

## Official Baseball Rules Changed for First Time in 10 Years

A revitalized Official Rules Committee in Major League Baseball has handed down 23 changes to the Official Baseball Rules. These are the first changes to the rulebook in 10 years. And for the first time, the changes came about with umpire input. Larry Young became the first umpire ever named to the MLB Rules Committee last year.

It is important to understand how these rule changes work. The changes are automatically in effect for the 2006 season in the National Association of Professional Baseball Leagues (NAPBL...the minor leagues, administered by the Professional Baseball Umpire Corp., or PBUC) and all other levels of baseball that play under the Official Rules.

Promulgation of the rules at the Major League Baseball (MLB) level involves one additional step. The Rules Committee has the power to change the rules, but in order for the changes to be implemented in MLB, the Players Association must approve them. For the 2006 seasons the Players Association has approved only four of the changes; specifically, changes which cannot affect on-field play. The changes below that are in effect this MLB season are numbers 1, 4, 13, and 18.

Following are the 2006 changes to the Official Baseball Rules:

### **Rule Change #1: Editorial; casebook comment identifiers added.**

The first change is editorial.

Casebook comments were once located en masse in the back of the rulebook. After the 1976 season they were moved into the body of the book – under the rules they related to – for easier reference. However, the exact rule a comment referred to was not always clear.

The 2006 editorial change puts identifiers in front of the casebook entries so that there is no doubt regarding the rules to which they pertain.

For example, what was formerly stated as such:

“If the umpire observes any violation of these rules...,”

is now stated as such:

“Rule 1.16 comment: If the umpire observes any violation of these rules...”

### **Rule Change #2: Pitcher can wear multi-colored glove.**

A change to rule 1.15 allows the pitcher to wear a multi-colored fielding glove as long as the plate umpire does not rule that it is distracting to the batter. The plate umpire can rule the glove as distracting on his own initiative or upon the recommendation of a fellow umpire. A ruling is required when an offensive manager requests one.

The restriction against the glove being white or gray remains.

ESO Educational Note: An NFHS (high school) rule change closely parallels this MLB change; see “NFHS Baseball Rule Changes and Points of Emphasis for 2006,” an ESO exclusive article by rules expert Kyle McNeely.

**Rule Change #3: Delegation of duties of league president.**

In this proposed rule change, provision would be made for the delegation of present-day responsibilities once reserved to MLB’s National and American League Presidents. The provision comes in a new casebook comment under the definition of League President in rule 2.00. The rule would allow the commissioner of baseball to delegate responsibilities once reserved to the League Presidents. Note that this rule change has not to date been approved by the Players Association and that it would affect only the Major Leagues.

**Rule Change #4: Gender-neutral reference added.**

All pronouns stated as masculine in the rule book are now considered to refer to male or female persons, depending upon the individual the pronoun is referring to in specific cases. The stipulation was added at the end of rule 2.00.

**Rule Change #5: Rule regarding rubbing of baseballs updated.**

Rule 3.01c was altered to reflect the fact that present-day umpires (especially in MLB) no longer perform the pregame duty of removing the gloss from new baseballs. This service is most often provided by clubhouse attendants who rub a bit of mud uniformly on each ball. The plate umpire is responsible for ensuring that official baseballs are used and are rubbed properly, and remains the judge of whether each ball is fit for play before and during the game.

ESO editor’s note: The plate umpire remains responsible for having the gloss removed from the baseballs; he or she must do so if there is no designee available.

**Rule Change #6: Rule regarding rosin bag responsibilities updated.**

The sixth rule change affects rules 3.01(f) and the 8.02(a) casebook comment.

Rule 8.02(a)’s casebook entry formerly required that an umpire carry an official rosin bag that could be used by the pitcher. Over time this messy duty was eliminated and the home team became responsible for providing the requisite rosin bag.

Rule 3.01(f) was altered such that the umpires remain responsible for ensuring that an official rosin bag is present and placed properly. The bag should be located behind (to the outfield side) of the pitching mound, and far enough down the back slope of the mound that a batted ball is not likely to touch it.

### **Rule Change #7: Clarification of penalty for altering a baseball or pitching an altered baseball.**

Rules 3.02 and 8.02(a) contained provisions that were in conflict. Rule 3.02 required the immediate ejection of a player who defaced a baseball. Rule 8.02(a) required a warning for the same violations and an ejection only on the second offense.

This discrepancy was cleared up by altering the penalty in 8.02(a) to agree with that found in 3.02. A pitcher guilty of altering a baseball or pitching an altered ball is now ejected and automatically suspended for 10 games. The former penalization in 8.02(a) – calling a ball and warning the pitcher – has been eliminated.

Occasionally a pitcher will unintentionally violate Rules 8.02(a) items 2 through 6. For example the pitcher might spit into his glove, rub the baseball against his leg, or pat the rosin bag on his leg. A new casebook comment attached to these rules allows an umpire discretion to warn the pitcher against repeating such actions rather than imposing immediate ejection.

ESO editor's note: It is important to note that under the new presentation of this rule, there is no longer provision for calling a ball when an altered baseball has been pitched.

For example; the plate umpire sees spit fly off the pitcher's hand during a spitball pitch. The pitch is either a strike or the batter grounds out. The pitcher is ejected and will most likely get the requisite 10-day suspension. However, in either case (strike or groundout) it is obvious that the offensive manager will not want the result of the play.

Under the former rule, the pitch of the altered baseball would have resulted in a ball being added to the count. This provision no longer remains.

It is recommended that non-professional umpires rule a pitch of an altered baseball a ball when the pitch was not a ball and the offensive manager did not elect to take the results of the play.

### **Rule Change #8: Elimination of "tie" game (replayed) after a game has become regulation.**

A change to the rules regarding suspension of play brings the Official Rule very close to the "experimental" or "optional" rule that has been used by the minor leagues for many years. Specifically, 4.10(d) was amended such that any regulation game (beyond 4½ or 5 innings) called when the score is tied becomes a suspended game. Formerly, such a game was ruled "no game," and there was the possibility that the many innings played would be nullified, with the game being replayed.

Rules 4.11(d) and 4.12 were revised and reorganized to reflect the change made in 4.10(d) and to increase the overall clarity of the rule.

The only difference that remains between the optional minor league rule and the new Official Rule is this: if a game is not yet regulation and is tied when it is called, it is replayed in MLB and suspended in NAPBL.

This rule change has no impact on the “experimental” or “optional” rule used in minor league baseball and other leagues that have adopted it.

**Rule Change #9: Requirements changed for valid notification of protest.**

Under Rule 4.19 a manager formerly had to notify an umpire of his intent to protest a game before a pitch was made or a runner was put out. The rule was changed to make it consistent with requirements involved in an appeal situation. A manager must now indicate to an umpire his intention of protesting the game before a pitch or play. If he fails to do so the protest cannot be accepted.

**Rule Change #10: Penalization changed for batter refusing to enter batter’s box.**

This is one of the more drastic of the rule changes although it concerns a situation that rarely surfaces and the change vastly simplifies the enforcement of the rule.

Rule 6.02(c) formerly stipulated that when a batter refused to enter the batter’s box the umpire was to order the pitcher to pitch and was to automatically call the pitch a strike. This of course brought with it a multitude of problems that were unaddressed, including what was to happen if the batter jumped in and hit the pitch, the pitch was wild and runners advanced, the pitcher balked, etc. Although the many possibilities were addressed in the MLB Umpire Manual, the Rules Committee obviously saw that this situation could be simplified with a change in how the rule is enforced.

Under the new penalization for this offense, the umpire is able to simply call time and add a pitch to the count; the pitch itself is no longer required. Note that while the umpire should call time when enforcing this rule, he will not call time when enforcing the pace-of-game measure immediately following.

**Rule Change #11: Pace-of-game rule used on experimental basis last year in NAPBL added to the rulebook.**

A new rule, 6.02(d) brings an experimental pace-of-game measure from last year into the official book.

This experimental rule was used last season in the minor leagues and was inserted – unchanged – into the Official Rules.

Under this new rule the batter must keep at least one foot in the batter’s box during his entire time at bat unless certain situations occur; he may then leave the box but not the dirt circle surrounding home plate. These are the situations which allow the batter to leave the box:

1. He swings at the pitch.
2. He is forced out of the box by the pitch.

3. A member of either team is granted time.
4. A play is made on any baserunner.
5. He fakes a bunt.
6. There is a wild pitch or passed ball.
7. The pitcher leaves the mound after receiving the ball.
8. The catcher leaves the catcher's box to give signals.

In other words, if the batter has a good reason to leave the box he may. If he leaves for no apparent reason and delays play, a strike is called. Unlike in 6.02(c), however, the ball remains in play when this strike is called (see Rule Change #10, above).

If either team calls time for a conference or substitution, the batter may leave the dirt circle around home plate.

This rule contains a casebook comment that directs umpires to encourage batters to come to the plate immediately when the previous at bat has ended.

### **Rule Change #12: Catch of fly ball in dugout no longer allowed.**

A few years ago, in the interest of player safety, the MLB Commissioner's Office disallowed all catches of fly balls when a fielder had entered a dugout. However, this measure, issued in the form of a memo to all clubs, was in direct conflict with a casebook comment to Official Rule 7.04(c), which allowed the fielder to enter a dugout to make a catch.

This problem has been rectified with a rule change that now disallows a fielder from entering a dugout to make a catch. The new rule was inserted as a casebook comment to Official Rule 6.05(a). The casebook comment of 7.04(c) that allowed such catches was deleted.

Note that a fielder may still complete a catch in the dugout, same as in any other dead ball territory. Such a fielder must glove the ball before either foot goes into the dugout.

ESO editor's note: This rule change brings into question whether opponents of a fielder reaching over their dugout to make a catch must vacate the area, or whether it is allowable for dugout personnel to remain where they are as long as they do not intentionally interfere – in other words, does Rule 7.11 still apply to the new rule? As of now, the wording of 7.11 has not changed so umpires should require bench personnel to vacate, allowing the fielder to try to catch the fly ball. Failure to do so puts them at risk for committing interference. In other words, such a play should be handled the same way as out on the field when a base coach must avoid a fielder trying to make a play on a fly ball.

**Rule Change #13: Editorial; redundant three-foot lane rule deleted.**

This change is editorial only.

Rules 6.05(k) and 7.09(k) were identical; 7.09(k) has been deleted and its casebook comment moved to 6.05(k).

The lettered items under 7.09 (a through k) are affected by this deletion and the deletion noted in item 18 below.

**Rule Change #14: Clarification of “attempts to use” altered bat.**

Rule 6.06(d) requires that umpires call out and eject any batter who uses or attempts to use an altered bat. However, the rule did not define “attempts to use,” leaving defensive managers at a loss as to when they could ask for an examination of the bat and get an out.

A new casebook comment added to the rule defines “attempts to use” as the batter entering the batter’s box with the altered bat. A pitch is not necessary. This is not a change in enforcement; the “attempt to use” the bat was defined the same way in both the PBUC (NAPBL) and MLB umpire manuals.

**Rule Change #15: Paragraphs altered regarding enforcement of catcher’s interference.**

The second- and third-to-the-last paragraphs of Rule 6.08(c) were deleted. The Rules Committee stated that 6.08(c) was “amended so as not to be in conflict with Rule 7.07.”

Rule 6.08(c) in its previous form dealt with whether catcher’s interference would be enforced, nullified, or ignored (i.e., manager elects to take the results of the play). The paragraphs that were deleted spelled out in detail the enforcement of catcher’s interference when there was not a runner from third stealing and the manager did not want the result of the play. The interference was then enforced as follows; batter awarded first, runners forced to advance or stealing get their advance base, other runners returned to time-of-pitch bases. To repeat, this stipulation has been deleted.

Two other rules have something to say about the enforcement of catcher’s interference. Rule 7.04(d) deals with a runner stealing during catcher’s interference. Such runner gets his advance base if the interference is enforced. Rule 7.07 deals specifically with a runner from third stealing during catcher’s interference (usually a “squeeze play”); all runners get their advance base if the interference is enforced. Prior to the deletion of the two paragraphs, Rule 6.08(c) had made an incomplete attempt to address both these situations and the enforcement of the rule if both situations were absent.

The deletion of the two paragraphs reduces 6.08(c) back to dealing only with whether the interference becomes nullified or the manager will elect to take the results of the play. For

instances wherein there is a runner stealing home, the reader is referred to Rule 7.07 in a new casebook entry under the rule.

The enforcement of catcher's interference remains unchanged despite the fact that the rulebook no longer explicitly states what an umpire must do to enforce the interference when there was not a steal of home and the manager does not want the result of the play. The casebook examples in 6.08(c) imply the steps in enforcement, namely, that the batter gets first, runners forced to advance get their next base, and those not forced and not stealing must return to their time-of-pitch bases.

ESO editor's note: Although the Rules Committee cited a conflict between 6.08(c) and 7.07 in making this change, the only conflict between the two rules was (and still is) this: 6.08(c) calls the defensive infraction catcher's interference and 7.07 calls it interference and a balk (called in some circles a "catcher's balk"). Why the rule makers of 1920 wanted to confuse the issue and create a "double penalty" in 7.07 is anyone's guess.

The easier solution back in 1920 would have been to amend all three related rules such that every runner gets his advance base when a catcher interferes with the batter. Or they could have called 7.07 an exception to the rule, which would have been much more umpire-friendly. Since umpires do not study scoring rules, and pitchers are the players who commit balks, most umpires would not look at the situation in 7.07 as a balk, but as an exception to the rule for enforcing catcher's interference. In other words, when catcher's interference is enforced, a non-stealing, non-forced runner is awarded his advance base only if there was a runner stealing home on the play (which is how the infraction is currently supposed to be enforced).

Although there never was any other conflict between 6.08(c) and 7.07, there was one point of confusion. Take the following play: Runners on second and third and the squeeze play is on. Runner from third is stealing home and the catcher interferes with the batter. Runner from second missed the sign and did not steal. An umpire familiar only with (or looking only at) the former Rule 6.08(c) would have thought that the runner from second must stay at second. But if he was familiar with 7.07 he would have known that the runner was supposed to get third. The deletion of the paragraphs and rewording of 6.08(c) will prevent this confusion in the future.

But with the effort to correct the problem came the new problem cited above. No longer does the rulebook specifically tell umpires what to do when enforcing catcher's interference unless there is a runner stealing home (which is of course the rare case). Rather, the rulebook reader will have to deduce from the casebook plays under 6.08(c) that the batter is awarded first, forced runners get a base, and non-stealing, non-forced runners must return to their time-of-pitch bases unless there was a R3 stealing home.

The most obvious problem relative to catcher's interference is that the rule is treated in three completely separate areas. Fortunately, the new rule language in 6.08(c) does refer the reader to 7.07. However, it does not refer the reader to 7.04(d), nor does either of the latter rules refer back to 6.08(c). Most glaring of these defects is the failure of 6.08(c) to direct the reader to 7.04(d) when a runner is stealing. The runner in the second example play of 6.08(c) might very well have

been running on the pitch (though the play does not state this), and an umpire unfamiliar with 7.04(d) will be unaware that the stealing runner should be awarded his advance base.

**Rule Change #16: Clarification of when a batter-runner is declared out after an uncaught third strike and absent a play being made on him.**

Rules 6.09(b) and 7.08(a) both addressed the situation wherein a strike three is uncaught, the batter becomes a runner (but doesn't realize it), and no play is made on him. Both rules provided that the batter-runner could try for first base until he entered the dugout or bench, when he would be declared out.

The problem with these two rules was that neither one of them gave a guideline for calling the batter out if the uncaught third strike happened with two outs; in such situations, the unknowing batter-runner would normally head for his position, not the dugout.

Under this rule change, if a batter is not out after an uncaught third strike and is not trying for first base when he leaves the dirt circle around home plate, he is declared out.

The section in 7.08(a) dealing with this situation, which appeared at the end of the rule as an approved ruling, was deleted, along with the short paragraph preceding it. The new rule appears in a re-written casebook comment under 6.09(b).

**Rule Change #17: Provision made for one base award when detached equipment is used to field a pitched ball.**

The Official Rules provide for base awards when a fielder touches a live batted or thrown baseball with detached equipment. However, the rule makers forgot to address the same situation with regard to pitched balls. The award in the new rule, 7.05(j), is one base from the base occupied at the time of the infraction. This interpretation had been in place for some time in the PBUC and MLB manuals.

ESO editor note: The rule was tacked on to the end of Rule 7.05 as the new letter "j." The other rules related to use of detached equipment are letters "a" through "e." Umpires should be aware that over the many years the rulebook has been in existence, new items have been inserted in a disjointed fashion. One must be persistent in order to find all aspects of such rules; they will not always appear in one place or in logical succession.

**Rule Change #18: Editorial; redundant rule 7.09(b) deleted.**

Rules 6.05(h) and 7.09(b) were identical; the latter was deleted. This affects the other lettered items in Rule 7.09 (see also rule change number 13). Rule 6.05(h) was not changed. The rule deals with a batter hitting the ball with his bat a second time on fair territory.

**Rule Change #19: Rules regarding position of pitcher's feet in relationship to the pitching rubber changed.**

Three changes in Rule 8.01 bring the rules closer to currently accepted interpretations regarding pitchers taking and maintaining a legal position on the pitching rubber.

The first change concerns the legal placement of the pivot foot (foot on the same side as the pitcher's throwing arm) in Rule 8.01(a) – the windup position – and 8.01(b) – the set (or “stretch”) position. When taking either position, the only requirement regarding the pivot foot in the new rules is that it is in contact with the pitching rubber. Previously, no part of the pivot foot could be off the side edges of the rubber, which is two feet long. The pitcher can now have as much of his pivot foot off the side of the rubber as he wishes, as long as the foot is touching the rubber.

The second and third changes are in regard to the non-pivot foot (foot on glove side of the pitcher) in the windup position – 8.01(a).

The pitcher's non-pivot foot is now allowed to be anywhere the pitcher wants it, including off the side of the rubber, which was previously prohibited.

And when the pitcher steps “back,” committing himself to pitch, the step can be sideways. The rule formerly stated that this step had to be backward; it could not be to the side of the rubber. The pitcher may now step to the side as he commits to pitch in the windup.

ESO editor's note: One problem with the liberalization of this rule is that it becomes more difficult for umpires and runners to ascertain whether a pitcher is taking a pitching position or just absent-mindedly touching or stepping on the rubber. This will have to be umpire judgment; if you think the pitcher intended to become in-contact, then consider him on the rubber. If you feel he has not intended to take a pitching position, but is “accidentally” touching the rubber, then rule as such.

It also becomes more difficult for umpires and runners to ascertain whether the pitcher is taking the windup or the stretch position. Look for the primary orientation of the pivot foot; if the foot is primarily perpendicular to the pitching rubber, consider it the windup; if primarily parallel, consider it the stretch. Also, in the stretch, the non-pivot foot must be in front of (toward home plate) the pitching rubber and primarily parallel to the rubber.

Concerning the step to the side as the pitcher commits to pitch, make sure that this step is led by the heel and/or side of the foot. If the toes lead the way, consider it a step to the base, which is exactly what it will look like.

**Rule Change #20: Pitcher using stretch position not required to come to a complete stop (set) with no runners on base.**

This rulebook change incorporates an interpretation already used in MLB and NAPBL; the pitcher is not required to come to a complete stop when using the stretch position with no runners on base. However, the pitcher is not to use this rule as license to “quick pitch” the batter, i.e., to deliver the pitch with the intent of catching the batter off guard. The stipulation was inserted as a new casebook comment under Rule 8.01(b).

**Rule Change #21: Automatic 10-game suspension implemented in penalty for possession of altering substance or object.**

Under a new stipulation in Rule 8.02(b), a pitcher found to have in his possession a substance or object that could be used to alter a baseball will now receive an automatic 10-game suspension.

**Rule Change #22: Time limit for pitcher to deliver pitch lowered.**

Under a change to Rule 8.04 the pitcher must now deliver a pitch to the batter within 12 seconds rather than the former 20 seconds when there are no runners on base. The new rule includes stipulations regarding the timing for this rule; it starts when the pitcher has the ball, the batter is aware of it, and the batter is in the box and ready to go. The timing ends when the pitcher releases the ball. Penalty for failing to deliver the pitch in time is to add a ball to the count.

ESO editor's note: It is important to note that the timing ends when the pitcher releases the ball, and not when the pitch starts (the pitcher commits to pitch). Thus, if the pitcher begins his motion to pitch and then fails to get the pitch released in time, you will obviously not be able to get the pitch stopped. The penalty is to call the pitch a ball, but what if the batter gets a base hit? Or flies out, etc., etc.?

The best time by far to enforce this rule is before a pitch is thrown. Only enforce the rule when it becomes obvious that the pitcher will not be able to get the pitch released before the 12 seconds expire. If it is going to be close, let it go and wait for a more obvious violation. No one needs the aggravation of trying to enforce this rule after a pitch has been made. The exception might be when the pitcher violates and the pitch is a strike (includes a foul ball). Wipe out the strike and add a ball to the count. It of course should go without saying that you will never take an advantageous play away from the offense to call a ball when the defense violated the rule. Let the play stand and warn the pitcher that he must keep it moving.

**Rule Change #23: Conflicts eliminated in penalization of a pitcher delaying the game.**

This rule change eliminates conflicting penalties when a pitcher is delaying the game by using unnecessary pickoff throws to a base. Rule 8.02(c) called for a warning, then ejection on a subsequent violation; 8.05(h) called for a balk.

The conflict was resolved by adding a casebook comment to 8.05(h), which provides that a pitcher who is delaying the game by throwing unnecessarily to a base is warned. A subsequent violation results both in a balk and an ejection of the pitcher.

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