



Plays of the Day – from DOD Kyle McNeely

A compilation of all "Plays of the Day"



From May 7, 2012

The Play: For many, this rule would be the equivalent to a "soft toss," but unfortunately for the umpires in this game, it was more like a smoking fastball. With a runner on first base, the batter hit a drive to left-center field. As the runner from first slid into third base, he dislodged the base from its usual spot and moved it a few feet into foul ground. At the same time, the throw from the outfield hit the sliding runner and bounded down left-field line. The runner was easily able to get up and advance to home to score, and the batter, who had taken second base, now attempted to advance to third. The batter, not quite sure what to touch, decided to touch the spot where the base had been, and continued on to score when he touched home plate. The defense then legally appealed that the batter had missed third base. When the defense appealed that the runner missed third, the umpires called the runner out, which created a brief, but intense discussion.

The Ruling: In actuality, the batter should be called safe on the appeal, and his run allowed. A succeeding runner merely has to touch or occupy the space/area where the base should be to be safe or judged to have touched the base. Fortunately, the run didn't matter by the time the game ended.

The Play: In the third inning, with a runner on second base, the number five hitter for the home team steps in to hit, batting out-of-order as the number four batter should be hitting. The number five batter walks and reaches second base when ball four gets by the catcher and goes all the way back to a deep backstop. The runner on second reaches third base, as he was stealing on the pitch. The visiting team, before the next pitch or play, appeals the batting out-of-order.

The Ruling (a): The umpires enforced the batting-out-of order correctly, but then the "baseball gods" decided to have some fun. 2 innings later, there is a visiting team runner on first base, when the wrong batter steps to the plate. The batter eventually walks and advances to second, when ball four gets by the catcher. The runner that was on first base advances to third. The home team appeals, before the next pitch or play, the batting out-of-order. The two plays, to the visiting team's head coach, looked the same. He expected the same enforcement for his team that the home team had received just a little bit earlier. Ahhhh, but things may not always be as they appear!

The Ruling (b): In the batting-out-of order scenario in the third inning that involved the home team, the umpires ruled the proper batter out (correct call), but left the runner on second stay at third (again, correct call). The runner on third was allowed to stay because his advancement was on his own; it did not result from the play on an improper batter. When what looked like the same scenario occurred to him a couple of innings later, the visiting team's head coach thought that his runner, too, would get to stay at third base. However, the rules would not agree. As before, the proper batter is called out, but the runner now on third must return to first base; his advancement was due to the play of the improper batter. This next play did not end well for one coach's emotional state.

The Play: A right-hander is listed on the official lineup card as the starting pitcher. In the second inning the opposing coach notices that a left-hander has been on the mound since the start of the game. He storms to the plate insisting that the right-hander must be put on the mound and pitch to at least one batter. What should the plate umpire do?

The Ruling: It is true that by rule, a starting pitcher is to pitch until the first opposing batter has been put out or has advanced to first base. There are some who think this means that if the starting pitcher cannot, for some reason, say his elbow or shoulder begins hurting as he takes his warm-up throws, or he back talks the coach, he still must go out to the mound and at least intentionally walk the first batter. This is simply not true. If the starting pitcher does not face one batter, the penalty is that while he may return and play another position, he cannot return to pitch in that game. Had the opposing coach caught this before the game started, the situation could have been handled at least in a manner where everyone knew what was occurring. But now, unless the plate umpire had definite knowledge that the right-hander did not pitch to the first batter, all that can be assumed is there was an unreported substitution. Everyone will update their respective lineups and scorebooks with the new pitcher, and the game will continue as is. And even if the plate umpire can recall that the right-hander did not pitch to the first batter, we won't make him come out to the mound. We will just inform his coach that he cannot pitch in this game. And that is most likely no problem for him.

From April 30, 2012

The Play: In this scenario, the defense had no idea that the batter-runner had missed first on his home run trot; at least until the first base coach let it be known. The batter hits a home run into the stands. He is between second and third when his first base coach finally is able to get his attention to tell him he missed first base. The batter stops, dutifully re-touches second base, retreats and touches first base and completes his home run trot. The defense now wants to appeal the baserunning error, but the offensive coach states there is no appeal, as he successfully retouched first base.

The Ruling: One of the greatest challenges for the umpire is to not laugh when making his explanation. Yes, the player did return and touch first base; but he is still at risk for an appeal by the defense. An appeal they now know they should make. When the ball left the field as a home run, it became a dead ball. Part of the baserunning rules states that when the ball is dead, a runner who is on or beyond a succeeding base cannot return to the missed base. So, even though he tried to undo the baserunning mistake, the rules do not allow it. The defense appealed and the runner was out and no home run.

The Play: This scenario in the rules can get anyone reaching for the Advil. Picture two coaches debating a possible batting-out-of order, both using their scorebook as evidence. Today's play occurred just a few days ago and lived up to the reputation. The batters in the fourth, fifth, and sixth positions are due up in the home half of the seventh inning. The batter in the sixth position leads off and singles. The batter in the number five position sacrifices him to second base. The batter in the number four position comes to the plate and takes one pitch for a strike when the defense decides something isn't right. As the coach approached the plate, the plate umpire looked to his partner who was now intently studied the mowing patterns in the outfield. The defensive coach was arguing for two outs, the number six batter who was on second base and the number four batter was now at bat. The offensive coach wanted to invoke the "concede rule." He would concede the mistake and just start the half-inning over. Unfortunately for him, he could not convince anyone that there was a "concede rule."

The Ruling: A few aspects of the rule become important as the plate umpire was finally able to sort through the animated discourse going on around him. First, once a pitch or a play has occurred, the batter who batted out of turn has his at-bat made legal. The next proper batter is then the one who follows him in the line-up. The plate umpire was finally able to get a lull in the conversation to let the coaches know how this situation was to be handled. The number six batter's at-bat became legal when the number five batter took his first pitch. It was the five batter who was next batting out-of-order. But then his at-bat became legal when the number four batter took the first pitch to him for a strike. So, the five batter's action is now good and the next batter who should be up to bat is the number six batter, but oops, he is standing on second base. "Awww," thought the defensive coach, "he is now out, right?" The offensive coach said, "no, I get to put in a runner for him at second and he comes back and bats again." The plate umpire's eyes began to cross once more. The plate umpire was right, the number six batter is actually the proper batter now, the one who should be batting. But since he is standing on second base, he stays there, and we go to the number seven batter who takes his place in the batter's box with a 0-1 count. Go light on the Advil.

The Play: This play created quite a stir when it happened. The defensive coach demanded an out. His first argument was that the batter-runner was "hit" by a fair batted ball, and then his argument became that the batter-runner interfered with the pitcher fielding the ball. The head coach of the team on offense wasn't sure what to argue, he was just hanging around the discussion to disagree if it looked like his player was going to be on the short end of the ruling. It is moments like these that as umpires, we never forget, or can forget. The plate umpire was trying to think through the shouting, while the base umpire had urgent business to attend at second base. But meanwhile, a decision needed to be made, and a bench vote wasn't going to work. The play that caused the migraine was this: The batter bunted the ball back toward the pitching mound, a little harder than he really wanted. The pitcher, attempting to field the bunt, deflected it with his glove into the base line where it was unintentionally kicked by the batter into the dugout. The batter went and stood on first, and the fireworks began.

The Ruling: Several rules come into play. One, we cannot have a runner hit by a batted ball since it was first touched by the pitcher. Only if the runner intentionally allowed himself or moved in such a manner to be hit would we have an issue. So, the first argument by the defensive coach is negated. And there is no interference by the batter-runner, again unless he intentionally kicked the ball, as the pitcher already had his first attempt to field the bunt. So, the second argument is not going to work for the defensive coach as well. And now, the day is going to become a little tougher for him. What we in essence now have, is a ground rule double. A batted ball that has gone into a dead ball area, provides a two base award. One coach never wants to see the plate umpire again. The other coach now wants him for every game. Go figure.

From April 9, 2012

The Play: With no outs and runners on first and second base, a batter hits a line drive to the shortstop which bounces off his glove and hits the runner who has a lead off second base. The ball then bounces directly back to the shortstop without hitting the ground. The shortstop gloves the ball and throws to the second baseman, who tags second and fires to first before the runner off first can get back to the base, and before the batter reaches first. The defense begins to celebrate its first ever triple play. The coach of the offense looks cross-eyed at the base umpire and asks, "What just happened?" What does the umpire tell him? The offensive coach truly thought that when the batted ball, deflected off the shortstop's glove hit his runner, the ball was dead and his runner was out. he couldn't believe that the umpires kept the ball live and in play. The defensive coach was celebrating what he thought was his team's first triple play.

The Ruling: In all reality, *neither* coach is right. When a ball comes off an infielder and hits an offensive runner it stays live and in play (unless the runner intentionally hit the ball). But, when it bounced off the runner and back to the shortstop, it can not be secured as a catch. The rules state that "It is not a catch when a fielder touches a batted ball in flight which then contacts a member of the offensive team or an umpire and is then caught by a defensive player." So, the shortstop did not make a legal catch. The ball is treated now just like a ground ball. The defense turned a double play, but not a triple play. The runner from first and the batter runner are out!

The Play: With two outs and runners on second and first in a tie game, the home team batter rips a double that is miss-played into a triple. The runner from second base crosses but does not touch home plate. The runner from first then touches the plate, scoring another run. The catcher, noticing (mainly because the on-deck batter kept yelling to the runner from second to touch home) the miss of home plate, properly appeals to the home plate umpire that the runner from second missed touching home. The plate umpire, very happy with himself, does indeed call that runner out, and announces to the official scorekeeper that only one counted, as the second run scored because it was a "timing" play. Everyone nodded their heads in agreement, with the coaches making a mental note to tell the assignor what a good crew they had that day. The home team goes on and eventually wins by that one run margin. So...how did the umpires REALLY do on this?

The Ruling: Indeed, had the defense not appealed at all, both runs would have scored. But when they successfully appealed that the runner from second missed home, actually neither run can count.

By rule, no run can score if the third out is made by a preceding runner who is out upon appeal because he failed to touch a base or left a base too soon on a caught fly ball. The game remains tied. Also, in this case as well, once the runner from first touched home, the runner from second no longer has the ability to return and touch home plate. Even if he does so, upon a proper appeal, he will be called out. That will get the rule experts in the stands going.

From March 29, 2012

The Play: This play is a scoring play that has the possibility of involving an appeal, which could change the score. With the bases loaded, the batter hits a looping fly ball that everyone thinks will drop for a base hit. All the runners are off and running and never retouch their respective base. But, the right fielder makes a "Baseball Tonight" spectacular catch. He comes firing the ball to second base for out number two on the runner from second who did not tag up. The second baseman then completes the triple play when he throws the ball to first for the third out on that runner who also had failed to tag up. The runner from third scored before the out at first was recorded. So, the discussion was on how many runs were counted? The offense thought one; the defense thought none since, well it was a triple play.

The Ruling: Even though the runner from third did not retouch third base, his run will count if the defense does not properly appeal his base running mistake. If they do not appeal, the play is a time play, with his run counting since he touched home before the third out at first occurred. However, if the defense appeals before the pitcher and all infielders have left fair territory, then it would be considered a fourth out and would take precedence over the third out at first base, thus negating the run. In other words, even though we have three outs, the defense may still properly appeal the infraction and have the run not count. If they fail to do so, count it for the offense. But, the fourth out does not carry over to the next inning, as the defensive coach tried to argue.

The Play: While this play is not that complex, it did manage to trip up some umpires in a game a few weeks ago. With runners on first and second base, the batter hits a solid line drive in the gap in right center field. The runner at first was off with the pitch, and both are going to attempt to score on the play. The runner from second trips over a loose shoelace as he nears third base and goes down in a tumble. The runner from first base, not far behind, slows down and stops behind the runner who is struggling to get back up on his feet. He helps his team mate up and they both proceed on to score. The throw comes in from the outfield, and the defensive coach begins arguing for outs. He believes that a double play should now be called, the runner from second who scored, he says, should be out as he was assisted by this following team mate, and the runner from first should also be out for his part in the "interference."

The Ruling: No outs will be declared. Both runs will count. The following runner has the ability to help his team mate up, provided he does not "pass" him while assisting him

The Play: With runners on first and third, the batter hits a clean double. The runner from third easily scores and the runner from first is waved home. In his haste to score, however he clearly does not touch third base. The head coach, in the third base coaching box, sees the miss and 1) yells at him to stop and go back; or 2) grabs him by his arm to stop him and then tells him to go back. As the plate umpire, do you have a call to make? Or is it just baseball?

The Ruling: In 1) it's nothing. That is what a coach is there to do. There are no issues. But in 2) we have interference on the coach for physically assisting the runner. This interference is one of the few interference occasions where the ball is delayed dead; not immediately dead. At the end of playing action, the runner who was assisted by the coach is called out, and other runners return to the base occupied at the time of the interference. This type of coach's interference can occur even when the ball is dead. The rule states that a coach may not physically assist a runner during playing action. This can occur when a batter hits a home run and as he advance to home, he misses third base and the coach reaches out and stops him. The player would be called out for the interference even though the ball is dead. Don't get this mixed up with a coach patting a player on the back or rear in congratulations. That is **not** assisting a runner.

The Play: This play happened a few weeks ago in a high school game played in the south. The plate umpire knew what he had to do, yet dreaded the repercussions that he knew were to come. With the home team ahead in the top of the sixth, 1-0, the visiting team has not been having a fun day. It has been one of those games where it seems every bounce, every close play, every call has gone against them. The visiting team's head coach, knowing it is not a conspiracy, is still frustrated. Finally, with two outs, they have runners on second and third. With a count of 1-2, the batter swings and misses at a ball in the dirt and no one knows where the ball went. Both his runners score and the batter gets to first base. They finally catch a break; or do they? One other "minor" factor here. As the plate umpire reached into his ball bag to hand another ball to the catcher, he realizes the baseballs he had there has grown. There are now three, instead of the two that were there at the beginning of that play. The pitched ball in the dirt; that was swung at and missed by the batter, went into the ball bag. The day is about to get a lot worse for the visiting team.

The Ruling: Once the pitch became "lodged" in the plate umpire's ball bag, it was immediately dead. The result of a pitch becoming dead is that all runners on base are awarded one base from where they were at the time of the pitch. Under normal circumstances, with first base unoccupied, the batter is entitled to go to first on a dropped third strike or a third strike not caught on the fly. But with the ball being dead, he cannot attempt to advance, and with that being the third strike, he is out. So, had there been one out (or no outs) at the beginning of this play, the visiting team would have only tied up the game, not gone ahead; the runner from third would have been awarded home and the runner from second awarded third. But with two outs, and the batter now out on strikes for the third out, no runs can score. The visiting coach thought he had gone ahead, and would have grudgingly settled for a tied game. But now he must get the news that the half inning is over and he is still behind. I understand the conversation did not go well.
