

# Westchester County Baseball Umpires Association Inc.

## GUIDE TO THE DH RULE

The high school designated hitter (DH) rule changed for the 2020 season, adding a new flexibility for teams, but adding a layer of complexity for umpires charged with ensuring the rules are followed, especially substitution rules related to the DH.

When teams submit their lineup cards at the pregame plate meeting, teams now have three options under NFHS rule 3-1-4

1. "Straight Nine"
2. "Traditional "DH
3. Player / DH

The following will explore the three options and will break down what teams can and cannot do related to the DH.

---

### **"STRAIGHT NINE"**

Teams aren't required to use a DH. When a team submits a lineup card with a DH, it is often called a "straight nine" since there are only nine starting player reflected in the lineup, all playing a defensive position and batting in one of the nine spots in the order.

**If a team starts with a "straight nine" lineup, later in the game can they decide to add a DH?**

**No.**

Rule 3-1-4 explicitly states that a team forfeits the use of the DH if it fails to declare a DH prior to the game.

During the pregame plate meeting the coaches, it's always good to inform that the team won't be using a DH and that everything is accurate on the lineup cards. Before the lineups cards have been accepted and made official, this is the last opportunity to correct something, such as whether a team intended to use a DH.

### **"TRADITIONAL NINE"**

The "traditional" high school DH rule provides a great deal of flexibility compared to the DH at the college and pro levels, where the DH may only bat for the pitcher.

Here are the highlights:

- The use of a "traditional" DH must be declared prior to the start of the game.
- A DH may be designated for any one of the starting nine, not just the pitcher.

- With a “traditional” DH a team effectively has 10 starters, each of whom has one-time re-entry rights under substitution rule 3-1-3.
- Both the DH and the player for whom the DH is batting may independently have substitutes.
- The DH and the player for whom he is batting are locked into that spot in the batting order. Also, the starting DH (and any substitutes) and the player for whom the DH is batting (and any substitutes) can NEVER be in the game defensively at the same time.
- The role of the DH is terminated for the remainder of the game when the defensive player (or any previous defensive player) for whom the DH batted pinch-hits or pinch-runs for the DH or when the DH or any previous DH assumes a defensive position.

**Can the “traditional” DH position have a substitute?**

**Yes.**

Just like any other position in the lineup, both the DH and the person for whom the DH is hitting are starters, can have substitutions and may also re-enter the game one time. Any substitutions, however, cannot alter the batting order.

**Can the “traditional” DH play a defensive position and remain the DH?**

**No.**

Once the “traditional” Dh enters the game defensively, the DH position is eliminated. That player then becomes the person occupying that spot in the lineup both offensively and defensively. (The new player/DH option will allow for the DH to occupy both the defensive spot and the DH spot.)

**Can the player who has the DH hitting for him enter the game in another position in the batting order?**

**No.**

A DH and the player for whom he is batting are locked into the batting order. That player can enter the game offensively, but only in the spot that the DH was occupying. When that occurs, the DH position is terminated for the remainder of the game.

**Can the player for whom the DH is batting for pinch-run for the DH without impacting the DH position?**

**No.**

If the defensive player for whom the DH is batting bats, pinch-hits or pinch-runs for the DH, the DH position is terminated for the remainder of the game. However, another eligible substitute may replace the DH at –bat or on the bases, and the substitute would become the new DH.

**After the DH position has been eliminated, is there still a way that the original DH can legally have another at-bat?**

**Yes.**

Under the “traditional” DH rule, that scenario is possible due to the re-entry rule. However, in that circumstance, the player is no longer considered a DH- the player enters as a straight substitute. This circumstance is probably the most complicated legal substitution scenario that can occur with a “traditional” DH.

Let’s walk through how this might play out; Irwin is the DH, batting for Baker in the 2 spot. Baker is playing first base. For the first three innings, Irwin bats while Baker plays defensively. In the fourth inning, the coach decides to have Baker bat for himself. That terminates the DH position for the remainder of the game. Baker is now batting and playing defensively in the 2 spot in the lineup and Irwin is out of the game. In the fifth inning, the coach puts Irwin in to bat again. This is legal because Irwin, as a starter, and re-enter the game one time (and it must be in the same position in the batting order). But he re-enters as substitute for Baker and not as the DH. In the sixth inning, the coach puts Baker back in the game – also legal because Baker also has re-entry rights as a starter. (At that point, Irwin cannot re-enter the game because he has used up his re-entry rights). If Baker is later removed from the game, he cannot return.

**If a team started with a “traditional” DH, can they later switch to a player/DH, or vice versa?**

**No.**

Once the start the game with a particular DH option, they cannot change to the other type of DH.

## **Player /DH**

This option is the new rules wrinkle added for the 2020 season. A player starts the game as both the defensive player and the DH.

Here are some highlights:

- A player/DH may be any of the nine starting players.
- The defensive role may be substituted by any legal substitute, but only the starting player/DH can ever occupy the DH role.
- If another player substitutes into the defensive role, the original player /DH may re-enter defensively one time and retain the player/DH status. That counts as the starters re-entry.
- The player/DH and any substitutes in the defensive role are locked into that spot in the batting order. Also, the starting player/DH and any substitutes can never be in the game defensively at the same time.
- The DH role is terminated for the remainder of the game if a substitute (including a player already in the defensive role) pinch-hits or pinch-runs for the player/DH.

### **Does the player/DH have to be the pitcher?**

**No.**

Although pitch count limits may have factored into the desire to have a player/DH option (and thus have another option to keep a hitter in the game after he has been removed from the mound), any player in any position can start as the player/DH'

### **Can someone substitute for the starting player/DH as a substitute player/DH?**

**No.**

A substitute can only enter in a defensive role. If a substitute hits or runs, the role of the DH is terminated. Only the starting player/DH can occupy the DH role.

### **Can multiple eligible substitutes substitute in the defensive role, without impacting the DH role?**

**Yes.**

Multiple legal substitutions in the defensive role are permitted and do not impact the DH role.

**Can someone substitute for the player/DH as a hitter or runner without impacting the DH role?**

**No.**

If someone substitutes for the starting player/DH as a hitter or a runner, the role of the DH is terminated. No one else can bat for a player/DH without terminating the DH for the remainder of the game.

**When a player/DH has a substitute in the defensive role and later returns in the defensive role, does that count as the player/DH's re-entry for purposes of re-entry rights?**

**Yes.**

If the player/DH has another player assume the defensive role, the player/DH can re-enter the defensive role once. Doing so effectively counts as re-entry. In that case, if the starter is substituted for later in the game, that starter cannot then re-enter.

Say, for example, that Davis starts as the 1b/DH in the No. 4 spot in the lineup. In the second inning, Jackson takes the defensive role; Davis continues as the DH. In the third inning Davis re-enters at first base. Jackson, as a substitute, does not have re-entry rights and is done for the game. Another substitute could take the defensive role and shift Davis back to the DH role only. If that substitute or another substitute pinch-hits or pinch-runs not only is the DH role terminated, but Davis has already used his re-entry rights and cannot come back into the game in any capacity.

**In the second inning, another player bats for the starting player/DH, thus ending the DH role. Is it still possible for the starting player/DH to re-enter?**

**Yes.**

Provided the starting player/DH has not had a substitute in the defensive and then returned to that defensive role, he still has re-entry rights. But once someone bats for the starting player/DH, the DH role is terminated for the remainder of the game – so the re-entry would be a standard re-entry.

Say, for example, the Davis starts as the 1b/DH in the 4 spot in the lineup. In the second inning, Jackson takes the defensive role, Davis continues as the DH. In the sixth inning of a tied game Davis hits a double. The coach decides to have the speedier Jackson run for Davis. That terminates the DH role. As a starter Davis still has re-entry rights. But if he does so, he re-enters as a standard player (on defense in the 4 spot).

**What if a player/DH is replaced because of injury – can that substitute continue as the player/DH?**

**No.**

If an eligible substitute replaces the player/DH as a pinch-runner (or pinch-hitter), the role of the DH is terminated and the player/DH option is removed from the game. An injury does not create an exception.

**Is it ever possible for the starting player/DH and a substitute in the defensive role to play defensively at the same time?**

**No.**

When another player assumes the defensive role, the starting player/DH becomes the DH only. While the starting player/DH can return once to the defensive role, if a substitute in the defensive role ever pinch-hits or pinch-runs, the role of the Dh is terminated.

**Under the player/DH rule, can anyone else ever become the DH?**

**No.**

Only the starting player/DH can be the DH. Any offensive substitutions terminate the role of the DH.

**Can a player/DH who starts as the pitcher, and is replaced as the pitcher in the third inning, return to pitch in the fourth inning?**

**Yes.**

Unlike some pitcher/DH rules variations that exist in some states, the NFHS player/DH does not restrict a player from pitching, provided all other pitching rules are met.

## **PENALTIES**

Preventive officiating can help avoid illegal substitutions related to the DH. There's nothing wrong with flagging an issue before the illegal substitution is accepted. But sometimes the illegal change doesn't get noticed until well after it has occurred, leaving the umpire to sort out the proper penalties.

An illegal substitute is defined under NFHS rule 2-36-3 as a player who enters or re-enters the game without eligibility to do so; a player who re-enters the game in the wrong position in the batting order; a player who enters the game the game on defense when a player for whom he is batting is also on defense; when a player for whom the DH is batting enters the game as a batter or runner in a different position in the batting order; or a player who violates the courtesy runner rule.

NFHS rule 3-1-1 sorts out the penalties for an illegal substitution. A player who is discovered to be an illegal substitute on offense is called out and restricted to the dugout for the remainder of the game. If an illegal offensive substitute is discovered after a player that scores a run, advances or allows another runner to advance but before a pitch to the next batter, the play is nullified. Any outs made on the play stand and the other runner(s) are returned to the base occupied at the time of the pitch. The penalty for an illegal substitution supersedes the penalty for batting out of order.

If discovered on defense, the illegal player is immediately removed and restricted to the dugout for the remainder of the game. If the illegal player is involved in a play and the infraction is discovered before the first pitch to the next batter, the team on offense has the option to let the play stand or allow the batter to bat again.

In all cases, the illegal substitute is removed from the game.

## **LINEUP CARD MANAGEMENT**

Good lineup card management practices will make it easier for umpires to keep track of who's in the game in what capacity, who has re-entry right and who is not permitted to return. Ideally, whatever system is used should make it easy for another umpire to pick up the lineup card and quickly understand the situation. That can become a necessity if a game is suspended or resumed a later date with another crew.

Some key Things to consider:

- Always confirm at the plate meeting whether the DH is being used and if so, the type of DH.
- Coaches have different ways of filling out lineup cards. With a "traditional" DH make sure it's clear for whom the DH is hitting.
- If a player/Dh assumes the DH-only role (when a sub enters in a defensive role), circle the DH or otherwise make some indication on the lineup card that this transition has occurred. Also make a notation if the player/DH makes his one-time return to the defensive role as this uses his one-time re-entry rights.
- Make sure you know who has re-entry rights. That will have a huge impact on allowable substitutions.
- If you are not certain of whether a change is permitted, don't be afraid to get together with your partner(s) to sort it out. Better to delay the game for a moment to ensure proper enforcement of a substitution rule to have to sort out a mess later in the game.

