



# ***TECHNICAL BULLETIN***

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## **2006 PLAYING RULE CHANGES**

A total of 258 rule change proposals were submitted to the 2005 ISF Congress Playing Rules Commission for consideration.

Of these, 58 were withdrawn, 39 were rejected, 94 were approved and 67 were approved with an amendment.

Of the approved changes, some will only apply in World Championship and Olympic Play, while others relate purely to Slow Pitch. Several of the changes were cosmetic, while some were simply a re-location without affecting the intent of the rule.

The most significant changes relate to **13.11 m (43 feet) Pitching Distance for U19 Women; A decrease in the time of the required "stop" by the pitcher, after taking the signal; The compulsory wearing of chest protectors by male catchers; The compulsory wearing of shin guards by all catchers; Intentional Walk for Fast Pitch; Obstruction at a base, and the change in terminology of the 'DEFO' to 'FLEX PLAYER' in the Designated Player rule.**

Following a review of the changes, Softball Australia has directed that the new rules are to apply at the 2006 Australian Championships.

As a result of this directive, the rule changes that will have the most effect at the Championships are listed below, with appropriate comments. NB. Rule references are as they will appear in the new rulebook, which should be available by the middle of 2006.

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### **Rule 1, Sec 27: DUGOUT:**

**The dugout is an out-of-play area designated for players, coaches, bat boys/girls, and official representatives of the team only. There shall be no smoking in this area.**

COMMENTS: *A new definition to describe who can be in the dugout (bench), that it is an 'out-of-play' area and that no smoking is allowed. This is the only place in the rules that addresses the 'no smoking' regulations.*

### **Rule 1, Sec 34: FLEX PLAYER.**

**The FLEX PLAYER is the starting player for whom the Designated Player (DP) is batting and whose name appears in the 10th position on the line-up card.**

COMMENTS: *In the previous Rule Book, the FLEX PLAYER was called the DEFO, which stood for Defensive Player Only. Since this player can bat and run for the DP, the new term is considered more appropriate, as the player in this position is now more FLEXIBLE in what he can and cannot do.*

**Rule 2, Sec 3: THE OFFICIAL DIAMOND SHALL HAVE PITCHING DISTANCES AS FOLLOWS:  
Women (including Junior U19 Women) ~ 13.11m (43 feet).**

COMMENTS: *The existing notation in the rulebook that the 13.11m (43 feet) distance for Adult Females applies to World Championships only has been removed. However, this does not prevent individual associations from creating By-laws to allow the distance for Adult Females in social grades to remain at 12.19m (40 feet).*

**Rule 2, Sec 4h: DOUBLE BASE.**

**EXCEPTION – Sec 4h 1(c):**

On any live ball play made from first base foul territory, the batter-runner and the defensive player may use either portion of the base. **When the defensive player uses the foul portion of the double base, the batter-runner can run in fair territory when the throw is coming from the foul side of first base, and if hit by the thrown ball, it would not be interference. However, if intentional interference were ruled, the batter-runner would be ruled out.**

COMMENTS: *Additional sentence clarifies interference will not be ruled if batter-runner is struck by a thrown ball from first base foul territory when running outside the one metre (3 foot) running lane, unless he intentionally interferes.*

**Rule 3, Sec 4: GLOVES & MITTS.**

**b. Gloves worn by any player may be any combination of colours, provided none of the colours (including the lacing) are the colour of the ball.**

**c. Gloves with a circle of white, grey or the colour of the ball on the outside, giving the appearance of a ball, are illegal for all players.**

COMMENTS: *New gloves on the market are prone to be multi-coloured and having different colours resembling softballs, circles resembling softballs and lacing of the softball colour. By stating ‘any player’ in sub-section ‘b’ allows all players, including the pitcher, to wear multi-coloured gloves.*

**Rule 3, Sec 6d: BODY PROTECTORS.**

**All catchers in Fast Pitch (adult and junior) must wear a body protector.** Female catchers may wear a body protector in Slow Pitch.

COMMENTS: *For safety reasons, and taking into account the ‘Duty of Care’ to all participants, all catchers, adult and junior, male and female, MUST now wear body protectors.*

**Rule 3, Sec 6e: SHIN GUARDS.**

**(FP ONLY) Adult and junior** catchers must wear shin guards that will offer protection to the kneecap.

COMMENTS: *For safety reasons, (similar to body protectors) and taking into account the ‘Duty of Care’ to all participants, all catchers, adult and junior, male and female, MUST now wear shin guards in the fast pitch game.*

**Rule 3, Sec 8: UNIFORMS.**

**Players and coaches may, for religious reasons, be permitted to wear specific head covering and apparel that does not conform to standard uniform requirements without penalty.**

COMMENTS: *This inclusion relaxes the uniform rule sufficiently to allow all religious groups, regardless of race or creed, the opportunity to participate in softball.*

**Rule 3, Sec 8a: CAPS.**

**Plastic or hard visors are not allowed.**

COMMENTS: *Also for safety reasons. (This does not apply in male play, as male players are not permitted to wear visors).*

**Rule 3, Sec 8g: JEWELLERY.**

**No items, other than medical alert bracelets or necklaces, may be worn.** Medical alert bracelets and/or necklaces are not considered jewellery and, if worn, must be taped to the body.

**EFFECT – Sec 8a-g:**

**If a player refuses to comply with the provisions of Section 8, then that player will be removed from the game.**

COMMENTS: *Previously it has been left to the umpire’s judgement as to whether any items of jewellery worn by a player were considered to be dangerous. There is now no judgement involved in this ruling.*

**Rule 4, Sec 5: DESIGNATED PLAYER.**

**EFFECT Sec 5g-i:** The provisions of Rule 4 Sec 8 and penalties for violations apply. Placing the *FLEX* in a position in the batting order other than that of the **starting DP, results in declaring the FLEX an Illegal Player.**

COMMENTS: *This is a change to the penalty for placing the FLEX into a different position in the batting order other than into the position of the starting DP. Previously the penalty was ejection of the player and the coach, now the FLEX simply becomes an Illegal Player.*

**Rule 5, Sec 6: RUN AHEAD RULE.**

- a. A Run Ahead Rule applies when one team leads the other by
1. (FP and MP ONLY) – Twenty (20) runs after three (3) innings, fifteen (15) runs after four (4) innings **or seven (7) runs after five innings.**

COMMENTS: *This was previously known as the Mercy Rule. The change to ‘7 runs after five innings’ now applies to all forms of the game and not just to Championship play*

**Rule 5, Sec 9b: CHARGED CONFERENCES.**

NOTE – Sec 9b:

5. It is not a charged conference for the defence if
- b) **They shout instructions from the dugout.**
  - c) **A manager /coach playing in the game confers with any defensive player. However, an umpire may control meetings between a playing manager/coach and a pitcher by first issuing a warning, and then ejecting the playing manager/coach.**
6. **Should a manager/coach from the dugout report a change to the umpire, this is not considered a charged defensive conference. After making the change, the manager then may cross the foul line to talk with any defensive player.**

COMMENTS: *Point 5 clarifies that simply shouting instructions from the dugout does not constitute a conference, and also allows an umpire to control repeated conferences between a playing coach and a pitcher. Point 6 stresses that a conference will not be charged when making any defensive change, provided the change is notified prior to crossing the foul line. (Previously the coach could only cross the foul line after making a pitching change).*

**Rule 6, Sec 1e: PITCHING.**

Before commencing the delivery (pitch), the pitcher

- e. Must, after taking the signal, bring his whole body to a full and complete stop with the ball held in both hands in front of the body. **This position must be held for two (2) seconds and not more than five (5) seconds,** before starting the pitch.

**NOTE – Sec 1e:**

**Holding the ball to the side is considered in front of the body.**

COMMENTS: *This will help speed up the game. Pitchers have often held the stop for up to 10 seconds, resulting in the batter requesting ‘Time’ to re-establish his position in the box. Five seconds is considered sufficient time for the pitcher to hold the ‘stop’ before delivery and will eliminate the ‘cat & mouse’ tactics that are occasionally utilised between pitcher and batter.*

**Rule 6, Sec 8: INTENTIONAL WALK.**

If the pitcher desires to walk a batter intentionally, he may do so by notifying the plate umpire who shall award the batter first base. The pitcher's notification to the umpire shall be considered a pitch.

**NOTE – Sec8:**

This can occur at any time prior to a batter beginning and ending his time at bat, regardless of the count. The ball is dead and runners cannot advance unless forced.

COMMENTS: This is a change from the previous requirement for an Intentional Walk, where the pitcher was required to pitch all four balls. The change will help speed up the game and removes the possibility of creating an Illegal Pitch, Wild Pitch or Passed Ball. Now applies to all forms of Fast Pitch play, not just Championship play.

**Rule 7, Sec 3b: BATTING POSITION.**

b. An offensive team member may not, under any circumstance, deliberately erase the lines of the batter's box at any time during a game. This includes a coach erasing the lines during the pre-game meeting.

**EFFECT – Sec 3b:**

1. If a batter erases the lines, the umpire shall call a strike. A pitch does not need to be thrown and the ball becomes dead.
2. If the coach or a non-playing team member erases the lines, a strike shall be called on the next scheduled batter (or his substitute) in the line-up.

**NOTE – Sec 3b:**

Should any person continue to deliberately erase a line after a first offence, that person shall be ejected from the game.

COMMENTS: There are several penalties in the rules associated with a batter being out of the batter's box at the time of contacting a pitched ball. The habit of leadoff batters erasing the lines has been ignored in the past, but this action is considered as a deliberate attempt to make the umpire's job in calling these infractions more difficult. The inclusion of this new rule is designed to eliminate the practice and ensures a penalty if a team member is considered to be deliberately erasing the lines.

**Rule 7, Sec 3d: BATTING POSITION.**

d. After the batter first enters the batter's box, he must remain in the box between pitches by keeping at least one foot in the box while taking signals and practice swings.

**EXCEPTION – Sec 3d:**

The batter can leave the batter's box

1. If the ball is hit fair or foul
2. On an attempted swing, slap or check swing
3. If forced out of the box by a pitch
4. (FP ONLY) On a wild pitch or passed ball
5. If there is an attempted play
6. If "Time" has been called
7. If the pitcher leaves the pitcher's circle (FP ONLY), or the catcher leaves the catcher's box
8. On a three ball pitch that is a strike that the batter thinks is a ball.

**EFFECT – Sec 3d:**

If the batter leaves the batter's box, delays play, and none of the exceptions apply; the umpire shall call a strike. No pitch has to be thrown and the ball becomes dead.

COMMENTS: The inclusion of this rule is another designed to help speed the game, by eliminating the practice of batters leaving the batter's box to take a signal or practice swings. It describes when the batter must stay within the batter's box with one foot while taking signals or practice swings. It also provides exceptions when the batter is permitted to leave the box without penalty.

**Rule 8, Sec 4: TOUCHING BASES IN LEGAL ORDER**

Runners must touch bases in legal order (i.e. first, second, third and home plate).

**EXCEPTION – Sec 4:**

When a runner has been obstructed at a base and the obstruction prevents him from touching the base.

COMMENTS: Adds a new interpretation to obstruction to cover the situation of when a defensive player, with or without the ball, obstructs or impedes a runner at a base in such a manner that the runner is prevented from touching the base. Removes the requirement for the obstructed runner to touch the base.

**Rule 8, Sec 7b: OBSTRUCTION.**

- b. When a fielder **prevents** the runner from making a base, or impedes the progress of a runner or batter-runner who is legally running bases; if the fielder is
1. Not in possession of the ball, or
  2. Not in the act of fielding a batted ball, or
  3. Making a fake tag without the ball, or
  - 4. In possession of the ball and who pushes a runner off a base, or**
  - 5. In possession of the ball, but not in the act of making a play on the runner which intentionally impedes the progress of that runner, while he is legally running the bases.**

COMMENTS: The new additions help clarify that the actions of a fielder deliberately pushing a runner off a base in an attempt to gain an out is a form of obstruction. The two new sub-sections now give the runner protection from this type of play. Numbers 1, 2 and 3 of sub-section 'b' cover obstruction when not in possession of the ball or not in the act of fielding the ball, while numbers 4 and 5 cover when an obstruction can occur while the fielder is in possession of the ball.

**Rule 8, Sec 7b: OBSTRUCTION.**

**EFFECT 4:** 4. An obstructed runner may never be called out between the two bases where he was obstructed.

**EXCEPTION 1 – Effect Sec 7b 4:**

If the obstructed runner commits an act of interference after the obstruction is ruled, or the runner is legally appealed for

- (a) Missing a base, **unless the runner has been obstructed at that base and the obstruction prevents him from touching the base, or**
- (b) Leaving a base before a fly ball was first touched, **the obstructed runner is no longer protected and may be put out.**

**EXCEPTION 2 – Effect Sec 7b 4:**

**If an obstructed runner safely obtains the base he would have been awarded, in the umpire's judgement, and there is a subsequent play on a different runner, the obstructed runner is no longer protected and may be put out. The ball remains alive.**

COMMENTS: Some participants think there is no difference between obstruction between two bases and obstruction at a base. Exception 1(a) now helps clarify the situation whereby a runner who has been obstructed at a base, and that obstruction prevents him from touching the base, will not be called out for failing to touch the base.

An obstructed runner should no longer be protected between the bases where they were obstructed if a subsequent play has been made on another runner. As a result of this new ruling, if another play occurs and then the defence makes a follow up play on the obstructed runner, the obstructed runner could be called out if tagged while off base. Exception 2 covers this situation.

**Rule 8, Sec 9k: THE RUNNER IS OUT.**

- k. When he is struck with **an untouched** fair-batted ball in fair territory while off base, **and** in the umpire's judgement, **any** fielder had an opportunity to make an out.

COMMENTS: Adding the additional words now compliment Rule 8, Sec. 10f, which indicates the runner is not out if the batted ball has been touched by a fielder before contacting the runner. Changing "no" to "any" clarifies the wording. Also allows the out to be called if struck by the ball, regardless of whether it has passed a fielder or not.



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