

Get to Know SSUSA and USA Softball Rules

As many managers and umpires know, the Senior Softball-USA rulebook does not cover every situation that can happen during games. It is short on details and in some cases, it completely ignores penalties for rule infractions.

Consider this example: What constitutes a base runner passing a preceding runner?

Our rulebook carries one sentence on the subject. Rule 9.2.G says the ball remains in play "when a base runner is called out for passing a preceding runner."

By contrast, the USA Softball rulebook covers the topic in multiple paragraphs and in two places: Rule 8.7.D, and in the Rules Supplement Section 39. That book gives examples, explains the live-ball penalty, and defines what constitutes "passing" a runner. ("To pass a runner, the trail runner must pass the entire body of the lead runner, not just an arm or leg ahead of the runner.")

Our rulebook has 12 words on the subject. USA Softball has 139 words, not counting a paragraph involving fast-pitch play.

SSUSA has always filled the rulebook gaps by falling back on ASA Softball (now USA Softball) for any rule not covered in our book.

When you look at our history, the situation makes sense.

Early in the life of senior softball, most leagues and tournaments around the country followed Amateur Softball Association rules. Back then, ASA was the largest softball organization in the country. After all, it had been around since the 1930s.

So, when Bob Mitchell

Umpire's Corner

By Donna McGuire

formed Senior Softball-USA in 1988, it was natural for him to base play on ASA rules while adding special rules for the senior game. ASA's book acted like a supplement to SSUSA's rules.

As the years and decades passed, SSUSA National Director Otis Rowland and others helped rewrite, improve and expand our rulebook. Even so, holes remained, and we continued to consult ASA as needed.

Though USA Softball still exists, it claims a much smaller slice of the pie today than it once did. As a result, fewer players and umpires nowadays have backgrounds in ASA/USA play.

Yet it's important for players, managers and umpires to understand our rules. So, in addition to studying our rulebook, it would be helpful if they understood at least the basic USA rules.

USA no longer prints it book but provides an electronic version that can be downloaded for \$14.99. Annual rules changes are published on the USA Softball website, so there's no need to buy an electronic rule book every year, as long as you keep the changes in mind.

A recent play during a Florida game illustrates the value of knowing USA rules. With one out in the top of the seventh,

the visitors trailed by one run and had runners on first and third bases.

The batter-runner hit a fly ball to right field that was caught. The runner at third tagged and scored to tie the game. The runner at first ran partway to second before retreating to first base after the catch.

For some reason, the batter-runner rounded first, passed the preceding runner and hustled to second.

The umpires called two outs on the play and negated the run, which ended the game. First, they claimed to have called two outs on the batter-runner, which isn't possible. Then after huddling, they claimed the runner at first somehow had interfered with the defense. They charged the second out to him and still ended the game.

That ruling was incorrect. The runner at first did nothing that could be considered interference.

Solving the situation takes understanding the nuances of interference and the penalties for committing it. Those nuances and full penalties are found in the USA rulebook, not ours.

Bottom line: A second out could have been called ONLY if the batter-runner confused

the defense by running to second base and drawing a throw. That action could have prevented the defense from attempting to double-up the runner headed back to first.

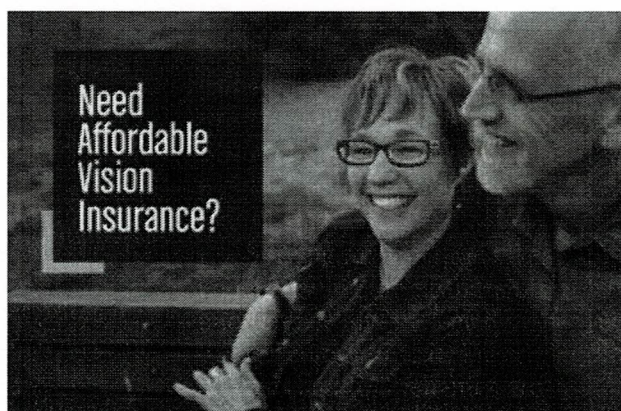
The umpire simply should have sent the batter-runner back to the dugout.

If a throw happened, and the umpires ruled interference on the batter-runner, what would happen next?

The batter-runner already has been called out. He can't be called out again. Therefore, by USA rule, the runner closest to home also is out. However, this is a timing play, based on when the interference happened. If the runner from third had not scored, he is out and the game is over. But if that runner scored before the interference, the game would have been tied, and the runner at first would have been the one called out. Thus, the game would have gone into extra innings.

If the umpires had known the USA rules, they could have avoided grasping for a ruling. They could have made the correct call.

Donna McGuire is SSUSA's Central Region UIC and Chair of the SSUSA National Rules Committee.



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