



May 5, 2025

NFHS Softball Weekly Rule Interpretations

Situation 1: Team A is at bat with R1 on second base and no outs. B2 hits a long fly ball that hits the fence in fair territory. As R1 is rounding third base, F2 is setup blocking home plate. As R1 nears home plate F2 moves in front of the plate to catch the incoming throw. After possessing the ball F2 moves back to a position where they are blocking home plate and tags R1 out as they are sliding into home plate. The umpire rules R1 out. Team A's coach claims obstruction should have been called and R1 awarded home plate as F2 had been blocking the plate without possession of the ball. The umpire rules that R1 was not impeded by F2's actions prior to them having possession of the ball and therefore there was no obstruction. **RULING:** Correct ruling by the umpire. (2-35, 8-4-3b)

Situation 2: Team A is at bat with R1 on second base and no outs. B2 drives a base hit up the middle that F8 fields cleanly. As R1 is rounding third base they are obstructed between third base and home plate, the umpire signals obstruction. R1 continues on toward home where they are tagged out easily by F2. The umpire rules a dead ball when R1 is tagged out between third base and home, announces the obstruction and places R1 back on third base, the base they would have reached in the umpire's judgement had there been no obstruction. Team B's coach believes that R1 was going to be obviously out and the obstruction should be cancelled and the runner remain out at the plate. **RULING:** Correct ruling by the umpire. (2-35, 8-4-3b)

Both of these plays center around obstruction. They both also bring up a point that is often present in NFHS Softball games, that being participants attempting to apply other organizations' rules to an NFHS Softball game. Although it is often interesting to debate and discuss various rules across the multiple organizations that govern different levels of softball, it is critical that players, coaches and umpires have a clear understanding and application of NFHS Softball rules during an NFHS contest. Again, examining the different organizations rule wording, interpretations and discussions are great academic exercises and viewing plays that happened in other organizations then applying NFHS Softball rules to them are incredibly powerful training tools. But a critical skill for all to gain is what umpires refer to as "knowing what is on your shirt" for each contest. This expression applies to making sure your mindset is using NFHS Softball rules and mechanics for an NFHS Softball game. It also applies to the verbiage, terminology and rule language used during the games. So, verbiage such as "access to the base", "blocking the leading edge", "runner would have clearly been put out" are all wording utilized in other organizations and would not apply to and should not be used in NFHS Softball games.

With that in mind, let's review NFHS Softball's obstruction rule. First the definition of obstruction from Rule 2-35.

Obstruction is the act of the defensive team member that hinders or impedes a batter's attempt to make contact with a pitched ball or that impedes the progress of a runner or batter-runner who is legally running bases, unless the fielder is in possession of the ball or is making the initial play on a batted ball. The act may be intentional or unintentional, physical or verbal.

The first part is typically well understood, anytime a fielder hinders or impedes a batter's attempt to make contact with a pitched ball it is obstruction. This is typically when a batter makes contact with the catcher's glove while swinging at a pitched ball.

The second part of this rule is the part that seems to have more gray area around its enforcement. A defensive player that is not in possession of the ball or not making the initial play on a batted ball is not allowed to impede the progress of a runner or batter-runner who is legally running the bases. Seems fairly simple, right? Well, the real discussion and varied rulings come in determining if the runner or batter-runner was impeded. This determination is based on umpire judgement. April 29th 2024's NFHS Softball interpretation also had some discussion about this topic. As was mentioned there, impeding is defined as delaying or preventing progress or movement. If a runner has to change direction due to the positioning of the fielder, for example if F5 is on the corner of third base and the runner has to change direction to go around them and touch the center of the base instead of the inside corner they were aiming for that would delay or impede them and obstruction should be called. If a runner has to slow down to find a way to touch a base because a defender is blocking the base, that would delay or possibly momentarily prevent them from touching the base impeding their progress and obstruction should be called. If the runner is impeded is the only real factor to consider when determining obstruction in NFHS Softball. Was the runner or batter-runner impeded by a fielder not making an initial play on a batted ball or prior to the fielder having possession of the ball? If they were impeded then obstruction is the proper call!

There are a number of factors that lead to an umpire determining that the runner or batter-runner was impeded. Often the fielders positioning will cause the umpire to have a heightened awareness of the potential for obstruction, but in NFHS Softball fielder positioning alone is NEVER a reason to call obstruction. Again in order for a fielder to be guilty of obstruction they must impede the runner or batter-runner.

To take situation 1 above to an extreme case. If F2 is blocking the entire plate...sitting on the plate where no part of the plate is visible as R1 is rounding third base (60 feet away from home plate) and R1 continues running full speed along their chosen path, is this obstruction? NO, if R1 is not impeded there is no obstruction.

Continuing, if F2 was blocking the plate and as R1 is 10 feet from home plate F2 moves and clears the plate area and R1 never hesitates, slows, changes their direction and they touch home plate, was there obstruction? NO, if R1 was not impeded there is no obstruction.

One final thought, if F2 was blocking the plate and as R1 is 10 feet from home plate F2 moves forward clears the plate and R1 was never impeded (no stutter step, not change in direction or speed etc), F2 then catches the thrown ball then moves back toward R1 tagging them as they slide into home, was there obstruction? NO, again as described R1 was not impeded prior to F2 having possession of the ball then there is no obstruction.

Situation 2 is again bringing another organizations ruling into an NFHS Softball game. Since R1 was obstructed between third base and home plate they cannot be called out, with six exceptions, between the two bases where they were obstructed. Being obviously out is not one of these exceptions, so when the runner is put out between the two bases they were obstructed the runner would be placed on the base the umpire judged they would have reached had there not been obstruction.