

THIS WEEK IN BASEBALL



The Ohio High School Athletic Association

The "Rules Process" – May 15, 2013

Where did THAT Crazy Rule Come From?

Most people do not realize that ALL states in the US play by the same set of playing rules. The popularity of MLB and the number of televised games makes many confuse Major League rules with High School rules. They are notably different. How does a rule get changed or added? Does anyone just make a recommendation to change a rule? Who decides these rules. This is designed to provide an insight to the "Rules Process" for high school baseball. You'll find it interesting and more detailed than you might have originally thought.

Playing Rules are NATIONAL Playing Rules

The OHSAA is a member of the "NFHS" (www.nfhs.org). One of the many functions of the NFHS is to write playing rules for most sports. These playing rules are codified each year in the Rules Book for each sport. Though there may be a rule or two that each OHSAA sport administrator (Assistant Commissioner) may not totally agree with, as a member of the NFHS, the OHSAA agrees to abide by all playing rules adopted by the NFHS.

The Committee & Representation on the "Committee"

Each sport recognized by the NFHS is represented by its "Rules Committee". The "committee" is comprised of a representative from each of 8 "Sections" across the nation plus a representative from the NFHS Officials Committee and a representative from the NFHS Coaches Committee. These members serve staggered 4 year terms with an additional member elected as the Chair. Mr. Bob Gardner, NFHS Executive Director serves as the publisher and Elliot Hopkins who oversees Baseball at the national level, serves as Editor. Only the Editor does not have voting privileges on the committee.



The NFHS divides the US into 8 different 'Sections'. Each Section elects one representative from the states making up that section to the Rules Committee. Ohio is part of 'Section 2' which includes PA, WV, KY, VA, DE and MD

Committee Members & Meetings

Current Committee Members in addition to the Editor and Chair are:

Larry White (New Jersey) - Chair	Jeremy Langner (Iowa) - Coaches Rep
Anthony Azzara (Connecticut) - Section 1	Ken Allan (California) - Officials Rep
Martin Ondrovic (Pennsylvania) - Section 2	Bert Borgmann (Colorado) - Section 6
Robert Holloway (Mississippi) - Section 3	Rob Cuff (Utah) - Section 7
Phil Gardner (Indiana) - Section 4	Peter Weber (Oregon) - Section 8
Brian Midthun (N. Dakota) - Section 5	Elliott Hopkins (NFHS Staff) - Editor

The "Rules Committee" meets 3 times per year at the NFHS offices in Indianapolis.

Input for Rule Changes

An important aspect of the Rule (change) Process is receiving input from a wide range of individuals involved in the sport. Officials and Coaches are represented by their representative own representatives to this Committee. Each Section is represented by its selected member. During the season, every sport administrator (yours truly) in each state is provided a list of survey questions regarding trends and current issues that may have developed during the year. Toward the end of each season, every school head coach along with every registered Class 1 official in the nation is given the opportunity to respond to a survey about trends in the game. The results of this survey are the basis for the Committee's agenda at its June meeting. Also, prior to the April meeting, individuals across the nation (coaches, officials and administrators) are provided an opportunity to submit "Rules Proposals" to the Committee. These proposals must first be read and approved by the state association sport administrator (such as myself) and signed by the state's Commissioner before submission to the Committee for consideration. This 'filter' eliminates outrageous proposals.

Rule Change Proposals...What Happens Next?

Once proposals are received by the Committee, the NFHS staff liaison meets with the Chair of the Rules Committee to evaluate the proposals and determine which proposals make the 'all important' next Committee meeting agenda. The agenda is provided to each state association for input and each state association administrator is contacted by the representative elected from their Section for feedback and direction. Any proposal that makes it to the agenda for discussion it must be approved by a margin of 2 votes to be considered for possible approval.

- Those that DO make it to the agenda for discussion, the entire committee reviews and works on the proposal.
- Vote is taken by the Committee and the proposal must pass by a margin of 2 votes to become a rule
- Any proposal that DOES pass by a margin of 2 votes now moves to the NFHS Rules Review Committee. This committee is comprised of NFHS staff member involved in writing rules. The object is to review for consistency with other rules.

What Happens Next....continued

- After review and (if) approval, the rule change is sent to the NFHS Board of Directors who make the final decision as to whether a rule change will take place.
- If the NFHS Board of Directors make no comment....**RULE CHANGE!**
- The NFHS Rules Book is changed, the Case Book is changed and the communication to all states, coaches and officials is developed.

Note: The Rules Review Committee or the NFHS Board of Directors will not change any proposal that comes to them, but they MAY refer it back to the original Rules Committee for further discussion.

How does the OHSAA Implement the Changes?

Each state is provided a News Release announcing any adopted Rule Change. This announcement generally takes place 3-4 months prior to the start of the season and is placed on the OHSAA's website and communicated to the Coaches' Association recognized by the OHSAA for that sport. Additionally, it is shared with the OHSAA's Director of Development for Officials in that specific sport. Then each of the following are scheduled and/or conducted:

National Rules Interpretation Meeting

Each state administrator logs on to a national webinar conducted by the NFHS Sport Administrator to review all Rule Changes, Editorial Changes and Points of Emphasis. This meeting offers an opportunity for open dialogue and Q and A's

State (Ohio) Interpreters Clinic

Each local officials' association has an "interpreter". These interpreters come to a meeting at the OHSAA to review the Rule Changes, Editorial Changes, Points of Emphasis and any official pertinent information. Their task of course is to take this to their local officials associations and convey it there. This meeting is conducted 2-3 weeks prior to the start of the season and conducted by the "Director of Development" (see inset) and the OHSAA's Sport Administrator (Jerry Snodgrass for Baseball)

State Mandated Rules Interpretation Meetings

Coaches and Officials across Ohio MUST attend a State Rules Meeting each year. The OHSAA has attempted to help both groups by offering the meetings online and as well as 1 face to face meeting at the OHSBCA Clinic in January. These meetings pass along the rule change information and Points of Emphasis from the NFHS Committee.

Local Officials Meetings

In addition to the mandated STATE Rules Meetings, each umpire in the state is required to attend 4 additional meetings at their local association during the baseball season. These "Local" meetings have agendas/topics set by the sport's Director of Development.

Directors of Development Key Part of Rule Enforcement

In 2009, the OHSAA recognized "Directors of Development" to serve as the lead rules interpreter and liaison to officials for each sport the OHSAA sponsors. These "DOD's" have the responsibility not only of interpreting rules but also for providing educational opportunities for officials and recruiting new officials. The DOD's assist with tournament assignments while also developing meeting agendas for required "local" umpire association meetings.

Yeah, ,but....aren't there Exceptions??? Of Course there are. They are called STATE ADOPTIONS!!

There is a slight bit of latitude given to the states that permits each state to adopt a certain rule if they so choose. These 'exceptions' are known as **State Adoptions**. Basically, any rule that is permitted to be adopted or not adopted by a state (therefore the term 'State Adoption'), is a rule that does not cause or create any fundamental difference in the game itself. One of the best examples would be the '3-pt line' in basketball. It is **NOT** a 'State Adoption', meaning states do not have a choice whether to adopt it or not. If one state were to have the 3-pt line and another state not, it would create an anomaly within the fundamental rules of the game and eliminate the necessary consistency from state to state. So, **State Adoptions** are generally granted for rules that if varied from state to state would have little fundamental difference in the game itself. And I know your next question....What ARE some examples of state adoptions? There are actually several in baseball and include:

- States are permitted to utilize or NOT utilize a double first base. Ohio chooses NOT to but is permitted to make that choice.
- States are permitted to determine their own "pitching limitations'. Ohio of course has approved the '10 innings in 3 days' but again, is permitted to do so within the NFHS Rules. (read EACH state's adoption at:

<http://www.ohsaa.org/sports/bb/boys/2013/2013StatebyStatePitchingRestrictions.pdf>

So Now, The Million Dollar Question..."Do we HAVE to follow all the NFHS Rules?"

Q: What if a state chooses not to follow all the Rules adopted by the NFHS or a selected Rule Change?

A: First, as mentioned, our Bylaws indicate the member schools will play by NFHS Playing Rules. If a state elected NOT to follow these playing rules, that state loses its opportunity to be part of the National Rules Committee either by sitting on the committee or by supplying input through the various questionnaires. "Ohio" recently CHAIRED the national basketball rules committee and Kyle McNeely, the OHSAA's Baseball "DOD" recently served as the chair of the NFHS Baseball Rules Committee. Ohio would lose this opportunity if we chose not to follow NFHS Rules.

What About Bats.....did THAT come from the NFHS Rules Committee?

Yes...and "no". Since testing of bats is extremely expensive, the NFHS has piggybacked on the NCAA and relies on its testing and has adopted the same bat regulations as the NCAA. The change from "BESR" to "BBCOR", though cumbersome at the time is in place today nationwide. Though 'decertification' was never intended, a few bats have actually been pulled from approval despite them having the "BBCOR" stamp.

Wish to Purchase an NFHS Baseball Rules Book?

You can purchase the NFHS Baseball Rules Book (along with any other sport's Rule Book) at www.nfhs.com.