



April 25, 2022

## NFHS Softball Weekly Rule Interpretations

**Situation 1:** With bases loaded, no outs and a 1 ball 1 strike count, B4 hits a high pop up that can be caught by an infielder with ordinary effort. In (a) F6 and the ball are in fair territory and F6 is in position to catch the fly ball when R2, as they are running to third base, interferes with F6's attempt to make an initial play on the batted ball. In (b) F5 and the ball are in foul territory when R1 interferes with F5's attempt to field the fly ball. In (c) F3 and the ball are in fair territory and F3 is in position to catch the fly ball when the batter-runner, as they are running to first base, interferes with F3's attempt to make the initial play on the batted ball. In (d) F3 and the ball are in foul territory when the batter-runner interferes with F3's attempt to field the fly ball. **NOTE:** In all of these cases, with bases loaded and no outs, the infield fly rule is in effect at the time of the pitch. As mentioned, the players are in position to field the ball with ordinary effort when these situations occur. However, one additional very important aspect of these plays needs to be considered. Looking at the definition of an infield fly, rule 2-30, the ball must be fair to qualify as an infield fly. In the first sentence of the definition, it mentions that an infield fly is "a fair fly" also in the last sentence it states, "If a declared infield fly becomes foul, it is treated as a foul ball, not an infield fly". Both of these statements support the fact that until the ball is ruled fair the batter-runner is not out for hitting an infield fly. NFHS umpire manual wording advises the umpire to declare the ball an infield fly when the ball reaches its highest point, but it also states that if the ball is near a foul line to verbally announce "Infield fly if fair the batter it out." This also supports that although the infield fly is determined and announced when the ball is at its highest point the enforcement piece of ruling the batter-runner out does not actually apply until the ball meets all the criteria of an infield fly by being declared a fair ball. With these key items in mind, the following rulings should apply to these situations. **RULING:** In (a) when R2 interferes with F6 making an initial play on the batted ball the ball becomes dead and its status becomes fair since it was over fair territory when the interference occurred. R2 is out for interference and the batter-runner is out for hitting an infield fly, B5 would come to bat with R1 on third base and R2 on first base (as long as they had not advanced prior to the interference) and two outs. In (b) the ball is dead when R1 interferes with F5 attempting to field a fly ball over foul territory and the ball is ruled foul since it was over foul territory when the interference occurred. R1 is out and the batter continues their at bat with a 1 ball 2 strike count and runners on first base and second base. In (c) when the batter-runner interferes with F3 making an initial play on the batted ball the ball becomes dead and its status becomes fair since it was over fair territory when the interference occurred. The batter-runner is out for hitting an infield fly and all runners are returned to their original base at the time of the pitch, B5 would come to bat with bases loaded and one out. In (d) the ball is dead when the batter-runner interferes with F3 attempting to field a fly ball over foul territory and the ball is ruled foul since it was over foul territory when the interference occurred. B4 is out and B5 would come to bat with bases loaded. (2-30, 8-2-7, 8-2-9, 8-6-10a, 8-6-10b)

**Situation 2:** With no outs, R1 on second base and R2 on first base, B3 hits a ground ball to F6. As F6 is making the initial play on a batted ball R1 accidentally interferes with them as they are running to third

base, but F6 is able to continue fielding the ball and their throw to first base is in time to retire the batter-runner. The umpires rule R1 out for interference and B3 out on the play at first base. **RULING:** Incorrect ruling. As soon as interference is ruled on R1 the ball is dead and the throw to first is ignored. In this situation the most likely ruling is R1 is out for the interference and the batter-runner is awarded first base and credited with a fielder's choice. In the very rare case that the umpire judges the interference was an OBVIOUS attempt to prevent a double play then the immediate succeeding runner (R2) would also be ruled out. In either case the batter-runner would be awarded first base, not allowed to be ruled out on the continuation of the play after interference had been called. (8-6-10a)

**Situation 3:** With no outs and R1 on second base, B2 hits a ground ball that F6 takes several steps toward second base attempting to field. As F6 is about to make the initial play on the batted ball R1 interferes with them and F6 is unable to complete the play allowing the ball to continue to the outfield. The base umpire rules obstruction on F6 since they moved more than a step and a reach from their original fielding position to field the batted ball. **RULING:** Incorrect ruling, the correct ruling would be a dead ball with R1 being out for interference and B2 being awarded first base. There is a consideration in the rule defining an initial play allowing the fielder to still be considered making an initial play on a batted ball if that ball is within a step and a reach in any direction from their initial contact with the ball. This would not apply in this case as there had not been any contact with the ball at that point. Prior to contact there is no restriction on a fielder's movement to be considered making an initial play on a batted ball. If F6 has a reasonable chance to gain control of a ground ball that no other fielder (except the pitcher) has touched they are considered to be making the initial play on a fair batted ball. As mentioned above if the fielder contacts the ball but fails to gain control of the batted ball and that ball is still within a step and a reach of the initial point of contact the fielder is still considered to be making an initial play on the batted ball. (2-47-3a&c, 8-6-10)