



May 8, 2023

NFHS Softball Weekly Rule Interpretations

Situation 1: With R1 on third base and no outs, B2 has a 3 ball and 2 strike count. The next pitch is ball 4 and as B2 starts slowly jogging to first base F2 returns the ball to F1 who is standing in the pitcher's circle. In a) R1 is standing 3-4 feet from third base not moving just watching F1 and B2. In b) R1 is "dancing", alternating between taking a step toward home then a step back toward third base. In both cases, B4 has not reached first base yet and the pitcher is not making a play on either runner. In both cases, the umpire rules a dead ball and R1 out for violating the look-back rule. **RULING:** Incorrect ruling in both cases. In both of these situations, although the pitcher does have possession of the ball within the pitcher's circle the look-back rule is not in effect until the batter-runner has touched first base. (2-45; 8-7-1)

Situation 2: With R1 on third base and no outs, B2 receives ball 4 and is slowing jogging to first base. F1 has possession of the ball within the pitcher's circle and R1 is standing 3-4 feet off third base not moving watching F1 and B2. As B2 touches first base, they advance toward second base as R1 continues to stand off third base and F1 does not attempt to make a play on either runner. The base umpire rules a dead ball and R1 out for violating the look-back rule and B2 must return to first base. The offensive coach claims that this is not a violation of the look-back rule as B4 is still advancing and the look-back rule does not go into effect until the batter-runner has stopped advancing. **RULING:** Correct ruling by the umpire. The coach is incorrect, in this situation the look-back rule is in effect as soon as the batter-runner touches first base and the pitcher has possession of the ball within the pitcher's circle. At this time, R1 must immediately return to the base or attempt to advance to the next base. Since R1 continued to stay off the base and did not start to advance or retreat it is a violation of the look-back rule. (2-45; 8-7-1; 8-7-2)

Situation 3: With R1 on second base and R2 on first base and no outs, B3 draws a walk. F1 has the ball within the pitcher's circle and does not make a play on any of the runners. As R1 rounds third base F5 accidentally trips them and they both fall to the ground just past third base with F5 landing on top of R1. The base umpire signals and verbalizes obstruction when F5 impeded R1's progress. When B3 reaches first base, R1 is still on the ground not moving as F5 was just now able to regain their footing. The base umpire rules a dead ball and R1 out for violating the look-back rule. **RULING:** Incorrect ruling. Although this is a violation of the look-back rule, R1 is protected between third and home plate due to the obstruction by F5. The look-back rule is not an exception that would allow the obstructed runner to be called out between the two bases where they were obstructed. Once R1 violated the look-back rule (is put out by rule) the umpire should have ruled a dead ball (verbal of "dead ball" along with the dead ball signal) then announced their was obstruction by F5 and R1 is awarded third base (the base the umpire judged they would have reached had there not been obstruction). (2-45; 8-4-3b Penalties 1 Exceptions; 8-7-1; 8-7-2)