



**OHIO HIGH SCHOOL
ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION**

**PRESEASON GUIDE
FOR SOFTBALL UMPIRES**

THE WHITE BOOK—2026

**JERRY FICK - DIRECTOR OF OFFICIALS
DEVELOPMENT – SOFTBALL**

jfick@ohsaa.org

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Officials Needed !

GETTING REGISTERED IS EASY!



- Create a profile on myOHSAA.org
- Pay course or testing fee
- Complete required coursework
- Attend required local and state educational meetings each year
- Contact a local secretary
- Begin officiating, make your own schedule and have fun!



Welcome to the 2026 Softball Season

It's time for another softball season and I again look forward to another season as Director of Officials Development - Softball. There is no doubt that the part of the job I enjoy the most is working with our roughly 2,000 umpires and with the interpreters and other leaders in our 60 local associations. Over the past several years, I have had the pleasure of meeting many of you at our clinics, state and local meetings, and during our tournaments. I hope to see you this year.

We had a big change in 2025 as our OHSAA Softball Tournaments moved from four to seven divisions. With this change we now crown three additional state champions plus twelve additional regional champions—all of whom join us in Akron for state championship play. With the expansion from four to seven divisions of tournament play we have 75 percent more state, regional and district games. This means more opportunities for our umpires and a greater need to understand the three umpire system. Throughout the year we will be talking about ways we can meet the challenge of developing more umpires with this 3-umpire system experience to provide the best product for our student athletes. This year we will also have four umpires assigned to all regional final games and about half of our regional semifinal games.

We have a few other things that are new this year – the first of these is another update of *The White Book*, which provides highlights of NFHS rules and mechanics along with the OHSAA information that you'll need for the coming season. The goal is to put all this information in one place and make it easily accessible for our umpires. It's important to note that unlike the OHSAA books provided in some other sports, this is NOT a replacement for the NFHS Softball Umpires Manual which you will continue to re-

Publications Note

In addition to this White Book, the OHSAA Softball Mailing includes your NFHS publications - Rule Book, Case Book, Umpire Manual. Note that the Umpire Manual is good for the 2026 and 2027 seasons.



Jerry Fick
Director of Officials
Development-Softball

ceive every other year (even numbered years).

We continue to use NFHS Mechanics, the same as used in USA Softball. We are confident that the OHSAA customized content of *The White Book* will better serve you.

We will also continue our popular series of one-day Softball Umpire Mechanics Clinics. We were pleased to have another record attendance level at the 2025 clinics with a 51 percent increase in participation over the last two years. These clinics, designed to help umpires improve their skills and attain their advancement goals, continue to emphasize both plate and base mechanics. We have found that umpires with a strong knowledge of mechanics add greatly to the game. Each clinic is staffed by the OHSAA Softball Umpire Instructional Team and will include OHSAA softball observers. **Again, umpires attending these clinics will receive six points (10% of potential score of 60) added to their TOURNAMENT SELECTION SCORE.** Details and registration information can be found near the final pages of this White Book or at the OHSAA officiating web page using this link: <http://www.ohsaa.org/Officiating/DOD>. Go to the softball section and click on Umpire Mechanics Clinics.

We have learned that many of our newer umpires (Class 1 and Class 2) were anxious to take advantage of these Mechanics Clinics, just as our veteran umpires have done in the past. They indeed provide a great supplement to the RefPreps classes offered to

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Honoring Our Umpires

Congratulations, on behalf of the entire OHSAA family and all our officials, to **Maria Hottinger**, who was the 2025 recipient of the NFHS Ohio Official of the Year for softball. Maria, who has been an OHSAA softball umpire for 11 years, lives in Hilliard in the Central District, and has served as an OHSAA tournament umpire at all levels. She is very active as a member of the Hub of Ohio Umpires Association. Maria has also served her local association as an instructor and in many other capacities. We appreciate her many contributions to the OHSAA and softball.



Maria Hottinger

Maria was honored at the Officials Hall of Fame Banquet in June.

In addition, veteran officials **Mathew Kleiner** and

Ralph Green were inducted into the 36th class of the OHSAA Officials Hall of Fame. Matthew is from Monroe and has been a tournament official in several sports. He is a 30-year offi-

cial and has worked at all levels of our softball tournaments. Ralph is from Toledo and is a newer softball umpire but has 32 years as a basketball official working all tournament levels. Also inducted was the late **Daniel Delande** of Shadyside in the East District. Daniel was a multi-sport official whose career included working all levels of our softball tournaments.

25 Years of Service

We also want to recognize officials completing 25 years of service as OHSAA softball umpires. These umpires are listed below:

JEFFREY BALL.....London
NICHOLAS BAUCCOLyndhurst
DAVE BENFIELD Belle Center
RAYMOND BESSZanesville
GARY BOWMAN Willowick
STEVEN BROWN Cincinnati
RODGER CAHNChagrin Falls
DAVID CHRISTENSENAshland
CHRISTEN CLEMSON Cortland
JED COUTS..... Ohio City
DAVID DACEK Middleburg Hts.
JOHN DALEY Parma
K. WILLIAM DREIERWarren

JOHN DURST Twinsburg
JAMES FERRY Fostoria
DEANNE FINKEL ...North Ridgeville
FRANK GRASSBeach City
KEITH HYPESDayton
KEVIN JACKSON Canton
FRANK LACHMarysville
FRANK LECONDalton
RICARDO LUCIO, JR...... Findlay
JOHN MCKENTY Toledo
ANTHONY MONTANA..... Warren
BILL QUIGNEY Mentor
RALPH RAY Lore City

LOWELL RICHEYSardinia
JEFF SANDERS.....Wooster
PATRICIA SHIPEColumbus
CHARLES SMIDDY . Mechanicsburg
MICHAEL SNYDER Marion
MICHAEL TURNER.....Lyndhurst
DUANE ULMAN Salineville
BRUCE WALKER .New Philadelphia
DONALD WALKER Norton
TIM WARD.....Chardon
SANFORD WASHINGTONLorain
DAVID WISNIEWSKI..... Mentor
ROBERT ZIEFLE..... Geneva

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our newest umpires. **This year’s clinics will divide umpires into groups based upon experience level. This is a great opportunity for both newer and veteran umpires to work on improving their mechanics in a setting that addresses their experience level.**

I’m happy to say once again that there are no changes to the softball umpire uniform for 2026 but there are some clarifications as

well as some improvements coming in future years. Although the OHSAA has an updated logo, the officials’ uniform logo stays the same. We have made updates to our Handbook for Officials to reflect the change made back in 2024-the approved navy blue knit cap with the OHSAA logo may be worn in lieu of the navy cap for cold weather situations. We’ve also clarified that the plate umpire may wear a short or long sleeve shirt, and the base umpire could

wear a jacket or vice versa.

In our meetings and publications last year we provided advance notice that we will be making a transition to charcoal gray pants as our default color and eventually to be our only color for pants. This is primarily for two reasons—first, the charcoal shade seems to hold the color better without fading and second, as more baseball/softball organizations make this

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change it appears that many vendors are reducing the availability of heather gray pants. We are taking this opportunity to further update you on default colors in this transition:

■ **For 2026 - In the event the umpires do not agree, heather gray pants shall be worn. This will allow the umpires to wear either pants color, but all must be dressed alike.**

■ **For 2027 - In the event the umpires do not agree, charcoal gray pants shall be worn. This will allow the umpires to wear either pants color, but all must be dressed alike.**

When purchasing new pants, umpires are encouraged to obtain charcoal gray pants. These will become mandatory in the next few years. Also, as we make this transition, we will take the opportunity to use navy blue ball bags as choice of color for that item.

This is the 16th year of the OHSAA's program to provide officials with additional training and you the opportunity to improve your "game." The OHSAA Board of Directors continues to direct substantial resources to enhance training programs for all officials. We need your help as we continue to strengthen officiating in Ohio. We expect your support in our efforts to follow playing rules and the approved umpire mechanics. These cannot be optional—either for individual umpires or local associations. Consistency is something the game, coaches, players, and your fellow umpires

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This Year's Education Opportunities

■ The White Book is updated annually—it is your OHSAA Preseason Guide—ALL INFORMATION IN ONE PLACE

■ Five Mechanics Clinics – One in each OHSAA District (E/SE Combined) - Attendees will also receive SIX points added to their TOURNAMENT SELECTION SCORE. We have learned that many of our newer umpires were as anxious as our veterans to take advantage of our Mechanics Clinics. These clinics provide a great supplement to the RefPreps classes offered to our newest umpires. **GROUPS WILL BE DIVIDED BASED ON EXPERIENCE LEVEL – THIS IS A GREAT OPPORTUNITY FOR BOTH NEWER AND VETERAN UMPIRES TO WORK ON IMPROVING THEIR MECHANICS IN A SETTING THAT HELPS THEM BASED ON THEIR AMOUNT OF EXPERIENCE.**

■ Our Mechanics Clinics will also include a presentation discussing expectations for OHSAA Tournament Softball. With the expansion from four to seven divisions of tournament play we now have 75 percent more state, regional and district games. This means more opportunities and a greater need to understand the three umpire system.

■ The NFHS has greatly enhanced the Softball Umpires Manual. This book is published every other year (even numbered years) and the latest update will be included in your 2026 mailing. Updates include new modeling of existing signals, editorial changes for clarity, and a new section covering movement to maintain an unobstructed view of a play – an item we have covered in past years but an NFHS Point of Emphasis for 2026. With this additional information we will be placing a greater emphasis on mechanics in this year's local meetings, publications, and of course our Mechanics Clinics mentioned above will have additional significance. It's our goal to make our umpires more proficient each year. The 80 pages on the Three Umpire System is a must for those working games at the District Tournament level and beyond. The OHSAA will continue to publish our own FOUR UMPIRE MECHANICS – these will be used in all state tournament games, all regional final games (new for 2026) and half of our regional semi-final games (increased for 2026).

■ Another great way to start your preparation for the coming season is to attend a face-to-face State Rules Interpretation Meeting. There will be seven in-person meetings. Each meeting will feature sessions of about two hours and in addition to the state meeting will review the most important items that we want to cover prior to the season. By attending the entire session, you will receive credit for a local meeting in addition to the state softball meeting. There is no need to "pre-register" for any State meeting. Information concerning attendance requirements, along with a list of state meetings, can be found at the end of this booklet.

■ Our pre-tournament clinic covering the three and four umpire systems, plus more, will be **Sunday, May 17** at Hilliard Memorial Middle School, 2900 Walker Rd, Hilliard. As attendance for this clinic has grown we are moving to a larger site – this school is located next to Hilliard Bradley High School. Also, with our tournaments now starting later, we have moved the date back from the week before to the week after Mother's Day. This free clinic is intended for umpires working in postseason play but is open to all OHSAA umpires. No preregistration is needed. Registration will be at noon with the clinic running from 12:30-430 p.m. With our expanded tournament format this clinic is now more important and valuable than it has ever been before. Save the date and watch for reminders in our weekly bulletins.

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all deserve. Our simple goal: ONE RULE/ONE INTERPRETATION/ONE MECHANIC

To further increase consistency, we continue our enhanced training opportunities for umpires. Details concerning attendance requirements, as well as the schedule of our state meetings, can be found at the back of the White Book.

Tournament Umpire Clinic

We will again offer a pre-tournament clinic covering the three and four umpire systems, plus more, on **Sunday, May 17 at Hilliard Memorial Middle School, 2900 Walker Road, in Hilliard**. As attendance for this clinic has grown we are moving to a larger site – this school is located next to Hilliard Bradley High School. Also, with our tournaments now starting later, we have moved the date back from the week before to the week after Mother’s Day.

This free clinic is intended for umpires working in postseason play but is open to all OHSAA umpires. No preregistration is needed. Registration will be at noon with the clinic running from 12:30-4:30 p.m. With our expanded tournament format this clinic is now more important and valuable than it has ever been before. Save the date and watch for reminders in our weekly bulletins.

Bulletins

We will continue to provide bul-



letins distributed electronically throughout the season. These bulletins are also posted at www.ohsaa.org (Go to the Officials Page—DOD Section). The direct link is: <http://www.ohsaa.org/Officiating/DOD>.

Also ongoing is the use of observers at our state and regional tournaments. Thanks to the many wonderful volunteers, we had observers last year watch all our regional and state championship umpires as well as many district games. These observers not only help the umpires working these games, but their input is very helpful in identifying areas where we need to focus our training efforts. I believe that if umpires working tournament games have areas that consistently show up as improvement items it’s likely that these can be improvement items for all umpires. It is also important to note that our observers play a key role in determining future tournament assignments.

Please take the time to review all your NFHS and OHSAA publications including the entire WHITE BOOK. In addition to valuable information being provided regarding rules changes, points of emphasis, and mechanics, the publications provide information especially for our OHSAA umpires. This includes emphasis points on safety issues which must be reviewed by

all involved in high school sports. I **also urge you to carefully study the OHSAA REMINDERS FOR 2026 as this section contains very important information that we all need to know.**

Recruitment

This season let’s continue to work on recruiting and retention efforts - especially in regard to females and minorities - we have not had much success in recruiting female and minority umpires and ask for your help with this. In many areas our assigners are having trouble filling games. Our umpires are the best recruiting source we have. If you know of anyone interested give them this address: <http://www.ohsaa.org/Officiating/permits>. Here they will find the information they need to join a class. After completing the online course and testing our local associations will work to help each new umpire with on-field mechanics and get the help they need to be successful. **Please encourage your friends and neighbors to get involved!**

As this booklet is printed in time for your rule book mailing, keep in mind that additional information will be provided online and through our Bulletins as the season progresses. Please watch for updates which are shared when available.

Have a great season – I hope to see you on the field!

JERRY FICK
Director of Officials Development
– Softball

NFHS POINTS OF EMPHASIS – 2026

Obstruction

Obstruction is defined as the act of a defensive player who hinders or impedes a batter's attempt to contact a pitch or impedes the legal progress of a runner or batter-runner advancing on the bases. This act may be intentional or unintentional, and it can be either physical or verbal. However, obstruction does not apply if the defensive player is in possession of the ball or is making the initial play on a batted ball.

The central element in identifying obstruction lies in whether the runner's progress is actually impeded. If the runner or batter-runner is not affected—if there is no delay, no forced alteration of their path, or no hesitation—then by rule, obstruction has not occurred. A defensive player's mere presence or positioning, even if questionable, cannot be ruled as obstruction unless it results in an actual impediment to the runner. An exception exists only for a fake tag, which always



constitutes obstruction, regardless of whether physical impediment occurs (Rule 2-20).

Impeding a runner means creating a negative effect on their ability to run the bases. This might include a runner slowing down, altering their intended path, stopping altogether, retreating to the previous base, or contacting a fielder that disrupts their movement. These examples underscore that the umpire must rely on judgment to determine both whether the runner was impeded and to what extent their progress was affected.

Unlike many rule violations in soft-

ball that carry standardized penalties—such as awarding two bases for a thrown ball that goes out of play or one base for a pitched ball entering dead ball territory—obstruction rulings are situational and vary based on the specifics of each play. The purpose of the obstruction award is not to penalize the defensive team arbitrarily, but to nullify the negative effect of the obstruction. The runners are not being granted an advantage; rather, they are being restored to the position they would have achieved had the obstruction not occurred. This could mean advancing the runner or, in some cases, returning them to a previous base, whatever is necessary to correct the disruption caused by the obstruction, based on the umpire's judgment.

Maintaining an Unobstructed View

There are times when an umpire must move from their primary po-

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NFHS Rules Changes 2026

A restriction on the use of electronic devices by players while on the field, and a restructuring of Rule 8, are the lone changes in NFHS Rules for 2026.

1-9-6: No player shall transmit or record audio or video from the playing surface. New language further clarifies the use of electronic devices and what is not permitted.

Rationale: This change clearly defines the types of electronic devices prohibited by the rule.

Rule 8: Rule 8 has been reformatted for clarity. Changes have separated longer articles, and organized exceptions, penalties, and effects into outline format for improved comprehension.

Rationale: Added article references to PENALTIES and EFFECTS, and Section 4 was separated into two sections addressing runners entitled to advance with and without liability to be put out to delineate differences.

10-4-2: Umpires have the option of wearing heather gray, charcoal gray, or navy blue slacks. Effective January 1, 2027, heather gray slacks will no longer be permitted as part of the umpire's uniform.

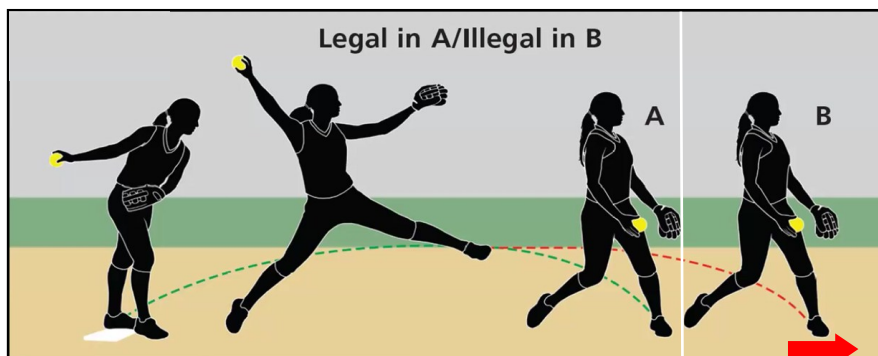
Rationale: Manufacturers have discontinued producing heather gray umpire pants. This change will assist umpires in the purchase of pants that are currently being manufactured.

NFHS Clarifies Replant Definition—Rule 2-47

There was a very important and helpful editorial change to Rule 2-47 in 2025. The definition of a replant was further clarified. The rulebook language, with added words both in bold and italics, is: A replant of the pivot foot occurs when the pitcher pushes off the playing surface from anywhere other than the pitcher's plate **resulting in the non-pivot foot becoming closer to home plate** prior to the act of delivering the pitch.

This additional phrase is designed to more clearly explain exactly what a replant is and better align this definition with the description of the pitch given in Rule 6-1-2c.

Often the pitcher has one or both feet landing (either from a leap or a drag) on the playing surface at about the same time as the pitch is deliv-



In A the pitcher is legal. The stride foot was on the ground or landed after the leap but did not move forward. In B the pitcher is illegal. After landing on her pivot foot she pushes off a second time with her pivot foot from a spot in front of the pitcher's plate and as a result her non-pivot foot moves closer to home plate.

ered. At times, her momentum may cause her pivot foot to continue moving forward. This movement alone is not a replant and not a violation of the pitching rule – a replant occurs only when she

pushes off from this spot in front of the pitcher's plate and there is resulting forward movement of the non-pivot foot prior to the act of delivering the pitch.

A Look Back at the 2025 Rules Changes and Points of Emphasis

As we prepare for the 2026 softball season, it might be helpful to take a look back at some of the NFHS rules changes that were enacted in 2025.

1-8-6 EXCEPTION & PENALTY: Provided coaches the opportunity to use electronic devices in the dugout for one-way communication to the catcher while the team is on defense. The penalty from Rule 3-6-11 was added to Rule 1-8-6 as well, with violators subject to ejection unless the offense is ruled to be of a minor nature.

Rationale: Permits the use of emerging technology by allowing the use of one-way electronic communication as an additional

option to communicate with the catcher while on defense.

3-6-11: This rule change specified that coaches are prohibited from using the device to communicate with any other team member while on defense or any team member while on offense and the coach cannot use the device outside the dugout/bench area.

Rationale: Clarifies that a coach may use an electronic device for one-way communication to the catcher only while the team is on defense.

9-3-2b: When a baserunner who is declared out for being hit by a fair batted ball, the batter-runner is credited with a fielder's choice in the scorebook.

Rationale: This change corrects an error in the rules that awarded a base hit in this instance.

POINTS OF EMPHASIS

Among the 2024 NFHS Points of Emphasis that merit review in 2025:

Teams' Role in Pace of Play

Specified coaches role in creating and maintaining pace-of-play standards for their individual players and teams and asked that efforts to educate players on the rules and timing protocols related to breaks between innings, as well as during gameplay.

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2026 NFHS POEs
cont. from page 7

sition to maintain an unobstructed view of a play. This is mentioned several times in the NFHS Softball Umpire Manual but, until now, there has not been any guidance for the umpire in the manual. Information has been added to the Umpire Manual to explain aspects of the play that should be considered when moving from the primary position to maintain an unobstructed view of a play.

There are key interactions of the four elements (offense, defense, ball, and base) on each play that need to be viewed clearly to make a judgment call. On tag plays:

- Defense contacting the offense with the ball (tagging the runner)
- Defense controlling the ball through the process of applying the tag

Offense contacting the base.

All three of these key interactions must remain within the umpire's view to make an accurate judgment call on the play. Also, when adjusting, an umpire needs to maintain proper distance to ensure no key interactions of the play are missed.

Details of each play include:

- Defensive positioning
- Direction, height and timing of the throw
- Path of the runner
- Timing of the ball and runner arriving near the base

All these items need to be evaluated in each play prior to moving from the primary positioning as each play develops slightly differ-

A Look Back at 2025 Rules
Changes/POEs cont. from page 8

Between innings, 60 seconds is provided for (a) the defense to take the field and throw warm-up pitches, and (b) the offense to prepare to bat. There are several ways that coaches can expedite this process with simple instructions to players. For example, if the catcher was batting when the third out was made, have another teammate or coach prepared to receive warm-up pitches while the catcher gets equipped. For the team coming to bat, coaches should encourage their lead-off batter to gather their batting equipment while the remainder of the team huddles in an appropriate area that doesn't pose a safety risk for the defense warming up.

There are prescribed penalties associated with excessive time between innings. Once the allowed 60 seconds has passed, the offensive team has 10 seconds for its batter to enter the batter's box (NFHS Rule 7-3-1). Similarly, once the allowed 60 seconds has passed, the pitcher has 20 seconds to legally deliver a pitch (NFHS Rule 6-2-3). The respective penalties for violations of these time constraints are either a strike or a ball on the batter, depending on the tardy party.

These same time constraints exist on each pitch thrown. Once the ball has been returned to the pitcher to prepare for the next pitch, the pitcher has 20 seconds to release the pitch. Coaches who delay in calling pitches risk a penalty for exceeding the allowed 20 seconds. The same applies

ently. Understanding how these items are going to come together on a particular play allows the umpire to determine where the key interac-

to the offense when a batter fails to enter the batter's box within 10 seconds after the ball is returned to the pitcher.

Situational Awareness

Asked coaches and umpires to help minimize risk and injury to players by understanding and enforcing existing bench and field conduct rules. NFHS rules stipulate that once the game has begun, only the batter, runner(s), on-deck batter, coaches in the coach's box, bat/ball shaggers or one of the nine players on defense are permitted to be outside the designated dugout/bench or designated warm-up areas (i.e. batting cage or bullpen). Additionally, during game play, hitting the ball to teammates on defense is prohibited. Between innings, bench personnel are permitted to engage in throwing and running activities.

Team personnel should assess and be aware of potential hazards associated with foul balls and overthrows. For example, if a bullpen is in an area where a foul ball or overthrow could contact the pitcher or catcher, the team might assign bench personnel with a glove to stand nearby to shield those warming up.

On-deck batters should be mindful of potential foul balls and overthrows. On-deck batters must use the on-deck circle closest to their own dugout. (NFHS Rule 7-5-1).

tions will occur, allowing them to adjust, when necessary, to maintain an unobstructed view of the play.

Doubling Up on the Double 1B

NFHS was one of the leaders in establishing the safety base, or double first base, to avoid collisions. Recently, other sanctioning bodies, including NCAA softball and baseball, have instituted the safety base. It is important to note that in many of these games, the rules differ from the NFHS softball rule. Also, note that the OHSAA has adopted this optional NFHS rule which applies for all games at all levels.

Here are the main differences. For clarity, we will restate only the NFHS application, all of which are found in Rule 8-11:

✦ The requirements for the offense and defense to use specific portions of the safety base apply only when there is a play being made on the batter-

runner at first base. In this situation, the batter-runner is required to touch the colored base and can be called out if the defense successfully appeals before the batter-runner returns to the base. The fielder is required to touch the white base to record a putout.

- *Exception:* The offense or defense can use either base on plays from foul territory or errant throws that pull the fielder into foul ground.

✦ Once the batter-runner reaches first base (i.e. over-runs the base or rounds the base toward second base), she may return to *EITHER* the



white or colored base.

✦ After reaching first base, the runner is considered to be in contact with the base when touching *EITHER* the white or colored base.

When the offense can use either base the defense can use either side as well. An example would be plays where the runner is required to return after a caught line drive or fly ball.

Notes for Assigners and Local Associations

A message to all who hold BOTH a baseball and softball permit and also to local association secretaries. OHSAA requires umpires holding permits in both sports to attend four local meetings for each sport (i.e. four local meetings for baseball and four local meetings for softball). Local associations are not permitted to offer meetings that give credit for both sports. There is one exception that allows each local association to conduct one meeting that covers OHSAA regulations and other items common to both sports. Umpires may attend only one such meeting and will receive dual credit for a meeting in both baseball and softball. All local associations offering these “dual credit” meetings may offer only one such meeting per year and will be required to follow a program provided by the OHSAA.

Umpire Advancement

All umpires assigned to varsity games must be Class 1 officials. If umpires have not completed the advancement process, this is done by completing the

application form and following the instructions included on that form which is found at:

<https://ohsaaweb.blob.core.windows.net/files/Officiating/forms/UpgradeApplication.pdf>

This process can be completed as early as an umpire’s first year and then can take effect the following season. More help can be obtained through your local association secretary.

Local Associations are encouraged to help umpires through the advancement process –this is a key responsibility of the association. Please work to insure umpires receive the required observations during the season and also are prepared for the advancement test given in May. An umpire who completes the advancement process is eligible to work both regular season varsity and tournament games, therefore the testing is a little more challenging than testing for new umpires and can also include some questions on the basics of three umpire mechanics.

OHSAA SOFTBALL POINTS OF EMPHASIS—2026

Pitching Rules Enforcement – The OHSAA continues to have expectations concerning the enforcement of all rules including the pitching rules. These expectations have not changed and are straightforward and reasonable but still require our attention:

- Study the pitching rules
- Learn to recognize infractions
- Use proper positioning & mechanics



the pitching rules, during our state and local meetings. Remember that “leaping,” defined as both feet airborne prior to delivering the pitch is ***NOW LEGAL*** in high school play. It’s also important to note that a replant of the pitcher’s pivot foot from anywhere other than the pitcher’s plate is still an illegal pitch.

NFHS made a very important and helpful editorial change to Rule 2-47 last year, clarifying the definition of a replant. The rulebook language, with added words both in bold and italics, is: A replant of the pivot foot occurs when the pitcher pushes off the playing surface from anywhere other than the pitcher’s plate ***resulting in the non-pivot foot becoming closer to home plate*** prior to the act of delivering the pitch (see diagram on page 8). This additional phrase is designed to more clearly explain exactly what a replant is and better align this definition with the description of the pitch given in Rule 6-1-2c. Often the pitcher has one or both feet landing (either from a leap or a drag) on the playing surface at about the same time as the pitch is delivered. At times, her momentum may cause her pivot foot to continue moving forward. This movement alone is not a replant and not a violation of the pitching rule—a replant occurs only when she pushes off from this spot in front of the pitcher’s plate and there is resulting forward movement of the non-pivot foot prior to the act of delivering the pitch. This clarification should make this rule even more clear not only for umpires but for coaches and participants as well. It also aligns with what we discussed in our meetings last year. We will continue to cover this in our 2025 meetings.

In addition we will again emphasize the requirement for the pitcher to take a position in contact with

OHSAA Rule Change 2026

Junior High/Middle School Pitching Distance

At its October, 2025 meeting the OHSAA Board of Directors approved a change in the pitching distance for games involving Grades 7 and 8. The new pitching distance will be 43 feet and match the distance for Grades 9-12. This action came after the OHSAA staff conducted surveys of both high school and JH/MS coaches on this issue. In each case the surveys revealed that about 75% of the respondents favored this change.

This change from 40 feet to 43 feet results in all playing rules for grades 7-12 being the same. In addition to the fact that coaches largely agree that this change will be beneficial for student-athletes it will also eliminate a difference that impacted some playing facilities and that had to be monitored by umpires.

There will no longer be any differences in the rules for high school and grades 7-8.

- When an illegal pitch is there call it
- Never guess an illegal pitch
- Get these calls made early in the game
- Let the pitcher adjust to your proper enforcement of the rule

We will discuss these, along with key provisions of

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the pitcher's plate and then simulate taking a signal from the catcher prior to bringing the hands together. This allows the batter to prepare for the start of the pitch. If the pitcher does not pause after stepping onto the pitcher's plate to simulate taking a signal from the catcher prior to bringing their hands together, an illegal pitch needs to be called.

Line Up Card Accuracy: Reporting and Recording Substitutions, Courtesy Runners, and other substitution related rules. Softball rules can be challenging, and we need to study and properly enforce rules relating to these areas. There is additional information relating to various aspects of this POE elsewhere in this booklet. Please always keep your lineup cards up to date and clearly announce any changes that area made. When an issue arises make sure that you understand the question and discuss as a crew referring to the rule book if needed.

Umpire Mechanics – The NFHS Softball Umpires Manual has been expanded in an effort to make it more valuable to all umpires. We continue to place additional emphasis on mechanics and will be updating our Mechanics Clinics to support this emphasis. In particular, we have learned that this program can benefit both newer umpires and our veterans—last year we had an increase in the number of umpires taking advantage of the clinics and many of those attending were newer umpires. These clinics provide a great supplement to the RefPreps classes offered to our newest umpires. The groups in these clinics will be divided by experience level this year. Those who attend these clinics will received **SIX POINTS** added to their tournament score as we further recognize the importance of proper mechanics.

Of special concern this year is our Base Umpire Mechanics and Positioning – we have had some con-

Special thanks to George Gulas, of Medina, and Tom Hathaway, of Cincinnati for their continued commitment to our umpires through annual contributions to this White Book!

fusion reported concerning base umpire positioning and proper depth with runners on base. Base umpires are to be deeper than the infielders and not directly behind an infielder but away and to the side (we sometimes call this “off the fielder”) from the middle infielder normally shading to the side of the lead runner. There are times a middle infielder may be playing further over in one direction and in this case the umpire may need to move to the opposite side. We want umpires to be deep enough, but not deeper than necessary, to see the pitcher, batter, and all runners and to allow the fielders freedom of movement. It's important not to be too deep in order that when the ball is hit to the outfield umpires can move inside the diamond as quickly as possible to cover multiple bases and have all elements of any play in front of the umpire.

Remember: Pivoting into the infield on balls hit into the outfield is a requirement of our mechanics. It's important when coming inside the diamond to move only to a position 10-to-12 feet inside the baseline. This allows the base umpire to turn quickly while picking up the ball, glancing at the runner(s), and letting the ball take the umpire to the play. Starting out too close to the fielders can cause the umpire to hinder fielders and runners. Starting out too deep and/or pivoting too far inside the diamond can prevent the umpire from quickly picking up the ball being thrown to the infield and getting good position to rule on a play. This is all a very difficult task but is necessary to

PUBGAR—Remember while pivoting into the infield to **Pick Up the Ball** and **Glance At the Runner**.

make for the best possible judgment calls. We will emphasize this point in our meetings and clinics this winter.

Finally, it is important for base umpires to move parallel to the baseline and not toward the base when covering a play. This applies to coverage of stolen bases as well as plays in the infield. By moving parallel, the BU creates and maintains an angle to the play; running toward the base takes away that angle.

OHSAA REMINDERS

RULES

Noisemakers - The use of any item to create additional noise is a violation of the unsporting conduct regulation. Noisemaking devices are not permitted in the dugout. This would include musical instruments, whistles and horns. It is also not permissible to bang items such as ball buckets or bang bats on dugouts, benches or fences. Note that the penalty for violations of this rule permits a “warning,” but for repeated violations the umpire may “restrict to the bench” or eject either the coach or offender(s). Umpires should first use warnings to enforce this rule.

OHSAA and NFHS Rules – All games played must be played under NFHS playing rules including the authorized OHSAA rules modifications. Leagues and conferences, schools, coaches, and umpires are not permitted to allow playing rule deviations. This includes items such as equipment, the ball - strike count, OHSAA adopted game ending procedures and OHSAA regulations concerning forfeited and protested games.

Sweatshirts/Jackets - Rule 3-2-1 allows state associations to permit players to wear sweatshirts and jackets when there is inclement weather. This rule has been adopted in Ohio.

Rule Books - We must have rule books available and consult those publications when needed during the course of a game. Be prepared to check the books and explain the proper ruling to the coach. We



continue to have a few unfortunate situations each year where rules are misapplied and not corrected. The OHSAA does not recognize protests so it is imperative that we refer to the books when needed and make corrections if necessary. I think that we can all agree that when the umpires in a game disagree on a rules application there is no reason not to check a rule before we award the wrong base, fail to count a run that should have scored or make some other rules misapplication.

Head Decorations/Headwear/ Religious Apparel – Regardless of NFHS Playing rules, state law requires that officials/contest administrators not prohibit or create any obstruction to wearing religious apparel when competing or participating in interscholastic athletics, unless a legitimate danger to participants is identified due to wearing religious apparel. If such a danger is identified, the administrator or official of the event or activity shall offer all reasonable accommodations to the participant wearing religious apparel.

Dugout Personnel must remain in the dugout. This includes coaches, players, and other team personnel. Rule 3-6-6 offers limited exceptions such as bat/ball shaggers (wearing helmets) who are retrieving discarded bats or foul balls that may be hit well off the field and down the foul lines. This exception does not cover foul balls or other loose balls near a fielder or behind home plate. Defensive coaches are not permitted to take positions outside the dugout for the purpose of signaling pitches. Offensive coaches on the field must take positions within the coach’s box.

Substitution Rules and Line Up Card Management – This is an area where softball rules provide some complexities. In an effort to assist umpires, Tom Hathaway of Cincinnati, a long time instructor and member of our Softball Umpire Improvement Team has developed a **DP Flex Chart** which includes various actions and results for the Flex rule. Tom has also authored an article covering **Lineups, Substitutions and Penalty Enforcement**. Each of these items can be found elsewhere in this White Book and I’m sure they will be helpful to all of us. I also remind you that Appendix H (page 99) of the NFHS 2026 Softball Rules Book is a valuable DP/Flex resource. These are great topics for local meetings as well. It is important to note the substitution and batting order rules for Junior High/Middle School (Grades 7 and 8) games are the same as the high school rules. There is no “roster batting” per-

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mitted for junior high/middle school.

Game Management – Umpires know that their responsibility is for what happens on the field. Game administration and site management is a school responsibility. This is important for a number of reasons—weather issues, the rare case of spectators causing problems that need attention, or other emergencies. Prior to the game, no later than the pregame conference with the coaches, find out if game management is available or if the head coach is filling that role. In the spring there are often many events going on at a school and this forces the coach to take this responsibility. In any event, umpires need to know who to go to should assistance become necessary. See our updates to our weather regulations elsewhere in this White Book.

Please note this excerpt from the OHSAA Bylaws: **School's Responsibility When Hosting A Contest 3-2-1** *The host school has the responsibility to ensure that a contest or event is administered in a manner which emphasizes the educational values inherent in interscholastic athletics. It is the host school's responsibility to remove any individual(s) who disrupts the educational goals of the contest or event. Likewise, the host school is ultimately responsible for the safety of all participants (players, coaches, officials, spectators, etc.) in the interscholastic contest immediately before, during and immediately after each contest or event. Therefore,*

the host school shall appoint a site director/ manager or administrator-in-charge for every contest or event. The host school shall ensure that the site director/ manager or administrator-in-charge is aware of the school's emergency action plan and how to adjust it to meet the needs of the particular contest or event. Included in the emergency action plan shall be procedures to deal with emergencies, crowd management and health and safety protections. The plan shall also include procedures to ensure that unauthorized personnel are kept from the playing field; to provide safety and security for the visiting team(s), their spectators and the contest officials, and to provide safety and security for parking areas related to the contest or event.

MECHANICS

George Gulas, our state interpreter from Medina, has again put together a list of observations from our observers and others who have watched many, many games over the past seasons. These items will be the basis for much of our Mechanics Clinics, content at our state meetings, and of course will be passed on to interpreters for discussion at local meetings. Here is a preview of some of the items we will be working on this winter and spring:

- **Plate Umpires** – Proper Position including Slot and Distance – Reporting Changes – Handling Intentional Walks – Fair/Foul Position, Priorities, Signals - Selling the tough

calls vs. making unnecessary calls.

- **Base Umpires** – Proper Initial Positions getting set and square to the plate – Tighter Pivots when coming inside diamond – Chasing Balls to the outfield including when to chase, proper angles, and signals.
- **General Mechanics** – Between Inning responsibilities - Communication through good signals – Don't take the easy way out – Keys to Good Judgment - Getting good angles, Timing, and STOP, SET, SEE THE PLAY, MAKE THE CALL.
- Pregame Conferences—it's important that we have good preparation and discussion with our partner(s) prior to each game. An outline is on Page 19 of the NFHS Umpires Manual.
- Working the final play of every game – communication with partners and expect the unexpected – it's not always over when you think it is.

Now is the time to plan to take advantage of both our Mechanics Clinics and Face to Face State Rules Meetings with the second hour (local meeting credit) devoted to items such as those mentioned above. Work in these areas will help improve the capabilities of all of our umpires.

A Word About Professionalism

The OHSAA's Mission Statement is simple and to the point but also speaks volumes: *To serve our member schools and enrich interscholastic opportunities for students.*

The OHSAA's Officiating Program Mission does the same: ***Creating a competent community of sports officials who play a key role in developing Ohio student athletes into good citizens of tomorrow.***

As officials, it's pretty easy for us to get caught up in what we do on a daily basis and forget the function that we really need to play in each and every contest and in all that we do as OHSAA officials. With this mind we are taking this opportunity to remind ourselves of our role as part of interscholastic athletics and the importance of professionalism. Each of the statements printed to the right on this page properly create the focus that is appropriately placed on the **student**.

In addition to the focus on the student, we reprint our Code of Ethics, reminding everyone of the importance of honoring our commitments and contracts regardless of possible inconvenience or financial loss.

Additionally, it is important that umpires respect the impact of comments made on social media. It is essential that we are always on our guard about what we say both verbally and in social media.

OHSAA Officiating Code of Ethics

Schools have entrusted the OHSAA and sports officials to assist them in the education and development of their youth through athletics. The proper operation of such a process requires that officials be independent, impartial and responsible to people they serve. In recognition of these expectations there is hereby established a Code of Ethics for all officials. The purpose of the code is to establish guidelines for ethical standards of conduct for all officials.

An Official must devote time, thought and study to the rules of the game and the mechanics necessary to carry out these rules so that one may render effective and creditable service in a fair and unbiased manner.

An Official must work with fellow officials and the state association in a spirit of harmony and cooperation in spite of differences of opinion that may arise during debate of issues.

An Official must resist every temptation and outside pressure to use one's position as an official to benefit oneself. Under all circumstances, officials must avoid promoting the special interest of any person or group of persons other than the athletes we serve.

An Official must constantly uphold the honor and dignity of the officiating industry in all personal conduct and relations with student-athletes, coaches, athletic directors, school administrators, colleagues, and the public, to be a worthy example to the athletes under one's jurisdiction.

An Official will be prepared both physically and mentally, dress according to expectations of sport standards, and maintain a proper appearance that is befitting the importance of the game.

An Official shall avoid the use of tobacco and tobacco products at the contest site.

An Official shall not consume alcohol (or any illegal/illicit drug or controlled substance) prior to or during the contest.

An Official must remember and recognize that it is important to honor contracts regardless of possible inconvenience or financial loss. Every member of the officiating profession carries a responsibility to act in a manner becoming a professional person. The conduct of any official influences the attitude of the public toward the profession in general as well as toward the official in particular.

An Official shall not delay the process of completing and returning paperwork provided by a site needed to process the game payments and will provide a W-9 when requested.

Note – The OHSAA Officiating Code of Ethics, along with OHSAA regulations relating to officials is found in Handbook for Officials. It may be accessed at this link: <https://www.ohsaa.org/Portals/0/Officiating/OHSAAOfficialsHandbook.pdf>

Sourcing the Right Resources

An umpire assigner and local rules interpreter received an email from a coach regarding a “new rule.” No, the rule in question had not been changed, responded the assigner. The coach produced an item from the internet. Upon investigation, the assigner recognized that the internet item was AI generated. It did not come from any one rule book and seemed to combine some baseball rules as well as softball rules in its response to a rules inquiry.

AI (artificial intelligence) can become a wonderful tool in our lives but it should never be used in place of a rule book! It is important for umpires to learn from the publications of their sanctioning bodies, apply those rules, and have rule books available for reference when a coach questions a call or ruling, particularly when confronted with “I read this on the internet.”

The sources of our rules and mechanics for umpiring OHSAA Softball are:

- ◆ NFHS Rules Book, 2026 edition
- ◆ NFHS Case Book, 2026 edition
- ◆ NFHS Umpires Manual, published every two years (2026-2027 edition)
- ◆ OHSAA White Book, produced annually to communicate Ohio information
- ◆ Weekly Bulletins, providing updates of rules and interpretations as well as other communications to umpires

The OHSAA website includes our General Sports Regulations, Softball Regulations and the Softball Manual published for coaches. Information that umpires need from these publications is included in the White Book, which is designed to put all information you need in one place.

The first four items were included in the mailing umpires received from the OHSAA. Note that the Umpire Manual is printed and sent to you every other year. Retain it for the 2026/2027 seasons.



These are the *only* official publications and sources for NFHS/OHSAA rules and mechanics. Our weekly bulletins provide any updates needed – make it a point to review each one.

With the current trends to add more technology to our lives we need to remember that –

- ◆ The internet is not always our friend! We can search for all types of information, but it is not always accurate to our games and may not meet our needs.
- ◆ When we search the web or use artificial intelligence, we may get results that are accurate for some sets of playing rules and mechanics but not for ours!
- ◆ There are countless softball groups that have rules and deviations from the rules of major softball organizations. We follow only NFHS/OHSAA rules and mechanics.
- ◆ Websites that discuss rules from codes such as NCAA, USA Softball or other groups are designed for their games and their various levels of play. NFHS rules are designed to make a great game for student-athletes in the interscholastic age group and with the goal of education based athletic opportunities.
- ◆ We are fortunate that our NFHS/OHSAA umpire mechanics match those of USA Softball but must remember they don't match the NCAA or other organizations.
- ◆ There are some training websites that include

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Mechanics Miscues

The following is a list of miscues regarding umpire mechanics which we continue to see in our contests. Let's work on improving in these areas in 2026!

- **Timing** continues to be a problem. Whether on the plate or bases, do not rush your call. Remember: stop and set, see the *whole* play, then make your call.
- **Pointing vs. Safe or Fair signals.** When there is a trapped ball (batted or thrown), give the Safe signal; if it is near the foul line, give the Fair signal. Pointing to the ground is not a signal in this case.
- **Unnecessary Foul calls.** There is no need for a signal or vocal on *obvious* foul balls—balls hit directly into the backstop or screen, balls hit out of play.
- **Sell Safe or Sell Out calls.** Be sure to use them on close plays but only on close plays. No showboating.

Sourcing the Right Sources cont. from page 16

mechanics used in other games or states but don't apply in our games. We need to ignore these sites as this is the only way we can work together and have all our umpires doing the same thing!

- ◆ At times coaches and/or fans may have good intentions but they use search engines that may lead them astray. We need to work with all stakeholders to ensure that we are using the proper resources to answer questions.
- ◆ Many of our umpires work both baseball and softball – this is often necessary. If doing this we need to study the rules and mechanics differences.
- ◆ Most importantly, it's our responsibility to have publications readily available at the game site and to refer to these if necessary. The OHSAA doesn't recognize protests of decisions made by umpires. Therefore, we need to use the books and "get it right at the game site." Our umpires have a big responsibility in this area.

Stick to the books - Don't be the MSU umpire (Making Stuff Up)!

■ **Infield Fly.** When one umpire signals/calls Infield Fly, all umpires should give the signal (fully extending the right arm above the head with a clenched fist). Show the signal until the play is over.

■ **Status.** On fly balls and line drives hit close to the foul lines, as soon as the ball is touched by the fielder, give fair or foul status by pointing into fair or foul territory, and then continue to umpire the play. If the ball, first touched over fair territory, is not caught and bounces into foul territory, give a vigorous fair ball signal. If first touched over foul territory, give the foul ball signal. If first touched over foul territory and caught, give the out signal only; remember, the ball remains live and the runners can tag and advance—calling a foul ball here will kill that play.

■ **Tighten Pivots.** Base umpires are reminded that our mechanics require them to pivot inside the infield when a ball is hit to the outfield. These pivots should be tight to the bases and not more than 10-to-12 feet from the base line. Too many base umpires are observed coasting into the center of the infield. Also, while pivoting, it is important to watch the runners touch the bases.

■ **Batted ball hit a second time, hit off the batter.** When a batted ball is hit a second time or comes into contact with the batter, the base umpire should call dead ball *immediately*. The umpires may need to confer to determine the position of the batter (fair or foul territory) to determine whether to assess an out.

■ **Obstruction enforcement.** If the obstructed runner is put out on the play, the umpire should call Dead Ball. Please do not call the runner out and then reverse your call with the obstruction award.

■ **Game Management.** The base umpire should assist the plate umpire and make necessary corrections when violations are observed, such as the on-deck batter positioning in front of the opponent's dugout or the presence of team personnel outside of the dugout.

■ **Excessive Brushing.** There is no need to brush the pitcher's plate each half inning if it is not covered with dirt. This specifically applies when playing on artificial turf. Also, don't hold up play to brush a base unless it is absolutely necessary.

Plate Mechanics Review: Are You Too Close or Too Far Away?

The plate umpire's positioning in relation to the strike zone is so important to judging balls and strikes. Standing too far back, a common mistake observed of many umpires, may restrict the PU's ability to see the entire strike zone. Standing too close presents its problems, among those the potential of being blocked by the actions of the batter or catcher and hindering the catcher's freedom of movement.

Strictly speaking, we don't want to be so far back that we do not see the pitch and possibly lose the outside edge of the plate, nor do we want to be so close that we are constantly coming in contact with the catcher. NOTE: Plate umpires should *NEVER* be touching the catcher, or appear to be touching the catcher.

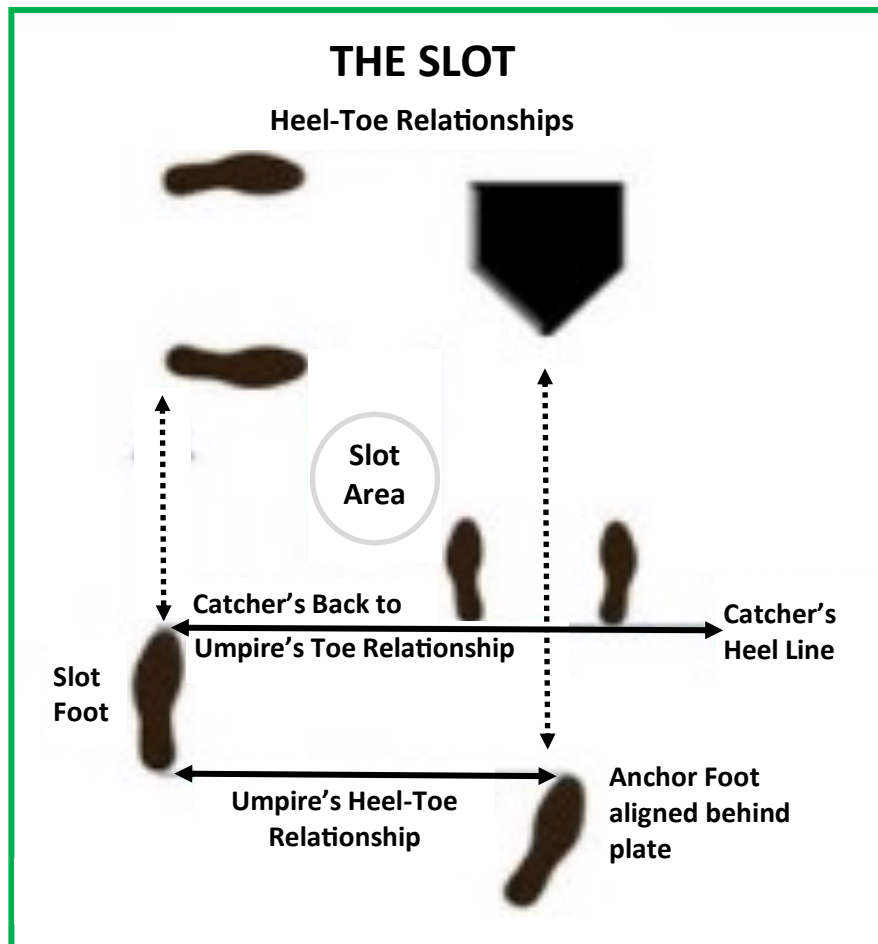
How do we know if we are in the proper position? It all starts with the feet.

Anchor Foot Behind the Plate

The NFHS Umpires Manual, in Chapter 2, provides an excellent account of the proper stance (note that the Manual addresses slow pitch and fast pitch separately). Like most other mechanics manuals, it specifies that the PU take position by setting the foot opposite the batter (right handed batter=right foot), behind the catcher. For most umpires, this foot should be directly behind the point of the plate and 10-to-12 inches from the back of the catcher.

The PU's hips and shoulders should square to the outside front corner of the plate. This is accomplished by moving the foot closest to the batter (right handed batter=left foot) toward the batter so that the heel of that foot is in a straight line with the toe of your foot behind the catcher. This is why we call this the toe-heel stance.

Doing this should put you in the slot,



the area your head should be located, when you drop into the set position. With the proper stance and distance from the catcher you should see the entire plate and as a result the entire strike zone.

Are you too close or too far away? Check your feet. If the toe of your batter-side foot is on a straight line with the back of the catcher, you should have achieved the proper distance.

Balance

Balance is important. The PU's feet should be positioned wide enough to provide a strong base yet also enable the umpire to move quickly when the ball is put into play (or gets away

from the catcher). Taller plate umpires may find that to attain that base, they may need to position their plate-side leg slightly on the other side of the point of the plate. Remember: The wider the stance, the less movement you will make dropping into the set position. Shorter PUs might achieve their base with their plate foot slightly nearer to the batter.

Make sure that your positioning for left handed batters mirrors that for right handed batters. Anchoring your stance by setting your foot behind the plate in the proper position and then stepping toward to batter and obtaining a toe-to-heel relationship, every time, should enable you to establish position consistently and be the basis for a consistent plate game.

Base Umpires: Are You Ready?

Whether in the 2-, 3- or 4-umpire system, base umpires are required to cover a lot of distance in a very short period of time to get into the best calling position. Accomplishing this is reliant on the following factors:

- ✦ Being in the proper starting position.
- ✦ Being ready to move when the ball is put into play.
- ✦ Being ready for the play via pre-pitch planning.

Proper Starting Position

The No. 1 flaw in this area is *aligning too deep*. When base umpires start off too deep, extra steps are required to get to the calling positions, sacrificing both angle and distance to the play. This is especially critical to efforts of the base umpire to get inside the infield when the ball is hit into the outfield, which is required by our mechanics. Getting inside the diamond quickly is imperative as this action allows us to pick up the ball while glancing at the runner(s). As the ball is returned to the infield we can let it take us to the play that we need to cover.

With no runners, our 2-umpire mechanics require the base umpire at first base to start in foul territory, a step off the foul line, and take a step or two forward with the pitch so that the umpire is 18 feet from first base and pushing off from the left foot to spring into fair territory when the ball is put into play.

■ **Avoid:** starting too deep, standing and not moving with the pitch.

With runners on base, our 2-umpire mechanics require the base umpire to “shade” the lead runner (i.e. being closest to the base of the lead runner). Base umpires should have unobstructed views of all runners and their bases for pick-off attempts, etc. but the most likely play is going to be on the lead runner. BUs should be deep enough, *but not deeper than necessary*, to see the pitcher, batter, all runners and allow the fielders freedom of movement.

■ **Avoid:** starting too deep, starting too far away from the lead runner (i.e. being to the right of the second baseperson with the lone runner on first base).

Being Ready to Move when the Ball is Put Into Play

Overlooked when starting from a position in the field is the use of the Ready position or stance prior to the pitch. Us-

Calling the Play Elements

Position—Angle, then Distance

- Force Plays—90 degrees to the throw
- Tag Plays—90 degrees to the approach of the runner

See all four elements:

- Ball
- Base
- Offensive Player
- Defensive Player

Stop and Set—be stationary to see the play

See the Play—watch the whole play

Make the Call—use proper signals

ing the Ready puts umpires in a position from which they can quickly react to the play, moving in any direction from a very balanced and athletic stance. Some elements of the Ready position (see Umpire Manual, page 33):

From standing upright in a comfortable position, place your feet at least shoulder width apart, which creates a firm foundation.

At the start of the pitch, go to the Ready position by leaning forward and placing your hands comfortably in front of your body (waist-to-thigh level). This transfers your weight to the balls of

your feet for better balance and providing you with the ability to make an athletic response to the play.

■ **Avoid:** standing straight up with feet close together, placing your hands on your hips, leaning forward and resting your hands on or above your knees; hands and arms should never be locked on the body but balanced freely in front of it. *The Ready position is an athletic position—you should not be locked into place.*

Being Ready via Pre-Pitch Planning

Focus is vital to reacting properly when the ball is put into play. In addition to preparing umpires for what could happen on the next play, it helps them maintain focus.

Pre-pitch planning starts at the conclusion of the play, once all action has stopped and the pitcher has the ball in the circle. At this point, the base umpire should assess the locations of all base runners and move to the proper starting position. While assuming the starting position, take into consideration the location of the fielders and make sure you are not affecting their ability to make a play, and that you have an unobstructed view of all runners.

Other items to be considered in pre-pitch planning:

- ✦ How many outs? Do we have Infield Fly?
- ✦ Watch for signal from PU
- ✦ What is my responsibility if ball is hit into infield?
- ✦ What is my responsibility if ball is hit into outfield?
- ✦ Bases to watch, runners, tag-ups
- ✦ Chase responsibility and area?
- ✦ Possible game strategies – plays to expect (steal, bunt)
- ✦ Make a final review of the previous play, particularly if there was a ruling involved; this is your last chance to get it right.

Lineups, Substitution and Penalty Reminders

Proper lineup card management and proper enforcement of the substitution rules is an important duty of the plate umpire. Below is a summary of the lineup and substitution rules that are contained in NFHS Rule 3, as well as a recap outlining the penalties that are applied in each situation.

Lineups

- Teams must have 9 players to start the game – NO EXCEPTIONS
- When using DP/Flex, lineup consists of 10 players but only 9 batters
- Roster Batting is prohibited—all levels
- Once the game has started, teams may drop to 8 players should a player leave the game for any reason and no sub is available.
- An out is charged each time the vacant position comes to bat.
- If a team drops below 8 players, the game cannot continue and is a forfeit.

Lineup Card Requirements:

- First initial, last name, jersey number and defensive position of all starters, listed in the order in which they will bat.
- First initial, last name, jersey number of all substitutes (a player does not need to be present in order to be listed as a sub).

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DP/Flex Quick Reference Chart

Managing the DP/Flex is a major challenge of lineup card management. The chart below presents a number of basic situations and resulting rulings that umpires may encounter. (NFHS 3-3-4)

ACTION	RESULT
DP/Flex must be included in starting lineup card submitted in pregame	DP/Flex cannot be implemented if not part of original starting lineup.
DP or Flex may be removed from lineup after lineups become "official"	Team goes from 10 to 9 players but may reinstitute DP/Flex during game. Player (DP or Flex) has been removed and may re-enter once.
DP plays defense for any of the other 8 batters	Player for whom DP is playing continues to bat and has not left the game. No effect to DP/Flex.
DP plays defense and Flex comes out of game	DP is playing defense for the Flex. Flex has left the game but may re-enter once. Flex may be reinstated by inserting an eligible sub into Flex position.
Flex bats or runs for DP	DP left the game but may re-enter once. DP may be reinstated by inserting an eligible sub into the DP position.
Flex bats or runs for one of the other 8 players in the lineup	Not allowed. Illegal sub penalty enforced.
Flex is withdrawn from game	Team continues with 9 players but may reinstitute the Flex by returning that player or an eligible substitute to the Flex position.
DP is withdrawn from the game	The Flex is inserted into the batting order in the DP's position. Team continues with 9 players but may reinstitute the DP by inserting that player or an eligible sub into that position in the batting order and returning the Flex player to defense only.

Lineups/Subs cont. from page 18

Lineup Card Violations and Penalties:

- Incorrect name, jersey number—make the correction (name supersedes jersey number). **PENALTY:** 1st offense=team warning; 2nd offense=head coach is restricted
- Substitute not listed on lineup card—add sub to lineup card and allow her to play. **PENALTY:** 1st offense=team warning; 2nd offense=head coach is restricted

Substitutes

- Substitutes may play even if not listed on the lineup card. **PENALTY:** 1st offense=team warning; 2nd offense=head coach is restricted
- Substitutes must be reported to the plate umpire. **PENALTY:** 1st offense=team warning; 2nd offense=head coach and substitute are restricted
- **Projected substitute:** The coach informs the umpire that No. 12 will bat for No. 7 but No. 7 will return to the game when the team goes on defense. The umpire accepts the No. 12 for No. 7 change. The second part is a projected substitute and is not accepted.
- **Re-entry:** Each starter may be removed from the game and returned to the game once, provided she returns to the same position in the batting order that she originally occupied. Each substitute may be removed from the game and returned to the game once provided she returns to the same position in the batting order that she originally entered.
- **PENALTY:** If a starter or sub re-enters the game in a position in the lineup other than the position she originally occupied or after being removed a second time, she is an ILLEGAL SUBSTITUTE.
 - If she is discovered while batting or on base, she is called out and restricted to the bench. When discovered after completing her turn at bat and before the next pitch, the offensive play is negated
 - If discovered while she is on defense, the player is removed from the game and restricted; if she was involved in a play immediately prior to discovery, the offense is given the option of negating the play.

- **Defensive positions:** There is no requirement for coaches to report defensive position changes that do not involve substitution. However, changes to the pitcher and catcher positions should be reported and recorded so that the courtesy runner rule can be properly applied.
- **DP/Flex:** Any change involving the DP or Flex is considered a substitution and must be reported and recorded.
- **Pitchers** may be removed and returned to the pitching position once per inning, regardless of whether they are removed from the lineup. A pitcher returning to the pitching position in the same inning is not allowed any warmup pitches. The second time the pitcher is removed from the pitching position, she may not return that inning.
- **Courtesy Runners:** All courtesy runners must be reported.
- **PENALTY:** An unreported courtesy runner is an UNREPORTED SUBSTITUTE; the unreported substitute penalty (1st offense-team warning; 2nd offense=restriction of head coach and substitute) is applied and the substitute and re-entry rules are applied to this lineup change.

Summary of Lineup and Substitution Penalties

- **Lineup Card Error** (incorrect name or number, substitute not listed)
PENALTY: 1st offense=team warning; 2nd offense=head coach restricted
- **Unreported Substitute**
PENALTY: 1st offense=team warning; 2nd offense=head coach and player restricted
- **Illegal Substitute** (improper re-entry, no longer eligible to re-enter, illegal courtesy runner, Flex entering on offense for a player other than the DP)
PENALTY: Player removed from the game and restricted. If at bat or immediately after at-bat=player declared out and play negated (other outs recorded on the play stand). If on defense, preceding play negated if offender was involved.

Update on Uniforms

There are no changes to the softball umpire uniform for 2026 but there are some clarifications as well as some improvements coming in future years. Although the OHSAA has an updated logo the officials' uniform logo stays the same. We have made updates to our Handbook for Officials to reflect the change made back in 2024 - the approved navy blue knit cap with the OHSAA logo may be worn in lieu of the navy cap for cold weather situations. We've also clarified that the plate umpire may wear a short or long sleeve shirt, and the base umpire could wear a jacket or vice versa.

In our meetings and publications last year we provided advance notice that we will be making a transition to have charcoal gray pants as our default color and eventually to become our only color for pants. This is primarily for two reasons – first, the charcoal shade seems to hold the color better without fading

and second, as more baseball/softball organizations make this change it appears that many vendors are reducing availability of heather gray pants. We are taking this opportunity to further update you on next steps in this transition:

■ **For 2026 - In the event the umpires do not agree, heather gray pants shall be worn. This will allow the umpires to wear either pants color, but all must be dressed alike. (NO CHANGE).**

■ **For 2027 - In the event the umpires do not agree, charcoal gray pants shall be worn. This will allow the umpires to wear either pants color, but all must be dressed alike.**

When purchasing new pants, umpires are encouraged to obtain charcoal gray pants. These will become mandatory in the next few years. Also, as we make this transition, we will take the opportunity to

Charcoal Gray Pants Vs. Heather Gray Pants

use navy blue ball bags as choice of color for that item.

Some other reminders as to uniforms:

- A navy shirt with the OHSAA embroidered or sublimated logo. It is not permissible to wear a long sleeve garment under a short sleeve shirt.
- A jacket shall be the red shoulder stripe model – Navy with red/white trim on the shoulder. The OHSAA logo shall be embroidered on the jacket.
- A navy cap with the OHSAA logo is required. The OHSAA **embroidered or sublimated** logo is the only logo permitted on shirts, jackets and hats.

Finally, we are observing umpires wearing ankle-length socks which expose the lower leg, particularly when the plate umpire drops into the set position. *Please wear socks that cover the mid-calf—this looks so much neater.*

2025 State Tournament Umpires

We congratulate the following umpires who were selected to umpire the 2025 OHSAA State Championships. With the change from four to seven divisions, the number of state championship umpires increased from 48 to 84. These umpires worked hard to improve at their craft. Many of these umpires attended our Mechanics Clinics.

Congratulations to all!

**Mark Abbuhl
Darin Alexander
Rick Annen**

**D Justin Barzak
Donald Barzak
Brian Beeksmas
Eric Bender
Lou Bennett
Eric Bond
Jeff Bowman
Terry Bowshier
James Brumbaugh
Mike Burwell
Dan Carnahan
Nathan Carroll
Wendell Caulley
William Combs III
Cindy Comyns
Rebecca Cooper
Michael Curtin
Todderick Davis
David DeVelvis
Greg Drach**

**Timothy Easterling
Danita Fick
Deanne Finkel
Eric Garber
Terrell Guidry
George Gulas
Andy Guzowski
Charles Hall
Dale Handley
Brian Harrell
Galen Harris
Steve Hartman
Scott Helberg
Bernard Hensley
Bradley Hoffman
Maria Hottinger
Kim Johnson
Lynn Johnson
William Jordan
Chad Leach**

**Carles Leach
Frank Lecon
Kevin Lehman
Mark McDonald
Paul Melcher
Steve Meyer
John Meyers
Jon Milesky
David Miller
Patrick Montana
Anthony Montana
Ryan Murphy
Harold Myers
Vickie Napierkowski
Tony Ninni
Kevin Oser
Jeff Overmyer
Linda Papagna
Earl Pugh
Richard Randall**

**James Reneau
David Robenstine
Edwin Roberts
Gary Russell II
Ken Schmitz
Pam Schultz
John Schulz
David Scott JR
Robert Seedhouse JR
Joseph Shaw
Max Smeltzer
Lester Stewart
Eric Stinehelfer
Karly Tennant
Ron Tatgenhorst
Jose Travis
Steven Trout
Joshua Walters
Michael Young
James Ziegler**

Are You that “Other Umpire?”

As an umpire, you are likely to have a coach or game administrator start a conversation with, “that other umpire we had...” and proceed to explain an issue. Most of these are issues of umpires “over-officiating” their games. This might involve applying rules that have since been changed or no longer exist; focusing on smaller details while allowing key violations (illegal pitch, obstruction, interference) to occur without enforcement; even lack of professional conduct in communications with coaches and players.

Are you “that other umpire?” Below are some examples of these faux pas. Let’s address these in 2026!

■ **Jewelry.** NFHS removed its rule which banned players from wearing jewelry in 2023 but we still re-



ceive complaints that umpires are enforcing a rule that is no longer in the book. Student-athletes are permitted to wear jewelry during softball contests. Rule 3-2-13 still applies, empowering umpires to prohibit potentially dangerous equipment. Unless the jewelry has spikes, spurs, or is a long, dangling piece outside the uniform it very likely is not dangerous. Remember that umpires wanted this rule and now we have it!

■ **Conversations with Players and Coaches.** After the occasional brief pre-game greetings these should be kept to a minimum and involve the *game in progress only!* There should be *NO* engagement in conversation with players. Ball, strike, safe, out, etc. should be the

only communication. Conversations with coaches should be professional—we are not there to socialize. Be polite but remember that our between inning positions are designed to keep us “alone”.

■ **Pregame Conferences** are not a time to put on a rules clinic. These should follow the format prescribed in the Umpires Manual (page 19). This is the opportunity for umpires to establish the tone of control for the game—please use it as such. By keeping this meeting brief we emphasize the importance of starting the game promptly and then keeping it moving. When we complain about long days on the field, we are often our own worst enemy.

■ **Enforce what needs to be enforced** but don’t look for trouble. Be observant in detecting rules violations without getting out your magnifying glass. When it involves player behavior, involve the head coach.

■ **Focus on the big picture.** Hone your rules knowledge and judgement to make the “big” calls such as obstruction, interference, malicious contact.

Caution About Social Media

Umpires need to take great care not only in performing all their duties but in controlling what is said on Social Media and for that matter what is said verbally. This would include any comments about a game or a prospective assignment.

It is inappropriate for any official, assigner, instructor, or local association executive to connect with a student via social media. This does not include athletes that are part of your family or officials that communicate to students as part of their job responsibilities (coaches, administrators, or teachers).

It’s also not appropriate to pose for photos with student athletes – “here is our favorite umpire.” This has long-range detriments to your reputation for fairness.

Continued on page 24

Are You That Other Umpire cont. from page 7

■ **Avoid interrupting the flow of the game.** In the midst of a 3-ball, 2-strike batter-pitcher battle, do you need to stop the game to position a coach in the coaching box or move someone from the bench away from the opening to the field? Sometimes you may need to stop play to make a correction. Be judicious as to when it is really necessary – pick your spots and keep the game moving. Another example of this is dusting home plate, pitcher’s plate and bases – whenever possible do this when there is a natural break in the action. Remember also that very little, if any, dusting may be necessary on a turf field.

■ **It’s 5 miles away, we should be safe.** Of course, this refers to lightning or thunder in the area. Whether its five or 50 miles is immaterial. Our rule book and OHSAA directive requires us to halt the game immediately at the first sign of lightning in the area or clap of thunder, and remain paused until 30 minutes has passed from the last strike. The portion of the rule covering lightning in the distance and seen on the horizon was designed for games played after dark.

■ **Have a great understanding of Rule 3-6.** These are the rules pertaining to various conduct violations and have varying penalties—warning, restriction, ejection. Apply the proper penalty to the violation. If unsure, consult the rule book (one umpire should have one at the field).

■ **Use proper mechanics.** Make sure your signals are sharp. Participants and spectators appreciate this from umpires. Proper signals and mechanics show that umpires know the rule and are sure of their judgement. Use proper signals and sell the close call using strong signals – and avoid selling the routine plays such as foul balls in the parking lot or over the backstop, routine catches of pop-ups and fly balls, a runner reaching the base safely when the fielder does not catch the ball or even when there is no throw to that base.

NOTE TO LOCAL INTERPRETERS—These are a great topic for Local Meetings!

Filing OHSAA Game Reports

To submit any report for player/coach ejections, sportsmanship, facility, and medical/concussion:

1. Reports are ONLY accessible from the **contract details of the contest you officiated in your DragonFly account**. Reports are NOT accessible in the DragonFly App. Do NOT use the app for reporting. Officials will fill out the form electronically on DragonFly. Go to “My Assignments” (may need to go to Past Games). Click on the contest needing the report. Scroll down to the bottom of the page and click “Add Document.” Please complete one report per offending school.

2. Follow the process as stated in the **OHSAA Officiating Handbook (pages 14 & 15)**: <https://ohsaaweb.blob.core.windows.net/files/Officiating/OHSAAOfficialsHandbook.pdf>

- Reports must be completed within 48 hours.
- Contact the AD or principal directly by phone, email, or in person and let them know you are filing the report in DragonFly.
- Make sure that you have the correct player jersey number, or player’s name or coach’s name.
- Be specific and factual and to the point. Leave out any thoughts or beliefs and state the rule where applicable.

The Officials Report Form may also be used to report good or poor sportsmanship, concussions, severe injuries, facility problems, or equipment problems.

Ejections other than players or coaches and other items of which the Director should be made aware must be submitted.

The school AD and OHSAA will automatically be sent an email through DragonFly regarding this report upon clicking on submit.

Response email notifications will be sent once the protocol has been completed.

An official failing to follow the ejection protocol and/or failing to file the Officials Report may result in a maximum fine of \$100 to the official per occurrence.

Bat Certification Marks

NFHS rules require that bats meet the USA Softball bat performance standards. Thus, bats that only bear approval marks from other softball organizations without one of the above certification marks do not meet the requirements for use in high school play. Note that USA Softball also publishes a listing of Non-Approved Bats with Certification Marks. This was created to provide a listing of bats that had once been approved for use but are no longer deemed approved for use. This listing can be found on the USA Softball website at this link - <https://usa.asasoftball.com/e/BB1P2000.asp>

Here is an excerpt from the 2020 NFHS Softball Points of Emphasis:

Bat manufacturers produce several models of bats for multiple organizations. These different models are often custom designed to meet the specific organizations' individual certification requirements. Bats that are custom designed for one organization may only bear that organization's certification mark. Conversely, a large number of these bats are designed to meet several organizations' requirements and will bear multiple organizations' certifications marks – making them legal to use in multiple codes. What is important to know is that NFHS softball recognizes and utilizes USA Softball's certification process. In order for a bat to be legal for use in NFHS softball it must be marked with the ASA 2000, 2004 or the USA Softball All-Games Certification Mark. Additionally, any bat with one of these certification marks must not appear on the list of the USA Softball Non-Approved Bats with Certification Marks. This list was created as a way to alert players and coaches that a bat that was once approved for use has now been deemed no longer approved for use. All bats that are approved by USA Softball, formally ASA, for use in fast pitch play shall bear one of the markings shown in the chart on this page. Once these bats have entered the market and possible issues arise, there is a process for revoking the approval of these bats. When it has been determined that a bat should have its approval revoked, either through the re-testing process or for a voluntary removal from the manufacturer, the bat is added to the Non-Approved Bats list with Certification Marks. These bats were approved when originally manufactured and were legal for play at that time, but due to some unforeseen issues no longer pass the approval requirements.



It is important to know what Certification Marks are required for NFHS softball competition. Rule 1-5-1d and Figure 1-6 have now been updated to include USA Softball's newest certification mark shown which are also provided below – there are now three marks which are the only approved marks for bats used in high school play.

Equipment Inspection

High school rules no longer require the umpires to inspect equipment prior to every game. Umpires are expected to remain vigilant throughout the game and when illegal or altered equipment is identified the existing penalties, which remain unchanged, will need to be assessed. Certainly be prepared to answer a question from a coach about legality of equipment whether it's asked before or during a game. We remind both coaches and umpires that penalties prescribed in Rule 3-6-1 and in Rule 7-4-2 will need to be enforced should violations occur. While most equipment violations result in a team warning for the first offense and a bench restriction for the offender and coach on the next offense it's important to again note that the penalty for bringing an altered or non-approved bat into the batter's box includes ejection of both the batter and head coach. This ejection includes the additional penalties that come with any ejection of a student-athlete or coach.

Here is another excerpt from a previous NFHS Softball Point of Emphasis:

Bats continued from page 25

It is the head coach's responsibility to make certain all players are legally and properly equipped, which includes checking bats, helmets and catcher's gear prior to every contest. Equipment wears during use. Bats can become damaged, or a player may purchase a new bat that does not meet requirements. Catchers' helmets and batters' helmets have screws that hold face guards in place. These screws loosen and will eventually fall out rendering the equipment illegal and potentially causing a safety risk if not detected. Coaches must remain vigilant in inspecting equipment before every contest to ensure no damage has occurred or new noncompliant equipment has been purchased since their last inspection.

Concussion Regulations

Ohio law and OHSAA rules spell out our concussion regulations. Every three years all OHSAA officials must complete concussion training. Some reminders:

Review often the list of common symptoms of a concussion. This list is found in the NFHS Rule Book (Appendix H, page 98).

A player removed because of signs or symptoms of concussion may not return to play that day.

If you send a player out with signs or symptoms of a concussion, you must complete and file a report to the OHSAA office. You will find this report form in DragonFly in the game file.

Please follow the directions provided in the article, Filing OHSAA Game Reports on page 24 of this White Book.

Bats—Definitions and Penalties

Rules 1-5-1, 2-4, 7-4-2

■ **An illegal bat** does not meet the specifications of Rule 1-5. **Altered bats** and **non-approved bats** are both types of illegal bats. There are other types of illegal bats – a bat without a sufficient safety grip or a bat that has pine tar on the barrel are just two examples.

■ **An altered bat** was once legal but has been structurally changed by rolling, shaving, warming, or some other intentional act. When an altered bat is used all penalties for an illegal bat apply PLUS the batter and head coach are also ejected from the game.

■ **A non-approved bat** is one that does not meet USA Softball specifications OR has been placed on USA Softball list of non approved bats with the USA Softball certification mark. When a non-approved bat is used all penalties for an illegal bat apply PLUS the batter and head coach are ejected from the game (same penalty as for an altered bat).

When a penalty includes ejection of the batter and head coach (altered or non-approved bat) the umpire is required to complete the online ejection report to inform the OHSAA and the school administration which is responsible for enforcing the additional penalties that apply when an ejection occurs.

■ **Illegal Bat Penalty:** A batter using an illegal bat may be discovered, either by the umpire or the opposing team, once she enters the batter's box and until a pitch to the next batter after she completes her turn at bat. The batter is declared out. If the ball was put into play, runners are returned to the base occupied at the time of pitch; however, runners who were put out on the play remain out. When the illegal bat is an altered or non-approved bat, the batter and the head coach are also ejected.

■ **Damaged bat**, a definition added in 2020, is defined as a bat that was once legal but is now broken, cracked, dented, rattles, or has sharp edges that could cut the ball. Note that a bat that has developed instability in the handle or taper (often called a wobble) is considered a damaged bat. Damaged bats are not considered illegal and when discovered are immediately removed from the game without penalty.

In 2022 a penalty was added to address when a damaged bat that was previously removed from the game is re-introduced into the contest. Under Rule 3-6-21 this penalty includes an out on the batter with all runners not put out on any play being returned to the original base as well as a bench restriction for both the batter and her coach.

SPORTING CONDUCT & EJECTIONS



We all know the importance of good sporting conduct. This applies not only to coaches and players but to umpires as well. Umpires are reminded to study Rule 3-6 and other rules relating to sporting conduct. Remember that potential penalties for unsporting conduct by a coach often include a bench restriction. When appropriate, we encourage that this option be used.

In recent years there have been some reports that celebrations have gone beyond what is acceptable and have been the cause of issues between participants. We certainly want to allow brief and spontaneous emotional reactions after a play. Beyond these reactions umpires should not permit prolonged, orchestrated, choreographed, self congratulatory, self glorifying, excessive, or demeaning actions that are not good for the game. It's impossible to write everything that should and should not be allowed. However, this listing of legal and specifically prohibited acts is intended to provide examples that will assist coaches in educating their teams and umpires in making decisions. Note that the penalty for illegal acts is covered in Rule 3-6-6.

Examples of Legal Acts

1. Celebration in the dugout or bench area.
2. Handshakes, high fives, chest bumps, and similar brief spontaneous celebrations with a teammate legally on the field.
3. Simulating a cross on the chest, pointing to the sky, or raising the hands or the ball into the air to celebrate a play.
4. Players spontaneously celebrating together after a home run or other outstanding play.

Examples of Illegal Acts

1. Use of profanity; insulting or vulgar language or gestures.
2. Taunting, baiting, deceitful or intimidating actions toward an opponent.
3. Words or actions designed to incite spectators.
4. An action which is intended or designed to embarrass, ridicule, or demean others under any circumstances including but not limited to race, religion, gender, or national origin.
5. Derogatory remarks directed at a game official.
6. Dancing, forward or back flips, orchestrated, choreographed, or extended celebrations.
7. Bowing at waist, making a hand salute, or striking a pose meant to incite or taunt opponents and/or spectators.
8. Hand gestures such as choking, throat slashing, or pointing a finger like a gun.

Ejections

When an ejection does occur, there are important steps that must be followed:

- A. Officials shall file a report with the OHSAA office whenever a coach or player is ejected from an athletic contest **within 48 hours of the ejection**.
 1. **Step 1: Speak with offender's principal/athletic director** – Whenever an ejection occurs, the ejecting

official shall speak with the offender's principal/athletic director no later than **the first school day** following the ejection.

2. **Step 2: Submit Report Form** – Officials will fill out the form electronically in DragonFly. Select the game file on your Game Assignments page, scroll to the bottom and click on the Add Document button. Select Ejection Report from the menu of documents and complete in its entirety (*see Filing OHSAA Game Reports on page 24 of this White Book*). Please complete one report for each person and for each offending school.
- B. The Officials Report Form may also be used to report good or poor sportsmanship, severe injuries, facility problems, or equipment problems.
- C. Ejections other than players or coaches and other items of which the Director should be made aware must be reported.
- D. The school AD and OHSAA will automatically be sent an email concerning the ejection.
- E. Response email notifications will be sent once the protocol has been completed.

An official failing to follow the ejection protocol and/or failing to file the Officials Report may result in a maximum fine of \$100 to the official per occurrence.

Ejected players must stay with the team (unless removed from the site by a parent/guardian). Ejected coaches or adult team personnel must leave the area of the contest, have no further communication with the team, and not perform any coaching functions. Such personnel may only return if summoned by an official in case of a situation such as a serious injury.

Ejected players and coaches are ineligible for the remainder of the day of the ejection and all contests at all levels until two games of the same level as the game of the ejection are played.

Post-game ejections are possible. Umpire jurisdiction does not end until all umpires have left the confines of the field. Inappropriate behavior on the field, after the game has ended may result in an ejection and will be handled no differently than an ejection during the game. Umpires are not to be harassed, threatened, followed, or menaced while coming to or leaving the field. The home team or game management is responsible for the security of the officials.

Game Ending/Suspended/Interrupted Games

With the typical weather issues we see each spring there seem to be many questions on this topic. There have been reports that officials have ignored severe weather conditions. Officials who do this will be fined and/or suspended.

Extra Innings

Most softball games are seven innings. When a game goes into extra innings, the OHSAA has no tiebreaker procedure and the only rules change relates to charged conferences (see Rule 3-7-1). No “ghost” runners are placed on bases.

5 Inning Games

Schools may agree to play a five inning game when multiple regular season games (such as a doubleheader) are scheduled for the same day. This agreement must be reached prior to the conclusion of the pregame conference.

Runs-Ahead Rule

The ten run rule applies after five innings in all games. In addition, any game will also end when both head coaches and the plate umpire mutually agree to shorten and terminate the game. A game will also end when it is forfeited under NFHS rule 4-3, however, in OHSAA play no game can be forfeited until after

it has started. A game which can't be started for any reason is a “No Contest”. All of these rules apply equally to regular season and tournament games.

Tournament Games

When an OHSAA tournament game is interrupted or suspended for any reason, the game shall be resumed at a later time and continued from the point of suspension/interruption unless both head coaches and the plate umpire mutually agree to shorten and terminate the game.

Suspended Games

The OHSAA does not permit games to be called and “started over” at a later date. When a regular season game is interrupted and the game can't be resumed that day, the game will be suspended if the team behind in the score has not completed its turn at bat in the fifth inning. If a regular season contest has gone beyond this point, it is a complete game subject to two important exceptions. The first of these exceptions is a tie game. The OHSAA does not permit games to end in a tie and therefore all games are won, lost, or suspended. Tie games are suspended.

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Completed or Suspended Game?

When a game is halted by weather or other factors, the OHSAA has rules for determining whether that game is “official”—does not have to be completed—or suspended in which case it must be completed from the point of interruption at a later date. Here are examples of completed and suspended games:

The game is halted before the completion of 5 innings of play (4 ½ innings if Home team is

ahead)

- **Suspended Game**

The game is halted in any inning with the score tied

- **Suspended Game**

The Visiting Team, trailing 6-4 entering the 6th inning, scores 3 runs to take a 7-6 lead but the game is halted before the Home Team completes its bat in the 6th inning

- **Suspended Game**

The Home Team takes a 6-4 lead in the bottom of the 5th inning; the game is halted while the Visiting Team is at bat in the 6th in-

ning with no change in score

- **Completed Game**

The Home Team enters the 6th inning with a 6-4 lead; the Visiting Team scores 1 run to make it 6-5 and has the bases loaded when the game is halted

- **Completed Game**

The Visiting takes a 7-6 lead in the 6th inning; the home team scores 2 runs for an 8-7 lead and the game is halted

- **Completed Game**

Suspended/Interrupted
Games— cont. from page 28

Any game is also suspended when all of these conditions apply:

- It has gone at least five innings
- The visiting team has scored to tie the game or take the lead in the top half of an inning
- The home team does not re-take the lead in the bottom half of the inning and has not completed its turn at bat

When a suspended game is resumed, it shall be continued from the point of suspension with batting orders and lineups the same. Substitutions may be made. Suspended games that are not resumed are a “No Contest”. These games do not count in a team’s won/loss record.

Continuing a Suspended Game

Rule 3-1-3 states: **The team's lineup card shall include first ini-**

tial and last name, jersey number, position and batting order of each starting player and shall include each eligible substitute. PENALTY: After the lineup card has been submitted to and verified by the umpire and a change is subsequently made to a player/substitute name or number, or if a player/substitute is added to the lineup card, the umpire shall issue a team warning to the head coach of the team involved. Any further changes made to a player/substitute name or number results in the head coach being restricted to the dugout/bench area for the remainder of the game.

In Ohio we have this exception to this rule:

EXCEPTION: If a game is suspended and resumed on another date the head coach may make any number of additions to the list of players and substitutes or uniform number changes to the lineup card provided such changes are reported to the umpire

immediately prior to the resumption of play on the new playing date.

Rationale: Due to weather conditions and darkness, suspended games with resumption of play on another date can be a common occurrence. This exception allows for lineup card numbering changes and player additions to be made in these situations without penalty. These changes and additions are often necessary for a variety of valid reasons – damaged uniforms, players moving from JV to varsity or vice versa, etc.

Special thanks to George Gulas, of Medina, and Tom Hathaway, of Cincinnati for their continued commitment to our umpires through annual contributions to this White Book!

Some Words on Playing Rules

We know that many of our umpires are working both OHSAA baseball and softball games on a regular basis. In many areas of the state this is very helpful as we work to insure all games are covered. Other umpires work softball games under other rules codes such as NCAA and USA Softball. This also provides valuable opportunities for umpires to get more work in each year. At the same time this can create some confusion about playing rules and the differences between sports and rules codes.

As a result it is essential to have rule books available and consult those publications when needed during the course of a game. Be prepared to check the books and explain the proper ruling to the coach. We continue to have a few unfortunate sit-

uations each year where rules are misapplied and not corrected. Some of the confusion seems to be caused by the factors mentioned above. Since the OHSAA does not recognize protests it is important that we refer to the books when needed and make corrections if necessary.

I know from experience that no one feels worse than the umpires when a rule is misapplied. We all need to get past the idea that checking a ruling is not something that should be done on the field. In this era of replay in professional and college sports it has become common to adjust a ruling – we don’t have the luxury of replay but can at least take advantage of using the books when necessary.

Thunder and Lightning—It’s Everyone’s Responsibility

Last season, an umpire posed the following question: *I was the base umpire on a game in which there clearly was thunder, but the plate umpire did not stop the game. If something catastrophic had happened, would I have been held liable since deciding whether to stop the game was his responsibility?*

The short answer is yes. But let’s take a step back to affirm a basic tenet: All umpires on the field are responsible for knowing and applying the rules. As an example, if you observe that your partner administered an improper base award or other penalty, you share in the responsibility of getting the correct ruling. You are a team.

This is especially true when it comes to applying the many rules to insure safety, such as the OHSAA Thunder and Lightning Policy.

It is clearly stated by the OHSAA. Whenever thunder is

heard or lightning is observed, the contest must be stopped and safety protocols must be initiated. If something happened, **BOTH UMPIRES** might be held liable—do we want to wait for a court to decide this?

Safety is most important, and we need to be sure that we put this foremost in our minds. Whether someone is hurt or not, in this situation both umpires would be subject to penalties imposed by the OHSAA. This could include a fine, loss of regular season or tournament assignments or suspension of an official’s permit.

A quick review of the OHSAA Thunder and Lightning Policy:

- 1. If thunder is heard, the game is stopped, the 30-minute clock kicks in—NO EXCEPTIONS!**
- 2. If lightning is seen (but no thunder heard), the game will**

be stopped and the Game Administrator(s), Umpires, and Head Coaches will convene and determine what type of delay will be administered. If there is lightning in the area, the 30-minute clock kicks in.

- 3. At night (after dark) under certain atmospheric conditions, lightning flashes may be seen from distant storms. In these cases, it MAY be safe to continue. If no thunder can be heard and the flashes are low to the horizon, the storm may not pose a threat. Independently verified lightning detection information would help eliminate any uncertainty. If any member of the group assessing conditions is uncertain, delay for 30 minutes!**
- 4. Lightning detection devices may be used to stop the contest if lightning is in the area (usually 10 miles) even if it is not seen or thunder heard. Often, school medical personnel are monitoring this equipment – obtain their input as part of your discussions.**
- 5. Err on the side of safety. If there is a delay, players, coaches and umpires must clear the field of play and seek cover. The host school is responsible to have an evacuation plan to get everyone to designated safer areas.**
- 6. The 30-minute clock is re-started each time that thunder is heard or there is lightning in the area.**

HELP WANTED

We still need your help – please join us in our efforts to recruit new people as softball umpires. We’d like you to encourage others – your friends, neighbors, relatives, and co-workers to join you as an OHSAA umpire. For information on becoming an OHSAA official go to our website, www.ohsaa.org and click on the Officiating tab then select – “Become an Official” or use this link - <https://ohsaa.org/Officiating/permits>. Remember that officials working other OHSAA sports and non-school sports are great candidates to join our team!

We also want to encourage umpires to follow our advancement process and move to Class 1. Local Associations are strongly encouraged to help umpires through this process –this is a key responsibility of the association. Please work to insure umpires receive the required observations and are prepared for the advancement test. A Class 1 umpire is eligible to work both regular season varsity and tournament games therefore the testing is a little more challenging and includes some questions on the basics of three umpire mechanics.

Tips for Newer (and Veteran) Umpires

We are fortunate to have both some veteran and retired umpires who contribute their time to watching and working with new umpires, primarily at the sub-varsity level. Here are some ideas that may help both newer and even not so new umpires. Special thanks to Bruce Fisher (Westchester), George Gulas (Medina), Tom Hathaway (Cincinnati) and Eric Shroyer (DeGraff) for their contributions to this list. All are members of our Softball Umpire Improvement Team and are well known for the work they do. If you have time to work with new umpires let your local secretary, instructor or assigner know—they will appreciate it and so will the umpires.

- Contact your partner before the game. Confirm game details—site, time, and where you will park and meet. Park next to your partner and if possible away from others.
- Arrive on time (at least 30 minutes before the scheduled game start).
- Create a list of items to include in a pregame conference with your partner. Each pregame is different -a sample is on page 19 of the NFHS Softball Umpires Manual. Umpires should work as one crew as opposed to two individuals!
- Be prepared and know how you will communicate with your partner—especially when you need help on a pulled foot, swipe tag, or similar. Remember we always need a call before getting help of any kind.
- Know the rules. Suggestion #1—read the rule and then the corresponding case play section. Suggestion #2—highlight items of importance to you and use for future study. Suggestion #3—take the rules test to assess your rules knowledge. Look up the answers if you don't know them. Suggestion #4—Attend local meetings and remember that four is the minimum—you will learn more by exceeding that number.
- Study your mechanics—they are just as important as rules. Know your responsibilities for base coverages, fly ball tag ups, and touching bases. ALWAYS HUSTLE!
- Check your appearance—proper OHSAA uniform, shoes, and equipment. FIRST IMPRESSION IS AN IMPORTANT PART OF WHAT WE DO!
- Pre-pitch Planning—prepare for the next play—WHAT WILL I DO IF?
- Make sure we always have “eyes on the ball and runners”. Know how you will transition from your calling position to your next Initial Position (IP) and be sure your partner has you covered as you lose eye contact with the ball and runners.
- Get the required distance and angle on plays – On tag plays 90 degrees to the path of the runner, at the leading edge of the base she is trying to reach, and 10 -12 feet from the play. On force plays and plays at first base increase the distance to 18-21 feet from the play and if possible ninety degrees to the path of the throw. (See Manual page 32)
- STOP, SET, SEE THE PLAY AND THEN MAKE THE CALL! Remember the three keys to good judgment calls—POSITION, STATIONARY, AND TIMING!!!
- Be approachable—be prepared to answer questions and treat people the way you would like them to treat you.
- After the game, make an honest review of your performance. What did you do well? What problems did you have? What do you need to improve? This can be done with your partner or on your own. If you are fortunate enough to have someone observe you listen carefully to what they have to offer to you and use it to your advantage. Make a list of the things that you want to work on and review regularly to improve on these.
- Learn from veteran umpires—if you have a day off or rain out go to a game and observe the crew. Ask questions after the game. Ask your assigner who would be good to observe and where they are working. Veteran umpires are always willing to help!
- Your association's interpreters, instructors, and observers are there to help. Call or email them with questions. Perhaps you'll be able to find a mentor through these people—this person can work with you and watch you—a great help. It's also helpful to share your experiences with other newer umpires. This can help both of you and is another type of mentorship.

Doing these things will help you develop confidence in your rules knowledge, mechanics, and in your calls – this helps you to sell yourself.

OHIO HIGH SCHOOL ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION

2026 SOFTBALL UMPIRE MECHANICS CLINICS

All sessions are from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

- Saturday, February 7 – East/Southeast – New Concord — East Muskingum Middle School—13120 John Glenn School Road—across from John Glenn High School — *Enter Main Entrance*
- Saturday, February 14 – Northwest – Findlay — Liberty-Benton Middle School—9180 County Road 9
Enter Middle School Main Entrance
- Sunday, February 22– Northeast — Berea — Midpark High School —165 E. Bagley Rd.
Enter at side gym doors in back of school off Eastland Rd.
- Saturday, February 28 — Southwest — West Chester — Lakota West Freshman School—5050 Tylersville Rd.
Park and enter on the west side of the school next to the softball and baseball fields
- Sunday, March 1 – Central - Hilliard — Bradley High School — 2800 Walker Rd.

The OHSAA will sponsor five Softball Mechanics Clinics this year. These clinics, designed to help umpires improve their skills and attain their advancement goals, will emphasize plate and base mechanics. Staff will be from the OHSAA Softball Umpire Instructional Team and will include OHSAA softball tournament observers. Umpires attending will receive one educational credit (local rules meeting).

◆ **Attendees will also receive SIX points added to their TOURNAMENT SELECTION SCORE.**

The cost of each clinic will be \$60 which includes all instruction, lunch, and a registration gift. Immediate registration is encouraged as the number of attendees at each location will be limited.

This clinic will be a working clinic – attendees should come prepared for both plate and base drills in an indoor setting. Please bring your plate equipment - OHSAA umpire uniform is recommended. Please also bring gym shoes as the weather will likely require that these be indoor events. Stations will be rotated in order that attendees can work with each instructor. We have learned that many of our newer umpires were as anxious as our veterans to take advantage of our Mechanics Clinics. These clinics provide a great supplement to the RefPreps classes offered to our newest umpires.

GROUPS WILL BE DIVIDED BASED ON EXPERIENCE LEVEL – THIS IS A GREAT OPPORTUNITY FOR BOTH NEWER AND VETERAN UMPIRES TO WORK ON IMPROVING THEIR MECHANICS IN A SETTING THAT HELPS THEM BASED ON THEIR AMOUNT OF EXPERIENCE.

Questions should be directed to Clinic Director Jerry Fick, OHSAA Director of Officials Development – Softball at jfick@ohsaa.org.

For Registration – See form on the next page – follow instructions on the form

Note – Clinic registration will start at 9 a.m. and program will begin at 9:30 a.m. In case of inclement weather participants will be notified by email and the clinic will be rescheduled.

OHIO HIGH SCHOOL ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION

2026 SOFTBALL UMPIRES MECHANICS CLINICS

REGISTRATION FORM

SELECT LOCATION:

- _____ Saturday, February 7 – East/Southeast – New Concord – East Muskingum Middle School—13120 John Glenn School Road—across street from John Glenn High School
- _____ Saturday, February 14 – Northwest – Findlay – Liberty-Benton Middle School—9190 County Road 9.
- _____ Sunday, February 22 – Northeast – Berea – Midpark High School—165 E. Bagley Road
- _____ Saturday, February 28 – Southwest – Westchester – Lakota West Freshman School—5050 Tylersville Road
- _____ Sunday, March 1 – Central – Hilliard – Bradley High School—2800 Walker Road

Name: _____

OHSAA Permit # _____ EMAIL ADDRESS _____

Primary Phone _____ Years as an OHSAA Softball Umpire _____

**Attendees will also receive SIX points added to their
TOURNAMENT SELECTION SCORE.**

TWO WAYS TO REGISTER

1. Detach this page. Complete the form above. Be sure to select the clinic you wish to attend at the top, include a check for \$60 made payable to the Ohio High School Athletic Association, and mail to:
OHSAA, Attn: Accounting, 4080 Roselea Place, Columbus, OH 43214

OR —

2. Click on the link to the clinic you wish to attend on the right. Find the link for the clinic you wish to attend. Click on that link. Complete the online registration form. Credit card required for \$60 registration fee.

[East/Southeast Softball Clinic - New Concord](#)

[Northwest Softball Clinic - Findlay](#)

[Northeast Softball Clinic - Berea](#)

[Southwest Softball Clinic - Westchester](#)

[Central Softball Clinic - Columbus](#)

Remove this page and complete form on the other side to submit your Mechanics Clinic Registration

State & Local Meeting Attendance Requirements

As in the past, all softball umpires must complete four education credits and one state rules meeting. The OHSAA requires umpires holding permits in both baseball and softball to attend four local meetings for each sport – details are elsewhere in this publication.

The state meeting will be available both online and in person. The **BEST WAY** to start your preparation for the coming season is to attend a “face-to-face” State Rules Interpretation Meeting. There will be seven in-person meetings. **Each meeting will feature sessions of about two hours and in addition to the state meeting will review the most important items that we want to cover prior to the season. By attending the entire session, you will receive credit for a local meeting in addition to the state softball meeting.** There is no need to “pre-register” for any face-to-face State meetings. The schedule is listed below with all meetings starting at 6:00 p.m.

- Monday, January 26 - Columbus—Franklin Heights High School—1001 Demorest Rd.
- Wednesday, January 28— New Concord – John Glenn High School -
13120 John Glenn School Rd.
- Tuesday, February 3 – West Chester - Lakota West High School, 8940 Union Centre Blvd.
Cafeteria - Enter through cafeteria doors east end of building – Door #24
- Thursday, February 5 – Cleveland – Berea-Midpark High School – 165 E. Bagley Rd.
Enter at side gym doors in back of school off of Eastland Road
- Thursday, February 12 – Findlay – Donnell Middle School – 301 Baldwin Ave.
- Tuesday, February 17 – Piqua – Upper Valley Career Center – 8811 Career Dr.
- Thursday, February 19 – Canton – Stark County Educational Service Center,
6057 Strip Ave NW

The online state meeting for softball will be available by the week of February 6. Details will be emailed to all officials and will include both login instructions and the deadlines for completing the meeting.

In-Person State Rules Meetings

Monday, January 26 - Columbus—Franklin Heights High School—
1001 Demorest Rd.

Wednesday, January 28 — New Concord — John Glenn High
School - 13120 John Glenn School Rd.

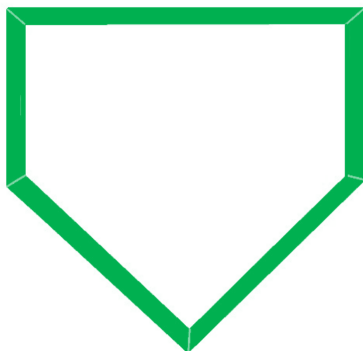
Tuesday, February 3 — West Chester - Lakota West High School,
8940 Union Centre Blvd.

Thursday, February 5 — Cleveland — Berea-Midpark High School —
165 E. Bagley Rd.

Thursday, February 12 — Findlay — Donnell Middle School — 301
Baldwin Ave.

Tuesday, February 17 — Piqua — Upper Valley Career Center —
8811 Career Dr.

Thursday, February 19 — Canton —Stark County Educational
Service Center, 6057 Strip Ave NW



OHSAA Softball Umpire Mechanics Clinics

- Saturday, February 7 — East/Southeast — New Concord —
East Muskingum Middle School—13120 John Glenn School Road
- Saturday, February 14 — Northwest — Findlay — Glenwood
Middle School—1715 North Main St.
- Sunday, February 22 — Northeast — Berea — Midpark
High School —165 E. Bagley Rd.
- Saturday, February 28 — Southwest — West Chester —
Lakota West Freshman School—5050 Tylersville Rd.
- Sunday, March 1 — Central - Hilliard — Bradley High
School—2800 Walker Road

OHSAA Softball Pre-Tournament Clinic

- Sunday, May 17 — Hilliard Memorial Middle School — 2900 Walker Road—Hilliard
12:00 p.m. registration, clinic runs 12:30-4:30. 3-Umpire and 4-Umpire mechanics will be covered.