



March 20, 2023

NFHS Softball Weekly Rule Interpretations

Situation 1: R1 is on first base and leads off on the pitch. As R1 is returning to 1B, F3 moves toward the base blocking the front edge of the base causing R1 to alter their path while returning to the base. The base coach asks the umpire about F3 obstructing R1 and they inform the coach that there is no need to signal obstruction since R1 obtained the base they would have reached had there not been obstruction.

RULING: Incorrect procedure. Although there may be no award/advancement for this obstructed runner, obstruction must be called (delayed ball signal and verbal of “obstruction”) every time that a defender impedes the progress of a runner without possession of the ball or not making an initial play on a batted ball. Consistency in making this call every time it occurs is critical to enforcement when a play results in awarding an obstructed runner the base they would have reached had there been no obstruction. If the umpire does not signal obstruction every time it occurs and only signals when the runner is put out and then they award that runner a base, the discussion with the defensive coach becomes much more difficult. This “routine” obstruction signal also does not have to be flashy or verbalized loudly, however it is necessary to signal so all can see and verbalized just loud enough for the runner, F3 and possibly the base coach to hear. (8-4-3b PENALTIES)

Situation 2: With R1 on second base and no outs, B2 hits a deep fly ball to left field. As R1 is approaching home, F7 throws toward home but the throw is offline toward the fence drawing F2 into R1’s path resulting in contact between the two players. R1 recovers and is able to touch home without any issue. The plate umpire makes no signal, after the ball is dead the third base coach asks if F2 running into R1 was obstruction. The plate umpire tells the coach that since R1 was able to continue to home and score there was nothing. **RULING:** Incorrect ruling, incorrect procedure. Any time that a fielder not in possession of the ball or not making an initial play on a batted ball, impedes the progress of a runner that is legally running the bases obstruction has occurred. In this play, as soon as R1 was impeded (they slowed down, adjusted their path etc., any reaction R1 had to F2’s position or actions) obstruction occurred and should be signaled with a delayed dead ball signal and a verbal of “obstruction”. As with situation 1 above, consistently enforcing the rules by correctly indicating a violation has occurred (delayed dead ball signal and verbal) every time it happens is critical when the obstruction results in a runner being awarded a base. (8-4-3b, 8-4-3b Penalties)

Situation 3: With R1 on first base and no outs, B2 hits a deep fly ball to left field. As R1 rounds second base and is headed to third base they are obstructed by F6. R1 is able to regain their footing and is put out on a close play sliding into third base, at this point B2 is two steps away from second base. When R1 is put out, the umpire signals and verbalizes, “Dead Ball that was obstruction this runner (pointing to R1) is awarded third base and that runner (pointing to B2) is awarded second base”. **RULING:** Correct ruling. It is umpire judgement as to the base(s) that a runner would have reached had there not been obstruction. In this case, the umpire judged that R1 would have safely reached third base had there

been no obstruction. Also as detailed in NFHS rules the obstructed runner and each other runner affected by the obstruction will be awarded the base or bases which would have been reached, in the umpire's judgment, had there not been obstruction. Since R1, the obstructed runner, was put out prior to reaching the base that would have been reached had there not been obstruction a dead ball is called. This dead ball, which was caused by enforcing the obstruction, affected B2 as they were kept from reaching second base. Due to B2 being affected by the obstruction they are awarded second base, the base the umpire judged they would have reached had there not been obstruction. (8-4-3b, 8-4-3b PENALTIES 1)

Situation 4: With no runners on and the outfield playing shallow, B1 hits a deep fly ball that hits the outfield fence in flight. As B1 is rounding first base, F3 is standing near the base watching the outfielders run toward the ball. B1 and F3 collide near first base knocking B1 to the ground with F3 landing on top of B1; at this point, no fielder has reached the ball in the outfield. It takes several seconds for F3 and B1 to untangle, when B1 is able to regain their footing the ball is heading toward the infield and B1 returns to first base. The umpire rules that F3 obstructed B1 but since B1 did not attempt to advance past first base, the only possible award is first base. **RULING:** Incorrect ruling. When a runner is obstructed, the umpire must judge what base the runner would have reached had there not been obstruction. This judgement is based on a number of factors including the speed of the runner, the location of the ball vs the defender's proximity when obstruction occurs, etc. In this play, which base the obstructed runner returns to, should not factor into the umpire's judgement of which base they should be awarded. As stated, the umpire should judge what base the runner would have reached had there not been obstruction. In this situation with the ball still a ways past the defenders in the outfield and the obstruction delaying B1 for several seconds, the award is most likely at least second base. If the umpire judges B1 would have reached third base had there not been obstruction it is well within the rules for the umpire to award third base. Again, the base the runner would have reached had there not been obstruction is completely umpire judgement. (8-4-3b, 8-4-3b PENALTIES 3)