

# TOP 10 MISUNDERSTOOD RULES

These ten rules have been selected as rules about which there are many common misconceptions. These misconceptions then lead to many forms of abuse whether it be heckling from the fans who misunderstand (or don't agree with) the rule, verbal abuse from coaches and/or players, etc.

The Top 10 Misunderstood Rules in Softball Are:

1. **Left Hand Turn from First**
2. **Check Swing**
3. **Award of Bases on Overthrow**
4. **Batted Ball hitting Home Plate, First Base, Second Base or Third Base**
5. **Batter stepping on home plate or mat or directly in front of home plate or mat**
6. **Fair ball bouncing out of play or off a defensive player**
7. **Infield Fly**
8. **Lead-off (Pitcher's Circle) - Fast Pitch only**
9. **Difference between Interference / Obstruction**
10. **Double Base**

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## 1. Left hand turn from first.

A runner forfeits his/her exemption from liability to be put out if, after overrunning first base, he/she makes an attempt to run to second base.

The key to this rule is to continue to second base. There must be at least an attempt towards second base. It does not matter which direction the batter-runner turns after reaching first base if they are coming back to first base without attempting to advance to second base.

## 2. Check swing.

If it is the plate umpire's judgement that the batter made an attempt to swing at the ball (but not a full swing), the plate umpire shall call the pitched ball a strike. This call is NOT to be appealed to the base umpire - use the guiding principle that the plate umpire does not call it a strike unless he/she saw the attempted swing - therefore no need for an appeal of what the plate umpire saw.

However, if the batter attempted to swing at the ball but the plate umpire did not see the attempt (perhaps blocked out by the catcher) then a ball shall be called. With this call, the plate umpire does have the opportunity to check with his/her base umpire(s) with or without a request from the defensive team. The plate umpire may make the request on their own or may choose to make the request when requested to do so by the defensive team. The key to the base umpire is that they shall only answer a check swing request made by the plate umpire - they do not respond to a request made directly to them by a defensive player.

Should the base umpire see the attempt that the plate umpire did not see, they shall respond by calling "yes" and the call shall be changed from ball to strike.

## 3. Award of bases on overthrow.

The common misconception with this rule is the old rule of "one plus one," a rule that was changed long ago. The correct ruling is that when a thrown ball goes out of play (beyond the established boundary lines of the playing field)

- ◆ all runners, including the batter-runner shall be awarded two bases from the last base legally touched based on their position at the time that the thrown ball left the fielder's hand
- ◆ if there are two runners between the same bases, the award is based on the position of the lead runner

Keys to remember with this rule:

- ◆ the award is based on their position at the time the throw was made, not at the time that the ball went out of play - watch for that very long overthrow from the outfield

- ◆ the award is two bases from the last base legally touched - if a runner is returning to first base to tag up on a fly ball, they will still be awarded two bases which is second base and third base as the last base that they had legally touched was first base
- ◆ The proper mechanics for this situation are to call "Dead Ball" as soon as the ball goes out of play then award the bases accordingly. Your award should be swift and decisive.
- ◆ With multiple runners or a long overthrow, if you have any doubt consult with your fellow Umpire(s) immediately before the award and get it right the first time.

#### **4. Batted ball hitting home plate, first base, second base or third base.**

##### Home Plate

- ◆ A batted ball remains alive and in play when it strikes home plate: This is a common misconception - many, many years ago when a batted ball struck home plate it was declared a dead ball.
- ◆ In the event that a batted ball comes to rest on home plate, it shall be ruled a fair ball and the plate umpire shall signal accordingly.
- ◆ Remember, the fair/foul lines come to the back point of home plate so the plate is completely in fair territory.

##### First or Third Base

- ◆ When properly installed, first and third base are positioned on the diamond completely in fair territory. A smart Umpire looks around between pitches to ensure this is always true.
- ◆ Once a batted ball strikes first or third base without having been first touched by a player, the batted ball shall be ruled a fair ball regardless of where the ball ends up.
- ◆ Once the ball touches first or third base it does not have to pass the base, touching the base is all that is required to make it a fair ball.
- ◆ The plate umpire should signal fair ball immediately once the batted ball strikes the base

##### Second Base

- ◆ Once a batted ball strikes second base without having been first touched by a player, the batted ball shall be ruled a fair ball.

#### **5. Batter stepping on home plate or mat or directly in front of home plate or mat.**

##### Stepping on Home Plate or Mat

- ◆ the batter is out if any part of their foot is touching home plate or touching the mat when the bat contacts the ball
- ◆ the ball is dead and runners may not advance on the play.

##### Stepping directly in front of Home Plate or Mat

- ◆ The batter is out if their foot is completely outside the lines of the batter's box and touching the ground when the bat contacts the ball - therefore if the batter's foot is completely in front of home plate their foot is obviously completely outside the lines of the batter's box.
- ◆ The batter is out if their foot is completely in front or behind the mat touching the ground when the bat contacts the ball.
- ◆ The ball is dead and runners may not advance on the play.

##### Points of Emphasis:

- ◆ There is no penalty unless the batter makes contact with the ball.
- ◆ The position of the foot must be judged at the time the bat makes contact with the ball - if the foot is in the air and then comes down on the ground after the ball is hit, there is no penalty.
- ◆ With the exception of the foot touching home plate or touching the mat, the foot must be completely outside the lines of the batter's box - touching any part of the lines is acceptable as the lines are part of the box
- ◆ The same penalty applies whether the batted ball is fair or foul - "Dead Ball" is called as soon as the batter makes contact with the ball.

#### **6. Fair ball bouncing out of play or off a defensive player.**

When a fair ball bounces out of play, including if it deflects off a defensive player, the umpire shall declare "Dead Ball" as soon as the ball goes out of play.

- ◆ All runners shall be awarded two bases.
- ◆ The award is based on their position at the time of the pitch - not at the time that the ball went out of play.
- ◆ The award is the same regardless of where the ball actually goes out of play.

- ◆ Be prepared that this rule could actually end up bringing runners backwards.
- ◆ A long rolling ground ball goes out of play and the batter is already past second base - the batter goes back to second base.
- ◆ Same play, runner starting at first base is already past third base and on their way to score when the batted ball goes out of play, the runner is returned to third base.

## 7. Infield Fly.

Requirements for an Infield Fly:

- ◆ Runners on first and second base OR first, second and third base.
- ◆ Less than 2 out.
- ◆ Not a bunt.
- ◆ Not a line drive.
- ◆ Can be caught by an infielder with ordinary effort this includes the, pitcher, catcher or any outfielder positioned in the infield.

What should the umpire do?

- ◆ In an infield fly situation, prior to the first pitch of the at bat, the umpires should give the infield fly signal to each other. When it becomes apparent that a batted ball is an infield fly (typically when the ball reaches its' highest point and is just on its' way down) the plate umpire shall declare "INFIELD FLY, IF FAIR - THE BATTER IS OUT"

Once an Infield Fly is declared:

- ◆ if the hit becomes a foul ball, no penalty, treat like any other foul ball
- ◆ if the hit remains a fair ball
- ◆ the batter is out regardless of whether the ball is caught or not
- ◆ the ball remains alive
- ◆ the runners may advance at their own risk
- ◆ if the fly ball is caught, they must tag up
- ◆ if the fly ball is not caught, they can choose to advance but as the batter has already been declared out there is no force play

## 8. Lead-off (Pitcher's Circle) - Fast Pitch only.

The Pitcher's Circle is the area within an 8' radius of the pitcher's plate - the lines are considered within the circle.

The common misconception is that if the ball is thrown back to the pitcher and he/she has it in his/her position in the pitcher's circle before the batter-runner reaches first base that the batter-runner must stop at first base.

Even though the ball may be in the pitcher's possession in the pitcher's circle, the batter-runner may:

- ◆ continue past first base.
- ◆ is entitled to run toward second base, as long as he/she does not stop at first base.
- ◆ once the runner makes a stop, he/she must immediately proceed to the next base or return to his/her base UNLESS the pitcher makes a play (including a fake throw) on the runner or another runner.

If the runner stops and simply stands there off the base while the pitcher has possession of the ball in the pitcher's circle and no play is made - "DEAD BALL - RUNNER IS OUT - LEAD-OFF" If the runner stops and then makes a move in more than one direction immediately after the stop while the pitcher has possession of the ball in the pitcher's circle and no play is made "DEAD BALL - RUNNER IS OUT - LEAD-OFF"

Points of Emphasis:

- ◆ The pitcher cannot force the first stop by a runner merely by having possession of the ball in the pitcher's circle. Put another way - the runner is allowed one stop - as soon as he/she stops he/she must make a decision immediately to either advance or return.
- ◆ A play on the runner (including a fake throw) nullifies any penalty - put another way, every fake throw allows the runner one more stop.

## 9. Difference between Interference/Obstruction

Interference:

- ◆ Typically an act by an offensive player.
- ◆ Also possible to have umpire interference and spectator interference.
- ◆ Results in “Dead Ball” being called (exception - umpire interference).
- ◆ Results in an out if by an offensive player.
- ◆ Common misconception - catcher’s interference is actually catcher’s obstruction.

Obstruction:

- ◆ Is an act by a defensive player.
- ◆ Results in a delayed dead ball.
- ◆ Award is determined at the end of the play (exception - if the obstructed runner is called out).
- ◆ An obstruction call does not entitle the obstructed runner to keep attempting to advance until played upon.

These two rules require:

- ◆ an immediate call when either interference or obstruction occurs - do not hesitate, these are not the type of calls to be made after the fact.
- ◆ A decisive call

Contact does not always mean interference or obstruction occurred. There is such a thing as incidental contact - 2 players both unsure of where to go and contact is made. Rule 8.10(c) states that the runner is not out when more than one fielder attempts to field a batted ball and the runner comes in contact with the one who, in the umpire’s judgment, was not entitled to field the ball.

**TIP** - when contact occurs and in the umpire’s judgment that neither interference nor obstruction occurred, make a “SAFE” signal with no verbal call - shows that you saw it and you made your decision that no call was necessary.

## 10. Double Base.

The Double Base is used at first base with the orange portion in foul territory and the white portion in fair territory. Referring to 4. above - a batted ball striking the white/fair portion is declared a fair ball, a batted ball striking the orange/foul portion is declared a foul ball - a batted ball striking the centre of the double base is declared a fair ball as it therefore hits a portion of the white/fair portion of the base.

The defensive player (typically the first baseman) must use only the white/fair portion of the base at all times.

The offensive player must use only the orange/foul portion of the base on his/her first attempt at first base when a play is being made on him/her. This includes when the batter-runner runs on a dropped third strike.

On a ball hit to the outfield with no play being made at first base, the offensive player may touch either portion of the base on his/her first attempt at first base.

Once an offensive player has touched the orange/foul portion of the base on his/her first attempt at first base, he/she must then use the white/fair portion of the base:

- ◆ when returning to the base after overrunning first base
- ◆ when taking his/her position prior to the next pitch
- ◆ when tagging up on a fly ball

Points of Emphasis:

- ◆ the defensive player - provided any portion of his/her foot is touching any portion of the white/fair portion of the base, he/she is considered to be in contact with the base
- ◆ the offensive player - when he/she is required to use the orange/foul portion, provided any portion of his/her foot is touching any portion of the orange/foul portion of the base, he/she is considered to be in contact with the base
- ◆ once the offensive player has made his/her first attempt at first base, for simplicity sake the orange/foul portion of the base no longer exists for him/her