

NFHS Rule Changes – 2010

By: Kyle McNeely 8/3/09

While there were not that many changes for the 2010 season – three true rule changes and a few editorial clarifications – we umpires need to understand the changes well. Let's take a look at them in rule order.

Extension of Dugouts (Temporary and Permanent)

The first change we will discuss is truly an editorial change for Rule 1-2-4. Many years ago schools that had small dugout areas were enlarging their space by simply chalking a line in whatever direction was available, and some were only increasing the size of their dugout space, not the visitors'. As a result, a rule was previously added that recommended teams only increase their space toward the outfield, in a line parallel with the foul line; not towards the foul line or the home plate area where the risk of injury would be higher. The rule also required that both dugouts be handled the same. The editorial change deleted the word "recommended" and replaced it with "shall." So now, if a team temporarily increases the size of the dugouts, with a chalk line or other temporary method, it must be extended toward the outfield on a line parallel with the respective foul line. The word "*temporary*" was added so not to preclude a team from making a permanent alteration, with a fence, brick or other permanent material, and making the change in any direction that best worked for their field.

Bats (effective 1/1/2012)

The next rule change will have a major impact in the 2012 high school season. Baseball bat specifications were made to help clarify bat compliance and make the purchase of bats an easier process. While two piece bats will still be legal, the wording was clarified in that the bat should be a "smooth cylinder implement from the top of the cap to the top of the knob." The new rule also states that non-wood bats, beginning in 2012, must meet the Batted Ball Coefficient of Restitution (BBCOR) performance standard. Prior to the 2012 season, non-wood bats used in high school play are required to meet the Ball Exit Speed Ratio (BESR) standard. This new BBCOR standard was previously adopted by the NCAA. Research shows that the BBCOR standard also incorporates the BESR so in reality the current standard is expanding to better meet high school players' needs. Non-wood bats that will meet the new BBCOR standard should swing and feel like the non-wood bats used today, but their performance will be very similar to that of a wood bat. Additionally, the new rule will require that the non-wood bats be labeled with a rectangular certification mark that is a minimum of a half-inch on each side and located on the barrel of the bat in any contrasting color. Some of the current BESR certification labels have become difficult to locate and identify.

Pitcher's Uniform

The next rule change is editorial in nature. It codifies the approved ruling that was made last year regarding uniforms worn by pitchers. Rule 1-4-2 now reads: "A pitcher shall not wear white or gray exposed undershirt sleeves or any white or gray sleeve that extends below the elbow. A vest and coordinating shirt that is worn underneath is viewed as a type of uniform top." In essence, while a pitcher still may not have exposed undershirt sleeves that are white or gray underneath a jersey shirt, they may wear a medical sleeve that is white or gray, provided it does not extend below the elbow. If it is a color other than white or gray, it may be worn below the elbow, provided it is not distracting. If the pitcher's team is attired in a vest style uniform, and the shirt worn beneath the vest is white or gray, it is legal for the pitcher to wear that shirt provided the sleeve does not extend below the elbow.

Assistant Coaches

For the past several years the Baseball Rules Committee has had concerns with reports from across the nation concerning the behavior of assistant coaches. It appeared that a trend was developing where assistant coaches were becoming much more vocal and disruptive, creating some counterproductive behavior. The intent of the rule change is to reinforce that head coaches are to represent their team in communications with the game officials. While it is certainly acceptable for an assistant coach to ask for clarification concerning a situation, it is not okay for an assistant coach to charge an umpire or challenge and argue a judgment call. For the past couple years, the committee had, as a Point of Emphasis, stressed proper coaching behavior, but it had a limited impact nationally. As a result, Rule 3-3-1g-6 was added to state that if any member of the coaching staff who was not the head coach (or his designee) left the area of the dugout or coaching box to dispute a call, both he and the head coach would be restricted to the dugout for the balance of the game. This rule is not intended to cover those instances in the past

where an assistant coach was heading to his dugout at the end of a half-inning and couldn't resist the temptation to say a word or so. If the comment in itself did not warrant any action, then this rule would not necessitate anything different. If a head coach were already restricted when an assistant coach violated this rule, the head coach would not be ejected based on this violation. Each action would be judged individually and on its own merit. There were a couple of states that experimented with this rule last season, and had very favorable results in the improvement of coaching behavior.

Interference with fielder's play on a foul fly ball

Another rule change involved Rule 7-4-1-f. In the past if any member of the offensive team, including a runner, interfered with a fielder attempting to field a foul fly ball, the ball would be dead and the batter out. To keep consistent the philosophy that a runner is out when he commits interference, the rule was changed so that if it is a runner who interferes with a fielder on a foul fly ball, the runner is out, and the batter is charged with a strike for the foul (given he did not start that pitch with a two strike count). If a coach or any other member of the offensive team, other than a runner, interferes with a fielder on a foul fly ball, then the batter will be out as with the previous rule.

Batting

There were a few additional, minor editorial changes made to better clarify existing rules. Rule 7-3-2 was clarified such that it reads "A batter shall not hit the ball fair, foul or foul tip while either foot or knee is touching the ground completely outside the lines of the batter's box or touching home plate." The words foul tip and knee were added to better describe the intent of the rule.

Batter hit by pitch

The wording of Rule 8-1-1d-1 was changed so that it is consistent with Rule 7-3-4, "A batter shall not permit a pitched ball to touch him."

Runner out of the basepath

Another editorial change in Rule 8-4-2 Penalty was clarified to avoid any confusion with the situation where a runner is more than three feet away from a direct line between the bases to avoid being tagged. In that instance, it is not interference and the ball should remain live with the batter being declared out. If he goes more than three feet out of the baseline to hinder a fielder, then interference would be called and the ball immediately dead.

Third out on an appeal play

The last editorial change involved Rule 9-1-1d, "When a third out is declared during a play resulting from a valid defensive appeal, which results in a force out (this takes precedence if enforcement of it would negate a score); or..." This rule section had not been changed when the appeal rule was put back into the rulebook, and it was updated to reflect the high school appeal play.

There were two **Approved Rulings** of note:

1. SITUATION: With a runner at third base taking his lead in foul ground, a batted ball hits third base and is deflected into foul ground where it contacts the runner. RULING: When a batted ball hits a base and is deflected into foul territory where it touches a runner, the ball stays live and in play. Unless the runner moved intentionally so that he contacted the ball, he is not out.
2. SITUATION: The pitcher, in the set position, takes his stance with the ball in his pitching hand and his pitching arm hanging straight down. RULING: This is legal. If the pitcher were to swing his pitching arm, while in this position, it would be illegal and a balk if runner(s) are on base.