



Rule Discussion #1 - Slide or Avoid

In a game two weeks ago while playing first base, I brushed against a runner when I moved backwards to catch a ball thrown one hop to 1st base. I have also been knocked to the ground by a runner at 1st when trying to catch a ball thrown over my head. And during a tournament, I was guilty of a dugout-clearing temper-tantrum, which lasted many minutes after an umpire refused to call a runner out at 2nd for running hard into me to stop himself on the bag while I made the putout.

Each contact occurred in a typical bang-bang play with the ball, the fielder, and the runner all arriving at the same time and the closeness of the play causing the players to collide or make contact.

Who was at fault in each of these situations? The short answer is I assume I was in the first two situations at 1st base, and the runner was in the play at 2nd base. Let's review our rules to see if I am correct.

Close plays at the bases are an integral part of baseball, and we assume it to be so in senior softball. But in senior softball safety - not competitiveness - is the over-riding goal. Therefore, our game incorporates several safety rules, a modified 1st base, and a modified scoring line at home plate to increase the safety of our players while still maintaining traditional baseball rules for most outs at the bases.

Our NCSS rules clearly make safety our #1 priority:

NCSS Rule Section 002 (10): Player Conduct.

Player safety supersedes all other goals of the game.

The main way we try to achieve this goal, is to follow the SSUSA and NCSS rules ***that require the player-runner to make every effort to avoid collisions when trying to advance to any base.*** The following are the specific rules that deal with these situations:

SSUSA Rule 7(4) • AVOIDING COLLISIONS

A runner must make every effort to avoid colliding with opposing players while running the bases. If, in the umpire's judgment, a runner misses a base to avoid a collision with a defensive player, the runner will not be called out. (See §8.6.).

NCSS Rule Section 010: Slide or Avoid.



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The purpose of this rule is to ensure the safety of all players.

1. When attempting to advance a base during a play, runners must slide to the bag or avoid collision with the baseman by yielding the base line.
2. When yielding the base line, the runner should veer out of the base line to permit the defensive player to make an unobstructed throw to another base.

In addition, while a runner may not normally slide into first base or at the scoring line next to home plate, our rules specifically allow both to avoid a collision:

SSUSA Rule 8.6 • WHEN SLIDING IS OPTIONAL - 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.

This **SSUSA Rule 8.6** also provides clear enforcement direction to the umpire:

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

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.

Safety is one of the main reasons why we do not let everyone volunteer to umpire. If an umpire does not know the rules, or does not have the integrity to enforce them fairly and impartially, then they are a danger to us all.

We also use different equipment in softball to promote safety. Senior softball uses a double bag at 1st base to help avoid collisions and defines which parts can be touched by the runner and which parts can be touched by the 1st baseman:



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SSUSA Rule 8.4(1) • BATTER-RUNNER REACHING FIRST BASE

Each batter must reach first base without the aid of a courtesy runner. A double bag shall be used at first base, the double portion of the bag being in foul territory abutting first base. If there is a play on a batter-runner going to first base, the batter-runner must touch some portion of the double bag extending into foul territory. He will be called out if he fails to do so, except if, in the umpire's judgment, the batter-runner is avoiding a collision. The batter-runner simultaneously touching both portions of the double bag is permitted. This is NOT an appeal play. Important: The defending player has only the white base, in fair territory, to make the putout; his touch of only the bag in foul territory will not result in an out. Once the batter-runner reaches first base, the double base shall be treated as one base and the fielder or runner may use either portion.

SSUSA Rule 2.3 NOTE: With the double base at first, the following rules shall be enforced:

1. A batted ball hitting or bounding over the white portion is declared fair and a batted ball hitting or bounding over the colored portion is declared foul.
2. Whenever a play is being made on the batter-runner, the defense must use the white portion and the batter-runner some portion of the colored portion. If the ball is overthrown, the batter/runner may use the white portion of the bag to avoid contact or collision. On extra base hits or balls hit to the outfield when there is no play being made at the double base, the runner may touch the white or colored portion (see §8.4(1)).
3. Should the batter-runner round the base on a hit to the infield or the outfield, he may return to either portion.
4. Once the batter-runner reaches first base, the double base shall be treated as one base and the fielder or runner may use either portion.

Similarly, senior softball uses a scoring line at home plate to avoid collisions at the plate.

I once suggested we should change our local NCSS rule to adopt a similar 1st base line to replace the double bag. In my opinion, a runner will not always be able to make a last second avoidance move at first base in situations where the 1st baseman's body drifts backward into the runner at the last second. The double base and the admonition for the runner to avoid a collision will never completely protect players from collisions without also having self-protective and skilled play by the 1st baseman too. Therefore, in some ways, I think the double base leads to a false sense of security instead of promoting the higher level of caution that a runner and 1st baseman would otherwise exercise if there was only a single base.

In addition, I worry that the double base and the rules placing the onus on the runner to



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avoid collisions allows teams to play an inadequately trained but highly competitive player at 1st who may lack the instincts to protect himself and who goes after balls he should not. Too many times the throw to 1st will cause even a veteran 1st baseman to negligently move into the base path of the runner. Therefore, we cannot merely rely on rules to protect our players; we should also make sure our 1st baseman are skilled enough to protect themselves. (In that respect, I still believe I was wrong in initiating the contact I made in the first two situations I described above.)

Perhaps, someday, there will be acceptance of a line at 1st like there is at home plate, but I suspect that will require the use of two umpires instead of one to gain the proximity necessary for making a call. The umpire call at first should always maintain its excitement and motivation for skilled play by ensuring umpire accuracy.

Another possible solution may be to significantly enlarge the double bag.

But until some such modification is approved, we need to make sure our runners and umpires all know and enforce the rule that it is the runner's primary-duty to avoid collisions. Period. End of subject. They should do so with the knowledge that our rules are intended to make playing again tomorrow more important than winning today.

Jim Dionne
Commissioner