

February 2010 Plays and Clarifications

Rule 3, Section 1A – H: The Official Bat We have received a lot of questions about the new rules as they pertain to the ASA Official Bat. These questions have centered on what can and cannot be done to the handle area of the bat. In this month's plays and clarifications we will try to answer some of those questions and hopefully clear up any misconceptions that may be going around the umpire community.

Question: Does the official bat have to have a knob?

Answer Yes as defined in Rule 3 Section 1B. The knob shall have a minimum diameter of 1.6 inches with no sharp edges. The knob will be permanently attached to the bat and may be taped with Safety tape. This allows for the smallest diameter knob that ASA has always allowed and eliminates the 90 degree rule, knob to handle.

Question: Can you have a buildup of tape forming a cone shape on the handle?

Answer Yes. Rule 3 Section 1D allows for a cone shaped grip. The cone shape grip must stay above the knob. The new rule allows for the buildup of tape which was previously in violation of the old 90 degree angle of the knob to bat. You can tape the knob however the cone shape needs to be above the knob.

Question: Can you use a choke up device, molded finger grip, flare cone shape grip?

Answer Yes. Rule 3 Section 1D allows for these devices that at one time were illegal. The rule states they must be attached with safety tape. If they are not attached with safety tape they must be removed.

Question: Can the handle have more than 2 layers of tape?

Answer Yes Rule 3 Section 1D has removed the wording about only 2 layers of tape being allowed. Therefore multiple layers of tape are allowed as long as there is no exposed metal or composite material in the minimum 10" range or the maximum 15" range

Question: Does a new model bat that does not appear on the non approved bat list and does not have the ASA certification mark on it fall under the penalty for using a non approved or altered bat?

Answer Yes. Any bat that does not meet Rule 3 Section 1A [1-3] is considered a non approved bat whether listed or not. This is the reason we went to the one bat list called Non Approved bats with Certification Marks. When making the change to the new list, the definition in Rule 1 "Non Approved Bat" was missed and the "and" in the definition should have been removed and replaced with "or." If it does not meet Rule 3 section 1A [1-3] or is on the Non Approved bats with Certification Marks list then it is a "NON APPROVED BAT."

Rule 8, Section 10A – G: Courtesy Runner (Fast Pitch/Modified)

This year the ASA council voted to make the courtesy runner part of the modified game by a rule change submitted and approved. In the game of Fast Pitch a question has been asked concerning the ability to have the DP bat for the Flex, (the pitcher), get a hit and be replaced by the flex on base. The coach will then put a courtesy runner in for the flex, (the pitcher).

Play: In a J.O Fast Pitch game, the DP is batting in the fourth spot of the line-up for the FLEX (the pitcher). In the third inning, the DP bats and reaches 1B safely. The coach asks for time to replace the DP with the FLEX (the pitcher). The FLEX advances to 2B on a hit from the next batter. The coach again asks for time and now wants to use a Courtesy Runner for the FLEX (the pitcher). Is this legal?

Ruling: ASA does not permit a team to circumvent the Courtesy Runner rule by putting the pitcher back in the game after the DP bats for the pitcher or catcher. A Courtesy Runner is permitted in J.O. play for the pitcher and catcher only. The Courtesy Runner rule is intended for the pitcher and/or catcher who bats and is running the bases. Rule 8, Section 10B states no Courtesy Runner is allowed when a substitute enters the game to bat for the pitcher or catcher and then that pitcher or catcher re-entering the game on the bases. Rule 8, Section 10E states that no Courtesy Runner is allowed for the DP if the DP is batting for the pitcher or catcher. (Rule 8, Section 10B & E)

Rule 8, Section 5B: Obstruction

There seems to be some question on the ASA obstruction rule as discussed in Rule Supplement 36. It states that "If a defensive player is blocking the base or base path without the ball, they are impeding the progress of the runner and this is obstruction." This has been interpreted by some to say that regardless of the location of the runner or runners blocking a base is obstruction. Therefore, regardless of where the runner is, for example 20 feet from the base, in ASA this is obstruction. This is a misunderstanding of

the Rule Supplement. The sentence is being taken out of context and should be applied with the rest of Rule Supplement 36.

However, it is also important to remember that a Rule Supplement is not a rule but written to support the rule. Our rule clearly states that it is obstruction if there is impeding of the runner. To have obstruction while blocking a base there must be two elements involved: 1) A defensive player blocking the base or base path without possession of the ball and 2) a defensive player impeding or hindering the runner's advancing or returning to a base by the action of blocking the base.

Ruling: No. R1 was not impeded or hindered on the way to the plate. (Rule 1, Definition; Rule 8, Section 5B)

January 2010 Plays and Clarifications

Welcome to the 2010 ASA Softball season. We are well on our way to the start of another great softball year. As the umpire community continues to grow we would like to remind all of us involved in the umpire family to invite a friend to join us for a fun ride and learning experience.

Rule 3, Section 1: New rules passed by the ASA Council have been posted on the ASA website for all to review. Because of changes to Rule 3 Section 1 we should add some comments to deal with them in this month's clarifications and frequently asked questions.

You will notice a change in the definitions describing parts of the bat. We have added a definition of the area between the handle and the barrel known as the taper. It was added to help equipment manufactures understand the area that we consider neither the handle nor the barrel of the bat. This allows for new bat designs to be an approved bat as this area is now clearly defined.

The definition of the bat handle has also been rewritten and now allows many things that were previously not allowed or considered an altered bat. The question of the choke up attachment or cone shaped grip was previously ruled to be an altered bat is no longer considered an altered bat. These attachments are legal provided they are permanently attached to the bat or attached with safety tape. We now allow more than two layers of tape on the bat handle.

These changes allow ASA to work on the barrel end of the bat to make the game more playable for everyone and reduce conflict on the items used to hold the bat. These changes make our rules more "player-friendly" and hopefully more fun for all those that participate in our great game of softball.

Interference

To start the New Year, it seems appropriate to revisit a topic that always attracts a lot of attention and discussion. The following situations and scenarios all pertain to the question: Is it, or is it not Interference?

The game is FP, Modified or SP with Stealing. In each case the backstop is very close to the plate area and the ball has a tendency to come off the backstop toward the plate area very quickly. There are also runners on base.

The ball gets passed the catcher and:

- a. Comes back and strikes the batter in the batter's box.
- b. Comes back and settles in between the legs of the batter in the batter's box.
- c. Comes back and strikes the batter out of the batter's box.
- d. Comes back and settles in or around the feet of the batter, preventing the catcher from cleanly fielding the ball.

The catcher has the ability to:

- 1) make a play with a chance to make an out
- 2) not to realistically make a play after the ball strikes the batter and the runners have not reached the next base at the time the ball strikes the batter or
 - a. the ball strikes the batter and settles near them or
 - b. the ball strikes the batter and bounces well away from the catcher preventing them from making a play or
 - c. the batter (brain dead) picks up the ball and hands it to the catcher or taps the ball to the catcher with their bat

Furthermore

a. Does it make a difference if the batter knows the ball is there and does or does not make an attempt to get out of the way?

b. Would it make a difference if the runner is trying to score from 3B?

Whenever we speak about Interference, we must always remember that the determination of whether an act is or is not Interference is found in its definition. (Rule 1)

Interference: The act of any offensive player or team member, umpire or spectator that IMPEDES, HINDERS OR CONFUSES a defensive player attempting to execute a play. Applying the definition of interference to all the situations above will lead you to the correct application of the Rule. In addition, when talking about Batter Interference, Rule 7, Section 6 P, Q, & S, may also apply.

The fact that the ball strikes the batter anywhere does not constitute Interference. However, the batter's actions after the ball has contacted them will determine whether Interference has or has not occurred. In all cases the batter should be given the opportunity to react to the fact that the ball has suddenly struck them. The batter's actions afterwards may or may not constitute Interference.

If the (brain dead) batter hindered, confused or impeded the catcher while they were attempting a play, Interference should be called. Conversely, in the judgment of the umpire, the batter did not hinder, confuse or impede the catcher, no Interference should be declared. If there was a runner attempting to score from 3B, the applied criteria would be the same.

In all of the above scenarios, the following observations should be made:

1. In order to arrive at the correct decision, the umpire must see the entire play.
2. The umpire's judgment, based on sound Mechanics and knowledge of the Rules, will determine the proper applications to the above questions.