

THE 8 MOST MISUNDERSTOOD RULES OF SLOWPITCH SOFTBALL

1. "SLIDE RULE"

The reason for the quotation marks is that there is no such rule. As is stated in the SCMAF rulebook, "at no time do we insist or make it mandatory for anyone to slide - only to avoid contact." In order to clarify this rule, we must take it in two steps, to cover the two instances where it most frequently comes into question.

DOUBLE PLAY SITUATIONS

This is easily the most difficult judgment call situation that recreational umpires run up against with frequency. The first key is to remember that a runner coming into second base in a double play situation need not slide. Let's take a look at what else the SCMAF book has to say about this situation.

1. Rule 7, Section 7(V) NOTE - says that if a runner coming into a base standing up causes contact with a fielder in the act of attempting a double play, the batter may also be called out. This rule states two things:
 - A. There must be contact
 - B. There must be a double play attempt by the fielder
2. Rule 2 defines "Interference" as an act by the team at bat which interferes with, obstructs, impedes, hinders or confuses any fielder attempting to make a play. Such interference may be physical, verbal or distractionary. This definition allows for a bit more judgment on the part of the umpire as to whether or not interference took place, since contact is not required.
3. Appendix C clarifies "Interference/Obstruction" and "Collisions." The "Interference/Obstruction" section is the key section for this scenario. Basically, the clarification implies that interference can only occur if the fielder is fielding a batted ball, or already has the ball. While the clarification states that runners should attempt to avoid contact whenever possible, it also makes it very clear that sliding is never required.

CONCLUSION

Interference is always a judgment call, and it is arguably the toughest judgment call. Umpires generally call interference on double plays a bit too much, but that is certainly better than too little. What we can pull from the rules is that a runner should avoid contact if he is out at second base and a double play is being attempted. If there is no contact, you cannot say that the runner failed to avoid contact. Given no contact, the only way an umpire can call interference on such a play is if he judges the interference to be "distractionary" as the definition states. In order to call distractionary interference, you must judge that the runner has time to realize that he is out, and after that realization, time to make an effort to avoid interfering with the play. Only then can you realistically consider calling interference. The bottom line is to try and see the playfully, use your best judgment, and remember the following:

1. A player need not slide, he need only avoid contact.
2. If there is no contact, you cannot say that the runner didn't avoid contact.
3. Given no contact, and no question of verbal interference, the only type of interference you can call is distractionary.

TAG PLAY SITUATIONS

This is the easier of the two scenarios to deal with when it comes to judging interference. Refer to the definition of interference above, as well as the following two rule references.

1. Rule 7, Section 7(X) - States that it is interference if a runner doesn't slide or attempt to avoid contact with a fielder who has the ball waiting to tag the runner.
2. Appendix C - States very clearly, in "Interference/Obstruction" that a fielder in this situation has a right to the baseline only if he has the ball.

CONCLUSION

Given that these are the only book references to this situation, the implication is clear. If the fielder does not have the ball, the runner need not slide or avoid contact. In fact, if the fielder doesn't have the ball, and there is contact in the baseline, the fielder is guilty of obstruction! This rule is really very easy to understand, but it is complicated by fielders who don't properly stand off to the side of the baseline while awaiting throws. When the hard collision occurs, everyone wants the umpire to punish the runner, when in over 90% of such cases, the fielder is at fault.

2. BASE AWARDS ON THROWN BALLS OUT OF PLAY

When a ball is thrown out of play by a fielder, the umpire should call and signal a dead ball. At this point, said umpire must make awards of bases to existing baserunners. This is really quite a simple process, made complicated too often by umpires.

WHAT TO REMEMBER

For this type of scenario, the umpire needs to remember the number of bases to award, plus a single question.

1. All baserunners are awarded two bases (Rule 7, Section 2(I))
2. The question is, "was the throw on a first play by an infielder?" If the answer to the question is yes, then the two-base award is made from the bases held at the time of the pitch. If the answer to the question is no, then the two-base award is made from the last bases held at the time said throw was released by the fielder.

NOTES

1. If two runners are between the same two bases when the throw is released, the lead runner will get two bases, the following runner, only one. (See Appendix C — "Awarding Bases")
2. Where runners are at the time the ball actually goes out of play means nothing.
3. There is no such thing as "one plus one." The award is always two bases.

3. SCORING OF RUNS

This scenario applies to determining whether or not runs will count that scored during a play in which the third out is made. This is covered in your rulebook, in Rule 8, Section 1, and also in the section entitled "Scoring of Runs" in the Umpire Mechanics Manual. When the third out is made, whether by appeal play or not, and runs came across the plate during the play, the umpire should use the following system to determine whether or not said "runs" actually count.

WHAT TO REMEMBER

1. If the third out is on the batter-runner at first base, no runs will ever count.
2. If the third out is on a different runner at the base to which he was forced to run by virtue of the batter becoming a runner, no runs will ever count.
3. If neither of the above scenarios apply, then runs who scored ahead of the third out in question will count.

NOTES

1. In #2 above, a baserunner is never forced to advance more than one base. For instance, a runner starting at first base is never forced to advance further than second base.
2. Runners who were behind the runner called out for the third out will never count.
3. In #3 above, runners who were ahead of the runner called out may count if they cross the plate prior to the actual out being made.
4. An out made by virtue of a baserunner leaving a base too soon on a caught fly ball is never a force out. While it is true that if the ball arrives at the base before the runner gets back, he is out, this does not mean that it is a force out for the purposes of scoring runs.

4. BATTING OUT OF ORDER

Batting out of order is covered in Rule 6, Section 3 of your rulebook, and in the section titled "Batting Out of Order" in the Umpire Mechanics Manual. As you will find, there are three different scenarios that can occur.

WHAT TO REMEMBER

If the appeal is made:

1. While the incorrect batter is at bat, the correct batter merely comes to the plate and assumes any current count on the batter. No further penalty.
2. After the incorrect batter has completed his turn, and before the next pitch, the batter who should have batted is called out. Nullify any advance of runners due to the batter becoming a baserunner, and the correct batter is now the one who follows the batter called out for failing to bat.
3. After the incorrect batter has completed his turn, and after the next pitch, the time at-bat of the incorrect batter is now legal. The next batter should be the one whose name appears after that of the "incorrect" batter. If this is not the case, said batter should come to the plate and assume any count. Any batters who were skipped have simply lost their turn. No further penalty.

NOTES

1. An appeal can be made anytime! What will vary, depending on when the appeal is made, is the penalty. However, the above three scenarios are the only possibilities.
2. If the appeal is made while there is a count on the current batter, scenario #2 above will never apply, and you will never call anyone out.
3. If you call someone out, it is always the player who failed to bat, not the incorrect batter.
4. Batting Out of Order is an appeal play! This means that the opposing team must make an appeal for a penalty to apply. Anyone else who might suspect batting out of order should be quiet about it. This includes umpires and scorekeepers.

STEPS TO FOLLOW

1. When the appeal is made, determine if there is a count on the current batter.
2. If there is a count, all you need to do is determine if the current batter is the correct one, if not, simply bring the correct one up to assume the count.
3. If there is not a count, you need to determine if the batter who just hit was correct. If not, call the correct batter out, nullify advances by other runners, and bring up the batter who follows the player you just called out. THAT'S ALL THERE IS TO IT!

5. BATTER'S BOX RESTRICTIONS

There are two areas to consider with regard to batter's box restrictions. These are:

1. The position the batter must take up when stepping into the box: Rule 6, Section 1 states that the batter must take up a position with both feet entirely within the lines of the batter's box. This means that no part of either foot may be outside the box. On the line is okay, as the lines defining the batter's box are within the box. The umpire should hold up play until the batter is entirely within the box.
2. The position of the batter's feet when contact is made with the ball. The batter's position at point of contact Rule 6, Section 1a states that the batter shall not have either foot touching the ground entirely outside the box when the ball is hit. This means that in order to call a batter out for being out of the box, his entire foot must be wholly out of the box. If any part of his foot is so much as touching the lines of the box, he is considered to be in the box. Also, he must hit the ball to be called out.

WHAT TO REMEMBER

1. To remember the batter's box rules, remember that the lines defining the box are wholly within the box, and the word "entirely," for the following two possibilities.
2. When a batter takes a position in the box, both feet must be entirely within the batter's box.
3. When the batter hits the ball, in order to be called out, the foot must be entirely out of the batter's box.
4. In the case of #3, it does not matter if the ball is hit fair or foul.

6. FAIR BALL/FOUL BALL

Judging whether a ball is fair or foul is relatively simple, however there are a lot of myths out there, so be aware. Read your rules carefully, and consider the following:

WHAT TO REMEMBER

Never judge a ball to be fair or foul until it has done one of the following:

1. Stopped rolling
2. Touched someone or something other than the ground
3. Passed first or third base after having touched the ground
4. Hit the ground for the first time beyond first or third base

For these cases, judge fair or foul according to the following criteria:

1. Position of the ball when it stops rolling
2. Position of the ball when it touches someone or something
3. Position of the ball when it is over, or even with the base
4. Position of the ball when it hits the ground

NOTES

1. When judging fair or foul, it is always the position of the ball, and never the position of the fielder.
2. The foul line is entirely in fair territory.
3. When the point of judgement arrives, if any part of the ball is on or over the foul line, it is a fair ball.
4. A fair ball is never a vocal call. The umpire should merely point into the infield
5. A foul ball is always a vocal call. The umpire should call "foul ball" in coordination with the "dead ball" signal, then point foul.
6. Home plate and part of each batter's box are in fair territory. Make your decisions only in accordance with the guidelines above, without regard to home plate or the batter's box.

7. INFIELD FLY

First and foremost, understand the reason for the infield fly rule. The purpose for the rule is to prevent the defense from completing an easy double play on a pop-up to an infielder. Keeping this reason for the rule in mind will help in determining when to apply the rule.

REQUIRED SITUATION

In order to have the possibility of an infield fly rule being enforced, there must be runners at first and second bases, and less than two outs. If this situation does not exist prior to the pitch, it is not possible to have an infield fly rule enforced.

WHAT TO REMEMBER

Given this situation, an infield fly rule is enforced when the batter hits a pop-up to an infielder that is catchable with ordinary effort. The rule protects runners on first and second (and possibly third) from being required to run should the ball be allowed to fall untouched by the fielder.

NOTES

1. When trying to determine whether or not to call infield fly, remember the intent of the rule. If, in your opinion, the defense will have an easy double-play if the ball is allowed to fall untouched, infield fly should be called.
2. It is also an infield fly even if an outfielder has a play on the ball, and in your opinion, #1 above still applies.
3. The boundary of the infield dirt and outfield grass means nothing for the purpose of determining whether it is or is not an infield fly.
4. Infield Fly is called verbally, at the same time the umpire raises the right arm over the head in a closed fist.
5. Infield Fly causes the batter to be out immediately. If the ball is allowed to fall untouched, runners on base need not run, although the ball is alive. However, should runners leave their bases, they may be tagged out (there is no force).

8. COURTESY RUNNERS

A. A manager can use a courtesy runner for any base runner in an inning (no approval required). A courtesy runner may only be used after base runners have reached their bases and the play is dead.

B. There is no limit to the number of courtesy runners allowed in an inning, however, a player may be a courtesy runner only once per inning.

C. The manager may select any player to be a courtesy runner, provided that:

1. Said player is not currently a base runner.
2. Said player is not the current batter.
3. Said player has not already been a courtesy runner in the current inning.

D. If a courtesy runner is on-base when it is his/her turn to bat, an additional out will be awarded to the defensive team. A courtesy runner cannot be requested for a courtesy runner. The courtesy runner is allowed to remain on-base (unless there are three outs), and the correct batter is now the player whose name follows that of the batter called out.