



## OHIO HIGH SCHOOL ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION --- STATE AND REGIONAL SOFTBALL TOURNAMENTS

### FOUR UMPIRE SYSTEM – SIMPLIFIED MECHANICS – UPDATED 5/10/26

This document should be a part of a good pregame conference. As the leader of the umpire crew the plate umpire conducts the pregame conference. Each crew will need to have a detailed pregame and you should be at the game site, ready to start the meeting, no less than one hour before scheduled starting time. If your plate umpire decides to start earlier s/he will inform you of the need to arrive earlier. A list of items that must be covered is on Page 19 the NFHS Softball Umpires Manual.

Before leaving home make sure that your equipment and uniform is clean, neat, and in great condition. The uniform must be as specified in the Handbook for Officials and the OHSAA White Book. For those who have been selected to work in our state tournament let's remember that this is just one area where we "need to turn things up a notch" and look extra sharp. We need to insure that umpires dress to impress and look alike in postseason play. Pants are to be either Heather Gray or Charcoal Gray. All umpires on a crew for any regular or post-season game are to be dressed alike. In the event that the umpires do not agree to all wear charcoal gray pants then heather gray pants shall be worn. For more information on our uniform expectations please review the OHSAA White Book – let's all make our **UNIFORMS UNIFORM**. Please be sure and contact your partners prior to these games – that will help insure that everyone is dressed alike. There are times that emergencies come up and last minute changes are required therefore assigned base umpires must have their plate gear with them.

All umpires should bring NFHS publications (rule/case books, umpire manual) and the OHSAA White Book (paper copy and also available on OHSAA website – DOD Page) to all sites. At least one umpire should have the USA Softball non approved bat list. As you know the OHSAA does not entertain protests of decisions by game officials and as a result you must be prepared to consult your publications in the event of a question on a playing rule. You should also review and, if needed, refer to our bulletins. **Every umpire on the field is responsible for proper rules enforcement. Should you note a misapplied rule call time and initiate a crew conference to discuss the situation and make the correct ruling.**

As part of your pregame, review initial positions. With no runners on, the first base umpire (1U) and third base umpire (3U) shall be 18-21 feet beyond first or third base and no more than a foot from the foul line, and shall "walk the line" with the delivery of the pitch. Whenever there is a runner occupying any base the 1U and 3U shall be in ready position 12-15 feet beyond their base and no more than a foot from the foul line.

The second base umpire (2U) shall be in a ready position on the third base-to-second base line extended, 18-21 feet beyond the base with no runners on and 12-15 feet beyond the base with runners on. Exception: When there is a runner on second base (even if there are other runners elsewhere), the 2U shall be in the ready position on the first base-to-second base line extended, 12-15 feet beyond the base. It is important to work from either of these positions to assure that 2U will not distract the batter or the center fielder while being in the best position to cover steals, pickoff plays and plays at the base.

All base umpires shall be aligned so that their shoulders are square to home plate in order to see the pitcher, batter, and runner at their base. Review mechanics for returning to proper position after each play. Insure that we have eyes on the ball and play at all times.

When a fly ball or line drive is hit to the outfield one of the base umpires will always go to the outfield to cover the play there. The second base umpire is responsible for the outfield area from the left fielder to the right fielder. This includes balls hit directly at either of these fielders. This umpire will likely spend more time covering catches, trapped balls, and balls that may go over/under the fence in flight or on a bounce than making decisions at second base. The first and third base umpires are responsible for coverage of balls hit between the outfielder and the dead ball area on their side. When base umpires go to the outfield don't move directly towards the fielder – work for a good angle and cover your foul line.

Remember that when a base umpire goes to the outfield for a play the umpire should ALWAYS stay out until all play has ceased. In the unlikely event that two base umpires would go out on the same ball the remaining umpires will revert to the two umpire system. By knowing where fielders are playing, properly reading batted balls, and using good communication this will not happen. **It is very important that you read your partners, communicate well and only go out on balls in your area. Our standard is simple – the second base umpire will read the umpire to either side and key off the movement of the “corner” base umpire. First and third base umpires need to be careful and only “chase” in their area.**

Also, the base umpire is then responsible for catch/no catch decisions and fair/foul calls when they have turned their back on a fly ball. **Remaining umpires, including the plate umpire are not to echo out/safe or fair/foul calls.** Review Fair/Foul mechanics and priorities on page 28 & 29 of the Umpire Manual.

When a base umpire has moved to the outfield we will use two basic coverage systems:

ROTATION COVERAGE - when the play begins with ***no runners on base*** or ***a runner on first base only***.

- When the first base umpire goes out the second base umpire covers first, the third base umpire covers second, and the plate umpire moves to cover third should a play develop there. A play at the plate then becomes the responsibility of the second base umpire. This is an unusual coverage so all of you must be prepared.
- When the second base umpire goes out the third base umpire covers second, and plate umpire moves to cover third should a play develop there. A play at the plate then becomes the responsibility of the first base umpire. This is similar to the three umpire system.
- When the third base umpire goes out the plate umpire moves to cover third should a play develop there. A play at the plate then becomes the responsibility of the first base umpire.

LATERAL COVERAGE - used in *all other situations*.

- When the first base umpire goes out, the second base umpire will be responsible for both second and first base.
- When the second base umpire goes out, the first base umpire will be responsible for second and first base.
- When the third base umpire goes out, the second base umpire will be responsible for third base and the first base umpire will be responsible for second and first base.
- The plate umpire will stay home when lateral coverage is used.

Umpires need to study both the rotation and lateral coverages. These are simplified to avoid problems and also help with base touch and tag up responsibilities. Tag up and base touch responsibilities are in accordance the ROTATION OR LATERAL COVERAGE, depending the position of the runners. A chart for tag up coverage is included at the end of this document. Crews are instructed not to make planned deviations from these coverages. **Prior to each pitch know the situation and where you are going on any play situation. Constant concentration on your coverages is required. Communicate with your partners – both prior to and during a play. Many of our best crews have demonstrated success when using a rotation or lateral coverage signal prior to each batter during the game. Please make sure each crew member is using these signals – an important part of pre-pitch planning.**

The plate umpire will conduct the conference with the coaches at home plate. Congratulate the coaches (and especially the captains if present), introduce the crew, review lineup cards and have the coaches verify the cards are correct. Remind the coaches that all changes are to be made through the plate umpire. Review the ground rules, ask the coaches to verify that their players are legally and properly equipped, and emphasize the importance of proper sporting behavior for all participants. Ask if the coaches/captains have any questions. Rarely will a base umpire need to add any comments at this conference. The ground rules will be reviewed with each crew as part of the crew pregame conference.

When recording substitution and other lineup changes, signal the press box with a quick wave and point to the change. Do not signal player numbers with your fingers. Record all changes on your lineup card which is the official batting order and notify the opposing coach of changes.

For between inning mechanics refer to the NFHS Umpires Manual Page 124. The second base umpire should be positioned in center field. All base umpires are to stay in fair territory between innings and avoid discussions with fans and those not involved in the game. This is not a time for visiting with each other, players, or coaches. Avoid unnecessary discussions with partners during the game.

In the event that an umpire needs to go to another umpire for help on any play we must have a call before asking for help. In the event that the crew needs to discuss a play or situation all four umpires (and no one else) must be involved in the discussion. Work to get the call correct and after the discussion the original calling umpire will verify or alter the call with a visual signal and verbal call.

After the game the umpires shall immediately leave the field together. Be courteous but do not engage in conversations with anyone.