

## Slide Rules

**Question:** Is a Runner required to slide on tag/force plays at a base?

**Answer:** No, but s/he must slide or seek to avoid contact with the fielder. Additionally, a runner cannot interfere with a fielder's ability to retire another runner.

### **Rule:**

*USSSA Rule 7.04 C:* "Whenever a tag play is evident, a runner must slide or seek to avoid contact with the fielder and / or catcher. Malicious contact shall supersede all obstruction penalties. Malicious contact is solely up to the discretion of the Umpire. **Rule 7.04.C Penalty:** The runner shall be called out and may be ejected from the game at the discretion of the Umpires.

*USSSA Rule 7.04.D:* A runner who jumps over a player will be called out whether or not contact is made with the defensive player.

For the purposes of league play, Warrior Baseball interprets this rule to equivalently to the NFHS rule, as discussed below.

### **Discussion:**

There is no "Must Slide" rule at any level of baseball, including High School (NFHS). See NFHS.org and 2020 Points of Emphasis ("Runners are never required to slide, but if a runner elects to slide at any base, it must be legal.") Little League uses similar language to USSSA, saying that runners must either "slide or attempt to avoid" a fielder with the ball attempting to make a tag, but also emphasizes there is no "must slide" rule.

USSSA does not define exactly what "seek to avoid contact" means, nor is there any approved interpretation or case play available for USSSA rules. Given the language tracking other leagues, however, Warrior Baseball interprets USSSA rule 7.04 C/D in line with NFHS guidance. A runner is not required to slide, but he must avoid interfering/malicious contact with the fielder attempting to make a play. A runner may not leap over an upright (sitting, kneeling, or standing) defender's body to avoid a tag. They may jump over a defender who is laying on the ground or the outstretched arm/glove of a defender who is not standing.

A runner who does not make a bona fide slide attempt at a base with a defender waiting to make a tag loses the benefit of any doubt regarding interfering contact. As this is a judgment call, the umpire may determine that the contact was illegal/interfering. In the event of malicious contact, the runner would also be ejected.

### **Plays:**

Runner at 3<sup>rd</sup>, 0 outs. B hits a ground ball to F5, who throws home to retire the runner. R3 dodges the tag while remaining in the baseline. LEGAL

Runner at 3<sup>rd</sup>, 0 outs, B hits a ground ball to F5, who throws home to retire the runner. R3 runs by the catcher while touching home plate. LEGAL

Runner at 3<sup>rd</sup>, 0 outs, B hits a ground ball to F5, who throws home to retire the runner. R3 does not slide, attempts to avoid the catcher, but runs into the body of the catcher who has the ball waiting at home plate. Likely INTERFERENCE

Runner at 3<sup>rd</sup>, 0 outs, B hits a ground ball to F5, who throws home to retire the runner. R3 does not slide, attempts to avoid the catcher, but makes contact with the outstretched glove of the catcher as R3 touches home plate, dislodging the ball. Likely LEGAL (Unless the runner deliberately attempted to dislodge the ball such as by swiping at the glove).

Runner at 3<sup>rd</sup>, 0 outs, B hits a ground ball to F5, who throws home. The throw is off-line, and R3 and F2 both run towards home plate. R3 does not slide and reaches home just before F2. LEGAL unless there is malicious contact by either R3 or F2.

### **Force Play Slide Rule for WBA:**

On a force play at 2<sup>nd</sup> base (or any other base), runners are not required to slide but must not interfere with the fielder's ability to throw. Failing to slide and remaining in the way of the fielder's throw results in the batter-runner being called out. A runner may "peel off" before the bag as long as they do not interfere with a throw or attempted throw. ***A runner who is not in the vicinity of the fielder/base*** (i.e. only halfway between 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> base) ***will not be deemed to interfere with a throw unless the action is deliberate*** (e.g. deliberately reaching out to deflect the throw). For younger ages, in the absence of contact, there should be a reasonable ability for the throw to have retired a subsequent runner. For older ages (11 and up), interference may be called regardless of whether a throw is made or attempted and regardless of whether there is a reasonable chance to retire the batter-runner. Interference would not typically be called if there was clearly no subsequent play, such as if the B-R has already passed 1<sup>st</sup> base.

Interference will not usually be called below age 7 on this type of play unless the contact was clearly intentional or clearly prevented the fielder from making a subsequent play.

The fielder does not have to throw the ball in order for interference to be called. However, the runner must actually interfere with a throw or attempted throw. For example, if the fielder is judged to have clearly not intended to make any following play, that would generally not be interference. The amount of contact between the runner and fielder, and/or the distance between the runner and fielder/base may be used by the umpire to determine if there was an "attempted throw." For example, interference is less likely to be called when there appeared to be no attempt to make a play, there was no contact, and there was space between the two players. Conversely, if there was contact, the fielder may be given the benefit of the doubt regarding whether a throw would or could have been attempted.

Plays:

Runner at 1<sup>st</sup>, 0 outs. B hits a ground ball to F6, who tosses to F4. R1 is 2 strides from the bag when F4 catches the ball. A) R1 continues directly towards the base while slowing down and does not slide. B) R1 continues directly towards the base, sliding such that any contact is on or before the base. C) R1 is 20 feet from 2<sup>nd</sup> base when F4 catches the ball and begins his throwing motion and R1 does not intentionally reach out to contact the thrown ball. D) R1 does not slide and 'peels out' 5 or more feet from the baseline such that F4 can make an unobstructed throw to 1<sup>st</sup> base. E) R1 slides and makes contact with F4 past 2<sup>nd</sup> base.

- A) Interference, R1 and B-R are both out
- B) Legal
- C) Legal
- D) Legal
- E) Interference, R1 and B-R are both out

Runner at 1<sup>st</sup>, 0 outs. B hits a ground ball to F4, who bobbles the ball and tosses to F6. A) R1 does not slide, does not make contact with F6, and arrives before the ball B) The ball arrives just before R1, who does not slide and does not make contact with F6. The B-R has reached 1<sup>st</sup> base prior to the out at 2<sup>nd</sup>. C) The ball arrives just before R1, who does not slide. F6's throw hits R1 in the helmet while the B-R was still 2 strides from 1<sup>st</sup> base. D) The ball arrives before R1, who does not slide and does not make contact with F6. F6 clearly did not intend to throw the ball or make a play at another base and the B-R was close to but had not yet reached 1<sup>st</sup> base and would have been clearly safe even in the absence of another runner.

- A) Legal
- B) Legal
- C) Interference
- D) Legal in coach pitch, judgement call in older age groups with potential INTERFERENCE

## Rolling of the Baseball

**Question:** For ages where fielders are not allowed to roll the ball to obtain an out, what constitutes a “rolled” ball?

**Answer:** A ball is rolled when the fielder did not make a legitimate, bona fide attempt to throw the ball to the base. The judgment of whether or not a ball was rolled is based on the umpire’s judgment. To be called, the ball must have been rolling or functionally rolling at the time it reached the fielder/base and have one or more other indicia of having not been a legitimate attempt to throw the ball. Indicia of the ball being rolled include:

- A ball that is rolled the entire distance
- A ball that is thrown directly into the ground in front of the thrower
- An underhanded throw that reaches the receiving fielder while rolling
- An infield throw which travels clearly less than half-way in the air and reaches the receiving fielder while rolling.

The umpire should also consider the location of the thrower and receiver and the game situation:

- “Rolling” should not be called in the extremely rare situation where a high school or higher-level player might reasonably have rolled the ball).
- “Rolling” should not be called on an outfielder who makes any reasonable attempt to throw the ball regardless of how far it travels; that is, there is no expectation for an outfielder’s throw to travel half-way)
- A ball which is deflected or missed at the original base and then rolls to a subsequent base would not be considered rolling.

It is rare for a rolled ball to be in time for an out, so this call is only made in unusual situations. If it looked like a real baseball play and a legitimate attempt by the defense, it is probably okay.

**Rule:** WBA Local Rules

## Injuries

**Question:** How should injuries be handled during play?

**Answer:** Injuries are handled according to the appropriate rules. Obstruction/Interference plays are handled according to the USSSA/MLB rules. For batted balls in coach pitch, the award is 1 base for an infielder and 2 bases for an outfielder. The umpire must evaluate the situation and potential injury to determine whether it is appropriate to stop play and where to place the runners as a result of the stoppage. Play should be stopped when the injury is serious enough to cause the fielder to be unable to continue the play as well as situations where there is concern regarding a potential head injury/concussion. Umpires are to err on the side of player safety and stop play if in doubt, but play need not be stopped if the fielder is clearly able to and does continue with the play.

### **Plays:**

6u game...B-R hits a ball which strikes F6 in the shin. F6 falls down and is unable to continue. Time is called and B-R is awarded first base (1 base on injury to infielder).

8u game...B-R hits a line drive to the outfield, which strikes F9 in the chest. F9 immediately screams in pain and falls down while F8 and F7 go to retrieve the ball. B-R rounds 2<sup>nd</sup> base and F8 throws out B-R at 3<sup>rd</sup> base on the attempted triple. Ruling: Time should have been called on the injury and the B-R is placed at 2<sup>nd</sup> base (2 base award due to injury to outfielder).

7u game...B-R at bat, R1 at first, R2 at second. B-R hits ground ball to F6, who throws to F4. All runners run appropriately given the force out situation. The throw from F6 hits F4 in the face, caroms into the outfield past F9, and F4 immediately is unable to continue. Ruling: Umpire should call time immediately due to the head injury. R2 awarded home as he was certainly going to score on the ball thrown into the outfield. B-R and R1 placed at the base they would have reached in the judgment of the umpire, which is likely third and home, or potentially both being awarded home, based on where the ball ended up following F6's throw which caused the injury. *Had the throw from F6 hit F4 not in the head*, the umpire should evaluate the extent of the injury and determine if time should be called. Runner placements would be the same as above (in the event time was called).

11u game...B-R at bat, no one on base. B-R hits ball which strikes pitcher's leg. Pitcher falls down briefly, then gets up, runs to ball, throws to F3 in time to retire the runner before again falling down in pain. Ruling: B-R is out on the force at first. As the pitcher was able to continue with the play, time should not be called until after the play at which point the injury can be addressed. Except in the case of a head injury, play should generally continue at least a fielder has clear possession of the ball a play is made or runners (including batter-runner) have advanced 1 base, subject to any further base awards as appropriate in light of the injury.

Note: Runner placements due to injuries such as throws or same-team collisions should be based on the umpire's judgment of what an ordinary fielding/running outcome would be for that age in the absence of the injury. Balls remaining in the infield are likely to result in an award of 0 or 1 base (A ball which ends up right next to the injured infielder may result in no bases, for example), while a ball ending up in the outfield may result in an award of 2 or more bases.

## Balk/Verbal Interference

**Question:** Can an offensive team or coach induce a pitcher to balk?

**Answer:** The offensive team may not intentionally induce a pitcher to balk. This concept generally applies to verbal actions; however, some physical acts may also apply (see plays section). Verbal actions which should not be allowed include multiple base coaches yelling at a baserunner during the pitcher's pre-delivery phase and actions such as team cheers which are timed to the pitcher's beginning to deliver the ball.

Some other non-verbal acts may also be considered inducing a balk and therefore prohibited. These include a batter simulating time being called (stepping out) even if time was not requested/granted or an on-deck hitter running behind or in close vicinity of the batter and inducing a balk.

Any balk in these situations is ignored, no pitch is counted (if a pitch was delivered), and the situation, including base-runners, is reset to before the actions inducing the balk.

### **Plays:**

Runner on 2<sup>nd</sup>, 0 outs (or 1 out or 2 outs; ruling is same in all cases in this section): As the pitcher lifts his leg, the 3<sup>rd</sup> base coach yells at his baserunner to steal, in a manner which disrupts the pitcher who subsequently balks. LEGAL unless the umpire(s) judge that the coaches intent was to induce the balk. R2 is awarded third base.

Runner on 2<sup>nd</sup>, 0 outs: As the pitcher lifts his leg, both base coaches yell at the baserunner to steal, in a manner which clearly and immediately disrupts the pitcher who then balks. ILLEGAL. No pitch, runner returns to 2<sup>nd</sup> base, reset. This should be called as inducing a balk if both coaches were individually yelling loud enough to clearly disrupt the pitcher. If either one of the coaches was not excessively loud, treat similarly to the first example above.

Runner on 1<sup>st</sup>, 0 outs: Without being granted time, the batter steps out of the box after the pitcher has begun his motion, and the pitcher subsequently discontinues the motion and therefore balks. NO BALK, RESET PLAY. The runner should return to 1<sup>st</sup> base, no pitch/play is recorded.

Runner on 1<sup>st</sup>, 0 outs: The on-deck batter is late leaving the dugout and runs behind the batter, catcher, and umpire, causing the pitcher to balk. NO BALK, RESET PLAY

Runner on 1<sup>st</sup>, 0 outs: The team at bat is cheering loudly in the dugout throughout the inning. The cheers/chants do not appear to be timed to the pitchers motion or delivery. LIKELY LEGAL. Note: The umpires may determine that some cheers or volume is overly disruptive and request the team reduce the volume or refrain from a specific action/chant (e.g. banging on the dugout fence), separately from whether those actions induce a balk. Should they have induced a balk in the umpire's judgment, the balk would be ignored.

Runners on 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>, 0 outs: The team at bat cheers quietly from the dugout until the pitcher comes set, at which point several team members scream in an attempt to disrupt the pitcher, who then balks. ILLEGAL: Warn the offending team, disregard the balk, and reset runners to 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>. NOTE: The pitcher does not have to actually balk for umpires to warn the offending team. Any cheering/chanting/similar actions which are clearly designed to induce a balk should be prohibited by the umpire, even if they do not result in a balk.

## Batter's Interference

**Question:** Is the batter protected from an interference call as long as they remain in the batter's box?

**Answer:** No. Batter's interference is any conduct by the batter which interferes with the catcher's attempt to put out an advancing runner. This also includes any conduct by the batter which interferes with a play at home plate. The batter interferes with the catcher's fielding or throwing by *stepping out of the batter's box* or by *making any other movement*. As a result, if the batter moves in the box in such a way as it affects the catcher's throw, it can be interference.

There are three main situations in which a batter might be judged to interfere with the catcher presented below, along with the most common scenarios where interference might occur in each situation:

Throw to second: batter's swing carries him out of the batter's box across the plate and into the path of the catcher's movement or throw. This is the most common form of interference at higher levels of baseball but is fairly uncommon at youth levels. That said, it does happen, and umpires must be prepared to call it.

Throw to third on a steal: The batter backs out of the batter's box after the pitch, into the path of the catcher's body or throw. OR, the batter moves in the batter's box such that they affect the catcher's movement or throw. This is very rare at higher levels of baseball but much more common at the youth level. *This is probably the most difficult and argued judgment call in 9-10 baseball.* While intent is not part of the rule, the umpire must maintain awareness of the situation and circumstances in order to properly make this call. Remember that the players are learning and some are facing kid pitch for the first time. They will move around more than older players. The following guidance may be helpful in making this call

- Generally speaking, *any movement out of the box* which impacts the catcher's fielding or throw should be called interference.
- The threshold for movement will be higher if the batter remains in the box. Taking a full step which interferes with the catcher's throwing or fielding, even if remaining in the box, should be called interference. Shuffling the feet slightly in place or moving the upper body slightly following the pitch (or as a result of the swing) is less likely to be interference.
- The catcher does not have to make a throw but the batter must clearly be interfering for this call to be made. For example, a catcher who never saw the runner and never made any motion associated with a throw is not being interfered with. Conversely, if the catcher stops a clear throwing motion due to the movement/position of the batter, it may be interference if the batter moved out of the box (or moved sufficiently in the box to interfere)
- Interference should not be used to bail out the defensive team from clear mistakes. A 9-10 batter who makes a bona fide attempt to avoid being hit by the pitch should not generally be called for interference on a throw unless the action following his attempt to get out of the way was clearly interfering or unnecessary and there was a legitimate attempt to retire the runner. Similarly, a catcher who steps into the box to draw interference should not be rewarded with the call unless the batter's conduct in the box was clearly or intentionally interfering. The batter is not required to "duck" for the catcher to make a throw. If he stands still, the catcher is obligated to throw around him. Proper throwing mechanics for catchers typically include a drop step or forward step to "clear the batter" based on the idea that the batter will not be moving. The greater the chance to retire the runner, the lower the threshold of conduct by the batter.

Play at the plate: This is the second most common type of interference at youth ages. This normally occurs when the batter fails to leave the box/area and therefore ends up either in the line of the throw/toss from the catcher OR if the pitcher cannot cover the plate (or catcher cannot return to the plate) in order to tag the runner because the batter is in the way. Less commonly this occurs when the batter moves out of the box but into the throwing lane, usually due to the ball deflecting off the fence or backstop. This should only be called if there was a legitimate attempt or chance to retire the runner but for the interference. If the batter remains in the box for too long but there was never any chance to retire the runner regardless of the batter's actions, it is probably not interference. Conversely, if a throw from the catcher hits the batter before the runner crosses the plate, it probably is interference as long as the pitcher was anywhere in the vicinity of the plate (if the pitcher never attempted to cover and remained at the mound, it would not be interference because there was no chance to retire the runner.

**Enforcement:**

Batter's interference is fairly rare and often enforced incorrectly. The default enforcement is similar to any other form of interference: the interfering player is out, and no runners may advance or score. Thus, in the usual case, the batter is out, and any runners return to the base they last occupied.

However, the enforcement is different for plays at the plate, depending on the number of outs:

Batter's interference on steal of 2<sup>nd</sup> 3<sup>rd</sup>, regardless of outs: The BATTER is OUT, all runners return to their last legally occupied base

Batter's interference on play at home *WITH 2 OUTS*: The BATTER is OUT, no run scores, and the following innings starts with the next batter in the lineup.

Batter's interference on play at home *WITH LESS THAN 2 OUTS*: The RUNNER is OUT, the batter remains at bat with the appropriate count

There are a few exceptions to the above enforcement:

- If the batter strikes out and then interferes with a throw (usually to second or third), the batter is still out and the runner is also called out
- If the batter walked prior to interfering, there is no interference unless it was intentional
- If the throw retires the runner, the interference is ignored and the batter is not out

## BALK PRIMER

The Balk rules are complicated and can be difficult to enforce and/or explain to coaches. This guide covers some of the most common types of balks and attempts to explain them in plain English. These guidelines are not a substitute for the official balk rules as continued in the MLB Rules.

- A balk can only be committed when there are runners on base.
- From the stretch, a pitcher must come to a complete stop (“Set”) before delivering the pitch
- Once the pitcher has come set, he cannot come set again. When he moves after coming set, he must deliver the pitch. Normally this happens when the pitcher gets the sign, then brings their feet closer together or touching but without bring their hands together in the glove (first set), then brings their hands together in the glove (second set, balk).
- If a pitcher comes set, begins to deliver the pitch, and then stops (usually due to thinking time has been called or slipping on the mound), it is a balk. Train your pitchers so that once they start, THEY DO NOT STOP unless the umpire clearly yells TIME. A coach moving around or a player getting into position in the on-deck circle is not necessarily time out.
- If you drop the ball while touching the rubber, that is a balk
- While in contact with the rubber, you have to step towards the base you are throwing to. You cannot step towards home and throw to third (or first).

Once the pitcher steps off the rubber, they are a regular fielder and can do whatever they like with the ball. However, they have to step off properly, with their back foot moving first. If the front foot moves first and they step off (or fail to throw a pitch), it is a balk.

If you are touching the rubber, you cannot fake to 1<sup>st</sup> base or 3<sup>rd</sup> base or a balk will be called. You must step off the rubber to fake to those bases.

Right handed pitchers can do a jump move or quick pick off to first base. This is where they do not step back off the rubber but instead jump and spin around 180 degrees (since they start facing third base and end up facing first base). Usually, their feet end up parallel to and just in front of or touching the rubber. This move is legal but you MUST throw the ball. If you don't throw the ball, it is a balk since that is considered faking a throw to 1<sup>st</sup> base while touching the rubber.

To be continued...