the exception: infield fly). But what about a runner on his base who impedes a fielder trying to get to a fly ball? Interference? It depends.

A runner need not vacate his base to permit a fielder to catch a fly ball, but he may not deliberately interfere. In PlayPic 1, if the umpire judges the runner did nothing to intentionally interfere, the runner cannot be called out for interference — the ball remains live and play proceeds. If the runner acted to deliberately interfere with the fielder, the runner is out and the batter-runner is awarded first base. All other runners return to the base occupied at the time of pitch.

The protection from interference only extends to a runner who is in contact with the base and does



nothing to intentionally interfere. If, as in PlayPic 2, the runner is off the base and impedes the fielder making a play on the fly ball, interference is called regardless of whether the runner intended to interfere (NFHS 8-2-8).



The base may not be a “safe haven” when it comes to a runner being hit by a fair batted ball before it has passed an infielder, but it does provide some protection from certain interference calls when a fielder is making a play on a fly ball. □

Don't Ditch That Pitcher Just Yet

At the start of the fourth inning in a high school game, the shortstop picked up the ball on the way to his position, stepped on the rubber and threw the ball to the catcher. The smile on his face evaporated when the plate umpire told him he was now the pitcher and had to pitch to the first batter.

While true under NFHS rules — an unannounced substitute pitcher becomes the pitcher when he takes his place on the pitcher’s plate — rule 3-1-1b specifies the ball must be made live for such a substitution to take effect. Thus a “harmless” throw by another player should be treated as such.

The prep incident with the overly officious umpire begs the question of ▶

When home-plate umpire Jeff Sill, Ventura, Calif., goes to the mound, he must know the rules governing pitching changes and whether any lineup changes requested by the coach are legal.



BOB MESSINA

► the situation where an actual pitcher mistakenly goes to the mound and warms up. The NFHS wording makes it clear, the error can be rectified, and the previous pitcher can continue up until the time the ball is made live. That is bound to generate an argument over warmup tosses, but by rule a continuing pitcher is entitled to five throws.

The starter

The player named on the starting lineup as the pitcher must remain in the game until the first batter reaches first base or is put out in both NFHS (3-1-1). The starting pitcher can be pinch-hit for in the top of the first and then exercise his re-entry right to pitch to at least one batter. Legal substitutions may be made at any time the ball is dead. The umpire-in-chief must be immediately notified, and “Time” must be requested to make a substitution.

A reliever

Any substitute pitcher must pitch to the batter then at bat or any substitute until that batter completes his at-bat or the third out is made in NFHS (3-1-2).

Play 1: With two outs in the top of the fourth inning, a new pitcher, Grady, picks off R1 before throwing a pitch. **Ruling 1:** Grady has fulfilled his obligation by retiring the side. Another pitcher may begin the top of the fifth.

Play 2: With one out in the seventh inning, Brown replaces Adams and strikes out the first batter he faces for the second out of the inning. Brown’s coach makes another trip to the mound

to replace Brown with Clark. **Ruling 2:** Legal. Brown has fulfilled his obligation since the batter completed his at-bat.

Warmups

Warmup throws or “preparatory” pitches are seemingly a simple issue — eight the first time and five any time thereafter, with no limit in the event of injury or ejection. Umpires may allow additional pitches on cold days. If the stars are right, it’s possible for complications to ensue. The crux of the issue is a lack of a definition of a “warmup” pitch.

In a 2018 high school game, a new pitcher came out and threw three quick tosses to the catcher from about halfway between the mound and plate. After his fifth toss from the mound, the base umpire told him the inning had to start. The player did not understand that edict and instead of explaining the rule, the umpire chastised the player.

The coach then came out to see why the umpire was yelling at his player. When all was said and done, the player was ejected and the coach restricted to the dugout.

Any throw from the pitcher to the catcher, or a stand-in if the catcher is delayed, should be counted as a warmup pitch. Throws to infielders while awaiting a catcher are not counted.

In NFHS, the throws must be completed within one minute, timed from the third out of the previous inning (6-2-2c Exc.).

Returning pitcher

A pitcher moving to another position and returning to pitch in the same game is not common but is permissible. Such a pitcher can return to the mound once per inning in NFHS as long as the visit does not mandate his removal (NFHS 3-1-2, 3-4-1). □

QUICK TIP

Officials become stronger only with the help of officials who are better than themselves. **Find someone who steps up in difficult situations and have that individual help you grow into that role.** A mentor can help you become the umpire you want to become.

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You're an Umpire ... Not a Catcher

There's a Correct Way for Teams to Get You Baseballs

It's no secret baseball coaches and players sometimes see that other guy on the field wearing protective gear — other than the catcher — as nothing more than a necessary nuisance.

To paraphrase Rodney Dangerfield, many a plate umpire can't get no respect, and it often shows up in the manner in which baseballs make their way back to the boy — or girl — in blue. The way some teams deliver new baseballs — or, at most levels, return already used ones that have gone out of play for one reason or another — you would think the home-plate umpire is nothing more than a dog playing fetch.

Rolled. Bounced. Thrown over the head or 10 feet short.

We can all agree that major league umpires would never allow such an act of disrespect to fly. Could you imagine attending a game at baseball's highest level and watching the likes of Gerry Davis and Joe West chasing wayward baseball in the downtime between pitches? Yet when it comes to the high school and amateur levels of the game, it happens all the time.

And we should be putting a stop to it.

That doesn't mean that an umpire should never be expected to handle a baseball. There are plenty of reasons for doing so. Perhaps you need to check a ball for a cut or scuff mark after the hitter nubbed one off the end of the bat. You're standing in the infield halfway between home plate and first base — because you mechanically did what you were supposed to on the ground ball — and the baseball has already been returned to the pitcher. Nothing wrong with asking him to toss it to you for inspection.

There is a huge difference between such onfield acts and the manner in which baseballs arrive from the dugout to the plate area. Plate umpires need to do their part in cleaning up that process and setting the tone for their fellow umpires who will work said teams in the future.

Address it during pregame. Some



The delivery of baseballs to umpires at the high school level should be a simple process. There is nothing wrong with an umpire like Don King, East Peoria, Ill., asking that new baseballs, or "gamers" already in use, be hand-delivered by a coach or a player and not thrown to the umpire.

coaches are difficult on purpose. Others are oblivious. Either way, you have an opportunity to set expectations during the plate meeting about any items that you feel need to be addressed. Let the coaches know that when you need baseballs, a uniformed team representative needs to run them out and hand them to you.

Be timely

Whether you use one ball bag or two is a matter of personal preference. Either way, you should be aware of how many baseballs you have at your disposal at all times. And as soon as you have fewer than two, you should be making the home team aware of that fact. We've all seen situations where a foul ball goes flying out of play and the umpire turns to the

dugout and yells, "We need a baseball. I am all out." Now, the teams and the fans have to play the waiting game because you didn't take care of business when your supply ran low. You don't wait until your car comes to a stop on a busy highway to re-fill your gas tank, right?

Be specific

In a perfect world, the home team will have someone responsible for paying attention to how many baseballs have gone out of play and how many you still have to work with. Then again, we all know that we rarely umpire in perfect situations. To that end, be specific with teams about what you need when you are requesting baseballs. If you yell to the dugout, "Guys, I need two baseballs, ▶

► please,” then it should be expected that someone will deliver two baseballs. If you just yell out that you need baseballs, don’t be surprised when they bring one (setting you up for the same conversation as soon as the next pitch is fouled out of play) or four (which, if you’re a single bagger, is going to leave you looking like you are ready to tip over).

Be respectful

Good baseball mechanics should be a two-way street. You have asked the coaches to respect your process; you

need to likewise be respectful of theirs. If you have a baseball that needs to be taken out of play, don’t just toss it toward the dugout with a grumble. The word for such an umpire is “hypocrite.” You don’t need to walk it over to the dugout and delay the game. But you should make eye contact with the head coach or whoever has been taking care of delivering baseballs and let them know why you are softly tossing one their way. “This baseball has a tear in the seams. We need to take it out of play. Thanks.”

Use proper language

When using language audible enough for anyone more than the catcher and batter to hear, remember to call them “baseballs.” Few things are more embarrassing than turning to the dugout and yelling, loud enough for everyone to hear, an abbreviated version of that word. Yes, it may elicit a chuckle. It may also open the door to ridicule and invite the lack of respect that we are trying to avoid in the first place. □

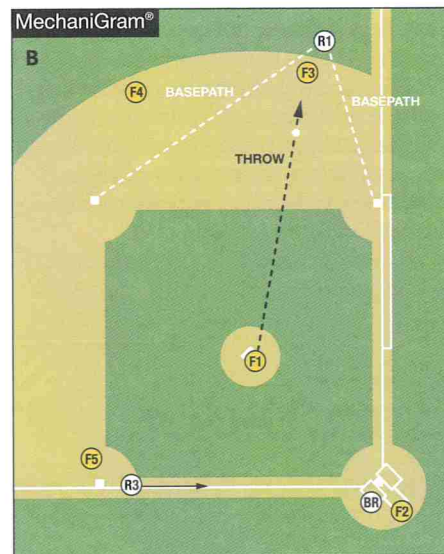
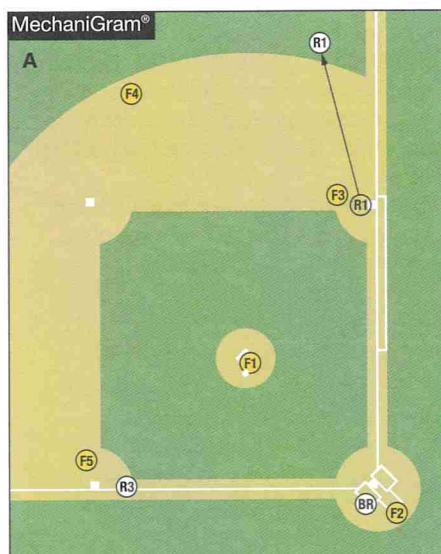
Slick Tricks

Deception is a part of every sport, and each sport has guidelines for legal trickery and illegal acts. Some of the bizarre tricks date back to the origins of the game and baseball is no different in that regard. Clever coaches constantly think of ways to fool opponents and it sometimes takes years for the rulesmakers to shut it down.

An early trick used by third-base coaches that was originally legal was for the coach to leave his box and act in a manner to draw a throw by a fielder, hoping for an overthrow so a runner on third could score. That became prohibited under pro rules in 1904 after being in use for about 30 years. If an uninformed coach should try that, the runner is immediately out and the ball is dead (NFHS 3-2-3).

Another trick of sorts was championed by Germany Schaefer, an early 20th century infielder for multiple teams, who was known for trying to manufacture a run with runners on first and third. Schaefer would try to draw a throw from the catcher by stealing second. If his tactic was not successful, however, he would return to first to try it all over again. The rules now allow a runner to retreat along the baseline or to return to a previously occupied base for a legitimate purpose, but running bases in reverse order is considered making a travesty of the game and is illegal. It is also illegal to retreat for the purpose of confusing the opponents (NFHS 8-4-2n).

Once a runner legally acquires title to a base and the pitcher assumes his pitching position, the runner may not return to a



The “skunk in the outfield” play is one of several situations where a team may resort to legal trickery to try to gain an advantage.

previously occupied base (NFHS interp). The most likely scenario for that is a missed base; however, it could also occur if a runner is confused as to whether or not a fly ball was caught. Retreating toward home to avoid a tag is not considered an attempt to confuse the defense. If a retreating runner runs beyond the plate, he is out (NFHS 8.1.1A).

A modern and legal version of Schaefer’s maneuver is for the runner on first to pull up short of second base and get in a rundown, hoping the distraction or a missed throw will allow his teammate to score from third. The technique is primarily attempted at the very lowest

levels of baseball. As players mature, their arm strength is such that the ball can be easily thrown to the plate from a rundown between first and second, reducing the likelihood this maneuver will be successful.

Balks. One of the prime issues rulesmakers have grappled with over the years is the distinction between legal and illegal deception on the part of pitchers. Pickoffs are of course a prime area of concern. The “3-to-1” pickoff is a rarely successful pickoff attempt where, with runners on first and third, a pitcher steps directly to third from the pitching plate,

SEE “TRICKS” P. 12

▶ Tricks CONT. FROM P.11

feints a throw there and spins around to throw to first. It is now only legal in NFHS (NFHS 6-2-4).

Probably the most common and accepted form of legal trickery involving the pitcher is the hidden ball trick. It is specifically mentioned in the NFHS casebook. It involves a fielder holding the ball without the runner's knowledge, waiting for the runner to take a lead from his base and then tagging him.

Under NFHS rules, he cannot position himself within approximately five feet of the pitcher's plate without having the ball (6-2-5). The rule accounts for an all-dirt infield. In all cases, the penalty for an infraction is a balk.

For the trick to be successful, the ball must be continuously live and the victim must not realize the fielder has the ball. Variations include the pitcher giving the ball to a fielder after a brief conference; a fielder taking a pickoff throw and then miming a return throw to the pitcher; and faking a throw to the pitcher while a sliding baserunner is distracted.

If the ball has become dead for any reason or time has been called, the trick

cannot be attempted. The ball can only become live when it is made live by the umpire. Play is resumed when the pitcher takes his place on the pitcher's plate with a ball in his possession and the runners have reached the bases to which they are entitled or retouched their bases. The plate umpire then points to the pitcher and calls "play" (NFHS 5-1-4, 5-2-2a).

If the pitcher engages the rubber without the ball and the umpire calls "play," it is not a balk. The ball was not legally made live and a balk cannot be called while the ball is dead. Any tag of a runner is ignored. The ball is returned to the pitcher and play resumes according to rule.

Miami play

A trick where no attempt is made to "hide" the ball was made famous by the University of Miami during the 1982 College World Series. In the "Miami Play," a fake throw is attempted in an effort to confuse the runner as to the true location of the ball.

Although Miami used the trick on a runner at first, the ruse is most often attempted at second base with the center fielder "attempting" to chase the ball

down. In a variation of this play, the Oscar-winning performances of the fielders chasing the ball are enhanced with shouts of "Get the ball!" or "Where's the ball?"

Skunk in the outfield

This "trick" also involves runners on first and third, with the runner on first taking an enormous lead into right field (MechaniGram A, previous page) hoping the defense will throw the ball to the outfield in an effort to retire him (MechaniGram B, previous page) and thus allow the runner on third to score.

The play is legal because a baseline only exists when a runner is being played on, so lacking a tag attempt runners are free to run wherever they want. When a play on a runner begins, the baseline is established as a direct line between the runner and the base to which he is advancing or retreating. Such a runner is out if he runs more than three feet away from that direct line to avoid being tagged (NFHS 8-4-2a). When a fielder goes to tag a runner, if the runner moves more than "a step and a reach" from the fielder, he has left the baseline. □

Run Over

Runner Not Always Out When Hit by a Batted Ball

It seems everyone "knows" a runner is out when he gets hit by a batted ball and while that is usually the case, it is not always true. So when the umpires allow play to continue, it's the umpires who don't know the rule.

If a runner is hit by a fair batted ball before it passes an infielder other than the pitcher, the ball is dead and the runner is out. The batter-runner is awarded first base and is credited with a hit. If all the infielders on the runner's side of the infield are playing in, a runner who is hit by a batted ball is not out unless he intentionally interferes (NFHS 5-1-1f2, 8-4-2k, 5.1.1H, 8.4.2I, 8.4.2 J).

A challenging scenario for umpires is when one infielder, most likely F3 or F5, is playing in front of the baseline, and another infielder, most likely F4 or F6, is playing deep. The umpire ▶

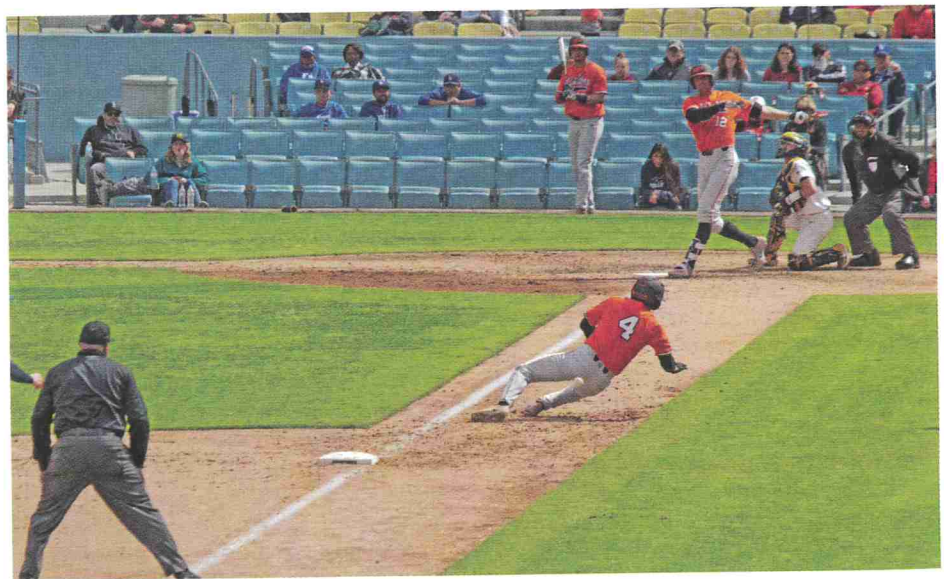


Plate umpire Ramon Armandariz of Inglewood, Calif., and third-base umpire Travis Reininger of Brighton, Colo., observe the runner get hit by a batted ball. Sometimes, that means the runner will be called out — but not in this case as the ball was foul.

► has two judgments to make. First, he must determine if the first fielder has a legitimate chance to field the ball such that it can be considered having passed a fielder. Next, he must determine if the deeper (second) fielder might be able to make a play.

If the first fielder did not have a legitimate chance to field the ball and it hits the runner, the runner is out because the ball is not considered having passed an infielder. There is no need to consider if another fielder could have fielded the ball.

If the first fielder has a legitimate chance and the ball passes by him untouched and hits the runner, the runner is not out unless a second fielder would have had a chance to make a play on the ball. Whether a fielder has a legitimate chance to field the ball is a judgment call.

Play 1: With R2 on second, B1 grounds the ball into the hole. F5, playing in front of the baseline, dives for the ball which passes under his glove. The ball then hits R2. F6 had gone deep into the hole. Ruling 1: R2 is out if the umpire judges F6 might have been able to make a play.

In Play 1, the umpire should not be too quick to rule F6 had a play. Simply being able to get to the ball is not being able to make a play. F6 would have to get to the ball and be able to make a throw that would retire a runner. Also, if F5 had touched (deflected) the ball and it then struck R2 (unintentionally on the part of the runner), it is live and in play despite the fact that another infielder might be in position to field the ball.

Play 2: With R2 on second and R3 on third, the infield is playing in. B1 grounds the ball into the hole about midway between F5 and F6. Neither

fielder is within an arm's reach of the ball. The ball then hits R2. Ruling 2: The ball remains in play.

Deflection

Another challenging scenario is when the batted ball is deflected into the runner by a fielder. Such a deflection is most likely to be by the pitcher or a corner infielder into a runner from first or second. Once a fielder touches the ball, the ball remains in play and interference cannot be called unless contact with the ball is intentional. It does not matter if another fielder could have made a play (NFHS 8-4-2k).

That may be difficult for umpires to keep in mind because it is different from the protection granted a fielder from being contacted by a runner after a deflected ball that the fielder may still have a play on. After a ball is deflected, the fielder still has the right of way and a runner must avoid a fielder who has a play on the ball. If a runner hinders or impedes a fielder in the act of fielding the

ball, he is out for interference regardless of intent and the ball is immediately dead (NFHS 5-1-1e, 8-4-2g).

Also, if such a deflected ball hits an umpire, the ball remains live and in play; it does not matter if the ball was deflected by the pitcher or another infielder. The same would be true if the ball had passed an infielder other than the pitcher. However, if a fair ball touches an umpire in fair territory before touching an infielder, it is umpire interference and the batter is awarded first base. The ball is dead and other runners advance only if forced (NFHS 5-1-1f1, 8-1-2b).

The Sanctuary

A base is a good place for a runner to be if he doesn't want to be tagged out, but it doesn't protect him from being hit by a batted ball unless it is an infield fly (NFHS 8-4-2k2, 5.1.1J). In fact, for other types of interference, his protection is only good for unintentional acts (NFHS 8-2-8). □

QUICK TIP

At the first sign you're struggling behind the plate, **immediately simplify your stance and mechanics**. Get back to the fundamentals. Then focus on timing. Going back to the basics should provide immediate results.

National Federation of State High School Associations



NFHS RULES APP



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Anticipate. You Read That Right. Anticipate.

Anticipation. In umpiring circles, that's often treated as a four-letter word. But should it be?

Of course, anticipation is an umpire's worst enemy if what you're anticipating is the call on a judgment play before it happens. Catch/no catch, fair/foul, safe/out and ball/strike calls should be made with an approach that is not biased to what an umpire thinks might happen given the circumstances leading up to the play.

Anticipation on a judgment call leaves the umpire headed down a predetermined path and unprepared mentally for how events actually unfold. That can lead to the call being signaled and verbalized not matching the reality on the field — despite the umpire being fully aware things did not go as he or she thought. A preconception such as, "That runner is a dead duck," doesn't help your judgment when it ends up being a bang-bang play.

That type of anticipation is to be avoided. Let the play unfold to completion, process what you observed and then call it — without anticipating the outcome before it happens.

But not all anticipation is bad. In fact, great umpires anticipate all the time.

Good anticipation involves foreseeing where the next play might occur. Anticipating the possibilities — and where plays are likely to develop — can help an umpire plan for positioning.

This is especially important in the two-umpire system, where there's a lot of field to cover. One example involves the classic double-play situation. The base umpire can't afford to get too close to the play at second base in order to be in position to rule on the play at first base, which is often the closer end of the double play.

But a seasoned umpire may be able to tell when only one play will result at second or first on a ground ball fielded by an infielder. The umpire will be able to get a little closer to the only play that will result. That will mean the umpire is in a better position to see a very tight play or at least demonstrate the appearance of being in the best possible position to rule.

Everyone in umpiring has heard the maxim: Watch the ball, glance at the runners. Not only does it prevent umpires from having their head taken off by an errant throw, but it helps umpires anticipate where the next play will develop.

Knowing the speed of the runners in various situations can help with anticipation of where the next play might occur. A very fast runner might be more likely to try to stretch a single into a double, or take an extra base on a hit by one of his teammates.

Another situation where anticipating is helpful is on timing plays. Many circumstances arise in games that will create the possibility of a timing play at home, where an umpire must determine if the runner scored before the third out was made on the bases. Anticipating a close timing play at the plate will require the plate umpire to be in great position to see both the runner scoring and the third out being made on the bases.

One final area where anticipation is especially handy is when something unsporting has happened that might lead to retaliation by the offended team. At a minimum, you'll be in a position to issue warnings immediately in an attempt to calm down what, unchecked, could become a volatile situation.

Anticipate the play — but not the call — and you could have an edge on calling the action that unfolds. □

Rambunctious Runners in a Rundown

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. □

A Breakdown of the Running Lane Rules

In the top of the seventh inning in Game 6 of the World Series on Oct. 29, 2019, the Washington Nationals had Yan Gomes on first and leadoff hitter Trea Turner at the plate with no outs.

Turner hit a slow roller down the third-base line. As he dashed toward first, his path kept him narrowly in fair territory. Houston pitcher Brad Peacock fielded the ball and his throw pulled first baseman Yuli Gurriel toward the baseline. Turner ran into Gurriel's glove, knocking it off his hand. The ball, meanwhile, bounced off Turner's leg and into foul territory. Gomes ended up making it to third, and Turner ended up at second.

Plate umpire Sam Holbrook, however, ruled Turner out for running lane interference. Gomes was put back at first base. The video shows Turner ran the last half of the distance from home to first well out of the running lane; however, that is only part of the rule. Let's take a look at each element of the rule and see what was and was not violated.

The rule in NFHS is 8-4-1g. As mentioned, under certain conditions the batter-runner is severely restricted as to where he may run. He is required to run the last half of the distance from home to first base within the three-foot lane. The lines are part of the lane, so stepping on the line is not a violation. Also, one foot inside the lane (or on the line) and the other foot in the air is permissible. The batter-runner must take two consecutive steps totally outside the lane to violate the rule.

Another requirement that triggers the rule is the "origin" of the throw. Although that is not specifically addressed in the rules, it is understood the throw must be made from "the area of the plate." The originating area is not a precise one and it allows umpires to make a distinction between throws that are roughly parallel to the first-base line and those made from the infield dirt or the pitcher's mound. The restriction applies both to batted balls and uncaught third strikes. It does not apply on throws in the opposite direction. So, if the first baseman were to field a batted ball and throw to the plate, it doesn't matter where the batter-runner is running.

Somewhat surprisingly the rule is not about interference with the throw, but

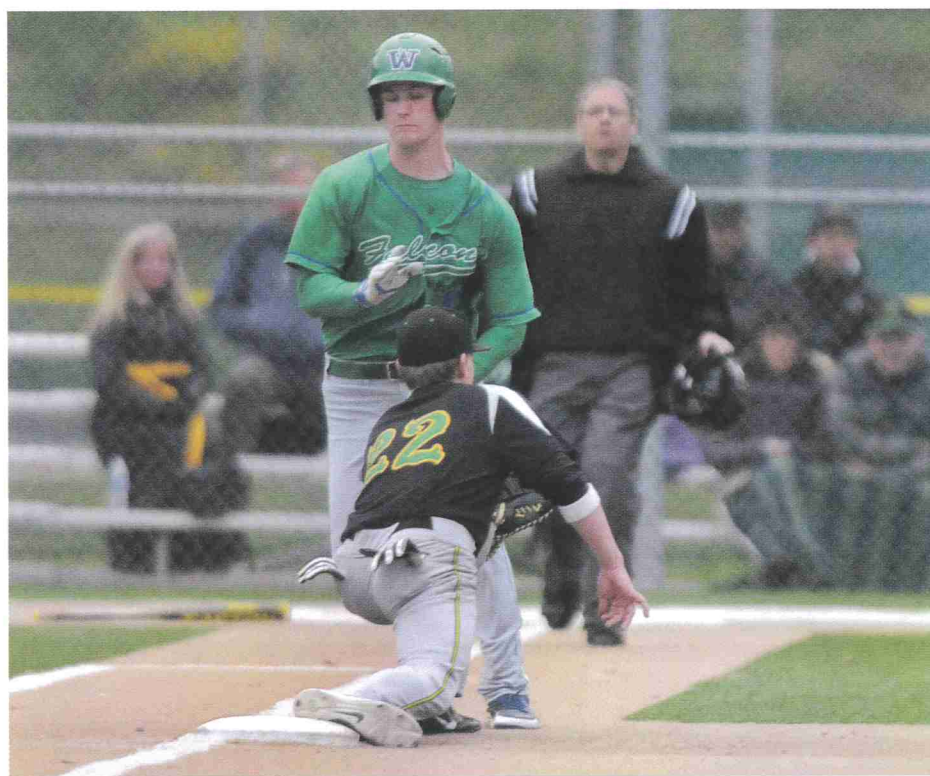


Plate umpire Glenn Campbell of Woodinville, Wash., trails the runner up the first-base line to observe for a potential running lane violation.

rather about interference with the fielder taking the throw at first base. There must be a throw for this rule to apply; if there is no throw it's impossible to interfere with a fielder taking a throw. Additionally, if there is no fielder in position at first base to catch the throw, the batter-runner's position and any contact with the ball is immaterial. The play simply was not going to be completed.

At some point in time, the batter-runner has to leave the lane. That may be to evade a tag, avoid contact with a fielder or simply to touch first base. How the batter-runner does that is dependent on the throw and the position of the fielder as well as his own position.

Third Strike

As noted, the runner's lane applies on an uncaught third strike. In high school play, the batter-runner on an uncaught third strike doesn't lose his opportunity to

advance until he enters the dugout (NFHS 7-4-1b1, 8-1-1b, 8-4-1f, 8.1.1B). Thus at any time prior, he can advance using any basepath he desires. If he does recognize that he may advance, he is not restricted as to the path he may take to first base.

Penalty

The penalty for interference is an immediate dead ball and the batter-runner is out; any other runners return to the base occupied at the time of interference (NFHS 8-4-1g).

As the World Series game demonstrated, plays involving the runner's lane are highly prone to dispute. The ruling led to the ejection of Nationals manager Dave Martinez, the first manager ejected from a World Series game since 1996. The only slam dunk, so to speak, is likely when the batter-runner gets plunked in the back while he is clearly outside the lane. □

Pick the Proper Penalty

What Results in Restriction and Ejection?

Restriction is a penalty unique to high school baseball, NFHS rules leave suspensions to the auspices of the state association and an ejection is simply the immediate removal of a player or coach from any further participation in the ongoing game. Restriction (an undefined term) has a different impact for players than it does for coaches.

Restriction of a player is virtually the same as an ejection but has a less pejorative flavor and may spare the player from a suspension; almost all states have a minimum one-game suspension for any ejection.

A restricted high school coach on the other hand avoids the probation and educational follow-up many states mandate for ejected coaches while receiving what some consider to be a minor reprimand. Such a coach can do pretty much what he would normally do except make a mound visit or come out of the dugout to argue with an umpire. He may, however, leave the dugout to attend to a player who becomes ill or injured (NFHS 3.2.1F) and may manage the game from within the dugout. He can still confer with the pitcher (or the entire team) as long as it is done immediately in front of the dugout.

There are several acts under NFHS rules where restriction is mandated without the option to eject.

Illegal Player

The first is when an illegal player (NFHS 2-36-3) is discovered. If on offense, he is also out (3-1-1).

Play: In the fourth inning, Green pinch runs for B8. In the fifth inning with one out, Green pinch hits for B5 with runners on second and third. Green singles to drive in two runs. The defense appeals immediately. Ruling: The defense will opt for the penalty, which returns R2 and R3 to their bases. Green is the second out and B5 is the next batter. Green is restricted to the dugout.

Illegal Bat

When a batter attempts to use (or has used) an illegal bat, in addition to the batter being declared out (NFHS 7-4-1a), the head coach is restricted for the



At the high school level, umpires like Jim Sayre, Sunland, Calif., have multiple options when it comes to dealing with an argumentative coach, including restriction to the dugout or ejection. Whether the coach's behavior requires a suspension typically falls under the purview of a state association.

remainder of the game. On the second violation, the head coach is ejected. On any subsequent violations, the replacement head coach is ejected (NFHS 4-1-3b Pen.).

Coach's Uniform

A high school coach who is not in the uniform of the team is restricted to the bench/dugout (3-2-1).

Pregame Conference

For high school games, the head coach must attend the pregame conference if available and is restricted if he refuses to attend (3-2-4).

Unsporting Acts

In all codes, acts related to sporting conduct allow the umpires great discretion.

For any of the following language or actions, the umpire may eject the offender from the game, or if the offense is judged to be of a minor nature, the umpire may warn the offender and then eject him if he repeats the offense. Additionally, the umpire has the option to restrict the offender to the bench/dugout for the remainder of the game (NFHS 3-3-1 Pen.).

Umpire discretion is justified as there is a great variety in intent and impact of the words and acts that are spoken or occur in baseball games. The type of language noted in the rulebook includes: attempts to incite spectator demonstrations; use of profanity; intimidation or baiting tactics; remarks reflecting unfavorably upon any other person; attempts to embarrass, ridicule or demean others under circumstances including race, religion, gender or national origin; intimidation; and any remarks not in accordance with the spirit of fair play.

Other specific actions deemed to be inappropriate in NFHS include: being in live-ball territory (excluding the bullpen) during the opponent's infield practice prior to the start of the game; entering the area behind the catcher while the opposing pitcher and catcher are in their positions; use of any object in the coach's box other than a stopwatch, rulebook (hard copy), or scorebook; being outside the designated dugout (bench) or bullpen if not a batter, runner, on-deck batter, in the coach's box or one of the nine players on defense; charging an umpire; or using amplifiers or bullhorns for coaching purposes during the course of the game.

In cases where any member of the coaching staff who is not the head coach (or designee) leaves the vicinity of the dugout or coaching box to dispute a judgment call by an umpire, both the head coach and the offending coach shall be restricted to the dugout for the remainder of the game. If the offense is judged severe enough, the umpire may eject the offender and restrict or eject the head coach (NFHS 3-3-1f6).

Automatic Ejection

There are five acts where ejection is automatic. These are: deliberately throwing equipment, malicious contact, enticing a balk, using tobacco and leaving a position to fight (NFHS 3-3-1m-q). The other codes also have numerous acts that mandate disqualification. □