

Welcome to Softball Training



Agenda

- New Rules
- Points of Emphasis
- Infield Fly
- Look Back Rule

New Rules

NEW RULES



Objective

- To develop a comprehensive understanding of the updated 2026 softball rules to enhance gameplay awareness, ensure fair competition, and apply rule changes effectively during officiating scenarios.

RULE 1-9-6



1-9-6: No player shall transmit or record audio or video from the playing surface. New language further clarifies the use of electronic devices and what is not permitted.

Rationale: This change clearly defines the types of electronic devices prohibited by the rule.

Comments: With the increasing accessibility and use of electronic devices, it is important to establish clear boundaries for their use in competitive softball. Players shall not record audio or video while on the playing surface, as doing so presents significant safety risks and potential distractions that can compromise the integrity of the game. Movement and recording during live play—whether with handheld devices, wearable cameras, or phones—can interfere with a player's ability to perform safely and effectively. Handheld equipment may limit a player's capacity to catch or throw a ball, while wearable devices can become entanglement hazards or create impact risks during high-speed plays or collisions. Additionally, extra foot traffic or positioning for the sake of capturing footage can unintentionally place individuals in the path of play, leading to unnecessary contact or disruption. Beyond safety, the use of recording equipment on the field raises concerns around focus and liability. Players distracted by filming may not respond as quickly to the ball or to their teammates, and their inattention could increase the chance of injury. Moreover, audio recordings introduce privacy and liability considerations, especially when capturing conversations during competition. For these reasons, no player is permitted to record while on the field of play. The emphasis must remain on maintaining a safe, focused, and fair playing environment for all participants.

RULE 8



Rule 8: Rule 8 has been reformatted for clarity. Changes have separated longer articles, and organized exceptions, penalties, and effects into outline format for improved comprehension.

Rationale: Added article references to PENALTIES and EFFECTS, and Section 4 was separated into two sections addressing runners entitled to advance with and without liability to be put out to delineate differences.

Comments: To improve clarity and enhance the overall usability of the rules, the existing content was reorganized into a structured outline format. This new layout allows for easier navigation and better comprehension of key concepts by clearly separating topics and presenting information in a logical, accessible sequence. One significant change involved dividing the original Section 8-4 into two distinct sections. This split more clearly distinguishes between situations in which runners are entitled to advance without liability to be put out and those where they advance with liability. By isolating these scenarios, officials, coaches, and players can more readily understand the conditions under which runners are protected or at risk during play. Additionally, article references were added to corresponding PENALTIES and EFFECTS. This change provides direct links between specific rule violations and their consequences, eliminating ambiguity and helping users quickly identify the appropriate rulings and applications. The result is a cleaner, more intuitive rule structure that supports accurate rule enforcement and improved learning.

RULE 10-4-2



10-4-2: Umpires have the option of wearing heather gray, charcoal gray, or navy blue slacks. Effective January 1, 2027, heather gray slacks will no longer be permitted as part of the umpire's uniform.

Rationale: Manufacturers have discontinued producing heather gray umpire pants. This change will assist umpires in the purchase of pants that are currently being manufactured.

Comments: Effective January 1, 2027, heather gray umpire pants will no longer be permitted for use, as manufacturers have discontinued their production. This update reflects a practical shift to ensure that umpires can purchase and wear uniform pants that are currently being manufactured and readily available through suppliers. Moving forward, umpires will be expected to wear pants in either charcoal gray or navy, both of which are actively produced and supported by major manufacturers. The transition to these colors—particularly charcoal gray—provides consistency in appearance while allowing state associations and officials to align with what is accessible in the current marketplace. This change comes in response to ongoing feedback from state associations, which emphasized the challenges officials face in locating heather gray pants and the need for standardized, available uniform options. By establishing a clear implementation date and aligning with existing production trends, this adjustment supports both uniformity and ease of compliance across all levels of competition. Pants in either heather or charcoal gray will be legal until January 1, 2027, when charcoal pants will be required.

EDITORIAL CHANGES



2026 SOFTBALL EDITORIAL CHANGES

1-6, 2-25-3, 3-2-3a & b, 4-3-2, 7-1-1, 7-2-2, 8-2-4 EXCEPTION, 8-2-12 PENALTY 2, 8-5-2 PENALTIES 1 & 2, 8-7-14 PENALTY 2, 8-7-16 PENALTY 2, 8-9-15c, 8-9-15 PENALTIES

Points of Emphasis

POINTS OF EMPHASIS



Objective

- To strengthen knowledge and application of rule enforcement, enhancing player safety, thereby ensuring the integrity and quality of competition across all levels of play.

OBSTRUCTION



Obstruction is defined as the act of a defensive player who hinders or impedes a batter's attempt to make contact with a pitch or interferes with the legal progress of a runner or batter-runner advancing on the bases. This interference may be intentional or unintentional, and it can be either physical or verbal. However, obstruction does not apply if the defensive player is in possession of the ball or is making the initial play on a batted ball.

The central element in identifying obstruction lies in whether the runner's progress is actually impeded. If the runner or batter-runner is not affected—if there is no delay, no forced alteration of their path, or no hesitation—then by rule, obstruction has not occurred. A defensive player's mere presence or positioning, even if questionable, cannot be ruled as obstruction unless it results in an actual impediment to the runner. An exception exists only for a fake tag, which in itself constitutes obstruction, regardless of whether physical impediment occurs.

Impeding a runner means creating a negative effect on their ability to run the bases. This might include a runner slowing down, altering their intended path, stopping altogether, retreating to the previous base, or making contact with a fielder that disrupts their movement. These examples underscore that the umpire must rely on judgment to determine both whether the runner was impeded and to what extent their progress was affected.

Unlike many rule violations in softball that carry standardized penalties—such as awarding two bases for a thrown ball that goes out of play or one base for a pitched ball entering dead ball territory—obstruction rulings are situational and vary based on the specifics of each play. The purpose of the obstruction award is not to penalize the defensive team arbitrarily, but to nullify the negative effect of the obstruction. The runner is not being granted an advantage; rather, they are being restored to the position they would have achieved had the obstruction not occurred. This could mean advancing the runner or, in some cases, returning them to a previous base—whatever is necessary to correct the disruption caused by the obstruction, based on the umpire's judgment.

MAINTAINING AN UNOBSTRUCTED VIEW OF THE PLAY



There are times when an umpire must move from their primary position to maintain an unobstructed view of a play. This is mentioned several times in the NFHS Softball Umpire Manual but, until now, there has not been any guidance for the umpire in the manual. Information has been added to the Umpire Manual to explain aspects of the play that should be considered when moving from the primary position to maintain an unobstructed view of the play.

There are key interactions of the **four elements (offense, defense, ball, and base)** on each play that need to be viewed clearly in order to make a judgment call. On tag plays:

- Defense contacting the offense with the ball (tagging the runner)
- Defense controlling the ball through the process of applying the tag
- Offense contacting the base

MAINTAINING AN UNOBSTRUCTED VIEW OF THE PLAY



All three of these key interactions must remain within the umpire's view in order to make an accurate judgment call on the play. Also, when adjusting, an umpire needs to **maintain proper distance** as to ensure no key interactions of the play are missed.

Details of each play like:

- Defensive positioning
- Direction, height and timing of the throw
- Path of the runner
- Timing of the ball and runner arriving near the base

All these items need to be evaluated in each particular play prior to moving from the primary positioning as each play develops slightly differently. Understanding how these items are going to come together on a particular play allows the umpire to determine where the key interactions will occur, allowing them to adjust, when necessary, to maintain an unobstructed view of the play.

INSIDE/OUTSIDE THEORY

Questions?

Points of Emphasis

1. Obstruction
2. Maintaining an Unobstructed View



PLAY
SAFER
TOGETHER

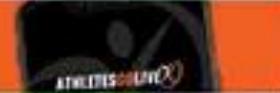
Rules Revisions

1. Players cannot transmit or record audio or video from the playing surface.
2. Rule 8 has been reformatted for clarity and to organize exceptions, penalties and effects into outline format for improved comprehension.
3. Effective January 1, 2027, heather gray socks will not be permitted as part of the umpire's uniform.

2026 SOFTBALL



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INFIELD FLY

INFIELD FLY



Objective

- To understand and correctly apply the Infield Fly Rule and mechanic by recognizing qualifying situations, ensuring fair play, and preventing defensive teams from gaining an unfair advantage over base runners.

INFIELD FLY



Definition 2-29 Pg. 24

Infield fly is, when declared by the umpire, a fair fly (not including a line drive or an attempted bunt) that can be caught by an infielder with ordinary effort when runners are on first and second or all three bases are occupied and before there are two outs in the inning. Any defensive player positioned on the infield at the time of the pitch shall be considered an infielder for the purpose of this rule. The rule does not preclude outfielders from making being permitted to match the catch. The ball is live, the batter is out, which removes the force, but runners may advance at their own risk. The runners may tag up and advance as soon as the batted ball is touched by the fielder. If a declared infield fly becomes foul, it is treated as a foul ball, not an infield fly.

INFIELD FLY



Definition: A fair fly ball (not a line drive, not a bunt). Must be catchable by an infielder with ordinary effort. Applies when runners are on first and second, or bases loaded, with fewer than two outs.

Purpose: Prevents the defense from intentionally dropping a pop-up to create easy double or triple plays. Ensures fairness by automatically declaring the batter out, regardless of whether the ball is caught.

Key Points of Emphasis:

The ball does not have to be caught for the batter to be out.

Runners may advance at their own risk, but they are not forced to run since the batter is already out.

SIGNALS AND MECHANICS OF INFIELD FLY



Mechanics Manual pg. 43

Infield Fly- Fully extend arm above the head with the hand in a **clenched fist**. Verbalize “infield fly, the batter is out.” If the ball is close to the line verbalize, “infield fly, the batter is out, if fair.”

The plate umpire is responsible for making this call. If the plate umpire does not make the call (forgets or is not certain of the call) and the base umpire, after eye contact communication with the plate umpire, is certain the ball is an infield fly; the base umpire can make the call.

INFIELD FLY SIGNAL



- Stand up-right facing square to the play with feet shoulder-width apart and with eyes on the ball.
- When the ball reaches its highest point extend your right arm above your head with the fist closed and verbalize “Infield Fly, the batter is out” or if near a foul line “Infield Fly, the batter is out if Fair”.

INFIELD FLY SITUATION IS ON



- The Plate Umpire should put their right hand over their chest and make eye contact with their partner.
- The Base Umpire(s) will return the same signal to the Plate Umpire.

INFIELD FLY SITUATION IS OFF



- The Plate Umpire will tap their left forearm with their right hand and make eye contact with their partner.
- The Base Umpires will return the same signal to the Plate Umpire.

LOOK BACK RULE

LOOK BACK RULE



Objective

- To understand and correctly apply the Look-Back Rule in softball by recognizing when the pitcher has possession of the ball within the circle (or partially in with NFHS), ensuring runners make an immediate decision to advance or return, and promoting fair play and game flow through consistent enforcement.

LOOK BACK RULE



- Rule 8-7 Pg. 72
- Art. 1... The Look-Back Rule will be in effect when the ball is live, the batter-runner has touched first base or has been declared out, and the pitcher has possession of the ball within the pitcher's circle.
- Art. 2... The runner(s) may stop once, but then must immediately return to the base or attempt to advance to the next base.
- Art. 3... Once the runner stops at a base for any reason, she will be declared out if she leaves the base.
- Art. 4... Responsibilities of batter-runner after completing a turn at bat, and while the pitcher has the ball within the 16-foot pitching circle, including a base on balls or a dropped third strike are as follows:

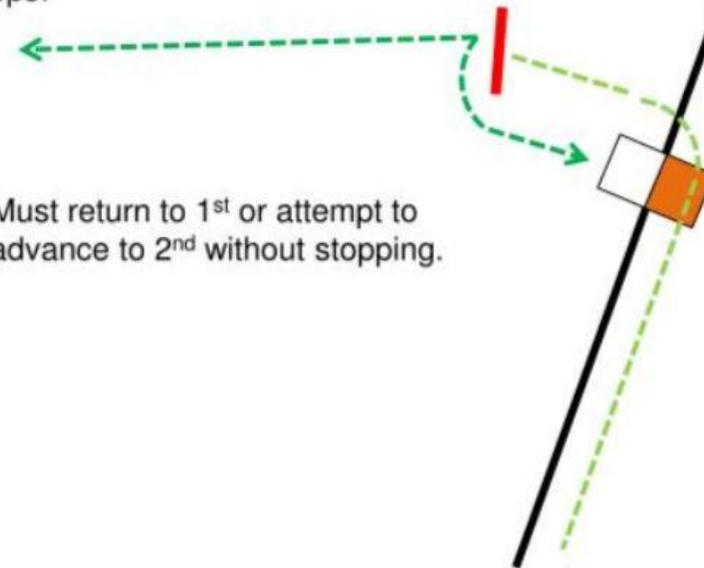
LOOK BACK RULE CONTD.



a. A batter-runner who rounds first base toward second base may stop, but then must immediately, without stopping, return to first or attempt to advance to second base.

LOOK-BACK RULE (8-7-4a)

Batter-runner rounds first base toward 2nd and stops:



Must return to 1st or attempt to advance to 2nd without stopping.



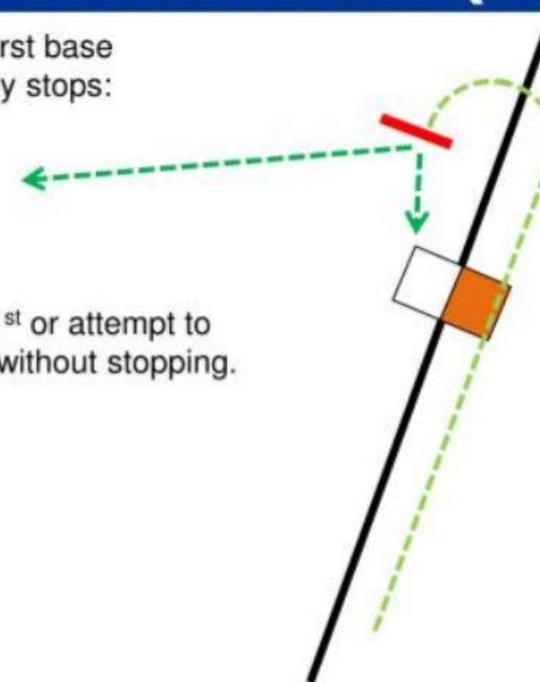
LOOK BACK RULE CONTD.



b. A batter-runner who overruns first base toward right field, turns left and immediately stops, must then return non-stop to first or attempt to advance to second base.

LOOK-BACK RULE (8-7-4b)

Batter-runner overruns first base
turns left and immediately stops:



Must return to 1st or attempt to
advance to 2nd without stopping.



LOOK BACK RULE CONTD.

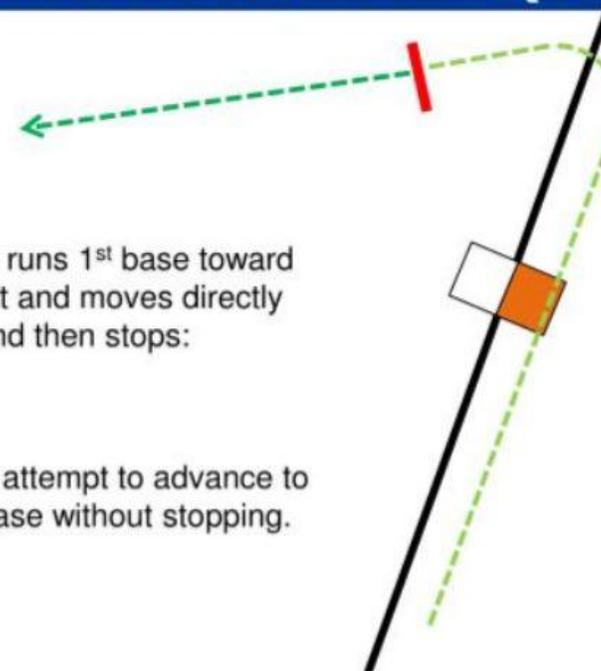


c. A batter-runner who overruns first base toward right field, turns left and moves directly toward second base and stops is committed to second and must attempt to advance non-stop to second base.

LOOK-BACK RULE (8-7-4c)

Batter-runner over runs 1st base toward right field, turns left and moves directly toward 2nd base and then stops:

Must attempt to advance to 2nd base without stopping.



LOOK BACK RULE CONTD.

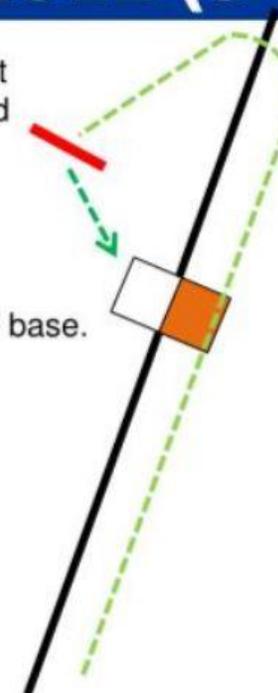


d. A batter-runner who overruns first base toward right field, turns left and moves back toward the infield in any direction except directly toward second base is committed to first and must return to first base.

LOOK-BACK RULE (8-7-4d)

Batter-runner over runs 1st base toward right field, turns left and moves back to the infield in any direction except directly toward 2nd base and then stops:

Must return to 1st base.



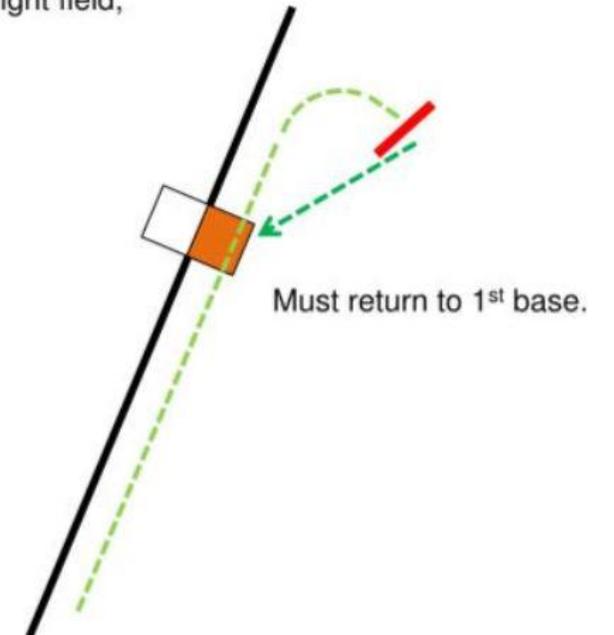
LOOK BACK RULE CONTD.



e. A batter-runner who overruns first base toward right field, and turns right, is committed to first base and must return to first base.

LOOK-BACK RULE (8-7-4e)

Batter-runner overruns 1st base towards right field, and turns right and then stops:



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Questions?