



## Iowa Conference Softball Umpire News

Newsletter # 1

Dear IIAC Umpires & Coaches:

April 16, 2002

Here are a few **rule interpretations** that either Dee Abrahamson, NCAA rules interpreter, has responded to or that we have come up the last week or so:

- There is no ball rotation (like ASA) in NCAA softball. The first ball pitched in the top of the 1st inning ball is in play until it goes out of play or becomes unusable. See Rule 10-12. a. & b. We don't go get the ball after the 1st ½ inning and put another one in just because the 1st one didn't go out of play.
- A fly ball that hits a tree, flag, spectator, etc. over fair territory is a blocked ball, 2 base award. Rule 9 covers all aspects of the blocked ball. If the flag or tree or whatever is 20 feet above the fence, it becomes a judgment call whether the ball would have been a homerun. This would be a good issue to cover at the pre-game with the coaches if there are non-equipment concerns that may hang over into the playing field. A foul ball that becomes blocked (hits a tree or flag etc) is a dead ball, foul.
- Both feet of the pitcher must be totally within the 24" length of the pitching (no part overhanging) rubber when taking the signal from the catcher. The illegal pitch is called when the hands separate.

### **Mechanics changes:**

- Remember that with a runner on 2<sup>nd</sup> only and we have a fly ball, the base umpire has the tag only at 2<sup>nd</sup> base and the plate umpire has the call at third base. If the lone runner has committed to third, we as a base umpire can go to cover home in case there is a possible play at the plate. This is only if we have no batter-runner and the ball has been caught. If we have a batter-runner we need to stay with them and any call at either first or second.
- They have also changed the missed tag/missed base mechanic at home plate. If the catcher misses the tag and we give a safe signal and say "no tag". If the runner misses the plate we do nothing as this is an appeal play by the defense and we cannot give information to tip off the defense that she may have missed the base. You may find it helpful to start at the third base extended calling area for a play at the plate and then adjust to your left if need be as the play dictates for a straight in slide. Most slides and tags are sweep slides and swipe tags at the plate so we should set up in our primary calling position first.

### **Points of Emphasis:**

- We do not warn on illegal pitches- call them. Do not let coaches continuously question whether a pitcher is illegal or not. If a coach has a question we will answer and explain, but we do not let constant questioning and debating continue and affect the players in the game. 1) The pitcher must have both feet on to start within the 24" 2) The pitcher must take a sign with the hands separated 3) The pitcher cannot pull the foot off the back of the rubber or step off of the front of the rubber 4) The pitcher

cannot leap and must push and drag the pivot foot 5) The pitcher cannot get a second push once they initially push and drag from the rubber 6) The stride foot must land within the 24" "chute" or imaginary extension from pitching rubber to home plate.

- The plate umpire needs to hold his/her ending position near the front of the circle until the ball goes into the pitcher's circle, the pitcher has the ball, the runner(s) is on the base(s) and their partner goes to their next position. We don't want to get caught with everyone turning their back to the ball and the runner(s).
- One more time, slow down on your calls. We cannot rule on a play if it isn't over. All outs need an out mechanic even if she's out by 10' (no vocal would be needed then), but if a runner is safe by 10 steps, no safe mechanic (or vocal) is needed (per the NCAA staff).
- The on-deck batter is supposed to warm-up in the on-deck circle, not almost to the plate. Base umpires need to assist with this as well as policing the number of players swinging bats outside the dugout between innings (2). Only the on-deck batter and leadoff batter for that ½ inning are to be on the field (live ball area) swinging a bat. The batter due up first to start the inning can be on either side of the batters box, but still needs to be a safe distance away from the box and the warm-up pitches. If runners want to time pitches and run between innings they cannot do so on the infield portion of the field. Runners must be no closer than the edge of the grass.
- Between inning mechanics. The plate umpire needs to be about 10-12' at an angle from the plate, 'facing' the dugout of the team coming to bat. Base umpires, 10-12 feet off the foul line on the grass at the edge of the infield cut unless the defensive team is using that area to warm up. If so, find an area that is out of their way, but not at the fence visiting with someone.
- Stop and get set - when you have to move to make a call, for example going out on a fly ball (especially near the line), or going from the 'B' position to 1st, stop and get set. Don't make the call on the move. Your eyes are bouncing and the ball is moving and this has a tendency to cause an optical illusion.
- Batting helmets- like the bats, there seems to be some confusion about what is a legal batting helmet. They are supposed to be embossed (etched into the plastic) with the NOCSAE seal, not have just the sticker. I just found out that some teams bought new helmets this year that have the sticker, but are not embossed. Coaches must have an affidavit/letter granting a waiver from the NCAA (Dee) that places the full responsibility for the helmets (releasing us of liability) on that head coach. These helmets are from ABC Helmets through Louisville Slugger. I am unaware at this time of any other helmet companies that may also have this same problem.
- Strike Zone - First and foremost, the diagram on page 137 of the Rule Book is drawn incorrectly. The balls inside the box at the bottom of the zone should actually be drawn below the box, which corresponds to the written text describing the strike zone on page 119. Ok, no real problem here, part of the ball has to be above the knee for the pitch to be called a strike. The main concern is the top of the zone that is indicated at the front armpit on the diagram and is written as the front armpit in the definition. The only adjustment that I perceive as of this time is if the top of your zone is not at or just below the letters you are in jeopardy of contradicting the written rule. In other words, if the top of your zone is at the belt, raise it.
- Coaches in dugouts - I don't know that we have had any troubles in our Conference with this, but coaches while their team is on defense must be inside the dugout.
- Additional Defensive Conference – When a coach makes any pitching change they get one additional conference for each change in the ½ inning. \* note conferences are not cumulative and a coach shall never have more than one conference available at any one time. i.e. Coach takes a defensive conference and then makes a pitching change and wants to talk to her team. The coach is granted an additional conference per the pitching change and can take time-out to talk to her team or use it later in the same half inning.
- Inaccurate Line-Up: An incorrect number is inaccurate and is treated as an appeal play from the opposing coach. The timing of the appeal or correction is essentially the same as batting out of order – review pgs. 78-79 and 210-11.
- Ball hitting a Bat – A ball hitting a bat resting in fair territory is a fair ball – live and no penalty. A bat rolling into a ball is interference.

- In NCAA softball it the infield fly is not called it is not an infield fly. Remember we can never have a force out on a infield fly that is dropped and runners must be tagged if they advance. If runners do not tag and an infield fly is caught we can have a force play (not force out).

**Things we need to work on:** Observers at several sites have noticed the following things we need to do a better job with.

- We do not have conversations with coaches or players unless is something that they have asked us or that we need to speak with them about. If something needs to be said to a player we need to let the coach know and have them address it with his/her team. We do not talk with fans or spectators at anytime.
- Sweep the pitching rubber after the third out of the inning if it needs to be swept and never kick the dirt off of the pitching rubber, base, plate, with your foot. That is what those nice little brushes are for.
- Work the slot!!!!!! Do not hide behind the catcher. Wear the gear and make sure your head is not in the strike zone. You must be able to see the WHOLE plate from your set position.
- Base umpires need to be observant between innings. Count pitches if plate is busy with a sub. Make sure we have only two players out with bats and they are where they should be and warm-up runners are where they should be. Make sure catchers wear the mask when warming up the pitcher.
- Never touch the teams equipment unless it is to avoid a potentially dangerous situation such as a bat in the way for a possible play at the plate. We do not pick up bats and give them to coaches or toss them to players or pick-up catchers masks or helmets and give them to catchers.
- Obvious foul balls back to the screen or down the line do not need a signal or a verbal. Use the signal when it is needed. Same goes for foul tips – it is a live ball strike so we don't need to signal a foul tip. Too many times it is misconstrued for a dead ball or foul ball signal. We do not mimic foul ball calls or verbal foul from the bases. It is the base coaches responsibility to hold up their players and if we should give the wrong information we are in big trouble.
- **Never** let your partner on the plate give the incorrect count. If you are sure the count is incorrect by the plate umpire or on the scoreboard, stop things immediately and get it corrected. Especially if a change in the batters status is about to occur (i.e. 1-2, 3-1...).
- Talk in your pre game how you will handle the short hop on the infield that a base umpire may be able to help with and fair foul over the bag if the plate umpire does not have a good shot at it and needs help (provided we have an umpire on the line.)

The season is in full swing and let's all take each game one pitch at a time and give the teams are very best with a lot of hustle and a lot of communication with our crew. Keep those game reports coming in and make sure we communicate at least a few days before each game with our partners and the schools to confirm everything. Keep up the great work! If you have plays or rule interpretations or things we need to address in our newsletters, please let me know. We can all learn from each others experiences.