



July Plays and Clarifications

Mechanic Issues:

Plate Mechanics

As we prepare for the 2016 National Championship season it is imperative that we review several areas of our plate mechanics that have caused concern around the nation.

The first topic we would like to discuss is placing your hands on your knees as a locking mechanism for your body. We have always taught that having your hands in front of your body in a comfortable position is the desired mechanic. However, some umpires prefer to place their hands on their knees to lock themselves in their plate stance. Steadying yourself by placing your hands on your knees is acceptable as long as three things happen. First, you must go to the set position at the top of the strike zone prior to placing your hands on your knees. Second, you should not be resting your weight on your knees. Third, you should not be locked into this position waiting for the pitcher to perform their preliminaries and start the pitch; but instead, as mentioned above, you should wait to place your hands on your knees as you reach the set position. Remember the modified Jerry Davis stance, where an umpire locks their hands on their knees as the pitcher receives the ball and remains in this position for the entire pitch is not **acceptable** in ASA/USA Softball.

The second topic of concern is being in the correct slot position to call balls and strikes. We have seen too many umpires set up too far in the slot placing them behind the batter. It is possible to have good heel / toe alignment, go set to the proper height and have Good Pelvic Alignment (GPA), but if you are not properly aligned in the slot it makes it very difficult to call a good and consistent outside corner. Properly positioning yourself in the slot is controlled by your step in technique combined with the width of your stance. We always stress you should step in with the foot behind the catcher first and then the foot behind the batter. Exact placement of the foot behind the catcher will vary from umpire to umpire depending on the width of their stance. Using the plate as a reference the umpire should find a location to place their foot behind the catcher so that when they place their foot behind the batter it brings their body to a position where their inside ear (the one toward the plate) is on the inside corner of the plate. This allows the umpire to be outside the perimeter of the strike zone where they can properly track the pitch all the way from the pitcher's hand to the catcher's glove or ground. If you are too far inside but feel your feet are not too spread out, then you should adjust how you walk in and where you place your foot behind the catcher. Adjust this foot so when you do spread out into your stance you have your inside ear (the one toward the plate) on the inside corner of the side of the plate you are on. In other words you could need to move where you place the foot behind the catcher further towards the other batter's box allowing your head and eyes to be out of the strike zone while affording the best and most constant view of the outside corner.

The third and final topic is the height of the set position. Whether you are umpiring Slow Pitch or Fast Pitch you should always go set to the top of the strike zone at the start of the pitch. Going set at the top of the zone, slightly inside the inside corner, ear on the inside corner, looking down and through the strike zone allows you to define two parts of the strike zone. This allows the umpire to see down and through the zone creating a consistent angle on every pitch leading to a much more consistent strike zone. Also by establishing these two parts of the strike

zone it makes calling pitches in these areas much easier. If you are tracking the pitch and have to move your head toward the batter when it crosses the plate, the pitch is inside. Similarly if you have to move your head up while tracking the pitch through the zone, the pitch has to be high.

As you can see from the above discussion all parts of the plate stance play a vital role in helping an umpire develop a consistent strike zone. An umpire must use all the elements of plate mechanics together correctly in order to develop into an excellent plate umpire. Working in the slot, with your ear on the inside corner, with a good heel / toe alignment, proper GPA and setting at the top of the strike zone along with proper tracking of the pitch will lead to a consistent, well defined strike zone. Please click on the link below to see an animation of what we are describing.

<http://downloads.asasoftball.com/about/videos/SlotDemoFinal.mp4>

Base Mechanics

We have had several discussions involving the terminology of “shading the lead runner” when we are counter rotated in a three umpire system or rotated in a two umpire system. We say in our umpire manual that with runners on base, the base umpire should “shade the lead runner.”

In Slow Pitch and Fast Pitch this normally means you are on the 1B side or off of the left shoulder of second baseman with a single runner on 1B. With a runner on 2B in Slow Pitch you are on the 2B side or off of the right shoulder of the second baseman. The same mindset is true in Fast Pitch if you are rotated to the shortstop side of the diamond.

Shading the lead runner does not necessarily mean you will be off of the shoulder closest to the lead runner. It could mean that you are off of the opposite shoulder of the defender but still close to the base occupied by the lead runner. This normally happens because of the positions of the fielders. This is especially true in our game of Slow Pitch. However, it also happens frequently in Fast Pitch.

Shading the lead runner in Slow Pitch or Fast Pitch should be defined as taking a position closer to the lead runner than the trail runner. This position should only be adjusted when the defensive alignment requires you to make an adjustment. If your movement violates the lead runner theory, then try to move in the direction closest to the lead runner.

Remember, it is okay to adjust your position if the adjustment clears the field of view for the fielder.

Plays and Rulings:

PLAY: (Fast Pitch) R1 on 2B, R2 on 1B and no outs. B3 bunts the ball in the air, all the way to just inside the third base bag. F5 knocks the ball down to the ground with the back of the glove, picks the ball up steps on 3B and throws to 2B for a double play. Offensive manager comes out protesting for an infield fly call.

RULING: The protest for infield fly is not valid. **Rule 1 Definition:** The infield fly rule is applicable to “a fair fly ball, not including a line drive or an attempted bunt”. The intent of the infield fly rule is to prevent this play on batted balls, not attempted bunts. On this play the offense is also protected from the fielder intentionally dropping the fly ball in an attempt to execute a double play (Rule 2, Section 2J), and its effect “dead ball, runners must return to last base touched at time of the pitch”. This rule would not apply to this play as the third baseman “knocked the ball down” and did not “intentionally drop the ball”. These rules are in place to protect the offense, but the defense made a legal play within the rules and earned a double play.

PLAY: Fast Pitch: R1 is on 3B, R2 is on 2B, with no outs and the defensive coach wants to walk the batter to load the bases. The coach has instructed the pitcher not to pitch the ball and let the 20 seconds expire. The umpire allows this four times and allows the batter-runner to advance to 1B.

RULING: This should not be allowed. **Rule, 6A, Section 3O**, “the pitcher has 20 seconds to release the next pitch after receiving the ball or after the umpire indicates “play ball”. The effect is a ball on the Batter. However this rule is intended to keep the speed of the game going not to allow players and or coaches to circumvent other rules. The umpire should warn the pitcher and or the coach that they, by rule, must pitch by rule and not doing so could result in an ejection of the pitcher and or the coach for Unsportsmanlike behavior. **Rule 10, Section 1**

PLAY: R1 on 2B and R2 on 1B and no outs. B3 is scheduled to bat but B4 bats. B4 hits a ground ball to F6 which fields the ball and throws to 2B retiring R2 and then to 1B retiring B4. After the play and before the next pitch, the defense appeals batting out of order.

RULING: By **Rule 7, Section 2D[2] Effect 1-4**, B4, who was the incorrect batter, time at bat is negated. B3 who should have batted is called out. Since R2 was called out prior to the discovery of the infraction, they remain out, R1 is returned to 2B and B4 now bats again. Result: two outs R2 back on 2B and B4 bats.

PLAY: R1 on 3B and R2 on 1B with one out. B4 hits a fly ball to F8 who catches the fly ball for out number two. R1 tags up properly and scores. R2 did not tag up and was between 1B and 2B when F8 throws the ball to 1B to appeal R2 for leaving early on a caught fly ball. F3 catches the ball and steps on 1B after R1 had scored from 3B. The umpire calls R1 out for the third out and allows the run to score.

RULING: R2 on 1B is out on appeal and R1 scored from 3B prior to the appeal and that run counts per **Rule 5 Section 5B[2]**. No run shall be scored if the third out of the inning is the result of a runner being put out by a tag or live ball appeal play prior to the lead runner touching home plate.

PLAY: R1 on 1B and one out. Fly Ball to F8 and F8 catches the ball. R1 had rounded 2B thinking the ball would not be caught and was on their way to 3B. F8 threw the ball to 1B to retire R1 for not tagging up while R1 was between 1B and 2B at the time of the throw. The ball gets away from F3 and goes out of play. In returning to 1B, R1 cut across the diamond without retouching 2B, retags at 1B and is awarded 3B by the umpire.

RULING: This would be an appeal play by the defensive team for R1 not returning to 1B by touching the bases in reverse order. If appealed properly before the next pitch R1 should be called out and there would now be three outs. Rule 8, Section 7G.