



April 8, 2026

NFHS Softball Weekly Rule Interpretations

It should be noted that due to some restructuring of the rule book performed between the 2025 and 2026 NFHS Softball Rules Book that some of the rule references have been updated. Please note the rule references provided will utilize the 2026 Rules Book.

There have been some discussions about Rule 8-5-2 that pertains to a runner that is obstructed while legally running the bases. A large part of the discussion deals with the protection for a runner that has been obstructed. This week's interpretations will focus on the rule as well as the different areas of protection and discuss some of the exceptions where an obstructed runner may be called out between the two bases where they were obstructed. Let's first look at the rule:

ART. 2 . . . A fielder not in possession of the ball or not making an initial play on a batted ball, impedes the progress of a runner or batter-runner who is legally running bases. Obstructed runners are still required to touch all bases in proper order, or they could be called out on a proper appeal by the defensive team. Should an act of interference occur following any obstruction, enforcement of the interference penalty would have precedence.

Question: Why is an obstructed runner required to touch all bases in proper order? **Answer:** The award for obstruction is the base the runner would have reached had there not been obstruction. Another way of saying that is awards for obstruction are based on the amount that the runner was impeded. The defense delayed the runner on their progression around the bases and the award is adjusted to remove the amount they were delayed. The longer the delay, the more the runner is awarded. If the runner is forced to "find the base" and it takes them 1-2 second to touch the base due to the defense committing obstruction, then that extra time will be factored into the base awarded at the end of the play if they do not reach the base the umpire judges they would have reached had there not been obstruction. Since the award removes the delay caused it is required that the runner still legally touch all bases.

Question: Why does an act of interference have precedence over obstruction? **Answer:** Since the runner is protected after being obstructed there is no reason they should be allowed to then interfere with the defense. Umpires have seen and are enforcing the obstruction, but the rule is not intended to allow them to "gain an advantage" by then interfering with the defense. Therefore, the act of interference would be enforced and the obstruction would be cancelled.

PENALTIES: (Art. 2) When any obstruction occurs (including a rundown), the umpire will signal a delayed dead ball. The ball will remain live.

Question: Why is this a delayed dead ball? **Answer:** The runner will be awarded the base they would have reached had there not been obstruction if they do not obtain that base during the play. With a delayed dead ball we let play "proceed with caution" as we are protecting the runner until they reach the base they would have reached had there not been obstruction and between the two bases where

the obstruction occurred. If we were to kill the play immediately, we would remove the runner's ability to take advantage of subsequent errors by the defense that would allow the runner to advance farther than they would have been awarded based on the obstruction. That is why we let the play continue and award the runner only if they do not reach the base they would have reached had there not been obstruction or if they are put out between the two bases where they were obstructed (without any exceptions being met).

1. If the obstructed runner is put out prior to reaching the base that would have been reached had there not been obstruction, a dead ball is called and the obstructed runner and every other runner affected by the obstruction will be awarded the base or bases which would have been reached, in the umpire's judgment, had there not been obstruction. An obstructed runner may not be called out between the two bases where the runner was obstructed.

EXCEPTIONS:

- a. When an obstructed runner, after the obstruction, safely obtains or returns to the base that would have been awarded, in the umpire's judgment, had there been no obstruction and there is a subsequent play on a different runner, the obstructed runner is no longer protected between the bases where the runner was obstructed and may be put out.
- b. When properly appealed for missing a base or leaving a base before a fly ball was first touched while advancing. If obstruction occurred while a runner was returning to touch the base, the runner is protected.
- c. When committing an act of interference.
- d. When passing another runner.
- e. When the batter flies out for the third out.
- f. When the batter-runner is obstructed between two bases and the batter-runner flies out.

Question: Why does the ball become dead once an obstructed runner is put out prior to reaching the base they would have reached had there been no obstruction? This doesn't seem fair, if R2 was obstructed and put out and the ball becomes dead with R1 two steps from home plate by making the ball dead it doesn't allow R1 to score. **Answer:** As the rule states, the ball becomes dead when the obstructed runner is put out. At that point the obstructed runner and EVERY OTHER runner affected by the obstruction will be awarded the base or bases which would have been reached, in the umpire's judgement, had there not been obstruction. Since the ball became dead when the obstructed runner was put out this obstruction affected R1 and they should be awarded home if the umpire judges they would have reached that base had the ball not been made dead due to the obstruction. Making the ball dead when the obstructed runner is put out has zero negative impact on the offense as the other runners are awarded the base or bases they would have reached had there not been obstruction.

Question: What play does exception a. specifically describe? If a runner returns to the base they would have reached then advances are they no longer protected between the two bases? **Answer:** NO. There are two parts to exception a.

1. The runner safely obtains or returns to the base they would have been awarded, in the umpire's judgement, had there been no obstruction **AND**
2. There is a subsequent play on different runner.

If the obstructed runner returns to the base they would have reached but there is NOT a play on a different runner that runner is still protected between the two bases where they were obstructed. A reminder of one of the plays from last week's interpretations below.

Situation 1: With no runners on, B1 hits a shallow fly ball that falls in front of F8 who has possession of the ball about 10 feet behind second base. As B1 rounds first base they are obstructed by F3 that is on the edge of the base, the umpire signals a delayed dead ball and verbalizes "obstruction". As F8 fakes a throw toward first base B1 returns to first base. The first base coach, seeing and hearing the obstruction call tells B1 to continue on to second base. F8 comes into the infield and tags B1 three steps from second base. The umpire calls B1 out, ruling that since B1 returned to first base, the base they would have reached in the umpire's judgement had there not been obstruction, they are no longer protected between first and second base and B1 should remain out. **RULING:** Incorrect ruling. B1 was obstructed between first and second base and cannot be put out between these two bases unless one of the six exceptions are met. One of those exceptions is that the obstructed runner, after the obstruction, safely obtains or returns to the base that would have been awarded, in the umpire's judgment, had there been no obstruction and there is a subsequent play on a different runner. In this situation the obstructed runner did safely return to the base they would have been awarded had there been no obstruction however the second part of the exception was not met as there was no subsequent play on a different runner. B1 was still protected between first and second base due to the obstruction and when B1 was tagged out the umpire should have ruled a dead ball and awarded B1 first base as this is the base they would have reached had there been no obstruction. (8-5-2, Penalty 1 Exception a)

However, if there is a play on another runner after they return to the base then they are no longer protected and would remain out. As situation 2 below details.

Situation 2: With R1 on third base, B2 hits a shallow fly ball that falls in front of F8 who has possession of the ball about 10 feet behind second base. As B2 rounds first base they are obstructed by F3 that is on the edge of the base, the umpire signals a delayed dead ball and verbalizes "obstruction". As F8 fakes a throw toward first base B2 returns to first base. As they are still on first base, R1 is still off third base and F8 throws to F5 to make a play on R1. B2 seeing the throw to third base advances toward second base as F5 throws back to F6 at second base where B2 is tagged out. Umpire rules that B2 remains out as they are no longer protected under the obstruction rule. **RULING:** Correct ruling. B1 was obstructed between first and second base and cannot be put out between these two bases unless one of the six exceptions is met. One of those exceptions is that the obstructed runner, after the obstruction, safely obtains or returns to the base that would have been awarded, in the umpire's judgment, had there been no obstruction and there is a subsequent play on a different runner. In this situation the obstructed runner safely returned to the base they would have been awarded had there been no obstruction (first base) and there was a subsequent play on a different runner(R1). B1 is no longer protected between first and second base due to the obstruction and is liable to be put out. (8-5-2, Penalty 1 Exception a)

2. If the obstructed runner is put out after passing the base that would have been reached had there been no obstruction and has advanced beyond the two bases where the obstruction occurred, the obstructed runner will be called out. The ball remains live.

Question: If a runner is obstructed rounding first base and the umpire judges they would have only reached first base had there been no obstruction and they attempt to advance to second base and are put out, do they remain out? **Answer:** No. The runner is protected between the two bases where they were obstructed, in this case first base and second base, the only way they can be put out between these two bases is if one of the six exemptions listed in Penalty 1 shown above are met. If a runner was put out between first and second base (without any exception being met) the ball would become dead and the runner would be awarded first base, the base the runner would have reached in the umpire's judgement had there been no obstruction.

This penalty describes a situation where the runner is no longer between the two bases where they were obstructed AND they have passed the base they would have reached had there been no obstruction. Situation 3 below provides a play where this penalty would apply.

Situation 3: B1 hits a deep fly ball that gets behind F9 and is obstructed by F3 rounding first base. The umpire signals a delayed dead ball and verbalizes "Obstruction" and they judge the runner would have obtained third base had there been no obstruction. B1 continues around the bases and is thrown out attempting to advance to home. The umpire rules that B1 is out since in the umpire's judgement the runner would have only obtained third base had there been no obstruction. **RULING:** Correct ruling. The umpire judged that B1 would have only obtained third base had there been no obstruction. Once the runner has passed the base that would have been reached had there been no obstruction (third in this play) AND they are no longer between the two bases where the obstruction occurred (first and second in this play) the obstructed runner will be called out and the ball remains live.

3. When a runner, while advancing or returning to a base:

- a. Is obstructed by a fielder who neither has the ball nor**
- b. Is attempting to make an initial play on a batted ball, or**
- c. A fielder who fakes a tag without the ball.**

EFFECT (Pen. 3): The obstructed runner and each other runner affected by the obstruction, will be awarded the base or bases which would have been reached, in the umpire's judgment, had there been no obstruction.

Question: If an obstructed runner is safe on a base after the play there is no award, correct? **Answer:** Not necessarily. If the obstructed runner obtains the base they would have reached, in the umpire's judgment, had there been no obstruction then this statement is true. However, if a runner has not obtained the base they would have reached had there been no obstruction, in the umpire's judgement, this statement is not true. In this case, when the play is over the umpire should award the obstructed runner and all other runners affected by the obstruction the base or bases which would have been reached had there been no obstruction. Situation 4 below details a situation where this penalty would be enforced.

Situation 4: With R1 on second base, B2 hits a deep fly ball that gets behind F9, as R1 is running toward third looking back to see if the ball is caught, they collide with F6 and both players fall into a pile on the ground. The umpire signals a delayed dead ball and verbalizes "Obstruction", and they judge the runner would have obtained home plate had there been no obstruction. B2 continues around second base but seeing R1 just getting up from the ground returns to second base. The umpire judges that B2 would have obtained third base had there not been the obstruction on R1. After the ball is returned to the pitcher and all play has stopped, R1 is on third base and B2 is on second base. The umpire signals and verbalizes "Dead ball" then states "That was obstruction (pointing toward the collision point between F6 and R1) that runner (pointing to R1) is awarded home and that runner (pointing to B2) is awarded third base". **RULING:** Correct ruling. The umpire ruled obstruction on F6 and judged R1 would have reached home plate had there been no obstruction, also during the play that obstruction affected B2 keeping them from reaching third base, in the umpire's judgement. Once the play was over the umpire made the appropriate awards to the obstructed runner and each other runner affected by the obstruction.