

NYSSO

UMPIRE SCHOOL



Founded by Aileen Durrant, 1987

Jim Berkery, Director
20 Massachusetts Avenue
Cohoes, New York 12047
(518) 237-6682

Gary Williams, Assistant Director
RR#5, Box 244
Montrose, Pennsylvania 18801
(570) 278-1817

Jay Miner, Rules Interpreter-Chief Clinician
1 Compass Court
Albany, New York 12205-1503
(518) 869-6309 Fax: (518) 869-7806

2007-08 NYSSO POINTS OF EMPHASIS

Areas of the game of high school softball that need special consideration and attention are identified as "Points of Emphasis." When a topic is included as a Point of Emphasis, that subject may not have been administered properly or misinterpretation of rules or mechanics may have occurred. The topics presented will provide you with information that the NYSSO state committee considers important. It is our belief that immediate attention to these topics will improve the game of high school softball. NYSSO rulings, interpretations, mechanics, techniques and procedures may differ from ASA, NCAA, NFHS and other organizations.

2008 POE Dropped Third Strike. Umpires along with filling the roles of game manager, and arbiter are also communicators. Yet, over the years many softball umpires do not communicate what happens when a third strike is dropped.

In NYSSO softball the plate umpire should use a third strike signal that is noticeably different than the standard strike signal. For example, a coach cannot realistically claim that a "bow and arrow" strike signal was an out signal. When the standard signal is given on strike three many defensive coaches unfortunately dupe officials on dropped third strikes by arguing, "You signaled the batter out! You can't allow her to stay on first base."

With good plate mechanics, most plate umpires can accurately determine whether the third strike was caught or dropped. On a dropped third strike, the plate umpire will extend both arms horizontally as is done on other "no catch" situations. The umpire will hold his horizontally extended arms for several seconds to convey that the third strike was not caught.

In the rare case when the plate umpire is unable to determine if the third strike

was held or dropped, the base umpire can assist by pointing to the ground for a dropped third strike or clasping his or her hands when the ball is legally caught.

Some associations teach that the base umpire will rule on all caught or uncaught third strike situations. Our research shows that plate umpires using good mechanics can consistently determine caught or dropped third strike plays more accurately than base umpires.

2007 POE Runner Interference. Runner interference occurs when a runner illegally impedes, contacts, hinders, confuses, visually distracts, verbally distracts or complicates a play by a fielder who is in the act of fielding a batted ball.

Most interferences occur on ground balls. A fielder is in the act of fielding a ground batted ball and protected by the interference rule when the fielder, in the umpire's judgment, is first attempting to field a batted ball until such time the fielder no longer has the ball or has completed her follow through motion after throwing the ball.

Therefore, the fielder is protected:

1. When she first attempts to field a batted ground ball.
2. When she is crouching to field a ground ball.
3. When she is catching the ball.
4. When she is within "**a step and a reach**" of a ball she has misplayed.
5. When she is rising after gaining control of the ball.
6. When she makes any movement normally associated with throwing the ball.
7. When she is throwing the ball.
8. When she is following through after releasing the ball.

Only one fielder at a time can be considered in the act of fielding a batted ball. When a batted ball is deflected from one fielder to another fielder, a runner cannot be charged with interference unless the runner intentionally interferes with the second fielder who has an opportunity to put a runner out. Consider that a runner who could have avoided the second fielder, but did not, as having intentionally interfered. A runner who merely jumps over a batted ball to avoid being struck, most likely has not committed interference. Contact is not necessary for interference to occur.

When interference occurs, (1) the ball is dead, (2) the interferer is out and (3) other runners are entitled to the base(s) reached at the time of the interference. When interference is called the umpire will, (1) extend both arms overhead, call, "Time," and while pointing at the runner's mid-section with the left arm call, "That's interference, the runner is out!"

2007 POE -> Obstruction. In recent years the obstruction rule has received considerable attention. The ASA obstruction rule was changed in 2004 when the words, "or about to receive a thrown ball" were removed from the rule. One reason for the

change was the belief by some that defensive teams were gaining unfair advantages by impeding the progress of baserunners. Had umpires properly enforced the traditional rule, perhaps the change would not have been made. Unfortunately, over the years, some umpires "froze" on obvious obstructions and did not react and make the necessary calls. Thus, the rule was changed to limit the fielder's positioning when the fielder is about to receive a thrown ball.

The change in the obstruction rule changed the way softball was traditionally played for many years. Softball was always based on fairness and balance between the offensive and defensive teams. Baserunners were entitled to run the bases and fielders were allowed to attempt to catch thrown balls. When a runner or a fielder was illegally disadvantaged, obstruction and interference rules were in place to penalize offenders. The obstruction rule is now obviously tilted in favor of the offensive team.

However, we still want to keep a favorable balance between the offensive and defensive teams. Contact does not have to occur for obstruction to occur.

The following information and guidelines are presented to help officials recognize and properly call obstruction in NYSSO softball.

NYSSO OBSTRUCTION

Keep The Phantoms In The Bag!

It is better to miss an obstruction call than to call a phantom obstruction that did not occur!

Two conditions must occur for obstruction to be called:

- 1. Fielder without ball sets up in runner's base path**
- AND**
- 2. Fielder impedes runner**

NYSSO OBSTRUCTION

Fielder without ball takes position in runner's path or blocks base

Runner not (yet) impeded in any way
(runner doesn't stop, slide, slow down or alter her path)

•••••11

No Obstruction!

NYSSO Obstruction and Interference

The "3 P's" of Obstruction and Interference

Every time baserunners are running the bases the umpires will decide:

- 1. Priority: By rule is the runner or the fielder entitled to Priority?**
- 2. Privileged: The player entitled to Priority becomes the Privileged Player.**
- 3. Protection: Privileged Player is granted Protection**

under the rules!

When an infraction occurs:

- 1. See It!**
- 2. Recognize It!**
- 3. Make The Right Call!**

2007 POE No Calls. Every interaction between a runner and a fielder is not necessarily interference or obstruction. Good umpires understand that sometimes a "No Call" is the best call. Consider:

1. B1 hits a ground ball to F6. F6's throw to first is on the home plate side of first base and a collision between B1 and F3 occurs.
2. R1 from first base attempts to steal second base. F2's throw draws F4 into the path of R1 and the opponents make contact as the ball skips into the outfield.
3. B1 hits a fair ball in front of the plate. B1 in going for first and F2 going for the ball make contact.

Because in those three situations, the offensive player, the defensive player and the ball (in #1 and #2) came together at the same time and the runner and the fielder were playing as normally expected, it's likely, that neither the runner nor the fielder was unfairly disadvantaged to the degree that interference or obstruction should be called. When a "No Call" occurs, the umpire should extend both arms horizontally in a safe signal to show that the umpire saw the play and determined that no call was the appropriate decision.

2006 POE -> Pitcher slaps thigh during delivery. The committee has received reports that pitchers have been warned to cease and in some cases charged with an illegal pitch for slapping their leg one or more times with their glove during the delivery motion. There is no penalty if the pitcher slaps her leg or hip with her glove during her delivery.

2006 POE -> Interchanging of DP/FLEX. The committee has received reports that officials are allowing the DP and the FLEX to completely reverse their roles. It is legal for:

1. The DP to play defense for the FLEX with the FLEX leaving the game. In that situation the team is playing with a conventional nine-player lineup. However, the DP and FLEX positions are not terminated and may again be used.
2. The FLEX may enter the batting order in the DP's batting position with the DP leaving the game. In that situation the team is playing with a nine-player lineup.

However, the DP and FLEX positions are not terminated and may again be used.

3. The DP may play defense for a player other than the FLEX and continue to bat. In that situation both the DP and the FLEX are playing defense and one of the eight other players in the batting order is playing offense only. In that situation the DP also continues to bat.

However, the positions of the DP and FLEX are not interchangeable. It is illegal for the two positions to switch with the DP becoming the FLEX and the FLEX becoming the DP.

2006 POE All players may re-enter the game once. It is legal for all starting players and all substitutes to re-enter the game one time.

2006 POE No penalty for unreported substitutes. There is no penalty if a player who is legally entitled to play in the game fails to report her entry in the game to the umpire. By Official NYSSO Interpretation, there is no penalty if the FLEX fails to report her assumption of the DP's position in the batting order.

2006 POE --> A pitcher may leave the game and return to the pitching position. A pitcher who is eligible to pitch who has not been removed from the pitching position because of the charged conference or other rule, and has re-entry eligibility, may leave the game and re-enter one time to the pitching position.

1. Philosophy. The NYSSO Umpire School was founded by Aileen Durrant in 1987. The school was established to provide quality instruction for umpires to develop the best possible officials for our high school softball program under the imprimatur of the New York State Public High School Athletic Association.

Each instructor and staff member should strive to ensure that all umpiring students will enjoy a serious but pleasant educational experience that is based on "positive reinforcement" training techniques.

2. Managing arguments. The ability to successfully manage arguments is an area of expertise that separates the average or good umpire from a truly outstanding official. Some umpires go into a game hoping that their game will be uneventful and without controversy. They base their personal umpiring evaluation on how eventful their game was. However, the umpire who confidently steps up with the big call, decision or ruling is the type of umpire needed for important games.

When an argument occurs, the umpire being confronted must be sure the person complaining is the head coach. All umpires on the crew must determine the head coach's identity at the pre-game meeting at home plate. A base coach, who is not the head coach, may briefly question the umpire on a play at his base or in his area of the

field. However, any extended discussion must be between the umpire and the head coach. Umpires not involved in the argument must act as buffers between assistant coaches and the umpire being questioned. Once the head coach assumes responsibility for the argument, other coaches should not be allowed to argue.

The umpiring crew must act as a single unit of authority. At no time should different coaches be arguing with different umpires at different field locations.

3. Calling plays in another umpire's area of responsibility. The committee has noticed that some umpires, especially in three-umpire crews, are making calls that are in another official's area of responsibility. Calling plays in another umpire's area can result in double calls, opposite double calls and protested games. Add the "Look" mode to the established "Pause-Read-React" technique in situations where another umpire may make a call. Double calls have been observed on Fair/Foul, Catch/No Catch and other situations. Therefore, watch other crew members and "Pause-Read-React and Look" before making a call.

4. Plate stances. NYSSO has approved three plate stances; the box, the scissors and the one knee stances. New umpires should first learn all aspects of the box stance. With experience, an umpire may elect to use the scissors or the one knee stances. No umpire or instructor should "bash" an approved stance.

The committee has noticed the combining of stances or the use of hybrid stances which can be counterproductive. Some poor plate mechanics observed by the committee includes:

- a. Working too low; lower than one full head above the catcher's head.
- b. Bending at the waist rather than at the knees in the box stance.
- c. Dropping the butt below the knees in the box stance.
- d. Setting up with a base (at the feet) that is not wide enough in the box **stance**.
- e. Failure to keep the back straight and knees flared out in the box stance.
- f. Failure to keep both feet flat on the ground in the box stance.
- g. Leaning or squatting with pitches to show location.
- h. Reading and/or calling pitches too soon. Not using the six point technique of calling a pitch: "On the rubber-get set-track-read-hold-call it."
- i. Not seeing the "money pitch" at the knees on the outside corner with both eyes.
- j. Ripping off the mask and spinning toward a foul ball in a "Rip, Spin and Spring" manner, rather than using the "Clear-(the catcher)-Pause-Read-Remove-(the mask if necessary)-React" technique.

5. Management of game balls. Have enough game balls on your person or in a bag nearby so it's not, "Foul Ball, Foul Ball" and the game is delayed because the umpire does not have sufficient alternate balls.

6. Checking needlessly with fellow officials. With modern mechanics and shared responsibilities, each umpire should strive to get his or her own calls without constantly going for help to the other umpire on judgment calls. Why would anyone believe that an umpire seventy or eighty feet away saw the play better than the calling umpire? Coaches are very successful at getting some umpires to frequently check judgment decisions with another umpire. In most cases, umpires should have the courage, concentration and conviction to get their own calls.

7. Nitpicking. An official should know the rules inside an out. But that is not a license to make esoteric calls or rulings on highly technical points when no unfair advantage not intended by the spirit of the rules is being gained by a player or team. Concentrate on umpiring the game at hand without being concerned about peripheral matters of little consequence.

8. The "riding" of umpires by coaches. A strong umpire must be able to determine the difference between when a coach has a legitimate complaint or when the coach believes he or she has a legitimate complaint as opposed to the coach who constantly "rides" an umpire or an umpiring crew. A coach who is attempting to intimidate or embarrass an umpire must be warned to cease such tactics or face expulsion from the contest.

9. Bat removal. An umpire should never handle equipment carelessly. A plate umpire may, at his or her discretion, cautiously and carefully push a discarded batter's bat out of the base path or away from the plate with his or her foot to "clear the home plate area" for a play. A plate umpire may, at his or her discretion, pick up a discarded batter's bat and cautiously and carefully DROP the bat away from the home plate area to "clear the home plate area" for a play. With safety a primary concern, it is safer for a trained adult umpire to cautiously and carefully move a bat that presents a possible hazard than to have a youth catcher, pitcher or other player move or throw the bat.

The decision by the umpire to "clear the bat" from the home plate area is an individual umpire's decision. For example, in a quickly developing play, the umpire may decide not to remove the bat because, in the judgment of the umpire, there is not sufficient time to clear the bat. The umpire may also decide not to remove the bat because the location of the bat does not, in the judgment of the umpire, present a hazard. Instructors should not criticize an umpire who elects to cautiously and carefully clear a bat. Nor should an instructor criticize an umpire who decides not to "clear a bat."

Rationale: An umpire who knowingly fails to cautiously and carefully "clear a bat" from a potentially dangerous area because the umpire was directed not to do so by his association, could be accused of negligence if the bat causes or exacerbates an injury.

In such a situation, the umpire's association and any parent organization could also be accused of negligence.

10. Two-Umpire mechanics. In the two-umpire system, the base umpire does not cover home plate under NYSSO mechanics. This mechanic has not been taught for many years.

Note: If there is an unusual play or occurrence, an umpire may make a call in the other umpire's area of jurisdiction when the other umpire is injured, has fallen, didn't see the play or for other prudent reasons.

11. Optional two-umpire mechanics #1. In the NYSSO two-umpire system, the base umpire may optionally, with runners on first and second with two outs and a three ball and two strike count on the batter, elect to take an initial position behind the second baseman. This has been an optional NYSSO position for many years.

Rationale. The optional position behind the second baseman may be taken by the base umpire, in the two-umpire system, when there are runners on first and second with two outs and a full count on the batter. The rationale for taking this position is that with runners running on the pitch the likelihood of a first play in the infield occurring at first base is 95%. There is a 4% chance of a play occurring at second base and just a 1% chance of a play at third base in this situation. By moving from behind the shortstop to behind the second baseman, the base umpire, on a play in the infield, has a 99% chance of being positioned on the same side of the diamond as the play.

12. Optional two-umpire mechanics #2. In the NYSSO two-umpire system, the base umpire may, when all bases are occupied, optionally take an initial position behind the second baseman. This has been an optional NYSSO position for many years.

Rationale. With all bases occupied, in the two-umpire system, the base umpire may elect to take an initial position behind the second baseman or behind the shortstop as the base umpire prefers. Statistically, the position behind the second baseman guarantees that the base umpire will significantly more often be positioned on the same side of the diamond as the play.

13. NYSSO ball rotation guidelines. The plate umpire will make final judgments about managing game balls. To start the game, the plate umpire will have a minimum of two new game balls. It's highly recommended that the umpire have three or more additional new or game quality balls on his person or in an area near home plate where the balls can be obtained immediately as needed.

1. Generally, the current game ball is in play until it leaves the playing field or is rejected by an umpire because it is discolored, scuffed or otherwise unsuitable for play. However, each pitcher will have a reasonable choice of game balls at the start of her

inning and may make reasonable requests for an alternate ball anytime while pitching.

2. If the pitcher wants an alternate ball, she or the catcher must first hand or toss the current ball to the plate umpire who will then provide an alternate ball for play. The pitcher may not hold more than one ball at a time for trial purposes. The game will not be delayed while someone retrieves a particular ball batted out of the playing field.

3. Anytime a game ball strikes a hard or sharp object that could cut or deface the ball, the plate umpire will check such ball.

Play 1: After walking two batters in the second inning, **F1** requests an alternate ball from the umpire. **Ruling 1:** The umpire will honor F1's request for an alternate ball.

Play 2: Every two or three pitches, F1 requests an alternate ball. **Ruling:** If the umpire judges that the requests are unreasonable, such as on dry field conditions, the umpire is empowered to direct F1 to pitch with the ball in her possession.

14. Changing calls. The debate continues among managers, coaches, players, umpires and everyone else with an opinion. Is it okay for an umpire to change a **call**? The confusing answer is yes and no and sometimes.

Managers and coaches are forever pressuring umpires to ask the other man on calls not to their liking. Of course, managers and coaches are just doing their job by trying to get a call reversed in their favor. They'll do that by pleading, "You've got to get help on that call!" and "Don't you want to get it right?" Yes, from the major leagues on down there is an increasing school of thought that four, six or eight eyes are better than two eyes when making a decision on a play.

However, asking the other man can lead to a winding trail to doom. You certainly don't want to be taking a poll after every close call. That's what occurred in late 1800's baseball when the rulebook encouraged umpires to seek the testimony of bystanders (spectators) if necessary on controversial plays.

Don't allow a manager to dupe you with, "Thanks for checking ump. That's good umpiring." Good umpiring? Maybe. But in the higher levels of play, be prepared to circle the wagons after changing a call.

Here are NYSSO guidelines about changing calls:

Get your own calls. That's right! Get your own calls and get them right. That requires concentration and anticipation. On the bases you must be alert for pickoffs and steals and be prepared for interferences, obstructions and those never ending "whackers" that can explode at any time. Think priority on the bases. Is the privileged player, at a given time, the fielder or the runner? The privileged player is granted priority on the play and protection under the rules. Try to anticipate the play and move into position for the next most likely play while keeping the field in proper officiating balance. Yes, anticipate the play, but never anticipate the call.

You should be able to make every call without going for help whenever you are on the same side of the diamond as the play. Good mechanics will permit you to see every

play on your side of the diamond. That includes a pulled foot or swipe tag. Don't cop out by claiming you were blocked out on a play. If you are actually blocked out, use the last information you have and make your call. The two-umpire system is a system of angles and compromises. Don't ask your partner who may be sixty feet or more away from the play for help unless it is absolutely necessary. Try telling a questioning manager that you were on top of the play and that you don't need help from your partner who wasn't nearly as close to the play. Let your partner make calls within his area of responsibility and you cover plays in your area. And, when asking for help, ask for help before making your call. Don't be easily stampeded to go for help after making a call.

When behind the plate use proper mechanics that positions you in the slot between the batter and the catcher. That way you'll be better able to see a hit batter, a ball off the batter's foot, batter's interference and catcher's obstruction. As far as changing calls, umpire as much as possible as though you are working the game alone.

Calls that may be changed:

1. The call of a "ball" on a half swing may, on appeal from the defensive team be changed to a strike if the base umpire judges that the batter offered at the pitch. Remember, only a ball call is appealable to the field umpire.

2. The misapplication of a rule can and should be changed when the umpires decide they made an improper ruling. Correcting the ruling could avoid a protested game.

3. A ball is dropped after a tag. We've all done it. You call a runner out but the ball is dropped. You must then immediately reverse your too quick out call to a "Safe!" If the calling umpire doesn't see the dropped ball in a dirt flying play, it's okay for his partner to change the call by assertively verbalizing, "Ball on the ground! Ball on the ground! The ball was dropped!" However, that change must be done with such assertiveness that everyone believes the changed call was the correct call.

4. There is an opposite double call. If two umpires make opposite double calls on the same play, the umpires must decide who had primary responsibility for the call, who was in the best position to see the play and which call was most likely correct. The call must be changed accordingly. Be prepared to take some criticism after an opposite double call.

5. A swipe tag on the batter-runner at first when the base umpire is on the left side of the diamond. If in doubt, the base umpire should point at and ask the plate umpire, before making a call, "Was there a tag!" What the base umpire is doing is seeking additional information before announcing his decision. That is good umpiring when the calling umpire is positioned on the opposite side of the field. Technically, asking for help before announcing a decision is not changing a call.

6. A pulled foot by the first baseman when fielding a throw from an infielder following a ground ball when the base umpire is on the opposite side of the field. When unsure, the base umpire should point at and ask his partner, "Was the foot on?" The

plate umpire will respond with, "Yes! The foot's on!" or, "No! She's off the base." The base umpire will then make the appropriate call. Again, that's not really changing a call.

The three-foot lane. Whenever possible the plate umpire should follow the batter-runner to first base or at least look in that direction for a trouble play when he has responsibility at third base or home. The plate umpire will automatically call a three-foot lane interference violation, obstruction or interference in his area and the ball becoming dead. The plate umpire is also responsible for a tag on the batter-runner for the first half of the distance to first base. The plate umpire will reserve his opinion on a pulled foot or swipe tag until asked by the base umpire.

Changing other calls. It's much easier to reverse calls on a play when the ball becomes dead. That's obvious because all playing action ends with the dead ball. **Play 1: B1** hits a long fly ball down the right field line and signals a home run. However, the catcher the first baseman, the right fielder and the entire defensive team's bench vociferously object to the decision. **Ruling 1:** The base umpire, if he isn't sure of his call, may ask the plate umpire's opinion in a private conference, with no managers, coaches or players present. The call may then be changed. Also, if the plate umpire is 100 percent sure he is correct, may hold a private discussion with the base umpire to tell him what he saw. However, it's the base umpire's decision as to whether he changes the call.

Be careful when changing calls that affect or could affect subsequent playing action. For example: **Play 2:** R2 is on second with two outs. **B1** hits a ground ball to F6. The base umpire, from the left side of the infield, calls B1 out but B1 and the first base coach assertively claim that F3's foot was off the bag. The base umpire then asks for help regarding the pulled foot and the plate umpire announces that F3's foot was indeed off the bag. The defensive team loudly argues that the call shouldn't be changed and that R2 advancing toward home should not be allowed to score. The team at bat complains that R2 would have easily scored on the play had B1 not been originally called out. **Ruling 2:** The base umpire should have requested the plate umpire's assistance before making the call. That way, the players on both teams would have had to play according to the safe call rather than the changed call.

So be careful what you ask for and good luck in changing calls.

15 IMPORTANT NYSSO MECHANICS

1. Modern Two-Umpire Fly Ball Coverage
2. Shared Fair-Foul Coverage

3. Shared Infield Fly Coverage

4. One-Step and Snap-Thud Theories for Calls at First Base

5. On Line-Off Line Theory for Calls at Home Plate

6. Optional Base Positions for Base Umpires

7. Pause-Read-React Technique for Base Umpires

8. Clear-Pause-Read-Remove (mask)-React Technique for Plate Umpires

9. On the Rubber-Get Set-Track-Read-Hold-Call It Technique for Calling

Pitches

10. Adoption of "Realistic Strike Zone"

11. Plant-Pivot-Step-Cross Step Technique for Making Button-Hooks

12. "Drift" Technique for Calling Double Plays

13. The "Flash Technique" for Catch/No Catch, Pickoffs, Steals and Tag Plays

14. No Umpire Fly Zone

15. Time Plays

Prepared by Jay Miner
August 20, 2007