

Softball Points of Emphasis - 2024

By NFHS on September 01, 2023

softball

Game Management

Coach and umpire communication should be conversational, not confrontational. Passion for their team is often the root of fiery responses from coaches about plays or rulings that they felt went against their team. As an umpire, it is important to balance an understanding of the passion coaches hold for their teams and the sporting expectations of education-based athletics. There has to be a mutual respect for each other and a professionalism that is followed by both coaches and umpires to maintain the working relationship that is imperative to have a successful game. Listening to understand a coach's issue so you can properly respond to their concerns is a huge part of defusing the situation. Maintaining a calm demeanor when speaking to the coach also often helps to lower the temperature of the conversation and assists in having a more meaningful discussion. Another helpful tool for the umpire is utilizing rule book terminology to help keep discussions on topic and achieve resolution more quickly.

Another key aspect of game management is managing the flow of the game. Last year, NFHS had a point of emphasis about the 60 seconds between innings. Although umpires are not there to "rush" players, one of the responsibilities of an umpire is to help maintain a good flow of the game. This can be done without being overly aggressive, often just a simple "here we go" or "let's get ready to play red" is all the encouragement that a team needs to know that it is time to get back to playing. Utilizing these simple reminders during each half-inning as well as during charged conferences can help make sure a good game flow is maintained.

Unacceptable Conditions

Umpire jurisdiction is limited to the confines of the field of play. Items outside of the field of play, like spectator behavior, is monitored and controlled by event management. Absent a designated event manager, the home team's head coach assumes this responsibility. Most spectator behavior never reaches a level that would be considered dangerous or severe enough to cause a concern for participant safety. However, if conditions become unacceptable for play due to spectator conduct, umpires have the authority to call (end) the contest. Again, this is a very rare occurrence and all attempts should be made to have event management control the situation prior to ending a contest.

In addition to spectator behavior, other external conditions could result in the umpire having to call (end) the contest. For example, at the start of a game, a wildfire might be a safe distance with winds carrying the smoke away from the field. If these conditions change and result in conditions becoming unacceptable for play, it may result in an umpire having to call (end) the game.

Unreported vs. Illegal Substitutions

An illegal substitute is a player who is ineligible to occupy a position in the lineup. This can occur when a player:

1. Enters or re-enters the game without eligibility to do so (illegal re-entry).
2. Re-enters the game in the wrong position in the batting order.
3. Is the (F.P.) FLEX and enters the game as a batter or runner in a different position in the batting order than the DP.

4. Violates the courtesy runner rule.

All of these violations result in an illegal substitution and the penalties for offensive violations are defined in Rule 3-4-2 and penalties for defensive violations are detailed in Rule 3-4-3. Along with additional penalties, one consistent penalty for all possible violations is the illegal substitute is restricted to the dugout for the remainder of the game on the first offense.

In contrast to an illegal substitute, an unreported substitute is a player that could legally occupy the position they are in the lineup but has simply failed to report that they are entering the game. All substitutions and courtesy runners are required to be reported to the plate umpire upon entering the game. When a player enters the game unreported, a warning is issued to the head coach. Any subsequent violation results in both the head coach and player being restricted to the dugout for the remainder of the game.

Pitching Mechanics: Replant

The allowance for both feet to disengage from the playing surface while delivering a pitch has increased the concern about pitching mechanics involving a replant of the pivot foot. A replant during the delivery would result in an illegal pitch. To help assist in enforcement of this rule, a new definition of replant was created. Rule 2-47 now defines that a replant of the pivot foot occurs when the pitcher pushes off the playing surface from anywhere other than the pitcher's plate prior to the act of delivering the pitch. With this definition in mind, it is an illegal action if the pitcher slides the foot forward past the pitching plate pushing off to start their movement from a position in front of the pitching plate (no part of their foot is still in contact with or over the pitching plate). Another common action, often referred to as "closing the hip," is pushing with the pivot foot while delivering the pitch. Depending on the pitching style, the pitcher will either bring the pivot foot forward to square up toward the batter or the pitcher will tuck the pivot foot behind the non-pivot foot. This push is during the act of delivering the pitch and is legal.