

*Differences between high school and USA rules and mechanics*

- A. Pitching - Most leagues use HS pitching rules because that is what they see at the high schools and middle schools and that is what most local pitching coaches teach. The summer travel leagues always say they use USA rules except for pitching. The HS rules for pitching state that a pitcher can step backwards with her non pivot foot **and** join her hands together before or after she begins to step backwards that one step. Her next move must be stepping forward towards the plate to release the pitch. The pitcher is to stay within the 24 inch width of the pitching rubber as she steps backward and/or forward for each pitch. In USA rules, the pitcher may not step backwards. Her first step must be towards the plate. We won't see this enforced, except in USA tournaments. Remember your mechanics for calling illegal pitches. Left arm extended, say "illegal" and wait to see what happens. If the batter does not swing, it's a ball and the runners move up one base in fast pitch. In slow pitch, it's a ball and the runners do not advance. The base and plate umpires may/should each call an illegal pitch when they see it. Crow hopping and leaping from the ground are illegal for the pitcher in both HS and USA games. \*\* Don't call illegal if they say they are using HS pitching rules and the pitcher steps backwards before the release.
- B. Pick off plays with 2 umpires : summer travel games and tournaments in Ramsey, Allendale, Mahwah - in semifinals and finals when they hire 2 umpires. The base umpire in USA softball has all pick off plays at all bases no matter where the base umpire is standing. In HS mechanics, the base umpire does not have the pick off at first base when the base umpire is in the "C" position....meaning when the base umpire is standing on either side of the SS. In HS mechanics - when the base umpire is in the "C", the plate umpire is responsible to call the pick offs at first base. If you are paired up with an umpire with whom you are not familiar (in a tourney, for example) make sure to discuss this difference in mechanics in your pre-game. We don't want 2 different calls being made on a pick off at first base. This would happen only when there is a runner at 2<sup>nd</sup> and/ or a runner at 3<sup>rd</sup> base because that is when the base umpire would be near the SS. When there is a runner only at first base, the base umpire has the pick offs at first and second bases in both systems of mechanics because the base umpire will be in the "B" position (on one side or the other of the second baseman.)
- C. In HS mechanics, the new mechanic this season is for the base umpire in the "C" position to ask the plate umpire on a possible pulled foot OR on a swipe tag attempt BEFORE the base umpire makes the out or safe call. Those are NOT the USA mechanics, so make sure you and your partner discuss that in pre-game.

The base umpire in the A, B or C position in USA Softball, makes the call and gives the signal at a base - **(no checking with plate partner before making the call in USA games.)** IF the team captain or coach requests you to ask for help after your call, then do so. Call time, gesture to your plate partner and have a PRIVATE chat in the middle of the infield away from everyone else. Get the info from the plate umpire, and then either change your own call - or keep your call as it was, based on your partner's view and info gathered from him/her. Plate umpers need to pay attention to possible pulled foot or swipe tag attempt at first base. That's why the teams are paying 2 game fees! Plate needs to pay attention at first base when there is a play IN CASE the plate umpire's input is requested by the base umpire on a difficult call.

D. Hit by a pitch : some **differences** here as well - the mechanic in USA is to shout dead ball, remove mask and either send the batter to first base OR not. The batter must make an attempt to not get hit by the pitch if the batter is in the batter's box in USA rules. In HS, the batter does not have to attempt to get out of the way IF she is in the box. So the mechanic will be to call dead ball in both cases. Award first base in USA if the batter flinched or made any move to protect herself or not get hit. Do not award first base if she just stood there and did nothing as the pitch hit her. In that case, it is still a dead ball (call it aloud and signal with arms up) but it is a ball on the batter and no one can steal (dead ball.) If it is ball 4, then the batter is sent to first base because it is ball 4, not because the pitch hit her. No stealing because it is a dead ball call. If the batter gets hit while hanging over the strike zone, shout dead ball and the batter stays put for the next pitch. It is a "dead ball strike." Again, no stealing because it is a dead ball. This mechanic is true for both USA and HS. No awards for getting in the way of a strike. If it's strike 3, the batter is out. Be ready to explain this to a volunteer coach who may likely not know the rule.

E. EQUIPMENT check : We **MUST** still check equipment before each game in USA softball. The HS mechanic has changed this year for this pre game check. It has **NOT** changed for USA softball. We must check all helmets and bats before allowing them to be used in a game. Please have your up to date, color banned bat list with you in your ball bag at all games and your bat ring to check for bat width, dents, etc. Don't be named in a lawsuit for not checking equipment.

F. Catcher or coach can call for an intentional walk before or during the at bat in HS fast pitch this year. Doesn't happen often in rec and travel ball. **In fast pitch USA rules and mechanics - the 4 pitches must be thrown to walk a batter.** The ball is live on each pitch. In slow pitch, the team just states the intentional walk. A batter **CAN** swing at those "intentional ball" pitches. Runners can steal on pitches. Be aware of these possibilities.

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## Foul tip vs foul ball mechanics - plate umpire

*Arms up, mask off and shout "foul!" (esp. when it's close.)*

*Make more of a loud statement if it is close and use less volume when it's a mile foul. Always signal with arms.*

*Say nothing on a foul tip. Stand up, rub right hand against left hand and then signal strike. If it's strike 3, the batter is out. Remember that the catcher must catch the tipped ball as it goes directly back to the catcher for it to be a foul tip. Don't ever say "foul tip."*

***Mechanics at the plate on a play at home*** : plate ump will be in foul territory, deep right hand batter's box corner, for almost all plays at the plate. NOT where the MLB umpires stand (first base side.) Then, **move** to see an angle, if the catcher has the ball in front of the plate and the slide has taken the runner into that area. Circle around a step or two to get the best angle. Then make your signal and verbal call. Make sure to see the ball before the call. This is true at any base. Find the ball first if it is a close play. The ball could have been dropped on the tag attempt. Take the extra moment to see the whole thing before making your decision. There is no rush.

***Plays at third base in a one umpire game*** : you need to get to third and need to see which direction the throw is coming from.

*Get down the line from the plate and get into fair territory a few feet from the base on a throw from the outfield. That gives you a good angle to see the 4 elements (base, ball, defender and runner.) When the tag is made or missed, signal and make the call. If the throw goes into foul territory and the runner gets up and heads home....run parallel with the runner but you stay in fair area inside the diamond. The throw will come from foul area so you'll be out of the way. Now your back is to the infield and you can see the throw, defender, home plate (base) and ball from your spot in fair area. That would be the instance to make the call at the plate from fair territory.*

***Calling time*** : The umpire is to be facing the field when she/he calls time (arms up and shouting "Time.") You shouldn't be walking towards the plate already as you are calling time. Also, brush the plate off frequently - butt towards the infield please !

***Line ups and substitutes*** : please remember that **the batting order is the thing that matters** - NOT where players play on defense. Subs can come in and out but **MUST** come back into the batting spot they used to be in - **NO WHERE ELSE** in the order!

*Some leagues will want you to enforce the automatic out if a batter is missing from the line up during the game (left due to whatever reason.) Some leagues do not enforce this. Ask right away if a player leaves the game. Get the coaches/captains together and let them tell you what their league plays. If they don't know, tell them about the automatic out each time through the order - if the opposite team wishes to take the out, then that's how it will be. If they do not take the out, that's on them and proceed with the game. No protests about it afterwards.*

**Run downs** : *in a one man game, you are IT so you need to run parallel to the run down. Ex: runner between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> bases - you need to be out there, inside the diamond, and move with the throws and players. The umpire has to watch for obstruction in these run down plays. The defense doesn't always move out of the runner's way after she/he has gotten rid of the throw. You might have to award the base to the runner - after he or she has been tagged by the defense - if the runner was obstructed during the run down.*

*When calling a play at third base - leave the plate to the left of the catcher and head to third base area. Get in **fair territory** and make your call. If a play is coming towards home plate (an instance when you did not have to be at third base because there was no play there) - then you will stay in **foul territory** and get ready - **near corner of the deep right hand batter's box with your MASK OFF !!** Then you may have to move a few steps to see what you need to see on a tag play at the plate. I have seen umpires make an out or safe call with the mask still on at the plate. **THAT is wrong.** See all 4 elements before you signal and verbalize the call.*

Examples of Appeals :    A) Live ball    B) Dead ball

*You have to be prepared by watching the play that just happened. **Examples** - Did the runner from 2<sup>nd</sup> base leave too soon on a tag up ? Did the batter runner miss 2<sup>nd</sup> base on that triple ? There are 2 runners and they are **BOTH** tagging up. Back up and get the best wide angle you can to see multiple runners. If it's impossible, then watch the catch and the lead runner, at least. You may have to position yourself along the third baseline (in foul territory) to see a catch in right field and the runner leaving third base. **MOVE** to the angle that will give you the best shot at seeing what is needed.*

**A good angle is better than a close distance.** *In a one umpire game, getting the best angle for a call is a top priority. One umpire cannot be in 2 places within 3 seconds ( EX: a close play at first and a then quick throw to third to make a play on a runner rounding third base. If you are near the middle of the field, you have the best angle you can have for those 2 plays. You do not have a good angle for either if you are right at the plate.*

*The appeals where the fielder is yelling for the ball because the runner left a base too soon or missed it (according to the defense) will be the **live ball appeals**. Make the call and signal when they touch the base (or runner) in question. Then you can call time out to reset. If the runner(s) have advanced and the defense is shouting that someone left early after the ball has come back in to the infield, and there is no other action on the field - you can call time out. Then it is a **dead ball appeal**. This is easier because you have a moment to think AND no one can advance anymore. You then call and signal out or safe. You have to have seen the action in question. Your head needs to be on a swivel in one man games...especially with multiple runners. You have to choose priorities. No throw to a base is needed on the dead ball appeal because no one can run anywhere.*

**Priorities** : example - runner at 3<sup>rd</sup> and a fly ball is hit along the right field line that may be fair or foul, may be caught or not.

*First priority is fair or foul. Second priority is a catch or not. Third priority is whether the runner left 3<sup>rd</sup> base (or any other base) too soon. My suggestion is to get in foul territory and do the best you can in this order (foul/fair, catch ?, then tag up.)*

**Do not GUESS an OUT.** You must really see the out being made by the defense in order to call a runner out. If not, the runner is SAFE.

***Mechanics for calling plays at bases :*** stand up, mask off, run to the spot (best angle) , STOP running, get your eyes STILL before the play is made. The runner and the ball and probably the defense are all moving. Your eyes NEED to be still - so STOP, even if it means you are not as close as you might like to be. Your judgement will be better if your body and eyes are still.

The ball goes flying out of the **pitcher's hand on her backswing** in fast pitch. It is a LIVE ball. Umpire says nothing right away. It is a ball on the batter but the runners can steal if they wish. The defense can get the ball and make a play at a base if they wish.

If the defense just grabs the ball and no one moves to another base, make sure you announce that it was a ball and move on to the next pitch. If this happens in a slow pitch game, it is a ball on the batter but no one advances. Don't call time right away because runners CAN advance in fast pitch.

When a **pitch is thrown and gets through the backstop**, call a dead ball with arms up. The runners should be advanced by the umpire one base each - in fast pitch. No runners advance in slow pitch. The batter stays put - unless that pitch was ball 4.

**A pitch (in fast pitch) that hits the ground** and then hits a batter in the box is a dead ball call by the umpire. Arms up and mask off, while shouting "dead ball !" In slow pitch it is different because as soon as a pitch hits the ground, it is a dead ball. The batter cannot swing at it after it has touched the ground. It is a ball. In fast pitch, the batter can swing at a pitch that has hit the ground. Play on.

**Batted ball hits batter** : Call dead ball ! If batter is in the box, it is a foul ball and dead (even if the batter was in fair territory in the batter's box when hit on the bounce back.) If the batter is in fair territory out of the box and gets hit with her/his own batted ball, it is an out. Call dead ball & OUT. Arms up, mask off. No other runners can advance. If batted ball hits the catcher and then rolls into fair area, it is a foul ball because it was touched in foul territory. These things happen so fast - we have to be ready to see, decide and then signal and verbalize.

**TALK to yourself all the time !** How many outs are there? Can the batter run to first on a dropped third strike ? Is the infield fly in effect ? Has the infield fly gone out of effect ? Is there a runner at second base who could possibly run into the SS if a ground ball is hit there? Are the bases loaded? Could I have a play at the plate ? What is the count ? Do I have runners on base(s) who could be tagging up on a fly ball ? If I am the base umpire, am I in the correct position ? Have I signaled to my partner that there is a possible infield fly ? Am I watching baserunners leave their bases on time (not early - as in before the release in FP or when the ball crossed the plate in slow pitch.) Be alert to possible obstruction at any time runners are on the move. What is my signal for obstruction ?

There are many more things, but these are some important ones to keep going through your mind all the time.

If you have hustled out to an appropriate angle and distance from first base on a routine play there and all of a sudden the throw pulls the first baseman's foot off the bag as the runner crosses the base, the correct mechanic is to call and signal safe. Then you can signal that the foot was off - with your hands and arms brushing away from the base. You can only see this if you have hustled out from behind the plate.

**A batter runner may not step backward to avoid a tag on the way to first base.** That is an immediate dead ball call and signal overhead by the umpire. All other runners must return to bases. Runners between any other bases *MAY* step back to avoid tags with no penalty.

Please keep in mind the difference between a base path and base line as regards a possible tag play by the defense.

Only POINT fair on fair batted balls that are close to the lines.

Say NOTHING! They'll get the hint and start to run.

Please do not describe pitches. Ex: "ball, inside", "ball low ", etc. Since we do not say "strike, down the middle " or "strike on the corner", we should not be describing pitches that are balls.

Remember, the verbal call is "infield fly if fair" on those pop ups that could go either way due to spin or wind. If it lands foul, it is just a foul ball. If it lands fair ( is not caught) - it is still an infield fly and the batter is OUT. Your right arm should be straight up in the air as you verbalize "infield fly, the batter is out" or "infield fly, if fair." Signals need go along with calls!

The 2018 USA Softball RULES SUPPLEMENT Section pgs. 122 – 151

**APPEALS** : section 1 p. 122-124 Good examples and explanations of various types of appeals. When runners can and cannot return to bases missed or left too soon. Live and dead ball appeals. Appeal about missing first base (white base.) Force outs and appeals.....do the runs score? Tag missed at the plate and runner misses the plate....appeal procedure.

Fig. 127 last 2 lines : " On a bunt attempt where the batter puts the bat across the plate and the pitched ball is OUT of the strike zone, a ball should be called unless the batter moves the bat towards the ball." This is different from HS rules so be careful. In *USA play*, the batter must make an attempt to bunt at the pitch, in order for it to be called a strike. In HS rules, no attempt is required.

Fig. 129 Section 13 Part F "When a defensive player is fielding a thrown ball and the flight of the ball carries or draws them into the path of the base runner, it is NOT a crash." This is because the runner is not responsible for a poor throw or can the runner see where the throw is going as he/she is running to a base. The proper mechanic is arms up and shout dead ball. Return all runners to the bases they had at the time of the crash - after you call "dead ball" on the interference.

Lead Sec. 14 pg. 129 for delayed dead ball reminders. Wait until action is completed before ruling or awarding after obstruction or illegal pitches.

Fig. 137 -138 Interference section - good explanations.

Fig. 140-142 Obstruction section - helpful info here

Fig. 142 Sec. 37 overrunning first base – the runner's rights & restrictions

