Softball Comments on the Rules - 2027

BY NFHS ON SEPTEMBER 22, 2026 | RULES, SOFTBALL

1-9-6 EXCEPTION - One-way electronic communication may be utilized by coaches to communicate from the dugout to the pitcher and/or catcher while the team is on defense. Previously, one-way electronic communication was permitted only to the catcher.

This change reflects the continued evolution of technology within the sport and provides coaches with an additional method to efficiently communicate defensive strategy and game management information. By expanding the exception to include the pitcher, coaches can deliver information directly to the two primary defensive leaders on the field, reducing the need for multiple signals and improving the pace and flow of the game.

This remains a permissive rule, allowing schools and teams to determine whether they wish to utilize one-way electronic communication technology. Teams may continue to use traditional communication methods, such as hand signals, wristbands, and/or play cards.

Regardless of the electronic device capabilities, under this exception they must only be utilized for one-way communication from the dugout to the pitcher and/or catcher. Players are not permitted to use these devices to transmit information back to coaches or other team personnel. All other provisions regarding the use of electronic devices remain in effect.

2-46-3a - The definition of an initial play has been clarified to align with other areas of the rules book. Under this rule change, once a fair batted ball has touched any fielder, including the pitcher, it is treated as a deflected ball rather

than an untouched batted ball for purposes of determining interference and subsequent play responsibilities.

If another fielder attempts to make a play on a fair batted ball touched by the pitcher, it is no longer considered an initial play. Under this change, a fielder is considered to be making an initial play on a fair batted ball only when the fielder has a reasonable opportunity to gain control of a ground ball that has not been touched by another defensive player, except as otherwise provided within the rule.

The change also creates consistency within the NFHS Softball Rules Book. Previously, a runner could be declared out for interference when a ball touched the pitcher if another fielder had an opportunity to make an initial play, even when the runner had no reasonable opportunity to avoid contact with the ball. The revised language aligns with Rule 8-9-6, which provides protection to a runner who is struck by a fair batted ball after it has touched any fielder, including the pitcher, and the runner could not avoid contact with the ball.

This clarification promotes consistent rule application, reduces confusion for umpires, coaches, and players, and ensures that deflected batted balls are treated uniformly throughout NFHS Softball rules.

8-10-2 -This removes the requirement or perceived requirement that the pitcher and catcher listed on the starting lineup card must face the first batter while on defense.

Previously, there was a misconception that the pitcher and catcher listed on the lineup card were always required to face the first batter (one pitch) which was never the intent of the rule. This change simplifies the administration of the courtesy runner rule and eliminates a provision that applied only during the transition between the top and bottom halves of the first inning. By eliminating a unique scenario that applied only to the bottom of the first inning, the rule becomes easier for umpires, coaches, scorekeepers, and players to administer and understand.

10-4-2 - The umpire uniform rule has been revised to provide greater flexibility in uniform administration while maintaining a professional, consistent and standard appearance for game officials. State associations may adopt uniform standards that best meet the needs of their membership and officiating programs.