

Baseball Points of Emphasis - 2020

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The NFHS Baseball Rules Committee and the NFHS Board of Directors believes 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 2020 high school baseball season, attention is being called to: Game Ending Procedures, Player/Designated Hitter Role, Proper Pitching Positions, Force Play Slide Rule, Enforcement of NFHS Jewelry Rule, Compliance of Player’s Equipment. 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.

Game Ending Procedures

Per rule, by state association adoption, a baseball game shall end when the visiting team is behind 10 or more runs after 4½ innings or after the fifth inning. However, if a state association does not adopt a game-ending procedure or by mutual agreement of the opposing coaches and the umpire-in-chief, any remaining play may be shortened, or the game terminated. Lopsided scores provide no educational value, increase the risk of unsportsmanlike behavior, and put undue pressure on the pitcher’s arm that would impact his/her pitch count.

Player/Designated Hitter Role

With the adoption of the changes to the designated hitter rule, teams now have three choices with respect to the use of a designated hitter in a specific game. First, a team may elect to not use a designated hitter. Such a team would have a “traditional” nine player line-up for that game. Second, a team may elect to use the same designated hitter rule that has existed for the last several decades. This option is selected when the team’s lineup card presented at the plate meeting has 10 players listed, one of whom is a designated hitter not playing defensively at the start of the game. Third, under the new change to the DH rule, a team may elect to have one player start the game as both a defensive player and designated hitter. This option is selected when the team’s lineup card presented at the plate meeting has nine players listed, one of whom has both a defensive position and “DH” written next to his name on the lineup card. If the third option is selected, a player can be substituted for the DH on defense and the starter will remain as the DH. However, if the third option is selected, the DH role is terminated if the starter is substituted for on offense. In either case, the starting defensive player/DH can re-enter if he has a re-entry remaining.

Proper Pitching Positions

The NFHS Baseball Rules Committee continues to be concerned with pitchers whose feet are not in a proper position prior to starting their delivery. Specifically, certain pitchers across the country continue to place their feet in an illegal “hybrid” stance. This appears to be a result of both coaches who continue to teach improper pitcher positions, and umpires who refuse to enforce the rules as written and apply the proper penalty.

Pitchers are required to use one of two positions; the wind-up or the set. In the wind-up position, the pitcher's non-pivot foot must be in a position on or behind a line extending through the front edge of the pitcher's plate. If the heel of the pitcher's non-pivot foot is closer to home plate than the front edge of the pitcher's plate, then the pitcher is in an illegal "hybrid" stance, unless he is using a proper set position. In the set position, the pitcher's pivot foot must be on or in front of and touching the pitcher's plate. The pivot foot must also be parallel to the pitcher's plate. The non-pivot foot must be entirely in front of the front edge of the pitcher's plate. If the non-pivot foot is touching (or next to) the front edge of the pitcher's plate, the pitcher is in an illegal "hybrid" stance, unless he is using a proper wind-up position.

Force Play Slide Rule

Simply stated, the runner never has to slide. However, on a force play when he does slide, it must be legal and in a direct line between the two bases. A runner may slide or run in a direction away from the fielder to avoid making contact or altering the play of the fielder. The force play slide rule is in effect at second, third and home plate.

Enforcement of NFHS Jewelry Rule

Items that are attached except medical appliances/devices are considered to be jewelry. The restriction of jewelry is primarily for risk minimization for the wearer and for the opponent. Earrings and various other piercings can be problematic for a player if the piercing gets caught on equipment and torn away from the body. Obviously, if a physician has provided

documentation in support of a particular piercing, the local state association has the latitude (with proper justification) to make a special accommodation for the player. We need to be more vigilant to protect our players and their opponents. Compliance of Player's Equipment In preparation of the new equipment that will have the NOCSAE stamp being introduced into high school baseball, it is appropriate to begin to have those discussions with players, coaches, umpires and parents. The NOCSAE stamped baseball has been available for use during the 2019 high school baseball season. The transition will be easier when all the baseballs have both the NFHS Authenticating Mark and NOCSAE seal effective January 1, 2020.