



May 20, 2024

NFHS Softball Weekly Rule Interpretations

Situation 2 from last week's interpretations has sparked some discussion about the philosophy of calling illegal pitches. The point of view has always been a pitch is considered legal until the umpire judges the pitcher has violated a part of the pitching rule. This is still the point of view that umpires should take when judging the pitchers actions. Wording of "If the umpire is able to determine that the pitchers hands are separated" was used for emphasis that the ball does not need to be visible prior to the pitcher starting their pitch, it was not intended to change the thought process umpires use when determining legal or illegal pitches. This discussion was to highlight that there are ways to determine the hands are separated without having to see space between the hands (ball covered by glove). Therefore, umpires should continue to judge a pitch legal until they determine that the pitcher has violated a part of the pitching rule.

Situation 1: In the third inning, Team A is at bat with B2 due to bat with two outs, B3 bats instead and is called out on strikes for the third out of the inning. As Team A comes up to bat in the fourth inning, B2 comes up to bat and gets a single. Team B's coach then appeals stating that B4 should be the proper batter since B3 was the last batter to complete their turn at bat. The umpire agrees and rules B4 out for failure to bat in the proper position and removes B2 from first base, announcing B5 as the next proper batter with one out. **RULING:** Correct ruling. B3 did bat out of order in the third inning; however, this was not appealed prior to all fielders leaving fair territory so the improper batter, B3, becomes the proper batter (7-1-2 Penalty 3). This makes the next proper batter to start the fourth inning B4 (7-1-2). Since B2 batted instead of B4 and it was appealed prior to a pitch to the next batter, B4 is ruled out and B2's at bat is negated (they are removed from first base) and B5 is the next proper batter (7-1-2 Penalty 2).

Situation 2: Team A's pitcher is listed as the FLEX player with a DP batting in the 5th spot in the lineup. As the team is getting ready to take the field in the third inning, Team A's coach informs the umpire that the DP will be pitching and the FLEX player will not be playing defense. The umpire records the change stating, "Ok the FLEX has left the game and has one reentry". Team A's coach disagrees stating that any nine can play defense without there being any substitution. **RULING:** Correct ruling by the umpire. The FLEX and DP split the "jobs" usually done by a single player into two positions. The FLEX is the defensive specialist and their "job" is to play defense, if they no longer play defense they have left the game (3-3-6e&f). The DP is the offensive specialist and their "job" is to play offense, if they no longer play offense they have left the game (3-3-6d). One unique aspect of the DP position is that although their main "job" is to play offense they may also play defense. If they play defense for anyone other than the FLEX, that player will continue to bat and has not left the game (3-3-6e). This allows the FLEX and the DP to both play defense at the same time, the FLEX can pitch and the DP can play first base as an example. In this example, the player who started the game listed as F3 will continue to bat in their spot in the lineup and has not left the game. This ability of the DP to play defense for any of the other batters in the lineup without there being a substitution has confused some as they attempt to apply this to the FLEX position also. As mentioned the FLEX position is different as the FLEX's main "job" is to play defense and if they

no longer play defense they are no longer doing their “job” and have left the game. This is why it is considered a substitution when the DP plays defense for the FLEX because the FLEX no longer has a “job” so they have left the game. When the DP plays defense for someone other than the FLEX that player still bats, so they still have a “job” and are still in the game. Again this explains the difference and why it is considered a substitution when the DP plays defense instead of the FLEX (they have no job to do and are no longer in the game if they aren’t playing defense) but is not considered a substitution when the DP plays defense for someone other than the FLEX (that player still bats so they have still have a job and are still in the game).