

March 25, 2024

Covering the Rules of Softball

Situation 1: With no runners on base, B1 hits a base hit to right field. As B1 is rounding first base F3 is standing on the corner of the base and B1 is forced to run around F3. The umpire signals and verbalizes “obstruction” and B1 seeing the ball being thrown in to F4 at second base returns to first base. The first base coach seeing and hearing the obstruction call tells B1 to run to second base where they are tagged out easily. The umpire rules that B1 remains out as the obstruction was cancelled once B1 returned to first base, the base they would have reached had there been no obstruction in their judgement. **RULING:** Incorrect ruling. A runner cannot be called out between the two bases where they were obstructed, with only six exceptions as listed in rule 8-4-3 Penalty 1, Exceptions. In order for exception (a) to apply, the obstructed runner must reach the base they would have reached had there been no obstruction AND there is a subsequent play on a different runner. In this case there was no subsequent play on a different runner so B1 is still protected between first and second base, in this case when B1 was tagged out the umpire should have called a dead ball and awarded B1 first base, the base they would have reached in their judgement. (8-4-3b Penalty 1, Exception a)

Situation 2: With R1 on second base, B2 hits a base hit toward the center fielder. As B2 is rounding first base they are obstructed by F3 between first and second base. Seeing the ball being returned to F6 at second base B2 returns to first base. R1 has rounded third base and F6 now throws behind R1 trying to make a play on them returning to third base. B2 seeing the throw leaves first base and continues on to second base where they are thrown out on a close play sliding into second base. The umpire rules B2 is out. The offensive coach objects saying B2 was obstructed between first base and second base and cannot be put out between those two bases. **RULING:** Correct ruling by the umpire. Obstructed runners cannot be put out between the two bases where they were obstructed (unless they violate the exceptions listed). In this play, exception (a) was violated. Once B2 returned to first base, the base the umpire judged they would have reached had there been no obstruction, and there was a subsequent play on a different runner (R1 at third base) then B2 is no longer protected between first and second base and they may be put out. (8-4-3b Penalty 1, Exception a)

Pace of Play

As umpires and coaches are aware, pace of play is a point of emphasis from the NFHS this year. Good softball is softball that hustles. Players, coaches and umpires are all part of keeping the pace desirable for good softball.

Get Everyone’s Opinion

If umpires believe there is legitimate information to be had from other partners, they take the time to get everyone’s opinion. That may sound contrary to the POE above, however this is an area we can take time to get it right. We don’t get talked into something from an outside source, but umpires should get together gather all the information on a play and make a final determination.