

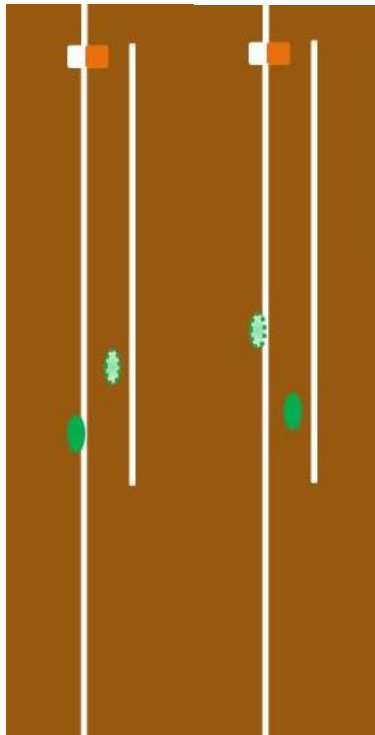


March 27, 2023

NFHS Softball Weekly Rule Interpretations

Three-Foot Running Lane

The NFHS has received some questions about the wording in the rule covering the batter-runner being within the three-foot running lane. Per NFHS Softball Rule 8-2-6 both feet have to be touching or have last touched the ground in the running lane for the batter-runner to not be at risk for an interference call (green ovals in illustrations below). If any part of the runner's foot is touching the foul line, that foot is considered to be within the running lane. Conversely, if either foot is touching or last touched the ground completely outside of the running lane (red ovals in illustrations below), they are at risk to be called out for interfering with the fielder taking the throw at first base. Again, the ovals below represent the runner's feet.



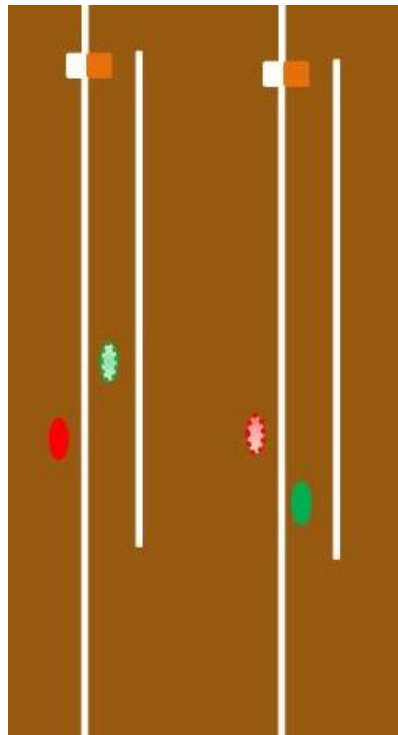
Batter-Runner is considered in the running lane.



Foot on ground in running lane



Foot on ground completely outside the running lane



Batter-Runner is considered out of the running lane.



Foot in air last touched in running lane



Foot in air last touched completely outside the running lane

Fast Pitch Strike Zone

The fast pitch strike zone as described in Rule 2-56-3 is the space over home plate which is between the batter's forward armpit and the top of knees when the batter assumes a natural batting stance. Any part of the ball passing through the strike zone in flight shall be considered a strike. The umpire shall determine the batter's strike zone according to the batter's usual stance.

There is little confusion about the description above. Where the discussion arises is around what is considered the "batter's natural batting stance" or "batter's usual stance". In slow pitch the definition in Rule 2-56-4 mentions "when swinging at a pitch" but the fast pitch definition does not have this description. The reason being, in slow pitch the only option for a batter is to swing at the pitch (bunting or chopping at the ball are illegal, Rule 7-4-10). In fast pitch, the batter could contact the ball by swinging, bunting or slapping. The majority of players batting stances are very similar whether they are swinging, bunting or slapping. However, some batters do adjust their stance significantly when bunting or slapping. If the fast pitch definition said "when swinging" there would be questions about how or if the zone should change if the batter attempted a bunt or should umpires consider a third strike zone when the batter is slapping. Another question might be what strike zone the pitcher should aim for, as many times the pitcher has released the ball prior to the batter squaring to bunt.

As with so many other aspects in the game of softball, umpire judgement plays a role in determining the batter's natural batting stance and being consistent in the enforcement of the strike zone is no different from having consistency when making other judgement calls during the game.