

Oregon School Activities Association

Baseball SRI Bulletin – #5

April 24, 2013

INTERFERENCE: BE WILLING TO CALL IT, EMPHATICALLY, BUT ONLY WHEN IT HAPPENS.

This SRI Bulletin has been written by Mark Anderegg, the co-author of the Oregon Baseball Manual, and member of the Portland Baseball Umpire Association. I would like to take the time to thank Mark for this article, and encourage other umpires interested in writing a guest bulletin to contact me.

As we swing through April, high school baseball in Oregon swings into high gear. Most of the teams are in the middle of conference play, and umpires are expected to have brushed off the early season rust and be on top of every call, every game.

Of course we know that is impossible. We are going to miss a pitch or two every game. There is going to be a balk that caught us off guard the first time it happened, but we promise ourselves that we will get it the next time.

But if there is one call in the game I would encourage you to strive hard to get right each and every time, it would be interference. Calling interference when appropriate, and passing on interference when all of the elements for the call do not exist, is absolutely critical. The penalty for interference can be dramatic, and typically plays involving possible interference are such that everyone in the park knows something significant has happened and are waiting for the umpire to step up and take control of the call/non-call.

The following actions constitute the most commonly seen acts of interference by the offensive team:

- An illegal slide by a runner, particularly on a force play (force play/slide rule). Illegal slides include (Rule 2-32-2) a) Using a “rolling, cross-body or pop up slide , b) sliding with the leg raised above the fielder’s knee, c) sliding beyond the bag and making contact with or altering the play of the fielder, e) trying to injure a fielder, f) failing to slide in a direct line between the bases.
- Any runner, or retired runner, obstructing, impeding, hindering, or confusing any fielder attempting to make a play. (Rule 2-18-21)
- A runner being contacted by a fair batted ball, except when that ball passed an infielder **and** no other fielder has a chance to make a play. (Rule 8-4-2k)
- The batter interfering with the catcher’s attempt to field or **throw** the ball. (Rule 7-3-5)

Interference by a base runner always results in the play being called dead immediately and at least one out being enforced. Any other type of interference (batter, coach’s assist, umpire) usually, but not always, results in a delayed dead ball. I encourage everyone to review Rule 5-1 (dead ball and delayed dead ball table).

At this point you may be flipping through your rule book, grateful for the reminder about how many nuances there are to calling interference. You may also be wondering why I am choosing to write about a topic so clearly defined in the rule book. I'll tell you: Because interference demands that we **umpire** and it demands that we use our best **judgment** and it demands that we display **timing and confidence**.

Consider the following plays: 1) R1 stealing second, 1-1 count on the batter. The batter flails at a pitch and steps all the way across the plate to the opposing batters box as the catcher releases a perfect throw to the shortstop who just misses tagging the runner before he slides safely into 2nd base. 2) R1, sharply hit ground ball to the third baseman. The ball is thrown to the 2nd baseman covering who comes "through the bag" several feet before releasing a good, but not great, throw to first in an unsuccessful effort to get a double play. R1, who is out by fifteen feet, lopes into 2nd base standing up. 3) R1, slow bouncer toward 2nd base. The 2nd baseman approaches the batted ball near the baseline. The runner, in an effort to avoid being hit by the ball, steps around and leaps over the batted ball. The ball takes one more clean hop and hits off the fielder's glove and into shallow right field.

All of these plays are situations which appear to fall into the category of "textbook" interference calls. But in reality, I have intentionally described them in a way as to make you take pause. Although we know a batter is not allowed to step across the plate in front of the catcher's throw, we also better be prepared to observe when there is NO effect on the play and simply give a safe signal and say "I've got nothing here". Although we all know that a base runner who chooses not to slide must avoid the play, we also know that fielders at second are often several feet clear of the bag when turning a double play, and any runner/retired runner, before throwing to first base.

Remember, for interference to be called, there must be **some effect** on the play. In other words, there needs to be interference in order to enforce interference. Don't get so anxious to come up with that big force play/slide rule call at 2nd base that you forget about umpiring the entirety of the play **and** make sure you feel the play was affected in some fashion, whether it be a standing runner visually impairing the throw to first or a sliding runner contacting the fielder beyond the bag and threatening his safety. And when you do call interference, be strong in your initial call, be verbal in your out call, and be confident in your subsequent placing of runners.

Be prepared to handle any argument calmly and always make sure you can confidently say to the offensive coach: "Your player's actions illegally hindered the defensive team's ability to make the play". If you know that is true, then I guarantee you will have gotten the call right.

Tad Cockerill

OSAA State Rules Interpreter

cockerill51@gmail.com