

Plays and Clarifications

February, 2026

Many of you have already started your 2026 umpiring season while others are preparing to start as the seasons change and the temperatures warm. Good luck to all our umpires and a wish for a successful '26 season. The preparation for this year begins with brushing up on mechanics, new rules and examining your uniforms and equipment. 2026 brings us relatively few changes, with changes coming in the rules and the uniform/equipment supplier that we use for USA Softball. The rule changes will be addressed below in the next paragraph. The uniform/equipment supplier is now Honig's, a legendary name in this industry. Your access to Honig's can be either through their website at www.honigs.com/collections/usa-softball or by clicking on the "Officials Gear" section in the umpire tab of the USA Softball website.

New Rules for 2026

The changes along with commentary are presented using the link below.

<https://www.usasoftball.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/120/2025/12/11-10-2025-2026-USA-Softball-Rule-Changes-with-Comments-Final.pdf>

National Umpire Schools

We have had a busy start to the year with the training component of our umpire program. We have had several NUS, a Fast Pitch Camp in conjunction with the HPP program in Vero Beach as well as a Slow Pitch Camp in Las Vegas. We still have four NUS opportunities available and information is available on those at

<https://www.usasoftball.com/umpires/national-umpire-schools/>

PLAYS

Any Game R1 on 3B and R2 on 2B, B4 hits a pop up behind the pitching plate. F1 is backing up along with F4 & F6 coming in to try and field the pop fly. F6 collides with R2 in their attempt to field the pop fly. The umpire ruled interference by R2 and declared them out, putting R1 back at 3B and B4 at 1B. Correct Ruling?

Result: This could be yes or no, and it depends on the judgment of the umpire. As we know there is a lot of gray area in rulings on interference and obstruction, but it boils down to the

judgment of the umpire. If, in the umpire's judgment F6 was the fielder in the act of fielding a batted ball and could make a play on the pop fly and retire either a runner or the batter-runner the call of interference would be correct. If, in the umpire's judgment F6 would not have had a play to retire either a runner or B4 then the correct ruling would have been obstruction on F6 impeding R2. Only one fielder is considered to be in the act of fielding a batted ball and they are the fielder that can be interfered with, the other fielders are liable to be guilty of obstruction. Lots of factors go into that judgment, but here we would have a call based solely on judgment of the umpire. *Rule 8-7-J, 8-5-B{4}, Rule 1 Interference, Rule 1 Obstruction, Rule Supplement 33 & 36*

Fast Pitch R1 on 3B and R2 on 2B. The pitch to B4 (RH batter) is inside and B4 makes a successful bunt up the first baseline. B4, slowed by the inside pitch and bunt is slightly delayed in leaving the batter's box, but proceeds towards 1B and is in fair territory just past the batter's box. F3 fields the bunt and throws to F2 for a play on R1 and the throw hits B4. The umpire allows the play to continue and B4 reaches 1B, R1 scores and R2 reaches 3B. The defensive coach wants interference on B4. What is the correct ruling?

Result: The umpire allowing the play to continue with all the results standing would be the correct ruling. B4 did not interfere with F3's opportunity to make a play. B4 was not required to be in the running lane (since the lane had not started yet) and was hit with an errant throw from F3. B4 could have created interference with the throw, but it would have taken a deliberate act of interference on the throw, merely running the bases properly is not a deliberate act. *Rule 8-2F-[2&3], 8-7J{3}*

Slow Pitch In a Men's "C" game the pitcher receives the ball from the catcher from six feet behind the pitching plate. The pitcher starts moving forward with one foot inside the length of the pitching plate and one foot outside the length of the pitching plate. As the pitcher approaches the pitching plate they release the pitch to the batter. Is this a legal delivery inside the pitching box?

Result: No. This pitch would be ruled an illegal pitch. The pitcher may take a position up to six feet behind the pitching plate with at least one foot within the 24" length of the pitching plate. This pitch was declared illegal because the pitcher after receiving the return from the catcher never came to a stop in the pitching position. The rules allow pitchers in the "C" level and below to use a six-foot pitching box and are not required to be on the pitching plate, but they are still required to come to a full and complete stop with the ball in front of the body. *Rule 6C-1-B&D*

Slow Pitch In the fourth inning F1 (Jones) is due to bat. The offense puts in a substitute (Smith) to bat for the F1. Smith reaches base with a double. The offensive team reenters

Jones at 2B. As Jones takes their position on 2B the offensive team now wants a courtesy runner for the pitcher Jones. Is this legal?

Result: No, they cannot enter a courtesy runner for the pitcher in this case. In Slow Pitch the pitcher is entitled to a courtesy runner when they earn their way on a base. In this play the substitute (Smith) earned their way on the base but had not yet established themselves as the F1. Jones was the F1 at the time of the at bat and would be allowed a courtesy runner had they batted for themselves and reached base safely. Although they cannot enter a courtesy runner for Jones as the pitcher, a team is allowed to use one courtesy runner per inning for a player other than the pitcher, and they could utilize that one allowance for Jones if desired. *Rule 8-9-A{2}*