

2012 IACO SOFTBALL OFFICIALS CLASS

Module 6
Interference vs. Obstruction

Module 6 Obstruction vs. Interference Introduction

- Upon completion of this Module, the student should be able to
 - Comprehend the differences between obstruction and interference, and proper protocol in the enforcement of each
 - Understand the concept of an initial play and how it relates to "obstruction vs. interference"
 - Learn various specific situations where obstruction and interference should be ruled

Module 6 Obstruction vs. Interference Definitions

- Interference
 - An act by the team at bat which illegally impedes, hinders, or confuses any fielder, OR
 - When a runner creates malicious contact with any fielder with or without the ball, in or out of the baseline
 - If malicious contact is ruled, the player is also ejected!!
 - Other types of interference can involve equipment, an umpire, or a spectator

Module 6 Obstruction vs. Interference Definitions

- Obstruction
 - An act by the defense which
 - Impedes the progress of a runner or batter-runner who is legally running bases
 - EXCEPTION: If a fielder is making an initial play on the ball, the fielder shall be allowed the opportunity to make that play

Module 6 Obstruction vs. Interference Definitions

- Obstruction
 - An act by the defense which
 - Hinders or impedes a batter's attempt to make contact with the ball
 - Also commonly known as Catcher's Obstruction

Module 6 Obstruction vs. Interference Definitions

- Obstruction
 - Can be
 - Intentional or unintentional
 - Physical or verbal
 - Applying a fake tag without the ball or verbally offering deceitful information can be forms of obstruction

Module 6 Obstruction vs. Interference Definitions

- Initial Play
 - The situation in which a fielder is playing a fair batted ball when she
 - Has a reasonable chance to catch the ball in flight, OR
 - Has a reasonable chance to catch the ball in flight after it has touched another fielder
 - This applies to fair AND foul batted balls in flight
 - More than one fielder could potentially make an initial play on a batted ball in flight

Module 6 Obstruction vs. Interference Definitions

- Initial Play
 - The situation in which a fielder is playing a fair batted ball when she
 - Has a reasonable chance to gain control of a ground ball that no other fielder (except the pitcher) has touched
 - Only one fielder can make an initial play on a batted ground ball

Module 6 Obstruction vs. Interference Definitions

- Initial Play
 - The situation in which a fielder is playing a fair batted ball when she
 - Fails to gain control of the ball, but is within "a step and a reach" in any direction of the player's initial touching
 - In other words, the fielder is afforded a reasonable opportunity to recover her own mishandled ball
 - This ONLY applies to the fielder making the Initial Play

Module 6 Obstruction vs. Interference Definitions

- Initial Play
 - Exception
 - If a ball deflects off of the pitcher, this touching is ignored as it regards to the spot of an Initial Play
 - The pitcher's touching is ignored only once – If the pitcher is the first to touch her own deflected ball, then this second touching will be the spot of the Initial Play

Module 6 Obstruction vs. Interference Definitions

- Base Line
 - A direct line between any two bases
 - Is rarely of any significance in an umpire's rulings

Module 6 Obstruction vs. Interference Definitions

- Base Path
 - Defined by a direct line between a runner and the base to which she is advancing or retreating when she is played upon
 - Can be redefined if a runner changes direction

Module 6 Obstruction vs. Interference *Interference*

- Interference – The Basics
 - When interference occurs
 - The ball shall become dead immediately
 - All runners shall return to the last base legally touched at the time of the interference
 - The offensive team member committing interference shall be called out
 - If interference is committed by a retired runner, coach, or other offensive team member not legally running the bases, then the runner closest to home plate is called out

Module 6 Obstruction vs. Interference *Interference*

- Interference – Fair Batted Ball/Initial Play
 - All offensive team members **MUST** avoid a fielder making an initial play on a fair batted ball
 - Intent is rarely a factor in determining interference
 - This includes contacting or illegally screening a fielder in the process of making an initial play
 - Exception: If the runner is touching a base to which she is entitled, then interference shall not be called unless the act is deemed to be intentional

Module 6 Obstruction vs. Interference *Interference*

- Interference – Touching a Fair Batted Ball
 - It is interference if a runner or batter-runner is touched by a fair batted ball (or a ball that, in the umpire's judgment, could have become fair)
 - That has not yet touched a fielder (including the pitcher), OR
 - That has not yet passed any fielder (not including the pitcher)

Module 6 Obstruction vs. Interference *Interference*

- Batted Ball Touching a Runner on Base
 - It is **NOT** interference if a runner or batter-runner is touched by a fair batted ball while legally touching a base to which she is entitled
 - EXCEPTION: Intentional touching shall be ruled as interference

Module 6 Obstruction vs. Interference *Interference*

- Batted Ball Touching a Runner on Base
 - The ball will become dead, the batter-runner will be awarded first base, and all runners must return to the base occupied at the time of the pitch, as long as the batted ball has not yet
 - Touched a fielder (including the pitcher), NOR
 - Passed any fielder (not including the pitcher)
 - If either of the above criteria have been met, then the ball will remain live

Module 6 Obstruction vs. Interference *Interference*

- Interference – Foul Fly Ball/Initial Play
 - All offensive team members **MUST** avoid a fielder making an initial play on a foul fly ball
 - If a runner interferes
 - The runner is out
 - A strike is added to the batter's count, unless she already has two strikes

Module 6 Obstruction vs. Interference *Interference*

- Interference – Foul Fly Ball/Initial Play
 - If the batter-runner, a coach, on-deck batter, or other offensive team member interferes
 - The batter shall be called out

Module 6 Obstruction vs. Interference *Interference*

- Interference – Thrown Ball
 - A batter-runner is guilty of interference when
 - A thrown ball hits her while she has at least one foot touching the ground ENTIRELY outside of the 30-foot running lane, OR
 - She contacts or impedes a fielder attempting to catch a thrown ball when illegally using the white portion of first base
 - EXCEPTION: If an errant throw pulls the fielder into foul ground, then both the defense AND the batter-runner may use EITHER portion of first base

Module 6 Obstruction vs. Interference *Interference*

- Interference – Thrown Ball
 - A runner has no responsibility to avoid a throw made by a fielder, nor to avoid a fielder making a throw
 - EXCEPTION: If the act is ruled intentional and/or malicious, then interference will take precedence

Module 6 Obstruction vs. Interference *Interference*

- Interference – Spectator
 - If the act of interference is by a spectator, AND
 - The interference (reaching into the field of play) prevents a foul fly from being caught
 - The batter is out

Module 6 Obstruction vs. Interference *Interference*

- Interference – Spectator
 - If the act of interference is by a spectator, AND
 - The interference (reaching into the field of play) is on a fair batted ball or thrown ball
 - All runners and the batter-runner shall be awarded the bases they would have reached, in the umpire's judgment, had there been no spectator interference

Module 6 Obstruction vs. Interference *Interference*

- Interference – Umpire
 - If the ball touches an umpire, AND
 - Touching is before the ball has touched any fielder (including the pitcher), OR
 - Touching is before the ball has passed any infielder other than the pitcher, and no other fielder has a chance to make a play
 - The ball is dead and the batter-runner is awarded first base
 - All other runners must return to the last base legally touched, unless forced

Module 6 Obstruction vs. Interference *Interference*

- ▣ Interference – Umpire
 - If the umpire's touching is after either of the previous two situations, then the touching is ignored and the ball remains live
 - Since field umpires always begin every play outside the baselines and behind the closest infielder, it should NEVER be necessary to rule a dead ball

Module 6 Obstruction vs. Interference *Interference*

- ▣ Interference – Umpire
 - Umpire interference is only ruled when a batted ball touches an umpire, NOT when a player comes into contact with an umpire
 - STAY OUT OF THE WAY!!

Module 6 Obstruction vs. Interference *Obstruction*

- ▣ Obstruction – The Basics
 - The act of obstruction shall result in a delayed dead ball
 - Malicious contact ALWAYS supersedes the act of obstruction

Module 6 Obstruction vs. Interference *Obstruction*

- ▣ Obstruction – The Basics
 - Any fielder without the ball who is not making an initial play must concede the base path and the entirety of any base to a runner
 - A fielder awaiting a throw while in a runner's base path, or while blocking any portion of the base could be liable for any contact with a runner
 - The timing of the fielder gaining possession of the ball will determine whether obstruction shall be ruled
 - No Ball = No right to be there when the runner arrives

Module 6 Obstruction vs. Interference *Obstruction*

- ▣ Obstruction – The Basics
 - When obstruction is ruled, the ball remains live until
 - Play has stopped, OR
 - The obstructed runner is put out prior to reaching the awarded base
 - Obstruction should ALWAYS be called at the time of its occurrence and recognized by the ruling umpire at the next dead ball, regardless of whether any further award is made

Module 6 Obstruction vs. Interference *Obstruction*

- ▣ Obstruction – Award
 - Any obstructed runner shall be awarded the base they would have reached, in the umpire's judgment, had there been no obstruction
 - No award of this nature can force an unobstructed runner forward
 - If two runners are obstructed between the same two bases, the award shall be governed by the lead runner's award, with the trail runner being awarded the preceding base

Module 6 Obstruction vs. Interference *Obstruction*

- ▣ Obstruction—Award
 - If the runner reaches the same base as the award would have granted, then no further award shall be granted
 - If the runner attempts to advance beyond the awarded base while the ball remains live, then she does so with liability to be put out

Module 6 Obstruction vs. Interference *Obstruction*

- ▣ Obstruction—Specific Cases
 - Obstruction shall be ruled if
 - A fielder, while making a play at first base, is pulled off of the base by an errant throw and touches the runner before she completes the putout
 - A fielder not making a play is standing on a base, hindering a runner's or batter-runner's opportunity to reach that base or advance beyond it
 - This happens much more often than it should!!

Module 6 Obstruction vs. Interference *Obstruction*

- ▣ Obstruction—Specific Cases
 - It is obstruction if
 - A fielder is blocking a base without having control of the ball, and touches a runner or the batter-runner
 - This means that if a fielder is waiting for a throw, but does not yet have control of the ball when contact is made with a runner, this is obstruction
 - This also means that if a fielder has control of the ball and is legally blocking a base, but loses control while attempting to apply a tag, this can become obstruction

Module 6 Obstruction vs. Interference *Obstruction*

- ▣ Catcher's Obstruction
 - Special category of obstruction
 - Occurs when a fielder (usually the catcher) hinders or impedes a batter's attempt to make contact with the ball

Module 6 Obstruction vs. Interference *Obstruction*

- ▣ Catcher's Obstruction
 - This type of violation is also possible (though not likely) by another fielder
 - For instance, if a fielder moves in front of the pitcher as she makes her delivery in an obvious attempt to screen or disconcert the batter
 - This is still called Catcher's Obstruction, therefore the procedure of enforcement is the same

Module 6 Obstruction vs. Interference *Obstruction*

- ▣ Catcher's Obstruction—Enforcement
 - When catcher's obstruction occurs, the penalty enforced as the following:
 - The batter shall awarded first base
 - All other runners must return to the base occupied at the time of the pitch unless forced
 - EXCEPTION: If a runner is running with the pitch (i.e. attempted steal, hit & run, or squeeze), then that runner shall be awarded the next base, regardless of whether she is forced

Module 6 Obstruction vs. Interference Obstruction

- ❑ Catcher's Obstruction—Enforcement
 - The coach or captain of the team at bat may choose to take the penalty, or the result of the play
 - Even though the choice may be obvious, always ask for or verify the choice, as a coach or captain may have something else in mind

Module 6 Obstruction vs. Interference Obstruction

- ❑ Catcher's Obstruction—Cancellation
 - If the batter-runner reaches first base on the play, and all other runners advance at least one base, then catcher's obstruction is cancelled
 - In this case, the play will stand, with no option of enforcement given

Module 6 Obstruction vs. Interference Obstruction

- ❑ Catcher's Obstruction—Case Play
 - *Example: With no outs and runner R1 on third base NOT running on the pitch, batter B1 swings and the bat tips the glove of fielder F2. Catcher's obstruction is immediately recognized by the plate umpire. A fair ground ball is batted to fielder F6, who throws to fielder F3 standing on first base to put the batter-runner out. Runner R1 also scores on the play. The head coach or team captain is given the option of taking the result of the play, which is a run and a groundout, OR taking the enforcement, which would put B1 at first base, and return R1 to third base, taking away the scored run, but continuing with no outs in the inning.*

Module 6 Obstruction vs. Interference Review

- ❑ Between offense or defense, which team commits interference?
 - Obstruction?
- ❑ How many possible initial plays can be made on a fair batted ground ball?
 - On any batted fly ball?
- ❑ What signal is given by the umpire when obstruction is ruled?

Module 6 Obstruction vs. Interference Review

- ❑ What is the proper protocol when an obstructed runner is put out, assuming that she has not yet advanced to the base she would have reached had there been no obstruction?
- ❑ True or False: It is always necessary to consider intent when ruling interference or obstruction.
- ❑ Which two options are given to the offensive head coach or team captain when catcher's obstruction is ruled (assuming that it is not cancelled)?

Module 6 Obstruction vs. Interference Review

Questions?