

Baseball Q & A for 2012

Q. Can you please remind all umpires about 2 simple rules that we should all be following:

Rule 6.2 - Art 1 item f states an illegal act by a pitcher would be wearing any items on the hands, wrists, or arms that may be distracting to the batter.

Rule 2, Section 35 - Strike Zone

The strike zone is that space over home plate, the top of which is halfway between the batter's shoulders and waistline, and the bottom being the knee when the batter assumes his normal batting stance.

As an umpire who enforces these rules, it is hard when coaches and kids then complain that other umpires do not enforce these rules. I was attending my son's baseball game last night, and the plate umpire did not enforce rule 6.2.1 and allowed the pitchers to pitch with arm bands on their non-pitching arm.

In working games, I often have to explain the strike zone to coaches because I enforce the exact strike zone, and am told that I have a high strike zone. I realize that sometimes, this may be a judgment call in the plate umpire's eyes, but it is frustrating to see other plate umpires call pitches just above the belt balls.

A.: Here are some thoughts:

If the pitcher has a flesh colored or black (not white) sweatband on his gloved hand (wrist) and the batter or offense says nothing, then a presumption may be made that it is not distracting to the batter. The pitching arm has to stay clean. Best advice: keep the arms clean and avoid problems that might arise in this situation.

Regarding the strike zone: it has always been a point of contention. The calling of balls and strikes is a judgment call and I can honestly say I have never seen the exact same strike zone by any umpires. Each is a little different and although to call each pitch exactly as the book states would be great, it doesn't happen from Little League to the Pros. If you are consistent with your zone the teams will adjust to it. Someone may not like your zone, but if you are consistent I think most baseball people would agree with me.

Q.: What is the rule in Wisconsin on jewelry worn by the ball players? We always go through this in the pre-meeting with the coaches and the other night we had a player wearing a necklace in the 3rd inning and we made him remove it. Then in the 4th inning we had another player from the same team with a necklace on. What would be the procedure in Wisconsin...in this situation would we have warned the first player, then removed the second player who we found with jewelry on from the game?

A.: We follow the NFHS rules on jewelry in baseball.

PENALTY: At the end of playing action, the umpire shall issue a warning to the coach of the team involved and the next offender on that team shall be ejected, except for (f), where the coach shall be ejected. In (b), it is also obstruction (8-3-2).

You appear to have followed procedures correctly.

Q.: Question regarding pitchers reentering the game: What are the limitations of my starting pitcher? Can he be taken off the mound, moved to another position, and then return to pitch?

A.: In the rule book on page 26 with rule 3-1-2, it states:

ART. 2 . . . If a pitcher is replaced while his team is on defense, the substitute pitcher shall pitch to the batter then at bat, or any substitute for that batter, until such batter is put out or reaches first base, or until a third out has been made. To ensure that the requirements of this article be fulfilled, the umpire will deny any coach-defensive player conference that will violate the rule. If a pitcher is incapacitated or guilty of flagrant unsportsmanlike conduct, this rule is ignored. A player may be removed as pitcher and returned as pitcher only once per inning, provided the return as pitcher does not violate either the pitching, substitution or charged conference rule. If the pitcher, because of an injury or being incapacitated, is replaced as pitcher and the above rule is not satisfied, or if his replacement requires more warm-up throws than permitted in 6-2-2 exception, he cannot return to the game as a pitcher.

In the book provided by the NFHS, 2012 High School Baseball Rules by Topic, on page 182, you will find:

Players may change fielding positions at any time except that a pitcher, after being listed as such on the official lineup card handed to the umpire, cannot change until certain conditions are met. The starting pitcher must pitch to the first batter until the first batter is out or has reached first base (3-1-1). If the starting pitcher does not face one batter, he may play another position, but may not return to pitch (3-1-1 penalty). If a pitcher is replaced while his team is on defense, the substitute pitcher shall pitch to the batter then at bat, or any substitute for that batter, until such batter is put out or reaches first base, or until a third out has been made (3-1-2).

In the case book on pages 24 & 25, you will find two examples as well:

3.1.2 SITUATION B: While taking his warm-up pitches prior to the start of the fourth inning, F1 develops a blister on the tip of his index finger and is replaced as pitcher. F1's replacement takes (a) the remaining number of warm-up pitches due starter F1, or (b) more warm-up pitches than starter F1 was entitled. **RULING:** As a substitute for the pitcher, S1 is allowed eight warm-up pitches. If S1 only takes eight warm-up pitches, F1 may return to pitch later in the game provided all other aspects of pitcher substitution have been met. If S1 needs to take more than eight warm-up pitches, that may be allowed by U1, but F1 could no longer return to pitch in this game.

3.1.2 SITUATION C: In the top half of the first, S1 pinch hits for F1. In the bottom half of the first inning, F1 (a) re-enters to face the first batter or (b) does not re-enter until later. **RULING:** A substitute may replace F1 while his team is at bat without penalty. Since F1 is a starter, he shall re-enter and pitch to the first batter in the bottom of the first inning. In (a) F1 has complied with the rule. In (b), since F1 did not pitch to the first batter, F1 may ever, play another position. (3-1-1, 3-1-3)

Q.: My son wears the Old School Pro Style helmet and mask. At a game this weekend the umpire told him that the helmet was illegal. Tonight the umpires said they were unaware of this ruling. Could you please clarify this for me?

A.: It is probably illegal. The catcher's helmet must protect the ears and have a throat protector. A catcher is required to wear head protection with double ear flaps that meets the NOCSAE standard. He will be told to get a legal helmet-and-mask combination. If he does not comply, he will be ejected.

Rule 1 – Players, Field and Equipment

SECTION 5 PLAYER EQUIPMENT

ART. 4 . . . The catcher's helmet and mask combination shall meet the NOCSAE standard. Any helmet or helmet and mask combination shall have full ear protection (dual ear flaps). A throat protector, which is either a part of or attached to the catcher's mask, is mandatory. A throat protector shall adequately cover the throat. The commercially manufactured catcher's head, face and throat protection may be a one-piece or multi-piece design. While in a crouch position, any non-adult warming up a pitcher at any location shall wear a head protector, a mask with a throat protector and a protective cup (male only).

PENALTY: Failure by a player to wear proper equipment after being so ordered by the umpire, shall result in ejection.

The NFHS rule was passed in 2003 and implemented in 2005.

Q.: A number of coaches are having players carry their batting gloves in an attempt to avoid jamming fingers. I have already had two different occasions where I made the players either put the gloves away or put them on. Am I correct? I thought all uniforms and equipment must be worn as manufacturers intended, but I cannot seem to find anything in the rule book relating to batting gloves. I did find in one penalty that if a player does not comply with an umpire's request to fix a uniform/equipment problem immediately, that player will be ejected.

My problem with this scenario is what if a runner carrying his gloves drops one near a ball and the defender accidentally gets the glove while attempting to get the ball. Not sure what ruling could even be made. If a defensive player has detached equipment, there is a base running award, but this is an offensive player with detached equipment affecting a play. Would appreciate your thoughts on this.

A.: This is one of the situations where there is no support by rule. I did contact the NFHS office for their thoughts. We determined that there is very little chance that a glove would interfere with play, but if it does we play on. If the runner's helmet accidentally fell off and touched a ground ball on the field on his way to second base we would not do anything except play. This is a non-issue and the umpire would have no rule book support for this interpretation. In addition, to me it would just be an area which creates friction between a coach and an umpire.

Q.: If a pitcher is in the set position, could half of his foot be outside the pitching plate, meaning half of his foot is directly in front of the mound, but the other half is nearer first base, outside the 24 inch plate. There seems to be disagreement about this, that as long as part of the foot is there, then it is okay. I'm looking at Rule 6-1-3, and I am unclear which way this goes. Is it as long as even the toe is in contact with the mound, but the rest of the foot is outside the 24 inches, or not?

A.: The entire **pivot foot** must be inside the **plate** in the set position. However, the **non-pivot** foot must be in front of the rubber, but not directly (inside the side planes) of the rubber. It depends on which foot you are referring.

From the *2012 High School Baseball Rules by Topic*: If the pitcher pitches with the toe of his pivot foot (right foot for a right-handed pitcher) in contact with the pitcher's plate but his heel is outside a line through the end edge of the plate. He pitches from the set position. Ruling: Illegal pitch or balk.

Also from Rules by Topic: F1 takes the set position with his pivot foot entirely in front of and in contact with the pitcher's plate. F1's non-pivot foot is entirely in front of his pivot foot (toward home plate) but is not within the plane of each end of the pitcher's plate. Ruling: This is legal, since only the pivot foot is required to be entirely in front of the pitcher's plate, within the plane of each end of the pitcher's plate, and in contact with it. The non-pivot foot is required to be entirely in front of the front plane of the pitcher's plate but does not have to be within the plane of each end of the pitcher's plate.

From the NFHS Rule Book (6-1-3): Before starting his delivery, he shall stand with his **entire non-pivot foot** in front of a line extending through the front edge of the pitcher's plate and with his **entire pivot foot** in contact with or directly in front of the pitcher's plate.

This book, the *2012 High School Baseball Rules by Topic*, is for sale in our office for only \$5 and is a great resource. It provides examples like the casebook, but in a different order.

Q.: In referencing Rule 1-Art 2 it states that a pitcher may not have a sleeve and/or undershirt that extends below his elbow that is white or gray. My question is does this only refer to the entire sleeve being white or gray or does it refer to any part of the sleeve/undershirt being gray/white?

A.: **When reading the rule, people usually overlook the part just before that sentence: If the pitcher's undershirt sleeves are exposed, they shall not be white or gray. The rule also repeats itself twice in the sentence you refer to: A pitcher shall not wear white or gray exposed undershirt sleeves or any white or gray sleeve that extends below the elbow.**

The rule only refers to the sleeves and states the word sleeves five times. The unexposed parts of the sleeve and body of the t-shirt may be white.

Rule 1 – Players, Field and Equipment

SECTION 4 – UNIFORMS

ART. 2 . . . For individual players, uniform sleeve lengths may vary. However, sleeves of each individual player shall be approximately the same length and shall not be ragged, frayed or slit. If the pitcher's undershirt sleeves are exposed, they shall not be white or gray. A pitcher shall not wear any item on his hands, wrists or arms which may be distracting to the batter. 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.

Baseball Q & A from 2011

Q.: I think it would be helpful to emphasize the check swing appeal rules in the video meeting next spring. It seems at least once a week I run into players and/or coaches who don't realize that only the plate umpire can ask for a check swing appeal from the base umpire - not players or coaches (or parents). They also don't always realize that the umpires manual says there can't be an appeal on "a checked swing when a strike is first called."

A.: While common in the MLB, the NFHS rules have guidelines for "half swings" in high school baseball. Umpires are not required to ask for help, but may choose to do so: **Rule 10-1 - ART. 4 ... "Any umpire's decision which involves judgment, such as whether a hit is fair or foul, whether a pitch is a strike or a ball, or whether a runner is safe or out, is final. But if there is reasonable doubt about some decision being in conflict with the rules, the coach or captain may ask that the correct ruling be made. The umpire making the decision may ask another umpire for information before asking a final decision. No umpire shall criticize or interfere with another umpire's decision unless asked by the one making it.**

a. The umpire-in-chief sometimes asks for aid from the base umpire when there is a question as to whether a batter's "half swing" is such as to be called a strike. As an aid in deciding, the umpire may note whether the swing carried the barrel of the bat past the body of the batter, but final decision is based on whether the batter actually struck at the ball." (NFHS Baseball Rules, page 61)

Q.: Is the throat protector required with hockey-style helmets?

A.: **Not necessary on the hockey-style helmet. Keep in mind with the old style catcher's mask, a throat protector is required (1-5-3 and 1-5-4) and a helmet with full ear protection is required (1-5-4).**

Q.: Correct me if I am wrong, but are catcher's not required to wear their masks when, during pre-game warm-ups the coach or pitcher, even when not in the circle or on the mound, throws a simulated pitch for the catcher to make a thrown down to second base on?

A.: **Since I was not present during your situations, I cannot tell you whether you are correct or not. The rule you refer to is in the NFHS Baseball Rules book on page 13, Rule 1-5-4: "The catcher's helmet and mask combination shall meet the NOCSAE standard. Any helmet or helmet and mask combination shall have full ear protection (dual ear flaps). A throat protector, which is either a part of or attached to the catcher's mask, is mandatory. A throat protector shall adequately cover the throat. The commercially manufactured catcher's head, face and throat protection may be a one-piece or multi-piece design. While in a crouch position, any non-adult warming up a pitcher at any location shall wear a head protector, a mask with a throat protector and a protective cup (male only)." The rule refers to warming up the pitcher and not infield practice.**

Q.: I've been reviewing the 2011 Part 1 exam and have a question on #60. I answered that it should be a suspended game and the correct answer is that the home team wins. If I read the question properly, it says the visiting team is down 2-0 before hitting a grand slam in the top of the 7th. That puts them up 4-2. In the bottom of the inning, with one run scored, the game is called due to lightning. At that point the visiting team is still up 4-3. The game would be suspended and not ended. I've read it so many times and can't see where I'm misinterpreting the question.

A.: **The rule states that if the visiting team goes ahead and the game is called before the home team can complete its turn at bat then the score reverts back to the previous inning which means the home team would win 2-0. This is qualified by the fact that state adoptions says that in Wisconsin we suspend and pick up where we left off.**

Q.: I had the opportunity to umpire 2 games in a 6-team tournament recently, and the following situation arose. For the first game on Saturday morning, the weather was cold and damp. During the pregame check of equipment, I noticed team personnel bringing a bat warmer into the dugout. As the plate umpire (chief), I conferred with my partner, and we ruled that the unit would not be permitted to be used. I informed the coach that they were not permitted to use it, and that it needed to be removed from the dugout. I remembered seeing the prohibition of this equipment, but I couldn't remember where. The coach complied with the ruling, but stated that he purchased it at a Federation convention. After the game, I polled other umpires at the tournament and called another Master level umpire, and they agreed with my ruling. I looked for the citation in the rule book and the Wisconsin adaptations, and I could not find it. Was I correct or incorrect in removing the equipment from the dugout? Please inform me whether my ruling was correct or incorrect, and any applicable citations.

A.: **Interesting question, so I asked for help from the NFHS: "NFHS Baseball allows bat warmers. NFHS Softball does not. We are going to discuss it again this summer so both committees are on the same page. Our scientists do not feel they provide any additional benefit, nor do they get warm enough to gain any advantage. Softball did not**

have the benefit of our scientists when they first dealt with the products. We will be together this summer. Sorry for the inconsistency.”

Q.: We have pitchers wearing neoprene sleeves on their pitching arm. Is it legal to wear one only on the pitching arm with the same color as the jersey? With a different color than the jersey?

A.: **It can be worn as long as it is not white, gray or a distracting color (i.e. metallic).**

Questions from 2010

Q.: Does the WIAA require that hockey style catcher helmets meet the NOCSAE standard?

A.: **Yes. The WIAA rules of baseball are the NFHS rules of baseball. The player equipment rules for NFHS baseball are rules 1-5-2 and 1-5-4. "All face mask/guards shall meet NOCSAE standard."**

Q.: A1 is on first base. A2, the batter, hits a deep fly ball to center field. A1 takes off thinking it is uncatchable. A1 rounds second base and the ball is caught on the fly. A1 retreats back to first by cutting across the infield. Is this an appeal play or do the umpires call the runner out for not retouching 2nd before he gets to first base?

A.: **The rule your situation references in 8-2-1. In the penalty portion, you will find the appeal process. Umpire would only call runner out for missing a base upon a live or dead ball appeal. If none the play stands. Rule 8-2-5.**

Q.: Situation – Runners are on first and third with less than two outs. Pitcher is in his set position when R1 begins running from first to second base ... Without any false motion to deceive the runners, the pitcher makes a pivot in a clockwise motion and steps toward second base to make a put-out on the runner advancing. No throw was made. Balk or not a balk? Just looking for a final clarification because I have been told a pitcher needs to step off the rubber: 1) The pitcher has not come to a set position, but is on the rubber – then the runner takes off to an abnormal lead. 2) He checks a runner at third. 3) Spins while on the rubber. Thus, there is some hesitation. 4) Then goes toward 2nd base. My question would be, the runner is not really going to second, but is taking an excessive lead off to get picked off first. Thus, how can a pitcher do these things without stepping off the rubber?

A.: **The key is that the move is continuous toward second on the spin. It is legal also provided there is no pause as they spin toward second. According to the rule, a pitcher can throw to the base the guy is occupying (first) or the base that he is advancing to. Rule 6, Section 2, Art. 4, b.**

Q.: Team A has 11 players total to start the game. During the 4th inning A10 replaces A3 and A11 replaces A6. A5 reaches second base after he steals and twists his ankle. He is unable to continue playing. Team A has no legal substitutes. Who can Team A put in to run for the injured player (A5)? What would happen to the batting order? Would Team A have to take an out when A5 came up to bat again?

A.: **If he has to be substituted for, the most recent batter not on base is allowed to run for that player. An out will be called each time A5 comes up to bat. Rule 4, Section 4, Art. 1, Notes: #1.**

Q.: Offensive Team had a runner at 1st, runner pulls a delayed steal and pitcher properly steps off the rubber and throws to second. Defense runs the runner back towards 1st and after a couple exchanges as offense was in a pickle, the defensive 1st baseman throws the ball to the shortstop now covering second and hits the offensive runner in the helmet. The offensive runner then bumps into the defensive player who was going to tag the offensive player out but couldn't because he didn't have the ball. The offensive player steps on second safely as no play could be made after the ball bounced off of the helmet. The defensive coach called time out and asked to talk with me, insisting that the offensive runner should be called out for interference. I didn't call interference because the throw hit the runner in the helmet and no play could be made on the runner by the now non-receiving defensive player. My call was runner safe at second! Correct or incorrect?

A.: **No call since the runner is running directly to the base. No interference since it is not intentional. Question to consider: Why obstruction was not called since the defensive player was in the base line without the ball.**

Q.: Situation – runner on first. As the pitcher begins his pitch, the third base coach, from near the defensive dugout, yells at the runner. I thought I heard stop or get back or maybe both. Pitcher stops in mid-motion. The coach right away says that was his fault, not to call the balk (so I do not believe he confused the pitcher intentionally), but my partner didn't hear that and called and enforced the balk. The defensive coach comes out to argue, my partner and I get together, I tell him what I heard, and he reverses his call. Now the third base coach is upset and wants us to "play varsity rules." We leave the runner on first. Later, I looked up the rules on a balk and can only find where the batter is the only one mentioned as far as we don't call the balk. I believe that if I had the same situation tonight, I would call it the same way. In our judgment, the

offensive coach caused the defense to error (the balk), and the defense should not be punished for that. Were we correct in our interpretation and enforcement of the rule?

A.: The way you have stated it, in your judgment, the offensive coach caused the pitcher to stop. Rule 3-3-1,0 Any coach, player, substitute or other bench personnel, shall not call time or use any command or commit any act for the purpose of causing a balk. I feel the call was correct. What I don't understand is why the coach first said it was his fault, then later he reverses his judgment and wants a balk. The only thing missing here is the penalty and that is an ejection, which I don't think would be appropriate, but should be conveyed to the coach, that is a rule on all levels of play.

Q.: Is it a balk if a left-handed pitcher, in the set position, turns to throw to 3rd, but does not complete the throw, in one continuous motion, either going to his left or right, with A) a runner only on 3rd; and B) with runners on 1st and 3rd.

A.: The answer can be found on page 53 of the Case Book. Reference 6.2.4. SITUATION C.

Q.: Team 1 had one runner at 2nd base with no outs. Team 2's pitcher was pitching from the stretch in the set position. Before delivering the pitch, Runner takes off toward 3rd base and is about halfway between 2nd and 3rd when the pitcher realizes the runner has taken off. With his foot still on the pitcher's plate he throws to 3rd base. The runner was subsequently tagged out but a balk was called, under the premise he could not throw to an unoccupied base. The coach for Team 2 protests, claiming that since the runner was past halfway to 3rd it should be considered an occupied base and the runner should be called out. Both umpires conferred and ruled as a balk, since 3rd base had been unoccupied. I checked the rule book and upon reading 6-2-4b and now am not certain that this was the right call? In my opinion, (I was the plate umpire) it was clear the pitcher was not attempting to deceive the runner but was "attempting to put out the runner" as stated in 6-2-4b.

A.: You are correct. This is not a balk.

Q.: What are the rules on students with tattoos? Can the tattoo show or if it does show then does it need to be covered up?

A.: The tattoo rule has been removed. However the umpire has authority to prohibit a player from participating if he/she judges a tattoo which is uncovered to be offensive.

Q.: If a coach wants to use his son to be involved in drills at home plate but is not on the team and is in middle school is he required to wear a protective helmet? It says ball shaggers and bat boys but really doesn't address this in the NFHS rule book. I was asked this question and I would say yes whether that person is standing upright or not.

A.: The NFHS rules do not stipulate that an athlete has to wear protective helmets before a game begins or after a game begins. Common sense, however, should prevail and a recommendation that the coach have someone not on his team where a helmet should be worn.

Q.: Is there a maximum length for a baseball glove?

A.: In the NFHS Baseball Rule Book (pp 10-11), you can find the requirements and limitations placed on gloves/mitts. 1-3-6-a: height (measured from the bottom edge or heel straight up across the center of the palm to a line even with the highest point of the glove/mitt): 14 inches. 1-3-6-b: width of palm (measured from the bottom edge of the webbing farthest from the thumb in a horizontal line to the outside of the little finger edge of the glove/mitt): 8 inches. 1-3-6-c: Webbing (measured across the top end or along any line parallel to the top): 5 3/4 inches. You can refer to diagram 4 on Page 11 to see the letter rules displayed with arrows on a glove/mitt.

Q.: We are going to be rebuilding our pitching mounds on our baseball fields. The rule states the mounds MUST be 10 inches above the pitchers plate, is this the max height as well as the minimum? If not what is the max height?

A.: The top of the pitcher's plate must be 10" above the top surface of HOME plate. It is the minimum and the maximum for the proper height.

Q.: Can a catcher use the old style catchers mask with the mask and helmet or are they required to wear a one piece mask?

A.: Rule 1-5-3 states the catcher shall wear, in addition to a head protector, a mask with a throat protector, body protector, protective cup (male only) and baseball protective shin guards. Therefore, the answer is yes. In fact, the new items are added to the "old" items. But the helmet must have dual ear flaps and NOCSAE seal which eliminates the skull cap option.

Q.: I have a question for you on rule 1-4-2. If the pitcher has a turtleneck shirt under his uniform that is white or gray and the sleeves are above the elbow. This is legal, but is illegal if below the elbow, correct?

A.: Yes, you are correct.

Q.: I watched the video which stated games are 7 innings long. Does this mean if a team is 10-runned in 5 innings say 15-1 score after 5 innings that the game would continue the full seven innings now?

A.: **A game is seven innings and may not be shortened unless by the 10 run rule. A double header must be two games of seven innings and not reduced by mutual agreement at any level. The rule has not changed but is emphasized. On page 31 (Rule 4-2-1) states a regulation game consists of seven innings unless extra innings(s) are necessary because of tie score, or unless shortened because the home team needs none of its half of the seventh or only a fraction of it (art 2); or because of weather, or darkness (art 3). In Art 2, it states: By state association (WIAA), the game shall end when the visiting team is behind 10 or more runs after 4.5, or after the fifth inning, if either team is 10 runs behind and both teams have had an equal number of times at bat.**