

ESO Baseball Exclusive: MLB adopts new rules for 2007

By Rick Roder, ESO baseball editor and rules expert

There were a few interesting developments – and a first – in the world of baseball rules this off-season.

The MLB Players Association approved all 23 changes that the Playing Rules Committee proposed last off-season (for a full description of those changes, see *Official Baseball Rules Changed for First Time in 10 Years*). Several of these changes were modified slightly before receiving Players Association approval.

With surprising speed, the Players Association then approved four additional changes proposed this off-season. These changes were perhaps “no-brainers” since three of them involve interpretations already used by umpires and another simply deletes an outdated reference.

The “first” is this: For the first time the Playing Rules Committee has borrowed language from the “Jaksa/Roder manual” (*The Rules of Professional Baseball: A Comprehensive Reorganization and Interpretation* by Chris Jaksa and Rick Roder). The two phrases that were adopted involve interpretations that are known to umpires and are used on the field.

Rules Committee member and MLB crew chief Larry Young asked permission to use the phrases. He said, “There was no way to improve how these two interpretations were stated by Jaksa and Roder. It would have been counter-productive to try to rephrase them.”

Young asked for permission from the authors to use the interpretations word-for-word and the permission was granted. Young then proposed the excerpts from the Jaksa/Roder manual to the Rules Committee and both were adopted. In a move aimed at eliminating the inevitable red tape, the Jaksa/Roder manual will not be cited within the *Official Rules*.

Adaptations to Off-Season 2006 Rule Changes

Following are eight adaptations made to the rule changes proposed last year; all will be in effect for MLB play in 2007. Additionally, one interpretation was added to the *MLB Umpires Manual*.

Clarification regarding coloring of pitcher’s glove

Last year’s rule change (*Official Rule 1.15a*, change #2 in the ESO document) proposed that pitchers can use multi-colored fielding gloves, but the prohibition of gloves that are white or gray in color remained. This year’s clarification states that the piping (lacing) of the glove can be white, as allowed in MLB’s *Collective Bargaining Agreement* with the Players Association. The thrust of this rule change remains that multi-colored gloves are

legal, white or gray gloves are not, and it is up to the umpires to decide if a pitcher's glove is distracting to a batter.

Three changes regarding "doctoring" of a baseball

As pointed out in rule change #7 in last year's ESO document, the 2006 change of Official Rule 8.02a failed to allow for the adding of a ball to the count when the defensive manager elected not to take the results of the play after a "defaced" baseball had been pitched. This problem was brought to the attention of Young by the author of this article. The oversight was corrected during the 2007 meetings, but the committee took it a step further, modifying the penalty. As before, a ball is added to the count if there were no runners. However if there were runners, the penalty is a balk (the pitch does not count).

The second change adopts language from Jaksa/Roder, but in this case a single word. The rulebook has previously referred to a "doctored" baseball as "defaced." The word has been changed to "altered." The Jaksa/Roder manual has always referred to bats and baseballs as "altered" if they were illegally modified with intent to cheat.

Lastly, the required 10-day suspension for players guilty of altering a baseball has been limited to minor league baseball (NAPBL) and other levels of play using the professional rules; in the Major Leagues the length of the automatic suspension is up to the commissioner.

Phrase added to penalization when batter is refusing to enter batter's box

Last year's vastly improved and umpire-friendly penalization for a batter refusing to enter the box (change #10 in the ESO document) was expanded slightly. The MLB Players Association requested that an additional statement be inserted. The added statement simply requires that after an umpire has called a strike under this rule (no pitch was thrown), he must give the batter a "reasonable opportunity" to get back in the box before calling a subsequent strike as further penalization.

Experimental pace of game rule for NAPBL changed slightly

After the author of this article pointed out to Larry Young that the pace of game rule was not consistent with the rule directly above it for refusal to enter the batter's box (ball would remain live under pace of game enforcement but dead under enforcement of refusal to enter the batter's box; see item #11 in ESO document), the pace of game rule was amended so that the ball will become dead when the rule is enforced.

Further, a statement was added to the pace of game rule allowing the batter the same "reasonable opportunity" to return to the batter's box as in the rule for refusal to enter the box.

Proposed change to Official Rule 6.09b casebook comment tabled

The last proposed amendment to the 2006 changes was tabled so that the Playing Rules Committee could take more time to consider the wording of the amendment.

The 2006 casebook comment stated that after an uncaught strike three where the batter becomes a batter-runner, he is to be called out if he is not trying to advance to first base when he leaves the dirt circle around home plate (see item #16 in the ESO document). The 2007 proposed amendment concerns what is to be done if the batter-runner is supposed to run but loiters at the plate for whatever reason.

Although the committee was unable to craft an amendment, section 5.16 of the MLB Umpires Manual will instruct umpires that “if the batter-runner lingers a reasonable amount of time at home plate, in the umpire’s judgment, indicating he does not realize his situation, he shall be declared out.”

This interpretation will be stated as such in the Jaksa-Roder manual: “Furthermore, if a batter-runner has been given a reasonable opportunity to advance but gives indication that he is unaware of this opportunity or is choosing not to take advantage of it (lingers in the plate area, begins to remove batting gloves or equipment, moves toward his position or dugout, begins to argue, etc.), the batter-runner is out.”

Off-Season 2007 Changes

The following changes to the rules were proposed this off-season. They have been adopted and will also be in effect for the 2007 season. All reflect interpretations already in use by umpires.

Base runner’s baseline defined

The following line from the Jaksa/Roder manual was added to Official Rule 7.08(a)1: “A runner’s baseline is established when the tag attempt occurs and is a straight line from the runner to the base he is attempting to reach safely” (See Jaksa/Roder, Chapter 6, Section A, number 4).

This rule insertion finally defines for the general public an interpretation that has been employed by umpires for many years.

Batter-runner permitted to exit the running lane to touch first base

The following line from the Jaksa/Roder manual was added as a casebook comment in Official Rule 6.05(k): “The batter-runner is permitted to exit the three-foot lane by means of a step, stride, reach or slide in the immediate vicinity of first base for the sole purpose of touching first base” (See Jaksa/Roder, Chapter 13, Section III, letter B-e).

This interpretation was probably not as widely standardized among umpires as the interpretation of a runner’s baseline, but is nonetheless a welcome clarification.

Time play situation during apparent game-winning home run

A phrase has been added to the end of the approved ruling of Official Rule 4.11c to clarify that even though an apparent game winning home run has been hit, a time play may prevent any runs from scoring. Specifically, if a runner passes a preceding runner before the runner from third touches home, the runner is out, it is a time play, and no runs can score.

Outdated rule deleted

Official Rule 4.03d has been deleted. It was an outdated reference to offensive players entering the catcher's box.