March 27, 2019

NFHS Softball Weekly Rule Interpretations

We have received a number of inquiries about properly enforcing the penalty for an illegal pitch and specifically when the Exceptions to the Penalty for Rule 6-1-1 apply. Exception 2 reads “If the batter does not reach first base safely or if any base runner fails to advance at least one base, the coach of the team at bat shall have the option of the result of the play or the penalty of the illegal pitch.”

This exception applies to all illegal pitches whether they are batted, or ruled a ball or strike. It is imperative that the umpires continue to umpire the entire play through its completion including calling the pitch a ball or strike and ruling on any attempted advancement of runners. One discussion point was that the comments on this rule change stated that the rules committee felt that only the batter was placed at a disadvantage by an illegal pitch so only the batter should receive a reward from the illegal pitch.

Although this is true, the rules are also in place to ensure that any undue disadvantage is removed from an illegal pitch. For example, if the offense is planning a bunt and run situation and the pitcher throws an illegal pitch that the batter is not able to hit. The runner that is running expecting their batter to put the ball in play is placed at a disadvantage possibly resulting in their being put out on what now appears as a steal.

As exception 2 above states, if any runner is putout on the pitch/play or the batter does not reach first base safely then the coach shall have the option of the penalty or the play. The following situations are designed to highlight the different situations where this issue may arise.

**Situations**

**Situation 1**: R1 on first base, B2 is at bat with a 1 ball 1 strike count. F1 is called for an illegal pitch that R1 attempts to steal second base on, B2 attempts to bunt the ball but does not make contact with the pitch and F2 throws R1 out at second base. **Ruling**: Since B2 did not reach first base safely, and R1 did not advance at least one base safely the offensive coach has the option of taking the penalty or the play. The play would result in R1 being out and B2 still at bat with a 1 ball 2 strike count. The penalty would place R1 back on first base and have B2 at bat with a 2 ball 1 strike count.

**Situation 2**: R1 on first base, B2 is at bat with a 1 ball 1 strike count. F1 is called for an illegal pitch that R1 attempts to steal second base on, B2 attempts to bunt the ball but does not make
contact with the pitch and F2 throws in an attempt to retire R1 but R1 is ruled safe at second base. **Ruling:** Since B2 did not reach first base safely, the offensive coach has the option of taking the penalty or the play. The play would result in R1 on second base and B2 still at bat with a 1 ball 2 strike count. The penalty would place R1 back on first base and have B2 at bat with a 2 ball 1 strike count.

**Situation 3:** R1 on third base, B2 is at bat with a 1 ball 1 strike count. F1 is called for an illegal pitch that R1 attempts to steal home on, B2 attempts to bunt the ball but does not make contact with the pitch and F2 misses the pitch allowing R1 to score. **Ruling:** Since B2 did not reach first base safely, the offensive coach has the option of taking the penalty or the play. The play would result in R1 scoring and B2 still at bat with a 1 ball 2 strike count. The penalty would place R1 back on third base and have B2 at bat with a 2 ball 1 strike count.

**Situation 4:** R1 on third base, B2 is at bat with a 1 ball 1 strike count. F1 is called for an illegal pitch that R1 attempts to steal home on, B2 attempts to bunt the ball but does not make contact with the pitch and F2 tags R1 out attempting to score. **Ruling:** Since B2 did not reach first base safely and R1 did not advance at least one base safely, the offensive coach has the option of taking the penalty or the play. The play would result in R1 being out and B2 still at bat with a 1 ball 2 strike count. The penalty would place R1 back on third base and have B2 at bat with a 2 ball 1 strike count.

**Situation 5:** R1 on first base, B2 is at bat with a 1 ball 1 strike count. F1 is called for an illegal pitch that R1 attempts to steal second base on, B2 makes no attempt to contact the pitch that the umpire rules a ball and F2 throws R1 out at second base. **Ruling:** Since B2 did not reach first base safely, and R1 did not advance at least one base safely the offensive coach has the option of taking the penalty or the play. The play would result in R1 being out and B2 still at bat with a 2 ball 1 strike count. The penalty would place R1 back on first base and have B2 at bat with a 2 ball 1 strike count.

**Situation 6:** R1 on first base, B2 is at bat with a 1 ball 1 strike count. F1 is called for an illegal pitch that R1 attempts to steal second base on, B2 makes no attempt to contact the pitch that the umpire rules a ball and F2 throws R1 out at second base. **Ruling:** Since B2 did not reach first base safely but R1 is ruled safe at second base. The play would result in R1 being on second base and B2 still at bat with a 2 ball 1 strike count. The penalty would place R1 back on first base and have B2 at bat with a 2 ball 1 strike count.

**Situation 7:** R1 on first base, B2 is at bat with a 1 ball 1 strike count. F1 is called for an illegal pitch that R1 attempts to steal second base on, B2 makes no attempt to contact the pitch that the umpire rules a strike and F2 throws in an attempt to retire R1 but R1 is ruled safe at second base. **Ruling:** Since B2 did not reach first base safely, the offensive coach has the option of taking the penalty or the play. The play would result in R1 being on second base and B2 still at bat with a 1 ball 2 strike count. The penalty would place R1 back on first base and have B2 at bat with a 2 ball 1 strike count.