

Plays and Clarifications January 2024

“Put me in coach, I’m ready to play”. Those words from yesterday ring true for today as players around the country are getting ready to play. And when they start playing, we need to be ready to umpire those games, which requires our preparation as well. For us the preparation for the season occurs in many ways. Physical conditioning, many of us due to location or other reasons stop umpiring in the late summer or early fall.

Understandably, we must recondition our bodies for the physical demands that umpiring brings. Uniforms and equipment need to be reviewed and prepped. Do you have all the uniforms that you will need? Is your equipment in good working order? Take stock, and if you need to order anything for the 2024 season you can get it from Official Gear at www.officialgear.com . We are physically ready and have the uniforms and equipment we need, what else? Let’s get into our rule book and umpire manual to refresh for this season. We have several new rules for our games that we will be detailing here. While we have no new mechanics in place for 2024, we all need to refresh and review the requirements for the games we call and the umpiring systems that we use. With those tasks complete we only need to register and complete our background check and Safe Sport requirements and we are set for 2024.

2024 National Championships

The 2024 National Championships have been set and scheduled. The At-Large selections for umpires will be announced soon. When the At-Large assignments are announced, and the selections notified we will have a relatively quick turnaround on acceptance along with Registration, Background Check completion and Safe Sport certification. This will tie in with another initiative we are trying for 2024. We are working this year to identify and assign umpires for the territorial National Championships much sooner so those umpires can make plans sooner. This will enable the umpire and the Championship to be able to make the necessary plans for the umpire staff needs. We have found ourselves really scurrying to fill rosters for the many Championships we staff in the July/August timeframe and taking this approach should prevent the last-minute rush.

Training Opportunities

We have several National Umpire Schools scheduled for 2024. These schools are designed to give you lecture and drill training in all aspects of USA Softball umpiring, focusing on mechanics including positioning, movements, and philosophy as well as discussions on rules, advancement opportunities and game management. The NUS opportunities for 2024 are:

Dates	Location	Contact	Email
January 12-14	Booneville, MS	Doug Chittom	dlchittom@gmail.com
January 19-21	Altamonte Springs, FL	Anthony Small	anthonymsmall5@hotmail.com
January 20-21	Henderson, NV	Dave Stocker	refemright@rocketmail.com

February 17-18	Elizabethtown, PA	Mike Zercher	berzerk@earthlink.net
March 2-3	Beaverton, OR	Joe Pree	jpree42@msn.com

We also anticipate the announcement of an Advanced Camp for Fast Pitch for the fall of 2024. We will keep you posted and make the announcement when details are finalized.

New Rules

At the USA Softball Council Meeting in October, 2023 our Council approved several rule changes for 2024. Listed below is an outline of the changes that were approved.

RULE REFERENCES FOR 2024

RULE	SECTION	TOPIC
3-6	Uniform	Changes the requirement for listed classifications of Slow Pitch from matching shirts to shirts that are similar in color. Adds Women's and Coed E/Rec.
3-6A[2]	Equipment	Specifies that head/sweat bands, both pullover and tied are options for players. Also adds pink as an approved color for headwear.
4-8B	Disqualified or Ejected Participants Foreign	Adds a one game suspension for any participant or game personnel ejected from a contest.
6A-6A	Substance/Protective Wraps Foreign	Adds an additional penalty for a defensive player that continues to place a foreign substance on the ball in Fast Pitch.
6B-6A	Substance/Protective Wraps	Adds an additional penalty for a defensive player that continues to place a foreign substance on the ball in Modified Pitch.
8-2K	The Batter-Runner is Out	Specifies that if an infield fly is ruled, the infield fly has precedence over an intentionally dropped ball.
8-9A[1]	Adult Slow Pitch	Changes when a courtesy runner is officially in the game.
8-9A [2&7]	Adult Slow Pitch	Allows for an additional courtesy runner for the pitcher anytime they are on base.

Rule Interpretation

One of the new rules adopted for 2024 in Adult Slow Pitch allows for an additional courtesy runner for the pitcher anytime they are on base. This change has already brought a lot of questions and comments in the Slow Pitch community about what is and will be allowed in the enforcement of this rule.

Previously, any eligible player could serve as a courtesy runner once per inning. This will continue for all positions except for the pitcher. For the pitching position, any eligible player may run for the pitcher anytime they are on base. This may be the same runner each time in an inning for the pitcher or it can be different runners each time. The courtesy runner in an inning for the non-pitching position player may not courtesy run for the pitching position in the same inning. Any courtesy runners for the pitcher in an inning may not also be a courtesy runner for the non-pitching position using a courtesy runner in the same inning.

This rule was adopted because of today's game where the pitchers often have a lot of equipment to attach for defense, and by allowing a courtesy runner this will speed up the change of players between innings. The rule change was never designed to allow one player to be a courtesy runner for all positions in an inning.

Correction and Clarification

A group of umpires in Montana who meet periodically throughout the year discussing rules and mechanics brought a play to our attention from a past edition of Plays and Clarifications. We will need to correct and clarify that particular play. Before that, we want to thank this group of umpires for their devotion to their craft and the effort they invest in their umpiring. We encourage every association to invest time and effort to raise our level of umpiring nationwide. As the world changes and life moves on it has become increasingly difficult for us to get together in person and develop our skills, as was the norm in the past. But, in today's world of technology and communications we can do so much more; easier and efficiently to improve our skillset. Let's take advantage of the tools we have to improve.

From the March, 2023 Plays and Clarifications:

Play: With R1 on 3B and R2 on 2B and 1 out, B4 hits a fly ball to F7. Both runners tag up and attempt to advance after the catch. The on-deck batter leaves their bat in the on-deck circle on the first base side of the field to direct the runner(s) coming home. F1 has taken a position behind the on-deck batter, third base line extended, to back up the throw. In a) F7 overthrows F2 in an attempt to retire R1 and the thrown ball deflects off the on-deck batter's helmet and goes out of play; in b) the overthrow hits the on-deck batter and deflects away up the first base line and as a result, R2 now attempts to score but the deflection has eluded F1 backing up the play; in c) the overthrow ricochets off the fence and hits the on-deck batter's discarded bat in the on-deck circle.

In giving the ruling on this play we ruled in all 3 scenarios that this was a blocked ball. We are in error there as Rule 1-Blocked Ball states “a batted, pitched or thrown ball that is touched, stopped or handled by a person not engaged in the game, or which touches loose equipment or any object that is not part of the official equipment or official playing area”. In this play in scenario a) the ball hits the on-deck batter’s helmet at the plate and scenario b) hits the on-deck batter and deflects. In both these instances we do not have a blocked ball by definition and in scenario c) we do have a blocked ball that hit the loose equipment. We apologize for the error and thank the folks in Montana for bringing it to our attention.

Plays

PLAY: R1 @3B and R2 @2B with one out in the bottom of the 7th inning. B4 is due up but B5 bats and hits a double which scores both runs. The defense changes pitchers and the new pitcher takes all their allotted warm-up pitches. B6 comes to the plate and before a pitch is thrown to B6 the defensive manager appeals batting out of order on B5. Does the change of pitchers and subsequent warm-up pitches negate the appeal?

RESULT: No. The only things that can negate the appeal is a pitch being thrown (legal or illegal), the pitcher and all infielders have vacated their normal fielding positions and have left fair territory, or the last play of the game and the umpires have left the playing field. This appeal is still valid. On appeal, B4 is called out for batting out of order, the runners are returned to 3B and 2B, and B5 is removed from 2B and will become the new batter. ***(Rule 7-2C & Note, and 7-2D{2} & Effect)***

PLAY: In a FP game using the DP, the starting DP, #8, is in the 4th batting position and is now playing F5 in place of #3 who is still batting but not playing defensively. In the 3rd inning #3, in the 6th batting position gets a base hit, and the manager brings in the Flex, #12, to run for #3 who has assumed the DP role in the game. Is this allowed? How do we administer this situation?

RESULT: This is not allowed and should be prevented from occurring. The Flex may only enter the game offensively for the DP position which is declared on the line-up card at the beginning of the game (this game it’s the 4th batting position). #3 in this game left the game defensively, but is still in the game playing offense only, thus the Flex is not eligible to run for #3. The position of DP is non-transferrable from one batting position to another in the line-up **(Rule 4-3E)** At the time the offensive manager is trying to enter the Flex to run for #3 the umpire should prevent this from occurring.