



OHIO HIGH SCHOOL ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION
PRESEASON GUIDE FOR SOFTBALL UMPIRES
“THE WHITE BOOK”

2024 Edition

JERRY FICK - DIRECTOR OF OFFICIALS DEVELOPMENT – SOFTBALL

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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 2024 Softball Season

It's time for another softball season and I again look forward to again serving 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 had the pleasure to meet many of you at our clinics, state and local meetings, and during our tournaments. I hope to see you this year.

We have a number of 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 receive every other year (even numbered years). We continue to use NFHS Mechanics, the same as used in USA Softball. We are confident that the customized content of the White Book will better serve you.

As mentioned in our EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITES section, the NFHS has greatly enhanced the Softball Umpires Manual for the 2024 season. The number of pages has tripled and there is new information on base umpire starting positions, signals, definitions and mechanics terminology plus improved diagrams and expanded information on both the Two Umpire System (65 pages) and the Three Umpire System (80 pages). Additional information has been added to such topics as proper positioning, angles and distances, and using good timing. With this additional information we will be placing a great emphasis on mechanics in this year's local meetings, publications, and of course our Mechanics Clinics will have additional significance. It's our goal to make our umpires even more proficient for the coming season.

We will also continue our popular series of one-day Softball Umpire Mechanics Clinics. These clinics, de-



Jerry Fick
Director of Officials
Development-Softball

signed 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 of softball. 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 learned last year 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. These clinics indeed provide a great supplement to the RefPreps classes offered to our newest umpires. **At this year's clinics, 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 upon their amount of experience.**

I'm happy to say once again that there are no changes to the softball umpire uniform this year. Although the OHSAA has an updated logo, the logo for officials' uniforms is NOT changing.

Before further discussing the coming season, I would like to congratulate, on behalf of the entire OHSAA family and all of our officials, Gary Russell II. Gary, who lives in Roseville in the Southeast District, has been an OHSAA Softball Umpire for 24 years, and

Publications Note

In addition to this White Book, the OHSAA Softball Mailing includes your NFHS publications - Rule Book, Case Book and the new Umpires Manual. Note that the Umpire Manual is good for the 2024 and 2025 seasons.

Continued on page 4

25-Years of Service Umpires

We want to recognize officials completing 25 years of service as OHSAA softball umpires. **Congratulations to all!**

JACK BIRD..... Norton
WAYNE ALLGOOD Jr..... Elyria
JACK BIRD..... Norton
EDWARD CIHY Wheeling
MIKE DRAGON..... Lagrange
ERIC ERICKSON Waterville
ROBERT GABELBridgeport
BRIAN HARRELLFairlawn
PHILLIP HENZLER Sr.....
Northwood
GARY JENNINGS..... Niles
KIM JOHNSONCincinnati
ERIC MARKHAM Wellston
MICHAEL McCLELLAN.....
Sylvania
MICHAEL McCORMIC.....
Newark
STEVE MEYERHamilton
JOHN MIRGON.....Zanesville
BILL OKOROWSKI... Walbridge
PAUL OYASKIMayfield Hts.
JOSEPH PENNINGTON.....
New Bavaria
HAROLD SHAFFER JR.....
North Canton
JOSEPH STEPHENS .. Massillon
CARL TIPTON Perrysburg
RONALD WILSONColumbus
TERRY WINCH..... Crestline

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was the 2023 recipient of the National Federation OHIO OFFICIAL OF THE YEAR for softball. He has served as an OHSAA tournament umpire at all levels and is very active as a member of the Muskingum Valley Umpires Association. Gary has also served as a tournament observer and clinic instructor. When you see Gary on the field please congratulate him and say thanks for his many contributions to the OHSAA.

Gary was honored at the Officials Hall of Fame Banquet in June. In addition, veteran softball umpires Andrew Holloman and Cheryl Opperman were inducted into the 34th class of the OHSAA Officials Hall of Fame. Andrew is from Orwell and has been a tournament official in several sports. He is a 46-year official and worked two state softball tournaments. Cheryl is from Wellington and recently retired after 32 years on the softball diamonds of Northeast Ohio. She served 13 years as Secretary-Treasurer of the Elyria Umpires Association and has worked 10 state softball tournaments and was a regional umpire 21 consecutive years.

We also want to recognize officials completing 25 years of service as OHSAA softball umpires. These umpires, along with those who worked our State Tournament in Akron, are listed elsewhere in the White Book. Again, roughly one third of our state tournament umpires were making their first appearance at this event and that is no doubt a result of many of these umpires attending our Mechanics Clinics and working hard to improve at

their craft. **Congratulations to all!**

This is the 14th year of the OHSAA's program to provide officials with additional training and 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 of 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 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 a schedule of our state meetings, can be found on the back cover of the White Book.

We will again offer a pre-tournament clinic covering the three umpire system, plus more, on Sunday, May 5 at Waggoner Road Junior High School in Reynoldsburg. 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 p.m..

With the changes in software packages, the OHSAA will not be able to offer rules testing for softball umpires this year. We hope to be able to reinstate this program in the future.

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We will continue to provide bulletins 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: www.ohsaa.org/Officiating/DOD. The comments we received have been very positive. If umpires have suggestions to further improve these please let me know.

Also ongoing is the use of observers at our state and regional tournaments. Thanks to the many wonderful volunteers, we had observers last year at all of our regional and state championship sites. 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 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 carefully study the OHSAA REMINDERS FOR 2024 as this section contains very important information that we**

2024 Umpire Education Opportunities

- The White Book has again been updated – your OHSAA Preseason Guide replaces the NFHS 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. Last year, we 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. **IN THIS YEAR'S CLINICS 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.**
- The NFHS has greatly enhanced the Softball Umpires Manual for the 2024 season. The number of pages has tripled and there is new information on base umpire starting positions, signals, definitions and mechanics terminology plus improved diagrams and expanded information on both the Two Umpire System (65 pages) and the Three Umpire System (80 pages). Additional information has been added to such topics as proper positioning, angles and distances, and using good timing. With this additional information we will be placing a great 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 even more proficient in 2024.
- 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 eight 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 is on the back cover of this booklet.

all need to know.

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: 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 – 2024

Game Management

Coach and umpire communication should be conversational, not confrontational. Passion for their team is often the root of fiery responses from coaches about plays or rulings that they felt went against their team. As an umpire, it is important to balance an understanding of the passion coaches hold for their teams and the sporting expectations of education-based athletics. There has to be a mutual respect for each other and a professionalism that is followed by both coaches and umpires to maintain the working relationship that is imperative to have a successful game. Listening to understand a coach's issue so you can properly respond to their concerns is a huge part of defusing the situation. Maintaining a calm demeanor when speaking to the coach also often helps to lower the temperature of the conversation and assists in having a more meaningful discussion. Another helpful tool for the umpire is utilizing rule book terminology to help keep discussions on topic and achieve resolution more



quickly.

Another key aspect of game management is managing the flow of the game. Last year, NFHS had a point of emphasis about the 60 seconds between innings. Although umpires are not there to “rush” players, one of the responsibilities of an umpire is to help maintain a good flow of the game. This can be done without being overly aggressive, often just a simple “here we go” or “let’s get ready to play red” is all the encouragement that a team needs to know that it is time to get back to playing. Utilizing these simple reminders during each half-inning as well as during charged conferences can help

make sure a good game flow is maintained.

Unacceptable Conditions

Umpire jurisdiction is limited to the confines of the field of play. Items outside of the field of play, like spectator behavior, is monitored and controlled by event management. Absent a designated event manager, the home team’s head coach assumes this responsibility. Most spectator behavior never reaches a level that would be considered dangerous or severe enough to cause a concern for participant safety. However, if conditions become unacceptable for play due to spectator conduct, umpires have the authority to call (end) the contest. Again, this is a very rare occurrence and all attempts should be made to have event management control the situation prior to ending a contest.

In addition to spectator behavior, other external conditions could result in the umpire having to call

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NFHS RULES CHANGES – 2024

1-8-6: The rule edit continues to require that electronic devices for coaching purposes can only be used in the dugout but does not require that the information originate from the dugout. The electronic information may be transmitted to the dugout from anywhere outside of live ball area.

3-2-3: Beginning January 1, 2027, uniforms may only bear a single manufacturer's logo, school name, school logo, mascot and/or the participant's name. Advertisements, messages, team slogans, etc., will no longer be allowed.

3-2-5: Headbands and ribbons are no longer restricted under the uniform rules. Headbands and ribbons may be any color or design.

3-2-7: If worn, a player’s wristband with a playbook/play card must be worn on the player’s wrist or arm. If worn by the pitcher, the wristband with a play-

book/play card must be worn on the non-pitching wrist or arm. It remains legal for players to keep the wristband with a playbook/play card in their back pocket.

4-2-7, 10-2-3e, h: The umpire may call (end) a game if conditions in or around the facility become unacceptable to safely continue the game.

6-1-2c, 2-47: The pitcher may now have both feet off the ground at the same time as long as both feet remain within the 24-inch width of the pitcher’s plate and the pitcher does not replant the pivot foot. A definition for the replant was added.

6-2-2: Pitchers shall only use dirt, powdered rosin or comparable drying agents that are listed on the USA Softball’s certified equipment webpage to dry the hand.

NFHS POEs cont. from page 6

(end) the contest. For example, at the start of a game, a wildfire might be a safe distance with winds carrying the smoke away from the field. If these conditions change and result in conditions becoming unacceptable for play, it may result in an umpire having to call (end) the game.

Unreported vs. Illegal Substitutions

An illegal substitute is a player who is ineligible to occupy a position in the lineup. This can occur when a player:

- Enters or re-enters the game without eligibility to do so (illegal re-entry).
- Re-enters the game in the wrong position in the batting order.
- Is the FLEX and enters the game as a batter or runner in a different position in the batting order than the DP.
- Violates the courtesy runner rule.

All of these violations result in an illegal substitution and the penalties for offensive violations are defined in Rule 3-4-2 and penalties for defensive violations are detailed in Rule 3-4-3. Along with additional penalties, one consistent penalty for all possible violations is the illegal substitute is restricted to the dugout for the remainder of the game on the first offense.

In contrast to an illegal substitute, an unreported substitute is a player that could legally occupy the position they are in the lineup but has simply failed to report that they are entering the game. All substitutions and courtesy runners are required to be reported to the plate umpire upon entering the game. When a player enters the game unreported, a warning is issued to the head coach. Any subsequent violation results in both the head coach and player being restricted to the dugout for the remainder of the game.

Pitching Mechanics: Replant

The allowance for both feet to disengage from the playing surface while delivering a pitch has increased the concern about pitching mechanics involving a replant of the pivot foot. A replant during the delivery would result in an illegal pitch. To help assist in enforcement of this rule, a new definition of replant was created. Rule 2-47 now defines that a replant of the pivot foot occurs when the pitcher pushes off the playing surface from anywhere other than the pitcher's plate prior to the act of delivering the pitch. With this definition in mind, it is an illegal action if the pitcher slides the foot forward past the

pitching plate pushing off to start their movement from a position in front of the pitching plate (no part of their foot is still in contact with or over the pitching plate). Another common action, often referred to as "closing the hip," is pushing with the pivot foot while delivering the pitch. Depending on the pitching style, the pitcher will either bring the pivot foot forward to square up toward the batter or the pitcher will tuck the pivot foot behind the non-pivot foot. This push is during the act of delivering the pitch and is legal.

A Look Back at the 2023 Rule Changes

As we prepare for the 2024 softball season, it might be helpful to take a look back at some of the NFHS rules changes that were enacted in 2023.

1-4-1 Removed the number of color restrictions on for gloves and mitts; multi-color gloves are permitted. The glove still cannot have an optic-colored marking which gives the appearance of the ball or is judged to be distracting to the umpire.

2-20-1g Editorial change which changed the wording of the definition of a fair ball to mirror that of a foul ball and reflect how it has always been called.

3-2-12, 3-6-11 NFHS no longer has a rule prohibiting jewelry. Umpires still have the authority to restrict anything that is considered a distraction or dangerous.

4-2-1 Allows for all runs to be counted when a fair batted ball clears the home run fence to end the game.

8-2-7 Clarifies batter-runner interference on a fly ball over foul territory. This has always been the enforcement but was not listed in the section covering batter-runner. The language is consistent with the rule covering interference on an initial play on a fair-batted ball and aligns with Rule 8-6-10.

Among the 2023 NFHS Points of Emphasis that merit review in 2024:

SPORTSMANSHIP: Good sporting behavior continued be emphasized as an important outcome of scholastic activities. The NFHS made this its No. 1 Point of Emphasis for the 2022-23 school year.

TIME BETWEEN INNINGS: More strict enforcement was requested for Rule 6-2-5 which specifies a 60-second time limit between half innings for the pitcher to complete her five warm-up pitches. That one-minute time limit begins from the third out of the previous half-inning. Umpires were requested to use judgement in enforcing the rule without the use of a timing device.

COMPARABLE DRYING AGENTS: Pitchers are not permitted to use any substance which transfers to the ball (i.e. discolors the ball or makes the ball "sticky." Comparable drying agents listed on the USA Softball website (USAsoftball.org) are permitted, and powdered rosin is also permitted. It is not necessary to wipe off the drying agent before making contact with the ball. If a pitcher licks the fingers, the player must wipe the fingers prior to touching the ball.

OHSAA SOFTBALL POINTS OF EMPHASIS 2024

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
- 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

meetings and also discuss key provisions of the pitching rules at that time. **Very important** - please note 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 the “crow hop” or any replant of the pitcher’s pivot foot from anywhere other than the pitcher’s plate is still an illegal pitch. This is an NFHS point of emphasis for 2024

In addition, the NFHS 2022 POE, which we will repeat again for 2024, requires that the pitcher to take a position in contact with the pitching 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

We will discuss these during our state and local

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Leaping vs. the Crow Hop

Beginning in 2024, NFHS rules allow pitchers to have both feet disengaged from the playing surface while delivering a pitch. As with many other softball rules codes, leaping is now legal in high school games.

While the leap is legal, replanting the pivot foot during delivery—often referred to as the crow hop—remains illegal in NFHS along with most of the other organizations. It is important to understand the differences between leaping and the replant and enforcing the rules prohibiting the latter.

Leap—occurs when both the pivot foot and stride foot or non-pivot foot are off the ground at the same time. With the rule change, pitchers no longer need to remain in contact with the ground with their pivot foot while pushing away from the pitcher’s plate. One way of looking at this is that the drag is no longer a requirement but it is still permitted.

Replant—The definition of a Crow Hop has been removed from the rule book and replaced by the Replant definition (Rule 2-47). A replant of the pivot foot occurs when the pitcher pushes off the playing surface anywhere other than the pitcher’s plate prior to the act of delivering the pitch. While pushing off from the pitcher’s plate, both feet may be disengaged from the playing surface as long as they remain within the 24-inch width of the pitcher’s plate and do not create a replant of the pivot foot resulting in the being farther away from the pitcher’s plate. Pushing off with the pivot foot from a place other than the pitcher’s plate, resulting in the non-pivot foot becoming closer to home plate is illegal.

The allowance for both feet to disengage from the playing surface while delivering a pitch has increased the concern about pitching

mechanics involving a replant of the pivot foot. A replant during the delivery would result in an illegal pitch. To help assist in enforcement of this rule, the new definition of replant was created. With this new definition in mind, it is an illegal action if the pitcher slides the foot forward past the pitching plate pushing off to start their movement from a position in front of the pitching plate (no part of their foot is still in contact with or over the pitching plate).

Another common action, often referred to as “closing the hip,” is pushing with the pivot foot while delivering the pitch. Depending on the pitching style, the pitcher will either bring the pivot foot forward to square up toward the batter or the pitcher will tuck the pivot foot behind the non-pivot foot. This push is during the act of delivering the pitch and is legal.

OHSAA POEs cont. from page 8

not pause after stepping onto the pitcher's plate to simulate taking a signal from the catcher prior to bring their hands together, an illegal pitch needs to be called.

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 DP/Flex rule. Tom has also authored an article covering **Lineups, Substitutions and Penalty Enforcement**. Each of these items are 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 100) of the NFHS 2024 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 & 8) games are the same as the high school rules (the only rules difference for grades 7 & 8 is the pitching distance). There is no "roster batting" for JH/MS.

Umpire Mechanics

The NFHS Softball Umpires Manual has been expanded in an effort to make it more valuable to all umpires – the use of the new manual will be a great advantage for our umpires. We are placing an 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 receive **SIX POINTS** added to their tournament score as we further recognize the importance of proper mechanics. Among the items discussed elsewhere in this White Book are proper

calling position and techniques for plate umpires calling balls and strikes, umpires taking their time and not rendering decisions too quickly, and the teamwork of the umpire crew. Let's make this year that all umpires work to improve their mechanics. We will be discussing these topics in our state and local

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 both baseball and softball. Local Associations are permitted to offer **one** meeting annually that covers OHSAA regulations and other items common to both sports and umpires may attend only one of these meetings to gain credit for both sports.

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 REMINDERS

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.

Sweatshirts/Jackets: Rule 3-2-1 allows state associations to permit players to wear sweatshirts and jackets when there is inclement weather. In Ohio, players may wear garments that cover their jerseys and *jersey numbers are not required to be visible* when this occurs.

Get it right! 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 a position outside the dugout for the purpose of signaling pitches. Offensive coaches on the field must take positions within the coach's box.

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.

Note this excerpt from the OHSAA By-Laws: **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.*

Professionalism

As an OHSAA licensed officials, umpires are responsible to upholding standards for professionalism. The OHSAA Officiating Code of Ethics, which is found in the OHSAA Handbook for Officials on the web site and which is printed here, outlines these standards. In addition, we remind each umpire of the importance of honoring our commitments and contracts regardless of possible inconvenience or financial loss, and also discuss the importance of being careful about what we say both verbally and in social media.

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.*

It is important that we as umpires commit to our best level of preparation by attaining thorough rules knowledge; put forth our best effort when we are on the field to call the game fairly and without bias; refrain from making comments about games, participants and situations, applying that diligence to social media; and comply with all related responsibilities such as proper certification, adherence to assignments, required reporting.

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>

Mechanics Miscues to Avoid

NOTE: This article has been compiled from the observations of George Gulas, our state interpreter from Medina, and consists of helpful do's and don'ts to improve your umpiring.

Crew Suggestions

◆ There is continued confusion over coverage at third base in the 2-umpire system. The plate umpire is responsible for calls at third (and needs to move into a calling position there), *with the following exceptions:* (Umpires Manual Page 56)

1. First play in the infield
2. Steal of 3B.
3. Pickoff attempt on a runner at 3B
4. Batter-runner to 3B
5. Last or only runner advancing to 3B
6. Play at 3B following a play or attempted play at the plate: this call is a difficult one and requires good communication and reaction by the base umpire.

◆ Don't look at your indicators immediately after a call; keep eyes on the field and look after you have re-set.

◆ Use proper in between inning mechanics. Don't stand by the side fences or by the dugouts. Consult the manual for proper positions (Umpires Manual, page 59). Also, this is not a time for socializing. Umpire-to-umpire signals should be originated by the plate umpire and returned by the base umpires (i.e. infield fly signal, number of outs, etc.). The entire crew should echo the infield fly rule when it is called.

◆ Communicate to your partners when the fly ball is caught.

New NFHS Umpires Manual

Your rulebook mailing from the OHSAA should have contained the new NFHS Umpires Manual. This is a new, larger and more detailed book with ample diagrams to enhance mechanics training, perfect for local rules meeting discussions and umpire pregame meetings. You will find some references to the manual in this and other articles.



Plate should call out so that their partner doesn't continue to pivot and run when not needed.

◆ Responsibilities to watch all action continue after the completion of the play. Once the ball is returned to the circle, the umpires should make eye contact. The base umpire should then move to the next starting position while the plate umpire keeps eyes on the field. The plate umpire should then return while the base umpire watches the field. (See also Between Play Mechanics – page 3 of Umpires Manual)

◆ When a pitching change occurs, there is no need to inform the new pitcher the number of outs, baserunners, etc. You are not the coach!

◆ If you are using sunglasses, remove them whenever speaking with a coach.

◆ Don't be chatty with players, coaches or fans. Be cordial but not overly friendly.

Base Umpires

◆ Hustle to your starting position after the call is made. Don't walk.

◆ Slow down your timing on your out/safe calls. Some umpires are way too quick!

◆ Prior to the release of the pitch, take the set position when off the line (see Umpires Manual, page 33) with your shoulders squared to the plate. Do this on every pitch. With no runners on walk the line each pitch.

◆ Don't give the count from the bases unless your partner requests it.

◆ Our mechanics specify that when the ball is hit through the infield or into the outfield, the

Continued on page 13

Mechanics cont. from page 12

base umpire must pivot/button hook into the infield. We do not “rim.”

- ◆ When making the button hook/pivot into the infield from the foul line, stay closer (10-to-12 feet) to the base and watch the batter-runner touch the base.
- ◆ When making the call from the shortstop side of the infield, move forward toward your call. Don’t grow roots.
- ◆ Don’t make your calls on the run! Stop, set, see the play and then make your call.
- ◆ Work on your signals, reviewing the charts in the Umpires Manual. In particular:
 - ◆ Raise your fist above the height of your head on out calls; upper arm should be parallel to the ground.
 - ◆ Rise to a standing position and THEN give your safe call; arms moving straight out (parallel to ground) from your body.
 - ◆ If the ball is dropped, overthrown or not thrown, there is no need to make a safe call.
 - ◆ With no runners, your starting position is 18-to-21 feet from first base in foul territory and about a foot from the foul line. Some umpires have been observed aligning way too deep.
 - ◆ In chase situations on balls hit into the outfield:
 - ◆ Get a to a depth in which you are in the grass.
 - ◆ If the ball is hit near the foul line and you are on that line, straddle the line to make your fair/foul judgement as well as the catch.
 - ◆ Give fair/foul status when the ball is first touched.

Plate Umpires

- ◆ Keep your pregame conference with the coaches concise. Discussion should be limited to ground rules and the acceptance of the lineup cards. It is not appropriate to issue warnings for issues such as sportsmanship or instruction as to how the coaches should act if they disagree with a call. You are asking for trouble.
- ◆ Your between-innings position is on the foul line extended on the side of the team taking the field for defense.
- ◆ Your mask should be off and in your left hand whenever the ball is hit, fair or foul; on walks, stolen bases or other runner advancement; or whenever talking to a coach.
- ◆ With no runners or a runner on first base only, you should trail the batter-runner in fair territory near the foul line for about 20 feet whenever the ball is put into play.
- ◆ On a base on balls, step out and observe the batter-runner moving to first base.
- ◆ Don’t announce the location of the pitch. Communicate location to the catcher or the batter only when asked.
- ◆ When the ball is put into play near the foul line, get into the best position for judging fair/foul; this is usually straddling the line or line extended.
- ◆ On foul fly balls that might be caught near the fence, get to a position at the fence line.
- ◆ Don’t give vocal of visual signals on obvious foul balls.
- ◆ Do NOT pick up bats, catcher’s masks or any other equipment.
- ◆ Record all substitutes and then report them to the opposing head coach.
- ◆ On-deck batters are to stay in the area in front of their dugouts, including between innings or pitching changes.

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.

Calling the Pitch

Consistent Mechanics Lead to Consistent Judgement

“Be consistent, Blue!” Plate umpires have heard this grouse since the beginning of time.

The fact is that consistency in plate mechanics leads to consistency in calling balls and strikes. In observations over several seasons, inconsistencies in plate mechanics have been noted. These inconsistencies have occurred in three main areas: positioning, going to set, timing of ball/strike call.

We will outline the issues observed and suggestions for insuring improvement.

Positioning

A major problem observed is umpires altering their stances, thus changing their positioning at the plate, batter-to-batter and sometimes even pitch-to-pitch. These inconsistencies give those umpires a slightly different view of the strike zone and the path of the pitch.

The photos in the upper right of this page show how the view differs when the camera is moved less than six inches. Does the plate seem larger when the camera is closer? Does the position of the ball differ between views?

The same differences evident in the repositioning of the camera occur for our vision when we position ourselves behind the plate. It is essential that we strive for the same view for each pitch by trying to maintain consistency in our positioning and head height when we go into the set position. Here are some measures umpires can take to achieve consistency.

- Anchor your stance with the

The Importance of a Consistent Stance: In both pictures the ball is suspended over the edge of the plate with about a third of it over the plate. In the left photo, the camera is aligned in the slot. In the right photo, the camera was moved 6 inches and is aligned over the left third of the plate. Note the difference in where the ball appears in relation to the plate.



TO THE RIGHT: Photos taken from the slot. The first is from a normal slot position. The second photo is from 8 inches further back. Note how the perspective of the ball and the plate change.



foot opposite the batter (i.e. right foot for a right-handed batter) by stepping into a position with that foot directly behind the point of the plate, about 8-to-12 inches from the catcher. This should allow for *most* catchers to move freely while you maintain a consistent distance from the plate.

- Then step with your opposite foot towards the batter. The heel of this foot should be in line with the toe of your anchor foot. Your feet should be spread apart in such a way that you obtain good balance and present minimal strain to your back and knees when you drop into the set position.
- Taking this position should put your head into the slot, filling the position between the catcher

and the batter. This puts the eyes looking at the inside edge of the batter's strike zone – often the ear closest to the plate is on that edge of the plate. That has been proven to give you the best view of the movement of the ball in relation to the strike zone.

In a perfect world, the catchers would align themselves in the same position behind the plate so that we could take our position in the same position throughout the game. Our footprints would show this consistency in placement, and our positions for right- and left-handed batters would be mirror images. In the games in which one team's catcher aligns with the front edge of the catcher's box and the other takes a much deeper position, your position will vary. However, if you consistently align your anchor foot in the 8-to-12

Continued on page 15

inches behind each catcher, your view will be consistent for the batters of each team.

Dropping to Set

Other inconsistencies involve umpires taking the set position—when they drop to call the pitch. There are two elements: timing—when to go set, and height in the set position.

- **When:** It is essential to be stationary to track the pitch. Umpires need to drop into the set position while the pitcher is in her windup and “lock in” in time to see the release and track the entire flight of the pitch. Like a camera, our eyes get a distorted and blurred view when our head is moving.
- **Where:** Umpires should drop into a position in which their eyes are just above, but not in, the strike zone. Achieving the same height in relation to each batter will lead to the best judgement of the high and low perimeters of the strike zone.

We must be able to see the entire plate, the entire strike zone and the flight of the ball all the way from the pitcher’s hand to the catcher’s glove. We may need to make adjustments to avoid being blocked by the catcher or a batter crowding the plate. Make the necessary adjustments but be sure to account for them when judging the pitch.

Timing

The third area of inconsistencies involves the timing of making ball/strike calls. When an umpire is

The Eyes Have It

Here is a helpful tip for plate umpires for achieving a consistent strike zone.

As you drop to the set position, glance at the bottom of the strike zone—the top of the batter’s knees, and then bring your eyes back up to the top of the strike zone. Then focus on the pitcher and the release of the ball.

Doing this will give you a reminder of the bottom and top of the strike zone. This is especially helpful if you encounter a situation in which the catcher’s positioning keeps you from taking your normal set position with your eyes positioned at the top of the strike zone. It also “opens” your eyes to their widest while watching the incoming pitch.

quick to make a ball/strike call on one pitch, then slower on another, it appears that the umpire was unsure of the latter pitch location. Additionally, when umpires are observed rushing their calls—the verbal ball or strike call comes very close to the sound of the ball entering the catcher’s glove—there is concern that the umpire did not see and track the pitch in its entirety.

To address this, it is essential that umpires develop very deliberate mechanics to be used on every pitch:

- Track the pitch from its release to the catcher’s glove before making any judgement. When an umpire vocalizes “ball” or “strike” almost simultaneously with the sound of the ball hitting the catcher’s glove, almost assuredly the umpire has judged that pitch too quickly.
- After the pitch reaches the catcher’s glove, make your judgement and give the vocal call from the set position. Yes, we make a vocal call on balls though the tone or inflection might be different. Stay-

ing in set and giving the ball call will help maintain the habit of timing.

- After making the vocal call, stand straight up but do not move from your position. We don’t want to look like we are backing away from the pitch but that we got a great look at it.
- If the pitch was a strike, give the strike signal *after* you have come to your standing position. Don’t give this while you are in the process of rising.
- After standing and giving your signal if appropriate, you can step back out of your stance which takes pressure off your back and knees. This also serves to clear your head and prepare you for the next pitch.

Consistency in your timing demonstrates your confidence as well as keeps you from rushing your call.

We hope umpires will find these mechanics useful and make you more *consistent* in 2024 and beyond.

Special thanks to Tom Hathaway, long time umpire, instructor with Blue Chip Umpires in Cincinnati and assigner who prepared this article and the next article on base mechanics.

Base Umpires: What's the Rush?

In the quest for accuracy, every umpire has had that moment in which they question whether they got that call right—either by the participants' reaction or their own self-review. When a call is “missed,” often it is because the umpire rushed the call.

Sometimes this is a result of an easy routine call becoming a much closer play. Sometimes the speed of the play—a bang-banger or the possibility of an ensuing play—causes the umpire to rush. Sometimes it's because the umpire is not quite in the proper calling position and is moving while making the call.

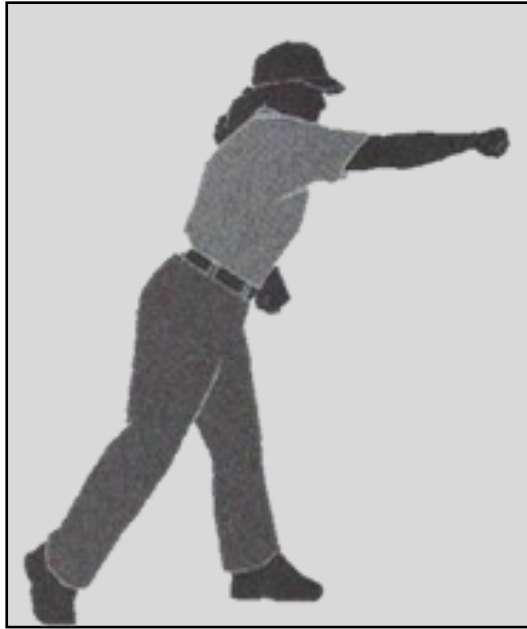
Our first objective is to get into the proper calling position. The proper calling position is one in which:

- You can see all four elements (ball, base, offensive player, defensive player).
- You have the proper angle (90 degrees to the throw on force plays, 90 degrees to the approach of the runner on tag plays). Remember to get the angle first, then move to close the distance if possible.

Anticipation of and proper reaction to the play is a great asset to obtaining the proper position and is aided by pre-pitch planning.

The 2-umpire system presents the base umpire with the challenge of covering a lot of field and a lot of potential plays. Additionally, players—particularly those less-experienced—don't always attempt the “normal” plays which can create unusual situations for umpires.

The key elements to keep umpires from rushing calls—and hence getting the call right—is



the three-step process for making calls:

1. Stop: Like a camera that is moving when you attempt to snap a photo, the view of a play can be distorted by being in motion. When the play (tag, catch, etc.) is about to take place, stop and be stationary while observing critical action. In addition to giving you a clear picture, this will help slow down your call.

2. See the WHOLE Play: Observe all four elements (tag, possession, contact with the base, etc.). Give them a chance to mess up the play

(i.e. drop/lose possession of the ball, lose contact with the base). This eliminates the potential of the “out-safe” double call.

3. Make Your Call: After observing all action, process what you saw. Make your determination, then utilize the proper calling mechanics. That involves rising to a full standing position, *then* giving a firm Safe or Out signal accompanied by your verbal call. After making your call, return to a ready position for a possible ensuing play.

Some considerations regarding the timing of calls:

Players, coaches and spectators watch the play and THEN look to the umpire for the call. If the umpire has rushed the call, the call may thus occur before this shift in focus occurs. The uncertainty this creates can begin the process of questioning the call.

Timing and the use of proper mechanics reinforces the confidence in your call and your judgement.

Remember—it is fast pitch; it is not fast umpiring.

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—be stationary to see the play

See the Play—watch the whole play

Make the Call—use proper signals

Lineups, Substitutions and Penalty Reminders

Here are some reminders about the lineup rules for *all levels* (varsity, JV, junior high/middle school):

Batting Order: NFHS rules limit the lineup to nine batters in all levels of play. Teams have the option to use a 10th player, the Flex. Other organizations might include additional hitters/extra players but these do not apply to NFHS.

Courtesy Runner: A courtesy runner *may* be used for the pitcher and catcher after the pitcher or catcher reaches base. The courtesy runner must be an eligible substitute—someone not in the game nor who has been in the game as a starter or sub. When a team has no substitutes eligible to enter the game, it has no courtesy runner option.

- 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.

DP/Flex: A team may elect to utilize the DP/Flex provided that the use is declared at the start of the game by listing on the lineup card submitted to the umpire.

- The DP must be one of the 9 batters
- The Flex is listed after the 9

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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 17

batters on the lineup card with the defensive position

- The DP may play defense for any of the other 8 batters; when this happens, that batter remains in the game on offense only and is eligible to return to defense
- The DP may play defense for the Flex; when this happens, the Flex has left the game
- The Flex may play offense (bat or run) ONLY for the player that started the game as the DP; when this happens, the DP has left the game
- The DP and Flex have re-entry rights; re-entry also applies to all substitutes used for the DP and Flex

All lineup changes, courtesy runners, changes involving the DP and Flex MUST be reported to and recorded by the plate umpire. Defensive changes (non-substitute) should be reported and recorded when they involve the pitcher or catcher to insure the proper application of the courtesy runner rule. Umpires must have a thorough knowledge of the DP/Flex Rule (3-3-6) and Courtesy Runner Rule (8-9).

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. If on defense, preceding play negated if offender was involved.

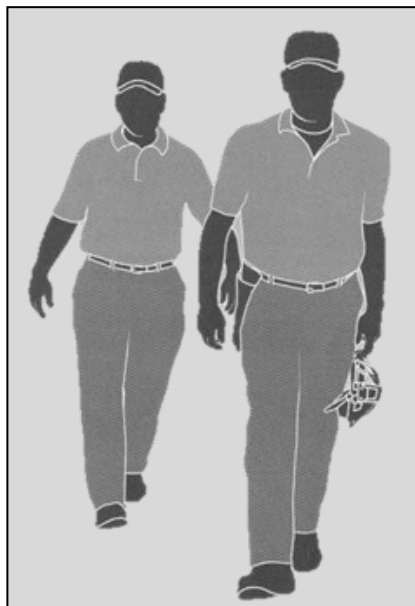
Special thanks to Tom Hathaway, long time umpire, instructor with Blue Chip Umpires in Cincinnati and assigner who prepared this article.

Working Together as a Team

Is your partner in an upcoming assignment is (a) a less-experienced, possibly a new umpire; (b) an umpire with questionable abilities; (c) an umpire you don't care to work with; or (d) all of the above?

That partner will be your best friend and sole source of support while you are on the field together. You have to make the best of the situation for the success of the umpire crew and ultimately, for your success in how you are viewed. It has been this author's experience that when coaches evaluate umpires, if one umpire's performance merits the lowest grade (i.e. F or 1), the other umpire may receive the same grade or a grade no higher than mid-range (i.e. C or 3).

Simply put, you need to make your partner better—for the game that you are assigned, for you and ulti-



mately for softball umpiring in general.

A few helpful measures to help make this happen:

Make contact with your partner a couple of days ahead of the assignment. Confirm arrival time and where to meet (parking). Make sure to keep each other aware of any issues regarding the ability to arrive on time. When a partner is delayed and no communication occurs, things get off to a bad start. Make sure you "park smart" – in the safest possible place and away from the fans.

A meaningful pregame meeting with your partner sets the tone. It is helpful to make this a discussion and not a lecture. Encourage your partner to contribute, which is a way of assessing their understanding of rules and mechanics. Ask if your partner has any concerns or areas that they are working on for improvement.

Arrive on the field and conduct all

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Check Your Uniforms

There are no changes to the OHSAA softball uniform this year. Some reminders as to uniforms:

- Pants are to be either Heather Gray or Charcoal Gray. All umpires for any regular or postseason game are to be dressed alike. In the event that umpires do not agree to all wear charcoal gray pants then heather gray pants shall be worn.
- 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.
- Undershirts or T-shirts are to be red.
- Dark blue or gray ball bags for the Plate Umpire. If two ball bags are worn, they shall be the same color.
- Wrist watches shall not be worn.

Umpires must remember that appearance and “looking the part” are important. When we take the field we have only one opportunity to make a first impression. All umpires have an equal opportunity to dress well – your uniform should be neat, clean and of course in accordance with OHSAA standards. Let’s make the extra effort to look great. Shine the shoes, clean the hats, and take time to see what needs to be replaced this year.

Working cont. from page 18

pregame responsibilities as a team. This projects a positive perception for the crew. If you are the veteran umpire, introduce the “newbie” to coaches and others you encounter.

During the game:

- Communicate with your partner between half innings about the game when necessary; avoid making this a “social time” just to visit which tends to affect focus.
- Mechanics issues *which can be corrected at the time* can be addressed during half-inning breaks (i.e. coverage); don’t try to re-work your partner’s entire mechanics repertoire while on the field.
- Provide positive reinforcement and encouragement.
- Never throw your partner under the bus; coaches and others do not need to know that your partner is a newer umpire, etc.

■ Follow proper procedures when judgement calls are questioned; direct coaches to ask your partner about their call and allow your partner the decision to ask you for help.

■ Remember that both umpires own the rules; provide guidance if your partner administers a rule incorrectly by giving your partner the proper information and letting them change the ruling.

Every game is a learning opportunity. Take advantage of this with a meaningful postgame review when you return to your cars. What did the crew do well? What could use improvement? How were performance objectives met? Suggestions for continued improvement?

And if you are that partner, be open to the comments and suggestions—that is the only way that you will become an accomplished veteran umpire.

2023 State Tournament Umpires

We congratulate the following umpires who were selected to umpire at the 2023 OHSAA State Championships. Roughly one third of our state tournament umpires were making their first appearance at this event and that is no doubt a result of many of these umpires attending our Mechanics Clinics and working hard to improve at their craft.

Darin Alexander
Steve Badertscher
Judd Baker
D Justin Barzak
Eric Bender
Ariana Bowles
Jeff Bowman
Dan Carnahan
Nathan Carroll
Wendell Caulley
Cindy Comyns
Rebecca Cooper
Michael Curtin
Darin Desender
Timothy Easterling
Danita Fick
Deanne Finkel
Kyle Ford
Eric Garber
Terrell Guidry
Carl Hamilton
Steve Hartman
Charles Hawsman
Scott Helberg

Bernard Hensley
Daniel Hodous
Maria Hottinger
Kim Johnson
Lynn Johnson
Mark McDonald
Rick Merb
Steve Meyer
Anthony Montana
Dana Motter
Jerry Norris
Kevin Oser
Jeff Overmyer
Earl Pugh
James Reneau
Edwin Roberts Jr
Pamela Schultz
Anthony Sheets
Max Smeltzer
Ken Stillwagon Jr
Eric Stinehelfer
Kevin Stubbins
Barry Tolchin
Michael Young

Bat Certification Marks

In order to be legal, bats used in all scholastic games must bear one of the three certification marks shown on the right. Bats which do not have one of these marks permanently inscribed on the bat (no stickers or decals) may not be used and when used are illegal and subject to penalties

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 below. 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.

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.

Continued on page 16

Bats continued from page 15

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

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 batter's 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 Rule Book.

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

If you send a player out with signs or symptoms of a concussion, you must complete the concussion form from the OHSAA website and send it to the OHSAA office.

Bats—Definitions & 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. The batter and the head coach are 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.

The only time the use of a damaged bat results in a penalty is when, after being removed from the game, it is reintroduced into the contest. In this case, the batter is declared out. If the batter put the ball into play, all runners who were not put out on the play are returned to the base occupied at the time of the pitch. However, the enforcement of Rule 3-6-21 requires that the player and head coach are both restricted to the bench and not ejected.

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.

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

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.**

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.

Step 2: Submit Report Form – Officials will fill out the form electronically on their Dashboard at www.myohsaa.org. The link is on the left hand side of the screen; "Submit New Game Report." Please complete one report per offending school.

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

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

The school AD and OHSAA will automatically be sent an email concerning the ejection.

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. 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.

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 "thirty minute clock" is re-started each time that thunder is heard or there is lightning in the area.

Game Ending/Suspended/Interrupted Games

With the typical weather issues we see each spring there seem to be many questions on this topic. Please review and apply the OHSAA Weather Policy regarding lightning. 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 rule change relates to charged conferences (see Rule 3-7-1). No 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.

Games Interrupted

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. 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 retake 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 initial 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.

OHIO HIGH SCHOOL ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION

2024 SOFTBALL UMPIRE MECHANICS CLINICS

All sessions are from 9 AM to 4PM

- **Saturday, February 10 – East/Southeast – New Concord – East Muskingum Middle School—13120 John Glenn School Road—across from John Glenn High School**
- **Saturday, February 17 – Northwest – Findlay – Glenwood Middle School—1715 North Main St.**
- **Sunday, February 18– Northeast – Tallmadge – Tallmadge Recreation Center—46 North Monroe Road**
- **Saturday, March 2 — Southwest — West Chester — Lakota West Freshman School—5050 Tylersville Rd.**
****THIS LOCATION IS AN UPDATE FROM THE ORIGINAL PRINTED WHITE BOOK****
Park and enter on the west side of the building near the softball and baseball fields
- **Sunday, March 3 – Central - Waggoner Rd. Junior High School — 360 South Waggoner Rd., Reynoldsburg**

The OHSAA will sponsor five Softball Mechanics Clinics in 2024. 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.

IN THIS YEAR’S CLINICS 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 swdoc@fuse.net.

For Registration – Send form on the next page to: OHSAA – follow instructions on the form

Note – Clinic registration will start at 9AM and program will begin at 930AM. In case of inclement weather participants will be notified by email and the clinic will be rescheduled.

OHIO HIGH SCHOOL ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION

2023 SOFTBALL UMPIRES MECHANICS CLINICS

REGISTRATION FORM

SELECT LOCATION:

_____ Saturday, February 10 – East – New Concord — East Muskingum Middle School—13120 John Glenn School Road—across from John Glenn High School

_____ Saturday, February 17 – Northwest — Findlay — Glenwood Middle School—1715 North Main St.

_____ Sunday, February 18– Northeast — Tallmadge — Tallmadge Recreation Center—46 North Monroe Road

_____ Saturday, March 2 — Southwest — West Chester — Lakota West Freshman School—5050 Tylersville Rd.

****THIS LOCATION IS AN UPDATE FROM THE ORIGINAL PRINTED WHITE BOOK****

_____ Sunday, March 3 – Central - Central — Reynoldsburg — Waggoner Road Junior High—360 South Waggoner 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.

Payment of \$60 may be made via check or credit card. Checks must be made payable to OHSAA. If paying by credit card scan and email completed form to jfick@ohsaa.org or mail to OHSAA as indicated in next line. If paying by check mail to:

OHSAA, Attn: Accounting, 4080 Roselea Place, Columbus, OH 43214

CREDIT CARD INFORMATION

Full Name on Card

Card Number

Expiration Date
(MM/YY)

CVV Code (3-4
digits)

Billing Street Address

Billing City

Billing State

Billing Zip Code

Amount to be charged

\$

Product Description

Phone Number

Email Address

Remove this page to submit your Mechanics Clinic Registration

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 eight 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.

Tuesday, January 30 - New Concord – East Muskingum Middle School - 13120 John Glenn School Rd. – across street from John Glenn High School

Wednesday, January 31 – Columbus – Upper Arlington High School – 1625 Zollinger Rd.

Tuesday, February 6 – West Chester - Lakota West High School, 8940 Union Centre Blvd. - -
Cafeteria - Enter through cafeteria doors east end of building – Door #24

Thursday, February 8 – Cleveland - Garfield Heights High School – 4900 Turney Rd.

Tuesday, February 13 – Jackson - Jackson High School – 500 Vaughn St.

Thursday, February 15 – Findlay – Donnell Middle School – 301 Baldwin Ave.

Tuesday, February 20 – Piqua – Upper Valley Career Center – 8811 Career Dr.

Thursday, February 22 –Canton –Stark County Educational Service Center, 6057 Strip Ave NW

The online state meeting for softball will be available by the week of February 5. Details will be emailed to all officials and will include the deadlines for completing the meeting. To access the meeting, log in to your myOHSAA profile and click the “Rules Meetings” icon in the top right, then click “Find a State Meeting” from the left side menu, then select “Softball” from the “Sports” dropdown menu, “Official” from “Meeting Type” dropdown menu, and then click “Search”. This search will display the online meeting option as well as any face-to-face meeting options. You may view the online meeting on any device except for a Google Chromebook. A Google Chromebook is a type of laptop computer, entirely different from the popular internet browser Google Chrome. You may view the online meetings using the internet browser Google Chrome.

In-Person State Rules Meetings

Tuesday, January 30 – New Concord – John Glenn High School -
13115 John Glenn Sch. Rd.—across from John Glenn HS

Wednesday, January 31 – Columbus — Upper Arlington High
School—1625 Zollinger Road

Tuesday, February 6 – West Chester — Lakota West High
School—8940 Union Center Blvd.

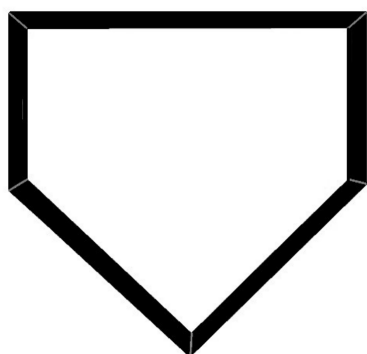
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Vaughn Street

Thursday, February 15 – Findlay — Donnell Middle School—301
Baldwin Avenue

Tuesday, February 20 – Piqua – Upper Valley Career Center –
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OHSAA Softball Umpire Mechanics Clinics

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