



Three-umpire systems offer many benefits, including improved angles and distances to a base. Tammy Hutchison, Racine, Wis.

MAX COVERAGE

Crew of Three the Better to See

By Nathan Huang

Being chosen for postseason tournament play is an accomplishment worth celebrating for any fast-pitch softball umpire, but with it comes a significant adjustment for many umpires — moving from a two-umpire crew to three umpires.

Many state high school associations, ASA and USSSA use three-umpire crews in postseason tournaments. The NCAA uses three umpires for all games in the Division I, II and III tournaments.

The addition of a third umpire is more than another set of eyes. The differences in mechanics and play coverage responsibilities for a three-umpire crew are designed to

maximize the crew's ability to be in position for any situation. NFHS, ASA, NCAA and USSSA use similar coverage responsibilities for the plate umpire, first-base umpire and third-base umpire.

"While not all plays can be covered with any system, the primary benefit to having three umpires is that you now have about 95 percent of all possible plays covered," said Brian Sonak, of State College, Pa., an NCAA, ASA and NFHS umpire who trains umpires in two- and three-person crew mechanics. "You have at least 75 percent of the outfield covered on all fly balls; checked swing views from both sides (first- and third-base lines); and (for the most part), umpires are mostly ahead of the play or have

more time to be set well ahead of the developing play.

"There is always an umpire watching the pitcher from a line. Seeing the pitcher from both sides can provide information that cannot be seen from the typical first-base side. And let's not forget the bonus of having three minds instead of two (and six eyes instead of four). If one of those once-in-a-lifetime plays happens, there is a better chance that the crew can reach the correct decisions."

Donna Vavrinec, the NCAA's national coordinator of softball umpires, is a strong proponent of using three-umpire crews for regular-season games, noting that the majority of Division I conferences use three

umpires in all conference games. She said an increasing number of Division II and III conferences are moving toward three-umpire crews.

"They see the advantages of having the third umpire," Vavrinec said. "Student-athletes are getting stronger and faster, which only supports the use of the third umpire."

Among the benefits of a three-umpire crew, she said, are always having help (one umpire ahead) to take a play at the next base; angles and distances are covered better; an umpire can work outside the diamond in foul territory if necessary to make the call at first or third, thereby preventing the umpire from having to cross a running or throwing lane and allowing the umpire to keep the ball in front of him or her at all times; and giving the umpire additional time to read the play and react accordingly.

The basic rules governing coverage responsibilities in a three-umpire crew are as follows:

- Rotation of the three umpires is always clockwise. A rotation includes the plate umpire covering third base as U3 covers second and U1 moves to cover the plate.

- When a base umpire turns his or her back to the infield to go to the outfield on a play, the umpire should remain outside the diamond until the play is completed.

- When a base umpire goes to the outfield, the other two umpires revert to coverage responsibilities of a two-umpire crew.

- When the umpires start from a counter-rotated position — the third-base umpire is down the line at third base and the first-base umpire takes a position behind the second baseman — there is no rotation.

- A base umpire should go to the outfield on any "trouble" ball hit in the air over an infielder's head. Some associations require a base umpire to go out on any fly ball and some to go out for rulings on possible trap/catched balls or catch/no-catch plays near the fence.

A three-umpire system cannot operate seamlessly without communication by all three partners.

ASA has made communication a point of emphasis for the 2016 season,

noting in its January 2016 edition of umpire "Plays and Clarifications" the following: "Based on visits to several national championships in our upper classifications of play, we have noticed several mechanics which were not being used properly ... (including) lack of communication between the umpires on the field when rotating, especially in the three-umpire system, and not verbally and visually confirming that your partner has rotated into the position they should be based on our preferred rotations."

Sonak stresses the importance of communication on fly balls.

"The NCAA philosophy allows for umpires to make the decision on whether to chase fly balls in their chase zone," said Sonak, who works in several Division I conferences and also is USA/ASA Elite and International Softball Federation (ISF) certified. "Umpires must be aware if an umpire decides to stay in the infield and not chase. I have had issues in college games where one partner didn't read another, and I had to cover second base as the plate umpire."

To reinforce the necessity of ongoing communication between umpires, Vavrinec said it is emphasized in the NCAA's umpire training process.

"Training consists of working with all umpires to know their responsibilities at each base and how to work as a team," Vavrinec said, adding that umpires are expected to thoroughly discuss this aspect and how it applies to all coverage and possible plays during their pregame meeting.

For those umpires who are not familiar with coverage responsibilities in a three-umpire crew, associations produce manuals to illustrate and detail key points to remember for each umpire — plate, first base and third base — in different situations. *Referee* also offers *Softball Umpiring Mechanics Illustrated* for two- and three-umpire high school crews.

Nathan Huang is a freelance writer based in West Chester, Pa., and umpires NFHS and ASA softball. □

TOOLS

Umpires Quiz

The annual Softball Umpires Quiz, prepared by the editors of *Referee*, is available free on the Internet. To access the 20-question quiz and answers, go to referee.com under "Sports Specific Quizzes" item on the website's home page. Test your knowledge of ASA, NFHS, NCAA and USSSA rules.



QUICKTIP

A commonly used position among plate umpires is the "slot," the area between the catcher and batter. To get a consistent look at each pitch, place your feet at least shoulder width apart with your non-slot foot (right foot on right-handed batters) about midway between the catcher's feet. **Your inside ear should be in line with the inside edge of the plate with your belt buckle on the batter's box line nearest home plate.** Be sure to see the outside corner of the plate and the batter's knees.

SIDELINE

Two-Second Pause

Prior to the start of this season, the NCAA issued an interpretation of rule 10.2.2 regarding a two-second pitching pause. As more pitchers take a signal from a coach or armband behind the pitching plate, the NCAA is trying to prevent pitchers from stepping on the plate and starting their windup without a noticeable pause. The NCAA said intent of the clarification is not to have a pitcher "quick pitch" to catch the batter and or umpire unprepared for the pitch.

Violating rule 10.2.2 is an illegal pitch.



TEST YOURSELF

Each of the following includes a situation and possible answer(s). Decide which are correct for ASA, NFHS, NCAA or USSSA rules and which might vary. **Solutions: p. 81.**

1. R2 occupies second base. F2 fires to second and R2 is called out on a close play by the base umpire. The coach of the team at bat requests the umpire to confer with his or her partner.

- That request can be made only on an out call.
- That request can be made only on a safe call.
- The base umpire must confer with his or her partner.
- There is no requirement that an umpire must confer with his or her partner on a pickoff attempt.

2. Fast pitch. B1 hits for extra bases. As B1 reaches second, the ball is fired to F1 in the pitcher's circle. B1 continues toward third base but stops about 20 feet from third. B1 looks around and then races toward third where she slides in safely.

- B1 is out.
- B1 has not committed a violation.
- B1 is returned to second base.

3. Substitute James is injured in the fourth inning and is replaced by legal substitute Wilson. In the sixth inning James attempts to re-enter the game for Wilson.

- That move is legal.
- James may not re-enter without approval of medical personnel.
- James must obtain written approval from a physician before re-entering the game.
- Substitute players are not permitted to re-enter the game.

4. The minimum length of an official bat grip is:

- Six inches.
- 10 inches.
- 10 inches for 32-inch to 34-inch long bats and eight inches for shorter bats.
- 12 inches.

5. R1 is on first base with fewer than two outs when B2 hits a ground ball to F4. When F4 moves to tag R1, she steps back toward first to avoid the tag and then reverses direction toward second after F4 throws to first where B2 is safe. R1 is also safe at second.

- R1 is declared out for stepping back toward first.
- The ball is immediately dead.
- No violation has occurred and the play stands.

Ice Batter Who Tries to Get Hit by Pitch

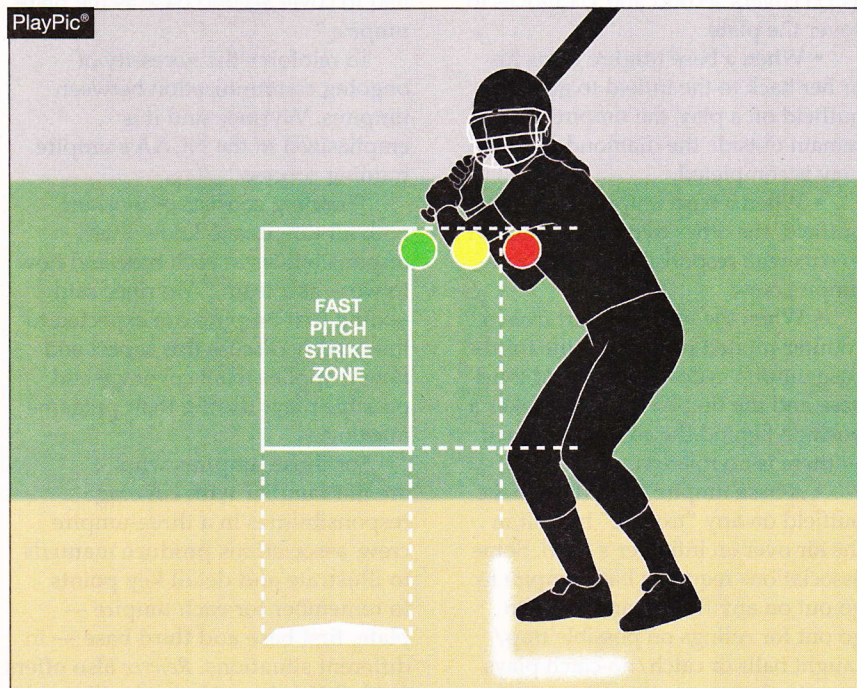
For umpires who work NFHS, ASA, NCAA or USSSA fast pitch, it is more important than ever before to know the rule differences between the aforementioned associations for when a batter is hit by a pitch. The requirements that allow the hit batter to be entitled to first base or remain in the batter's box with a ball (unless it is ball four) or strike (unless it is strike three) vary amid those codes.

Umpires should always be aware of the potential for a batter to be hit by a pitch, especially if the batter is crowding the plate by moving as close to it as possible yet keeping both feet within the batter's box lines. Keep in mind, however, that where the ball contacts the batter and if the batter is trying to avoid the pitched ball or try to get hit can result in a different ruling depending on the association.

In ASA (rule 8-1F), a pitched ball not swung at nor called a strike that contacts a batter is awarded first base. The exception to that rule states that if no attempt is made to avoid being hit, the batter will not be awarded first base unless it is ball four.

NFHS (rule 8-1-2b) says that the batter does not have to attempt to avoid being hit by the pitch if the pitch is entirely within the batter's box. "However, the batter may not obviously try to get hit by the pitch," according to the rule.

USSSA (rule 8-4D) is similar to NFHS, but the pitched ball does not have to be within the batter's box if the umpire judges that the batter intentionally moved to get hit by the pitch, "it is a strike or ball depending on the location of the pitch." Also, if a pitched ball strikes the batter's



In hit batter situations with two balls or less and one strike or less, if a batter does not attempt to avoid a pitched ball that is in the strike zone (green ball), it is a strike. If the pitched ball is between the plate and batter's box (yellow ball), it is a dead ball "ball," and if the pitched ball is entirely within the batter's box (red ball), the batter is awarded first base. However, in ASA, the batter is only awarded first base if she attempts to avoid being hit by the pitch.

loose garment, such as a shirt that is not buttoned, the batter is not entitled to first base.

In NCAA (rule 11.15), if a pitched ball is entirely in the batter's box and hits the batter, the batter is awarded first base. If the pitch is a ball and it is in the area between the batter's box and the plate, the batter must attempt to avoid being hit in order for her to be awarded first base. If the pitch is a strike, there is no base award and it remains a strike.

Key guidelines in helping

umpires determine if a ball is entirely within the batter's box is to make sure the batter's box lines are drawn correctly with the full six inches of space between the plate and edge of the batter's box line. That restricts the batter from placing their toes any closer than six inches from the plate in their stance. Some batters will move as close to the plate as possible with an exaggerated knee or waist bend along with holding their arms/hands out farther from their body. Some batters also will

wear protective equipment, which is legal, but is it being improperly worn below the elbow and hanging into the area between the batter's box and the plate?

With any inside pitch, the plate umpire should determine if the batter intentionally moved or turned into the pitch. If so, and the ball is between the plate and edge of the batter's box, the umpire in any association should call, "Dead ball" and order the batter to "stay here" on a count with two balls or less. □

Suddenly, I'm Going Solo

By Anthony "Corky" Carter

Settle for less than 100 percent? There may be times when settling for less than perfection is for the better. Let me explain.

In the world of amateur slow-pitch softball, especially during league play, the criteria for "being on time" is often "as long as you are on the field before the first pitch." Assigners and league supervisors are always encouraging us to arrive at the ballpark at least 15 minutes before the game. That concept is foreign to those umpires who have worked at the college level where being at the game site at least an hour before game time is a minimum expectation. But with nightly leagues starting as early as 6 p.m. and the traffic, and the unexpected, and people having to stay a few minutes longer at their regular jobs, getting to the ballpark even 15 minutes before game time does present a challenge.

And, there are those that know they will be arriving near game time because of their work schedule and the time it takes to get to the ballpark. In those instances we have a system in place where the plate umpire gets the game started and his partner trots onto the field sometime before the first half-inning is completed. That happens.

However, when the clock begins to move toward game time and the umpire you are scheduled to work with is not at the ballpark, there is a bit of unease. And with about five

minutes to go before game time, you begin to focus on the entrance, looking for your partner, or looking for anyone dressed as an umpire. As the time ticks away during the last few minutes and you still have no partner, you resign yourself to the reality that you will be doing at least one game by yourself and hopefully not the entire set of games.

As you walk to the field you begin to mentally prepare yourself

for working alone. (I realize there are many leagues across the country that use the single-umpire system, and those umpires are excellent. Their brain is definitely in gear for the task at hand).

How are you going to approach the situation? Are you going to meet with the coaches and tell them: "I'm going to do the best I can." "I might miss a couple of calls." "I don't. I simply start the game. Believe it or

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CASEPLAYS

First Baseman Intentionally Distracts Batter

Play: Fast pitch. R3 occupies third base with one out and a 1-1 count on B3. F3 anticipates a bunt and charges in toward the plate. As F3 nears the plate she wildly flaps her arms in a distracting manner. B3 bunts the ball that settles in foul ground.

Ruling: In ASA and NFHS, rule an illegal pitch. Award R3 home and add a ball to B3's count. In ASA, F3 could be ejected from the game for unsporting conduct, but technically, the offensive team has the option to take the result of the play or the penalty for the illegal pitch. In NCAA, fielder obstruction has occurred. Award R3 home and add a ball to B3's count. B3 continues at bat with a 2-1 count. Technically, the coach of the offensive team has the option of taking the result of the play or the awarding of a ball to the batter with R3 scoring. Also in NCAA, a warning is issued to F3 and a subsequent violation by that player will result in a behavioral ejection. In USSSA FP, F3 is ejected from the game but an illegal pitch is not called. Return R3 to third base and B3 remains at bat with a 1-2 count (ASA 6-5B Effect; NFHS 6-2-8 Pen.; NCAA 9.5.2.11 Effect, 13.2.1; USSSA FP 6.2C Effect).

Verbal Obstruction by Fielder Causes Confusion

Play: Fast pitch. R2 occupies second base with two outs. B4 hits a high pop up directly above F5. After F5 drops the ball that lands at her feet, F6 yells, "Go back! Go back!" R2 returns to second base as B4 makes first.

Ruling: In ASA, the play stands. Play resumes with R2 on second and R1 at first and two outs. Casebook 1-57 rules "Although this is a distracting act, there is no penalty for a defensive player or coach yelling." In NCAA, NFHS and USSSA FP, the umpire will award the appropriate bases. Most likely R2 will be awarded third or home depending upon the umpire's judgment. B4 could be awarded second base based on the umpire's judgment (ASA 1-Obstruction B, CB 1-57; NFHS 2-36, 8.4.3J; NCAA 1.36, 9.4.1 Effect; USSSA FP 3-Obstruction).

not, I've completed an inning before where all six batters hit fly balls that were caught and the players did not notice that there was no umpire at first base. And, I have been on the field when the shortstop fielded the ball, threw to first and I made the call about halfway down the first-base line, and it wasn't until then that the players realized we were missing a base umpire.

So, as you physically approach the field, you have got to mentally approach how you are going to handle mechanics. And here is where I made my error as a younger umpire even though I was already a "veteran" umpire. My partner didn't show, and I knew that the assigner at the private softball complex would have someone there by the second game. As I mentally prepared to solo, my mindset was "I'm going to do the most fantastic job they have ever seen by an umpire working alone!" "I'm not going to miss a single call because my hustle is going to be without reproach." "I know I am good enough to watch everything my partner would be watching along with everything I should be watching."

As you might guess, it was not long into the game that reality set in as I made a mistake. There was a runner on first and a long fly ball was hit deep into left field. In those days the bases were only 60 feet apart, so I knew the runner was going to tag up and attempt to advance to second. At the crack of the bat, I headed out from behind the plate, past the pitcher, and set myself up to make the call at second base on the runner's advance. I was determined that the runner at first was not going to get an advantage by leaving early. When the ball touched the fielder's glove I looked back and saw the runner tag up legally. I immediately turned my head toward the fielder to locate the ball being thrown toward second base.

To my dismay, when I looked to left field, the ball was on the ground and the fielder was picking it up. The runner advanced to second and as I called time, the voices rang with, "He didn't catch it!" by the offensive players and "He dropped it on the transfer!" by the defensive players.

What could I do? What should I do?

Luckily for me, these were two of my regular league teams, the players were friends, and I knew both coaches well. So I called the coaches out to where I was standing and explained the situation. There was a bit of hesitancy and then the offensive coach said, "He caught the ball." All was fine. I learned a lesson that I have never forgotten. There are plays made by fielders that take precedence and it is important you get them correct as a lone umpire.

Umpiring alone is taxing physically and of all the things you can do, hustling into the most advantageous position is critical. It is critical from the standpoint of making the correct call and critical from the standpoint of the visual that is seen by the players.

As a single umpire it is important to portray that hustle after the play is over by jogging back to the plate. You are going to be in the middle of the diamond quite often and because most games are on a time limit, that extra hustle will be appreciated by the teams as you move back behind the plate.

You won't see everything that two umpires will see during a slow-pitch softball game. Knowing if the fielder made the catch is more important than knowing if a runner at first left too soon. Following the ball to move into the correct position at third base is more important than ensuring each runner has touched first and second base. Even being at second base to make a call is more important than seeing whether or not a runner touched the plate when scoring.

Do not use umpiring a game by yourself as a justification for not being in position to make a call. As a single umpire, you can cover the plays effectively.

Mentally prepare yourself before beginning the game by thinking through the scenarios that might occur and deciding what call is the most important. And in that unusual situation, realize it is OK to settle for less than perfection.

Anthony "Corky" Carter, Brentwood, Tenn., is a longtime slow-pitch umpire, instructor and USSSA Hall of Fame umpire. □

5 MINUTES WITH MIKE RAYNOR

New National Pro Fastpitch Supervisor has lots of experience.

REFEREE: How did you go from umpiring to coordinator of umpires for four conferences and now your new position with National Pro Fastpitch?

RAYNOR: Through the years I coached softball at every level, from travel ball to high school ball. I was a Division I coach, and for many of those years I was also a Division I umpire, umpiring in the Southeastern Conference and the Atlantic Coast Conference, and the big conferences that are in a geography that I could access through the years. All of a sudden one day (spring of 2012) I was in Gainesville, Fla., umpiring the Georgia/Florida series. I got a phone call after the Saturday game, and the person on the other end of the phone said, our coordinator of officials for the ACC has just resigned, would you be interested in being our coordinator? On that day I was 63 years old, and my two partners were about 33. I realized this was probably a pretty good bus to hop on. It was time, and I've had the experiences that I've had, so I knew that was probably a good opportunity to go out of umpiring at the top of my game and hop into an administrative role, keeping me included in the sport.

REFEREE: How did you go about becoming coordinator of umpires for different NCAA conferences?

RAYNOR: In the beginning, it was the ACC and the Big South. Since then, the Big East has been added, as well as the Ivy League, and then most recently I became the supervisor of officials for the National Pro Fastpitch.

REFEREE: How did the position with National Pro Fastpitch come your way?

RAYNOR: Cheri Kempf, who is the commissioner of the league, and I have known each other for years from being at the same games, either when I was an umpire or I was the coordinator. She called me up and we talked, and it seemed like a real good fit. It was certainly something that excited me. It was a good add-on to what I was doing. I had a relationship with the top umpires in the country, and that's what we were looking for at the NPF level.

REFEREE: How do you go about evaluating umpires that are working for you in the various conferences and now National Pro Fastpitch?

RAYNOR: We live in a time that almost everything and everybody has to be camera ready. There are lots of games that are televised. ESPN

Residence: Lenox, Ga.

Occupation: National Pro Fastpitch (NPF) supervisor of officials, umpire coordinator and supervisor of officials for the Atlantic Coast (ACC), Big East and Big South conferences and Ivy League.

Experience: Former NPF umpire; combined 20-plus years umpiring the Southeastern Conference, ACC, Conference USA, the Southern Conference, and numerous others; former head softball coach of Division I Mercer University from 2007-12 (Atlantic Sun Conference); former high school football coach, baseball coach and athletic director.

is great for our game. Many games are streamed via the Internet by the individual colleges. I have access to many games every weekend. And then being there in person, being there on site, watching, observing, evaluating and talking with umpires that are the to-be-developed umpires, the experienced veterans, and the guys and gals that are kind of in their twilight years trying to fade out on top. You have to be there, and constantly on the telephone with the coaches and umpires.

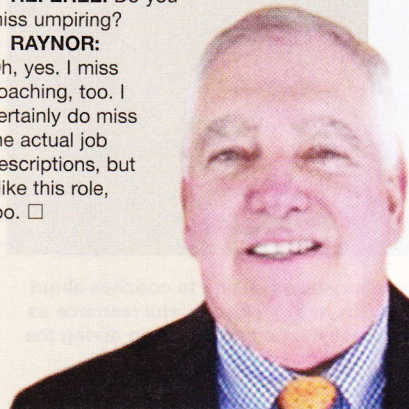
We have an evaluation system that creates a paper trail that gives coaches and umpires opportunities to evaluate umpires, so we have a lot of methods to determine who's on top of their game, who's got some work to do, who do I need to put on this game, etc.

REFEREE: How many umpires are on the NPF roster?

RAYNOR: There's about 50 umpires on the roster. That gives you a workable number in the various geographies so that you try to minimize travel and minimize cost, and maximize the professionalism and effectiveness of the officials.

REFEREE: Do you miss umpiring?

RAYNOR: Oh, yes. I miss coaching, too. I certainly do miss the actual job descriptions, but I like this role, too. □



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