

January 2012 Plays and Clarifications

Welcome to the 2012 Softball year. It is that time of year for some of our Local Associations while other Associations wonder why we talk about softball while there is snow on the ground. This year we hope to post plays and clarifications on our rules, updates on any issue with the rule book and umpire manual and general information about our umpire program each month going forward.

On that note I can say the rule books are beginning to ship to our Local Associations. If there are any issues you find in the 2012 Rule Book please let your Umpire-in-Chief, Regional Umpire-in-Chief, Territorial Deputy or myself know so we can correct it in the 2013 Rule Book. Also the 2012 Umpire Exam is complete and available from the National Office. As many of you know we are trying a new on line version of the umpire exam with four Local Associations this year, our goal is to have the umpire exam on line for all the Associations and eliminate the paper copy. Our goal is to have this done by 2013 so we will keep all of you up to date on that progress.

We have already held two successful National Umpire Schools for the 2012 season with many more to follow this year. If you have not attended a school in recent years please try to fit one into your budget and calendar for 2012. We are also holding a Fast Pitch Camp in Waxahachie TX in June and a Slow Pitch Camp in Lincoln NE in May. We are excited about both camps and are sure they will give our umpires the best instruction for our Fast Pitch and Slow Pitch umpires. You can see all the schools with dates and locations on this web page under the umpire section.

We will also post the rule difference between ASA, NCAA, and National High School Federation. We have listed some of the rule differences that affect the games from the different organizations. It is not a comprehensive list of all the differences so if you know of one that you feel should be listed then please let us know. We have also posted the rule differences between our games of Fast Pitch and Slow Pitch. We hope this helps when you have a question concerning anything that may happen in both of these great games of ASA Softball.

So, good luck in 2012 with your ASA umpire season and if there is any items you would like discussed on our monthly Plays and Clarifications, please email me at kryan@softball.org or contact your Association UIC and they will pass them on to me.

THE CHALLENGE OF RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

With the declining number of umpires registering each year, the challenge of recruiting umpires and then retaining them beyond two or three years is a mighty task. Here are some thoughts on how to maximize your efforts and turn the tide in an upward direction.

Throughout our lives, and especially as umpires, we have been able to meet many people from all walks of life and all parts of the country. Some become close friends and some, just acquaintances. With this in mind, let's explore the Art of Recruiting and Retaining, by reflecting back on an old rhyme...“Make new friends, but keep the old...some are Silver and the others Gold”

Recruiting: In order to find new umpire candidates we may employ time tested methods such as advertising in the Local Newspaper, on the Radio or through public service announcements that are provided by some Local TV stations. In addition, we can create flyers and actually make phone calls to those leads we received throughout the umpiring year. As Association leaders, we can even put out a challenge to all our fellow umpires to bring in “just one” new candidate. These still may be very viable ways to get a perspective umpire to begin to attend meetings.

However, this is the 21st century and the technological age is here to stay. It allows us to reach out further than we have ever been able to, through social media such as Face Book and Craig's List to name a few. We can now create an E-Mail blast that can not only encompass our local umpire group, but coaches, managers, players and the like. These tools can open the door to a number of people waiting to see what we have to offer.

The Message: As in any “friendship”, there has to be common ground and most importantly mutual respect, driven by a sense of commonality. The ASA community has many benefits that are mutually shared by all their umpires. It is our job to let our new friends know about those benefits such as state of the art training, the opportunity for advancement, and a modern up-to-date Web Site on the National level in addition to the local Web which will keep both old and new umpires informed. The trepidation of learning a new trade can sometime be overwhelming. Inform them that the ASA makes available Clinics, both Rule and Mechanics, as well as tools such as DVD's and Power Points to enhance their learning experience. Local Associations can develop a buddy or mentoring program to individually serve every new umpire that needs one. It can be formal or informal, as long as it pairs a qualified and interested veteran with a newer

umpire. As in umpiring, communication is the key to the success of any program like this.

Understand your customer: The individuals you are welcoming into your group will have varying amounts of knowledge and experience in umpiring, differing physical capabilities and most of all diverse reasons why they were attracted to our avocation. It is important to get a feel for who they are, more as a group at first, than as an individual. To that end, be careful that you keep similar groups together. If it is possible, separate candidates and newer umpires from the veterans group, it is sometime overwhelming when you know very little and understand even less. Be cognizant of the amount of money it will cost a first year umpire to Register and buy uniforms and equipment. Try, to the best of your ability, to make them aware of what they can expect the first year in assignments based on their availability. For some, umpiring is a means to create a second income. Let them know how, how much and when they can expect their game fees. Make them aware that background checks are becoming a way of life in all parts of the country. Being proactive and honest in answering all questions will have a lasting effect on the type of “friendship” that is created with the new candidate.

The close: There is really no formal close. The lines of communication should always be open, not only between the Mentor and their Candidate, but between those who are part of and also represent the local association. Observations and evaluations whenever possible should let the new umpire know where they are, where they need to go and what they have to do to get there. Positive reinforcement coupled with good constructive advice, allows the umpire to feel good about what they have done well and identify what they can do better. If time and resources permit, place a follow up call or two to these newer umpires to see how things went during the year and what can be done to make the next year better. This is in addition to calling those umpires who chose not to register in the previous year. This most importantly shows your concern and gives them a real sense that they are wanted and needed.

Remember, most of all, not everyone is equal. That goes not only for their ability, but for what motivates them to umpire. Whether they desire to work National Championships or to work in their local leagues....”some will be Silver and others Gold” but all equally important to the ASA family.

Rule Book Fixes

Due to some additions to the code this year there are few errors in the rule when referencing the code as the reason for the rule. The two changes are in Rule 5 Section 10 and Section 11. Rule 5 Section 10, The Time Limit Rule, references Code Article 510 O and is now 510 P. Rule 5 Section 11, The Tie Breaker Rule, references Code Article 510 N and now is listed as 510 O. Please mark your books accordingly and we apologize for the error.

Beginning of the year Clarifications

A new rule this year has already caused a few questions about the Batter-Runner in the game of Slow Pitch. The new Rule is **Rule 8 Section 1C[2] Exception:** "The ball is live and on ball four the Batter-Runner may only advance to 1B unless a play is made on another runner or there is an errant throw." The questions have been when can or cannot a Batter-Runner continue to 2B on ball four in slow pitch with stealing.

With the new rule the batter-runner is awarded 1B only and must stop at 1B unless there is a play on another runner or there is an errant throw. This would mean the batter- Runner must stop at 1B and would not be called out if they round 1B and the catcher threw the ball to 1B. If the ball is thrown to 1B and thrown away then the Batter-runner, now a runner could advance. A walk on the Batter-Runner should be treated like any other play in Slow Pitch. If there was a runner on base and decided to steal and a play was made on that runner then the Batter-Runner could continue past 1B to whatever base they may reach until all playing action has ceased. Since the Batter-Runner can only go to 1B once all playing action has ceased the ball would be dead. This is similar to the ball being returned to the infield and time being called when all playing action has ceased.

It was pointed out that in Rule 7 Section 1D EFFECT [2] when there is on deck batter interference with a defensive fielder fielding a fly ball our rules says the batter is out. The question that was posed does the umpire have the ability to call a runner out if they think the interference was done to prohibit a double play.

Play: R1 on 1B with no outs and attempts to steal on the pitch. B2 hit a pop up that the catcher is moving over to catch. The On Deck Batter sees that R1 does not know where the ball is and if the ball is caught R1 could be subject to being called out on appeal for a double play. B2 causes interference, can you have two outs?

Ruling: Dead ball is called by the umpire, B2 is called out for interference, **Rule 7 Section 1D EFFECT [2]**. If in the judgment of the umpire this was an attempt to break up a double play then R1 could be called out by **Rule 1 Interference**.

When making a ruling on any play we must make sure we apply the rule to the play and not the play to the rule. In the case of On Deck Batter interference, we know we have in Rule 8 Section 7J [1-3] EFFECT that a runner who commits interference and in the umpire's judgment is an attempt to prevent a double play and it occurs before the runner is put out, the immediate trailing runner shall also be called out. In Rule 8 Section 2 F [1-6] NOTE If this interference is an attempt to prevent a double play, the runner closest to home plate shall be called out. In both these cases we could have a possible double play without applying the current rule but by just applying Rule 1 Interference. In these cases the rule book specifies who should be called out. In the area of On Deck Batter interference if this interference is an attempt to prevent a double play, the runner that would have been out on the double play should also be called out.