

Obstruction to Bases Prohibited in 2008 Baseball Rules

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INDIANAPOLIS, IN (July 9, 2007) -- Beginning with the 2008 high school baseball season, fielders without possession of the ball will not be allowed to deny access to the base that a runner is attempting to achieve.

This change in Rule 2-22-3 is one of numerous rules revisions approved by the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) Baseball Rules Committee at its annual meeting June 12-14 in Indianapolis. The rules changes subsequently were approved by the NFHS Board of Directors.

"This rules revision will be very beneficial because it will minimize the risk of injury for both offensive and defensive players," said Elliot Hopkins, NFHS director of educational services and liaison to the Baseball Rules Committee.

A revision to Rule 3-2-1 rescinds the previous rule that stated a coach or player occupying the coaches' boxes shall remain there upon the batter entering the batter's box until the release of the ball by the pitcher if requested by the opposing coach. Beginning with the 2008 season, one player or coach may occupy each coach's box while his or her team is at bat.

"This rule was virtually impossible to enforce in the past," Hopkins said. "The umpire does not normally focus on the coach in the box, and shouldn't have to split his or her focus between the coach and the game. In addition, a lot of fields are not properly lined with coaches' boxes, and it's tough to say where the coach should be if the marks are not clear."

Along with the previous rule, multiple rules changes were made regarding head coaches. Rule 3-2-4 requires the head coach to be in attendance at the pregame conference if available. If he or she is not present, the head coach will be restricted to the dugout for the remainder of the game unless he or she must attend to a sick or injured player.

Another rule, Rule 1-1-2, suggests the importance of both the captain and the head coach being in communication with the umpires. Both must be present at the pregame conference, and the head coach is responsible for ensuring that his or her team is in compliance and will adhere to good sportsmanship. The rule also requires the name, shirt number, position and batting order of each starter to be placed on the lineup card. The name and shirt number of each eligible substitute should also be placed on the card, but are not required.

"It is important and necessary to require lineup cards to be filled out correctly," Hopkins said. "We looked at the vocabulary for the requirements for substitutions and changed 'shall' to 'should' in the section concerning eligible substitutions because there is no violation or penalty outlined if the eligible substitute's name is not listed on the card."

Two final rules changes deal with equipment and apparel. Rule 1-3-6 will require a pitcher's glove to be removed from the game if it includes the colors of white and/or gray and is noticed by the umpire or opposing team.

"It is the coach's responsibility to make sure his team is properly equipped, and it is the umpire's responsibility to enforce the rules," Hopkins said. "Instead of penalizing the opposing team with a multi-base award, the glove will only be required to be removed."

According to Rule 10-1-9, it is necessary that umpires dress alike in heather gray slacks and either a navy pullover shirt or a state association-adopted shirt. They are not required to supply a wide variety of shirts beyond what is necessary.