

# BASEBALL

PRESEASON GUIDE 2025

## Sticky Situations

### Hitting Aids, Forfeits Focus of NFHS Rule Changes

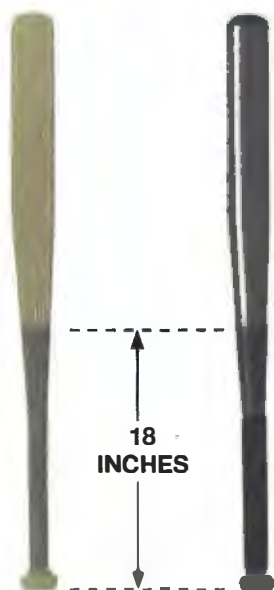
The NFHS Baseball Rules Committee approved two rule changes related to equipment and forfeits during its 2024 meeting in Indianapolis.

The new rule changes were subsequently approved by the NFHS Board of Directors for implementation during the 2025 high school baseball season.

#### Bats, Ball and Gloves (1-3-2c1)

A change to rulebook language clarifies what is legal for a batter to use on all bats — both wood and non-wood — to aid in being able to hold on to the bat.

Resin, pine tar or any drying agent are permitted to enhance the hold on



An NFHS rule change for the 2025 season allows batters to use resin, pine tar or any drying agent up to 18 inches from the base of the knob toward the barrel on any non-wood bat.



the bat, not to exceed 18 inches from the base of the knob. The rationale for the change is to allow batters to have better control over non-wood bats so they do not slip out of the hands.

**Play 1:** As B1 is approaching the plate with a non-wood bat, F2 asks the home plate umpire whether the pine tar on B1's bat is legal. Upon visual inspection, the umpire rules the pine tar (a) does not exceed 18 inches from the base of the knob toward the barrel, or (b) exceeds 18 inches from the base of the knob toward the barrel. **Ruling 1:** In (a), the bat is legal. In (b), the bat is not legal and is removed from play. B1 is not out for using an illegal bat, as he has not yet entered the batter's box (7-4-1a).

**Play 2:** B1 hits a home run to tie the game. As B1 touches home plate, the catcher challenges the legality of B1's bat, as it has pine tar above and on the bat off of the bat grip. **Ruling 2:** It is now permissible for pine tar to be on the bat and off of the bat grip, provided it does not extend beyond 18 inches from the knob of the bat. While B1's bat has pine tar above the grip, it does not extend more than 18 inches from the knob of the bat and thus is legal. The home run counts.

#### Forfeits (4-4-1c)

The language of the forfeiture rule has been expanded to include situations when a team delays more than a

reasonable amount of time in not obeying an umpire's order to remove a player, coach or team personnel for violation of the rules.

**Play 3:** During the third inning, team A is leading, 3-0, when (a) F1 is ejected for intentionally throwing at B1, (b) team A's head coach is ejected after a second occurrence of a team A player using an illegal bat, or (c) a student scorekeeper is ejected for stepping out of the dugout and yelling at U1 following a close play at first base. In all three instances, the offender refuses to leave the dugout and allow the game to resume. **Ruling 3:** In all three instances, the umpires shall declare a forfeit and rule a 7-0 victory in favor of team B (4-4-2). ■

## NFHS 2025 Points of Emphasis

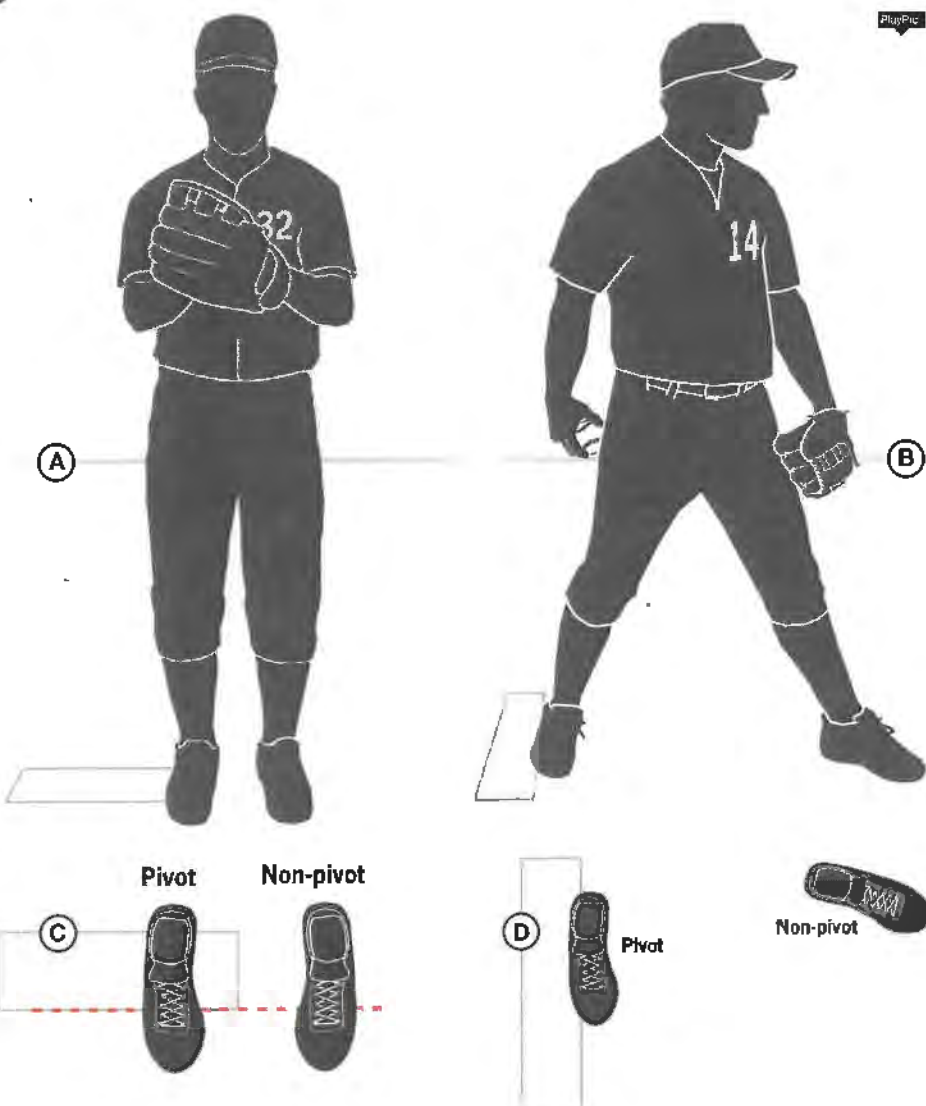
The NFHS Baseball Rules Committee has issued five points of emphasis (POEs) for the 2025 season. They are not listed in priority order and are considered of equal importance:

### Pitching Positions

The proper manner in which a pitcher may deliver a pitch to the plate continues to be one of the most discussed and modified rules in NFHS baseball.

Entering the 2025 season, it's important for umpires to remember that pitchers are required to use one of two positions — the windup or the set — and for umpires, players and coaches to understand the differences between the two as spelled out in rule 6 of the NFHS rulebook.

The only two starting positions for a pitcher in NFHS play are the windup (PlayPic A) and the set (PlayPic B). Footwork determines which of the two positions the pitcher is using (PlayPics C and D).







One of the points of emphasis for the 2025 season centers on last year's rule change to allow one-way electronic communication between the dugout/bench area and the catcher, and reminding coaches that this communication cannot be used with any other players on the field (PlayPic E).

The most basic tenet currently in use is that the position of the pitcher's pivot foot determines which of the pitching positions is being used. In the windup, the pitcher's pivot foot is in contact with the pitcher's plate and is not parallel to it. In the set, the pivot foot is in contact with or directly in front of and parallel to the pitcher's plate.

## Improper Use of Communication Equipment

Last season, the NFHS approved

the use of one-way electronic communication devices from the dugout/bench to the catcher. Trial and error of the first season of use has prompted the NFHS to clarify a few items related to the use of this technology.

First, the device cannot be used by the catcher to respond or communicate back to the coach.

Second, various equipment may be used, such as an ear-piece style, an electronic band or a smart watch,

providing schools with several options at various costs.

Finally, no other player is able to wear or use this device, and a coach is not allowed to communicate with any other player using electronic communication.

## Bench Decorum

Good sporting behavior continues to be a concern for the NFHS across all sports. This year's POE stresses the need for coaches to set the tone at athletic contests with their own display of sportsmanship and respect, and that with proper management of students in their dugout/bench area, such behavior will set a positive example for players, spectators and others.

## Use of Props

The NFHS is adamant that there is no logical purpose for the inclusion of props at education-based athletic events, as they are being used to demean and embarrass the opponent.

## Use of Authenticated Mark Program Balls

This POE stresses the need for NFHS games to be played with baseballs that feature the NFHS authentication mark. Doing so serves two purposes: proving that the use of conforming equipment is essential to the integrity of NFHS contests, and promoting a level playing field by ensuring consistency in the equipment being used. ■

# Flashback: 2024 Rule Changes

Communication between coaches and players, and more specifically, the tools allowed to facilitate it, took center stage during the 2023 NFHS Baseball Rules Committee meeting in Indianapolis.

The committee voted in favor of three rule changes related to communication devices and clarified one rule related to the forfeiture of games due to sportsmanship issues, all of which were subsequently approved by the NFHS Board of Directors for implementation during the 2024 high school baseball season.

## Player Communication Equipment/Coaching (3-2-5 NEW, 1-6-2 NEW)

The NFHS followed the lead of the NCAA and pro games, allowing one-way communication devices from the dugout to the catcher while the team is on defense for the purpose of calling pitches.

Coaches are only allowed to use a

communication device to communicate with the catcher while their team is on defense. The coach must also be in the dugout/bench area.

The penalty for improper use of the communication device is a team warning on the first offense. Any subsequent offense will lead to ejection of the offender and the team's head coach.

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**Play 1:** After putting the ball in play to start the game, the plate umpire notices team A's catcher is wearing (a) an earpiece, (b) a microphone or (c) an electronic watch. **Ruling 1:** Legal in (a), illegal in (b) and (c), as the communication device may only be one-way from the coach to the player. The catcher must remove the equipment and the team is issued a warning for using illegal equipment.

**Play 2:** During the second inning, the base umpire notices the team A shortstop has an earpiece and is receiving (a) pitch signals or (b) defensive positioning instructions from the third-base dugout. **Ruling 2:** Illegal in both (a) and (b), as the communication device may only be one-way from the coach to the catcher. The shortstop must remove the earpiece and the team is issued a warning for using illegal equipment.

**Play 3:** During the third inning, the plate umpire notices the team A catcher is receiving instructions via an earpiece. The umpire asks the catcher where his coach is located, and the catcher responds that his coach is (a) in the first-base dugout, (b) in team A's bullpen down the right-field line or (c) in team A's locker room. **Ruling 3:** Legal in (a), illegal in (b) and (c), as the communication device may only be used from the dugout/bench area. The team is issued a warning for using illegal equipment.

**Play 4:** During the fourth inning, the plate umpire notices batter B1 is wearing an earpiece and receiving instructions from his coach in the third-base coaching box. **Ruling 4:** Illegal, as the communication device may not be used on offense. A1 must remove the earpiece and the team is issued a warning for using illegal equipment.

### Player Communication Equipment (1-6-1 NEW)

Any wristband with defensive shifts/offensive plays/pitching choices or game directions attached shall be considered non-electronic equipment and is permitted as long as it is a single, solid color.

For pitchers, it may not contain the colors white, gray or be distracting. It does not have to match the color of the uniform or the sleeves worn underneath the uniform.



A new NFHS rule for the 2024 season states that any wristband being worn containing defensive shifts, offensive plays or pitching choices must be worn on the player's wrist or forearm, as is the case with this catcher. If umpire Derek Clair, Yorba Linda, Calif., notices this piece of non-electronic equipment being worn improperly, he needs to issue a team warning.

Finally, it must be worn on the player(s) wrist or forearm, and pitchers must wear it on their non-pitching arm.

The penalty for wearing these wristbands improperly is a team warning on the first offense. Any subsequent offense will lead to ejection of the offender and the team's head coach.

The rationale for the rule change was to allow consistent enforcement of these communication systems due to their increase in popularity. The rule change prohibits these types of products from being worn in other places on the body or uniform.

**Play 5:** A1 comes to the plate in the top of the first inning with a wristband



containing offensive plays written on it. Team A is wearing white uniforms with red trim. The wristband is (a) solid red, (b) solid blue, (c) being worn on A1's wrist or (d) being worn looped around A1's belt. **Ruling 5:** Legal in (a), (b) and (c), illegal in (d). The wristband must be removed from the belt in (d) and team A is given a warning for improperly wearing the equipment.

**Play 6:** Pitcher B1, who is right-handed, is wearing a wristband with pitching signals written on it. Team B is wearing gray uniforms with blue trim. The wristband is (a) solid gray, (b) solid black, (c) being worn on B1's right wrist or (d) being worn on B1's

left wrist. **Ruling 6:** Legal in (b) and (d), illegal in (a) and (c). A gray wristband may never be worn by a pitcher and a pitcher may never wear the wristband on his throwing arm. It must be removed in (a) and (c) and team B is given a warning for improperly wearing the equipment.

**Play 7:** A2 comes to the plate in the bottom of the second with a runner on first base and no outs. Before A2 steps into the batter's box, the third-base coach yells out, "32!" A2 reaches into his pocket and pulls out a wristband with offensive plays written on it, then puts the wristband back into his pocket before taking his position in the

batter's box. **Ruling 7:** Legal. A2 is not improperly wearing the equipment.

#### Umpire-in-Chief (10-2-3h)

The umpire-in-chief may forfeit the game for prescribed infractions by coaches, players or team/bench personnel.

This rule was modified to remove the word "spectators" from the umpires' jurisdiction. Umpires have jurisdiction over the confines of the field, players, coaches and team/bench personnel. If there are issues with spectators, it is the responsibility of game management to deal with the problem and ensure the facility is safe for all involved. ■

## DH Provides Biggest Wrinkle in Lineup Management

If you are particular about the type of paper calendar you have in your office, you have your work cut out finding what you want. There are a variety of formats available and stores tend to carry only one style. Lineup cards have multiple formats and the real problem is umpires have very little choice; they have to accept and sometimes decipher what the coach hands them.

One of these days, there will be a lineup app and the coach will send the lineup electronically to the opponent and all umpires, but we are not yet there. Consequently, it is important umpires understand what must be on the lineup card and what may be there. The biggest challenge is figuring out where the DH, if any, is batting and for whom.

The lineup cards are presented to the home plate umpire at the pregame meeting at home plate, which takes place five minutes prior to the game (2-10-2). The batting orders become official when they are exchanged, verified and accepted by the umpire-in-chief (1-1-2).

#### Typical Mistakes

Umpires are expected to call attention to obvious errors and allow correction without penalty. Typical errors include two players with the



It's important for umpires who work NFHS games to understand when substitutions to the lineup go into effect. Announcing the change, as Dale Ducheny, Orange, Calif., does here, means the substitution is immediate and binding.

same surname and no distinguishing initial, nine players not listed, and the pitcher omitted or 10 players listed when there is no DH indicated. Errors on jersey numbers are not considered, and erroneous fielding positions do not have an impact except for the pitcher and the catcher (because of eligibility for a courtesy runner). The one slip-up that is virtually impossible for an umpire to catch is when the coach gives the plate umpire a different lineup than what he posts in the dugout. That's a sure-fire way to have a batting-out-of-order infraction.

Not listing a DH when nine players are listed is not an obvious error, but it certainly makes sense for an umpire to ascertain the coach's intent regarding a DH. Umpires should always treat the lineup as 10 slots, even though there may only be nine players. As long as the substitution rule is adhered to, when a team is using the P/DH option, it may alternate between nine and 10 players. The 10th slot remains until one of the acts that terminates the DH takes place.

In NFHS, the situation can seem complicated because there are two unique DH rules. A prep coach has the choice of a traditional DH, a player/DH or no DH; the version being used must be indicated when the lineup card is submitted and that cannot be later changed (3-1-4). The traditional rule is the same as the pro rule except the DH may bat for any player in the lineup, not just the pitcher. The DH is not associated with any defensive position but is associated with a spot in the batting order and is the 10th starting player, so he has re-entry eligibility. There are only two ways the DH can be terminated. The first is if the DH plays defense. The second is if the player for whom the DH is batting for bats for himself.

The player/DH rule allows the starting designated hitter to also be a starting defensive player. Utilizing the player/DH option, the player has two positions: defensive player (any position) and designated hitter. The team begins the game with nine starters — nine defensive players — one of whom also assumes the role of the designated hitter, in a nine-player lineup. In effect, there are 10 positions occupied by nine players. The team can ultimately go to 10 players and then also return to nine.

The defensive role may be

Union Eagles				
NO.	PLAYER	RE	POS.	
14	1 Abel		7	
9	2 Baker		4	
12	3 Charles		8	
44	4 Daniels		DH	
32	5 Edwards		6	
17	6 Franklin		2	
24	7 George		9	
2	8 Hamilton		5	
19	9 Irwin		1	
6	10 Jackson		3	
11	SUBSTITUTES			
28	Knutson			
3	Lorson			

NATIONAL FEDERATION OF STATE HIGH SCHOOL ASSOCIATIONS				
Official Line-up Baseball				
DATE	May 7, 20	TEAM	Union Eagles	
NO.	PLAYER	RE	POS.	
14	1 Abel		7	
9	2 Baker		4	
12	3 Charles		8	
44	4 Daniels		3/DH	
32	5 Edwards		6	
17	6 Franklin		2	
24	7 George			

**PlayPic 1** shows a 10-player lineup where the designated hitter is batting for the first baseman. **PlayPic 2** shows a nine-player lineup featuring a player/DH. Both are legal options in NFHS. The designated hitter may only bat for the starting pitcher and all subsequent pitchers in NCAA and pro.

substituted by any legal substitute, but only the starting DH can ever occupy the DH role. An offensive substitution (pinch hitter or pinch runner) for the DH terminates that role; the player in the defensive role for the DH cannot become the DH; however, the original player/DH may re-enter defensively one time and resume as the player/DH. The player/DH and any substitutes in the defensive role are locked in that spot in the batting order. Also, the starting player/DH and any substitutes can never be in the game defensively at the same time. Umpires must ascertain which type of DH is being used and should annotate their lineup card accordingly.

### Changes

Once the umpire has a full understanding of both lineups, the umpire must be wary of changes. Theoretically, all substitutions will be clearly announced, but it doesn't always happen. The coach's excuse will be he forgot or he told the player to inform the umpire and the player didn't do what he was told. Not to worry, the rules account for lack of communication.

When a substitute enters the game without being announced, as long as the substitute is legal, there is no penalty. The

substitute is considered to have entered the game when a batter takes his place in the batter's box, a runner takes the place on base of the runner he has replaced, a pitcher takes his place on the rubber, or a fielder reaches the position usually occupied by the fielder he has replaced, and play commences. The substitute is not in the game until the ball becomes live following each of the preceding acts. Any play made by, or on, such unannounced substitute is legal (3-1-1). The umpire must not neglect to annotate the lineup card.

Play 1: Jones is listed in the starting lineup as the second batter. In the top of first, Smith, who is not in the lineup, bats in the second spot and no notification is made to the umpire. Ruling 1: Smith is not a pinch hitter until the ball becomes live.

A pitfall for prep umpires is projected substitutions; they are not allowed (3-1-1). The only impact is on courtesy runners.

Play 2: In the top of the seventh, Brown is sent in to pinch hit for the catcher and walks. The coach sends in a courtesy runner for Brown. Ruling 2: Not allowed; Brown is not the catcher and cannot be the catcher until his team goes on defense. ■



# They're Both Yours

There are several scenarios that occur in two-person umpiring that put one or both umpires in sub-optimal positions for playcalling. Such is life when you have three bases and a plate, the possibility of four baserunners and only two arbiters to keep tabs on the action.

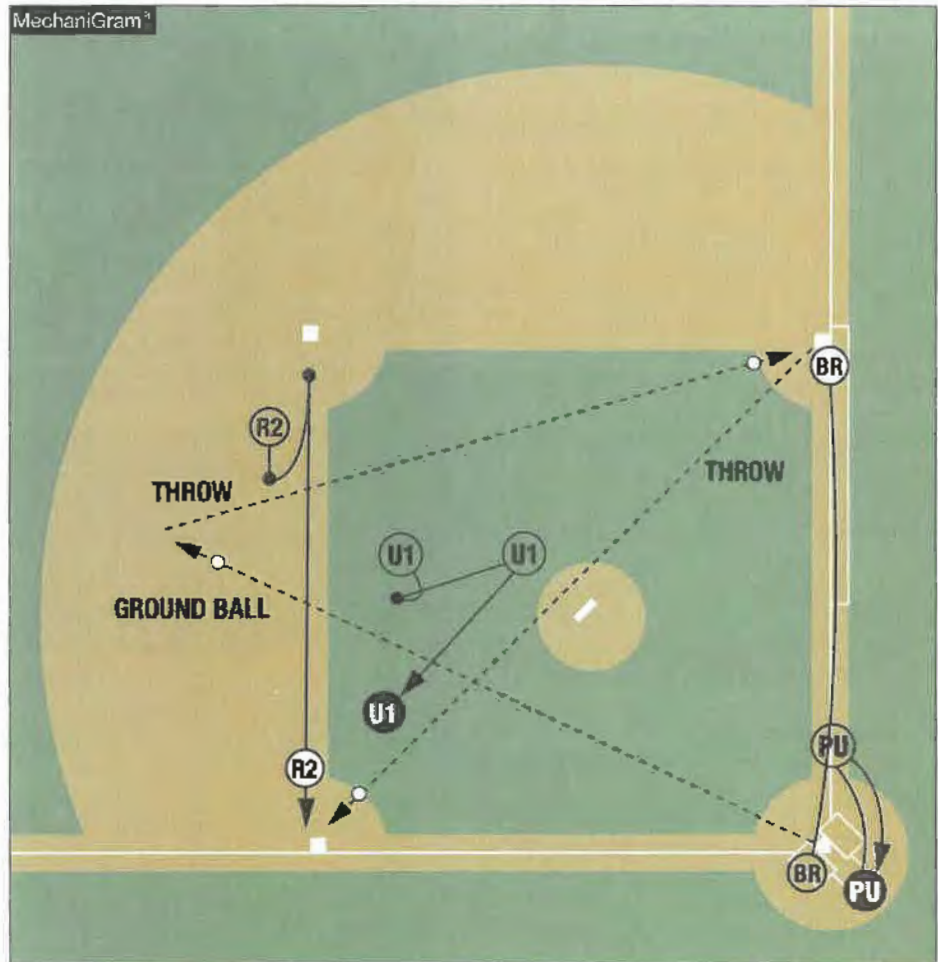
And then the odds get even worse when a situation develops where one umpire is required to do the heavy lifting at two vastly different spots on the field.

Case in point is shown in the MechaniGram. Here's the situation: a runner on second base and less than two outs. The batter-runner hits a ground ball to the left side of the infield.

The base umpire, who has set up pre-pitch in the C position, has a lot on the plate as this play develops. First, U1 must keep eyes on the baseball, know whether the ball has been fielded cleanly by either the shortstop (as shown) or the third baseman, and know where the first play is going to take place. Has R2 broke for third base or is he holding his ground? Will the infielder who comes up with the ball make a play on this lead runner, or look him back and throw to first? And from a health and safety standpoint, are you going to be able to get out of the way if the throw comes zipping across the infield?

While avoiding this throw, U1 must also create an angle for making a ruling at first base and must understand this ruling always belongs to the base umpire. Yes, the plate umpire should be moving out from behind the plate to open up a look at a possible pulled foot or swipe tag by the first baseman. However, this is information the plate umpire may share during a post-play discussion, not as the primary playcaller. That responsibility belongs to U1, who can then ask for help if necessary.

However, that ruling is not the final piece of the puzzle for U1. What if R2 breaks for third base after the throw has been made across the diamond in an attempt to retire the batter-runner? That's right ... this is



also the responsibility of U1, not the plate umpire. After finding one good position in the working area to make a ruling at first base, U1 must now avoid a second throw across the infield and create yet another angle for a probable tag play at third base.

As a base umpire, don't fall asleep and find yourself out of position to rule on the back half of this play. Your plate umpire, if doing everything correctly, is not going to be in a position to bail you out, having moved up the first-base line to keep tabs on the first play and then hustling to get back to the dirt circle and the third-base line extended should a play ultimately develop on R2 at the plate.

A base umpire will look like a million bucks and perhaps even earn a little bit of credibility from

stakeholders when using solid footwork, positioning and situational awareness to be on top of both of these rulings. ■

## QUICK TIP

**Rule No. 1** as a plate umpire is to stay safe. This is one of the reasons why umpires are instructed to work in the "slot" when calling pitches. In addition to offering an unobstructed view of the arriving pitch, it's also the safest place to be in avoiding foul balls that come directly back off the bat. What should you do if the catcher shifts inside and doesn't give you a good slot to work in? Do not move further outside. This will put you at greater risk of injury and creates an unfamiliar vantage point for seeing pitches. Instead, adjust upward.



# Try This Recipe for a Great Plate Meeting

**W**hether they realize it or not, umpires can do several things before they ever put a ball into play to mess up that day's ballgame for themselves and their crews.

It's often said coaches begin assessing umpires as soon as they first walk onto the field. And if that isn't the case, you can certainly bet plenty of assumptions will be made just moments later during the pregame plate meeting.

What seems like a basic, routine endeavor can have drastic consequences if it's not handled properly by the umpiring crew. As the saying goes, you never get a second chance to make a first impression, and the plate meeting is typically when the first interaction between umpires and coaches takes place. When that meeting concludes soon after (more on this later), your hope as an umpire should be the two coaches are walking back to their dugouts thinking, "We're in good hands today" and not "This is mess just waiting to happen."

## On Time and on Point

The first element of a successful plate meeting is conducting it when you are supposed to. There's no better way to get off on the wrong foot with both coaches than to make them wait. Failure of you and your partner(s) to show up at the plate on time is a severe case of disrespect and a recipe for disaster.

Just as important is how you look when you get there. Never step onto the field until you are game ready. Shirts need to be tucked in. Jackets zippered. Shoes tied. Hats on. (And it should go without saying, all of the pregame uniform preparation that should have taken place such as shining your shoes, ironing your uniform and taking care of three days' worth of facial stubble.) When you walk on the field, you should look like you are ready to handle your business.

## Introductions

Once the coaches wander out of the dugout and make their way to the dirt circle, the first order of business is saying hello. Remember, this is a professional relationship. It's not a time to show you are best buddies or mortal enemies. Give each coach a firm handshake. Look



A clear, concise plate meeting will allow plate umpire Dan Baldino, San Dimas, Calif., and base umpire Bruce Daniels, Hemet, Calif., to obtain all the necessary information they need to work that day's game and set the stage for a professional day at the ballpark.

both in the eye (and if you are wearing sunglasses, remove them before the coaches arrive). Introduce yourself by name. It's OK to address them by name, but only if you know the names of both coaches. Coaches are paranoid by nature, and if you address one by name and the other simply as "Coach," you can bet the latter is going to take note of the more collegial greeting you offered the adversary.

## The Business at Hand

Once introductions between the coaches and all members of the umpiring crew are complete, the plate meeting becomes the plate umpire's show. And this show should be a simple three-act play: lineups, ground rules and safety/sportsmanship.

Take the lineup card from the home coach first and scan it for all necessary and pertinent information. Does every player in the starting lineup have name, uniform number and position number

listed? Is it a traditional nine-player lineup or is there a designated hitter? Are all of the substitutes listed? Confirm with the coach the key elements — "Smith is your DH in the three hole, hitting for Jones, the pitcher?" Perform this same lineup scan with the visiting coach, announce the lineups are official, then move on to ground rules.

Ask the home coach to take you around the field. Allow the coach to explain whether there are any subtleties involving the dugouts, the bullpens, fencing or netting that is out of play, the location of scoreboards, light poles, overhanging trees and tarps and anything else that may require explanation. Once the coach is finished, ask any questions regarding areas in which you may still have questions. Confirm with the visiting coach the ground rules are understood and agreed upon.

Finally, regardless of the level of game you are working, ask both coaches



if their teams are legally and properly equipped, mention the need for good sportsmanship and send them on their way with another handshake. It's fine to say something like, "Good luck" or "Let's have a great day," but nothing more than that.

#### Key Considerations

While the plate meeting is very much a "Just the facts, ma'am" operation, it doesn't mean everyone should stand at the plate acting like robots. Some personality is fine, so long as it doesn't distract from the professional atmosphere you need to establish and the job duties you need to perform. That said, here are some items to take note of before you and your partners take the field:

- As already mentioned, the plate meeting is the plate umpire's show. That umpire is the one who runs the meeting, asks the necessary questions

and directs the entire enterprise. The base umpire(s) are like children in the 1950s — other than the initial introductions, they don't speak unless they are spoken to. A good plate umpire, before the meeting ends, will ask his or her partners whether they have anything to add, and this is the opportunity to have any lingering questions addressed. Wait patiently for that opening and don't prematurely overstep onto the plate umpire's turf.

- The plate meeting is not the time to conduct a rules clinic. If a coach asks a question about a specific rule, feel free to briefly address it. However, it is not the umpiring crew's responsibility or job description to initiate discussion or drone on about proper use of courtesy runners, base awards, charged conferences or anything else.

- Save the comedy routine for the locker room or the drive home. This doesn't mean you and your partners

can't share in a laugh if one of the coaches makes a joke or cracks wise about something. Again, you aren't robots. But allow the coaches to set that tone if they want to go there. It's not your job to try to loosen them up if they have their intensity amps turned up to 11.

- Brevity is your friend. On a good day, you're going to spend between 90 minutes and three hours on the field, depending on your level of play and the number of innings required to complete an official game. No need to unnecessarily add to that number. The coaches are ready to play and you need to be ready to work. Conducting your plate meeting business shouldn't be so tedious the attendees are looking for the nearest clock. If your plate meeting is taking more than 2-3 minutes, you are doing it wrong. Get in, get out and get on with it. ■

## Baseball Injury Surveillance Study



As participation in high school baseball continues to increase in the United States, the number of sports injuries will also likely increase unless effective injury prevention programs are implemented. The NFHS Sports Medicine Advisory Committee (SMAC) and the NFHS Sport Rules Committees use data from the National High School Sports-Related Injury Surveillance Study (High School RIO™) to monitor rates and patterns of injuries among high school athletes. High School RIO is currently collecting the 19th year of sports exposure and injury data.

Among the nine sports included in the original sample of High School RIO for which national estimates are constructed (i.e., football, boys' and girls' soccer, girls' volleyball, boys' and girls' basketball, wrestling, baseball, and softball), baseball had the second lowest

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injury rates in the 2022/23 academic year. The shoulder (21%), hand/wrist (17%), and arm/elbow (14%) were the most commonly injured body parts, and strain (22%) and sprain (19%) were the most common diagnoses. 20% of injuries sustained in competition and 16% of injuries sustained in practice were to pitchers. The most common injuries among pitchers in 2022/23 were ligament sprains, tendonitis, and muscle strains

and were most commonly to the arm/elbow and shoulder. While concussion rates in baseball are generally low compared to other sports, concussion rates in practice have significantly increased over the study period. This trend will continue to be monitored during the upcoming academic year.

Understanding patterns of injury in boys' baseball is one important tool when considering injury prevention efforts to

keep baseball athletes as safe as possible.

If you are interested in more information about the High School RIO Study or you are a certified athletic trainer who is interested in becoming a reporter for baseball, please email the High School RIO team at [highschoolrio@datalycenter.org](mailto:highschoolrio@datalycenter.org). Please visit <http://datalycenter.org/resources/high-school-río-annual-reports/> to access the annual summary reports referenced above. ■

## Understanding the Differences Between Tags and Forces

There are several ways to record an out, including interference calls and of course, the plentiful strikeouts in most games. For plays on the bases, the vast majority of outs will be either plays that require the runner be tagged, or plays when either the runner or the base may be tagged (2-24-4).

Most of the plays where only the base need be tagged are force plays, but please understand a routine groundout at first is not a force out. A force out occurs when a runner loses his right to the base he occupies because the batter becomes a batter-runner (2-29-3). While it is true a batter is compelled to touch first base after hitting a grounded fair ball, he is not "forced." A batter does not "occupy" the plate so he hasn't lost the right to occupy a base. However, because he is compelled to advance, a fielder need only touch the base with possession of the ball before the batter-runner arrives to gain an out. For practical purposes, all plays on the batter-runner advancing to first are treated the same as a force play.

When a runner is compelled to advance, the base may be tagged without necessarily tagging the runner. Other examples of a runner being compelled to touch a base include returning to a missed base or a base left too soon.

### Control/Possession

Unlike the rules of other sports, neither term is defined in any of the baseball codes. The dictionary is of minimal value as the definitions of the



When observing this play at the plate, Joe Venegas, Orange, Calif., must ensure that all the elements of a successful tag are met including possession of the ball at the time of the tag and maintaining control through the end of the play.

two terms are circuitous, so we'll consider the terms identical and describe them as a firm or secure grip of the ball. For an out to be recorded, the fielder must have possession of the ball. When making a tag in a force situation or if the first baseman is attempting to put out the batter-runner, the ball cannot be pressed against his body; it must be controlled in his hand or glove. If the runner knocks the ball away from the fielder, the tag is still valid.

### Time Element

If a fielder is in the process of making a tag and drops the ball, it is not a tag. Simultaneously dropping the ball or dropping it immediately after making the tag is an indication the ball was not securely and firmly possessed. The fielder must hold the ball long enough to prove he has complete control of the ball while in the act of making the tag; there is no set time limit. However, if the fielder has made a tag and drops the



ball while in the act of making a throw following the tag, the play should be ruled as a legal tag.

## Application

On plays where the base may be tagged, tagging the runner also accomplishes the out, but the converse is not true. When tagging the runner is required, having possession of the ball while touching the base does not get the out.

## Tagging the Base

Situations when touching the base with control of the ball before the runner arrives will result in an out include a force play, a play at first as explained above, a continuing action appeal and an announced appeal with a live ball, to include a missed base or home plate. Almost always, the fielder uses his foot to contact the base, but any body part can be used to include the hand or glove even if the ball is held in the opposite limb.

Here are some plays that illustrate getting an out by tagging the base.

**Play 1:** With runners on first and third and one out, R1 on first takes off with the pitch. B4 hits a line drive into the gap that is caught. R3 tags and trots home. R1 hastily attempts to return to first. The ball is returned to first before R1 arrives, but after R3 touches the plate. **Ruling 1:** It's a double play. Although R1 was compelled to return to first, it is not a force play as B4 had been retired. R3's run scores on the time play. However, the fact R1 was compelled to return allows the base to be tagged prior to R1's return; there is no need for R1 to be tagged on the continuing action appeal.

**Play 2:** B2 singles to apparently score R2 from second. The ball is returned to F1 and before F1 engages the rubber, F2 yells for F1 to make an appeal at third. F1 throws the ball to F5, who touches third and appeals R2 missed third. **Ruling 2:** That is a legal announced appeal. There is no need for R2 to be tagged. Touching the base with the ball is sufficient and R2 will be declared out.

**Play 3:** With a runner on second, B2 singles. R2 attempts to score and there is a close play at the plate. F2 misses the tag as R2 misses the plate. F2 jumps up quickly, steps on home plate and yells, "I'm appealing!" as he fires to second to prevent B2's advance. As F2 appealed,

R2 was (a) scrambling back to the plate, or (b) heading for the dugout. **Ruling 3:** In (a), R2 is not out and the run counts. Because R2 immediately made an effort to touch the plate, he is out only when he is tagged. In (b), R2 is out since he left the plate area heading for his dugout. In such a case, he is out when he is tagged or the base is tagged and appealed.

## Tagging the Runner

Situations when it is required to touch the runner with control of the ball before the runner touches the base in order to record an out include steal attempts, pickoff attempts and runners attempting to advance to a base to which they are not forced. The fielder must make the tag with either the glove or hand, but the ball must be firmly gripped in such glove or hand. If the fielder uses his hand, it does not matter if the tag is made with the back of the hand or with the ball. If the glove is used, the ball doesn't actually have to be in the glove, but may be pressed against the inside or

outside of the glove as long as the fielder has control of the ball in his hand. A tag with the dangling strings of a glove is not a legal tag.

The tag on the runner does not have to touch the player's body to be legal; a tag can be made on any proper baseball equipment worn by the player, obviously including the uniform. Batting gloves sticking out of a pocket are considered baseball equipment, as is a helmet. However, if the player's helmet is dislodged, it is no longer part of his person. A fielder cannot make a legal tag of a dislodged helmet. But if the helmet is still touching the player's head, and the helmet is tagged, the runner is out.

Jewelry worn by a player (e.g., necklaces, bracelets, etc.) is not considered proper baseball equipment. While tagging jewelry without also simultaneously tagging part of the body would be unusual, a swipe tag on a dangling necklace would not be considered a legal tag. ■

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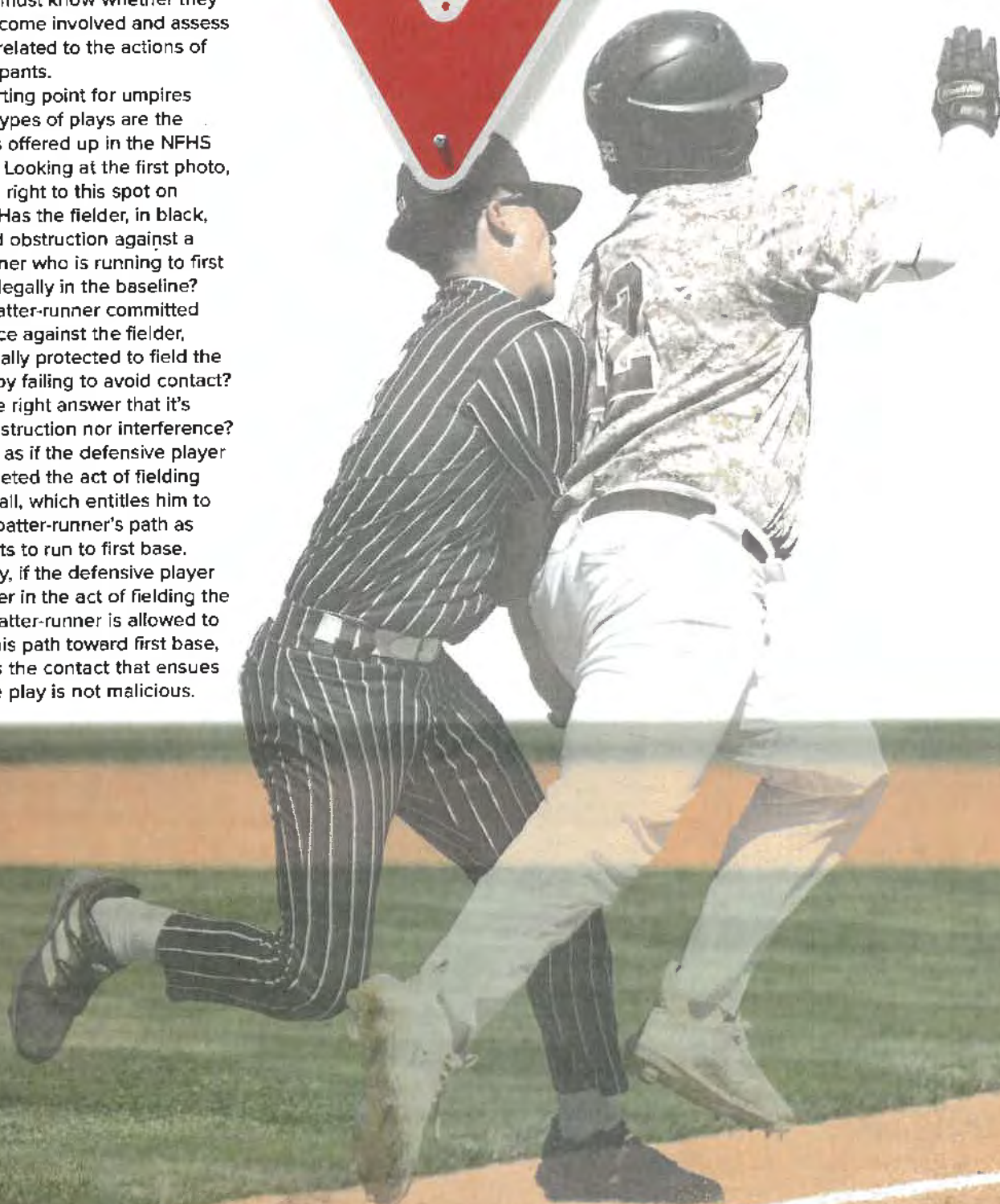
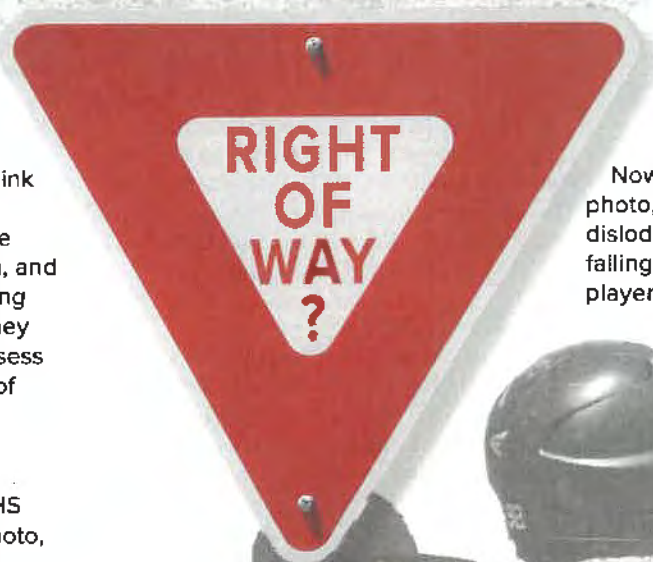


**M**ost people would not think of baseball as a contact sport. However, as these two photos prove, it can happen, and when it does, the umpires working the game must know whether they should become involved and assess penalties related to the actions of the participants.

The starting point for umpires on these types of plays are the definitions offered up in the NFHS rule code. Looking at the first photo, who has a right to this spot on the field? Has the fielder, in black, committed obstruction against a batter-runner who is running to first base and legally in the baseline? Has the batter-runner committed interference against the fielder, who is legally protected to field the baseball, by failing to avoid contact?

Or is the right answer that it's neither obstruction nor interference? It appears as if the defensive player has completed the act of fielding the baseball, which entitles him to be in the batter-runner's path as he attempts to run to first base. Conversely, if the defensive player is no longer in the act of fielding the ball, the batter-runner is allowed to maintain his path toward first base, so long as the contact that ensues during the play is not malicious.

Now, let's look at the second photo, where the ball has become dislodged from the fielder and is falling to the turf. Did the defensive player make a legal tag when he and





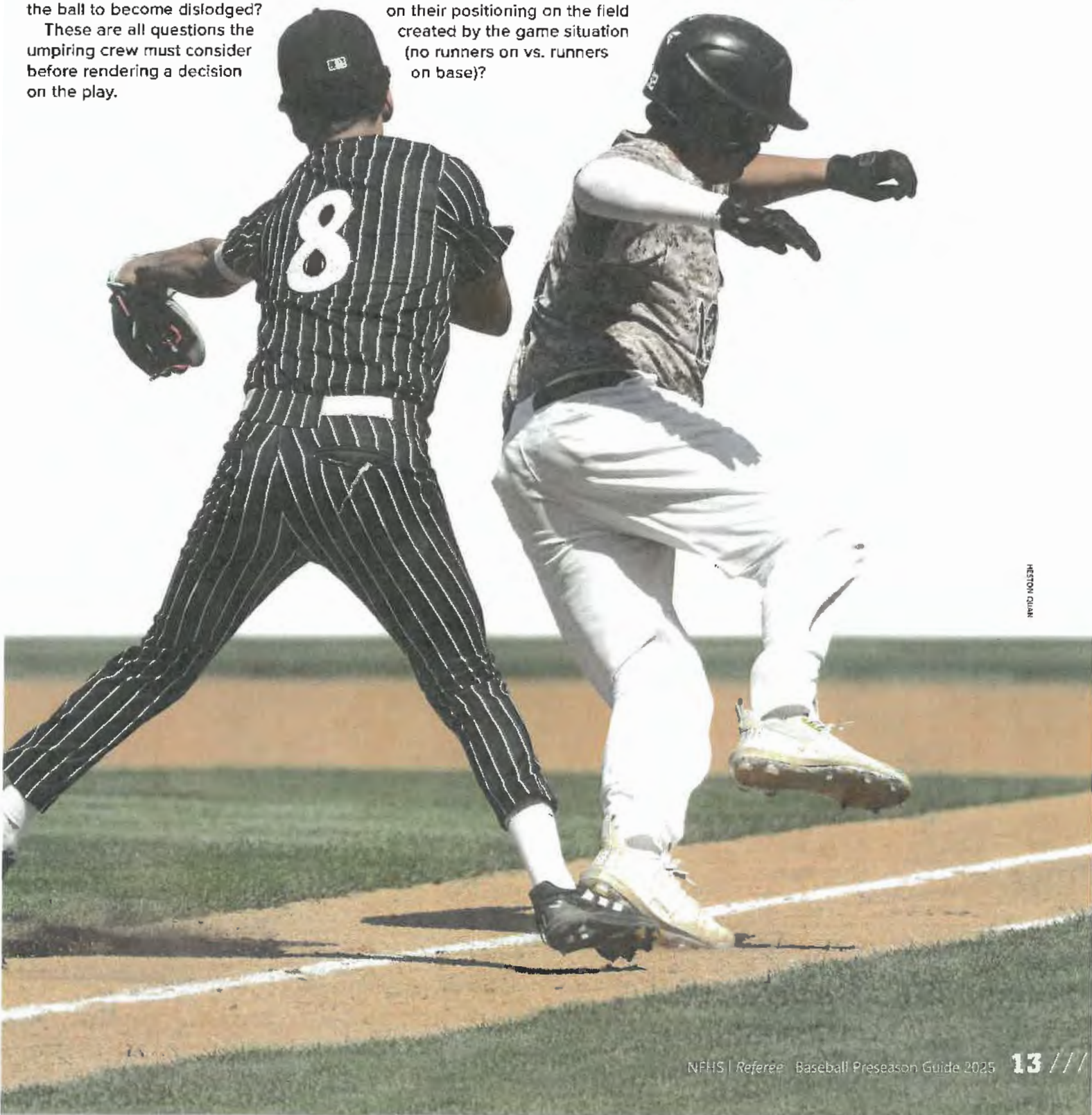
the batter-runner collided? Was the live ball securely held by the fielder during this tag attempt, or was it immediately juggled or dropped? Did any illegal contact by the baserunner cause the ball to become dislodged?

These are all questions the umpiring crew must consider before rendering a decision on the play.

## Other items to consider:

Whose call is this to make, the plate umpire or the base umpire? Does it change depending on how many base umpires are part of the crew, or based on their positioning on the field created by the game situation (no runners on vs. runners on base)?

If there are additional runners on base, how does the umpires' ruling on this play impact their status? If nothing illegal has taken place, does the ball remain live? ▼



HESTON QUINN

# Equipped to Rule Correctly?

**B**aseball players do not have nearly as much equipment as football players, but there is enough equipment in and about the dugout where play can be altered by items placed where they are not supposed to be.

## Detached Equipment

Probably the most obvious use of equipment in a manner not intended is when a fielder throws his glove at the ball, or uses his cap or mask to intentionally catch, stop or deflect the ball. In those cases, the ball remains live (delayed dead ball) and runners may advance beyond the awarded base at their risk. The penalty varies based on the status of the ball and the award is from the last base touched at the time the ball is illegally contacted.

There is no penalty if the above acts are attempted and the ball is not touched. Also, there is no penalty if the glove is carried off the fielder's hand by the force of a thrown or batted ball, or if the glove

comes off in a legitimate effort to make a catch (8.3.3F).

The penalty for using detached equipment on a pitched ball is a two-base award (8-3-3c1).

**Play 1:** With R1 on first, a wild pitch deflects off the catcher's shin guard. As the ball is about to roll into the dugout, F2 throws his glove at the ball and stops it. When the ball hits the glove, R1 had already rounded second. **Ruling 1:** R1 is awarded home — two bases from the time of the touch.

The penalty for using detached equipment on a thrown ball is a two-base award (8-3-3c1).

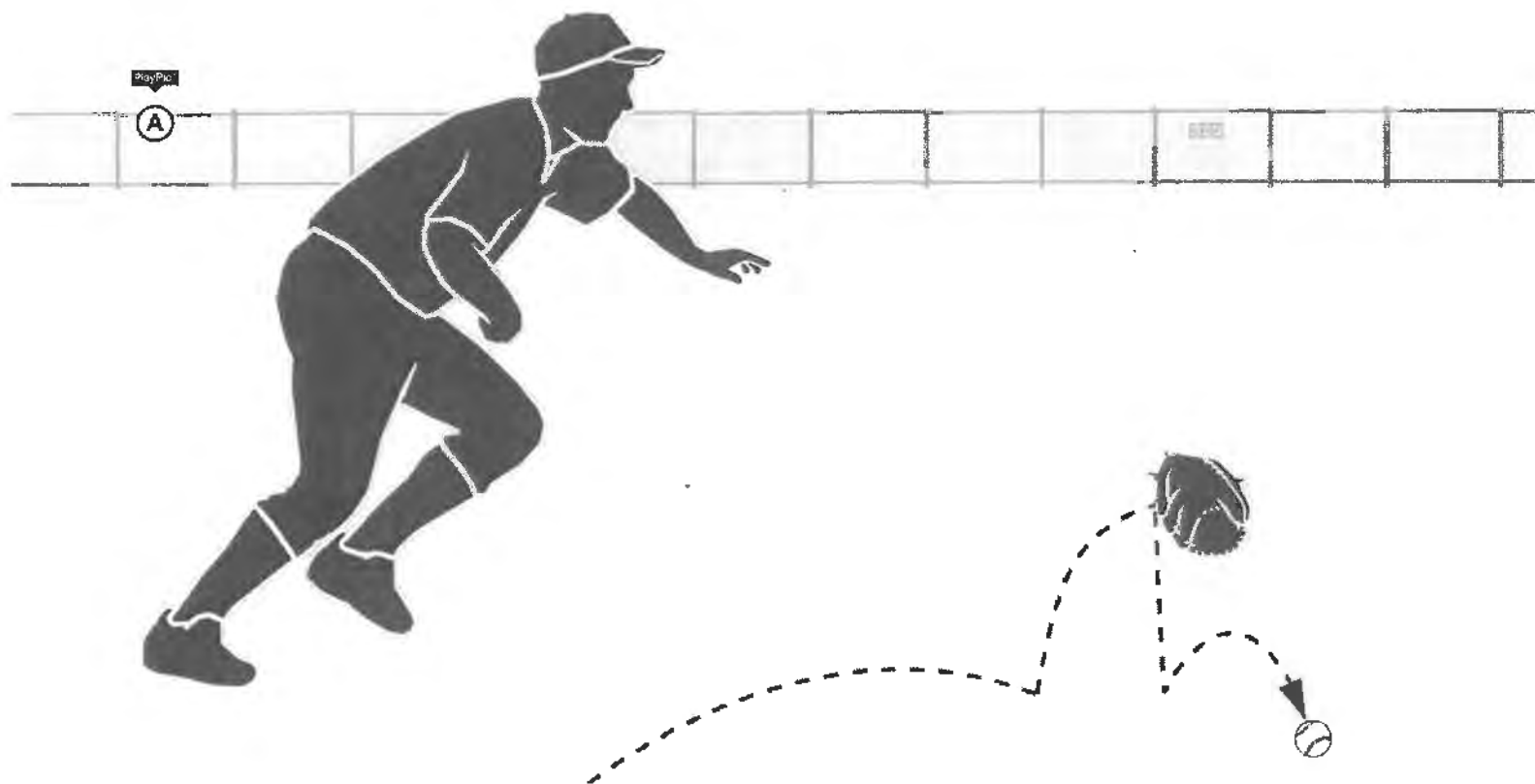
**Play 2:** With a runner on first, B2 hits a line-drive base hit into left field. R1 is approaching second as F7's high throw is knocked to the ground by F4's thrown glove. **Ruling 2:** Once all play stops, the umpires shall ensure all runners get at least two bases from the time the ball was touched by the thrown glove.

Using detached equipment on a fair batted ball or a foul ball that has a chance of becoming fair is a three-base award (8-3-3b). If the thrown glove prevents a fair batted ball from going over a fence in flight, it is a four-base award (8-3-3a).

**Play 3:** B1's high fly is along the right-field foul line. The right fielder cannot make the catch and while standing on the foul line, F9 throws his glove at the ball, causing it to go over the fence in foul territory. **Ruling 3:** The umpire must judge whether the ball was fair or could have gone fair. If so, B1 is awarded four bases. If the ball was clearly foul, there is no penalty and it is simply a foul ball.

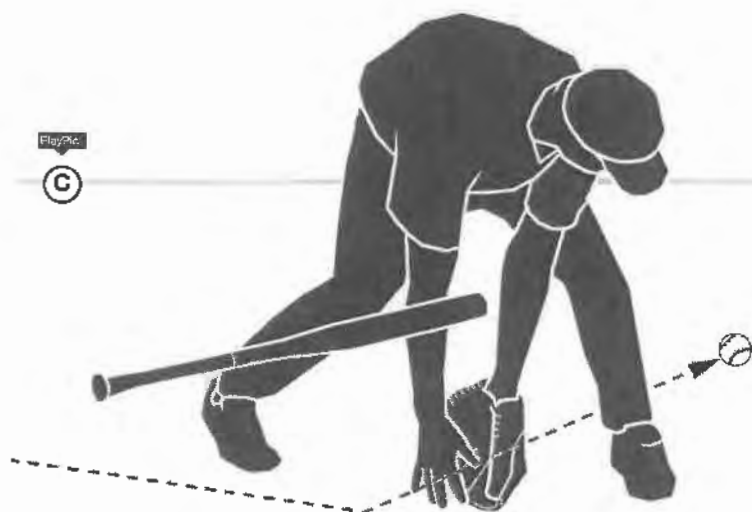
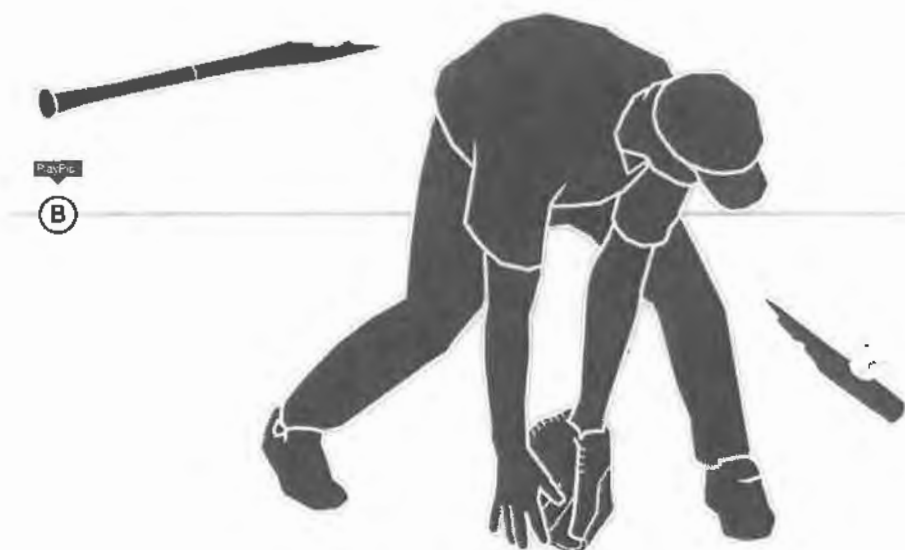
## Helmet Thrown

A batter or runner is also out for interference and the ball is immediately dead if he intentionally interferes with a thrown or batted ball by dropping the



If a fielder throws his glove at and hits a fair batted ball, or a ball that, in the umpires' view, has a chance of becoming fair, each runner, including the batter-runner, is awarded three bases in all three rule codes. However, it's important for the umpiring crew to remember this is a delayed dead ball situation and the batter-runner is liable to be put out if he tries to score on the play.





If a bat breaks and comes in contact with a batted ball (PlayPic B), there is no interference and the ball remains live. If a whole bat is thrown and interferes with a defensive player attempting to make a play (PlayPic C), interference has occurred and should be ruled.

helmet or throwing it at the ball; any runners return. No interference is called and play continues if a batting helmet is accidentally hit by a ball, even if it is intentionally detached (2007 Interp No. 2).

Play 4: B1 tops a ball that rolls along the first-base line. While the ball is in foul territory, he throws his helmet at the ball and deflects it farther foul to

prevent it from rolling fair. Ruling 4: The ball is dead and B1 is out. He cannot intentionally deflect either a fair ball or a foul ball that has a chance of becoming fair.

## Wayward Bats

The advent of metallic or composite bats has almost completely brought an end to the launching of a bat fragment,

but there is still some amateur baseball played with wood bats. Such missiles are part of the game and the play stands. However, if a whole bat is released and interferes with a defensive player attempting to make a play, interference shall be called, whether intentional or not (7-3-6).

A batter-runner has some responsibility on where he throws his bat so that it does not interfere with a defensive player making the initial play on the ball. However, any touching of a static bat in fair territory is ignored. In foul territory, the bat is a foreign object and any touching kills the ball and makes it foul (2.16.1D & Cmt.).

Additionally, NFHS addresses carelessly thrown bats (3-3-1c). The penalty is a team warning with ejection of any subsequent offenders. The bat does not have to touch anyone for the warning to be given.

## Loose Equipment

There are various provisions regarding interference involving the on-deck circle and the dugout area, but they are in regard to the on-deck batter or other offensive players failing to vacate space needed by a fielder to field a batted or thrown ball; in such circumstances the batter would be out (NFHS 2-21-1a, 3-2-3, 7-4-1f).

Play 5: B1 hits a high foul ball that initially appears it will go over the backstop. Instead, the ball stays in play and drifts toward the first-base dugout. The on-deck batter, in an effort to avoid the ball, moves out of the circle, but not quickly enough. F2 runs into the on-deck batter and the ball falls uncaught. Ruling 5: B1 is out due to his teammate's interference. Intent is not a factor.

In the case of loose equipment in NFHS — such as gloves, bats, helmets or catcher's gear lying on the field — the umpire may call an out(s), award bases or return runners, based on his judgment and the circumstances concerning the play if play is altered. Equipment in the on-deck circle is considered authorized to be on the field and any play stands (1-3-7).

Play 6: Same as play 5, except F2 trips over a bat in the on-deck circle and the ball falls uncaught. Ruling 6: Foul ball. Since the equipment is legally on the field, interference cannot be called. ■

# Dial in on the Dish

No matter how long we umpire we're going to have games where we struggle behind the plate. What to do when this happens? External forces may be a factor — bad weather, pitchers or catchers, etc. — but often our issues are our own making. Following are some thoughts about how to get back in the groove.

## Take Inventory

When umpires start to struggle it's typically because something was out of whack in one or more of three basic areas: position, steadiness or timing. Start by objectively analyzing these candidates.

It seems counterintuitive, but although we may think if we're having trouble, especially with low pitches, we should set up lower, the opposite is true; we see better if we're higher. We should set our eyes at the top of each batter's strike zone, so check that you're doing this. Also, are you squared up so you see pitches straight-on or so much in the slot that you see them at an angle?

Catchers crowd the plate a lot today. If this happens, don't move over the shoulder of the catcher opposite the batter, for this makes it more likely the catcher will block your view of things like whether a pitch hits the batter. Work over the catcher's head, like umpires did when they used the outside protector.

Are you getting in your stance long before the pitcher begins his delivery? If so, the added pressure on your legs may make you subconsciously want to raise up too soon, which affects your timing and distorts your perception of the strike zone; also, it's harder to stay still and to maintain your focus the longer you're in your stance.

Are you tracking pitches into the mitt or losing them earlier? Are you keeping your head steady? Moving around affects our tracking ability and also makes our "window" — our mental conception of the strike zone — move, and this detracts from our consistency.

Is your timing too quick? After seeing the pitch into the mitt we should pause for a two-count and then call it. And we should do this on the obvious



Between innings is a great time for home-plate umpires to take a mental inventory of how their game is going and, if there is an issue they need to correct, getting themselves in the right frame of mind to do so. Jason Keys, Dallas

and close ones, because if you get to where you have the same tempo on every pitch, you buy yourself an extra second to judge the close ones without anyone being the wiser. The "make up your mind" blast from the dugout comes when we call some pitches quickly but are perceptibly slower on other ones.

## Relax

The more we mess up, or think we do, the more rigid we may get. If you sense this happening, take a deep breath and try to feel the tension ease out of your body. I've seen umpires who were so rigid it seemed like they'd been embalmed. Just like we can't play golf well if we're tense, we can't umpire well.

## Focus

Sometimes we let work or family problems, weather, etc., affect our concentration. If you force yourself to block out distractions and focus on the little white ball, it usually helps.

## Don't anticipate

Are you anticipating what pitch will be thrown? If you're having issues, maybe you're not taking each pitch as it comes without preconceived notions of what it will be.

## Don't be too fine

Pitchers can be too fine, and so can we. Sometimes, for whatever reason, it seems we won't ring up a pitch unless it's perfect. A good philosophy is that when a ball leaves the pitcher's hand assume it is a strike until convinced otherwise. If you're having a rough day, maybe you haven't adopted this mindset or have temporarily gotten away from it.

## Have a short memory

This can be hard, but if you think you missed one, quickly turn the page. Stewing on the one that got away makes it more likely you'll boot the next one. ■