



June Plays and Clarifications

Comments from the National Umpire Staff

Fast Pitch Pitching:

The ASA/USA softball season is well underway around the country. Questions about rules, players and National Championships are flowing in as normal this time of year. Players, coaches and umpires are asking rule questions so they can be prepared for National Championship Play.

One question that always comes up is about Illegal Pitches especially in the Junior Olympic and Women's Classification of Play. These questions center on if a Pitcher is legal or illegal, position of feet, number of arm revolutions and taking a signal. The majority seem to be about the position of the feet and whether a pitcher is "pushing and dragging" or "leaping".

An umpire should always presume that a pitcher is legal unless they do something to prove they are illegal. Do not enter a game looking for what a pitcher might be doing that is illegal. Enter the game with the mindset that the pitcher is legal. Do not enter the game thinking they are illegal and I am going to catch them being illegal.

There are many styles and motions to pitching. Some of them might appear to be illegal but when you break them down they are legal. In today's world of technology you can see videos at all sorts of speed to watch a pitcher and their delivery. If you have to take a camera and slow it down to tell if a pitcher is legal or illegal because you cannot tell in real time, more often than not the pitcher is legal.

When specific pitching questions are asked about pitchers they usually center around the "push and drag" required in the Women's and Junior Olympic Game. Here are some good ways to differentiate "a leap" and "a push and drag" from Julie Johnson, ASA/USA Northern Territory Deputy Director of Umpires and National Federation of High Schools Rules Committee Chairman.

"First thing, please don't get hung up on the terms "leap" and "crow hop." As an umpire you just need to see if the pitcher is in compliance with the rules.

Rule 6, Section 1C states that the pitcher must start the pitch with both feet in contact with, and within the 24" length of the pitcher's plate.

Rule 6, Section 2 states the pitch starts when the hands separate once they have been brought together.

Rule 6, Section 3I states that the pivot foot (right hand pitcher - right foot; left hand pitcher - left foot) may turn or slide or slide toward the batter provided it remains in contact with the pitcher's plate. *What that means for me as an umpire is that I need to make sure both feet are still in contact with the pitcher's plate when the hands separate to start the pitch.*

Rule 6, Section 3K states that pushing off and dragging the pivot foot in contact with the ground is required. If a hole has been created, the pivot foot may drag no higher than the level plane of the ground. *As an umpire I need to make sure I take into consideration that the toe would have dragged the ground if the dirt was in front of the pitching plate.*

As long as some part of the pivot foot is touching the ground during the drag, it is legal by rule. If the pivot foot breaks contact with the ground before the non-pivot foot lands, an illegal pitch should be called provided there was not a hole in front of the pitcher's plate and the pitcher would have dragged the ground had that hole not been there. When explaining to a coach that the pitch was illegal, do not use the words "leap" or "crow hop." ***Simply state the pivot foot did not remain in contact with the ground until the non-pivot foot landed.*** This is the best way to let the coach know that the pitcher violated the rule along with what needs to be corrected. Leaping and crow hopping are terms which describe different "styles" of illegal pitches in the female pitching rule. It is not important to put a name to what is illegal however, it is important to let the coach know what rule was violated so the pitching coach can correct the problem. Simply inform the coach what the pitcher did to violate the rule. Example: "Coach or pitcher, the foot needs to be in contact with the ground until the non-pivot foot lands."

Equipment:

We have a new Easton Bat that has been submitted for approval, approved and posted on the ASA/USA Equipment website. The Model name of this bat is the **Mako Torq**. The bat has a rotating handle. The bottom of the handle, approximately 4 inches, and knob rotate. The grip is a two piece grip butted together and meets our rule, Rule 3, Section 1D.

We are pointing this out because of the rotating handle and knob. We need to make sure we as umpires realize that this handle design and even though it rotates it does not violate ASA/USA rules.

As umpires we have always checked the joint on two piece bats and if the joint was loose and or rotated we took that bat out of play. In this case the handle by design will rotate. Education of our umpires about this design is essential so that we do not remove this bat from Championship play.

2015 Biennial UIC Clinic:

The 2015 UIC Clinic is closer than we think. Meeting about topics, costs, agenda and many more items have been underway for several months. More exact details about the clinic will be coming out in the future months. However we want you to mark your calendars, the dates are February 5th – 8th 2015. Please plan on attending and taking home a lot of great information to your Local Association Umpires.

Mechanics:

We want to clarify a mechanic that may be misunderstood because of our definitions in Rule 1 and in the mechanics Manual. In teaching and discussing the inside outside theory we use the terminology if the ball goes outside the diamond or infield we come inside the infield. When that ball stays inside the diamond or infield we stay outside the infield. Rule 1 Definitions: **INFIELD:** That portion of the field in **fair territory** that includes areas normally covered by infielders. In the umpire manual we state: The Inside / Outside Theory is simple:

- If the ball is hit inside the diamond stay outside the diamond.
- If the ball is hit outside the infield move inside the infield.

This allows the four elements to be in front of you; the ball, the base, the offense and the defense.

The confusion seems to be when the ball is hit in the infield and there is an overthrow to 1B. If the ball is overthrown and stays inside the infield area, in this case fair and foul territory is considered in the infield, then the umpire should stay out so they still have all 4 elements in front of them. Draw an imaginary line from the outer edge of the base to the out of play area and if the ball stays in the area stay outside. If the ball is over thrown and goes outside the infield / diamond then come inside the diamond. Keep in mind when deciding to come inside the diamond, do this to keep all 4 elements in front of you. There are times when the ball is overthrown and it may be slightly outside the diamond / infield and you are stuck cannot get inside. This is when you have to umpire and try to get to the best position possible. Remember just because the ball is in foul ground on an overthrow it does not mean it is outside the infield and or diamond. Keep all four elements in front of you is the key as to if you need to come in or stay out.

Plays and Clarifications:

Play: With one out and R1 on 1B, B3 hits a ground ball that deflects off F1's glove towards F4. R1 in trying to get out of the way bumps F4 causing F4 to miss play the ball resulting in B3 being safe at 1B. The umpire allows play to continue with no outs being called.

Ruling: The umpires are correct in not calling interference if they considered the contact unintentional. The ball was deflected and ASA/USA rules requires the runner to be called out for interference if the contact is intentional. Rule 8, Section 7J[4].

Play: With no outs and R1 on 2B and R2 on 1B, B3 bunts the ball and is thrown out at 1B. R1 advances to 3B and R2 to 2B. After the first pitch to B4, F2 returns the ball to F1 removes her mask and glove and walks toward the pitcher's circle at which time the plate umpire calls "time." After that half inning ends the coach of the team that was on defense tells the umpire not to call time when their catcher removes their equipment and goes to the pitching circle. He informs the umpire that they had a trick play they use to draw the runners off their bases thus getting a runner called out for violation of the Look Back Rule.

Ruling: We do not specifically mention trick plays in the ASA/USA Rule Book or Umpire Manual. If all playing action is over and the pitcher has the ball in the eight foot circle, the runners are required to go one way or the other. That said we should teach umpires as part of *Game Management* that any time the catcher goes to the eight foot circle to talk to the pitcher "time" should be called as long as all play has ceased. In this case, this would be interpreted as the runners have returned to or are returning to their base. Umpires should call "time" as a courtesy for the catcher so that the one time the catcher forgets to request time they are covered by our mechanics. We should not let a mechanic that was started to protect the defense become a trick play. We will call time when the catcher vacates their position to go to the circle to protect them as well as the integrity of the game. Rule 8, Section 7T,

Play: With one out, R1 on 3B, R2 on 1B, B4 hits a ground ball to F6 who throws to 2B to retire R2. On the relay throw to 1B, R2 interferes with the throw. R1 had scored prior to the interference occurring so the next runner closest to home is B4 who the umpire calls out for the third out. Does R1's run count?

Ruling: Since the third out of the inning is on the batter-runner at 1B, the run would not count. Rule 5, Section 5B.

Play: With R1 on 3B and R2 on 2B, B3 hits a sharp grounder back to F1 who knocks it down and it rolls toward the foul line. F1 picks the ball up and throws to 1B and the ball rolls into dead ball territory. B3 had already passed 1B when the ball left F1's hand. Neither R1 nor R2 had advanced.

Ruling: The ball is dead, R1 and R2 are awarded home and B3 is awarded 3B. Rule 8, Section 5G

Play: With R1 on 3B and R2 on 2B, B3 hits a ball toward 3B. R1 (a) touches the batted ball over fair ground while proceeding toward home plate, (b) collides with F5 attempting to throw the ball toward 1B. R2 reaches 3B before R1 interferes.

Ruling: In both (a) and (b) the ball is dead and R1 is out for interference. R2 remains at 3B since the interference occurred after R2 legally touched the base. Rule 8, Section 6C; Rule 8, Section 7J[2].