

2020 PRESEASON GUIDE



# BASEBALL



When high school coaches submit their lineups, they will have a new option for the designated hitter under an NFHS rule change for the 2020 season. Dominic Machado, Los Angeles.

## DIG INTO A NEW DH

### NFHS Rule Change Expands Designated Hitter Options

The NFHS Baseball Rules Committee opted for just one rule change during its annual meeting in June in Indianapolis. But it is significant and will require high school umpires to consider all of its ramifications during the 2020 season.

The rule change, related to the use of the designated hitter, was subsequently approved by the NFHS board of directors and made public in late June.

#### Designated Hitter (3-1-4b)

The change to rule 3-1-4 provides an extra scenario in which a designated

hitter may be used. The starting designated hitter may now also be a starting defensive player.

Teams that utilize this option will have one player in the lineup listed with two positions: one of the nine defensive positions and designated hitter. This may include any of the nine defensive positions on the field and is not confined to just the pitcher. Teams using this scenario would begin the game with a lineup featuring nine starters — nine defensive players, one of whom is also the designated hitter.

This differs from the traditional use of the designated hitter at the NFHS level. In that scenario, which remains an option, the designated hitter is listed as a 10th starter who hits for any one of the nine starting defensive players.

Teams also still have the option of not using a designated hitter and batting a straight lineup of nine players.

The role of the defensive player in this dual role may be substituted for by any legal substitute. Once that occurs, the original player/designated hitter

SEE "DESIGNATED HITTER" P. 2

## ▶ DESIGNATED HITTER CONT. FROM P.1

may re-enter as a defensive player one time.

However, the role of the designated hitter is terminated for the remainder of the game when a substitute or former substitute for the defensive role subsequently participates in an offensive role, or the starting defensive player/designated hitter is substituted for either as a hitter or runner. This is a major difference with the traditional designated hitter scenario, in which a substitute may replace the designated hitter as a hitter or runner, and the designated hitter may re-enter the lineup one time and maintain his designated hitter status.

The two available designated hitter options are also a point of emphasis for the 2020 season.

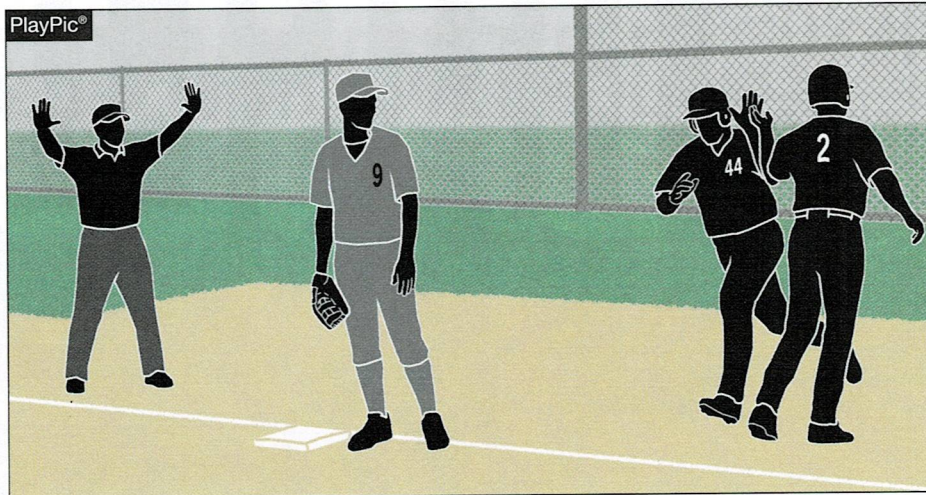
**Play 1:** Team A lists Daniels as the starting designated hitter and the starting first baseman in the No. 4 position in the lineup. **Ruling 1:** This is legal, as a player can now be listed on the starting lineup as one of the nine defensive positions and a designated hitter.

**Play 2:** Team A lists Daniels as the starting designated hitter and the starting first baseman in the No. 4 position in the lineup. In the fourth inning, Jackson substitutes as the first baseman. In the fifth inning, Daniels comes to bat in the No. 4 position. In the sixth inning, Daniels re-enters defensively as the first baseman.

**Ruling 2:** This is legal, as the role of the defensive player has been substituted by a legal substitute, while the designated hitter role remains intact. The original defensive player/designated hitter is also allowed one re-entry on defense.

**Play 3:** Team A lists Daniels as the starting designated hitter and the starting first baseman in the No. 4 position in the lineup. In the fourth inning, Jackson substitutes as the first baseman. In the fifth inning, Jackson comes to bat in the No. 4 position.

**Ruling 3:** This is legal, and the role of the designated hitter is terminated for the remainder of the game. However, Daniels still has re-entry rights, may re-enter at any defensive position and may replace Jackson as the No. 4 hitter in the lineup.



If the DH is batting for another player, when he bats, he is a DH. As a result, if a runner comes in for him when he gets on base, it is a substitution, and that player is now the DH. If the DH is a player/DH, he is batting as the DH. A substitution by an offensive player would eliminate the role of the DH.

**Play 4:** Team A lists Daniels as the starting designated hitter and the starting first baseman in the No. 4 position in the lineup. In the top of the fifth inning, Daniels hits a single, and Jackson substitutes for him as a pinch-runner. In the bottom of the fifth inning, Daniels continues to play first base on defense. In the sixth inning, Daniels comes to bat again in the No. 4 position. **Ruling 4:** This is legal. Once Jackson entered as an offensive substitute for Daniels, the role of the designated hitter is terminated. However, Daniels still has re-entry rights, may re-enter at any defensive position and may replace Jackson as the No. 4 hitter in the lineup.

**Play 5:** Team A lists Daniels as the starting designated hitter in the No. 4 position in the lineup, and Jackson as the starting first baseman in the No. 10 position. **Ruling 5:** This is legal, as the designated hitter may still be a 10th starter hitting for any one of the nine starting defensive players.

**Play 6:** Team A lists Daniels as the starting designated hitter in the No. 4 position in the lineup, and Jackson as the starting first baseman in the No. 10 position. In the fifth inning, Jackson comes to bat in the No. 4 position.

**Ruling 6:** This is legal. Jackson is allowed to pinch-hit, and the role of the designated hitter is terminated for the remainder of the game.

**Play 7:** Team A lists Daniels as the starting designated hitter in the No.

4 position in the lineup, and Jackson as the starting first baseman in the No. 10 position. In the fifth inning, Daniels replaces Jackson as the first baseman. **Ruling 7:** This is legal. Daniels is allowed to play a defensive position, and the role of the designated hitter is terminated for the remainder of the game. However, Jackson still has re-entry rights as a starter and may either pinch-hit or pinch-run for Daniels, and may also re-enter on defense.

### Points of Emphasis

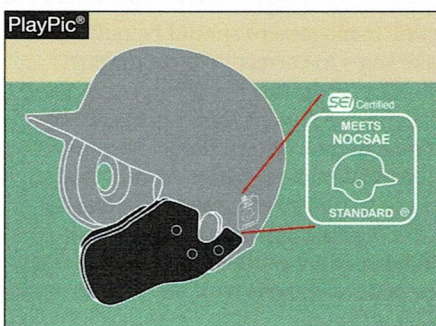
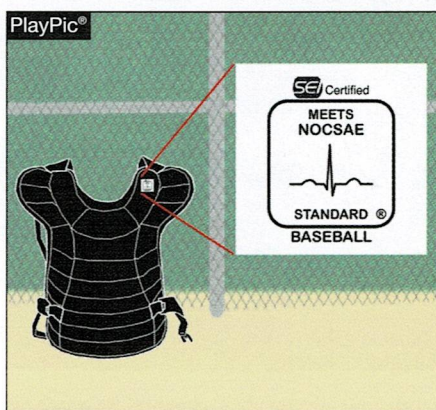
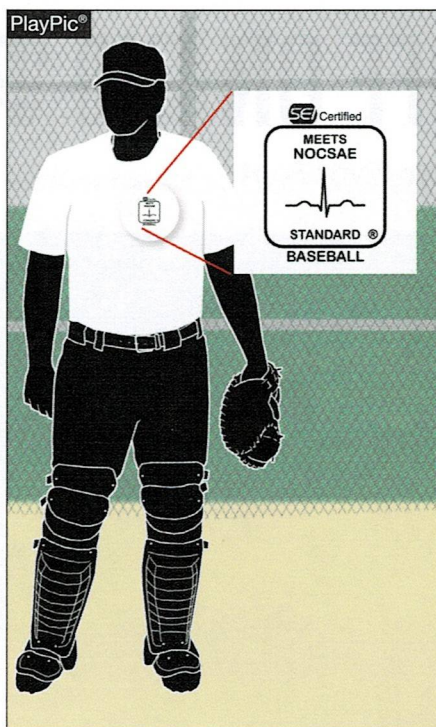
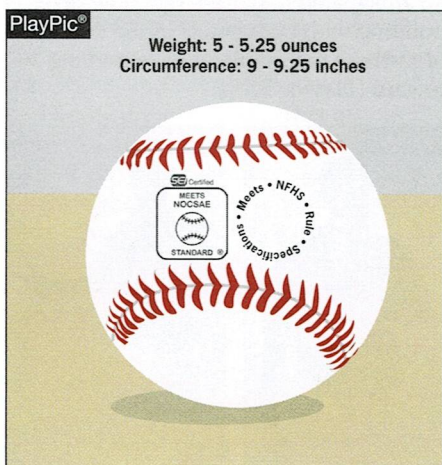
**Game-ending procedures.** A state association may adopt game-ending procedures that determine how games are ended, including suspended games. However, if a state does not adopt game-ending procedures, by mutual agreement of the opposing coaches and the umpire-in-chief, any remaining play may be shortened or the game terminated. If a state association has adopted game-ending procedures, only those game-ending procedures may be used, unless the opposing coaches wish to terminate a game (4-2-4). ▶

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Total
VISITOR	3	2	4	1	4			14
HOME	1	0	0	0	0			1

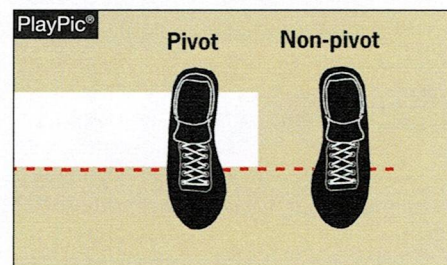
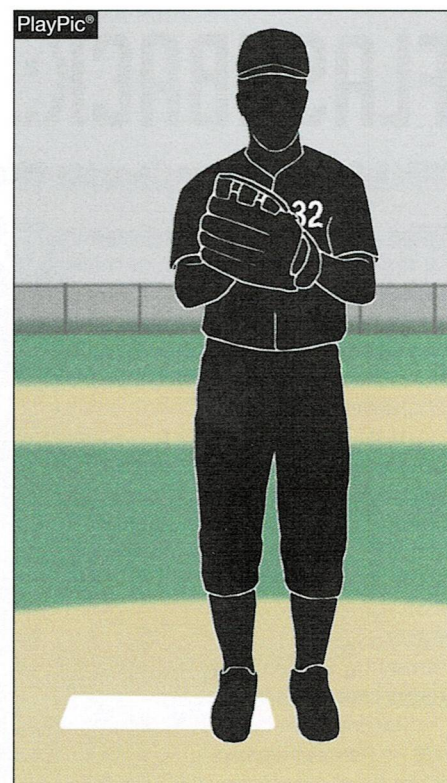
► **Force-play slide rule.** Runners are never required to slide, but if a runner elects to slide, it must be legal. A legal slide can either be feet first or head first. If a runner slides feet first, at least one leg and buttock shall be on the ground. Runners may not pop-up into a fielder, have a leg raised higher than the fielder's knee, slide away from a base in the direction of a fielder, or slide through or beyond the base, except at home plate. A runner may slide or run in a direction away from the fielder to avoid making contact or altering the play of the fielder. The runner is out when he illegally slides.



**Compliant equipment.** The ball and the catcher's body/chest protector shall meet the current NOCSAE standards for baseball effective Jan. 1, 2020. Helmets must meet the provisions of rule 1-5-1, including that all facemasks/guard attached after manufacture are approved by the manufacturer and meet NOCSAE standards at the time of manufacture. Bats shall be unaltered from the manufacturer's original design and production and must meet the provisions of rule 1-3-2.



**Proper pitching positions.** The windup and set are the two legal pitching positions. For the windup, the pitcher's non-pivot foot shall be in any position on or behind a line extending through the front edge of the pitcher's plate. For the set position, a pitcher



shall stand with his entire non-pivot foot in front of a line extending through the front edge of the pitcher's plate and with his entire pivot foot in contact with or directly in front of and parallel to the pitcher's plate. Pitchers are no longer required to have their entire pivot foot in contact with the pitcher's plate. The so-called hybrid stance remains illegal as it does not meet the requirements of either the windup or set positions.

**Enforcement of NFHS jewelry rule.** Jewelry, including necklaces, bracelets and earrings, shall not be worn except for religious or medical medals. A religious medal must be taped and worn under the uniform. A medical alert must be taped and may be visible.

*Scott Tittrington is an associate editor at Referee. He umpires college and high school baseball, and officiates high school basketball and football. □*

# FLASHBACK: OFF ON THE 'RIGHT' FOOT

## NFHS Rule Change Targets Pitcher's Pivot Foot

The NFHS Baseball Rules Committee approved a modification of rules regarding the pitcher's pivot foot. From the set position, it will no longer be an illegal pitch (balk with runners on base) if the entire pivot foot isn't in contact with the pitcher's plate.

At its June 3-5 meeting in Indianapolis, the committee made that change and extended the implementation date for baseballs meeting the NOCSAE standard. All recommended changes were subsequently approved by the NFHS Board of Directors.

### Removing an Element of the Pivot Foot Requirement (6-1-3)

Starting with the 2019 season, pitchers will no longer be required to have their entire pivot foot in contact with the pitcher's plate while in the set position.

The rules committee recognized that the condition of many pitching mounds makes it problematic for the pitcher to have his/her entire pivot foot in contact with the pitcher's plate. No advantage is gained by a pitcher who had some of his pivot foot not in contact with the pitcher's plate.

**Play:** From the set position, a pitcher stands with his non-pivot foot in front of a line extending through the front edge of the pitcher's plate and the toe of his pivot foot in contact with the pitcher's plate but with the back half of the foot hanging off the side. The pivot foot is in front of and parallel to the pitcher's plate. **Ruling:** Since part of his foot is in contact with and in front of and parallel to the pitcher's plate, this is legal. The pitcher is no longer required to have his entire pivot foot in contact the pitcher's plate.

**Play:** A pitcher claims that because of the condition of the mound, he should be allowed to pitch from the set position without having any of his pivot foot in contact with the pitcher's plate. **Ruling:** Not permitted. Rules for the set position require the pitcher, before starting his delivery, to have at least part of his pivot foot in contact with the pitcher's plate. If the mound is in such poor condition to make that impossible, the home team or



Pitchers in the set position are no longer required to have their entire pivot foot in contact with the pitcher's plate.

game management should be notified to take steps to correct field conditions.

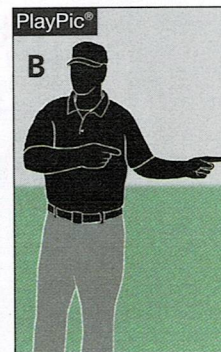
**Play:** From the wind-up position and prior to starting his delivery, a pitcher stands with only part of his pivot foot in contact with the pitcher's plate. **Ruling:** Legal. In the wind-up position, there is not a requirement that the pitcher stand with his entire pivot foot in contact with the pitcher's plate.

### New Umpire Signals

**Information Available.** An umpire can indicate to a partner(s) that he or she has information relevant to them by tapping two times over the chest/heart area (PlayPic A.)

**Correct Rotation.** In three- or four-umpire mechanics, umpires can indicate

to their partners where they will be rotating to a specific base for coverage of an anticipated play. This signal involves pointing with both hands in the direction of the base the umpire will be moving toward (PlayPic B.) □



# WHEN 'TIME' IS RIGHT

One of the biggest challenges for baseball umpires takes place when something out of the ordinary occurs.

In many cases, the situation that makes an umpire think twice is either interference or obstruction. Here are some of the situations where umpires need to be sure whether to call "time" and stop play or whether to allow play to progress.

**Umpire hit by batted ball.** If a fair ball touches an umpire in fair territory before touching an infielder, it is interference and the batter is awarded first base. The ball is dead and other runners advance only if forced. However, if a fair ball touches an umpire after having passed an infielder other than the pitcher, or after having touched an infielder, including the pitcher, the ball remains live and in play (5-1-1f1).

**Obstruction.** NFHS rules make the umpire's life a bit easier because all obstruction is a delayed dead ball and play is allowed to continue until all action ends (5-1-2b).

Situations where obstruction may occur while the runner is being played on include: rundowns; any play where another fielder is making a direct throw to a base in an attempt to retire that runner; and a batter-runner who has not yet reached first base and a ball is hit to an infielder.

**Play 1:** With one out and R2 on second and R3 on third, B1 flies out to center field. Both runners legally tag up. R3 stumbles going to the plate and ends up in a rundown. R2 is between second and third when R3 is obstructed by F5 during the rundown. **Ruling 1:** The play is kept live until all action ceases.

**Dropped third strike.** After an uncaught third strike, the batter may not interfere with the catcher's fielding or throwing by stepping out of the batter's box or making any other movement that hinders the catcher's play. If while attempting to advance to first base, the batter-runner intentionally deflects the ball, the batter-runner is declared out, the ball is dead and all runners return.

If the batter unintentionally deflects the ball, the ball is live and in play (7-3-5b, 8-4-1a).



Jim Sayre of Sunland, Calif., signals time during a game. Certain situations are delayed dead balls and others are immediate dead balls – knowing the difference for NFHS play is important.

**Play 2:** With no runners, B1 swings and misses at a pitch in the dirt for strike three. F2 blocks the ball, which then rolls forward. As B1 leaves the batter's box, he kicks the ball into foul territory. B1 is safe at first. **Ruling 2:** The umpire must judge whether B1 intentionally kicked the ball. If so, B1 is out for hindering F2's attempt to field the ball; the ball is dead. If not, the play stands.

**Spectator interference.** When someone other than one of the nine defensive players touches a live ball, the umpires must first determine whether that person was a spectator or an "authorized" person. Non-

playing personnel such as coaches in uniform, athletic trainers, umpires, team managers, bat persons and authorized home attendants, including security personnel, are only guilty of interference if their act is intentional (2-21-3, 5.1.1K). If such personnel inadvertently touch the ball or their contact with a player does not alter the play, the ball remains live and in play. Please note it is intentional interference if any non-player fields, kicks or pushes a ball, regardless of possible motives.

For unintentional contact, the ball is live and in play. It is not "interference"

SEE "TIME" P. 6

▶ **TIME** CONT. FROM P.5

if a base coach, bat person, etc., tries to evade the ball and it touches the individual or if it touches such person without the person being aware the ball was coming. If the umpire determines the interference was intentional based on the person's action, the play is treated the same as spectator interference.

Follow-through interference. Follow-through interference is when the bat hits the catcher after the batter has swung at a pitch and hinders actions at home plate or the catcher's attempt to play on a runner (2-21-4). The batter is entitled

to swing at any pitch unhindered by the catcher, but once he does he is responsible for not interfering with any attempt by the catcher to make a defensive play. The follow through is the batter's responsibility, so if the bat hits the catcher on the follow through, it's the batter's fault unless the catcher jumps up and moves into the swing.

The key for umpires is determining if a play is in progress. If there is not a play occurring when the contact occurs, there cannot be interference. The pitch is called a strike, the ball is dead and no runner shall advance on the play. If there are two strikes on the batter and

the follow-through causes an uncaught third strike, the batter is out and no runners can advance (7-3-5c). If the contact occurs while the catcher is in the act of making a throw to retire a runner, the batter is out and the runner returns (7-3-5c).

Play 3: With a R1 on first and a 1-0 count, B1 swings and misses the pitch. His follow-through on the swing comes around and hits the ball out of F2's glove immediately after he securely catches the pitch. R1 then goes safely into second base. Ruling 3: B1 is out and R1 returns to first base. □

## SIGNAL SELL POINTS

It is often said that an important part of successful umpiring is the ability to sell ourselves. Perception is reality. If people think we know what we're doing, we'll get the benefit of the doubt on close calls; indeed, many umpires who aren't as proficient as others in rules knowledge or judgment have climbed to the top of the heap because they mastered the little things — the intangibles — that made others see them in a positive light. But the converse is also true.

Our signals for strikes, safes, outs, etc., are a vital part of how people perceive us. Say a batter hits a can-of-corn fly ball to an outfielder. The base umpire extends his arm way above his head and gives a big-fisted out-pump. Really? When everyone in the park knows the ball was caught? Or there's a grounder to an infielder who fires the ball to first base, beating the runner by two steps, and the umpire virtually does cartwheels while banging the guy out. And there's the plate umpire who almost throws his arm out of socket while signaling a third strike.

There are two problems in these scenarios. First, we need to let the situation dictate the kind of signal we make. Close plays require emphatic ▶

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Mike Cafaro of Lillington, N.C., applies a proper amount of "sell" on a strike call. Applying too much "sell" can be detrimental to the perceptions of an umpire's credibility.



► calls; open-and-shut plays only need an acknowledgement. If we almost go into orbit on routine calls, we won't have anything left in our arsenal to sell the tight ones.

Second, even when there's a bang-bang play that requires a big sell, one can be emphatic without going nuts. We may think the flamboyant, overly aggressive signal conveys certainty, but what it really does is make it look like we're trying too hard, which sends a negative message. The signals that look the most authoritative are firm, but low-key, controlled and crisp.

This is especially true with strike signals. It looks like you know what you're doing, not when your arm is flailing wildly about, but when you simply point to the side with definition — "pop" — at the end. Or use a fist — also with "pop" — a foot or two in front of your body. Most of us like to do something different to sell a strike three

call but all that's needed is a low-key signal, made while looking forward so you don't miss any subsequent action.

Same with calls on the bases. If the runner is out by two steps at first base, has been easily nailed trying to steal or has beaten the throw by three feet while stretching a single into a double, acknowledge out or safe but do it in an almost "nothing" manner. Don't look lazy — even "nothing" signals need to be crisp — but don't act like the call is a big deal. Save the forceful punchout or big spread of the arms for tight plays. And then, to repeat, controlled and crisp seem authoritative more than wild, animated gestures do.

Watch professional officials in all sports; the trend in recent years has been to cut out the animated signals that used to be prevalent and be far more low-key. As for major league umpires, who have been at it so long that they've lost any tendency they may have once

had to be flashy, their "sell" signals are authoritative and have definition ("crisp") but aren't flamboyant and don't force the body into weird contortions. Once you see signals you like and think fit your personality — not every signal works well with every body type — play with them in front of a mirror. Virtually every good umpire I've known has done that. They've also gotten videos of themselves in action and objectively assessed whether their signals are a positive or a negative in their overall repertoire.

You've heard it said that players should act like they've been there. Do the job and go on, without calling undue attention to themselves. We should, too. Excessive signaling can make it seem like we're not in control of things and out of our league. If we keep them understated, we'll make it seem like it's not our first rodeo — even if it is. □

## HBP WARNING SIGNS

**T**hump! A pitch hits the batter. "I told you!" was the reply the catcher has to the batter. All umpires have had a hit batsman. However, are there signs we should have read to prevent this act from happening? The answer is, "yes," if the batter was hit on purpose. There are a dozen different acts that may provoke the inside pitch that brushes the batter back or even hits him.

The quickest way for a smoothly flowing game to blow up is for you to fail to recognize when a batter is intentionally being thrown at or brushed back by the pitcher. You should be aware that when one or more of the following events occurs, the likelihood of the batter being thrown at or brushed back is very possible the next time the offending player bats. You can all probably add to this list.

► SEE "HBP" P. 8

Travis Roberts of St. George, Utah, awards the batter first base after he was hit by a pitch. Detecting whether a batter was accidentally hit by a pitch or intentionally thrown at is often a matter of paying attention to what has happened earlier in the game.



▶ **HBP** CONT. FROM P.7

Here are the “dirty dozen” to look for:

**1. The batter just watches the ball leave the park on an obvious home run.**

The old adage of monkey see, monkey do, could not be more appropriate. Players see it on TV and try to copy their favorite major leaguer. You can bet that if words are exchanged between the pitcher and batter when this happens, trouble is just around the corner.

**2. The batter points to the outfield stands, where he is going to hit it out, as he steps into the batters box.**

Again, just like No. 1, this is another surefire way for the batter to irritate the pitcher and likely cause a negative reaction.

**3. The proverbial home run trot before the ball has left the park.**

Similar to the first two, this will annoy the pitcher and if words are exchanged, be on your toes (be on your toes either way). Maybe you will luck out and the coach will bench the player if the ball doesn't go out.

**4. Taking two bases on a passed ball when a team has a substantial lead.**

Beating an opponent into the ground and running up the score is a guaranteed

way to get the opposing manager's attention in a very negative way.

**5. A real hard collision, normally at the plate, when trying to add to a big lead.**

Even if not attempting to add to a big lead, an unnecessarily hard collision can lead to trouble. As per high school rules, taking out a player who has the ball and is waiting to make the play is illegal. Also, remember if the contact is malicious, the offender is ejected.

**6. An unnecessary rough takeout at second base with the middle infielder possibly being spiked.**

Even with the addition of the force play slide rule, if this happens, be wary when the offender comes to bat again.

**7. After back-to-back home runs with some bench jockeying or some unknowledgeable fans adding fuel to create a fire.**

Be alert to retaliation by the opposing pitcher. He is probably frustrated.

**8. Bench jockeying that goes outside normal bounds of sportsmanship.**

This can often lead to trouble. One side usually wants to make a point to the other and someone ends up being the victim of a brushback pitch.

**9. Stealing a base when a team has a substantial lead, normally eight to 10 runs.**

Although this is a bit different, it is similar to taking two bases on a passed ball. Be on your guard if this happens, since trouble is sure to be right behind.

**10. Baserunner on second base blatantly making it obvious that he is stealing signs.**

Keep your ears open and talk with your partner who is working the bases, since a middle infielder will normally visit the pitcher and catcher and make them aware this is happening.

**11. Batter looks back for catcher giving signs or his positioning.**

Similar to the above situation except you can expect an *immediate* response from the opposing battery.

**12. A fake tag by an infielder on a ball hit to the outfield.**

This can cause an injury if it causes a player to have to make an unexpected quick slide. This is an illegal action in games played under NFHS rules.

**Conclusion.** Remember, the key to preventing problems is for both you and your partner(s) to remain constantly aware. Be proactive. If you know there is a history between the two teams, remind both managers before the game, when you have your pregame conference, of the necessity for sportsmanship from everyone involved in the game. □

# A CATCH WITH CARRYOVER LANGUAGE

Unbeknownst to some coaches, “catch-and-carry” is an obsolete term.

When it existed, catch-and-carry meant exactly what is said: a fielder was allowed to catch a ball and carry it into dead-ball territory without the ball becoming dead unless the fielder fell while out of the live-ball area.

The rules now state if a player makes a catch and enters (completely) into dead-ball territory (as shown in the PlayPic), the ball is dead and runners are awarded one base (5-1-1i, 8-3-3d). Consequently, one can argue that catch-and-carry still exists but instead of the ball remaining live, it now means a dead ball with a one-base award. It makes sense at this point to get a better understanding of what a catch is and what constitutes stepping into dead-ball territory.

## Catch

In baseball, the term “catch” has to be taken into context, but here we are talking about the act of a fielder getting secure possession in his hand or glove of a ball in flight and firmly holding it. He may not use his cap, protector, pocket or any other part of his uniform in getting possession (2-9-1). “In flight” means a ball that has not yet touched the ground or some object or person other than a fielder (teammate). That means a ball that touches an umpire or an offensive player is treated as if it had touched the ground.

The fielder must hold the ball long enough to prove that he has *complete control* of the ball.

On a routine catch, when the fielder returns the glove to his body, that is

long enough. On a diving shoestring catch, when the fielder raises his glove off the ground to “sell” the catch, that is long enough. Dropping it as he comes to his feet does not invalidate the catch unless it's all done in one continuous motion. On a catch at full speed, when the fielder stops, signifying the initial action is complete, that is long enough. Whatever the play, the umpire should look to see the fielder has control of what he's doing. If the player has control of his body, it is an indication that the play is over.

The fielder's release of the ball must be *voluntary and intentional*. If the fielder then falls, it is still a catch. A player may stumble, lean on a dugout wall, be supported by players or spectators, or teeter on a railing without actually falling. If he ▶



▶ intentionally slides or goes down to one or both knee(s), he has not lost body control.

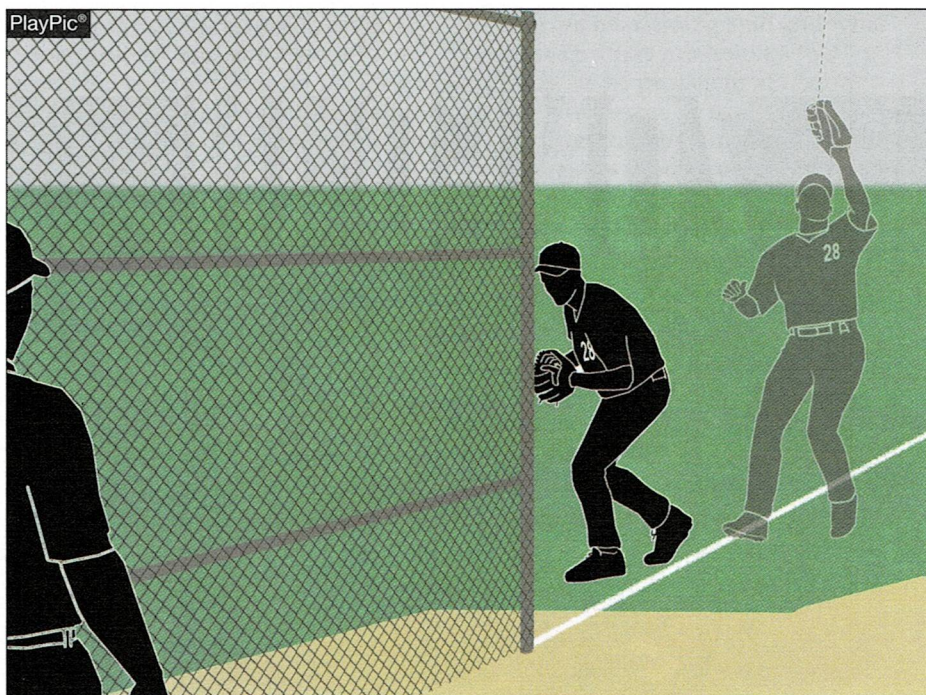
A player may touch or lean against the fence with the body or hands and make a legal catch even though the fence is pushed back, but may not push it back or down with either foot. That also pertains to an out-of-bounds fence.

**Dead-ball territory**

Under NFHS rules, a catch can be made as long as one foot (any part of it) is touching live-ball territory. Thus a catch can be made with one foot in live-ball territory and one foot in dead-ball territory, one foot in live-ball territory and one foot in the air or both feet in the air (provided one foot left from live-ball territory) (2.9.1C Cmt.). Jumping on top of a railing or canvas that may be in foul ground is usually prohibited by ground rule.

There is always a line of demarcation between live-ball and dead-ball territory. That could be a fence, a railing or a chalk line. Prep fields frequently have imaginary lines such as a fence line extended, a creek edge or the start of an upslope. Whatever the delineation is, it is considered live-ball territory (2.9.1C Cmt.).

A fielder may also enter dead-ball territory and re-enter live-ball territory to make a catch. If he does that he must comply with the requirements mentioned above. In NFHS, he need only get a foot down in live-ball territory. □



**QUICK TIP**

Letting the coach have a final word can help defuse the situation. Insisting on being the last one to interject something in the conversation can often serve to fuel the fire — and could lead to an ejection where one could have been avoided. Where appropriate, let the coach voice his opinion and leave it at that, especially if he's starting to walk away. Of course, if a coach crosses a line, the umpire will ultimately have the final say — with an ejection.

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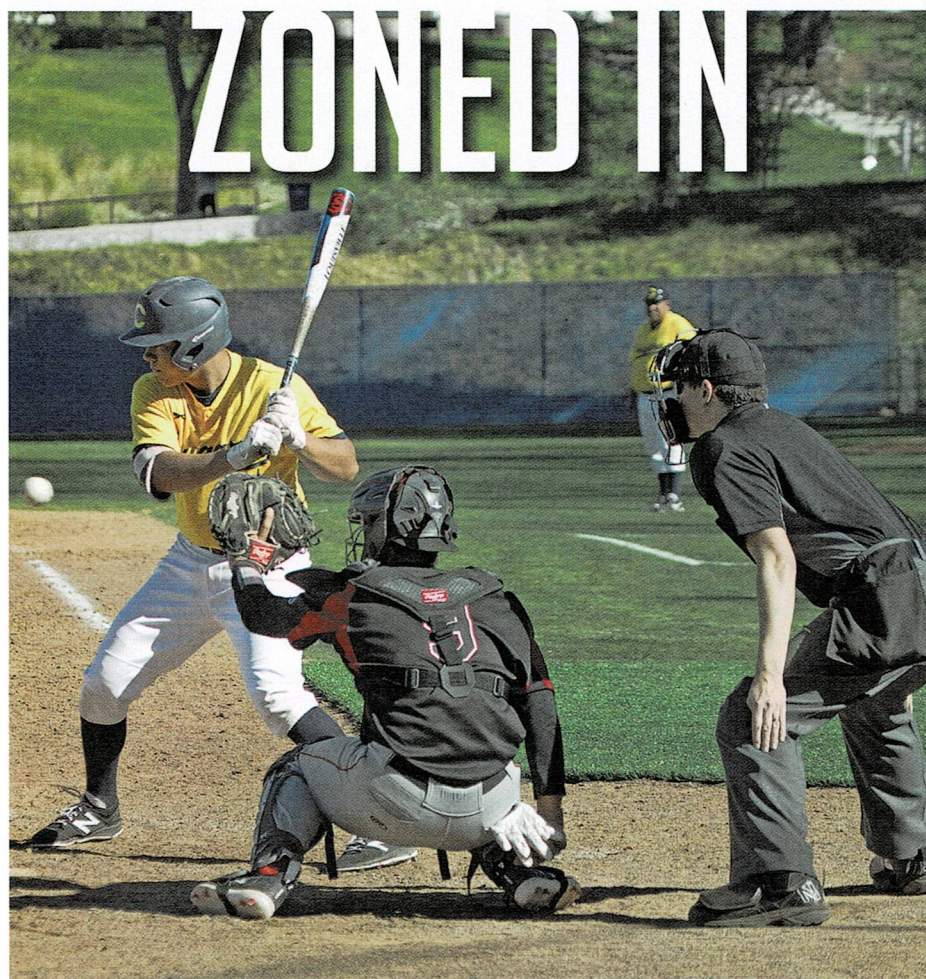


Plate umpire Michael Frain, Simi Valley, Calif.

If any part of the ball passes through any part of the strike zone, it is a strike. The strike zone is the space or area over home plate, and:

#### Top of the Zone

**NFHS:** Halfway between the batter's shoulders and the waistline.

#### Bottom of the Zone

**NFHS:** The knees.

Note: Definitions differ in relation to when the pitch is supposed to be judged. In NFHS, the determining factor is the batter's normal stance. □

## GET AN 'A' IN THE 'A POSITION'

Does your association have “good umpires”? Certainly it does. But are there a few umpires acknowledged to be better than the rest of the “good umpires?” Why is this so? It results to some degree from the better umpires doing more and seeing more during their time on the field. One way to enhance your positioning decisions and place yourself for better calls is to prepare for duties in the A position even before the game starts and half-innings begin.

OK, you jogged out to your position

on the edge of the outfield grass. You notice the catcher calling for a throw down to second base and take that as your cue to jog quickly to the A position. You look up and see the plate umpire step out from behind the plate and point at you for final confirmation that you are ready. As you point back at him to confirm that you are ready, are you really as ready as you can be?

How many times have you found yourself waiting for pregame actions to be completed so the plate umpire can begin the game? Ideally you jogged

from the home-plate meeting along the baseline past first base, then turned to a position at the outfield grass equidistant from both first base and second base. You stand there as you wait for the plate umpire to signal the last warmup pitch or the catcher to announce he will throw to second. Then you jog briskly to take up your position next to the baseline 10 to 12 feet behind the first baseman. This process takes a couple of minutes. You can and should use this time to improve your positioning and anticipation for calls. ►

► Consider making the following a habit:

1) Introduce yourself to the batting team base coach, if he is already present. Just a simple exchange of names in a cordial manner will do. Knowing his first name is helpful but not necessary to the communication process when you have to quell dissent on a call, i.e., “No, Coach Ken, he got him on the arm.” Be sure to introduce yourself to both team base coaches in the same manner. Keep it short, but be sure to do it.

2) Observe the playing area boundaries whether or not you are familiar with the field. Open dugouts, open or ill-fitting gates, gaps in fencing, the odd concrete post here and there and water drains all appear on baseball fields in foul territory behind first base. Make a mental note about how they can impact an overthrow. Are there obstacles in the line of an overthrown ball? Recognize trees or wires overhanging the field down the right-field boundary and prepare yourself to act accordingly. Situations with balls heading their way should have been covered in the pregame plate meeting, but be sure to recognize them from the A position before play begins. Check the gates as half-innings are getting ready to begin and remind bench personnel to close them.

3) Observe the area around your position. Is there a crown or bump along the baseline? Many groundskeeper-challenged high school fields have uneven surfaces along the right-field line behind first base. The last thing you need is to trip or stumble on uneven ground as you move into the infield or pivot to go out on a trouble fly ball.

4) Scan the dugout areas. Be alert for equipment or bats not stored within the confines of the dugout. Remind the appropriate coach to collect the stray team gear so the game isn't unnecessarily delayed. Be sure to get players and extra team attendants in the dugout well before play can begin.

5) Scan along the boundary fence for baseballs on the playing field. Some balls may not be picked up after infield practice or before-inning warmups — some could even remain

from a previous practice or game. Look for them and get them off the field. You should also scan for pieces of trash that might resemble a ball in the grass. Direct that these be picked up, too.

6) Observe infielder throws during warmups. You will probably get a couple of chances to observe second base, shortstop and third base throws. A third baseman whose practice throws consistently take the first baseman into the running lane on the home-plate side is likely to make a similar throw on a play in the upcoming innings. Watch for it and make a mental note. You can prepare yourself for a shift in positioning to account for this offline throw, which may prompt a swipe tag or collision.

7) Track the infielder warmup throws into the first baseman. You probably have about six throws to

observe his fielding skill and what he seems likely to do on a low throw. Is he proficient at digging out low throws or is every bounced throw getting by him? Knowing his tendencies makes your read-and-react process quicker if the ball is snagged or if it trickles by him to the boundary fence. Repeat this process when a substitute fielder enters at first base.

8) Keep observing the infield warmups during the game for offline-throw clues, especially when substitutions put a new player at second base, shortstop or third base.

Now, again, you see the plate umpire step out from behind the plate and point to you for final confirmation that you are ready. If you have taken care of business to get yourself ready for A position, when you point back to confirm that you are ready, you really are as ready as you can be! □

National Federation of State High School Associations



# NFHS RULES APP



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# BASEBALL INJURY SURVEILLANCE STUDY

As high school sports participation continues to increase in the United States, the number of sports injuries will also likely increase unless effective injury prevention programs are implemented. The NFHS Sports Medicine Advisory Committee and the NFHS Sport Rules Committees use information from the National High School Sports-Related Injury Surveillance Study (High School RIO™) to monitor rates and patterns of sports injuries among high school athletes. High School RIO™ is currently collecting the 14<sup>th</sup> year of sports exposure and injury data.

High School RIO™ data shows that boys' baseball has one of the lowest injury rates among the boys' sports

## REPORTING INFORMATION ONLINE

under surveillance. Baseball injury rates have remained relatively stable throughout the past 13 years. During the 2017/18 academic year, sprain/strains (38.7 percent) and concussions (13.5 percent) were the most common injuries sustained by baseball athletes. The body sites most commonly injured were the head/face (21.0 percent) followed by arm/elbow (18.7 percent). The most common injury mechanisms were contact with another player (15.1 percent), throwing-not pitching (13.7 percent) and contact with bases (11.6%).

In 2017/18, of the nine original sports under surveillance in High School RIO™, baseball had the lowest overall concussion rate. Understanding such patterns of injury is one important tool when keeping risk minimization as a priority in the efforts to keep baseball players as safe as possible.

If you are interested in more information on the High School RIO™ Study or a certified athletic trainer is interested in becoming a reporter for boys' baseball, please visit <http://www.ucdenver.edu/academics/colleges/PublicHealth/research/ResearchProjects/piper/projects/RIO/Pages/Study-Reports.aspx> for summary reports. □

## IT'S ABOUT TIME

In baseball, a time play is not formally defined in any of the codes, but is generally understood to occur when the runner crosses the plate at approximately the same time as the third out is made at another base.

The sequence of events determines whether the run scores. For example, with a runner on second and two outs, the batter singles and is out at second trying to stretch the base hit. If R2 crosses the plate before the batter's out, the run scores. If not, no run scores.

When there's a potential for a time play — when there are two outs and a runner in scoring position — umpires signal each other by tapping their wrist with two fingers, as Jamie Payne of Dobson, N.C., demonstrates in the photo.

On a time play, each umpire has a set job. For the base umpire, it's nothing out of the ordinary. In fact, it is critical that the base umpire do everything correctly and normally. If, in the play example, B1 was safe at second, there is no time play to be called.

The base umpire must not rush the call — the plate umpire can see when the tag was applied and that's the important



Jamie Payne, Dobson, N.C., signals to his partner that the potential exists for a timing play should the offensive team put the ball in play.

time, not when the base umpire calls the out.

For the plate umpire, recognition that a time play is possible is key. In the

play above, seeing the batter stretch the single into a potential double is the most significant clue. The plate umpire should be directly behind the plate, in line with the potential play on the bases.

See if the tag is made before or after the runner who is attempting to score crosses the plate. Don't make any signal until the base umpire calls the runner at second out. If that runner is safe, there's no time play to judge. When the base umpire does make the out call, only then should the plate umpire indicate emphatically whether to score the run or wave it off. □

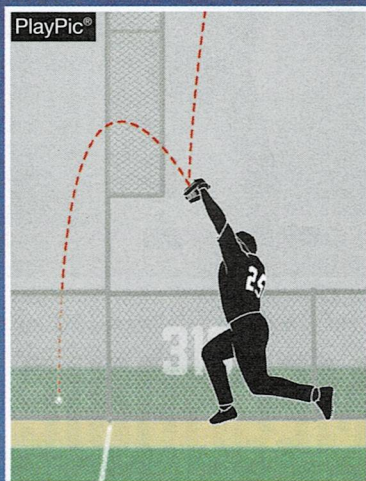
### QUICK TIP

Coaches form impressions of umpires with whom they're not familiar by watching their body language as they walk to the plate for the pregame meeting. Umpires either convey the message they're ready for prime time or they don't, and those impressions can last forever. Moving with a purpose and keeping things businesslike will contribute to a good field presence.

# FOUL POLE FOLLIES

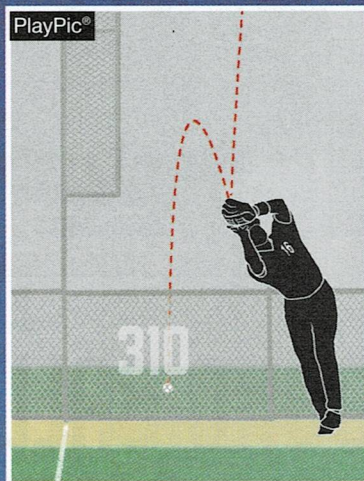
**A**n outfielder making a play on a fly ball at the foul pole requires a pretty well-hit ball by the batter and some extraordinary athletics by the outfielder. If the ball is caught, it's typically a spectacular play. But

what happens if things go awry, as they often can in this great game? Let's explore some more unusual situations and how the rules apply.



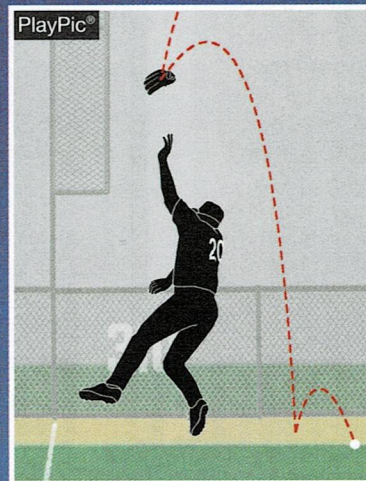
## DEFLECTED FOUL

**Play:** A fly ball deflects off the fielder's glove (properly worn) and goes over the fence in foul territory. If the fielder hadn't deflected the ball, it would have gone over the fence in fair territory. **Ruling:** Two-base award (NFHS 8-3-3c; NCAA 8-3o-2; pro 5.06-4F).



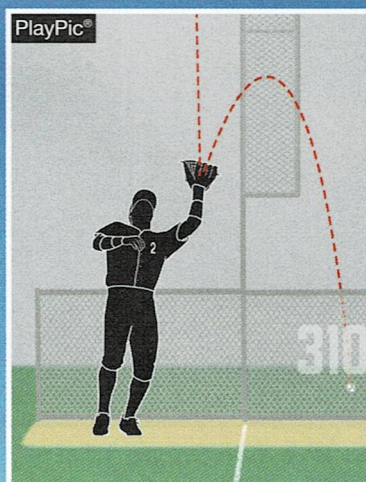
## DEFLECTED FAIR

**Play:** A fair fly ball deflects off the fielder's glove and goes over the fence on the fair territory side of the foul pole or hits the foul pole. **Ruling:** Home run. If a fly ball deflects off a glove (or, as Jose Canseco learned in '93, his head) and goes over the fence between the foul poles or hits the pole, it's treated as if it had gone over the fence in flight (NFHS 8-3-3a; NCAA 8-3h; pro 5.06-4A).



## DETACHED GLOVE

**Play:** A fly ball that would have gone over the fence in flight in fair territory is deflected back on the field by the fielder's glove, which was deliberately tossed in the air by the fielder. **Ruling:** Detached player equipment. Four-base award if the umpire judges the detached player equipment prevented the ball from going over the fence (NFHS 8-3-3a; NCAA 8-3h; pro 5.06b-4A).



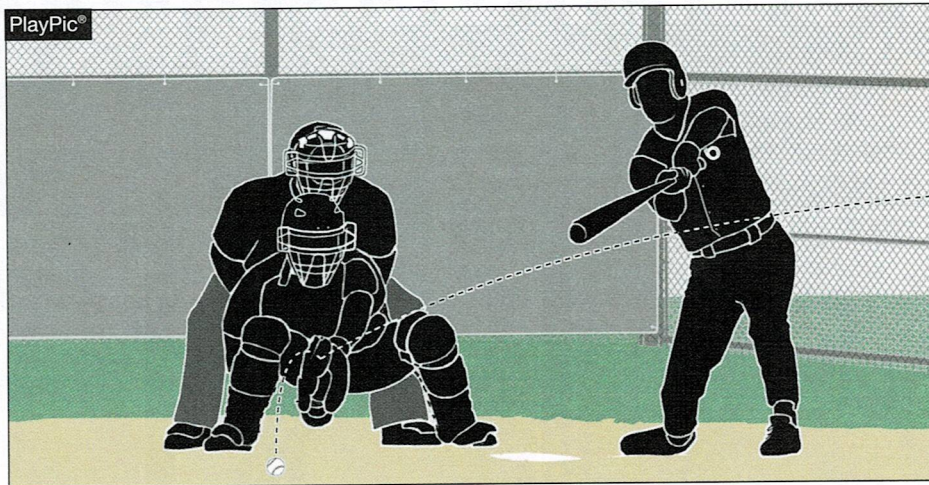
## TOUCHED FOUL

**Play:** A fly ball is touched by the fielder in foul territory but deflected over the fence in fair territory. **Ruling:** Foul ball. As soon as the ball was touched by the fielder in foul territory, it became a foul ball. If the catch is not completed, the ball is dead (NFHS 2-16; NCAA 2-35; pro Def. Foul Ball).

# DROPPED THIRD POINT OF NO RETURN

On a dropped third strike (as shown in the PlayPic) when the batter-runner is permitted to attempt to advance to first (i.e., less than two outs with first unoccupied or with two outs), when does that ability to run end?

The batter-runner may try to advance to first until the time of the next pitch, until he reaches his bench or other dead-ball area or until the infielders have left the diamond when the half-inning has ended (8-4-1i). Depending on the dugout's location and when the batter-runner begins running to first, that can result in a strange route to first base — but the unusual path would still be legal. □



# BASES LOADED, GROUND BALL MECHANIC

In the two-umpire system, a ground ball to the infield with bases loaded provides the potential for a double play with lots to observe.

With a runner headed home, the plate umpire (P) can't enter the infield to observe the slide at second base, but remains responsible for that call.

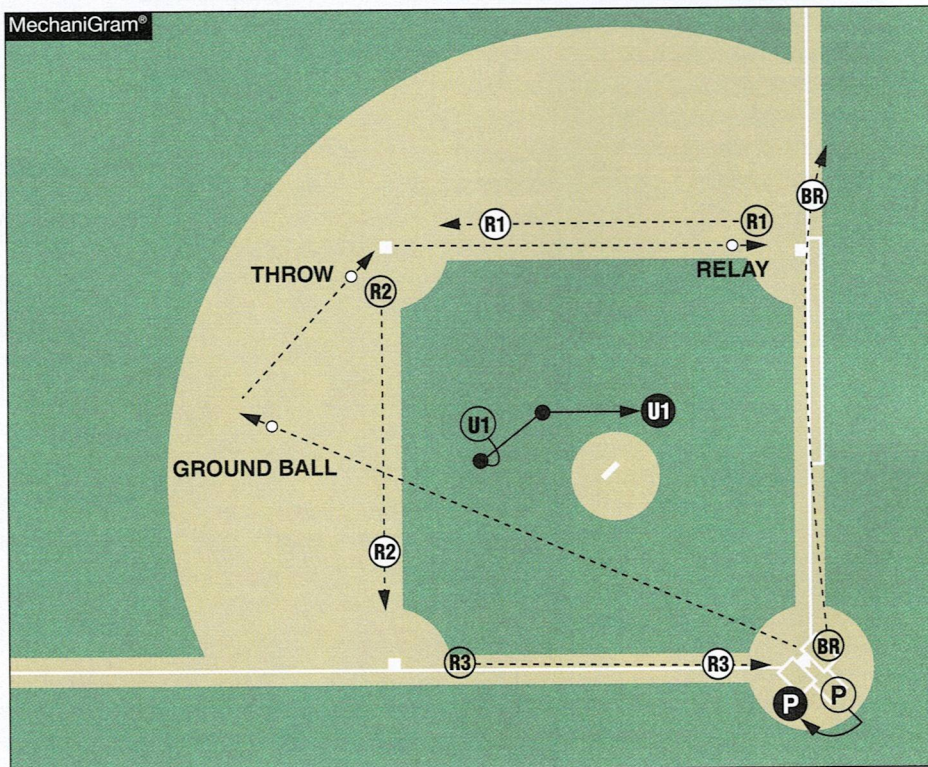
The base umpire (U1), who starts in "C" position, takes a step forward and turns with the batted ball. As the throw heads toward second base, U1 steps toward first base and gets into standing-set position for the play at second. Then, U1 moves one step more toward first while calling the play at second, getting set for the play at first. U1 should not

overcommit to first base in case there is a subsequent play at another base. If R1 was safe at second, U1 moves back

toward second after the play ends. U1 also has responsibility for any play on R2 at third base. □

## QUICK TIP

If a catcher shifts inside and restricts the view of the slot, don't try to move to the catcher's opposite side. Such a move will put you at greater risk of getting hit by a foul ball and provides a foreign vantage point to assess the pitch. Instead, adjust upward.



# R1 + R2 + FLY TO RIGHT

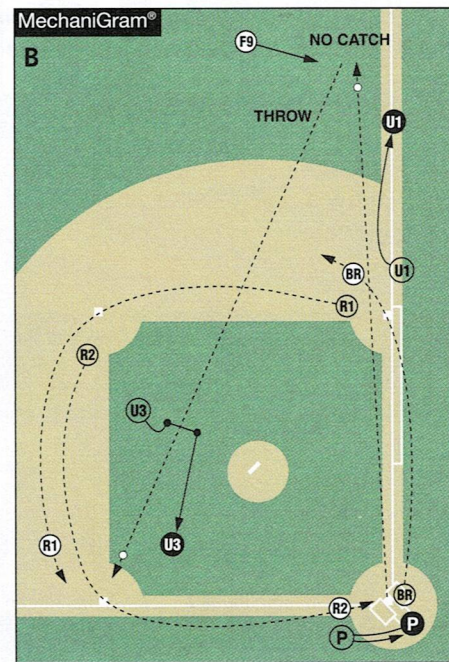
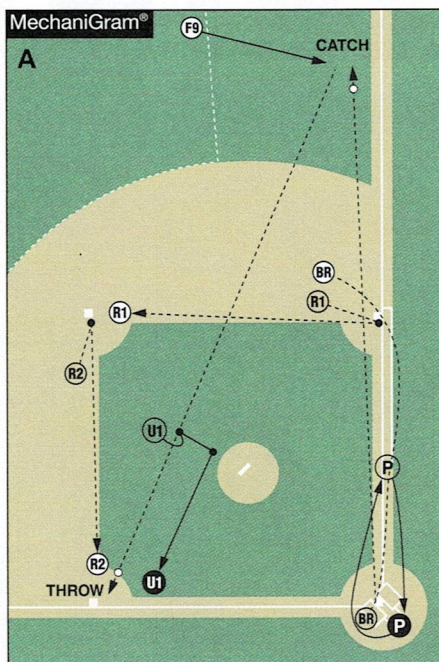
In the two-umpire system with runners on first and second and a fly ball down the right-field line (MechaniGram A), the plate umpire (P) has responsibility for the fly ball.

P will move up the line and get the best position possible to view fair/foul and catch/no catch. Communication between umpires is important in these situations. P should let U1 know that P is on the line — and thus not available to cover third if R2 tags up and advances to third. After ruling on the fly ball, P returns to the plate.

U1, who starts in the “C” position, will take a step toward the mound to open up the view of the runner. U1 is responsible for both R2 and R1 tagging up. U1 also retains responsibility for all plays on the bases.

In the three-umpire system (MechaniGram B), coverage changes slightly. U3 starts in the “C” position and U1 starts in the “A” position. U3 goes out to cover the fly ball. U3 retains responsibility for R2 and R1 tagging up.

P will take a play on R2 at third base if the ball is caught and R2 tags up



and advances. P should communicate to U3, “I have third if he tags.” U3 has responsibility for all other plays on the bases, including any plays on R1 or the

batter-runner at third. If R2 does not tag up, P stays at home for any plays there and U3 has all plays on the bases. □

## ONE LAST LOOK

Before a half-inning begins, remember to check the field and backstop for stray baseballs. That’s especially important before the top of the first inning. Teams often use old, discolored baseballs for infield, outfield and batting practice. Those “experienced” balls can sometimes blend in with the warning track, grass and other areas surrounding the field. The last thing you want is a fielder inadvertently (or purposely, for that matter) picking up one of those strays and throwing it to make a play on a runner. If you’ve been busy between innings recording lineup changes or getting a drink of water, you can miss seeing a warmup pitch thrown to the backstop. That’s an even bigger recipe for disaster since it’s a game ball and could easily be confused for the one that’s supposed to be in play. □

JIM WHITE



Greg Lentz, Carmel, Ind.

# CHOOSE YOUR DELIVERY METHOD

Foul batted balls leaving the field of play are a frequent occurrence at most fields — and, in the interest of keeping the game moving, umpires need to be ready to get another ball in play.

## There are two approaches:

1. Hand a ball to the catcher, as shown by umpire John Cyr of Woodridge, Ill.
2. Throw a ball to the pitcher.

Both approaches have merits and drawbacks:



### Handing the ball to the catcher

The catcher's arm is warmed up and ready to make that throw, so the umpire doesn't have to worry about it. In fact, if you get into a good rhythm with the catcher, he will reach back without looking. Simply deposit the ball into his waiting hand or glove and a new ball quickly gets tossed to the pitcher and the game can resume. The plate umpire looks like he or she is on top of things. Just don't mess up the handoff or you'll be wasting time chasing baseballs dropped to the dirt.

### Throwing the ball to the pitcher

The umpire throwing the ball right to the pitcher cuts out the middleman, potentially shaving off a bit of time every time a new ball must be put into play. But a botched throw not only wastes time and creates embarrassment, there's a risk of injury — a few years back, a high school pitcher in a Wisconsin postseason game landed badly on his ankle trying to snag an umpire's errant throw to the mound; the pitcher had to leave the game. You can keep the game moving by throwing the ball directly to the pitcher, but make sure you can fire it accurately to the pitcher time after time.

DEAN REID