



## June Plays and Clarifications

### Mechanic Issues:

#### When do we come out of the ready position:

The question “When does a base umpire come out of their ready position?” has been asked frequently. The ready position sometimes referred to as the set position, can be different for each umpire as it allows the umpire to be prepared for the result of the delivery of a pitch. However, in ASA/USA Softball umpire mechanics when to come out of this position should be about the same for all umpires. We should come up from the ready position when the catcher receives the pitch or the ball is batted. This allows us to be mobile and react to any situation that may occur after the pitch. Coming out of the ready position in a timely manner will also aid in better movement when using the ASA/USA Softball inside/outside theory.

#### No Interference Signal

We are frequently asked why we do not give a safe signal when we observe action on the field that could be questioned as interference. Some umpires say that giving the safe signal in this situation shows that we did not see interference. However, we in ASA/USA Softball, feel that the safe signal should show what we saw, not what we did not see. This is the reason we teach umpires to call dead ball when the interference occurs. We agree that there are times when the safe signal may prevent a coach from coming out to question interference and in some situations may be a good signal to use. However we feel that teaching our umpires to call dead ball when they do see interference is more effective.

#### Starting Distances and Calling Distances.

We are often asked about correct starting positions and calling distances for ASA/USA Softball Umpires when working a three umpire system. In the three umpire system the starting positions for Fast Pitch and Slow Pitch are identical. With no runners on base, both base umpires should start in foul ground next to the foul line 18-21 feet behind their base (1B and 3B) and walk the line on the pitch. Remember that walking the line is only a step or two making sure that the umpire times their step with the pitch so they are applying pressure on their outside foot as the ball is batted. Pushing off the outside foot allows the umpire to smoothly transition into the field toward their primary position for a possible play when the ball is batted. Utilizing this starting position along with only one to two steps while walking the line provides us a better opportunity to ensure we are no closer than 18 feet on force plays and plays at 1B.

With runners on base, both base umpires should start at a depth of 12-15 feet from the base or baseline between the bases they are responsible for. With a runner on 3B the 3B umpire should start slightly off the line to be able to see and judge check swings on left handed batters. Once in this position both base umpires should go to the “ready or set position” square to home plate when the pitcher starts their pitch. Whether you have responsibility for a runner or not,

both base umpires should go to the ready position anytime there is a runner on any base. From this starting position you can easily move for a possible tag play allowing you to be in proper position, 10-12 feet from the play.

In summary there are three important items we have discussed above that we see performed incorrectly at National Championships. These are: depth of starting positions, calling distances and when umpires go to a ready position in the three umpire system. As mentioned above starting distances are 18-21 feet deep when there are no runners on base and 12-15 feet with runners on base. Calling distances are no closer than 18 feet on a force out or play at 1B and 10-12 feet for a tag play. Both umpires should go to a ready position anytime there is a runner on any base; conversely they should both walk the line only when there are no runners on base. Also remember that regardless of where you start, if it is a tag play, a force out or a play at 1B, you should always end up in a position where you have an unobstructed view of the play and should STOP, see the play, and make the call.

### **Do we always Buttonhook in Fair Territory:**

The short answer to this question is yes, we should always buttonhook in fair territory but also keep in mind we should never, "say never". If umpires pre-pitch correctly, which includes being ready to umpire and reacting quickly to a batted ball, we should always be able to buttonhook in fair territory. A correctly executed buttonhook is critical to the success of the inside / outside theory. The buttonhook starts with movement inside the diamond followed by stopping, planting your foot and turning toward your primary responsibility. Why does ASA/USA Softball continue to utilize the inside / outside theory and the buttonhook? We feel strongly that it is the best possible way to put all umpires in the best position for their primary call while also allowing them the most options to transition to a secondary call as the play continues to develop. The third, and often forgotten reason, is properly executing the inside/outside theory and buttonhook on every hit to the outfield provides consistent mechanics. Being consistent allows all umpires to know where their partner should be and provides an alert when they are not in the proper position. When we rotate in a three umpire system, or move to cover plays in a two umpire system, we are taught to verify both audibly and visually that our partner is in the proper position. If we do not see an umpire where they should be we will deviate from our prescribed mechanics to make certain an umpire is in position to cover a possible play. If that umpire has remained outside when they should be inside we may end up with two umpires at one base prepared to make a call on the same play. It is imperative that we properly and consistently execute the buttonhook and follow the inside / outside theory to ensure we avoid these situations.

### **Plays and Ruling:**

**PLAY:** Top of the 6th inning and the home team is up by 1 run. With one out and R1 on 1B, B3 hits a line drive to left field. R1 leaves thinking the ball will not be caught. F7 makes a shoestring catch and throws hard back to first to pick off R1 who is now trying to get back to 1B. As R1 returns toward 1B, the ball is over-thrown and enters the dugout when R1 is just a couple feet short of re-touching 1st base. The plate umpire delays to give R1 time to complete their base running responsibilities then calls dead-ball and announces "Two bases". R1 turns around and touches 2B and then onto 3B without re-touching 1B. Prior to the next pitch, the defensive coach requests time to appeal the runner not having properly tagged up on the initial catch by F7.

**Ruling:** The appeal would be allowed and the runner called out for not tagging up on a caught fly ball. **Rule 8, Section 3H.** Even though the ball went out of play the runner is still required to tag up on a caught fly ball in order to advance without liability to be called out and the umpire gave the player enough time to retag prior to the dead ball call. **Rule 8, Section 5G.**

**PLAY:** R1 on 1B with one out. B4 hits a ball in the gap that R1 thought would be caught. B4, now R2, catches and passes R1 after rounding 3B. R1 stumbles and falls and R2 picks R1 up and assists them in getting to home plate.

**RULING:** Once R2, formerly B4, passes R1 they should be called out and the ball remains live. **Rule 8, Section 7D.** Once R2 is declared out they are no longer considered a runner and by rule cannot help another runner who has fallen down. Therefore R1 would also be called out on this play resulting in three outs. **Rule 8, Section 7E.**

**PLAY:** One out and B2 hits a ground ball to F6 who fields the ball and throws to 1B. B2 beat the throw but missed 1B. The umpire immediately calls B4 out. The offensive team protests before the next pitch that there was no appeal for B2 missing 1B therefore B2 should not have been called out. B2 is ruled not out and they are put back up to bat with the same count before hitting the ground ball.

**RULING:** The umpire is correct that B2 should not have been called out. However B2 should have been placed on 1B due to the protest not put back up to bat with the same count. **Rule 8, Section 7G, Rule 8, Section 3B, Rule 8, Section 7I,**