

SRI BULLETIN # 4 – APRIL 2, 2012

FORCE PLAY SLIDE RULE

Many athletes suffer injuries, minor and career ending, as the result of slides, legal and illegal. This bulletin will focus on the NFHS instituting the force play slide rule in 1998, and making it a point of emphasis in 1999. The force play slide rule protects fielders from injury. At first glance, the application of this rule seems difficult. I will attempt to clarify the rule, the exceptions, and the definition of legal and illegal slides, hopefully making the slide rule easy to understand and enforce correctly.

PURPOSE OF THE RULE

It is a safety rule designed to protect a fielder on a force play, especially when a runner takes out a fielder on the front end of a double play that starts at second base. The purpose is to cut out the hard slides often seen in professional baseball, where runners break up the pivot of the second baseman or shortstop.

Once we examine FED 8-4-2b, force play slide rule, and FED 2-32-1, 2 and exception, the definition of a slide, it's easier to understand the rule.

Rule 8-4-2 reads: Any runner is out when he: (b) does not legally slide and causes illegal contact and/or illegally alters the actions of a fielder in the immediate act of making a play, or on a force play, does not slide in a direct line between the bases. A runner may slide away from the fielder to avoid contact or alter the play of the fielder. Runners are never required to slide, but if a runner elects to slide, the slide must be legal. The force play slide rule can be enforced at all bases, including the plate.

Comment: Remember, on a force play slide rule at the plate, the run does not count if there is an illegal slide. In addition, the slide rule must be called if the runner slides and stops on top of the plate, contact occurs and the catcher goes down.

LEGAL SLIDES

First we'll look at a legal slide. Next we will look at what constitutes an illegal slide. Finally, we'll study what happens on the force play slide rule.

What is a legal slide? A legal slide can be either feet first or head first. If a runner slides feet first, at least one leg and buttock shall be on the ground. If a runner slides, he must slide within reach of the base with either a hand or foot. (FED 2-32-1)

ILLEGAL SLIDES

What is an illegal slide? An illegal slide occurs when a runner uses a rolling, cross body, or pop-up slide into the fielder, the runner's raised leg is higher than the fielder's knee when the fielder is in a standing

position; the runner goes beyond the base and then makes contact with or alters the play of the fielder; the runner slashes or kicks the fielder with either leg; or the runner tries to injure the fielder; the runner, on a force play, does not slide on the ground and in a direct line between the two bases. (FED 2-32-2a-f)

TAD'S TRICKY TRIVIA

How many teams have retired pitching great Nolan Ryan's number?

Name the teams..... (see answers at the end of SRI bulletin).

PENALTIES

When any of these conditions are met, the call is interference. The ball is dead and the runner is out.

An exception is allowed: a runner may slide in a direction away from the fielder to avoid contact or altering the play of a fielder. (8-4-2b)

On a force play slide rule with less than two outs, the batter runner is called out in addition to the runner. Runners shall return to the bases occupied at the time of the pitch. Of course, with two outs, the runner is declared out and the batter runner is credited with a fielder's choice.

It is a no call when the runner does not slide in a force situation and does not contact the fielder or alters the play. The rule is not enforced if the infielder has cleared the area. In other words, as long as the defensive player has moved away from the base before the runner arrives, and he does not slide and does not have an effect on the play, no violation shall be called.

FORCE PLAY SLIDE MECHANICS

The mechanic for the force play slide rule is: **Call the play dead with “Time, Time. That’s interference”.** Point to the runner who interfered and say, “He’s out.” Then point to the batter-runner and say “and he’s out”.

This call is generally made by the plate umpire, who after the ball is hit has moved out in front of the plate near the mound on the third base side to watch the play. The base umpire can also make this call, and far too often the base umpire turns to quickly, when he should stay with the play longer. Don’t be in a hurry to turn away and make the call at first, and count on the plate umpire. Late developing plays are really where we see the violations the most...**Base umpires need to recognize the timing, and stay with it!** A good pre-game with your partner about coverage problems associated with a two-man system, will go a long way in getting this call right.

SAFETY FIRST

Umpires must remember, first, that the force play slide rule is a **SAFETY RULE**, which is by nature a punitive rule. Regardless of what happens during the play, umpires always need to err on the side of protecting the student-athlete. By calling this rule from the beginning of the game, both offensive teams are aware that you know the rule.... and will call it.

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Answer to Tad's Tricky Trivia; Houston Astros, Texas Rangers (#34) and California Angels (#30)