

FHSAA AUTHORIZED MECHANIC MODIFICATIONS

[Updated 2 May 2021]

There are times that play dictates that umpires make adjustments to their movement and positioning to achieve the best calling distance and angle. This document outlines acceptable mechanics changes for FHSAA 3-Man Mechanics.

WORKING THE PLATE

The Heel-Toe Stance in the Slot Position with a Good Pelvic Alignment to the front outside corner of the plate is the only acceptable stance for FHSAA Softball. However, the hand placement requirement is waived. Hands will be in front of the body, in the best working position for the individual umpire.

POSITIONING GOALS

Umpires must strive to be in the best position to see all four elements of the play — Ball, Base, Runner and Defender.

- FORCE PLAY – 18 to 21 feet calling distance and a 90-degree angle to the flight of the thrown ball.
- TAG PLAY – 10 to 12 feet calling distance with the four elements in view. As the play develops, the best calling position changes as the runner, defender, and ball move. Move and adjust as required to keep all four elements in view.

STARTING POSITIONS with RUNNER on THIRD BASE ONLY

With a runner at 3rd Base ONLY, U3 will be 12 feet from the base—a stride off the line in foul ground—in a set position and square to the plate. U1 will be 18-21 feet from the base, in foul ground close to the line, shoulders square to the plate. U1 will WALK the line.

U1 STARTING POSITION with a RUNNER ON FIRST BASE ONLY

With a runner on 1B only, U1 will be 12 feet behind the base, with the right foot 12-18 inches off the line—in a set position and square to the plate. Turn your head slightly to look through the runner at the pitcher. U1 may stay in the set position for an attempted pick-off. You're in perfect position to see a tag or obstruction by F3.

U1 COUNTER-ROTATED

U1 normally takes a position off the 2nd baseman's shoulder when counter-rotated. (Right shoulder if there is a runner on 2B, left shoulder if there is no runner on 2B.) If the defense takes a position that is far from the "normal," U1 should adjust to stay in the middle 30' and not be pushed too deep. If the 2nd baseman is playing extremely deep, move farther off her shoulder and stay a step-and-a-half behind an imaginary line draw between her and the adjacent fielder (1st baseman or shortstop).

FOUL GROUND

When an umpire's starting position is ON THE LINE, the use of movement into FOUL GROUND can effectively accomplish our goals.

FIRST BASE (U1)

When the 2nd baseman fields a ball close to first base or at the edge of the infield moving in the direction of first base, the normal movement into the infield can cause the umpire to be in a direct throwing lane—or worse—interfere with the play. The option of staying on the line or backing into foul ground will allow the umpire to keep their calling distance for the force play and establish a 90 degree angle to the throw. This positioning allows the umpire to see all 4-elements (ball, base, runner & defender) of the play without being in a throwing lane or potentially interfering with the play.

With a ball hit to the right-fielder, who is in a position to attempt a throw to first base to retire the batter-runner, these same optional movements and positioning can allow the umpire a good view of the play.

In either of these optional positioning movements, the umpire is still in a good position for any secondary calls that may be needed. If the batter-runner rounds and returns to first base, continue to move through foul ground to a position inside the diamond 10 to 12 feet from first base with a 90-degree angle to the path of the returning runner. If the batter-runner continues to advance and a rotation is needed, simply advance in foul ground to the rotated holding position at home plate.

THIRD BASE (U3)

With a runner at 3rd base, if the catcher attempts a pick-off play at 3rd, the umpire should move in foul ground from their starting position (12 feet from the base—off the line in foul ground and in a set position) to a calling position 10 to 12 feet from the base with a good view of the returning runner, the base, the ball, and the defender. Movements into the diamond for any over-throw or secondary plays are easily done without placing the umpire into possible throwing lanes.

With multiple runners on base and a base hit or extra base hit, the option of moving in foul ground to a position inside 3B base allows the umpire to observe runners touching the base, see the play develop, and move into a preferred calling position—all without being in a throwing lane, possibly interfering with a fielder, or obstructing a runner.

WORKING OUTSIDE THE DIAMOND

FIRST BASE (U1)

With no runners on base or a runner at 1st Base only ... U1 can move directly into fair territory remaining outside the diamond on balls hit to left or center. U1 observes the batter-runner approach and round 1st base. U1 must be prepared to take any return play into 1st Base or to rotate to the plate if a rotation is required.

When Counter-Rotated and U3 does not go out, U1 has the option of working outside the diamond parallel to the base-line between 1st and 2nd base or moving inside the diamond and working parallel to the base line as dictated by the play.

THIRD BASE (U3)

When rotated and U1 DOES NOT go out ... U3 can work outside of the diamond, moving parallel to the base line between 1st and 2nd base when required. If U1 does go out, but-ton-hook inside the diamond for any potential play at 1st or 2nd base.

COVERING 1B WHEN U1 GOES OUT (NO RUNNERS)

Normally, when one of the base umpires covers a ball to the outfield, the other two umpires revert to two-ump mechanics. However, when U1 goes out with no runners on base, the Plate Umpire will cover 1B and U3 will move directly to calling position at second base. It makes more sense to have Plate move 50' than to have U3 try to move 85'. In this case, U3 has all calls at 2B and 3B and Plate takes all calls at 1B and home plate. Use this mechanic regardless of number of outs.

BRACKETING FOUL BALLS

When starting on the line, base umpires should bracket foul popups with the plate umpire. The umpire that the fielder is facing takes the catch/no catch call. (Plate umpire always has fair/foul.) The remaining base umpire assumes responsibility for runners tagging up to advance or returning to their bases.

TIMING PLAY SIGNAL

Timing plays occur when the third out is made on the bases (not a force out) and the timing of the out determines whether or not a run scores. Like infield fly situations, it is important that the crew be aware of a potential timing play. Crews are encouraged to

use a signal (tap the outside of the left wrist with one or two fingers of the right hand) to communicate potential timing plays.

- Two-out Timing Play — whenever we have baserunner(s) and two outs.
- One-out Timing Play — whenever we have multiple runners with the lead runner on 3B and one out.

HOLDING POSITION FOR CALLS AT THE PLATE

The old standard position for a developing tag play at the plate — 1B line extended / back of the right hand batters box — is not be the best position in today's more athletic game. The plate umpire should choose a holding position behind the point of the plate to read the developing play, watch for obstruction, and then adjust to keep all four elements in sight as the play proceeds.

CONSIDERATIONS:

These are ACCEPTABLE MODIFICATIONS that are dictated by the play, speed of the players, speed of the umpire, positioning of the players, plus many other considerations that may become a factor.

Umpires **MUST** know and consider: (1) Where am I going and why? (2) What am I gaining or sacrificing? (3) Will I be able to cover any secondary calls? (4) Is this a good option or not?

Just as there are back-side 90-degree angles to tag plays that work well provided all goes well (but really leave one out of position for secondary plays), over-use or the incorrect use of these modified mechanics can leave an umpire out of position or missing one of the four elements. You are encouraged to use these acceptable modifications, provided you use them correctly.