

D1 Rules Forum V18: 12-15-2025

This Rules Forum is compiled from interesting calls that occur at D1 games and elsewhere. New Rules anecdotes will be added to the top of this list.

If any D1 player, manager or umpire wants to suggest an anecdote or question or interesting call to be added to this forum, contact the Umpire Committee Chair for D1 Softball (Walker Royce at walker.royce@gmail.com.) You can also draft a short situational description and submit it via email. We will review, edit, and make sure the rulings and discussion are compliant with D1 rules and publish it in an updated forum.

D1RF-36 Foul ball call with 2 Umpires.

With nobody on, the batter hits a line drive down the right field line. The home umpire calls the ball foul. The base umpire calls the ball fair. Whose call is it? What do you do if there are conflicting calls?

Two umpires during regular season:

The plate umpire is usually responsible for fair/foul determination down the baselines. He should make the fair/foul call on:

1. ground balls near the 1B line,
2. infield flies near the 1B line, and
3. fly balls near the 1B line only when the base umpire is positioned near 2B.

When the base umpire is positioned down the 1B line, they are primarily responsible for judging fly balls and line-drives hit past 1B down the right field line. The plate umpire should let the base umpire make the fair/foul determination on close fly ball calls in right field and then affirm those calls. If there is a conflict between calls, the base umpire's judgment should prevail.

With four umpires in the playoffs:

With base umpires positioned down both the 1B and 3B lines, the plate umpire has the same primary responsibilities as above down both foul lines. The 1B and 3B umpires would take primary responsibility for line-drives and fly balls hit past the bases near the line.

D1RF-35 Not Avoiding a Collision at 2B.

In the 2025 summer season finals (with 4 umpires), there was an interesting call involving a runner who did not slide into 2B and did not veer to avoid a collision. With 1 out and a man on first, the batter hits a ground ball to the SS who tosses to the mid-fielder covering 2B for a possible double play. The mid-fielder bobbles the ball but recovers, touches the bag and sets up to throw to 1B when the runner collides with him. The mid-fielder drops the ball in the collision. It is questionable whether the mid-fielder could have thrown the batter-runner out at 1B for a double play.

The 2B umpire called the runner at 2B out and then called time and convened with the other umpires. They were unsure of the ruling on whether the batter-runner should also be called out. One umpire thought the batter-runner would have been safe even if there was no collision and one ump thought a good throw would have completed a double play. They finally agreed that since the runner did not try to avoid a collision, both outs should be called and the inning was over.

Rule 8.6 WHEN SLIDING is OPTIONAL – AVOIDING COLLISIONS states:

If in the umpire's judgment the runner's collision with the defensive player involved in the play negates a double play, the umpire may award a second out.

The wording of this rule does allow for the umpires to have made either call on this particular play. If the umpires determined that there was "no chance" of the throw completing the double play, even without the collision, they could

have called only a single out at 2B. If the umpire consensus was that there was a chance of completing the double play, they could call both outs.

The runner said that he didn't avoid a collision because the mid-fielder bobbled the ball and he wanted to make it to the bag if he didn't hold onto it. The runner is protected from that possibility, but only if he avoids the collision. For example, had the fielder bobbled the ball to the ground and then picked it up and touched the bag while the runner was away from the bag the umpire can call the runner safe. Here is that rule:

Rule 8.6 WHEN SLIDING is OPTIONAL – AVOIDING COLLISIONS also states:

If in the umpire's judgment, a runner misses a base to avoid a collision, the runner will not be called out.

The moral of this story is that the onus is on the runner to avoid collisions. If you do, you may be called safe if the fielder bobbles. If you don't you will be called out whether he bobbles or not and you may get another out called on a potential double play.

D1RF-34 Double Force out at Home.

With 1 out and a man on first, the batter hits a line drive to the RF fence that goes over the Right Center fielder's head at the last second. The runner on first was tagging up so he gets a late start from 1B. The batter runner was running full blast and is directly behind the lead runner as they circle the bases. The coach sends the lead runner home as he rounds 3B and the batter-runner follows him home. The throw comes in to an infielder and the relay to home is in time to get the lead runner with the Batter-Runner right behind him **and past the commitment line**. The umpire calls the lead runner out and the Batter-Runner safe since the catcher touched the plate and then came off the plate and didn't retouch before the batter runner crossed the scoring plate. Time out was called and the umpires huddled to ensure they had the right ruling. After a short discussion, the umpires called over the rules coordinator (who was playing) because they were unsure of the correct ruling. The rules coordinator confirmed that they should call both runners out.

Any player past the commitment line is out when the catcher touches home plate before they touch the scoring plate. It applies to every runner past the commitment line. There is no rule saying the catcher must retouch for each independent runner.

This is the right way to handle a disputed rules call. If both umpires are unsure of the rule governing a play, they can query any board member present or the rules coordinator to ensure they have the play called correctly by the rules. If the original call was not consistent with the rules, they can overturn it. That is what happened here.

D1RF-33 Verbal Interference or Verbal Obstruction.

With a man on 1B and 2 out, the batter hits a line drive to the outfield. The runner heads for 3B and as the fielder bobbles the ball, the coach waves him home. The runner approaches home and the catcher tells the runner to ease up and the runner obliges, slowing down as he approaches the scoring plate. Then the catcher realizes that the SS had gotten the ball and was firing home. The ball beats the runner, the catcher tags the strike mat before the runner hits the alternate home plate, and is called out. The runner argues for an obstruction call.

The catcher was being polite and misjudged what was happening in the field. In some cases, being confused by the opposing players is simply gamesmanship. In extreme cases, it might even be unsportsmanlike, but it is not verbal obstruction. Here are some similarly confusing plays:

1. A SS that acts nonchalant as the ball comes in from an outfielder to dupe the runner into thinking there is not a good throw coming in behind him.
2. An outfielder that screams "I've got it" on a bloop hit that he has no chance of catching to dupe the runner on 1B into thinking he will catch it and returning to 1B.
3. The batter hits a pop fly to the middle of the infield. The runner on 2B yells "I've got it" as the shortstop and second baseman converge to catch the ball.

Verbal interference is an act of the offensive team that might confuse the fielders of the defensive team. *Verbal obstruction* is an act of the defensive team that might confuse the runners or batters of the offensive team. Usually, verbal interference or obstruction occur when a player **loudly interferes with the umpire's call of a play**. Here are the pertinent SSUSA rules:

SSUSA Rule 1.45 Interference

Interference is the act of an offensive player or team member that impedes or confuses a defensive player attempting to execute a play.

SSUSA Rule 1.48 Obstruction

Obstruction is the act of a fielder who is not in possession of the ball nor in the act of fielding a batted ball who impedes the progress of a runner or batter-runner who is legally running the bases.

ASA Rule Supplement 33.

Interference may be the form of physical contact, verbal distraction or any type of distraction which would hinder the fielder in the execution of the play.

Here are some examples of verbal obstruction:

1. A catcher yells "foul ball" on a ball that the umpire has pointed fair (a fair ball is not "called"). If the runner stops, the umpire should call a dead ball and then award bases. Base awards of runners and batter-runner are at the discretion of the umpire. If the runner ignored the catcher's call of foul, the umpire could call a delayed dead ball and award further bases after the play completes.
2. A third baseman yells "infield fly" on a ball that is not called an infield fly by the umpires. The umpire should call a delayed dead ball and if the ball is caught, call an out, return all other runners safely. If the ball is not caught, call verbal obstruction and award all runners one base. Issue a warning to the third baseman.
3. A third baseman fakes a tag on a runner approaching third base to get him to slide or stop when there is no ball approaching. (With or without saying something, this act is obstruction.)

Here are some examples of verbal interference:

4. A third base coach yells "infield fly" on a ball that has not yet been called an infield fly by the umpires. The umpire should wait for the play to finish and after time is out, award all runners one base, or play it as though it was called an infield fly with only the batter-runner called out, whichever is worse for the offensive team.
5. A base coach calls "illegal" as the ball is in the air and the batter does not swing. If it is a ball, the umpire should call it a ball and warn the offensive team. If it hits the strike mat and the umpire clearly thought it was an illegal pitch, he should call it a ball. If he thought it was borderline illegal, he could call it a strike and warn the offensive team for verbal interference.

In all such instances of verbal interference or verbal obstruction, umpire judgment will come into play. Was it loud enough to make a difference? Did it possibly impact the play? Was it interfering with the umpire enforcing the rules of the game?

D1RF-32 Obstruction.

With one out and a man on 1B the batter hits a sharp ground ball to the right side of 2b. The midfielder stops the ball and the ball dribbles in front of him. The midfielder and shortstop both move to pick up the ball and the SS who is covering 2B picks up the ball and touches 2B. The runner from 1B sees the play unfold right in front of him and runs directly to 2B standing up as the ball rolls free in front of him. After stopping the ball the midfielder is moving forward to pick it up and make a play at 2B. The runner and mid-fielder both try to avoid colliding at the last minute and the umpire sees "incidental contact." The 2B umpire was positioned well, sees the SS control the ball and tag the base well before the runner arrives, and calls the runner out at 2B. You can see this play on the D1 YouTube channel [here](#). The play begins at 1:15:50 in the video replay.

The runner and the manager's designee wanted the fielder to be called for obstruction. Their argument was that the runner could have made it safely to 2B had the mid-fielder not "obstructed his base path" after he muffed the ball.

SSUSA Rule 1.48 Obstruction

Obstruction is the act of a fielder who is not in possession of the ball nor in the act of fielding a batted ball who impedes the progress of a runner or batter-runner who is legally running the bases.

The umpire listened to the offensive team's protest and explained that in his judgment, the fielder was in the act of fielding a batted ball (even after he muffed it) and it was the runner's responsibility to avoid collision.

The runner could have slid into 2B but he did not. He also did not veer to avoid a collision. Had he veered to and missed the bag, he may have been called safe by the umpire had he beaten the throw. Since he did not veer and the fielder has the right of way in fielding a batted ball, there is no justification for obstruction.

D1RF-31 Batter on Base when it is His Turn to bat.

With two out there are men on 1B and 2B. The runner on 2B was a courtesy runner for an earlier batter who made it safely to 1B. The pitcher realizes the batter on 2B is the on deck batter in the batting order so they walk the next batter to load the bases. The next batter in the order is now standing on 3B. What does the umpire do in this situation?

SSUSA Rule 8.5 (4) Courtesy Runner Coming to Bat While on Base

A courtesy runner on base when it is his turn to bat will be declared out. The runner will be removed from the base and a second courtesy runner cannot be substituted. The courtesy runner called out does not lose his turn at bat. The out occurs at the base the courtesy runner abandons to take his required turn at bat, unless it is the third out; and the courtesy runner retired for the third out will become the first batter of the team's next half-inning at bat.

With two out, the man on 3B is out and the inning is over. He would then lead off the next inning since he was declared out as a courtesy runner. Had there been less than 2 out, the other runners would remain at their bases and the retired runner comes to the plate to take his turn at bat.

D1RF-30 Interference.

It is a very windy morning. With a runner on 2B and two outs, the batter hits a high pop fly to the left side of the infield. The runner on 2B heads to 3B. The third baseman calls that he has the ball and moves forward into the runner's path. The runner slows to avoid contact but the fielder collides with the runner as he makes an attempt to catch the ball. The ball falls in front of both players and the runner reaches 3B safely.

The fielding team argues that the runner should be called out for interference. The fielder has the right of way to field the ball and the runner did not avoid the collision. The third baseman was making an attempt to field a pop fly and colliding with the runner impeded him from getting to the ball.

The umpires felt that the runner tried to avoid a collision, but the 3rd baseman's arm or shoulder hit the runner as the third baseman ran into him. Additionally, the umpires did not think the 3rd baseman had a good chance of making the play in the wind. So they felt the contact was "incidental" as the third baseman ran into the runner and was not going to catch the ball.

SSUSA Rule 1.45 Interference states: Interference is the act of an offensive player or team member that impedes or confuses a defensive player attempting to execute a play. **A base runner must avoid a fielder making a play.**

Interference is a judgment call. An umpire must judge whether the fielder has a play on the ball, when he had a play on the ball, and whether the runner reasonably avoided the fielder. Here is an MLB play that explains a tough interference call. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W2tHkfugJNw> This isn't the situation we had with pop-fly in the wind, but the governing rules are similar. The umpires in this MLB YouTube video appear to have gotten the call wrong (my judgment and the commentators, with the benefit of a replay). Nevertheless, it is a good example of how quick and uncertain such plays can be. If the runner had contacted the fielder a half second quicker or a half second later, the call may have been more obvious. Interference and obstruction can be complicated by human to human interaction.

When a runner and a fielder collide as the fielder is making a play on a ball, interference is the default call. Had the umpires called interference in this situation, there would have likely been little argument. However, if the umpire's judgment is that the contact would not have affected the outcome, or the fielder was responsible for contact where no play was possible, they can withhold an interference call, or even call obstruction on the fielder.

D1RF-29 Passing a preceding runner.

With a runner on 1B and no outs, the batter hits a very high fly ball into right field. The fielders were playing deep and the runner on 1B tags up. The batter is an aggressive runner who digs out of the box full speed knowing that if it does drop, he is going to try and get to 2B. The home umpire is watching for the tag up as the play unfolds. The ball falls untouched and the plate umpire sees that the aggressive batter-runner, who took a wider path toward 2B had just passed the lead runner on 1B by a few feet, quickly stopped, and let the runner on 1B lead him to 2B. After the ball drops, the lead runner continues to 3B and the batter-runner stops at 2B. The umpire was not quite sure of the rule and made no call.

After time out was called, the plate umpire calls over the base umpire to tell him what he saw. The base umpire convinces the plate umpire that he did not think that the batter-runner passed the lead runner on 1B. They decide to make no call. Both runners are safe.

This is a rare call but entirely possible in the situation described above. SSUSA Rule 9.2 states "The ball remains in play when a base runner is called out for passing a preceding runner." The umpire should have called the batter-runner out immediately for passing the preceding runner and let play continue. The lead runner can still advance.

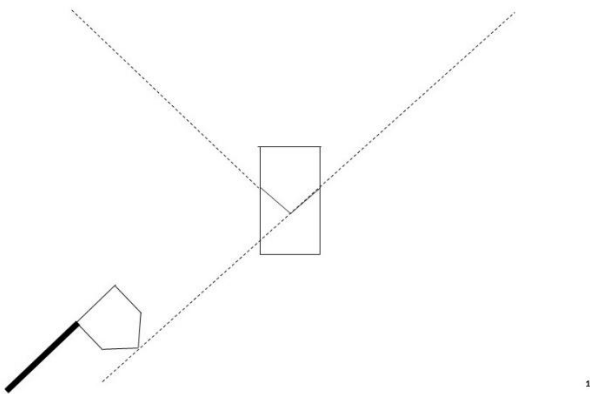
After the play ended, the plate umpire could have consulted with the base umpire to confirm what he saw. He may have reversed his call with a compelling perspective from the base umpire as he heard in this case. However, this is the plate umpire's call. He has a very clear perspective. The base umpire would be in poor position and concerned with whether a catch was made in the outfield. It would be difficult for him to confirm or deny a judgment call that the plate umpire sees clearly.

You can actually see this play on the D1 You-tube channel [here](#). The at-bat starts at 43:30 and the play in question happens at 43:40. Note the great view of the plate umpire and the tough view of the base umpire.

D1RF-28 Drawing the Scoring line.

Occasionally, when the scoring home plate is slippery/wet and a potential safety issue, our umpires will draw a scoring line that runners must pass. How do you correctly draw this line?

Umpires should scratch a line in the dirt that starts from the upper left corner of the scoring plate and runs parallel to the first base line.



Here is the governing rule:
SSUSA Batter's Box Official Dimensions, Page 86

D1RF-27 What does 6-12 feet really mean for pitch height?.

Here is a question from the D1 certification exam:

For a legal low pitch, just the top of the ball must be above 6 feet and for a legal high pitch the top of the ball must be below 12 feet.

- i. True
- ii. False

The correct answer is True. The ball does not need to be entirely above 6 feet. It just needs to partially break the 6 foot height. You will often hear an umpire say: "the pitch was not above the top of the screen" when questioned about calling an illegally low pitch. Well, most pitching screens are 6 foot 3 inches. So that top-of-the-screen benchmark is not exactly right. Be careful how you use it

In Senior Softball-USA (SSUSA), a legal pitch must have its highest point between **6 and 12 feet** above the ground; it's not about the entire ball being within that range, but its peak height, with the umpire calling it illegal if it's too low or too high in the air. The ball must reach at least 6 feet and not exceed 12 feet at its

apex, meaning some portion (often the bottom) needs to meet these height requirements, ensuring a perceptible arc for safety and playability.

Recognize that none of us can precisely judge these heights on every pitch. There is always some uncertainty. The 6' and 12' heights are subjective judgments and every umpire will have a slightly different perspective on every pitch. Batters want 7' to 11' and pitchers want 5' to 13'. Whatever you as the umpire calls as 6' to 12' **is the strike zone**. As long as you are consistent, players can adjust and pitchers can adjust.

One of the hardest judgments for a plate umpire is an illegally low pitch call. You need to make that call quickly to be useful to a batter. So be prepared to make the "Illegal" or "Too Low" call on the start of every pitch. If not too low, you have more time to judge that the ball might be "Too High."

Practice making those calls when watching a game from behind the backstop. It is a pretty similar view.

D1RF-26 Tagging a runner after a Force Out.

With 1 out and a runner on 1B and 2B, the batter hits a solid ground ball right at the mid-fielder. The runner on 2B waits for the ball to pass and heads off the base toward 3B only a step or two. The mid-fielder fields the ball cleanly steps on 2B and calls "time." The runner on 2B comes back and retouches 2B. All play stops, even though no umpire called time. The mid-fielder then tags the runner who is now back on 2B and the umpires call a DP with the runner at 1B forced out and the runner at 2B tagged out.

Was this the right call?

No. Once the mid-fielder touched 2B and forced out the runner from 1B, the runner on 2B has the right to return to 2B. If he was standing on the bag when he was tagged, he is safe. What the mid-fielder should have done was tag the runner before he retouched 2B, then he would have been out for a DP.

This is similar to another situation that frequently arises. Bases loaded and the batter hits a sharp ground ball to 3B. If the runner does not leave the bag, the third baseman must tag the runner before touching the bag to register a DP. If he tags the bag and then the runner standing on 3B, the runner is safe.

D1RF-25 Scoring conflict.

There was a confusing situation in the semi-finals of the Fall 2024 playoffs.

In the open inning, the visiting team came up trailing 16-3. After a strong run, they found themselves behind 16-15 with 2 outs and a runner on 1B. After the plate umpire asked the scorekeeper to double check the current score, the scorekeeper confirmed that he had it at 16-15. The home team manager asked who led off the inning and after identifying the actual leadoff batter, he determined that 14 players had batted. With 2 outs and 1 runner on, only 11 runners could have scored. Therefore he asserted that the score should be 16-14. The scorekeeper checked the scorebook with the visiting manager to confirm and no error was found. The opposing manager stood firm that there must be an error. The umpire went back to the scorer's booth and this time they did find an error. The leadoff batter was credited with a run scored where everyone agreed he had popped out to leadoff the inning. After correcting the score to 16-14, the next batter made an out and the game was over.

The plate umpire was calm and patient throughout and worked with both managers and the scorekeeper to make sure everyone understood exactly what happened. The managers of both teams calmly debated the discrepancy in the score and stayed composed during the confusion. They set a good example for their teams and both sides of players remained patient. It took about 10 minutes to resolve but in the end, the umpire/scoring team got it right and there was no adversarial escalation.

What should an umpire do in such situations?

In a sportsmanlike way, let both managers advocate for what they thought was right. You can even take both managers up to the scorer's booth if necessary where you can walk through the book and get things right. The scorer's book is the best reference and the scorer/umpire are the independent arbiters.

D1RF-24 An unseen tag.

With 1 out and a runner on 1B, the batter hits a solid line drive pretty deep to left center. The runner on 1B attempts to make it from 1B to 3B on the hit. The left-center fielder fields the ball cleanly and makes a strong throw to 3B. The home plate umpire has moved half way up the line toward 3B and is in good position to see the pending play at third. The throw comes in ahead of the runner, the third baseman fields it cleanly and swipes down at the extended arm of the runner who makes a well-executed head-first slide into 3B. The plate umpire sees the ball beat the runner in a nicely executed defensive play and calls the runner out.

The runner and 3B coach explode in protest saying the fielder missed the tag. The plate umpire now realizes that he didn't actually see the physical tag and maybe the fielder's swipe tag did not touch the runner. As the third baseman turned and knelt to make the tag, his view of the physical contact between the fielder's glove and the player's arm was blocked by the third baseman's body. He wasn't unsure of the call when he made it, but with a loud protest, he now questioned his own call and immediately called over the base umpire who might have had a clear view of whether a tag was made. Unfortunately, the base umpire could offer no help as he was blocked by some other fielder. With no evidence to turn around his call, the plate umpire stuck with his original call. The runner was out. More strong protest followed and then play continued.

Sticking with his original call was good decision by the plate umpire.

He was looking for evidence to overturn his call. He thought he possibly had it wrong because he didn't see the actual tag so he asked for help. If the base umpire told him the fielder clearly missed the tag, it was easy to reverse his out call. If the base umpire told him he saw a tag, it was easy to confirm his out call. But the base umpire told the plate umpire he didn't see evidence either way. Now the plate umpire has a dilemma.

1. Should he reverse his call since he did not see a physical tag and the base ump did not see a physical tag? You shouldn't call an out unless you see an out.
2. Should he stick with his call? He was in good position and made a call on what he saw.
3. Should he have been more disciplined and made no call, and then immediately ask the base umpire for help?

There is some disagreement among all the handful of umpiring authorities and opinions that we consulted. A case can be made for each of the three options. The strongest support appears to be for approach 2.

This is a situation that every umpire is going to see someday. You make a judgment call. One side sees at as wildly wrong. You question it yourself once you hear the protest and you stick with it because you did the best you could. It won't feel very comforting, but that is the best you can do.

D1RF-23 Warning and Ejecting.

Occasionally, our umpires will face players and managers who sound off too much on a perceived bad call.

[Excerpt from SSUSA Mechanics Manual] HANDLING OF ARGUMENTS AND GAME PROTESTS.

Expulsion is the umpire's last means of punishment and should be used sparingly. It should never be applied unless a player is delaying the game or attempting to draw the crowd or his teammates upon the umpire. Umpires should never hear too much on the field; they should make it a point to hear only what the player intends for him to hear. Treat any protest upon its merits. Avoid any actions that may show up a player and never raise your voice so spectators can hear.

We want our D1 managers to help avoid conflict and de-escalate conflict. The most important advantage in avoiding and de-escalating disputes is to **know the rules**. If you are ignorant of the rules, you are going to infuriate the other side and complicate the resolution. This applies to umpires, managers and players.

Many players want to vent their frustration with a bad call. When a call goes against a player, let them vent **once**, and then tell them to stop. It is a part of the game to protest bad or unfair calls - but only once. Anything further needs to be between the managers and the umpire.

Some suggestions when facing adversity in a disputed call:

1. Listen to the complaints of the players and managers.
2. If the game is delayed by a continuing complainant, warn them and re-start the game. If the complaints continue, then a written warning or ejection is an option.
3. Never eject a player unless it is absolutely necessary to maintain order; or they have violated D1 Rule F3. Ejections get reported to the Villages Recreation department and there are consequences.
4. When an argument results from a rule being misinterpreted (not a judgment call), consult with your partner and if you decide the original decision was an incorrect one, make sure you get it right. Correcting a call will avoid conflicts. Any change in a call should be announced by the umpire that made the original call.
5. In D1, as in most leagues, we want the managers talking through disputes with umpires. If a player is arguing, their manager should immediately take the player aside, calmly ask to understand the issue, ask the players to back off, move away with the umpire, represent the issue, discuss the resolution, and accept the outcome.
6. Poor judgments are part of the game. Only discuss the current issue, previous calls don't matter anymore.
7. Complaints that get personal should immediately result in a verbal warning and if personal attacks continue, a written warning is warranted and required. When issuing a verbal warning, the offender should be told that additional attacks will result in a written warning or ejection (if warranted). There should be little tolerance for personal attacks against any of our volunteers.

For infractions occurring during a D1 game, including the dugout and spectator stand areas, the umpire(s) witnessing the infraction shall have the authority to issue a warning, an ejection and banishment from the facility for the remainder of the day. The umpires have such authority from the time the umpires arrive on the field until they leave the field area after the final out is recorded.

An ejected player is not eligible to play in any subsequent D1 games on that day. Furthermore, the umpire(s) observing the infraction shall file a report with The Villages Recreation Department ("TVRD") with notice to the Board and the player having committed the infraction.

D1RF-22 Controlling the Pace of Play.

The D1 board recently discussed a new policy to allow infield practice between innings. Throwing infield balls was previously disallowed by policy to help improve the pace of play. The board unanimously approved a new policy [Do we have anything written in our rules that we should reference?]. Infielders are now allowed to take practice balls from the first baseman between innings.

D1 Umpires, along with managers, have the responsibility for controlling the pace of play.

Here are some umpire mechanics suggestions for controlling the pace of play.

1. Be at the field 15 minutes before game time.
2. Start the game on time as best you can. If you are umping an early game, you should start at 9am. If you are umping a 10:30 game and waiting on subs or umpires from the early game, figure out who you need to start the game and get the teams prepared to start as soon as possible.
3. [SSUSA 6.12] At the beginning of each half-inning, or when a pitcher relieves another, not more than one minute may be used to deliver not more than three warm-up pitches. The "beginning" of each half inning means that the team is on the field and the pitcher has arrived at the mound.
4. If pitchers lolligag out to the field or fiddle around with the pitching screen unnecessarily, the umpire can call the batter into the box, cut off the number of practice pitches, and start the inning by calling "Play."
5. [SSUSA 6.12] For excessive warm-up pitches, a pitcher shall be penalized by awarding a ball to the batter for each pitch. This does not apply if the umpire delays the start of play due to substitution, conference, injuries, etc.
6. If players lolligag out to the field, the umpire can cut off infield practice by calling "balls in."
7. If players repeatedly lolligag out to the field, the umpire should warn the manager and ask for players to respect a quicker pace of play. If that warning is ignored, the umpire can call "play" and then call a ball for each 10 second period that it takes the fielders to get into position. [SSUSA 6.6] The pitcher has ten seconds to release the next pitch after receiving the ball, or after the umpire indicates "play ball."

Umpires have the authority to control the pace of play and everyone appreciates a collegially managed pace.

D1RF-21 Tagging a base for a force out.

At the 2024 SSUSA World Championships in Las Vegas, we experienced the following.

With one out and a man on 1B, the batter hits a ball to the SS who throws to the Mid-fielder covering 2B for a possible double play. The mid-fielder bobbles the ball and it falls to the ground where he controls the ball with his bare hand and tags the base with his empty glove. The umpire calls the runner safe saying that touching the bag with your empty glove is not a legal tag of a base. An argument ensued, but the umpire did not budge on the call. His explanation was that you must make a force-out with your foot or with the ball. The call was later confirmed by the umpire with the tournament umpire official. They both had this call wrong.

Here are the governing rules.

- There is no definitive rule in the SSUSA rule book that says you can only touch a base in a specific way.
- USA Softball Rule 8 Section 7C.
 - *The batter is out when, on a force play, a fielder contacts the base while holding the ball.*
- Under Official Baseball Rules 2.00 A TAG is the action of a fielder in **touching a base with his body while holding the ball securely and firmly in his hand or glove**; or touching a runner with the ball, or with his hand or glove holding the ball, while holding the ball securely and firmly in his hand or glove.

Here are a few situations where I doubt you would see an umpire call a runner safe because he wasn't touching the base with his foot.

1. A first baseman goes down on the white bag with his knee as he fields a tough short-hop.
2. A second baseman falls down and sits on 2B as he catches a ball from the SS.
3. A second baseman falls down, catches the ball in his glove and touches the bag with his bare hand.

These situations are all legal force outs. A fielder has control of the ball and touches the bag with some part of his body.

D1RF-20 Crossing the Commitment line.

On a hit to the outfield, a runner rounds 3B and heads home. The throw comes into the catcher in time but off-line and the catcher moves away from the plate to catch the ball. The runner sees that the throw may beat him and stops with one foot past the commitment line. With the catcher away from the plate the runner tries to lure him over to tag him. When the catcher makes no move either way, the runner heads to the scoring plate and scores easily with no play. The umpire called the runner safe and the run counted. Debates ensued from both teams.

One side was arguing that the runner crossed the commitment line and then recrossed it to head back to 3B. If the umpire saw that, the runner should have been declared out and the ball would remain live. The umpire judged that the runner was straddling the commitment line and never made an attempt to return to 3B and therefore he rightly called the runner safe and the run counts.

Here is the governing rule:

SSUSA 8.8 Once a runner's foot touches the ground on or past the commitment line, the runner is committed to advancing to the scoring line or scoring plate. Once both of his feet have touched or crossed the line, he may no longer be tagged out. Effect: If tagged once both feet have touched/crossed the line, the runner will be called safe, the ball remains live and the runner is not required to touch the scoring plate or cross the scoring line. NOTE: If a runner re-crosses the commitment line for any reason in an attempt to return to 3B, he will be declared out and the ball will remain live.

D1RF-19 Illegal Courtesy Runner.

With nobody out, a batter reaches 1B safely. After time-out is called the runner calls for a courtesy runner and starts walking to the dugout. The first base coach says "I will do it" and steps toward the bag. The team manager and other team members discuss the choice of the courtesy runner and select a different runner. As the team's chosen courtesy runner heads for 1B, the base umpire sees the 1B coach step off the bag and back to the coaching box. After the chosen runner gets to 1B, the pitcher tells the plate umpire that the courtesy runner is illegal because another potential runner had already touched 1B. The plate umpire says "I didn't see that" and calls the base umpire in to discuss. The base umpire confirms that he saw a runner touch 1B before

the chosen runner was announced and subsequently touched 1B. After some discussion on the right penalty, the umpires called the courtesy runner out.

This is the correct call. This call involves two SSUSA rules, 8.5(5) and 8.5(3). 8.5(5) says that a courtesy runner is in the game when he touches a base. 8.5(3) says a courtesy runner cannot be replaced by another courtesy runner unless the first courtesy runner is injured and cannot continue.

SSUSA 8.5(5) also states that *An illegal courtesy runner on base is committing a continuing violation and may be called out upon appeal at any time while on base or, if he scores, prior to the pitch to the next batter.*

D1RF-18 Bare-handed control of the ball

With a man on 1B and 1 out, the batter hits a ground ball to shortstop. The shortstop fields the ball and makes a throw to the midfielder who drops the ball. The ball rolls 5 or 6 feet away from the bag. With his foot still touching 2B and the runner approaching, he stretches out on the ground, grasps the softball on the ground and securely grips the ball with his whole hand before the runner hit the bag. The bottom of the ball was never off the ground. The umpire called the runner out. The player's manager argued that "The ball was still touching the ground when the runner got to the bag so he should be safe." The umpire affirmed his call and stated that the fielder had control. Was this the right call?

Catching a thrown ball doesn't have the same definition and requirements of catching a batted ball for an out. If the ball is touching the ground at some point while a fielder tries to glove a thrown ball, it doesn't necessarily mean that the fielder won't subsequently demonstrate possession and control. This play requires the rule book definition of "a tag", and not "a catch". A good tag requires that the fielder be holding the ball "securely and firmly in the hand or glove" and touches the runner, or the bag in the case of a force out.

If the fielder raised the ball from the ground then the umpire would easily see that it was "securely and firmly held." If the fielder grabs the ball against the ground and does not raise it off the ground, the umpire's judgment is much more difficult and most umpires will not judge it to be securely and firmly held in the hand.

This is a judgment call. The umpire judged that the fielder had control of the ball and it was a good tag. There is no rule stating that the ball must be raised off the ground in a tag.

Word to the wise: if you are a fielder confronted with a bare hand grab of a ball on the ground, pick it up and show the ball. It will greatly increase the chance of the umpire making an out call.

D1RF-17 Throwing a Bat or other Equipment

Here are three situations that have occurred in the last few years in senior softball games.

1. A batter hits a ground ball up the middle and in rushing to take off toward 1B, unintentionally flips the bat behind him in a way that endangers the umpire and/or the catcher.
2. A batter hits a weak fly ball to right field and on the way down to 1B, he intentionally flips the bat in frustration toward the dugout.
3. A batter with 2 strikes hits a weak foul tip caught by the catcher. In frustration, the batter slams the bat to the ground in a way that it rebounds backwards and hits the umpire or the catcher.
4. A batter, disappointed with their at-bat, tosses his bat with force near the on-deck batter and it bounces off the fence in front of the fans.

What should the umpire do? Warn the player? Eject the player?

The D1 rules are purposely open-ended with regards to unsportsmanlike conduct. We don't list all the examples of such conduct because there are many possibilities and degrees of unsafe behavior. Like many other calls, we leave it up to the umpire's judgment. Here is the governing D1 Rule:

D1 Rule F.3. F. WARNINGS AND EJECTIONS

Grounds for warning/ejection/suspension include (but not limited to): unsportsmanlike conduct, profanity, abusive behavior, smoking or alcohol use on field, using an unsafe bat.

A few years ago, D1 rules explicitly stated "intentionally throwing equipment." However, several debates ensued about 1) judging intention, 2) "what is a throw" vs "what is a flip or a toss" and 3) "what is unsafe" vs "what is not." The board decided to simplify the words and capture it all under unsportsmanlike conduct. Throwing a bat (or other equipment) can be unsportsmanlike conduct and we leave it up to the umpire to judge whether the situation deserves a verbal or written warning, or an ejection.

In situations 1-3 listed above, the default recommendation would be that the player should be verbally warned and possibly receive a written warning if the flip/toss was intentional and with sufficient force to possibly cause injury. If the initial behavior was sufficiently flagrant, the umpire does have the authority to eject immediately. For example, consider situation 2 or 3 listed above. If the action could have seriously injured a player or volunteer, or the player also loudly verbalized an obscenity, the Umpire could eject immediately. The degree of unsportsmanlike conduct is a judgment left up to the umpire(s) and is not appealable. In situation 4 above, where a person's safety was jeopardized, the default guidance is a written warning and the umpires should consult to discuss an ejection.

D1RF-16 Batter-Runner gets hit with his own pop-fly.

Just when you thought you had seen everything...

With 1 out and a runner on 1B, in the late innings of a close game, the batter hits a short pop-up between home and first near the foul line. The first baseman, catcher and pitcher all converge to make the play. The batter-runner does not see where the ball is headed, but seeing three fielders converging on him, stops and ducks in foul territory. The ball hits him on the head in the running lane about half way down the first base line and goes into fair territory. The pitcher had his glove close to the batter-runner's head and had a chance to catch it. The fielding team grabs the deflected ball in fair territory and touches both 2B and 1B before the runners. The umpires called it a foul ball since it hit the runner while the ball and the runner were still in foul territory.

The fielding team wanted interference and the pitcher claimed that the ball deflected off his glove when his elbow collided with the runner's head. The umpires met and judged that the batter-runner, being surrounded, did all he could to safely avoid a collision and decided there was no interference. The call was upheld as a foul ball.

This is a judgment call.

Had the batter-runner been close to fair territory when a fair batted ball hit him, he should have been declared out. Rule 8.3.F states:

Batter-runner is out when he makes contact with a fair batted ball before reaching 1B. The ball is dead and all runners are returned to the base occupied at the time of the pitch.

A runner can be called out for interference, whether he sees the ball or not, whether the ball is fair or foul, and whether there is a collision or not. The ball had not yet landed in foul territory, so it was a live fieldable ball. Interference may be in the form of physical contact, verbal distraction, visual distraction, or any other action that would hinder the fielder in the execution of the play. Defensive players must be given the opportunity to field the ball anywhere on the playing field.

In this case, the umpires judged that the runner did not interfere, and was safely avoiding a collision with fielders. Intent does not matter, but it is still a judgment call.

D1RF-15 Runner deflects ball in a rundown.

With men on 1B and 2B, the lead runner is caught in a run-down between 2B and 3B. The fielder throws the ball over the runner's shoulder close to his head. The umpire sees the runner catch the ball with his hand and deflect it to the ground. The umpire called him out for interference. The runner claimed he deflected the ball with his hand and had the right to protect himself and just threw up his arm/hand in self-defense.

The umpire's judgment was that the runner did not make enough of an effort to move out of the way. He judged that the runner interfered by touching the ball with his hand.

SSUSA Rule 1.45 defines interference as an act by an offensive player or team member that impedes or confuses a defensive player from attempting to execute a play. This is a judgment call by the umpire.

Had the runner ducked or veered rather than throw up his hand, the umpire might have judged the runner's act to be self-defense caused by a poor throw. The umpire would still have to judge whether it was the runner's action (interference), or a poor throw that caused the ball to hit the ground. Either way, the umpire's judgment governs the outcome. It is sometimes a very tough call where a conversation with your partner can help.

D1RF-14 Intentional walk of a protected batter?

This situation happened in the Winter 2024 playoff semi-finals.

In a close game, runners are on 2B and 3B with one out in the 7th inning. A protected batter who was walked in the 1st inning comes to the plate. The defensive team waves him to 1B with an intentional walk. The protected batter heads to 1B and now the bases are loaded.

Nobody on either team and none of the umpires say anything and the game continues. After the game, the umpire is confronted by one of the players who asks why the protected batter was not awarded a ground rule double? Good question!

Whose responsibility is this? While umpires are responsible for enforcing the rules, they are not responsible for keeping track of who is protected and whether they were walked previously. Similarly, umpires are not responsible for keeping track of how many times each player has run as a courtesy runner. These

responsibilities are on the managers and scorekeepers. If a protected batter who had previously walked, is intentionally walked or walked on 4 pitches, the scorekeeper or manager should announce to the umpire that a ground-rule double is warranted before the next pitch is thrown. If not, the standard walk, with the protected batter taking 1B will stand.

D1RF-13 Does the Run Count?

This situation happened in the Winter 2024 playoff finals.

Runners are on 1B and 3B with one out when the batter hits a shallow fly ball that is caught by a diving leftfielder. The runner at 3B tags but the runner at 1B did not tag up and is close to 2B when the catch is made. The defense returns the ball to the infield and tags 1B on a live-ball appeal after the runner from 3B has scored. The umpire rules that the run does not score. A few players challenge the call but the plate umpire maintains that the run does not score. There is no further appeal and the game continues.

How should the umpires have ruled?

SSUSA Rule 5.7.B States

1. No run shall be scored when a batter-runner is called out before reaching 1B or any other runner is called out on a force out caused by the batter becoming a runner.
2. No run shall be scored when a live ball appeal play happens **prior** to the lead runner touching the scoring plate.

The batter was called out on the catch. When the runner on 1B returns to 1B because he did not tag up, it is not a force out. The run should have scored because the runner who tagged up from 3B hit the scoring plate **prior** to the live ball appeal at 1B retired the runner from 1B. This is the definition of a "timing play."

A few other observations from this incident.

1. Four umpires, 2 managers and 22 players let this play stand.
 2. A proper appeal should be made by managers if they disagree with a ruling.
 3. Only Managers should be debating any ruling with the umpire crew and only they can escalate an in-game protest to a board member.
-

D1RF-12 Sliding into 1B.

With 2 out and a man on 2B, the batter hits a ground ball into the hole at SS. The SS fields the ball cleanly and throws to 1B pulling the first baseman off the bag toward home plate and into foul ground. The batter-runner was running hard since it was likely to be a close play and sees the first baseman move toward him to field the off-line throw. The batter-runner starts to veer about 6 feet from the orange safety bag and goes to the ground as he barely touches the orange bag with his foot. The first baseman tags the runner in the head after he hits the bag as he is "sliding" past him to the ground. The pitcher and first baseman demand the umpire call the runner out for sliding into 1B. As they protest that "In D1, you can never slide into 1B," the initial runner on 2B who advanced to 3B on the throw, scores. A relatively calm conversation among umpires and players follows and a player asks for escalation of the ruling to a board member. The umpires rule that the runner is safe at 1B because he was avoiding a collision. And the run scores because nobody called time out and it was still a live ball.

How should the umpires have ruled?

D1 Rule E.14 states: *14. Safety Base: When there is a play on him at 1B, the batter-runner must touch only the orange safety base at 1B; out if any part of white base is touched unless judged by the umpire to be avoiding a collision. Once he has reached 1B safely, a runner and fielder may touch either bag.*

The wording of this D1 rule is to allow the batter-runner to veer and avoid a collision (without risk of being called out) when an errant throw takes the defensive player onto the orange bag. The defense must still touch some part of the white bag and cannot use only the orange bag. Our rule allows for the batter-runner to completely miss the bag when avoiding a collision as long as he does not intentionally slide.

D1 Rule E.15 adds: *15. Sliding: Intentional sliding into the orange safety base at 1B or scoring plate at home will be called out.*

These D1 rules are different than SSUSA Rule 8.6 which states that: *Sliding or diving into 1B or the scoring plate is permitted only to avoid a collision with a defensive player. This is an umpire's judgment and not subject to protest or appeal.*

The umpire was within the rules to judge the batter-runner safe. The runner should veer to avoid a collision and he fulfilled that obligation. In the umpire's judgment, the batter-runner went to the ground to safely avoid a collision and was not attempting a slide to safely attain the base or avoid a tag. Umpires must judge if there was an intent to slide or if a batter-runner tripped or stumbled because he was an off-balanced elder trying to avoid a collision.

In D1, the rules forbid an **intentional** slide into 1B or the scoring plate to ensure safety of the fielders. In this situation, the defense had reason to challenge the umpire's judgment call. Although the D1 rule is slightly different than SSUSA rules it has the same safety purpose. The umpire's judgment was that the "apparent slide" was unintentional and the runner went to the ground to avoid a collision, not to avoid a tag.

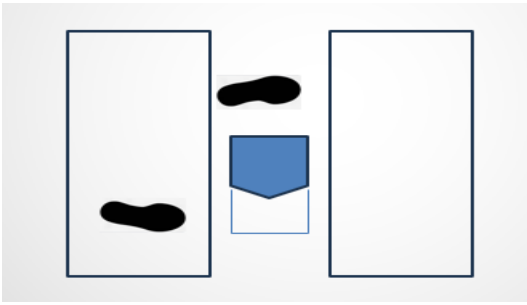
The umpire's judgment on this is the bottom line. If the runner is making an effort to avoid a collision, he should get the benefit of the doubt. *We also don't want to create a situation where the defense might benefit from an erroneous throw.*

A few other observations from this incident.

1. Players and umpires should wait until the ball is dead before discussing a potentially disputed call.
2. A proper appeal should be made by managers if they disagree with a ruling. Managers should be the representatives debating any ruling with the umpire crew and only they can escalate a disagreement to a board member.

D1RF-11 Stepping out of the Batter's Box.

A protected batter comes up with the bases loaded and 2 out. The count goes to 2-2. The pitcher throws a ball way outside. The protected batter steps in front of the plate with his forward foot to reach the outside pitch and smacks it to the fence in centerfield. His left (forward) foot was in front of the plate and completely outside the inner batter's box line like the graphic below. The umpire called the batter out, no runs score and the inning was over.



SSUSA Rule 7.3.A states that: *The batter must have at least some portion of both feet on or inside the lines of the batter's box. A batter who steps out of the batter's box and hits the ball, fair or foul, shall be called out. The ball is dead and the runners cannot advance.*

The umpire was correct to call the batter out.

D1RF-10 Pitcher Presenting the Ball.

A manager questioned a pitcher's presentation and pause. The umpire judged that the pitcher wasn't doing anything to fool the batter, or to quick pitch the batter. The manager emphasized the need for the pitcher to stop and pause one second while touching the pitcher's plate before starting his motion. What is the rule?

SSUSA 6.4.C states that *The Pitcher must come to a full and complete stop with the ball in front of the body. The front of the body must face the batter. The position must be maintained at least one second before starting the pitch.*

This is a judgment call. If the umpire judges that the pitcher is presenting the ball adequately, and not trying to pitch to the batter before he is ready, that is his prerogative. One second is simply a benchmark for a "full pause." Nobody needs a stopwatch. However, in D1 rules, the pitcher must be touching the pitcher's plate when he pauses and presents the ball.

When confronted with this complaint, the umpire can simply restate the rule for both pitcher and manager. A rule clarification for both sides usually de-escalates the dispute. Furthermore, if batters are uncomfortable, they can always call for time until they are set in the batter's box.

A few years back, I saw this same complaint in a tournament with a manager demanding that the pitcher stop for at least a full second. The pitcher started to deliberately pause for over 3 seconds like a statue and then pitched. Guess what? The opposing manager started screaming bloody murder again and the batters started stepping out of the box. The pitcher was well within the rules (he has 10 seconds between each pitch), but everyone was now off-balance.

Pitchers need a rhythm. Whether the actual pause is half a second, one second or longer, the umpire's main obligation is to ensure the batter is ready and not quick-pitched.

D1RF-9 Infielder intentionally dropping a line drive for a double play.

With a runner on 1B and nobody out, the batter hits a sharp line drive at the midfielder. The plate umpire is shielded by the screen and pitcher but sees the ball dropped and not caught. The base umpire happens to be

positioned behind the midfielder and only sees that he didn't catch the ball. The midfielder picks up the ball, steps on 2B and throws the batter runner out at first. The base umpire calls a double play and the midfielder grins from ear to ear. The team at bat screams bloody murder. What should the call be?

SSUSA 8.3.J states that: *When an infielder intentionally drops a line drive that can be caught with ordinary effort with a runner on 1B (or on 1B, 2B, or on 1B, 2B and 3B) and less than 2 outs, the umpire shall call a dead ball and declare the batter runner out and return other runners to the base they occupied at the time of the pitch.*

SSUSA 1.37 states that: *When an infielder intentionally drops a line drive that can be caught with ordinary effort with a runner on 1B (or on 1B, 2B, or on 1B, 2B and 3B) and less than 2 outs, only one recorded out may be made on the play and the ball is dead. This is a judgment call.*

In the situation described above, the base umpire could have:

- a) judged the midfielder's actions (i.e., dropping the ball) to be completely unintentional, or
- b) judged that the sharply hit ball required extraordinary effort to catch.

Since he was blocked by the midfielder, the base umpire only saw a dropped ball. It would have been wrong to call an intentionally dropped ball when he wasn't in a clear position to see the fielder's actions.

Some skilled players are going to try and "sell" a dropped ball as unintentional. That is part of our game. Judging a player's actions to be intentional or unintentional is not always easy in a senior softball game. This is one call where asking your partner's opinion may be a good idea. Unfortunately, in the scenario above, both umpires were blocked from a clear view.

D1RF-8 Leaving a base before the ball is hit.

With a runner on 1B and nobody out, the batter takes a huge swing and whiffs the ball completely. The runner on 1B heads for 2B when he expected the batter to strike the ball. As the batter follows-through and the runner is now off the base, the base umpire judges that the runner left 1B prior to the ball hitting the ground and calls the runner out for leaving the base early.

Most of us know that if you leave a base before the batter strikes the ball, you are out. Furthermore, it is a dead ball and no pitch. Even if the batter hits the ball over the fence, the runner is called out and all action is nullified. The batter would then have to stay at the plate with the count reset to whatever it was prior to that no pitch call.

But...what is the call if the runner leaves the base when the batter misses the ball and prior to the ball hitting the ground? This is entirely possible if an umpire is looking for it and was the reason that the umpire called the runner out in the initial situation introduced above.

SSUSA Rule 6.13.C states that: *"No Pitch" shall be declared if a runner is called out for leaving his base before the pitched ball reaches home plate, is batted, or touches the ground before reaching home plate.*

SSUSA Rule 9.1.Q states that: *The ball is dead and not in play when a base runner fails to keep contact with his base until the pitched ball has reached home plate.*

"Reaching home plate" does not mean the ball touches home plate on the ground. It means the ball has crossed the plane, whether it was struck or not. USA rules are a little clearer than SSUSA rules on this but they both mean the same thing. **The umpire should not call a runner out for leaving a base early when a**

batter swings and misses. The exception would be if the runner leaves 1B way early (like before the batter starts his swing), an umpire could call him out if he judged that the ball had not reached home plate.

D1RF-7 Is the Strike Mat fair or foul?

Part of the batter's box is in fair territory and the majority of it is in foul territory. When the ball comes to rest or is touched in fair or foul territory depends on where the ball is in relationship to the baseline including home plate. The D1 home plate is painted on the strike mat and the foul lines start at the bottom point of the plate's pentagon. So only the painted home plate pentagon is in fair territory. Right?

This used to be the rule in softball and it is the rule in baseball. But SSUSA changed this rule.

SSUSA Rule 1.23: Fair territory is that part of the playing field within, and including, the first and third base foul lines from home plate to the bottom of the playing field fence and perpendicularly upwards. **(NOTE: Any batted ball first hitting any portion of the strike mat then settling in fair territory is a fair ball. Fair territory includes the strike mat.)**

Since most SSUSA games are played with a strike mat, not a painted home plate, the rule was changed so that the whole strike mat is considered fair, even the part that is in foul ground.

D1RF-6: Catching a Ball.

The batter hits a screaming line drive into right field. The right fielder charges in, makes a shoestring grab, stumbles awkwardly, takes two more flailing steps and does a face plant with the ball coming loose as his glove slams on the ground. The players in the field scream "Great catch!" What should the umpire call?

The answer is "no catch". This is not the NFL. The ground can cause a fumble and taking a couple steps with control of the ball does not matter. A catch is legal when it is caught (by hand or glove) and the **resulting release of the ball is voluntary.**

D1RF-5: Veering at 2B.

With a runner on 1B and nobody out, the batter hits a ground ball up the middle where it is fielded by the middle infielder deep behind 2B. As the SS covers the bag, the middle infielder throws to him in plenty of time to beat the runner who was veering to the outside of 2B to avoid a collision. However, the SS could not handle the ball. After dropping the ball to the ground, the runner attempts to touch 2B, but the SS picks up the ball in time and touches 2B before the runner.

The umpire was positioned well to see the play. In his judgment, the runner would have reached the bag safely (while the fielder was picking up the ball) had he not veered to avoid a collision. This is the right call.

SSUSA RULE 8.6 - AVOIDING COLLISIONS: *Sliding or diving into first base or the scoring line or scoring plate is permitted only to avoid a collision with a defensive player. This is an umpire's judgment call and is not subject to protest or appeal. A player may slide or dive into second or third bases, or when returning to any base. A runner must make every effort to avoid colliding with opposing players while running the bases or*

sliding or diving. If in the umpire's judgment a runner misses a base to avoid a collision, the runner will not be called out.

Under the same scenario, suppose the runner went into the bag standing up and without making an attempt to avoid the collision, he beats the throw. If, in the umpire's judgment, the runner's lack of adjustment to avoid collision caused the fielder to miss the ball, the umpire could call the runner out, AND call the batter runner out for a double play. The decision to call the batter runner out would be a second and separate judgment that the fielder had a possibility of completing the double play.

SSUSA RULE 8.6 - AVOIDING COLLISIONS: *If in the umpire's judgment the runner fails to avoid a collision with a defensive player involved in the play, the ball will be declared dead and that runner called out. All base runners except the batter will be returned to their previous base unless forced to advance. If in the umpire's judgment the runner's collision with the defensive player involved in the play negates a double play, the umpire may award a second out.*

D1RF-4 Ball off Top of Fence

A ball is hit deep down the left field line and strikes the top of the fence first and then bounces up off the fair/foul pole and back onto the field. The left fielder throws the ball in as the runner reaches second base safely. Both teams start making their case. What is the right call?

Any ball that hits the foul pole above the fence is a home run. The foul pole is outside the playing field. By hitting the fair/foul pole, the ball is fair and "over the fence." This situation is no different than hitting the flag pole 10 feet above the fence and bouncing back onto

D1RF-3 Ball out of play in Outfield.

The fields in the Villages are spectacular and it is pretty uncommon for a ball to go out of play. In many different senior leagues who play on less functional fields, there are plenty of live balls that go out of play and the umpire has to judge how many bases to award the runners on base.

Our umpires are lucky they don't have to make these calls, but there is one such situation that will occur in D1 and it has happened already a couple times this year. When a batter slices a ball down the right field line, or left field line, there is a chance that it will roll out of the tractor gates in foul territory near the fair/foul poles. The fielder can also muff the ball and intentionally or unintentionally knock the ball through the open gate. What should be the call on such plays?

SSUSA 8.4 (10) E states that when a fair ball bounces or rolls through a fence or any designated boundary of the playing field, the ball should be called dead and all runners awarded two bases from the last base touched when the ball goes out of play. Whether the ball goes by itself, is intentionally kicked, or is unintentionally kicked, the award is the same: 2 bases from the last base touched.

D1RF-2 Touching Bases Before an Inning Ends.

With two out, bases loaded and a protected batter who has already walked once at the plate, the batter is walked on four straight balls. As the 5th run scores to end the inning, the batter walks back to put his bat back in the bat rack. The opposing manager points out that the batter is out for not touching 1B. The umpire goes over to the batter to speak with him when the opposing manager justifies the out further by saying he is a protected batter and he needed to also touch 2B since in D1 a protected batter walked for the 2nd time is

awarded a ground rule double. The umpire then called the batter out for being out of the baseline. The batter's manager protests and goes to the rulebook to find a good reason. After a few minutes of discussion, the opposing manager backed off his demand for an out and the game proceeded to closure with no issue. In a recreational league like D1, this was a classy move by that manager.

So what is the right way to deal with this situation?

A runner cannot be called out for being out of the baseline unless he is being played upon in a live ball situation. At the moment the base path is established (i.e., when the tag is attempted), the runner cannot veer more than three feet to the left or right of the base path for the purpose of avoiding a tag. (SSUSA Rule 1.3)

A runner should be called out for entering the dugout before fulfilling his obligation to touch a base or bases, or if he grabs his glove and heads out to the field (equivalent of entering the dugout in D1) before touching his bases. SSUSA Rule 8.3.C states:

The batter-runner is out when he fails to advance to first base and enters his team area after a fair batted ball, a base on balls or catcher obstruction.

In D1, "team area" is the dugout. Even though players congregate outside the dugout and the bat rack is outside the dugout, it is not the team area.

So...in this situation, if the batter-runner had entered the dugout or took his glove and went out to the field before he touched 1B, he should be called out (no appeal necessary) and all runners are returned to the base they were on before the award. No run would score because the out at 1B was a force out.

Now suppose the batter-runner touched only 1B, then entered the dugout before fulfilling his obligation to touch 2B for the ground-rule double (D1 rule for a second walk of a protected batter). Now the out is recorded at 2B and the run counts because it is a timing play. The batter would only get credited with a single in the stats.

Lesson for all of us: when you get walked, or when the 5th run scores to end an inning, COMPLETE your obligations in the current half-inning before moving on to the next. It's a team effort, everyone can help avoid conflicts like this one.

D1RF-1 Interference at 3B.

With nobody out and runners at 1B and 2B, the batter hits a slow groundball to the shortstop. The SS fields the ball as the runner passes him and turns to throw to 3B. The SS throws over the runner's shoulder to the third baseman who is outstretched like a first baseman to make a force play. As the runner approaches 3B, he lifts his hands in the air to avoid getting hit and makes incidental contact with the glove of the third baseman. The third baseman could not hold on to the ball (that arrived in time for the force out) and then the runner safely hits the bag standing up. The plate umpire called the runner safe.

The fielding team claimed that the runner interfered with the third baseman. The umpires conferred and agreed there was no interference. This judgment call could have gone either way.

If a runner is not going to slide, the onus is more on him to make some sort of effort to avoid any collision. Since the runner went straight at the fielder on the bag, he was vulnerable to being called out for interference if he made any incidental contact. The third baseman also has a right to field the ball. Incidental contact is not necessarily a collision, but if you don't adjust your path to avoid a potential collision, it easily passes the threshold for an interference call. (see SSUSA Rule 8.6). Throwing up your arms to prevent getting hit in the

head is OK, but if the runner's raised arms hit the fielder's glove, as they did in this case, than the runner has caused interference and can be called out.

As a runner, if you slide correctly (i.e., to the bag, not through the bag), you have avoided contact safely. If you don't slide, you must make an effort to avoid a collision and avoid interfering with the fielder.

An interference call was an entirely reasonable judgment on the play described above. The umpires chose not to make this judgment, but if they had called interference there should have been little argument. The runner must make an intentional effort to avoid a collision. If the umpire judges otherwise that a runner does not try to avoid collision, he should be called for interference.

Safety is the reason for these avoiding collision rules. If the runner had adjusted his path slightly to avoid contact with the 3B and missed the bag because of his adjustment, the rules protect him. The umpire could award him 3B safely if the third baseman dropped the ball, picked it up and tagged him out because he was off the bag to avoid the collision. The umpire must judge that the runner would have been safe had he not taken safety measures to avoid collision.

One final clarification. If a runner veers early or makes a half-hearted attempt to get to a base, the umpire is not going to award him the base if the fielder drops the ball. That is only going to happen if an umpire judges that a runner making a concerted effort to make the base was close enough to have possibly made it safely.

ERF-10 What is a catch?

A line drive hit right up the middle ripped the fielding glove right off the pitcher's hand and the ball remained lodged in the webbing of the gloves, face up. Is the batter out when the fielder picks up the glove? The ball never touched the ground.

This is a judgment call. If the fielding glove was dislodged instantaneously, it should be called "no catch" and a live ball. SSUSA defines a catch as follows:

- A catch is a legally caught ball, which occurs when a fielder catches a batted or thrown ball with the hand(s) or glove.
- To establish a valid catch, the fielder shall hold the ball long enough to prove control of it and the release of the ball must be voluntary.

ERF-9 Avoiding Collisions.

Both fielders and base runners have a right to bases. It's impossible to fully eliminate some level of contact between a base runner and an infielder on close plays, particularly force plays at second base and occasionally even at third base. If a base runner slides into, not through, the bag to prevent a collision with an infielder, he has acted responsibly and has made the necessary effort to avoid a collision. Some contact between the two opposing players is inevitable on any tag play when the tag is applied.

While both fielder and runner can take actions to avoid a collision, ***the onus to do so falls more on the runner than the fielder.*** Therefore, base runners must make every effort to avoid this from happening.

If a runner does not adjust his path to avoid a collision and causes intentional or incidental contact with the fielder, the umpire should call interference, call "dead ball" and declare the runner out. If the interference also negated a potential double play, the umpire may award a second out at the appropriate base.

Runners should not be called out on a force play if the umpire believes the runner would have beat the throw to the bag but failed to touch the bag to avoid a collision. This judgment call cannot be protested or appealed. The runner is not required to run away from the base or veer into the outfield. He also does not have a pass to over-run the base. The runner should run to the base and if needed, make an adjustment to avoid a collision and interference.

If the defensive player has the ball and the runner remains upright and intentionally crashes into a defensive player, not only is the runner ruled out for interference, he should also be ejected for unsportsmanlike disregard for safety.

Now let's look at what happens when a batter gets a hit and tries to stretch it into a double (or triple). In these cases, an out can only be recorded by the fielder tagging the runner. The runner must be able to make contact with the base without being tagged out first. If you plan on running to the base standing up and don't make a late adjustment to avoid contact, you are vulnerable to an interference call.

Infielders should not hog the base and should give the runner as much room as possible by making most plays on the margins of the bag. Unless in the act of fielding a batted ball, infielders not in possession of the ball must provide base runners with a clear path to the base. Failure to do so shall result in obstruction if you have impeded the progress of the runner. So don't have your foot in the middle of the bag while you await a throw.

ERF-8 Runner Hit By Batted Ball While on Base

With one out and a runner on first, a left-handed batter lined a wicked shot up the first base line that hits the runner on 1B. The runner had no place to go and the first baseman, playing behind the runner, picked up the ball. The runner headed for 2B. The first baseman tagged 1B for the force and threw to 2b for a tag play on the runner. Is this a double play? The umpire's judgment was that the runner's foot was on first base the instant the ball hit him.

If the batter hit a ground ball that struck the runner between first and second base with the first baseman playing behind the runner, the ball should be ruled dead, the runner would be called out, and the batter-runner would be awarded first base. The only wrinkle here is the umpire's judgment that the runner was on first base when he was struck by the line drive.

According to SSUSA Softball rules 8.2.C.1, if the runner is still on the bag, the ball should be called dead, the runner on first would be safe, the batter-runner awarded first, and all base runners forced would advance one base.

If the runner was off the base when hit with a batted ball and he was in front of the first baseman, the ball should still be called dead, the runner on first would be out, and the batter-runner would have been awarded first base. (If the runner was off base when hit with a batted ball *and first baseman is in front of the runner*, then the ball is live and there should be no call.)

The SSUSA Softball rule differs from the MLB rule in which a runner in contact with a base does NOT have a safe haven from being called out if struck by a batted ball. Such a runner would be ruled out in baseball. Also, a runner who intentionally gets hit by a batted ball standing on the bag should be called out for interference.

ERF-7 Thrown Gloves.

Runners were on first and third with 1 out and the batter hit a fly ball that was apparently going to clear the closest outfielder to the ball. The outfielder throws his glove off his hand into the air, it made contact with the batted ball, and the ball landed on the field close to the him. The outfielder threw the ball into the infield and the runner that was on first had stopped at second base and the batter-runner was on first. The umpire awarded the runner on second, home plate, and the batter-runner, third base. Is this the right call?

Here's the SSUSA Softball Rule 8.4 (10) C, "When a fielder **intentionally contacts** or catches a fair batted or thrown ball with his helmet, cap, mask, protector, pocket, detached glove or any part of his uniform that is detached from its proper place on their person. Effect: Delayed dead ball. The batter & runners are entitled to: 3 bases from the time of the pitch on a batted ball or two bases from the time of a thrown ball, and in either case they can advance farther at their own risk.

This rule covers something we've all seen in our past, usually when we are shagging balls in BP and we throw our glove at the ball to avoid another trip to the fence. That, everyone would agree, is intentional.

One more thing. If a player attempts to stop a ball by throwing his glove or hat at the ball but misses, the ball remains live and there is no penalty. A penalty is only assessed if there's illegal contact with the ball.

ERF-6 Live Ball Hitting a Discarded Bat.

A throw came into the infield from an outfielder, is not caught and contacts the batter's bat that was dropped in fair territory just in front of home plate. The ball deflects and ends up in foul territory but within the playing field where it was retrieved by the catcher as runners continued to advance. Some players protested that the ball should have been ruled dead as soon as it came into contact with the bat on the ground, and base runners returned to the last base touched. What is the correct call?

A batter's discarded bat is considered part of the field. The ball is live.

There are times when a thrown ball is considered "blocked" and the ball is dead. A blocked ball is a batted, pitched, or thrown ball that is touched, stopped or handled by a person not engaged in the game, or which touches loose equipment or any object that is not part of the official equipment or official playing area.

So let's assume the team in the field left one of their bats leaning up against the fence in front of their dugout and neither the umpire nor anyone else noticed it and put it off the playing area, on the rack. An overthrown ball makes contact with that bat (or glove or any other equipment left on the field by the team on defense), the ball is blocked, a dead ball is called, all runners are awarded 2 bases and the award is governed by the position of the runners when the ball left the fielder's hand. In other words, this would be treated the same as a throw that ends up in dead ball territory.

But there IS an exception when such a ball comes into contact with equipment not involved in the game belonging to team on offense. Let's assume the team at bat left a bat or some other equipment in front of their dugout. SSUSA Softball Rule 8.4 (10) D states that the effect is a dead ball and runners are returned to the last base touched at the time of the blocked ball. Furthermore, if a blocked ball (blocked by a piece of equipment from the offensive team) prevents the defense from making an out, the runner being played on is declared OUT (SSUSA 8.4(10)D1). The offense is penalized for their carelessness.

ERF-5 Balls That Hit a Bat Twice.

It all started with a ferocious swing that led to a tiny pop up just in front of home plate. The batted ball landed less than 5 feet from the batter and didn't get 5 feet off the ground. The batter corkscrewed himself into the

batter's box and temporarily had no idea where the batted ball was headed. With both feet still fully inside the batter's box, he was just unwinding from the follow-through of his swing as the ball landed in fair territory. When the ball made contact with the infield, it had so much backspin that it immediately bounced back towards the right-handed batter's box and struck the bat still in the batter's hand. The umpire raised both hands and yelled, "FOUL BALL!"

The pitcher was irate and insisted the batter was out for hitting the ball a second time. The pitcher insisted that any time a batter makes contact with the ball twice, he must be called out. Not true.

SSUSA Rules 1.28 E: *A foul ball should be called for a ball that touches the batter or a bat in the hands of the batter a second time while the batter is in the batter's box.*

If the bat contacts the ball a second time when the batter's entire foot is completely outside the batter's box, the batter is out.

ERF-4 Who is Up When a Courtesy Runner is Called Out for Missing At-Bat?

A Courtesy Runner was still on 3rd base when his spot in the batting order came up. The umpire ruled that he was out. But then there was a great deal of discussion about whether that runner should lead off the next inning or whether he lost his time at bat and the inning should be started with the next player in the batting order.

SSUSA Softball Rule 8.5 (4). *The courtesy runner called out does NOT lose their time at bat.* He should lead off the next inning. The player ruled out is the player the courtesy runner had replaced.

Think of it this way, Ralph can't run and Ed substitutes for him as a Courtesy Runner and scores. If you are keeping statistics of your team, Ralph would get credit for the run scored, not Ed. The same is true here. Bob is called out for violating the Courtesy Runner rule. The out belongs to Joe.

ERF-3 Appeals of Missing a Base.

On an infield ground ball, the batter-runner clearly beat the throw to the first baseman. However, the umpire called the batter-runner out for missing (i.e., not touching any part of) the safety base. Nobody on the team in the field noticed he missed touching the base so no one appealed the play. Was the umpire right in calling the batter-runner out?

While it's great the umpire was in position to see that the batter-runner missed touching the safety base, making an out call without the play being properly appealed by the defense is not the correct call. When a batter-runner passes the safety base at first before the throw arrives and a defensive player is in contact with the first base bag, they are considered safe unless properly appealed. While most appeals can be in the form of a live ball appeal or a dead ball appeal, this particular one must be made while the ball is live. In other words, the fielder must tag the batter-runner before they have returned to the safety base and touched it.

What the umpire should do when they realize the batter-runner missed touching the safety base is signal the runner safe. Next, the umpire should refrain from calling time out until it's clear no appeal is forthcoming. Last, if the batter-runner who missed the safety base later proceeded directly to the regular first base, they could still be tagged out on a live ball appeal.

ERF-2 Kicked balls.

Runner on first with less than 2 outs. The batter hit a ground ball to the first baseman and it was misplayed. The ball bounced off the first baseman's glove and into the path of the base runner who, while running to second base, inadvertently kicked the ball making it impossible for him to be forced out at second base or the batter-runner to be thrown out at first. Naturally, had the umpire judged the kicked ball to be intentional, he would have called "dead ball," declared the runner out, and if, in the judgement of the umpire the interference possibly negated a double play, he'd rule the batter-runner out, too. But the umpire believed the kicked ball was inadvertent because the ball deflected right into the runner's feet, so the ball remained live.

ERF-1 Courtesy Runners.

Q; Can a Courtesy Runner be sent in after an at bat has begun?

A: A Courtesy Runner can be sent whenever time is out. The substitution does not have to occur before the first pitch to the batter. However, once the umpire has called "Play," he is not required to grant time if requested, especially if the pitcher is ready to pitch. If the umpire does not grant time, a manager can request a courtesy runner again after the pitch.

Q: What should an umpire do if a Courtesy Runner has been named by a manager and that runner touches the base, but that player had replaced by a Courtesy Runner earlier in the inning?

A. SSUSA Rule 8.5 (2) states that a runner who is replaced by a Courtesy Runner cannot be used as a Courtesy Runner for the remainder of the inning. A violation of this rule makes the selected Courtesy Runner an illegal Courtesy Runner, results in an out, and the removal of the runner from the base.
