



June 2020 Plays and Clarifications

Mechanics

There is always a lot of discussion concerning movement by umpires on force and tag plays. Force plays are easier by nature as the base is fixed, not moving, there is little movement besides the stretch from the fielder as the ball is received and the runner is running in a straight line through the base in most situations. Tag plays can be extremely tricky and difficult as most of the four elements, excluding the base we are watching, are all moving at different speeds and angles. It is important that we, USA Softball, continue to discuss and breakdown the different variables that go into achieving the best angle and distance for the dynamics of a tag plays.

In USA Softball, our mechanic expectation for tag plays is that we move to a starting position first. The starting position for tag plays should be 90 degrees to the path of the runner just short of the base they are trying to reach. As the four elements come closer, move if needed, to get an unobstructed view of the play. We believe moving to the starting position first puts you in the best position to see the four elements of the play. Thus, as the four elements come closer you can better judge if and / or when to move to get an unobstructed view of the tag while keeping all the elements of the play in front of you.

Helpful hints that we teach to assist you in understanding how a play is going to develop are:

- Read the defense fielding and throwing the ball. If we as umpires read the player's / fielder throwing the ball hips and shoulders, it will tell us where or the direction they are going to throw the ball.
- Read how and where the defense is setting up in relation to the base. The distance between the fielder and the runner's path may also be a variable of how the four elements will come together.
 - Are they setting up in front, middle or behind the base?
 - Are they setting up in the runner's base path, potential obstruction?
- Read the speed and path of the runner toward the base.
 - Is the runner's path to the leading edge?
 - Is it toward the back corner of the base?
- Read the speed of the ball on a throw compared to the runner. It is important to gauge, is the ball closer than the runner or is the ball further from the runner. When the ball arrives compared to when the runner arrives, will be a variable on how a fielder may apply the tag.

- If a ball is going to arrive in front of the runner, tags may be more likely to be at the leading edge or in front of the runner's body.
- If the ball is going to arrive behind the runner, tags are more likely to be at the side or back of the body, like a swipe tag. The ball/tag is catching up to the runner/body.
- With the above variables, read and move based on all the elements. This should help you move to the best angle and distance for a swipe tag and at the same time stay out of the way of a possible throw for a subsequent play.
- We also believe a movement of about three feet in either direction (right or left) from your starting position will allow you the best unobstructed angle and distance, to see almost every swipe tag and a tag applied straight on.

For tag plays specifically at home plate, we teach to try and not go inside the diamond because after the play at home, any subsequent plays that develop, will be to one of the other bases and the calling umpire may be in the throwing lanes on many of the throws.

Play: JO Girls Fast Pitch, F1 takes a step back with the non-pivot foot as she is bringing her hands together. When the step backwards is complete her foot is partially outside the width of the 24 inches of the pitcher's plate. The plate umpire calls the pitch an illegal pitch. Correct?

Ruling: The ruling is correct. Our rule states that both feet must be in contact with the ground within the 24-inch length of the pitcher's plate. Therefore, if a step backwards is taken it too must stay within the width of the pitcher's plate. **Rule 6A, Section 1C**

Play: JO Girls Fast Pitch, F1 toes the pitcher's plate with the ball in the glove. While taking the sign F1 lets the ball roll out of her glove and drop into her hand. F1 then brings her hands together and completes the pitch. Is this legal?

Ruling: Yes, this is legal. When taking the pitching position in contact with the pitcher's plate, the pitcher must have their hands separated and must have the ball in either the glove or the pitching hand. The rule also says, "While in contact with the pitcher's plate, the pitcher shall take a signal or appear to take a signal with the hands separated." The ball must remain in either the glove or pitching hand. Even though the ball rolled into the hand from the glove it remained in the hand and or the glove. Therefore, no illegal pitch. **Rule 6A, Section 1A and Rule 6, Section 1D.**

Play: R1on 2B and R2on 1B and 1 out. B4 has a 1 ball 1 strike count and hits a long fly ball down the 1B line. R1 watches, thinking the ball will be caught, and R2 passes R1 while the ball is in the air. The ball falls into foul territory just short of the fence. The umpires call R2 out for passing a runner and puts B4 back up to bat with a 1 ball 2 strike count.

Ruling: This ruling is incorrect. Yes, R2 should have been called out after passing R1 since the ball was still live. Since the ball then fell uncaught into foul territory the ball is

no longer live and runners cannot advance on a foul ball so both runners go back to the base they occupied at the time of the pitch. **Rule 8, Section 7D and Rule 1 Foul Ball.**

Play: JO Fastpitch: A team shows up wearing Optic Yellow uniforms. PU does not allow the team to participate as their uniform, particularly the pitchers, matches the color of game balls and believes this provides the team an unfair advantage. Umpire knows that no rule expressly states requirements on uniform color but invokes Rule 10-1 for justification of their decision.

Rule: This is an incorrect ruling. The equipment rule regarding uniforms does not require there be any color except the color of the ball. The issue of the umpire considering the uniform being distracting does not come into play. Think of old softball when all players wore white uniforms and played with a white ball. The rule regarding wearing anything distracting does not apply to the color uniforms. It applies to items on the pitching hand, wrist, forearm, elbow or thighs which may, in the umpire's judgment, be distracting to the batter under the protective wraps rule, meaning added on items not parts of the uniform. **Rule 3, Section 6 and Rule 6A, Section 6.**