



April 24, 2023

**Note yellow highlights indicate specific reference to last week's rules interpretations*

NFHS Softball Weekly Rule Interpretations

Last week's interpretations have sparked some great discussions. Parts of those situations were dealing with when a ball is fair or foul. One aspect is that a batted ball becomes fair when a player first touches it over fair territory between home and first base or home and third base (2-20-1a). A second concept is that a batted ball is ruled foul when it contacts a batter while they are still in the batter's box (2-25-1f, 7-2-1f). Neither of these points were under debate; the discussion centered on determining when a batter is considered to be out of the batter's box.

Since there is no clear-cut answer to this question in the rules book or case book, an interpretation is necessary. As we know, it is not possible to have a black and white written rule or case book ruling for every play or possible action that could occur during an NFHS Softball game. When a situation like this occurs and an interpretation is required, we must revert to the basis of NFHS Softball rules, which is to create a balance of play and provide equal opportunity between offense and defense. With this in mind an investigation of other similar rules is performed. Although these rules most likely do not directly apply to the current situation, they do provide a concept and intent of the rules in similar situations that can be applied to create an interpretation for the situation in question. For this particular question, when is the batter considered to be out of the batter's box, other rules that deal with a player's movement from one area to another were examined. The following rules were considered, with the highlighted portions considered the most applicable:

Rule 2-9-5d

ART. 5 . . . A catch shall not be credited if:

d. An **entire foot is touching dead-ball territory** at the time of the catch.

Rule 2-10-2

ART. 2 . . . Catcher's Box – The catcher's box is the area to which **the catcher's feet are restricted** from the time the pitcher is in contact with the pitcher's plate until the pitcher releases the pitch. The catcher's box is a rectangle 10 feet deep from the rear outside corner of the batter's boxes and is 8 feet, 5 inches wide.

Rule 2-27-1c

ART. 1 . . . Illegally Batted Ball – An illegally batted ball is a pitch contacted by the batter:

c. when **one or both feet are on the ground and entirely outside the lines of the batter's box** at the time of bat-ball contact.

Rule 2-45

The 16-foot circle is used for the look-back rule (8-7). A pitcher is in the 16-foot circle when both feet are within or partially within the line. The feet may touch the line and extend outside the line.

Rule 5-1-1 Notes 1-3

1. If the fielder's feet are touching the line or are in live-ball territory, the fielder is considered in the field of play and legally may field, catch or throw the ball without penalty.
2. If the player's entire foot (no part of the foot is touching in live-ball territory) is beyond the line and touches dead-ball territory at the time the player catches, fields or throws the ball, the player has entered dead-ball territory, the ball is dead, no play is allowed.
3. If a fielder has one foot in play and the other foot in the air, the fielder legally may catch, field or throw the ball unless the fielder's entire foot contacts the ground in dead-ball territory, at which time the ball becomes dead, no play is allowed, and the penalty is applied.

Rule 6-1-1

ART. 1 . . . Prior to starting the delivery (pitch), the pitcher shall take a position with the pivot foot in contact with the pitcher's plate and the non-pivot foot in contact with or behind the pitcher's plate. Both feet must be on the ground within or partially within the 24-inch length of the pitcher's plate.

Rule 6-1-2c

c. The pivot foot may remain in contact with or may push off and drag away from the pitching plate prior to the front foot touching the ground, as long as the pivot foot remains in contact with the ground and within the 24-inch length. If a hole has been created in front of the pitcher's plate, the pivot foot may be no higher than the level plane of the ground. Pushing off with the pivot foot from a place other than the pitcher's plate is illegal.

Rule 7-4-8

ART. 8 . . . The batter hits the ball fair or foul while either foot is touching the ground completely outside the lines of the batter's box or while touching the plate.

Rule 8-2-6

ART. 6 . . . The batter-runner runs outside the three-foot (0.91m) lane and, in the judgment of the umpire, interferes with the fielder taking the throw at first base (there must be a throw); however, the batter-runner may run outside the three-foot (0.91m) lane to avoid a fielder attempting to field a batted ball. A runner is considered outside the running lane if either foot last contacted the ground completely outside the lane.

Looking at the highlighted portions of the above rules it is a consistent point that for a player to be considered out of an area they must have at least one foot in contact with or a foot has to have last contacted the ground completely outside of their current area. If a player's entire foot is touching dead ball territory they can no longer legally catch a fly ball. If either foot is touching the ground entirely outside the lines of the batter's box when their bat contacts a pitched ball it is an illegally batted ball. If either foot is in contact with or last contacted the ground completely outside of the running lane they are considered out of the running lane. Rule 5-1-1 note 3 even specifically states that if one foot is in play and the other foot is in the air but has not contacted the ground in dead-ball territory they are still considered in play and may continue play.

With all these different areas in the rules pointing to the same type of ruling, it leads to an interpretation that a batter is still considered within the batter's box until either of their feet has contacted the ground completely outside of the batter's box. If their foot is still in contact with the batter's box line they are still considered within the box. If one of their feet is still in the air outside of the batter's box they are still considered within the batter's box. Only after either foot has contacted the ground completely outside of the batter's box should the batter be considered out of the batter's box.

Situation 1: With no outs and a 2 ball 0 strike count, B1 is at bat in the right hand batter's box and hits a ball that goes directly off home plate and bounces up hitting the batter in the helmet, which is over home plate at the time of contact. The plate umpire rules this a foul ball as B1 is still within the batter's box when contact was made with the batted ball. **RULING:** Correct ruling. Since the batter's feet were both still within the batter's box the batter is still considered to be within the batter's box. When the batter is contacted while still within the batter's box the ball is foul and B1 continues their at bat with a 2 ball 1 strike count. (2-25-1f; 7-2-1f)

Situation 2: With no outs and a 0 ball, 1 strike count, B1 is at bat in the right hand batter's box and hits a ball that bounces off the plate and hits the batter in her elbow that is completely outside of the batter's box in fair territory. The plate umpire rules B1 out since the ball was in fair territory when contact was made. **RULING:** Incorrect ruling. Although this would normally be a fair ball as it was first touched on or over fair territory between home and third base, rule 2-25-1f and 7-2-1f specifies that when contact between a batter and a batted ball occurs when the batter is still within the batter's box it is a foul ball. In this case, the batter is still considered to be within the batter's box and the correct ruling is a foul ball and B1 remains at bat with a 0 ball, 2 strike count. (2-25-1f; 7-2-1f)

Situation 3: With no outs and a 0 ball, 1 strike count, B1, a left handed slapper, is up to bat. As B1 finishes their swing making contact with the ball, their front foot is in the air in front of the batter's box in fair territory while their back foot is still within the batter's box. The batted ball bounces up and makes contact with the batters front foot while still in the air. The plate umpire rules a dead ball, foul ball. B1 continues their at bat with a 0 ball 2 strike count. **RULING:** Correct ruling. When contact occurs, the umpire must judge if that contact between the batted ball and the batter happened while the batter was still considered within the batter's box. Since neither of the batter's feet had contacted the ground completely outside of the batter's box when contact was made with the batted ball the batter is still considered within the batter's box. This is a foul ball and the batter continues their at bat with a 0 ball 2 strike count. (2-25-1f; 7-2-1f)