



April 28, 2025

NFHS Softball Weekly Rule Interpretations

Situation 1: Team A turns in a lineup at the plate meeting that after being reviewed by the coach/captain is confirmed and accepted as official by the plate umpire. After the lineups are official while still at the plate conference the following situations occur. In a) Team A's coach tells the umpire "My DP is going to pitch, and my FLEX is not going to play defense." In b) The coach tells the umpire "My DP is going to pitch and #3 (B4 in the lineup) is going to continue to play offense but not defense." In c) The coach tells the umpire "#5 (B6 in the lineup) is going to pitch and #3 (B4 in the lineup) is going to play first base." In d) The coach tells the umpire "My DP is going to catch and #6 (B6 in the lineup) is going to play offense only." In all cases the umpire does not allow the changes to occur stating that the pitcher and catcher listed on the starting lineup must face at least the first batter on defense (one pitch).

RULING: Incorrect ruling in all cases. Once the plate umpire accepts the lineups and makes them official, changes to the lineup are then allowed with all substitution rules applying. In a) this is a substitution as the FLEX is not playing defense, so they are leaving the game. This should be noted on the lineup card and the coach informed the FLEX has left the game and has one reentry. In b & d) it is legal for the DP to play defense for any player other than the FLEX and that player continue to play offense and no player has left the game. These changes should be noted on the lineup card so the umpire is aware who is eligible for a courtesy runner. In c) this is a legal defensive change and should be noted on the lineup card to ensure the proper player is eligible for a courtesy runner. The requirement of the players listed in the starting lineup as pitcher and catcher to face the first batter (one pitch) is listed in the courtesy runner section of the rule book. This only applies in the bottom of the first inning and only if that player utilized a courtesy runner in the top of the first inning. Since these changes were made at the plate conference there is no requirement for the players to ever face a batter. (3-3-6e, 4-1-2b, 8-9-2)

Situation 2: Team A turns in a lineup with nine players listed at the plate meeting that has #3 (B4) listed as F1, #5 (B6) listed as F3, #8 (B2) listed as F9 and #7 (B9) listed as F2. In a) After scoring a number of runs in the top of the first and prior to their team taking the field in the bottom of the first inning the home team coach tells the umpire "#5 is going to pitch and #3 is going to play first base." During the top of the first inning #3, the player listed as F1 on the starting lineup, did not utilize a courtesy runner. In b) After scoring a number of runs in the top of the first inning the home team coach tells the umpire "#5 is going to pitch and #3 is going to play first base. Also #8 (B2 in the lineup) is going to catch and #7 (B9 in the lineup) is going to play right field." During the top of the first inning #3 grounded out and never utilized a courtesy runner, #7 hit a double and #11, an eligible sub, was utilized to courtesy run for #7 the catcher of record. In both cases the umpire does not allow the defensive changes stating the pitcher and catcher listed on the starting lineup must face the first batter (one pitch). **RULING:** Incorrect ruling in a) and for the pitching change in b). In a) since the pitcher did not utilize a courtesy runner in the top of the first inning there is no requirement for them to face the first batter in the bottom of the first inning. The defensive change of #5 moving to F1 and #3 moving to F3 should be noted as #5 is now the player eligible for a courtesy runner. In b) since the pitcher did not utilize a courtesy runner in the top of the first inning, they are not required to face the first batter in the bottom of the first inning. However,

since the catcher did utilize a courtesy runner in the top of the first inning #7 is required to face the first batter (one pitch) in the bottom of the first inning prior to allowing the defensive position change.

The requirement of the players listed in the starting lineup as pitcher and catcher to face the first batter (one pitch) is listed in the courtesy runner section of the NFHS Softball Rules Book. This only applies in the bottom of the first inning and only if that player utilized a courtesy runner in the top of the first inning. (8-9-2)

Situation 3: In the third inning Team A is playing defense with R1 on first base, no outs and a one ball no strike count on B2. Team A's pitcher legally starts their pitch but fails to release the pitch resulting in R1 leaving the base prior to the ball leaving the pitcher's hand. The umpire rules this a dead ball as the illegal pitch was not delivered and places R1 back on first base and awards a ball to the batter. Play continues with R1 on first base and B2 batting with a two ball no strike count. **RULING:** Correct ruling. When an illegal pitch is not delivered the ball becomes dead and the illegal pitch is enforced. In this situation the pitcher's illegal actions, not releasing the pitch, resulted in the runner violating the rule governing their staying in contact with their base. This is a different situation from previously discussed plays where the illegal pitch and the runner leaving early were both enforced. In those situations, the illegal action by the pitcher did not result in the violation seen by the offense. Due to this difference, as detailed in case play 7.1.2 Situation J, both penalties would be enforced in those situations. However, an illegal action by the defense should not allow them to gain an unfair advantage by creating a violation by the offense. (3-6-13c, 5-1-1o, 6-2-4e, 7.1.2 Situation J, 8-6-18)

This situation brings up the important balance between offense and defense and creating an atmosphere of sporting behavior and fair play that the NFHS Softball playing rules are fundamentally designed to provide. Our rules have many areas where these concepts are specifically detailed and unacceptable actions of the participants are listed and information provided on how these actions should be addressed. Obviously the NFHS Softball rule book could never cover all situations as the book would need to be multiple volumes and as soon as it was printed a different situation would occur. There are places like rule 6-2-4e that state actions "for the obvious purpose of trying to make the pitcher commit an illegal pitch" are not allowed and result in a no pitch vs awarding the offense for causing an illegal pitch. Just as this rule would not allow the offense to gain an advantage by creating an illegal pitch, the defense should not be allowed to gain an advantage by not releasing the pitch and causing the runner to leave early, that is why an illegal pitch that is not released becomes a dead ball. Multiple rules taken with the intent and purpose in mind often must be combined and used to apply to specific situations during a softball game. This is a balancing act that must involve good judgement and a firm understanding of the NFHS Softball rules and their intent. As mentioned in the preface prior to Rule 1 in the NFHS Softball Rules Book "The Intent and Purpose of the Rules" details that the rules are designed to create a balance of play between the offense and defense. Rules and umpire rulings should not penalize a team for being clever and skilled in their play, but they should not be allowed to gain an advantage that is not intended by rule or to place another player at a disadvantage not intended by rule. There is a lot of judgement needed to correctly umpire an NFHS Softball game and umpire judgement can vary based on several factors. Although this is true, it is hard to argue that an unfair advantage for the defense not intended by rule is not created when a pitcher does not release the ball resulting in the runner leaving the base prior to the ball being released. Also, this action could be accidental due to a number of factors, but if it was an intentional action by the pitcher, it could be viewed as an action not in accordance with the spirit of fair play. If determined to be intentional the penalty in rule 3-6-13c would result in at least a warning and possibly an ejection for these actions.

THE INTENT AND PURPOSE OF THE RULES

The restrictions which the rules place upon the players are intended to create a balance of play; to provide equal opportunity between the offense and the defense; to minimize risk; to create an atmosphere of sporting behavior and fair play; and to emphasize cleverness and skill without unduly limiting freedom of action of individual or team play on either offense or defense.

Therefore, it is important to know the intent and purpose of a rule so that it may be intelligently applied in each play situation. A player or a team should not be permitted an advantage which is not intended by a rule. Neither should play be permitted to develop which may lead to placing a player at a disadvantage not intended by a rule. It is the policy of the NFHS Softball Rules Committee that there is no deviation from the rules unless experimental approval has been granted by the NFHS.