

## **FHSAA SOFTBALL MECHANICS — 2024**

[Updated 30 December 2023]

Florida high school softball umpire mechanics are based on the NFHS Umpire Manual — with a significant number of modifications that improve the umpires' ability to accurately and fairly officiate our games. When working FHSAA games, use FHSAA mechanics. NCAA softball (or any baseball) mechanics are NOT authorized.

### **WORKING THE PLATE**

The Heel-Toe Stance in the Slot Position with a Good Pelvic Alignment to the front outside corner of the plate is the only acceptable stance for FHSAA Softball. The hand placement requirement is waived. Hands will be in front of the body, in the best working position for the individual umpire.

### **POSITIONING GOALS**

Starting positions and distances are specified in the *Three Umpire Tips* document on the FHSAA Central Hub. When making a call, umpires must strive to be in the best position to see all four elements of the play — Ball, Base, Runner and Defender.

- **FORCE PLAY** – 18 to 21 feet calling distance at a 90-degree angle to the flight of the thrown ball. (Do not go past 45-degrees off the line for plays at 1B.)
- **TAG PLAY** – 10 to 12 feet calling distance with the four elements in view. As the play develops, the best calling position changes as the runner, defender, and ball move. Move and adjust as required to keep all four elements in view.

### **STARTING POSITIONS with RUNNER on THIRD BASE ONLY**

With a runner at 3rd Base ONLY, U3 will be 12 feet from the base—a full stride off the line in foul ground—in a set position and square to the plate. U1 will be 18-21 feet from the base, in foul ground close to the line, shoulders square to the plate. U1 will WALK the line.

### **U1 STARTING POSITION with a RUNNER ON FIRST BASE ONLY**

With a runner on 1B only, U1 will be 12 feet behind the base, with the right foot 12-18 inches off the line—in a set position and square to the plate. Turn your head slightly to look through the runner at the pitcher. U1 may stay in the set position for an attempted pick-off. You're in perfect position to see a tag or obstruction by F3.

## **U1 COUNTER-ROTATED**

U1 normally takes a position off the 2nd baseman's shoulder when counter-rotated. (Right shoulder if there is a runner on 2B, left shoulder if there is no runner on 2B.) If the defense takes a position that is far from the "normal," U1 should adjust to stay in the middle 30' and not be pushed too deep. If the 2nd baseman is playing extremely deep, move farther off her shoulder and stay a step-and-a-half behind an imaginary line drawn between her and the adjacent fielder (1st baseman or shortstop).

## **FOUL GROUND**

When an umpire's starting position is ON THE LINE, the movement into FOUL GROUND can effectively accomplish our goals.

### FIRST BASE (U1)

When the 2<sup>nd</sup> baseman fields a ball close to first base or at the edge of the infield moving in the direction of first base, the normal movement into the infield can cause the umpire to be in a direct throwing lane—or worse—interfere with the play. The option of staying on the line or moving into foul ground will allow the umpire to keep their calling distance for the force play and establish a 90 degree angle to the throw. This positioning allows the umpire to see all 4-elements (ball, base, runner & defender) of the play without being in a throwing lane or potentially interfering with the play.

With a ball hit to the right-fielder, who is in a position to attempt a throw to first base to retire the batter-runner, these same optional movements and positioning can allow the umpire a good view of the play.

In either of these optional positioning movements, the umpire is still in a good position for any secondary calls that may be needed. If the batter-runner rounds and returns to first base, continue to move through foul ground to a position inside the diamond 10 to 12 feet from first base with a 90-degree angle to the path of the returning runner. If the batter-runner continues to advance and a rotation is needed, simply advance in foul ground to the rotated holding position at home plate.

### THIRD BASE (U3)

With a runner at 3<sup>rd</sup> base, if the catcher attempts a pick-off play at 3<sup>rd</sup>, the umpire should move in foul ground from their starting position (12 feet from the base—off the line in foul ground and in a set position) to a calling position 10 to 12 feet from the base with a good view of the returning runner, the base, the ball, and the defender. Movements into the diamond for any over-throw or secondary plays are easily done without placing the umpire into possible throwing lanes.

With multiple runners on base and a base hit or extra base hit, the option of moving in foul ground to a position inside 3rd base allows the umpire to observe runners touching the base, see the play develop, and move into a preferred calling position—all without being in a throwing lane, possibly interfering with a fielder, or obstructing a runner.

### **WORKING OUTSIDE THE DIAMOND**

#### **FIRST BASE (U1)**

With no runners on base or a runner at 1<sup>st</sup> Base only — U1 can move directly into fair territory remaining outside the diamond on balls hit to left or center. U1 observes the batter-runner approach and round 1<sup>st</sup> base. U1 must be prepared to take any return play into 1<sup>st</sup> Base or to rotate to the plate if a rotation is required.

When Counter-Rotated and U3 does not go out, U1 has the option of working outside the diamond parallel to the base-line between 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> base or moving inside the diamond and working parallel to the base line as dictated by the play.

#### **THIRD BASE (U3)**

When starting rotated with a runner on 1st base only, and U1 DOES NOT go out — U3 can work outside of the diamond, moving parallel to the base line between 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> base when required. If U1 does go out, button-hook inside the diamond for any potential play at 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> base.

### **TWO UMPIRE MECHANICS**

The base umpire in the two-umpire system may also work outside the diamond when starting in A or B. On a ball hit to left, you have everything in front of you while working parallel to the baseline between 1B and 2B. If the runner attempts extra bases, cut inside and get to calling position for a potential tag play.

#### **COVERING 1B WHEN U1 GOES OUT (NO RUNNERS)**

Normally, when one of the base umpires covers a ball to the outfield, the other two umpires revert to two-ump mechanics. However, when U1 goes out with no runners on base, the Plate Umpire will cover 1B and U3 will move directly to calling position at second base. It makes more sense to have Plate move 50' than to have U3 try to move 85'. In this case, U3 has all calls at 2B and 3B and Plate takes all calls at 1B and home plate. Use this mechanic regardless of number of outs.

### **BRACKETING FOUL BALLS**

When starting on the line, base umpires should bracket foul popups with the plate umpire. The umpire that the fielder is facing takes the catch/no catch call. (Plate umpire

always has fair/foul.) The remaining base umpire assumes responsibility for runners tagging up to advance or returning to their bases.

### **TIMING PLAY SIGNAL**

Timing plays occur when the third out is made on the bases (not a force out) and the timing of the out determines whether or not a run scores. Like infield fly situations, it is important that the crew be aware of a potential timing play. Crews are encouraged to use a signal (tap the outside of the left wrist with one or two fingers of the right hand) to communicate potential timing plays.

- Two-out Timing Play — whenever we have baserunner(s) and two outs.
- One-out Timing Play — whenever we have multiple runners with the lead runner on 3B and one out.

### **“I HAVE NOTHING” SAFE SIGNAL**

There can be several situations (typically on potential interference or obstruction calls) in which the umpire sees the near interference or near obstruction, but judges that no violation has occurred. By giving a safe signal, the umpire can communicate to players, coaches, and fans, “Yes, I saw what you saw, but *I have nothing.*”

### **HOLDING POSITION FOR CALLS AT THE PLATE — THE WEDGE**

The old standard position for a developing tag play at the plate — 1B line extended / back of the right hand batters box — is not be the best position in today’s more athletic game. Use the WEDGE — plate umpire starts from a holding position behind the point of the plate to read the developing play. Put yourself about 10’ back of the catcher’s plate-side hip and see the ball in the “wedge” between the runner and the catcher. As the catcher rotates to make the tag, rotate with her to keep all four elements in view.

### **CONFERENCES & TIME OUTS**

When a team is granted a conference for a coach or bench personnel to meet with defensive or offensive players, the other team may also meet—as long as they are ready to play when the original conference is over. If the defensive team requests a time out (not a conference) for a player-to-player meeting, do NOT allow base runners to leave the area of their bases to meet with the 1st or 3rd base coach. “*Coach, we do not have a defensive conference. Would you like to use your offensive conference for this inning?*”

## **INTERFERENCE WITH A THROWN BALL**

In high school, the ONLY way a runner (active or retired) can interfere with a thrown ball is if she does so INTENTIONALLY. [Example: If a runner on 1B is forced at second and then is hit by the throw to first, she has not committed interference unless she intentionally made a move to contact the thrown ball.]