

## Plays and Clarifications

### March 2025

For many across the US, March means it's time to wipe off the dust and start preparing for another year of summer softball. Sure, others in the southern states may have already started playing, and those in the northern states may still have snow on the ground, but once March arrives, those wishing to get back on the diamond start their ritual of getting ready for another season of the game they love, Softball. The same is true for those who plan to umpire. Many associations are having in-person clinics and training sessions. Umpires may be getting their 2025 rule books. Whatever the case, it is a great time to get back into the USA Softball Rule Book and Umpire Manual. Spend time reviewing and learning new things you can implement into your game. Our USA Softball National Umpire Schools finished up at the end of February. Minnesota hosted first, followed by Central California and Kansas City, and finished with Michigan. Be on the lookout for future National Umpire Schools later this summer. They are a great way to get additional information for umpires wanting to get better!

#### New Rule Clarification - Rule 6C Section 1B

The purpose for this year's rule change was to change where a pitcher could pitch from in classifications of Men's, Women's, and Coed Class C, D, and E/Rec. When we wrote the change in the rulebook, we copied and pasted the rule for Seniors, with the exception that we changed the 10' to 6', which had been in place for a few years. **The intent was not to change the foot placement in any way.** The new rule allows the pitcher to have one foot in the pitcher's box, within the 24" pitcher's plate, and one foot out, emphasizing that they both need to be on the ground. Since the pitcher's box has no pitcher's plate, we use the wording within the width of the pitcher's plate. Both rules emphasize the need to have both feet on the ground.

#### Rule 6, Section 1

A. The pitcher shall take a position with both feet firmly on the ground and with one or both feet in contact with the pitcher's plate.

**B. (Men's, Women's and Coed Class C, D and E/REC) The pitcher may take a position from the front edge of the pitcher's plate to 6 feet behind the pitcher's plate within the 24-inch width of the pitcher's plate with both feet firmly on the ground.**

#### UIC Clinic

The biennial UIC Clinic is set for October 23-25 at the Oklahoma City Convention Center. The hotel used for the clinic will be the Omni. We will arrive on Thursday, October 23, and the instruction will start Friday morning, October 24. The clinic will kick off with our guest speaker, Patty Gasso, coach of the Oklahoma Sooners who has won eight NCAA National Championships. Coach Gasso was also recently named head coach for the U.S. Women's National Softball team that will be gearing up for the Olympics in 2028. Following Coach Gasso's speech, we will have presentations and breakout sessions on various umpiring topics. The clinic will conclude mid-afternoon on Saturday, October 25. We have moved to a fall date for the clinic to tie in with the USA Softball Council Meeting, which begins on Sunday, October 26. Registration will be open soon for the clinic and to reserve rooms at the Omni with the discounted rate for the clinic and Council meeting attendees. Registration for the clinic and hotel can be made in the UIC Clinic section of the umpire tab of the USA Softball website. If you need any further information, please contact Steve Nelson, Chairman of the UIC Clinic committee at [bubbatheump@windstream.net](mailto:bubbatheump@windstream.net)

Knocking off the rust we have gathered in the off season starts with a review of the rule book. There are a few plays or situations that have been discussed in the past few months and we wanted to share some information regarding them. As you might imagine, a couple deals with either interference or obstruction. Let's get into them.

To begin, it's very important to have a working understanding of the definition of each so be sure to review all your definitions at the beginning of the season. However, oftentimes it goes further than that when applying a rule. In many cases, a combination of rules apply to a game situation and it's important to familiarize yourself with either definitions or other areas of the rule book. Let's take a look at Batter-Runner (Rule 8, Section 1) Interference (Rule 8, Section 2).

**Play 1:** R1 on 1B, the batter swings and tops the ball forcing it down to the ground. They discard their bat and take off towards 1B. R1 takes off towards 2B. F2 reacts by initiating an attempt to field the batted ball. As the batter takes off towards 1B, their forward leg makes contact with the ball, over the inside corner nearest the plate of the batter's box and the ball gets kicked away from the area.

**Ruling:** What's the call? Where do you find the verbiage in the rule book to support your call? Rule 8, Section 1A states the batter becomes a batter-runner "as soon as the batter legally hits a fair ball." The definition of a fair ball (Rule 1) is: A legally batted ball that:

- A. Settles or is touched on or over fair territory between home and first base or between home and third base.**
- B. Bounds over or past first or third base, which is in fair territory, regardless of where the ball hits after going over the base.
- C. While on or over fair territory, touches the person, attached equipment, or clothing of a player or an umpire.**
- D. While over fair territory, an offensive player interferes with a defensive player attempting to field a batted ball.**
- E. Touches first, second, or third base.
- F. First falls or is first touched on or over fair territory beyond first, second, or third base.
- G. While over fair territory, leaves the playing field beyond the outfield fence.
- H. Hits the foul pole.

Some people would stop here and make a decision on their call for the above play. Others may look in a different area of the rule book. They may look under (Rule 1) Foul Ball:

- A. Settles or is touched (not caught) on or over foul territory between home and first base or between home and third base.
- B. Bounds or rolls past first or third base on or over foul territory.
- C. While over foul territory, touches the person, attached or detached equipment or clothing of a player or an umpire, or any object foreign to the natural ground.
- D. While over foul territory, an offensive player interferes with a defensive player attempting to field a batted ball.
- E. First hits the ground over foul territory beyond first or third base.
- F. Touches the batter or the bat in the batter's hand(s) a second time while the batter is within the batter's box.**
- G. Goes directly from the bat to any part of the catcher's body or equipment and is caught by another fielder.
- H. Hits the pitcher's plate and rolls untouched to foul territory before reaching first or third base.

Here's a case where different rules (definitions) seem to be in conflict. In the same instance, when the ***"batter takes off towards 1B, their forward leg makes contact with the ball, over the inside corner nearest the plate of the batter's box and the ball gets kicked away"*** we can visualize that the batter has met the parts A, C & D of FAIR BALL, and part F of FOUL BALL. So now let's go back to Rule 8 Section 1A which states "the batter becomes a batter-runner "as soon as the batter legally hits a fair ball." By definition, a ball cannot be Fair AND Foul. In this case, the proper ruling would be "FOUL BALL" because once a ball is ruled foul it cannot be ruled fair. Consequently, in this situation, because the batter was still within the batter's box lines, the umpire should rule a "Foul Ball" and the batter gets a strike added to their count.

**Play 2:** Two Outs, R1 on 2B, R2 on 1B and B3 hits a line drive to right-center. On the hit, the runners take off rounding the bases. R1 touches 3B and heads home. F6 significantly obstructs R2 at 2B who then heads to 3B. The umpires see and signal/verbalize obstruction and they make a mental note that they would protect R2 to 3B. The outfielder cleanly fields the ball and throws home to make a play on the lead runner. R1, sees the ball arrive before they get home, so they stop and return towards 3B. The defense gets R1 in a rundown between 3B and Home. During this time, R2 continues towards 3B. The batter-runner (BR) touches 1B and goes toward 2B.

**Below are five scenarios, although there could be more based on when runners are tagged, etc. What would be the rulings based on the information below?**

2A) R1, who is in the rundown returns to 3B, where R2 is standing on the base watching the action. The BR reaches 2B, and the defense touches both runners (R1 & R2) standing on 3B.

2B) R1, who is in the rundown, returns to 3B, and R2, who touched 3B now returns toward 2B where the BR is standing on 2B, and gets in a rundown and is tagged between the two bases just before R1 crosses the plate.

2C) R1, who is in the rundown, returns to 3B, R2 who touched 3B now returns to 2B where the BR is standing on the base. The defense touches both runners standing on 2B after R1 has crossed the plate.

2D) R1, who is in the rundown returns to 3B, R2 seeing R1 return to 3B stops short of touching 3B and gets in rundown between 2B and 3B. The BR reaches 2B when R2 is tagged between 2B and 3B just before R1 crosses the plate.

2E) R1, who is in the rundown returns to 3B, R2 seeing R1 return to 3B stops short of touching 3B and returns to 2B, where the BR is standing watching the action. The defense tags both runners at 2B just before R1 crosses the plate.

### **Rulings:**

In 2A) When R1 returns to 3B and the defense tags both runners (R1 & R2) who are standing on the base, the umpire should indicate "Safe" when R1 is tagged, and when R2 is tagged, they should give the "Dead Ball" signal and call time. Once the ball becomes Dead, the umpire should enforce the Obstruction violation of R2 by F6. In the umpire's judgment, R2 would have reached 3B safely had they not been obstructed. However, because R1, who is legally standing on 3B when the ball becomes Dead, R2 would be called out. But, because of the obstruction, R2 should now be awarded 3B (umpire's judgment) and R1, affected by R2's obstruction should be awarded home. The BR remains at 2B. **Rule 8 Section 3 E / Rule 8 Section 5 B1 Exc A**

In 2B) When R1 returns towards 3B, and R2 who touched 3B retreats towards 2B, gets in a rundown, and is tagged between the two bases before R1 crosses the plate, the umpire should rule R2 "Out." This becomes a timing play, and because the third out was made before R1 crossed the plate, the run does not score. ***In this play: Rule 8 Section 5B, 1, Exception A applies. "When an obstructed runner, after the obstruction, safely obtains the base they would have been awarded, in the umpire's judgment, had there been no obstruction and there is a subsequent play on a different runner."*** This is one of the five exceptions of when an obstructed runner can be called out between the bases they were protected. ***Effect: The obstructed runner is no longer protected between the bases where obstructed and may be put out.***

In 2C) When R1 returns to 3B, R2 returns to 2B, where the BR is standing on the base, and the defense tags both runners (R2 & BR) who are standing on the base, the umpire should indicate "Safe" when R2 is tagged, and rule the BR "Out" when tagged. R2 is safe because they still legally occupy 2B. The BR is out because they cannot legally occupy 2B. This becomes a timing play, and because the third out was made after R1 crossed the plate, the run scores. **Rule 5 Section 5 A, B / Rule 8 Section 3 E / Rule 8 Section 5 B1 Exc A**

In 2D) When R1 returns to 3B and R2 does not reach 3B safely, this changes things. When R2 gets tagged during the rundown between 2B and 3B, the umpire should give the “Dead Ball” signal and call time. Once the ball becomes Dead, the umpire should enforce the Obstruction violation of R2 by F6. In the umpire's judgment, R2 would have reached 3B safely had they not been obstructed. R2 should now be awarded 3B (umpire's judgment) and R1, affected by R2's obstruction should be awarded home. The BR remains at 2B. **Rule 8 Section 5 B2**

In 2E) When R1 returns to 3B and R2, who has not reached 3B, returns to 2B where the BR is standing and the defense tags both runners, another twist comes into play. NOW the umpire must pay attention to the order in which the defense tags the runners on 2B. If the defense tags the BR first, they are “Out” because they are not legally able to occupy 2B. This is the third out of the inning. This is a timing play, and if the third out was made before R1 crosses the plate, the run does not score. **Rule 5 Section 5 A, B / Rule 8 Section 5 B2**

However, once the defense tags R2, who is standing on 2B, the umpire should give the “Dead Ball” signal and call time. Once the ball becomes Dead, the umpire should enforce the Obstruction violation of R2 by F6. In the umpire's judgment, R2 would have reached 3B safely had they not been obstructed. R2 should now be awarded 3B (umpire's judgment). Even though the defense tagged the BR standing on 2B, because the ball becomes Dead once R2 is tagged, the BR is not out once the ball becomes Dead. R1 is awarded Home because R2 is awarded 3B on the obstruction, so the run counts. **Rule 5 Section 5 A, B / Rule 8 Section 5 B2**

In these situations, it's important to have a thorough understanding of the rules, but perhaps more important is to stay calm, stay focused on what happened, and if possible, use the members of your crew to get together and talk the situation through. Try to slow the action down. Unlike NCAA Softball, which people watch on TV, we cannot go to replay for help for a second, third, or more look. Instead, we must have an understanding of the rules, and the ability to communicate effectively what happened and why we made the ruling we made. USA Softball umpires must use correct verbiage when talking with coaches. Be sure to correctly use terms such as “interference” and “obstruction” and the supporting definitions that apply.

Use these plays and clarifications to “jump-start” your season! Spend time in the rule book and practice the mechanics that are in the USA Softball Umpire Manual. Together, they will help you become the best you can be! Have a great season! We'll be in touch again next month!