



Plays of the Day

One of the chief cornerstones for NFHS rules committees is the consideration of safety for those playing the respective sport. It was with this fundamental in mind, that the Baseball Rules Committee adopted the "force-play slide rule" in high school some years ago. The intent was to eliminate the "take-out" slide that had dangerous potential for injury as a baserunner would attempt to disrupt the infielder attempting to receive the baseball and throw it for a double play. The rule basically requires that a runner, in a force situation, slide in a direct line between the two bases. It is important to remember that in high school, a slide is never mandatory, but in a force situation, if the runner chooses to slide, he must execute a legal slide and do so in a direct line. The runner may slide to a side of the base where the fielder is not making the play, or may go in standing up by moving away from the base to the side, or infield, where the play is not being made. One of the key components is, when the runner opts to slide, he does make a legal slide. It is important to remember that the fielder has "protection" on the back side of the base or home plate. If a runner slides and goes past the base or plate, and makes contact or alters the fielder's play, the runner has committed an illegal slide, which is interference in this situation. The rule does apply at all bases, including home plate, (except for first base), in a force situation.

Today's play illustrates this rule: With a runner on first and one out, the batter hits a ground ball to the second baseman. He flips the ball to the shortstop who is standing on the back side of second base. The shortstop touches the back edge of the base and for some unknown reason, the ball falls from the glove, no transfer from glove to throwing hand was involved. As the ball drops, the runner from first slides past second base and contacts the shortstop. Wishing he was in the stands and not on the field, the plate umpire is aware of everyone's attention moving to him.

This is one of those plays where, as an umpire, we know we are going to get an earful. But, we don't have the luxury, of picking and choosing a rule to use.

In this play, because the runner slid past the bag and made contact with the shortstop, he committed an illegal slide. So, we now have an illegal slide in a force play situation. The fact that the fielder dropped the ball is immaterial. The rule dictates that the runner is now out and the batter-runner is also out; even if he was clearly safe in the play. It is a "penalty" out. So, we have two outs, and ringing in our ears from the coach upset with the call. In such situations, I always have to bite my tongue in my desire to tell the coach it was the coaches on the rules committee who pushed for the rule. Experience has told me that during the game is not a good time to provide that information.

Today's play occurred in the same game this weekend. In fact, it occurred in the top and bottom half of the same inning. The officials soon suspected they should have seen a movie.

PLAY: In the top half of the inning, the runner from first is off with the pitch, which the batter hits as a high fly ball to center field. As the runner advances, he fails to touch second base and is digging for third when the center fielder makes a great catch. The runner is still between second and third, when the throw from the center fielder sails into a group of dads slapping the back of the father of the player who made the catch. In the bottom half of the same inning, a runner from first, having missed second base, is near third when the throw from the right fielder goes into the third base dugout. The outfielder had fielded a simple one-hopper single from the batter.

Where should the umpires have placed the runners?

Until tomorrow, have a good one.

Kyle