



March Plays and Clarifications

National Umpire Staff:

As we move closer to the start of the season in some places, continue with the season in other areas and wait for the snow to stop in others, we will continue with the discussion on mechanic issues noticed in our National Championships in 2015. In some cases, you will see the mechanics being missed may critically affect other mechanics that might follow during certain plays. Please review our mechanics carefully and if there are issues in what you read let us know. Contact your Regional Umpire-in-Chief, Deputy Director or me so we can discuss the issue. Let's use these narratives to be more specific in areas that need improvement.

Mechanic Issues:

Pick up the ball and glance at the runner:

One of the most prevalent mechanic issues we noticed in our National Championships was our umpires having a tendency to move to the button hook and not pick up the ball until they have reached a desired position inside the diamond. They basically are moving from 18-21 feet down the line to 10-12 feet inside the diamond to button hook. That is over 30 feet of movement without picking up the ball and glancing at the runner.

We need to make sure our umpires understand that picking up the ball and glancing at the runner starts when the ball is hit. We should immediately pick up the ball and glance at the batter-runner as they approach first base in addition to glancing at any other runner on base. It is imperative that while we are going to start the plant and pivot movement, which we refer to as the button hook, that we have already picked up the ball and we pivot our head to also glance at the runner. There will come a time in this process that we will pick up the runner and glance at the ball and then switch back, prioritizing our focus based on how the play develops. The important thing is that we must pick up the ball as we move from walking the line or the set position to inside the diamond before we start the button hook. This will help us in a couple of ways. It will allow us to read the play better in addition to helping us stay ahead of the runner as our mechanics are designed to do.

The next time you are working the bases, pre-pitch you should pick up the ball and glance at the runner. This will allow for better movement as a base umpire and will help keep all the elements in front of you on a possible play. We have taught for years that nothing can happen without the ball. Find the ball and then pivot your head to pick up the ball while glancing at the runner to help yourself read the play and the situation.

What direction does an umpire exit when calling time with a batter in the batter's box?

This question is asked a lot because umpires get different answers and are then actually evaluated on the movement during Championships. Do we exit on the side of the batter or do we exit on the side opposite of the batter? It is not a simple answer. Some use the rule of thumb to exit on the side of the batter especially in the game of Fast Pitch so you do not get hit by a pitch. Others say exit opposite the side of the batter so not to get hit by the batter swinging their bat. Either movement is correct. The natural tendency would be to exit to the left of the catcher as we do when exiting the plate, however each situation is different and exiting either side should be allowed.

Warm-Up Pitches between Innings:

We believe this is coming up because of the differences in codes. Our rule is simple: No more than five pitches within one minute for Fast Pitch. No more than three pitches in one minute allowed in Slow Pitch and Modified.

Effect: For excessive warm-up pitches award a ball to the batter. **This does not apply if the umpire delays the start of play due to substitution, conference, injuries, or other umpire responsibilities.**

Translation: If there are legitimate reasons for delaying the start of the half inning, a pitcher can throw more than the allowed number of warm-up pitches without penalty. These pitches may be thrown from the pitcher's plate.

Plays and Rulings:

Play: R1 is on 1B with two outs. B4 hits the ball to the outfield and it rolls past the outfielders to the fence. R1 rounds 2B and is obstructed by F6 and goes down to the ground unable to resume running the bases. Obstruction was called. B4 passes R1 and is thrown out at the plate for the third out. No ruling was made until the out was made at the plate.

Ruling: When R1 was obstructed the umpire would signal delayed dead ball. There are two possible rulings.

- **One:** If R1 is passed before the umpire can signal dead ball due to an injured player, then once B4 passed R1 time should have been called since this was now the third out. **Rule 8, Section 7D Effect 2.** We should then enforce the obstruction and award the bases the runner and batter-runner would have reached had there been no obstruction.
- **Two:** If the umpire determined R1 was injured and, in the umpire's judgement, requires immediate attention prior to B4 passing the runner, the umpire should have called Dead Ball and awarded the injured player and all other runners the base they would have reached in their judgement. **Rule 4, Section 10.**

Play: R1 on third base, R2 on second base and R3 on first base, with two outs in the bottom of last inning, the home team is at bat. B6 has a 2-2 count. The plate umpire loses the count and on the next pitch calls ball four and awards B6 first base. B4 heads to first base and R1 walks in to score the winning run. The team on defense's coach requests "time" and says that was only ball three. The plate umpire says "Coach, you're right" and brings the batter back to complete her turn at bat, but allows the run to score, thus ending the game. Correct ruling?

Ruling: In this play it appears the plate umpire put the defense and the offense in jeopardy for calling ball four on ball three. We should put R1 back on third and bring B6 back at the plate assuming the correct count of three balls and two strikes. **Rule 10, Section 1 and Rule 10, Section 3C.** Note if the defense appealed that it was only ball three we could have a misapplication of the playing rules by awarding the B6 first base on ball three. Bottom line it is a correctable error and should be corrected.

Play: A team is playing shorthanded and taking an out in the position for the missing player. It's a tie game in the sixth inning with one out. R1 is on third base and B3 is at bat with B4 the open spot for the automatic out. B3 hits a long fly ball to F8 that is caught. R1 tags up on the catch and scores after the second out is recorded. The umpire disallows the run because B4, the next batter, is automatically out once the second out was recorded, thus being the third out of the inning. Correct Ruling?

Ruling: Our shorthanded rule was put in place to allow players to play games and reduce the number of forfeits due to a player's injuries, illness or lack of players available at the start or to continue a game. An out would be recorded when the vacant position in the batting order is scheduled to bat. This out is not simultaneous with any other put out. Prior to the shorthanded out being enforced, the offensive team has the opportunity to return to full strength should an eligible player arrive. **Rule 1 Definition; Turn at Bat:** When a player enters the batter's box and continues until the player is substituted for, put out or becomes a batter-runner.

By allowing the third out to be simultaneous with the second out when the absent position in the batting order is due up we would be violating two sections of **Rule 1 Definition**. The correct ruling in this play would be: allow all playing action to cease, call time, allow the run to count and call for the next batter. If the next batter is the vacant position in the batting order then make the third out call.

Play: B2 came to the plate instead of B1. B2 received a base on balls and is standing on 1B. Before the next pitch is delivered the offensive coach approached and told the plate umpire the proper batter should have been B1. What action should the plate umpire take?

Ruling: The offensive coach cannot make an appeal for batting out of order. It is true the offense can, without penalty, bring to the attention of the umpires that the wrong batter is in the box and place the proper batter at bat with the current balls and strikes count. But, after the batter has completed their turn at bat, only the defense can make an appeal. **Rule 7, Section 2C&D [1]** B2 can still be appealed by the defense for batting out of order prior to the next pitch or after the next pitch and then the penalty from **Rule 7, Section 2D [2] & [3]** would apply.