

INTERVENTION ATTENTION

An 'Intervening Play' Can Affect the Final Result



On a play where a running lane infraction occurs, an intervening play — such as a tag attempt on a runner advancing home — before the interference could impact where other runners ultimately are placed.

By George Demetriou

There are two situations in baseball rules where an intervening play can impact the result of the play. One involves appeal plays and the other can affect whether or not a run scores when there is running lane interference. The latter is specifically referred to as an intervening play in the rulebooks, so we will begin there. Except where noted, the material applies equally to NFHS, NCAA and pro rules.

Running lane interference. The three-foot-wide lane (aka 45' lane) along the last half of the distance between home and first base in foul territory only applies when the ball is being thrown to first base from the area of the plate (roughly from behind the runner).

When the lane applies, the batter-runner is required to run the last half of the distance from home to first base within the three-foot lane. If the runner does not do so, there is no penalty unless, in the umpire's judgment, he interferes with the fielder taking the throw at first base. The batter-runner is not necessarily out if he interferes with the throw itself.

The lines are part of the lane, so stepping on the line is not a violation. Also, one foot in or on the line and the other foot in the air is permitted. The batter-runner must take two consecutive steps totally outside the lane to violate the rule.

The throw does not have to strike the batter-runner for interference to be called but lacking such contact makes for a very contentious call. If the runner interferes with, obstructs, impedes, hinders or confuses the defensive player who is taking the throw at first base, it is interference. Umpires should be on the lookout for any unnatural arm-waving or the veering of the runner if the catcher calls "in" or "out."

There must be a throw for this rule to apply. If there's no throw, it's impossible to interfere with a fielder taking a throw. The quality of the throw is also a factor. It is not interference if a fielder is not covering first or if the throw had no realistic chance of retiring the batter-runner, unless in the umpire's judgment (NFHS rules only), the bad throw is a direct result of the batter-runner's improper position. The batter-runner is permitted to exit the three-foot lane by means of a step, stride or slide in the immediate vicinity of first base for the sole purpose of touching first base.

In summary, two things must occur for running lane interference to be called: (1) The batter-runner must be running with one or both feet entirely out of the box; and (2) the batter-runner must interfere with the catch of the throw at first base.

If interference is called, the ball is immediately dead and the batter-runner is out; any other runners return to the base occupied at the time of the pitch except in NFHS where runners are returned to the base occupied at the time of interference (NFHS 8-4-1g, 8-2-9; NCAA 7-11p; pro 5.09a11). In NCAA and pro, if there is an intervening play between the batted ball and an act of interference by the batter-runner before he reaches first base, the runners return to the base occupied at the time of the interference (NCAA 2-51 Nt 2; pro 6.01a Pen. para 2). That could make the difference in the scoring of a run. The following two plays illustrate the impact of the intervening play.

Play 1: With runners on second and third and no one out, B4 bunts for a suicide squeeze. R3 slides into home as F1 fields the bunt. F1 throws to first and hits B4, who is running completely outside the lane in fair territory. F3 picks up the ball and throws home to retire R2, while B4 makes it to first. **Ruling 1:** B4 is out and the ball is immediately dead, thus the out on R2 at the plate never happened. In NFHS, the runners return to last base occupied at the time of interference, which means the run scores and R2 is placed on third,

provided he had gotten there before B4 got plunked. In NCAA and pro, the runners go back to second and third and the run does not score.

Now let's add an intervening play.

Play 2: Same as Play 1 except when F1 fields the ball, he flips it to F2 as R3 slides in safely. F2 then fires to first and the throw hits B4 outside the lane. **Ruling 2:** In NFHS, the result is the same as Play 1 because intervening plays are not a factor. However in NCAA and pro, the intervening play causes the runners to be returned to the last base occupied at the time of interference. Consequently, we have the same result in all codes — the run scores and R2 is placed on third.

Appeal plays. An appeal is the act of a fielder or coach claiming a violation of the rules by the opposing team. Appeals for baserunning infractions may involve missing a base, failing to properly retouch a base (leaving too soon) or failing to touch home immediately after over running/over sliding. In NCAA and pro, a runner who takes a running start on a tag up must also be appealed, but in NFHS such a runner is immediately declared out (8-4-2o).

An appeal must be made while the ball is live in NCAA or pro, but may also be made while the ball is dead in NFHS. After an NFHS play ends, regardless of whether the ball is live or dead, a defensive player with or without the ball or a coach may make an appeal by verbally stating the infraction (8-2 Pen.).

Any appeal must be made before the next pitch or any play or attempted play and thus the opportunity for an intervening play to negate the appeal (NFHS 8-2 Pen.; NCAA 8-6b; pro 5.09c4 para 1). If the offensive team initiates the play, the appeal is not negated; however, if the defense originates the action, no further appeal is allowed.

An appeal is not a play, but if a pitcher balks when making an appeal, it is considered a play and no further appeals are allowed. It is not a balk for a pitcher, while in contact with the rubber (does not step back), to throw to an unoccupied base for the purpose of making an appeal play. If

the defensive team errs on an appeal play and the ball is thrown into dead-ball territory, the appeal is canceled, except in NFHS (2.29.6B). Once it is understood an appeal is going to be made, the NFHS umpire should simply ask the defense to state the appeal and avoid all debate.

If the erroneous throw on an appeal remains in live-ball territory, the appeal is allowed if the ball immediately is returned to the base being appealed and no runners advance on the misplay. However in NCAA only, if any runner advances, the appeal is not allowed (8-6b3, 8-6b5b).

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