

BASEBALL

2023 PRESEASON GUIDE



Some Bling Is Now an OK Thing

NFHS Tweaks Rules Regarding Jewelry, Pitching Positions

The NFHS Baseball Rules Committee convened in person in June for the first time in three years and used the occasion to make some significant changes to the official NFHS Rules Book for the 2023 season.

Players' use of jewelry and legal pitching positions are among the handful of items that have been addressed with new rulebook language. Those rule changes, along with updated official NFHS umpire signals, were subsequently approved by the NFHS Board of Directors in July.

Player Equipment (1-5-12, 3-3-1d)

The longstanding prohibition of jewelry being worn by players on the field, with the exception of religious or medical medals, has been significantly altered. The rule now states that all jewelry, including religious or medical medals, is permitted, and that said medals no longer must be taped and worn under the uniform (1-5-12). However, a provision does remain that any jewelry an umpire believes poses harm or injury to the wearer or their opponent shall be immediately removed (1-5-9).

An NFHS rule change for the 2023 season allows for players to wear jewelry, including religious or medical medals, so long as the umpires do not believe it poses harm or injury to the wearer or opponent.

The new language for rule 3-3-1d now simply states that no coach, player, substitute attendant or bench personnel shall wear bandannas. All mentions of jewelry have been stricken from that rule. ►

BOB MESSINA



NATIONAL FEDERATION OF STATE HIGH SCHOOL ASSOCIATIONS

► The rationale for the rule change is there is no substantiating sports medicine data that supports the prohibition of jewelry.

Play 1: B1 comes to the plate in the top of the first inning wearing (a) a necklace with a cross that is dangling outside of B1's uniform, (b) a nose piercing, or (c) a silicone wristband.

Ruling 1: All of the items are legal, so long as the umpire does not believe it poses harm or injury to any participants on the field.

Play 2: During a defensive conference, the coach decides to have the shortstop and pitcher switch positions. The shortstop, who was wearing sunglasses while playing in the field, places them atop his hat while completing his warmup pitches. The plate umpire notices there is a glare from the lenses while the pitcher is warming up. **Ruling 2:** According to rule 1-5-9, any player equipment the umpire judges to be distracting to the batter is illegal. The umpire may tell the pitcher to remove the sunglasses from the hat.

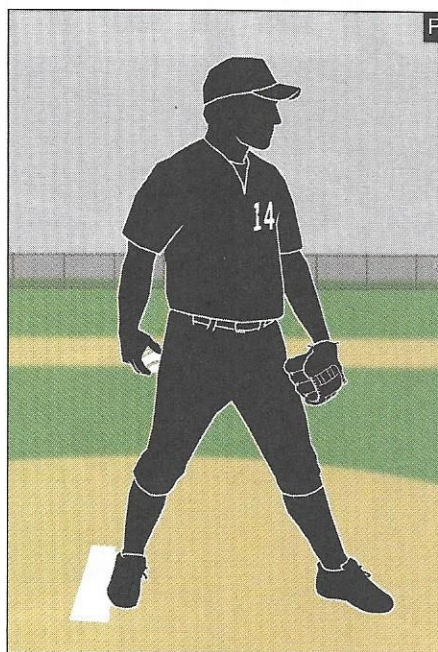
Play 3: B1 comes to the plate and is wearing a silicone bracelet that has a racist word written on it. **Ruling 3:** The umpires should instruct B1 to remove the bracelet because NFHS rule 3-3-1f2 prohibits any items that use profanity, intimidation tactics, remarks reflecting unfavorably upon any other person, or taunting or baiting.

Pitching (6-1-1, 6-1-2, 6-1-3)

All three rules articles related to pitching positions now include new language that spells out whether a pitcher is legally in the windup or set position, based on the position of the pivot foot only when the pitcher engages the pitcher's plate.

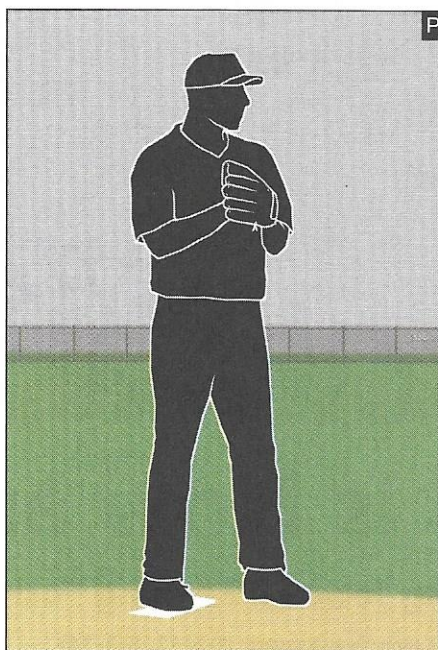
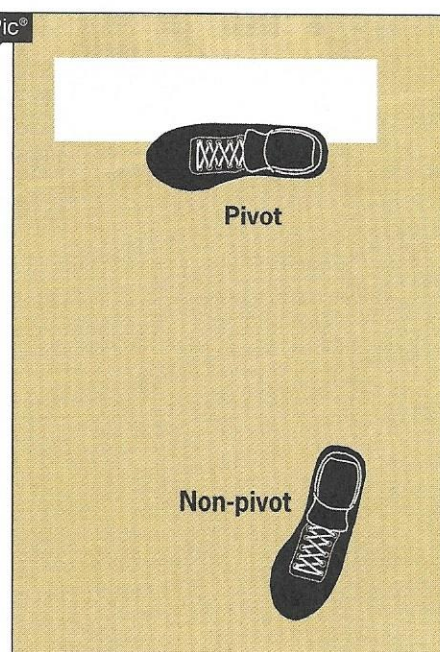
The pitcher will be considered to be in the set position when their pivot foot is in contact with or directly in front of and parallel to the pitcher's plate (PlayPic A). The pitcher will be considered to be in the windup position when their pivot foot is in contact with the pitcher's plate and not parallel to it (PlayPic B).

No longer will umpires need to enforce penalties against pitchers for using the "hybrid" pitching stance that combined elements of the windup and set positions based on the position of the pivot and non-pivot feet, as such



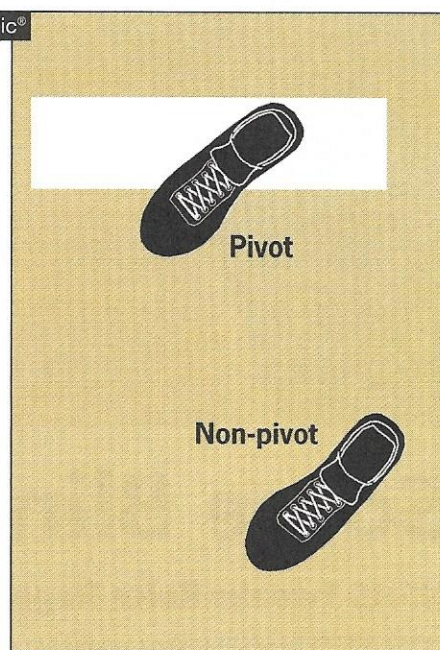
PlayPic®

A



PlayPic®

B



a stance no longer exists by definition according to NFHS rules. The pitcher is either in the windup or the set based on the position of the pivot foot only.

The rationale for the rule change is that with the evolution of pitching styles

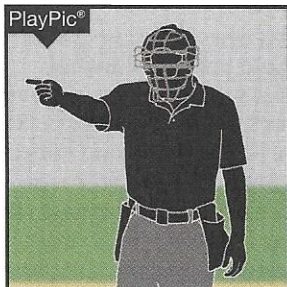
at the high school level, using only the pivot foot to determine whether the pitcher is in the windup or the set makes it clean and easily discernible for all involved.

See "Bling" p.4

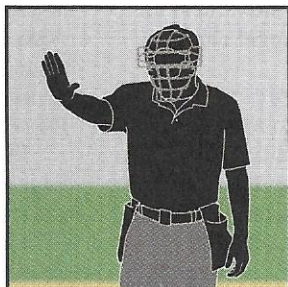
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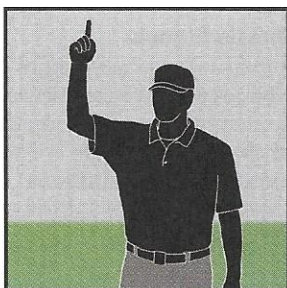
A. Pre-pitch Situational Signals



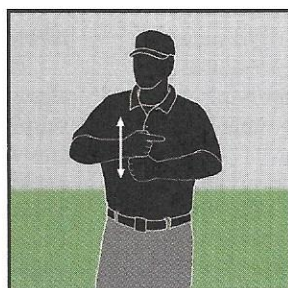
1. Play Right hand point to pitcher "Play." Ball is live.



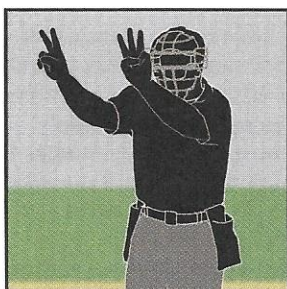
2. Do Not Pitch Right palm facing out. Ball is dead.



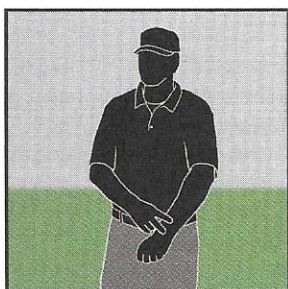
3. Infield Fly Point up with index finger.



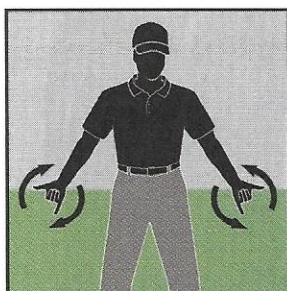
4. Double Tag Rotation PU covers 3rd on double tag.



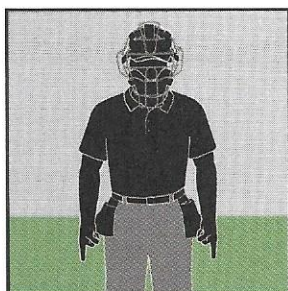
5. Count Left hand indicates balls and right hand strikes. Verbal count given.



6. Time Play With 2 out potential run score 2 fingers on left wrist.

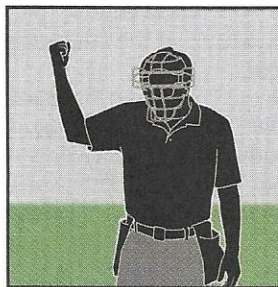


7. Rotation Thumbs and pinkie fingers extended. Arm down by side. Rotate hand.

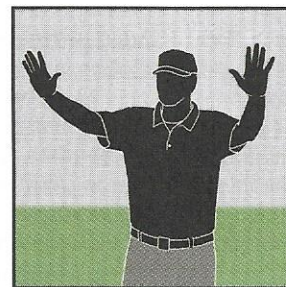


8. Stay Home Both arms with index finger straight down.

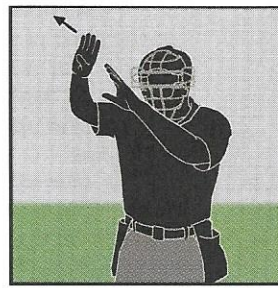
B. During Play and Results



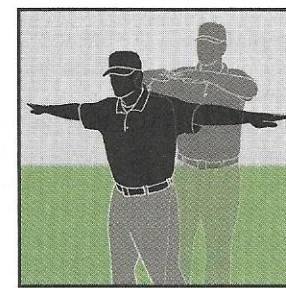
1. Strike Verbal only without swing.



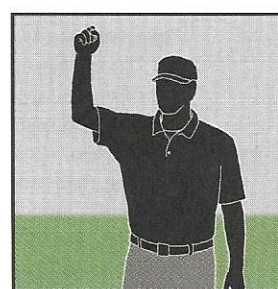
2. Foul Ball, Time Out, Dead Ball



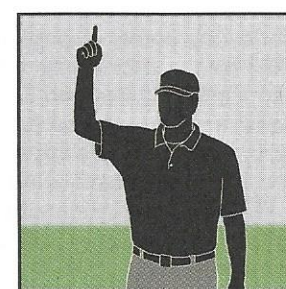
3. Foul Tip Right hand pass over left hand. Strike call. Live ball.



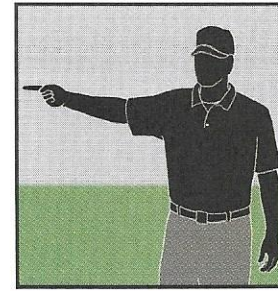
4. Safe, Uncaught 3rd Strike, "Did Not Go" Arms extended in front and swing open.



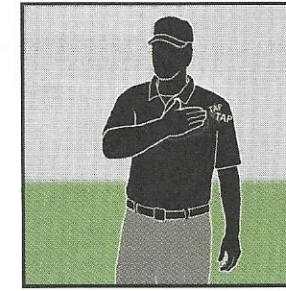
5. Out Right arm up with fist hammering motion. "He's out."



6. Infield Fly Point up with index finger. Verbal on way down "If fair."



7. Fair Ball Point only. No verbal.



8. Information Tap chest. Has relevant information for partner.

Bling
continued from p.2

Play 4: Right-handed pitcher F1 engages the pitching plate (a) with the right foot at a 45-degree angle on the plate, or (b) with the right foot parallel to and in contact with the plate. In both positions the left foot is in front of the plate. **Ruling 4:** In (a), because F1's pivot foot is not parallel with the pitching plate, F1 is in the windup position. In (b), because F1's pivot foot is parallel with the pitching plate, F1 is in the set position.

Play 5: With a runner on third base, F1, a left-handed pitcher, engages the pitching plate with the left foot at a 45-degree angle on the plate and the right foot in front of the plate. The offensive team's head coach, in the third-base coaching box, yells at the plate umpire to call a balk because F1 is using an illegal hybrid pitching position. **Ruling 5:** There are no longer any hybrid pitching positions in NFHS baseball. The

position of F1's pivot foot means F1 is in the windup position and must meet all of the other criteria for a legal windup.

Player Equipment (1-5-4)

In its ongoing quest to keep unsafe aftermarket equipment out of the game, the NFHS clarified its rule regarding the catcher's helmet-and-mask combination to state that not only must it meet the NOCSAE standard at the time of manufacture, but that eye shields that are not designed for baseball shall not be attached to the catcher's mask after manufacture. Any eye shields attached at the time of manufacture must be constructed of a molded rigid material and be clear without the presence of any tint. Tinted eyewear worn on the face and under the facemask is permitted.

The rationale for the rule change is the increase in catchers attaching aftermarket eye shields that are not manufactured for baseball to their

facemasks that are tinted and not approved by the original manufacturer. Also, tinted eye shields are problematic as one would prevent a medical professional from accessing the eyes of the catcher to determine their condition.

Play 6: The plate umpire notices F2 is wearing a helmet-and-mask combination with (a) a clear eye shield, (b) a tinted eye shield, (c) a clear eye shield while also wearing sunglasses, or (d) an ill-fitting eye shield designed for attachment to a football helmet/facemask. **Ruling 6:** Legal in (a) and (c), illegal in (b) and (d).

NFHS Officials Signals

The committee approved eight signals to be used pre-pitch between umpires to demonstrate situations, situational changes and their explanations, and eight additional signals to demonstrate calls during play and their results (see signal chart on page 3). □

New NFHS POEs for 2023

The following points of emphasis (POEs) for the 2023 season were crafted by the NFHS Baseball Rules Committee during its annual June meeting and subsequently approved by the NFHS Board of Directors in July.

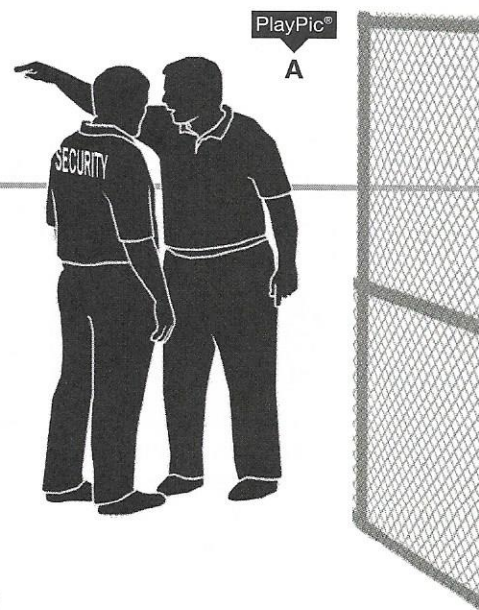
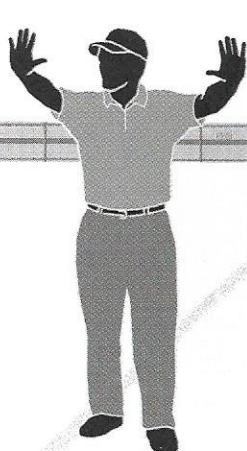
The POEs are all considered to be of equal importance and appear in no particular order.

Sportsmanship

Good sporting behavior is one of the fundamental ingredients to the continued success and enjoyment of education-based high school sports and activities. NFHS playing rules are written to encourage sportsmanship, and participation in these programs should promote respect, integrity and sportsmanship.

There must be a collaborative, working relationship between umpires and game administration to promote good sportsmanship and safely conduct the game. Everyone has their roles to play in creating a positive, sportsmanlike atmosphere at games.

Umpires should focus on the actions of players, coaches and other ►



► bench personnel. A positive, open line of communication between umpires and coaches ultimately results in a better game for everyone involved. Umpires should not, however, engage with spectators who are exhibiting unsporting behavior (PlayPic A). Once the game begins, school administration is responsible for dealing with unruly spectators. A proactive approach by school administration includes monitoring the behavior of spectators and intervening as needed. If spectators are using demeaning or profane language at umpires, or others in the stands, those individuals should be removed from the contest by school administration.

The use of demeaning language, or hate speech, by students, parents and other fans must cease. High schools must establish a culture that values the worth of every single person — both players on the school's team and players on the opposing team. There must be a no-tolerance policy regarding behavior that shows disrespect for another individual.

Obstruction and Interference

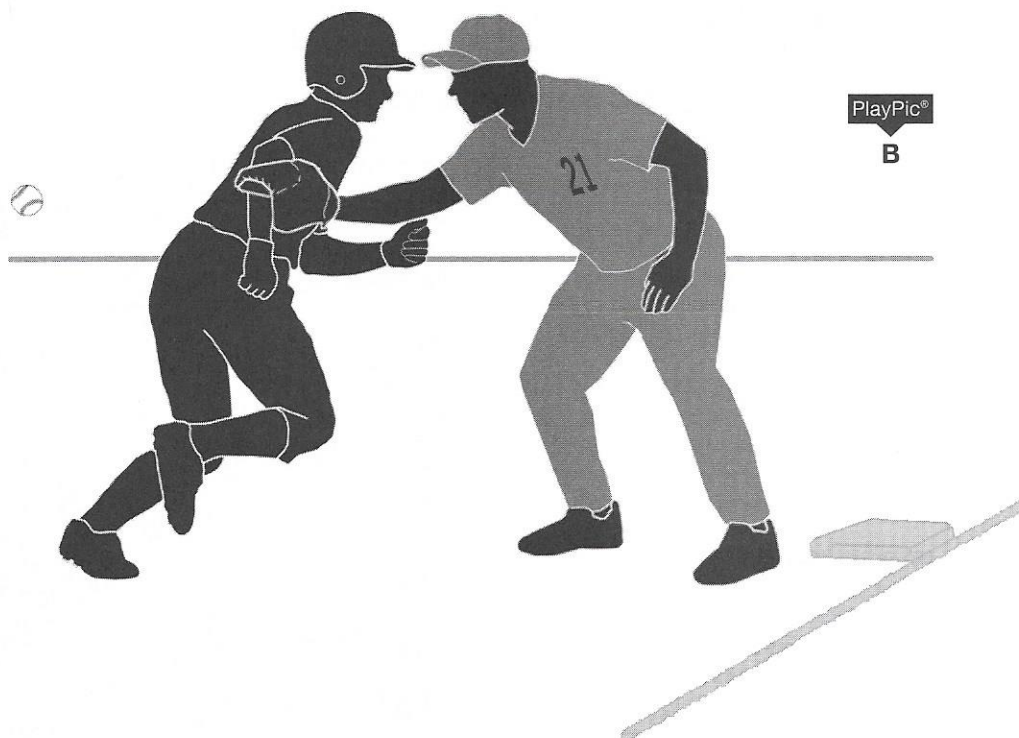
There are many nuances to both obstruction and the multi-layers of interference.

Simply stated, obstruction is any act — accidental, intentional, verbal or physical — by any fielder or member of the defensive team that hinders a runner or affects the pattern of play (PlayPic B). Interference is very similar and addresses any act, verbal or physical, by the team at bat that impedes, hinders or confuses any defensive fielder attempting to make a play (PlayPic C).

Coaches, umpires and players have a role in understanding the rules related to each of these violations. Because both violations are sportsmanship-centered at their core, the penalties — which are some of the sternest in the NFHS rules code — are commensurate to the overarching concern regarding fair and equitable play in interscholastic baseball.

Jewelry

This year's rule change that eliminates the prohibition against jewelry will permit players to freely



wear items including medical alert bracelets and some religious, cultural or tribal adornments.

However, any jewelry that contains profanity, taunting, language to intimidate or baiting an opponent is still not allowed under various sportsmanship rules, and bench and field conduct policies. Rules coverage also remains to prohibit any item that presents a danger to the player, a teammate or opponent.

Usage of Eye Black

Eye black was originally introduced to help players reduce glare from the sun. However, the high school game is now experiencing the use of eye black that is being used as face decoration, with images and/or sayings being drawn on the faces of players to try to intimidate and/or taunt an opponent.

There are existing sportsmanship rules available to mitigate any use of eye black (in any version) in an inappropriate or unfavorable way. Coaches are encouraged to direct their players to use this tool in a more productive way. □



Flashback: Here's Your Sign

New NFHS Language Addresses Start of Pitcher's Delivery

During its June 2021 meeting, held virtually for the second consecutive year due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the NFHS Baseball Rules Committee voted to approve one rule change and crafted its points of emphasis for the 2022 season.

The rule change, which dealt with how a pitcher handles taking a sign from a catcher, and the POEs were subsequently approved by the NFHS Board of Directors in July.

Pitching (6-1-1)

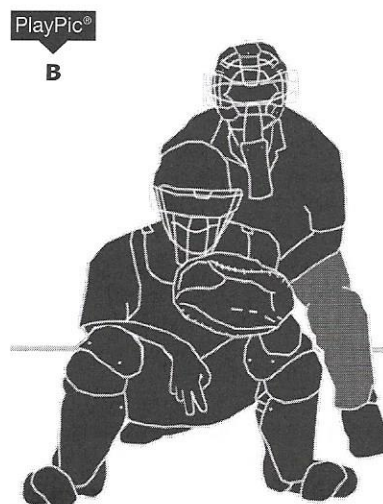
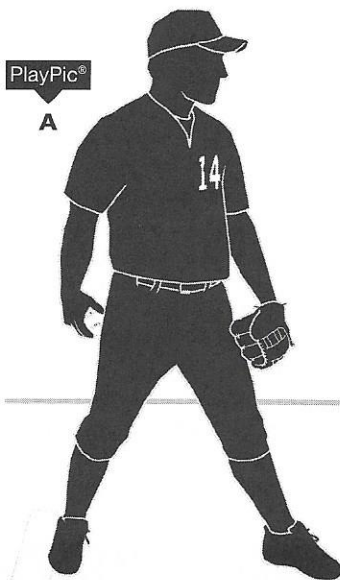
A pitcher taking a sign from the catcher is one of the fundamental rules of baseball, allowing both the offensive and defensive teams to understand that playing action is about to take place. However, that basic act has become much more complex in recent years due to the proliferation of signals being verbally relayed directly from the dugout to the pitcher and catcher. However, such activity was not supported by an accompanying rule to allow the offensive team to be prepared for the start of action.

Therefore, rule 6-1-1 has been changed to include wording that, while defensive teams are legally allowed to relay signs in this newly accepted manner, the pitcher must still "take or simulate taking his sign from the catcher with his pivot foot in contact with the pitcher's plate." This is shown in PlayPics A and B. This requirement is in place whether the pitcher is working out of the windup or the set position, as established in 6-1-2 and 6-1-3.

By simulating taking a sign, the playing action is allowed to start in the same fashion as it always has, eliminating the possibility of a pitcher illegally delivering a quick pitch to an unsuspecting hitter or a baserunner now having the opportunity to lead off from a base. □



After plate umpire Steve Baker, New Castle, Ind., puts the ball in play, there are specific procedures a pitcher must follow in high school baseball before delivering a pitch. A rule change approved for the 2022 season requires the pitcher to either take or simulate taking a sign from the catcher before beginning the delivery.



Baseball Injury Surveillance Study

As participation in high school baseball continues to be in the top 10 of the most popular boys sports in the United States, the number of sports injuries will also likely increase unless effective injury prevention programs are implemented. The NFHS Sports Medicine Advisory Committee (SMAC) and the NFHS Sport Rules Committees use data from the National High School Sports-Related Injury Surveillance Study (High School RIO™) to monitor rates and patterns of injuries among high school athletes. High School RIO is currently collecting the 17th year of sports exposure and injury data.

Among the nine sports included in the original sample of High School RIO for which national estimates are constructed (i.e., football, boys' and girls' soccer, girls' volleyball, boys' and girls' basketball, wrestling, baseball,



and softball), baseball continues to have one of the lowest overall injury rates, ranking eighth overall in competition and ninth in practice (note, these results may have been affected by COVID-19). The arm/elbow (22 percent) and shoulder (14 percent) were the most commonly injured body parts, and arm/elbow strain/sprain (12 percent) was the most common diagnosis. Pitchers sustained the most injuries during both competition (21 percent) and practice (24 percent), and the most common injury among pitchers in 2020/21 was tendonitis (competition: 19 percent; practice: 35 percent). While concussion rates in baseball are generally low compared to other sports, concussion

rates in practice have significantly increased over time in boys' baseball. This trend will continue to be monitored by the NFHS SMAC.

The coronavirus pandemic remains a challenge for high school sports due to extended absences and altered training schedules. Understanding patterns of injury in boys' baseball, both in general and related to the ongoing pandemic, is one important tool when considering injury prevention efforts to keep baseball athletes as safe as possible.

If you are interested in more information about the High School RIO Study or you are a certified athletic trainer who is interested in becoming a reporter for baseball, please email the High School RIO team at highschoolrio@datalyscenter.org. Please visit <https://www.datalyscenter.org/rio-annual-reports/> to access the annual summary report referenced above. □

White's Not Right, Gray's a No-Go

One of the hottest trends in baseball is players using gloves that match their team uniform colors. For the most part, that's not an issue. However, pitchers need to be aware of certain rules restrictions that do not apply to their teammates, specifically when it comes to the color of their mitts.

The NFHS rule is quite stringent, as the colors white and gray are completely forbidden on a pitcher's glove. The body of the glove, the laces, the piping, even the manufacturer's logo, it does not matter — the glove must be removed upon discovery by either team and/or umpire (1-3-6, 1.3.6 Sit. D and E). This is the only penalty. If the glove is discovered after a play has been made — for instance, the pitcher fields a bunt and throws the batter-runner out — the simple remedy is removal of the glove. There is no "do-over" or base award because the glove was involved in the play (1.3.6 Sit. F). □



Collision Course

Obstruction, Interference or Play On?

So you think baseball is not a contact sport?

Look at the photo that accompanies this article, captured during a Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletic Association state tournament game last season, and think again as you try to unravel what may have happened on this particular play. Such a big collision on any of the bases is certain to draw plenty of reactions by the interested parties, and it's up to you and your crew to use proper rules knowledge and mechanics to make an informed ruling that may not be popular, but correct nonetheless.

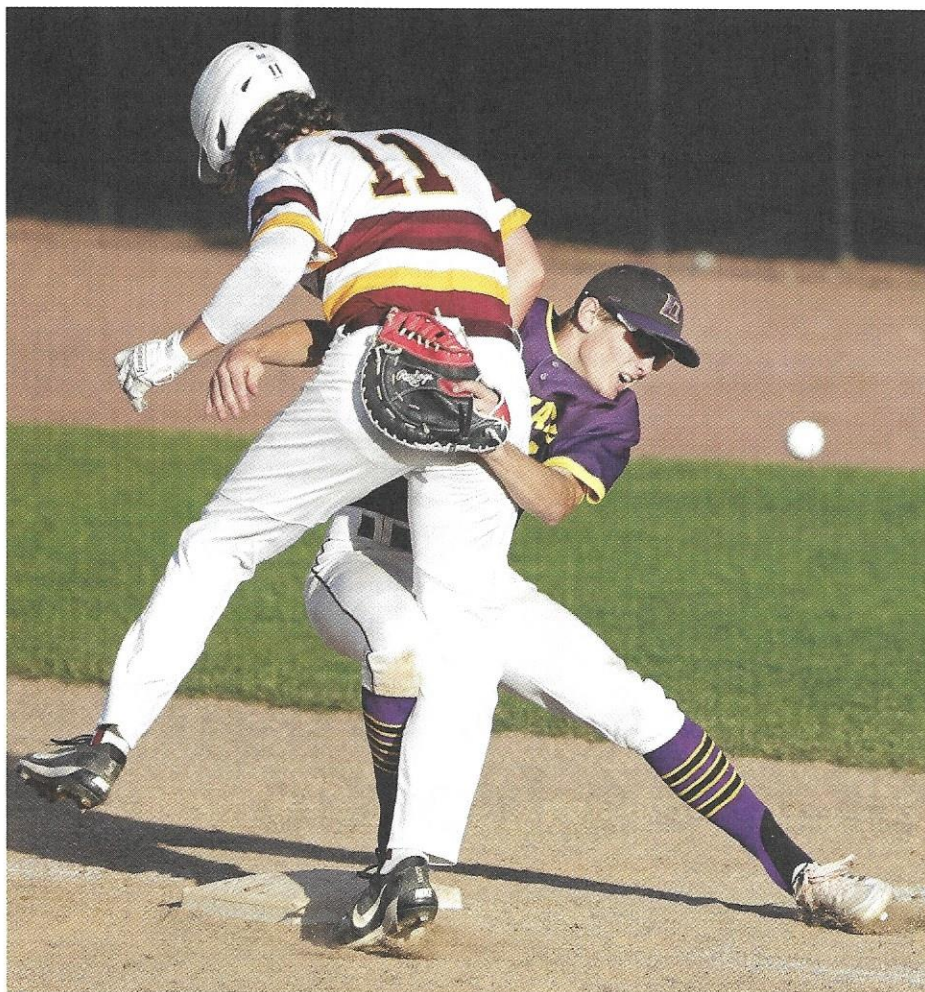
From a rules perspective, is this obstruction by the defense, with the first baseman cutting off access to the bag before he has the ball in his possession (2-22-3)?

Is it interference by the offense, either due to the batter-runner purposely making contact with the first baseman in an effort to jar the ball loose (2-21-1a), or due to a runner's lane violation as he runs inside the foul line during the final 45 feet between home plate and the first-base bag (8-4-1g)?

Regardless of who may be at fault, is this malicious contact on the baserunner according to NFHS rules (2-21-1b)?

From a mechanics perspective, if you are the first-base umpire on this play, are you putting yourself in a position to see all the necessary elements of this collision, or simply going through the motions related to a seemingly routine force play when all of a sudden this situation blows up on you? Are you aware of where the baseball is when the contact occurs? Did the first baseman complete the catch and then lose the ball due to the impact of the collision caused by the baserunner, or did he never have possession of the ball? Are you certain the batter-runner either has, or has not, touched first base?

As the plate umpire, are you coming up the first-base line and in a position where you can offer an opinion on the collision if asked? Are you ready to rule obstruction on the first baseman or runner's lane interference if that's what you have observed from your angle on the play?



When this type of play develops during a game, umpires must use their rules knowledge in numerous areas to determine whether there is any illegal activity or just an unfortunate collision.

Finally, both from a rules perspective and a mechanics perspective, the crew must understand this collision — whether illegal because of one of the many possibilities listed above, or a legal baseball play that happens to occur due to two players and the ball all arriving at the same place at the same time — is only one small part of the story. Because the inevitable follow-up question is: What happens next?

Is there activity on this play that requires the ball to become dead, either immediately or delayed once the playing action comes to a stop? If the ball remains live, what is the aftermath of this collision? Does the first baseman obstruct the batter-runner and prevent him from trying to advance to second base? Does the batter-runner interfere with the first baseman's ability to freely move and secure the baseball? ►

► And speaking of the ball, what if it ends up in dead-ball territory following the collision? Is it due to the throw itself? Is it because it was dislodged after being caught, making it the second act on the play? Does the base award differ if it's one instead of the other?

Rules committees at all levels in recent years have taken great pains to try to remove unnecessary contact from the game. Efforts are constantly being made to protect players and to give umpires rules to enforce to help that cause.

And still, a train wreck often occurs. When it does, the umpiring crew must know what's OK, what's not and the proper places to be on the field to make sure everyone has a clear look at the action so it can be properly adjudicated. □

Do You Get What I'm Saying?

An inexperienced umpire is working home plate when he looks out at his partner in the middle of the diamond who is using a series of pre-pitch signals the plate umpire does not understand.

Between innings, the two umpires meet halfway up the first-base line and the plate umpire admits to having no idea what the base umpire is trying to communicate.

The good news is they are having that conversation. The bad news is it did not occur before taking the field.

Umpires should never use any signals on the field they do not

understand or their partner is not going to understand. Doing so is just an invitation for trouble. As such, it's imperative to have a pregame discussion about the signals you use and what each one means.

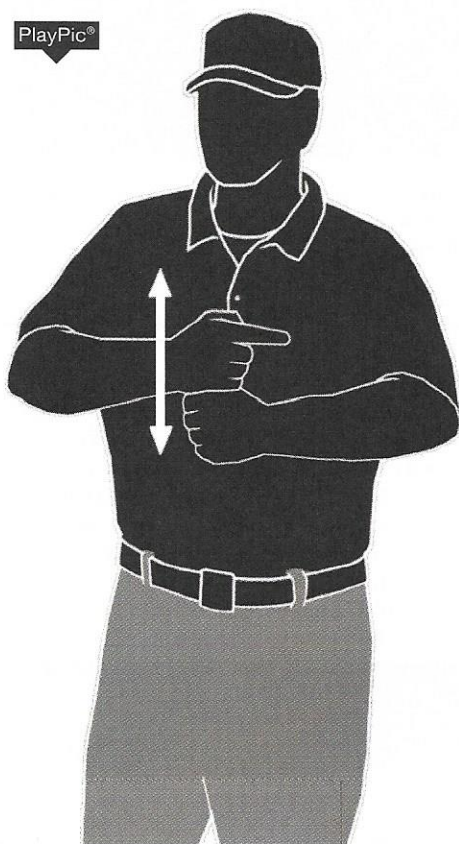
Many a plate umpire can tell you about the times they have used the signal for a double-tag plate rotation to third base as a home-plate umpire, only to have a partner relay it back and then, once the situation presents itself, do the exact opposite. Or the partner who for

some reason points to his elbow and then, when asked about it, says he was signaling the possibility of a timing play. (Who wears a watch on their elbow?)

Never skip the pregame discussion and assume your partner is going to be on the same page as you. Everyone's experience level is not the same. When it comes to making sure you and your partner(s) are going to be on the same page on the field, there are no stupid questions. □

The umpiring signal for a double-tag rotation is shown. Are you confident that when you step on the field, you and your partners will know what's being said with your physical reactions to one another?

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Seeing Is Believing

Eyes Active and on the Action

No matter what umpiring mechanics are being used in a particular game, the numbers are not in our favor when it comes to the need to see all possible action on the playing field.

Think about it: There are nine possible players who can be involved in any particular play on defense. There could be anywhere between one and four baserunners. And just for fun, we have the actual baseball often moving at speeds close to 100 mph, whether the result of an incoming pitch, solid contact off the bat or a throw from across the infield or back in from the outfield. Expecting two, four, six or even 12 eyes to be able to see every last detail is basically one impossible ask.

So it's imperative umpires do nothing during a game that is going to tilt those odds even more in favor of not being able to see something. Because then we are left in the position of having to make a guess — and not even an educated one at that.

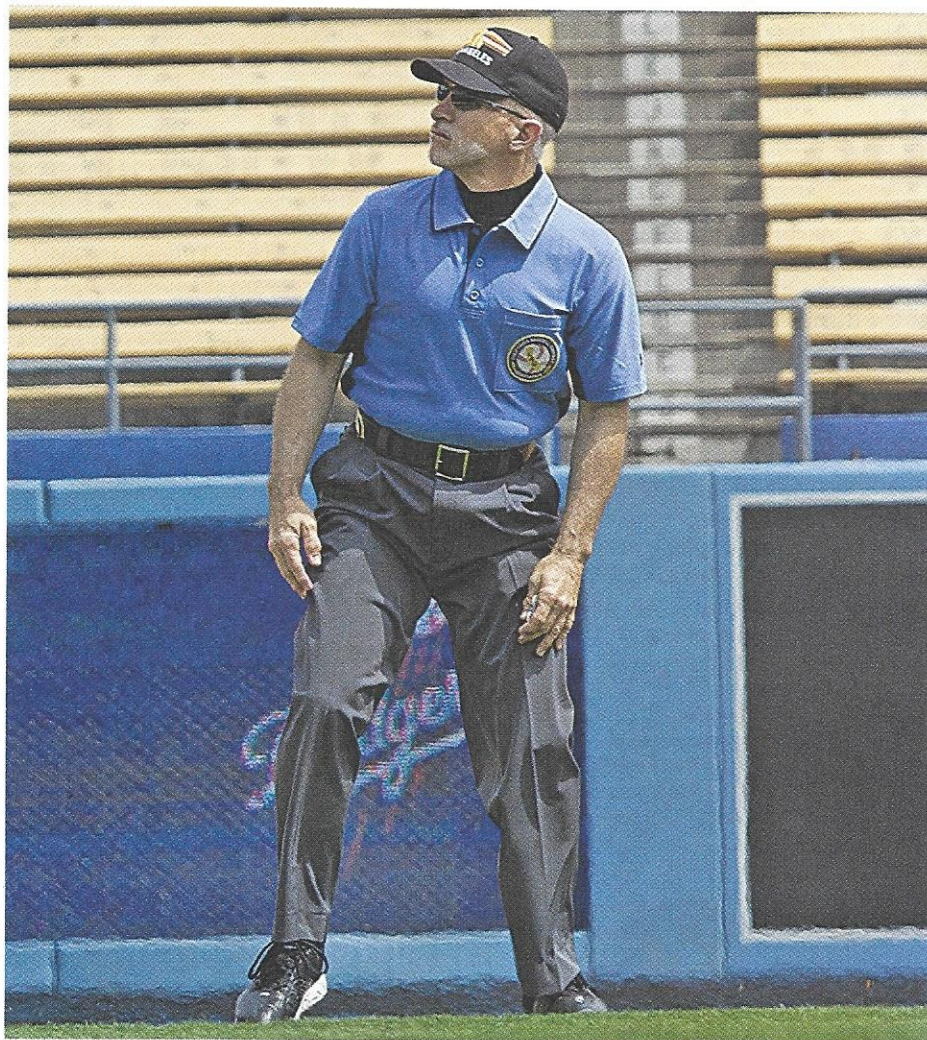
Let's examine a few situations where umpires can get themselves in trouble by taking their eyes away from the action — even if it's just for a brief moment.

Strike-calling mechanics

There will likely be eternal debate among umpire instructors about which mechanic to use when calling a strike as the plate umpire: the hammer or the point. What typically happens is an umpire decides whichever mechanic simply feels better and looks better for his or her body type.

However, one part of the mechanic that should definitely not be in dispute no matter an umpire's preference is where the eyes go while it's happening. While some individual flair is not necessarily a bad thing — especially on a strike-three mechanic — the days of the big sideways step and point popularized by former MLB umpire Dutch Rennert or the back-breaking twist more recently employed by current MLB umpire Tom Hallion are now always going to be considered a no-no.

The reason? At some point in the mechanic, the eyes move away from the



The first responsibility for all umpires is to keep their eyes on the ball and allow it to take them to the positions on the field where they need to make rulings. Once Don Shorman, Los Angeles, knows if this ball has been caught or not, he can shift his attention to baserunners and adjudicate follow-up situations.

playing action on the field, creating a recipe for disaster.

What if it's strike three and the catcher fails to cleanly secure the pitch? We need to know how the ball got on the ground. Did he simply drop it? Did the batter interfere via a wayward backswing? And what if that loose ball suddenly gets away from the catcher? Did the batter kick it with his foot? If so, was it done with intent or accidentally?

Another plausible situation: A runner is stealing on the pitch. If we're looking anywhere but straight ahead, we could easily miss offensive interference by a batter who steps in front of the catcher who is attempting to make a throw. There are few worse feelings than having a coach question why interference was not called on a batter, and you knowing you are unable to provide an honest answer because you didn't see what ►

- ▶ actually transpired, courtesy of being too wrapped up in a showy strike-three punch-out mechanic.

Catch/no catch situations

It's seemingly elemental that knowing whether or not the ball has been caught is a primary job requirement for an umpire. But again, we have a lot of things to keep an eye on, and sometimes the desire to quickly move on to the next facet of play gets us in trouble on this most basic of tasks.

Let's start with routine fly balls hit into the outfield with runners on base. It's an understandable tendency that an umpire would like to shift the focus from that proverbial "can of corn" to subsequent playing action such as runners tagging up and trying to advance as quickly as possible. The problem is when that can of corn suddenly ends up spilled all over the supermarket aisle.

Did the outfielder actually complete the catch and drop the ball during his voluntary release of starting his throw back to the infield? Or did he never complete the act of making a catch by rule? Only a split-second may differentiate between the two, but you may not have the information to rule accurately if that's the moment in time you have taken your eyes off the play.

Double-play situations are also a prime time for this type of problem. Let's say you're working two-umpire mechanics and the defense is trying to turn a 6-4-3 double play. As the base umpire in the middle of the infield, you need to be aware of a successful turn at second base that includes the second baseman catching the ball and stepping on the bag, while also keeping an initial look on any illegal activity by R1 coming into the base. You then must follow the second throw to first base and try to have a good look at what is often a bang-bang play. That's a lot of information for one set of eyes to digest.

It's made even more troubling, however, if you miss any one part of the play to move on to another. All umpires have faced the situation where, convinced of the first out, they turn their head too quickly to see the back end of the play, only to find out the baseball is now lying on the ground at the second baseman's feet. Did he complete the catch of the first throw by the shortstop and then drop the ball on the transfer?

Did he never actually complete the catch? It's a play that can quickly put a knot in your stomach when you realize you didn't actually see it and can't honestly rule on it.

Errant throws

Lucky is the umpire who has never taken a thrown baseball off the head. However, your odds of avoiding such embarrassment are greatly increased if you can just remember to always keep your eye on the baseball and not assume a player is going to have true aim.


A perfect example is the ball hit deep in the hole at shortstop with an umpire in the "C" position. Once the ball has been fielded, many umpires have turned their back on the baseball on this play in anticipation of the long throw to first base, setting up two potential problems.

The first is there is no guarantee that shortstop is going to have the accuracy to avoid pegging you. How many times has one of these throws whizzed right past your ear, leaving you with the realization

that had you taken one false step in your set-up to see the play at first base, you would have instead been lying on the ground seeing stars?

Or, how about this embarrassing wrinkle: The shortstop never actually throws the baseball. If you're in "C," that means there is a runner on second or third base. Ever experienced the situation where the ball is hit deep in the hole, you turn toward first and crouch down to give the shortstop plenty of room to make his throw, and then you realize there isn't one, because instead a play is being made on that lead runner, and you never saw it? That's a fun one to try to explain to an exasperated coach.

The bottom line in all of these situations, and the many, many more that we haven't even dug into? Keep your eyes on the baseball. If you can see it, you can at least sell it. You may not have everyone in agreement with your judgment, but at least you will be able to say that you had all the necessary information to make your ruling. □



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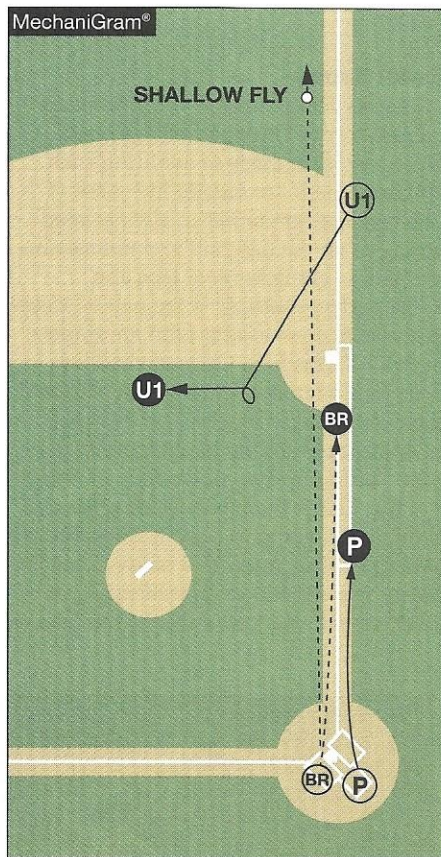
Get Out of Dodge

One of the most confounding mechanics decisions when umpiring in the two-umpire system occurs when there are no runners on base and the batter hits a fly ball directly behind the first-base bag, as shown in the MechaniGram below.

On paper, it's a simple play with simple maneuvers. But for whatever reason, the idea of the ball coming back to earth in the same general area where U1 takes a starting position leaves said umpire often looking like a deer in the headlights, completely frozen and indecisive about where to move to put the crew in the best position to umpire not only that immediate play, but any follow-up action.

Such hesitation has caused more than one assigner, evaluator or camp clinician to bellow these immortal words at U1: "Get your butt into the infield."

The logic is easy to follow. This type of play is not a trouble ball. Either the first baseman or second baseman is going to be able to drift back or over and settle under the ball. While a fair/foul decision may need to be rendered, it should be an easy one for the plate umpire, who has moved up the first-base line toward the 45-foot



mark and has a clear view of the play.

Also whether it is a catch/no catch — barring a swirling wind or two fielders who mistakenly run into one another, this should not be a decision that becomes embroiled in controversy.

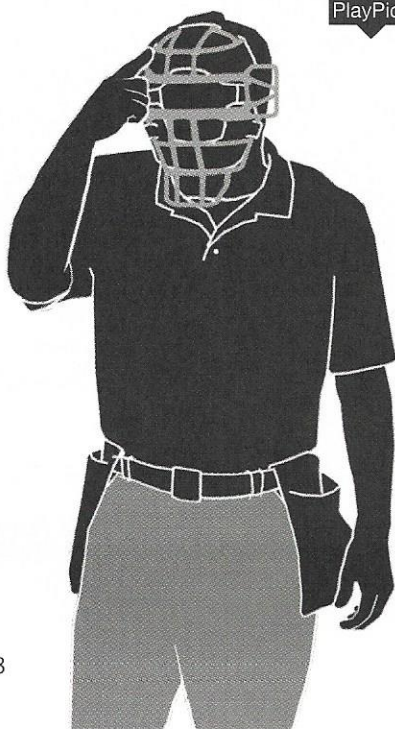
Given the routine nature of the play, just as with any other routine fly ball, the proper mechanic for U1 is to run into the infield and pivot, picking up the batter-runner as he rounds first base. This will allow U1 to pick up the base touch and to be in position to follow the batter-runner into either second or third base should those be the locations where a subsequent play develops.

This is understandably preferable to a U1 who holds a position near the right-field line, trying to maintain a good angle to see the play while attempting to dodge one or more fielders who are now scrambling to make the catch. Getting into the infield will also keep the U1 on friendly terms with the plate umpire, preventing the latter from having to run all over the infield, suddenly tasked with responsibility for the batter-runner at all bases. □

Silence Is Not Golden on Infield Flies

Here's the scenario: With no outs, R1 on first and R2 on second, B3 hits a towering pop fly in the infield and both F3 and F4 easily settle under it. The two fielders fail to communicate — each thinking the other will make the catch — and the ball ends up falling to the ground untouched. R1 and R2 both attempt to advance. F4 fields the ball, tags R1 and fires to third, where the tag is successfully applied on R2. B3 holds safely at first. After the dust settles, both the plate

When an infield fly situation is in effect, both the plate umpire and base umpire(s) should be signaling to each other pre-pitch. This should help the crew avoid failing to verbalize an infield fly when it occurs during the game.



umpire and base umpire realize they failed to call the infield fly.

It's an error umpires hope to avoid by using physical umpire-to-umpire signals that help them maintain their situational awareness. But we're human and mistakes can happen. The question now is, how to clean up the mess? Very likely, one or both of the coaches is screaming at the crew about the missed infield fly.

Under the NFHS rule code, B3 is out on the infield fly even though the umpires didn't declare it during the play. The batter is out by rule, not because of the umpire's declaration. That's clearly stated in NFHS caseplay 7.4.1G: "The situation determines the out, not the declaration."

The only elements of judgment ►

► in enforcing the infield fly rule are whether it's a fair fly ball and not a line drive or bunt, and whether the ball could be caught by an infielder with ordinary effort. In the example above, there's no doubt this hit qualifies as an infield fly. That the fielders failed to catch it due to failing to communicate doesn't change it could have been caught by one of them with ordinary effort.

But what about the runners who apparently thought they were forced to advance?

In NFHS, the outs on R1 and R2 stand. Multiple caseplays indicate the onus to know the situation falls on the teams. "Even though the infield fly rule was not announced by the umpire, it is still in effect," the NFHS casebook states in 10.2.3F. "Both teams have the responsibility to know when

conditions exist for an infield fly."

Ultimately, the infield fly rule exists to protect the offense. It removes the force and prevents the defense from getting what is considered an undeserved double play.

At the end of the day, stay on top of game situations and communicate with partners and you'll avoid an infield fly oops. □

Come to Terms With Definitions

Proper Rulebook Language a Must When Handling Situations

Expecting a brand-new umpire to digest everything included in the NFHS rulebook in 8-10 weeks and have a full mastery of said material when they first walk on the field is unrealistic. Most umpires will tell you that no matter their experience level, they learn something new every time they open the rulebook and casebook.

A couple of things to keep in mind. First, don't try to sit down and read the rulebook like a novel, going from cover to cover, and expect to learn and retain everything you have just read. The rulebook is not designed to foster effective learning in this manner, as there are far too many examples of a particular action on the field requiring knowledge of multiple different rules scattered throughout all sections of the book.

Second, learn your definitions. As an umpire, these are your best friends. Rule 2 in the NFHS rulebook is titled "Playing Terms and Definitions." More often than not, when an umpire gets hung up on the word salad that can sometimes crop up in another rule, the right answer can be reached by going back to rule 2 and understanding the basic building blocks of otherwise tricky concepts. This is also where umpires will find the proper language to use with coaches and players when finding themselves in the middle of a discussion about a particular play or ruling.

Let's look at some examples and why what may seem to be an innocuous vocabulary difference to the lay baseball fan may instead carry a significant



Before signaling for an infield fly, base umpire Chris Claflin, Seattle, must understand that all the rulebook parameters are met, both from an offensive and defensive perspective.

full definition makes it clear several additional factors play into an umpire's judgment about whether a ball has been caught or not. So let's take a look at those requirements.

- The player cannot use his cap, protector, mask, pocket or other part of his uniform to trap the ball.

- The catch of a fly ball by a fielder is not completed until the continuing action of the catch is completed. A fielder who catches a ball and then runs into a wall or another player and drops the ball has not made a catch. A fielder, at full speed, who catches a ball and whose initial momentum carries him several more yards after which the ball drops from his glove has not made a catch.

- When the fielder, by his action of stopping, removing the ball from his glove, etc., signifies the initial action is completed and then drops the ball, he will be judged to have made the catch. This is what is commonly referred to as a "voluntary release," and while this is universally recognized language, it does not actually appear in the rulebook.

There are several additional examples related to what is or is not a catch, such as when a fielder is attempting to make a double play, catching a ball and then falling into a bench, dugout or bleachers, a ball touched by a fielder that then contacts an offensive player and bounces back to the defensive player, and more.

The bottom line — knowing, by definition, what a catch is and is not will help you stay out of trouble. ►

amount of weight when used by an umpire on the baseball field.

Catch

A catch is the act of a fielder in getting secure possession in his hand or glove of a live ball in flight and firmly holding it (2-9-1).

Simple enough, right? Well, yes, if the definition of a catch stopped right there. However, one look at the

► Foul/foul tip

Imagine this scenario: Tie game, bottom of the seventh, with a runner on first base. He attempts to steal second on the delivery of the pitch. His teammate swings, nicking the ball with his bat, and it's caught by the catcher. The defense stops playing and the runner glides into second base. The coach of the team on defense goes apoplectic. "That's a foul ball! He has to go back to first base!"

The coach is incorrect. By definition, it was not a foul ball. A batted ball that goes directly to the catcher's hands and is legally caught by the catcher is a foul tip. It is a strike and the ball is in play (2-16-2). This distinction is extremely important, as it differs from a foul ball (2-16-1) that becomes dead when it touches any object other than the ground

or any person other than a fielder, goes directly from the bat to the catcher's protector, mask or person without first touching the catcher's glove or hand, or becomes an uncaught foul (5-1-1d).

It may be hard to believe, but there are coaches even at the high school level who do not know the difference between the two. By knowing the definition of a foul tip, you'll be able to explain why that baserunner legally remains at second base.

Infield fly

The offensive situations during which an infield fly (2-19) may be applicable are easily understood by most baseball aficionados. There must be runners on first and second bases or the bases loaded, and less than two outs,

and a fair fly that does not include a line drive nor an attempted bunt is hit.

It's the defensive half of the equation where the problems arise, because again, players and coaches often do not have knowledge of the full definition of the rule. The fair fly can be caught by an infielder with ordinary effort, but the rule does not preclude outfielders from being allowed to make the catch.

Let's break down the individual parts of that last sentence because, at first glance, there may appear to be contradictory information. Other than being a fair ball, the only additional requirement is the fly can be caught by an infielder with ordinary effort. Where the infielder is standing in fair territory is not relevant. He can be in the infield grass or the infield dirt. He can be well into the outfield grass. As long as an infielder can make the catch with ordinary effort that fly ball is, by definition, an infield fly.

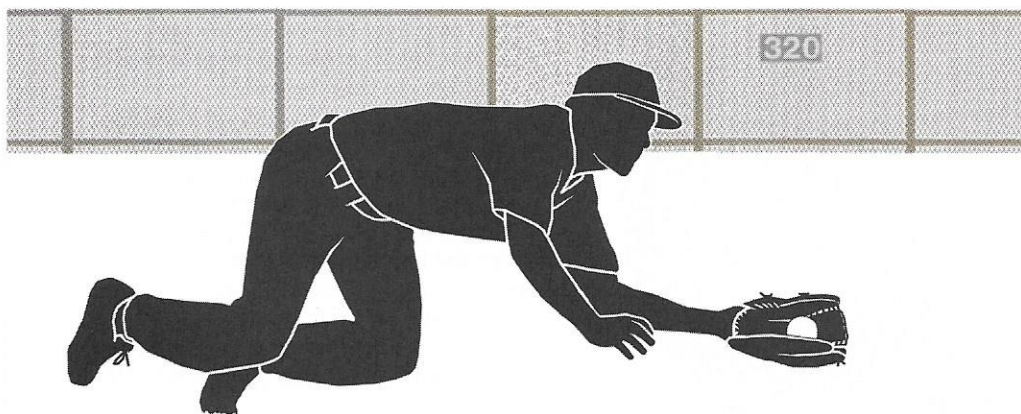
Let's take it one step further. Let's say the fly ball is hit into shallow right field. The second baseman, who is an infielder, drifts out and is going to be able to make the play with ordinary effort. However, the right fielder runs in, calls him off and makes the catch. By definition, this is still an infield fly. All the infielder must prove is he can catch the ball with ordinary effort, but the infielder does not have to be the one who ultimately catches the ball. It's a subtle, but important, distinction that you as an umpire must understand.

Finally, one more step. The infield is playing deep. The batter hits a fly ball just behind the pitcher's mound. None of the infielders are going to be able to reach the ball and catch it with ordinary effort. By definition, this is not an infield fly. The fact the ball comes down squarely in the middle of the infield does not make it so, because the ordinary effort clause of the rule is not met.

These are just three of the 42 playing terms and definitions listed in rule 2 in the NFHS rulebook. As you partake in the ongoing rule study required of every good umpire, regularly check in on this rule and find new ways to expand your rules vocabulary. It's just a matter of time until having a grasp of proper rulebook language will pay off in a big way for you on the baseball diamond. □

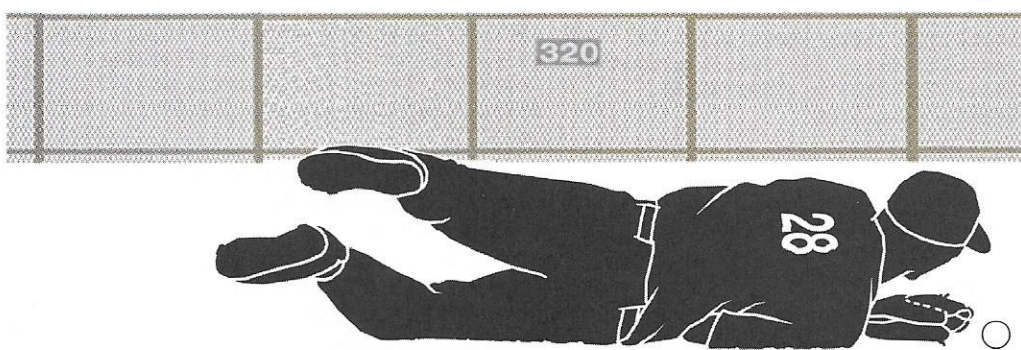
PlayPic®

A



PlayPic®

B



A catch of a fly ball is not completed until the continuing action of the catch is completed (2-9-1). The player in PlayPic A initially catches the ball, but as can be seen in PlayPic B, drops it before securing possession and voluntarily and intentionally releasing the ball. This is not a catch.

Stay Warm, Stay Legal

The months of February and March can be interesting ones on the baseball calendar. At the pro level, pitchers and catchers are starting to report to spring training in Arizona and Florida, never mind the fact that it will still technically be winter for a few more weeks. Meanwhile, college baseball programs are also flocking like birds to the south in search of warmer climes to get their seasons started.

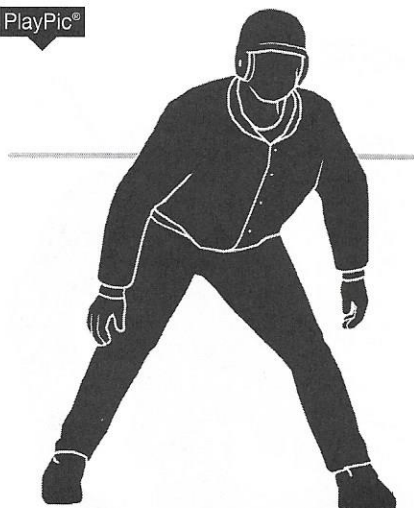
However, most high school programs do not have that luxury. If they want to play baseball at that early point on the calendar, they are going to have to deal with whatever Mother Nature throws at them.

Just because it's cold doesn't mean the rules of the game suddenly change, especially when it comes to proper attire. While the dugouts and bullpens may be a case of anything goes when it comes to jackets, beanies, blankets and who knows what else, there are rules that govern what can and cannot be worn by players on the field.

Jackets

The legality of wearing jackets is not addressed in the NFHS rulebook. However, a caseplay included in the NFHS casebook does cover the situation. No player, including a pitcher, is ever allowed to wear a jacket while on defense. The pitcher is the only player allowed to wear a jacket as an outer garment while a baserunner (1.4.4 Sit. A).

PlayPic®



Sleeves

With jackets out of the question for the majority of the players on the field, the issue of what type of undergarment sleeves are legal becomes one of utmost importance.

For individual players, uniform sleeve lengths may vary. If the catcher wants to prove how tough he is by wearing short sleeves despite temperatures in the 40s, the shortstop doesn't have to dress the exact same way and may opt for long sleeves instead. However, an individual player's sleeves shall be approximately the same length,

and torn, ragged or frayed sleeves are prohibited (1-4-2).

Another important consideration for sleeves at the NFHS level is their color. In NFHS play, if a pitcher's undershirt sleeves are exposed, they shall not be white or gray (a vest/coordinating shirt uniform combo is viewed as a uniform top and may include these colors). The pitcher also may not wear any sleeve, including a compression sleeve, that is white or gray and extends below the elbow. Compression sleeves must be solid black or another solid dark color (1-4-2). □

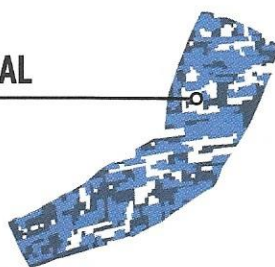
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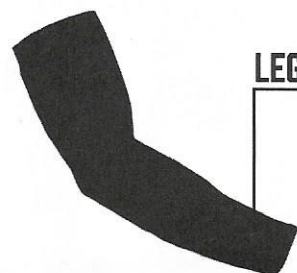
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ILLEGAL



LEGAL



ILLEGAL



Stay in the Slot, Safe in the Slot

It's a familiar refrain shared by trainers, assigners and supervisors with home-plate umpires:

Stay in the slot. That's where you'll have the best look at pitches and it's where you are safest.

Hearing those words, however, sometimes does not resonate. For all the visual learners out there, take a look at PlayPics A, B and C, where the simple concept of a stoplight helps deliver that same important information.

In each PlayPic, the color green indicates where the plate umpire should be setting up shop. You'll notice the location of the umpire does not change with the location of the catcher. Whether the catcher is set up directly behind home plate (PlayPic A), favoring the outside corner (PlayPic B) or is crowding the batter (PlayPic C), the umpire sets up in the exact same spot, just off the inside edge of home plate. The reasons for this are two-fold.

First, it's important for the plate umpire to have a consistent starting position for calling pitches throughout an entire game. The best place to see the entire plate is from the slot, where the umpire can look over the catcher's inside shoulder and have an unobstructed look at every pitch as it crosses the plate area. The umpire's head height should remain consistent, and so should the umpire's lateral positioning. If an umpire decides to move out into the yellow area in PlayPic B just because the catcher has moved farther out, the umpire is opting for a different look at the subsequent pitch and runs the risk of not seeing in the same manner as every other pitch to that point in the game.

Of course, if the catcher decides to move inside, as in PlayPic C, and takes away the plate umpire's usual slot, an adjustment has to be made. Again, however, the umpire does not want to drift outside to create this look (more on this in a minute). Instead, the umpire should adjust and work a little bit higher, still fighting to find the sweet spot between the batter's hands and the catcher's head.

The second reason an umpire wants to stay in the slot is simple self-preservation. No matter where the catcher chooses to align himself, the safest spot for the plate umpire remains in the slot. The reason is a large majority of foul balls redirected off the bat are going to deflect straight back over the plate or even further outside, based on the position of the bat barrel when contact is made. When the umpire is in the correct slot position, most of these foul balls will whistle past the right ear (with a right-handed batter) or the left ear (with a left-handed batter) and miss drilling the umpire directly in the mask. If the umpire is lined up in either the yellow or red parameters, the umpire is setting up in the danger zone for these dangerous deflections.

Perhaps the hardest internal conversation any plate umpire will have on the field is when the catcher makes the pre-pitch decision to set up significantly outside, as in PlayPic B. The natural instinct is that the umpire is a sitting duck, with absolutely no one and nothing standing in the way of an oncoming 90 mile-per-hour fastball, and the umpire is going to want to seek shelter behind the catcher. This is where building trust

in a catcher is paramount. One of his job responsibilities is to protect the person calling balls and strikes. Give him the opportunity to do so. If he comes up short in this area, a conversation between the two of you is going to be necessary, as you need to be able to rely on him to do his job in order for you to safely and effectively do yours.

So, how do you know if you are setting up in the green consistently? There are two very strong indicators, as well as two additional areas of feedback. One, if you are an umpire who hasn't taken very many direct foul shots off the bat to the mask, chances are you are establishing a good starting position. Two, if you aren't receiving many complaints about your strike zone, it's a pretty good sign you are seeing pitches clearly from the proper position.

That said, if you are seeking more concrete evidence, try to find video of your plate work. Everyone has a camera now, and it's a safe bet that with a little bit of digging you can find plenty of footage that will allow you to self-evaluate your positioning. And finally, rely on your partner(s). The next time you are assigned to work the plate, ask your base partner(s) to take note of your positioning whenever they are in the middle of the infield working in the B or C position. If they notice something is amiss, they can either bring it to your attention between innings for an immediate fix, or they can share any relevant information postgame so that you will have something to think about and work on before your next plate job. □

