



NFHS 2015 Baseball Points of Emphasis

The NFHS Baseball Rules Committee and the NFHS Board of Directors believe there are areas of the game of interscholastic baseball that need to be addressed and given special attention. These areas of concern are often cyclical – some areas need more attention than others, and that is why they might appear in the rules book for consecutive editions. These concerns are identified as “Points of Emphasis.” For the 2015 high school baseball season, attention is being called to: helmet maintenance and usage, pitching substitution/change, sportsmanship celebrations around or near home plate and post-game ejections. When a topic is included in the Points of Emphasis, these topics are important enough to reinforce throughout the academic year because they are not being given the proper attention.

HELMET MAINTENANCE AND USAGE

When looking at the sheer numbers of players (and some coaches) who are wearing batting helmets, it becomes clear that a lot of individuals are invested in protecting their health by wearing one that meets the NOCSAE performance standard. There should be a routine scheduled review to assess the condition of the batting helmets. They should be free of cracks, cuts, missing pieces and should have proper ear pads installed without tape holding them together. They should also be maintained in a manner that your team can enjoy several seasons of functional use. Batting helmet manufacturers normally provide a routine maintenance schedule either with the product or on their company’s website.

PITCHING SUBSTITUTION AND CHANGE

Pitching is critical in our game and substituting for the pitcher is a key personnel strategy. By rule, there are some specific time guidelines provided for the execution of substituting the game pitcher. It is becoming more noticeable that the defensive coach is extending his time around the mound while the substitute pitcher completes his warm-up pitches. This delay of the game by lingering around the mound has become problematic. While it provides the coach an opportunity to speak to the rest of the defensive team, but it is also lengthening and delaying the game. The coach should make his substitution known to the umpire-in-chief, scorekeeper, relieve the game pitcher, instruct his players quickly, and leave the diamond area heading back to the dugout/bench area. For the sake of continuity, it is a better game when it is fluid and with minimal interruptions.



SPORTSMANSHIP - CELEBRATIONS AROUND OR NEAR HOME PLATE

Any walk-off, game-winning base hit or home run generates immediate excitement for the player who hit the ball, his teammates and fans. Adolescent emotion is at its best when a young person does something successful. Unfortunately, for players on the team that just gave up the run or lost the game, their emotion is different and being jubilant is not their first thought. Everyone on the winning team wants to congratulate the successful batter as he turns the corner at third base and heads to home plate. The problem is that the umpire-in-chief has to be able to verify that the runner scores.

His job becomes exponentially more difficult if his view is hampered by cheering players along the third-base line and around home plate. It is important to keep the area around home plate clear of bodies (and equipment) so the umpire can do his job correctly. In addition, hovering around the third-base line and home plate is a perfect opportunity for bad sportsmanship actions that include taunting and other boorish behavior. Umpires will be asked to be more diligent at 'players' behavior during such celebrations because of the number of poor sportsmanship incidents being reported throughout the country.

SPORTSMANSHIP - POST-GAME EJECTIONS

Whenever a game is ended by a great play or controversial call, emotions typically run high for the unsuccessful side. While winning and losing are perfect "teachable moments" opportunities, disrespectful behavior severely erodes the basic premise of educational-based athletics. When coaches and players allow their emotions to get the best of them and they act badly, the rules allow for warnings, restrictions and ultimately ejections from the contest.

A phenomenon that is becoming all too common and frequent is that once the game has concluded, the losing side waits for the umpiring crew to leave the confines of the field to then verbally attacks the umpires. By rule, the umpires have the latitude through their local state association's intervention to make a postgame report and forward it to the state association describing the type of bad behavior and based on the severity of the infraction, the umpires' jurisdiction can be extended after their jurisdiction has ended. Please discuss this with your local state association for its guidance and procedure.

Young people, when surveyed, have indicated that their primary purpose for participating is to "have fun." Winning is further down the list of expected outcomes. The beneficial effect of activity/athletic participation is annually researched as a good and healthy experience and is a precursor for future success in life. We all have a vested interest and role in preserving the positive benefits that young people experience when playing high school sports.